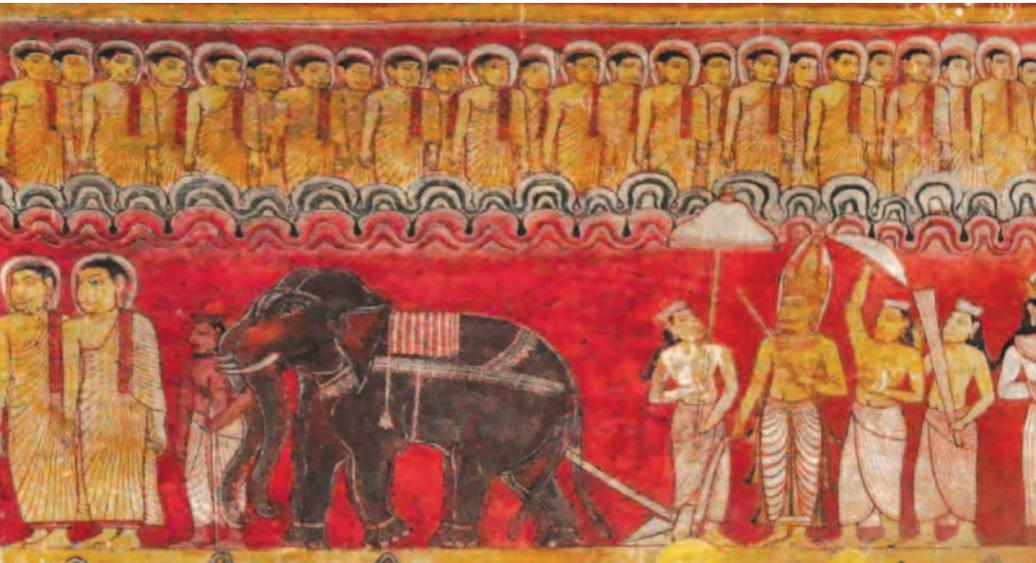


How Theravāda is Theravāda?
Exploring Buddhist Identities



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How Theravāda is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities

Edited by

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*To the ācariyas of the past
To the ācariyas of the present
To the ācariyas of the future*

*May the parampara
of practices, ideas, and discussion
Continue unbroken.*

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SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA



The map is geographically and historically hybrid, juxtaposing place names from different periods. It is a tool to help readers locate places mentioned in the individual chapters and does not pretend to be politically correct. The map is not to be used in local or international disputes.

SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA



MAP BY PIERRE PICHARD MARCH 2012



The Teachings of the Abhayagiri School

L. S. Cousins

Introduction

IN THE LATTER HALF OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM AD, SOURCES FROM BOTH inside and outside of Ceylon refer to the existence there of three distinct schools belonging to the overall Theriya tradition. In this article I aim to do three things:

SECTION I. Examine whether there is adequate evidence for a division of Sinhalese monasticism into separate fraternities (*nikāya*) before the dispute between the Mahāvihāra and Abhayagiri monasteries and their followers in the third century AD.

SECTION II. Outline some of the main teachings attributed to the Abhayagiri school in the subcommentarial (*ṭīkā*) literature and re-examine the similarities between those attributions and the content of the *Vimuttimaggā*, surviving in a Chinese translation and in Tibetan materials.

SECTION III. Assess whether the content of those teachings is compatible with an early date for the separation between Abhayagiri and the Mahāvihāra.

The evidence explored in this paper is most compatible with the position that the Pali Canon, largely or wholly, dates back to the first century BC, but the Abhayagiri school, as a separate fraternity, emerged only some centuries later.

I The earliest evidence for the division into two or three *nikāyas*

The Ceylonese school that is best known to us today, much of whose literature survives in Pali, is that of the Mahāvihāra in Anurādhapura. Naturally enough, those who belong to this lineage are referred to as the Mahāvihāravāsins, although often they refer to themselves as the Theriya¹ or Theravādin school. Indeed the other two schools are not so described in any surviving source from Ceylon. This contrasts with evidence from outside Ceylon which uses a term probably corresponding to Theriya as a collective name for all three schools.

Initially, the most important competing school appears to have been based in the Abhayagiri Monastery in Anurādhapura, also known as the Northern Monastery (Uttaravihāra). This is sometimes referred to as the Dhammaruci(ka) school, which seems to have been the name of the monastic *nikāya*; and it is used always in reference to monks of this school outside of Anurādhapura or over the whole island. Otherwise the commonest name for this school in the *īkā* literature is Abhayagirivāsīn or occasionally Abhayagirivāsika or Abhayagirika, but we also find Uttaravihāravāsīn or Uttaravihārin (see below p. 94 f). Earlier, however, these terms might refer simply to inhabitants of the monastery without any necessary implication of belonging to a different *nikāya*.

A third school was centred on the Jetavanavihāra in Anurādhapura, also known as the Southern Monastery (Dakkhiṇavihāra = Dakkhiṇārāma). The *Mahāvamsa* refers to this *nikāya* as the Sāgalika or Sāgaliya school, probably after the name of a famous teacher. It is likely that the teacher or teachers of the *Sārasamāsa* belonged to this

¹ On the name Theriya, see: Cousins 2001, n. 23, and Gethin in Chapter 1 above.

school, which seems to have initially been rather small, but probably grew more important in the course of time.²

Evidence from outside Ceylon

Doxographical works

Looking first at the doxographical works, we find that three well-known doxographical treatises, all of Indian origin, but none surviving in an Indic original, present different pictures:

- a. The treatise on the Buddhist schools attributed to *Vasumitra makes no mention of any schools in Ceylon.³
- b. The writings attributed to *Bhavya or *Bhāviveka at most know only one Ceylon school, designated as Tāmraparṇīya or Tāmraśāṭīya.⁴
- c. Only a later work attributed to *Vinīdadeva knows all three.⁵

So these writings provide no support for the existence in Ceylon of three monastic *nikāyas* before the sixth century at the earliest.

Chinese pilgrims

The earliest of the Chinese pilgrims is Fa-hsien, who visited Ceylon in the early fifth century. He tells us that there were 5,000 monks in the Abhaya Monastery, 3,000 in the Mahāvihāra and 2,000 at the Cetiyapabbata monastery. But Fa-hsien stayed at the Abhaya Monastery, and his account relies on Abhaya Monastery sources,

² Mori 1988a. The *īkās* attribute views found in the commentaries of Buddhaghosa to this source. However, this only means that they found them there, not that the *Sārasamāsa* is as early as that.

³ Bareau 1954, Masuda 1925.

⁴ See my unpublished paper: Cousins 2010. Available from: <http://www.ocbs.org/images/fellows/lancearticle1.pdf>. Also Eckel 2008, pp. 115 and 119f.

⁵ Bareau 1956; Funayama 2001 dates Vinīdadeva to c. 660–720 AD.

which probably downplay the role of the Mahāvihāra. Note that Fahsien mentions just the three monasteries. There is no mention of even two fraternities, let alone three; indeed, the Jetavana school is not mentioned at all, unless it is meant by the reference to Cetiyaḥabbata. In fact, there does not seem to be any external confirmation of the existence of all three Sinhalese fraternities until I-ching at the end of the seventh century.

Hsüan-tsang at the beginning of the same century knows only two fraternities in Ceylon, and, probably, two in India, if his disputed reference to those who study Mahāyāna and *Sthavira teachings is a reference to the Abhayagirikas. Since the *Cūlavamsa* also does not explicitly refer to the presence of the third fraternity until around the beginning of the sixth century, it may be that the Jetavana school did not separate from the Abhayagirikas until late in the fifth century, and did not become prominent for some time.⁶ Probably the building of the Jetavana monastery (for members of the Southern Monastery) late in the reign of Mahāsena has been confused with the somewhat later event of the formation of the Sāgalika sect which was to be based there.

We can say that Hsüan-tsang provides some support for the existence in Ceylon of two, or just possibly three, long-established Nikāyas in the early fifth century.

In the Record of Hsüan-tsang, we read:

There are several hundred monasteries with more than twenty thousand monks who follow the teachings of both the Mahāyāna and the Sthavira schools. More than two hundred years after the arrival of the Buddha-dharma, they were divided into two separate sects, each specializing in its own theories. One was the Mahāvihāra sect, which refuted the Mahāyāna teachings and advocated Hīnayāna tenets. The other one was the Abhayagiri sect, which studied the teachings of both yānas (vehicles) and propagated the Tripiṭaka. The monks, strict and pure in practising the disciplinary rules, are experts in meditation and have brilliant wisdom. Many of them are model in conduct and serve as teachers of good behaviour.⁷

⁶ Mhv XXXIX 33, 41, 43.

⁷ Li 1996.

The first sentence seems to be what Hsüan-tsang had learned from contemporary sources, presumably either the Sinhalese monks he met in Kāñcipura or those at Bodhgayā – both will have been followers of Mahāyāna and unlikely to be from the Mahāvihāra. The remainder is probably from some historical source and perhaps represents the situation at some earlier date, e.g. the time of Fa-hsien.

As has been said, I-tsing in the late seventh century does know all three Sinhalese fraternities.

Inscriptional evidence

In 1955–56, during the excavation of a monastic site at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, a stone slab was discovered near the entrance to the *stūpa*.⁸ The slab contained a third century AD inscription, referring to:

*ācariyaṇaṃ theriyānaṃ vibhajavādānaṃ ... mahāvihāravāsinaṃ ...
vihāre*

in the monastery ... of the teachers of the Theriya school, the
Vibhajjavādas ... the Mahāvihāravāsins.

Here by way of comparison is the conclusion to the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa (Vism 711f.), where the elder who requested Buddhaghosa to write this work is described as:

*Vibhajja-vādi-seṭṭhānaṃ Theriyānaṃ yasassinaṃ,
Mahāvihāra-vāsinaṃ vaṃsa-jassa vibhāvino,*

a member of the lineage of the Mahāvihāravāsins, illustrious Theriyas,
best of Vibhajjavādins.

⁸ Sircar and Lahiri 1960. According to Sircar and Lahiri, the characters are similar to those of epigraphs of the reign of the Īkṣvāku king Vīrapuruṣadatta i.e., after the middle of the third century AD.

Summary

In sum, no source from outside Ceylon that can be securely dated prior to the fifth century AD knows of the existence of three fraternities on the island. The inscriptional evidence probably implies that the Mahāvihāravāsins wanted to identify themselves as distinct in the third century, presumably from the Abhayagirivāsins. That was perhaps not yet widely known outside the island. Many sources from the seventh century, some of which may go back to the sixth, are aware of all three. Outside sources then would suggest a date in the third century AD rather than the traditional first century BC for the breach between the Mahāvihāra and the Abhayagirivihāra and subsequent formation of two (and then three) fraternities on the island.

Evidence from inside Ceylon: The foundation of the Abhaya Monastery

The evidence of the Dīpavaṃsa

It is usually stated that the monastery associated with the *stūpa* at Abhaya Hill (Abhayagiri) was founded by King Abhaya, differentiated from other kings with the same rather frequent name of Abhaya by the locality identifier of Vaṭṭagāmaṇī. This would be in the period from 89–77 BC by the chronology of Mendis and others.⁹

The above claim is not really supported by our oldest source: the *Dīpavaṃsa*. In chapter XIX the first ten stanzas refer to the constructions, in the Mahāvihāra at Anurādhapura, of an earlier King Abhaya, known to later writers by his identifier of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī (161 BC–137 BC). Then come three stanzas which are taken by Geiger to

⁹ For simplicity, I shall use the ‘Mendis’ chronology exclusively in this paper; so those who prefer the Geiger chronology will need to add sixty years to the dates I mention. I will also use approximations as far as possible, rather than spuriously exact dates — for two reasons: firstly because, even if one chronology is correct, it is probably accurate only to within a decade and secondly because I shall mostly be referring to events which occurred at some indeterminate point in the reign of the given king.

refer to subsequent kings, but this is not indicated in the text and the natural reading is to take these as further works of the earlier King Abhaya (Duṭṭhagāmaṇī). Then comes the fourteenth stanza:

*Giri-nāma-nigaṇṭhassa vuṭṭh'-okāse tahiṃ kato
Abhaya-giriṃ ti paññatti vohāro¹⁰ samajāyatha. (14)*

The designation of Abhayagiri was made for that place which the Jain named Giri had inhabited. A monastery came into existence.

The natural way to take this is again as a work of the former King Abhaya. The confusion here is perhaps caused by the reference to the Jain ascetic with the unlikely name of 'Hill' (*giri*). It is often taken to refer to the story in the *Mahāvamsa* of the Jain named Giri who was contemptuous of the later King Abhaya (Vaṭṭagāmaṇī) as he fled the Tamils. But in fact it is far more likely to refer to the account (also in the *Mahāvamsa* in chapter IX, but presumably based on earlier sources) of the rebuilding of Anurādhapura by an even earlier King Abhaya (with the identifier of Paṇḍuka) i.e. Paṇḍukābhaya. In this account a whole area to the north of the city is assigned to different kinds of religious ascetics, including Brahmins, Ājīvakas, *paribbājakas*, *samaṇas* and various unnamed groups. Particularly prominent are the Jains. A house for a Jain with the more reasonable name of Jotiya (but cf. AMg: *joḍia*) and a *devakula* for one with the even less plausible name of Kumbhaṇḍa are mentioned. Of special relevance in the present context is the fact that we are told the Jain named Giri dwelt in this region together with many members of various sects.

The first thing to note about this passage is that as a whole it is anachronistic for the time of Paṇḍukābhaya (fourth century BC) Note in particular the reference to an area reserved for the Yonas (near the western gate). Although the terms Yona and Yavana are most probably derived, directly or indirectly, from the name of the easternmost group of the Greeks, the Ionians, after the time of Alexander the name could refer to the inhabitants of any realm outside India ruled by kings of Hellenistic Greek culture or descent. Archæological evidence has

¹⁰ Read *vihāro* for *vohāro* (influenced by the proximity of *paññatti*).

demonstrated the antiquity of Anurādhapura's trading links but even so a significant presence of Near Eastern traders is not likely even for the time of the Emperor Asoka in the third century BC. Yet the passage has definite Asokan resonances – resonances that is to say with the Asoka of the inscriptions rather than the less ecumenical Asoka of the commentaries and chronicles. In fact, the model of a kingship giving support to all religious traditions recalls also another more immediate monarch: the Tamil ruler, Eļāra, of the early second century BC, who is equally depicted as an ecumenical and just king. Very probably it was a widespread, but not universal, ideal of kingship during the Mauryan period and after.

The scenario is then reasonably plausible for the second century BC. At that time, during a longish period of Tamil rule, (and perhaps at no other time in Sinhalese history) an important presence of Jains in Anurādhapura is quite likely, given the probable strength of Jainism in early South India generally around this time. Does this mean that we should accept that the name Abhayagiri originates from a combination of the name Abhaya with the name of the Jain Giri? *I think not*. Firstly, that kind of combination of names is typical of folk etymology but very unlikely to be historically correct. Secondly, no one would introduce the name of a Jain ascetic into the name of a Buddhist monastery. What we have here is the name of a locality: Abhaya Hill (used quite plausibly at some point by various non-Buddhist religious groups), a locality which eventually acquired a folk etymology, unlikely to have any historical basis. (It is worth noting also that the main reservoir to the west of the city was the Abhaya tank or Abhayavāpi – attributed to the same rebuilding of Anurādhapura by King Abhaya, centuries earlier.)¹¹

So the *Dīpavaṃsa* tells us that a monastery was built at a place that had acquired the name of Abhaya Hill by King Abhaya i.e., Dutthagāmaṇī. It doesn't in fact say that Abhaya Hill was the name of the monastery and in fact usually refers to it as the Abhaya Monastery (Abhayārāma). It is probably the *stūpa* which is referred to as the Abhaya Hill *stūpa* i.e., the *stūpa* at Abhaya Hill.

¹¹ Abhayapura is also supposed to be an old name for Anurādhapura.

Continuing in the *Dīpavaṃsa*, the next two stanzas simply name five kings who ruled for twelve years and tells us that the noble named Abhaya, the son of king Saddhātissa, slew the last of these and reigned. This of course is the king now usually referred to as Vaṭṭagāmaṇī. The first half of the next stanza is:

Abhayagirim patiṭṭhāpesi silā-thūpaṃ cetiya-m-antare. (17)

Oldenberg renders this as: ‘He erected the Abhayagiri (monastery) between the Silāthūpa and the Cetiya.’ I would prefer to translate: ‘He erected the stone *stūpa* of Abhaya Hill [which is] within the shrine’ or ‘He erected the Abhaya Hill shrine with a stone *stūpa* inside’. In fact, this could refer to several possibilities, given the practice of building one *stūpa* around another and given also that *cetiya* can have a wider meaning than *stūpa*. In any case, there is no reference to a monastery. Of course, a misreading of this line is *by itself sufficient* to account for the later belief that the Abhaya Hill monastery was built by this king.

It is significant that the *Dīpavaṃsa* records no donations to the new monastery or embellishments to its *stūpa* by subsequent kings for the next two hundred years. It is in the reign of Gajabāhu c. 125 AD that the Great Stūpa in the Abhaya Monastery was constructed (Dīp XXII 13; cf. Mhv XXXV 119f.). This must refer to the monumental and highly impressive *stūpa*, which is still found at Anurādhapura. That *stūpa* may have been enlarged at some subsequent date or dates, but the use of the term *mahāthūpa* is quite enough to show that the Abhaya Monastery was now a place of some considerable importance. The same king also constructed a pond for the monks of the Abhaya Monastery. Fifty years later King Tissa (distinguished as the Younger Tissa) erected an Uposatha hall in the ‘delightful Abhaya Monastery’ (Dīp XXII 23; cf. Mhv XXXVI 7f.) as well as constructing various works at the long established Mahāvihāra together with a monastery and a *stūpa* within the Southern Monastery (Dakkhiṇārāma). (His elder brother had redug the pond.)

A further fifty years on, King Vohārikatissa erected the topmost stone parasol of the Great Stūpa in the Abhaya Monastery (Dīp XXII

39).¹² He also constructed a golden *stūpa* in the delightful Mahāmegha wood (in the Mahāvihāra) and one in the beautiful Abhaya Monastery: ‘at both the most excellent monasteries’. It is interesting to note that it was this same king who gave such conspicuous support to both major monasteries in what looks like a policy of equal treatment who was also responsible with his minister Kapila for the suppression of specious doctrines (*vitaṇḍavāda*). This could have been a *Vinaya* dispute, as we are told that they proclaimed much which was unfitting (*akappiya*) but the use of the term *vitaṇḍavāda* may indicate some kind of doctrinal position. [See Appendix below.] The only other relevant donation is perhaps that of King Abhaya (distinguished as Meghavaṇṇa) in the middle of the third century AD who built an Uposatha hall within the Southern Monastery.¹³ The remarks concerning King Mahāsenā at the end of the fourth century no doubt refer to religious events which are not recorded in detail in the *Dīpavaṃsa* itself, but undoubtedly involve support for the Abhaya Monastery.

In summary, then, the *Dīpavaṃsa* suggests that the Abhaya Monastery was founded on Abhaya Hill in the reign of King Abhaya (= Duṭṭhagāmaṇī) in the second century BC and a stone *stūpa* on Abhaya Hill was established by another King Abhaya (= Vaṭṭagāmaṇī) in the early first century BC. Major construction work is recorded in the second century AD but there is no explicit suggestion of unorthodoxy and some praise. No mention is made of any formation of a separate sect based at Abhaya Hill. The importance of this is partly that the *Dīpavaṃsa* is the oldest of our historical sources. It is certainly prior to the time of Buddhaghosa and probably dates from soon after the end of the reign of Mahāsenā around the beginning of the fourth century. More crucial, however, is the fact that it is a rather crudely constructed work and plainly strings together material from several, much earlier, sources. The most obvious reason for its failure to portray the formation of the Abhayagiri school is that *its sources are older* than the formation of a separate Abhayagiri school.

¹² Oldenberg takes it as referring to the Abhaya Monastery and to the Great Stūpa in the Mahāvihāra. But it is odd to speak of putting a parasol on a monastery.

¹³ Dīp XXII 58; cf. Mhv XXXVI 107.

The evidence of the works of 'Buddhaghosa'

In general, the authors of the works traditionally attributed to Buddhaghosa do not refer to the Abhayagiri school by name. They do refer to the above-mentioned views of the Vitaṇḍavādin. In the *Kathāvatthu* Commentary we hear of views attributed by name to nearly all of the traditional 18 schools, as well as those of a few later schools, some of which may originate in the early centuries AD. The simplest explanation for this is that the *main sources* for these commentaries pre-date the division of the Ceylon school into two or more fraternities.¹⁴

One exception to this is found in the introductory verses to the *Abhidhamma* Commentary.¹⁵ Here the author (a senior contemporary of Buddhaghosa) states explicitly that he is giving the conclusions of the Mahāvihāravāsins, unmixed with the views of other fraternities. This is surely a reference to the other two fraternities on the island and probably establishes that they both existed in the fourth or fifth century AD. (A similar statement is found in the conclusion to the *Abhidhammāvatāra*.) If the subcommentaries are correct, the commentaries do refer to the other schools, but not by name – they are simply indicated as ‘some people’ (*keci*), ‘others’ (*apare*) and the like.

At first sight, this general picture seems to be in conflict with the evidence of the *Mahāvamsa*. So we will now turn to that.

The evidence of the Mahāvamsa

Two things we should remember about the *Mahāvamsa* are firstly that it is much later than the *Dīpavamsa* – perhaps two to three centuries later. Secondly, it is a much better written work, but sometimes a less reliable one. For some topics, but not others, it may have had access to some of the same sources as the earlier chronicle. So at least Geiger

¹⁴ Important for assessing the age and nature of Buddhaghosa's sources is: Lottermoser 1982.

¹⁵ Dhs-a 2:
nikāy'antaraladdhīhi, asammissaṃ anākulaṃ |
Mahāvihāravāsīnaṃ, dīpayanto vinicchayaṃ ||

has argued, but this is far from certain. It also draws on material from the general commentarial tradition. It sometimes badly misunderstands the source materials, as Gombrich's study of the chronology of the early *vinaya* masters has shown. Like all historical works prior to the eighteenth century (and many since), it has its own agenda and must be carefully interpreted within that context. In effect, all this means that we have to be wary of uncorroborated statements in the *Mahāvamsa*.

The *Mahāvamsa* does not record any foundation of the Abhaya Monastery in the reign of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī. This would be more convincing if it didn't also omit detailed reference to any constructions of his outside the general area to the south and south-west of the capital city of Anurādhapura. Of course, it makes much of the major building works in the area of the Mahāvihāra: the copper-roofed Lohapāsāda,¹⁶ the Gold-banded (*soṇṇamālin*; Si: *ruvanveli*) Great Stūpa and the Marīcavaṭṭivihāra. In the sixth century AD after subsequent enlargements and reconstruction this must have seemed an enormously impressive legacy. The *Mahāvamsa* does, however, record that Duṭṭhagāmaṇī constructed one hundred monasteries (Mhv XXXII 26) without specifying where they were. We may suspect that sections in its sources which included mention of the initial founding of the Abhaya Monastery have been omitted. Perhaps Mahānāma (who plainly wrote in the Mahāvihāra tradition) was reluctant to associate the rival Abhaya Monastery with the heroic figure of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī.

We may also be suspicious of the story of the contemptuous shout of the Jain Giri, as Vaṭṭagāmaṇī was fleeing from Anurādhapura. This story, as we have it, is plainly based upon a misunderstanding of the reference in the *Dīpavamsa*. It is known to the *ṭīkā* to the *Mahāvamsa*, but this probably dates from between the eighth and tenth centuries. In fact, Geiger identifies a textual problem at this point and omits a stanza and a half from his edition of the *Mahāvamsa*.

This is worth giving in full:

*Tato te Damiḷā yuddhaṃ rañṇā saha pavattayum,
Kolambālaka-sāmantā yuddhe rājā parājito. (42)*

¹⁶ According to Dīp XX 24ff. the copper roofing was added by Saddhātissa in his reconstruction and only then was the name Lohapāsāda adopted.

Titthârāma-duvārena rathârūḷho palāyati.
Paṇḍukābhaya-rājena titthârāmo hi kārīto.
Vasito va sadā āsi eka-vīsati-rājusū. (–)
Taṃ disvāna palāyantaṃ nigaṇṭho Giri-nāmako:
‘Palāyati mahā-kāla-sīhalo’ ti bhusaṃ ravi. (43)
Taṃ sutvāna mahārājā: ‘siddhe mama mano-rathe
Vihāraṃ ettha kāressaṃ’ icc evaṃ cintayī tadā. (44)

Geiger omits the unnumbered six *pāda* stanza, mainly on the grounds that such stanzas are always spurious in this text. It certainly looks like a gloss. One could however restore:

Titthârāma-duvārena rathârūḷho palāyati.
‘Palāyati mahā-kāla-sīhalo’ ti bhusaṃ ravi. (43, restored)

I would translate:

Then those Damiḷas made war on the king.
 The king was defeated in battle near Kolambālaka. (42)
 Mounted on his chariot he fled by the Titthârāma gate.
 A loud cry was raised: ‘the big black Sīhala is fleeing’. (43)
 Hearing this, the king thought at that time
 ‘If I get my wish, I will construct a monastery here’. (44)

Verse 44 could also be a later addition, but it could equally refer to the enlargement of a previously existing Abhaya Monastery. Although we speak simply of monasteries here, these city monasteries tended to grow into substantial monastic complexes over time. Subsequent writers tend to see this as all happening at the foundation, rather than as a process of development over centuries – almost certainly the normal case. So they would probably not realize that the so-called Titthârāma might have co-existed with the Abhaya Monastery for a long while. Equally, the gate might have retained the name of Titthârāma gate long after there ceased to be a Jain presence in the area.

During the course of Vaṭṭagāmaṇī’s exile he was helped by a monk named Kupikkala or Kutthikkula Mahātissa, first of all in the Vessagiri forest and later in Malaya (at Mātuvelaṅga in the region of Sāmagalla). Later he saw the same monk again and had a *Buddhapūjā* performed

in the Acchagalla monastery. Then another monk, who is referred to as the learned Tissa and as *catunikāyika*, enters the scene. He appears to be an inhabitant of a monastery known as Hambugallaka (vll. include Amba- and Kamba-).¹⁷ Both Tissa and Mahātissa feature together shortly afterwards in reconciling the king with his alienated followers.

We are told that the king's first act on recovering Anurādhapura was to destroy the Jain monastery (Nigaṅṭhārāma) and construct there a monastery with twelve *pariveṇas*. The date of the construction of the Abhayagiri monastery is given as a little less than 218 years after the founding of the Great Monastery. The figure is itself obviously symbolic but it is clearly intended to imply that the construction began immediately after the king recovered control of the capital city. The king then summoned the elders and gave the monastery to Mahātissa who was the first of the two monks to assist him. The *Dīpavaṃsa* already tells us the names of five monasteries constructed by the leading warriors of Vaṭṭagāmaṇī, including the Dakkhiṇavihāra (mentioned first) and the *Mahāvamsa* repeats this but adds that each of the five monasteries was given to Tissa who got monks (according to the *ṭīkā* those who had mastered all five *Nikāyas*) to inhabit them. The monks in the King's own monastery became numerous because of his full provision of support.

The evidence for the first schism

Then comes the startling event of Mahātissa's expulsion from the Mahāvihāra because of *kulasaṃsagga* (Mhv XXXIII 95ff.). This offence seems to correspond to the *gihisaṃsagga* of the *Khandhaka* and *Parivāra*, part of a *Vinaya* complex ultimately associated with the thirteenth *saṅghādisesa* offence.¹⁸ His pupil Bahulamassutissa 'Bigbeard Tissa' and his party went to Abhaya Hill to live. The following verses (which are not commented upon in the *ṭīkā*) tell us:

¹⁷ Possibly Acchagalla and Hambugallaka are versions of the same name.

¹⁸ Vin I 321f.; 330; 332; II 4; 7; V 121f. These passages have both *gihisaṃsagga* and *gihisaṃsaṭṭha*, where Mhv XXXIII 95 has both *kulehi saṃsaṭṭham* and either *kulasaṃsagga-* or *kulasaṃsaṭṭha-*.

Henceforth those monks did not come to the Mahāvihāra.
 In this way the Abhayagirikas departed from the Theravāda. (97)
 The sages of the Southern Monastery separated from the Abhayagirikas.
 So the monks who were separated from the Theravādins
 were divided in two. (98)

The Sinhalese manuscripts contain a further stanza that Geiger rejects:

In order to increase the bhikkhus of the Great and Abhaya
 [Monasteries] dwelling in the island,
 King Vaṭṭagāmaṇī gave what is known as *patti*.¹⁹

It is clear that the passage is either badly constructed or a later addition; for verse 99 continues on from verse 94 (or possibly from verse 96). The most likely explanation for this has to be that these four verses i.e., 95–98 (and probably the stanza rejected by Geiger too) were added later to the *Mahāvamsa*, but before the date of the *ṭīkā*. The only other alternative is that they have been clumsily added by Mahānāma himself from a different source. Even if the latter is the case, it is not actually clear that the first two verses are intended to refer to the period of Vaṭṭagāmaṇī. The last two verses obviously refer to a later period, although they give no indication of this. It could also be that the first two verses equally refer to a later time.

The natural objection to this is the name of Mahātissa, but there are problems with that.²⁰ But let us consider the question of other evidence for the division of the Abhaya Monastery and the Mahāvihāra

¹⁹ i.e., he transferred ‘merit’ in some way.

²⁰ Vjb to Sp II 473f.: *Piturājā Damiḷassa parājito Rohaṇe soḷasavassāni vasitvā mittāmaccaparivuto ‘rajjaṃ gaṇhāmī’ ti āgantvā antarāmagge appamattakassa kāraṇā ekaṃ amaccaṃ ghātāpesi. Sesā bhayena palāyantā araṇṇe antarāmagge corehi viluttā Hambugallakavihāraṃ gantvā tattha Cātunīkāyikatissatthero tesam saṅgahaṃ katvā puna ānetvā raṇṇo dassesi, tehi saddhiṃ rajjaṃ gahetvā rājā Hambugallakattissattherassa Abhayagirivihāraṃ akāsi. Sesā pi ekekahāraṃ kārāpesuṃ kira.* Sp II has: *paṭisanthārānisaṃsadīpanatthañ ca Coranāgavattu, bhātarā saddhiṃ Jambudīpagatassa Mahānāgaraṇṇo vatthu, Piturājassa rajje catunnaṃ amaccānaṃ vatthu, Abhayacoravattū ti evam ādīni bahūni vatthūni Mahā-**atthakathāyaṃ** vithārato vuttāni.* The passage at Sp II is missing in Chin. Sp p. 332.

into two distinct fraternities (*nikāya*) or teachings (*vāda*). As we saw, the *Dīpavaṃsa* does not explicitly refer to any such division. It does indicate some conflicts from the third century AD onwards, but no more than that. In its account of the eighteen kinds of teaching it specifically mentions six additional teachings which arose later. It does not mention any separate teaching in Ceylon. This can only mean that its main sources knew nothing of any such division. The same is the case for the corresponding passage in the *Kathāvatthu* Commentary. It is only with the *Mahāvamsa* (Mhv V 13) that we find the addition of two Ceylon schools to the list of *vādas*: the Dhammaruciya and the Sāgaliya.

None of this gives any real support for the claim that the Abhayagirivāsins became a separate school in the first century BC. Given the absence of secure evidence prior to the sixth century AD, the only safe assumption is that they did not separate before the third century AD. Of course, there is no doubt that a member of the Abhayagiri school would have taken the view that his tradition is authentic and ancient. He might well have seen it as continuing from the foundation of the Abhaya Monastery and have viewed the tradition of the Mahāvihāra as divergent and corrupt. Indeed, it is not necessarily the case that the two traditions would have agreed on the date of the schism while, of course, a historian in possession of the facts might easily choose a different date again as the effective time of divergence.

In fact, we now know a great deal more about the way in which large monasteries in royal capitals tend to develop over time. This can be quite simply expressed as follows. Strict, impressive monasteries – initially perhaps of quite a small size – tend to gather support from the laity. This popularity will naturally lead to interest and financial assistance from the power-holding elite. Over time the monastery will grow greatly. Inevitably, it must, sooner or later, become a powerful institution that kings will see as a threat to their power and revenues. One very common response to this is to turn to some newer monastic group which may be seen as stricter or more genuine in its practice. In later times a new ordination may be introduced from outside, enabling the king to take control of monasteries and even of monastic lands. It is clear to the historian that, in practice, things are not usually as black and white as they tend to be painted by reformers. Moreover,

a monastery or monastic fraternity may be at one time the focus for reform and at another, later time may become the primary reforming group.

Given this perspective, we must suppose that by the second century AD the Abhaya Monastery had become a significant rival to the Mahāvihāra and was attracting significant support. The evidence for this is the record of royal donations and constructions preserved for us in the *Dīpavaṃsa*. Since the chronicle is only a couple of centuries later in date, this is quite good evidence. The propensity of Sinhalese kings for marking their buildings with dedicatory inscriptions means that oral tradition within a given monastery will be significantly reinforced. Moreover, many more second century inscriptions will have been still extant (and readable) at the time of the composition of the *Dīpavaṃsa*. But we must remember that growth in support doesn't yet constitute the formation of a separate fraternity.

The separation of the Abhayagirikas

There is then no evidence that conclusively establishes the existence of a separate fraternity (*nikāya*) centred upon the Abhaya Monastery before the reign of Mahāsenā (274–301 AD) or his predecessor. Nothing at all in the *Dīpavaṃsa* and very little in the *Mahāvāṃsa*. Nor is there any clear evidence for such a separation in the works of Buddhaghosa. The *Vinaya* Commentary does describe a dispute during the reign of king Bhātiya (143–167 AD) between the elders living in the Abhaya Monastery and those living in the Mahāvihāra.²¹ But the description of the dispute and its presentation before the king's minister in no way implies that the two monasteries had formed separate fraternities, rather the converse. Moreover, it is clear from the account that the *Vinaya* of the two was virtually identical – the dispute turned upon a single phrase which looks suspiciously like a gloss.²²

²¹ Sp 583. Other discussions: Hinüber 1995, pp. 36–38; Nolot 1999.

²² Despite what is sometimes suggested, in the *Vinaya commentary* account the minister does not give a judgment in favour of one side. Rather, the point of the passage is that despite his skill in languages he can, amusingly, do no better than indicate in each case the implication of their textual reading.

Other commentarial references to the Abhaya Monastery are remarkably few. This is no doubt due to the fact that most of the contents of the main commentaries derive from a period prior to the rise of the Abhaya Monastery to importance. So apart from the dispute just referred to, there is a mention in a list of elders in the *Jātaka* Commentary (IV 490) of a monk named Mahādeva who lived in the Abhaya Monastery. The only other reference in any extant *aṭṭhakathā* is in the *Dīgha* Commentary (Sv II 478) which refers to great monasteries with twelve thousand monks and then remarks that they were just like the Abhayagiri, Cetiyaṭṭhā, Cittalapabbata and Mahā monasteries.²³

I assume then, that the separation of a separate fraternity based on the Abhaya Monastery in fact occurs in the reign of Mahāsena or a little before. If this is correct, then the writing of the *Dīpavaṃsa* with its conclusion in that reign makes perfect sense. The point of the chronicle is to glorify the history of the Mahāvihāra in response to the events which brought about the first formal schism in the Saṃgha in Ceylon. But the account of the schism is in fact very simple. There is no mention of *Vetullavāda* nor of any prior events in the reign of the king's father. It simply says that in trying to decide which of two sets of bhikkhus were *dhammavādin* and *lajjin*, he came under the influence of those who were *adhammavādin* and *alajjin*. We may deduce that a schism had broken out and the king set about trying to resolve it. Unfortunately, from the point of view of the Mahāvihāra, he came under the influence of the wrong people and attempted a forcible reunification which he probably saw as a reform.

What is interesting here is that the chronicle uses unusually strong language in referring to Evil Mitta and Wicked Soṇa and others – they are like rotting corpses and compared to black flies in their behaviour (*nīlamakkhikā*). They plot in secret to bring harm to those who keep their vows. Shameless, they taught false *dhamma* for the sake of gain. This strongly suggests that major events of the kind described in the *Mahāvamsa* had occurred. Yet, on the natural reading of the

²³ B^c reads: *Abhayagiri-Cetiyaṭṭhā-Cittalapabbata-Mahāvihāra-sadisā va*. E^c omits mention of the Mahāvihāra. There do not appear to be any other mentions in any text prior to the *Mūlaṭṭhā*.

Dīpavaṃsa, Evil Mitta and Wicked Soṇa are definitely described as *bhikkhus*, whereas for the later writers Soṇa was a minister and only Saṅghamitta was a monk. Moreover, there is no indication of the latter's Tamil origins nor any mention of the other main events described in the later chronicle.

How far then can we trust the *Mahāvāṃsa* account? I do not believe we can. Geiger argues that the *Mahāvāṃsa* is based upon earlier sources and this is no doubt true. Nothing, however, establishes that those sources are as old as the sources of the *Dīpavaṃsa* and nothing prevents those sources from containing much material which is later than the *Dīpavaṃsa* in date. Where earlier sources are silent, later elaborations may easily develop and in the absence of competition, they will persist. Particularly likely is the tendency to attribute schismatic tendencies to the foundation of rival centres – we must bear in mind that an Abhayagirika or Sāgalika monk, if asked the origin of his sect, is likely to date it back to the foundation of his monastery.

Summary

The evidence of the *Dīpavaṃsa* and the commentarial literature would suggest that a formal division between the monks of the Mahāvihāra and those of the Abhayagirivihāra probably does not predate the third century AD.²⁴ If so, it is likely that they had fairly similar Canons. Below I will examine how far this is supported by the evidence of the subcommentaries.

If the Pali Canon was written down in the Pali language largely as we know it in the first century BC, then the Abhayagiri school will have had a Canon in Pali. On the other hand, the texts may have been written down, then or a little later, in a form of Middle Indian close to the inscriptional Prakrit used in most of India before the rise of Sanskrit. If so, the Abhayagiri monastery might have initially used some type of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit close to the 'Buddhist Hybrid Pali'²⁵ perhaps used in the Mahāvihāra in the third century AD.

²⁴ See however, Kieffer-Pulz 2000, p. 72f.

²⁵ By 'Buddhist Hybrid Pali' I mean a language that bears the same relationship to the classical Pali of Buddhaghosa that Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit bears to

II What is known about the Abhayagirivāsins

Works sometimes attributed to the Abhayagiri School

Before addressing the teachings belonging to the Abhayagiri school which are mentioned in the subcommentaries, it should be mentioned that there are four extant texts which have been identified by scholars as possibly belonging to the Abhayagiri school: three of these survive in Chinese translation and one in Pali.²⁶ In addition, there are many anonymous short texts used for chanting and so on which survive from the mediæval period – it is quite possible that some of these have a non-Mahāvihāra origin.

Taking the four extant texts in order, the **Upālipariṭṭhāsūtra* preserved in Chinese appears to be an appendix to the *Vinayapīṭaka*, along similar lines to the *Parivāra* with which it shares some parallel material. So it has been suggested that this was the Abhayagirivāsin version of the *Parivāra*.²⁷ In this context it should be noted that we do not know whether the Abhayagiri school used Sanskrit or Pali or a mixture of the two in their writings. Occasional citations in Pali do not prove anything, since Sanskrit quotations are normally rendered into Pali in the Pali commentarial tradition. Even so, the **Upālipariṭṭhāsūtra* may very well belong to another school from outside Ceylon and no conclusions can be drawn from it.²⁸

For both of the next two I rely on the English translations from Chinese, although these are apparently in need of revision.²⁹ The *Vimuttimaggā* is an account of the Buddhist path along the lines of the *Visuddhimaggā* of Buddhaghosa, although shorter and probably

the Classical Sanskrit generally used by Northern Indian Buddhist writers after the fourth century AD or earlier.

²⁶ Norman 1991.

²⁷ Stache-Rosen 1984.

²⁸ Norman 1991, p. 45.

²⁹ Ven. Nyanatusita is currently working on a revised annotated version of the *Vimuttimaggā* translation.

earlier.³⁰ K.R. Norman³¹ and Kate Crosby³² have questioned the idea that this is a text of the Abhayagiri school, but it does contain a number of ideas which were later on attributed to that school. This is addressed in detail below, but we can note here the idea that there is a particular kind of *rūpa* called sleepiness (*middha*)³³ and the notion that ascetic practices (*dhut'-aṅga*) are a concept to which the first triplet of the *Abhidhamma-mātikā* therefore does not apply.³⁴ We can also point to the exegesis of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* expansion of the idea that the *dhamma* and specifically the first *jhāna* are good in three ways. But there is debate as to whether these ideas represent a school-specific position or simply an earlier time when there was greater fluidity of viewpoint in the Mahāvihāra. We should however ignore suggestions that this might be a work produced outside Ceylon, if this means in a tradition not derived from Ceylon. It is clearly in the Ceylon *abhidhamma* tradition and we have no evidence that such ideas were current in other schools.³⁵ For the purpose of this article I would regard the term Abhayagirivāsin as applicable to writers of that tradition in India, just as South Indian writers like Dhammapāla or the non-Sinhalese Buddhaghosa would be considered Mahāvihāravāsin.

There is a Chinese translation of a *Vinaya* commentary related to the *Samantappāsādikā*, attributed to Buddhaghosa.³⁶ It refers to the *Visuddhimagga* and seems clearly based on *Samantappāsādikā*, but differs in places. It was probably obtained from Abhayagiri sources and could be an Abhayagiri recension or be based upon a manuscript

³⁰ Bapat 1937, Bapat 1964, Ehara, Soma, and Kheminda 1961 = Vim Trsl. Bapat suggested that the manuscript brought to China would have been obtained by Guṇabhadra, the translator's teacher in China, when he visited Ceylon on his way to China in 435 AD.

³¹ Norman 1991, *ibid*.

³² Crosby 1999; see also now: Anālayo 2009.

³³ Bapat 1939; Skilling 1994.

³⁴ Vim Trsl. p. 37; Mḥ to Vism 79f.

³⁵ Of course, Anurādhapura was a major centre attracting monks from far afield and affiliated monastic groups had certainly spread from there to the Tamil country and the Deccan at an early date. But there is no reason to doubt that Pali forms of Buddhism in South-East Asia came there originally from Ceylon, either directly or second-hand from the Āndhra region.

³⁶ Bapat and Hirakawa 1970 = Chin. Sp.

with Abhayagirivāsin additions and corrections, but it seems more probable that the Chinese translator has been eclectic in places.

The *Saddhamm'opāyana* is a literary composition in the form of a letter, attributed to an Ānanda who is given the title Abhayagirikavicakravartī in a commentary on *Saddhamm'opāyana*. Since at least one definitely Abhayagiri view is given in this work, it probably is an Abhayagiri work. That is the notion of twelve *puññakiriyāvatthu* (see below). Saddhatissa lists a number of other unusual statements, some of which might be Abhayagirivāsin.³⁷ It should be noted that the whole work is structured on the basis of the three *apāyas*³⁸ and the twelve *puññakiriyāvatthu* which provide fifteen out of nineteen chapters. Since the latter list is not usual for standard Theravāda and is known as an Abhayagirivāsin teaching, and given its central role in the work, it seems likely that the identification as an Abhayagirivāsin work is correct. So this is probably the only work of that school which survives in Pali.³⁹

References to named works and authors

Three texts and one teacher of the Abhayagirivāsins are known by name:

³⁷ Saddhatissa 1965, pp. 59–63.

³⁸ It is probably not the case that Saddh 5 is utilizing a list of three *apāyas* as against the list of four which is standard in Pali. Rather, it is referring to three of the four *apāyas*, extracted and given the name of 'apāya' from the list of the eight *akkhaṇa*, as already at Vv-a 193.

³⁹ Norman 1991 suggests that it could be the work of an author writing in the Abhayagiri monastery after the unification of the monastic *nikāyas* in the twelfth century and hence not Abhayagirivāsin in the usual sense. That is possible, but we do not know whether Abhayagirivāsin teachings continued in that monastery or, if they were rejected, were reintroduced by monks returning from India or elsewhere at a later date. There is considerable doubt as to how far later accounts of the unification can be relied upon, given discrepancies in inscriptional evidence. See Gunawardhana 1966; Gunawardana 1979.

Khuddasikkhā of the Abhayagirivāsins

A *Khuddasikkhā* is mentioned twice in the *ṭīkā* to the *Khuddasikkhā* (Khuddas) (of the Mahāvihāravāsins) known to us. It is attributed once to the Uttaravihāravāsins and once to the Abhayagirivāsins, but these must be references to the same work. In the first case, the *ṭīkā* proposes an amendment to *Khuddasikkhā* which appears to have originally added *vasā* to the five permissible *bhesajja* foods restricted to seven days of use.⁴⁰ The addition in Dhammasiri's *Khuddasikkhā* is attributed to the influence of the *Khuddasikkhā* of the Uttaravihāravāsins.⁴¹ The corresponding verse in that is quoted as:

*sappi navanītaṃ telaṃ, madhu phāṇitapañcamaṃ.
acchamacchavasādi ca, honti sattāhakālikā ti ||*

The *ṭīkā* objects to this because it has the consequence of restricting the use of *vasā* in case of illness to seven days instead of being indefinite. It indicates that for the orthodox tradition (*amhākaṃ*) *vasā* is nowhere specified as restricted to seven days.⁴²

In commenting on the chapter on confession in the *Khuddasikkhā* (Khuddas XLII) the *ṭīkā* notes that, when some manuscripts give a formula for confessing offences that require confession, it is based on the *Khuddasikkhā* of the Abhayagirivāsins. It cites that as giving the formula: *Ahaṃ, āyasmā, sambahulā pāṭidesanīyā āpattiyo*

⁴⁰ Khuddas VIII 6: *sappi nonītatelāni, madhu phāṇitaṃ eva ca, sattāhakālikā* ... This is the reading in E^s and B^c and it is this which is proposed by the *ṭīkā*. The original reading appears to have been something like: *sappi nonītatelāni, madhu ca phāṇitaṃ vasā, sattāhakālikā* ...

⁴¹ Khuddas-pt 114: *Therena pana Uttaravihāravāsīnaṃ Khuddasikkhāya āgatanayena vuttaṃ. Tesam pana:*
*sappi navanītaṃ telaṃ, madhu phāṇitapañcamaṃ.
acchamacchavasādi ca, honti sattāhakālikā ti ||
evam āgataṃ. Amhākaṃ pana visuṃ sattāhakālike āgataṭṭhānaṃ n'atthī ti vadanti. Upaparikkhitabbaṃ.*

⁴² Khuddas-pt 114: *Amhākaṃ pana visuṃ sattāhakālike āgataṭṭhānaṃ natthī ti vadanti. Amend visuṃ to vasāya, cf. Khuddas-ṭ 300: Ṭīkāyaṃ pana vasāya sattāhakālike āgataṭṭhānaṃ natthī ti vadanti ti vatvā taṃ upaparikkhitabban ti vasāya sattāhakālikattam āsaṃkiyaṃ vuttaṃ.*

*āpanno, tāyo paṭidesemi. Ahaṃ, āyasmā, ekaṃ pāṭidesanīyaṃ āpattiṃ āpanno. Taṃ paṭidesemi.*⁴³ The *ṭīkā* gives the correct formula as found at Vin IV 176 and followed in subsequent commentaries.⁴⁴ This could imply that the Abhayagirivāsins had a different version of the *Suttavibhaṅga* at this point, but may only mean that they had standardized the confession formula to accord with that for other types of offence.

These comments in *Khuddasikkhāporāṇaṭīkā* may indicate an awareness that the Mahāvihāra *Khuddasikkhā* was a rewritten version of the Abhayagirivāsins *Khuddasikkhā* that sometimes retained elements that were inappropriate in a Mahāvihāravāsins *vinaya* context.

Mahāvamsa of the Uttaravihāravāsins

The *ṭīkā* to the *Mahāvamsa* (Mhv-ṭ 134) attributes a slightly different version of the listing of the descendants of Okkāka in chapter two of the *Mahāvamsa* to the *Mahāvamsa* of the *Uttaravihāravāsins*. The main difference is the addition of an additional king named Bhagusakka. It is possible that a careful examination of the *ṭīkā* could identify other material likely to be from this source.

Aṭṭhakathā of the Uttaravihāravāsins

The *ṭīkā* to the *Mahāvamsa* mentions eight times the *Aṭṭhakathā* of the Uttaravihāravāsins or *Uttaravihāra-aṭṭhakathā*.⁴⁵ All these mentions are from the portion of the *Mahāvamsa* dealing with history prior to Devānampiyatissa. In most cases additional or slightly variant details are cited, but in one case agreement between the *Aṭṭhakathā* [of the Mahāvihāra] and that of the Uttaravihāra is pointed out. In several cases the author points out that he is giving this information in brief to

⁴³ Khuddas-ṭ 202: *Ahaṃ, bhante, ekaṃ pāṭidesanīyāpattiṃ, dve, sambahulā pāṭidesanīyāpattiyo āpajjin ti imaṃ pana yesu potthakesu likhitaṃ, taṃ Abhayagirivāsinaṃ Khuddasikkhāvasena dassitaṃ kira.*

⁴⁴ E.g. Kkh (E^c 2003) 247.

⁴⁵ 125; 155; 177; 187; 247; 249; 289; 290.

avoid creating an obstacle to the orthodox position (*samayâvirodha*). It is evident from the references, however, that the Uttaravihâra had a commentary with similar material to that in the commentaries which are part of the sources of the *Mahāvamsa*.

The Teacher Rāhula (Rāhulācariya, Rāhulapāda)

One teacher is mentioned by name. That is Rāhulācariya. He is clearly their most famous author, and he may have played a role equivalent to that of Buddhaghosa for the Mahāvihāra. If so, we may suspect that he played a part in the compilation of the *Aṭṭhakathā* of the Uttaravihāravāsins. The *Vajirabuddhi-ṭīkā* refers to the view that the wording in the introduction to the *Samantappāsādikā* is intended to specifically exclude both non-Buddhist teachers and such teachers within the Buddhist dispensation as the teacher Rāhula.⁴⁶ The *Netti-ṭīkā* explains a view attributed to ‘some’ in the *Netti* Commentary as belonging to the Abhayagirivāsins. This view explains that *akkhara* (syllable) is ‘teaching by the mind due to the non-perishing (*akkharaṇa*) of the utterance’.⁴⁷ The *ṭīkā* indicates that the Abhayagirivāsins referred to the teaching of the *abhidhamma* as teaching by mind, and elaborates: ‘since the teacher Rāhula said that the teaching by the mind on the part of those with pure compassion is called *akkhara* because it does not perish’.⁴⁸

The view in question is given in more detail in the *Niddesa* Commentary and by Sāriputta in his *Vinaya-ṭīkā*: ‘Some, however, say that teaching executed by the mind by those with pure compassion because of the purified effort at the three doors [of those to be taught] is referred to as *akkhara* because it is not spoken or taught by speech.

⁴⁶ Vjb to Sp I 1: *Keci pubbācariyā ti vutte lokācariyā pi, sāsane Rāhulācariyādayo pi saṅgayhanti, te apanetuṃ kāmañ cā ti ādi vuttan ti vadanti.*

⁴⁷ Nett-a 32: *Keci pana ‘manasā desanā vācāya akkharaṇato akkharan’ ti vadanti.*

⁴⁸ Nett-pt 34: *Kecī ti Abhayagirivāsino. Te hi abhidhammedesanam “manasā desanā” ti vadanti, yato Rāhulācariyo “visuddhakarūṇānaṃ manasā desanā vācāya akkharaṇato akkharasaññitā” ti āha. Cp. Vism-mhṭ I 273: Visuddhakarūṇānaṃ manasā desanāvācāya akkharaṇato akkharan ti aññe.*

It should be understood that it is called *akkhara* with reference to the questions asked mentally by the Pārāyaṇika Brahmins and the mastering of the great manual of the *Paṭṭhāna* by the Lord as he was seated in the jewelled house.⁴⁹

If the *Netti-tīkā* is correct to attribute this teaching to the Abhayagirivāsins, it would seem to imply that the tradition of the formulation of the *abhidhamma* in the weeks immediately after the enlightenment of the Buddha was current among them and most probably the teaching that it was preached in the Tāvatiṃsa heaven to the *devas*, including the Buddha's mother. It is likely then that they possessed a recension of the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* very similar to that of the Mahāvihāra and indeed it is never said that they did not.⁵⁰

A Sanskrit verse found in the *sanne* to the *Visuddhimagga* (*Vism-sn* II 479 to *Vism* 201) is attributed to Rāhulapāda:

*Budha ity avagamane yo dhātuḥ paripaṭhyate yatas ta[j]-jñāih
gaty-arttha ity ato 'smāt karttaryy api yujyate 'yaṃ ktaḥ.*

[a (Ce1): *yaṃ dhātuḥ*; b (Ce1): *ta-jñā*]

Ole Pind translates:

Since (*yatas*) the verbal root \sqrt{budh} is enumerated [in the *dhātupāṭha*] by those who know it, in the sense of understanding (*avagamane*), (*atas*) the *kta* suffix [= *-ta*] is also correctly used (*yujyate*), in the sense

⁴⁹ Nidd-a I 2: *Tattha tīsu dvāresu parisuddhapayogabhāvena visuddha-karuṇānaṃ* (so B^c; E^c: *Satthu karuṇā* with vll.: *visuddhakāraṇānaṃ*) *cittena pavattitadesanā vācāhi akathitattā adesitattā* (so B^c; E^c: *adesanattā*) *akkharam iti saññitā. Taṃ Pārāyaṇikabrāhmaṇānaṃ manasā pucchitapañhānaṃ vasena, Bhagavatā ratanaghare nisīditvā sammasita-Paṭṭhāna-mahāpakaraṇavasena ca akkharam nāmā ti gahetabbaṃ. ≠ Sp-ṭ I 329* (reading: *visuddhakarāṇaṭṭhānānaṃ*). Cf. Dhs-a 15: *Satta rattindivāni sammasitadhammo kittako ahoṣī ti? ananto aparimāṇo ahoṣī. Ayaṃ tāva manasādesanā nāma. Satthā pana evaṃ sattāhaṃ manasā cintitadhammaṃ vacībhedaṃ katvā desento vassasatena pi vassasahassena pi vassasatasahassena pi matthakaṃ pāpetvā desetum na sakkoti ti na vattabbaṃ.*

⁵⁰ The exception might be the *Kathāvatthu*, since some seem to have included another work in its place; cf. Dhs-a 3.

of the agent [*kāraka*, i.e., in an active sense] after [the verbal root \sqrt{budh}] when it has the meaning of movement.⁵¹

It is just possible that this is the work of the same Rāhula, since *pāda* here is probably honorific, but without further evidence there is no way to be certain of this.

A *Buddhavaṃsa* of the Abhayagiri school

To the above, we may add that Peter Skilling has postulated a *Buddhavaṃsa* of the Abhayagiri school.⁵² This is based on a citation of a text of the Ārya Sthavira Abhayagirivāsins, given by *Bhāviveka in the sixth century AD. The title of this text is restored by Skilling (followed by Eckel) as **Dvādasasahassabuddhavaṃsa*, but even if the restoration is correct, there is no way of knowing if this was the Abhayagiri version of the canonical *Buddhavaṃsa* or a later text. The number of Buddhas seems rather large for an early text, although later Pali sources do sometimes refer to a large number of Buddhas.⁵³ That said, the *Buddhavaṃsa* is a late text and may not have been included in the Canon when it was first put into writing.⁵⁴ So the Abhayagirivāsins could have had a different recension of this work.

Mahāyāna literature

I do not discuss here Mahāyāna literature that might have been composed or utilized by Abhayagirivāsins. There can be no doubt that

⁵¹ Pind 1990, p. 210f.; cf. also Sp I 172; Sv-pt III 122; Abhidh-av-ṭ I 143.

⁵² Skilling 1993; Eckel 2008, p. 169f.

⁵³ Seven verses current today offer homage successively to: 512,028 Buddhas, then 1,024,055 and finally 2,048,109: Anon. 1975, p. 112f. See Skilling 1996. Ja I 90 refers to many thousands of Buddhas: *ete ca aññe ca anekasahassasāṅkhā Buddhā bhikkhācarā*. Sv II 471: *nirantaram buddhavaṃsam kathetvā*.

⁵⁴ At Sv I 15 Buddhaghosa cites the views of the Dīghabhāṅakas who did not include the *Buddhavaṃsa* in their list of canonical texts. It is unlikely that Dīghabhāṅakas existed at the time of Buddhaghosa; so he is probably quoting from an earlier commentary.

all or some of them adopted Mahāyāna practices and read Mahāyāna literature, but there is no way of knowing whether any of the extant Mahāyāna *sūtras* were composed by Abhayagirivāsins.⁵⁵

Names used for the Abhayagiri School

We find a number of names used to refer to the school associated with the Abhayagiri monastery in Pali literature from the second half of the first millennium AD.

1. Abhayagirivāsin
2. Abhayagirivāsika
3. Abhayagirika
4. Abhayagiri (in plural)
5. Dhammaruci (in plural)
6. Dhammarucika
7. Dhammarucikavāda (in plural)
8. Uttaravihāravāsin
9. Uttaravihāravāsika
10. Uttaravihārin
11. Abhay'-uttara

The name Abhayagirivāsin becomes the standard designation of the school in later sources from Ceylon, as it is in sources from ancient South Asia. It is found twice in the above-mentioned *Vinaya* Commentary account of the dispute in the second century AD in the reign of king Bhātiya between the Elders of the Mahāvihāra and those of the Abhayagirivihāra. Note that here it is not the name of a school, but simply of the monks who dwell in particular monasteries. It is not found in the commentaries attributed either to 'Buddhaghosa' or to 'Dhammapāla' nor in the older *vaṃsa* literature, but it is fairly frequent in the *ṭīkā* works, occurring at least 14 times in *ṭīkā*s attributed to Dhammapāla. In the oldest *ṭīkā*, the *Mūlaṭīkā*, it is found once, while in the *Vajirabuddhiṭīkā* it occurs three times, with a number

⁵⁵ Bechert 1977; Schopen 1982.

of other occurrences in various later commentaries. Our sources may overstate its frequency as a result of the tendency to normalization of the manuscripts from South East Asia in recent centuries, but in any case, the word does not occur as the name of a school in any source that definitely predates the sixth century AD.

The three variants on the name Abhayagiri are quite rare. I have so far found a total of seven occurrences, but some of these are duplications or citations.⁵⁶ The three variants of the name Dhammaruci are also quite rare, occurring once in a doubtful verse at *Mahāvamsa* V 13, commented on in *Mahāvamsaṭṭikā* 175f., six times in the *Cūlavamsa*, and twice elsewhere in *Mahāvamsaṭṭikā*.⁵⁷ There can be no doubt at all that it refers to the Abhayagirivāsins. It is probably a self-designation of the Abhayagirivāsins, introduced to Mahāvihāra literature by the author of *Mahāvamsaṭṭikā* who has clearly read at least some Abhayagiri sources.

The other name of importance is Uttaravihāravāsins. This is found once in the *Mūlaṭṭikā* (Vibh-mṭ 169), once in the *Vajirabuddhiṭṭikā* (Vjb 172) and around fifteen times in the *ṭṭikās* of Dhammapāla. I know only six other occurrences in later works (excluding those from the last few centuries).⁵⁸ The two variations are again very rare.⁵⁹ We may add that the *Mahāvamsa* refers to the Abhayagiri *mahāthūpa* once by the mixed name of Abhay³-uttara. This is used thirteen times by the *Cūlavamsa* to refer to the monastery and once for the *cetiya* (once also in the *Rasavāhini*).

⁵⁶ Abhayagirivāsika is found once each in Vjb and in the *Mahāṭṭikā* to the *Visuddhimagga*. Abhayagirika is found twice in one passage of the *Mahāvamsa* and twice in a thirteenth century *ṭṭikā* to the *Vinaya* (Vmv). Abhayagiri (plural) is found once in Kkh-pt.

⁵⁷ Mhv-ṭ 176; 676.

⁵⁸ Khuddas-pt 114; Mhv-ṭ 125; 155; Mp-ṭ II 374; Ras (C^e 1961) 192; Sah (E^e 2003) 141.

⁵⁹ Uttaravihāravāsika is found once in the *Mahāṭṭikā* and once in a passage of the *Vinayaṭṭikā* copied from that. Uttaravihārin is found once only in the twelfth century *Vinayaṭṭikā*, if it is not simply a mistake.

Abhayagiri practices recorded in the *Mahāvamsa* Commentary

The only explicit evidence as to the issues that caused a formal separation between the Mahāvihāra and the Abhayagiri monastery is found in the *ṭīkā* to the *Mahāvamsa*. Unfortunately the date of this commentarial work is not known, but it must be posterior to the eighth century AD at the very earliest. Still, the author is clearly widely read and must have known earlier accounts, giving both Mahāvihāra and Abhayagiri viewpoints. He specifies five points of dispute, classifying them under the two headings of explaining [correct] *vinaya* to be false *vinaya* and explaining false *vinaya* as [correct] *vinaya*. He is commenting here on the account in Mhv XXXVII 4 where Saṅghamitta, the leader of the Abhayagiri party, makes the precise claim that those who dwell in the Mahāvihāra are *avinayavādins*, while those of the Abhayagiri monastery are *vinayavādins*. In fact, two of the five points cited are already mentioned in the brief account given in the *Dīpavamsa*, although the terms used there are *kappiya* and *akappiya*.

The author of the *ṭīkā* to the *Mahāvamsa* explicitly states that previously the Abhayagirivāsins had altered by means of changes to the text and changes to the meaning the *Khandhaka* and *Parivāra* of the *Vinayapiṭaka*, which had been authoritatively uttered by the Buddha. I infer from this that the Abhayagirivāsins and the Mahāvihāra had an identical text of the older part of the *Vinayapiṭaka* i.e., the *Suttavibhaṅga*. I understand also that when referring to the text and meaning here, what is meant by meaning (*attha*) is precisely the *aṭṭhakathā*, i.e., one or more *Vinaya* commentaries.

Turning now to the five points at issue, let us consider them. Taking first the two points already mentioned by the *Dīpavamsa*, we have two practices adopted by the Mahāvihāra but rejected by the Abhayagiri monastery. The first of these is the practice of using ivory(-handled) fans. Although the *Mahāvamsa* Commentary refers to this as being allowed in the story of the monks belonging to the group of six, the intended reference is no doubt to the commentary to the *Cullavagga*.⁶⁰ It is only in the commentary that ivory(-handled) fans are explicitly allowed. So this is not evidence that the Abhayagiri school had

⁶⁰ Sp VI 1209f. on Vin II 130.

a different text of the *Khandhaka*. The second of the two points mentioned by the *Dīpavaṃsa* does definitely refer to the *Khandhaka* text (i.e., the *Mahāvagga* = Vin I 93) and not the commentary. Indeed there is no comment on this at all in the *Vinaya* Commentary (at Sp V 1033), leaving us with the suspicion that this very short piece of just twelve lines in the PTS edition of the *Cullavagga* is a late addition to the Mahāvihāra text to justify the, no doubt old, practice of taking the twentieth year rather than the twentieth birthday as the minimum age for ordination.

Turning to the remaining three points mentioned by the *Mahāvāṃsa* Commentary, I shall take them in reverse order. The *Vinaya-piṭaka* contains a number of rules concerning spitting, but as far as I know, nothing concerning what one should do with the water in one's mouth after rinsing, following the use of a toothbrush (*dantakaṭṭha*). It seems far more likely that a prohibition of spitting on the ground at that time was contained in a *Vinaya* commentary of the Abhayagiri school than that such a prohibition was found in a text of their *Vinaya-piṭaka*. So this too is not evidence that the Abhayagiri school had a different text of the *Khandhaka*. It is not entirely clear to me what exactly is meant by saying that a *khaṇḍasīmā* which has been superimposed is not superimposed due to a *sīm'antarikanimitta*, but the reference must be to exegesis of a short passage in the *Mahāvagga*.⁶¹ However, since the term *khaṇḍasīmā* is not found in canonical literature at all, the most reasonable supposition is that this is also not likely to be from the *Khandhaka* text of the Abhayagiri school, but rather from their exposition of its meaning. Very possibly also, this has something to do with the dispute over the *sīmā* of the Mahāvihāra in the reign of Mahāseṇa.

There remains the last point from those added in the *Mahāvāṃsa* Commentary – the ordination of a nun by a messenger. As is indicated, this is specifically authorized in the story of the courtesan Aḍḍhakāsi(ka) in the *Cullavagga* and is briefly commented on in the *Vinaya* Commentary.⁶² The idea that a nun who has been ordained

⁶¹ Vin I 111: *anujānāmi, bhikkhave, sīmaṃ sammannantena sīm'antarikaṃ ṭhapetvā sīmaṃ sammannitun ti.*

⁶² Vin II 277f. (Sp VI 1295); Ap II 610; Thī-a 30.

by an appropriate number of nuns can (in case of a major difficulty) complete her ordination by simply sending an experienced nun as a messenger to the appropriate group of monks is well established in the Pali commentarial literature.⁶³ Nor is it confined to the Mahāvihāra; it is explicitly mentioned in the *bhāṣya* to the *Abhidharmakośa*, although there the example given is the well-known nun Dharmadinnā rather than the Aḍḍhakāśī of the Pali sources.⁶⁴ The *Abhidhamma* Commentary specifically states that of the eight kinds of unusual ordination recorded this was one still currently applicable.

Given that we do not know the date of the *Mahāvamsa* Commentary, we cannot be certain that the order of nuns was still extant at the time when it was written. Nor do we know much at all about Abhayagiri nuns. It is perhaps possible that there is a memory here of some kind of dispute in relation to nuns in the third century AD. That would certainly account for the emphasis on the role of nuns in parts of the *Dīpavaṃsa*. Given the long period of five or even seven centuries between the time of the dispute and the writing of the *Mahāvamsa* Commentary, we may also suspect a simple error or the reflection of some later issue in relation to nuns in India. Indeed, there may be some connexion between the spread of the Indian Mahāyāna and the decline of the female monastic order. Or, it may simply be that the *Vinaya* Commentary of the Abhayagiri school restricted the practice of ordination by a messenger to the time of the Buddha and rejected its contemporary use. If so, this again would not imply a different *Khandhaka* text.

Some conclusions

The *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvamsa* nowhere suggest that the monks of the Abhayagiri monastery had a different version of the *Vinayaṭṭhaka* (as opposed to different readings of the text in specific places).

⁶³ Mp II 165; Sp I 242 (Chin. Sp Trsl. p.181); Vibh-a 330; Kkh 28; Vin-vn 3017; Utt-vn 648.

⁶⁴ Abhidh-k-bh(-vy) IV 26: *dūtena dharmadinnāyāh*.

One of the two views attributed by *Dīpavaṃsa* to the Abhayagiri monks does entail a different text of the *Mahāvagga*, but this is probably a very late addition to the Mahāvihāra text.

Only one of the three cited in *Mahāvamsaṭṭikā* could entail a different text of the *Cullavagga* and even this is not certain.

Most probably, if we exclude the *Khuddakanikāya* from consideration, the substantive differences between the canonical literature of the two schools did not exceed those we might expect between two distinct manuscript traditions.

We do not know if there was a difference in the degree of Sanskritization.

Ideas attributed to the Abhayagiri school in the Subcommentaries

At least forty six ideas are explicitly attributed to the Abhayagirivāsins or to the dwellers in the Northern Monastery in one or more works from the *ṭīkā* literature. A few more may await discovery in less well-known or unpublished works, but this is enough to give the general picture. The earliest attributions are found in the oldest extant *ṭīkā*: the *Mūlaṭṭikā*. It, however, indicates that such attributions were found in earlier sources.

In fact, it seems likely that the subcommentaries are correct in supposing that the references to ‘some’ (*keci*) and the like in Buddhaghosa’s works are often referring explicitly to the Abhayagirivāsins. This can be inferred from the fact that many of them must come from a *Suttanta* Commentary, as already pointed out by Sodō Mori. So, for example, when answers to such context-specific questions as why (in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*) King Ajātasattu was afraid on arriving at the silent grove where the Buddha and his entourage were staying, or why he could not recognize the Buddha amongst the people there, are attributed to the Abhayagirivāsins, we can only conclude that Buddhaghosa is referring to a *Suttanta* Commentary of the Abhayagirivāsins. Similarly, in the lists of various numbers of *kammas* in the stock accounts of the views of the various saviours (*titthakara*), the explanation of these views of the Abhayagirivāsins

can only have been known from a *Suttanta* commentary. There are many more such examples.⁶⁵

When we look at some of the *Abhidhamma* issues, it is equally clear that, as in the case of the *Vimuttimaggā*, they seem to largely presuppose something like the Pali *Abhidhammapiṭaka*. There are at least fifteen such views attributed to the Abhayagirivāsins and rejected in the literature.⁶⁶

1. *The nature of the dhutaṅgas*

The *Visuddhimaggā* (Vism 80) refers to a view that the purificatory practices known as the *dhutaṅgas* are not included in the first triplet of the *abhidhamma mātikā*, i.e., they are not real entities but rather concepts. The *Mahāṭīkā* attributes this view precisely to the ‘*Abhayagirivāsike*’. This position seems to be stated in the *Vimuttimaggā*.⁶⁷ The canonical works do not attempt to define the *dhutaṅgas* in *abhidhamma* terms.

⁶⁵ Views in commentaries identified in the *ṭīkā*s as Abhayagirivāsins or Uttaravihāravāsins:

Probably from some kind of *Suttanta* commentary: Sv I 80 (= Ps II 211 = Mp III 194 = Pp-a 241); 84; 87 (= Mp II 292f.); 113f. (also in Mp-t); 150; 152; 162 (= Ps III 230 = Spk II 342); 184f. (= Ps I 253 = Spk III 182 = Vibh-a 347, cf. Mp-t II 378); II 437 (= Ps IV 183); 514 (cf. Pp-a 190f.); Ps I 37f.; 63; 123; IV 61ff.; Spk I 208; 270 (= Vism 278; cf. Vism-mhṭ I 313; Vism-sn 647). In some of these and in a number of other cases views are attributed similarly to the *Sārasamāsa* or its teacher(s). See Mori 1988b.

Probably from some kind of *Vinaya* source: Khuddas-pṭ 185; 202; Vin-vn 2540; Vjb 329 (on Sp IV 861); Vjb 172 (on Sp II 496); Khuddas-pṭ (on Khuddas 89); Kkh-pṭ 114; Sp-t III 71 = Vjb 323 = Pāc-y 89f. = Pālim-nṭ 214 (on Sp IV 846f.); Vjb 307f.; Vmv 114ff.

⁶⁶ See Gunawardhana 1979 pp. 27–30 for a similar list of thirteen views. He is mistaken to include the occurrence of three *apāyas* in the *Saddhamm’opāyana* as one of these. See n.37 above.

⁶⁷ Vim Trsl. p.37; Bapat 1937 p.23f. According to Bapat, the Tibetan translation says that they are skillful, but this must be a later emendation. See Bapat 1964, p. 76.

2. The beginning, middle, and end of *jhāna*

Discussing the detailed account of the first *jhāna* in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, the *Visuddhimagga* and other sources reject the view of ‘some’ (*eke*) that purification of the way refers to access together with its requisites, increase of equanimity to absorption and delighting to recollection.⁶⁸ Precisely this view is set forth in the *Vimuttimagga*.⁶⁹ The *Mahāṭīkā*, Sumaṅgala and the *sanne* to the *Visuddhimagga* (Vism-sn 358) all attribute it to the Abhayagirivāsins.

3. Sleepiness (*middha*)

A number of commentaries criticize the view of those who held that there is a kind of materiality called sleepiness (*middha*).⁷⁰ They are identified in various sources as the Abhayagirivāsins.⁷¹ This issue is exceptionally prominent and is addressed in some detail in the commentaries and the *ṭīkā* literature. An abbreviated version of the arguments as given in the *Abhidhamma* Commentary and the *Mahāṭīkā* is presented by Bapat.⁷² I translate here in full the discussion in the *Mahāṭīkā*:

Of some i.e., of those who dwell in [the monastery of] Abhayagiri.
Rejected: the rejection of this should be known as follows:

There is no specific sleepiness *rūpa* (materiality), because sleepiness has been taught among the hindrances. For that which is taught among the hindrances is not *rūpa*, e.g. sensual purpose.

[The Abhayagirivāsin:]

But it is possible that there are two kinds of sleepiness: *rūpa* and mental. Of those the one which is mental has been taught among the hindrances, not the one which is *rūpa*.

⁶⁸ Vism148 = Paṭis-a II 475 = Nidd-a I 33.

⁶⁹ Vim Trsl. p. 94; Bapat 1937 p. 49.

⁷⁰ Vism 450; Dhs-a 340; 377–83; Abhidh-av p. 72; Moh 58. Bapat 1937 p. 95, and Bapat 1939.

⁷¹ Dhs-y (S^c 1982) 360f.; Abhidh-av-ṭ (B^c 1977) II 157; Vism-mhṭ (C^c 1930) II 455; Vism-ṭ (S^c 1987) p. 22; cf. Vism-sn p. 1070 (*jātirūpa*).

⁷² Bapat 1939.

[Reply:]

That is not the case, since there is no specific mention [in the scriptures]; for sleepiness is not taught among the hindrances after making a distinction [between physical and mental sleepiness]. Therefore it is not possible to prevent sleepiness counting as a hindrance even by imagining two kinds of sleepiness. For it is possible to reply that whatever sleepiness is imagined as other than mental, that mental kind is a hindrance because its nature is sleepiness, the other [non-mental kind] is [merely] similar to sleepiness.

[The Abhayagirivāsin:]

If it is replied: let that [mental kind] be a hindrance. What is the problem?

[Reply:]

But a hindrance is something to be abandoned, due to the words: ‘abandoning the five hindrances’ [and] ‘the fully awakened one is surely a saint, a sage; you have no hindrances’ (Sn 541). *Rūpa* on the other hand is something which is not to be abandoned, because of the saying: ‘Which *dharmas* are not able to be abandoned either by vision or by bringing into being? Skilful in four levels, resultant in four levels, *kiriya* undeclared in three levels and materiality and *nibbāna*.’ (Dhs §1393).

Nor is the abandonment of defilements which have that as their object referred to here, as in such cases as: ‘*Rūpa*, monks, is not yours; abandon it.’ (M I 140; S III 33f.; Nidd I 438), because there is no reference to such abandoning of sensual purpose and the other hindrances. Therefore sleepiness is not *rūpa*.

[The Abhayagirivāsin:]

If you do not accept that sleepiness is *rūpa*, how can the Lord have sleep? For sleepiness is sleep, because it has been explained in the *Vibhaṅga* that sleepiness is: ‘sleep ... dozing,’ etc. (Vibh 254).⁷³

[Reply:]

Sleepiness is not sleep; it is a cause of sleep. But due to its nature it is explained as ‘sleep,’ as in such cases as feminine gender, etc.

[The Abhayagirivāsin:]

In that case if he has no sleepiness which is the cause of sleep, how can the Lord have sleep?

[Reply:]

The sleep of the Lord is connected with bodily weakness, not due to sleepiness. And it is not possible to deny that he has this, because of

⁷³ Note that the Abhayagirivāsin is presented here as citing the *Vibhaṅga*.

the saying: ‘My back is aching. I will stretch it.’ (D III 209; M I 354; etc.). As to this, no restriction that ‘the cause of sleep is exclusively sleepiness’ should be understood. But there is a restriction that ‘only sleepiness is caused by sleepiness’⁷⁴ Therefore there is another cause of sleep.

[The Abhayagirivāsin:]

What is that?

[Reply:]

Weakness of the physical body. Therefore it has been said that the sleep of the Lord is due to weakness of the physical body, not caused by sleepiness. And it is not possible to reply that ‘the Lord does not have sleep’ because of the passage: ‘But I acknowledge, Aggivessana, ... that I sleep by day’ (M I 249).

Moreover, sleepiness is not materiality, because of the word ‘joined with’ (*sampayoga*); for it is said that ‘the hindrance of sloth and sleepiness in relation to the hindrance of ignorance is both a hindrance and joined with a hindrance’ (Dhs §1170) and so on.

[The Abhayagirivāsin might claim that this could be selectively interpreted as applying only to sloth:]

And it is not possible to affirm that it is here [an utterance] which applies as appropriate as in such passages as: ‘gravel and pebbles, shoals of fish – moving and remaining still’ (D I 84; M I 279; A I 9), because it has not been established that sleepiness is *rūpa*. Only if it had been established that sleepiness is *rūpa*, would a construction which applies as appropriate be applicable.

[A further point:]

Moreover, sleepiness is not *rūpa*, because it arises in the *Arūpa* states. The following is said: ‘conditioned by a *dhamma* which is a hindrance arises a *dhamma* which is a hindrance by non-prenascent-condition’ (Dukap 291). [It is given] in detail in the detailed analysis of that with the words: ‘in the *Arūpa* [Immaterial realm] conditioned by the hindrance of sensual purpose arise the hindrance of sloth and sleepiness, the hindrance of excitement [and] the hindrance of

⁷⁴ Vism-mhṭ II 105: *na c’ettha evam avadhāraṇaṃ middham eva niddāhetū ti, niddāhetu eva middhan ti evam avadhāraṇā. . . tasmā añño pi atthi niddāhetu*. Abhidh-av-ṭ II 160 has: *na c’ettha evam avadhāraṇaṃ daṭṭhabbaṃ “middham eva niddāhetū” ti, tasmā añño pi atthi niddāhetu*. The text is unclear here and it may be better to adopt the reading from Abhidh-av-ṭ and translate: ‘sleepiness is definitely not a cause of sleep [in the case of the Lord]’.

ignorance' (Paṭṭh III 300).⁷⁵ Therefore that which has been rejected in the Commentaries with the words 'sleepiness is not *rūpa*' is certainly well-rejected.

...
[The opponent:]

But why was the rejection of these *rūpas* not made according to their order?

It should be understood that [this was done], referring to the fact that not [even one] exists separately, because they cannot be found, in order to show that they are of little account or the rejection of sleepiness was made first, since that is a major question.⁷⁶

The prominence of this idea in Mahāvihāravāsin criticism of Abhayagirivāsin views may be partly because it is put forward in the well-known *Vimuttimaggā*.⁷⁷ We may note that Sumaṅgala is aware that *middha* is described as a *rūpa* which can originate from season, consciousness or nutriment.⁷⁸ That is exactly as in the *Vimuttimaggā*.⁷⁹

Different evaluations have been put forth as to how radical a difference from the extant Pali texts is involved here. Both traditions are based on the standard list in the *Dhammasaṅgaha*: 27 kinds of *rūpa* or 25 taking earth, fire and wind as a single tangible *rūpa*. The Pali commentaries have added to this only one *rūpa* – variously referred to as *hadayavatthu*, *vatthurūpa* and occasionally as *hadayarūpa* on

⁷⁵ In Paṭṭh read with B^c: *āruppe kāmacchandānīvaraṇaṃ paṭicca thinamiddhanīvaraṇaṃ uddhaccanīvaraṇaṃ avijjānīvaraṇaṃ uppajjati*; cf. Abhidh-av-ṭ. Dukap omits *thinamiddhanīvaraṇaṃ*, but must intend to refer to the variant in its note 3.

⁷⁶ So B^c: 1977 *mahāpaṇho*; C^c: 1930: *mahāpapaṇco* 'a great proliferation'; S^c: *mahāpaṇco*.

⁷⁷ I see no reason to doubt that copies of Abhayagirivāsin works were available in Mahāvihāra libraries. The author of Mhv-ṭ takes it for granted that those works were available for consultation. Cooperation and communication between the *nikāyas* must have been the norm except at periods of exceptional tension, such as the reign of Mahāsena.

⁷⁸ Abhidh-av-ṭ (B^c: 1977 II 157; C^c: 1961 p.284): *Kecī ti Abhayagiri-vāsino. Middha-rūpassa vadana-sīlo middha-vādo vā etesan ti middha-vādino. Middharūpaṃ nāmā ti utu-cittāhāra-vasena ti-samuṭṭhānaṃ middhaṃ nāma rūpaṃ*.

⁷⁹ Vim Trsl. p. 241.

the strength of its frequent occurrence as *vatthu* in the *Paṭṭhāna*. The *Vimuttimaggā* adds two more: *jātirūpa* and *middharūpa*. The first is not controversial, since it is not considered to be an ultimately real *dhamma*. The second is and so it is presented as an issue. But it still does not suggest anything more than a somewhat different commentarial tradition.

Bapat partly misunderstands the position in the canonical *Abhidhamma*, when he writes in reference to the definitions at *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* 1156f. and *Vibhaṅga* 253: ‘Here if we read these words independently of the commentary, it appears that *thīna* was considered to be a mental condition, while the other [i.e., *middha*] was a physical one.’⁸⁰ In fact, it is a characteristic of the Pali *abhidhamma* that *kāya* in such expressions as *kāyapassaddhi* and *kāyakammaññatā* does not mean tranquillity of the body or wieldiness of the body; it refers instead to a mental *dhamma* which acts on the body to make it tranquil or wieldy. So a similar interpretation of *middha* is quite natural. For these texts *middha* is a *nīvaraṇa* and that is definitely something mental, e.g. *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* 1163ff.

Nothing however prevented the exegetical tradition of the Abhayagirivāsins from postulating a type of *middha* which was material and not a *nīvaraṇa*. This is no greater a step than was taken with the addition of various other *yevāpanaka dhammas* in the *Aṭṭhakathā* literature. It certainly does not imply that they were utilizing a different *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*. The objection of the Pali commentators to this is simply that it is nowhere stated in any text that was authoritative for them.

4. Attaining the fruit

The *Visuddhimaggā* (Vism 700) refers to the view of those who declare that, if a stream-enterer establishes insight with the idea of attaining the fruit (*phala*), he becomes a once-returner. The *Mahāṭīkā* attributes this to the Abhayagirivāsins, commenting that they mix up

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 5.

path, fruit and insight.⁸¹ This must be a reference to the view rejected just before in the *Visuddhimagga* (Vism 690) that stream-enterers and once-returners do not attain the path fruition; only never-returners and *arahats* do so. Precisely this discussion is found in the *Vimuttimagga*.⁸² Particularly indicative is the question as to why when the non-returner ‘experiences the enjoyment of fruition’, adoption does not develop the path of arahatship immediately (p. 322).

5. *The object of mind-encompassing knowledge (cetopariyañāṇa)*

Several commentaries refer to the view that the object of mind encompassing knowledge (*cetopariyañāṇa*) is momentary present (*khaṇapaccuppanna*), i.e., at the moment when the knowledge arises, it knows another person’s mind at that very same moment.⁸³ This is rejected on the grounds that a mental state which is present at the moment of the prior adverting cannot still be present subsequently when the knowledge arises. Therefore when this knowledge is declared to have a present object, what must be meant is one of the other two kinds of present – present sequentially (*santatipaccuppanna*) or extended present (*addhāpaccuppanna*). Normally in a *Suttanta* context the latter means in this present life. So one might suppose that it is the first that is meant – i.e., the mind that occurs for two or three active (*javana*) processes, sometimes defined as the time it takes for vision to become clear on moving from a dark place into the light. But in the context of the present discussion the extended present is defined rather to mean a single *javana* sequence i.e. the one which is occurring at the time.

In effect, the position of the commentaries is that when mind encompassing knowledge is stated to have a present object, what is meant is that its object is approximately of the present moment. From the discussion in the *Abhidhamma* commentary and in Sumaṅgala’s *ṭīkā* to the *Abhidhammāvatāra* it is clear that this issue and the view in question are taken from the pre-Buddhaghosa commentaries. The

⁸¹ *Ye paṇā ti Abhayagirivāsino sandhāyāha. Te hi maggaphalavipassanāya āloṭevā vadanti.*

⁸² Vim Trsl. p. 320f.; Bapat 1937 pp. 125ff.

⁸³ Vism 432; Dhs-a 421ff.; Abhidh-av 1125ff.; cf. Sv II 438f.

attribution to the Abhayagirivāsins was known to Ānanda, the author of the sixth-century *Mūlaṭīkā*, but questioned by him.⁸⁴ See next. This does not appear to be discussed in the *Vimuttimaggā*. The issue must arise from commentarial discussion of the canonical classification of mind encompassing knowledge as able to take a present object.⁸⁵

6. The bases of iddhi

For the Pali commentaries, following the *Vibhaṅga* account (Vibh 224ff.), when the four *iddhipādas* are referred to, what is meant by both the *iddhi* and the *iddhipāda* is one of the four *dhammas*: *chanda*, *virīya*, *citta* or *vīmaṃsā*. They refer, however, to views which take either *iddhi* or *iddhipāda* as ‘not produced’ (*anipphanna*) i.e., as conceptual and not really existent from the highest standpoint.⁸⁶ This view is attributed in several *ṭīkā*s to the Abhayagirivāsins or Uttaravihāravāsins.⁸⁷ It is explicitly indicated that some held the view that *iddhi* is ‘not produced’, whereas others thought that it was just *iddhipāda* which was not produced. According to the commentary to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, this view was based on exegesis of the *Vibhaṅga* (Vibh 216ff.).⁸⁸ The *Vimuttimaggā* does not appear to discuss this.

7. A single virati

According to the *Abhidhammāvatāra* (Abhidh-av p.22), ‘Some teach that a single one of these [three restraints] is necessarily present [in the

⁸⁴ Mṭ to Dhs-a 421: *Kecī ti Abhayagirivāsino ti vadanti; te pana cittassa ṭhitikkhaṇaṃ na icchantī ti “ṭhitikkhaṇe vā paṭivijjhati” ti na vattabbaṃ siyā.*

⁸⁵ e.g. Paṭṭh II 424: *Cetopariyañāṇena paccuppannārammaṇapaccuppannaci ttasamaṅgissa cittaṃ jānāti. Paccuppannārammaṇā paccuppannā khandhā cetopariyañāṇassa, āvajjanāya ārammaṇapaccayena paccayā; cf. Trsl. II 493.*

⁸⁶ Sv II 642; Spk III 256; Vibh-a 308; Paṭis-a I 344; cf. Vism 385.

⁸⁷ Sv-pt II 268f. (*Abhayagirivāsino*); Spk-pt to Spk III 256 (*Uttaravihāravāsino*); Vibh-mṭ 169 (*Uttaravihāravāsī therā kira*).

⁸⁸ Paṭis-a I 344: *Keci pana “Vibhaṅge ‘iddhī ti yā tesam tesam dhammānaṃ iddhi samiddhi ijghanā samijjhanā’ ti (Vibh 217–23) vuttattā iddhi nāma anipphannā, iddhipādo nipphanno” ti vadanti.*

first skilful *citta*].⁸⁹ This seems to be the position of the *Vimuttimaggā* which lists a single ‘(removal of) hindrance’, whose near cause is the four *jhānas*, as one of the 31 *dhammas* which make up the aggregate of *saṅkhāras* (Vim Trsl. p. 247f.).⁹⁰

At a later date, the *ṭīkā* notes that some Abhayagirivāsins accept the arguments against this position and teach that [the restraints are] threefold and are not necessarily present.⁹¹ As evidence, Sumaṅgala cites a stanza of theirs:

*karuṇāmudītā sammāvācākammantaājivā
yebhuyyato aniyatā honti gocarabhedato.*

Compassion and joy in the joys of others, right speech, action and livelihood are for the most part not necessarily present due to having different objects.

In fact, however, it would be possible to reconcile these two positions, if the Abhayagirivāsins regarded right speech, etc. as different modes of operation of a single *virati*. In the *Dhammasaṅgaha* the three restraints are listed only for *lokuttara cittuppādas*.

⁸⁹ *Keci pana imāsu ekekaṃ niyataṃ viratiṃ icchanti.*

⁹⁰ Ven. Nyanatusita indicates: “The Chinese has: 蓋, which corresponds elsewhere in Vim to *nīvaraṇa*, *āvaraṇa* “hindrance, obstruction.”. However, the Tibetan quotation (183a) has *sdom pa*, which corresponds to *saṃvara* “restraint” (e.g., *so sor thar pa* ‘i *sdom pa* = *pātimokkha-saṃvara*). As both the Chinese and Tibetan words indicate the root √*var*, it is likely that the original had *nivāraṇa*, which was misunderstood as *nīvaraṇa*. Cf. PED s.v. *nivāraṇa* and *nivāreti*. Dh-p-a III 4 (on Dh-p 77 *pāpā cittaṃ nivāraye*): *Pāpā cittaṃ ti kāyaduccarītādipāpakammato vā akusalacittuppādato vā sabbathāmena cittaṃ nivāraye*. Pj II 269: *Yatatto, yasmā anuttarāya viratiyā sabbapāpehi uparatacitto ti vuttaṃ hoti.*””Restraining (*nivāraṇa*?)’ is the avoiding and stopping of mental wrong-doing (*duccarita*). It is likened to a man who wishes to live, avoiding poison. The four *jhānas* are its near cause.” [Email: 29.8.11]

⁹¹ *Ten’eva hi Abhayagirivāsino yeva ca keci imāsaṃ tividdhattaṃ aniyatattam eva ca icchanti.*

8. Very brief and very small visibles, etc. are dhamma objects

The *Abhidhammāvātāra* cites a view that visible and other sense objects which are fleeting or very small do not enter the range of the senses and are *dhamma* objects.⁹² The two *ṭīkā*s discuss this at length. The older *ṭīkā* attributes this to *ekaccānaṃ ācariyaṇaṃ*, but the well-read Sumaṅgala refers to wrong practice (*vip̄paṭṭipatti*) among the Abhayagirivāsins. A similar view is also rejected in the *Abhidhamma* Commentary,⁹³ but the *ṭīkā*s do not identify the proponents.

Nevertheless, this is likely to be an Abhayagirivāsin view. The usual position in the Pali literature is that anything can be *dhammārammaṇa* except for the five kinds of sense object. Most kinds of subtle matter, such as the sensitive matter of the sense organs, are known only at the mind door. However, the objects of the divine eye and the like can be various of the six kinds of *ārammaṇa* as appropriate. A colour seen in imagination or dream or meditation is *rūpārammaṇa*, not *dhammārammaṇa*.

The view criticized here takes the same general position, but wishes to make a special case for very small or fleeting objects, such as the atom (*paramāṇu*). So the opponent is clearly someone within the general viewpoint derived from the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*. Again, the *Vimuttimaggā* does not appear to discuss this.

⁹² Abhidh-av 301:

*khaṇavatthuparittattā āpāthaṃ na vajanti ye.
te dhammārammaṇā honti yesaṃ rūpādayo kira ||.*

⁹³ Dhs-a 72: *Ye pana anāpāthagatā rūpādayo pi dhammārammaṇaṃ icc eva vadanti, te iminā suttena paṭikkhipitabbā. Vuttañ h' etaṃ: "Imesaṃ kho, āvuso, pañcannaṃ indriyaṇaṃ nānāvisayaṇaṃ nānāgocarānaṃ na aññamaññassa gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhontānaṃ mano paṭisaraṇaṃ mano nesam gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhoti" ti (MN I 295). Etesaṃ hi rūpārammaṇādīni gocaravisayo nāma. Tāni manena paccanubhaviyamānāni pi rūpārammaṇādīni yevā ti ayam attho siddho hoti. Dibbacakkhuññādīnaṃ ca rūpādi-ārammaṇattā pi ayam attho siddho yeva hoti. Anāpāthagatānaṃ eva hi rūpārammaṇādīni dibbacakkhu-ādīnaṃ ārammaṇāni, na ca tāni dhammārammaṇāni bhavanti ti vuttanayena eva ārammaṇavavattānaṃ veditabbam.*

9. Relation of the elements to the sense organs

The *Visuddhimagga* and other sources⁹⁴ reject a view that declares that the element of energy is predominant in the eye, space in the ear, wind in the nose, water in the tongue and earth in the body. Just this view is put forward in the *Vimuttimagga*.⁹⁵ According to the *sanne* to the *Visuddhimagga*, this is a view of the Abhayagirivāsins.⁹⁶ The issue is not addressed in the canonical texts.

10. Rejection of the *ṭhiti-kkhaṇa*

Ānanda's claim that the Abhayagirivāsins rejected the division into three moments of arising, presence and ceasing and allowed only arising and ceasing is not contested by the later *ṭīkā* writers and may well be correct for his time. Since, however, he cites earlier writers as giving an argument attributed to the Abhayagirivāsins that refers to the moment of presence, it is possible that the Abhayagirivāsin view on this had changed. Ānanda himself is evidence that the issue was by his time disputed in the Mahāvihāra tradition itself. The *Vimuttimagga* seems to refer to the moment of ageing when discussing *rūpa*,⁹⁷ but does not seem to envisage a moment of ageing or presence for mind.⁹⁸ This view is rejected by Buddhaghosa (Spk II 267) who cites but rejects an *ācariyagāthā*:

*atthitā sabbadhammānaṃ ṭhiti nāma pavuccati,
tass'eva bhedo maraṇaṃ sabbadā sabbapāṇinan' ti.*

⁹⁴ Vism 444; Dhs-a 312f.; Abhidh-av 658–62; Moh 60.

⁹⁵ Vim Trsl. 238ff.; Bapat 1937 p. 96.

⁹⁶ Vism-sn p.1050 attributes to Vasudhamma the Abhayagirivāsin, but Vasudhamma is named as author of the immediately preceding Mahāsaṃghika view in the *Mahāṭīkā*.

⁹⁷ Vim Trsl. p. 242.

⁹⁸ Vim Trsl. p. 296 has: “in every concentrated thought-moment there is the change of arising, stability and destruction”. Ven. Nyanatusita translates: “in a single mind-moment (*citta-khaṇa*) there is birth and aging, death, and change,” or perhaps “birth and the change which is aging and death”. I am uncertain whether to interpret this as indicating a moment of presence or simply a reference to *ṭhitass' aññathatta*.

The existence of all *dhammas* is what is called ‘presence’.
The break up of that is death [which comes] always to all living beings.

He goes on to say that they specify that more exactly (*athavā*) it should be understood that ‘presence’ is remaining by way of continuity. In other words, it refers not to a single moment or part of a moment, but to overall existence over time. The *īkā* appears to understand this latter position as affirming the moment of presence for material *dhammas* and denying it for mental *dhammas*.⁹⁹ The *Yamaka* refers frequently to the arising moment and the moment of break up, but there is no canonical reference to the moment of presence or ageing. So this discussion belongs to the commentarial period.

11. Twelve puññakiriyavatthu

The *Upāsakajanālamkāra* (Upāsak 292) attributes the view that there are twelve bases for performing fortunate-bringing actions to the Mahāsaṃghiyas and the Abhayagirivāsins. It cites a stanza, most probably from an Abhayagirivāsin source:

*Dānaṃ sīlaṃ bhāvanā manasā suti desanānussati
Modanā veyyāvaccamaṃ pūjā saraṇaṃ patti pasamsā cā ti.*

Generosity, precepts, practice, learning by mind, teaching, recollection [of good that one has done],
rejoicing [in good done by others], service, worship, [taking] refuge,
[sharing good actions] that have been obtained and praise [of the virtues of others].

This adds three items to the standard Pali list of ten *puññakiriyavatthu*, but at the same time it omits one – straightening one’s view. Both Upāsak and Sumaṅgala understand Abhidh-av 24 to be directly rejecting the Abhayagirivāsin view:

⁹⁹ Spk-pt II 218: *Ayaṃ viśeso ti thitikkhaṇo nāma rūpadhammānaṃ yeva, na arūpadhammānaṃ ti ayaṃ īdiso viśeso.*

*sabbānussati puññañ ca paṣaṃsā saraṇattayaṃ,
yanti diṭṭhi-’jjukammaṣmiṃ saṅgahaṃ natthi saṃsayo ti.*

All recollection [of good that one has done], praise [of good done by others] and [taking] the three refuges are without doubt included in the action of straightening one’s view.

It is clear then that both the Mahāvihāra and the Abhayagirivihāra traditions expanded the *Suttanta* list of three *puññakiriyavatthu* in their *Aṭṭhakathā*, but the difference between their positions seems purely formal. We may note that, like the *Visuddhimagga*, the *Vimuttimagga* does not enumerate the *puññakiriyavatthu*.

12. Issā and macchhariya can arise together

The same writer cites a sentence from the Abhayagirivāsins:

Jealousy and miserliness arise together spontaneously.¹⁰⁰

This contrasts with the usual position of the Pali commentaries that these two never arise in the same *cittuppāda*. They are *yevāpanaka dhammas*, i.e., they are not specifically indicated as present in specific types of consciousness in the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*. The *Vimuttimagga* does not appear to discuss this question.

13. Reaching the third formless attainment

According to the *Visuddhimagga* (Vism 333), the third formless attainment is reached by adverting to the non-existence, emptiness and non-occurrence of the first formless attainment. Similarly, in the *Abhidhammāvatāra* (Abhidh-av 1010), but Sumaṅgala’s *ṭīkā* attributes to the Abhayagirivāsins the view that only the non-existence of the sphere of boundless consciousness should be adverted to. That in fact seems similar to the account given in the *Vimuttimagga*, which does

¹⁰⁰ *Ṭīkā* to Abhidh-av p.25: *Tasmā yaṃ Abhayagirivāsino vadanti: issāmaccheraṃ yadicchāvasena ekato pi uppajjati ti na taṃ gahettabbhaṃ.*

not mention the first formless attainment at this point.¹⁰¹ The method of developing the third formless attainment is not given in the canonical texts.

14. *The teaching of the Abhidhamma was teaching by mind*

See above. This topic is not addressed in the *Vimuttimaggā*. The contemplation of the seven books of the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* is found only in the commentaries.

15. *Less than seven births for a sattakhattuparama*

According to the *Anuṭṭikā*, the idea attributed to ‘some’ in the *Mūlaṭṭikā* that ‘One with seven births at the most does not exceed the seventh birth, but less is not rejected’ is a teaching of the Abhayagirivāsins.¹⁰² This is not stated in the *Vimuttimaggā* and in fact this is the only case where the *Vimuttimaggā* appears to make a statement contradicting a view attributed to the Abhayagirivāsins.¹⁰³ Again, this is clearly a matter of commentarial exegesis.

The *Vimuttimaggā* and the Abhayagirivāsins

Reviewing the evidence presented above, we see that fifteen views rejected by the commentarial tradition are attributed to the Abhayagirivāsins by the subcommentaries. The *Vimuttimaggā* seems to hold seven of these (items 1–4, 7, 9, and 13 above). Tellingly, six

¹⁰¹ Vim Trsl. p. 117f.

¹⁰² Mṭ to Kv-a 137: *Keci vadanti: sattakkhattuparamo sattamaṃ bhavaṃ nātikkamati, orato pana natthi paṭisedho ti*. The attribution to the Abhayagirivāsins is found also in the thirteenth century *sanne*: Saddhātissa 1949–1955 = Vism-sn pp. 1015, 1017, 1018.

¹⁰³ Vim Trsl. p. 308; cp. Vism 709: *sattasugatibhave saṃsaritvā dukkhass’ antaṃ karoti*. Vim Trsl. p. 308 has: “*Sattakkhattuparama*: After dwelling in the divine-realms (for six births), he, in his seventh birth, is born here, and makes an end of ill.” Ven. Nyanatusita indicates that the Chinese text literally has: “Seven-birth [stream-enterer] he goes seven times to a heavenly realm, and coming to this [world, = *idhāgata*], he makes an end to suffering.” But this may just be a matter of repeating a standard phrase for the normal case.

of the other eight do not seem to be discussed in the *Vimuttimaggā*. For two the evidence is ambiguous. Overall this evidence is entirely compatible with the *Vimuttimaggā* being an Abhayagirivāsīn work. Since that was clearly the view of the *ṭīkā* writers in South India and Ceylon while at the same time it is cited by Mahāyānist sources in India, whose connexions are more likely to be with the Abhayagirivāsīns, we cannot hope to do better than them in the absence of any contrary evidence.

On this basis further careful study of the *Vimuttimaggā* material can enable us to develop a more rounded picture of what exactly the Abhayagirivāsīns taught. That could be compared with the many further views mentioned in the commentaries without attribution.¹⁰⁴

III The picture that emerges

Looking at the views attributed to the Abhayagirivāsīns, a rather consistent picture emerges. The differences between their views and those familiar to us from the Pali texts of the Mahāvihāra are just what we should expect if the two schools gradually diverged during the period when the pre-Buddhaghosa *aṭṭhakathā* literature flourished, i.e., around the second and third centuries AD. The *Vimuttimaggā* too emerges as a work of the same kind. Buddhaghosa tells us that in writing his commentaries he has omitted material which he has put in in his *Visuddhimaggā*, and that the *Visuddhimaggā* stands in the middle of the four *Āgamas*.¹⁰⁵ The *ṭīkā*s interpret this as showing that the *Visuddhimaggā* functions as a shared commentary for the four *Āgamas*. We can understand it as meaning that the source of most of the material in the *Visuddhimaggā* lay in the earlier commentaries (including those of the Abhayagirivāsīns). The same must have been the case for the *Vimuttimaggā*, although the two works may have differed as to exactly which commentaries they preferred. This does not of course preclude the likelihood that Buddhaghosa was also significantly influenced

¹⁰⁴ Horner 1981; Endō 1999.

¹⁰⁵ Sv I 2; Ps I 2; Spk I 2; Mp I 2.

by the work of Upatissa, and he certainly incorporated into his work developments in the Indian grammatical tradition.

The Abhayagiri monastery was then founded in the second or first century BC and emerged to prominence perhaps during the course of the first century AD, but at any rate by the second century AD. Inscriptional evidence demonstrates that island-wide organisation becomes characteristic of the Saṃgha fraternities in Ceylon during the latter half of the first millennium AD, but it is unclear if there was any such large-scale systematic control in the early period. More probably the connexions between monasteries were much looser at this time, but we have no reason to suppose that there was any formal breach between the residents in the Abhayagiri monastery and the Mahāvihāra before the third century AD.

The general development of the Theriya school can be envisaged as follows: at some point the Ceylon-based fraternity became gradually separated from or outgrew its connexions on the mainland, most probably with the Mahiṃsāsaka school (perhaps established in Vanavāsa). In Ceylon we see a lively period when distinctive *abhidhamma* ideas were debated and formulated. Some of these debates are recorded in the *Abhidhamma* Commentary with views attributed to named figures. The figures involved are associated with the reigns of named kings and appear to have been active around the first century BC.¹⁰⁶ We may envisage that these ideas were incorporated in commentarial and exegetical literature during the following century or two. Such *aṭṭhakathā* works were probably produced in many locations and not only in Ceylon.¹⁰⁷ Eventually, one or more large compilations of this material were made and became authoritative. For the Mahāvihāra this was the *Mahā-aṭṭhakathā*.¹⁰⁸ The Abhayagiri

¹⁰⁶ Mori 1988b.

¹⁰⁷ We know of an *Andhak'aṭṭhakathā* which must have been produced by Theriyas in the Āndhra region. It could have been in the local language, but seems more likely to have been in something related to Pali. It certainly was not a work of the Andhaka schools, since that is just a designation of convenience adopted in the *Kathāvatthu commentary*.

¹⁰⁸ The process is closely analogous to the manner in which the *vibhāṣā* literature developed and was then aggregated into a *Mahāvibhāṣā*. See: Cox 1998, pp. 229ff.

monastery may well have developed its own equivalent. At all events it is not clear if the *Mahā-aṭṭhakathā* had any authority there.

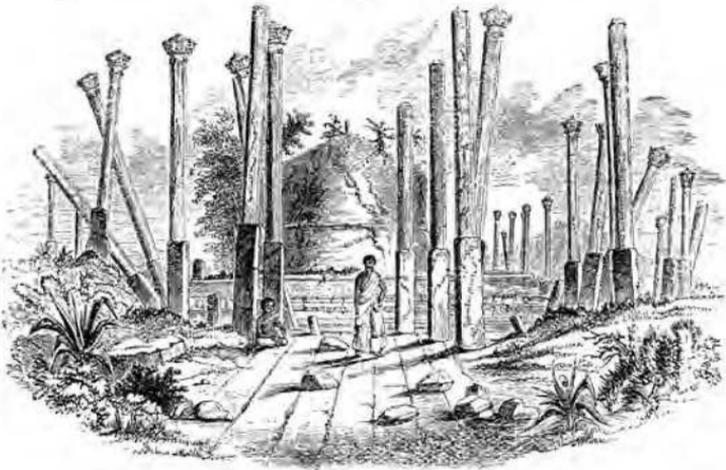
Alongside this we should envisage the process by which the Theriya school spread outwards from Ceylon. We know of the presence of Theriyas in the Āndhra region by the third century AD. They were certainly found in areas of South India closer to Ceylon by the fourth or fifth century AD and probably earlier. A form or forms of Pali-utilizing Buddhism was present in South-East Asia in Pyu and Mon areas, and perhaps in Arakan, soon after this and quite possibly earlier. That must derive, directly or indirectly, from Ceylon. What part the Abhaya monastery played in this is unclear, but it is probable that the Abhayagirivāsins came to control the Sinhalese monastery founded at Bodhgayā by a Sinhalese king. The Chinese pilgrim Hsüantsang refers to the monks there as mainly from Ceylon and as following Mahāyāna and *Sthavira teachings; so they are likely to have been Abhayagirivāsins, or at any rate that school, which was by this time probably the largest Buddhist school in Ceylon, is likely to have been the most numerous. The expansion outwards from Ceylon is also indicated by the presence of *Sthaviras in various coastal regions of India. We can certainly attribute this expansion to the patronage of Sinhalese kings and their dynastic marriages, as well as to the growth of Anurādhapura as a major monastic centre, attracting monks from a very wide area.

The issues debated with the Abhayagiri school and the other evidence reviewed here seem to presuppose a largely shared Canon. If this is correct, then there are several possibilities:

- Both the Abhayagiri school and the Pali Canon, largely or wholly, date back to the first century BC or thereabouts.
- Both are considerably later in date.
- The Pali Canon, largely or wholly, dates back to the first century BC, but the Abhayagiri school arose as a separate fraternity only some centuries later.

The evidence cited in this article seems most compatible with the third possibility. What seems impossible is the position that the Abhayagiri school dates back to the first century BC, but texts such as

Paṭisambhidāmagga originate some centuries later. If that were the case, one would expect the Abhayagirivāsins to have had, for example, a significantly different *abhidhamma* system. And there is no evidence that this was so.



Thūpārāma Dāgaba. Lithography by James Prinsep, in James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, Vol. 1, London 1910, p. 234.

Appendix: The Vitaṇḍavādin

The troubles mentioned in the reign of Vohārikatissa (209–231 AD) could be related to the schism between the Mahāvihāra and the Abhaya Monastery; so that needs to be examined.

The account in the *Dīpavaṃsa* (XXII 43–45) is quite brief:

But in the reign of that king they expounded much which is *akappiya*.
Expounding *viṇḍa* teachings they harmed the Jina's religion. (43)
When the king saw that a wicked bhikkhu was harming the Jina's
religion,
He took the courtier Kapila and expelled the wicked [one]. (44)
After he had crushed the *Vetulla* teaching and made the religion shine,
He gave *odana* in the Meghavana with his own hands at the prescribed
distance.¹⁰⁹ (45)

The account in the *Mahāvāṃsa* (XXXVI 41) is even briefer and is clearly a contraction of the three stanzas of the *Dīpavaṃsa* version into a single stanza:

After he had crushed the *Vetulla* teaching and expelled the wicked
[one],
He made the religion shine by means of the courtier Kapila. (41)

The omission of the cryptic and uncertain line at the end is revealing. Quite plainly, Mahānāma's only source for this event is the *Dīpavaṃsa*. Since the *ṭīkā* adds nothing, we can be sure that nothing more was known. This means that in this particular case we must ignore claims made much later in thirteenth or fourteenth century Sinhalese sources. In particular, we should note that there is no mention made of the Abhaya Monastery and no particular reason to associate this event with any monastery other than the Mahāvihāra itself. Even the mention

¹⁰⁹ *Vetulla-vādaṃ madditvā, jotayitvāna sāsanam,
? Sa-pāṇīhi hattha-pāsaṃ adā Megha-van'-odanam.*

of the Vetullavāda (i.e., the Mahāyāna) is rather uncertain, since the Burmese manuscripts read Vitaṇḍavāda. The term Vitaṇḍavāda, used in verse 43 (in the plural), is clearly the most important information here. So let us turn to the evidence concerning Vitaṇḍavāda in the Pali commentaries.

The evidence has been usefully collected in a paper by Sodō Mori.¹¹⁰ He distinguishes also an earlier usage of this and similar terms, mostly concerned with exegesis of canonical references to such things as *lokāyata* or *lok'akkhāyika*. It is not necessarily a pejorative term, as evidenced by the reference to King Milinda as *vetanḍī* or the usage as a technical term in Nyāya. We should note also that it is sometimes used as a name for the Mādhyamikas in Sanskrit literature.¹¹¹ It is with the second usage that is distinguished by Mori that we are now concerned. As he points out, the Vitaṇḍavādin is usually referred to as opposed to the 'agreed commentary of the teachers' (*ācariyānaṃ samān'aṭṭhakathā*). This suggests a non-Theravādin individual or group¹¹² (and, I should add, probably one which came to Ceylon later than the main period of the formation of the commentaries). This is further suggested by the very similar treatment of *paravādin*, a term which certainly does refer to members of non-Theravādin schools in the older commentarial sources. Mori goes on to consider and discard two further possibilities: (1) it refers to Mahāyānist coming to Ceylon or, (2) what is meant is a specific non-Mahāyāna sect. (In this context he considers specifically the Mahiṃsāsakas.) His final conclusion is that the term simply refers to dissenting views of the many non-Theravādin schools from outside Ceylon.

It is at this point that I part company with Sodō Mori. One of his reasons for this conclusion is that he does not feel that a coherent picture emerges from a survey of the views in question. My understanding of them is a little different and I will indicate this shortly. The other reason for his rejection of the two possibilities he suggests is a rather

¹¹⁰Mori 1989 [1975]; Silk 2002. See also: Bechert 1955/1957; Ray and Paranavitana 1959, p.248ff.

¹¹¹Ruegg 1969, p. 521; Ruegg 1982, p. 338n.

¹¹²The expression 'Vitaṇḍavādi' could refer to an individual (as I take it) or it may be generic: 'the follower of Vitaṇḍavāda'.

limited picture of the historical processes involved in the rise of the Mahāyāna. In fact, since Mori first wrote this paper in 1975, some things have become clearer as regards the difficult questions involved in the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism, although much remains unclear.

The Vitaṇḍavādin and the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism

How does this apply to the case of Ceylon? What it means, I think, is that we should not expect the arrival in Ceylon of Mahāyānists as such. Rather the Mahāyāna teachings (or at least those which did not develop in Ceylon itself) would be brought by monks belonging to some other school, quite probably a closely related one. Since the Theriya tradition was not only found in Ceylon, it is theoretically possible that innovations could be brought by Theravādin monks from southern India and no doubt that was sometimes the case. Early Indian Mahāyāna was certainly a movement of many small groups (who no doubt varied greatly in calibre); so there is no reason to doubt that such ideas might have entered Ceylon from more than one source. Still the most probable means of entry would be a closely related school. This certainly rules out the Mahāsaṃghikas, who seem not to have been welcome in Ceylon, and it probably rules out the Puḍgalavādin schools as well. The Sarvāstivādins seem never to have had a presence in the South. In effect, then, the choice must lie with one or more of the four schools which are classified by Bhavya as Vibhajyavādin – schools which must be relatively closely related to the Theravāda.

The schools in question are the Dhammagutt(ik)as, the Kassapikas and the Mahimsāsakas. (The fourth school is precisely the Sinhalese school itself.) Pali sources know of the Dhammaguttas only from the list of schools in the *Dīpavaṃsa*, which is certainly an import from North India. In fact Vasumitra knows little more and they are largely absent from the epigraphical record in mainland India.¹¹³ The reason is plain. This was a school of the North-West, writing in Gāndhārī and for long well-established in the areas now known as Swat and Afghanistan as well as spreading out through Central Asia to China. One might see it as in a similar position in the far North-West to the Theriyas in the

¹¹³A number of inscriptions mentioning them are known from the North-West.

far South – both schools on the one hand far away from the homelands of Buddhism but both well-established on major trade-routes. The Kassapikas are equally little known in Ceylon and also probably mainly located in the North-West. The situation of the Mahiṃsāsakas is quite different. They are known both to the commentary on the *Kathāvatthu* and to the northern treatises on the schools. Inscriptions, admittedly not many, locate them both in the Punjab and in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. Their name: ‘Teachers of the Earth’ must have been well justified at an earlier date before the separation of their extreme branches in the North-West and the far South. The kind of claim involved is clearly attested from both the *Dīpavaṃsa* and from an inscription of Sinhalese origin of the third century AD in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. Such a claim made by the shared ancestors of Dhammaguttas, Mahiṃsāsakas and the Ceylon monks could be inherited by any or all of their successors.

More importantly, they also have clear links with Ceylon. In the early fifth century AD, Fa-hsien stayed at the Abhaya Monastery and, while in Ceylon, obtained a copy of their *Vinaya*. At a slightly later date, the author of the *Jātaka* Commentary mentions in the introduction that he was requested to write it by Buddhmitta who was originally ordained in the Mahiṃsāsaka lineage (*vaṃsa*). This is quite enough to make the Mahiṃsāsakas a very strong possible source for the ideas expressed by the Vitaṇḍavādin in Ceylon in the third century AD. If Bechert is correct to amend the mention of *Mahāsaṃghikabhikkhūnaṃ* in the *Cūlavaṃsa* (Mhv L 68) to *Mahiṃsāsaka-*, there is a third mention referring to the early ninth century.¹¹⁴ Let us note also that both they and monks from Ceylon were present in the third century AD in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. The question of course can be asked: why in that case are the teachings in question not simply ascribed to the Mahiṃsāsakas, rather than to a Vitaṇḍavādin? The answer is obvious. The reference is precisely to Mahāyānist Mahiṃsāsakas. The Sinhalese were no doubt well aware in the third century AD of the existence of non-Mahāyānist Mahiṃsāsakas. It is perhaps worth noting that in Vasumitra’s treatise on the schools (which was probably written quite close to this date) the

¹¹⁴Geiger 1960, p. 208n. I have some doubts about this, however. A reference to Mahāsaṃghikas and Theravādins might simply mean ‘all monks’, since this is the primary division from which all others develop.

Mahīmsāsakas are extremely prominent. Only the Mahāsaṃghikas and Sarvāstivādins are treated in more detail. No other school has anything like this prominence.

What would one expect to be the characteristics of such a group? Quite possibly a textual and disciplinary tradition relatively close to that of the Ceylon Theravāda. So the Mahīmsāsakas might well have had an *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* close to but not identical with that of the Ceylon school; in particular, the oldest texts such as the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* and the *Vibhaṅga* could be shared. The latest works might not be. Yet, as Mahāyānists, they may well have been affected by the kind of Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika critique which was developed by Sarvāstivādin Mahāyānist critics of the Vaibhāṣika tradition. One might also expect the presence of some views from the general North Indian tradition. I believe that this mixture is exactly what we do find.

Views ascribed to an unnamed Vitaṇḍavādin (presumably the wicked *bhikkhu* of *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa*) are refuted seven times in the *Abhidhamma* Commentary, nine or ten times in the commentaries of Buddhaghosa, once by Mahānāma, and twice by Dhammapāla. This gives a total of nineteen or twenty passages, omitting passages with the same discussion but no attribution. But some of the discussions are repeated; so the total number of points discussed is twelve or thirteen.

The presentation leaves little doubt that the commentators are drawing on a single source text – probably one which set out to refute the Vitaṇḍavādin in a debate format following the style of the earlier traditions of the *Kathāvatthu* and the *Milindapañha*. In many cases the debates begin with the setting out of the agreed commentary (*samān'-atthakathā*) of the teachers. Often too the debate ends with the instruction that, if the opponent cannot be got to recognize the correct teaching, he should be told: 'Go. Enter the monastery early in the morning and drink gruel.' This must mean before departing, since Dhammapāla has instead: 'after what needs doing has been done, he should be urged to depart where he likes (*yathāsukham*).'

Summary

The *Dīpavaṃsa* then tells us that a wicked *bhikkhu* was expelled either from the island or from the order at the behest of the king, after much which is unfitting (for monks) and *vitaṇḍa* teachings had been expounded. Then after this, the king gave alms in the Meghavana, i.e., in the area of the Great Monastery. At this point either the *vitaṇḍa* teachings or the *Vetulla* teachings had been crushed. The *Mahāvāṃsa* text has only the latter; so this could easily be the source of the reading of *Vetullavādam* in *Dīpavaṃsa*. There is no reason to suppose that these events had anything to do with the Abhaya Monastery. Rather the mention of the Meghavana strongly suggests that we are dealing with events in the Mahāvihāra itself. Very probably this was the point in time when the Mahāvihāra became established as the stronghold of orthodoxy it was henceforward to be. It is not at all surprising that some mediæval sources assume that this had always been the case and place these events in the Abhaya Monastery. But it is almost certainly not so.

It is highly likely that the Vitaṇḍavādin of the commentarial writers is one and the same with the ‘wicked *bhikkhu*’ but there is no way to be completely certain of this. It is unlikely that there was ever such a thing as a school of Vitaṇḍavādins (except insofar as the Vitaṇḍavādin had gathered a party of supporters). But analysis of the views makes their Dārṣṭāntika and Mahiṃsāsaka origin certain and their association with Mahāyāna probable.

A note on abbreviations and sources

Abbreviations of the names of Pali and Sanskrit texts in this paper follow the system of the *Critical Pāli Dictionary*. Page references for Pali texts are to the Pali Text Society (PTS) edition, where available, otherwise to the Burmese edition as given on the Vipassanā Research Institute (VRI) CD, unless otherwise indicated. The preferred spelling of *Samantappāsādikā* is with *-pp-*. The title *Dhammasaṃgaha* is used alternately with *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*; both titles are traditional, and refer to the same work.

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