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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.

## X Philology and Buddhism

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This is the last of the series of lectures on “A Philological Approach to Buddhism”. A number of people have asked me what the difference is between “Buddhism and Philology”, which was the title of my first lecture, and “Philology and Buddhism”, which is the title of this lecture. My answer is “In principle, none”, but that does not mean that I am going to repeat the first lecture.

If I had entitled the two lectures “Buddhism and the achievements of Philology” and “Buddhism and the future aims of Philology”, respectively, it would perhaps would have given the best indication of my intention, because that really is the point of the reversal of the order of the two words. In the first lecture I looked back at some of the achievements of philology in the field of Buddhist studies, and looked forward to the subjects which I was going to cover in this course of lectures. In this last lecture I want to consider the subject from the opposite point of view. I want to look back over the series of lectures, to summarise what I have said, and to look forward to see what contribution philology may be expected to make in the future.

In these lectures, I have tried to show some of the results which a philological approach to Buddhism has helped to produce. One such result is a better understanding of texts, as, of course, is to be expected if there is a better understanding of the language in which the texts are written, or if it is possible to make a comparison with other versions of the texts in different languages or dialects. This, however, is not the only result. A philological approach can also lead to a better understanding of the way in which the Buddhist tradition was transmitted, how the various versions of the Buddhist canon were developed, how cultural developments had an influence on Buddhist texts, and consequently how Buddhism itself developed.

In what I have said in these lectures I have been deliberately vague, avoiding as far as possible the presentation of a plethora of Sanskrit, Pāli and Prakrit words, although, even so, some of you may think that I have given far too many. I have very rarely quoted authorities for the statements I have made, and I have never given specific references to publications. I thought that such details were out of place in a course of lectures which was intended to be of general interest,

and which, I hoped, would be intelligible to those who knew little or nothing about languages or philology. They will be added when the lectures are published.

In this final lecture I want to say something about my hopes and fears for the future. I want to suggest what further contributions I think philology can make to the study of Buddhist texts and to the study of Buddhism itself, and I want to point to some of the difficulties which lie in our path, and some of the problems which must be overcome if a philological approach is to achieve the goals of which I think it is capable.

- (1) To do this, I must summarise what I have said in previous lectures. I started these lectures by explaining how I personally had become involved in philology and in the study of Buddhist texts, and I said something about the light which a philological approach had already thrown on some of the major problems of vocabulary and interpretation which occur in Sanskrit, Pāli and Prakrit versions of Buddhist texts.
- (2) In the next lecture I spoke about the political, economic, social and religious background to the Buddha's teaching. I commented briefly upon the date of the Buddha, and said something about his *kṣatriya* background. I described the evolution of his teaching from the *śramaṇa* religious movement which had arisen in opposition to the *brāhmaṇa* caste, and I discussed the relationship between Buddhism, Jainism and brahmanical Hinduism, and pointed to some of the vocabulary which they held in common, although frequently with changed meanings.

The work of identifying traces of other brahmanical terminology in Buddhism continues, and scholars are currently devoting time to considering the echoes of the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads which can be heard in some of the Buddha's teachings, e.g. in the Aggaññasutta of the Dīgha-nikāya. There are certainly more features common to Buddhism and Jainism which await detection. They may be small points, such as the explanation I mentioned in the ninth lecture of the word *arahant* as "destroyer of enemies", which suits the Jain spelling of the word (i.e. *ari-hant*), but not the form which we find in the Theravādin canon. Nevertheless, collected together, lots of small points of this nature may help to establish a significant body of evidence.

- (3) In my assessment of the oral aspects of the Buddha's teaching I mentioned some of the work which has been done to identify the similarities, and also the differences, between the oral nature of the *Buddhavacana* in the fifth century B.C.E. and the recitation of oral epics in modern times. Investigation is continuing into the features in the Theravādin canon which seem to be mnemonic devices, designed to help in the task of remembering canonical texts and reciting them accurately. If we can assess the significance of such devices,

and if we can understand the way in which modern oral literature is recited, we shall be better able to understand the transmission system by means of which the early *Buddhavacana* was handed down. Consequently we shall be able to see what effect that system had on it, and it will, perhaps, be possible to deduce something about the form of the *Buddhavacana* before the editorial process which we associate with the *bhāṇaka* system was instituted.

- (4) As long as our knowledge of Middle Indo-Aryan dialects is limited to the languages of the inscriptions, starting with those of Aśoka, and the literary languages, there will be gaps in our knowledge of the dialects in which the *Buddhavacana* was first promulgated and through which it was transmitted. Nevertheless, as I suggested in the fourth lecture, on regional dialects, careful examination of what evidence there is in the Theravādin canon, e.g. anomalous forms with unusual sound changes, will enable us to make deductions about what lies behind our earliest tangible evidence, and to postulate something about the characteristics of the dialects which were in use at a very early stage in the development of Buddhism, and also about the development of translation techniques which were used when the Buddha's teaching was being taken to areas where different dialects were spoken.

A linguistic problem which awaits solution is the nature of the early terminology of Buddhism, and the way in which the various schools make use of terms which seem similar enough to suggest that they are based upon common ancestors, and yet different enough to defy an easy solution to the problem, e.g. *apadāna/avadāna*; *ekabījin/ekavīcika*; *anupādisesa/anupadhiśeṣa*; *saṅghādisesa*; *saṅghāvaśeṣa*; *paṭisaṃbhidā/pratisaṃvid*; *sammappadhāna/samyakprahāṇa*.<sup>1</sup> Further investigation may enable us to decide whether these variants are genuine dialect forms, incorrect back-formations, or whether they have been modified to comply with the interpretations which were handed down in the various traditions.

- (5) In the lecture about Buddhism and writing, I said something about the theories which are held about the introduction of writing to India, and the effect which early Indian writing systems had on Buddhist oral literature when it was first written down. I pointed out how the deficiencies of the writing system had led to ambiguous forms, which were then interpreted in varying ways. Confirmation of the provisional dating of the recently-found material from Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka is eagerly awaited, because, if it is as old as it is claimed to be, then, providing there is enough of it, we should be able to confirm whether our conjectures about the nature of early writing are correct. If they are, then we should be better able to assess its effect upon texts.

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<sup>1</sup> See Norman, 1989C, 375 (= CP IV, 53).



- (6) In the lecture on Sanskritisation, I gave some examples of the effect which the introduction of Sanskrit forms into the Middle Indo-Aryan dialects had upon the structure of the languages of Buddhism. I pointed out how redactors sometimes chose the wrong one of a pair of homonyms when translating from Middle Indo-Aryan into Sanskrit, and also how the necessity of making a choice deprived them of the word-plays which homonyms had made possible. As more Sanskrit and Sanskritised texts from Turfan and elsewhere are published, and as comparative studies of them are made, then we shall be better able to assess the way in which Sanskritisation was carried out. This should enable us to identify, more accurately, the precise form of the Middle Indo-Aryan versions which underlie the Sanskrit texts.
- (7) When considering Aśoka and the contribution which he made to Buddhism, I gave information about what the Theravādin chronicles said about him, and also what he had said about himself in his edicts, and I suggested that some of the claims made about him were erroneous or at least overstated, in some cases because researchers had not made the distinction between Aśoka's *dhamma* and the Buddha's *dhamma*. The time has perhaps arrived when a new assessment of Aśoka should be made, in which philology and archaeology are linked together to assess more carefully the area over which Aśokan influence was felt, and the nature and effect of that influence.
- (8) In the lecture on canonicity, I noted that this is essentially a western concept, and that it is still not clear whether there was anything which could be called a canon in early Buddhism or, if there was, when the various canons were closed. There is uncertainty about the contents of the canons of some schools, and there is a continuing debate about the status of some Theravādin texts. There is need for more work of the sort which has been done recently, i.e. the extraction from Sanskrit, Tibetan, and other sources,<sup>2</sup> of material which is alleged to belong to various schools of Buddhism, to see what we can deduce about the texts which non-Theravādin traditions regarded as canonical.
- (9) In the ninth lecture I spoke about the commentarial tradition, and showed that it was often transmitted separately from the text being commented upon, so that the commentary sometimes kept correct readings and explanations, even when the text was corrupt. I pointed to the evidence that material, which occurred in commentaries in one tradition, was regarded as canonical in another tradition, and I suggested that at an earlier time the distinction between text and commentary was not always so clear-cut, and that at one time text and commentary were possibly of equal importance. More comparative work of this nature between commentarial and canonical texts of different schools may be expected to unearth more examples of this phenomenon, and thus shed light on

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Skilling, 1993.

the way in which the Buddha taught, and the means by which his teachings were transmitted and explained.

In particular a thorough investigation of the commentaries should be made, because in the past the need for such an investigation has tended to be overlooked. Since their purpose is interpretive and exegetical, their language is often difficult to understand. Consequently, the scribal tradition often found them problematic, with the result that the text of commentaries is frequently corrupt. Some of the Pali Text Society's editions are, in fact, so bad that the Society is unwilling to reprint them. New editions are needed, and also translations, and critical studies, in an attempt to establish what the relationship is to the texts they comment on, and to versions in other traditions and languages. What little study has been done has centered mainly upon the explanatory portions, the etymologies, etc., but the commentaries also contain long exegetical passages, which sometimes seem irrelevant to the subject matter being commented upon. We may presume that the reason for the inclusion of these passages perhaps varied depending on the type of text, i.e. material in a Vinaya commentary would have had a different purpose from that in a commentary on a Sutta-piṭaka text, and that would have differed from anything in the commentary on an Abhidhamma-piṭaka text. A careful study might help to reveal just what purpose the commentators had in mind when introducing such material.

The individual subjects of these lectures were not, of course, clear-cut and separate. They were designed to be inter-dependent to some extent, at least, and they were intended to blend together to make a whole. My hope is that any future work done along the lines I have suggested will lead to a situation where:

- a) A careful investigation of the Theravādin texts, and an assessment of the philological and cultural information contained therein, will enable us to unravel the problems of the development of the Middle Indo-Aryan dialects, and as a result of this, to date, if only relatively, the composition of certain portions of early Buddhist texts.<sup>3</sup> This will also require us to take into consideration philological evidence available from other, non-Theravādin and non-Buddhist, sources, and to co-ordinate it with archaeological and any other evidence, which sheds light on the development and spread of Buddhism.
- b) And even more ambitiously, any conclusions to which we come as a result of this philological work will not be restricted to Buddhism, but will enable us to

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<sup>3</sup> von Hinüber (1993, 113): "By using first of all the invaluable evidence of the Theravāda Tipiṭaka and linking it to the events of general cultural history, it will not only be possible to trace the history of MIA within this general development, but, at least to a certain degree, to find even approximate dates for certain passages of early Buddhist texts".

define more accurately the development of the religious milieu as a whole during the period between the fifth century B.C.E., and the fifth century C.E., i.e. between the time of the Buddha and the time of Buddhaghosa, and also the literature, in the very broadest sense, which was composed in that religious environment, whether Buddhist, Jain, brahmanical or secular.<sup>4</sup>

In my first lecture I repeated the statement which I usually make to those who are just entering the field, and wonder what tasks remain to be done, and which task they personally should select as their contribution to Buddhist studies. In this last lecture I will repeat my statement yet again: “Everything that has not been done needs to be done. Everything that has been done needs to be done again”. So everything that I have said about the achievements of philology, every suggestion I have made, and all the suggestions of other scholars, all need to be kept permanently under review to see if new evidence can help to prove or disprove what has been proposed.

So much for my hopes. What about my fears? You will have noticed that all the tasks I have just mentioned demand considerable philological skills. They all require a wide knowledge of Indian languages, and in some cases Tibetan and Chinese too. And this is the problem. Where are the philologists who can do this now, and who will train the philologists of the future?

What I should therefore like to do in this final lecture is to make a plea for a bigger and better use of philology in the field of Buddhist studies. Unfortunately, I know that for the most part my plea is destined to fall on stony ground. For a number of reasons the number of philologists capable of working in the field of Indian languages and in the field of Buddhist studies based on those languages—I will say nothing about the comparable situation in Tibetan, Chinese, Khotanese, and a host of other languages in which Buddhist texts are written—is decreasing and is likely to decrease even more in the future. There are various reasons for this. One of them, perhaps the most important, is that because the number of teachers of Indian philology is small, and the number of students of philology is also small, compared with other subjects, in any set of circumstances where the financing of teaching is in direct proportion to the number of students taught, then the amount of money available for teaching philology will decrease as the number of students decreases proportionally. Less money for teaching means less teachers, which means fewer classes, and as the numbers of classes and students continue to decrease, in comparison with other

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<sup>4</sup> Bechert (1991A, 19): “If we view our question in its broader ramifications, its answer will prove to be an important element in the task of elaborating an accurate understanding of the entire linguistic, literary and religious development in India during the 5th to the 1st century B.C.E.”

subjects, the amount of money available for teaching philology will decrease even further. This is a circle of the most vicious nature.

And this is very unfortunate, because by and large the number of those interested in Buddhism is growing and I think will grow even more now that Buddhism is one of the religions to be taught in British schools as part of Religious Education. And so I would hope that as the numbers of those studying Buddhism grow, the amount of money available for the teaching of Buddhism will increase and the number of teachers of Buddhism will increase. But if the possibility of learning the languages of Buddhism has diminished, and if the teachers of Buddhism have not been able to gain an adequate philological training in Buddhism, then I suspect that the situation that pertains at the moment, where much of the work in the field of Buddhist studies is done by those who have not had an adequate philological training in the languages required, will continue and will in fact get worse.

I suspect that what I have said in these lectures will have little effect upon some scholars, who would probably say that I am overstating the need for philological training. They would perhaps not describe themselves as philologists, but would nevertheless regard themselves as sufficiently competent in philology to be able to handle all the textual material they need, because in their books and articles about Buddhism they do include Pāli and Sanskrit terms. This, however, is not what I regard as philology. Any work on Buddhism, which makes a claim to be based on original language sources, will be worthless unless it is based upon a full understanding of those sources. This may appear to be stating the obvious, but it seems to me that much of what is alleged to be based on such sources is, in fact, not so based. Some of it seems to be based on translations, with Pāli and Sanskrit equivalents inserted in brackets, to give a veneer of scholarship.

Anyone who writes about Buddhism can sprinkle his article with Pāli and Sanskrit equivalents, but this is not the same as knowing what the words mean, or why they mean it. I say “anyone can do it”, but this is not entirely true. I have read books, published recently, by teachers in recognised academic institutions, where the Pāli and Sanskrit words in brackets do not actually coincide with the English words which are supposed to be their translation. Even if the authors have succeeded in tracking down the correct place on the page in the text, the way in which they quote the reference, with compounds wrongly divided, or case forms misunderstood, makes it clear that some of them do not fully understand Pāli and Sanskrit.<sup>5</sup>

Diacritical marks are often a complete mystery to those who write about Buddhism. One gets the impression that some authors assume that they are just

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the review of Wiltshire, 1990 (*BSOAS* 55, 1, 1992, 144–45).

dots and dashes which can be added or removed at will. It sometimes appears that they are added merely to placate critics like myself, who in reviews regularly complain about their omission.<sup>6</sup> They are inserted in such an inconsistent and incorrect way that it is obvious that the authors have little idea of what they are doing, and do not understand that diacriticals are a matter of spelling, not of aesthetics, or of whim, and result from an attempt to make the Roman alphabet cope with a sound pattern that needs an alphabet with more than 26 letters. Omitting diacritics is therefore a matter of misspelling and inserting them is a matter of correct spelling. It is not just a way of placating some pedantic academic who is a stickler for accuracy.

What is perhaps the most discouraging feature of all is that some of these publications are in fact based upon doctoral dissertations, which means either that the examiners concerned did not detect such blatant errors, or that, hardly less culpable, they did not inform the doctoral candidate of the errors, if they did spot them.

When I began to read Indian Studies more than 40 years ago, the situation in Buddhist studies seemed very simple. If you look at some of the older books on Buddhism available in English about that time you will find that everything seemed cut and dried. We knew exactly when the Buddha lived and died; we knew what he had preached and how he had preached, and we knew how his followers had recited his words and handed them on to their followers; we knew how in three joint recitations held during the two centuries or so after his death this tradition had been continued; and so on. I remember that I was advised to read E.J. Thomas's *The Life of Buddha* and *The History of Buddhist Thought*, because those two books would tell me all I needed to know about Buddhism—you will understand that I was training as a philologist, not as a Buddhologist.

In general, books about Buddhism written in English at that time tended to be based on Pāli source materials, partly because of the long history of Britain's involvement in Burma and Sri Lanka, which had brought British missionaries and civil servants into contact with Theravāda Buddhism. It was thought that with all the Pāli canonical texts and commentaries published and most of them translated, and with the *Pali-English Dictionary* and other ancillary works available, all problems in Buddhism had been solved, or nearly so. There was a tendency to think that Pāli sources gave the most reliable picture of early Buddhism, being the oldest and the most complete, while Sanskrit sources, being mainly Mahāyāna, were late and suspect, with their grain of truth overlaid with a thick cover of mythology.

This view had, of course, been quite untenable since the discovery of Sanskrit Hīnayāna material in Chinese Turkestan and Gilgit, etc., and to do Thomas

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the review of Stargardt, 1990 (*JRAS*, 2, 1, 1992, 114–17).

justice, he did take account of Sanskrit materials, and he pointed out the danger of neglecting the works of schools preserved in Sanskrit, and in Tibetan and Chinese translations from Sanskrit. As he said, such Sanskrit works needed to be analysed, no less closely than the Pāli. But Thomas wrote his books in 1927 and 1931 respectively, when comparatively little of the Hīnayāna material from Chinese Turkestan had been published, and the Gilgit manuscripts had not yet been discovered. It was in the third edition of *The Life of Buddha*, published in 1949, that he drew attention to the fact that our knowledge of Buddhism during the previous 20 years had consisted chiefly in establishing the fact of a Sanskrit canon parallel to the Pāli, and he was able to include a reference to Waldschmidt's analysis of the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra in his Bibliography. In the preface to the second edition of *The History of Buddhist Thought* (published in 1951), he again referred to Waldschmidt's analysis of the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra, and its value for determining more of the actual relations between Pāli scriptures and the recensions of the Indian schools, although he did not actually include any material from Waldschmidt in that revised edition of his book. Thomas's books have been reprinted and are still available, and are still referred to, despite the absence in them of any detailed consideration of all the texts published since they first appeared more than 60 years ago.

Outside Britain, the situation was rather different, and there was less emphasis on Pāli sources. Étienne Lamotte commanded a wide range of languages, and his *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*<sup>7</sup> was based upon Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese as well as Pāli materials. In Germany a strong school of Sanskrit Buddhist studies was emerging, based mainly upon the German Turfan material, which was providing material for doctorate after doctorate. Although much more of the Turfan material has been published since 1951, it has not all been translated, or if translated, it is usually into German and only rarely into English. The differences between this Sanskrit material and the Pāli tradition have still not been adequately studied, and hence it has not been adequately taken into account in any English books which deal with Buddhism in a general way. So a recent publication, intended, according to the publishers, as a textbook specifically for students of Religious or Asian Studies, deals with the four noble truths and other Buddhist doctrinal matters in their Pāli versions, without making it clear that these are not necessarily the original forms of these terms, and that in some cases the Sanskrit equivalents are perhaps nearer in form and meaning to the Buddha's own words.<sup>8</sup>

I had myself studied with Professor Sir Harold Bailey, who was well acquainted with the material from Chinese Turkestan and referred to it

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<sup>7</sup> Lamotte, 1958.

<sup>8</sup> See the review of Harvey, 1990 (*BSOAS* 55, 1, 1992, 142–43).

constantly in his lectures, but since his main orientation was towards Iranian, it was the Khotanese material which he tended to refer to most often, and the impact of this new material upon Indo-Aryan studies, and particularly the Middle Indo-Aryan studies on which I had decided I would concentrate after graduation, was somewhat less emphasised.

The biggest influence upon Middle Indo-Aryan studies came from the posthumous publication of Heinrich Lüders' *Beobachtungen über die Sprache des buddhistischen Urkanons* by Ernst Waldschmidt in 1954, with its collections of eastern dialect forms in Pāli and Buddhist Sanskrit, including those which had been misunderstood by the later tradition, its observations on the phonological and morphological features which Lüders had identified as belonging to the Urkanon, and its comments upon such details of nominal inflection as the ablative singular and accusative plural endings in *-am*. As I have sometimes noted in studies I have made of various phenomena in Middle Indo-Aryan, a few examples of something can frequently be explained away piecemeal, but when dozens of examples are put forward together, it is more difficult to do this. All the constituent examples of a phenomenon have, together, a holistic effect, where the evidence as a whole is greater than all the individual parts taken singly.

Sir Harold had already referred to many of these individual features in his lectures, and I find that my student notes from his lectures on the Pāli Dhammapada are full of references to the published portions of the Udānavarga and to the Gāndhārī Dharmapada of which he had made an edition, at least of the portions which were available to him at that time. It was not, however, the individual forms which were so impressive, but the fact that all of them put together really made a coherent whole. Whether they proved that there had been an Ur-kanon or not was beside the point. What was clear was that there was evidence which could be extracted from the texts to show that there had been dialects, not attested in any literary works now extant, with characteristics which could help to explain some of the problematic forms which existed in Buddhist texts in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pāli.

At that time, there was about half the Udānavarga available in Chakravarti's edition of the French Pelliot material,<sup>9</sup> and a few other vargas that had been published separately. Some years later our knowledge of this text was immeasurably increased by the publication of Bernhard's edition of the German manuscripts of the Udānavarga,<sup>10</sup> at almost the same time as John Brough published all the Gāndhārī Dharmapada material which was available,<sup>11</sup> thus

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<sup>9</sup> Chakravarti, 1930.

<sup>10</sup> Bernhard, 1965.

<sup>11</sup> Brough, 1962.

revising and augmenting the portions of this in the French and Russian collections which had been made known more than 60 years before. Then came the discovery that there was another version of the Dharmapada available in Buddhist Sanskrit, the so-called Patna Dharmapada, photographed by Rāhula Saṅkṛtyāyana in Tibet in the 1930's. This disclosure was closely followed by no less than three editions of this text,<sup>12</sup> followed finally by an edition of all the French Udānavarga material.<sup>13</sup> This means that there is now enough material available to make a full-scale comparative investigation of the Indian source material of the Dharmapada genre, but despite the fact that new translations of the Pāli Dhammapada appear almost every year, few translators seem to realise the help which such a comparative study could give, or if they do realise it, they do little about it.

Other branches of Indian Buddhist textual studies are not so well provided for, but the continuing publication of material from the German Turfan collection and the on-going appearance of the Dictionary of the Turfan Sanskrit material<sup>14</sup> means that more and more comparative studies of *suttas* in the prose *nikāyas* can be made. Once again, few translators of Pāli *suttas* make such studies before producing their translations.

As a result of the publications of all these texts in Sanskrit and Prakrit, much of what has been written about the early days of Buddhism, the assembling of texts, the way in which they were transmitted, and the languages in which they existed is now, to a greater or lesser extent, incorrect or misleading. Consequently a meeting was held in Brussels in 1989 to see what should be done to bring Lamotte's work up to date. Bizarrely, the meeting was timed to coincide with the release of an English translation of his *Histoire*.<sup>15</sup> This was a straight translation from the French, with almost no attempt, except for the Bibliography, to bring it up to date, despite the protests of some of us that the book needed revising, not translating. It seemed nonsense to me, when I was asked to act as a consultant on the section which Lamotte had devoted to the formation of the Buddhist languages,<sup>16</sup> to be told that I must make no changes whatsoever to the portion sent to me, even though I knew well, in the light of knowledge gained since 1954, that some of it was misleading, or even incorrect.

Consequently, those who now rely on the English translation of Lamotte are making use of something which is not quite as old as Thomas's books, but still more than 35 years out of date. Reading the books listed in the Bibliographical

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<sup>12</sup> (1) Shukla, 1979; (2) Roth, 1980; (3) Cone, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> Nakatani, 1987.

<sup>14</sup> *SWTF*, 1973–.

<sup>15</sup> Lamotte, 1988.

<sup>16</sup> Lamotte, 1988, 549–93.



Supplement will, of course, help to overcome this defect, but a list of publications, most of them prefixed by “see ...”, “see now” or “new study” is not very helpful, since few of the entries give a summary of the conclusions arrived at in the new publications. The very aim at completeness in some of the entries is self-defeating. For example, there is a reference to a dozen publications about Aśoka’s Greek-Aramaic bilingual inscription from Kandahar,<sup>17</sup> which have appeared since Lamotte’s *Histoire* was first published. This leaves the reader uncertain about where to start in his search for extra information about this inscription. In the fifteen lines taken up in listing these works, useful information could have been given about the relative value of some of these publications.

I should strike a warning note. Although comparative studies, e.g. those on the Dharmapada genre which I have just mentioned, can bring positive results, the field to be covered is so large, especially if it is extended to include Chinese and Tibetan translations, that one person can scarcely be expected to cover all of it. Such projects must therefore be joint ones, and although in theory such a solution to the problem should bring good results, this will only happen if there is complete and harmonious co-operation between all participants, and if there is give and take between the proponents of each tradition. If I choose to think that the Middle Indo-Aryan component is nearer the Buddha’s own words, and I therefore disparage everything outside that field, as being merely translations—and sometimes faulty translations—of Middle Indo-Aryan originals, then I shall be the loser. If scholars working in the Buddhist Sanskrit field are content to edit their texts and make statements such as “metre incorrect”,<sup>18</sup> whenever the metre of their verses does not fit the classical Sanskrit pattern, then they will be the losers. The task of reading fragments written in a difficult script, and of finding parallels in Pāli, Tibetan or Chinese texts which will help with the reading of illegible akṣaras and the understanding of problematic readings, is in itself very considerable. Nevertheless, a study of related fields might well enable those scholars to understand the problems better, to realise how the imposition of Sanskritisation upon a Middle Indo-Aryan original has produced these incorrect forms, to deduce the forms which lie behind their texts, and thus to interpret them better. If those dealing with Tibetan or Chinese believe that their traditions are more faithful transmitters of the Buddha’s teaching than any of the Indian language versions, which have in some way become corrupted, then they are the losers. There is, however, no reason why any of us should be losers. This is a situation where we can all be winners if we are willing to work together, and to stop disparaging those whose interests do not coincide exactly with our own.

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<sup>17</sup> Lamotte, 1988, 743.

<sup>18</sup> Matsumura, 1989, 69–100 (e.g. “Pāda b unregelmäßig”, 81, note [32].2).

I am afraid that some of you may have found this course of lectures hard going. I am sorry about that, but the fact remains that philology is hard going, which is why philologists are rather rare beasts, perhaps even an endangered species. The purpose of this course of lectures has been to show that the study of Buddhism based upon texts is not a simple matter of taking an edition and a translation and assuming that all problems have already been solved.

I will repeat myself, and say again that, in my opinion, no worthwhile original work on early Buddhism, perhaps any sort of Buddhism, can be done by anyone who does not have a good grasp of the relevant languages. And by a good grasp I mean the ability not only to say what the words mean, but also why they mean it, so that a researcher is not restricted to working with translations, but can actually refer to the original text and see if the translator has gone astray. As part of his work he should be able not only to look words up in a dictionary, but also to judge whether the meanings given there are likely to be correct. Dictionary writers are only human, and they too, like other people, are liable to make mistakes, including mistakes of judgement.

For example:

- (1) There is in Pāli a word *kaṇṭaka* meaning “thorn”, and then, metaphorically, “obstacle”. In several Theravādin texts there is a statement that “sound (*sadda*) is an obstacle to the first meditation” (*paṭhamassa jhānassa saddo kaṇṭako*), where the word for “obstacle” is *kaṇṭaka*. There is a compound “sound or noise is an obstacle” or “having sound as an obstacle” (*sadda-kaṇṭaka*), and we find statements such as “meditations have sound as an obstacle” (*saddakaṇṭakā jhānā*). *A Critical Pāli Dictionary*, however, although listing the meanings “thorn” and “obstacle” for *kaṇṭaka*, has a separate meaning for the examples I have just given: “a sharp and annoying sound” and it compares the Sanskrit usage.<sup>19</sup> It does not specify what Sanskrit usage, nor is the reader given any guidance about the way in which the sentences are to be translated if this sense is adopted.
- (2) Again, reference to *A Critical Pāli Dictionary* will show that it gives two meanings for the compound *kañcana-de-piccha*. On the face of it, this word should mean “having two golden tail feathers”, but the commentary explains it as “having two wings like gold”. The Dictionary entry states that the literal meaning does not make sense, but no reason is given for this statement. The editors have clearly been unable to agree about the interpretation of this word, and have therefore agreed to differ and, more surprisingly, they have agreed to let the world see their difference, even to the point of writing two separate entries, each signed by its author.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> CPD III, 58.

<sup>20</sup> CPD III, 29–30.

The two separate entries are mutually incompatible, with different word divisions proposed for the verse in which the word occurs. One editor says “*pāda* must contain a finite verb”, and refers to a parallel passage in the *Jātaka-mālā* as an authority, but gives no guidance as to how the problematic compound is to be translated. The other editor gives no hint of believing that there must be a finite verb in the first *pāda*, and says that the verse in the *Jātaka-mālā* has been reformulated, and is therefore, we assume, no guide as to the original form of the verse. What is a user of *A Critical Pāli Dictionary* to do? Few will have the lexicographical expertise to solve the matter themselves, and, not unreasonably, will expect the editors to have solved the problem for them. They will be disappointed, because the editors would seem to have abandoned their editorial responsibility. It is unique, in my experience, for two editors of a dictionary to be unable to agree upon a meaning, or, if there is genuine doubt about the meaning, to be unable to agree upon a form of words which would make the difficulty of finding a meaning clear.

So those working in the field of Buddhist studies must have genuine expertise, the ability to make real judgements. They must be able to tackle textual problems, and not propose emendations to texts simply in order to produce an easier reading. Still less must they give arbitrary meanings to words because the attested meanings do not fit in with their theories of what the Buddha said. Theories must be based on facts and must fit the facts. Facts must not be twisted to fit a theory.

My optimism about an increased interest in the study of Buddhism, because it is one of the religions to be taught in British schools, is perhaps outweighed by my pessimism about the way in which Buddhism will be taught. Despite all the efforts put into this project by advisory committees and bodies whose aim is the promotion of Buddhism, there will inevitably be shortcomings in the teaching. I suspect that there will be a market for school-level text-books on various religions, where opinion will be represented as fact, and everything will be set out clearly as unambiguous and undeniable. I am well aware of the fact that at school level the teaching must of necessity be somewhat cursory, but I hope that the teaching will not be so cursory as to obscure the fact that there are many problems remaining in the interpretation of quite vital aspects of Buddhism. The problematic nature of these concepts is rarely stressed in popular literature, and the views of different schools of Buddhism are rarely given, even, as I said earlier, in a book intended as a handbook for university students.<sup>21</sup>

If you investigate the translations and interpretations given of many of the basic terms of Buddhism in such text-books, you find that what had been presented as a fact is in many cases only the writer’s opinion, said three times, of

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<sup>21</sup> Harvey, 1990.

course, so that it is true. Very few things in life are clearly black or white. Most of them are some shade of grey, and this is true for Buddhism also. Even for such fundamental concepts as *Buddha*, *nirvāṇa*, *mokṣa*, *āryasatya*, etc., the translations which are usually given, and the interpretations which are made on the basis of those translations, are frequently misleading or, if not misleading, tell only half of the story.

It is alleged, and I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of my informants, that when teaching posts in Indian Religion are being filled in Departments of Comparative Religion in some American universities, preference is given to those who have no language ability, so that applicants who do have some philological expertise are forced to hide the fact, in order to have any hope of being appointed. What hope is there for the subject in such circumstances? Even in British universities, if there is no language component to be taught in courses on comparative religion, then the ability to teach languages will certainly not be a qualification when applying for jobs, and might even be taken to be a dis-qualification by an appointments committee which can see no relevance in the ability to read source materials in the original language. Such an appointments committee might perhaps fear that anyone with that ability would, if appointed, waste his time teaching this irrelevant subject.

I can only view with horror the prospect of more and more courses on Buddhism being taught to those who have no knowledge of language, by those who have no knowledge of language, so that if those being taught want to learn the language they cannot do so, because there is no one to teach them.

Some years ago I read a paper to the Buddhist Forum<sup>22</sup> in the School of Oriental and African Studies, in which I drew attention to the great difference to be seen between the state of affairs in the editing of Pāli texts as opposed to editions of Christian gospels in New Testament Greek. I pointed out that whereas we might have an edition of a Pāli text based upon two or three manuscripts or printed editions, or even less, New Testament scholars might be able to make use of 200 or even 2000 manuscripts and other sources. I contrasted the number of New Testament scholars who could handle the Greek of the New Testament, as well as the Greek of the Old Testament and the Hebrew of which that is a translation, with the comparatively small number of scholars capable of handling Pāli, Sanskrit and Prakrit. I was therefore surprised to find, in a recent publication by a Professor of Theology at a British university, a reference to the state of affairs in one branch of the Christian church—and by no means a moribund branch. It was stated that one of the aims of the book was “to stimulate ... renewed interest in serious theological study, particularly

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<sup>22</sup> Norman, 1990C.

among ordinands and clergy”,<sup>23</sup> where it would appear that interest was waning. There was a clear statement that academic theology at its best is concerned with the central questions, not the proliferation of marginal theories,<sup>24</sup> which reminded me of the marginalisation of Buddhist scholars to which I referred in my first lecture. The book also included the revelation that many ordinands were informing the author that they were giving up Greek, i.e. New Testament Greek, because they could not see its relevance to their future ministry.<sup>25</sup> They apparently felt no need to read the primary source for their religion in the original language. What was needed, the writer stated, was a revival of serious interest in learning the original languages in which the great treasures of the tradition had been written. It seems, then, that even in a subject so well established in Great Britain as the study of Christianity, there are problems when it comes to training people adequately in philological method. We are then not alone in having problems, but if that is the situation in a field where the facilities are infinitely greater than in the field of Indian and Buddhist studies, then the outlook for us is bleak indeed.

The difference is that, in the field to which I have just referred, the study of the tradition has always in the past been based upon philology, and the mechanism for teaching philology still exists, and will continue to exist, for a time at least, despite the flight from philology by those newcomers to the field who do not realise its relevance. In the field of Buddhist studies, however, in many universities the subject has never been taught on a philological basis, even if the teachers were capable of doing so, because the syllabuses and the examination system have not demanded it. The situation in the future can only get worse, because those graduating from such universities—those who will be the teachers of the future—will not have received the necessary training to remedy the situation. I am glad to be able to say that my own university still thinks that competence in language is essential for religious studies, and those reading theology and religious studies have compulsory papers in Hebrew, Greek, or Sanskrit. I hope that this will continue to be the situation, although I know that this deters some applicants for admission, who consequently choose to go to other universities, where life looks a little easier.

Nevertheless, even if knowledge of the relevant languages is not compulsory, I hope that there are those who realise that it is not satisfactory to study Buddhist texts exclusively in English translation, without being able to read anything of the teachings of the Buddha in an oriental language. If anything I have said in

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<sup>23</sup> Young, 1992, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Young, 1992, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Young, 1992, 2.

any of these lectures has inspired anyone to learn a little more about philology, then my time has not been wasted.