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Panel: Scriptural authority and apologetics in the Indian religio-philosophical environment

Transmission of Scripture: Exegetical Problems for Kumāṛila and Dharmakīrti

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Looking in broader perspective at exegetical problems concerning the transmission of scripture, such as the notion of lost scripture, one soon notices that not only Mīmāṃsakas but also Buddhists used this strategy in order to justify their teachings. The Vaibhāṣikas sometimes claim that their abhidharmic teachings are based on lost *sūtras*. According to the Mahāvibhāṣā, Bhadanta Kātyāyanīputra was able to observe lost passages by the force of *prañidhijñāna*. Here the Vaibhāṣikas postulate lost *sūtras* in order to justify their *śāstras*. Ironically, as Honjo [1989] points out, the introduction of this theory allows their Mahāyāna opponents to use the same logic against them. Mahāyānikas can also claim that their teachings, though they look newly fabricated, are in fact based on lost *sūtras*. This ironical situation is somewhat parallel to the situation with which Kumāṛila saw himself confronted against his Buddhist opponents. The exegetical device of lost scripture can be equally used by his opponent. A Vedic passage to be postulated on the basis of Manu's teaching is not directly accessible. The passage in question is not perceivable but only to be inferred. This procedure is similarly applicable to the Buddha's teaching. If Mīmāṃsakas claim that a Vedic source, though imperceptible, is to be postulated from Manu's teaching, then Buddhists can similarly claim that the Buddha's teaching of dharma is in fact based on a lost Vedic passage. One could make any teaching valid by postulating that it is based on the lost Veda. In this way, the notion of "lost scripture", though it looks very convenient at first glance, can lead to problems. In using it, Mīmāṃsakas need to somehow set up a restriction in order to be able to defeat the heretics without allowing a parallel counterargument. But what exactly is the criterion that can allow them to use the device safely? How did Kumāṛila use the theory and develop it in his own way? In this paper I shall first investigate Kumāṛila's view and then compare it with Dharmakīrti's criticism of the Mīmāṃsā theory concerning the transmission of Vedic scripture, because, as is often the case, Dharmakīrti's criticism can be best understood as being aimed against Kumāṛila.