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## The Riddle of the First Buddhist Council — A Retrospection

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### Summary

An account of the First Buddhist Council has been given in the Cullavagga XI as well as in the corresponding sections of the other Vinaya versions.

The present paper deals with certain problems related to this Council, especially the problems of this account being legendary or historical. Oldenberg pointed out that some parts of the Cullavagga XLI agrees verbatim with certain section of the Mahāparinibbānasutta that deals with the news of the death of the Buddha and the diverse reactions of the monks to -this news. But the MPS is silent about the Cullavagga account of the proposal to hold a Council in order to chant the dharma and vinaya, and other episodes related to this Council. This silence on the part of the MPS led Oldenberg to conclude that the chanting together with all the incidents inseparably connected with it are to be regarded as myth. Moreover the episodes of the 'khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni' and the monk Channa are nothing but imaginary continuation of the data already given in the MPs. It is obvious that Oldenberg thinks that portions of the MPS which is an earlier work, were either copied or elaborated later by the Cullavagga. And whatever extra material is found in the later work of the Cullavagga, is unhesitatingly assigned to the realm of fantasy. As Poussin puts it, the whole of the Cullavagga XI, according to Oldenberg, is a case of forgery.

Poussin refuses to follow the lead of Oldenberg. He points out that a theory based on the silence of a text can never be anything more than a mere hypothesis, and so can never lead to anything tangible. Consequently Poussin tries to approach the problem from a different standpoint. He, following Minayeff, came to believe that the Cullavagga XI is an intricate mosaic of earlier and later

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traditions, and these two types of traditions contradict each other. The chanting, a tradition of later origin, is not in harmony with the earlier traditions of the episodes of the 'khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni' and the charges against Ānanda, and, therefore, is to be regarded as a legend.

Poussin gives different reasons for contradiction in different cases. The charges against Ānanda show that the orthodoxy has not yet developed the concept of arhat, where : Is the episode of the 'khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni' takes us to a time when the official version of the 'vinaya' is still in a fluid state. On the other hand the chanting of the 'dharma' and 'vinaya' by five hundred arhats reveals a state of things where a complete canonical version of the 'vinaya' is already a matter of common knowledge, and the developed concept of arhat is an accepted dogma. The episodes of 'Channa, Ānanda and the 'khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni' bear marks of great antiquity and may be accepted as genuine traditions of an earlier origin. Minayeff took the episode of 'khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni' as the core of the vinaya tradition while Po us sin regards the narration of the faults of Ānanda as the ancient nucleus around which the vinaya account grew.

The contention of Po us sin that the episodes of Channa, Ānanda etc. belong to an earlier tradition and they contradict the later tradition of chanting has been shown to be mere assumption which cannot be supported by any known tradition. Moreover the non-mention of the First Council in the MPS which was actually composed later than the Cullavagga XI, also does not pose any problem. In the earliest period the materials concerning 'dharma' and 'kṛtya' formed two mutually exclusive categories. This would explain why the account of chanting which belong to the category of kṛtya finds no mention in the MPS which is a part of the 'dharma' literature.

Thus the arguments in favour of the chanting of the dharma and vmaya being a legend are not tenable. On the other hand we have very positive grounds to accept the account of the Cullavagga XI including the narration of the chanting as history. All unanimous traditions mentioned in all the 6 Vinayas-vesions such as the chanting and the episodes discussed in this article belongs to the earliest strata of traditon known to the undivided Buddhist community and as such are quite near to the time when the chanting and other episodes occured. Such an

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early tradition has every right to be trusted as history unless there are equally strong evidences against it. Moreover the tradition of chanting also bears the mark of great antiquity. The definition of 'vinaya' which emerges from the study of this tradition most probably goes back to the time when the Buddha was alive. Its rejection which is more or less the result of subjective reaction to certain informations, would be quite contrary to reason. The kṛtyas regarding the chanting of 'dharma' and 'vinaya', the khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni, Channa and the charges against Ānanda are all to be accepted as history.

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The problem of the First Council was first raised and discussed in detail by Minayeff in 1887. [1]He thought that the chapter XI of the Cullavagga which contains an account of the First Council is riddled with contradictions, and rejected the episode of chanting of the dharma and vinaya as legend, for it was contradicted by traditions of earlier origin. His view as summarised by Poussin[2]may be stated as follows:

Minayeff puts aside as apocryphal or tendencious the history of the council in its official convocation and in its literary labours. But he retains as history or semi-historic the episodes of Subhadra, the Khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni, faults of Ānanda, etc. Minayeff comes to this conclusion for he thinks that the account of the chanting of dharma and vinaya suffers from both incoherence and contradiction. He finds it incoherent when the CV speaks of the suggestion of Kassapa to the monks to chant together and next records that the monks request Kassapa to choose competent monks for chanting the dharma and vinaya; or when the CV first puts the decision of the monks to hold the council at Rājagṛha and then proceeds to record the same as an official resolution proposed by Kassapa and accepted by the Saṃgha. On the other hand, Minayeff sees contradiction between the drawing up of a complete canon and the episodes of Khuddā nukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni, faults of Ānanda, etc. It is also clear that the legendary account of the chanting of dharma and vinaya is of much later origin while the different episodes which are of historical nature, belong to an earlier tradition.

**Keywords:** 1.Mahāpaninibbānasutta 2.Kṛtya 3.Khuddānukhuddakāni  
sikkhāpadāni 4.Brahmaṇḍa 5.Arhat

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## Oldenberg's Criticism of Minayeff

This view of Minayeff is totally rejected by Oldenberg. [3]He neither finds any incoherence nor contradiction in the account of the Cullavagga. Moreover Oldenberg rightly points out that so far as the official resolution regarding the chanting is concerned, nothing 'can be more probable nor more conformable to the habits made known to us by the literature'. He further states that the 'point of view of Minayeff who claims to recognise in these episodes (and those of the failings of Ānanda) an old kernel of authentic tradition (einen guten alten kern guter überlieferung) and to separate them from the rest of the account due to a much younger time, is illusory'. In fact "Der Culla, wenn er.... die Geschichte von dem Konzil mit dem in Rede stehenden Episoden ausstattete beging damit nicht in mindesten, wie Minayeff will, einen Selbstwiderspruch. "So Oldenberg neither accepts the view that the episodes of Subhadra etc. are historic and earlier in origin than the legendary account of, nor accepts that there is any contradiction between the chanting and the other episodes.

This does not mean that Oldenberg believes in the authenticity of the Council. He has other reasons to discard it as a legend.

Oldenberg points out that much of the Cullavagga XI. 1 agrees almost verbatim with certain portions of the Mahāparinibbānasutta (VI.19-20).[4] In order to understand the relationship between the Cullavagga and the Mahāparinibbānasutta we will give below a synopsis of the Cullavagga XI. 1:[5]

'Now the venerable Mahākassapa said to the monks that one day he was travelling from Pāvā to Kusinara with about five hundred monks. Along the road there came an Ājīvika monk who informed Mahākassapa and other monks about the death of the Buddha. The faithful but imperfect monks abandoned themselves to grief, but those who were

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already perfect told that all things are impermanent. Kassapa also reminded the grieving monks that it was in the nature of things that one had to be separated from the near and dear ones. Among the monks there was an old monk called Subhadda who rejoiced at the news of the death of the Master and told: "Enough Sirs, weep not, neither lament! we are well rid of the great Samana. We used to be annoyed by being told: 'This beseems you, this beseems you not'. But now we shall be able to do whatever we like; and what we do not like, that we shall not have to do."

The Cullavagga does not record the reaction of Kassapa to the statement of Subhadda. After narrating this incident Kassapa simply told the monks: "Come, my bretheren, let us chant together the dharma and vinaya before the non-dhamma spread and the dhamma be put aside." Then the Cullavagga goes on to narrate how the formal resolution to chant was adopted, the monks selected and the place for chanting decided upon.

It is to be noted that the account about the formal resolution etc., are not recorded in the MPS. The MPS in fact does not contain the slightest hint as to the chanting of the dhamma and vinaya. Otherwise the two texts agree with each other verbatim, and Oldenberg is of the opinion that the Cullavagga copied this part of the narration from the MPS. As the MPS does not breathe a single word about the chanting, Oldenberg came to the conclusion that all the incidents connected with the Council (viz. Kassapa's proposal to chant, his selection of the monks, selection of the place for chanting, formal proposal for chanting, and its acceptance by the Samgha, the chanting of the dhamma and vinaya etc. ) and mentioned in the Cullavagga but omitted in the MPS are nothing but fiction. And this elaborate fiction, according to Oldenberg, was concocted in imitation of the Second Buddhist Council which is historical. [6]It is, however, not properly explained by Oldenberg why the Cullavagga would have to copy the. MPS or to feel inclined to creat such a fiction in imitation of the Second Council. Oldenberg is equally determined to deny the historical nature of even those

incidents which are not inseparably connected with the chanting of dhamma and vinaya. For example, Oldenberg also regarded the episodes of Channa and the khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni as legends. "The hypothesis forces itself upon us", says Oldenberg "that the redactor of our Chapter of the Cullava gga spoke of these things (i.e. stories of Channa etc. ) because the MPS has spoken of them." [7]"Buddha has given orders to be executed after his death: ought not one, when one had to speak of what had happened after the death of the Buddha, to explain how these orders have been executed? The tradition of the MPS speaks in the sense which we know of the khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni; on the other hand the Buddhists did not know that the community had suppressed any of the intended rules. Hence what is more simple than to suppose that the community had resolved to keep all the established rules?" [8]

Thus according to Oldenberg the redactors of the Cullavagga were familiar with the account of the MPS regarding the khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni and the punishment of the Channa, but were not aware whether the instructions of the Buddha had already been carried out or not. So they imagined fitting sequels to the account of the MPS and wrote about the actual execution of the orders of the Buddha. Oldenberg is also sceptical about the historical nature of the episode of the faults of Ānanda which is not connected with the chanting directly.

Poussin has excellently summarised the opinion of Oldenberg in the following way:[9]"Wishing to set forth the primitive compilation of scriptures, postulated by orthodoxy, the compiler of Cullavagga has naturally brought forward Kassapa, Ānanda and Upāli. He added the story of Kassapa's journey and the episode of the lesser precepts, had grouped and developed several other souvenirs relative to this period: almost all were known to him through the MPS. In one word Oldenberg believes that all our chapter of the Culla is a forgery."

## Criticism of Oldenberg by Finot and Obermiller

As against Oldenberg's contention that the MPS maintains utter silence concerning the First Council, Finot [10] offers the following arguments. He points out that the chapters XI and XII of the Cullavagga which contain the accounts of the two Councils, have such an abrupt beginning unlike the other chapters of the Cullavagga that they could not have been originally a part of this work. He further points out that the Mahāpaninibbānasutta also differs from the other suttas of the Dīgha Nikāya in the nature of its contents, being more historical in character, and that the Mahāparinibbāna sutta and the two chapters (XI, XII) of the Cullavagga are so similar in nature that they must have been originally parts of one and the same work. In support of his view he refers to a work entitled Samyukta-vastu (Nanjio 1121), the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins, which contains the account of both parinirvāṇa and the Councils, and concludes therefrom that the Theravādins too had a work corresponding to the Samyukta-vastu and that it was dismembered at a later date by the ancient editors of the Nikāyas and Vinaya. Dr. Obermiller[11] corroborates

Finot's contention and gives us in detail the contents of the Vinaya-kṣudra ka which roughly corresponds to the Cullavagga, and shows that it not only contains the account of the two Councils but also the Mahāpaninibbānasutta. He further points out that "the story of the Councils begins just on the same line in which the narrative of the burial of the Buddha finishes, without any indication whatsoever".

In view of these evidences Prof. N. Dutt [12] takes Finot's contention as sound, viz., that the Mahāpaninibbānasutta and at least the chapter XI (and not the chapter XII) of the Cullavagga originally formed one treatise, and in the analogy of the Vinayakṣudraka it may further be stated that the Mahāparinibbānasutta formed originally the first portion of the chapter XI of the Cullavagga. This takes away the force of Oldenberg's arguments and we may now brush them

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aside. Poussin[13] also is inclined to support the conclusions of Finot drawn on the basis of his finding of the text of Saṃyukta-vastu.

## Rejection of Finot's View

It is difficult to support the views of Finot and others. Both the Saṃyukta-vastu and the Vinaya-kṣudraka belong to the Mūlasarvāstivādins. And it is only the Mūlasarvāstivādins who have joined the MPS and the account of the two Councils into one single text.

This arrangement has not been followed by any other school which arose out of the Sthaviras. The tradition followed by these schools definitely shows that the MPS was regarded as a sutta which was held separate from the account of the First Council. Though the Mahāsaṃghika version of the MPS has not come down to us, it is certain that the Mahāsaṃghikas possessed this sutta. The Mahāsaṃghika Vinaya[13a] refers to this sutta by name and reproduces certain informations mentioned in the available MPS versions belonging to schools which developed out of the Sthaviras. Thus the compilation of the MPS must have been completed before the Sthavira-Mahāsaṃghika split. It is clear that even in this early period the MPS was known as sutta to the Mahāsaṃghikas, and that, according to the Mahāsaṃghika tradition also, it existed separately from the account of the First Council. So it is obvious that the arrangement discussed by Finot and other scholars is to be taken as a later development peculiar to the Mūlasarvāstivādins, and can be of no use in determining the arrangement of the Buddhist traditions in the earliest period. This cannot solve the problem raised by Oldenberg due to the silence of the MPS. As for the abrupt beginning of the Cullavagga account it has been shown later that this perception of the abruptness is only due to the misunderstanding of the real nature of this part of the Cullavagga account. There are, however, some objective grounds for rejecting the view of Oldenberg which may now be discussed.

## Refutation of Oldenberg's theory

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The grand edifice of Oldenberg's theory rests on a number of facts and assumptions. The observations that certain parts of the Cullavagga agrees verbatim with the MPS, and that the MPS does not mention anything about the First Council refer to facts. As for the assumptions which contribute greatly to giving the final shape to the theory of Oldenberg we may note the following:

- 1) The MPS is earlier in origin than the Cullavagga XI.
- 2) The compilers of the Cullavagga XI were quite familiar with the MPS and under the influence of the second Buddhist Council copied some portions of the MPS (e. g. the report of Kassapa about Subhadda) as well as elaborated and brought to reasonable completion some episodes mentioned in the MPS (e. g. the episode of Channa etc. ). This suggests a long gap between the completion of the MPS and the compilation of the Cullavagga XI.
- 3) The MPS would have recorded the traditions connected with the chanting of dharma and vinaya mentioned in the Cullavagga provided these were known to the compiler of the MPS.
- 4) Such Cullavagga episodes which should have been mentioned by the MPS but find no mention there are to be taken as legends. Accordingly the chanting of the dharma and vinaya in a council passed over in utter silence by the MPS but given a prominent place in the Cullavagga XI was taken to be a legend by Oldenberg. Similarly all the other events exclusively mentioned in the Cullavagga and inseparably bound up with the chanting also came to be regarded as legends by Oldenberg.
- 5) The compiler of the Cullavagga had to imagine fitting sequels to the episodes of Channa and the khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni mentioned in the MPS.
- 6) Conversely, if an episode is recorded in both the Cullavagga XI and the MPS it should be regarded as authentic. For example, the Buddha's instructions about Channa and the minor rules as well as Kassapa's report to the monks about the Ājīvika monk and Subhadda mentioned in both the MPS[14] and the Cullavagga XI [15] have not been marked out as legends by Oldenberg.

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Before we start our examination of the theory propounded by Oldenberg we would like to enumerate the following principles which should guide us in our investigation:

- a) Any tradition mentioned not only in the Vinayas of the Buddhist sects which developed out of the Sthaviras, but also in the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya can be reasonably taken to have originated before the Sthavira-Mahāsaṅghika schism. Such an early tradition should be regarded as authentic unless there is some strong evidence to the contrary. The rejection of such a tradition without unassailable arguments cannot be justified.
- b) On the other hand, if a tradition finds mention only in the canon of the Sthavira sects or of the Mahāsaṅghika, it can be said to have become a part of the canon at the hands of the Sthaviras or the Mahāsaṅghikas, but cannot be taken for granted to have been known to the undivided Buddhist community before the Sthavira-Mahāsaṅghika schism. The mention of a tradition in this stage should not, under

normal condition, affect adversely the authenticity of a tradition belonging to the earliest period.

- c) According to earliest traceable classification of the Buddhist literature 'dharma' and 'kṛtya' belonged to mutually exclusive categories, the former referred to the suttas while the latter dealt with the collection of kṛtyas or Formal Acts. A tradition belonging to one category did not form a part of another category. [16] The MPS was included in the category of dharma while the Cullavagga is basically a collection of kṛtyas.[17] The accounts of the chanting of the dharma and vinaya, the discussion of the minor rules etc. are all Formal Acts performed by the Saṃgha, though in some cases all the steps in the procedure of a fully developed Formal Act are not mentioned. There is no doubt, that if the early Buddhists wanted to group together such events, they could have done so only under the category of 'kṛtya'.
- d) According to the ancient Buddhist law each kṛtya is to be regarded as

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separate from or independent of other kṛtyas, each of them being introduced by a separate proposal and concluded by a particular resolution. So the incidents described in the Culla vagga XI are to be treated as independent Formal Acts performed separately by an identical group of competent monks within the legal boundary of a Saṃgha. It also follows that to the early Buddhists the Cullavagga XI is neither an account of a Council nor that of a tribunal but represents merely a collection of Formal Acts.

We may start our criticism of Oldenberg's view by pointing out that there is no decisive reason to hold that the MPS is earlier than the Cullavagga XI. It is true that the MPS deals with events that took place before the holding of the First Council. However the fact that the MPS records earlier events does not by itself prove that the MPS was composed at an earlier date. The possibility that the MPS might have been composed at a later date cannot be ignored. The MPS not only describes the last days and the funeral ceremony of the Buddha but also records the distribution of the relics and the construction of the stupas over the relics which certainly took place quite some time after the death of the Buddha. On the other hand the First Council, took place, according to the tradition of the undivided Buddhist community during the first rainy season after the Buddha's Parinirvana. The time gap between these two events is quite short, and it is obvious that the MPS could not have been composed before the First Council or discussed during the Council. In short, the MPS or rather the genuine traditions exclusively recorded in the MPS had not yet become a part of the official canon fixed during the First Council. On the other hand, the Culla vagga XI records different Formal Acts performed during the First Council and so the core of this account must be contemporaneous with the Council.

A careful analysis of the Cullavagga XI will even now reveal to us traces of such traditions which became part of the Buddhist scripture during the time of the First Council and therefore, before the compilation of the MPS. Some of these tradition came to be included in the MPS at a later date. Let us, for example, first discuss that

part of the Cullavagga XI where Kassapa is reporting to the monks about the reaction of Subhadda to the news of the death of the Buddha. This incidence is also given in the MPS. From the Cullavagga account it is clear that the monks in general have not yet heard of the Subhadda episode. This

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detail would be out of place if we have to admit that the Cullavagga XI was composed at a later period when the MPS had already become quite well known to the Buddhist community. This ignorance on the part of the Buddhist monks indirectly shows that the MPS was not yet composed at that time.

As already pointed out, the Cullavagga XI mainly consists of a number of *krtyas* or Formal Acts performed by the Saṅgha. The chanting of the dharma and the vinaya, the deliberations on the minor rules etc. are different Formal Acts. The features of a Formal Act have been carefully preserved in case of the chanting of the dhamma and the vinaya which is mentioned in all the vinaya versions including that of the Mahāsaṅghikas, and thus belongs to the earliest strata of tradition. This is the most important of all the Formal Acts discussed in this chapter, and for the sake of which the First Council was probably held. Now as the chanting is a Formal Act, it, according to the ancient legal custom, was performed with reference to the *vattu*, *nidāna* and *puggala*, [18] i.e. the subject-matter, the place and the person or persons concerned. The necessary information about these three points were generally supplied as a sort of introduction to the legal act of *krtya*. The Formal Act of chanting of the dhamma and the vinaya also has its introduction which still can be discerned in the first few sections of the Cullavagga XI.[19] This introduction which contains the story of Subhadda[20] must be as old as the First Council, and consequently must have been a part of the Buddhist canon long before the MPS came to be recognised as a canonical work.

But how this episode came to be later included in the MPS? The reason would be clear if we once again pay attention to the contents of the MPS. This work deals with among other things the parinirvana of the Buddha and other incidents directly connected with it. So it is but natural that the compiler of the

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MPS got interested in the incidence of Subhadda as it is directly related to the death of the Buddha. The state of things thus influencing the composition of the Cullavagga XI and the MPS may be described as follows: The incidence of Subhadda became widely known to the Buddhist monks in that early period after Kassapa's report. It came to be first included in the official Buddhist tradition as a part of the *krtya* related to the chanting of the dhamma and the vinaya. And the same story due to its connection with the death of the Buddha became an episode in the MPS. The verbatim identity existing between the two accounts can be safely put to the credit of the later editors. The other details exclusively connected with the *krtya* of chanting such as the official proposition to chant, the selection of the place for chanting etc. were ignored by the compiler of the MPS as these were not directly related to the parinirvāna of the Buddha. We can justifiably reject the thesis of Oldenberg that the chanting of the dharma and vinaya together with other relevant details given in the Cullavagga XI but

not found in the MPS are but later fictitious additions to the earlier account of Subhadda. With the acceptance of the historical nature of the chanting the bar to the authenticity of the First Council is also removed. We find that there is no reason to doubt the historical nature of the First Council simply because it has not been mentioned in the MPS.

The cases of the minor rules (Khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni) and the monk Channa are slightly different. Each of these episodes consists of two parts: i) the Buddha's instruction, and ii) the execution of this instruction. The instructions on these two cases are mentioned both in the MPS[21] and the Cullavagga[22] while the account of their execution is only found in the Cullavagga Oldenberg[23] came to the conclusion that the monks were no longer aware whether the Buddha's instructions had already been carried out or not. So they imagined fitting sequels to those instructions in the form of suitable actions taken by the Saṃgha. This theory of Oldenberg is solely based on two presuppositions:

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- i) The MPS is an earlier work which influenced the composition of the Cullavagga XI at a later date.
- ii) The time-gap between the MPS and the Cullavagga is long enough to make the monks uncertain about the execution of the Buddha's orders.

But these presuppositions cannot be accepted. The entire Buddhist canon does not provide us with the slightest ground to suppose that the devoted disciples would be so indifferent to the instructions of the Buddha that they would not only neglect to execute them but would not even be certain whether the instructions have been carried out or not. It would be more reasonable to accept as fact the Cullavagga account that the monks lost no time to act according to the orders of the Buddha. The other objections to the theory of Oldenberg would be the same as what we have already pointed out regarding the chanting of the dhamma and vinaya, viz. i) the Cullavagga XI is as old as the First Council and the MPS is a comparatively later work; ii) the instructions of the Buddha being connected with the last days of the Buddha naturally find mention in the MPS while official actions taken on the basis of the instructions by the Saṃgha should belong to the category of *krtya* and as such are justifiably excluded from the MPS and included in the Cullavagga

## Poussin's view and its criticism

Poussin does not subscribe to the view of Oldenberg and puts it aside as a mere hypothesis. [24] The path he treads is not entirely different from his predecessors; he develops a view which is an improved version of Minayeff's theory. Like Minayeff, he perceives multiple internal contradictions in the account of the Cullavagga XI, regards the chanting of dhamma and vinaya as a later product of imagination because of such contradiction but ascribes the other episodes to an authentic, earlier tradition. Actually the main thrust of his arguments is to prove the legendary nature of the account of chanting the dhamma and vinaya. He strongly believes in the legendary

nature of this episode, and this attitude has influenced his summarisation of the CV XI, the

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beginning of which may be quoted below:[25]

Kassapa suddenly appears on the scene, no one knows where and addressing himself to no one knows whom he relates how during his journey, he has learned the death of his master.

The expressions given in italics by me were used by Poussin to emphasise the vagueness and suddenness of the rambling Cullavagga account, and thus to raise doubt about its authenticity. It is to be noted that this imperfect beginning was made to gradually lead us to the account of the chanting of the dhamma and vinaya in the Council.

He proceeds further to show that the account of the chanting does not fit well with the two other episodes narrated in the Cullavagga XI, viz. the account of the charges brought against, Ānanda, and the discussion on the minor rules (khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni). We may first start with the episode of Ananda.[26]

The monks reproach Ānanda with a number of faults which he had committed before his attainment of the status of an arhat. For example, they told Ānanda: "You committed a fault for you had not enquired about the minor rules. Confess your fault. "Ānanda confessed the faults which he had done either through forgetfulness or with a good intention. And all his replies end with the formula: "I do not see any wrong in that . Nevertheless out of deference to you (āyusmantānam sddhāya) I confess this sin."

Minayeff[27] questions the propriety of charges being brought against one who is an arhat.

Ānanda has already become an impeccable saint, that is an arhat, and yet he submits to a trial; the assembly calls upon him to do penitence for some sins..... at any rate, it is a fact that the most ancient accounts

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have, in spite of their late redaction, preserved the vagueness of the primitive ideas with regard to the saint. We can hardly consider even the fact of the trial an invention of the legend.....

It is obvious that Minayeff takes the tradition of Ānanda's trial to be genuine which leads him to conclude that the ideal of an arhat was still vague. This speaks in favour of the antiquity of the tradition. On the other hand, the episode of chanting which could only be done by Arhats, shows that the Arhats were already valued as perfect

saints. This is, no doubt, a later tradition, and is contradicted by the earlier tradition. Hence the episode of chanting is a legend.

Oldenberg[28] objects to this view. He points out that the Arhat ideal must have been clear from very ancient time, but he holds that one can naturally make mistake before becoming an arhat, and he can be judged for such a mistake even after he has attained the status of an arhat. Oldenberg points out that anybody who is familiar with the Vinaya, will agree that every offence committed must find its disciplinary action without taking account of the fact as to the guilty person has in the meantime attained to some degree of spiritual perfection. Against this view of Oldenberg, Poussin[29] draws our attention to the episode of Channa and works out a long and complicated thesis in defense of Minayeff. Let us take a look at the episode of Channa[30] so that we would be in a better position to understand the view of Poussin.

After the chanting of dharma and vinaya, Ānanda informed the monks that the Buddha had instructed the Saṅgha to impose the brahmadāṇḍa on Channa. Being asked by the monks Ananda explains the nature of this punishment: "Let the monk Channa speak whatever pleases him; the monks will not speak to him, will not exhort him, neither will they warn him. "Ānanda agrees to go and announce this sentence to Channa, provided a group of monks accompanies him, "for this monk is fierce and passionate". Ānanda announces this sentence to Channa who receives it with great humility. His grief and remorse is such that

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he attains the state of an arhat. He then tells Ānanda: "Suppress for me, O Ānanda, the brahmadāṇḍa. "From the same moment, O Channa, that you realised the quality of arhat, from that same moment the brahmadāṇḍa was suppressed."

The point which Poussin wants to make is that while in case of Channa the punishment is lifted due to his attainment of 'arhatva', Ānanda, on the other hand, is subjected to disciplinary action even after he becomes arhat. The saṅgha is adopting different types of action against 2 Arhats. Poussin further states that Channa finds himself absolved from the brahmadāṇḍa when it is no longer harmful to him.

This state of things, according to Poussin, [31] shows that from very ancient time the Buddhists were having two very different concepts about the state of an arhat. It refers to a very early period when the concept of arhat had not yet been dogmatically propounded. This is what Minayeff saw here. He is therefore, justified in pointing out the contradiction between the Ānanda episode and the tradition of chanting.

In support of this contention Poussin further states that according to orthodox argument, not only the arhat cannot fall, but also the counsel, assistance etc. of others are absolutely useless to him. The story of an arhat culpable and subject to penance against will is contrary to the orthodoxy of the non-Mahāsaṅghikas. The story of Channa reflects the attitude of the conservative group while episode of Ānanda shows the existence of the non-orthodox group which later championed the five points of Mahādeva and facilitated the rise of the Mahāsaṅghikas.

Poussin[32] is further of the opinion that "in the oldest account there is no question of a Council; they reprimand Ānanda. If one adds to this nucleus the legend of a Council, the reprimand of Ānanda will not at first change its character: and if orthodoxy, just about to be formed exacts that all the members of the Council should be Arhats, there will no difficulty in assigning to the reprimand the second rank which is suitable to it after the narration of an event of

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so great importance as the redaction of the Scriptures. Orthodoxy is not yet sufficiently sensitive to feel the contradiction of the chronological arrangement; it is not sufficiently rigid to exclude the precise mention of the 'non-sanctity' of Ānanda at the time of a gathering the object of which was to punish him. All that the orthodox tendency can obtain is to promote Ānanda to sanctify during the night of the Council.

The elaborate speculations of Poussin can be summarised thus: Originally the episode of Ānanda who was not an arhat was an independent matter which became in course of time the nucleus to which was added the imaginary account of the Council. Due to the importance of the Council its account was related first and then was narrated the episode of Ānanda. Up to this stage of development there is no contradiction, for the arhat element has not yet been introduced. The contradiction arises when due to the demand of orthodoxy Ānanda is first made an arhat before the Council starts, and then because of the previously arranged sequence of events, is made to face the charges brought against him.

Poussin comes to the same conclusion regarding the discussion on the minor rules (Khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni)[33] during the First Council. Poussin draws our attention to the three references to the minor rules in the MP S VI. 3, the CV XI. 9, and the Pācittiya LXXII. In the MPS the Buddha permits the Order to abolish the minor rules if it deems it necessary to do so. In the CV XI we read that Ānanda informed the Saṅgha about this permission of the Buddha. On being asked Ānanda admitted that he had not asked the Buddha which these rules were. The monks offered six different suggestions about the identity of the minor rules, but could not come to any decision. On the advice of Kassapa the Saṅgha adopted the resolution not to change anything which the Buddha had approved. The Pācittiya LXXII states: " If a monk at the time of recitation of the Pātimokkha should speak thus: 'What is the good of recitation of the minor rules, except to engender doubt, weariness and perplexity?', this monk is guilty of contemning the rules."

In his discussion on these three references Poussin[34] agrees entirely with

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Minayeff. He points out that whether these references are considered separately or collectively, it becomes clear that here one is dealing with a datum 'bearing the mark of great antiquity' and which is irreconcilable with a rigorous constitution already fixed by discipline.

Let us first discuss how old could these references be. The compilation of MPS, as we have already shown, occurred at a comparatively later time, after the First Council but

before the rise of different Buddhist sects. The Pācittiya rule in question also appears to have been promulgated after the First Council. Poussin<sup>[35]</sup> thinks that Kassapa, Upāli, Ānanda etc. missed this rule during the First Council. This view is not tenable. It is really unthinkable that the Vinaya experts among the monks would not recall to mind this rule when they were discussing the problem of the minor rules. It is even most likely that the other monks also would be able to point out this Pācittiya rule, for they listened to the recital of Prātimokṣa every month. We have good reasons to hold that this rule was not yet formulated at the time of the First Council, and that this Pācittiya rule came into existence later under the influence of the First Council's discussions on the minor rules. It was only during the First Council that the monks for the first time came to know that the Buddha had designated a part of the Prātimokṣa rules as khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni, and also became aware of the fact that they did not know which rules the Buddha meant when he talked about the abrogation of some minor rules. It was also shortly before his death that the Buddha for the first time used this particular term for the minor rules. So it is not possible that this Pācittiya rule was promulgated before the First Council.

In the MPS the Buddha permits the Saṅgha to annul the minor rules, but the arhats during the First Council decided to preserve all the Vinaya rules, for they lacked precise knowledge as to the identity of the minor rules. They virtually put an end to all future deliberations on this problem. It is obvious that the statement of the Pācittiya rule that any discussion unfavourable to the recitation of the minor rules will lead to uncertainty, and therefore it is an ecclesiastical offence to do so reflects faithfully the cautious spirit of the First Council, but runs counter to the generous attitude of the Buddha. This suggests that the Pācittiya

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LXXII was promulgated after the First council.

The Cullavagga XI account of the minor rules, however, really belongs to a very early period. It has been mentioned in all the Vinaya versions, and therefore surely goes back to the time of the undivided Buddhist community. And this genuinely old tradition of the minor rules according to Poussin cannot be reconciled with the tradition of chanting the Vinaya, for while the former shows that the disciplinary rules at the time of the death of the Buddha were very far from being fixed, the latter speaks of the rules being officially fixed during the First Council. This contradiction shows that the account of the chanting is a later fabrication. Poussin further thinks that this episode also shows a clash between the liberal and orthodox forces.<sup>[36]</sup>

## Criticism of Poussin's view

We have seen that one of the reasons for which Poussin considers the chanting to be a legend is that the initial part of the account of the CV XI leaves out many necessary details and so appears to be disconnected and abrupt. This objection of Poussin is not tenable when we comprehend the true nature of this part of the Cullavagga account. Here we are actually dealing with an introduction to the Kṛtya of chanting the dharma and vinaya. An official act performed by the Saṅgha, that is a kṛtya, must be accompanied by informations regarding vatthu, nidāna and puggala. The initial

portion of the Cullavagga XI provides us with necessary informations on these points. It tells us about the business the monks are to perform (vatthu) , the place where the chanting is to take place (nidāna) and the persons selected for the chanting (puggala). As all these relevant details are contained in this portion of the Cullavagga XI account, it cannot be regarded as disconnected and abrupt. The introductory part of the Cullavagga account has even indirectly mentioned the story of Subhadda as the cause of the chanting. Though this piece of information was not legally necessary for the kṛtya, it was naturally recorded as it was so closely connected with the proposal of chanting. This also seems to be an authentic piece of tradition as it not only finds mention not only in the different Sthavira accounts

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but also in the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya. The other details to which Poussin drew our attention while summarising the Cullavagga account are so superfluous from the legal point of view of the Buddhist Saṅgha and so far removed from the account of the chanting that they were quite naturally ignored in the Vinaya accounts. It is absolutely superfluous to introduce the introduction containing the legally necessary informations concerning the kṛtya, and the recording of these details would be unnecessary even for introducing the introduction. Thus the non-mention of these details does not in the least affect the authenticity of the Cullavagga account.

It is also not correct to maintain that the two episodes of Channa and Ānanda prove the imposition of different punishments where uniformity was expected. From the MPS and CV accounts it is clear that Channa has not actually committed any offence. He was known to be of passionate and violent nature, and the brahmadāṇḍa was imposed on him not as a punishment for some offence already done, but as a preventive measure. It was imposed to prevent the arising of a situation that may provoke Channa to act violently to others. The narration in the Cullavagga does not show that due to his attainment of 'arhatva' Channa is getting absolved from any offence committed by him in the past. Ānanda, on the other hand, has actually done something which was wrong in the opinion of the Saṅgha, and must be met with disciplinary action. Thus the cases of Channa and Ānanda represent two different legal problems, and the Cullavagga is, therefore, justified in recording two different types of actions being taken against them. This account of the Cullavagga cannot be interpreted as showing the existence of two different concepts of arhat followed by the orthodox and non-orthodox monks. Moreover the contention that an arhat cannot be subjected to any disciplinary action does not stand to reason. The term 'arhat' simply stands for a spiritual concept. Arhat is an enlightened person who has attained freedom from ignorance, passions and rebirth. But he is liable to commit mistake about anything which is not integral to the enlightened state of an arhat. In the Cullavagga XI itself we have passages which confirm our characterisation of an arhat. Here we read the Ānanda[37] became free from passions (āśrava) when he

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attained the spiritual height of arhatva. We also know from this chapter of the Cullavagga that the arhats made mistake about the definition of minor rules. Similarly the mistakes Ānanda made had nothing to do with the 'arhatva'. From the confession of Ānanda it appears that the actions of Ānanda were not even mistakes according to

the current monastic rules, though the Samgha had the legal authority to interpret them as mistakes. These actions of Ānanda came to be regarded as offences of which Ānanda was absolved by confession. It should be also noted in this connection that there is no doctrine belonging to this early period explicitly stating that an arhat can never act in a culpable manner, or that he cannot be charged for any violation of the discipline done by him. Thus there is no reason to conclude that the episode of the charges against Ānanda contradicts the tradition that he had attained arhatva before he was subjected to disciplinary action.[38] The incidence of charges against Ananda does not reveal the vagueness of the arhat concept, but it shows that the spiritual perfection of an arhat does not automatically exempt him from his past mistakes in disciplinary matters. This legal standpoint is in conformity with the Buddhist doctrine of karma. Even a Buddha has to suffer the effects of his past actions.

Likewise Poussin's observations on the account of the Khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni cannot be accepted. Poussin first emphasises the antiquity of the tradition regarding the minor rules, and then proceeds to point out that this tradition is irreconcilable with the episode of chanting the entire Vinaya, thereby implying that the tradition of chanting cannot be trusted as an authentic piece of history.[39] The view that the tradition of the minor rules goes back to remote antiquity can be fully supported. We have seen that the promulgation of the Pacittiya LXXII was caused by the discussion of minor rules in the First Council.

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This indirectly proves the antiquity of the tradition about its discussion in the First Council. The fact that this tradition finds mention in all the Vinayas including that of the Mahāsaṅghikas, proves that it originated before the Sthavire- Mahāsaṅghika schism, and should be taken to be as old as the First Council. However the other part of Poussin's theory viz. The tradition of the minor rules are earlier than the tradition of chanting and contradicts it, cannot be supported. Poussin based his conclusion on the assumption that at the time of the discussion of the minor rules no fixed code of discipline existed. It appears that this surmise of Poussin is too far fetched and does not take into consideration other relevant traditions. The discussions on the minor rules show that the Buddhists were already certain about the definition of Vinaya, and they also knew that the minor rules consisted of a part of this Vinaya, though they had no precise knowledge as to which part it was. The definition of Vinaya that emerges from the discussions on the minor rules is in conformity with the concept of Vinaya[40] that emerges from our discussion of the schismatic matters. And the discussions on the minor rules and the chanting of the Vinaya were done by the same group of monks. So it is obvious that the Vinaya was already a fixed code at the time of the First Council, and the tradition about the chanting cannot be later than that of the discussion on the minor rules. Both these traditions belong to the same period and find mention in all the Vinayas. Moreover, that the Buddhists were discussing the minor rules in order to abrogate a part of the Vinaya does not in any way prove that the Vinaya, as understood by them in that early period, was not already compiled and fixed. The monks cannot be expected to abrogate a part of the Vinaya, unless they know what is exactly meant by Vinaya. This opinion is also supported by the tradition that the Buddha told Ānanda that the dhamma and vinaya would be the teacher of the monks after his death.[41] Moreover the fact that the Vinaya consists of the rules

promulgated by the Buddha did not form a bar to the abolition of a part of it. For it was the

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Buddha himself who had authorised the monks to abrogate the minor rules if necessary. Thus the contention of Poussin that the tradition of chanting the vinaya at the First Council is a legend for it is contradicted by the earlier tradition of the minor rules is not acceptable.

## Conclusion

The historic nature of the Cullavagga XI account, specially the episode of chanting the dhamma and vinaya, has been denied either because of the silence of the MPS about the chanting, or due to the internal contradictions supposed to be existing between the different episodes narrated in the Cullavagga XI. But we found that these objections against the authenticity of the account are not valid, for they are based on the following wrong assumptions:

- 1) the MPS is earlier than the Cullavagga XI;
- 2) the MPS would have recorded the kṛtyas concerning, the chanting, the minor rules, charges against Ānanda etc. if these were known to it;
- 3) the episodes of Ānanda and the minor rules represent earlier tradition and contradict the account of chanting which is of later origin.

These assumptions are shown to be wrong by our finding that while the MPS deal with materials connected with the dhamma, the Cullavagga XI is concerned with kṛtya traditions, and as such the MPS will naturally omit traditions that rightfully belong to the category of kṛtya. Moreover we have shown that all these episodes including that of the chanting belong to the earliest traceable tradition current before the Sthavira-Mahāsaṅghika schism, and there is no objective ground whatsoever to hold one episode earlier than the other.

On the other hand, there is strong internal evidence to show that the episode of chanting also bears mark of great antiquity. If we analyse materials bearing upon the connotation of the term 'vinaya' as given in accounts of the First Council, and the list of schismatic matters, we will see that the term 'vinaya' has been used in an extremely archaic sense, viz. to mean some of the disciplinary rules at present included in the Prātimokṣa-sutra and the informations regarding vatthu, nidāna and puggala with reference to these rules. Hence not only the episodes of Ānanda, minor rules etc. but also the account of chanting the dhamma and vinaya should be regarded as history.

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# 佛教第一結集的難題——一個回顧

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## 提要

佛教第一結集的記載，在小品（Cuffamgga）XI，以及其他律藏譯本的相對應部分都有提及。

這篇論文將討論與此吹結集有關的一些問題，特別是，第一結集到底是傳說，抑或是歷史事實的問題。Oldenberg 指出「小品」（Cullauagga）XI.1 的某些部分，在討論佛陀涅槃的消息，及比丘對此消息的不同反應時，與〈大般涅槃經〉（以下簡稱 MPS）的某些章節是字句不差的；但是，MPS 對於「小品」中所記載的，為了合誦「法」與「律」而舉行結集的提議，以及有關此次結集的其他事件，卻隻字未提。由於 MPS 對此部分隻字未提，使 Oldenberg 下結論說，合誦以及所有與此合誦有緊密關係的事件，都應被視為虛構的故事；且「小小戒」及闍那比丘的事件，只不過是採取 MPS 中已有資料，而添加的想像罷了。很明顯的，Oldenberg 認為 MPS 的這部分是較早的作品，「小品 J 則是於稍後加以仿製或發揮而成。而且，在較晚的「小品」中，無論發現任何其他資料，他總是毫不猶豫地將之歸為想像的領域如：Poussin 指出整個「小品」XI，根據 Oldenberg 的說法，是一個偽造的案例。

Poussin 拒絕追隨 Oldenberg 的線索；他指出，一個學說的形成，若僅基於經典沒有記載的話，最多只不過是假設罷了，決不能以此來證明任何事情；因此，Poussin 嘗試由不間的觀點來研究這個問題；他同意 Minayeff 的說法，相信「小品」XI 是由較早及較晚的兩種傳統，複雜地殷饒而成，且這兩種傳統彼此互相矛盾。合誦是屬於較晚傳統，與「小小戒」及向阿難舉罪等較早傳統的事件矛盾，因此，被認為是一種傳說。

Poussin 對於不同事件之矛盾，給予了不同的理由；例如，向阿難舉罪，顯示阿羅漢概念在當時的佛教，尚未發展為被接受的觀念；而「小小戒」的事件，使我們瞭解到當時正式的律文仍然處於尚未固定的狀態。另一方面，由五百阿羅漢合誦「法」與「律」的情形，顯示當時僧團完全接受的律文，已經是一般的常識；已成形的阿羅漢概念，

是一種被大家所接受的觀念；闍那、阿難及「小小戒」的事件，其有很古老的特性，且可能被認為是淵源較早的真正傳統。Minayeff 以「小小戒」的事件為律的傳統的核心，然而 Poussin 認為向阿難舉過的故事是古代核心，據此而發展為律的記載。

Poussin 主張闍那、阿難等事件屬於較早的傳統，且與合誦的較晚傳統相矛盾的論點僅是一種假設，沒有任何已知的傳統能支持此種假設。此外事實上較小品 ( Cuffamgga ) 還晚成立的 MPS，未提及第一結集，亦不構成任何問題；因為在最早期，有關「法」與「羯磨」的資料，形成了兩種相互不相容的分類，這可解釋為何屬於「羯磨」分類的合誦的記載，在 MPS 這屬於「法」的文獻中，找不到任何陳述。

因此，支持合誦「法」與「律」是傳說的論點，是站不住腳的；另一方面，我們有非常正面的理由，來證實「小品」XI 的大部分記載，包括合誦的敘述，是歷史的事實。在現有六種律藏中，一致記載的所有傳統諸如合誦及本文所討論的一些事件，是屬於佛教教團未分裂的最早期傳統，這種傳統十分接近合誦及其他事件發生的時間；像這樣的一種傳統，具有讓人相信其為歷史的理由，除非有同樣強的證據來反駁它；而且，合誦的傳統也其有很古老的特性；由這個傳統的研習而興起的律的定義，很可能溯回到佛陀在世時。由於對某些資料，或多或少的主觀反應而反對此傳統，是十分不合理的。和羯磨有關的「法」與「律」的合誦、「小小戒」、闍那、向阿難舉罪等，都應該被認為是歷史的事實。

[1] D.P. Minayeff published his work in Russian in 1887. This was translated into French under the title *Recherches sur le Bouddhisme* in 1894. Poussin gave a critical account of Minayeff's thesis in his work (see next note) which I have utilised for the article.

[2] Louis De La Vallee Poussin, *The Buddhist Councils* (K. P. Bagchi and Co, Calcutta, 1976), p.10, Henceforth abbreviated as *Councils*.

[3] *Ibid*, p.10.

[4] *The Mahāparinibbānasutta* (PTS, London, 1982), VI. 19~20 ( abbreviated as MPS ). Also see, *Dialogues of the Buddha, Part II*, pp. 73ff (PTS, London, 1977).

[5] *Cullavagga XI. 1* (abbreviated as CV ).

[6] Poussin, *Councils*, p.10.

- [7] Poussin, Councils, p.22.
- [8] Poussin, Councils.
- [9] Poussin, Councils, p.12.
- [10] Nalinaksha Dutt, Early Monastic Buddhism vol.I (Calcutta, 1941), p.337, Indian Historical Quarterly (Calcutta), VIII, pp. 241~6.
- [11] N.Dutt, Early Monastic Buddhism vol.I, pp.337~38; Indian Historical Quarterly (Calcutta), vol.VIII, pp.781~84.
- [12] N.Dutt, Early Monastic Buddhism vol. I, p.338.
- [13] Poussin, Councils, p.13, note 39, p.11, note 36.
- [13a] T. 22, p.489 C27ff (T. for Taisho ed. of Tripitaka).
- [14] MPS VI, 19~20.
- [15] CV XI, 1.
- [16] Biswadeb Mukherjee, The Schismatic Matters and the Early Buddhist Literature especially, pp.89, 90, 95 ( Journal of Research V. B. vol. 1, part I, Humanities and Social Sciences, 1977).
- [17] Ibid, p.94.
- [18] I have shown that the invariable association of "vatthu", nidāna, and puggala with the vinaya was due to ancient legal Custom (see ibid, pp.92ff) , kṛtya being a legal act should also be discussed together with vatthu, etc.
- [19] Cullavagga XI.1 (PTS, London, 1977 p.284 ff.)
- [20] Cullavagga XI, pp.284ff (Vinaya Pitaka vol II (PTS, London, 1977) (Mi) T. vol.22, p.190b (Dh) , T.22, p.966b.
- [21] MPS (VI.3).
- [22] CV XI. 12; XI. 9.
- [23] Poussin, Councils p. 22t note 64.
- [24] Council, p.13.
- [25] Council, p.2.
- [26] CV XI. 10; T.22, p.191 b3ff; T.22, p.967b 2 7ff.

- [27] Poussin, Councils, p.15; Minayeff, (Cherches, p.31)
- [28] Poussin, Councils, pp.15~16; Oldenberg, *Buddhistiche Studien*, pp. 620~21.
- [29] Poussin, Councils, p.16.
- [30] XI.12, T.22, p.192 a15ff, etc.
- [31] Poussin, Councils, pp.15~17.
- [32] Ibid, p.17.
- [33] Ibid, pp.21ff.
- [34] Ibid, p.22.
- [35] Ibid, p.22, note 63.
- [36] Ibid, p.25.
- [37] CV XI. 6; T. 22, p. 190c 16ff; (T.22), 967a20ff etc.
- [38] Poussin, (Councils, p.17) points out that Ānanda was judged after he became an arhat. Thus this tradition appears not only in the account of the two Sthavira streams but also in the Mahāsaṃghika Vinaya. So this tradition might have belonged to the earliest strata (for 3 streams of tradition, see, Mukherjee, *ibid*, pp.81~83.).
- [39] Both Poussin and Oldenberg think the tradition about the minor rules also is not historical, see Poussin, Councils, p. 26, note 64.
- [40] Mukherjee, *ibid*, pp.89~93.
- [41] MPS VI.1.