

What's in a Repetition? On Counting the Suttas of the Saṃyutta-nikāya*

I. Introduction

One of the stylistic features of ancient Indian Buddhist texts is their repetitiveness. Of course, other ancient Indian literatures display some of the same repetitive devices, yet it seems that none develops the art of repetition quite to the extent that Buddhist texts do (cf. Allon 1997, p. 360). While this stylistic feature has been frequently noted, as Allon comments, it “has never been satisfactorily analysed or quantified” (1997, p. 273). Certainly Mark Allon’s own 1997 study of the function of certain stylistic features in Pāli texts (the product of doctoral research carried out in Cambridge under the supervision of K.R. Norman) makes an important contribution to our understanding of the nature of repetition in early Buddhist literature, but his study was not intended as exhaustive and more remains to be said.

In his analysis of repetition in the Udumbarikasihanāda-sutta (D III 36–57), Allon calculates that 30% of the full text can be classified as “verbatim repetition”, while 86.8% can be classified as repetition of one sort or another (pp. 358–59). He distinguishes five types of repetition : verbatim, repetition with minor modifications, repetition with important modifications, repetition of structure types 1 and 2 (p. 287). While the five different types are important for his calculations, in the present context I shall collapse Allon’s first three categories into what might be called “narrative repetition” and his last two into “structural repetition”.

By “narrative repetition” I refer to repetition of blocks, with or without modification, in the course of a narrative. Thus a text may describe events relating to person A who then describes these events in full to person B who then in turn relates to them to person C in full who then meets person A and asks, describing the events in full yet again,

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whether they are true.¹ By “structural repetition” I refers to the practice of providing a framework structure which can then be used as the basis for a series of repetitions by substituting different items and/or modifying the frame. For example, the *Gaṅgā-peyyāla* of the Saṃyutta-nikāya uses the following frame: “Just as the river Ganges flows to the east, so a *bhikkhu* who develops the noble eightfold path resorting to seclusion flows to nirvana.” By substituting different rivers for the Ganges, different items for the noble eightfold path, “great ocean” for “east”, different expressions for “resorting to seclusion”, a whole series of repetitions are achieved (S V 38–41). Such repetitions are especially characteristic of the Saṃyutta- and Aṅguttara-nikāyas and also the canonical Abhidhamma texts.

Both kinds of repetition are routinely abbreviated in the manuscripts and printed editions by the use of the term *peyyāla*, itself usually abbreviated to *pe* or *la*. The use of abbreviation in this connection poses something of a problem for the full analysis of repetition in Pāli texts, since it is not always clear precisely what is to be repeated. In the present paper, offered on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Pali Text Society in 1881 and K.R. Norman’s 80th birthday in 2005, I should like to focus on the use of structural repetition in the Saṃyutta-nikāya, considering in the first place its extent and in the concluding section its possible significance and function.

2. Counting the suttas of the Saṃyutta-nikāya

With reference to the 56 *vaggas* that make up the Saṃyutta-nikāya, K.R. Norman observes that “[t]hey contain 2,889 suttas in all, in the European edition, although Buddhaghosa states there are 7,762 suttas”

¹As K.R. Norman (2006, pp. 70–71) has pointed out, this kind of repetition is well exemplified by the opening of the Alagaddūpama-sutta (M I 130–31); this describes how Ariṭṭha is beset by a pernicious view, how *bhikkhus* hear of this and proceed to ask Ariṭṭha if it is true, how Ariṭṭha confirms it is true, how the monks reprimand Ariṭṭha and then report to the Buddha, relating everything in full to him.

(1983, p. 50). This discrepancy between the European edition and Buddhaghosa is worth pondering. Buddhaghosa also gives figures for the number of suttas in the other Nikāyas: 34 for the Dīgha-nikāya, 152 for the Majjhima-nikāya and 9,557 for the Aṅguttara-nikāya.² The fact that the figures Buddhaghosa gives correspond to the number of suttas found in modern European editions in the cases of the Dīgha-nikāya and Majjhima-nikāya but are wildly out of line in the cases of the Saṃyutta-nikāya and Aṅguttara-nikāya (the European edition of the latter counts between 2,308 and 2,363)³ should give us pause for thought. Buddhaghosa's figures do not seem intended as vague big numbers — like, say, 84,000 — but as a precise count, so either the tradition he reports was talking about a very different text from the one that has come down to us, or it counted suttas in a very different way. In fact it is clear from the introductions to their editions that both Feer and Hardy struggled with how to present the Saṃyutta-nikāya and Aṅguttara-nikāya and that a significant issue was the problem of repetition and what to count as a single sutta. Feer claims that by counting the suttas of the Saṃyutta-nikāya in a different way “the sum of 7,762 can be attained, but not be got from the data of the MSS” (S V ix). Yet his claim that he “counted the suttas according to the Uddānas” is problematic,⁴ because, as we shall see, in the first place the *uddānas* are not always clear on numbers and in the second place he seems on occasion to ignore — or at least interpret in a conservative way — the *uddānas*' instructions to expand.⁵

²Sp 18 = Sv I 17 = As 18 (cf. Spk I 2). The Chinese translation of Sp gives the number of suttas for D as 44 (possible variant noted), for M as 252, but the numbers for S and A are as in the Pāli Sp. See Bapat and Hirakawa 1970, pp. 10–11.

³See Norman 1983, p. 54.

⁴Elsewhere Feer seems in fact to favour counting larger numbers in certain instances S IV xii: “But if we count 247 suttas in the Saḷāyatana and 1,463 in Asaṅkhata, — what the text seems to permit — if not require, — this total would amount to 1,850 suttas.”

⁵For example the *uddāna* at S II 133 is explicit that 132 suttas should be counted.

The same problem has troubled these texts' translators. For the most part C.A.F. Rhys Davids and Woodward followed Feer's lead, though correcting some obvious slips. In the introduction to his recent translation Bhikkhu Bodhi makes some attempt to address the problem of the number of suttas in the Saṃyutta-nikāya, providing tables of Feer's and his own count, and suggesting that since Buddhaghosa's Sāratthappakāsinī comments on a text that seems to correspond to what we have, "the difference in totals must certainly stem merely from the different ways of expanding the vaggas treated elliptically in the text", although he still finds it "difficult to see how the commentator could arrive at so large a figure" (2000, p. 26).

The "problem" of repetition seems to have two facets. The first is that, as the editors point out, the manuscripts they had before them were inconsistent, using different ways of presenting an abbreviated text, though it is not exactly clear that this meant different numbers of repetitions were evidenced in the manuscripts. The second facet of the problem is that editors seem to have found the repetitions "tiresome", so much so that they were predisposed to play down the numbers of suttas implied by the repetitions.⁶ Certainly it seems worth trying to establish whether it is possible on the basis of the text of the Saṃyutta-nikāya that has come down to us to arrive at the number of suttas Buddhaghosa counted. It also seems worth pondering further the question of why all these "tiresome" repetitions.

Ideally the question of counting the suttas of the Saṃyutta-nikāya should be addressed by going back to representative manuscripts. In the present context I shall confine myself to carrying out a preliminary study on the basis of a selection of modern printed editions: the five

⁶So Feer at S V v–vi comments, "The tiresome repetitions, peculiar to the buddhist scriptures, abound exceedingly in the Mahā-Vaggo, and form so great a proportion in several of its Saṃyuttas that important abridgments are required. The singhalese and burmese MSS. differ so much in the manner and quantity of their abbreviation that they seem to have nothing in common, although they are dealing with the same subject." On the issue of the early European tendency to abbreviate Pāli texts, see also Norman 2006, p. 113.

volumes of Feer's PTS edition of 1884–1898 (E^c); the five volumes of the *Syāmaratṭha-tepiṭaka* of 1927 (BE 2470) (S^c); the three volumes of the *Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti-piṭaka* of 1957 (B^c); the six volumes of the *Buddhajayanti-tripiṭaka* of 1960–83 (C^c).⁷ Of course, this is not ideal since all these Asian editions may have been influenced to some extent by Feer's European edition.⁸

As I have already indicated, Feer gives his count of the total number of suttas in the introductions to each volume of his edition; unfortunately, for the most part S^c counts paragraphs or sections rather than suttas, so does not make explicit how many suttas it recognizes, though the edition is still useful for comparing the number of repetitions understood in the text. Both B^c and C^c give a running count of suttas for each of the five *vaggas* of *Samyutta-nikāya*. Bhikkhu Bodhi also offers a count in the introduction to his translation. The various enumerations of suttas are set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Numbers of suttas counted in the *Samyutta-nikāya*

vagga	suttas			
	E ^c Feer	B ^c CS	C ^c BJT	Bodhi
Sagātha	271	271	271	271
Nidāna	286	246	406	286
Khandha	733	716	716	716
Saḷāyātana	391	420	2286	434
Mahā	1208	1201	3977	1197
	2889	2854	7656	2904

⁷I have had access to S^c and B^c in both the printed editions and also the digital editions in the form of the BUDSIR (Bangkok: Mahidol University, 1994, 1996) and "Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana" (Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute, 1999) CD-ROMs respectively. Unfortunately I have only had direct access to the digital edition of C^c (Sri Lanka Tripitaka Project, Colombo; www.buddhistethics.org/palicanon.html), though I am grateful to Peter Jackson for supplying me with some details directly from the printed edition.

⁸The *Syāmaratṭha* edition has been reprinted with the addition of at least some variants in 1956 (BE 2499), 1979 (BE 2522), 1995 (BE 2538). I have used the 1995 reprint; how far this differs from the original is unclear.

In each *vagga*, except the Sagātha-*vagga* where the counting of suttas seems unproblematic, there is some variation; particularly in the Saḷāyātana- and Mahā-*vaggas* the discrepancies are considerable. Tables 2–5 show the differences in detail for each *vagga*. The figures which appear initially discrepant are highlighted in bold. These discrepant figures allow us to identify places where it seems likely different methods of counting are in operation. In tables 2–5 I have added a column giving my own count of suttas.

The discrepancy in the *nidāna-saṃyutta* turns out to be precisely connected with a repetition section that closes the *saṃyutta*, the *antarā-peyyāla* (S II 130–33). This *peyyāla* applies a structure based on the four truths to each of eleven links of the formula of dependent arising in turn (*avijjā* is omitted): someone who does not know or see old age and death, etc., their arising, their ceasing, and the path leading to their ceasing as they truly are should seek the Teacher in order to know them as they truly are. This gives eleven suttas.⁹ The *peyyāla* section then gives a further eleven alternatives to seeking the Teacher that someone who does not know or see should do in order to know and see. This gives a total of (11 × 12 =) 132 repetitions or suttas acknowledged in the *uddāna*.¹⁰ This gives C^e's total of 213 for the *saṃyutta*.¹¹ In fact, all editions recognize the same number of repetitions, but in B^c these are counted as just one, and by Feer and Bodhi as 12. In the preceding *samaṇabrāhmaṇa-vagga* where Feer, C^e and Bodhi count 11, B^c treats

⁹S II 130,28–29 makes it clear at the end of the initial treatment of *jarāmaṇa* that someone at some point in the history of the texts regarded this as a sutta: *suttanto eko. sabbesaṃ evaṃ peyyālo*.

¹⁰The *uddāna* has a number of variants in the manuscripts and printed editions: S II 133,5 talks of *suttā dvattiṃsasatāni*, presumably to be construed as “suttas numbering thirty-two and a hundred”, while the variant Feer records from his Sinhalese manuscripts has *antara-peyyālassa suttantā ekasatañ ca dvattiṃsa bhavanti*.

¹¹Strictly C^e seems not to recognize a *nidāna-saṃyutta*, but counts it as part of the *abhisamaya-saṃyutta*.

a similar application of a formula to each of the same eleven links as two and thus reaches a total of only 73 for the *nidāna-saṃyutta*.

In the *lābhasakkāra-saṃyutta* and *Rāhula-saṃyutta* B^c in fact counts the same number of suttas in each of the four (10 + 10 + 10 + 13 = 43) and two *vaggas* (10 + 12 = 22) that make up these *saṃyuttas*, but the running total of suttas for the whole Nidāna-vagga anomalously counts eight abbreviated suttas as one at S (B^c) I 430,18–19, six as one at S (B^c) I 438,1–2, and a further eight as one at S (B^c) I 443,14–15.

In the *khandha-saṃyutta* Feer's edition simply omits a sutta which should have *dukkhānupassī vihareyya* for the *aniccānupassī vihareyya* of sutta 147 (S II 179).

The arrangement of the *diṭṭhi-saṃyutta* is problematic; see Feer at S III ix–x and Bodhi 2000, pp. 1097–98 (n. 264). Since there are *in toto* 26 views and four different frames, one would expect 104 as the total number of repetitions, but the initial frame appears to be only applied to 18 views, so we have $18 + (26 \times 3) = 96$. Feer suggests, somewhat anomalously, counting 114.

In the *saḷāyatana-saṃyutta* the main problem is the *saṭṭhi-peyyāla* (S IV 148–56). Since this *peyyāla* seems to upset an implied structure for the whole *saṃyutta* of four sets of fifty suttas (*paññāsaka*), each comprising five *vaggas*, Feer asked: “Ought not this *peyyāla* to be lessened? I thought so.” (S IV viii) Notwithstanding its name, he suggests reducing this *peyyāla* to 20 by not treating certain repetitions as qualifying as suttas.

At S IV 126–28 Feer counts only one sutta, but B^c, C^c, and Bodhi count two: the first with verses, the second precisely the same without verses. This seems unusual and Feer may well be right in counting only 11 suttas in this *vagga* rather than 12.¹²

In the final *vagga* of the *vedanā-saṃyutta* Feer counts only 9 where B^c, C^c and Bodhi count 11, understanding new suttas to begin at S IV

¹²The *uddāna* as given by Feer at S IV 132 reads: *agayha dve honti palāsinā*, and Feer presumably takes the *dve* as applying only to *palāsinā*.

233,25 and at S IV 235,21. The *uddāna* at S IV 238 might be construed in either way, but the latter seems more likely to me.

In the two *peyyāla-vaggas* of the *mātugāma-saṃyutta*, C^c repeats the formula *pañcahi kho Anuruddha dhammehi samannāgato ... nīrayaṃ upapajjati ti* containing *kodhano ca hoti* (S IV 240,25–241,2) twice, thus creating an extra sutta. And later it counts what is clearly an introductory paragraph (S IV 243,16–24) as a separate sutta. Its count of 36 for this *saṃyutta* is thus a clear error.

The *Sāmañḍaka-saṃyutta* is a straightforward repetition of the 16 suttas of the immediately preceding *Jambukhādaka-saṃyutta* substituting *Sāmañḍako paribbāko* for *Jambukhādako paribbāko* throughout; B^c gives only the first and last sutta separated by the comment *yathā Jambukhādakasamuttam tathā vitthāretabbaṃ* (S (B^c) II 455,20), and counts only 2 suttas although it recognizes the repetition of all 16.

The difference in the count for the *Moggallāna-saṃyutta* is more complex and concerns what in E^c and B^c are counted suttas 10 (S IV 269–280) and 11 (S IV 280). The former initially describes how Sakka accompanied by 500 devas approaches Moggallāna and they both agree that going for refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha is a good thing since as a result some beings are reborn in heaven (S IV 269,21–270,24). What follows is abbreviated with *pe* but indicates that the preceding section should be repeated a further four times in full with Sakka approaching with, in turn, 600, 700, 800, and 80,000 devas (S IV 270,25–271,19).¹³ The second section repeats all this — in effect five suttas — in full but this time Sakka and Moggallāna agree that the good thing is having trust in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha that is based in understanding (*avecca-pasāda*) (S IV 271,21–274,27). The third section once again provides five further repetitions by returning to the theme of going for refuge as the good thing, but adding that the beings reborn in heaven surpass other devas in ten respects (S IV 274,29–276,31). A fourth section gives five more repetitions by combining the

¹³As Bodhi 2000, p. 1440 (n. 282) notes, E^c in fact has *asītiyā devatāsatehi* but other editions have *asītiyā devatāsahashehi*.

trust based in understanding (section two) with the ten respects in which beings surpass devas (S IV 276,33–280,19). To this point we have thus had twenty repetitions. What is counted as sutta 11 indicates that Sakka is to be replaced by the names of five further devas (Candana, Suyāma, Santusita, Sunimmita, Vasavatti) followed by the instruction *ime pañca peyyālā yathā Sakko devānam indo tathā vittharetabbānī ti*. This gives five further sets of 20 repetitions and a total for this *saṃyutta* of 129 suttas — $9 + (20 \times 6)$.

The *asaṅkhata-saṃyutta* (S IV 359–73) begins with a sutta setting out the “unconditioned” (*asaṅkhata*) and “the path leading to the unconditioned” (*asaṅkhatagāmi-magga*). The latter is explained as *kāyagatā-sati*. This is followed by a second sutta identical in every respect except that the path is this time explained as *samatha* and *vipassanā*. The same structure is then repeated with a further nine explanations of the path, and thus a total of eleven suttas (S IV 359–61). This concludes the first *vagga*. Explanations 2–11 are in the form of numerically increasing sets of items: *samatha* and *vipassanā* ; three kinds of *samādhi*, a further three kinds of *samādhi*, four *satipaṭṭhānas*, four *sammappadhānas*, four *iddhipādas*, five *indriyas*, five *balas*, seven *bojjhaṅgas*, the eightfold path. The second *vagga* now proceeds by using the same framework but explaining “the path leading to the unconditioned” as each individual item from each of these ten sets in turn, giving a total of 45 suttas ($2 + 3 + 3 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 5 + 5 + 7 + 8$). We have now had a total of 56 (11 + 45) suttas, although Feer arbitrarily counts the second *vagga* as only a single sutta. The third *vagga* replaces *asaṅkhata* and *asaṅkhatagāmi-magga* with *anta* and *antagāmi-magga*. Feer's PTS edition gives — or rather suggests — in radically abbreviated form a further set of 45 suttas. These are followed by 31 further sets of 45 suttas achieved by replacing the original *asaṅkhata* by 31 different terms. Feer's edition thus implicitly recognizes a total of 1,496 suttas for the *saṃyutta* — $11 + (45 \times 33)$ —

although he himself prefers to count only 44 (11 + 33).¹⁴ The oriental editions of this *saṃyutta* seem to understand things differently. The Siamese Royal Edition states of *anta* and the final term *parāyana*: *yathā asaṅkhatam vitthāritam tathā vitthāretabbam*.¹⁵ This suggests that we should in fact understand the *saṃyutta* as containing a total of 1,848 suttas: $(11 + 45) \times 33$. The Burmese *Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti* and Sinhalese *Buddha-jayanti-tripiṭaka* seem to understand the text similarly.¹⁶

The largest number of discrepancies in the counting of suttas in the different editions is found in the *Mahā-vagga*. The first *saṃyutta* — the *magga-saṃyutta* — ends with a series of nine *vaggas*, five of which are explicitly referred to in the manuscripts as *peyyālas*, that almost entirely consist of repetitions once more indicated by the term *pe* or *la* in the manuscripts.

The *aññatitthiya-peyyāla* gives a series of eight items for the sake of which the spiritual life is lived. In each case it is further explained that the way or path to reach the aim of the spiritual life is the noble eightfold path. This gives a total of eight radically abbreviated suttas.

The *suriya-peyyāla* gives a series of seven items which prelude the arising of the noble eightfold path just as the dawn preludes the arising of the sun. In each case it is further explained that it is to be expected of a *bhikkhu* who is accomplished in the particular item that he will

¹⁴Woodward 1927 and Bodhi 2000 follow Feer in counting 44. Feer, however, then seems to get misled by his own method of counting and so at S IV x–xi claims the second *vagga* comprises only 44 alternative “paths leading to the unconditioned” instead of the actual 45, which leads him to conclude that the total number of suttas can be counted as either 44 or 1,463 $(11 + (44 \times 33))$. This error is repeated by Wynne (2004, p. 107, n. 24). Collins (1998, pp. 199–200) suggests a different enumeration for this *saṃyutta*: 1,485 (45×33) — although he states 32) or 1,518 (46×33) .

¹⁵S (S^c) IV 450, 453.

¹⁶S (B^c) II 541, 543; (C^c) IV 656, 666: *yathā asaṅkhatam tathā vitthāretabbam*. The numbering in C^c also makes explicit that the editors understood the repetition of a full set of 56 suttas for each of 33 items. Skilling (1994, pp. 79–81) also concludes that this *saṃyutta* comprises 1,848 suttas.

develop the noble eightfold path. This is followed by a statement of how the *bhikkhu* develops the eightfold path: he develops each constituent of the path with reference to two different formulas: the *vivekanissita* and *rāgavinaya* formulas. This then gives us a total of fourteen (7×2) abbreviated suttas.

The *ekadhamma-peyyāla I* and *ekadhamma-peyyāla II* take the same seven items used in the previous *vagga* and state how each represents one quality in particular suited to the arising of the noble eightfold path (*ekadhamma-peyyāla I*) or how the Buddha sees no other single quality which leads to the arising and full development of the noble eightfold path (*ekadhamma-peyyāla II*). The two *vaggas* then follow the pattern of the *suriya-peyyāla*. This gives two further sets of fourteen suttas.

The *Gaṅgā-peyyāla* describes how just as five separate rivers and then all five rivers together flow (1) to the east and (2) to the great ocean so the *bhikkhu* who develops the noble eightfold path flows to *nibbāna*. This gives an initial set of twelve suttas. But as in the *Suriya-* and *ekadhamma-peyyālas*, each sutta incorporates a statement of how the *bhikkhu* develops the eightfold path: but here he develops each constituent of the path with reference to *four* (not two) different formulas: the *vivekanissita*, *rāgavinaya*, *amatogadha* and *nibbānaninna* formulas. This then gives the *peyyāla* a total of 48 suttas ($6 \times 2 \times 4$).

The *appamāda-vagga* gives a set of ten different similes for the way in which wholesome qualities are rooted in heedfulness (*appamāda*). In each case it is further explained that it is to be expected of a *bhikkhu* who is heedful that he will develop the noble eightfold path. This is followed by a statement of how the *bhikkhu* develops the eightfold path: he develops each constituent of the path with reference to *four* (not two) different formulas: the *vivekanissita*, *rāgavinaya*, *amatogadha* and *nibbānaninna* formulas. This then gives the *vagga* a total of 40 suttas (10×4).

The *balakaraṇīya-vagga* gives a set of twelve different similes relating to the way in a *bhikkhu* develops the noble eightfold path. As in

the *appamāda-vagga*, this is followed by a statement of how the *bhikkhu* develops the eightfold path: he develops each constituent of the path with reference to the same four formulas: the *vivekanissita*, *rāgavinaya*, *amatogadha* and *nibbānaninna* formulas, though Feer, mistakenly in my view, questions whether all four formulas should apply here.¹⁷ So on the assumption that they should, this gives the *vagga* a total of 48 suttas (12 × 4).

The *esana-vagga* gives 10 — or 11 if the final repetition based on *tasinā* is treated as a distinct repetition from that based on the preceding *taṇhā*, which I suspect it should not be¹⁸ — items for the direct knowledge (*abhiññā*) of which the eightfold path is developed. Once

¹⁷At the end of the first sutta of this *vagga* Feer's PTS edition states *paraṅgāpeyyālivāṇṇiyato paripuṇṇasuttan ti viṭṭhāramaggī*. Feer notes (p. 46, n. 3): "This phrase is to be found in the burmese MSS. which add, according to the preceding case, the three statements referring to 1. *rāga-dosa-moha*; 2. *amata*; 3. *nibbāna*. — Nothing of this appears in the singhalese MSS. Therefore I bound myself to this note upon this matter." However the same phrase appears in the Syāmaratṭha edition at S (S^c) V 68, which then proceeds to repeat the sutta with the additional three formulas: the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti does the same at S (B^c) III 42–43, while BJT simply gives all four formulas in full. Woodward (1930) does not translate the concluding phrase and simply passes over the question of whether the sutta is to be repeated with all four formulas; Bhikkhu Bodhi (2000, p. 1553), however, notes that each of the twelve suttas of the *vagga* is to be expanded by way of the four formulas, though he does not count each as a separate sutta in his numbering.

¹⁸This explains the extra sutta counted by B^c for the *magga-saṃyutta* when compared with E^c and Bodhi's translation; while both the latter include the *tasinā* repetition they do not number it separately (see Bodhi 2000, p. 1898, n. 46). It also explains similar discrepancies in some of the other *saṃyuttas* of the Mahā-vagga. The word *tasinā* (or *tasinā*) is, of course, simply another Prakrit form, alongside *taṇhā*, of Sanskrit *trṣṇā*, showing svarabhakti rather than assimilation of the consonant group (cf. Geiger & Norman 1994, § 30.3). This alternative form is extremely rare, however, such that it would seem appropriate to regard it as anomalous in Pāli. In the present context *tasinā* is not included in S^c and C^c, while E^c (S V 58, n. 1) notes that it is not found in the Sinhalese manuscripts. Electronic searches of E^c, C^c, S^c and B^c give no other occurrences of the form *tasinā*, while the form *tasinā* appears at Dh 342–43, Nidd I 488 (v.l. and other editions, *tasitā*), and Nidd II 221.

again it is explained that the *bhikkhu* develops each constituent of the path with reference to the *vivekanissita*, *rāgavinaya*, *amatogadha* and *nibbānaninna* formulas. A further set of repetitions is then obtained by substituting thorough knowledge (*pariññā*), destruction (*parikkhaya*) and abandoning (*pahāna*) for *abhiññā*. This gives the *vagga* a total of 160 suttas ($10 \times 4 \times 4$).

The *ogha-vagga* exactly repeats the pattern of the *esana-vagga* by giving a further set of 10 items for the direct knowledge, thorough knowledge, destruction, and abandoning of which the eightfold path is developed. The *vagga* thus again contains a total of 160 suttas ($10 \times 4 \times 4$).

These nine *peyyālas/vaggas* of the *magga-saṃyutta* thus contain a total of 506 suttas. The figure of 506 repetitions is not in doubt (apart from the issues with the *esana-* and *balakaraṇīya-vaggas* noted above): it is simply that Feer and the Mahā-vagga's two English translators have chosen somewhat arbitrarily not to count each repetition as a sutta in its own right. The BJT C^c edition, however, makes its total number of suttas for the *magga-saṃyutta* explicit: 546. And while the Syāmaratṭha edition does not give a running total for suttas, it indicates the beginning of repetitions with the expression *Sāvathhīnidānaṃ*,¹⁹ making clear that it is treating each as a sutta. Moreover, as we shall discuss presently, it is only by counting such repetitions as suttas in their own right that we can arrive at something like the figure Buddhaghosa gives for the number of suttas contained in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*. In other words, there must be a long tradition of treating such formulaic repetitions as suttas.

The last five of the above nine *peyyālas/vaggas* (comprising 456 repetitions in the *magga-saṃyutta*) occur again in a further seven *saṃyuttas* of the Mahā-vagga, substituting in each case for the eightfold path the set of items that constitute the subject of the *saṃyutta*: the seven *bojjhaṅgas*, the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, the five *indriyas*, the four

¹⁹Although this expression itself gets lost in the abbreviations and does not occur 506 times.

sammappadhānas, the five *balas*, the four *iddhipādas*, and the four *jhānas*. In the case of the *sammappadhānas*, the *balas* and the *jhānas*, this set of five *peyyālas/vaggas* in fact constitutes the entire *saṃyutta*.

However, rather than allowing a full set of 456 repetitions in the contexts of these seven *saṃyuttas*, Feer's edition (followed by the English translations) seems to suggest a reduction in the number of repetitions. That Feer wants to limit the number of repetitions is clear from the figures he gives in the table in the introduction to his edition (S V v). Yet it is not clear from the text presented by Feer himself that such a reduction in repetitions is warranted.

Feer's edition is based on rather limited materials, just four manuscripts, two in Sinhala script and two in Burmese; one of the Sinhala manuscripts had three missing sheets, while one of the Burmese he describes as "unfortunately very deficient in this part, as many sheets are wanting" (S V vii). It is also difficult to follow in the abbreviated sections, perhaps reflecting inconsistencies in the manner of presentation of the abbreviations in his manuscripts.

In the case of the *bojjhaṅgas*, *indriyas* and *balas*, Feer concludes that only the *vivekanissita* and *rāgavinaya* formulas apply (omitting the *amatogadha* and *nibbānaninna* formulas), which effectively reduces the number of repetitions by half from 456 to 228. Feer's conclusion is apparently based on the fact that his manuscripts only make explicit that these two formulas apply. In the case of the *satipaṭṭhānas*, *sammappadhānas*, *iddhipādas*, and *jhānas*, Feer's text omits all four formulas (*vivekanissita*, *rāgavinaya*, *amatogadha* and *nibbānaninna*), which effectively reduces the number of repetitions by three quarters to 114. Feer's conclusion is apparently based on the fact that his manuscripts fail to make explicit that any of these formulas apply — if they do apply they are lost in abbreviation.

Nevertheless, apparently following Burmese manuscripts, the *bojjhaṅga-saṃyutta* ends in his edition with *yad api maggasaṃyuttaṃ vitthāretabbaṃ tad api bojjhaṅgasamṃyuttaṃ vitthāretabbaṃ* (S V 140), the *satipaṭṭhāna-saṃyutta* with *yathā maggasaṃyuttaṃ vitthāritaṃ*

evaṃ satipaṭṭhānasamyuttaṃ vitthāretabbaṃ (S V 192), and the *jhāna-samyutta* with *yathā maggasamyuttaṃ evaṃ jhānaṃ samyuttaṃ vitthāretabbaṃ* (S V 310). The *Gaṅgā-peyyāla* of the *indriya-samyutta* concluded again in his Burmese manuscripts with *yathā maggasamyutte evaṃ bhavati indriyasamyutte* (S V 240, cf. n. 1). Notes at the end of the *indriya-* and *bala-samyuttas* (S V 243, n. 1; 253, n. 3) record that in fact his two Sinhalese manuscripts included a reference to the two additional formulas (*amatogadha* and *nibbānaninna*), while the *ogha-vagga* of the *bala-samyutta* in his Sinhalese manuscripts also had *yathā pi maggasamyuttaṃ tathā pi indriyasamyuttaṃ vitthāretabbaṃ* (S V 251, n. 3). In the case of the remaining *samyuttas*, which Feer presents as limited to the *vivekanissita* formula, we have only phrases such as *Gaṅgapeyyāla* [sic] *satipaṭṭhānavasena vitthāretabbaṃ* (S V 190), *sammappadhānasamyuttassa Gaṅgāpeyyāli sammappadhānavasena vitthāretabbā* (S V 245), *Gaṅgāpeyyāli iddhipādavāsena vitthāretabbaṃ* (S V 291) — phrases which would seem to leave the question of whether or not all four formulas apply at least open. These various phrases are, incidentally, omitted by the *Mahā-vagga*'s English translators.

In sum, the manuscript evidence as presented by Feer would seem in fact capable of being interpreted differently, and might be taken as suggesting that in every case the full 456 repetitions are to be understood. Moreover, as a general rule in Pāli texts, where we find abbreviations, we would expect to refer back to the place where the unabbreviated text first occurred in full, in this case the relevant *peyyālas/vaggas* of the *magga-samyutta*.

Turning to the modern Asian editions, however, there is some confusion and inconsistency on this issue. Like Feer, both S^c and B^c generally make only the application of the *vivekanissita* and *rāgavinaya* sets of repetitions explicit in the case of the *bojjhaṅgas*, *indriyas* and *balas*. Yet they both contain anomalies. At the equivalent of S (E^c) V 137,8, both S^c and B^c seem to indicate that all four formulas should

apply to the *bojjhaṅgas*.²⁰ The numbering of suttas in BJT C^c makes clear that it understands all four formulas should apply in all cases.

It is also worth noting that the *amatogadha* formula is anyway applied to the *indriyas* at S V 220–23, 232–33, while the *nibbānaninna-nibbānapoṇa-nibbānapabbhāra* formula is already in effect applied in each of these *saṃyuttas* since it is imbedded in the *Gaṅgā-peyyāla* frame. This makes clear that we should not think in terms of there being some sort of a priori doctrinal objection to applying these formulas to items other than the eightfold path.

None the less, although BJT C^c wants to apply all four formulas in all cases,²¹ it is not entirely clear how to apply any of the four formulas. Usually they are inserted after *bhāveti*,²² but the exposition of the *satipaṭṭhānas*, *sammappadhānas* and *jhānas* does not follow the same pattern; the main verb is *viharati* or *padahati* rather than *bhāveti*, and it is not clear how the formulas would fit into such sentences.²³ In other

²⁰S (S^c) V 187,19–188,6 = (B^c) III 120,18–25: *idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu sati-sambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ || pa || upekkhāsambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti rāgavinayapariyosānaṃ dosavinayapariyosānaṃ mohavinayapariyosānaṃ || amatogadhaṃ amataparāyanaṃ amatapariyosānaṃ || nibbānaninnaṃ nibbānapoṇaṃ nibbānapabbhāraṃ. imesaṃ kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu pañcannaṃ uddham-bhāgiyānaṃ saṃyojanānaṃ abhiññāya pariññāya parikkhayāya pahānāya ime satta bojjhaṅgā bhāvetabbā. The above occurs at the conclusion of the first rehearsal of the *ogha-vagga*, which begins by applying only the *vivekanissita* formula and is followed by further rehearsals of the *Gaṅgā*-, *appamāda*-, *balakaraṇīya*-, *esanā*- and *ogha-vaggas* applying the *rāga-vinaya* formula.*

²¹Thus, for example, S (C^c) V 340 states with reference to the *Gaṅgāpeyyāla* in the *satipaṭṭhānasamyutta*: *vivekanissitādivasena rāgavinayapariyosānādivasena amatogadhādivasena nibbānaninnādivasena ca ekekaṃ cattāro cattāro katvā aṭṭhacattālīsasuttantā vitthāretabbā.*

²²*bhikkhu sammādiṭṭhiṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ, etc.*

²³To apply the *vivekanissita* formula to the sentence *idha bhikkhave bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ*, the only option would seem to be to make *vivekanissita* qualify *bhikkhu* which is hardly possible.

contexts in the Nikāyas we find the *vivekanissita* formula only applied to the *magga*, *indriyas*, *balas* and *bojjhaṅgas*, though in the Nettippakaraṇa and some Buddhist Sanskrit sources it is applied to the *iddhipādas*/*iddhipādas* (Gethin 1992A, pp. 92, 162–68). On balance I think Feer was probably right to exclude the application of all four formulas from the *satipaṭṭhāna*-, *sammappadhāna*-, *iddhipāda*- and *jhāna-saṃyuttas*, but wrong to limit the application of these to the *vivekanissita* and *rāgavinaya* formulas in the case of the *bojjhaṅga*-, *indriya*- and *bala-saṃyuttas*.

Finally in the *sacca-saṃyutta*, C^c counts 15 instead of the 11 of the other editions. The 4 extra suttas are found by taking the terms in the compounds *tulākūṭa-kamsakūṭa-mānakūṭa* (S V 473,15–16) and *ukkoṭana-vañcana-nikati* (S V 473,20–21) as the basis of six separate suttas rather than just two. This is possible though somewhat arbitrary given the occurrence of dvandva compounds in other suttas of this *vagga* which are not so treated.

3. Conclusions

1. Buddhaghosa's total of 7,762 suttas for the Saṃyutta-nikāya suggests that the Pāli tradition itself has long opted for the maximum number of repetitions in considering this text. Moreover, in contrast to the text's European editors and translators, it has wanted to count these repetitions as "suttas" in their own right.

2. But even taking the option of the maximum number of repetitions, I have not succeeded in reaching Buddhaghosa's total. The figure I reach is 6,696, a figure which is still 1,066 short of his total.²⁴ This suggests that either I have made a mistake and overlooked some section of repetitions or that the text of the Saṃyutta-nikāya that has

²⁴We might add 342 to the total for the *iddhipāda-saṃyutta* on the grounds that the *vivekanissita*, etc., formulas could conceivably be applied, but that still leaves us 724 short, and if, against reason, we attempt to apply the *vivekanissita*, etc., formulas and add 342 also in the case of the *satipaṭṭhāna*-, *sammappadhāna*-, and *jhāna-saṃyuttas* we have 8,064 — 302 over.

come down to us is not as Buddhaghosa himself (or at least his source for the figure 7,762) had it.

3. What then are we to make of these repetition sections of the Saṃyutta-nikāya? Mark Allon (1997, pp. 360–63) has summed up some of the suggestions that have been made concerning the significance and function of repetitions generally in Buddhist texts. To paraphrase, these include aiding memorization, getting the message across, cultivating mindfulness, and enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the texts.

4. It is difficult to see how the structural repetitions of the kind we have been considering have a straightforward mnemonic function in so far as they themselves are what is to be remembered rather than an aid to remembering it. But certainly we might see these kinds of repetition as functioning as a way of getting the message across, cultivating mindfulness, and enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the texts. The doctrinal and practical importance of the items that are the subject of the most repetitions — the unconditioned, and the seven sets of items that come to be termed “*dhammas* that contribute to awakening” (*bodhipakkhiya-dhamma*) — is clearly highlighted and enhanced by the repetitions. Moreover this kind of structural repetition involving as it does the substitution of various items in turn must require and develop a certain mental alertness and agility that goes beyond mere rote repetition, such that it might be considered a practice for developing the Buddhist meditative virtues of mindfulness and concentration. But we can perhaps go a little further in considering this function of repetition.

5. Although the items that are the subject of structural repetition may be doctrinally important, it is hard to see how it could be doctrinal considerations that are driving the repetitions. That is, in the *Gaṅgā-peyyāla*, it would seem it does not matter *doctrinally* whether it is the river Ganges or the Yamunā; or whether they are flowing to the “east” or the “great ocean”. What is driving the repetition seems to be the very requirement to repeat. This gives this kind of repetition something of the quality of the kind of repetitive recitation that is found in various religious traditions and often associated with the use of a rosary as a

means of counting off the repetitions. Of course, I am not suggesting that a rosary was actually used in the recitation of the Saṃyutta-nikāya, merely that consideration of broader religious practices can help us understand the possible functions of repetition in early Buddhist texts.

6. Given that what matters is not whether we are talking of the Ganges or the Yamunā, but repetition for its own sake, why in the *Gaṅgā-peyyāla* stop at six rivers? Why not throw in a few more? Why in the *asaṃkhata-saṃyutta* not add a few more substitute terms for the unconditioned? One response to such questions might be to say that one cannot add any more rivers because this is *buddhavacana* and this is the text and it cannot be changed. But such a response seems to me to miss the point. Certainly the modern editions and the manuscripts on which they are based each provide a fixed text, but when these different fixed texts are considered collectively, although we can move some considerable way towards determining a textual consensus, we are confronted by the fact that in certain places the editions and manuscripts indicate patterns of repetition that are *by their very nature* at least to some extent open ended. My suggestion is that, although over time these repetition sections have become more or less fixed, they originally seem to have been composed in a manner that invites addition and expansion — within certain parameters.²⁵

7. The term *peyyāla* itself is rather curious. It appears to represent Sanskrit *paryāya* in the sense of “repetition”: *paryāya* > *payyāya* >

²⁵I made somewhat similar observations in Gethin 1992A (p. 252) and 1992B (pp. 157–58) which have recently been the subject of criticism by Alexander Wynne (2004, pp. 104–108): while I would wish to tighten the use of the term “improvisation” and exclude the implication of composition in performance, on grounds that I hope are apparent in the present paper, I would wish to stand by the claim that there are good reasons for thinking of different recensions of Buddhist texts crystallizing after a period of somewhat freer composition and adaptation. These are extremely complex issues and it seems to me that we still lack a convincing model for the oral composition and transmission of early Buddhist texts that can explain the kinds of difference *and* correspondence that we find between versions of material in Pāli, Sanskrit, and Chinese and Tibetan translations.

peyyāya > *peyyāla* (cf. Geiger 1994, §§ 52.5, 52.9, 46.3 ; Trenckner 1908, p. 117). But the technical sense of “repetition” seems to be reserved for this particular form, which occurs alongside Pāli *pariyāya*, used in other senses. Similar Middle Indic forms such as *peyāla* and *piyāla* are found used in the same way in Buddhist Sanskrit texts (q.v. *BHSD*). Thus the term *peyyāla* in the sense of “repetition” seems to have become frozen and is left unchanged when Buddhist texts are transposed from one Middle Indian dialect to another. K.R. Norman (2006, p. 114) has drawn attention to the fact that *peyyāla* seems to represent an eastern dialect form. If we assume that *peyyāla*, *pe*, and *la* were only used in abbreviating *written* texts, then as Norman points out, the eastern form of the word might indicate that the texts began to be written down before they were transposed into a western dialect ; alternatively *peyyāla* in its technical usage is borrowed from some other source at some later date. Another alternative, however, might be that *peyyāla* was already used to abbreviate texts in *oral* recitation. It does not seem to me implausible — *pace* Wynne 2004, p.107 — that reciters and teachers of the texts might have resorted to the use of *peyyāla* to establish the framework for patterns of repetition of the kind we have been considering in the Saṃyutta-nikāya ; these specific repetitions might then have been recited in full as a religious exercise.

Table 2. Numbers of suttas counted in S II (Nidāna-vagga)

saṃyutta	suttas				
	E ^c Feer	B ^c CS	C ^c BJT	Bodhi	RMLG
nidāna	93	73	213	93	213
abhisamaya	11	11	11	11	11
dhātu	39	39	39	39	39
anamatagga	20	20	20	20	20
Kassapa	13	13	13	13	13
lābhasakkāra	43	31	43	43	43
Rāhula	22	14	22	22	22
lakkhaṇa	21	21	21	21	21
opamma	12	12	12	12	12
bhikkhu	12	12	12	12	12
TOTAL	286	246	406	286	406

Table 3. Numbers of suttas counted in S III (Khandha-vagga)

saṃyutta	suttas				
	E ^c Feer	B ^c CS	C ^c BJT	Bodhi	RMLG
khandha	158	159	159	159	159
Rādha	46	46	46	46	46
diṭṭhi	114	96	96	96	96
okkantika	10	10	10	10	10
uppāda	²⁶ 10	10	10	10	10
kilesa	10	10	10	10	10
Sāriputta	10	10	10	10	10
nāga	50	50	50	50	50
supaṇṇa	46	46	46	46	46
gandhabba	112	112	112	112	112
valāhaka	57	57	57	57	57
Vacchagotta	55	55	55	55	55
jhāna/samādhi	55	55	55	55	55
TOTAL	733	716	716	716	716

Table 4. Numbers of suttas counted in S IV (Saḷāyatana-vagga)

saṃyutta	suttas				
	E ^c Feer	B ^c CS	C ^c BJT	Bodhi	RMLG
saḷāyatana ²⁷	207 (247)	248	248	248	248
vedanā	29	31	31	31	31
mātugāma	34	34	36	34	34
jambukhādaka	16	16	16	16	16
sāmaṇḍaka	16	2	16	16	16
Moggallāna	11	11	57	11	129
citta	10	10	10	10	10
gāmaṇi	13	13	13	13	13
asaṅkhata	44 (1463)	44	1848	44	1848
avyākata	11	11	11	11	11
TOTAL	391	420	2286	434	2356

²⁶Table at S III xi has “13” but this must be an error.

²⁷C^c counts with next.

Table 5. Numbers of suttas counted in S V (Mahā-vagga)

saṃyutta	suttas				
	E° Feer	B° CS	C° BJT	Bodhi	RMLG
magga	180	181	546	180	546
bojjhanga	187	185	632	184	632
satipaṭṭhāna	103	104	506	104	164
indriya	185	180	526	178	526
sammappadhāna	54	54	456	54	114
bala	110	108	456	108	456
iddhipāda	86	86	488	86	146
Anuruddha	24	24	24	24	24
jhāna	54	54	114	54	114
ānāpāna	20	20	20	20	20
soṭāpatti	74	74	74	74	74
sacca	131	131	135	131	131
TOTAL	1208	1201	3977	1197	2951

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