

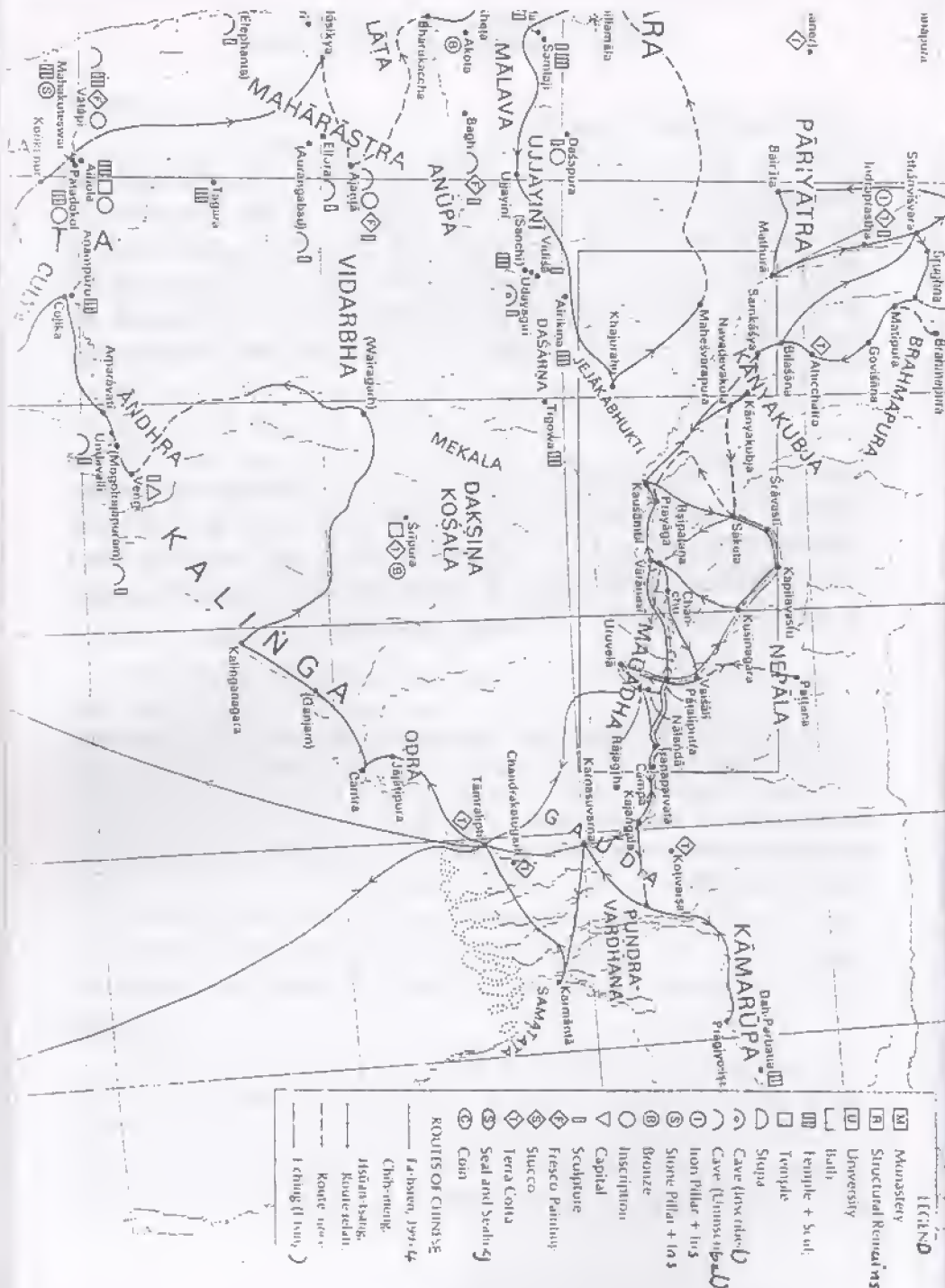
DID HSÜAN-TSANG MEET THE FOLLOWERS OF DEVADATTA ?

Paola G. Tinti

With the arrival in India of the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien in 400 CE, a tradition began of Chinese monks willing to travel to the subcontinent to find original versions of sacred books, visit Buddhist sites and learn Sanskrit. These monks collected an enormous amount of information regarding the regions they visited and the people they met, with special regard to Buddhism, and reported on them in their memoirs. For this reason their descriptions are of incomparable value for the study of the history and religions of the areas they visited.

A long time after Fa-hsien's journey another monk, Hsüan-tsang, came to India between 629 and 645. Unlike his predecessor, Hsüan-tsang extensively toured Puṇḍavardhana, Kāmarūpa, Samatata, Tāmralipti and Kārasuvarṇa¹. Accordingly, his account of the eastern part of the subcontinent² is rich in interesting data and is considered the most important source on the condition of Buddhism in the area at the time. His account is important because there is a lack of archaeological material predating the eighth century. In fact, according to Bareau:

No document has yet been discovered which attests the presence of the Theravādins, or of any other school, in this vast region, so that, were it not for the testimonies of Hsüan-tsang and I-ching, it could be doubted that this part



¹ I use the form of geographical names as restored by Watters 1905: 184, 186, 188, 190 and 191.

² Beal, trans., 1884, 2:194-204.

of India was converted to Buddhism before it was governed by the Pāla kings from the eighth century on (Bureau, 1981, 2).

Moreover, when Hsüan-tsang returned to China, one of his disciples, the monk Hui-li, compiled his biography³ so that we have a very important secondary source available⁴. This biography is of great value since it can be considered a supplement to Hsüan-tsang's own account: 'What is obscure or half told in one is made clear in the other'⁵.

While travelling around Kāṇasuvārṇa, Hsüan-tsang, who otherwise mostly met monks who followed the Sthavira school in East India⁶, found that:

There are believers and heretics alike amongst them. There are ten *saṅghārāmas* or so, with about 2000 priests. They study the Little Vehicle of the Sammatīya (*Ching-tiang-pu*) school. There are fifty Dēva temples. The heretics are very numerous. Besides these there are three *saṅghārāmas* in which they do not use thickened milk (*ū lok*) following the directions of Dēvadatta. By the side of the capital is the

saṅghārāma called Lo-to-wei-chi (Raktaviṭi), the halls of which are light and spacious, the storeyed towers very lofty. In this establishment congregate all the most distinguished, learned, and celebrated men of the kingdom (Beal 1993, 2: 201-2).

Some differences can be found in the narrative of the memoirs and the biography of Hsüan-tsang with respect to the numbers of temples and monks the pilgrim found in Kāṇasuvārṇa⁷, but this can easily be considered a minor imprecision and there is no reason to believe this part of the journey did not take place. Likewise, although Watters states that Hsüan-tsang's '... location of Kāṇasuvārṇa. . . is not in agreement with the rest of the narrative, and we must apparently regard that place as 700 *li* to the north-east instead of north-west of Tāmralipti'⁸, this discrepancy does not undermine the overall legitimacy of Hsüan-tsang's report.

Hsüan-tsang's reference to a sect of Devadatta's disciples is of interest. According to the Pāli Canon, Devadatta was the son of a maternal uncle of the Buddha, who had been converted by the Buddha himself when he visited Kapilavatthu after the Enlightenment⁹. After years in which he had become a respected member of the Sangha, Devadatta is said to have started a series of manoeuvres, including three attempted murders, in order to take control of the Sangha from the Buddha. The enmity between the

3 Beal, trans., 1911.

4 For what concerns the part of the pilgrim's journey to East India, the order of the trip is very differently told in the two books. According to the biography, instead of following the Puṇḍavardhana, Kāmarūpa, Samatāṣa, Tāmralipti and Kāṇasuvārṇa itinerary, Hsüan-tsang went from Puṇḍavardhana south-east to Kāṇasuvārṇa, then south-east to Samatāṣa and finally to Tāmralipti. Only much later would he have gone, if he went at all, to Kāmarūpa. In any event, there is no doubt that Kāmarūpa is described in both texts as a non-Buddhist country, thus eliminating any possible controversy on this issue.

5 Cranmer-Byng 1911, v.

6 In fact the only region where the Chinese monk met followers of the Great Vehicle is Puṇḍavardhana.

7 The number of temples is identical, but the number of priests goes from 2,000 to 3,000. According to the biography, there were two temples with supposed followers of Devadatta, not three.

8 Watters 1905, 2: 192.

9 For all references to Devadatta in the Pāli Canon see: Mulalasekera 1974, 1, 1106-11.

two is not limited to this life, as illustrated in many Jātakas. However, Devadatta's efforts to overthrow the Buddha resulted in failure and, when all his followers left him for the Buddha, he fell ill and eventually died swallowed up in the Avīci hell.

The Chinese monk identifies the ascetics as Devadatta's followers because they do not use thickened milk, a proscription he attributes to Devadatta although this does not agree with the account in the Pāli Vinaya Piṭaka. In the Pāli text, the five points on which Devadatta confronted the Buddha, in Pāli *dhutaṅga*¹⁰, do not include the exclusion of milk and its derivatives. According to the Pāli text, Devadatta declares:

It were good, Lord, if the monks, for as long as life lasted, might be forest-dwellers; whoever should betake himself to the neighbourhood of a village, sin would besmirch him. For as long as life lasts, let them be beggars for alms; whoever should accept an invitation, sin would besmirch him. For as long as life lasts, let them be rag-robe wearers; whoever should accept a robe given by a householder, sin would besmirch him. For as long as life lasts, let them live at the root of a tree; whoever should go under cover, sin would besmirch him. For as long as life lasts, let them not eat fish and flesh; whoever should eat fish and flesh, sin would besmirch him (Vinaya Piṭakam, Cullavagga, VII.3.14)¹¹.

10 This term indicates a set of practices appropriate to a scrupulous person leading to the 'shaking off' of evil dispositions or obstacles to spiritual progress. A list of 13 such practices is given in passages of the Pāli Canon where they are also discussed, together or separately. See: Rhys Davids – Stede 1921–25, 342.

11 *sādhū bhante bhikkhū yāvajīvaṃ ārañṇakā assu, yo gāmantaṃ osareyya vajjaṃ naṃ phuseyya. yāvajīvaṃ piṇḍipātakaṃ assu, yo nimantanaṃ sādīyeyya vajjaṃ naṃ phuseyya. yāvajīvaṃ paṃsukūlikā assu, yo ganapatiṭvaram sādīyeyya vajjaṃ naṃ phuseyya. yāvajīvaṃ rukkamūlikā assu, yo channaṃ*

Besides that of the Theravādins, other schools have produced versions of the Vinaya which have been preserved in Chinese translation. These are:

Mahāsāṃghikas
Mahīśāsakas
Dharmaguptakas
Sarvāstivādins
Mūlasarvāstivādins.

Of the last we have a Tibetan version as well as some parts of the Sanskrit text¹². According to Bareau, the exclusion of milk from the monk's diet is mentioned in both the Mahīśāsaka and Dharmaguptaka versions¹³. He also gives us a list of seven (or eight, depending on the method of counting) different points that, variously combined in the above Vinayas, would account for the five *dhutaṅgas* of Devadatta, which are always five, but not the same five¹⁴. This is incompatible with my findings. Firstly, I have traced the presence of the point regarding milk in a Tibetan text¹⁵ as well as in a Chinese Mahāsāṃghika one.¹⁶ Since it is the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya that survives in Tibetan it is surprising that Bareau missed this and found the same point about milk only in

upagaccheyya vajjaṃ phuseyya. yāvajīvaṃ macchamaṃsaṃ na khādeyyuṃ, yo macchamaṃsaṃ khādeyya vajjaṃ naṃ phuseyyāti. English trans. I.B. Horner, *The Book of the Discipline*, V: 276 (PTS, London 1975).

12 Bareau, 1989–90, 1.

13 *Ibid.*, 13.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Dulva, iv, f.453 as in Rockhill 1884, 87. Unfortunately Rockhill does not mention which edition of the Tibetan Vinaya he refers to, so that I cannot locate the original text. According to Rockhill the same list is in the Udānavarga, p.204.

16 Taishō Tripiṭaka 24: 149, text 1450, part B (text available only in Chinese). Translated for me by Glen Dudbridge, Professor of Chinese at Oxford.

the Mahīśāsaka and Dharmaguptaka versions. Secondly, in both versions of the Vinaya I examined, the list of the five points differs from any combination hypothesised by Bareau, containing some elements not listed by the French scholar and some in contrast to what is generally believed was Devadatta's philosophy. These are:

- (1) The *çramana* Gautama makes use of curds and milk; henceforth we will not make use of them, because by so doing one harms calves. (2) the *çramana* Gautama makes use of meat; but we will not use it, because, if one does, living creatures are killed. (3) The *çramana* Gautama makes use of salt; but we will not use it, because it is produced from a mass of sweat (*rngul khrod-nas byung*). (4) The *çramana* Gautama wears gowns with cut fringes; but we will wear gowns with long fringes, because by his practice the skilful work of weavers is destroyed. (5) The *çramana* Gautama lives in the wilds; but we will live in villages, because by his practice men cannot perform works of charity (*dana*) (Rockhill 1884, 87-8)¹⁷.

It therefore appears that there is some confusion about Devadatta in the Buddhist literature.

Watters suggests that:

With reference to the Brethren who abstained from the use of milk, curds, and [*sic*: word apparently missing in Watters' text] as articles of food our pilgrim's statement that they did so as followers of Devadatta may have been the suggestion of a Mahāyānist Brother. All Mahāyānists are supposed to

abstain from milk food, and I-ching states expressly that it is unlawful food (Watters 1905, 2:192).

I cannot find any evidence suggesting that Mahāyānists should abstain from milk products, but even if this were the case, the attribution of this rule to Devadatta must be later. It is agreed that Devadatta was a contemporary of the Buddha, if not a relative of his, and that he attempted to divide the Order during the lifetime of the Blessed One. Following the date provided by Gombrich, the Buddha's Parinibbāna occurred in c. 404 BCE¹⁸, but 'the expression «Mahāyāna» (or its equivalent in the local language) has been used by Buddhists from perhaps the first century BCE. . .¹⁹. It is therefore absurd to use the term Mahāyāna in reference to Devadatta or his followers. Also, Vinaya rules are not Mahāyāna²⁰ and all mentioned here are Sthavira, thus it would be impossible to place Devadatta in the Mahāyāna tradition on these grounds.

As for the allusion to I-ching's work, the Chinese pilgrim outlines in a paragraph of his text the Vinaya rules followed by the Indians regarding food. He relates that food is classified as soft and hard and that each group is made of five kinds of food, milk not belonging to any of the two groups. Then he adds:

We may regard milk, cream &c., as besides the two groups of the five mentioned above; for they have no special name given in the Vinaya, and it is clear that they are not included in the proper food (Takakusu, trans., 1896, 43).

Even if this were the case, it would not account for the identi-

17 Note that in the Chinese text of the above footnote, the five points are arranged in the same way.

18 Gombrich 1991.

19 Williams 1989, 2.

20 On this point, see Gombrich 1988, 112.

fication of some ascetics as the followers of Devadatta on the basis of the exclusion of milk from their diet.

Because of the above considerations I believe that it is improbable that Hsüan-tsang ever came across any adherents who owed eating practices to Devadatta. If the followers of Devadatta ever really existed and survived their founder, to the extent that Hsüan-tsang found two or three of their monasteries as late as more than a thousand years after the decease of the Buddha, one would expect to find archaeological or textual evidence of their existence, and yet there is none. What the pilgrim might have come across is a sect of ascetics who followed a particular diet which excluded milk. Because of the Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya that he probably knew (since it had already been translated into Chinese), Hsüan-tsang may have assumed that these were followers of Devadatta. Moreover, Chinese people do not traditionally use dairy products, so Hsüan-tsang may have been particularly sensitive on this issue and been happy to find some ascetics who appeared to him to follow this Chinese tradition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bureau, A. 1981. 'The Theravādins and East India according to the Canonical Texts', *Journal of the Pali Text Society* IX, Pali Text Society, London.
- 1989-90. 'Devadatta et le premier schisme bouddhique', *Oriente e Occidente (Pūrvāparam)*, Marsala.
- Beal, S., trans. 1884. *Si yu ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London (repr. Delhi 1994).
- trans. 1911. *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, London.
- Cranmer-Byng, L. 1911. 'Preface' to *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang* (Beal

- op. cit.*, above).
- Gombrich, R.F. 1988. *Theravāda Buddhism. A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, London and New York.
- 1991. 'Dating the Buddha', *The Dating of the Historical Buddha*, ed. H. Bechert, Göttingen.
- Majumdar, R.C. 1971. *History of Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta.
- Malalasekera, G.P. 1974. *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, 2 vols, Pali Text Society, London.
- Niyogi, P. 1976. 'Dynastic and regional affiliations of Buddhism in ancient Bengal', *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, ed. K.K. Ganguli, Calcutta University.
- Rhys Davids, T.W. - Stede, W. 1921-25. *Pali-English Dictionary*, Pali Text Society, London.
- Rockhill, W.W. 1884. *The Life of the Buddha and Early History of his Order*, London (repr. Petaling Jaya 1987).
- Sen-Majumdar, G. 1983. *Buddhism in Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta.
- 1985. 'Buddhism in Ancient Bengal as known from Chinese sources', *Buddhism, Early and Late Phases*, ed. K.K. Dasgupta, Calcutta University.
- Sircar, D.C. 1960. *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, Delhi.
- Taishō Tripiṭaka. [*Ta tsang ching*] *taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, Taipei 1900.
- Takakusu, J., trans. 1896. *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (A.D.671-695) by I-tsing*, Oxford (repr. New Delhi 1982).
- Vinaya Piṭakam, ed. H. Oldenberg, London 1878-83.
- Watters, T. 1905. *On Yuan Chwang's travels in India*, London.
- Williams, P. 1989. *Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Doctrinal Foundations*, London and New York.