

On the Reliability of the Theravāda: The Abhidhamma, the Commentaries, and Buddhaghosa

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For the Theravāda, the Abhidhamma is the word of the Buddha, taught by him, and the commentaries preserve the meaning. The teaching in all three Piṭakas is one teaching, with one end. However, we may read the beliefs of sceptics who cast doubt on this. The only way to develop full confidence is to understand paramattha dhammas, ultimate realities, as they are. But incipient saddhā can be damaged if, or when, one reads that the Abhidhamma is a later invention; the commentaries (aṭṭhakathā) are the private opinions of Buddhaghosa; and the orthodox tradition is not what the suttas teach. This essay explains the Theravāda position on the Abhidhamma and the commentaries, and provides references that hopefully dispel at least some of these unfortunate misconceptions.

The seven books and their commentaries

“There is a consensus of opinion among teachers that the Abhidhamma is divided into seven books, viz., Dhammasaṅgaṇī, Vibhaṅga, Dhātukathā, Puggalapaññatti, Kathāvatthu, Yamaka, and Paṭṭhāna.” — Expositor, p. 5¹

Abhidhamma “exceeds and is distinguished from the Dhamma,” the teaching of the suttas: i.e. the same Dhamma, in its fullest statement.²

The Dhammasaṅgaṇī begins with the mātikā, the main table of the Abhidhamma. It gives wholesome, unwholesome, and indeterminate states, and then analyses consciousness, mental factors, and matter in detail.

The Vibhaṅga analyses the chief categories of the teaching in eighteen chapters: the aggregates, the bases, the elements, the truths, the faculties, dependent origination, the foundations of mindfulness, the right strivings, the bases of accomplishment, the enlightenment factors, the path constituents, jhāna, the illimitables, the precepts, analytic insight, knowledge, small items, and the heart of the teaching.³ Most it treats by three methods: the Suttanta method, the Abhidhamma method, and questions based on the mātikā.

The Dhātukathā examines how terms relate to the aggregates, bases, and elements. Together, these first three books form the basic analytical foundation of the Abhidhamma.⁴

The Puggalapaññatti explains conventional designation, especially the designation of persons. The Kathāvatthu refutes the wrong views of other schools, especially views about the person as ultimately real.⁵

The Yamaka clarifies the exact meaning of terms through paired questions. The Paṭṭhāna, the Great Book, explains the twenty-four conditions by which dhammas are related to one another. It is the vast final system of conditional relations.⁶⁷

Each book has its ancient commentary. The Atthasālinī explains the Dhammasaṅgaṇī, the Sammohavinodanī explains the Vibhaṅga, and the Pañcappakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā (also called the Paramatthadīpanī) explains the remaining five books. Its Kathāvatthu portion names the school that held each of the refuted views.⁸

Buddhaghosa was an editor, not an inventor

On a forum a writer posits:

“I think we should not place much confidence in the commentaries. Buddhaghosa and his successor Dhammapāla laid the foundations of Theravāda, and are basically equivalent to the founders or patriarchs in the other schools. Buddhaghosa wrote the commentarial literature of Theravāda, and key texts like the Visuddhimagga. Theravāda is of course based on the words of the Buddha, but so is every other school. What makes Theravāda distinctly Theravāda are these commentaries and subtexts, which give the Theravāda position and emphasis.”

In fact, Buddhaghosa compiled and translated, in the fifth century, the ancient Sinhala commentaries preserved at the Mahāvihāra in Anurādhapura. What he added on his own authority, he was careful to mark as such.

He cites two ancient teachers, sometimes three, and notes where they differed.⁹ Sometimes he reaches no decision at all, but simply records the division. And where he does prefer one view, he tells us it is only his own opinion (attanomati): the weakest authority of all, as he reckons it.¹⁰

A teacher who knows the texts, guards the heritage, and protects the tradition will follow the elders’ opinion rather than his own. — Visuddhimagga III.64¹¹

The antiquity of the commentaries

The commentaries Buddhaghosa edited were themselves ancient, dating in part from the time of the Buddha. Foremost was the Mahā-aṭṭhakathā, the Great Commentary of the Mahāvihāra, his chief source throughout. The Atthasālinī, in its introductory discourse:¹²

“The ancient commentary thereof was sung
By the First Council, Mahākassapa
Their leader, and later again by seers;
Mahinda brought it to the peerless isle,
Ceylon ...”

The Pāli of the verse: Yā Mahākassapādīhi vāsīh’aṭṭhakathā purā saṅgītā anusāṅgītā pacchā pi ca isīhi yā — “the commentary which was earlier recited by the residents beginning with Mahākassapa, and later recited again by the sages.” The commentary was learned alongside the canon as one body of knowledge. Moggaliputtatissa, the elder of the third council, “whilst yet being a novice ... mastered together with the commentary the entire word of the Buddha, with the exception of the Vinaya Piṭaka” (Vinayanidāna, VA i, p. 41).¹³

I. B. Horner, a President of the Pali Text Society, in her introduction to the Buddhavaṃsa commentary:

“The prime object of every Commentary is to make the meanings of the words and phrases in the canonical passages it is elucidating abundantly clear, definite, definitive even ... This is to preserve the Teachings of the Buddha as nearly as possible in the sense intended, and as conveyed by the succession of teachers, acariyaparama. Always there were detractors, always there were and still are ‘improvers’ ready with their own notions. Through friends and enemies alike deleterious change and deterioration in the word of the Buddha might intervene for an indefinite length of time. The Commentaries are the armour and protection against such an eventuality. As they hold a unique position as preservers and interpreters of true Dhamma, it is essential to follow them carefully and adopt the meaning they ascribe to a word or phrase each time they comment on it. They are as closed now as is the Pali canon. No additions to their corpus or subtractions from it are to be contemplated, and no commentary written in later days could be included in it.” — Horner, Clarifier of the Sweet Meaning, p. xiii¹⁴

The Buddha:

“Monks, these two things conduce to the confusion and disappearance of true Dhamma. What two? The wrong expression of the letter (of the text) and wrong interpretation of the meaning of it. For if the letter be wrongly expressed, the interpretation of the meaning is also wrong ... Monks, these two things conduce to the establishment, the non-confusion, to the non-disappearance of true Dhamma. What two? The right expression of the letter and right interpretation of the meaning. For if the letter be rightly expressed, the interpretation of the meaning is also right ...” — Gradual Sayings, Book of the Twos¹⁵

The commentaries protect both of these.

I have little truck with most modern scholars, but even they reach much the same conclusion about the antiquity of the material. As the philologist K. R. Norman notes, some of it is plainly very old: matter that the Theravāda transmits as commentary, some other schools carried inside their canons. For example, in the Theravāda Pāli only the Jātaka verses are canonical and the stories are commentary, while jātika stories are part of the canonical Mahāvastu, a Vinaya text of the Lokottaravādins. So the shared material must pre-date the schisms that separated those schools from the Theravāda.¹⁶

Was the Abhidhamma recited at the First Council?

The doubt comes in part from unfamiliarity with how the canon is classified. The Atthasālinī:

“Which is the Khuddaka Nikāya? The whole of the Vinaya-piṭaka, Abhidhamma-piṭaka, and the fifteen divisions [of the Khuddaka] excluding the four Nikāyas ... Thus, as rehearsed at the Council, the Abhidhamma is a Piṭaka by Piṭaka-classification, Khuddaka-Nikāya by Nikāya-classification, veyyākaraṇa by part-

classification, and constitutes two or three thousand units of text by the classification of textual units.” — Expositor, p. 32¹⁷

So when the old accounts say that the Dhamma and the Vinaya were recited, the Abhidhamma is included in the Khuddaka, and the Khuddaka in the Suttanta. The accounts did not omit it; they used the larger name.

The same work, in the verse account of the descent of the teaching:

“Unto the spirits taught, he afterwards,
The Leader, told it all in form concise
To Sāriputta Elder, when he waited on
The Sage at Anotatta lake. And what
The Elder heard, he brought to plains of earth
And taught it to the brethren. And they all
Remembered it. And when the Council met,
By the wise son of the Videhī Dame [Ānanda]
It was again rehearsed.”¹⁸

When the Buddha came down at Saṅkassa, Sāriputta greeted him:

“Never before have I seen,
Nor heard from anyone,
A Teacher so sweet in speech,
A leader come from Tusita.” — Suttanipāta 955

The Mahāniddeśa explains the verse as spoken at the descent from Tāvātimsa by the central jewelled stairway.¹⁹

From its first teaching the Abhidhamma went together with satipaṭṭhāna. The commentary to the Lomasakaṅgiyabhaddekaratta Sutta:

“There the Blessed One, surrounded for the most part by the devatās assembled from ten thousand world-systems, with his mother as bodily witness, was teaching the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, profound, subtle, stamped with the three characteristics, the talk delimiting materiality and immateriality; and at intervals, to stir urgency in the devas unable to penetrate it, he spoke the summary and the exposition of the Bhaddekaratta [“with insight let him see each presently arisen state”].” — Papañcasūdanī on MN 134²⁰

The Kathāvatthu, the fifth book, was completed only at the third council, by the arahat Moggaliputtatissa, more than two centuries after the Buddha. This does not leave the Abhidhamma unfinished. The Buddha, foreseeing the wrong views (diṭṭhi) that would arise, laid down the table of contents of the book. The Atthasālinī:

“Thus in teaching the seven books, when he came to the Kathāvatthu the Buddha laid down the table of contents ... In doing so he foresaw that two hundred and eighteen years after his death, Tissa, Moggali’s son, seated in the midst of one thousand bhikkhus, would elaborate the Kathāvatthu ... And Tissa, Moggali’s son, expounded the book not by his own knowledge but according to the table of contents laid down, as well as by the method given, by the Teacher.

Hence the entire book became the word of the Buddha. Thus the Abhidhamma consists of seven books inclusive of the Kathāvatthu.” — Expositor, p. 65

This is the principle by which the suttas spoken by the disciples count as the Buddha’s word. The Buddha praised Mahākaccāna’s exposition (“Bhikkhus, learned is Mahākaccāna, profoundly wise is Mahākaccāna. If you had asked me the same question, I would have answered exactly as he has done”). The Atthasālinī: “Thus since the time when the Teacher gave his approval, the whole Suttanta became the word of the Buddha. And it is the same with the suttas expounded by Ānanda and others.” (Expositor, p. 8)²¹ Where the Teacher gives the outline, the method, and his approval, the whole is buddhavacana, the word of the Buddha. The Nettippakaraṇa, the Guide to the interpretation of the teaching, ends on the formula entire: “spoken by the venerable Mahākaccāna, approved by the Blessed One, and recited at the Original Council.” The elder is the Mahākaccāna whom the Buddha set “foremost of those who analyse in detail what is stated in brief.”²²

Sāriputta was an arranger, not an author

The Atthasālinī itself raises the question of Sāriputta’s contribution:

“Of these, the twenty-two triplets and the hundred couplets taught by the omniscient Buddha are the directly spoken words of the Conqueror and form the table of contents for the seven books. Then whence arose the other forty-two couplets? By whom were they laid down and taught? They originated with Sāriputta, Generalissimo of the Law, having been laid down and taught by him. But he did not lay them down through his own self-evolved knowledge. They have been gathered from the Eka-Nipāta and Duka-Nipāta of the Aṅguttara-Nikāya, the Saṅgīti and Dasuttara Suttantas of the Dīgha-Nikāya, in order to help students of the Abhidhamma in their references to the Suttantas. These triplets and couplets are disposed of in one summarizing chapter. In the remaining chapters the Abhidhamma (proper) is expounded till the couplet of the ‘harmful’ (and the harmless) is reached.” — Expositor, pp. 11-12²³

Any “own self-evolved knowledge” is expressly ruled out, even for Sāriputta. And on the same page the working out of the details of the Great Book is assigned in so many words to the Teacher: “The supreme Buddha taught in the way of right succession the Tika-Paṭṭhāna, based on the twenty-two triplets, and the Duka-Paṭṭhāna, based on the hundred couplets,” and so on through all six methods.²³ The textual order and the numerical series remain Sāriputta’s; the commentary adds that he laid down the numbering “without spoiling the unique doctrine,” and asks who understood the Abhidhamma first. The answer is the Supreme Buddha: “For he, seated on the throne under the Wisdom Tree, penetrated it and became the Buddha.”²⁴

Bhikkhu Bodhi writes (a rare case where I strongly disagree with him):

“Perhaps we should see in these admissions of the Atthasālinī an implicit acknowledgement that while the philosophical vision of the Abhidhamma and its basic architecture originate from the Buddha, the actual working out of the

details, and perhaps even the prototypes of the texts themselves, are to be ascribed to the illustrious Chief Disciple and his entourage of students.” — A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma²⁵

But the *Atthasālinī* contains no implicit acknowledgement. The substance, down to the details, was the Buddha’s; the arrangement was the Elder’s.

Even the Northern schools remember it

The Theravāda position (that the Abhidhamma, except for the full elaboration of the *Kathāvatthu*, was recited at the First Council) is attested in the Northern, non-Theravāda accounts as well.²⁶ Geiger, in his introduction to the *Mahāvamsa*:²⁷

“Among the Northern Buddhist sources dealing with the first Council I mention the *Mahāvastu*. Here, in agreement with the southern tradition Kasyapa is given as the originator of the council, the number of the bhiksus taking part is stated to be 500 and the place the Saptaparṇa grotto near Rājagṛha. There is, besides, an account in the second volume of the *Dulva*, the Tibetan Vinaya of the Sarvāstivādin sect. The fixing of the canon took place, according to this source, in the following order: 1) Dharma, by Ānanda; 2) Vinaya, by Upāli; 3) Mātṛka (i.e. Abhidharma) by Mahākasyapa himself. ... Fa-hian and Hiuen-thsang also mention the First Council. The former gives the number of the bhiksus as 500, the latter as 1,000; the former speaks in a general way of ‘a collection of sacred books,’ the latter expressly mentions also the redaction of the Abhidharma by Mahākasyapa.”

The schismatic schools differed widely in the content of their several Sanskrit Abhidharmas. However, this is because a school with a new doctrine needed an Abhidharma that taught it. A sutta, spoken in conventional terms (*vohāra-vacana*) for a particular hearer, can possibly be reread to fit a view; the Abhidhamma, which is painstaking in its details, cannot, and so it had to be altered. The Sarvāstivādins held that all dhammas exist through the three periods of time, and their seven books teach it. The Puggalavādins somehow believed in a person, yet neither the same as the aggregates nor different from them. Both doctrines are refuted in the *Kathāvatthu*.²⁸ Each seceding school recast the Abhidhamma to carry its views, and the recasting is what the differences show. New doctrine needed new books, and new books needed authors. The *Dīpavaṃsa* says it of the first seceders: “altering the original redaction,” they rejected the *Parivāra*, six sections of the Abhidhamma, the *Paṭisambhidā* and the *Niddesa*, “and composed new ones.”²⁹

Anālayo, examining the accounts of the first saṅgīti in the schools’ Vinayas, notes the Abhidharma in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya’s account, an Abhidharma-piṭaka in the Vinayamātṛkā of the Haimavata tradition, and, in the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, Mahākāśyapa asking Ānanda where the Buddha had taught the Abhidharma, with Ānanda answering: at Sāvattihī.³⁰

Bhikkhu Bodhi: “According to the Sarvāstivādins, the books of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka were composed by Buddhist disciples, several being attributed to authors who appeared generations after the Buddha.”²⁵ A school that freely credited its own

seven books to later authors had nothing to gain by placing an Abhidharma at the First Council; and its own Vinaya places one there all the same. The memory of the Māṭṛka recited at Rājagaha was older than the school's account of its own treatises. Bodhi adds: "In other early Buddhist schools, too, the Abhidhamma is closely connected with the Venerable Sāriputta, who in some traditions is regarded as the literal author of Abhidhamma treatises."²⁵

The Buddha was a vibhajjavādin

The Abhidhamma is pure analysis (vibhajja) and the term applies to the whole Dispensation. When Asoka set about purifying the Sāsana, he had the Order assembled at the Asokārāma, grouped the monks according to their views, and asked each group what the Perfectly Enlightened One taught. The eternalists answered that he was an eternalist; the eel-wrigglers, the annihilationists and the rest each answered according to their own theory; and the king, who had studied the Teaching, saw that they were not monks but heretics of other schools, gave them white garments, and expelled them, sixty thousand in all. The Vinayanidāna continues:

"He next summoned the remaining monks and asked, 'What teaching did the Perfectly Enlightened One expound?' 'Great King, He was an exponent of the analytical doctrine (Vibhajjavāda).' When it was said thus the King asked the Elder, 'Did the Perfectly Enlightened One expound the analytical doctrine?' 'Yes, Great King.' Thereupon the King said, 'Sir, the Dispensation is now pure; let the Order of monks hold the uposatha.'" — Vinayanidāna §62³¹

The uposatha was held in perfect harmony, and Moggaliputtatissa, the elder who completed the Abhidhamma's fifth book, convened the Third Council and recited the Kathāvatthu to that same assembly.

The Abhidhamma is already in the Suttas and Vinaya

Nor is the Abhidhamma different in meaning from the suttas. By the four great references (mahāpadesa) of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, whatever is claimed as the Buddha's word is to be laid beside the Suttas and compared with the Vinaya, and stands if it accords.³² And the commentary defines the term: sutta here is the three Piṭakas, not the Sutta Piṭaka alone.³³ The Nettippakaraṇa's ṭīkā: a text "not contradicted by the four great references is itself the measure."²²

In the Mahāgosiṅga Sutta, Sāriputta reported to the Teacher the questions and answers he had exchanged with Mahāmoggallāna, and the Buddha said:

"Brother Sāriputta, in this religion the talk of two bhikkhus on the Abhidhamma, each asking and answering the other without faltering, is in accord with the Dhamma. Now such a bhikkhu, brother Sāriputta, might enhance the beauty of the Gosiṅga Sāla Forest." — Majjhima Nikāya 32³⁴

The Atthasālinī notes that the Teacher praised Moggallāna as a true preacher of the Dhamma. It adds that only the bhikkhus who know the Abhidhamma are true preachers, for the rest, in speaking on the Dhamma, confuse the kinds of kamma and result, the distinction between mind and matter (nāma and rūpa), and the different

kinds of states, while the student of the Abhidhamma does not get so confused. And of the one who would prohibit the teaching:

“He who prohibits (the teaching of) Abhidhamma gives a blow to the Wheel of the Conqueror, denies omniscience, subverts the Teacher’s knowledge full of confidence, deceives the audience, obstructs the path of the Ariyas, manifests himself as advocating one of the eighteen causes of dissension in the Order, is capable of doing acts for which the doer is liable to be excommunicated, or admonished, or scorned (by the Order), and should be dismissed after the particular act of excommunication, admonition, or scorn, and reduced to living on scraps of food.” — Expositor, p. 37³⁵

The word is named in the Vinaya too:

āraññikenāvuso bhikkhunā abhidhamme abhivinaye yogo karaṇīyo — “Friends, by a bhikkhu living in the forest, effort ought to be made in the Abhidhamma and the Abhivinaya.” — Gulissāni Sutta, M 69³⁶

The Vinaya finds no offence in one who, without any wish to revile the Vinaya, says to another, “Pray study the Suttas or Gāthās or Abhidhamma first, and afterwards you will learn the Vinaya.” The Bhikkhunī Vibhaṅga likewise counts it a minor offence for a bhikkhunī to ask a question “on the Abhidhamma or Vinaya after getting permission to question on the Suttanta,” and so for each pair in turn: the three baskets named as a settled threefold division. The Saṅghādisesa account of Dabba the Mallian assigning lodgings tells how he housed the monks together by their specialty: the suttantikā together, that they might rehearse the Suttanta with one another; the vinayadharā together, that they might settle the Vinaya; the dhammakathikā together, that they might discuss the Dhamma.³⁷

The commentary to the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, on the Buddha’s last instruction that the Dhamma and the Discipline should be teacher after him, explains the three baskets one by one.³⁸ Of the third:

“And while I was still present, having analysed these dhammas in detail: the five aggregates, the twelve sense bases, the eighteen elements, the four truths, the twenty-two faculties, the nine roots, the four nutriments, the seven kinds of contact, the seven kinds of feeling, the seven kinds of perception, the seven kinds of volition, and the seven kinds of consciousness; and among these, this many dhammas belong to the sense sphere, this many to the form sphere, this many to the formless sphere; this many are included, this many are not included; this many are mundane, and this many are supramundane; I taught the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, which is adorned by the Mahāpaṭṭhāna with its complete set of twenty-four conditions and its innumerable methods. When I have attained parinibbāna, that entire Abhidhamma Piṭaka will fulfil for you the function of the Teacher.”

Abhidhamma is found in the suttas. The aggregates (khandha), the sense bases (āyatana), the elements (dhātu), the truths (sacca), the faculties (indriya), dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda): all are there, only treated in the suttas in conventional language for particular hearers, and in the Abhidhamma exhaustively,

without reference to persons. The commentary to the Middle Length Sayings: “There is a twofold teaching of the Buddha, the Blessed One: the teaching in the conventional way and the teaching by way of ultimate realities”; each was given to those able to penetrate the meaning by it.³⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi says the same: “The difference between the two in no way concerns fundamentals but is, rather, partly a matter of scope and partly a matter of method.”²⁵ The first two discourses are already Abhidhamma in substance. The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta declares that the five aggregates of clinging are dukkha; the Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta analyses materiality, feeling, perception, the formations, and consciousness, with the eleven distinctions of each.⁴⁰

In the suttas and in the Abhidhamma alike the analysis serves one purpose: yathābhūta-ñāḍadassana, knowledge and vision of things as they really are. The Buddha ties that seeing directly to the aggregates:

Samādhim, bhikkhave, bhāvētha. Samāhito, bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Kiṃca yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti? Rūpassa samudayañca atthaṅgamañca, vedanāya samudayañca atthaṅgamañca, saññāya samudayañca atthaṅgamañca, saṅkhārānaṃ samudayañca atthaṅgamañca, viññāṇassa samudayañca atthaṅgamañca — “Develop concentration, bhikkhus. A concentrated bhikkhu understands as it really is. And what does he understand as it really is? The arising and passing away of materiality, the arising and passing away of feeling, of perception, of the formations, of consciousness.” — Samādhī Sutta, SN 22.5⁴¹

The concentration meant is of a particular kind, not one-pointedness on just any object. The Mahācattārīsaka Sutta defines noble right concentration: the one-pointedness of mind furnished with the other seven path factors, right view running first; and its object is a characteristic of nāma or rūpa appearing through one of the six doors.⁴¹

The Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, of each aggregate: it “should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’”⁴⁰ Concentration has this knowledge and vision as its purpose and benefit, and the knowledge leads on to disenchantment (nibbidā), dispassion, and liberation.⁴² And the Buddha did not claim unsurpassed full awakening until his knowledge and vision of the four noble truths as they really are was fully purified, in its three rounds and twelve aspects.⁴⁰

Why the “forgery” theory fails

Set the historical arguments aside, and the case against the Abhidhamma comes down to a feeling: that its tone differs from the suttas, and that “modern experts” have judged it late. The objection from style proves nothing, for there are very different presentations within the Sutta Piṭaka itself.

The Abhidhamma bears the stamp of a single mind. It is not a patchwork stitched together over generations, but one vast and consistent system of analysis. The Dhammasaṅgaṇī enumerates and classifies dhammas; the Vibhaṅga examines the principal categories through several methods of analysis; the Dhātukathā analyses

them by elements; the Yamaka tests their definitions and relations through paired questions; and the Paṭṭhāna gives the conditions.

Who but a Buddha could have fathomed it? The Paṭṭhāna alone, with its twenty-four conditions interweaving at every moment of experience, is of a depth that could only have come from omniscience. The Expositor, quoting the same Great Commentary: “What is known as Abhidhamma is not the province nor the sphere of a disciple; it is the province, the sphere of the Buddhas (Omniscient Ones).”⁴³ The tradition tells how, in the fourth week after the enlightenment, the Buddha sat contemplating the seven books, and his body emitted no rays through the first six; but when he reached the Great Book and its twenty-four conditions, “his omniscience certainly found its opportunity therein. For as the great fish Timiratipiṅgala finds room only in the great ocean eighty-four thousand yojanas in depth, so his omniscience truly finds room only in the Great Book,” and rays of six colours issued from him.⁴⁴ Believe the detail or not: the tradition could ascribe the Paṭṭhāna’s depth to nothing less than a Buddha’s omniscience. And the minute detail that the sceptic finds dry is not idle scholasticism. It is what the path requires. R. E. Iggleden, in his introduction to the Vibhaṅga:⁴

“It is all very well to say ‘I know what needs to be done to break the continuity of rebirth and death.’ In fact very few people know of even the most elementary reasons for the continuity of process, let alone of breaking it. It is the detailed description, analysis and reasons given for this cyclic process that the scriptures spend so much care in putting before us. It is all very well to say ‘What do I want to know all these definitions of terms for, it only clutters the mind?’ The question is, though, how many people, when they seriously ask themselves as to the extent and range of some such apparently simple terms as greed, hatred and ignorance, can know their full and proper implications and manifestations within their own thoughts and actions ... This the scriptures are at pains to make clear to even the dullest reader.” — Book of Analysis, Introduction

And if the Abhidhamma was concocted after the Buddha’s death and passed off as his word, there must have been a long, deliberate plot of thousands of monks. In those early days arahats were abundant, and they would surely have objected. And to falsely ascribe one’s own words to the Buddha is a serious kamma.

“Monks, these two slander the Tathāgata. Which two? He who explains what was not said or spoken by the Tathāgata as said or spoken by the Tathāgata. And he who explains what was said or spoken by the Tathāgata as not said or spoken by the Tathāgata. These are two who slander the Tathāgata.” — Abhāsita Sutta, AN 2.23⁴⁵

Where is the trace of protest in the record? U Nārada asks the same question:

“As for the view that the Abhidhamma was added later, one should ask, ‘By whom was this done?’ If there were any person capable of compiling this profound and abstruse Piṭaka, then his name would still be famous today. But because this Piṭaka cannot be ascribed to any such person it has been assumed

that it came into existence after the Third Council. This, however, is an entirely false view.” — Conditional Relations, Introduction, p. ciii⁴⁶

The precision of the Abhidhamma made it a poor vehicle for tampering in any case: to change the doctrine a school had to rewrite the books, and the rewriting left its marks. The Theravāda’s is whole.

Analysis and synthesis

The first six books analyse: they take what seems a single thing, a person, a mind, a moment of seeing, and separate it into the bare phenomena that compose it, each with its own characteristic, function, and range. The last book, the Paṭṭhāna, takes those bare phenomena and shows how they condition one another. This synthesis shows each phenomenon arising only in dependence on others. Bhikkhu Bodhi writes that the analytical method and the synthetic method of the Paṭṭhāna establish “the essential unity of the twin philosophical principles of Buddhism, non-self or egolessness (anattā) and dependent arising or conditionality (paṭicca-samuppāda).”²⁵

This is why the analysis must be exhaustive. If the point were mere cataloguing, a partial list would do. But the work is to leave no apparent whole unbroken in which the notion of self can still hide, and no phenomenon unaccounted for that might seem to stand on its own. Bodhi grants the aesthetic point and answers it: “Despite its dry and tabular format,” the Paṭṭhāna is “one of the truly monumental products of the human mind,” and to the Theravāda “the most eloquent testimony to the Buddha’s unimpeded knowledge of omniscience.”²⁵

The Paṭṭhāna and the teaching of anattā

The crown of the Abhidhamma is the Paṭṭhāna, the Book of Conditional Relations, which states the twenty-four ways one state conditions another. As the late U Nārada of Burma points out, although there are only twenty-four main conditions, under them there are in all some 129,232 sections.⁴⁷ The tradition holds that the Paṭṭhāna is “the first portion of the Buddha’s teaching to decay,” the first to be lost as the Dispensation (sāsana) wanes, because it is the most profound and the hardest to keep. Nina van Gorkom: “May the Abhidhamma survive for an additional length of time. This would also insure the survival of the other parts of the scriptures, the Vinaya and the Suttanta.”⁴⁸

The Paṭṭhāna, condition by condition, shows that states “behave according to their own natures and, therefore, are not dependent on one’s wishes”: that they arise, as U Nārada puts it, “not from one cause alone, but from many causes,” and so are “neither willed nor planned by atta which does not really exist but is imagined to exist by certain sects.”⁴⁹ The so-called being “consists of materiality-mentality (the five aggregates) and nothing else besides.” The classic statement is the answer the bhikkhunī Vajirā gave to Māra:

“‘A being’! Why dost thou harp upon that word? Among false views, Māra, hast thou strayed. Mere bundle of conditioned factors, this! No ‘being’ can be here discerned to be. For just as, when the parts are rightly set, the word ‘chariot’

arise in our minds, so doth our usage covenant to say ‘a being’ when the aggregates are there.” — Vajirā Sutta, SN 5.10⁵⁰

Take the simplest event: the seeing of a visible object now. It happens when, and only when, the conditions are complete: a visible object, a sensitive eye, light, and attention (*manasikāra*). U Nārada counts them: the group of mental states “arises ... by the forces of eighteen conditions,” and so, he says, these states are “neither willed nor planned by *atta*.”⁵¹ The Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination, Nārada notes, state the manifested causes and effects; the *Paṭṭhāna* is concerned above all with the forces that relate them: *satti*, conditioning force. The force is inherent in the state and cannot exist apart from it, as the heat cannot exist apart from the chilli or the sweetness apart from the sugar.⁵² Nothing wields the conditions from outside; the force is the state’s own. There is only *dhamma* conditioning *dhamma*, lawfully and impersonally, at a speed beyond imagining. The Buddha says the same in the Six Sixes:

“If anyone should say, ‘Eye is self,’ that is not fitting. For the arising of the eye is to be seen, and its decaying ... Therefore, if anyone should say, ‘Eye is self,’ that is not fitting; in this way the eye is not self.” — Chachakka Sutta, MN 148⁵³

And so for all the rest.

We may grant that seeing and hearing happen impersonally, and still feel that action is different, for a person intends, chooses, speaks, and so makes *kamma*. But this shows intending, not an intender. The mistake is to slide from “there is choosing” to “there is a chooser.” Intention (*cetanā*) is a real mental factor; it arises with its conditions and does its work. But the owner of the intention is a concept, not a reality. The commentaries show it even for so simple an act as looking up: with the thought “I shall look,” mind-born materiality (*cittaja-rūpa*) arises, bodily intimation occurs, and the eyelids move. The denial falls not on the movement, nor the thought, but on the controller imagined to open the eyes by command. The analysis distinguishes even processes that involve intention from those that do not: eating is pervaded by volition, while digestion is a bodily process, the work of the fire element (*tejo-dhātu*), going on whether one attends to it or not. In both there is only the lawful working of *dhammas*.

The Visuddhimagga and the Vimuttimagga

The *Vimuttimagga*, the “Path of Freedom” by Upatissa, survives complete only in Chinese. Saṅghapāla translated it at the beginning of the sixth century, and it stands in the Chinese canon as Taishō 1648; no Pāli text has come down. A single chapter, on the ascetic practices, survives in Tibetan, and Daśabalaśrīmitra quotes the work as a scripture of the Noble Sthavira school.⁵⁴

It is an Abhayagiri text, and the Abhayagiri’s history is on record in the *Mahāvamsa*. It began in a schism (ch. 33): a *thera* named Mahātissa was expelled from the Mahāvihāra for frequenting lay families, and his disciple “went in anger to the Abhayagiri (*vihāra*) and abode there, forming a separate faction.”⁵⁵ In time the school took up the *Vetulya* (proto-Mahāyāna) doctrine, and its adherents were

expelled for it as “a thorn in the doctrine of the Buddha” (ch. 36). Under King Mahāsena (ch. 37), urged on by the thera Saṅghamitta, the Mahāvihāra itself was reduced to ruins: a royal penalty was set on any who fed a Mahāvihāra monk, the place stood empty for nine years, and the Lohapāsāda was pulled down, its materials carried off to enrich the Abhayagiri. Only when one of the king’s own wives had Saṅghamitta killed, and the minister Meghavaṇṇābhaya rebelled, was the Mahāvihāra restored.

The Vimuttimaggā comes from a quieter time. By then the Abhayagiri was less estranged from the Mahāvihāra, and the book shows it: much of it is sound. It drew, as the Visuddhimaggā drew, on the same ancient material. But it still has errors. One example is torpor (*middha*) taught as a material quality: the Vimuttimaggā includes it among the forms, and the Atthasālinī closes the count of material qualities against it, “There is no matter other than these forms,” the note naming the “some” as the dwellers at Abhayagiri.⁵⁶

Buddhaghosa knew it and on occasion refers to it indirectly, where he says *keci* or *ekacce*, “some say,” the commentaries’ shorthand for a view to be corrected. And Dhammapāla’s *ṭīkā* names the source: *ekacce ti upatissattheraṃ sandhāyāha, tena hi vimuttimaggē tathā vuttaṃ*, “‘some’ is said with reference to the Elder Upatissa, for he said so in the Vimuttimaggā.”⁵⁷ Elsewhere the *ṭīkā* identifies the “some” as the Abhayagirivāsins.

Peter Skilling, who has studied the text against its Tibetan and Chinese witnesses, reaches the same finding on the *middha* case, and the wider conclusion: “The Vimuttimaggā cannot have been transmitted by the post-Buddhaghosa Mahāvihāra, since it disagrees with the texts of that school on a number of points, such as the important definition of one of the four elements and the inclusion of *rūpassa jāti* and *middha* as an elemental form.”⁵⁸

The relation between the two is better seen not as copy and original but as two works drawing on a shared inheritance: the Visuddhimaggā the fuller and orthodox account, the Vimuttimaggā a slighter one that carries, alongside much sound material, a few positions of the lineage in which it was preserved. The Visuddhimaggā is Buddhaghosa’s ordering of the Mahāvihāra’s own inheritance: the “Path of Purification” that gathers the scattered teaching on virtue, concentration, and wisdom (*sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*) into a single graded path, drawn from the same ancient commentaries he edited. He says as much in its opening verse: the path he expounds is the one taught by the dwellers in the Mahāvihāra, and he sets it down without adding anything of his own authority.⁵⁹ The commentary to the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* says of the island:

“And such bhikkhus in the Buddha’s dispensation who have aroused insight and attained arahatship after drinking congee cannot be counted. In the island of Sri Lanka alone, in the sitting halls of various villages there is not even a single seat where a bhikkhu did not attain arahatship after drinking congee.”⁶⁰

The colophon at the end of the Visuddhimaggā is not his. The verses wishing for rebirth in *Tāvatiṃsa* and a meeting with Metteyya stand only in Sinhalese

manuscripts, a copyist's addition; the praise of the author speaks of him in the third person, and the thirteenth-century Visuddhimārga-mahāsannaya of Parākramabāhu II assigns the epilogue to his pupil Buddhāmitta. His own dedication asks nothing for himself: "By the power of that store of merit may every being prosper happily."⁶¹ The Visuddhimagga agrees with the Vimuttimagga wherever the Vimuttimagga keeps to the common tradition, and parts from it exactly where the Vimuttimagga follows the Abhayagiri: what one expects of the orthodox recension set beside a heterodox cousin.

How the later tradition worked

A council of monks compiled the sub-commentaries (ṭīkā), which clarify the hard points of the aṭṭhakathā, afresh in the twelfth century under King Parākramabāhu the Great. The Saddhammasaṅgaha preserves the account. The elder Mahākassapa of Udumbaragiri assembled the order and said:⁶²

"Friends, the whole of the Aṭṭhavaṇṇanā [explanation of the meaning], compiled by the ancients for the purpose of explaining the hidden meaning of the Aṭṭhakathā of the three Piṭakas, does not serve the purpose of bhikkhus residing in different countries. Some are written in many terse expressions according to the grammar of the Sinhalese language, some are written in the dialect of Māgadha ... but they have been confused and twisted by translation. We should, removing the drawback in the translation, compile a complete and clear Aṭṭhavaṇṇanā."

The king answered, "It is well, reverend sir, I will lend my bodily co-operation; let the Order of bhikkhus be confident." Then, the chronicle says, "the Thera Mahākassapa together with many thousand theras put forth their exertion and, even as the rehearsal of the Dhamma and the Vinaya, completed the Aṭṭhavaṇṇanā of the Aṭṭhakathā on the Piṭakas. When the compilation ... was completed, many wonders, including the earthquake and the like, were manifested, and the gods shouted applause."

Out of that work came the Sāratthadīpanī on the Vinaya commentary (the Samantapāsādikā), the four Sāratthamañjūsās on the commentaries of the four Nikāyas, and the threefold Paramatthappakāsinī on the Abhidhamma commentaries. This is how the orthodox tradition handled its texts: not by individuals quietly composing and ascribing, but by gatherings of learned elders, "even as the rehearsal of the Dhamma and the Vinaya."

Do we need the Abhidhamma?

It may be asked if we need to learn the Abhidhamma. After all, in the Buddha's time there were many who attained by just hearing a few sentences of Dhamma. However, there are different capacities of listeners. The ugghaṭṭitaññū understands from only a short discourse. The vipaṇcitaññū understands when Dhamma is expounded at more length. The neyya needs detailed instruction, questioning and long development. The padaparama cannot reach the path in this life but can accumulate the understanding that leads to attainment in the next life or in subsequent lives (AN 4.133;

Puggalapaññatti). According to Ledi Sayadaw, at this time only the neyya and padaparama remain.⁶³

The real test

We cannot finally prove by historical argument that the Abhidhamma is the Buddha's word. But neither can we prove it of the Suttanta or the Vinaya. Historical study can help, if it moves us to verify the teaching for ourselves; it can also hinder, if we rely on the faulty reckoning of those who pronounce the Abhidhamma a late addition. U Nārada closes his hundred-page introduction to the Paṭṭhāna with the same advice:

"So instead of simply arguing whether Paṭṭhāna, which is part of Abhidhamma, was expounded by The Buddha or not, this translated Text should be studied and understood. Then the facts should be tested as Paṭṭhāna deals with all the causes and effects that arise and cease in the continuity of beings at every instant of the day. Only then will one be in a position to make a personal decision as to whether The Buddha expounded Paṭṭhāna or not." — Conditional Relations, Introduction, p. cvii⁶⁴

The real confirmation is in studying the details and testing them against the dhammas arising and falling away at this very moment, in seeing, in hearing, in feeling, in thinking. The Abhidhamma gives a precise account of what is appearing now at the six doors. And vipassanā is the development of the direct understanding of those same realities.

The Milindapañha shows it happening. Nāgasena, still a worldling, gave thanks to a laywoman "by means of a profound talk on Abhidhamma that was supermundane and connected with (the concept of) emptiness," and as she sat there "Dhamma-vision, dustless and stainless, arose to her: that whatever is of the nature to arise all that is of the nature to stop." And the venerable Nāgasena, "reflecting on the Dhamma he himself had taught," "aroused insight and was established in the fruit of stream-attainment as he was sitting on that very seat." The elder Assagutta, seeing that both had attained, applauded: "by one shot of an arrow two great persons are pierced."⁶⁵ The Dhammasaṅgaṇī and the rest classify the phenomena so minutely (by characteristic, function, manifestation, and proximate cause) in order to point us to the realities themselves, so that we begin to tell nāma from rūpa, concept from reality, and to see that there are only conditioned dhammas, impermanent and not-self, where we had assumed a self. As Nina van Gorkom writes of paññā in her Cetasikas, there are many degrees of it: understanding that knows the benefit of wholesomeness; intellectual understanding of realities, of kamma and result, of the nāmas and rūpas experienced through the six doors; and, as understanding develops, "direct understanding of ultimate realities, of nāma and rūpa," which "can develop to the highest wisdom which eradicates all defilements."⁶⁶ That is the ladder the Abhidhamma is built to help us climb.

When one finds that the analysis fits (that there is only mind and matter, conditioned, evanescent, ownerless, exactly as the texts describe), then the question whether the teaching came earlier or later no longer has the last word. The proof is here and now for those who wish to learn.

RobertK

Notes

1. The Expositor, p. 5.
2. The Expositor, pp. 2-3, on the sense of the prefix: the teaching “exceeds and is distinguished from the Dhamma,” that is, from the suttas.
3. The chapter titles are Thittila’s renderings of the canonical names. The last two are the Khuddakavatthuvibhaṅga, “small items,” a catalogue of the minor defilements, and the Dhammahadaya-vibhaṅga, “the heart of the teaching,” which shows the occurrence of the principal categories across the planes of existence.
4. R. E. Iggleden, introduction to The Book of Analysis (Vibhaṅga), trans. Paṭhamakyaw Ashin Thiṭṭila (Setthila) (London: Pali Text Society, 1969).
5. The Expositor, p. 6 (on the Buddha’s laying down of the table of contents of the Kathāvatthu).
6. U Nārada, translator’s introduction to Conditional Relations (Paṭṭhāna), vol. I (London: Pali Text Society), pp. xiii-xv: the four methods and six divisions of subject-matter giving the twenty-four divisions of the Paṭṭhāna, each treated under the seven chapters (Dependent, Conascent, Conditioned, Supported, Conjoined, Associated, Investigation).
7. In English, all from the Pali Text Society: Buddhist Psychological Ethics (Dhammasaṅgaṇī, trans. C. A. F. Rhys Davids); The Book of Analysis (Vibhaṅga, trans. Paṭhamakyaw Ashin Thiṭṭila); Discourse on Elements (Dhātukathā, trans. U Nārada); Designation of Human Types (Puggalapaññatti, trans. B. C. Law); Points of Controversy (Kathāvatthu, trans. Shwe Zan Aung and C. A. F. Rhys Davids); The Book of Pairs (Yamaka, trans. C. M. M. Shaw and L. S. Cousins); Conditional Relations (Paṭṭhāna, trans. U Nārada).
8. The Atthasālinī is translated as The Expositor (Pe Maung Tin, Pali Text Society); the Sammohavinodanī as The Dispeller of Delusion (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Pali Text Society, 2 vols.). Of the Pañcappakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā, the Kathāvatthu portion is translated as The Debates Commentary (B. C. Law, Pali Text Society) and the Yamaka portion in The Book of Pairs and Its Commentary (Shaw and Cousins). The commentary on the five books is also transmitted under the name Paramatthadīpanī (so the Saddhammasaṅgaha, ch. VIII; and so Jayawickrama, The Inception of Discipline, p. xxv n., citing “Paramatthadīpanī (Pañcappakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā)”). It is not to be confused with the Samantapāsādikā, which is Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the Vinaya Piṭaka.
9. A strong example stands at Samantapāsādikā iii 588 (PTS; CST pārā. aṭṭha. 385-86), on who is entitled to bring an accusation against a monastic. Mahāpaduma Thera gives the most restrictive ruling; Mahāsumma Thera allows the five classes of fellow renunciants (sahadhammikā); Godatta Thera excludes no one, citing a sutta in which an accusation may rest on what is heard from a monk, a nun, or even a disciple of another sect. Buddhaghosa chooses none of them. He records only the point common to all: tiṇṇampi therānaṃ vāde cuditakasseva paṭiññāya kāretabbo, under the position of all three elders, action is to be taken only on the admission of the accused.
10. Samantapāsādikā (Buddhaghosa’s Vinaya commentary), at Sp I 230-231, on the four authorities for deciding a question of Vinaya — sutta, suttānuloma,

ācariyavāda, and attanomati (“one’s own opinion”). The four are ranked in ascending order of weight, own opinion being the weakest: *ayañhi attanomati nāma sabbadubbālā; attanomatito ācariyavādo balavatāro ... ācariyavādato hi suttānulomaṃ balavataram ... suttānulomato hi suttameva balavataram. suttam hi apaṭivattiyam kārakasāṅghasadisam buddhānam ṭhitakālasadisam* — “this ‘own opinion’ is the weakest of all; stronger than own opinion is the teachers’ doctrine; stronger than the teachers’ doctrine is what conforms with the sutta; stronger than what conforms with the sutta is the sutta itself. For the sutta cannot be overturned: it is like a Saṅgha carrying out a formal act, like the very time the Buddhas stood present.” The rendering given is from the Pāli. And sutta at the head of the ranking is the whole word of the Buddha, the Abhidhamma included: the commentary on the great references glosses *sutte ti tepiṭake buddhavacane otāretabbāni*, “in the sutta: to be set beside the Buddha-word of the three Piṭakas” (Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, DA II 566).

11. Visuddhimagga III.64, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, The Path of Purification (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society). Buddhaghosa is here describing the conduct of a teacher who guards the tradition.
12. Atthasālinī (commentary on the Dhammasaṅgaṇī), introductory verses on the descent of the ancient commentary; trans. Pe Maung Tin, The Expositor (Atthasālinī) (London: Pali Text Society, 1920–21). The Pāli of the verse cited is from the same.
13. Vinayanidāna (the introduction to the Samantapāsādikā, Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the Vinaya), trans. N. A. Jayawickrama, The Inception of Discipline and the Vinaya Nidāna (London: Pali Text Society, 1962), VA i, p. 41.
14. I. B. Horner, introduction to The Clarifier of the Sweet Meaning (Madhuratthavilāsinī), her translation of the commentary on the Buddhavaṃsa (London: Pali Text Society, 1978), p. xiii. (Horner was President of the Pali Text Society.)
15. Aṅguttara Nikāya, Book of the Twos, II.10; The Book of the Gradual Sayings, trans. F. L. Woodward (London: Pali Text Society), I. Quoted in Nina van Gorkom, Preserving the Buddha’s Teaching (Bangkok: Dhamma Study and Support Foundation), the chapter on the disappearance of the teachings, where the passage is set beside the commentarial account (the Dispeller of Delusion, on the Book of Analysis) of the order in which the scriptures are lost: the Paṭṭhāna first.
16. On the antiquity of the commentarial material, see K. R. Norman, Pāli Literature (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), and Oskar von Hinüber, A Handbook of Pāli Literature (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), §§ on the aṭṭhakathā. Norman’s point is that some commentarial material affords parallels with texts the other early schools regarded as canonical, and so must pre-date the schisms; critical examination suggests no additions were made after about the first century A.D.
17. The Expositor (Atthasālinī), trans. Pe Maung Tin (London: Pali Text Society), p. 32.
18. Atthasālinī (commentary on the Dhammasaṅgaṇī), introductory discourse on the descent of the Abhidhamma (Nidānakathā); trans. Pe Maung Tin, The Expositor (Atthasālinī) (London: Pali Text Society, 1920–21), pp. 16–17. The verses recount the Buddha teaching the Abhidhamma to the devas, conveying it in summary to Sāriputta at the Anotatta lake, and its rehearsal by Ānanda at the First Council.

19. Sāriputta Sutta, Suttanipāṭa v. 955, with the Mahāniddeśa's comment on the verse and the one following (Sixth Synod ed., p. 386). The Mahāniddeśa gives the setting; the identification of the teaching as the Abhidhamma is made in the commentaries quoted before and after this passage. The rendering of the verse is from the Pāli. See also U Nārada, translator's introduction to Conditional Relations (Paṭṭhāna), vol. I (London: Pali Text Society), pp. civ-cvi, where the pagoda and marble inscriptions of King Dhammāsoka at Saṅkassanagara are also cited as testimony.
20. Papañcasūdanī on the Lomasakaṅgiyabhaddekaratta Sutta (MN 134): tatra viharanto bhagavā yebhuyyena dasahi cakkavālasahashehi sannipatitāhi devatāhi parivuto mātaraṃ kāyasakkhiṃ katvā abhidhammapiṭakaṃ kathento gambhīraṃ nipuṇaṃ tilakkhaṇāhataṃ rūpārūpaparicchedakathaṃ paṭivijjhitaṃ asakkontānaṃ devānaṃ samvegajananatthaṃ antarantarā bhaddekarattassa uddesaṇca vibhaṅgaṇca abhāsi. The rendering given is from the Pāli. The bracketed line is Bhikkhu Bodhi's rendering of the Bhaddekaratta verse (MN 131); his note there cites the commentary, that each presently arisen state is to be contemplated, just where it has arisen, by the seven contemplations of insight.
21. The Expositor, p. 8 (the parallel with Mahākaccāna and the suttas spoken by disciples).
22. Nettippakaraṇa, concluding colophon; the epithet is from the ṭīkā's opening verses, and the ṭīkā defends the ascription by the four great references and the "unblamed succession of teachers." The Nettippakaraṇa: A Layered English Edition (root text after Ñāṇamoli, The Guide, London: Pali Text Society; the aṭṭhakathā and ṭīkā rendered from the Pali).
23. The Expositor, pp. 11-12: the forty-two Suttanta couplets, their four named canonical sources, and their single summarizing chapter; and, on p. 12, the six methods of the Paṭṭhāna taught by the Buddha "in the way of right succession."
24. The Expositor, pp. 16-17 (immediately following the verses of the descent): the textual order and the numerical series ascribed to Sāriputta, laid down "without spoiling the unique doctrine."
25. Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.), A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha of Ācariya Anuruddha (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1993), Introduction, from the account of the Abhidhamma's origins, immediately before the section "The Seven Books."
26. Peter Skilling, "Theravāda in History," Pacific World, 3rd ser., no. 11 (2009): 64-65: the thera of "Theravāda" names the five hundred arahats of the first recitation, citing Dīpavaṃsa 4:6. His n. 12 records the telling contrast: the Theravāda maintained that it preserves the original redaction, while in north India it was admitted that the original redaction (mūlasaṃgīti) was no longer extant.
27. Wilhelm Geiger, introduction to The Mahāvamsa, or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon, trans. Wilhelm Geiger (London: Pali Text Society, 1912), surveying the Northern sources (Mahāvastu, the Tibetan Dulva, Fa-hian, and Hiuen-tsiang) on the First Council.
28. The person is the first debate of the Kathāvatthu (I.1), and "all exists" the sixth (I. 6), where the commentary names the Sarvāstivādins; Points of Controversy, trans. Shwe Zan Aung and C. A. F. Rhys Davids (London: Pali Text Society, 1915). Bodhi

notes the Sarvāstivāda books are “considerably different in detail from the Theravāda treatises” (A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma, Introduction).

29. Dīpavaṃsa, on the Mahāsāṅgītikas, as quoted in the Kathāvatthu commentary; Points of Controversy, pp. 4–5.
30. Anālayo, The Dawn of Abhidharma (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2014; open access), in the discussion of the first saṅgīti: the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, T 1428 at T XXII 968b; the (Haimavata?) *Vinayamāṭṭṛkā, T 1463 at T XXIV 818a; the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, T 1435 at T XXIII 449a, where Ānanda locates the Buddha’s teaching of the Abhidharma at Sāvattṭhī. Anālayo himself treats several of these mentions as later expansions of the narratives; the schools that transmitted them did not.
31. Vinayanidāna, trans. N. A. Jayawickrama, The Inception of Discipline and the Vinaya Nidāna (London: Pali Text Society, 1962), §62, pp. 54–55: the purification of the Dispensation before the Third Council. The same account is given in the commentary on the Kathāvatthu and in the Mahāvaṃsa, ch. 5.
32. Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, DN 16 (D ii.123–26): the four great references (mahāpadesā).
33. Sumaṅgalavilāsinī on the mahāpadesas of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (DA II 566): sutte ti tepītake buddhavacane otāretabbāni, “into the sutta: they are to be brought into the Buddha-word of the three Piṭakas.” The Netti-ṭīkā records the same rule, that the aṭṭhakathā calls the three Piṭakas sutta, and finds it in accord with the Netti’s own words.
34. Mahāgosiṅga Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 32; see The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995). The comment on the Abhidhamma is from the Atthasālinī (The Expositor, pp. 36–37).
35. The Expositor, p. 37, immediately following the comment on the Mahāgosiṅga Sutta. The translator’s note there records that the “eighteen causes of dissension” (bheda-kāravatthu) include “showing what has been spoken by the Buddha as not spoken” (see Vinaya Texts, iii, 266).
36. Gulissāni Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 69.
37. The no-offence clause belongs to the bhikkhus’ Pācittiya on disparaging the Vinaya, Vin IV.144; the bhikkhunī’s questioning rule is Vin IV.344. The renderings quoted are those of the Atthasālinī, which adduces both passages in its proof that the Abhidhamma is the Buddha’s word (The Expositor, pp. 35–36); for the direct translation see The Book of the Discipline, trans. I. B. Horner (London: Pali Text Society), III, pp. 42 and 415, the same passages cited by U Nārada, translator’s introduction to Conditional Relations, vol. I, pp. ciii–civ. The account of Dabba the Mallian assigning lodgings by specialty is the origin story of Saṅghādisesa VIII, Vin III.158 (ye te bhikkhū suttantikā ... vinayadharā ... dhammakathikā ...); The Book of the Discipline, I.
38. Commentary to the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, the commentary on the Dīgha Nikāya), on Dīgha Nikāya 16. The rendering given is from the Pāli. The Abhidhamma statement is the third of three. The commentary first has the Buddha say the same of the entire Vinaya Piṭaka, sakhandhakaparivāro ubhatovibhaṅgo, the two Vibhaṅgas with the Khandhakas and the Parivāra, and

then of the entire Suttanta Piṭaka, characterised by the thirty-seven factors of awakening; of each, *taṃ sakalampi ... tumhākaṃ satthukiccaṃ sādheyyati*, that entire Piṭaka will perform the Teacher's function. It then reckons the whole forty-five years' teaching as *tīṇi piṭakāni, pañca nikāyā, navaṅgāni, caturāsīti dhammakkhandaṃ*, the three Piṭakas, the five Nikāyas, the ninefold teaching, and the eighty-four thousand aggregates of Dhamma, which remain to instruct after him.

39. The commentary to MN 5; quoted in Nina van Gorkom, *Introduction to the Abhidhamma* (London: Zolag, 2011), ch. 1.
40. *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (SN 56.11) and *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* (SN 22.59); see *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000). The *Dhammacakkappavattana* declares that the Buddha did not claim unsurpassed full awakening until his knowledge and vision of the four noble truths as they really are (*yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ*) was fully purified in its three rounds and twelve aspects.
41. *Samādhi Sutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 22.5; see *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000). The rendering given is from the Pāli. The concentration meant is of a particular kind. The *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* defines it: *yā kho, bhikkhave, imehi sattahaṅgehi cittassa ekaggatā parikkhatā, ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, ariyo sammāsamādhi*, the one-pointedness of mind furnished with the other seven path factors: this is called noble right concentration; and among those factors *sammādiṭṭhi pubbaṅgamā hoti*, right view runs first (MN 117; so too SN 45.28). Nina van Gorkom notes: *sammāsamādhi* of the eightfold Path “arises together with *samma-ditthi* and *samma-sati*,” its object a characteristic of *nāma* or *rūpa* appearing through one of the six doors (*Mental Development in Daily Life*, ch. 9, “Right Concentration”). And the introduction to the *Book of Analysis* says it of the Path itself: the Path is one thing, its eight constituents “practised in conjunction with each other” (*Book of Analysis*, Introduction).
42. *Upanisa Sutta*, SN 12.23, and *Kimatthiya Sutta*, AN 11.1, where concentration is said to have knowledge and vision of things as they really are (*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*) as its purpose and benefit, and that knowledge and vision to have disenchantment as its purpose, leading on to dispassion, liberation, and the knowledge of destruction. See *The Connected Discourses*, trans. Bodhi, and *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).
43. *The Expositor*, II, p. 519; quoted by U Nārada, translator's introduction to *Conditional Relations*, vol. I, p. cii, in the section “The Abhidhamma was Expounded Only by the Buddha” (pp. ci–cvii).
44. *The Expositor*, pp. 16–19 (Introductory Discourse): the fourth week in the jewel house and the six-coloured rays, pp. 16–18; the rays' spread through the world-systems and the explanation from the clearing of the blood, p. 18; the *Tāvatiṃsa* discourse of three months, p. 19. The central passage is also quoted by U Nārada, translator's introduction to *Conditional Relations*, vol. I, p. xv.
45. *Abhāsita Sutta* (“What Was Not Said”), *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 2.23 (PTS A i 59); trans. Ṭhāṇissaro Bhikkhu, *Access to Insight*. Bodhi renders the pair as the two who “misrepresent the Tathāgata” (*The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston:

- Wisdom Publications, 2012). Cf. the Book of the Ones, ch. X, §§ 33–42 (The Book of the Gradual Sayings, trans. F. L. Woodward, London: Pali Text Society, I, p. 13), where the monks who point out “things not uttered and proclaimed by the Tathāgata as having been uttered and proclaimed by him” are among those whose conduct is “to the loss of many folk, to the misery of many folk,” who “beget great demerit and cause the disappearance of this true Dhamma.”
46. U Nārada, translator’s introduction to Conditional Relations (Paṭṭhāna), vol. I (London: Pali Text Society), p. ciii, from the same section.
 47. U Nārada (Mūla Paṭṭhāna Sayadaw), Guide to Conditional Relations, 2 vols. (London: Pali Text Society / Rangoon: Buddhasāsana Council). The figure of 129,232 sections is from the Preface, p. viii; the description of the Paṭṭhāna as “the first portion of the Buddha’s teaching to decay,” p. xi. The full sentence there reads: “Pth., which is the first portion of the Buddha’s teaching to decay, is found to be difficult, not only by laymen, but even by bhikkhus who are constantly studying the three Piṭakas.” Cf. I. B. Horner’s Foreword to Conditional Relations, vol. I, p. viii, on the “disappearance of learning” in which the Great Paṭṭhāna decays first, and the hope that its being understood “as it really is” (yathābhūta) will assure the survival of the rest of the scriptures.
 48. Nina van Gorkom, The Conditionality of Life: An Outline of the Twenty-Four Conditions as Taught in the Abhidhamma (Zolag, 2010), Preface. She there notes that “it has been said in commentaries that Buddhism will decline and that the Buddhist scriptures will disappear. The Abhidhamma, and in particular the ‘Paṭṭhāna’, will be the first to be lost,” and expresses the hope that the Paṭṭhāna’s survival will “insure the survival of the other parts of the scriptures, the Vinaya and the Suttanta.” The same book observes that the teaching of conditions “is not theory; conditioning realities and conditioned realities pertain to our daily life right now,” and that the Paṭṭhāna “helps us to have more understanding of the truth of non-self.”
 49. U Nārada, Guide to Conditional Relations, Preface, pp. xii–xv (“So Pth. is the teaching of anatta,” pp. xiii, xv). The phrases quoted: “behave according to their own natures and, therefore, are not dependent on one’s wishes” (p. xii); “not from one cause alone, but from many causes” (p. xiii); “neither willed nor planned by atta which does not really exist but is imagined to exist by certain sects” (p. xiv); “consists of materiality-mentality (the five aggregates) and nothing else besides” (p. xii).
 50. Vajirā Sutta, Saṃyutta Nikāya 5.10 (vv. 553–555). The rendering quoted is the older Pali Text Society version (C. A. F. Rhys Davids, The Book of the Kindred Sayings, I); cf. Bhikkhu Bodhi, The Connected Discourses of the Buddha, p. 230: “Just as, with an assemblage of parts, the word ‘chariot’ is used, so, when the aggregates exist, there is the convention ‘a being.’” U Nārada quotes the same verse at the corresponding point of his Preface (Guide to Conditional Relations, p. xii).
 51. U Nārada, Guide to Conditional Relations, Preface, p. xiv, working out the conditions operative in a single moment of eye-consciousness. He notes there that the mental processes described by the commentators “were not made up by the Commentators. They took them from proximity condition of Pth. expounded by the Buddha” (p. xiii n.).

52. U Nārada, translator's introduction to Conditional Relations (Paṭṭhāna), vol. I (London: Pali Text Society), pp. xi-xii, on force (satti): the conditioning force inherent in a state and inseparable from it, illustrated by the heat inseparable from the chilli and the sweetness from the sugar. The distinction from the methods of the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination, which give only the manifested causes and effects, is drawn at pp. ix-x.
53. Chachakka Sutta ("The Six Sixes"), Majjhima Nikāya 148. The rendering quoted is I. B. Horner's, The Middle Length Sayings, III (London: Pali Text Society), p. 333; U Nārada quotes the same passage in the same words, Guide to Conditional Relations, Preface, p. xiv. Cf. The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp. 1129-1136.
54. The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimagga), trans. N. R. M. Ehara, Soma Thera, and Kheminda Thera (Colombo, 1961; Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society), Introduction: Saṅghapāla's Chinese translation, 505 CE, Taishō vol. 32, no. 1648. For the Tibetan chapter and Daśabalaśrīmitra's excerpts, Peter Skilling, "Vimuttimagga and Abhayagiri: The Form-Aggregate According to the Saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛta-viniścaya," Journal of the Pali Text Society 20 (1994): 171-210, at 174-75.
55. The Mahāvamsa, trans. Wilhelm Geiger (London: Pali Text Society, 1912), chs. 33, 36, 37 (the secession of the Abhayagiri, the Vetulya doctrine, and the persecution under Mahāsenā).
56. The Expositor, pp. 440-41, on the count of the material qualities; the note there identifies the "some" as "the dwellers at Abhayagiri" (from the Burmese Pyī edition). Buddhaghosa makes the same rejection at Visuddhimagga XIV.71, where the sub-commentary again names the Abhayagirivāsins; see The Path of Purification, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society), p. 502, n. 31. For the doctrine in the Vimuttimagga and the work's Abhayagiri affiliation, P. V. Bapat, Vimuttimagga and Visuddhimagga: A Comparative Study (Poona, 1937).
57. Paramatthamañjūsā (Vism-mht) I 123, on Visuddhimagga III.80: ekacce ti upatissattheraṃ sandhāyāha, tena hi vimuttimagge tathā vuttaṃ; I 104 and I 172 identifying the "some" as the Abhayagirivāsins (Burmese edition).
58. Peter Skilling, "Vimuttimagga and Abhayagiri: The Form-Aggregate According to the Saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛta-viniścaya," Journal of the Pali Text Society 20 (1994): 171-210, at p. 199 (Conclusion); on middha-rūpa, pp. 186-87. Skilling collates the Dhammasaṅgaṇī and Atthakathā against the Chinese Vimuttimagga and the Tibetan Saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛta-viniścaya, and finds the Vimuttimagga admitting middha (torpor) and rūpassa jāti as derived form where the Mahāvihāra rejects them.
59. Visuddhimagga I.4; see The Path of Purification, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society), p. 5, where Buddhaghosa states that he expounds the teaching as it is established among the dwellers in the Mahāvihāra.
60. The Discourse on the Fruits of Recluseship: The Sāmaññaphala Sutta and Its Commentaries, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1989), p. 100.

61. The Path of Purification, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, concluding verses and Postscript: the Metteyya verses carry the editor's mark "only in Sinhalese texts," and the dedication of merit is as quoted. The Visuddhimārga-mahāsannaya (Parākramabāhu-sannaya) of King Paṇḍita Parākramabāhu II, thirteenth century, attributes the epilogue beginning "This Path of Purification was made by the elder..." to the elder Buddhhamitta, Buddhaghosa's pupil, and explains the name "conferred by the venerable ones" as the pupil's convention of not speaking his teacher's name.
62. Saddhammasaṅgaha, ch. VIII, "The Account of the Ṭikās of the Three Piṭakas"; trans. Bimala Churn Law, A Manual of Buddhist Historical Traditions (Saddhamma-saṅgaha) (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1941), pp. 83-89. Mahākassapa's address is at pp. 84-85, the king's reply at p. 85, and the completion with its wonders at p. 87; the chronicle names the elder as Mahākassapa of Udumbaragiri (Law, p. 11). The works compiled are listed at pp. 85-87 and in the closing verses (p. 89): the Sāratthadīpanī on the Samantapāsādikā; four Sāratthamañjūsās on the commentaries of the four Nikāyas; and a threefold Paramatthappakāsinī on the Abhidhamma commentaries, that is, on the Atthasālinī, the Sammohavinodanī, and the commentary on the five books (which the chronicle calls the Paramatthadīpanī), each compiled as "an original Ṭikā and a sub-Ṭikā." Pāli text ed. Nedimāle Saddhānanda, Journal of the Pali Text Society (1890). For the purification of the Sāsana under Parākramabāhu the Great with Mahākassapa presiding, cf. the Cūḷavaṃsa, ch. 78.
63. Ledi Sayadaw, The Requisites of Enlightenment (Bodhipakkhiya Dīpanī), trans. Sein Nyo Tun (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971); the Dīpanī was first published in 1904. The four types of persons are given at Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.133 and in the Puggalapaññatti.
64. U Nārada, translator's introduction to Conditional Relations, vol. I, p. cvii (the Conclusion of the introduction).
65. Milinda's Questions, trans. I. B. Horner (London: Pali Text Society), vol. I, pp. 21-22, in the account of Nāgasena's training: he was at that point still a puthujjana, and the one talk brought stream-entry to hearer and speaker alike.
66. Nina van Gorkom, Cetasikas (London: Zolag, 1999), on the degrees of paññā.