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Buddhist Narrative Transmitted in Thai and Lao
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François Lagirarde

The Nibbāna of Mahākassapa the Elder: Notes on a Buddhist Narrative Transmitted in Thai and Lao Literature

THIS LEGEND OF MAHĀKASSAPA'S NIBBĀNA from his last morning, to his failed farewell to King Ajātasattu, to his parinibbāna in the evening, to his ultimate “meeting” with Metteyya thousands of years later—is well known in Thailand and Laos although it was not included in the Pāli *Tiṭṭaka* or even mentioned in the commentaries or sub-commentaries. In fact, the texts known as *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* (*The Nibbāna of Mahākassapa the Elder*) represent only one among many other *Nibbāna* stories known in Thai-Lao Buddhist literature. In this paper I will attempt to show that the textual tradition dealing with the last moments of many disciples or “Hearers” of the Buddha—with Mahākassapa as the first one—became a rich, vast, and well preserved genre at least in the Thai world. But we do not know if these *Nibbāna* stories were initially written to form a collection or if they were composed separately and then compiled and expanded. Moreover we do not know when or by whom they were written.

The *Nibbāna of Mahākassapa the Elder* appears to have been exceptionally popular, since it is found in every “nibbāna collection” kept in monastic libraries. Very frequently it is also found as an independent title, possibly for ease in handling or diffusion. Since we know that this outstanding narrative has been famous in the whole Buddhist world, particularly the Mahāyana, it is fair to say that Thai and Lao Buddhist literature have been as greatly inspired by this legend as have any

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other traditions. To illustrate this opinion in detail I have appended to this paper an English translation from the Thai edited version of the *Nibbāna of Mahākassapa* for comparison with other versions already published.¹

In his introduction to *The Birth-Stories of the Ten Bodhisattas...* Ven. Saddhatissa states, “Apart from a reference in the *Mahāsampiṇḍanidāna*² [...], the original text concerning Mahākassapa’s *parinibbāna* and his cremation in the hands of Metteyya cannot be traced in Pāli literature” (1975:44). While acknowledging the existence of some remnants of the story in Lanka in the form of popular beliefs regarding Mahākassapa’s cremation, he shows how Sanskrit or Northern Buddhist sources were able to beautifully preserve this episode. This difference suggests that the cult of Metteyya was more naturally associated with Bodhisattvayāna than Śrāvakayāna and that perhaps the older school of Buddhism was not deeply concerned with it. Ven. Saddhatissa’s statement may have been the English echo of a lengthy note by Étienne Lamotte, who in 1944 wrote: “Le Nirvāṇa de Mahākāśyapa, sur lequel les sources pâlies sont muettes, est raconté dans toute une série de textes [of the Northern tradition] avec plus ou moins de détails” (Lamotte 1981:191). Lamotte then provides a remarkable list of works offering different accounts of this story, all recorded in the repertoire of the Chinese and Japanese Buddhist Canon (in the Taishō edition).³

These two statements suggest that Mahākassapa’s *parinibbāna*⁴ was not told in canonical Pāli sources. Both statements underline the fact that this particular episode seems to belong almost completely to the Bodhisattvayāna. But Saddhatissa introduces an element that could lead to further research: this episode was certainly known inside the Theravāda since it is referred to in a later Pāli text from Sri Lanka, the *Mahāsampiṇḍanidāna*. Consequently, there are several possibilities: 1) there might have been a full original Pāli text that is now missing; 2) Mahāyana sources such as this kind of narrative were well known in the Theravāda context; 3) this kind of narrative, not bearing the seal of a *Vinaya* lineage, is (or should be) found naturally in any Buddhist literary tradition where it was freely transmitted and retransmitted in different languages. Thus, its presence or absence should not be overestimated.

The *Mahāsampiṇḍanidāna* certainly deserves a better study, analysis, and even a new translation since there seem to be difficulties with Saddhatissa’s English

1. This research would not have been possible without the kind help of many colleagues, especially Jacqueline Filliozat, Peter Skilling, Uthen Wongsathit, Thanthip Keothip, Bonnie Brereton and John Glatzmayer. I express my sincere thanks to all. I shall indeed take full responsibility for all remaining errors.

2. “A rare Pāli work [... that] deals with the Bodhisatta ideal and the biography of the Buddha.” Saddhatissa refers to “Ola leaf MS of the *Mahāsampiṇḍanidāna* of the Colombo Museum, No. S.8.” (note 48 p. 52).

3. I will refer to the catalogue of the *Taishō* published as an annex to *Hōbōgirin* in 1978.

4. In this note I will use “*parinibbāna*” or “*nibbāna*” to refer to an historical or factual occurrence and “*Parinibbāna*” or “*Nibbāna*” to refer to text(s). Both are about the last day of Mahākassapa and the prediction about his ultimate “meeting” with Maitreya. Thai sources do not usually distinguish between “*parinibbāna*” and “*nibbāna*.”

version that might or might not reflect the original.⁵ It is safe to predict that more research in this field—in Sri Lanka—should lead to new interesting discoveries. Moreover, as I will show below, if the *Mahāsampiṇḍanidāna* is the first text in the Theravāda literature “discovered” by international scholars to mention the nibbāna of Mahākassapa, it is not the only one.

1. Texts and Anthologies Related to the Nibbāna of Mahākassapa and other Hearers of the Buddha in Southeast Asian Theravāda

The earliest mention of this family of texts appears in the first catalogue of the Watchirayan Library published in 2459 BE (1916 CE). This *Banchi rueang nangsue nai ho phra samut watchirayan* puts it in the section of the *tamnan*⁶ (“traditional history”) where it mentions 1) the *Paṭhamasambodhi*, 2) the *Sāvakanibbāna*, 3) the *Bimbābhikkhunībāna*, and then 4) the *Mahākassapatheranibbāna*, followed by the stories of the nibbāna of other disciples (22). This classification suggests that the *Nibbāna* stories and biographies of monks or supporters of the Buddha were probably considered a natural continuation of the “Indochinese Life of the Buddha” as Cœdès called the *Paṭhamasambodhi*. The catalogue then mentions the translation of the *Sāvakanibbāna* in two *samut farang* (modern notebooks or exercise books). Another section of the catalogue (*plae phra sut, akson lao pen phasa thai nuea*) presents an *Arahantanibbāna* in six bundles. From the first catalogues, the problem of the anthology (*Sāvakanibbāna*) versus odd or independent texts was already obvious. The existence of two traditional series was also clear: the manuscripts in Pāli (probably in *khom* script) and the Northern Thai manuscripts in *tham* script. So far it is not certain if the Siamese versions are derived from the Pāli or from the Northern Thai version.

The first mention in a western language of a text known as *Mahākassapanibbāna* appears only one year later in Finot (1917:190) as No. 354 of his catalogue. This reference—*Mahākassapanibbāna*—was actually provided in a first inventory by Meillet (R. 124) who surveyed the manuscript collection of the Royal Palace in Luang Prabang. In the catalogue by Lafont (1959) we find first mention of a manuscript in seven bundles kept in Vat Xieng Muane in Luang Prabang, the *Asitimahāsāvok* (No. 34)⁷ then a *Mahā Kassiapa Nibban* (No. 415) in the collection of Vat Pra Keo in Vientiane.

Research conducted in the National Archives in Bangkok, in Chiang Mai, and in Paris shows that a good number of Pāli manuscripts are kept under the title *Mahākassapanibbāna*. Monastic collections at Wat Pho and Wat Bowonniwet also

5. This rendering is likely erroneous since it is stated first that Mahākassapa “passed away” in his monastery then that the king sees his dead body in the middle of the mountains when they open at his royal “asseveration of truth” (Saddhatissa 1975:44).

6. Apparently this section was considered very important since it appears after the *Vinaya* and the *Sutta* and before the *Abhidhamma*.

7. *Asitimahāsāvaka* seems to be an alternate title for *Sāvakanibbāna*, but this should be confirmed by further research.

possess the title found with the *Nibbāna* stories of other Hearers of the Buddha. In the Paris collection, for instance, two bundles of 48 palm-leaves contain (1) the *Sāriputtanibbāna*, (2) the *Moggalānanibbāna*, (3) the *Mahākassapanibbāna* and the *Kaccāyananibbāna*.⁸ The modern printed Thai edition of the *Phrasāvoknipphān* (*Brah̄sāvakanibbāna*)⁹ gives a different order: Kaccāyana (Gavampati), Koṇḍañña, Mahākassapa, Sāriputta, Mahāmoggāllana.¹⁰ It is followed by sixty-five other names, all of which are already recorded in the *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names* (Malalasekera 1937). This list is provided in the first appendix to this paper with the corresponding DPPN names. It falls short of offering the eighty names expected and it will be interesting to survey all the national archives to find out how many different nibbāna stories are actually (and still) on palm-leaf manuscripts.¹¹

Indeed, the largest collections are kept in the National Library in Bangkok (see list in the bibliography). Under the generic title of *Brah̄pālīsāvakanibbāna*, eight different sets (*mat*) of four, five, and six bundles (*phuk*) can be found. One belongs to the second reign of the Chakri Dynasty (1809-1824), and two to the third reign (1824-1851); some independent bundles bearing the title *Brah̄pālīsāvakanibbāna* or *Asītimahāsāvakanibbāna* can also be found.

Seven independent bundles bearing the title *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* should be mentioned in this collection; all are in *khom* script: six in Pāli and one in Pāli and Thai. The oldest is dated 2331 BE or 1788 CE (first reign of the Chakri dynasty).¹² All of these odd or independent texts are physically associated with other texts, such as: *Paṭhamasambodhi*, *Dasapuññakiriyavatthugathā*, *Paññāsajātaka*, etc.

In Chiang Mai the National Library holds two manuscripts. One Pāli text in *khom* script is in two bundles, while the second is in modern Thai, dated 2484 BE (1941 CE). No manuscript in Northern Thai and *tham* script seems to be listed either in the National Library of Chiang Mai or in the Chiang Mai University Social Research Institute catalogue under the entry “Mahākassapa.” This is very surprising since we know of a manuscript from a “Wat Pa Daeng” (probably from the Wat Pa Daeng in Chiang Mai) kept in the National Library in Copenhagen dated 1228 CS or 1866 CE. However, the unpublished lists of Lanna manuscripts drawn up by the Project for

8. This text was presented in my doctoral dissertation (Lagirarde 2001). It is different from *Mahākaccāyananibbāna* and is based on the story of Gavampati becoming a fat ugly monk.

9. The full title is *Brah̄sītimahāsāvakanibbāna* (or “A.s.n.”) with two different sub or alternate titles: *Hnāñsijā Sāvakanibbāna* (in the 1914 edition) or *Brah̄sāvakanibbāna* (in the 1972 edition).

10. The *Pālīsāvakanibbāna* kept in Wat Phra Jetuphon (Wat Pho, Bangkok).

11. There is a similar situation at Wat Suthat (Bangkok) where the statues of the eighty Hearers do not bear eighty different names (there is an inscription on their backs).

12. We can suppose then that this manuscript was made from a copy saved from Ayutthaya.

the Conservation of Lanna Palm Leaf Manuscripts”¹³ give eight *Mahākassapanibbāna*, four *Mahākassapa* and one *Vohāra Mahākassapanibbāna* kept in different monasteries of Sung Men (Phrae), Nan, Lamphun, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai.

In addition, a beautiful *Braḥ Pālī Sāvakanibbāna* can be found in the manuscript collection of Wat Pho in Bangkok. Recently my colleague, Uthen Wongsathit, drew my attention to a version written in Mon script that was circulated as a photocopy among a circle of monks scholars around Bangkok.

I personally made copies of the Wat Pa Daeng manuscript from Chiang Mai (kept in the National Library in Copenhagen) and the Lao manuscript from the National Library in Vientiane. I am currently translating and comparing them. The Lanna manuscript bears the title *Mahākassapathennibbān Vat Pā Dèn* (= WPD) and the Lao manuscript *Mahākassapanibbān* (= BNLV 1). So far my reading shows that they are identical, except for the usual variants between Northern Thai and Lao.

The title “*Mahākassapanibbāna*” seems also to be known in Cambodia but it also could be a modern importation.¹⁴

Not much is known about the *Mahāsampiṇḍanidāna* mentioned by Ven. Saddhatissa. This text begins with a lengthy quotation from the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini*, the commentary of the *Dighanikāya* of the *Sutta Piṭaka* composed by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century CE, recounting how Mahākassapa collected the Buddha’s relics. The story of Mahākassapa’s nibbāna comes after.

More research on this *Mahāsampiṇḍanidāna* is necessary since it also exists in the form of an Indochinese text (the Paris National Library version is in *khom* script) and we know that in 1756 a manuscript of a text entitled *Sampiṇḍamahānidāna* was sent to Lanka with many others (Filliozat 1997:101; von Hinüber 1988:175–183; and Skilling-Pakdeekham 2002:lxvii). Does this mean that the manuscript was lost or unknown on the island? It is true that Saddhatissa believes that the *Mahāsampiṇḍanidāna* was “probably written in the later part of the twelfth century” (1975:44) and suggests that it was composed in Lanka. But again, more research should be done in Sri Lanka’s archives.

Another text describes the final story of Mahākassapa. This is the *Mahākassapatheranibbānakathā*, which belongs to a larger text called the *Vaṃsamālinī*. The *Vaṃsamālinī* is a Pāli text (at least) from Thailand that was edited by Dr. Balee Buddharaksa (1991) from three main manuscripts: one in Thai Yuan (or *tham*) script and two in *khom* script.¹⁵ Dr. Balee believes that this text could have been “compiled in Lān Nā, [the] North of Thailand, during the fifteenth to the sixteenth century AD, as mentioned in the traditional composition of Vaṃsa-literature” (Balee 1991:45).

13. Or the Thai-German cooperation project from the Center for the Promotion of Arts and Culture, Chiang Mai University.

14. We received one photocopy from the Vat Unalom EFEO archives in Phnom Penh but J. Filliozat found that under the title *Mahākassapanibbāna* is a different story.

15. But altogether Dr. Balee has found eight different manuscripts. Only three were selected for the critical edition.

The *Mahākassapatheranibbānakathā* (61–107) is preceded by an episode called “the deposition of the relics” (Dhātunidhānaṃ, 27–60) in which we learn how Mahākassapa finally collected the relics of the Buddha to enshrine them in one stūpa. This is basically the story told in the *Mahāsaṃpiṇḍanidāna* and in the *Mahākassapanibbāna* from the *Pāli Sāvakanibbāna*. They are identical to the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* (*Mahāparinibbānasuttavaṇṇanā*, the commentary of the *Dīghanikāya* composed by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century CE).

The *Mahākassapatheranibbānakathā*’s narrative structure parallels that of the *Mahākassapanibbāna* (Pāli or Thai), but its wording in Pāli is totally different since it is shorter.

2. The *Mahākassapanibbāna*’s Narrative Structures

We have already mentioned that the “introduction” to the story of Mahākassapa’s nibbāna (his collection of the Buddha’s relics) is found only in the Pāli texts and not in the Siamese, Lanna, or Lao versions. From manuscript BNF Pāli 298, collated by J. Filliozat, I made this fast reading with the help of my colleague, Uthen Wongsathit:¹⁶

1. Mahākassapa feels that the relics of the Buddha [after they were divided into eight parts] are in danger;
2. So he goes to see Ajātasattu and tells him that there should be a single proper place to install the relics;¹⁷
3. The king agrees to look for a place but wonders how he could gather the rest of the relics;
4. The monk answers that he will take care of gathering the relics;
5. Then Mahākassapa goes and asks for the relics from the different families and gets them easily;
6. Only the Nāgas keep their relics at Vāmagāma (Rāmagāma) where they are safe. Mahākassapa knows that in the future they will be kept in the Mahācetiya in the Mahāvihāra on the island of Lanka;
7. The monk brings the rest of the relics to keep them in a place on the east of Rājagṛha;
8. Meanwhile the king orders that a plot of land be measured and bricks be made from earth;

16. Just a few days before I sent this paper to the conference, I learned that the commentary on the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* was translated and published in 2003 by Yang-Gyu An. This commentary is an essential part of the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* and appears largely quoted in the Pāli *Mahākassapanibbāna*.

17. In the *Visuddhimagga* are reported vows or predictions uttered by Mahākassapa when “making a receptacle for the relics.” Buddhaghosa writes, apparently quoting his own *Sumaṅgalavilāsini*, the words of the Elder: “For two hundred and eighteen years to come, may these flavours not dry up, may these flowers not fade away, may these lamps not die out!” (*The Path of Purity*, 498).

9. When people asks the king about what he is going to do, he answers that he will build the cetiya(s) to give to the eighty great Hearers;
10. The king asks the people to dig a hole eighty cubits deep and to build the cetiya(s) for the eighty Hearers;
11. At the bottom he orders that metal layer be put on the floor and then a building of copper be constructed on top the same size as the cetiya at Thūpārāma;
12. He also orders the building of eight stūpas and eight sandalwood caskets. Then he puts the relics in the eight sandalwood caskets. Again he puts in another set of eight sandalwood caskets. And again.¹⁸
13. Then he puts them in the stūpas made of sandalwood and then all the stūpas in caskets made of ivory; and in a stūpa made of ivory; a casket made of crystal, gold, silver, ruby and two other kinds of crystal or precious stones with stūpas made of the same material. The last stūpa is the same size of the cetiya in Thūpārāma. At the top he orders the building of four houses, one of crystal inside one of gold, inside one of silver, inside one of copper. After that he deposits flowers in great quantity and then he orders the making in gold of the *Jātakas*, the history of the eighty great elders, the story of Suddhodana and Māyādevī, and the seven *sahajāta*¹⁹.
14. He leaves five hundred silver pots and five hundred gold pots of perfume and five hundred torches. He makes a wish that they never lose their fragrance and never stop burning. He puts an inscription on the urn stating that in the future King Aśoka will also take care of the relics and build reliquaries. Then the king worships the relics and locks the chamber.

Needless to say, this text gives a greater role to Mahākassapa in the “biography” of the Buddha. A few points are still unclear and their interpretation rather difficult. For instance, what is the meaning of the king’s answer to the people about building “a cetiya to give to the eighty great Hearers”? Is it a pious lie to protect the site or a way to announce that images of the Hearers will be enshrined in the monument? Since some of the Hearers, like Sāriputta and Moggallāna, are already dead the second solution seems more probable but still problematic.

When the king gives the order “to make the *Jātakas*, the history of the eighty great elders, the story of Suddhodana and Māyādevī, and the seven *sahajāta* in gold” what are we to understand? What exactly was the meaning and the purpose of this

18. I fail to clearly understand if all the relics are reunited in one casket. Yang-Gyu An translated the passage as follows, “they enshrined the relics of the Blessed One in a box made of yellow sandalwood” (2003:220) but he does not connect this box with the eight other boxes. But my reading is perhaps deficient.

19. These are the seven beings or objects born or produced at the same time when the Buddha was born (see Yang-Gyu An 2003:221 note 1).

edict?²⁰ It is certainly an order to sculpt, cast, or carve images (statues) or plaques and reliefs or even paintings. But the site was to be sealed off, and therefore this “making” is not related to wanting to illustrate a story (especially a *Jātaka*) for the purpose of supporting a teaching. In his translation of the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*, Yang-Gyu An proposes the following interpretation: the king “had the following made of [sculpted in] gold” (2003:221). Since the stūpa has to remain closed, these sculptures should be considered an ultimate offering in order to gain merit. They also add to the consecration of the monument by connecting the relics of the Buddha with his Dhamma because they remain, in the case of the *Jātakas*, visual citations of texts.

The closest material illustration of this passage appears to be found in several inscribed tablets and images of Metteyya, some Hearers of the Buddha, together with an image of Suddhodana that were discovered in the moated city of U Thong. They were found in a stūpa at a site belonging to the cultural area of Dvāravatī in central Thailand. The inscriptions are “in Pāli and in a Pallava script similar to that used in other Pāli epigraphs in the region. They provide further evidence for the use of Pāli and the presence of a Theravādin *Vinaya* lineage” (Skilling and Pakdeekham, 2002a: 11-12). At least we know that probably from the later Mon period (eleventh to fourteenth century) to the Siamese Ratanakosin period the “cult” of the Hearers, including Gotama’s family, has been practiced continually. But a problem remains because, in this case, the relationship between texts and cult is not explicit; in the case of the eighty Hearers should we think that the cult was suggested at first, leading to the creation of images and then to the textual production of hagiographies?

Structure of the Main Thai Text

1. Introduction: the story begins after the Buddha’s parinibbāna and the Council at Rājagṛha [this short section is not in the Pāli version];
2. Mahākassapa realizes through *jhānasamāpati* that he is ready for parinibbāna; it will happen the next day in the evening at the Kukkuṭa-sampātaparbata;
3. Mahākassapa informs his followers and gives another preaching; he then goes begging for alms wearing the robe given by the Buddha;
4. Mahākassapa pays a visit to King Ajātasatṛū, who is sleeping;
5. Mahākassapa goes back to his monastery, cleans everything, and proceeds to the mountain;
6. Mahākassapa performs miracles, preaches again, and finally goes to the middle of the three peaks where his funeral bed has been installed;

20. A good explanation on the reason why *Jātaka* paintings and reliefs were installed in hidden places, has been given by my colleague M.L. Pattaratorn Chirapravati in her article “Original or Recycled: *Jātaka* Reliefs at Wat Si Chum (Sukhothai)” published in this very volume. Her remarks follow the conclusions proposed by Brown (1997:97–100).

7. Mahākassapa makes a wish (*adhiṣṭhān*) or a prediction; he first explains the somber future of the human race, then the coming of a new age and the advent of another Buddha, Metteyya; he explains that his body will not decay until that time;
8. Metteyya will come to the place where Mahākassapa is buried. He will take Mahākassapa's body in his hands, explain to his followers who he was and, after that, the body will burn to ashes by itself;
9. Mahākassapa performs his parinibbāna; then the three mountain peaks close in on his body;
10. In the royal palace King Ajātasatrū learns the news. After nearly dying of grief, he goes to the mountain, which opens up, allowing him to see Mahākassapa's body;
11. Homely: the author confirms Mahākassapa's wish and prediction; he concludes with *samsāra*, *anicca*, the duty of following the precepts (*sīla*), practicing generosity (*dāna*), and performing wholesome action (*kusala*) in order to avoid suffering (*dukkha*).

The reading of this text (see my translation in the annex *infra*) shows its richness even though it is sometimes a bit complicated because of the presence of several voices at various times. The unknown author-compiler-translator is able to quote canonical Pāli verses but his inspiration might have been inspired by numerous different sources.

There are many remarkable points, some of which can be highlighted here. One extraordinary example is the depiction of King Ajātasatrū's fainting. We know that in the past he plotted with Devadatta to kill the Buddha and afterwards his remorse was intense. This scene is inspired by another one in which the king hears of the death and parinibbāna of the Buddha himself, which can be found in Buddhaghosa's *Commentary of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (Yang-Gyu An 2003:209–211). A similar scene can also be found in the Chinese and Tibetan translations (from the lost Sanskrit parts) of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*.

Moreover, the “twin miracles” performed by Mahākassapa before he incinerated himself in the hands of Metteyya are quite extraordinary in relation to the strict Theravādin tradition. This tradition recognizes these miracles as performed by Buddhas and Bodhisattas and not by the Hearers (*sāvaka*) or later disciples. However, other examples are known in the Thai context, as in the story of the nibbāna of Gavampati/Kaccāyana, which also resembles parts of the story of Gavampati as told in Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*.

Another interesting point concerns the non-decaying body and ritual offerings. It is pronounced as a wish but Mahākassapa the Elder knows what purity means since he has been an ardent practitioner of the thirteen *dhutaṅga*, the austere practices allowing a radical removal of defilements. This idea of avoiding decomposition of the body after death illustrates a state of purity that is still recognized in modern Thailand for venerated *luang pho* who have not been cremated (when cremated their ashes turn into precious stones).

3. The Nirvāṇa of Mahākāśyapa in the Northern Tradition

As already mentioned, Lamotte (1981:191) gives a full description of the literature dealing with the nirvāṇa of Mahākāśyapa (as he is called in the Sanskrit context). After the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* (in this list put in the first position) Lamotte quotes ten different texts:

1. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* (T.1509) attributed to Nāgārjuna (150-250? CE) translated into Chinese between 404 and 405 CE.
2. The *Ekottarāgama* (T.125);
3. The *Mahāmāyāsūtra* (T.383);
4. The *Sūtra on Maitreya's birth* (T.453, trans. De Visser);
5. The *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* (T. 454 and T.455);
6. The *Mi lö ta tch'eng fo king* (T 456),
7. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* (T.1448 and T.1451, trans. Przyluski 1914 with an introduction by S. Lévi);
8. The [*Abhidharma*] *mahāvibhāṣā [śāstra]* (T.1545);
9. The *Aśokarājāvadāna* (T.2042, trans. Przyluski 1914 and 1923; Strong 1983);
10. The *Aśokarājāsūtra* (T. 2043);
11. The *Fa hien tchouan* or *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* (T.2085, trans. Legge 1886), the well-known travels of the monk Faxian at the beginning of the fifth century;
12. The *Ta t'ang si yu ki* or *The Buddhist Records of the Western World* (T. 2087 trans. by Beale 1884 and Li Rongxi 1996) the famous travels of the monk Xuanzang in the seventh century.

The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* attributed to Nāgārjuna is a Sanskrit text that we know only from its Chinese translation. It gives a very precise account of the Mahākassapa legend. From Lamotte's translation (1981:191–196) we can extract the following narrative structure:

1. Mahākāśyapa decides to enter nirvāṇa;
2. He goes to Rājagṛha to beg for alms;
3. He goes to the mountain (Gṛdhra-kūṭaparvata) and tells his disciples his decision;
4. He goes back to his dwelling place and prepares his body;
5. His disciples bring the news to the dignitaries in the city of Rājagṛha;
6. The dignitaries are sad and they lament; in the evening they gather with the monks on the mountain;
7. Mahākāśyapa goes to the mountain and gives a final preaching (about *saṃskṛtadharmā, anitya*, etc.);
8. Mahākāśyapa performs miracles (he flies into the air, takes the four positions, multiplies his image while fire goes out from one part of his body and water from another part, and vice versa);
9. Mahākāśyapa makes a wish: his body should not decay and it will be visible during the time of the future Buddha;
10. Mahākāśyapa goes inside the mountain and enters nirvāṇa;
11. The text gives a prediction about the time when the Buddha Maitreya will come into the world. The future Buddha will go to the Gṛdhra-kūṭaparvata and

knock on the mountain. The skeleton of Mahākāśyapa will appear, prostrate itself before the Buddha, and fly into the air. Then it will burn by itself.

12. Maitreya will explain to his followers who this minuscule monk is and suggest that they follow his example.²¹ Some will become *arhat*, *anāgamin*, etc. The Buddha then continues to explain why the Ḡḍhrakūṭaparvata was the preferred residence of Śākyamuni, of many Bodhisattvas, etc.

This version does not mention King Ajātaśatru, who appears both in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* and in the Pāli and Thai texts. But it is noticeable that the Mūlasarvāstivādin and Theravādin versions differ on the nature of the king. In the former he remains a cruel tyrant, whereas in the latter he appears gentle and devoted. Here there is no mention of the transmission of the robe of the Buddha Gautama.

The *Sūtra on Maitreya's Birth* (T.453), translated into Chinese around 313-317 CE (De Visser 1923:66) by the Chinese monk Dharmarakṣa, says that the Buddha had instructed Mahākāśyapa to wait for "Maitreya's appearance into the world." Therefore Mahākāśyapa should live inside a mountain in a "cavern of meditation" where he will be found by the future Buddha and then revealed to the people. Among the witnesses of these prodigies many will attain arahantship. Mahākāśyapa will deliver the robe that the Buddha Gautama had given to him to Maitreya, and after that his body will disappear in flames.

This sutra is probably the oldest text relating the (delayed) nibbāna of Mahākassapa. It was followed by others, as pointed out by De Visser (1923:66-67).

From the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda (T.1451), J. Przyluski has translated the story of Mahākāśyapa as the "Nirvāṇa de Mahā-Kācyapa" (1914:522-528). This story begins with an original element: the prediction about Ḡaṇika (Śaṇika) given to Ānanda.²² Then the story tells us that Mahākāśyapa went to pay homage to the relics of the Buddha, including a trip to the Nāgas' kingdom (here "le dragon"). Only after that he will visit Ajātaśatru (the servants will not awake the king who is presented as "cruel") and go to the Kukkuṭapāda. He makes the vow about the coming visit of Ajātaśatru and then the prediction concerning Maitreya²³; he performs miracles, and then enters nirvāṇa amidst the three peaks. The devas pay final homage and the three peaks close in on his body. Ajātaśatru wakes up, learns the news, and collapses; his servants sprinkle cool water on his face (here no elaborate different baths). The king asks Ānanda to take him to the mountain that will open as soon as they arrive. Ānanda prevents the king from gathering wood to build a funeral pyre and explains that the body of the Elder will be preserved from decay in order to meet Maitreya, pass along the robe of the Buddha, and help Maitreya's followers become arahants.

21. In this time the size of the people should be much bigger. Hence the comment of the followers of Maitreya: "On dirait un homme mais en petit." (Lamotte 1981:195).

22. Śaṇika is presented as the third patriarch of the Community, after Mahākassapa and Ānanda.

23. Here he wishes to pass the *saṃghāti* of the Buddha to Maitreya.

The “Avādana du Nirvāṇa de Mahākāśyapa” (1914:541–568) gives a very similar story. It differs from the version above on some relatively minor points of composition or expression.

This contradiction between the fact that Mahākāśyapa has attained his parinirvāṇa and is still alive is strongly evident in the *Aśokāvadāna* (T.2042).²⁴ This text was translated around 300 CE in Chinese and, according to Strong, “was probably composed sometime in the second century A.D.” (1983:170). When Upagupta leads Aśoka to visit the stūpas of the Buddha’s disciples they stop at Mahākāśyapa’s stūpa where the king makes an offering and pronounces these words:

I honor the elder Kāśyapa
who dwells hidden inside the mountain;
serene, his face turned away from strife, devoted to tranquility,
he has fully developed the virtues of contentedness.
(Strong 1983:27).

The *Mahāvibhāṣā* (T.1545) answers this question: “Why, unlike [the Buddha], does Mahākāśyapa keep his body intact after his parinirvāṇa?” (my translation from Lamotte 1981:191). The answer is given clearly: because he made a vow to pass along the Buddha’s robe to Maitreya.

The famous monk and pilgrim Faxian (Fa-hien, Fa-hsien) visited Rājagṛha between 403 and 404 CE. He tells us only that the body of Mahākāśyapa is inside the mountain: “the place where he entered [by “magic”?] would not (now) admit a man” (Legge 1886:92–93). This not much and there is a possible confusion with Kāśyapa, the Buddha of the past.

Xuanzang, another Chinese monk and pilgrim, is more explicit and explains that the Buddha instructed Mahākāśyapa to transmit his robe—*kaśāya*—to Maitreya. So when Mahākāśyapa wished to enter nirvāṇa he went to the mountain (the description of the ascension of the mountain is far more realistic than any other one) and stood in the middle of the three peaks. Then “by the power of his vow the three peaks closed together.” The monk does not wear the robe but holds it (Li Rongxi 1996:264–266). The text then says that in the future Maitreya will come to this place and open the mountain, after which Mahākāśyapa will pass along the robe before performing miracles and auto-cremation.

THIS NOTE STARTED with a double quotation that was somehow “prejudicial” to the Southeast Asian Buddhist literature describing it as poor when we see it rich. Even Padmanabh S. Jaini has repeated that this narrative, at its crucial conclusion—“Maitreya’s noble act of honoring the remains of the elder Kāśyapa”—“was conspicuously absent in the *Dīghanikāya* [...] and in the later Theravāda literature” (1988:75). Since then we can obviously say that there is no

24. This text was first translated into Chinese in 300 CE and Strong proposes to date it from the second century CE (1983:27).

extraordinary absence of this episode at least in later Theravāda literature. On the contrary it is obvious that the narrative has been well transmitted and has been popular in the community of monks throughout Thailand and Laos. It is preserved in different languages: Pāli, Siamese, Northern Thai, and Lao—in at least one title in every language—under several titles.

For Jaini this narrative, which gives a remarkable role to Mahākassapa, “was motivated by a desire to establish a physical connection, if not a direct line of transmission, between the Buddha of the present and the Buddha of the future” (Jaini 1988:75). The author sees it as a story introduced by the Mūlasarvāsvādins [in the Buddhist literature] possibly “through the influence of the Indo-Greeks and the Persians who ruled these lands [Kashmir and Gandhāra]” (Jaini 1988:75).

On my side I have tried to show that not all (Northern Buddhist) sources insist on this point. But this is a difficult matter and a recent and very well documented article by Jonathan Silk (2003) casts more light on this question, however not in the field of local Southeast Asian Buddhist literature.²⁵ Silk has explained how Mahākāśyapa was chosen by “the authors of the Mahāyāna scriptures [...] to play one of the lead roles in these Mahāyāna scriptural dramas” (2003:176). One of these dramas—his parinibbāna—is considered an “essentially physical connection between Maitreya and Kāśyapa to Śākyamuni” (Silk 2003:176).

In the texts from the Pāli or Thai-Lao tradition the transmission of the robe is omitted but the connection between the Buddha Gautama and Maitreya is well depicted. Does the absence of the passing of the robe make the story less significant? The final meeting between a perfect arahant and the ultimate bodhisattva seems remarkable enough.

There is no direct proof whether the Southeast Asian story of Mahākassapa’s nibbāna was composed originally in Pāli or in a vernacular language or if compositions could have been done independently in different languages from existing written texts or from an oral stock. However, we cannot see here any direct influence from Sanskrit even if it is not excluded that Sanskrit *Avādanas*—for instance—may have inspired the composers of our *Nibbāna* stories. A simple and glorious story such as this one could have been heard in India where pilgrims were certainly delighted to memorize it to take it back to their countries, including the petty kingdoms of Southeast Asia. But one cannot rule out the possibility that tales of this kind could have been imported at an early date in these kingdoms (starting at the middle of the first millenium) as Sanskrit originals to be translated into local languages and retranslated into Pāli or vice versa. It is true that in Thailand this kind of literature does not enjoy a recognizable status in the dominant Buddhist circles: one may wonder whether this is a sign of modern intransigence or of an original and essential difference.

25. This article was published after the Conference “Buddhist Legacies in Southeast Asia.”



*A Chinese interpretation of the last apparition of Mahākāśyapa in front of Ananda and King Ajātasatṛū.
(Wieger 2002:220)*

Appendix 1

The Nibbāna of Mahākassapa the Elder

A translation from the Thai¹

§ 1) *Namatthu āyasmā Mahākassapo tasmīṅ yeva veḷuvanārāme viharanto kālaṃ vītināmesi appamādena satthu sāsane paṭipajjati ti.*² (Homage! When the venerable Mahākassapa was living in the Veḷuvana Monastery he was carefully following the teaching of the Master.)

§ 2) *Thero* (the Elder)—This is about the ageing venerable Mahākassapa the Elder after the Omniscient One had reached his parinibbāna. Mahākassapa organized a council in order to collect the eighty four thousand constituents of the Dhamma making up the *Tripīṭaka*, [that is to say] the teachings of the Buddha.³ He divided this collection into three parts: the section of the *Vinaya*, the section of the *Sutta* and the section of the *Abhidhamma*. He carefully followed the comments of the Buddha (*buddhaṭṭhā*). When the council was over, the Elder Mahākassapa took residence in the Veḷuvanārāma and practiced the teaching of the Buddha diligently. He also carried on with the instruction of all the monks who had been his senior or minor disciples for a long time.

§ 3) *Evaṃ gate kāle* (As time was thus passing by)—Mahākassapa the Elder was peacefully living in the Veḷuvanā Mahāvihāra. This monastery was a place highly renowned for its quietness. *Ekasmīṅ rattibhāgasamaye* (once in the night time)—Once, in the middle of the night, Mahākassapa entered an absorption (*jhānasamāpatti*) which is a state of happiness for a saint (*ariya*). Then he obtained quickly the fruits of this absorption (*phalāsamāpatti*) and was able to see and evaluate his life expectancy [“his vital formations”] (*āyusāṅkhāra*) so he said to himself: “*Ahaṃ kho* (I, indeed)—I am old, I have lived one hundred and twenty years, how much longer

1. From: “Brahmahākaṣṣapatheraṅgānibbān” in *Hnāṅsijā Sāvakanibbāna - Brahasītimahā-sāvakanibbāna*, pp. 42–61, Watchirayan Library, Bangkok, cremation book, 2 vol., 368 and 375 p. 2457 (1914 CE).

2. The original Thai text is divided into six paragraphs which are indicated by the “§” symbol followed by a number. For the sake of clarity, in the translation, paragraphs 3 to 6 have been split into sub-paragraphs which are not numbered.

As any *nissaya* type text, the original starts with an invocation in pāli (§ 1) and is punctuated by pāli “quotations” that “announce” the beginning of the following sentence. These pāli “quotations” are given in italics and followed by their translation between brackets, and they are linked to the sentence they announce by a dash. Example : *Ekasmīṅ rattibhāgasamaye* (once in the night time)—Once, in the middle of the night, Mahākassapa...

Whenever deemed necessary, the English translation of some Thai (and “Thai Pāli”) words is followed by the transliteration of the original word (in italics, between brackets).

3. In this text the Buddha is called by the full title of *samdec brah buddha àn cao*.

shall I live?." *Olovento* (considering)—Considering his condition further, he realized that he was reaching the end. Then he said: "Eh, when shall I enter nibbāna then? *Pabhātāya rattiyā* (at daybreak)—I shall perform my parinibbāna tomorrow." *Kattha parinibbāyissāmi* (where shall I [enter] parinibbāna?)—"Eh, where will it be? At the Kukkuṭasāmpātaparbata⁴ (a mountain) located near the great capital city of Rājagṛha." *Evaṃ cintetvā* (having thus reflected)—The next morning Mahākassapa the Elder, because of what he had seen, washed his body and his face and rinsed his mouth. He used a broom to tidy the area around the vihāra. After that he convened an immediate meeting of all the members of the Saṅgha to make the following declaration: "Āvuso (friends!)—Listen o monks, you should not be negligent, you should not lose time in your efforts, you should try hard to practice the Lord Buddha's teaching. *Ahaṃ* (I...)—My body has done its time and I will be entering nibbāna this evening."

Ye ye puthujjanā bhikkhū (whoever, ordinary bhikkhus)—All the bhikkhus who still were ordinary monks having heard the news that Mahākassapa would not be keeping his body any longer, started to cry. *Paridevīṇsu* (they lamented)—They were weeping, lamenting and complaining, saying: "*Aho vata* (alas!)—This is so deplorable, what an unfortunate action! Since the Buddha himself has entered nibbāna we are only able 'to see' Mahākassapa and it is as if the Omniscient himself were still alive. He has always given his teaching to all of us, never missing a day, but now who is going to deliver any teaching in the future?" All these bhikkhus were in great sorrow. *Khīṇāsavā pana* (however the *khīṇāsavā*)—Meanwhile, other monks free from mental obsessions (*khīṇāsavā*) when they learned that Kassapa would enter nibbāna, each of them gave a reflection about impermanence, that is to say that every living being, every [bodily] formation will unavoidably meet his end and extinction. "*Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti* (being born they will perish)—Whatever is born will pass away. If the law [that imposes] decay for all formations, could be stopped there would be great happiness. *Adhuvam* (impermanent)—every living being, every formation is unsteady and impermanent, there is always an end and no way to extend its time. The body is exclusively an impersonal⁵ organic structure and its changing is normal." All these monks free from mental obsessions became conscious of the fragility of life in this manner.

Thero (the Elder)—The venerable Mahākassapa the Elder considered all these bhikkhus crying and lamenting. *Samassāsetvā* (having relieved)—He thought he could console them properly according to the instructions of the Buddha. So he said: "*Sabbe saṅkhārā* (all constituents)—Listen, all of you, fellow monks, anything that is born and constitutes a body is unsteady and impermanent, subject to constant changes. *Sabbabuddhehi desitā* (what all the Buddhas have taught)—All the Buddhas of the past and the future who have been or will be enlightened deliver the same teaching that says: anything that is born and constitutes a body cannot escape

4. Thai *parbata* = Sanskrit *parvata* = mountain. *Parbata* is considered as belonging to the proper name hence the repetition of the Thai word *phu khao* ("mountain").

5. Meaning not being the private property of any soul or spirit.

impermanence. *Pāto diṭṭhā bahū janā*⁶ (in the morning many people realized)—All the people born in this world have well realized that if one morning they are alive they could well be obliterated in the evening. *Sāyaṃ diṭṭhā bahū janā* (in the evening many people realized)—Sometimes people are engaged in conversation with others and the next morning they disappear. So the people of this world are subject to impermanence, their only direction forward. *Ko jaññā*⁷ (who knows?)—The man who clearly perceives such a fact will be certain of the reality of impermanence for every living being. Therefore it is urgent to try without fail to be released from this cycle. *Na hi no saṅgaran tena*—It is difficult for anybody to escape from King Maccu⁸ the god of death; only the pure (*brah̥ ariya puggala*) who can accomplish nibbāna are able to do so. But in general the worldly creatures born in *saṅsāra* will die, unable to avert the power of King Maccu. *Mahāsenena maccunā* (the great general Maccu)—King Maccu is accompanied by his numerous troops used to inflict conquest and even if people battle with elephants and horses and whatever power they could use, they would for sure be overthrown. *Mā bālham̐ paridevetha* (do not lament too much)—Fellow monks, all of you, do not cry, impermanence is a normal worldly condition for all beings and constituted bodies. All the Buddhas have constantly commented on this topic in their exposition of the Dhamma. Fellow monks, you should therefore try hard to be among those who can avoid [being the victims of] King Maccu. In addition, you, bhikkhus, who would like to see me at the moment that I enter nibbāna, I invite you to gather at the foot of the mountain Kukkuṭasampāta, as I will enter nibbāna today, in the evening.” *Iti vatvā* (having said this)—Thus spoke Mahākassapa the Elder to the assembly of monks. As it was then time to go for collecting alms he stood up rising from his seat and he adjusted his garments, putting his upper robe over his lower robe. The color of his upper robe was like a flash of lightning. A long time ago it had been woven with threads from a robe made of rags (*pāṅsukulacīvara*) that had been offered to the Daśabalañña by the slave-woman Puṇṇā, and when [the Buddha had received it] the earth trembled three times. The Buddha ordered the garment to be stitched and dyed and he wore it himself before offering it to the Elder.

Mahākassapa took his bowl and went out from the Veḷuvanārāma, walking gracefully, to receive food offerings. His bowl had a green and beautiful color, like the color of the wings of a carpenter bee. He was as elegant as a lion king leaving

6. This sentence and the following one with the asterisk are excerpts from a series of canonical verses dealing with impermanence. They can be found in *Dasarathajātaka* (Jāt. 461, IV 127), *Mūgapakkhajātaka* (Jāt. 538, VI 28), etc.

7. This is the beginning of a citation of two verses, continued in the next sentence (*ajjeva kiccāmātappam̐ ko jaññā maraṇam̐ suve // na hi no saṅgaram̐ tena mahāsenna maccunā*). It appears in some canonical texts, the first of all being the *Majjhimanikāya* (Chalmers, 1994:187, *Chaṭṭha Saṅgayāna* 272, verses 21-22). Cowell gave this translation from the *Mūgapakkhajātaka* (1973:17): “Do what thou hast to do to-day, who can ensure the morrow’s sun // Death is the Master-general who gives his guarantee to none.”

8. In Thai Māccurāja (Pāli maccu, Skt. mṛtya) another name for Yama, the god of death.

his magnificent cave to hunt. *Santindriyam* (faculties calmed)—His body straight, he looked right on the walkway, fixing his eyes at the distance of four elbows in front of him. He walked in this manner into the city of Rājagṛha, collecting alms from street to street until he had sufficient food to nourish himself. *Piṇḍapāta paṭikkanto* (back from collecting alms)—Then having finished receiving his alms he went back to his residence and ate the food collected at his convenience.

§ 4) *Tadā bhikkhusaṅgho* (at that time the Community of monks)—Meanwhile all the bhikkhus in every monastery became very agitated, excited by the prospect of going to witness Mahākassapa the Elder entering nibbāna. Every one was carrying ritual offerings on their way to Kukkuṭasāmpāta, a mountain near the great city of Rājagṛha. Divinities and people gathered at the foot of the mountain to watch the event and all had brought flowers, perfumes and other offerings for the sole purpose of paying ultimate homage to the great Elder. The place was crowded and in great disorder with everybody meeting there at the same time. *Thero* (the Elder)—On his side the Elder, the venerable Master, having finished his meal, said to himself: “*Ayam Ajātasatturāja* (this King Ajāsattu)—King Ajātasatrū (Ajātasātrū)⁹ has been of great support to me, he is a believer who always took the trouble to provide the four requisites¹⁰ to the Community of monks, to the Triple Gem with a delighted heart and he used to help me to praise the doctrine of the Lord Buddha during the first Council. All this obliges me to go and tell King Ajātasatrū that I shall take leave of the world.” *Iti cintetvā* (having thus reflected)—With this thought in mind Mahākassapa the Elder rose from his seat wearing his upper robe and his lower robe as it is supposed to be worn by a Buddhist monk. He then left the place immediately for Rājagṛha.

Phra Suriyothai was reaching the zenith¹¹ when the Great Elder entered the premises of the royal palace. At this time the King had already gone to bed and was asleep¹². *Amaccā* (the privy councillors)—When the royal councillors saw the Great Elder entering the Palace they were all wondering why Mahākassapa was coming at the wrong time. No doubt it must signify something important. *Paccuggantvā* (having gone out to meet)—The councillors, having thus reflected, went out to welcome the Great Elder. They prostrated themselves before him then stood up again. The Great Elder then pressed them to answer his question: “Lay followers, right now where is the King?” All the councillors answered: “Venerable master the King is sleeping.” Then they asked him: “*Bhante* (O Master!), venerable Master Mahākassapa, what is the reason for your presence here?” The Elder replied: “O lay

9. Or Ajātasattu (Pāli), King of Magadha. He helped Devadatta in his attempts to kill the Buddha but repented later (Malalasekera 1937:I 31–35).

10. The four requisites, *catupaccaya*, are clothing (*cīvara*), food as alms (*piṇḍapāta*), dwelling place (*senāsana*) and medicine (*bhesajja*).

11. The sun was at its highest point; it was noon.

12. Probably because he met his council at night and gave an audience in the early morning. According to Professor Charnvit Kasetsiri this schedule was customary at the court of Siam.

followers, I am here to present my farewell to the King since I will enter nibbāna in the evening of this very day.” As the councillors asked him where it was to happen, he added: “I will enter nibbāna in the middle of the Kukkuṭasāmpāta, the mountain with three peaks, in the evening of this very day.”

Ettakam eva vatvā (having said this)—Having spoken so, the venerable Mahākassapa returned to his place, the Veḷuvanā Mahāvihāra. When he arrived he grasped his broom and started to sweep around the vihāra, acting as he usually did: he left the pots of water for cleaning and for washing as well as the pots of water for drinking in their usual place and tidied up his dwelling, all objects remaining where they belonged. Mahākassapa then finished arranging everything.

Mahatā bhikkhusaṅghena (with a large group of monks)—The venerable Master then left the Veḷuvanā Mahāvihāra, a huge retinue of monks behind him.

Yena kukkuṭasampātapabbatā (toward the Kukkuṭa mountain)¹³—Mahākassapa the Elder led the procession in the direction of the mountain with three peaks that was called Kukkuṭasāmpāta.

So thero (he, the Elder)—Mahākassapa the Elder, the venerable Master, arrived in the evening¹⁴ at the mountain with all the monks. The sun was setting and the atmosphere was cool and comfortable. Mahākassapa the Elder then started to fly in the air reaching seven times the height of a sugar-palm tree and performing miracles (*pāṭihāriya*) like emitting fire or water out of his body.¹⁵ Sometimes one side of his body was releasing water and the other side fire and vice versa. Sometimes the upper part of his body was emitting fire and the lower part, water. Sometimes a stream of water and a stream of fire will come out together.

Ekadā (once)—Sometimes the flame would engulf his entire body but sometimes a flow of water would recover it totally. Mahākassapa the Elder was performing these miracles while he was preaching. *Ekadā* (once)—Showing that he was like an emperor (*paramacākrabātrā*),¹⁶ the Great Elder sometimes appeared bearing the full regalia and jewels of a supreme Ruler with his four generals and their innumerable men as a guard of honor. Sometimes his body appeared to be as high as twelve *yojanas*¹⁷ to all the people at the same time. Some other time he manifested himself in the appearance of the King Kosiya¹⁸ measuring three hundred

13. Literally: “the mountain where [the peaks] meet together like the foot of a cock.”

14. “*yēn yam₁ suriyodāy*” [at] the time before dusk.

15. This is the “twin miracle.” Peter Skilling pointed out to me that it is not supposed to be performed by an auditor or direct disciple of the Buddha (*sāvaka*) according to the Theravādins (it is considered as *asādhāraṇa* to *sāvakas*).

16. *Paramacākrabātrā*, here, stands for *paramacakravartin*, or *cakkavattī*, a supreme and universal king.

17. If a *yojana*, according to the PTS *Pāli-English Dictionary*, is equal to 7 miles (or 11.2 kilometers) then it makes 84 miles (135 kilometers). But the estimated length of the *yojana* is still a matter of discussion. On this topic, see Skilling (1998: 149–170).

18. The name Kosiya has been used several times in the Pāli *Tiṭṭaka* in speaking of the god Sakka. It refers directly to Indra in Vedic literature (Malalasekera 1937:I 700).

sen²¹⁹ and adorned with full beautiful divine attire marvelous to behold. Another time he took the shape of the Great Lord Brahma, three *yojana* tall, accompanied by a huge retinue. Everybody could see it.

After that Mahākassapa continued to preach to the people in order that many of them could arrive at attainment of the levels of the Nobles Ones (*ariyabhūmi*).

Otaritvā (having descended)—Then he descended from the sky [back to the ground] and said farewell to the Monks in these words: “*Āvuso* (friends!), O monks, all of you assembled, continue to live well, try to fulfill the duties of a monk, and do not be careless in following the teachings of the Buddha. I have to take my leave, monks, I am entering nibbāna.” After that Mahākassapa went right to the middle of the three peaks with the idea that this should be the very place of his nibbāna.

Meanwhile all the gods and divinities, knowing the spiritual state of the master monk prepared a bed (*āsanaḥ*) with a supernatural silk cloth for him to lay down on²⁰. Then they decorated its sides with green, white and red lotuses²¹ together with jars, neatly lined up, containing pure water. *Catūsu koṇesu* (at four corners)—At the four corners of this bed they arranged incense sticks for the devotional offerings. *Cattāro daṇḍadīpakā* (four torches)—Then they also put candles and garlands of flowers at these corners as well as lamps, small or big. All these devotional objects were installed to decorate beautifully the place for the coming nibbāna.

Thero pi kho (as for the Elder)—Then the venerable Elder Mahākassapa climbed into the place where he reclined and acquired the fruits of attainment (*samāpatti*), that are supreme bliss. *Tato paṭṭhāya* (after that)—Then, very quickly he came out of the attainment and was able to make the following vow: “*Yadā āyusāṅkhāro* (when the vital formations)—since I have to meet my extinction, the end of my formations by entering nibbāna at any moment—*ime tayo pabbatā* (these three mountains)—may the three peaks of the mountain merge together to be only one. They will constitute a closed chamber inside the rock of the mountain itself, like a splendid sleeping room at this propitious moment. *Imāni pupphāni* (these flowers)—May these garlands of buds and blossoms all fresh and moist, never dry, may their freshness be their permanent condition! *Cattāro dīpā* (four lamps)—Candles and incense sticks at the four corners will not stop burning from now on.”

Punādhittḥāsi (he wishes again)—Mahākassapa the Elder then continued to express his vow (*adhiṣṭhān*) as follows: “*Ito ca yathā* (from now on)—Starting from now, the life of all human beings will get shorter and shorter. At a time people will live only ten years and it will be an era of violence and murder²². Like beasts the people of this dark age of warfare (*miḡasaññī*)²³ will regard each other as wild animals. Some of them will take the opportunity to take lumps of mud and sticks of

19. A *sen*₂ is about 40 meters. This would equal 12 kilometers.

20. Details in the narrative imply that this place is installed above the ground.

21. Or water lily (*upalacaṅkalani*).

22. To be more precise: murders committed with blades.

23. In Thai, *miḡasaññī* means a time when people are acting like beasts (*miga*).

wood to turn them into weapons. They will hunt the others and kill each other until they all die. The people remaining will be the ones who escape by hiding in gorges and crevices next to mountainous streams. But each one will be alone since a group of two or three persons will inevitably start a fight until all die. *Sattāhe atikkante* (after seven days)– This *migasaññī* will only last seven days. After that the survivors will leave their shelters, meet and show benevolence toward each other. They will behave and all adopt right conduct according to the Dhamma avoiding killing (*pāṇātipāta*) and stealing (*adinnādāna*) avoiding all actions that are demeritorious like sexual misconduct (*kāmesumicchācāra*), lying and becoming intoxicated (*musāvāda surāmerāya*). [Those people] aged ten years old [practising] generosity will have children and their kind-hearted children who will do meritorious deeds will double their life expectancy and live twenty years. The children of their children will live fifty years and so on doubling [every generation] up to from one hundred thousand of ten millions of millions of hundred of *koṭi*²⁴ of thousands of *koṭi* of hundred thousands of *koṭi*... Everybody being eager to always cultivate the Dhamma then the duration of life will be incalculable.

“*Tadā* (at that time)—In that era human beings will not be threatened by old age or death, and for that reason they will neglect to behave according to the Dhamma and this negligence will lead to a reduction in their duration of life. Their incalculable long lives will be reduced to hundred thousands of *koṭi*. As people will be more and more negligent, they will live less and less longer reaching at the end a life of eighty thousands years.

“*So jambudīpo* (this Country of Rose-apples [India])—At this time the Chomphuthawip (*jambūdvīp*), the world where we live now, will be peaceful and smooth like the surface of a drum. In country villages and royal cities, large or small, all the land will be crowded with very rich householders (*śreṣṭhīgahapati*) and there will be complete abundance.

“*Tadā* (at that time)—Then the Perfectly Awakened Master Victorious over Māra called by the name of Mettray²⁵ will come to be awakened in this world. After his Enlightenment he will teach the Dhamma²⁶ to the numerous beings ready to receive his instructions, to accomplish the Path (*marga* [magga]) and receive the Fruits (*phala*). He will come to this very place. There will be a congregation of devotees that will form a procession around the Future Buddha²⁷ on a twelve *yojana* perimeter. The Buddha Mettray will use his right hand to take my corpse, lift it and keep it in his hand that bears the mark of the Wheel (*cākralākkhaṇa*). Then he will say these words to the Community of monks:

24. A *koṭi* is ten million.

25. Metteya or Maitreya with his full Thai title of *àṅg brah̄ bijita m̄ra s̄mmā s̄mbuddha cao2*.

26. Or teach the Wheel of the Law: *deśanā dharmacākra*.

27. I use here and in following occurrences the expression “Future Buddha” that is not in the text for the terms *brah̄ àṅg*”.

‘*Bhikkhave* (monks!)—O monks! You have to observe this corpse. It is the body of the older brother of the Great Being (*tathāgata*) he was a major disciple (*sāvaka*)²⁸ in the time of the teaching of the Perfectly Awakened Master, the Buddha Gotama. His name was Ariyakassapa the Elder and he was occupied by the practice of the thirteen austerities (*dhutaṅg*”) until he passed away.

‘*Ayaṃ thero* (this Elder)—This Ariyakassapa observed the practice of wearing discarded rags (*paṇsukulikadhutaṅg*” [paṇsukūlikadhutaṅga]) until he passed away. He observed the practice of wearing three robes (*tecīvarikadhutaṅg*” [tecīvarikadhutaṅga]), of eating alms-food (*piṇḍapātikadhutaṅg*” [piṇḍapātikadhutaṅga]), of not being selective while going for alms-food (*sāppadānacārikadhutaṅg*” [sapadānacārikadhutaṅga]), of having one meal session (*ekāsanikadhutaṅg*” [ekāsanikadhutaṅga]), of eating only from the bowl (*pāttapiṇḍikadhutaṅg*” [pattapiṇḍikadhutaṅga]), of abstaining from eating after the normal time (*khalupācchābhātikadhutaṅg*” [khalupacchābhāttikadhutaṅga]), of living in the forest (*āraññikadhutaṅg*” [āraññikadhutaṅga]), of living at the foot of a tree (*rukhamūlikadhutaṅg*” [rukhamūlikadhutaṅga]), of living outside (*ābbhikāsikadhutaṅg*” [abbhokāsikadhutaṅga]), of living in a cemetery (*sosānikadhutaṅg*” [sosānikadhutaṅga]), of accepting whatever seat (*yathāsāntatikadhutaṅg*” [yathāsanthatikadhutaṅga]) and of sleeping seated (*nesājjikadhutaṅg*” [nesajjikadhutaṅga]). He always observed this rule and never lay down to rest from the day of his full ordination to the day of his parinibbāna.

‘O monks! For Ariyakassapa the thirteen austerities were the usual practice that he performed at the highest degree much better than the other monks who were the disciples of the Perfectly Enlightened Master, the Buddha Gotama. Many of these disciples would content themselves with superficially wiping out their faults (*pāpa*) when Ariyakassapa, never being attached to any group, would live just in purity without committing any offense.²⁹ The venerable Ariyakassapa made his name famous in the Doctrine—*puṇṇacando viya* (like the full moon)—like the moon, daughter of the gods, when it is full, shining and spotless in the sky.’

“The Blessed One (*bhagavā*) and Perfectly Enlightened Master Mettray will praise my virtues (*guṇa*) profound and firm like the earth like the water in the bed of the high seas and like the Mount Sineru, mountain of the Kings which is higher than any other in this world. The Perfectly Enlightened Master Mettray will again praise my virtues to make them known to the Community of monks in this manner. At that moment, a flame will ignite within my own corpse and burn down my remains inside the palm of the Perfectly Enlightened Master Mettray.”

When Mahākassapa the Elder finished expressing this vow he continued with another one: “Since the King Ajātasatṛū has been informed of my nibbāna, he will

28. Or the Hearers, the disciples and the devotees able to listen directly to the words of the Buddha.

29. The Thai text is vague and the meaning uncertain. Does it mean that the Elder would not adhere to any of the different monks’ lineages or is it about dependency upon large clans or families?

come to perform faithfully the ceremony of paying respect. *Ime tayo pabbatā* (these three mountains)—The three peaks of the mountain must open for the occasion and let the King come and show his veneration. *Pūjāvasāne* (at the end of the homage)—When he has finished his homage the three peaks will join back together sealing over my body to remain tightly closed just as before.”

Thero (the Elder)—Thus spoke the Elder Mahākassapa. He then leaned down on his right side on the bed already prepared, in the direction of the east, his hands and feet perfectly disposed and his head facing the north. *Nibbānadhātuyā* (the sphere of nibbāna)—Then his five aggregates (*pañcakhāndh*)³⁰ simply extinguished as he entered the deathless state of nibbāna, which is extinction and the complete end of all hardship (*vipāka*),³¹ aggregates and forms provoked by action without any rest. There cannot be any physical continuation in the future and this state is called *anupādisesaparinnibbāna*.³²

Tasmim khane (at this moment)—at the very moment when Mahākassapa the Elder entered nibbāna the three peaks of the mountain closed together just as he had expressed in his wish. The peaks were tightly sealed around his body making just one rock. It was like a well shut receptacle but inside it was a sealed chamber ornamented with different offerings.

Sabbe devamanussā (all the gods and men)—When all the gods and people who gathered with all the monks senior and junior disciples saw the mountain closing upon the body of the Elder, hiding it from their eyes they felt perturbed in mind and they all started to cry and to lament loudly, saying: “From now on it will be hidden and out of sight! It is like a crystal light from a lamp burning for all creatures that extinguishes definitively when misfortune comes: what was clear becomes obscure. As for a great number of people that used to see every morning and evening Mahākassapa who was always teaching them, now what shall they do?” The people were in deep affliction about not being able to see the body of Mahākassapa anymore. This wonder provoked great confusion. All the gods and people, not able to see his body, then decided to perform the rites of paying respect outside the mountain. They disposed of their offerings and prostrated themselves for a last farewell to the Master before returning home.

§ 5) *Tadā* (at that time)—At this very moment King Ajātasatrū was still enjoying a very pleasant sleep in his palace. His royal councillors met and discussed the matter in this way: “What should we do? The King is asleep but is going to wake up and we shall inform him about the nibbāna of Mahākassapa. He will hear the news then he will feel terribly sorry and sad because of his love for the Elder. We could certainly see him die of grief! At this moment what solution are we going to find? We have to protect the life of our king!”

30. Or *pañcakhāndha* in Pāli.

31. *Vipāka* means results or consequences of actions in Pāli. In Thai it only means the bad results of actions.

32. Total extinction completely free from the elements of attachment (the five *khandhā*).

Evaṃ mantetvā (having thus deliberated)—The councillors of the king having thus deliberated summoned all the physicians of his majesty and spoke to them with these words: “Please, all of you, listen to us. If the king hears the news about the nibbāna of Mahākassapa, he will be deeply affected and his life will be in danger. You have to think how you will manage to alleviate [his grief].” The physicians comforted them by saying : “All of us will prepare medicine.” Then they ordered [the servants] to bring five golden basins³³: they filled the first one with sugarcane juice, the second one with milk, the third one with clear curd, the fourth one with perfumes and the fifth one with cool clear water. In every basin they added the drugs they had brought together. Then they waited in good order for the king to wake up.

Atha pabujjhitvā (then having woken up)—The King Ajātasatrū woke up, rinsed his mouth and left his royal room. Below the great state umbrellas in the royal hall, all the councillors were gathered, waiting for his orders. The king was happy. All the officials prostrated themselves and spoke to him with these words: “*Deva* (Lord)—We, the servants of your divine majesty should inform you that during your sleep, at midday, Mahākassapa the Elder came here to give his blessings to your majesty but since he could not see you at this time he went back.” *Rājā* (the king)—The king having heard his people telling him about this visit asked them where the Elder was going afterwards. The councillors answered that he was taking leave [of the world] and would enter nibbāna. “When?” asked the king. They informed him then that the Elder had already entered nibbāna in the evening of that very day.

Taṃ sutvā (having heard that)—When the king heard the news his heart started to palpitate wildly. *Dalham sinehasena* (because of strong affection)—Because of the strong love the king felt for the Elder his body could not bear the power of the sorrow, his condition became severely affected and he began losing his faculties. Finally he fainted and had to lean on a dais in the great hall. *Te amaccā* (these councillors)—all the councillors then came to support the king. They immersed him in the basin filled with sugar cane juice in order to imbue his body totally [with the medicine]. Then they lifted him again and immersed him promptly in the basin filled with milk. The milk penetrated his body and started to heal his heart as he was regaining consciousness. He was then able to be in command again and ask questions to his councillors. They prostrated themselves and again explained the story. One more time the king collapsed and his people supported him bringing him to the milk basin. Next they put him in the basin filled with curd (*sāppi*) and then in the basin filled with perfumes³⁴. Finally they immersed him in the cool clean water.

Rājā (the king)—The king Ajātasatrū after taking the medicines presented by all his physicians regained his normal state and he questioned his councillors again. “*Bhonto* (sirs)—Listen, my dear councillors, tell me where did Mahākassapa the

33. These basins are big, they might look like jars.

34. The text suggests that the perfumed mixture is made with water containing floating fragrant balls or lumps.

Elder, our spiritual teacher, enter nibbāna?” The consellers, prostrated, answered: “Majesty, the Elder has entered nibbāna in the Kukkuṭasāmpāta mountain.”

Hearing that the king ordered them to beat the drum and spread the news among all the people of his kingdom. Then he ordered them to prepare all the necessary ritual offerings, flags made of cloth and paper, big and small umbrellas, a gamelan orchestra with victory and funeral drums, *trae*³⁵, conch shell trumpets, *bandao*,³⁶ every kind of musical instruments and garlands of fragrant flowers. Then they all left the city (*braḥ bhārā*)³⁷ escorted by four kinds of troops³⁸. As the king started his travel, he immediately turned his face in the direction of the Kukkuṭasāmpāta. When he arrived at the destination his eyes could not see the body of the master, only the mountain with the three peaks in one. Only at this moment he turned his face to his councillors to ask them : “*Bhaṇe* (you, tell me!)—Listen to what I am saying! Where is the body of my spiritual teacher? Why is it I cannot see him?” All the councillors, prostrated, replied: “*Deva* (Lord)—Majesty, the great Elder lies in the midst of the three peaks.” The king listened to what the councillors told him and wondered what he should do to be able to see the body of his spiritual teacher. Then he thought of making a vow (*tāṇ₂ gvām sac[c]a*)³⁹ the only thing on earth that can be relied on.

Iti cintetvā (thus having reflected)—The king having considered the situation went closer to the rocky peak. *Jānumaṇḍalaṃ patitṭhapetvā* (having put himself in the kneeling position)—He kneeled down on the ground (*basudha*), put his hands together, raised them, and lowered his body to bow down in a gesture of reverence (*abhivāda*) done with the five members of his body. He bowed three times (*vāraḥ*) laid his hands on the top of his head, and then spoke the following words: “*Bhonto devasaṃghāyo* (sirs, the assembly of gods)—Please listen to me, O Gods, the ones with elevated souls. I had great veneration for Mahākassapa the Elder, the spiritual teacher. My pleasure will be too great to be expressed by any word [if you listen to me]. By the power of my vow⁴⁰, may the three peaks open to let me see the body of Mahākassapa the Elder!” Just after the king had said this prayer—*tayo pabbatā* (the three mountains)—the three peaks opened and the body of the great Elder became visible for everyone and first of all, to the king. By the power of the sincere prayer (*sacca*) of the king Ajātasatṛū and because of the power of the resolutions taken by the Elder when he entered nibbāna—*mahājanakāyo* (a large crowd)—all the people, soldiers and ordinary citizens were able to witness this wonder. Some

35. A brass wind instrument like a trumpet.

36. Small drums used in brahmanical rites (*pāṇḍauḥv*”).

37. *Bhārā* is a rare word given as the equivalent of *mueang* (*mīōn*) in the Rachabandit dictionary.

38. The four arms of a traditional army: elephants, chariots, cavalry and the infantry.

39. Peter Skilling pointed out to me that such *sacca-adhiṭṭhāna* or *satyavāk* is a common element in Indian and Buddhist narratives.

40. Or: “by the power of my sincere prayer.”

people clapped their hands others laughed or cried or shouted in praise⁴¹ in a general boisterous demonstration. Some were so pleased to watch this scene that they took the cloth they were wearing over their shirts to make flags in order to pay respect to the corpse of the Elder.⁴²

To have the pleasure to see this wonder with his own eyes—*rājā* (the king)—the king cast his eyes in the distance to observe the body of Mahākassapa the Elder lying on the platform. There were plenty of devotional offerings that the divinities had set up for the ritual: joss sticks, candles and lamps. *Sañjātabalavasoko* (feeling a strong grief)—At this sight the king’s heart was broken and tears ran down his face. He went closer and reached the body while crying and lamenting, and he prostrated himself laying his hands on the feet of the great Elder. The king in great sorrow honored the Elder with the devotional offerings, perfumes, royal umbrellas, flowers, drums, *trae* and the other musical instruments. Music was played and food served for seven days to pay tribute to the Elder. The king stayed and paid respect for seven full days and seven full nights. *Sattāhavasāne* (after seven days)—At the end of the seventh day the three peaks of the mountain merged again to become only one and the body was then to remain protected and invisible.

Rājā (the king)—King Ajātasatrū with all his retinue, unable to see the body of Mahākassapa the Elder, felt very perturbed—*sañjātabalavasoko roditvā* (feeling a strong grief and weeping)—it provoked great sorrow and anxiety. Everyone was crying with a feeling of loss⁴³ as if the sun was disappearing at the ridge of Mount Sumeru at the point of the west. The grief of the king was provoked by this bereavement, the loss of his spiritual teacher. *Abhivātetvā* (having bowed down)—Then the king prostrated himself for a last salute before taking the road back to his city with all his followers, his heart feeling how much he will miss every day the great Elder because of the ties of his love beyond calculation. The king thereafter tried hard to observe the precepts and follow frequently the [rule of] giving, always remembering the teaching of Mahākassapa the Elder, his spiritual teacher.

Yāvajjattanā (till today)—Day after day, the corpse of the great Elder never altered, never decayed. All the joss sticks, candles, flowers and other offerings remained in their original condition also. The lights never stopped burning, the flowers never dried, they kept on looking as they did when the Elder made his wish. All these offerings would continue to be in the same condition until the time of the teaching of Mettray the Perfectly Enlightened Master. The body of Mahākassapa and these offerings will certainly not be subjected to the smallest disappearance.

Anāgate kāle (in the future time)—Far in the future, Mettray the Perfectly Enlightened Master will obtain the higher knowledge and come to this place with his retinue as long as twelve *yojana*. The Buddha Mettray will pick up the body of

41. They were using the exclamative expression *sathu* (“Hail!”) used at the conclusion of Buddhist rituals as a sign of agreement and devotion (*sādhukāra*).

42. People are wearing a piece of cloth on the shoulder (the *sabai*) that can be used for many purposes.

43. Literally “obscurity.”

the great Elder with his right hand and raise it above the community of monks following him. Then the Lord [Buddha] with the Knowledge of the Ten Powers will reveal the virtues of Mahākassapa to the assembly as already mentioned above. All the monks who hear his words will be delighted by his preaching. At the very moment when Ariya Mettray will finish describing the virtues of Mahākassapa, the corpse will catch fire and burn by itself. Soon it will disappear for ever and be reduced to a small quantity of ashes and powder in the palm of the hand of the Perfectly Enlightened Ariya Mettray.

Lokanātho (the Protector of the world)—The Perfectly Enlightened Ariya Mettray Protector of the World then will gather these relics and enshrine them in a stūpa in this country hoping that it will become a place of worship for all divinities and men. Then he will come back to his usual residence.

§ 6) *Sādhavo* (O good people!)—Listen, good people, people with faith and intelligence, able to consider that everybody is born in the Round of Existence where there is essentially separation and death and that everybody is subject to the law of impermanence. No one is exempted, no one escapes impermanence: not only you who are only ordinary people, full of desires, but also people who attain a high degree of excellence like Mahākassapa. These people as well will be subject to ageing, decrepitude and death, they will totally extinguish.

Sādhu, good people, people with great insight who can realize impermanence as it just has been said before. You should use your mindfulness to try to search for what is firm, that is to say to follow the precepts, practise giving and earn merit as the fruit of wholesome acts. Prepare your mind to cultivate the ten ways of wholesome action (*kuśala kammaṣaṭṭha*)⁴⁴. Do not be lazy in managing your good actions since they will have an effect on your next life. Try always to accumulate merit without fail, just like a container which is open in the outside, gathering rainwater in the rainy season and continuing to be filled in the dry season even if it rains only a little bit at a time, and just like an intelligent person who never fails to cultivate wholesome actions as time goes by, attains the completion. These will be the requirements for one who searches to go out of the Round of Existence and proceeds towards the nibbāna, the end of desire. If he attains that stage at the end of that life then he will go directly to the city of crystal, nibbāna. He will not be born again in a next life. This will be supreme bliss and an end to suffering, misfortune and harm.

All of this will be just like the end of such a “noble” person in the former time [Mahākassapa] who will no longer endure suffering⁴⁵ and only be happy in the city of crystal which has just been mentioned, the Great City of Nibbāna.

Here ends the story of the nibbāna of Mahākassapa the Elder.

44. For a detailed list and explanation of the ten *kuśala kammaṣaṭṭha* see Phrathepweṭhi 2532:276–279.

45. The negation in this last sentence is in Northern Thai, Lao or old Siamese (*baḥān*.)

Appendix 2

The Nibbāna stories of the Hearers of the Buddha

From the first Thai edition (2457) of *hnānsiṅgā sāvakanibbāna - brahasītimahā-sāvakanibbāna* (as listed in the book, with chapter numbers and corresponding proper names in the DPPN).¹

1. Kaccāyanatheranibbāna (in fact Gavampati DPPN I, 757)
2. Koṇḍaññatheranibbāna (Aññāta Koṇḍañña DPPN I, 43)
3. Mahākassapatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 547)
4. Sāriputtatheranibbāna (or Upatissa DPPN II, 1108)
5. Mahāmoggallānatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 541)
6. Ānandatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 249)
7. Bākulatheranibbāna (Bakkula ou Vakkula DPPN II, 261)
8. Bāhiyadāruccīriyatheranibbāna (an arahant but not a monk DPPN II, 281)
9. Kuṇḍalattissathera & Bayagghatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 627 & ?)
10. Piṇḍapātiyatissatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 201)
11. Sāṇutheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1095)
12. Nālakatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 55)
13. Buddhapitānibbāna (the father of the Buddha, Suddhodana, DPPN II, 1200)
14. Santatimahā-aṃmātayanibbāna (a minister of Pasenadi DPPN II, 1023)
15. Mahāpajāpatīgotamīnibbāna (DPPN II, 522)
16. Dabbamallaputranibbāna (Dabba-Mallaputta DPPN I, 1059)
17. Pūtiggattatissatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 241)
18. Godhikatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 816)
19. Anuruddhatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 85)
20. Bhaddiyatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 358)
21. Piṇḍolabhāradvājatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 202)
22. Puṇṇatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 220)
23. Soṇakoṭikaṇṇatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1291)
24. Sivalītheranibbāna (Sīvalī DPPN II, 1163)
25. Vakkalītheranibbāna (DPPN II, 799)
26. Rāhulathera & Raṭṭhapālatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 737 & DPPN II, 706)
27. Uruvellakassapatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 432)
28. Kāḷudāyītheranibbāna (DPPN I, 589)
29. Sobhitatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1305)
30. Upālītheranibbāna (DPPN I, 408)
31. Nandakatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 17)
32. Nandatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 16)

1. For a larger discussion on various disciple lists, see my doctoral dissertation (Lagirarde 2001, chapter IV.2, 301–320).

33. Mahākapīnatheranibbāna (Mahā-Kappina DPPN II, 473)
34. Mahākaccāyanatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 468)
35. Sāgatatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1087)
36. Rādhattheranibbāna (DPPN II, 730)
37. Mogharājatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 669)
38. Bhaddajītheranibbāna (DPPN II, 349)
39. Upasenatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 404)
40. Kumārakassapatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 632)
41. Cūlapanthakathera & Mahāpanthakatheranibbāna (Cūlapanthaka DPPN I, 897 & DPPN II, 530)
42. Revatatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 752)
43. Subhūtītheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1235)
44. Kaṅkhārevatatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 543)
45. Soṇakoḷivisatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1293)
46. Uttaratheranibbāna (DPPN I, 349)
47. Vaṅgīsatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 802)
48. Sopākatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1302)
49. Nāgatheranibbāna (Mahā Nāga? DPPN II, 511)
50. Kassapatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 547)
51. Kimilatheranibbāna (Kimbila DPPN I, 504)
52. Sunandatheranibbāna (?)
53. Dhaniyatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 1133)
54. Vimalatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 890)
55. Mahānāmatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 514)
56. Vappatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 832)
57. Girimānandatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 770)
58. Sumanatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1240,1241)
59. Subhaddatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1231)
60. Mahākoṭṭhitatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 485)
61. Sambhūtatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1062)
62. Samiddhītheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1050)
63. Subāhūtheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1225)
64. Aṅgulimālatheranibbāna (DPPN I, 22)
65. Sukhatheranibbāna (DPPN II, 1174)
66. Sumanatheranibbāna (bis DPPN II, 1240, 1241)
67. Loludāyītheranibbāna (Lāḷudāyi DPPN II, 777)

Two theras are named in chapters 9, 26, and 41. This makes a list of seventy names. More than twenty names of famous Hearers are unmentioned (like Assaji, Udāyī, etc.). However, these names are well attested in Pāli literature: perhaps all are arahants but not all are bhikkhus.

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a-1. *Sāvakanibbāna* collections in the National library in Bangkok

1. *brahṇpālīsāvakanibbāna* — palm-leaves, 5 *phūk*, *khom* script, Pāli, no. 2380/1-5 h 10 j. 5/1
2. *brahṇpālīsāvakanibbāna* — palm-leaves, 5 *phūk*, *khom* script, Pāli, with a seal from the second reign of the Ratanakosin era, no. 2362/k/1-5 h 10 j. 5/1 236/kh 2362/g
3. *brahṇpālīsāvakanibbāna* — palm-leaves, 5 *phūk*, *khom* script, Pāli, third reign of the Ratanakosin era, no. 2379/k/1-5 h 10 J. 5/1 2379/kh
4. *brahṇpālīsāvakanibbāna* — palm-leaves, 5 *phūk*, *khom* script, Pāli, third reign of the Ratanakosin era, no. 2391/k/1-5 h 11 j. 4/1 2591/kh 2591/g 2591/gh
5. *brahṇpālīsāvakanibbāna* — palm-leaves, 6 *phūk*, *khom* script, Pāli, fourth reign of the Ratanakosin era, no. 2381/k/1-6 h 10 j. 5/1 2381/kh
6. *brahṇpālīsāvakanibbāna* — palm-leaves, 6 *phūk*, *khom* script, Pāli, fifth reign of the Ratanakosin era, no. 2377/k/1-6 h 10 j. 5/1 2377/kh
7. *brahṇpālīsāvakanibbāna* — palm-leaves, 4 *phūk*, *khom* script, Pāli, fifth reign of the Ratanakosin era, no. 2375/1-4 h 10 j. 5/1
8. *brahṇpālīsāvakanibbāna* — palm-leaves, 5 *phūk*, *khom* script, Pāli, fifth reign of the Ratanakosin era, no. 2378/1-5 h 10 j. 5/1

a-2. *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* texts in the National library in Bangkok, ancient languages room, cabinet 1, box 10, *khom* script

1. *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* — palm-leaves, one *phūk*, Pāli, no. 12330/1 t. Taṃ 38 j. 2 m.P.t.
2. *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* — palm-leaves, one *phūk*, Pāli, no. 6120/gh/1 t. 126 m.P.t. j. 4/5, dated BE 2331 [CE 1788]
3. *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* — palm-leaves, one *phūk*, Pāli, no. 6117/g/1t. 126 m.P.t. j. 4/5
4. *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* — palm-leaves, one *phūk*, Pāli, no. 11562/th/1 t. 132 m.P.t. j. 3/4
5. *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* — palm-leaves, one *phūk*, Pāli, no. 4642/gh/T t. m.P.t. j. 2/1 n.
6. *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* — palm-leaves, one *phūk*, Pāli, no. 268/kh/t. 89 m.P.t. j. 4/3 t.
7. *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* — palm-leaves, one *phūk*, Pāli, no. 6883/jh/1 t. 128 m.P.t. j. 2/2

a-3. *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* texts in the National library in Chiang Mai

1. *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* — palm-leaves, one *phūk*, Thai script, Pāli and Thai, jm. P. 3207/1

1. I wish to thank Rampa Salikarin, Jacqueline Filliozat and Uthen Wongsathit for their help in the elaboration of this bibliography which is not intended to be exhaustive.

2. *Mahākassapatheranibbāna* — palm-leaves, two *phūk*, *khom* script, Pāli and Thai, jm. P. 3084/3:3 k.

b. Pāli and Siamese manuscripts surveyed by J. Filliozat in Bangkok

Wat Hong Ratanaram Thonburi 250(1): *Kassapanibbāna* (Pāli-Siamese).

Top ola, middle: *bra kassapa kho(?) nibbāna bra buddha i(?)karāja* + Siamese... 2457

Begins ola ka a | namatthu | ekasmiṃ samaye mahākassapo upanissāya rājagahe viharati tena kho pana samayena appamādadhamme paṭipajjatha te(!)rassa dhutaṅgaṃ samādāya arahantānaṃ seṭṭho ti visutto ahosi | + Siamese... nidāna... bra mahākassapathera... bra nibbāna...

Ends ola kai b line 5 | kassapatheraṃ niṭṭhitam |

One *phūk* only; olas ka-kai; complete; 57.5 x 6 cm; 2 cord-holes, 5 lines *Khom* script; gilded edges with vermilion band, olas stuck, never touched after gilding; no covers; BS 2457 = CE 1913.

Wat Phra Jetuphon, Bangkok; 6/ta.3: *Pālisāvakanibbāna*.

Cartouches in ink on top olas of the 5 *phūk*: *braḥ pālisāvakanibbāna phūk 1, 2, 3, 4, 5*

Begins ola ka a: | ekasmiṃ kira samaye eko mahāthero brahmaputto nāma sīlasamādhīpañāya samannagato hemabhūmaṃ nāma nagaraṃ upanissāya...

ola khi a line 2: | gavampatisuttaṃ niṭṭhitam |

“ gū b line 5 | ayaṃ mahākassapatherassa parinibbānakathā samattā |

Ends *phūk* 5 ola ñaḥ line 4: | yathā vuttajātavedo viya añatti bhāvameva hi so gato ti attho | dasamasuttavaṇṇanā samatā | bra pālisāvakanibbānaṃ niṭṭhitam | cudasavatthu |

5 *phūk*; olas ka-ñaḥ; complete; 58 x 5.2 cm.

c. Pāli manuscripts kept in French collections:

École française d'Extrême-orient (EFEO) and Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) according to *EFEO database* (a catalogue by J. Filliozat)

EFEO PALI 64 *Pālisāvakanibbāna*

188 olas, 6 bundles, 2 thick wooden covers, 530 x 52 mm; gilded edges with vermilion band, 2 cord holes, 5 lines, 55 char. — *mūl* script — Numb. *mūl* letters — no date — former shelfmark Finot XI; Louis Finot bequest 1935.

BnF PALI 298 *Sāriputtaparinibbānavāṇṇanā*, *Mahāmoggallānaparinibbānadhātukathā*, *Mahākassapanibbāna*, *Mahākaccāyananibbāna*

48 olas, 2 bundles, 2 modern wooden covers, 540 x 48 mm; gilded edges, 2 cord holes, 5 lines, 78 char. — *mūl* script — Numb. *mūl* letters — no date z— Missions Étrangères de Paris.

d. Manuscripts from Lanna and Laos

Mahākassapatheranibbāna (*Mahākassapathennibbān vat pā dèn* = WPD)

Description in Coedès 1966, p. 94. Dated CS 1228 (CE 1866). Original kept in Copenhagen, Lanna script and language.

Mahākassapanibbāna (*Mahākassapanibbān* = BNLV 1).

National Library, Vientiane Lao PDR, tham script, Lao language.

1 bundle, 28 olas, n °01 0129 13 041 04, dated CS 1169 (CE 1807).

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