Liberation through Hearing? Perceptions of Music and Dance in Pāli Buddhism

Oscar Carrera

MA Thesis in South Asian Studies

Studentnummer: s2211351

Supervisor: Dr. Henny van der Veere

Universiteit Leiden

Contents

Introduction

This thesis compiles views, rules and practices related to music and dance in the Pāli Tipiṭaka and its commentaries, the authoritative scriptural tradition of Theravāda Buddhism, preserved in the Pāli language.[1] It does not try to conceal the fact that many of those views are negative, and many of those rules dissuasive. Though particularly dramatic, the following passage embodies what many consider as the quintessential attitude towards music and dance in the Pāli texts:

> Bhikkhus [monks], in the Noble One's discipline, singing is wailing. In the Noble One's discipline, dancing is madness. In the Noble One's discipline, to laugh excessively, displaying one's teeth, is childishness. Therefore, bhikkhus, in regard to singing and dancing [let there be] the demolition of the bridge (AN 3.107, tr. Bodhi 2012).

After such 'demolition,' it might seem that there is little left to discuss in the following pages. Based on this and similar instances, a certain scholarly consensus has reached the conclusion that early Pāli literature is unequivocally wary of music and other art forms. I contend that this conclusion is misleading: the texts inevitably host different voices, which do find room for the Dhamma in songs and for songs in the Dhamma. This

is true for both the texts commonly seen as earliest and the much later commentaries, and has something to do with the arguably unique characteristics of this textual corpus.

The so-called Pāli Canon is a prodigy of textual preservation. Containing sermons (*sutta*), monastic rules (*vinaya*) and scholastic treatises (*abhidhamma*), attributed to the Buddha himself, the impressive bulk of this Canon—fifty-six volumes in the Roman script edition (Pali Text Society. n. d.)—seems rather to be the product of a wide temporal and spatial transmission. Initially oral, the Canon was not committed to writing until at least the 1st century BC. The environmental conditions of South Asia, where written culture was long confined to vulnerable palm-leaf manuscripts, required a recopying of the works throughout the centuries, in various scripts (Pāli has none of its own). As a result, Gombrich (1996, 9) notes, 'hardly any Pali manuscripts are more than about five hundred years old.' Even the modern editions of the Pāli Text Society spring from a handful of manuscripts that happened to be available, many of them inaccessible today.[2] Thus, the textual chain, purported to date back to the Buddha, was in fact discontinuous even as late as in the early 20th century.

Between the estimated death of the Buddha and the redaction of the Pāli commentaries spans almost one millennium (5th century BC-5th century CE). Most Pāli canonical texts fall somewhere in between; their date and location is, at the very best, a matter of controversy. Therefore, my aim is not to discover the attitude towards music and dance of a particular historical and geographical Buddhist community, something perhaps impossible to draw from the sources, but to see how they fit (or how they *do not* fit) in Buddhist doctrines, theories and ideals.

If all the above factors suggest an appalling heterogeneity, an analysis of the contents of the Pāli Canon and its commentaries only happens to confirm it. Even

though the assertion that 'any opinion can be found' in their pages is something of an exaggeration, it is obvious that the memory of the Buddha, if there was ever one, was assaulted by the anonymous voices of those who claimed to be his followers. At first sight, it may seem that no single mind could hold such a variety of views on so many topics without being either demented or enlightened in the most eccentric of ways. I believe, however, that this diversity is more apparent than it seems, and does not necessarily lead to a total epistemic chaos. This thesis argues that, in the case of music and dance, some degree of harmonization is possible within the doctrinal boundaries of the early texts.

The pages that follow contain theories, interpretations and even alleged records of spiritual experiences based on songs, dances and perceptions of beauty, which are understood variously, from entertainments to be avoided at any cost to triggers of Awakening experiences. In my view, they are sufficient proof that the presentation of music and scenic arts in the Pāli texts has much more nuance and ambiguity than is commonly thought. Facing these internal divergences could help us explain the use of music and songs in medieval Vajrayāna contemplative traditions, or even some features of modern Buddhist romanticism, as I will briefly venture. My main motivation, however, is to help laying a foundation on which a much-needed history of Buddhist aesthetic ideas could be built someday.

1. Avoiding the noise and the crowds

Surrounded by song and dance,
awakened by cymbals and gongs,
he did not find purification
while delighting in Māra's domain
(Thag 16.9, tr. Sujato, Walton 2014)

In most Buddhist traditions, the seventh precept for novices and the devout laity includes the abstention from dancing, singing, music and entertainments. Although for laypeople it is rarely a lifelong observance, it is so in the case of monastics: in the Theravāda Vinaya attending musical shows is a minor offence for monks (*dukkata*, Vin ii.107-108) and a slightly more severe one for nuns (*paccitiya*, Vin iv.267). Even if monastics successfully culminate their training, it is claimed that 'as long as they live the arahants renounce dancing, singing, music, and seeing entertainments (*visūka*)' (AN iv.250). Early Buddhist spirituality, hence, seems to be partly grounded on the avoidance of music in all its forms. My interest in this chapter is to explain the reasons for this avoidance.

One could argue that having a musician nearby when one is trying to meditate is irritating, and that music is therefore unwelcome in a monastery (at least in one whose monks or nuns meditate). Most often, however, the texts depict those shows as

occurring elsewhere, and the interdiction is mainly about *approaching* those places. The *Brahmajāla Sutta* puts music in a very illuminating context: among

> such shows as dancing, singing, music, displays, recitations, hand-music, cymbals and drums, fairy-shows, acrobatic and conjuring tricks, combats of elephants, buffaloes, bulls, goats, rams, cocks and quail, fighting with staves, boxing, wrestling, sham-fights, parades, manoeuvres and military reviews (DN i.6, tr. Walshe 1995).

If there is anything common to most of these shows, it is their popular, noisy, immoderate, sometimes even bloody, nature. They are quite possibly the kind of shows one could find in popular fairs of the time when texts like this were composed. What concerned early Buddhists seems to have been the sensory excitement to which they were considered to lead, the loss of moral control and restraint they favoured. Thus, the *Sigālaka Sutta* lists

> six dangers attached to frequenting fairs: [One is always thinking:] "Where is there dancing? Where is there singing? Where are they playing music? Where are they reciting? Where is there hand-clapping? Where are the drums?" (DN iii.183, tr. Walshe 1995)

Here again, singing and dancing appear as part of the revelry of a fair, with all the mental excitation that this entails. In a well-known text, the *Tālapuṭa Sutta* (SN 42.2), the Buddha is initially unwilling to tell an actor the truth about his profession: that he will be reborn in the 'hell known as laughter' (*pahāso nāma nirayo*), because an actor in a festival, mixing truth with lies, inspires further greed in the already greedy, aversion in

the already aversive, ignorance in the already ignorant. Tālapuṭa would abandon his profession and become a monk (see Thag 19.1) and, though we do not have a similar instruction for his accompanying musicians, there is little reason to think that it would be essentially different.[3]

Yet, it is not only the psychological or moral side of visiting fairs that concerned early Buddhists. Any reader of the several extant monastic codes will know how interested they are in stressing the difference between the monks and the 'pleasure-enjoying householders' (*gihī kāma-bhogin*), between ascetic renouncement and 'village-things' (*gāma-dhamma*); this opposition permeates the entire monastic imagery, starting from the practice of celibacy (AN iii.216). The presence of monks in 'dance shows,' 'sham-fights,' or 'combats of cocks and quail' (not to speak of dancing or singing in them) would not bring the best reputation to Gotama's order, not only because of the doubtful reputation of those shows, but also because renouncers, who were entirely maintained by lay society, were not supposed to be seen taking delight in activities belonging to the 'inferior' (*hīna*) life of the lay person. Thus, when a controversial group of six monks is seeing dancing and singing, some laypeople start criticizing the entire Buddhist community (Vin ii.107-108). When the Buddha enumerates to these six monks the drawbacks of intoning in recitation (AN 5.209, Vin ii.108), one of them is precisely that householders complain, 'As we ourselves sing, so those ascetics, sons of the Sakyan, sing!'

That this was a shared cultural value can be inferred from the *sūtras* of the Jains, who seem to have had a decisive influence on the criteria of respectability of the Northeastern Indian ascetic milieu from which Buddhism sprang. In the Jain *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, very concerned with monastic decorum, we also find rules against approaching

places with 'festive entertainment' (AS 2.1.2.5), or places where string, wind and drum instruments are heard (2.11.1-4), or where there are 'story-tellers, pantomimes, songs, fights at quarter-staff, and boxing-matches' (1.8.1.8, tr. Jacobi 1964)—again, music appears as one more ingredient of the revelry.[4]

The reason why scenic arts are looked down as worldly is not only that they are what worldly people enjoy watching. In fact, they are worldly in two more complex senses. First, they often appear surrounded by all the pomp of society (and its vices), a social rather than a subjective experience—a symbol of status and power rather than a device able to induce deep emotions or reflections. If they are not employed to enliven the festive ambiance of parties, they are employed to show the greatness of a sovereign. Beauty and opulence are, therefore, two sides of the same coin, and one of the signs of wealth is the fulfilment of sensual pleasures that the devout Buddhist aims to overcome.[5] As a result, we have a triangle of beauty, opulence (either human or divine: e.g., Tha Ap 492) and sensuality nourishing each other.

The subsumption of beauty under the shade of worldly pleasures and glory is a standard of the texts from the ancient Indian ascetic context. In a thoughtful article regarding early Buddhist aesthetics, Gombrich (2013, 141, 146) argues that in the Buddha's native culture 'aesthetic beauty (created beauty) has an erotic overtone' and that 'the idea of beauty in the abstract was absent,' as beauty was considered an inherent quality of things.[6] For the earnest aspirant to liberation from the cycle of life and death, a quality that so permeates saṃsāric things would seem to deserve indifference at best—let alone if it has an erotic connotation.

There is probably no better illustration of this 'erotic' conception of beauty that some representations of music in the Pāli Canon. We mentioned that the infamous

group of six monks created controversy among the laity due to their fondness for singing and dancing (among many other things improper for a monastic). Descriptions of their naughtiness are among the most cartoonish of Buddhist literature, but, in this case, they reveal associations that underlay the sight of a monk frequenting shows of music and dance:

> They danced when she danced; they sang when she danced; they played musical instruments when she danced; they sported when she danced; they danced when she sang (Vin ii.10, tr. Horner, Brahmali 2014).

The introduction of a *she* here is not casual, nor, as in much of Buddhist monastic literature (Wilson 1996), positive. On a certain occasion, the demon Māra invites a nun to join him to enjoy the 'fivefold music' (*pañcaṅgikena turiyena*)—the nun's answer reveals the sexual connotation of the preposition (Thig 6.3). In their rainy-season palaces, the *bodhisattas* Vipassī and Gotama, and perhaps all future buddhas, dwelled surrounded by musicians 'who were not men' (*nippurisehi*) (DN ii.21, AN i.145).[7] The Buddha once describes the sound of a lute with the same standardized expression applied to sensual temptations: 'so tantalizing, so lovely, so intoxicating, so entrancing, so enthralling' (SN iv.196-197, tr. Bodhi 2000).

Again, this seems to be a widespread association at the time. Music and feminine temptations are equally linked in the Jain scriptures, which include singing and dancing among the 'sixty-four accomplishments of women' (KS 1.211, n.2, in Jacobi 1964). Characters who try to discourage ascetics make the same connection between music, worldly glory and sensual pleasures: 'Surround yourself with women who dance, and

sing, and make music; enjoy these pleasures, O monk; I deem renunciation a hard thing' (Ut 13.14, tr. Jacobi 1964; see also Sut 2.2.55). According to Singh (1967, 65), courtesans in Pre-Mauryan Northeastern India were 'the real custodians of such fine arts as singing, dancing, and music, through which the aesthetic emotions of the people were aroused and satisfied,' and of course they 'aroused and satisfied' much more than that.[8] Nonetheless, the most explicit connection known to me appears in a later Pure-Land *sūtra*, which boldly states, 'In that Buddha-land, singing and playing do not involve sexual desire. The sentient beings there derive their joy exclusively from the Dharma' (Chang 1983, 325).

Early Buddhism discouraged its most committed practitioners from experiencing scenic arts, which for most people were only available in a wider festive ambiance. The very wording of the seventh precept prohibits 'seeing' (*dassana*) entertainments (*visūka*), and not, in a more modern parlance, 'reading' plays or 'listening to' music—in the Buddha's time, both drama and music had to be *seen*.[9]

We have examined three reasons for this reluctance. First, music and dance were strongly associated with the joys of lay life, so that the presence of a renouncer was potentially embarrassing for their monastic order as a whole. Secondly, these and other fine arts were understood as symbols of mundane glory and power, with which a good renouncer must be unconcerned; and thirdly, they had a sensual and erotic connotation, entirely unfitting for a celibate monastic, and made explicit in a number of passages.

As depicted in these texts, scenic entertainments known to the early Buddhist community certainly seem to have been 'of a debased kind arousing feelings of the

spectators instead of sublimating them' (Marasinghe 2003, 66). Whether they were debased in themselves or seen as such by 'puritanical' ascetics can be, apart from indemonstrable, a chicken-or-egg sort of question, at least if the standards of those ascetics were shared by the wider society. Knowingly or not, Coomaraswamy (1985, 46) made an intelligent choice of words when he described the early Buddhist view of art as 'strictly hedonistic'—when art is widely seen as nothing but pleasure, it is difficult for it become something better, and even if it does, this can hardly be recognized by a 'hedonistic' aesthetic gaze.[10]

These are, to conclude, the reasons why an earnest Buddhist is generally exhorted to avoid *deliberately attending* this kind of shows. As far as I know, only in one case there is also the withdrawal of the 'sensory faculties' (*indriyāni*) at the *unexpected* sight of music, and even then the association with heavenly (and feminine) temptations is clear (AN iv.264-265); in chapter 3 we will present some cases where closing one's eyes may not be the wisest decision.

The aforecited *Ruṇṇa Sutta* (AN 3.107), which compares singing with wailing and dancing with madness, does not propose staying away from music, but a different reaction to it: smiling to show satisfaction. It is, hence, more a matter of decorum than of avoidance. A monastic need not flee if music comes to his or her temple, even though he or she may sometimes be understandably irritated (ThaA i.152). In fact, we have little reason to doubt that Buddhist religious festivities of India or Sri Lanka have included not only music, but also a high degree of noise and fanfare since the earliest times. Striking as it might seem in light of the precept against entertainments, the very funeral of the Buddha is depicted thus:

> And there [the Mallas] honoured, paid respects, worshipped and adored the Lord's body with dance and song and music, with garlands and scents, making awnings and circular tents in order to spend the day there. And they thought: 'It is too late to cremate the Lord's body today. We shall do so tomorrow.' And so, paying homage in the same way, they waited for a second, a third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth day. And on the seventh day the Mallas of Kusinārā thought: 'We have paid sufficient honour with song and dance… to the Lord's body, now we shall burn his body after carrying him out by the south gate' (DN ii.159, tr. Walshe 1995).

Parallels of this text differ on the reasons for the delay, but agree on the weeklong musical ceremony (Bareau 1970-1, 187-91). If this did not happen historically, at least it reflects the treatment due to the Buddha's mortal remains ever since, for relics and their containers have long been commemorated with the help of orchestras and dancers (e.g., Mhv XXXIV, vv. 58-60). There is, indeed, a specific use of music within Buddhism, but to hear it we have to sneak out of the revelry of the town's fair.

2. The birth of the Buddhist hymn

Quickly put in motion your lovely speech, O lovely one…,
with a sweet and well-modulated voice
—we all listen, sitting upright
(Sn 350)

If one of the functions of music and dance in ancient India was to show the power of influential individuals, one could expect that the prince who was to become the Buddha had some exposure to them. Indeed, in the texts he seems to excel in courtly arts, and to have more than a basic understanding of musical theory. The notion behind these superb skills is that the glory of a renouncer increases the more he has mastered the values of the world (Powers 2009, cp. 2): according to a Mahāyāna sutra, 'when he was born, he was already conversant with all such things as poetry, speech, debate, incantation, drama, singing, dancing, music, and craftsmanship' (Chang 1983, 447). Even Gotama's supreme voice (*brahmassara*) is described as one that had 'fluency, intelligibility, sweetness, audibility, continuity, distinctness, depth and resonance' (PPN, s.v. 'Gotama'). This befits someone who in a previous life was a legendary musician: Guttila, 'the foremost bard of all India (*jambudīpa*)' (Jat ii.248), and also appreciated in some of the heavens.[11]

On one occasion, the Buddha goes as far as to make a critique of a musical composition. When the heavenly bard (*gandhabba*) Pañcasikha plays a bewildering song

blending erotic attraction and religious emotion,[12] the seemingly crude ascetic puts forth an informed opinion:

> 'Pañcasikha, the sound of your strings blends so well with your song, and your song with the strings, that neither prevails excessively over the other. When did you compose these verses on the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Arahants, and love?' (DN ii.267, tr. Walshe).

If Māra the tempter was treated as a nuisance when he approached the Buddha with a lute (Sn 449), here the well-intentioned song receives its due praise.[13] The technicality of the observation, as an author highlights, 'neatly avoids commenting on the content of the song' (Sujato 2011), which is somewhat inappropriate.

Sakka (Indra), chief among gods, congratulates Pañcasikha for having successfully drawn the Buddha's attention, and names him king of *gandhabbas* (DN ii.288). Pañcasikha would receive the Buddha with a song in the latter's legendary visit to the heaven of the Thirty-Three (Vis 392), and perhaps on other important occasions (DN ii.220).

The second instance in which the Buddha makes a positive evaluation of 'devotional music' takes place shortly before he dies. When he laid on his deathbed, among magical blossoms and showers of petals and sandalwood powder, 'divine music and song sounded from the sky in homage to the Tathāgata,' who declared,

> Never before has the Tathāgata been so honoured, revered, esteemed, worshipped and adored (DN ii.138, tr. Walshe 1995).[14]

His demise would inspire melancholic verses in the attendance and, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the Mallas played music for days on end during his funerals (DN ii.159). Hence, the earliest memory of Buddhism after the death of its founder is that of an orchestra playing a sad song of homage. If there is some truth in Masefield's (1986) theory about the necessity of the Buddha's presence for the accomplishment of Buddhist soteriology, this melancholic scene is pretty much the foundation stone of Buddhism as we know it today.

It is too tempting to see these episodes as mere concessions to popular devotions, however ancient they might be.[15] It is true that ambiance music appears in some passages with a popular flavour, including a couple of what we might term 'folk utopias.' The fabulous city of Kusāvatī, as described by the Buddha, 'was never devoid of ten sounds, whether by day or by night,' including musical instruments and cries of 'Eat, drink, be merry!' (DN ii.147). Ruled by the compassionate and wise Mahāsudassana, the city had webs of bells and magical trees whose leaves, when stirred by the wind, made 'lovely, delightful, sweet and intoxicating' melodies, by which 'those who were libertines and drunkards in Kusāvatī had their desires assuaged' (DN ii.172, tr. Walshe). I personally do not share the widespread image of an early Buddhism where single-minded strife for salvation would progressively accommodate popular practices and conceptions, and would even prefer to see it the other way round (Carrera, forthcoming); but that need not concern us here. There is a stronger argument against it, and it is that this selective way of looking at the scriptures is not the way in which Buddhism has understood itself throughout the centuries.

In fact, from an insider's perspective, the birth of Buddhist devotional compositions should be placed several eons before the magnificent funeral of Gotama

or the song of love of Pañcasikha—at least in the time of the buddha Padumuttara. We are told that a layman came across this buddha and his retinue of monks and praised them with some verses, as a reward for which he became king of the gods eighteen times, king of earth twenty five times, and eventually an arahant (Tha Ap 43). The bird Cittapatta earned a future sweet voice when he sang the joy of seeing Vipassī Buddha eating a mango he himself had offered (SA ii.237-238). A bird pleased the buddha Kakusandha with his songs, and, in another life as a peacock, sang in front of a Paccekabuddha's cell three times per day (ThaA ii.116). As the Jātakas reminds us, animals, even tortoises and fish (Jat 233), are as capable as men of appreciating music; not to speak of gods and godlings: at the death of Sikhī Buddha, a tree-dweller[16] offered flowers and instrumental music to his funerary pyre, and, partly as a result of that action, attained Nirvana several cosmic cycles later (Tha Ap 118).

Music is omnipresent in the Apadānas, arguably the earliest hagiographical Buddhist collection, as an offering to dead (Tha Ap 116) and living (Tha Ap 4[3-4]) buddhas and arahants. We are told that once, when the Buddha Padumuttara was entering a city, instruments such as drums and lutes started playing by themselves (Tha Ap 435) (one can only hope that the merits earned thereby could help them be reborn as a holy man's alms bowl!). More 'historical' times do not lack such lively retinues: when king Bimbisāra invited the Buddha and a thousand monks to a meal for the first time, Sakka (Indra) himself took the shape of a young man and sang verses of praise at the head of the entourage (Vin i.38).

Latā, the most skilled dancer of the Tāvatiṃsa heaven, considered her inborn gifts as the fruit of plentiful merits (Vv 32). It seems clear, from the evidence collected, that, as long as the goal is the glorification of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha, skills

like hers are perceived as wholesome. On this point, we cannot but share Gnanarama's (1998, 118) conclusion: 'Buddhism advocates aesthetic experience congenial to a higher mode of living: it should be instrumental for moral perfection.' The stories mentioned above, both canonical and commentarial, imply that music and verse as ways of expression are not the monopoly of humans, but common to many sentient beings—and sometimes the fastest way for them to get to a higher destination. In the next chapter we will investigate how high this can be.

3. Theravādan songs of enlightenment

I roamed about all sorts of existences[17],

like a dancer on a stage

(Tha Ap 537)

Some Buddhist monks, ancient (Thag 6.4, 7.2, 18.1) and modern (Thanissaro, Orloff 2010), have compared the pleasure of meditation with that offered by music—often to conclude the superiority of the former. If the comparison is already telling, sometimes the two are not even far apart. The present chapter will examine some instances of dance, music and meditation interacting, and perhaps merging, with each other.

According to the *Theragātha*, the monk Nāgasamala Thera came across a female dancer on his daily alms round, reflected on the sight and became an arahant ipso facto (Thag 4.1). We have already seen episodes where the offering of music to the Buddha eventually leads to arahanthood, as is typical of Apadāna literature, but there were always many lifetimes in between. This case is different: the attainment is instantaneous, and it seems to be related to some psycho-emotional process directly triggered by the dance.

Elsewhere, it would seem that the farthest one can go in the path of music-enhanced devotion is the attainment of Stream-Entry. Asandhimittā, the main consort of king Aśoka, was obsessed with the Buddha's voice, which, as already mentioned, was proverbially melodious. She obtained a *karavīka* bird, apparently the closest one could

get, and hearing its song (and imagining the sweetness of the Buddha's own voice), entered the Stream leading towards Nirvana (DA ii.453).[18] Nonetheless, in the case of the Ven. Nāgasamala the cause is not an innocuous bird, but a gaily-dressed woman, and she does not remind him directly of the Buddha, but displays her charms in a public dance. (Notice that the association woman/dance/sensuality is still quite present here.)

Buddhist literature occasionally records thoughts presumed to have led directly towards Awakening. Extraordinarily, the story of Nāgasamala offers three different explanations for a single mind-process. First, there are the verses attributed to him in the *Theragātha*:

> As I was going along I saw her ornamented, well-dressed, like a snare of death spread out.
>
> Then reasoned thinking arose in me; the peril became clear; disgust with the world was established.
>
> Then my mind was released; see the essential rightness of the doctrine. The three knowledges have been obtained, the Buddha's teaching has been done (Thag 4.1, tr. Norman 1969).

These are vague, and follow a common pattern of awareness of peril (*ādīnava*) and subsequent disgust (*nibbidā*) (see SN 35.235, Vis 647-651). For the commentary to the stanzas, the enlightening mind-process is triggered by a reflection on the dancer's bodily impurities (*asubha*). 'Reasoned (or wise) thinking' (*manasikāro yoniso*) is interpreted as a reflection on the nature of her contorting body, its 'unclean, pestilent, loathsome impurities' (*asuciduggandhajegucchapaṭikkūlo*), and how it is destined to

destruction. Here we meet a language very dear to Pāli commentators (Hamilton 1996); the reflection inserted in the background story reads somewhat differently:

> 'This one twisted a concocted body (*karaja-kāyassa*) under the influence of the vibration (*vipphāra*) of the wind-element and the action of the mind (*cittakiriya*): impermanent, indeed, are formations!' (ThaA ii.110)

Though it contains a deprecatory term for the body (*karaja-kāya*), disgust is substituted for its decomposition into basic elements, focusing on the air-element (*vāyo-dhātu*); this, in turn, leads to a perception of impermanence (*anicca-saññā*). In standard terminology this is called *catu-dhātu-vavatthāna* or 'analysis of the four elements' (Vis 347-370); one *sutta* explains in detail how the perturbation of elements leads to an understanding of impermanence (MN i.188-189 for *vāyo-dhātu*).

This sort of sudden contemplation is not uncommon in commentarial encounters between women and monks on their alms round (see Vis 20-21), which lead to the perception of the impermanence in the women's body, often via what Wilson (1996, 138) calls an 'ossification' or visualization of her bones. The music itself seems to be at best tangential to these contemplations, sometimes even detrimental to them, as happened to Uttiya Thera, who resolved to make a nirvanic effort after feeling aroused by a singing woman (ThaA i.215). Similar stories are those of the novices Pālita, who fell in love when he heard the song of a female firewood fetcher and committed a transgression (ThaA i.208), and Tissa, who was flying when he heard the song of a recently bathed maiden, lost concentration and fell to the ground (SnA i.70, ii.7; see Jat 66 for a moral about this).

These stories might seem irrelevant to our interests, but they share a narrative trope with a handful of similar episodes that go decidedly farther. In all of them, one character, most commonly a monastic, attains Nirvana after hearing a song, though for a different reason: it is not the sight of a woman that perturbs them, but the content of her song.

The commentary to the *Subhāsita Sutta* (Sn 3.3) claims that sixty meditator-monks attained arahantship in Sri Lanka after hearing, from a she-slave in the fields, a song in Sinhala dealing with birth, old age and death (*jātijarāmaraṇayuttamgītaṃ*) (SnA ii.397). Several similar stories follow. A monk named Tissa, also a meditator (*vipassaka*), became an arahant near a lotus pond when he heard another female slave breaking lotuses and singing the following:

> 'As the red lotus blossomed in the early morning is roasted[19] by the light of the sun,
> so beings who have come to be human are trampled by the high speed of old age'

In a period between buddhas, a man returns from the forest along with his seven children, and hears a woman singing while pounding rice grains with a pestle. The good woman's song deals with the worthlessness of the body, house for worms (*kimīnaṃālayaṃ*), vessel of impurities (*asucissabhājanaṃ*), similar to the trunk of a plantain tree (*kadalīkhandha*)[20]—all stock images of monastic Buddhist literature. After such unexpected hint of the then-forgotten Dhamma, the father and his sons attained silent buddhahood (*paccekabodhi*). The commentary goes on to compare these episodes with the ones in which the words of the Buddha awaken multitudes, and states that even

songs of female slaves can be well spoken (*subhāsita*), faultless and blameless for sons of good family who seek benefit and take shelter in the spirit (*attha*) rather than the letter (*vyañjana*) (SnA ii.398); the happiness they can bring is both mundane and supramundane (397). In another context, the same commentator (Buddhaghosa) makes a proviso for Buddhist music, whereby adapting the Dhamma to songs is deemed improper, but not adapting songs to the Dhamma (KhdA ii.36-7).[21] Perhaps this is what he refers to, in the commentary to the Vinaya, as 'songs of sacred festivals' (*sādhukīḷitagītaṃ*),[22] dealing with the qualities of the Three Jewels and sung on the occasion of the final Nirvana of the Noble ones (VA iv.925). This time, however, his intention was apparently the opposite: to make the prohibition of songs for monastics as wide as possible.[23]

This evidence nuances some common presuppositions about Theravāda Buddhist doctrine, coming from both external observers and the tradition itself. First, dhammic music is not only '*customarily* considered to be religiously supportive' (Carter 1993, 141, my emphasis), since we have found authoritative approval for it in the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* and the *Subhāsita Sutta* commentary, as well as canonical and non-canonical examples of its positive results. (The Vinaya commentary, however, makes sure that such episodes are sporadic at most.) Second, in contrast to the belief that in Theravāda Buddhism 'music should be approached only with great caution' (Williams 2006, 173), in the stories cited the spontaneity of the audition seems to play a major role. Nor are the *Subhāsita Sutta* commentators alone in their openness to popular songs. A Chinese translation of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* manuscripts obtained in Sri Lanka by the traveller Faxian in 411 contained a section, lacking in the extant Pāli versions, where a monk 'hears

the singing of various secular songs, and converts them to Buddhist purposes by comparatively slight alterations' (Basham 1954, 476-478).[24]

It would appear that, as Afro-Americans in the blues or Gypsies in flamenco, Sinhalese slaves of old (and even more female slaves) knew how to express in their songs the precariousness of human existence.[25] Having said that, the reactions described differ widely from each other. As we saw, the meditation of the elder Nāgasamala seems to combine contemplation of the elements with a perception of impermanence—the dance is only a disturbance, as the songs for Uttiya Thera or the novice Tissa. In the other three cases, on the contrary, it is the discursive content of the song that propels the experience of Awakening. The man and sons who attained Nirvana after hearing a diatribe against the body could have been supposed to experience some contemplation on its parts or its decay (*kāyanussati, asubhasaññā*). The songs of (the monk) Tissa and the sixty *vipassaka-bhikkhus* are connected with more philosophical—at least, less graphic—issues of birth, old age and death; the former stresses the fugacity of human life, in a way that could lead to a sense of urgency (*saṃvega*).

These varieties of insight prompted by music are not as obscure as it might seem at first—they have at least one major precedent. One of the core revelations attributed to the Buddha is the simile of the lute, where spiritual life is compared to a lute string: if too loose (sensual indulgence), it will not sound; if too tight (mortification of the flesh), it will break (AN 6.55). Later tradition believes that this philosophy of the Middle Way was inspired by the sound of a heavenly musician (*gandhabba*) playing next to Gotama, which made him ponder whether he also was tightening his spiritual quest too much.[26] The Middle Way is one of the first discoveries the Buddha would reveal to the

world as soon as he started doing the 'singing of the Dhamma' (*dhammagāyana*) (see SN 56.11).

We will, of course, never be able to determine what these arahants-to-be might have felt, or been imagined to feel, when hearing those peasant songs about life, death or the body. However, it would seem that the key feature of these musical encounters has so far been ideas. It is the *content* of the songs, namely the lyrics, that prevails. It leads to a form of non-discursive insight, but this has to be triggered by some form of at least preliminary reflection. To be sure, this musical-spiritual experience is a long way from the prohibition of all forms of music, but it remains a helpful tool to be eventually forsaken. Beauty or any other artistic quality seems to have little value except as an enhancer of the discourse, and the aesthetic experience, if there is any, is mediated by doctrinal concepts. 'Enlightening' music works rather like poetry, which abounds in all Buddhist canons, and has to be abandoned at the gates of the realm of meditation, to which we now turn.

4. Meditations on sound and beauty

> Then the Blessed One, with the divine ear-element, purified and beyond that of humans, heard the chief of the gods Sakka, having risen to the sky, in the air, in the atmosphere, uttering an utterance three times. (Ud 3.7)

Despite the flourishing modern industry of music for meditation, many yogic traditions have historically been suspicious of the possibilities of meditating without any accompaniment other than deep inner silence. In the Buddhist case, it was Mahāyāna texts, such as the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (Yü 1966, 135-50), which first presented specific techniques of concentration on sound. In the early medieval Vajrayāna similar techniques would gain prominence, and the new literature included characters such as the Mahāsiddha Vīṇāpa, who was enlightened after nine years of concentration on the sound of a lute (Dowman 1985, 91). This is in tune with the developments in Shaivite schools (see VBtr, 41), of which we may postulate some degree of influence.

Almost none of those exercises requires any aesthetic appreciation whatsoever. They treat the sound strictly as an object of concentration (*samādhi*), which is generally seen, in later Buddhism, as a means to transcend sensory perception altogether. This is no revolution—and yet, to my knowledge, such techniques are entirely absent from early Buddhism. In fact, there is nothing among the earliest classifications of meditation objects that is not visual, imaginal, or, at most, tactile:[27] no sound, smell or taste to be

found. When other senses could be useful, such as smell in the meditations on corpses (*asubha*), they are unmentioned or explicitly warned against. According to King (1980, 69), even there 'only visual contact was desirable.'

This is not to say that sounds did not occur in early Buddhist meditation. I must underlie here the word *early*, to mark a difference—perhaps an unbridgeable gap—with the rationalistic interpretations of meditation that abound in modern Buddhism. Mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) seems to have been originally in Buddhism not only a technique to cross beyond the ocean of *saṃsāra*, but also a means to acquire miraculous powers, such as telepathy, clairvoyance or clairaudience, and even to visit other realms of existence, be it sitting cross-logged in the air or after the creation of a mind-body (*mano-kāya*), able to climb the cosmic mountain above which the heavenly worlds are located, or to descend to the subterranean torture chambers where the damned are punished, often for thousands of years, according to their karmic misdeeds (see DN i.77-83).

Experiences such as these involve a great deal of sensory, or extra-sensory, perception. Most Indian yogic traditions envisage that the calming of common sights and sounds that follows from meditative exercises may lead to the apparition of plenty of other sights and sounds, only rarer. Besides, I would argue that a sharp distinction between sensory and extra-sensory input makes little sense in the early Buddhist context, where it is just a matter of degree or origin—a quantitative, rather than qualitative, distinction.[28]

As we are concerned here with sound, there is no better way of approaching this other dimension of meditation than the *Mahāli Sutta* (DN 6). Oṭṭhaddha the Licchavi asks the Buddha why his fellow clansman Sunakkhatta, after three years of Buddhist training, experiences heavenly sights but not heavenly sounds. The Buddha replies that

there are different kinds of *samādhi*: in some of them, one comes across heavenly sights; in others, heavenly sounds; in others both at once, what is called a 'two-sided' (*ubhayaṃsa*) *samādhi*. He makes a curious distinction, in this classification of *samādhis*, between facing east and facing all the other directions (south, west, north, upwards, downwards and across).[29] But he also claims to teach more important things: the four stages of sanctity culminating in Nirvana.

It is unclear whether this *sutta* uses the term *samādhi* in a loose sense or whether it refers specifically to the meditative absorptions starting from the first *jhāna*. That smells, tastes or even touch are not mentioned at all might support the latter hypothesis, since in Buddhist cosmology the heavenly realms where the *jhānas* are the prevalent state of mind admit no senses but sight and ear, and hence, no presumable sensory experience other than heavenly sounds and sights. However, the descriptions of those sounds seem to fit lower, sensual heavens, because both the text and its commentaries employ terms like 'desirable' (*kāmūpasaṃhita*), 'intoxicating' (*madhura*) (DA i.311), 'pleasing' (*iṭṭha*) or 'delightful' (*manorama*) (DT i.442).

The contents of those (extra)sensory experiences are nowhere described, and their relation to the one-pointedness of mind considered as characteristic of *samādhi*[30] remains something of an enigma. The commentary claims that the Buddha did not teach the divine ear because Sunakkhatta was unable to attain it, as the karmic result of deafening a monk by damaging his eardrum in a previous life. He gets upset and goes around slandering the Buddha, claiming that he was refused instruction out of envy (DA i.311-312).[31] A typical story with little to add, apart from the straightforward association with the divine ear (*dibba-sota*). Note also that, as previously explained, there is a close link between sensory and extrasensory perception, and, as elsewhere (Vis 407-408), the

physical ear is virtually assumed to be the channel through which the sounds of the gods are perceived (but see Kv 3.8).

'Intoxicating' or not, this *samādhi*—if it is so—is not only the closest early Buddhist meditation gets to music (as delightful sounds), but to aesthetic experience altogether. To my knowledge, there is only one state that can possibly be paired with it, and a similar one in some respects.

The so-called eight liberations (*vimokkha*) are stages of *samādhi* that include, in the highest levels, the formless attainments (*arupa-jhāna:* liberations 4-7) and the cessation of perception and feeling (*nirodha-samāpatti*: liberation 9), which results in the obtainment of either arahantship or the state of non-returner. This partial alignment with the standard progression of *samādhis* has led to the belief that these liberations have to be attained successively, and are not—as their name might suggest—equidistant to Nirvana. However, the nature of the first three liberations is far from clear. The *suttas'* description of the third liberation reads little more than: 'He is inclined only to the beautiful' (*subhan t'eva adhimutto hoti*) (DN ii.71, AN iv.306, MN ii.12). It is called the 'beautiful-liberation' (*subha-vimokkha*).

There are few indications in the *suttas* than can be of any help. In the *Pāṭika Sutta* some ascetics and Brahmins are said to mistakenly attribute to the Buddha the idea that someone who attains the liberation of the beautiful 'finds everything repulsive' (*asubha*); the Buddha rejects this counterintuitive claim and points out that what he teaches is, in fact, that whoever attains this state 'is aware that it is beautiful' (*subha*) (DN iii.34). I am following here a common choice of words, but in fact the term *subha* is notoriously difficult to translate: the PED renders (as an adjective) such disparate qualities as 'shining, bright, beautiful, auspicious, lucky, pleasant, good.' *Asubha* presents a less vast

range of meanings: 'impure, unpleasant, bad, ugly, nasty,' the second and the fourth being perhaps most prominent. If *subha* and *asubha* are contrasted, as in this passage, it is safe to say that the opposition is restricted to the beautiful/pleasant and the repulsive/unpleasant (the 'aesthetic hedonism' discussed above does not certainly force a clear distinction between that which has beauty and that which brings pleasure).

It is not clear whether this semantic choice is applicable to other mentions to this liberation, where *subha(nteva)* has been interpreted variously, even as 'radiant' (Wynne 2015, 233), 'loveliness' (Vajirā, Story 2007, 34) or 'endless beauty' (Ānandajoti 2008). However, it might help us understand some exegetical understandings of this liberation-by-beauty. First, let us turn to the customary explanation. Most frequently, Theravāda relates it to the *kasiṇa* meditation, that is, the concentration on a colour surface (usually a disk) with the purpose of attaining the *jhānas*. *Subha* can be interpreted, thus, either as 'beauty,' referring to the colour of the *kasiṇa*, or as 'purity,' referring to the attainment of concentration (DA ii.513).

The main commentator of the Pāli Canon, Buddhaghosa, points to the problem inherent in this idea: for one immersed in meditative trance, the thought of the beautiful does not occur (DhsA 191). He posits, however, that, by focusing on a pure, beautiful *kasiṇa*, one may enter the *jhānas* along with that thought, as it were. A major treatise from the Canon, of which all the commentators are aware, provides a very divergent interpretation. The *Paṭisambhidāmagga,* one of the few works of scholastic clarification found among the early discourses (*sutta*), relates the beautiful-liberation to the practice of the four sublime states (*brahmavihāra*):

> Here a bhikkhu dwells intent upon one quarter with his will endued with lovingkindness, likewise the second quarter, likewise the third quarter, likewise the fourth quarter; so above and below and around; he dwells intent on the entire world everywhere and equally with his will endued with lovingkindness, abundant, exalted, measureless, free from affliction. Because of the development of lovingkindness beings are unrepulsive (Pat ii.39, tr. Ñāṇamoli 2009 [V.20]).

The same description is applied to the other three sublime states: compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

In all likeliness, 'unrepulsive' (*appaṭikūla*) is used here as a synonym for *subha*, to further determine its slippery meaning. The term 'liberation' (*vimokkha*), on the contrary, has a rather loose sense in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*.[32] We do not even know if 'liberation' here entails some stage of concentration, or if it merely refers to the perception of all beings as beautiful—the commentary suggests the former (PatA iii.554). Be that as it may, this interpretation gets much closer to our modern conception of an 'aesthetic' experience (in its simplest definition as a subjective experience of the beautiful) than the single-minded concentration on primary colours, such as the *kasiṇas* proposed by other voices.[33] It is not that the author(s) of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* ignored, or disfavoured, the *kasiṇas*, since among the first three liberations (whose canonical descriptions are, as mentioned, extremely laconic) this is the only one not linked by them to *kasiṇa* exercises (see Pat ii.38-39). Here, however, they saw something else.

There is one *sutta* where this connection is elaborated upon, though, unlike the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, it is restricted to loving-kindness (*mettā*), the first *brahmavihāra*

state. It is said in the *Mettāsahagata Sutta* that 'the beautiful is the summit of the liberation of mind by loving-kindness' (*subhaparamāhaṃ mettācetovimuttiṃ*), whereas compassion and the rest have formless (*arūpa*) *jhānas* as their summit (SN v.119-121). The 'summit' of each *brahmavihāra* is attained only as long as one has not made a breakthrough to a 'superior liberation' in the process (by which the commentary understands a supramundane (*lokuttara*) state: SA iii.172).

In a way, this makes sense, since loving-kindness is arguably the most 'aesthetic'—as opposed to 'ethic'—*brahmavihāra*: the one grounded on an indiscriminative friendliness towards beings, disconnected from the 'reactive' ethical sentiments of compassion, fruit of perceived suffering, or sympathetic joy, fruit of perceived happiness. The indiscriminative friendliness of *mettā* springs from the bare contemplation of beings as such, and, according to this *sutta*, that contemplation entails a beautification.

Buddhaghoṣa's commentary to the *Mettāsahagata Sutta* seems intent on safeguarding the commentarial reduction of the beautiful-liberation to the *kasiṇas*, explaining that, as one who cultivates loving-kindness becomes 'familiar with the unrepulsive' (*appaṭikūla-paricayā*), it is easier for him to focus on the unrepulsive, pure colours of the *kasiṇa* (SNA iii.173, see Vis 324). This rationalization *in extremis* might seem convoluted, but, by postulating this common feature, it is also a(n odd) way of doing aesthetics. An aesthetic which, from sentient beings glorified through the lens of kindness (*mettā*) to pure primary colours (*kasiṇa*), displays a wide conception of beauty, or 'unrepulsiveness.'

The beautiful-liberation could hence be seen as the aesthetic 'side' of the *brahmavihāras*. What we are not told is whether it takes place during meditation (as a

form of mental visualization, or even of extrasensory perception)[34] or afterwards, in sensory contact with other beings: in other words, if the beautification of beings is *part* of the meditation or its *outcome* (or both). We also ignore if it is something that happens *always* that the *brahmavihāras* are cultivated, an occasional occurrence, or a particular way of practicing them.

It might be imprudent to make a strong connection between this interpretation of the beautiful-liberation and the *samādhi* of divine sounds. They differ as experiences, in purpose and as techniques: the former is part, or a more or less natural outcome, of *brahmavihāra* meditation; the latter seems to be akin to the 'supernatural' side effects of any concentration exercise ('paranormal' abilities, broadly speaking), although the commentary alludes to a specific training. One involves the beautification of (presumably) all beings; the other is seemingly concerned with the realms of gods and godlings.

There are several points in common, however. Both have an emotional quality to them, though of a different nature: if the unrepulsiveness of beings is in principle compatible with calm and equanimity, the enticing, inebriating divine sounds are susceptible to increase desire: both reactions could be called 'aesthetic' from a certain *etic* perspective, but are a world apart in *emic* categories. Another curious convergence is the concern of both meditations with space, in the forms, respectively, of 'pervading' (*pharitvā*) quarter by quarter (Pat ii.39) and facing a certain direction (see note 29). Most remarkable, however, is how openly they associate meditation with certain unseemly experiences: Sunakkhatta wants to meditate *for the sake of* hearing beautiful sounds, and the Buddha confirms that this can be done; in the *subha-vimokkha*, the whole sentient world becomes, in a way, aestheticized. This is perfectly in tune with the spirit

of early Buddhist meditation, which, as previously noted, encompassed all kinds of sensory and extrasensory experiences, from telepathy to the *descensus ad inferos*. Being focused on one's breathing, the modern meditational technique par excellence, is just one among several dozens, and the way it is practiced today tends to leave out most of its requirements and downplay its (extra)sensory side-effects (McMahan 2017, Sharf 2015). Nothing new here, thus, but something sometimes forgotten.

Conclusion

But when we are not making our formal analysis,
still there is a beautiful tune to be heard
Dharmarakṣita, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*
(Berzin, Dhargyey et al. 1973, 31)

The history of Buddhist music is a continuous cut and thrust between the more stringent prohibitions of music and its use for devotional or even meditational purposes, which inevitably crept into all traditions. For example, although Ronald Davidson (2002, 223) credits the (Shaivite) Pāśupatas with the introduction of songs and dance in Buddhist worship, their Indo-Tibetan inheritors worship a small pantheon of musical deities (Chandra 2007) and narrate stories with striking similarities to those presented in chapter 2, where music conveys moral or spiritual lessons (Cornu 2004, 257). In the course of time, several distinctively Buddhist musical forms evolved, such as the Bengali *dohā*, the Tibetan *mgur* or the Japanese *honkyoku*.

Although these phenomena are interesting enough in themselves to have received some scholarly attention (e.g., Guenther 1993, Sujata 2005, Sanford 1977), there is a dearth of general studies on Buddhist *perceptions* of music. In fact, there is little about Buddhist perceptions of art altogether. Most of the secondary literature dealing with Buddhism and art focuses on the artistic heritage of Buddhist cultures, but not so

much on Buddhist art *in theory*, on Buddhist ideas about art(s) and on their historical evolution. These lacunae are even more conspicuous regarding early Buddhism or the Theravāda tradition. We do find a few overviews of arts in the Pāli Canon, notably by authors from Sri Lanka (de Silva 1987, Gnanarama 1998, Guruge 2010) or associated to the island (Carter 1993). That an authority on the Pāli Canon like Richard Gombrich chooses such a tentative title as *Buddhist Aesthetics?* (2013) shows how much the study of conceptions of art in early Buddhism is in its infancy.

I have decided to focus on music partly because for early Buddhists it seems to have constituted, along with dance, the archetypal art form. Of course, they would have never used this terminology of Western, post-Romantic origins, but I believe it sheds some light on their own attitude towards wholesome and unwholesome things (*dhamma*-s). If early Buddhist literature perceives *what we call* art as potentially sensual and dangerous, scenic arts are the only ones that receive some categorical opposition. Some stories, such as the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa,[35] may be considered inappropriate topics of conversation (VibhA 490), but few Buddhists would tolerate avoiding stories ('literature') altogether. Similarly, monks are discouraged from making anthropomorphic sculptures, but are expressly allowed to confect garlands and other non-figurative designs (Vin ii.151-152). Moreover, if 'drunk on poetry' (*kāveyyamatta*) is sometimes used as an insult, the Buddha encourages Vaṅgīsa, the poet of the Saṅgha, to improvise (Buddhist) verses in front of the monks (SN 8.8). The comparison reveals that *only* scenic arts are subject to definite, unambiguous rules and precepts. Yet, if art forms can transmit some meaning, even a dhammic one, then there is little on record with the potential of a good old Sinhalese slave song, apart from perhaps some poetic utterances.[36] No wonder it is something to be handled with care.

It has been common to portray an almost unsolvable conflict between 'the negative attitudes of the early tradition and the extensive use of music in modern popular Buddhist practices' (Deegalle 2000, 910).[37] If that negative attitude is, as we hope to have shown, an oversimplification, those popular practices are not necessarily modern either. To be sure, one finds in modern times a disorderly explosion of devotional music—including such concoctions as Cantopop karaoke-style songs in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit! (Tarocco 2007, 136)—, but there is also undeniably a minimization of ritual and an avoidance of even longstanding musical forms.[38] Some major contemporary meditation lineages prohibit music and entertainment in their centres in all circumstances, including in ceremonies that traditionally allowed them (Houtman 1990, 114). Certainly, some forms of Buddhism practiced not so long ago would be almost unimaginable today. Consider, for instance, the Lao messianic troubadours that roamed about the tumultuous Northeast of Thailand singing the imminent kingdom of Dhamma at the turn of the previous century (Keyes 1977, 295), and into the 1930s (301). [39]

As could perhaps be expected after such ambivalent legacy, modern Buddhist thought has produced almost no systematic aesthetic reflection, with the remarkable exception of the British author Sangharakshita (2010; see also Govinda 1936). There remains, however, an intriguing, sporadic, but recurrent association between meditational experience, on one side, and artistic performance, contemplation or creativity, on the other—with a special mention to music (to reference only a few, Theravāda-inspired works: Bahm 1957; Batchelor 2015, 233; Coomaraswamy 1964, 115; Ito [on Buddhadasa Bhikkhu] 2012, 113; Nyanaponika 2007, 111; Rahula 1967, 72; Sangharakshita 1987, 117).

They are not the first to do this: comparisons between the strings of a lute and moral tightness (AN 6.55) or between meditative and orchestral pleasures (Thag 6.4, 7.2, 18) are, as we have seen, as old as the Pāli Canon itself. It is the recurrence of this parallel in modern times that makes it extraordinary. Arthur Schopenhauer's influential aesthetic theory could help us explain this widespread association between meditation and aesthetics. According to Schopenhauer, the aesthetic experience functions as a temporary cease of the Will to live, in which the mind gets absorbed, momentarily disconnected from the sensual desire that constitutes one of the primary manifestations of the Will. What makes aesthetic experience supreme is, thus, that it enables us to temporarily transcend our limitations as ever-desiring creatures; it is a precious occasion of repose. Although this would seem to be the antipodes of early Buddhist conceptions of art, the parallels with the Buddhist absorption (*jhāna*) are striking. Indeed, some passages allow for an almost complete translation to jhānic terminology:

> The aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful largely consists in the fact that we have entered into a state of pure contemplation [*ekaggatā*], momentarily suppressing all willing, i.e. all desires [*kāmacchanda*] and concerns [*uddhacca-kukkucca, vicikicchā*], we are free of ourselves, as it were [*tadaṅga-nibbānaṃ pariyāyena*: AN 9.50] (Schopenhauer 2010, 417).

Lethargy (*thīna-middha*) and ill will (*vyāpāda*) are also seen as hindrances (*nīvarana*) for the attainment of this nineteenth-century German access-*jhāna* (*upacāra-samādhi*) of sorts.[40] Our suggestion would be that some romantic and post-romantic aesthetes, such as Schopenhauer, turn aesthetic contemplation into a *functional equivalent* of Buddhist *samādhi*. There seems to be, in Panikkar's (1999, 17) terms, a

'homeomorphic' equivalence between the two states, regarded as the summit of spiritual absorption or psycho-emotional fulfilment in their own cultural constellations. That could explain such ease in jumping from one to the other, when Buddhism and Romanticism are in touch. David McMahan (2008) has aptly written the history of a facet of this intriguing osmosis (from Romanticism and American transcendentalism to D.T. Suzuki and John Cage; see also Thanissaro 2006), but connections with meditative and early Buddhist doctrines are still awaiting future research. I will only add here that, as regards Pāli Buddhism, the beautiful-liberation as understood in the *Paṭisambhidhāmagga* and the mysterious *samādhi* of divine sounds are, though little known, the points where the bridge is at its shortest—in a strictly conceptual sense.[41]

In chapter 1, we explored the reasons for the early Buddhist monastic mistrust of music and dance, from the preservation of the outer dignity of the Sangha to the underlying association with power, glory and, even worse, sexual desire. The contrast between this suspicion and the weeklong musical service during the Buddha's funeral led us to investigate, in chapter 2, Buddhist devotional music, which is praised at least twice by the founder himself, and is seen as predating him for millennia. Chapter 3 examined encounters with music and dance that were said to lead towards Nirvana, either as a negative reaction to them or propelled by their suitable topics. In the latter case, however, it is the lyrical contents that matter: the question arose if there is any non-discursive meditational state grounded only on sound or beauty. Chapter 4 rendered two of them, which reflect the wide-ranging conception of meditation of pre-modern Buddhism. Earlier in this conclusion we have addressed the issue why some

major exponents of modern Buddhism associate meditational and aesthetic or musical experiences: our provisional argument has been that both are seen as supreme in two cultural paradigms, namely Buddhism and modern aesthetic Romanticism, which nowadays engage in a mutual influx.

The reason why we suddenly transported the discussion from the earliest Buddhism known to us to its modern, even post-modern, counterpart is to better frame the following question: are these developments doctrinally justified? When an odd *sutta* from the Pāli Canon gives advice on how to obtain heavenly sounds (or even presents a poetical theory: AN 4.231, SN 1.60),[42] when a commentary portrays monks being enlightened by singing slave women, are these voices consistent with the guidelines of Buddhist doctrine and precepts? Is there much difference between those perhaps atypical incidents and a modern Buddhist who claims that the practice of Dharma leads to an increased musical sensibility (e.g., Harvey 2007, 30)?[43] Or are they the living proof that no such thing as a single, monolithic Buddhist doctrine is even conceivable?

It would be tempting to conclude the last, but I do believe that there is a chance to explain these disparate developments without abandoning the framework of early Buddhism. We have addressed the question of early meditational practices, and enough has been said about their strong (extra)sensory, sometimes deeply emotional, component and their ties to Buddhist cosmology. This helped us make sense of some of the episodes discussed, but there is a more direct, doctrinal explanation: in spite of rules, precepts and conventions, in the end nothing is itself wholesome or unwholesome; everything depends on the intention with which one approaches it. Escaping the world means removing the *desire* from the world (AN i.258), and abandoning sensory objects

means nothing more (and nothing less) than abandoning the *thirst* for them (DN iii.280[iv]), which is merely the fruit of unwise attention (AN 1).

This ethical intentionalism, considered by some the foremost discovery of the Buddha (Gombrich 2009), is explicitly connected to the sight of beauty in one passage:

> They are not sensual pleasures, the pretty things in the world:
> a person's sensual pleasure is lustful intention;
> the pretty things remain just as they are in the world,
> but the wise remove the desire for them
> (AN iii.411, tr. Bodhi 2012[6.63])[44]

The texts frequently present equanimity (*upekkhā*) as an alternative response to loathing (*pāṭikkulyatā*), even when facing the 'pretty things of the world' (AN iv.50-51). Consequently, it is not a contradiction to say that 'those without passion will find delight (*ramissanti*)'—provided that 'they are not pleasure-seekers' (Dhp v. 99).

Intention (*cetanā*) or volition (*saṅkhāra*) are also emphasized to relativize other topics that were controversial in the Indian ascetic milieu, meat eating for instance (Sn 2.2). One *sutta* goes as far as to state,

> Whatever object perceived by the eye, if its pursuit leads to the increase of unwholesome factors and the decrease of wholesome ones, that is not to be sought after; if its pursuit leads to the decrease of unwholesome factors and the increase of wholesome ones, such an object is to be sought after. And the same applies to things perceived by the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind (DN ii.281-282, tr Walshe 1995).

Elsewhere, the Buddha makes the further claim that 'all wholesome states (*dhammā*) are included within the four noble truths,' as the footprint of any animal can fit in the footprint of an elephant (MN i.184; see also, on a more advertising note, DN iii.56-57). We cannot avoid now the following question. If even the lures of music and dance can result in Awakening, then what does not? If even states triggered by them can find their place among the four noble truths, does anything go? In a way, that is our conclusion, but if any outer object can prove to be wholesome, it is precisely because the inner ethical and emotive priorities are strictly in their place. Otherwise, and as long as these are not mastered, one could start dancing along as a madman instead of finding the truth of the universe therein.

Notes

[1] The Pāli Canon is by far the main body of work in the language from which it borrows its name. I intend to address Pāli sources as representative of early Buddhist doctrine, and correspondingly use the Pāli versions of terms and names (e.g., Gotama instead of Gautama) unless a different source is discussed or a word has already found its way into English (karma, Nirvana). The Chinese Āgamas, the other earliest Buddhist witnesses, are less accessible to me for purely linguistic reasons. As the general doctrinal uniformity of both canons has long been acknowledged (Lamotte 1958, 170-1), the greatest structural difference is perhaps the fact that, as Rupert Gethin (2004, 201 n.1) observes, the Pāli texts are preserved in 'an ancient Indian language which must be relatively close to the kind of dialect or dialects used by the Buddha and his first disciples.' I can only add that none of the textual parallels I have consulted (e.g., SN 47.20 ≃ SĀ 623) has yielded major differences.

Having said this, I must decidedly refrain from imposing a strict chronological order on the texts addressed, a task I believe is outside not only my own competence, but also that of any living scholar. As stated below, this thesis is more about ideas and representations (that is, *perceptions*) than about whatever people used to do when the Buddha was around—or at any other time, for that matter. I do not infer, for example, that a story *must* be later only because it appears in a commentary. Nor do I hasten to discard the material that does not share the modern criteria of realism—all too often, Pāli scholars end up portraying a Buddha who, instead of the supreme teacher who reveals the planes of rebirth and the ways leading to them, seems to be wholly unconcerned with supernormal powers, gods, spirits and their worlds (Brahmali, Sujato, 2015, 73, 94-6; Gombrich 2009, 36, 73; Wynne 2019, 134-5). In this sense, I am siding with traditional Theravādins in that I make a rather indiscriminate use of the scriptures, but I probably differ in that I fail to hear a single voice in them.

[2] Often they belonged to private collections and little more than the name of the possessor was provided, or were contemporary copies of previous manuscripts of which we know nothing. A description of a source can sometimes read as follows: 'Burmese transcript made by a Burmese monk residing in London to learn English, but left penniless by his patron, and employed by the P.T.S.' (Jośī 1933, v).

[3] It must be mentioned that, throughout its long history, the Theravāda tradition has not necessarily interpreted this as to include pious stage shows and farces inspired by the life of the Buddha or the Jātakas, which were once common in Thailand or Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, even these edifying art forms have sparked controversy. A decree from the 13th century, the *Dambadeṇi Katikāvata,* still a major influence on Sinhalese monastic ideals, forbade monks from participating in 'despicable arts like poetry and drama,' and was kind enough to warn that 'foolish poets who liken the face of a woman to a lotus will be born as worms inside the bellies of those women' (Hallisey 2003, 712). This is apparently in tune with a commentarial tradition that prohibits watching 'dances' even of peacocks, parrots and monkeys (VA iv.925), and praises a great Elder who lived for six decades in a cave without ever looking at a painting right in front of him (Vis 38). Modern Sri Lanka, however, shows a rather practical approach, and it is not unusual to see monks composing songs to convey Buddhism to the youth (Jeffrey 2010, 34) or watching traditional Kandyan dance on the grounds that it is 'culture' (*saṃskṛtiya*) and not entertainment (*vinōdē*) (Gombrich 1988, 131). Some go as far as to write songs on both religious and secular themes, for others to sing (Deegalle 2006, 172). It is, I believe, not necessary to postulate a Mahāyāna influence to explain the musical history of the island (as done in Weerakkody 2011, 1000).

[4] The *Ruṇṇa Sutta*, quoted in the introduction, also has a close parallel in the Jain scriptures: 'All singing is but prattle, all dancing is but mocking, all ornaments are but a burden, all pleasures produce but pains' (Ut 13.16, tr. Jacobi 1964). Which one was first? (Compare with the positive,

dharmic interpretation of the terms 'singing' and 'dance' in the early tantric *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi-sūtra* [Vabhi I.3a, in Giebe 2005, 11-2].)

[5] A story that makes this point in a particularly poignant fashion is found in the *Māra Samyutta* (SN 4.20), where the demon Māra tempts the Buddha with becoming a just ruler (not unlike Satan in the desert in Luke 4:5-8), and the latter refuses because of the issue of pleasure alone.

[6] That is not to say that there is not an aesthetic sense permeating the entire Buddhist worldview, in a broader sense than the one employed here by Gombrich (who restricts aesthetics to the beautiful). I am referring not only to the world of karmic correspondences, which can be seen as primarily guided by literary devices such as analogy, metaphor, symbolism or even hyperbole. A few scholars have addressed the aesthetic value of ancient South Asian ideals, from Jain perceptions of non-violence (Laidlaw 1995, 159) to Buddhist monastic deportment (Samuels 2010). Indeed, the associations that Buddhism and other śramaṇic sects attached to scenic arts are inevitably, paradoxically, *aesthetic* and imaginal: the peace of the monastery (the Sanskritic *śānta-rasa?*) against the noise of the town's fair, the melody that reaches one's ear as a tentacle of the temptress, and so forth. Or, in the *suttas'* own words, 'a lodging in the forest, in the depths of the jungle, free from noise, with little sound, far from the madding crowd, undisturbed by men, well fitted for seclusion' (DN iii.38) against 'dancing, singing, music, displays, recitations, hand-music, cymbals and drums, fairy-shows, acrobatic and conjuring, combats of elephants [...]'(DN i.6, trs. Walshe 1995).

[7] *Nippurisa* could also mean 'not human,' though non-human beings are absent even in Vipassi's early life-story (see Rhys Davids 2000, 18, n. 1).

[8] Though there are other instances where the same misdeed carries a greater offense for Buddhist nuns than for monks, it is tempting to see the disparity in the rule against joining musical shows (see p. 6) as an attempt to prevent nuns from being associated with 'the kind of women' that performed them.

[9] Most of the present art forms and formats are apparently unknown to the Buddha and his early followers, including books, CDs, computer files, photography, film, reproductions of paintings or even paintings themselves. The closest to our contemporary concept of 'work of art' seems to have been statuary, architecture, oral literature, the refined arts of princely courts, and town festivals presenting ephemeral ambulatory shows.

[10] Indian aesthetics had to wait to Abhinavagupta (c. 950 – 1016) to offer a systematic homology between the mystical experience (sc. *brahmāsvāda*) and the aesthetic experience (*rasāsvāda*), according to common criteria such as bliss or loss of one's self (there is an illustrious precedent in Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka [Gnoli 1968, 48, n.1]). By then, Buddhism was over 15 centuries old. Although in its long journey through time and space Buddhism will lead successful incursions in the arts, music has not received in it, to my knowledge, a theoretical revalorization comparable in extent and influence to the one carried out by Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) in the Islamic tradition. A large part of its aesthetic reflection has been reduced to exactly the same three 'flavours' (*rasa*) extolled in some of the earliest texts: the flavour of meaning, the flavour of the Dhamma, the flavour of liberation (AN 1.346)

[11] In another previous life, he is credited as the composer of the first Indian musical hit on record—and an explicitly Buddhist one (Jat 415).

[12] Pañcasikha's love song may well be the first of its genre preserved in the annals of Indian literature—poorly disguised in religious garb, possibly in order to be included in the Canon. If that was the case, could we see in the Buddha's response also the first instance of music criticism? (The song will be lovingly recreated in medieval Sinhalese literature: see Dhammapala 1973, 401ff.)

[13] In fact, it was played with the same lute, which Māra had dropped and Sakka fetched and gave to Pañcasikha (SnA ii.393-394). This change of hands is almost symbolic of a more sympathetic approach to music, not unlike the episode, in the *Vimalakīrtinirdesa-sūtra*, where the

bodhisattva Vimalakīrti accepts the twelve thousand singing goddesses that the *śrāvaka* monk refuses (Lamotte 1987, 204-207). (The Mahāyāna was often more openly embracing of music.)

[14] Despite these two incidents, the *samaṇa* Gotama of the Pāli sources does not show a great interest in the arts after leaving his palace. His later career takes place in the silence of meditation and the heights of the Doctrine. His most frequent opportunity for aesthetic recreation, within the narrow margins of an ascetic, are landscapes: on occasion, he speaks with admiration of both urban (DN ii.102) and natural (MN i.167) places. This sensibility is shared by the authors of the Theragātha, who left beautiful descriptions of nature (Thag 1.22, 1.113, 18.1…). This praise of nature often includes a more or less open invitation to meditate in the solitude and calm it provides, and stands very far from the Indian literary trope of the forest as a frightening, threatening place, of which the *suttas* make use only occasionally (MN i.20-21).

[15] Trainor (1997, 161) sees Kandyan musical offerings as part of a tendency 'to attribute characteristics of kingship to the Buddha.' However, arahants and past buddhas have also been celebrated in a similar fashion, regardless of their birth or former position in society; the texts make clear their will to worship them in just the highest possible manner (which, in the Apadānas, rarely requires less than sixty thousand musical instruments).

[16] I take *rājāyatane* as a kind of tree (see PPN, s.v. 'Rājāyatana'), but it could also be interpreted as a reference to royalty (see translation in Walters 2018).

[17] *Bhavābhave* (Be); as against PTS *bhavākāse*.

[18] The voice of another buddha is compared to a *karavīka* bird as well (Tha Ap 353).

[19] I prefer the Burmese reading, which has *bhajjiyate* (PED: 'to roast, toast'). The PTS edition has *tajjīyate* in its stead.

[20] Which is empty and dies after producing fruit (see PED, s.v. *kadalī*)

[21] This sentence was known to the twelfth-century commentator Sāriputta, who quotes it in the sub-commentary to the *Uposatha Sutta* (AN 3.70), it seems approvingly (AT iii.7.10).

[22] Be; PTS prefers *sādhukīḷikagītaṃ*.

[23] The commentary to the Cūḷavagga states that even 'virtuous songs' (*sādhugīta*) are off limits for monks (VA vi.1201). Most medieval sub-commentators gloss this term as songs 'connected with impermanence and so forth' (*aniccatādipaṭisaṃyuttaṃ*) (VTa 248, VTb 248, VTc 34.25), the Burmese Jāgaratthera adding that they are 'beautiful' (*sundaraṃ*) (VTd 248).

[24] A few centuries later, when the Chinese master Huanglong Huinan (1002-1069) had to provide an example of 'a single phrase from someone who has quieted the wind and pacified the waves,' he chose, 'The fisherman hums a carefree song. The woodsman sings a high melody!' (Ferguson 2011, 405). The Japanese Zen poet Ikkyū (1394–1481) would write, 'Learning the Way, studying Zen, they run afoul of the Buddha's original mind./ One tune from the fisherman is worth a thousand pieces of gold' (Arntzen 1979, 208). The Pāli texts, however, lack this romanticization of peasant life, which, if anything, is seen in light of the suffering it creates.

[25] Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988, 416) inform us that the new Sinhalese society, dominated by what they call 'Protestant Buddhism,' has no room for the songs of harvesting women, which have virtually disappeared from villages. If this is true, it means the end of a thousand-year-old custom, which sometimes gave expression to a marginal experience of the human condition, reputed to move even those next to Nirvana.

[26] In the Khmer tradition, it is often Sakka (Indra) who plays the instrument (Kersalé 2019).

[27] 'Tactile' objects may be the wind *kasiṇa* (Vis 172) or the popular mindfulness of breathing (*satipaṭṭhāna*), which nonetheless has also an imaginal component—one could argue that the 'breathing' to be mindful of has to be partly imagined to keep attention attached to it, and both ancient (e.g., Vis 278-285) and modern (e.g., Buddhadasa 1997, 60ff) instructions devise all kinds of mental exercises to that purpose.

[28] Notice that the divine-ear and the divine-eye (*dibba-cakkhu*) are described as 'purified' (*visuddha*) versions of their human counterparts (DN i.79, 82). It is just like the difference between men and gods *tout court*, which Buddhism tends to efface by postulating the continuity of karma between them.

[29] The translator Maurice Walshe (1995, 552, n.184) comments on this point, 'The intolerably laboured repetition concerning a relatively unimportant matter is noteworthy, even in a style given to much repetition'; therefore, he postulates 'a late date for this Sutta.' From a modern perspective on meditation this is fair criticism, since the pursuit of heavenly sounds and lights is less than a concern there, but one wonders if the cardinal position was seen as having an influence on their audibility and visibility—after all, in traditional Buddhist cosmology the closest gods to us (Catu-mahārāja) are those of the four cardinal points. The Buddha seems to be merely confirming the existence of different kinds of *samādhi*, as befits he who 'makes known this world, with its devas, its Māras, its Brahmās [...]' (DN i.150).

[30] It is first in the scholastic Abhidhamma Piṭaka that *ekaggatā* appears consistently as a jhānic factor, whereas the *suttas* rarely include it among the first three absorptions. There is indeed something of an inner tension between deep concentration and the two forms of thought (*vitakka, vicāra)* considered as constitutive of the first *jhāna* (Stuart-Fox 1989, 103-5). The answer might be that in earlier Buddhism initial stages of *samādhi*, whatever their nature, tolerate some degree of thought and sensory experience, such as heavenly sounds; in fact, the commentarial tradition, which follows the Abhidhammic scheme, feels the need to create a preliminary access-*jhāna* (*upacāra-samādhi*) incorporating several meditation objects from the *suttas* which require less concentration (and which are declared to lead no further than this access-*jhāna*, even though they constitute one fourth of the objects listed in the *Visuddhimagga*).

[31] We have other instances of the interest in 'superhuman things' (*uttarimanussadhammā*) of Sunakkhatta, a quite problematic character (see DN 24).

[32] The 'liberation by voidness' (*suññata-vimokkha*), for instance, is not explicitly described here as a particular way of attaining the highest goal of Nirvana (see Dhp vv. 92-93), but rather as an unwavering reflection on the lack of self—something lofty, but not quite (Pat ii.36).

[33] In the *Atthasālinī*, Buddhaghosa seems to discard the 'aesthetic' interpretation for purely formal reasons, arguing that the *brahmavihāras* do not belong here, since they are explained somewhere else in the text he is commenting (DhsA 191).

[34] In this regard, the commentary clarifies that it happens in 'the monk's mind' (*bhikkhuno cittassa*) (PatA iii.555).

[35] The words commonly taken to refer to these two epics are, respectively, *Bhāratayuddha* and *Sītāharaṇa* (see also DA i.76). In fact, many Buddhist stories employ literary archetypes that also exist in those epics, such as the exile to the forest of the hero (Jat 461, 547) or the human sacrifice aborted by Sakka (Indra) (Jat 542), both present in the forbidden *Rāmāyaṇa*.

[36] I leave aside uplifting hagiographies, cosmological descriptions, past-birth accounts and other edifying stories, which may seem to fit in certain modern conceptions of 'literature' or 'fiction' but were not seen, or at least presented, as such. I have only considered 'secular' literature (≃ *kāveyya*).

[37] Much more nuanced is the '*vinaya* [monastic code] vs. *vīṇā* [lute]' clash that Carter (1993, 151) reads in the texts.

[38] Sometimes we hear from modern Buddhist authors that the function of music and dance is merely distracting 'us from seeing the fleeting nature and uncertainty of existence and thereby delay our being able to perceive the true nature of the self' (Dhammananda 2007, 16). Others, however, take into account the episodes presented in chapter 3 or similar possibilities (see Ñanavara 1993; Jayasaro 2013, 144; Tan 2011, 2).

[39] It would be unfair to blame the loss of artistic forms in Buddhist cultures on modern religious fundamentalism alone, since there are other considerations at play: among the causes of this loss in Northeastern Thailand are the association of some musical styles with foreignness (which turns them into a menace for the modern 'national culture'), or even the risk of drought that they are considered to entail (Singh, Piengkes 2011, 159-160).

[40] The German philosopher agreed in at least one more thing with early Buddhists, as we have portrayed them: that music is art pushed to the extreme, which for him meant that it was not the lowest, but the highest of human achievements (Schopenhauer 2010, 283).

[41] A. G. S. Kariyawasam advances another approximation, based on the division between sensual (*sāmisa*, literally 'carnal') and non-sensual (*nirāmisa*) delight. He argues that there is a subtype of the former that includes 'any kind of (aesthetic) delight (*sukha*) unsullied by sensual defilement and is free from unskilled state of mind' and quotes a passage of the *Majjhima Nikāya* about 'a pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality and unwholesome things' (*sukhaṃ aññatreva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi*, my translation) (Kariyawasam 1984, 358). However, the various contexts of this and similar formulas make it abundantly clear that it refers to the (first and second) jhānas (MN i.91, iii.233), and the ascetic narrative of the Buddha shows him initially afraid even of this peaceful, meditative pleasure (MN i.246-247). Hence, it seems that this early division of pleasure was as dual as it could, and did not conceive a third between the carnal (*sāmisa*) and the spiritual (*nirāmisa*) (only further beyond the latter: SN 36.31)

[42] For a (rudimentary) musical theory, see AA iii.390.

[43] Others, however, have stressed the difficulty of combining a meditative and a musical life (e.g., Palmer 2008).

[44] Note that here beautiful things, if not inherently intoxicating, are apparently seen as 'pretty' (*citra*) in themselves, that is, as having an inherent quality that may lead to intoxication—what other texts would call a 'mark of the attractive' (*subha-nimitta*) (e.g., AN 1.11).

References

The numeration of Pāli *suttas* follows that of *SuttaCentral* (https://suttacentral.net). For the longer *suttas* and particular sections within texts, I reference the volume (Roman numerals) and page number of the Pali Text Society edition (abbreviated *PTS*), except when I follow the Burmese (Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana) edition, as provided by *Tipitaka.org* (https://tipitaka.org), and abbreviated *Be*. Variant readings between different editions are discussed in some of the notes.

PED stands for *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English dictionary*, edited by T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (Chipstead: Pali Text Society, 1921-1925). *PPN* stands for G. P. Malalasekera's *Dictionary of Pāli proper names* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2008, 2 vols.). When not stated otherwise, translations are my own.

Abbreviations

AA= *Aṅguttara-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Manorathapūraṇī)*

AN= *Aṅguttara-nikāya*

AS= *Ācārāṅga-sūtra (Jaina)*

AT= *Aṅguttara-nikāya-ṭīkā (Sāratthamañjūsā)* (Be)

DA= *Dīgha-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Sumaṅgalavilāsinī)*

Dhp= *Dhammapada*

DhsA= *Dhammasaṅgaṇi-aṭṭhakathā (Atthasālinī)*

DN= *Dīgha-nikāya*

DT= *Dīgha-nikāya-ṭīkā (Sumaṅgalavilāsinī-purāṇa-ṭīkā)*

Jat= *Jātaka*

KhdA= *Khuddakapāṭha-aṭṭhakathā (Paramatthajotika I)*

KS= *Kalpa-sūtra (Jaina)*

Kv= *Kathāvatthu*

MA= *Majjhima-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Papañcasūdani)*

Mhv= *Mahāvaṃsa*

MN= *Majjhima-nikāya*

Pat= *Paṭisambhidāmagga*

PatA= *Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā (Saddhammappakāsinī)*

SĀ= *Saṃyukta-āgama*

SN= *Saṃyutta-nikāya*

Sn= *Sutta-nipāta*

SNA= *Saṃyutta-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Sāratthapakāsinī)*

SnA= *Sutta-nipāta-aṭṭhakathā (Paramatthajotikā II)*

Sut= *Sūtrakṛtāṅga (Jaina)*

Tha Ap= *Thera-apadāna*

ThaA= *Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā* (*Paramatthadīpanī)*

Thag= *Theragāthā*

Thig= *Therīgāthā*

Ud= *Udāna*

Ut= *Uttarādhyayana-sūtra (Jaina)*

VA= *Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā (Samantapāsādikā)*

Vabhi= *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi-sūtra*

VBtr= *Vijñāna-bhairava-tantra (Śaiva)*

VibhA= *Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā (Sammohavinodanī)*

Vin= *Vinaya (Theravāda)*

Vis= *Visuddhimagga*

VTa= *Sāratthadīpanī-ṭīkā: Cūḷavagga-ṭīkā* (Be)

VTb= *Vimativinodanī-ṭīkā: Cūḷavaggavaṇṇanā* (Be)

VTc= *Vinayālaṅkāra-ṭīkā* (Be)

VTd= *Pācityādiyojanā: Cūḷavaggayojanā* (Be)

Vv= *Vimāna-vatthu*

Bibliography

Ānandajoti, Bhikkhu (tr.). 2008. *The Discourse about the Great Emancipation (Mahāparinibbāna Sutta).* SuttaCentral. https://suttacentral.net/dn16/en/anandajoti

Arntzen, Sonja Elaine. 1979. *The Poetry of the Kyōunshū 'Crazy Cloud Anthology' of Ikkyū Sōjun*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Columbia.

Bareau, André. 1970-1971. *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha dans les Sūtrapiṭaka et les Vinayapiṭaka anciens. II: Les derniers mois, le Parinirvāṇa, et les funérailles*. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.

Bahm, Archie J. 1957. "Buddhist Aesthetics." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16 (2): 249-252.

Basham, A. L. 1954. *The Wonder That Was India*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson.

Batchelor, Stephen. 2015. *After Buddhism: Rethinking the Dharma for a Secular Age*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

Berzin, Alexander, Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey et al. (trs.). 1973. *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons: A Mahayana Training of the Mind*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 2000. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

_____. 2012. *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Anguttara Nikaya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu, and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. 1995. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Brahmali, Bhikkhu and Bhikkhu Sujato. 2015. "The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts." *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 5 (supplement). https://ocbs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/authenticity.pdf

Carrera, Oscar. Forthcoming. *Rajgir, año -500: el budismo, el jainismo y los ājīvikas.*

Carter, John Ross. 1995. "Music in the Theravāda Buddhist Heritage: In Chant, in Song, in Sri Lanka." In *On Understanding Buddhists: Essays on the Theravāda Tradition in Sri Lanka*, 133-152. Delhi: Sri Satguru.

Chandra, Lokesh. 2007. "Musical Deities in Buddhism." In *Buddhism Art and Values: A Collection of Research Papers and Keynote Addresses on the Evolution of Buddhist Art and Thought across the Lands of Asia*, 90-5. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, Aditya Prakashan.

Chang, Garma C.C. 1983. *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*. University Park (Pa.): Pensylvannia State University.

Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. 1964. *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*. New York/Evanston/London: Harper & Row.

_____. 1985. *The Dance of Śiva: Essays on Indian Art and Culture*. Mineola, N. Y.: Dover Publications.

Cornu, Philippe. 2004. *Diccionario Akal del budismo*. Barcelona: Akal.

Davidson, Ronald M. 2002. *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press.

De Silva, Lily. 1987. *The Buddhist Attitude towards Nature* (Wheel no. 346). Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Deegalle, Mahinda. 2000. "Music: Buddhist Perspectives." In *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, vol. 2, edited by William M. Johnston, 909-911. New York: Routledge.

_____. 2006. *Popularizing Buddhism: Preaching as Performance in Sri Lanka*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Dhammananda, K. Sri. 2007. *A Happy Married Life: A Buddhist Perspective*. Singapore: Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery.

Dhammapala, Gatare. 1973. *A Comparative Study of Sinhalese Literature in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Doctoral dissertation, University of London.

Dowman, Keith. 1985. *Masters of Mahamudra: Songs and Histories of the Eighty-Four Buddhist Siddhas*. New York: SUNY Press.

Ferguson, Andy. 2011. *Zen's Chinese Heritage: The Masters and Their Teachings*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Gethin, Rupert. 2004. *On the Practice of Buddhist Meditation according to the Pali Nikāyas and Exegetical Sources*. Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart 9: 201-221.

Giebe, Rolf W. 2005. *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi Sūtra, Translated from the Chinese (Taishō Volume 18, Number 848).* Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research.

Gnanarama, Pategama. 1998. "The Early Buddhist Attitude to Aesthetics." In *Aspects of Early Buddhist Sociological Thought*, 100-133. Singapore: Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association.

Gnoli, Raniero. 1968. *The Aesthetic Experience according to Abhinavagupta*. Benares: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office.

Gombrich, Richard. 1971. *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

_____. and Gananath Obeyesekere. 1988. *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

_____. 1996. *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*. London/New York: Routledge.

_____. 2009. *What the Buddha Thought*. London: Equinox.

_____. 2013. Buddhist Aesthetics? *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, 5: 136-160.

Govinda, Anagarika B. 1936. *Art and Meditation: An Introduction and Twelve Abstract Paintings.* Allahabad: The Allahabad Block Works.

Guenther, Herbert V. 1993. *Ecstatic Spontaneity: Saraha's Three Cycles of Doha*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.

Guruge, Ananda. 2010. *Buddhism Today and Aesthetic Creativity: a Miscellany of Recent Articles, Essays and Speeches*. Lulu.com

Hallisey, Charles. 2003. "Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture." In *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, edited by Sheldon Pollock, 689-746. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.

Hamilton, Sue. 1995. "From the Buddha to Buddhaghosa: Changing Attitudes Toward the Human Body in Theravāda Buddhism." In *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, edited by Jane Marie Law, 46-63. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Harvey, Jonathan. 2007. "Buddhism and the Undecidability of Music." In *Circles of Silence*, edited by Jonathan Harvey and Jean Claud Carrière, 29–38. Lewes: Sylph Editions.

Horner, I. B., and Bhikkhu Brahmali. 2014. *The Book of the Discipline: Vinayapiṭakaṁ*. SuttaCentral. https://github.com/suttacentral/suttacentral-files/blob/master/Book_of_the_Discipline.pdf?raw=true

Houtman, Gustaaf. 1990. *Traditions of Buddhist Practice in Burma*. Doctoral dissertation, London University.

Ito, Tomomi. 2012. *Modern Thai Buddhism and Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu: A Social History*. Singapore: NUS Press.

Jacobi, Hermann (tr.). 1964. *Jaina Sūtras. The Sacred Books of the East*, vols. 22, 45. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Jayasaro, Ajahn. 2013. *Without and Within: Questions and Answers on the Teachings of Theravāda Buddhism*. Bangkok: Panyaprateep Foundation.

Jośī, Cintāmaṇa Vināyaka (ed.). 1933. *The Saddhammappakāsinī: commentary on the Paṭisambhidāmagga*, vol. I. London: Published for the Pali Text Society by the Oxford University Press.

Kersalé, Patrick. 2019. *The 'Lesson of the three strings.'* https://chapei.jimdofree.com/english/history/the-lesson-of-the-three-strings

Keyes, Charles F. 1977. "Millennialism, Theravāda Buddhism, and Thai Society." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 36 (2): 283-302.

King, Winston L. 1980. *Theravāda Meditation: The Buddhist Transformation of Yoga*. University Park/London: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Laidlaw, James. 1995. *Riches and Renunciation: Religion, Economy, and Society among the Jains*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Lamotte, Étienne. 1958. *Histoire du bouddhisme indien: des origines à l'ère Śaka*. Louvain: Publications Universitaires.

_____. 1987. *L'enseignement de Vimalakīrti (Vimalakīrtinirdeśa).* Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique, Institut Orientaliste.

Marasinghe, E. W. 2003. "Music." In *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, vol. VII, fasc. 1, edited by W. G. Weeraratne, 66-71. Colombo: Government of Sri Lanka.

Masefield, Peter. 1986. *Divine Revelation in Pāli Buddhism*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

McMahan, David L. 2008. "Buddhist Romanticism." In *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 117-147. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____. 2017. "How Meditation Works: Theorizing the Role of Cultural Context in Buddhist Contemplative Practices." In *Meditation, Buddhism, and Science*, edited by David McMahan and Erik Braun, 21-46. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu. 2009. *The Path of Discrimination: Paṭisambhidāmagga*. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

Ñanavara, Thera (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya [Prayudh Payutto]). 1993. *Uposatha Sila: The Eight-Precept Observance*. Thailand: The Office of the Secretary of the Supreme Patriarch. https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nanavara/uposatha.html

Norman, K.R (tr.). 1969. *The Elders' Verses*, vol. 1. London: Pali Text Society.

Nyanaponika, Thera. 2007. *Abhidhamma Studies*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Pali Text Society. n. d. “Sets of the Pāli Canon in English Translation and in Pāli (Tipiṭaka).” PTS website. Accessed July 1, 2019. http://www.palitext.com/palitext/tipitaka.htm

Palmer, Amanda. 2008. “Melody vs. Meditation.” *Lion’s Roar*, May 1. https://www.lionsroar.com/melody-vs-meditation/

Panikkar, Raimundo. 1999. *The Intrareligious Dialogue*. New York: Paulist Press.

Powers, John. 2009. *A Bull of a Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Rahula, Walpola. 1967. *What the Buddha Taught*. Bedford: Gordon Fraser.

Rhys Davids, Thomas W. 2000. *Dialogues of the Buddha: Translated from the Pali of the Dīgha Nikāya*, vol. II. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Sanford, James H. 1977. “Shakuhachi Zen. The Fukeshu and Komuso.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 32 (4): 411-440.

Sangharakshita. 1987. *Crossing the Stream*. Windhorse Publications. https://www.sangharakshita.org/_books/crossing-the-stream.pdf

_____. 2010. *The Religion of Art (Sangharakshita Classics)*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. 2010 [first ed. 1818]. *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I. Translated by Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sharf, Robert H. 2015. “Is Mindfulness Buddhist? (And Why It Matters).” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 52 (4): 470–484.

Singh, Draupadi, and Adisorn Piengkes. 2001. The *Buddhist Culture of North-East Thailand*. Delhi: Buddhist World Press.

Singh, Madan Mohan. 1967. *Life in North-Eastern India in Pre-Mauryan Times*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Stuart-Fox, Martin. 1989. “Jhāna and Buddhist Scholasticism.” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 12 (2): 79-110.

Sujata, Victoria. 2005. *Tibetan Songs of Realization: Echoes from a Seventeenth-Century Scholar and Siddha in Amdo*. Leiden: Brill.

Sujato, Bhikkhu. 2011. “The Ten Funniest Scenes from the Pali Canon.” *Sujato’s Blog*, November 29. https://sujato.wordpress.com/2011/11/29/the-ten-funniest-scenes-from-the-pali-canon

Sujato, Bhikkhu, and Jessica Walton. 2014. *Theragāthā: Verses of Senior Monks. An approachable translation of the Theragatha*. https://readingfaithfully.org/verses-of-the-senior-monks-theragatha-ebook-by-bhikkhu-sujato-epub-kindle-pdf

Tan, Piya. 2011. “Ruṇṇa Sutta: The Discourse on Lamentation | A 3.103/1:261.” *The Dharmafarers,* http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/37.3-Runna-S-a3.103-piya.pdf

Tarocco, Francesca. 2007. *The Cultural Practices of Modern Chinese Buddhism: Attuning the Dharma*. London: Routledge.

Thanissaro Bhikkhu. 2006. “The Roots of Buddhist Romanticism.” In *Purity of Heart: Essays on the Buddhist Path*, 40-50. https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/Writings/Ebooks/PurityofHeart_181215.pdf

Thanissaro Bhikkhu, and Rich Orloff. 2010. “Being a Monk: A Conversation with Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2/2).” *Buddha Channel*, January 22. http://www.buddhachannel.tv/portail/spip.php?article9710

Trainor, Kevin. 1997. *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism: Rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravāda Tradition*. Cambrige: Cambridge University Press.

Vajirā, Sister, and Francis Story. 2007. *Last Days of the Buddha: The Maha-parinibbana Sutta*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Walshe, Maurice. 1995. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Somerville, Mass: Wisdom Publications.

Walters, Jonathan S. (tr). 2018. *Legends of the Buddhist Saints: Apadānapāli*. Whitman College. http://apadanatranslation.org/public/links/walters_legends-of-the-buddhist-saints.pdf

Weerakkody, D.P.M. 2011. “Sri Lanka: Musical Heritage.” In *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Music of India*, edited by Saṅgīt Mahābhāratī, 1000-1006. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Williams, Sean. 2006. “Buddhism and Music.” In *Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music in World Religions*, edited by Guy L. Back, 169-190. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Wilson, Liz. 1996. *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wynne, Alexander. 2015. "Early Buddhist Teaching as Proto-Śūnyavāda." *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 6: 213-241.

_____. 2019. "Did the Buddha Exist?" *Journal of the Oxford Centre of Buddhist Studies* 16: 98–148.

Yü, Lu K'uan (tr.). 1966. *The Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Leng Yen Ching)*. London: Rider & Company.