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AŚOKA'S EDICTS AND THE THIRD BUDDHIST COUNCIL

The attention paid so far to those edicts of Aśoka which make specific reference to Buddhism is somewhat meagre in contrast to his other edicts, with the possible exception of the Bhabru Edict. The lofty ideals and enlightened outlook evinced in the edicts have been of great interest to the student, and in his eagerness to treat the material before him as a whole, some aspects of the edicts have been overlooked. Events of great significance in Aśoka's reign find no direct mention in the edicts, while others like the conquest of Kalinga are dwelt on at length as they have a direct bearing on his central theme *dharmavijaya,* "Conquest by Righteousness". Aśoka's emphasis on his *dharma,* "Moral Law," and his "Conquest by Righteousness" have more or less thrown into insignificance the statements he makes in the Minor Rock Edicts of Brahmagiri I, Rūpnāth, Bhabru and Maski regarding his conversion to Buddhism and association with the *Sangha*, etc., and his deep concern for the unity and general welfare of the *Sangha* which find expression in the Minor Pillar Edicts of Sārnāth, Kosambī and Sañcī. The Lumbinī and Nigliva Pillar Edicts too are essentially "Buddhist" edicts while Rock Edict VIII mentions Aśoka's visit to the *Buddha*'s seat of enlightenment.

The central theme in the majority of the above edicts is the welfare of the *Sangha*. The opening lines of the Bhabru Rock Edict refer to Aśoka's reverence for the *Buddha*, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*: "King Piyadassī of Magadha expresses his respectful greetings to the

Sangha and enquires after their health, well-being and general comfort. Sirs, the extent of my reverence and devotion to the *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Sangha* is known to you. Whatever, Sirs, has been declared by the *Buddha*, the Exalted One, has been well declared. And, Sirs, what may be pointed out by me that the good Teaching shall endure for long, that I deserve to say"[1]. He next proceeds to prescribe seven disquisitions of the *Dhamma* to be learned and retained in mind by monks and nuns and lay male and female disciples[2].

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[1] More than anywhere else in the inscriptions, here in the Bhabru Edict, the term *dhamma* clearly refers to the *Dhamma* of the *Buddha* in contrast to the wider meaning that scholars are apt to assign to it. Other references to the *Dhamma* are not wanting in the edicts (see R. BASAK, *Aśokan Inscriptions*, p. 158), but it is not intended here to enter into an unending controversy on the connotation of the term *dhamma* in the edicts. Suffice it to say that nowhere in the edicts does Aśoka specifically mention any *dhamma* other than the *Buddha*'s *Dhamma* and none of the principles of his "Moral Law" goes counter to the teachings of the *Buddha*. The so-called two senses in which he used the term *dhamma* are in effect one and the same.

[2] The seven *dhaṁmapaliyāyāni* (P. *-pariyāyāni)* of Aśoka have been more or less satisfactorily identified. *Vide* T. W. RHYS DAVIDS, Note on Some of the Titles used in Bhabra Edict of Aśoka, in *JPTS*, 1896, pp. 93 ff.; *JRAS*, 1898, pp. 693 ff.; D. KOSAMBI, Aśoka's Bhabra Edict and Its Reference to Tipaṭaka Passages, in *IA.*, 41, 1912, pp. 37 ff.; R. MOOKERJI, *Aśoka*, L., 1928, pp. 117 ff.; A. J. EDMUNDS, Identification of Aśoka's First Buddhist Selection, in *JRAS*, 1913, p. 387; B. M. BARUA, A Note on the Bhabra Edict, in *JRAS*, 1915, pp. 809 ff.; S. N. MITRA, Identification of Vinayasamukase in Aśoka's Bhabra Edict, IA., 48, 1919, pp. 8 ff.; D. R. BHANDARKAR, *Aśoka*, Calcutta, 1925, pp. 85 ff.; S. LEVI, *J.A.*, Ser. 9, 7, pp. 475 ff.; H. OLDENBERG, *Vinaya Pitakaṁ* I, pp. xl ff.; HULTZCH, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, I, pp. 172 ff. Also *vide* U.C.R. I, I, pp. 63 ff., VI, 4, pp. 229 ff.

The seven passages are:

(1) *Vinayasamukase* (P. *Vinayasamukkaṁsa),* "The Exaltation of the Discipline," identified as the *Tuvaṭaka Sutta* of *Sutta Nipāta*, Sn. 915 ff. I agree with Bhandarkar here *(Aśoka,* pp. 87 ff.).

(2) *Aliyavasāni* (P. *Ariyavaṁsāni),* "The Noble Lineages", identified as the *Ariyavamsa Sutta* of *Anguttara Nikāya*, A. II, 28 (S.N. MITRA).

(3) *Anāgatabhayāni,* "The Future Dangers," generally agreed as the *Anāgatabhaya Sutta* of *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, A. III, 100 ff.

(4) *Munigāthā,* "The Stanzas on the Sage," identified as the *Muni Sutta* of *Sutta Nipāta*, Sn. 207 ff. (RHYS DAVIDS).

The Minor Pillar Edicts of Sārnāth, Kosambī and Sañcī are similar to one another as regards their contents. The unity of the *Sangha* and the punishment meted out to those who cause dissension in the *Sangha* find mention in them. The Sārnāth Edict, though a line or two are partially defaced, says: "In Pāṭa(liputta) .... (It shall not be possible) for any one to divide the *Sangha*. Whosoever monk or nun will divide the *Sangha* shall be made to wear white garments and compelled to live in a non-monastic dwelling. Thus this command shall be communicated to the *Sangha* of both monks and of nuns." Next he instructs as to where the edict should be posted and enjoins the Mahāmātras to enforce the rule of expelling the schismatics. The Kosambī Edict, though brief, in essence contains the same injunction: "The *Mahāmattas* of Kosambī (are commanded).... (the *Sangha*) has been united.... is not to be found among the *Sangha*.... Whosoever monk or nun will divide the *Sangha* shall be made to wear white garments and compelled to live in a nonmonastic dwelling". The Sañcī version goes one step further in describing the lasting effects of Aśoka's unification of the *Sangha*. He says: "The *Sangha* of monks and of nuns has been united to remain so to the time of my children and grandchildren and as long as the sun and the moon endure. Whosoever monk or nun will divide the *Sangha* shall be made to wear white garments and compelled to live in a non-monastic dwelling. What is my intention? It is that the *Sangha*, united, shall endure for long."

In the Lumbinī Pillar Edict Aśoka refers to his visit, in the twentieth year of his consecration, to the *Buddha*'s birthplace where

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(5) *Moneyasūte* (P. *Moneyyasutta)*, "The Discourse on Saintly Life," identified as the *Moneyya Sutta* (i.e. *Nālaka Sutta* without the *vatthugāthā)* of the *Sutta Nipāta*, Sn. 699 ff. *(Vide* U.C.R. VI, 4.)

(6) *Upatisapasine* (P. *Upatissapañha)*, "The Question of Upatissa," correctly identified as *Sāriputta Sutta* of *Sutta Nipāta*, Sn. 955 ff. by D. KOSAMBI.

(7) *Lāghuvāde musāvādaṁ adhigicya* (P. *Rāhulovādo musāvādaṁ adhigacca)*, identified as the *Ambalaṭṭhika Rāhulovāda Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikāya*, M.I., 414 ff. (RHYS DAVIDS).

he constructed a stone monument[3] and set up a pillar and exempted the village of taxes. In the Nigliva Minor Pillar Edict reference is made to his having rebuilt, in his fourteenth year after consecration, the *stūpa* to *Konāgamana Buddha*, and of a second visit paid in the twentieth year when he set up a pillar there. He also undertook a pilgrimage to the *sambodhi*, "the place of enlightenment of the *Buddha*," in the tenth year of his consecration.

These and a fair proportion of Aśoka's other edicts bear testimony to his direct connections with Buddhism. The edicts of Brahmagiri (No. 1), Rūpnāth and Maski refer to his having been a lay disciple of the *Buddha* for over two and a half years; he had not made much progress for one whole year, and after he has had closer associations with the *Sangha* for a period of over one year, i.e. out of the full period of two and a half years as an *upāsaka,* he began making great progress in the *Dhamma*[4]. Aśoka's words are quite clear with regard to the period he had *saṃghaṃ upayīte*, "gone to the *Sangha* (for guidance)," though the edicts are often mistranslated as Aśoka having entered the *Sangha* either as a monk or as a *bhikkhugatika,* a close follower of the monks. In doing so, too much reliance has been placed on a statement made by I-tsing[5] that he had seen Aśoka represented in the garb of a monk in sculpture, but "the supposed representations of Aśoka in the Sanchi sculptures show him dressed like a king and surrounded with all the paraphernalia of a king"[6]. However, Mookerji's interpretation that Aśoka became a

[3] The word used is *silāvigaḍabhī* generally explained as *śilā-vikṛtabhitti* but a more plausible explanation is given by R. BASAK, *Aśokan Inscriptions*, p. 150, that it stands for *silā-āvir-gardabhī*, "a she-ass clearly carved out of stone," serving as a capital to the pillar. He supports his explanation on the testimony of Hiuen Tsang, who refers to this pillar as having a horse capital and that he may have mistaken the *gardabhī* for a horse.

[4] *Vide* Brahmagiri Rock Edict 1: "It is over two and a half years since I have been a lay-disciple (of the *Buddha*), but I did not make great progress for one year. It is over a year since I have gone up to the *Sangha* (for guidance) and have made great progress." A variant in the Maski Edict states: "I have been a follower of *Buddha*, the *Sakyan* ... gone up to the *Sangha*".

[5] TAKAKUSU, translation, p.73.

[6] R. MOOKERJI, *op. cit.*, p.23, n. 1.

bhikkhugatika[7] can hardly be justified. Later on at p. 109 he reiterates the point but adds a more plausible explanation equating it to his becoming a *sāsanadāyāda*, "an heir of the Dispensation," as the Pali sources[8] would have it, though it certainly does not imply a formal change in the status of the disciple unlike in the case of becoming a *bhikkhugatika*. The phrases *saṁgha upayite, saṁgha upete, saṁghaṁ upagate* in the three edicts are better interpreted along with the reference made in the Pali records that Aśoka studied the teaching of the *Buddha* under Moggaliputta Tissa[9]. The edicts merely state that he had closer associations with the *Sangha* for over a year though he had nominally been an *upāsaka* for two and a half years.

The closer association leading to "greater progress" may have consisted in his studying the *Dhamma* under the *Sangha*. Evidently, it was as a result of the study of the *Dhamma* that he was inspired by the everyday ethics of Buddhism, which he in turn inculcated in his edicts, all published after his conversion to Buddhism[10]. This is supported by B.M. Barua[11] who rejects the views of Bühler and Kern that Aśoka temporarily became a monk giving up the kingship, and of Vincent Smith that while remaining king he assumed monastic vows. He also criticizes Kern for taking the phrase *saṁghaṁ upagate* to mean a state visit to the *Sangha* to make a public profession of his faith, but states that Aśoka lived among the monks as an *upāsaka*[12].

All these references are of great significance in discussing Aśoka's personal religion and the *Dhamma* he advocated and promulgated among his subjects. This subject has been comprehensively dealt with from several angles making use of the same evidence sometimes to establish divergent points of view. Whatever conclusion one arrives at, two facts have to be kept in

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[7] *Ibid.*
[8] *Samantapāsādikā* (Smp.), 1, 50.
[9] See note 19 below.
[10] *Vide* R. MOOKERJI, *op. cit.*, p. 37, for chronology of Aśoka's reign.
[11] B. M. BARUA, *Inscriptions of Aśoka* II, pp. 334 ff.
[12] The reader is referred to Barua's conclusion (ibid., p. 337).

mind: first, that nothing in the edicts goes counter to the teaching of the *Buddha*; and second, that all his edicts were published after his conversion to Buddhism. A recent addition to the literature on Aśoka's *dhamma* is made by R. Basak in his *Aśokan Inscriptions* (already referred to), pp. xxii ff., where he establishes that it is the *Buddha*'s *Dhamma*. In this connection, however, it is interesting to note that offences punishable by law are not mentioned in the edicts, and that it is only the avoidance of misdeeds that lie outside the scope of the common law and the inculcation of good deeds which cannot be enforced by law that are recommended.

Beside all this, a reference to an event of far greater significance is to be seen in the edicts cited. This has so far escaped the attention of Aśokan scholars as the event has not been specifically mentioned. Barua[13] very nearly mentions it but hazards no inference. What has been omitted from the edicts is adequately supplemented by the Sri Lankan Pali Chronicles and the *Samantapāsādikā*. Scholars are emphatic that the Third Buddhist Council held at Asokārāma in Pāṭaliputta finds no mention in the edicts. Some have even gone to the extent of denying its historicity while others grudgingly concede that there was a Council under Moggaliputta Tissa but maintain that it was a mere "party-meeting." By rejecting the testimony of the Pali sources, whose tradition was not very far removed from the dates of the three Councils, and by accepting the confused accounts of the Sanskrit Schools preserved in translation in Tibetan and Chinese, the travellers' tales of Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsang to whom the living tradition was no longer available, in preference to the Pali accounts, attempts have been made to identify the Second and Third Councils[14].

The charge that the Pāṭaliputta Council was only a party-meeting can be summarily dismissed as the only form of Buddhism that the Pali accounts refer to and perhaps Aśoka patronized is the *Theravāda*, while the Chinese accounts, with the exception of *Sudarśana-vibhāṣā Vinaya* (trans. of Snip.), confuse Kālāśoka with

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[13] Ibid. II, 378 ff.

[14] *Vide* GEIGER, Mhv. transl., pp. lix ff., for a clear analysis of the confusion.

Aśoka. Although the *Mahāsanghika* split is recorded as having taken place after the Second Council, no reference whatever is made to other Schools of Buddhism in connection with the accounts of the Third Council. The *Sangha* is said to have been cleansed of the *titthiyā*, "heretics", who are enumerated at Smp. 1, 53. The *Kathāvattha,* however, which was finalized at the Council presupposes the existence of other Schools when it refutes their views. Seventeen Schools, excluding the parent *Theravāda*, are said to have arisen in the second century after the *Buddha*[15], yet it is strange that the accounts carefully avoid mentioning them in connection with the interruption of the *uposatha*, *saṅghakamma*, *gaṇakamma* and so forth, which resulted in the disunity of the *Sangha* (see below). Apparently the only form of Buddhism that the accounts refer to is the *Theravāda* and it is the *Theravāda* that was established in "the border districts", including Sri Lanka. Further, the seven "disquisitions of *Dhamma*" mentioned in the Bhabru Edict are passages that can be identified with Pali texts[16] and evidently they are not to be taken as forming parts of the Sanskrit Canon. The suggestion that they formed parts of a Prakrit Canon is based on the fact that the names of the *suttas* are given in the local Prakrit in use in and around Bairat in Aśoka's day. Hence, as far as Aśoka was concerned, he was an adherent of the *Theravāda.*

Before proceeding any further it would be useful at this stage to briefly recount the narrative from the Pali sources. The most comprehensive account of the Third Council in Pali is found in the introductory chapter *(bāhiranidāna)* of the *Samantapāsādikā*, the *Vinaya* Commentary of Buddhaghosa, though both the chronicles *Dīpavaṁsa* and *Mahāvaṁsa* deal with it to a satisfactory extent. It would suffice to give the *Samantapāsādikā* version here[17]:

> In this manner there arose great gain and honour to the Dispensation. The heretics, whose gain and honour had dwindled to the extent of their failing to obtain even their food

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[15] Mhv. V, 11.
[16] See n. 2 above.
[17] Smp. 1, 53 ff.

and raiment, gained admission into the Order in the Dispensation in their eagerness for gain and honour, and each propounded his speculative theory claiming it to be the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*. And those who failed to gain admission to the Order, themselves shaved off their hair, and wearing yellow robes wandered about in monasteries intruding at the *uposatha* and *pavāraṇa* ceremonies and at formal acts of the Order and of the Chapter. The monks did not perform the *uposatha* ceremony in their company.

Thereupon the Elder Moggaliputta Tissa handed over the leadership of the Chapter to the Elder Mahinda, thinking, "Now this dispute has arisen, it will soon be aggravated, and it is not possible to settle it living in their midst". Wishing to abide at peace as he was wont to, he retired to the hill near *Ahogangā*. And in spite of the heretics being subjected to censure by the Order of monks in respect of the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya* and the Teaching of the Master, they gave rise to diverse forms of upheavals, stains and thorns in the Dispensation, as they did not conform to the principles in accordance with the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*. Some of them tended the sacrificial fire, some subjected themselves to the heat of the five fires, some worshipped the sun following its movements in the sky, while others made a determined effort to destroy the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*. At that time the Order of monks held neither the *uposatha* nor the *pavāraṇa* with them.

The *uposatha* at Aśokārāma was interrupted for seven years. They informed the King too of this matter. The King commanded a minister to go to the monastery and settle the dispute and revive the *uposatha*.

Next follows the description of the minister's abortive attempt at uniting the *Sangha*, by beheading the monks. The King was greatly upset that he was responsible for the killing. Moggaliputta Tissa was with great difficulty persuaded to come back to Pāṭaliputta, and he finally reassured the King that he was not

responsible for the minister's misguided act. The narrative continues[18]:

> In this manner the Elder reassured the King: and living there in the King's park itself, for seven days he instructed the King on the Teaching[19]. On the seventh day, the King had the Order of monks assembled at Asokārāma, and having had an enclosure of screens put round, he sat within that enclosure, and separately grouping together monks who held divergent views, and summoning each group of monks he asked, "What teaching did the Perfectly Enlightened One declare?". Then the eternalists replied that he was an eternalist. The qualified eternalists, the propounders of the theory of finiteness and infinitude, the eel-wrigglers, casuists, those who held theories of conscious existence, non-conscious existence, neither conscious nor non-conscious existence, annihilationists and those who professed *Nibbāna* of this life, replied (in accordance with their views). Since the King had already studied the Teaching he realized that they were not monks but heretics belonging to foreign sects; *and giving them white clothes he disrobed them.* They numbered sixty thousand in all. He next summoned the remaining monks and asked, "What teaching did the Perfectly Enlightened One declare?"
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> "Great King, he was an exponent of the analytical doctrine".
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> When it was said thus, the King asked the Elder, "Did the Perfectly Enlightened One expound the analytical doctrine?"
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> "Yes, Great King."
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> Thereupon the King said: "Sir, the Dispensation is now pure; let the Order of monks hold the *uposatha*[20]. And giving them his

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[18] Smp. 1, 60 ff.

[19] The word used is *samayaṁ*, "philosophy" or "system of philosophy." But Mhv. V, 265 is more specific in referring to it as *sambuddhasamayaṁ*, "the Teaching of the Perfectly Enlightened One," while Dpv. VII, 53, merely uses the word *sāsana*, "the Message."

[20] The *uposatha* is an essential feature in the unity of the *Sangha*. Hence the great emphasis laid on it.

protection he entered the city. *The Order, united in perfect harmony (samaggo), assembled and held the uposatha*[21].

The *Dīpavaṁsa* gives two versions of the account of the Council in one and the same chapter, at Dpv. VII, 35-43 and 44-59. The stanza Dpv. VII, 53 succinctly points out the precise role of the King in uniting the *Sangha* and bringing about its purification. It runs:

Therassa santike rājā uggahetvāna sāsanaṁ
theyyasaṁvāsa-bhikkhuno nāsesi liṅganāsanaṁ.

The King, who had studied the Teaching under the Elder, destroyed the outward emblems of those who had furtively entered the Order[22].

The parallel account in the *Mahāvaṁsa* commences at Mhv. V, 228 and proceeds to the end of the chapter with no significant variations from the Smp. version. The manner of disrobing the heretics is not so graphically described and clearly stated in the *Mahāvaṁsa* as at Dpv. VII, 53 and Smp. 1, 61. The *stanza* Mhv. V, 270 merely states, "The King had all those heretics disrobed, and all those who were disrobed numbered sixty thousand". The *Sangha* then being united, performed the *uposatha* as Mhv. V, 274 states *(Saṅgho samaggo hutvāna tadākāsi uposathaṁ)*.

In the foregoing data we have two independent sources to go by: the edicts and the Pali accounts of the Third Council. The common factors of both sources are (1) the uniting of the *Sangha*, and (2) the disrobing of heretics.

The Pali sources confirm Aśoka's role in bringing about unity in the *Sangha*. While the edicts confine themselves to these two events, the Pali accounts go much further and continue the narrative right up to the despatch of missionaries to the border districts. The legitimate inference from this silence of Aśoka is that he was interested only in

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[21] Smp. next mentions that Moggaliputta Tissa recited the *Kathāvatthu* refuting heretical views and held the Third Council rehearsing the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya* and cleansing the Dispensation of all stains.

[22] The outward emblems of the *theyyasaṁvāsakā* – "those who live clandenstinely with the *bhikkus*" – are the yellow robes. They were disrobed and given white garments, as the Smp. and edicts state.

making known the things he was directly responsible for. The Council was held by Moggaliputta and as such Aśoka cannot be expected to claim any credit for it. Thus the repeated mention of his bringing about unity in the *Sangha* and the reference to the punishment to be meted out to schismatics eloquently speak of his contribution towards the stabilization of the *Sāsana* while the silence in the edicts regarding the Council is a still more eloquent tribute to the actual author of the Council.

With all the evidence available before us, there is no justification for denying the historicity of the Council. According to the Pali sources, he united the *Sangha* by disrobing the heretics and giving them white clothes, or in other words, by removing the outward emblems of a monk. This is exactly what he did as may be inferred from the edicts. Aśoka's command that whosoever disrupts the *Sangha* shall be made to don white clothes and be compelled to live in a dwelling other than a monastery, is a mere reminiscence of what he actually did at the time he united the *Sangha*. There is no justification at all to construe that this statement was made in a vacuum, thinking of a future eventuality only, especially when it is followed by the reference to his having united the *Sangha* in the previous sentence. All events and statements are to be viewed against their background and the only possible background one can conceive of is the unsettled conditions of the *Sāsana* during the years prior to the Council, the Council itself being the logical conclusion resulting in the unification of the *Sangha*. The dissension in the *Sangha* was brought about by the *theyyasaṁvāsaka* heretics who clandestinely lived among the monks; and Aśoka's warning is against the repetition of such activity which will merit the same punishment as he had meted out earlier. With all the evidence from Pali sources and circumstantial evidence, it would be highly unhistorical to suggest that Aśoka was thinking of a punishment he would mete out at a future date and that the statement has no reference to anything he actually did.

The fact that most of the edicts are dated (from the year of Aśoka's consecration) helps us to determine that the Council was

anterior to the edicts[23]. The unification of the *Sangha* mentioned in three of the edicts is a matter of very great significance in the eyes of Aśoka and it is meaningless to speak of uniting the *Sangha* without there being any disunity. It is here that the Pali accounts fill the gap left in the edicts, as the general background which brought about chaos in the Order is graphically described in them. Further, when a reigning monarch, a *cakkavatti rāja*, takes a step of this nature resulting in far-reaching consequences, it is to be inferred that the necessary setting has been provided. He would not have acted unless the situation demanded his intervention. It is to be expected that the purification of the *Sangha* was conducted with all ceremony and formality appropriate for the occasion. The opportunity was provided to the King at the assembly of monks prior to the actual recital at the Council.

Aśoka cannot be expected to decide for himself who the real *bhikkhus* and who the heretics were. He too did not consider himself competent to judge who the upholders of the Doctrine were and who were not. He needed the help of the monks to decide this. It was very necessary that he should receive instruction on the *Dhamma* to carry out this task. His earlier ignorance of the *Dhamma* is to be inferred from the statement in the *Samantapāsādikā* that Moggaliputta instructed the King on the Teaching and that he was able to judge the heretics as a result of this. His utter dependence on Moggaliputta is reflected in his having to look to him for advice even when the true *bhikkhus* reply that the *Buddha* was a *Vibhajjavādin*. The phrase *saṁghaṁ upagate* in the edicts too definitely expresses Aśoka's earlier ignorance of the *Dhamma* and the two things evidently are one and the same, as mentioned earlier.

With the advice of the *bhikkhus* he was now in a position to judge the heretics; and the purification of the *Sangha* was a thing that needed his immediate attention. There should be a suitable occasion for this and there is no better opportunity for it than at a formal meeting of the members of the *Sangha*, and this was at the

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[23] 218 A.B. works out to 265 B.C., taking 483 B.C. as the date of the *Buddha*'s *parinibbāna*.

time of the Third Council. The Council was held in his imperial capital of Pāṭaliputta, in his own monastery of Asokārāma, and it is inconceivable to think of a Council without his being associated with it and having given it his blessing and patronage.

The Elders who conducted the Council do not claim to have united the *Sangha*. As in the edicts, in the Pali sources too, the King is responsible for uniting the *Sangha*[24] and the Elders next proceed with the affairs of the Council. The manner in which Aśoka brought about the purification of the *Sangha* has already been mentioned. Here, too, the Elders do not claim any responsibility for disrobing the heretics. All temporal authority was vested in the King and this has confirmation in a statement attributed to Ajātasattu in connection with the First Council, *mayhaṁ āṇācakkaṁ tuyhaṁ dhammacakkaṁ*, "mine is the wheel of authority and yours the wheel of the *Dhamma*" (Smp. 1, 10). The *bhikkhus* would not undertake the task of disrobing individuals though they could pass a *pabbājaniya kamma*, "a formal act of excommunication". The assistance and support of the temporal authority was required in carrying out the actual expulsion and in this case it was Aśoka who came to the assistance of the *Sangha*. When Aśoka says in his edicts that those who bring about dissension in the Order shall be disrobed, he does not give expression to a new idea that has occurred to him. His role in the historic unification of the *Sangha* at Pāṭaliputta, participating in the preliminary proceedings of the Council, is still fresh in his

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[24] At Smp. 1, 61, the King says, *suddhaṁ dāni bhante sāsanaṁ, karotu bhikkusaṅgho upasathaṁ*: "Sirs, the Dispensation is now pure, may the Order of monks hold the *uposatha*". It adds later, *samaggo saṅgho sannipatitvā uposathaṁ akāsi*, "The Order assembled, and united, held the *uposatha.*" Mhv. V, 273 ff. too states:

"Saṅgho visodhito yasmā, tasmā saṅgho uposathaṁ
karotu bhante" icc'evaṁ vatvā therassa bhūpati
saṅghassa rakkhaṁ datvāna nagaraṁ pāvisī subhaṁ
saṅgho samaggo hutvāna tadākāsi uposathaṁ.

"Since the Order has been purified, may the Order, Sirs, hold the *uposatha*", saying thus to the Elder, the King gave protection to the Order and entered his beautiful city. The Order being united (in harmony), then held the *uposatha*.

memory and this warning is intended to serve as a deterrent to individuals prone to dividing the Order at a future date.

To this extent it may be said that the edicts refer to the Council, and it is like throwing away the baby with the bath (as Geiger puts it) if we persist in rejecting the historicity of the Council, paying scant respect to the general trustworthiness of the tradition embodied in the *Samantapāsādikā* and the Sri Lankan Pali chronicles and that too, in spite of the corroborative evidence from the edicts which has hitherto been neglected. The edicts certainly do not refer to conditions obtaining at the time they were issued though one may be tempted to imagine so, for the Council was held long before these edicts were issued[25] and there is nothing to indicate that the chaos that prevailed prior to the Council had again returned while the *Sāsana* was making rapid progress throughout the Empire and beyond, and while Aśoka who meted out such severe punishment to the miscreants was still reigning.

Hence the Pali accounts are quite clear as regards Aśoka's role at the Council while they are corroborated by the evidence from the edicts. His edicts too, true to his sense of propriety in not claiming for himself what he was not directly responsible for, make no reference to the part played by the Elders whose work really began when Aśoka had attended to the all-important task of purifying the *Sangha*. The Council alone is not mentioned specifically though everything that transpired preparatory to the Council is mentioned. There is every reason to believe that the statement *saṁghe samage kaṭe*[26] is an allusion to Aśoka's work prior to the Council and none other; and the argument from silence, which itself is invalid, to deny the historicity of the Council is no longer tenable when the fresh

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[25] *Vide* R. MOOKERJI, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[26] The reader is referred to Dr. B. M. BARUA's *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, II, 378 ff. where he has given comprehensive notes and observations on the Schism Pillar Edict. He concludes: "By the consensus of opinion the text of Aśoka's ordinance confirms the authenticity of the Pali tradition concerning the third or Pāṭaliputra Council. Strictly speaking it throws some light on the truth behind the tradition concerning the *samāgama* or assembly of the community of *bhikkhus* which preceded the Council".

evidence thus available from the edicts is used along with the traditional accounts of the Council in the Pali sources[27].

[27] While the edicts go up to this point, the discovery of the caskets containing the relics of the missionaries who were despatched after the Council gives us further data in support of the Council.