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4 Redaction, recitation, and writing

Transmission of the Buddha's teaching in India in the early period*

Peter Skilling

Transmission of the Dharma

The transmission of the Buddha's teaching, the Dharma, evidently started during the Buddha's lifetime with the "first sermon," the "Turning the Wheel of the Dharma" (*Dharmacakrapravartanasūtra*). The transmission continued throughout his teaching career, during which the practice of commentary began. During the forty-five years of the Buddha's career, the nuns and monks—and also laywomen and laymen—helped to teach the Dharma, sometimes in his presence, sometimes in the same city, and sometimes in distant towns or cities. Even during the lifetime of the Master, his disciples spread over a large area, and administratively independent monasteries were established.

From the earliest period, the Dharma was transmitted not only by the Buddha, but also directly from disciple to disciple. Monks and nuns explained and amplified the statements of the Master and initiated others into the order. Śāriputra, at that time a young ascetic in search of the truth, achieved insight into the Dharma when taught a summary of "the Great Śramaṇa's teaching" by the monk Aśvajit, one of the Buddha's first five disciples. Śāriputra taught the summary to his companion ascetic, Mahāmaudgalyāyana, who also achieved insight. Soon afterwards, the Buddha designated the two young brahmans as his "foremost pair of disciples." Disciples or "auditors" (*śrāvaka*) played an active role in the dissemination of the Buddha's teachings, and some of their own teachings were preserved and collected in the Sūtra Piṭaka. *Sūtras* spoken by auditors are found in all of the four Āgamas and four Nikāyas, and the Sarvāstivādins devoted a section of the *Saṃyuktāgama* to "Teachings spoken by the auditors" (*Śrāvaka-bhāṣita*: Bucknell 2006, 2007).

The Buddha declared Pūrṇa Maitrāyaṇīputra to be foremost among the monks who expound the Dharma, and announced that Kātyāyana was foremost of those who explain in detail what the Buddha had taught in brief. The Dharma was also transmitted by nuns. Dharmadinnā was foremost of the nuns who expounded the Dharma; Pāṭācārā was foremost of those who mastered the Vinaya. Somā was "foremost among those who are learned and who preserve the oral tradition;" Kacaṅgalā was "foremost among those who explain the *sūtras*;" Kṣemā

was "foremost among those who are very wise and very eloquent." These references are found in the Sarvāstivāda tradition as represented by the *Vinaya* and the *Avadānaśataka*; some, but not all, are given in the Mahāvihāravāsin tradition of Sri Lanka.[1]

Naturally enough, the early texts show a concern for the accurate transmission and preservation of the Dharma. A compelling expression of this concern is the Pāli *Saṃgītisutta*. The opening states that after the death of the Jaina leader Mahāvīra (known as Nirgrantha Nāṭaputra in Buddhist texts), his disciples fell into dispute about his teachings. In response to the situation Śāriputra delivered a long inventory of the basic categories of the Buddha's teaching, presented in ascending numerical order from one to ten. In the Pāli version, each category is followed by a refrain, which states that the teaching should be remembered just as it has been pronounced, and that the monks should recite it together in unison and without contention (*Dīghanikāya* III 211):[2]

> There is one *dhamma* which has been correctly proclaimed by the Blessed One, the knower, the seer, the worthy one, the truly and fully awakened one. With regard to this, it should be recited by all of us together, and should not be disputed, in order that this holy life may endure for a long time, which will be for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, from compassion for the world, for the good, for the benefit, for the happiness of gods and humans.

The Pāli *Saṃgītisutta* is transmitted by the Mahāvihāra school of Sri Lanka. The Sarvāstivādins transmitted a counterpart *Saṃgītisūtra* which, amplified by a commentary, became one of the early books of the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma, the *Saṃgītiparyāya*. That is, in the case of the Sarvāstivādins, the preservation and systematization of the Dharma led to the compilation of an Abhidharma text. An (assumed) Dharmaguptaka *Saṃgītisūtra* is preserved in a *Dīrghāgama* translated into Chinese, and fragments of a Gāndhārī version and a Gāndhārī commentary—also assumed to be Dharmaguptaka—are being prepared for publication by Collett Cox at the University of Washington. Another compendium of teachings is the *Daśottarasūtra*/*Dasuttarasutta*. Like the *Saṃgītisūtra*, it is spoken by Śāriputra. In these texts, we see how the early imperative to preserve the Dharma led to the drawing up of itemized and structured compendia of basic categories set within a narrative frame, and, in at least one case, how it led further to the production of an Abhidharma text. Going further, we may, at least in part, count the Abhidharma as a product of the concern for accurate preservation.

In the Pāli *Aṅguttaranikāya*, the Buddha himself addresses the questions of accurate transmission of the Dharma and of fidelity of phrasing and of interpretation (*Aṅguttaranikāya* I 59):

> Two things, O monks, conduce to the confusion and disappearance of the True Dharma (*saddhamma*). What two? The wrong arrangement of words and letters, and the wrong interpretation of the meaning…

> Two things, O monks, conduce to the maintenance, the non-confusion and non-disappearance of the True Dharma. What two? The correct arrangement of words and letters, and the correct interpretation of the meaning…
>
> These two, O monks, slander the Tathāgata. What two? The one who asserts that what was not spoken or uttered by the Tathāgata was spoken and uttered by the Tathāgata, and the one who asserts that what was spoken and uttered by the Tathāgata was not spoken or uttered by the Tathāgata.
>
> These two, O monks, do not slander the Tathāgata. What two? The one who asserts that what was not spoken or uttered by the Tathāgata was not spoken or uttered by the Tathāgata, and the one who asserts that what was spoken and uttered by the Tathāgata was spoken and uttered by the Tathāgata.

These and similar passages reveal that the problem of inauthenticity had arisen by the time these texts were redacted. That the texts of the emergent "bodhisattva movement" or what came to proclaim itself as the "Mahāyāna" faced charges of inauthenticity and met with outright rejection may be seen from phrases and passages that run through the literature, to the extent that to deny the Mahāyāna or its texts was declared to be a grave offence, or that attempts to turn bodhisattvas away from the Prajñāpāramitā were denounced as "the words of Māra" (e.g. Jaini 2002: 105–106). The concern for accurate and authentic transmission of the teaching runs through Buddhist literature and society up to the present.

After the Buddha: the recitation-councils

Our traditions report, more or less unanimously, that in the first rains retreat after the passing of the Buddha, his teachings were recited by five hundred worthies at Rājagṛha. This is called the "recitation-council of the five hundred" or the "first recitation-council."[3] The corpus of texts redacted at the council is called the "root compilation" (Pāli *mūla-saṅgaha*) or the "root recitation" (Sanskrit *mūla-saṃgīti*). One hundred years later, a second council was convened at Vaiśālī to settle a dispute over ten points of monastic discipline. At the end, however, the "Dharma-Vinaya" was again recited—that is, the corpus of teachings was verified and codified, and, it is safe to suggest, expanded, and processed.

These two councils are the only "pan-*saṃgha*" councils—that is, councils that are accepted by the known Buddhist traditions. The accounts of the councils belong, primarily, to the Vinaya tradition and are found in the Vinaya texts of the different schools. That is, it was the Vinaya masters of individual traditions who kept, transmitted, and—retrospectively—shaped the records. Many tellings of the details of the councils exist, and there are, naturally, many conundrums and discrepancies. For over a century, scholars have produced an extensive literature on the nature, historicity, and significance of these and other councils.[4]

After the second council, the monastic order gradually branched into several distinct lineages or schools, which began to hold their own councils. There is no "third Buddhist council" that is accepted by all schools. Records of the councils of most of the schools are now lost—along with their scriptures—and we have only two complete lists, the one of the Mahāvihāravāsin Theravādins of Sri Lanka and the other of the Sāṃmitīyas of northern India.[5] We also have several disjointed accounts of a Sarvāstivādin tradition, or, perhaps, of several Sarvāstivādin traditions.

The best-known account of a "third council" is that of the Mahāvihāra tradition, which maintains that a third council was held at the Mauryan capital of Pāṭaliputra, under the patronage of King Aśoka. The description of the council is artificial and unconvincing. The sponsorship and intervention of Aśoka, or at least his active support of any particular school or faction, is doubtful. In any case, although there are a few references in non-Pāli sources to an event or events during Aśoka's reign that may possibly (but only possibly) be memories of a council, there is no evidence that a grand and pan-*saṃgha* council took place there.

The Sāṃmitīya councils are listed in two texts, the *Mahāsaṃvartanīkathā* and the *Saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛtaviniścaya*. The former was composed in Sanskrit verse by the "Great Poet" (*mahākavi*) Sarvarakṣita in the tenth century, probably in Northeastern India (for Sarvarakṣita see Okano 1998: 10–18). The latter, which survives only in Tibetan translation, is a massive compendium of Buddhist philosophy compiled by Mahāpaṇḍita Daśabalaśrīmitra, probably in northern India in the twelfth century. The two texts list the five recital-councils:[6]

> *The First Council* In the second month after the passing (*parinirvāṇa*) of the Tathāgata, five hundred monks (*bhikṣu*) free of desire (*vītarāga*) compiled[7] the teaching of the Buddha in the Saptaparṇa cave (*guhā*).
>
> *The Second Council* One hundred years after the passing of the Tathāgata, seven hundred monks free of desire compiled the Dharma.
>
> *The Third Council* Four hundred years after the passing of the Tathāgata, when the monastic community (*saṃgha*) had become divided into different groups, each adhering to its own school (*nikāya*), Vātsīputra[8] compiled the Dharma of one school. From that time on, that school was known as the expounders of the Dharma, the Vātsīputrīyas.[9]
>
> *The Fourth Council* Seven hundred years after the passing of the Tathāgata, a senior monk (*sthavira*), the sage (*muni*) Saṃmata, compiled the scriptural traditions (*āgama*) of that school. From that time on, that school has been known as the Sāṃmitīya school.
>
> *The Fifth Council* Eight hundred years after the passing of the Tathāgata, the senior monks (*sthavira*) Bhūtika and Buddhamitra compiled the scriptural traditions of that school.

Not many details are given for the third Sāṃmitīya council, but they are sufficient to demonstrate that the council has no connection with the Mahāvihārin council of Pāṭaliputra.

A comparative study of available accounts of the councils leads to some general conclusions. For the first two councils, the "shared" councils, there is broad agreement. The texts—a wide range from different schools preserved, very incompletely, in different Indic languages and (primarily) Chinese and Tibetan translations and accounts—are talking about an event shared by a *saṃgha*, which viewed itself as a single entity. After these two councils, the picture changes, and the councils become self-validating events for individual schools. The shift is easily seen in the Sāṃmitīya narration. The participants in the first two councils are all worthies, "monks free of desire"—it is this that gives the councils their authority. The Sāṃmitīya account makes a point of noting that by the time of the third council "the monastic community had become divided into different groups, each adhering to its own school"—a statement paralleled in Sarvarakṣita's version:[10]

> In the fourth century [after the Buddha's passing]
> When the community of ascetics had settled into individual *nikāyas*
> The Teaching was settled in purity like the autumn moon
> By the sage Vātsīsuta (i.e., Vātsīputra).

In the fourth council the active figure was the *muni* Saṃmata, in the fifth "the *sthavira* monks Bhūtika and Buddhamitra." There are also shifts in the language. The first council "compiled the teaching of the Buddha," and the second council "compiled the Dharma." But at the third council Vātsīputra "compiled the Dharma of one school (*nikāya*)." At the fourth and fifth councils, the *sthaviras* are said to have "compiled the traditions (*āgama*) of that school."

The Sāṃmitīya account shows a clear evolution from the two pan-*saṃgha* councils to the later school-specific assemblies presided over by individuals who oversee the compilation of the scriptures of a single school. This is seen in the narratives of other schools. In the Mahāvihāra tradition, Moggalliputtatissa presides over the third council. Butön's report of a council in Kashmir (see below) mentions Pūrṇika, while Chinese accounts refer to Kātyānīputra, Vasumitra, and so on (Willemen et al. 1998: 116–121). The later councils were internal affairs of individual schools; at the same time, the first two councils became mythical events, considered foundational by all the schools. This led to a shift in the meaning of *saṃgīti*—the term no longer signified the universal ratification of the saints—the *arhats* of the councils of the 500 and the 700—but invoked the authority of a single lineage, led by historical individuals. School identity rose to the fore and henceforth prevailed, although of course each school believed that it was transmitting the word of the Buddha accurately.

Accounts of a third council (or of further councils) in Tibetan historical sources such as Butön (Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub, 1290–1364) and Tāranātha (1575–1635) are difficult to interpret. Butön opens his discussion of the "third council" with

the statement that "since it is not [described] in the Āgamas the [accounts] are accordingly conflicting."[11] He presents several versions of the event. The first is the council of Sthavira Vātsīputra, that is, the third council according to the Sāṃmitīya reckoning. Otherwise, "some say" that three hundred years after the Buddha's passing, in the Jalandhara monastery, *arhats* and unenlightened experts compiled [the Dharma]. Butön then quotes prophecies connected with King Aśoka from the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarīkasūtra* and the *Prabhāvatī*. In the last account presented by the great polymath, "some say" that:[12]

> The purpose [of the third council] was to dispel the apprehension that [the scriptures of] the dispersed eighteen [*nikāya*] were not the word (*vacana*, of the Buddha). The time was three hundred years after the passing of the Teacher. The location was the Kunpana monastery in the land of Kashmir. The patron was the king of Jalandhara, Kanika (Kaniṣka). The redactors were Pūrṇika, etc. and 500 worthies; Bhasumitra [sic] etc. and 500 bodhisattvas, and 250 or 16,000 ordinary scholars (*paṇḍita-pṛthagjana*), who assembled and performed a recitation, and established [the scriptures of] all eighteen [*nikāya*] as the word [*vacana*].

Butön's accounts seem to be fragments of reports of different events or of different councils. The same may be said for the reports given in Chinese sources. In one account, "in the year 500 A.B. Kātyāyanīputra convened a synod in Kāśmīra, which was attended by five hundred *arhats* and five hundred *bodhisattvas*;" while according to Xuanzang "in the year 400 A.B., king Kaniṣka of Gandhāra, in accord with Pārśva, his advisor, decided to convene a synod" (Willemen et al. 1998: 117).

To sum up: at the two shared councils, the compilers are described as "worthies," and they redact "the word of the Buddha." At later councils, the participants are no longer assemblies of worthies, and they redact the tradition of a single, individual school.

An early generation of western scholars was skeptical about the historicity of the councils, from the first council onwards, an attitude that persists today. It should be obvious that the accounts are not to be taken at face value—they are first-order foundation narratives, and their aim is the validation of tradition rather than historical or historicist "reality." However, when a description of an event is accepted by a tradition as authentic, the account takes on the force of "history" within that tradition, even when, in modern historicist terms, it is not at all historical. The event becomes an ineluctable part of the collective memory of tradition. This is the power of the imaginaire in history, and the legend remains potent even when far removed in space and time. In tenth-century China, Qian Hongshu (r. 947–978) erected 84,000 gold-plated *stūpas* as part of an act of atonement (Huang 2005: 36–37), a project that must have been inspired by the legend, disseminated in China through several texts such as the *Aśokasūtra*, that Aśoka erected 84,000 *stūpas*. Not many scholars today accept Aśoka's deed as an historical project, but as legend, it has impacted directly on historical events through emulation.

Rather than doubt the existence of the *saṃgīti*, I would suggest that there were more—perhaps many more—*saṃgīti* than we have records of. If the different schools did not hold their own *saṃgīti*—in most cases, a succession of *saṃgīti* over the centuries, in different centres, depending on the fortunes of the school in terms of patronage and expansion—how are we to explain the many variant redactions of Vinaya and Sūtra that have come down to us? Are we to assume that the redactions came about haphazardly? Nearly a hundred years ago, Louis de La Vallée Poussin wrote (1910: 179):

> While it is impossible to accept the Buddhist opinion, which views [the councils] as ecumenical assemblies after the Nicene type, it is at the same time necessary to explain how Buddhist monastic life, without the help of such solemn assemblies, nevertheless resulted in a sort of "Catholicism," and secured the redaction and the compilation of Canons of scriptures very like one another.

As we have seen above, the concern to preserve the words, letters, and meaning of the "True Dharma" was codified in the scriptures. Compilation and redaction were a natural and inevitable consequence. To transmit a massive textual corpus calls for a complex of decisions regarding language, style, grammar, phrasing, and orthography, as well as formatting and standardization. A new redaction would have required consensus and ratification by the members of the monastic community in question. Our texts reveal a self-consciousness of the role of the redactors (*saṃgītikāra*), who are explicitly and repeatedly referred to in Mahāvihārin commentaries, in Sarvāstivādin texts like the *Vinayavastu*, and in śāstra like the *Abhidharmakośa*. Each school must have held redactional councils, and each school must have been conscious of this, codifying this consciousness—these "memories"—in its own lineage histories, as is done in the *vaṃsa* literature of the Mahāvihāravāsins. Consciousness of redactional lineage—of language and of textual fidelity—is explicit, for example, in the Pāli *Dīpavaṃsa* (especially Chapter V), in the verse preambles to Ācariya Buddhaghosa's commentaries (see for example the *Majjhimanikāya* commentary, Jayawickrama 2003: 73–75), and in the introductions and colophons of Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin texts (Roth 1985). Redactional councils reinforced consciousness of difference with regard to other schools and of authenticity with regard to one's own school.

The idea of the redactional council developed a powerful resonance of authentication and transmission and the term "saṃgīti" was used in titles of Mahāyāna *sūtras*, for example the *Dharmasaṃgītisūtra* and the *Buddhasaṃgīti* (both preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translations).[13] The term also occurs within Mahāyāna *sūtras*—for example "recitation of the six perfections" in the *Samādhirājasūtra*.[14] Bhāviveka (*ca.* 500–570) and others cite a tradition of a redactional council of the Mahāyāna itself, at which Vajrapāṇi recited the *sūtras*, but it is not clear when this tradition arose or how widespread it may have been. Haribhadra, who worked at Nalanda during the reign of Dharmapāla (r. *ca.* 770/775–810/812), cites "past teachers" (*pūrvācāryāḥ*) who

refer to it as a "recitation-council of the precious *sūtras* of the Prajñāpāramitā (*prajñāpāramitā-sūtra-ratna-saṃgīti*).[15] Ratnākaraśānti (first half of the eleventh century) describes the redactor of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* as "the Great Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi who dwells in Aḍakavatī, who follows the Tathāgatas of the Bhadrakalpa to protect their physical bodies and Dharma bodies."[16] Here the principle of redaction runs through the "Auspicious Eon" with its one thousand Buddhas.

Among Buddhist monastic lineages, I would suggest that diversity rather than uniformity was the rule. A certain group of schools developed Abhidharma literatures, and divided their scriptures into three divisions: Vinaya, Sūtra, and Abhidharma (Lamotte 1976: 163–167). It is not certain that all schools adopted this tripartite division, and it is possible that, just as in China, in Tibet, premodern Siam, and India itself, "Tripiṭaka" could mean "complete collection" rather than or at least in addition to three formal divisions. That there were alternate systems of classification is certain. According to Candrakīrti, the Aparaśaila and Pūrvaśaila schools (from the vicinity of Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh) had a seven-fold Piṭaka, consisting of collections of texts on Bodhisattva, Vidyādhara, Sūtrānta, Abhidharma, Vinaya, Vaipulya, and Jātaka (Sorensen 1986: 50–53). Other schools had a five-fold division, including a Dharaṇīpiṭaka (Lamotte 1976: 313).

A history of Indian Buddhism could reasonably be written in terms of *saṃgīti*, *saṃgāyanā*, *saṃgītikāra*, and the many uses of the *saṃ-gī*.[17] The terms carried their force beyond India nearly two millennia later. In Siam, kings held *saṃgīti*, and for the last such event, the Ninth Saṃgīti convened during the reign of King Rama I (1782–1809), a history was written in Pāli, the *Saṃgītivaṃsa*. The term *saṅgāyanā* could also be used for the printing of the *Tripiṭaka*, for example the first printed edition during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910). *Saṅgāyanā* took on a special meaning in ritual chanting, involving formalized performance of the recitation by monks on several preaching thrones. The texts used for this were inscribed on palm leaf and are common in old temple collections. The practice was also followed in Cambodia (Leclère 1917: 405–410). For the royal ceremony during the reign of King Ang Duong (1847–1860), five hundred monks were invited to "*saṅgāyanā*" or "*deśanā saṅgāyanā*" for three days in the palace, and a set of the four monastic requisites was offered to each monk (Pakdeekham 2007 [2550]: 179). In the second half of the twentieth century, the definitive edition of the Pāli Tripiṭaka for the Theravādin tradition became that recited and settled at the "Sixth Council." This was held in Rangoon from May 1954 to May 1956 and was followed by a council for the commentaries from December 1956 to March 1960. By 1999 a CD-ROM edition of the "Sixth Council" text appeared.

Writing down the Tripiṭaka

When and where was the Tripiṭaka written down? Given that several of the most prominent of the "eighteen schools" had their own distinctive Tripiṭakas, we must

rephrase the question: "When and where were the Tripiṭakas written down"?[18] Alternatively, to include other systems of classification, we may ask, "When and where were the Piṭakas written down?" There is no evidence that there was ever a single *written* "Ur-collection" that was accepted by all schools; by the time the schools wrote down their scriptures, the "*mūlasaṃgīti*"—at any rate more an ideal than an historical collection—would have been gradually transformed into several different collections in different varieties of middle Indic. That is, there would be as many commitments of canonical collections to writing, made at different places at different times, as there would have been schools. It is probable that certain individual texts would have been written down independently and could have circulated independently before the grand Piṭakas were codified. Therefore, we must rephrase the question as: "When were the texts of a particular tradition or school written down as *a single project*?"

Only two accounts survive. It is therefore difficult to answer these questions with much confidence. The best-known account is that of the Mahāvihāra tradition, the so-called Pāli canon. According to this version, the Pāli canon along with its commentaries was written down in Sri Lanka, in the first century BCE. To write down a body of texts the size of a Tripiṭaka—even an earlier and sparser prototypical collection—was a stupendous task. Many decisions had to be made: what materials to use and how to obtain and prepare them; what script to use; how to divide, how to format, how to punctuate, and how to paginate the text; and how and where to store the resultant manuscripts. The account given in the *Mahāvaṃsa* (XXXIII, 100–101) is brief and matter-of-fact and does not address any of these questions. The aforementioned Sāṃmitīya account takes us up to eight hundred years after the Nirvāṇa (but what was the basis of the calculation?), but it does not explicitly mention writing. Preserved in Tibetan only, the account only uses forms of the Tibetan verb *bsdu ba*, which I have translated here as "compile." Does this mean that up to its fifth council the Sāṃmitīya school had not written down its scriptural collection?

The *Lalitavistara* and other works, including some Jaina texts, list a superabundance of scripts or writing styles current in India and beyond, each with an emblematic name, and there is no doubt that in some circles—not only the court but also the monastery—writing was regarded as a significant and desirable skill. The idea that Śākyamuni, as a young Bodhisattva, mastered the art of writing was sufficiently important that biographies like the *Lalitavistara* devoted a chapter to the event, and that the Bodhisattva with a writing tablet was one of the scenes of the life of the Buddha chosen for depiction in Gandharan art.[19] According to the *Mahāvastu*, *bodhisattvas* have a very special relationship to writing: *bodhisattvas* are generally the initiators of sciences and skills, including writing systems, of which thirty-two scripts are named (Senart 1882: 135.4).

Later texts sometimes indulge in anachronisms that place the writing of the Buddha's teachings immediately after the Nirvāṇa. In the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarīka*, a Mahāyāna *sūtra* set on the eve of the Nirvāṇa, the Buddha instructs the monks to write down his teachings.[20] The *Manjuśrīmūlatantra* "predicts" that a son of King Ajātaśatru will benefit from the Buddha's teaching and "will have the

word of the Teacher committed to writing in extenso" (*tad etat pravacanaṃ śāstu likhāpayiṣyati vistaraṃ*). The reference is to Udāyin or Udayabhadra, who reigned *ca.* 462–446 BCE.[21] The passage is cited by Butön, who immediately afterwards quotes the eleventh-century *Vimalaprabhā*—a commentary on the *Kālacakra-tantra*—as stating that:

> When the Blessed One had passed away, the redactors (*saṃgītikāra*) wrote down the three vehicles (*yāna*) in books (*pustaka*).

The passage does not say how long after the Nirvāṇa the event took place.

More relevant to our question, perhaps, both Butön (loc. cit.) and Tāranātha report traditions that the texts were written down at—in what was in their system—the "third council." Butön writes (uncharacteristically without giving any source):[22]

> Thus, when the third collection had been made, in order that the word of the Sage (*munivacana*) would not be corrupted through omissions and interpolations made when recited by ordinary people (*pṛthagjana*) who had not achieved *dhāraṇī*, it was redacted in written form in books (*pustaka*). Before that, it had been recited from memory, not through writing.

In his "History of Buddhism" Tāranātha writes that:[23]

> … at the time of the third council, the eighteen monastic orders (*nikāya*) made the teaching (*śāsana*) pure (*viśuddha*), and redacted the Vinaya in writing. Sūtras and Abhidharma that had not yet been redacted in writing were redacted in writing, and those that had already been redacted were revised.

Thus, both Tāranātha and Butön agree that the writing of texts began after the "third council." The fact that Tāranātha discusses the writing down of the Tripiṭaka has not generally been recognized because the passage is mistranslated in the only available English translation.[24] Tāranātha's account points to a gradual writing of the texts and a later standardization, both of which seem natural and plausible. Also noteworthy is the way Butön gives concern for textual corruption as the reason for recording the Buddha's teaching and the manner in which he connects memory and *dhāraṇī*.

No manuscripts of any of these early editions survive. The oldest manuscripts extant today are the Gāndhārī texts, recorded in ink in the Kharoṣṭhī script on birch-bark, some of which may date to the first century. These are followed by some of the palm leaf manuscripts from Central Asia, dating to the second century (Sander 1999).[25] Although the Pāli *texts* are held to be old, the bulk of the surviving *manuscripts* are very late. Von Hinüber (1996: § 6) writes that "The continuous manuscript tradition with complete texts begins only during the late fifteenth century. Thus, the sources immediately available for Theravāda literature are separated from the Buddha by almost 2000 years. It should be kept in mind, however, that the age of the manuscripts has little to do with the age of the texts they contain." When we take into account the date of the surviving Gāndhārī manuscripts, the Sri Lankan tradition that Pāli manuscripts were written down in the first century BCE, and the various traditions reported in Tibetan histories, we may suggest that Piṭakas were compiled and were written down in different scripts and formats, in the Northwest of India and in Sri Lanka, by about the beginning of the Christian Era, or earlier.

Early written texts

A great deal has been written about the prehistory and history of writing in India.[26] For present purposes, let me repeat the commonplace that, while writing systems existed at the time of the Buddha, writing was not used for the transmission of teachings or texts, which were memorized and transmitted orally.

How were the texts referred to? It appears that they were assigned titles in the early phases of oral transmission—titles must have been one of the principles of organization devised to transmit and retrieve texts. The earliest epigraphic use of titles is in Aśoka's Calcutta-Bairāṭ inscription, which dates to the mid-third-century BCE.[27] Aśoka recommends seven texts by name, with the implication that they were known or would be easy to locate and to learn. The edict is addressed to the monastic order (*saṃgha*) in Western India, far from the Magadhan heartland of Buddhism.

How are titles used in Buddhist literature? Some longer *sūtras*—especially in *Majjhimanikāya* and *Madhyamāgama*—close with a stock formula in which Ānanda asks the Buddha the name of the "turn of the teaching" (*dharmaparyāya*) that he has just given, and the Buddha responds by supplying not one but several titles. For example, the Buddha assigns the names "With many elements" (Bahudhātuka), "Four chapters" (Catuparivaṭṭa), "Mirror of the Dharma" (Dhammādāsa), "Drum of the deathless" (Amatadundhubhi), and "Unsurpassed victory in battle" (Anuttara Saṃgāmavijaya) to the sūtra we now call *Bahudhātukasutta* (*Majjhimanikāya* 115). The practice of referring to texts by name and by greater text unit is seen in several places in the Vinaya and Sūtra literature. The *Mahāvagga* of the Pāli *Vinaya* and the *Udāna* of the *Khuddakanikāya* relate how the monk Soṇa recites the entire *Aṭṭhakavagga* and is praised by the Buddha for his performance (*Vinaya* I 196.19 foll.; *Udāna* 57–59). In the *Nidānasaṃyutta*, Sāriputta cites a verse from the "Questions of Ajita of the Pārāyaṇa" (*parāyane ajitapañhe*, *Saṃyuttanikāya* II 49.3). In the *Aṅguttaranikāya* a laywoman known as "Nanda's mother" (*Nandamātā upāsikā*) recites the *Pārāyaṇa* (*Aṅguttaranikāya* IV 63.11). In one case, a large group of monks discusses a verse "spoken by the Blessed One, in the 'Questions of Metteya of the Pārāyaṇa' " (*Aṅguttaranikāya* III 399.17). In another case, the Buddha himself cross-references his own statement "in the 'Questions of Puṇṇaka' of the *Pārāyaṇa*" (*Aṅguttaranikāya* I 133.6; II 45.34).

Such references occur not only in Pāli but also in the texts of other schools such as in the Sarvāstivādin/Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya and Sūtra literature.[28]

The recently published Gāndhārī manuscripts also use titles; in the Senior collection there is one manuscript with a "table of contents" (which does not precisely fit the actual contents). It is evident that the collections of different schools and different regions used different titles and that within any single collection there could be alternate titles (for example *Majjhimanikāya* Sutta 26 is called *Pāsarāsi* in some manuscript traditions, and *Ariyapariyesana* in others). There was no standardization of titles, which might be taken as meaning that the titles were devised later, but for the fact that many titles are shared by Mahāvihāra and Sarvāstivādin collections.[29] One potentially rich source for titles and classifications of texts is the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, which should give a pool of data for the first to second centuries CE. Regrettably, the *Mahāvibhāṣā* is not preserved in Sanskrit. The three Chinese translations represent different phases of the development of the text, which may help in the identification of different strata. Further studies of titles in available sources including Chinese and Tibetan translations are needed.

In general, the different schools whose texts have been preserved use verse tables of contents (*uddāna*), usually placed at the end of chapters, sections, and text-units, as a key to the contents. There were several types of summary verses, and they functioned as a sophisticated hierarchical system of cross-reference. The "titles" we use today are drawn from these tables or summary verses. The verses also functioned, at least among those schools that accepted a particular recension, as authoritative guides to the contents of a text. Both the Mahāvihāra tradition (Buddhaghosa in *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* I 25) and the Vaibhāṣikas claim that the *uddānas* were fixed at the first recitation—that is, they enjoy the full authority of the *saṅgītikāras*. The author of the *Abhidharmadīpa* writes (translation after Jaini 2002: 104):

> Only those sūtras should be accepted that have been spoken by the Lord Buddha, and that are to be found in the four Āgamas compiled by the Elders Mahākāśyapa, Ānanda, and so forth, and that have been put together in the summary verses called Uddāna Gāthā by those who presided over the saṃgītis (councils).

An *uddānagāthā* is cited in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (ad *kārikā* 3: 12d—note that in Pradhan's edition it is misspelled as *udāna-*) with the sense that "if you accept this *uddānagāthā*, then you must accept this *sūtra* because it is listed here." These examples show a consciousness of classification and titles, and of a developed or developing "canon"—already in the sense of a closed body of texts or at least of a body of texts accepted as authoritative by one community.[30] Aśoka's Calcutta-Bairāṭ inscription shows that by the third century BCE systems of cross-reference by individual title and by collection were already developed and widespread. The concept of direct citation, usually marked by the closing particle "*iti*," in addition to direct and indirect speech, are all clearly delineated in the inscriptions and in early texts, which are sophisticated and multi-layered documents.

How long after the Buddha was this? This depends on the date accepted for the Buddha's Nirvāṇa, about which there is no consensus. If we assume that the texts and system of reference were already in existence by the time of Aśoka, this means by 250 BE ("Buddhist Era"). According to Sinhalese tradition, this would be about 210 years after the Nirvāṇa; according to the "Northern" schools, it would be about 100 years after the Nirvāṇa.

Picture books in stone

After Aśoka's references, the earliest allusions to Buddhist texts are associated with the great "monuments of merit," the *stūpas* and caves that belong to the Śuṅga and Kāṇva periods (*ca.* second to first centuries BCE) or earlier—bearing in mind that these monuments were long-term projects that underwent frequent if not constant repair and alteration. The monuments refer to Buddhist literature in two ways—through the carved or painted image and through the engraved or painted word. The short inscriptions that accompany the sculpted representations of *jātakas* and the life of the Buddha at the Bharhut *stūpa*, inscriptions which date to before 100 BCE, are among the earliest, if not the earliest, written scriptural texts of India. They stand out amongst the corpus of early inscriptions of India by their literary nature. The mass of early inscriptions—including those at Bharhut itself—are donative inscriptions, rich in social, geographical, and religious details. Of the 225 inscriptions from Bharhut, 141 are donative and the remaining 84 are label inscriptions (Salomon 1998: 141). At Sanchi the early inscriptions—842 in number (Salomon loc. cit.) are almost all donative. Both donative and label inscriptions have been found at Pauni (Salomon: 142) near Nagpur in Madhya Pradesh. Label inscriptions are, however, generally rare, and were not usually used at sites like Amaravati (with an important early exception, to be discussed below) and Nagarajunakonda.

The Bharhut inscriptions that concern me here are phrases that function as labels or captions that explain a sculpted scene or supply a title for a *jātaka*.[31] The labels are keywords that connect visual representations to pools of narrative resources—they are links to banks of data. At the same time, some of them are the earliest excerpts of Buddhist texts to survive, and they represent the beginnings of written scriptures. They label or map the rich iconographic programs of the *stūpa*, giving the names of the beings that inhabit the narrative and ritual landscape—of nature spirits, serpent kings, and celestial maidens, or of female deities like Sirimā (L B8 [770]).[32] Some inscriptions allude to cosmology, others to the "awakening trees" (*bodhi*) of past Buddhas. Most of these labels are simply phrases, "convenient short designations" (Lüders 1998: 67), but some are full sentences. One of the longer sentences refers to an as yet unidentified event:[33]

> *mahāsāmāyikaya arahaguto devaputo vokato bhagavato sāsani paṭisandhi* (B 18 [777])

The event described and depicted has not been identified, although several conflicting interpretations have been proposed by scholars since the nineteenth century. The stumbling block is the fact that a deity named "Arahaguto" (equivalent to Sanskrit "Arhadgupta") cannot be traced in any extant texts, whether in Pāli, Sanskrit, or Chinese. Arahaguto is only known from Bharhut, where he is referred to in one other inscription (B20 [814]). This, along with several other untraceable names in the Bharhut corpus, shows that the monument was conceived according to a local/regional tradition or to the tradition of one of the "eighteen schools" whose texts have not survived. As engraved in stone in the second century BCE, this tradition is more ancient than the present "Pāli Canon."[34]

Another caption identifies the conception of the Bodhisattva (here called "the Blessed One," *bhagavā*) in the form of an elephant, descending to enter the womb of his mother:

> *Bhagavato ūkraṃti* (B 19 [801])
> The conception of the Blessed One.

Accompanying a splendid representation of dancers and worshippers is the legend:

> *sudhammā devasabhā bhagavato cūḍāmaho* (B 21 [775])
> The Sudharmā Assembly-hall of the Gods: the festival of the Blessed One's top-knot.

Some short sentences describe events in Śākyamuni's career:

> *aj[ā]tasat[u] bhagavato vaṃdate* (B 40 [774])
> Ajātaśatru pays homage to the Blessed One.

> *erapato nāgarājā bhagavato vadate* (B 37 [753])
> The Nāga King Erapato pays homage to the Blessed One.

> *digha-tapasi sise anusāsati* (B 63 [692])
> Dighatapasi instructs his disciples.

One of the longer sentences refers to a celebrated event that took place early in Śākyamuni's career (Figure 4.1):

> *jetavana anādhapeḍiko deti koṭi saṃthatena keṭā* (B 32 [731])
> Anādhapeḍika presents the Jetavana, having bought it for a layer of crores.

Around the edge of this scene, two buildings are identified by inscriptions (Figures 4.2 and 4.3):

> *kosabak[u]ṭi* (B 33 [732])
> The Kosambi hut [of the Buddha].

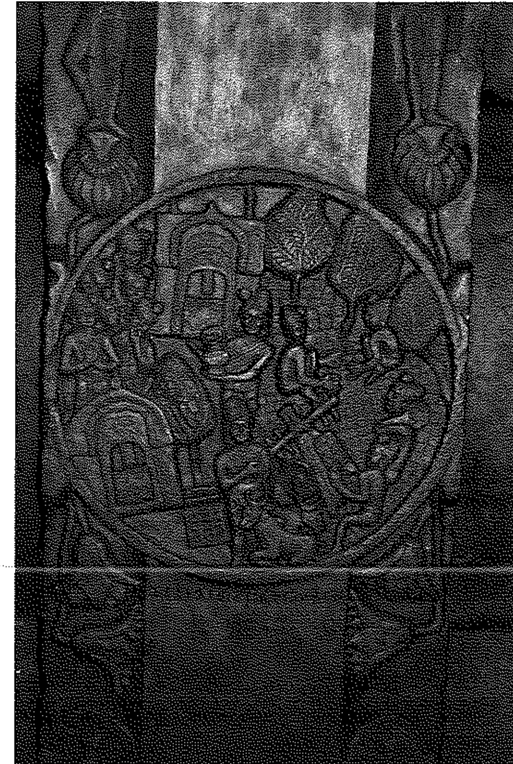

Figure 4.1 "Anadhapedika presents the Jetavana, having bought it for a layer of crores." An early inscribed narrative scene from the Bharhut *stūpa*, depicting how the financier Anāthapiṇḍika purchased a grove from Prince Jeta by covering the ground with gold coins. The Jetavana was the most famous of the Buddha's residences, and the scene is found twice at Bharhut as well as on the broken inscribed pillar from Amaravati *stūpa*. Indian Museum, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. (Photo courtesy of Peter Skilling)

> *gadhakuṭi* (B 34 [733]))
> The fragrant hut [of the Buddha].

One unique label inscription is significant in several ways. It refers to what in the Pāli collection is known as the *Aṇḍabhūtajātaka* (no. 62). The label gives not a title but the first line of the verse of the *jātaka* (Figure 4.4):

> *Yaṃ bramano avayesi jatakaṃ* (B 51 [810])
> The jātaka [beginning with] 'because the brahman played'.

This shows that the practice of referring to a verse text by giving its first line was already in vogue. Furthermore, insofar as the verses of the *jātaka* are considered

Figure 4.2 Close-up of Jetavana, showing the "fragrant hut" of the Buddha. Indian Museum, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. (Photo courtesy of Peter Skilling.)

by tradition to be spoken by the Buddha, it is one of the earliest examples of a citation of *buddhavacana*.

Bharhut attests to the development of the narratives of the life of the Buddha, of *jātaka* stories, and of cosmology, or at least of deities. It memorializes space, both "historical" sites connected with the life of the Master, and "mythical" sites like the Sudharmā Hall in Indra's heaven.[35]

The Bharhut scenes discussed above portray the early phase of the Buddha's career. A pillar from the south of India gives scenes from several periods. The broken pillar—partially intact, with inscribed narratives on three faces—was discovered at the site of the Amaravati stupa in 1958–1959.[36] Ghosh and Sarkar suggest "a date slightly earlier than the rail-stage of Bharhut and the gate-stage of Sanchi, perhaps late second century BC." The three surviving faces depict nonfigural scenes from the life of the Buddha, with captions in Prakrit in Brāhmī script. One face depicts the city of Śrāvastī, showing the Jetavana and the covering of the ground with gold coins by Anāthapiṇḍada—the celebrated event mentioned above. Another face depicts "a town with storeyed mansions, located at a sharp bend along a river;" the label informs us that this is Dhanyakada, that is, Amaravati itself (Dehejia 1997: 145). On the remaining face, a series of scenes depicts stages on the Buddha's last journey, that is, a part of a *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. Five of the accompanying captions survive. They read:

bahuputa-cetiya vesālakāni cetiyāni
The Bahuputa Shrine and the shrines of Vesāli.

cāpala-cetiye māro yācate osaṭh-iti
At Cāpala Shrine Māra requests "the [Blessed One] to relinquish [his life]."

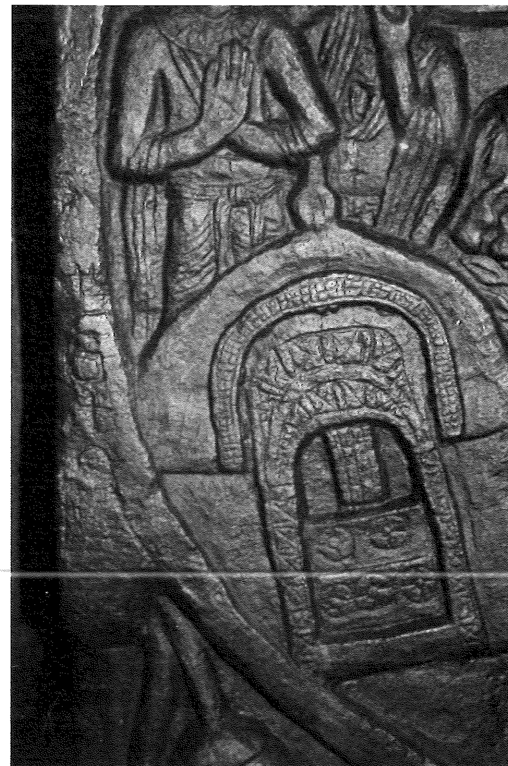

Figure 4.3 Close-up of Jetavana, showing the "Kosambi hut." Indian Museum, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. (Photo courtesy of Peter Skilling.)

vesāliye viharati mahāvane kuḍāgārasālāya
[The Blessed One] resides in Vesālī in the Mahāvana, in the pavilion with the gabled roof.

nāgāpalogana
The elephant's gaze.

sālavane bhagavato parinivute
The Blessed One passes away in the Sāla grove.

Dehejia remarks that "the scenes chosen for portrayal, and the phrases used in the inscribed labels, indicate close familiarity with the text of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*; in fact, viewers unfamiliar with the text would not have understood most of the inscribed notations" (Dehejia 1997: 143). We might describe the inscribed scenes as the earliest extant version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, one of the great classical narrative texts of Buddhism.

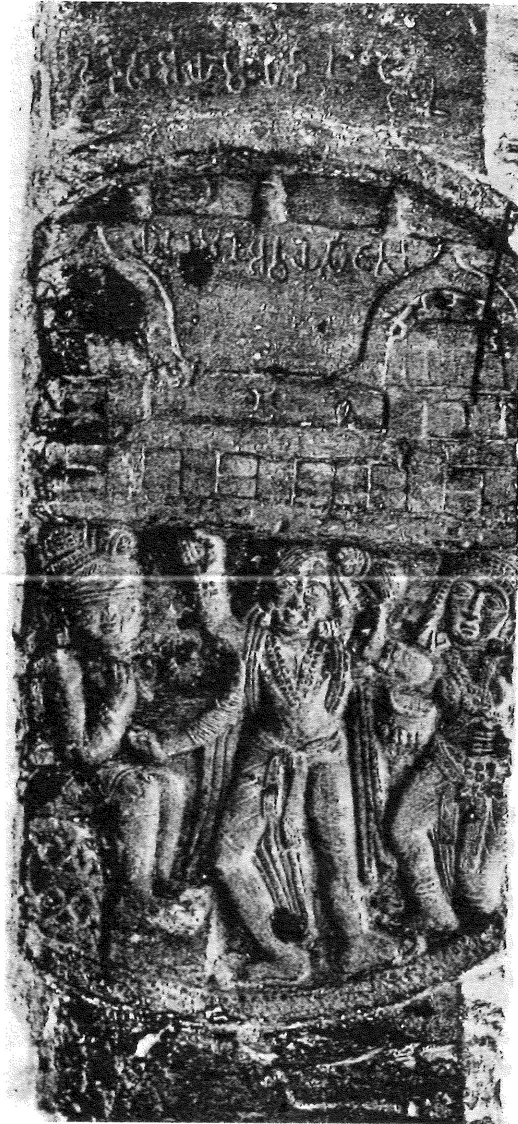

Figure 4.4 Bharhut, Aṇḍhabhūtajātaka (Jātaka 62). After Coomaraswamy 1956, fig. 69. The Prakrit insciption reads "yaṃ bramana avayasi jātakam."

One other recently excavated site has yielded stone sculptures with inscribed labels. This is Kanaganahalli in Karnataka. Some of the carved *jātaka* slabs bear labels with Prakrit inscriptions.[37] The labels give the word "*jātaka*" first, followed by the name: *jātakaṃ sajiniya[ṃ]* (Das 2004: pl. X), *jātakaṃ chaddatiyaṃ*

(Dehejia 2007: Fig. XIII.3), etc. Other labelled slabs depict scenes from the life of the Buddha; particularly impressive are two slabs recording the donation of and localities in the Jetavana, both of which "make extensive use of inscribed labels to identify the various structures that Anathapindaka then raised within the park" (Dehejia 2007: 291). A slab depicting King Aśoka is labelled *raya asoka* (Dehejia fig. XIII.13; *Indian Archaeology* 1997–98 pl. 72). Regrettably an excavation report of the site, arguably one of the most important for the study of Buddhist texts, has not yet been published.

Conclusions

Where does all this lead us? This paper is an exploration, an attempt to re-examine the rise of the use of writing in relation to the transmission of texts. Some of our earliest written donative records from India and from Sri Lanka refer to the "reciters" (*bhāṇaka*), recording their contributions to the construction of stūpas and caves. That is, we can follow the activity of reciters at the same time that the use of writing is developing. At Bharhut donations were made by specialists in the "*peṭaka*"—that is a section of or commentary on the scripture—and in the "five *nikāyas*," that is, five collections of scriptures (Lüders A 56 [856] and A 57 [857]; see also p. 71). Donations were made by the reciters Isipālita, Valaka, Isidina, and Kanhila (Lüders A59, A 61, A 62, A 63). Other donations by reciters are recorded at Karli and at Amaravati, and in early cave dedications from Sri Lanka (Paranavitana 1970: cvi-cvii; 2001: 270–271). At Sanchi the donors included a royal scribe (*rājalipikāra*) and several writers or clerks (*lekhaka*), and I suspect that the "professional" donors such as the *seṭṭhis* and *gahapatis* would usually have been literate.[38]

It would be absurd to expect the use of writing to have replaced the oral practices of the reciters suddenly or abruptly. The period from the second century BCE to the second century CE was an important one for the development of Buddhist scriptures. During this period the reciters thrived, grand monuments were erected and embellished, and manuscript culture developed. Recitation, depiction, and writing flourished side by side. New ideas about the nature of the Bodhisattva and the Buddha came to the fore, giving rise to new forms of devotion and to intense debate. Some of these ideas became what one might term "movements"; they were recorded in "Vaitulya" or "Vaipulya" texts and evolved into the Mahāyāna movement and the Mahāyāna *sūtras*.

This was also an age of classification, exegesis, narration, and innovation. Abhidharma, Vaitulya, and Avadāna traditions, recited and written, evolved, making it an exceptionally creative and productive period in the intellectual and literary history of Buddhism. The reciters branched out, inspired by new texts, and helped to circulate new ideas across India and beyond (Skilling 2004). Figures known as "reciters of Dharma" (*dharmabhāṇaka*) were central in the dissemination of the burgeoning Mahāyāna sūtra literature (Drewes 2006; Nance 2008). The relationship between these reciters of the Dharma and the earlier reciters mentioned in the Mahāvihāra commentarial tradition and in inscriptions remains unclear.

Gombrich has proposed "the rise of the Mahāyāna is due to writing" (1990: 21). Like many bold statements, this is an over-simplification. Part of Gombrich's argument is that the Vinaya schools had a mechanism—the reciter system—to preserve and transmit their texts, while the Mahāyāna did not. How could the Mahāyāna have preserved its texts, otherwise than through writing? This ignores the fact that the monastics who transmitted the Mahāyāna sūtras themselves belonged to the Vinaya schools and lived in monasteries. The *Ugrapariprcchā* and other texts show that monks with various specialities and inclinations dwelt together in the same monastery: the greatly learned ones (*bahuśruta*), the dharma-preachers (*dharmabhāṇaka*), the experts in Vinaya (*vinayadhara*), the experts in the summaries (*mātṛkādhara*), the experts in the *bodhisattva-piṭaka* (*bodhisattvapiṭakadhara*), the wilderness-dwellers (*āraṇyaka*), the meditators (*dhyānin*), the followers of the bodhisattva vehicle (*bodhisattvayānika*), and so on (Nattier 2003: 273–274 and Appendix 3). A monastery sympathetic to the new movement, or a sympathetic community within a single monastery or in affiliated monasteries, could have agreed to institute recitations just as easily as they could have agreed to copy and store manuscripts.

Surely, the situation was much more complex. Is it not possible that, in addition to Mahāyāna *sūtras*, the composition and transmission of the complex and massive technical literature of the age—exegesis, Abhidharma, *śāstra*—presupposed writing? The relation between writing and Buddhist literature in this period was interactive and dynamic. The movement into a new storage system—from memory to the written word—did not mean that the exercise of memory was abandoned, or even that it was eclipsed—only that its functions and contexts changed. Literature—and other arts—flourished, and the use of the written word inspired new possibilities. Any writing down entailed redaction and revision, as texts moved from one storage system to another. It is probable that different Vinaya schools—let us remember that they were autonomous, and spread over large regions—participated in the evolution of scripts and manuscript formats, starting with imported or regional styles and developing their own forms and conventions. The main scriptural schools may have preferred particular writing styles, as, it seems, the Sāṃmitīyas preferred the "bhaikṣukī" or "arrow-headed" script (Hanisch 2006). Given that the Buddhist monasteries must have been the greatest producers of manuscripts, is it likely that they did not actively advance manuscript culture, including the arts of writing?[39] Moreover, the "Mahāyānists" would have shared in this grand movement from oral to written culture (a movement that retained many of its oral metaphors, ideals, and practices). In sum, the medium was not quite the message.

Notes

* References to Pāli texts are to the editions of the Pāli Text Society, unless otherwise noted, by volume, page, and first line of passage in question. Unless otherwise stated, translations are by the author. Titles of texts are italicized; general Indic terms for genres or textual classes (*jātaka, sūtra*) are not. In my translations from Tibetan I supply Sanskrit terms in parentheses as appropriate; these are standard equivalents but there is no absolute guarantee that the original Sanskrit used the exact term. I thank Nalini Balbir, Justin Meiland, and Jan Nattier for their comments and corrections.

1 For references to the attainments of the nuns see Skilling 2001.

2 In a different context, the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, a relatively early Mahāyāna *sūtra*, uses the phrase *saṃgāyisyāma vayam āyuṣmaṃto na vivadiṣyāmaḥ* (Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya et al. 2002: § 142), which parallels the Pāli. The Sarvāstivādin *Saṃgītisūtra* uses a different phrasing: *te vayaṃ samhitāḥ samagrāḥ saṃmodamānā bhūtvā saṃśayāya na vivādāmahe* (Stache-Rosen 1968: 45). I cite the Pāli versions of this and other *sūtras* not because they are more authentic but because they are more accessible to the general reader. It is important to stress that other schools transmitted their own versions of these or similar texts.

3 There is no exact English equivalent for the Indic term "*saṃgīti*," and I use here the clumsy makeshift "recitation-council," or more often simply "recitation," "redaction," or "council."

4 The councils in general have been studied by Minayeff (1894), La Vallée Poussin (1910, 1976), Bareau (1955a; also 1955b; 1966: 26–30; 1970), Lamotte (1976: 136–154; 297–300), Renou and Filliozat (1953 §§ 2212–2220), and Warder (1970, Chap. 7). Przyluski (1926–1928) devoted a study to the first council, Hofinger (1946) a study to the second. Franke (1908) studies the first two councils using mainly Pāli sources; Frauwallner (1994) evaluates the Sinhalese chronicles. The early studies of La Vallée Poussin, Bareau, and Lamotte are unsurpassed and remain required reading. Hallisey (1992) is one of the few scholars to break the mould and rethink the question of "councils." Other thoughtful contributions are Tilakaratne 2000 (who emphasizes the important connection between the councils and establishing harmony within the order) and Witanachchi 2006. (I regret that I am unable to consult the considerable Japanese-language scholarship on the councils.)

5 For the spelling "Sāṃmitīya" see Okano 1998: 280, n. 4.

6 What follows is a summary of Daśabalaśrīmitra's account (for an earlier English translation see Skilling 1987; for Tibetan with German translation see Okano 1998: 434–436).

7 "Compiled" renders the Tibetan *yaṅ dag par bsdu bar mdzad do*. The phrasing differs for each council: *saṅs rgyas kyi bstan pa … yaṅ dag par bsdu bar mdzad do* for the first council; *chos yaṅ dag par bsdu ba mdzad do* for the second; *chos bsdus so* for the third; *de'i luṅ ñid bsdu ba mdzad do* for the fourth; and *de'i luṅ rnams bsdu ba ñid du byas so* for the fifth. Other Tibetan translations of *saṃgīti* include *yaṅ dag par brjod pa* and *yaṅ dag par bgro ba* (often written *'gro ba*).

8 Sarvarakṣita has *muni-vātsī-suta*, m.c. for "Vātsīputra." The Tibetan of Daśabalaśrīmitra reads *gnas ma bu pā ra pādsi su tras.* "gNas ma bu" is a standard translation of Vātsīputra; it is followed by the transliterated form *pādsi su tra* (correct *su tra* to *pu tra*: a correct transcription is given in the following sentence). I can make no sense of *pāra*. Could be a scribal error for *para* = Skt. *vara*, "the illustrious"?

9 *chos smra byed* = *chos smra ba, dharmabhāṇaka*?

10 Okano 1998: 278.

11 Bu-ston 1988: 131–134; tr. Obermiller 1932: 96–101, Vogel 1985: 104–109. See also Ruegg 1985. Other Tibetan scholars bring together and discuss these and other sources on the council, using extant translations or following earlier works like those of Butön. These include Mkhas-grub-rje (1385—1438) and Paṇ-chen bSod-nams grags-pa (1478—1554) (Lessing and Wayman 1968: 57–69; Panchen Sonam Dragpa 1996: 11–13).

12 Bu-ston 1988: 131.23. There are variant spellings of "Kunpana monastery," which is not very convincing.

13 The two sūtras cannot be dated; as a working hypothesis, one might place them in the first century CE. According to *IDP News* No. 28 (Winter, 2006) a manuscript of Dharmarakṣa's Chinese translation of the *Buddhasaṅgīti* dated CE 296 is the

"oldest dated Buddhist manuscript." The entry on *saṃgīti* in *the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* is useful: Edgerton 1953: 547–548.

14 *Ṣaṭpāramitā-saṃgīti*: Dutt 1954: 457.9, translated in Pagel 2006: 24.

15 *Abhisamayālaṃkārāloka* in Wogihara 1932: 5.6.

16 *Sāratamā* in Jaini 1979: 4.15 *saṅgītikāraḥ aḍakavatīnivāsī vajrapāṇirmahābodhisattvaḥ. sa hi bhādrakalpikānāṃ tathāgatānāṃ rūpakāyasya dharmakāyasya ca rakṣādhikṛtaḥ pṛṣṭato'vagataḥ* ... Unfortunately the rest of the passage is missing.

17 For a suggested evolution of the now popular term *saṃgāyanā*, which "is not found used as a substantive in canonical or post-canonical Pāli works," see Witanachchi 2006: 722. The importance of councils is seen not only in Buddhism but also in Jainism, where the term *vācanā* is used (see e.g. Kapadia 2000: Chap. III). Comparative study of Buddhist *saṃgīti* and Jaina *vācanā* is a desideratum.

18 Only one Tripiṭaka – the Pāli canon, transmitted by the Mahāvihāravāsin Theravādins, has survived intact (as defined or codified by Buddhaghosa or at the time of Buddhaghosa, *ca.* fifth century CE). We do not know much if anything at all about the collections of many of the schools (for a recent survey of the canonical texts of the Śrāvaka schools excluding the Mahāvihāra, see Oberlies 2003). For direct albeit brief citations from scriptures of the eighteen schools, see Skilling 1997. In this article, I use "eighteen schools" not as an exact or historical figure – it is not, being only a convention – but as a global term for early Buddhist tradition in its entirety and in its diversity. The fact that only a single Tripiṭaka has survived has been taken carelessly to mean that there has only ever been a single Tripiṭaka, or that other Tripiṭakas are derived from or dependent upon the Pāli canon. This in turn has caused considerable confusion in Buddhist studies, which even today often treats the Pāli canon as "*the* Tripiṭaka" – the sole representative of "early Buddhism" – and sets up a false dichotomy between "the Canon" and "the Mahāyāna."

19 The Pāli *Jātakanidāna*, one of the latest of the Indic-language biographies of the Buddha, does not mention the Bodhisattva's study of writing, and the event is not, as far as I know, depicted in the art of Sri Lanka, South India, or Southeast Asia.

20 For this *sūtra*, see Csoma de Körös in Ross [1912] 1991: 433–436 and Feer 1881: 239–242, and also Feer 1883: 153–175. For other examples of anachronistic reference to writing see von Hinüber 1990: Chap. XV.

21 *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, in Vaidya 1964: 471, Chap. 55, vv. 299–300; cf. citation in Bu-ston 1998: 133.23; Obermiller II 101; Vogel 1985: 108–109. Butön's citation gives the name – or the code or abbreviation of the name – differently: A son of Ajātaśatru named "Upa" will write the teachings of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*) in letters *('jam dpal rtsa rgyud las, ma skyes dgra'i bu u pa źes bya bas saṅs rgyas kyi gsuṅrab rnams yi ger 'bri bar 'gyur ro źes zer ro*. For Udāyin see Lamotte 1976: 102.

22 Bu ston 1988: 133.20, *de ltar bsdu ba gsum pa byas nas so so skye bo gzuṅs ma thob pa rnams bka' lhag chad du 'don pa las thub pa'i gsuṅ mi ñams par bya ba'i phyir glegs bam yi ger bkod kyi de yan chad blo la 'don gyi yi ge med zer ro*. The phrase *lhag chad du* is not clear to me. My translation is a guess, based on the fact that *lhag ma* = *avaśeṣa, śeṣa* and *'chad-pa* means, "to cut."

23 Schiefner 1868: 48:19; Chattopadhyaya 1980: 95.

24 In Chattopadhyaya 1980: 95, the passage is rendered as "The controversies subsided at the Third Council, when all those belonging to the eighteen sects jointly purified the Law and codified the Vinaya. Also those portions of the Sūtra-piṭaka and the Abhidharma which were not codified before received codification and those portions which were already codified were revised." The terms translated with forms of "codify" are in the Tibetan *yi ger bkod*, "to put into writing." (Schiefner's German translation is not available to me.) Tāranātha makes other references to writing, as does Sumpa Khenpo (Das 1908: 137–138), but space does not allow me to discuss them here. See Skilling 2006 for narratives that link the depiction of the Buddha with scriptural citations.

25 One of the oldest surviving doctrinal texts from northern India that I know of is a fragment of a stone umbrella inscribed with four truths of the noble (*ariya-sacca*). It was found, appropriately, at Sarnath, the site of the "turning of the wheel of the Dharma," that is, the first enunciation of the four truths (Konow 1981; Tsukamoto 1996: Sārnāth 94, p. 913), and is dated by Konow to the second or third century CE.

26 See von Hinüber 1989, Falk 1993, Salomon 1996, Salomon 1998 and Pinault 2001. Norman's important studies are reprinted in Norman 2006; see Barrett 1992 for Ji Xianlin's comments and criticisms. For an early discussion of the writing and Buddhism see Rhys Davids [1903] 1999, Chaps. VII, VIII; see also Griffiths 1999, 34 foll.

27 For the text see Bloch 1950: 154–156; for the site see the splendid Falk 2006: 106–108.

28 For further references, see Lamotte 1976: 172–178. These and similar internal citations have been much discussed, especially in relation to the textual history of the *Khuddkanikāya* and "*kṣudraka*" texts, for which see the classic Lévi 1915.

29 For the titles of the texts cited by Vasubandhu in his *Vyākhyāyukti*, see Skilling 2000: Appendix 4.

30 See here the passage from Saṃghabhadra's *Nyāyānusāra* cited in de La Vallée Poussin 1925: 23, n. 1.

31 What are the earliest label inscriptions? Can they be the Aśokan "elephant labels" – the epigraphs signifying that an image of an elephant represents the Buddha – at Girnar (Bloch 1950: 135; Falk 2006: 118–120), Kalsi (Bloch, loc. cit.; Falk 124–126), or Dhauli (Bloch, loc. cit., who judges the label to be post-Aśokan; Falk 113–115)? For label inscriptions, see Salomon 1998: 120–121.

32 References to Bharhut inscriptions follow Lüders' system (1998: Preface, p. vi).

33 I do not translate the inscription because the meaning is not clear to me. I find Lüder's "Descended from the (hall of) the Great Assembly the angel Arahaguta apprises the Holy One of (his future) reincarnation" problematic.

34 See Lüders 1998: 66–71 for a detailed discussion and different conclusions.

35 For the importance of Indra's Heaven, the Trayastriṃśabhavana, see Skilling 2008.

36 Ghosh and Sarkar 1964/65; Tsukamoto 1996: Amarāvatī 205–212; Dehejia 1997: 144–146. The readings of the inscriptions given here follow the "restored" versions of Ghosh and Sarkar, with one correction: I read *Cāpala-cetiye* for their *Cāpala-cetiya*, the locative ending being clear in the reproduction of the rubbing.

37 For early reports on Kanaganahalli see *Indian Archaeology 1994–95 – A Review*, 37–39; *Indian Archaeology 1996–97 – A Review*, 53–55; *Indian Archaeology 1997–98 – A Review*, 93–96; *Indian Archaeology 1998–99 – A Review*, 66; for articles see Das 2004; Dehejia 2007, the latter the most important study to date.

38 See Appendix B in Chakravarti 1996.

39 If recent proposals that "the first written version of the Mahābhārata belongs to the final centuries preceding the Common Era" (Bronkhorst 2007: 94–98) have any merit, then the early written versions of Buddhist scriptures and of the great epic would have been contemporary. However, the idea that the epic was written down at such an early date is a novel hypothesis, and there does not seem to be sufficient evidence to propose that textual communities other than the Buddhists – with the very possible exception of the Jains – were large producers of manuscripts.