Canon formation in Indian Buddhism operated along very different lines than canonicity found in the Semitic religions, primarily because the process not only entailed leaving the canon open in some measure, and therefore incomplete, but also because Buddhists resisted all efforts at final closure, long after Buddhist communities had been introduced to such ideas both within India and from abroad. Esoteric or tantric Buddhist representatives from the late seventh century CE forward continued the tradition as they had received it from the early schools and the Mahāyānists who preceded them – and who indeed still surrounded them – but tantric masters emphasized both ritual and charisma to a degree not previously seen. The Buddhist resistance to canonical closure allowed Indians a facility to appropriate materials from others so that the canon would be continuously renewed by influences from subcultures within India and, eventually, outside of it. By the end of the eighth century, we find small esoteric communities formed in proximity to the larger orthodox monasteries but separate from them. Because of the preeminent position of the tantric master in such communities, and because the parameters of the tantric canon were so amorphous and unclear, such tantric communities took the ritual and ideological texts and statements affirmed by the teachers as the focus and defining characteristics of community membership and identity.

1. Canon as a Contested Category

The formation of canons of literature, especially religious literature, has been a contentious issue in the West with the formation of the Jewish

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and Christian canons in the first few centuries of the common era. For Jews, despite the lengthy history of the *Torah*, the tripartite canon as accepted today (Law, Prophets and Writings) is largely a product of the Rabbinical tradition, especially as developed by Masoretic scholars like Ben Asher (10th cen. CE) in Tiberias, who codified the canon and formulated a pronunciation text that has been widely accepted. For Christians the fourth century proved the watershed in canonical development; although earlier canonical lists had been circulating, Ferguson has argued that the acknowledgement of the twenty-seven books of the *New Testament* by the councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397, 419) appeared seemingly an acquiescence to the consensus already fait accompli. Around the canonical texts grew a wealth of referential literature, whether the *Mishnah* and *Talmud* of the Jews or the Apostolic and early Church writings in Christianity. Consequently, the canon became iconic in a manner similar to the way that category structures in natural language are established by iconic or prototypic systems of reference, with both denotative and metaphorical semantic systems developed over time through authoritative voices, popular acceptance, folk sayings and a mutually reinforcing sense of textual charisma.

In the course of canon formation, as has been generally acknowledged, a basic strategy was to limit the range and number of texts. While Josephus argued that the defining characteristic of the Hebrew

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