This book is a slightly modified version of my master’s thesis submitted in October 2009 at the Department of Classical Indology, South Asia Institute, Ruprecht Karl University Heidelberg, written under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Axel Michaels and Dr. Mudagamuwe Maithirimurthi.

Nāmarūpa (literally “name and form”) plays an important role in the Upaniṣads, where it refers to “individuality” on the one hand and “empirical reality” on the other; the latter being characterized by individuality and diversity. In Buddhism, nāmarūpa is known as one link within the formula of origination in dependence (paṭiccasamuppāda) and is commonly understood as an individual consisting of the five groups (khandhas). Whereas the various meanings of rūpa as “(visible) form” or “body” were preserved, nāma² was reinterpreted as “mind,” and thus equated with the non-material khandhas (vedanā “feeling,” saññā “ideation,” sañkhāras “impulses,” and viññāṇa “perception”).³ Although some authors have attempted to clarify the connection between nāmarūpa in the Upaniṣads and the Pali Canon, they all reach very different conclusions. For instance, Wayman⁴ and Hamilton⁵ interpret the Buddhist nāmarūpa as a person, whilst Reat⁶ and Bucknell⁷ regard it as a designation of the entire (perceptible) world. This book explores the connection between the pre-Buddhist nāmarūpa and its Buddhist interpretation, and examines the plausibility of the explanations advanced by these authors.

The first part deals with the passages related to nāmarūpa in the

1 Deussen 1963: 909.
2 In this book, nāma refers to the term in Buddhist texts (both in Sanskrit and Pali).
3 The translation of the khandhas, with the exception of viññāṇa, follows Vetter 2000.
7 Bucknell 1999.
Vedic texts and the Upaniṣads. Chapters 1.1 and 1.2 discuss the meaning of nāman and rūpa as independent terms in the Vedic texts. Chapter 1.3 offers an analysis of the text passages that can be regarded as predecessors of nāmarūpa, whereas chapters 1.4 and 1.5 analye those where nāmarūpa actually occurs. Chapter 1.6 briefly presents significant issues raised in scholarship regarding the relationship between Buddhism and the Upaniṣads. The second part is concerned with nāmarūpa in the Pali Canon. It begins with a brief survey of the various scholarly approaches to the paṭiccasamuppāda and the attested variants of the formula in the Pali Canon (ch. 2.1). Chapters 2.2 to 2.5 provide a detailed analysis of the relevant passages in the Canon concerning nāmarūpa, focusing on those where nāmarūpa occurs in a context different from the paṭiccasamuppāda.

The first part of this book shows that in the Vedic texts nāman and rūpa are neither opposites nor counterparts and actually overlap. It is therefore inaccurate to assume that they are always to be understood in terms of name (nāman) and named (rūpa) or to treat nāman as a synonym of “language.” Moreover, a separate analysis of the usage of these words reveals that we are not dealing with homogeneous notions, since nāman and rūpa are highly polysemous. Accordingly, the meaning of nāmarūpa and its “predecessors” is far from being univocal. In the light of this ambiguity, I argue that speaking of an “Upaniṣadic” nāmarūpa is of little assistance when exploring how the meaning of the term has changed over time.

The aim of the second part is not to question the viability of interpreting nāmarūpa as the five or four (if viññāṇa is excluded) non-material khandhas, but to explore other possible interpretations that may antedate the systematization of the Abhidharma. In so doing, I follow Frauwallner,9 Schmithausen,10 Cox,11 and Schul-

---

8 Faute de mieux, the term “Vedic texts” excludes here the Upaniṣads.
10 Schmithausen 2000.
11 Cox 1993.
man, who suggest that the interpretation of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* as referring to the world is a later development, and argue that *nāmarūpa*, as a link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, initially referred to a person but still did not stand for the *khandhas*. Indeed, the fact that *nāmarūpa* occurs in the oldest parts of the Pali Canon – e.g. in the *Pārāyana* and the *Āṭṭhakavagga* of the *Suttanipāta*, and in the *Sagāthavagga* of the *Sānyuttanikāya* – while the five *khandhas* are rarely mentioned in the Nikāyas suggests that *nāmarūpa* was incorporated into the Canon before the *khandha*-theory and the twelve-membered *paṭiccasamuppāda* achieved their final form. Chapter 2.2 therefore deals with *nāmarūpa* and the *khandhas*, relating them to another understanding of the human being as consisting of *viññāṇa* and *kāya*, which is also found in the Canon and had been already pointed out by C.A.F. Rhys Davids, Falk, and Harvey. The variants of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* relevant to *nāmarūpa* – such as the ten- and the nine-membered formulas – are analysed in chapters 2.3 and 2.4, with particular emphasis on the various explanations of the relationship between *viññāṇa* and *nāmarūpa*. Lastly, chapter 2.5 focuses on the occurrences of *nāmarūpa* where no mention to the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is made. Since, in its most general sense, *nāmarūpa* stands for all things having name and form, it is possible to interpret it simultaneously as designating both the world and the sub-category “person” without creating contradictions. For this reason, I preferred to leave the question of whether *nāmarūpa* initially referred to the world or to an individual aside, and focused instead on a more relevant, though generally neglected, distinction, namely between what I called a subjective and an objective *nāmarūpa*; in other words, between one’s own *nāmarūpa*, “my name and my appearance/body,” and the *nāmarūpa* “outside” (*bahiddhā*), i.e. the object(s) of perception. The objective *nāmarūpa* implies reading *nāma* as “designation,” while in the subjective one *nāma* is primarily, though not exclu-

---

12 Schulman 2008.
13 Rhys Davids 1937.
14 Falk 1943.
15 Harvey 1981.
sively, a “proper name.” A subjective nāmarūpa can thus also be interpreted as identity (and not “mere” individuality) – we consider not only our bodies but also our names an essential part of us and actually identify with them. Yet, unlike Hamilton\textsuperscript{16} I understand “name” as a proper name and not as an abstract identity based on concepts.

The book concludes that assuming the presence of a “pre-Buddhist” nāmarūpa in the earliest portions of the Pali Canon does not require that nāma be interpreted as an abstract concept. In Vedic texts, nāman is far from being a conventional sign; on the contrary name and named are quite often considered identical. In addition to this conception, in Vedic texts and Upaniṣads names appear as a subtle substance, as an essential constituent of a person. I therefore see no reason to dismiss these notions of nāman. Indeed, the fact that nāma could have been easily identified with the core of a person or with a component subsisting after death may explain why its reinterpretation became necessary. For this reason, I consider it more plausible to interpret nāma as proper name in the passages where nāmarūpa means nothing more than a “living body” – such as those addressed by Schmithausen\textsuperscript{17} and Langer,\textsuperscript{18} in which the conception and development of the embryo in the womb are described. Nāmarūpa may therefore have been used to refer to a body that has a proper name, i.e. a person. Since the narrow meaning of nāma still allowed its identification with the core or the essence of a person, it was finally reinterpreted and split into different constituents, first into vedanā, saṁñā, cetanā “volition,” phassa and manasikāra “attention,” and subsequently into the five khandhas: vedanā, saṁñā, saṅkhāras and viññāna. Thus, this reinterpretation of nāma mirrors that of viññāna, in which the older notion of viññāna as a transmigrating entity\textsuperscript{19} was eventually replaced by the sixfold perception.

\textsuperscript{16} Hamilton 1996 and 2000.
\textsuperscript{17} Schmithausen 2000.
\textsuperscript{18} Langer 2000.
\textsuperscript{19} See above pp. 73f.