

THE PHRA LAK PHRA LAM AND THE LAOTIAN CULTURAL TRADITION

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IN 1970, when I began my studies on the Rāma saga in Laos, none of the existing manuscripts had been published.¹ A number of studies and résumés enabled me to acquire some idea of their relative importance. However, it was not possible to undertake any exhaustive critical study without a detailed and direct analysis of the original texts. An indirect result of such analysis was my decision to publish certain texts from the original manuscripts in order to give them a wider circulation.

I published the *Phra Lak Phra Lam*² first, primarily because, far from being simply the translation of a foreign narrative into the Lao language, it constitutes one of the finest examples of Lao literature. In the course of an audience graciously granted to me, His Majesty King Sri Savang Vatthana described this work as a "monument of Lao literature executed in the purest Lao style".³ In fact, through its vigorous prose style, it graphically depicts the manifold aspects of Lao culture. Its annual recitation at numerous monasteries during the Buddhist Lent testifies to its continuing popular appeal.

Though the text is quite long, the narrator has laid down the sequence of major events in such a way that the relationship of cause and effect between these events can be clearly seen. An introductory section relates the establishment of Inthapathanakhon⁴ and Sisattanak (Vientiane), where the events of the first part of the story take place.

At the beginning of the present aeon, a Phom couple descends to the Earth from the Akanittha stage of Heaven. Since their bodies become heavy after tasting the flavour of earth they are unable to fly back to the heavenly abode and resign themselves to settling by the sea in the south. In the course of time, one hundred and one children are born to them and a city named Inthapathanakhon comes into being. While their one hundred and one children go to rule in Jambudīpa, their youngest son, Tapparamesuan rules in Inthapathanakhon.

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¹In addition to the *Phra Lak Phra Lam*, the following four versions are known to exist in Laos: the Pommachak in Tay Lu, found from Muong Sing; the Lanka Noi; the Hleuang Khvay Thoraphi, preserved in the Royal Palace, Luang Prabang, and written in Yuon; and the *Phra Lak Phra Lam* published by the National Library, Vientiane, in 1971.

²Published by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, from Vientiane, 1973, Vol. I-II. This edition has been referred to

in the present article.

³Audience granted on the 26th September 1972.

⁴The author of the *Phra Lak Phra Lam* locates Inthapathanakhon in the Khmer kingdom (part II p. 2). However, it does not seem possible to identify this city with a historically known city of Cambodia since the indications concerning its location are not at all precise. The problems regarding the identification of place-names mentioned in this text will be discussed in a forthcoming paper on "The Geography of the *Phra Lak Phra Lam*".

Since Tapparamesuan gives the throne of Inthapathanakhon to his youngest son, Virulaha, his eldest son, Thattarattha (Daśaratha), goes to seek his fortune in the north. At the end of his long journey, which is narrated with geographical precision, Thattarattha settles at Phan Phao. Later, on the advice of a seven-headed Nāga the guardian of the Mekong river, he transfers his capital to the opposite side and names the city Sisattanak after the name of the seven-headed Nāga.

Next, the narrator relates the birth of King Virulaha's son, Raphphanasuan (Rāvaṇa). In order to illustrate Raphphanasuan's conceit, the story of his former life as a Maha Phom (Maha Brahma) is included in this section.

The Maha Phom descended from the Akanittha stage of Heaven in order to be born on the Earth. On his way, he stopped in the Catummaharajika stage of Heaven. The "Then" advised him to have his spirit remoulded before descending to the Earth, but because of his conceit he did not allow this to be done. As a result, he was born deformed into a farmer's family in the outskirts of Inthapathanakhon and was known as Thao Lun Lu. Taking pity on the new born child, Indra came to him, and after asking him riddles regarding Buddhist doctrines, which he answered satisfactorily, the god took him back to the "Then" in the Catummaharajika. After several futile attempts to remould his spirit, the seven "Thens" took him to Indra's abode. He was remoulded there and became as handsome as Indra himself. The latter predicted that in his next life the Maha Phom would be very proud, greedy and powerful. He could not be killed by any other weapon but the arrow Keo Vasiraphet, which lies on the bed of the ocean.

Thus, after his short life as a deformed child, the Maha Phom is reborn as Raphphanasuan, the son of Inthapathanakhon's king Virulaha. As predicted by Indra, he is endowed with supernatural powers and armed with a heavenly bow of the third category. At the age of three he flies to Chanthaburi Sisattanak and abducts Nang Chantha, the daughter of his uncle, Thattarattha.

Taking Nang Chantha as his wife, Raphphanasuan contravenes the established Lao customs in two ways; firstly he violates the taboo against marriage with an elder cousin and secondly he does not ask for Nang Chantha's hand in the traditional way, which is by presenting dowry. As we will see later, while Lao society can pardon the first fault, it cannot forgive the second.

Worried about Prince Raphphanasuan's conduct, Indra sends a thevabut, skilled in astrology, to be born as the Prince's younger brother and to offer him advice. The astrologer's birth as Phik Phi (Vibhīṣaṇa) is followed by the birth of Inthasi (Indrajit), the youngest brother of Raphphanasuan.

Raphphanasuan then travels throughout Jambudīpa in search of one who can challenge him, and fights with the Lords of the kingdom of Takkasila and Lomavisay before returning to Inthapathanakhon.

As a result of King Thattarattha's prayer, Indra sends two thevabut, armed with divine bows of the first and second category, to be born as the King's sons, Phra Lak (Lakṣmaṇa) and Phra Lam (Rāma). At the age of one, Phra Lak and Phra Lam set forth on their journey to Inthapathanakhon. Phra Lam takes Nang Chantha from Raphphanasuan who has been lying in a coma for three months.

Regaining consciousness, Raphphanasuan follows Phra Lak and Phra Lam in order to rescue his wife. He fights many battles before surrendering at the mouth of the Bang Muk river.⁵ From there, Phra Lak and Phra Lam travel to Chanthaburi Sisattanak in a boat given to them by Raphphanasuan.

After this victorious campaign, Phra Lam is married to Nang Si Phimpha and Phra Lak to Nang Si Kanya and they are made respectively king and viceroy of the kingdom of Chanthaburi Sisattanak. They then send their officers and the horse Manikap to present dowries and to ask for the hands of the fourteen ladies whom they have married in the course of their expedition to Inthapathanakhon.

Next Raphphanasuan sends his two officers to Chanthaburi Sisattanak to present dowry for Nang Chantha. He himself goes there and fulfils all the conditions imposed by Phra Lam before getting Nang Chantha back.

When Raphphanasuan returns to Inthapathanakhon with Nang Chantha, everybody except his grandfather goes to receive him. In fact his grandfather is unable to reconcile himself with Raphphanasuan who, in his eyes, has violated a fundamental norm of Lao society by taking Nang Chantha, his elder cousin, as his wife. He is so disgusted that in the end he leaves Inthapathanakhon and goes to live on Mount Yukhanthon with his wife, sons and daughters-in-law.

The above analysis shows that the focal theme of the first part of the story is the Lao custom of presenting a dowry prior to asking for a girl's hand. All the major events of the story are designed to stress this custom. Being defeated by Phra Lak and Phra Lam, Raphphanasuan thus pays for his improper conduct. Not quite sure that the moral has made a lasting impression on the audience, the narrator relates further that, as ideal Lao princes, Phra Lak and Phra Lam do not take with them the daughters of the local chiefs, whom they had married in the course of their expedition to Inthapathanakhon, because they could not formally present dowries. They negotiate for them and present dowries subsequently, even though their marriages are accomplished facts. This is followed by Raphphanasuan's submission to the established custom.

Finally, the grandfather of Raphphanasuan, who symbolizes the older generation's adherence to the established customs, leaves Inthapathanakhon in protest against this marriage with an elder cousin, even though Raphphanasuan has gone to present dowry for Nang Chantha and ask for her hand in the customary way.

Raphphanasuan's decision to abandon Inthapathanakhon for Lañkā⁶ marks the beginning of the second phase of the story. After having settled in his new kingdom, Raphphanasuan visits Indra and seduces his wife,

⁵The Bang Muk river is the modern Huai Muk which flows through northeastern Thailand and joins the Mekong opposite Savannakhet.

⁶Prince Dhani Nivat has suggested that Lañkā of the Lao text should be identified with Lankasuk in the Malaya Peninsula. Cf. Dhani Nivat, "The Rama Jataka", Collected Articles published by the Siam

Society, 1969, p. 88. However, we expect the Buddhist writer of the Phra Lak Phra Lam to be more familiar with the island of Lanka. The itinerary between Sri Lañkā (Ceylon) and Laos via Inthapathanakhon seems to be well known. Such an itinerary is described in the Lao text, Pheun Phrabang.

Nang Susada. As in the first part, his abduction of Nang Chantha leads to the subsequent events, so in the second part, his violation of Indra's wife accounts for the events which follow. Offended, Indra's wife incarnates herself as Raphphanasuan's daughter, Nang Sida. In her infancy, she is cast adrift by her father for making an attempt on his life. After a long journey lasting for many years, she arrives at the hermitage of a sage who adopts her.

The narrator then relates in detail Raphphanasuan's journey from Laṅkā to the island of Nang Sida and his failure to lift the sage's bow, a feat he must perform in order to win Sida's hand. The sage creates a lady, Nang Suddho, identical in appearance to Nang Sida, and offers her to Raphphanasuan as consolation. However, before returning with this lady, Raphphanasuan makes an attempt to abduct Nang Sida which is foiled by the sage. On his way back to Lanka, Nang Suddho gives birth to nine invulnerable sons at the rate of one per month.

After Raphphanasuan's departure from the island, Phra Lam arrives there from Chanthaburi Sīsatānak and lifts the bow. He takes Nang Sida as his wife and sets off on his return journey.

Perceiving Phra Lam's victory with his divine eyes, Raphphanasuan appears on the island to make a last effort to take Nang Sida. However, before he finally succeeds in abducting her through the stratagem of the golden deer, he creates a succession of fatal insects, birds, animals, serpents, magical cities and a number of alluring things either to kill Sida's companions or to lure them away from her. Then, because her body is very hot to his touch, he creates a stone figure to carry her off. He keeps Nang Sida in a palace outside the city of Laṅkā.

Having been overpowered by the horse Manikap's magic spells, Raphphanasuan travels again from Laṅkā with Nang Sida to visit the island where Phra Lam is staying. On his way back to Laṅkā, he encounters the fabulous bird Phraya Khut, an ally of Phra Lam. Severing his wings with a ring from Sida's finger, Raphphanasuan returns to Lanka. Phra Lam cures the wounded bird.

In the latter half of the text, Phra Lam's efforts to assemble his allies and raise an army are followed by long descriptions of numerous battles fought in Laṅkā. However, the post-war events are only briefly described. While Phra Lam lives as a monkey for three years after eating a Nikhot fruit, the narrator relates the birth of Nang Phengsi, the daughter of a sage. The sage's wife gives birth to two sons, Sangkhip and Phra Līchan, as a result of her illicit relations with the Sun god. Suspicious of their legitimacy, the sage institutes a water ordeal. The two children are carried off to the kingdom of Kasi where they install themselves as king and viceroy respectively. Nang Phengsi also turns into a monkey after eating the Nikhot fruit. As a result of her union with the monkey, Phra Lam, a monkey son, Hullaman, is born.

Next, the narrator relates how Sangkhip banishes his younger brother Phra Līchan from the kingdom as the result of a misunderstanding created during their fight against the bull Thoraphī. Having reassumed the form of a man, Phra Lam meets the banished Phra Līchan and helps him gain the throne by killing his unsuspecting elder brother, Sangkhip. While fighting for her husband, Sangkhip, Nang Kottarat is blinded by Phra

Lichan. Phra Lam restores her sight and lives with her for some time. Thao Khuan Thao Fa is born as a result of this union.

After raising an army of one akkhopheni⁷ in the kingdom of Kasi, Phra Lam, his companions and his ally Phra Lichan, travel to Inthapathanakhon where they camp for some time.

Phra Lichan flies all over Jambudīpa and many islands in search of a suitable messenger. Finally, Thao Khuan Thao Fa offers his services. Accompanied by Hullaman, he flies from Inthapathanakhon to Laṅkā. One of the most interesting episodes of this journey is their meeting with a sage named Chao Rsi Ta Fai who reduces them to ashes and then restores them to life again. After meeting Nang Sida and introducing themselves with the ring given to them by Phra Lam, they arrive at the palace of Raphphanasuan. In an effort to kill them, the servants of Raphphanasuan wrap them in oil-soaked rags and set fire to them. After burning the city they return to Inthapathanakhon. Phra Lam sends them back to extinguish the few flames that still burn on their bodies, saying: "The fire of a city should be extinguished by the water of the same city".

Phra Lam raises another army of eight akkhopheni from Inthapathanakhon, and joined by the eight princes, his sons and nephews from Chanthaburi Sisattanak; he moves towards the ford in the ocean discovered by Hullaman and Thao Khuan Thao Fa. Because of their advice to send Sida back, Phik Phi, Inthasi and Settakumman are thrown across the sea by Raphphanasuan and are welcomed in Phra Lam's camp.

Hullaman and his three companions Thao Khuan Thao Fa, Satta Phraya and Kallaha Phraya, sever Khun Sivha's tongue which he had stretched to form a bridge in order to trap Phra Lam's army. The idea of fording the ocean is dropped in favour of a bridge which is constructed by Hullaman and his three companions. This is followed by an episode relating the destruction of the bridge by the four daughters of Phraya Nak, the king of the Underworld, and their subsequent union with the makers of the bridge, resulting in the birth of a son to each of them.

After crossing to Laṅkā, Phra Lam sends an arrow to warn Raphphanasuan who transfers Nang Sida to his own palace for her protection. Raphphanasuan's general, Phraya Chan, transforms a banana trunk into the dead body of Nang Sida and floats it towards the camp of Phra Lam with the rumour of Sida's suicide. Settakumman exposes this ruse in Phra Lam's camp.

The death of Raphphanasuan's four generals in the first battle precedes Phra Lam's abduction by Phraya Pattalum, king of the Underworld, and his rescue by Hullaman and the latter's three companions.

At the end of an indecisive battle fought by his nine sons, Raphphanasuan stretches himself to the height of Mount Yukhanthon to inspect Phra Lam's army. The latter shoots an arrow which follows Raphphanasuan wherever he goes.

Although Raphphanasuan pours his army of 12 akkhopheni into the battle, his wife Nang Suddho and his nine sons are killed. He shoots then an arrow which wounds Phra Lam in the sole. Hullaman brings Mount

⁷An army of one akkhopheni consists elephants and 21870 chariots. of 109350 soldiers, 65610 horses, 21870

Khanthamat with its medicinal plant, the dung of the bull Usupharat and a part of Karanak's pillow. Settakumman prepares the medicine which heals Phra Lam's wound. Phra Lam kills Raphphanasuan with the arrow Keo Vasiraphet, retrieved from the bed of the ocean by Hullaman, and installs Phik Phi as king of Laṅkā and Nang Chantha as queen. Inthasi is appointed viceroy.

After staying in Laṅkā for three months, Phra Lam returns to Inthapathanakhon, where the army of eight akkhopheni is disbanded. Phra Lichan sails for the kingdom of Kasi with his one akkhopheni army. The Phraya Khut also departs. Accompanied by Nang Sida, Nang Phengsi, Phra Lak, Hullaman and eight princes, Phra Lam returns to Chanthaburi Sisattanak. During his return journey several cities in Thailand are established and the eight princess are appointed to rule them. Hullaman turns into a man after eating the Nikhot fruit and is appointed the royal agent to collect taxes from the market in Vientiane.

After her return from Laṅkā, Nang Sida is condemned to death by Phra Lam for having drawn a portrait of Raphphanasuan at the request of palace maidens. Phra Lak brings his sword, dipped in the blood of a dead dog as a proof of her execution. In the meantime the horse Manikap takes her to the hermitage of her foster father. There she gives birth to a son named Phra But. At one stage, when Phra But is absent for long time, the sage makes a wooden image of him to console Nang Sida. On Phra But's insistence the sage gives life to the wooden image to serve as the former's companion. This companion is named Phra Hup.

The author then presents purely Lao circumstances in which Nang Sida again meets Phra Lam. Since her children insist on seeing their father, Nang Sida brings them to Vientiane. They stop in the house of the headman of a neighbouring village. The village headman's two daughters go to sell Hmak Teng fruit. Phra But, who helps them in their sales, refuses to give the Hmak Teng fruit to the servants of Hullaman. Fighting follows in which Hullaman, Phra Lam, Phra Lak and the horse Manikap are all involved without any being able to gain victory. Finally they are introduced to each other; Sida and her two children are brought to the palace of Phra Lam. After ruling for countless years, Phra Lam gives the kingdom of Vientiane to Phra But and Phra Hup. He as well as Nang Sida, Phra Lak and Hullaman go to heaven in the same year.

As can be seen in the preceding analysis, the description of Raphphanasuan's birth and early life has been given precedence over the description of Phra Lam's birth and early life.⁸ In fact Raphphanasuan's role is the most prominent. Other characters are introduced only when they are needed to further his story. Unlike the ten-headed demon-king Ravana of Valmiki, he is a young prince of exceptional physical beauty and displays at the very outset of the story a remarkable understanding of Buddhist doctrines. However, his downfall is caused by his pride and disrespect for established social traditions.

⁸Similar is the case in some other South East Asian versions of the Ramayana. Cf. S. Singaravelu, "A comparative study of the Sanskrit, Tamil, Thai and Malay Versions of the story of Rāma....." JSS LVI-2 p. 151.

Phra Lam's role in the story appears to be secondary since Raphphanasuan is always on the offensive. The author has tried to portray Phra Lam as an ideal Lao prince conscious of his ultimate duty as the upholder of social norms and Buddhist traditions.

The name of Phra Lam is invariably preceded by his younger brother's, Phra Lak; because this combination produces a rhythmic effect. However, Phra Lak rarely plays an active role in the story. Second only in importance to Phra Lam is the horse Manikap. He transports his masters, offers them judicious advice and acts as an one-man army. Many millions of enemy soldiers are reduced to dust by one of Manikap's kicks, as the narrator reiterates on numerous occasions.

Nang Chantha and Nang Sida, who display a completely Lao attitude towards life, are the two most lively female characters.

The monkey Hullaman is not simply a faithful ally of Phra Lam as in most other versions. He is Phra Lam's son. He assumes a human form at the end of the story. He has also been portrayed as a romantic hero.

Most of the numerous secondary characters are the creations of the Lao author and thus cannot be found in any other version of the story. In order to provide some comic relief, the author has given humorous names to some characters whose role, however, is not at all comic.

Finally, the characters act and behave like Lao and can be considered as representatives of different elements of Lao society.

Though the major episodes in the story are not numerous, the text has assumed a voluminous size through the extensive elaboration of the narrative. Discussions of the origins of place-names, descriptions of flora and fauna, details of Lao customs and beliefs, numerous battle descriptions, elements of love poetry and exposition of the Buddhist cosmology and doctrine are interwoven with the main story with varying degrees of skill.

The first part of the story is set in an area which extends from Inthapathanakhon to Vientiane, and includes northeastern Thailand. The narrator has given many legends about the place-names and has displayed his knowledge of the geography of this area.

In the second part the geographical horizon is extended with Raphphanasuan's transfer of his capital from Inthapathanakhon to Lan̄kā. Inthapathanakhon becomes a medial point between Vientiane and Lan̄kā. From Inthapathanakhon Phra Lam goes to Lan̄kā to recover his wife from Raphphanasuan. From there he comes back to Inthapathanakhon and then sets out for Vientiane. In the first section the place descriptions are very precise due to the narrator's familiarity with the area but in the second, the descriptions of the area between Inthapathanakhon and Lan̄kā are quite vague.

On the numerous occasions in the story when a character happens to pass through a forest, the narrator forces upon the reader detailed descriptions of trees, flowers, birds, serpents, fish etc., making the text a veritable dictionary of Laotian flora and fauna.

Interspersed with the narrative are numerous sequences of love poetry, rich in metaphors and similes. Plants, fruit, fish, birds and animals serve as literary symbols and testify to the closeness of Lao life to Nature. Thus, for example, "to ring a buffalo" means to take a girl as one's wife. The

Hmak Kok fruit stands for a girl. A talkative person is described by the expression "an elongated mouth like the Hlot fish's snout".

On several occasions, the Lao ceremonies of the Baci, of begging pardon from elders, of the birth of a child and of marriage are described with a surprising wealth of detail. Lengthy descriptions of wars often detailing magical feats fill the narrative. Hyperbole, meant to captivate the mind of the unsophisticated audience, is present throughout the story.

It is worth noting that, like all major works of Lao literature, the Phra Lak Phra Lam is designed to be sung and listened to by large gatherings over a period of several months. The repetitions of the same patterns of ideas and the stereotyped phrases are therefore intentionally introduced by the narrator so that his audience may not lose the thread of the story.

The story has been conceived on the pattern of a Buddhist Jātaka. Buddha first narrates the past story (atītakathā) of Rāma and then correlates the events and characters of the story with the events and people of his own lifetime. Thus at the end of the story the Buddha says that he is himself the reincarnated Rāma, his cousin Devadatta is Rāvaṇa, and so on. The narrator has exploited every opportunity to propound Buddhist doctrine. The story of Thao Lun Lu is so designed as to explain at the very beginning of the story the fundamental principles of Buddhism. Rāma, the Bodhisatva, is found preaching the Law even to elephants and oxen. Interesting details of Buddhist cosmology, including descriptions of different stages of heaven, of hell and of the universe and its mythical centre, Mount Sumeru, are offered together with a strange fusion of Buddhist cosmology and local beliefs.

A crucial task in the study of this text will be to determine its relationship to the Valmikian version and to other Indian and South-east Asian versions of the story. This will require a more detailed analysis and comparison with the other versions than is possible here.

It is difficult to identify with certainty any episode of the actual Rāma story in the first part of the story although the names of some Indian characters are found there. However, further research may reveal the existence of some episodes that have been completely transformed by local folklore.

In the second part of the text, the episodes of the Rāma story can easily be identified. The generally accepted opinion that the text represents an extra-Valmikian version appears to be correct. It may, however, be remarked that the influence of Vālmiki on certain sections of this part of the story is quite obvious. For example, the legend of the bull Thoraphi as a whole seems to be inspired by the Valmikian account of Dundubhī. One part of the story which narrates how the bull went from place to place inviting several persons to fight a duel with him seems to be an almost verbatim rendering of similar passages of Vālmiki.⁹

Without dwelling any further on the above aspects of the text, which will be treated in a separate volume, I shall note here certain technical aspects involved in the critical edition of the text published from Vientiane.

⁹*The Phra Lak Phra Lam*, part II, pp. 210-212. Cf. the Rāmāyaṇa IV, 11.8-22.

The manuscripts used in the critical edition

In addition to the three known manuscripts from Roi Et (north-eastern Thailand), Vat Pra Keo (Vientiane) and Vat Kang Tha (Ban Bo O), henceforth referred to as MSS A, B and C respectively, I discovered three previously uncited manuscripts from Ban Naxon Tai, Ban Hom and Vat Nong Bon, which shall henceforth be referred to as MSS D, E and F.

MS A consists of two parts, the first of twenty sections, and the second of twenty-three. It does not bear any date and is preserved now in the Thai National Library, Bangkok.¹⁰

MS B originally consisted of 43 sections, but half of it is missing. The remainder is now preserved in the Lao Ministry of Cults, in Vientiane.¹¹

MS C consists of 44 sections, divided into 4 parts, each of 11 sections. Some of its sections are missing. The manuscript was copied in the year 2476 of the Buddhist Era (1933 A.D.).¹²

MS D contains a complete text and is carefully preserved in the monastery of Ban Naxon Tai, 40 Kms from Vientiane. It consists of 43 sections divided into 4 parts. In the first part there are 10 sections, and in each of the remaining three are 11 sections.

MS E, which belongs to Mr. Chan Kam of Ban Hom, presents another complete and well-preserved text. The second part of the manuscript has 10 sections, and the remaining three have 11 each. Both the manuscripts, D and E, contain several dates which will be analysed later.

MS F is incomplete and does not contain any date. Only the first, second and fourth parts of this manuscript are traceable.

In selecting the manuscript to serve as the basis of a critical edition, I chose MS D. Only much later in my research did I discover MS E, which had been copied 43 years before MS D. However, careful comparison of the two texts revealed no significant differences. The two manuscripts appear to have been copied from the same original, as will be seen later. In both manuscripts, the copyists have made omissions and, as a result of careless copying, rendered the text defective. Fortunately, such omissions and errors are not always coincident in the two manuscripts. Thus the comparison was helpful in completing the text of this edition (MS D). I have indicated in footnotes in the critical edition even very insignificant differences between the two manuscripts, as well as the common errors which probably existed in the original manuscript. MS D seems to have altered certain archaic forms, which are present in MS E. I have noted such changes as well.

Comparison of MSS C and D did not bring to light any notable difference in the story. The Abbot of Vat Kang Tha informed me that this text

¹⁰Prince Dhani Nivat op. cit., pp. 73-90.

¹¹P. B. Lafont, *P'a Lak P'a Lam*, Pom-machak, 1957.

¹²Vo Thu Tinh, "Phra Lak Phra Lam", *Bulletin des Amis du Royaume Lao* (=BARL)

No. 6, 1971, pp. 1-94. Cf. the English version of the text, *the Phra Lak Phra Lam*, published by the Cultural Survey of Laos, 1972.

(MS C) was copied from MS E of Ban Hom (a neighbouring village).¹³ It seems that the copyist omitted the colophons found at the end of MSS D and E, judging them superfluous.

Unlike MSS D and E, MS C has forty-four sections. It is unlikely, however, that any extra episode occurs in the additional section since, in a manuscript containing 800 palm leaves inscribed on both obverse and reverse, a difference of twenty leaves can be easily explained by variation in the copyists' handwriting from one manuscript to the other.

The date and authorship of the text

The present text (MS D) contains several dates.

The colophon at the end of the first part records that Phra Khnan Pu was the copyist (*phu khien*) and mentions Chullaśakarāja (=CS) 12956, the year of the dog, as the date of the copying of the text.¹⁴ At face value this appears to be erroneous since the present year is only 1335 of the Chullaśakarāja. Assuming that the copyist meant either 1295 or 1296 CS, it seems preferable to adopt the later date since the year of the dog falls in 1296 CS.¹⁵

¹³What appear to be differences in details in Vo Thu Tinh's paper (Cf. f. n. 12) are inaccuracies resulting from the author's attempt to present a short and simplified text for the general reader. Some of these inaccuracies include:

(i) On page 1 (BARL No. 6), it is said that the Buddha was in the Vat Savatthi near Muong Phalanasi. But the manuscript mentions the monastery of Jetavan in the city of Savatthi (Vat Kang Tha, Phuk I, Mat I, p. 1).

(ii) On page 1 (*ibid.*) we read that Tapparamesuan did not rule and ceded the throne to his younger son. However, from the manuscript it appears that Tapparamesuan ceded the throne after nineteen years of rule. (Mat. I, Phuk I, p. 45).

(iii) On page 22 (*ibid.*, cf. the English version, p. 28) the author says: "One day Hapkhanasouane heard of Nang Chantha, his uncle's daughter. He rushed to Chanthaburi Sisattanak, and...carried off his charming cousin". But according to the manuscript Raphphanasuan flew to Chanthaburi Sisattanak without knowing anything about his uncle or cousin (Mat. I, Phuk 3, p. 24).

(iv) The author has presented his analysis following the original division of the manuscript into Mat., but he has placed the materials of the first Mat. into the second.

(v) On page 24 (*ibid.*) we read that Phra Lak and Phra Lam took wives in the course of their journey from Inthapathanakhon

to Chanthaburi Sisattanak at the following five places: Takkasila, Muong Thouay, Muong Khun Khom, Khun Phi Phak's (village), and Don Keut. However, according to the original manuscript they were married at six places instead of five; and the marriages were not all concluded in the course of one journey. Thus, on their journey from Chanthaburi Sisattanak to Inthapathanakhon they were married at four places: Nam Sathon, an unnamed place past Nam Hin Bun, Doy Ching (Khun Phi Phak's village) and Muong Khun Khom (Mat. I, Phuk 5, pp. 41-46; Phuk 6, p. 29; Phuk 7 pp. 14, 44). On their return journey they were married at Takkasila Nakhon Noi and Muong Thouay (Mat. II, Phuk 2, pp. 20-22; Phuk 3, p. 8 ff.). Due to this confusion places which are located in the extreme south appear to be situated near Vientiane.

(vi) Phra Lak and Phra Lam did not marry with four nang thevadas at Don Keut as the author states inadvertently. They simply spent a night of festivities there (Mat. II, Phuk 3, p. 22 ff.). According to the original manuscript, they married four nang thevadas at Nam Sathon (Mat. I, Phuk 5, pp. 41-46).

¹⁴The Phra Lak Phra Lam, part I, p. 229 f.n. I.

¹⁵I am grateful to Maha Pasit Saenraleuk of the Lao Ministry of Cults who verified the dates mentioned in the text.

From another colophon, at the end of the second part, it appears that a certain Mom Phai finished copying this part on Wednesday the 4th day of the new moon of the tenth month of the Śaka Era 2477 in the year of the dog.¹⁶ Though it is not specified whether it is CS or BS (=Buddhaśakarāja), in view of the fact that at present we are in BS 2516, it seems that the Śakarāja 2477 refers to the BS. The date given in this colophon seems to correspond to the 12th September 1934 A.D.

A third colophon at the end of the tenth section of the third part notes that the four sections of this part were copied (=sang) by Phra Kham Mi the remaining seven by Nen On and that the writing ended on Thursday, the 7th day of the new moon of the 9th month.¹⁷ The year is unfortunately not mentioned.

A final colophon at the end of the manuscript states that the Phra Lamma Kuman was written (khit khien) by Phutthaphochan on Wednesday, the 11th day of the waxing moon of the 7th month of the CS 1212 in the year Kot Set.¹⁸ This date should correspond to the 22nd May 1850 A.D.

The acts of copying and composing a text are normally not distinguished by different verbs in the Lao manuscripts. Thus in the four colophons noted above, terms like phu khian, lichana, sang, khit khian, mean simply writer or to write.

It appears, however, that the first three colophons indicate the names of copyists and the date of copying while the final colophon gives the name of the author and the date of composition.

In fact, the dates in the first and the second colophons seem to correspond to 1934 A.D., a date much later than that of the last colophon, 1850 A.D. If Phutthaphochan had simply copied his text in 1850 A.D. from an earlier manuscript, the latter copyists of MS D would not have retained his name. A copyist does not normally mention the name of a previous copyist. The uniform state of preservation of all portions of MS D eliminates any possibility of some parts of the manuscript being copied in 1934 A.D. and some other parts in 1850 A.D.

This conclusion is further supported by the dates furnished by manuscript E. On the covering leaf of all the sections of the third part, excepting the sixth section, the following information is found: "Through the benevolence of Phraya Ratsombat, the Phra Lam was copied on Wednesday, the eleventh day of the waxing moon of the eleventh month of the Śaka Era 1253, in the year of the hare (Tho), tinisok".¹⁹ The CS or BS is not specified, but considering that we are now in CS 1335 the Śakarāja 1253 seems to be CS (=1891 A.D.).

It is further stated on the covering leaf of the sixth section that Mr. and Mrs. Chan Kam had had this section copied in CS 1295, the year Hao (=1933 A.D.).²⁰ I learned from Mr. Chan Kam that this section of the manuscript of Ratsombat had been lost and that he had it copied from a spare copy of the manuscript made in his time.

¹⁶ *The Phra Lak Phra Lam*, part I, p. 476 B. f.n. I.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, part II, p. 196 f.n. I.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, part II, p. 419, cf. the frontispiece,

¹⁹ Cf. the frontispiece, C.

²⁰ Cf. the frontispiece, D.

At the end of this manuscript (part IV, section XI) there occurs exactly the same colophon containing the name of Phutthaphochan and identical details of the year CS 1212 to those given in MS D.²¹ Conscious of the importance of the final colophon in the original manuscript, the copyists of MSS D and E reproduced it in their texts. But the copyists of MSS A, B, C and F have not given this information although they appear to have copied the same text.

From the foregoing discussion it may safely be assumed that a text of the Phra Lak Phra Lam written by a certain Phutthaphochan existed in 1850 A.D. in the region of Vientiane. In the two villages of this region, separated by a distance of nearly 70 Kms. from each other, the 1850 A.D. manuscript or a post 1850 A.D. copy of this manuscript was copied at later dates; in the village of Ban Hom in 1891 A.D., and in the village of Ban Naxon in 1934 A.D. In 1934, while reproducing the text from the original manuscript, the copyists inserted their names and the date of copying in the first three parts of the Ban Naxon manuscript, but they copied the name of Phutthaphochan, the author of the text, and the date CS 1212, the date of the composition, which obviously occurred at the end of the original manuscript. Similarly in 1891, the copyists of the manuscript of Ban Hom inserted the date of copying, 1891 A.D., and the name of Phraya Ratsombat, the benefactor, but they faithfully copied the name of Phutthaphochan and the date CS 1212, which figured in the original manuscript.²²

An analysis of the political picture of Lan-Xang drawn by the author, and of the historical events which lie submerged beneath his veneer of folklore descriptions, may give a certain insight into the problem and offer some internal evidence by which we might confirm or invalidate the 1850 A.D. date given by MSS D and E.

The author of the Phra Lak Phra Lam maintains complete silence as to the name of Luang Prabang. To explain this, three alternative hypotheses may be offered: (i) The author was writing this text in the period after 1563 A.D., when Setthathirat transferred his capital to Vientiane. Luang Prabang then lost its importance and did not figure in the political geography of the period presented by the author. (ii) The author wrote this text in the period

²¹Cf. the frontispiece, A.

²²Since the latter half of the manuscript of Vat Pra Keo is missing, I could not check if any date is mentioned there. However, a scholar has noted that the last colophon of this manuscript contains the following information: Maha Buddhaghosatheracharya wrote the *Rāma Jātaka* on Wednesday, the 11th day of the waxing moon of the eighth month of the Chullasakarat 1200 in the year Kaset. However, this date appears to be erroneous because the Chullasakarat 1200 does not correspond to the year Kaset, but to Peuk Set.

The Phnom Penh manuscript similarly notes that Maha Buddhaghosatheracharya wrote the *Rāmarājajataka* on Wednesday,

the 11th day of the waxing moon of the seventh month of the Chullasakarat 212 in the year Kot. The above date is incomplete since the year Kot of ten-years' cycle is not followed by the corresponding year of twelve-years' cycle. However, it is interesting to note that all the elements of the above date except C.S. 212 are identical to the date contained in the last colophon of the Ban Naxon and Ban Hom manuscripts. It seems that in the Phnom Penh manuscript, the figure for the millenium has inadvertently been omitted as is the case with several other Lao manuscripts. Finally, a Lao manuscript dated C.S. 212 (850 A.D.) is historically improbable.

after 1713 A.D. when the kingdom of Lan-Xang was divided into three rival kingdoms: Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Champassak. He was a resident of Vientiane and intended to glorify this kingdom. (iii) Irrespective of political considerations, the author did not mention the name of Luang Prabang simply because he lived in the area of Vientiane and was not interested in Luang Prabang. This last hypothesis seems less than convincing in view of the author's invention of elaborate legends to explain a multitude of place-names, most of which are in no way related to the main story. Strangely, Luang Prabang is omitted.

The text does not seem to offer any internal evidence in support of the first hypothesis. Since Phra Lam has been portrayed as a mighty king of Vientiane, who was able to exercise considerable political influence over neighbouring principalities through matrimonial alliances, it may be argued that a powerful historical monarch like Setthathirat has been used as a model. According to the text, Phra Lak and Phra Lam, after their victory over Lan-kā, returned to Vientiane through Thailand. They founded, among others, the cities of Ayuthaya, Pisanuloke and Nakhon Savan where their sons were appointed as rulers. In terms of actual history, Lao military expeditions were sent against Ayuthaya and Pisanuloke and matrimonial alliances were fostered with the kingdom of Ayuthaya.²³ But at no time was either Pisanuloke or Ayuthaya reduced to complete subjection to the kingdom of Lan-Xang.

Thus the political picture which represents Phra Lam as a mighty king, whose commands were obeyed from Vientiane to Inthapathanakhon, the capital of the Khmer kingdom, and whose sons and nephews ruled not only northeastern Thailand, but also Ayuthaya, Pisanuloke and Nakhon Savan, does not correspond to any historical reality. Rather, it is the literary expression of a nationalist political utopia. The mention of Ayuthaya, therefore, cannot be seen as providing any sure index to the antiquity of the text. Even after the fall of Ayuthaya, the Phra Lak Phra Lam's author might have included the name of this famous kingdom to enhance the prestige of a utopian Lan-Xang.

The significance of the author's allusions to other historical events and locations in the text is equally subject to conjecture. Nevertheless, the following analysis, although by no means certain, appears to contain some measure of cogency, and to indicate that the author has referred to post-1713 Laos.

Hongsavadi

Two references to the kingdom of Hongsavadi appear to imply some relation to actual historical events. The first occurs in the story of the foundation of Muong Kham Keut. Thao Keut, son of Khun Mun Na of Vientiane, and his beloved Nang Kham Sing of Muong Khun Khom fled the authority of the rulers of their respective kingdoms. They established a new settlement whose name, Muong Kham Keut, was a synthesis of their own names. To prevent the kings of Vientiane and Khun Khom from

²³Maha Sila Viravong, *Phongsavadan* 126, 130 cf. Paul le Boulanger, *Histoire du Muong Lao* (Second Edition), pp. 101, 118, *Laos Français*, pp. 51, 55.

pursuing them and carrying them back, they wrote the following inscription on a piece of stone: "Another king from Muong Hongsavadi has come here".²⁴

Let us examine the history of Lao-Burmese relations to determine in what period a Lao rebel might have used the name of Hongsavadi's king as a shield to protect himself against the authority of the Lao king in Vientiane. Although the Burmese invaded Laos twice, in the years 1563 and 1569, it was only after the reign of Setthathirat that the Burmese king was able to lead a successful expedition to Vientiane. In 1575, he installed his Lao protégé, Phra Maha Uparaja Voravongsa, as the king. On his way back to Hongsavadi, the conqueror posted at every crossroad a proclamation in favour of his Lao protégé. The kingdom of Laos was thus reduced to the reign of Bureng Naung.²⁵

Although the Burmese, Lao and Thai sources contain contradictory references to the Burmese invasions of Indochina, Burma undoubtedly controlled Laos for some time after the disappearance of Setthathirat. The Burmese king Bureng Naung appointed a series of Lao rulers who accepted the Burmese suzerainty. During this period, a Lao rebel against the authority of Vientiane might well have used the name of the Burmese to divert the attention of his pursuers.

However, a similar situation in the latter half of the 18th century seems to be more probable. In 1753, during the reign of the Burmese king Alompra, Luang Prabang was attacked and reduced to the state of a subordinate kingdom. The invaders carried off Prince Tiao Vong as a hostage to Burma. Since the king of Vientiane had supported the Burmese during the attack, Inthasom, the king of Luang Prabang, attacked Vientiane in 1771 to take his revenge. At the request of Ong Bun, the king of Vientiane, a Burmese army marched on Luang Prabang and captured the city for a second time. The army of Luang Prabang, thereupon, lifted its siege of Vientiane and turned to meet the advancing Burmese. A pitched battle was fought in the plain of Kasi, resulting in the capitulation of the army of Luang Prabang.²⁶

The author of the Phra Lak Phra Lam might have had in mind the period of political confusion created by these Burmese attacks. The flight of a couple, their establishment of a new city bearing their names, and the writing of the above mentioned inscription may simply have been imagined by the author. However, it seems fairly probable that the story reflects to some extent the actual conditions of political upheaval resulting from the Burmese attacks with which the author was familiar through popular tradition.

A second reference to Hongsavadi does not at present appear to offer any clues to the dating of the manuscript.²⁷

Nong Bua Lumphu

The story of the settlement at Nong Bua Lumphu appears to offer further internal evidence regarding the date of the text.

²⁴*The Phra Lak Phra Lam*, part I, p. 425.

²⁵Maha Sila Viravong op. cit., pp. 122, 134, 142, 149, cf. Le Fevre Pontalis, "La lutte des Thai contre les Birmans au seizieme siecle", *Revue Indochinoise* 1914, tome 8,

p. 189, Paul le Boulanger op. cit., pp. 58, 65.

²⁶Paul le Boulanger op. cit., pp. 125, 126.

²⁷*The Phra Lak Phra Lam*, part I, p. 427.

Raphphanasuan ordered Khun Chong to lead the citizens of Vientiane back to their city. On his way to Vientiane, Khung Chong stopped at Phan Phao, from which one hundred persons fled. They made a settlement near a pool (Nong) of lotus (Bua) at the foot of a mountain (Lumphu) and named it Nong Bua Lumphu. The author adds that the people could not live there for long, since a Phraya Nak protected the pond. They went to the south, where the author predicts the rise of a city.²⁸ At face value, this legend seems to be devoid of historical significance. However, the following analysis of this folklore description suggests that the author has alluded to the rebellion of Phra Vor and Phra Ta against the king of Vientiane, in the year 1741 or 1766.²⁹

Although in the legend referred to in our text, historical details are not presented, striking similarity between that presentation and the historical description of the rebellion cannot escape notice:

1. The hundred persons mentioned in the Phra Lak Phra Lam story were the subjects of the king in Vientiane. Similarly the rebels Phra Vor and Phra Ta and their followers were the subjects of a king in Vientiane.

2. The flight of the hundred persons and the creation of the settlement at Nong Bua Lumphu had as their purpose the establishment of a community outside the jurisdiction of the royal authority in Vientiane. Similarly Phra Vor and Phra Ta were dissatisfied with the king of Vientiane and fled to Nong Bua Lumphu, where they declared themselves independent.

3. The hundred persons could not stay for long at Nong Bua Lumphu due to the presence of a Phraya Nak, who was the guardian deity of the pond where they had settled. Phra Vor and Phra Ta, similarly could not stay for long at Nong Bua Lumphu, since the king of Vientiane pursued them with his army.

4. The hundred persons were forced to leave Nong Bua Lumphu and flee to the south where, the author of the Phra Lak Phra Lam predicts, a city is to rise. According to the historical description of the rebellion, Phra Ta was killed. Phra Vor was defeated and left Nong Bua Lumphu to live in the south under the protection of the king of Champassak. He established himself at Wieng K'ong Kong, forty kilometers from Champassak.

Thus, it might be assumed that the author of Phra Lak Phra Lam has given folklore form to the rebellion, transforming the historical Phra Vor and Phra Ta and his followers into the hundred persons who escaped to Nong Bua Lumphu. In similar fashion, the king of Vientiane who pursued the two rebels and their followers has been given the identity of the Phraya Nak, who protected the territory of Nong Bua Lumphu and forced the new settlers to move to the south.

Passak and Attoueu

A reference to the city of Passak may be another indicator that could be used to date this work. According to the author of the Phra Lak Phra Lam, a certain Thao Pan Dam fled with a lady named Nang Sakda and established on the banks of the Mekong, a city named Passak.³⁰

²⁸Ibid., part I, p. 465.

Campassak", JA, pp. 558, 588 f.n. 129.

²⁹Maha Sila Viravong op. cit., p. 166.
Cf. Ch. Archambault "Histoire de

³⁰The Phra Lak Phra Lam, part I, p. 461.

No specific reason has been given for the flight of the couple. It is, however, obvious that the couple escaped and established Muong Passak because they preferred to live outside the jurisdiction of Vientiane.

A similar situation has been presented by some versions of the annals of Champassak which record that the mother of Chao Si Samut Phuthangkun and Phra Khru fled to escape the authority of an official who had usurped the throne of Vientiane. Phra Khru succeeded in establishing himself at Champassak and later invited Chao Si Samut Phuthangkun to be the king of Champassak.³¹

Thus, it seems probable that the author of the Phra Lak Phra Lam has referred to the existence of an independent kingdom of Passak (= Champassak) in post-1713 Laos.

The mention of Muong Attoupeu in the text seems to be similarly significant.³² Though a village named Attoupeu might have existed long before the reign of Chao Si Samut, it seems to be an historical fact that this village was raised to the status of a Muong by Chao Si Samut himself.³³

Vientiane-Lan-Xang

The frequent reference to "Vientiane-Lan-Xang" in the text also seems to be quite significant. If the text had been written when the term "Lan-Xang" signified one kingdom, the author would not have used a qualifying term. Only in the post-1713 period, when the kingdom of Lan-Xang was divided into three smaller kingdoms, could the term "Vientiane-Lan-Xang" have been used to distinguish this kingdom from the two other Lan-Xang kingdoms, Luang Prabang and Champassak.

It may be argued that the term has simply been used to indicate the fact that Vientiane was the capital city during the period when the kingdom of Lan-Xang was not yet divided into three kingdoms. However, this was such a well known fact that an author living in that period would not have used the clarifying term of "Vientiane-Lan-Xang". Since Vientiane is the focal point in the entire story, the possibility of the term "Vientiane-Lan-Xang" being an interpolation is excluded.

The foregoing analysis of the internal evidence suggesting the post-1713 period for the composition of the text is extremely speculative and tentative. It appears to correlate well, however, with the last colophon in each of the two manuscripts, which states that the present text of the Phra Lak Phra Lam was written by Phutthaphochan in 1850 A.D. When composing his text in 1850, the author might well have alluded to historical events which had occurred a century before.

It remains to be asked whether the period around 1850 was in any way particularly favourable for the composition of a work of such magnitude. As has been indicated earlier, the author has presented this lengthy text as a eulogy of the kingdom of Vientiane. After the defeat of Chao Anu in 1828, the kingdom of Vientiane was no longer independent and the capital city itself was a scene of utter desolation. It seems quite plausible that during

³¹Ch. Archaimbault op. cit., pp. 536, 538.

³²*The Phra Lak Phra Lam*, part I, p. 429.

³³Maha Sila Viravong, op. cit., p. 234. Cf. Ch. Archaimbault, op. cit., p. 595.

such a period of political eclipse, just this sort of work might have been written to inspire the people with the past glories of the vanquished kingdom.

It appears that the present text was developed in 1850 from a smaller nucleus, either from a written text composed in an earlier period, or directly from oral tradition. In fact, the actual Rāma story occupies only a small portion of the text. The description of Lao place-names, customs, and beliefs has assumed a far greater prominence. The relationship between these two distinct elements in the text obviously implies the superimposition of a mass of details concerning Lao culture on an existing Rāma-story core. It is not at present possible to determine, however, whether that Rāma-story core existed in an oral form or in a written form.

One might also ask whether one person wrote the entire text or whether others contributed to its development. Since the text does not display uniform literary quality, it might be argued that more than one person was involved. However, in so lengthy a text, one man's having written portions of varying literary quality cannot be ruled out.

No information is found in the text regarding its author. In MSS D and E, even the orthography of the author's name, Phutthaphochan appears to be faulty; since the name ending "phochan" has no meaning. Many erudite Lao have suggested to me that "Phutthaphochan" is a corruption of "Phutthakhochan" (Buddhaghosacharya).³⁴

If we accept this suggestion as probable, it may be asked whether this "Buddhaghosacharya" can be identified with the author of the same name who wrote the "Pu Son Lan". The latter text clearly states that its author lived in the kingdom of Lan-Xang.³⁵ It is almost certain that the author of the Phra Lak Phra Lam was a Lao residing in the kingdom of Lan-Xang. Throughout the text, he sings the glory of the kingdom, and of Phra Lam, its mighty king. He refers to the city of Vientiane-Lan-Xang with great pride and predilection.

The identification of the two authors appears untenable, however, if we subscribe to the generally accepted opinion that the "Pu Son Lan" was written during the reign of Suriyavongsa (1637-1694)³⁶. The Phra Lak Phra Lam on the other hand, according to MSS D and E, should have been written in 1850 A.D.

It is impossible to explain the difference of more than one hundred years unless one assumes that either the date of one of the two texts is incorrect, or that the authors were two different persons. It may be noted here that although considerable currency has been given to the opinion that the Pu Son Lan was written in the time of Suriyavongsa, the text itself neither bears a date nor offers any internal evidence as to the date of its composition.

³⁴There is another example in the text of writing phuthhasenā for Khuththasena, the *Phra Lak Phra Lam*, part I, p. 205 f.n. 2. Madam Borthwick has kindly drawn my attention to the possibility of a variant

reading; phocna (vacana).

³⁵Pu Son Lan, edited by the Comité Littéraire Lao p. 43.

³⁶Maha Sila Viravong op. cit., p. 155.

The title of the text

The manuscripts of the Rāma story found in the region of Vientiane are popularly known as Phra Lak Phra Lam. The author has intended, however, to present the story in the form of a Jātaka. The term "Phra Lam Sadok" occurs twice in the text, once at the beginning and once at the end.³⁷ Hence, Prince Dhani Nivat judiciously refers to the manuscript A as the "Rāma Jātaka", although on the covering leaf only the title "Phra Lam" occurs.³⁸ To avoid the misleading implication that there exist two different works, I have preferred to use the clarifying title, the Phra Lam Sadok.

The area of the Phara Lak Phara Lam's dispersion

Since all the manuscripts analyzed so far, except the one from Roi Et, come from the region of Vientiane, the term "Vientiane version" has been used for them. This term may lead one to think that the text of the Phra Lak Phra Lam was known only in the region of Vientiane. However, Prince Dhani Nivat's analysis of the Roi Et manuscript suggests that this manuscript is identical to those of Vientiane.³⁹ The Ban Hom manuscript also appears to have been copied in 1891 from a manuscript preserved in Ubon, Thailand⁴⁰.

A recent census of the Lao Ministry of Cults has revealed the existence of Phra Lak Phra Lam manuscripts consisting either of 43 or 44 sections, in the region of Savannakhet and Champassak. It is quite significant that these manuscripts are exactly the same in size as those of Vientiane. I, therefore, personally believe that this text of Phra Lak Phra Lam is a version widely known throughout central and southern Laos and northeastern Thailand.^{41*}

³⁷*The Phra Lak Phra Lam*, part I, p. 2, *ibid.*, part II, p. 416.

³⁸Prince Dhani Nivat, *op. cit.* p. 73.

³⁹Prince Dhani Nivat, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-90.

⁴⁰Mr Chan Kam, the owner of the manuscript informed me that his maternal grandfather, Phraya Ratsombat, an elephant merchant, had it reproduced from a manuscript which he had borrowed from a monastery at Ubon against a monetary security. Due to his great age Mr Chan Kam does not remember the name of the monastery, though he himself stayed there for some time. He recollects only that it was a very big monastery on the banks of the Mun river in Ubon. A manuscript of Phra Lak Phra Lam identical to the manuscript of Vat Pra Keo appears to be pre-

served in Phnom Penh. This manuscript is of southern Lao origin.

⁴¹A careful comparison of the present text with at least three more manuscripts coming from southern Laos and northeastern Thailand will be required in order to verify the validity of the above hypothesis. Such a comparison may bring to light some regional differences which need not necessarily change the basic story presented by this text.

*The present article substantially reproduces my introduction to the critical edition of the *Phra Lak Phra Lam* (Cf. *Supra*, footnote 2) published from Vientiane in 1973, which is now not easily available outside Laos.