

How Theravāda is Theravāda?
Exploring Buddhist Identities



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Edited by

Peter Skilling
Jason A. Carbine
Claudio Cicuzza
Santi Pakdeekham



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*To the ācariyas of the past
To the ācariyas of the present
To the ācariyas of the future*

*May the parampara
of practices, ideas, and discussion
Continue unbroken.*

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SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA



The map is geographically and historically hybrid, juxtaposing place names from different periods. It is a tool to help readers locate places mentioned in the individual chapters and does not pretend to be politically correct. The map is not to be used in local or international disputes.

SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA



MAP BY PIERRE PICHARD MARCH 2012



Was Buddhaghosa a Theravādin? Buddhist Identity in the Pali Commentaries and Chronicles

Rupert Gethin

THE EXPRESSION ‘THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM’ IS USUALLY TAKEN AS REFERRING to a particular branch of Buddhism – a branch of Buddhism that was brought from India to Laṅkā¹ in the middle of the third century BCE and thence spread to the lands of South East Asia, and which is found today, flourishing still, in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos.² It is commonplace to contrast this Theravāda branch with ‘the other’ great branch of Buddhism found both in history and the world today, namely Mahāyāna.³ Any scholar of Buddhism will immediately

¹ Throughout this article I use ‘Laṅkā’ in preference to ‘Sri Lanka’, since the latter as the name of a modern state is clearly anachronistic when speaking of pre-modern times, while the former can at least claim to be one of the ancient, general names for the island.

² R.F. Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), p. 3.

³ Taking *Wikipedia* as an indicator of general perceptions, we find the second paragraph of its general article on Buddhism opens with: ‘Two major branches of Buddhism are recognized: Theravada (“The School of the Elders”) and Mahayana (“The Great Vehicle”).’ <http://en.wikipedia.org/>

point out that even while having a certain practical usefulness, such a characterization of Buddhism and Buddhist history is simplistic and misleading in a variety of ways. In the first place there is an imbalance of terminology: the term *theravāda* should strictly refer to one of several ancient monastic ordination lineages,⁴ whereas the term *mahāyāna* refers to a particular orientation in Buddhist practice. Ordination lineages pertain to the specific tradition of the monastic rule (*vinaya*) that an individual monk follows; they do not pertain to whether his goal is to become an arhat or to become a buddha. Continuing in this vein, one might point out that the Buddhist tradition itself speaks of the ancient ordination lineages in terms of eighteen ‘schools’ (*nikāya*); only three of these, however, survive – the Theravādins in Sri Lanka and South East Asia, the Dharmaguptakas in East Asia, and the Mūlasarvāstivādins in Tibet and Mongolia. Yet this is about as far as one can go without becoming ensnared by various problems, which despite the undoubted scholarship that has been devoted to them continue to resist easy solution. The problem in general is that we do not fully understand the nature of the ancient Buddhist schools: their origins, relative chronology and development, their relationship to particular teachers or geographical areas, their relationship to doctrine and practice. The reason for this is simple: the sources are complex and contradictory. In such circumstances it is not difficult to understand why we tend to retreat to the certainties of such categories as ‘Theravāda’ and ‘Mahāyāna’. Yet as soon as we do so we create of Theravāda a constant and enduring tradition to which Buddhists, both lay and monastic, in different times and places have belonged and continue to belong; a tradition that is moreover rather more than a simple ordination lineage. Pivotal in such a construction of Theravāda

wiki/Buddhism, accessed on 5 March 2010. Kevin Trainor (ed.), *Buddhism: the Illustrated Guide* (London: Duncan Baird, 2001), effectively divides Buddhism along these lines: the section entitled ‘Principles and Practice’ gives ‘an historical overview of the principal schools of Buddhism ... with detailed coverage of the Theravada and Mahayana traditions, including Zen and Vajrayana (Tantra), which are among the best known schools in the West’ (p. 9).

⁴ In fact, as discussed below, it might be better to use ‘Theriya’ than ‘Theravāda’ in this context.

is the figure of Buddhaghosa, a monk who probably in the early fifth century CE came from India to reside in the ‘Great Monastery’ – the Mahāvihāra – in the ancient capital of Laṅkā, Anurādhapura. Buddhaghosa’s position as the quintessential Theravādin derives from his authorship of authoritative commentaries to some of the principal works of the Pāli canon.⁵ These commentaries and especially his ‘monumental’ ‘Path of Purification’ (*Visuddhimagga*), ‘a summary compendium of Theravādin doctrine’,⁶ are taken as establishing ‘a framework for the interpretation of the Tipiṭaka for Theravādins down to the present day’.⁷

Given the problematic nature of the notion of ‘Theravāda’, it seems appropriate to ask to what extent and in what sense a figure such as Buddhaghosa would have conceived of and identified himself as a specifically ‘Theravādin’ Buddhist, and pushing the question further back in time, to what extent and in what sense the monks who first brought Buddhism to the island of Laṅkā would have thought of themselves as belonging to the Theravāda as opposed to some other tradition of Buddhism.

In what follows I want primarily to consider the sense of Buddhist identity as revealed in Pāli works composed in Laṅkā (or in some cases perhaps in Southern India) up to the end of the twelfth century CE, but I shall also make some reference to epigraphical evidence and consider briefly how Buddhists elsewhere might have perceived the

⁵ According to Gv 59,18–30, 68,34 (Norman, *Pāli Literature*, p.121), Buddhaghosa was author of Vism, Sp, Kkh (= Pātimokkha-a), Sv, Ps, Spk, Mp, Pj I (= Khp-a), Dhp-a, Pj II (= Sn-a), Ja-a, Ap-a, As, Vibh-a, Dhātuk-a, Pugg-a, Kv-a, Yam-a, Paṭṭh-a; these commentaries end with a eulogistic ‘signature’ referring to Buddhaghosa (Sp 1416, Kkh 208, Spk III 308–09, Mp V 99–100, Dhp-a IV 235–36, Pj I 253, Pj II III 308–09, As 430, Vibh-a 523–24, Ppk-a 367, Vism 712; the PTS editions of Sv and Ps omit this formula, but it is included in B^c and S^c.) However, his authorship of Kkh and the *Khuddaka-nikāya* commentaries is problematic, and I follow von Hinüber in accepting that Buddhaghosa was not the author of the Abhidhamma commentaries; von Hinüber also follows Finot in questioning whether Buddhaghosa was the author of Sp; see von Hinüber, *Handbook of Pāli Literature*, §§ 209, 220, 224, 259, 260, 312.

⁶ Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism*, p.4.

⁷ Trainor, *Buddhism: the Illustrated Guide*, p. 194.

identity of the Buddhists of Laṅkā. Throughout my concern is not so much to reveal the history of Buddhist sectarian development and affiliation that might lie behind the traditions, as to articulate what these traditions reveal about how Buddhists conceived of their own and others' Buddhist identity. Inevitably, though, these two issues impinge upon each other at certain points.

On the basis of the evidence I present I shall attempt to trace the way in which Buddhist identity in Laṅkā shifted and evolved in stages from something vague and not fully determined into something more definite and precise. I shall suggest that four more or less distinct phases can be distinguished. The earliest phase was marked by an emphasis not on rival Buddhist schools, but on the Buddhism of Laṅkā as a local branch of a pan-Indian lineage that was connected to the wider Buddhist world of India through the figures of Mahinda and Moggaliputta Tissa. This was followed by a more specific sense of identity which was conscious of the early divisions in the Buddhist Saṅgha and presented the Laṅkā lineage as specifically Theriya ('belonging to the Theras') as opposed to Mahāsaṅghika, with these seen as two broad traditions embracing several schools and which originally came into existence following a division soon after the second council. This sense of being Theriya rather than Mahāsaṅghika was subsequently consolidated in the specifically Mahāvihāra claim to be the only true Theriyas in Laṅkā. Finally the Theriyas of Laṅkā came to be regarded both by themselves and others as the representatives *par excellence* of the ancient Theriyas or Sthaviras.

Since the name 'Theravāda' is the one most often used in the modern literature, my starting point is the general use of the term *theravāda* in the Pali commentaries and chronicles (section 1). Having considered this, I shall turn to the indications of Buddhist identity given in the opening and closing verses of the Pali *aṭṭhakathās* (section 2). I shall then move on to a detailed examination of the account of the coming of Buddhism to Laṅkā in the *Samantapāsādikā*, which, although apparently postdating the *Dīpavaṃsa*, I suggest represents the oldest and fullest description of what the Buddhism of Laṅkā was taken to be and where it came from; significantly, it contains no account of the division of Buddhism into schools (section 3). Having briefly considered some inscriptional evidence and issues of chronology

(section 4), I shall turn to the earliest Pali sources for the division of Buddhism into schools, the *Dīpavaṃsa* and the commentary to the *Kathāvatthu* (section 5). Finally I consider the perspective of the *Mahāvamsa* (section 6) and some later sources (section 7), before attempting to draw some conclusions (section 8).

1. The terminology: *theravāda*, *theriya* and *theravādin*

Although the term *theravāda* is routinely used in modern literature as the name of the school its usage in the ancient texts turns out to be somewhat problematic. In the Pali canonical texts the term is found in just one context: in the *Majjhima-nikāya* in the first-person account of the *bodhisatta*'s time as a pupil of first Āḷāra Kālāma and then Uddaka Rāmaputta. The *bodhisatta* declares his initial mastery of their teaching in the following terms:

As far as mere mouthing of the words, mere repeating of what had been repeated to me was concerned, I declared a *ñāṇavāda* and a *theravāda*; I, along with others, claimed, 'I know, I see.'⁸

While it is clear that *theravāda* cannot be taken here as the name of a *Buddhist* school, it remains unclear how it should be rendered. I. B. Horner, for example, opted for 'I ... spoke the doctrine of knowledge and the doctrine of the elders',⁹ while Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi chose to follow the lead of the commentary with 'I could speak with knowledge and assurance'.¹⁰ What Horner's 'speaking the doctrine

⁸ M I 164 = 165: *so kho ahaṃ bhikkhave tāvataken'eva oṭṭhapahatamattena lapitalāpanamattena ñāṇavādaṃ ca vadāmi theravādaṃ ca jānāmi passāmi ti ca paṭijānāmi ahaṃ c'eva aññe ca*. The account of the bodhisatta's time with Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta is repeated in 4 different suttas: the Ariyapariyesana (M I 163–66), the Mahāsaccaka (M I 240), the Bodhirājakumāra (M II 93), and the Saṅgārava (M II 212); the expression *theravāda* thus occurs 8 times in the canon, although in the PTS edition of M I and M II it is edited out by abbreviations in all but the first of these 4 suttas.

⁹ *Middle Length Sayings*, vol. I (London: Pali Text Society, 1954), p. 208.

¹⁰ *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom, 1995), p. 257.

of the elders' should indicate in this context is not obvious; presumably 'speaking the doctrine of the elders' of Āḷāra's and Uddaka's respective schools, but possibly the phrase is better understood as 'making the declaration of the elders', that is, making the declaration that those established in Āḷāra's and Uddaka's traditions had also previously made. Yet on balance the commentarial explanation of *theravāda* seems to make the better sense: in as much as he had learnt the verbal formulation of their teachings the *bodhisatta* could make 'a declaration of knowledge and a declaration of *certainty*'.¹¹

The interpretation of this passage is not of crucial significance for what I want to argue below, but if *theravāda* here means a 'declaration of certainty' it does suggest that there is no general pre-existing tradition for the expression in the sense of 'the doctrine or tradition of elders' that is somehow inherited and adapted by later Theravāda tradition. The isolated occurrence of the term in the canon counts against this way of looking at the development of the term. It is worth noting that there appear to be no equivalents for *theravāda* or this whole sentence in the Chinese *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to this passage.¹²

The expression *theravāda* in the sense of 'the doctrine or tradition of elders' would seem then to be an expression that, if not coined by the Pali commentarial and exegetical tradition, is certainly characteristic of it. This is underlined by the fact that there appears to be no evidence for a Sanskrit equivalent of the term – whether **sthāviravāda* or **sthaviravāda* – in Sanskrit texts, Chinese or Tibetan translations of Indian texts, or in inscriptions.

¹¹ Ps II 171: 'A *ñāṇavāda* is a declaration that one knows. A *theravāda* is declaration of being certain; 'I am sure of this' is what is meant.' (*ñāṇavādan ti jānāmī ti vādaṃ. theravādan ti thirabhāvavādaṃ; therō aham etthā ti etaṃ vacanaṃ.*) There seems to be little problem in taking *thera* here as equivalent to a Sanskrit **sthera* or **sthaira*. It is, of course, possible that because of the negative context here the commentary deliberately chooses to avoid an explanation in terms of 'declaration of the elders'.

¹² MĀ (= Taishō 26) 204, T I 776b, 8–19. (I am grateful to Lin Qian for checking this parallel.)

But what is the extent and usage of the term *theravāda* in the Pali commentaries?¹³ I count thirty-four occurrences of the term in the PTS editions of the *aṭṭhakathā* literature. In the majority of instances *theravāda* appears to be used simply and unproblematically to refer to ‘the opinion or view of an elder or elders’, where the elders are monks of some authority.¹⁴ For example, a discussion (found repeated in three places) of what factors determine the precise constituents of awakening, the path and *jhāna* at the moment of attaining ‘the noble path’ (*ariya-magga*) sets out the different views (*vāda*) of three groups of elders (*thera*) on this issue, prefacing its comments in the second and third cases with ‘in the opinion of the second [group of] elders’ (*dutiya-tthera-vāde*) and ‘in the opinion of the third [group of] elders’ (*tatiya-tthera-vāde*) respectively.¹⁵

¹³ An electronic search of the Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana digital texts finds 213 occurrences in 36 pre-twentieth-century Pali texts. To this we can add 14 occurrences in the *Dīpavaṃsa*, giving a total of 229 occurrences in 37 texts. Grouping the texts roughly in chronological order (canonical, *aṭṭhakathā*, *ṭīkā*) and type (*vinaya*, *sutta*, *abhidhamma*, other, and *vaṃsa*) the statistics are as follows: M (8); Ps (1), Sp (9), Th-a (1), Paṭis-a (4), As (9), Vibh-a (2), Pp-a (1), Kv-a (7), Vism (2); Sv-pt (12), Sv-nt (5), Sp-ṭ (21), Kkh-ṭ (1), Pāc-y (3), Pālim (4), Pālim-nt (17), Vjb (27), Vmv (18), Spk-pt (6), Mp-ṭ (8), Dhs-mṭ (6), Pp-mṭ (3), Kv-mṭ (2), Dhs-anuṭ (2), Vibh-anuṭ (3), Abhidh-av-nt (11), Abhidh-s-mṭ (1), Moh (3), Vism-mṭ (1), Mil-ṭ (1), Nett-pt (1), Sadd (1); Dīp (14), Mhv (4), Cūlavāṃsa (2), Thūp (1), Sās (4). Nine of these occurrences relate to *theravāda* in the *Majjhima-nikāya* passage just discussed (the 8 occurrences in M (see note 8), together with the comment at Ps II 171). Leaving these aside, we have 35 occurrences of the term in the *aṭṭhakathā* literature, and 18 in the earlier *vaṃsa* literature (Dīp and Mhv); the other 165 occurrences of the term are in the *ṭīkā* and subsequent literature. Two of the *aṭṭhakathā* occurrences concern a B^c variant *theravādaṅga* for the E^s and S^c *theraratarāṅga*, as do six of the *ṭīkā* occurrences. (I have left out of this reckoning the works of Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923) and the twentieth-century *Visuddhimagga-nidānakathā*, which give a further 29 and 37 occurrences respectively.)

¹⁴ This covers 23 occurrences of *theravāda* at Sp I 231 (1), II 300 (1), III 538 (1), Sp IV 737 (1), 890 (1), Th-a 15 (1), Paṭis-a I 194–95 (2), III 574 (1), As (9), Vibh-a 343 (2), Pp-a 190 (1), Vism 666–67 (2).

¹⁵ As 228–89 = Vism 666–67 = Paṭis-a I 194–95; the subcommentaries (Dhs-anuṭ (B^c) 11, Vism-mṭ (B^c) II 473) go on to explain that the first follow

The status of these ‘views of the elders’ is spelt out near the beginning of the *Samantapāsādikā* in a discussion of the sources of authority for one aspiring to mastery of Vinaya. These are in order of decreasing authority: Sutta, accordance with Sutta (*suttānuloma*), the view of the teachers (*ācariyavāda*), and individual opinion (*attano mati*). Significantly, in this hierarchy of authority, the ‘view of elders’ (*theravāda*) is equated with ‘individual opinion’ and so comes below the ‘view of the teachers’ (*ācariyavāda*), that is, of the 500 arahats whose views were understood to have been recorded in the original commentaries and brought to Lañkā by Mahinda along with the canon:

‘The view of the teachers’ (*ācariyavāda*) refers to the series of expositions of meaning (*aṭṭhakathā*) constituted by the judgements passed down separately from the canonical text and established by the 500 arahats who were the compilers of the Teaching. ‘Individual opinion’ refers to exposition in a form established by one’s own inference, reasoning and good understanding separate from Sutta, the principles of Sutta, and the tradition of the teachers. The entire [body of] opinion of elders (*sabbo theravādo*) that has come down in the commentaries to the Suttanta, Abhidhamma and Vinaya is also called ‘individual opinion’. But in adopting an individual opinion one should explain it without holding to it stubbornly and come to a conclusion; the evidence should be explained by considering the meaning of the canonical text and applying the meaning to the canonical text; individual opinion should fit with the view of the teachers; if it fits and agrees with this, it should be accepted; but if it does not fit and agree, it should not be accepted. For it is individual opinion that is certainly weakest of all; the view of the teachers is firmer, but it also should fit with the principles of Sutta; when it fits and agrees with this it should be accepted, otherwise it should not; the principles of Sutta are firmer than the view of the teachers.¹⁶

the opinion of Tipiṭaka-Cūlanāga-tthera, the second of Moravāpīvasi-Mahādatta-tthera, and the third of Tipiṭaka-Cūlābhaya-tthera.

¹⁶ Sp I 231: *ācariyavādo nāma dhammasaṅgāhakehi pañcahi arahantasatehi ṭhapitā pāḷivinimuttā okkantavinicchayappavattā aṭṭhakathānti. attanomati nāma sutta-suttānuloma-ācariyavāde muñcivā anumānena attano anubuddhiyā nayaggāhena upaṭṭhitākārahakathanam. api ca suttantābhidhamma-vinayaṭṭhakathāsu āgato sabbo pi theravādo attanomati nāma. taṃ pana attanomatiṃ gahetvā kathentena na daḥhaggāhaṃ gahetvā*

This passage, then, sees the commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*) as containing both an original exposition, that of the earliest ‘teachers’ (namely the 500 arahats present at the first council), as well as a subsequent body of opinion deriving from various individual elders.¹⁷ The primary usage of the term *theravāda* in the Pali commentaries themselves is to refer to that body of opinion. And since all early Buddhists might wish to cite respected ‘elders’ as an authority for their traditions of exegesis, it is difficult to read this as a sectarian claim to the particular authority of the Theriya or Theravāda tradition.

A passage found near the beginning of the commentary to the *Theragāthā* explaining the introductory verses has a slightly different take on the ‘elders’ whose opinions are referred to in the expression *theravāda*. Here the ‘views of the elders’ (*therānaṃ vādā/theravādā*) appear to be equated with the utterances of the elders whose words are contained in the *Theragāthā* itself. Significantly, these views are contrasted not with the views of some other tradition of Buddhism, but with the views of the followers of religious traditions other than the Buddhist (*aññatitthiyavāda*):

Just as a pack of animals cannot match a lion’s roar, much less prevail against it, and on the contrary a lion’s roar will prevail against them, so the views of the followers of other religions cannot match the views of the elders, much less prevail against them, and on the contrary the views of the elders will prevail against them.¹⁸

voharitabbaṃ. kāraṇaṃ sallakkhetvā atthena pāḷiṃ pāḷiyā ca atthaṃ saṃsanditvā kathetabbaṃ. attanomati ācariyavāde otāretabbā. sace tattha otarati c’ eva sameti ca gahetabbā. sace neva otarati na sameti na gahetabbā. ayañ hi attanomati nāma sabbadubbalā. attanomatito ācariyavādo balavataro. ācariyavādo pi suttānulome otāretabbo. tattha otaranto samento yeva gahetabbo itaro na gahetabbo. ācariyavādato hi suttānulomaṃ balavataram. Cf. Nett-ṭ (B^c) 56.

¹⁷ For the tradition that the commentaries were recited at the first council see Sv 1,15–18, = Ps I 1,21–24 = Spk I 1,17–20 = Mp I 1,18–21; As 1,27–30; cf. Norman, *Pāli Literature*, pp. 118–19; von Hinüber, *Handbook of Pāli Literature*, p. 101 (§ 206).

¹⁸ Th-a 15: *yathā pana sīhanādaṃ pare migagaṇā na sahanti, kuto abhibhavo, aññadatthu sīhanādo va te abhibhavati, evam eva aññatitthiyavādā therānaṃ vāde na sahanti, kuto abhibhavo, aññadatthu theravādā va te abhibhavanti.*

In the passages we have considered so far it is clear that *theravāda* is not used as the name of a particular school of Buddhism. There are in fact just ten occurrences of the term *theravāda* in the *aṭṭhakathās* where it is possible to take it as such. In three of these ten cases the meaning is ambiguous: two in the *Samantapāsādikā* (one in the introductory verses and one in the body of the ‘Background Story’),¹⁹ and one in the closing verses of the commentary to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*. I will discuss the former two in detail below in the context of a full consideration of the *Samantapāsādikā* account of the coming of Buddhism to Laṅkā, and the latter in the context of a general consideration of the introductory and closing verses of the Pali *aṭṭhakathās*. The other seven occurrences are all found in the introduction to the commentary to the *Kathāvatthu*, where the term is used in the context of the division of the Saṅgha into eighteen schools.

This means that outside the *Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā* there is little evidence for the use of the expression *theravāda* in the *aṭṭhakathās* as the name of a particular school or lineage of Buddhism contrasted with other schools or lineages of Buddhism. Moreover, three of the *Kathāvatthu* commentary’s seven uses of the term *theravāda* occur as part of an extended quotation from the *Dīpavaṃsa*.²⁰ In sum, in the Pali *aṭṭhakathās* the term *theravāda* appears to be used primarily to

¹⁹ Sp 2, 52. Two further *Samantapāsādikā* occurrences concern a B^e variant *theravādaṅga* for the E^e and S^e *theratarāṅga* (cf. Sp I 235, Sp (B^e) I 200, Sp (S^e) I 277–78): ‘In this way, by declaring each elder one after the other (*theratarāṅgaṃ*) and reaching his own teacher, he establishes the full lineage of teachers’ (*evaṃ sabbaṃ ācariyaparamparaṃ theratarāṅgaṃ āharitvā attano ācariyaṃ pāpetvā ṭhapeti*). It is not clear what *theravādaṅga* might mean in such a context: perhaps ‘by declaring the full lineage of teachers whose members constitute the *theravāda*’ or ‘by declaring each part of the *theravāda*’? Sp-ṭ (B^e) II 49 glosses with ‘the succession of elders’ (*therapaṭipāṭin ti attho*) which suggests that *theratarāṅga* is the preferable reading, though the fact that at some point the reading *theravādaṅga* was adopted is not entirely without significance. The context here is that of a specific lineage of Vinaya teachers: the Buddha, Upāli, Dāsaka, Soṇaka, Siggava, Moggaliputta Tissa. While such a lineage is related to the issue of ordination traditions and the early Buddhist schools, what seems to be the focus here is being able to legitimize one’s ordination by being able to point to a specific lineage, rather than contesting the legitimacy of rival lineages.

²⁰ Cf. Kv-a 3–5 and Dīp V 30–53.

refer to the opinions of *theras* that come down in the commentaries but are distinguished from the ‘original’ commentary (*aṭṭhakathā*) that was considered to have been rehearsed at the first council soon after the Buddha’s death.

The *Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā*’s use of *theravāda* in the context of different schools of Buddhism seems in fact to be borrowed directly from the *Dīpavaṃsa*; as we shall see, this usage is also taken up by the *Mahāvāṃsa*. It is worth noting that even where *theravāda* is used in the earlier sources in the context of the ancient schools of Buddhism, it is not clear that we should think of precisely *theravāda* as the name. It is not impossible that the compounded *thera* itself should be taken as the name of the school, either as the plural ‘elders’, or as an adjective in the sense of ‘belonging to the elders’ and qualifying a *vāda* or *nikāya*; *thera* in the expression *theravāda* might simply be an alternative form of *theriya*, a term that appears to be used unambiguously in the *Mahāvāṃsa* to refer to one of the parties in the first division of the Saṅgha after the second council.²¹ I make this suggestion on the basis of the way the *Kathāvatthu* commentary talks of the eighteen ancient schools of Buddhism as *ācariya-kula* or *ācariya-vāda*; the list includes the Mahisāsakas and Vajjiputtakas, who are then referred to as the Mahisāsaka-*vāda* and Vajjiputtaka-*vāda*, suggesting that *vāda* is not so much part of the name of the school as simply a term for ‘school’ or ‘tradition’, just like *nikāya*, which is also used here.²² Also of note in this context is the way in which the subcommentary to the *Kathāvatthu* commentary explains the *Dīpavaṃsa*’s (V 52) syntactically rather awkward *theravādānam uttamo*:

²¹ Mhv V 1, III 40.

²² Kv-a 2–3. In fact the terms *vāda* (‘exposition’ or ‘doctrine’), *kula* (‘community’), as well as *ācariyavāda* (‘teachers’ [tradition of] exposition’) and *ācariyakula* (‘community of teachers’) all seem to be used in the introduction of Kv-a as equivalents of *nikāya* (‘group’).

Here *thera* is specified without any case ending; *thera* is in the sense of ‘that of the elders’. What does it refer to? The tradition (*vāda*). ‘That of the elders is the highest of traditions,’ is what is meant.²³

In other words, we can understand the expression *theravāda* in the *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa* as equivalent to *theriya-vāda* and as meaning strictly ‘the tradition belonging to the elders’;²⁴ Theravāda would simply be an alternative to Theriya-nikāya, although the latter expression seems not to be found in Pali literature. That there is some uncertainty about the use of the full expression *theravāda* as the proper name of a school is perhaps a minor point. Yet since the expected Sanskrit equivalent *sthāviravāda* seems not to be found in the ancient sources, it is a point still worth making as it suggests that the Pali sources may not be as out of line with other ancient Indian Buddhist sources in their use of terminology as might otherwise appear. For Buddhist Sanskrit sources, Edgerton cites simply Ārya-Sthāviras (paralleling Ārya-Saṃmatīyas and Ārya-Sarvāstivādas) and Ārya-Sthāvarīya-nikāya. All this suggests that strictly we should think of Pali Thera and Theriya as the proper names of a school, rather than *Thera-vāda*.²⁵

We should note, however, that the Pali *theriya*, corresponding to the Sanskrit *sthāvirīya*, is itself extremely rare. Apart from the two occurrences in the *Mahāvāṃsa* just cited and some occurrences in the

²³ Kv-mṭ (Be) 49: *theravādānam uttamo ti ettha therā-iti avibhattiko niddeso. therānaṃ ayaṃ ti thero. ko so. vādo. thero vādānam uttamo ti ayam ettha attho*. We can note that in his 1879 translation Oldenberg tends to treat theravāda as a proper name; he renders this Dīp passage: ‘The most excellent Theravāda which resembles a large banyan tree, is the complete doctrine of the Jina, free from omission or additions.’ (Dīp, p. 142). The expression theravādānam uttamo is found in three verses: Dīp V15, 16, 50.

²⁴ The term *theriyavāda* is found at Mhv XLII (= Cūlavāṃsa) 80, XLIV (= Cūlavāṃsa) 8.

²⁵ See BHSD s.vv. *āryasaṃmatīya*, *āryasarvāstivāda*, *ārya-sthāvira*, *sthāvira*. MW gives *sthāvira* mfn. in the sense of ‘old, venerable, etc.’ and the *vrddhi* form *sthāvira* n. in the sense of ‘old age’ and also as mfn., equivalent to *sthāvira*. Peter Skilling has drawn attention to the issue of the correct Sanskrit designation of the school we have come to call ‘Theravāda’ in his ‘Theravāda in History’, *Pacific World*, Third Series, n. 11 (2009), 61–93.

Cūlavamsa,²⁶ the term appears to occur in just four places in the corpus of pre-twentieth century Pali literature.²⁷ I will have occasion to refer to two of these passages below, but the passages from the commentary to the *Khuddakapāṭha* is rather curious and is worth noting in passing. Commenting on the first question in the *Kumārapañha* series,²⁸ the commentary explains:

But with reference to the question ‘what is one?’ (*ekaṃ nāma kiṃ*), there are two readings: of these, *kiha* is the reading of the Sīhaḷas, for they say *kiha* when what one should say is *kiṃ*. Some suggest that *ha* is the [emphatic] particle and that this is also a reading of the Theriyas, but either way the meaning is the same, and one can read as one chooses.²⁹

What this passage seems to want to suggest is that the alternative reading was taken by some as not just a local Sinhalese ‘corruption’ but a legitimate reading accepted by a wider Buddhist tradition; and presumably the use of Theriya means that that wider tradition is being contrasted with the Mahāsaṅghikas.

Turning finally and very briefly to the term *theravādin*, we find that this is barely used at all in pre-twentieth century Pali literature, perhaps only three times, and only once before the twelfth century.³⁰ We should

²⁶ Mhv XXXVII 245; XLI 17, XLII 80, XLIII 30–31, XLIV 8.

²⁷ Vism 711, Sv-pt III 372 (although E^c reads *ther’ anvaya* for B^c *theriyena*), Pj I 78, Vin-vn-pt (B^c) I 2 (the twelfth-century commentary to Buddhādatta’s *Vinayavinicchaya*, where Buddhādatta is described as a light in the lineage of the Theriyas (*theriyavamsadīpa*)).

²⁸ Khp 2: *ekaṃ nāma kiṃ. sabbe sattā āhāraṭṭhitikā.*

²⁹ Pj (=Khp-a) I 78: *ettha ca ekaṃ nāma kin ti ca kihā ti ca duvidho pāṭho, tattha sīhaḷānaṃ kihā ti pāṭho. te hi kin ti vattabbe kihā ti vadanti. keci bhaṇanti ha-iti nipāto, theriyānaṃ pi ayam eva pāṭho ti. ubhayathā pi pana eko va attho. yathā ruccati, tathā paṭhitabbaṃ.*

³⁰ An electronic search for forms of *theravādin* in the available digital editions of Pali texts (PTS, CS, Syāmaratṭha and BJT) finds just two or three occurrences in the whole corpus of pre-twentieth century Pali literature: one at Mhv XXXIII 98 (*theravādīhi*, but with a variant *theravādehi*) and two in the first part of the *Cūlavamsa* (twelfth century). The twentieth-century (?) introduction to a Ceylonese edition of the nineteenth-century *Sāsanavamsa* also uses the term once (Sās C^c iv); the body of Sās C^c also has *theravādīgaṇo*

note in this context, however, that *theravāda* is occasionally used as *bahuvrīhi* compound in the sense of ‘one who follows the exposition of the elders’ in several places.³¹

In sum we can see that although *theravāda* is used by such texts as the *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa* in their discussions of Buddhist schools, it is not clear that this is intended as the *name* of a school; *vāda* here seems to be an alternative to *nikāya*, and to talk of the ‘Theravāda school’ is like saying the ‘Thera school school’. As in the Buddhist Sanskrit sources, the name of the school contrasted with the Mahāsaṅghikas is variously given in the early Pali sources as simply Thera or Theriya. As for the Pali *aṭṭhakathās*, the term *theravāda* is not used to refer to a school or Vinaya ordination lineage at all; it is used to refer to a general body of received interpretation of the canonical texts which is distinguished from the earlier traditions of interpretation thought of as deriving from the 500 arahats present at the first council.

2. The Elders of the Mahāvihāra: the commentaries’ introductory and closing verses

In the introductions (*ganthārambhakathā*) and colophons (*nigamanakathā*) of the commentaries we find statements that give some indication of where Buddhaghosa and the other authors of Pali commentaries position themselves in the Buddhist world. Tradition has it that Buddhaghosa wrote his *Visuddhimagga* first; this seems to be confirmed by the fact that his commentaries on the four *Nikāyas* refer

although Sās B° has *theravādagaṇo* (cf. Sās C° 14 and Sās B° 17); there are twelve occurrences in the *Visuddhimagga-nidānakathā*, a text composed in the context of the Sixth Council in the nineteen-fifties. This text also uses the term *mahāyāna* in opposition to *theravāda* in speaking of, for example, the *mahāyāna-piṭaka* and the *theravāda-piṭaka* (*Vism-nidānakathā* B° 29–30). This means that we only have one problematic occurrence of *theravādin* in Pali literature prior to the twelfth century, and only two clear occurrences prior to the twentieth century.

³¹ See e.g. Mhv V 6: *puna pi theravādehi mahimsāsakabhikkhavo | vajjī-puttakabhikkhū ca duve jātā ime khalu*; see also Kv-a 3,10, Mhv XXXVII (= Cūlavāṃsa) 241, XLII (= Cūlavāṃsa) 80.

to it. In the concluding verses of the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa twice mentions the Mahāvihāravāsins, stating that in presenting the *Visuddhimagga* he is ‘relying on their method or system of teaching’.³² He goes on to say that he wrote the *Visuddhimagga* at the suggestion of the monk Saṅghapāla, whom he describes as ‘belonging to the lineage (*vaṃsa*) of those who dwell in the Mahāvihāra, the best of *vibhajjavādins* and famed *theriyas*’.³³

If we take *vibhajjavādin* and *theriya* here as referring to ‘schools’ of those names we have a straightforward statement of school affiliation. The monks of the Mahāvihāra saw themselves as belonging to the Vibhajjavāda school which was related in some way to the Theriya as opposed to the Mahāsaṅghika branch of the Saṅgha. Certainly given the way the term *vibhajjavādin* features in the Mahāvihāra’s own story of its origins and lineage – a story which I shall examine in some detail below – it seems reasonable to take *vibhajjavādin* as a proper name rather than as simply indicating ‘those who advocate analysis’; and it seems unlikely that ‘belonging to the theras’ (*theriya*) can be anything other than a reference to the split between the Sthaviras and Mahāsaṅghikas witnessed generally in the ancient Buddhist sources.

Yet this is the only place where the Vibhajjavādins and Theriyas are explicitly and unambiguously mentioned in the introductions and colophons to the *aṭṭhakathās*. Elsewhere Buddhaghosa states his affiliation in more general and open terms. At the beginning of each of his commentaries to the four *Nikāyas*, Buddhaghosa states that:

In order to make the meaning [of the scriptures] clear, the commentaries were originally recited by the 500 masters [at the first council] and subsequently recited again [at the second council]; they were then brought to the island of Laṅkā (Sīhaladīpa) by the Master Mahā-Mahinda and rendered into the Sīhala language for the sake of the inhabitants of the island.

I will translate them from the Sīhala language, putting them into the pleasing language that conforms to the system of the canonical

³² Vism 711: *Mahāvihāravāsīnaṃ desanāyananissitaṃ | Visuddhimaggaṃ bhāsissaṃ. . .*

³³ Vism 711: *vibhajjavādisēṭṭhānaṃ theriyānaṃ yasassinaṃ | Mahāvihāra-vāsīnaṃ vaṃsajassa. . .*

scriptures and is without fault, in the process not contradicting the consensus of the elders who dwell in the Mahāvihāra and are lamps in the lineage of the elders (*theravaṃsa*) and so wise in judgment.³⁴

This once more makes clear that Buddhaghosa sees his primary affiliation as the Mahāvihāra in Anurādhapura, and that he sees the residents of the Mahāvihāra as famed and renowned representatives of a tradition of elders; he also makes reference to traditions that can be traced back to the first Buddhist council through a particular master, namely Mahinda. Additionally, in the closing verses of the *Sumaṅglavilāsini*, Buddhaghosa explains that he composed his commentary on the *Dīghāgama* at the request of the Saṅghathera Dāṭhānāga, whom he also describes as ‘a follower of the lineage of the Theras’ (*theravaṃsanvayena*).³⁵

Buddhaghosa’s affiliation to the Mahāvihāra lineage of elders is also emphasized in a eulogistic formula presumably not composed by him but at some point added to the conclusion of the works attributed to him. Here Buddhaghosa is described as ‘a jewel in the lineage of the elders who dwell in the Mahāvihāra, the lights in the lineage of the elders’ (*theravaṃsappadīpānaṃ therānaṃ mahāvihāravāsīnaṃ vaṃsālāṅkārabhūtena vipulavisuddhabuddhinā*).³⁶

Other Pali commentarial works attributed to Dhammapāla similarly emphasize that they follow the consensus of those who dwell

³⁴ Sv 1 = Ps I 1 = Spk I 1 = Mp I 1: *atthappakāsanatthaṃ aṭṭhakathā ādito vasisatehi | pañcahi yā saṅgītā anusaṅgītā ca pacchāpi || sīhaḷadīpaṃ pana ābhātā ’ha vasinā mahāmahindena | ṭhapitā sīhaḷabhāsāya dīpavāsīnaṃ atthāya || apanetvāna tato ’haṃ sīhaḷabhāsāṃ manoramaṃ bhāsāṃ | tantinayānucchavikaṃ āropento vigatadosaṃ || samayaṃ avilomento therānaṃ theravaṃsappadīpānaṃ | sunipuṇavinicchayānaṃ mahāvihārādhivāsīnaṃ [B^c mahāvihāre nivāsīnaṃ] || . . .*

³⁵ These verses are omitted in the PTS edition (Sv III 1064) but are commented on at Sv-pt III 372; the verses are found at Sv (B^c) III 250 and Sv (S^c) III 267: *āyācito Sumaṅgalapariveṇanivāsīnā thiraguṇena | Dāṭhānāgasaṅghattherena theravaṃsanvayena || Dīghāgamavarassa dasabalaguṇagaṇaparidīpanassa aṭṭhakathaṃ | yaṃ ārabhiṃ Sumaṅgalavilāsiniṃ nāma nāmena ||*

³⁶ Sp 1416, Kkh 208, Spk III 308–09, Mp V 99–100, Dh-p-a IV 235–36, Pj I 253, Pj II III 308–09, As 430, Vibh-a 523–24, Ppk-a 367, Vism 712. The PTS editions of Sv and Ps omit this formula, but it is included in B^c and S^c.

in the Mahāvihāra,³⁷ while in the colophon to the commentary to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, composed by Mahānāma in 499 or 559 CE,³⁸ we find the following:

Just as this commentary, which accords with the consensus of the elders who illuminate the tradition [or statements?] of the elders (*therānaṃ theravādadīpānaṃ*), has reached a conclusion, bringing benefit to people, likewise may those wishes of all beings that accord with the Truth and accomplish benefits for themselves and others reach a conclusion.³⁹

While we might take *theravāda* here as referring to a specific ordination lineage and school of the Saṅgha, in the light of the more general usage of *theravāda* outlined above it is equally possible to see it as characterizing a looser tradition of interpretation of the texts exemplified by a group of *theras*.

Apart from the occurrence of *theriya* at the close of the *Visuddhimagga*, the only place a name of a Buddhist school occurs unambiguously in the introduction or colophon of a commentary is in the *Jātaka* commentary, which may or may not be the work of Buddhaghosa. In the introduction a monk from the Mahiṃsāsaka

³⁷ Ud-a 2, Vv-a 1, Pv-a 1, Th-a I 2, Nett-a (B^c) 2, Vism-mhṭ (B^c) I 2: *mahāvihāravāsīnaṃ samayaṃ avilomayaṃ*. The questions of whether we should think in terms of two Dhammapālas and their dates have been much discussed. Oskar von Hinüber takes the cross reference between the Dhammapāla *aṭṭhakathās* and the Abhidhamma *ṭīkā*s as effectively doing away with the necessity for two Dhammapālas; he also follows De Silva in rejecting arguments for dating Vism-mhṭ to the tenth century and suggests the possibility of an earlier date for Dhammapāla, namely the latter half of the sixth century (pp. 167–71, §§ 357–70) and that Dhammapāla was a pupil of Ānanda, the author of the Abhidhamma *mūlaṭīkā* (§§ 356, 360); in an unpublished paper Lance Cousins has suggested that Dhammapāla may have been a pupil of the author of the Abhidhamma *anuṭīkā*, which would place him in the early seventh century.

³⁸ von Hinüber, *Handbook of Pāli Literature*, p. 144 (§ 291).

³⁹ Paṭis-a 704: *samayaṃ anulomentī therānaṃ theravādadīpānaṃ | niṭṭhaṃ gatā yathāyaṃ aṭṭhakathā lokahitajananī || dhammaṃ anulomentā atthahitaṃ parahitaṃ ca sādhetā | niṭṭhaṃ gacchantu tathā manorathā sabbasattānaṃ ||*

lineage is mentioned as one of three monks inviting the author to compile the commentary:

Having been approached and requested to do so by the Elder Atthadassin in his desire to perpetuate of the history of the buddhas, and likewise by Buddhamitta, who dwells at all times in purity in his isolated monastery, tranquil in heart and wise, and likewise by Buddhadeva, a monk from the Mahiṃsāsaka lineage who is skilled in the system [of exposition] and of clear intellect, I will present an explanation of the *Jātaka* – a work that illustrates the unlimited power of the deeds of the Great Man – based on the method of exposition of those who dwell in the Mahāvihāra.⁴⁰

The precise significance of this passage is difficult to gauge. Clearly in designating Buddhadeva a Mahiṃsāsaka it is implied that his school is different from Atthadassin and Buddhamitta's. Yet the author does not reveal what name he would use to designate this school. Would he have used Theriya, notwithstanding the fact that the Mahiṃsāsakas too are Theriya in so far as they are regarded by the ancient sources as a school that derives from the Theriya rather than Mahāsaṅghika branch of the Saṅgha?⁴¹ There is no mention of the *thera-vaṃsa* or *thera-vāda* in the passage, only of 'the method of exposition' (*vācanā-magga*) of those who dwell in the Mahāvihāra, which the Mahiṃsāsaka Buddhadeva seems happy to endorse.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ja I 1: *buddhavaṃsassa etassa icchantena ciraṭṭhitim | yācito abhigantvāna therena Atthadassinā || asaṃsaṭṭhavihāre sadā suddhavihārinā* [E° *saddhi-*] | *tath'eva Buddhamittena santacittena viññunā || mahiṃsāsakavaṃsamhi sambhūtena nayaññunā | Buddhadevena catathā, bhikkhunā suddhabuddhinā || mahāpurisacariyānaṃ ānubhāvaṃ acintiyam | tassa vijjotayantassa jātakass' athavaṇṇanaṃ || Mahāvihāravāsīnaṃ vācanāmagganissitam | bhāsissam ...*

⁴¹ Kv-a 2–3.

⁴² E.W. Adikaram (*Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon* (Migoda: D.S. Pusewella, 1946), pp.94–95) relates this to the fact that Faxian obtained a copy of the Mahiṃsāsaka Vinaya in Lan kā in the early fifth century. André Bareau (*Les sectes bouddhiques du petit véhicule* (Saigon: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1955), p.183) has argued that the Mahiṃsāsakas and Theravādins are essentially representatives of the same school, the

Clearly it is possible to read the various passages considered above in light of the colophon of the *Visuddhimagga* and take *thera* in *theravaṃsa* or *theravāda* as equivalent to *theriya* and so as specifically referring to the Theriya as opposed to the Mahāsaṅghika school of Buddhism;⁴³ we might then read these passages as an explicit and self-conscious statement of the school affiliation of those who dwelt in the Mahāvihāra Anurādhapura. Indeed, as we shall see when we turn to the *Kathāvatthu* commentary and the *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa*, there can be little doubt that Mahāvihāra monks of the fifth century did understand their lineage as in general terms affiliated to the Theriya school. But what is not so clear is just how they understood the nature of that affiliation and how they saw their own lineage in relation to other lineages in the wider Buddhist world of the fourth to fifth centuries. Significantly, when the subcommentaries explain the phrase ‘the elders who dwell in the Mahāvihāra and are lamps in the lineage of the elders’ found at the beginning of Buddhaghosa’s commentaries, they make no reference to the split in the Saṅgha between the Mahāsaṅghikas and Theras, but instead explain it in a way that might include any Buddhist tradition that would wish to trace its lineage back to Mahākassapa and the first council – and which Buddhist tradition would not?

The Thera lineage is the succession of teachers that comes down from those Theras – [so called] because they are endowed with ‘solid’ (*thira*) complements of conduct, and so forth – beginning with Mahākassapa; belonging to that lineage, the Mahāvihāravāsins are lights in the lineage of Theras because of brightening it by the brilliance of their understanding which derives from their knowledge of scripture.⁴⁴

Vibhajyavāda: the Theravādins are the branch of the Vibhajyavāda that lived in Laṅkā, and the Mahīśāsakas that which lived on the Indian mainland.

⁴³ The term *vaṃsa*, however, is not used as an equivalent to *vāda* or *nikāya* in the discussions of schools in the *Dīp*, Kv-a and Mhv.

⁴⁴ Sv-pt I 20 = Ps-pt (B^c) I 17 = Spk-pt (B^c) I 17 = Mp-ṭ (B^c) I 19: *theravaṃsapadīpānān ti thirehi sīlakkhandhādīhi samannāgatattā therā, mahākassapādayo. tehi āgatā ācariyaparamparā theravaṃso, tappariyāpannā hutvā āgamādhigamasampannattā paññāpajjotena tassa samujjalanato theravaṃsappadīpā mahāvihāravāsino therā; tesaṃ.*

Since all Indian Buddhist schools might wish to legitimize themselves by tracing their lineage back via a tradition of elders to the first Buddhist council, the introductions and colophons of the commentaries remain rather general affirmations of the Mahāvihāra tradition's authenticity.

For more evidence on how a figure such as Buddhaghosa positioned his own lineage in relation to other lineages and to the wider Buddhist world of the fourth to fifth centuries we must now look in some detail at the accounts of the lineage of the Mahāvihāra tradition which relate how the Buddhist *sāsana* came to Laṅkā. There are four relatively ancient accounts of this in Pali literature: one traditionally regarded as the work of Buddhaghosa in the *Samantapāsādikā*,⁴⁵ another by a close follower of Buddhaghosa in *Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā*,⁴⁶ and one each in the *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa*. At over 100 pages the account found in the *Samantapāsādikā* is by far the longer of the two *aṭṭhakathā* accounts and can be taken as the principal Mahāvihāra account, which is supplemented by the *Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā* account at a mere eleven pages.

3. The coming of Buddhism to Laṅkā: the *Samantapāsādikā*'s background story

As a commentary on the Vinaya the *Samantapāsādikā* begins with a 'background story of its origin' (*bāhiraṇidānakathā*, Sp 3,13–105,22). The purpose of this Background Story is to explain how the Vinaya was originally recited by Upāli at the first council shortly after the Buddha's death, and how it was brought to Laṅkā and the Buddhist Order was established there. The story thus covers events from the first council down to the establishment of a branch of the Bodhi tree in Anurādhapura in the middle of the third century BCE.⁴⁷ The same events

⁴⁵ But see von Hinüber's comments, *Handbook of Pāli Literature*, §§ 209, 220.

⁴⁶ As noted above, I follow von Hinüber (*Handbook of Pāli Literature*, § 312) in accepting that Buddhaghosa was not the author of the Abhidhamma commentaries.

⁴⁷ A period of something over two centuries according to the 'long chronology' of the Sp, but of only about a century according to the 'short chronology' now generally more favoured in scholarly writings.

are covered by the slightly earlier *Dīpavaṃsa* (IV–XVI) in 60 pages and the slightly later *Mahāvāṃsa* (III–XIX) in 140 pages.⁴⁸ The Vinaya Background Story is the principal place in the Pali commentarial literature where an attempt is made to demonstrate the authenticity of the Vinaya traditions established in Laṅkā; as Jayawickrama has observed, the author ‘is anxious that no relevant detail, however insignificant, is left out in his description’ (p. ix). The account divides into five main sections:

- (i) The first council (*paṭhama-mahāsaṃgīti*, Sp 4–30,14)
- (ii) The second council (*dutiya-mahāsaṃgīti*, Sp 30,15–37,7)
- (iii) The third council (*tatiya-mahāsaṃgīti*, Sp 37,8–61,25)
- (iv) The succession of teachers (*ācariya-paramparā* Sp 61,26–63,18)
- (v) The story of the successive events (*ānupubbīkathā*, Sp 63–105):
 - (a) summary of the nine ‘missions’ (Sp 63,20–64,11);
 - (b) brief accounts of the first eight missions (Sp 64,12–69,14);
 - (c) extended account of Mahinda’s missions to Laṅkā, including the establishment of relics (Sp 69,15–104,16)

The prologue

In his prologue the author⁴⁹ states that in commenting on the Vinaya he will rely on the authority of the teachers of the past (*nissāya pubbācariyānubhāvaṃ*): the Vinaya, he says, has been ably explained by these ‘pre-eminent teachers of the past who are like banners of the Mahāvihāra’ (*pubbācariyāsabhehi ... mahāvihārassa dhajūpamehi*), but since their explanation is transmitted in Sinhala, it is not accessible to monks from another country; he will therefore now undertake to provide their explanation in a manner ‘conforming to the system of the

⁴⁸ The text of Mhv includes a full critical apparatus often amounting to half a page, which means that the Mhv account is in fact of similar length to the Sp account.

⁴⁹ Although Buddhaghosa is traditionally and generally assumed to be the author of Sp, this assumption is questionable; see von Hinüber, *Handbook of Pāli Literature*, §§ 209, 220.

canonical texts' (*pāḷinayānurūpaṃ*). This appears to involve translating it into the canonical language, namely Pali.⁵⁰ He then comments:

But in undertaking this explanation, I shall use the *Mahā-Aṭṭhakathā* as the main source; and not neglecting what is significant from the judgements stated in the *Mahāpaccarī* and likewise in such well-known commentaries as the *Kurundī*, I shall undertake a thorough explanation that incorporates the views of the elders from those works too.⁵¹

What precisely is meant by 'incorporates the views of the elders' (*antogadhatheravādaṃ*) is unclear. It appears here to refer back to the past teachers he has just mentioned who are 'the banners of the Mahāvihāra'. What the author seems to be saying is that his Vinaya commentary will encompass the whole body of opinion and views that derives from the elders recognised as having some authority by the Mahāvihāra lineage. This appears to be how the later twelfth-century Vinaya subcommentaries take this passage:

Having stated that he will give an explanation taking account of only the [*Mahā-Aṭṭhakathā*, since this might leave out the views of elders stated in the *aṭṭhakathās* [generally] and desiring to include these too,

⁵⁰ Cf. Sv 1 = Ps 1 1 = Spk 1 1 = Mp 1 1: *apanetvāna tato 'haṃ sīhaḷabhāsaṃ manoramam bhāsaṃ | tantinayānucchavikaṃ āropento vigatadosam*, literally 'removing the Sīhala language from it, I will render it into the pleasing language that is free from faults and conforms to the system of the texts'.

⁵¹ Sp 2: *saṃvaṇṇanaṃ tañ ca samārabhanto tassā [E° tasmā] mahā-aṭṭhakathaṃ sarīraṃ | katvā mahāpaccariyaṃ tath' eva kurundināmādisu vissutāsu || vinicchayo aṭṭhakathāsu vutto yo yuttam atthaṃ apariccajanto | tato pi antogadhatheravādaṃ saṃvaṇṇanaṃ samma samārabhissaṃ ||*. My translation follows the exposition found at Sp-ṭ (B°) 1 20 and Vmv (B°) 1 6 and differs from that of N.A. Jayawickrama, *The Inception of Discipline and the Vinaya Nidāna* (London: Pali Text Society, 1986), p.2: 'And in commencing the exposition I shall practically base it on the Mahā-aṭṭhakathā as well as the Mahāpaccariya without discarding the relevant statements and the rulings given in the recognized commentaries such as the Kurundi; and thenceforth I shall proceed with the correct exposition of the Tradition of the Elders embodied therein.'

he says ‘incorporating the views of the elders’; ‘including the views of the elders’ is what is meant.⁵²

This is in line with the use of the term *theravāda* to refer generally to the opinion or view of an elder or elders, where the elders are simply respected monks of some authority, that we have already seen in the *aṭṭhakathās*. Such a usage does not of itself involve a specific reference to a Thera or Theriya school in contrast to the Mahāsaṅghika school.

The narrative

The hero of the Background Story narrative is without a doubt Moggaliputta Tissa: he is presented as the leading Buddhist monk in Asoka’s capital, who first resolves a crisis (*abbuda*) that has arisen in the Saṅgha, and then sends out Buddhist missions to nine different regions, including Laṅkā.

According to the account given of the second council in the Background Story, the dispute that prompted the gathering at Vesālī and second council was settled (Sp 34: *adhikaraṇam vūpasamitaṃ*) and there was then a recitation of the Dhamma and Vinaya by 700 monks. There is no mention of the defeated Vajjiputtaka monks establishing a separate Mahāsaṅghika group of teachers (*ācariyakula*), as we find in the *Kathāvatthu* commentary, following the *Dīpavaṃsa* (see below). Instead we move straight into the narrative that culminates in the third council. The elders who have taken part in the second council foresee that in 118 years, during the reign of Asoka, the Saṅgha will face another crisis (*abbuda*): it will become so successful and receive so much support that non-Buddhist ascetics (*tiṭṭhiya*) will infiltrate the Saṅgha; again someone will be required to settle the matter and they see that this must be Tissa, who is currently nearing the end of his life span in the Brahma world. So these elders charge two younger monks (Siggava and Caṇḍavajji) to look out for Tissa when he is reborn a

⁵² Sp-ṭ (Be) I 20 = Vmv (B^c) I 6: *aṭṭhakathaṃ yeva gahetvā saṃvaṇṇanaṃ karissāmī ti vutte aṭṭhakathāsu vuttatheravādānaṃ bāhirabhāvo siyā ti te pi antokattukāmo antogadhatheravādan ti āha; theravāde pi antokatvā ti vuttaṃ hoti.*

brahmin, the son of Moggali, and to make sure he becomes Buddhist monk. The first act in the drama that culminates in the third council is thus the story of Moggaliputta Tissa's monastic education (Sp 37–41), Asoka's conversion to Buddhism (Sp 41–50) and the ordination of his son, Mahinda, with Moggaliputta Tissa as his preceptor (Sp 50–52). As the one who will bring the *sāsana* to Laṅkā Mahinda shows early promise and masters the Tipiṭaka and commentaries in the space of three years (Sp 52).

The narrative now moves on to recount how King Asoka then lavished so much wealth on the Saṅgha that, as predicted, non-Buddhist ascetics (*titthiya*) decided that in order not to miss out they should ordain as *bhikkhus* or even just shave their heads, put on robes and masquerade as such. The consequence of this large number of false monks infiltrating the Saṅgha was that formal acts of the Saṅgha (*saṅghakamma*) were compromised, and the true monks did not feel able to carry out the *uposatha* ceremony. Moggaliputta Tissa sees that things will get worse before they get better and decides that he will step in later. Leaving Mahinda in charge he retires to the mountain of Ahogaṅgā.

It is important to note that the crisis is presented as resulting from *titthiyas* or non-Buddhist ascetics infiltrating the Saṅgha who are described as continuing with their previous practices such as performing *agnihotra*, enduring the five fires, and worshipping the sun (Sp 53).

The *uposatha* ceremony is interrupted for seven years at the Asokārāma, and finally Asoka decides to intervene, sending a minister to the *vihāra* who orders the monks to hold the *uposatha* ceremony. When they refuse the minister starts killing them, but hesitates when it comes to killing Asoka's brother who has also become a monk. The minister returns to Asoka to tell him what he has done. Asoka is horrified and goes straight to the monks and asks if it is he who is responsible for the deaths of the monks,⁵³ even though his only intention was that a unified Saṅgha should hold the *uposatha* ceremony (Sp 56: *samaggo*

⁵³ Giving an order to kill is regarded as one of six means of effecting the act (*kammapatha*) of killing; cf. Sp 439–41; Sv 69–70 = Ps I 198 = Spk II 144 = Nidd-a 115 = As 97.

bhikkhusaṃgho uposathaṃ karotu). The responses of the monks fail to satisfy Asoka; he is left full of doubt about his actions, and so asks the monks if there is any monk who might be able to help him. The monks recommend Moggaliputta Tissa who is duly sent for.

Moggaliputta Tissa arrives, performs a miracle, making a specific area of the earth shake, and resolves Asoka's doubts. He then gives Asoka instruction in the recognised teaching of the Buddha (Sp 60: *samayaṃ ugganhāpesi*) for seven days. On the seventh day Asoka summons all the monks from the Asokārāma and tests them, asking them what the Buddha taught (*kiṃvādī sammāsambuddho*). The eternalists say he was an eternalist, the annihilationists an annihilationist, and so forth. The explicit reference here is to the sixty-two views set out in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* (D I 12–46). Since Asoka has already learnt what the recognized teaching is (*rājā paṭhamam eva samayassa uggahītattā*), he knows that these are not monks but followers of other religions (*na ime bhikkhū aññatitthiyā ime ti ñatvā*), and so gives them white garments and expels them – all 60,000. Asoka then asks the remaining monks what the Buddha taught, at which they respond that he was an 'analyst' (*vibhajjavādin*). Asoka asks Moggaliputta Tissa whether this is the correct answer, and he confirms that it is. Asoka then tells Moggaliputta Tissa that the *sāsana* has been made pure and the *bhikkhusaṅgha* should perform the *uposatha* ceremony; the unified (*samagga*) Saṅgha – amounting to six million bhikkhus – duly does so. At the same assembly, to finally crush contrary views, Moggaliputta Tissa proclaims the *Kathāvatthu* (Sp 61,12–14: *tasmiṃ samāgame moggaliputtatissatthero parappavādaṃ maddamāno kathāvatthupparakaṇaṃ abhāsi*). Immediately after this Moggaliputta Tissa selects a thousand arahats from among the six million monks and, like Mahākassapa and Yasa before him at the first and second councils respectively, he organises a recitation of the Dhamma and Vinaya and so presides over the Third Council (Sp 61,14–20).

The final part of the *Samantapāsādikā*'s Background Story – which in fact constitutes a little over one third of the narrative (Sp 61–104) – tells the story of how Moggaliputta Tissa organized nine different missions (to Kasmīra-Gandhāra, Mahiṃsa, Vanavāsi, Aparantaka, Mahārāṭṭha, Yonakaloka, Himavanta, Suvannabhūmi,

Tambapaṇṇidīpa), and provides a full account of how Mahinda established Moggaliputta Tissa's lineage in Tambapaṇṇidīpa (Laṅkā).

The starting point is the full list of the lineage of teachers who have handed down the tradition in Laṅkā, a list beginning with Mahinda and ending with Sīva and consisting of 30 names. We are then given the story in full. Immediately following the third council, Moggaliputta Tissa asks himself: 'Where in the future might the Sāsana be firmly established?' He concludes that it is in 'the border regions' (*paccantimesu janapadesu*) that the Sāsana will be well established in the future.⁵⁴

His reflection prompts him to send out Buddhist missions to nine different distant regions: the names of these regions are given along with those of the monks charged to take the Sāsana there (Sp 63,20–64,11). Brief accounts of the first eight missions (Sp 64,12–69,14) follow, but the main focus is, of course, the story of Mahinda's mission to Laṅkā and the establishment of the Sāsana there; this occupies over 30 pages (Sp 69,15–104,16). This story of the establishment of the Sāsana in Tambapaṇṇi can be divided into four parts. The story begins with a brief introduction that has Mahinda delay his journey to Tambapaṇṇi and travel from Pāṭaliputta to Vedisa in central India to meet his mother.⁵⁵ We are then told of Mahinda's journey to Tambapaṇṇi and his encounter with King Devānaṃpiyatissa and how the Mahāvihāra was established and 62 arahats spent the first rainy season at Cetiyaḡiri (Sp 73–83), later known as Mahindataṭa or Mihintalē. We are next told of the establishment of various relics in various shrines in and around Anurādhapura; this section includes the story of the bringing of the branch of the Bodhi Tree to Laṅkā by Asoka's daughter, the nun Saṅghamittā, and culminates in the prediction of the future construction of the Mahācetiya by King Duṭṭhagāmaṇī Abhaya (Sp 83–102). The culmination of the story of the establishment of the Sāsana in Laṅkā and of the *Samantapāsādikā's* Background Story is the account of

⁵⁴ Sp I 63: *moggaliputtatissatthero kira imaṃ tatiyadhammasaṅgītiṃ katvā evaṃ cintesi kattha nu kho anāgate sāsanaṃ suppatiṭṭhitaṃ bhaveyyā ti. atha 'ssa upaparikkhato etad ahosi paccantimesu kho janapadesu suppatiṭṭhitaṃ bhavissatī ti.*

⁵⁵ As an aside we are informed how on a visit to Vedisa Asoka married Devī and Mahinda was conceived (Sp 69–71).

Ariṭṭha's preaching of the Vinaya: the preaching of the Vinaya by a monk whose parents were themselves born in Tambapaṇṇi marks the true establishment of the Sāsana there (Sp 102–104).

Interpreting the narrative

It is possible to read this narrative as a memory or a way of talking of a past dispute that resulted in a schism in the Saṅgha: the other



Figure 1. King Devānampiyatissa and the Arahat Mahinda: Piṭaka Hall, Wat Pavaranives, Bangkok, mid-nineteenth century (courtesy Santi Pakdeekham).

side, branded as not even worthy of being acknowledged Buddhist *bhikkhus*, deserved to be summarily expelled from the Saṅgha. In which case this rhetoric might reflect the actuality of a schism that resulted in the emergence of two Buddhist schools, such as the Theriyas (the Buddhist *bhikkhus*) and the Mahāsaṅghikas (the non-Buddhist *tiṭṭhiyas*), or, as Bareau seems to have wanted to argue, the

Vibhajyavāda and the Sarvāstivāda.⁵⁶ And yet this hardly fits with the tenor of doxographical discourse found in other Pali sources: when Buddhist schools come to be discussed explicitly in the *Dīpavaṃsa*, *Mahāvāṃsa*, and *Kathāvatthu* commentary, there is no suggestion that these schools are not Buddhist, that is, that they are *titthiya*.

Moreover, in the present context it is important to note that there is no reason to think that the monks of the Mahāvihāra in the fourth and fifth centuries read the *Samantapāsādikā* narrative as concerning an internal Buddhist dispute. In terms of their lineage's own self identity this is straightforwardly a narrative not about two rival Buddhist traditions out there in the wider Buddhist world, one (their own) authentic and the other (the Mahāsaṅghikas and friends) inauthentic, but about the hero of their lineage assisting the great emperor Asoka purge the Saṅgha of non-Buddhist ascetics. Though, as I shall discuss later, quite how the exposition of the *Kathāvatthu* fits into such a narrative is unclear.

One of the most surprising features of the *Samantapāsādikā*'s Background Story is that despite its being the principal Pali commentarial account of the origins of the Mahāvihāra lineage and how it arrived in Laṅkā is that it contains no mention at all of any split between the Vinaya lineages of the Theras and Mahāsaṅghikas. It thus appears to have no interest in Buddhist sectarianism. There is one occurrence of the term *theravāda* in the whole Background Story narrative (the term *theriya* does not occur at all):

Receiving (*pariyāpuṇanto*) the Dhamma and Vinaya directly from his preceptor, within three years from the time of his ordination the Elder Mahinda learned (*uggahetvā*) the whole tradition of the elders (*theravāda*), together with the commentary collected with the Tipiṭaka established at the two councils, and became the foremost of the thousand monks who were pupils of his preceptor.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Bateau, *Les sectes bouddhiques*, pp. 33, 206.

⁵⁷ Sp 52: *atha Mahindatthero upasampannakālato pabhuti attano upajjhāyass'eva santike dhammañ ca vinayañ ca pariyāpuṇanto dve pi saṅgītiyo ārūḷhaṃ tipītakasaṅgahitaṃ saṭṭhakathaṃ sabbaṃ theravādaṃ tiṇṇaṃ vassānaṃ abbhantare uggahetvā attano upajjhāyassa antevāsikānaṃ saḥassamattānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ pāmokkho ahoṣi.*

What the expression *sabbaṃ theravādaṃ* (or *sabbattheravādaṃ* according to some mss and editions) refers to here is unclear: to take it in this context as the name of a school or monastic lineage hardly works. The verbs *pariyāpuṇāti* and *uggaṇhati* suggest the memorization and recitation of texts; in fact we might translate here ‘learning to recite the Dhamma and Vinaya ... the Elder Mahinda memorized the whole *theravāda*’.⁵⁸ But what textual tradition might *theravāda* refer to? It is possible to take it here in the sense I have already noted as most frequent in the *aṭṭhakathās*: an authoritative body of tradition and opinion associated with various elders – which, although recorded in the extant commentaries, is nevertheless distinguished from the ‘original’ commentary of the 500 arahats who conducted the first council.

The twelfth-century subcommentary of Sāriputta explains that what is meant by *theravāda* here is simply the canonical text (*pāḷi*), which is referred to as such because it constitutes the tradition (*vāda*) of the elders beginning with Mahākassapa.⁵⁹ The thirteenth-century (?) *Vimativinodanī* essentially repeats this explanation adding, however, that the canonical text (*pāḷi*) is called *theravāda* here ‘in order to distinguish it from the canonical texts of schismatics such as the Mahāsaṅghikas’. Moreover, referring to the incident immediately prior to the third council when Moggaliputta Tissa confirms that the Buddha was a *vibhajjvādin*, it further adds that it is the *vibhajjvāda* that is referred to as the *theravāda*.

Significantly, perhaps, the *Vimativinodanī* goes on to cite a variant reading (apparently not recorded in any modern edition of the *Samantapāsādikā*): *sa-theravādaṃ*; the commentator then glosses the phrase *tipiṭakasaṅgahitaṃ saṭṭhakathaṃ satheravādaṃ* as ‘the word of the Buddha comprising the Tipiṭaka, along with its commentary including the traditions of the elders that have come down in the commentaries’.⁶⁰ This second explanation agrees precisely with

⁵⁸ Cf. Steven Collins, ‘Notes on Some Oral Aspects of Pali Literature’, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35 (1992), pp. 121–35 (123).

⁵⁹ Sp-ṭ (B^c) I 135: *sabbaṃ theravādan ti dve saṅgītiyo āruḷhā pāḷiy’ ev’ ettha theravādo ti veditabbā. sā hi Mahākassapapabhutīnaṃ mahātherānaṃ vādattā theravādo ti vuccatī.*

⁶⁰ Vmv (B^c) I 30: *sabbaṃ theravādan ti dve saṅgītiyo āruḷhā pāḷi. sā hi mahāsaṅghikādibhinnaladdhikāhi vivecetuṃ theravādo ti vuttā. ayañ*

the usage of *theravāda* in the *aṭṭhakathās* to refer to a tradition of commentary and exposition that is additional to an original commentary thought to have been recited at the first council.

The suggestion of the *Vimativinodanī* that *theravāda* here refers to the scriptural tradition (*vāda*) of specifically the Theriyas in contrast to the scriptural traditions of other schools such as the Mahāsaṅghikas is not impossible. Yet strictly all we have in the *Samantapāsādikā* is a statement that the tradition mastered by Mahinda was one that had the authority of unspecified elders and the first two councils, a claim that all Buddhist traditions would want to make concerning their tradition. Of course, it might be countered that (given what we know from the *Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā* and the *Dīpavaṃsa*) the connotation of the term *theravāda* would be taken for granted by both the author and his readers. While this may be true, it still seems to me that the complete absence of any account of the split between the Theriyas and Mahāsaṅghikas in the Background Story must carry some significance for our understanding of the earliest sense of Buddhist identity in Lāṅkā.

If we only read the *Samantapāsādikā* account we would learn nothing about a split between the Theriyas and Mahāsaṅghikas, nor of any other splits in the ordination lineage of the Saṅgha. The narrative does not even present the crisis that led up to the third council as involving a split in the Saṅgha, let alone indicate which schools might have resulted from that split. And this is so even though according to the other accounts preserved at the Mahāvihāra, the splits that resulted in the emergence of the eighteen schools are all understood to have taken place between the second council and the convening of the third council, the precise period covered by the Background Story.

The identity and authenticity of the Lāṅkan lineage of elders turns out not to be defined by reference to a true and authentic lineage contrasted with other lesser and inauthentic lineages of the Saṅgha and Vinaya that have split off, but simply by reference to a single lineage of

hi vibhajjavādo Mahākassapattherādīhi asaṃkarato rakkhito ānīto cā ti theravādo ti vuccati. satheravādan ti pi likhanti; tattha aṭṭhakathāsu āgatatheravādasahitaṃ sātṭhakathaṃ tipīṭakasāṅghitaṃ buddhavacanan ti ānetvā yojetabbaṃ.

teachers whose key figures are Moggaliputta Tissa and Mahinda – the first because having resolved a crisis (*abbuda*) in the Saṅgha, he then sends out Buddhist missions to nine different regions, including Laṅkā; the second because he is the monk charged with actually establishing the Sāsana in Laṅkā.

What is interesting about the Background Story narrative in the present context is the emphasis on how this is not an exclusive transmission to Laṅkā; on the contrary, the point seems to be to connect the Laṅkā tradition to a significant and broader tradition established across the Indian subcontinent and beyond. The purpose of the narrative seems to be to defend the Laṅkā tradition's credentials against an anticipated charge that it is a peripheral and insignificant tradition. We should recall at this point that in the *Nikāyas* one of the eight or nine inopportune circumstances for following the spiritual life (*akkhaṇā asamayā brahmacariyavāsāya*) is said to be being reborn in the border regions 'among ignorant foreigners where there is no access to monks, nuns and laypeople'.⁶¹

The Background Story defends the authenticity of the Laṅkā tradition not by claiming a specifically Theriya lineage, but by making a series of other specific claims. First, it tells how the Laṅkā ordination lineage goes back to Moggaliputta Tissa whom it depicts as the most famed monk in Asoka's imperial capital: the teacher of the king himself who helped him purge the Saṅgha of non-Buddhist ascetics, expounded the final text of the Pali canon and like the great elders Kassapa and Yasa before him convened a Buddhist council. Secondly, the narrative demonstrates that far from being peripheral and isolated, the Laṅkā tradition shares its connection with the great Moggaliputta Tissa with eight other branches of the same tradition found in different lands; moreover Moggaliputta Tissa himself predicted that in the future it was precisely such 'peripheral' places as Laṅkā that would become the significant centres of Buddhism. Finally the narrative links the Laṅkā tradition to the centre and Asoka once more, through the figure of Mahinda, one of Asoka's sons, whose connections allowed

⁶¹ D II 264, 287, A IV 226: *ayaṅ ca puggalo paccantimesu janapadesu paccāḷāto hoti, so ca hoti milakkhusu aviññātāresu yattha n' atthi gati bhikkhūnaṃ bhikkhunīnaṃ upāsakānaṃ upāsikānaṃ.*

him to facilitate the bringing of important Buddhist relics to the island, including a branch of the Bodhi Tree brought by no less a person than Saṅghamittā.⁶²

The Background Story narrative seems to reflect a relatively early stage in the development of Buddhist identity in Laṅkā. That is, it is indicative of what its author found in and took over relatively unedited from a particular source available to him.⁶³ The concern was not to tell the story of how something called Theravāda – or even Theriya – Buddhism as opposed to some other, less authentic form of Buddhism (such as the Mahāsaṅghika) was brought to and established in Laṅkā. The concern was simply to demonstrate that what was introduced to Laṅkā was in itself authentic and significant. There is thus no exclusive claim to authenticity. On the contrary, the Buddhism brought to Laṅkā is the same Buddhism found at the centre of the Buddhist world and also, thanks to the vision of Moggaliputta Tissa, in far distant lands. In the *Samantapāsādikā* account the name of this tradition is never identified as Theriya (or Theravāda) as opposed to Mahāsaṅghika. The designation *vibhajjavāda* occurs, yet in something of a narrative aside. While it is used to characterize the genuine teaching of the Buddha, the contrast is not the teachings of other Buddhist schools, but the teachings of non-Buddhist ascetics who have entered the Saṅgha for

⁶² The continuing importance of the figure of Mahinda in the religious life of Lankan Buddhists in the early centuries CE is evidenced by the institution of the ‘Mahinda festivals’; see Mhv XXXIV 68–86; Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, 2nd edition (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena, 1966), pp. 275–76, 282; R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), p. 233; Petra Kieffer-Pülz, ‘Old and New Ritual: Advancing the Date of the Invitation ceremony (*pavāraṇā*) with regard to the Mahinda festival’ in *Jaina-itiḥāsa-ratna: Festschrift für Gustav Roth zum 90. Geburtstag*, ed. by Ute Hüsken, Petra Kieffer-Pülz and Anne Peters (Marburg: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 2006), pp. 339–49 (346–47).

⁶³ Erich Frauwallner, ‘On the Historical Value of the Ancient Ceylonese Chronicles’, in *Erich Frauwallner’s Posthumous Essays* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1994), pp. 7–33, has argued on the basis of evidence from the *Vamsaṭṭhapakāsini* that the author of the *Samantapāsādikā* follows the old Sinhala *Vinayaṭṭhakathā* (pp. 10–17).

material gain. Nevertheless *vibhajjavāda* does seem to form part of the identity of the Buddhists of Lañkā.⁶⁴

The relationship of such a narrative to actual events and persons remains problematic, and preoccupation with such questions means that insufficient attention has been paid to the narrative's own concerns. Even if it is claimed that it is likely that such a narrative would preserve the names that constitute its lineage of teachers, it would be surprising if elements of hagiography had not also found their place in the narrative. Suspicions are raised especially about the figure of Moggaliputta Tissa when the *Samantapāsādikā* narrative is considered alongside the narratives of teacher lineages found in certain Buddhist Sanskrit sources.⁶⁵ As has long been recognised, there are striking parallels in the stories of Moggaliputta Tissa and Upagupta. Both are closely associated with Asoka as important monks in his capital, yet Pali sources know of no Upagupta just as northern sources know of no Moggaliputta Tissa.⁶⁶ Is it plausible that two monks of such importance and eminence should be completely forgotten by the other tradition? Of course, one possibility is that Moggaliputta Tissa and Upagupta are one and the same.⁶⁷ Yet this makes little sense of the narrative differences. While Upagupta shares with Moggaliputta Tissa a narrative association with Aśoka, Upagupta does *not* help Aśoka expel non-Buddhist ascetics from the Saṅgha, he does *not* preside over a third council, and he does *not* recite the *Kathāvatthu*. Rather than seeing the story of Upagupta as somehow corroborative evidence that

⁶⁴ A detailed consideration of the significance of the term *vibhajjavāda* is beyond the scope of the present article. For a discussion of some of the evidence see L. S. Cousins, 'On the Vibhajjavādins' *Buddhist Studies Review* 18 (2001), pp. 131–82.

⁶⁵ See Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, pp. 222–32; Strong, *Legend and Cult of Upagupta*, pp. 60–61.

⁶⁶ Unless Moggaliputtatissa is to be identified with the Śramaṇa Maudgalyāyana (Mūlián) who teaches that the past and future do not exist in the *Vijñānakāya* (Taishō 1539, T 26 531a, 25: 沙門目連作如是說 過去未來無); cf. Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, 225.

⁶⁷ See Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, 225; Strong, *Legend and Cult of Upagupta*, p. 147; Strong refers in particular to Waddell's article 'Identity of Upagupta, the High-priest of Açoka with Moggaliputta Tisso', *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 66 (1899), pp. 70–75.

Moggaliputta Tissa was associated with Asoka in the manner described in the *Samantapāsādikā*, it seems more reasonable to see the details of the stories that associate figures such as Moggaliputta Tissa, Upagupta and Mahinda with Asoka as part of a more general strategy to enhance the reputation and prestige of these teachers and their lineages.

4. Some epigraphic evidence

What seems to be brought out for the monks of Laṅkā is a basic sense of identity as the local branch of a broader school that is in principle to be found flourishing as far away as Gandhāra and Kaśmīra. It is also worth noting that the sense of identity is taken as applying to the Laṅkā tradition in general; there is no suggestion in the *Samantapāsādikā* that other monks in Laṅkā are not part of this lineage. The early inscriptional evidence from Laṅkā also suggests the non-sectarian nature of the Buddhism established there in the third to first centuries BCE; at least there is no mention of Theriya or any other sectarian affiliation, and the epithet *Mahaviharavasiska* appears to occur in just one relatively late Brāhmī inscription.⁶⁸ Local rulers from different parts of the island have left records of their donations at Mihintalē (the Cetiyaḡiri of the *Samantapāsādikā*),⁶⁹ while a second-century inscription at Rājagala in the east of the island, far from Anurādhapura and Mihintalē, proclaims a stūpa as the ‘stūpa of the elder Iṭṭhiya and the elder Mahinda, who

⁶⁸ S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon Volume I* ([Colombo:] Department of Archaeology, 1970), p.98 (No. 1206): ‘The cave of the elder [Di]tima Apaya, a resident of the Mahāvihāra, has been donated to the Saṅgha of the four quarters, past and present.’ With reference to the Mahāvihāra of this inscription, Paranavitana observes (p. cvii) ‘presumably at Anurādhapura’; the inscription is from Kaduruvāva, some 30 miles southwest of Anurādhapura.

⁶⁹ See R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, ‘Prelude to the State: An early phase in the evolution of political institutions in ancient Sri Lanka’, *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 8 (1982), pp. 1–39 (pp. 25–27, 32–33); Paranavitana’s *Inscriptions of Ceylon* gives 75 early Brāhmī inscriptions at Mihintalē; on the dating of the earliest of these inscriptions to the reign of Uttiya (207–197 BCE), successor of Devānampiya Tissa, see p. lii.

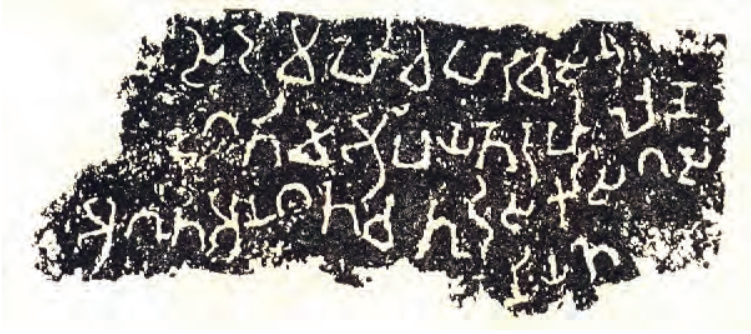


Figure 2. Brāhmī inscription from Kaduruvāva: “The cave of the elder, [Di]tima Apaya, a resident of the Mahāvihāra, has been dedicated to the Saṅgha of the four quarters, present and absent.” After S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Volume I, *Early Brāhmī Inscriptions* (The Department of Archaeology, Ceylon, 1970), Pl. CXXVIII, No. 1206.

came to this island by its foremost good fortune’;⁷⁰ Iṭṭhiya was one of the four monks said to have been sent with Mahinda to Tambapaṇṇi by Moggaliputta Tissa (Sp 64, 69–72).

A number of inscriptions discovered in Andhra Pradesh seem to have been composed by Buddhists with a rather similar sense of identity. A mid-third-century CE (that is, a date that perhaps postdates somewhat the substance of the *aṭṭhakathā* material)⁷¹ inscription from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa recording the laywoman Bodhisiri’s donation is dedicated ‘to teachers who are Laṅkā (*tambapa[m]ṇaka*) Theriyas, the

⁷⁰ Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, p. 35 (No. 468): *ye ima dipa paṭamaya idiya agatana Idika-[tera-Mah] ida-teraha tube*; Paranavitana discusses the interpretation of this inscription, in particular of the phrase *paṭamaya idiya* (= *prathamayā ṛddhyā*), on p. ci.

⁷¹ Although Buddhaghosa should be dated to the late fourth century or early fifth century CE (von Hinüber, *Handbook of Pali Literature*, § 207), the substance of the material contained in the *aṭṭhakathā* seems not to be later than the first or second century CE; see Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, p. 87; Norman, *Pāli Literature*, pp. 119, 121; von Hinüber, *Handbook of Pali Literature*, § 206.

bringers of faith to Kasmira, Gaṃdhāra, Cīna, Cilāta, Tosali, Avaramta, Vaṃga, Vanavāsi, Yavana, Damila, Palura, and Taṃbapaṃnidīpa'.⁷²

Another Nāgārjunakoṇḍa inscription of similar date refers to teachers who are 'Analyst (*vibhajavāda*) Theriyas, the bringers of faith to Kasmira, Gaṃdhāra, Yavana, Vanavāsa, and Taṃbapaṃnidīpa, and who live in the Mahāvihāra'.⁷³ Whether or not the Mahāvihāra



Figure 3. Prakrit footprint slab inscription from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa (after *Epigraphia Indica* 33, Pl. 46 A)

⁷² J. Ph. Vogel, 'Prakrit Inscriptions from a Buddhist Site at Nagarjunikonda', *Epigraphia Indica*, 20 (1930), 1–37: *ācarīyānaṃ Kasmira-Gaṃdhāra-Cīna-Cilāta-Tosali-Avaramta-Vaṃga-Vanavāsi-Yavana-Da[mila-Pa]lura-Taṃbapaṃnidīpa-pas[ā]dakānaṃ theriyānaṃ Taṃbapa[m]ṇakānaṃ* (p. 22). Lamotte (*Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, pp. 326–27) reads the description as suggestive of the laywoman Bodhisiri's naïve belief that it was the Laṅkā tradition itself that brought Buddhism to the whole of India. Yet, given that Taṃbapaṃnidīpa itself is included in the list of places to which Buddhism was brought, and that the teachers referred to seem to be third-century CE contemporaries of Bodhisiri, it is perhaps unlikely that they themselves are being referred to as the teachers who brought Buddhism to all these places, even by a naïve laywoman, assuming she is to be regarded as the actual author of the inscription. It is possible to construe the inscription as suggesting that the teachers in question are specifically Taṃbapaṃnakas who belong to a more general Theriya lineage which was considered to have brought Buddhism to the various regions mentioned. This inscription has also been discussed by among others Walters ('Rethinking Buddhist Missions', pp. 303–05) and Cousins, 'On the Vibhajjavādins', pp. 142–43, 161–63. For some discussion of the actual locations these place names refer to see Frauwallner, *Earliest Vinaya*, pp. 15–17; Vogel, 'Prakrit Inscriptions', pp. 35–36; Cousins, 'On the Vibhajjavādins', pp. 161, 166.

⁷³ D. C. Sircar and A. N. Lahiri, 'Footprint Slab Inscription from Nagarjunikonda', *Epigraphia Indica* 33 (1960), pp. 247–50: *ācharyānaṃ theriyānaṃ vibhajavādānaṃ kasmira-gaṃdhāra-yavana-vanavāsa-taṃbapaṃnidīpa-pasādakānaṃ mahāvihāravāsinaṃ* (p. 250).

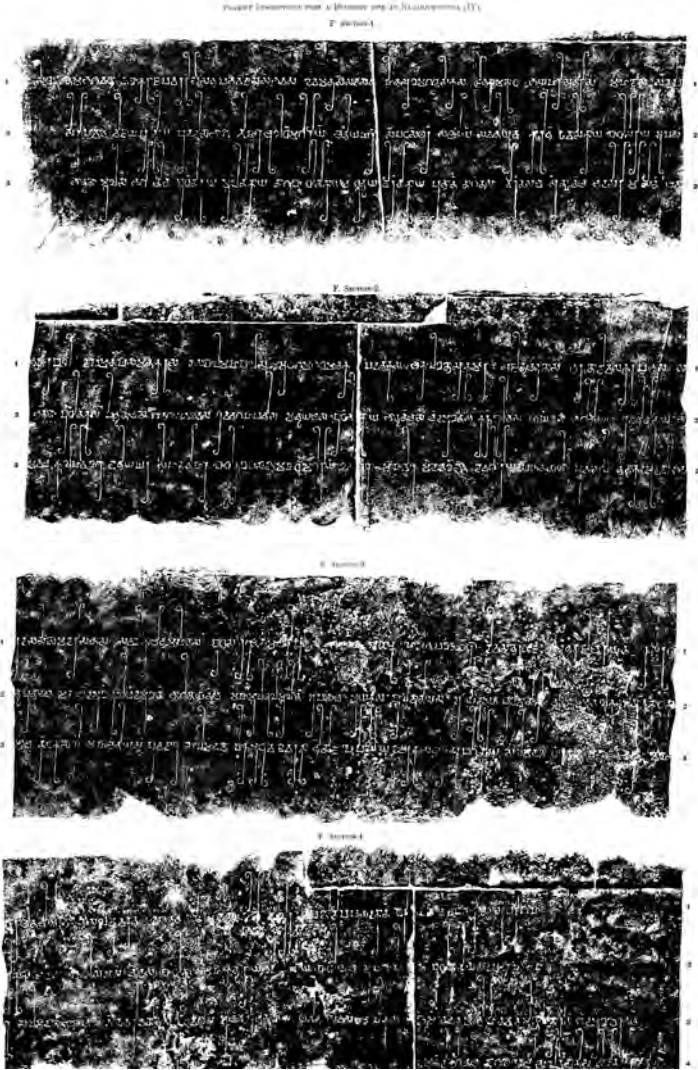


Figure 4. Nāgārjunakoṇḍa inscription (after *Epigraphia Indica* 20, Pl. 1)

Figure 5. Reliquary inscribed with the names Kosikiputa, Gotiputa and Mogaliputa, from Sanchi, Stūpa 2. (OA 1887.7-17.4, after Michael Willis, *Buddhist Reliquaries from Ancient India*, London: British Museum Press, 2000, cat. no. 25, figs. 57-60).

referred to here is a local monastery or the one at Anurādhapura,⁷⁴ these inscriptions seem to affirm that association with a set of Buddhist missions to various parts of India was part of what defined the identity of the tradition to which the Laṅkā Theras considered they belonged. These inscriptions, after all, occur in a context where the identity of these explicitly Theriya teachers is implicitly being contrasted with the identity of teachers from other Buddhist schools: at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa we find inscriptional evidence of the presence in the third century CE of Mahāsāṃghikas, Mahīśāsakas, Bahuśrutīyas, and Aparasāilas.⁷⁵

How all this relates to the historical circumstances of the introduction of Buddhism to Laṅkā is a complex issue that goes beyond the



⁷⁴ That there was a local Nāgārjunakoṇḍa *mahāvihāra* is clear: it is mentioned by name further on in the same inscription as a place where the same Bodhisiri has had a *maṇḍava* pillar erected; it is also mentioned in one other inscription (Vogel, ‘Prakrit Inscriptions’, p.19); yet the picture is complicated by the fact that this local *mahāvihāra* appears to be the residence of Aparamahāvīnaseliyas (i.e. Aparaseliya Mahāsāṃghikas?), and by the mention of a local Sīhaḷa-vihāra, once again in Bodhisiri’s inscription (cf. Vogel, ‘Prakrit Inscriptions’, pp.4, 9). Sircar and Lahiri (‘Footprint Slab Inscription’, p.249) assume a reference to the local *mahāvihāra*, while Walters (‘Rethinking Buddhist Missions’, pp.303–05) and Cousins (‘On the Vibhajavādins’, pp.140–42, 144–46) assume the Mahāvihāra of Anurādhapura.

⁷⁵ Vogel, ‘Prakrit Inscriptions’, pp.10–11; Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, pp.579–84; see also Cousins, ‘On the Vibhajavādins’, pp.148–51 for some useful reflections on the epigraphical evidence for the distribution of Buddhist schools in the early centuries CE.



Figure 6. Reliquary vase from Andher, Stūpa 2, inscribed with the name Mogaliputa. (OA 1887.7-17.18, after Michael Willis, *Buddhist Reliquaries from Ancient India*, London: British Museum Press, 2000, cat. no. 27, fig. 121).

scope of the present discussion, but it is worth commenting on three matters: chronology, the inscriptions from Vediṣā in central India, and the Aśokan inscriptions.

The fact that the *Samantapāsādikā* mentions no schisms in the Saṅgha and shows no interest in Buddhist sectarianism might in part reflect circumstances where schisms in the Saṅgha might occur in one place but not be known of, or at least not considered significant, in other places for some time. The ‘short chronology’, which in some version seems generally favoured by scholars since the nineteen-eighties, gives the Buddha’s death as occurring in *ca.* 400 BCE. This brings the Second Council and the split between the Mahāsāṃghikas and Sthaviras to within twenty to forty years of the ‘events’ recounted in the *Samantapāsādikā* as having taken place during the reign of Asoka in Pāṭaliputta.⁷⁶ As I shall discuss below, the record of the identity and affiliation of Buddhist schools found in the Pali sources takes the form

⁷⁶ For some reflections on the implications of adopting the ‘short chronology’ for the early history of Buddhist sectarianism see Charles Prebish, ‘Cooking the Buddhist Books: The Implications of the New Dating of the Buddha for the History of Early Indian Buddhism’, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 15 (2008), pp. 1–21.

of a bare and ideal schema;⁷⁷ it thus seems likely that this has been projected back in time in a mechanical fashion.

It has long been recognized that the names of the monks of mentioned in Pali sources as bringing Buddhism to the region of the Himālaya (*Himavanta-padesa-bhāga*) bear some relationship to the names of the ‘Hemavata’ monks found on reliquaries from stūpas at Sāñcī and Sonārī in ancient Vediśā in central India. Michael Willis has explored this relationship in some detail and argued convincingly for a more or less precise correspondence.⁷⁸ While this corroborates some details of the Pali tradition about the mission to the Himālaya regions, it also raises questions. A reliquary from the Andher stūpa refers to a ‘Mogaliputa the pupil of Gotiputa’. As Willis shows, this Vedisa Mogaliputa must have lived in the middle of the second century BCE, so cannot in any straightforward way be identified with the Tissa Moggaliputta of the the Pali sources, a contemporary of Asoka a century earlier. As Willis further points out, this undermines the suggestion of Frauwallner and Yamazaki that we can take the Vedisa inscriptions as evidence that the Buddhist missions mentioned in the Pali sources actually originated in Vedisa.⁷⁹ The early Brāhmī inscriptions from Lañkā suggest that at the time of Mogaliputa of Vedisa Buddhist monks were already living in the caves of Mihintalē.

Two Asokan inscriptions have long been discussed as having some bearing on the accounts given in the Pali sources: the thirteenth Rock Edict (which survives in four versions) and the so-called ‘schism’

⁷⁷ Cousins (‘On the Vibhajjavādins’, p.147) draws attention to the fact that as early as 1903 Hendrik Kern (*Histoire du bouddhisme dans l’Inde*, 2 vols (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1901–03) II 481) pointed out that the number ‘18’ must be ideal (like the 18 *Purāṇas*); Gananath Obeyesekere has more recently made the same point in his ‘Myth, History and Numerology in the Buddhist Chronicles’, in *The Dating of the Historical Buddha/Die Datierung des historischen Buddha*, Part 1, ed. by Heinz Bechert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), pp. 152–82.

⁷⁸ Michael Willis, ‘Buddhist Saints in Ancient Vedisa’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 11 (2001), pp. 219–28

⁷⁹ Erich Frauwallner, *The earliest Vinaya and the beginnings of Buddhist literature* (Roma: ISMEO, 1956), pp. 13–19; Gen’ichi Yamazaki, ‘The Spread of Buddhism in the Mauryan Age with Special Reference to the Mahinda Legend’, *Acta Asiatica*, 43 (1982), pp. 1–17.

edict found at Kauśāmbī, Sāñcī and Sārnāth. The former refers at its conclusion to Asoka's dispatching emissaries (*dūta*) to various kingdoms. K. R. Norman has recently re-examined this edict alongside the Pali sources and listed the various differences between Asoka's *dūta* missions and Moggaliputta Tissa's Buddhist missions and concludes that 'it is hard to imagine why anyone should ever have thought they were the same'.⁸⁰ The 'schism' edict demonstrates Asoka's willingness to intervene in the affairs of the Saṅgha to avert 'schism',⁸¹ and some of the terminology of the edict is echoed in the Pali sources, yet it remains unclear what kind of 'schism' is being referred to and how the edict might bear on any schism mentioned in other sources.⁸²

Since the present focus is Buddhist identity rather than Buddhist history, it is worth taking stock of the evidence for the former so far reviewed. Both the textual and inscriptional evidence seems to suggest that the Laṅkā Buddhist tradition's identity comprises three ingredients: (1) a lineage of Theras, occasionally explicitly characterised as Theriya (*presumably* as opposed to Mahāsaṅghika), (2) a set of Buddhist missions, sometimes explicitly linked to a particular famed Buddhist monk in the figure of Moggaliputta Tissa, and (3) rather more vaguely, the notion of following the tradition of the 'Analysts' or Vibhajjavādins. A fourth ingredient is specific to one group within Laṅkā, the group whose writings have in the main come down to us: belonging to the Mahāvihāra (as opposed to the Abhayagirivihāra or Jetavana) in Anurādhapura. The sources combine these ingredients in different ways and in different measures.

⁸⁰ K. R. Norman, 'Aśokan Envoys and Buddhist Missionaries', *Collected Papers* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1990–), 8 (2007), pp. 183–98 (196).

⁸¹ The terms Asoka uses are from the roots *bhid* and *bhañj*.

⁸² See in particular: Heinz Bechert, 'The Importance of Aśoka's so-called Schism Edict', in *Indological and Buddhist Studies*, ed. by L. A. Hercus, and others (Canberra: Australian National University, 1982), pp. 61–68; K. R. Norman, 'Aśoka's "Schism" Edict', *Collected Papers* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1990–), 3 (1992), pp. 191–218.

5. The *Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā* and *Dīpavaṃsa*: ‘We are Theriyas, and not Mahāsaṅghikas’

Buddhaghosa and his fellow monks on Laṅkā in the fifth century CE certainly knew of the split between the tradition of the Theras and the Mahāsaṅghikas, and also of subsequent splits; the author of the *Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā* outlines them at the beginning his of commentary where he goes over essentially the same material found in Sp, but in only eight pages instead of 100.⁸³ The account in *Kathāvatthu* commentary comprises three parts:

- (i) reference to the Buddha’s teaching of the Abhidhamma in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three and his foreseeing that in the future Moggaliputta Tissa will give the full exposition of the *Kathāvatthu* at the third council (Kv-a 1,1–2,9);
- (ii) the stories of the first and second councils followed by an account of the split of the Saṅgha into eighteen traditions (*ācariyavāda*) during the second 100 years after the Buddha’s death (Kv-a 2,10–5,25);
- (iii) the story of non-Buddhist ascetics (*titthiyas*) infiltrating the Saṅgha culminating in the third council during the reign of Asoka (Kv-a 6,1–8,25).⁸⁴

According to the account of the second council provided here, the defeated Vajjiputtaka monks immediately established a separate Mahāsaṅghika group of teachers (*ācariyakula*) (Kv-a 2). In a little less than a page we are then given the barest of outlines of the splits that resulted over the course of 100 years in eighteen different schools. This is followed by a substantial quotation of 51 lines from the *Dīpavaṃsa* (V 30–53) which merely repeats the bare account of the split into 18 schools, concluding with the statement that:

⁸³ The Mahāsaṅghikas are also mentioned elsewhere in Sp, but apparently only once, at 874,11 where the Mahāsaṅghikas, etc., are given as an example of the latter of two types of enemy: personal (*atta-paccathika*) and of the dispensation (*sāsana-paccathika*). This appears to be the only occurrence of the term in the *aṭṭhakathās* other than Kv-a.

⁸⁴ Kv-a 6–8 is more or less compiled from Sp 52,20–53,23, 56,26, 60,12–61,20, adding a slightly longer description of the *Kathāvatthu*.

Of the traditions, that of the Elders, which resembles a large banyan tree, is the best; it is the religion of the Jina in full, with nothing lacking or added.

The other traditions grew like thorns on the tree.⁸⁵

The author then notes (as does the *Dīpavaṃsa*) that six more schools (*ācariyavāda*) appeared subsequently, that is, some time after 200 BE, but in the author's eyes presumably after the reign of Asoka rather than during it, since the narrative of the Third Council immediately returns to talking in terms of eighteen schools.⁸⁶ Both the author of the *Kathāvatthu* commentary and the *Dīpavaṃsa* thus name a total of 24 schools (see Table 1).

The most likely reason for the omission in the *Samantapāsādikā* of any account of the splits in the Saṅgha is that it was also omitted in the author's principal source and that he felt no need to make good this omission.⁸⁷ When the author of *Kathāvatthu* commentary comes to comment on the contents of the *Kathāvatthu*, however, it seems likely that since the sources of his commentary went some way in tying the views of the *Kathāvatthu*'s anonymous opponents (*paravādin*) to named Buddhist schools, he felt a brief account of the evolution of the schools was appropriate.⁸⁸ Yet the list of schools he provides in his

⁸⁵ Dīp V 52: *nigrodho va mahārukkho theravādānam uttamo | anūnaṃ anadhikañ ca kevalaṃ jinasāsanam || kaṇṭakā [B^c santakā] viya rukkhamhi nibbattā vādasesakā |*

⁸⁶ Of the six additional schools (Hemavatikas, Rājagirikas, Siddhatthikas, Pubbaseliyas, Aparaseliyas, Vājiriyas), four seem clearly Mahāsaṅghika (Kv-anuṭ (B^c) 133); but the Hemavatikas are Thera-derived; nothing is known of the Vājiriyas.

⁸⁷ It is clear that some version of the *Dīpavaṃsa* was one of Buddhaghosa's sources since he quotes from it by name at Sp 74,18 and 75,14, yet it does not seem to have been the principal source he was following; cf. n. 51 above. The twelfth-century subcommentary to the *Samantapāsādikā* finds it appropriate to make good Buddhaghosa's omission, and begins its explanation of the third council by quoting in full and verbatim, but without acknowledgement, the relevant section from the *Kathāvatthu* commentary; see Sp-ṭ (B^c) I 116–19 (to Sp 37).

⁸⁸ The split between the Mahāsaṅghikas and Theriyas is also not mentioned in the introduction to the *Atthasālinī*, which is likely to be by the same author as Kv-a (see von Hinüber, *Handbook of Pali Literature*, §§ 308–11); this seems

introduction in the context of the account of the split of the Saṅgha into eighteen schools does not fit well with the schools he subsequently goes on to specify in the body of his commentary as holding the particular viewpoints set out in the *Kathāvatthu*: half of the eighteen schools given in the introduction are not mentioned at all in the body of the commentary, and some that are mentioned relatively frequently in the body of the commentary are not found in the introduction⁸⁹ (See Table 2. Number of views attributed to schools in Kv-a).⁹⁰ The Vibhajjavādas are mentioned neither in the introduction as one of the 18 original

to go against the principal stated in the introduction to the commentaries to the four *Nikāyas*, namely to comment in full on issues the first time they are relevant, but not subsequently.

⁸⁹ Lance Cousins has argued that all this suggests that the Mahāvihāra commentarial tradition did not in fact preserve its own tradition of the origin of the eighteen schools and that the *Dīpavaṃsa* must have borrowed its account from a northern Sarvāstivādin source; see his ‘The “Five Points” and the Origins of the Buddhist Schools’, *The Buddhist Forum* 2 (1991), pp. 27–60 (31–34).

⁹⁰ Only four or five of the 18 schools given in the account of the division of the Saṅgha turn out to be relevant to the allocation of the *Kathāvatthu*’s anonymous views to specific schools; it is an additional six to nine groups, not mentioned in the introduction, that feature most prominently in this exercise: the Andhakas first and foremost – presumably because their close proximity meant that their views were most familiar to the southern Tambapaṇṇikas – with the Uttarāpathakas or ‘northerners’ – lumped together presumably because the southern Tambapaṇṇikas were vague about their precise affiliation – coming a very poor second. In detail, leaving aside the Theras, of the original 18 schools the Mahāsaṅghikas have 24 theses attributed to them, the Sammitiyas 22, the Mahisāsakas 9, the Sabbatthivādas 3, and the Vajjiputtakas 2; a further 3 schools (the Gokulikas, Kassapikas and Bhadrāyānikas) have 1 thesis each attributed to them, while 9 schools (the Paṇṇattivādas, Bāhuliyas, Cetiya, Ekabyohārikas, Saṅkantikas, Suttavādas, Dhammaguttikas, Dharmuttariyas, Channāgārikas) have no thesis at all attributed to them and are never mentioned again. The 6 additional schools feature more prominently: the Pubbaseliyas have 29 theses attributed to them, the Rājagirikas 11, the Siddhatthikas 9, the Aparaseliyas 5, the Hemavatikas and Vājiriyas 0. The body of Kv-a mentions 4 other groups that are not mentioned at all in the introduction: the Andhakas have 72 theses attributed to them, the Uttarāpathakas 45, the Hetuvādas 11, the Vetullakas 8; the Andhakas are explained as a collective name for the Pubbaseliyas, Aparaseliyas, Rājagiriyas, Siddhatthikas (Kv-a 52: *andhakā*

schools, nor in the body of the commentary; the term only occurs in the context of the expulsion of the non-Buddhist ascetics from the Saṅgha.

Moreover, relating the composition of the *Kathāvatthu* – and the views of the anonymous Buddhist opponents contained in it – to a series of splits in the Saṅgha that are supposed to have occurred during the century *before* the crisis that prompted the third council only further highlights the way in which the *Kathāvatthu* is ill suited to resolving a dispute that turns on the infiltration of the Buddhist Saṅgha by non-Buddhist ascetics.⁹¹

As has often been pointed out, the *Dīpavaṃsa* appears to be a text that combines material from a number of sources with little attempt to rework the material into a single, coherent whole. It provides two accounts each of the first, second and third councils.⁹² Frauwallner has suggested that this indicates that the *Dīpavaṃsa* as we have it is drawing on two ancient lost sources, a Mahāvihāra *Mahāvaṃsa* and an Abhayagirivihāra *Mahāvaṃsa*.⁹³ Yet the account of the split into eighteen schools occurs only once in the *Dīpavaṃsa*, as a continuation of the *second* account of the second council (Dīp V 39–54); there is no reference to the splits in the Saṅgha in connection with either of the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s accounts of the third council in chapter seven. Frauwallner takes the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s second version as deriving from the lost Abhayagirivihāra's *Mahāvaṃsa*. Whether or not that is so it seems likely that this *Dīpavaṃsa* account of the split into schools is the source of the *Kathāvatthu* commentary's account. All this reinforces the conclusion that the traditions available to Buddhaghosa and his fellow monks relating to the split of the Saṅgha into eighteen schools

nāma pubbaseliyā, aparaseliyā, rājagiriya, siddhatthikā ti ime pacchā uppannanikāyā).

⁹¹ Norman ('Aśoka's "Schism" Edict', p. 214) suggests the conflation of three separate events in the Pāli sources: a schism, a dispute about doctrine, and the third council.

⁹² See Dīp IV 1–26 and V 1–14 (first council), Dīp IV 47–53 and V 15–38 (second council), and Dīp VII 34–43 and VII 44–59 (third council); ('On the Historical Value of the Ancient Ceylonese Chronicles', pp. 20–21).

⁹³ Frauwallner, 'On the Historical Value of the Ancient Ceylonese Chronicles', pp. 19–21. The Uttaravihāra (or Abhayagiri) *Mahāvaṃsa* is mentioned by name at Mhv-ṭ 134, 14–15; for the editor's discussion see Mhv-ṭ lxx–lxxvii.

were rather limited: essentially a footnote to one account of the second council. Moreover, it seems likely that the account of the splits did not originally form an integral part *either* of the earliest traditions concerned with the third council and the transmission of Buddhism to Laṅkā *or* of the traditional exegesis associated with the *Kathāvatthu*.⁹⁴ The *Samantapāsādikā*, *Kathāvatthu* commentary, and *Dīpavaṃsa* all struggle to relate three separate traditions: the story of the transmission of Sāsana to Laṅkā, the history of the division of the Saṅgha into various schools, and the technical doctrinal Abhidhamma debates that underlie the *Kathāvatthu*.

Despite the fact that the history of the splits in the Buddhist Saṅgha is not well integrated into the overall account of the Laṅkā tradition's lineage, bringing in the account of the split into eighteen schools (six Mahāsaṅghika and twelve Thera) does make clear that in the fourth and fifth centuries monks in Laṅkā identified their tradition as Theriya rather than Mahāsaṅghikas. But not only is the tradition understood to be Theriya, it derives directly from the original Theras; the other eleven Thera derived schools are considered to have split off from them in the second century BE:

All eighteen teachers' traditions emerged in the second century [BE]. It is just these that are also referred to as 'the eighteen schools' and 'the eighteen teachers' groups'. Of these eighteen traditions, seventeen should be considered schismatic, and the Tradition of the Elders not schismatic.⁹⁵

Yet, given that the story of Moggaliputta Tissa's missions continues to be emphasized,⁹⁶ the Thera tradition of Laṅkā remains one that is not exclusively Laṅkan; the Theras of Laṅkā are a branch of a

⁹⁴ Cousins ('On the Vibhajjavādins', p. 151) suggests that 'there can be no doubt' that the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s account of the schools must ultimately derive from Vasumitra's **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* (third or fourth century?); the precise grounds for this claim are not clear.

⁹⁵ Kv-a 3: *sabbe va aṭṭhārasa ācariyavādā dutiye vassasate uppannā. aṭṭhārasa nikāyā ti pi aṭṭhārasācariyakulānī ti pi etesaṃ yeva nāmaṃ. etesu pana sattarasa vādā bhinnakā, theravādo asambhinnako ti veditabbo.*

⁹⁶ These are not mentioned in Kv-a, but are found in Dīp VIII.

broader tradition that is found, or at least was found, across the Indian subcontinent and even beyond; the claim is not so much to be *the* authentic Theras, but to be *a branch* of the authentic Theras.

6. The *Mahāvamsa*: ‘The Mahāvihāravāsins are the only true Theriyas in Laṅkā’

When we turn to the *Mahāvamsa*, however, we find evidence that the claim to be the true inheritors of the tradition that derives from Mahinda and Moggaliputta Tissa came to be contested in Laṅkā. The fifth chapter of the *Mahāvamsa* begins with an account of the split into twenty-four schools (*ācariyakulavādakathā*, Mhv V 1–13) that follows exactly that found in Kv-a and *Dīpavamsa*. But at the conclusion it adds that two further schools split off in Laṅkā, the Dhammaruci and Sāgaliyas, also known as the Abhayagirivāsins and Jetavanīyas.⁹⁷ This thus refers to events connected with the establishment in Anurādhapura of the two *vihāras* that were to become rivals of the Mahāvihāra: the Abhayagirivihāra (in the first century BCE during the reign of Vaṭṭagāmaṇī) and the Jetavana (in the fourth century CE during the reign of Mahāsena).

The reigns of both these kings are dealt with in the *Dīpavamsa*, and while in the case of the former, the king’s construction of Abhayagiri is mentioned, there is no mention of any formal split in the Laṅkā Saṅgha in connection with this; the establishment of Jetavana is passed over entirely.⁹⁸ According to the *Mahāvamsa* the initial founding of

⁹⁷ Mhv V 13c–d: *Dhammaruci Sāgaliyā Laṅkadīpamhi bhinnakā* ||; see Mhv-t 175, 176, 676–80.

⁹⁸ Dīp XIX 14–19 relates the founding of Abhayagiri (but makes no mention of a split) and also of the Dakkhinavihāra (cf. Mhv XXXIII 88), a second Abhayagiri establishment; its monks later split from the Abhayagiri and went to live in the newly founded Jetavana (Mhv XXXVI 110 – XXXVII 39); the founding of Jetavana by Mahāsena seems not to be mentioned in the short account of his reign at Dīp XXII 66–75, though he is said to have fallen under the influence of shameless (*alajji*) and immoral (*dussīla*) bhikkhus; their names do not fit with those given in Mhv in connection with the dispute with the Mahāvihāra.

the Abhayagirivihāra did not involve a formal split, it was only subsequently when a monk was expelled from the Mahāvihāra (on Vinaya grounds) and his pupil took refuge in Abhayagiri that a separate ‘faction’ (*pakkha*) was formed.⁹⁹ Despite the use of the word *pakkha*, the author immediately treats this as a split in the Laṅkā Saṅgha:

From that time these bhikkhus came no more to the Mahāvihāra: thus the bhikkhus of the Abhayagiri split from the tradition of the Elders (*theravādato*). From the monks of the Abhayagiri-vihāra those of the Dakkhīna-vihāra split [afterwards]; in this way those bhikkhus who split from the followers of the tradition of the Elders (*theravādīhi*) were divided into two.¹⁰⁰

This indicates a shift in the Mahāvihāra monks’ sense of their Buddhist history and identity. No longer is the lineage of the ancient Elders brought to Laṅkā by Mahinda something shared in common by all the monks of Laṅkā, it is now something that the Mahāvihāra attempts to lay exclusive claim to: only the Mahāvihāra is the authentic *theravāda*. This is no doubt to some extent a question of rhetoric: how you present yourself depends in part on whom you intend to impress and persuade.¹⁰¹ We should be wary of concluding that the implication of the

⁹⁹ Mhv XXXIII 78–83 (initial founding); XXXIII 93–98 (split, including reference to the subsequent Jetavana Sāgaliya split. It is not entirely clear whether the Mahātissa who is expelled (Mhv XXXIII 95) is the same as the Mahātissa to whom Vaṭṭagāmaṇī gives Abhayagiri (Mhv XXXIII 82); Geiger’s translation seems to suggest they are different as does DPPN (s.vv. 12 Mahātissa and 13 Mahātissa); but Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, pp. 82–83 takes them as the same.

¹⁰⁰ (Adapted from Geiger.) Mhv XXXIII 97–98: *tato pabhuti te bhikkhū Mahāvihāraṃ nāgamuṃ | evaṃ te ’bhayagirikā niggaṭā theravādato || pabhinnā ’bhayagirikehi Dakkhīnavihārikā yatī | evaṃ te theravādīhi pabhinnā bhikkhavo dvidhā ||*

¹⁰¹ As Kulke suggests the significant reason for Mahānāma’s writing ‘his new chronicle appears to have been sectarian struggles’; a century or so before the composition of the *Mahāvamsa*, the Mahāvihāra had experienced real threats to its prestige and even survival in the form of King Mahāsena’s (334–362/272–302 CE) patronage of its rival institutions. H. Kulke, ‘Sectarian Politics and Historiography in Early Sri Lanka: Wilhelm Geiger’s studies of the chronicles of Sri Lanka in the light of recent research’, in

Mahāvamsa passage is that from then on all Mahāvihāra monks always thought of themselves as the only true *theravādins*. And it is unlikely that the monks of the Abhayagirivihāra accepted such a claim. We know from the eighth-to-ninth-century commentary to the *Mahāvamsa* that they preserved their own account of their lineage,¹⁰² and it seems likely that the monks of the Abhayagirivihāra regarded themselves just as much heirs of the Mahinda-Laṅkā lineage as the monks of the Mahāvihāra, and just as much belonging to the Theravāda or lineage of the Theriyas. When the point of contrast is the Mahāsaṅghikas, for example, even the Mahāvihāra *Cūlavamsa* would seem ready to include the Abhayagirivāsins within the fold of the Theriyas.¹⁰³ Yet with the purification and unification of the three Laṅkā *nikāyas* by way of the Mahāvihāra *upasampadā* in the middle of the twelfth century during the reign of Parākramabāhu I, it can perhaps be said that the Mahāvihāra's claim to be the authentic *theravādins* is endorsed, at least *de facto*: henceforth 'Theravāda Buddhism' is exclusively the lineage of the Mahāvihāra, but passed down to us not precisely by the monks of the *vihāra* in ancient Anurādhapura, but by their descendents in twelfth-century Polonnaruva.¹⁰⁴

Wilhelm Geiger and the Study of the History and Culture of Sri Lanka, ed. by Ulrich Everding and Asanga Tilakaratne (Colombo: Goethe Institute and Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, 2000), pp. 112–136 (134).

¹⁰² On the *Uttaravihāra-aṭṭhakathā* (Mhv-ṭ 125, 155, 177, 187, 247, 249, 289, 290) and *Uttaravihāra-Mahāvamsa* (Mhv-ṭ 134,14), see Malalasekera at Mhv-ṭ lxx–lxvii; Malalasekera takes these as different names for the same text; in any case the *Uttaravihāra-aṭṭhakathā* certainly contained an account of the second Council (Mhv-ṭ 155,15); Walters, 'Rethinking Buddhist Missions', pp. 271–72.

¹⁰³ Mhv (Cūlavamsa) L 68 talks of the construction of a monastic establishment / or monastic establishments within the Abhayagirivihāra for the use of both Mahāsaṅghikas and Theriyas, suggesting that Abhayagiri monks could be designated Theriyas, unless we are to assume that Mahāsaṅghika here is meant to characterise the Abhayagirivāsins monks (*katvā Viraṅkurārāmaṃ vihāre Abhayuttare | Mahāsaṅghikabhikkhūnaṃ Theriyānañ ca dāpayī ||*); I will return to this passage below. Cf. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, p. 252.

¹⁰⁴ For primary accounts of the unification see Mhv (Cūlavamsa) LXXVIII 1–27; *Epigraphia Zeylanica* 2, 256–83; Nandasena Ratnapāla, *The*

7. The four great schools (*mahānikāya*): ‘The Theriyas of Laṅkā are the Sthāvīras’

In the material considered so far, there is no explicit expression of a sense of identity involving the claim to be the sole surviving Theravādins as opposed to the Laṅkā branch of a broader tradition of ancient Theriyas. Theoretically at least for the Laṅkā Buddhists the possibility remained that there were in India other surviving Theriya traditions descended from Moggaliputta Tissa’s original missions. Nonetheless the evidence is that by the end of the seventh century such a possibility was no longer countenanced, either within the Laṅkā tradition or outside it.

Buddhists from the Indian mainland appear originally to have regarded the Buddhists of Laṅkā as simply the ‘Laṅkā school’, thus Vasubandhu writing in the fourth century cites the notion of the *bhavāṅga-vijñāna* of the Tāmraparṇīya-nikāya as a forerunner of the *ālaya-vijñāna*.¹⁰⁵ But beginning with Yijing’s account of his travels in India (671–695 CE) and Vinītadeva’s eighth-century summary of the divisions of the Buddhist schools (*Samaya-bhedoparacana-*

Katikāvatas: laws of the Buddhist Order of Ceylon from the 12th century to the 18th century (Munich: Kitzinger, 1971), pp. 127–35; for discussion see Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, pp. 313–37 and Heinz Bechert, ‘The *Nikāyas* of Mediaeval Sri Lanka and the unification of the *Saṅgha* by Parākramabāhu I’, in *Studies on Buddhism in honour of Professor A.K. Warder*, ed. by N.K. Wagle and Fumimaro Watanabe (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1993), pp. 11–21 (15–19). Bechert criticizes Gunawardana’s suggestion that the unification of the *Saṅgha* did not effect the disappearance of the *nikāyas* other than the Mahāvihāra and concludes that ‘it is reasonable to say that the unification did amount to the “victory” of the *Mahāvihāra* and to the disappearance of the other two *nikāyas* as organised monastic groups’ (p. 18).

¹⁰⁵ See L. S. Cousins, ‘The Paṭṭhāna and the Development of the Theravādin Abhidhamma’, *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 10 (1981), pp. 22–46 (22); L. Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy* (Tokyo, 1987), 17–8. The relevant texts are the *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa* § 35 (see É. Lamotte, ‘Le Traité de l’acte de Vasubandhu’, *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 4 (1936), pp. 151–264 (250)) and the *Pratītyasamutpādayākhyā* (here the notion is ascribed to the Mahīśāsakas – see Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna*, II 255–56, n. 68).

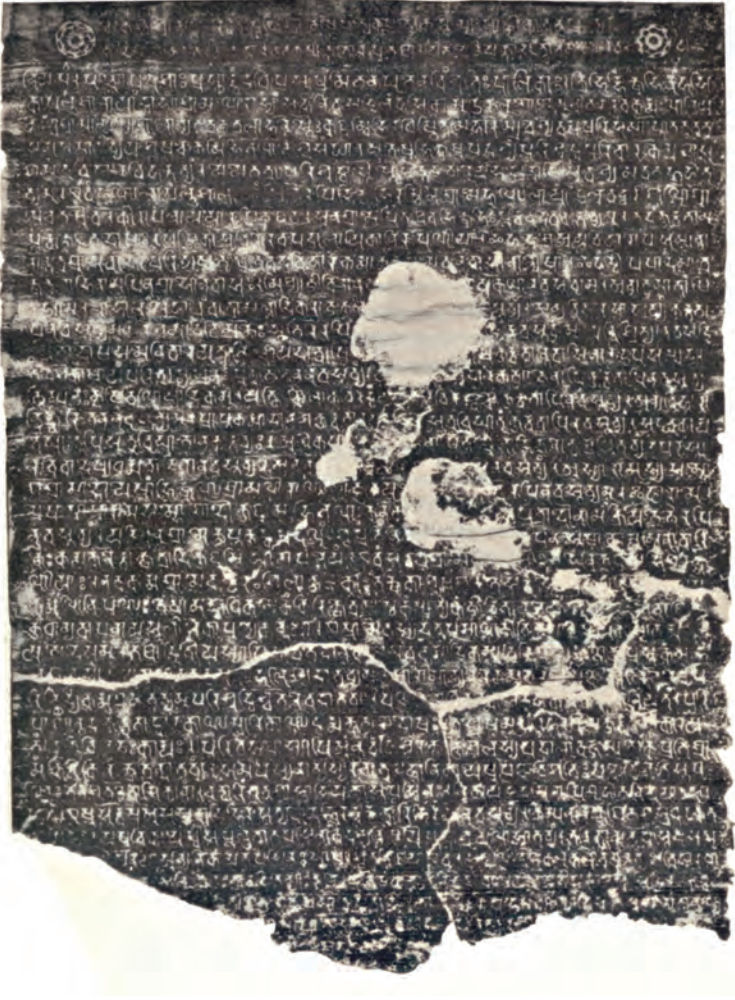


Figure 7. Jetavanārāma Sanskrit Inscription No. 1, Siddhamātrka script, Sanskrit, ca. ninth century (after *Epigraphia Zeylanica* Vol. I, Pl. 1).

cakra-nikāya-bhedopadarśana-cakra), we find north Indian sources describing the Buddhist Saṅgha as comprising four *nikāyas*: (1) the Mahāsāṃghikas, (2) the Sthāviras, (3) the Sarvāstivādins, and (4) the Saṃmatīyas. Significantly, the Sthāviras in turn comprise three sub-*nikāyas*: the Jetavanīyas, the Abhayagirivāsins, and the Mahāvihāravāsins.¹⁰⁶ The Buddhists of Laṅkā are thus no longer regarded as the ‘Laṅkā school’, they are *the* Sthāvira, despite the fact that both the Sarvāstivādins and the Saṃmatīyas were also understood as tracing their lineage to the Sthāvira side of the original split with the Mahāsāṃghikas.¹⁰⁷ The reason for referring to the three Buddhist *nikāyas* of Laṅkā as *the* Sthāvira is probably not so much a recognition of an exclusive claim to be the authentic *theravāda*, as a reflection of the simple fact that the Laṅkā schools alone of the various Sthāvira schools continued to refer to themselves as *theriya* or *theravāda* in certain contexts.

Within Laṅkā, while the tendency to think of the Laṅkā Buddhist Saṅgha as comprising three principal *nikāyas* consisting of the Mahāvihāravāsins, Abhayagirivāsins (Dhammarucika), and Jetavanavāsins (Sāgalika) is clear from a variety of sources, the evidence for a conception of the Buddhist Saṅgha as a whole as comprising four principal *nikāyas* is, although not entirely lacking, more limited. I noted above that at the conclusion of the *Sumaṅglavilāsinī*, Buddhaghosa says that he composed his commentary on the *Dīghāgama* at the request of the Saṅghathera Dāṭhānāga, whom he describes as ‘a follower of the lineage of the Theras’ (*theravaṃsanvayena*). Explaining this expression in his seventh-century (?) subcommentary, Dhammapāla states that it refers to ‘someone who is a follower of the lineage or tradition of the Theras, beginning with Mahākassapa [the convener of the first council]; of those belonging to the four principal schools (*mahānikāya*), what is meant is someone who is a Theriya’.¹⁰⁸ This appears to be the only reference to four *mahānikāyas* in the Pali sources

¹⁰⁶ Bateau, *Les sectes bouddhiques*, pp. 24–25; Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, pp. 601–03.

¹⁰⁷ See Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, pp. 585–96.

¹⁰⁸ Sv-ṭ III 372 (to Sp 1064): *therānaṃ mahākassapādīnaṃ vaṃso pavenī, anvayo etassā ti theravaṃsanvayo; tena catumahānikāyesu theriyenā ti atho*.

and whether the *mahānikāyas* referred to are the Mahāsaṅghikas, Theriyas, Sabbatthivādins, and Sammitiyas is uncertain but seems likely. There is, however, a further reference to four *mahānikāyas* in a ninth-century Sanskrit inscription written in a north Indian script and found within the grounds of the Abhayagirivihāra.¹⁰⁹ Towards the end of this inscription we find the following:

Twenty-five ascetics from each of the four principal schools [are to reside here], making one hundred residents; forty [of these should be] ascetics versed in the *śāstras*. Those who have received tutelage irrespective of division into schools ... Among all these [ascetics], those whose speech is coarse or untruthful, and whose behaviour is improper shall not reside [here], let alone those ascetics who carry clubs and knives. If there is a deficiency [in the number] of ascetics of any of these schools, with the agreement of that school it should be made good by [ascetics from] the other schools.¹¹⁰

Gunawardana has linked this Abhayāgiri inscription to Vīraṅkurārāma, a monastery said in the *Cūḷavaṃsa* to have been built by Sena I (833–53 CE) in the grounds of Abhayāgiri-vihāra, and donated to monks belonging to the Mahāsaṅghika and Theriya schools,¹¹¹ and concluded

¹⁰⁹ The inscription was edited by Don Martino de Zilva Wickremasinghe and published under the title ‘Jetavanārāma Sanskrit Inscription’ (EZ I, 1–9); this is because at the time of its publication (1912) there was still confusion about the identifications of Jetavana and Abhayāgiri.

¹¹⁰ EZ I, 5,33–37: *cātur mahānikāyeṣu pañcaviṃśatiḥ pañcaviṃśatis tapasvinaḥ tena śatan naivāsikānāṃ | catvāriṃśat śāstrābhiyuktās tapasvinaḥ | nikāyabhedam vināpi gṛhītanīśrayāḥ ... | ... eṣu sarveṣu asabhyavādibhir asatyavādibhir ayuktakāribhir api na vastavyaṃ | kim punar lākuṭikaśastradharaḥ [pasvi]bhiḥ | yeṣu nikāyeṣv asaṃpūrnatā tapasvināṃ tadanyanikāyais tadāśrayeṇa sthātavyaṃ | tan nikāyatapasviṣu sa ... [apa]neyā anyanikāyatapasvinaḥ sthāpyāś ca tannikāyā eva ...* With regard to the reference to ‘ascetics versed in the śāstras’ see Upās 106–111 for a summary of evidence of Sanskrit Buddhist texts known in Laṅkā by the end of the thirteenth century.

¹¹¹ Mhv (Cūḷavaṃsa) L 68: *katvā Vīraṅkurārāmaṃ vihāre Abhayuttare | Mahāsaṅghikabhikkhūnaṃ Theriyānaṃ ca dāpayī ||* For Gunawardana’s discussion see, *Robe and Plough*, pp. 247–54. Bechert has proposed reading *Mahimsāsika-* (Wilhelm Geiger and Heinz Bechert, *Culture of Ceylon in*

that the four principal *nikāyas* referred to in the inscription are thus indeed the Mahāsāṃghikas, Sthāviras, Sarvāstivādins and Saṃmatīyas. While Bechert has disputed Gunawardana's argument, he offers no alternative suggestion; accepting 'that the inscription was meant to regulate the affairs of a monastic establishment which housed monks of Indian origin' he then concludes that 'the evidence available so far is not sufficient to identify these four *nikāyas*, and that all attempts to do so remain pure speculation'.¹¹² Neither Gunawardana nor Bechert refers to the passage from the *Dīgha-nikāya ṭīkā* just cited, but given that the passage contrasts the Theriya as one *mahānikāya* among three others, it tends to suggest that Gunawardana's conclusion that we have in the inscription a reference to Mahāsāṃghikas, Sthāviras, Sarvāstivādins and Saṃmatīyas is the most plausible.

8. Conclusions

I suggested above that in defining its Buddhist identity Laṅkā Buddhist tradition made reference to four things:

- (1) a lineage of Theras,
- (2) a set of Buddhist missions associated with the famed Moggaliputta Tissa,
- (3) the tradition of the 'Analysts' or Vibhajjavādins, and
- (4) the principal monastic establishments of Anurādhapura (the Mahāvihāra, Abhayagirivihāra and Jetavana).

On the basis of the material considered above it seems possible to distinguish four different phases in the development of Buddhist identity referring to these four things:

Mediaeval Times (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1986), pp.208, n. 1), an emendation rejected by Gunawardana (p.248).

¹¹² See Heinz Bechert, 'On the Identification of Buddhist Schools in Early Sri Lanka', in *Indology and Law: Studies in Honour of Professor J. Duncan M. Derrett*, ed. by Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Parameswara K. Aithal (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1982), pp.60–76; Bechert, 'The Nikāyas of Mediaeval Sri Lanka', p. 15

(1) An initial phase when the Buddhists of Laṅkā see themselves as connected to an important lineage which they regard as pan-Indian. Through Mahinda and Moggaliputta Tissa, this lineage can trace itself back directly to the elders who presided at the first and second councils; yet, significantly, it does not define itself by reference to other Buddhist lineages. Such an initial phase is exemplified especially by the Background Story of the *Samantapāsādikā*.

(2) From this develops a more specific sense of identity which takes this lineage as that of the Theras from whom the Mahāsaṅghikas and others split after the second council. This phase is exemplified especially by the *Kathāvatthu* commentary and the *Dīpavaṃsa*.

(3) Next there is the development of the claim on the part of the Mahāvihāravāsins that they alone in Laṅkā are the authentic heirs of this Thera lineage. This phase is exemplified especially by the *Mahāvamsa*.

(4) Finally there is a phase in which the Theras of Laṅkā come to be seen as the only surviving representatives of the Theras from whom the Mahāsaṅghikas and others split after the second council. This perspective is explicit in the writings of mainland Indian Buddhists and implicit and probably assumed in later Pali commentaries.

The characterization *vibhajjavāda* is present and part of this identity, especially in the first and second phase, yet since it is never explained in the sources quite how the term *vibhajjavāda* relates to the list of schools preserved by the tradition, it remains unclear how precisely it contributed to the sense of belonging to a specific lineage and school.

We should no doubt be wary of seeking one fixed formulation as finally defining the sense of Buddhist identity embodied in the ancient Pali sources. After all, our sense of ourselves shifts depending on context and on what sense of identity we feel we need to project. The different senses of Buddhist identity that developed in Laṅkā overlaid each other in a way that does not entail that what is later totally obscures what is earlier. Moreover, the pattern of *nikāya* formation, affiliation and identity in both ancient Laṅkā and India is likely to have been more complex and subtle than a simple model of three or four *nikāyas* suggests – just as it is in Sri Lanka today. As Richard Gombrich observes:

There are said to be three Nikāyas in Sri Lanka today: the Siyam, the Amarapura and the Rāmañña; and yet this is a kind of fiction, the pattern being set by the glories of the ancient past. The modern Nikāyas are much subdivided, some by disagreement over a point of *vinaya* and some geographically; and some forest hermitages recognize allegiance to none of the three ...¹¹³

Having made a similar point with regard to the ideal division of the modern Sri Lankan Saṅgha into three *nikāyas*, Bechert goes on to comment:

It is almost certain that the real *nikāya* divisions in Sri Lanka during the mediaeval period as well did not always agree with the traditional tripartition. Thus, we know from the *Cūlavamsa* that the *Pamsukūlika* monks branched off from the Abhayagirivāsins during the ninth century. The situation concerning the validity of the traditional divisions of the Saṅgha was not very much different in India.¹¹⁴

So what of the question posed in the title of this article: was Buddhaghosa a Theravādin? The answer to such a question must depend in part on what is understood by the term *theravādin*. What becomes apparent from a detailed consideration of the sources is that the ways we tend to use Theravāda today do not correspond to the ways it is used in the sources known to and composed by Buddhaghosa, thus the question is in part anachronistic. Was Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) a Catholic? Modern notions of being a Catholic often assume such things as the eleventh-century schism between the Eastern and Western Church and the Protestant Reformation, which make this question inappropriate. The problem is that modern notions of Theravāda also often assume certain things: a home in Laṅkā as the base for the school's missions to South East Asia, an opposition with Mahāyāna, the final pre-eminence of the Mahāvihāra, and the almost mythical status of Buddhaghosa himself as author of the defining works of Theravāda – when in fact his authorship of a number of these works is problematic. It is as well to remind ourselves that it was not always so and that what we think of as

¹¹³ Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism*, pp. 159.

¹¹⁴ Bechert, 'The Nikāyas of Mediaeval Sri Lanka', p. 12.

Theravāda is not some constant throughout Buddhist history. It would be unhelpful and misleading to end this discussion by concluding that Buddhaghosa was not a *theravādin*, suggesting that he was something else, a Mahāsāṃghika perhaps. There can be little doubt that if pressed on the question of what *nikāya* he belonged to, Buddhaghosa would at some point have referred to the ancient division in the Saṅgha between the Theras and Mahāsāṃghikas and would have suggested that his *nikāya* was related to the former. And yet it is extremely unlikely that he would have used the word ‘Theravādin’ of himself and not at all clear that he would have used the name ‘Theravāda’ of his *nikāya*.



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Table 1. Schools of Buddhism according to Dīp V 30–53, Kv-a 2,10–3,15, Mhv V 1–13

the 18 schools	1. Mahāsaṅghika	
	2. Gokulika	
	4. Paṇṇattivāda	
	5. Bāhulika (Bahussutika)	the 6 Mahāsaṅghika schools
	6. Cetiya(vāda)	
	3. Ekabbohārika	
	1. Thera	
	2. Mahimsāsaka	
	8. Sabbatthivāda	
	10. Kassapika	
11. Saṅkantika		
12. Suttavādā	the 12 Thera schools	
9. Dhammaguttika		
3. Vajjiputtaka		
4. Dhammuttariya		
5. Bhadrāyānika		
6. Channāgārika		
7. Sammitiya		
Hemavatika, Rājagiriya, Siddhatthika, Pubbaseliya, Aparaseliya, Vājiriya		the 6 additional schools
Dhammaruci (Abhayagirivāsīn), Sāgaliya (Jetavanavāsīn)		the 2 schools that arose in Laṅkā (Mhv V 12–13)

Table 2. Number of views attributed to schools in Kv-a

24 schools of Dīp, Kv-a, Mhv				4 schools exclusive to Kv-a			
	18 schools		6 additional schools				
Mahāsaṅghika	25	Thera	–	Hemavatika	0	<i>Andhaka*</i>	73
Gokulika	1	Mahimsāsaka	9	Rājagiriya	11	Uttarāpathaka	45
Paṇṇattivāda	0	Sabbatthivāda	3	Siddhatthika	9	Hetuvāda	11
Bāhuliya	0	Kassapika	1	Pubbaseliya	29	Vetullaka	8
Cetiya(vāda)	0	Saṅkantika	0	Aparaseliya	5		
Ekabyohārika	0	Suttavādā	0	Vājiriya	0		
		Dhammaguttika	0				
		Vajjiputtaka	2				
		Dhammuttariya	0	* Identified as Pubbaseliya, Aparaseliya,			
		Bhadrāyānika	1	Rājagiriya, Siddhatthika and as 'mostly'			
		Channāgārika	0	Mahāsaṅghikas (Kv-a 52, Kv-a-mṭ (B°)			
		Sammitiya	23	95, Kv-anuṭ (B°) 132).			

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Conventions

I generally give terms cited from Pali sources according to the Pali spelling, for example, Mahāsaṅghika. The spelling Mahāsāṅghika would be used with reference to sources originally written in Sanskrit. This may at times lead to inconsistencies, but I hope not to confusion.

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Contributors and editors

Olivier de Bernon obtained his PhD in philosophy in 1984. Afterwards he spent over twenty years in Southeast Asia, first in Thailand, and then in Cambodia. In 1991, he became a member of the EFEO (French School of Far East Studies); based in Phnom Penh, he was active in the revival of French Khmer studies, and he directed a project which inventoried the surviving manuscript tradition of Cambodia, which had been devastated during a decade of war. The project conserved and photographed thousands of manuscripts in hundreds of monasteries across the country. In 2000 M. de Bernon received a second doctorate in Khmer language from l'Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales, Paris. Starting in 2004, de Bernon coordinated the cataloguing of Norodom Sihanouk's personal archives, which the former king had donated to France, and are now stored in the National Archives in Paris. During this period, de Bernon also gave courses on aspects of Buddhism in Indochina at several institutes in Paris. In September 2011 he became president of the Musée Guimet.

Anne M. Blackburn is Professor of South Asian and Buddhist Studies at Cornell University. She studies Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia, with a special interest in Buddhist monastic culture and Buddhist participation in networks linking Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia before and during colonial presence in the region. Her publications include *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth-Century Lankan Monastic Culture* (2001) and *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka* (2010).

Jason A. Carbine earned his doctorate from the University of Chicago (2004) and is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Whittier College. His research traverses the Buddhist cultures of Myanmar and Sri Lanka, past

and present, monastic and lay, and he teaches widely on religion and society across Asia and around the globe. He has published on topics such as *yaktovils* (healing rituals), monastic funerals, and social order and disorder. His recently published book, *Sons of the Buddha* (2011), explores the theme of continuity and rupture in a Burmese monastic tradition. He is currently working on a new translation and study of the famed Kalyani Inscriptions.

Claudio Cicuzza studied at the University of Rome, “La Sapienza”, where he received his MA and PhD in Indology. At present he is teaching Buddhism and Religious studies in Webster University, Thailand, and his current research focuses on the Pali literature of Central Siam and Pāla period scholasticism of Northern India. His publications include *The Laghutantraṭṭikā by Vajrapāni* (Rome 2001), *La rivelazione del Buddha* (co-authorship, Milan 2001 and 2004), *Peter Skilling. Buddhism and Buddhist Literature of Siam. Selected Papers* (editorship, Bangkok 2009), *A Mirror Reflecting the Entire World. The Pāli Buddhapādamāṅgala or “Auspicious signs on the Buddha’s feet”* (Bangkok 2011).

Max Deeg is Professor of Buddhist Studies at Cardiff University. He specializes in the transmission and adaptation of Buddhist traditions in their movements from India to Central Asia and China. He has a particular interest in the use of narrative to construct and re-construct religious and political identities and past(s). Besides numerous articles in published volumes and academic journals, his monographs include *Das Gaoseng-Faxian-zhuan als religionsgeschichtliche Quelle. Der älteste Bericht eines chinesischen buddhistischen Pilgermönchs über seine Reise nach Indien mit Übersetzung des Textes* (“The Gaoseng-Faxian-zhuan as a source for the history of religion. The oldest report of a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim on his journey to India – with a translation of the text”) (2005).

Rupert Gethin is Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Bristol where he teaches courses in Indian religions. He obtained his doctorate from the University of Manchester (1987) with a dissertation on the theory of meditation in the Pali Nikāyas and Buddhist systematic thought. In addition to his dissertation in 1992, he has published a number of articles on aspects of Pali literature and the psychology and philosophy of Theravāda systematic thought, as well as an English translation (with R. P. Wijeratne) of the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī* (2002), a commentary on the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, and an introduction to Buddhist thought

and practice, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (1998), *Sayings of the Buddha* (2008). Since 2003 he has been President of the Pali Text Society, and in 2008 he was Numata Visiting Professor of Buddhist Studies at UC Berkeley.

Lilian Handlin received her PhD from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where she was a member of the history department until 1977. She is the author of numerous reviews and articles, and several books, including a four-volume *Liberty in America, 1600 to the Present* (1986–1994), co-authored with her late husband, Oscar Handlin.

Todd LeRoy Perreira is a PhD candidate in Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is currently working on a new study that utilizes a transnational framework for exploring the transferability of religious practices, cultural loyalism, and symbolic capital in the interplay between “Asians” and “Americans” with the emergence of Thai Buddhism as a global phenomenon. The working title is *Where Dhamma Dwells: On the Transnational Borders of Thai Buddhism in America*. Perreira is also a lecturer at San José State University and a graduate of Harvard University (M.T.S.).

Ven. Anil Sakya was educated at the universities of Cambridge and Brunel in the UK. He is a Deputy Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences at Mahamakut Buddhist University of Thailand and founding honorary treasurer of the Association of Theravāda Buddhist Universities (2007). Since 2003, he has been Visiting Professor of Religious Studies of Santa Clara University, USA, every other Spring quarter. He is also Assistant Secretary to His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand. As a broadcaster and Dhamma speaker he runs “Sunday Dhamma Talk” on Radio Thailand and is a regular guest of many television programs in Thailand. In addition to numerous articles in journals and edited collections, he is author of *A Modern Trend of Study of Buddhism in Thailand: King Mongkut and Dhammayutikanikaya* (2005).

Santi Pakdeekham graduated from Silpakorn University (MA, Oriental Epigraphy) and obtained a PhD in Literature and Comparative Literature at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, in 2007. He is Assistant Professor in the Department Thai and Oriental Languages at Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand. He publishes regularly on Thai literature and especially on cultural, literary and historical relations between Thailand and Cambodia. Included among his publications are *Jambūpati-*

sūtra: A synoptic Romanized edition (Bangkok and Lumbini 2009) and *Piṭakamālā: The Garland of the Piṭaka* (Bangkok and Lumbini 2011).

Arthid Sheravanichkul earned his PhD in Thai literature from the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. His dissertation is entitled “Dana and Danaparami: Significance in the Creation of Thai Buddhist Literature.” At present he teaches in the Department of Thai and researches Anisamsa texts and the Mahachat ceremony.

Peter Skilling is Maître de Conférences with the École française d’Extrême-Orient, Bangkok. He received his PhD (2004) and his Habilitation (2008) from the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris. He specializes in the history and literature of the Buddhism of South and South-East Asia. He has been Visiting Professor at Harvard, Oxford, Berkeley, and Sydney. At present he is Special Lecturer at Chulalongkorn University, and Honorary Associate, Department of Indian Sub-Continental Studies, University of Sydney. In 2009 he was awarded the Ikuo Hirayama Prize from the Académie des Inscriptions et Belle-Lettres, Paris for his work in general and the publication *Wat Si Chum, Sukhothai* (Bangkok 2008).





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