

Dhamma's Transmission and the Pali Theravada Canon

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Abstract: The presentation will outline a history of the creation and development of the PāliThēravāda Canon created in India and Sri Lanka almost entirely in the period preceding the *parinibbāna* and up to the unification of the squabbling three schools of the Sangha in Sri Lanka by King ParakramaBahu I in 1164/5 CE – a period of approximately 1,655 years. A history of the development of this Tipitaka is important because it has been suggested that this Canonical text is the only one now in existence of all the Buddhist schools that remains complete and intact (Tilakaratne). Also because the operations involved in its creation are in some ways unique in comparison with the scriptures of other Buddhist schools. In addition, comparison with the scriptures and canonical literatures of other religions, this Tipitaka has heretofore never resulted in a comprehensive history [at least in English] of its development. Comparisons with other religions' scriptures indicate that Judaism has its Torah, the Talmud and Mishnah; Islam possesses the Koran and its tafsirs (or expositions of its scriptures) and its hadiths ("collection of the reports and teachings, deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhmmad"); Christianity its Bible in two Testaments, gospels and countless commentaries. The PāliThēravādaTipitaka possesses none of these. It stands uniquely on its own. This international conference presentation will obviously have to omit many details and supporting evidence owing to time constraints nevertheless it will identify the major events that led to this Tipitaka's creation in the form in which its contents are possessed today; brief comments or explanations will be made where considered necessary. In total more than thirty major issues, incidents or events have been identified of which eighteen are associated with India before the Third Buddhist Council and thereafter the departure of the Arahant Mahinda with his entourage to spread this Dhamma in Sri Lanka. These total another thirteen similar issues or events. Each event is considered as 'links' in this 'chain of transmission' of the Dhamma that has resulted in this Tipitaka. Each 'link' being assessed against stated criteria as strong or weak in its contribution to this entire 'chain of transmission' that has led to this Tipitaka.