

A survey of the extant vinayavibhaṅga texts and a reassessment of the dating the vinayas

Introduction

The vinayavibhaṅga provides analysis, explanation, examples and counter-examples of the offences listed in the Prātimokṣa rules of discipline. A number of monks' vinayavibhaṅga texts are extant today which are associated with different Buddhist nikāyas (sometimes called sects or schools). They are thought to have arisen at different times. The sequence and dating of these texts is discussed from the time of the Buddha up to about 700CE, by which time the last of these texts was translated into Chinese. As there does not seem to be a convenient and convincing summary of the development of the extant set of vinayas, this paper reassesses the available evidence and presents a summary from a wide range of sources and some proposals where convincing information seems lacking. Various points are made in support of the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinayavibhaṅga being the most recent of the texts and the unlikely conclusion is proposed that the spread of the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya outside India is intimately related to the spread of Tantric Buddhism.

All un-attributed translations are by the author. Texts prefixed with "T" are from the Taisho catalogue of the Chinese Tripitaka, those prefixed with "D" are from the Derge edition of the Tibetan Tripitaka.

Background

It will be seen that versions of the vinayavibhaṅga texts are, as might be expected, some of the earliest Buddhist works apparent, whereas these texts continued to evolve for nearly a thousand years as Buddhism developed in India. There are versions of the texts addressing the prātimokṣa rules of monks and nuns separately. The monks' text is called the Bhikṣuvibhaṅga (Pāli: Bhikkuvibhaṅga), the nuns' text is called the Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga (Pāli: Bhikkunīvibhaṅga).

The extant vinayavibhaṅga texts and their development

There are six monks' vinayavibhaṅga texts extant. These are listed in Prebish's "Survey of Vinaya Literature" (Prebish 1994, pp.43-126) and a table correlating the various sections of each is given by Rosen in "Der Vinayavibhaṅga zum Bhikṣuprātimokṣa der Sarvāstivādins" (Rosen 1959, p.42). Rosen's table also cross references with the prātimokṣa rules listed in Prebish's "Buddhist Monastic Discipline" (Prebish 1975, pp.140-148) which uses the same numbering scheme. Of the six, only one has been translated into English. The information available can be summarized as follows:

| Nikāya | Language of extant text | Text in original language | English Translations |
|------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|
| Theravāda | Pāli | PTS Vinaya Pitakam V3&4 | PTS The book of the discipline V1-3 (Horner 1938), (Horner 1940), (Horner 1942) |
| Mahāsāṃghika | Chinese | T.1425 227a1-412b16 | |
| Mahīśāsaka | Chinese | T.1421 1a1-77b20 | |
| Dharmaguptaka | Chinese (Sanskrit fragments) | T.1428 567b7-713c29 | |
| Sarvāstivāda | Chinese (Sanskrit fragments) | T.1435 1a1-147b16 | |
| Mūlasarvāstivāda | Chinese Tibetan (Sanskrit fragments) | T.1442 627a1-905a7 Derge D.3 | |

Looking at each text in turn, by relating it to the available information on the development of its nikāya and corresponding vinaya, some idea of the date of the text can be obtained.

Theravāda

The Theravāda text is called the *suttavibhaṅga*. The Pāli text exists in a number of different modern vinaya editions and was translated by Horner for the Pāli Text Society.

Two different points have been made concerning the date of *suttavibhaṅga*:

1. In “Vinaya Texts, Part I”, by Rhys Davids and Oldenberg, the so-called “Ten Points” are used to propose a date for the “closing” of the *suttavibhaṅga*. The “Ten Points” are the elements of difference that led to the schism following from the Council of Vesālī (Skt. Vaiśālī). In the introduction (Davids & Oldenberg 1881, p.xxi), they explain that the Ten Points are not mentioned in the *Vibhaṅga* and only in the last section of the *Khandakas*, which they point out is of a different nature from the preceding sections, in that it is an account of the Councils of Rāgaha (Skt. Rājagrha) and Vesālī. They conclude that *Vibhaṅga*

and the Khandakas (except for the last two) are older than the Council of Vesālī (ibid. p.xxii).

2. In “A History of Pāli Literature”, Law considers the account of the Second Council contained in the Cullavagga. He explains that it contains nine references to items which Oldenberg has shown to be from the Suttavibhaṅga (Law 1933, p.15) and that the suttavibhaṅga existed as an authoritative text on vinaya questions prior to the compilation of the Cullavagga (ibid. p.17). He earlier concluded that the Cullavagga was closed soon after the Council of Vesālī and certainly before the reign of Aśoka (ibid. p.15). Law also explains the traditional account from the Parivārapāṭha that the Suttavibhaṅga, the Cullavagga and the Mahāvagga were all brought to Sri Lanka by Mahinda.

Although there has been considerable re-evaluation in recent years of the dates of early Buddhism, an idea of the date of the Second Council can be found from a reference to the reigning king. He is described by Jayaswal in “An Imperial History of India”(Jayaswal & Sankrityayana 1934, p.14) as being “Kālāśoka” for whom dates are given in Smith’s “On the Ancient Chronology of India (II)” (R. M. Smith 1957, p.270) as reigning 397-385BCE. Smith’s chronology is based on the Pūrāṇas and is independent of the various Buddhist chronologies. The same chronology gives 294-237BCE as the dates for Aśoka, reigning from 274BCE. Interestingly, in “History of Indian Buddhism”, Lamotte gives dates of 386BCE for the Second Council (Lamotte 1988, p.96) and 272BCE (ibid. p.217) for the assumption of Aśoka, as based on Buddhist sources.

From this, it would be fair to say that the suttavibhaṅga of the Theravādins already existed by about 380BCE and was closed by 270BCE, but it may be somewhat later as is discussed next.

Mahāsāṃghika

The Mahāsāṃghika nikāya arises from the first schism that is mentioned above. Traditional accounts ascribe this to the Second Council, held at Vesālī. A summary of modern scholarship on this is given in “Mahāsāṃghika Origins: The Beginnings of Buddhist Sectarianism”, (Nattier & Prebish 1977). It is proposed that this schism occurs at a slightly later “sub-council” under the reign of Māhapadma Nanda, which Nattier and Prebish assign to 116AN (after nirvāṇa). They consider four dates – 100AN, 116AN, 137AN, 160AN. They describe the dating to the reign of Māhapadma Nanda as a problem, but are using dates for his reign taken from Lamotte. Using dates from Smith’s “On the Ancient Chronology of India” (R. M. Smith 1957, p.272), this problem is resolved and both 116AN and 137AN would occur during his reign. Nattier and Prebish prefer 116AN over Bureau’s date of 137AN (Nattier & Prebish 1977, pp.271-272), which makes 116AN to be 370BCE based on Smith’s Chronology. Nattier and Prebish summarize the current view that the Mahāsāṃghika vinaya represents the status quo against which the schism occurred, with the Theravādin position

represents the opposing position – contrary to the later Theravada accounts which present the Mahāsāṃghika as the schismatics. Smith’s chronology is very interesting and merits reconsideration.. Bechert dismisses it out-of-hand as pre-supposing Buddha’s nirvāṇa to occur in 486BCE (Bechert 1995, p.246). He ignores the fact that the chronology also aligns with Alexander’s expedition to India and the dates of Kaniṣka and his father Vima Kadphises.

As to a closing date for this vinaya, Faxian made a copy of it during his visit to Pāṭaliputra during his visit to India 401-411CE (Gernet 1982, pp.223-225). It is worth noting that Faxian says: “In the various kingdoms of North India, however, he had found one master transmitting orally (the rules) to another, but no written copies which he could transcribe.” (Fa-Hien 1886, p.98) and that, albeit later, as Lamotte reports, Xuanzang (Hsuan Tsang 7CCE) finds very few Mahāsāṃghika monks and that “The Mahāsāṃghikas were in the process of disappearing”(Lamotte 1988, pp.541-543). It might be supposed that the Mahāsāṃghika vinaya was closed quite some time before Faxian visited India.

Mahīśāsaka

Not much is known about the emergence of the Mahīśāsaka vinaya. According to Vasumitra (1-2CCE) as related by Lamotte, the Mahīśāsakas arise during the third and early 4th C AN – about 300-150BCE (Lamotte 1988, p.531). Faxian obtained a copy of the Mahīśāsaka vinaya when in Sri Lanka in 411CE. Later again, Xuanzang does not report any Mahīśāsaka monasteries or monks at all. In Rosen’s table of vinaya correlations, the Mahīśāsaka version shows the greatest variance from the others. This could be explained by supposing that of the extant vinayas, this one went out of use first. With no active “supporters”, it could be come degraded and also would not be subject to recension when read by persons knowing the other versions at a later date.

Dharmaguptaka

Heirmann after Bureau describes the origin of the Dharmaguptakas as arising from the Mahīśāsakas during 250-200BCE (Heirmann 2002, pp.12-13). She relates that most evidence of the Dharmaguptakas is found in the north-west region of India, up to Afghanistan and that Xuanzang found only a few of their monasteries as he passed through Uḍḍiyāna (Swat) and nowhere else (ibid. p.17), despite the Dharmaguptaka vinaya being the main one used in China even up to the present day. Various finds in Afghanistan and along the Silk Road have yielded text fragments of the Dharmaguptaka vinaya in Sanskrit: from a bhikṣuprātimokṣa with many Prakrit forms and from a bhikṣuvibhaṅga with some Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit forms (ibid. p.27). In “Ancient Buddhist scrolls from Gandhāra”, Salomon dates some other Dharmaguptaka texts (Salomon 1999, p.155) from the same area to the first half-century CE. Lamotte provides a chronology for the gradual change in the Buddhist literary language in the northern subcontinent from Prakrits (up to 0CE),

through Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (0-300CE) to essentially Classical Sanskrit with a Buddhist vocabulary (300CE onwards) (Lamotte 1988, p.583). Since the first translation of parts of the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya into Chinese take place in 252CE (Heirmann 2002, p.18), these various points would point to the texts being closed by 150-200CE.

Sarvāstivāda

In “Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Scholasticism”, Dessein explains that the doctrine of sarvāstivāda (Pāli: sabbathivāda) that “everything exists” is one of the main points of contention in the Kathavāthu of Mogalīputta-tissa and of the Third Council, held in Pāṭaliputra in the reign of Aśoka, (Willemen et al. 1998, pp.16-17, 45-59). Dessein seems sure about the facts of the Third Council. Lamotte, who dates it 250BCE(Lamotte 1988, p.273), is less certain, although as Dessein considers that the Council only discussed the matters that form the first part of the Kathavāthu, and not the five theses of Mahādeva, which he places about 100 years later. The Sarvāstivādins arise from the group who are said to have “lost” the debate and many departed to Kashmir. Heirmann explains the subsequent development of the Sarvāstivādins in “Vinaya: Perpetuum Mobile” (Heirmann 1999, pp.850-855), spreading into Bactria and Gandhāra and quoting Nakamura to propose the vinaya as finalized in 1CCE. A brief review of the Sanskrit fragments of the Sarvāstivādin vinayavibhaṅga presented in Rosen (Rosen 1959, pp.20-36) shows only some use of Buddhist vocabulary, with standard Sanskrit grammar. Using the language classification of Lamotte, as above, might suggest this text closed a little later, perhaps 2CCE. Parts of the Sarvāstivādin vinaya were first translated into Chinese around 379CE (Willemen et al. 1998, p.132) and a little later Faxian obtained a full version during his stay in Pāṭaliputra, although he relates that this is already observed by the monks of Chin (his homeland) which have been handed down orally (Fa-Hien 1886, p.59).

Mūlasarvāstivāda

The Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya (MSV) is considerably larger than the Sarvāstivādin vinaya (SVV), from which we shall see it most likely descended. The same is true of the vibhaṅga section also. Frauwallner and later Dessein present opposing theories concerning the origin of the MSV, neither of which seems satisfactory.

Frauwallner proposes that the Sarvāstivādins develop as a school being “a late one” in Kashmir and Gandhāra, having arisen from the mission sent to Kashmir by Aśoka. He proposes that their position develops from the time of Kaniṣka, following after the arrival of the party that “lost” the debate at the Third Council, described above. He then proposes that the more developed Sarvāstivādins spread out, including back to Mathurā, whence further developments take place, leading to the Mūlasarvāstivādins (Frauwallner 1956, pp.38-41).

On the other hand, Dessein proposes that the Sarvāstivādin are active in both Mathurā and in Kashmir, with a fuller vinaya being produced earlier in Mathurā and part of the contents of that being partly rejected and a reduced vinaya being produced in Kashmir.

They both propose that the MSV arises from the larger of these two Sarvāstivādin vinayas (Willemen et al. 1998, pp.88-89). The idea of there being two Sarvāstivādin vinayas is found in the 大智度論 (dà zhì dù lùn – hyp. Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa T.1509) attributed to Nāgārjuna in the catalogues, but thought to be later 4-5CCE (Ruegg 1981, p.32). It says there is a vinaya in two parts: a vinaya of Mathurā with eighty sections including the Avadāna and Jātaka sections and a vinaya of Kashmir which has removed the Avadāna and Jātaka sections. However, from reviewing the available analyses of the contents of these sections (Lamotte 1988, pp.161-162), (Gaffney 1996, pp.77-78), (Willemen et al. 1998, pp.84-86) and from inspection by this author, it appears that neither the SVV nor the MSV vinayavibhaṅga sections actually contain Jātaka or Avadāna materials. This also appears so for the Tibetan MSV Kṣudraka, D.6. These materials are found in the MSV Vinayavastu but not in the corresponding SVV Skandhakas: the Kinnarī-jātaka from the MSV Bhaiṣajyavastu, T.1448 versus the SVV Bhaiṣajyavastu in the SVV Skandhakas being a clear example. However, the additional material in the MSV vinayavibhaṅga does not have the nature of Avadāna or Jātaka material at all, but consists of stories from the time of the Buddha, based on contemporary persons and with Buddha making rulings and explanations of the rulings. Hence, the proposal that this material has been removed from the MSV vibhaṅga for this reason to form the SVV version does not really stand up, as does not the idea that one these of vinayas provides the basis of the extant SVV vibhaṅga and the other of the MSV version, diverging from an early date.

What can be said about the origin of the MSV then? There is no mention of ‘Mūlasarvāstivādin’ as opposed to ‘Sarvāstivādin’ until Yijing (I-Ching) reports of his visit to India in 673-685CE (Enomoto 2000, pp.242-243). This report is in Chinese, of course. ‘Mūlasarvāstivādin’ is not attested in an Indic language until an inscription found near Patna and dated to the beginning of the 11CCE (ibid. p.247). Enomoto proposes that the Mūlasarvāstivādin are just a term used later for what were earlier called Sarvāstivādin (ibid. p.248). His well made argument is based on literary analysis and further historical evidence will be presented to support this.

A particular problem to be addressed arises from the visits to India of Xuanzang (629-645CE) and of Yijing (673-685CE). Xuanzang spent five years studying at Nālandā, while Yijing spent ten years there (Gernet 1982, pp.279-280), yet he does not mention “Mūlasarvāstivādin” nor does he mention any different vinaya being used, despite considerable differences between the extant SVV and MSV. Yijing, on the other hand, when studying in Nālandā only thirty years later finds the MSV in use, with Mūlasarvāstivādin in the majority in Magadha. The MSV is really considerably different from the SVV and for it to be created and then become the majority vinaya Magadha in only

thirty years seems unlikely. So either the MSV was being used in Nālandā and Xuanzang was not aware of this, or it arrived from somewhere else and was adopted in the interim. Xuanzang particularly reports his relationship with the king of that time, Harṣvardhana has expanded his rule across Northern India from 606CE after the White Huns have been driven out by Bālāditya-II by about 530CE. During the Hun invasions, from 465CE when Gandhāra is taken and eventually all of Northern India is conquered with even a client king as far as Magadha. This Hun conquest was not well disposed to the Buddhists and one can suppose a tide of displaced people moving east in front of this invasion, bringing an influx and mixture of different peoples and ideas (Chakravarti 2002, pp.341-354), (Jayaswal & Sankrityayana 1934, pp.61-69).

It is just these kinds of circumstances that cause changes and new ideas to develop. The fact that Xuanzang does not mention the MSV while he is in Nālandā, whilst Yijing does is a parallel of the situation with respect to tantra – Xuanzang does not report anything that might represent tantra, yet thirty years later Yijing finds it in Nālandā (Hodge & Buddhaguhya 2003, pp.9-11). We know that tantra spread to Tibet from the Nālandā and its associated monasteries and from recent work by Shane Clarke (Clarke 2006) we find that the MSV was taken to Japan by Kukai, who said it should be used as the vinaya of those practising tantra, rather than the Dharmaguptaka vinaya used, supposedly, throughout China and Japan. Since that tantra tradition taken to Japan by Kukai was taken to China originally by Śubhakarasiṃha from Nālandā, who was there at the same time as Yijing, we can see a parallel spread of the MSV and tantra. Some of the reliefs from Borobudur indicate that the MSV was in use there at the same time as tantra was extant in Śrī Vijaya (Jaini 1966). So we can establish a strong correlation – where we find tantra, we find the MSV, and where we do not find the MSV, there is no tantra, as in the case of Xuanzang.

However, it is still puzzling that Xuanzang does not mention any trace of either tantra nor the MSV in Nālandā. A possible clue to this is given in a comment by Ettinghausen in “Harṣa Vardhana, empereur et poète” where he relates the catalogue entry for the Simā-saṅkhara-chedani in the Nevill Collection of Pāli manuscripts, then at the British Museum:

“Un prêtre fonda la secte des Nīlapāṭadaras pour déguiser une offense qu'il avait commise ; alors Çrī Harṣa rassembla tous leurs livres avec les prêtres, et les brûla dans un prāsāda.” (Ettinghausen 1906, p.86)

So we see that the “wearers of black/blue robes” were persecuted and killed by Śrī Harṣa. This may be a distant report that he persecuted tantra practitioners and if Nālandā had been “cleared” or just devoid of tantra practitioners through threats, the MSV may not have been practiced either. Harṣa dies soon after Xuanzang leaves India and his kingdom disintegrates about 647CE (V. A. Smith &

Edwardes 1924, p.371). This would allow the tantric practitioners to return to Nālandā and re-establish the MSV by the time Yijing finds both there, from 673CE onwards.

Finally, Sylvain Levi says of the MSV: “. . . elle montre le sanscrit de Paṇini . . .”, so using the language classification of Lamotte, this would place the text no earlier than 300CE and since Kaniṣka is mentioned in the MSV Bhaiṣajyavastu (Dutt 1939, p.2), it must be later than 120CE: “kaniṣke nama rājā bhasviṣyati . . .” – “there will be a king called Kaniṣka . . .”, which occurs in the Tibetan version 'dul ba gzhi at D.1 Kha 122.a2.

Overall, given the political situation described above and the language aspects, it would be fair to say that the MSV text was a further development of the SVV and wasn't closed until at least 300CE. Dutt goes as far as to propose “between the 5th and 6th century A.D.”(Dutt 1942, p.xiv).

Appendix 1. Bibliography

- Bechert, H., 1995. *When did the Buddha live? : the controversy on the dating of the historical Buddha* 1st ed., Delhi India: Sri Satguru Publications.
- CBETA Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association 中華電子佛典協會, 2010. CBETA Chinese electronic Tripitaka collection. Available at: www.cbeta.org.
- Clarke, S., 2006. Miscellaneous Musings on Mūlasarvāstivāda Monks: The "Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya" Revival in Tokugawa Japan. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 33(1), 1-49.
- Dauids, T.W.R. & Oldenberg, H., 1881. *Vinaya texts Pt. 1: The Pātimokkha. The Mahāvagga, I-IV.*, Oxford: Clarendon.
- Dutt, N. ed., 1939. *Gilgit manuscripts. Vol. III Part 1.*, Srinagar: Research dep.
- Dutt, N. ed., 1942. *Gilgit manuscripts. Vol. III Part 2.*, Srinagar: Research dep.
- Enomoto, F., 2000. 'Mūlasarvāstivādin' and 'Sarvāstivādin'. In *Vividharatnakaraṇḍaka: Festgabe Für Adelheid Mette*. Swisttal-Odendorf: Indica et Tibetica.
- Ettinghausen, M., 1906. *Harṣa Vardhana, empereur et poète de l'Inde septentrionale (606-648 A. D.)*, Louvain: J.-B. Ista.
- Fa-Hien, 1886. *A record of Buddhistic kingdoms, being an account of the Chinese monk Fa-Hien of his travels in India and Ceylon (A. D. 399-414) in search of the Buddhist books of discipline*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Frauwallner, E., 1956. *The Earliest Vinaya and the beginnings of Buddhist literature.*, Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.

- Gaffney, S., 1996. The Pāli Nidānakathā and its Tibetan Translation. In *The Buddhist Forum*, Vol. IV. Routledge, pp. 75 - 92.
- Gernet, J., 1982. *A History of Chinese Civilization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heirmann, A., 2002. "The discipline in four parts" Rules for nuns according to the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Heirmann, A., 1999. Vinaya : Perpetuum mobile. *Asiatische Studien*, 53(4), 849-871.
- Hodge, S. & Buddhaguhya, 2003. *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra with Buddhaguhya's commentary*, London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Horner, I., 1938. *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka) Suttavibhaṅga, Vol. I*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Horner, I., 1940. *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka) Suttavibhaṅga, Vol. II*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Horner, I., 1942. *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka) Suttavibhaṅga, Vol. III*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Jaini, P.S., 1966. The Story of Sudhana and Manoharā: An Analysis of the Texts and the Borobudur Reliefs. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 29(3), 533-558.
- Jayaswal, K.P. & Sankrityayana, V.R., 1934. *An imperial history of India in a Sanskrit text (c. 700 B.C.- c. 770 A.D.) : with a special commentary on later Gupta period*, Lahore: Motilal Banarsidass.

- Lamotte, E., 1988. *History of Indian Buddhism: from the origins to the Śāka era*, Louvain-la-Neuve: Université catholique de Louvain, Institut orientaliste.
- Law, B., 1933. *A History of Pāli Literature, Vol. I*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.
- Nattier, J.J. & Prebish, C.S., 1977. Mahāsāṃghika Origins: The Beginnings of Buddhist Sectarianism. *History of Religions*, 16(3), 237-272.
- Prebish, C., 1994. *A survey of Vinaya literature* 1st ed., Taipei: Jade Scepter Imprint Jin Luen Pub. House.
- Prebish, C., 1975. *Buddhist monastic discipline: the Sanskrit Prātimokṣa sūtras of the Mahāsāṃghikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins.*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Rosen, V., 1959. *Der Vinayavibhaṅga zum Bhikṣuprātimokṣa der Sarvāstivādins*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.
- Ruegg, D.S., 1981. *The literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Salomon, R., 1999. *Ancient Buddhist scrolls from Gandhāra : the British Library Kharoṣṭhī fragments*, Seattle Wash.: British Library and University of Washington Press.
- Smith, R.M., 1957. On the Ancient Chronology of India (II). *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 77(4), 266-280.
- Smith, V.A. & Edwardes, S.M., 1924. *The early history of India from 600 B.C. to the Muhammadan conquest, including the invasion of Alexander the Great.*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Willemsen, C., Dessein, B. & Cox, C., 1998. *Sarvāstivāda Buddhist scholasticism*, Leiden; New York: Brill.