

## Buddhaghosa's interpretation of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* in the *Mahāparinibbāna-Suttanta*

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In the *Mahāparinibbāna-Suttanta* (MPS hereafter) we can discern the notion of *Dhammakāya*<sup>1</sup> which stands for the Buddha in his absence.

### 1. *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* in MPS.

#### i. Collection of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*

MPS is referring to *Dhammakāya* when, just before the Buddha passes away, he makes a final exhortation: "It may be, Ānanda, that to some among you the thought will come: 'Finished is the word of the Teacher; we have the Teacher no longer.' But it should not, Ānanda, be so considered. For that which I have proclaimed and made known as the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*, that shall be your Teacher (*Satthā*) after I am gone".<sup>2</sup> This means that the term *Satthā* formerly applied to the Buddha himself, but now to *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*, which henceforth will be the substitute for the Buddha to the Order.

It is also noteworthy that in this statement the term *Vinaya* appears, unlike in the earlier passages in MPS,<sup>3</sup> which focus on *Dhamma* only. MPS here shows that by the time of the Buddha the institution of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* was established. Earlier in MPS, the Buddha refuses to comment on the future of the Order. Recovering from his serious illness in the village of Beluva, the Buddha

<sup>1</sup> The term *dhammakāya* appears only a few times in early Buddhist literature. The idea of *Dhammakāya* as a substitute for the Buddha can be traced in the famous passage: "Whoever sees *Dhamma* sees me; whoever sees me sees *Dhamma*. Seeing *Dhamma*, Vakkali, he sees me; seeing me he sees *Dhamma*" (SN iii p. 120).

<sup>2</sup> DN ii p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> DN ii p. 100; pp. 104f; p. 138.

refuses to answer Ānanda's request for some last instructions about the Order of monks, saying "Ānanda, what does the Order of monks expect of me? I have taught *Dhamma*, Ānanda, without making some of it esoteric and some exoteric. Ānanda, the Tathāgata does not have the closed fist of a teacher (*ācariya-muṭṭhi*) in respect of *Dhamma*. Surely, Ānanda, if there is anyone who thinks, 'I shall lead the Order of monks', or 'The Order should refer to me', let him make some statement about the Order of monks. But the Tathāgata does not think that he should lead the Order of monks, or that the Order of monks should refer to him. So why should the Tathāgata make a statement about the Order of monks?"<sup>4</sup>

However, now at the last moment he is described as addressing a piece of advice with regard to the future of the Order in his absence. As the quotation above shows, *Dhamma* in the absence of the term *Vinaya* characterises anti-organization, self-realization and universalism, while *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*, which appear side by side in this quotation, concern the preservation of monasticism after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*. The author of MPS here may be seeking for authority for the collection of texts. The appearance of the term *vinaya* is not accidental but significant. When collective monastic life had begun, the need arose for a comprehensive system of discipline, namely *Vinaya*. The appearance of the *Vinaya* in its monastic sense distinguishes monks from lay people. *Dhamma* is now concerned with the inner life of monks while *Vinaya* is the discipline governing and regulating the outward life of the monks and nuns who had entered the monastic Order.<sup>5</sup> *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* are transmitted by monks.

If we interpret the *Vinaya* in this context as not signifying the rules for monasticism in particular but those of right conduct in general, *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* become the same as *Dhamma*, which we have discussed earlier.<sup>6</sup> But MPS seems to treat *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* here in the monastic context, excluding lay people; immediately after this declaration of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* as a substitute

<sup>4</sup> DN ii p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> BD i p. vii.

<sup>6</sup> See the details at my D. Phil. thesis pp.56-65.

for the Buddha, MPS records a series of monastic matters such as how monks are to address each other, abolishing the lesser and minor precepts, and imposing the higher penalty (*brahmadāṇḍa*).<sup>7</sup>

It might be appropriate to compare other versions of MPS. Un (188a18) defines the *Dhamma* as the twelve branches,<sup>8</sup> and the *Vinaya* as Uposatha; Po (172b23) defines the *Dhamma* as the scripture (*sutta*) and the *vinaya* as 250 precepts; Yo (26a26) defines the *dhamma* as scripture (*sutta*), and the *vinaya* as precepts; Mu (398c23) and Sk (386. 41. 2) define the *dhamma* as the twelve branches; Fa (204b29), Sk (386. 41. 2) and Mu (398c22) define the *Vinaya* as Pātimokkha. All the version virtually agree that the *dhamma* is a collection of texts; the *vinaya* is a body of monastic rules.

Careful scrutiny of the use of the terms *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* in MPS reveals the process of Buddhist monasticisation of these terms.<sup>9</sup> We come upon the fact that the terms *Dhamma-Vinaya* are used not exclusively for Buddhism, but for religions in general. In response to Subhadda's question whether or not six other teachers have realised the truth, the Buddha answers, "In whatever *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* the Noble eightfold Path is not found, no ascetic is found of the first, the second, the third, or the fourth grade."<sup>10</sup> It is noticeable that the term *Vinaya* is employed of other religious groups. The Buddha recalls his noble search during

<sup>7</sup> DN ii p. 154.

<sup>8</sup> This classification of the words of the Buddha (*Buddhavacana*) is adopted by Northern tradition, while the Theravādins of Ceylon adopts the nine constituents. The twelve constituents are: *nīdāna*, *avadāna*, *upadeśa* plus the Theravādin nine: *sutta*, *geyya*, *veyyākaraṇa*, *gāthā*, *udāna*, *itivuttaka*, *jātaka*, *abbhutadhamma* and *vedalla* (Lamotte 1988 pp. 143-7).

<sup>9</sup> Studies of the formation of MPS (Bareau 1979 pp. 45-103; Ray pp. 381-7; Trainor pp. 44-6) show that MPS took a long time to assume its present form; so the text reflects the layers of development of the Order. Buddhaghosa regards the second list of relics as added by monks in Sri Lanka (DA ii p. 611).

<sup>10</sup> DN ii p.268.

which he once led the holy life in *dhamma-vinaya* under Ālāra Kālāma.<sup>11</sup> *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* is a common expression in the early texts for the teaching in both principle and practice.<sup>12</sup>

The term *Dhamma* in a Buddhist context is used to include the scope of *Vinaya*. Near the beginning of MPS, the term *Dhamma* is employed to contain the usage of *Vinaya*. Among the five sets of seven conditions for the welfare of the Order (*satta aparihāriye Dhamme*), especially the first two sets deal mainly with monastic matters, and one set of six conditions for the welfare of the Order mainly concerns monastic rules.<sup>13</sup> "The '*Dhamma* of the Sakyaputtiyas' is the name taken to distinguish it from other sects: not *Dhamma-Vinaya* as the legends usually name and specify it".<sup>14</sup> The Buddha's teachings have come down to Buddhists under the name of *Dhamma*.

In the process of development of the collective life of the saṅgha, "the *Dhamma* expanded into *Dhamma-Vinaya* which is the conventional canonical term for the system of the religion. The recognition of *Vinaya* as collateral with *Dhamma* in the system marks the first step in the transition of the Buddhists from Sect to Order."<sup>15</sup> "*Vinaya* is the name given to the system of Saṅgha life that developed in the early monk-settlements."<sup>16</sup> The aim and purpose of *Vinaya* was evidently organizational.<sup>17</sup> After the Buddha's *parinibbāna*, "the doctrines and tenets of the *Dhamma* would naturally seek for authority in the legends; and the

<sup>11</sup> MN i p.163. "It is reasonable to suggest that in the early period of the Buddha's ministry this compound was probably a tappurisa in locative relation meaning 'training in dhammas' and that later, as the training became more thoroughly formulated, the compound might have lent itself to being interpreted as *dhamma* and discipline." (Carter p. 69 fn 25).

<sup>12</sup> RFG.

<sup>13</sup> DN ii pp. 76-8.

<sup>14</sup> S. Dutt 1962 p.66.

<sup>15</sup> S. Dutt 1962 p. 68.

<sup>16</sup> S. Dutt 1962 p.74.

<sup>17</sup> S. Dutt 1962 p.75.

*Vinaya* also had to seek this authority at a stage when the concept emerged of the Saṅgha as an Order, regulated and governed by its own system."<sup>18</sup> The *Mahāpadesa* (the four great references) in MPS shows the process of textualisation of *dhmma* and *vinaya*. It is a monastic device to settle disputes by testing and textualising the authenticity of *dhmma* and *vinaya*. The process of establishing standard texts out of the oral tradition was the work of monks when the Saṅgha had settled into a relatively developed monastic life.<sup>19</sup>

The word *anudhamma* in MPS seems to be distinct from the monastic sense of *vinaya*. The passages where the terms *dhmma* and *anudhamma* are compounded indicate no difference between monks and householders in the matter of practicing *Dhamma*. Probably the *anudhamma* refers to a sort of moral conduct in general, not in the monastic *vinaya* sense. Rhys Davids translates *dhmma-anudhamma* as "the lesser corollaries that follow from the larger doctrine", and *anudhamma* as "the precepts".<sup>20</sup> In the later part of his book, he gives slightly different translations: *dhmma-anudhamma* as "the greater and lesser duties"; *anudhamma* as the precepts.<sup>21</sup> Ray agrees with the latter translation. "Rhys Davids is probably right in translating such terms as *dhmma-anudhamma* in ways that suggest that *vinaya*, moral precepts, and correct behaviour in general are meant."<sup>22</sup> Buddhaghosa defines *anudhamma* as moral conduct.<sup>23</sup>

## ii. Buddhaghosa's definition of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* in MPS

On the statement that *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* will be your teacher, Buddhaghosa makes a detailed comment. As we have shown, MPS treats the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya* in terms of texts; in the same way Buddhaghosa also

<sup>18</sup> S. Dutt 1962 p.77.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed discussion on *Mahāpadesa*, see my D. Phil. thesis pp. 80-112.

<sup>20</sup> Dial ii p.112.

<sup>21</sup> Dial ii p.151.

<sup>22</sup> Ray p. 360.

<sup>23</sup> DA ii p. 578.

understands them as the three baskets.<sup>24</sup> According to Buddhaghosa, Kassapa, remembering this statement, proposes the first council; this admonition encourages Kassapa to hold the recital of *dhmma* and *vinaya*.<sup>25</sup> Buddhaghosa holds that for forty-five years from his enlightenment to his *parinibbāna*, what the Buddha taught is Buddhavacana, which is classified as follows: the three baskets, the five Nikāyas, nine branches (*aṅga*), eighty-four thousand groups of *Dhamma*. Buddhaghosa, however, concentrates on the classification of the three baskets.

## i). Buddhaghosa's definition of *Vinaya* as the *Vinayapiṭaka*

He first comments on the scope of the *Vinaya*. He believes that the Buddha laid down all sorts of rules for the Order during his lifetime. Concerning the seven groups of offences, the Buddha taught the *Parivāra*, the *Khandhaka* and two *Vibhaṅgas*. In his commentary, it is quite noticeable that he puts *Vinaya* before *Dhamma*, while the main text does the opposite. His preference for the *Vinaya* is not just an accident, but rather lies in the Theravādin tradition which puts more emphasis on the observance of *vinaya*.<sup>26</sup> The Pāli account of the First Council say that the *Vinaya* was recited before the *Dhamma*.<sup>27</sup> Buddhaghosa writes in the introduction to his commentary on the *Vinayapiṭaka*. "When the venerable One (Ānanda) was thus seated, the elder Mahākassapa addressed the monks, 'Friends, what shall we recite first, the *Dhamma* or the *Vinaya*?' The monks replied, 'Sir, Mahākassapa, the *Vinaya* is the very life of the dispensation of the Enlightened

<sup>24</sup> DA ii p. 591.

<sup>25</sup> Sp p. 4. But the account of the council in Vin ii pp. 284 has no mention of Kassapa's remembering this statement.

<sup>26</sup> The Pāli canon is arranged with the *Vinayapiṭaka* first, and the *Suttapiṭaka* and lastly the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, but other schools such as the Mahāsaṃghikas, the Haimavatas, the Mahiśāsakas and the Dharmaguptakas place the *Sūtrapiṭaka*, the *Vinayapiṭaka*, and the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* in that order (Lamotte 1988 p. 150f). The order of the three baskets reflects their relative importance.

<sup>27</sup> Vin ii p 285.

One: so long as the *Vinaya* endures, the dispensation endures, therefore let us recite the *Vinaya* first'.<sup>28</sup> On this passage N. A. Jayawickrama comments as follows: "Even as early as the time of the finalizing of the Cullavagga account of the Council, the *Vinaya* appears to have been considered more important than the *Dhamma* though it is not explicitly stated there. This seems to be a special development in the Theravāda with its emphasis on paṭipatti (the observance of precepts), and whenever pariyatti (the learning of the sacred texts) gains precedence over paṭipatti, a period of decay in the Sāsana is generally reflected as may be seen from its subsequent history in Ceylon."<sup>29</sup>

The fact that the Theravāda school upholds the importance of the *Vinaya* over the *Dhamma* is in striking contrast with other schools' preference for the *Dhamma*. Przyluski remarks, "In giving precedence to Upāli over Ānanda, the redactor of the Pāli Cullavagga or a late compiler has only expressed his desire to indicate the excellence of the *Vinaya*, which in other respects appears consistent with the general tendencies of the Sthaviravādins. The Mūla-sarvāstivādins on the contrary recognise the pre-eminence of the Sūtras over the *Vinaya* and that of Ānanda over Upāli."<sup>30</sup> The Theravādin emphasis on *Vinaya* is well revealed when they call the first council "chanting of the discipline" (*vinayaśaṃgīti*) although both *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* were recited together.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Sp i p. 11. Buddhaghosa expresses the same idea in his verse at the beginning of the commentary to the *Vinaya*: "Placing reliance in the greatness of the teachers of yore (the exponents of the *Vinaya* who preceded Buddhaghosa) I shall expound the uncontaminated Code of Discipline by the survival of which is assured the mainstay of the Dispensation of the Sage of great stability though He exists no more." (IDV p. 1; Sp. p.1 verse 5).

<sup>29</sup> IDV p. 98 fn. In connection with the subsequent situation in Ceylon, Jayawickrama refers us to Rahula pp.158-9.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Przyluski 1967 p. 29. "Ānanda recites before Upāli in the Mahāsaṃghika and the Mūlasarvāstivādin..." (André Bareau 1958 p. 22. Quoted by Freedman p. 464 fn 45). See also Lamotte, 1988 pp. 149-150.

<sup>31</sup> Vin ii pp. 292 f.

Why does Buddhaghosa put more emphasis on *Vinaya* than *Dhamma*? An answer lies in the history of monasticism in early Buddhism and the Theravādin tradition. The account of the second council clearly shows the disunity among the Order of monks over *vinaya*. In fact, there were said to be eighteen sects by the time that Mahāyana doctrine arose: "Buddhist 'sects' are therefore bodies of monks (and nuns); they have nothing to do with the laity. Splitting is a matter of *vinaya*, of behavior. If the split arises as the result of a disagreement, the disagreement itself is likely to be over a point of *vinaya* - of this recent Theravādin history furnishes us with many examples."<sup>32</sup> The best way to prevent these sorts of possible future schism is to establish monastic rules and stick to them. As the monastic tradition is closely related to the paramount role of the disciplinary code (*Vinaya*), and notably of the detailed set of rules governing the monk's daily life,<sup>33</sup> the observance of the monastic rules is essential for maintaining the Order in unity.

Buddhaghosa's understanding of *Vinaya* as the monks' monopoly may be found in the *Milindapañha*.<sup>34</sup> We can trace the reduction of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* into monastic privilege in a dialogue between King Milinda and Nāgasena. The king quotes, "The *Dhamma*-and-Discipline, monks, proclaimed by the Tathāgata shines forth when it is unveiled, not when it is concealed."<sup>35</sup> He then puts this quotation in conflict with the fact that the recitation of the Pātimokkha and the whole of the *Vinaya*-piṭaka are open to monks and nuns only.<sup>36</sup> The king's

<sup>32</sup> Gombrich 1988 p. 111. He assumes that doctrinal opinion was unlikely to cause a split (Gombrich 1988 p.112). Erik Zürcher (p. 441) is of the same opinion, when he speaks about the emergence of eighteen monastic traditions, "...., we must realise that the difference that divided them concerned details of discipline rather than doctrinal matters". He further states that the five different Vinayas of the various early schools show difference among them as to *Vinaya*, while they show very little variation as far as doctrine is concerned.

<sup>33</sup> Erik Zürcher p. 441.

<sup>34</sup> Mil pp. 190 ff.

<sup>35</sup> AN i p. 283.

<sup>36</sup> Originally the Pātimokkha ceremony was intended to edify the laity, for this institution was

understanding of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* is that *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* are open and universal, as we have discussed above. He supposes that if one were to find what is appropriate to the Buddha's teaching, then the *Vinaya* rules would appear obvious, because only in that way would conduct be properly regulated in keeping with the flavour of the goal, the flavour of *Dhamma*.<sup>37</sup>

Nāgasena answers that the Pāṭimokkha and the *Vinayapiṭaka* are open exclusively to monks and nuns when an Order has established a boundary (*sīmā*).<sup>38</sup> He proceeds to explain. Firstly it is restricted according to the customary usage of previous Tathāgatas. As each group passes its secret lore down within that group, so the recitation of Pāṭimokkha is handed down in the Order of monks. Secondly it is restricted out of respect for the *Dhamma*, because the Buddha wishes that the *Dhamma* may not fall into the hands of the wrong people. Lastly it is restricted out of respect for the monkhood. As valuable property in the world comes to kings, so the tradition of a Buddha, the scriptures, good behaviour and so forth pass to the Order.

Nāgasena's answer reflects established monasticism. His first explanation echoes the kind of "closed fist teacher" whom the Buddha repudiates, as we have seen. The second one disregards lay people in general; on the other hand, the last shows respect for the monkhood. In short, his explanations are a mere justification of monks' and nuns' monopolising the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*. The *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* which King Milinda quotes are universal truth and right conduct in general, but the Pāṭimokkha and the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, which Nāgasena interprets them as, are

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initiated at a king's suggestion (Vin i p.101). But later on the rule was laid down that laymen were not allowed to be present (Vin i p.115). Most probably monks would find it embarrassing to confess their faults before lay people. Gombrich (1988 p. 109) rightly concludes that this development must post-date the Buddha's lifetime.

<sup>37</sup> The passage is not entirely clear but the meaning seems to be that the *Vinaya* rules are essentially a matter of common sense if one is to adhere to the Buddha's soteriological teaching (RFG).

<sup>38</sup> As Horner notes, *sīmā* should be taken here in its technical *Vinaya* sense of boundary (MQ i p.271 fn 1).

restricted to monks and nuns. We can notice the process through which the Buddha's *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* are monopolised by monks. Buddhaghosa's monasticism-oriented definition of the *Vinaya* as the *Vinayapiṭaka* agrees with Nāgasena's standpoint.

## ii). Buddhaghosa's definition of the *Dhamma* as the *Suttanta-piṭaka*

Buddhaghosa believes that while the Buddha remains alive, he teaches these: the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), the four right efforts (*sammappadhāna*), the four roads to supernormal power (*iddhipāda*), the five spiritual faculties (*indriya*), the five mental powers (*bala*), the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*), the eight-fold noble path (*magga*). In various ways he has analysed these doctrinal matters and taught the basket of Suttanta. The whole basket of Suttanta will perform the role of Teacher for monks when he has attained *parinibbāna*.<sup>39</sup>

Let us discuss why Buddhaghosa chooses these seven sets among doctrines as representing the Buddha's *Dhamma*. These seven sets are explicitly identified with the path.<sup>40</sup> These seven sets evidently form a programme of practical training for enlightenment. This whole programme of practice presupposes the theory of the Four Noble Truths, or Dependent Origination.<sup>41</sup> Certainly the doctrine of Dependent Origination is purely theoretical, but the teaching of the Four Noble Truths provides both theory and practice. In this regard the Four Noble Truths are more comprehensive than Dependent Origination. The eight-fold noble path, the last item of the seven sets, is a part of the Four Noble Truths. Why does Buddhaghosa choose the seven sets instead of the Four Noble Truths to define the Buddha's *Dhamma*?

His choice of the seven sets as the Buddha's *Dhamma* might be based on the passages in MPS where the Buddha, after having decided to give up the will to

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<sup>39</sup> DA ii p. 591.

<sup>40</sup> Gethin pp. 105 ff.

<sup>41</sup> Warder pp. 105 ff.

live on, requests Ānanda to assemble the monks who live in the neighbourhood of Vesālī, and addresses them with the seven sets: "So, monks, those dhammas that I have directly known and taught to you-- having properly grasped them, you should practice them, develop them, make them great so that *the spiritual life may continue and endure long; this will be for the good of the many*..... And what, monks, are the *dhammas* that I have known directly and taught to you...? Just these--the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four roads to supernormal power, the five spiritual faculties, the five mental powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, the eight-fold noble path."<sup>42</sup>

Warder believes that the seven sets are the basic doctrines of Buddhism as originally propounded by the Buddha, on the grounds that "a set of seven headings found in all the sources was original and may have constituted the whole Mātrkā at first."<sup>43</sup> "The passage itself and the immediate context of the announcement of the imminent *parinibbāna* of the Buddha make it abundantly clear that this is intended as an important and essential summary of the Buddha's teaching."<sup>44</sup> As Gethin suggests, "as far as the early Buddhist tradition is concerned, the seven sets should be seen as encapsulating the essential teaching and practice of Buddhism."<sup>45</sup> So Buddhaghosa might regard this sermon as representing the *dhamma* of the Suttanta-piṭaka. In addition, another more important reason for his choice is

<sup>42</sup> DN ii p.120. The Tibetan version of MPS has the Buddha list the 37 dhammas when Ānanda, seeing the deadly sickness of the Buddha expresses his concern for the future Order (Snellgrove p. 401). Snellgrove (p. 401 fn 4) adds that this list forms the climax of the third and shortest *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, a Tibetan version of MPS. "This Sūtra is in the form of a prophecy concerning the success of the *Dhamma* under the Emperor Aśoka 100 years after the parinirvāṇa and a subsequent decline gradually worse up to 1,100 years after. Ānanda is distressed and asks what are the essential teachings for restoring order. The Buddha quotes the 37.....".

<sup>43</sup> Warder, p. 11. Warder (p. 82) goes on to say that the teaching of the seven sets at Vesālī quoted above gives rise to the idea of a mātrkā and in due course to the elaboration of it as *Abhidhamma*.

<sup>44</sup> Gethin 1992 p. 231. cf. Warder pp. 81 ff.

<sup>45</sup> Gethin 1992 p. 232.

revealed when we look at the introduction to the seven sets rather than the sets themselves.

In MPS, the seven sets are taught against the background of the Buddha's imminent *parinibbāna* and the future of the Order and his teachings. The same concern about the destiny of the Order, leading to the teaching of the seven sets, is found at several suttas. In the *Pāsādika-sutta*, when a report reaches the Buddha that at Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta's death his followers split and started quarrelling with each other, the Buddha says: "So, Cunda, regarding those dhammas which I have known directly and taught to you, you should all meet and come together to chant meaning for meaning, word for word, and not to dispute so that *the spiritual life may continue and endure long; this will be for the good of the many*, ..... And what, Cunda, are those dhammas...? Just these, the four foundations of mindfulness..... the noble eight-fold path."<sup>46</sup>

This passage emphasises that the practice of the seven sets, without dispute, will preserve the spiritual life. In the *Sāmaṇyāna-sutta*<sup>47</sup> too, the news of the Nigaṇṭhas' splitting makes Ānanda concerned for the future of the Order after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*, which leads the Buddha to teach the seven sets. The *Kinti-sutta* also conveys the same message. "You should all train yourselves therein (the seven sets) being united, in concord, not disputing. While you are training yourselves united, in concord, not disputing, there may be two monks who hold opinions about *dhamma* at variance with one another."<sup>48</sup> These passages quoted above show that the seven sets are taught to ensure the long-term fortunes of the order and the maintenance of the tradition established by the Buddha.<sup>49</sup> The fact that the seven sets are taught for the unity of the saṅgha must have made Buddhaghosa regard the seven sets as the *Dhamma*, representing the teachings of the Suttantapiṭaka.

<sup>46</sup> DN iii pp. 127f.

<sup>47</sup> MN ii pp. 243-51.

<sup>48</sup> MN ii pp 238-43.

<sup>49</sup> Gethin 1992 p. 235.

The seven sets are referred to by Gethin as "representing the path or practice to be undertaken by the monk".<sup>50</sup> When Buddhaghosa regards the seven sets as the Buddha's original *Dhamma*, he cannot help incurring the criticism made by Wayman in another context that "the only teaching of the Buddha amounted to the details of the Buddhist path as followed by the monks, and so there were no characteristic doctrines of Buddhism as contrasted with monkish practice, no instructions to the laymen of how they could lead a Buddhist life without going into a monastery, and so on."<sup>51</sup>

### iii). Buddhaghosa's definition of *Dhamma* as the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*

Buddhaghosa understands the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* as part of the *Dhamma* in the Buddha's statement, "The *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* will be your teacher after the Tathāgata has gone." He elsewhere lists the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* in seven books: the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, the *Vibhaṅga*, the *Dhātukathā*, the *Puggalapaññatti*, the *Kathāvatthu*, the *Yamaka*, the *Paṭṭhāna*.<sup>52</sup> Certain schools such as the Sautrāntikas and the Mahāsaṃghikas do not regard the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* of the Theravādas as the word of the Buddha.<sup>53</sup> The seven books of the *Abhidhamma* are peculiar to the Theravādins. Even within the Theravādin school, the *Dhātukathā* is considered apocryphal.<sup>54</sup> "Until the fifth century certain Sinhalese schools hesitated over the place they should give the *Abhidhamma* books."<sup>55</sup> "In their present form, the

<sup>50</sup> Gethin 1992 p.229.

<sup>51</sup> Alex Wayman pp. 418f. Wayman criticises Warder for regarding the seven sets as representing the 'basic doctrines of Buddhism as originally propounded by the Buddha'. Gethin (1992 p. 343) agrees when Alex Wayman criticises Warder for taking the seven sets as representing the Buddha's teaching, but disagrees when he states that the seven sets reduce the Buddha's *Dhamma* to monastic practice.

<sup>52</sup> DA i p. 17; Sp p. 18; Asl p. 3

<sup>53</sup> Lamotte 1988 p. 181.

<sup>54</sup> SA ii p.201.

<sup>55</sup> Lamotte 1988 p. 182.

seven Books of the *Abhidhamma* by no means present that canonical nature which tradition claims in their favour."<sup>56</sup> In spite of these historical facts, how can Buddhaghosa claim the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* as Buddhavacana?

Buddhaghosa's inclusion of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* in the *Dhamma* is derived from the statement, "The Basket of *Vinaya* is the *Vinaya* and the rest of the word of the Buddha is the *Dhamma*."<sup>57</sup> In fact, there is no mention of the recitation of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* in the account of the first council. So Buddhaghosa attempts to include the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* under the *Dhamma* rehearsed by Ānanda. Buddhaghosa asserts that at the first council Upāli explained the *Vinaya*, which formed a part of the Khuddaka Nikāya, while Ānanda explained the remaining sections of the Khuddaka-nikāya and the four Nikāya.<sup>58</sup> He defines the Khuddakanikāya as the rest of the sayings of the Buddha, including the entire *Vinayapiṭaka*, the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, and the fifteen divisions commencing with the Khuddakapāṭha excluding the four Nikāyas.<sup>59</sup> The *Abhidhamma* belongs to the Khuddaka-Nikāya.<sup>60</sup>

Probably this division of the entire of the word of the Buddha into five Nikāyas was intended to include the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* under *Dhamma* and thereby be able to assert that all three piṭakas were recited at the first council. However, this division has disappeared in the Pāli tradition, though some schools refer to the Khuddaka as a miscellaneous piṭaka (not a Nikāya), giving it more or less the status of the *Vinayapiṭaka* or the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*.<sup>61</sup> Buddhaghosa's attempt to include *Abhidhamma* under *Dhamma* merely reflects the conditions prevalent in his time: the Theras try to establish the authenticity and antiquity of

<sup>56</sup> Lamotte 1988 p. 183.

<sup>57</sup> Sp i p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Sp i p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Sp i p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> Asl p.27.

<sup>61</sup> Jayawickrama p. 4.

their *Abhidhamma*.<sup>62</sup>

In order to put the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* on the same level as the other two piṭakas, in the *Aṭṭhasālinī*, which is regarded as the basis of the orthodox Mahāvihārin understanding of the Theravāda-*Abhidhamma*, Buddhaghosa elaborates a mythological scenario in which the Buddha contemplates the literal contents of the seven books of Theravādin *Abhidhamma* during his enlightenment.<sup>63</sup> The Buddha teaches the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* in Tāvātimsa. Then he teaches the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* to Sāriputta. At the council, it was recited by Ānanda, and the commentary on all seven books was given by Mahākassapa at that time.<sup>64</sup>

In order to show that the *Abhidhamma* is the Buddha's word, Buddhaghosa quotes two *Vinaya* texts (Vin iv p.144; p.344).<sup>65</sup> Since the term *Abhidhamma* appears side by side with Suttanta and *Vinaya* in these texts, Buddhaghosa believes that the *Abhidhamma* is equally the Buddha's word.<sup>66</sup> He further quotes the *Mahāgosiṅga Sutta* as even stronger proof that the *Abhidhamma* is the Buddha's authentic word. In this *sutta*, the Buddha praises a talk of Sāriputta and Mahāmoggallāna on the *Abhidhamma*.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Lamotte 1988 p. 182. Jayawickrama (p. 17) dates the division into *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* as old as Pāli Buddhism; Five Nikāyas about the time of the second council. The division into piṭaka was probably prior to the third council. The division of the *Dhamma-Vinaya* into five Nikāyas is a stage of development prior to the division into three piṭakas (Freedman p. 461).

<sup>63</sup> At the end of the third watch, the Buddha arrived at the ocean of the *Abhidhamma* method. In the fourth week, he contemplated the self-acquired *Abhidhamma*-piṭaka (Asl p.35)

<sup>64</sup> Asl pp. 12-4; 27; 30-1; JA i p. 78. cf. The Sarvāstivādas maintain that the *Abhidhamma* text was collected by a monk, and then was approved by the Buddha as Buddhavacana (Takakusu pp. 99 ff.).

<sup>65</sup> Asl p.28.

<sup>66</sup> In *suttas* (e. g., Vin i 64; iii 144; iv 344) the word *Abhidhamma* means 'special *dhamma*' (without admixture of literary treatment or personalities, etc. ), and is sometimes coupled with the word *abhivinaya*. (DPPN s. v. *Abhidhamma*).

<sup>67</sup> MN i p.218.

How can Buddhaghosa refute the Sinhalese tradition that the Kathāvatthu was composed by Moggaliputta Tissa at the third council?<sup>68</sup> Against the Vitaṇḍa school,<sup>69</sup> which rejects this book by quoting this traditional account, Buddhaghosa defends it as the Buddha's word. The table of contents in the text had been laid down by the Buddha himself, because he foresaw that, 218 years after his *parinibbāna*, Moggaliputta Tissa would elaborate the Kathāvatthu, bringing together 500 orthodox and 500 heterodox suttas. The elder, however, expounded the book not by his own knowledge, but according to the table of contents laid down, as well as by the method given by the Buddha. Therefore the entire book became the word of the Buddha.<sup>70</sup>

Considering the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* as the supreme words of the Buddha, Buddhaghosa highly praises a monk who knows *Abhidhamma* as a true preacher of *Dhamma*, but strongly warns that one who prohibits the teaching of the *Abhidhamma* is guilty of striking a blow against the wheel of the Buddha's doctrine, denies his omniscience, and is capable of doing acts for which the doer is liable to be excommunicated by the Order and should be dismissed.<sup>71</sup> To legitimise the seven books of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, Buddhaghosa insists that they originated from the Buddha himself. His *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is that of the Theravādin Mahāvihāra.

### 3. Conclusion

Like the author of MPS, Buddhaghosa is more concerned with the maintenance of the Order. He puts more emphasis on *Vinaya*; he defines the

<sup>68</sup> Dpv. vii 41; 56-8; Mhv v. 278.

<sup>69</sup> This school is the sect of Abhayagiri and Jetavana (Expo p.5 fn 3).

<sup>70</sup> Asl pp. 4 ff.. Buddhaghosa further supports his argument by quoting the *Madhupindika-Suttaṅga*, (MN i pp.108 f.) where, since the Buddha gave his approval to Kaccāna's explanation of the heads of a discourse laid down by the Buddha, the whole suttanta became the word of the Buddha.

<sup>71</sup> Asl p.29.



*Suttantapiṭaka* as representing the thirty seven *dhamma* conducive to enlightenment, which help to maintain the Order in harmony. *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* have, in effect, been transformed into the values, preoccupations, and institutions of settled monasticism. His identification of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* as a body of *Dhammakāya* represents the Theravādin Mahāvihāra tradition.

Buddhaghosa's definition of *dhammakāya* as the scriptural tradition is realistic. He would entirely agree with Nāgasena when the latter says that it is possible to point to the Buddha by pointing at the body of *Dhamma*, for *dhamma* was taught by him.<sup>72</sup> His understanding is quite in contrast with the other schools and traditions which develop the notion of the *dhammakāya* in various complex ways. Moreover his realistic understanding has its own features. Firstly, his definition is favourable to the Theravādin tradition; the *Dhamma* legacy is manifested in the Pāli scriptures only when he defines the Theravādin *Abhidhamma* texts as part of *dhammakāya*; hence other schools' *Abhidhamma* texts are excluded. Secondly, his definition is a reflection of monastic tradition. Since the body of the Buddha's teachings was gathered together at the first council by monks and was passed on to the Order of monks, the *dhammakāya* legacy is inherited by the Order of monks.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<sup>72</sup> Mil p. 73.

### i. Primary texts

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
Asl	Atthasālinī
DA	Dīghanikāya Commentary
Dpv	Dīpavaṃsa
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
Fa	A Chinese Version of MPS (TD vol. 1)
Mhv	Mahāvamsa
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
Mil	Milinda-pañha.
MPS	Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta
Mu	A Chinese version of MPS (TD vol. 24)
Po	A Chinese Version of MPS (TD vol. 1)
SA	Samyutta Nikāya Commentary
Sk	Sanskrit Version of MPS (ed. by Waldschmidt)
SN	Samyutta Nikāya
TD	Taisho Shinsu Daizokyo
Un	A Chinese Version of MPS (TD vol. 1)
Vin	Vinaya
Yo	A Chinese Version of MPS (TD vol. 1).

### ii) Translations and others

BD	The Book of the Discipline
Dial	Dialogues of the Buddha
DPPN	Dictionary of Pāli Proper Name
Expo	The Expositor
IDV	The Inception of Discipline and The Vinaya Nidāna
MQ	Milinda's Questions
RFG	Richard F Gombrich (private communication)

Note: References to Pāli texts and their translations are to the Pāli Text Society

editions unless otherwise stated.

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## Key words :

Dhammakāya, Mahāparinibbāna-Suttanta, dhamma, vinaya, Buddhaghosa, anudhamma, Suttantapiṭaka, Vinayapiṭaka, Abhidhammapiṭaka, seven sets, Patimokkha, Milindapañha