

# NOTE

## A NOTE ON MR. MICHAEL WRIGHT'S LECTURE ON THE HISTORICAL LANKAN BUDDHIST CONNECTION IN SIAM AND CAMBUJIA

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Having attended the meeting at the Siam Society held on the 15th November, 1983, upon kind invitation of a member, at which Mr. Wright spoke on the 'presumed' historical direct Buddhist links between Lanka and Siam, I had the privilege of offering some limited ideas, more as enquiries, during the time for questions after the talk. Mr. Wright's interesting presentation suggested:

(a) that the first contact of Lankan Buddhism was with Cambujia, whence it came to Siam, and not with Siam at Nakorn Sri Thamarat, as widely held; and

(b) that the traditional exchange of princely daughters, in this case from Lanka to Cambujia, inevitably led to the arrival of Lankan clergy.

Various supporting evidences included a War alliance between Lanka and Cambujia against Ramani Desa in Burma; and a Lankan-style (almost) stupa in an important temple of the Cambujian capital at Angkor.

Briefly, during discussion time, I enquired on the plausibility of travel from Lanka to Cambujia without a thought of touching Siam that lay across; and on an explanation of the role of the Pallava influence in Cambujia, as manifest in the names of their kings and in the uniform presence of the Shiva emblem at the very centre of all major temples there. Mr. Wright suggested in reply that the Lankan monks could have gone across, or via Burma; and that the Pallava link did not fit with the position that there was no evident Tamil legacy in Cambujia.

There being promise of many other questions or enquiries in the brief time available, it would have been certainly somewhat impolite to impose oneself within that space, although Mr. Wright was kind enough to enquire if his remarks met my needs; to which I offered the remark that his observations now made the subject even more interesting. The interest, even obvious devotion, of those who attended, as well as the usefulness of fuller ideas on the situation, led me to feel that I may set down some facets of importance and some suggestions, and hope that they will find a recep-

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tion and use in the stimulating engagements and pursuits of the Siam Society in this field. Perhaps the Note may be made available to those interested, and feature in the essential further study of missing areas by Mr. Wright, to whom we remain indebted. For convenience, of everybody, these further thoughts and considerations are set down below as numbered points, which obviously then have to be re-woven in a much wider fabric, involving historical Burma and India, as much as Lanka, Siam and Cambujia. (The Indonesian link surged forward more in the Wijayanagar period, although perhaps starting, as elsewhere, with the Jain and Buddhist periods of South India ending around the sixth century.)

1. First, for a possible total picture, the excellent discernment shown on the Lankan-Cambujian connection must, as hinted earlier, be supplemented with a deep and necessary probe into: (a) the Lankan-Burmese religious connections, despite any wars, in a long-recognized, close Theravada affinity between Burma and Lanka; and (b) possible Lankan travel to Cambujia through Burma accounting for the slightly 'off-style' Lankan stupa referred to by Mr. Wright as found in Cambujia. (Or, it may be simply the much earlier South Indian Buddhist period).

2. Similarly, a most glaring lacuna is a clear historical Indian (Pallava) link and contributions, whatever our ignorance of them so far. While there were, at Cambujia, Suriyavarman, Rajendravarman and Jayavarman, there was, before that, Mahendravarman at Kanchi and, so far as is known, the 'source' of the Cambujian royal nomenclatures. (It is in accord that these were not repeated in Indonesia, as stated above).

3. Also, as all of India was, as pointed out above, Buddhist up to a period, it would not be unexpected to accommodate spiritually, culturally and socially, a stupa heritage similar to that in India, later in Cambujia when Buddhism emerged in the latter place. But more importantly, not only Thamil, but no 'contemporary' Indian language had found a place in the soils of any of the lands overseas in South East Asia, that intermingled the Pallava, or other, culture and influence. Thus no 'contemporary' Indian language, save Sanskrit and later 'scriptural' Pali, would be found; and in fact that is the case. So it had to be with Thamil and, therefore, that this linkage was not found in Cambujia is not only in conformity with the manner of transfusion of Indian religion and culture, but is also in conformity with a Pallavan role in that transfusion. Languages themselves, in Cambujia and other countries like it, were invariably the outgrowth of the 'local' languages. Somewhat like in the European Middle Ages and the Renaissance when Latin was the language of knowledge, culture and respectability, so it was Sanskrit and none else. (It was the Jains and Buddhists in India who used the local languages there when these two religions flourished). Thus it is that while

the languages of Cambujia and all similar countries are outgrowth from the local languages, they are full with wide-ranging and rich intermixtures of Sanskrit. For Culture and Hinduism, Sanskrit and, for Buddhism, Pali, has been the vehicle, right up to Indonesia; with Thamili permeations, in lands such as Cambujia or Indonesia, being peripheral, for example, in certain colloquialisms, including the still current descriptions of some interesting food items in Java. The evidences of external fertilization lie, therefore, in other than whether the 'contemporary' languages from the originating countries were found or not found in the receiving countries. Thus the three manifestations mentioned, of the particular royal Names, the Shiva emblems, and the Sanskrit infusion.

4. In this, the Lankan Buddhistic flow may be seen as a peaceful exchange. Lankan historical tradition, while deeply aware of Sanskrit, was never capable of carrying the vigorous Sanskrit literature and traditions overseas. Over time, the South East Asian countries developed from both sources a rich, entirely indigenous mosaic that was a genius of fusion of Sanskrit, Hindu culture, Buddhism, Pali scripture and some social identities.

5. The Lankan Buddhist flow may 'technically' have gone through Burma to Cambujia and then to Siam. At one period large parts of Siam were parts of the Khmer Empire, whence some of Siam culture was also derived. But the Lankan flow must as well have been direct at some stages, with reverse flow also from Siam to Lanka. For this is the other historical fact, as for example evidenced in a Lanka vihara in Siam, in existence to this day, and the Siam Nikaya in Lanka, even today the most important of the Buddhist chapters in the country. This could not have emerged without also a direct connection between the historical Siam and Lanka, whatever the help of any 'genetically engineered' flows from Lanka via daughters given in marriage in the court of Cambujia. Also it is unimaginable, after nearly one and a half millenia of perfecting the Dagoba in Lanka, that a mis-shaped one should be in the Sanctum Sanctorum of a Cambujian temple.

6. Mr. Wright's work as presented has been so commendable that others could be indebted to him if he could add these dimensions to a totality in research so that he may give us, in time, a reading from a wider canvas and, hopefully, most interesting results on one of human history's truly fascinating and creative chapters.