

The Sutta on Understanding Death in the Transmission of *Borān* Meditation From Siam to the Kandyan Court

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Abstract This article announces the discovery of a Sinhalese version of the traditional meditation (*borān yogāvacara kammaṭṭhāna*) text in which the Consciousness or Mind, personified as a Princess living in a five-branched tree (the body), must understand the nature of death and seek the four gems that are the four noble truths. To do this she must overcome the cravings of the five senses, represented as five birds in the tree. Only in this way will she permanently avoid the attentions of Death, Māra, and his three female servants, Birth, Sickness and Old Age. In this version of the text, when the Princess manages not to succumb to these three, Māra comes and snatches her from her tree and rapes her. The Buddha then appears to her to explain the path to liberation. The text provides a commentary, *padārtha*, which explains the details of the symbolism of the fruit in terms of rebirth and being born, the tree in terms of the body, etc. The text also offers interpretations of signs of impending death and prognostications regarding the next rebirth. Previously the existence of Khmer and Lānnā versions of this text have been recorded

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by Francois Bizot and Francois Lagirarde, the former publishing the text as *Le Figuier a cinq branches* (Le figuier à cinq branches, 1976). The Sinhalese version was redacted for one of the wives of King Kīrti Śrī Rājasinha of Kandy by the monk Varañña Mahāthera of Ayutthayā. This confirms earlier speculation that this form of *borān/dhammakāya* meditation was brought to Sri Lanka with the introduction of the Siyam Nikāya in the mid-eighteenth century. It also shows that in Sri Lanka, as in Ayutthayā, this form of meditation—which in the modern period was to be rejected as ‘unorthodox’—was promoted at the highest levels of court and Saṅgha.

Keywords Theravada · Buddhism meditation · *Dhammakāya* · *Yogāvacara* · *Borān kammaṭṭhāna* · Sinhalese manuscripts · Nevill collection · Māra · Figuier à cinq branches · Mindfulness of death · *Maraṇaṅgaṇasutta* · *Cittakumārī*

Introduction

In the modern period the traditional or ‘ancient’ meditation tradition of Theravada, *borān* (*yogāvacara*) *kammaṭṭhāna*, sometimes known as *dhammakāya* meditation, is attested as a living practice only in unreformed Cambodian Buddhism and at a handful of temples in Thailand.¹ In recent times, its rich symbolism and its methods, which involve the physical internalisation or manifestation of aspects of the Theravada path by incorporating them at points in the body between the nostril and navel, have been regarded as somewhat unorthodox for Theravada.² However, current scholarship can show that, regardless of how *borān kammaṭṭhāna* has been perceived by modern reformists and colonial scholars, it was in fact accepted as a— if not the—mainstream form of Theravada by Saṅgha and court hierarchy alike

¹ Thai temples connected with the practice include Wat Rajasittharam and temples associated with the Dhammakaya network, such as Wat Paknam and Wat Phra Dhammakaya. On the important position of Wat Rajasittharam see de Bernon (2000, p. 419). Evidence for much wider continued practice than hitherto realised by scholars has recently come to our attention, and is the basis of ongoing research. On Cambodian practice as well as Thai and Khmer texts see de Bernon (2000) and publications by Bizot listed here and also discussed in Crosby (2000). On our use of the phrases *yogāvacara* and *borān kammaṭṭhāna* to refer to this tradition, as well as other names that have been applied to it, see Crosby with Choompolpaisal (forthcoming). The term *yogāvacara* (Pali) means ‘meditation practitioner’ and is one of the few terms that appears to be found across the tradition. *Kammaṭṭhāna* (Pali) means meditation practice or exercise. *Borān* (Khmer/Thai) means traditional, is found in both Thai and Khmer sources, and is used for the form of Buddhism that preserves this tradition in contrast to *samay* ‘reform/modern’ Buddhism in Cambodia, although it has a broader application. The corresponding Pali term *purāna* does not appear in any texts we have consulted so far.

² The point two fingers width below the navel is the lowest point in the body, used for the basic form of the meditation. There are other points above the eye/back of the nose in some forms of the meditation, which will be discussed in the account Crosby is currently preparing on how these practices relate to other technologies of directed transformation that developed throughout the history of South and Southeast Asia. Crosby first coined the phrase ‘technologies of directed transformation’ in 2005 when she recognised the interconnectedness of the various sciences, including this tradition of meditation, medicine, obstetrics, group theory mathematics and chemistry (‘alchemy’).

across much of the Theravada world before the reforms and Pali canon-based learning of the 19th–20th centuries.³ We know that it thrived at the highest levels of the Saṅgha hierarchy not only in Cambodia, but also in Siam during the Ayutthaya and Thonburi periods. An inscription of the Sukhotai period takes it back to the sixteenth century in northern Thailand.⁴ In fact, several Thai publications and oral traditions take it back further, indeed to Rāhula, the son of the Buddha, although we have yet to scrutinise these claims.⁵ Such practice was also promulgated by Saṅgharājas in Laos and used in Sri Lanka at least into the nineteenth century.⁶ This article is about the Sri Lankan version of a text belonging to this tradition which is now housed in the Nevill Collection of the British Library in London. It confirms the previously conjectured association of this tradition with the royal house of Kandy in the eighteenth century and also contains a rather surprising depiction of Māra engaging in sexual intercourse with the human mind represented as princess *Cittakumārī*, imagery that we have not found elsewhere in *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, even in the Khmer and Lao versions of this same text. For while there are similarities between *borān kammaṭṭhāna* and tantric methodology in the internalisation of qualities into the body, the use of symbolic language, etc., we nowhere find the pantheon and sexual imagery or practice of *tantra* and *borān kammaṭṭhāna* relies on Theravada *abhidhamma* for its doctrinal make-up.

The first part of this article looks at the dating of the text and related practices within the context of the introduction of the Siyam Nikāya to Kandy. We then look at the content of the text. This is followed by an analysis of the text's position in relation to Southeast Asian versions and *borān kammaṭṭhāna* more generally. Finally we assess the new light the text sheds on our understanding of that tradition.

³ Our current state of knowledge on such practice historically in regions now within the modern boundaries of Thailand, Laos, Cambodian, Vietnamese (Kampuchea Krom) and Sri Lankan is fairly strong and growing, including evidence for Lao practice into the 1970s, although this last remains a sensitive topic to explore. (We would like to thank David Wharton of the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts in Vientiane for highly informative discussions on Lao Buddhism over the years that have helped inform our understanding of the Lao tradition. Our investigation into the presence of this practice in Burmese, Arakanese and Shan materials has only begun in earnest quite recently, but there are certainly promising leads in Burmese materials.)

⁴ See Choompolpaisal et al. (forthcoming) on the inscriptional evidence.

⁵ Phibul Choompolpaisal with the help of Ven. Veera of Wat Rajasittharam, Thonburi, Bangkok, Andrew Skilton and Kate Crosby collected a significant number of Thai publications and Ph.D. theses pertaining to the tradition in August and September 2011. Most of these have yet to be taken into consideration by scholars writing on the subject. We hope to assess their contents, and especially the evidence for an earlier tradition, in due course. For the position of the Buddha's son, Rāhula, generally, and how this use of him as an authority fits with his portrayal in other Theravada literature, see Crosby (forthcoming 2012).

⁶ For a timeline of the tradition see Crosby with Choompolpaisal forthcoming. Much information on Saṅgharājas connected with this tradition comes from Yasotharat (1936) and from the oral and manuscript history preserved at Wat Rajasittharam. On the connection of the tradition with Somdet Suk and Somdet To, see also de Bernon (2000, pp. 421–455).

Borān kammaṭṭhāna texts from Sri Lanka and the Introduction of the Siyam Nikāya

Although *borān kammaṭṭhāna* is thought to have died out as a monastic practice in Sri Lanka by the start of the twentieth century, a number of extant manuscripts in temple libraries and Western library collections, especially in the Hugh Nevill collection of the British Library, attest to its widespread presence in the 18th–19th centuries. Most of the extant texts are meditation manuals, which provide almost no evidence of date or authorship. The first such manual to be published in the West was *The Yogāvacara's Manual* in 1896. This Sinhalese-Pali work was edited by T. W. Rhys Davids on the basis of a copy of a manuscript from Bambaragalavihāra, 16 miles from Kandy in central Sri Lanka, that had been lent to him by the well-known Buddhist revivalist Anāgārika Dharmapāla.⁷ A translation of this text into English by F.L. Woodward was published in 1916 as the *Manual of a Mystic*.

The person who had secured the copy of the manuscript from Bambaragala for Anāgārika Dharmapāla was the great scholar of Buddhism and classical Sinhala, D. B. Jayatilaka. He wrote an Appendix, called 'A Dhyāna Book', to Woodward's translation.⁸ There he conjectured that the practice had been introduced into Sri Lanka during the reign of King Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha (r.1747–1782).⁹ In part Jayatilaka based his theory on his assessment of the language: "to judge from the Sinhalese passages, it is a work of the eighteenth century" (Jayatilaka 1916, p. 144). Other factors were what he regarded as a vacuum in the Buddhist culture on the island between the invasion of the Portuguese in 1505 and the revival under the monk Vāliṅga Saraṇaṃkara (later to become the last Saṅgharāja of the island) during the reigns of Kīrti Śrī and his predecessor Vijaya Rājasimha (r. 1739–1747). Furthermore, Jayatilaka identified reports in the extended *Mahāvamsa* and contemporary accounts which describe Sinhalese monks learning meditation from Siamese meditation monks in the mid-eighteenth century. The context in which this happened was the introduction of the Siam Nikāya ordination lineage in 1753 by Siamese monks sent by the King of Siam at the request of King Kīrti Śrī with the assistance of the Dutch on whose ships the embassies between Siam and Sri Lanka travelled. Summarising the Siamese missions to Kandy at this period, Blackburn writes, "Three embassies arrived in Lanka from Siam. The first, in 1753 under the leadership of the Siamese monk Upāli, performed the *upasampadā* ritual that marked the formal start of the Siyam Nikāya, and then went on to establish monastic ritual boundaries at many of the main temples. A second embassy arrived in 1756, under the leadership of the monks Visuddhācāriya and Varañāṇa, and remained

⁷ A version was later published in Sinhala script in Ratnajoti and Ratnapāla (1963), on which publication see Crosby (2005).

⁸ In Woodward (1916, pp. 143–150).

⁹ Dates in this article are taken from de Silva (1995, p. 595).

until 1764. The third embassy arrived in 1759 and was drawn into the 1760 plot against Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha.”¹⁰

Jayatilaka describes the 1755/1756 embassy: “A second deputation of Siamese bhikshus came two or three years later, and met with an equally hearty reception. Among them were several who were specially qualified to give instructions in dhyāna meditations, and they undertook the training of Sinhalese bhikshus in these practices.” The *Mahāvamsa* records, “Now the priests of Lankā (who were placed under the instruction of the Siamese priests) some who were endued with virtue took lessons from the elder Mahā Visuddhācariya in (the method of) meditation, which is the road to Nibbāna. Some learned under his fellow-worker, Varaṇānamuni [sic], the interpretation of the Dhamma and the Vinaya, and also the science of words.” (Jayatilaka 1916, p. 150) Jayatilaka then translates from the *Kuśalākriyānudeśaya*,¹¹ a contemporary account of Saraṇamkara’s activities, a passage describing how the king provided a forest abode for the two venerable teachers of *vidarśanā* meditation, Mahānāma and Brahmaśvara, and entrusted 24 native monks to train in the practice of the forty *kammaṭṭhāna* meditations. (Jayatilaka 1916, p. 150). This gives us the names of at least four Siamese monks—Visuddhācariya, Varaṇānamuni, Mahānāma and Brahmaśvara—remaining in Sri Lanka to teach the Sinhalese monks meditation, Dhamma, Vinaya, and grammar.

This picture is confirmed from Thai sources which report that in 1755 King Baromkot sent the second group of monks to Sri Lanka for the purpose of spreading Buddhism.¹² The twenty monks in this group include: Visutthajan, Varayan(muni),

¹⁰ Blackburn (2001, pp. 54–55). The plot referred to is the foiled attempt to place one of the Siamese princes—travelling in robes—on the throne after killing the king by booby trapping his throne. See Dewarāja (1972, Chap. VI) for a discussion of events under Kīrti Śrī. See Pieris (1903) and Fernando (1959) for a description of the embassy to Siam to bring back the ordination lineage. The dates do not fully tally with the dates in Thai sources, which we give below.

¹¹ Although Jayatilaka identifies *Kuśalākriyānudeśaya* as British Museum (now British Library) manuscript Or. 6606 (163), Somadasa has this as the *Rājādhirājasimha Katikāvātā* (Somadasa, Vol. 4, p. 270). Two copies of the text, under the title *Kuśalānukriyāsandesaya*, are found in the Nevill Collection of the British library as manuscript numbers Or. 6606 (157) (text one in the manuscript) and Or. 6606 (158), described by Somadasa (vol. 4, pp. 264–266).

¹² The date of 1755 accords with the Sinhalese sources. An earlier date of 1753 is given in some modern Thai sources such as <http://www.rakpratad.com/index.php?lay=show&ac=article&Id=99068&Ntype=1> (accessed 22 July 2010). This website belongs to Chomrom Rak Phra Barommthath Haeng Prathet Thai (the Society for Preserving the Buddha’s Relics in Thailand). Information about Varaṇāna/Varayana Mahathera on this website is based on Thammathacho (Phrasritawat Methi) 2004 (There are no page numbers on our copy, but it looks like it is the introduction or preface to the dissertations contained in the volume), who likewise gives the earlier date. We would like to thank Phrasritawat Methi for providing us with a copy of his article. Since he does not provide references, we add some below. The correct date of 1755 is provided on <http://www.dhamma5minutes.com/webboard.php?id=5&wpid=0058> (accessed 3 August 2010), which website belongs to Panyadharo Foundation [มูลนิธิปัญญานาโธ], Wat Ratsongkhro (Wat Pa Nong Saeng), Udonthani Province and was launched at the end of 2005. A royal letter about the monks accompanying Varayan dated 1755, cited by Damrong, confirms the 1755 date (Damrong 2457/1914, pp. 189–210—Prince Damrong first published this work which includes reproduction of many primary sources in 1914 CE (2457 BE) in honour of Prince Kromphraya Naritsaranuwattiwong. The reprint on 26 April 1960 CE (2503 BE) was as a funerary publication on the funeral day of Supreme Patriarch Wachirayanawong at Wat Thepsirin in Bangkok).

Jantasan, Intachoti, Suwannachoti, etc.¹³ Transferring from the Thai to the South Asian pronunciations, we see that the first two of these are the two monks Visuddhācariya and Varañāṇa mentioned by Blackburn and Jayatilaka (above). According to Thai sources—and as one might expect—these monks, under Visuddhācariya's and Varañāṇa's leadership, taught meditation as practised in Ayutthaya,¹⁴ some of them returning to Ayutthaya in 1758.¹⁵ Some of the monks remained in Sri Lanka and assisted Saranangkorn/Saraṇaṅkara, who had been ordained by Ubali/Upāli Mahāthera of Siam as part of the first mission, with the translation and composition of Pali and Sinhalese texts.¹⁶

Jayatilaka suggests that *The Yogāvacara's Manual*, thought to be a unique text at the time of its publication and translation, was written by one of the Sri Lankan

¹³ According to <http://www.rakpratad.com/index.php?lay=show&ac=article&Id=99068&Ntype=1> (accessed 22 July 2010), 12 monks came, accompanied by 2–3 novices. According to <http://www.dhamma5minutes.com/webboard.php?id=5&wpid=0058> (accessed 3 August 2010), 20 monks and 20 novices came. Damrong mentions that of the 18 monks who accompanied Visutthajan and Varayan, 7 monks came back. 10 monks and two novices had died from illness during the course of the mission, never returning to Siam (Damrong 2457/1914, pp. 206–207).

¹⁴ <http://www.rakpratad.com/index.php?lay=show&ac=article&Id=99068&Ntype=1> (accessed 22 July 2010). On Visutthajan, especially, as the meditation master, see below. Evidence for the type of practice current in Ayutthaya can be gleaned from the manuals of Suk Kaithuen, printed versions of which can be found in a number of works including Yasotharat (1936). Phibul Choompolpaisal, Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton are currently working on making more information available about both manuscript and printed versions of Suk Kaithuen's materials.

¹⁵ <http://www.dhamma5minutes.com/webboard.php?id=5&wpid=0058> (accessed 3 August 2010). The date of 1758 for the return of the monks to Siam is confirmed in the royal letter in Pali from the senior-most Siamese general (*aggamahāsenāpati*) to the seniormost Sri Lankan general cited by Damrong (translation Damrong 2457/1914, pp. 211–295, summary *ibid.* 210).

¹⁶ <http://www.rakpratad.com/index.php?lay=show&ac=article&Id=99068&Ntype=1> (accessed 22 July 2010). The royal letter cited above it associates Visutthajan with meditation expertise and the ordaining of 300 monks. It associates Varayan with work on texts including *vinaya* texts and the compilation of the Pali canon (and also possibly on commentaries, *athakathā*, if Damrong's interpretation is correct). It states that the two corresponding divisions of the *nikāya*, the *ganthadhura* division for work with texts and the *vipassanādhura* division for work on meditation, were firmly established following the work under these two monks. The national centre for both *dhura* was at Wat Pupphārām. (Damrong 2457/1914, pp. 209–210.) Pupphārām is Malvatu Vihāra in Kandy. On its association with the Siyam Nikāya and the rivalry with the other powerful monastic institution in Kandy, Asgiri Vihāra, see Blackburn (2001, p. 44 with note 6). The manuscripts listed for the temple (Blackburn 2001, p. 213) show a preponderance of *vinaya*, canonical and *athakathā* texts, confirming Damrong's interpretation. The Ayutthaya sources and account from the Thai side presented by Damrong make for an interesting counterbalance to the Sinhala sources. Blackburn, while looking in depth at the educational and literary activity under Saraṇaṅkara, does not discuss the Siamese literary input beyond the initial training referred to in the *Mahāvamsa*, because—as she points out - in the Sinhalese accounts Saraṇaṅkara is so lionised (Blackburn 2001, p. 54). She observes “It is difficult to reconstruct the first stage of the Siyam Nikāya's educational institutions with confidence because nearly all of our evidence for the period comes from the enthusiastic biography of Saraṇaṅkara... Because this text was clearly written in part to extol the merits of Saraṇaṅkara and his early students, it would be unwise to accept it unquestioningly.” (2001, p. 47). Blackburn's study includes a description of some discursive meditation texts of this period, in particular on loving kindness (2001, pp. 186–189), but the meditation manuals of the period that we are interested in here are not included in her discussion. They are included neither in a list of texts sent from Siam to Kandy with the second mission (the letter in which they are listed is found at Damrong *ibid.* and the list from it Romanised by Na Bangchan (1988), also reproduced from Vijayavardhana and Migaskumbura 1993 in Blackburn, 2001, p. 217), nor in the lists of manuscripts at important temples connected with the Siyam Nikāya at that period, which Blackburn also provides (*ibid.* Appendix C).

monks sent to study with the Siamese meditation masters. He envisages the Siamese monks teaching the meditation tradition to the Sinhalese monks orally in Pali, the language shared by the Sinhalese and Siamese and used as the lingua-franca between them, as is attested by the letters sent between Sri Lanka and Siam in arranging the envoys of monks and texts.¹⁷ Jayatilaka suggests that one of the Sinhalese monks then wrote down a manual of the practices taught, adding the translation into Sinhala for the benefit of others.¹⁸ While other theories had been put forward about the origins of the tradition in Sri Lanka, those working on the subject tended to agree with Jayatilaka. This is not to say that the tradition was absent at an earlier date—Crosby has observed a reference in a seventeenth century Sinhalese *jātaka* retelling (Crosby, 1999, Chap. 3), and oral tradition makes an earlier connection with Sri Lanka – but rather that current scholars have tentatively accepted Jayatilaka’s suggestion that the circulation throughout Sri Lanka of still extant manuscripts of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* came from this moment in the tradition’s history.¹⁹

Confirmation of the Transmission of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* from Ayutthaya in the 1750s

The text we examine in this article provides the first conclusive evidence that Jayatilaka’s conjectures were correct, namely that *borān kammaṭṭhāna* came with the second of the mid-eighteenth century missions from Siam to the Kandyan kingdom of Sri Lanka. The text in question is a Sinhala-script manuscript of a non-canonical ‘*sutta*’ text from Sri Lanka called the *Maraṇāñānasutta* ‘Discourse on the Understanding of Death.’ The Sinhalese version of this text held in the Nevill Collection of the British Library, manuscript number Or.6600(90) is currently the only attested version from Sri Lanka.²⁰ However, related versions of this text, albeit under different names, have been found in Lännā and Khmer manuscripts. The usual Khmer and Lännā titles appear to be *mūla kammaṭṭhāna* ‘fundamental/original meditation subjects’ (although this is a broad, inclusive title, which may or may not include the narrative of our text) and *Pvārabandh* ‘the excellent work’ (Lagirarde 1994). An edition and translation into French of a version of this text, which clearly

¹⁷ The letters sent from the Siam court to the Kandyan kingdom were written in a form of Pali. See Na Bangchang (1988, p. 185–212).

¹⁸ Jayatilaka, op.cit. p. 150.

¹⁹ On the different theories about the origins of this tradition in Sri Lanka and their tentative acceptance of Jayatilaka’s suggestion, see Crosby (1999, Chapter Three) and de Bernon (2000, pp. 456–459).

²⁰ This manuscript is described by Somadasa vol.1: 152. There are two Pali commentaries on the text, on which we intend to conduct further research. The provisional identification of the *Maraṇāñānasutta* with the *Figuier à cinq branches* was proposed by Skilton (2005) in the course of a survey of Somadasa’s catalogue (op.cit.) looking for unidentified mss. of *borān yogāvacara* texts. Kate Crosby and Amal Gunasena were able to confirm that identification and the further details discussed here through a closer study of the text as part of their work on the Sri Lankan evidence for *borān yogāvacara* as part of the AHRC Religion and Society project ‘Yogavacara Traditions in Theravada Buddhist Societies’ (2009–2010).

forms part of the *borān yogāvacara* corpus, was published by François Bizot in 1976 as *Le figuier a [sic] cinq branches*.²¹ We have used this latter for comparison, although we note that the *Maraṇāñāna* is closer to the Lānnā versions described by Lagirarde in that it refers to a single transmigrating individual, *cittakumārī*, rather than the pair *cittakumārī* and *cittakumāra* in the version edited by Bizot, on which point see further below.²² We thus have a copy in Sri Lanka of a *borān kammatthāna* text that was widespread in mainland Southeast Asia, and—as we shall now explain—we can date this text with some degree of accuracy as well as confirm its Southeast Asian origins.

The colophon of the manuscript of the *Maraṇāñāna* in the Nevill collection identifies it as the copy belonging to the virtuous monk of Henegama, *Henegama Silvat Unnāhanse*, whose identity and date we do not know. However, we are able to date this particular redaction of the text from the introduction it provides. The redactor explains that he translated it (presumably into Sinhala, the language of our version—see discussion of the language mixture found in the text below) from Pali language at the behest of the chief queen (*aggamahesikā*) of King Kīrti Śrī Rājasin̄ha (*ka verso*) during Kīrti Śrī's reign. This was done in honour of the chief queen of Vijaya Rājasin̄ha, the first Nāyakkār king (1739–1747), who was brother-in-law to Kīrti Śrī Rājasin̄ha and had preceded him on the throne.²³ The virtues of first the Buddha and then of King Kīrti Śrī are praised in the introduction. Perhaps the text was commissioned as an act of merit for this queen after her death.

Both queens are referred to by the title *mahāpuṇyadevī*, 'highly meritorious queen,' rather than by name. We have been unsuccessful in finding the names or dates for either queen, although the first or primary queen of Vijaya Rājasin̄ha, whom he married in 1740 was the daughter of Narenappa Nāyakkār and the link by which the Kīrti Śrī's succession had been secured. Kīrti Śrī himself had four wives drawn from noble families of Madurai, by all of whom he was childless, the first of whom, the daughter of Nadukattu Sāmi Nāyakkār, he married in 1749. However he also had a much favoured Sinhala secondary wife or concubine (*yakadadoli*) called Māmpīṭṭiye Kumārīhāmy by whom he had several children (including Māmpīṭṭiye Baṇḍāra, later executed by his own brother and royal successor, Rājādhirāja Sin̄ha). Māmpīṭṭiye indicates the place of origin of this family and is located upcountry of Kandy. It is tempting to speculate that a Sinhala translation would have been made for a Sinhala speaker rather than one of his Telugu speaking wives from Madurai,

²¹ For a comparison with the Lānnā versions see Lagirarde (1994), and comments on the discussion there in Crosby (2000, pp. 24–25). See also the further study by de Bernon (2000).

²² Before noticing Lagirarde's observation we had thought that the single *cittakumārī* in our text was because it was adapted to its intended recipient, the queen. This remains a pertinent point, namely that the reason for two *citta*, as Prince or Princess/Boy or Girl (*kumāra/o* and *kumārī*) in the Khmer version may be to allow the text to be adapted to individual members of its audience, i.e. the gender of the *citta* depends on that of the person stuck in *saṃsāra*. This is consistent with the tendency in Theravada to assume continuity of gender across lives (Crosby 2008, p. 34).

²³ The inheritance pattern for the Nāyakkār kings of central Sri Lanka, who came from South India, was that the queen's brother would become the next king (Dewaraja 1995, p. 286).

although she would not normally warrant the title of *aggamahesikā* 'chief queen'.²⁴ Be these speculations as they may, their identification by their husbands' names allows us to place this text exactly in the context of the mid-eighteenth century transmission of the Siyam Nikāya under Kīrti Śrī, who is stated in the text to be ruling Kandy at the time. We can go further and confirm the connection with the second mission bringing the meditation monks, for the monk who undertook the translation identifies himself as Varañāṇa Mahāthera of Ayutthaya (*ka verso*).²⁵ The text, then, explicitly names Varañāṇa, one of the two leaders of the meditation and education mission of 1756, as its redactor.

The Year of the Translation of the Maraṇāṇasutta into Sinhala

We can now place the text in the hands of the monk Varañāṇa from Siam, in Kandy, after 1755/1756. We can also identify more details about the date, even though there are some problems with the text, which reads:

*srīsugathasaṃvaccharoto ekūnavīsati dina te māsaṃvaccharāni satatā(k)āni²⁶
dvesaṃvaccharasahassāni atikkante sasasaṃvacchare vassāna utumhi
bhaddajamāse sukkhapakkhe pañcamitithiyaṃ nisākaradine meṃ suttaṃ
nitthāpetvā... (folio 1, ka, recto)*

The problematic reading is '*dina [te] mā*'. It is a little unusual to place the day (*dina*) or, possibly, month (*te mā[sam]*) this early on in the date, rather than going from year through to season, fortnight, and day or lunar day. Moreover, if the reading should be *māsaṃ*, then we are a syllable short, as the single *saṃ* is also needed for the following word, *saṃvacchara*, the usual word for 'year'.

On the basis of a number of internal factors, although it leaves one inconsistency, our best conjecture is to correct the reading.

*srīsugatasamvaccharoto ekūnavīsati dina te māsaṃ [te] saṃvaccharāni
satata(k)āni dvesaṃvaccharasahassāni atikkante sasasaṃvacchare vassāna
utumhi bhaddajamāse sukkhapakkhe pañcamitithiyaṃ nisākaradine meṃ
suttaṃ nitthāpetvā...*

Having finished this *sutta* on the nineteenth day, i.e. the fifth lunar night and day in the bright fortnight of the third month, the month of August, in the rainy

²⁴ Dewaraja (1974) and Pieris (1918, pp. 69 and 96). Kīrti Śrī's first wife had therefore been living in Kandy for around a decade at the earliest point for the composition of this version of the text and this is enough time to have become familiar with Sinhala language, although what incentive there would have been for her to make such an effort in court circles populated by Telugu speaking nobility and family members from Madurai is unclear. Of course, it is possible that Varañāṇa did not translate the text into Sinhala, but Telugu and our version is a further translation from Telugu into Sinhala. However, we do not think this likely, both because of the broader context of Varañāṇa's role in Sri Lanka and because of the style of the Sinhala (see below).

²⁵ We are not sure if the *Mahāthera* in Varañāṇa's title is an indication of automatic chronological seniority, as is current usage in Sri Lanka, or a title bestowed by the royal court, a continuation of the earlier Ayutthaya practice (see Choompolpaisal, et al., forthcoming). We note that all the monks listed in the Thai accounts noted above are given this title, suggesting the latter to be the case.

²⁶ The syllable *ka* is a conjecture—there is a small hole in the manuscript at this point.

season in the year of the hare when two thousand three hundred years had passed since the year of the [*parinibbāna*] of the Auspicious Gotama.

This would give us a date of 2,300 years after the death of the Buddha, i.e. Buddha Era year 2300, which gives us a date in Common Era of $-543 + 2,300$, i.e. 1,757. The resulting year, 2300 BE, i.e. 1757 CE, would be the tenth year of Kīrti Śrī's reign (r. CE 1747–1782, BE 2290–2325) and two years after Varañāṇa's arrival in Sri Lanka and so possible in terms of the people named. However, the mention of 'the year of the hare' *sasasaṃvacchare*, the fourth year in the Chinese-Tai twelve-year cycle, means that this solution is not very satisfactory. The nineteenth day (rather than nineteenth year, the year of the monkey) is confirmed internally since that is indeed the 5th *tithi* (lunar night and day) in the second (bright) fortnight of the lunar month, the *sukkapakkha*.²⁷ While the reading *te mā[sam]* as 'three months' is confirmed by the mention of the month of *bhaddaja*, 3rd after the month of Wesak, we have to read *te* twice (whether written by the author to refer to both *māsa* and *sataka* or written only once in error) or the date would be 200 years earlier, i.e. long before the reign of either king mentioned in the texts, and so out of the question. So the year of the hare remains an issue. We find three hare years in Kīrti Śrī's rule of 35 years, 1747–1782 CE. The year of his succession was a hare year. The two hare years remaining during his reign are BE 2302, CE1759/1760 and BE 2314, CE1771/1772 CE. The former seems more likely, i.e. that Varañāṇa was translating the work he knew or had brought from Siam into Sinhala in the fourth year of his arrival in the Kandyan kingdom, at the midway point before the mission returned to Ayutthaya four years later. We do not feel it is possible to resolve this matter with absolute certainty on the basis of the current manuscript reading, but it nonetheless points to a date within the early years after the arrival of the second Siamese mission in Kandy.

The Language of the Maraṇāñāsutta

The language of the text may also reflect this relatively early transmission between the Siamese and Kandyan contexts. For while the language into which the text was translated from Pali is clearly meant to be Sinhala, it in fact ranges between Sinhala, Pali and Sanskrit, with the Sinhala showing unusual features. The Sanskrit components are found in the metaphors praising the king and are similar in style to those found at the openings of other documents of the period. This use of Sanskrit is a feature of Sinhalese texts of the time. As Liyanaratne notes in his examination of a letter from the King to the Dutch governor only a few years earlier, the sections full of Sanskrit terms praising the king tend not to conform to Sinhalese grammar, unlike the use of Sanskrit terms in formal Sinhala generally.²⁸ The syntax is closer

²⁷ We also rejected the reading of 19 as part of the year, i.e. BE 2319, 1776CE, partly because this would be long after both dates given (1758/1764) for the monks returning to Siam. Moreover, BE 2319, was the year of the monkey, the ninth in the Chinese-Tai twelve-year cycle (Eade 1995, p. 22).

²⁸ Liyanaratne (1984, p. 274). The letter in question, dated 1746 CE, concerns the bringing of Arakanese monks to restart the Buddhist higher ordination lineage in the Kandyan kingdom, which did not succeed and was then superceded by the success of the Siamese lineage.

to that of classical Sanskrit syntax, although inconsistently so. Some features of the script are also typical of the Kandyan period: the use of the *ambabayanna*—half nasal with ‘b’, e.g. in *Sambuddha* and *jambudīpe*—and various combined letters common for the period, e.g. *gunānveta* folio 2 line 5, although these ligatures do continue into later periods.²⁹ While these features are to be expected, the unusual feature of our text is that the nouns, especially, are not always embedded grammatically into the sentence in the Sinhala portions also. The result is that ascertaining the meaning is difficult in places. The opening lines, which also manifest this problem, are in very ornate Sinhala, perhaps copied from a standard opening hymn of praise for the Buddha. By contrast the Sinhala of the main text is relatively simple in structure, yet still shows this feature. We find this non-syntactical listing of terms interesting. While a number of grammatical irregularities and mistaken repetition is frequently found in manuscripts, we speculate that the lack of grammatical embedding is not necessarily to be explained by corruption on the part of copyists but rather due to the translator not being a native speaker of Sinhala. Indeed, we think it may indicate the Thai influence of Varañña’s native tongue.

The Contents of the *Marañāñanasutta*

The basic story of the Sinhala *Marañāñanasutta* and the Southeast Asian versions is the same: the mind, *cittakumārī* (or *cittakumārī* and *cittakumāra* in the Khmer version) must kill the five birds (the cravings of the sense faculties) in the five-branched tree (her/their body) in order to find the gems within her/their own body that are the four noble truths, and thus find Nirvana. Before looking in more detail at some interesting differences between the content of the Sinhala and Southeast Asian versions, we first offer a summary of the text as presented in our manuscript.³⁰ In the manuscript we find both the *sutta* and a word-for-word commentary, *padārtha*, interwoven.

The text describes itself at the beginning as a translation of a sermon in Māgadhī language (Pali) delivered by the Buddha on the subject of physical processes (*śarīra pravuttiya*). The translation was written at the invitation of the chief queen of King Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha for the benefit of the chief queen of the previous king, King Vijaya Śrī Rājasimha in order to help her to fulfil the perfection of wisdom (*paññāpārami*) and develop ‘recollection of/reflection on the qualities of death’ (*marañānussati bhāvanā*). The text identifies itself as a *sutta*, i.e. a teaching of the Buddha.

The main body of the *sutta* is a quasi-metaphorical representation of how embodied consciousness is at the mercy of the three key stages in the cycle of

²⁹ A feature of this particular copy is that errors are marked with a dot close to the offending syllable rather than with the two small lines crossing through it.

³⁰ In some places here we provide a word-for-word translation, in others, particularly whether there is repetition, we summarise, indicating the content of any larger sections not reproduced here. We plan to publish a full edition and translation at a later point, in conjunction with two commentarial texts connected with this *sutta*. The letters plus *recto* or *verso* provided in brackets refers to the page in the manuscript where the relevant text is found.

rebirth, namely birth, decay and death (*jāti, jarā, maraṇaṃ*).³¹ This teaching is given in a form of a story about a princess called Cittakumārī, Princess Mind. Thus the princess named Citta represents the mind. Meanwhile the body is represented by a *sālā* tree with five branches. Princess Citta has been born in a flower of this *sālā* tree. This flower has fallen onto the ground and from it developed a new *sālā* tree, which represents the new embodiment of the subsequent rebirth.

The *padārtha* explicitly explains the metaphor that being born in the *sālā* flower is the conception of a living being in the mother's womb and the Princess Citta is a name for the mind of living beings (*satvayange sita*) which in this world consists of the 16 states of mind (*solos prakāra*) such as desire (*rāga*) and hatred (*dveṣa*), etc. (folio *ki recto*). The tree is the body consisting of 16 decaying parts. The *sālā* flower is the flesh of the heart, the size of half a leaf. Princess Mind is born in that flower. What is called 'birth' in this context is when a being is born in the mother's womb. It comes about after the end of the mother's menstruation when the blood becomes more pure, and after the father and mother have engaged in sexual activity (*kar-maprīti*). Once it is conceived the young fruit, the foetus, becomes a ball of flesh. The *sālā* fruit fallen from the stem sprouts on the ground and gradually becomes a huge tree. The ball of flesh gradually develops and after ten months comes out of the mother's womb and goes through the stages of youth, middle age and old age (*ki verso*).

The text returns to the allegorical narrative and explains how Princess Citta lives in a hole in this tree and moves around the branches.³² The five branches are the two arms, two legs and the head of living beings. The mind moves around daily to look at the branches. There are five birds, which are the sense faculties, living on this tree and there are five palaces, which are the physical sense bases, hanging on this tree. The birds are equated with the faculties of the two eyes, ears and the tongue. There are also five youthful, mighty giants living in the palaces to protect the princess. There is a seat in each of the five palaces on which the Princess sits and takes food. The five giants are the energy or strength (*bala*) generated in the physical body, such as the three energies *trimada*.³³ The five palaces are then identified as the five sense-consciousnesses, i.e. sight, sound, smell, taste and physical consciousness. To watch dancers while sitting on one of the seats is the act of seeing, likewise to hear drumming is called sound consciousness, etc. There are doors to the five palaces which prevent enemies entering and are cleaned every day and at the same time used to get rid of water, etc. The mighty giants constantly protect Princess Citta. Princess Citta, having cooked rice feeds the strength-giants and gives them water. The guarded door is the door through which urine and faeces pass. What is the meaning of cleaning the guarded door? It is cleaning ourselves with water after going to the toilet (*ku recto*). Drinking water through the upper door and giving it to these giants gives them more energy.

³¹ There is usually a fourth item in this list, namely illness or disease, *roga*. This does appear later in this text.

³² This reflects the South Asian understanding of consciousness moving to different faculties, rather than having a permanent, centralised base.

³³ The *trimada* are the three levels of sexual urge or energy (*mada*—usually translated as rut in the context of elephants) generated in the body of both humans and animals, in Sinhalese understanding.

The next part of the text describes the unavoidable threat to life of Death, Māra. Māra is personified as a king who has heard of the birth of this princess. King Māra wants to capture Princess Citta. He cannot achieve this alone and needs others' help. He has two queens called Birth (*jāti*) and Decay (*jarā*). King Māra orders his two queens to bring Princess Citta to him. The author describes birth and decay in some detail. Thus decay is loosing teeth and sight and going grey. Here, illness (*roga*), which weakens and destroys the body and takes it to Māra, is also represented as a woman (*kū recto*).

These women (*jati*, *jarā*) utilise every opportunity to try to bring the Princess Citta to the King Māra. They employ various ruses, including offering her a better life, in their efforts to succeed. Then comes the third woman Illness, *roga*, which—the text explains—is a name for 98 diseases. When Princess Citta delays too long in going to King Māra, Illness employs termites (*veyo*), i.e. skin diseases and cancers, to make holes on the tree trunk to weaken it. When the termites attack the tree, the body is going to die. This is what happens when living beings lose the hair on their head and on their body, their teeth discolour and their skin stretches and they lose body moisture.

Princess Citta remains determined to resist the efforts of these three women and is resolved not to go with them to King Māra until the time comes. When Princess Citta refuses to go with these women they send a letter to King Māra for an alternative strategy (*kr verso*). They tell him he must send the form of a tiger, elephant, bear and a man holding a sword to Princess Citta. “If she sees one of these at least, she will definitely come to you.” What is the meaning of these four signs used to bring Princess Citta to Māra? Most people will come to the mouth of Māra when they become frightened even though some living beings never become ill. If a person sees one of these omens, they will die.

There follows a detailed section on death and various signs that appear before death overtakes us. The author offers a fascinating description of omens that appear when death is approaching a living being (*kṛ recto* ff.).³⁴ For example, the text explains that one should look at one's shadow in the month of *Mādin* and *Bak* (ca. March–April). If the shadow has turned and is facing the moon, death will come soon. In the months of *Asala* and *Nikini* (ca. July and August) if one looks at a fire and it appears black in colour death will come after two months. Also if one looks in a mirror in the morning and sees one's nose and mouth as black, death will occur in 2 days. This section is very detailed and not all the particulars are entirely clear to us as yet. The text further relates signs seen before death that augur one's destiny after death in terms of the five *gati*, possible rebirth destinations, of Buddhist cosmology. If a person sees fire just before his death, s/he will be born in hell. If s/he sees the moon, sun or stars, s/he will be born in heaven. If s/he sees darkness, s/he will be born in the realm of the hungry ghosts. If s/he sees a forest, s/he will be born as an animal. If s/he saw human flesh, s/he will be born as a human being (*kau verso*).

³⁴ In this section the text has strong resonances with the ‘signs of death’ section of the full text of the Tibetan Book of the Dead which may also suggest that the *Maraṇāṇānasutta* should be seen in part as a ‘book of the dead’ (Gyurme Dorje 2005, chap. 9, ‘Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Visual Indications and Signs of Death’).

At that time Princess Citta, with one foot, crushes the birth-flower, and with the other foot she crushes the hole in the middle of tree. Then King Māra takes Princess Citta between his legs and has sexual intercourse with her, after which the Princess again enters into a new birth-flower. Then King Māra, not yet seeing the Princess this time, remains standing there guarding the tree. From that moment, the birth flower, having shed pollen, becomes a fruit. The merits or sins acquired affect the development of every part of the body that comes into being. When any living being witnesses the signs of death, and is close to death, their entire body including all 900 veins and 300 bones, becomes crushed and soft. The whole body dries out like a palm leaf. The heat element completely disappears, and the breathing stops. At this point the text repeats the next-life prognoses from, “If someone sees fire, they will be born in hell...” (*kām recto*).

Princess Citta putting one foot on the flower and the other on the tree means that all beings will leave this life and be reborn in some other form. The act of King Māra pulling the Princess from the tree is the act of dying, leaving this life. The falling of the pollen from the birth flower is the embryo coming to full term (*garbhaparipāka*), i.e. a name for being born. What is the meaning of the parts coming into being? After five months, six doors/orifices [now six rather than the five mentioned earlier] come into being, good or bad according to one’s sins. It happens like this from *saṃsāra* to *saṃsāra*, rebirth to rebirth. When the Princess is young, she does not know the bad effects, *dosa*, of *jāti* and *jarā*. But on account of *jāti* and *jarā* Princess Citta becomes disheartened and seeks a means (*upāya*) to become free of them. She realises it is certain that everyone dies. Some people suffer from false view, not understanding that the ten unskillful actions, *akusala*, are bad, but rather indulging in them. Other people, with correct view (*sammādr̥ṣṭi*), follow the noble eightfold path and reach the immortality (*amuta*) of Nirvāna.

Then Princess Citta, looking up into the sky, sees a god in human form, *manuṣyadeva*, who is coming from four directions holding four gems and four fruits.³⁵ That god in human form is the one who has attained the ten perfections and has shaken the three worlds, i.e. the supreme (*lovutura*) Buddha. The four great gems are the four noble truths (*kaḥ verso*). Princess Citta on seeing the human god asks him where he is going. He replies, “I am going to the deathless place (*amara*). The City of Immortality, Amara Nuvara, is the name for the state of *Nirvāna*. I can’t think of a single road in that city along which Māra is able to travel.” The Princess says, “I want to avoid Māra and would like to go with you.” Having heard this the god says, “You cannot go with me now. One day, when you receive the four gems of the Dimbul (fig tree) flower and become equal to me, then you will be able to go with me.” Having heard this, the Princess asked, “Where is this Dimbul flower? I am going to find it and the four gems. Please tell me where.” The god says, “That tree, it will arise in India (*Jambudīpa*). There will be hundreds of thousands of branches spreading all over the world going up to the world of the Great Brahma gods. The aroma will pervade the entire universe. If you want to acquire the four gems, you must defeat the five birds that are the sense faculties (*indriya*) and be virtuous. This is the only way to escape the four servants [of Māra], birth (*jāti*),

³⁵ Bizot understands this to be a ‘a god transformed into a human’ (1976, p. 81).

ageing (*jarā*), disease (*vyādhi*) and dying (*maraṇa*). There is no beginning or end to *saṃsāra*, so you will otherwise suffer an unlimited amount of suffering. Therefore you should make every effort to discover the four gems.”

The meaning is as follows: The Dimbul (fig tree) flower is the extremely rare arising of a Buddha. The hundreds of thousands of leaves and branches throughout the universe are the power of the Buddha and Dhamma, which is superior to the power of any being, including *brahmā*, *yakṣa*, *rakṣasa*, *nāga* or *supaṇṇa*. The aroma that pervades the universe is the teaching of the Dhamma. The birth of the four gems in the Dimbul flower is the four noble truths that originate in the heart of the Buddha (*budunge śrī matvu hṛdayen pahala vannāha*). Defeating the five birds means defeating the sixfold (*sic*) cravings that originate in the eye first of all. Therefore defeating the six organs means defeating Māra also. Discovering the four gems means understanding the four noble truths. Having followed the eight noble path, one wears the crown of arhatship and destroys all the sufferings of *saṃsāra* such as birth, ageing, disease, etc. Then one obtains the peaceful, exquisite immortality that is the great Nirvāna.

A four line verse completes the text, advising that if one learns and understands this *sutta*, he or she will understand the time of their death and, being mindful and having performed meritorious acts such as offerings (*dāna*) and good conduct/undertaking the precepts (*sīla*), will be released from being born in the four hells (*apāya*).

The final line before the verse repeats the name of the text, but with the phrase *padārtha* “word and meaning” or “explanation of words”: *maraṇañānasūtra-padārthaniṭṭhitam*. This indicates that part of the text as we have it, i.e. those parts where the meaning of the allegory is explained, is to be seen as a commentary, rather than the *sutta* proper. The colophon then confirms that it is the Account of the Body preached by the Buddha, *budun vahansē vadāla bāhira kathā namvu sarīra pravuttiya* called a *bāhirakathā*, i.e. an ‘external discourse/discussion.’ We shall return to the term *bāhirakathā* below.

Variations Between the *Maraṇañānasutta* and the *Figuier à cinq branches*

The Sinhalese version focuses much more on the character of death than the Southeast Asian version. We have nowhere else found the story of Māra having sex with his victim (an episode in the narrative which is perhaps only found when it is for a female audience). Māra does this after snatching Princess Citta from her tree after she fails to fall for any of his other wives, and before she moves on to her next rebirth, an experience that makes her determined to avoid him in the future. The Sinhalese text also tells us how to understand signs of forthcoming death, whereas the Southeast Asian version explains more about conception and interpreting the new born child’s appearance (Bizot 1976, p. 79).³⁶ The latter also explains how one can understand how much the mother gets on with the father by the tufts of hair on

³⁶ Bizot misunderstands the word *dosa* in the text at this point as the Buddhist term for fault or hatred. It is the *ayurvedic* term *dosa*, often translated—for want of a better term—as ‘humour’. The *ayurvedic* term is also found in the *Maraṇañānasutta*. The close correlation between *ayurveda* and *boran kammaṭṭhāna* will be discussed in Crosby’s forthcoming work on this subject (in preparation).

the new born baby's head. If a child looks more like the mother than the father then the mother released sexual fluids before her partner! The Southeast Asian version provides the identification of components of the body, following the standard canonical lists found in such meditation texts as the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 2001, pp. 527–530), yet classified according to male and female. The twelve liquids found in the body come from the mother, and this explains why a boy must be ordained as a novice at the age of twelve to repay the mother. Someone who fails to do this is like a thief stealing from the house of one's own mother. On death he goes to the Avīci hell. The twenty one solid constituents found in the body, in turn, are derived from the father and this is related to the age of ordination as a *bhikkhu*. These elements are all related to the *Paṭṭhāna*. (Bizot 1976, pp. 88–89). We presume this is because this is the primary *Abhidhamma* text dealing with the complexity of causes and origins.³⁷

The description of the body is taken to greater lengths in the Southeast Asian version of the text, with much of the kind of detail and the same vocabulary that one finds in ayurvedic texts (Bizot 1976, p. 92). The text builds on the anatomical description to offer information not present in the *Maraṇāñāna*, namely that the path to *nirvāna* is at the forehead (Bizot 1976, p. 93) and relates the attainment of *nirvāna* by the *bodhisattvas* and *pratyeka buddhas* to their meditating in order and reverse order (Bizot 1976, p. 96). This is a reference to the order of the components of meditation being brought into and moved around the body in *borān kammatṭhāna*. The text then identifies certain lists of letters with different aspects of the body, of the Buddha and of aspects of monastic life. Thus *namo*, the word meaning 'homage' that commences any Theravada litany, especially homage to the Buddha *namo Buddhāya*, is divided into two syllables, *na* representing the twelve constituents from the mother and *mo* the twenty one constituents of the father noted above. These combine to form the "globe d'esprit", the sphere that is the *citta*, which in turn gives rise to the thirty three letters of the Pali alphabet that in turn form other groupings (Bizot 1976, p. 100). The imagery of crystal spheres (Khmer text) or gems (Sinhala text) for the mind and for the four truths (Bizot 1976, p. 75) is harnessed in the meditation practices in which one visualises or witnesses such spheres entering or in the body. The Khmer text explicitly relates the path to Nibbāna to the practice of meditation *kammatṭhāna* (loc.cit.). The relationship between the understanding of death and rebirth in this anatomical and allegorical detail and the attainment of spiritual liberation brings to mind the related practices in Cambodia involving the physical enactment of rebirth in the womb-shaped cave observed by Bizot in the 1970s (Bizot 1980). The letter symbolism of *na mo* unfolding into further groups of letters and Buddhist concepts evolves into extensive number/letter equations in the Khmer version of the text. Such equations are typical of *borān kammatṭhāna* practice and key to the more complex visualisation of the

³⁷ Crosby, in her forthcoming work on the models of directed transformation to which *borān kammatṭhāna* relates, identifies the mathematics of *borān kammatṭhāna* as that found both in the *Paṭṭhāna* and in ayurvedic pharmaceutical preparations for *dosa* treatment.

concepts and their complex combination in the ‘womb’ of the practitioner. They are also crucial to the aspects of this tradition applied to healing and protection.³⁸

The absence of this number/letter symbolism in the Sinhalese version of course begs an important question: Has Varañāṇa redacted this text in compliance to a reformed or ‘orthodox’ form of Theravada, i.e. a form more in line with the presentation of such matters in the Pali canon? Alternatively, was the form of Buddhism practised by Varañāṇa such a reform version of Theravada? These are worthwhile considerations, given that the eighteenth-century revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is often discussed in terms of reform, usually with reference to Saraṇaṃkara’s emphasis on strict *vinaya* observation. Moreover, number identifications of the sort found in the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* are also found in medicine and astrology, both excluded as professions for monks under Saraṇaṃkara’s reform. Yet we know that the later Saṅgharājas of Siam continued to practise the form of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* that involves such number-letter symbolism.³⁹ The anonymous meditation manuals of this tradition from Sri Lanka mentioned above can contribute to our understanding here. If we compare the Tai and Khmer *borān kammaṭṭhāna* meditation manuals published by Bizot (1976, 1981, 1989, 1992) and de Bernon (2000) with Sinhalese *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts we seem the same contrast. The written Sinhalese manuals do not provide the numerating parallels. At first sight, this would seem to suggest that the Sinhalese importers of the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition in the eighteenth century were indeed already reforming it as they adopted it, shearing it of its quasi-magical number identifications. However, this conjecture is patently unviable. For while the Sinhalese manuals do not *describe* the syllabic number identifications in words, they do contain diagrams of spheres with the very letters required in such identifications in order to indicate how such syllables in syllable-spheres, representative of their respective concepts, are to be placed in relation to each other in the body. These diagrams, scattered throughout the meditation manuals from Sri Lanka, make it clear that the practitioners were using such identifications during the internalisation process.⁴⁰ Moreover, the descriptions within the written manuals only make sense when one understands that the lengthy instructions rely absolutely on such identifications. Thus the Sinhala manuals also knew of and accepted the number-letter symbolism more explicitly explained in the Tai and Khmer texts. The lack of explicit expression of them in the wording of both the manuals and the *Maraṇāññasutta* may therefore rather be seen as the Sinhalese tradition being more cautious about committing the knowledge of these all-important concept-syllable equations to writing. One other option is that the Tai and

³⁸ We note that the apotropaic functions appear to have continued more widely than the soteriological functions, for the use of yantra and tattoos in Southeast Asian Buddhism draws exactly on this feature. Crosby has explored the implications of this for the labelling of such practices as magical in a paper entitled ‘*Yogāvacara* and Magic in Theravāda Buddhism’ at the EUROSEAS conference in Göteborg 26 August 2010.

³⁹ See Yasotharat (1936) and Crosby with Choempolpaisal (forthcoming) for the position of later Thai Saṅgharājas in the transmission of *borān kammaṭṭhāna*.

⁴⁰ See Crosby (2000, 2005) for a description of the *Amatākaraṇṇanā*, one of the Sri Lankan manuals in question. Crosby has unpublished editions and descriptions of these closely related manuals, which are written using different forms of abbreviation/presentation and in varying degrees of mixture of Pali and Sinhala.

Khmer traditions had this aspect less well internalised. The lack of explicit reference in the Sinhala texts could be because this numerical dimension was so familiar as to be taken for granted.

This brings us back to the phrase *bāhirakathā* ‘external discourse/discussion’ noted above, used twice in our manuscript of the *Marañāñanasutta* to describe itself. The *Pali-English Dictionary* (PED) offers “non-religious discourse”, profane story” for this term (s.v. *bāhira*) although this is belied by the content which is clearly Buddhist and soteriological in orientation. As a descriptor the term is rarely used, PED citing solely the colophon to the first chapter of the *Milindapañha*, but several interpretations seem possible here.⁴¹ The first option is that the term is used to refer to a discussion preserved ‘outside of’ the canon, i.e. an apocryphal text. For the text identifies itself as a *sutta* given by the Buddha, yet it is not included in the canon. The phrase *bāhirakathā* could possibly be in recognition of this. Secondly some guidance is offered by the usage of the term in the *Milindapañha*, where it is used to describe the first chapter in which the broad narrative context explaining the circumstances of the detailed doctrinal discourse by Nāgasena to Milinda (itself a model for Varāṇāṇa’s role in relation to his royal student, the queen) takes place. This chapter of the *Milindapañha* gives us considerably more than the usual *nidānakātha*, i.e. the (notional) occasion for a debate or discourse. It provides former life stories of the protagonists, detailed histories of their present lives and a broad assessment of their characters and accomplishments that prepare them for the doctrinal dialogue that the *Milindapañha* describes. We could therefore see the term *bāhirakathā* as indicating that the text thus described offers an account of the ‘contextual’ story or general rationale, i.e. in the case of the *Marañāñāna* we have a general rationale for the meditations being taught by Varāṇāṇa and his fellow missionaries from Ayutthayā.⁴² Alternatively, and not incompatible with the last interpretation, the phrase *bāhirakathā* could refer to a version of the text that specifically excludes secret, ‘internal’ topics, i.e. is an exoteric rather than an esoteric version of the text. The extent to which *borān yogāvacara kammaṭṭhāna* practices have been esoteric, i.e. shared only with the initiated and guarded from the non-initiated, at different stages and places in their history is not entirely clear. Certainly, their acquisition in 18th-century Sri Lanka and mid-20th-century Cambodia required multiple initiations, as can be seen from the lengthy instructions and litany provided by such texts as the *Samathavipassanā-vākkapprakaraṇa* (Crosby 1999, Chap. 6), the Sinhalese-Pali parallel of the Khmer texts published by Bizot as *Le Chemin de Laṅkā* (Bizot 1992). The *Samathavipassanā-vākkapprakaraṇa* and its attendant *Amatākaravaṇṇanā* require hundreds of rituals of initiation involving worship and an exchange of *kamma* between disciple and teacher for each of the different levels of the meditation. The post-1991 practitioners in Cambodia also restrict access, although with some flexibility.⁴³ The higher levels of intensive

⁴¹ Similarly PED cites only the *atthakathā* to the *Khuddakapāṭha* for the cognate term *bāhirakathā*, s.v. *bāhiraka*.

⁴² Horner translates the term as ‘talk on secular matters’ which seems somewhat wide of the mark given that the chapter contains contextual material that is no different from similar material found throughout the canon (Horner 1963, pp. 1, 33).

⁴³ Crosby, conversations with current monastic practitioners in Cambodia (2003).

vijjādharmakāya methods currently taught at Wat Phra Thammakay in Pathumthani are open only to those who have reached certain standards in the preliminary practices open to the broader practitioner base, and the teaching is conducted in a specially constructed complex such that the select practitioners are sequestered from the rest of the temple.⁴⁴ It seems entirely possible, then, that the text is made *bāhirakathā*, exoteric, or offered to the queen as context for the meditation practices being taught. It is certain from diagrams in the related manuals mentioned above, compiled by the monks studying meditation under Vajirañāna's colleagues, that the Sri Lankan monks were studying the 'esoteric' aspects. It is worth considering whether the fullness of the Cambodian texts that Bizot used in his work on the subject reflects the fact that they were written down relatively late, in the mid-20th century, when the methods were already under threat, and those preserving them may have feared their knowledge would be lost to posterity.⁴⁵

The Significance of the *Maraṇāñānasutta* for Our Understanding of *Borān kammaṭṭhāna*

In the meantime, the discovery of the identity of the *Maraṇāñāna* and its redactor/ translator confirms a number of things. It confirms that *borān kammaṭṭhāna* was imported by the 1755/56 mission of meditation monks following the 1753 introduction of Siyam Nikāya in a context otherwise seen as the revival of canon-based orthopraxy. *Borān kammaṭṭhāna* was therefore represented by the elite of the Saṅgha in Siam during the Ayutthaya period before it was taught by Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Theun of the Ayutthaya and Thonburi periods (Cai Yasōtharat 1936).⁴⁶ Far from being unorthodox, it was accepted by the reformist monks of Kandy under the leadership of Saraṇamkara. This gives us the first *named* Siamese monk from this period associated with *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, i.e. Varañāṇamuni. His association with other named meditation teachers in the same mission expands the named Siamese monastic practitioners into a substantial list. This updates information available in the collection of manuals published by Yasōtharat, which mentions 56 meditation

⁴⁴ Personal communication with senior monks and current practitioners at Wat Phra Thammakay, 22–23 August 2010. While relatively simple forms of the meditation are taught to mass audiences and through websites by Wat Phra Thammakay, my understanding is that we would be mistaken to assume that Luong Phor Sot, the late abbot of Wat Paknam who popularised this method, taught only a simplified version because such assessments do not take into consideration the gradation of the practice or the nature of the more advanced practices.

⁴⁵ Choompolpaisal, Skilton and Crosby now have digital images of a significant number of 18th–19th century *borān kammaṭṭhāna* manuscripts from Thailand and hope therefore to assess whether Cambodians putting their practice to paper in the twentieth were indeed more open with their knowledge.

⁴⁶ We are using what we believe to be the 6th edition. For a discussion of the different printings of this text see Crosby with Choompolpaisal, forthcoming.

monks connected to the tradition in Ayutthaya without naming any specific people (e.g. Yasōtharat 1936, p. 484).

The discovery also confirms the presence in both central Siam (Ayutthayā) and Kandy (Śrīvardhanapura⁴⁷) of a more narrative text of the *borān kammatthāna* tradition, previously only attested in Lānnā and Khmer traditions and in relatively late manuscripts. This manuscript further confirms the high-status representation of *borān kammatthāna* among senior monks and the court, further debunking suggestions made in some quarters of such practice being a modern creation or import, or a marginal practice.⁴⁸ On the contrary, *borān kammatthāna* was clearly dominant and mainstream in the pre-modern period. Its virtual disappearance in Sri Lanka, much of Thailand, Laos and, temporarily, from Cambodia, resulted from the active undermining of the broader Buddhist context (as in Sri Lanka in the nineteenth century and Laos in the 1970s) or the more specific suppression of the practice tradition itself on the part of those who would rise to power independently of those associated with it (19th–20th-century Thailand, mid-late twentieth century Cambodia).

The fact that much of the material is fairly standard, ‘orthodox’ Theravada, i.e. in conformity with canonical and *abhidhamma* materials, confirms a point that we have made elsewhere (Crosby 1999 and Choompolpaisal, Crosby and Skilton, forthcoming), namely that *borān yogāvacara kammatthāna* appears to be located not only within the mainstream Theravada practice of these relatively recent times, but within Theravada canonical and *abhidhamma* doctrine. We shall explore how to understand the apparently surprising *form* of the meditation, the internalisation of qualities into the body, within *abhidhamma* ‘orthodoxy’, elsewhere.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the sexual imagery of Māra raping Cittakumārī may conjure up associations with Vajrayāna Buddhism or tantric Hinduism, yet the imagery here is seen as entirely negative. Thus if one wishes to see a connection with non-Theravāda tantra here, one must see the relationship as one of rejection. The association of sexual intercourse with *samsāra* and the absence of any harnessing of the sexual act for spiritual or power-related attainments adds a further piece to the growing body of evidence that this tradition cannot be seen as borrowing or derivative from the tantra of either Śaivism or Mahāyāna.

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⁴⁷ Śrīvardhanapura is the name used for Kandy in our text. Liyanaratne notes the same name in the eighteenth century letter from the King of Kandy, mentioned above, and points out that Seṅkaṇḍasaīlābhīhāna Śrīvardhanapura is the early name for the city, mentioned in the *Cūlavamsa* as the residence of Vikramabāhu, who founded Kandy as a capital in the sixteenth century (Liyanaratne 1984, p. 278).

⁴⁸ See Crosby with Choompolpaisal (forthcoming), for examples of such views, and the political motivation that sometimes lies behind them.

⁴⁹ Crosby (in preparation).

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