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# Contents

## Prelims
- Contributors.............................................................................................................. xi
- Editors and Editorial Board.......................................................................................... xxxiii
- Primary Sources Abbreviations.................................................................................... xxxv
- Books Series and Journals Abbreviations................................................................. xxxvii
- General Abbreviations ................................................................................................ xlii
- Introduction .................................................................................................................. xlv

## Section One:
- Śākyamuni: South Asia ................................................................................................. 3
- Barlaam and Josaphat .................................................................................................. 39

## Section Two:
- South & Southeast Asia:
  - Ajātaśatru .................................................................................................................. 51
  - Āryadeva .................................................................................................................... 60
  - Āryaśūra ..................................................................................................................... 70
  - Asaṅga/Maitreya(nātha) ............................................................................................ 73
  - Bhāviveka .................................................................................................................. 81
  - Brahmā, Śakra, and Māra ........................................................................................ 85
  - Buddhaghosa .......................................................................................................... 92
  - Buddhas of the Past: South Asia .............................................................................. 95
  - Buddhas of the Past and of the Future: Southeast Asia .......................................... 109
  - Candragomin ............................................................................................................ 121
  - Candrakīrti ............................................................................................................... 125
  - Dākīni ......................................................................................................................... 132
  - Devadatta .................................................................................................................. 141
  - Dharmakīrti ............................................................................................................... 156
  - Dharmapāla .............................................................................................................. 168
  - Dharmottara ............................................................................................................ 173
  - Dignāga .................................................................................................................... 179
  - Early Sarvāstivāda Masters .................................................................................... 186
  - Gavampati in Southeast Asia .................................................................................. 191
  - Gopadatta ................................................................................................................ 196
  - Guṇaprabha ............................................................................................................. 198
  - Haribhadra ............................................................................................................. 204
  - Haribhaṭṭa ............................................................................................................. 209
  - Harivarman ............................................................................................................ 211
  - Harṣa ....................................................................................................................... 214
  - Hayagrīva ................................................................................................................ 218
  - Indian Tantric Authors: Overview ......................................................................... 228
  - Jñānagarbha ............................................................................................................ 261
  - Jñānapāda .............................................................................................................. 264
Jñānaśrimitra............................................................................................................................. 269
Kamalaśila ...................................................................................................................................... 272
Karunāmayā ................................................................................................................................... 279
Kṣemendra....................................................................................................................................... 286
Kumāralāta .................................................................................................................................... 293
Mahādeva ....................................................................................................................................... 298
Maitreya ......................................................................................................................................... 302
Mārici ............................................................................................................................................... 325
Mātrceṭa .......................................................................................................................................... 333
Nāgarjuna ........................................................................................................................................ 335
Pacecekabuddhas/Pratyekabuddhas in Indic Sources .................................................................. 348
Phra Malai in Thailand and Southeast Asia ................................................................................ 357
Prajñākaraṇagupta ....................................................................................................................... 363
Ratnākarāsāntī ............................................................................................................................... 366
Ratnakirtī ........................................................................................................................................ 371
Saṅghabhadra ............................................................................................................................... 374
Saṅkaranandana ........................................................................................................................... 378
Saṅkarasvāmin ............................................................................................................................. 382
Śāntarakṣita .................................................................................................................................. 383
Śāntideva ....................................................................................................................................... 391
Sarasvatī/Benzaiten ........................................................................................................................ 398
Śāriputra ....................................................................................................................................... 409
Scholars of Premodern Pali Buddhism ....................................................................................... 420
Seers (ṛṣi/ṛṣi) and Brāhmaṇas in Southeast Asia ....................................................................... 437
Siddhas.......................................................................................................................................... 443
Śrīlāta ............................................................................................................................................. 452
Śthiramati ........................................................................................................................................ 456
Śubhagupta ..................................................................................................................................... 458
Tantric Buddhist Deities in Southeast Asia .................................................................................. 463
Thera/Theri in Pali and Southeast Asian Buddhism .................................................................. 474
Udbhataśiddhavāmin ..................................................................................................................... 479
Upagupta ........................................................................................................................................ 481
Vāgīśvarakirtī ............................................................................................................................... 490
Vasubandhu .................................................................................................................................... 492
Vināyaka ......................................................................................................................................... 507
Yama and Hell Beings in Indian Buddhism .................................................................................. 513

East Asia:
Akāśagarbha in East Asia .................................................................................................................. 521
Arhats in East Asian Buddhism ..................................................................................................... 529
Aśvaghoṣa (East Asian Aspects) .................................................................................................. 549
Avalokiteśvara in East Asia .......................................................................................................... 546
Dīzang/jizō ..................................................................................................................................... 562
Jianzhen (Ganjin) ......................................................................................................................... 571
Mahākāla in East Asia ................................................................................................................... 576
Mahākāśyapa in Chan-inspired Traditions ................................................................................. 586
Maṇjuśrī in East Asia ..................................................................................................................... 591
Maudgalyāyana (Mulan) ................................................................................................................ 600
Musang (Wuxiang) ...................................................................................................................... 608
Tejaprabhā ..................................................................................................................................... 612
Yinyuan Longqi (Ingen) ................................................................................................................ 616
China:

Amoghadavajra ................................................................. 643
An Shigao ........................................................................ 639
Chengguan ................................................................. 642
Daoxuan ........................................................................ 648
Falin ............................................................................. 653
Faxian ........................................................................ 657
Faxun ........................................................................... 662
Hanshan Deqing ............................................................ 668
Hongzi Zhengjue .......................................................... 673
Huixiong (see Juefan Huixiong)
Huixin (see Shenxiu)
Huixiong (see Lushan Huixiong)
Jigong ........................................................................... 679
Juefan Huixiong ............................................................. 684
Liang Wudi ................................................................. 689
Lokaksema .................................................................. 700
Luo Qing ..................................................................... 707
Lushan Huixiong .......................................................... 711
Mazu Daoyi ................................................................. 722
Mingben (see Zhongfeng Mingben)
Nāgarjuna in China ....................................................... 727
Nenghai ........................................................................ 735
Ouyang Jingwu ............................................................. 741
Ouyi Zhixu ................................................................... 748
Paramārtha .................................................................. 752
Qian Qianyi ................................................................... 759
Qisong .......................................................................... 764
Shenhui (see Shenxiu)
Shenxiu, Huixin, and Shenhui ....................................... 768
Subhakarasimha ............................................................ 777
Wumen .......................................................................... 782
Wuxiang (see East Asia: Musang)
Wuzhu ................................................................. 787
Xiao Ziliang ................................................................ 791
Yinshun ........................................................................ 795
Yixing .......................................................................... 800
Yuan Hongdao ............................................................. 806
Yuanwu Keqing ............................................................ 810
Zhanran ................................................................. 814
Zhi Qian ........................................................................ 818
Zhili .............................................................................. 826
Zhixu (see Ouyang Zhixu)
Zhixi ................................................................. 833
Zhongfeng Mingben .................................................... 839
Zhuoshong ............................................................... 844

Korea:

Chinul ................................................................. 853
Hyujang ................................................................. 860
Ich'adon ................................................................. 864
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japan:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amaterasu Ōmikami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benzaiten (see South and Southeast Asia: Sarasvati)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dōgen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dōhan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisai (see Yōsai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En no Gyōja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enchin</td>
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<td>Ennin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ganjin (see East Asia: Jianzhen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genshin</td>
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<td>Hachiman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakuin</td>
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<td>Hōnen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ikkyū Sōjun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingen (see East Asia: Yinyuan Longqi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ippen Chishin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jakushō</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiu Sonja</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jizō (see East Asia: Dizang)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jōin</td>
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<td>Jōkei</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kakuban</td>
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<td>Keizan Jōkin</td>
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<td>Kūkai</td>
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<td>Kūya</td>
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<td>Menzan Zuihō</td>
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<td>Monkan</td>
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<td>Mugai Nyodai</td>
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<td>Mujaku Dōchū</td>
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<td>Musō Soseki</td>
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<td>Shōtoku Taishi</td>
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<td>Yōsai/Eisai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zaō</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tibetan Cultural Sphere</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atiśa and the Bka’ gdams pa Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ge sar of Gling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gter ston</em>: Tibetan Buddhist Treasure Revealers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gtsang smyon Heruka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lcang skya Rol p'ai Rdo rje</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi la ras pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mongolian Jebdzundamba Khutugtu Lineage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padmasambhava in Tibetan Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sa skya School's Five Forefathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirits of the Soil, Land, and Locality in Tibet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ston pa Gshen rab: The Bön Buddha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet’s Crazy Yogins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsong kha pa and his Immediate Successors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldly Protector Deities in Tibet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix To Volume I:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist Narrative Literature in Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry: Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Sŏn Literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scholars of Premodern Pali Buddhism

According to the Pali Buddhist tradition, the Buddha taught the Dhamma in 84,000 parts. Over more than two and a half thousand years these diverse teachings have further proliferated in countless languages, texts, and discourses. Yet within this diversity, a number of the monastic lineages that spread throughout Southern Asia—the so-called Theravāda—hold one language, Pali, as the only one in which the Buddha taught, and as the principle sacred language of their tradition (On the problem of defining “Theravāda,” see Skilling et al., 2012; Crosby, 2014, 2–5). As well as being the exclusive language of the Buddha's teachings or Buddhavacana, from around the 4th century onwards Pali became the privileged language used to comment on and propagate those teachings. Pali Buddhism refers, in this view, not only to early Buddhism—for the Buddha’s three baskets of teachings, the Tipiṭaka, represent a fraction of what is written in Pali—but to the entire history of Pali literature.

Many figures contributed to this literary tradition throughout its long history, of whom only a few can be discussed here. This overview is organized according to author and region, rather than as a modular, genre-based account, in order to expose the changing scope of scholarly erudition, how this reflected shifts in the perceived authority of different Pali texts, and how scholars were represented in histories, hagiographies, and eulogistic colophons.

This survey extends up to around 1800, which marks the beginning of a renaissance in Pali scholarship in the 19th century, during which the modern forces of colonialism, capitalism, and nationalism particularly shaped Pali literature.

Buddhaghosa and Buddhadatta

Buddhaghosa is the archetypal commentator in the Pali Buddhist imagination. His authority is felt in all regional traditions of Pali Buddhism, and his writings were formative in shaping Pali scholarly practice more broadly. His commentaries were preceded by a number of other Pali works, many of which were likely composed in early post-Aśokan India. These texts can roughly be divided into those that narrate the past, including histories and biographies, and those that are concerned with textual exegesis. Representing the former, for instance, we have the Apadāna, Cariyāpiṭaka, and Buddhavamsa (von Hinüber, 1996, §§121–128). We might also add the Dipavamsa, a history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka up until the 4th century and possibly the first Pali work composed on the island (von Hinüber, 1996, §83). The earliest exegetical literature is represented by the Suttavibhaṅga, a commentary contained in the Vinaya on the Pātimokkhasutta (von Hinüber, 1996, §§22–27); the Suttanidāsaka, a commentary on selected chapters of the Suttanipāta (von Hinüber, 1996, §§116–118); and two exegetical manuals, the Nettipakkaranā and the later Paṭakopadesa, both of which are likely of north Indian origin (von Hinüber, 1996, §§158–166, §§167–171).

According to the Pali tradition, relying on older Sinhala antecedents, Buddhaghosa wrote Pali commentaries on the five nikāyas of the Suttapiṭaka, two commentaries on the Vinaya, commentaries on the seven books of the Abhidhamma, and a comprehensive summary of Buddhist practice, the Visuddhimagga (Norman, 1983, 121). Modern scholarship has rightly questioned this view, however, and attributes to Buddhaghosa only the Visuddhimagga and the commentaries on the first four nikāyas (von Hinüber, 1996, §207, §226). The author of these works was likely of South Indian origin and can be dated to between 370 and 450 CE (von Hinüber, 1996, §207). The major commentary on the Vinaya attributed to Buddhaghosa, the Samantapāsādikā, was composed in the 20th or 21st regnal year of King Sirinivāsa, which is often, but not without problem (Kieffer-Pütz, 1992, 162–167), identified with King Mahānāma, that is, in either 369/370 or 429/430 CE (von Hinüber, 1996, §209). The anonymous commentary on the Pātimokkhasutta, the Kankhāvitaranī, was composed after the Samantapāsādikā, since it often cites the latter (von Hinüber, 1996, §224). The Abhidhamma commentaries, the Atthasālinī, Sammohavinodani, and Pañcappakaranatṭhakathā, refer to Buddhaghosa as their initiator and frequently quote the Visuddhimagga. As such, they are likely contemporary with Buddhaghosa, author of four nikāya commentaries and the Visuddhimagga.
(von Hinüber, 1996, §312–§313). The commentaries on the Khuddakanākiyā, namely, the Paramatthajotikā I on the Khuddakapāṭha, the Paramatthajotikā II on the Suttanipāta, the Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā and the Jātakavāghanā, are of uncertain date, though all presuppose Buddhaghosa’s nikāya works (von Hinüber, 1996, §§252–269). The Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā was likely composed after the Jātakavāghanā (von Hinüber, 1996, §269).

The Buddhist tradition regards all of these commentaries to be the work of a single genius, Buddhaghosa, in part due to later eulogistic postscripts that were attached to many of these works citing Buddhaghosa as author and praising his qualities and attributes as a scholar. As might be expected, in these postscripts Buddhaghosa is praised for his embodiment of Buddhist virtues, such as faith and wisdom, but he is also lauded more generally as a fine orator “gifted with sweet and noble speech that springs from the ease born of perfection of the vocal instrument, a speaker of what is appropriately said, a superlative speaker, a great poet” (Ñāṇamoli, 1999, 837). This scholarly portrait develops even further in a 13th-century account of the composition of Buddhaghosa’s commentaries contained in the extension to the Mahāvaṃsa known as the Cūḷavaṃsa. There, Buddhaghosa is depicted as a Brahmin born near Bodh Gaya who in his early years wandered India engaging in philosophical debates. After turning to Buddhism under the tutelage of the Elder Revata he received the name “Buddhaghosa” since his speech was profound like that of the Buddha. His teacher entreated him to translate back into the “language of Magadha” Sinhala commentaries on the canon that were themselves said to be based on a lost Pali original brought to Sri Lanka by the monk Mahinda, Åsoka’s son.

According to the narrative, Buddhaghosa then traveled from India to Sri Lanka and studied the Sinhala commentaries while staying in the Mahāvihāra during the reign of Mahānāma. Before beginning his Pali commentaries, the Saṅgha gave him two Pali verses and entreated him to demonstrate his potent learning by commenting on them in public. From those two verses he composed the Visuddhimagga. As he was about to read the work before the assembled Saṅgha, deities hid the book and he had to go back and compose it again. When about to recite the work a second time, the same deities hid the book once more. Having composed the Visuddhimagga for a third time, Buddhaghosa again began to recite the work, at which point the deities appeared with the previous two copies. His monastic audience inspected all three copies and, having found them to be identical, declared in delight that Buddhaghosa must be the future Buddha Maitreya (Mhv 37.215–247).

Buddhadatta, another major commentator, was contemporary with Buddhaghosa, and according to tradition authored two handbooks summarizing the Vinaya, two summarizing the Abhidhamma, and a commentary on the Buddhavaṃsa (Norman, 1983, 131). The two works on the Vinaya, the Vinayavinicchaya and Uttaravinicchaya, are later than the Samantapāsādikā since they probably relied on it as a source (von Hinüber, 1996, §326). The two handbooks on the Abhidhamma, the Abhidhammāvatāra and Rāpāripavibhāga, however, do not refer to the Abhidhamma commentaries or the Visuddhimagga (von Hinüber, 1996, §341). According to his Vinayavinicchaya, Buddhadaṭṭa worked in the Coḷa country during the reign of Accutavik-kanta of the Kalambhas, an obscure clan who held power in the region sometime between the 3rd and 6th centuries (von Hinüber, 1996, §329). Dimitrov confirmed the hypothesis that the author of these handbooks did not compose the commentary on the Buddhavaṃsa, the Madhuratthappakāsini. He plausibly dates this work on stylistic grounds to the 10th century, though far more speculatively attributes the authorship of the commentary to the scholar-monk Ratnamati (Dimitrov, 2016, 239–250).

Eulogistic postscripts were likewise appended to Buddhadaṭṭa’s works, and similarly much is made of Buddhadaṭṭa’s skill as a poet (Buddhadatta, 1980, 239). Vācissara, the 13th-century commentator on his Vinayavinicchaya, relates a story of a meeting between Buddhaghosa and Buddhadaṭṭa, traditionally viewed as the former’s elder contemporary. This meeting supposedly took place when the boats of the two collided as they traveled between India and Sri Lanka. During this encounter Buddhadaṭṭa asked Buddhaghosa to send his Pali commentaries to him once written, so that he might summarize them (Buddhadatta, 1945, 34). The same episode is recounted in the later Buddhaghosuppatti or “Story of Buddhaghosa,” a 15th-century (?) Burmese work composed by a certain Mahāmaṅgala (von Hinüber, 1996, §207, n369). There, Buddhadatta is depicted rather as a failed scholar who traveled to Sri Lanka intending to compose Pali commentaries for the canon, which he was however unable to do. During the meeting Buddhadaṭṭa handed over his iron
but disagrees on the directionality of influence with this general date for the century (Kiefer-Püllz, 2013, vol. I, 70ff.). Dimitrov agrees with Upasena’s work and can be dated in the 10th century (Kiefer-Püllz, 2009, 163–164). Kiefer-Püllz argues that the commentary should be dated to the late 9th century, since it cites a variant verse from the Kathāvatthu which he argues was first introduced by Buddhaghosa’s Abhidhamma works. Kiefer-Püllz has further expositions on these works (von Hinüber, 1996, §§357–366). There is continued debate whether Dhammapāla (I) is in fact identical with Dhammapāla (II). A significant piece of evidence in favor of their unity is that the former, in his commentary on the Udāna (94, 9 = Nettipakkaranatikā 67), quotes the subcommentary of the latter on the Kathāvatthu (122,14f.) (von Hinüber, 1996, §360, §364). Cousins has variously argued that Dhammapāla (I) here is quoting Ānanda’s mūla/uni1E6Dīkā on the Vibha/uni1E45ga and the Nettippakara/uni1E47a on the Kathāvatthu was intended, which Cousins argues may have been composed by a certain Jotipāla and not Dhammapāla (II) (see also Kiever-Püllz, 2013, vol. I, 80).

There is little we can say about the scholar Ānanda, who composed commentaries on Buddhaghosa’s Abhidhamma works. Kiever-Püllz has proved that he cannot be identified with another Ānanda who resided in a certain Kalasapura (von Hinüber, 2016, 501). His commentary on the Kathāvatthu may have been composed by a certain Jotipāla and not Dhammapāla (II) (see also Kiever-Püllz, 2013, vol. I, 80).

stilus, writing stone, and myrobalan given to him by the God Sakka, and encouraged Buddhaghosa to complete the task (Gray, 1892, 17–19, 49–51).

South India and Sri Lanka, 500–900 CE

Following the composition of the first Pali commentaries, a constellation of scholars continued to write expositions on the remaining books of the canon that had yet to be commented upon. Alongside commentarial writing, we see the continuation of the Pali historiographic tradition and the composition of the first Pali grammatical works. A burgeoning scholarly ideal emerges during this period due to the authority of Buddhaghosa’s commentarial style, but this ideal was not consciously theorized in eulogistic colophons and hagiographies in the same way as we find in the later works of the 2nd millennium.

The earliest subsequent commentator was Mahānāma, who composed a commentary on the Patisambhidamagga, the 12th book of the Khuddakaniyā. In its colophon Mahānāma writes that he composed his work three years after the death of “King Moggallāna,” who can tentatively be identified with Moggallāna II (r. 537–556), that is, in 559 (von Hinüber, 1996, §291). Another commentator, Upasena, composed the Saddhammapajjotikā as a commentary on the Suttaniddesa of the Khuddakaniyā in the 26th regnal year of King Sirinivāsa Sirisāṅghabodhi, who is often identified with Sena II (von Hinüber, 1996, §287), that is, in 877, according to Kiever-Püllz (Kiever-Püllz, 2009, 144n4). Dimitrov has contended recently, however, that the commentary should be dated to the late 10th century, since it cites a variant verse from the Buddhavamsa, which he argues was first introduced by the Amatārasadhārā, a commentary on the Anāgatavamsa that he believes can be dated to the 960s (Dimitrov, 2016, 449–501). The career of Upasena is intimately linked with the author of a commentary on the Samantapāsādikā, the so-called Vajirabuddhi/uni1E6Dīkā, since the former’s commentary shares a number of parallel passages with the latter (Kiever-Püllz, 2009, 163–164). Kiever-Püllz argues that the Vajirabuddhi/uni1E6Dīkā likely borrowed from Upasena’s work and can be dated in the 10th century (Kiever-Püllz, 2013, vol. I, 70ff.). Dimitrov agrees with this general date for the Vajirabuddhi/uni1E6Dīkā but disagrees on the directionality of influence between it and Upasena’s commentary (Dimitrov, 2016, 501).

Foremost among Buddhaghosa’s successors was Dhammapāla who, according to tradition, commented on seven books of the Khuddakaniyā and the Nettippakara/uni1E6Dīkā (von Hinüber, 1996, §§272–286). The colophon appended to Dhammapāla’s Khuddakaniyā commentaries states that he was affiliated with the otherwise unknown Badarati/uni1E6D/uni1E6Dhivhāra (von Hinüber, 1996, §274). At least since the 12th century (De Silva, 1970; Cousins, 1972, 161), this Dhammapāla has been regarded as identical with another Dhammapāla (II), who composed subcommentaries on the first four nikāyas of the canon, a commentary on Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhimagga, a subcommentary on the Nettippakara/uni1E6Dīkā, and further expositions (anu/uni1E6Dīkā) on Ānanda’s earlier commentaries on Buddhaghosa’s Abhidhamma works (von Hinüber, 1996, §§357–366). There is continued debate whether Dhammapāla (I) is in fact identical with Dhammapāla (II). A significant piece of evidence in favor of their unity is that the former, in his commentary on the Udāna (94, 9 = Nettipakkaranatikā 67), quotes the subcommentary of the latter on the Kathāvatthu (122,14f.) (von Hinüber, 1996, §360, §364). Cousins has variously argued that Dhammapāla (I) here is quoting Ānanda’s mūla/uni1E6Dīkā on the Vibha/uni1E45ga or Dhammapāla (II)’s anu/uni1E6Dīkā (Cousins, 2011, 161). Neither assertion can be substantiated, however, and it is likely that the anu/uni1E6Dīkā on the Kathāvatthu was intended, which Cousins argues may have been composed by a certain Jotipāla and not Dhammapāla (II) (see also Kiever-Püllz, 2013, vol. I, 80).

There is little we can say about the scholar Ānanda, who composed commentaries on Buddhaghosa’s Abhidhamma works. Kiever-Püllz has proved that he cannot be identified with another Ānanda who resided in a certain Kalasapura (Kiever-Püllz, 2013, vol. I 149–150, also 149n363, 150n364; pace von Hinüber, 1996, §356). Other late medieval Pali texts quote another commentary on Ānanda’s works attributed to a scholar known as Jotipāla, who was likely of Indian origin (Cousins, 2011, 3). The extant quotations of these works are often critical of Ānanda, and many of his views are echoed in the subcommentaries ascribed to Dhammapāla (II). For this reason, Cousins has suggested that either the Abhidhamma subcommentaries ascribed to Dhammapāla (II) may actually be Jotipāla’s or, more likely, that Jotipāla composed earlier
subcommentaries to Ānanda’s Abhidhamma works that were then used by Dhammapāla (II) (Cousins, 2011, 23–24).

Jotipāla is significant since he is the only commentator of this period, other than Buddhaghosa, who is likely eulogized in the Cūḷavamsa, where he is depicted as defeating in debate a Vetullavāda opponent called Dāthāpabhuti. The narrative states that, humiliated in defeat, Dāthāpabhuti attempted to strike Jotipāla and, as a result, an ulcer miraculously appeared on his hand, from which he died (Mhv 42, 35–38 cited in Cousins, 2011, 2–3). If this narrative does indeed refer to Jotipāla the commentator, we can date the scholar to the reign of Aggabodhi (r. 571–604) and thus to the early 7th century. Ānanda would then have composed his commentaries in the 6th century (Cousins, 2011, 25–26). If Dhammapāla relied upon Jotipāla’s works, this would further push the terminus post quem of Dhammapāla from around 500 (von Hinüber, 1996, §365) to the 7th century at the earliest (Cousins, 2011, 25).

Towards the end of this period we begin to see the revival of the production of handbooks, in particular, on the Abhidhamma and Vinaya. Foremost among the authors of handbooks during this period was Anuruddha, who is said to have composed three works on the Abhidhamma, namely, the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, Paramatthavinicchaya, and Nāmarūpapariccheda (von Hinüber, 1996, §354). Anuruddha is often dated to the 10th or 11th century largely due to the Sanskritic style of his writing (von Hinüber, 1996, §354; Malalasekera, 1958 [1928], 168–169). Gethin, however, suggests a date in the 6th or 7th century (Wijeratne & Gethin 2002, xiv; Kerr, 2012, 13–17). In the colophon to his Paramatthavinicchaya he states that he was from Kāverinagara (Kāveripaṭṭana) in the district of Kaṅcī, and that he was residing in the town of Taṅja in the district of Tambi (von Hinüber, 1996, §348), which was almost certainly in South India (Gunawardana, 1967, 11–17). Like his predecessor Buddhaghosa, Anuruddha is known for his literary eloquence and he often incorporates highly poetic versified summaries of particular Abhidhamma topics in his works (Kerr, 2012, 14–15, 28–49). Other handbooks that were composed in the second half of the 1st millennium include the Saccasankepa, a work on Abhidhamma possibly composed by Jotipāla (Cousins, forthcoming), often incorrectly attributed to either Ānanda or Dhammapāla (von Hinüber, 1996, §351), and the Khuddasikkhā, a Vinaya manual composed by a certain Dhammasiri, possibly in the 5th or 6th century (Kiefer-Pülz 2013, vol. I, 194–197; →BEB I: Vinaya Commentarial Literature in Pali, 435).

While Pali scholarship during this period was largely restricted to commentarial writing, it also witnessed the continuation of Pali historiography and the beginning of the Pali grammatical tradition. A certain Mahānāma (II), for instance, composed the Mahāvamsa at the end of the 5th century, though there is no evidence to suggest he is the same author as the commentator (von Hinüber, 1996, §185; contra Paranavitana, 1962). The scholar Kaccāyana authored the first Pali grammar – his eponymous Kaccāyanavākarana – possibly in the 7th century (Pind, 2012, 73). The earliest commentators, such as Vimalabuddhi, also known as Vajirabuddhi (c. 10th cent.), claim, on the basis of a passage in the Apadānathathakathā, that the author of the Kaccāyanavākarana was none other than the Buddha’s disciple Mahākaccāyana (Pind, 2012, 71). A 15th-century Burmese Pali grammar, the Suttaniddesa of Chaṭṭha, further relates a traditional account that ascribes the first grammatical aphorism in the work to the Buddha himself (Subhūti, 1876, vii; Pind, 1996, 67–72; Ruiz-Falqués, 2015, 155).

South India and Sri Lanka after 900

From around 900 we begin to see a diversification in the types of text scholar monks composed in Pali, as well as the increasing influence of Sanskrit writings on these new Pali works (Bechert, 1976, 1987, 1998, 2005; Collins, 2003; Pollock, 2006, 386; Gornall & Henry, 2017). We see a proliferation in handbooks, commentaries on handbooks, new histories of the Buddha’s relics, related literary works such as Buddhist biographies and other devotional poems, as well as large numbers of Pali philological works dealing with grammar, lexicography, poetics, and prosody. The new scope of erudition was accompanied by an increase in eulogistic colophons praising authors for their various scholarly virtues and their mastery of Pali and Sanskrit systematic thought, in particular the language sciences.

One of the most important scholars to shape the literary culture of this period was Ratnasiri or Ratnasiriśāna, as he is known in his Sanskrit works. Dimitrov identified these two authors and has argued that this Sri Lankan monk composed a number of influential Sanskrit philological works, including the Ratnasiriśāka, a Sanskrit commentary.
on Daṭṭha’s Kāvyādārśa, the Cāndrānapaṇḍikā, a commentary on the Cāndravākyakaraṇa, and the Śabdārthacintā, a study of semantic and syntactic relations (Dimitrov, 2016, 51–76, 557–708). Dimitrov further claims that Ratnamati composed a number of Pali and Sinhala works. The Pali works include the Anāgatovamsa; its commentary, the Amatarasadhāra; the Mahābodhivamsa; its commentary, the Madhurathappakāsini; a commentary to the Mahāvamsa, the Vamsatthappakāsini; a Vinaya subcommentary, the Vājirabuddhiṅika; and the Jinacarita, a biography of the Buddha. His theory relies upon the evidence that all these works share a discernible influence from Sanskrit literary culture and that many are connected by a number of intertextual references. He does not provide, however, conclusive or direct evidence linking these works to those certainly composed by Ratnamati or Ratnaśrījñāna.

Ratnamati’s Sanskrit philological works greatly influenced the development of the Pali grammatical tradition and the composition of the first and only treatise on Pali poetics. Using the Cāndravākyakaraṇa, Ratnamati’s Cāndrānapaṇḍikā and Sāriputta’s Candraṅkāra, in Anurādhapura in the second half of the 12th century Moggalāna composed a new Pali grammar, the Moggalānavaṇyākaraṇa, a gloss or vṛtti for its rules, and an elaborate commentary on the gloss known as the paṇḍikā. His work is very often critical of the Kaccāyanavyākaraṇa and its tradition (Gornall, 2013, 68–136), in particular its 10th-century commentary, the Mukhamattadipani or Nyūsa composed by Vimalabuddhi (Pind, 2012, 117–120) and a grammatical handbook called the Rūpasiddhi authored by a South Indian monk Buddhappiya, probably in the early 12th century (Gornall, 2014, 521). A number of eulogistic verses are found in the works of Moggalāna’s pupils praising their teacher’s vast erudition. One Sanskrit verse in particular found quoted in Śrī Rāhula’s Moggalānapaṇḍikāpradīpaya praises Moggalāna as having the same power (śakti) as the three great Sanskrit grammarians Pāṇini, Kātyāyana, and Candragomin (Dharmarāma, 1896, 3). Moggalāna had a number of pupils including Piyadassi, who composed a grammatical handbook, the Padasādāhāna, Saṅgharakkita, who wrote a commentary on Moggalāna’s paṇḍikā, and Medhāṅkara, who authored another handbook, entitled the Pa yogasiddhi (Subhūti, 1876, xxxiii–xxxiv, xxviii–xli, xlvi–xlvi; Franke 1902, 44–45). Another Moggalāna (II), the grammarian’s junior contemporary, composed the first Pali lexicon, the Abhidhānappadīpikā, based on Amarasiṅha’s Amarakośa (Franke, 1902, 68–83; Yamanaka, 2008).

A few scholars of this period undertook enormous intellectual feats, composing a remarkable number of works in a variety of different genres and fields of expertise. Not unlike the postscripts attached to Buddhaghosa’s works, their scholarly and spiritual achievements are often eulogized in elaborate and lengthy colophons. These colophons combine images of kingship, ascetic power, and intellectual virtuosity to create a complex scholarly ideal that reflects the close connection between monastic and royal power in this period (on grammarians in particular, see Gornall, 2013, 36–67). The 12th-century scholar Sāriputta, for instance, a leading intellectual in the aftermath of Parākramabāhu I’s saṅgha reforms (c. 1155), composed the aforementioned Candraṅkāra, a Sanskrit commentary on Ratnamati’s Cāndrānapaṇḍikā (Dimitrov, 2010), a Sinhala commentary on Anuruddha’s Abhidhammathasaṅgaha, Pali subcommentaries on the Vinaya and Anuguttaranikāya, a Pali handbook on the Vinaya with autocommentary, a commentary on the Mahālasutta, a meditation manual (kammatthānasaṅgaha), and possibly a work on astrology (Pecenko, 1997; Crosby, 2006; Kieffer-Pülz, 2013, vol. I, 22ff.).

At the end of the colophon of his commentary on Anuruddha’s Abhidhammathasaṅgaha, Sāriputta is depicted both as “the lord of ascetics” (yatissara) and as a noble (parisuddhakulodaya) who dwelt in a splendid palace in Polonnaruva built for him by Parākramabāhu I (r. 1153–1186). He is further compared as an author with the Sanskrit grammarians, Pāṇini and Candragomin, the best minds in the field of philosophy, and with the poet Kālidāsa in literary skill (Pannamoli, 1925, 257). Sāriputta was the first to hold the title of grandmaster (mahāsāmī) (Rohanadeera, 1983) and inherited the leadership of the Saṅgha from his forest-dwelling teacher, Kassapa of Dīnabulāgala, who composed a Sanskrit grammatical handbook, the Bālāvabodhana (Bechert, 1987, 11). While the intellectual imagery in these portraits is often cosmopolitan and transregional in reference, expressions of monastic lineage during this period became increasingly localized with authors often referring to each other as “Coliya” (“from Cola country”) or “Sīhala” (“from Sri Lanka”), respectively (Monius, 2001, 123–128; Liyanagamage, 1978). Soon after Sāriputta composed his Vinaya works, for instance, a certain Coliya Kassapa wrote
another commentary on the Samantapāsādikā, the
Vinativinvodanītikā, from the perspective of the
Colūya monastic community in which Śāriputta’s
commentary is often dealt with critically (von
121). The same author also composed a com-
mentary on the Abhidhamma mātikās, entitled
the Mohaviccchedani (Crosby & Skilton, 1999; von

One of Śāriputta’s most prolific students was
Saṅgharakkhita, who composed a number of impor-
tant works of Pali systematic thought. Alongside
his aforementioned commentary on Moggallāna’s
paṭicīka, Saṅgharakkhita further composed the first
treatise on Pali poetics, his Subodhālakāra,
an auto-commentary on this work (the so-called
mahāsāmitikā), the first Pali work on metrics, the
Vuttaodaya, a work on syntax, the Sambhandhacintā,
and another grammatical handbook, the Yogavi-
icchaya (Kieffer-Pülz, 2017). Saṅgharakkhita’s
philological works relied upon a large number of
Sanskrit sources. His Subodhālankāra in particular
is heavily reliant upon Daṇḍin’s Kāvyādārśa (c. 8th
cent., Bronner, 2012) among others, and his
Vutta-
daya is essentially a translation of Kedāra Bha-
uni’s Vyuttaratnaśākara (c. 11th cent.) (Siddharatha,
1981; Jaini, 2000). In addition to his works on the lan-
guage sciences, Saṅgharakkhita composed a com-
mentary on a Vinaya handbook, the Khuddasikkhā
(Kieffer-Pülz, 2017). It is worth mentioning in the
context of 13th-century scholarship on Pali šāstra
that an anonymous author, a monk of Brahmin
descent (brahmanavaya) and head of a “group of
five monastic colleges,” composed the only known
Pali treatise on medicine, the Vinayavinicchaya
(Kieffer-Pülz, 2013, vol. 1, 67) and it was possibly
the same Buddhanāga who wrote a Sanskrit com-
mentary on a grammatical handbook of the Cāndra
school, the Pūtrikaraṇa of Guṇākara (Bechert, 1987,
11–12; Dimitrov, 2016, §656–6). Another pupil of
Śāriputta, the forest monk Suṁaṅgala composed
commentaries on the Abhidhammavatāra and
Abhidhammatthasāṅgaha (von Hinüber, 1996, §344:
§346). He was the head of his own branch monas-
tery at Jambudūni (Danibadinya), and was possi-
bly the brother of Mayūrapāda Thera, author of the
Pūjāvalīya (1266) (Kieffer-Pülz, forthcoming, n16).

One of the last major pupils of Śāriputta was
Vācissara who, in the second quarter of the 13th
century, composed commentaries on Buddhada-
tta’s Vinayavinicchaya and Uttaravinicchaya,
the Saccasankepa, as well as the Thūpavamsa, a
history of the construction of the Mahāthūpa at
Anuradhapūra (Kieffer-Pülz, forthcoming; see also
von Hinüber, 1996, §892, §830). It is possible that this
Vācissara was the author of a handbook of Vinaya
rules concerning monastery ritual boundaries or
sīmā, namely, the Simālankārasāṅgaha (Kieffer-
Pülz, forthcoming).

A number of these works were translations
from Sinhala antecedents in order, they state, to
make these works accessible to monks from India.
Suṁaṅgala’s commentary on the Abhidhammattha-
sāṅgaha, for instance, is based on Śāriputta’s Sin-
halanaryaka, the only known commentary on the
same work, and Vācissara explicitly mentions in his commentary on the
Vinayavinicchaya and in his Thūpavamsa that these works are based on older Sinhala versions
(Kieffer-Pülz, forthcoming). Finally, to this list of
handbook authors we should add Ananda, who
composed in South India a treatise for the laity,
the Upāsakajānālaśākara (von Hinüber, 1996, §386;
Young, 2011, 23–31; Astostin, 2013), which can be
dated to first part of the 13th century (Kieffer-Pülz,
2015, 632), and a certain Siddhattha who composed the Sārasaṅgaha, a compendium of teachings from
the canon and its commentaries, probably in the

The Pali historiographical tradition flourished
during this period, and a number of scholars com-
posed histories of the Buddha’s relics, biographies
of the Buddha, and other devotional literary works
often focused on the Buddha’s past lives. A certain
Upatissā composed the Mahābodhiśāṃsā, a
history of the Bodhi tree, possibly in the 10th century
(von Hinüber, 1996, §191; Dimitrov, 2016, 160–161). In
1211/1212, another pupil of Śāriputta, Dhammakitti,
composed the Dāthavamsa, a history of the Bud-
tha’s tooth relic. Dhammakitti states in his opening
verses that his history is based on older Sinhala
work (von Hinüber, 1996, §193). It is perhaps the
same Dhammakitti who composed the Cūlavamsa to include all the monarchs from the 4th century onwards, ending with an elaborate, eulogistic account of the reign of Parākramabāhu I (r. 1153–86) (Geiger, 1930, 206–208). This work was further extended in the 14th, 18th, and 19th centuries (von Hinüber, 1996, §182). In the 13th century, the scholar Vedeha composed the Samantakāvyaavānana, a history of the Buddha’s visits to Sri Lanka, in particular his third visit where he left a footprint on Mt. Samanta (von Hinüber, 1996, §189); the Rasavāhini, an eloquent narrative work that ostensibly revises older Pali tales found in the Sahassavatthu (Matsumura, 1992, xxvii; von Hinüber, 1996, §413); and possibly the Sīlātasaṁyāra, the first grammar of Sinhala (Gair & Karunatillake, 2013, xiiff.).


In the middle of the 14th century, the head of the saṅgha (saṅgharāja) Devarakkhita Jayābahu Dhammakitti of Gaḍalādeniya composed the Jīnabodhāvali, a Pali poem listing the previous Buddhas and their bodhi trees (von Hinüber, 1996, §408a), and the Bālāvatāra, a handbook for the Kaccayanavākarana (Subhūti, 1876, xxiv; Franke, 1902, 24). He further composed in Sinhala the Saddharmālankāra, a narrative work based in part on the Rasavāhini, and the Nikāyasangrahaya, a history of the Buddhist monastic order (Liyanarathne, 1983, 51–52). He should not be confused with his late 13th-century teacher, Dhammakitti (I), who also held the position of saṅgharāja and composed three Pali poems, namely, the Ājanānurāgacarita, Pāramisataka (Liyanaratne, 1983, 53), and Suvismīvarana (Deepanka, 1921). Due to the focus of much of this literature on the previous lives of Gotama Buddha and his predecessors, it is perhaps not surprising that the scholars who authored these works often make resolutions in their colophons to become future buddhas themselves.

While Sinhala and Pali literary production coexisted from at least the 10th century onwards, beginning in the 15th century there was an increasing preference for writing in Sinhala rather than Pali. The famed scholar monk Śrī Rāhula of Toṭa gagmuva, for instance, composed a number of Sinhala works, namely, the Kavyāśekharaya (1449), an epic poem based on the Sattabhajātaka, two messenger poems, the Parivesandēsaya and the Sūlalīthinandēsaya (1450), and a commentary on Moggallāna’s pañcikā, the Moggallānapañcikārapīṇḍaya (1458) (Godakumbara, 1955, 152–154, 191–195, 316–317). Other works traditionally ascribed to him include the Pārākumbāsirita, a biography of Parākramabāhu VI, the Kuvēnāsana, a work of magical rituals composed for Parākramabāhu VI of Koṭē, and the Toṭa gamunimitta, a work on divination (Godakumbara, 1955, 290–291, 294, 339). Śrī Rāhula only composed one Pali work, an important but minor Pali grammatical commentary on Piyaddāsi’s Padasādhana known as the Buddhīppasadāna (Subhūti, 1876, xli–xlvi; Franke, 1902, 45). Unlike the case in previous centuries, in which celebrations of scholarly erudition extend beyond Pali works only to the Sanskrit sāstras, depictions of Śrī Rāhula, which may be in part rhetorical, also praise him for his knowledge of Sinhala and Tamil, his mastery of the six literary languages of classical India, and for his association with various deities more usually associated with the Hindu pantheon, such as Skanda (Hallisey, 2003, 707–721).

In this context we should mention the 18th-century saṅgharāja Saranāṅkara, who composed a number of important works in Sinhala, such as, the Madhurārthapramāṇa, a commentary on the Mahābhodhīvamsa, the Sārārthasaṅgrahaya, a compilation of Buddhist doctrine, and the Sārārthadipani, a commentary on the Pali paritta texts. Saranāṅkara further completed an old Sinhala commentary on the Bhesajjamaṇjuṣṭā, of which half had been lost (Godakumbara, 1955, 33, 66, 333, 353; see also Blackburn, 2001). His pupils composed a number of works in Sinhala including many Sinhala commentaries on suttas as the Suttapiṭaka (Godakumbara, 1955, 22). The only two works he composed in Pali were the Rāpaññālā, a grammatical work on nominal declension, and the Abhisambodhiyalankāra, a biography of the Buddha Gotama (Malalasekera, 1958, 281). Despite this, works of Saraṇāṅkara’s pupils and their successors often eulogize his scholarly achievements in terms that reflect the old scholarly ideal of the 10th to 13th centuries centered on Pali scripture and sāstra, in particular the language sciences. An 18th-century Sinhala commentary on the Bālāvatāra, the so-called Liyanasannaya, for instance, describes
Saranaṅkara as one “who had risen to the position of saṅghārāja and who had thoroughly understood metrics, lexicography, grammar, Dhamma, and Vinaya, who possessed such virtues as moral behavior, and who was renowned in his own country and abroad” (Gornall & Gunasena, 2018, 39, trans. of Subhūti, 1876, lv).

Burma/Myanmar

What we know about the lives of early Burmese Pali scholars greatly depends on late chronicles and reports, especially from the Konbaung period (1752–1885), as well as the collophons of the few edited works we possess. Nevertheless, the image of early Burmese Pali literary culture that emerges from these sources, however accurate, depicts a scholarly community focused on composing doctrinal commentaries on Pali handbooks, in particular, and on writing Pali grammatical works.

Sāgara or Guṇaśāgara of Pagan was the author of a grammatical treatise in verse called the Mukhamattadīpanī (Bode, 1897, 76; Kumar, 1992, 11). The work is an abbreviated version of the Mukhamattadīpanī or Nyāsa of Vimalabuddhi (for excerpts, see Ruiz-Falqué, 2014b). According to the Sāsanavamsa (written in 1861 on the basis of older historical materials), Guṇaśāgara composed this work during the reign of King Kyau Cvä (r. c. 1235–1249) (Bode, 1909, 25). Indeed, according to the internal evidence, the Mukhamattasāra must date to later than the 12th century since it refers by name both to Buddhappiya and his Rāpasiddhi. In the colophon of his work we learn that Guṇaśāgara was not a monastic, but probably a member of the royal family (Ruiz-Falqué, forthcoming, v. 925). Guṇaśāgara further states in the colophon that he has a close relationship with the monks of Arimaddana (Pagan) and adds that “on account of having taken up the lifestyle of the theras, I am also known as therā” (Ruiz-Falqué, forthcoming, v. 926).

King Kyau Cvä is sometimes stated to be the author of the grammatical versified treatise called the Saddabindu “A Drop of Sound” and the Abhidhamma (?) treatise Paramatthabindu “A Drop of the Sublime” (Franke, 1902, 55; Bode, 1909, 25; Lottermoser, 1987, 77; Kumar, 1992, 25). The Saddabindu’s earliest commentary composed by Nāṇavilāsa from Pagan, however, interprets the work’s colophon as indicating that the author was a certain Rājaguru (Subhūti, 1876, xcii; Lottermoser, 1987, 105n9).

Another well-known scholar is the author of the grammatical commentary on the Nyāsa, called Nyāsappadipa, Nyāsāṭikā, or more commonly Saṃ pyān ṭikā (Subhūti, 1876, xiv–xv; Franke, 1902, 23). There is no firm evidence that corroborates its attribution to Pagan (Nyunt, 2012, 76), but a legend preserved in the Sāsanavamsa tells us that the author was a certain minister (saṃ pyān) of the Pagan court during the reign of King Narapati. This minister wanted to marry a princess and the king requested him to prove his value first. The minister ordained as a monk and displayed his intellectual skills by composing the Nyāsa commentary. Afterwards, he disrobed and married the princess (Bode, 1897, 75; 1909, 21). This work contains parallel verses with the Mukhamattasāra and it is further possible to speculate that the Saṃ pyān ṭikā and the Mukhamattasāra were composed by the same author, at different time periods, the former being a commentary or extended version of the latter. The Gandhavamsa, for instance, states that Guṇaśāgara wrote a ṭikā on his own work at the request of the Saṅgharāja of Pagan (Kumar, 1992, 73), and we find important similarities between the Mukhamattasāra and the Saṃ pyān ṭikā in terms of their structure, content, and the pseudomonastic status of their author (Ruiz-Falqué, forthcoming).

The main contribution of the Saṃ pyān ṭikā is to clarify the turns of debate in the Mukhamattadīpanī, which is written in the style of a scholastic debate. The author of the Saṃ pyān ṭikā, who, as we said, was allegedly not a monk, was familiar with Sanskrit systems of vyākaraṇa (grammar), as well as sāstra, as he refers to the Pāñjini school of grammarians. He calls Vimalabuddhi, author of the Mukhamattadīpanī, an expert in the entire kalāpayākaraṇa, that is, expert in the Sanskrit Kātantra grammatical system (Maung Lin, 1913, 11). The author resorts to Abhidhamma philosophy in order to explain certain linguistic problems and displays a tendency to merge Abhidhamma and vyākaraṇa, which is already attested in Vimalabuddhi’s Mukhamattadīpanī and continues in the works of subsequent Pali grammarians in Burma.

The most influential Pali scholar in Burma, allegedly from the Pagan Period (c. 1054–1287), is Aggavamsa, author of the Saddanīti (Smith, 1928; von Hinüber, 1982; Kahrs, 1992; Kumar, 1992, 18, 23; Dekor, 2008, 2012; Pind, 2012). Information about the date and place of Aggavamsa derives from late literature, especially the Sāsanavamsa, which...
tells us that the Saddanāti was composed in 1154 in Pagan (Bode, 1897, 74). According to Nyunt in his edition of the late 19th-century bibliographical treatise Pitaka-tō-samuñ (Nyunt, 2012, 77n89), Aggavamsa was known as Tatiya-aggapanāṭita or Pugam Sayadaw and was the preceptor of King Alaungsithu (t. c. 1112/1113–1160). Tin Lwin (1991, 124ff), however, proposes that Aggavamsa worked in the 13th century, during the reign of King Kyau Cvā, though the epigraphical evidence he presents is inconclusive. In the colophon of the Saddanāti the author is designated as the “Third Mahāaggapanāṭita” and as the nephew of another Aggapanāṭita, which perhaps implies his membership of a succession of royal advisers related by kinship (the name Aggavamsa literally means “supreme lineage” or “supreme in the lineage”). The Saddanāni must be earlier than the Saddatthabhedacintā (c. 13th cent.), which cites it on three occasions (Tvan Sinh, 1964, vv. 295, 325, 343). It must also be earlier than the Mukhamattasāra, which refers to the author of Saddanāti as “the master who was the nephew of Bhadanta Agga” (Ruiz-Falqués, forthcoming, v. 543). It seems clear that Gunasāgara considers Aggavamsa a bhadanta, that is to say a member of the order.

Dhammasenāpati is the well-known author of the Kārikā, a versified text on Pali grammar and philosophical topics. According to the colophon of this work, Dhammasenāpati resided at the Ananda temple in Pagan (Bode, 1909, 16; Kumar, 1992, 11, 18, 24). Probably influenced by the Sāsanavamsa, Vaskađuvē Subhūti (1876, lxix) suggests a date of around 1056/7 for the work. The Kārikā was allegedly composed at the request of a monk named Nāṇagambhāra, perhaps the author of the Thāthāgatuppati (Bode, 1909, 16). A remarkable influence of Patañjali’s Mahābhāṣya can be traced in the Kārikā, but with much modification, which sees all Brahmanic/Nedic references made Buddhist (for examples, Ruiz-Falqués, 2017, 65ff). According to Dimitrov and Deokar (2017), at least half of the Kārikā may well be a Pali adaptation of Ratnamati’s Śabdārtha-cintā. Dhammasenāpati allegedly composed two other works that are now lost, the Etimāsamidīpakā, presumably a grammatical commentary on Kaccāyanasāra 65 (“etimāsam”), and the Manohāra, the topic of which is unknown (Bode, 1909, 16).

Another important Pali scholar of Pagan is Saddhammasiri, the author of the influential grammatical and philosophical treatise the Saddatthabhedacintā, and allegedly the author of a Burmese translation of a Sanskrit astronomical treatise called “Brhadaj,” which is most likely the Brhadajātaka (Subhūti, 1876, xlvii–xlviii; Bode, 1897, 75; 1992, 10; Nyunt, 2012, 78). In the colophon of the Saddatthabhedacintā, Saddhammasiri states that he composed a treatise that analyzes the hidden essence of sound and meaning in the country known as Tambadiā, in the city of Arimaddana, that is to say, Pagan (Tvāṇ Sinh, 1964, 32). Little is known about the author. According to Luce and Tin Htway (1976, 207), a certain Dhammasiri is mentioned in an inscription from 1237 (?), together with two other leading monks, Mahākassapa and Subhūticanda. These three monks are said to have witnessed a dedication at Pagan. Dhammasiri and Subhūticanda are also mentioned in a verse inscription found near the Dhammarājaka Pagoda, dated 1248 (Luce & Tin Htway, 1976, 207). According to Subhūti, the anonymous Kaccāyanasāraṭṭikā states that Saddhammasiri’s treatise was translated into Pali from various Sanskrit works (Subhūti, 1876, xlvi). Dimitrov provided conclusive evidence that the Saddatthabhedacintā used Ratnamati’s Śabdārtha-cintā as a source (Dimitrov 2016, 594–596; see also Subhūti, 1876, lxix).

At the Shwe Gu Kyi Monastery of Pagan, the learned monk Abhaya Thera wrote a commentary on Saṅgharakkha’s Sambandhacintā and a commentary on Saddhammasiri’s Saddatthabhedacintā. This commentary is commonly known as the porāṇaṭikā “old commentary,” although the colophon gives its original name as Sāratthasāgaha. In the same colophon, Abhaya is described as tipiṭakadhara “holder of the Tipiṭaka.” From the quotations in Abhaya’s commentary we can surmise that he was familiar with the Sanskrit vyākaraṇa tradition, especially Buddhist authors such as Candragomin, Dharmadāsa, and Jinendrabuddhi (Ruiz-Falqués, 2017, 33ff.).

The so-called navāṭikā “new commentary” on the Saddatthabhedacintā, otherwise known as the Dipanī, of unknown authorship, was written, according to the Pali colophon, at the Shwe Gu Kyi Monastery of Pagan, in 724 Sakkarāj (1362/3). This date roughly coincides with the accession of King Thado Minbya, founder of Ava, in 1360 (Bode, 1897, 90), and it is not implausible that the composition of the Dipanī was conceived as an act of merit, part of the celebrations in Pagan of the new overlord of Ava. This date represents the most reliable terminus ante quem for Saddhammasiri.
Two Pali scholars particularly stand out in 15th-century Burma, Chataṭa (or Chapada) Saddhammajotipala of Pagan and Mahā Ariyavansa of Ava. Saddhammajotipala was a cosmopolitan monk of the Mahavihara lineage. In the colophons to his Kaccayanasuttaniddesa and Sankhepavannana, he says that he traveled to Sri Lanka and participated in royally sponsored ceremonies during the reign of Parakkamabahu VI of Koṭṭe (Buddhadatta, 1957; Godakumbura, 1969; Ruiz-Falques, 2014a, 2015, 97). In Sri Lanka Saddhammajotipala was presumably involved in the establishment of monastic boundaries and monastic ordinations. An inscription originally found at the Chapada (or Sapada) Stūpa in Pagan seems to refer to a monk of this name who had returned with relics from Sri Lanka in 1441 and who received the patronage of the Queen of Khūkan, present-day Pakhangyi (Frasch, 1996, 331; Win Than Tun, 2002, 203; Ruiz-Falques, 2015, 100). His most extensive scholarly work (larger than all the rest combined) is the Kaccayanasuttaniddesa, an erudite commentary on the Kaccayanavyākaraṇa. The Kaccayanasuttaniddesa includes a detailed revision of other commentaries, such as the Mukhamattadipani, Saddanīti, Rūpasiddhi, and lesser-known treatises allegedly of Burmese origin, such as the Atthabyākhyaṇa and Mukhamattasāra. The work is “the most important source of information on grammatical literature in the fifteenth century A.D.” (Pind, 2012, 59).

Saddhammajotipala’s major Abhidhamma contribution is the Sankhepavannana, a commentary on Sumanigala’s exposition of Anuruddha’s Abhidhammatthasangaha. In the introductory stanzas of the Sankhepavannana the author describes himself as a minor author, stating that, “[e]ven though there are many commentaries composed by the older masters, they are like the moon, unable to shine inside [hidden places] such as the bamboo reed. Therefore, I will compose a commentary which, like a firefly, [is able to shine inside hidden places such as a bamboo reed]” (Sumanigala, 1930, 1). It is not clear whether Chataṭa Saddhammajotipala composed all of his works in Pagan. The colophons of the Suttaniddesa and Sankhepavannana date the work to 1446/7, making it roughly coincident with Mahā Narapati of Ava’s coronation in 1442 (the same date when a large library was donated to the saṅgha; see Luce & Tin Htway, 1976, for the library inscription). Saddhammajotipala seems to return to Pagan one year before the coronation. Some traditions report that some works of Saddhammajotipala, such as the Sankhepavannana, could have been originally composed in Sri Lanka (Subhuti, 1876, xvii; Bode, 1909, 18). Chataṭa composed another short, versified treatise on the Abhidhamma, the Nāmacāradīpikā (or -dīpaka) (Saddhatissa, 1990, 1–28; von Hinüber, 1996, §353). The rest of Chataṭa Saddhammajotipala’s works remain to be properly identified and studied (Ruiz-Falqués, 2015, 105ff.).

During the Konbaung period, the figure of Chataṭa Saddhammajotipala was identified with a legendary 12th-century Chataṭa Thera, an allegedly historical character whose first attestation is not found in a document of Burmese origin, but of Mon origin, namely the Kalyani Inscriptions of King Dhammaceti of Pegu, commissioned in 1476 (Taw Sein Ko, 1892, 4). Chataṭa Thera, who is said to be a Mon by birth, is presented in that story as the founder of the Sīha lineage of Pagan (Burma). From what we know, he did not leave any writings (Buddhadatta, 1957; Godakumbura, 1969). His legend, however, was incorporated in the Burmese chronicles of the Konbaung Period, notably in the Sasanavamsa. Since then, the monastic name “Chataṭa” has been associated with the Sri Lankan Mahavihara tradition and seems to be a title conferred to some text-oriented monks who were ordained or educated in Sri Lanka.

Perhaps the greatest name in Pali Abhidhamma studies during the 15th century is Mahā Ariyavansa, author of the Maṇisāramaṇīṣa, a voluminous and detailed exposition of Sumanigala’s commentary on Anuruddha’s Abhidhammatthasangaha. Ariyavansa, whose monastic affiliation is ambiguous in the chronicles (Mendelson, 1975, 45), composed this commentary at the Dhammakapabba in Sagaing in 1466 (von Hinüber, 1996, §347). The Maṇisāramaṇīṣa is abundant in grammatical points of analysis of the Abhidhamma text, a salient feature of Burmese scholasticism. The author was also skilled in kāvya poetry as we can see from the colophon of his commentary (Ariyavansa, 1930, 459-460). According to the Sasanavamsa (Bode, 1897, 95ff), Ariyavansa studied first in Panýa and later moved to Sagaing to study Abhidhamma. The same account tells us that Ariyavansa had to struggle in order to obtain the teachings of a certain monk, named Re Nūm (“Water-in-Mouth”), who kept his mouth full of water in order to avoid idle talk. With much insistence, Ariyavansa was trained
in Abhidhamma by Re Nuṃ. After receiving a full course on Sumangala’s Abhidhammatthasangaha commentary, Ariyavansa was requested by the teacher to write a commentary on it, which would become the Manisāramāṇijā. “While writing it” says Bode (1909, 42) “he submitted it, chapter by chapter, to the criticism of his fellow-monks, reading it aloud to them as they sat assembled on uposatha days in the courtyard of the Puññācetiya [of Sagaing].”

While Ariyavansa does not figure in the chronicle Vamsadipani (c. 1795), allegedly one of several sources used for the Sāsanavanśa (Lieberman, 1976; see also Kirchenko, 2009), the latter history mentions a 15th-century scholar-monk of Sagaing named Dhammaketu, also known as “the Second Chapaṭa,” whose biography is reminiscent of Ariyavansa’s (Pranke, 2004, 165ff.).

Ariyavansa wrote another Abhidhamma work in Pali, the Manidipaṭikā, a commentary on Budhaghosa’s Atthasālīni (Bode, 1909, 42; Kumar, 1992, 37; von Hinüber, 1996, §308n53; Nyunt, 2012, 62). Ariyavansa states that he composed this commentary in order to clarify difficult points in the Mūlāṅka of Ānanda (Chara Thāna, 1928, 2). His commentary only extends up to the Dwārakathā section of the Atthasālīni.

Ariyavansa further wrote a grammatical treatise on Pali indeclinables, the Gandhāhārana (sometimes spelled Gandhāharaṇa; Tvanh Sinh, 1964, 221), which, according to Subhūti (1876, lxxv) was composed in 1435/6. He also wrote a collection of philological notes on the ten major Jātakas called the Jātakavisodhana (Ariyavansa, 1978), and a Burmese commentary or nissaya on Dhammapala’s (II) Abhidhamma anutikā, known as the Mahānissaya (Nyunt, 2012, 111).

Also to be mentioned is Dhammakitti or Sadāgāra, a disciple of Ariyavansa. According to Bode (1909, 45) he lived in Ava during turbulent times and had to flee the country. He composed the Pali Ekakkharakasa based on a work of the same title in Sanskrit (there are many ekākāsarakasas, “one-syllable thesauri”). Dhammakitti died in exile in Taungū (Ketumati in Pali), allegedly an independent kingdom that welcomed refugees from the Ava king Thoḥanvbw (Bode, 1909, 45). According to Subhūti (1876, lxxx–lxxxi), the work’s anonymous commentary states that the Ekakkharakasa was composed in 1464/5 and that the author composed other grammatical works that are now lost, namely the Lingatthavivarana, the Dhāturiṇappakarana, and a work called the Atthavisesaṇāpaka.

In the city of Panyā (Vijayapura in Pali), established by King Sīhasūra in 1212, was the Pali scholar Srimangala or Sirisumangala (14th century CE, see Bode, 1909, 27), who composed expositions on the commentaries on the Vinaya, Dhammasaṅgani, and Vibhanga traditionally ascribed to Buddhaghosa (see Section 1 in this article). In the same city we find an interesting name in Burmese scholarship, a certain caturangabalāmaṭa “chief counselor of the army,” who under King Kittisīhasūra wrote a commentary on Moggallāna’s Abhidhamappadipika (Yamanaka, 2008); a commentary on a certain treatise called “Koladdhaja,” which most likely refers to the Golādhyāya (Chapter on the Sun) in Bhāskara’s Sanskrit astronomical work, the Siddhāntasīromani (1150) (Luče & Tin Htway, 1976, 243); and another lost commentary on Daṇḍin’s Kahyādāra (Bode, 1909, 27). Under the same monarch, there was another scholar named Nāgita originally from Sagu, also known as Khāṇṭakakhipha (“Thrown into Thorny [Bushes]”) since, as a child, his father threw him in thorn bushes due to his reluctance to visit the local vihāra. He wrote a work of grammatical philosophy, the Saddasāratthajālīni (often called jālīni) (Bode, 1909, 27; Subhūti, 1876, iii–lx).

Among scholars working under the sponsorship of the later Ava court (16th to 18th centuries) was Tipitakakāraka, his full name being the first Thaungbhila Sayadaw Tipitakakāraka Munindagosa (1578–1650/1). According to 17th- to 19th-century biographies about him (Lammerts, 2013, 128ff.), he was educated in Pyi (Prome) and at the age of 14 composed a verse adaptation of the Vesantara Jātaka. When the Ava king Anaukphetlun (1606–1628) took control of Pyi, Tipitakakāraka, who was known then by his ordination name, Upāli, was relocated in Ava. There he studied under the court monk Dhammarājaguru (1551–1641). In 1621 he received the donation of a monastery in Sagaing, and in 1627 the title Tipiṅgāra was conferred on him. In the Sagaing Hills, some time between 1639 and 1651, Upāli composed the Vinayalankārātīka, a major commentary on Sāriputta’s 12th-century Vinaya handbook (von Hinüber 1996, §337). Tipitakakāraka also co-authored two legal treatises (dhammasaṅhata), in monolingual Pali and Burmese nissaya, and to him are attributed “several nissayas to Pali vinaya and abhidhamma texts, vernacular poems about the former lives of the Buddha, collections of apotropaic verses and mantras and, especially, a number of medical and alchemical treatises” (Lammerts, 2013, 129).
Among the eminent scholars of Ava at the time of Tipițakālanākāra we can count Ariyālanākāra the elder, of whom little is known, apart from the fact that he was supposedly Tipițakālanākāra’s intellectual rival. His pupil, Ariyālanākāra the younger, composed nissayas on commentaries ascribed to Buddhaghosa, as well as on local commentaries such as Saddhammajotipāla’s Saṅkhепavaṇṇana (Nyunt, 2012, 78 n.92). He wrote a Pali commentary on the Kaccāyanabheda, known as the Sāratthavikāsini, in 1607/8, according to Subhūti’s reading of the colophon (1876, lxvi). He worked at the Dākkhinavānāhara Monastery near the Rājamanicālacetiya in Sagaing (Bode, 1909, 55).

Another renowned scholar of the 17th century is Tilokaguru of Sagaing (Bode 1909, 53ff; Nyunt, 2012, 63), who authored a number of nissayas on Abhidhamma texts and composed Pali commentaries on the Yamaka and Paṭṭhāna books of the Abhidhamma. We should also include Dāțhanāga of Sagaing (Bode 1909, 55; Nyunt, 2012, 76, n.87), royal preceptor of King Thalun (r. 1629–1648), known for his grammatical commentary in Pali, the Niruttisārāmaṇjīsā, a voluminous tīkā on Vimalabuddhi’s Mukhamattadīpani composed, according to the work’s colophon, in 1647/8 (Subhūti, 1876, xiv; Franke, 1902, 23).

Finally, the 18th-century scholar Nāṇābhivaṃsa Dhammasenāpati Dhammarājādīraguru was the saṅgharāja in the reign of King Bodawphaya (r. 1782–1809). Similar to his contemporary Sāranākāra in Sri Lanka, Nāṇābhivaṃsa led a revival in the study of Pali texts and oversaw the production of many vernacular commentaries and translations of Pali works. Styling himself a forest monk (araṇīṇavāsī), he traced his lineage back to Tipițakālanākāra Munindaghosa, and to a lineage of Lower Chindwin monks, in particular to a certain Aggadhannālāṅkāra Munindaghosa, and to a lineage of Lower Chindwin monks, in particular to a certain Aggadhannālāṅkāra Munindaghosa, and to a lineage of Lower Chindwin monks, in particular to a certain Aggadhannālāṅkāra Munindaghosa.

As with other scholar-monks of the 18th century, the majority of Nāṇābhivaṃsa’s works were in Burmese, and he authored or co-authored many vernacular compositions, including two important histories, the Mhan nanh mahārāja vañh tau krīh (Glass Palace Chronicle) and the Sāsanālāṅkāra cā tamḥ (Treatise on the Ornament of the Religion), which he wrote as a layman after being disrobed by the king (Charney 2006, 108–124).

Thailand

Pali Buddhism was already well established in Thailand by the time of the Sukhothai kingdom of the 13th to 14th centuries, the Lanna kingdom of the 13th to 18th centuries, and the Ayutthaya kingdom of the 14th to 18th centuries. As in Burma, archaeological and epigraphical traces of Pali in the region date to the mid-1st millennium (Skilling, 1997, 98), but no Pali authors or works are known from this early period. While the Pali literature of these three kingdoms has been relatively little studied, we can point out two general trends. First, there was a marked preference for the use of vernacular languages to comment on Pali texts and compose new works. Second, the majority of Pali texts composed in the region were anonymously authored (Skilling & Pakdeekham, 2002, 2004; Skilling, 2014, 355). The case of Pali in Cambodia and Laos follows a similar pattern (Saddhātissa, 1979, 1980; Harris, 2005, 82; McDaniel, 2008). According to de Bernon (2006, 56), “it seems that before the twentieth century there has never been in Cambodia any renowned Pali scholar-monk” (see also de Bernon et al., 2004; de Bernon, 2012).

The most important Pali literary personalities in the region came from the Lanna kingdom. During the 15th and 16th centuries, in particular, Lanna became a center for Pali scholarship, and a Sihaḷa monastic lineage was brought to Chiang Mai by a certain Sumana in 1371. From that moment the connection between the Sihaḷa saṅgha and Chiang Mai is relatively well documented (Penth, 2004, 74) and, as such, the local Pali literary culture and the scope of scholarly erudition resembles, to some degree, literary developments found in Sri Lanka in the first half of the 2nd millennium, namely the interest in histories (on Thai “tamḥan,” see Lagirarde, 2007), handbook commentaries, and grammatical works.

The earliest author writing in Pali in Lanna was Mahāṭhera Bodhirāṇi, the 15th-century compiler
of the Cāmadevīvamsa “Chronicle of Queen Cāmadevī,” which he translated from earlier written or oral Thai version(s) (von Hinüber, 1996, §426; Skilling & Pakdeekham, 2002, §2.47; Veidlinger, 2007, 52). He was also the author of a history of the Phra Singh Buddha image, called the Siṁha(buddharūpa)-mātikā (Saddhātissa, 1989, 43; von Hinüber, 1996, §427).

Arguably the most prominent Pali scholar of the Lanna period was ṇaṇakitti, although very little is known about his biography. He composed two commentaries on the Vinaya and “possibly” eight on Abhidhamma texts (von Hinüber, 2000, 124), among these only three are dated: the Dḥūtukathā and Pātimokkhagāthipada composed in 1492/3, and the Abhidhammatthasaṅgahāmāhātikāyojananā, also known as the Paṭīcikā, composed in 1502/3. In terms of relative chronology, ṇaṇakitti’s Samantapāsādikāthayojananā was written earlier than the Pātimokkhagāthipada (→BEB I: Vinaya Commentarial Literature in Pali, 434). He further composed a grammatical work called the Kaccāyanarūpadipani, a commentary on Buddhappiya’s Rūpasiddhi. Another grammatical work ascribed to him is the Miḷakaccāyanayojanā (Saddhātissa, 1989, 43). He was the rājaguru “royal preceptor” of King Tiloka (r. 1441–1487) (Saddhātissa, 1989, 41; Ongsakul, 2005, 80). A manuscript of the Kaccāyanarūpadipani, dating from 1538 is preserved in Vat Suän Men in Phrae in Northern Thailand. Its colophon states that the author dwelt in the Pānavārāma (Jack-fruit Monastery) situated to the northwest of Abhinavapura (Chiang Mai); this monastery remains unidentified. The author describes himself as well-versed in all branches of grammar, and as having a full command of the Pāli language, and as having a full command of the Pāli language.

Another important scholar of Lanna is Ratanapāni, the author of a history of the sāsana entitled the jīnaka{lāmāli, composed around 1516 to 1517, and a Pali translation of a Thai chronicle entitled the Mūlasāsana (Saddhātissa, 1974, 216; 1989, 44; von Hinüber, 1996, §428; Skilling & Pakdeekham, 2002, §2.55). The author lived in a monastery called Wat Pa Daeng (“Red Forest Monastery”), which was associated with the Sihaḷa monastic lineage. The jīnaka{lāmāli presents a history of the sāsana from the Buddha up to the establishment of the Sihaḷa monastic lineage in Thailand. The same author possibly composed a Pali commentary on the mātikā of the Dhammasaṅgani (Skilling & Pakdeekham, 2002, §3.44) and a commentary (1535) on a short cryptic poem, the Vajirasāratthasangaha of Sirimāṅgala (see below) (Saddhātissa, 1989, 43; Skilling & Pakdeekham, 2002, §4.108).

Sirimāṅgala is another major Pali scholar from Lanna of whom we know very little, apart from the fact that he was the preceptor of King Muang Khetklao (r. 1495–1525) (Saddhātissa, 1989, 42; Yamanaka, 2010, 2). He belonged to the Sihaḷa monastic lineage in Chiang Mai and may have taken part in the eighth Tipiṭaka Council held at Wat Mahā Bodhārāma, also known as Wat Chet Yot, in 1447, under the aegis of King Tiloka (r. 1441–1487). The assembly of monks revised the Tipiṭaka texts and eliminated discrepancies and errors, eventually producing the recension that has circulated in northern Thailand until today (Ongsakul, 2005, 80).

In the colophon of his works Sirimāṅgala is said to have dwelt in Wat Suan Kuan, near Wat Phra Singh in Chiang Mai (Veidlinger, 2007, 94). Sirimāṅgala composed two commentaries on the Vessantarā Jātaka, the Vessantaradipani (1557) and the earlier Gāthādīpaka (Yamanaka, 2010; Kourilsky, 2014). He is also the author of the Cakkavālu(ttha) dipani, written in 1520 (von Hinüber, 1996, §400), a learned commentary on a work on Buddhist cosmology. In the same year he wrote the Saṅkhyaṇapakāsakatiṣṭha, a commentary on Saṅkhyaṇa of Sirimāṅgala (Skilling & Pakdeekham, 2002, §2.210), a work “explaining the counting and calculating of time, the systems of weights and distances, the seasons, minted currency in Buddha’s time, etc.” (Ongsakul, 2005, 82). Furthermore, in 1524 he composed the Mangalatthadipani, a commentary on the Mangalasutta that is the largest and best known of Sirimāṅgala’s works (partial ed. and trans., Yamnada, 1971; Kourilsky, 2014).

Finally, there were a small number of Pali authors active in the late Ayutthaya to early Bangkok periods. As Saddhātissa (1974, 212) has noted, “in the southern capital of Ayodhya (or Ayuthia) ... it would appear that the only scholars present were those who could translate Pali texts into Thai and no original Pali studies from this region are known to us.” There are a few exceptions to this general trend, however. A certain Dhammakitti composed the Saddhammasaṅgaha in 14th-century Ayutthaya (Saddhātissa, 1974, 213) and may have studied in Sri Lanka with Devarakkhita Jayabāhu Dhammakitti of Muang Ketklao (r. 1495–1525) (Saddhātissa, 1989, 42; Yamanaka, 2010, 2). He belonged to the Sihaḷa monastic lineage in Chiang Mai and may have taken part in the eighth Tipiṭaka Council held at Wat Mahā Bodhārāma, also known as Wat Chet Yot, in 1447, under the aegis of King Tiloka (r. 1441–1487). The assembly of monks revised the Tipiṭaka texts
Ayutthaya kingdom, the Saṅkhēpa, was composed at the request of a certain Phra Narai (Saddhātissa, 1974, 218; see Eoseewong, 2005, 292–330, for a list of the Thai chronicles of the Ayutthaya period). In the 18th century, Vanaratana Vimaladhamma (Phra Phonnarat) composed in Bangkok the Sangītīvānsa (d. 1789), a history of Buddhist councils up until the Bangkok council of 1767 in which Rāma I united the divided saṅgha after the fall of Ayutthaya (Saddhātissa, 1974, 219; Cœdès, 1914; von Hinüber, 1996, §199; for Vanaratana’s historical context, see Eoseewong, 2005, 232–3; Reynolds, 2006, 143–160).

In conclusion, in the foregoing analysis we have described the changing scope of scholarly erudition in Pali Buddhism up until 1800. In the first half of the 1st millennium, scholarly erudition includes the writing of commentaries and histories. Buddhaghosa, in particular, emerges as an archetype for a developing scholarly ideal. For much of the second half of the millennium, there is the gradual inclusion of the study of Pali grammar and the intensified production of handbooks. From around 900, the scope of erudition diversifies significantly to include handbook commentaries, relic histories, poetry, and philological works and we find, for the first time, the emergence of virtuoso scholars who mastered many of these fields and whose achievements are eulogized in colophons. From around the 15th century, the scholarly ideal further incorporated vernacular scholarship relating to the Pali tradition as well as other independent vernacular and Pali disciplines that were not previously included, such as astrology and nonmonastic law (dhammasattha). Finally, towards the end of the 18th century, fewer scholar-monks were writing in Pali, though we see an increase in anonymous Pali scholarship from outside traditional centers of power.

Bibliography


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