

SUTTA CENTRAL

Early Buddhist texts, translations, and parallels

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: Scanning and transcribing the Cullavagga manuscript of Parākramabāhu II

It was with great delight and not a little surprise that I recently came across a 13th century manuscript of the Pali Cullavagga in the National Library of Colombo. As soon as I saw it I recognized its great value, and realized the need for a digital edition for use by Pali scholars. With this letter Venerable Abhayatissa and myself propose the establishing of a project to scan and transcribe the manuscript.

In recent years, Pali scholars internationally have shown an increasing interest in the manuscript tradition. Most published Pali texts are based on manuscripts that are no more than a century or two old. While we believe that these are reliable witnesses for a much earlier textual tradition, it is important to establish this as firmly as possible.

The Parākramabāhu II Cullavagga manuscript is five centuries older than most published sources, but remains in exceptionally good condition despite its great antiquity. It is one of the few surviving Pali manuscripts that pre-dates the re-importing of manuscripts from Burma and Thailand in the 18th century.

Here is an initial proposal for the scope of the project.

1. Scan the manuscript in high-resolution images.
2. Engage an epigraphic expert to assess the script.
3. Carbon date the manuscript.
4. Have the manuscript typed and carefully proofread.
5. Publish digitally and in print.
6. The text, as well as accompanying artwork and historical context, should be described in appropriate international journals.

The manuscript is the property of the Department of Archaeology, and is currently on display in the National Museum of Colombo. We respectfully request the permission of these two bodies to undertake this project. We also would like to notify the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and the Department of Cultural Affairs in order to seek their kind endorsement and support. We envisage that this will be a project of national and international cooperation, involving a number of experts in the field. If there is a positive response, we will proceed to make a detailed proposal.

Should there be any questions, please do not hesitate to contact myself or Venerable Abhayatissa.

Yours with respect,

Bhante Sujato

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