THE EASTERN BUDDHIST
An unsectarian journal devoted to an open and critical study of Buddhism in all of its aspects, published by The Eastern Buddhist Society
Otani University, Kyoto

Vol. 41, No. 2 NEW SERIES 2010

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Photograph of a Mural Painting of the First Council frontispiece

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ARTICLES

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

PETER SKILLING

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

1. Touchstones of Authenticity

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

I THANK Venerables Anālayo and Changtzu Shi, Nalini Balbir, Claudio Cicuzza, Steven Collins, Anne MacDonald, Jan Nattier, Mattia Salvini, and Alexander Wynne for references, corrections and suggestions. Translations from Pāli, Sanskrit, and Tibetan are my own unless otherwise noted.

1 Ratnagotravibhāga, chap. 5, v. 18 (Prasad 1991, p. 185): ṣad arthavat dharmanipasamhi, tridhātuśvāntasambarvaham v vocah, bhave ca yac chāntya anuvamaśakam, tad uktam āraṇa vairītam anyataḥ (Vamsasthavila meter). Both arthavat and dharmanipasamhi evoke an ancient pairing of artha and dharma in the Āgama traditions (for example, in connection with speech, at Udiśnavarga, chap. 24, vv. 1–2). The verse recapitulates a celebrated paragraph of the Adhyātavasamcudama; Prajñākaramatī cites the two together, first the stītra, then the verse: Vaidya 1960b, p. 204.19.

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

What were the criteria of authenticity in India? In our investigation, we do not have much to go on. We have no ancient (or even medieval) Indian *sūtra* catalogues, no correspondence or diaries, no specificities whatsoever which might expose the historical underpinnings of the ideology of authenticity—or rather ideologies, given the intricacy of the family tree(s) of Indian Buddhism. The question must be asked for each of the (conventionally counted) eighteen *nīkāyas,* each of which transmitted its own scriptures.

What was authentic to one lineage might not have been so for another, a point cogently drawn by Vasubandhu in his *Vyākhyāyukti.* This itself is significant: there can be no simple or single answer to our question.

The sources that we do have are scholastic, and decidedly partisan. Early witnesses to the philosophical ferment of the second and first centuries BCE are the Mahāvīrāṅīn *Kathāvatthu,* preserved in Pāli; the first two chapters of the Sarvāstivādin *Vijñānākāya,* preserved in Chinese translation (*Apa-damo sīshṭen su lun* 三弥底部論, T. no. 1539); and the *“Pudgalavādin”* 2

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

3 A *nīkāya* was primarily a *vinaya* or monastic ordination lineage, and hence is best rendered as "order." But the orders also transmitted ideas, tenets, and practices, and thus they were also "schools." They were not "sects" in the usual sense of the word in English, and it is important to remember that *nīkāyas* were monastic lineages, rather than lay communities. The relations between the ancient *nīkāyas* and their lay supporters, and to society in general, remain to be seriously investigated. In the *Kathāvatthu-atthakathā* (p. 3.13) the terms *nīkāya,* *ācaravyābāda,* and *nātana* are treated as synonyms: *saṁve sa athārāsa ācaravyāvāda duṣṭe vasasante uppana. athārasaṁkhyā ti pī athārasaṁkhyālāni ti pī ētasaṁ yeva nānām.* Cf. also *Aṭṭhakathā,* p. 2.3, *nīkāyanatra.*

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

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

*Sammitinikāya-sāstra* (*Sammitidhī lun* 三弥底部論, T. no. 1649), also preserved in Chinese. These are compendia of formal dialogic debates which record competing ideas and measure them against the words of the Buddha. The question is not the authenticity of *buddhavacana*—and hence the compendia already go beyond the range of the four *mahāpādaṇa* (to be mentioned below)—but the appropriateness of ideas or views. Final authority lies in the word of the Buddha; a tenet is defeated if it contradicts the *sūtra.* From the time of the treatises on, the principle of "contradiction of *sūtra*" (*sūtradātā) is regularly invoked in debate.

The *Kathāvatthu* itself does not ascribe the theories that it raises to any school or individual—for that we must turn to the commentary, the *Kathāvatthu-atthakathā.* Was this silence simply a matter of *politesse*? In much later periods, authors observed a kind of decorum through which opponents were not named, and alternate or opposing views were introduced anonymously with statements like "some assert" (*keci vadanti*) or "others would have it" (*anīche icchanti*). If the *Kathāvatthu* must be studied in tandem with its commentary, we must be careful to remember that the latter was written four or five centuries later in a quite different intellectual and geographical milieu. 6

6 See Thich Thien Chau 1999, pp. 99–117. To these sources we may now add the "Spitzer manuscript" and Gāndhāri scroll BL 28 (Foncette 2004 and Cox 2010). These and other emerging sources demand a complete reformulation of the study of the evolution and interaction of the early Buddhist schools.

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

Caution is always appropriate when using commentaries, but perhaps Frauwalter exaggerates the problem. By the time the commentary was written, some of the schools may have been extinct, and their positions and tenets no longer living options. In the Sarvāstivādin *sāstra* literature, where the evolution of ideas is somewhat clearer due to the wealth of relatively dateable texts, we see that the same arguments are rehearsed for centuries. We might suspect that the debates become internalized, indeed ossified, within the school, and that the refutations were not for the benefit of the perpetually misguided opponents, but for the members of the school, to reassure themselves that their own positions were correct. But by "members," I refer only to those monastics who engaged in scholarly pursuits, and not to the general monastic membership. These were not dogmas to which the laymen or even the monks and nuns were obliged to adhere, but rather the deliberations of influential scholastics. Some medieval Indian debates are enacted to this day in the courtyards of Tibetan monasteries.
The accessible Viṃhaśā literature consists of three texts, or recensions, preserved only in Chinese (that is, no Sanskrit versions or Tibetan translations survive). The Viṃhaśās are treasures of views, citations, and debates. Proponents and opponents are often identified, and the arguments can be quite elaborate. There are also doxographic compendia of tenets, preserved in Chinese and Tibetan, such as the *Samayabheda vānaya-vividha (Ch. Yibso zonglu lun 美部宗輪論, Tib. Gzun thugs kyi bye brag bchod pa'i 'khor lo, P no. 5639) by Vasumitra (second century CE?) and the oldest such work to survive.8 Later examples are a section of the fourth chapter of Bāhevikaka's Tarkajvāla, which circulated independently under the title *Nikāya-vivedha (Tib. Sde pa tha dad par byed pa dam rnam par bsdod pa, P no. 5640, sixth century?;9 and the *Samayabheda vānaya-vividhā (Tib. Gzun tha dad pa rim par klag pa'i 'khor lo las sde pa tha dad pa bstan pa bsdus pa zhes bya ba, P no. 5641) of Vinītadeva (eighth century). These compendia describe the evolution of the Buddhist schools and inventory their characteristic views; no attempt is made to refute or deny the views in question. I am not convinced that we understand the purpose of these texts. Were they reference works, simple doxographies? Were they crammers for monastic courses on comparative Buddhism? Or were they handbooks for training in debate?10

Several studies have examined the question of authenticity within Indian Buddhism on the normative level, using a set of criteria shared by the early Buddhist samghas. These are the mahāpādaśa or “great authorities.” These criteria glimpse back at the age of oral transmission and the formative period of the scriptural collections.11 The relevance and meaning of the criteria would have changed after the compilation and writing down of the distinct scriptural collections of the different schools—that is, by the first century BCE to the first centuries CE. Nonetheless, the mahāpādaśa have continued to be applied in the scrutiny of ideas or texts in exegesis or debate, from the time of the Nettipakarana (early centuries CE?) to that of Vasubandhu and Buddhaghosa (fourth–fifth centuries?) to that of Haribhadra (ninth century) and Prajñākaramati (fl. second half of the tenth century), up to the present.12

Since the late nineteenth century, Western scholars have tended to use the Pāli scriptures as the touchstone of authenticity. This is problematic. The idea that Pāli texts are the oldest and most authentic is modern; it is a product of Western philological and text-comparative methodologies. The claims put forward by the Mahāvihāra in texts composed in Sri Lanka (the Dipavamsa and the Atthakathā) follow a different logic, which one might describe as genealogical: the Mahāvihāra is the original, unsullied vinaya lineage and as such it possesses, inherently and by right, the true texts.13 The common contemporary designation of Theravāda as the oldest school, as the sole representative of “original,” “primitive” or “early” Buddhism is not pertinent to the concept of authenticity from the viewpoint of the North Indian schools. The Mahāvihāra’s claims are not directly impinge on the self-representation of the North Indian schools, for whom the Stāviras, insofar as they were known at all, were only one of eighteen schools, and not, apparently, an especially prominent one.14 But the claims, ideas, and evolution of the Mahāvihāra school are certainly relevant to the textual and intellectual history of Indian Buddhism, and this essay examines some

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9 See Lamotte 1958, pp. 301–2: the earliest of three Chinese translations dates to between 388 and 413.
11 A rich doxographic literature, based upon and elaborated from Indian exemplars, developed in Tibet. See, for example, Mimaki 1982 and Hopkins 1996.
14 I prefer the term “Mahāvihāra” to “Theravāda.” In the vast oceans of Buddhist scriptures, including those composed in Pāli, and including chronicles and inscriptions, the term Theravāda is a rather rare fish. The school that we know today, which performs its rites and liturgies in a language which has come to be called Pāli, was codified primarily by Buddhaghosa in fifth-century Sri Lanka at the Mahāvihāra. The opening stanzas of the Pāli commentaries—the defining texts of the tradition—identify themselves as representing Mahāvihāra thought; Buddhaghosa states further that his selective translations and reworkings of the old Sīhāla commentaries do not contradict the tenets of the Theras, and that they illuminate the lineage or heritage of the Therās (sāmaṃ avivento therān theravamsappadānāṃ: preamble to his commentaries on Dīgha-, Majjhima-, Samyutta-, and Anguttara-nikāyas). That is, “Theravāda” and “Mahāvihāra” are not coequivalent. Rather term denotes a constant or monolithic tradition; see especially Endo 2003, Endo 2008, Endo 2009 for the intricacies of the Indian–Sīhāla–Pāli conundrums.

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

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

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

II. Authority and Language

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

16 See Ruegg 1989.

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

20 *"Samayabhūtādoparacanaka-nikyabhūtadoparacanasasangraha" (Gshung thag da rim par klag pa'i 'khor lo las sde pa tha da pa bstan pa bsdu bs); P vol. 127, no. 5641, folio 187b7: yul don slob dpal byes brag gis, tha dad rnam pa bo bsgyod gcig.
22 von Hübner 1989, p. 361. The reference is to Shāstrī 1917, p. 77.
23 Lamotte 1958, p. 614 (translation, Lamotte 1988, p. 556). In the Ganṣeng zhuan, the early translator Dharmarakṣa is said to have studied and mastered thirty-six languages. This may be a figure of speech, a stock Chinese phrase, but it underlines the importance of linguistic skills (see Shih 1968, p. 34).
The language used by an order or school was a key component of the package that constituted its identity. By the medieval period, North Indian tradition described what we now might call “monastic Buddhism” in terms of “the four nikāyas,” which subsumed the eighteen bhedas. These were:

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

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

As for the division into various Nikāyas (schools), according to the Western (Indian) tradition, there are only four great systems. With regard to their appearance and disappearance, and the diversity of their names, there is no agreement on such matters. Thus it is that in the five parts of India and in the islands in the South Seas, four Nikāyas are spoken of everywhere.

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

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

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

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

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

Rather, the name Mūlasarvāstivādin was used by Sarvāstivādins to claim (historically) that they were the “root” of all other nikāyas; that is, it is a self-representation asserted at a certain point in the history of the school, and nothing else: see Enomoto 2000. For evaluations of Enomoto 2000, see Skilling 2002 and Wynne 2008.

Herein, what is niruktipratisamvid? It is understanding the language of all sentient beings, that is, understanding the language of gods, the language of nāgas, the language of yakṣas, of gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas, humans, and non-humans. In sum, insofar as there is language, words, speech, ways of speech, expression, convention, linguistic practice of beings born in the five destinies, he understands them all. Understanding them, with these or those words, with these or those expressions, he teaches the Dharma to these or those beings in accordance with their speech. This is niruktipratisamvid.\footnote{Aksayanatirideśaśūtra (Braarvig 1993, vol. 1, p. 112): de la t[e]i pā’i ṭhiṅg so so yah dag par rīg par gai ẓe nai’ gai’ sems can thams cad kyi skad la ’jug pa’ ẓes pa’ ste: tha’i skad dān, kh’i skad dān, gnod stbyin gryi skad dān, dri za dān, thya m[a] yin dān, nam khā’ ldān, m’i am ei dān, lto ’phye chen po dān, m[a] dān, m[a] m[a] yin’ pα’i skad la ’jug pa’ ste, mdkor na ji sred du ’gro bar bhar stbyes pa’i sems can mnams kyi skad dān, sgru dān, dbya’i dān, ṭhiṅg gi lam dān, nes pa’i ṭhiṅg dān, brda’i dān, srov pa’ ji sred pa, de dag thams cad rub tu’ ẓes te, ies m[a] kyi sgra de dān de dag dān, hes pa’i ṭhiṅg de dān de dag gis sems can de dān de dag la sgra ji lia ba bzin du ’jug pa’ chos ston te. ’di ni hes pa’i ṭhiṅg so so yah dag par rīg par ẓes bya’o. For translation and commentary, see Braarvig 1993, vol. 2, pp. 431–32. See also Pagel 1995, p. 363; Mahāyāna-strīśāṃskāra (Lévi 1907–11, vol. 1, chap. 18, v. 34, p. 139, l.: ṭriṅg vēlje pratyekam jānapadesya u bhūṣat).}

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

III. Māgadhī: The Root-Language

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

Buddhaghosa, Vihaṅga-atthakathā\footnote{Vihaṅga-atthakathā, pp. 387.33–388.8: yo pi aṅgāmak mahā-arahṭe nibbato, yathā atihō katheto nāma netthi, so pi uttano dharmattho vocānam samanupātento māgadhabhāsam eva bhāsissati. miraye tirochchānapoṃyam puttirūpya manastāloko deveroke ti sabbotthā māgadhabhāsi eva tuṣanāḥ ... samāsambuddho pi izhāpaṃ buddhavacanam tantiṃ āropeṇ to māgadhabhāṣāya eva āropasi. kasmā, evam hi attuṃ āhartuṃ sukhāni hoti. Cf. also Mahaśravastī Ādikuddammatthā-āthavagānā, p. 186.11: sabhāvasūritī ti ca māgadukā bhāṣā.}

Language looms large in Mahāvihāra definitions of canonicity, and a theory promoted in the works of Buddhaghosa asserts not only that Pāli equals Māgadhī, the language spoken by the Buddha, but that it is the root-language (mūlabhāsa)—the natural language, the root of all languages. Such a claim appears to be unique in Buddhist tradition to the Mahāvihāra, or more accurately to Buddhaghosa (and it certainly runs against the sentiment of the Aksayanatiridēśa). What inspired it? Does it seek to counter Brahmanical assertions about the status of Sanskrit?\footnote{In the Spitzer manuscript, “the truthfulness of the Buddha’s word” is questioned because of the fact that it is in Prakṛti (prākṛtavād antarakm budhavacanan. The text is fragmentary, but “the argument obviously presupposes that one can speak correctly and truthfully only in Sanskrit” (Franco 2004, p. 93). The context is not clear to me, but the opponent seems to be brahmanical rather than Buddhist.} Or to counter Jaina theories about Ardhamāgadhī?\footnote{For a Śvetāmbara description of Mahāvīra’s preaching, see Lalwani 1988, pp. 177–79. For aspects of Jaina attitudes to language, see Granoff 1991; Dundas 1992, pp. 60–61; and Dundas 1996. The Jaina theories, including the Digambara divyadhāraya theory, do not provide direct parallels to the mūlabhāsa theory (see Dundas 1996, pp. 140–42).} Or it is a dialogue with other Buddhist schools?\footnote{Surviving North Indian Buddhist literature does not seem to be aware of the mūlabhāsa theory.}

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

Buddhaghosa presents the conceptual lineage of the commentaries in the verse preambles to his great commentaries on the four main sūtra collections:
At [the] First [Council], the five hundred arhats
Recited the commentaries to illuminate the meaning.
Later [at the Second and Third Councils], they were recited again.
Brought to the Isle of the Sihalas by the arhat Mahāmahinda
They were translated into the Sihala language for the benefit of
the islanders. 38

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

Then I, rendering them from Sihala into the delightful language,
Following the principles of the scriptures, without fault,
Not contradicting the tenets of the Elders, illuminators of the
Elders’ lineage,
Whose interpretations are meticulous, the residents of the Great
Monastery,
Eliminating repetitions, will illuminate the meaning
For the satisfaction of good people and for the long life of
the Dhamma. 39

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

vattabhi, paccāhī yā sāngā tassu sāntatikā ca paccāhī pit. sīhālavatī pana abhātīhī
vastū mahāmahindho, bhupāla sīhālavatī sīhālavatī dipavāsanaṃ attabhāya.
The same verses are given at the beginning of the Majjhima, Samyutta, and Ariyattara-nikāya-āṭṭhakathā. For a
translation from the Majjhimanikāya-āṭṭhakathā, see Jayawickrama 2003, pp. 73–74.

manorājanā bhūsana, tanmataya cāvahitāy uposaṇa vijjadaṣana, sāvattā avilomento
therānam theravāpasappadānaṃ, saṁvattanācāyaṇāṃ mohāvāraśīlāvaśaṃ. hirvā
punarāckāsita āṭṭhānām pākkāya vissāya sajanāsā ca suññathām cāritthāthathāhī ca
dhammasa. The same verses are given at the beginning of the Majjhima, Samyutta, and
Ariyattara-nikāya-āṭṭhakathās.

Owing to the fact that the hermeneutic tradition [of the
Mahāvihāra]
Has been composed in the language of the Isle of Sihala
The meaning is not accessible
To communities of monks in other lands.
Therefore, I now undertake this exegesis
Which accords with the principles of the Canon. 40

That is, the production of the Pāli commentaries, a massive project, was
undertaken with a view to making the Mahāvihāra tradition available internation-
ally, though what “communities of monks in other lands” Buddhagho-
sha had in mind remains unknown. 41 More work is needed to understand
the social and historical factors that drove this ideological expansion. If
Buddaghosa came from India to Sri Lanka, as tradition has it, it was interna-
tional to begin with, and if some commentaries were written by natives
or residents of South India (Dhammapāla in Badarattitha, for example),
the movement seems to represent a revival, a renaissance of the Mahāvihāra—
but the degree to which it was an innovation in the name of a revered insti-
tution remains to be seriously investigated. In any case, the adherents
of the Mahāvihāra certainly succeeded in realizing some of the goals stated by
Buddaghosa. Good people as well as scholars (the two terms are not neces-
sarily mutually exclusive) enjoy the satisfaction of reading texts in Pāli,
which have been well-preserved, and the Mahāvihāra tradition, long estab-
lished in Sri Lanka and South-East Asia, is growing in Nepal and India, and
it is evolving in the West, where “Theravāda Buddhism” competes with
“Tibetan Buddhism,” “Zen,” and other Buddhism in the global market of
religions. Today, the Pāli language is studied academically beyond its tradi-
tional “homelands” of Sri Lanka and South-East Asia—in India, Nepal,

40 Jayawickrama 1962, p. 136, vv. 8–9; samvattamā sīhālavatī, vāpyena ca pana
sakkhāhāta, na kicca āṭṭhānāvāhaṃ, dipantaṃ bhikkhujaṇanassya yāmā, taṁni ānūm
pālīnāyikānuṣṭhaṃ, samvattamāvādāyāvāhā (for Jayawickrama’s translation, see
Jayawickrama 1962, p. 2).

41 It is appropriate to note here that in India and abroad numerous monasteries proudly
bore the epithet “Mahāvihāra,” as is known from epigraphy and historical records, and
that such monasteries might belong to any school, or might be shared by several schools
(as, for example, Nālandā Mahāvihāra). In Sri Lanka, the great Mahāvihāra of the early
Anurādhapura period was the center of scholastic and educational traditions that spread
beyond the island. In later periods, after the decline of Anurādhapura, several monasteries
bore the name Mahāvihāra. The significance of this in relation to Mahāvihāra as an ideal
lineage remains to be determined. For the idea of Mahāvihāra in China and Japan, see Hōbō-
gūrin, s.v. “Daidei” 大寺 (vol. 6, pp. 679–711).
China, Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, often as part of an impetus towards “Early Buddhism.” These accomplishments are remarkable, especially when we consider that the other seventeen schools eventually died out (with the exception of the Sarvāstivādin and Dhamaguptaka vinaya lineages, still active in Tibet and East Asia, respectively).

The concern to promote Pāli was largely, I believe, monastic: to firmly establish a coherent body of texts for the maintenance and expansion of the vinaya lineage. If it is true that “a later Vinaya regulation . . . specifies that legal transactions of the Order had to be performed in correctly pronounced Pāli to be valid,” it is only natural, if not inevitable, that this should be the case for a single monastic lineage, in this case, that of the Mahāvihāra.

Communal rites and recitations have to be performed in a single language. As in a formal meeting anywhere, members must agree on a common language, common rules, and common procedures. There is nothing mystical about this; it is a matter of survival.

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

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

Whatever the case, for the Mahāvihāra, Pāli was the ultimate language. Buddaghosa’s “mūla-bhāṣā ideology” contrasts with the more natural attitude towards language presented in North Indian texts that are affiliated with Sarvastivadins and Vaibhavikas thought, which recognize the role of language in the evolution of Buddhist literature, and seem to regard it in a positive light.

IV. Authority and Authorship

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

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

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


43 One relevant conflict is mentioned below, the problem of an ordained monastic paying homage to a bhīṣaṅgadātva.


45 See Skilling 2009.
The **samghas** were never regulated by a central authority, and as they spread throughout the subcontinent and beyond, new texts were produced and claims of scriptural authenticity multiplied. Questions of authority and authorship already surface in canonical collections, for example in the *Anāgatāvarttaka-sūtra*. In the Pāli version, the Buddha warns of five “future perils, not yet arisen, which will come to be in the future.” The fourth peril concerns monks **“who have not cultivated the body; who have not cultivated morality; who have not cultivated the mind; who have not cultivated wisdom”** (abhāvākāra ṣāvakaṁ ārasīṁ courthākāraṁ). **“When suttas expounded by the Tathāgata, profound and of deep significance, transcending the world, dealing with emptiness are recited, they will not want to listen; they will not lend an ear or take interest, and will not think to retain or fulfill such teachings”** (ye te suttantā tathāgatāvīhāraṁ gambhirā gambhirāṁ lokuttarā suññatāpajñisasamutthānaṁ tesu bhaññanāmavesu na sususissantā na sataṁ odahissante na aññācittam upeññapessaṁ, na ca te dhamme ughahetuṁ paryāpannatthāma maññissante). Instead, they will be interested in “suttas composed by poets—verses intricately worded and elegantly phrased—that belong to outsiders, that are spoken by authors” (ye pana te suttantā kavikathā kaveyaṁ citthakhāraṁ citthayayajānaṁ bāhīrakā sāvakaṁ ārasīṁ).47

In an early Mahāyāna samādhi sūtra, the *Pratuyapanna-buddha-saṁmukha-vasthittha-samādhi-sūtra* (hereafter *Pratuyapanna-buddha-sūtra*), the Buddha speaks about “beings who do not wish to hear this samādhi, and who will reject this samādhi” [6B].48 He warns of future monks and bodhisattvas **“who have not cultivated the body; who have not cultivated morality; who have not cultivated wisdom”** and who are among other things, “frightened by the exposition of emptiness.”49 When the *Pratuyapanna-buddha-sūtra* is being expounded, they **“will not give ear to it or listen to it, will not have faith in it, nor accept, master, keep, or read it”** [6D]. They will deride and denounce it, saying, **“sūtras like this are fabrications, they are poetic inventions; they were not spoken by the Buddha”** [6E], or the *Pratuyapanna-buddha-sūtra* is **“something which was not spoken by the Buddha, which is a poetic invention of their own fabrication, a conglomeration of words and syllables** uttered merely in conversation” [6H].

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

47 Parallel phrases occur at the *Āṅguttaraniyā*, vol. 1, pp. 72.26, 73.8, and the *Suttaṅga*, vol. 2, p. 267.6. A Sanskrit parallel from a list of sounds or topics to which a disciple of the Buddha abstains from listening in the Gilgit vinaya (Gnoli 1978, pp. 235.18) is kavatārake citrāske citrapadavyayajānaṁ. See also the *Paññāvaṁśihaṁsaṁhāraṁ* (Dutt 1934, pp. 158.4–5: naitat tathāgatānītati samakṣaṁsambuddhaṁ bhiṣāṁ tī kaviṁ bhiṣāṁ evāṁ bhūtoṁ naitatāṁ śāstraṁ) and the *Aṣṭasahasrikā Paññāvaṁśihaṁsaṁhāraṁ* (Nālaka 1968b, pp. 163.29–30: yad etat tāvadeṣināṁ ērānam, naitat buddhavacananī, kaviṁ citram evāṁ, yad punar etatam ahāmaṁ bhūtoṁ, etat buddhavayānī, etat buddhavacanaṁ ētāṁ)
48 Harrison 1978 and Harrison 1990. References to brackets are in the context to Harrison’s edition and translation. I describe the text as “early” because of the “early” Chinese translation by Lok alkēna, but the distinction is somewhat arbitrary. For “samādhi sūtras,” see Skilling 2010, especially pp. 216–17.
49 The trope of the “fear of emptiness” has a long history, and its evolution merits scrutiny. In the Bodhicaryavatāra (chp. 9, v. 41), a rhetorical opponent of the Mahāyāna questions the usefulness of the teaching of emptiness: is it the realization of the Four Truths of the Noble that leads to liberation—what use is emptiness?
50 *Ṭhāng and yē se sna tsātump pa. CE* the citrāske citrapadavyayajānaṁ of the Gilgit and the citrāske citratāyajānaṁ of the Pāli phraseology.
51 *Āṅguttara-nītikā*, vol. 3, pp. 272.16–17: bāhīraṁ ti sāsanaṁ bahiddhā ṣātī sāvakaṁ ārasīṁ ti bāhāsakāre bhaṁ bhaṁti. In the Mahāvihāra tradition, the trope of non-Buddhists, in this case the tiṣṭhāna or aññā-tiṣṭhāna, is brought in to explain the state of the samgha that led to the convocation of the Third Council. This simply doesn’t work, with the result that the account of the council is exceptionally weak. It is interesting that the Mahāvīra-sīvalakṣāyāna exposes the fallacy of such a trope in its defense of the Mahāyāna: can this show an awareness, if not of the relevant Mahāvihāra texts (the Mahāvīra-sīvalakṣāyāna is, after all, older than the Pāli *Aṭṭhakathā*) but of the use of this argument by opponents of the Mahāyāna? For the argument, see Davidson 1990, p. 309.
52 That the sūtra is questioned not only by monks in general but also by bodhisattvas is intriguing. It seems to lift the debate beyond a simple Śrāvakayāna/Bodhisattvayāna conflict.
The idea of future threats to the Śāsana was an enduring concern, mentioned as early as the Bairā-Calcutta (or Bhābrā) inscription of Aśoka. The Mahāyāna-sūtrālāṃkāra invokes the Buddha’s predictions of future perils in its defence of the Mahāyāna: “If [the Mahāyāna] were to arise in the future as a threat to the Saddharma... why did the Blessed One not predict this from the start, as [he did for] the future perils?” The argument rests on the idea that the Buddha would have foreseen and predicted the arising of Mahāyāna, had this been a real danger—therefore, since he did not, Mahāyāna thought and practice are not threats to the “established order” of Buddhism. What are we to make, then, of the Blessed One’s prediction in the Anguttara-nikāya, that in future his profound sūtras would be ignored in favor of later literary compositions? This is clearly an anticipation—we can interpret “predictions” as statements of contemporary concerns—of the problem posed by “non-authentic” texts, but, as we have seen, in the absence of any central authority, the trope could be, and was, exploited to differing ends. The Mahāyāna-sūtrālāṃkāra argument seems to explicitly ignore, or to deny, any identification of the future threats with the Mahāyāna.

V. Vasubandhu and the Varieties of Textual Expression

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

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


56 Abhidharmakosā, chap. 8, v. 41: nimittā sātari loka-kāsaṭṭhi, sāyana gate sākkhiṇe ca bhāyad, adhāvatvā vacīnāvagāhaṁ kṛtam, kutārīkaṁ śāsanaṁ etad ākālam (Vānuma Balavī Vil)...

57 For details and further examples, see Lamotte 1958, p. 168ff.
Originally the Ekottaragama enumerated dharmas from 1 to 100; today it stops at 10, and between 1 and 10 many are lost... At the Nirvâna of Śāṅkâvâsa, disciple of Ananda, 77,000 Avadâna and Sûtra, and 10,000 Abhidharmaśāstra were lost.61

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

Nonetheless, Vasubandhu did have access to a wide range of sources belonging to a wide range of schools—far more than we have access to today. In his Abhidharma-kosa, he makes reference to the textual traditions of schools other than the Sarvastivâda, either by name or in the reading (pâtha) of “another school (or other schools)” (nîkâya-antarika, nîkâya-antarika, nîkâya-antarika).65 In at least one case, he refers to a reading common to all schools, sarvanîkâya-vântere... pâthâd. 66 That, is makes

61 Lamotte 1958, p. 179 (translation, Lamotte 1988, p. 163); La Vallée Poussin 1971, p. 245, n. 2. The Sanskrit is given in the Abhidharma-kosayâkyâ as a statement of the Valbhisâkas (Waghira 1932–36, p. 188.24–25; tavâ hi ekottarikâgama a sarad dharmamûrdhita ãsit. idâm te ã dusâkād drsyaṁta iti).
62 Bu-ston in Obermiller 1931–32, part 2, pp. 169–70.
65 Abhidharma-kosabhâsya (Pradhan 1975, p. 114.1): nîkâya-antarika-pâthâd, ibid. (Pradhan 1975, pp. 55.8, 72.7: nîkâya-antarika [I correct from -tâb] sûtre paññhita. In other Pradhan’s uses the term nîkâya-antarika for the interpretations or opinions of other schools rather than for citations; this also demonstrates that he had access to sources that presented their texts. In some cases, Vasubandhu may be citing a citation rather than the original text, and other citations (a custom that becomes even more evident in later texts), but I do not think he had an accessible library to his disposal.
66 Abhidharma-kosabhâsya (Pradhan 1975, p. 439.5). Cf. Candrakârti, Prasamapadâ, in La Vallée Poussin 1903–13, p. 269.11, idâm ca sûtrah sarvanîkâyasya paññhate, tata asmai ãgamin yathâpavarnitvâyai copayate târtikat (“This sûtra is read in all schools.”); p. 549.8, use of his encyclopedic knowledge of the texts, and invokes the principle of stûra-vîrâdha to invalidate an opponent’s argument.

Reasonings similar to those of Vasubandhu’s Vyâkhya-nîkâya are often presented in idealized debates in favor of the authenticity of the Mahâyâna, for example in the Mahâyâna-sûtra-loka and the Tarkavâda.67 In the commentary to chapter 9 of the Bodhicaryavatâra, the Śrâvaka announces that his own tradition is uncontested because of its status as buddhavacana (madâgama buddhavacanatve vîvâdah), while the Mahâyâna is contested (sâvâdâm savipratipattikam mahâyânam). Prajñâkaramit turn the tables to show that the Śrâvaka doctrine is also contested. Firstly, the four nîkâyas with eighteen divisions do not agree with one another, and secondly, even within the same nîkâya, specialists in sûtra, abhidharma, and vînaya do not agree with one another.68 The same point was made earlier by Harîbhadrâ in his Ālokâ in the Abhisamayalankâra, where he notes the discrepancies among the Tripiṭakas of the eighteen nîkâyas.69

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

etâ ca gâhana sarvanîkâya-lokotvâreṇa paññhante (“These verses are found in the treatises and sûtras of all schools.”). The Tibetan equivalent, xe pa thams cad, occurs, for example, in the Madhyamakavatâra (La Vallée Poussin 1907–12, p. 250.19, xe pa thams cad kyis ’don pa yin te) and elsewhere. See also La Vallée Poussin 1925b, p. 23 n. 1.

67 For another debate on this subject, see *Vyâkhyântaracîdha* (La Vallée Poussin 1928, pp. 175–78). A comparative study of these passages may unravel the intertextual tangles. For now I assume that Vasubandhu was one of the initiators; this might well prove to be wrong if earlier or shared sources can be traced.
68 Bodhicaryavatâra (Vidyâ 1960b, p. 206).
else. That is, this is the only place that I know of where samples of texts of the eighteen schools are cited side by side. It is regrettable that the passage survives only in Tibetan translation, since the citations may well have been in several different Buddhist languages.

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

VI. Inclusion and Exclusion: The Mahāvihāra Canon

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

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

At an early date, the Suttavivaha of the Pāli vinaya defines “Dhamma” as spoken by Buddhas, spoken by auditors, spoken by sages, and spoken

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71 Dīpavaṃsa, chap. 5, vv. 32–38. The passage is cited at the beginning of the Kathāvītarīya-āthakhā, pp. 3–5. Is pajirapa an innocent term, or does it evoke the saddharmapariṇāma of the decline of the True Dharma (for which see n. 78 below and Lamotte 1958, pp. 210–222)? The date of the Dīpavaṃsa is not known; a third–fourth century date is often proposed. The ideas of counterfeit dhamma and the decline of the True Dhamma were well-established by that time, but remained a concern for the Buddhist communities.

by deities, pertaining to welfare, pertaining to practice.72 Is this an oblique recognition that the Dhamma, the texts, are products of multiple or collective authorship? Not according to the commentary, the Samantapāsādikā, which restricts its examples of the four categories to known Pāli texts in which the sages and deities play subordinate roles as interlocutors. It interprets attha-upasaṅghito as attha-kathā-nissito, “grounded on the commentaries,” and dhamma-upasaṅghito as pāli-nissito, “grounded on the Pāli,” i.e., the Tipiṭaka.73 This considerably narrows the scope of what might seem to be a very generous and open definition of Dhamma—here it is recast in exclusively Mahāvihārin categories.74

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

- Kalama-sutta
- Rājavāda-sutta
- Tikkhānāyica
- Catupariyaṭṭha
- Nandopananda-damanam
- Apalāsa-damanam.

72 Vinaya, vol. 4, p. 15.9–10; dhammo nāma buddhabhāsito saṅkābhidāsitāt devatābhāsito attha-upasaṅghito dharmapāsādikā. The Sijantanim piṭakā (commonly transcribed as Sijantani) (T no. 1462) is rather different, but not without interest: Bapat and Hirakawa 1970, pp. 446–47 (for the problem of identifying this text with the Samantapāsādikā, see Pinte 2010). For a different, earlier opinion, see Endo 2006, which is a response to Gurge 2003.) For examples of texts spoken by auditors, see Lamotte 1947, p. 215 (translation, Boin-Webb 1983–84, p. 6); for sages and gods, Lamotte 1947, pp. 215–16 (translation, Boin-Webb 1983–84, pp. 6–7). The Dhammapādikās also give the same fourfold definition (loc. cit.). For a fivefold classification, see below.

73 Samantapāsādikā, vol. 4, p. 742.9.

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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Samantapāsādikā, Sārasangaha</th>
<th>School according to Nikāya-sangrahaya</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vanṇa-piṭaka</td>
<td>Hemavata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aṅgulimāla-piṭaka</td>
<td>Rājagiri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratthapāla-gajīta</td>
<td>Pūrvasaili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ālavaka-gajīta</td>
<td>Aparasaili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulha-ummagga</td>
<td>Siddhārthaka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sīrāsangaha</th>
<th>Nikāya-sangrahaya</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ratanakītām</td>
<td>1. Māyājāla-sūtra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Māyājālālata</td>
<td>2. Samāja-sūtra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mahāśamayatatva</td>
<td>3. Mahāśamayatatva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tatvasaṅgha</td>
<td>4. Tatvasaṅgha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Bhūtacāmara</td>
<td>5. Bhūtacāmara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Cakkasaṅvaram</td>
<td>7. Cakkasaṅvaram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Mahāśamayam</td>
<td>8. Mahāśamayam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Sādhabuddhām</td>
<td>10. Catuspīṭha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

81. Variant spellings in the *Samantapāsādikā* include Vedajha and Vedallja. Vaidalya, Vaitalya, and Voajha are epithets of what later became the “Mahāyāna.” See also the list at the *Samyutta-āṭṭhakāṭha*, vol. 2, p. 201.

82. Guḷha-bhavasamgga-gulha-ummagga-gulha-vinaya-veda-kappika are mentioned by Buddhaghosa at the *Dīgha-āṭṭhakāṭha* (vol. 2, p. 566) and *Aṅguttara-āṭṭhakāṭha* (vol. 3, p. 160.6), in the context of the mahāpadesa, apparently in the words of Sudhima Thera, as texts which are not found in the Pāṭimaka and do not lead to the subduing of desire.

83. Etaī *vagga-piṭaka-kai* obuddhavacanē kehi katān ti. bhikkhuva-sadharehi tithiyehi katam (p. 45.31).
languages or in translation, which, with the exception of the Pāli texts, is distinctly North Indian, whether Sarvāstivādin, Lokottaravādin, or Dharmaguptaka. We might conclude that there is an enormous blank spot on our literary map of the subcontinent: the South.\textsuperscript{86} These passages show that the Mahāvihāra excluded texts from its Tripitaka, and categorically classed certain texts of other schools as ābuddha-vacana. It is evident that the school was aware of textual innovations and intellectual developments on the mainland—not only in the South, with which monastic relations are explicitly mentioned, but also in North India. The Šīkṣas, for example give close paraphrases in Pāli of passages from the scholastic literature of the Vaibhāṣikas.\textsuperscript{87}

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

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

\textsuperscript{86} For something of what we do know, see Monius 2001.

\textsuperscript{87} For examples, see Skilling, forthcoming (s).

\textsuperscript{88} For the Milindapañha, see Horner 1964, pp. ix–xviii (and in general, see Skilling 1998, pp. 81–101). For the Nettipakarana, see ṇāmānoli 1962 (translator’s introduction, pp. lv–lvi and a list of quotations, pp. 283–87); for the Petakopadesa, see ṇāmānoli 1964 (translator’s introduction, pp. xxiv–xxv and a list of quotations, pp. 381–85). For early Chinese references to and translations from a text or texts parallel to the Petakopadesa, see Zucchi 2002a; Zucchi 2002b.

\textsuperscript{89} ṇāmānoli 1964, pp. xxix–xxxii.

11. Sabbathuyā 
12. Samuccayaṁ.

Here, some of the titles can be provisionally identified. Ratanakīṭa may be the Ratnakīṭa-sūtra, also known as the Kāśyapaparipravṛtta. The others are tantras, among which the Māyājñā, Tatvasaṁghraha, and Ćakrasaṁvara are well known, and others evoke familiar titles or cycles.

What can we learn from these fragmentary reports of texts known to the learned scholars of Sri Lanka? The titles in the earliest list cannot be identified, with the exception of Vettula- (Vedalha-, Vedalla-) pīṭaka, which seems to have been an early term for a collection of proto-Mahāyāna or pre-Mahāyāna texts—that is, Mahāyāna avant la lettre, before a cohesive Mahāyāna identity was consciously forged.\textsuperscript{84} Even the style of some of the titles is unusual: I do not believe that there are other instances of titles ending in -gajīta, for example.\textsuperscript{85} If we accept the attributions of the Nikāyasamghraha, we might conclude that most of the texts were transmitted by South Indian schools. And this might give us pause: few if any texts of the Southern schools survive, especially from the early period when Buddhism flourished at sites like Amarāvatī, Nāgarjunakoḍa, and Phanigiri in Andhra Pradesh, or Kanaganahalli in Kannataka. We might conclude from the titles listed in the Samantapāṇḍitā and Nikāyasamghraha, from the excerpts from the canons of the Southern schools cited by Bhāviveka, and from the few citations in other texts, that Southern literature had a distinct character, quite different from the literature that survives in Indian

\textsuperscript{84} The terms Vedalla, etc., are used by Asanga and others as synonyms of Mahāyāna, and one of the forms, Vajjiputta, persists in the literature. But whether a collection called Vedallapīṭaka ever actually existed, whether orally or in manuscript, is an unknowable.

\textsuperscript{85} The term is used elsewhere in Pāli commentaries, however, for example, in the Donagajīta. See An 2003, p. 213 and n. 3 with reference to the Manorathapūrṇa, vol. 3, p. 77.
another version. In any event, the citations reveal that the textual tradition of the Mahāvihāra is not as uniform as has been claimed.

VII. Texts Unique to the Mahāvihāra

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

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

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

90 For the texts of the Khuddaka-nikāya, see von Hentiber 1996, §§ 84–128.

Can it be mere chance that the Dīpaṃkara alleges that the “Mahāsaṅgītikas” rejected just these texts (along with a few others)? It states that they rejected the Parivāra, Atthuddhāra,92 Patisambhidamārga, Niddesa, and part of the Jātaka, along with the six (!) books of the Abhidhamma, and made up their own versions.93 Buddhaghosa introduces an otherwise unidentified Sudatta Thera who seems to reject all works that are not called sutta.94 Might this not reflect uncertainty about the status of these works within the Theravāda, or at least the Mahāvihāra, fold itself? It is natural that other schools would not accept the Mahāvihāra Abhidhamma, since they had their own abhidharmas, which in some cases may have developed earlier, and in any case would have reached their final form independently.95 The early abhidharma literature that survives today—of any school, in any language, including the seven books of the Mahāvihāra Abhidhamma—is the end-product of several centuries of intellectual endeavor that began with early pedagogical and exegetical practices and was formalized with the formation of the Pitakas, as seen in the Vibhaṅgas of the vinayas and in certain sūtras or nikāyas, especially the Anguttaras.96 The Abhidhamma is not only

92 Atthuddhāra presumably refers to the Atthuddhāra-katha of the Dhammasaṅgītikas; see von Hentiber 1996, § 134.
93 Dīpaṃkara, cited at the Kathāvatthu-āṭṭhakathā, p. 4.9–11: parivaram attuddhārām abhidhammanum chappakarānam, patisambhidām na niddesam ekadivesh ca jātakam, vissajjeya taṁ ca aṭṭham akassa te. For chappakarānam, see Lamotte 1958, p. 200. One might ask whether the missing seventh work is not the Dīpañkara, as Lamotte suggests, but rather the Kathāvatthu. The status of the Kathāvatthu was contested even within the school itself, and it is logical that it would be the last book to enter the Abhidhamma-piṭaka. It is also a cumulative text, that, according to Lamotte, may not have achieved its final form until the second half of the third century CE (see Lamotte 1958, p. 202). I am not convinced, however, that we need to wait so late for Vesālīvadā doctrines to have been introduced to either the Kathāvatthu or to have reached the Isle of Tabropane.
95 For a survey of the abhidharma literature, see Lamotte 1958, pp. 197–210 and the introduction to Cox 1995, also Cox 1992.
96 Perhaps not even a finished product: see Lamotte’s cogent remark that “the Abhidhamma abounds in repetitions, recitations, reclassifications and explanations which give it the character of an unfinished work still in the process of elaboration” (Lamotte 1988, p. 184. Original French [Lamotte 1958, p. 202]: “l'Abhidhamma abonde en reprises, en rectifications, en reclassifications et en explications qui lui donnent le caractère d'une œuvre inachevée, encore en pleine élaboration”). I suggest below that the Abhidhamma (along with, for example, the Pajñāpatimāla), is an ideal text: with its multiple layers of abbreviation and cross-reference, it cannot be finished or be fully written down. What we have are sample recordings, working texts.
assumed to be lost. A remarkable feature of the Gandharan commentarial or śāstra literature that is currently being studied by Cox and others is that none of the texts has any parallels in extant śāstra literature, whether preserved in Indic languages or in translation. Of the vast and magnificent library of Buddhist literature, the contents of only a few rooms remain.

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

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

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

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

98 Faure 1962, p. 78.2–5: cattusīte pana saññāhe bodhiho pacchimāvatāsādhāge devatā ratanagahaṃ māpañāya, tathā paññākena sīlāvāvā abhidhammapiṭakam vissato c ettha anumattānaṃ samantapattānaṃ vicinato satāham viñāmī na.
100 See Lamotte 1958, pp. 280–201 and 203, with reference to Bu-ston (Obermüller 1931–32, part 1, pp. 49–50) who is paraphrasing the Abhidhammakośabhāṣya and Abhidhammakośovivādhāya (Koša 1:3). The Vīhāra cited by Lamotte (1958, p. 205, translation, Lamotte 1988, p. 187) would have it both ways: “The Abhidharma was originally the word of the Buddha, but it is also a compilation by the Ārya Kāṭiyāyanaputta.” On the intricacies of the claims, see Cox 1992, pp. 160–61.
101 See Lamotte 1958, pp. 202–10 for the several traditions, which often bear traces of memory of historical post-nirvāṇa authorship, obscured by a growing trend to move them back to the authors and time of the Blessed One.
104 The Suttaangaha (Chaudhuri and Guha 1957; Norman 1983, pp. 172–73; von Hentiber 1996, § 157) is a good example of a source book for sermons—the selection of texts is very
VIII. Sutras Unique to the Sarvāstivāda

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Long sūtras unique to the Sarvāstivāda:

Arthavistara-sūtra (Dīghāgama)
Māyāśāla-sūtra (Dīghāgama)
Catuspariṣat-sūtra (Sāsāṭrakāraṇīpāta of the Dīghāgama)
Trīdaṇḍi-sūtra (Śīlasthakākā of the Dīghāgama)
Bimbisārapratyudgamanasūtra (Madhyāgama)
Nyagrodha-sūtra
Arthaśīrṣika-sūtra
Āyuparyanta-sūtra
Garbhāvāgrānti-sūtra

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

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


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

110 Vinayakuvravakasutra (Du bhaṃ tuṣṣā ḍhi ṛṇ kuṭa gṛi), P vol. 44, no. 1035, folios 119a–14b7; Ratnakūta, “Ayuṣmanindagarbavakrāntinīrasa” (Tse ba hdam pa sga’ bo mthal du ’jug pa bstan pa), P vol. 23, no. 760, part 13 (as far as I know this is the sole Śrāvakā sūtra in the Ratnakūta collection); cited at Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, chap. 1, v. 35 (Śāstrī 1970–73, part 1, p. 93.10), as well as in the *Śrāvakasamuccaya (Chos mgon pa’i ’jug pa rgya ches ‘grel pa snying po kun las btus pa), P vol. 119, no. 555, folios 320a8, 320b2, the Pañcavasukavibhāṣya (Śāstrī, n.d., p. 22.10), the Yeṣuṭravatīkā (Bhattacharya 1957, p. 27.6), and (several times) in the Bhāvanīśīrasaśūtrasamuccaya (P vol. 102, no. 5329). For some of the complications in the transmission of the Garbhāvakrānti, see de Jong, 1977, pp. 29–31. We await Robert Krieger’s study, edition, and translation of the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya version.

111 The Sanskrit Ayuparyanta-sūtra is also from the Gilgit finds, which suggests by association (with the famous vinaya and sundry Śrāvakā texts) a Mūlasarvāstivādin affiliation; it is cited in full by Samāsthadeva in his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya-gyukṣā (Chos mgon pa’i nubrol kyi ’grel bsod Rab bar mkha’ ba, P vol. 118, no. 5595, hereafter *Upṣṭākā-tīka), a collection of Mūlasarvāstivādin sources. Yāsomitra (Abhidharmakośavyākhyā, chap. 1, v. 3 (Śāstrī 1970–73, part 1, p. 15.181) states that the Sautrāntikas classify the Arthaviniścaya under Abhidharma. The Sautrāntikas make this statement in a debate with the Vaibhāsikas about the status of the Abhidharma and the Abhidharma-pitaka; for the assertion to be meaningful, the sūtra must have been accepted by the Vaibhāsikas. (See Samtani 1971, pp. 28–30, on the importance of the Arthaviniścaya.) Since both the Sautrāntikas and the Vaibhāsikas belonged to the (Mūla)Sarvāstivādin fold, the sūtra must have been transmitted in that school.

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


114 This Mahāśāntavāta-sūtra deals with pratyavatamāda and is not to be confused with the Mahāśāntavāta-mahāśātra or the Pāli Mahāśāntavattra-sutta: see Skilling 1997b. References in part 2, introduction to Mahāśātra 4, section 4.

115 *Upṣṭākā-tīka, P vol. 118, no. 5595, folio 112a4; cited in the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya and Abhidharmavattra.


117 Abhidharmakośabhāṣya chap. 6, v. 3 (Śāstrī 1970–73, part 3, p. 888.1); cited in the Abhidharmakośavyākhyā and *Upṣṭākā-tīka.

118 Abhidharmadīpā (Jaini 1977, p. 271.18); cited in Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, Vyākhyāntika, and *Upṣṭākā-tīka.

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

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

One of the earliest anthologies in Pāli is the Khuddaka-nikāya of the Khuddaka-nikāya, “a collection of nine short pieces gleaned from the canon and put together most probably for practical purposes as a kind of handbook.” A later example, compiled in Sri Lanka at an uncertain date, is the Catubhāṣāvāra, a collection which serves both curricular and ritual purposes. The Suttasamgaha presents itself as a source book for sermons (desanā). Several paritta or rakṣā collections, compiled at different places and different times, are used in the Mahāvihāra lineages. These include the above-mentioned Catubhāṣāvāra, the Paritta and Mahāparitta, and the Cūḷārāja-paritta (Sattaparitta) and Mahārāja-paritta (Dvādasaparitta).

Another genre is condensation, which summarizes narratives or doctrines in a few stanzas, and is recited both as a rakṣā and as homage (vandanā). Examples in Pāli include the Jayamangalagāthā (invoking the power of the eight victories of the Jina), the Sattamahāsthānakāthā (homage to seven sites in the vicinity of the Bodhi-tree at Vajrāsana) and the Aṭṭhamahāsthānakāthā (homage to the eight great sites of Śākyamuni’s life and career). The Boffhānakoparitta is a verse summary of three suttas from the Sānṅgītika-nikāya, whose power lies in an invocation of truth (etena saccavajjena sothi te hota sabbadā). The Aṁśatāparitta is only an excerpt of the opening verses of the long sūtra of the same name, and many other paritta are similarly only extracts. Condensations of the seven books of the Abhidhamma, the Sattapakara-ahāridhamma, are among the most common manuscripts found in Thai and Khmer collections.

The examples that I have given are all in Pāli. We know much less about collections used in other traditions, although it is likely that many of the fragmentary manuscripts of Central Asia belonged to liturgical or apotropaic collections. The Sarvāstivāda had collections of the Mahāsūtras; the lists of titles and the Mahāsūtras preserved in Tibetan show the diverse type of texts which could be used as rakṣā. In Nepal, there is the famous Pañcarakṣā, and in Nepal and Tibet there are numerous collections of dhāranī (dhārasamgraha, gzugs ’dus), which include texts parallel to the Pāli Paritta and to the āryavas of the great Mahāyāna sūtras.

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

X. Questions without Conclusion

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

I have shown, I hope, that the individual Sūtra-piṭakas of different schools, the Mahāvihāra and Sarvāstivāda, each contained texts that the other did not possess, and that these texts were fully authoritative to the

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121 See von Hūtber 1996, pp. 43–44. In fact, one text is not found in the Pāli Tripitaka, as the author himself notes.
122 For these, see Skilling 1992.
123 For the last two, see Skilling and Pakdekham 2010.
school in question. Each school accues the other schools of adding books to the canon, and each, in its own way, is right. The Pitakas of different schools are products of different contexts, different imperatives, and different principles of redaction.

To what needs did these "new texts" respond? To what degree were the needs doctrinal, to what degree were they social? To what degree were they generated by historical change, by geographies, by localisations, dislocations, disruptions? Texts were designed, selected, or promoted to fulfill specific and socially significant functions: protection against calamity (rakṣā), promotion of welfare (svastigāthā, svastyayanagāthā), rejoicing in merit (anumodanā), mobilization of funds and works through promise of blessings (ānīsamsā), source books for sermons (deśanā). Texts were canonized by function, and I wonder whether they were ever meant to be absolute statements of the buddhavacana in the abstract.

The primary evolution is one of ideas, not one of texts. Texts are bounded; ideas are not. Modern scholarship has set up chronological hierarchies of authenticity: from canonical to paracanonical, to postcanonical, to noncanonical, to apocryphal. This hierarchy coincides to some degree with traditional models. For example, the Mahāvihāra tradition has Pāli, Ājjhakatthā, Tikā, Mahājātā, Anūṭikā, Pakaranavisesa, etc. We have no evidence for such a tiered system of commentary in North India, where the main contrast is between buddhavacana and sāstra.

When we take the role of the sāṃgītikāraka into account, it is obvious that every word of a sāutra or of a Tripitaka cannot be buddhavacana. This fact, recognized by Buddhist tradition, is sometimes ignored in modern scholarship.

All of these canonical collections reflect what the schools concerned (Theravāda, Mahāsāṃghika, Sarvāstivāda, Dharmaguptaka, etc.) eventually considered to be the [author’s emphasis] Canon [author’s capitalization], the authentic statement of the teaching of the Buddha as remembered, transmitted, and eventually written down. Each school claimed to represent unadulterated the original Buddhism of the Buddha. . . . In the Theravāda tradition, all the contents of the Tipitaka are held to stem from the Buddha himself either directly or through his active approval of the teaching of other enlightened monks.125

125 Without question many or most texts were (and are) multi-purpose. 126 Williams 2000, p. 31.
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A MURAL PAINTING OF THE FIRST COUNCIL FROM PAGAN

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

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

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