Heinz Bechert


During the years 2004 and 2005, shortly before his death, Heinz Bechert (1932–2005), who held the chair of Indology at Göttingen from 1965 to 2000, delivered the course on Buddhism at the University of Vienna published in this volume. Assisted by Edgar Leitan, E. Steinkellner took the trouble upon himself to edit the difficult manuscript of the lectures originally conceived long ago and, to a very modest extent only, it seems, updated here and there.

In 18 chapters H. Bechert introduces his readers in broad outline to the Buddhism of the Theravāda school following the steps of Hermann Oldenberg (1854–1920), one of his predecessors in Göttingen (1908–1920), as pointed out by E. Steinkellner in his introduction. Besides the usual topics dealt with in introductions of this kind, the chapters on the early “diversification” and splits of the community of monks (*saṃghabheda*), on the date of this historical Buddha or on “Buddhist modernism” particularly in Ceylon, all based on H. Bechert’s own researches, are of particular interest.

Although usually dealing only with general topics, occasionally details are briefly touched upon such as the meaning of Pāli verb *anujānāti* (p. 97 note 13).

Here H. Bechert returns to a topic dealt with a couple of times since 1968, when he pointed out that this verb does not mean “to allow” (as it is usually translated), but, following H. Oldenberg again, “anordnen” (“to order, command,” Bechert [1968], “to prescribe,” G. Schopen) in Vinaya contexts.1 This far

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1 The relevant references are conveniently collected in G. Schopen: The Buddhist Bhikṣu’s Obligation to support His Parents in Two Vinaya Traditions. JPTS 29. 2007, pp. 107–136 (reprinted in Buddhist Nuns, Monks, and Other Wordly Matters. Recent Papers on Monastic Buddhism
reaching claim is based on only two references: \textit{anujānāmi ... kaṭhināṃ attha-rituṃ}, Vin i 254,7 and \textit{anujānāmi ... uposathakammaṃ}, Vin i 105,2 “ich ordne die Beichtfeier an.” The cautious and carefully limited assertion of 1968 and 1997 “the meaning in this context (my italics) is clearly ‘I order’ or ‘I command,’” is generalized in 2014 “bedeutet als Rechtsterminus des Vinaya ‘ich ordne an’” ([\textit{anujānāmi}] as a legal term of the Vinaya means ‘I order’). This is highly problematic. While it makes sense (or seems to make sense) to translate \textit{anujānāmi} as “I order” in both the examples quoted, it does not necessarily do so in other instances.

There are indeed contexts where the suggested translation is much less likely, if not impossible, such as: \textit{aññataro bhikkhu ... satthe vassaṃ upagatuṃ}, Vin i 152,5–8 “a certain monk wanted to go with a caravan. I allow ... to spend the rains with a caravan.” This is just an option for monks, but hardly a prescription forcing all monks to spend the rains with caravans. Similarly, it is not easy to see why the normal procedures of \textit{upasampadā} should be forbidden in “very remote areas” by \textit{anujānāmi ... sa- bbapaccantimesu janapadesu vinayadhara pañcamena gaṇena upasampadā}, Vin i 197,19 “I allow ... in very remote areas an \textit{upasampadā} by a group (of only five monks), if the fifth is a \textit{vinayadhara}.” This is clearly an alternative, because as stated at Vin i 319,32–34 a \textit{dasavagga samgha} can act not only in the very small area which is \textit{majjhima janapada} but everywhere without any geographical restriction. Consequently, if taken as an order, almost all ordinations were void in case they were following the normal procedure involving ten monks. Practice shows that \textit{anujānāmi} was understood as “I permit,” allowing an easier form of ordination as some sort of emergency measure, as the context shows.


\footnote{The areas, which are \textit{majjhima} and \textit{paccantima janapada} respectively are defined at Vin i 197,20–30, cf. O. v. Hinüber, rev. of Der Buddhismus i. Der indischer Buddhismus und seine Verzweigungen von Heinz Bechert \textit{et alis} [Die Religionen der Menschheit, Band 24,1]. Stuttgart 2000, 111 45, 2002, pp. 77–86 (reprinted in Kleine Schriften. Stuttgart 2009, pp. 1048–1057), particularly p. 79 (p. 1050); on the history of Thanesar (of marginal relevance to the definition of \textit{paccantima}) see now H. Bakker: The world of the Skandapurāṇa. Northern India in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries. Supplement to Groningen Oriental Studies. Leiden 2014, p. 79, note 224.}