

THE *CĀMADEVĪVAMSA* AND THE CHRONICLE  
TRADITION IN NORTHERN THAILAND

Because northern Thai chronicles are so diverse, a singular or univocal characterization is impossible. Scholars have proposed different ways of classifying these texts. Hans Pentz divides northern Thai or Lān Nā ("land of a million rice paddies") historical literature into two categories, factual history and fictional (i.e., mythical, legendary), although he notes that these categories are fluid and overlapping.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this broad distinction, he proposes five classifications for Lān Nā Buddhist literature that can be considered historical: chronicles that deal in general with the history of Buddhism, chronicles about Buddha images, chronicles of religious sites, inscriptions, and a miscellaneous category into which he places the CDV.<sup>2</sup>

Charvut Kasetsiri explores the conceptualization of ancient Thai history in terms of the categories of *tamnān*, *phongsāwadān*, and *jotmāibaet*.<sup>3</sup> The first two terms are usually translated by the word, *chronicle* and the second as *annals* or *records*. He proposes that premodern Thai records or historical documents fall into two main categories: the history of Buddhism (*tamnān*) and the history of dynasties (*phongsāwadān*).<sup>4</sup> *Tamnān* history or the history of Buddhism, he contends, flourished from before the fifteenth century into the seventeenth century at which point it began to decline. Dynastic history or *phongsāwadān* history appears in the seventeenth century. It is a history that begins with the foundation of the kingdom and then lists accomplishments of successive kings.<sup>5</sup> *Tamnān* history, by contrast, highlights the Buddha and particular events in the development of the tradition (*sāsana*). In a manner reminiscent of the *Mahāvamsa*, the classic Pāli chronicle of the Sinhalese Mahāvihāra tradition, *tamnān* such as the sixteenth-century JKM begin with Gotama Buddha, his vow to reach enlightenment and a sketch of his life. The story continues through the major Buddhist councils, King Asoka, and an account of Buddhism in Sri Lanka

before concluding with the establishment of Buddhism in northern Thailand. Kasetsiri summarizes the nature of *tamnān* history as follows:

The main theme of *tamnān* history is clearly religion and it is Gotama Buddha who is the moving force in it. Its purpose is to describe the development of Buddhism. Kings and kingdoms come into the picture in so far as their actions contribute to the promoting of Buddhism. History in this sense is not concerned with the past. The past is continuous with the existence of the present and the present is also part of the future. Thus the past, the present, and the future are parts of one whole, the history of Buddhism.<sup>6</sup>

While the distinction between *tamnān* and *phongsāwadān* ways of understanding the past (and the present) refines a crude sense of "chronicle," it fails to address the variety of northern Thai *tamnān* suggested by Penth's categories and also fails to capture the intentionality of a chronicle like the CDV.

David K. Wyatt develops a more thorough and nuanced classification of northern Thai *tamnān*: the *tamnān* of the distant past; the "universal histories" in Pāli and Thai, the product of Buddhist efflorescence in Lān Nā in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; and "monumental *tamnān*" concerning Buddhist images, relics, and institutions.<sup>7</sup> He classifies the CDV with universal histories. Although the CDV begins with the Buddha's visit to Haripuñjaya and in this sense seems to connect with Buddhist history beyond the area, it differs significantly from the model of the *Mahāvāṃsa* more nearly reflected in the JKM and the TM. The nature of the CDV as presented in this monograph suggests that Wyatt's categories may be inadequate to fully appreciate the CDV. In many respects the chronicle exemplifies what he calls "monumental *tamnān*," although it also shares the dynastic characteristics he attributes to "universal *tamnān*."

Classifying northern Thai *tamnān* can be heuristically useful but in the end it may be best to follow Bodhiraṃsi's advice to deconstruct all classifications and simply listen carefully to the story:

Upon her death she was born in the world of the gods (*devaloka*). The beauty and prosperity of the *devas* in Tusita heaven is beyond description . . . Therefore, no one can describe the wonder of Cāmadevi's attainment. Listen well to her story.

The story of Queen Cāma is Bodhiraṃsi's rendering of a northern Thai folk legend about an extraordinary woman who founded the first

northern Thai city-state, today known as Lamphūn. According to the JKM, the founding date would have been in 663 C.E.<sup>8</sup> But in the CDV, the Queen Cāma legend is linked to another story, the discovery and enshrinement of a Buddha relic at Haripuñjaya by King Ādittarāja (c. 1047 C.E. in the JKM).<sup>9</sup>

Although the chronicle has a *vaṃsa* or dynastic element, Bodhiraṃsi finds more interest in myth and legend than in history. Hence, the chronicle resembles two genre of Buddhist literature produced in great quantities in northern Thailand, the *jātaka* (previous lives of the Buddha) and *tamnān*. The association of the CDV with these forms of oral/aural or so called popular literature prompted George Coedès to characterize the text as follows: "C'est une sorte de poème épique entremêlé de réflexions morales, et les faits y sont noyés dans un intarissable verbiage."<sup>10</sup>

In terms of literary genre the two most distinctive types of Buddhist literature produced in northern Thailand are the *jātaka*<sup>11</sup> and *tamnān*. That the two are closely related is indicated by the fact that they are referred to as *nidāna-jātaka* and *tamnān-nidāna*. In short, both *jātaka* and *tamnān* are classified as *nidāna* or "legend." From a historical perspective it is reasonable to assume that many of these texts originated in Chiang Mai during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century considered to be the Golden Age of northern Thailand. From the perspective of popular Buddhist devotional practice such texts served several functions, in particular: (i) to legitimate the founding of a monastery-temple (Thai, *wat*; Pāli, *āvāsa*) and other sacred sites associated with a Buddha relic; (ii) as texts incorporated into particular rituals, e.g., the consecration of a Buddha image, (iii) as sermons preached on special occasions, e.g., the beginning of the rains retreat.

The CDV, like a *jātaka* tale, begins with a story of the past, in this case the Buddha's visit to Haripuñjaya and prediction of the discovery of a Buddha relic by King Ādittarāja. This discovery appears in the last chapter of the chronicle, thus providing a frame for the entire narrative in the same way that the final chapter of a *jātaka* tale connects past and present.

The second chapter, "Vāsudeva and the Founding of Migasaṅgha-nagara," provides another story of the past that focuses on the sage (Pāli, *isi*; Sanskrit, *ṛṣi*) Vāsudeva. Vāsudeva and other mountain-dwelling ascetics featured in the story have a special relationship with Queen Cāma. Thus, the first two chapters can be seen as representing two stories of the past. In effect, Haripuñjaya has two strands of mythic origin: one associated with the Buddha and the other with Vāsudeva. Haripuñjaya's history is grounded in a mythic time represented by the Buddha and the legend-

ary sage, Vāsudeva. This mythic time is actualized in history by the ruling dynasty of Haripuñjaya, in particular, Cāmadevī and Ādittarāja. This dual thematic structure of the CDV will be examined in further detail in the following section.

While the CDV may resemble the form of a *jātaka*, one strand reflects the content of *phuttha tamnān* texts, which are legends of the Buddha's visit to northern Thailand. These texts vary greatly in scope. Some, such as the *Phrajaḥ Liap Lōk* (PJLL) (The Buddha Travels the World), construct a northern Thai sacred geography created by the visit of the Buddha to the region.<sup>12</sup> Others focus primarily on a single site, for example, the Haripuñjaya Buddha relic.<sup>13</sup> *Phuttha tamnān* are characterized by two basic elements: (i) a visit by the Buddha to the region, (ii) the enshrinement of a Buddha relic or the prediction of the appearance of a relic. In short, PT focus on instantiating the presence of the Buddha—the creation of a “Buddha land” (*buddha-desa*). Within the context of the PT, this *buddha-desa* is actualized by the Buddha with the assistance of *devatā*, usually Indra, and King Asoka. When the narrative moves from myth toward history, the Buddha's presence in the form of a relic is actualized by rulers, as in the case of Ādittarāja of Haripuñjaya. All of these elements are present in the CDV.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF THE CĀMADEVĪVAṂSA

The *Cāmadevīvaṃsa* has much in common with the literary genre associated with preaching and other modes of popular instruction in the vernacular, e.g., *jātaka*, *nidāna*, *tamnān*. This is hardly surprising when one finds that Bodhiraṃsi wove into his story a *nidāna*, the legend of Queen Cāma, and a “Buddha history” (*phuttha tamnān*) associated with the central Buddha relic (*mahādhātu*) of Haripuñjaya. Bodhiraṃsi not only wove these two strands into his narrative, he also used them to ground the creation of the kingdom of Haripuñjaya in the dual powers associated with ascetical renunciation and fertility. In the first of these origin stories two powerful, liminal figures, sages (*isi*), among whom Vāsudeva and Brahma (Subrahma) are the most prominent, and a pregnant woman, Queen Cāma, create order/cosmos out of disorder/chaos. Together they build a walled, moated city out of the dark tangle of jungle and in so doing bring civilization to an indigenous people referred to in the text as the Milakkha, who are assumed by scholars to be the Lawa. The CDV's juxtaposition of the rational order of the royal city-state with the seeming irrational disorder of the jungle suggests a culture/nature duality; however, the CDV reverses the conventional woman-equals-nature equation

by associating Cāmadevī with culture and the male ruler of the Milakkha with nature.<sup>14</sup>

The secondary origin story serves as the climax to the chronicle—the discovery and enshrinement of a Buddha relic by King Ādittarāja, an event predicted by the Buddha, himself, during his legendary visit to the area. In this narrative strand the world-renouncing power of the Buddha is conjoined with the sovereign power of the world-ruling king (*cakkavatti*). This part of the chronicle reflects one of the major features of popular Thai Buddhist practice, namely, the veneration of Buddha relics.<sup>15</sup> The association of Buddha relics with Buddhist kingship dates from the origins of the tradition, if the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* is to be believed, and certainly from the Mauryan period of Indian history (viz. Asoka). Buddha relics enshrined by rulers in *cetiya* (Thai, *jetī*) serve as the axial center of the kingdom. The fact that they may be homologized with the axial world mountain (Mount Sumeru) of Indian cosmology only adds to their grandeur and power.<sup>16</sup>

Both Cāmadevī and the Buddha bring “seeds” to Haripuñjaya. Queen Cāma’s seed (*bija*) bears the fruit of a dynastic lineage; the Buddha’s seed (*dhātu*) bears the fruit of the *sāsana* or the Buddha’s religion, his teaching (*dhamma*), and the monastic order (*saṅgha*). Bodhirāṃsi weaves the polarity of renunciation and production/fertility into his story: a pregnant Cāma leaves her husband (who becomes a monk) in order to rule Haripuñjaya, an act mediated by an ascetic, Vāsudeva; Prince Siddhattha renounces kingship for spiritual enlightenment and, as the Buddha, brings a bodily relic/seed to Haripuñjaya that becomes Wat Phradhātu, the center of the kingdom. Vāsudeva, an *isi*, actualizes the fertile power of Queen Cāma; Ādittarāja, a monarch, actualizes the ascetical power of the Buddha. The bodies of women and Buddhas are so potent and powerful that they must be channeled by the charisma of ascetics and kings. The overlapping polarities of male and female, asceticism and fertility are at the heart of the dual structure of the CDV.

Although from an historical-critical perspective the two major strands Bodhirāṃsi integrates into the CDV—the Cāmadevī-*isi* strand and the Ādittarāja-Buddha relic strand—can be seen as distinctive if not separate narrative traditions, in the CDV they are synthesized into one story. Was this Bodhirāṃsi’s doing or did synthesis occur over time? On the basis of an examination of other northern Thai chronicles, such as the *Tamnān Mu’ang Lamphūn* and the Haripuñjaya section in other northern Thai chronicles, especially the *Tamnān Mūlasāsanā*, it appears probable that storytellers prior to Bodhirāṃsi had brought together various narrative strands. However, this does not necessarily mean that

Bodhiraṃsi was simply translating one composite vernacular story into Pāli. It appears likely that Bodhiraṃsi used several sources, not just northern Thai texts, but standard doctrinal teachings based on the Pāli canon and commentary as well. Bodhiraṃsi's references to *porāṇavacanāṃ* ("ancient words") throughout the text can be seen as an attempt to legitimize his unique story, something akin to the Theravāda use of *buddhavacanāṃ* ("Buddha's words") to lend authority to Pāli *suttas*.

Keeping in mind that the strands or components of the CDV are parts of a single story, the narrative can be divided into four distinct sections:

- I. Stories of the Past: The Buddha's prediction of the appearance of his relic and the founding of the first town [Migasaṅgha-nagara] (chapters 1–2)
- II. The Cāmadevī Era. From the founding of Haripuñjaya to the death of Queen Cāma (chapters 3–11)
- III. The Interlinear *Vaṃsa* or Genealogy of the rulers of Haripuñjaya (chapter 12)
- IV. King Ādittarāja's reign and the Discovery and Enshrinement of the Buddha Relic (chapters 13–15)

Within this structure, Part I establishes the dual perspective taken by the chronicle on the origin/creation of Haripuñjaya; Part II, as verified by Bodhiraṃsi's own statement at the end of chapter 11, is the story of Queen Cāma translated and interpreted by Bodhiraṃsi; Part III, the brief genealogy of the rulers of Haripuñjaya, formally links the CDV with the *vaṃsa* genre of Buddhist chronicles; and Part IV associates the story with the extensive tradition of northern Thai *phuttha tamnān* or Buddha-chronicles.<sup>17</sup>

#### THE CĀMADEVĪVAṂSA AS A NARRATIVE TAPESTRY OF MYTH, LEGEND, AND HISTORY

If one accepts Bodhiraṃsi at his word, the reason he wrote the CDV in Pāli was to enhance the prestige of a vernacular northern Thai legend. He offers no other rationale. A variant interpretation of Bodhiraṃsi's claim would be that he wanted to Buddhicize a centuries-old folktale about the founding of the first kingdom in the Chiang Mai valley. He accomplished this goal by writing his story in Pāli, synthesizing the Cāmadevī *nidāna* with what David Wyatt characterizes as a monumental *phuttha tamnān* or history of the central reliquary (*phradhātu*) of the

kingdom of Haripuñjaya, and, finally, by incorporating into the text Buddhist teachings typical of the early fifteenth century. Bodhiraṃsi's story is not so much a history as a colorful narrative tapestry woven together on the warp and woof of two master stories. That Bodhiraṃsi puts into Pāli two widely known vernacular stories suggests that he is attempting to bridge what is simplistically characterized as "monastic" and "lay" Buddhism. In other terms, one could read Bodhiraṃsi's narrative as an effort to legitimate by means of the CDV, varied forms of Buddhist thought and practice that has constituted the Buddhist tradition of northern Thailand since its origin.

There is no specific evidence that indicates whether a particular historical occasion prompted Bodhiraṃsi to write the CDV; he might have written the text as a response to the religious situation of his day; perhaps he hoped to enhance his own reputation as a scholar-monk; or some combination of the above. Even though Bodhiraṃsi wrote the text in Pāli, it does not appear that the CDV was intended as a book for scholarly study or monastic edification as was the case with Sirimaṅgalācariya's commentary on the *Maṅgala Sutta*. It is more reasonable to assume that it was written to be preached. Even though the lay audience would not have understood the Pāli language, the stories of Cāmadevī and of Ādittarāja would have been well known and the doctrinal homilies inserted into the text so familiar that many in the audience would have recognized the Pāli terms. Perhaps the CDV was occasioned by a royal donation to Wat Haripuñjaya or Wat Cāmadevī in Lamphūn or was written to be preached during a rains retreat (*vassa*). Whatever the motivation, Bodhiraṃsi composed the CDV to elevate the status of Queen Cāma as the progenitor of a lineage that ruled Haripuñjaya (modern Lamphūn) and Khelāṅga (modern Lampāng), the two Mon city-states that predate the Tai kingdom of Chiang Mai; to promote veneration of Lamphūn's central relic at Wat Phradhātu Haripuñjaya both as an authentic Buddha relic and for its connection with the princely family of Lamphūn; and to propagate Buddhist ethical teachings within this narrative context.

The diverse and colorful strands of the Cāmadevī and Ādittarāja stories can be separated into four major thematic subjects. These include: (i) the prominence of polarities within the dual structure of the narrative; (ii) the liminal nature of the *dramatis personae*; (iii) the syncretic flavor of early fifteenth-century Buddhism in the Chiang Mai valley; and (iv) the ethical teachings and the doctrinal themes that dominated the popular preaching of Bodhiraṃsi's day. The subsequent analysis follows this outline. It is not meant to replace but to enhance and commend a reading of the text itself.

## (i)

The CDV moves between the dual perspectives of Cāmadevī and Ādittarāja, a duality determined partially but not exclusively by the author's integration of two different narratives into a single story. From a structural point of view these two poles provide Bodhirāṃsi with a literary device through which he incorporates several other polarities into the narrative. Prominent among them is the creative opposition of procreation and renunciation. As previously suggested, this polarity does not divide strictly along female and male gender lines: Cāmadevī procreates a lineage biologically; the Buddha generates his religion (*sāsana*) primarily through the promise of a bodily relic (*sāriṅkadhātu*); the power of Cāmadevī who comes to Haripuñjaya pregnant is mediated by an ascetic (*isī*); the power of the renunciant Buddha is actualized by the militarily victorious king, Ādittarāja, who enshrines the Buddha's bodily relic.

Within the context of the northern Thai *phuttha tamnān* tradition, the Buddha can be understood as sacralizing the entire region by impregnating it with his bodily relics following an itinerary that is at once an etiological justification for Buddhist pilgrimage sites and a symbolic guarantee of the order, prosperity, and productivity of the land. As Cāmadevī travels from the Mon city-state of Lavapura to Haripuñjaya, her retinue founds towns along the way with, as the TML notes, the thrust of a spear into the ground. The power of Cāmadevī's sexuality emerges even more prominently in other versions of the Cāmadevī story. In one, the king of the Lawa, Vilaṅga, pursues Cāmadevī's hand in marriage. The good queen foils the tribal chieftain's ardent intentions through an act symbolizing the power of female procreative sexuality and the taboos surrounding it (see, "Which Cāmadevī?").

Other types of polarities are woven into the narrative. Some are oppositional as in the polarity of urban culture versus wild nature, the city dweller versus the hunter and gatherer. Haripuñjaya in its civilized splendor stands over against the jungle and rustic villages that the CDV presents as being both culturally and morally deficient. Those who look to Buddhism for an apologia of wild nature will not find it in the CDV. This oppositional character also has an ethnic or racial dimension: the Mon versus the Lawa and the Khmer.

Other polarities are complimentary rather than oppositional. Twinning, for example, is an important literary device in the CDV. Shortly after Cāmadevī arrives at Haripuñjaya she gives birth to twin sons. One becomes the ruler of Haripuñjaya, and in time the second twin rules Khelāṅga. They marry the twin daughters of the King of Milakkha. Biological twins rule twin cities guarded by two sages, one of whom lives on



Twin Peak Mountain. That Cāmadevī's twin sons and the twin daughters of the king of the Milakkha are small children when they marry suggests several possible interpretations: (i) that youth is innocence, innocence is purity, and hence the lineage lines will be worthy; (ii) that marriage alliances were arranged by families through child betrothal; (iii) or that what appears as differences—political, ethnic, gender—are but two sides of the same interdependent reality. The CDV depicts the samsaric world of change in terms of polarities that reflect the fluid, ambiguous, sometimes complimentary, often oppositional world of nature, animals, humans, and divine beings.

## (ii)

The major classes of *dramatis personae* who populate the CDV are royalty (*devī, rāja*), ascetics/sages (*isī*), gods (*devatā*), children, and animals, especially crows. Presiding over them all is the absent Buddha made present by his relic. All participate in and help to create a fluid, sometimes liminally defined social universe that lacks absolute distinctions. With the exception of the Buddha, no one—human, animal, or divine—as portrayed in the narrative, is either absolutely good or absolutely evil. Royalty can be deceitful and vengeful as well as brave and caring;<sup>18</sup> ascetics possess the foresight gained by intensive meditation, but they are also subject to anger; the *devatā* are both malevolent and benevolent, protective and violent; and crows, consistent with their trickster nature, protect the Buddha but also profane the king.

The ambiguity of the *devatā* stems, in part, from the very fluidity of the term, for the Theravāda tradition classifies 308 different varieties. Kings, also, are depicted in ambiguous terms. Their power may be used for good or ill. At the very point where Ādittarāja discovers the Buddha relic buried under his palace, Bodhiraṃsi decides to poke fun at the prerogatives of royal privilege and power with ribald humor (see chapter 15). One wonders if the good monk was employing a culturally sanctioned technique to ridicule the rulers of Lamphūn or Chiang Mai for some real or imagined slight, or to humor or gently chide them to make large donations (*dāna*) to the monastic order (*saṅgha*).

Ambiguity and relativity find expression in paradox and reversal. Kings defeated in battle one day are victorious the next and vice versa. As mere babes the twin sons of queen Cāma defeat the powerful king of the Milakkha (see chapter 7). In defiance of logical rationality, the princes return from battle to suckle at their mother's breast, thereby further reinforcing the paradox of the child warrior. The paradox serves the author's intent of weaving various polarities into the tapestry of his narrative, in

this case the contrast between the calm, peaceful scene of babies nursing and the violent chaos of war that can be interpreted as narrative representations of the polarity of destruction and creation. Cāmadevī's sons feed on mother's milk which, like menstrual blood, symbolizes the procreative power of Queen Cāma not only as the fertile progenitor of a new lineage but as co-cosmocrator of Haripuñjaya in tandem with the Buddha.

In the narrative, children have a special but seemingly contradictory relationship to animals. In the Cāmadevī-*isi* strand of the story children discovered by Vāsudeva in the footprints of animals represent instinctual behaviors incompatible with the rational and orderly form of town life; however, in the Ādittarāja-Buddha relic strand of the narrative a child learns crow language and reveals to the king the location of the Buddha relic. Similar to other major actors in the CDV, children embody contradictory qualities.

Central characters in the narrative are not only the *dramatis personae* in a morally ambiguous and relativistic social universe, they embody a sui generis liminality. Foremost among them is the pregnant Cāmadevī who arrives at Haripuñjaya without a husband. The pregnant queen is symbolically powerful, and her arduous journey from Lavapura to Haripuñjaya without a protective spouse defies conventional canons of social rank and status of the time.

The ascetic sages (*isi*) who bring Cāmadevī to northern Thailand are betwixt-and-between figures, neither laymen nor Buddhist monks, neither entirely human nor divine. The *isīs* play several mediatorial roles. In particular, they mediate Mon culture to the Milakkha, and they integrate Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions. Vāsudeva and the other ascetics live in the mountains on the margins of the city-states located in the river valleys of northern Thailand. But, while they lack political authority—just as Cāmadevī's five-year-old sons lack physical power—it is only through their agency that the towns of Haripuñjaya and Khelāṅga come into being.

In terms of spiritual ideals, life style, and role as teachers, the sages embody the norms of the Buddhist monkhood. Yet, as *isīs* rather than *bhikkhus* they perform ritual functions, such as royal coronations, that monks do not perform. Within the narrative, their lives as monks prior to adopting the life of an *isi* qualifies them to play a *bhikkhu* role even though technically they are not monks. Within the context of contemporary northern Thai Buddhist practice, the role of the *isi* in the CDV is not unlike the role of the lay temple teacher (*ājān wat*) in northern Thai Buddhism who mediates between monk and laity. Customarily the *ājān wat* serves as a monk for several years. Upon leaving the monastic order he becomes the principal ritual leader for the lay community in the *wat*.

Within the life of the community, the *ājān wat* plays a role of equal or even greater importance than the monk.<sup>19</sup> In the CDV, no monk rivals the role of Vāsudeva and his cohorts.

In this fluid, ambiguous, relativistic social universe, populated by a pregnant queen without a husband, trickster crows, sometimes violent *devatā*, and betwixt-and-between sages, the Buddha stands alone as an absolute value both in the material form of his body-cum-relic and in the *dhamma* as embodied in the doctrinal and ethical homilies Bodhiraṃsi inserts into the narrative. Thus, even though the king of the Milakkha had a larger army than Haripuñjaya he was defeated because he lacked the dharmic qualities of “mindfulness and discrimination.”

(iii)

It is not surprising that the living Buddhism of early fifteenth-century northern Thailand as depicted in the CDV is highly syncretic and apotropaic in nature. In fact, Buddhism as currently practiced in the Chiang Mai valley closely resembles Bodhiraṃsi's description of fifteenth-century northern Thai Buddhism.<sup>20</sup> The fluid ambivalencies that characterize the narrative world of the CDV naturally characterize the relationship between Buddhism and non-Buddhist systems of belief and practice. Vāsudeva and his hermit colleagues are ordained first as Buddhist monks but then surrender the monastic life to become *isis*. Within the narrative, their role as the spiritual progenitors of Haripuñjaya and Khelāṅga dictates that they leave the monkhood. Nevertheless, the ease with which monks become mountain hermits who then become euhemerized guardian deities, illustrates the problematic of univocal characterizations of Buddhism within a given cultural tradition. Still today, Vāsudeva is believed to reside on Mount Suthēp on the outskirts of Chiang Mai as a cohort of the Lawa guardian spirits of the city, Pu Sæ and Ya Sæ, and as a guardian of the Buddha relic enshrined on the mountain at Wat Phradhātu Doi Suthēp.

Guardian and protective spirits play as important a role in the CDV as they do in contemporary Thai Buddhism. In one of the story's most poignant moments an elderly tree deity pleads with the sages not to uproot his dwelling as they go about clearing the land to build Haripuñjaya. Yet, the CDV also depicts the *devatā* as agents of extraordinary violence. Above all, the *devatā* function as guardians of the major contending city-states, Haripuñjaya and Lavo. Battles are depicted not only as struggles between armies but also between guardian deities of warring kingdoms. More importantly for the purposes of this study, shrines dedicated to the *devatā* are venerated in much the same way that

Buddha relics are enshrined and venerated. Although guardian spirits in northern Thailand are more informally constructed than in Myanmar (Burma) and Sri Lanka, the scope of their dominion determines the extent and nature of their power.<sup>21</sup> Some are assigned specific locations—for example, a house compound, a rice paddy—while others protect a town or a kingdom, as in the case of Haripuñjaya and Lavo.

Paradoxically, in the CDV the Buddha and *devatā* share important characteristics: both are absent in the sense that they are unseen, but both are embodied in the narrative as actors in life and by their material presence in the form of relic or image after death. The king of Lavo not only venerates the cremated remains of the guardian deity of the city enshrined in a *cetiya* but he also worships a statue: “Since that time the Khmer have venerated the *devatā* thinking, ‘This statue (*devatārūpaṃ*) is our city guardian deity.’” In like manner, the absent Buddha is made present in a material form as relic and image. In Lamphūn today devotees pay their respects to the *cetiya* reliquary and images of the Buddha at Wat Phradhātu Haripuñjaya and then across town venerate the statue of Cāmadevī as the guardian spirit of the city. Within the uncertain, ambiguous, samsaric world of the CDV, the principal function of religion-on-the-ground—be it Buddhism or animism, veneration of the Buddha or veneration of the *devatā*—seems to be apotropaic. Even Bodhiraṃsi prefaces his story with the expectation that “having paid homage to the Triple Gem, to the [Buddha’s] relics in all places and to the noble *bodhi* tree, I am protected from danger everywhere I go.”

Modern interpretations of Buddhism often emphasize its rational, ethical nature. From this perspective the Three Refuges or the Three Gems (Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha) to which Buddhists pay respect at the opening of all Buddhist ceremonies is rationalized as a ritual honoring the founder of the tradition, his teaching, and the monastic order that perpetuates it. Such an interpretation ignores the apotropaic intent of taking refuge in the Triple Gem as expressed by Bodhiraṃsi in the CDV and found in most popular devotional texts. Apotropaism constitutes a fundamental ingredient in northern Thai Buddhist belief and practice as much in Bodhiraṃsi’s fifteenth century world as in the twentieth century world of modern Chiang Mai.<sup>22</sup>

(iv)

*Buddha-dhamma*, that is to say the specifically Buddhist teachings in the CDV, include the three traditional Theravāda divisions of the Buddhist path (*magga*), namely, ethics (*sīla*), mindfulness (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*); nevertheless, as befits a text intended for a broad audi-

ence, the *Buddha-dhamma* of the CDV is primarily ethical in nature. The two ethical concerns that dominate the story are social and political. In a manner similar to the *Sigālaka Sutta* and the social sanctions governing action and speech (e.g., the *pañcasīla*), social ethics in the CDV are predicated on the family or local community, the prime example in the narrative being the relationship between Queen Cāma and her sons. Behaviors based on social hierarchies of status, gender, and age such as respectful deference, are woven into the story. During his travels in northern Thailand, the Buddha teaches the Mon whom he encounters to “support [your] parents, respect your elders in the family; speak politely; do not steal; in the morning and the evening venerate the Buddha, the *dhamma*, and the *saṅgha*; do not speak in a demeaning manner.” After receiving this teaching the Mon acknowledge the authority of the Buddha and accept membership in the Buddhist community by taking the Five Precepts—refrain from taking life, from stealing, from adultery, from lying, and from intoxicants—a ritual act that continues to define the Buddhist moral community in Thailand. All formal gatherings begin with the congregants taking refuge in the Buddha, his teaching, and the monastic order, and repeating the precepts.

More striking, however, are the virtues of caring and love underlying socially constructed external behaviors. A mutual care and concern characterizes the relationship between the queen and her two sons. In one episode, Cāmadevī faces the dilemma of whether to continue in her mothering-nurturing role in relationship to her son, Anantayasa, or force him to act independently once he came of age. It took great moral courage for the queen mother to make the right choice in the light of her immature son’s plea, “Mother, when you stay here, I am happy. How can I be happy when you have gone? Therefore, I beg you not to leave me. If you leave, I’ll soon die.” The wise Bodhiraṃsi recognized that Queen Cāma’s dilemma was common to all parents regardless of social status (see chapter 11 of the CDV).

Political ethics focus primarily on kingship. Consistent with the *jātaka* tradition, the CDV upholds the Ten Royal Virtues model of ideal Buddhist kingship—generosity, high moral character, self-sacrifice, honesty, kindness, self-control, nonanger, nonviolence, patience, and conformity to the law. The ideal king has “eliminated anger, is fully aware, cares for his soldiers under all conditions, has eliminated in himself and others discontent, greed, hatred, and delusion, and is indifferent to pride and conceit.” In the narrative, royal behavior sometimes exemplifies this ideal but more often it incorporates two other modes of kingship—the mediocre (*majjhimarāja*) and the truly evil (*atipāpadhamma*): “When the righteous king rules, the city will be happy, prosperous, and pleasant; the

Buddha's religion will progress, and it will have a large, contented and satisfied population. When the unrighteous king rules, the city will experience famine and suffering as if it were consumed by fire. When the mediocre king rules, the people will decline and the Buddha's religion will vanish." The well-being of the people, the Buddha's religion, and the moral quality of the king are interdependent.

Structurally, the principle of causality or interdependent co-arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*) underlies the CDV. Rather than spelling out the twelvefold doctrinal formula, the narrative embodies various forms of the principle in its classical sense of cause and effect/arising and cessation. The behavior of kings, for example, leads to good or evil results. Certain inevitable consequences arise from the actions of an immoral king, and conversely as well. Although good and evil are not constructed as moral absolutes in the story, there is no doubt that the defeat of the Khmer by King Ādittarāja is a moral as well as a military victory. After defeating the Khmer, the good king provides his former enemies with food, shelter, and clothing and when he hears stories of rampant disease among them he is "so overwhelmed with sorrow" that he constructs a village for their benefit.

The principle of causal interdependence also finds expression in the classic terms of *kamma*, *saṃsāra*, and *puñña* (merit). The sages teach Cāmadevī and her two sons to: "Maintain mindfulness, be firmly established in the Buddha's religion, be well disciplined, observe the tenfold virtues of the king, care for the people, and do no harm to others and you will gain all that you desire both in this world and the world hereafter." Bodhirāṃsi often extols generosity (*dāna*) to the monks and the consequences of merit-making not only for one's own benefit "in this world and the next," but also for one's relatives, a notion of a shared field of merit that remains one of the core meanings of current northern Thai Buddhist ritual practice. Of particular importance is the dedication of merit to one's parents. Upon Queen Cāma's death her son, Mahantayasa, teaches the people assembled for her funeral, "Those who love their relatives should perform meritorious deeds—give *dāna*, observe the precepts, build *cetiya*, construct Buddha images—and dedicate the merit to your relatives, especially your parents. In so doing you will be returning your obligation and will become even more beloved by them."

Merit is also linked to the doctrine of impermanence. At one point the sage, Subrahma, instructs Queen Cāma: "all compounded things are impermanent, changing, and transient. Therefore, accumulate more and more merit [so that] you may travel safely by the power of your meritorious deeds (*puññakamma*)." After Queen Cāma's death and cremation, her son, Mahantayasa, advises the people not to grieve or lament "for the

Blessed One taught that death is common to all living beings." At the same time he acknowledges the natural feelings of attachment that one has for loved ones and sees merit-making on behalf of relatives as a natural expression of those feelings.

In contemporary northern Thailand, funeral sermons continue to stress the teaching of impermanence and acknowledge the inevitability of death in this uncertain, morally ambiguous, *samsaric* world. Consequently, one must not be attached to the things of this world—even one's beloved parents and children; nonetheless, it is equally true, that meritorious deeds bear good consequences not only for oneself but for others.

In this life and the next, we are not mere pawns in the hands of an impersonal fate nor are we merely at the mercy of whimsy or the uncertainty of day-to-day life. There is, after all, the enduring truth of the Buddha's *dhamma* and the hope against life's adversity gained through the protection of the gods and the Buddha, the rule of a just and righteous king, the love of family and friends, and the reward from generous support of the *saṅgha*.

Scholars of Thai Buddhism have long observed that the transfer of merit is at the very core of popular religious practice even though it seems to contradict a strict construction of *kamma* doctrine. From a logical point of view, furthermore, it seems contradictory to link the doctrine of impermanence and not-self (*anattā*) with merit-making practices on behalf of parents. It must be kept in mind, however, that devotional religious belief and practice are not determined by the logical constructions of either Buddhist or Western philosophy, but rather grow out of experience. In the case of the above passage, the experience of love and affection between children and parents extends beyond the boundaries of death. An atomized construction of *kamma* and *puñña* as doctrinal concepts is not reflected in the living Buddhist tradition of northern Thailand. The ritual acts of merit transference are rightly associated with the ethical concepts of sympathy (*anukampā*), loving-kindness and compassion (*mettā-karuṇā*).

#### AND HISTORY

The CDV is not without historical value. To interpret the text solely through a religio-mythic lens de-emphasizes or omits entirely important aspects of the story, in particular, the battles between Haripuñjaya and the Milakkha, presumed to be Lawa, and between Haripuñjaya and Lavo, presumed to be Khmer, the forebearers of modern Cambodians. This is the historical dimension of the chronicle that addresses the timing and

extent of Mon influence in the Lamphūn area of northern Thailand and the relationship among the Mon, Lawa, and Khmer between the seventh and thirteenth centuries. An important historical feature of the CDV is the connection made between Lamphūn and the Mon towns of Thaton and Pegu in Burma, a claim that supports Mon suzerainty at Haripuñjaya at various times during the five-hundred-year period in question. The CDV makes clear, however, that the fortunes of the Mon rose and fell at Haripuñjaya and that at times the city was ruled by the Lawa and perhaps the Khmer. It is important to keep in mind that rigid distinctions made in the CDV between the uncivilized or barbaric Lawa and the civilized Mon probably have a more legendary meaning than a historical basis. If one assumes that the Cāmadevī story was originally created by the Mon of Lavapura to legitimate their domination of Haripuñjaya, it then logically follows that the legend makers would denigrate the local Lawa population. Neither the CDV nor any historical evidence of which I am aware supports the claim made by Kraisi Nimmanahaeminda that the Lawa were aborigines residing in the basin of the Ping River long before the Mon people founded their kingdom of Lamphūn and who were by nature savage headhunters practicing cannibalism, being "no different from the Wa of northern Burma or the Naga in northwestern Burma near Assam, where headhunting is practiced to this day."<sup>23</sup>

George Coedès was one of the first Western scholars to recognize the crucial place of the Mon in the cultural and religious history of Thailand: "One of the most striking, as well as the newest, facts resulting from the study of our Pāli texts, is the importance of the role played by the Mon in the history of Western Laos."<sup>24</sup> When Coedès made this claim in 1925 he was reacting to currently held Western views of Khmer cultural dominance as advanced by M. P. Lefevre-Pontalis, who maintained that Cāmadevī brought Khmer civilization into the area. Lefevre-Pontalis was of the opinion that the Khmer then dominated the region until the Thai challenged Khmer hegemony in the Menam basin after the thirteenth century. Prior to that time, he contended, the northern region was torn asunder by a series of fratricidal wars among the Khmer states, in particular, the parent state, Lopburī (Lavapura in the CDV) and its colonies, Lamphūn and Lampāng.<sup>25</sup>

Although Coedès agrees with Lefevre-Pontalis's identification of the CDV term *milakkha* (= uncivilized, primitive) with the Lawa, he argues that the Cāmadevī of the CDV was Mon, not Khmer. He accepts as historically true the claim that Cāmadevī was the daughter of the king of Lavo and the wife (or widow) of the ruler of a Mon state, Ramañnanagara, situated between Lopburī and Ayutthayā.<sup>26</sup> He also accepts the historical veracity of the cholera epidemic reported in the



twelfth chapter of the CDV in which the population of Haripuñjaya decides to migrate to Sudhammapura (Thaton) and Haṃsavati (Pegu) because they spoke a common language. Coedès believes that such a seemingly factual claim validates the view that Haripuñjaya was Mon at the time: "If this were a matter of some miraculous or edifying incident, of which the text contains so many examples, one might have reason to suspect its authenticity. But it is a detail given in passing, dispensable to the narrative, and its simplicity is enough to inspire confidence."<sup>27</sup>

Coedès finds additional support for his interpretation of the CDV in inscriptional evidence from both Lopburī and Lamphūn. Several eighth-century Mon pillar inscriptions discovered at Lopburī confirm the Mon cultural identity of Lopburī at that time; hence, he concludes, "the emigrants who accompanied Cāmadevī and founded Haripuñjaya were therefore, if not of the pure Mon race, at least carriers of the Mon language and civilization, and of the Buddhist religion."<sup>28</sup> Mon stele inscriptions discovered at Lamphūn similar to Mon inscriptions at Pagan date from the early thirteenth century:

Their appearance in locations relatively distant from one another proves that the Mon language imported from Lavo by Cāmadevī and spoken in the eleventh century by the fugitives to Pegu, had become by the beginning of the thirteenth century the official language of Haripuñjaya. Thus, it is quite understandable that in the retelling of the battles between Lavo and Haripuñjaya under the reign of Ādittarāja (twelfth century), the CDV regularly calls the inhabitants of Haripuñjaya, Ramañña.<sup>29</sup>

That the text identifies the inhabitants of Lavo (Lopburī) at that time as Kamboja (Khmer) is also corroborated by epigraphic evidence. While the inscriptions of the Cāmadevī period at Lopburī are Mon, by the eleventh century Khmer inscriptions were found in Lopburī and twelfth-century bas-reliefs at Angkor Wat depict the Lavo army dressed in Cambodian style under the direction of a Cambodian chief.<sup>30</sup> Even though Uccihñhacakkavatti, the tenth-century Lavo king recorded in the CDV, may have been Mon, Coedès contends that Ādittarāja fought against the Khmers of Lavo in the twelfth century and that these battles constitute a chapter in the history of the expansion of Khmer power into the lower Menam basin.

Coedès makes a strong case for the historical value of the CDV in interpreting the pre-Thai history of the region bounded by Lopburī in the south and Lamphūn in the north. His major contribution is twofold: convincingly establishing the political and cultural importance of the Mon in

this region over against prevailing views of Khmer dominance; and, arguing for the historical value of northern Thai chronicles such as the CDV. While Coedès was essentially correct on both points, I offer two qualifications:

(i) Given Coedès' historical orientation to the CDV, he tends to accept as factual those parts of the story that support his strongly held convictions about the Mon. The episode of the cholera epidemic and the resultant emigration to Thaton and Pegu are interpreted by Coedès as confirmation that the population of Haripuñjaya is Mon. He contends that this view is supported by the fact that the narrative at this point is neither miraculous nor didactic in nature. Just because an episode in a narrative *appears* to be historical does not necessarily *make* the episode factual. Although it is reasonable to posit the facticity of the event, one can argue that the purpose of the episode is *etiological*, that is to provide an explanation for the festival of Loi Krathong (the festival of the floating boats) featured prominently in this episode. Such an interpretation does not depend on external evidence but on evidence within the text when it is seen through the lens of folklore, myth, and legend, a literary genre that features etiologies and etymologies. Therefore, if one sees the intentionality underlying the CDV as primarily mythic, legendary, and religious, then it seems prudent to withhold judgment on the historicity of the cholera epidemic episode on the grounds that an etiological explanation is more consistent with the nature of the text. Without dismissing historical explanation, viewing the CDV from the perspective of myth and legend opens up a wider range of hermeneutical possibilities that may well be more consistent with the text's genre and also to the oral/aural context in which it was probably used. The CDV was not written as a history book to be read in monastic schools. Rather, it was composed to enhance the prestige of Haripuñjaya and its central relic, and to inspire, instruct, and entertain an audience.

(ii) Perhaps the most important historical question asked of the text is whether Cāmadevī, herself, was fact or fiction. Coedès acknowledges that Cāmadevī might have been created as a historical fiction meant to represent Mon cultural and political influence in the Haripuñjaya area. He treats her as factual only in specific instances that support his theory, in particular, that she was the daughter of the king of Lavo and the wife or widow from the Mon town, Ramaññanagara. Coedès, therefore, begs the question of Cāmadevī's historicity and is inconsistent regarding her possible facticity.

In the last analysis there is insufficient evidence to determine whether or not the CDV's portrait of Cāmadevī can be taken as factual. We do know that, in the middle of the sixteenth century, residents of

Lamphūn probably believed she was historical. In a 1554 inscription found at the *cetiya* on Doi Noi in Chomthong District, where it is believed that Cāmadevī had enshrined relics and to whose service she had assigned descendents of the four sages who figure in the founding of Haripuñjaya, we learn that "Phayā Mekuti now gathers the descendants of the sages and assigns them again to the relics and the *cetiya* and donates rice fields and villages to the *wat*."<sup>31</sup> Yet, other evidence calls into question the historicity of Cāmadevī. A legend similar to the Cāmadevī story and celebrated ritually at the New Year in Champasak, Laos, indicates a wider provenance for the story than the specific historical circumstances regarding the founding of Haripuñjaya. Studies by Charles Archambault suggest that within the Lao context the legend of a pregnant queen was associated with New Year rites of purification and renewal. This perspective reinforces the mythic, cosmogonic significance of the story.<sup>32</sup>

The approach of this monograph to the CDV does not resolve fully or definitively the question of Cāmadevī's facticity, and considers this question to be of secondary importance to the religio-mythic nature of the text. As a figure who participates in the creation of Haripuñjaya, Cāmadevī is as necessary to the sages as Ādittarāja is to the Buddha. In the CDV, Cāmadevī enables the work of the sages to become a historical reality in the same way that Ādittarāja actualizes the presence of the Buddha at Haripuñjaya in the form of his relic. From this perspective, the logic of the text does not make Cāmadevī a factual personage but it does make her historical. By this I mean that *it is through Cāmadevī and Ādittarāja that the cosmological and ontological reality represented by myth becomes history*. In literary-critical terms Cāmadevī may be assessed as either a legendary fiction or a euhemerized heroine, but that judgment is as peripheral to the basic intent of the story as the debate over whether or not Cāmadevī was a living, flesh-and-blood person.

Historical events must certainly have prompted Bodhiraṃsi to write the *Cāmadevīvaṃsa*. Was this sermon-*tamnān* an effort on the part of a monk from Lamphūn to restore the former luster of the *cetiya* at Wat Phradhātu Haripuñjaya that was being eclipsed by the growing importance of Chiang Mai as the dominant Buddhist center in northern Thailand? Or could the CDV together with the chronicle of the Sihing Buddha image [TPPS] authored by Bodhiraṃsi be seen as the monk's reaction to reformist aniconic piety of the Wat Pā Daeng tradition of forest monks?

Bodhiraṃsi lived at a time of religious and political transition at the beginning of the Golden Age of Lān Nā/Northern Thailand. Presumably he was alive during the reigns of Saen Mu'ang Mā (1385–1401) and Sam Fang Kaen (1401–1441). The revered monk, Sumana Mahāthera, arrived

from Sukhōthai during Ku' Nā's reign (1355–1385) bringing with him the Sinhalese Udumbaragiri order that had been established first at Martaban and subsequently at Sukhōthai. If we accept 1410 as the probable date of the *Cāmadevīvaṃsa*, the new Sinhalese reformist tradition established at Wat Pā Daeng probably antedated Bodhiraṃsi because its founder, Nānagambhīra, did not arrive in Chiang Mai until 1430.<sup>33</sup> While it is interesting to speculate what historical circumstances, especially in regard to possible controversy over religious practice, might have prompted Bodhiraṃsi's work, it is indisputable that the CDV celebrates Lamphūn at a time when Chiang Mai was emerging as the region's dominant political power and cultural center.

In terms of Bodhiraṃsi's historical context, it is possible that the CDV did have a covert sectarian, political agenda. Perhaps the Mahāthera wanted to elevate Wat Phradhātu Haripuñjaya over Wat Suan Dḥk in Chiang Mai where Ku' Nā had enshrined the Buddha relic Sumana Mahāthera brought from Sukhōthai. Or, perhaps Bodhiraṃsi wanted to legitimate a traditional devotional piety under threat from a fledgling reform movement that culminated a century later in the work of Sirimaṅgalācariya and Ratanapañña Mahāthera, members of the Wat Pā Daeng scholarly fraternity. Such speculation aside, however, it is certain that Bodhiraṃsi wrote a treatise to revitalize devotion to the oldest, most sacred site in the Chiang Mai valley, the Haripuñjaya reliquary in Lamphūn.

In this study I propose that the value of the CDV for an understanding of the traditional northern Thai Buddhist worldview is unique, and that an analysis of the text must go beyond a quest for historical facts to reveal the extraordinary nature of Bodhiraṃsi's story as a bridge between myth and history, the secular and the religious, a synthesis of Buddhism, Brahmanism and animism, and the integration of the devotional piety of ordinary lay practitioners with Buddhist ethical ideals.

## WHICH CĀMADEVĪ?

### (i)

Other northern Thai chronicles, in particular the TML, TNJT, and the TM enlarge the CDV's portrait of Cāmadevī, especially her relationship with Vilaṅga, the ruler of the Milakkha. The humorous, ribald story of Cāmadevī and the Milakkha [Lawa] chieftain, Vilaṅga, is omitted from the CDV but appears in the TML, the TM, and the *Phongsāwadān Yōnok* [PY].<sup>34</sup> It is, furthermore, a well-known tale in popular folklore about