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Photograph of a Mural Painting of the First Council  frontispiece

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ARTICLES

Scriptural Authenticity and the Śrāvaka Schools: An Essay towards an Indian Perspective

PETER SKILLING

The statement that is meaningful
Relevant to the practice of dharma
That destroys the defilements of the three realms
And that reveals the advantages of Peace (nirvāṇa):
That is the Sage’s statement.
Anything else is not.
Maitreya, Ratnagotravibhāga

I. Touchstones of Authenticity

The question of scriptural authenticity with regard to the Śrāvaka schools in India is very different from that beyond the subcontinent. In China and Tibet, the decisive determinant was whether or not a text had been translated from an Indian or Indic original (leaving aside here the possible definitions of India, Indian, or Indic, a Camelot which in the Chinese

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1 Ratnagotravibhāga, chap. 5, v. 18 (Prasad 1991, p. 185): yad arthavat dharmapadopasamhiṣitaṃ, tridhātusamklesambarhansam vacabḥ, bhavet ca yac chānty anudharmakarṣakaṃ, tad uktam ārṣaṃ vapiditam anyathā (Vamsasthavīla meter). Both arthavat and dharmapamhiṣita evince an ancient pairing of artha and dharma in the Āgama traditions (for example, in connection with speech, at Udānavarga, chap. 24, vv. 1–2). The verse recapitulates a celebrated paragraph of the Adhyātvasamcudana; Prajñākaramati cites the two together, first the sūtra, then the verse: Vaidya 1960b, p. 204.19.

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and Tibetan *imaginaires* meant an ideal Madhyadeśa). That is, authenticity depends upon source language and origins. Did a text have an Indian original? Was it transmitted from India to China or Tibet? Or was it an imposter, a native in Indian garb, a faux-immigrant? The question was one of ancestry, of genealogy, and not content or thought—although these certainly could and did enter into the debate.

What were the criteria of authenticity in India? In our investigation, we do not have much to go on. We have no ancient (or even medieval) Indian sūtra catalogues, no correspondence or diaries, no specificities whatsoever which might expose the historical underpinnings of the ideology of authenticity—or rather ideologies, given the intricacy of the family tree(s) of Indian Buddhism. The question must be asked for each of the (conventionally counted) eighteen nīkāyas, each of which transmitted its own scriptures. What was authentic to one lineage might not have been so for another, a point cogently drawn by Vasubandhu in his *Vākyāvyāyukti*. This itself is significant: there can be no single or single answer to our question.

The sources that we do have are scholastic, and decidedly partisan. Early witnesses to the philosophical ferment of the second and first centuries BCE are the Mahāvihārin *Kathāvatthu*, preserved in Pāli; the first two chapters of the Sarvāstivādin *Vijñānākāya*, preserved in Chinese translation (*Api-damo* *shih* *shen* *lu* *nun* 阿毘達磨識身是頌, T no. 1539); and the “Pudgalavādin”

2 For the question of scriptural authenticity in China, see Kuo 2000 and the collection of essays in Buswell 1990. In Tibet, the question usually centers on the status of certain *lantros*; it is imbued in the rivalry of lineages and schools, and further complicated by the tradition of “treasure texts” (*gyur mo*)—all far beyond the scope of this paper.

3 A nīkāya was primarily a *vinaya* or monastic ordinance lineage, and hence is best rendered as “order.” But the orders also transmitted ideas, tenets, and practices, and thus they were also “schools.” They were not “sects” in the usual sense of the word in English, and it is important to remember that nīkāyas were monastic lineages, rather than lay communities. The relations between the ancient nīkāyas and their lay supporters, and to society in general, remain to be seriously investigated. In the *Kathāvatthu*-āṭṭhakathā (p. 3.13) the terms nīkāya, ācāravyavāda, nāgārjunaśīkha, and āchāryavādā are treated as synonyms: sabbe va aṭṭhārasa ācāravyavādā datta vasasatā uppanā. aṭṭhāraśākhyā ṭi pi aṭṭhāraśācāryakalā ṭi pi eṭesaṃ yeva nāmām. Cf. also *Avtaṭṭhakāni*, p. 2.3, nīkāyanāra.

4 See, for example, Lee 2001, pp. 227–29.

5 Recently, the first known Sanskrit fragment of the *Vijñānākāya* has been identified: see Wille 2000, § 1869, p. 61. On the Chinese translation of the *Vijñānākāya*, see La Vallée Poussin 1925a, vol. 1, pp. 343–76; La Vallée Poussin 1971, pp. xxxii–xxxvii; Willemen, Dessein and Cox 1998, pp. 197–205; Watanabe 1983, chap. 11; Potter et al. 1996, pp. 367–74 (on p. 367 there is a memorable misprint in the title of La Vallée Poussin’s article [in addition to a forgettable one]).

6 See Thich Thiên Châu 1999, pp. 99–117. To these sources we may now add the “Spitzer manuscript” and Gândhâra scroll BL 28 (Franco 2004 and Cox 2010). These and other emerging sources demand a complete reformulation of the study of the evolution and interaction of the early Buddhist schools.

7 Caution is urged by Frauwallner (1995, pp. 86–87): “A close examination should be made of the attribution of the controversial doctrines to the various schools. The commentary in which it is contained dates from a late period. It is also hard to believe that the transmission regarding the original opponents of the polemic was preserved over the centuries out of antiquarian interest. It is perfectly conceivable, indeed perhaps even likely, that the individual polemics were later related to contemporary schools. This still needs to be clarified.”

8 Caution is always appropriate when using commentaries, but perhaps Frauwallner exaggerates the problem. By the time the commentary was written, some of the schools may have been extinct, and their positions and tenets no longer living options. In the Sarvāstivādin *sūtra* literature, where the evolution of ideas is somewhat clearer due to the wealth of relatively dateable texts, we see that the same arguments are rehearsed for centuries. We might suspect that the debates became internalized, indeed ossified, within the school, and that the refinements were not for the benefit of the perpetually misguided opponents, but for the members of the school, to reassure themselves that their own positions were correct. But by “members,” I refer only to those monastics who engaged in scholarly pursuits, and not to the general monastic membership. These were not dogmas to which the laity or even the monks and nuns were obliged to adhere, but rather the deliberations of influential scholastics. Some medieval Indian debates are enacted to this day in the courtyards of Tibetan monasteries.
The accessible Viḥārā literature consists of three texts, or recensions, preserved only in Chinese (that is, no Sanskrit versions or Tibetan translations survive). The Viḥārakūtas are treatises of views, citations, and debates. Proponents and opponents are often identified, and the arguments can be quite elaborate. There are also doxographic compendia of tenets, preserved in Chinese and Tibetan, such as the *Samayabheda Viḥāra (Ch. *Yi bu zong lun lun*), *Gzüñ legs kyi bey brag bWood pa* (*'khor lo*, P no. 5639) by Vasumitra (second century CE?), the oldest such work to survive. Later examples are a section of the fourth chapter of Bhāviveka’s *Tarkajñāla*, which circulated independently under the title *Nikāyabheda viḥāragyāvyāhyāna* (Tib. *Sde pa tha dad pa byed pa dan ram par btsad pa*, P no. 5640, sixth century?), and the *Samayabheda-Prasangakrama-nikāyabheda-padasaranasamgraha* (Tib. *Gzüñ tha dad pa rim par kag pa* (*'khor lo las sde pa tha dad pa bstan pa bsdus pa zhes bya ba*, P no. 5641) of Vinñādeva (eighth century). These compendia describe the evolution of the Buddhist schools and inventory their characteristic views; no attempt is made to refute or deny the views in question. I am not convinced that we understand the purpose of these texts. Were they reference works, simple doxographies? Were they crammers for monastic courses on comparative Buddhism? Or were they handbooks for training in debate?

Several studies have examined the question of authenticity within Indian Buddhism on the normative level, using a set of criteria shared by the early Buddhist samghas. These are the mahāpādāsa or “great authorities.” These criteria glimpse back at the age of oral transmission and the formative period of the scriptural collections. The relevance and meaning of the criteria would have changed after the compilation and writing down of the distinct scriptural collections of the different schools—that is, by the first century BCE to the first centuries CE. Nonetheless, the mahāpādāsa have continued to be applied in the scrutiny of ideas or texts in exegesis or debate, from the time of the *Nettipakarana* (early centuries CE?) to that of Vasubandhu and Buddhaghosa (fourth–fifth centuries?) to that of Haribhadra (ninth century) and Prajñākaramati (fl. second half of the tenth century), up to the present.13

Since the late nineteenth century, Western scholars have tended to use the Pāli scriptures as the touchstone of authenticity. This is problematic. The idea that Pāli texts are the oldest and most authentic is modern; it is a product of Western philological and text-comparative methodologies. The claims put forward by the Mahāvihāra in texts composed in Sri Lanka (the *Dīpavamsa* and the *Aṭṭhakathās*) follow a different logic, which one might describe as genealogical: the Mahāvihāra is the original, unsullied vinaya lineage and as such it possesses, inherently and by right, the true texts.14 The common contemporaneous designation of Theravāda as the oldest school, as the sole representative of “original,” “primitive” or “early” Buddhism is not pertinent to the concept of authenticity from the viewpoint of the North Indian schools. The Mahāvihāra’s claims do not directly impinge on the self-representation of the North Indian schools, for whom the Stāvīras, insofar as they were known at all, were only one of eighteen schools, and not, apparently, an especially prominent one.15 But the claims, ideas, and evolution of the Mahāvihāra school are certainly relevant to the textual and intellectual history of Indian Buddhism, and this essay examines some

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14 I prefer the term “Mahāvihāra” to “Theravāda.” In the vast oceans of Buddhist scriptures, including those composed in Pāli, and including chronicles and inscriptions, the term Theravāda is a rather rare fish. The school that we know today, which performs its rites and liturgies in a language which has come to be called Pāli, was codified primarily by Buddhaghosa in fifth-century Sri Lanka at the Mahāvihāra. The opening stanzas of the Pāli commentaries—the defining texts of the tradition—identify themselves as representing Mahāvihāra thought; Buddhaghosa states further that his selective translations and reworkings of the old Sinhala commentaries do not contradict the tenets of the Theras, and that they illuminate the lineages or heritage of the Theras (*samaṇa avilōṣṭa therānam theravamsappaddham: preamble to his commentaries on Dhūka-, Majjhima-, Samyutta-, and Anguttara-nikāyas*). That is, “Theravāda” and “Mahāvihāra” are not coeval. Neither term denotes a constant or monolithic tradition; see especially Endo 2003, Endo 2008, Endo 2009 for the intricacies of the Indian–Sīhāla–Pāli conundrums.

Furthermore, we know very little about the traditions of the other branches of Sri Lankan Theravāda—the Abhayagiri and Jetavanaya schools—and the relations between the Sri Lankan Theravāda and the Viḥāravāda of the mainland remain obscure. For the latter, see Cousins 2001. The Gāndhārī equivalent of Viḥāravāda (Vivaravāda) occurs in the polemical manuscript BL 28: Cox 2010.

15 For the problem of the presence and identity of the Indian Stāvīras, see Skilling 1993.
of these ideas in comparison with those of the great Northern school, the 
Sarvāstivāda.

Modern scholarship has also addressed the question of authenticity with 
regard to the Śrāvakā schools and the Mahāyāna, almost inevitably with 
the received idea that “Śrāvaka” (or “Hinayāna”) equals “Theravāda,” and 
that the Pāli texts must necessarily be older and more complete. The situation 
was, however, much more complex. Neither Śrāvakayāna nor Mahāyāna 
was a monolith. The Mahāvihāra was only one agent among many, and most 
of the important Mahāyāna śūtras and śāstras predate the defining literature 
of the Mahāvihāra—the works of the prolific Buddhaghosa—by centuries. 
The Mahāyāna was a dynamic interplay of competing streams of thought: 
the history of Indian Buddhism was never a simple, two-way contest. Not 
only must we consider the relations between the various schools and the 
Mahāyāna on the level of ideas, we must remember that the monks who 
practised Mahāyāna took Śrāvaka vows, and shared the same monasteries 
with their fellow ordinands. Above all, we should not forget that those who 
practised Mahāyāna accepted the Śrāvaka Pītakas. They followed one or 
the other vinaya, they studied and recited śūtras, and they studied the abhi-
dharmas. They did not reject the Śrāvaka Pītakas: they were the word of the 
Buddha. The differences lay in questions of interpretation and emphasis, 
of ontology and epistemology—the subtleties of nēyārtha and nītārtha, of 
vatharūta, abhisamādhi and abhiprāya, of samvrti and paramārtha.16

II. Authority and Language

I do not mean to imply that language has no bearing upon the problem of 
authenticity in India. To do so would be absurd—language and interpreta-
tions of language are, one might suggest, natural troublemakers. The point 
is that, in South Asia, language(s) played roles quite different from that 
which it (they) played in China or Tibet. Lamotte counts “the formation of 
Buddhist languages” as one of the two most remarkable accomplishments 
of Buddhist monastics during the three centuries leading up to the Christian 
Era (the second is “the progress in Abhidharma”).17 His evaluation seems 
all the more pertinent in the light of the new varieties of Buddhist Sanskrit 
evident in the manuscripts of the Schøyen Collection and the revelations of 
the riches of Buddhist Gāndhāri literature.18

16 See Ruegg 1989.
18 For the continually expanding horizons of Gāndhāri literature, see Allon 2008, Salomon 

In both textual transmission and ritual practice (performance of 
karmavāhya), language mattered. The (probably) eighth-century North 
Indian scholar Śākyaprabha (representing a Sarvāstivādin tradition) and 
the later Tibetan polymaths Bu-ston (1290–1364) and Tāranātha (1575– 
1635) hold that the use of regional dialects affected the transmission of the 
buddhavacana from an early date, starting from the second century 
after the Parinirvāna, and that this led to the birth of the various schools.19 
According to the (probably) eighth-century vinaya specialist Vinītadeva, 
the eighteen orders arose from distinctions in region (deśa), interpretation 
(artha), and teachers (ācārya).20 Does this mean that there were eighteen 
different languages? Given that most of the collections are lost, it is impos-
sible to count the languages used. By the beginning of the Christian Era, 
the register of languages already went far beyond the four Indic languages 
of the North to be listed below. The Sarvāstivādin and Mālasarvāstivādin 
vinayas and the Vībhāṣās relate how the Buddha explained the Four Truths 
of the Noble to each of the Four Great Kings in his own language, bringing 
each one to realize the state of stream-enterer.21 Two of the languages 
were Āryan, and two non-Indo-European: a Dravidian language and Mlecha—
the myth indicates the wide sweep of the North Indian Buddhist linguistic 
imagination. By the eleventh century, taking into account dialects, vernacu-
ulars, translations, and archaic and later forms of languages, the statement 
made in the Vimalaprabhā Laghuḥālacakratantrarājā-liṅga that “even 96 
languages are said to be found in Buddhist texts” may not have been far 
off.22 As Lamotte remarks, “Exaggerations and anachronisms apart, the 
Vimalaprabhā at least has the merit of drawing attention to the multiplicity 
of Buddhist languages, and this is confirmed by manuscripts found in 
Central Asia.”23

19 For Śākyaprabha, see Obermiller 1931–32, part 2, p. 98; Vogel 1985, p. 106 (skad tha 
dad bya 'don par); for Bu-ston, see Obermiller 1931–32, part 2, p. 96; Vogel 1985, p. 105; 
Yuyama 1980, p. 177. For Tāranātha, see Schieffer 1868, p. 42; Schieffer 1869, p. 52; 
Chattopadhyaya 1980, p. 81.
20 *Samayabhodoparanacakra-nikṣayabhodopadarśanasangrāha* (Gshung thag pa rim par klag pa'i 'khor lo las de pa tha pa bstan pa bsdu pa, P vol. 127, no. 5641, folio 187b7: yul don slob dpön 'bya brag gis, tha dad rnam pa bco bgyod gsum).
21 See Lamotte 1958, pp. 608–9 and Hōbōgirin, s.v. “buttsoo” (vol. 3, pp. 207–9). Also 
relevent to the Buddha’s speech is Hōbōgirin, s.v. “buttun” (vol. 3, pp. 215–17).
22 von Hünber 1989, p. 361. The reference is to Shaṅkara 1917, p. 77.
23 Lamotte 1958, p. 614 (translation, Lamotte 1988, p. 556). In the Ganseng zhuan (高僧传), 
the early translator Dharmarakṣa is said to have studied and mastered thirty-six languages. 
This may be a figure of speech, a stock Chinese phrase, but it underlines the importance 
of linguistic skills (see Shih 1968, p. 34).
The language used by an order or school was a key component of the package that constituted its identity. By the medieval period, North Indian tradition described what we now might call “monastic Buddhism” in terms of “the four nikāyas,” which subsumed the eighteen bhedas. These were:26

Sarvāstivāda, who used Sanskrit;
Mahāsāṃghika, who used Prakrit;
Sāṃmitiya, who used Apabhraṃśa;27
Sthavira, who used Paścāti.

In the latter part of the seventh century, Yijing (635–713) reported that:

As for the division into various Nikāyas (schools), according to the Western (Indian) tradition, there are only four great systems.

With regard to their appearance and disappearance, and the diversity of their names, there is no agreement on such matters.28

Thus it is that in the five parts of India and in the islands in the South Seas, four Nikāyas are spoken of everywhere.29

Each of the four schools had its own collections of scriptures.30 A stereotyped description listed some of their distinctive features in addition to language: caste, style of robe, etc. These are deemed to mark the identity of the four nikāyas, but there is no hard corroborative evidence for the latter feature. The fourfold classification had circulated widely, largely in the North, by the second half of the first millennium, probably in Mūlasarvāstivādin circles; its origins need further research. The classification completely ignores Gândhāri as a nikāya language, along with the Dharmaaguptakas or related schools of the Northwest, for which we have increasing early evidence in the form of inscriptions and, especially, Kharoṣṭhī birch-bark scrolls. Does this suggest that the Gândhāri traditions had already waned, or that they had died out by the time the fourfold grouping was codified? Or is it simply a question of geographical prejudice—for the schools of Madhyadese—or of ignorance?

The texts available to us do not make any judgments regarding authenticity on the basis of language or any other factor. Can it be that, at that time, the schools had been assimilated by the Mūlasarvāstivāda? Was the interpretation of the term Mūlasarvāstivāda as “Sarvāstivāda, the root of all Buddhist schools” simply a strategy, a claim, with no historical reality?31 Or was it—at least in the great Northern monasteries—a fact, accepted by the surviving schools? Did competition continue until the demise of monastic Buddhism, or was there accommodation and cooperation?

It is noteworthy that of the Indo-Nepalese manuscripts available today, only those of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottarāvādins specify their school and language.32 No other Indic Buddhist manuscript, whether sūtra, vinaya, or abhidharma, saw fit to supply this information (the same is true for the Pāli manuscripts of Sri Lanka and South-East Asia). When we describe the Sanskrit vinaya recovered from Gilgit as “the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya,” or the Turfan manuscripts as “Sarvāstivādin,” we should remember that we are voicing hypotheses. The manuscripts do not identify themselves, and it might be safer to speak of manuscripts by their find-spots or present locations as the “Gilgit vinaya,” etc. Only certain translations into Tibetan or Chinese specify the school of the text. To what degree are modern conclusions regarding the school affiliation of texts based on secondary literary and epigraphical evidence? To what degree do they correspond to genuine textual identities?

There is no question that partisans of the Mahāyāna had a flexible attitude towards the use of language. For a bodhisattva, “skill in the analytical knowledge of languages” (prakṛtipratisamvid) is the ability to explain the Dharma in every conceivable language. The Aṣṭasātyamatinirdeśa explains:

24 For “the Buddhist languages” see Lamotte 1958, pp. 607–57 and von Hinüber 1989, passim.
25 It seems that nikāya meant the mainstream school, bheda its divisions.
26 All sources agree that the Sarvāstivāda, the school that concerns us here, employed Sanskrit. See Yuyama 1980, pp. 175–81; Vogel 1985; Ruegg 1985. For further details see Skilling forthcoming (b).
27 For a note on the language of the Sāṃmitiyas, see Thích Thiên Châu 1999, pp. 31–32, and, more recently, Hanisch 2006. It is likely that, in these sources, Apabhraṃśa refers to an earlier Prakrit, an “imperfect” language (compared to the perfect language, Sanskrit) rather than the later Indian dialect.
28 We might reflect on this when, one thousand three hundred years later, we set out in quest of absolute answers.

31 I refer here to the conclusions of Enomoto Fumio (a theory first published in Japanese as Enomoto 1998): “the word ‘Mūlasarvāstivādin’ does not refer to a branch/affliation of ‘Sarvāstivādin’ nor a sect independent from ‘Sarvāstivādin’” (Enomoto 2000, p. 248).

Herein, what is niruktipratisamvid? It is understanding the language of all sentient beings, that is, understanding the language of gods, the language of nāgas, the language of yakṣas, of gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, mahoragas, humans, and non-humans. In sum, insofar as there is language, words, speech, ways of speech, expression, convention, linguistic practice of beings born in the five destinies, he understands them all. Understanding them, with these or those words, with these or those expressions, he teaches the Dharma to these or those beings in accordance with their speech. This is niruktipratisamvid.33

Mahāyāna śāstraṅkaras—Candrakirti and Śāntideva, for example—cite texts in various forms of Buddhist Sanskrit. Śāntideva and the author of the commentary on the Ratnagotrabhūṣāṇa cite brief excerpts in Pāli—or a language very close to what we now call Pāli—from texts that are unknown to the Mahāvihāra collections available today. Linguistic variety was an accepted reality.

III. Māgadhī: The Root-Language

Someone who is born in an uninhabited great wilderness, where no one speaks it, will on his own naturally speak nothing but the language of Māgadhā. In hell, in the animal world, in the peta realm, in the world of men, in the world of gods, the language of Māgadhā is pre-eminent.... When the correctly and fully awakened Buddha delivered the texts of the buddhavacana of the Tipiṭaka, he delivered them in the language of Māgadhā alone. Why? Because this made it easy to communicate the meaning.

Buddhaghosa, Vibhanga-atṭhakathā34

Language looms large in Mahāvihāra definitions of canonicity, and a theory promoted in the works of Buddhaghosa asserts not only that Pāli equals Māgadhī, the language spoken by the Buddha, but that it is the root-language (mūlabhāsa)—the natural language, the root of all languages. Such a claim appears to be unique in Buddhist tradition to the Mahāvihāra, or more accurately to Buddhaghosa (and it certainly runs against the sentiment of the Aṣṭasāhasrikaṇḍa). What inspired it? Does it seek to counter Brahmanical assertions about the status of Sanskrit,35 or to counter Jaina theories about Ardhamāgadhī?36 Or is it a dialogue with other Buddhist schools?37 Buddhaghosa, who in the fifth century spearheaded the movement to privilege “Māgadhī” over all other languages, gives several reasons for translating (or rather rewriting) the commentaries into Māgadhī.

Before looking at Buddhaghosa’s explanations, we should note another concept unique to the Mahāvihāra: that in addition to the buddhavacana, the commentaries were recited at the three Councils, and that these were brought to Lanka by the arhat Mahinda, the son of Asoka. The idea that commentaries also deserve the seal of authenticity of the early councils has not been traced in any of the Indian schools, and even the term “atthaṅkathā” (or its hypothetical Sanskrit equivalent, *atthakathā) is so far unattested outside of the Mahāvihāra tradition. Sanskrit commentaries, described variously as pīkā, vyākhyā, vyākhyāna, vivarana, etc., are ascribed to historical authors who lived after the death of the Tathāgata.

Buddhaghosa presents the conceptual lineage of the commentaries in the verse preambles to his great commentaries on the four main sūtra collections:

33 Aṣṭasāhasrikaṇḍa (Braarvig 1993, vol. 1, p. 112): de la nē pa’ī tśhīg so so yān dag par rīg pa gān že nā’i gān sems can thams cu kyi skad la ‘jug pa sēs pa sče: thā’i skad dān, kh‘i skad dān, gno dbyin gnyi skad dān, gnyi dza dān, thā ma yin dān, nam mkha’ ldi‘ dān, mī’i am ci dān, līt phye chag po dān, mī dān, mī ma yin pa’i skad la ‘jug po sče, mdo rna ji shes du ‘gro bar bhar skyes pa’i sams can rnam kyi skad dān, sgra dān, dbyangs dān, tshig gi dam dān, nes pa’i tshig dān, brda’ dān, snyed pa’i jī shes pa, de dag thams cu rad tu tses te. Tses nas kyis sgra de dān de dag dān, nes pa’tshig de dān de dag gis sams can de dān de dag la sgra ji la ba bā san du ‘jug pa chos ston te. ‘dī mī nes pa’i tshig so so yān dag par rīg pa gān že lla’o. For translation and commentary, see Braarvig 1993, vol. 2, pp. 431–32. See also Pagel 1995, p. 363; Mahāyāna-sūtraśāstra (Lēvi 1907–11, vol. 1, chap. 18, v. 34, p. 139.1: tīṃ tsvi smokers japaṃsūya vā bhūṣāṭ.34 Vibhanga-atṭhakathā, pp. 387.33–388.8: yo pi gūṃmane mahā-araṇe nibbato, yath‘a ath‘a katho nāma matti, so pi uttana dharmamāya vacanam samanupāyento māgadhāhāsas eva bhūṣṣāt. niranye tiroschāyānyam pātivyāvāya maṅgulasākṣa devatek ni sabbattita māgadhahāsakā vau mānaṇā ... samāsakānādhi pī ṭepikākām buddhavacananam tanāṁ āśreṇa māgadhāhāsāya eva ārpopi. kāsam, evam hi attham āhukino sukham hoti. Cf. also Mahāvihārerādhi Ādhyātma-kāṇḍa-atthavacanā, p. 186.11: sabbavairītī hi ca māgadhākā śātā.

35 In the Spitzer manuscript, “the truthfulness of the Buddha’s word” is questioned because of the fact that it is in Prakrīt (prākritavād antam buddhavacananam). The text is fragmentary, but “the argument obviously presupposes that one can speak correctly and truthfully only in Sanskrit” (Francq 2004, p. 93). The context is not clear to me, but the opponent seems to be brahmānical rather than Buddhist.

36 For a Śvetāmbara description of Mahāvīra’s preaching, see Lalwani 1988, pp. 177–79. For aspects of Jaina attitudes to language, see Granoff 1991; Dundas 1992, pp. 60–61; and Dundas 1996. The Jaina theories, including the Digambara dhiyavahana theory, do not provide direct parallels to the mūlabhāsa theory (see Dundas 1996, pp. 140–42).

37 Surviving North Indian Buddhist literature does not seem to be aware of the mūlabhāsa theory.
At [the] First [Council], the five hundred arhats
Recited the commentaries to illuminate the meaning.
Later [at the Second and Third Councils], they were recited again.
Brought to the Isle of the Sihalas by the arhat Mahāmāhīna
They were translated into the Sihala language for the benefit of
the islanders.

Thus the first stage was to make the commentaries—which had been
imported from India and were recited in Māgadhī (remember that at this
stage transmission was oral)—available to the inhabitants. The next stage,
over five hundred years later, was to translate them back into Māgadhī from
written sources. Why was this necessary?
Buddhaghosa’s preamble continues:

Then I, rendering them from Sihala into the delightful language,
Following the principles of the scriptures, without fault,
Not contradicting the tenets of the Elders, illuminators of the
Elders’ lineage,
Whose interpretations are meticulous, the residents of the Great
Monastery,
Eliminating repetitions, will illuminate the meaning
For the satisfaction of good people and for the long life of
the Dhamma.

Here, the great scholar does not name the language into which he has ren-
dered the commentaries, but he does give two reasons why he has done this:
to please good people, and to preserve the teachings. Both of these are
universal motivations for the production of Buddhist literature, anywhere
and at any time, and hence they do not tell us much. In the verse preamble
to his commentary on the vipāka, however, Buddhaghosa is more specific:

38 Dīghanikāya-āthakathā, vol. 1, p. 1, vv. 6–7: athāppakāsamattanatham āṭṭhakathā bhūta
vatisatehi, paṭecihi yā sāngā ca asasaṅgā ca cacehi, pi sīhalādīpam pana āṭṭhātātha
vasti mahāmāhīna, ṭhapāla sīhalabhāsya dipavāsanaṃ atīhāya. The same verses are
given at the beginning of the Majjhima-, Sānāvutta-, and Aṅguttara-nikāya-āṭṭhakathās. For
a translation from the Majjhimañikāya-āṭṭhakathā, see Jayawickrama 2003, pp. 73–74.
For the “introductory sections” in general, see Edo 2009.

39 Dīghanikāya-āṭṭhakathā, vol. 1, p. 1, vv. 8–10: aparanvā tato hi sīhalabhāsā
manoramam bhūsaṃ, tantavāya ucchavāya uropeto vijñato bhūsaṃ. sānāvāya avilomto
therānam theravassupādīnōn, tantavāya ucchavāya mahāvihārādāvānaṃ. hirvā
pamucchāpātaṃ attho hi avilom pakāsāyissi, sūjana-puta eva tathāthaṃ cirothithatthaka
do dhānassasa. The same verses are given at the beginning of the Majjhima-, Sānāvutta-, and
Aṅguttara-nikāya-āṭṭhakathās.

Owing to the fact that the hermeneutic tradition [of the
Mahāvihāra]
Has been composed in the language of the Isle of Sīhala
The meaning is not accessible
To communities of monks in other lands.
Therefore, I now undertake this exegesis
Which accords with the principles of the Canon.

That is, the production of the Pāli commentaries, a massive project, was
undertaken with a view to making the Mahāvihāra tradition available inter-
nationally, though what “communities of monks in other lands” Buddhaghosa
had in mind remains unknown. More work is needed to understand
the social and historical factors that drove this ideological expansion. If
Buddhaghosa came from India to Sri Lanka, as tradition has it, it was inter-
national to begin with, and if some commentaries were written by natives
or residents of South India (Dhammapāla in Badaratiṇhi, for example),
the movement seems to represent a revival, a renaissance of the Mahāvihāra—
but the degree to which it was an innovation in the name of a revered insti-
tution remains to be seriously investigated. In any case, the adherents of
the Mahāvihāra certainly succeeded in realizing some of the goals stated by
Buddhaghosa. Good people as well as scholars (the two terms are not nec-
essarily mutually exclusive) enjoy the satisfaction of reading texts in Pāli,
which have been well-preserved, and the Mahāvihāra tradition, long estab-
lished in Sri Lanka and South-East Asia, is growing in Nepal and India, and
it is evolving in the West, where “Theravāda Buddhism” competes with
“Tibetan Buddhism,” “Zen,” and other Buddhism in the global market of
religions. Today, the Pāli language is studied academically beyond its tradi-
tional “homelands” of Sri Lanka and South-East Asia—in India, Nepal,
China, Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, often as part of an impetus towards "Early Buddhism." These accomplishments are remarkable, especially when we consider that the other seventeen schools eventually died out (with the exception of the Sarvāstivādin and Dhamaguptaka vinaya lineages, still active in Tibet and East Asia, respectively).

The concern to promote Pāli was largely, I believe, monastic: to firmly establish a coherent body of texts for the maintenance and expansion of the vinaya lineage. If it is true that "a later Vinaya regulation . . . specifies that legal transactions of the Order had to be performed in correctly pronounced Pāli to be valid,"42 it is only natural, if not inevitable, that this should be the case for a single monastic lineage, in this case, that of the Mahāvihāra. Communal rites and recitations have to be performed in a single language. As in a formal meeting anywhere, members must agree on a common language, common rules, and common procedures. There is nothing mystical about this; it is a matter of survival.

But does this mean that Mahāvihārins rejected other vinaya traditions entirely? Or did they recognize the validity of other lineages who recited texts in other languages, and accept them as fellow, at times rival, organizations? Our understanding of nikāya to nikāya relations and exchanges in India is, to put it mildly, inadequate. We know that, at least at Nalanda, different nikāyas lived side by side, but questions remain: did the members of the different orders follow a common curriculum? Did they perform samghakarma together? But if so, how? Did each active nikāya have its own ritual space (simha)? Was there tension and conflict, and if so, over what ideas or practices?43

In the verse preamble to the Jātaka commentary, the author (the or a Buddhaghosa according to later tradition) states that he was requested to compose the work by three monks: Atthadassī, Buddhāmita, and Buddhadeva. He describes Buddhāmita as "peaceful in mind, wise, belonging to the Mahāpiśāca-vamsa, and adept in principles of exegesis."44 The author belongs to the Mahāvihāra, but describes Buddhāmita with respect. Can the author’s use of the term vamsa for the Mahāpiśāca tradition have any significance? Can it imply acceptance of the order as a valid lineage going back to the Buddha?

43 One relevant conflict is mentioned below, the problem of an ordained monastic paying homage to a bhikṣu bhūṁi.
44 Jātaka, vol. 1, p. 1, vv. 89a–9ab: satth’ eva buddhāmitthaṃ santacittena vihīnā, mahāpiśācavamsaṃhi sambhūtena na vikētanā.

IV. Authority and Authorship

The Great Śrāmaṇa Gautama, the Lion of the Śākyas, the Ten-Powered One, travelled and taught in the region of Magadha for forty-five years. His life was devoted to teaching, "for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, for the benefit and happiness of gods and humans." This teaching was entirely oral, through discussion, debate, and sermon, and it spread by word of mouth for several centuries and over a vast area. The Sage of the Śākyas never took stylus, brush or pen in hand, but hundreds of thousands of pages have been written, calligraphed, and printed in his name.

How should we—limiting ourselves to the Śrāvaka texts—conceive the question of authorship? The Tripitakas are the collective work of teams of editors or samghitikāras (known in Pāli by the same name or as dhammasamghātaka).45 It was the samghitikāra who supplied the setting and connecting narrative, and their contributions to the formation of the Tripitakas are explicitly acknowledged by tradition, for example in the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya and in the Mahāvihāra commentaries. The stratigraphy of the editorial process can sometimes be distinguished, for example in the Lalitavistāra, where there are abrupt changes of voice, or in the Mahāvastu, with its duplicated and interrupted texts. The Tripitakas are certified as genuine buddhavacana because they have been passed down through a succession of communal recitations (saṅgītis). The saṅgīti is the pedigree of the Tripitakas.

The fact that the narrative was produced by samghitikāras did not diminish its authority. On the one hand, the narrative was the vessel for the precious buddhavacana; on the other, the samghitikāras who participated in the earliest councils were believed to be all arhats. That is, the product—the Buddha’s words—was packaged by an elect elite (and further guaranteed by their prajñāhāna). What could be more authoritative? The whole text, the buddhavacana in its narrative setting, was imbued with power and came to be recited to bring blessings, prosperity, and protection.

45 See Skilling 2009.
The **samghas** were never regulated by a central authority, and as they spread throughout the subcontinent and beyond, new texts were produced and claims of scriptural authenticity multiplied. Questions of authority and authorship already surface in canonical collections, for example in the *Aṅguttarayā-sūtra*. In the Pāli version, the Buddha warns of five “future perils, not yet arisen, which will come to be in the future.” The fourth peril concerns monks “who have not cultivated the body; who have not cultivated morality; who have not cultivated the mind; who have not cultivated wisdom” (abhāvītipātā bhavānīpātā bhavānīpātā, “When suttas expounded by the Tataṅgata, profound and of deep significance, transcending the world, dealing with emptiness are recited, they will not want to listen; they will not lend an ear or take interest, and will not think to retain or fulfill such teachings” (ye te suttantā tathāgatabhāsāta gamhīrā gambhīrīta lokuttarā suññatāpajñāsanyātā tesu bhānāmānesu na susussantā na sotam odahissantā na anātissatā upātthāpesantu, na ca te dhamme uggahetabbaṃ pariyāpātītabbaṃ mānissantā). Instead, they will be interested in “suttas composed by poets—verses intricately worded and elegantly phrased—that belong to outsiders, that are spoken by authors” (ye pana te suttantā kavikāta kāveyya cittakkhāvā cittiyayājanā bahirākā sāvakabḥāsāta).47

In an early Mahāyāna samādhi āśrama, the Pratyuppanna-buddha-samkhyāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra (hereafter Pratyuppanna-buddha-sūtra), the Buddha speaks about “beings who do not wish to hear this samādhi, and who will reject this samādhi” [6B].48 He warns of future monks and bodhisattvas “who have not cultivated the body; who have not cultivated morality; who have not cultivated wisdom” and who are among others, “frightened by the exposition of emptiness.”

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48 Parallel phrases occur at the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, vol. 1, pp. 72.26, 73.8, and the *Samaṅganiyākāya*, vol. 2, p. 267.6. A Sanskrit parallel from a list of sounds or topics to which a disciple of the Buddha abstains from listening in the Gilgit śāstra (Gnoli 1978, p. 235.18) is kavāttāvive taṅkāvāvive taṅkāpanvāvye. See also the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasīrīkā Prājñāpāramitā* (Dutt 1934, p. 158.4–5: nātā tathāgatanānātā smāyasmambuddhena bhāṣam iti kavikārya etāti kāveyyā nātārāḥ svātātāḥ svātātāḥ) and the *Aṣṭasahasīrīkā Prājñāpāramitā* (Nālak 1961b, p. 169.29–30: yad etat tvaṇḍināṃ śrutiṃ nātād buddhavicayam, kavikāryam kāveyyām etat, yad punar idam ahāṃ bhūṣe, etad buddhabhāṣāṃ etad buddhavicayam iti)

49 Harrison 1978 and Harrison 1990. References in brackets are to sections in the Harisson's edition and translation. I describe the text as “early” because of the “early” Chinese translation by Lokâkṣaṇa, but the distinction is somewhat arbitrary. For “samādhi sūtras,” see Skilling 2010, especially pp. 216–17.

50 When the *Pratyuppanna-buddha-sūtra* is being expounded, they “will not give ear to it or listen to it, will not have faith in it, nor accept, master, keep, or read it” [6D]. They will deride and denounce it, saying, “sūtras like this are fabrications, they are poetic inventions; they were not spoken by the Buddha” [6E], or the *Pratyuppanna-buddha-sūtra* is “something which was not spoken by the Buddha, which is a poetic invention of their own fabrication, a conglomeration of words and syllables’ uttered merely in conversation”[6H].

If it is clear that the two texts draw upon a common phraseological source, it is equally evident that they apply the phraseology to their own ends. Buddhaghosa’s interpretation, oddly enough, takes the passage to refer to texts that are not Buddhist at all: he interprets bahirākā as “set up outside the sāsana” and sāvakabhāsāta as “spoken by disciples of outsiders.”51 I am not certain what he intends by this. The concepts of “outside” (bahiddā) and “outsider” (bahirākā)—rhetorical devices of exclusion, figures of alienation—in early Buddhist texts merit examination, but this lies beyond the agenda of this over-inflated article. Remembering that the pronouncement is a prediction, one might interpret “suttas expounded by the Tataṅgata” as the texts of one’s own Tripiṭaka—for Buddhaghosa, the Mahāvihāra canon—and the “suttas composed by poets” as the “fabrications” of other Śrāvakas and of the Mahāyāna. In the *Pratyuppanna-buddha-sūtra*, it is a Mahāyāna tract—the *Pratyuppanna-buddha-sūtra* itself—that is authentic, but its authenticity is challenged by ill-trained “monks and bodhisattvas.”52

51 *Aṅguttara-āṭṭakathā*, vol. 3, p. 272.16–17: bahirākā ‘tī sāsanaṃ bahiddhā īttā sāvakabhāsāta iti bahirāvāsakhe bhūṣāta. In the Mahāvihāra tradition, the trope of non-Buddhists, in this case the titīvihār or aṭṭha-titīvihār, is brought in to explain the state of the *samgha* that led to the convocation of the Third Council. This simply doesn’t work, with the result that the account of the council is exceptionally weak. It is interesting that the *Mahāyāna-sūtravālapāka* exposes the fallacy of such a trope in its defense of the Mahāyāna: can this show an awareness, if not of the relevant Mahāvihāra texts (the Mahāyāna-Sūtravālapāka is, after all, older than the Pāli *Aṭṭakathā*) but of the use of this argument by opponents of the Mahāyāna? For the argument, see Davidson 1990, p. 309.

52 That the *āṭṭa* is questioned not only by monks in general but also by bodhisattvas is intriguing. It seems to lift the debate beyond a simple Śrāvakavyāna/Bodhisattvavyāna conflict.
The idea of future threats to the Śāsana was an enduring concern, mentioned as early as the Bairā-Calcutta (or Bhābrā) inscription of Asoka. The Mahāyāna-sūtraśāntaka (or Mahāyāna-sūtraśāntaka) invokes the Buddha's predictions of future perils in its defence of the Mahāyāna: “If [the Mahāyāna] were to arise in the future as a threat to the Saddharma... why did the Blessed One not predict this from the start, as [he did for] the future perils?”53 The argument rests on the idea that the Buddha would have foreseen and predicted the arising of Mahāyāna, had this been a real danger—therefore, since he did not, Mahāyāna thought and practice are not threats to the “established order” of Buddhism. What are we to make, then, of the Blessed One’s prediction in the Anguttara-nikāya, that in future his profound sūtras would be ignored in favor of later literary compositions? This is clearly an anticipation—we can interpret “predictions” as statements of contemporary concerns—of the problem posed by “non-authentic” texts, but, as we have seen, in the absence of any central authority, the trope could be, and was, exploited to differing ends. The Mahāyāna-sūtraśāntaka argument seems to explicitly ignore, or to deny, any identification of the future threats with the Mahāyāna.

V. Vasubandhu and the Varieties of Textual Expression

The Eye of the World—the Teacher—has closed;
Most of those who saw him with their own eyes have died.
Stoical thinkers, unscrupulous, who have not seen the truth
Have left the Jāsana in turmoil.
Vasubandhu, Abhidharmakosa

Modern scholarship has often assumed that the canonical sūtra literature of the various Śrāvakā schools should be broadly similar. Did not the influential schools—Sārśūtivāda, Theravāda, Mahāsāṅghika, Mahāsāsaka, Dharmaguptaka—construct their collections according to similar principles? By length (Dīrgha-, Madhyama-), by subject or theme (Samyuktas), by numerical classification (Ekottarika-), and by genre (verse, jātaka, narrative)?55 Do not the schools share many of the same sūtras? The Samgiti


54 Abhidharmakośa, chap. 8, v. 41: nimmilī śāstara lokakāsaṁ, ṛṣeyate gate sākṣajana ca hityaṁ, adṛṣṭatvādavā memśvag ratīṁ, kutārkaśā śāsanam etad akalam (Vasumāvatīsūtras meter).

55 For details and further examples, see Lamotte 1958, p. 168ff.

and Śrāmanekapahala-sūtras, for example, are known in Pāli, Sanskrit, and Gāndhārī versions, and in several Chinese translations. Many other sūtras may be compared in any number of versions. Lamotte went so far as to aver that “it can be said that, on the whole, the various Buddhist schools used an identical Sūtrapitaka and several similar Vinayapitakas.”56 Before that, La Vallée Poussin had come to the conclusion that, “judging by the literature that has come down to us, or of which we have some indication, the numerous branches of the [monastic] community, distinguished by local legends, practices, dialect, and all sorts of priorities, did not, from a broad perspective, have more than a single canon,” but he qualified this in a footnote that did justice to the intricacy of the question.57

I wonder whether the available materials are sufficient to make such claims. In the fourth century CE, Vasubandhu assessed the condition of the literature of the schools and found it problematic. The “original recitation” (mūlasaṅgiti) was no longer intact; different schools arranged their canons differently and included or excluded sūtras differently.58 In the Vīkhāyāyukti and the Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa, Vasubandhu notes that at his time not all the sūtras were preserved.59 The implications of mūlasaṅgitiḥcaśramita are fundamental to Vasubandhu’s thought. He discusses the problem in detail in his Vīkhāyāyukti—in his incisive critique of the very idea of a perfect buddhavacana—and in passing in his other works.60

By the second century CE, the Vībhāṣā had already reported that certain texts survived only in reduced form, or were entirely lost, even if some of the claims sound exaggerated:

57 La Vallée Poussin 1925b, pp. 22–23 and n. 1, p. 23.
58 The term mūlasaṅgiti seems rare. It is used in Pāli in the very interesting colophon of the Nettipakarana: “At this point the Netti—which was spoken by the venerable Mahākaccāna, which was endorsed by the Blessed One, and which was recited at the original recitation—is completed” (p. 193.1–2: etatā eva samātta neti āyasmantu mahākaccānena bhāsita bhagavato anuvastito mūlasaṅgitiḥ samāttaḥ). The colophon states explicitly that the Netti was spoken by Mahākaccāna during the lifetime of the Buddha, who “rejoiced in” it—approved— it, and that it was recited at the First Council.
59 Lamotte 1936, § 37b (p. 200): “The Vīkhāyāyukti has demonstrated that ‘Today, the complete [corpus of] sūtras is no longer extant’,” and therefore one cannot deny the store-consciousness, ālayaparipāca, by saying that it is not taught in the sūtras (rūnam par hiḥ pad pa’i rig pa las kyaḥ, den sād mā slo dhāmas cad ni sānāt̥ āsas yas bris tās, de la bas na mā slo deh la ḍhanās por ma guraśa iṣes te, kun gāi rūnam par iṣes pa’i dūr pad por na ya ba na ma yā yin no). For Lamotte’s translation, see Lamotte 1936 p. 252.
60 See Skilling 2000, p. 300.
Originally the Ēkottarāgama enumerated dharmas from 1 to 100; today it stops at 10, and between 1 and 10 many are lost... At the Nirvāṇa of Sāyāvēsa, disciple of Ananda, 77,000 Avadāna and Sūtra, and 10,000 Abhidharmaśāstra were lost.\(^61\)

In certain instances, this rhetoric of loss was a device to justify doctrines not found in the extant canon (such as the six causes, hetu)—amārtikānaṃ tat śūram, “that śūra is lost”—but it is evident that texts had been lost (the “new” Gandhārī texts amplify confirm this), and that this fact was part of the received picture of the buddhavacana. At a later date, it was also believed that many chapters or sections of Mahāyāna sūtras and tantras were no longer extant.\(^62\) The Viśhāsa noted further that false texts had been inserted into the sūtra, vinaya, and abhidharma.\(^63\) At one point, Vasubandhu laments, “What can we do now? The Teacher has passed away: leaderless, the religion is divided into many factions, and today they do whatever they like with texts and ideas.”\(^64\)

Nonetheless, Vasubandhu did have access to a wide range of sources belonging to a wide range of schools—far more than we have access to today. In his Abhidharma-kosā, he makes reference to the textual traditions of schools other than the Sarvāstivāda, either by name or as the reading (pāṭha) of “another school (or other schools)”: nīkāya-antaraka, nīkāya-antaritaka or nīkāya-antarīrya.\(^65\) In at least one case, he refers to a reading common to all schools, sarvanikāyāntareṣu... pāṭha\(^66\). That is, he makes

\(^{61}\) Lamotte 1958, p. 179 (translation, Lamotte 1988, p. 163); La Vallée Poussin 1971, p. 245, n. 2. The Sanskrit is given in the Abhidharmanāyākyāya as a statement of the Viśhāsa (Wogihara 1932–36, p. 188.24–25; tathā hi ekāsvarakārama ā tatād dharmamundrādā āsīt. idāmin t v ā daśaśādī dhṛṣṭam iti).

\(^{62}\) Bu-ston in Obermiller 1931–32, part 2, pp. 169–70.


\(^{64}\) Abhidharmakosahāsya (Pradhān 1975, pp. 122.24–123.2): kām āntaraḥ kāma yāc catāraṁ pariṇāmyati dhanaṁ cātamaṁ anāyakam bhudāhā bhinnataṁ bhinnataṁ cātāmaṁ yathaccakam grannatāḥ cātāmaṁ ca.

\(^{65}\) Abhidharmakosahāsya (Pradhān 1975, p. 114.1): nīkāya-antaraka-pāṭhād. ibid. (Pradhān 1975, pp. 55.8, 72.7): nīkāya-antarikṣa [I correct from -tād] śūra pāṭhāna. In other Pradhan (1975, p. 55.8, 72.7): nīkāya-antarikṣa (a custom that becomes more and more evident in later texts), but I do not think that he had an extant library at his disposal.

\(^{66}\) Abhidharmakosahāsya (Pradhān 1975, p. 439.5). Cf. Candrakīrti, Prasaṃpadā, in La Vallée Poussin 1903–13, p. 269.11, idām cā śūraṁ sarvāntikṣeṣu pāṭhāya, tad asmind āgamād yathopavartitād cātāmaṁ nāhāti (“This śūra is read in all schools.”); p. 549.8, use of his encyclopedic knowledge of the texts, and invokes the principle of śūraṇāsāsa to invalidate an opponent’s argument.

Reasonings similar to those of Vasubandhu’s Viśhāsā are often presented in idealized debates in favor of the authenticity of the Mahāyāna, for example in the Mahāyāna-sūtra-lāṅkāra and the Turaga.\(^67\) In the commentary to chapter 9 of the Bodhicaryāvatāra, the Śrāvaṇaka announces that his own tradition is uncontested because of its status as buddhavacana (madāgame buddhavacanatā eva vīvādaḥ), while the Mahāyāna is contested (saṃvādaṃ saṃpratipattikam maṅghārām). Praṇākaramati turns the tables to show that the Śrāvaṇaka doctrine is also contested. Firstly, the four nīkāyas with eighteen divisions do not agree with one another, and secondly, even within the same nīkāya, specialists in śūra, abhidharma, and vinaya do not agree with one another.\(^68\) The same point was made earlier by Haribhadra in his Ālōka in the Abhisamayālāṃkāra, where he notes the discrepancies among the Tripiṭakas of the eighteen nīkāyas.\(^69\)

In one extraordinary case in the Turaga, Bhāviveka quotes extracts from the scriptures of all eighteen schools in order to demonstrate that, from the point of view of scripture (āgama), it is allowable for an ordained monastic, a bhikṣu, to offer homage to a lay bodhisattva.\(^70\) The question was not merely theoretical—it impinged directly on the quotidian worship of bodhisattva images by ordained monastics, which seems, at a certain point, or at certain points, to have stirred up the dust of debate in the corridors of the monasteries. The question was sufficiently important to galvanize Bhāviveka to cite by title one text of each of the eighteen schools in support of the concept—something that neither he nor anyone else does anywhere.

\(^{67}\) Bodhiśāpaṭa (Vaidya 1960b, p. 206).


else. That is, this is the only place that I know of where samples of texts of the eighteen schools are cited side by side. It is regrettable that the passage survives only in Tibetan translation, since the citations may well have been in several different Buddhist languages.

Bhāviveka's excerpts are tantalizingly brief, but one thing is certain: most of the texts, titles, and even genres are unknown to us today. His brief citations of lost texts offer a glimpse of another side of the iceberg: they are not mere variant versions of known texts, but are texts about which we know absolutely nothing. This fact, combined with the recent revelations arising from the study of the Gândhārī manuscripts, the Śākyan manuscripts, and new manuscript finds from Xinjiang and Tibet, leads us to the conclusion that there is much we do not know about the Buddhist literatures of the early period.

VI. Inclusion and Exclusion: The Mahāvihāra Canon

The Mahāvihāravāsinīs of Sri Lanka were aware that other schools transmitted sūtras that they themselves did not, and that other schools arranged their sūtras and vinaya collections differently. An early report of this is made in the Dīpavamsa, which describes how the "schismatics," that is, the "eighteen schools," "broke up the original redaction (mūlasangaha) and made another redaction," and how they "rejected parts of the profound Sutta and Vinaya and made a different, counterfeit (paṭiriṭṭha) Suttavinaya." 71 The passage also refers to differences of exegesis and of grammar and orthography—that is, of language.

The mūlasangaha of the Dīpavamsa is a semantic counterpart of Vasubandhu's mūlasangiti, but the terms are put to opposite uses. For Vasubandhu, the mūlasangiti is lost, and we can access the buddhavacana only through an imperfect textual pluralism. For the Dīpavamsa—and for the Mahāvihāra tradition up to the present—the mūlasangaha survives, despite the depredations of other schools: it is the Pāli canon.

At an early date, the Sukottacavangaha of the Pāli vinaya defines "Dhamma" as spoken by Buddhas, spoken by auditors, spoken by sages, and spoken by deities, pertaining to welfare, pertaining to practice. 72 Is this an oblique recognition that the Dhamma, the texts, are products of multiple or collective authorship? Not according to the commentary, the Samantapāsādikā, which restricts its examples of the four categories to known Pāli texts in which the sages and deities play subordinate roles as interlocutors. It interprets aṭṭha-upasaṅhīto as aṭṭhakathā-nissito, "grounded on the commentators," and dhamma-upasaṅhīto as pāli-nissito, "grounded on the Pāli," i.e., the Tipitaka. 73 This considerably narrows the scope of what might seem to be a very generous and open definition of Dhamma—here it is recast in exclusively Mahāvihārīn categories. 74

The Pāli Sārasaṅga, composed by Siddhattha at Polonnaruwa in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, follows the Samantapāsādikā definition, describing the "Dhamma" as the "Pāryavatti-dhamma"—textual Dhamma, transmitted by the saṅgha through the recitation councils, and acquired through memorization and study. The two texts list titles that "were not recited at the three Councils," as follows: 75

Kulamba-suttam
Rājovāda-suttam
Tikkhindriyam
Catuparivatām
Nandopananda-damanam
Aṇapāla-damanam.

72 Vinaya, vol. 4, p. 15.9–10; dhammo nāma buddhabhāṣito sāvakabhāṣito istbhāṣito devatābhāṣito aṭṭhavacanabhāṣito dharmavacanabhāṣito. The Shanjuanii pipatthe 蒲見佛世如意 (T no. 1462) is rather different, but not without interest: Bapat and Hirakawa 1970, pp. 446–47 (for the problem of identifying this text with the Samantapāsādikā, see Pinte 2010). For a different, earlier opinion, see Endo 2006, which is a response to Guruge 2005.) For examples of texts spoken by auditors, see Lamotte 1947, p. 215 (translation, Boin-Webb 1983–84, p. 6), for sages and gods, Lamotte 1947, pp. 215–16 (translation, Boin-Webb 1983–84, pp. 6–7). The Dhammapaṭikas also give the same fourfold definition (loc. cit.). For a fivefold classification, see below.

73 Samantapāsādikā, vol. 4, p. 742.9.

74 One example of Dhamma transmitted by a deity that the commentary does not mention (though it does finish with an ādī ["etc."]) is the Ariṭṭhīya-sutta of the Dīghaṇkāya, one of the most important long sūtras of early Buddhism in the sense that we have evidence of its use as a ritual and textual source across "Buddhist Asia" from an early period to the present. The text—which I cannot help but see as dramatic or operatic—is framed in two movements, the first spoken by Vāsīrāna to the Buddha, the second spoken by the Buddha, who, upon the morn, transmits Vāsīrāna's text to the monks.

75 Samantapāsādikā, vol. 4, pp. 742.24; 743.6; Sārasaṅga, p. 45.24: idam saṅghītītarājan ānārāham (I follow the spelling of the Sārasaṅga).
Although they were not recited at the councils, they do not seem to be explicitly accepted or rejected, and their status is not clear to me. One title, *Nandopamanda-damana*—the subduing of the dragon-king Nandopanda—may be identified with a text cited by Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga*. Buddhaghosa quotes it by the title *Nandopamandadama*, and does not describe it as a sūtra—but this is done in a thirteenth-century Tibetan translation and in Thai tradition. The story itself is integrated into the “eight victories” of the Buddha in the *Bōhūm* [or *Aṭṭhā*] *Jayamangala* verses (Verses on the Blessings [brought by the] Eight Victories [of the Buddha]), in Thailand today one of the most common chants for blessing and success. The *Apalāḷadaṇama* must have been a similar narrative on the Buddha’s conversion of the nāga king Apāḷā, a well-known but extra-canonical story, frequent in Gandhāran narrative art. The other titles have not been identified.

Our two sources then list titles of texts which are “not the word of the Buddha” (abuddhavacana). More or less the same list is given in the commentary on the *Samyuttanikāya*, where the titles are given as examples of the counterfeit Dharma. The late fourteenth-century Sinhalese-language *Nikāyasangrahaya*—composed by Samgharakṣa Dharmakirti, “the greatest scholar of his day in Ceylon, and . . . one of those rare men of learning and genius whose greatness is for all time and all climes”—attributes some of the titles to different schools, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>School According to <em>Nikāya-sangrahaya</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Vāniṇī-piṭaka</em></td>
<td>Hemavata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Āngulimalā-piṭaka</em></td>
<td>Rājagiri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rathapāla-gajita</em></td>
<td>Pūrvasālī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ālavaka-gajita</em></td>
<td>Aparāśālī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gulha-ummagga</em></td>
<td>Siddhārthaka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

77 See Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names, s.v. “Apāḷā.”
78 *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka, Sīrāratnapāḷākāsin* vol. 2, p. 201, penult.
79 Fernando 1908, p. v.
80 The left-hand column gives the titles from *Samantapāśādīkā* vol. 4, p. 742.29 and *Sārasangaha*, pp. 45–46. The right-hand column gives the school attributions of *Nikāya-sangrahaya* (Fernando 1908, p. 9). I have attempted to regularize the names of the schools, but have had no opportunity to consult the original Sinhalese.

The texts cannot be precisely identified. Two seem to be related to well-known āṭṭakas, the *Mahā-Ummagga* or *Mahosadha* (Jātaka no. 546) and the *Vessantarā* (Jātaka no. 547), but the significance of *gulha*, “secret,” is anybody’s guess, as in the case of the *Gulha-vinaya*. Do some titles refer to known Mahāyāna sūtras like the *Āṅgulimalā-sūtra* and the *Rāṣṭrapalaparipṛcchā*? Are any of them tantras? Whatever the case, none of them merits buddhavacana status. The *Sārasangaha* explains that they were composed by “non-Buddhists in bhikkhu’s robes,” and gives a condensed version of the classical account of the Third Council.

The *āṭṭhakathā* list ends with “*Vetulla-piṭaka*, etc.” (*ādi*). The *Sārasangaha* expands the list, and the *Nikāyasangrahaya* expands it further. In these lists we find some familiar titles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sārasangaha</th>
<th>Nikāyasangrahaya</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. <em>Bhūtacāmaraṃ</em></td>
<td>5. <em>Bhūtacāmara</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <em>Cakkasamvarat</em></td>
<td>7. <em>Cakkasamvara</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. <em>Mahāsamaṃya</em></td>
<td>8. <em>Dvādaśacakra</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. <em>Catuspiṣṭha</em></td>
<td>12. <em>Catuspiṣṭha</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

81 Variant spellings in the *Samantapāśādīkā* include *Vedajha* and *Vedallā*. *Vaidalya*, *Vaitula*, and *Vatulya* are epithets of what later became the “Mahāyāna.” See also the list at the *Samutta-āṭṭhakathā*, vol. 2, p. 201.
82 *Gulhavessantarā-gulhavnimadīga-gulhavina* is referred to in the *Dīgha-āṭṭhakathā* (vol. 2, p. 566) and *Aṅguttara-āṭṭhakathā* (vol. 3, p. 160.6), in the context of the mahāpadesa, apparently in the words of Sudāna Thera, as texts which are not found in the *Pāṇīpiṭaka* and do not lead to the subduing of desire.
83 *etini vajrapiṭakādīni obuddhavacanah kahi katam ti. bhikkhuvarṣadharehi tithiyehi katam* (p. 45.31).
languages or in translation, which, with the exception of the Pāli texts, is distinctly North Indian, whether Sarvāstivādin, Lokottaravādin, or Dharma-guptaka. We might conclude that there is an enormous blank spot on our literary map of the subcontinent: the South.86

These passages show that the Mahāvihāra excluded texts from its Tripitaka, and categorically classed certain texts of other schools as abuddhavacana. It is evident that the school was aware of textual innovations and intellectual developments on the mainland—not only in the South, with which monastic relations are explicitly mentioned, but also in North India. The Tilas, for example give close paraphrases in Pāli of passages from the scholastic literature of the Vaibhāsikas.87

There remains the puzzle of the untraced citations in the Milindapañha, Nettipakarana, and Petakopadesa. These works cite passages from sūtras that are not found in, or differ from, the Mahāvihāra Tripitaka that we know today.88 A further discrepancy that haunts these works is that, for example, on occasion the Pāli commentaries cite the Petaka, but the cited passages cannot be found in the extant Petakopadesa.89 What does all this signify? I find it hard to believe that the texts were excluded or removed individually from the Mahāvihāra Tripitaka by a series of considered and collective editorial decisions over the centuries. Firstly, they are cited in the works in question for their very authority as buddhavacana. To reject them would be to render invalid the arguments that they are enlisted to support. Secondly, they do not introduce any radically new ideas or turns of language.

What other possibilities are there? The three texts are not Mahāvihāra works as such; they were originally produced in India using a different Tripitaka or Tripitakas. The citations, and other indicators, show that the three works were not collated and edited to agree with the Mahāvihāra Tripitaka. It is also possible that at one point the Mahāvihāra, or its predecessors, had to choose among variant recensions, and chose a recension or recensions that differed from those cited in the texts in question. That is, it was not a question of deliberate rejection, but of selection, of choice of

86 For something of what we do know, see Monius 2001.
87 For examples, see Skilling, forthcoming (a).
88 For the Milindapañha, see Horner 1964, pp. ix–xviii (and in general, see Skilling 1998, pp. 81–101). For the Nettipakarana, see Nāgamoli 1962 (translator’s introduction, pp. i–vi) and a list of quotations, pp. 283–87; for the Petakopadesa, see Nāgamoli 1964 (translator’s introduction, pp. xxiv–xxv and a list of quotations, pp. 381–85). For early Chinese references to and translations from a text or texts parallel to the Petakopadesa, see Zucchetti 2002a; Zucchetti 2002b.
another version. In any event, the citations reveal that the textual tradition of the Mahāvihāra is not as uniform as has been claimed.

VII. Texts Unique to the Mahāvihāra

We have seen that the Mahāvihāra was aware that other schools arranged their Tripitakas differently and that they transmitted texts which the Mahāvihāra did not accept as buddhavacana. To turn the tables, we will now examine texts transmitted by the Mahāvihāra that are, as far as we know, unique to that school. We have no explicit evidence that other schools actively rejected these texts, but we at least know that they were not part of their textual transmissions.

These texts belong to several genres and to all three Piṭakas. The Khuddaka-nikāya of the Mahāvihāra Sūtra-piṭaka preserves commentaries and treatises, in the form of Niddesa and Paṭisambhidāmaggas, as well as a handbook, the Khuddakapāṭha (for which see further below). None of these texts are known outside the Pāli versions. The Khuddaka-nikāya includes the Buddhavamsa and Carīyāpiṭaka, texts whose authenticity has been questioned (and usually rejected) by modern scholarship from the early years of Buddhist studies. Although both belong to genres developed by other schools as well, the two Pāli texts are thoroughly unique and independent. The succession of past Buddhas presented in the Buddhavamsa is not known to any other school (apart, of course, for the shared seven Buddhas leading up to Śākyamuni). The configuration of jātakas in relation to permutations in the Carīyāpiṭaka is specific to that text. The numerically arranged verses of the canonical Jātaka are also unique as a collection, although some of the verses have counterparts in the literature of other schools (and in Indian literature in general).90

Included in the Vinaya-piṭaka is the Parivāra, a digest or handbook compiled in Sri Lanka by the learned monk “named Dīpa” and completed by the first century CE.91 The integration of this text into the vinaya—at the end, as the last book—shows that the Mahāvihāra Tripitaka was not closed until the first century CE at the earliest. The Abhidhamma-piṭaka preserves a post-Asokan treatise, the Kathāvatthu.

92 Atthukhāra presumably refers to the Atthukhāra-kāṇḍa of the Dhammasangaha; see von Hintber 1996, § 134.

93 Dīpavamsa, cited at the Kathāvattu-ajṭhakathā, p. 4.9–11; parivāram atthukhāram abhidhamman chappakaram, paṭisambhidā ca niddesam ekadēsā ca jātakān, vissajjēvana tathā ca aṭṭham ekamsu te. For chappakaram, see Lamotte 1958, p. 200. One might ask whether the missing seventh work is not the Dhammakatha, as Lamotte suggests, but rather the Kathāvattu. The status of the Kathāvattu was contested even within the school itself, and it is logical that it would have been last book to enter the Abhidhamma-piṭaka. It is also a cumulative text, that, according to Lamotte, may not have achieved its final form until the second half of the third century CE (see Lamotte 1958, p. 202). I am not convinced, however, that we need to wait so late for Vettavādā doctrines to have been introduced to either the Kathāvattu or have reached the Isle of Tabropana.


95 Perhaps not even a finished product: see Lamotte’s cogent remark that the Abhidhamma abounds in repetitions, recitations, reclassifications and explanations which give it the character of an unfinished work still in the process of elaboration” (Lamotte 1988, p. 184. Original French [Lamotte 1958, p. 202]: “L’Abhidhamma abonde en reprises, en recitations, en reclassements et en explanations qui lui donnent le caractère d’une œuvre inachevé, encore en pleine élaboration”). I suggest below that the Abhidhamma (along with, for example, the Pariyātāpanikā) is an ideal text: with its multiple layers of abbreviation and cross-reference, it cannot be finished or be fully written down. What we have are sample recordings, working texts.
“the Doctrine pure and simple, without the intervention of literary developments or the presentation of individuals,”97 but an intellectual movement of definition, classification, and synthesis—the Abhidharmikas are precisely described as “categorizors” (lākṣaṇika).

The Mahāvihāra seems to be alone in its literal ascription of the seven books of its Abhidharma to the Buddha himself (literal with the exception of the Kathavatthu). The school holds that the Tathāgata first realized and reviewed the contents of the seven books in the fourth week after his awakening, in a Jewelled Residence constructed for him by the gods to the north-east of the Bodhi-tree.98 Later he delivered six books, in tota as books, in the Tavatiṣṭha Heaven,99 and laid down the outline of the seventh, the Kathavatthu, to be completed several centuries later by Moggallānaputta Thera. Such radical claims are not made by other schools for their abhidharmas. The Vaiśeṣikaśikas of Kashmir do maintain that the Abhidharmas was spoken by the Buddha, but they explain that it was spoken here and there, and then later collected by his auditors100—a position which in some cases is not far from the truth, in the sense that the basic works of the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma hinge on and revolve around extensive citations of sūtras. Other schools at best claim multiple authorship, by the Buddha’s close auditors, notably Śāriputra, or by later historical (but obscure to us today) figures.101

In the case of the abhidharma, as in the case of sūtra, vinaya, and sāstra, more texts have been lost than have been preserved. Among the manuscripts carried back to China by Xuanzang (602–664), in addition to sūtras, vinayas, relics, and Buddha images, were sāstras belonging to the Sthavira, Mahāyānashikha, Sāṃskṛtya, Kāśyapāya, Dharmagupta, and Sarvāstivāda schools,102 most of which were never translated into Chinese and are assumed to be lost. A remarkable feature of the Gāndhāran commentarial or sāstra literature that is currently being studied by Cox and others is that none of the texts has any parallels in extant sāstra literature, whether preserved in Indic languages or in translation. Of the vast and magnificent library of Buddhist literature, the contents of only a few rooms remain.

The conclusions of the great Belgian savant Lamotte still merit citation:

Despite their supposed canonicity, the Abhidharmas are the works of schools and it is only through contrivance that they are connected with the Buddha and disciples contemporary with him. However, whoever the authors of the Abhidharmas may have been, they reveal themselves as strictly faithful interpreters of the “Meaning of the Sūtras”: at the most they limited themselves to compromising the doctrinal integrity of Śākyamuni’s message. They therefore have every right to present their Abhidharma as the Word of the Buddha.103

Mahāvihāra texts are rich in narrative. Commentaries on “canonical” texts, such as that on the Dhammapada (Dhammapada-āṭṭhakathā) relate stories and events unknown to other schools, or relate shared stories in versions substantially different from those of other schools. Translated from Sinhala to Pāli on the Isle of Sri Lanka seven or eight hundred years after the passing of the master, the Dhampapada-āṭṭhakathā is an unlikely candidate for authority by modern standards. But through its association with the canonical Dhammapada, through its purported authorship by Buddhaghosa, and through language—the very fact that it is in Pāli—its stories have achieved the status of history or biography, and for many Theravādins the Dhammapada-āṭṭhakathā is as authoritative as any sūtra, and certainly more familiar.

As a general principle, we might say that texts achieve authority through use. The Buddhavamsa and other texts of the Khuddaka-nikāya considered “later” by modern scholarship—Vimānavatthu, Petavatthu, Jātaka, Apadāna—are precisely the texts that were deemed important and became familiar—not, perhaps, as texts, but through their narratives, mediated through the sermon. They were resource collections—the stuff from which sermons are fashioned.104 They were also recited in rituals and illustrated on the walls of temples and in cloth paintings and other media.

98 Faure 1962, p. 78.2–5: catutthe pana sattāvāha bodhito pañcimastāraddhāye devātā ratanagnaharana māpyāyaṁ. tathi patiṇkathā nābhittā abhidhammaparikām viśesato c etthā anumāṇani samantapāṭhānaṁ vicinato satāmaṁ viṁśāme.
100 See Lamotte 1958, pp. 280–201 and 203, with reference to Bu-ston (Obermiller 1931–32, part 1, pp. 49–50) who is paraphrasing the Abhidharmakosabhāga and Abhidharmakośaśīlaṅghī (Kośa 1:3). The Viheṭṭa by Lamotte (1958, p. 205, translation, Lamotte 1988, p. 187) would have it both ways: “The Abhidharma was originally the word of the Buddha, but it is also a compilation by the Aṭṭha Kāśyapīṇīputra.” On the intricacies of the claims, see Cox 1992, pp. 160–61.
101 See Lamotte 1958, pp. 202–10 for the several traditions, which often bear traces of memory of historical post-nirvāṇa authorship, obscured by a growing trend to move them back to the auditors and time of the Blessed One.
104 The Suttaparamāna (Chaudhuri and Guha 1957; Norman 1983, pp. 172–73; von Hentiber 1996, § 157) is a good example of a source book for sermons—the selection of texts is very
VIII. Sūtras Unique to the Sarvāstivāda

The Sarvāstivāda produced an immense literature which has come down to us only in part. Like the Pāli vinaya, the Sarvāstivāda vinaya allowed several sources of the Dharma, as reported in the Dazhidu lun 大智度論:

The Buddha said this in the Vinaya: What is the Dharma of the Buddha? The Dharma of the Buddha is that which has been uttered by five types of person:

1. That which was uttered by the Buddha.
2. That which was uttered by the Buddha’s auditors.
3. That which was uttered by the sages.
4. That which was uttered by the deities.
5. That which was uttered by magically conjured humans/persons.

When we compare the available texts of the Sarvāstivādins with those of the Mahāvihāravāsins, an interesting picture emerges. Both schools divide their sūtra into four primary categories (the Āgamas or Nikāyas) and one different from those “canonized” by modernity, and the collection has elicited little interest from contemporary scholarship.

105 Here, I use “Sarvāstivāda” for all inflections of the school: the so-called Mūlasarvāstivāda, the Central Asian Sarvāstivādins, and the Sarvāstivādins of the Chinese Madhyamāgama and Samyuktāgamas, including the philosophical movements within these lineages, the Vaibhāśikas, Sautrāntikas, and so on.

Dazhidu lun, T 25, no. 1509: 66b4–6. See Lamotte 1944, pp. 81–82:

Ainsi le Buddha a dit dans le Vinaya: Qu’est-ce que la loi bouddhique (buddha-dharma)? La loi bouddhique, c’est ce qui est énoncé par cinq sortes de personnes: 1. Ce que le Buddha a énoncé (buddhabhāṣita); 2. Ce que les disciples du Buddha ont énoncé (sravakabhāṣita); 3. Ce que les sages ont énoncé (śrībhāṣita); 4. Ce que les dieux ont énoncé (devabhāṣita); 5. Ce que les êtres apparitionnels ont énoncé (upapādabhāṣita).

The translation of number (5) differs from Lamotte’s. His interpretation of hua ren 佗人 as upapādaka does not seem justified. In Kumārajiva’s translation of the “Lotus Sūtra,” hua ren corresponds to nirmita (Kern and Nanjo 1908–12, p. 235.1. See Karashima 2001, p. 120). Further, upapādaka or asupapādaka is one of the four types of birth, referring to “apparitional beings.” They are not known to teach the Dharma. On the contrary, in Mahāyāna sūtras, the Dharma is often taught by humans conjured up by Buddhhas or bodhisattvas. Only the Dazhidu lun passage includes the fifth category. See Lamotte 1944 [p. 82, n. 1] for some of the parallels in vinayas and other sources.

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miscellaneous (Kyudraka, Khuddaka) collection, and their Piṭakas share many sūtras. But the Sarvāstivāda transmitted sūtras that were not known to the Mahāvihāra. These sūtras, some of them very long, were full members of the Sūtra-piṭaka, and were invoked as fully authoritative in the exemplified debates reported in Sarvāstivāda or Vaibhāśika scholastic literature. That is, texts unknown to the Mahāvihāra were not only canonical buddhavacana for the Sarvāstivāda, but they enjoyed prominence and full authority.

Because no complete Tripiṭakas or even registers of any of the Sarvāstivādins Tripiṭakas exist, we cannot draw up a complete list of the sūtras of the Sarvāstivādins, and because the same is true for the other schools such as the Mahāsāṃghikas, with the exception of the Mahāvihāra, we cannot with any security know whether a text was only transmitted by the Sarvāstivāda. But it is possible to list a number of texts which are certainly not found in Pāli, which were certainly authoritative for the Sarvāstivāda (and for the Vaibhāśikas and Sautrāntikas), which in their extant recensions are certainly Sarvāstivādin, which are not found or referred to in the literature of other schools, and therefore were almost certainly unique to the Sarvāstivādins. The list includes both long and short texts. In some cases, we know to which Āgama a text belonged, in others we do not—and some may have been transmitted outside of the Āgamas—extra-Āgama or extra-Tripitaka, for which the term may have been muktaka-sūtra, although this is not certain.

Long sūtras unique to the Sarvāstivāda:

Arthavistara-sūtra (Dīghāgama)
Māyājīla-sūtra (Dīghāgama)
Catuspariṣat-sūtra (Sāstuvakānīpa of the Dīghāgama)
Trīdanta-sūtra (Śīlaśankhikā of the Dīghāgama)
Bimbisāra-pratyudgama-sūtra (Madhyamāgama)
Nyagrodha-sūtra
Arthavisñucaya-sūtra
Āyupāryanta-sūtra
Garbhavakranti-sūtra

Some of the texts are quite distinctive. Others—like the Bimbisāra-pratyudgama and the Catuspariṣat-sūtra—are composite reorganizations of elements found in the collections (mainly the vinayas)
of most other schools. Once again, it is the editorial voices—those of the samghātikāras—that make the difference. The whole of the Bimbisāra-pratyāgaṇama makes up one section of the Čatusparṣaṭ-sūtra.107 The Āyuparyanta-sūtra108 and the Arthaviniścaya-sūtra,109 both available in Sanskrit (the first from Gilgit, the second from Nepal) and Tibetan, are encyclopaedic compilations, the first of cosmological material and verses gathered in part from various shorter sūtras, the second of lists and categories. The Garbhāvakṛtī, available in two Tibetan versions, is also composite; not only is it a sūtra, but it is incorporated into the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya and the Tibetan Ratnakūta, which is otherwise a collection of Mahāyāna texts.110 It is not clear whether the Āyuparyanta, Arthaviniścaya, and Garbhāvakṛtī were included in one or the other Āgama, or whether they were transmitted extra-Āgama.111

107 Waldschmidt 1952–62. The title carries a conundrum: the sūtra does not deal with the “four assemblies” but only three. The bhikṣuṇī assembly was not yet founded during the period covered by the sūtra. The Čatusparṣaṭ-sūtra is found in the Sūbhaksheravastu of the vinaya. This is an example of one type of intertextuality in the Śrāvaka collections.


109 Samtani 1971 (Sanskrit text) and Samtani 2002 (English translation).

110 Vinayakusumadhavavastu (Du bu phran byed kyi gsal), P vol. 44, no. 1035, folios 119cb–145cb; Ratnakūta, “Āyupamandagarbhāvakrtiniśreṣṭa” (Tshe Ḍu lсан pa dga’ bo mthul du ’jug pa bstan pa), P vol. 23, no. 760, part 13 (as far as I know this is the sole Śrāvaka sūtra in the Ratnakūta collection); cited at Abhidharmakosābhidhāya, chap. 1, v. 35ab (Śāṅkara 1970–73, part 1, p. 93.10), as well as in the *Sūtrasamuccaya (Chos mton pa la ’jug pa rgya cher ’grel pa snying po kun las btsan pa), P vol. 119, no. 5598, folios 320a8, 320b2, the Paharvastavikavibhāṣā (Śāṅkara, n.d., p. 22.10), the Yogācārabhūmi (Buddhaghara 1957, p. 27.6), and (several times) in the Bhāvanāpratīṣṭhānasamuccaya (P vol. 102, no. 5329). For some of the complications in the transmission of the Garbhāvakṛtī, see de Jong 1977, pp. 29–31. We await Robert Kriêzer’s study, edition, and translation of the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya version.

111 The Sanskrit Āyuparyanta-sūtra is from the Gilgit finds, which suggests by association (with the famous vinaya and sūtra Śrāvaka texts) a Mūlasarvāstivādin affiliation; it is cited in full by Śamathadeva in his *Abhidharmakosāvīkārya (Chos mton pa ’i mṅdog kyi ’grel bya bsdus pa, P vol.118, no. 5595, hereafter *Upayākā-fūka), a collection of Mūlasarvāstivādin sources. Yosominā (Abhidharmakosāvīkārya, chap. 1, v. 3 (Śāṅkara 1970–73, part 1, p. 15.181) states that the Sautrāntikas classify the Arthaviniścaya under Abhidharma. The Sautrāntikas make this statement in a debate with the Vaiśādhikas about the status of the Abhidharma and the Abhidharma-piṭaka; for the assertion to be meaningful, the sūtra must have been accepted by the Vaiśādhikas. (See Samtani 1971, pp. 28–30, on the importance of the Arthaviniścaya.) Since both the Sautrāntikas and the Vaiśādhikas belonged to the (Mūla)Sarvāstivādin fold, the sūtra must have been transmitted in that school.

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Short sūtras unique to the Sarvāstivāda:112

Paramārthaśānti-sūtra113
Mahāśānti-sūtra114
Māṇḍukya-sūtra115
Vidyāsthānapama-sūtra116
Sahajapurāṇasamādāna-sūtra117
Hastadāpadama-sūtra118
Sūtra comparing the Buddha to a physician119

At least some of these short sūtras belonged to the Saṃyuktāgama. All but the Vidyāsthānapama are cited as authoritative in the Abhidharmakosā in the course of “debates” within the Vaiśādhika tradition.

Should one propose that these texts were lost in Pāli, or that they did not enter into the final Mahāvihāra transmission? Or are they examples of the bold and innovative literature of the Sarvāstivādins? Clearly, for that tradition these texts had canonical authority, since they are cited or referred to in the Viḥāra compendium, the Abhidharmakosā, the Abhidharmakosa, and other manuals and Āstras, as well as by others such as Asanga and Harivarman. The “traditional” comparative model, in which the presence or absence of a Pāli version has an absolute chronological value, even in regions where the Pāli texts were not transmitted, has had its day. It is time to move with new models which take into account the geography and the linguistic realities of South Asia.

112 For translations of short sūtras from the Chinese Saṃyuktāgama, many of which have no precise parallel in Pāli, see Choong Man-keat, 2004.

113 Lamotte 1976, pp. 2135–37; cited in the Abhidharmakosābhāṣya and *Upayākā-fūka.

114 This Mahāśānti-sūtra deals with pratyavasamupāda, and is not to be confused with the Mahāśānti-mahāśānta or the Pāli Mahāśānta-sutta: see Skilling 1997b, references in part 2, introduction to Mahāśānta 4, section 4.

115 *Upayākā-fūka, P vol. 118, no. 5595, folio 112a4; cited in the Abhidharmakosābhāṣya and Abhidharmavatāra.

116 Edited from Central Asian manuscripts in Waldschmidt 1959; translated in Skilling 1979 (pp. 64–67).

117 Abhidharmakosābhāṣya chap. 6, v. 3 (Śāṅkara 1970–73, part 3, p. 888.1); cited in the Abhidharmakosāvīkārya and *Upayākā-fūka.

118 Abhidharmadīpa (Jaini 1977, p. 271.18); cited in Abhidharmakosābhāṣya, Vyākhyāyukti, and *Upayākā-fūka.

119 I do not know the title of this sūtra, which is cited in the Abhidharmakosābhāṣya and Abhidharmakosāvīkārya.
IX. Anthology and Authority

Tripitakas are ideal collections: as books they are sets of resource materials, deemed by their editors to be comprehensive and complete, rather like encyclopedias. Only a scholarly elite had the need, ability and leisure to consult or to master them. Otherwise, selected texts were anthologized for practical use: for curricula, for sermons, for ritual (including ritual copying for merit-making), and for handbooks (mûdhâpothaka) to be carried about in a monk's bag. (In fact we know next to nothing about the production, storage, circulation and use of manuscripts during the period, or about monastic libraries, apart from stray references in inscriptions.)

One of the earliest anthologies in Pâli is the Khuddaka-nikâya, "a collection of nine short pieces gleaned from the canon and put together most probably for practical purposes as a kind of handbook." A later example, compiled in Sri Lanka at an uncertain date, is the Catubhânavâra, a collection which serves both curricular and ritual purposes. The Suttasamgaha presents itself as a source book for sermons (desamã). Several paríta or râksã collections, compiled at different places and different times, are used in the Mahâvihâra lineages. These include the above-mentioned Catubhânavâra, the Paritta and Mahâparitta, and the Cûlārâjaparîta (Sattaparîta) and Mahârâjaparîta (Dvûdaspârîta).

Another genre is condensation, which summarizes narratives or doctrines in a few stanzas, and is recited both as a râksã and as homage (vandamã). Examples in Pâli include the Jayamâlangalâgâthã (invoking the power of the eight victories of the Jina), the Sattamahâthânagâthã (homage to seven sites in the vicinity of the Bodhi-tree at Vajrâsana) and the Asthamahâthânagâthã (homage to the eight great sites of Sâkyamuni's life and career). The Bojjhânâparîtta is a verse summary of three suttas from the Sûnyatâ-nikâya, whose power lies in an invocation of truth (etena saccavajjena sothi te hotu sabbâtû). The Âjñâtâtûrarâjaparîta is only an excerpt of the opening verses of the long sûtra of the same name, and many other parîta are similarly only extracts. Condensations of the seven books of the Abhidhamma, the Sattapakarana-abhidhamma, are among the most common manuscripts found in Thai and Khmer collections.

121 See von Hintber 1996, pp. 43–44. In fact, one text is not found in the Pâli Tripitaka, as the author himself notes.
122 For these, see Skilling 1992.
123 For the last two, see Skilling and Pakdekham 2010.

The examples that I have given are all in Pâli. We know much less about collections used in other traditions, although it is likely that many of the fragmentary manuscripts of Central Asia belonged to liturgical or apotropaic collections. The Sarvâstivâdins had collections of the Mahâsûtras; the lists of titles and the Mahâsûtras preserved in Tibetan show the diverse type of texts which could be used as râksã. In Nepal, there is the famous Pâñcarâksã, and in Nepal and Tibet there are numerous collections of dhâranîs (dhârañâmangrâha, gzmês 'dus), which include texts parallel to the Pâli Parîtta and to the hrdayas of the great Mahâyâna sûtras.

The collections were (and are) transmitted in independent manuscripts or books, "outside the formal canon"; they were (and are) committed to memory. They usually mix canonical and non-canonical material, but the distinction between the two is not meaningful to the users. Whatever modern scholarship may say about their authenticity, for tradition their authority is unimpeachable, and many indeed invoke the power of truth (sacca-adhîthãna, satya-adhîthãna). Their very efficacy lies in their truth, in the fact that they are the word of the Buddha. Even those that are abstracts or condensations of narratives or of sûtras transmit the power of the word, deeds, or truths of the Buddha and other realized beings. Perhaps the condensed version is even more powerful, as in the "essence formulas" (hrdaya) that concentrate entire collections or texts into a few syllables. Their recitation invokes the presence of the Buddha, which dispels dangers and bestows felicities.

X. Questions without Conclusion

What was the situation on the ground at the time of Vasubandhu and Buddhaghosa? Is it likely that they both saw a Buddhism with multiple recensions of Tripitakas, with different nikayas making competing claims to possess the authentic word? Buddhism had undergone disruption in some parts of India, and the golden age, if there ever was one, had passed. Certainly the great age of composition and compilation had passed, issuing in a period of consolidation, condensation, and attempts at reconciliation of different views.

I have shown, I hope, that the individual Sûtra-pitakas of different schools, the Mahâvihâra and Sarvâstivâda, each contained texts that the other did not possess, and that these texts were fully authoritative to the

I find a number of problems in this statement. First, all canons contain a great deal of narrative material, which tradition attributes, not unreasonably, to the editors, the samgiṭikārakas (although we may reasonably ask, "which samgiṭikārakas?"). This is explicit in the Mālasarvāstivādin vinaya and in the Pāli commentaries. Canons are the work of samgiṭikāras, of successions of editorial committees; they contain the statements of the Buddha, within narrative settings, and the statements of others—as the vinaya remarks, of auditors, sages, and deities. They contain statements of Māra (mārabhūṣita) and of opponents of the Buddha like Devadatta. Narrative truth is efficacious in its own right; it edifies, inspires, and entertains. But it is not, and does not pretend to be, the word of the Buddha. Thus the canons are not—and cannot be—eternally with buddhavacana, the "speech of the Buddha." Secondly, we do not have evidence that "each school claimed to represent unadulterated the original Buddhism of the Buddha." Williams may be projecting a selective Theravādin perspective onto the other schools. For some of the schools, we have no evidence whatsoever that they made such a claim, while for others the evidence suggests that they did not make such a claim at all.

The question of authenticity is not simple. It is not a binary question, as it is often presented: it is not a question of Theravāda versus the other nikāyas, or Theravāda versus Mahāyāna, or Mahāyāna versus Theravāda. The positions of different schools and texts agree on many points, while even within a single school there is disagreement about what texts were buddhavacana, what texts not, what texts were nīṭārtha, which nīyārtha, and so on. Texts were continually measured against the sayings of the Buddha, and all schools sought to avoid sūtravīrodha. But given that textual plurality was the rule, and that, as diverse strategies of exegetis developed, a single text or statement could yield multiple meanings, decisions of authority were never final.

**ABBREVIATIONS**


REFERENCES

Unless otherwise noted, references to Pali texts are to the editions of the Pali Text Society (UK), by page and line number.


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A MURAL PAINTING OF THE FIRST COUNCIL FROM PAGAN

The teachings of the Buddha were verified, codified, and transmitted by a series of councils or recitations (sangiti), held, according to tradition, by assemblies of arhats. The First Council (pathama-sangiti) was convened at Rājagaha (Pāli, Rājagaha) in Magadha not long after the death of the Buddha. According to later Theravāda tradition, it was sponsored by King Ajātasatru (Pāli, Ajātasatru). As the foundational council for all Buddhist monastic traditions or orders, it was also known as the "root" or "original" recitation or collection (mulasangiti, mula-sangaha)—the first codification or oral compilation of the Blessed One’s teachings.

Here the First Council is depicted in a twelfth-century mural at Pagan (Pugama), Burma. The monk seated on the central throne is most likely Mahakasyapa (Pāli, Mahakassapa), who presided over this council. He is holding a fan, a ritual object that is held by monks in other depictions of the councils at Pagan, and is surrounded by representatives of the five hundred monks who participated in it. Below, wearing a crown, is King Ajātasatru with members of his court. The assembled monks and nobles raise their hands in homage as they listen to the Dharma.

This mural is a painting from the northwest corner of Kubyaung-gyi, a temple at Myinkaba, Pagan, that was built in 1113 CE by Rājakumārī. The ink gloss in Mon script and language reads: “The First Council. It was indeed King Ajātasatru who held it at that time" (from G. H. Luce and Bohmu Ba Shin, “Pagan Myinkaba Kubyaung-gyi temple of Rajakumar, 1113 A.D. and the old Mon writings on its walls,” Bulletin of the Burma Historical Commission 2, 1961, p. 382 [full article: pp. 277–417]).