



Consonanze 11.1

ANANTARATNAPRABHAVA

STUDI IN ONORE DI GIULIANO BOCCALI

*a cura di Alice Crisanti, Cinzia Pieruccini,
Chiara Policardi, Paola M. Rossi*

I



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‘As a She-Elephant, I Have Broken the Tie’. Notes on the *Therī-apadāna*-s

Antonella Serena Comba

1. *The Apadāna*-s

The *Apadāna*-s¹ constitute the thirteenth book of the *Khuddakanikāya*, the *Sutta-piṭaka*’s last section in the Pāli Buddhist Canon or *Tiṭṭaka*. According to the Buddhaghosa’s *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* or *Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā* (I, 15) published by the Pali Text Society, the Dīghabhāṅga group, *viz.* the monks who were specialized in the recitation of the *Dīghanikāya*, did not consider the *Apadāna*-s as a part of the *Khuddakagantha*; the opposite is said in the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini*’s text published in the CST (I, 15).²

The *Apadāna*-s exist today in a few different and sometimes corrupted versions.³ The first Pali Text Society edition of the *Apadāna*-s by Mary E. Lilley (first published in 1925) contains a *Buddha-apadāna*, a *Paccekabuddha-apadāna*, plus 547 *Thera-apadāna*-s, collected in 55 sections or *vagga*-s, dedicated to the lives of older monks (*thera*), and 40 *Therī-apadāna*-s gathered in four *vagga*-s, telling of the existences of elderly nuns (*therī*).⁴

The *Thera-apadāna*-s with the *Visuddhajanavilāsini* commentary published by C. E. Godakumbura in 1954 have 561 poems by senior monks, the last of whom is Venerable Raṭṭhapāla.⁵ *Therī-apadāna*-s have no commentary, notwithstanding that the *therī*-s are sometimes mentioned in the *Visuddhajanavilāsini*; moreover, the commentary cites the title of *Therī-apadāna*-s (pp. 101-102). In short, the

1. The word *apadāna* (sanskrit *avadāna*) means ‘cutting, reaping, harvest; a person’s “reaping”, (the result of) one’s actions; the story of a person’s actions and their result; division, discrimination’ (Cone 2001, 163). On the definition and etymology of *apadāna*, see also Mellick Cutler 1994, 3-7; Clark 2015, 4-5. All Pāli texts, if not otherwise indicated, are from CST. The *Thera-Apadāna*-s are quoted from Lilley 2006. The *Therīgāthā*-s and the *Therī-apadāna*-s are quoted from Pruitt 1998. All the translations from Pāli are the author’s own.

2. On this problem see Mellick Cutler 1994, 20-21; von Hinüber 1997, 61; Clark 2015, 9-10.

3. See Clark 2015, VIII; Mellick Cutler 1994, 36.

4. See Lilley 2006. The words *thera* and *therī* not only indicate seniority, but also the success of the Dhamma practice.

5. See *Visuddhajanavilāsini*. On the problem of the number of *apadāna*-s, see Mellick Cutler 1994, 36-37; Clark 2015, 5-7.

Therī-apadāna-s are poems which follow the *Thera-apadāna-s*, but, unlike them, have no commentary. In the CST edition the so-called *Apadānapāḷi* has one more *thera-s' vagga* with 11 *apadāna-s*, therefore the *apadāna-s* are in total 600.

The narrative structure of the *Therī-apadāna-s* is almost always the same: in a previous existence the women met the Buddha-s who lived before the Buddha Gotama in various cosmic eras of the past, or a Paccekabuddha ('solitary Buddha'); they offered them clothes, food, flowers, lamps, seats or something else; by means of the offers' merits, they are reborn at the time of Gotama Buddha and hear his teachings or those of his disciples. They practice the Dhamma and reach the *arabhat*-ship. Sometimes their offers are directed to the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha was enlightened, or to other sacred objects.⁶

2. *The Apadāna-s and Their Canonical Antecedents*

The most renowned canonical antecedent of the *apadāna-s* is the *Mahāpadānasutta* ('Discourse on the Big *Apadāna*') from the *Dīghanikāya* (II, 1-54). Here the Buddha Gotama gives to his disciples a long speech about himself and the six Buddhas who preceded him, *viz.* Vipassin, Sikhin, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana and Kassapa. He explains the differences between them, after which he narrates in detail the life of the Buddha Vipassin. Therefore, the *Mahāpadānasutta* mainly concerns the Buddha-s before the Buddha Gotama. This discourse displays a legendary aura of the narrative and contains many hyperboles, as usual in the Indian culture, besides some typical patterns of situations experienced by the Buddha-s.⁷ Contemporary historiography tends to consider "late" all the texts that refer to more than one Buddha, because over the centuries, in the Buddhist literature, the Buddha-s prior to the Buddha Gotama became more and more.⁸ But the existence of more than one Buddha is likely to be an ancient doctrine, already spread at the time of the Buddha Gotama. Also Jainism listed twenty-four patriarchs or Tīrthāṅkara-s, the last of whom is the Jīna Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, contemporary of the Buddha Gotama.⁹

The *Apadāna-s* take their cue from the *Mahāpadānasutta* both in their title and content, because they associate the story of the disciples of the Buddha Gotama with one or more previous Buddha-s; however, these Buddha-s are not just six,

6. See Comba 2016, 110-111.

7. The Indian love for hyperboles was wonderfully described by Professor Giuliano Boccali, in a public lecture at the University of Turin.

8. See for example *Buddhavaṃsa*, which mentions 24 Buddha-s.

9. See Dundas 2005, 8.

as in the *Mahāpadānasutta*, but they amount to thirty-five. The same number of Buddha-s is also present in later texts, e.g. the Mahāyāna *Triskandhadharmasūtra*, translated into Tibetan with the title of *Phung po gsum pa'i mdo*, contained in *Ratnakūṭasūtra* (tib. *Dkon mchog brtsegs pa'i mdo*) and commented on by Nāgārjuna with *Bodhipattidesānāvṛtti* (tib. *Byang-chub ltung-ba bshags-pa'i 'grel-pa*).¹⁰

A second canonical antecedent of the *Apadāna-s* consists of the *Theragāthā-s* ('Stanzas of the Senior Monks') and the *Therīgāthā-s* ('Stanzas of the Elderly Nuns'), respectively the eighth and ninth book of *Khuddakanikāya*. Some *apadāna-s* narrate the lives of the monks and nuns who wrote the stanzas collected as *gāthā-s*; others, as we shall see, are merely connected to the *gāthā-s* by the commentator Dhammapāla.

The third canonical antecedent of the *Apadāna-s* consists of the *Jātaka-s* or '[Buddha Gotama's] Prior Lives': here, just as in the *Apadāna-s*, there is a "story of the past" and a "story of the present". The present is connected with the past.¹¹ But while, generally speaking, the *Jātaka-s* only concern Buddha Gotama's previous existences, the *Apadāna-s* recount the stories of *thera-s* and *therī-s* who were his disciples. There are three exceptions: the *Buddha-apadāna*, the *Paccekabuddha-apadāna*, about Paccekabuddha-s, and the *Pubbakammapiṭikabuddha-apadāna*, about the past bad actions of the Buddha Gotama.¹² Moreover, while each *jātaka* expounds only one of the Buddha Gotama's former existences, each *apadāna* usually describes the story of several lives of its hero or heroine, starting with one or more noble actions which made the spiritual accomplishment possible. Last but not least, the *Jātaka-s'* canonical poems do not tell the full story of the Buddha's previous life: the story is mainly told by the prose narrative, a commentary called *Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā*, attributed to Buddhaghosa but based on older Pāli commentaries, written at least four centuries after the canonical stanzas, while the stanzas give voice to the core of the story.

On the other hand, as maintained by the Majjhimabhāṅga-s or *Majjhimanikāya's* reciters, the stories told by the *Apadāna-s* are entirely canonical.¹³ As we shall see, unlike the *Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā*, the *Visuddhajanavilāsīnī*, the partial commentary to the *Apadāna-s*, is not indispensable for the comprehension of the stanzas;

10. See Barua 1946, 183.

11. See *Paramatthadīpanī*, 66, where Dhammapāla calls, as in the *Jātaka-s*, the past story *āitavattbu* and the present story *paccuppannavattbu*.

12. See *Apadāna*, I, 299-301; 7-14. The *Buddha-apadāna* is not about the Buddha's life, but speaks of a mental offering carried out by the Buddha himself, viz. the *Buddhakhetta-s*, the wonderful lands where the Buddha-s live with their disciples.

13. See Mellick Cutler 1994, 20-21.

furthermore, unlike the stanzas in the *Jātaka*-s, the *Apadāna*-s narrate the full story of the lives of *thera*-s and *therī*-s.¹⁴

3. *Date of the Apadāna-s and of Their Commentary*

According to Lilley, the *Apadāna*-s are a late canonical work, which was very difficult to edit.¹⁵ At first glance, the content of the *Apadāna*-s as a whole may seem late not only because of the mention of 35 Buddha-s, but also because the Buddha's fields (*Buddhakhetta*-s) are talked about.¹⁶ Further evidence is also given by the mythological aspects of the monks' stories, by the types of glorified acts (veneration of *stūpa*-s, shrines, relics and so on),¹⁷ and by the fact that two *apadāna*-s mention the *Kathāvatthu*.¹⁸ As the *Kathāvatthu* is a book of the *Abhidhamma* composed during the III Council of Pāṭaliputra, the latter *Apadāna*-s are reputed to be later than the middle of the III century BCE, but earlier than the end of the first century BCE, when the canonical *corpus* was put down in writing in Sri Lanka.¹⁹ However, the commentary says that the word *kathāvatthu* may mean either the book or the classical 'ten topics of the discourse', such as contentment etc.; and so, according to Pruitt, the word *kathāvatthu* in the *Khemātherī-apadāna* «presumably does not refer to the fifth division of the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* [...]».²⁰

Again, there is a text called *Anavatapta-gāthā*, partially preserved in Gāndhārī, Sanskrit and other languages, whose fragments «indicate that there are parallels with a number of the Pāli *Apadāna*-s»;²¹ it seems that the *Apadāna*-s passages are borrowings from the *Anavatapta-gāthā* (first half of the first century CE) or that a lost Pāli version of the *Anavatapta-gāthā* was quoted by the other texts.²²

An element in favour of a relative antiquity of the *Apadāna*-s is, for example, the fact that they sometimes have linguistic features typical of Indian Prakrits, but uncommon or absent in Pāli (masculine plural forms in *-āni*, aorists in *-e*), which

14. Sometimes, as Noemi Appleton observes (Appleton 2010, 3-4), the terms *avadāna* (Sanskrit)/*apadāna* (Pāli) were confused with *jātaka*, but in the Pāli Canon they surely denote different books.

15. Lilley 2006, V.

16. See the *Buddha-apadāna* (*Apadāna*, I, 1-6).

17. See Law 1937, 23.

18. *Apadāna* (*Puṇṇamantāniputtattherāpadāna*), I, 37, stanza 6; *Apadāna* (*Khemātherī-apadāna*), II, 550, stanza 89.

19. See Norman 1983, 90 and n. 399; 103-105; Mellick Cutler 1994, 32.

20. *Visuddhajanājanavilāsini*, 274; Pruitt 1999, 73, n. 1. See also Clark 2015, 11-12: a Burmese *nissāya* and a modern Pāli commentary confirm the interpretation of the word *kathāvatthu* as 'the ten topics of discourse'.

21. Norman 1983, 92.

22. Clark 2015, 12; 30-33.

may mean that these texts were written in India before the Canon was brought to Sri Lanka, without undergoing linguistic standardization in Pāli.²³ Moreover, some parallels are contained in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayapīṭaka* discovered in Gilgit, and a few passages of the *Apadāna-s* were also found in Chinese and Tibetan translations.²⁴

In any case, since some *apadāna-s* have different styles, it is possible that not all of them have the same antiquity and that, over time, a few *apadāna-s* were added to the collection. According to Malalasekera, it is very likely that the stories in the collection are from different ages.²⁵

The *Visuddhajanavilāsini*, also called *Apadāna-aṭṭhakathā*, has been attributed to Buddhaghosa (IV-V cent. CE) by the *Cūḷaganthavaṃsa* or *Gandhavaṃsa*;²⁶ and to Dhammapāla (V-VI cent. CE), the commentator of the *Visuddhimagga* and of the *Thera-Therīgāthā-s* by W. A. de Silva.²⁷ These attributions are not very reliable: the author of the *Visuddhajanavilāsini* cannot be identified with Buddhaghosa, because he quotes and even mentions (p. 540) Dhammapāla's later commentary on *Thera-Therīgāthā-s*; nor can he be Dhammapāla, because he despises the *Porāṇa-Aṭṭhakathā*, which Dhammapāla reputes as trustworthy in his commentaries.²⁸ The author of the *Visuddhajanavilāsini* is also presumed to be late because he shows some knowledge of Sanskrit and Sanskrit grammarians.²⁹ According to von Hinüber, his date is between 1000 and 1500 CE.³⁰

4. Therī-apadāna-s, Therīgāthā-s and Paramatthadīpanī

The greater part of the *Therī-apadāna-s* is connected to the *Therīgāthā-s* by Dhammapāla's commentary *Paramatthadīpanī* ('Light of the Supreme Meaning'), also called *Thera-Therīgāthā-aṭṭhakathā*. This text, which explains the *gāthā-s* word by word, quotes almost all the *apadāna-s* and enriches them with narratives of the lives of other *therī-s*. Dhammapāla had a slightly different text of the *Apadāna-s* to ours, because he quotes an *apadāna* which is absent from our version. For

23. See Bechert 1958, 308-316; Norman 1983, 92.

24. See *ibid.*; von Hinüber 1997, 61; Mellick Cutler 1994, 14-15.

25. See Malalasekera 1960, 116 and n. 5.

26. See *Cūḷaganthavaṃsa*, 4, Ka; Bode 1911, 190 and n. 1; Norman 1983, 121.

27. See, in *Visuddhajanavilāsini*, the Godakumbura's *Introduction*, XIV, who quotes De Silva's *Memoirs of the Colombo Museum*, 1938; see also *ibid.*, XVII, n. *: «It is not known on what evidence W. A. de Silva has attributed the ApA. to Dhammapāla».

28. Cf. *Visuddhajanavilāsini*, 2 and *Paramatthadīpanī*, 300.

29. See *Visuddhajanavilāsini*, 220: *Canda-Pāṇinīya-Kalāpādi byākaraṇe...*; 109; 491.

30. von Hinüber 1997, 149.

the most important *therī*-s the *apadānic* narrative is supplemented with elements derived from commentaries to the *Āṅuttaranikāya* and the *Dhammapāda*.³¹

Dhammapāla's commentary on the *Therīgāthā*-s was firstly published for the Pali Text Society in 1893 by Edward Müller with an extensive introduction that provided a first comparison between the *therī*-s authors of the stanzas and the ones mentioned in the *Apadāna*-s.³²

Subsequently, from 1940 to 1959, Frank Lee Woodward republished Dhammapāla's commentary on the *Thera-Therīgāthā*-s in three volumes, but expunged the *Apadāna*-s from the work, merely quoting their first two stanzas for each *thera* and *therī*, even though they were contained in full in the manuscript. According to the scholar, the scribes were responsible for the addition of the sometimes confused and corrupt text of the *Apadāna*-s.³³ Finally in 1998 William Pruitt published the *Therīgāthā*-s and the *Paramatthadīpanī* with the full text of the *Apadāna*-s quoted in it, putting the variants in the notes.³⁴

The analysis of the *Therī-apadāna*-s contained in the *Paramatthadīpanī* and their comparison with the *gāthā*-s and the commentary provide much interesting information about these three texts. First, if we compare the names of the *therī*-s mentioned in the *Therīgāthā*-s with those of the heroines of the *Therī-apadāna*-s, we notice that only fourteen nuns – Dhammadinnā, Abhirūpanandā, Sukkā, Bhaddhākāpilanī, Sakulā, Soṇā, Bhaddākuṇḍalakesā, Paṭācārā, Khemā, Kisāgotamī, Uppalavaṇṇā, Puṇṇā, Ambapālī and Sumedhā – are referred to with exactly the same name in both texts. Others are given a slightly different name in their *apadāna* – for example, Mahāpajāpatīgotamī and Sundarīnandā are simply called Gotamī and Nandā, while Aḍḍhakāsī is called Aḍḍhakāsikā. Then there are fifteen nuns who in their *apadāna* are named after their offerings: for example, in her *apadāna*, Mettikā becomes Mekhalādāyikā, 'One who offers a belt'; Mittā is called Ekapiṇḍapātādāyikā, 'One who gives the food in an act of begging', and so on.³⁵

Thirty-eight *therī*-s authors of *gāthā*-s, as well as two groups of nuns, are lacking any *apadāna*, while only three of the protagonists of the *apadāna*-s did not write poems, namely Udakādāyikā, Yasodharā and Pesalā, plus the three groups of nuns called *Yasovatī-āpamukhadāsabhikkhunīsahassa* ('ten thousand nuns guided by Yasovatī'), *Yasodharāpamukha-aṭṭhārasabhikkhunīsahassa* ('eighteen nuns guided by Yasodharā'), and *Yasavatīpamukha-aṭṭhārasa-bhikkhunīsahassa* ('eighteen

31. See Woodward 1971, vol. I, VII; on the relationship between Dhammapāla and the other commentaries, see also von Hinüber 1997, 137-142.

32. See Müller 2013, VII-XXVIII.

33. See Woodward 1971, vol. I, VII.

34. See Pruitt 1998.

35. Cf. *Apadāna*, II, 513-514 and *Therīgāthā*, 35-36; *Apadāna*, II, 514 and *Therīgāthā*, 36-38.

nuns guided by Yasovatī³⁶).

Even the order in which the *Therī-apadāna*-s are presented does not match with that of the *Therīgāthā*-s: while the latter are ordered by length, from the shortest to the longest of the poems, the *Apadāna*-s do not seem to follow this rule or any other one. With a few exceptions, however, it is found that in the text the “generic” *apadāna*-s, dedicated to nuns named after their offerings, are placed before the “specific” ones, dedicated to nuns mentioned with their own name. The memory of these latter nuns may have been better preserved by various factors: the listing of the nuns who excelled in a particular quality – for example, Dhammadinnā was the foremost of nuns in preaching the Dhamma; the listing of the mythical seven daughters of Kikin, the king of Benares, who were reborn as seven renowned Buddha Gotama nuns;³⁷ the mention is found in another part of the Pāli Canon.

Then, if we compare the contents of the *Therī-apadāna*-s with that of the *Therīgāthā*-s, we note that, typically, the generic *apadāna*-s do not contain anything that links them directly to a certain nun’s *gāthā*-s: the connection is only made by Dhammapāla’s commentary on those *gāthā*-s.

For example, Therikā, the first nun of the *Therīgāthā*-s, received this stanza from the Buddha Gotama:

Sleep well, Therikā, wrapped in the robe you have sewn.
Your desire subsided, like a dried vegetable in a pot.³⁸

In the *apadāna* quoted by Dhammapāla this *therī* briefly recounts her good deeds in a previous life:

For the Buddha Koṇāgamana I built a pavilion.
I always offered three robes to the Buddha, the world’s relative.
In any province, merchant city, king’s capital,
everywhere I go I am honored: this is the fruit of the meritorious act.
My defilements are burned, all lives are uprooted.
As a she-elephant, I have broken the tie. I live free from taints.
Welcomed to the presence of the best of the Buddhas,
having reached the three knowledges, I realized the Buddha’s Teaching.
Achieving the four analytical skills, the eight liberations and the six superior knowledges, I realized the Buddha’s Teaching.³⁹

36. See Table 1 below.

37. Kikin’s seven daughters Samaṇī, Samaṇaguttā, Bhikkunī, Bhikkhudāyikā, Dhammā, Sudhammā and Saṅghadāyikā were reborn as Khemā, Uppalavaṇṇā, Paṭācārā, Kuṇḍalā, Gotamī, Dhammadinnā and Visākhā (see e.g. Dhammadinnā’s *apadāna*, II, 567-569, stanzas 20-21).

38. *Therīgāthā*, stanza 1.

39. *Paramatthadīpanī*, 6-7.

In this case it seems that Therikā's *therīgāthā* and *apadāna* have nothing in common. Dhammapāla links them by saying that, thanks to the merits acquired with offerings to the Buddha Koṇāgamana, Therikā was reborn into a family of warriors at the time of the Buddha Gotama and, having reached puberty, was married to a prince. One day she listened to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, the Buddha Gotama's aunt, who was preaching the Dhamma, and she decided to become a nun. Her husband refused to give her permission to leave his home, so Therikā tried to meditate while doing her daily wifely duties, but once, as she was cooking curry, a huge flame burned all the food. By carefully observing the impermanence of the flame and superimposing the painfulness and the not-self of all phenomena on it, Therikā attained a high level of spiritual achievement. From that moment on, she refused to wear ornaments and jewelry. Then her husband allowed her to take monastic ordination. After her consecration, Mahāpajāpatī led her to the Buddha, who spoke the stanza to her.⁴⁰

Unlike the generic *apadana*-s, the specific *apadāna*-s explicitly mention elements outlined in the *gāthā*-s or quote them and other parts of the Canon. For example, Sikkā's *apadāna* quotes almost word for word two of her *gāthā*-s;⁴¹ Nandā's *apadāna* (stanzas 47-49) quotes *Therīgāthā*, 82-84; these last two stanzas are also partially quoted in Khemā's *apadāna* where we also find the *therīgāthā*-s 19-20 (Abhirūpanandā, Sundarīnandā and Khemā have much in common); in Puṇṇikā's *apadāna* there are four stanzas (7 to 10) identical to *Therīgāthā*, 236-239; Sumedhā's *apadāna*, stanzas 1-3 and 6, quotes *Therīgāthā*, 518-521. In addition, Dhammadinnā's *apadāna* recalls the episode recounted in the *Cūḷavedallasutta* in the *Majjhimanikāya*, which describes how her husband would check her understanding of the Dhamma.⁴² There are also many cases in which the *Therīgāthā*-s, the *Apadāna*-s and the stanzas quoted in Dhammapāla's commentary match with the *Dhammapada* or with other canonical texts.⁴³

5. *A Number of Versions*

Many passages of these texts have internal or external inconsistencies. One such example is the reason why Soṇā became a nun. According to the *Therīgāthā*-s, she had ten children. Weak and worn out by these multiple deliveries, she went to a

40. *Paramatthadīpanī*, 4-6.

41. Cp. *Apadāna*, II, 607, stanzas 25-26 and *Therīgāthā*, stanzas 54-55.

42. Cp. *Apadāna*, II, 569, stanza 122 e *Majjhimanikāya*, I, 298-305.

43. See Pruitt 1998, notes marked with asterisks.

nun who taught her the Dhamma revealing the doctrine of aggregates, sense bases and elements. Then Soṇā cut her hair and renounced the world.⁴⁴

Another version is found in the *Soṇā-apadāna*. Here Soṇā's ten sons abandoned her and, together with her husband, turned to the monastic order, against her will. She was left alone, elderly and unhappy and decided to become a nun.⁴⁵

Dhammapāla gives us yet another version of the story: Soṇā got married and had ten children; when her husband became a monk, she divided all her wealth among her children, keeping nothing for herself, but after a while her sons began to treat her with contempt. Soṇā then thought: «Why should I put up with their contempt?». She went to the nuns and asked to be ordained in the monastic order.⁴⁶

The story of Bhaddākuṇḍalakesā is also told in many different ways. This woman, who came from a wealthy family, fell madly in love with a thief destined for the gallows, whom she saved and then married. After a while, her husband led her to the mountains to steal her jewels and kill her. But Bhaddā, guessing his intentions, asked him for one last hug and shoved him into the precipice. The husband fell to the ground and was killed. Bhaddā then converted to Jainism, the school of *ni-gaṇṭha-s*, and became a nun. According to the *Therīgāthā-s* (stanza 107), her hair was cut or shaved (*lūna*); according to the *apadāna* (stanzas 36-37), the white-robed Jains plucked out all her hair with tweezers, while Dhammapāla says that they uprooted it with a palm kernel (*tālaṭṭhi*).⁴⁷ Later her hair grew curly and Bhaddā received the nickname of Kuṇḍalakesā ('with curly hair').

Another relevant discrepancy regards the circumstances of Bhaddā's conversion to Buddhism. The *Therīgāthā-s* say that she came out of her abode on the Vulture Peak and saw the Buddha free of any impurities, surrounded by monks. Then, on impulse, she knelt down and put her hands together in the *añjali* gesture. The Buddha said: «Come, Bhaddā!». Through the Buddha's call, she instantly received full ordination (stanzas 108-109). This type of direct ordination was clearly considered a great privilege reserved for males, because at the end of his commentary Dhammapāla strives to demonstrate that only the monks received it from the Buddha. As a consequence, passages like this must be considered as metaphorical.⁴⁸ The *apadāna* says that Bhaddā was reflecting on the doctrine of the Jains, when she was approached by a dog carrying a worm-ridden human hand in its mouth. The dog dropped it beside her. Bhaddā was very upset and asked her fellow Jains for

44. See *Therīgāthā*, stanzas 102-103.

45. See *Apadāna*, II, 577, stanzas 10-14.

46. *Paramatthadīpanī*, 95.

47. Cp. *Therīgāthā*, stanza 107; *Apadāna*, II, 563, stanza 37; *Paramatthadīpanī*, 101.

48. *Paramatthadīpanī*, 297-299.

an explanation. They advised her to go to the Sakya monks. The monks led her to the Buddha, who taught her the aggregates, the sense bases and elements such as «filthy, impermanent, painful and devoid of self».⁴⁹

Finally, Dhammapāla in his commentary says that Bhaddā, dissatisfied with the Jain doctrine, wandered through the villages and towns taking up the dialectical challenges of any other teacher, but no one was able to defeat her. One day she had a debate with Sāriputta and was left speechless. The monk taught her the Dhamma and Bhaddā asked him to take refuge in him. Sāriputta sent her to the Buddha, who spoke one stanza to her:

One word of a stanza that makes the listener completely calm is better
than a thousand stanzas with meaningless words.⁵⁰

On hearing this, Bhaddā achieved *araha*t-ship, accompanied by the four analytical skills. Only later did Bhaddā ask to be ordained as a nun.⁵¹ So, unlike the canonical texts, in Dhammapāla's narrative Bhaddā's direct ordination is absent, but in return it is clearly stated that Bhaddā achieved awakening while she was still a Jaina nun.

These are just a few examples of the differences between the narratives about these exceptional women found among the oldest writers of poetry in Indian literature.⁵² From this we can understand how the tradition of the transmission of the *Apadāna*-s is independent from that of the *Therīgāthā*-s. Due to his great respect towards canonical texts, Dhammapāla did not try to unify these versions, but retained them all. In one case, which deals with Khemā's awakening, Dhammapāla explicitly noted: «In the comments (*aṭṭhakathāsu*, pl.) it is said that at the end of the stanzas she reached the condition of *araha*tta along with analytical skills. But in the *apadāna* it is handed down that, having heard this verse, she settled in the *sotapatti* fruit; after obtaining the king's permission, she took the lower ordination and reached the condition of *araha*tta».⁵³ The reference to a number of *aṭṭhakathā* should be understood as an allusion to the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* (IV, 59), but perhaps also to the lost *Porāṇa-aṭṭhakathā*, which the author claims to follow as a source.⁵⁴

49. *Apadāna*, II, 563, stanzas 38-42.

50. *Paramatthadīpanī*, 102; *Dhammapada*, 101.

51. *Paramatthadīpanī*, 102 e 106.

52. See also the story of Selā *alias* Pañcadīpikā in Comba 2016, 110-111 and n. 33.

53. *Paramatthadīpanī*, 128.

54. *Paramatthadīpanī*, 300.

5. Conclusion

Despite the conflicting versions, the “ocean of stories” about the nuns’ lives which was handed down in Pāli literature – especially in the *Therī-apadāna-s* and in the commentaries – preserves all its charm and reveals the fluid world of oral tradition that was slowly crystallizing in writing. The poetic universe of the *Therīgāthā-s*, in which the nuns’ free mind expressed the silence of *nibbāna*, was enveloped in stories to be handed down through the centuries. Nuns and lay women were inspired by the *gāthā-s*, while the stories were a great help in generosity, faith and renunciation. We do not really know how far these old stories of the past are historically reliable, but, even so, they still stand as a symbol of all the women who sought the meaning of life. The fact that the *Therī-apadāna-s* particularly praise the qualities of women, for example, celebrating the Mahāpajāpatigotamī’s *parinibbāna* may mean that they and also the *Therīgāthā-s* were composed by women.⁵⁵

55. See *Paramatthadīpanī*, 156, stanza 176: *Buddhassa parinibbānaṃ nedisaṃ āsi yādisaṃ / Gotamīparinibbānaṃ atevacchariyaṃ ahu*; Walters 1995, 114.

Table 1
Therī-s mentioned in the *Therī-Apadāna-s*

| | <i>1. Sumedhāvagga</i> | | <i>Apadāna</i> |
|----|------------------------------------|----|-----------------------|
| 1 | Sumedhā | 1 | II, 512-513 |
| 2 | Mekhalādāyikā | 2 | II, 513-514 |
| 3 | Maṇḍapadāyikā | 3 | II, 514 |
| 4 | Saṅkamanattā | 4 | II, 514-515 |
| 5 | Tīṇiṇaḷamālikā | 5 | II, 515 |
| 6 | Ekapiṇḍadāyikā | 6 | II, 515-516 |
| 7 | Kaṭacchubhikkhādāyikā | 7 | II, 516-517 |
| 8 | Sattuppalamālikā | 8 | II, 517-519 |
| 9 | Pañcadīpikā | 9 | II, 519-521 |
| 10 | Udakadāyikā | 10 | II, 521-522 |
| | <i>2. Ekūposathikāvagga</i> | | |
| 1 | Ekūposathikā | 11 | II, 522-524 |
| 2 | Saḷalapupphikā | 12 | II, 524 |
| 3 | Modakadāyikā | 13 | I, 524-525 |
| 4 | Ekāsanadāyikā | 14 | II, 525-526 |
| 5 | Pañcadīpadāyikā | 15 | II, 527-528 |
| 6 | Nalamālikā | 16 | II, 528-529 |
| 7 | Gotamī | 17 | II, 529-543 |
| 8 | Khemā | 18 | II, 543-551 |
| 9 | Uppalavaṇṇā | 19 | II, 551-557 |
| 10 | Paṭcārā | 20 | II, 557-560 |
| | <i>3. Kuṇḍalakesīvagga</i> | | |
| 1 | Bhaddākuṇḍalakesā | 21 | II, 560-564 |
| 2 | Kisāgotamī | 22 | II, 564-567 |
| 3 | Dhammadinnā | 23 | II, 567-569 |
| 4 | Sakulā | 24 | II, 569-572 |
| 5 | Nandā | 25 | II, 572-576 |
| 6 | Soṇā | 26 | II, 576-578 |

| | | | |
|----|---|----|-------------|
| 7 | Bhaddākāpilānī | 27 | II, 578-584 |
| 8 | Yasodharā | 28 | II, 584-590 |
| 9 | <i>Yasovati-āpamukhadasa- bhikkhunīśahassa</i> | 29 | II, 591-592 |
| 10 | <i>Yasodharāpamukha- aṭṭhārasa- bhikkhunīśahassa</i> | 30 | II, 592-596 |
| | 4. Khattiyāvagga | | |
| 1 | <i>Yasavati-pamukha- -aṭṭhārasa- bhikkhunīśahassa</i> | 31 | II, 597 |
| 2 | <i>Caturāsītībhikkhunīśahassa</i> | 32 | II, 598-601 |
| 3 | Uppaladāyikā | 33 | II, 601-603 |
| 4 | Siṅgālamātar | 34 | II, 603-605 |
| 5 | Sukkā | 35 | II, 605-608 |
| 6 | Abhirūpanandā | 36 | II, 608-610 |
| 7 | Aḍḍhakāsi | 37 | II, 610-611 |
| 8 | Puṇṇikā | 38 | II, 611-612 |
| 9 | Ambapālī | 39 | II, 613-614 |
| 10 | Pesālā | 40 | II, 614-615 |

Table 2
Concordance between *Therīgāthā*-s and *Therī-apadāna*-s

| | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|--|-----------|
| 1 | <i>aññatarā therī</i> , Therikā | Maṇḍapadāyikā | 3 |
| 2 | Muttā | Saṅkamanattā | 4 |
| 3 | Puṇṇā | Puṇṇā | 5 |
| 4 | Tissā <i>sikkhamānā</i> | – | |
| 5 | Tissā <i>therī</i> | – | |
| 6 | Dhirā | – | |
| 7 | <i>aññatarā</i> Dhirā | – | |
| 8 | Mittā | – | |
| 9 | Bhaddā | – | |
| 10 | Upasamā | – | |
| 11 | Muttā | <i>caturāsītibhikkhunīsahassa?</i> | 32 |
| 12 | Dhammadinnā | Dhammadinnā | 23 |
| 13 | Visākhā | – | |
| 14 | Sumanā | – | |
| 15 | Uttarā | – | |
| 16 | Sumanā <i>vuddhap°</i> | – | |
| 17 | Dhammā | – | |
| 18 | Saṅghā | – | |
| 19 | Abhirūpanandā | Abhirūpanandā, Sukkā, Piṇḍapātadāyikā | 36, 35, 6 |
| 20 | Jentā | – | |
| 21 | Sumaṅgalamātā | – | |
| 22 | Aḍḍhakāsī | Aḍḍhakāsikā | 37 |
| 23 | Cittā | Tiṇṇaḷamālikā, Nalamālikā | 5, 16 |
| 24 | Mettikā | Mekhalādāyikā | 2 |
| 25 | Mittā | Ekapiṇḍapātadāyikā | 6 |
| 26 | Abhayamātā | Kaṭacchubhikkhādāyikā | 7 |
| 27 | Abhayā | Sattuppalamālikā | 8 |

| | | | |
|----|--|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 28 | Sāmā | – | |
| 29 | <i>aññatarā</i> Sāmā | Ṣaḷalappupphikā | 12 |
| 30 | Uttamā | Ekūposathikā | 11 |
| 31 | <i>aññatarā</i> Uttamā | Modakadāyikā | 13 |
| 32 | Dantikā | Naḷamālikā | 16 |
| 33 | Ubbirī | Ekāsanadāyikā | 14 |
| 34 | Sukkā | Sukkā | 35 |
| 35 | Selā | Pañcadīpikā | 9 |
| 36 | Somā | Sattuppalamālikā, Uppaladāyikā | 8, 33 |
| 37 | Bhaddākāpilānī | Bhaddākāpilānī | 27 |
| 38 | <i>aññatarā bhikkhunī apaññātā</i> | – | |
| 39 | Vimalā | – | |
| 40 | Sihā | – | |
| 41 | Sundarīnandā | Nandā | 25 |
| 42 | Nanduttarā | – | |
| 43 | Mittakālī | – | |
| 44 | Sakulā | Sakulā | 24 |
| 45 | Soṇā | Soṇā | 26 |
| 46 | Bhaddākuṇḍalakesā | Bhaddākuṇḍalakesā | 21 |
| 47 | Paṭācārā | Paṭācārā | 20 |
| 48 | <i>tiṃsamattā bhikkhunī</i> | – | |
| 49 | Candā | – | |
| 50 | <i>pañcasatā</i> Paṭācārā | – | |
| 51 | Vāsiṭṭhī | – | |
| 52 | Khemā | Khemā | 18 |
| 53 | Sujātā | – | |
| 54 | Anopamā | – | |
| 55 | Mahāpajāpatīgotamī | Gotamī | 17 |
| 56 | Guttā | – | |
| 57 | Vijayā | – | |

| | | | |
|----|----------------------------|-----------------------|----|
| 58 | Uttarā | – | |
| 59 | Calā | – | |
| 60 | Upacālā | – | |
| 61 | Sīsūpacālā | – | |
| 62 | Vaḍḍhamātā | – | |
| 63 | Kisāgotamī | Kisāgotamī | 22 |
| 64 | Uppalavaṇṇā | Uppalavaṇṇā | 19 |
| 65 | Puṇṇā | Puṇṇā | 38 |
| 66 | Ambapālī | Ambapālī | 39 |
| 67 | Rohiṇī | – | |
| 68 | Cāpā | – | |
| 69 | Sundarī | Kaṭacchubhikkhādāyikā | 7 |
| 70 | Subhā, figlia di un fabbro | – | |
| 71 | Subhā Jīvakambavanikā | – | |
| 72 | Isidāsī | – | |
| 73 | Sumedhā | | |

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