Devānaṃpiyatissa Encyclopedia Article

Devānaṃpiyatissa

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Devānaṃpiyatissa

DEVĀNAṂPIYATISSA (247–207 BCE), king of Sri Lanka. According to the *Mahāvaṃsa*, Devānaṃpiyatissa was an ally of Aśoka and through Aśoka's influence introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka. At the outset of his reign, Devānaṃpiyatissa sent envoys to India with gifts for Aśoka. In return, Aśoka sent gifts and implicit support for Devānaṃpiyatissa's kingship. The Sinhala chronicles also relate that the Buddhist elder, Mahinda, who was either the son or the brother of Aśoka, visited Devānaṃpiyatissa to establish the Buddhist tradition in Sri Lanka.

Mahinda is said to have arrived in the island on the full-moon day of Poson (May–June), a day still celebrated in Sri Lanka as the date of the founding of Buddhism there. Devānaṃpiyatissa greeted Mahinda on Missaka Hill, now called Mihintale, and proceeded from there to the site of Anurādhapura. Near the royal pavilion in Mahāmegha Park at Anurādhapura, Mahinda and Devānaṃpiyatissa laid out and subsequently built the monasteries and shrines that came to be the international center for the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. The heart of their complex was the Mahāvihāra, the Great Monastery, which was established 236 years after the Buddha. The king also built the first stupa or *cetiya* in Sri Lanka, the Thūpārāma, to enshrine the collarbone relic of the Buddha.

At the request of the women in Sri Lanka, Devānaṃpiyatissa arranged for Mahinda's sister Saṃghamittā to come from India to ordain women into the Buddhist order of nuns. Saṃghamittā brought with her a branch from the bodhi tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. The king planted this branch at Anurādhapura, where it remains today as a sacred shrine for Buddhists.

See Also

Aśoka.

Bibliography

The primary source for this subject is *The Mahāvaṃsa, or, The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, translated and edited by Wilhelm Geiger (1912; reprint, Colombo, 1950). A reliable secondary source is C. W. Nicholas and Senarat Paranavitana's *A Concise History of Ceylon* (Colombo, 1961).

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