Early Buddhism

Workshop 2:
Texts of Early Buddhism

When those discourses are being recited that are mere poetry composed by poets, beautiful in words and phrases, created by outsiders, spoken by disciples, the bhikkhus do not want to listen to them, do not lend an ear to them, or apply their minds to understand them; they do not think those teachings should be studied and learned. But when those discourses spoken by the Tathāgata are being recited that are deep, deep in meaning, world-transcending, connected with emptiness, the bhikkhus want to listen to them, lend an ear to them, and apply their minds to understand them; they think those teachings should be studied and learned. And having learned those teachings, they interrogate each other about them and examine them thoroughly, [asking]: ‘How is this? What is the meaning of this?’ [They] disclose to [others] what is obscure and elucidate what is unclear, and dispel their perplexity about numerous perplexing points.

What texts?

- Pali
  - Late manuscript tradition
- Chinese
  - Mostly circa 400 CE
  - Tripitaka Koreana, 13th century

- Tibetan, Sanskrit, other.
  - Sanskrit recovered from Nepal, Tibet, or from chance manuscript finds in Afghanistan, etc.

A Pali verse

Sace labhetha nipakaṁ sahāyaṁ,

If you gain a discerning friend

Saddhiṁ caraṁ sādhuvihāridhīraṁ;

Wander together, living well with that wise one

Abhibhuyya sabbāni parissayāni,

Overcoming all obstacles

Careyya tenattamano satīmā.

You should wander with him, oneself being mindful

Gandhari Dhammapada

sace labheyā nipakaṃ sapraṁñaṁ
sāddhiṁcaraṁ sādhuvihāradhīraṁ |

adhibhūya sabbāṇi pariśrav[ ] careyā
tenāttamano satīmā

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Text critical criteria

- Linguistic criteria
  - vocabulary (Anupada Sutta)
  - grammatical usage (Khandha Paritta)
  - compounding (Lakkhaṇa Sutta)
  - etc.

Text critical criteria

- Metre
  - Asita
  - Parāyanavagga
  - Lakkhaṇa Sutta
  - End of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta

Text critical criteria

- Doctrinal evolution
  - Bodhisattva ideal
  - Anupada/proto-Abhidhamma
  - Later ideas assume earlier

Text critical criteria

- Comparative study
  - Absence of parallels
  - Expansion or loss of text
  - Teachings vs. narrative

Text critical criteria

- Relation to historical events/places/persons/social structures
  - 16 nations
  - Relations of brahmins and khattiyas

Text critical criteria

- Direct textual evidence
  - narrative vs. teaching,
  - internal relative dating (e.g. when the Buddha is said to have passed away)
  - attribution

Anupada Sutta (MN 111)

Tyāssa dhammā viditā uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbhatthaṁ gacchanti. So evaṁ pajānāti– 'evaṁ kirame dhammā ahutvā sambhonti, hutvā paṭiventī'ti. So tesu dhammesu anupāyo anapāyo anissito appaṭibaddho vippamutto visaṁyutto vimariyādīkatena cetasā viharati. So 'atthi uttari nissaraṇan'ti pajānāti. Tabbahulīkārā atthitvevassa hoti.

Known to him those mental factors arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus: 'So indeed, these mental factors, not having been, come into being; having been, they vanish.' Regarding those mental factors, he abided unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, disconnected, with a mind rid of barriers. He understood: 'There is an escape beyond,' and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.

Discussion

- Canki Sutta
  - Is it early?
  - Why?
  - Can we apply any of the criteria we have learned?