

# The Monk Mūlaphalguna and the Nuns: Biography as Criticism

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**Abstract:** Most of the monks that cause trouble in vinaya texts are either nameless or members of the Group-of-Six. Those in the first category are almost certainly literary fictions and were not historical people, and the same is being more and more suggested for those in the second category as well: each member of the Group appears to be a literary creation meant to embody or stand for one or another common monastic failing or fault—over eating, acquisitiveness, lasciviousness, etc. This paper will focus on another named figure who appears to have been a literary device used to criticize the practices of nuns that some monks did not approve of. His biography seems to have no other purpose than to represent nuns in an unfavorable light, as head-strong and overwrought. His name was Mūlaphalguna.

**Keywords:** Mūlaphalguna, Vinaya literature, Indian Buddhism, monastic regulation

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15239/hijbs.05.01.08>

—For Phyllis Granoff, Who has  
Shown Better than Anyone What  
You Can Do with a Good Story—

One of the ironies in the study of religious biographies in early Buddhist monastic sources, or of ‘saints’ and conceptions of sainthood in vinaya literature, is that we are told there far more about ‘sinners’ than we are about ‘saints’. In the *Vinayas* there are, to be sure, references to ‘big’ monks like Śāriputra or Maudgalyāyana, and Kāśyapa and Ānanda even have something of a personality there. There is, as well, what has been taken to be a small anthology of ‘Lives of the Saints’—Hofinger has presented a kind of synoptic version of it with the subtitle *Vies de saints bouddhiques*.<sup>1</sup> But this compares rather poorly with the hundreds of pages devoted to the ‘bad’ monk Devadatta—more than two hundred in the *Saṅghabbedavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* alone<sup>2</sup>—or the hundreds of references there to the monks Upananda and Chanda, two of the best known members of the notorious Group-of-Six. In fact, it appears that the shyster monk Upananda may be one of the most fully developed characters in all of Indian literature. The monks of the Group-of-Six have been called ‘miscreants’, ‘dissentients’, even ‘evil-doers’. Edgerton went so far as to suggest that they were not Buddhist,<sup>3</sup> yet they remained monks in good standing, and they are almost the only monks in this *Vinaya* who are represented as knowing the Doctrine, and the only monks who can, and do, quote scripture.<sup>4</sup> However unlikely this might seem, these figures—like

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<sup>1</sup> Hofinger, *Le congrès du lac Anavatapta*.

<sup>2</sup> Gnoli, *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabbedavastu* ii, 68–86, 93–135, 163–75, etc.; Mukherjee, *Die Überlieferung von Devadatta*.

<sup>3</sup> Dhirasekera, ‘Rebels against the Codified Law’, 88; Dhirasekera, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, 135, etc.; Sarkar, ‘Critical Observations on Chabbaggiya’; Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, s.v. ‘ṣaḍvārgika’; see also Liu, ‘Noble or Evil’, especially 181, note 6; Pandita, ‘Who are the Cabbaggiya’; etc.

virtually all named monastic figures in the Canon—have been more often than not taken without good evidence to have been actual historical people. If nothing else, this flatfooted historicism has seriously hampered any attempt to study how these figures might have functioned as literary devices, and yet that is exactly what an obscure monk named Mūlaphalguna appears to be: his ‘story’ seems to have no other purpose than to criticize learned monks and certain kinds of nuns that some, apparently, did not approve of. Obviously, a study of the Group-of-Six monks from this point of view is out of the question here—it would be far too large—but we can look, at least briefly, at Mūlaphalguna who has some interesting things in common with them and watch how he is presented.<sup>5</sup>

We are told several things about the monk Mūlaphalguna in the *Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga*, the first of which was that he was disruptive, derisive, divisive, and quarrelsome<sup>6</sup>—in short, aggressive and unpleasant. He also, according to the text, had been ‘suspended’ from the Order: *utkṣipati*, ‘to suspend’, is a formal act of a Community of monks to deny a monk the privileges of belonging to the Order.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For some examples, see Schopen, *Nuns, Monks, and Other*, 404–31.

<sup>5</sup> His name occurs in Sanskrit four times in the *Cīvaravastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* iii 2, 143.17–145.8 and there is translated into Tibetan as *Khrums stod* every time. This, however, is not typical. The name more typically is translated into Tibetan as *gre las skyes* or *gre skyes*—see *Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga* Ta 80a.6ff; *Kṣudrakavastu* Da 172b.2ff; *Ekottarakarmaśataka*, bstan 'gyur Wu 240a.3; *Vinayasūtraṭikā*, bstan 'gyur Yu 180b.7; at *Kṣudrakavastu* Da 160a.2 the name is transliterated: *mu la pa la gun*.

<sup>6</sup> *Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga* Ta 80a.6ff. The Sanskrit here would have been something very much like the string *kalahakāraḥ bhaṇḍanakāraḥ vighrakāraḥ vivādakāraḥ adbhikaraṇikas* which occurs at Yamagiwa, *Das Pāṇḍulohitakavastu* 44.1, 45.1, but in the singular.

<sup>7</sup> The opposite of ‘suspended’, *utkṣiptaka*, is *prakṛtisthaka*, ‘in good standing’. This pair occurs, for example, in *Cīvaravastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscript* iii 2, 113.14–114.13 which illustrates as well the loss of privileges of the ‘suspended’ monk: here the estate of a deceased fellow monk goes only to monks in good standing and a suspended monk cannot inherit.

The individual who was suspended, however, still remained a monk, and in the case of Mūlaphalguna this created a particular problem for nuns because in addition to being described as disruptive, etc., it is said there that ‘through mixing very closely with nuns he came to be associated with them’ (*dge slong ma rnams dang shin tu ‘dre bas lhan cig par ‘gyur te*). While what *exactly* this means is not clear, it gives rise to a complicated series of events that the text develops.

When Mahāprajāpatī, the Buddha’s stepmother and the foundress of the Order of Nuns, hears that Mūlaphalguna has been suspended she goes to the Buddha and says:

Reverend, when some monk were to be suspended by the Community how must I proceed in regard to him? (*de la bdag gis ji ltar bsgrub par bgyi*)

The Buddha’s reply is straightforward and immediate:

If you see him you must rise from your seat but not show deference to him! (*phyag mi bya bar stan las ldang bar bya’o*)

Mahāprajāpatī’s question would seem to come from her awareness of what the Buddha is said to have said about nuns honouring monks. Established rule dictated that to show deference one should rise from one’s seat and:

All those who are ordained (*upasampanna*) must show deference (*vandya*) to one who was ordained earlier, except in the case of a nun: she— even if ordained for a hundred years—must show deference to a monk who has just been ordained that day!<sup>8</sup>

But if nuns must show deference to all monks, and a suspended monk is still a monk, what should a nun do in regard to such a one? The

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<sup>8</sup> Gnoli, *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu* 5.3. See also *Kṣudravastu* Da 137a.1 where a nun not rising for a monk is explicitly declared an offence, referred to again in n.15 below.

same established rules indicated that monks must not show deference to a suspended monk, but nothing there had been said about what nuns should do in regard to one, and hence Mahāprājapatī's dilemma. But Mahāprājapatī's question and the Buddha's response are both generic—they refer to 'some monk'. When she asks specifically about Mūlaphalguna the Buddha's response goes considerably further.

The Buddha responds to Mahāprājapatī's specific question about what should be done in regard to Mūlaphalguna by putting in place a formal procedure which follows a protocol similar to the one used to impose suspension. He says: 'The anathema of one who is not worthy of deference must be imposed!' (*phyag bya ba'i 'os ma yin pa'i sdom pa bya'o*) But when this is done and Mūlaphalguna is formally declared unworthy of deference for the nuns, he is said to wonder why, go directly to Mahāprājapatī, and ask the reason, saying that when someone disparaged the nuns he got angry with them and retaliated. He says:

So, since I have taken the side of you nuns why do you declare the anathema of one who is not worthy of deference on me?

Mahāprājapatī's response indicates what could almost have been anticipated by a reader of this *Vinaya*. She first says she has done so because he has actually done more harm than good to the Order of Nuns, because he has been suspended by the Order of Monks, and because the Blessed One said to. But then the redactors provide further information on Mūlaphalguna by having her encourage him to seek forgiveness and regain his full standing. She—who is the model of the 'good' nun—is made to say:

Moreover, hear, Mūlaphalguna! Although you are a son of the Śākyas (*śākyaṃputrīya*), One who has Entered the Religious Life from a Śākya Family, One who Knows the Three Baskets (*tripiṭa*), a Reciter of Dharma (*dharmakathika*), so too are you One of Great Learning (*babuśruta*), without asking pardon of the Community how can you be restored?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga* Ta 81b.5.

What needs to be noted here, of course, is the characterization of Mūlaphalguna put into the mouth of Mahāprajāpatī and the seemingly odd juxtaposition it sets up: we are presented with a very learned monk and teacher, ‘One who Knows the Tripiṭaka’, who is also described as disruptive, abusive, suspended, and overly close to the nuns. This would not seem to be a ringing recommendation of learned monks, but such a juxtaposition is typical of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and is repeatedly found there.

Something like the characterization of Mūlaphalguna as a learned monk that occurs in the above passage occurs elsewhere in this *Vinaya* in regard to a whole series of dubious or unsavory monks. Mahāprajāpatī’s characterization of Mūlaphalguna puts him first of all in the company of the Group-of-Six, and especially Upananda and Chanda who are repeatedly called or claim to be ‘Masters of the Tripiṭaka’.<sup>10</sup> It also puts him in the company of a monk who had killed his mother, a monk who speaks ill of the Community and is given to harsh speech, another who is mean and jealous and is reborn as a pig dealer, one who does not have sense enough not to teach his sick father a Dharma that encourages him to kill himself and who is blamed for his death, or one who is arrogant or easily duped, all of whom are characterized as learned monks in the same way, using the same language, as is Mūlaphalguna in the *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga* text.<sup>11</sup> In this *Vinaya* at least to call a monk a ‘Master of the Tripiṭaka’ and very learned was more often than not to associate him with a whole string of negative characteristics, and was not by any means necessarily a compliment. Notice that here too in our account in the *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga* the text appears to have been intentionally constructed to show the learned monk in a bad light: by having Mūlaphalguna be identified as a learned monk—which is completely unnecessary to the plot—the text shows that not only could a learned

<sup>10</sup> *Vibhaṅga* Ca 247a.7, Cha 205b.2, Nya 228b.5, etc.

<sup>11</sup> *Pravrajyāvastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* iii 4, 56.10; *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* iii 1, 55.8; *Vibhaṅga* Ja 80a.2; *Vibhaṅga* Cha 129b.7; *Uttara-grantha* Pa 102b.4; *Vibhaṅga* Ca 78a.4—see also Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters*, 404–31 for the learned monk as a comic figure more broadly.

monk be disruptive and derisive, he could also be—as Mūlaphalguna’s subsequent behaviour will demonstrate—easily misled by a bunch of women and the promise of material goods.

It is, however, not just the characterization of Mūlaphalguna as learned that puts him in bad or questionable company. It is—and this may surprise some—also the narrative fact that he is called a *śākyaputrīya* and is said to be from a Śākyan family. One might have thought that to be associated with, or belong to, the family of the Buddha himself would be a good thing, but that very often seems not to be so in this *Vinaya*. Some have maintained—with out paying any attention to its actual usage—that *sakyaputtiya*, sometimes rendered ‘son of a Sakyan’ or something like that, is the ‘normal’ expression for a Buddhist monk. But this term or title, even in the Pāli *Vinaya* is overwhelmingly often used only by ‘brahmins and householders’ when they are expressing their criticism, disdain, and disapproval of what Buddhist monks did. There are, of course, exceptions, but they are not numerous, and more than anything the expression appears to be, like the expression *muṇḍika-śramaṇa*, ‘bald-headed ascetic’, which Edgerton defines as a ‘contemptuous ep[ithet] of Buddhist monks’,<sup>12</sup> virtually a term of abuse. Examples are legion: typically they say in Horner’s rendering ‘People...spread it about, saying: “How can these recluses, sons of the Sakyans”’ do this or that that the speakers do not approve of. This same phrasing occurs hundreds of times in the Pāli *Vinaya*, and something like it is even more common in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.<sup>13</sup> But in addition to calling Mūlaphalguna a *śākyaputrīya*, Mahāprajāpatī also says he is ‘One who has Entered the Religious Life from a Śākya Family’, that he is *śākyakulāt pravrajitaḥ*,

<sup>12</sup> Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, s.v. ‘muṇḍika’.

<sup>13</sup> Examples in the Pāli *Vinaya* can easily be found in the *Index* to it prepared by Ousaka et al. For some examples from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* in Sanskrit see *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* iii 1, 19.12, 236.5, 285.19 (also called there *anātha*, ‘lordless’), *Pravrajyāvastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* iii 4, 39.1, 52.4, etc. Examples in Tibetan: *Vibhaṅga* Ca 155a.4, 249a.4; Cha 136b.6, 187b.6, 208b.3, 280a.5; Ja 87b.7, 229b.1; Nya 75b.3, 210a.4; *Kṣudrakavastu* Da 35b.2, 156a.3, 156b.7, 158a.3, 180b.2, 182b.3, 184a.3, 224b.2, etc., etc.

and this too puts him in bad—if not even worse—company.

Probably the best-known monk who is described as *śākyakulāt pravrajitaḥ* is none other than the nefarious—and stupid—Devadatta: he is described this way by the model nun Utpalavarṇā. Then there is Upananda of the Group-of-Six, who himself claims to have entered the Order from a Śākyan family, and Chanda, another member of the Group-of-Six is also described in this way. Sthūlanandā, a member of the parallel group of trouble-making nuns, not only claims that she herself was *śākyakulāt*, but insists that the entire Group-of-Six—except for Udayin—all were.<sup>14</sup> It should be clear from all of this that in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, and probably elsewhere, there was considerable ambivalence in regard to those who were described as, or claimed to be, members of the Śākyan family: the list of Śākyan family members—starting with Devadatta—reads like a who’s who of divisive, disruptive, and arrogant monks and nuns who are of dubious moral character. By simply having Mahāprajāpatī describe Mūlaphalgunā as she does, the redactors accomplish two things: they cast Mūlaphalgunā in a very bad light—the reader of this *Vinaya* would have known immediately who else was described in this way—and with the same move, the redactors make it hard for the reader not to see that this is the kind of disreputable monk who associates with and takes the side of the nuns, or conversely, it is this kind of disreputable monk that nuns support and foster.

Mūlaphalgunā’s first reaction to what Mahāprajāpatī had said about going to the Community of Monks to ask for pardon is to think that what she said was beneficial and that he should do that. But he does not do so. Instead, he thinks to himself: ‘I, indeed, should go to the sisters (*sring mo, bhagini*), and, arriving, ask them also’. This, of course, is fatal because there are in this *Vinaya*—as in others— both ‘good’ nuns and ‘bad’ nuns, and he goes to the Group-of-Twelve nuns, the female counterpart of the male Group-of-Six already mentioned. They are equally bad if not worse than the group of monks, and the

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<sup>14</sup> Gnoli, *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu* ii 254.20; *Vibhaṅga* Cha 206b.2; *Vibhaṅga* Ca 247a.7; *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga* Ta 183a., 295a.4; *Kṣudrakavastu* 137a.1; *Vibhaṅga* Nya 228b.5.



most prominent member of the female group, Fat Nandā, not only repeatedly claims to be from a Śākyan family as we have seen, but also repeatedly claims to be a ‘Master of the Three Baskets’ while being at the same time represented as arrogant, foul mouthed, pugnacious, and gluttonous.<sup>15</sup> Since Mahāprajāpatī represents the ‘good’ nuns, and she has already counseled seeking pardon and reconciliation, the response of the Group-of-Twelve is in part perfectly predictable: they counsel against it. They first say—in effect playing off Mūlaphalguna’s arrogance or vanity as a Śākyan—that Mūlaphalguna should not seek pardon in the presence of those who have entered the religious life from all sorts of families and backgrounds, i.e., the riffraff that makes up the Community. Then they make him an offer he apparently cannot refuse. These nuns say:

We will look after you without letting you want for anything whatsoever that you might think of, or ask for: bowls and robes or carrying slings or cups or girdles, medicine for treating ills suitable to the season, and suitable for nights, seven days, or for long as you live!<sup>16</sup>

This then is reported to the Buddha, and the rest of the text is taken up with his instructions: the nuns must admonish any nun who encourages a suspended monk not to seek pardon and offers her

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<sup>15</sup> *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga* Ta 183a.5, 184b.7, 185b.4, 186a.2, 221b.5, 295a.4, etc. On Fat Nandā more generally see also Ohnuma, ‘Bad Nun’; Schopen, ‘A Tough-talking Nun’. A particularly good example involving Sthūlanandā of the kind of arrogance that the redactors of this *Vinaya* attribute to those who are called, or claim to be, Śākyans and Knowers of the Three Baskets occurs at *Kṣudrakaṣṭu* Da 137a.1. Here, when she is criticized for refusing to stand for the monk Mahākāśyapa she retorts: ‘Since he has entered the religious life from some other religious group, is stupid, really stupid, dumb, really dumb, but I have entered the religious life as a Śākyan, Know the Three Baskets etc., why when I see him should I rise from my seat?’ It is probably obvious from what has been seen so far that the role of Śākyans and the attitudes towards them in monastic literature must be fully revisited, which could not be done here.

<sup>16</sup> *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga* Ta 82a.3.

support to him. If after being admonished three times she still persists in this behaviour she comes to be guilty of a *pārājika*, the most serious of all offences, and is expelled. Note here first that unless nuns were powerfully persuasive and had the means to support monks, it is hard to see how the nuns' actions in regard to Mūlaphalguna could constitute such a threat that it had to be judged the most serious sort of offence. The male reaction seems entirely out of proportion. Then note that the text in effect either blames Mūlaphalguna for the institution of the last of the new *pārājikas* that were added to the nuns' rules—there is of course no counterpart in the male rules—or at least closely associates him with it. The message here is that this is again what learned monks do. But the message must also be that this is what nuns do: they lead monks astray and encourage and support their misbehaviour. They in effect—as in this case—reject the collective judgement of the male Community and defy its authority. It seems, in fact, that nuns might have frequently cowed monks. It is otherwise hard to account for the third *pratideśanīya* rule in the male *Prātimokṣa* that makes it an offence for a monk not to speak up when an officious nun at an invited meal bosses the donor around and takes over.<sup>17</sup> (*Vibhaṅga* Nya 228b.5). But in addition to things of this sort, two other things need to be noted.

In the *Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga* text under discussion we are not actually told why Mūlaphalguna was suspended, though it is said that he closely associated with the nuns. In fact, these two things are casually related. Elsewhere it is unequivocally said that he was suspended *because* he 'associated', or 'mingled', or 'joined' with the nuns. This is particularly clear in Guṇaprabha, in both the *Vinaya-sūtra* and the *Ekottarakarmasāta*, even if the exact significance of the verbal expression used is not clear. The *Vinaya-sūtra* actually provides some of the Sanskrit vocabulary involved in the *Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga* account. Stating it as a general rule—which the *Ṭikā* explicitly identifies as having come from the case of Mūlaphalguna—it says:

They (i.e., the monks) should suspend too one who intimately

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<sup>17</sup> *Vibhaṅga* Nya 228b.5.

associates and dwells with nuns.

*samsr̥ṣṭavihārīnam api bhikṣuṇībhir utkṣipeyuh / dge slong ma  
rnams dang 'dre zhing gnas pa la yang gnas dbyung bar bya'o.*<sup>18</sup>

And the *Ekottarakarmaśataka* says:

Because the Noble Mūlaphalguna intimately and closely associated and dwelt with the nuns the Community of Monks performed the act of suspension.<sup>19</sup>

This, of course, would simply seem to add to the complexity of the actions of the nuns in the *Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga*. There, this group of nuns was represented as both having taken a position opposite that of Mahāprajāpatī and their 'foundress', in effect rejecting her council, and subverting the judgement of the male Community. But the additional information—which presumably would have been known to the intended audience—would suggest that these nuns acted not just to defy their foundress and the male Community, but they did so also to keep a learned monk who took their side on their side: If Mūlaphalguna had sought formal pardon from the male Community he would have been required to cease and desist associating with the nuns. Whether he did so is also not explicitly stated in the *Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga*, but other sources indicate, as we will see, that he did not, and that at his death he was still being supported by nuns.

If the redactors of this *Vinaya* intended to use the figure of Mūlaphalguna to paint unflattering pictures of both learned monks and certain kinds of nuns that they did not approve of, they seem to have succeeded, and the message here to their monks would have been—as already noted—that learned monks were easily misled by women and the promise of material support. But nuns cannot only mislead monks, they can also, it seems, kill them. This at least would seem to be the message of another text telling more of the story of Mūlaphalguna, this one found in the *Cīvaravastu*.

<sup>18</sup> Sankrityayana, *Vinaya-sūtra* 103.12= bstan 'gyur, 'dul ba Wu 85b.7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ekottarakarmaśataka*, bstan 'gyur, 'dul ba Wu 240a.3.

On the surface the text in the *Cīvaravastu* deals with a technical point in monastic inheritance law and the handling of a dead monk's estate. But just below the surface there appears to be a parallel presentation of a negative—if not nasty—view of nuns which might well serve as a cautionary tale for monks. The first part of the text and the part that is most germane here is this:

The setting was in Śrāvastī.

When King Prasenajit of Kośala established the Festival of Toyikā then there was there an enormous gathering of monks, nuns, lay brothers and lay sisters. At that time too Mūlaphalguna the monk was nurtured by the nuns (*bhikṣuṇībhāvanīya, dge slong mas bkur ba yin pa*). When the festival occurred a great many nuns said: 'Noble One you must be invited! We are going to the Festival of Toyikā.'

He said: 'Who here is going to look after my bowl and robe (*pātracīvaram sthāpayati*)?'

The nuns of the Group-of-Twelve said: 'You must not worry, Noble One, we are going to look after them.'

He delivered them over (*samarpita*) to them. But they left them with Mahāprajāpatī, Mahāprajāpatī left them with the Venerable Ānanda, and the Venerable Ānanda left them in some monastery.<sup>20</sup>

Just this much confirms two aspects of Mūlaphalguna's character in particular, and makes a statement about nuns, and not just the Group-of-Twelve. Notice that when Mūlaphalguna is urged to go to a religious festival his first thought is not about its significance or its religious benefits. His first thought is about his material possessions, and bear in mind that 'bowl and robe' is an euphemism for a monk's accumulated possessions, and these could be substantial: in the *Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga* the nuns offered Mūlaphalguna, as we have seen, both bowls and robes and all sorts of medicines. But when the monk Upananda died—to cite only one other clear example—he is said to have had 'a great deal of gold, three hundred thousand in

<sup>20</sup> *Cīvaravastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* iii 2, 143.15. On the Festival of Toyikā, *toyikāmaha*, see Schopen, *Bones, Stones*, 28–29.

gold, one hundred thousand was from bowls and robes, a second hundred thousand from medicines for sickness, a third from worked and unworked gold'.<sup>21</sup> A second thing about Mūlaphalguna that is confirmed here and that at the very head of the passage is his close association with nuns. The text will have more on this, but he is already described as *bhikṣuṇībhāvanīya*, and the range of possible meanings for the verbal element here is impressive. It could mean 'nurtured, nourished, cherished, looked after, taken care of, or protected', or all of these at once. And here too it is not just the Group-of-Twelve nuns that is focused on Mūlaphalguna, but, apparently, all nuns. The statement being made here about nuns, finally, seems obvious: they are irresponsible and untrustworthy. They do not do what they say they will, and they mishandle other people's property. Culpability here is clearly attributed to the Group-of-Twelve and probably to everyone involved. Although a model nun, Mahāprajāpatī is not immune from criticism in this *Vinaya*—in one of the stranger accounts found in it, for example, she is directly reprimanded by the Buddha himself for saying to him 'May you live long!' when he sneezes, and, although it is not explicitly said so, this reprimand is the cause of her death.<sup>22</sup> Here the implication is that she acts as irresponsibly as the Group-of-Twelve in not looking after Mūlaphalguna's goods. Likewise, Ānanda—who is, of course, criticized elsewhere for taking the side of nuns<sup>23</sup>—should have known better than to take another monk's property that had not been entrusted to him.

But if the first part of the *Cīvaravastu* text represents nuns as irresponsible and untrustworthy, the second part of it would seem to suggest that they are dangerous, and that being the focus of the nun's attention or affection can have fatal consequences for a monk. The text continues on from where we left it.

Then the Venerable Mūlaphalguna went to the Festival of Toyikā.

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<sup>21</sup> *Cīvaravastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* iii 2, 118.11; see also Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters*, 115–16 where the text is translated in full.

<sup>22</sup> *Kṣudrakavastu* Tha 110a.6–113b.3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* Da 306b.3; Rockhill, *The Life of the Buddha*, 152; etc.

He there was invited by the nuns. One said: ‘The Noble One should take his morning meal with me today!’ And he was invited to another morning meal. And still another.

Another nun said: ‘The Noble One must eat with me!’ And still another. And another said the same thing.

Yet another said: ‘The noble One must take an allowable beverage with me!’ And still another, and still another said the same thing.

Out of consideration, when he had taken a little bit from each, he had his morning meal. It was the same when he ate and when he took his allowable beverage. But the repeated small portions turned out to be a huge amount. Being tired from the trip he, having eaten an enormous amount, got indigestion, with vomiting and diarrhea, and died.<sup>24</sup>

The rest of the text is concerned with the proper formal procedure that the Community must follow in taking possession of Mūlaphalguna’s estate and is not directly relevant here but for two points which are worth noting. The first of these is the simple narrative fact that the *Saṅgha* is ordered to formally take possession of the estate of a suspended monk who has died. This confirms the fact that from the point-of-view of monastic law a suspended monk is still a monk. Otherwise, the *Saṅgha* would have no claim on his estate. The second point is that in laying out the procedure for taking possession of Mūlaphalguna’s property that had been left in the hands of Ānanda the text describes it twice, and the description confirms the fact that *pātracīvara*, ‘bowl and robe’, was here—as elsewhere—shorthand or a euphemism for all Mūlaphalguna’s accumulated property. In the second part of the text, what is said to have ended up in Ānanda’s hands, or in the monastery where he left it, was Mūlaphalguna’s *pātracīvaraṃ sacīvaracīvarikaṃ*, his ‘bowl and robe together with his cloth and cloth money’. *Cīvarika*, ‘cloth money’, is repeatedly here translated into Tibetan as *gos kyi rin*, ‘the price of cloth’, and this would have to be money. *Gos kyi rin*, moreover, is repeatedly glossed in this *Vinaya* as ‘gold and silver’.<sup>25</sup> Apart from these points, however,

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<sup>24</sup> *Cīvaravastu*, Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* iii 2, 144.3–.13.

there remains the main subtext of this second part of the text.

If the message carried by the first part of the text in the *Cīvaravastu* is that nuns are untrustworthy and not reliable, and if the *Bhikṣuṇī-vibhaṅga* account says in effect to a monk that nuns will mislead you, then the message in the second part of the *Cīvara* text to a monk would have to be that the attentions and solicitude of nuns can kill you. It is true, as P. Granoff has shown in one of her numerous insightful papers, that Buddhist monks had a reputation for gluttony and that more than one died from over eating,<sup>26</sup> still here Mūlaphalguna is not so much represented as gluttonous as overly solicitous of the nuns: he accepts each and every one of their invitations. This almost bizarre story of nuns vying to over-feed a monk, moreover, has no obvious or integral connection with the issue of monastic inheritance law that is being adjudicated. It is in that sense utterly adventitious. Since the rule delivered here on the proper procedure for taking possession of a monastic estate in certain circumstances could easily have been delivered without it, the text as we have it looks like it is simply a superfluous swipe at nuns in general—notice here that it is not just the Group-of-Twelve, but nuns in general who over-feed Phalguna. It seems, however, that the Group-of-Twelve could be even more dangerous.

The death of Mūlaphalguna as a result of the nuns' insistent solicitude was not the end of his story in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. There are further accounts of how even after his death he continued to be a centre of attention for the nuns, and in extending his biography to cover events which immediately followed Mūlaphalguna's death the redactors had, or took, the opportunity to represent nuns as incapable of controlling their feelings and given to public displays of grief. The text is a short one:

The causal event was in Śrāvastī.

At that time when the monk named Mūlaphalguna died, the Group-of-Twelve nuns, after they had performed the honours for him and had cremated him, were beating their breasts (*brang brdungs ba*,

<sup>25</sup> *Vibhaṅga* Cha 114b.1, 118a.3, 125a.7.

<sup>26</sup> Granoff, 'Divine Delicacies', especially 60.

*urastāḍayati*). But other nuns were critical saying ‘How is it proper for nuns to beat their breasts?’

When this is duly reported to the Buddha he says:

Monks, the situation is that the Group-of-Twelve nuns are doing improper things and other nuns are critical. Therefore, nuns must not beat their breasts! If nuns beat their breasts they come to be guilty of an offence!<sup>27</sup>

There are obvious echoes here of the account of the Buddha’s death found in this *Vinaya*. There some monks—i.e., not model monks—rolled around on the ground, stretched out their arms and cried out. But while this show of emotion might not have been approved of, it was not explicitly declared improper, and a rule was not made against it.<sup>28</sup> The intended audience, moreover, would have been aware of a certain incongruity: whereas some monks might exhibit a strong emotional reaction at the death of the Buddha, these nuns exhibited a similar reaction at the death of a disreputable, divisive monk who had been suspended by his colleagues. What some monks do in regard to the Buddha these nuns do in regard to a monk of dubious character, and this invidious contrast appears elsewhere in the final piece of Mūlaphalgunā’s biography that can be cited here.

Just two dozen pages after the text on nuns beating their breasts in the *Kṣudrakavastu*, there is a second and even fuller account of the actions of the Group-of-Twelve nuns on the death of Mūlaphalgunā. It opens this way:

When the Venerable Mūlaphalgunā died then the Group-of-Twelve nuns, after collecting his bones, with great veneration built a stūpa at a spacious spot. They attached to it umbrellas and banners and flags. Adorning it with perfumes and flowers, and having assigned two nuns who spoke sweetly, they every day had clay and water and incense and

<sup>27</sup> *Kṣudrakavastu* Da 160a.2.

<sup>28</sup> Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* § 44.12.



flowers placed there. Then to those monks who came there from other places they gave the washing of hands, and had them pay reverence to that stūpa with flowers and incense and the singing of verses.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from the fact that the Group-of-Twelve nuns are represented here as treating the bones of Mūlaphalguna as the relics of the Buddha or a monk of high religious achievement should be treated, and this in itself is quite jarring, what they did once the stūpa was made parallels in almost every point what the ‘good’ nun Dharmadinna is said to do in regard to the stūpa of the Buddha. When lay women and men came to the nunnery she

...set out clay, water, fragrances, incense, flowers, and censers, and assigned nuns who spoke sweetly...

And when she

...had given them clay and water for washing the hands, fragrances... she venerated the stūpa with the sound of verses...<sup>30</sup>

Once again, then, the Group-of-Twelve nuns are acting in regard to a suspended monk of dubious character as ‘good’ nuns act in regard to the Buddha himself, they are treating what an angry monk calls ‘a heap of bones and bone lumps’ as if they were holy relics. But even worse, they are misleading monks into doing the same. When the ‘good’ nun Utpalavarṇā leads one such misled monk to discover what was in the stūpa he criticizes even the ‘good’ nun. He says to Utpalavarṇā: ‘Although an abscess has appeared on the Teaching you just sit there and ignore it!’ Then he and his disciples completely destroy Mūlaphalguna’s stūpa. When the Group-of-Twelve nuns ‘and others who were not free of feelings of affection and fixation toward Mūlaphalguna’ find out what had occurred they blame Utpalavarṇā, they arm themselves with ‘weapons and needles and daggers of hard

<sup>29</sup> *Kṣudrakavastu* Da 172b.2.

<sup>30</sup> *Vibhaṅga* Cha 190a.2, 191a.3.

wood' and try and kill her. This story—which has been treated elsewhere in some detail<sup>31</sup>—although initially about the final fate of Mūlaphalguna, ends up producing a rule that requires a monk to determine if nuns seeking to enter the *vihāra* are carrying concealed weapons. He must say to any nuns who come:

Sisters, having some grudge, are you not carrying weapons and needles?

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This is almost all we are told about the monk Mūlaphalguna, and he seems to have no other role in this *Vinaya* than to serve as a vehicle for the criticism of nuns by monks. In every case the rule delivered could have easily been delivered with no reference at all to him. But even this brief foray into the biography of a monk found in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* allows some broader observations. The first of these may be this: However unlikely it might be that there ever was a Mūlaphalguna, or a Group-of-Six, or a Group-of-Twelve, or even if there had been, there can be no doubt that in constructing their biographies the redactors of this *Vinaya* knew how to tell a good story—Sylvain Lévi recognized this long ago.<sup>32</sup> These biographical stories were, moreover, frequently layered, the main or surface text having one or more subtexts running below it. These subtexts are often critical so that stories about monks are often criticisms of other monks and very often—as in the stories of Mūlaphalguna—of nuns and their activities. Such criticisms of nuns are even carried by episodes in the biography of the Buddha. The account of the descent at Sāṃkāśya, for example, becomes a vehicle for criticizing even the 'good' nun Utpalavarṇā for being focused on the physical body of the Buddha.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters*, 329–59.

<sup>32</sup> Lévi, 'Les saintes écritures', 113; 128–29; Lévi, 'Note sur des manuscrits', 23–24.

<sup>33</sup> *Kṣudrakavastu* 90b.6–93b.1; see also Boppearachchi, *From Bactria to Taprobane*, 84–98; Mace, 'First and Foremost: The Nun Utpalavarṇā'.

But nuns acting independently of male authority seems to have been a particular concern for the redactors. All of this must, however, be much more fully studied.

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