

**SACRED BOOKS OF THE  
BUDDHISTS. VOL.  
IV; DIALOGUES OF  
THE BUDDHA. PART III**

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SACRED BOOKS OF THE BUDDHISTS

TRANSLATED

BY VARIOUS ORIENTAL SCHOLARS

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# DIALOGUES OF THE BUDDHA

*TRANSLATED FROM THE PALI  
OF THE DĪGHA NIKĀYA*

BY

T. W. AND C. A. F. RHYS DAVIDS

PART III

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## INTRODUCTION.

It is now twenty years since the first volume of this translation of the *Digha* was published. Other work, infirmities and old age have contributed to the delay, and the work would never have been finished if it had not received the co-operation of my wife, who in spite of much other work to do, found time to assist me so often and so much.

In the opening pages of the first volume eight facts were referred to as evidence of the age of the *Digha*, and incidentally of the rest of that part of the Pali literature which belonged to the same period. The conclusions drawn from these facts were that the books in question were North Indian in origin; that they belonged to a period before the time of Asoka, and before South India and Ceylon were well known in the North of India; and that they contained good evidence for the 5th century, and indeed, in parts of them, for the 6th century B.C.

Since these conclusions were drawn the Pali Text Society has published nearly fifty volumes of Pali texts. They belong to all periods. But so far as they throw light on the subject, they confirm the above conclusions. Two valuable treatises on Pali Literature have also appeared—the one by Professor Winternitz in the 2nd vol. of his *Geschichte der Indischen Litteratur*,<sup>1</sup> and the other by Professor Geiger in his *Pali Literatur und Sprache*.<sup>2</sup> The two scholars, though differing on many points of detail, agree on

<sup>1</sup> Leipzig, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I, Pt. 7 of *Grundriss der Indo-arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde*, Strassburg, 1916.



the main point of the general accuracy of the above conclusions.

We can now go a little further. With the whole of the texts before us we can speak with more certainty as to the method of their gradual growth, and as to the difference of age of the various portions. We have no space here to repeat the arguments put forward in *Buddhist India*, pp. 165-188. We can only give the general conclusions. These are—

1. Of the twenty-nine books in the canon only one—the latest—has a putative author, and even in that case 'editor' would be more accurate than 'author.'

2. Most of them, including all the most important, are anthologies, collections of older material.

3. Some of this older material had already been collected into smaller anthologies, now no longer extant as separate books, but incorporated in the existing ones. Such are the *Pātimokkha*, the *Sīlas*, the *Pārāyana*, and the *Octades*.

4. The older material consists of hymns or ethical verses or ballads; and of prose passages on doctrine or ethics or conduct, and of parables, or short episodes in the life history of the principal contemporaries of the Buddha. Such passages can often be distinguished from the context in which they now stand by the fact that they are found in identical words in two or more of the existing anthologies.

5. The great compendiums—that is the Four *Nikāyas*, and the *Vinaya*—grew up side by side, and were probably completed in their present shape about a century after the Buddha's death.

6. When such a passage or stanza as is mentioned in § 4 occurs in two or more of these five there need be no question of one having borrowed from the other. Each may have incorporated the passage or stanza or episode from the common stock of such passages, etc., handed down in the community.

7. Each of them has at the end an appendix which is a little later than the rest of the work.

8. We have now a long and increasing list of words or

thoughts which are tests of age—words used in one sense in the older strata of the literature and in another sense in later strata (abhiññā, anāgāmin, abhidhamma, ogha, etc.)—new words introduced to modify or supplement ideas in older works (dukkha, dhutanga, etc.) and new words formed to express new ideas.<sup>1</sup> Such test-words are invaluable in assisting us to determine the comparative age (with reference to other passages) of the particular passage in which they occur.

9. It has been possible therefore to arrange the canonical books into a list showing their comparative age during the period from the time of the Buddha to that of Asoka.<sup>2</sup>

10. Not one of these twenty-nine Pali books has been, so far as we know, translated into Sanskrit. When some Buddhists, notably the Sabbatthivādins (to be henceforth known as Sarvāstivādins), began to write in Sanskrit about the time of Kanishka, they wrote new works, or made new anthologies. These sometimes had titles imitated from the titles of the Pali books; and the anthologies, whether in prose or verse or both, contained some of the selections included in the Pali anthologies with similar names. But they were new books.

11. Their historical value is all the greater on that account. It is the differences we want to know about. What changes did they make in doctrine or discipline, and why? It is waste of time to speculate without the texts. And especially we want a complete edition of all the Sarvāstivādin works (except more story books—they can wait).

T. W. RHYS DAVIDS.

*January, 1921.*

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Mrs. Rhys Davids' *Buddhist Psychology* (Quest Series), pp. 140-200; and cf. the list given in Rhys Davids, *Questions of Milinda* I, xlv. ff.

<sup>2</sup> See *Buddhist India*, p. 188.

