

Known History of the Middle Length Discourse Collection

(based on “short chronology” for computing Buddha’s year of death)

Before the Common Era

- c. 480-400** Teachings by the Buddha and his disciples. Within MN suttas these texts are referred to as *pariyaya* and *vibhanga*, not suttas or suttantas.
- c. 400** First Council; assumed to have occurred though it is unknown when the Vinaya account of the council was written or how accurate it is. It is unknown which suttas were collected at this council and how they were organized. Within the MN the Buddha’s teachings are listed as falling into three and nine categories (MN 122.20 and 22.10, respectively).
- The Vinaya account of the council says that Ananda recited the Brahamajala Sutta and the Samannaphala sutta (DN 1 and 2)
- The Vinaya account mentions an arhat with a following of 500 monks who ignored results of the first council wishing to remember teachings as he had heard them directly from the Buddha. This suggests some suttas were transmitted outside of those collected by the First Council.
- c.400-360** Buddha’s disciples give additional teachings after Buddha’s death which are later included in canon.
- c. 300** Later Theravada tradition claims second council added to the canon teachings given after the first council. Still no evidence of how the suttas were organized
- c. 250** Earliest archeological evidence of the Buddha’s scriptures found on King Ashoka’s stone edicts. Includes first dateable mention of a sutta now found in MN (**MN 61**):

“Allow me to tell you what I believe contributes to the long survival of the the Buddha’s Dhamma: These sermons on *Dhamma* – The Excellence of the Discipline, The Lineage of the Noble Ones, the Questions of Upatissa, and **The Admonition spoken by the Lord Buddha to Rahula on the Subject of False Speech** – these sermons I desire that manly monks and nuns should hear frequently and meditate upon, and likewise laymen and laywomen.”

- c. 250** Beginning of sectarian schisms.
- 250-150** First extant reference to *tipitaka* (three baskets) inscribed on stupas of Sanchi and B̄harhut. Still no evidence for how suttas were organized.

c. 200 B.C. to 100 C.E. Earliest extant mention of Middle Length Discourse (found in Sri Lankan cave inscriptions referring to reciters of the Middle Length Discourses)

29-17 The Sri Lankan chronicle, Dipavamsa (end of 4th Century) states that in the reign of the Sri Lankan King Vattagamini,
 “In former times the wise monks handed down the three pitakas and the commentaries orally, but seeing that the people were falling away (from religion) the bhikkhus came together, and in order that the true doctrine might endure, **they wrote them down in books.**”

Common Era:

147-168 Parallels to MN 2 and 141 translated into Chinese by An Shigao

230-250 Parallels to MN 14, 82, 91 translated into Chinese by Zhi Qian.

398 *Madhyama Agama* (Sarvastavadin version of MN) translated into Chinese by Gautama Sanghadeva.
 Contains 222 suttas, 98 of which also occur in Pali MN.

430 Buddhaghosa’s commentary on MN is **first confirmation of existence of MN in its current 152 sutta form.** Buddhaghosa writes that the account of the distribution of the Buddha’s relics was compiled by Third Council and added to the Mahaparinibbana Sutta by monks in Sri Lanka.

1600 Date of oldest extant MN manuscripts. (Found in Northern Thailand.)

1888-1902 Publication of Pali Text Society’s Pali edition of MN by V. Trencker and Robert Chalmers.

1890’s Publication of Thai edition of MN. (Contains Sanskrit elements not found in older extant Thai suttas.)

1954 I.B. Horner’s translation published by Pali Text Society

1995 Bodhi/Nyanamoli translation published by Wisdom Press. (revised in 2005)

2002 Thanissaro Bhikkhu publishes English translations of 37 suttas from Thai version of MN. An additional 19 suttas were published in 2007.