

CATS WITH FLAMING TAILS:
THE SIMILE OF THE FORTIFIED CITY IN PĀLI
AND GĀNDHĀRĪ SŪTRA LITERATURE¹

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Upamā kho myāyaṃ, bhikkhave, katā atthassa viññāpanāya

I have made a simile, monks, so that you will understand my meaning.²

1. Introduction

Over a hundred years ago, Caroline Rhys Davids recognized that Buddhist similes and parables, like those in the Christian Gospels, carry a “deep-lying esthetic effect,” a “perennial charm,” which was in part responsible for the longevity of Buddhist teachings wherever they went (Rhys-Davids 1908: 521). Beyond their charm, such images are also important to Buddhist texts because they convey essential but often abstruse concepts in terms of concrete, tangible things. Buddhists knew well what Nietzsche later observed: “The more abstract the truth you wish to teach, the more must you allure the senses to it.”³ Innovations in the study of metaphor support Nietzsche’s observation, finding that it is “one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what

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² E.g. SN IV 174. All Pāli citations are Pāli Text Society versions unless otherwise noted.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* §128. Translation by Zimmern (1907: 94).

cannot be comprehended totally,” that is, among other things, our “moral practices, and spiritual awareness” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 193). However, despite the frequency and importance of literary devices like similes in early Buddhist literature, they remain largely understudied.⁴

Among the many ‘alluring’ similes employed in early Buddhist *sūtras*, those built around the image of the fortified city are especially evocative and prolific.⁵ These similes draw upon the imagination of listeners by painting pictures of lively cities replete with defensive fortifications and inhabitants. In one common expression of the simile (e.g., SN V 160), a royal frontier fortress (*rañño paccantima nagara*) is described as having solid ramparts, walls, arches, and a single gate. In it, a wise gatekeeper controls the traffic in and out of the city, making sure that there are no cracks in the city walls, not even one big enough for a cat to sneak through. He would know that anyone entering or exiting the city must come through the single gate. In the same way, there is only one path toward *nirvāṇa*, the one laid out in the Buddha’s Dharma. Fortified city similes are further employed in a broad range of contexts and forms, in each instance emphasizing different characteristics of the city and thereby different aspects of Buddhist ideology and practice. Noticing the variety of city similes, Charles Hallisey suggested that their comparative study would contribute to our understanding of the role of imagery in Buddhist literature as a whole (Hallisey 1990: 164).

⁴ While there are numerous studies of individual similes, there is no comprehensive study of the function of similes or other illustrative images in early Buddhist literature. A selection of studies of individual Buddhist similes or other images includes Wayman 1974 and 1979; Kragh 2010; and Ohnuma 2012. More general studies of similes in Buddhist literature Caroline Rhys-Davids’ index of similes in Pāli (1907), her article on similes and parables (1908), and the useful Japanese index edited by Mori Shōji (1987). For a general study of similes in Indian literature, see Gonda 1949. The distinction between simile (*upamā*) and metaphor (*rūpaka*) is significant in certain contexts in Buddhist literature, especially in *kāvya* where metaphor was often employed for its practical economy in verse, but we can consider them in the same light in this discussion. I will refrain from using either of the technical vocabularies available in Indian and Western sources. Instead, I will refer to the subject of comparison as the ‘subject’ and the object of comparison as the ‘image.’ For a useful discussion of the problem of clarity when discussing Buddhist literary devices, see Kragh 2010.

⁵ I call this simile the ‘simile of the fortified city’ as opposed to ‘frontier city’ or ‘fort’ in order to put this essay in conversation with the recent English translation of Dieter Schlingloff’s archaeological study of “fortified cities of ancient India” (2013).

In this article, I compile and analyze examples of Buddhist similes of the fortified city from Pāli, Chinese, and Gāndhārī sources in an effort to shed light on the nature and function of this particular group of similes and of Buddhist similes in general. The frequency of this image illustrating such essential Buddhist ideas as *nirvāṇa*, *dharma*, and mindfulness indicates how important Buddhist teachers must have considered it as a pedagogical tool. Furthermore, although there is significant variation among the different fortified city similes, in most cases they appear to be derived from a shared trove of building blocks and themes, reflecting a kind of polythetic simile family that is comprised of a series of associations between characteristics of the city and Buddhist concepts, although only some of these associations appear in any given simile.⁶ To better understand how the simile family works, I borrow the concept of the ‘simileme’ from classicist W. C. Scott, who introduces it in the context of Homeric poetry. Scott uses this term to distinguish the “full range of possibilities” for a simile “developed through a long series of performances,” from the individual simile, which reflects the “particularized composition” of a single poet, or in the Buddhist case, teaching. The simileme is the “nonverbal background material,” that is, all of the various associations that underlie a given comparison familiar to performers and audience members alike (Scott 2009: 19). Despite the vast differences between the contexts of Homeric verse and Buddhist *sūtras*, Scott’s simileme is a suitable lens through which to examine the present case in that it helps us to better understand the way in which certain tropes common in the literary imagination of the time were utilized in Buddhist texts, as well as the extent of literary creativity employed by their author or authors.

⁶ Here I am influenced by Jonathan Silk who defines Mahāyāna Buddhism as a polythetic class (2002). According to Silk, “In a Polythetic Class, to be considered a member of the class each object must possess a large (but unspecified) number of features or characteristics which are considered relevant for membership in the class. And each such set of features must be possessed by a large number of members of the class. But – and this is the key – there is no set of features which must be possessed by *every* member of the class. There is no one feature or set of features necessary and sufficient for inclusion in the class” (Silk 2002: 402).

In order to illustrate the way in which a single occurrence of the fortified city simile alludes to, or operates in conversation with, the greater simile, I turn to a recently discovered Gāndhārī version – the oldest manuscript attestation – preserved in scroll 20 in the Robert Senior Collection.⁷ Although the Gāndhārī simile is unique in both the context in which it occurs and in its phrasing, its meaning can only be fully understood when considered in the context of the general fortified city simile. In other words, the Gāndhārī text assumes that its audience is familiar with the relationships between the city and Buddhist ideas present in other versions of the simile. At the same time, it informs our understanding of those other versions; it offers us a key to unlocking a rather curious idiomatic expression common to the simile involving a gatekeeper, a cat, and by implication, as I will argue, siege warfare.

2. Imagining the City

The world inhabited by the characters of early Buddhist literature is distinctly colored by the ‘second urbanization’ of the mid-to-late 1st millennium BCE, when cities began to develop in the Gangetic valley and spread across South Asia.⁸ In this period, rural life was drawn into stark contrast with the burgeoning world of political, social, and technological innovation inside city centers, and images of well-protected and often lavish cities became common in Indian visual and literary culture. Relief sculptures at early sites like Sāñcī, Mathurā, and Amarāvātī contain images of fortified cities with imposing ramparts, gates, arches, and grand multi-level balconies filled with onlookers (Kaul 2011: 60–65).

⁷ The Robert Senior Collection of Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts consists of twenty-four birch bark scrolls from the second century CE containing at least forty-one Buddhist texts in the Gāndhārī language. On the Senior Collection, see Allon 2014 and Glass 2007.

⁸ Thapar 2004: 139–146. With respect to early fortified cities, according to archaeological evidence, large settlements were first created in South Asia in the seventh century BCE and were defended by ditches, moats, and ramparts. There is also evidence that towards the end of the first millennium BCE city gateways with brick towers and guard stations were further developed (Heitzman 2009). Excavations of Kauśāmbī, a major early Buddhist hub, have revealed ramparts thirteen meters high, encased in 154 layers of brick, containing six gates, and surrounding a city area 2.29 km² (Schlingloff 2013: 19). For an indispensable literary survey of cities featured in the Pāli canon, see Sarao 1990.

Descriptions of the city also featured prominently in Indian literature. Early *kāvya* poets such as Aśvaghōṣa, Āryaśūra, and Kālidāsa often explored imaginative descriptions of cities to draw in listeners or readers. For example, in Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*, the protagonist yakṣa offers a fanciful description of his native city Alakā by comparing it to his cloud messenger:

Its mansions are your equals – they have for your lightning
the flash of dazzling women, for your rainbow
arrays of paintings, for your deep and soothing thunder
drums beating for dance and song, for your core
of waters floors inset with gems, and roofs that graze the sky for your
loftiness.⁹

In the same poem Kālidāsa also famously describes the historical city of Ujjain in such fantastic terms that it has been called “the city of romance *par excellence*” (Sharma 1990: 129).

As Shonaleeka Kaul has noted, our understanding of urban life in ancient South Asia should incorporate such imagined cities:

The city in history has had not only a spatial existence but an ideational one – an existence in the realm of ideas. It has elicited and gathered around itself notions, images, and associations. These ideas of the city are as material a part of the story of urban space as the tangible structures and systems that inhabit or delimit it on the ground (Kaul 2011: 1).

The city as imagined in Buddhist literature, particularly the fortified city at the edge of the reach of a central lord, made to guarantee its own protection, might have evoked themes such as vulnerability and safety from attacks by neighboring kingdoms, protection from the dangers of the wilderness, and social stratification. The city might also have been viewed with some degree of ambivalence by some Buddhist monks, for whom it was at once the site of patronage but also, at least according to some textual sources, a site of distraction. For example, in the

⁹ Translation by Nathan (1976: 64).

*vidyutvantam lalitavanitāḥ sendracāpaṃ sacitrāḥ
saṅgītāya prahatamurajāḥ snigdhaḡambhīraghoṣam |
antastoyam maṇimayabhuvas tuṅgaṃ abhraṅliḡagrāḥ
prāsādās tvam tulayitum alam yatra tais tair viṣeṣaiḡ ||*

Theragāthā, a monk is said to lie “trembling” or “in fear” (*uttasaṃ*) in the city, and only finds peace in the forest which is more conducive to meditation:

In the city, within high encircling walls and solid watchtowers and strongholds, protected by sword-wielding men, I lived in fear.

Today, fortunate and at ease, with all fear abandoned, Bhaddiya, son of Godhā, having entered into the forest, meditates.¹⁰

Of course, as Gregory Schopen has made apparent, what we find in the literature does not necessarily reflect the lived reality of Buddhist communities.¹¹ Still, one can’t overlook the fact that the setting of the stories of early Buddhism – and the setting of the rise of historical Buddhism – is determined in no small part by city centers. We need only look to the beginning of nearly all *sūtras* where the Buddha and his monks rest just outside the city in pleasure gardens, where the imposing reality of walls and fortifications – and the contrast between inside and outside – stands conspicuously in the background.

3. Examples of the Simile

Various Buddhist texts contain similes painting pictures of cities defended by ramparts (*uddāpa*) or walls (*pākāra*). Many examples describe a border city (*paccantimam nagaram*), which according to the *Arthaśāstra* must be manned by a commander to guard the entrance to the interior of the kingdom.¹² I have not tried to exhaustively treat every reference to a protected border city in Buddhist literature, but only to select enough

¹⁰ Th, V. 863–4:

*Ucce maṅḍalipākāre daḷhamatṭālakoṭṭhake /
rakkhito khaggahattehi uttasaṃ viharim pure //
So ’jja bhaddo anutrāsī pahīnabhayabheravo /
jhāyati vanam ogayha putto Godhāya Bhaddiyo //*

(All translations not otherwise attributed are my own.)

¹¹ See Schopen 1991: 311: “...we need not – and probably should not – assume that the presence of an idea in a canonical Buddhist text necessarily means that that same idea was current in actual Buddhist communities. The two need not – and probably often did not – have any necessary connection, chronological or otherwise.”

¹² The relevant section of the *Arthaśāstra* (2.1.5) reads: *anteṣv antapālādurgāṇi janapadadvārāṇy antapālādhiṣṭhitāni sthāpayet* (“At the frontiers, he should construct the forts

examples from Pāli, Gāndhārī, and some Chinese parallels to illustrate the diverse meanings and functions of this simile in the early Indian Buddhist literary milieu.

Examples of the simile can be broadly divided into three types on the basis of their particular application or theme. In each type, the city carries a different metaphorical force and doctrinal association:

1. *City-as-nirvāṇa*: Just as the city sits at the end of a road, *nirvāṇa* lies at the end of the Eightfold Path.
2. *City-as-body*: Just as a city must be protected from attackers, the body must be protected from distraction.
3. *City-as Dharma*: Just as an architect creates a beautiful city, so did the Buddha create the Dharma; and just as a fortified city protects a citizen, so does the Dharma protect Buddhists from Māra's forces.

These categories are somewhat fluid, often with considerable overlap, and should therefore be treated as heuristic devices. Nevertheless, they structure the imagery of their respective similes in a way that allows us to tease out their various characteristics and functions.

3.1. *City-as-nirvāṇa*

The *city-as-nirvāṇa* type describes *nirvāṇa* as a physical place, a wonderful city filled with luxuries that can be reached via the Eightfold Path. This type is exemplified in the well-known account of the Buddha's enlightenment in the *Nagarasutta* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya*.¹³ There, the Buddha describes how he realized the nature of dependent co-arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) the night before his awakening by discovering the Eightfold Path. He illustrates this through the following simile:

Suppose, *bhikkhus*, a man wandering through a forest would see an ancient path, an ancient road travelled upon by people in the past. He would follow

of the Frontier Commanders as gateways into the countryside and under the control of Frontier Commanders"). Translation by Olivelle (2013: 99).

¹³ SN II 104–7. This text is not to be confused with another *Nagarasutta* (AN IV 106–13). The *Nagarasutta* in the *Saṃyuttanikāya* also has a parallel in Sanskrit which was compiled from various manuscripts from Turfan, Kucha, and Dunhuang, and possibly other places. For a comprehensive study of these manuscripts, see Bongard-Levin et al. 1996.

it, and would see an ancient city, an ancient capital that had been inhabited by people in the past, with parks, groves, ponds, and ramparts, a delightful place. (...) So too, *bhikkhus*, I saw the ancient path, the ancient road traveled by the Perfectly Enlightened Ones of the past. And what is that ancient path, that ancient road? (...) It is just this Noble Eightfold Path. (...) I followed that path and by doing so I have directly known [dependent co-arising].¹⁴

This simile contains three features that are especially important for the present study. First, the association between the path leading to the city and the Eightfold Path is a key component of the fortified city simile, appearing in numerous individual similes. Second, even though it is not made explicit in the text, one can infer that, because the path is the Eightfold Path, the city must be *nirvāṇa*, as do Buddhaghosa in his commentary¹⁵ and at least one similar Chinese text.¹⁶ Third, the Buddha says that by following the path he came to directly know (*abbhaññāsiṃ*)¹⁷ each component of the twelve-fold chain of dependent co-arising. The focus here on direct knowledge is the opposite of that on inferred knowledge (*anumānāñāṇa*) that we find in most other versions of the simile.

¹⁴ Translation by Bodhi (2000: 603). SN II 105–6: *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave puriso araññe pavane caramāno passeyya purāṇam maggam purāṇañjasam pubbakehi manussehi anuyātaṃ. So tam anugaccheyya tam anugacchanto passeyya purāṇaṃ nagaraṃ purāṇaṃ rājadhāniṃ pubbakehi manussehi ajjhāvutthaṃ ārāmasampannaṃ vanasampannaṃ pokkharāṇisampannaṃ uddāpavantaṃ ramaṇīyaṃ. (...) Evam eva khvāhaṃ bhikkhave addasaṃ purāṇaṃ maggaṃ purāṇañjasam pubbakehi sammāsambuddhehi anuyātaṃ. Katamo ca so bhikkhave purāṇamaggo? (...) Ayam eva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo. (...) tam anugacchim. Tam anugacchanto (...) [paṭiccasamuppāda] (...) abbhaññāsim.*

¹⁵ SN-a II 117: *Purisassa ten’ eva maggena gacchato purato nagaradassanaṃ viya Tathāgatassa nibbānanagaradassanaṃ.* (“A person’s sight of the city that had previously been reached by this very path is like Tathāgata’s sight of the city of Nirvāṇa.”)

¹⁶ The primary Chinese parallel to the *Nagarasutta* found in Guṇabhadra’s *Samyuk-tāgama* (T 99 80b24–81a08) does not explicitly call the city the “city of Nirvāṇa,” but the Chinese translation of the *Nidānasūtra* attributed to Faxian (T 715 830a08) also deals with dependent co-arising and reads: 我今已履佛所行道，已被昔人所被之甲，已到昔人涅槃之城 (“I have now tread the path walked by Buddhas, and worn the armor worn by people from the past, and arrived at the the city of Nirvāṇa of the people of the past”).

¹⁷ In Pāli, *abbhaññāsiṃ*, an aorist form of Skt. *abhi + jñā*, can mean “to know by experience, to know fully or thoroughly” (PTSD s.v. *abhiññāti*); or, more closely related to the Buddhist technical term *abhiññā* (according to the CPD, “higher or supernatural knowledge”), “to know by intuition” (CPD s.v. *abhiññāti*). Here it seems to connote knowledge by direct observation.

Where the *Nagarasutta* implies an identification of the city with *nirvāṇa*, two non-canonical texts, the *Nibbāṇasutta* and *Tuṇḍilovādasutta*, make the association explicit, spelling out a host of connections between characteristics of the city and characteristics of *nirvāṇa*.¹⁸ For the sake of space, I will limit my discussion to the *Nibbāṇasutta*, which is similar to the *Nagarasutta* in that it is framed in a story of a man on a path to a great city. After overcoming four pursuing enemies (birth, old age, sickness, and death) and a great tree of defilements (*kilesamahāruhaṃ*), the man arrives at the city of Nirvāṇa, which has defensive measures like a wall, gate, watchtower, and moat, as well as a bazaar, pillars, beds, couches, and natural luxuries like ponds, geese, and other pleasant birds. After the description of the city, each item is made to correlate with an important Buddhist concept, a technique called “application of a simile” or “association via comparison” (*upamāsaṃsandana* or *opammasaṃsandana*) by commentators.¹⁹ For example, the beginning of this list of associations reads:

What is the wall? The wall of virtue. What is the [gate]?²⁰ The gate of knowledge. What is the watchtower? The watchtower of concentration. What is the moat? The moat of loving kindness...²¹

The simile in the *Tuṇḍilovādasutta* is presented in similar fashion, except that it describes many items as “perfections” (*pāramī-s*).²² Table 1 compares the key associations between the city and Buddhist concepts in the city-as-*nirvāṇa* type:

¹⁸ Hallisey 1990 and 1993. Neither text is found in standard editions of the Pāli canon.

¹⁹ The neuter *saṃsyandana* is defined by Edgerton in the BHSD as “agreement.” The PTSD defines the feminine *opammasaṃsandana* as “application of a simile.” Occurrences of similar phrases in Pāli commentaries include MN-a III 262: *ettha evaṃ upamāsaṃsandana-kam veditabbaṃ* (B° has *saṃsandanaṃ*) and SN-a III 62: *tatridaṃ opammasaṃsandanaṃ*.

²⁰ Here the text reads, *kin taṃ pākāraṃ? nāṇaṃ dvāraṃ*. As Hallisey notes, the intended reading must be **kin taṃ dvāraṃ?* (Hallisey 1993: 122).

²¹ Hallisey 1993: 122: *Kin taṃ pākāraṃ? Silapākāraṃ. Kin taṃ pākāraṃ [dvāraṃ]? Nāṇaṃ dvāraṃ. Kin taṃ ṭṭalakaṃ [aṭṭalakaṃ]? Samādhiṭṭalakaṃ. Kin taṃ parikkhaṃ [parikkhaṃ]? Mettāparikkhaṃ*. (Corrected readings in brackets are provided by Hallisey).

²² Other references to the perfections (*pāramī-s*) as a set in Pāli are found in *Khuddakanikāya* texts like the *Buddhavaṃsa* (e.g., 6, 16) and *Cariyāpiṭaka* (e.g., 13, 22, 23), but as far as I can tell not in the other four *nikāyas*.

	<i>Nagara</i> (SN II 104–7)	<i>Nibbāṇa</i>	<i>Tuṇḍilovāda</i>
City (<i>nagara</i>)	Nirvāṇa	Nirvāṇa	Tuṇḍilovāda
Straight path (<i>ujumagga</i>)	Eightfold path (<i>aṭṭhaṅgika magga</i>)	Eightfold path (<i>aṭṭhaṅgika magga</i>)	–
Walls (<i>pākāra</i>)	–	Virtue (<i>sīla</i>)	Perfection of patience (<i>khantipāramī</i>)
Gates (<i>dvāra</i>)	–	Knowledge (<i>ñāṇa</i>)	Perfection of giving (<i>dānapāramī</i>)
Watchtowers (<i>aṭṭālaka</i>)	–	Concentration (<i>samādhi</i>)	Concentration (<i>samādhi</i>)
Pillars (<i>thaṃbha</i>)	–	Vigour (<i>viriya</i>)	Seven books of Abhidhamma (<i>Abhidhammasattap- pakaraṇa</i>)
Surrounding ramparts ²³ (<i>parikkhitta pākāra</i>)	–	Loving kindness (<i>mettā</i>)	Perfection of loving kindness (<i>mettāpāramī</i>)
Palaces (<i>pāsāda</i>)	–	–	Ten perfections (<i>dasapāramī</i>)
Beds (<i>sayana</i>)	–	Renunciation (<i>nikkhamma</i>)	Perfection of renunciation (<i>nekkammapāramī</i>)
Lamps (<i>padīpa</i>)	–	Insight arising from knowledge of release ²⁴ (<i>vimuttiñāṇadassana</i>)	Knowledge (<i>ñāṇa</i>)
Lotus ponds (<i>pokkharanī</i>)	–	Cultivation by meditation (<i>bhāvanā</i>)	Cultivation by meditation (<i>bhāvanā</i>)
Cool water (<i>sītajala</i>)	–	Compassion (<i>karuṇā</i>)	Compassion (<i>karuṇā</i>)
Pleasure garden (<i>uyyāna</i>)	–	Vigour (<i>viriya</i>)	–

Table 1. Summary of correspondences in city-as-nirvāṇa similes.

²³ *Parikkhitta* in the *Tuṇḍilovādasutta* should perhaps read *parikhā* (moat) which appears in many city descriptions. The *Nibbāṇasutta* has *parikkhaṃ*. It is also possible that it should read *parikkhata*, “endowed with” (PTSD s.v.), but the syntax of the compound would be irregular. To better understand the possible confusion, cf. AN IV 106, where a city is described as being well-endowed (*suparikkhitta*) with a moat (*parikhā*) which is a requisite (*parikkhāra*) of a city.

²⁴ PTSD s.v. *dassana*.

Hallisey considered whether the complex city similes in the *Nibbānasutta* and *Tuṇḍilovādasutta* might be secondary to a “more fundamental conventional metaphor of the city of Nibbāna, which itself is linked to the conventional metaphor of *nibbāna* as a ‘place’” (Hallisey 1993: 109), but he was unable to locate any such image. But it is clear that they are related to the more basic city-as-*nirvāṇa* image in the *Nagarasutta* described above. Altogether, they reflect a specific creative application of the fortified city simile in teaching contexts emphasizing the nature of *nirvāṇa*, utilizing details appropriate to the story that contains them.²⁵

3.2. City-as-body

In the second type of fortified city simile, the city-as-body, the theme is not the discovery or the wonder of the city, but rather the protection of the city. As the comparison goes, one must defend one’s body as one would defend a vulnerable border town. The most succinct example of the city-as-body type comes from the *Dhammapada*:

Just as a border city is protected inside and out, so protect yourselves.
Do not let the moment pass you by, for those who have been passed by the
moment grieve when they are consigned to hell.²⁶

Here, the correlation between city and self is explicit. Lack of protection, even for a moment, leads to hell. The Chinese parallel attributed to Vighna is similar, but specifically calls for the protection of the mind (心):

Like a prepared border city, strong and secure inside and out, one should guard one’s mind. Don’t give rise to unrighteous things. Practice, if deficient, results in distress, and causes one to fall into hell.²⁷

²⁵ Another noteworthy, but brief and fragmented example is found in the so-called Buddhist Yoga Manual (“Yogalehrbuch”), which features a gatekeeper who warns that those who enter the city of Nirvāṇa (*nirvāṇapuram*) cannot leave: *dauvārikaḥ puruṣo v. + + + + + kathayati / iha nagare yaḥ praviṣṭo na bhūyo nirgacchaṭīti* (YL 161R2 ll 5–6; Schlingloff 1964: 169). “The gatekeeper...says: ‘One who has entered this city will not leave again’.” Apparently, no other example describes the city of Nirvāṇa in such terms.

²⁶ PTS edition verse 315. Translation by Norman (1997: 46):

*nagaraṃ yathā paccantaṃ guttaṃ santarabāhiraṃ
evaṃ gopetha attānaṃ, khaṇo vo mā upaccagā,
khaṇāttā hi socanti nirayamhi samappitā.*

²⁷ T 210 570b1: 如備邊城 中外牢固 自守其心 非法不生 行缺致憂 令墮地獄。

The Pāli commentary on *Dhammapada* V. 315 sharpens the focus of the simile by not only comparing the body to a city, but also the six internal sense gates to city gates:

Here, monks, with respect to ‘inside and out,’ just as a frontier city is well protected on the inside and out by men building firm gates and walls on the inside, and firm towers, ramparts, and moats on the outside, so too should you establish mindfulness and close the six internal gates. Don’t give up the mindfulness that protects the gates, and because the six external sense objects, when being grasped, lead to personal injury, become firm by not grasping them. Without giving entry to them, and without abandoning the mindfulness that protects the gates, protect yourself as you go about.²⁸

This expanded image comes alive with people who construct the essential defensive mechanisms of a fortified city: gates (*dvāra*), walls (*pākāra*), watchtowers (*aṭṭāla*), ramparts (*uddāpa*), and moats (*parikhā*).

A more extensive version of the city-as-body simile can be found in the *Kiṃsukasutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya*. It begins:

Suppose, monk, that a king had a frontier city with strong ramparts, strong walls and arches, and six gates. In it, there is a wise, experienced, intelligent gatekeeper who refuses entrance to those he does not know and admits those he does know.²⁹

This formulaic passage occurs in at least five other examples of the simile,³⁰ though these usually describe a single-gated city rather than one with six entrances.³¹ As the simile continues, the Buddha says, “I have

²⁸ Dh-p-a III 488: *Tattha santarabāhiranti, bhikkhave, yathā tehi manussehi taṃ pac-cantanagaraṃ dvārapākārādīni thirāni karontehi saantaraṃ, aṭṭālaḥkauddāpaparikhādīni thirāni karontehi sabāhiranti santarabāhiraṃ guttaṃ kataṃ, evaṃ tumhepi satīṃ upaṭṭha-petvā ajjhattikāni cha dvārāni pidahitvā dvārarakkhikaṃ satīṃ avissajjetvā yathā gay-hamānāni bāhirāni cha āyatanāni ajjhattikānaṃ upaghātāya saṃvattanti tathā agahaṇena tāni pi thirāni katvā tesāṃ appavesāya dvārarakkhikaṃ satīṃ appahāya vicarantā attānaṃ gopethāti attho.* (PTS has *aṭṭālaḥkauddāmaparikhādīni*, but CPD calls it a mistake for *uddāpa*.)

²⁹ SN IV 194: *Seyyathāpi, bhikkhu, rañño paccantimaṃ nagaram daḥhuddāpaṃ daḥhapākāratorāṇaṃ chadvāraṃ. Tatrassa dovāriko paṇḍito vyatto medhāvī, aññātānaṃ nivāretā, nātānaṃ pavesetā.*

³⁰ SN V 160, AN V 192, DN II 82, DN III 101. The Gāndhārī example from Senior scroll 20 is similar, but does not include the part about keeping out strangers.

³¹ There are at least two important historical examples of South Asian fortified cities with six gates: Kausāmbī, which is described as a *mahānagara* in the *Dīghanikāya* (DN II 146)

made a simile, monks, so that you will understand my meaning, and here it is,”³² and then presents a list of direct one-to-one correspondences between the fortified city on the one hand, and the body or experience of a practitioner on the other:

<i>Kiṃsukasutta</i> (SN IV 191–5)	
City (<i>nagara</i>)	Body (<i>kāya</i>)
Six gates (<i>chadvārā</i>)	Six internal sense gates (<i>ajjhattikā āyatanā</i>)
Gatekeeper (<i>dovārika</i>)	Mindfulness (<i>sati</i>)
Two messengers (<i>dūtayuga</i>)	Tranquility (<i>samatha</i>) and insight (<i>vipassanā</i>)
City commander (<i>nagarasāmin</i>)	Consciousness (<i>viññāṇa</i>)
Central square (<i>majjha siṅghāṭaka</i>)	Four elements (<i>catumahābhūtā</i>)
Message (<i>vacana</i>)	<i>Nirvāṇa</i> (<i>nibbāṇa</i>)
Path to the city (<i>yathāgatamagga</i>)	Eightfold Path (<i>aṭṭhaṅgika magga</i>)

Table 2. Summary of correspondences in Kiṃsuka Sutta’s city-as-body simile.

A few of the associations warrant further comment. As in the *Dhammapada* example, the city stands for the body, and as in the *Dhammapada* commentary, the gates stand for the six senses. The city is animated by a number of characters, including a gatekeeper who embodies mindfulness, the city commander who stands for consciousness, and messengers who stand for tranquility and insight (*samatha* and *vipassanā*).³³ While

and around which six gates were discovered by archaeologists (see note 6 above), and in the northwest, Bactra (modern Balkh), which was another important city for early Buddhists, and is said to have had six gates, at least at the time of Ibn Hawqal’s 10th century explorations. Kramers and Wiet’s French translation of Ibn Hawqal’s *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-arḍ* reads: “Elle est bâtie en terre. La ville a plusieurs portes, dont la porte du Naubahar – la porte de Wakhteh – la porte de Fer – la porte de Hinduwan – la porte des Juifs – la porte de Shastaman – et la porte de Bakhti. – C’est dans le mur d’enceinte que sont percées ces portes. (...) Le mur de la ville est construit en terre” (Kramers and Wiet, trans. 1964: 433). The ramparts of both Kauśāmbī and Bactra are both still clearly visible from satellite images.

³² *Upamā kho myāyam, bhikkhu, kata atthassa viññāpanāya ayañcevettha attho.*

³³ The commentary (SN-a III 60) explains the messengers in this simile with a story of a king who sends his prince to establish a border city. When word reaches the king that the prince has been wasting his time drinking, singing, and dancing in the company of scoundrels (*dhutta*), the king sends messengers to the city to admonish the prince. The messengers

it signifies a shift from the city-as-*nirvāṇa* type in that it is not the city but the message that stands for *nirvāṇa*, the *Kiṃsukasutta* still draws a thread from the city-as-*nirvāṇa* type in continuing to associate the path into the city with the eightfold path. Interestingly, in the Pāli commentary Buddhaghosa also interprets the Kiṃsuka's simile in light of the city-as-*nirvāṇa* type, at least partially, describing the city as both "like the body" (*viya sakkāyanagaraṃ*) and "like *nirvāṇa*" (*viya hi nibbānanagaraṃ*, SN-a III 62). This suggests that Buddhaghosa was aware of the multiple possibilities of the fortified city simile.

3.3. *City-as-Dharma*

In the third type of fortified city simile, the city represents the Dharma, or the methods developed by the Buddha as teachings leading to *nirvāṇa*. The first example is from the *Apadāna*, in which the monk Upāli builds a city of Dharma like a powerful king (*yathā rājā balavā*):

He put an end to other views and to Māra along with his army,
Dispelled the darkness, and built a city of Dharma,

Where virtue was its walls and knowledge its gateway strongholds,
Faith its strong pillars, and restraint its wise gatekeeper.

The bases of mindfulness were the watchtowers, sagely wisdom its crossroads,
The bases of supernatural power were its central square, and the Dharma its well-built road.³⁴

ask the gatekeeper where to find the prince, and he sends them to the central square where the prince sits in a drunken stupor, pretending not to hear the messengers. Upon finding the prince, the messengers threaten to cut his head off if he does not comply with the king's commands. The prince's incompetent servants then flee the city. This interpretation, though creative, does not correspond well to the context of the simile. It is possible that the story told in the commentary appears elsewhere and was used here to explain the messengers, whose function in this *sūtra* is not completely clear. Either way, the fact that the commentary's interpretation does not seem to fit the context is a sign that the fortified city simile of the *Kiṃsukasutta* is somehow an atypical application of the simile.

³⁴ Ap I 44:

*Titthiye nihanitvāna mārañ cāpi sasenakaṃ
tam andhakāraṃ vidhamitvā dhammanagaraṃ amāpayi.*

*Sīlaṃ pākārikaṃ tattha ñāṇan te dvārakoṭṭhakaṃ
saddhā te esikā dhīradvārapālo 'va saṃvaro.*

*Satipaṭṭhānam aṭṭālaṃ paññā te caccaraṃ mune
iddhipādañca siṅghātaṃ dhammavīthiṃ sumāpitaṃ.*

Here the emphasis is placed not on the need to protect the city (as body), but on the protection that the city – the Dharma – can provide for the practitioner: virtue, knowledge, faith, etc. are the defensive measures that keep Māra at bay. All of the characteristics of the city mentioned here (e.g., walls, pillars, etc.) appear in other city similes, showing a strong consistency in the city’s features as described across the greater simile.

A second Dharma city is described in great detail in the *Milindapañha* in the section dealing with questions solved by inference (*anumāna-pañha*). This directly contrasts with the emphasis on the Buddha’s direct knowledge (*abhiññā*) described in the *Nagarasutta* of the city-as-nirvāṇa type. In the *Milindapañha*, King Milinda asks Nāgasena how he really knows that the Buddha existed if neither he nor his teacher has ever met him. Nāgasena says that one can infer that the Buddha existed by reference to the teachings he left behind, including the four bases of mindfulness (*cattāro satipaṭṭhānā*), the seven limbs of enlightenment (*satta bojjhaṅgā*), and the Eightfold Path (*aṭṭhaṅgika magga*). Just as someone entering a glorious city would know that the architect must have been skillful (*cheka*), so too would one recognize that the one who developed the Dharma must have been an incomparable Buddha. Nāgasena then describes the Buddha building his city of Dharma in much the same way as Upāli’s efforts are described in the *Apadāna*:

After defeating Māra together with his army and breaking through the net of false views, having destroyed ignorance and brought forth wisdom, bearing up the torch of the law, and having obtained omniscience, [the Buddha], undefeated and victorious in battle, built a city of Dharma.³⁵

Following this, Nāgasena further describes the Buddha’s city in an extended simile much like the ones in the *Tuṇḍilovādasutta* and *Nibbāṇasutta*:

Oh King, the Lord’s city of Dharma had virtue for its walls, modesty for its moat, knowledge for its gateway strongholds, vigor for its watchtowers, faith for its pillars, mindfulness for its gates, wisdom for its palaces, the *sūtras* for its crossroads, the Abhidharma as its central square, the Vinaya

³⁵ Mil 332: *sasenaṃ māraṃ parājetvā diṭṭhijālaṃ padāletvā avijjaṃ khepetvā vijjaṃ uppādetvā dhammukkaṃ dhārayitvā sabbaññutaṃ pāpuṇitvā nijjitavijitasangāmo dhammanagaraṃ māpesi.*

for its courthouse, and the bases of mindfulness for its roads. And in those streets which represent the bases of mindfulness such shops were laid out as follows: a flower shop, a perfume shop, a fruit shop, an antidote shop, a medicinal herb shop, an ambrosia shop, a jewel shop, and a general shop.³⁶

For a comparison of the metaphorical associations in the *Apadāna* and *Milindapañha*, see table 3.

	<i>Apadāna</i> (I 44)	<i>Milindapañha</i> (Mil 332)
City (<i>nagara</i>)	Dhamma	Dhamma (once <i>nibbānanagara</i>)
Walls (<i>pākāra</i>)	Virtue (<i>sīla</i>)	Virtue (<i>sīla</i>)
Gateway stronghold (<i>dvārakoṭṭhaka</i>)	Knowledge (<i>ñāṇa</i>)	Knowledge (<i>ñāṇa</i>)
Watchtowers (<i>aṭṭālaka</i>)	Bases of mindfulness (<i>satipaṭṭhāna</i>)	Vigor (<i>virīya</i>)
Gatekeeper (<i>dovārika</i>)	Restraint (<i>saṃvara</i>)	Mindfulness (<i>satī</i>)
Pillar (<i>esikā</i>)	Faith (<i>saddhā</i>)	Faith (<i>saddhā</i>)
Palace (<i>pāsāda</i>)	–	Wisdom (<i>paññā</i>)
Road (<i>vīthika</i>)	Dhamma	Bases of mindfulness (<i>satipaṭṭhāna</i>)
Central Square (<i>siṅghāṭaka</i>)	Bases of magical power (<i>iddhipāda</i>)	Abhidhamma
Crossroads (<i>caccara</i>)	Wisdom (<i>paññā</i>)	Suttānta
Courthouse (<i>vinicchaya</i>)	–	Vinaya

Table 3. Summary of correspondences in city-as-Dharma similes in *Apadāna* and *Milindapañha*.

The *Aṅguttaranikāya*'s *Nagarasutta*³⁷ (which I will call the *Fortress Sutta* to avoid confusion with the *Nagarasutta* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya*)

³⁶ Ibid. *Bhagavato kho mahārāja dhammanagaraṃ sīlapākāraṃ hiriparikhaṃ ṇāṇadvārakoṭṭhakaṃ virīyaaṭṭālakaṃ saddhāesikaṃ satidovārikaṃ paññāpāsādaṃ Suttantaccaraṃ Abhidhammasiṅghāṭakaṃ Vinayavinicchayaṃ satipaṭṭhānavīthiyaṃ. Tassa kho pana mahārāja satipaṭṭhānavīthiyaṃ evarūpā āpaṇā pasāritā honti, seyyathidaṃ: pupphāpaṇaṃ gandhāpaṇaṃ phalāpaṇaṃ agadāpaṇaṃ osadhāpaṇaṃ amatāpaṇaṃ ratanāpaṇaṃ sabbāpaṇanti.*

³⁷ AN IV 106–13.

presents the relationship between the Dharma and the fortified city in even greater detail. Unlike other similes of the fortified city which are inserted into larger stories to illustrate a teaching, the simile in the *Fortress Sutta* itself constitutes the entire *sūtra*. It opens by comparing a frontier city well stocked with seven key defensive requisites and four key food provisions to a noble disciple who can fend off Māra with seven good qualities (*saddhamma*) and access to the four states of concentration (*jhānas*):

Bhikkhus, when a king's frontier fortress is well provided with seven appurtenances of a fortress and readily gains, without trouble or difficulty, four kinds of food, it can be called a king's frontier fortress that cannot be assailed by external foes and enemies. (...) So too, *bhikkhus*, when a noble disciple possesses seven good qualities, and when he gains at will, without trouble or difficulty, the four *jhānas* that constitute the higher mind and are pleasant dwellings in this very life, he is then called a noble disciple who cannot be assailed by Māra, who cannot be assailed by the Evil One.³⁸

Here, the text emphasizes the way in which the Buddha's Dharma can adorn a practitioner as armor. Technically, in this comparison the city itself is equivalent to the practitioner and the Dharma is represented only by certain attributes of the city, but the emphasis of the teaching is placed on learning the Dharma, so I examine this as an example of the city-as-Dharma type. The *Fortress Sutta* is further unique among city similes in that it does not simply list the correspondences in the style of the 'serial simile,' but rather offers a thorough explanation of each comparison.³⁹ The description of the gatekeeper serves as an example:

Just as the gatekeeper in the king's frontier fortress is wise, competent, and intelligent, one who keeps out strangers and admits acquaintances, for protecting its inhabitants and for warding off outsiders, so too a noble disciple

³⁸ Translation by Bodhi (2012: 1075–6). AN IV 106–9: *Yato kho bhikkhave rañño paccantimaṃ nagaraṃ sattahi nagaraparikkhārehi suparikkhitaṃ hoti catunnaṃ ca āhārānaṃ nikāmalābhī hoti akicchālābhī akasiralābhī. Idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave rañño paccantimaṃ nagaraṃ akaraṇīyaṃ bāhirehi paccatthikehi paccāmittehi. (...) Evameva kho bhikkhave, yato ariyasāvako sattahi saddhammehi samannāgato hoti catunnaṃ jhānānaṃ abhicetasikānaṃ dīṭṭhadhammasukhavihārānaṃ nikāmalābhī hoti akicchālābhī akasiralābhī. Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave ariyasāvako akaraṇīyo Mārassa akaraṇīyo pāpimato.*

³⁹ The *Milindapañha* example also contained this kind of lengthy description, but only for the various shops found inside the city.

is mindful, possessing supreme mindfulness and alertness, one who remembers and recollects [even] what was done and said long ago. With mindfulness as his gatekeeper, the noble disciple abandons the unwholesome and develops the wholesome, abandons what is blameworthy and develops what is blameless, and maintains himself in purity.⁴⁰

Table 4 contains the complete list of associations:

<i>Fortress Sutta</i> (AN IV 106–13)	
Seven Defensive Requisites of a City	Seven Good Qualities of a Practitioner
Pillar (<i>esikā</i>)	Faith (<i>saddhā</i>)
Moat (<i>parikhā</i>)	Modesty (<i>hiri</i>)
Path around the city (<i>anupariyāyapatha</i>)	Scruples (<i>ottappa</i>)
Many weapons (<i>āvudha</i>)	Great learning (<i>bahussutta</i>)
Army (<i>balakāya</i>)	Vigour (<i>virīya</i>)
Gatekeeper (<i>dovārika</i>)	Mindfulness (<i>sati</i>)
Walls (<i>pākāra</i>)	Wisdom (<i>paññā</i>)
Four Provisions of a City	Four <i>jhānas</i>
Grass, timber, water	First <i>jhāna</i>
Rice and barley	Second <i>jhāna</i>
Seeds, beans, and cereals	Third <i>jhāna</i>
Ghee, butter, oil, honey, molasses, and salt	Fourth <i>jhāna</i>

Table 4. Summary of correspondences in Fortress Sutta's city-as-Dharma simile.

The structure of the *Fortress Sutta* suggests that it might have served a mnemonic function in which certain elements of the city are made to 'store' information about Buddhist practice. The text begins by painting a detailed picture of a fortified city in which each defensive requisite and

⁴⁰ Translation by Bodhi (2012: 1078). AN IV 110–11: *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave rañño paccantime nagare dovāriko hoti paṇḍito vyatto medhāvī aññātānaṃ nivāretā nātānaṃ pavesetā abbhantarānaṃ guttiyā bāhirānaṃ paṭighātāya, evaṃ eva kho bhikkhave ariyasāvako satimā hoti paramena satinepakkena samannāgato cirakatampi cirabhāsītampi saritā anussaritā. Satidovāriko bhikkhave ariyasāvako akusalaṃ pajahati, kusalaṃ bhāveti; sāvajjaṃ pajahati, anavajjaṃ bhāveti; suddhaṃ atānaṃ pariharati.*

food item earns its own paragraph of description. The text essentially asks the audience to visualize a city in detail, walking through it in their minds, meeting the gatekeeper, touching the pillars, smelling the foods; only then does it introduce Buddhist concepts which can then be mapped onto the image of the city. We can think of this image as a ‘memory palace,’ or a ‘method of loci,’ an aid for memorization that goes back at least as far Cicero’s *De Oratore* (1st century BCE). Cicero attributes this technique to the Greek Simonides from the 5th century BCE:

[Simonides] inferred that persons desiring to train this faculty [of memory] must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves, and we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing-tablet and the letters written on it.⁴¹

Four other Pali *sūtras*⁴² draw upon the *Fortress Sutta*’s implicit notion that there is only one way to *nirvāṇa*, namely by following the eightfold path, developing the seven good qualities (or sometimes seven limbs of enlightenment), and obtaining the four *jhānas* (or sometimes four bases of mindfulness). The simile in each of the four describes a city with only one gate, illustrating the single path to *nirvāṇa*. It constitutes a single formulaic expression, or pericope, that has been inserted as a single unit in texts that teach the path to awakening, and that also focus on what can be known “by inference from the Dharma,” or “by logical conclusion from the Dharma” (*dhhammanvaya vidita*).⁴³ Inference (*anumāna*) is often

⁴¹ Sutton and Rackham, trans. 1942: lxxxvi.

⁴² *Uttiyasutta* (AN V 194–5), *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (DN II 83), *Sampasādanīyasutta* (DN III 101), and *Nālandāsutta* (SN V 160). The page numbers reflect the location of the similes in each *sūtra*.

⁴³ Walshe translates *dhhammanvayo* as “the way the Dhamma goes” (1987: 235; 568, n. 372), but in a different *sūtra* with the same phrase Bhikkhu Bodhi translates, “I have understood this by inference from the Dhamma” (2000: 1642). Buddhaghosa (SN-a III 210) equates *dhhammanvayo* (“as a logical conclusion of the Dharma”) with *anumānañāṇa* (“inference,” or knowledge based on previous knowledge): *Dhammanvayo ti, dhammassa paccakkhato nāṇassa anuyogaṃ anugantvā uppannaṃ anumānañāṇaṃ* (“With respect to ‘*dhhammanvayo*,’ having come to the application of knowledge from direct perception of the Dharma, knowledge by inference arises”). See also MN-ṭīkā (B^c: 2.162): *dhhammanvayasāṅkhātāṃ anumānaṃ* (“inference is considered [to mean] ‘as a logical conclusion of

contrasted by Buddhist scholastics with direct sensory experience (*pratyakṣa*) in discussions about types of authority (*pramāṇa*), or ways of knowing.⁴⁴ It is fitting that a simile explaining something abstract in terms of something concrete would be used to convey such concepts. In the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, Sāriputta tells the Buddha that even though he does not know the minds of the past or future Buddhas, he knows by inference from the Dharma that there has never been an ascetic more enlightened than Śākyamuni Buddha. He supposes that all enlightened arhats must have followed the same dharmic teachings and offers the following simile to illustrate how he knows this:

Suppose, sir, a king had a frontier city with strong ramparts, strong walls and arches, and a single gate. In it there is a wise, competent, intelligent gatekeeper who keeps out those he doesn't know and lets in those he does. While he walks along the path that encircles the city, he would not see a breach or an opening in the wall even big enough for a cat to slip through. He might think: "Whatever larger creatures enter or exit this city, will all enter and exit through this gate. So too, sir, I have understood this by logical conclusion from the Dhamma."⁴⁵

An expression of this formula in the Chinese translation of the similar *Uttiyasutta* from the *Samyuktāgama* shows some slight variation from the Pāli formula, but still highlights the theme of inferred knowledge:

It is as if a king has a frontier citadel whose walls were solid all the way around. Its alleys and lanes are even and straight and it has only one gate. There is appointed a gatekeeper who is clever and intelligent, a skilled assessor. As for people coming from the outside, those who ought to enter, he admits, and those who ought not enter, he does not admit. If he were to

the Dharma"), and *diṭṭhena hi adiṭṭhassa anumānaṃ* ("inference of what is not seen by what is seen").

⁴⁴ The types of authority are a common point of discussion among Indian philosophers, but are most famously discussed in the Buddhist context by Dharmakīrti (~6th century) in his *Pramāṇavārttika* ("Commentary on Epistemology").

⁴⁵ I have translated this to match Bhikkhu Bodhi's translations of similar phrases. DN II 83: *Seyyathāpi bhante rañño paccantimaṃ nagaraṃ dalhuddāpaṃ dalhapākātoranaṃ ekadvāraṃ, tatrassa dovāriko paṇḍito viyatto medhāvī aññātānaṃ nivāretā nātānaṃ pave-setā. So tassa nagarassa samantā anupariyāya pathaṃ anukkamamāno na passeyya pākārasandhiṃ vā pākāravivaraṃ vā antamaso biḷāranissakkanamattampi. Tassa evam assa, ye kho keci oḷarikā pāṇā imaṃ nagaraṃ pavisanti vā nikkhamanti vā sabbe te iminā vā dvārena pavisanti vā nikkhamanti vā ti. Evam eva kho me bhante dhammanvayo vidito.*

go all the way around the city looking for a second gate, he would not succeed. (The walls) would lack even space for a cat to come or go, let alone a second gate. The gatekeeper would not be aware of every single person who enters or exits, but nevertheless he would know that anyone who enters or exits could only do so through this [one] gate.⁴⁶

Three items from the closely parallel city-as-Dharma similes require attention. First, the reference in all four sutras to understanding by inference from the Dharma (*dhammanvayo vidito*) connects them to the *Milindapañha*, where inference is the predominant theme, and places them in contrast to the *Nagarasutta* (SN), which focused on just the opposite: direct knowledge. Second, the gatekeeper has an expanded role in these versions. Although he is not explicitly identified as mindfulness (*sati*), he embodies it by walking around the city walls making sure they are solid. If the walls are solid, he can infer that nothing can enter the city except through its single gate. Third, the integrity of the walls is measured in a peculiar way. They are described as not containing an opening “even big enough for a cat to slip through” (*biḷāranissakkana-mattaṃpi*). On the surface, this appears simply to be an idiomatic way of saying that nobody could sneak through the wall. Why would the gatekeeper be concerned specifically with a cat? However, as we will see in the Gāndhārī text in the following section, the gatekeeper probably had a very real fear of cats and other small animals.

4. New Evidence from a Gāndhārī Version

The Robert Senior Collection of Gandhāran Buddhist manuscripts⁴⁷ includes a new version of the fortified city simile – its earliest extant manuscript attestation – that confirms and augments the discussion above, showing that individual fortified city similes draw from a central repository of associations, that is, the fortified city simileme. As we will see,

⁴⁶ T99 248a3: 譬如國王。有邊境城四周堅固。巷陌平正唯有一門。立守門者。聰明點慧善能籌量。外有人來。應入者聽入不應入者不聽。周匝遶城求第二門。都不可得。都無貓狸出入之處。況第二門。彼守門者。都不覺悟入者出者。然彼士夫知一切人唯從此門若出若入。

⁴⁷ See n. 7.

the Gāndhārī simile embodies multiple meanings, depending on which aspect of the greater simile one chooses to focus on.

The simile is contained on the recto of Senior scroll 20, in the first of two *sūtras* on the manuscript.⁴⁸ In the text, a brahman asks the Buddha about the cause and condition for the arising of happiness and suffering in the world (*ko bho goḍama haḍa ko pacae logo suha-dukhassa upaḍae*). The Buddha replies that there are six causes and conditions, namely, the existence of the six senses and contact with each of them. He offers the following simile to illustrate his point:

*Sayasāvi, bramaṇo, rañ(*o) pacatim(*a) ṇ(*a)kara dhriḍa-dava [5] dhriḍa-prakara-toraṇa ṣa-daro. Tatraṣpi doario paḍiḍa mesavi tatro mia-vimassa-samuṇakāḍa.*⁴⁹ *So imasa ṇakarassa samato aṇupa(*ya)[6]ya-paṣo ṇa i paṣea paṣaṇaṣa chidva atamaḍo bilaḍa-ṇisaṅgaṇa-matra va. Taṣa <*i>masa eḍa ahuṣi: ye ke oraḍi praṇa ima ṇ(*a)k(*a)[7]ro pravi(*ṣati ṇa)kr(*a)mati s(*a)v(*a)t(*e) i im(*e)hi ṣ(*a)hi dvarehi praviṣati ṇakramati. Evam=eva bramaṇa ṣa haḍa ṣa pacea loga suha-dukhassa upaḍ(*a)[8]e*

Suppose, Brahman, that a king had a frontier city with strong ramparts, [5] strong walls and arches, and six gates. In it, there is a wise, intelligent gatekeeper charged with the investigation of animals. On the path encircling the city on all sides, he would not [6] see a crack in the stone even big enough for a cat to sneak through. It might occur to him: “Whatever larger creatures enter [7] and exit this city will all enter and exit through these six doors.” Just so, Brahman, there are six causes and six conditions for the arising of happiness and suffering in the world [8].

In terms of its phrasing, the Gāndhārī simile is nearly identical to the city-as-Dharma formula found in texts like the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*. Other than the context in which it is used, it differs only slightly in the description of the gatekeeper and the number of doors to the city. Like the *Uttiyasutta*, it also lacks the final phrase “So too, venerable sir, I have

⁴⁸ I am currently preparing an edition of the *sūtras* on Senior scroll 20 for my PhD dissertation. I am provisionally calling the *sūtra* containing the city simile (beginning on the recto) the **Suhadukhasūtra*, based on the theme of the text and the Gāndhārī spelling. The *sūtra* has no direct parallel, but it likely forms part of a Gāndhārī *Samyuttanikāya/Samyuktāgama*-type collection. For an in depth discussion of the Senior collection’s relationship to the *Samyuttanikāya/Samyuktāgama* collections, see Glass 2007, especially chapters 1 and 2.

⁴⁹ The scribe of the Senior manuscripts uses the sign *ṇa* for both retroflex and dental nasals. I have chosen to reflect this scribal preference in my preliminary transcription.

understood this by inference from the Dharma” (*evam eva kho me bhante dhammanvayo vidito*). However, any familiarity with city-as-Dharma similes in which inferred knowledge is the theme would lead one to interpret the Gāndhārī text in a similar way. Thus, the sutra would be summarized as follows: just as a gatekeeper in a city with solid walls and six gates could infer that anyone entering or exiting the city would have to come through the six gates, so too can one infer that happiness and suffering (*G. suha-dukha*) must be caused by contact with the six sense bases.

However, when read in the context of the city-as-body similes like those in the *Dhammapada* and the *Kiṃsukasutta*, the Gāndhārī simile takes on quite a different meaning. Although it lacks the *Dhammapada*’s direct command to protect oneself (*evaṃ gopetha attānaṃ*) or the *Dhammapada* commentary’s direct association of the city gates with the six sense bases, the theme of protection is implied by the proximity of the six-gated city image to a discussion about the six sense bases. Furthermore, because the gatekeeper routinely stands for mindfulness in texts like the *Kiṃsukasutta*, one can assume that the Gāndhārī version is also suggesting that mindfulness can protect the sense bases, and in turn control the arising of happiness and suffering. Therefore, when read in the context of the city-as-body versions, the Gāndhārī simile could be summarized as follows: just as a watchful gatekeeper protects the six gates of a city, so too must one be mindful and protect the six sense bases.

Thus, the Gāndhārī simile appears to draw upon the fortified city simile to allow for two different but equally viable readings. On the one hand, the text is an explanation of the origin of happiness and suffering. On the other hand, it is a warning to guard the senses with mindfulness. Assuming that the goal of the author of this text was to effectively and efficiently communicate the Buddha’s Dharma, it is highly possible that the city simile was utilized precisely because of its power to evoke both of these messages in the minds of traditional audiences. If, as I suspect, there existed a kind of fortified city idea in the imagination of early Indian Buddhists, and the **Suhadukhasūtra* evoked this idea in its audience, then the *sūtra* may have brought to mind any number of other associations with the city present in the greater simile.

5. Incendiary Cats

Thus an understanding of the fortified city simile clarifies the Gāndhārī text, while conversely the Gāndhārī text has implications for understanding other expressions of the simile. But it is also of interest for an entirely different matter, namely, the nature of siege warfare in ancient India. As mentioned above, the Gāndhārī simile is nearly identical to the four formulaic city-as-Dharma similes. However, it differs in containing a unique description of the duties of the gatekeeper. Where the other versions describe a gatekeeper who is wise, competent, and intelligent (e.g., *paṇḍīto viyatto medhāvī*), the gatekeeper in the Gāndhārī version is wise, intelligent, (*paḍiḍa meṣavi*) and “charged with the investigation of animals” (*mīa-vimasa-samuṇaḱaḍa*; P. **mīga-vīmaṃsā-samannāgato*: literally “endowed with the examination of animals”).⁵⁰ In light of this phrase about investigating animals,⁵¹ two other phrases in the simile take on an interesting flavor. First, the walls are described as without a space “even big enough for a cat to sneak through” (*biladaṇisagaṇamatra*),⁵²

⁵⁰ Given the lack of other meaningful ways of reading *mīa* and its occurrence in a context which also describes a cat and “larger creatures” (*oraḍi praṇa* = P. *oḷārikā pāṇā*), I am confident in reading *mīa* as equivalent to Pāli *mīga*. Elision of intervocalic *-g-* in Gāndhārī is not uncommon (e.g., *(*a)traīṇa* = *antraguṇa* in Salomon 2008, § II 3.2.1.2.), and the G. equivalent of Skt. *mṛga*/P. *mīga* also occurs as *mriam* with *-g-* elided in the uddāna of the Gāndhārī *Rhinoceros Sūtra* (see Salomon 2000: 189).

⁵¹ The *Visuddhimagga* also contains a passage which connects a *dovāriko* with *vīmaṃsā* (“investigation”), but says nothing of animals (Vism 281). Although it does not refer to a gatekeeper, the *Āsīvisasutta*, part of the *Ṣalāyatanaṣaṃyutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya*, also contains a description of a “wise, competent, intelligent person” (*paṇḍīto viyatto medhāvī*) who “investigates” (*upaparikkhati*) (SN IV 175). Here, the six internal sense media (*ajjhattikā āyatanā*) are compared with an empty village (*suñña gāma*), and the external sense media (*bāhirā āyatanā*) with “robbers infesting the village” (*corā gāmaghātakā*). In striking similarity with Senior 20, the *sūtra* describes a “wise, competent, intelligent person” (*paṇḍīto viyatto medhāvī*) who “investigates” (*upaparikkhati*) the internal sense media from the perspective of each sense. While I have not yet found a Chinese description of a gatekeeper who “investigates,” a partial Chinese parallel to the **Suhadukhasūtra* contains a description of a gatekeeper who is “a skilled assessor,” or “capable in estimating and considering” (善能籌量 [T 99 248a5]).

⁵² I am indebted to Megan O’Donald of the University of Washington for bringing to my attention what appears to have been a similar idiom in Attic Greek, as employed by the comic playwright Apollodorus of Carystus (3rd century BCE): κεκλεισθεῖ ἡ θύρα μοχλοῖς· ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ εἷς, τέκτων ὄχυράν οὕτως ἐποίησεν θύραν δι’ ἧς γαλῆ και μοιχὸς οὐκ εἰσερπύσει (“The door’ll be bolted; but no carpenter was ever known to make so

and second, the gatekeeper is said to be on the look out for “large creatures” (*oraḍi praṇa*) who might enter the city. The phrases about the cat and large creatures in the four city-as-Dharma type *sūtras* seemed unremarkable until read in light of the new Gāndhārī passage with three separate phrases referring to the gatekeeper’s preoccupation with animals. Why is the gatekeeper of a fortified city so worried about cats?

Here, the Kautilīya *Arthaśāstra*, the core of which is perhaps roughly contemporary with the earliest layers of Buddhist literature, can offer some help. Its thirteenth book, on laying siege to a fortress, contains a passage describing the use of small birds and animals in covert siege operations:

After getting hawks, crows, nightjars, vultures, parrots, mynas, owls, and pigeons living within the fort captured, he should attach an incendiary mixture to their tails and release them into the enemy’s fort. (...) Clandestine operatives, moreover, working as guards within the fort should attach an incendiary mixture to the tails of mongooses, monkeys, cats, and dogs and release them among reeds, stocks, defenses, and houses.⁵³

Here, spies are advised to select animals – including cats – whose homes are inside the fortified city, and then set them on fire to run among the flammable homes. Apparently, in their panic the animals were capable of burning down the city. The *Arthaśāstra* does not specifically describe sending small animals through the cracks in the city walls, but it takes little imagination to extend the tactics from the text to that extent.

Of course, the *Arthaśāstra* is not the only place in early Indian literature in which animals light a city on fire. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāvaṇa has Hānuman’s tail set on fire as a punishment, but Hānuman turns the tables by running across the roofs of Laṅkā setting the city on fire.⁵⁴ There are also a number of examples from other ancient literatures of animals used

strong a door as to keep out a cat or a paramour”). See Fragment 6. Stob. Fl. 6. 28 = 11H: The Slanderer in Edmonds 1961: 189.

⁵³ Translation from Olivelle 2013: 415. The original text reads: (13.4.14, 13.4.16) *durgavāsinaḥ śyenakākanapṭṛbhāsaśukasārikaulūkakapotān grāhayitvā puccheṣv agniyogayuktān paradurge viṣṭjet || ... gūḍhapuruṣāś cāntardurgapālakā nakulavānarabiḍālaśunām puccheṣv agniyogam ādhāya kāṇḍanicayarakṣāvīdhānaveśmasu viṣṭjeyuḥ ||*

⁵⁴ *Rāmāyaṇa* V. 53–4.

as incendiary devices in siege warfare.⁵⁵ In the Old Testament book of Judges, Samson, not wanting to take personal responsibility for an attack on the Philistines, ties lighted torches to the tails of foxes and releases them into the Philistine's standing grain.⁵⁶ The tenth century Chronicle of Nestor⁵⁷ cites a story of Olga, who had sulfur attached to the feet of birds so that when they returned to their nests within Olga's enemy's city walls, they proceeded to burn the city to the ground (Aalto 1983: 13). Genghis Khan is also said to have requested one thousand cats as a peace offering from a fortress he wished to attack, after which he lit their tails on fire and sent them back into the fortress to watch it burn, although this is probably a tale inserted into the Mongol chronicles by a later interpolator.⁵⁸ An example from a sixteenth century German war strategy manual provides the best illustration of this technique. The manual contains images of birds and cats affixed with what look like jet packs flying over the walls of a fortress. The text reads in part:

Create a small sack like a fire-arrow (...) if you would like to get at a town or castle, seek to obtain a cat from that place. And bind the sack to the back of the cat, ignite it, let it glow well and thereafter let the cat go, so it runs to the nearest castle or town, and out of fear it thinks to hide itself where it ends up in barn hay or straw, it will be ignited.⁵⁹

The incendiary animal strategy was most recently employed by the United States military during WWII, via the 'Project X-Ray' in which incendiary devices were tied to bats, who were then stuffed in bomb

⁵⁵ Pentti Aalto's short article (1983) is undoubtedly the best source on these stories and includes examples from the *Arthaśāstra* as well as Central Asian and European sources. He concludes that European versions of the story might have come from the east via the Vikings, or Varangians, through Old Norse sagas.

⁵⁶ Judges 15:5: "Samson then said to them, 'This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm.' Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned the foxes tail to tail and put one torch in the middle between two tails. When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards and groves" (translation from New American Standard Bible).

⁵⁷ Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, trans. 1953: 81, 239, n. 57 (cited in Aalto 1983: 13).

⁵⁸ See Prawdin [1940] 2006: 107 and Aalto 1983: 12–13.

⁵⁹ Translated by University of Pennsylvania researcher Mitch Fraas and published in Scriber 2014. See also Fraas 2013.

casings and dropped from planes as “bat bombs.”⁶⁰ The plan was for the bats to roost in the wooden structures which were common at the time in order to burn down Japanese cities. However, in a not very surprising turn of events, during testing the bats failed to reach their intended targets and burned down a number of US research facilities instead.

All this is to say that the clue offered by the Gāndhārī version of the simile – that the gatekeeper was charged with investigating animals – combined with evidence of cats and other small animals being used during siege operations in India and elsewhere, shows that the *biḷāra* might have at some point been more than a generic idiom of measurement. Instead, it might have been something the gatekeeper of our fortified city similes literally had to guard against. After all, this image is used to emphasize the need for mindfulness, to guard against overwhelming sensation, and it is often those distractions we expect least which sneak through the gates of body and mind. However, it remains a mystery why, despite the many different fortified city similes involving gatekeepers, only the gatekeeper of the Gāndhārī version is explicitly “charged with investigating animals.”

6. Conclusion: Similes and the Construction of Buddhist Texts

Throughout this essay I have traced threads from a wide variety of fortified city similes back to a kind of simile family from which they emanate, and to which they feed back. To describe this family I have borrowed classicist W. C. Scott’s term ‘simileme,’ which represents all the various possible expressions of a simile as a single unit. One might think of the relationship between the individual simile and the greater simileme as the branches and trunk of a tree. All of the branches grow out of the trunk while at the same time feeding back energy to the trunk and the other branches, helping them grow and change. The point at which a branch and the trunk, or a branch and another branch, become separate from each other is only vaguely defined. There exists a clear continuum from one branch in the tree’s canopy to a low branch near the roots, and yet they can be separated by a considerable amount of space.

⁶⁰ Couffer 1992.

It could be argued that where I see a fortified city tree – individual simile-branches connected to a simileme-trunk – there is in reality only a messy array of city similes that share few features in common. It is possible that city similes sprung up separate from each other, their popularity stemming only from the ubiquitous experience of cities. However, I would argue that despite the apparent randomness in some of the associations of the similes, they still contain a considerable internal conceptual clarity and are remarkably consistent with each other. For instance, the gatekeeper is always a metaphor for mindfulness (*sati*) or restraint (*saṃvara*), and a path leading to the city is almost always called the Eightfold Path. Also, the themes of protection, inferred knowledge, and discovery of *nirvāṇa* occur frequently across typological boundaries. Scott has argued that the strongest evidence for the existence of the simileme in Homeric poetry is the “regularity with which similes of a single family are developed from a series of motifs that are repeatedly used together;”⁶¹ it is clear that such a regularity exists in the present case.

The similes are also connected by their usefulness as didactic tools, which is likely part of the reason that they were used so often. The very architecture of the city image reveals its pedagogic function. They situate the same core teachings about *nirvāṇa*, mindfulness, and the importance of practicing the Buddha’s Dharma in city spaces which everyone would be able to know through daily sensory experience. As in the ‘memory palace’ of the *Fortress Sutta*, it is not necessarily the details of the simile’s associations that make it effective, but rather its power to ‘allure the senses’ and act as a bridge to understanding. Even if the logic of each individual correspondence is not immediately obvious to the listener, there is still power in the imaginative process of metaphor-making that is conducive to learning.⁶²

Applying Scott’s idea of the ‘simileme’ to the fortified city simile family not only gives us language with which to organize our similes, but it also draws our attention to the possibility that there was considerable

⁶¹ Scott 2009: 37.

⁶² It is important to note the seminal role of metaphor in recent pedagogical theory. For example, see Botha 2009: 432: “[I]t is exactly the creative and innovative and interactive role of metaphor which creates the similarities between a student’s earlier understanding and the acquisition of new knowledge of an unfamiliar topic.”

creative freedom in the process of composing and teaching the Buddhist *sūtras* under discussion. According to Scott:

(...) as similes are the product of human imagination, a wide variety of individual similes can be created by recombination, deletion, or addition of customary elements – and also, undoubtedly, at moments of creative innovation or discovery. (...) In drawing on the simileme, the poet is exercising his artistic choice within the traditional devices and language (...) in order to tell his own story (Scott 2009: 25).

Scott refers to the context of Homeric poetry when he speaks of the “recombination, deletion, or addition of customary elements” to creatively make new texts, but his words could just as easily describe the nature of Buddhist texts. On this topic, Jonathan Silk has recently written that “nearly all Buddhist scriptural literature from the very earliest times follows exactly the same pattern: texts are constructed out of parts, stock phrases, pericopes, elements which are drawn upon to create – with of course new elements as well – new works.”⁶³ In the Buddhist context, similes operate as kinds of interchangeable stock phrases, and there are examples of single teachings that occur in different *sūtras* with different similes used to illustrate them. In fact, the basic teaching about the arising of happiness and suffering contained in the Gāndhārī **Suhadukhasūtra* discussed above also appears elsewhere with a different simile, not including a city image.⁶⁴ Another example of this phenomenon is the Lābhasakkārasaṃyutta of the *Samyuttanikāya*, in which a single teaching is presented eight times in a row, each time with a different simile.⁶⁵ These examples suggest that the Buddha gave individual teachings multiple times in different ways, a possibility that Silk recently called “entirely plausible, if not overwhelmingly likely” (Silk 2015: 207).

It is also possible that later teachers applied new imagery like the popular fortified city simile, which proved to be effective elsewhere, to already existing teachings, thus expanding the ‘canon’ with each new teaching – or perhaps performance – of a given text. However, scholars

⁶³ Silk 2015: 208.

⁶⁴ *Hatthapādūpamāsutta* of the *Śaḷayatanasaṃyutta* (SN IV 171–2).

⁶⁵ These texts (SN II 225–231), beginning with the *Dāruṇasutta*, describe the dangers of gain, honor, and praise (*lābhasakkārasiloko*), using eight different similes.

of Buddhist literature have been reluctant to imagine early Buddhist teachers as creative storytellers. In his recent discussion about the oral nature of early Buddhist texts, Bhikkhu Anālayo argues that “we simply have no evidence that would support a shift from an early period of fairly free improvisation to a subsequent period of strictly formalized transmission, except for variations found between parallel versions of a discourse” (Anālayo 2014: 52). While there might not be enough evidence in a brief study of one simile to contradict Bhikkhu Anālayo’s position, it is enough to encourage further study of the role of Buddhist similes in the composition and performance of Buddhist literature. Studying Buddhist literature by means of its imagery can help scholars connect texts otherwise not recognized to be parallel, to bring more clarity to the process of textual composition, and gain a better understanding of the relationship between visual culture and texts. And as we have seen in the Gāndhārī text above, it can offer us rather surprising insights into ancient history as well.

Abbreviations and Primary Sources

(All Pāli citations are Pāli Text Society versions.)

AN	<i>Aṅguttaranikāya</i>
Ap	<i>Apadāna</i>
<i>Arthaśāstra</i>	Accessed on the Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (Gretil, http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/) . Based on Kangle, R. P. 1969. <i>The Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra</i> . Part I: A Critical Edition with a Glossary. 2nd ed. (1st ed. 1960). Bombay: University of Bombay.
BHSD	Edgerton, Franklin. 1953. <i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary. Volume II: Dictionary</i> . New Haven (Conn.): Yale University Press.
CPD	Trenckner, V., Dines Andersen and Helmer Smith. 1924-1992. <i>A Critical Pāli Dictionary</i> . 3 Vols. Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters.
Dhp-a	<i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i>
DN	<i>Dīghanikāya</i>
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i>
MN	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i>
MN-a	<i>Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>

MN-ṭīkā	<i>Majjhimanikāya-ṭīkā</i>
PTS	Pali Text Society
PTSD	Rhys Davids, T.W. and William Stede. 1921–1925. <i>The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English dictionary</i> . London: Luzac
<i>Rāmāyaṇa</i>	Jhala, G. C., ed. 1966. <i>The Sundara Kanda, the Fifth Book of the Valmiki Ramayana</i> . Baroda: Oriental Institute.
SN	<i>Samyuttanikāya</i>
SN-a	<i>Samyuttanikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
YL	“Yogalehrbuch”. See Schlingloff 1964.

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