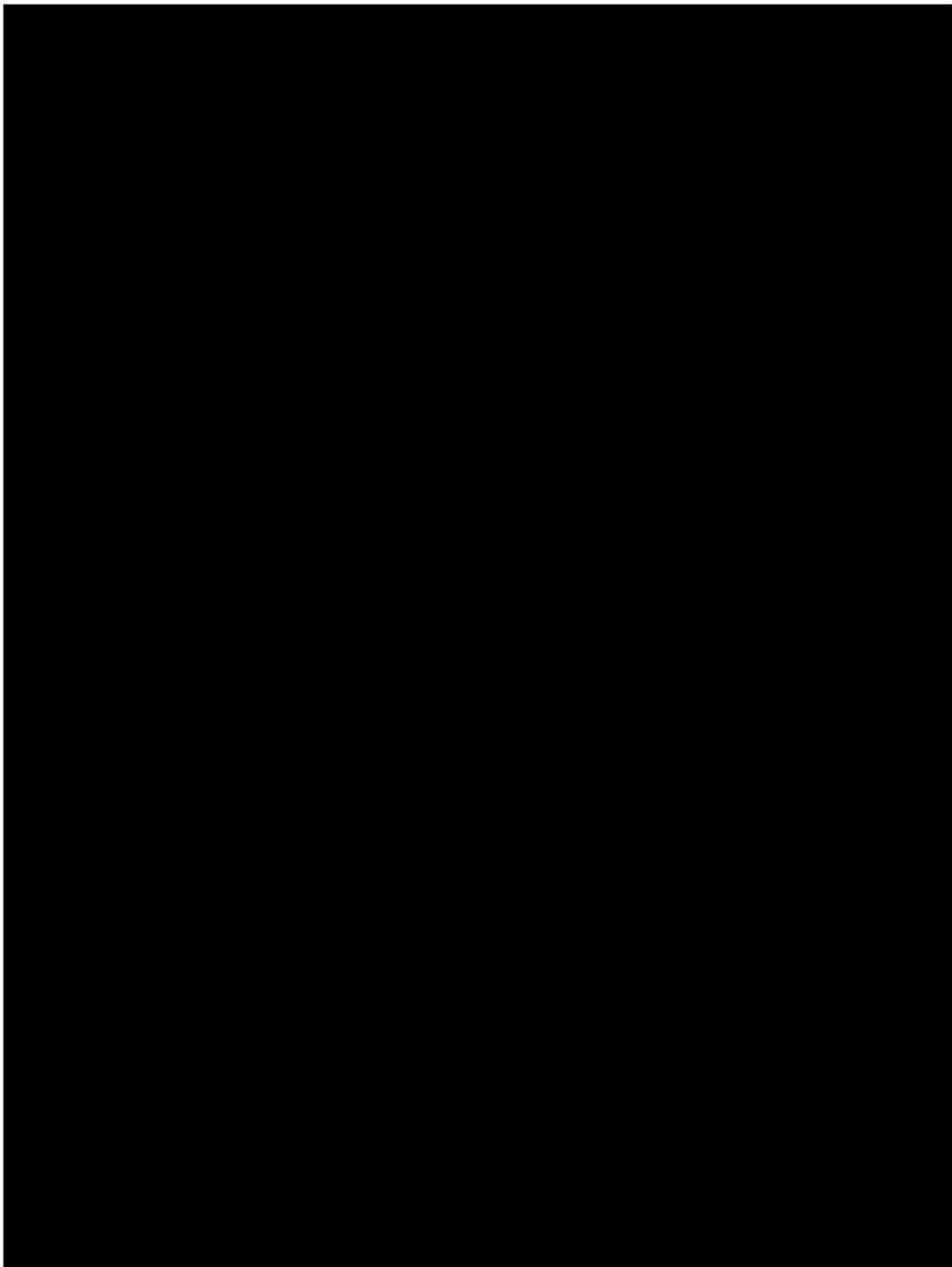


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A MURAL PAINTING OF THE FIRST COUNCIL FROM PAGAN

The teachings of the Buddha were verified, codified, and transmitted by a series of councils or recitations (*saṃgīti*), held, according to tradition, by assemblies of *arhats*. The First Council (*paṭhama-saṃgīti*) was convened at Rājagrha (Pāli, Rājagaha) in Magadha not long after the death of the Buddha. According to later Theravādin tradition, it was sponsored by King Ajātasātru (Pāli, Ajātasattu). As the foundational council for all Buddhist monastic traditions or orders, it was also known as the “root” or “original” recitation or collection (*mūlasaṃgīti*, *mūlasaṅgaha*)—the first codification or oral compilation of the Blessed One’s teachings.

Here the First Council is depicted in a twelfth-century mural at Pagan (Pugāma), Burma. The monk seated on the central throne is most likely Mahākāśyapa (Pāli, Mahākassapa), who presided over this council. He is holding a fan, a ritual object that is held by monks in other depictions of the councils at Pagan, and is surrounded by representatives of the five hundred monks who participated in it. Below, wearing a crown, is King Ajātasātru with members of his court. The assembled monks and nobles raise their hands in homage as they listen to the Dharma.

This mural is a painting from the northwest corner of Kubyauk-gyi, a temple at Myinkaba, Pagan, that was built in 1113 CE by Rājakumār. The ink gloss in Mon script and language reads: “The First Council. It was indeed King Ajātasattu who held it at that time” (from G. H. Luce and Bohmu Ba Shin, “Pagan Myinkaba Kubyauk-gyi temple of Rajakumar, 1113 A.D. and the old Mon writings on its walls,” *Bulletin of the Burma Historical Commission* 2, 1961, p. 382 [full article: pp. 277–417]).

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