

# A Note on Three Old Sinhalese Palm - Leaf Manuscripts

Only a few of the comparatively old Sinhalese palm-leaf manuscripts found today in libraries and other collections in Sri Lanka and abroad can be traced to a period anterior to the middle of the eighteenth century when as a result of the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by the exertions of the Sangharāja Vāliviṭa Saranākara and King Kīrti S'ri Rājasimha (A. D. 1747–1782), a large number of copies were made on palm-leaf of texts of books that were essential for the study of Buddhism. Even long before that, on several occasions texts of books that were of particular interest to Buddhists were transcribed on palm-leaf *en masse*, but only a few of these palm-leaf manuscripts have survived upto the present day. One such occasion was the attempt made by King Vijayabāhu III (A. D. 1232–1236) to copy manuscripts of Buddhist texts to make good the destruction of books caused by Māgha and his hordes when they invaded Sri Lanka about the first quarter of the thirteenth century. In view of its relevance to the subject under discussion, the account of the steps taken by King Vijayabāhu to transcribe Buddhist texts as given in the *Mahāvāṃsa* may be quoted in full:

"Now in his faith," says the *Mahāvāṃsa*, "the Sovereign set about rendering helpful service to the Order of the Perfectly Enlightened One. If one asks how (this was done), the account runs thus: Deeply grieved in his heart that on the island of Lanka so many books that dealt with the true doctrine had been destroyed by the alien foe, the Ruler called together laymen endowed with a good memory and with knowledge, pious, well instructed, free from indolence and skilled in quick and fair writing, and along with these many other writers of books and made all these write down in careful fashion the eighty four thousand divisions of the doctrine and made over to them in accordance with the number of divisions the like number of kahāpaṇas."<sup>2</sup>

Some of these manuscripts thus copied prior to the reign of King Kīrti S'ri Rājasimha have been found both in Sri Lanka and abroad. Apart from providing the scholar with redactions of valuable texts as existing during these early periods they sometimes provide in the form of colophons and notes scribbled on fly leaves incidental information which is of some value for the understanding of some aspects of literary activity during the period concerned.

One of the first such manuscripts to be noticed in Sri Lanka is a copy of the *Cullavagga*, one of the books forming the Vinaya-Piṭaka of the Pāli Canon, now deposited in the Library of the National Museum, Colombo.<sup>3</sup> It was purchased

1. Manuscripts written in Sinhalese characters. The language may be Sinhalese, Pāli or even Sanskrit.
2. *Cūlavāṃsa*, being the more recent part of the *Mahāvāṃsa*, Part II, edited by Wilhelm Geiger, Vol. II, London, 1927, 81. 40–45.
3. W. A. De Silva, Catalogue of Palm Leaf Manuscripts, Colombo, 1938, No. 2363.

by the National Museum from a relation of the late H. C. P. Bell, the first Archaeological Commissioner of Sri Lanka. This manuscript has been assigned to the reign of King Parākramabāhu II (A. D. 1236–1270) tentatively by the late Professor Paranavitana. His observations on this manuscript are as follows: "This manuscript is written in the characters of the thirteenth century and the colophon at the end in Sinhalese states, in effect, that the manuscript was copied by Sumedha Thera of Beligala when the hierarch Medhankara, under the patronage of King Parākramabāhu, was having religious texts copied so that every monk in the island could be supplied with one. Judging from the script and the names of the Theras mentioned therein, I would tentatively take Parākramabāhu mentioned in the colophon to be the second of that name (1236–1271)."⁴

As will be shown in due course Paranavitana's identification of the king named Parākramabāhu in the colophon of this manuscript as King Parākramabāhu II of Daṁbadeṇiya is, confirmed by a closer examination of the colophon referred to above. As no Sinhalese palm-leaf manuscript of a period earlier than the reign of King Parākramabāhu II has been thus far found in Sri Lanka or elsewhere this manuscript of the Pāli *Cullavagga* would be the oldest extant palm-leaf manuscript written in Sinhalese characters.

It is difficult to distinguish between the script employed in the Polonnaruwa period and that employed in the subsequent Daṁbadeṇiya period in which the manuscript under discussion would have been copied, particularly because of the paucity of documents that can be assigned to the latter period with certainty. One such document is the Anurādhapura Pillar-Inscription of Bhnvanekabāhu Mahapā, son of Vijayabāhu III, who founded the kingdom of Daṁbadeṇiya.<sup>5</sup> The forms of letters appearing in this inscription are generally of a more developed type than those in the inscriptions of the Polonnaruwa period.<sup>6</sup> The letter *na* takes an oblong form horizontally, and the curves that form the letter are less pronounced than those that appear in the letter *na* in the documents of the Polonnaruwa period. The letter *na* appears in two different forms as in the earlier period, one with a quite attenuated loop and the other with a fuller loop which often tends to be triangular. The letter *ma*, generally speaking, takes a more developed form than that to be found in Polonnaruwa documents, with some forms having a full loop at its centre. It is certainly the letter *ra* in the Pillar-Inscription that unmistakably indicates its later date with a triangular 'tadpole' shape. In some forms of this letter the left arm stretches upwards even after coming in contact with its right arm. In Polonnaruwa documents the letter *ra* takes an oblong shape vertically, the upper and the lower ends of the letter being of equal breadth. The same four letters as appearing in the manuscript under discussion when compared with the corresponding letters in the Inscription shows very clearly that the manuscript and the Pillar-Inscription belong to the same period of time, i. e., the 13th century. It has, however, to be

4. *Ceylon Administration Reports*, 1937, Part IV, Colombo, F 21.

5. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. III, London, 1933, Plate 34.

6. Stone Inscriptions of the Polonnaruwa Period may be consulted in *Epigraphia Zeylanica* Vol. II, London, 1928.

remarked that some letters appearing in the manuscript, particularly the letters *ma* and *ra*, seem to have retained some archaic features not noticed in the Pillar-Inscription.

The general pattern of writing in the manuscript under discussion also indicates that the manuscript is of a later date than any point of time in the Polonnaruwa period.

The king named Parākramabāhu in the manuscript, therefore, cannot be the king of that name who ruled Sri Lanka from Polonnaruwa from A. D. 1153-1186, namely King Parākramabāhu I.

Parākramabāhu III (A. D. 1287-1295) and his successors who were known by the name Parākramabāhu do not conform to the data contained in the colophon of the manuscript, and can be easily ruled out as being qualified to be identified with the ruler mentioned in it. In the reign of Parākramabāhu III the office of *Mahā-sāmi* was held by a Thera named Anomadassī on whom this office appears to have been conferred in the last years of King Parākramabāhu II. Besides other circumstances, the evidence of the script employed in the manuscript under discussion would, without the least doubt, rule out the possibility of any of the successors of Parākramabāhu III, known by the same name from being identified with the king named Parākramabāhu mentioned in the colophon of the manuscript. Thus the only ruler of the name of Parākramabāhu in whose reign this manuscript could have been copied must be King Parākramabāhu II of Daṁbadeniya.

The colophon of the manuscript written in three lines of minute scribbled writing reads as follows:

#### *Text of Colophon*

1. කොඩුවාචනයේ මෙධිකර මාහිමි ස්වූතීන්වහන්සේ ලංකාධිපති පරාක්‍රමබැඩු නගරපුද්‍රාපතිග්‍රයෙන් තෙර මාණෙර අෑ සුම්සරුන්
2. වහන්සේ සමාදන් කරවා නමකට පොතක් ලියවා ලක්දිව වැඩි සංස්යාචන්සේට සාංසික කොට්ඨ ආගමයක් මූල්‍ය කොට්ඨ මූල්‍යෙනැළ පැයි සලකා
3. සමමත්‍රණය කොට්ඨ බෙලිගලේ පූමෙද මහතෝන්වහන්සේ ලියවා සාංසික කොට්ඨ ලියවා ලැයි පූලවගැ පාලි පොතයි”

#### *Translation*

This is the Pāli book *Suluvaga* that the Venerable Great Lord Medhāṅkara of the Kōñduruvā forest caused to be transcribed by the Grand Thera Sumedha of Beligala as a gift to the *saṅgha*, after collating a whole *nikāya*, being satisfied (with regard to its accuracy) after consultation (with competent scholars), with the patronage of King Parākramabāhu, the Sovereign of Laṅkā and the participation of fellow-monks living the holy life, such as *Theras* and *Grand Theras*, for the purpose of transcribing (providing) one book for each monk as a gift to the venerable *saṅgha* living in the island of Laṅkā.

7. In the reign of King Parākramabāhu IV there was a thera named Medhāṅkara, but he is described as a monk of no particular importance in the *Cūlavam̄sa*, *Cūlavam̄sa*, 90. 86.

This translation is offered on the basis of a general sense of the colophon which consists of one single sentence of a very complex and involved character. Some of the expressions employed in the colophon are also obscure in meaning and have to be explained only tentatively. In the phrase *namakaṭa potak liyavā*, 'caused one book to be transcribed for each monk' the word *potak* is vague. Possibly it means one of the books of the Pāli Canon which is divided into three departments known as the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, the *Sutta-piṭaka* and the *Abhi-dhamma-piṭaka*. Thus the word *potak* probably indicates a book such as the *Dīgha-nikāya* from the *Sutta-piṭaka*. In this instance one of these several books<sup>8</sup> forming the three departments of the Canon appears to have been transcribed to be given to each monk, each book being given as a gift to the whole community of monks and not to an individual monk. A monk who received one of these books would have been expected to study it so that he could become an expert exponent of its contents. The book mentioned in the colophon as having been transcribed is the Pāli work *Cullavagga* of the *Vinaya-piṭaka*.<sup>9</sup>

The expression *āgamayak muļulu koṭa mulumānā pāsi* would indicate the manner in which the original manuscripts were collated before transcription commenced. In the process of collation the particular book of the Canon (*āgamayak*) that had to be transcribed was examined in full in consultation with competent scholars (*samantranaya koṭa*) and every matter arising therefrom given due consideration. The meaning of the word *pāsi* which appears to be an intransitive participle is not clear at all.

The colophon of the manuscript makes it clear that a *Mahā-svāmi*<sup>10</sup> named Medhankara caused the manuscript under discussion to be transcribed by a *Mahāthera* named Sumedha of Beligala. It also provides an insight into the precautions taken by those responsible to ensure the accuracy of texts transcribed on palm leaf.

Though more than one scholar has attempted to decipher this colophon no one appears to have succeeded in producing an accurate transliteration of this note which is of some importance as a historical document. The name of the forest where the *Mahā-sāmi* Medhankara resided has been a matter of some uncertainty.

W. A. De Silva has failed to draw attention to this important colophon in his *Catalogue of Palm Leaf Manuscripts* but has merely stated that it had been acquired by the Colombo Museum after the body of the Catalogue had been printed.<sup>11</sup> Paranavitana, who, as stated above, has made some observations on the colophon, refers to the *Mahā-sāmi* Medhankara without mentioning the name of the place where he resided. The Reverend Māda-uyangoda Vimalakitti has deciphered the name of the residence of the Venerable Medhankara as 'Konupā-

8. An account of the works of the Pāli Canon will be found in M. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. II, University of Calcutta, 1933, pp. 1-175. How the books of the three departments of the Pāli Canon were distributed among the monks is not clear at all. Probably only one book, whatever it was, was given to a monk, the choice being made according to the individual preference and attainments of the monk concerned.

9. *Suluvaga* is the Sinhalese equivalent of the Pāli *Cullavagga* for which see, Winternitz, Vol. II, p. 25.

10. The word used in the colophon is *māhimi-svāmi*. *Māhimi*, Great Lord, is the equivalent of the Pāli *mahā-sāmi* (Sanskrit, *mahā-svāmin*).

11. W. A. De Silva, p. 381.

මුද්‍රණය ඇත්තා සිංහල මාලින් ප්‍රතිච්චිත නොවූ මෙම මාලින්  
සැක්කී තුළු මාලින් නොවූ වෛත්ති නොවූ මාලින් නොවූ වෛත්ති නොවූ  
ප්‍රධාන මාලින් නොවූ වෛත්ති නොවූ වෛත්ති නොවූ

Colophon in the Cullavagga Manuscript

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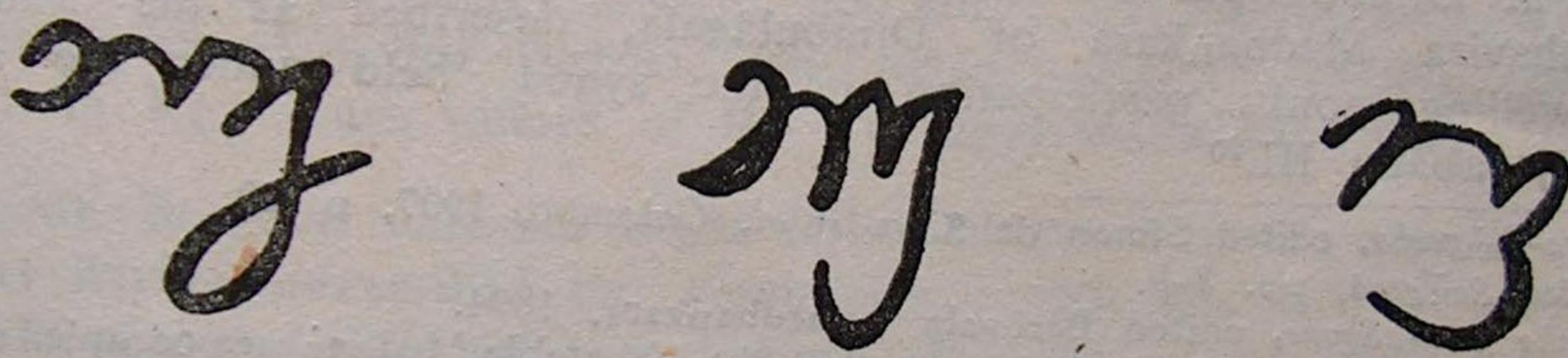
PLATE 1

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*vanaya*'. Rohanadeera also has deciphered the name as '*Konupā-vanaya*'.<sup>12</sup> Besides the transliteration of the colophon he has offered is not free from inaccuracies. The letters in the name that seem to have baffled these scholars are the second and the third letter of the first line of the colophon. Both these scholars have taken these two letters as *nu* and *pā* respectively.

Even a mere glance, however, would show that the second letter is much more complex than the simple character *nu*. It consists of what appears to be a loop linked on to an irregular half-loop opening downwards, the right hand-side arm being retraced upwards and the line coming far down vertically to form a large loop and turn right, intersecting the vertical. This complex character is a conjunct consonant combining the letters *n*, *d* and *ru*. The long vertical arm ending in a large loop at its lower end represents the syllable *ru*. A comparison of this letter with the conjunct consonant *ndra* in the word *narendropānisrayen*, in line 1 easily deciphered by the context in which it appears, should confirm the accuracy of this identification. If the medial *e* sign and the medial *ā* sign that combine to give a medial *o* value to the letter are ignored in this letter this letter would be identical with the second letter in the first line of the colophon, without the medial vowel *u*. This letter in the *Cullavagga* colophon may also be compared with the conjunct consonant *ndra* in the word *bhūpālendrān* appearing in line 2 of the Häṭadāgē Portico Slab-Inscription of King Nis'sāṅkamalla (A. D. 1187–1196).<sup>13</sup> There is no doubt that the letter that has been misread by the scholars mentioned above is the conjunct consonant *ndru*. in the first line of the colophon, see Fig. 1.

Fig. 1.



- 1 *ndru* in the first line of the *Cullavagga* MS.  
 2 *ndra* in the word *narendropānisrayen* in the *Cullavagga* MS.  
 3 *ndra* in the word *bhūpālendrān* in the Häṭa-dā-gē Portico Slab-Inscription

The third letter is again somewhat confusing, being easily mistaken as *pā*. The first letter is *ko* representing actually *kō*, it being the practice in mediaeval documents for scribes to often omit the sign for (long) *ō*. The name of the place where the Venerable Medhaṅkara resided is *Kōndruvā-vanaya* the form *Kōndruvā* being an orthographic peculiarity for *Kōnduruvā*.

The identity of the hierarch Kōnduruvā-vanayē Medhaṅkara Māhimi Svāmin-vahansē can perhaps be established without much difficulty. It is almost certain he is the Mahā-sthavira Medhaṅkara residing at Udumbaragiri, described in the *Dāmbadeṇi-katikāvata* as being one of the three Mahātheras under whose initiative a synod had been held in the reign of King Vijayabāhu III.<sup>14</sup> He is also identical with the hierarch Āraṇyaka Medhaṅkara Mahā-svāmi mentioned in

2. Mendis Rohanadeera, *Sri Lankāvē Saṅgha Samvidhānaya*, Nugegoda, 1974, p. 5 and footnote 5 on the same page. The text given here differs from that on p. 115 of the same work

13. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. II, Plate 15, line 2. The same letter *ndra* appears in line 1 of the Galpota Slab-Inscription, *ibid.* Plate, 20, Section B. The letter *ndu* also appears in the same line

14. *Katikāvat Saṅgarā*, edited D. B. Jayatilaka, Kālaniya, 1955, p. 8.

the *Nikāya-saṅgraha*, as a pupil of the Venerable Buddhavāmsa Vanaratana of the famous Dīmbulāgala (Udumbaragiri) fraternity,<sup>15</sup> and also as having presided over the synod held in the reign of King Parākramabāhu II (1236–1270).<sup>16</sup>

The Venerable Medhaṅkara was also the author of *Kudusika-sanne* a Sinhalese commentary on the Pali work *Khuddasikāhā* compiled by a monk named Dhammasiri in the Polonnaruwa period.<sup>17</sup>

It will be noted that when a synod was held in the reign of King Vijayabāhu III (A. D. 1232–1236) the Mahā-sāmi Medhaṅkara of a later day was a *mahā-sthavira*, an office second in rank only to that of *Mahā-sāmi*. The Venerable Medhaṅkara was appointed to the higher rank of *Mahā-sāmi* in the reign of Parākramabāhu II.<sup>18</sup>

The only circumstance that militates against this identification is that Mahā-sāmi Medhaṅkara is described in the colophon as residing in a forest known as Kōnduruvā-vanaya, while the *Nikāya-saṅgraha* in a brief reference to the synod held in the reign of King Vijayabāhu III at Vijayasundarārāma refers to the same monk as *Dīmbulāgalavāna vāsi Medhaṅkara Mahā-sthavira*.<sup>19</sup> It will be recalled that when the capital of Sri Lanka was at Polonnaruwa the headquarters of the forest-dwelling monks was on the mountain fastness of Dīmbulāgala or Udumbaragiri. But consequent to the invasion of the country by Māgha when the new capital was set up at Daṁbadeniya by Vijayabāhu III, monks who were residing at Dīmbulāgala moved to the new capital and among them was the Mahā-sthavira Medhaṅkara of Dīmbulāgala, described as the leader of the forest-dwelling monks participating in the synod held under the auspices of King Vijayabāhu III.<sup>20</sup>

15. *Nikāya-Saṅgraha*, edited Simon de Silva et al., Colombo, 1907, p. 20.

16. *Katikāvat Saṅgarā*, pp. 8–9.

17. *Kudusika* with *Sanne*, edited Beruvala Sumedhaṅkara, 1894.

18. *Katikāvat Saṅgarā*, p. 13. It is known that the Venerable Medhaṅkara occupied the high office of *mahā-sāmi* when he presided over the synod held in the reign of King Parākramabāhu II, *ibid.* pp. 8–9.

19. *Nikāya-Saṅgraha*, p. 20.

20. Daṁbadeni Katikāvata in *Katikāvat Saṅgarā*, pp. 7–8. There is no certainty regarding the date of the synod held in the reign of King Vijayabāhu III, because the commencement of the reign of this ruler has not yet been ascertained. Probably what appears to have misled both Codrington and Paranavitana is a statement in the Daṁbadeni Katikāvata, where it is said to be stated that for a period of thirty six years after the death of King Parākramabāhu I (A. D. 1153–1186) there had been disorder in the *sangha* owing to the absence of a wise and impartial ruler in the country, Daṁbadeni Katikāvata in *Katikāvat Saṅgarā*, p. 7. It will be seen that in the preamble to the Daṁbadeni Katikāvata an attempt has been made to trace the history of Buddhist synods from the time of King Vattagāmani upto the time of King Parākramabāhu II. In this preamble there seems to be a clear lacuna for it fails to mention the synod held in the reign of King Niśāñkamalla (A. D. 1187–1196). Most probably the passage dealing with the synod that resulted in the Hāta-dā-gē Inside Wall-Inscription has been left out in the existing copies of the Daṁbadeni Katikāvata. Thus, if in the passage *ema maharajāṇan svargastha samvatsarayehi paṭan satis havuruddak ātuṭata* the king referred to is taken as King Niśāñkamalla (A. D. 1187–1196) the period of disorder in the *sangha* that lasted for thirty six years would cease with the setting up of a new capital at Daṁbadeniya by King Vijayabāhu III about A. D. 1232. Thus there would be no need to assume that there was an interregnum of about ten years between the death of Vijayabāhu III and the accession of his son Parākramabāhu II in A. D. 1236. Nor is there a need to assume that the first *katikāvata* promulgated by Vijayabāhu III was of an informal nature, that it was promulgated before his accession to the throne and that a second *katikāvata* was promulgated after Vijayabāhu's accession to the throne, as Paranavitana has suggested. For the views expressed by Codrington and Paranavitana on this chronological discrepancy, see, *History of Ceylon*, ed. H. C. Ray, Colombo, 1960, pp. 616, 617. For the Hāta-dā-gē Inside Wall-Inscription, see, *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. II, pp. 96, 97.

Reporting the same event the *Asgiriye Talpata* says that some monks headed by the Mahāsthavira Medhañkara, pupil of Buddhavamsa Vanaratana and another group of monks led by the Venerable Dipañkara residing at Udumbaragiri moved to Dambadeniya and to Yāpahuva respectively when the country was invaded by Māgha.<sup>21</sup> What appears to have happened is that after the Venerable Medhañkara arrived in Dambadeniya probably in the reign of King Vijayabāhu III he had decided to remain at Dambadeniya in some suitable place so that he could be of service to the ruling king. The place he selected as suitable for his residence according to the colophon was a place called Kōnduruvā-vanaya, which has to be sought somewhere in the vicinity of Dambadeniya.

No place by the name of Kōnduruvā-vanaya can be found in modern maps of Sri Lanka. Three places, however, with the prefix Kōnduruvā are to be found in the vicinity of Dambadeniya, namely, Koñduruvā-vela, 5 km. south west of Dambadeniya, in Mādapattu Kōralē, Koñduruvā-poļa, 11km. north of Dambadeniya, in Māddekātiya Kōralē, and Kōnduruvā-połagedara, 22km. north west of Dambadeniya in Yaṭikaha Kōralē North, all in the North Western Province of Sri Lanka. The names of these villages would show that Kōnduruvā-vanaya too was situated somewhere in the vicinity of Dambadeniya, and it may be possible that one of these villages is identical with the residence of the Venerable Medhañkara, the original name of the place undergoing some change in course of time. A place called Koñduruvākanda is mentioned in the *Mātale Kada-im Pota*,<sup>22</sup> but it is far removed from Dambadeniya towards the north and is situated within the limits of the Nuvarakalāviya District. This place, therefore, cannot possibly be identified with Kōnduruvā-vanaya of the *Cullvagga* manuscript.

The monk Beligala Sumedha Maha-terun-vahanse who is described in the colophon as having transcribed the manuscript is not known from other literary or epigraphic sources. He held the rank of *Maha-tera* (Pāli, *Mahā-thera*), a high ecclesiastical office second only in rank, as pointed out above, to that of *Mahā-sāmi*. In the reign of King Parākramabāhu II there could be only two *Mahā-sthaviras* in the whole Island at any given point of time, one to represent the forest dwellers and the other to represent the town dwellers. It was one of these two *Mahā-sthaviras* that would be appointed to the office of *Mahā-sāmi*, whenever this office fell vacant.<sup>23</sup> Beligala is situated in Beligal Kōralē in the Ātara Pattuva, Kegalle district, at a distance of about 25 km. to the south-east of Dambadeniya. This inaccessible rock fastness was fortified by King Vijayabāhu III, who brought here from Dambadeniya the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha which had been taken to Kotmalē earlier for reasons of security.<sup>24</sup> Prince Bhuvanekabāhu, Vijayabāhu's son, founded on the rock of Beligala a *pirivena*, a dwelling place for monks.<sup>25</sup>

21. *Asgiriye Talpata*, edited Mendis Rohanadeera, 1969, p. 5.

22. *Kada-im-pot Vimarsānaya*, edited H. A. P. Abhayavardhana, Department of Cultural Affairs, 1978, p. 231.

23. Dambadeni Katikāvata in *Katikāvat Saṅgarā*, p. 13. However, according to the *Mahāvamsa* there were eight *mahā-sthaviras*, Grand Elders in charge of the eight *āyatanas*, monastic communities, in the capital, *Mahāvamsa*, 84, 17-21. The Dambadeni Katikāvata on the other hand states that only *sthaviras*, Elders, were appointed as heads of *āyatanas*, *Katikāvat Saṅgar*, p. 13.

24. *Cūlavamsa*, 81. 31-37.

25. Ibid. 85. 59-60.

Whether the colophon is a holograph cannot be stated with certainty. The writing in the colophon is very cursive, but is certainly contemporary with the writing in the body of the manuscript.

As a manuscript transcribed in the thirteenth century, this manuscript preserves a recension of the Pāli *Cullavagga* as current at the time. As far as the present writer is aware this manuscript does not appear to have been utilised by any scholar in the preparation of the printed editions of this important Buddhist text, most of which have been printed before 1937 when this manuscript was brought to light.

Another palm-leaf manuscript of about the same date as the manuscript discussed above is deposited in the Library of the University of Peradeniya.

It is a copy of the Pāli *Visuddhimaggā-tikā* of Ācariya Dhammapāla (Accession No. 276985).<sup>26</sup> The codex had been found in a collection of palm-leaf manuscripts belonging to the late Gate Mudliyar W. F. Goonewardene, a well-known scholar, and was presented to the University of Peradeniya by his daughter Mrs. Agnes Jayasuriya about thirty years ago. The codex contains one hundred folios of which a large number has been attacked by white ants. Apart from its value as one of the oldest palm-leaf manuscripts in Sri Lanka, it contains some interesting but tantalisingly meagre information regarding its early ownership.

I am most grateful to Mr. K. D. Somadasa, formerly Librarian, University of Peradeniya, for bringing this manuscript to my notice.

On the reverse of the first leaf of the manuscript the following words are incised in almost the same script as is found in the body of the same document: එයුදීමාගිතවේකා සිල මා තෙ

The words are appropriately separated. But the incised characters have not been stained in black, as is the practice, to bring out the letters with clarity.

Slightly below these words appear the following words: කපා(රා) ම සිලටය මා තෙ

These words have been written in characters of the same period and style, and probably by the same hand. They also have not been stained in black.

In the centre of the page now marked (5) which is otherwise blank are incised the following words, the characters being again unstained:

- 1 - - නි - - මා තෙර(සා)මින්
- 2 නාරද තෙරසාමින්ට දුන් වි
- 3 අධිමා(ගිත)ආදි කබවේකාවයි

It is clear that the separate letters and the word *sila* appearing in the reverse of the first leaf are abbreviations, which could be interpreted by reference to the page now numbered (5). Then *sila mā te* would stand for *Silavamsa Mā-tera*,

i.e., Sīlavāmsa Mahā-thera, the Grand Thera Sīlavāmsa. Kapārā mu certainly stands for Kapārā-mula, the name of a fraternity of monks which had its origin in the latter part of the Anuradhapura period.<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to ascertain the word represented by the letter *ma* appearing after Kapārā mu on the reverse of the first leaf. It most probably represents an attempt made inadvertently to write the letter *mā* appearing in its correct place after the word *Silavamsa*.

Before the import of these colophons discussed is reference may perhaps be made to another manuscript, which, on palaeographical grounds can be assigned to the same period as the manuscript of the *Visuddhimagga-tikā* described above. This is a copy of the first part of the *Sāratthadipani*, a commentary on the *Samantapāsādikā*.<sup>28</sup> This manuscript bearing No. Or. 6676 has been presented to the Library of the British Museum by Henry Parker, an irrigation engineer who had served in Sri Lanka in the early part of the present century, or more probably by his wife.<sup>29</sup> The manuscript bears a label which states in Sinhalese *Parkar mahatmayāgē Vinaya tikāva*, Mr Parker's *Vinaya Tikā*.<sup>30</sup> Parker had found this manuscript in the Ridī Vihāra in the Kurunegala District some time prior to 1902, when a copy of this was made under the orders of H. C. P. Bell, the Archaeological Commissioner at the time, to be deposited in the Colombo Museum Library.<sup>31</sup>

On the last page of the manuscript appear the following words written in characters which can also be assigned to the thirteenth century:

සිලවාම්ස තෙරස්වාමීන්ගේ විනය ටිකා ආදි කවයි

Translated the colophon would read: The first part of the *Vinaya-tikā* of the Venerable Thera Sīlavāmsa

The writing in the body of this manuscript is of the same period as that in the manuscript of the *Visuddhimagga-tikā*. It follows, therefore, that the Mahā-Thera Sīlavāmsa of the *Visuddhimagga-tikā* and the Sīlavāmsa Tera-svāmī of the *Sāratthadipani* (*Vinaya-tikā*) are one and the same, two eminent *Theras* bearing the same name and living at the same time being a rather unlikely

27. R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, University of Arizona Press, 1979, p. 290.

28. For *Sāratthadipani* and *Samantapāsādikā*, see, G. P. Malalasekera, *The Pali Literature of Ceylon*, Colombo, (reprinted), 1958, p. 192 and pp. 93-95.

29. It would appear that some of the palm-leaf MSS. that Henry Parker collected in Sri Lanka were taken by him to London, perhaps, on his retirement from the Irrigation Department. Later his wife appears to have offered them for sale. This MS. may have been sold or presented to the British Museum by Mrs Parker, *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIX, pp. 133 and 143.

30. H. C. P. Bell, Commissioner of Archaeology at the time, who was responsible for securing copies of old palm-leaf MSS. comments on the *Sāratthadipani* MS. as follows: "A very old copy of the *Vinaya-Tikā* obtained by Mr Parker, Irrigation Officer in the North Western Province, and kindly lent for the purpose, is being transcribed for the Oriental Library, Colombo Museum. This rare old manuscript contains 240 leaves of twenty lines, closely written in archaic Sinhalese characters and needs great care in copying. The manuscript probably belongs to the 13th century and is therefore the oldest yet discovered in Ceylon," For these comments, see *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, Annual Report*, 1901, Colombo, 1907, p. 14.

31. W. A. De Silva, No. 15. Transcription of this copy from the MS. now in the British Museum Library was completed in May, 1902.

happening.<sup>32</sup> It will be noted that in the latter manuscript the name of the owner is given as *tera-svāmi*, a position obviously lower in rank than that of a *Mahā-thera* (*Mā tera*),<sup>33</sup> the designation of the owner of the manuscript of the *Visuddhimagga-tikā*. It would appear that the Venerable *Silavamsa* had come into possession of the *Visuddhimagga-tikā* only after he had been appointed to the position of *Mahā-thera*. It will also be noted that in the manuscript of the *Visuddhimagga-tikā* an additional item of information is given that the Thera belonged to the monastic fraternity known as *Kapārā mula*.

The Venerable *Silavamsa* is not mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa* or in any of the other historical narratives of Sri Lanka. There is, however, some evidence to identify the one-time owner of the two manuscripts discussed above with the Venerable *Silavamsa* who compiled the *Dhātumañjusā*, a systematically arranged glossary of Pāli roots for the benefit of students of the Pāli language.<sup>34</sup> In the colophon to this work the Venerable *Silavamsa* is described as a *yatissara*, a leader among the monks, as *saddhammapañkeruharājahamso*, a royal goose in the lake of the good Dhamma, and as *āsittha-dhammatthiti*, with wishes for the endurance of the Dhamma. He resided, according to the same colophon, on a mountain fastness called *Yakkhaddi-leṇa*, which can be identified as the rock known as *Yak-dessā-gala*<sup>35</sup> in the present day, situated at a distance of 6 km. to the north of Kurunegala in the North Western Province of Sir Lanka.<sup>36</sup>

The *Dhātumañjusā* is assigned to the reign of King Parākramabāhu IV (A. D. 1302-1326) as a mere surmise,<sup>37</sup> a possible reason being perhaps that *Yak-dessā-gala* is situated quite close to Kurunegala, the capital of this ruler. Though this mountain fastness is closer to Kurunegala than to *Dambadeniya*<sup>38</sup> such a surmise can hardly be justified.

In the colophon appearing in the centre of the reverse of the third leaf, i. e., in the centre of the page, now numbered (5) of the manuscript of the *Visuddhamagga-tikā* the first word preceding the words *Mā tera (sā)min* is almost completely effaced, and the only letter that can be made out being probably *ni* or *na*. There appear to have been at least two letters on either side of this letter.

32. See note 23.

33. The office of *Tera* and *Maha-tera* were conferred on deserving monks by the King with the approval of the community of monks, *Katikāvat Saṅgarā*, p. 13.

34. *Kaccāyana-Dhātumañjusā* edited Pandita Devarakkhita, 1872. See also, Malalasekera, p. 237.

35. W. A. De Silva, No. 2085. See also translation of conclusion of *Kaccāyana-Dhātumañjusā*.

36. The rock named *Yak-dessā-gala* is situated in Megoda Kōrāle in Vā-uḍavili Hat-pattuva in the Kurunegala District, *Vivaraya sahitā Nam-pota*, edited Pannila Sri Sārānanda and Īpāta Sri Saranākara, Agalavatta, 1956, p. 72. See also, F. H. Modder, Animal-shaped Rocks of Kurunegala, in *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XI, Colombo 1890, p. 240.

37. Malalasekera, p. 237; M. De Z. Wickremasinghe, Catalogue of the Sinhalese Manuscripts in the British Museum, London, 1900, p. xviii.

38. Vihāras came to be built at Kurunegala at the latest in the reign of Parākramabāhu II, and the surrounding hills were also occupied by Buddhist monks probably about the same time, see, *Cūlavamsa*, 85. 62-63.

It is not possible even to hazard a guess as to the name that had been inscribed here. Whoever was the monk whose name had been inscribed here must have been a monk of considerable standing in the country, as he is described as a *Mā tera* (*sā*) *mi*, one of the two monks, as has been shown above, occupying the rank next to that of the *Mahā-sāmi*, the hierarch.

The monk named Nārada, described in the colophon as a *Tera sāmi*, venerable elder, only, would also have been a monk of some importance because appointments to the position of *Tera* (Sanskrit, *sthavira*) were also made by the ruling king. But his name does not appear in any contemporary or other document and has to remain unidentified for the present.

The Venerable Sīlavam̄sa had come into possession of the manuscript of the *Sāratthadipani* when he was only a *Sthavira*, while the manuscript of the *Visuddhimagga-tikā* had come into his hands later when he had already been appointed to the office of a *Mahā-thera*. The chronological order in which he had been appointed to the two offices of *Tera* and *Maha-tera* does not appear to be reflected in the writing either in the body of the text or in the colophons of the two manuscripts. It is, thus, not possible to suggest which of the two manuscripts is the older even on the not-too-reliable evidence of the hand-writing.

From the hands of the Venerable Sīlavam̄sa the manuscript of the *Visuddhamagga-tikā* had passed into the hands of the monk whose name appearing in the first line of the colophon on the page now numbered (5) has been almost completely effaced. This monk, who was also a *Mahā-sthavira* (*Mā-terasāmi*), had given the manuscript, probably as a gift, to another monk named Nārada, who was a *Sthavira* (*Tera*) at the time. It is not possible to ascertain at what points of time these changes in the ownership of this manuscript had taken place, in the present state of our knowledge, though in all likelihood these changes appear to have taken place within a short space of time, judging by the style of writing in the colophons.

It has also to be pointed out that all the foregoing statements have been made on the assumption that the leaves containing the colophons in the manuscript of the *Visuddhimagga-tikā* have remained undisturbed in the same order in which they were originally placed.

It is interesting to note that the manuscript of the *Sāratthadipani* was discovered in 1902 by Parker at the well-known and historic Ridi Vihāra<sup>39</sup> in the North Western Province, about 15 km. to the east of Yak-dessāgala. Thus if the identification here presented of the owner of the two palm-leaf manuscripts discussed above, is accepted, it has to be assumed that the manuscript of the *Sāratthadipani* had remained in the Kurunegala district for over six hundred years before it was discovered by Parker.

There is yet another palm leaf manuscript, written in Sinhalese characters, that can be assigned to the thirteenth century on the evidence of the hand-

writing. It is also a copy of the Pāli *ṭīkā Sāratthadīpanī*, now deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. This manuscript is said to have belonged to the Venerable Toṭagamuve Sri Rāhula Sthavira, the celebrated poet and scholar who lived in the reign of King Parākrambāhu VI (A. D. 1412-1467). The writer had the occasion to examine this manuscript some years ago and confirm Cabaton's view that it was transcribed in the thirteenth century<sup>40</sup>. He is, however, unable to say anything more about this valuable document as he has unfortunately misplaced or possibly even totally lost the notes he made thereon.

An attempt has been made in this paper to bring to the notice of interested scholars three of the oldest extant palm-leaf manuscripts written in Sinhalese characters with a brief reference to a fourth, containing the texts of three important Pāli works as current in Sri Lanka in the thirteenth century. Their authenticity and history, as far as the brief colophons on them permit, have also been established with a view to assessing their value as source material for editing these texts so necessary for a study of the development of Buddhist thought in Sri Lanka.

P. E. E. Fernando

P. S Since writing this paper I have been able to obtain some most useful information about the old *vihāra* at Kōnduruvā-poḷa from Mr Luxman Gunawardhana of Hamaṅgalla, near Nārāmmala, in a letter dated 7th October, 1984. On the basis of this information I am inclined to believe that this Vihāra, which covers an area of about two hectares of land, represents the residence of the Venerable Medhaṅkara, referred to as Kōnduruvā-vanaya in the manuscript of the *Cullavagga*. According to Mr Gunawardhana the architectural remains scattered about the *vihāra* grounds may be assigned to the 13th century, some of them possibly being of even a still earlier date. I express here my sincere thanks to Mr Luxman Gunawardhana for sending me a detailed note on the Kōnduruvā-poḷa Vihāra at my request. P. E. E. F.

40. A. Cabaton, *Catalogue Sommaire Des Manuscrits Sanskrits et Pālis de La Bibliothèque Nationale - 2e Fascicule - Manuscrits Pālis*, Paris, 1908, No 45. A palm-leaf manuscript written in the Sinhalese language and in Sinhalese characters, and assigned to the 13th century is reported to be in a monastery in Tibet. For particulars of this manuscript, see, R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, 'A Buddhist Manuscript in the Sinhala Language from the Sa-skya Monastery in Tibet', *K. P. Jayaswal Commemoration Volume*, ed. J. S. Jha, K. P. Jayaswal Institute, Patna, 1981, pp. 199-206.