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Introduction: Themes and Theories

Throughout history Buddhists have held vastly different views about the language in which the Buddha taught. For some he possessed a supernatural ability to speak in any language he wished. Others claimed by contrast that the Buddha never taught anything at all. Theravada Buddhist scholar-monks, however, believe that the Buddha taught in only one language, Pali, or ‘the language of Magadha’ (magadhabhāsā), as it is known by the tradition, and that he produced a body of teachings, the Tipiṭaka (‘three baskets’), so large that, after his death, it took his disciples seven months to recite and compile it. When we speak of ‘Pali literature’ it is perhaps understandable that many people will think of the Tipiṭaka or ‘Pali canon’, as it is often referred to in Western academic writings. And yet for almost 2,000 years the monastic community, the Saṅgha, has continued to use Pali as a privileged language for commenting on and elaborating upon the Buddha’s doctrine, the Dhamma.

One of the most important commentators in Buddhist history was a fourth or fifth-century South Indian scholar fittingly known as Buddhaghosa or ‘voice of the Buddha’ who wrote a number of definitive works in Sri Lanka elucidating and developing upon the Buddha’s ideas. Tradition has it that Buddhaghosa based his commentaries on Sinhala translations of earlier Pali works that were brought to Sri Lanka by a monk named Mahinda, the eldest son of emperor Aśoka. A late Burmese biography of Buddhaghosa states that, when these first Sinhala commentaries were piled up, they reached the height of seven ‘medium-sized’ elephants. Throughout the first millennium the Pali tradition continued to grow; scholars added new commentaries, some composed explanations of older commentaries, and others occupied themselves by writing histories of the Buddhist tradition and their monastic lineage.

Then something radically changed. From around the tenth century there was a massive explosion in the number and types of works composed in Pali. This period of literary efflorescence reached its peak in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, specifically between the years 1157–1270. To give
a rough estimate, it is likely that out of all the known Pali works composed in Sri Lanka and South India, more than a third were composed during this long century.6 The number of works preserved from this era attests not only to the relative magnitude of literary production but also to the fact that these works have long been preserved as key authorities for the Theravada Buddhist tradition throughout Southern Asia.

For the new Pali texts that emerged during this period were taken by scholar-monks from Sri Lanka to Southeast Asian kingdoms from the twelfth century onwards and they thus became an important resource in the development of early modern Theravada Buddhism.7

I refer to this long century, spanning 1157–1270, as Sri Lanka’s ‘reform era’, since the period was marked by three important monastic reforms held in 1165, c. 1232–6 and 1266 during the reigns of Parākramabāhu I (1157–86),8 Vijayabāhu III (1232–6) and Parākramabāhu II (1236–70) respectively. These reforms responded to what was perceived to be an age of religious decline and attempted to purify and unify the monastic community, which before 1165 was traditionally said to have been divided into three fraternities, but that in reality was likely even more fragmented than this formulaic enumeration suggests.9 The idea of a ‘reform era’ does not mean, however, that the reform process began or ended with the reigns of these three kings, when in fact moves towards unifying the Saṅgha are apparent in the decades before 1165, in particular during the reign of Vijayabāhu I (1055–1110), and also between 1165 and 1232, when the monastic community emerged as a more coherent and autonomous entity better able to regulate itself. Despite the turmoil of the decades after Parākramabāhu I’s reign, the process of reform, characterized by constant attempts to reconcile the different factions of the Saṅgha and unify them under a single administrative structure, continued even during times of minimal royal intervention, patronage and protection.

This book is the first intellectual history of what was the most culturally productive period in Sri Lanka’s premodern era.10 It is less concerned with cataloguing the doctrinal positions of the reform-era Saṅgha than with describing broader changes in the monastic community’s religious orientation as expressed primarily in the Pali literature composed during the reforms and in the role played by these works in facilitating the reform process. It argues that the intensive production of Pali literature during this era was fundamentally a consequence of the Saṅgha’s emerging political autonomy and that scholar-monks composed works in Pali, in particular philological works, commentaries, anthologies and poems, as a means of framing the increasingly chaotic political landscape of their time within an organizational plane, in which they could navigate their changing social and economic conditions.11
Pali specifically, rather than Sinhala, was the privileged medium for creating this ordered, conceptual space for three main reasons. First, scholar monks viewed Pali as authoritative both because it was the language of the Buddha and because it was thought to have magical properties that made it uniquely capable of expressing reality. Second, reform-era scholars, increasingly conscious of Pali’s relationship with the other literary languages of South Asia, also began to view Pali as a sui generis, independent language that, unlike all other languages in South Asia, was underived from Sanskrit. As such Pali was considered to be ‘pure’ (*saddha*) and we can hypothesize that underlying ideas of moral and linguistic purity, in part, also meant that reform-era works were preferably composed in Pali before being translated and disseminated more widely in what were perceived to be derivative languages like Sinhala. Finally, as a transregional medium, Pali was the choice language for conveying the Saṅgha’s new, unified monastic identity to the increasingly cosmopolitan monastic community at home; to non-Sinhala speaking communities abroad, in particular those in the Tamil South; as well as to the royal court, which from the eleventh century onwards was dominated by foreign rulers and factions such as the Kāliṅgas and the Pāṇḍyas from Northeast and Southeast India respectively.

1.1. Three Orientations of Reform-era Literature

The forces of reform governing the unification of the monastic community are, in many respects, mirrored in the changing form of the Pali literature produced during this period. The new Pali works and textual genres that emerged out of the reforms all reflect, in various degrees, the desire to fight the forces of doctrinal degeneration and social fragmentation. This desire emerges in the literature of the long century in a number of ways but which, for analytical purposes, we can group together under three interrelated orientations, namely (1) an increasing concern for the degeneration of the Dhamma, social-moral order and cosmos; (2) a desire to recover and protect the perceived essential meaning of the Buddha’s teachings through new forms of scholastic enquiry; and (3) an urgent need among elites to accrue vast amounts of merit through devotion to the Buddha, facilitated, in particular, by new aesthetic literary techniques better able to inculcate such devotional sentiments.

The first of these orientations provides much of the context for understanding the development of the other two. The monastic writings of the reform era are haunted by a sense of urgency to counter the perceived decline of their Buddhist tradition. In 993 the South Indian Cōḷa king Rājarāja Cōḷa I (985–1012) invaded Sri Lanka and moved its capital to Pōḷonnaruva, resulting
over the century of Cōḷa rule in the gradual collapse of the old sacred capital of Anurādhapura. The post-Cōḷa political environment was marked, furthermore, by frequent, transregional wars for the throne between rival foreign factions. These events aligned with ideas about the precipitous decline of the Dhamma. The Buddha’s Dhamma, it is said, would last 5,000 years and over time the possibility of liberation would diminish. Faced with social upheaval, monks depict their age as one in which disorder prevails in the interpretation of texts, in the production of literature and in the behaviour of monks. Authors explicitly state that they codified the rules of language, wrote new works and revised old ones with the idea that they were creating order out of what was perceived to be chaos.

These attempts to unify the sprawling Pali textual tradition were based, in part, on the traditional belief that preserving the Dhamma would postpone this inevitable decline. What was innovative about the exegetical approaches of reform-era works, the book argues, is that they adopted new textual models from the Sanskrit tradition while also subtly shifting their attitude concerning the nature of the Dhamma. Scholar-monks of the era, in contrast to earlier commentators, such as Buddhaghosa, began to think of the Dhamma principally as the meaning of the Buddha’s teachings rather than its wording and they place emphasis on distilling and condensing the ‘essence’ (sāra) of this meaning through philological work. The concern for the essence of the Dhamma, rather than simply its literal form, accompanied the development of new modes of scriptural analysis, including new types of grammar, anthology and handbook commentary all of which claimed to recover or protect some essential part of their scriptural heritage that in some way had been obscured by previous scholarly approaches.

The need to protect and preserve their tradition in the face of religious decline was accompanied by a desire to intervene in the circumstances they faced. The eschatological concerns of the scholar-monks of the era shifted their attention to more immanent religious goals – transforming their lives within Saṃsāra rather than obtaining nirvana – since transcendence was perceived to be increasingly difficult to achieve. Central to this shift was a need to develop better karmic conditions for the survival of their religious tradition. The attention of elites thus turned to enhancing the accrual of merit through devotional practices, in particular the cultivation of favourable emotions in the worship of the Buddha and his relics. New forms of Pali literature too played an important role in supporting this emotionally charged soteriology, and scholar-monks, for the first time, composed devotional poems designed to inspire transformative sentiments in their audience. In writing these works, monks disregarded centuries of scepticism about the moral value of ornate
poetry and relied on Sanskrit aesthetics and Sanskrit literary models as a resource for their new literature.

1.2. Theoretical Considerations

A close reading of the texts produced in the reform era allows us to critique and re-examine more generally a number of important themes and concepts frequently used in the civilizational history of Theravada Buddhism. The book challenges ideas about Buddhism in Sri Lanka as an essentially conservative tradition preserving Buddhism in its earliest form, it rethinks the social role of Pali literature as an ‘imaginaire’ or ‘databank’ and lastly it critiques the pervasive characterization of the relationship between the Saṅgha and the royal court in terms of a symbiosis of social functions.

(a) An Island unto Itself?

Island cultures, it is said, can be viewed in two ways, either as ‘continental islands’, that is, those ‘accidental, derived islands’ that at some point drifted away from the mainland, and ‘oceanic islands’, the ‘originary, essential islands’ that spontaneously arose from the sea. These two physical processes mirror the way in which medieval Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been discussed in much academic writing. Early colonialists and Orientalists, for instance, often regarded Buddhism in Sri Lanka and its Pali canon, in particular, as representative of ‘original’ or ‘early’ Buddhism. There was an assumption that the island of Sri Lanka had protected the Buddha’s teachings from the same fate as its Indian counterpart, which according to R.C. Childers (1838–1876) had fallen over time into ‘an extraordinary state of corruption and travesty’.

Related is the commonly held view of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka as an essentially conservative tradition that stubbornly resisted the cultural influence of the wider region. The Theravada Buddhist tradition in Sri Lanka is, of course, conservative in that it strove to preserve the Buddha’s teachings in a literal form, though, as we will see, these practices of conservation were themselves subject to change. What is problematic is the idea of a generalized conservative mentality, almost akin to a political attitude, in opposition to ‘liberal’ Buddhists elsewhere, that has often meant that scholars have viewed Buddhism on the island, in particular during the ‘traditional period’ of the middle ages, as without innovation. In light of the intellectual vigour of the reform era, it is remarkable that Sri Lanka’s foundational
national history, the *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, dismisses the period as follows: ‘This literature does not reveal that there has been much original thinking in the domains of metaphysics, philosophy or doctrine. The Pāli language, in fact, had ceased to be an instrument of original thought long before our period.’

When scholars have recognized the innovations of the Pali literature of the reform era, there has been the opposite tendency to view it as inauthentic, both in relation to canonical language and to the Sanskrit literary tradition. With respect to late medieval Pali poetry, A.K. Warder in particular noted that ‘scholars have often spoken, with something like scorn, of “Sanskritised” Pali in works like these, as if their style of composition is not really legitimate or natural’. We can partly explain this attitude as a by-product of the way Orientalists privileged Pali canonical writings as the authentic representation of Buddhism over those of the later tradition. It re-emerges in the late colonial writings of Sri Lankan scholars too, who sometimes recapitulated the same idea, albeit now imbued with a sense of authentic national identity. G.P. Malalasekera in his *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon*, for instance, linked the influence of Sanskrit during the reform era with the presence of Tamil ‘colonists’ and wrote of Sanskrit as a contaminating influence on Pali. At the same time one can detect an intellectual chauvinism among Sanskrit scholars and historians of India too who habitually ignore Sri Lanka as a participant in the cultural history of South Asia. To his credit, P.L. Vaidya, editor of numerous Buddhist Sanskrit works, put this usually informal bias into writing and, with respect to later Pali literature, once wrote that, ‘save for the lively commentarial literature, it is but a poor imitation of the corresponding works in Sanskrit literature’.

The island model then presents us with a false dichotomy: either medieval Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka was conservative and culturally isolated, or it was derivative and provincial. A combination of these approaches has resulted in the extraordinary fact that the full intellectual significance of this era has been largely overlooked in modern academic writing. This book challenges both positions by demonstrating firstly that Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka was always intimately connected with the history and culture of the Indian subcontinent but that the contours of its engagement appear differently depending on the texts and genre one is looking at. In addition, we will see in the six case studies that the Pali literature of this long century was not simply a mere imitation of continental literary traditions, but rather that it played a genuine and authentic role in Sri Lanka’s changing religious and political life.
The Orientalist view of the Pali canon as original or ideal Buddhism further led some early scholars to view the culture of later Buddhist societies, more generally, as a vulgarization and deviation from the perceived purity and pristine teachings of the Buddha. For almost half a century anthropologists in particular have challenged this approach and have instead analysed contemporary Buddhist societies on their own terms, viewing the historical developments of the tradition as ‘continuities’ and ‘transformations’ rather than deviations. And yet, while scholars no longer make a moral distinction between the Buddhism of Pali literature and contemporary forms of Buddhist life, the dichotomy between the ideal Pali canon and ‘living’ Buddhism – which was originally the product of an Orientalist concern for origins – lives on, in many respects, even in the works of the foremost critics of this view.

Pali texts in some way or another are still used, for instance, as a point of reference for contextualizing local forms of Buddhist belief and practice. While nobody speaks any more of ‘original Buddhism’, the Pali canon and Pali literature in general often form the constituent part of what is signified by more innocuous, but in some cases no less suspect, analytical categories, such as the ‘doctrinal’, ‘orthodox’ and ‘normative’. These concepts are then used as a structural framework to think about the specificities of religion in a particular time and place, sometimes referred to as ‘practical’, ‘popular’ or ‘local’. Distinctions such as these are, to some extent, a necessary outcome of establishing ‘Theravada Buddhism’, both in its universality and particularity, as a coherent, historical and social object of academic enquiry. One unintended consequence of this analytical dichotomy, however, is that, in many cases, what is regarded as ‘doctrinal’, ‘orthodox’ and ‘normative’ is treated as if it transcends history.

This is the case even in one of the most sophisticated models for thinking about the social function of Pali literature in Buddhist civilizational history. In his erudite and expansive work, Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities, Steven Collins coined the felicitous expression ‘the Pali imaginaire’, which he defined as ‘a discursive, textual world available to the imagination of elites, and gradually others, in the premodern agrarian societies of Southern Asia’. It was an ideology, he argues, that primarily established the hegemony of a dominant class comprising the royal court and the Buddhist monastic community and that further served to naturalize its extraction of tribute from the agrarian populace. Collins presents the Pali imaginaire as a stable system, preserved by scholar-monks, enmeshed and intertwined within the societies and cultures of what we might ex post facto call the Theravada world. It played this role throughout what Collins
refers to as ‘the long middle ages’, an agrarian, pre-industrial period that he argues lasted from the third century BCE to the nineteenth century.20

There is much to admire in the notion of the Pali imaginaire as an analytical category, that is, as a way of thinking about the historical influence of ‘the mental universe created by and within Pali texts’.20 The concept, however, has limitations when one tries to historicize the Pali intellectual tradition itself. This is because Collins, due to the admirably broad historical scope of his book, adopts an analytical dualism in which he strategically separates Pali texts as a ‘cultural system’, from what he refers to as ‘socio-cultural life’, with the former possessing an ‘a priori and a posteriori coherence’.30 He states that:

there is sufficient coherence in the Pali imaginaire – at least in the grand matters of time, death, happiness and wisdom with which this book has been concerned – to treat it as a Cultural System in abstraction from its (greater or lesser) imbrication and enmeshment in the Socio-Cultural life of countless millions of people in Southern Asia over countless generations.31

Collins thus approaches the Pali tradition as an intellectual resource independent of the historical Buddhist tradition in which it played an important cultural part. He perhaps overlooks, then, the role of Pali texts themselves as agents of social and cultural change.

While Collins stresses that he treats the Pali imaginaire as autonomous in this way only for analytical utility, he imbes his analytical category with an ontological coherence by connecting it to real economic conditions, explaining that the imaginaire’s constancy and longevity derives from the general stability of the agrarian society of the Middle Ages. Any analysis of the possible dynamic interplay between the ‘cultural system’ and ‘socio-cultural life’ is largely curtailed, therefore, first by his deterministic view of material conditions and second by an exceedingly long definition of the Middle Ages. Peter Skilling in a recent, useful critique has questioned this overly stable depiction of premodern Pali textual culture and the very notion of a long ‘traditional period’, stating ‘I do not see any exceptional degree of stability or cohesion – there is continuity, there is rupture, there is reformation, and there is reformulation, none of which avoid or inhibit change and reinvention.’32 Skilling still subscribes, however, to a similar analytical dichotomy that places Pali textual culture as a ‘databank’, ‘a fount of ideas, a system or network of references and co-ordinates’, and states that these ‘key ideological components are, so to speak, downloaded through sermons and through liturgy, through social etiquettes and hierarchies, through legal enactments and educational patterns, and through architecture and the visual and plastic arts’.33
In critiquing the Pali *imaginaire* I do not wish to challenge the general premise that culture plays a role in structuring agency. Rather, I think it is necessary, if we are to recover the historical agency of the authors of Pali texts, to no longer objectively conflate the analytical category of a ‘cultural system’, that is, the structuring ideas of a society, with existing texts in a particular language. This is important, first, so that we do not confuse analytical utility with ontological reality and second, so that we can view the ideas of Pali texts, where suitable, either as cultural structures – part of the system – or as part of ‘socio-cultural life’, that is, as a key expression of agency in history that allowed individuals to actively and purposefully change and reshape their already existing circumstances. This book emphasizes the latter role of Pali texts in the intellectual history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. It is perhaps better, in this regard, then, to think of these works as something like a matrix (*mātikā*) rather than *imaginaire*; an orientating point of origin that was created to inspire new thoughts, feelings and actions.

(c) Saṅgha, State and Compound Kingship

The economic and intellectual stability that scholars have seen in premodern Theravada Buddhist societies also pervades ideas about the historical relationship between ‘Saṅgha and state’. Frequently invoked to describe all types of premodern Buddhist societies is R.A.L.H. Gunawardana’s description of monastic and court relations in early medieval Sri Lanka as an ‘antagonistic symbiosis’.34 Gunawardana’s useful ecological metaphor reveals an essentially functionalist approach to this relationship, where the state is thought to have provided the necessary coercive power to protect the Saṅgha and, in return, the Saṅgha offered religious ideology and legitimation in support of the state. In its foundations, then, Gunawardana’s notion of symbiosis is clearly inspired by earlier sociological models, such as those of Georges Dumézil and Louis Dumont.35 Gunawardana notes, however, that this symbiosis of functions became steadily antagonistic in the early medieval period due to the fact that the Saṅgha was developing into an increasingly autonomous legal and fiscal entity.36 In his felicitous expression, then, Gunawardana manages to capture not only the historical interdependence between the two institutions but also the often conflictual nature of their relationship.

Gunawardana did not necessarily intend for his expression to be a definitive characterization of the relationship between Saṅgha and state, however. Rather, he coined the expression specifically to describe early medieval Sri Lanka in contrast to Walpola Rahula’s characterization of the early
Saṅgha-state relationship as purely symbiotic and A.M. Hocart’s view that the Saṅgha effectively functioned as a ‘court and kingdom in miniature’.  

It is worth turning to A.M. Hocart (1883–1939) in more detail for our late medieval context since he offered a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between institution and function. Hocart developed a theory of ‘dual kingship’ in which he argues that society is structured by complementary ‘terrestrial’ and ‘spiritual’ functions. While predicated on a similar notion of natural symbiosis, Hocart differs from Gunawardana in that he did not regard function and institution (Hocart’s ‘organization’) as necessarily contiguous. He stresses that this ‘dichotomy need not produce a pair’ and that the duality of functions can manifest in any institutional pattern, whether, one, two or many institutions. When observing the societies of India and Sri Lanka, Hocart observed, in this regard, that:

the Church and the State are one in India. The head of this Church-State is the king … The king’s state is reproduced in miniature by his vassals; a farmer has his court, consisting of the personages most essential to the ritual, and so present even in the smallest community, the barber, the washerman, the drummers and so forth. The temple and the palace are indistinguishable, for the king represents the gods. Therefore, there is only one word in Sinhalese and in Tamil for both. The god in his temple has his court like the king in his palace; smiths, carpenters, potters all work for him.

A.M. Hocart could not have known at the time that what he observed in Sri Lanka had a specific historical genesis. Based, in particular, on the work of Ronald Inden, we can now describe the politics of late medieval Sri Lanka more accurately as one based on political models that developed in India between the eighth and twelfth centuries. Inden describes the medieval Indian imperial formation as a ‘society of kings’ structured by a ‘scale of kingships’, that is, a hierarchy of rulers based on encompassing spheres of lordship, from village chieftains at the bottom to the emperor, or ‘king of kings’ at its worldly apex. Above him, still, Inden describes a higher transcendent king, usually a deity, such as Viṣṇu or Śiva, but also, the Jina too, who bestowed lordship upon the emperor. This formation was not structured by a balance of religious and political functions between institutions but rather – and here we see the influence of Hocart’s more fluid view of social function – Inden describes political power as ‘compound kingship’, ‘the manifestation of divine and human wills relative to one another in a complex agent’. Each of the political actors, then, in this scale of kingship, is a compound king and maintains a diminishing sphere of both temporal and spiritual power.
This book shows that beginning in reform-era Sri Lanka we see monks claiming a similar position for the Buddha as sovereign over the temporal and spiritual worlds and depicting the ruling monarch as the Buddha’s inferior vassal. What is less clear in Inden’s work, however, is where religious specialists, such as Buddhist monks, fit within such a scale of kingship. Inspired by Hocart’s analysis of the sociological position of the Saṅgha, the book argues that the monastic elite in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries increasingly styled itself as an independent royal court led by a king-like figure, the so-called ‘grandmaster’ (mahāsāmi), with an administrative structure that resembled a political actor. Monastic elites presented themselves, rather than the king and his court, under the Buddha at the apex of Laṅkā’s long chain of lordship and believed that the superior rights enjoyed by the Buddha should extend first to them before the king. The relationship then between the Saṅgha and the royal court was no longer one of an antagonistic symbiosis but rather a hierarchy of compound kingship, in which, at least from the monastic perspective, the Buddha and monastic elites possessed temporal and spiritual rights superior to the ruling king and nobility.42

1.3. Chaos, Order and Emotion

This book is divided into three parts, ‘chaos’, ‘order’ and ‘emotion’. In part one, we explore the historical context of the first of our overarching themes, namely that the cultural efflorescence that took place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was in part a response to social and political disorder. The term ‘chaos’ is not used to denote a complete breakdown of order but rather reflects the multiple, competing orders that ruptured the stable social structures of the previous millennium.

In the first chapter we will explore the prehistory of the reform era in the two centuries before the reform and unification of the Saṅgha in 1165. The chapter focuses in particular on the Cōḷa invasion and rule of Sri Lanka in the tenth century and the role it played in the rise of new centres of monastic power, changes in the cultural make-up of the royal family in Sri Lanka, and the increasing authority of Sanskrit textual models within the Saṅgha’s literary culture. In the second chapter we will then situate the production of Pali literature itself within the immediate context of the monastic reforms that took place in the era. The chapter outlines in broad terms the connection between reform-era Pali texts, the Saṅgha’s developing institutional autonomy and the localization of politics on the island.

The following two sections of the book are divided according to the two other intellectual orientations that shaped the reform era, namely a desire
to enframe and protect the essential meaning of the Buddha’s teachings and to accrue transformative merit through devotion to the Buddha. In part two, ‘Order’, we will discuss the connection between social and political disorder, monastic perceptions of religious decline and the emergence of new types of grammar, commentary and anthology.

Chapter three discusses the prominence of grammar or vyākaraṇa in reform-era intellectual culture. It focuses on the new grammar of Moggallāna and its perceived role as the first line of defence in stemming religious decline. Moggallāna adopted Sanskrit grammatical models and philosophies of language that allowed the Saṅgha to think about their scriptures in new ways. In chapter four, we turn to Sumaṅgala’s reform-era handbook commentaries and highlight the development of a new scholastic formalism in these works, based in part on the pedagogical needs of the reform-era school system. These formal changes were accompanied by a reappraisal of the authority of handbooks and the nature of scriptural language. Chapter five focuses on the composition of new anthologies, in particular, Siddhattha’s Sārasaṅgaha, ‘Compendium of the essence’. It explores how Siddhattha used new philological techniques to curate his scriptural heritage into practical models for pursuing religious goals relevant to his chaotic era, in particular the pursuit of buddhahood through devotional practices.

In part three, ‘Emotion’, we explore in more detail the renewed emphasis on religious devotion to the Buddha, in particular relic worship, in the reform era, its role in instantiating a new social order presided over by monastic elites, and how these changes in orientation reflected and were supported by the development of independent works of Pali kāvya or poetry, including histories of the Buddha’s relics and Buddha biographies.

Chapter six focuses on the development of Pali poetics (alaṅkāra) in the reform era and investigates how literary theorists abandoned their scepticism about the religious value of ornate poetry and instead came to view literary eloquence in devotional poetry as a moral virtue. In chapter seven, we then turn to how Pali kāvya worked in practice. One relic history, the Dāṭhāvaṃsa or ‘History of the tooth’, the chapter argues, was used to establish devotional relationships with the reform-era’s shifting elites and to instantiate relic shrines and the monastic leadership above the royal court at the pinnacle of a new devotional and political hierarchy. Chapter eight concerns a similar development in the composition of ornate Buddha biographies. It explores in particular how one Buddha biography, the Jinālaṅkāra or ‘Ornament of the Conqueror’, managed the aesthetic experiences and religious ambitions of its audience so as to support, rather than destabilize, monastic power.

The final chapter brings together the different intellectual strands discussed in the book, namely the creative influence of perceived religious
decline, the desire to protect the Buddha’s teachings through new scholastic forms, and the perceived need to accrue transformative merit through devotion to the Buddha, as expressed in particular in new forms of Pali poetry. It then explores how Pali literary production changed in Sri Lanka in the two centuries after the reform era and reassesses the way in which reform-era monastic lineages were transmitted to Southeast Asia, in particular to the Pagan empire in what is now Burma.

Notes

1. See Wallace, 2018. Mahayana literature and some early Pali texts before Buddhaghosa also interpret the so-called ‘analytical knowledge of language’ (niruttipatisambhidā, Sk. niruktipratisamvid) as the ability of an enlightened being to convey the Dhamma in any language necessary. See Mahāyānasūtrānsūtrasvaṃvatī of Asaṅga, 18.34; Peṭakovadāsa, 33.34–4.


6. Taking as guides: Franke, 1902; Von Hinüber, 1996; Subhūti, 1876.

7. See chapter nine.

8. The dates given after the names of kings and queens, unless otherwise specified, refer to the duration of their reigns. On the regnal dates of reform-era kings and queens, see chapter three.

9. See chapter two.

10. There are a number of useful social, economic and political histories that, at least in part, cover the reform era. Book-length studies include, for instance, Ariyapala, 1956; Bechert, 1966; De Silva, 1981; De Silva, 1997; Dhammavisuddhi, 1970; Gunawardana, 1979; Ilangasinha, 1992; Liyanagamage, 1968; Panabokke, 1993; Ray, ed. 1959–60.

11. Throughout this book I have found useful Whitney Cox’s recent work on politics in premodern South India. See Cox, 2016, esp. 16–21. I borrow the concept of an ‘organizational plane’ from Deleuze and Guattari, 1994. I have found helpful their distinction between the chaotic conceptual world as a whole, the ‘virtuality’, and the local conceptual orders immanent within this virtuality that help agents think and act. For an earlier, looser adaptation of similar Deleuzian ideas in the interpretation of the Sri Lankan ‘Suniyama’ ritual, see Kapferer, 1997. I have also found particularly inspiring Alan Strathern’s recent monumental study on religious and political change in premodernity, especially his second chapter. See Strathern, 2019.

12. Here, see chapter two.

13. On this, see the discussions in chapters one and four.

14. A number of other works have drawn a connection between cultural production and eschatological expectations. See, in particular, Blackburn, 2001, 80–6; Blackburn, 2017; Frasch, 2014; Frasch, 2017.


17. Childers, 1875, xii.
19. See, for instance, Paranavitana, 1960, 566–70.
24. I borrow the description of Pali texts as a ‘view from nowhere’ from a critical appraisal of this position in Choompolpaisal, 2008.
27. Collins, 1998, 1–11. This book owes a great deal to the works and advice of Steven Collins. In testament to his generosity as a teacher and intellectual spirit, I am particularly grateful to him for encouraging me to engage more critically with his work.
34. The expression is employed by Steven Collins, for instance, to describe premodern Buddhist civilizations in general. See Collins, 1998, 1–40. It has been adopted in comparative studies of premodern religion too.
37. Hocart, 1968, 67–8. Hocart recognized that this dichotomy was an analytical distinction rather than a natural one, stating that ‘the divorce of temporal and spiritual is unnatural; for both are rules of living, and there cannot be two sets of rules’ (176).
38. Hocart, 1970, 162–79. Hocart recognizes that this dichotomy was an analytical distinction rather than a natural one, stating that ‘the divorce of temporal and spiritual is unnatural; for both are rules of living, and there cannot be two sets of rules’ (176).
39. Hocart, 1970, 289. He earlier in the work distinguishes the fluctuating functions of persons or organizations in contrast with the more stable functions of what he calls ‘personages’, that is, characters or representations of persons. He writes, for instance, that ‘we thus see how vain it is to try and define the terms “priest”, “king” in fact any titles. You cannot define what is in a constant state of flux; priest passes into king, especially law-king, such as the Dalai Lama and the Pope, and king may be assimilated to priest.’ See Hocart, 1970, 200.
42. This is not to say that this phase of ‘compound kingship’ cannot be thought of as a development on the antagonistic symbiosis of the early medieval period. It is simply that we need to view symbiosis as defining the relationship between functions (in this case, of a single institution) and not between institutions, since function and institution were no longer identifiable in the reform era. Rather, the relationship was now largely competitive and hierarchical, with co-operation induced through the powers of persuasion rather than met as a result of social needs. See also the extended discussion in the notes on part four of chapter eight.