

## MYTH, LEGEND AND HISTORY IN THE NORTHERN THAI CHRONICLES \*

by

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The title of this article is somewhat misleading. It sounds quite broad when in fact it is directed toward a rather circumscribed topic, namely, the founding of the city of Haripuñjaya or Lamphun. This is primarily an attempt to analyze the myths and legends surrounding that event in order to elucidate the meaning of these traditions and their potential historical import. While the focus of this study is a particular one, the parameters are the broad issues of the nature of myth and legend and their relationship to history.

Sound historical evidence for the pre-Thai period in the north is extremely limited. This period is generally referred to as Mon, although neither archaeology nor the northern chronicles lend much support for a dominant Mon presence in Haripuñjaya prior to the 11th century. The paucity of archaeological evidence for the pre-Thai period compels us to examine seriously the mythical and legendary, as well as the historical, traditions embedded in the northern chronicles. While myths and legends provide a minimum of concrete historical data, an analysis of their content may offer a modicum of historical information or at least some degree of historical insight.

We shall begin with a brief examination of the chronicles studied. Then following a few remarks about the nature of myth and legend, we shall move on to relate a connected narrative compiled from the texts. After postulating an interpretation of the narrative, we shall then conclude with some of the historical implications to be derived from the narrative as interpreted.

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## The Texts

Northern Thailand is blessed with an abundance of historical and quasi-historical texts written on palm leaf (*pai lān*) or very heavy paper folded in accordion fashion (*samut khoi*) in northern Thai (Lānnā Thai or Thai Yuan), Pali or a mixture of northern Thai and Pali. These northern chronicles or epics are usually identified in Thai as *damnān* or *phongsāwadān*. The most widely known is the *Jinakālamālīpakaraṇam* (JKM). A Pali edition has been printed by the Pali Text Society of London, and Thai, English and French translations have also appeared.<sup>1</sup> Even more important for a knowledge of northern Thai Buddhism but less well known outside the relatively small circle of students of Thai history are the *Damnān Mūlasāsanā* (MS) and the *Phongsāwadān Yonok* (PY) both published in Thai editions.<sup>2</sup> Of more particular focus on the history of Haripuñjaya are the *Cāmadevīwongsa* (CdW), *Damnān Lamphun* or *Lamphun Chronicle* (DL).<sup>3</sup>

The chronicle of Wat Phra Dhatu, Lamphun, *Damnān Phra Dhātu Haripuñjaya* (DPDH), provides additional information as may several others which have escaped my attention. The *Mahāwongsa Luang*, apparently a borrowing from the Ceylonese *Mahāvamsa* with considerable material appended dealing with northern Thailand, may contain more information than the *Damnān Mūlasāsanā*. Few copies are available and it was not included in this study. Serious, critical investigation of these texts is still in an infant stage. Perhaps the most critical work remains Coedès' study of the *Jinakālamālī* and *Cāmadevīwongsa* done around

- 1) Ratannapañña, Thera, *Jinakālamālīpakaraṇam*, ed. A.P. Buddhadatta (London; Luzac & Co., 1962); Ratannapañña Thera, *The Sheaf Garlands of the Epochs of the Conqueror*, trans. N.A. Jayawickrama (London: Luzac & Co., 1968); Ratannapañña Thera, จินกาลมัลลปกรณัม (Bangkok: The Department of Fine Arts, B.E. 2509); G. Coedès, "Documents sur l'histoire politique du Laos Occidental", *Bulletin de L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient*, 25: 1-2 (1925), pp. 1-202.
- 2) *Mūlasāsanā* (ตำนาน มุลสาสนา) (Bangkok: The Department of Fine Arts, B.E. 2513); *Phongsāwadān Yonok* (พงศาวดาร โยนก) (Bangkok: Klāng Witayā, B.E. 2503).
- 3) Bodhirangsi, *Cāmadevīwongsa* (จามเทวีวงศ์ พงศาวดาร เมือง หริภุญไชย) (Bangkok: The Department of Fine Arts, B.E. 2510); G. Coedès, *op. cit.*; *Chronique de La: p'un*, trans. M. Camille Notton, *Annales du Siam*, Vol. II (Paris: Charles Lavauzelle, 1930).

1925. As David Wyatt observes, however, in his review of the recently published *Chiengmai Chronicle*. (*Damnān Phuan Muang Chiengmai*), "Indeed, this reviewer cannot recall a single major Thai text which has ever been properly edited . . ."<sup>4</sup>

Of the major *damnān* mentioned there is disagreement as to which is oldest. Prince Damrong was of the opinion that the MS was older than the CdW.<sup>5</sup> There are, however, some internal evidences in the MS which seem to contradict this judgment. I have discovered at least two instances where the MS notes that the same event is interpreted differently in another *damnān*, e.g. that Cāmadevī's husband was free to leave Lavapuri for Haripuñjaya because her husband had become a monk. That particular interpretation is, in fact, found in the CdW. Consequently, either the CdW is older than the MS or utilized an older tradition. We know that the CdW was written by Phra Bodhirangsi, the author of *Sihinganiḍāna* in the first half of the 15th century. It is thought that the MS was begun by Phra Buddhanāṇa, the 4th abbot of Wat Suan Dok in Chiang Mai (1417-1429) and completed by Phra Buddhapukāma, the 12th abbot (1489-1499). It would appear that whereas the CdW and the MS might have been begun at about the same time, the completion of the MS was over fifty years later. It might also be speculated that the narrative style of the CdW is closer to an older, oral tradition than the MS which is more descriptive in style. Indeed, on general stylistic grounds there appears to be an evolution from the loose, narrative expositions of the CdW to the more descriptive style of the MS to the comparatively terse directness of the JKM.

We know that the JKM was written by Phra Ratanapanna of the Sinhala Nikaya at Wat Pa Daeng in Chiang Mai between 1516 and 1528 A.D. The CdW was written before 1450 and the MS before 1500. The DL, mentioned half of the 15th century. The DL, mentioned in the JKM, refers to the MS, so, it in turn must have been composed in the latter part of the 15th or early 16th centuries. Finally, the DPDH is estimated to have been written about 1565. In sum, with the exception

4) David K. Wyatt, "The Chiengmai Chronicle", *Journal of the Siam Society*, LXI, 1 (January, 1973), p. 348.

5) Introduction to Prasert Churat's unpublished English translation of the *Mūla-sāsana*.

of the PY, an acknowledged later composite of several chronicles, the major northern *damnān* with which we are familiar were written over a period of a little more than a century between the early 15th to the mid-16th centuries. Roughly speaking, this covers the period from the return of the Buddhist mission to Ceylon in 1430 through the reigns of two of the greatest Buddhist monarchs of the north, Tilokarāja (d. 1487) and Phra Muang Keo (d. 1525).

The content and style of the northern chronicles relevant to the Haripuñjaya story vary greatly. It has been mentioned that stylistically the CdW is a loose narrative in a rather florid style, that the MS combines narration and description, and that the JKM is almost entirely descriptive. While all of the CdW and the DL are devoted to Haripuñjaya, only about a third of the MS deals with Haripuñjaya and just a small section of the JKM. In terms of the range of coverage the MS is the most important chronicle, although, as we shall see, the CdW provides additional valuable information.

### Myth, Legend and History

The terms, myth and legend, are popularly used to denote the opposite of the truth. When we say, "It's a myth" or "He's legendary" we imply that the story or person referred to is false, untrue or exaggerated. Such a popular understanding of myth and legend is at odds with the way in which these terms are understood and used by students of religion and culture. While myths and legends about gods or superhuman beings do not relate stories that are historically or empirically true, they convey archetypal or paradigmatic truth. Thus, a creation myth may include a hierogamy and also function as a model and justification for all human activities including whole complexes of discursive, ethical and ritual systems.<sup>6</sup> We might say simply that the patterns of truth encased in myth and legend infuse the cultures which gave birth to them with higher or transcendent meaning. Myths and legends, consequently, have greater import than factual history for the on-going life of a people. History records what has happened, and while myths and legends may

6) Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Cleveland; Meridian Books, 1963), p. 412.

have a relationship to a past history, their contemporaneity lies in the fact that they transcend history. Myths and legends may be used to tell us something about the history of a people, but more significantly, they give a commentary on what a people has held and holds to be of lasting value.

The myths and legends surrounding the founding of Haripuñjaya can be divided into three layers: the Buddhist, the Rishi and the Cāmadevī. These layers are intermeshed, yet a study of the chronicles reveals them to have been three distinct traditions which came to be amalgamated into one story. The Rishi and Cāmadevī elements are more closely related to each other than to the Buddhist element. The Buddhist layer is comprised of the Buddha's forecast that his religion would prosper in the area, his visit to Haripuñjaya and the establishment of his relic, and the appearance of his relic during the reign of Ādittarāja (fl. 1047 A.D.). The Rishi tradition describes the founding of several towns including Haripuñjaya and the calling of Cāmadevī as its ruler. The Cāmadevī layer brings the founding of Haripuñjaya into the realm of the historical. Whether Cāmadevī actually existed as an historical person is, perhaps, debatable; however, she serves to establish historical connections between Lamphun, Lopburi and Lampang where one of Cāmadevī's sons was installed as ruler within his mother's lifetime.

The three elements from the chronicles which constitute the Haripuñjaya story proceed in rough fashion from the mythical to the legendary to the historical. The Buddha's visit to Haripuñjaya is mythical, yet the visit enhances the significance of the reign of Ādittarāja for the history of Buddhism in the area. The rishis are legendary cult heroes or clan progenitors who represent not only supernatural power but the creation of civilization (i.e. cities). And the narrative surrounding Cāmadevī often has the style of legend (e.g. the enumeration of her retinue, the founding of cities along the way from Lopburi to Haripuñjaya), yet she appears on the scene as a historical personage. The most archaic part of the Haripuñjaya story appears to be the Rishi tradition to which the Cāmadevī layer is appended. The Buddhist element seems to be a later overlay. Interestingly enough, the episode of the Buddha's prediction and visit to Haripuñjaya is not related to Cāmadevī but to

Ādittarāja some three to four hundred years later. The narrative from Cāmadevi to Ādittarāja definitely has been Buddhasized but the structure of the story does not denote this period as being predominantly Buddhist. From a structural perspective, Buddhism comes to the fore only with Ādittarāja.

### The Story of the Founding of Lamphun

Our purpose here is to tell the story of the founding of Haripuñjaya as compiled from several of the northern Thai chronicles. The chronicles differ to some degree in their accounts. However, our intention is not to offer a critical analysis of these differences, but, rather, to present a unified narrative noting conflicting reports or other discrepancies only when relevant to the main thrust of the paper. Interpretation will follow the narrative.

#### A. The Buddhist Layer

The Buddha was living in the Isipatāna forest in Benares with his disciples when he looked into the future and predicted that 1008 years after his *parinibbāna* a great city named Haripuñjaya would be established in the country of Sāmadesa or Muang Ping<sup>7</sup> where his religion would prosper. The next day after his morning ablutions the Buddha picked up his begging bowl and flew to Muang Takara (now known as Jaiyabhūmi) where he went on his *pindapata* rounds. The villagers in the area, identified by the CdW and PY as Meng (i.e. Mon), were amazed by his beauty and inquired whether he was a deva, Nāga king, Indra or Brahma. The Buddha then identified himself as the *samma sambuddha*, the savior of the three worlds. After being presented with gifts of food, the Buddha preached to the Mons who then followed him to the future site of Haripuñjaya along the Raming or Mae Ping River.<sup>8</sup>

Arriving at a spot on the west bank of the river, the Buddha put down his begging bowl and on the spot a boulder miraculously arose from the ground to prevent the bowl from becoming soiled. The Buddha then predicted that this spot would be the location of his relic to be revealed

7) PY reads Sāmadesa; MS reads Samanta or Muang Ping. Not designated in JKM.

8) The PY elaborates this episode into the conversion of the Mons as disciples of the Buddha. พงศาวดาร ไชนก, p. 164.

in Haripuñjaya during the reign of Ādittarāja<sup>9</sup> for the adoration of men and devas. In the DPDH the Buddha is presented with fruit of a betel nut tree by a Lava hunter. After eating the Buddha cast aside the seed, whereupon it circled (*patakasīn*) three times. The Buddha then interprets this miracle to Ānanda as a sign that at this place Haripuñjaya would be located and upon the place where he sat a golden *chedi* for several bone relics would be built. Furthermore, he predicts that these relics will appear when the Lava hunter who gave him the fruit of the betel nut tree is reborn as Ādittarāja. When the Buddha had spoken, those who were with him—the *arahants*, King Asoka, a pink Nāga king and the king of the crows—all requested a hair relic. He offered one which was encased in an urn and placed in a cave to the south of where he sat.

After his predictions about Haripuñjaya, his relics and Ādittarāja, the Buddha commands his bowl to fly back to Benares. He returns in the same manner and along the way is followed by a white crow who had overheard the Buddha's predictions. The white crow returned to its home in the Himalāyas and ordered his nephew, a black crow, to go to the Mae Ping to guard the holy spot until the advent of Ādittarāja. Also guarding the place were indigenous devas (MS, DL). The DPDH has the pink Nāga king and 100,000 of his followers remain to guard the relic and specifically notes that the crow was to prevent the sacred site from pollution by animals and people.<sup>10</sup> It should be noted, in concluding this description of the Buddha's visit to the future site of Haripuñjaya, that this episode is part of an extensive visitation by the Buddha to northern Thailand. The *Phra Caw Liep Lok* and other *Buddha Damṇān* have both a cosmogonic and etiological import and account for the founding of many towns, Wats and other holy sites in the north. To my knowledge, the physical presence of the Buddha as represented by his reputed visit to the north plays a more omnipresent role here than in other parts of the country. That subject, however, is beyond the scope of this present paper.

9) Variant spellings for Ādittarāja are Āditayaraja (PY) and Ādicca (JKM).

10) Sīngkha Wannasai, *Damṇān Phra Dhātu Chao Haripuñjāya* (ตำนานพระธาตุเจ้าหริปุญไชย) (Chiang Mai, B.E. 2516), p. 9.

In the PY, MS and the DL the Buddhist layer of the chronicles tied to the Buddha's visit and the Buddha relic is broken by the Rishi and Cāmadevī traditions. It is resumed again with the advent of Ādittarāja in the year 409 of the Culasakara Era (i.e. 1047 A.D.).<sup>11</sup> Ādittarāja and his queen, Padumavadi, are depicted as devout supporters of the Buddhist Sangha who ruled faithfully according to the Ten Royal Precepts: to provide for the poor, to be established in the five precepts, to make gifts to the Three Gems, to be truthful in word, thought and deed, to be humble and sympathetic toward others, to be diligent in eradicating demerit, to have pity toward all, not to oppress anyone, to have patience and be restrained, and to be sensitive to the feelings of others.<sup>12</sup>

As expected, the major event in the reign of Ādittarāja is his discovery of the holy relic, related by the chronicler in a humorous manner. After the coronation ceremony in which sixteen Brahmins poured lustral water over the hands of the sovereigns, Ādittarāja retired to his private quarters to relieve himself. It so happened that these quarters were built directly over the spot where the Buddha relic was being protected by the indigenous guardian of the soil and the black crow. The crow, being warned by the deva of the desecration due to take place, quickly flew over the king and let its droppings fall on his head. The king was understandably angered, and when he opened his mouth to call his courtiers, the crow let more of its droppings fall into the king's mouth. So great was Ādittarāja's consternation now that he ordered the entire city to set traps to capture the crow. After catching it, the king was advised by his astrologers not to kill the crow for the bird's strange behavior must portend some important event. That night a deva appeared to the king in a dream and told him to have a new-born child live with the black crow for seven years in order to learn the crow's language. This advice was followed and after the allotted time had passed, the child was then able to

11) *Epochs of the Conqueror*, p. 106. There is disagreement on the succession of Ādittarāja. In the MS his reign is 27th after Cāmadevī; in the DL and JKM it is the 31st. There are even more problems with the chronology. See Coedès, p. 25.

12) This list of virtues is also applied to Cāmadevī—DL, p. 29; MS, p. 169. One of the purposes of the chronicles was to offer advice and good counsel to the wielders of political power.



act as an interpreter between Ādittarāja and the crow. When the king had ascertained the cause of the crow's behavior, he had his private quarters demolished and the ground reconsecrated. He then prayed, "Servants of the Buddha of the magnificent destiny, Lord, I beg that you deliver all of us, Servants of the Master of the Sages. Lord, make the relic appear to us soon; show to us now this excellent marvel. Render us pure in the merit of our Buddha."<sup>13</sup> After this invocation, the relic miraculously appeared. Both the DL and the CdW add considerable detail regarding the relic and Ādittarāja's reign, while the MS and JKM end the narrative with the relic's appearance. While Ādittarāja takes us far beyond the founding of Haripuñjaya under Cāmadevī, his reign deserves the brief mention allowed because it is tied directly to the myth of the Buddha's visit. Indeed, the appearance of the relic is not unlike a second founding of the city, an argument to be expanded in our interpretation of the narrative.

### B. The Rishi Layer

The founding of Haripuñjaya is attributed to a rishi named Vāsudeva.<sup>14</sup> He appears in the chronicles with either three (CdW) or four (MS, JKM, PY) other rishis. All of the rishis are associated with mountains or towns or both: Vāsudeva with Doi Suthep near Chiang Mai, Sukkadanta (or Sukkanta) with Lāvo or Lavo (Lopburi), Anusissa or Anusisaṭa with Sajjanālaya (near Sukhothai), Buddhajātīla with Doi Juhapabbata (or Doi Pa Yai, near Lamphun), and Subrahma with Doi Ngām near Lampang. These five high-born clansmen found the teaching of the Buddha attractive and were ordained as monks. Unable to follow the strict rules of the *vinaya*, they reverted to lay life. However, the householder life was ultimately unsatisfying, so they became rishis or hermits and acquired the five higher knowledges (*abhiññas*) and five perfections (*sampattis*).<sup>15</sup> Of these five rishis, Vāsudeva is the most

13) DL, p. 48.

14) In the PY he appears as Sudeva. While the names of the rishis and the places with which they are associated differ somewhat between the PY and MS, there are significant differences between the CdW and the other two chronicles. It would appear that CdW relied on a different source from the other chronicles at this point.

15) The JKM has Sukkanta becoming a layman again. *Epochs* . . . , p. 97.

important and figures as the founder of several towns including Hari-puñjaya.<sup>16</sup> It should also be kept in mind that Vāsudeva plays an important role in the Lava tradition where he is the son of the clan progenitors, or two of the major guardian spirits of the Lava, Pu Sae, Ya Sae.

Vāsudeva always bathed in the Rohiṇī River or Maenām Khān at the base of Doi Suthep near the present site of Wat Cedi Cet Yod. One day while bathing in the river he saw three sets of male and female infants in the footprints of an elephant, rhinoceros and gayal or bullock.<sup>17</sup> In the CdW rendering, Vāsudeva "looks in all directions" and sees children in four footprints (also note that in the CdW there are four rishis instead of five): elephant, rhinoceros, bullock and cow (*wua*).<sup>18</sup> Feeling sympathetic for their plight he adopts them and miraculously nurses the children with his fingers. To these six are added yet another couple born of a doe who had conceived by drinking Vāsudeva's urine containing his semen. The rishi named the boy Kunāra Rasī and the girl Migapati Rasiṇī. He married the two when they attained the age of sixteen and made them sovereigns of a city he created named, Migasangara. They also ruled over the other children Vāsudeva had raised as well as a large number of hill tribesmen.

Kunāra Rasī and Migapati Rasiṇī had three sons and one daughter. The eldest son, Kunārikanāda (MS) or Kunarishiganāsa (JKM), succeeded his father as the ruler of Migasangara. The other two sons were made rulers of two new cities, Anarapura Nagara (MS) or Rannapura (JKM) and Kulissa Nagara (MS).<sup>19</sup> For reasons unstated in the chronicles, Vāsudeva became dissatisfied with the original city, Migasangara

16) Kraisri Nimmanahaeminda provides an interesting account of the conversion of the Lava to Buddhism in, "The Lawa Guardian Spirits of Chiangmai", *Journal of the Siam Society*, LV, ii (July, 1967), pp. 185-225. There would seem to have been distinctive Lava and Mon Buddhist traditions which become merged in the chroniclers' accounts.

17) Jayawickrama's rendering as 'elephant-footed' following the suggestion of Sayadaw U Titthila has no meaning in terms of the probable cosmological structure of this mythic-legendary event. See *Epochs* . . . , p. 98.

18) The Thai terms translated here as bullock and cow are ไก่ and วัว. They are formal and common terms for the same kind of animal. It would seem that the author's purpose was to emphasize the four cardinal directions.

19) The details of this part of the narrative including the names of the cities are quite at variance among the CdW, MS, DL and JKM. For the most part, I shall follow the MS.

Nakhorn, and built a new city to the south of the place where the Buddha had made his prediction and named it, Pura Nagara, which was ruled by Kunārikanāda.

Kunārikanāda apparently proved to be an unworthy ruler. In the MS it is said that he refused to observe the ten royal Precepts and, in particular, refused to mete out justice to a boy who had beaten his elderly mother. She appealed to the devas for help. They heard her plea and said to her, "Old woman, go and tell your relatives and friends to leave the city immediately." After these people had gathered up their belongings and escaped, the devas deluged the city with a great flood destroying everything within it including the wicked king.

Vāsudeva, being informed of the destruction of the city by the devas who protected the world and seeing that the city had, indeed, been entirely annihilated, said, "When I was a Bhikkhu I realized that people without wisdom and virtue, no matter of what rank or position or number of followers, usually make no progress or self-improvement. Not only are they dangerous to themselves but also cause sorrow to other people. This is the teaching of the Buddha. Now, where can I find a man of wisdom and virtue to rule in accordance with the ten royal Precepts?"<sup>20</sup> Deciding that his friend, Sukkadanta in Lavo, could help, Vāsudeva descended from Doi Suthep to seek him out. Coming to the place the Buddha had predicted as the future site of Haripuñjaya, he decided to found the new city there. He sent a message to Sukkadanta via a deva who resided in a nearby bamboo grove. Not only did the deva bear the message to Sukkadanta but miraculously brought the hermit upstream using the bamboo grove as a raft. Along the way Sukkadanta founded several villages including one where he built a shrine to the deva of the bamboo grove.

Vāsudeva and Sukkadanta met at a place half way between Doi Suthep and Muang Lavo which was given the name of Chiang Krung or "half-way city". This spot coincided with the place where the Buddha's begging bowl had been received by the rock. Vāsudeva thrust his staff into the ground and pulling forth a clump of earth and perceived that the area was rich in precious gems, fuel (charcoal) and paddy rice. If ruled by

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20) MS, p. 140; DL, p. 13.

a man of virtue and justice (*dhamma*), the area would prosper, while an unjust ruler would bring only calamity and famine.

Having decided to found the city of Haripuñjaya at that very location, Vāsudeva consulted with Sukkadanta regarding the city's proper size and shape. Sukkadanta suggested that the city's plan should be based on the sea shell model of Halitavalli Nagara (Sajjanālaya) founded by their friend Anusissa. The two rishis immediately set off for Sajjanālaya where Anusissa promised to find a shell they could use as a design for the borders of their town. Afterwards he instructed a Hasatiling<sup>21</sup> bird to secure a sea shell from the ocean and take it to the two rishis. The bird returned with the shell, perched on the branch of a tree, and let it fall at a spot to the west of where the Buddha had made his prediction. Vāsudeva then took his staff and traced a line around the parameter of the shell. Through his supernatural power, the line became deeper and deeper until it formed the city's moat. Houses and shrines for five kinds of spirits arose from the soil and, for this reason, the city was named Lamphun.<sup>22</sup> Vāsudeva then had the tree devas move their abodes beyond the moat to make the city neat and orderly.

The city being properly prepared, Vāsudeva next sought Sukkadanta's advice about a virtuous and just ruler. "My friend," replied Sukkadanta, there is a universal monarch (*cakkavatti*) who has succeeded his father as ruler of Muang Lavaratha or Lavo. He has a daughter named Nāṅ Cāmadevī who practices the five precepts. Let us go and request that she rule our city."<sup>23</sup> Sukkadanta and Gavaya<sup>24</sup> armed with appropriate gifts and an escort of five hundred retainers then proceeded to Lavo to request that Cāmadevī become the ruler of Haripuñjaya.

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21) The Hasatiling, a mythological bird with an elephant head and a bird's body, is often used in funeral processions to transport the coffin of an abbot from the Wat to the cremation ground. It signifies the passage from one mode of being to another. Here it symbolizes the creation of a new order of things, the Muang Haripuñjaya.

22) DL, p. 16.

23) *Ibid.*

24) JKM has Gavaya going on this mission alone, and the translator queries in a footnote whether Gavaya might be one of the Gavaya-pāda children. See *Epochs* . . . , p. 100.

### C. The Cāmadevī Layer

Cāmadevī is depicted in all of the northern chronicles as the daughter of the ruler of Lavo. The DL adds an interesting footnote to that tradition. There she becomes an incarnation of the fifth wife of Indra born as the daughter of the wife of a village headman. Indra intervenes in an argument over the girl and places her in a 500 petaled lotus. Vāsudeva discovers her one day while searching for food and looks after her in his hermitage until she is two or three years old. His three friends, Sukkadanta, Anusissa and Buddhajalita, admonish him, because adopting a girl is not acceptable behavior for a rishi. The four then agree to send Cāmadevī on a raft to Muang Lavo with a note requesting the king to adopt her as his daughter. The devas guide the raft safely to the city where the ruler of the city duly accedes to the request of the rishis. When Cāmadevī reaches the age of 15, the king marries her to his son and together they rule as viceroys in his kingdom. In the JKM, Cāmadevī's husband is the provincial ruler of the city of Rāmañña, a designation for a Mon area in the central plains of Thailand perhaps extending into Lower Burma.<sup>25</sup>

The chronicles offer a variety of reasons for requesting Cāmadevī to become the ruler of Haripuñjaya. The MS and DL state that it was impossible to find someone who was virtuous and pious, endowed with the Ten Royal Precepts, and—above all—of royal descent. The CdW offers another explanation: that the people (of Lamphun) were uncivilized forest dwellers endowed with the characteristics of the animals in whose footprints they were born; that they could not tell right from wrong, good from bad; and that they were unable to govern themselves.<sup>26</sup> Here Cāmadevī is called to rule Haripuñjaya not only because of her reputation for piety and virtue, but also for her connection with the ruling family of the more cultured and powerful kingdom of Lavo. The exact nature of that connection is ambiguous because of the conflicting testimony of the chronicles.

25) See *Epochs* . . . , p. 100, n. 6.

26) CdW, p. 26.

Sukkadanta and Gavaya from Haripuñjaya are received favorably by the ruler of Muang Lavo. He does not, however, immediately accede to their request but leaves the decision up to Cāmadevī. She, in turn, graciously asks for the king's advice, which is, "To be sent to govern the land towards the sources is of considerable importance, and the request is made by a powerful rishi."<sup>27</sup> Cāmadevī consults her husband who is not overly enthusiastic about the proposal even when his father says he can have any other woman in the kingdom for his wife. Yet, in the end, neither Cāmadevī nor her husband can obstruct the wishes of the ruler of Lavo, so she prepares to depart. With her she takes 500 bhikkhus, 500 ascetics, 500 scribes, 500 sculptors, 500 jewellers, 500 silversmiths, 500 goldsmiths, 500 blacksmiths, 500 painters, 500 astrologers, 500 governors, and 500 of every other profession to execute every kind of sacred and profane labor. "The bhikkhus, ascetics and scribes numbered 1500. On the lists there were 7,000 others, but there were certainly more than 7,000 men, elephants and horses involved. No one made count, and no one knows if the number was in the ten thousands or millions."<sup>28</sup> The king's parting advice was, "My dear daughter, you must realize that you are not an ordinary or common person. You are of royal blood, a descendant of kings. Now you go and become a ruling queen. Take the Buddhist religion and five hundred monks with you which will be the basis for your progress and prosperity. When you are queen, always observe the ten precepts for the happiness and prosperity of your people. You must teach your people how to behave according to the Buddha's precepts. The five hundred monks going with you are men of piety and virtue who will protect and pray for you every day and night. Do not deprecate them or be heedless of them."<sup>29</sup>

Cāmadevī departs with her large retinue and along the way builds chedis and several important northern towns including Tak and Hot. Much as Vāsudeva used his staff to test the probity of the site on which Haripuñjaya was founded, Cāmadevī located her towns at the spot on which her royal archer's arrow fell. One location, Ramayagāma, receives considerable attention in the DL where it is said that Cāmadevī

27) DL, p. 17.

28) *Ibid.*, p. 19.

29) MS, p. 153.

erected palaces, pavillions and houses all in one day.<sup>30</sup> After some time Haripuñjaya is reached amid the great rejoicing of Vāsudeva and the populace. Cāmadevī is consecrated as queen seated on a heap of gold and "in consequence of it, up to the present day, the name Haripuñjaya has been traditionally handed down for this city."<sup>31</sup> After ruling the city for seven days, Cāmadevī (who had been three months pregnant when she left Muang Lavo) gave birth to two boys, Mahantayasa and Indavara.

Under Cāmadevī, Haripuñjaya flourished. Monasteries are built for the five hundred monks who came from Muang Lavo and the people piously practice Buddhism due to the encouragement and example of Cāmadevī. She settled the town according to the regions from which the elements of the populace came: those from Muang Lavo in the north-east; those from Migasangara in the west; those from Ramañiya Nagara in the south; and the interior of the town to the descendants of those born in the footprints of the elephant, rhinoceros and buffalo.<sup>32</sup> She made propitiatory offerings to the town's protective devas and requested an elephant of supernatural power so that her sons could protect Haripuñjaya against its enemies. The devas granted her request and sent an elephant of silvery white skin and green tusks. Cāmadevī had it duly consecrated on an auspicious day in a ceremony lasting three days and nights. The elephant had such power that everyone who stepped before it was stricken with an illness which could only be cured by making suitable offerings to the animal.

One incident during Cāmadevī's reign receives special attention in both the chronicles as well as the oral traditions of the Lava.<sup>33</sup> There was a Lava (recorded as Lua in the DL) chieftain named Vilangkha (Milangkha in the CdW) who, having heard of Cāmadevī's great beauty wanted her for his wife. He sought her hand in marriage but was refused. The DL chronicle records the conversation between Vilangkha's envoy and Cāmadevī as follows: "Your majesty," said the envoy, "Vilangkha, who lives in the heights of the Lua mountains, the chief of all the Lua, has

30) DL, p. 25.

31) *Epochs* . . . , p. 100, n. 8.

32) DL, p. 27; PY, p. 170; MS, p. 166.

33) MS, p. 169; PY, p. 181; DL, p. 29. See Kraisi Nimmanahaeminda, "The Romance of Khun Luang Viranga", (mimeographed).

sent me with my men to tell you that he would like to have you as his major wife." "O messenger," she replies, "I have never seen your chief. What does he look like?" "Like us," was the answer. "Like you" she cried. "Don't talk of making him my husband. It doesn't seem fit to me that he should even touch my hand!"<sup>34</sup> Vilangkha did not take Cāmadevī's refusal seriously and assembled an army of 80,000 men before the gates of Haripuñjaya. Once again the queen refused the Lava chief's hand in marriage and sent her own troops led by her two sons, Mahantayasa and Indavara, mounted on the magic elephant. The Lava troops were seized with fright, threw down their arms and headed back for the hills.

The Lava traditions have an expanded version of the Cāmadevī/Vilangkha episode.<sup>35</sup> In response to Vilangkha's pursuit of her hand in marriage, Cāmadevī sets a trial which she considers impossible to accomplish successfully. She tells the Lava chieftain she will marry him if on three tries he can throw his spear from Doi Suthep into the Lamphun city walls. Vilangkha accepts the challenge, and with the first mighty throw almost manages to reach the city wall. Today can be seen a small pond marking the spot of the first throw. Cāmadevī, now fearful that her ardent suitor will succeed, plots Vilangkha's downfall. Taking her sarong she fashions a hat for the Lava chief and has it presented as a gift feigning admiration for Vilangkha's great strength. He puts it on his head and launches his second throw only to find that it lands quite short of the mark. His third effort is so weak that the spear is caught by the wind and like a boomerang reverses its direction and pierces Vilangkha's own heart. Unwittingly by wearing the defiled hat, Vilangkha had broken the taboo of touching cloth profaned by menstrual blood. This taboo still conditions spacial relationships between men and women as well as many modes of behavior. This old taboo accounts for the prohibition against women entering such sacred places as the precinct of the sacred chedi at Wat Phra Dhātu Haripuñjaya in Lamphun or Wat Phra Dhātu Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai.

The JKM devotes a small paragraph to Cāmadevī herself being more interested in Lamphun's subsequent history, in particular, wars

34) DL, p. 35.

35) Kraisri Nimmanahaeminda, "The Romance . . ."



involving Lamphun, Lopburi and Cambodia. Cāmadevī's son, Mahantayasa, is installed as the ruler of Haripuñjaya at the age of seven in an elaborate Brahmanical ceremony including such regalia as a nine-tiered umbrella, jewelled sword and scabbard and golden slippers. Indavara, not content with the status of *uparāja* under his brother, asks his mother for a kingdom of his own. With the help and advice of the rishis—Vāsudeva, Buddhajalita and Subrahma—and a hunter, Khelānga, a grand city was miraculously created named, Khelānga Nagara (modern day Lampang), and "on the same day, towns were created as dependencies of the city, a considerable population of all sorts of people was brought into being,"<sup>36</sup> and Indavara was made the ruler. While neither the episodic nor the regal chronology of the subsequent history of Haripuñjaya will concern us here, one further incident must be mentioned. During the reign of a king named Kambala in the 10th century A.D., a cholera epidemic broke out. The citizens fled to the city of Sudhammanagara (modern Thaton) and, later, being harassed by the king of Pagan left for Hamsāvatī (Pegu). When the epidemic subsided after six years, all of them returned to Haripuñjaya. Coedès uses this incident to support his identification of Lamphun as Mon, a presumption we hope to qualify later in this paper.

### The Narrative Interpreted

The epic history describing the founding of Haripuñjaya or Lamphun is a series of creation myths and legends in the genre of the Sinhalese chronicles (e.g. *Dīpavamsa*, *Mahāvamsa*), and Indian purāṇic and āgamic literature which manifested itself in such Pali works as the *Nidāna-kathā* and the commentary on the *Buddhāvamsa*.<sup>37</sup> Above all else, this history narrates the creation of civilization (i.e. Muang, Nagara or town) in the midst of a non-civilization (i.e. forest-dwelling hill tribes). The fundamental polarity of these mythic-legends is, therefore, one between town

36) DL, p. 38.

37) See E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha As Legend and History*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1949). Thailand's contribution to this tradition is not even noted by Thomas. European scholars are generally unaware of such works as the *Phra Chao Liep Lok* and other northern Thai *Buddha damṇān*.

or city and village or tribe. This polarity is manifested primarily in the calling of Cāmadevī to govern Haripuñjaya, but secondarily in such episodes as Vilangkha's pursuit of Cāmadevī's hand in marriage. Cāmadevī personifies the advanced or Muang culture of Lopburi adumbrated in the stylized lists of professionals in her retinue. She stands in stark contrast to the rustic attributes of those whom she has come to govern symbolized in the CdW by the children in the footprints of the forest animals.

On a sociological level, the narrative speaks of the progressive development of a Muang culture. The first city Vāsudeva created was Migasangara. [*Miga* here should probably not be translated in its particular meaning of deer but in its generic sense of forest or untamed animal.] Migasangara, here, is a town designating the first settlement of different tribal peoples, yet it cannot be called a civilization or culture at this point. Consequently, other towns emerged until the founding of Haripuñjaya which benefited from its alliance with Lopburi. Later, it developed a unique identity distinct from other centers of high culture, including Lopburi, Cambodia and even the cultural influences of Nakorn Si Thammarat.

On a mythological level, Haripuñjaya is what Mircea Eliade would term an *axis mundi* or center of the sacred cosmos. It is in this sense that Vāsudeva descends from Doi Suthep, "looks in all directions" and then takes people from the four cardinal points which serve to populate the cities he creates. Also, the flood destroying Pura Nagara and the sea shell model of Haripuñjaya are intended to convey the emergence of a new, sacred order. A similar mythic mentality informs the narrative of the Buddha's visit and relic. It establishes Haripuñjaya as a place guarded by the devas and the nagas, the cleverest of the birds that fly (crow), the temporal authority of King Asoka, and the spiritual authority of the Buddha himself. Haripuñjaya is a Buddha-desa, the center of a sacred cosmos charged with the power of the Buddha's presence conveyed through his personal visit and the deposit of his relic—hence, the chronicler's concern for pollution as evidenced by the role of the crow and the indigenous deva as guardians of the reliquary against all kinds of impurities and Ādittarāja's near desecration of the holy spot.

From the standpoint of the narrative's structure as outlined in our description, Lamphun has two foundings, one associated with the Rishi/Cāmadevī continuum and the other with the Buddha/Ādittarāja continuum. The creation of a Muang culture involves the federalization of tribal or communal loyalties by subjugating them to a higher political authority. Cāmadevī primarily fulfills this function. She symbolizes a new political authority associated with a powerful ruling family of a Muang with a high culture (i.e. Lopburi). Yet, while Cāmadevī brings with her political power invested with the authority of both Buddhism and Brahmanism, the religious identity of tribal affiliation is not yet decisively transformed. Buddhism as the religion of the Muang is not established until the time of Ādittarāja. The Buddha predicts that his religion will flourish in the land of the Mae Ping River at the time of Ādittarāja. There are at least two possible explanations for the chronicler's point—either Buddhism was established in Haripuñjaya by Ādittarāja or it began to flourish as a popular religion during his reign. In either case—and the latter may be the most probable—Buddhism was established as the religion of the Muang during the reign of Ādittarāja, not of Cāmadevī. Ādittarāja, then, becomes the second founder of Haripuñjaya. No reign matches his importance until that of Mengrai in the 13th century A.D.

The specific details of the narrative are, of course, liable to a variety of interpretations. Some informants say that the black and white crows are meant to symbolize south and north Indian influences; others have attempted to identify the children of the animal footprints with specific tribal groups in northern Thailand; and still others have pointed out Vāsudeva's connection as the son of the clan progenitors of the Lava. Such speculations may, indeed, have merit. I have tried to offer a framework in terms of which the mythic-legendary part of the founding of Haripuñjaya has meaning. I have suggested, by way of summary, that the fundamental polarity in the myths and legends is between civilization (town) and non-civilization (village) and that Haripuñjaya has two foundings, one associated with a Rishi tradition<sup>38</sup> actualized by Cāmadevī

38) Rishis are persons who have gained supernatural powers through the exercise of ascetic disciplines. They often play the role of founder or progenitor. See Hermann Kulke, *Cidambaramūhātmya* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1970) for a suggestion of the role of the rishis at Cidambaram a holy Śaivite site in South India. Parallels are also found in the Romulus and Remus tradition appended to the founding of Rome. cf. F. Hermann Strasburger, *Zur Sage von der Gründung Roms* (Heidelberg: Universitäts Verlag, 1968).

and another associated with a Buddhist tradition actualized by Ādittarāja. These distinctions, as our description of the narrative points out, are not clear cut but, nevertheless, are implicit in the texts.

### Historical Implications

The historical relevance of our study of the story of the founding of Haripuñjaya focuses on the long-held assumption that from the 7th or 8th century<sup>39</sup> until Mengrai's conquest in 1281<sup>40</sup> Haripuñjaya can be identified as Mon. This position has been generally held by scholars since it was established by Coedès in refutation of M. Lefevre-Pontalis' view that Cāmadevī brought Khmer influence into northern Thailand.<sup>41</sup> Coedès' position means that for a period of approximately 500 years, Haripuñjaya was dominated by a culturally and artistically advanced people who had established themselves in great strength in the central plains. There are at least three problems with this theory: (1) Haripuñjaya would have been an isolated outpost of a people representing a highly developed culture for a half millenium, (2) it is probable that of the eight Mon inscriptions discovered in Lamphun, none can be dated before the reign of King Kyanzittha of Pagan (1084-1113),<sup>42</sup> (3) some of the earliest archaeological remains in the area, in particular a few sculpted Buddha heads, are identified by some Thai scholars not as Mon but some other, as yet unidentified, Buddhist culture.<sup>43</sup>

These problems are significant enough to call into question the presumption that Haripuñjaya was Mon from the time of Cāmadevī until the Thai conquest. By applying our study of the chronicles' account to the historical situation, there appears to be some grounds for asserting that Haripuñjaya was not dominated by a Mon Buddhist culture until the 11th century, if at all, and that prior to that time it was culturally a

39) Coedès places Cāmadevī in Haripuñjaya in the 8th century and the beginning of Adittarāja's reign around the middle of the 12th century. His dating pushes the chronology of the chronicles up approximately 100 years.

40) W.A.R. Wood, *A History of Siam* (Bangkok, 1924), p. 55.

41) Coedès, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

42) See A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "An Inscription in Old Mon from Wieng Mano in Chiang Mai Province", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 59: 1 (January, 1971), p. 154.

43) M.C. Chand Chirayu Rajani, *Thai Monumental Bronzes*.

Lava-Mon area dominated by the Lava. This position is not a direct refutation of the traditionally held view but a qualification of it. Basically, it reduces the gap between the Lava and Mon who, after all, are ethnically and linguistically related. It sees the Lava not as "primitive and savage" (to use Coedès' terms) but as relatively less advanced than the Mon. And it affirms that Haripuñjaya cannot be seen as Mon in the same terms as the Mons of central Thailand. In short, it broadens the Mon/Khom debate by suggesting that the Lava transformed the culture of Lopburi Mons into something unique. *Mom Chao Chand* makes a similar suggestion in his *Thai Monumental Bronzes* but it has not been seriously followed by historical scholarship.

The identification of Cāmadevī as Mon (or Meng) is not, in fact, corroborated by any direct references in the northern chronicles including the CdW which makes pointed reference to the Mons. The section of the CdW dealing with her qualifications to rule Haripuñjaya simply identifies her as the daughter of the King of Lavo. The only particular support in the chronicles for such an identification comes from the mention of Rāmañña Nagara, a Mon designation, to which Cāmadevī is related through her husband who ruled there as viceroy. The DL and a version of the CdW as yet untranslated from northern Thai even suggests that Cāmadevī was only the adopted daughter of the King of Lavo and had, in fact, been born in northern Thailand. An association of Cāmadevī with the Lava is made possible by her connection with Vāsudeva who, as mentioned earlier, is the son of the guardian spirits of the Lava, Pu Sae, Ya Sae. It might be noted that the Lava have their own independent tradition of being converted to Buddhism during the Buddha's visit to northern Thailand.<sup>44</sup> It should at least be queried whether this tradition points to an early Indian Buddhist contact with the Lava.<sup>45</sup>

Given the following: that we know very little about the nature of Mon influence in Lopburi in the 7th and 8th centuries; that there is an allusion to Cāmadevī's origin being in the north; and that no source directly identifies her as Mon, it is questionable at best to assume that Cāmadevī initiated the Mon period of Haripuñjaya. In fact, it seems just

44) Kraisri Nimmanahaeminda, "The Lavo Guardian Spirits...".

45) There are two badly weathered Buddha heads in the Wat-Phra Dhātu Haripuñjaya museum which appear to be close to a pure Gupta style.

as reasonable to picture Cāmadevī as a pawn in alliances between cousins in her marriage to the Mon prince of Lavo and then later in her reign in Haripuñjaya. She brought with her not only enhanced political authority but many of the Mon traditions and customs she had imbibed while in Muang Lavo or Rāmañña Nagara. These, in turn, were transformed into unique tradition properly designated as Lava-Mon or simply as Haripuñjaya.

It is probable that Mon Buddhist influence became dominant in the 11th or 12th century. Historically, Mon strongholds in central Thailand and lower Burma were being disrupted during this period by the Khmers and the Burmese respectively. It would be natural to assume a movement of Mons into areas which seemed to offer greater security. Haripuñjaya, an up-country station with Mon connections, offered one of those places. For this reason, the earliest Mon inscriptions discovered in Lamphun dating from the 11th and 12th centuries are similar to the language and epigraphy of the Mon inscriptions in Thaton and Pegu of approximately the same time. It might even be that the Thais further to the north came under the influence of the Buddhist Mons during roughly the same period. Could this influence of Mon Buddhism have brought about such a decisive change that it should be looked upon as the second major turning point in the cultural and religious development of Haripuñjaya? In which case the period from Cāmadevī to Ādittarāja might be thought of as the Lava-Mon period and from Ādittarāja to Mengrai as the Mon-Lava period. Such a distinction may seem to be nit-picking, yet it reveals a new dimension of northern Thai cultural and religious development that has been largely neglected.

One final note—what about the cholera epidemic at Haripuñjaya and the forced migration to Thaton and Pegu? Frankly, I see no reason to become literalistic in interpreting the chronicles on this point. Perhaps, as the chronicles suggest, the incident is primarily an explanation of the meaning of Loi Krathong. Or, as Coédes argues, it points to old Mon traditions at Haripuñjaya. Might it not, however, be a sign pointing to the future influence of Mon Buddhism from lower Burma into northern Thailand? My position would support such an interpretation,