

Petra Kieffer-Pülz

The Dispute about the Validity of the *sīmā* of Bālapiṭṭiya in 19th-century Lanka, I

Ñeyyadhamma's *Sīmāvivādavinicchayakathā*
Edition and Translation



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in 19th-century Lanka, I

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Preface

This volume contains an edition and an annotated translation of the *Sīmāvivāda-vinicchaya(kathā)*, “(Exposition of the) Judgement on the Boundary Dispute”, a Pāli text written by the Venerable Ñeyyadhamma (1799–1865) between 13 May and 4 July 1858. He was the Chief of Buddhist Affairs (Saṅgharāja, Bur. Thathanabaing), a position he held from 1839 to 1846 and again from 1853 to 1865, in Burma (now Myanmar). He is also known by his sayadaw name as Second Maungdaung Sayadaw (Moṅḥ thoṅ charā tau). The *Sīmāvivādavinicchayakathā* is his judgement on the dispute concerning the legal validity of the monastic boundary (*sīmā*) of the Amarapurāṇikāya in Bālapīṭiya (Sri Lanka), which was of the “water-splashing boundary” type (*udakukkhepasīmā*). He wrote it at the request of a delegation of two Sinhalese monks who arrived in Burma on 18 February 1858 and left for Lanka (Ceylon at the time, present-day Sri Lanka) on 4 July of the same year. The delegation had been sent by Sinhalese monks who considered the Bālapīṭiya boundary to be invalid due to its connection – generally described as “confusion” – with a “village boundary” (*gāmasīmā*). This group is therefore known as the “confusionists” (*saṅkaravādin*), as opposed to their opponents, the “non-confusionists” (*asaṅkaravādin*), who considered the *sīmā* to be not confused and legally valid. The text itself has been known for over a century in the form of Minayeff’s edition (MINAYEFF 1887).

Of all the texts and letters written in the context of the Bālapīṭiya dispute, this judgement is one of the earliest, if not the earliest. This implies that parts of the judgement were quoted and discussed in later writings. To avoid overburdening the translation’s footnotes, such cases will only be mentioned, not discussed in detail. A comprehensive treatment of the entire Bālapīṭiya dispute will only be possible once texts written in this context in subsequent years have also been made accessible.

As part of this project, I visited Sri Lanka in 2015, with the aim of finding manuscripts of this text and others written by the Saṅgharāja relating to the dispute. As these texts are referenced by rather general titles, such as “*Sīmāvinicchaya*” in the *Sīmānayaḍappana*, I searched all the monastery libraries that granted me access for manuscripts containing the word *sīmā*. This was made possible thanks to the generosity of the various *vihārādhipatis*, who not only allowed me to search their

monastery libraries, but also helped me to find and photograph the manuscripts. Unfortunately, none of the *sīmā* texts that I found were directly related to the Bālapīṭiya *sīmā*.

While working on the Bālapīṭiya dispute, I was fortunate to receive assistance from several colleagues. I would like to thank Alexey Kirichenko, Christian Lammerets, and Peter Skilling wholeheartedly for their support. Alexey provided me with various manuscripts and information about Burmese personnel, and directed my attention to manuscripts related to the Bālapīṭiya case. Christian, in particular, provided me with transliterations and translations of Burmese sections, as well as information about Burmese personnel. He was always available to answer my various questions, and also checked and corrected the Burmese passages and my English. I would also like to thank François Tainturier for providing photographs of the Saṅgharāja's monastery in Mandalay and a map of the newly built city. He also added the legend to the map of Mandalay published here with the permission of the British Library. Thanks also go to Aruna Gamage for providing a scan of a *Saṅkara Vinīścaya* manuscript and Sinhalese secondary literature; Norihisa Baba for sending secondary literature; Katrin Einicke for helping clarify the date of Kahavē Nāṇānandatissa's death; and my co-editor of the series, Andreas Pohlus, for reading the final version. Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Masahiro Kitsudo for allowing me to reproduce his photograph of the Bālapīṭiya *sīmā* (Figure 2), and for providing me with the original. Fortunately, Claus Vogel, who has since passed away, translated and calculated the exact date of the ordination mentioned in the text for me at a time when electronic calculators were not yet available. His calculation has since been proven correct by calculation systems, as well as by other sources. It goes without saying that all faults and shortcomings are my responsibility alone. Work on this text was carried out as part of the project "Der Streit um die Rechtsgültigkeit der buddhistischen Gemeindegrenze (*sīmā*) von Balapīṭiya in Sri Lanka im 19. Jh." (The Dispute about the Legal Validity of the Buddhist Monastic Boundary of Balapīṭiya in 19th-century Sri Lanka), based at the Academy of Sciences and Literature (Mainz) and funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation). This publication was also supported by a printing subsidy from the German Research Foundation.

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PETRA KIEFFER-PÜLZ

Contents

Preface	v
Figures	ix
Introduction	1
1. General remarks	1
2. History of research	3
3. The Bālapīṭiya case: overview up to the second delegation	9
3.1 The early phase	9
3.2 The Saṅkaravādins' first successful delegation to Burma (1857/58)	29
3.3 The Asaṅkaravādins' delegation to Burma (1859/60)	34
4. The Saṅgharāja Ñeyyadhamma's <i>Sīmāvivādaviniṅchayakathā</i>	35
4.1 The text and its title	37
4.2 The author	37
4.3 The text and its date	40
4.4 The contents of the <i>Sīmāvivādaviniṅchayakathā</i>	42
4.4.1 The <i>sīmā</i> section of the <i>Sīmāvivādaviniṅchayakathā</i>	45
4.4.2 The ordination of the Sinhalese monks	51
5. Sources for the present edition	59
5.1 Manuscripts of the <i>Sīmāvivādaviniṅchayakathā</i>	59
B ¹	59
B ²	61
B ³	63
C	64
M	66
5.2. Manuscript of Kalyāṇa's <i>Sīmāvivādaviniṅchayanissaya</i>	68
Niss	68

Edition	71
Preliminary remarks	73
Editorial principles	74
Critical apparatus	74
Main text	74
Sīmāvivādavinicchayakathā	75
[I. udakukkhepagāmasīmādhikāre vivādavinicchayakathā]	76
[II. anumoditabbakathā]	84
[III. mettāpubbaṅgamadhammakathā]	91
[IV. *nigamana]	99
 Translation	 101
Exposition of the Judgement on the Boundary Dispute	103
[I. Exposition of the judgement on the dispute over a water-splashing boundary and a village boundary]	104
[II. Exposition to be approved joyfully]	120
[III. Exposition of the dhamma preceded by loving-kindness]	132
[IV. Colophon]	140
 Appendix I: Vaskaḍuvē Dhammakkhandha's travelogue	 141
 Appendix II: Timeline	 149
 Abbreviations	 159
 Works Cited	 163
Manuscripts	163
Published Works	163
 Index	 175

Figures

- 1 Ambagahapitiyē or Vālitārē Ñānavimalatissa Mahānāyaka Thera. Stamp issued on 5 May 2009 to commemorate the 175th anniversary of his death. Photo: World Buddhist Stamps e.Gallery <<https://www.buddhiststamp.com/about>>. p. 10
- 2 The *sīmā* of Bālapitiya in 1996: “Siri Ñānavimalatissa Udakukkhepasīmā Mālakaya 1802 CE, 2346 BE” (KITSUDO 2002b, 155), © Masahiro Kitsudo. Printed with the owner’s permission p. 13
- 3 Laṅkāgoḍē Dhīrānanda Sirisaddhammavaṃsapāla (1808/1811–1871) (Vin-vn-sn, photograph after the title page) p. 15
- 4 Bōpāgoḍē Ñāṇalaṅkāra (Siri) Sumana, painted by Joseph Selleny in 1858. This aquarell belongs to the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna, Inventarnummer 2257f. Accessible: <<https://sammlung.belvedere.at/objects/10172/buddhistischer-oberpriester-mit-assistenz-auf-ceylon?>> p. 17
- 5 The problem with the Bālapitiya *sīmā* (Sīmā-nd 139) p. 19
- 6 Kahavē Ñāṇānandatissa Saddhammajotipāla (1816 till 19 March 1856) (Sīmāl-sn, photograph after title page) p. 21
- 7 Map of Mandalay. Manuscript from the British Library Collection: Or.3478.D. Printed with permission. Legend added by François Tainturier p. 33
- 8 Horoscope chart with numbers in black for the zodiac signs, and numbers in red for the planets as given in the Burmese *jātās* p. 57
- 9 left: Horoscope (Bur. *jātā*) for the date of the ordination of the Sinhalese monks from B² p. 57
- right: Horoscope (Bur. *jātā*) for the date of the ordination of the Sinhalese monks from B³ p. 57
- 10 Horoscope (Bur. *jātā*) for the date of the ordination of the Sinhalese monks from MINAYEFF 1887, 27 p. 58

Introduction

1. General remarks

The dispute concerning the Bālapīṭiya *sīmā* occurred within the Sri Lankan Amarapurānikāya, which dates back to the five ordination lineages imported from Burma to Lanka at the beginning of the 19th century.¹ It concerned the legal validity of the monastic boundary (*sīmā*) of the Buddhist community at Bālapīṭiya, in the south-west of the island.² This boundary was a monastic boundary of the “water-splashing” type (*udakukkhepasīmā*). The dispute began in 1851, when Laṅkāgoḍē Dhīrānanda expressed concerns about the legal validity of that *sīmā*. It continued for more than three decades, leading to the formation of two subgroups of the Amarapurānikāya: the Saddhammavaṃsanikāya and the Mūlavaṃsanikāya.³ The Saddhammavaṃsanikāya consisted of the “confusionists” (*saṅkaravādin*), who initiated the dispute because they perceived a confusion (*saṅkara*) between the *udakukkhepasīmā* and the “village boundary” (*gāmasīmā*). The Mūlavaṃsanikāya represented the “non-confusionists” (*asaṅkaravādin*), who considered the *udakukkhepasīmā* legally valid, i.e., without confusion. Both parties sought support from the Burmese Saṅgharāja independently, sending delegations of monks to Burma: the Saṅkaravādins in 1857/58,⁴ and the Asaṅkaravādins in 1859/60.⁵ Due to the involvement of the Burmese clergy, there are texts written not only by Sinhalese monks, but also by Burmese monastics. The most notable examples are the works of the Saṅgharāja of that time, that is, Ñeyyadhamma (1799–1866), and later of the

1 See below, p. 11, n. 53.

2 See below, p. 9.

3 As a date for this split, 1852 CE is given by Bechert (1966, 264). This would be the time when Bōpāgoḍē Sumana switched from the Saṅkaravādins to the Asaṅkaravādins. Ahungalle Arunatileke and Abhayasundera (1999, 136) give a much later date (20th January 1865) one year after Bōpāgoḍē Sumana’s death. Kitsudo (2002b, 172) mentions the year 1864 as the year of the foundation of the Saddhammavaṃsikānikāya.

4 KIEFFER-PÜLZ 2023b, 194–195.

5 KIEFFER-PÜLZ 2023b, 196–197.

Shwegyin Sayadaw, the elder Jāgara (1822–1893).⁶ According to Kariyawasam the dispute was resolved in 1892;⁷ according to Malalgoda, it was never settled.⁸ Both Amarapura subgroups still exist today.

Between 1855 and 1885, Sinhalese and Burmese monks wrote numerous texts related to this dispute – including pamphlets, letters, judgements, and books of several hundred pages – primarily in Pāli, but also in Sinhalese and Burmese. The present book contains an edition and translation of the first text, written by the Burmese Saṅgharāja Ñeyyadhamma in 1858. This text is his judgement on the Bālapitiya case, which was sent to Lanka with the first Sinhalese delegation upon their return from Burma. It bears the title *Śimāvivoādaavinicchayakathā*, “Exposition of the Judgement on the Boundary Dispute” (hereafter referred to as *Śimā-vn*).

A note on translations, monks’ names and dating

Unless stated otherwise, the translations from Pāli are mine. The transliterations and translations from Burmese are by D. C. Lammerts. As several of the sources are only available in Sinhalese script editions (especially the letters in BUDDHADATTA 1962, *Śimā-ld* and *Śimā-nd*), the Pali text has been added in transliteration to the translations.

The names of Lankan monks usually consist of two parts. The first part is the name of the town or village where they were born or live, either in its locative form (°ē) or in its base form (°a). Sometimes, both variants are used alongside each other. Here, I mostly use the first variant. The second element of a monk’s name is the name they receive upon ordination. Sometimes, such monks’ names consist of several elements, with the final element always being the same, as in the case of the monks’ names in Bālapitiya, which often end in °tissa (for example, Vimalasāra or Vimalasāratissa).⁹ Between the place name and the monk’s name, the honorifics Siri/Sri or Mahā (used in case of elder or more important monks) may be placed (Bōpāgoḍē Siri-Mahā-Sumanatissa). Since many monks have the same name, adding the place name is necessary for correct identification. Therefore, if I am able to trace them, I usually give the complete names. In cases where Sinhalese monks received titles from Burmese kings, these titles, or parts of them, may precede the monk’s full name (e.g. Ñāṇālaṅkāra-Siri-Sumanatissa°). In Burmese writings, the abbreviated Burmese title may serve as the monk’s name,

6 Sirisaddhammavaṃsa Jāgara Mahā Thera (DHIRASEKERA [1982] 2007, 332; BRAUN 2006, 65 s.v. Jāgara).

7 KARIYAWASAM 1973, see below, p. 6, n. 23.

8 MALALGODA 1976, 161.

9 For this ending, see p. 7, n. 30.

omitting the place and/or monastic names. For example, Nāṅālaṅkāra for Bōpā-goḍē Sumana(tissa).

The countries involved in the judgement edited and translated here, are Burma (present-day Myanmar) and Sri Lanka. In the text, Burma is designated as Jambudīpa (“Plum Island”).¹⁰ Sri Lanka is mostly referred to as Sihaḷadīpa (“Lion island” or “Sihaḷa island”), but also as Laṅkādīpā (“Laṅka island”), and Tambapaṇṇidīpā (for the genesis of this name, see COUSINS 2013). I have kept these names as such in the translation, except for Sihaḷadīpa, which I rendered as “Sihaḷa island”. Otherwise, I use Burma and Sri Lanka, or Lanka, throughout the book.

Dates are mostly given according to the Buddhist Era (BE; starting from April 544 BCE) and according to the most commonly used Burmese era, the Cūḷasakarāja Era (CS; starting from March 638 CE) as well as once according to the Indian Śaka Era or Mahāsakarāja Era (starting from March 78 CE).¹¹ Converted dates are provided in the translated text in addition. Conversion into CE dates is performed using the Myanmar Calendar website.¹²

The turn of the year according to the Buddhist Era in Burma nowadays occurs on the day after the full moon in the month of Vesākha (Bur. Kason, that is, April/May), and according to the Burmese Era one month earlier in the month of Citta (Bur. Tagu, that is, March/April). Thus, two possible years in the Gregorian calendar exist if only the year is given in any of these Eras.¹³ Without specifying at least the month, it is therefore impossible to determine the year in which an event took place. This explains why many dates in secondary literature diverge by one year. To avoid this issue, I indicate both possible years in such cases. In the timeline (Appendix II), I provide both the original and the converted dates. Where only converted dates are available in secondary literature, the source of the corresponding date is cited. Sometimes the sequence of events helps to narrow down the date in such cases.

2. History of research

The Bālapīṭṭiya case is well known, even beyond the circle of monks directly involved in it. This is probably because the dispute, the first since the origins of the Amarapurāṇikāya, concerned one of the foundations of administrative Sangha life: the “monastic boundary” (*sīmā*). This threatened the continued existence of the Nikāya as a harmonious group. Many people were involved in trying to recon-

10 Once Jambudīpa was used to refer to India (*Sīmā-vn*, § 2).

11 For more information on the various eras, see EADE 1995, 15–19.

12 <<https://yan9a.github.io/mcal/m.htm>>.

13 On the differences regarding the turn of the year in various areas, see EADE 1995.

cile the disputing parties. One or other aspect of the case is mentioned in secondary literature. However, it is notable that none of these authors have examined the *sīmā* problem at its core. Although the monks involved discussed many aspects of the *sīmā* problem, the secondary literature does not address these issues. Where the *sīmā* problem is mentioned at all, the descriptions often demonstrate a lack of understanding on the part of the authors.

In his *An Introduction to the Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Burma* (1946, 247–248), Niharranjan Ray mentions the Bālapīṭiya dispute, basing himself mainly on the report contained in Paññāsāmi’s *Sāsanavaṃsa*.¹⁴ Ray clearly did not understand the nature of the dispute, as the following passage shows:

The *sīmā* in question was situated on the bank of a certain river over which a bridge was built for easy passage of the monks to the other side of the river. This involved what is called *saṅkāradosa* [sic], i.e., confusion of boundaries of the *sīmā*, which invalidated a particular *sīmā* for the *upasampadā* ordination. (RAY 1946, 247)

The *sīmā* was not situated on the riverbank, but inside the river. Nor was the bridge built over the river to enable the monks to go to the other side, as this would have been impossible given the width of the Mādu Gaṅgā. Ray further mentions the first Sinhalese delegation to Burma, led by the two monks Dhammakhandha and Vanaratana, as a delegation sent jointly by the two disputing parties, even though it was actually only the Saṅkaravādins’ delegation.¹⁵ Ray then lists two further delegations, one by the Asaṅkaravādins, and a third one (also mentioned in the *Sāsanavaṃsa*).

In his thesis, Tissa Kariyawasam investigated the Bālapīṭiya dispute in more detail, focusing primarily on its historical development.¹⁶ However, he also seems to have misunderstood the issue relating to the *sīmā*, as he states that the planks between the bridge and the platform, which were usually removed, were not removed in 1851.¹⁷ This would have been a mistake that only occurred during the

14 Sās 158.27–160.6; LAW [1952] 1986, 158–161. The dates in Sās are sometimes incorrect, and Law’s translation of the *Sāsanavaṃsa*, particularly the section dealing with the Bālapīṭiya dispute, is not reliable. For a discussion of the dates and a new translation of this section, see KIEFFER-PÜLZ 2023b, Appendix I.

15 Ray names Nāṇālaṃkāra (i.e., Bōpāgoḍē Sumana) and Dhīrānanda (i.e., Laṅkāgoḍē Dhīrānanda) as the representatives of the two parties. They held these positions from 1852 onwards. However, the first delegation was sent by Laṅkāgoḍē Dhīrānanda and his followers, not by Bōpāgoḍē Sumana.

16 KARIYAWASAM 1973, 28–41; 285–286.

17 Kariyawasam (1973, 28) describes how, from 1845 onwards, when the platform was erected, the monks reached the platform via a plank that was removed once all the monks were on the platform. He continues: “But in 1851, they performed the higher

performance of a single *kamma*, since the “water-splashing boundary” is temporary, and could easily have been corrected by removing the planks before future *kammās*. Kariyawasam describes the further development of this dispute, for which he seems to have essentially relied on Laṅkāgoḍḍe Dhīrānanda’s letter to the Burmese Saṅgharāja Ñeyyadhamma¹⁸ which was sent on 11 waning Sāvaṇa 2404 (= 12 August 1860).¹⁹ Kariyawasam does not mention the delegations of the Saṅkaravādins (1857/58) or the Asaṅkaravādins (1859/60), but simply states that Laṅkāgoḍḍe Dhīrānanda wrote to the Saṅgharāja, and “was informed in return that his views on the matter were acceptable”.²⁰ He provides numerous details regarding the historical development of this dispute, particularly in the later decades, though he rarely mentions his sources. Even though he speaks about the monk Vimalasāratissa and his high qualities,²¹ he does not mention the latter’s *Śīmālakkaṇadīpanī*, which reignited the earlier dispute, nor Dhammālaṅkāra’s response, the *Śīmānayadappana* published in 1885.²² Instead, he states that, by carrying out a *dalhīkamma* (“reinforcing legal procedure”) with monks from various monasteries, including those of the Ambagahapīṭiya “the most prolonged controversy in the

ordination ceremony without dissociating the land from the boundary, without removing those planks. When ropes and other elements of the bridge exist on the boundary it is called ‘Samkara Dōsa’ (fault of hybridism),” This statement misinterprets a passage in Laṅkāgoḍḍe Dhīrānanda’s letter to the Saṅgharāja Ñeyyadhamma, for which see below, p. 16, n. 70.

- 18 This letter is mentioned by Kariyawasam (1973, 286 n. 37), and was available to him in Buddhadatta’s edition (BUDDHADATTA 1962) as well as in manuscript form in the British Library (Or 6605(5)) (mentioned as British Museum; possibly it was originally there).
- 19 BUDDHADATTA 1962, 151: *sakyasīhassa bhagavato parinibbānato catusatādhikānaṃ dvinnāṃ vassasahassānaṃ upari* (Ms. wrongly adds *nibbānato catusatādhikānaṃ*) *catutthe vasse Sāvaṇamāsakālapakkha-ekādasamiyaṃ ravidine pahītaṃ*. (The ms. adds: *idan ti saddahāpanāya c’ ettha idāni Laṅkādiṭṭhe cārittavasena SirisaddhammavaṃsapālaDhīrānandattherābhidhānassa mayhaṃ hatthasaññā kariyati. SirisaddhammavaṃsapālaDhīrānanda. Me atsana tibuna hātiya yi*. “[This letter] was sent on Sunday, the eleventh day of the dark half of the month of Sāvaṇa, in the year 2404 since the final passing away of the Blessed One, the Sakya lion (i.e., 11 waning Sāvaṇa 2404 = 12 August 1860).” (Addition in ms.: “And for the sake of rendering trustful, I, named Sirisaddhammavaṃsapāla Dhīrānanda Thera, make this hand sign in accordance with the custom in the island of Lanka. ‘Sirisaddhammavaṃsapāla Dhīrānanda’, this is how the signature was placed”). Malalgoda (155 n. 39) incorrectly gives “2404 (1861)” as the date of this letter.
- 20 KARIYAWASAM 1973, 32.
- 21 KARIYAWASAM 1973, 281–282, 435.
- 22 He mentions “Randombē Dhammālaṅkāra of Mahā Mangala Samudrārāmaya”, but states “we hardly come across any literary activities which could be attributed to this scholar except the educational institutes he formed ... and the participation in the Tripiṭaka edition in 1867” (KARIYAWASAM 1973, 286–287).

history of Amarapura sect came to an end with the unification of the chapters” on 27 March 1892.²³

Less concerning the texts about the *sīmā* problem than concerning the historical background of the dispute which led to the writing of the *Sīmā-vn* is to be found in Kitsiri Malalgoda’s *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750–1900* (MALALGODA 1976, 144–161). Malalgoda places particular emphasis on the caste affiliation of those involved in this dispute, especially on the fact that Laṅkāgoḍē Dhīrānanda “belonged to the higher of the Salāgama subcastes”.²⁴ Though it may be that caste differences became an issue in the course of the dispute, they seem to not have played a role in the beginning. Unlike Kariyawasam, Malalgoda mostly gives references and quotes his sources. However, he often gets the dates wrong by one year. He describes the early phase of the dispute up to the deaths of the two main disputants – Bōpāgoḍē Sumana (d. 1864) and Laṅkāgoḍē Dhīrānanda (d. 1871), but provides little information on the later phase in which Am̄bagahapiṭiyē (or Vālitārē or Vālitote) Vimalasāratissa (1825–1889),²⁵ head of the Am̄barukkhārāma from 2410–2432 BE (= 1866–1889 CE), played a significant role.²⁶ Malalgoda also mentions the Saṅgharāja’s judgement – according to him, widely distributed – which conformed with the Saṅkaravādins’ opinion. He describes it as a “significant victory for the confusionists”,²⁷ yet does not discuss its contents.²⁸

In his book *Buddhist Monastic Discipline* ([1982] 2007, Appendix III), Jotiya Dhirasekera deals with the “Concept of *Sīmā*: Its Origin and Development”. In this context, he also briefly outlines the Bālapīṭiya case (DHIRASEKERA [1982] 2007, 330–333). His presentation is mainly based on the English preface by L. Corneille Wijesinha to Dhammālaṅkāra’s *Sīmānayadappana*,²⁹ written from the perspective of the Saṅkaravādins. Jotiya Dhirasekera became the monk Dhammavihari at a later stage in his life and identified with the Saṅkaravādins.

23 KARIYAWASAM 1973, 40–41. Unfortunately, Kariyawasam does not provide detailed references, but merely states that “[s]ome of the materials for this discussion were taken from the reports at the Śailabimbārāma Library, Doḍandūva” (KARIYAWASAM 1973, 41 n. 47).

24 MALALGODA 1976, 152 and n.30. For castes in Sri Lanka, see ROBERTS 1982. For information on caste differences within the various *nikāyas*, see KITSUDO 2002b, 168–171. Similar to Ahungalle Arunatilaka and Praneeth Abhayasundera who are partisans for the non-confusionists, Kitsudo emphasises caste differences.

25 BUDDHADATTA 1950, 109–112; SANNASGALA 1994, 746.

26 For this later phase Kariyawasam (1973) has more information, although there too several aspects are omitted.

27 MALAGODA 1976, 159.

28 MALAGODA 1976, 159 and n. 48 based on BUDDHADATTA 1950, 57.

29 *Sīmā*-nd IX–XXVI.

The dispute over the legal validity of the monastic boundary (*sīmā*) of Balapiṭṭiya in Sri Lanka began in 1851 and lasted for over three decades. During this period, various authors produced a number of texts in the middle Indic language Pāli, as well as in Sinhalese and Burmese.

A *sīmā* (“boundary”) defines the area within which a local Buddhist monastic community (*saṅgha*) can perform legal procedures (*kamma*), such as full ordination (*upasampadā*). The Balapiṭṭiya *sīmā*, a “water-splashing boundary” (*udakukkhepasīmā*), was the first *sīmā* established by the Amarapurānikāya, a monastic lineage which originated in Sri Lanka in the first half of the 19th century.

This volume contains a brief introduction to the dispute, describing the period up to the second Sinhalese delegation to Burma in 1860. It furthermore includes an edition and translation of the *Sīmāvivādavini-cchayakathā* (“Exposition of the Judgment on the Boundary Dispute”), a text written in Pāli in 1858 by Ñeyyadhamma, the *saṅgharāja* (head of the Buddhist community) in Burma, in response to a request from the first Sinhalese delegation to Burma which arrived in 1858. Although this text was already edited by the Russian Indologist J. P. Minayeff in 1887, a new edition was required, since Minayeff’s text, based on a single Sinhalese manuscript, contains various lacunae. The new edition is based on three Burmese manuscripts and one Sinhalese manuscript, as well as on Kalyāṇa’s gloss (*nissaya*) to the text, accessible in a single Burmese manuscript.

