The Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya on the Formation of Bhikṣuṇīs

Damchö Diana Finnegan

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Ways We Use Vinaya Texts in Discussions of Bhikṣuṇī Ordination

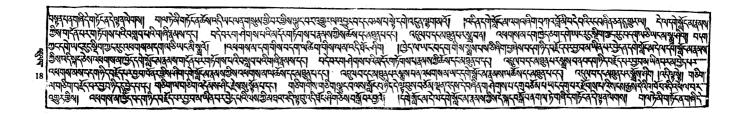
As a legal code?

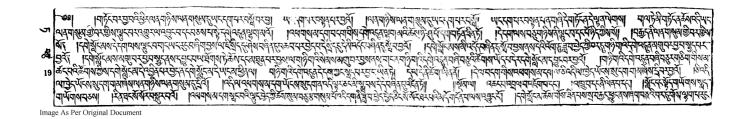
As a source of evidence on historical antecedents?

What kind of text is the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, anyway?

A very, very long one.







...and almost 8,000 more pages like these

What kind of text is the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, anyway?

Sūtras Ritual manual Cosmology History of kingdoms Buddha's biography Jātakas Avadānas

Narrative, narratives ... and more narratives

Reading As Authoritative Text

- Not what the Buddha intended?
 - Set in stone or set in water?
 - Superseded by "easier" text:
- 6th/7th-century "Root" Vinaya *Vinayasūtra*

Reading As Narratives

The great Indologist Sylvain Lévi called it a "masterpiece of Sanskrit literature" composed by someone "whose verbal enthusiasm and rampant imagination evoke the memory of Rabelais, and the best of Rabelais." *

* Lévi, Sylvain. 1932. "Notes sur des manuscripts sanscrits provenant de Bamiyan (Afghanistan) et de Gilgit (Cachemire)." *Journal Asiatique* 220: 23-

Reading As Narratives

Issues in reading as history

- Date (at least six centuries after events described)

- Politics of representation
- Multivocal yet authoritative

Reading As Narrative

- The world of the *MSV* is densely populated by women
 - Women not confined to ghetto
- Their voices are heard, subjectivity imagined
 - Narrator(s) acknowledge misogyny

Story One: Gender is on the *MSV*'s Radar

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī Arranges First Dharma Teachings for Śākya Women

"...the arising of the Buddha in the world is for the sake of men, not for women."

Vinayavastu, Sanghabhedavastu

Making Bhiksunīs

- Not a Process that ends when vows are given
 - Envisioning women As full participants in Buddhist monasticism

Story Two: Just What Does a Bhikṣuṇī Do, Anyway?

(Definitely not housework)

- Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's part in defining a bhikṣuṇī's role
- Class and gender; or, the advantages of being led by a queen

Bhikşunīvibhanga

Story Three: The Buddha as Protector of Nuns

A Former Prostitute, a King, a Brahmin and an Eye

- Females as vulnerable to male predators
- The Buddha as protector places nuns under monks
- Protecting bhikṣuṇīs from the bhikṣus

Bhikṣuvibhaṅga and *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga*

Story Four: Bhikṣuṇīs Caring for Women

Carving out separate spheres

Bhikşuvibhanga

"Gender pairing" *

* Skilling, Peter. 2001b. "Nuns, Laywomen, Donors, Goddesses: Female Roles in Early Indian Buddhism." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Stu*dies 24.2: 241-274.

Some Final Reflections