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**A PHILOLOGICAL APPROACH  
TO BUDDHISM**

The Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai Lectures 1994

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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AMg	Ardha-Māgadhī
AO	Acta Orientalia
B.C.E.	Before Common Era
BHS	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
BHSD	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary
BHSG	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar
BSO(A)S	Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies
BSR	Buddhist Studies Review
BUp	Brhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad
C.E.	Common Era
CP I–V	K.R. Norman. Collected Papers, Volumes I–IV (1990–94)
CPD	A Critical Pāli Dictionary, Copenhagen
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DEDR	T. Burrow & M.B. Emeneau, <i>Dravidian Etymological Dictionary</i> (Revised edition, 1984)
DPPN	G.P. Malalasekera, <i>Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names</i> (1937–38)
EV I, II	K.R. Norman, <i>Elders' Verses</i> I (1969), II (1971)
GD I, II	K.R. Norman, <i>The Group of Discourses</i> I (1984), II (1992)
IJ	Indo-Iranian Journal
IT	Indologica Taurinensia
JA	Journal Asiatique
JBuRS	Journal of the Burma Research Society
JOI(B)	Journal of the Oriental Institute (Baroda)
JPTS	Journal of the Pali Texts Society
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
m.c.	metri causa
MIA	Middle Indo-Aryan
MRI	<i>Minor Readings and Illustrator</i>

MW	M. Monier-Williams, <i>Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> (1899)
OUP	Oxford University Press
PDhp	Patna Dharmapada
PE	Pillar Edict
PED	The PTS's Pali-English Dictionary
Pkt	Prakrit
PTS	Pali Text Society
RE	Rock Edict
SBE	Sacred Books of the East
Skt	Sanskrit
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies (London)
SWTF	Goerg von Simson (ed.), <i>Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden</i> (1973–)
Überbl	O. von Hinüber, <i>Das ältere Mittelindisch im Überblick</i> (1986)
WZKSO	Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens

Abbreviations of the titles of Pāli texts are those adopted by the CPD.  
Editions are those of the PTS, unless otherwise stated.

## VIII

### Buddhism and Canonicity

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We are accustomed to talking loosely of Buddhist texts being canonical or non-canonical. Perhaps we ought to try to define what precisely we mean by “canonical”, because when discussing the period of early Buddhism to which these lectures have been mainly devoted, scholars tend to use the terms in different, and therefore confusing, ways. For example, Étienne Lamotte asserted that there was no question of there being either a canon or a Tripiṭaka before the end of the Mauryan period, and he stated categorically that there was no canon, Magadhan or otherwise, before the period of Aśoka.<sup>1</sup> Since it has been pointed out that a western term such as “canonical”, although convenient, must nevertheless be used with circumspection,<sup>2</sup> we must recognise, when considering Lamotte’s statement, that much hinges upon the definition of “canon”, because there is a danger that we may be perpetrating an anachronism by trying to read the wrong concept of the word “canonical” into the period immediately preceding and following the time of the Buddha’s death.

I want in this lecture to restrict myself to the canons of the Indian schools of Buddhism, and specifically to the Theravādin canon, although there is no reason to think that, in principle, the canons of other Hīnayāna schools were formulated in a different way. We simply do not have enough information to be certain about it.

To define the word “canon” briefly, we may say that it is a collection of scriptures (oral or written), which gives a certain authority to those texts included in it. The collection may be open, giving the possibility of other texts being added to it, or closed, which implies that the texts listed in it, *and no others*, are documents fundamental to the religion concerned.

For the most part, except where the founder of a religion produces a closed body of inspired scripture, many religions start with a body of texts which have been collected together over a period of time during the life and after the death of the founder, and it is only later, if at all, that the list is closed, sometimes after the weeding out of texts which were at one time thought of as authoritative, but

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<sup>1</sup> Lamotte, 1988, 562.

<sup>2</sup> Brough, 1962, 33.

about whose nature doubts have arisen. So in the case of the Christian scriptures, it was only some centuries after the foundation of the church that the present contents of the New Testament were given canonical status, in the second, closed, sense. The situation in Jainism is confusing. One section, the Digambaras, believe that all the early teachings of the founder Mahāvīra have been lost, and what they regard as authoritative is a number of texts written by eminent Jain authors from the second century C.E. onwards. The Śvetāmbara section of the Jain community, however, believe that not all the early scriptures were lost, but even they are not in total agreement about those which remain. One sect rejects a number of texts which are accepted by another, and even the latter cannot agree about the texts which are to be included in the *prakīrṇaka* “minor” class, with the manuscript tradition rarely agreeing about the texts in this category.

If we speak of the Theravādin canon, in the form in which we have it now, it clearly comes into the second category. It is closed. The concept of canon for Mahāyānists and in Tibet and China differs. Some traditions include texts which are canonical and non-canonical by Theravādin standards, and there was the possibility of making additions at a late date, so that it was, for example, possible for a translation, and a bad translation at that, of the Jātakamālā to be added to the Chinese canon at the end of the eleventh century C.E.

Perhaps we should begin by considering the categories which do *not* necessarily constitute a canon. There are in the Theravādin canonical texts traces of a different division of the *dharmma* from the one we have now—one into nine *aṅgas*. The number is increased in some traditions, with a list of twelve *aṅgas* being found in the Mahāvvyutpatti.<sup>3</sup> Not all the divisions in the list (*suttaṃ geyyaṃ veyyākaraṇaṃ gāthaṃ udānaṃ itivuttakaṃ jātakaṃ abbhutadhammaṃ vedallaṃ*)<sup>4</sup> are easily explicable. According to the Dīpavaṃsa,<sup>5</sup> the change from the old ninefold classification into the later one took place at the first joint recitation (*saṅgīti*). This is therefore taken by some as implying that there was a nine-fold canon already in existence during the Buddha’s lifetime. The *aṅgas* seem, however, not to refer to precise portions of the canon, but are rather a classification of types of texts, at least if we follow Buddhaghosa’s interpretation of their meanings,<sup>6</sup> and it does not seem possible to take them as evidence for the existence of a canon in the second sense of the word.

In the quotation which I gave at the beginning of this lecture, Lamotte made a distinction between canon and *tipiṭaka*. He was right to do so, since it is clear

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<sup>3</sup> See Thomas, 1951, 276 foll.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. M I 133, 24–25.

<sup>5</sup> Dp 4.18–20.

<sup>6</sup> Ps II 106,8 foll. See von Hinüber, 1994.

that the word “*tipiṭaka*” is not synonymous with “canon”. *Tipiṭaka* is a division of texts rather than an assessment of their authority, and this and other terms, such as *nikāya*, only came into use at some time after the Buddha’s death.

The word *tipeṭakin* “having three *piṭakas*” occurs in the canon in the Parivāra to the Vinaya,<sup>7</sup> and *tepiṭaka* and *tipeṭaka* occur in the Milindapañha.<sup>8</sup> The Vinaya reference occurs in the list of theras prefixed to the Parivāra, which is probably an addition made in Ceylon as late as the 1st century C.E.<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to date the Milindapañha, but it must have been composed long enough before the time of Buddhaghosa for it to be regarded as authoritative, for he seems to quote it on the question of tradition, authority, etc.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, these texts, however they are dated, must be some centuries before Buddhaghosa, and the word *tipiṭaka*, and the idea of *piṭakas*, must therefore be old.

We are accustomed to refer to the Buddha’s teaching as the *t(r)ipiṭaka* “the three baskets”, but this is not the only way in which the *Buddhavacana* was divided up. Hsüan tsang records the fact<sup>11</sup> that the Mahāsāṅghikas collected the Sūtra-piṭaka, the Vinaya-piṭaka, the Abhidharma-piṭaka, the miscellaneous *piṭaka* (Khuddaka-nikāya), and the Dhāraṇī-piṭaka, and thus they distinguished five *piṭakas*. It is noteworthy that they call the Khuddaka-nikāya a *piṭaka*, but this arises from the fact that the word *piṭaka* is not only used of the baskets of the Buddha’s teachings. There is a Theravādin canonical text called the Cariyā-piṭaka, and *piṭaka* is used in the Theravādin canon itself to refer to the collections of other teachers, including brahmins.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear that the words *piṭaka* and *tipiṭaka* simply denote a type of text or an arrangement of texts, and do not, in themselves, imply any sort of canon, open or closed, although of course the words can be, and are, applied to a body of scriptures which is regarded as canonical.

The use of the word “*pāli*” in this connection is both confused and confusing. Although it is often translated as “canon”, it is more correctly translated as “text”, since it is the complement to *aṭṭhakathā* (“commentary”), being the text on which the commentary is written.

For the most part, the *aṭṭhakathās* we have are on canonical texts, in the sense of the closed canon which we know of from Buddhaghosa’s list of texts in the

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<sup>7</sup> Vin V 3,14 (*Khemanāmo tipeṭakī* [m.c.]).

<sup>8</sup> Mil 18,15 (*tepiṭakaṃ buddhavacanam*); 19,14 (*thero tepiṭako*); 90,4 ([*Nāgaseno*] ... *so pi tipiṭako* [m.c.]).

<sup>9</sup> See Norman, 1983C, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Sp 230,28 quoting Mil 148,6 foll. (but in a slightly different form from the text as we have it).

<sup>11</sup> Beal, 1884, Part II, 164–65.

<sup>12</sup> M I 10 and II 169,13. See Collins, 1990, 89–126 (108, note 15).

three *piṭakas*. There is, however, an *aṭṭhakathā* upon the *Netti-ppakaraṇa*, and in it the author *Dhammapāla* refers to the *Netti* as a *pāli*, and the *ṭīkā* also refers to *Netti-pāli*.<sup>13</sup> The bibliographical text *Gandhavaṃsa* also calls the commentary upon the *Netti* an *aṭṭhakathā*.<sup>14</sup>

This same criterion applies to certain portions of the *Jātakas* “the birth stories of the Buddha”, which are for the most part in verse, the prose being later and commentarial. There are, however, certain portions in prose upon which there is a commentary, implying that these prose passages are *pāli*. We in fact can accept that this is so, because almost without exception<sup>15</sup> such prose passages occur in the *Kuṇāla-jātaka*, and they are, for the most part, composed in a very archaic form of rhythmical prose known as *veḍha*, quite different in style from the ordinary commentarial narrative type prose.

Nevertheless, the whole discussion about *pāli* and *aṭṭhakathā* is made uncertain by the fact that there are certain passages where *pāli* means nothing more than text, with no implication whatsoever about canonical or non-canonical status.<sup>16</sup>

The fact of the matter is that there is no single Pāli word which exactly coincides with our word “canon”. It is probable that what we call a canon in this context is what early Buddhists would describe as *Buddhavacana* “the words of the Buddha”, since they were probably concerned only with what the Buddha taught.

I mentioned in the fifth lecture the four *mahāpadesas*,<sup>17</sup> the four references to authority: the Buddha, a community with elders, a group of elders, and a single elder, mentioned in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and elsewhere in the Pāli canon,<sup>18</sup> which were concerned with finding out whether a particular teaching was *Bhagavato vacanam*. The Buddha’s criteria were clearly intended to be applied after his death, when the Buddha himself was no longer available as an authority. In effect, anything that was said to be *Buddhavacana* and was consistent with the *sutta* and the *vinaya* was acceptable. The importance of obtaining such a *sutta* is shown by the existence of a rule in the *Vinaya* stating that a monk may interrupt his rains retreat for up to seven days to get a text which may otherwise be lost.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted by Hardy, 1902, x, note 6 (on xi) and xi, note 1.

<sup>14</sup> Collins, 1990, 108, note 11.

<sup>15</sup> The cty is also found at Ja I 7.

<sup>16</sup> von Hinüber (1977, 237–46 [244]), draws attention to: *catunnam pi catasso gāthā bandhitvā pālim eva ugganḥāpetvā uyyoesi*, Ja VI 353, 11–12: “Composing four verses, and making the four learn them, he sent them off”.

<sup>17</sup> D II 123–26.

<sup>18</sup> D II 124,10 foll. = A II 168,11 foll. See Collins, 1990, 109, note 18.

<sup>19</sup> *āgacchantu bhaddantā imaṃ suttantaṃ pariyaṇissanti pur’ āyaṃ suttantaṃ palujjati*, Vin I 140, 37 foll. See Norman, 1988, 1–27 (14) (= CP III, 225–43 [236]).

If, then, by canon we mean a body of texts regarded as having a specific kind of authority,<sup>20</sup> there seems to be no reason to doubt that such a body of texts began to come into existence very soon after the Buddha's death, and indeed might have already existed in embryonic form during his lifetime.

Buddhaghosa talks of bringing together in the Vinaya-piṭaka what had been both recited and not recited at the first *saṅgīti*, recognising that many sayings of the Buddha had escaped the attention of the *saṅgītikāra*s, and also that many additions to the collections were made at a date subsequent to that of the first *saṅgīti*.<sup>21</sup>

If, however, the canon is what is *Buddhavacana*, then we have problems with the various texts which are ascribed to various persons other than the Buddha. We find that notice is taken of this in some of the early canonical texts, where an enquirer received his reply, not from the Buddha, but from one of the Buddha's close followers, and we are told that this is in effect the word of the Buddha because the follower has answered in exactly the same way as the Buddha would have answered had he been present, and it was therefore approved of by him.<sup>22</sup>

The summaries of the story which we find in some texts, e.g. the Mahāparinibbānasutta, including the information about the distribution of relics, the portions of verses which we find in, say, the Suttanipāta, which are ascribed to the *saṅgītikāra*s,<sup>23</sup> all go to show that the concept of a closed canon or a canon consisting entirely of *Buddhavacana* cannot be entirely correct.

The very fact that the Kathāvatthu was recited at the third *saṅgīti*, in the reign of Aśoka, somewhere around 250 B.C.E., i.e. a century and a half or so after the death of the Buddha, however, produced a controversy about the propriety of regarding it as *Buddha-bhāsita*,<sup>24</sup> and the Mahāvihāra tradition, reported by Buddhaghosa, had to explain that it was *Buddha-bhāsita* because the Buddha had drawn up the table of contents, foreseeing that it would be elaborated by Moggaliputta Tissa at a future date.<sup>25</sup> The reciter was therefore merely giving words which the Buddha had already put into his mind, so to speak. The Sarvāstivādins faced a similar problem by saying that the Buddha composed the Jñānaprasthāna, but Kātyāyanīputra edited it after the Buddha's death.

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<sup>20</sup> See Collins' Preface to Horner and Jaini, 1985, ix.

<sup>21</sup> Jayawickrama, 1962, 100 (§ 20, note 1). *pathamasāṅgītiyaṃ saṅgītañ ca asaṅgītañ ca* (Sp 18, 3–4).

<sup>22</sup> The justification for the Madhupiṇḍakasutta of the Majjhima-nikāya (18) and other *suttas* is that (in that particular case) Mahākaccāna had answered in exactly the same way as the Buddha would have done, had he been asked.

<sup>23</sup> See Norman, GD II, xxxv.

<sup>24</sup> *Vitaṇḍavādī pan' āha: Kathāvatthum kasmā gahitaṃ?* As 3, 25–26.

<sup>25</sup> As 5, 32.

Buddhaghosa, in his account of the first *saṅgīti*, states that the fifth *nikāya*, the Khuddaka-nikāya, included whatever sayings of the Buddha were not included in the first four *nikāyas*.<sup>26</sup> Since he lists the texts included in that *nikāya*, he must have been aware of the fact that many of them, e.g. the Niddesa, Theragāthā, Therīgāthā, Vimānavatthu, Petavatthu, and portions of the Apadāna, are attributed to others. It is, however, noteworthy, that, in the Theragāthā and Therīgāthā, many of the verses are said to have been uttered by the Buddha in the first place. They only became the verses of the thera or therī after they had repeated them.

According to the Saddhammapajotikā,<sup>27</sup> the commentary upon the Niddesa, the Niddesa was composed by the Buddha's disciple Sāriputta, but if this was so, then it is strange that he gives three different explanations of his own words as recorded in the Suttanipāta. This would seem to indicate that although some of the Niddesa material perhaps goes back to the time of the Buddha, the work as a whole was later.<sup>28</sup>

What, however, are we to make of a text like the Apadāna, where we find that some individuals are actually acquainted with the Kathāvatthu,<sup>29</sup> therefore making (those portions at least of) the text even later than Aśoka?

It becomes clear that *Buddhavacana* was interpreted in a broader sense. *Buddhavacana*, in this broad sense, means the sayings of the Buddha, but sometimes it means what the Buddha would have said, had he been there, or sayings about the Buddha, or sayings in accordance with the Buddha's teaching.

How did the Theravādin canon develop from being an open collection of *Buddhavacana* into a closed canon?

As far as the contents of the Theravādin canon are concerned, we have the information which Buddhaghosa gives us. He lists three *piṭakas*: Vinaya-, Sutta- and Abhidhamma-; the Sutta-piṭaka has five *nikāyas*, the fifth of which, the Khuddaka-, contains fifteen texts, although he also mentions a division into fourteen parts,<sup>30</sup> without specifying which text is omitted under this scheme; the Abhidhamma-piṭaka contains seven texts. He tells us, however, that some *bhāṇakas* had different ideas, and also put texts into different categories.<sup>31</sup> He

<sup>26</sup> Sp 16,14–15.

<sup>27</sup> Nidd-a I 1, 14–15.

<sup>28</sup> See Norman, 1983C, 84–85.

<sup>29</sup> *Kathāvatthuvisuddhiyā*, Ap 37, 1; *Kathāvatthuvisārada* 550, 21, both times in conjunction with *Abhidhammanayaṅṅā*.

<sup>30</sup> As 26, 3.

<sup>31</sup> See Norman, 1983C, 9. The Dīgha-*bhāṇakas* put the Khuddaka-gantha into the Abhidhammapiṭaka, classifying the texts in the following way: Jātaka Mahāniddesa Cūlaniddesa Paṭisambhidāmagga Suttanipāta Dhammapada Udāna Itivuttaka Vimānavatthu Petavatthu Theragāthā Therīgāthā. The Majjhima-*bhāṇakas*, however, put these texts in the Sutta-piṭaka, together with Cariyāpiṭaka Apadāna and Buddhavaṃsa. Both groups of *bhāṇakas* thus omitted the Khuddakapāṭha from the canon. We must assume that the Dīgha-*bhāṇakas* closed their list of the Khuddaka-nikāya before Cariyāpiṭaka Apadāna and Buddhavaṃsa were added to it, while the Majjhima-*bhāṇakas* closed their list before the Khuddakapāṭha was reckoned as being canonical.

was giving information about the situation in his own time, but the situation in earlier times must have been rather different.

In the third lecture I spoke about the tradition that a collection of teachings of some sort existed and was recited immediately after the Buddha's death, and I dealt with the institution of the *bhāṇakas*, the reciters of various parts of the Theravādin canon. I suggested that this event was not as early as the tradition suggests. Although we can point to the references to the foundation of the *bhāṇaka* system as support for the existence of the *nikāyas*—the constituent part of the Sutta-piṭaka—at an early date, it is not in the canon itself but only in the commentaries that we find mention of these reciters,<sup>32</sup> although there are references to them in early inscriptions.<sup>33</sup> There are also inscriptional references to *nikāyas*, although we have no idea of the contents of those early *nikāyas*. We must accept, then, that the suggestion that the *bhāṇakas* were instituted at the first recitation creates difficulties because the Sutta-piṭaka was probably not in its present form at that time. It is obvious that if the Dīgha-nikāya, Majjhima-nikāya, etc., had not yet been formulated and named, there could hardly have been Dīgha-*bhāṇakas* and Majjhima-*bhāṇakas*, etc.

There is also some doubt in the tradition as to when the Abhidhamma-piṭaka came into existence. In place of the expected *abhidhamma-dhara* “remembering, i.e. an expert in, the *abhidhamma*” to go with *vinaya-* and *sutta-dhara* “expert in the Vinaya and the Sutta-piṭaka”, in a number of places in the canon we find *mātikā-dhara*, implying that only the *mātikās* “the indexes” to the Abhidhamma texts existed at an earlier time.

It is quite clear that, as long as the canon was open for any text to be added to those texts, by following the principles enunciated in association with the four *mahāpadesas*, then the canon in so far as it consisted of the word of the Buddha was not closed. At some stage, however, each of the *piṭakas* must have become closed and the question is to decide whether they all became closed at the same time, or whether at different times, and if at the same time, what that time was.

Ever since the time when the discovery of different sets of canonical texts belonging to different schools of Buddhism undermined the claim of any one version to be the authentic word of the Buddha, some scholars have nurtured a hope that, by delving behind the texts which we have available to us, we can find

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<sup>32</sup> See Norman, 1983C, 8–9.

<sup>33</sup> See Paranavitana, 1970, civ, cvi.

the texts upon which they are all based, perhaps the very words of the Buddha himself. As part of the task of discovering that underlying canon, scholars have subjected the various versions of the Buddhist canon we possess to careful scrutiny, and by seizing upon the various anomalous factors they have discovered therein they have been able to find traces of earlier languages.

I mentioned, for example, in the fourth lecture that there were different views taken of the non-Pāli features of the Theravādin canon, which were obviously remnants from earlier dialects through which the texts had passed. S. Lévi,<sup>34</sup> when he discussed them, spoke of them as “pré-canonique”. Lüders,<sup>35</sup> however, decided that they were remnants of an Ur-kanon “a primitive or original canon”, the language of which he called “Old Buddhist Ardhamāgadhī”. He regarded this as the language of the original canon of writings. Both scholars had the idea that there was something earlier than the Pāli canon, but as can be seen from the way in which they described the material, it is uncertain whether the earlier form should be described as a canon, or whether it should be described as pre-canonical. Most scholars now, I think, would be very wary about this whole matter. These forms, in themselves, show nothing more than that the material had existed in another dialect before it was taken over into the Theravādin canon. It is, of course, possible for both Lévi and Lüders to be correct, if they were following different definitions of “canon”.

The problem is to decide when the open canon became a closed canon. When did the body of the Buddha’s teaching gain the status of canonicity? In general, scholars are far from unanimous about the time when the Theravādin canon became closed, and we are not likely to be able to come to any definite answer about this in this lecture. I would hope, however, that we will be able to narrow things down a little.

There are those who say that the Pāli canon, as we know it, was not fixed until the time of Buddhaghosa who, by listing the texts which he regarded as forming the various constituent parts of the *tipiṭaka*, in effect defined and limited the scope of the *tipiṭaka*. There are, on the other hand, others who believe that the writing down of the canon in the first century B.C.E. had effectively done that already.

Lamotte seems to have held both views. He stated that the Pāli canon was open until the fifth century C.E., but this is at variance with another statement which he made with reference to the writing down of the Theravādin canon in the first century B.C.E.: “From that moment”, he said, “the text of the *Tipiṭaka* in Māgadhābhāsā was drawn up in its final form”.<sup>36</sup> Although it is possible that

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<sup>34</sup> Lévi, 1912, 495–514.

<sup>35</sup> Lüders, 1954.

<sup>36</sup> Lamotte, 1988, 558.

he made this statement as a summary of the tradition in the Pāli chronicles, and not as his own point of view, this precise form of words does not occur in any text known to me. I mentioned in the third lecture the fact that Buddhaghosa used commentarial material which was perhaps centuries old, and it is possible that the number and names of texts which make up the canon were indeed fixed at the time of writing the canon down.

Nevertheless, when Lamotte said that, with regard to the Pāli canon, the collections were not closed before the time of Buddhaghosa in the fifth century of the Christian era,<sup>37</sup> we might think that, while this might be true of the collections as a whole, it was probably not true of the greater part of them. It is hard, for example, to think of the Vinaya-piṭaka being open until so late a date. On the other hand, it could well have been true of the Abhidhamma-piṭaka, since, as we have seen, the Kathāvatthu was not composed until the time of Aśoka.

We can give tentative dates to the closure of some parts of the Theravādin canon. The fact that the Theravādin version of the Vinaya and the Vinayas of other schools of Buddhism include accounts of the events which led up to the second *saṅgīti*, and an account of the second *saṅgīti* itself, shows that those accounts were composed after that event. Traditionally it took place 100 years after the death of the Buddha, but in view of the fact that 100 is a round figure, not intended to be accurate, we can probably assume that the second *saṅgīti* was somewhere around 60 years after the death of the Buddha. There is, however, no reference in the Vinaya to the third *saṅgīti*, held during the reign of Aśoka, i.e. about 150 years after the Buddha's death. This would suggest that the Vinaya had not been closed by the time of the second *saṅgīti*, but was closed before the third *saṅgīti*.

The fact that the Theravādin canon includes the Kathāvatthu shows that the Abhidhamma-piṭaka was not closed before the third *saṅgīti*. Similarly, since the Niddesa is a commentary upon a canonical text, it must be later than that text. If the Kathāvatthu was the last text added to the Theravādin canon, then the Niddesa is earlier than this. The Dīpavaṃsa states that the Niddesa was one of the texts rejected by the Mahāsāṅghikas after the second *saṅgīti*.<sup>38</sup> This perhaps is not to be taken literally, but it means that the Niddesa was not included in the Mahāsāṅghika canon, either because it did not exist at the time of the schism, or because it had not yet attained canonical status at the time the Mahāsāṅghikas split from the Theravādins, at some time before the third *saṅgīti*.

With these exceptions, we probably have to agree in principle with those who date the closure of the canon to the time of Buddhaghosa. There is, however,

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<sup>37</sup> Lamotte, 1988, 562.

<sup>38</sup> Dīp 5.37.

some evidence which suggests that the canon had been closed at an earlier time. As I said in the fifth lecture, despite the separation of the Sinhalese Buddhists from North India,<sup>39</sup> it seems that literary material continued to reach Sri Lanka, but there is no evidence for the addition of any complete text to the Theravādin canon after the *saṅgīti* at the Ālokavihāra in the first century B.C.E. An origin in North India is postulated for the *Milindapañha*,<sup>40</sup> the *Peṭakopadesa* and the *Nettipakaraṇa*. The fact that these texts are highly regarded by the commentators, but are not given canonical status, suggests that they arrived in Sri Lanka after the closure of the canon. This view is supported by the fact that these post-canonical works contain a number of verses and other utterances ascribed to the Buddha and various eminent theras, which are not found in the canon. It was possibly such material that Buddhaghosa had in mind when he referred to some of the Buddha's utterances being *pāli-muttaka* "not included in the texts".<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, there was no attempt made to add such verses to the canon, even though it would have been a simple matter to insert them into the *Dhammapada* or the *Theragāthā*. This perhaps supports the suggestion I have made that Buddhaghosa was sometimes giving the views of commentators who lived long before him, so that the canon had effectively been closed before his time.

Another point to consider, and I will return to this in the ninth lecture, is the fact that some of the best known stories in Buddhism, e.g. the story of the *kṣatriya* maiden *Kisāgotamī*,<sup>42</sup> are known in the Theravādin tradition only in the commentaries, although they are found in texts which are regarded as canonical in other traditions. It would make no sense to say that these stories are inventions of the Northern Buddhists which reached Sri Lanka too late to be included in the canon, if it was really open until the time of Buddhaghosa, who translated many of the *Mahāvihāra* commentaries into Pāli. We have, therefore, to assume that at least the *Vinaya-* and *Sutta-piṭaka* had been closed at an earlier date.

There is some doubt about the status of four texts (the *Peṭakopadesa*, *Sutta-saṅgaha*, *Nettipakaraṇa* and the *Milindapañha*) in Burma. In a survey of Pāli literature in Burma they are said to be recognised as canonical in that country,<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The break between North India and Ceylon was clearly not an abrupt one, nor even a complete one, for Theravādins continued to reside near Bodhgayā for some centuries. The fame of the Sinhalese commentaries was sufficiently widespread in North India to attract Buddhaghosa to Ceylon.

<sup>40</sup> See Norman, 1983C, 108, 110, 111.

<sup>41</sup> See Collins, 1990, 92.

<sup>42</sup> As Collins points out (1990, 117, note 55); cf. *Mvu* II 157, where the lady is called *Mṛgī*.

<sup>43</sup> Bode (1909, 4–5) states that the Burmese tradition adds to the fifteen ancient texts of the *Khuddakanikāya* four other works—the *Milindapañha*, the *Suttasaṅgaha*, the *Peṭakopadesa* and the *Nettipakaraṇa*.

and certainly the Nettipakarāṇa, Peṭakopadesa and Milindapañha are added to the usual fifteen texts of the Khuddaka-nikāya in the edition of the canon which was carved on stone by King Mindon after the fifth *saṅgīti* in the nineteenth century, and also in the printed sixth *saṅgīti* (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana) edition in this century. A reviewer of the survey,<sup>44</sup> however, said that this statement was mistaken, and commented: “No educated Burman, lay or monk, ever included these four works among the *piṭaka* books of the Khuddaka-nikāya. They are placed after the books of the Khuddaka-nikāya only because of their intrinsic value (this applies to the first and the last two, the second [the Sutta-saṅgha] being merely a collection of *suttas*) as a help to the study of the Scriptures”.

The Nettippakarāṇa itself includes the statement that it was recited at the first *saṅgīti*, in which case we must ask why Buddhaghosa did not include it in his lists, and it is perhaps the designation as *pāli* which I have mentioned, which has led to the Netti being added at the end of the Khuddaka-nikāya in Burma. We can also see why the Sutta-saṅgha might be included. It is in fact a selection of the Buddha’s *suttas* and is, therefore, *Buddhavacana*. We are back to our original question of what constitutes a canon. If these texts are published with the canon, how are we to decide whether they are regarded as canonical or not?

I have just said that the fact that the Kathāvatthu could be added to the Abhidhammapiṭaka at the time of the third *saṅgīti* shows that that *piṭaka* at least had not been closed before the reign of Aśoka. Do we have any firm evidence that there was a canon of any sort in existence at that time?

Aśoka’s Bairāt inscription, in which he recommends seven texts to the *saṅgha*,<sup>45</sup> has been variously interpreted. There is the problem that we cannot be certain of the identity of some of the texts which Aśoka recommends, but since we sometimes find that the commentaries, e.g. that on the Sutta-nipāta,<sup>46</sup> know of some texts under other names,<sup>47</sup> it is perhaps not altogether surprising that we cannot recognise all of Aśoka’s choices. It has been suggested<sup>48</sup> that, as Aśoka specified the “Exhortation to Rāghula in regard to lying”<sup>49</sup> as a text to be studied, he must have known of the existence of the other exhortation to Rāghula,<sup>50</sup> but this does not follow—it may have been his teacher who

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<sup>44</sup> Duroiselle, 1911, 119–21.

<sup>45</sup> *imāni bhaṃte dhammapaliyāyāni: vinayasamukase aliyavasāṇi anāgatabhayāni munigāthā moneyasute upatisapasine e ca lāghulovāde musāvādaṃ adhigicya bhagavatā budhena bhāsīte*. There are many discussions of these titles. See Winternitz, 1933, 606 foll.

<sup>46</sup> For such alternative titles, see Norman, GD II, xxvi–xxvii.

<sup>47</sup> See also Balbir, 1993, 47–59 (53).

<sup>48</sup> Winternitz, 1933, 607.

<sup>49</sup> M 61.

<sup>50</sup> M 62.

specified the *sutta* in this way. The question is whether this reference to texts indicates that the Buddhist canon was already in existence in Aśoka's time, as some have suggested.

He clearly had knowledge of some individual texts. In what language were they written? The titles are in an Eastern Prakrit, but that may simply be as a result of Aśoka using such a Prakrit. It tells us nothing about the dialect of the texts—presumably an Easterner could read a Western dialect—but on balance it seems more likely that he knew the texts in an Eastern form. And it was therefore not the Theravādin canon as we know it. It seems to me that all that Aśoka's inscription proves is that texts were still thought of as individual *suttas*, not as parts of *nikāyas* or other large collections, and that these seven texts were already thought of by some, including Aśoka (and presumably his teacher who recited them to him), as of particular value.

The fact that Aśoka specified *suttas* by name, rather than referring to *nikāyas* or *piṭakas* need cause no surprise. Although there are very few references in the Theravādin canon to portions of the canon by name, what references there are, are to individual *suttas*, and there is evidence that texts were often spoken of as individual *suttas*, by name, rather than as parts of *nikāyas*.<sup>51</sup> We should remember that the Niddesa is a commentary on two *vaggas* and one *sutta* of the Sutta-nipāta, which suggests that those *vaggas* were still thought of as individual *vaggas*, when the Niddesa was composed. As can be seen from catalogues of manuscripts, what was transmitted in manuscripts was frequently individual *suttas* rather than the whole *sutta-piṭaka*, or even a single *nikāya*.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, it is interesting to note that when texts were exported to other countries, e.g. Burma, it would seem that they were taken as individual texts or as groups of texts, rather than as *nikāyas* or *piṭakas*.<sup>53</sup>

When Lamotte wrote of the impossibility of there being “a canon or a Tripiṭaka” before the end of the Mauryan period, it is not clear what distinction he was making between the two, but if by “canon” he meant a closed canon, then there can be no doubt that he was correct. Nevertheless, the fact that Aśoka could quote titles of *suttas* means that those texts were available for recitation to laymen, and in that sense we can say that some sort of collection of the *Buddhavacana* was in existence in Aśoka's time.

We know little about the closure of the canons of other schools of Hīnayāna Buddhism. As I said earlier, there is no reason to think that, in principle, the canons of other Hīnayāna schools were formulated in a different way. We can

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<sup>51</sup> Balbir, 1993, 50.

<sup>52</sup> See Hallisey, 1990, 155–95 (162).

<sup>53</sup> See Luce, 1974, 125–27.

surmise that, like the Theravādin canon, they were at first open, but were closed at some later date.

The Dīpavaṃsa tells us something about the contents of the Mahāsāṅghika canon: “They rejected the Parivāra, Abhidhamma, Paṭisambhidā, Niddesa, and a portion of Jātaka”.<sup>54</sup> This probably means, not that they actually rejected these texts at the time of the split from the Theravādins, but that they were not in the Mahāsāṅghika canon. Since all these texts, with the exception of the Jātakas, are accepted as late compositions, on stylistic and other grounds, we can surmise that they were not in the Mahāsāṅghika canon because they did not exist when the split took place. We may therefore date their composition some time after the second *saṅgīti*.<sup>55</sup> In the case of the Jātakas, the collection available to the Mahāsāṅghikas would have represented the size of the Jātaka collection at that time. Further additions must have been made by the Theravādins before the canon was finally closed,<sup>56</sup> just as the presence of Jātaka stories in the Mahāvastu<sup>57</sup> (which is described as being based on the redaction of the Vinaya-piṭaka made by the noble Mahāsāṅghikas, the Lokottaravādins of the Middle Country)<sup>58</sup> which have no counterpart in the Pāli collection shows that the Mahāsāṅghikas also continued to add Jātaka stories to their canon.<sup>59</sup>

The Dīpavaṃsa gives a description of the Mahāsāṅghikas’ canon: “Altering the original redaction, they made another redaction.”<sup>60</sup> They transposed *suttas* which belonged to one place (in the collection) to another place; they destroyed the meaning and the doctrine which were in the five *nikāyas*. The monks, not knowing what was taught with exposition or without exposition, neither the natural meaning nor the recondite meaning, placed in one place the meaning which was spoken with reference to another. Those monks destroyed much

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<sup>54</sup> Dīp 5.37.

<sup>55</sup> “Council” is misleading as a translation of *saṅgīti*. It was a recitation carried out by the Theravādins alone. The Dīpavaṃsa tells us that most of the Northern Buddhist sects separated from the Theravādins in the second century after the Buddha’s death. Few of these sects are likely to have known of the *saṅgīti*, much less have regarded it as authoritative.

<sup>56</sup> “Closed” implies that no new texts were admitted to the canon after that time, not that the texts themselves underwent no change. The Abhidhamma texts, excluding the Dhammasaṅgaṇi and Kathāvatthu, probably consisted of nothing more than the *mātikā* lists, with a few examples to show how they should be elaborated. I assume that the Dhammasaṅgaṇi, since it incorporates a portion of ancient cty, is earlier than the Third Council in its present form. I accept the tradition that the Kathāvatthu was compiled by Tissa and was recited at the Third Council.

<sup>57</sup> e.g. Anaṅga-jātaka (Mvu II 271–76), Puṇyavanta-jātaka (III 33–41).

<sup>58</sup> Mvu I 2.

<sup>59</sup> See Norman, 1983C, 84.

<sup>60</sup> *Mahāsaṅgītikā bhikkhū vilomaṃ akaṃsu sāsaṃaṃ | bhindivā mūlasaṃgahaṃ aññaṃ akaṃsu saṃgahaṃ*, Dīp 5.32.

(true) meaning under the shadow of the words”.<sup>61</sup> These words might have been written with the Mahāvastu in mind, for the inclusion in it of *suttas* which were in the Theravādin Sutta-nipāta, e.g. Sabhiya-sutta, Nālaka-sutta, and Khaggavisāṇa-sutta, and Jātakas which were in the Theravādin Jātaka collection, e.g. Kusa-jātaka and Sarabhaṅga-jātaka, would inevitably give the impression to any Therāvadin who examined the Mahāsāṅghika canon that the Theravādin collections had been re-arranged.<sup>62</sup> The phrase “placed in one place the meaning which was spoken with reference to another” describes very accurately the displacement of some of the *pādas* in the Sabhiya-sutta from their original position, so that they are no longer in close contact with the words they are defining.

An example of the uncertainty about the meaning of the word “canon”, which I mentioned earlier, can be seen in Lamotte’s use of the word when referring to the Gāndhārī dialect. He stated<sup>63</sup> that the mere existence of the Gāndhārī [Dutreuil de Rhins] Dharmapada “does not allow us to infer the existence of a canon in North-Western Prakrit”. The fact that one text does not prove the existence of a closed Tripiṭaka is so self-evident that it seems unlikely that Lamotte could have been using the word in that sense. If he was using the word in the other sense of “canon”, then we must remember that he was writing before the publication of John Brough’s edition of the Gāndhārī Dharmapada, in which the idea of such a canon was considered in detail. Brough concluded that it was difficult to believe that a group of monks, whom he identified tentatively as Dharmaguptakas, might have possessed a Dharmapada, without at the same time possessing at least some stock of Sūtra and Vinaya works.<sup>64</sup> It has also been shown that some Chinese translations of canonical texts appear to have been made from the Gāndhārī dialect, or something very similar to it. This does, however, raise the question of whether such a collection merits the name of “canon”, and clearly this depends on which definition of “canon” we adopt.

If we accept the latest date proposed for the closing of the canon, i.e. the time of Buddhaghosa,<sup>65</sup> then we should note that, in some cases, this may have been

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<sup>61</sup> Dīp 5.32–35.

<sup>62</sup> It seems likely that at the time of the Second Council individual *suttas* and Jātakas still had an independent existence, and after the schism the sects were able to arrange them as they wished. It is clear that at the time of the composition of the Niddesa the Sn collection was still regarded as separate *vaggas*, not as a whole. This would explain why cties were made on two *vaggas* only. The existence of the cty on the Khaggavisāṇa-sutta presumably shows that this was still regarded as an individual sutta.

<sup>63</sup> Lamotte, 1988, 573.

<sup>64</sup> Brough, 1962, 43.

<sup>65</sup> Lamotte, 1988, 562, 140 foll. (especially 163 foll.).

effective only so far as the titles of texts were concerned, not necessarily the contents.

The form of some texts, including the Kathāvatthu, Dhammapada, Apadāna, Theragāthā, and Therīgāthā, is such that even when the texts themselves had been accepted as canonical and included in an individual *nikāya*, or *piṭaka* of the *Buddhavacana*, additions could still be made. As I mentioned in the third lecture, the *uddānas* to the Theragāthā and Therīgāthā, the index verses found at the end of the text, give a list of the number of theras and therīs and their verses which does not accord with the texts as we have them now, showing that changes have been made since the *uddānas* were formulated, doubtless at one of the *saṅgītis*, by those who were holding the *saṅgīti*, the *saṅgīti-kāras*.

It is probable that the Kathāvatthu which was composed at the time of the third *saṅgīti*, was in fact only the core of the text as we have it, and its form was not finally fixed until the early commentators, whose work Buddhaghosa made use of, wrote their commentaries upon it. Even after that time we might believe that minor additions could be made. The first part of the Kathāvatthu deals with items which we can identify with the five points of Mahādeva, which the other Buddhist traditions state caused the schism in the Buddhist *saṅgha* which led up to the third *saṅgīti*, at which the Kathāvatthu was recited. Because of the form of the text, there would have been no problem whatsoever in adding further material dealing with other points of doctrinal interest, over the next few centuries, until the text was finally fixed.

As a general principle, we may note that once a portion of a text had been commented upon, then the presence of canonical words in the lemmata, and in the explanations of those words, meant that changes were very unlikely to be made. We must, however, note that not every word in every text is commented upon, and we must not assume that because something is not commented upon it must be a later addition. All we can say is that a word or phrase, which is commented upon, was in the text in front of the commentator. There are, however, in the Suttanipāta verses which have no old commentary upon them,<sup>66</sup> and it might be argued that they were not commented upon because they did not exist at the time when the commentaries were being compiled.

We can conclude that the form of the Theravādin canon, and the texts it comprises, are fixed by the information Buddhaghosa gives. He records other views about this, but clearly his version prevailed. The latest date for the closing of the canon, i.e. the date of the establishing of its canonicity, is, then, the fifth century C.E. We can, however, to a certain extent, narrow down the date of the

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<sup>66</sup> The author of Pj II (477,13–14) notes that there was no old commentary upon Sn 677–78: *avasāne gāthādvayaṃ eva pana Mahā-aṭṭhakathāyaṃ vinicchitapāṭhe n' atthi*. See Norman, 1978, 28–47 (34) (= CP II, 30–51 [36–37]).

closing of the canon. We have seen that the Vinaya includes an account of the events which led up to the second *saṅgīti*, but not to the third *saṅgīti*, and it must therefore have been closed at some time between the two. The Abhidhamma-*piṭaka* includes the Kathāvatthu, and cannot therefore have been closed until the time of the third *saṅgīti* in the reign of Aśoka. The canon was in all probability closed some time before the time of Buddhaghosa because stories and texts and verses from North India did not find their way into the canon.

I suggested in the fifth lecture that the writing down of the Theravādin texts prevented any further changes in the language of the texts, and it is highly likely that the same event also prevented any changes in the contents of the canon, with the exception of additions to those texts whose structure permitted them. Such additions were finally stopped by the comments made upon them by the commentaries, mainly in the fifth and sixth centuries, although we must note that these commentaries were mainly based upon earlier material, and so in effect the prevention of additions dated from an earlier period. A text like the Therīgāthā-Apadāna, having no commentary, was only partially limited by the quotations from it in other texts, especially the Therīgāthā-aṭṭhakathā.

If these guesses are correct, then the canonicity of the Theravādin texts was effected some time after the writing down of the canon in the first century B.C.E.—perhaps in the first century C.E.—and we should perhaps see writing and canonicity together as two parts of an attempt by the Theravādins of the Mahāvihāra to legitimise their claims to be the true recorders of the Buddhist tradition. It seems clear that the Theravādin school have used the canon for their own purposes. Their aim was doubtless to make it clear that their texts, and their texts only, represented the true *Buddhavacana*.<sup>67</sup>

There is, however, an interesting post-script to this discussion of canonicity. As we have seen, the Buddha allowed for texts being added to the collection of *suttas*, presumably after his death, and Buddhaghosa accepted that not all texts had been recited at the first *saṅgīti*. Although it is clear that the sources which Buddhaghosa was following had defined exactly the texts which were, according to their belief, included in the *tipiṭaka*, it is not certain whether Buddhists at a later time thought that their canon was closed, and that nothing beyond what had been listed could be regarded as canonical. The fact that the Buddha had given criteria for determining whether a newly found *sutta* was authentic or not, meant that it was always possible for another text to be brought forward and added to the body of material. If something looks as though it is *Buddhavacana*, i.e. it follows the pattern of earlier accepted texts, contains the typical formulae,

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<sup>67</sup> See Collins, 1990, 89: “The Pāli canon ... should be seen as a product of [the Theravāda] school, as part of a strategy of legitimisation by the monks of the Mahāvihāra lineage in Sri Lanka in the early centuries of the first millennium A.D.”

includes a reference to the Buddha preaching, and has in it nothing which is at variance with the *sutta* and the *vinaya*, then why should this not be *Buddhavacana*, in the broadest of the senses I have mentioned?

It is probable that by medieval times, once the Mahāvihāra had triumphed over the Abhayagirivihāra, the need to maintain the closed nature of the canon became less important, and the distinction between canonical and non-canonical became blurred. This had already received an impetus from the fact which I have already mentioned, that some of the best known stories about the Buddha were in non-canonical texts. It is certainly the case that canonical and non-canonical texts were often written in the same manuscripts,<sup>68</sup> and preserved by the same tradition, in the same place, at the same time.<sup>69</sup>

Consequently we find individual Jātaka stories and collections of such stories in South-east Asia which are not identical with the collection of stories in the Theravādin canon, but are clearly modelled upon that collection in their formal structure.<sup>70</sup> They are sometimes called “Apocryphal”.<sup>71</sup> There are also individual texts found in the same area. By title they are *suttas*; they have the standard canonical opening *evaṃ me sutaṃ ekaṃ samayaṃ ...* ; the narrative attributes their contents to the Buddha; they meet the requirements of the Buddha’s criteria, in as much as they contain nothing which is not in conformity with the Theravādin version of the Buddha’s teaching, but they are not included in any edition of the Pāli canon. These are sometimes called “quasi-canonical” or “allegedly non-canonical”.<sup>72</sup>

It is probable that the purpose behind such works was merely the desire to produce teaching material, or sermons. Having composed something which was suitable for these purposes, based upon scriptural material, there perhaps seemed to be no reason why the usual scriptural trappings—the opening formula and standard phraseology, etc., should not be added. There was no intention to deceive.

I know of no evidence that would make me think that those who composed such works were deliberately forging material which they hoped to pass off as *Buddhavacana*. There is nothing which would make such a thing desirable. The fact that the newly found *sutta* had to be compatible with the *sutta* and the *vinaya* would mean that the possibility of anyone forging a document to support a new heresy he had just thought up was ruled out. It was not like the situation in Chinese Turkestan at the turn of the century when the presence of European

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<sup>68</sup> As Collins (1990, 116, note 55) reminds us.

<sup>69</sup> Collins, 1990, 111.

<sup>70</sup> Collins, in the Preface to Horner and Jaini, 1985, x.

<sup>71</sup> See Horner and Jaini, 1985, and Jaini, 1986.

<sup>72</sup> See Hallisey, 1993, 97–130.

explorers searching for ancient documents meant that there was a market for forged documents. Nor is it like the Chinese translation of the *Jātaka-mālā*, which is not so much forged (as its description as a “pseudo-translation”<sup>73</sup> implies), as made by incompetent scholars.

I have already mentioned the fact that one of the canonical texts, the *Niddesa*, is a commentary upon parts of the *Suttanipāta*, made—it would seem—so early that it could be accepted as part of the canon. I will deal with this at greater length in the ninth lecture.

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<sup>73</sup> Brough, 1964, 27–53.