CROSSING THE WATERSHED: BUDDHIST EDUCATION, DEVOTION AND COMMUNITIES IN NINETEENTH CENTURY SRI LANKA[1]

Introduction

The many fields across which we work have been profoundly altered in recent years by the emergence of provocative and often sophisticated studies of colonial experiences. Most often focused on the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such studies have applied the constructivist insights of post-Orientalist scholarship—indebted to the work of Michel Foucault and Edward Said—to a range of contexts. Scholars of southern Asia have seen a dismantling of many earlier assumptions about the cultural forms and practices that constitute the focus of our work. In place of long-held views about the essential stability of ethnic and religious identity in southern Asia, for instance, many of us have come to see intensified colonial presence in the region as the catalyst and arena for the construction of Asian "traditions." On this view the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a powerful though subtle transformation of cultural forms and practices, a transformation often implied to be unprecedented in southern Asian contexts. Arguments in favor of this perspective on cultural transformation typically highlight the complex interaction of three forces: colonial administrative practices, Orientalist scholarship, and local assimilations of a conception of self and community naturalized by this political and scholarly discourse.[2]

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[1] The ideas presented below were developed primarily through series of presentations made for the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Annual Conference on South Asia (1999), the Department of Philosophy and Religion at the College of Charleston (1999), the Department of Religion at Bard College (2000) and the New England/Maritimes Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (2000). I am grateful to all of these audiences for thoughtful questions and comments but wish to thank especially: Laura Ahearn, Carol Anderson, John Clayton, Robert Culp, Richard Davis, and Mark Whitaker. I am grateful to the University of South Carolina for funding the preliminary research on which much of this essay is based. For a fuller perspective on Vidyodya and Hikkaduv ē Sumaṅgala (indebted to a wider range of sources in Sinhala and English) and a more detailed response to the idea of "Protestant Buddhism," see my 2002 lecture forthcoming in *Nēthrâ* "Buddhism, Colonialism, and Modernism: A View From Sri Lanka."

Despite their obvious power and creativity, however, these post-Orientalist analyses of colonial experience remain haunted by a critical weakness. What I call, for the sake of convenience, post-Orientalist analyses of later colonialism are weakened by their lack of historical depth. Accounts of cultural transformation brought on by the invention of "tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) in the crucible of colonialism remain less persuasive than one would like because they exist largely without connection to thick and subtle descriptions of local contexts before the advent of heightened colonial activity.[3] Moreover, their claims frequently fail to convince because they are put forward without a detailed understanding of the history of local institutions within which encounters between colonizer and colonized took place.

"Buddhist Modernism" and Monasticism

Accounts of nineteenth century Sri Lankan Buddhist thought and practice provide a provocative context for reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of post-Orientalist analyses of later colonialism. According to such accounts, the last third of the nineteenth century witnessed a rather sudden transformation of Buddhism on the island, a transformation often described as the rise of "Buddhist Modernism" or "Protestant Buddhism."[4] On this view, the result of an increasingly strong colonial administrative apparatus in place of a royal patronage system, the proliferation of missionary activities, and a growing Orientalist dedication to the study of Buddhist origins was a "watershed" in the history of Sri Lankan Buddhism (Gombrich 1988, 172). As Richard Gombrich puts it,

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[2] See, *inter alia*, Breckenridge and van der Veer (1983), Cohn (1996), Kemper (1991), Mani (1990), Said (1978) and Spencer (1990).

[3] On this point see also Blackburn (2001, Chp. 1) and Pollock (1993).

[4] The classic accounts of "Buddhist Modernism" and "Protestant Buddhism" are, respectively, Bechert (1988) and Obeyesekere (1976). For critical reflections on "Protestant Buddhism," see Holt (1990), Harris (Forthcoming) and Blackburn (2001 and Forthcoming).

> The confrontation with Christianity is the one great and sudden break in Sinhalese Buddhist history, far more significant than the vicissitudes which affected the fortunes of the sangha during the previous two thousand years (1988, 22-3).

Buddhism post-watershed is typically described as rationalist, increasingly fundamentalist with respect to authoritative Pâli texts and, importantly, characterized by growing lay autonomy from monastic authority and monastic institutions. In other words, Sri Lankan Buddhists are said to have moved away from the supernatural and ritualistic dimensions of their "tradition," and toward a de-mythologized approach to Buddhist "scripture." This is attributed to the combined effects of an encounter with the natural sciences of modern Europe, exposure to biblical-critical reevaluations of "scriptural" authority, and the assimilation of European scholarly accounts of the Buddha as a reformer of degenerate and overly-ritualized Hindu practice. At the same time, as the watershed argument goes, growing Protestant Christian influence on the island led Buddhists to develop increasingly a form of religiosity oriented by the canonical texts of the Pâli tipiṭaka rather than by the larger and diverse array of Buddhist devotional texts composed during the medieval period. Moreover, Protestant Christian emphases on the individual's transformative relationship to the divine through scripture and distrust of the monastic life are understood to have spurred a shift toward lay Buddhist autonomy and activism on the island.

Such bold analyses of nineteenth century Sri Lankan Buddhist culture raise important questions for a broader community of scholars concerned to delineate the effects of colonial contact on local cultures. In this preliminary essay, developed in response to theories of "Buddhist Modernism" and "Protestant Buddhism" as part of larger project of research, I hope to show that the study of local religious educational practices in the context of colonization provides a rich and complex perspective on the relationships between colonization, dynamic local religious institutions, and the emergence of what may be called "national" communities.[5]

As this essay unfolds, I approach questions about the character of local religious communities within the larger perspective of global colonial presence by looking at the Sri Lankan Buddhist community over a period of a hundred years from one perspective. In my view the study of Buddhist monastic careers within the Buddhist reveals much about changes and continuities in Sri Lankan Buddhist culture during the nineteenth century. Any evaluation of the watershed view of nineteenth century Sri Lankan Buddhism requires an attempt to understand in some detail the processes through which the island's residents encountered Buddhist teachings, reflected upon them, and drew them into a complex array of devotional practices. The study of monastic lives lived at the intersection of lay and monastic institutions provides a historically dense and locally comparative perspective on these processes.

Monastic sermons were the primary means through which lay men and women encountered Buddhist teachings until the emergence of large-scale printing establishments at the end of the nineteenth century (Blackburn 2001, Mahinda 1995). Even after printed texts and newspapers entered more widespread distribution at the turn of the century, monastic authors and editors continued to dominate textual production. Thus an examination of monastic learned culture provides important information about the nature of religious ideas encountered by lay and monastic Buddhists alike throughout most of the century and about the degree to which the texts and interpretations put forward during the nineteenth century differed from those popular in earlier centuries. The study of monastic lives in their institutional settings also highlights the ways in which monastic Buddhists responded to the concerns and constraints of changing lay communities. By looking at the types of patronage monks received from lay men and women, for instance, it is possible to discern subtle changes in lay expectations of their monastic teachers and exemplars, and to explore the impact of an increasingly diverse lay community on Buddhist institutions and devotional practices.

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[5] In this essay, I do not pursue a full review of the growing literature on the nature and rise of nationalism. Key works include: Anderson (1991), Bayly (1998), Chatterjee (1986, 1993), Gellner (1983) and Kemper (1990).

One might say, in more general terms, that the study of monastic lives thus provides a particularly auspicious vantage point from which to understand how nineteenth century Sri Lankan Buddhists came to inhabit new "interpretive communities" (Blackburn 2001, Davis 1997, Fish 1980), communities influenced but not fully determined by their experience of colonial contact within the cultural constraints of empire. By looking at changes and continuities in the nature of monastic learning, at the place of monasticism in a cultural politics of display, and at the relationships between monks and their lay patrons we learn much about the historical particularity of being a monk, but also of being a Buddhist, in Sri Lanka's later colonial period.

Moraṭota Dhammakkhandha

I focus on the lives of three major monastic figures whose careers – taken together –span the demise of the royal Kandyan court, growing British presence on the island, and significant changes in the character of local elite communities. [6] These lives provide a particularly useful set of cases through which to explore questions about continuity and change in nineteenth century Sri Lankan Buddhism and, more generally, about cultural transformation within the context of colonialism. With careers reaching from the heart of the royal Kandyan period to the first stirrings of nationalist sentiment on the island, all three monks were powerful public figures, celebrated by lay and monastic Buddhists alike for their work as Buddhist teachers and monastic leaders. All three monks were members of the same monastic order, the Siyam Nîkāya and established in 1753 with the assistance of monks from

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[6] For the purposes of this brief essay, I primarily cite biographical information presented in Buddhadatta (1950), a compilation of monastic biographies for important Buddhist teachers from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries that draws on written and oral histories within the Sri Lankan monastic community. The larger project from which this essay stems naturally involves a larger range of sources, including prose and verse biographies composed about individual monks, institutional documents, and correspondence.

Ayutthaya. As members of the Siyam Nîkāya all three men participated in the order's monastic administrative system, according to which authority over ordination and, at times, influence over monastic appointments was held by monastic officers based in the two largest temples of the island's up-country, Kandyan, region (Blackburn 2001, Chps. 2-3). At the same time, however, the fact that two of these monks hailed from low-country rather than up-country villages makes them an apt point of orientation when reflecting on the growing power of Buddhist communities in Sri Lanka's coastal region throughout the nineteenth century (Peebles 1995, Roberts 1982, Seneviratne 1999).

I begin in the late eighteenth century, in the central highlands of Sri Lanka, with a monk named Moraṭota Dhammakkhandha. At this time Dutch and British merchants, soldiers and administrators contested control of Sri Lanka's coastal areas which were a lucrative source of spices and other luxury goods for sale in Europe, India and Southeast Asia. They also sought to command the trading corridor running from India's southwest to China. At the center of the island, despite occasional incursions from the Dutch and the ongoing pressure to negotiate unfavorable treaties with Holland and Britain, the largely landlocked Kandyan Kingdom retained its autonomy. Dhammakkhandha rose to power within the Buddhist monastic community at the peak of Kandyan royal patronage of Buddhist institutions, dominated by the new Siyam Nîkāya. Despite colonial pressures on the Kingdom's economy, Buddhist temples and monastic educational centers were well endowed by the king and other leaders at the royal court. Born to an elite brahmin family, Dhammakkhandha studied with the founding monk of the Siyam Nîkāya, Väliviṭa Saranamkara. By virtue of his close relationship to the order's founder and leader, Dhammakkhandha was well placed to move rapidly to a position of authority within the monastic community. Dhammakkhandha appears to have made the most of this possibility.[7]

The style of Dhammakkhandha's movement through the order's hierarchy reveals much about the nature of monastic life during this time. In particular, it offers important evidence of the nature of monastic learning, the role played by monastic learning in a cultural politics of display, and the nature of lay-monastic patronage relations. As a young monk Dhammakkhandha studied in the most prestigious educational centers of his day, following a curriculum established by his teacher and the founder of his order, Saraṇaṃkara. This curriculum, used within all of the order's educational centers, led promising monks through four educational levels. In part through the use of manuscripts written on palm leaves, and in part through aural-oral learning, Dhammakkhandha and his fellow monks studied Pāli tipiṭaka texts and their commentaries, as well as some of the devotional prose texts popularized during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The monks who studied the Siyam Nîkāya's standardized curriculum, and who drew its interpretive emphases into their work as preachers, significantly shaped the character of eighteenth century Buddhist understandings of religious teachings and desirable action. As I have argued elsewhere (Blackburn 2001, esp. Chp. 6), the educational practices of Dhammakkhandha and his confrères impacted lay and monastic Buddhists, all participants in the island's new interpretive community.

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[7] The preceding paragraph and those on Dhammakkhandha that follow partly recapitulate arguments made in Blackburn (2001, Chps. 2-5).

While Dhammakkhandha's life story tells us much about the ways in which lay and monastic Buddhists encountered Buddhist teachings and wove those teachings into the fabric of their lives, it also illuminates other aspects of late eighteenth century Buddhist life, such as the impact of lay expectations on monastic practices. In the monastic culture of this period, advancement within the order was determined by familial connections and scholarly attainments. Public displays of learning, especially through preaching and poetic composition, were crucial to the receipt of substantial lay patronage. Though set apart from and above those of their lay patrons in certain ways, monastic careers were determined by the ability to excel in an elite performative culture that cut across the island's several religious communities, and across lay and monastic lines.

The circumstances of Dhammakkhandha's higher ordination reveal this clearly. As was customary during the later years of the eighteenth century, candidates for monastic higher ordination were required to demonstrate publicly their skill as Buddhist scholars, typically by reciting an original verse composition or by offering an oral commentary on a highly regarded Buddhist text. One monastic account, while perhaps luxuriant in its detail, underscores the high stakes involved in such performance. Capturing the attention of king Kīrti Śri Rājasiṃha with a moment of compelling exposition before monastic and court leaders, Dhammakkhandha is said to have been dressed in royal ceremonial clothes, and processed around the city of Kandy. Only after this somewhat ironic reenactment of the Buddha's own renunciation—which simultaneously served the cause of king and monk—did Dhammakkhandha receive his ordination (Buddhadatta 1950, 12).

Like most men who went on to gain substantial appointments within the monastic community at this time, Dhammakkhandha continued to attract and sustain lay and monastic patronage through demonstrations of erudition. In recognition of his preaching skills, for instance, Dhammakkhandha received the monastic incumbency at Degaldoruva Vihāra, an appointment that brought with it considerable landed wealth. In time Dhammakkhandha was invited by the king to reside at an important royal temple, Gaṃgārāma Vihāra, a key monastic educational center from the mid- to late eighteenth century. Celebrated as a teacher of laymen as well as of monks, Dhammakkhandha eventually received the title of Rājaguru, one of the most prestigious appointments possible for monks during that period. At the culmination of his career Dhammakkhandha became the Mahānāyaka for the most powerful of two sub-divisions within the Siyam Nîkāya. As Mahānāyaka of the Malvatte sub-division, Dhammakkhandha exercised considerable power over monastic appointments and ordination procedures. In doing so he was tightly bound to the royal court, which remained the guarantor of monastic bureaucratic procedures until the fall of the Kandyan Kingdom to the British in 1815 (Blackburn 2001, Chps. 3-4, Buddhadatta 1950, 12-13).

Lay patronage closely determined monastic advancement during Dhammakkhandha's lifetime. Significantly, one patron – the king – was the primary focus of monastic attention and anxiety. An almost certainly apocryphal story eloquently crystallizes these anxieties. It describes Dhammakkhandha's test at the hands of king Rājādhi Rājasiṃha, for whom he had served as Rājaguru. Responding to rumors that Dhammakkhandha's expert knowledge of monastic disciplinary texts received little practical application, the king is said to have dressed up as a woman and entered the sleeping quarters of his erstwhile monastic teacher. Seeing the richly ornamented "female" form in the wee hours, Dhammakkhandha discerned the king's intention and composed a short poem on the spot, filled with references to the Buddhist festival month of *äsala*. Faced with the monk's unflagging wit. Rājādhi responded in turn with a poem that, significantly, celebrated both the monk's virtue and his wisdom (Buddhadatta 1950, 14-15).

Valānē Siddhārtha

The monk Valānē Siddhārtha was born near Pānadura on Sri Lanka's southern coast in 1811. During his childhood the British colonial administration took full control of the island, a move marked by its conquest of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. The conquest of the Kingdom—which formally marked the island's inclusion within British imperial formation—and removal of the king from power accelerated the autonomization of low-country Buddhist monks from the Kandyan-based system of monastic administration. Although Siyam Nîkāya monks continued to visit the two chief Kandyan temples in order to obtain higher ordination, the authority of Kandy-based monastic leaders over appointments diminished without the king as guarantor of the administrative system. There is considerable evidence of rising tension within the monastic community, as monks in the coastal areas began to question the authority of highland monks who had dominated the order from the mid-eighteenth century onwards (Malalgoda 1976, Sannasgala 1964, esp. 508-527). In this increasingly contested situation, caste antagonism played a major role as lower caste monks from the island's coastal regions sought to displace a highly stratified monastic bureaucracy (Roberts 1982). In addition, the increasing distance visible between low-country and highland monks owed much to the emergence of new elites in the low-country whose pursuit of both material and symbolic capital took place in the developing coastal towns (Peebles 1995).

By the time Siddhārtha received higher ordination at Kandy's Malvatte Vihāra in 1831, the ideal path to be followed by a monk with ambitions in the monastic community was far from clear. It was no longer possible to invigorate a burgeoning monastic career with an extended stay in Kandy designed in part to capture the attention of the king. Indeed, it was by no means evident how an intelligent monk was to turn his learning to advantage, or which lay patrons were likely to be the most fruitful focus of a monk's activities. Siddhārtha's early years as a monk reveal these uncertainties. Yet it is interesting to note that uncertainty about ***how*** a monk was to use his learning did not appear to cause a marked shift in the nature of ***what*** he studied. What we know about Siddhārtha's early educational experiences strongly suggests that he followed the curriculum established for Siyam Nîkāya monks by the order's founder Saraṇaṃkara. Seeking an advanced education, Siddhārtha studied at Pälmaḍulla Vihāra in Sabaragāmuva. Pälmaḍulla's monastic educational program was set squarely within Saraṇaṃkara's tradition (Blackburn 2001, Chp. 3). The monastic teachers with whom Siddhārtha studied – Gālle Medhaṃkara and Induruvē Sumaṅgala – were closely bound to Saraṇaṃkara's lineage through the monk Karatoṭa Kīrti Śrī Dharmārāma (Buddhadatta 1952, 70-71). Although the monks with whom Siddhārtha studied and the temples in which he studied were no stranger to visits by colonial administrators and missionaries who sought information about Buddhism and training in Pāli and Sinhala (Young and Somaratne 1996), I have thus far encountered no evidence that the substance of Siddhārtha's education was altered by this contact context.

In the absence of a single powerful patron or group of patrons prepared to assure his future, Siddhārtha returned to his home temple, Valānē Vihāra. There he began to develop a favorable reputation as a teacher able to count several skilled lay and monastic figures among his student circle. By the mid 1840s Siddhārtha's work as a teacher and preacher was sufficiently well known to attract the attention of lay patrons based several towns distant, in Ratmalāna on the outskirts of Colombo. These lay patrons, led by one Don Purolis Lēkam Rāḷahāmi, invited Siddhārtha to spend the rains retreat at a new monastic educational institution established under their patronage (Buddhadatta 1950, 71-72). This invitation was quite quickly followed by one to reside permanently at the Paramadhammacetiya Piriveṇa as its head teacher. Siddhārtha's experience of the lay patrons from Ratmalāna, which we might think of as a successful instance of head-hunting within the monastic community, marks the start of a strikingly new chapter in the history of Sri Lankan Buddhist lay-monastic relations.

Although Siddhārtha's growing visibility was the result of activities closely akin to those in which Dhammakkhandha had engaged – teaching and preaching – the patronage context in which he operated was significantly transformed. In the first place, Siddhārtha's movement from one institutional setting to another was not characterized by the clear and unilateral appointment by a monastic or lay superior. This contrasts sharply with the professional experience of monks in Dhammakkhandha's generation, whose mobility was sharply circumscribed by royal desires and the centralized Kandyan monastic bureaucracy. Siddhārtha and his lay patrons appear to have engaged in a period of mutual scrutiny before Siddhārtha became a full-time resident at Paramadhammacetiya. In another interesting departure from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century practice, the lay patrons involved in the establishment of Paramadhammacetiya broke with existing patronage norms. Instead of establishing a new Buddhist temple or moving to dominate the community of lay supporters at an existing temple, these men choose to start a new educational center without connection to a temple site.

Much remains to be learned about Siddhārtha and his patrons, which makes it impossible to offer any sustained analysis of the reasons for an altered institutional context in which displays of learning were undertaken and made the object of public commentary. It is likely, however, that Siddhārtha's success at Paramadhammacetiya is to be explained with respect to at least two factors. One was the increasingly diverse set of elite communities in the Colombo area who sought new environments within which to play the long-honoured role of Buddhist patron. A second factor was the emergence of a new discourse on learning within Sri Lanka's Buddhist community, a discourse prompted in part by the growing attention to education visible within the island's colonial administration.[8] Although the activities of lay patrons did not reveal a desire to alter the nature of Buddhist higher education on the island, they do indicate a small but significant change in lay Buddhist understandings of religious education. The establishment of Paramadhammacetiya suggests the emergence of a new view of religious education as a cultural practice in some ways separable from devotional activities.

Hikkaḍuvē Sumaṅgala

The career of Hikkaduvē Sumaṅgala reveals the crystallization of trends within the Sri Lankan Buddhist community first visible during the career of Siddhārtha. Born, like Siddhārtha, in the southern maritimes (though at a greater distance from Colombo), Sumaṅgala entered the monastic community at age fourteen in 1840. Considered to be a promising young monk, Sumaṅgala was brought by his teachers to the newly established Paramadhammacetiya Piriveṇa in the mid 1840s for an advanced education. His period of study there overlapped with the arrival of Siddhārtha, under whom Sumaṅgala studied. After completing the program of higher studies at Paramadhammacetiya,Sumaṅgala remained there for a time on the teaching staff (Buddhadatta 1950, 92-94).

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[8] On this point, in English, see C.R. de Silva (1992) and K.M. de Silva (1981).

In Sumaṅgala's education we find further evidence of considerable continuity in the nature of Buddhist learning. Sumaṅgala trained with Siddhārtha, whose conservative educational orientation I have already described. The list of manuscripts collected and copied by Sumaṅgala for use by his own students in the early 1870s also betrays the strong influence of an earlier Siyam Nikāya curriculum.[9] Moreover, accounts of Sumaṅgala's higher ordination reveal that he was skilled in the sorts of learned display that were a focus of monastic education since the time of Saraṇaṃkara in the eighteenth century. Sumaṅgala is said to have made the long journey to Kandy in order to receive higher ordination at the hands of the Siyam Nikāya's monastic authorities (Buddhadatta 1950, 94). Like Dhammakkhandha before him, Sumaṅgala presented an original composition before the authorities gathered around him. Surprised by the quality of his poem, leading monks from Kandy suggested that Sumaṅgala was guilty of monastic plagiarism. Responding to these allegations Sumaṅgala composed another work on the spot, with which he dazzled the assembled monks. The result was Sumaṅgala's receipt of ordination at the hands of the order's highest ranking monk instead of at the hands of his original teacher with whom he had arrived. While this story, like those about Dhammakkhandha, is likely well embroidered, its content makes an important point: the standards of monastic learning against which Sumaṅgala was measured, and the elements of learned display highlighted by his own students, were significantly continuous with the aspects of eighteenth century monastic culture I have already described.

Like Siddhārtha and, indeed, like Dhammakkhandha, Sumaṅgala's rise to eminence within the island's Buddhist community owed much to the publicly successful character of his scholarly work. It was in large part on the basis of his perceived erudition, for example, that a group of landed elites in Sabaragamuva bestowed on Sumaṅgala the prestigious post of Nāyaka at the Śrī Pada pilgrimage site (Buddhadatta 1950, 95). Their choice was all the more striking since Sumaṅgala then lived and taught in Galle, a southern city many miles distant. Sumaṅgala's career suggests that Buddhist monks of his generation had begun to take the measure of monastic life in a post-Kandyan, post-royal age. His productive relations with diverse groups of lay donors located in widely distant regions of the island reveals Sumaṅgala's ease in a Buddhist community increasingly crosscut by caste, class and wealth unlinked to land. Sumaṅgala's supporters included traditional aristocrats like those involved in the Śrī Pada appointment as well as the new elites involved in temple-independent institutions established on the model of Paramadhammacetiya.

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[9] See *Vidyodaya Piriveṇa Puskoḷa Pot Nāmavaliya* (n.d.).

At the peak of his powers in the last two and a half decades of the nineteenth century, Sumaṅgala directed a major new educational center – Vidyodaya Piriveṇa – that came to exercise a profound influence on monks and laity throughout the island. The diverse activities undertaken by Sumaṅgala during those years underscore the complex intersection of influences affecting Buddhists—lay and monastic—on the island at that time. As the director of Vidyodaya, Sumaṅgala developed a model for monastic education that has influenced all monks in Sri Lanka in subsequent years. He drew heavily on the curriculum established for eighteenth century monks by Saraṇaṃkara, which had served as his own educational foundation. However, Sumaṅgala made important changes in educational structure by systematizing monastic pedagogy and introducing formal examinations for monastic advancement. Several influences on Sumaṅgala's educational vision are visible; taken together they highlight the difficulties involved in analyzing the effects of empire and colonialism on indigenous cultural forms.

Sumaṅgala articulated his debts to Saraṇaṃkara and leading monks of Dhammakkhandha's generation. At the same time, however, he reached back into Sri Lanka's more distant past for an educational model, asserting that Vidyodaya reintroduced the systematic educational practices of the fifteenth century monastic luminary Srî Rāhula.[10] Since the establishment of Vidyodaya coincided with lengthy debates by colonial administrators about indigenous education and government patronage of local schools it is almost impossible that Sumaṅgala's educational vision remained untouched by the state discourse on education first audible during the time of his teacher Siddhārtha. Yet, simultaneously, Sumaṅgala communicated with high-ranking monks in Siam, and received substantial support for Vidyodaya from the Thai king Chulalongkorn (Buddhadatta 1950, 96). Any effort to understand Sumangala's educational efforts as "modernist" must contend with the doubled and by no means consistent visions of "modernization" emanating from London and Bangkok.[11]

In addition to his work at Vidyodaya, Sumaṅgala played a leading role in low-country Buddhist responses to increasingly assertive Christian attacks on Buddhist teachings. Though baptized at birth and closely associated with local Christians, Sumaṅgala helped to establish the first Buddhist printing press which was used to disseminate pamphlet-sized defenses of Buddhist teachings to lay and monastic readers, and to publish the island's first Sinhalese newspaper (Young and Somaratne 1996, 116-117). Sumaṅgala authored many of the publications produced by the press in the 1860s, including comparisons of Buddhist and Christian understandings of divinity, a defense of Buddhist cosmography, and text-critical queries about the Bible's historical veracity (Young and Somaratne, 119-123).

Given Sumaṅgala's early involvement in Buddhist uses of print technology, it is striking that his Vidyodaya students continued to rely on and to produce palm leaf manuscripts in the course of their studies. In this multi-media approach to religious education we find a suggestive instance of the slow and unsystematic transitions from manuscript to print culture described for Europe by Clanchy (1979). Sumaṅgala's involvement in print and manuscript based textual practices also points our attention once again to the complex and shifting associations between religious learning and devotion that appear to characterize the later years of the nineteenth century. His participation in the synod called in 1868 to redact an authorized version of Pāli texts from the tipiṭaka appropriate for citation in

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[10] Vidyodaya Piriveṇa Adhipati. Personal communication, July 1999.

[11] On Bangkok, see Wyatt (1969).

Buddhist-Christian controversies elegantly condenses these associations. Chief editor of the Vinaya, or disciplinary, section of tipiṭaka, Sumaṅgala apparently intended his edition to serve as a useful counter to critical Christian citations from Pāli texts and, as such, to participate in the increasingly print-bound controversy between Buddhists and Christians on the island. It was, in other words, intended to play a major role in the reactive and "fundamentalist" approach to authoritative texts said to characterize Sri Lankan Buddhism post-watershed. Yet, importantly, at the conclusion of his edition, Sumaṅgala brought the manuscripts from Pälmaḍulla to Galle along the southern coast, in a slow procession that evoked and sustained a distinctly devotional attitude to religious manuscripts (Young and Somaratne 1996, 152-154).

Through his work as a teacher, author, editor and preacher, Sumaṅgala helped to shape the way that lay and monastic Buddhists came to understand Buddhist teachings and appropriate religious action. The educational program established at Vidyodaya Piriveṇa by Sumaṅgala and retained for use by monastics after his death had, in particular, a powerful impact on Sri Lanka's Buddhist community. Vidyodaya—in striking contrast to the educational institutions of the Siyam Nikāya during Dhammakkhanda's lifetime—was open to monks from all the Buddhist monastic orders and from all regions of the island. Despite Sumaṅgala's high position within the Siyam Nikāya and close ties to high caste monks and laymen, Vidyodaya's education was accessible to a larger monastic community. The implication of such accessibility is itself a matter for further reflection and research. While the educational activities of the early Siyam Nikāya monks such as Saraṇaṃkara and his student Dhammakkhandha had created a standardization of religious education and interpretation remarkable in a pre-print era (Blackburn 2001, Chp. 6), access to Buddhist education—and thus the character of Sri Lanka's Buddhist interpretive communities—remained significantly determined by local conditions. In the rise of Vidyodaya we see, I believe, the first steps toward the creation of an island-wide interpretive community of Buddhists, in which local distinctions between caste, class and region were overlaid—though never displaced—by a translocal, island-wide, sense of Buddhist culture and of political association.

Conclusion

Even this brief discussion of three monastic lives lived between the late eighteenth and late nineteenth century gives us good reason to believe that historians of Sri Lanka's Buddhist community—and, indeed, of the many other cultures affected by the projects of colonialism—have reason to be way of "big bang" theories of "modernization" and religious transformation. Our current understandings of the emergence of "Buddhist Modernism" on the island are not unreasonable based on the sources historians have typically examined. However, they are not adequate to broader evidence of late colonial local religious institutions and practices. As I have indicated, we find evidence of change and innovation within Sri Lanka's Buddhist communities throughout the nineteenth century. Yet such shifts were neither sudden nor a clearly identifiable reaction to the singular transformative forces of colonialism. Instead, as throughout the history of medieval Buddhist communities in Sri Lanka, lay and monastic Buddhists engaged in the on-going renegotiation or invention of "tradition" in which a variety of influences—local, regional, imperial, and global—played a role.

These reflections on Sri Lankan Buddhist communities during the later colonial period suggest some new ways to approach questions about the impact of colonial projects on Southern Asia and, perhaps, on other regions. Attention to the history of local religious educational institutions and practices in the mid-*longue durée* allows us to take seriously the effects of colonialism on indigenous cultures without attributing an unduly reactive or passively assimilative role to local men and women. By looking at religious educational institutions and practices it is possible to identify shifting concerns within local communities as well as many of the processes through which understandings of self and community emerged. The development of religious educational institutions and practices reveals the intersection of the economic, political and discursive elements of colonialism with particular clarity.

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