“Recently we have had an occasion to listen to a series of sermons on Nibbāna and there have been differences of opinion regarding the interpretation of some deep suttas on Nibbāna in those sermons. And so the venerable Great Preceptor suggested to me that it would be useful to this group if I would give a set of sermons on Nibbāna, touching on those controversial points.

At first, for many reasons, I hesitated to accept this invitation for a serious task, but then, as the venerable Great Preceptor repeatedly encouraged me on this, I gave some thought as to how best I could set about doing it. And it occurred to me that it would be best if I could address these sermons directly to the task before us in this Nissarana Vanaya, and that is meditative attention [yoniso manasikāra], rather than dealing with those deep controversial suttas in academic isolation. And that is why I have selected the above quotation as the theme for the entire set of sermons, hoping that it would help create the correct atmosphere of meditative attention.

\textit{etaṃ santoṃ etaṃ pañītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sabbūpadhipatīnissaggo taṅhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānam}.
‘This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, detachment, cessation, extinction.’

This in fact is a meditation subject in itself, a kammaṭṭhāna. This is the reflection on the peace of Nibbāna, upasamānussati.”

(Bhikkhu K. Ānāṇananda 2003: 1)

- The Nibbāna Sermons as a learned piece of contemplative scholarship on the meditative theme of upasamānussati, “recollection of peace”, that is, the Nibbāna-experience itself.
- The Pali discourses present Nibbāna by means of an illustrated, figurative, often metaphorical mode of exposition.
- The later Theravāda tradition – including Abhidhamma, post-canonical, paracanonical and commentarial literature – understood such an exposition as contingent, provisional, conventional, in contrast to the universally valid, categorical, definitive exposition of the Abhidhamma, represented as the acme of the Buddha’s word.
- The status of the commentaries came to be enhanced by the popular belief that their content is ultimately traceable to a miscellany of the Buddha’s own word scattered in different places, pākiṇṇaka-desanā:

“[b]ut the true state of affairs seems to be rather different. Very often the commentaries are unable to say something conclusive regarding the meaning of deep suttas. So they simply give some possible interpretations and the reader finds himself at a loss to choose the correct one. Sometimes the commentaries go at a tangent and miss the correct interpretation. Why the commentaries are silent on some deep suttas is also a
problem to modern day scholars. There are some historical reasons leading to this state of affairs in the commentaries.”
(Bhikkhu K. Ānānanda 2003: 2)

the epistemological & scriptural foundations

ancient Indian approach to truth: valid means of knowledge
(1) oral tradition (the ancient sayings handed down by oral transmission)
(2) logic (philosophical analysis, reasoning & inference)
(3) direct knowledge (extrasensory/meditative perception, intuitive knowledge)

the Buddha’s epistemology
based on and priorities (3), points out the limits of (1) & (2)
dīṭṭhadhammābhīñāvocānānapāramīppattānāṁ, ādibrahmacariyaṁ paṭijānāntānampi kho aham ... vemattāṁ vadāmi.
santi ... eke samaṇabrāhmaṇaṁ anussavikā. te anussavena
dīṭṭhadhammābhīñāvocānānapāramīppattā, ādibrahmacariyaṁ paṭijānanti; seyyathāpi brāhmaṇā tevijjā.
santi pana ... eke samaṇabrāhmaṇaṁ kevalāṁ saddhāmattakena dīṭṭhadhammābhīñāvocānānapāramīppattā, ādibrahmacariyaṁ paṭijānanti; seyyathāpi takkī vīmaṁsi.
santi ... eke samaṇabrāhmaṇaṁ pubbe ananussutesu dharmesu sāmaṁyeva dhammaṁ abhiññāya
diṭṭhadhammābhiṅñāvosānāpāramippattā, ādibrahmacariyaṁ paṭijānānti.

tatra ... ye te samaṇabrāhmaṇā pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu sāmaṇṭyeva dhammaṃ abhiṅñāya
diṭṭhadhammābhiṅñāvosānāpāramippattā, ādibrahmacariyaṁ paṭijānānti, tesāham asmi.

tadamināpetam ... pariṇāyena veditabbaṃ, yathā ye te samaṇabrāhmaṇā pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu sāmaṇṭyeva dhammaṃ abhiṅñāya diṭṭhadhammābhiṅñāvosānapāramippattā, ādibrahmacariyaṁ paṭijānānti, tesāham asmi.

“‘I say that there is a diversity among those recluses and brahmins who claim [to teach] the fundamentals of the holy life after having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge here and now.

There are some recluses and brahmins who are traditionalists, who on the basis of oral tradition claim [to teach] the fundamentals of the holy life after having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge here and now; such are the brahmins of the Three Vedas.

There are some recluses and brahmins who, entirely on the basis of mere faith, claim [to teach] the fundamentals of the holy life after having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge; such are the reasoners and investigators.

There are some recluses and brahmins who, having directly known the Dhamma for themselves among things not heard before, claim [to teach] the fundamentals of the holy life after having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge.

‘I … am one of those recluses and brahmins who, having directly known the Dhamma for themselves among things not heard before, claim [to teach] the fundamentals of the holy life
after having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge.”
(Saṅgārava-sutta, MN 100 at M II 211,8; trsl. Ñāṇamoli 1995: 820)

→ “[in the early discourses, the Buddha] is never simply described as a vibhajja-vāda or vibhajja-vādin; it is always a question of being one who responds critically in a particular matter, as indicated by the pronoun ettha. In fact, elsewhere and on other issues, the Buddha’s position is represented as unequivocal ... there would in fact be some support in the Nikāyas for calling him [also] an ekāṃsā-vādin. It is true that this exact term is not found, but in the Poṭṭhapāda-sutta (D I 191) we find the Buddha declaring that he has made known ekāṃsikā teachings, namely the Four Noble Truths.”
(Cousins 2001: 133–134)

→ “it is not appropriate to think that the Buddha employed only the Vibhajjavāda methodology at all times in relation to all propositions. His answers varied depending on the nature of the questions. His statements were sometimes categorical and at other times analytical. Therefore, the Canonical evidence does not support the traditional claim that the Buddha can be branded as a Vibhajjavādin.”
(Abeynayaka 2009: 96–97)

the Buddha’s epistemology for Buddhist disciples
exposes and re-qualifies the means of knowledge:
• limits of oral tradition (1): material committed to memory might be wrongly remembered or well-remembered material might be false and misleading or be misinterpreted and decontextualised
→ might be related to learnedness in the Teacher’s teachings (the textual transmission of the Teacher’s teachings has limits too!)

na tāvāham pāpīma parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me bhikkhuniyo na sāvikā bhavissanti, viyattā vinītā visāradā bahussutā, dhammadharā dhammānudhammapaṭipannā, sāmīcipaṭipannā anudhammacāriniyo, sakām ācariyakaṁ uggahetvā, ācikkhissanti desessanti paññāpessanti paṭṭhapessanti, vivarissanti vibhajissanti uttāni karissanti – uppannam parappavādaṁ sahadhammena sunigghātām niggahetvā – sappāṭihāriyaṁ dhammadṁ desessanti.

“I will not attain Parinibbāna, Wicked One, for as long as my nuns are not [true] disciples, accomplished, disciplined, confident, learned, bearers of the teaching, practising in conformity with the teaching, correct in their practice, living in conformity with the teaching, and having learned it from their own teacher, will declare, reveal, make known, set forth, open up, analyse, make plain – after giving a good rebuke with reason to the doctrines of others that have arisen – and teach the sappāṭihāriya teaching.”

(Mahāparinibbāna-sutta, DN 16 at DN II 105,8; trsl. with modifications after Ānandajoti 2008: 95–96)

• limits of logical reasoning (2): might appear convincing, but then fall apart upon closer inspection or else prove false if based on false premises (heuristic not eristic!)

→ to be enhanced to the tetralemma model

• shared limits (1+2): the acceptance of a view (dogmatism vs. faith vs. investigation vs. firm confidence)
• shared limits (1+2): what has not been well remembered or what does not appear to be soundly reasoned might prove to be true (*Sandaka-sutta*, MN 76 at MN I 520,3 and *Caṅkī-sutta*, MN 95 at MN II 171,10)

• limits of experience (3): in the absence of established right view (*samma-diṭṭhi*), experience as the chief culprit for the arising of wrong views (*micchā-diṭṭhi*) when upheld one-sidedly and dogmatically

→ 49 out of 62 grounds for formulating (wrong) views in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* (DN 1) are pure or at least to an extent “direct” meditative experiences, whereas 13 grounds are based on pure reasoning


→ yet, direct knowledge of the real nature of present experience at the six sense bases (*saḷāyatana*) and its cessation qua direct experience of *Nibbāna* and knowledge of liberation is possible:

it is a “sphere of experience that should be known”, *āyatane veditabbe* (*Kāmaguṇa-sutta*, SN 35.117 at SN IV 98,3 with the commentary, Spk II 391,3) for “there is that sphere of experience”, *atthi ... tad āyatanaṁ* (*Nibbānapaṭisāmyutta-sutta*, Ud 8.1 at Ud 80,9).

This sphere of experience is to be realised through a method of exposition (*pariyāya*) for attaining valid final knowledge (*aṇṇa*) independent of faith (*saddhā*), personal preference (*rucī*), oral tradition (*anussava*), reasoning (*ākārparivitakkā*), and acceptance of a view (*diṭṭhini jjhānakkhanti*):

“There is a method of exposition by means of which a monk—apart from faith, apart from personal preference, apart from oral tradition, apart from reasoned reflection,
acceptance of a view after pondering it—can declare final knowledge thus: ‘Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being.’ And what is that method of exposition? Here, monks, having seen a form with the eye, if there is lust, hatred, or delusion internally, a monk understands: ‘There is lust, hatred, or delusion internally’; or, if there is no lust, hatred, or delusion internally, he understands: ‘There is no lust, hatred, or delusion internally.’

Since this is so, are these things to be understood by faith, or by personal preference, or by oral tradition, or by reasoned reflection, or by acceptance of a view after pondering it?”

“No, venerable sir.”

“Aren’t these things to be understood by seeing them with wisdom?”

“Yes, venerable sir.”

“This, monks, is the method of exposition by means of which a bhikkhu can declare final knowledge thus: ‘Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being’.”

(Atthinukhopariyāya-sutta, SN 35.153 at SN IV 139,5; trsl. with integrations after Bodhi 2000: 1214–1215)

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“[the Buddha’s awakening] represents the human experience around which the religion would develop its practices and ideals. This was the experience whereby Śākyamuni became an ‘Awakened One’ (buddha). His disciples came to believe that all aspects of Buddhist doctrine and practice flow from this experience of awakening (bodhi).”

(Gómez 1987: 355)
“the Buddhist emphasis on ‘inner experience’ is in large part a product of modern and open lay-oriented reform movements” … “a product of twentieth-century reforms inspired in part by Occidental models.” “[Such a concept of] religious experience is a relatively late and distinctly Western invention.”


→ direct final knowledge of ‘all’ (sabba-) ≠ ‘Theravāda’ commentarial & Abhidhammic omniscience (sabbaññā)

→ sabbaññā of the ‘Theravāda Buddha’ impugned by Protestant and Catholic polemicians and debaters who paved the way to Buddhist revivalism and the emergence of ‘Protestant Buddhism’ in Sri Lanka

→ knowledge of conditionality & its cessation ≠ Theravāda Paṭṭhāna-project

→ etc. …
ON BUDDHISM:
Being the First Part of the Kristiyani Prajñapti.

CHAPTER I.
CONCERNING GAUTAMA BEING SARVAJÑA *
OR OMNISCIENT.

The founder of Buddhism did not deduce his doctrines from reasonings on their nature, but from his own intuitions. Thus when he delivered his first discourse at Benares, after declaring the four leading doctrines of his system, he states at the close of each of the doctrines: Me bhikkhave pubbe ānussate su dhammase su akkhāhu udāpādi nāma udāpādi paññā udāpādi vijjā udāpādi śloko udāpādi.† “Bhikshu! for the attainment of these previously unknown doctrines the eye, the knowledge, the wisdom, the clear perception, the light were developed within me.”

In many of his discourses he affirms that he did not derive his doctrines from the instruction of others, nor from various reasonings, but from his own underived wisdom; and

[Note. The Pali quotations are not literally translated but their correct sense is given.]

* Ṣārva-jiṁśa
† Ṣārva-jiṁśa ṁukhaṁ parigrahaṁ iva bhūtajñataṁ iva jñānaṁ iva anuññātaṁ iva bhāṣyate tatra vijjā udāpādi sā sāppulāyā ruci nāma nāma āśeṣāya āsitaṁ.

therefore the truth of his system depends upon the unlimited extent and the unerring nature of his knowledge. He is accordingly styled Sarvajña * or the Omniscient One. By this word the Buddhists mean that Gautama is fully acquainted with all existing things; but some
“The entire teaching of the Buddha could be summed up in a single Pāḷi word. What do you think it is?’ …

‘Yāvadeva’, comes the unexpected answer. Bhante adds the Sinhala word: ‘hudek’. In English, it means ‘merely for the sake of’ … ‘That one word transcends all those isms. We might as well call this teaching a yāvadeva-ism. Each step on the way is merely for the sake of taking the next, and that too is merely for the next. In other words, one has to reverse paṭiccassamuppāda. We encounter the word āhāra (food, nutriment), for both good and the bad. Hetu, paccaya, āhāra all indicate causality. Later tradition tried to make a distinction between hetu and paccaya but we do not see this in early texts. For example, we find phrases such as ‘ko hetu, ko paccayo’. The teaching was given to be made use of, to go to the other shore, not to get entangled in words.’ …

‘That’s why we said that it is when pāriyatti (scriptural study) overtook paṭipatti (practice) that the decline started. How can one understand the texts without any practice? It would be just a collection of words. We need both: sāttthamā sabyāñjanaṃ (right meaning and right phrasing). If the meaning is wrong, the phrasing would be wrong, and vice versa. However, if the meaning is right, even if the phrasing is wrong, there is the possibility of making corrections. Otherwise we’ll be passing the piṭaka, the basket, in the dark.’

‘I’m reminded of one beautiful line from a story mentioned in the commentaries, which my teacher (Ven. Āṇārāma Mahāthera) used often in his Dhamma talks: aṅño esa, āvuso, gatakassa maggo nāma [Vism III.41 at Vism 97,6] — This path is different, friend, to one who has travelled by it.”

(Bhikkhu K. Āṇananda in Bhikkhu Yogānanda 2016: 39–40)
the textual & historical background: Theravāda

theravāda in the Pali discourses: the ‘Sayings of the Elders’

▪ tāvataken’ eva oṭṭhapahatamattena lapitalāpanamattena ṇāṇavādañ ca vadāmi theravādañ ca jānāmi passāmī ti ca paṭijānāmi

“As far as mere lip-reciting and mere repetition were concerned, I [could] say the sayings of knowledge and the sayings of the elders, and claim that I knew and saw them”

(Ariyapariyesanā-sutta, MN 26 at MN I 164,4; trsl. Anālayo 2013: 215 note 1; cf. also Cūḷasāropama-sutta, MN 36 at MN I 240,26; Bodhirājakumāra-sutta, MN 85 at MN II 93,19; Saṅgārava-sutta, MN 100 at MN II 212,1)

→ “the occurrence of the term theravāda in the account of the apprenticeship of the future Buddha under Aḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta is unique to the Pāli canon”

(Anālayo 2013: 216)

▪ theravādan ti thirabhāvavādaṃ, thero aham etthā ti etam vacanaṃ

“A theravāda is [a] declaration of being certain; ‘I am sure of this’ is what is meant”

(commentary on the Ariyapariyesanā-sutta, Ps II 171,15; trsl. Gethin 2012: 6 note 11)

→ the commentarial explanation that Gotama declared his certainty about the teachings of Aḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta is acceptable (so also Āṇāmoli 2005 [1995]: 257), yet “it is, of course, possible that because of the negative context here the commentary deliberately chooses to avoid an explanation in terms of ‘declaration of the elders’”

(Gethin 2012: 6 note 11)
“[c]onsidered within its narrative context, I do not find this explanation compelling, since the Ariyapariyesanā-sutta continues with Gotama approaching his teachers with the query, what they had actually realized. This conveys the impression that he was aware of the need for some personal realization beyond the type of knowing and seeing that comes from theoretical knowledge, which would make it less natural for him to claim that he had reached certainty after merely learning a theory.”
(Anālayo 2013: 216)

alternative interpretation adopted by the majority of translators of this passage: theravāda as a reference to some theory (“the sayings of the elders”) Gotama would have learnt from the elder disciples of Aḷāra and Uddaka.
(e.g., Chalmers 1926: 115; Horner 1967: 208; Neumann 1995 [1896]: 186)

“[o]nce having learned the theravāda from these senior disciples the neophyte would then approach the master himself for further clarification of specific points, “which is in fact precisely what Gotama did according to the report given in the Ariyapariyesanā-sutta. On this interpretation of the Ariyapariyesanā-sutta, the present reference to theravāda as sayings of the elders Aḷāra or Uddaka and their disciples would stand in a natural continuity to references in later Pāli literature to theravāda as sayings of Buddhist elders.

… it seems to me that the sense of theravāda as the ‘sayings of the elders’ – in this case obviously not Buddhist elders – does yield a meaningful reading of the present passage.”
(Anālayo 2013: 216 + 217 note 10)
**theravāda in the Pāli commentaries & chronicles**

ācariyavādo nāma dhammasaṅgāhakehi pañcahi arahantasatehi ṭhapitā pāḷivinimuttā
okkantavinicchhayappavattā atṭhakathātanti. attanomati nāma sutta-suttānuloma-ācariyavāde muñcitvā anumāṇena attano anubuddhiyā nayaggāhena upaṭṭhitākārakathanamā. api ca suttantābhidhammavinayāṭṭhakathāsu āgato sabbopi theravādo attanomati nāma. taṃ pana attanomatiṃ gahetvā kathentena na dalhaggāham gahetvā voharetabbāṃ. kāraṇam sallakkhetvā athena pāḷin, pāḷiyā ca athaṁ samsanditvā kathetabbam. attanomati ācariyavāde otāretabbā. sace tattha otarati ceva sameti ca, gahetabbā. sace neva otarati na sameti, na gahetabbā. ayañhi attanomati nāma sabbadubbalā. attanomatito ācariyavādo balavataro. ācariyavādo pi suttānulome otārettabbo. tattha otaranto samentoyeva gahetabbo, itaro na gahetabbo. ācariyavādato hi suttānulomaṁ balavataram.

“‘[t]he view of the teachers’ (ācariyavāda) refers to the series of expositions of meaning (atṭhakathā) constituted by the judgements passed down separately from the canonical text and established by the 500 arahats who were the compilers of the Teaching. ‘Individual opinion’ refers to exposition in a form established by one’s own inference, reasoning and good understanding separate from Sutta, the principles of Sutta, and the tradition of the teachers. The entire [body of] opinion of elders (sabbo theravādo) that has come down in the commentaries to the Suttanta, Abhidhamma and Vinaya is also called ‘individual opinion’. But in adopting an individual opinion one should explain it without holding to it stubbornly and come to a conclusion; the evidence should be explained by considering the meaning of the canonical text and applying the meaning to the canonical text; individual opinion should fit with the view of the teachers; if it fits and agrees with this, it
should be accepted; but if it does not fit and agree, it should not be accepted. For it is individual opinion that is certainly weakest of all; the view of the teachers is firmer, but it also should fit with the principles of Sutta; when it fits and agrees with this it should be accepted, otherwise it should not; the principles of Sutta are firmer than the view of the teachers.”
(Sp I 231,9, cf. Nett-ṭ (Bª) 56; trsl. Gethin 2012: 8)

→ “in the majority of instances theravāda appears to be used [by the commentaries] simply and unproblematically to refer to ‘the opinion or view of an elder or elders’, where the elders are monks of some authority.”
(Gethin 2012: 7)

→ hierarchies of scriptural authority:
theravāda is not to override the actual canonical texts, which are referred to in the commentarial tradition as the pāḷī.

→ elsewhere in the same Vinaya commentary (Sp I 52,7), theravāda features as a reference to the Pali canon, together with its commentaries.

Here the term occurs in a description of the arahant Mahinda’s ability to learn the canon and the commentaries within three years.
The Bodhi-tree arrives in Laṅkā:
Kelaniya
The Bodhi-tree arrives in Laṅkā: Dambulla Cave 2
The Bodhi-tree arrives in Laṅkā:
Wat Pho, Bangkok
Bodhi-tree pūjā: Sumathipāla Araññā, Kanduboda
pañcasatehi therehi dhammavinayasamgaho, therehi katasaṃgaho theravādo 'ti vuccati

“the collection of the Teaching and the Discipline [was made] by the five hundred elders — this collection made by the elders is called theravāda”

(Dīp 4.6)

→ theravāda as the ‘Sayings of the Elders’ qua the five Nikāyas and the Vinaya of the Pali canon that according to the traditional account were collected at the first saṅgīti according to the Dīpavaṃsa

→ “the language of the proceedings of the Council ... might have been Old Mg [Māgadhī] or more likely Old AMg [Ardhamāgadhī], or even a more supra-regional type of Prakrit”

(Roth 1980: 78)

aṭṭhārasanikāyā ... etesu pana sattarasa vādā bhinnakā, theravādo asambhinnako ti veditabbo

“the eighteen schools ... of these seventeen doctrines should be seen as schismatic, the Theravāda as non-schismatic”

(Kv-a 3,13; trsl. Anālayo 2013: 218 note 17)

→ theravāda portrayed as the single non-schismatic tradition in the commentary on the Kathāvatthu [introducing a quotation from the Dīpavaṃsa on the arising of the different schools]

→ “[t]hus the proper name Theravāda for the Buddhist tradition nowadays found in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia has
its root in the conception of theravāda as the Pāli canon, in the sense that the Theravāda school is the tradition that transmits and follows the Pāli recension of the canon that according to the traditional account had been recited by the elders at the time of the first saṅgīti — the theravāda.”

(Anālayo 2013: 218)

theravāda qua Pali tradition, Pali as the ‘sacred language’
→ “[t]he preservation, transmission, and study of the Pali canon and the use of Pāli as a liturgical language—by monastics and laity—is one distinctive and unifying feature of the Theravādin lineages … Pali was a resource, a database, that offered stability and continuity to a congeries of constantly evolving traditions.”

(Skilling 2009: 64)

→ “the actual importance of what we know as the Pali Canon has not lain in the specific texts collected in that list, but rather in the idea of such a collection.”

(Collins 1990: 104)

theravāda as a pure monastic lineage
→ the Pali Vinaya as law and ritual: between literalism, nominalism, legalism and pragmatism

Theravāda as a modern invention?
→ “[w]hile there clearly is continuity in the sense of shared identity based on the ‘Sayings of the Elders’, tradition did not consistently use the term theravāda to refer to this sense of identity.”

(Anālayo 2013: 221)
“[the Burma-ordained British monk Ānanda Metteyya (née Allan Bennett)] was himself the source of our modern use of ‘Theravāda’ [Buddhism as a term covering the Buddhist traditions of Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand] – and not a Burmese text or Burmese informant.”
Perreira (2012: 554)

**the habit makes the true Theravāda!**

“[i]n one case in which the term is used – and is used emphatically – Theravāda is assigned a meaning that contemporary readers might scarcely expect. This is in the Burmese *Vamsadīpanī* (‘Treatise on the lineage [of theras]’), attributed to Vinaya jurist Mehti Sayadaw (1742–?) at Toungoo, Burma, in 1799. *Vamsadīpanī* is a polemical work written after decades of factionalism which divided the Burmese saṅgha into ‘hat-wearers’, ‘single-shoulder robe-wearers’, and ‘two-shoulder robe wearers’. Methi Sayadaw comes down strongly in favour of covering both shoulders with the robe, which he describes as ‘orthodox’ and true ‘Theravāda’, as opposed to the Ācariyavāda of the other
‘shameless’ monks. Here the habit makes the true Theravāda monk through adherence to the authorized dress code: the reason for this is clear, since the factions are required to prove that their preferred styles are supported by scriptures – the Vinaya and its commentaries, the authority of which is traced back to the first council. This was an inside dispute over monastic practice. The controversy did not concern lay practice, although naturally the monastic factions reached out to enlist royal and lay support. ‘Theravāda’ was indeed a keyword: but only monks and novices could merit the name, by wrapping the robe in the proper fashion.”
(Skilling 2012: xx)

rhetorics of invention?

→ “[p]lace Perreira (2012, 553f), the question here is not if the Burma-ordained monk Ānanda Metteyya had personal acquaintance with a manuscript of this particular work. The point is rather that this work clearly shows that Burmese monks were sufficiently familiar with the conception theravāda for it to be employed as a source of authority in a polemical discussion.

Besides the occurrence of the expression in this work, the term theravāda in the commentary on the Kathāvatthu and in the Ceylonese chronicles does designate the Theravāda tradition as distinct from other Buddhist schools. This concept of the Theravāda tradition must have been known in Burmese and Sri Lankan monastic circles, so that Ānanda Metteyya could easily have come to know of it, in some form or another, from his monastic teachers in Burma or during his previous stay in Sri Lanka, when he apparently learned Pāli.

Infact Ānanda Metteyya himself points to the Pāli commentaries, the Ceylonese chronicles and Oldenberg’s introduction to the PTS edition of the Vinaya as sources for his
usage … [he] was not the first to use the term Theravāda in the sense of a school, and the sources that apparently inspired his usage were available in the West already before his departure to Asia.

When evaluating the finding that Theravāda as a designation for the sense of shared Buddhist identity among countries like Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand is attested to only at the beginning of the 20th century, two questions need to be asked: 1) does the same term occur earlier in a related meaning?, and 2) has the sense of identity to which it refers already been in existence before? It seems to me that both questions would receive a clear affirmative reply. While the usage may be (comparatively) new, the term itself is old and what it now refers to is similarly an ancient phenomenon. In other words, the use of the expression Theravāda to refer to the sense of shared Buddhist identity among countries of South and Southeast Asia is not just the result of an unprecedented invention by a Western convert to Buddhism.”

(Anālayo 2013: 222–223)

[to be continued, lecture 1, 2018 course]
References


(Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, 23), Vienna: University of Vienna.