

The Conversion of Aṅgulimāla in the *Samyukta-āgama*

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ABSTRACT: The present article offers a translation and comparative study of the conversion of Aṅgulimāla as recorded in the *Samyukta-āgama* preserved in Chinese, with particular emphasis on what transformed a killer into a saint.

INTRODUCTION

The discourses in the Pāli *Nikāyas* and their counterparts in the Chinese *Āgamas* portray the Buddha as a teacher with a remarkable ability to adjust himself to the thought world of his audience, expressing his teachings in ways well suited to the capacity of his listeners.¹ Perhaps one of the most outstanding testimonies to the Buddha's capability as a teacher is the conversion of the killer Aṅgulimāla. The contrast set by this conversion could not be more extreme: Aṅgulimāla rushes with weapons in his hands at the Buddha, but after a short exchange discards his weapons, requests going forth as a Buddhist monk and eventually becomes an *arahant*.

This fascinating transformation from killer to *arahant* has been a popular subject in the Buddhist traditions, and as such has been recorded in a range of texts and found representation in Buddhist art.² One of these textual records of Aṅgulimāla's conversion is found in the *Samyukta-āgama*,³ a discourse collection probably transmitted by the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda tradition,⁴ and translated into

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1. For a survey of different aspects of the Buddha's teaching abilities see Guruge (2003).
 2. Schlingloff (1988, 229) refers to a representation of the Aṅgulimāla tale in Gandharan art, which depicts how 'Aṅgulimāla appears before the Buddha twice; once rushing towards him to attack and then bowed at his feet', a contrast that highlights the Buddha's ability to convert a ferocious brigand.
 3. SĀ 1077 at T II 280c–281c; cf. also Yin-shun (1983, 18–20).
 4. Bucknell (2006, 685); Choong (2000, 6 n.18); Enomoto (1986, 23); Harrison (2002, 1); Hiraoka (2000); Lü (1963, 242); Mayeda (1985, 99); Schmithausen (1987, 306); Waldschmidt (1980, 136) and Yin-shun (1983, 696).

Chinese by Bao-yun (寶雲) between 435 and 436 CE, based on a manuscript read out by Guṇabhadra.⁵

TRANSLATION

*The Discourse on the Robber*⁶

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha, who was staying among the people of the Āṅga country, was walking in the Dhavajālikā forest.⁷ He saw that there were cowherds, shepherds, wood gatherers, grass gatherers and other types of workers.

These saw the Blessed One walking on the road. Having seen him, they said to the Buddha: ‘Blessed One, do not continue to walk on this path. Further ahead there is the robber Āṅgulimāla, avoid this fearsome man!’. The Buddha told the men: ‘I am not afraid’, and having said this he continued walking along the path. [They] said the same three times, but the Blessed One [continued] walking all the same.

From afar, he saw Āṅgulimāla who, with sword and shield in his hands, was running towards [him]. The Blessed One performed such a supernormal feat that his body appeared as if he were walking calmly, yet Āṅgulimāla was unable to catch up, even though he was running. Having become utterly exhausted from running, [Āṅgulimāla] said to the Blessed One from afar: ‘Stand still, stand still, don’t go!’. The Blessed One [continued] walking and at the same time replied: ‘I am always standing still, you are not standing still yourself’.

At that time Āṅgulimāla spoke these verses:

‘Recluse, though even now [you are] walking swiftly,
Yet you say: “I always stand still”.
And though I now stand still, tired and exhausted,
You say: “you are not standing still”.
Recluse, what do you mean by saying:
“I am standing still and you are not standing still”?’

At that time the Blessed One answered with these verses:

‘Āṅgulimāla, I say
That I always stand still,
In the sense that I have put down

5. T 2145 at T LV 13a5.

6. The Taishō edition does not give a title. I follow Anesaki (1908, 117) and Akanuma ([1929] 1990, 96) who suggest the title 賊, a title listed at T II 381a18 for the parallel discourse SĀ² 16.

7. SĀ 1077 at T II 280c19: 陀婆闍梨迦林, identified to correspond to Dhavajālikā by Bingenheimer (2006, 46 n.76), whom I also follow in adopting Pāli terminology throughout this translation and article, without thereby intending to take a position on the original language of the *Samyukta-āgama* manuscript.

Knife or stick towards any living being.⁸
 You, [however], are terrifying living beings,
 Not resting from [doing] evil deeds.
 I have stopped and put down
 Knife or stick towards all creatures,
 While you constantly oppress
 And terrify creatures,
 Never ceasing from
 Performing evil deeds.
 I have stopped and put down
 Knife or stick towards all that are alive,
 [While] you for a long time have been [inflicting]
 Suffering and oppression on all that are alive,
 Performing black and evil deeds,
 Without ceasing until now.
 I am established in my own *Dhamma*,⁹
 Totally free from negligence,
 [But] because you do not have the vision of the four truths,
 You have not ceased being negligent'.

Aṅgulimāla spoke these verses to the Buddha:

'At long last I see the sage,
 Whose tracks I earlier pursued.
 Now, having heard [your] true and sublime words,
 I shall forsake my prolonged evils'.
 Having spoken like this,
 He promptly forsook sword and shield.
 Prostrated himself at the Blessed One's feet [and said:],
 'May I be granted the going forth'.
 The Buddha with his mind [full of] loving kindness and compassion,
 And with the pity of a great spirit for the manifold sorrows [of beings]
 Said: 'Come, monk,
 Go forth and receive the full ordination'.

At that time, after he had gone forth, Aṅgulimāla stayed in a solitary place and energetically practised contemplation, and he here and now realized by himself [that goal] for the sake of which clansmen shave off hair and beard, don the ochre robes and with proper faith leave behind the household, go forth to train in the path and practice the holy life. He knew by himself that: 'Birth is extinguished

8. SĀ 1077 at T II 281a5: 調息於刀杖. My rendering of 息於 here and in the following verses is oriented on the reading *nidhāya daṇḍam* in the fragment parallel SHT I 160c R1, R2 and R3 in Waldschmidt *et al.* (1965, 91); cf. also Enomoto (1994, 22).

9. Adopting the 宋, 元 and 明 variant reading 自 instead of 息, in accordance with *svake ca dha[rm]e* in SHT I 160c R4 in Waldschmidt (1965, 91).

for me, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there will be no more becoming hereafter’.

Then Aṅgulimāla, who had become an *arahant* and was experiencing the joy and happiness of liberation, spoke these verses:

‘Formerly I received the name Harmless,
 Yet many I meanwhile harmed and killed.
 Now I have obtained a vision of the truth of my [former] name,
 As I forever have given up harming and killing.
 With bodily deeds I do not kill or harm,
 The same is entirely the case for speech and mind.
 [You] should know I truly no [longer] kill,
 Nor oppress [any] living beings!
 [Formerly] I [had to] wash my always bloodstained hands,
 Being called Aṅgulimāla
 [I was as if] floating and carried along by a current.¹⁰
 [But now I am] controlled, ruled and calmed by the threefold refuge.
 Having taken refuge in the three gems,
 I went forth and obtained full ordination.
 I have acquired the threefold knowledge,
 The Buddha’s teaching has been done.
 The tamers of oxen use punishing rods,
 The trainers of elephants use iron hooks,
 [But the Blessed One] without using knife or punishing rod,
 Through right deliverance tames gods and men.
 To sharpen a knife one employs water and a stone,
 To straighten an arrow one heats it with the help of a fire,
 To dress timber one uses an adze,¹¹
 [But] those who tame themselves use skilful wisdom.
 A man who earlier was engaged in heedlessness,
 But afterwards becomes able to control himself,
 Such a one illumines the world,
 Like the moon appearing from behind a cloud.
 A man who earlier was engaged in heedlessness,
 But afterwards becomes able to control himself,
 With right mindfulness goes beyond
 The current of craving and affection in this world.
 One who goes forth in his youth,
 And diligently practices the Buddha’s teaching,
 Such a one illumines the world,

10. SĀ 1077 at T II 281b4: 湊流之所漂, following T 2128 at T LIV 394a8, which explains 湊流 as standing for 水急流. The same sense is also found in the parallel verses in SĀ² 16 at T II 379a6 and in MN 86 at MN II 105,12.

11. Adopting the 元 and 明 variant reading 杖 instead of 材.

Like the moon appearing from behind a cloud.
 One who goes forth in his early youth,
 And diligently practices the Buddha's teaching,
 With right mindfulness goes beyond
 The current of craving and affection in this world.
 One who transcends all evil deeds,
 Who with right wholesomeness can cause them to cease,
 Such a one illumines the world,
 Like the moon appearing from behind a cloud.
 A man who earlier performed evil deeds,
 Who with right wholesomeness can cause them to cease,
 With right mindfulness he goes beyond
 The current of craving and affection in this world.
 Previously I did such evil deeds,
 Which certainly would have led me to an evil borne,
 [But now] I have already experienced the fruit of evil,
 Already [free of] former debts I eat [my] food.¹²
 Those who feel resentment and dislike towards me,
 [May they] hear this rightful *Dhamma*,
 Obtain the stainless eye of *Dhamma*,
 Practise patience towards me,
 And not give rise to further quarrels and disputation.
 Because of receiving the Buddha's kindness and strength,
 [May those] resentful of me practise forbearance,
 And always commend patience.
 [May they] hear the right *Dhamma* at the proper time
 And, having heard it, practise accordingly'.

When the Buddha had spoken this discourse, Aṅgulimāla delighted in what he had heard the Buddha say and practised accordingly.

COMPARISON

In addition to the above *Samyukta-āgama* account of the conversion of Aṅgulimāla, another five versions of the same event are extant among the early discourses. One of these is found in the 'other' *Samyukta-āgama* translation rendered into Chinese (*Bie-yi za a-han*, T 100), a collection preserved only partially and whose translator is unknown.¹³ Apart from some minor differences, the account in the 'other' *Samyukta-āgama* translation is similar to the above *Samyukta-āgama* discourse.

12. SĀ 1077 at T II 281b24: 宿責食已食. My rendering is conjectural, based on adopting the 元 and 明 variant reading 債 instead of 責, and based on the assumption that the intended meaning is similar to MN 86 at MN II 105,16 and Th 882: *anaṇo bhuñjāmi bhojanam*.

13. SĀ² 16 at T II 378b–379a. This discourse has been translated by Bingenheimer (2006, 46–9).

The other four discourse versions are considerably longer, as they provide a more detailed introduction to the encounter between Aṅgulimāla and the Buddha and also cover several other events that happened after Aṅgulimāla had become a monk. One of these is the *Aṅgulimāla-sutta* in the *Majjhima-nikāya*.¹⁴ Another version is found in the *Ekottarika-āgama* translated between 384 and 385 CE by Zhu Fo-nian (竺佛念),¹⁵ based on an original probably recited from memory by Dharmanandin.¹⁶ The school affiliation of this collection is still a matter of discussion.¹⁷

The other two discourse parallels are individual translations, in the sense of not being part of a translation of an entire *Āgama*.¹⁸ According to the information given in the Taishō edition, one of these parallels was translated by Dharmarakṣa, while the other was translated by Fa-ju (法炬),¹⁹ two translators active during the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century.

In addition to these altogether six complete discourse versions in Chinese and Pāli, parts of a record of the event under discussion have also been preserved among Sanskrit fragments discovered in central Asia.²⁰ Reports of Aṅgulimāla's conversion can, moreover, be found in the Chinese *Udāna* collection,²¹ and in the 'Discourse on the Wise and the Fool', a collection of Buddhist tales preserved in Chinese and in Tibetan.²²

Of the different discourse versions, only the individual discourse translated by Dharmarakṣa explains why Aṅgulimāla had become a killer. It relates that the wife of Aṅgulimāla's teacher had fallen in love with Aṅgulimāla and tried to seduce him. When he refused to comply with her wishes, she pretended to her husband that Aṅgulimāla had forcefully tried to have intercourse with her. The enraged

14. MN 86 at MN II 97–105, cf. also Th 866–919.

15. EĀ 38.6 at T II 719b–722c.

16. For a brief discussion of why the role of Saṅghadeva would probably only have been to revise, instead of re-translating the *Ekottarika-āgama*, cf. Anālayo (2006, 145–6).

17. A survey of some relevant points can be found in Anālayo (2009).

18. T 118 at T II 508b–510b and T 119 at T II 510b–512a.

19. 宋, 元 and 明 variant readings attribute T 119 also to Dharmarakṣa.

20. SHT I 160c in Waldschmidt (1965, 90–91); SHT VI 1561 in Bechert & Wille (1989: 189) (identified by Hartmann [1998, 356 n.18]); and two fragments from the Hoernle collection published in Hartmann (1998). A correlation of SĀ 1077 with its Sanskrit counterparts can be found in Enomoto (1994, 22).

21. T 212 at T IV 703a–704b. Bernhard (1969) points out that the original title of this collection would have been just *Udāna*, similar to its Pāli counterpart, not *Udāna-varga*; cf. also the discussion in Willemsen (1978, XXV) and Dhammajoti (1995, 39).

22. T 202 at T IV 423b–424b; with its Tibetan counterpart in Schmidt (1843, 239–61). The conversion of Aṅgulimāla has also served as the basis for T 120 at T II 512b–522a and its Tibetan counterpart at D *mdo sde, tsha* 126a–206b or Q *tsu* 133b–215a. Nattier (2007, 185 n.16) comments that this discourse 'should not be treated as a close relative of the Pāli sutta or the Chinese *āgama* texts in which Aṅgulimāla is the main figure, but rather as an independent scripture whose authors took earlier traditions concerning Aṅgulimāla as their point of departure'. Though I have not consulted this text for the present study, a survey of the Aṅgulimāla tales that also takes into account T 120 can be found in Bureau (1985, 654–8). A study of the *bodhisattva* ethics proposed in T 120 has been undertaken by Schmithausen (2003, 22–34).

teacher thereon devised the idea of commanding Aṅgulimāla that he should collect the fingers obtained by killing a hundred victims within a single day, hoping that as a result of carrying out this mission Aṅgulimāla would be reborn in hell.²³ A similar account can be found the Chinese *Udāna* collection and in the discourse on the Wise and the Fool, which differ in so far as they report that Aṅgulimāla had to kill a thousand victims.²⁴ The Pāli commentaries also narrate that it was at his teacher's bidding that Aṅgulimāla had to kill a thousand victims, though according to them Aṅgulimāla's defamation was the work of jealous fellow students.²⁵

Obedying his teacher's command, Aṅgulimāla armed himself and set out on his mission, which he carried out with such efficacy that, according to the individual translation by Fa-ju, he had caused harm to villages and towns in the area.²⁶ The *Aṅgulimāla-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* reports that villages, towns and whole districts had been laid waste by him.²⁷ The Pāli commentary explains that out of fear of Aṅgulimāla, people in these areas deserted their homes and fled to Sāvaththī.²⁸

Though the abandonment of a village in the direct vicinity of Aṅgulimāla's murderous activities seems conceivable, one might wonder how a single brigand could cause the depopulation of whole districts. In a predominantly agricultural society, such a mass exodus would imply loss of livelihood for a considerable part of the population and thus be quite a dramatic decision. Besides, the same two versions – the Pāli discourse and the translation by Fa-ju – report that when the Buddha had come close to where Aṅgulimāla lived, he encountered farmers and other travellers.²⁹ Thus even the area in close proximity to Aṅgulimāla's haunts had not yet been deserted.

Another dramatic element can be found in the discourse translated by Dharmarakṣa, in the *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse and in the Chinese *Udāna* collection. According to these versions, when the Buddha approached, Aṅgulimāla was just about to kill his own mother, who had come to bring him food.³⁰ The reason for wanting to kill his mother was that he lacked one victim to fulfil the task imposed by his teacher.

23. T 118 at T II 508c18.

24. T 212 at T IV 703b17: 人斬之, 數滿千人; T 202 at T IV 423c28: 斬千人首, and its Tibetan counterpart in Schmidt (1843, 242,3): *mi stong gi mgo bcaad nas*.

25. Ps III 329 and Th-a III 55.

26. T 119 at T II 510c8: 'towns and widespread villages have all been harmed by this man', 城廓村落皆為彼人所害.

27. MN 86 at MN II 97,26: *tena gāmā pi agāmā katā, nigamā pi anigamā katā, janapadā pi ajanapadā katā*.

28. Ps III 331.

29. MN 86 at MN II 98,27 lists cowherds, shepherds, ploughmen and travellers, *gopālakā pasupālakā kassakā pathāvino* (following B^e and C^e against *padhāvino* in E^e and S^e); T 119 at T II 510c5 similarly lists collectors of fire-wood and grass, farmers and travellers, 眾人擔薪負草及耕田人, 有行路人.

30. T 118 at T II 509a20; EĀ 38.6 at T II 719c14; and T 212 at T IV 703b22. T 202 at T IV 424a19 and its Tibetan counterpart in Schmidt (1843, 243,5), as well as the *Maitrisimit* in Tekin (1980, 162), also report that Aṅgulimāla was about to kill his mother and only let go of her to kill the Buddha. The version of the Aṅgulimāla tale Xuan-zang (玄奘) heard during his travels in India similarly depicts Aṅgulimāla about to kill his mother, cf. T 2087 at T LI 899a24, translated in Beal ([1884] 2001, 3).

This dramatic element takes an almost humorous turn in the *Ekottarika-āgama* version. Here Aṅgulimāla is prevented from committing this abominable crime by a great light that illuminates the whole forest. On being informed by his mother that the source of this light could only be the Buddha, Aṅgulimāla lets go of her and tells her to wait for a moment, as he will just go to kill the Buddha, after which he will be ready to partake of the meal she has brought for him.³¹

A dramatic feature found in all versions is the magical feat performed by the Buddha to keep Aṅgulimāla at bay. The Pāli version and the translation by Fa-jū highlight the extraordinary nature of this feat by indicating that, even though Aṅgulimāla had formerly been able to catch up with an elephant, a horse or a chariot, now he was unable to catch up with the Buddha.³² The Chinese *Udāna* account offers an explanation of this supernormal feat. According to its description, the Buddha magically contracted the earth where Aṅgulimāla was running and expanded the earth where he was standing himself, thereby remaining out of reach of his persecutor.³³

These various dramatic elements and introductory narrations lead up to the same type of verbal exchange, where according to all versions Aṅgulimāla tells the Buddha to stop, and in reply is told to stop himself. Puzzled by this statement, which stands in evident contrast to the actual situation where Aṅgulimāla stands still while the Buddha is still walking, Aṅgulimāla requests an explanation.

The Pāli discourse and the translation by Fa-jū present the Buddha's reply in a single stanza, which explains that the Buddha had stopped in the sense of having stopped violence towards living beings.³⁴ Dharmarakṣa's translation and the *Ekottarika-āgama* version have the same in two stanzas.³⁵ The two *Samyukta-āgama* versions, which in all other respects present by far the briefest account, report the Buddha's reply in five or six stanzas, explaining in detail in what sense he had stopped and Aṅgulimāla had not yet stopped.³⁶ Particularly noteworthy is that this detailed reply additionally brings in the theme of the four [noble] truths.³⁷

31. EĀ 38.6 at T II 720a9: 母, 今且住, 我先取沙門瞿曇殺, 然後當食. T 212 at T IV 703c9 also records that Aṅgulimāla thought of coming back for his meal after killing the monk he had seen, whom in this version he had not recognized to be the Buddha.

32. MN 86 at MN II 99,12 reports him reflecting: *pubbe hatthim pi dhāvantaṃ anupatitvā gaṇhāmi, assam pi dhāvantaṃ anupatitvā gaṇhāmi, ratham pi dhāvantaṃ anupatitvā gaṇhāmi*; a reflection similarly recorded in T 119 at T II 510c20: 我走能逮象, 亦能及馬, 亦能及車.

33. T 212 at T IV 703c11: 佛以神力令彼無害在地頓縮, 佛地寬舒, 如是疲極不能及佛. The Pāli commentary Ps III 332 also records that the Buddha used magical power to influence the earth in such a way that Aṅgulimāla was unable to catch up with him.

34. MN 86 at MN II 99,29, cf. also Th 867; and T 119 at T II 511a1.

35. T 118 at T II 509b9 and EĀ 38.6 at T II 720a24.

36. SĀ 1077 at T II 281a4 and SĀ² 16 at T II 378c2. Though the *Udāna* account has only a single stanza, it specifies that this verse should be supplemented with what is found in detail in the respective discourse, T 212 at T IV 703c20: 廣說如契經偈, thereby indicating that the Buddha's treatment of the topic of 'stopping' was longer than the single stanza it quotes.

37. SĀ 1077 at T II 281a14: 汝不見四諦; SĀ² 16 at T II 378c12: 汝不見四諦 (adopting the 宋, 元 and Ming variant 諦 instead of 部).

From the perspective of the discourse as a whole, this more detailed treatment seems quite to the point, since the words spoken by the Buddha at this moment convert Aṅgulimāla from a brigand ready to kill a monk into a repentant desiring to become a monk himself. Given such a radical conversion, it seems quite appropriate that, with the four noble truths, some aspect of the Buddha's teaching is brought in.

That the different accounts attribute the actual conversion to the words spoken by the Buddha at this point can be seen in Aṅgulimāla's reply. According to the *Saṃyukta-āgama* report, the freshly converted Aṅgulimāla proclaims that 'having heard [your] true and sublime words, I shall forsake my prolonged evils'.³⁸ Similar proclamations can be found in the other versions.³⁹

In contrast, according to the different records of his verses, Aṅgulimāla does not in any way refer to the Buddha's magical feat. Thus the magical feat appears to be a less important matter from the perspective of the actual conversion.

In fact, one might even imagine the whole scene without any magical feat,⁴⁰ since the Buddha's refusal to obey the brigand's order to stand still, and his fearless rebuttal, 'I have stopped, you stop too!', would fit in well at such a juncture and be sufficient to account for the subsequent denouement of events. Though the miracle might have been introduced into the account of Aṅgulimāla's conversion at a time early enough to be present in all versions, this remains evidently hypothetical, given that all versions state that a miracle took place.

What seems certain, however, is that in all versions what really affects Aṅgulimāla are the words spoken by the Buddha, since after the miracle he just commands the Buddha to stop, whereas after the words spoken by the Buddha he throws away his weapons and asks to be accepted as a monk. Moreover, after the magical feat, Aṅgulimāla still addresses the Buddha as 'recluse',⁴¹ a mode of address used in the early discourses by outsiders that have no particular relation to or confidence in the Buddha. After the words spoken by the Buddha, however, a change of attitude takes place, as he refers to the Buddha as 'Sage', 'Blessed One' or 'Venerable One'.⁴² These epithets express Aṅgulimāla's appreciation of

38. SĀ 1077 at T II 281a17: 今聞真妙說, 當捨久遠惡。

39. MN 86 at MN II 100,3, cf. also Th 868; SĀ² 16 at T II 378c18; T 119 at T II 511a5 and EĀ 38.6 at T II 720b18. The same is also implicit in T 118 at T II 509b15, though this version does not report any words spoken by Aṅgulimāla in reply.

40. Stede (1957, 34), however, feels that 'there can be little doubt that the account is true and that the miracle actually happened'.

41. SĀ 1077 at T II 280c29: 沙門; SĀ² 16 at T II 378b27: 沙門; MN 86 at MN II 99,17 and Th 866: *samaṇa*; T 118 at T II 509b2: 沙門; T 119 at T II 510c26: 沙門; EĀ 38.6 at T II 720a18: 沙門; T 212 at T IV 703c15: 沙門. Wagle (1966, 56) explains that the use of the address *samaṇa* here 'denotes a certain indifference'.

42. SĀ 1077 at T II 281a16: 'Sage', 牟尼; SĀ² 16 at T II 378c15: 'such a man', 如此人 and 'Blessed One', 婆伽婆; MN 86 at MN II 100,1 and Th 868: 'Venerated Sage', *mahesi*; T 118 at T II 509b13: 'Great Sage', 大聖; EĀ 38.6 at T II 720b16: 'Venerable One', 尊; and T 212 at T IV 704a6: 'Great Sage', 大聖. An exception to this pattern is T 119 at T II 511a5, where he still uses the address 'recluse', 沙門. In regard to the address used by Aṅgulimāla in the different versions at this point, it may be

the wisdom underlying the Buddha's explanation and probably also his respect for the Buddha's fearless response when commanded to stand still by an armed brigand.⁴³

The degree to which fearlessness can impress even a whole group of bandits is depicted in the *Theragāthā*, which reports an occasion when the novice Adhimutta had been caught by bandits ready to kill him. The brigands were surprised to find that, whereas other victims would tremble in fear and dread, young Adhimutta did not show any sign of fear at the prospect of being killed, in fact his countenance even brightened up when confronted with such a dreadful prospect.⁴⁴ Asked what made him to be fearless to such a degree, Adhimutta explained that one who has reached liberation is no longer afraid of death. Unlike the case of the Buddha's reply to Aṅgulimāla, Adhimutta's explanation does not even mention the need to refrain from evil. Nevertheless, his words had the same converting effect as those spoken by the Buddha to Aṅgulimāla, as, according to the *Theragāthā* report, the robbers threw away their weapons and some even went forth and eventually attained realization.⁴⁵ Since in this case no magical feat was performed, the main factor that brought about the conversion would have been Adhimutta's fearlessness.

The same appears to be the case for Aṅgulimāla's conversion. This conversion comes about when Aṅgulimāla encounters someone who not only disobeys the order to stand still, in spite of having no weapons to defend himself or counter-attack, but even returns this order and tells the armed Aṅgulimāla to stand still himself. This apparently made quite an impression on Aṅgulimāla. The impression made by this command to stand still himself, spoken without being supported by the threat of weapons, resonates in one of Aṅgulimāla's verses that

worthwhile to note that none of them supports the emendation of *mahesi* to *maheso* suggested by Gombrich (1996, 151), based on which he then concludes that Aṅgulimāla could have been a 'proto-Śaiva/Śākta'. A similar suggestion was already made by Eitel ([1888] 2004: 13), who in his gloss on 'Aṅgulimāliya' speaks of a 'Śivaitic sect of fanatics who practiced assassination as a religious act. One of them was converted by Śākyamuni'; by Legge ([1886] 1988: 56 n.2), who suggests that 'the Aṅgulimālya were a sect of Śivaitic fanatics, who made assassination a religious act'; and by Soothill & Hodous ([1937] 2000, 454), who under the entry 烏崛摩羅 speaks of a 'Śivaitic sect that wore ... chaplets' of finger-bones. Yet, as pointed out by Maitrimurthi & von Rospatt (1998, 170, 173), 'there seems to be no testimony at all in the history of Indian religions to the practice of killing for decorating oneself with parts of the victim's body' and such a proto-Śaiva/Śākta would antedate 'other known practitioners of Śaivic tantrism by a millennium'.

43. Harris (1994, 36) explains that, owing to the words spoken by the Buddha, 'Aṅgulimāla is forced into the realization that his life has been a futile chase, a fretful searching, without peace and fulfilment. The tranquillity of the Buddha contrasts sharply with his own turbulence and the destructive state of his mind. The contrast makes him see the nature of his mind. A revolution – in its true sense of a complete turning around – takes place'.

44. Th 705–706: *yaññatthaṃ vā dhanatthaṃ vā, ye hanāma mayaṃ pure, avasesaṃ bhayaṃ hoti, vedhanti vilapanti ca. tassa te n' atthi bhītatthaṃ, bhiyyo vaṇṇo pasidati, kasmā na paridevasi, evarūpe mahabhaye?*

45. Th 724–725.

contrasts the use of a punishing rod or iron hooks by those who train oxen and elephants to the Buddha's way of taming, which dispenses with knife or rod.⁴⁶

Thus the actual conversion appears to set in with Aṅgulimāla's astonishment at his inability to reach the Buddha, be this in a literal sense by being unable to catch up with the Buddha or in a figurative sense by being unable to measure up to the Buddha's level of utter fearlessness. This, then, is followed by words that highlight the evil he had done, a rather direct mode of addressing a feared brigand, and especially when used by a prospective victim. In the *Samyukta-āgama* version, the contrast between Aṅgulimāla's evil deeds and the Buddha's harmless conduct is rounded off by a reference to the deeper insight that stands behind this contrast. This deeper insight is a vision of the four noble truths. The four noble truths, representative of the essentials of the Buddha's teaching in a nutshell, reveal that there is a path to fearlessness – a path which, according to all versions, Aṅgulimāla was quick to embark on himself.

CONCLUSION

Looking back on the different versions of Aṅgulimāla's conversion, the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse presents a rather brief and straightforward account. Without any further ado it begins with the Buddha approaching the whereabouts of Aṅgulimāla, about whom all we are told is that he is a robber and thus better avoided. In the other versions he is introduced as a serial killer, engaged in a mission to kill a hundred or even a thousand victims. This killer possesses supernormal strength, as he has already laid waste whole districts, and is of such extraordinary speed as to be able to catch up even with an elephant, a horse or a chariot. His strength and speed, however, are no match for the Buddha, who defeats Aṅgulimāla through a magical feat that renders the robber incapable of coming close to his slowly walking victim.

The fascination that the motif of Aṅgulimāla's conversion must have exerted on early Buddhists may well be responsible for the apparent tendency to dramatize or exaggerate, which manifests repeatedly in the different versions. The proliferation of wondrous element is particularly pronounced in the *Ekottarika-āgama* version, where the Buddha emanates a great light that pervades the whole forest where Aṅgulimāla is staying. Another facet of this dramatizing tendency is the depiction of Aṅgulimāla's utter recklessness, where he is ruthless to such an extent as to be willing to kill his own mother. That she has just come to bring him food further emphasizes her motherly role and thereby sharpens the con-

46. SĀ 1077 at T II 281b7; with its counterparts in SĀ² 16 at T II 379a9; MN 86 at MN II 105,7, cf. also Th 878; EĀ 38.6 at T II 721b15; T 118 at T II 510a22 and T 119 at T II 512a20. Another instance of such taming without weapons is reported in the *Divyāvadāna* in Cowell & Neil (1886, 97,14), according to which the Buddha converted a thousand highwaymen, who went forth under him.

trast between his intended deed and his chosen victim. To kill one's own parent is according to early Buddhism one of the most heinous of crimes, an act that renders the perpetrator incapable of real spiritual progress during the remainder of his or her life, and inevitably destines the killer to an evil rebirth.

The fascination exerted by Aṅgulimāla's conversion would also be responsible for the increasing degree to which other events related to him are treated in detail. The verses at the end of the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse suggest awareness of at least one other event recorded in the parallel versions. In these verses, Aṅgulimāla refers to 'those who feel resentment and dislike' towards him and asks them to 'practise patience towards' him and to 'not give rise to further quarrel and disputation'. These lines appear to refer to an incident that according to the other versions happened after he had gone forth, when people attacked him while he was begging food in town.⁴⁷ The karmic fruition experienced in this way might also underlie the statement that he had 'already experienced the fruit of evil'. The *Samyukta-āgama* discourse, though apparently aware of this event, contents itself with giving pride of place to the actual conversion and relegates all other events to the background, merely referring to them in verse.

Owing to the straightforward and brief nature of the *Samyukta-āgama* account, the actual conversion stands out with increased clarity, an effect further increased by the circumstance that the words that effected this conversion are reported at considerable length. In the other versions, in contrast, the actual conversion gets somewhat out of focus, being buried under increasingly wondrous and miraculous events and embedded in a wider narration that treats events that happened before and after this conversion.

In a way, the variations found between the accounts of Aṅgulimāla's conversion could be seen to represent general tendencies at work in the development of Buddhist oral literature, where the introduction of wonders and miracles, as well as the successive amplification of narrative details, can at times obfuscate the main message of the text. In the present case, the central message would be the contrast between the fear-inspiring brigand Aṅgulimāla, in full attack with weapons in hand, and the peaceful Buddha who fearlessly refuses to obey Aṅgulimāla's orders. The actual conversion of Aṅgulimāla then throws into relief the potential of the early Buddhist teachings of leading even a criminal to renunciation and eventually to a state of peacefulness and true fearlessness, an ability that in the case of Aṅgulimāla involves a change from killer to saint.⁴⁸

47. MN 86 at MN II 104,3; EĀ 38.6 at T II 721a22; T 118 at T II 510a6; T 119 at T II 511c23; T 212 at T IV 704a26.

48. I am indebted to Rod Bucknell, Ken Su and Peter Harvey for comments on an earlier draft of this article.

ABBREVIATIONS

B ^e	Burmese edition	SĀ ²	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
C ^e	Ceylonese edition	S ^e	Siamese edition
D	Derge edition	SHT	Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)	SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
E ^e	PTS edition	T	Taishō
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>	Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>	Th-a	<i>Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Q	Peking edition	Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)		

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