

The Story of Prince Saṅgadā - a Mon legend in Southeast Asian context

ဝတ္ထုကောန်သွင်သင်ဂါ

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Opening lines of Saṅgadā

“I will arrange glorious words, like pearls on a necklace, according to the rules of poetry. I will tell a story that happened in the land of the Mon. In the country of the Hamsā Swan it appeared, the story of Saṅgadā it is called. This book was written before, composed in verses long time ago. Because much time has since passed the verses have become incomplete, the language distorted. I will therefore write the poem again, in perfect verses and in new words.”

Topics of the present study:

- General information
- Summary of the plot
- Historical background
- Value of the epic
- Comparison with Thai and Lao versions
- Linguistic characteristics of Mon poetry

1. General Information

- Old folk legend, performed for home or village audience
- Performed at merit making occasions at home
- Entertainment and education of audience
- Originally probably oral transmission, later written down
- Written versions frequently recopied and altered, no single author
- Same story also found in Thailand (Thai and Lao versions), no clear evidence of direct borrowing

2. Summary of the plot of the epic

King Senāgutta's little sister is abducted by the ghost Akāy Bala. In his grief the king leaves his palace and becomes an ascetic in the forest. There he meets seven beautiful young maidens whom he takes back as his consorts. Soon the six older sisters each give birth to a son, while the youngest sister and her servant have very special children, one of which is Prince Saṅgadā. He is born riding a conch shell and carrying an ivory bow. Afraid that their sons might lose the right to rule the country to their younger brother, the six older sisters talk the king into banishing the new born children and their mothers.

Prince Saṅgadā grows up and learns various skills from his Devatā playmates which were sent to him by Indra. When he reaches the age of seven, his brothers come looking for him and persuade him to go with them and rescue their aunt from the realm of the ghost Akāy Bala. He succeeds in bringing her back, but on the way to their hometown his brothers push Saṅgadā into a deep well in the forest, afraid that he might report his deeds to their father.

After seven days Indra rescues Saṅgadā and in the end he safely returns to his father's palace and becomes king of the country, while his brothers and their mothers receive their well deserved punishment.

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- Considered “historical” text ($\sigma\epsilon\omega\epsilon\eta$)

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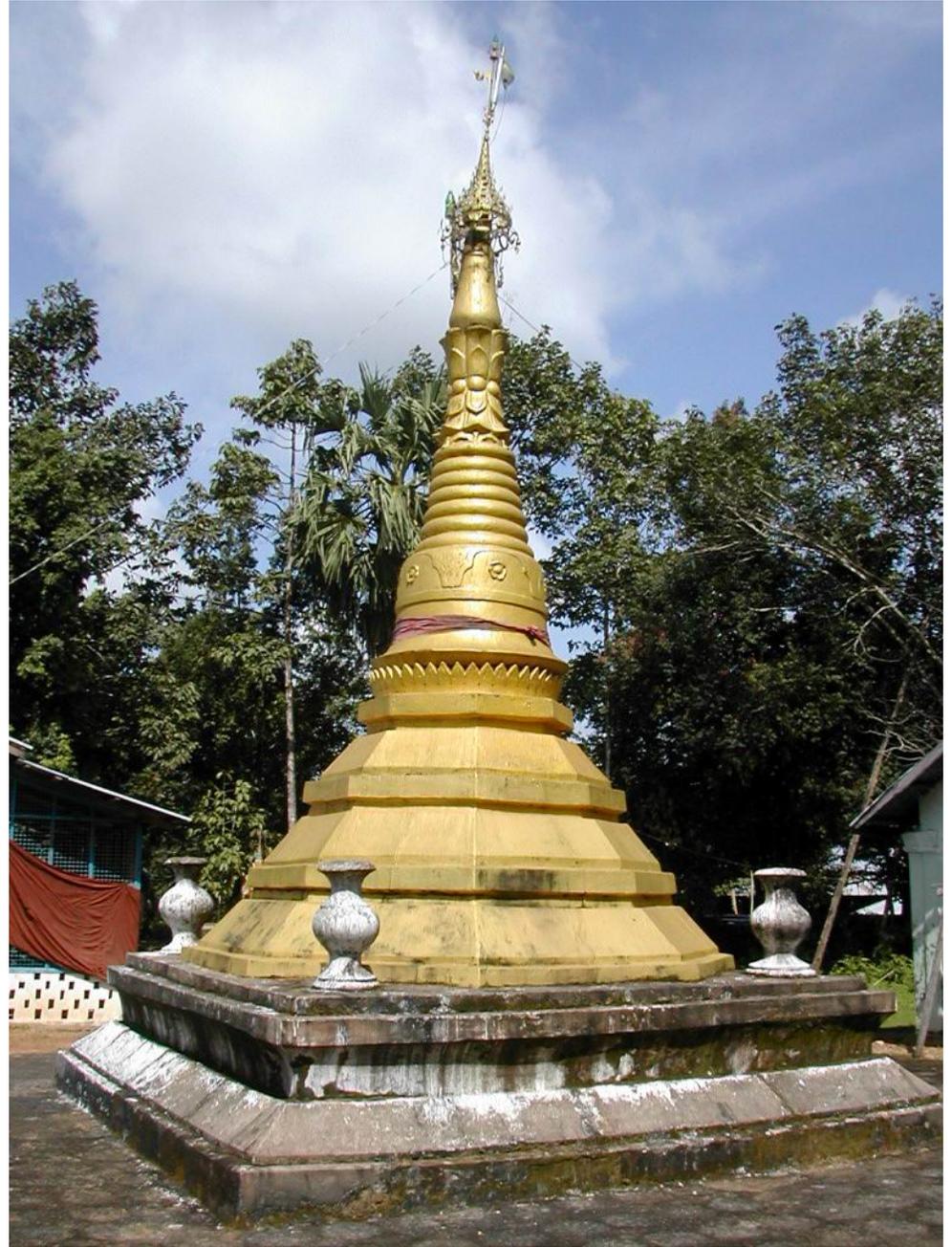
“Many tongues were spoken, all languages were heard, the place was filled with Chinese and Haw, Siamese (or Shan?), Mon, and Burmese, Indian, Chin, and Parsi.”

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- Old place called Saṅgadā (*၁/၉၁၉၀၃/၄၈၅ sēŋhətèə*) in South Burma, history unknown (connection with legend?)



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King, consorts, ascetic, astrologer

- Moral teaching, Buddhist elements

Deeds and results (karmic law, 'do good, get good'), explanatory flashbacks

5. Comparison with Thai and Lao versions

- Lao (Thai Isaan) version dated to 1650 (Thao Pangkham, Nongbualamphu)
- 2 Thai versions, older one undated, second early 20th century (King Rama VI)
- Mon version undated, probably frequently recopied/recomposed

☞ Thai version thematically between Lao and Mon

☞ Lao version most extensive, most historical, most political

☞ Mon version more archaic than Thai and Lao

Detail	Mon	Thai	Lao
<i>City</i>	Velukaccā	Pāñcāl	Peñcāl
<i>Hero</i>	Saṅgadā	Saṅkh Śilpjay	Saṅkh Silpjay
<i>Father of hero</i>	King Seṅāgutta	King Senāgut, son of Kuśarāj	King Kusarāj
<i>Mother of hero</i>	Devīpadma	Pradum	Nāñ Lun
<i>Sister of king</i>	Pāladevī	Kesarasumaṅḍā	Sumundā
<i>Sister abducted by</i>	Akāy Bala, ghost	Kumbhaṅḍ, ogre	Kumband, ogre
<i>King becomes</i>	ascetic	Buddhist monk	Buddhist monk
<i>Seven maidens are</i>	poor farmers' daughters	poor farmers' daughters	princesses of Campā
<i>Mother of lion-boy</i>	servant, no name	servant, Kraisara	first queen of Kusarāj, Candā
<i>Hero is pushed</i>	into well	over precipice	into waterfall

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Special sound and rhythm patterns, rhymes

Special vocabulary

Conservative morphology, uncommon syntax

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- ☞ Creation of emotional surroundings by sound and rhythm
- ☞ Conservation of archaic words and forms, dialectal vocabulary through fixed rhymes

Example: Morphosyntax

ဟိုတ်ဒေံဖြဟာန်နူဌာန်သွေဲခြာ အဲဂွိုင်စံင်တူ အဲဂွိုင်ပူဆာ။

hət tɛʔ sɛʔhàn nù than hùə-khra,
reason y.sibling love ABL place far-apart

ʔuə klàŋ cəŋ-tao, ʔuə klàŋ paocha.
1s much burn-burn 1s much anxious

‘Because my beloved little sister is far away from my place I am very anxious and distressed.’

Same sentence in colloquial Mon:

အဲစံင်တူပူဆာတုာဂမ္ဗိုင် ဟိုတ်နူဒေဆာန်အဲသွေ့ဘဲခြာနူဌာန်။

ʔuə cəŋ-tao paocha ma hələn hot nù
1s burn-burn anxious extent ATTR:much reason ABL

tèʔ chan ʔuə hùə-khra nù than.
y.sibling love 1s far-apart ABL place

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Locative verb <i>hùə-khra</i> 'be far away' occurs after the locative prepositional phrase <i>nù than</i> 'from the/my place'	Prepositional phrase follows verbal expression

Rhyme patterns

- Loosely fixed indigenous rhyme patterns based on syllable nucleus and coda

o o o x	o x o y
o o o w	o o w y
o o o u	u o o y
o o o r	o o r y
o o o y	o y o z
o o o p	o o p z
o o o t	o t o z
o o o k	o o k z



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Different vowel changes in two registers:

- tendency to diphthongise in light register (i > ɪə, u > əu)
- raising/fronting in heavy register (a > ɛ̃, əu > ɛ̃ə)

→ Some rhymes are not pronounced as such in modern Mon
but: not orthographic rhymes: swa? - mbo?, lñow – law
→ Rhymes must have been real at time of composition

→ Epic or parts of it dating back to pre-devoiced time (Middle Mon)

Later recopying of manuscripts did not change rhyme patterns

→ “distorted language” mentioned in opening lines is not about pronunciation, but probably missing or unclear words

Pronunciation:

kəbɔŋ thək kəlɔ *tə pɛŋ yɛ sətɔt*
kwèə pɔəʔ ləŋò *ləyɛŋ lə cɔt*
kùn kyac kəmyàŋ *pənaŋ taŋ ɓɛʔkɔt*
ʔuə mə ləŋò kla *hɛʔ khra təsɔt*

Transliteration:

kɓɔŋ thək kaluiw *tay paŋ yuiw stuit*
dwā pi lnow *layuŋ law cuit*
gun kyāk gamyuiŋ *pnāŋ tuiŋ mboʔkuit*
ʔay ma lnow klā *hwaʔ khra tasuit*



Pronunciation:

kùn thò trao **sw?** pa? lè **ḅy?kət**
tao *kəniəŋ* cw? **phəḍun** taŋ **kùn** prəə **sətət**
ʔuə ɗoc *ləŋò* **pəŋxŋ** ləyʔŋ lè **cət**
ʔərwəya? **səŋ** ɲòŋ kəm**rèŋ** **pʔt**

Transliteration:

gun dhaw trao **swa?** pa law **mbo?kuit**
tū kneñ cwa? **phḍun** tuiñ **gun** pray **stuit**
ʔay ɗik lñow **pñuñ** la**yuñ** law **cuit**
ʔariyya **sañ** ñoñ gam**rañ** **buit**



Pronunciation:

cəɗah nù rɛə	kɛ?	kpəʔlɛsa?	ʔɒt
ʔuə ɗoc /əŋò	hiəŋ	priəŋ	lò cəɾɒt
phɒ ʔuə /əŋò	ci?	ròt	pɒə? prɔə sətɒt
ʔontərəy	chɛk	cɔh /əŋim	lɛk kɒt

Transliteration:

cɗah nū rāga	kilesa	ʔuit
ʔay ɗik lnow	hen	preñ law caruit
phuiw ʔay lnow	ci	rat pi pray stuit
ʔantarāy	chak	cah lñim lak kuit



Pronunciation:

kə lày lòn ʔət	kə hom plət ɲìʔ
prəə lòn ʔəchət	taŋ kùn rət pəəʔ
ʔuə ləŋò toə ʔao	pùə krao təmlìʔ
phyɣŋ cətəna mùə	pùə tèhrèh ciʔ

Transliteration:

kuiw lāy leñ ʔuit	kuiw hom pluit ñi
pray lon ʔachat	tuiñ gun rat pi
ʔay lñow tuy ʔau	bway krau damli
phyuñ cetnā mway	bway daħrah ci



Pronunciation:

ʔuə priəŋ lə hən̩iʔ

taŋ lən̩ka plə̀ə

həm lə̀ lə̀c m̩ə̀

pə̀ɬə̀ rə̀h hən̩sa

sə̀ərvə̀ʔ wə̀əkyə̀ʔ

p̩ə̀ə ləm̩iəŋ chə̀nt̩ə̀ʔ

pə̀ɬə̀ rə̀h mən̩ŋə̀ʔ

prakət hət̩aʔ

Transliteration:

ʔay preŋ law g̃ni

tuiŋ laŋkā blay

huiŋ law lik mway pḍay raḥ mañā

pḍay raḥ haṁsā

sīri wākya

bway lmeŋ chanda

prākat gata



6. Conclusion

- › Story probably based on an old folk legend common to different peoples in Southeast Asia
- › Rhyme patterns suggest early date (pre-devoiced, pre-register)
- › Mon literature should be seen as integral part of Southeast Asian literature with its own characteristics besides shared components shared with other literatures
- › More research needed, including comparison of existing versions (pamphlet manuscripts in monasteries and other collections)

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