THE ASGIRIYA MANUSCRIPT OF THE
PALLI VIMUTTIMGAGGA: AN INQUIRY INTO ITS
AUTHENTICITY

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The first reference to a Chinese book named ‘Chiê-tou-tao-lun’, which is also rendered into Pali as Vimuttimagga (Vim.), was made more than six decades ago by Prof. M. Nagai of Japan. Since then Buddhist scholars have paid attention to this book and the most fruitful results were obtained when Prof. P. V. Bapat of India made a comprehensive study of the Chinese Vimuttimagga comparing it with the Pali Visuddhimaggava of Buddhaghosa. His work entitled ‘Vimuttimagga and Visuddhimaggava: A comparative study’ was published in 1937 revealing much about the Chinese Vimuttimagga to the world.

Bapat in his aforesaid work says that Upatissa’s Vimuttimagga, as we have it now in its Chinese translation, bears a very close resemblance to Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhimaggava. And he tries to establish a possible reason for this resemblance in the introduction to his work.

After the publication of Bapat’s work, there were some more publications that helped scholars to approach Vimuttimagga more closely than ever. Firstly, in the year 1958, a Japanese translation of ‘Dhatanganimideśa’, equivalent to the third chapter of the Chinese Vimuttimagga, was made by Prof. G.H. Sasaki of Japan. Secondly, Bapat also critically edited and translated into English the corresponding Tibetan chapter in 1965, entitled ‘Vimuktimārga Dhatuṅganimideśa’. Thirdly, an English translation of the Chinese Vimuttimagga was made by Prof. R. Higata in 1972.

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* When I had finished the present article substantially, I was made to pay attention to the reviews of the Pali Vimuttimagga written by Prof. P. V. Bapat which appeared in the Journal of the Vidyālankara University of Ceylon, 1972, Vol. I, No. 1, in which I was unfortunately not aware of before writing my article. However, on reading through Bapat’s reviews, I was convinced that the approaches I adopted through which I came to the same conclusion as Bapat’s were somewhat different from those of Bapat. So I decided to get my article published without much modification while trying to minimize overlapping areas with Bapat’s as much as possible.

1. JPTS, 1917-19, pp. 69-80
The Vimuttimagga was translated into Chinese by Seng-chi-po-lo (Saṅghapāla) of Fu-nan in 505 A.D. Regarding the language of the original Vimuttimagga, scholars have not yet come to the definite conclusion. “It is difficult” says Prof. R. Higata in “Kokusyaku Issukyō, Roshi-bu, No. 7, p. 3, Tokyo”, “to decide whether the original Vimuttimagga was written in Pali or Sanskrit”.