

## DHAMMA PUZZLES

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In recent decades, the commonly accepted history of Buddhism in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia has been challenged by scholars who have brought to light a group of texts, primarily concerned with meditation, that, it has been argued, have been suppressed for nearly two hundred years and that put forward methods and views that are not strictly orthodox from a Theravādin point of view. The dust has not settled. This article presents an analysis of a short section of an illustrated manuscript in the National Library, Bangkok, arguing that the program of meditation it presents is derived from the *Visuddhimagga*, the classic 4th–5th-century textbook of Theravāda meditation. At the same time, the manuscript incorporates features that link it to such supposedly heterodox texts as the one translated from Khmer into French in 1976 as *Le Figuier à cinq branches*, and—rather more speculatively—a case will be made that the Bangkok manuscript can help establish an historical position for *Le Figuier*.

The Bangkok manuscript will be introduced in a roundabout way, in large part in order to indicate how meditation was traditionally a creative endeavor. True, texts such as the *Visuddhimagga* laid down protocols to be followed, but meditators might deviate from the prescribed rules and subsequently compose a text that might itself serve as the ground for additional innovations. In this process visual images might play as large a role as the instructions in a text.

In 1968, the Social Science Press of Thailand, then managed by Sulak Sivaraksa, published an illustrated book entitled *Teaching Dhamma by Pictures: Explanation of a Siamese Traditional Buddhist Manuscript*. This manuscript, kept at the time in Chaiya, probably dates from the late eighteenth century, and the explanations were written by the famed Buddhist teacher, practitioner, and writer the Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906–1993).<sup>1</sup> I was re-directed back to this book, which is not

<sup>1</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Teaching Dhamma by Pictures: Explanation of a Siamese Traditional Buddhist Manuscript*, trans. Sulak Sivaraksa and Donald Sweetbaum (Bangkok: Social Science Association Press, 1968). On the web site WorldCat, the author's name is given as Phra Thēpwisutthimēthī (Ngu'am). A German translation was published in 1969. There have been subsequent reprintings. Due to library closures, it has not been possible to consult the original Thai text, published as *Pritsanā tham Thai*.

well known, by an illustration of a fragmentary manuscript in the British Library.<sup>2</sup> The same scene appears in both manuscripts: an illustration of the *bhayañāna* (“Knowledge of fear”), as exemplified by the sudden appearance of a mythical lion (*rājasīha*) inside a cave where the meditation practitioner has gone for a rest. This exploration then led to the depiction of another of the *ñāna* (Knowledges) in the same manuscript, and then to a second manuscript of the same type, one that also includes a section devoted to the Supramundane Path. The effort to understand this presentation, finally, led to the challenge of describing its historical relationship to the group of texts—those variously described as Old Mahānikāya, Yogāvacara, Tantric, esoteric, and Boran Kammathan—that in recent decades has created new currents in the study of the history of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand and Cambodia. These are the topics that will be addressed successively in this article.

The last of the ten Knowledges, in the program of Vipassanā, or insight meditation, is Conformity Knowledge (*anulomañāna*; also Conformity-to-Truth, *sacca-anulomañāna*), and this is the illustration in *Teaching Dhamma* that will be examined here (Figure 1). Buddhadasa’s explanatory text reads as follows:

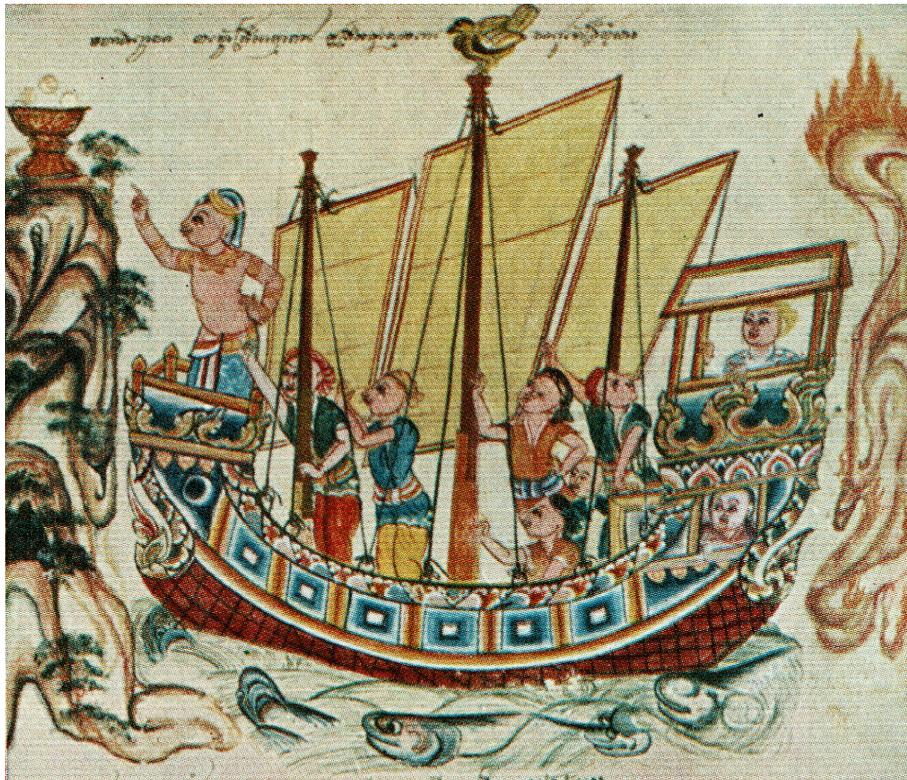


Figure 1. “Conformity Knowledge.” After Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Teaching Dhamma by Pictures* (Bangkok: Social Science Association Press, 1968), pl. 38.

<sup>2</sup> San San May and Jana Igunma, *Buddhism Illuminated: Manuscript Art from South-East Asia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 114–15; Jana Igunma and San San May, *Buddhism: Origins, Traditions and Contemporary Life* (London: British Library, 2019), 200–201. According to the British Library web site, [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=OR\\_14447\\_f001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=OR_14447_f001r), there are five illustrated pages in ms. OR 14447, evidently with illustrations of preceding or following Knowledges.

Saccānulomikā-ñāṇa. The ninth stage of knowledge derived from conformity with truth. The ship represents the body (rūpa) and the owner of the ship, standing at the bow is mind (citta).

The ship is crossing from the burning world of mortality to the other shore of Nibbāna, which is represented by the Three Gems to which the owner of the ship (mind) points. The crew and equipment aboard are the various teachings necessary to cross the seas of wandering-on in birth-and-death (saṃsāra). The Noble Eightfold Path and other necessary Dhamma such as faith (saddhā), or wisdom (paññā) are essential to guide the ship across. Of these teachings, Right View (Sammādiṭṭhi) is the most important.

The importance of right view and wisdom is shown by the bird perched atop the mast of the ship. Should the ship go astray, the bird is sent out to establish the right course. This practice of using a sea-bird for navigational purposes dates back to the time three or four thousand years ago, when compasses and other navigational instruments were not available. Steering from the stern of the ship is the captain who represents Right Mindfulness [Sammāsati].<sup>3</sup>

Since Buddhadasa does not tell us anything about the captions in the manuscript, which are written in Khom script and are more or less indecipherable in the reproductions, we might wonder how his explanations relate to them. In general, it would appear that he has noted the captions but is not interested in providing a text that explicates or reinforces them. He feels free to instruct.<sup>4</sup>

The Knowledges are the subject of Chapter XXI of the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa's exhaustive treatise on meditation, a cornerstone of Theravādin orthodoxy. The chapter begins by stating that there are eight Knowledges (beginning with the Knowledge of Rise and Fall), then goes on to add a ninth Knowledge, Saccānulomikāñāṇa, at the end of the chapter. The pre-12th-century treatise, the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*, on the other hand gives a list of ten Knowledges, adding Sammasana, Investigating Knowledge, at the beginning.<sup>5</sup> All ten appear in *Teaching Dhamma*. These differences make for a slight confusion when it comes to numeration. Buddhaghosa explains his eighth Knowledge, Saṅkhara-upekhā, Knowledge of Equanimity About Formations, as follows:

<sup>3</sup> Buddhadasa, *Teaching Dhamma*, 87.

<sup>4</sup> In the case of the Saccānulomikāñāṇa, in fact, consultation of the *Visuddhimagga* indicates that the invocation of Sammādiṭṭhi, the full realization of the Four Noble Truths and the first step in the Eightfold Path, is doctrinally more strongly associated with a Knowledge that is a step beyond the Saccānulomikāñāṇa, namely Maggañāṇa, Knowledge of the Path, which is realized when the practitioner reaches the state of a Stream Winner. Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, trans. Bhikku Ñāṇamoli (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), 706 (ch. XXII, section 45; henceforth XXII 45). In Buddhadasa, *Teaching Dhamma*, 67, plate no. 28, it is stated that the Knowledges are explained in detail in chapter XXI of the *Visuddhimagga*, but this information was apparently added by Phra Khantipalo, a British monk residing at the time at Wat Bowonniwet (see "Acknowledgements" following the title page).

<sup>5</sup> Narada Maha Thera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma Being Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha of Bhadanta Anuruddhācariya* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1968), 409, 411.

But if this [Knowledge] sees nibbāna, the state of peace, as peaceful, it rejects the occurrence of all formations [*saṅkhāra*] and enters only into nibbāna. If it does not see nibbāna as peaceful, it occurs again and again with formations as its object [*ārammaṇa*], like the sailors' crow.

When traders board a ship, it seems, they take with them what is called a land-finding crow. When the ship gets blown off its course by gales and goes adrift with no land in sight, then they release the land-finding crow. It takes off from the mast-head, and after exploring all quarters, if it sees land, it flies straight in the direction of it; if not, it returns and alights on the mast-head. So too, if knowledge about formations sees nibbāna, the state of peace, as peaceful, it rejects the occurrence of all formations and enters only into nibbāna. If it does not see it, it occurs again and again with formations as its object. (*Vism.* XXI 64-65)

What the tale makes possible is a vision of the meditator's focused mind, engrossed in the Knowledge, becoming a crow, and then forming a partnership: the crow sees land and the meditator sees Nibbāna, but at the same time the crow sees Nibbāna and the meditator sees land. This crow/mind either sees Nibbāna for what it is, peaceful, or it doesn't. The crow is shown twice; once on the mast-head, once on the shore. Nibbāna is surely symbolized by the three disks in the bowl, as Buddhadasa writes; whether they are also the Triple Gem is less clear. Buddhadasa's understanding of the scene is not drastically different from one directly informed by the tale in the *Visuddhimagga*, but the latter seemingly puts more emphasis on the meditational experience and on the projection of the mind of the meditator into the body of a crow. We don't know if Buddhadasa was aware that the story in the *Visuddhimagga* illustrated the Knowledge of Equanimity about Formations rather than Conformity Knowledge. In the *Traiphūm lōk winitchayakathā*, the cosmology compiled during the reign of King Rāma I (1783–1802), extensive translations from the *Visuddhimagga* appear, and there the crow story is placed at the end of an extensive section devoted to the Knowledge of Equanimity about Formations.<sup>6</sup>

In 2002, the National Library published *Samut phāp pritsanā tham*, a volume devoted to a manuscript of exactly the same type, with complete readings of the Khom-script captions and interpretations of the illustrations.<sup>7</sup> This manuscript, undated, was transferred from the Royal Palace to the National Library in 1938. The manuscript is in agreement with *Teaching Dhamma* that the crow is an illustration of Conformity Knowledge (Figure 2). Transcribing the Indic loan words in italics and the Thai words phonetically (here and subsequently), the caption reads:

*Anulomañāna* dut dang *samuddakākei* an nai samphao liang  
 Conformity Knowledge is like the sea-crow raised by the ship captain.

<sup>6</sup> *Traiphūm lōk winitchayakathā* (Three Realms: the World Analyzed), 3 vols. (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1977), vol. 3, 397. Buddhadasa did not hesitate to be critical of Buddhaghosa: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Patīcasamuppāda: Practical Dependent Origination* (Nonthaburi: Vuddhidhamma Fund, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Praphat Surasen, *Samut phāp pritsanā tham* (The illustrated manuscript "Dhamma Puzzles") (Bangkok: Hō Samut Hæng Chāt, Krom Sinlapakōn, 2002). I thank Dr. Samerchai Poolsuwan for sharing a pdf.

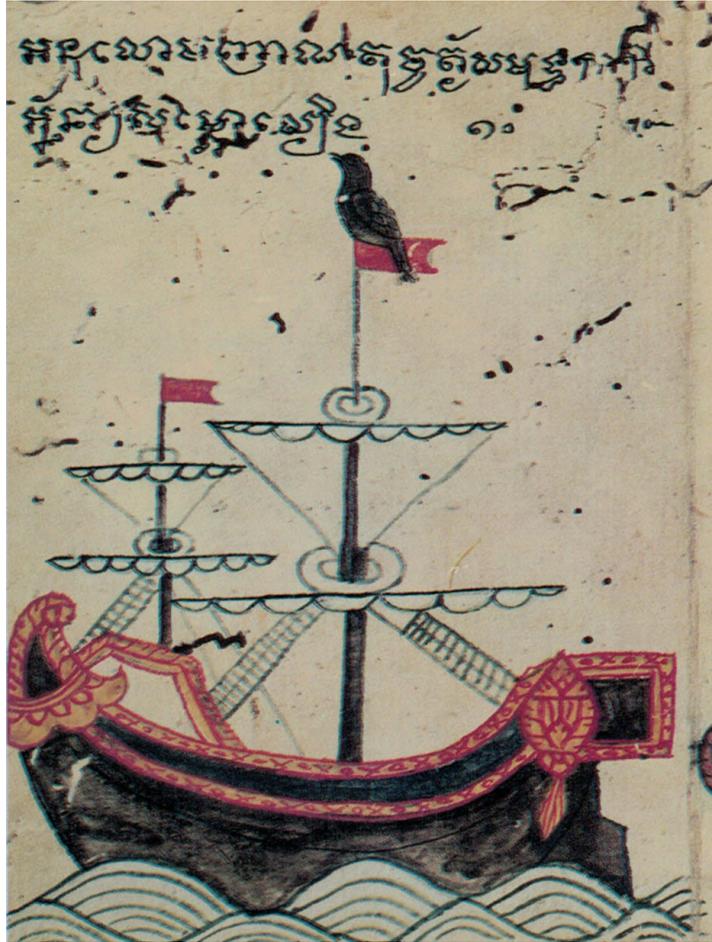


Figure 2. “Conformity Knowledge.” After Praphat Surasen, *Samut phāp pritsanā tham* (Bangkok: Hō Samut Hāng Chāt, Krom Sinlapakōn, 2002), pl. 37, p. 66.

The ship with the crow at the top of the mast is the emblem; there is no shore, no Nibbāna, no captain, steersman, or crew, no fire on the right. The words *dut dang* make it clear that this is a comparison; it would be a mistake, we are instructed, to consider the visual image the subject of the meditation. In Buddhaghosa’s text the crow is a “land-finding crow” (*disākāka*), which in this manuscript becomes female.<sup>8</sup> *Kāka* becomes *kākī*, using Indic grammatical rules. This adds a new dimension to the relationship between captain and crow, as does the fact that it has been raised, or nurtured, by the captain.

An additional example of the crow image survives in a text but not an illustration. In 1936, the monk Chot Panyo published an extensive compendium of old texts on meditation (henceforth the 1936 anthology) he had uncovered in monasteries around Thailand and in Laos. In one of the texts there is a list of the Knowledges (beginning with the Knowledge of Rise and Fall) and their associated images. Here is the description of the Conformity Knowledge:

<sup>8</sup> The Pali text was consulted on the site <http://www.palikanon.com>.

Nai hōng phra *anulomañāna* sī khao *bicāraṇā* hen *nāmarīpa* nī mūan dang kā an bin ‘ōk čhāk plāi sao kradong hæng thāi samphao an tām nām *mahāsamudra-sāgara* nan læ bō mi thīang thæ yōm prakōp pai duai *dukkha* bō mi chai tua ton læ mī *lakṣaṇa* hai ‘ōn plīa ḡup pai ḡup mā mūan hāo nōn læ<sup>9</sup>

In the room of the holy Conformity Knowledge, which is white, (the meditator) considers, seeing the constituents of the personality as like a crow flying off the top of the mast of a ship, following the waters of the great ocean; there is nothing straight; all is bound to be painful; there is no fixed identity; having a character soft and feeble, nodding up and down, as if dozing off.

The white color of the “room” is an additional meditational aid. The author of this passage appears to have no notion of the original meaning of the crow image. Maybe it was for him merely a memory device, which he did not hesitate to interpret as he saw fit. At the same time, the author may be accused of having failed to adhere to the stricture to maintain one-pointed concentration. His mind has wandered. But having recorded what can be understood as his experience, he has created a text that might serve as inspiration for even more adventurous meditation. The lesson here is that meditation, far from being bound by precise rules, could become an innovative endeavor.<sup>10</sup>

In another list of the ten Knowledges in the 1936 anthology, by Phra Mahathera Phuttharangsi of Wat Pa Daeng in Chiang Mai, the associated images in the manuscripts are more or less ignored, and the Truth Conformity Knowledge is said to be pure white, like the luminous moon.<sup>11</sup>

## THE OPENING SECTION OF THE BANGKOK MANUSCRIPT

The illustration of Conformity Knowledge in the Bangkok manuscript (Figure 2) is accompanied by a straightforward text. That is not the case in the opening section (Figures 3 and 4), where there is a sequence of twelve images, some of which have clear identifications, others whose captions consist of collections of Pali-language terms. The images are arranged at right angles to the normal placement, so that the manuscript needs to be turned sideways to read. The manuscript title is *Pritsanā Tham*, or “Dhamma Puzzles.” The word *pritsanā* (spelled *prīśnā*) is derived from Sanskrit *praśna*, “question” or “problem,” and it might seem appropriate that a

<sup>9</sup> ในห้องพระอนุโลมญาณ สีขาว พิจารณาเห็นนามรูปนี้เหมือนดังกาดันบินออกจากปลายเสากระโดงแห่งท้ายลำเภา ขึ้นตามน้ามหาสมุทรสาคร นั้นแล บมีเที่ยงแท้ ย่อมประกอบไปด้วยทุกข์ บมีโชติตัวตนแล ๆ มีลักษณะอ่อนเปลี้ยงูไป งูบมาเหมือนหาวนอนแล ๆ Phra Mahā Chotpanyo (Čhai Yasothararat), *Nangsū phuttharangsi thriisadi yān wa duai samatha læ wipatsanā kammathan sī yuk* (Book of the bold rays of the Buddha, consisting of the calming and insight meditations of the four eras) [Bangkok: Wat Baromniwat, 1936], 326. I thank Louis Gabaude for sharing a pdf.

<sup>10</sup> For their views on meditation as a creative endeavor I am grateful to Louis Gabaude and Samerchai Poolsuwan.

<sup>11</sup> Chotpanyo, *Nangsū phuttharangsi*, 151. For the identification of the author, Phibul Choompolpaisal, “Nimitta and Visual Methods in Siamese and Lao Meditation Traditions from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present Day,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 20 (2019): 152–83; 157; 160–61. The pagination in the edition cited by Phibul differs from that in the 1936 edition.

manuscript that presents so many problems of interpretation be called a “puzzle.” Nevertheless the publication does not indicate that this title comes from internal evidence; it might be a name assigned by a cataloguer.<sup>12</sup> Without this title, the subject of the manuscript would probably be considered *Kammaṭṭhāna* (“stations of action”), a program of meditation, the most orthodox of which consists of a sequence of forty.<sup>13</sup> The captions in the manuscript are not the only elements that demand interpretation; there are the disks or empty circles, the plant forms, and the matter of where, in any one image, we stand on the path to sainthood.

The accompanying charts provide a summary account of the illustrations and the texts of the captions. These texts depend entirely on the transliteration of the Khom script into Thai by Praphat Surasen in *Samut phāp pritsana tham*. It would seem that with so much information, from both captions and images, an explanation of these scenes would be relatively straightforward, but that is hardly the case. Nevertheless it is clear that the twelve scenes depict the Supramundane Path (*lokuttara magga*) and the noble persons (*ariya puṅgala*). There are tiny numbers, 1-11, written next to all the scenes (except for the wheel of existence) which suggests the existence of what will be called the Lost Text—presumably, when it is found, a meditation manual in which the content of the captions is explicated at greater length. The *Teaching Dhamma* manuscript includes depictions that correspond to numbers 6–12 in the list in the chart, including the small numbers (5–11), but these depictions are not placed in the publication at the beginning. Scenes 1–4 are missing. I suspect that originally the sequence was the same but that the opening page of the manuscript was irreparably damaged, as is frequently the case.<sup>14</sup>

Captions 1–4 all contain the Pali words *lobha dosa moha* and so therefore can be grouped together. Greed, hate, and delusion are the three immoral roots. Among the factors that form the personality they play a special role because they not only number among fourteen unwholesome mental factors within the family of Feeling, but as roots, they serve to fortify twelve unwholesome consciousnesses that are grouped in the Consciousness family.<sup>15</sup> They are preceded in #1 and #2 by words that refer to Buddhist cosmology: *kāma* (-bhava), or *kāma* (-bhūmi), the Realm (or World) of Sense Desires; *rūpa*, the World of Pure Form, and *arūpa*, the Formless World. The other term in all four of these captions is *nirodha*, extinction; initially it might be regarded cosmologically, as

<sup>12</sup> *Pritsanā Tham* is the title of two texts in Chotpanyo, *Nangsūi phuttharangsi*, 348–68. Both are questions or questions-and-answers. Nineteenth-century murals at Wat Bowonniwet and Wat Boromniwat are also titled *Pritsanā Tham*, meaning that they display symbols that are explained in accompanying texts. See Suthā Linawat, *Kānsūksā sanyalak nai chittrakampbāp pritsanā tham khōng nikāi thammayut* (A study of symbols in dhamma-puzzle murals of the Thammayut sect) (Bangkok: Piriya Krairiksh Foundation, 2012). I thank Dr. Piriya Krairiksh.

<sup>13</sup> These forty are the organizing principle in Sarah Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology of Texts from the Pāli Canon* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Buddhadasa, *Teaching Dhamma*, 11: “The sequence of the illustrations has been re-arranged here, for a more lucid presentation.” According to a statement on the book jacket, the illustrations were arranged in two groups, the first showing attachment to Samsāra, the second the practices leading to enlightenment and Nibbāna. Numbers 6–9 appear as pl. 42, 94–95, introduced as “This is another way of explaining the four stages of knowledge leading to Nibbāna.” Numbers 10–12 are in pl. 43, 96–97.

<sup>15</sup> I am grateful for the clarity of the presentation in Sayadaw U Silānandabhivamsa, “Well-Informed Buddhist” (Tathagata Meditation Center, San Jose CA, 2014; on line at [http://www.tathagata.org/sites/default/files/Well-Informed\\_Buddhist.pdf](http://www.tathagata.org/sites/default/files/Well-Informed_Buddhist.pdf), accessed 29 August 2020), pp.43–44 and 56–57.



Figure 3. The Supramundane Path, scenes 1–6. Begins at the lower left, and then moves up. Right-hand column, from the bottom: scene 4; (5) the Wheel of Samsāra; (6) Stream Winner. After Prapbat Surasen, Samut phāp pritsanā tham, 12.

Number	Marked number	Position of circle	Posture	Other	Caption
1.	1	overhead	standing, grasps plant		<i>nirodha arūpa rūpa lobha dosa moha*</i>
2.	2	above, on pole	standing		<i>bhava kāma bhava nirodha lobha dosa moha</i>
3.	3	above, on pole	seated		<i>nirodha lobha dosa moha</i>
4.	4	above, on pole	standing		<i>nirodhasacca lobha dosa moha</i>
5. A wheel, with captions that can be translated, “This is the wheel of saṃsāra, as it moves, you die, you’re born, you go, you come,” and then around the wheel “birth, old age, sickness, death”					
6.	5	overhead	standing, grasps lotus-bearing plant		<i>dai sotā nirodhasacca nirodhasacca</i> “Having become a Stream Winner; Truth of Extinction, Truth of Extinction”

\* The manuscript appears to have *nirodha arūpava pari*. Along with Prapbat, I take *pari* as an inadvertent mistake for *rūpa*. The stray *v* is a problem; perhaps it is supposed to stand for *arūpavacara*, “belonging to the immaterial sphere.”

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Figure 4. The Supramundane Path, scenes 7–12. Left-hand column, from the bottom: (7) Change of Lineage Knowledge; (8) Stream Winner; (9) Stream Winner. Right-hand column, from the bottom: (10) Once Returner; (11) Never Returner; (12) Arahatta. After Praphat Surasen, Samut phâp pritsanâ tham, 13.

Number	Marked number	Position of circle	Posture	Other	Caption
7.	6	in palm of outstretched hand	standing, arm outstretched		gotrabhūā(nā) yip chū wai “Change of Lineage Knowledge; having grasped and lifted”
8.	7	overhead, between palms	standing		dai sota nirodhasacca “Having become a Stream Winner; Truth of Extinction”
9.	8	Between palms, in front of face	kneeling		thūng sota nang katuk nirodhasacca “Having become a Stream Winner, sitting, jerking; Truth of Extinction”
10.	9		standing, hand touches stem of flowering plant		thəng sakadaga mā ket jāti (for jāti) nī “Having become a Once Returner, come to be born this life”
11.	10	on the pedestal	seated in meditation	in monk's robes	thəng anāga bō mi dai _____ samuddha _____ “Having become a Never Returner, never . . . ocean . . .”
12.	11	Replaced by gem, in palm	reclining	in monk's robes	thəng arabatta tat bapa dhamma thang puang sia lao dai pen brah ariya læ atisukha “Having become an Arahatta, cutting off sinful factors entirely, becoming someone noble and supremely blissful.”

\* This is the one caption where the reading and meaning are uncertain. Praphat read the Khom-script letters as follows:  
 thōñanāgā p̄midaimāṣssmuddhdulk  
 Three of the consonants, the first *m*, the second *s* (which also could be a *y* [I thank Ashley Thompson]), and the *dh* in *smuddh* are written as sub-script consonants. Praphat's modern Thai rendering is  
 ถือนานา นมิดำยสสมุดดหุลก  
 Phonetically:  
 Thūng 'anākhā bō mi dai mā tat samuttha thulaka  
 “Having become a Never Returner, never coming (back), cutting off the ocean . . .”  
 There is no known word *dulk* / *thulaka*, and Praphat did not attempt to explain it. Thomas Hudak (in email messages) has suggested that *māṣ* could stand for *māt sia* អាតស៊ី and that a line through the *l* of *dulk* indicates an erasure, leaving *thukka* for *dukka* ពុក, suffering. That would lead to the translation  
 “Having become a Never Returner, never again fixing his mind on the ocean of suffering.”

a fourth realm, but then in #4, with *nirodhasacca*, it is clear that it is the third of the Four Noble Truths, the Truth of Extinction.

Some of the different ways these terms can be understood will become clearer later in this paper, but probably they should be regarded as extractions from some longer text, or possibly from canonical scriptures, and understood as providing snapshots of the meditator's consciousness, not here focused on one thing but embracing a range of topics. The place of greed, hate, and delusion can to some degree be mapped by reference to a Pali text called the *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha*, written in Chiang Mai in 1534 by Ratanapaññā, quite probably the same Ratanapaññā who composed the Buddhist history the *Jinakālamāli*. The *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha* has recently been exhaustively studied by Javier Schnake.<sup>16</sup> It contains a number of heart formulas (*hua chai* หัวใจ, "head heart"), sequences of phonemes, each of which stands for a word; they could be called acronym-like mantras. One of these is *sa lo sī do pa mo*, which stands for *samādhi lobba sīla dosa paññā moha*.<sup>17</sup> Clearly this sequence of terms has a kinship with *nirodha arūpa rūpa lobba dosa moha* and the following three captions in the manuscript. On the other hand it has a clear meaning: concentration destroys greed, morality destroys hate, and wisdom destroys delusion. It could be that the captions have equally clear meanings; it is just that the text clarifying the meanings has not been identified.

In another section of the *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha* appears a brief psychological analysis that offers a way to connect *lobba*, *dosa*, and *moha* with the levels of the cosmos. Ordinary people (those not yet on the Supramundane Path) are a combination of six different motivations (*betu*): *lobba*, *dosa*, and *moha* and their absence, *alobba*, *adosa*, and *amoha*. It is necessary to have all three of the favorable motivations in order to enter the first Jhāna, at the lowest level of the World of Pure Form; before then, one is confined to the World of Sense Desires.<sup>18</sup>

This invocation of the *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha* raises methodological issues. It could be argued that an interpretation of the Bangkok manuscript should be postponed until the Lost Text, or something comparable among the thousands of Buddhist manuscripts awaiting discovery and

<sup>16</sup> Javier Schnake, "Letters and Numbers: Protective Aspects in the *Vajirasārattha-saṅgaha*," in *Katā me rakkhā, katā me parittā: Protecting the Protective Texts and Manuscripts*, ed. Claudio Cicuzza (Bangkok and Lumbini: Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation and Lumbini International Research Institute, 2018), 157–95; Schnake, *Le Dhamma par le jeu d'esprit et de la langue: le Vajirasaratthasaṅgaha, texte pâli du Nord de la Thaïlande (XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris: Université Paris sciences et lettres, 2018). Downloaded from <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-02141367/document>.

<sup>17</sup> Schnake, "Letters and Numbers," 165–66; Schnake writes (p. 160, n. 8) that heart formulas are often referred to as mantras in Western studies but that he prefers the Thai terminology. The same point was made in 2012 by Peter Skilling: "These are often described as 'mantra' in some European studies, but it seems better to retain the terminology of the traditions." See "At the Heart of Letters: Akṣara and Akkhara in Thai Tradition," in *80 That Phon Tri Mōm Rāchawang Suphawit Kasemsri*, ed. Weerawan Ngamsantikul (Bangkok: Deuan Tula, 2012), 436 n. 8. In a master's dissertation Ake Nakornthab quoted a 1992 publication by Phaya Upakit Sinlapasan stating that heart formulas were initially mnemonic devices that came to be regarded as having intrinsic powers and used as mantras. See Ek Nākhōnthap, *Kansūksā lak khamsōn phutthasāsanā thi prakot nai lekyan thai / A study of Buddhist Teachings as Appeared in Thai Yantra*, Mahachulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 2017, 104 (downloaded from <http://mcupress.mcu.ac.th/userfiles/file/วิทยานิพนธ์/ปริญญาโท/พระพุทธศาสนา/2560/MCU600202208.pdf>). Since there are heart formulas in which the syllables do not have a phonetic connection with a text, the terminology is an open question. More examples are presented in Peter Skilling, "Calligraphic Magic: Abhidhamma Inscriptions from Sukhodaya," *Buddhist Studies Review* 35.1–2 (2018): 161–87.

<sup>18</sup> Schnake, *Le Dhamma*, vol. 3, 347–48, 369.

analysis, is found. Or, perhaps, no one but a specialist should attempt an interpretation. The study of the *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha* indicates that it had many different textual sources; it is unlikely, it could be said, that so much in the manuscript under study, as will be seen, can be traced back to a single text, the *Visuddhimagga*. The response to these objections is that all scholarship is a work in progress.

Number 5 is the wheel of *saṃsāra*, which will be discussed later. Captions 6, 8, and 9, all contain the words *nirodhasacca*—twice in #6, possibly suggesting that spoken repetition was part of the practice. Captions 6–12 differ from the first four because they include Thai-language verbs, primarily *thiing* ឹង (or in an alternative spelling *thæng* ឹង), reach, and *dai* ใต้, obtain. Like numbers 1–4, numbers 9–12 can also be grouped together. The captions refer to the four stages in the Supramundane Path to sainthood: *sotā[-panna or -pattī]*, the Stream Winner;<sup>19</sup> *sakadāgā[-mī]*, the Once Returner (to a rebirth in this world); *anāgā[-mī]*, the Never Returner; and the *arahatta*, the arahatta, arahant, saint. If both #1–4 and #9–12 are groups, that leaves numbers 5–8, which, it will be argued here, can be considered transitional. To understand them, as well as the sequence as a whole, and its relationship to the practice of meditation as found in other sources, it is necessary to review a variety of texts and then incorporate an analysis of the images into the interpretation.

## THE TEXTS

As in the case of the Knowledges, the most crucial text is the *Visuddhimagga*, even when recognizing the role of the Lost Text. To understand the *Pritsanā Tham*, it is necessary to grasp the position in the *Visuddhimagga* of the Earth Kaṣina, the initial meditation device that remains a foundation for meditational exercises of many sorts. The ten *kaṣina* are the meditation subjects or “totalities” (the four elements, the four colors, light, and space), and the first, the earth, becomes a tool, the Earth Kaṣina, made by the practitioner by smearing mud onto a flat surface in the shape of a disk, about six inches in diameter.<sup>20</sup> The practitioner stares at the Earth Kaṣina and concentrates his mind (this can be reinforced by exclaiming “Earth!”) until he is able to retain a vivid image even when his eyes are closed. This is called the *uggaha nimitta*, the learning sign. Focusing on the learning sign suppresses unhealthy tendencies, and at a certain point the *paṭibhāga nimitta* (the Counterpart Sign) “appears as if breaking out from the learning sign, and a hundred times, a thousand times more purified” (*Vism.* IV 31). Through subsequent processes of expansion the counterpart sign leads to *upacāra samādhi*, access concentration, which gives way in turn to absorption, *appanā samādhi* (*Vism.* IV 34, IV 126). And absorption is equivalent to the First Jhāna, the meditative state or “absorption” physically located at the bottom of the material (*rūpa*) world. Buddharaṅsī, the Chiang Mai *mahāthera* already quoted, simplified it somewhat: “after you have

<sup>19</sup> I retain *Stream Winner* because of its familiarity. According to Peter Masefield, *Divine Revelation in Pali Buddhism* (London: Routledge, 2013), 134, the actual meaning is “one who has come into contact (or undergone) the hearing.” I thank Nicolas Revire.

<sup>20</sup> Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, *Ānāpānasati (Mindfulness of Breathing)*, trans. Bhikkhu Nāgasena (Bangkok: Sublime Life Missions, 1971), 82.

truly seen the *paṭibhāga nimitta* as pure white you can request entry into the First Jhāna.”<sup>21</sup>

Other parts of the *Visuddhimagga* will be discussed at length further on. Some of these chapters appear in Thai translation in the Rāma I cosmology, *Traiphūm lok winitchayakathā*. In the 14<sup>th</sup>-century cosmology, the *Traiphūm Phra Ruang*, brief accounts of the Supramundane Path appear near the end of the text because the upper reaches of the cosmos, the Formless Realm in particular, are knowable only through meditation.<sup>22</sup> In the Rāma I *Traiphūm* this need became an excuse for including extensive excerpts from the *Visuddhimagga* in translation.

The introductory chapter of the Rāma I *Traiphūm* is also worthy of note. It has a section devoted to the *ariya puggala*, dwelling on the pairing of two phases, path (*magga*) and fruit (*phala*), for Stream Winner, Once Returner, Never Returner, and Arahatta. The eight phases appear as the introductory illustration in the illustrated *Traiphūm* of the Thonburi and early Bangkok periods (Figure 5). Captions identify all eight figures. The *phala* phase is denoted by a rare gesture, arms raised upward. One of the mystical-tradition texts that have come to light in recent decades, the Khmer-language *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhān*, known in translation as *Le figuier à cinq branches*, may provide an explanation. The raised arms accompany an exclamation.<sup>23</sup> Most likely, the same gesture is seen again in *Pritsanā Tham*, no. 8 (Figure 4). Another point of connection is the disk or circle seen in the hands of the Fruition-phase Arahatta (Figure 5, upper right), which looks very like the disks depicted in *Pritsanā Tham*.<sup>24</sup> That is a matter that will be addressed below. At any rate, the placement of the eight figures at the very beginning of the cosmological treatise can be said to parallel the placement of the Supramundane Path in *Pritsanā Tham*.

The remaining texts belong to a mystical tradition that has not been entirely absorbed by historians of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. *Manual of a Mystic Being a Translation from the Pāli and Sinhalese Work Entitled The Yogāvachara's Manual*, which appeared in 1916, has an appendix by D. B. Jayatilaka (1868–1944), in which he recounted the missions that led to monks from Ayutthaya carrying texts to Sri Lanka in the mid-18th century, and then gave his reasons for believing that the *Manual's* origins lay in Siam.<sup>25</sup> The manual is a course of meditation, *Kammaṭṭhāna*. The Ten Knowledges are given a concrete mental focus by connecting each with one of the four elements in turn (earth, water, fire, and wind), and some visual images are provided (“lions, tigers and devils” for Fear, but no crow).

The very last part concerns the Supramundane Path, and it corresponds to the depictions of the Ariya Puggala seen in Figure 5. There are nine supramundane states in all; one becomes a Stream

<sup>21</sup> Chotpanyo, *Nangsū phuttharangsī*, 153.

<sup>22</sup> Frank E. Reynolds and Mani B. Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1982), 331-48.

<sup>23</sup> François Bizot, *Le Fiquier à cinq branches*, *Recherches sur le bouddhisme khmer*, I (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1976), 96. “Ensuite lever les mains et saluer une seule fois: [C'est ce que] que l'on appelle atteindre la voie de l'Arahant (*arahattamagga*). . . .”

<sup>24</sup> Barend Jan Terwiel, “The City of Nibbāna in Thai Picture Books of the Three Worlds,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 20 (2019): 184–99, Figures 6 and 8.

<sup>25</sup> F. L. Woodward, *Manual of a Mystic*, ed. Mrs Rhys Davids (orig. publ. London, 1916); rpt. Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2003, 150.

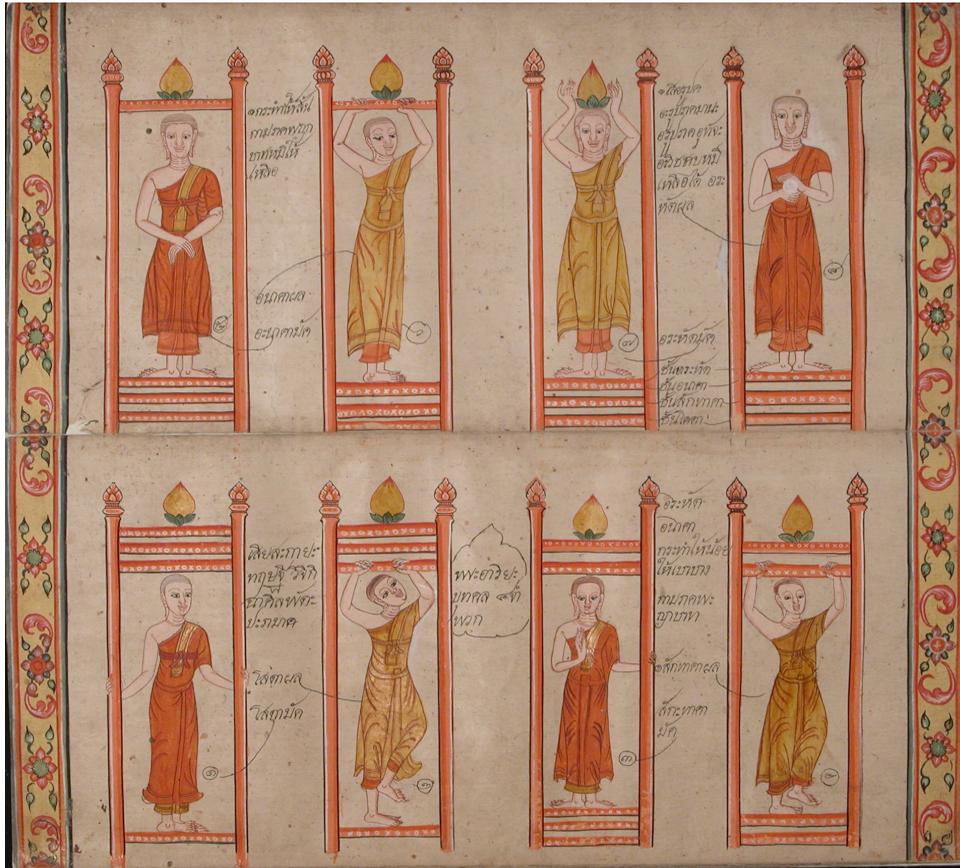


Figure 5. The Supramundane Path, beginning with the Stream Winner, lower left. Traiphūm, dated 1776, bpk Bildagentur / Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany / Art Resource, NY (number II 650 V006-V007).

Winner, Once Returner, Never Returner, and Arahatta (four); then the fruit of each is experienced (another four); then Nibbāna is reached (making nine). As with the Knowledges, an element is associated with each state. There is an additional feature of considerable importance. The complete meditational sequences relating to each state are placed inside the body, each in a different spot. The process is initiated with the statement at the very beginning of the section, “I earnestly ask to attain in the inmost shrine of my being [antogabbha] the mark of upholding [uggahanimitta, the learning sign], the image of the mark [paṭibhāganimitta, the counterpart sign], the way of access (upacāraṇidhi, access concentration), the way of ecstatic concentration [appanāsamādhividhi, absorption] and, of the four paths, the path of entering the stream.”<sup>26</sup> These are the four steps that have already been reviewed, as found in the *Visuddhimagga*. Placement of the sequences, or of other qualities, inside the body does not feature in the *Visuddhimagga*, however, and is sometimes considered an identifying characteristic of the mystical tradition.

<sup>26</sup> F. L. Woodward, *Manual*, 135; Pāli text from T. W. Rhys Davids, *The Yogavacara's Manual of Indian Mysticism* (London: Pali Text Society, 1896; rpt. LaVergne TN USA; BiblioLife, 2009), 98 and translation as it appears in the Introduction, p. XI.

The Pali and Sinhalese text of *The Yogāvacara's Manual* had originally been published in 1896, and T. W. Rhys Davids added “of *Indian Mysticism*” at that time because he believed that the practice of Jhāna was inherently mystical.<sup>27</sup> Mrs. Rhys Davids, in her introduction to the 1916 translation, questioned the usage because she believed that Western mysticism implied some sort of union with a divinity, while Theravāda Buddhism was not a theistic religion. Both assumptions could be questioned today, yet the term *mysticism* might well be valid for somewhat different reasons, namely that the installation into the body of the meditational steps leading to Sainthood implies a mystical identity.

It was not until 1976 that a Southeast Asian text with an apparent relationship to *The Yogāvacara's Manual* was published. This was the Khmer text *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhāna* (Roots of Kammaṭṭhāna, or maybe Basic Kammaṭṭhāna), translated as *Le figuier à cinq branches* (The Fig Tree with Five Branches), which has already been mentioned.<sup>28</sup> This was the first of a series of publications by François Bizot with the overall title “Recherches sur le bouddhisme khmer.” Eventually there were to be five “Recherches,” which were followed by three “Textes bouddhiques.” Bizot found manuscripts of texts in Cambodia and, eventually, in Laos and northern Thailand, that he believed represented traditions that had been suppressed by reform Buddhists and overlooked by Western scholars. The downloading of divine qualities in the *Yogāvacara's Manual* is paralleled by the placement of the Triple Gem in the body in the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhāna*, the Saṅgha, for instance, becoming associated with the heart, the *tuon cit*—in French the “globe vital.”<sup>29</sup> This word *tuon* appears frequently in the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhāna*, especially in the expression *tuon kèv* (equivalent to Thai *duang kao* ดวงแก้ว), globe of crystal. In the text, these globes, containing letters and standing for various ideal entities—the Triple Gem, texts, elements, Perfections—are hidden inside of the figs of a fig tree; the Mind (*cit*, or *citta*) must seize them if Nibbāna is to be reached. Much more about this text (versions have which have been found in Northern Thailand and in Sri Lanka) and about “globes” will be found on subsequent pages.<sup>30</sup>

From the beginning, the question of terminology has bedeviled the study of the mystical tradition in Southeast Asia. In *Le Fiquier*, Bizot used the term “ancien Mahānikay,” drawing on the name of the older Buddhist sect in both Cambodia and Thailand (the newer sect, established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, being the Dhammayutika). This raised the question of whether he meant all Mahānikaya or simply one portion of it, and the term tends not to appear in subsequent writings. He also used Tantric and *yogāvacar*, meaning the Cambodian practitioner (distinguishable from the

<sup>27</sup> Rhys Davids, *The Yogāvacara's Manual*, XX.

<sup>28</sup> Bizot, *Le Fiquier*. For a discussion of the range of meanings of *mūla*, F. Bizot, *Le Chemin de Lan̄kā* (Paris – Chiang Mai – Phnom Penh: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1992), 34-35. It is possible to consider a text published in the intervening years as belonging to the mystical tradition: G. Cœdès, “Dhammakāya,” *The Adyar Library Bulletin* 20.3-4 (1956), 248-86. *Fiquier*, fig, Khmer *lvā / lovea* Thai *dūa* เต้า. Bizot, *Fiquier*, 74n, identified as *ficus racemosa*. *Ficus hispida* is another possibility. See Tem Smitinand, *Thai Plant Names* (Bangkok: Sa-nguan Likhasit, 1980), 152-53.

<sup>29</sup> Bizot, *Le Fiquier*, 99.

<sup>30</sup> François Lagirarde, “Textes bouddhiques du pays khmer et du Lanna: un exemple de parenté,” in F. Bizot, *Recherches nouvelles sur le Cambodge* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1994), 63-77; Kate Crosby, Andrew Skilton, and Amal Gunasena, “The *Sutta on Understanding Death* in the Transmission of *Borān* Meditation from Siam to the Kandyian Court,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40 (2012): 177-98.

*yogāvacara*, the practitioner who appears in the *Visuddhimagga*). In later works, the negative appellation “non-Mahāvihāra” is sometimes the term of choice, to indicate a tradition outside the Sri Lankan bastion of Theravādin orthodoxy, with its adherence to the teachings of the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Abhidhammatha Saṅgaha*. When the British Buddhistologist Kate Crosby came to write a thorough summary of Bizot’s publications in 2000, she chose the words *Tantric* and *yogāvacara*: “Tantric Theravāda: A Bibliographic Essay on the Writings of François Bizot and Others on the Yogāvacara Tradition.”<sup>31</sup> Crosby’s interest had been stimulated by her Ph.D. project, on Sri Lankan manuscripts in the British Library that could be linked to *The Yogāvacara’s Manual*.

Since 2000, Crosby’s career has been devoted to the study of the mystical tradition in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, and in 2013 she introduced a new term, *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, prefacing *kammaṭṭhāna* with a phonetically transcribed Thai word meaning “ancient” (one derived from Pali *purāṇa*, old).<sup>32</sup> The two words together sound weird to anyone who knows some Thai because ordinarily one would say *kammathan borān*. The term is also used, in various spellings, by Crosby’s colleagues and collaborators, Andrew Skilton and Phibul Choompolpaisal.<sup>33</sup> “Boran kammathan” is a useful term because of its artificiality: it means whatever Crosby, Skilton, and Phibul say it means. By and large, according to their most recent publications (in *Contemporary Buddhism*, vol. 20), they appear to think that not all old-tradition meditation was “boran kammathan,” that “boran kammathan” has definable limits, and that within “boran kammathan” there were various schools of practice and a number of lineages.<sup>34</sup> There are many other terms that could be brought into play: “unorthodox” or “heterodox,” as opposed to “orthodox;” “esoteric” as opposed to “exoteric;” “Old Meditation;” “Old-School Meditation;” “Old-Text Meditation.”

Crosby, Skilton, and Phibul have also written about survivals (notably, at Wat Ratchasittharam) and revivals of mystic traditions in Thailand.<sup>35</sup> Significant among the latter is the Dhammakaya

<sup>31</sup> Kate Crosby, “Tantric Theravāda: A Bibliographic Essay on the Writings of François Bizot and Others on the Yogāvacara Tradition,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 1:2 (2000): 141–98, 141. There is also a helpful summary of Bizot’s work in Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 95–104. For an introductory overview, Nathan McGovern, “Esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia,” online, Oxford Research Encyclopedias, published Oct. 2017. Also Kate Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity, and Identity* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2014), 141, 146-48, 157-59.

<sup>32</sup> Kate Crosby, *Traditional Theravāda Meditation and its Modern-Era Suppression* (Hong Kong: Buddha-Dharma Centre of Hong Kong, 2013), 3–4. Kate Crosby, *Esoteric Theravada: the Story of the Forgotten Meditation Tradition of Southeast Asia* was published in December 2020, after the completion of this article.

<sup>33</sup> In the *Khamnam* (foreword) to Chotpanyo, *Nangsū phuttharangsi* (unpaginated), there is a mention of *porāṇācārya* / *borānācāhān*, “professors of olden times,” a well-established word having the terms in Indic order. I have not encountered a “boran kammathan.” Cf. Phibul, “Nimitta,” 154.

<sup>34</sup> Many Thai programs of *kammaṭṭhāna*, old texts reveal, begin with the five *pīti*, happinesses or raptures, as does *The Yogāvacara’s Manual*. Here is an instance of Skilton arguing with himself concerning the boundaries of *boran kammathan*: “I would go so far as to say that any text that opens its account of meditation with (or simply includes) a discussion of *pīti* as a *kammaṭṭhāna* belongs to the *boran kammathan* tradition, although I would not go so far as to say that the absence of *pīti* excludes it.” (Also, in this instance, he writes *tradition* rather than *traditions*.) Andrew Skilton, “Meditation and its Subjects: Tracing *kammaṭṭhāna* from the Early Canon to the *Boran Kammathan* Traditions of Southeast Asia,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 20, nos. 1–2 (2019): 36–72, 58.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Skilton and Phibul Choompolpaisal, “The Old Meditation (*boran kammathan*), a Pre-Reform Theravāda

movement, based on the teachings of Luang Pho Sodh (1884-1959), who was trained at Wat Ratchasittharam and also made use of a text (one included in the 1936 anthology) by Suk Kai Thüan (1733-1822), Supreme Patriarch in the early Bangkok period.<sup>36</sup> Luang Pho Sodh's *Samatha Vipassanā Meditation*, which is available online in both Thai and English, is a valuable text because—among other reasons—it gives explicit instructions about recitations, which must once have been a substantial part of the practice but are hard to reconstruct on the basis of texts alone.<sup>37</sup>

One text that stands apart from the *kammaṭṭhāna* practices discussed so far is a protective *paritta*, the Pali-language *Jinapañjara*, Armor of the Conqueror Buddhas, one page in length and widely recited today in Thailand (but also known in Sri Lanka). The twenty-eight Buddhas of the past are fixed on the speaker's head, the dhamma is in his eyes, and, among the disciples, one is in his heart, and others are in his ears. "I dwell in the Victors' cage [or armor], protected by the power of the true Dhamma."<sup>38</sup> In his discussion of this text in his 2011 book, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand*, Justin Thomas McDaniel recognized that there are connections with the texts published by Bizot, but he was not interested in making specific comparisons. Not only do the texts belong to different realms, one to the world of popular Buddhism, the other to solitary pursuits in monasteries, but in McDaniel's view, there has always been a great variety of practices in Theravāda communities, and the popularity of the *Jinapañjara* disproves Bizot's contention that texts proclaiming beliefs like those in this *paritta* have been suppressed.<sup>39</sup> Although the origin of the *paritta* is not known for sure, the placement of twenty-eight Buddhas on or in the head in the opening stanzas brings to mind 13th-century Buddha images from Thailand in which the Buddhas of the past appear over the head in the leaves of an aureole.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, in 1994, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism, Roger R. Jackson, had published in an obscure journal an article entitled "A Tantric Echo in Sinhalese Theravāda? *Pirit* Ritual, the

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Meditation System from Wat Ratchasittharam," *Aséanie* 33 (June 2014): 83–116.

<sup>36</sup> Potprecha Cholvijarn, "The Origins and Development of Sammā Arahāṃ Meditation: From Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro) to Phra Thep Yan Mongkhon (Sermchai Jayamangalo)," Dissertation, University of Bristol, November 2019 (accessible on line from Academia.edu.), 1-10.

<sup>37</sup> Mongkol-Thepmuni, Venerable Phra (Sodh Candasaro), *Samatha Vipassanā Meditation in Accordance with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness to Dhammakāya* Included in *A Study Guide for Samatha-Vipassanā Meditation Based on the Five Meditation Techniques* (Ratchaburi: The National Coordination Center of Provincial Meditation Institute of Thailand, 2012), 5-1 – 5-206. Available on line as a GoogleBook. Thai-language version, *Lak læ wihī samatha læ wipatsanā būang ton thiing thammakāi*, 5-1 – 5-202, in *Khū mū patibat samathawipatsanākammathan 5 sāi* (Ratchaburi: Wat Luang Phō Sot Thammakāyārām, 2010). Also accessible on line.

<sup>38</sup> Petra Kieffer-Pülz, "Extra-canonical *Parittas*: The *Jinapañjara*, *Jayapañjara* and *Mahajinapañjara*," in *Saddharmamṛtam: Festschrift für Jens-Uwe Hartmann zu seinem 65.*, ed. Oliver von Criegern, Gudrun Melzer, and Johannes Schneider (Wien: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien, 2018), 238 (231–250). Cf. Justin Thomas McDaniel, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 78–80. For a discussion of related texts, Nicolas Revire, "Buddhas of the Past and of the Future: Southeast Asia," *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, vol. 2, *Lives* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 109–20.

<sup>39</sup> For McDaniel's view of the work of Bizot, *The Lovelorn Ghost*, 100–109.

<sup>40</sup> For some of these images, Hiram W. Woodward, Jr., "The Bayon-Period Buddha Image in the Kimbell Art Museum," *Archives of Asian Art* 32 (1979): 72–83. McDaniel was inclined to put the origin in Sri Lanka, in about the 15<sup>th</sup> century: *The Lovelorn Ghost*, p. 88 and n. 21, p. 245. The question is not addressed in Petra Kieffer-Pülz's article.

Book of *Paritta*, and the *Jinapañjaraya*.”<sup>41</sup> Jackson’s sophisticated discussion of the Tantric elements in the text was unknown to McDaniel, and has remained unrecognized by Kate Crosby and her associates. Not being a meditation text, the *Jinapañjaraya* has nothing about visualizations, but the placement of divine qualities in the body raises questions about its relationship to the texts of the mystical tradition.

## THE MEDITATOR’S PATH

The time has now come to endeavor to interpret the twelve scenes depicted in Figures 3 and 4. Despite the speculative nature of many of the identifications, I shall try to avoid expressions like “might be” and “it could be argued that.” It will be seen that the Lost Text upon which these scenes depended apparently combined paths that were based on Vipassana (Insight) meditation, through the Ten Knowledges, on one hand, and on Samatha (Calming) meditation, beginning with the Earth Kaṣina, on the other. Also conflated were two distinct transformative points: first, the entry into the World of Form and the First Jhāna, and, second, the entry into the Formless World and the Fifth Jhāna.

Let us start with the middle section, which begins with the wheel at number 5. Crucial is number 7, *gotrabhūñāna*, Change of Lineage Knowledge, the subject of *Visuddhimagga* XXII 1—14. It interrupts the flow from one state to the next because it involves the acquisition of a new self and the obliteration, so to speak, of all the DNA one was born with. “Change of Lineage knowledge’s seeing the clear Nibbāna when the murk that concealed the truths has disappeared is like the man’s seeing the clear moon in the sky free from cloud” (*Vism.* XXII 9). It follows the Conformity Knowledge discussed in the first section above, and it is associated with the Stream Winner stage. This association must account for the depiction of the Stream Winner at numbers 6 and 8, on either side of Change of Lineage.

Change of Lineage Knowledge makes it possible for the Path to pierce and explode “the mass of greed, the mass of hate, and the mass of delusion never pierced and exploded before” (*Vism.* XXII 11). So the *lobba dosa moha* (greed, hate, and delusion) present in numbers 1-4 are at this point destroyed. At XXII 12, Buddhaghosa inserted one of his illustrative examples: this is like a man shooting an arrow from a revolving platform. “Revolving platform” is the interpretation by the translator, Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, of “wheel contrivance,” *cakkayanta*. But in this manuscript, clearly, *cakkayanta* was understood to be a yantra in the form of a wheel, that is, the wheel of *saṃsāra*. Escape from *saṃsāra* is the platform for the destruction of greed, hate, and delusion. There is no little number in this scene, suggesting that if the wheel was mentioned in the Lost Text, it was not considered to constitute a stage of meditation distinct from Change of Lineage Knowledge or becoming a Stream Winner. It should probably be understood as having an emblematic role; it is an image extracted from the text, somewhat in the way syllables are extracted from words in heart

<sup>41</sup> *Dhīb—Journal of Rare Buddhist Texts Research Project* 18 (1994): 121–40. I was alerted to the article by the writings of Jeffrey Sundberg, accessible online at Academia.edu, but it is cited in the articles by Kieffer-Pülz and Revire.

formulas.

Moving now to the very beginning of the section, it is time to identify the circles. They have a long but quite precise name: *kaṣiṇuggghaṭṭimākāsanimitta*, “the sign (*nimitta*) of the space (*ākāsa*) left by the removal of the Kaṣiṇa” (*Vism.* X 8-9).<sup>42</sup> The practitioner is in the Fourth Jhāna, still in the confines of the World of Form, and starts up the meditative process, beginning once more with the Earth Kaṣiṇa. But since the Earth is inherently material, he can’t very well achieve Immaterial Sphere Consciousness (*arūpāvacaracitta*) while thinking about Earth. With some violence, Earth is removed from the Kaṣiṇa. The Kaṣiṇa with a hole punched through it can just be referred to as a circle, both in Pali (*maṇḍala*, *Vism.* X, 11, 276) and Thai (*wong*).<sup>43</sup>

In the first illustration (Figure 3, bottom left), the circle is shown over the head of the practitioner. In numbers 2-4, it appears to float above a pole the practitioner holds aloft. Is he aware of it, oblivious of it, or somewhat conscious of its presence? At the very beginning of chapter X of the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa wrote, “Now as to the four immaterial states mentioned next to the divine abidings (*brahmanihāra*, states belonging to the World of Form), one who wants firstly to develop the base of boundless space (*ākāsa*) sees in gross matter danger through the wielding of sticks (*daṇḍa*), etc.” The practitioner has two opposing things in his mind: some kind of awareness of the Formless World, on one hand, and his recollection of disputes, on the other. The nearness of the Formless World is indicated by the circles. Awareness of brawls is symbolized by the incorporation of a short pole, a kind of staff (*daṇḍa*) the practitioner holds overhead with both arms. This awareness may also be indicated by the reference to the World of Desire (*kāma*) in the number 2 inscription. I do not mean to suggest that the meditator is involved in brawls. The *daṇḍa* he holds is an emblem, another example of the extraction of a single item from the text, and the way it is depicted is no doubt informed by an awareness of a counterpart, say the royal staff, the *thān phra kḥn / dhāra brah kara* ๙๗๖๙๓๓๓, “supporting the hand.”<sup>44</sup>

Number 5 is the Wheel of Life. At number 6, the Stream Winner state has been achieved. If he is not yet fully aware of the circle upon his head, that would suggest that he is still dwelling in the World of Form. He carries a bouquet of three lotus blossoms and is poised to pluck a fourth. Although it does not appear in the *Visuddhimagga*, a passage in the *Vimuttimaggā* (a meditation manual somewhat older than the *Visuddhimagga*), presenting an image found in the canonical scriptures, is apt:

Hence, the Buddha taught the bhikku this: “Just as in a pond of blue and white lotuses, the blue, red, and white lotuses are born, grow and stand in the water and are immersed in the cold water from root to neck, so this body is filled and

<sup>42</sup> The Pāli term is used in the translation in the Rāma I *Traiphūm*: *Traiphūm lōk*, vol. 3, 290.

<sup>43</sup> *Traiphūm lōk*, vol. 3, 288, 290.

<sup>44</sup> For illustrations of the royal staff, enter the Thai characters in an internet search engine. In the Rāma I *Traiphūm*, the *daṇḍa* and the words that follow are rendered as “short sticks and big sticks,” *mai nḥi mai yai* ไม่น้อยไม่ใหญ่ (*Traiphūm lōk*, vol. 3, 287). For the purposes of meditation, *daṇḍa* was conceptualized differently. I owe a debt to Louis Gabaude for raising the issue of the royal staff. The overhead poles in the *Traiphūm* illustration (fig. 5) may or may not be the same *daṇḍa*. Three poles are removed, one by one, suggesting they could stand for greed, hate, and delusion.

saturated with bliss that is free from joy.” As the blue, red and white lotuses stand in the water, so he abides in the third meditation, *jhāna*. His body should be known thus: as the lotuses born in the water are immersed in the water from root to neck, so he abides in the third meditation, *jhāna*, with body and mind filled and saturated with bliss that is free from joy.<sup>45</sup>

There is also a plant in number 1. The practitioner reaches for a flower in the middle, but it is unclear if he will actually pluck it or not. I suspect that he does not obtain what he is seeking at this point. One of Buddhaghosa’s anecdotal illustrations can be invoked, but if it is relevant, it would mean that the source text departed from the *Visuddhimagga* in certain ways, and that the plant has to be understood in a negative way. The tale appears toward the end of the Knowledges chapter (XXI).

There was a bat, it seems. She had alighted on a *madhuka* tree with five branches, thinking ‘I shall find flowers or fruits here’. She investigated one branch but saw no flowers or fruits worth taking. And with the first so too she tried the second, the third, the fourth, and the fifth, but saw nothing. She thought, ‘This tree is a tree.’ She climbed up on a straight branch, and poking her head through a gap in the foliage, she looked upwards, flew up into the air and alighted on another tree.

Herein the meditator [*yogāvacara*] should be regarded as like the bat. The five aggregates [five *khandā*] as objects of clinging are like the madhuka tree with the five branches. The meditator’s interpreting of the five aggregates is like the bat’s alighting on the tree. His comprehending the materiality aggregate [*rūpakhandā*] and, seeing nothing there worth taking, comprehending the remaining aggregates is like her trying each branch and, seeing nothing there worth taking, trying the rest. His triple knowledge beginning with desire for deliverance [the *ñāna* three prior to Conformity Knowledge], after he has become dispassionate toward the five aggregates through seeing their character of impermanence, etc., is like her thinking ‘This tree is barren; there is nothing worth taking here’ and losing interest. His Change of Lineage knowledge is like her poking her head out and looking upwards. His path knowledge [*maggāñāna*] is like her flying up into the air. His fruition knowledge [*phalañāna*] is like her alighting on a different tree. (*Vism.* XXI 91–92.)

It is not easy to give a specific interpretation of the plant in number 1. Number 7 is Change of Lineage Knowledge. It has already been pointed out that the destruction of greed, hate, and delusion has been already carried out by the Wheel of Life. What Change of Lineage does here is to continue the story of the circle. There are only two instances in which the captions describe actions involving the circle, and this is one. (The circle itself rests unidentified.) The practitioner has *yip chū wai* หนีบชูไว้, “grasped and raised”(it).<sup>46</sup> Change of Lineage again plays a revolutionary

<sup>45</sup> *The Path of Freedom by the Arāhant Upadissa*, trans. N. R. M. Ehara, Soma Thera, and Kheminda Thera (Colombo: D. Roland D. Weerasuriya, 1961), 108–09.

<sup>46</sup> *Wai* ไว้ here would indicate a completed action.

role; here he perceives the nature of the void, *ākāsa*, symbolized by the circle, and has entered the Formless World. The next figure (#8) is identified as the Stream Winner, who is closely associated with Change of Lineage. He might be identified as a Stream Winner in the fruition (*phala*) phase, making number 6 a path (*magga*) – phase Stream Winner. That would concur with the meaning of the raised-arm gesture in the illustrated *Trai Phum* (Figure 5).<sup>47</sup> The *kaṣiṇugghāṭimākāsanimitta* floats between his palms; perhaps he is not yet fully aware of its nature.

That clearly changes with number 9, which shows the Stream Winner once again, now the first in the sequence that ends with Sainthood. Here he is sitting *nang* นั่ง “jerking repeatedly” *katuk* กระทบ. This takes us back to the *Visuddhimagga*, X 9, “He adverts again and again to the sign-of-the-space-left-by-the-removal-of-the-kaṣiṇa as ‘space, space’, and he strikes at it with thought and applied thought (*takka* [thought] – *ābata* [struck] *vitakka* [applied thought] – *ābata*). As he adverts to it again and strikes at it with thought and applied thought, the hindrances are suppressed, mindfulness is established and his mind becomes concentrated in access (*upacāra*).” (Hyphens added.) The mental action is obscure (it might be a battle between reasoning [*takka*] and initial apprehension [*vitakka*]), but it is described in physical terms, and that is how it is depicted in the manuscript; *katuk* here is a kind of tossing between palms. In the Rāma I *Trai Phum* translation, the action is rendered, “raise *vitakka* up in space (*ākāsa*), place *vitakka* in space.”<sup>48</sup>

There is little to say about the remaining episodes. In number 10, the Once Returner is depicted not in a supramundane sphere but here on earth, in his last incarnation. The precise meaning of the plant and his interaction with it remains to be determined, but would no doubt be linked to the significance of the plant in number 1. Number 11 shows the Never Returner meditating; the circle appears beneath his legs, on the rock pedestal. Finally the Arahatta is shown reclining in number 12; no circle is visible, and there may be a gem in his palm, but the reproduction is unclear.

This is a remarkable series of images, not yet encountered elsewhere. In the Lost Text upon which it was based, the author took apparently incidental aspects of the *Visuddhimagga*—the single word *danda* from the beginning of chapter X being the most notable example—and devised extended sequences of meditational exercises based upon them (presumably numbering them 1–11, as indicated in the manuscript). Much, of course, remains for the present inexplicable: the function of many of the Pali terms; whether any them were supposed to be chanted in the course of meditation; why the scenes prior to the final path beginning at number 9 were stretched to eight in number; why the *magga* and *phala* aspects were not explicitly illustrated, except by implication in numbers 6 and 8.<sup>49</sup> The dependence on the *Visuddhimagga* accords with Kate Crosby’s understanding

<sup>47</sup> Praphat, without referencing the *Trai Phum* illustration, suggested that grasping the gem stands for Path Knowledge, and placing the gem over one’s head for Fruition Knowledge: *Pritsanā tham*, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> *Traiphum lōk*, vol. 3, 190: *yok witok kbiin nai akāt tang witok wai nai akāt* ยกติดขึ้นในอากาศ ตั้งติดไว้ในอากาศ.

<sup>49</sup> Change of Lineage Knowledge appears elsewhere in the Bangkok manuscript (pl. 42), and between it and Conformity Knowledge (pl. 37 and Figure 2 here), there are exactly four scenes: the four primary elements, *mahābhūta*, as snakes (pl. 38; cf. *Vism.* XXI 35), the Arahant *kbināsava*, with cankers destroyed (pl. 39; cf. *Vism.* XXII 30); the primary elements again (pl. 40); and the three liberations, *vimokkha* (pl. 41; cf. *Vism.* XXI 66). Whether this format could have any bearing on numbers 1–4 in plate 3 (prior to Change of Lineage Knowledge at number 7) is unknown. It is also possible that the concept of *javana* (impulsions) plays some role. This term appears in the *Traiphum Lōk*, vol. 3, 291.

of the mystical-tradition Sri Lankan texts: that they are natural developments within Theravāda, entirely orthodox.<sup>50</sup> The circles represent more of a challenge, in order to understand how they fit into the history of the development of mystical texts in Thailand and Cambodia.

## DUANG

In *Teaching Dhamma by Pictures*, Buddhadasa provided his understanding of an opening in the Chaiya manuscript with four images, corresponding to numbers 6–9 in the Bangkok manuscript. In one, the practitioner “has just found a precious stone while plucking lotuses at a lotus pond,” and in another, he is “appreciating the flawless quality of that gem.”<sup>51</sup> In *Pritsanā Tham*, Praphat Surasen wrote that the plant in number 1 is a lotus, to which he ascribed an allegorical significance close to that in the passage quoted above (number 6, the lotus), and that over the head is a *duang kao* ดวงแก้ว symbolizing the *yogāvacara*’s *sati* (mindfulness).<sup>52</sup> Obviously, these interpretations differ from those presented here, but the terminology, “gem” and *duang kao*, has a claim to legitimacy.

The *tuon kev* (the transliteration of the cognate Khmer term) is ubiquitous in the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhān* and has been translated by Bizot as the “globe de cristal.” In *Le figuier*, Bizot wrote that “the important and complex question of the ‘globe de cristal’ will be the subject of a separate study,” but this has never appeared.<sup>53</sup> A number of years has now passed, and subsequent studies emanating from the École Française and produced by Kate Crosby and her colleagues have altered the picture considerably. Three distinct approaches to *tuon / duang* can be characterized, focusing on *duang* at the expense of *kao*. There is overlapping, and blurring as the result of the existence of two linguistic realms, one vernacular (involving the words *duang* and *tuon*) and the other Indic (*nimitta*)—categories sometimes distinguishable, sometimes not. *Duang*, in the first of the three approaches, can be considered the direct outcome of meditation on the Earth Kaṣina; or, secondly, it can be regarded as one of many possible *nimitta*; finally, whatever its origins may be, it should be treated as an independent entity.

The first is in line with the thrust of this article. The point at which the vernacular term *duang / tuon* is likely to have entered the vocabulary of meditation is with the realization of the counterpart sign, the *patibhāga nimitta*. Although actual evidence for this historical reconstruction is spotty, it is possible to point to the end of a text dating from 1661, where ten characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of the Counterpart Sign are listed, each one becoming the basis for a subject of meditation. The first is the *candamaṇḍala* (moon circle), glossed in Thai as “appearing as the *duang* (orb) of the

<sup>50</sup> Kate Crosby, “Abhidhamma and *Nimitta* in Eighteenth-Century Meditation Manuscripts from Sri Lanka: a Consideration of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in *Boran kammaṭṭhāna*,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 20 (2019): 111–51, 137, 146.

<sup>51</sup> Buddhadasa, *Teaching Dhamma*, pl. 42, 94–95.

<sup>52</sup> Praphāt, *Samut phāp*, 18.

<sup>53</sup> “Tout spécialement, l’importante et complexe question du ‘globe de cristal’ fera l’objet d’une étude à part.” *Le figuier*, 111n.

moon” *prākot dang duang chan* ปรากฏดวงจันทร์.<sup>54</sup> *Duang* here is a translation of *maṇḍala*, circle.

The word *duang* is widespread in Tai languages but is not found in Angkorian Khmer.<sup>55</sup> Its first attestation in Siam is in the 14th-century Inscription II of Sukhothai (2.51), where it appears with *dao: duang dao* ดวงดาว, the orbs of stars. *Orb* was the gloss of the linguist William Gedney, who used it in his private notes on the vocabulary of Sukhothai inscriptions.<sup>56</sup> *Orb* is a tempting translation because it conveys *duang*’s inherently radiant quality. That it has retained this luminosity is suggested by Bizot’s intermittent translation of the single word *duang* / *tuon* as the two words “globe lumineux.”<sup>57</sup>

The second approach to the word *duang* can be found in the beliefs of the followers of the Dhammakaya movement. There, the final product—the *nimitta* as perceived by the Ariya Puggala in *Pritsanā tham*—becomes the initial object of concentration, rather than the Earth Kaṣina. This is entirely within the bounds of orthodox Theravāda, since any object can be chosen as an object of concentration; the Earth Kaṣina is just the recommended one. Dhammakāya *nimitta*, produced and kept in the monastery, look like giant clear marbles. Luang Pho Sodh wrote, “The sphere might be about the size of an eyeball, transparent like glass and round like a ball, without any flaws. It is like a magic crystal ball [ดวงแก้ว กายสิทธิ์, *duang kəo kāyasiddhi* ‘magically formed’]. The sphere is called the *parikamma-nimitta* or Preliminary Sign of Concentration.”<sup>58</sup> The *duang* that is placed in the body has a center of space (*ākāsa*) like the *nimitta* in the *Pritsanā Tham*, but its border, in four quarters, consists of the four elements, as if materiality were needed to place the ineffable in the body. The role of the elements is reminiscent of their presence in the mental states that are placed in the body in the final section of *The Yogāvacara’s Manual*. In general, Kate Crosby and her colleagues have adopted a terminology that presupposes an outlook similar to that of the Dhammakaya. To speak of “*nimitta* as spheres of light,” for instance, is to regard the *duang kəo* as one possible kind of *nimitta*.<sup>59</sup> The earthless *nimitta* that appears in the *Pritsanā Tham* (Figures 3 and 4) is a narrower concept, but seeing it presented floating in the air opens the way to understanding it more broadly.

Finally, the approach of Bizot was somewhat different. For him the gem and the crystal globe were more or less interchangeable, and the gem became a “vehicle of immortality,” quite in opposition to orthodox Theravāda—“a sort of equivalent of the eternal and luminous ātman.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, although initially the *yogāvacara* might through meditation achieve a realization

<sup>54</sup> Olivier de Bernon, “Le *mūl kāmattāhan* du Wat Ratchathiwat date de 1661 A. D.: présentation et traduction,” *Journal of the Siam Society* 90.1 & 2 (2002): 149-60, 154 and 158.

<sup>55</sup> For information about *duang* in Tai languages I thank Thomas Hudak.

<sup>56</sup> For this information I am indebted to Thomas Hudak. *Duang* also serves as a classifier for objects generally circular in shape.

<sup>57</sup> E. g., Bizot, *Le Chemin*, 237.

<sup>58</sup> Mongkol-Thepmuni, Venerable Phra (Sodh), *Samatha Vipassanā Meditation*, 5-7; Thai text (see note 37), 5-7.

<sup>59</sup> Skilton, “Meditation and its Subjects,” 50. The French word *sphère* has been used to translate Khmer *lèn* (e. g. Bizot, *Le Chemin*, 221), but *chambre*, or *room*, would be preferable; *lèn* here corresponds to Thai *hōng*, the “room” that bounds the mental space of a meditation. For *chambre*, Joseph Guesdon, *Dictionnaire Cambodgien-Français*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1930), vol. 2, 1620.

<sup>60</sup> Bizot, *Le Chemin*, 29.

visualized outside the body, once it was installed within the body, it became eternal and more or less divorced from the *nimitta*.

The fact that Khmer *tuon* is a loanword from Thai does not mean that the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhān* was composed outside Cambodia. Three of its features—the use of Indian phoneme mysticism, the presence of an internal duct in the body, and the image of the tree—most likely have Angkorian sources. At the very beginning of the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhān*, the five syllables or letters (*aksara* = Pali *akkhara*) are born, NA MO BU DHĀ YA, that is, “homage to the Buddha.” Each of the syllables stands for something, NA being maternal *gūṇa* (quality), for instance, and DHĀ both inhalation / expiration and the Abhidhamma texts.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the five syllables can be made to stand for any fivefold entity, and they can easily be presented spatially. This type of thinking can be found in the Mantrayāna Buddhism that came to Cambodia in the 9th and 10th centuries, exemplified especially by the alphabet diagram (*prastāra*), the circle of Sanskrit letters, with an inner ring of sixteen vowels.<sup>62</sup> Although the evidence concerning Theravāda Buddhism in Cambodia in these centuries is practically nonexistent, it is likely that there were pockets of Theravāda Buddhists who became familiar with the power of mantras and the mechanics of phoneme mysticism.

The second phase of Tantric Buddhism, that of the Yoginī Tantras, became established in the Khmer empire in the eleventh century; the Yoginī Tantras incorporate an elaborate inner anatomy and a meditation curriculum that involves movements of qualities within the body. That the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhān* preserves traces of the influence of the Yoginī Tantras is evidenced by the use of the word *iddhā* for a vertical duct within the torso; it is a borrowing of the duct *idā* in the Yoginī Tantras.<sup>63</sup> Finally, the image of the tree itself must have an Angkor-period source. In inscription K. 484 of the Jayavarman VII period (ca. 1200), the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha was enlightened is said to have the Hindu god Shiva for a trunk and Vishnu for branches. It promises deliverance and is called a giver of fruits (*phala*).<sup>64</sup>

That brings us to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a period of increasing contact between Thai and Khmer speakers. At various points Bizot and his colleagues have drawn attention to the fact that in some of the texts belonging to the mystical tradition exhibit Mon linguistic influence.<sup>65</sup> That accords well with what art history informs us about the religious history of the 13th century.<sup>66</sup> Then or not too long thereafter comes the point at which the Supramundane Path of the *Pritsanā Tham* necessarily

<sup>61</sup> Bizot, *Le figuier*, 74.

<sup>62</sup> For the alphabet diagram in Cambodia, Woodward, “Aspects of Buddhism in Tenth-Century Cambodia” in *Buddhist Dynamics in Premodern and Early Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. D. Christian Lammerts (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015), 218–60. In Java, the alphabet diagram became one of the organizing principles of the Buddhist monument Borobudur: Woodward, “Bianhong, Mastermind of Borobudur?” *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. 11 (2009), 25–60. A northern Thai Pali alphabet diagram, with eight vowels at the center, is illustrated in Schnake, “Letters and Numbers,” 176.

<sup>63</sup> Bizot, *Le figuier*, 94.

<sup>64</sup> Bizot drew attention to the relevance of this tree in *Le figuier*, 118–19. For the text of the inscription, S. Lewitz, “L’Inscription du Phimanakas,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 58 (1971): 91–103.

<sup>65</sup> For instance, Christian Bauer, “L’épithète du Maître et son origine môme,” in F. Bizot, *Le Chemin*, 277–86.

<sup>66</sup> Hiram Woodward, *The Art and Architecture of Thailand from Prehistoric Times through the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 166–229.

plays a role. The crucial joint feature is the act of seizing, *yip*, of the *nimitta*, performed at the point of Change of Lineage, no. 7. This corresponds to the grasping or obtaining of the fruit of the fig tree in the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhān*, each fruit containing a *tuon kèv*. If this is also the point at which the Thai word *duang* was adopted into Khmer as *tuon* ផ្លែ, it is also worth asking if the conceptualization of *duang* was shaped by the existence of a similar sounding word in Khmer, namely *daung* ផ្លែ, “coconut.” The Khmer-language legend accompanying an illustration in *Le figuier* compares the fruit of the fig tree to the coconut.<sup>67</sup> These observations support the priority of *Pritsana Tham*. This means that the primary monk responsible for *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhān* probably stood at least two generations away. One monk, having been trained in the discipline of the *Pritsanā Tham*, made some adjustments and adaptations, retaining certain visual elements and altering content; his successor made even more changes.

That is not the end of the story, however, because one element, the eagles guarding the tree, must historically be the most recent. They are also the most puzzling. The mind of the practitioner, before the fruit and the *tuon kèv* can be seized, must kill the guardian eagles. The bow and arrow with which they are shot I regard as a re-appearance of the weapons in the *Visuddhimagga*, which Change of Lineage Knowledge used to destroy greed, hate, and delusion. The problem is that the eagles stand for the senses, eye, ear, and so forth, which in Buddhist texts are not generally considered enemies.<sup>68</sup>

There is word play involved. The Thai word for senses is *indrīya* (lengthening the short *i* of the Pali *indrīya*, as is quite common), and the same word is used to mean *eagle*. In Thai they are both pronounced *insī*. The same pair occurs in Khmer, pronounced *ĕntri*, written *indri*.<sup>69</sup> It was Bizot’s belief that the meaning “eagle” for Khmer *ĕntri* was spread by people who were familiar with the depiction of the *indrīya* (senses) as eagles in the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhān*.<sup>70</sup> If that seems hard to accept, it is with good reason. It is more likely that the existence of the two homonymous words predated the composition of the text. In Thai there is not just a *nok* (bird) *insī* นกอินทรี but a *plā* (fish) *insī* ปลาอินทรี (a kind of mackerel), and it is probable that this *insī* is a word of non-Indic origin that

<sup>67</sup> Bizot, *Le figuier*, pl. XIII. The illustration caption translates the Khmer legend: “Voici ce qu’on l’appelle le figuier à 5 branches et 5 fruits de chaque côté. Les fruits ressemblent aux noix de coco. Voici ce qu’on l’appelle les oiseaux Indri. Il y en a six pour garder les figues. Ces dix fruits, le Maître les tient pour les dix globes (*tuon*). Les oiseaux Indri sont [représentés sur la figure] en couleur bleue.” (“Here is what is called the fig tree, with five branches and five fruits on each side. The fruits resemble coconuts. Here are what are called Indri birds. There are six to guard the fruits. These ten fruits, the Master holds for the ten globes (*tuon*). The Indri birds are blue in color.” For the word for *coconut* in Khmer, see Philip N. Jenner and Saveros Pou, *A Lexicon of Khmer Morphology*, Mon-Khmer Studies IX–X (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1980–81), 111 (*tūna*); Saveros Pou, *Dictionnaire vieux khmer – français – anglais* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992), 220 (*toñ, tvañ, tvoñ*).

<sup>68</sup> Perhaps it is not the *indrīya* that are the enemy but the cravings these faculties have a need for: Crosby et al., “The *Sutta on Understanding Death*,” 187. One of the texts in Chotpanyo, *Nangsū phuttharangsi*, “Phra kammathān bæp phra tham,” 289–95, also has a lengthy discussion of *indrīya*, and it should be studied.

<sup>69</sup> Guesdon, *Dictionnaire Cambodgien-Français*, vol. 1, 52. Actually it says *sātĕntri* means “l’oiseau d’Indra, l’aigle.”

<sup>70</sup> The text of the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhān* spells the term with a long *i* and a *y*, *Indriy*: Bizot, *Le figuier*, 57, 83. Bizot apparently thought that when the text said *satv indriy*, it meant “the creature (standing for the) *indrīya* (sense).” In a footnote (p. 83), he pointed out that when he was studying textile patterns at Angkor Wat, he was told that certain birds (evidently Chinese phoenixes) were “*satv indriya*,” thereby demonstrating to him that his informants were familiar with the name given to the birds in representations of the fig tree in the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhān*.

ended up being spelled in an Indic way.<sup>71</sup> Thus the compiler of the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhān*, having the bow-and-arrow image in his head, and engaged by the two distinct meanings of *insi / éntri*, decided it would be a good idea to have the arrow shoot senses/eagles.

There is much else left to understand about this rich text, or family of texts, including the circumstances of the spread to northern Thailand and to Sri Lanka.<sup>72</sup> Lagirarde believed that the Khmer and Thai texts had a common ancestor. The Lao text, the *Saddavimāla*, has a brief section near the beginning incorporating the imagery of the fig tree. Immediately following conception, the *duang kao* in the flowers of the fig tree are obtained; they stand for various virtues (*sīla*). A few sentences later the *yogāvacara* stands at the crystal gates of the city of Nibbāna, firmly holding the *duang kao* that will make it possible to enter (*thū ao duang kao dai thā* ถือเอาดวงแก้วได้แท้).<sup>73</sup>

## THE RĀMA I TRAIIPHŪM

This image of the *yogāvacara* holding the *duang kao* fits the depiction of the Fruition Arahatta in the illustrated Traiphūm (Figure 5, top right). The importance of this representation was recognized by B. J. Terwiel, who called the circle a “crystal ball” and concluded his article with this sentence, “It is just possible that what I tentatively call the ‘City of Nibbāna school’, where invariably the crystal ball represents the ultimate goal of meditation, is also a branch of the *yogāvacara* / *borān kammaṭṭhān* school.”<sup>74</sup> In the light of the *Pritsanā Tham*, the crystal ball (= *duang kao*) is technically the *kaṣinuggbhāṭimākāsanimitta*, the sign of the space left by the removal of the kaṣina. It is clutched by the Arahatta as an indication he has realized the pinnacle of the cosmos.<sup>75</sup> Terwiel’s identification of “schools” and “branches” seems premature. At this point, it would be better to say that segments of meditational practices and their associated imagery circulated around Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos and combined in ways that are difficult or impossible to reconstruct.

The depictions of the Supramundane Path in *Pritsanā Tham* (Figures 3-4) and in the *Traiphūm* manuscript (Figure 5), together with the text of the Rāma I *Traiphūm*, may constitute two somewhat

<sup>71</sup> This was the view of William J. Gedney, as found in William J. Gedney, “Indic Loanwords in Spoken Thai,” doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1947. I thank Thomas Hudak for this information.

<sup>72</sup> Crosby et al., “The *Sutta on Understanding Death*”; Lagirarde, “Textes bouddhiques du pays Khmer.” One small observation on the relationship of the Northern Thai to the Khmer text. Lagirarde says (p. 69) that the Khmer text has a Triple Gem where the Thai a *nimitta*. It seems more probable that *nimitta* corresponds to the *tuon kèv* just preceding (Bizot, *Figuier*, 77, 53)—an instance in which the vernacular term is replaced by the Pāli.

<sup>73</sup> F. Bizot and F. Lagirarde, *La pureté par les mots* (Paris-Chiang Mai-Phnom Penh-Vientiane: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1996), 181-82, 210-11.

<sup>74</sup> Terwiel, “The City of Nibbāna,” 196–97.

<sup>75</sup> Another depiction of the same type is in a Cambodian manuscript illustrated in *Le figuier*, pl. XIII. The practitioner is shown standing, crowned, and six-armed—two arms on the hips, two raised toward the five-branched fig tree (with five branches on each side), and two holding a disk in front of the chest. This is the illustration with the caption translated in n. 67.

divergent developments. The hand-raising gesture is quite explicit in the *Traiphūm*, and only implied in *Pritsanā Tham*, where the terms *magga* and *phala* do not appear in the captions. The illustrations of the newly identified meditational practices, one with a *daṇḍa* (at numbers 2, 3, and 4), the other with a “jerking” of the circle (at number 8), differ sufficiently from the descriptions of the actions in the *Traiphūm* to suppose they are independent outgrowths of *Visuddhimagga* meditation.

Despite the difficulty of establishing borders around one or another “school,” the introductory chapter of the Rāma I *Traiphūm* suggests the existence of a divide between exoteric and esoteric that might be useful. Various epithets of the Buddha are introduced. One is *Brah arahaṃ* (pronounced *arabang*); others include *sattbā* and *buddho*.<sup>76</sup> *Brah arahaṃ* is said to mean “far from evil people, far from unworthy persons, near good people, near worthy persons”; the Buddha has the name *arahaṃ* because he is far from enemies like the *keḷesa* (defilements) and halted with his hand the wheel of *samsāra*.<sup>77</sup> The meanings continue, from various points of view (*naya*), for *arahaṃ* and the other epithets.

*Arahaṃ* is a frequently chanted epithet, especially in Dhammakāya meditation and in the text translated as *Le chemin de Lan̄kā*. In the Sinhalese preamble to the *Manual of a Mystic*, the *A* of *Arahan* is said to stand for the Dhamma, the *ra* for the Buddha, and the *han* for the Sangha.<sup>78</sup> For the author of the Rāma I *Traiphūm*, the word is a semantic unit; the different meanings are ascribed to it as a whole. Surely the author was aware that the syllables comprising *arahaṃ* could be said to signify various terms, syllable by syllable. But he pointedly refused to involve himself in such an activity. The reason may be that he considered phoneme mysticism a secret business, one not to be addressed in the *Traiphūm* but nevertheless valid, and a practice that could coexist with the exoteric Buddhism presented in his text.

## POSTSCRIPT

My first encounter with the word *kammathān* occurred in about 1965, in Peace Corps days. My adopted intellectual father was Than Chand, Prince Chand, M. C. Chandchirayu Rajani, and one day he lent me a book entitled *Thiēo kammathān kbōng Phra ‘Āḥān Bunnāk* (in the WorldCat transliteration), telling me it was not that difficult to read. It was the autobiography of a wandering monk in northeastern Thailand. I own a copy but have not looked at it for ages. I remember it as about a sort of do-it-yourself program of meditation, in which the author rid himself of sexual yearnings by nearly starving himself to death. I do not know how much of it might resonate with the programs of *Kammathān* I have learned about in carrying out researches for this article. I was able to report back to Than Chand that I thought it was a wonderful book. It also meant something to him, and he was proud to have been part of a remote section of the royal family descended from

<sup>76</sup> *Traiphūm lok*, vol. 1, 21–30.

<sup>77</sup> *Traiphūm lok*, vol. 1, 24.

<sup>78</sup> F. L. Woodward, *Manual*, 1–2.

Rāma III rather than King Mongkut—through the Second King under Chulalongkorn (“George Washington”) and Than Chand’s father Prince Bidyalankarana, the poet N. M. S. This meant he could disdain the Thammayut Sect as nothing to do with him. I would like to think that the precious memory of borrowing this book has helped fortify me with the patience needed to write this article.

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