

The Canonicity of the Netti and Other Works

In her book *The Pali Literature of Burma*¹ Mabel Bode has the following statement:

Burmese tradition adds to the fifteen ancient texts of the Khuddakanikāya four other works — the Milindapaṇḥa [*sic*], the Suttasaṅgaha, the Peṭakopadesa, and the Netti or Nettipakaraṇa.

Duroiselle,² reviewing this book, criticizes her statement:

No educated Burman, lay or monk, ever included these four works among the Piṭaka books of the Khuddakanikāya. . . .

This is a very sweeping generalization, and therefore it would be very difficult to prove, but quite easy to disprove, which latter is my object here.

In the introduction to the Sumaṅgalavilāsini, in the account of the First Council, Buddhaghosa has a section on the minor books, including the following words:³

Jātakaṃ Mahāniddeṣo Cūlaniddeṣo Paṭisambhidāmaggo Suttanipāto Dhammapadaṃ Udānaṃ Itivuttakaṃ Vimāna-Petavatthu Thera-Therigāthā ti imaṃ taṃtiṃ saṃgāyivā Khuddakagantho nāma ayan ti ca vatvā ... Dīghabhāṇakā vadanti, Majjhimbhāṇakā pana Cariyāpiṭaka-Apadāna-Buddhavaṃsesu saddhiṃ sabbam pi taṃ Khuddakaganthaṃ ... ti vadanti.

“‘Jātaka, Mahāniddeṣa, Cūlaniddeṣa, Paṭisambhidāmagga, Suttanipāta, Dhammapada, Udāna, Itivuttaka, Vimāna-Petavatthu, Thera-Therigāthā’ – having chanted together this text, having said, ‘This is named Khuddakagantha’ ...” — thus say the Dīgha reciters, but the Majjhima reciters say, “Together with Cariyāpiṭaka, Apadāna, and Buddhavaṃsa, all that is also Khuddakagantha ...”

¹Royal Asiatic Society, 1909, pp. 4f.

²*Journal of the Burma Research Society* 1.1 (1911), p. 121.

³Sv I 15.

Thus there appears to be a difference of opinion between the reciters on whether the Cariyāpiṭaka, etc., are canonical.⁴

On this point, Ñāṇābhivamsa, who was Mahāsaṅgharājā of Burma⁵ at an early age, in his *Sīlakkhandhavagga-abhinavaṭīkā* (on D I, completed, according to the closing verses, in 2345 B.E.), has this comment:⁶

*Cariyāpiṭaka-Buddhavaṃsānañ c' ettha aggahaṇaṃ Jātakagatikattā,
Netti-Peṭakopadesādīnañ ca Niddesa-Paṭisambhidāmaggagatikattā.*

And here Cariyāpiṭaka and Buddhavaṃsa are not taken because they go under Jātaka; and Netti, Peṭakopadesa, and so on, because they go under Niddesa and/or Paṭisambhidāmagga.

In the first half of the sentence, which is carried over from the old *īkā*,⁷ Ñāṇābhivamsa is claiming that there was no substantive difference on the contents of the Canon between the reciters: that the Dīgha reciters really did recognize e.g. the Cariyāpiṭaka as canonical, but counted it as part of the Jātaka rather than a separate book. Similarly, in the second half he is claiming that Buddhaghosa and all the other classical authorities considered the Netti to be canonical, but counted it as part of the Niddesa or Paṭisambhidāmagga when they listed the books of the Khuddakanikāya.

I think it is clear from this that Ñāṇābhivamsa considers the Netti and Peṭakopadesa to be just as canonical as the Cariyāpiṭaka and Buddhavaṃsa.

Peter Jackson

⁴This has been mentioned by various writers before, of course.

⁵My thanks to Lance Cousins for drawing my attention to this last fact.

⁶Introduction, Section 17, *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana CD-ROM*, Version 3.0 (Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute, 1999).

⁷Sv-pt I 29. There are textual variations, but they do not affect my argument.