

Redaction at Aloka Vihara: an Assessment of its Significance in the Transmission Processes of the Pali Canon

Russell Bowden¹

By way of introduction, the presentation will briefly recount the events from the arrival of Arahant Mahinda in Sri Lanka in 246 B.C. – bringing the Canonical texts approved by the Third Buddhist Council; his creation of the Lankan Sangha; the ordination of Ven. Arittha; the re-establishment of the *bhanaka* tradition in Lanka; the intrusion of *vaitulya* doctrines and the protective role of the Maha Vihara; historical events leading to the apparently simultaneous invasion of seven Chola kings and Damilas with the arrival from Rohana of the Brahmana Tissa and his horoscope-predicted ambitions and the simultaneous famine; the significant dispute in the Sangha over *pariyatti* (learning, knowledge and meditation) and *patipatti* (practice and connections with the laity) and the former's dominance and its consequences. These events contributing to the Sangha's approval to commit to manuscripts, the previously unwritten *sruti* texts of the Theravada Tipitaka at the Aloka Vihara in the reign of Vattagamini (29 to 17 B.C.) circa 23 B.C.

Related questions will be addressed – why the Aloka Vihara (remote from the capital); on whose suggestion; the roles played by the King and the Maha Vihara monks; the manner in which redaction was accomplished and what; if any, benefits accrued. Answers, based on facts and not suppositions, will be attempted.

Assessments are more significant (than simple repetitions of history) – as much as these are now possible - of (1) the impacts of these events on the spread of the Doctrine, (2)

¹ 115/1 A, Parakum Mawatha, Bangalawatte, Kottawa
Email: Russell@slt.lk

on the reliability and integrity of the Buddha's Words and the related authenticity of the Canonical texts, (3) the early contribution redaction made to the establishment of what was to develop into the Sinhala Literary Heritage, (4) the spread of manuscripts, (5) their use in learning and teaching, (6) their contribution to libraries' developments, (7) the continuing disputes between Theravada factions and (8) subsequent, later, book burnings.

The processes of transmission of the Buddha's Words - from 483 B.C. to redaction (circa 23 B.C.) and translation of the Pali Canon into Sinhala (between 341 and 370 A.D.) – gave rise to major hurdles, setbacks as well as benefits. These will be briefly assessed.

Keywords: Aloka vihara, Pali Canon, manuscript writing