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Pali Scripture, Theragāthā (Ch. 2, 16)  
Translated from Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

SOURCE: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/thag/thag.02.16.than.html>

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The Pali canon was first committed to writing just before the common era.

English	Pali
<p><b>Mahākāla</b></p> <p>This swarthy woman Kāḷi [preparing a corpse for cremation] — crow-like, enormous — breaking a thigh &amp; then the other thigh, breaking an arm &amp; then the other arm, cracking open the head, like a pot of curds, she sits with them heaped up beside her.</p> <p>Whoever, unknowing, makes acquisitions — the fool — returns over &amp; over to suffering &amp; stress. So, discerning, don't make acquisitions. May I never lie with my head cracked open again.</p>	<p><b>Mahākāḷa</b></p> <p>Kāḷi itthī brahatī dhāṅkarūpā Satthiṃ ca bhettvā aparāṃ ca satthiṃ, Bāhaṃ ca bhettvā aparāṃ ca bāhuṃ Sīsaṃ ca bhettvā dadhithālakaṃ' va Esā nisinnā abhisaddahitvā.</p> <p>Yo ve avidvā upadhiṃ karoti Punappunaṃ dukkhamupeti mando, Tasmā pajānaṃ<sup>2</sup> upadhiṃ na kayirā Māhuṃ puna bhinnasiro sayissanti.</p> <p>Itthaṃ sudaṃ āyasmā mahākāḷo thero gāthāyo abhāsittā'ti.</p> <p>Mahākāḷattheragāthā.</p> <p><b>CAVEAT</b> <b>The “swarthy woman” was not identified in the earliest scriptures. It was only in later commentaries that she was named Kāḷi. See Note 1 below.</b></p>

NOTES

1. Says the [Digital Dictionary of Buddhism](#) (log in user name = guest): “The great black deva Mahākāla (translated as Daikokuten 大黒神). Two interpretations are given. The esoteric cult describes the deva as the masculine form of Kālī, i.e. Durgā, the wife of Śiva; with one face and eight arms, or three faces and six arms, a necklace of skulls, etc. He is worshipped as giving warlike power, and fierceness; said also to be an incarnation of Vairocana for the purpose of destroying demons; and is described as 大時 the 'great time' (-keeper), which indicates Vairocana, the sun. The exoteric cult interprets him as a beneficent deva, a Pluto, or god of wealth. Consequently he is represented in two forms, by the one school as a fierce deva, by the other as a kindly happy deva.”
2. Says [Mark Schumacher](#): “While the name Mahākāla is surely ancient, the deity Mahākāla is only ancient within Hindu circles (i.e. Śiva). The above reference to his name is no doubt related to Śaivism, but the terrifying multi-limbed Mahākāla had not yet entered Buddhism. The next mention of his name appears in Yijing's 義淨 7<sup>th</sup>-century text [T. 2125.54.0209 b21], which contains details on Mahākāla's “benign” sitting form; it says the god is always wiped with oil and is thus blackened and called Mahākāla (aka Daikoku-shin 大黒神, lit. great black deity). Curiously, the terrifying Mahākāla doesn't appear in Buddhist artwork until the 9<sup>th</sup> C. CE.