Buddhist Connections in the Indian Ocean: Changes in Monastic Mobility, 1000-1500

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Abstract

Since the nineteenth century, Buddhists residing in the present-day nations of Myanmar, Thailand, and Sri Lanka have thought of themselves as participants in a shared southern Asian Buddhist world characterized by a long and continuous history of integration across the Bay of Bengal region, dating at least to the third century BCE reign of the Indic King Asoka. Recently, scholars of Buddhism and historians of the region have begun to develop a more historically variegated account of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia, using epigraphic, art historical, and archaeological evidence, as well as new interpretations of Buddhist chronicle texts.¹ This paper examines

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¹ “Chronicles” is a term of art, used here to refer collectively to texts composed in Pāli or local literary vernacular languages derived, directly or indirectly, from the Pāli-language vaṃsa genre popularized in Laṅkā (now Sri Lanka) during the first millennium CE. In the Buddhist world, vaṃsas are texts that celebrate the lineage of a place, person, polity, community, and/or object, typically in relation to Buddhist monastic institutions and royal families. Shared access, direct or indirect, to Mahāvaṃsa, an early sixth-century Pāli-language text from the kingdom of Anurādhapura in Laṅkā, led to the popularization of a written style celebrating monastic-cum-royal institutional developments in the Buddhist world (sāsana).
three historical episodes in the eleventh- to fifteenth-century history of Sri Lankan-Southeast Asian Buddhist connections attested by epigraphic and Buddhist chronicle accounts. These indicate changes in regional Buddhist monastic connectivity during the period 1000-1500, which were due to new patterns of mobility related to changing conditions of trade and to an altered political ecosystem in maritime southern Asia.

Keywords

Buddhism – Buddhist chronicles – Buddhist networks – Indian Ocean – Sri Lanka

Introduction

Writing from self-imposed exile in Lanka in 1897, the Siamese monk-prince Prisdang (Jinavaravamsa), formerly a high-level envoy from Bangkok to many European capitals, celebrated the forthcoming visit of the Siamese king Chulalongkorn to the island colony as an opportunity to renew long-standing connections of Buddhist fraternity and amity among the “nations” of Ceylon, Burma, and Siam. Prisdang sought to make King Chulalongkorn the protector of Buddhism in the region and to subsume all Buddhist monks from these three locations in an ecclesiastical council administered from Bangkok (Blackburn 2010: 167-86). Prisdang’s vision of enduring connections between Lanka, Burma, and Siam would have come as no surprise to most of his monastic colleagues in Lanka and Southeast Asia, as the nineteenth century was a period of intense communication among Buddhist monks in Lanka, Burma, and Siam, as they sought to address intellectual, political, and institutional challenges to Buddhism linked to French and British colonial projects in the region (Reynolds 1973; Malalgoda 1976; Blackburn 2010). The Buddhists of Prisdang’s day studied Buddhist textual reports of historical trans-regional connection, seeking models and precedents for nineteenth-century activities.

While Prisdang and his monastic colleagues often celebrated unbroken Buddhist connections in the Indian Ocean region in a manner that emphasized continuities with the era of the third-century BCE King Asoka, scholars of Buddhism and historians of the region have lately begun to forge a more detailed and temporally sensitive account of Buddhist mobility and religio-cultural exchange and influence across South and Southeast Asian lands. This article is intended as a contribution to our understanding of Buddhist mobility and trans-regional Buddhist institution-building, focusing on the period between 1000 and 1500. It examines three episodes of trans-regional Buddhist
activity recounted in epigraphic and/or Buddhist chronicle sources: the importation of Buddhist bhikkhus (fully ordained monks) from Ramañña to Polonnāruva, in Laṅkā, during the late eleventh century, the pilgrimage journey of the Sukhothai Buddhist monk Si Satha to Laṅkā in the early fourteenth century, and the embassy sent by Bago’s King Dharmazedi to Koṭṭē in Laṅkā in the late fifteenth century to secure a new monastic higher-ordination lineage for bhikkhus in Bago. These events are all instances of trans-regional southern Asian Buddhist connection, involving ties between Laṅkā and Southeast Asian Buddhist locations. They might be said to support monk-prince Prisdang’s invocation of a regional Buddhist history of continuous fraternity and support. Examined more closely, however, they reveal significant differences, including the scale of activity, the geographic locus of Buddhist authority in the transaction, and the routes and technologies involved in Buddhist travel. This paper argues that these three episodes of Buddhist mobility across oceanic space and the borders of polity reflect changes in the trading and political ecosystem of the Indian Ocean in the first half of the second millennium CE, as well as the gradual crystallization of new forms of royal and monastic Buddhist institution-building that relied on trans-regional communication and the transmission of Buddhist texts, ideas, and persons. Attending to them closely helps us envision in a more nuanced manner a dynamic history of Buddhist connection during this period.

1 Bhikkhus from Ramañña

According to Cūlavamsa chapters composed in the thirteenth century, King Vijayabāhu I (r. 1058-1114), ruling from Polonnāruva after defeating Cōla forces in the mid-1070s, restored Lankā’s Buddhist monastic community by bringing fully ordained Buddhist monks from Ramañña to recommence a bhikkhu lineage within the island.

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2 In the pages that follow, I generally use the term “southern Asia” when referring to the geographic space encompassing Laṅkā, the southern Indian mainland, and locations typically referred to as falling within “Southeast Asia.” The mobile persons and communities investigated here understood themselves to function within a broad trans-regional geography that transcends the boundaries of current academic area studies. The frameworks of “South Asia” and “Southeast Asia” are of recent vintage, established during the Cold War. Relying on those frameworks and the anachronistic distinction between them makes it more difficult to recognize Lankā’s historical participation within networks and processes traversing the wider region.

3 Cūlavamsa extends the earlier Mahāvamsa chronicle and was composed serially. The chapters describing Vijayabāhu I are in the section composed during the thirteenth century.
As there not enough bhikkhus to fulfill the quorum for higher ordination and other monastic rituals, focused on the stability of the sāsana [Buddhist tradition], the Ruler of Men had messengers with presents sent to the realm of Ramañña, into the presence of his friend King Anuruddha. From there he had brought bhikkhus characterized by moral discipline and other virtues, with a complete knowledge of the Three Piṭakas [Buddhist “scriptures”], who were acknowledged as senior monks [theras]. Having had them reverenced with costly gifts, the Ruler of Men had many acts of first and final monastic ordination performed (Cūlavamsa 60: 4-7).4

4 I have revised the translation in Geiger (1992). This is also reported in Pūjavaliya, Rājavaliya, and Nikāya Saṅgrahaya. See also EZ 2.40.
Seen from the perspective of Laṅkā’s later Kandyan and colonial periods (seventeenth-twentieth centuries), characterized by a large volume of ordination traffic between Kandy, Arakan, Bago, Ayutthaya, Bangkok, Amarapura, and Mandalay (Malalgoda 1976; Blackburn 2001, 2010), Vijayabāhu I’s overtures to Ramañña appear unremarkable.

Vijayabāhu I’s importation of bhikkhus from Ramañña is, however, the first introduction of non-Lankan monks into the island for ordination purposes reported in Mahāvamsa-Cūlavamsa chronicles after the establishment of the Lankan monastic order at Anurādhapura, in the time of the third-century BCE King Asoka. Although many other instances of monastic reorganization or renewal of royal favor to monastics are reported in these chronicles before the eleventh-century era of Vijayabāhu I, there is no reference to ordination through or with foreign monks after the foundational acts of Asoka’s son and emissary Mahinda. Given the extant evidence, we cannot know with certainty whether foreign monks were used for this purpose earlier but not celebrated as such in royal-monastic narratives, but there is no reference to such activities in extant inscriptions or in the Nikāya Sangraham, a Sinhala-language monastic history composed in the late fourteenth century. At the least, the thirteenth-century Cūlavamsa treatment of Vijayabāhu I’s activities marks an important shift in Lankan literary imaginings of the Buddhist world and trans-regional possibilities for the creation and re-creation of Buddhist institutions.

It is possible that Vijayabāhu I’s move to import bhikkhus from Ramañña marks the start of such ordination traffic on the island. The timing supports such a hypothesis, inasmuch as the period of Cōla rule in Laṅkā (1017-69/70) appears to have been the first occasion in which local rulers of the island’s Anurādhapura-based polity were displaced by foreign powers for a sustained period. Cōla rule on the island was long enough to affect at least two generations of Buddhist monastics. Perhaps Cōla attacks on Buddhist properties—narrated but probably sensationalized in Cūlavamsa (55: 20-22)—and/or the transfer of the capital eastward from Anurādhapura to Poḷonnāruva interrupted the patronage and ritual systems of Anurādhapura on a scale large enough to render Buddhist monastic institutional and ritual life dysfunctional. This would have required the reintroduction of Buddhist monastic ordination lineages and practices after the end of Cōla rule. Or, perhaps Buddhist monastic institutional and ritual life did continue on the island during the Cōla era from the new capital at Poḷonnāruva. In that case, the move by Vijayabāhu I’s court to introduce a bhikkhu lineage from Ramañña would have provided a means to replace a Cōla-supported monastic administration with one loyal to the new court. Vijayabāhu I’s choice of monks from Ramañña followed his earlier
overture to the ruler of Ramañña (Cūlavamsa 58: 8-10). This is the first reference in the Mahāvaṃsa-Cūlavamsa chronicles to such a diplomatic overture to a location in what we now call Southeast Asia. The name Ramañña refers to the southern maritime region of what is now Burma, as the same Cūlavamsa author, when describing a twelfth-century Lankan raid on Kusumi (Pathein), refers to Kusumi (Pathein) and Ukkama (Mottama) as in Ramañña (Cūlavamsa 76: 59-67; Epigraphia Zeylanica 3.34). It is possible that the Aniruddha mentioned in the context of imported Buddhist monks is King Anawrahta of Bagan (r. 1044-77), given Bagan’s growing interest in southern maritime commercial centers (Aung-Thwin 2005, 111-3; Hall 2011, 218). Bagan’s efforts to control the delta may have been recognized at Polonnāruva. On the other hand, the name may have been used to refer to a local ruler in Ramañña at that time or applied retrospectively by the thirteenth-century author of Cūlavamsa on the basis of reports of Burmese kingship circulating in the Buddhist world by the thirteenth century.

The orientation of Vijayabāhu I towards Ramañña for projects Buddhist and otherwise is more intelligible when seen in a wider Indian Ocean context. Laṅkā’s place in the Indian Ocean trading sphere changed during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These changes had implications for Lankan military and diplomatic activities and for how Buddhist persons, ideas, and practices moved to and from the island. The eleventh century saw a sharp rise in international trade through the Indian Ocean region, due to the coincidence of three strong, trade-oriented polities: the Cōlas, the Song, and the Fāṭimids (e.g., Kulke 1999:

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5 The Pāli passage is ambiguous, however, as to whether the “ships filled with goods including diverse items such as camphor and sandalwood” were those carrying gifts from Vijayabāhu I to Ramañña or received from the latter.


7 It is unclear what Lankan Buddhists knew about Bagan and other Burmese and Mon sites by this time and whether any textual accounts of Anawrahta circulated in Laṅkā. The Burmese and Pāli chronicles from Burma that mention Anawrahta were compiled later. On the textualization of Anawrahta and the possibility that Buddhists in Bagan, northern Thailand, and Laṅkā understood themselves as participants in a Buddhist oikoumene starting in the eleventh century, see Goh (2007: esp. 18). There is, however, no extant textual or epigraphic record of that understanding so early, as Goh recognizes (59). Goh’s study is a salutary reminder that we have much to learn about pre-modern southern Asian Buddhists’ conception of the geographic and political space of Buddha sāsana (the world of Buddhism).
20; Ray 1999: 37). Smaller ports supplied local and subregional commodities to larger outlets. Relationships between smaller and larger ports, and the character and volume of commodity flows, were dynamic, being reconstituted in response to changing political and military conditions and market demands. Hall has aptly characterized this trading world as a “poly-centric networked realm” (2010: 113).

Competition for control of ports and goods in the region stretching from India and Laṅkā to insular Southeast Asia resulted in rapidly shifting politico-military arrangements (including expansion of Cōla power in the region) and the extension of trade guilds and material forms associated with southern India. Archaeological and inscriptive evidence from Laṅkā points to the eleventh century as a transformative period for the island’s trans-regional engagements, including a greater impact of the China trade. Bopearachchi notes that Chinese coins appear in the island’s archaeological record beginning in the eleventh century, including finds at the new political centers that developed southwest of Anurādhapura and Polonnaruva (1996: 72-3). Evidence from ceramics is also striking. In the late first millennium, Near Eastern and Chinese ceramics made their way to Lankan ports (including Mantai). By the eleventh century, however, “the former balance between Chinese and Near Eastern ceramic goods… tipped sharply towards the Chinese” (Prickett-Fernando 1990: 71).

Cōla threats to the island from southern India and Laṅkā courtly engagement with Ramañña are signs of the island’s changing place in Indian Ocean circuits oriented to the expanding trans-oceanic trade between Egypt and China. The location of the kingdom of Polonnaruva made it readily accessible to such wider oceanic processes. It was connected by riverine routes to the eastern port of Trincomalee, which came to dominate Lankan trade during the eleventh century, outstripping the earlier centrality of Mantai in the northwest (Kirabamune 1985: 101; Kirabamune 2013: 51-2; Bopearachchi 1996: 72).

8 Wade (2009) provides a valuable summary of relevant changes in Song China, including new financial systems, internal trade regions, and demographic changes in Fujian. See Christie (1998a: 253; 1998b: 369) for arguments that the Southeast Asian trade boom began in the tenth century.


10 See also Sen (2003, 159, 220-4). According to Karashima (2009a), the twelfth century was the high point of Tamil-language trade guild inscriptions extant in Sri Lanka. See also Velupillai (1971: 46, 48; 1972: 13, 19-21).

11 See also Kanazawa (2004) and Karashima (2004).
This context illuminates connections between the Polonnaruva court of Vijayabahu I and Ramañña, as well as the unprecedented reference to trans-regional Buddhist monastic reordination in Cūlavamsa’s chapters on Vijayabahu I. The shift of the northern Lankan royal center from Anurādhapura to Polonnaruva—thus providing better access to eastern trading sectors through Trincomalee, contemporary with the expanding speed and volume of Indian Ocean trade—greatly altered conditions in which Lankan Buddhist institution-building and reorganization occurred. The introduction of bhikkhus from Ramañña to Polonnaruva to establish a new lineage of fully ordained Buddhist monks in Vijayabahu I’s realm signals an early phase of intensifying high-level Buddhist connections between the island and mainland Southeast Asia.12

2 A Sukhothai Pilgrim to Laṅkā

The undated Sukhothai inscription no. 2 records the Buddhist devotional activities of a high-placed monk, Venerable Si Satha, born into the leading family of the neighboring Rat kingdom, which had helped to secure Sukhothai’s independence from Khmer control during the eleventh century. The inscription celebrating Si Satha’s activities is remarkable; it is the only extant Sukhothai inscription that rivals royal epigraphs in its detailed account of religious patronage and the patron’s person. Vickery has suggested that the inscription was intended to glorify Si Satha’s family line, in a context of regional familial rivalry (1978, 212); the inscription readily supports this reading.13 It is also striking for reporting Si Satha’s activities in a narrative style indebted to biographies of Buddha Gautama and to Gautama’s previous life as Bodhisattva Vessantara (Griswold and Prasert 1992: 387-9). In inscription no. 2, Si Satha’s construction and reconstruction of Buddhist devotional sites includes travels in the area of Sukhothai and Si Sajjanalai, as well as Sihala (Laṅkā).

Si Satha’s journey to Laṅkā probably occurred in the mid-fourteenth century. Sukhothai inscription no. 2 portrays him as of the generation of King Mahā Dhammarāja I, enthroned in 1347. According to Jinakālamāli, a monk

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12 I do not discuss here the possible travels to Laṅkā from Bagan by the monk Uttarajīva and novice Chapada during the late twelfth century. This account appears only in later Burmese and Pāli sources and, as Win remarks (2002, esp. 88-9), there is no epigraphic reference to a Chapada until 1240 (which may or may not refer to Uttarajiva’s co-traveler) and the name Uttarajива does not appear in Bagan inscriptions. Cf. Goh (2007, 42).

13 See also Griswold and Prasert (1992: 342-96) and Blackburn (2007).
trained in Ramañña by a Lankan monk reached Sukhothai in the late 1330s or early 1340s (Buddhadatta 1962: 84-5). If this is correct, it would probably have encouraged the interest of Mahā Dhammarāja I (r. 1347-?) in Lankan Buddhist sites, which is evident in Sukhothai inscription no. 3 (dated 1357) (Griswold and Prasert 1992: 448-65).\(^{14}\) Reports of Lankan Buddhist sites and institutions circulating at this time informed Si Satha’s journey to Laṅkā. Moreover, if Si Satha was a rival to the line of King Mahā Dhammarāja I, as inscription no. 2 suggests, a merit-making journey to Laṅkā was a natural response to the Sukhothai politics of his time. It provided high status through a competitive merit-making that trumped King Mahā Dhammarāja I’s indirect contact with Lankan Buddhism, while providing an excellent reason for Si Satha’s departure from Sukhothai.\(^ {15}\) According to face 2 of inscription no. 11, he spent ten years in Laṅkā.

Si Satha’s journey is a sign of changes underway in the relationship of Tai and Lankan Buddhist institutions, as Tai Buddhists began to make direct contact with Laṅkā and Lankan Buddhist institutions, rather than mediating their contact with desirable Lankan Buddhism through southern maritime realms such as Nakhon Si Thammarat and Mottama. Inscriptions no. 2 and 11 are our first extant evidence in chronicles or inscriptions of direct monastic contact between Tai regions and Laṅkā. These possibilities for direct contact continued to develop, as we see from monastic-lineage texts composed in Chiang Mai and Kengtung in the northern Thai and Pāli languages and celebrating the travel of monks from Chiang Mai and Kengtung to Laṅkā in the 1420s (Buddhadatta 1962; Swearer and Premchit 1977; Sao Saimong 1971). This journey resulted in the creation of the new monastic higher-ordination lineage associated with Wat Pa Dāng, in what is now northern Thailand and the Burmese Shan States. The possibility of direct contact between monks from Tai territories and their counterparts in Laṅkā created a new flexibility in the constitution and reconstitution of Buddhist monastic lineages and Buddhist institutions in Tai lands. Obtaining new ordinations from the island—described as more pure and authoritative than those existing previously on local soil—was an effective ritual-cum-political tactic. As discussed below, during the fifteenth century Tai monastic leaders and royal courts resorted to Lankan Buddhist monastic lineages and Buddhist institutions to reorganize monastic administration in Tai territories and to neutralize monks and temples associated with political rivals.

\(^{14}\) See also Coedès (1924: 84-90) and Blackburn 2007.

\(^{15}\) The inscriptions of Sukhothai King Mahā Dhammarāja I reveal his fascination with producing copies of Lankan Buddhist relic sites in his realm. See Blackburn (2007).
The emerging possibilities of Buddhist trans-regional connection indicated by Si Satha’s voyage to Lanka should be understood in relation to changes in the Indian Ocean trading environment during this time, as well as to shifts in regional political formations. Trading practices and political relationships shifted significantly during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the area encompassing the Bay of Bengal, Lanka, and the Malay Peninsula. As to Buddhist transactions between Tai territories and Lanka, the most important development during this period was the gradual rise of Ayutthaya in the lower Menam River Basin, with access to the Gulf of Siam. The early years of the fourteenth century—the era of Si Satha and Mahā Dhammarāja I at Sukhothai—saw the rise of the kingdom that Charnvit calls Ayodhya, a pre-Ayuttahan polity able to control Menam River Basin traffic and access to the Gulf of Siam that gained strength in the river basin region over several decades through trade and effective marriage alliances with other nearby polities (Charnvit 1976: 83-6).16 Despite tensions with Sukhothai and Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya came to function as a key entrepôt for maritime Southeast Asia, linked to China, Champa, a vast riverine network stretching north and northwest from the mouth of the Chao Phraya River, and the Malay Peninsula. This coincided with growing Chinese participation in trade within Southeast Asia (Heng 2009: 129), which helped reshape port polities in the wider Malay region (213). This extension of Ayutthaya’s power involved attacks on locations in insular and lower peninsular Southeast Asia during much of the fourteenth and part of the fifteenth centuries (Baker 2003: 46-8). By the 1460s Ayutthaya “dominated the affairs of the upper Malay Peninsula,” annexing the Tenassarim (1460s) and Dawai (1488) regions (Hall 2011: 235; see also Heng 2009: 138). Ayutthaya’s rise altered the routes available for Tai Buddhist traffic to Lanka, as the inscriptions celebrating Si Satha themselves suggest. According to face 2 of Sukhothai inscription no. 11, Si Satha traveled to Lanka by way Kalinga (Orissa), Cōla lands, and the kingdom of Malala (Griswold and Prasert 1992: 410-11); we have no information about his first port of departure.17 He is explicitly reported to have returned via Tenasarim (Tanāvsri) and Ayutthaya (Ayodyā Śrī Rāmadebanagara) (412-13).18

The possibility of generating wealth by dominating sectors of the Indian Ocean trade catalyzed the reorganization of political relations also in what

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17 Griswold and Prasert locate the Malala kingdom on the Malabar coast.

18 See also Coèdes (1924: 149).
is now Burma. Despite warfare with the southern polity of Bago through the fourteenth and into the early fifteenth century, Bagan’s successor kingdom, Innwa, was unable to maintain control of the delta port of Pathein at the mouth of the Irrawaddy River on the Indian Ocean, providing access to and from northern Burma (Fernquist 2008). Contemporary with the rise of Ayutthaya in the fourteenth century was the emergence of Bago as a major polity in maritime Burma, which extended its reach in the south throughout the century (Lieberman 1.126: 130-1; Fernquist 2006: esp. 50-1; Fernquist 2008: esp. 85-93, Aung-Thwin 2005: 310-11). The fourteenth century was thus a transformative century with respect to regional Buddhist mobility, a century characterized by the final decline of Cola power in the region and the consolidation of two larger Buddhist-inclined polities—Ayutthaya and Bago—active in the Burma delta, the Malay Peninsula, and the Gulf of Siam. Both were invested in Buddhist institutions and participated substantially in Indian Ocean trade.

3 King Dhammazedī’s Embassy to Koṭṭē

According to manuscript texts of the Kālīṇī Inscriptions (KI) in 1475, Bago’s King Dhammazedī sent an embassy of twenty-two senior bhikkhus, with younger monks and attendants, to the court of Koṭṭē, in Lāṅkā, to make devotional offerings at the island’s most celebrated pilgrimage locations and to obtain a pure monastic higher ordination suitable for Dhammazedī’s realm. In these KI texts, the decision to send the embassy is framed in terms of the

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19 See Hall (2010: esp. 113) on the rise of “more port-centered regional states” and Hall (2006: esp. 455).

20 Note, however, Hall’s distinction between Ayutthaya and Bago with respect to the degree of upstream control achieved by the former (2011: 234).

21 The manuscripts used to prepare the existing print edition of the KI are later and of uncertain date, bearing an unclear relationship to the extant epigraphs containing narratives of King Dhammazedī’s embassy. The epigraphs themselves are in poor condition and have not yet been systematically compared to KI manuscripts; see the comments by Temple (1893) regarding a comparison of the stones and manuscripts. No mention of Dhammazedī’s embassy has yet been found in the literary and inscriptive records of Lāṅkā. Nonetheless, the details about Lankan geography, monastic leadership, and the Lankan court at Koṭṭē are accurate and consistent with other, Lankan, literary sources from the period. See Sannasgala (1964) and Ilangasinha (1992). The KI’s treatment of Buddhist history, monastic discipline, and the technical details of Buddhist ritual life suggest that it draws on a variety of Buddhist genres, including vinaya commentary. This composite character of the KI deserves further attention.
heterogeneity and impurity of existing monastic lineages in the kingdom (Taw Sein Ko 1893: 33-4, 155-6), and the king’s desire to secure the future of the Buddha sāsana (39, 207).

Having appropriately invited experienced and competent bhikkhus, having had them properly bring the extremely pure Lankan upasampadā and establish it in this Ramaññadesa . . . I would make the sāsana, having become clean and pure, able to extend to the limit of its 5000-year extent (40, 207).²²

King Dhammazedi is explicitly compared to the Indic King Asoka and the Lankan King Parakramabāhu I (r. 1153-1186) (38-9, 159, 207). This comparison sets the scene for King Dhammazedi’s intentions, as both Asoka and Parakramabāhu I are portrayed in Mahāvaṃsa-Cūlavaṃsa chronicle-traditions as rulers strong enough to control all Buddhist monks in their polity through a royally sponsored act of monastic “purification.”

The KI describes Dhammazedi’s realm specifically as including the Haṃsavati mandala, the Kusima mandala, and the Muttima mandala (34, 155-6), thus encompassing the entire Burma delta region, from Pathein to Mottama. The monks sent from Bago received higher ordination at the hands of Lankan bhikkhus in Koṭṭē (210). This replaced their earlier monastic ordination status, creating a new company of bhikkhus ordained at the Lankan Kalyāṇī ritual boundary and ritually prepared to ordain other Bago monks in their Kalyāṇī lineage. Upon returning to Bago the following year, the new ordinands participated in Dhammazedi’s elaborate reorganization of monastic life in his realm. According to the KI report, monastic ritual sites were replaced, authority for monastic ordination put in the hands of the king and the new Kalyāṇī company of monks, and local conferral of monastic higher ordination outside the Kalyāṇī lineage expressly forbidden (52, 241-2).

The embassy to Koṭṭē and subsequent reordination of Buddhist monks in the sphere of King Dhammazedi’s control was closely related to the recent political history of Bago. The incorporation of Burma delta areas in Bago’s control was a gradual process. The broadest control by the court at Bago was attained during Dhammazedi’s reign (Aung-Thwin 2005, 311). From at least the late first millennium onwards in the southern Asian region—as shown by examples from Anurādhapura (Gunawardena 1979), Bagan (Aung-Thwin 1985), Chiang Mai (Swearer and Premchit 1978), and Kandy (Blackburn 2001)—achieving and retaining political and economic control in Buddhist-

²² I have modified the translation given by Taw Sein Ko.
oriented kingdoms characterized by substantial monastic institutional presence required the state to control monastic administration and property. King Dhammazedi sought to use the new Kalyāṇī ordination lineage brought from Koṭṭē to assert control over Buddhist monks in his realm. Bhikkhus ordained in earlier ordination lines lost monastic seniority and control over Buddhist institutions and property; monastic assignments could be made according to new hierarchies introduced through the imported ordination line. This is explicitly remarked in the kī. The Kalyāṇī bhikkhus fresh from their Lankan ordination refuse to ordain any monks who do not first resume lay status. Within the new monastic hierarchy, this protected the seniority of the monks associated with the new Kalyāṇī lineage (52, 241).

The embassy from Bago to Koṭṭē is an important indication of the maturation of Buddhist connections and institutional ties linking mainland Southeast Asia and Laṅkā during the first half of the second millennium. The scale of Dhammazedi’s activities—the size of the embassy, the ability of his court to command transportation technologies, and the extent to which a new monastic order was institutionalized within the kingdom to further court control of the monastic community—was remarkable. While the paucity of evidence demands cautious comparison, it appears that both the size and local institutional impact of the late-fifteenth-century Bago embassy were unprecedented. It also required a command of wealth and maritime transportation sufficient to support the grand overture to Koṭṭē. The scale of Indian Ocean trade by the late fifteenth century, and the place of Bago in it, helped make possible Dhammazedi’s Lankan adventure.

The account of Tomé Pires, composed largely in the 1510s in Melaka, portrays a trading world in which Bago and Ayutthaya control the Burma delta and northern Malay Peninsula, while Melaka serves as the key port of insular Southeast Asia and the main entrepôt between western India and China (Cortesão 1944: esp. 97-105). At that time, well after the wars between Innwa and Bago, Bago controlled three ports within the Burma delta region: Pathein

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23 See also Aung-Thwin (2005: 115-6).
24 Hall suggests (2010: 134-7), drawing partly on Holt (1991) and Ilangasinha (1991), that Dhammazedi was drawn to Koṭṭē in part by the fame of Koṭṭē’s court and Buddhist institutions, developed during the reign of King Parakramabāhu V (r. 1412-68). This is possible, but we have as yet no evidence of whether or how reports of Parakramabāhu V or the still more famous Buddhist royal patron and centralizing force, King Parakramabāhu I (r. 1153-86) circulated in the Buddhist world beyond Laṅkā. Chronicles thus far available from Tai, Mon, and Burmese areas do not highlight the activities of these rulers.
25 See also the account of Barbosa from the early sixteenth century (Stanley 1866, i88).
(Cosmin), Yangon (Dagon), and Mottama (Martaban). Other evidence suggests that the division of power between Bago and Ayutthaya portrayed by Pires existed already in the last third of the fifteenth century. Inscriptions from Tenassarim dated from 1462 to 1466 strongly suggest the influence of the Ayutthayan court there by this time (Vickery 1973: esp. 51-7), while Bago had gradually consolidated control of the delta region (Fernquist 2006: esp. 50-1; 2008: esp. 85-93).

It is possible to distinguish more sharply between two scales of trade in the Indian Ocean region after the rise of Melaka, and this helps us identify more clearly the arena for Buddhist movements involving Bago and Laṅkā. Long-haul trade between Cambay and Melaka circumnavigated Laṅkā before entering the Straits of Melaka. At the same time, there were various shorter trade routes that involved Lankan kingdoms and Buddhist-oriented polities in Southeast Asia possessing maritime access. These shorter routes functioned partly to provide goods from various Indian Ocean subregions to Cambay and Melaka, via strong intermediary ports such as those on the Malabar and Coromandel coasts, at Bengal, in Bago, and further south, on the Malay Peninsula. The shorter trade routes could also serve more local needs, transporting goods not destined for the larger east-west trade. It is possible that the voyages of Zheng He and his activities along the Lankan coast also encouraged increased trade after 1411 by securing sea lanes (Hall 2010: 113-4 n.12).

Koṭṭē and Bago appear to have been bound together in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries partly through a rice-based trading relationship routed via the Coromandel Coast. The reliance of parts of Laṅkā on imported rice dated at least to the twelfth century (Nainar 1942: 17-8, 41; Strathern 2009, 52, citing de Silva 1995). Judging from Pires’s slightly later account, areca nuts were among the prized Lankan commodities, traded on the Coromandel Coast in return for rice and other commodities (Cortesão 1944: 84-6). Rice was Bago's major export. Bago’s port at Pathein traded with Bengal and ports on India’s eastern coast, while her port at Mottama sent rice to Melaka (97-8). Pires’s depiction of the intersection of Bago’s and Laṅkā’s interests at Coromandel Coast ports is supported by the detailed account of maritime transportation found in the KI, according to which travel to Bago was possible via the seaport of Nāgapattanam and other outlets on the southeastern Indian coast.

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27 I am grateful to Engseng Ho for his comment on this point.
28 See also Wade (2012). One man’s pirate is, of course, another’s entrepreneur.
29 Two ships left Laṅkā for Bago. The ship sent by the Lankan king with royal gifts for his counterpart at Bago was shipwrecked in what KI calls the Silla (Sīhala?) Strait,
The *KI* mentions specifically two port administrators (*paṭṭanādhikarinō* [sic]) at Nāvutapattanam—Mālimparakāya and Pacchaḷiya—who were already connected to Dhammazedi’s court at Bago via two ships sent annually for trade. These port administrators housed and cared for the shipwrecked party returning from Laṅkā and arranged their onward journey to Bago.

**Conclusion**

Hall suggests that the period from 1300 to 1500 was characterized by “expansive human networking” in the Bay of Bengal maritime region and that “sojourning merchants” and “religious clerics” played a central role in the integrity of Indian Ocean port-polity networks during this period (2010: 138). According to Hall, various types of “community interests,” beyond the “exclusively commercial,” characterized this maritime space (139), one marked by Buddhist as well Chinese, Persian and Yemeni-linked networks, and South Indian Muslim and Hindu sojourners.

Hall’s discussion of merchant sojourners and religious clerics is suggestive for the three episodes of Buddhist movement within southern Asia discussed above, helping us to imagine better the interlocking interests, agencies, and flow of ideas that were involved in the movement of Buddhist monks—as well as their ritual forms and institutionally transformative lineages—in the Indian

between Laṅkā and the southeast coast of the Indian peninsula. This, in turn, triggered a relay between ports on the eastern Indian coast and Bago, stopping at Nāgapattanaṃ (Nagapattinam), site of a long-famous coastal Buddhist temple-monastery, and Nāvutapattanaṃ. From there, one party continued to Bago from Pathein, while another went to Kōmālapattanaṃ and thence to Bago. According to Subbarayalu (personal communication via O. Bopearachchi, June 2013), Nāvutapattanaṃ may be Nagur (Nagore), a little north of Nagapattinam, mentioned as Tiru-Naavuvar (see “Leyden Plates.” *Epigraphia Indica* 22 (1933-34). Kōmālapattanaṃ is probably Kovalam, north of Mamallapuram. Kovalam is mentioned as a *paṭṭanam* (emporium), along with some other *paṭṭanams* in a Vijayanagara inscription at Pennesvaramadam, Krishnagiri Taluk, Krishnagiri District, dated 21 July 1367 (see *Krishnagiri District Inscriptions*, Chennai 2007, no. 77b/1973). I am grateful to Professors K. Subbarayalu, K. Rajan, S. Rajagopal, and O. Bopearachchi for their assistance in this matter, and to Prof. B. Wentworth for discussions of these references.

30 “[T]wo officers of the port had sent people for trade annually through two ships; sending a gift to King Rāmādhipati [Dhammazedi] and experiencing his royal favor, they were devoted to King Rāmādhipati. Thus, having given the senior monks robes and meals and a place to reside, they served them” (45, 211-12). I have modified Taw Sein Ko’s translation.
Ocean subregion encompassing the Bay of Bengal, the Burma delta, the Malay Peninsula, and the Gulf of Siam. Although we do not yet possess adequate evidence to link firmly the episodes of Buddhist mobility discussed above with specific sojourning communities and mercantile interests, the instances of Buddhist monastic movement addressed in this article do suggest a growth in royally-supported Buddhist monastic movement in the region from the eleventh century, with larger and more elaborate Buddhist embassies to Lāṅkā developing during the fifteenth century. It is possible that the increasing scale and ambition evident in the Buddhist embassies of the fifteenth century, including that from Bago to Koṭṭē and the Chiang Mai/Kengtung monastic cohort that traveled a half-century earlier, was due partly to the expansion and consolidation of trading communities in the maritime space and its connected riverine and overland routes, traveled by Buddhist monks. These communities would have been in a position to support—financially, technologically, and sometimes devotionally—large-scale, high-status Buddhist missions in the region, supplementing whatever resources were provided by royal and monastic patrons.

It is worth considering (in addition to the role of merchant communities) as one of the conditions favoring the emergence of more substantial missions in the fifteenth century, the ways in which the Buddhist-oriented royal courts of Tai, Mon, and Burmese areas were linked through relations of competitive imitation within the arena of Buddhist kingship. As noted earlier, Bago and Ayutthaya had, by the fifteenth century, developed as flourishing maritime kingdoms supportive of Buddhist ritual sites and monastic establishments. These polities were rivals for trade, labor, and land. They were, along with Chiang Mai, also rivals for recognition as the leading Buddhist righteous monarch in the region.31 This is evident from the Buddhist titles adopted by the kings of Bago, Ayutthaya, and Chiang Mai and the ways in which Buddhist texts associated with Bago and Chiang Mai narrated the activities of their rulers as continuous with the example of Buddhist kingship set by the Indic King Asoka.32


32 See, for instance, the translations in Cushman (2000), Jayawickrema (1968), and Taw Sein Ko (1893). See also Aung-Thwin (2005: 115).
There are striking temporal conjunctions between royally sponsored construction of Buddhist buildings in these kingdoms, royally sponsored Buddhist monastic reordination rituals, and Buddhist-related diplomatic contact among these kingdoms. According to the Jinaśālamāli and Tamnān Wat Jet Yott, Chiang Mai’s King Tilokarāja (r. 1441/2-87) in 1455 began construction of Wat Bodhārama, a monastery and devotional site constructed over twenty years, which—in name, ground plan, and architectural style—evoked Buddha’s enlightenment site at Bodh Gaya, on the Indian mainland (Griswold 1965: 182-6; Jayawickrama 1968: 139-40; Buddhadatta 1962: 98; Hutchinson 1951: 43; Blackburn 2007). During the same period, closely following Tilokarāja’s inaugural work at Wat Bodhārama in Chiang Mai, the Bago King Dhammazedi sent a mission to Bodh Gaya via Laṅkā, with the assistance of a Sīhala (Lankan) merchant residing at Bago, to obtain exact descriptions of the Buddhist sites and monuments at Bodh Gaya, resulting in the construction of the Mahā Bodhi Temple at Bago (Griswold 1965: 186-7).

A growing mutual interest in foundational Indian Buddhist sites at Chiang Mai and Bago during this period was matched by a striking conjunction of large-scale royally sponsored Buddhist monastic reordinations held in Ayutthaya, Chiang Mai, and Bago. Monks from Chiang Mai, Kengtung, and “Kambojja” (perhaps the Lopburi area) traveled to Koṭṭē in Laṅkā, with the support of the monastic leaders of Chiang Mai and Ayutthaya. Upon their return to Chiang Mai in 1424, the Chiang Mai monks were drawn into a royally sponsored reordination of Chiang Mai bhikkhus during the reign of King Sām Fang Kān (r. 1401-41) and into the reorganization of local monastic administration and hierarchy (Buddhadatta 1962: 93-5; see also Blackburn 2007). Throughout the northern region, the newly imported Lankan higher ordinations enabled the reorganization of local monastic ritual practice and hierarchy (Swearer and Premchit 1977; Saimong 1981). Forty years later, towards the middle of the reign of the Ayutthaya King Trailokarāja (r. 1448?-88), during a period of increasing military threat from Chiang Mai and the relocation of Ayutthaya’s capital to the north, near Sukhothai, Trailokarāja engaged in grand Buddhist merit-making schemes to assure the protection of his realm (Charnvit 1976: 137-8; Cushman 2000: 17). According to Prachum Chotmaihet Samai Ayudhya (Collected Ayudhyan Records) cited by Charnvit, King Trailokarāja in 1465

33 This occurred sometime between 1458 and 1472, according to the Burmese and Mon sources Dhammacetimañ-athuppatti and Nidāna Ārambhakathā (cited in Griswold 1965: 186-7).

34 For descriptions and images of the Bodh Gaya replicas at Chiang Mai and Bago, as well as other locations, see Griswold (1965).
organized a monastic ordination of more than two thousand men, including his own temporary ordination (Charnvit 1976:138-9; see also Cushman 2000:17). The ordination ceremony was led by a Lankan monk, said to have been brought from the island to the northern Ayutthayan capital of Phitsanulok. As Charnvit notes, this bypassed the leaderships of the Sukhothai monastic community, previously dominant in the north of the Ayutthayan realm. King Trailokarāja was thus able to establish, near the military border with Chiang Mai, a new monastic community at Phitsanulok, loyal to his administration. In addition to its strategic value in the Ayutthayan realm, the ordination ceremony was obviously intended as a larger diplomatic gesture to neighboring polities. The rulers of Chiang Mai, Bago, and Luang Prabang reportedly sent gifts on the occasion of King Trailokarāja’s temporary monastic ordination (Charnvit 1976: 138-9). Given Trailokarāja’s proximity to Chiang Mai and Sukhothai monastic institutions at this time, his choice to ordain a new company of Buddhist monks in the northern area of his kingdom with the support of a Lankan Buddhist ritual officiant was probably informed by the earlier history of royal Buddhist overtures to Lankā at Sukhothai and Chiang Mai, including the 1423-4 Chiang Mai mission. King Trailokarāja’s monastic undertaking occurred just a decade before King Dhammazedi’s massive reordination of bhikkhus under his control at Bago in the new Kalyāṇī lineage from Koṭṭē (see previous section).

The episodes of Buddhist mobility discussed in this article, running from the eleventh-century importation of Buddhist monks by the Poḷonnāruva King Vijayabāhu I, through the fourteenth-century pilgrimage of the Sukhothai monk Si Satha, to King Dhammazedi’s fifteenth-century embassy to Koṭṭē, suggest that the first half of the second millennium was a transformative period that saw the creation of new Buddhist institutional linkages in the Indian Ocean Buddhist world, as new regimes of trade drew Laṅkā into faster and closer connection with Burmese, Mon, peninsular Malay, and Tai locations. Although we do not yet have adequate evidence from Buddhist sources to support the view that “fifteenth-century Sri Lanka under Parakramabāhu VI assumed significance as the acknowledged center of a conceptual Bay of Bengal Theravada Buddhist cultural cosmopolis network” (Hall 2010: 139), it

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35 This probably included the reordination of existing bhikkhus, but this is not clear in Charnvit (1976); I do not have direct access to the Thai source.
36 Temporary royal ordination, especially in times of military or political duress, was not uncommon in Tai areas, as shown in the inscriptions of Sukhothai and in Chiang Mai’s Jinakālamālī. See also Blackburn (2007).
37 On the anachronism of “Theravāda Buddhist” applied outside narrow technical monastic contexts before the nineteenth century, see Skilling 2012.
is clear that the island played a significant role in the religious and maritime trade networks of the period, including those of Hindus and Muslims as well as Buddhists.

The changing patterns of trade referred to in this article help clarify how such religious networks were constituted during the early second millennium. Tilman Frasch argues that a long-standing Buddhist network in the Bay of Bengal, active since the third century CE, fell into decline towards the end of the thirteenth century, due in part to the disintegration of the Burman kingdom of Bagan (1998, 92). Further investigation of inscriptions and monastic-lineage texts from Burman territories is necessary in order to develop a clearer picture of trans-regional Buddhist mobility involving Buddhist institutions at Bagan and Innwa from the late thirteenth century on. The material presented in this essay, however, indicates that, even if the northern inland Burman area became less active in the trans-regional Buddhist mobility of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean regions, Buddhist networks across this seascape remained viable and were, in fact, strengthened by the conjunction of new trading patterns and new political centers that grew up along the southern coastal areas of what is now Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. Further research is needed to clarify whether Lankan Kandyan monastic overtures to Bago, Arakan, and Ayutthaya in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should be understood as another new chapter in trans-regional Buddhist mobility (Frasch 1998: 90), or whether they may be understood as an extension, during the Dutch-English colonial period, of the new patterns of southern Asian Buddhist traffic that developed between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries.

With respect to the new patterns of trans-regional Buddhist mobility that developed during the first half of the second millennium, Buddhist sources clarify the logic of overtures to Lankā at this time. According to the political theory implied by Buddhist-royal histories like the chronicle texts referred to above, the consolidation of royal power by a Buddhist-oriented monarch (whether or not freshly consecrated) required several interventions in Buddhist arenas: public merit-making activities that signaled the right to rule and protected the ruler and the realm; the reorganization of monastic administration in order to ensure that high-ranking monks (sometimes also functioning in court administration and/or as landholders) were loyal to the throne; and “purification” of the monastic community as a sign of the ruler’s devoted wish to extend the vitality and longevity of the Buddhist tradition. “Purification” of the monastic community and the reorganization of monastic administration typically

38 See also Goh (2007: 53).
39 I am grateful to Alexey Kirichenko for preliminary conversations on this matter.
occurred together. One effective means of accomplishing both was to introduce a new monastic higher-ordination lineage from another Buddhist location held in esteem. Such goals evidently shaped King Dhammazedi’s approach to Koṭṭē in the 1470s and King Sām Fang Kān’s response to the monks returning from Koṭṭē in the 1420s. They may have influenced King Vijayabāhu I’s overtures to Ramañña in the late eleventh century.

It is striking that, in a period of approximately fifty years during the fifteenth century, Bago, Chiang Mai, and Ayutthaya all took steps to consolidate their authority according to the Buddhist political theory outlined above. In doing so, all resorted to Laṅkā as the source for a new monastic higher-ordination lineage capable of “purifying” and reorganizing monastic administration in the realm. Why did they focus on Laṅkā in this way? Laṅkā’s authoritative position was due partly to the island’s long-standing and positive image within Buddhist contexts. Laṅkā had a long and impeccable pedigree as a center of Buddhist life. It was celebrated by early Buddhist chronicles (in Sanskrit as well as Pāli) as a site honored by Gautama Buddha himself, said to have predicted Lankan guardianship of Buddhist teachings. Laṅkā’s lineages of Buddhist monks and nuns descended from the famous Indian Mauryas. The island had played host to the most famous commentator on authoritative Pāli Buddhist texts, Buddhaghosa, whose fifth-century Lankan compositions traveled gradually outwards through Southern Asia. At least in Pāli-language works, Laṅkā was the location most frequently and thoroughly described after northeastern India/Nepal, the site of Gautama Buddha’s first activities, and reports of Laṅkā were carried around Asia by pilgrims such as the seventh-century traveler Yijing.

Another factor was the regional decline of Buddhist intellectual and ritual centers concomitant with the rise of Islam in northeastern India and insular Southeast Asia from the thirteenth century onward. Although it is now clear that earlier arguments for the wholesale displacement of Buddhism by Islam in northeastern India during this period were overstated, massive monastic centers such as that at Nālanda no longer received large-scale royal patronage. On the islands of Java and Sumatra, earlier Buddhist centers gave way to sultanates oriented towards Islam. Therefore, when royal courts of Tai, Mon, and Burmese lands sought to import new monastic higher ordination lineages that could be used to “purify” and reorganize Buddhist monasticism in their kingdoms, they faced a shrinking Buddhist world.40 If they wished to use monastic higher ordination lineages that shared their existing use of Pāli as a scriptural/liturgical language and that could argue for historical connections to the third-

40 I am grateful to Geoff Wade and Alexey Kirichenko for conversations on this point.
century BCE monastic community of the Indian King Asoka, they could look only among their mainland neighbors or to Laṅkā.

Laṅkā was a strategic choice. In addition to the positive historical associations that had long existed around Lankan Buddhist monks and institutions, the island was generally distant from political and military conflicts on the Southeast Asian mainland. There is no evidence of aggression from Laṅkā against Tai, Mon, or Burmese polities, apart from Polonnaruva’s raid on the Burma delta.41 Long described as a center of Buddhist education and monastic practice, with deep historical links to early Indian Buddhist lineages and institutions, Laṅkā was ideologically close. Lankan kingdoms were, however, usually politically distant from mainland competition and aggression, without the military might to intervene in the region of the Burma delta and the Gulf of Siam.42 Thus, Laṅkā’s desirability in Buddhist ideological terms was further enhanced by the island’s relative weakness in politico-military terms. It stood outside the fraught history of mainland diplomatic and military adventuring that characterized kingdoms in what is now Burma and Thailand, including the dominant Buddhist-oriented polities of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya, and Bago.

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41 The chronicles of Nakhon Si Thammarat (Wyatt 1975) are late compositions, extant only in poor manuscript witnesses. I am not yet persuaded that Laṅkā made military incursions into Nakhon Si Thammarat in the twelfth century or made that polity a tributary of the island.

42 I have benefited from discussions with Chris Hinkle, Drew Johnson, and Steve Collins on this point.


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Buddhist Connections in the Indian Ocean


Blackburn


