

Hoisted by their Own Petard

The Emergence of Sri Lankan Buddhist Printing and Counter-Christian Activities

Ann-Kathrin Bretfeld-Wolf

This contribution describes the emergence of print technology in Sri Lanka and the role it played in shaping modern Sri Lankan Buddhism, as exemplified by the case study of the textual transmission of the *Mahāvamsa*, a chronicle of the history of Sri Lanka. The first part is devoted to a description of the reception of this work in the European scholarly tradition, followed by a brief examination of the interaction of oral and manuscript transmission of Buddhist texts in pre-modern Sri Lankan Buddhist culture and society. *Vamsa* literature can be seen as a product of the change from orality to writing. The establishment of printing culture in the nineteenth century however changed the status of this type of literature. The rediscovery of *vamsa* literature by European scholars caused a change in the reception and use of this genre in Sri Lanka. Thus, in recent times *vamsas* are seen as historical literature and play an important part in Sinhala Nationalism.

1. Introduction

In 1736 the Dutch established the first printing press in Sri Lanka. The use of the technology remained a monopoly of the European colonial powers for the first 100 years¹ and was mainly applied for missionary activities like the printing of Christian works in Sinhala. This changed in the middle of the 19th century when a newly emerged Buddhist elite started to use printing for its own purposes. Prior to the introduction of printing, Sri Lankan Buddhists had used manuscripts for the preservation and promulgation of their knowledge. As has been emphasised by recent publications,² Buddhist manuscript culture needs to be seen as a social practice and therefore as connected to certain institutions, routines, and performances. One of those works is Anne Blackburn's study of transformations within monastic education in 18th-century Sri Lanka that resulted in the composition of new *sannaya* texts; *sannayas* are Sinhalese word-for-word explanations which enabled those who were not familiar with Pāli to gain access to the canonical literature (Blackburn 2001). The

¹ The Dutch were succeeded by the British in 1796.

² See for example Berkwitz, Schober, and Brown (2009).

employment of these new *sannaya* texts, called *sūtra sannayo*, in public recitations merged monks and laity into a new textual community and created a “reading” Buddhist public (Blackburn 2001: 171). If the selection of language contributes to such transformations of the reading practice, what types of changes could then be brought about by the use of mass media like printing? Media historian Marshall McLuhan has already addressed the question of habitual and practical change in relation to the introduction of new media (McLuhan 1962). Elizabeth Eisenstein published an extensive study on the impact of the introduction of the printing press in Europe (Eisenstein 2009). Although several studies have been published on changes of textual media in Europe, the application of this topic in relation to Asia is rather rare. Therefore this paper will consider the textual media change from manuscripts to printed books in 19th-century Sri Lanka. We will focus mainly on the *Mahāvamsa* (5th or 6th century), because its popularity as a printed book had a major impact on the creation of cultural and national identities of Sinhalese Buddhists in the late colonial phase. Simultaneously, from the perspective of European philologists and historians the text was seen as a valuable source and the key to explore Sri Lanka’s past. In the *Mahāvamsa* and other texts of the genre of *vamsa* literature (succession/lineage literature) the past is organised in the form of lineages of important groups of persons, objects, or practices. 19th-century scholars proudly announced the so-called “chronicle literature” of Sri Lanka to be the only existing historical tradition in South Asia. In doing so they imposed their notions of history and textual authority upon Buddhist texts. The *Mahāvamsa*, like several other works of Asian history of literature, was made accessible in critical editions that catered to the needs and interests of the European academia, including ordered annotation of variant readings, page and verse numbering, datings of kings and other persons according to Christian chronology, and indexes to personal names, locations, or cited works. Later, Buddhists adopted these textual authority structures in their own printing activities and thus promoted a major shift in the usage of Buddhist texts. This paper will investigate this shift connected to the rise of printing in Sri Lanka and the related socio-historical processes by example of the *Mahāvamsa*. Before we turn to a short history of orality and writing in Sri Lanka and the mentioned socio-historical processes, we will first devote some words on the European scholarly reception of the *Mahāvamsa* and related texts, which was strongly influenced by its printed form and the aforementioned performative shift.

2. The Reception of *Vamsa* Literature in Europe

In 1837 George Turnour published his English translation of the *Mahāvamsa*. Suddenly the text became accessible for scholars not familiar with Pāli, and the *Mahāvamsa* was gradually established as the main source for the reconstruction of the history of Sri Lanka and other parts of India. Intensive

discussions were held concerning the historical value of the *vaṃsas*, especially the *Mahāvāṃsa*. Wilhelm Geiger arrived at the conclusion that, when leaving aside all the legends and accounts of miracles, one could find valuable, historical information in this kind of literature (Geiger 1943). Turnour's and Geiger's works, together with those by scholars like Rudolf Otto Franke and Erich Frauwallner, gave rise to an initial manner of reception in which the search for historical authenticity was in the foreground.³ Here, *vaṃsas* served as containers of information, and everything that was not deemed useful for the reconstruction of a historically "reliable" picture of the past was banished to the realm of mythology.

This search for historical authenticity was followed by a second line of reception embodied by scholars like Heinz Bechert, Frank Perera, and Steven Kemper, who focused on the ideologies expressed in *vaṃsa* literature. In a prominent article Bechert ascribed political meaning to the *Mahāvāṃsa* and its predecessor from the 4th century, the *Dīpavaṃsa* (Bechert 1969). According to him *vaṃsa* texts form historiographies, in which religion and national consciousness are combined and a certain political ideology is expressed, namely "the equation of the concept of the state with that of a linguistically and culturally unified nation and its religion."⁴ This connection between the classical chronicle and a modern concept of nation has been widely discussed in the scientific field. Regarding its historical value Jonathan Walters was among the first to emphasise that texts like the *Mahāvāṃsa* needed to be treated carefully when using them as historical sources. His main argument was that the *Mahāvāṃsa* only represents one possible interpretation of Sri Lanka's Buddhist past, namely that which emerges from the perspective of the monastic group of the Mahāvihārins (Walters 2000: 150).⁵ In recent years the search for historical authenticity and ideologies has been contested by various scholars who have begun to see *vaṃsa* literature from a more ethical and practical perspective.

This third type of reception centres around the social practice connected to *vaṃsa* literature. This rather recent development is mainly connected with the works of Stephen C. Berkwitz (Berkwitz 2004), Kevin Trainor (Trainor 1997), and Kristin Scheible (Scheible 2010). In a case study Berkwitz

³ Franke (1907), Frauwallner (1984), Turnour (1836), and Geiger (1905). Between Franke and Geiger a dispute over method broke out that focused on the question of the historicity of the Pāli *vaṃsas*. Geiger's response followed in Geiger (1909: 540-550).

⁴ "[D]ie Gleichsetzung der Sache des Staates mit der einer sprachlich kulturell [sic!] einheitlichen Nation und ihrer Religion" (Bechert 1969: 49; my translation).

⁵ The Mahāvihārins have been the dominant school of monks in Sri Lanka until today. Until the 13th century their rivals had been the monks of the Abhayagirivihāra and the Jetavanavihāra in Anurādhapura. However, the Mahāvihārins prevailed and nothing is left of the other two schools.

(2004)⁶ points out that there are religious practices and certain notions of identity connected with the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*. One aim of that text is to remind people of deeds done by great persons of the past who serve as models for responsible and meritorious religious activity (Berkwitz 2004: 291-292); by reminding the recipients, the text adopts an appellative function, because people are requested to behave in a certain way, for example to offer flowers in front of a *thūpa*.

Berkwitz refers to the practical dimension of texts: *vaṃsas* are historical accounts but also represent a kind of manual for the practice of relic veneration. Accounts and descriptions of relic veneration can be found frequently in *vaṃsa* texts. In the *Mahāvaṃsa*, for example, a long account, extending over four chapters, is given on the history and enshrinement of a small share of Buddha relics within the Mahāthūpa in Anurādhapura. In this way, *vaṃsas* narrate the background of relic veneration and give plausibility to this practice: by telling the “succession” of particular relics of the Buddha, their authenticity is “proven.” Furthermore, the specific localisation of the relics is described in these stories. Finally, the text provides models for the veneration of relics. By revealing favourable rebirths of past heroes the positive effects of religious behaviour are illustrated. Whereas a practical message was paramount in the pre-modern textual practices of these texts, this message changed with the use of printing: it was transformed, under the influence of modern textual scholarship, into a storehouse of information, contributing to the European academic project of universal history, and into a testimony of an ancient identity policy. This brought forth the first two types of specialists in Asian history. Representatives of the third type attempt to complement the former two approaches with a focus on pragmatic dimensions these texts had for the formation of religious subjects and their embodiment of cultural values.

Vaṃsas prospered in a time when Buddhist texts were handed down in the medium of manuscripts. A look at the transition from oral to written transmission will shed some light on the development of certain practices and authority structures related to the medium of Buddhist manuscripts in Sri Lanka.

⁶ The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* was composed in the 13th century based on the Pāli *Thūpavaṃsa*. It represented one of the first texts written in the Sinhalese vernacular.

3. From Orality to Written Texts

The introduction of writing to India is dated to the Mauryan period,⁷ 4th to 2nd century BCE. The Aśokan edicts constitute the oldest extant testimonies, written in Brāhmī. In this context, Jens Braarvig formulates the hypothesis that the “development of writing seems to have been closely connected with the promulgation of Buddhism” (Braarvig 2012: 250), as he considers writing to have been crucial for the spread of Buddhism and Buddhist knowledge transfer. He contrasts this with the situation in the Vedic or Brahmanical tradition, where sound was the most important feature in the transmission of sacred knowledge, whereas Buddhism favoured conveying meaning by written texts (Braarvig 2012: 250 ff.).

However, writing was not involved in the spread of Buddhism right from the beginning. Before the usage of writing, the preservation of the *buddhavacana* (the word of the Buddha) was accomplished by an oral system of transmission, performed by monks who memorised the word of the Buddha in terms of labour division. This so-called *bhāṇaka* (reciter) system developed in Northern India from the 4th century BCE onwards. It may be speculated that the *bhāṇaka* system was gradually changed with the advent of writing.

When Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE, the *bhāṇaka* system was introduced along with it. According to Buddhaghosa, the missionary Mahinda brought the *tipiṭaka* to the island, which was then spread further (Jayawickrama 2010: 63). Only a few centuries later writing was used to transmit Buddhist “texts” in Sri Lanka. The writing down of the *tipiṭaka* and related commentaries is believed to have taken place in the 1st century BCE in the Aluvihāra monastery. The introduction of writing gave rise to new genres of literature, one of them being *vaṃsa* literature. Although *vaṃsa* texts are based upon oral predecessors and reference texts (Geiger 1905: 11), it was only after they were written down that the genre evolved into the form that is preserved today.

Although writing gained importance for the production and transmission of texts, orality as a text-related element did not disappear. The *Dīpavaṃsa*, for example, the oldest existent *vaṃsa* text, contains an important reference to orality at its very beginning:

I will set forth the history of Buddha’s coming to the Island, of the arrival of the relic and of the Bo (branch), of the doctrine of the teachers who made the recensions (of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*), of the propagation of the Faith in the Island, of the arrival of the chief of men (*Vijaya*); listen. (Oldenberg 1879: 1.1)

⁷ See for example von Hinüber (1990) and Falk (1993); the latter gives a comprehensive overview of the 19th-century discussion concerning the introduction of writing in India.

The invitation “listen to me” (*sunātha me*) refers to the practice of recitation. From this we can conclude that texts were meant to be recited orally in front of an audience rather than read silently or in private. The aspiration *sunātha me* appears in later texts as well, for example in the *Mahāvamsa* and in the 13th-century *Thūpvamsa*. Public reading performances seem to have been the natural medium the authors of classical Buddhist texts had in mind when they composed their works. Trainor concludes in dependence on Geiger that *vamsa* texts were not only recited in public but also “used liturgically in the context of regular religious festivals commemorating significant occasions in the history of the island” (Trainor 1997: 81). A hint to this fact can be found in the *Cūlavamsa*, as one passage provides the information that king Dhātusena ordered a recitation of the *Dīpavamsa*:

After having an image made of the great Thera Mahinda
he brought it to the spot where the Thera’s body had been burnt, to organise there at
great cost a sacrificial festival.
He gave orders with the outlay of a thousand gold pieces, for the interpretation [*dīpetum*]
of the *Dīpavamsa*
and commanded sugar to be distributed among the *bhikkhus* dwelling there. (Geiger 1929:
38.58-59)⁸

The exact interpretation of this passage is contested. Even though Geiger translated *dīpetum* as *interpretation*, which can be either a written or oral act, he explains in a footnote that the presented activity is reading and not compiling of a text. The former translation understands *dīpetum* as an illustrated recitation as a part of the festival performances, the latter would mean the festival provided an opportunity for king Dhātusena to order a new commentary to the *Dīpavamsa* to be written. However, with regard to the general presence of recitation in the Sri Lankan Buddhist sphere we can assume that this passage from the *Cūlavamsa* most probably refers to a public narration of the Mahinda story in colloquial language, following the *Dīpavamsa*’s structure of the account. In addition, this narration was probably interspersed with sung verses from the *Dīpavamsa* in Pāli. Such a scenario is reasonable to assume as similar practices became established in the so-called *baṇa* tradition (recitation tradition) which emerged in the 13th century and is believed to be a transformation of the older *bhāṇaka* tradition (Deegalle 2006: 45):

baṇa encompasses four interrelated devotional activities, and within each preaching is paramount: (1) giving religious instruction; (2) rhythmic reading of a religious text in

⁸ *Mahāmahindatherassa kāretvā paṭibimbakaṃ therass’ ālāhanaṃ netvā kātuṃ pūjaṃ mahārahaṃ, datvā sahassaṃ dīpetuṃ Dīpavamsaṃ samādisi, ʾhitānaṃ tattha bhikkhūnaṃ dātuṃ c’āṇāpayi guḷaṃ.*

public; (3) reading a religious text aloud and explicating its content in the vernacular; and (4) narrating *Jātaka* stories with or without explanations. (Deegalle 2006: 17)

However, recitation was not the only element of orality that remained connected to Buddhist texts. As Braarvig states, *mantras* and *voces magicae* were also found in the Buddhist tradition and here “literature was rather for the sound of the reading and magical effect than for understanding its content” (Braarvig 2012: 249). Steven Collins identifies a remaining element of orality within the transmission process of Buddhist texts: one person read the text aloud to a scribe, and the scribe then wrote down the words which he had heard. From this Collins concludes that the Buddhist tradition of texts continued to be oral, although written texts existed (Steven Collins 1992: 128). Still, to characterise the Buddhist textual tradition as oral even after the establishment of writing would go too far. Although the South Asian heritage of the high status of orality was still somehow present, writing developed into the most important medium for the production and transmission of Buddhist knowledge. This especially becomes apparent in the arising of new textual practices with the introduction of writing. We will consider these practices using the example of the *Mahāvamsa*.

4. Worship for a Better Future

The *Mahāvamsa*'s main concern is to give an account of the establishment of the “true *dhamma*” in Sri Lanka. The text was popular in Sri Lanka but also in Burma and other parts of Southeast Asia. This was promoted by the spread of Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism to Southeast Asian countries in the 13th century. In the course of these translocal Theravāda network relations a high degree of exchange of texts took place, so that newly compiled texts were relatively quickly exchanged between Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia (Frasch 2001: 96).

In Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia the *Mahāvamsa* existed in different versions. The *Extended Mahāvamsa*, for example, probably has a Southeast Asian text tradition, as all extant manuscripts are in Cambodian script (von Hinüber 1996: 93). Further, Burmese and Cambodian manuscripts of the *Mahāvamsa* and *Mahāvamsa-ṭīkā*, its commentary, bear witness to the presence and distribution of these texts in Burma and Cambodia.

The *Mahāvamsa* served as a model and reference text for the composition of autochthonous texts in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. This is illustrated in the spread of certain narratives and story lines that reappear frequently in different *vamsa* texts. One example is the motif of the visiting Buddha that appears in several Sri Lankan *vamsa* texts, and in a modified form also in the 15th-century Thai *vamsa Cāmadevīvamsa* written by Bodhiraṃsi. Here, the motif of the visiting Buddha and certain

narrative elements have been adopted, whereas the setting of the story was transferred to Northern Thailand (Swearer and Premchit 1998: 37-40). This accounts for the function of the *Mahāvamsa* as a reference text and as a model after which texts like the *Cāmadevīvaṃsa*, *Dhātuvamsa* or *Thūpavaṃsa* were modelled.

However, reports from British colonial times suggest that at the time of its European discovery the *Mahāvamsa* was not very prevalent any longer. In his introduction to the *Epitome of History* Turnour states that manuscripts of the *Mahāvamsa* are only “rarely found in the temples” (Turnour 1837: xvii). According to a letter by Sir A. Johnston the *Mahāvamsa* was seen by Sri Lankan priests as an important text, bearing “the most genuine account which is extant of the origin of the Buddha religion, of its doctrines, of its introduction to Ceylon” (Turnour 1837: vii). With the “discovery” of the *Mahāvamsa* by Johnston and Turnour the text came to European attention. The seminal, most widely circulated edition and translation of the *Mahāvamsa* were both done by Geiger in the beginning of the 20th century and constitute the most authoritative edition until today. In its printed form the *Mahāvamsa* gained widespread popularity and publicity. For example, modern histories of Sri Lanka rely heavily on the *Mahāvamsa*. Together with inscriptions and archaeological findings it constitutes an important reference source for the reconstruction of events from Sri Lanka’s past. Furthermore, and in the same context, the *Mahāvamsa* serves as a kind of flagship for Sinhala nationalism. Therefore it is not exaggerated to state that this text is omnipresent in Sri Lanka.

The *Mahāvamsa* in pre-modern Sri Lanka is tied to the medium of written manuscripts, which are accompanied by a set of textual practices. Before we turn to the description of these practices we will first consider a brief description of manuscripts in general: as they are made from palm leaves, so-called *ola* leaves, the shape of manuscripts depends on the shape of the leaves. Pages consist of one palm leaf. These pages are tied together by a string that runs through two holes. “The distance at which the holes are punched follows a definite rule” (de Silva 1938: xiv). The manuscript as a whole is surrounded by two woodblock covers called *kamba* which are usually decorated. A manuscript of the *Mahāvamsa* from Haguranketha, for example, has a *kamba* that is illustrated with golden, flowery ornaments and small black lines on a red background. According to B. D. Nandadeva these flower illustrations on *kambas* represent offerings in honour of the *dhamma* (Nandadeva 2009: 159). He describes paintings of flowers on *kambas* of manuscripts as a visual liturgy and points out that they “have the same ritual and visual function as actual flowers offered in ritual veneration of the Triple Gem” (Nandadeva 2009: 167). Another form of textual veneration is the affirmation in the beginning of the *Mahāvamsa* that states *namo tassa bhagavato sammā sambuddhassa* “Honour to him, who is blessed, worthy, and fully enlightened”. This constitutes the most prominent and widespread

affirmation of textual veneration within Pāli works and is found in the beginning of texts very frequently. This *namaskāra* (exclamation of homage) is usually separated from the following textual body by a visual offset in jagged lines. As described by several scholars, manuscripts of Pāli texts, like canonical or *vaṃsa* texts, constitute representations of the *dhamma* and are therefore considered as part of the triple gem. This classification explains textual practices of veneration like the *namaskāra* and flower illustrations connected with these texts. Nandadeva also states that manuscripts containing the *dhamma* of the Buddha are seen in Sri Lanka “as live, animated objects” and are treated in the same way as representations of the Buddha and monks, i.e., with veneration and respect (Nandadeva 2009: 165). However, veneration is not the only textual practice associated with the *Mahāvamsa*.

Being a representation of the *dhamma*, the *Mahāvamsa* is also connected to the textual practice of gaining merit. Berkwitz distinguishes between three different types of expressions of this practice: “1) blessings (*āsīrvāda*), 2) affirmations about the benefits associated with Buddhist texts (*dharmānisamsa*), and 3) aspirations (*prārthanā*)” (Berkwitz 2009: 43). *Āsīrvādas* like *svasti siddham ka* are found on the margins of manuscripts pages. Berkwitz sees this practice, which he considers as a scribal convention, as a mimicry of *paritta* (protection) chanting (Berkwitz 2009: 45). According to him “the *dharmānisamsa* texts celebrate the efforts of those who write, read, and listen to texts, providing a clear rationale for engaging in all kinds of textual activity” (Berkwitz 2009: 45). And *prārthanā*, being at the end of the text, refer mainly to the writers or patrons of a text and the merit they gained with the creation of this work (Berkwitz 2009: 46). All three types of expressions therefore relate to the gaining of merit.

As we will see later, not all elements described here can be found in printed editions neither in each and every palm-leaf manuscript of the *Mahāvamsa*. Each manuscript is unique and comes with its own variations. Hence, the production and transmission of Pāli Buddhist texts like the *Mahāvamsa* has to be regarded as a unique product of a religious practice, prefigured by rules but open for improvisation. The medium of manuscripts is therefore tied to performance. The individual manuscript is thus an imprint of the partly free activity of making religious merit by copying it, illustrating it, endowing it with (written) blessings, ordering and sponsoring its production.

In addition to its importance at the level of religious practice, there was also a vivid and distinct scholarly tradition connected to Buddhist texts. In this regard, commentaries formed the most important type of texts. Commentaries were a widespread vehicle for the scholarly examination of older texts with a long tradition. One example is the *Mahāvamsa-ṭīkā*, the commentary to the *Mahāvamsa*. In the period of manuscript transmission the composition of commentaries required that

the commentator knew a lot of texts by heart. There were no indices and hardly any detailed tables-of-content or even layout indicators to facilitate his access to the text he commented upon, nor to others he wanted to cite in his interpretation.

Buddhist manuscripts served as a medium over centuries and played a major role in the religious field, both on the levels of distributing religious knowledge and performing religious practices. But have there been any changes to these practices with the adoption of the medium of printing in the nineteenth century?

5. Printing Saves Buddhism

The statement that printing would save Buddhism was made by the Sri Lankan monk and Buddhist revivalist Mohoṭṭiwattē Guṇānanda in the early 1860s in order to obtain funds for the establishment of a Buddhist printing press (Young and Somaratna 1996: 134). In the following we will explore the historical and social context of this assumption.

As mentioned above, printing was not introduced to Sri Lanka before the 18th century. Though woodblock printing had been invented in China as early as in the 7th century and spread to other countries like Korea, Japan, or Tibet, it was not present in South and Southeast Asia. There, manuscripts formed the most important medium of texts up to the modern period. The increased activity of Christian missionaries in 19th-century Sri Lanka led Buddhist leaders to wish to publish printed books. The first Buddhist printing press, called Laṅkopakārā Press, was established in Galle in 1862 with the help of the king of Siam (Malalasekara 1958: 303)⁹ and was guided by Hikkaḍuvē Sumaṅgala, an important monk of the Buddhist Revival Movement. During the same period another famous monk, Mohoṭṭiwattē Guṇānanda, ran the Sarvajña Press in Koṭahēna, Colombo. Many others followed, which led to an increased use of printing to publish Buddhist texts. With regard to Sinhalese manuscripts Mark Frost states, for example, that “between 1880 and 1924 every major classical Sinhala work had been edited and published” (Frost 2002: 945). Printing had an influence on textual practices, not primarily because of its technology but because of the contexts in which it emerged: Buddhist-Christian controversies. Therefore, as Blackburn has noticed, the increasing usage of printing by Buddhists was connected with the so-called Buddhist Revival Movement (Blackburn 2010: 199). A short presentation of the movement’s historical background will illustrate this point.

⁹ In the same year the Society for Propagation of Buddhism was founded by Guṇānanda (Frost 2002: 944).

George D. Bond summarises four changes on different levels that were triggers for the rise of the Buddhist Revival Movement (Bond 1988).

1. Before the British rule colonial activities of the Dutch and Portuguese were limited to the coastal areas, while the highlands were still ruled by Sri Lankan kings of the Kandy kingdom. This changed when the British extended their rule of the coastal area to the highlands and changed the political system by deposing the king (political level).

2. and 3. Since power did not lay in villages any longer, the possibility of gaining wealth was no longer bound to a particular caste but led to a formation of a new elite beyond the caste system (economic and social levels).

4. Further, the British had an interest in this new elite and founded schools to promote it (educational level). Bond states:

Although the exact causes for the beginning of the revival are difficult to trace, the rise of an educated, Westernized laity and the repression of both the traditional Buddhist elite, the *Sangha*, and traditional Theravada itself proved to be tandem forces that generated the need for reform. (Bond 1988: 21)

Bond dates the beginning of the Buddhist Revival Movement to the 18th century and establishes a connection with the reform activities of the monk Saraṇāṅkara, who introduced the Siam Nikāya in 1753 and laid the foundation for a general period of monastic reform (Bond 1988: 46).

However, the formation of active Buddhist printing more than a hundred years later occurred during another period of the Buddhist Revival Movement, which was marked by the founding of several Buddhist educational institutions from 1845 onwards, whose purpose was to serve as an alternative to British-Christian education.¹⁰ Likewise, the rise of printing is connected to the fact that the Buddhist Revival Movement responded to the growing influence of Christianity with reactions directed against it as well as imitations of it. Early printing activities mainly included the printing of anti-Christian expressions such as “scurrilous single-sheet broadsides, angry four-page tracts, and the occasional lengthier and weightier pamphlet on Christianity” (Young and Somaratna 1996: 41). Although — as R.F. Young and G.P.V. Somaratna have shown — before the Buddhist use of printing an apologetical tradition against Christianity on palm-leaf manuscripts existed, printing increased these textual anti-Christian activities (Young and Somaratna 1996: 113). Furthermore, the rise of printing

¹⁰ In 1845 the Parama Dhamma Cetiya Piriveṇa, an institution that offered higher education for Buddhists, was founded in the South of Colombo. In the 1870s graduates of this *piriveṇa* founded further institutions such as the Vidyodaya Piriveṇa at Maligākanda, which was established by Sumaṅgala (see Bond 1988: 46).

took place during the period of debates between Christians and Buddhists from 1864 until 1873. These debates were held orally as public events and afterwards published by the Buddhist presses (Young and Somaratna 1996: 47). In these times, printing was mainly limited to the publication of anti-Christian texts in various forms. This changed with the great debate of Pānadura between Mohoṭṭiwattē Guṇānanda and David de Silva in 1873, which marked the peak of the period of debate, in that from this time the printing of Buddhist texts was considered as well. The Sinhalese translation of the *Milindapañha* called *Milindaprasānaya*, a version compiled by Hīnaṭikumburē Sumaṅgala in the 18th century, was among the most important texts that were printed during that period (Malalasekara 1928: 303–304). The choice of this particular text as one of the first printed Buddhist texts is quite telling, since it recounts an ancient debate between Buddhist monks and Greeks (or, more precisely, a dialogue between the Indo-Greek king Menandros and the Buddhist monk Nāgasena) and as such, another encounter between Sri Lankans and Western foreigners. The edition was published by Guṇānanda’s press in Kotahena in 1877 (Young and Somaratna 1996: 210).

Printing activities with regard to the *Mahāvamsa* began during the same period. They took place at the boundary between the cultural interests of the colonial government and the revivalist agenda of the new Buddhist elite. In the 1870s monks like Sumaṅgala Hikkaḍuvē and Pandit Baṭuvantuḍāvē were requested by the British colonial government to create editions and translations of the *Mahāvamsa* (Kemper 1991: 95).¹¹ Even a continuation of the text into the most recent history was produced. All of them were published by the Government Printer. This new edition added new elements foreign to the manuscript design. These mainly served the intellectual desires of philologists and historians of Indian Culture. Therefore, the introduction and establishment of a printing culture not only established a new technology but also implemented new structures of textual authority and functions originating in European academia. However, we must realise that these conventions were not simply European norms for book printing forced upon the emerging Buddhist textual community but also creatively used to “adequately” react to Christian attacks.

A comparison of manuscripts and printed editions of the *Mahāvamsa* shows that there is a variance in the appearance of the text regarding different formats or materials, like paper or palm leaves. Three aspects stand out that relate to connected notions and conventions: illustration, standardisation, and organisation.

1. As we have seen in the previous section, manuscripts of *vamsa* texts in the pre-modern era had a strong connection to religious practice. They were objects of worship, “witnesses” of worship,

¹¹ For a more detailed account of publishing activities around the *Mahāvamsa* see Kemper (1991) and Blackburn (2010).

and simultaneously manuals for this worship. Therefore, illustrations were commonplace in manuscripts. However, printing as a technology heavily influenced by Protestantism did not provide for the worshipping of texts.

2. Driven by the idea that the value of a text solely rests upon its intellectual content, a certain form of standardisation was established. In classical text-critical editions this quest for content was accompanied by the additional task of discovering the “original” content the historical author had actually written. While variants occur frequently in manuscripts, and manuscripts of the same text may differ from each other in their appearance, the text becomes standardised in printed editions. Illustrations and variations disappeared or, as in the case of the latter, were organised in a different way, namely documented in footnotes. Printing marked the birth of critical editions as we know them today.

3. The organisation of texts changed through the use of footnotes and page as well as verse numbers, which enabled different readers to refer to the same text edition. However, pre-modern texts on manuscripts were also standardised and organised, but the form was different. Considering again the example of the *Mahāvamsa* and its manuscript from Haguranketha, it becomes obvious that layout and form of texts on manuscripts are shaped by the medium of palm leaves. The text flows continuously and extends across the whole page. Verses are only separated by a black jagged line. This structure of manuscripts emphasises the narrative flow. The story as a continuous whole stays in the foreground, an aspect that is also reflected in the commentaries and thus in genuine Buddhist scholarly examinations, as these follow the narrative flow of the respective texts. Few illustrations and a high degree of standardisation and organisation in printed editions point to the transfer of the *Mahāvamsa* into a new discursive setting that carries its own authority structure. This structure is now shaped by European formal scientific requirements. Mark-up like footnotes, headings, numerations, long introductions by the editor and indexes guaranteed that an edition would be critical and easily accessible. The index allowed scholars unfamiliar with the text to access it and to quote from it. Printed books were produced with the purpose of collecting and accessing information. Thus, texts like the *Mahāvamsa* became repositories of single particles of information which could easily be re-organised into completely different structures of knowledge authority, such as, for example, history-writing according to European standards. A topic like relic-worship is no longer directly communicated by the *Mahāvamsa* in this sense, but it can recur in studies of cultural history making use of the *Mahāvamsa* as a source. Therefore, we can observe in the shift from manuscripts to printed books how the *Mahāvamsa* transforms from a historical narrative into a historical source.

Within the complex entanglement of European-influenced printing culture, colonial forces, scientific interest and upcoming anti-colonial movements the *Mahāvamsa* has become a work of reference for scholars from various disciplines. However, the status as a reference work is not new to the *Mahāvamsa* since it has been the major reference or model for the compilation of new works like the *Thūpavamsa*. But with printing this status has moved into the European-influenced dimension of science and experienced a perceptual shift. Whereas in the period of manuscript transmission the emphasis of *vamsa* texts was on their narrative flows, printing transformed this to the use as an information container, in which the overview of the whole was often abandoned in favour of the focus on details.

Yet, this whole process of adoption and transformation cannot be considered as a one-sided, culture-hegemonic imposing of “Western” achievements. Rather, it has to be seen as a process influenced by two major lines: British-Christian colonialists and Sri Lankan Buddhist revivalists. The case of the *Mahāvamsa* shows very clearly that this text “became a contested site for control of the Sri Lankan past” in the 19th century (Kemper 1991: 79), with Oriental scholars on the one side and Buddhist revivalists on the other. The history provided in these ancient texts had become the major interest for both sides, the texts’ connection to religious practice took a back seat.

6. Conclusion

In the course of the Buddhist Revival Movement nationalistic ideas arose, in which especially the *Mahāvamsa* played an important role. Thus, next to the scientific a nationalistic discourse emerged, and both strongly interwove and influenced each other. This interaction is still strong today. The general world-wide importance of printing for the emergence of nationalistic ideas has been addressed by several scholars (Eisenstein 2009: 117; Anderson 2006, Kindle edition, chap. 3, par. 20). In the case of Sri Lanka Kemper argues in his study of the *Mahāvamsa*, referring to Benedict Anderson, that the technology of printing contributed fundamentally to the rise and diffusion of nationalistic ideas in Sri Lanka, but he refuses to see them as merely the results of an adaptation of Western models (Kemper 1991: 19). Unlike several earlier studies his investigation sets out from the premise that foreign ideas have to share connecting factors with local ideas and practices (Kemper 1991: 18).

This points to the complex situation of cultural entanglement in which printing in Sri Lanka emerged. Printing represents only one of many factors contributing to the re-fashioning of the *Mahāvamsa* as a central focus of reference on Sri Lanka’s way into Modernity. The adoption of new conventions of text production and reception brought forth a completely new model of education and intellectual engagement in the context of the Buddhist Revival Movement. The leaders and

addressees of this movement were mainly members of the new social and economic elite who were educated according to British standards in the many Christian missionary schools along the west coast. Thus, the transformation of textual practices also gave rise to creative tension between new and traditional forms of religious learning and engagement, which quite quickly shaped a new form of Buddhism. This development gained momentum through the anti-colonial and anti-Christian discourse, which governed these processes right from the beginning. Printing marked a new period in which Buddhist self-confidence and identity grew stronger amidst a British-dominated environment.

In summary, we can say the introduction of a new medium has had a transforming influence on the dimensions of textual practice. However, this influence must be seen before the background of broader historical and social processes, which provided a framework as well as direction for its transformative thrust. What is striking is that both media changes analysed in this article, the one from orality to writing and the one from manuscript use to printing, stimulated the emergence of new forms of Buddhist identity production.

We have seen that the wider introduction of writing in India was connected with the promulgation of Buddhism. In contrast to supporters of the Brahmanical tradition, Buddhists turned writing and manuscript usage into a major constituent of religious practice and reproduction, even if orality nevertheless remained important for the recitation of Buddhist texts—and hence also for their publication. In the exemplary case of the Sri Lankan *Mahāvamsa* it has become obvious how Buddhist manuscripts are subject to practices of text veneration. Therefore, the scholarly investigation of Buddhist textual sources cannot be reduced to their semantic content. Furthermore, during the period of manuscript transmission the narrative flow of the text stood in the foreground. Hence, sophisticated systematic procedures, such as finding parallel passages for exegetic purposes, required memory-based mastery of large literary collections, rather than physical tools of text access (indices etc.). This situation changed with the rise of printing in 19th-century Sri Lanka. During its 300-year history in Europe printing had already helped to form several epochs of literary history, such as Reformation and Enlightenment, before it arrived in Sri Lanka in 1736. Another 100 years passed before printing was adopted by Sri Lankan Buddhists. This happened at a time of increasing resistance against Christian influence. Personalities like Sumaṅgala Hikkaḍuvē and Mohoṭṭiwattē Guṇānanda endorsed strategies and technologies used by Christian missionaries and transformed them to serve the Buddhist cause. As members of the new anglicanised elite, these leaders of the Buddhist revival movement not only used printing as a technology but also adapted associated European notions of what textual authority had to consist of. For example, the medium of printed

books transformed the perception of *vaṃsa* texts into one of information containers that were not necessarily accepted in total, but “critically” scrutinised according to reliability, rational acceptability, source criticism, originality, ideological implications and the like. The authority structure of European science was introduced also through the backdoor of specific layouts and the organisation of textual presentation (e.g. headings, numerations, and indexes). The usage of the *Mahāvamsa* marked a shift from the dimension of religious practice into the scientific and, later, nationalistic discourse.

References

- Bechert, Heinz. 1969. *Zum Ursprung der Geschichtsschreibung im indischen Kulturbereich*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Bechert, Heinz. 1978. “The Beginnings of Buddhist Historiography. Mahāvamsa and Political Thinking.” In *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, edited by Bardwell L. Smith, 1-12. Chambersburg, Penn.: Anima Books.
- Berkwitz, Stephen C. 2004. *Buddhist History in the Vernacular*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Berkwitz, Stephen C. 2009. “Materiality and Merit in Sri Lankan Buddhist Manuscripts.” In *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures. Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*, edited by Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober, and Claudia Brown, 35-49. London: Routledge.
- Berkwitz, Stephen C. and Juliane Schober, and Claudia Brown. 2009. *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures. Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Blackburn, Anne M. 2001. *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth Century Lankan Monastic Culture*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Blackburn, Anne M. 2010. *Locations of Buddhism. Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bond, George D. 1988. *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka. Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Braarvig, Jens. 2012. “The Spread of Buddhism as Globalization of Knowledge.” In *The Globalization of Knowledge in History*, edited by Jürgen Renn, 245-267. Max Planck Research Library for the History and Development of Knowledge. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://www.edition-open-access.de/studies/1/index.html>.
- Collins, Steven. 1992. “Notes on some Oral Aspects of Pali Literature.” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35.2-3: 121-135.
- Deegalle, Mahinda. 2006. *Popularizing Buddhism. Preaching as Performance in Sri Lanka*. New York: Suny Press.
- Eisenstein, Elizabeth. 2009. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change. Communication and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Kindle edition.

- Falk, Harry. 1993. *Schrift im alten Indien. Ein Forschungsbericht mit Anmerkungen*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.
- Franke, Rudolf Otto. 1907. "Dīpavaṃsa und Mahāvaṃsa." *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 21: 203-250, 317-372.
- Frasch, Tilmann. 2001. "The Buddhist Connection. Sinhalese-Burmese Intercourse in the Middle Ages." In *Explorations in the History of South Asia. Essays in Honour of Dietmar Rothermund*, edited by Georg Berkemer, Tilmann Frasch, Hermann Kulke, and Jürgen Lütt, 85-97. New Delhi: Manohar.
- Frauwallner, Erich. 1984. "Über den geschichtlichen Wert der alten ceylonesischen Chroniken." In *Nachgelassene Werke. Aufsätze, Beiträge, Skizzen*, edited by Ernst Steinkellner. Wien: Verlag der ÖAW.
- Frost, Mark. 2002. "'Wider Opportunities.' Religious Revival, Nationalist Awakening and the Global Dimension in Colombo, 1870-1920." *Modern Asian Studies* 36.4: 937-967.
- Geiger, Wilhelm. 1905. *Dīpavaṃsa und Mahāvaṃsa und die geschichtliche Überlieferung in Ceylon*. Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Nachf.
- Geiger, Wilhelm. 1909. "Noch einmal Dīpavaṃsa und Mahāvaṃsa." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 63: 540-550.
- Geiger, Wilhelm. 1980. ed. *Cūḷavaṃsa*. Vols. I, II. 1925/27. Combined Reprint. London: Pali Text Society.
- Geiger, Wilhelm. 1929. trans. *Cūḷavaṃsa*. Vol. I. Reprint. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2003.
- Geiger, Wilhelm. 1943. *Pali Literature and Language*. Reprint. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2004.
- Hinüber, Oskar von. 1990. *Der Beginn der Schrift und frühe Schriftlichkeit in Indien*. Wiesbaden: Steiner.
- Hinüber, Oskar von. 1996. *A Handbook of Pali Literature*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Jayawickrama, N.A. 1962. *The Inception of Discipline and the Vinaya Nidāna being a Translation and Edition of the Bāhiraṇidāna of Buddhaghosa's Samantapāsādikā, the Vinaya Commentary*. Reprint: Bristol: Pali Text Society, 2010.
- Kemper, Steven. 1991. *The Presence of the Past. Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Malalasekara, G.P. 1928. *The Pali Literature of Ceylon*. Reprint: Colombo: Gunasena, 1958.
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1962. *The Gutenberg Galaxy. The Making of Typographic Man*. London: Routledge.
- Nandadeva, Bilinda Devage. 2009. "Flowers for the Dhamma. Painted Buddhist Palm Leaf Manuscript Covers (kamba) of Sri Lanka." In *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures. Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*, edited by Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober and Claudia Brown, 159-171. London: Routledge.
- Oldenberg, Hermann. 1879. *Dīpavaṃsa*. Reprint: New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2001.
- Perera, Frank. 1979. "The Early Buddhist Historiography of Ceylon." PhD diss., University of Göttingen.
- Scheible, Kristin. 2010 (2011). "Priming the Lamp of Dhamma. The Buddha's Miracles in the Pāli Mahāvaṃsa." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 33.1-2: 435-451.

- Silva, W. A. de. 1938. *Catalogue of Palm Leaf Manuscripts in the Library of the Colombo Museum*, Vol I. Colombo: Ceylon Government Press.
- Swearer, Donald, and Sommai Premchit. 1998. *The Legend of Queen Cāma. Bodhiraṃsi's Cāmadevivaṃsa, a Translation and Commentary*. New York: Suny Press.
- Trainor, Kevin. 1997. *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism. Rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravāda Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turnour, George. 1837. *An Epitome of the History of Ceylon. Compiled from Native Annals and the First Twenty Chapters of the Mahawanso*. Ceylon: Cotta Church Mission Press.
- Walters, Jonathan S. 2000. "Buddhist History. The Sri Lankan Pāli Vaṃsas and Their Community." In *Querying the Medieval. Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia*, edited by Ronald Inden, Jonathan S. Walters, and Daud Ali, 99-164. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Young, R.F., and G.P.V. Somaratna. 1996. *Vain Debates. The Buddhist-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon*. Vienna: Sammlung de Nobili.

Ann-Kathrin Bretfeld-Wolf is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the NTNU Trondheim, Norway. Her main interests are Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, Material Religion and Spatial Approaches to the Study of Religion. She was trained in German and Religious Studies at the Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany.