



There is no dhammakāya in the Pāli canon

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Conventional wisdom, both within Buddhist traditions and in modern Buddhology, traces the important concept of the *dharmakāya* back to several key passages in the Pāli canon. Indeed, recent work, especially Paul Harrison's much-cited article "Is the *Dharma-kāya* the Real 'Phantom Body' of the Buddha?", has tended to argue that if anything, this supposed early notion of the *dharmakāya* persisted for longer than had been previously recognised, well into the burgeoning Mahāyāna. Upon close examination, however, those passages, including the sole instance of the term *dhammakāya* in the *Aggañña-sutta* (DN 27), do not yield sufficient evidence to support this conventional wisdom. This paper will therefore argue that there is no conception of the *dhammakāya*/**dharmakāya* in the Pāli canon. As a corollary of this finding, I will suggest in closing that at the dawn of the Mahāyāna in our record, the field of conceptions of special "Buddha bodies" (*buddhakāya*) was in fact entirely clear. This work is thus part of a larger attempt to fundamentally reorient our understanding of the history of body doctrine in Buddhism.