*BSRV* 36.1 (2019) 31–51
http://www.doi.10.1558/bsrv.37052
*Buddhist Studies Review* ISSN (print) 0256-2897
*Buddhist Studies Review* ISSN (online) 1747-9681

# From the Blacksmith's Forge to the Fires of Hell: Eating the Red-Hot Iron Ball in Early Buddhist Literature

Joseph Marino

University of Washington

jamarino@uw.edu

Early Buddhist texts were first being composed and compiled during South Asia's Iron Age, and thus contain many references to iron and other metal technologies. This article examines one metalworking image that came to play a special role in the imagination of early Buddhists: the red-hot iron ball. I argue that the iron ball, which comes to be a torture device in hell, force-fed by hell wardens, is a mimesis of the *piṇḍapāta,* or almsfood offered to monks and nuns by the laity. Around iron ball imagery clusters a set of related Buddhist concerns: anxieties about undisciplined and deceitful monks and nuns, especially in relation to taking alms; the public perception of the *saṅgha*; the conceptualization of Buddhist hells as an unfortunate karmic result of lacking discipline; and the relationship between these hells and Indian juridical forms of punishment.

## Introduction

When Buddhists were first composing and compiling their teachings, South Asia's Iron Age was well under way. Developments in iron weapons and agricultural tools helped usher in the region's second major urbanization (Thapar 2002, 142–144; 2013, 70). Like steel in Pittsburgh or computers in Silicon Valley, the blacksmith's furnace found its way into the imagination and everyday language of people in the Buddhist heartland along the Gangetic plains in the mid-to-late first millennium BCE. Thus references to iron and other metal technologies regularly appear in early Buddhist texts. This article examines one metalworking image that came to play a special role in early Buddhist literature: the red-hot iron ball.

The catalyst for this study comes from a reference in a second-century Gandhāran Buddhist manuscript from the Robert Senior Collection, which I am currently editing.[1] The manuscript contains a *sūtra* (G. **Mahaparaḍaha Sūtra*)[2] that warns that a failure to understand the four noble truths will lead to the conflagration of birth,

1. *Two Gāndhārī Saṃyuktāgama Sūtras: Senior Kharoṣṭhī Fragment 20* (manuscript edition in progress).
2. Richard Salomon has published part of the text in Salomon 2003, 87–90.

Keywords: early Buddhist literature, discipline, similes, metallurgy, Gandhāra

old age, death, etc. This, it says, is worse even than a hell (or hells) called 'Great Conflagration' (G. *Mahaparaḍaha,* Skt. *Mahāparidāha,* P. *Mahāpariḷāha*), a hell named in this *sūtra* alone, though with parallels in Pāli (SN V 450.30[3]–452.5), Sanskrit,[4] and Chinese (SĀ 422 at T 99 111b10–24). The description of this hell in the Gāndhārī *sūtra* is unique among the different versions: bodies of those who are born there are compared to red-hot iron balls (G. *ayaüḍa ... aḍita*):

> Just like iron balls which are heated all day, burning, blazing, glowing, so too are there hells named 'Great Conflagration' where the bodies of beings who are born, arise, and come into being are burning, blazing, glowing.[5]

Considering only its occurrence in the Gāndhārī *sūtra*, the simile appears to contain a relatively innocuous reference to the blacksmith's unworked ball, or lump, of glowing hot iron. This brings to mind the iron age context and conveys a sense of great heat, but not necessarily great horror. It is only after exploring the range of red-hot iron ball imagery in early Buddhist literature — particularly references to eating the iron ball — that one understands its full allusive force, especially in a *sūtra* about hell.

Around the red-hot iron ball clusters a set of related Buddhist concerns: anxieties about undisciplined and deceitful monks and nuns; the public perception of the *saṅgha*; the conceptualization of Buddhist hells and the role of this in encouraging discipline; and the relationship between these hells and Indian juridical forms of punishment. As is demonstrated below, the phrase 'better to eat a red-hot iron ball' becomes a kind of refrain to convey the importance of upholding the precepts (*śīla*), especially in the context of the alms-for-merit exchange between the *saṅgha* and their lay patrons. If a monk or nun would take alms without being a worthy recipient of merit-generating gifts, they would risk not only their own progress on the Buddhist path, but in abusing their most critical public-facing relationship, they would risk the legitimacy, and thus survival, of the whole *saṅgha*. In this sense, the red-hot iron ball becomes a horrific mimesis of the *piṇḍapāta,* which is the lump of almsfood offered to the monastic community by lay devotees. Moreover, its appearance in gruesome tortures in hell testifies to its role as a symbolic karmic result for a lack of discipline, especially designated for those who compromise the alms exchange.

3. With '.30' denoting line number.

4. There is a broken Sanskrit fragment from the Turfan collection (SHT II 51 fl + 2 B1. [10]4) that contains only a small fraction of the *sūtra*, and does not include a description of the hell.

5. *sayasavi ayaüḍa divasa ṣatata aḍita bhoti sapacaliḍa saje̱ḍibhuḍa evam eva sati mahaparaḍaha ṇama ṇirea tatra satvaṇa jaḍaṇa bhuḍaṇa aviṇivurtaṇa aḍita kaya bhoti sapacīliḍa saje̱ḍibhuḍe.* All translations not otherwise attributed are mine. While no other version of this *sūtra* describes the Great Conflagration Hell this way, a similar passage in verse describes the hell called *Avīci* in the *Mahāvastu* (1.15–16): *ayoguḍā hi agnismiṃ yatha-r-iva saṃtāpitā | evaṃ avīcī narako heṣṭā upari pārśvato || jātavedosamā kāyāḥ teṣāṃ narakavāsināṃ | paśyanti karmadṛḍhatāṃ na tasmāt bhoti no gatiḥ.* 'Red-hot like iron balls in fire, thus [in] Avīcī hell, from below, above, and on all sides, the bodies of those dwelling there are like fire. They realize the fixed nature of karma, [thinking:] "There is no way for us [out] from there."'

The red-hot iron ball has a story to tell, and the smith's shop is only its beginning. In this essay, I trace the iron ball through similes and rhetorical turns of phrase in mainstream Indic and Chinese Buddhist texts, mostly *sūtra*s from the *nikāya*s/*āgama*s and their commentaries. The various references do not necessarily follow a historical path of development — it would be impossible to completely reconstruct one — but they nevertheless offer the reader a literary path to follow that illustrates how Indian Buddhists of the centuries just before and after the common era drew upon a burgeoning iron industry to conceptualize essential components of their soteriological and social project.

## The Iron Age in South Asia

A full account of first millennium BCE developments in Indian iron technologies is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth examining a few aspects that help situate references to the iron ball and take the modern reader back to the ancient Indian smith's workshop. While base metals like copper, silver and gold had long been mined and worked in northern India, the first evidence of iron working in the region comes from around the beginning of the first millennium BCE.[6] Later, starting around 700 BCE and coinciding in many instances with the development of Northern Black Polished Ware, there was a significant increase in the use of iron across sites in northern and central India, as evidenced by archaeological studies (Upadhyaya 2000, 244). During this phase, the iron ploughshare significantly improved agricultural efficiency, and iron spear tips, arrowheads, and daggers began to replace copper counterparts, making stronger weapons for fighting and hunting. Iron tools were also used by artisans to improve the efficiency and quality of their crafts.[7]

Evidence of iron use can be found throughout Indian literature, beginning with the Vedas. The Sanskrit word *ayas,* usually translated 'iron', is known as early as the *Ṛg Veda*, where it probably referred in general to non-precious metals that were used for crafting, of which copper would have been the most common.[8] Later Sanskrit texts like the *Athārva Veda*, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* seem to reflect a culture that used both copper and iron, distinguishing *ayas* into 'black' (iron) and 'red' (copper).[9] The *Mahābhārata* describes *ayas* and *loha* weapons, includ-

6. There has been considerable attention paid to the Iron Age in early India, especially by archaeologists. See again the summary in Thapar 2002, 143–144 and 2013, 70. Other useful studies include Sharma 1960, Singh 1962, Kosambi 1963, Banerjee 1965, Chakrabarti 1992, as well as the volume on archaeometallurgy in India edited by Tripathi 1998, and the volume on iron technology from an Indo-European perspective edited by Pande and Geijerstam 2002.

7. Thapar 2002, 144. Examples of such tools, noted in Upadhyaya 2000, 166–182, include adzes, chisels, borers, anvils, nails, hooks, tongs, and staples, among others.

8. Tripathi 1998, 347 suggests that in the period corresponding to the early Vedas, *ayas* referred to base metals while *hiraṇya* and *rajata* referred to precious metals. Since copper was commonly used by smiths, *ayas* meant copper. But as iron technology advanced and other base metals like tin and lead became more common, copper came to be called *lohāyasa,* or 'reddish base metal', to distinguish it. See also Rau 1974, 18–25 (cited in Fitzgerald 2000, 48).

9. Singh 1962, 215. The *Athārva Veda* distinguishes *śyāma* (black) and *lohita* (red). The *Śatapatha*

ing an iron ball (*ayoguḍa*) as a projectile (Mbh 7.153.23).[10] There, *ayas* usually refers to iron and *loha* to 'metal' in a general sense, but Fitzgerald argues that *loha* sometimes signifies iron when specifically describing metal weapons (Fitzgerald 2000, 47). He notes that the *Mahābhārata* 'was entirely composed well after the use of iron had generally displaced copper as the main utilitarian metal in north India' (49).

In Pāli Buddhist texts, *ayo* and *loha* objects appear frequently. Pāli commentaries sometimes distinguish *ayo* as *kāḷaloha* ('black *loha*', probably iron) and *loha* as *tambaloha* ('coppery/red *loha*', probably copper).[11] Other commentaries gloss *ayo* with just *loha*.[12] This suggests either that *loha* was the more generic term for workable metal or that it specifically replaced *ayo* as the common word for iron in the parlance of some redacted Pāli commentaries. Monier-Williams' definition for Skt. *loha* — 'iron (either crude or wrought) or steel or gold or any metal' — suggests the same was true in later Sanskrit (MW, s.v. *loha*). For example, in the *Arthaśāstra*, the superintendent of *loha* is said to be responsible for forging all kinds of workable metals.[13] It is possible that the earliest layers of Buddhist literature were composed by people who encountered copper more commonly than iron, but as iron working became more common, the semantic use of words like *ayas* and *loha* shifted to accommodate new technologies. In this essay, I assume Pāli *ayo* refers to iron. However, in many cases it remains unclear whether Pāli *loha* refers to iron or copper, or generically to workable metal. Some of the translations I use, like Bhikkhu Bodhi's, render *loha* as copper. In those cases, I supply *loha* in brackets after 'copper' so the reader knows it is uncertain which metal it refers to. The main thrust of the discussion does not change whether one or another instance refers to an iron ball or a copper ball.

## The red-hot iron ball in the blacksmith's shop

It is often pointed out that Buddhist *sūtra*s are most concerned with 'abstract spiritual and philosophical matters', and thus are poor witnesses of history on the ground.[14] But in similes that illustrate Buddhist concepts, that is, in the efforts of Indian Buddhists to make the abstract concrete, we can find hints about the daily life of those who composed and received the teachings.

*Brāhmaṇa* also distinguishes *ayas* and *lohāyasa* ('red ayas'; see ŚB 5.4.1.1 and 5.4.1.2). The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* mentions *kārṣṇāyasa,* which is something made from black iron, *kṛṣṇāyasa*.

10. The *Mahābhārata* reference denotes book, chapter, and verse. See pg. 882 of the 1958 edition of the *Droṇaparvan* by Sukthankar et al.

11. E.g., Sv III 812.33–4 and Ja V 380.7.

12. E.g., Pj II 479.27: *tattha ayoti loham* ('Here, "iron" means *loha*'). In Ps IV 234.24–25, the iron ground and ceiling of the 'Great Hell' (*Mahāniraya*), which are described as *ayo* in the *sūtra*, are called *loha* by the commentator.

13. *Arthaśāstra* 2.12.23: *lohādhyakṣas tāmrasīsatrapuvaikṛntakārakūṭavṛttakaṃsatālalohakarmāntān kārayet, lohabhāṇḍavyavahāraṃ ca.* ('The Superintendent of Metals should establish factories for copper, lead, tin, Vaikṛntaka metal, brass, steel, bronze, bell metal, and iron, as well as the trade in metal goods'. Translation by Olivelle 2013, 128.)

14. Clarke 2014, 11. See also Salomon 2018, 18: 'But Buddhist canonical texts are uniformly ahistorical, in the sense that they are never dated and mention historical circumstances, if at all, only in passing and only with reference to some point of Buddhist teaching or doctrine'.

Several *sūtra*s and commentaries present similes related to the smith's shop,[15] providing details about ancient metalworking. Some of these texts emphasize the transformative process the iron ball undergoes in a furnace. For instance, in the Discourse About Pāyāsi (*Pāyāsi Sutta*) of the *Dīgha-nikāya*, the monk Kassapa compares the heaviness, firmness, and stiffness of a dead person to a cold iron ball. He then compares the lightness, softness, and flexibility of a living person to a heated iron ball that is lighter, more pliant, and more workable (DN II 335.2–19). Here, the description of an 'iron ball that is heated all day, burning, blazing, glowing' is nearly identical to that of our Gāndhārī text.[16] It becomes a kind of stock, formulaic way of describing heated iron objects. Another example is the aptly named Iron Ball Discourse (*Ayoguḷa Sutta*) in the section of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* dealing with *iddhipāda*s, or supernormal powers. The Buddha teaches Ānanda that 'just like an iron ball that has been heated all day is lighter, more pliant, more workable, and brighter', so too is a Tathāgata who dwells with his mind concentrated in the body, and body in mind, lighter, more pliant, etc (SN V 283.13–20). According to the commentary, the *sūtra* explains the power of supernatural transformation (Spk III 261.19: *vikubban' iddhi*), which suggests that the chemical transformation of metal ore in a carbon heated furnace held a popular mystique associated with spiritual attainments. There is something almost alchemical about this; as the iron ball requires heat to transform, so might we say the practitioner requires *tapas*, the 'heat' of religious austerity, to transform.

Some texts shed light on specific blacksmithing techniques. The Iron Ball Discourse commentary explains how a smith works an iron ball:

> [The iron ball] is lifted up and placed in a blacksmith's furnace by two or three people, and being smelted all day with fire and air forced in through an opening [in the oven], joined with blowing air, heat, and fire, it thus becomes light. And when the blacksmith grabs it with large tongs and turns it over to one side, takes it up and beats it, it thus becomes soft and workable. As he breaks off piece after piece, striking with a hammer he makes fragments in the shape of rectangles, etc.[17]

It is noteworthy that the unheated *ayoguḷa* requires 'two or three people' to raise it into the blacksmith's furnace, suggesting they are beginning with heavy raw ore. The rest of the text appears to describe the smelting of the ore in a smith's fur-

15. According to the *Arthaśāstra*, iron/copper smiths would have been highly visible, living within the walls of a fortified city in a relative place of honor in the north among the Brahmins, jewelers, and the tutelary deity of the city and king: (2.4.15): *tataḥ paraṃ nagararājadevatā lohamaṇikāravo brāhmaṇāś ca uttarāṃ diśam adhivaseyuḥ*. See Olivelle 2013, 106.

16. P. *divasasantattaṃ ayoguḷaṃ āditttaṃ sampajjalitaṃ sajotibhūtaṃ*. G. *ayaüḍa divasa ṣatata aḍita bhoti sapacaliḍa sajeḍibhuḍa.*

17. Spk III 261.10–18: *so hi dvīhi tīhi janehi ukkhipitvā kammār' uddhane pakkhitto pi divasaṃ dhamamāno* (B[e] *paccamāno*) *vivarānupaviṭṭhena tejena c' eva vāyena ca vāyosahagato ca usmāsahagato ca tejosahagato ca hutvā evaṃ lahuko hoti. yathā naṃ kammāro mahāsaṇḍāsena gahetvā ekato parivatteti, ukkhipati, paharati, evaṃ pana mudu ca hoti kammaniyo ca. yathā naṃ so khaṇḍākhaṇḍaṃ bhindati, kuṭena hananto dīghacaturassādībhedam pi karoti.* The meaning of the last sentence is uncertain. It is also unclear whether the commentary reflects metalworking techniques of the mid-to-late first millennium BCE or those of the commentator's time, which could be as late as the early fifth century CE, or whether there was a significant difference.

nace (*kammār'uddhane*), or 'bloomery', to form a 'bloom', a lump of porous, spongey, high-slag metal. The bloom had to be subsequently hammered to remove impurities, a process apparently referenced in the commentary by the phrase *khaṇḍākhaṇḍaṃ bhindati,* ('he breaks off piece after piece'). It is only after this that the smith finally hammers it, or forges it, into regular shapes, like a rectangle (*dīghacaturassādībhedam*).[18] Because the commentary does not mention molten metal or casting, the *ayoguḷa* probably refers to the irregular bloom and not an actual sphere. It will be clear below that in many cases the *ayoguḷa* must have been imagined as small enough to eat.

Other important features of the smith's furnace described by the commentary include the use of a tuyère, or nozzle through which air was pumped in with bellows. The bellows (*kammāra-gaggarī*) are further described in the Serpent Discourse (*Sappa Sutta*), where the rushing sound they make is compared to the breathing in and out of Māra in the form of a massive serpent (SN I 106.22–23). Although the quenching of iron is not mentioned in the Iron Ball Discourse commentary, other texts like the *Sutta-nipāta* describe the quenching of a ploughshare (*phāla*) that had been heated all day, which 'sizzles, hisses, and gives off steam and smoke'.[19] Smiths also used charcoal to heat the furnace and chemically reduce the metal.[20] References in Pāli mention firebrands (*ukkā*) and coals (*aṅgāra*) in the smithing context.[21] Such descriptions of iron working in Buddhist texts generally agree with archaeological data. For example, in his review of studies of Ujjain, N. R. Banerjee describes mixed deposits of charcoal and iron slag, unsmelted ore, a crystalline powder that might be lime, and remains of a simple furnace, dating to roughly 500–200 BCE.[22]

18. An alternative reading of this is that the smith is fragmenting the iron and forging small ingots. According to the *Arthaśāstra*, weights used in commerce were made of iron: *pratimānāny ayomayāni* (2.19.10). For the process of forging steel from smelted iron blooms, see Forbes 1950, 438.

19. Trans. Bodhi 2017, 169. Sn p. 15.10–12: *seyyathā pi nāma phālo divasasantatto udake pakkhitto cicciṭāyati ciṭiciṭāyati sandhūpāyati sampadhūpāyati.* For similar references to quenching iron in Chinese *āgama*s, see T 99 27b18–19 (如熱丸投於冷水啾啾作聲) and T 101 493b04–06 (譬喻如揣鐵赤葉鐵一日在火燒便投水便熱出瀉出沸大沸有聲). Fitzgerald (2000, 51) notes that quenching is only effective in hardening iron that has been carburized, or made into steel. Thus the quenching process here might reflect steel production.

20. The use of charcoal as a reducing agent by metal smiths is in evidence at archaeological sites (see Banerjee below), and in literature in the *Arthaśāstra* (2.15.60), where the superintendent of the storehouse is instructed to give smiths charcoal and chaff, presumably to heat their furnace: *aṅgārāṃs tuṣān lohakarmāntabhittilepyānāṃ hārayet* ('He should have coal and chaff taken to metal factories and to sites where walls need to be plastered'. Translation Olivelle 2013, 138.)

21. See MN III 243.12–16 for the use of *ukkā* in the context of goldsmithing, and see Ps V 54.10 for the association between *ukkā* and *aṅgāra*.

22. Banerjee 1965, 179 reconstructs the smelting process from his observations of the archaeological finds: 'The *modus operandi* consisted, inferably, in laying several alternate courses of charcoal and iron ore and covering the entire pile thickly with clay to prevent the heat from escaping. The sides of this heaped and simple kiln, which should have been circular in plan, must also have been provided with passages for the intake of air and escape of gases, and outlets for molten iron. The molten liquid, after collection, was, no doubt, first cooled by dipping into water and then beaten with hammer to drive out the charcoal, which, in the course of the hammering went into the (reduced) iron, giving it, to an extent, the properties of steel, and thus eliminating the slag.'

I emphasize the technological process here to show that the iron ball drew upon the imagery of a vibrant industry with a tangible, everyday presence. Some references stress the wonder of this technology, that an iron ball can literally transform in the hands of a skilled smith, his fire, and tools. Moreover, the detailed description of the smelting process is foreboding. It is loud, volatile, mysterious, and to a certain degree violent. Combined with the massive risks involved with superheated metal, it is no wonder that references to hot iron take on a decidedly infernal connotation in other Buddhist texts.

## The red-hot iron ball and monastic discipline

The examples of red-hot iron ball and other metalworking references described above are all set specifically in the smith's shop. The transformation described in these references — the chemical change, the pounding off of slag, the forging of specific shapes — is a kind of disciplining of its own. But other Buddhist texts draw upon the iron ball image in new contexts to emphasize a specific kind of discipline related to food. The commentary to the *Cittasambhūta-jātaka* hints in this direction, explaining how a young man impatiently tries to eat his 'lump of porridge' (*pāyāsapiṇḍa*) before it has cooled. It burns his mouth 'like a red-hot iron ball' (Ja IV 391.26–7: *ādittaayoguḷo viya*). The simile in this context illustrates the need for discrimination and patience, and importantly shifts the context to food.

Of course the major concern about food in the early monastic community was related to alms. The daily ritual of going house to house for food was how the *saṅgha* survived. The laity offered alms in an implicit exchange for merit, which was accrued according to the intentions of the donor and the suitability of the monk or nun as a field of merit. This suitability was in turn determined by their adherence to monastic discipline (*vinaya*). According to the Analysis of Offerings Discourse (*Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta*), the best gifts to the *saṅgha* are both given and received by people who are not only of virtuous conduct, but also free of passion (MN III 257.22: *vītarāga*). Several texts use the iron ball to warn monks and nuns against taking alms without practising proper moral conduct. One verse that epitomizes this concern occurs widely in early Buddhist verse texts like the *Āpāyika Sutta* of the *Itivuttaka*, the Pāli *Dhammapada*, the Gāndhārī Khotan *Dharmapada*, and the Sanskrit *Udānavarga*.[23] It presents the following antithetical proposition:

> Better to eat an iron ball
> red-hot like a flame,
> than should a person of poor moral conduct with no control
> eat the people's almsfood.[24]

Here, a monk or nun of poor moral conduct (*dussīlo*) is said to be better off eating a red-hot iron ball than taking alms. For a community that survives on alms, this

23. It pg. 43.7–10, Dhp 308, Dhp-G$^{K}$ 331, Uv 9.2.

24. It: *seyyo ayoguḷo bhutto,*
*tatto aggisikhūpamo,*
*yañce bhuñjeyya dussīlo*
*raṭṭhapiṇḍaṃ asaññato ti.*

can be a serious problem. A narrative illustration of this concern can be found in the smaller Chinese *Saṃyuktāgama* collection (T 100 at 378a23–26). There, a monk complains of having to go for alms to a house that only offers spoiled food, and then slanders the monk responsible for sending him there, falsely accusing him of sexually assaulting a nun. In response to this deception, the Buddha says: 'It is better to eat a red-hot iron ball with this body (寧當以此身 吞食熱鐵丸) than to take alms given in good faith with an undisciplined body.' In these examples we begin to see the iron ball as the inversion of the *piṇḍapāta* and the suggestion that there is something to be feared even more than eating a hot iron ball.

Such a concern about this critical public-facing, daily activity is plainly expressed in the rules for monks and nuns. The fourth of the set of *vinaya* rules related to offenses worthy of expulsion from a *saṅgha* (*pārājika* offenses) in the Pāli *Bhikkhu Vibhaṅga* concerns monks who falsely claim a certain level of spiritual advancement and use it to attract patronage. It calls such a monk 'the worst sort of thief' (*aggo mahācoro*), who in effect eats the peoples' alms by stealing (Vin III 90.20–22: *theyyāya*). Three verses summarize the basis for the *vinaya* rule and threaten rebirth in hell for these 'yellow-necks', monks in name but not deed. The last of the verses is the same as that mentioned above, 'Better to eat an iron ball ... than the peoples' almsfood'. Here the emphasis is on lying about spiritual attainment, essentially cheating, but anxiety about various aspects of taking alms is evident elsewhere in the *vinaya*. For instance, later in the same *pārājika* ruling monks are warned against going for alms with a specific desire in mind, like hoping that people will revere them.[25] No matter the specific offense, these examples illustrate the monastic lawyers' concern to maintain discipline — or at least the appearance of it — in order to preserve their institutions' public image and ability to acquire patronage.[26] In discussing the Pāli *vinaya*, I. B. Horner sums up these concerns:

> It must be remembered that it was considered highly important to propitiate these [lay supporters], to court their admiration, to keep their allegiance, to do nothing to annoy them. ... Historically, the success of the early Buddhist experiment in monasticism must be in great part attributed to the wisdom of constantly considering the susceptibilities and criticisms of the laity.[27]

Other *sūtra*s foreshadow the role the heated metal ball would come to play in hell tortures. For instance, in the Discourse on the Simile of the Mass of Fire (*Aggikkhandhopama Sutta*) in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, the antithetical proposition in the verse listed above extends into an unsettling scene of torture. The emphasis shifts to monks who beg at rich households:

25. Vin III 101.5–9: *tena kho pana samayena aññataro bhikkhu paṇidhāya piṇḍāya carati evaṃ maṃ jano sambhāvessatīti. ... na ca bhikkhave paṇidhāya piṇḍāya caritabbam.* ('At one time a certain monk wandered for alms with the hope: "people will thus honor me." ... Monks, do not wander for alms with [this] hope.') There are also numerous other rules in the Theravāda *pācittiya* section that regulate how monks take alms, e.g., Vin IV 70–93, rules 31–42. For a more comprehensive review of the *saṅgha*-donor relationship, see Findly 2003, especially chapter 8.

26. For a recent discussion about the connection between the *vinaya*, the *saṅgha*'s public image, and patronage, see Clarke 2014, 11–12.

27. Horner 1949, xxix. Partially cited in Schopen 2006, 317.

> What do you think, Bhikkhus? Which is better, for a strong man to force open one's mouth with a hot iron [*ayo*] spike, burning, blazing, and glowing, and insert a hot copper [*loha*] ball, burning, blazing, and glowing, which burns one's lips, mouth, tongue, throat, and stomach, and takes their guts and goes out their bottom, or for one [who is an immoral man of bad character … not an ascetic though claiming to be one] to consume almsfood given out of faith by affluent khattiyas, brahmins, or householders?[28]

The strong man, the iron spike, and the graphic depiction of the metal ball — here *loha,* possibly copper or iron — running through the body are egregiously horrific. Given the choice between this torture and almsfood, the monks of course choose almsfood. But the Buddha quickly corrects them: it would be better to choose the metal ball because at least that would only be painful for a short while, whereas intentionally seeking alms from the wealthy could lead to extended torture in hell. With this text, the shift in the focus of imagery of the iron ball from encouraging discipline to threatening a horrifying karmic result in hell for lacking it marks a distinctly dark turn in the road of the iron ball's story.

## Eating the red-hot iron ball in hell

This dark turn culminates with the use of the red-hot iron ball, along with numerous other iron instruments, as torture devices in Buddhist descriptions of hell. A glimpse at this function can be found in two Chinese versions of the popular story of Mahāmaudgalyāyana's visions of the tortured dead. The longer Chinese *Saṃyuktāgama* (T 99) contains several variants of a tale in which Mahāmaudgalyāyana, while on a path, sees beings suffering painful karmic consequences in hell. In one vision, their bodies are run through with hot iron balls (SĀ 527 at T 99 138a13–23). Their predicament is explained in terms of karma accrued in a previous life, when they had stolen fruit from the *saṅgha*. Thus another clear connection is made between food related misdeeds and the iron ball torture in the afterlife. In another of the monk's visions, people are forced to eat the iron balls (SĀ 530 at T 99 138b17–29).

In the more explicit descriptions of the iron ball tortures in hell, the strong man of the Discourse on the Simile of the Mass of Fire is replaced by hell guardians (P. *nirayapāla*; Ch. 獄卒 'prison wardens'), or sometimes *rakkhasa*s,[29] who pry open the

28. AN IV 131.23–132.4: *taṃ kiṃ maññatha bhikkhave, katamaṃ nu kho varaṃ: yaṃ balavā puriso tattena ayosaṅkunā ādittena sampajjalitena sajotibhūtena mukhaṃ vivaritvā tattaṃ lohagulaṃ ādittaṃ sampajjalitaṃ sajotibhūtaṃ mukhe pakkhipeyya, taṃ tassa oṭṭham pi daheyya mukham pi daheyya jivham pi daheyya kaṇṭham pi daheyya udaram pi daheyya antam pi antaguṇam pi ādāya adhobhāgā nikkhameyya, yaṃ vā khattiyamahāsālānaṃ vā brāhmaṇamahāsālānaṃ vā gahapatimahāsālānaṃ vā saddhādeyyaṃ piṇḍapātaṃ paribhuñjeyyā ti?* Translation slightly modified from Bodhi 2012, 1092.

29. See Ja V 268.14 for a version with *rakkhasa*s. The presence of such 'prison wardens' in hell presented a problem for Buddhist interpreters. Were there actual beings doing the torturing? And if so, did they constantly generate such bad karma that they could never achieve a better rebirth? In the *Katthāvatthu*, the Theravādins argued that they were in fact real beings (Kv XX.3 at 596–8), in contrast the Andhakas, who according to the commentary said that sufferers in hell were tortured by their own karma which had taken the form of hell wardens (*nirayapālarūpa*; see *Paramatthadīpanī* 187.2). In his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya,* the Sarvāstivādin Vasubandhu also argues

mouths of hell residents with iron rods and drop in hot iron balls that pass through their victims' bodies. Sometimes they do so in response to the prisoners' cries of hunger. In the Divine Messengers Discourse (*Devadūta Sutta*) in the *Majjhima-nikāya* (MN 130), which is often regarded as a particularly early Buddhist hell text,[30] and which has several diverse parallels in Chinese,[31] the iron ball appears in a gruesome sequence of tortures which take place in the *Mahāniraya* (Great Hell) and its subsidiary hells. In this text, after the condemned person has suffered many tortures like a giant burning iron box and a sword leaf forest, and right after he has been swept about in the caustic river (*khārodakā nadī*), hell wardens fish him out with hooks and ask him 'What do you want?' The sufferer replies, 'I am hungry!' Here the torture begins:

> Then, Bhikkhus, the hell wardens prop open [his] mouth with a red-hot iron stake, burning, blazing, glowing, and drop in the mouth a red-hot copper [*loha*] ball, burning, blazing, glowing. It burns his lips, mouth, throat, chest, and small intestine, and taking the large intestine, its goes out his bottom. There, he feels painful, fierce, severe pain, but he doesn't die as long as his wicked karma is not exhausted.[32]

It appears to be a sadistic game to the hell wardens, who wryly get the prisoner to cry out in hunger, only to feed him hot metal balls. There is no specific alms-related crime mentioned here, but there is a clear association with hunger.

In terms of the literary context, the symbolic meaning of this hell torture comes in part from its intertextual relationship to other occurrences of the image in Buddhist texts, such as the descriptions of the smith's loud furnace and the widely used proposition 'better to eat an iron ball ... [etc]' cited above, which also appears in the *vinaya* rule about taking alms. We must read these texts in relationship to one another as part of the same imaginaire.[33] The boundaries between *sūtra*s, especially within the Pāli Canon, are remnants of the organizing principle of canon redactors, and not usually a reflection of a major conceptual break. In other words, certain

that the wardens are not real (see III.59a–c at Pruden 1988–90, 458–9). See also the related discussion in Braarvig 2009, 260–261.

30. E.g., Kirfel 1920, 199; Przyluski 1923, 130–31; van Put 2007, 206.

31. On Chinese texts related to the *Devadūta Sutta* and the similar *Bālapaṇḍita Sutta* (MN 129), see Maki 1985 and 1989. See also Anālayo's indispensable comparative study of these texts (2011, 741–53).

32. MN III 186.3–10: *tam enaṃ, bhikkhave, nirayapālā tattena ayosaṅkunā mukhaṃ vivaritvā āditena sampajjalitena sañjotibhūtena tattaṃ lohaguḷaṃ mukhe pakkhipanti āditaṃ sampajjalitaṃ sañjotibhūtaṃ. tassa oṭṭham pi ḍayhati mukham pi ḍayhati kaṇṭham pi ḍayhati uram pi ḍayhati antam pi antaguṇam pi ādāya adhobhāgā nikkhamati. so tattha dukkhā tippā kaṭukā vedanā vedeti, na ca tāva kālaṃ karoti yāva na taṃ pāpaṃ kammaṃ byantihoti.* Translation slightly modified from Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2001, 1035.

33. I reference here Steven Collins' use of the term 'Pāli imaginaire', which he defined as 'a mental universe created by and within Pali texts, which remained remarkably stable throughout the traditional period' (1998, 41). For the purposes of studying metaphorical imagery in early Buddhist literature, I would go beyond Collins, and cautiously towards Reiko Ohnuma's notion of an 'Indian Buddhist discursive world' (2012, 6), to say that many similes, metaphors, and other tropes found across Pāli, Gāndhārī, Sanskrit, and Chinese *āgamas* draw from the same wellspring of Indian imagery, even if it is then adapted to different languages, locales, and moments.

tropes repeat across *sūtra* and *nikāya/āgama* borders, drawing upon the same wells of imagery and meaning, often even retaining the same formulaic phrasing.[34]

The iron ball torture in the Divine Messengers Discourse is far from unique. It joins a group of other tortures — boiling in iron pots, climbing spiked trees, being torn apart by dogs, etc. — in what comes to be the formalized theater of hell in the Indian Buddhist imagination. The *Mahāvastu*, in the chapter recounting Mahāmaudgalyāyana's travels through hell,[35] contains a scene nearly equivalent to that in the Divine Messengers Discourse. There, as starving and thirsty people are dragged out of the river Vaitaraṇī, probably the equivalent of the *khārodakā* river, they beg for food and drink: 'We are starved and extremely thirsty!' Hell wardens are said to actually 'smelt a mass of iron' (*ayoṣaṇḍaṃ dhamenti*), and drop the iron balls into the sufferers' mouths while shouting 'eat this, good sirs!' (Mvu 1.7–8: *taṃ bhuṃjantāṃ bhavanto*). The *Saṃkicca-jātaka* (Ja V 261–77) situates the iron ball torture in the Black Thread Hell (*Kāḷasutta-niraya*). The commentary describes the torture:

> Now [the demons] make [the person] eat boiled excrement and a hot iron ball. The person, seeing [the demon] bringing [the heated items], shuts tight his mouth. Then, taking up a ploughshare that had been heated for a long time, [the demons] prop open [the person's] mouth, drop in an iron fishhook attached to a rope, pull out the tongue, and drop the iron ball and pour [the excrement] into the wide open mouth.[36]

The iron ball, the iron ploughshare, and the iron fishhook are now completely divorced from the context of the blacksmith's furnace. But one is tempted to imagine that the hell itself is a smith's furnace gone awry. In the *Kokāliya Sutta* of the *Sutta-nipāta*,[37] the iron ball torture appears in the context of a different set of hells, the *Abbuda* series, but its function is the same: 'He goes to the place of impaling upon iron spikes, to the iron stake with its sharp blade. Then there is food like a red-hot iron ball, thus appropriate'.[38] Here eating iron balls is described as 'appropriate', in Dante-esque fashion directly connecting the misdeed, described broadly as 'having done many bad deeds',[39] and its unpleasant karmic fruit.

The translation of such punishments into Chinese led to innovations in the trope in East Asian Buddhism. In the *Sūtra* of the Account of the World (*shìjì jīng* 世記經)

34. See for example my study of the fortified city simile across *nikāya/āgama* borders in Marino 2015.

35. A narrator recounts Mahāmaudgalyāyana's journeys through hell, which he describes 'in brief' (*samāsato*), as well as the Buddha's account of hells, which he describes 'at length' (*vistarato*). The two versions contain many similarities, but are not completely parallel. Zin 2014, 275 noted that the text, at times, appears to follow different sources.

36. Ja V 273.31–274.1: *puna pakkaṭṭhita-* (B$^{e}$ *pakkuthitam*) *gūthakalalañ c'eva jalitaayoguḷañ ca khādāpenti, so pana taṃ āhariyamānaṃ disvā mukhaṃ pidheti, ath' assa dīghe ciratāpite jalamāne phāle ādāya mukhaṃ vikkhambhetvā vivaritvā rajjubaddhaṃ ayabalisaṃ khipitvā jivhaṃ nīharitvā tasmiṃ vatte vivaṭṭe mukhe taṃ ayoguḷaṃ samsavayanti* (B$^{e}$ *sampavisanti*) *pakkhipanti.*

37. Sn pp. 123–31. Similar versions of this *sutta* appear in SN I 149–53 and AN V 170–4, but without the verses describing the hell tortures. A parallel in the Chinese SĀ is T 99 *sūtra* 1278 at 351b12.

38. Sn 667: *ayosaṅkusamāhataṭṭhānaṃ tiṇhadhāram ayasūlam upeti. atha tatta ayoguḷasannibhaṃ bhojanam atthi tathā patirūpaṃ.* Translation follows Norman 2001, 77.

39. Sn 665: *bahuni ca duccaritāni caritvā.*

in the Chinese *Dīrghāgama* (T 1), a cosmological text not yet found in an Indic parallel, iron balls are featured in punishments of several minor hells, including one aptly named Iron Ball Hell (鐵丸地獄). In the Hell of Boiling Excrement (沸屎地獄), iron balls are literally everywhere:

> In that hell, there is bubbling excrement, and iron balls naturally appear everywhere before them. [The hell wardens] goad forward the wrong-doers, forcing them to embrace the iron balls, which burn that person from the hands up to their face, covering everything. Then [the hell wardens] force them to gather up [the hot iron balls] and put them in their mouths, burning their lips and tongues. From their throats to their stomachs [the balls] pass through penetrating down, burning everything.[40]

In this scene, iron balls seem to magically manifest. Such creative Chinese interpretations of the iron ball torture appear to have influenced later innovations in East Asian descriptions of hells, such as those in Genshin's popular tenth century *Ōjōyōshū*, in which iron balls rain from the sky[41] and hell wardens shoot them from their sixty-four eyes,[42] and the many depictions in East Asian Buddhist visual culture that cannot be explored here.[43]

It is not only monks and nuns who were threatened with the iron ball experience in the afterlife. Lay people who are not generous in giving alms to the *saṅgha* are also said to suffer such torments. In the Sanskrit *Koṭikarṇa Avadāna*, Śroṇa Koṭikarṇa encounters a family of *preta*s, or hungry ghosts. The mother of the family explains that she once offered alms to the monk Mahākātyāyana who had come to her door, and wanting her son to share in her joy, she told him about it. Her son, being upset that she offered alms to a monk before brahmans or ancestors, said, 'Why doesn't that lousy, shaven-headed ascetic eat balls of iron instead?'[44] As a result, anything he ate in the *pretaloka* became an iron ball. This story draws upon both the Buddhist rhetoric about the alms-for-merit exchange and also the torturous experiences in hell described elsewhere, clearly connecting the two. Unlike texts mentioned above which focus on the perspective of the *saṅgha*, the *Koṭikarṇa Avadāna* focuses on lay donors, encouraging, or frightening them into giving alms to the *saṅgha*, or at least not treating them with disrespect.

Eating the iron ball as a result of food-related misdeeds is also found in Brahmanical texts. In the *Manusmṛti*, in the section on the *śrāddha* ceremony for recently dead relatives (III.133), there is a warning similar to some discussed in Buddhist *sūtra*s above: 'A man will have to eat as many red-hot spikes, spears, and iron balls as the rice balls that he, ignorant of the Veda, eats at his divine or ances-

40. T 1 122a15–19: 其地獄中有沸屎, 鐵丸自然滿前. 驅迫罪人使抱鐵丸, 燒其身手, 至其頭面, 無不周遍. 復使探撮舉著口中燒其脣舌. 從咽至腹通徹下過無不燋爛. (Punctuation mine).

41. T 2682 36a4–5: 雨大鐵丸亦滿城內.

42. T 2682 35c26: 有六十四眼迸散鐵丸.

43. See for example the hell scrolls attached to the thirteenth century Japanese *Kitano Tenjin Engi Emaki*, in which a hell warden is depicted like a kind of nightmare blacksmith-dentist, holding a hot iron ball with tongs above the open mouth of a person lying supine below him.

44. Divy p. 13.23–4: *kasmāt sa muṇḍakaḥ śramaṇako 'yoguḍaṃ na bhakṣayatīti?* Translation from Rotman 2008, 55.

tral offerings'.[45] Instead of warning against overindulging in alms, or taking alms without proper discipline, a particularly Buddhist monastic concern, the *Manusmṛti* warns against eating offerings designated for ancestors despite one's ignorance of the Vedas, a Brahmanical concern. The trope is the same for both: abuse of the food offering will result in consuming red-hot iron food in the next world.

## The red-hot iron ball in juridical punishments

The iron ball as a torture device also sheds light on the relationship between Buddhist conceptions of hell and notions of juridical punishments in ancient India, real or imagined. We can see the symbolic relationship between this — and otherworldly punishments made explicit in some Buddhist *sūtra*s. For example, the Discourse on Faults (*Vajja Sutta*) of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* juxtaposes criminal acts punished by a king in this world with bodily, verbal, and mental misconduct that leads to tortures in hell (AN I 47–52, especially 47–48). The list of juridical punishments for criminals is similar to one found in the Divine Messengers Discourse, where Yama asks newly arrived denizens of hell if, upon seeing a criminal tortured in various ways by a king, they did not realize by analogy that they too were susceptible to torture in hell for their bad deeds. Among the many juridical punishments are being whipped, having limbs removed, and several more esoterically named tortures like 'Rāhu's mouth', 'fiery wreath', and 'lye pickling', apparently alluding to parallel tortures in hell.[46] Among these tortures is one called the 'gruel pot' (*bilangathālika*), which according to the commentary involves another creative use of the iron ball:

> 'Gruel Pot' torture refers to the sour rice-gruel pot torture; while they do it, they tear off the top of the head, grab a red-hot iron ball with pincers, and drop it [inside] there, after which the brains boil over.[47]

Once again we are made to imagine a nightmare blacksmith with his tongs (P. *saṇḍasa*), only this time in the context of a real juridical punishment in ancient India, not a fantasy of hell. Whether this and the other punishments were actually practised in ancient India is not clear. But in some cases punishments in Buddhist hells are echoed in the *Arthaśāstra*, suggesting that both Buddhist and normative political literatures drew upon similar tropes, and possibly that certain Buddhist hell tortures were also the fate of criminals at that time.[48]

45. Edition from Olivelle 2005, 472: *yāvato grasate piṇḍān havyakavyeṣvamantravit, tāvato grasate pretya dīptāñchūlarṣṭyayoguḍān.* Translation Olivelle 2005, 115.

46. MN III 181.29–31. The PTS version abbreviates here, linking to MN III 163.27–164.12 where the same tortures are described in the *Bālapaṇḍita Sutta*. Similar lists can be found elsewhere, e.g., AN I 47–8, AN II 122.10–23, MN I 87.9–19, Mil 290.13–19.

47. Ps II 58.19–22 and Mp II 88.14–17: *bilaṅgathālikan ti kañjiyaukkhalikaṃmakāraṇaṃ. taṃ karontā sīsakapālaṃ uppāṭetvā tattaṃ ayogulaṃ saṇḍāsena gahetvā tattha pakkhipanti. tena matthaluṅgaṃ pakkaṭṭhitvā upari uttarati.*

48. For instance, the removal of criminals' hands, feet, ears, and nose are prescribed in the *Arthaśāstra* (4.10.12) and described in the *Majjhima-nikāya* (MN III 164). In the *Arthaśāstra*, those guilty of committing adultery with the queen are condemned to be cooked alive in a cauldron (*kumbhīpāka*) (4.13.33), which is one of the preliminary punishments in *Mahāniraya*, or 'Great

One might assume that Buddhists were borrowing the details of hell torture from real-world executioners, but there are also stories describing transmission going the other way, where kings institute punishments according to those found in Buddhist texts. One such story appears in the legendary accounts of the most famous king in Indian Buddhist history, Aśoka. In the account of the Chinese pilgrim-monk Faxian's journey to India, Aśoka (*Āyù*) stumbles upon an opening to hell in a mountain valley and thinks to himself, 'If Yama is able to make a prison to punish wrong-doers, then why shouldn't I, a ruler of people, make a prison to punish wrong-doers?'[49] In the Sanskrit *Aśokāvadāna*, Aśoka hires the executioner Caṇḍagirika to build a state-of-the-art torture chamber that was beautiful on the outside but horrible on the inside, and 'from which no one who entered could leave again',[50] calling to mind the warning above the entrance to hell in Dante's *Inferno*: 'Abandon all hope, ye who enter here'. Caṇḍagirika is said to have been inspired for the design of his 'beautiful prison' (*ramaṇīyakaṃ bandhanaṃ*) after hearing a monk in Pātalipūtra's Kukkuṭārāma monastery preach the *Bālapaṇḍita Sutta*. The section the monk preached corresponds to the Pāli *Devadūta Sutta* as we have it today.[51] In the Sanskrit *Aśokāvadāna*, part of the quoted text is precisely the iron ball torture described above: 'Hell wardens ... fix open the mouth with an iron prop and drop into the mouth red-hot iron balls that are burning, blazing, glowing ... Such is the suffering of beings who are born in hell'.[52]

Here is a story about a political actor intentionally making use of a hell torture described in Buddhist didactic literature for the purpose of this-worldly political control. Whether this reflects a real historical exchange between Buddhists and political leaders is beside the point. The story shows that some Buddhist composers were intentionally connecting this- and other-worldly tortures, mirroring Buddhist justice with kingly justice. Moreover, that it is the red-hot iron ball torture, which is described just as in our Gāndhārī *sūtra* as 'burning, blazing, glowing', shows that that particular torture came to be among the early archetypal symbolic representations of hell.

Considering the many descriptions of earthly and infernal punishments that are shared among the *Manusmṛti*, *Arthaśāstra*, and Buddhist texts, to say nothing of other

Hell' according to the Divine Messengers Discourse (MN III 183.16 *lohakumbhiyā*). Some Buddhist commentaries (e.g., Mp II 58.28–59.2) and the *Arthaśāstra* (4.8.22) agree that some real-world criminals were condemned to drink hot oil and then either be set alight or cooked for a day.

49. T 2085 863b29–c1: 鬼王尚能作地獄治罪人. 我是人主何不作地獄治罪人耶. On the Buddhist narrative of the cruel, pre-Buddhist phase of Aśoka, see Guruge 1993, 79. Thanks to Peter Harvey for this reference.

50. A-av 45 based on Mukhopadhyaya 1963: *yas tatra praviśet tasya na bhūyo nirgama iti.*

51. MN III 186.3–10. In the Chinese *Āyùwáng jīng* 阿育王經 (*Sūtra* of King Aśoka), the monk is said to have preached the *wǔtiānshǐ xiūduōluó*五天使修多羅 (Five Heavenly Messengers *Sūtra*), which corresponds to the *Devadūta Sutta*. See T 2043 134a9–10. Przyluski (1923, 121–130) discusses the complicated relationship between the *Devadūta Sutta* and the *Bālapaṇḍita Sutta*. See also van Put 2007, 206.

52. A-av 45: *narakapālā ... ayomayena viṣkaṃbhakena mukhadvāraṃ viṣkambhya ayoguḍān ādīptān pradīptān saṃprajvalitān ekajvālībhūtān āsye prakṣipanti ... iyad duḥkhā hi bhikṣavo nārakāḥ santi sattvā narakeṣūpapannāḥ.*

Indian genres not explored for this paper, despite the significantly different orientations of each text, it is clear that certain concepts of discipline, punishment, and negative karmic results functioned across political, social, and religious contexts, and the boundary between each context was porous.

## Punishment, discipline, and liberation

An analysis of the iron ball imagery driving teachings about monastic behaviour and hell tortures must address its focus on controlling and disciplining behaviour by referring to bodily pain that can be the future karmic result of ill discipline, and which might be seen by some as 'punishment' for it. How should one interpret this Buddhist discourse of control? First of all, it is important to recognize the relationship between some hell tortures (e.g., swallowing an iron ball) and the bad actions that conditioned them (e.g., gluttony/taking advantage of almsgivers). An analogue is found in the spectacle of corporal punishment in pre-eighteenth century Western Europe as described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault described a system of symbolic torture whereby certain punishments were designed to match a specific crime. Vico called this 'an entire poetics' (cited in Foucault 1977, 45), and Rossi called it 'the poetry of Dante put into laws'.[53] This made the awful torture in some way rational, an equal penance. In the Buddhist case, this parallelism between the bad action and karmic result is probably drawing upon a similar parallelism in the juridical punishments of ancient India.[54] But it is also part of a Buddhist discourse about karma that says a person will pay off his or her karmic account, so to speak, by enduring physical pain.[55] Karma is often said to 'ripen', to come to fruition, expressed by the Skt. verb √*pac*. In a strange sort of parallel to this, bodies in hell are often tossed in an actual metal pot and 'cooked' or 'boiled', also expressed by √*pac*, but do not die until the evil karma that conditioned the cooking is exhausted.[56] This suggests that karma associated with certain misdeeds can be effectively 'cooked off' by suffering analogous tortures in hell. When one who takes advantage of almsgivers suffers the maturation of his bad karma by eating hot iron balls, as

53. 'C'était de la poésie du Dante mise en lois' (Rossi 1829, 26 n.1; cited in Foucault 1977, 34). Speaking about the 'well-defined procedure' and 'regulated practice' of matching punishments to crimes, Foucault says: 'the various stages, their duration, the instruments used, the length of ropes and the heaviness of weights used, the number of interventions made by the interrogating magistrate, all this was ... carefully codified' (40–41).

54. See for example the *Arthaśāstra* book IV chapter XI, in which, for example, arsonists are burned to death and those who speak against the king lose their tongues.

55. On early Buddhist discussions about the relationship between karma and hell, especially in the *Kathāvatthu,* see Braarvig 2009, 260–265. On the development of the notion of karma in Indian religions more broadly speaking, see Obeyesekere 2002, especially chapter 1.

56. E.g., *Devadūta Sutta* (MN III 183.15–22): *tam enaṃ, bhikkhave, nirayapālā uddhapādaṃ gahetvā tattāya lohakumbhiyā pakkhipanti ādittāya sampajjalitāya sañjotibhūtāya. so tattha pheṇudehakaṃ* ***paccati*** *... na ca tāva kālaṃ karoti yāva na taṃ pāpaṃ kammaṃ byantihoti.* ('Next the wardens of hell take him feet up and head down and plunge him into a red-hot metal cauldron that is burning, blazing, and glowing. He is **cooked** there in a swirl of froth ...Yet he does not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result'. Translation Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 1033. Bold marked by author.) Braarvig 2009, 264 also makes this connection between the ripening of karma and the cooking of bodies in hell.

his karma in a sense 'cooks' him, it is itself 'cooked off'.[57]

But even if Buddhist hell tortures were inspired by existing public juridical tortures in ancient India, bodies are punished in hell — in the literal sense — only in imagined scenarios. However, one can suppose that the rhetoric about hell and images like the force-feeding of iron balls still played a role in controlling monastic bodies — i.e. bodily desires and conduct — here and now. Borrowing Talal Asad's summary of the western prison system described by Foucault, we might say that hell rhetoric is in some way a goad to inspire monks and nuns to pursue an 'economy of training' — a system of mental and physical discipline — that could 'carefully mold the body and soul' in this world in order to save them from physical tortures in the next (Asad 1993, 88).

If texts threatening the iron ball and other hell tortures are about discipline, they are at least in part also about one's own disciplining of oneself. Where Foucault left no space for a 'metaphysical subjectivity' within large disciplinary structures like prisons (Glucklich 2001, 155), one can leave space for it in the context of the Buddhist monastery, as Talal Asad did with respect to medieval Christian monasteries: 'The obedient monk is a person for whom obedience is *his* virtue — in the sense of being his ability, potentiality, power ...' (Asad 1993, 125). It is in part through the soft disciplinary power of rhetoric about bodily torture in hell that monks and nuns are encouraged to follow training rules. But it is through following such rules that they obtain their own power for ending suffering, or as fields of merit, or in rarer cases as possessors of supernatural powers. It facilitates virtue formation, not just subjection to law. Moreover, the imagery of torture in hell seems to be designed to precipitate an inward turn, admission of guilt, and reconciliation. As Ariel Glucklich has pointed out, the tortured person can be 'a willing participator' in his own ritual drama, not just 'as a passive object that registered the signs of a technology of power, but as a subject of some consolation and potential redemption'.[58] Such a willing participation and inward turn is ritualized in the monastic ceremonial recitation of the *Prātimokṣa Sūtra*, an inventory of offenses, each fortnight at the *upoṣadha* ritual, during which *saṅgha* members publicly disclose any offenses to the community.[59] This ritual is in part about members being accountable to the community, but also about self-cleansing and refreshing one's practice. The iron ball torture and the larger discourse of control associated with its imagery can be considered as part of the same disciplinary power exhibited at such rituals. Read in this light, if the *sūtra*s cited above call for restriction and discipline from one perspective, from another they exhort: 'wake up!' and 'strive diligently!' The simile of the red-hot iron ball may on the one hand function as a rhetorical tool for legitimizing discipline,

57. On cooking as a pervasive metaphor in Vedic sacrificial literature, especially insofar as the body of the sacrificer is imagined to be cooked, see the excellent summary of literature in Gummer 2014, especially 1094–99. Gummer also discusses 'cooking' as a positive metaphor in early Mahāyāna literature whereby 'listening, reciting, memorizing, and retaining the sūtra constitute a process of cooking' (1109).

58. Glucklich 2001, 156. Glucklich argued that Foucault overlooked the self-reflective role of the guilty in the face of torture. See chapter 7.

59. See Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. *upoṣadha.*

but on the other hand, it is a literary record of a Buddhist concern for the mental and spiritual freedom of the individual.

## Conclusion

It should be evident now that the red-hot iron ball image was prolific in early Buddhist literature, and that the simile of the iron ball in the Gāndhārī *sūtra* that sparked this study, which compared bodies in hell to hot iron balls, is not merely a reference to a very hot object. It draws upon a network of imagery that ultimately connects the blacksmith's shop to horrific tortures in hell. We have seen that the iron ball evokes and connects several important, related Buddhist concerns or themes. In the proposition beginning 'better to eat a red-hot iron ball', seen in verse texts like the *Dharmapada/Udānavarga*, it highlights the importance of discipline and integrity among those begging for alms. This reveals a monastic anxiety about lay patronage and maintaining the public image of the *saṅgha*. As Buddhists attempted to establish new *saṅgha*s across regional and cultural boundaries, as in greater Gandhāra during the first two centuries CE, the legitimacy of their order and the trust of their patrons was of ultimate concern. Moreover, in its role as a torture device forced down the throats of those suffering in hell, which is a conceptual extension of the proposition from the *Dharmapada*, the iron ball appears to be a punishment appropriate to food-related misdeeds, such as abusing the alms system. And we have seen that hell tortures like those using the iron ball drew from — or themselves informed — juridical penalties in ancient India, imagined or real.

Furthermore, the widespread use of the iron ball trope testifies to the evocative power of iron, and innovations in metalworking more generally, in the imagination of Buddhists in the late first millennium BCE. In some texts, it is a tool for illustrating transformation — of iron ore into workable iron, and monks and nuns into the possessors of supernatural power (P. *iddhi*). More importantly, elsewhere it was used to inspire discipline and threaten other worldly punishment, turning the blacksmith's workshop with its glowing metal, constant hammering, and haunting sounds into a veritable torture chamber. Here, it is useful to stretch Thomas Tweed's notion that religions in part help people to make dwellings by inscribing their homeland — 'the street, the temple, the neighborhood, the shrine, the region, the city' — with religious significance (Tweed 2006, 97, 222–23 n. 14). One could say that Buddhists inscribed, or mapped onto the iron ball (and the smith's shop in general) their views of discipline, misdeeds, hell, and thus a Buddhist theory of karmic results. This suggests a pedagogy that intentionally combined the imagined and the concrete, the metaphorical and the literal, to evoke in the working of an iron ball the working of the self, and to encourage an experience of daily life that is haunted by the potentiality of hell.

## Acknowledgements

This article is based on a chapter of my dissertation under Richard Salomon (2017) and a talk I delivered at the 2017 Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Toronto, Ontario. I am grateful for the helpful comments on

that talk and different versions of this article by Richard Salomon, Tim Lenz, Mike Skinner, Michael Butcher, Dan Boucher, Mark Allon, Bhikkhu Anālayo, and the careful editors of this journal. Thanks also to the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhist Studies who supported my work on this project.

## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| A-av | *Aśokāvadāna* |
| AN | *Aṅguttara-nikāya* * |
| $B^e$ | Burmese (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana) edition(s) of Pali texts (=VRI-CD). |
| CPD | V. Trenckner *et al., A Critical Pāli Dictionary,* Copenhagen 1924-. |
| Dhp | Pāli *Dhammapada* |
| Dhp-$G^K$ | Gāndhārī *Dharmapada* from Khotan (='Gāndhārī Dharmapada', ed Brough 1962) |
| Dhp-$G^L$ | Gāndhārī *Dharmapada*, London (BL Fragments 16 + 25; ed. Lenz 2003: part I) |
| Divy | *Divyāvadāna* (ed. Cowell and Neil 1886) |
| DN | *Dīgha-nikāya* |
| $E^e$ | European (Pali Text Society) edition(s) of Pali texts |
| G. | Gāndhārī |
| It | *Itivuttaka* |
| Ja | *Jātaka* |
| Kv | *Kathāvatthu* |
| MBh | *Mahābhārata* (critical edition; Poona, 1927-66) |
| MN | *Majjhima-nikāya* |
| Mp | *Manoratha-pūraṇī* (*Aṅguttara-nikāya* commentary) |
| Mvu | *Mahāvastu Avadāna* (ed. Senart 1882-97) |
| MW | M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1899) |
| P. | Pāli |
| Pj | *Paramattha-jotikā* (*Sutta-nipāta* commentary) |
| Ps | *Papañca-sūdanī* (*Majjhima-nikāya* commentary) |
| SĀ | Longer Chinese *Saṃyukāgama* (Taishō 99) |
| SHT | E. Waldschmidt *et al.*, *Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfan-Funden,* vol. 2 (Wiesbaden, 1968) |
| Skt. | Sanskrit |
| Sn | *Sutta-nipāta* |

| | |
|---|---|
| SN | *Saṃyutta-nikāya* |
| Spk | *Sārattha-ppakāsinī* (*Saṃyutta-nikāya* commentary) |
| Sv | *Sumaṅgala-vilāsinī* (*Dīgha-nikāya* commentary) |
| T | J. Takakusu and K. Watanabe, eds., *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō,* 100 vols. (Tokyo, 1924-34). Taishō edition (SAT Daizōkyō Text Database). |
| Uv | *Udānavarga* (ed. Bernhard 1965-8) |
| Vin | Theravādin *Vinayapiṭaka* |

*All Pāli texts based on Pāli Text Society editions, also referred to as $E^e$, unless otherwise noted.

## Bibliography


Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2011. *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya. Vol. 2.* Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing.

Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Banerjee, N. R. 1965. *The Iron Age in India*. Delhi: Munshiram Monoharlal.

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

———. 2012. *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya.* Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.

———. 2017. *The Suttanipāta: An Ancient Collection of the Buddha's Discourses Together with its Commentaries*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.

Braarvig, Jens. 2009. 'The Buddhist Hell: An Early Instance of the Idea?' *Numen* 56(2/3): 254–281. https://doi.org/10.1163/156852709X405008

Bühler, George. 1886. *The Laws of Manu.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buswell, Robert E., Jr., and Donald Lopez Jr., eds. 2014. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400848058

Chakrabarti, D. K. 1992. *The Early Use of Iron in India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Clarke, Shayne. 2014. *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824836474.001.0001

Collins, Steven. 1998. *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520655

Cowell, E. B. and R. A. Neil, eds. 1886. *The Divyāvadāna.* Cambridge: The University Press.

Deshpande, P. P. and N. B. Dhokey. 2007. 'Metallographical Investigations of Iron Objects in Ancient Vidharbha Region of Maharashtra'. *Transactions of the Indian Institute of Metals* 61(2–3): 135–137. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12666-008-0013-6

Fitzgerald, James. 2000. 'Sanskrit Pīta Śaikya/saikya: Two Terms of Iron and Steel Technology in the Mahābhārata'. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120(1): 44–61. https://doi.org/10.2307/604884

Findly, Ellison Banks. 2003. *Dāna: Giving and Getting in Pāli Buddhism.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Forbes, R. J. 1950. *Metallurgy in Antiquity: A Notebook for Archaeologists and Technologists.* Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Foucault, Michel. 1977 [1975]. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House.

Glucklich, Ariel. 2001. *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gummer, Natalie D. 2014. 'Sacrificial Sūtras: Mahāyāna Literature and the South Asian Ritual Cosmos'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82(4): 1091–1126. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfu067

Guruge, Ananda W. P. 1993. *Asoka, the Righteous: A Definitive Biography.* Colombo: Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Information.

Horner, I. B. 1949. *The Book of Discipline (Vinaya Pitaka), Vol. 1.* London: Luzac and Co.

Jones, J. J. 1949. *The Mahavastu, Vol I.* London: Luzac & Co.

Kangle, R. P. 1960. *The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra, Part I: A Critical Edition with a Glossary*. Mumbai: University of Bombay.

Kirfel, W. 1920. *Kosmographie der Inder nach den Quellen dargestellt.* Leipzig: Kurt Schroeder.

Kosambi, D. D. 1963. 'The Beginning of the Iron Age in India'. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 6(3): 309–318. https://doi.org/10.1163/156852063X00158

Maki, Tatsugen. 1985. 『増一阿含経善聚品32-4・天使経』考 (A study of the Devadūtasūtra of the Ekottarikāgama 32-4) 印度学仏教学研究 (Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies) 34: 148–153. https://doi.org/10.4259/ibk.34.148

———. 1989. 『増壱阿含経善聚品32- 4天使経』考(2) (A study of the Devadūtasūtra of the Ekottarikāgama 32-4, Pt. 2) 印度学仏教学研究 (Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies) 38: 286-93. https://doi.org/10.4259/ibk.38.286

Marino, Joseph. 2015. 'Cats with Flaming Tails: The Simile of the Fortified City in Pāli and Gāndhārī Sūtra Literature'. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 38: 73–105.

———. 2017. 'Metaphor and Pedagogy in Early Buddhist Literature: An Edition and Study of Two Sūtras from the Senior Collection of Gāndhārī Manuscripts', University of Washington PhD dissertation: https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/39788/Marino_washington_0250E_16997.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Mukhopadhyaya, Sujitkumar. 1963. *The Aśokāvadāna.* New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.

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

Norman, K. R. 2001. *The Group of Discourses (Sutta Nipāta),* 2nd edition. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

Obeyesekere, Gananath. 2002. *Imagining Karma: Ethical Transformation in Amerindian, Buddhist, and Greek Rebirth.* Berkeley: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520232204.001.0001

Ohnuma, Reiko. 2012. *Ties That Bind: Maternal Imagery and Discourse in Indian Buddhism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199915651.001.0001

Olivelle, Patrick. 2005. *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the* Mānava-Dharmaśāstra. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2013. *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India: Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199891825.001.0001

Pande, Girija and Jan af Geijerstam, eds., 2002. *Tradition and Innovation in the History of Iron Making: An Indo-European Perspective.* Nainital: Pahar Parikarma.

van Put, Ineke. 2007. 'The Names of Buddhist Hells in East Asian Buddhism'. *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies.* Third series, no. 9, 205–239. Berkeley, CA: Institute of Buddhist Studies.

Prebish, Charles. 1996 [1975]. *Buddhist Monastic Discipline: The Sanskrit Prātimokṣa Sūtras of the Mahāsāṃghikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins*. University Park: Penn State University Press.

Pruden, Leo. 1988–1990. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu.* Translated by Louis de la Vallée Poussin. Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press.
Przyluski, Jean. 1923. *La Légende de l'Empereur Açoka (Açoka-Avadāna) dans les textes Indiens et Chinois.* Paris: Paul Geuthner.
Rau, Wilhelm. 1974. *Metalle und Metallgeräte im vedischen Indien.* Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.
Rossi, Pellegrino. 1829. *Traité de droit penal.* Brussells: Louis Hauman et Compagnie.
Rotman, Andy. 2008. *Divine Stories: Divyāvadāna, Part 1.* Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
Salomon, Richard. 2003. 'The Senior Manuscripts: Another Collection of Gandhāran Buddhist Scrolls'. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123: 73–92. https://doi.org/10.2307/3217845
———. 2018. *The Buddhist Literature of Ancient Gandhāra: An Introduction with Selected Translations.* Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
Schopen, Gregory. 2006. 'A Well-Sanitized Shroud: Asceticism and Institutional Values in the Middle Period of Buddhist Monasticism'. In *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE,* ed. Patrick Olivelle, 315–347. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195305326.003.0013
Sharma, G. R. 1960. *The Excavations at Kauśāmbī (1957–59): The Defences and the Śyenaciti of the Puruṣamedha.* Allahabad: University of Allahabad.
Singh, S. D. 1962. 'Iron in Ancient India'. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 5(2): 212–216. https://doi.org/10.2307/3596367
Sukthankar, V. S., *et al.* 1958. *The Mahābhārata, Vol 9: Droṇaparvan.* Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
Thapar, Romila. 2004 [2002]. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300.* Berkeley: University of California Press.
———. 2013. *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674726512
Tripathi, Vibha, ed. 1998. *Archaeometallurgy in India.* Delhi: Sharada Publishing House.
———. 1998. '"Ayas" in the Rigveda—A Note'. In *Archaeometallurgy in India,* ed. Vibha Tripathi, 346–349. Delhi: Sharada Publishing House.
Tweed, Thomas. 2006. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674044517
Upadhyaya, J. P. 2000. *Metal Implements in Ancient India (From Earliest Times up to Circa 2nd Century BC).* Delhi: Pratibha Prakashan.
Zin, Monika. 2014. 'Imagery of Hell in South, South East and Central Asia'. *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* LXVII, Z. 1: 269–296.