

Saṅghamittā's Story

(from Extended Mahāvamsa V, XV, XVIII–XX)



Text edited by
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(1937 A.D. / 2481 B.E.)

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Preface

The Mahāvamsa is a well-known chronicle from Sri Lanka that has seen a number of translations into English, most famously by Wilhelm Geiger.¹ It tells the story of the kings of Sri Lanka, the establishment of Buddhism in that country, and the support and challenges the religion has received down the ages.

What is little known to the general public is that there is a secondary version of the text, which its editor chose to call the *Extended Mahāvamsa*.² This text is almost twice as long as the original text,³ which has been accomplished in two ways: through addition and through rewriting. It therefore contains much extra information about all aspects of the story, though the additions are unevenly spread.⁴

The sections presented here are those that pertain to the arahat Saṅghamittā's story. This is not told, as we might like, in a continuous narrative, but rather—as it is incidental to the main story—comes to us in isolated sections. Be that as it may, we still have a fairly large and interesting amount of information on a nun who was—and still is—held in the very highest esteem in Sri Lanka.

The episodes cover her birth, going forth, journey to Sri Lanka, and the central role she played in establishing the religion in that country. It also records her passing, along with the passing of the first generation of missionaries.

In what follows, the material that is different from the *Mahāvamsa* is set in italics and the materials that coincide are in normal font. The chapter headings are taken from the original end titles, while the internal headings in square brackets have been supplied by the translator to help give context.

The translations presented here are excerpted from a much larger selection I have been making centered around Asoka and the Missions,⁵ and as far as I know they are the first

translations into English⁶ of any section from the extended version of the *Mahāvamsa*.

In preparing this translation I was fortunate enough to be able to consult with two experts on Sri Lankan medieval texts and history: Prof. Dr. Junko Matsumura in Japan and Ven. Dr. M. Wijithadhamma in Sri Lanka. If any mistakes remain, it is because I didn't get them corrected with these two scholars.

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu, July 2012/2556⁷

From V. The Third Recital

[Saṅghamittā's Birth]

ExtMhv 246-263 ≠ Mhv XIII 8-11

Formerly in the Moriyān lineage, a son called Bindusāra was born to the previous king called Candagutta⁸ in the city of Pāṭaliputta, and after the death of his father, while still growing, he became the king.

To that king there were two sons of the same mother, and to those two, there were ninety-nine other sons of the king who were brothers by different mothers.

To the eldest of them all, Prince Asoka, the Lord of the Earth gave the vice-sovereignty over the country of Avanti. Then one day the king came to the attendance hall, and seeing his son, he sent him off, saying: "Go to the country and dwell in the city of Ujjeni."

In accordance with his father's bidding, he went to Ujjeni by the interior road, and there in the city of Vedisa he arranged to make his dwelling in the house of the merchant Deva.

Seeing the merchant's daughter, he reflected gladly and said this: "I have heard she is endowed with auspicious marks, wealth, affection, and is amiable; if they will receive these gifts, I will win her favor."

They received what was given, and he became intimate with her. After life arose in the womb, she was led to the city of Ujjeni, and there she gave birth to the prince's handsome son, called Mahinda, and also had a daughter called Saṅghamittā.

When Bindusāra was lying on his deathbed, he remembered his son and sent ministers to fetch him from the city of Ujjeni. They went to Asoka with the news and announced his bidding, and he went quickly into their presence.

He placed his children and wife there on the interior road of the city of Vedisa and went into his father's presence. When his father

¹ First published in 1912. The edition I have access to was published by the Ceylon government in 1950 and reprinted in 1986. There are also translations by George Tournier (1837), Ananda Guruge (1990), and an abridged translation by Ruwan Rajapakse (2001).

² Extended Mahāvamsa, Chapters XII-XIV, edited by G. P. Malalasekera, Colombo 1937. Reprinted by the Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1988. I think it would have been better called the Expanded Mahāvamsa, as there is a danger of thinking of it as an extension rather than enlargement of the original, and confusing it with the so-called Cūḷavamsa.

³ 5,791 verses against 2,904.

⁴ Sometimes the extended version simply follows the original for a long time, at others it gives a lot of information otherwise not recorded there.

⁵ For more selections please see <http://www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net/English-Texts/Asokan-Missions/index.htm>.

⁶ The text has not yet been translated into Sinhala either.

⁷ Buddhist era.

⁸ Candagutta was the founder of the Mauryan Empire, which eventually Asoka inherited.

died in the city of Pāṭaliputta, he did the proper duties to the body for seven days. Then he had his ninety-nine brothers by different mothers murdered and raised the royal canopy over himself and was consecrated right there in the city.

After the two children were sent out of the presence of the king, the venerable mother herself resided right there in the city of Vedisa.

[The Going Forth of Saṅghamittā's Uncle and Husband]

ExtMhv 462-479 = Mhv. 154-172

One day Prince Tissa went hunting and saw deer sporting in the wilderness, and having seen that, he thought thus: "Even the deer who live on grass enjoy themselves in the wilderness, will not the monks who live on pleasant food also enjoy themselves?"

He went to his house and informed the king about his thought. To teach him, Asoka gave him sovereignty for seven days, saying: "You can experience sovereignty for seven days, young man; after that I will kill you."⁹

With the passing of seven days, he asked: "Why are so you wasted away?" "Through fear of death," he said, and the king spoke again, saying: "Thinking that after seven days you will die, you did not enjoy them; how will the strivers enjoy themselves, dear, when they always contemplate death?"

Spoken to thus by his brother, he gained faith in the dispensation and in time having gone hunting again, he saw the restrained elder Mahādhammarakkhita, pollutant-free, being fanned with a sāl branch by a nāga, and the one with wisdom reflected: "When will I go forth in the Victor's dispensation and live in the wilderness like this elder?"

The elder, in order to instill faith, rose into the sky, went to Asoka's monastery and stood on the water of the pool. He hung the robes he wore in the sky and descended into the pond¹⁰ and bathed his limbs.

The prince, seeing this psychic power, gained great faith, and saying: "Today itself I will go forth!" the wise one made a wise decision. He approached and respectfully asked permission from the king for his going forth, and being unable to prevent him, the Lord of the World, surrounded by a great retinue, took him to his own monastery, and he went forth in the presence of the elder Mahādhammarakkhita. With him roughly 4,000 other men

also received the going forth, but the exact number is not known.¹¹

The Lord of Men's nephew, called Aggibrahmā,¹² well-known as the husband of the king's daughter Saṅghamittā, and their son who was known by the name of Sumana, after asking permission from the king, went forth with the prince.

The prince's going forth was in King Asoka's fourth year and increased the benefit of the multitude. Right there he received the higher ordination, and having the supporting conditions, while striving, the prince became a worthy one with the six psychic powers.

[The 84,000 Monasteries]

ExtMhv 480-490 = Mhv. 173-183

All those delightful monasteries he had undertaken to build in all the cities were completed within three years. And through the superintendent elder Indagutta's psychic power, the one called Asokārāma¹³ was also completed. In the various places that had been visited by the Victorious One, the Lord of the Earth made delightful shrines.

From the eighty-four thousand cities on all sides, letters were brought on the same day, saying: "The monasteries¹⁴ are finished."

Having heard the letters,¹⁵ the great king of great power, success, and heroism, desired to hold great festivals himself at all the monasteries. In the cities the drum was beaten and it was announced:

A week from this day all the monasteries must hold a festival at the same time in all directions. On the whole earth, league by league,¹⁶ give a great donation and make decorations along the pathways and in the village monasteries. In all the monasteries every day prepare a great donation for the community of monks, according to the right time and according to ability, with ornamentation of garlands of flowers and strings of lights here and there, and all musical instruments, and

⁹ As he had already killed ninety-nine of his brothers, this must have sounded very threatening.

¹⁰ Monks are allowed three covers for their bodies: their robes, a fire-house (sauna) covering, and a body of water covering. See Vinaya Cullavagga, Ch. 5, 16, 2.

¹¹ A curious admission, as the numbers never seem to be realistic anyway. Geiger interprets this as meaning: *the number of those who afterwards were ordained is not known*; but quite how he derives this meaning is unclear to me.

¹² Although I cannot find more information on Aggibrahmā, it appears he must have been Tissa's son, as it is inconceivable that Asoka, who had killed all his rivals to the throne except Tissa, would marry his daughter to one of his rival's sons.

¹³ I.e., Asoka's monastery.

¹⁴ *Vihāra* literally means "a living place," but by this time it had taken on the special meaning of a living place for monastics, i.e., a monastery.

¹⁵ We would say "having read the letters," but in court the letters would have been read out.

¹⁶ Meaning "in every place."

manifold presents. Having taken upon themselves the fast-day observances,¹⁷ let everyone listen to Dhamma and make innumerable offerings and merit on that day.

And everyone, everywhere, in every way, in accordance with that order, prepared offerings, delighting the heavens.

[The Going Forth of Mahinda and Saṅghamittā]

ExtMhv 491-519 ≠ Mhv. 184-211

On that day the great king, decked out with all adornments, together with his harem and ministers and surrounded by his army, went to his own monastery,¹⁸ as though splitting the whole earth,¹⁹ and after worshipping the supreme community, stood in the midst of the community.

In that assembly there were 800 million monks, and of them, one hundred thousand were strivers who had destroyed the pollutants.²⁰ There were also ninety thousand nuns in that place, and at that time one thousand nuns had destroyed the pollutants.

Those who had destroyed the pollutants performed the miracle called “Opening the World”²¹ for the purpose of instilling confidence in King Dhammāsoka.

Previously, because of his wicked deeds, he was known as “Violent Asoka,” and later, because of his meritorious deeds, he was known as “Righteous Asoka.”

He looked at the Rose Apple Island, which is surrounded on all sides by the ocean and all the monasteries decorated with many offerings, and having seen that, he was very satisfied, and after sitting down, he asked the community: “Was anyone, venerable sirs, so generous in the dispensation of the Greatly Fortunate One?”

The elder Moggaliputta²² answered the king’s question: “Even while the Fortunate One was living, there has been no generosity like unto yours!”²³

Hearing that statement, the king was very satisfied and asked him: “Is there anyone who inherits the Awakened One’s dispensation who is like unto me?”

The elder saw the supporting conditions of the king’s son Mahinda, and similarly of the king’s daughter Saṅghamittā, and being responsible for the dispensation, and seeing the conditions for the its growth, he answered the king:

Even such a one who is greatly generous is not known as an heir in the dispensation. Whoever, Great King, having amassed a heap of wealth from the plains of the earth up to the tip of the Brahma worlds would give it all as a great donation to the community of monks is still only known as a supporter of material requisites, O Ruler of Men.

But he who lets his son or daughter go forth in the dispensation is a true supporter of the dispensation, as well as our material supporter.

Then the Lord of the World, wishing to be a supporter of the dispensation, asked Mahinda and Saṅghamittā as they were standing there: “Will you go forth, dears? Going forth is known as a great thing.”

Hearing their father’s statement, they said this to their father: “Today we will go forth if the God-King wishes; there will be gain for us and for you in our going forth.”

Since the time of the Prince Tissa’s going forth, *the young man Mahinda had naturally desired to go forth*; and Saṅghamittā had made a resolve at her husband Aggibrahmā’s going forth.

Although the Lord of the Earth desired to give the vice-sovereignty to Mahinda, even more than that he was pleased with his going forth. His dear son Mahinda, who was wise, handsome, and very strong, he let go forth with festivities, and also his daughter Saṅghamittā.

Then Mahinda, the king’s joy, was twenty years old, and the king’s daughter, Saṅghamittā, had reached eighteen.²⁴ On the same day he had the going forth and higher ordination, and on that very day she had the going forth and the placing in training.²⁵

The prince’s preceptor was called Moggali,²⁶ the elder Mahādeva let him go forth, but Majjhantika²⁷ made the formal announcement; and in the place of the higher

¹⁷ This means the eightfold precepts, in brief: to restrain from killing, stealing, sexual contact, wrong speech, intoxicants, eating after noon, amusements, and decorations.

¹⁸ I.e., the Asokārāma.

¹⁹ The simile is not clear; maybe it is meant to indicate his power.

²⁰ I.e., were arahats.

²¹ Described in the Buddhavaṃsa commentary as making all the beings in the universe visible to each other, from the highest heaven to the lowest hell.

²² Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa was the chief elder in the Saṅgha at the time and would soon head the Third Council.

²³ Interestingly, this places Asoka above Anāthapiṇḍika as the most generous supporter.

²⁴ I do not know how we can reconcile this with her having had a son who had taken novice ordination two years earlier. If it were so, it would mean that she gave birth to her son around age 11.

²⁵ This means she was given the further ordination as a sikkhamāna, which she must hold for two years, before acquiring her higher ordination as a bhikkhūṇī.

²⁶ I.e., Moggaliputta Tissa.

²⁷ These are two of the named missionaries in the later part of the text, who took the Dispensation to Mahisamaṇḍala and Kasmīra Gandhāra, respectively. They were sent on their missions by Mahinda’s preceptor, Moggaliputtatissa.

ordination,²⁸ Mahinda attained worthiness, together with the analytic knowledges.²⁹

Saṅghamittā's preceptor was the well-known nun Dhammapālā, her teacher the nun Āyupālā, and in time she also became pollutant-free. They both were lights of the dispensation, and helpers of the island of Laṅkā; they went forth six years after King Dhammāsoka came to the throne.

The great Mahinda, who brought faith to the island, in his third year learned the three baskets³⁰ in the presence of his preceptor. The nun, a crescent moon, and the monk Mahinda, the sun, *younger sister and brother, these two were lights of the Awakened One's dispensation.*

From XV. The Acceptance of the Great Monastery

[The Great Cloud Monastery and Queen Anulā]

ExtMhv 1-37b ≠ Mhv. 1-26b

[The story now moves on around thirteen years. In the meantime, King Asoka had seen to the reunification of the Saṅgha and the holding of the Third Council, in which the teachings had been reconfirmed. Following this, the leading monk at the Council had arranged to send missionaries to the border area. The arahat Mahinda had been sent to the island of Laṅkā, where he had converted King Devānampiyatissa and many others. The story picks up as he continues with his teaching mission.]

"The elephant stall is crowded," said those who had assembled there; and outside the southern gate in the delightful Joy Wood, in the king's garden, which was well covered, cool, and grassy, the people reverentially prepared seats for the elders.

Having left by the southern gate, the elder Mahinda sat down there, *and the one skilled in Dhamma related the Simile of the Poisonous Snake.*³¹ *In that place one thousand breathing beings entered into the first path and fruit*³² *on that day, and on the second day also two and a half thousand penetrated the Dhamma.*

Many women from the great families came there *and after worshipping, sat down, filling the garden.* The elder taught the

Discourse on the Fools and the Wise,³³ and one thousand of those women entered into the first path and fruit.

And so there in that garden the evening time set in, and therefore the elders departed, saying: "We go to the mountain."

Seeing them going, men said: "The elders have left straight away," and they went and informed the king. The king went quickly, and after going and worshipping the elder, the Lord of the Planet said: "Venerable sir, it is far from here to the mountain in the evening; live comfortably right here in the Joy Wood."

"It is unsuitable, being too near to the city," he said.

*Hearing that he uttered this statement to the elder: "The Great Cloud Grove*³⁴ *is neither too near nor too far, delightful, endowed with shade and water; be pleased to reside there. You should turn back, venerable sir!" and the elder turned back.*

In that place where they turned back, on the banks of the Kadamba River,³⁵ the shrine called the Turning Shrine was built.

The Best of Charioteers led the elders to the south of the Joy Wood and through the eastern gate in the Great Cloud Grove. There, near the delightful palace, he spread good beds and chairs and said, "Dwell comfortably here."

The king worshipped the elders and, surrounded by his ministers, entered the city, but the elders dwelt for the night right there.

Having gathered flowers in the morning, the Lord of the Planet, after approaching the elders and worshipping them with the blossoms, asked, "How? Did you abide happily? Was the garden comfortable?"

"We did abide happily, Great King; the garden is comfortable for strivers."

He asked, "Is a monastery suitable for the community, venerable sir?"

The elder said: "It is suitable," and the one skilled in what was suitable and unsuitable spoke about the receiving of the Bamboo Grove Monastery.³⁶ *Hearing that, the Lord of the World was happy and very joyful.*

²⁸ It means right there in the *sīma*, or boundary hall.

²⁹ They are four: analytic knowledge of meanings, conditions, language, and of improvisation.

³⁰ The three baskets of the teaching: Discipline (*Vinaya*), Doctrine (*Dhamma*), and the Abstract Teaching (*Abhidhamma*).

³¹ Probably SN 35, sut. 238, although there are others that include a relevant simile. It was also taught by Majjhantika in Kasmīra Gandhāra, see above XII v. 30.

³² I.e., they became stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*).

³³ MN 129; it relates the deeds done by fools and by wise men and their respective rewards.

³⁴ Situated south of the Joy Wood, which itself was south of the city area.

³⁵ Which lay to the east of the city.

³⁶ By the Buddha from King Bimbisāra; see The Great Chapter, section 40.

Queen Anulā, together with five hundred women, came in order to worship the elders, and after listening to the Dhamma teaching with faithful minds, they entered the second path and fruit.³⁷

Then Queen Anulā had a desire to go forth together with the five hundred women and said this to the Lord of the World: “Today itself we will go forth, if it is your wish, Lord of the Earth.”

Hearing her statement, the king said to the elder: “Venerable sir, Queen Anulā desires to go forth together with five hundred women; please give them the going forth.”

“It is not suitable, Great King, for us to give the going forth to women.³⁸ There is in Pāṭaliputta³⁹ a nun who is my younger sister, Saṅghamittā by name, who is famous and very learned, Lord of Men.

“Bring the southern branch from the great bodhi tree of the Lord of Ascetics,⁴⁰ and also the noble nuns, to the city in the island of Laṅkā, King. Then as the bodhi trees of the three self-made buddhas⁴¹ were planted by the kings, so today the bodhi tree⁴² of the famous Gotama, which has a resplendent halo, should be planted, Lord of the Earth.

“Send a message to the king, our father, saying: ‘Let her come,’ and that elder nun will come and give the going forth to these women.”

After saying: “Well said!” and taking the noble water jug, the king said: “I give this Great Cloud Grove to the community,” and sprinkled water over the right hand of the Elder Mahinda.⁴³

As the water fell on the earth, with that statement the earth, in excess of four myriads, for two hundred leagues in extent, or a thousand thick, bearing waters to their edge, shook on all sides.

³⁷ They became once-returners (*sakadāgāmi*).

³⁸ Mahinda says this because he believes dual ordination is necessary, whereby a female aspirant needs to be ordained by nuns first, and then have the ceremony confirmed by monks. This is sometimes disputed, as the Buddha never revoked the original ordination by monks only, but clearly this was Mahinda’s understanding.

³⁹ The capital of the Asokan Empire. It is mentioned in Mahāparinibbānasutta, DN 16, as *Pāṭaligāma*, and is called so because of the *Trumpet Flowers* (*Pāṭali*) that were growing there when it was founded; it is also known as *Pupphapura* and *Kusumapura* (both meaning “Flower City”).

⁴⁰ It means “a sapling.”

⁴¹ These are the three buddhas preceding Gotama in this aeon: Kakusandha, Konāgamana, and Kassapa. All the buddhas have different bodhi trees; in their cases they were acacia sirissa, udumbara (glamorous fig tree), and nigrodha (banyan tree).

⁴² The assattha or fig tree (*ficus religiosa*).

⁴³ This is a way of making a formal donation by pouring water; it was also done this way by King Bimbisāra when he donated the Bamboo Wood.

Having seen that wonder, fearful, frightened and apprehensive, the Guardian of the Earth asked, “Why does the earth tremble?”

“Do not be afraid, great king, the dispensation of the One of Ten Powers will be established here, and because of that this earth trembles. The first monastic dwelling place will be in this place.”⁴⁴

Having heard that statement, the Lord of the World had great faith and offered sweet-smelling jasmine flowers to the elder.

From XVIII. The Acquisition of the Great Bodhi Tree

[Requesting Venerable Saṅghamittā and the Bodhi Tree]

ExtMhv 1-32 ≠ Mhv. 1-18

In order to bring the great bodhi tree and the elder nun, the Lord of the World, remembering the statement spoken by the elder, on a certain day in the rainy season while sitting in his own city near the elder, consulted his ministers and urged his nephew, the minister called Ariṭṭha, to undertake these deeds.

After considering it and inviting him, he uttered this statement: “Dear, after going into the presence of King Dhammāsoka will you be able⁴⁵ to bring the elder nun Saṅghamittā and the great bodhi tree here?”

“I will be able, God-King, to bring these two from there if, after returning here, I am allowed to go forth, your Honor.”

“You may go, dear, and after bringing the elder nun together with the bodhi tree and reaching Laṅkā, you can go forth according to your wish.”

Having said that, the king sent his nephew, and he took the message of the elder and the king and worshipped them.

Leaving on the second day of the bright fortnight in Assayaṅga,⁴⁶ he, being dedicated, boarded a ship in the port of Jambukola⁴⁷ and crossed the ocean, and through⁴⁸ the

⁴⁴ I.e., the Mahāvihāra, or Great Monastery, which became the seat of Theravāda orthodoxy. The emphasis is changed somewhat from the Mahāvamsa version; there, as soon as he had given the grove, the dispensation is said to be established; whereas here it will be established only when the monastery has been built.

⁴⁵ *Sakkhissasi* is unclear; it suggests a verb *sakkhati*, which is not found in Pāli. In Mhv. there are many vll, most of which connect it with *sakkoti*, being able.

⁴⁶ Normally falling in October.

⁴⁷ Probably on the northern coast of the Jaffna peninsula.

⁴⁸ ExtMhv: *Therādiṭṭhabalena pi; through strength unseen by the Elder*, which doesn’t make much sense.

power of the elder's determination, on the very day of departure it arrived at Pāṭaliputta.

Then Queen Anulā, with five hundred young women, and together with another five hundred women of the harem, having undertaken the ten precepts, pure in the yellow robes,⁴⁹ looked forward to the going forth and for the training rules that would come with the elder nun.

She made her dwelling in good conduct in the delightful nunnery in a certain district of the town where the Lord of Men had had it made.⁵⁰ As these lay women lived in the nunnery it became well-known throughout Laṅkā as the Lay Women's Monastery.⁵¹

His nephew Mahāriṭṭha, having reached King Dhammāsoka, spoke the king's message and the elder's message: "Your son Mahinda, God-King, sent me into your presence. The queen named Anulā, your friend the King Piyatissa's brother's wife, O Chief of Kings, desiring the going forth, has undertaken the ten precepts together with a thousand women and lives constantly restrained. Please send the elder nun Saṅghamittā to give the going forth and, together with her, a branch from the south side of the great bodhi tree."

Then the minister went into the presence of the elder nun and said this: "Noble sister, your brother Mahinda sent me into your presence. Devānampiyatissa's brother's wife, the lay woman called Queen Anulā, through having a desire for the going forth, together with a thousand women, lives constantly restrained. Go together with me and please give them the going forth."

Hearing the minister's word she very quickly went to her father, and the elder nun related the elder's thought: "My brother Mahinda has sent these into my presence, and after we have sent the people back, I will go. Very many people, daughters of good families, with Anulā at their head, desiring the going forth, are looking forward to my journey."

The king, who was flushed,⁵² hearing the elder nun's statement, with a shower of tears set rolling, said this to the elder nun: "My son Mahinda, dear, and my grandson Sumana having left us here, I am as though with my hands cut off. They both have gone to the Copper Dust Island, I no longer see them, and great grief has arisen.

⁴⁹ It is interesting that she is portrayed as already wearing the yellow robe, even though she only has ten precepts, which are not even sāmaṇeri precepts. It is a strong echo of the first nun Mahāpajāpati and her following, who also donned robes before they were ordained.

⁵⁰ The exact location cannot now be determined, except that it was within the city limits.

⁵¹ The proper name for a residence for nuns (bhikkhūṇīs) is an upassaya; but before they were ordained they lived there as lay women under ten precepts, so it became famous as the Lay Women's Monastery.

⁵² Lit., white-throated. I cannot find this word or phrase used elsewhere, and the reading must be in doubt.

Seeing their faces today your grief will be allayed. But not seeing you also, dear, how will I put aside my grief in being parted from my son and grandson? Enough, dear, if you were to go today, you also will not return."

Hearing the statement of her father, the elder nun said this: "My brother's word has importance for me, king, together with the request of the great queen and the thousand women. Further, I suppose, this is not just my brother's word and many are waiting for the going forth, which I also desire to give, Great King, and so now I must go."

"If you desire to go, take a branch of the supreme bodhi tree and go, noble sister. You must see your brother in Laṅkā."

[Festivities for the Bodhi Tree]

ExtMhv 111-120 ≠ Mhv. 64-68

On the first day of the bright half of the month Kattikā, the Guardian of the World Asoka placed a branch of the great bodhi tree to the east of the root of a lovely great sāla tree, and worshipping it day by day, on the seventeenth day new shoots started taking hold and arose on the trunk of the delightful bodhi tree.

Seeing that, the Lord of the World, his mind faithful and satisfied, with his ten fingers raised in reverential salutation to his head, said: "I give it sovereignty over the whole of the Rose Apple Island," and the Lord of the World consecrated the great bodhi tree with sovereignty.

The novice Sumana, who was sent by Mahinda in order to take a relic of the Teacher together with his bowl, on the full moon day of Kattikā, flew through the sky and arrived in the delightful City of Flowers.⁵³

At that time the great bodhi tree had been placed at the root of the lovely sāla tree, and in that place he saw them worshipping with the offerings at the Kattikā festival. The Lord of the Planet placed a guard around the bodhi tree and dwelt near it together with his council of ministers.

All the women of the harem, with Saṅghamittā at their head, went out from the city and worshipped it with all sorts of offerings, and they dwelt near the great bodhi tree, together with their husband.

The worship of the beautiful, noble, excellent bodhi tree, with many and extensive flags, flowers, and fruits at its head, opened the minds of men and the protective gods, like a lotus opened by the rays of the sun without any effort on its part.

The blossoming flowers in the lakes of Pāṭaliputta delighted the minds of the people and the protective gods. After emitting six colorful rays in the sky and on the ground, and instilling faith in all the people, it dwelt there like an Awakened One.

⁵³ Another name for Pāṭaliputta, Asoka's capital, now known as Patna.

Written for the faith and invigoration of good people
the eighteenth chapter in the great lineage called
The Acquisition of the Great Bodhi Tree

From XIX. The Journey of the Great Bodhi Tree

[Saṅghamittā and the Bodhi Tree Set Out for Laṅkā]

ExtMhv 1-37 ≠ Mhv 1-22

In order to protect the great bodhi tree, the Best of Charioteers appointed eighteen from royal families, eight from ministerial families, eight from brahminical families, eight from merchants' families, and from the foremost and faithful cowherders' families, the sparrow weavers,⁵⁴ the potters' families, the hyena families, eight of each were also appointed.

He sent nāgas and yakkhas together with their assembly and sprinkled it with water brought for the purpose day by day and gave eight gold and eight silver water pots, as was desired. Then taking the great bodhi tree and worshipping it in various ways, he said: "In whatever way you like, go from city to city."

The Ruler of Men, surrounded by his army, dismissing them, went immediately with his elephants, horses, and chariots, and by crossing through the jungle called the Viñjhā Forest, he arrived at Tāmalitti⁵⁵ within seven days.

The gods, nāgas, and men quickly assembled on the highway and worshipped the bodhi tree in the way they liked, and worshipped it with a great offering day by day with manifold heavenly musicians' music and song, and going gradually they also arrived on the seventh day.⁵⁶

The Lord of the World placed the great bodhi tree on the bank on the great ocean and worshipped it with various offerings for seven days, and the Guardian of the World, the Best of Charioteers, consecrated the great bodhi tree with sovereignty over the whole of the Rose Apple Isle.

On the first day of the lunar fortnight in the bright half of Maggasira,⁵⁷ he raised the great bodhi tree with help given by eight of each from the highborn families appointed at the root of the sāl tree with all kinds of offerings. He descended into the water up to his neck and established it properly on the ship and invited

the great elder Saṅghamittā with eleven other nuns⁵⁸ onto the ship with various offerings.

Then he uttered this statement to his chief minister, Mahāriṭṭha: "This great bodhi tree, dear, I consecrated three times with sovereignty over the whole of the Rose Apple Isle. Now, after bringing the great bodhi tree myself and arranging all kinds of ceremonies here in the port town, I descended up to my neck into the water and established it on the ship with the elder nun Saṅghamittā.

"Seeing that you are sent back from the city to my friend, the king should also worship it with sovereignty in the same way. As I have made all kinds of ceremonies and offerings, my friend the great King Devānampiyatissa should also make all the offerings that have been made by me."

Having given this advice to his friend, the resplendent Guardian of the World, lamenting tearfully, uttered this statement: "Alas, the bodhi tree of the virtuous one, the One of Ten Powers! While it is still emitting a net of twenty colored rays, we have gladly given it up."

Having said this, the great king, after making reverential salutation with his head, seeing the great bodhi tree going with the elder nun, stood depressed on the bank with a shower of tears set rolling.

While watching the ship with the great bodhi tree on board going from the multitude and the king, after crossing the water somehow, the waves settled down for a league all round on the great sea.

Five-colored lotuses on all sides blossomed, and in the firmament manifold instruments played, manifold offerings were made by the gods, and the nāgas worked magic in order to seize the great bodhi tree.

The great elder Saṅghamittā, who had gained the strength of psychic powers, took the form of a supaṇṇa⁵⁹ and frightened the great snakes.

Trembling and fearful, seeing the spiritual power and the splendour of the great elder nun, they worshipped the elder's feet with their heads and begged for their lives, saying: "Don't be angry with us, noble sister, on this journey today there will be no obstacle for you, you will be safe; we have come in order to ask for the bodhi tree."

She gave the great bodhi tree to the nāgas to worship, and they took the great bodhi tree to the dragons' abode. They worshipped it with various offerings and gave it sovereignty over the nāga

⁵⁴ It is unclear why the weavers are designated as "sparrow weavers" or what the hyena families mentioned were. Geiger suggests these may be totem clan names.

⁵⁵ On the coast of the Bay of Bengal, near to modern-day Kolkata.

⁵⁶ This account is different from the Mahāvamsa, where the bodhi tree is put on board ship and sails down to Tāmalitti. Here it appears to be taken by the land route before it sets sail.

⁵⁷ Normally falling in December.

⁵⁸ These are named in Dīpavaṃsa, XVIII, vv. 11–12 as follows: Uttarā, Hemā, Pasādapālā, Aggimittā, Dāsikā, Pheggū, Pabbatā, Mattā, Mallā and Dhammadāsiyā.

⁵⁹ The traditional enemies of the nāgas (mythical snakes) were the supaṇṇas (mythical birds).

realm for seven days, brought it back, and placed it on the ship, and that same day the ship arrived at Jambukola in Laṅkā.⁶⁰

King Dhammāsoka, affected with grief⁶¹ over separation from the great bodhi tree, helpless, looked longingly toward that region, and after making great lamentation, he went back to his city.

[Reception in Laṅkā]

ExtMhv 38-51 = Mhv. 23-31

King Devānampiyatissa, who delighted in the benefit of the world, had heard from the novice Sumana about the day of the arrival of the bodhi tree, and from the first day that began the month of Maggasira, he decorated the highway from the north gate as far as Jambukola with silver leaves of cloth strewn like sand that had been sprinkled all round on the highway.

From the day the king went out from the city, he waited at the grounds of the reception hall by the ocean, and there the Lord of the Earth, through the psychic power of the great elder nun, saw the great bodhi tree coming in the middle of the great ocean, decked out in all its splendor, and by the power of Mahinda, he drew as though close to it.

In that place a hall was made to display the wonders which became well-known as the Ocean Reception Hall. After leaving the Ocean Reception Hall and standing outside, while raising the panda, he saw both of the roads strewn all round with five-colored flowers and various flags and clothes, together with priceless flowers, great water pitchers, all full with lilies.

The Guardian of the World, having placed them at intervals on the road, through the power of the great elder together with the other elders, after leaving, in one day had reached Jambukola.

The Lord of the Earth, driven by joy at the coming of the great bodhi tree, plunged into the water up to his neck and raised the beautiful body of the great bodhi tree on his head.

He emerged from the ocean, placed it aside with all offerings, and put it under the care of the sixteen families in that lovely pavilion. For three days on the shore of the ocean, the Lord of Laṅkā, having adorned it, worshipped it with sovereignty over Laṅkā.

[Saṅghamittā and the Nunneries]

ExtMhv 118-120 & 166-189 ≠ Mhv 68-85

Near the Lord's great bodhi tree, through the wonder of being near the flag of the true Dhamma preached in the lovely words of the land of Laṅkā, Queen Anulā, with five hundred women and together with another five hundred women of the harem, received the going forth in the presence of the elder Saṅghamittā, and those

⁶⁰ This is the same port from which the envoys had left Laṅkā, see Ch. XVIII, vs. 8 above.

⁶¹ A play on his name. Asoka means "griefless"; here he is said to be sasokavā (with grief).

one thousand nuns, after developing insight, in no long time attained the state of worthiness.

The great elder Saṅghamittā lived in the nunnery known as the Lay Women's Monastery together with her Community. She made there three dwelling places which were considered the foremost.⁶² Previously, Queen Anulā had heard a Dhamma teaching in the elder Mahinda's presence, understood the truths, donned the yellow robes, undertook the ten precepts and made her dwelling in the home of the minister named Dolaka.⁶³

Afterwards, with the coming of the elder nun to the island of Laṅkā, these three foremost palaces—Small Chapter, Great Chapter, and Increasing Splendor—were made by the Lord of the World.

For the benefit of his retinue and many others in the palace, when the great bodhi tree was brought in the ship, the Ruler of the World had the mast placed in the house named the Small Chapter, the sail was established in the Great Chapter house, and then the rudder was placed in the Increasing Splendor house.⁶⁴

The Lord of the World, who was of such a kind, endowed with virtue and respect for the Three Treasures, paid lifelong respect to the bodhi tree and caused all the places in the isle to be prepared, gaining a famous name, lasting even until today.

The king's state elephant, which wandered wherever it liked, stayed on one side of the city in a cool spot in a mountain grotto, near to a kadambapuppha bush, where it grazed.

Often people journeyed there, and after seeing the elephant, and saying, "This elephant delights in the Kadamba Grove," fed it with rice and fattened up the elephant, and that place came to be known by the name of the Measure of Grain.⁶⁵

One day the elephant didn't take even a morsel, and the king asked the elder who brought faith to the island the reason. "Near the kadambapuppha bush site he desires that a sanctuary be built," the great elder said to the great king.

⁶² In Mhv. it mentions that she built twelve dwelling places in all.

⁶³ It appears from this that the Lay Women's Monastery had previously been Doloka's residence. Exactly how we reconcile this with the statement in XVIII v.12 that the king had built the nunnery, I don't know. It may be that the traditions were not properly harmonized at this point.

⁶⁴ Dr. Hema Goonatilake, in her paper "The Unbroken Lineage of the Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Sangha from 3rd Century B.C.E. to the Present," makes the interesting point that these nunneries are the first museums we hear of in history.

⁶⁵ Contrary to Geiger, who interprets *ālhaka* as meaning "post" (a meaning not found in the dictionaries), this story indicates that the reason for the name is that the elephant was given a full measure of food by the visitors to the place.

The king, who was ever delighting in the welfare of the people, quickly built a sanctuary there together with a relic and a sanctuary room.

The great elder Saṅghamittā, who longed for an empty abode, as the dwelling place she lived in was crowded, seeking the benefit of the dispensation and the welfare of the nuns, being wise and desiring another nunnery, went to that lovely shrine house, which was comfortably secluded, and spent the day there, she who had faultless skill in dwellings.

The king, after going to the first nunnery in order to worship *the elder nun, heard that she had left the place. He departed from the nunnery, arrived near the shrine house, and worshipped the great elder.*

After exchanging greetings with the elder Saṅghamittā, understanding her intention, the Guardian of the World, who was a wise man, skilled in intentions, a hero of great power, had a delightful nunnery built near the sanctuary house.

The nunnery was built near where the elephant took his measure of grain therefore it became well known as the Elephant's Measure Monastery.

The good friend,⁶⁶ the great elder Saṅghamittā, who was greatly wise, then made her dwelling in that delightful nunnery.

Thus benefitting the world of Laṅkā, and accomplishing the development of the Dispensation, the great bodhi tree, endowed with various wonders, remained for a long time⁶⁷ in the Great Cloud Grove, in the delightful island of Laṅkā.

*Written for the faith and invigoration of good people
the nineteenth chapter in the great lineage called
The Journey of the Great Wisdom Tree*

From XX. The Complete Emancipation of the Elders

[The Passing of Arahat Mahinda]

ExtMhv 43-64 ≠ Mhv 29-47

After the King Devānampiyatissa's passing, his younger brother, well known as Uttiya, also born of King Muṭasiva, ruled righteously.

The elder Mahinda was the Light of Laṅkā, a leader of a great crowd, who lit up the island of Laṅkā, who propogated the supreme dispensation of the Victor consisting of proper study,

⁶⁶ This is a play on her name, which means "friend of the community."

⁶⁷ Indeed, it still remains there to this day, being the oldest historical tree in the world.

practice, and penetration. He, who was like the Teacher,⁶⁸ benefitted many in the world in Laṅkā, with a virtuous crowd of wise monks in the community, in the eighth victorious year of the King Uttiya, within the rains retreat, after he had dwelt sixty years near the Cetiya mountain, on the eighth day of the bright half of the month Assayuja,⁶⁹ that passionless elder, who increased the light,⁷⁰ attained emancipation.

As the passionless Mahinda passed on the eighth day, it was agreed upon that his name be given to the eighth day.⁷¹

Hearing that, King Uttiya was affected by the dart of grief, and after going, worshipping and lamenting the elder a great deal, he had the body of the elder quickly laid out in a golden casket that had been sprinkled with perfumed oil.

He placed that perfect casket on a golden bier and lifted it, and while making righteous ceremonies with a great flood of people who had come together from here and there, he made various offerings with a great army of people.

Going through the city's decorated path that had many decorations, *they lifted and carried the bier along the highway, and led it to the Great Monastery, together with the assembly, and placed the decorated bier there.*

The Guardian of the World celebrated in the Mango Question enclosure for seven days with arches, flags, and flowers, with pots full of incense, adorned for a distance of three leagues around the monastery.

This was through the power of the king, but the whole island was decorated through the power of the gods.

The Lord of the World made many offerings for a week, then in the easterly direction in the elder's enclosure, he made circumambulation of the fragrant pyre near the Great Sanctuary and led the delightful bier to that place and placed it on the pyre, paying his final respects.

After lighting the fire and sprinkling with perfumed water, the Lord of the Earth, right there in the elder's cremation spot made a shrine and deposited the relics there, as was fit.

The Ruler of Men had half of his relics deposited in the Cetiya mountain, and deposited the rest of the relics in all the monastic sanctuaries, and he made offerings day by day.

The place where the sage's body had been laid is called, out of respect for him, the Seer's Courtyard. Thenceforth after

⁶⁸ I.e. the Buddha.

⁶⁹ Around October.

⁷⁰ Or perhaps, "who increased the (virtue in the) island."

⁷¹ It seems each day of the lunar month had a name specially assigned to it, and they gave Mahinda's name to the eighth day of the month.

bringing the body of the noble ones from three leagues all round, they were burnt in that place.

[The Passing of Arahāt Saṅghamittā]

ExtMhv 65-74 ≠ Mhv 48-53

The great elder Saṅghamittā, of great power, great intelligence, fulfilled all duties to the dispensation with virtue and wisdom, and benefitted many people in the delightful island of Laṅkā.

Nine years after the beginning of the reign of King Uttiya, being fifty-nine years old,⁷² while residing in the Elephant's Measure House, this light of the world passed away.

Hearing that, King Uttiya, affected by the dart of grief, with a shower of tears set rolling,⁷³ went out with his assembly and just as for the elder Mahinda, he made supreme offerings and paid respect to the elder nun for a week in that place, and decorated the whole of Laṅkā as for the elder Mahinda.

After seven days the elder's body was placed on top of a bier and was led round the delightful city with the assembly and the Guardian of the World, placing the decorated bier aside, near to the beautiful hall, in sight of the great bodhi tree, on the eastern side of the Sanctuary Monastery, in the place indicated by the elder nun, had the cremation carried out.

The Lord of the World Uttiya also had a sanctuary built in that place. Having taken her relics, he deposited them in the sanctuary, and he worshipped there day by day, with all kinds of offerings.

[The Passing of Other Elders]

ExtMhv 75-82 ≠ Mhv 54-58

Also the five great elders—Ittiya, Uttiya, the great elder Bhaddasāla and the greatly intelligent Sambala, and Mahinda—these five, being without pollutants, attained emancipation.

Also beginning with the great elder Ariṭṭha, greatly wise and skilful, after skillfully teaching many students in the discipline, doctrine, and abstract doctrine, being expert in discrimination, together with innumerable thousands of monks who had destroyed the pollutants, passed away.

Also the twelve elder nuns, beginning with Saṅghamittā, and many thousands of nuns who had destroyed the pollutants, who were learned, greatly wise in the discipline of the Victor's tradition, after showing the light, shining forth, and

lighting up the earth like a mass of fire, being pollutant-free, attained emancipation.

King Uttiya made his reign for ten years, then, being oppressed by disease, he attained the state of impermanence, just so is the whole impermanent world heading for destruction.

That man who, knowing that impermanence is very violent, strong, and unstoppable doesn't grow weary of coming to existence, and being tired of it, doesn't have disgust for wicked things and doesn't delight in meritorious things, because of the strength of his great delusion is one who, though knowing the truth, forgets it.

Written for the faith and invigoration of good people
the Twentieth Chapter in the great lineage called
The Complete Emancipation of the Elders

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu has been resident in the East since 1987, mainly in Sri Lanka, India, and Malaysia. He ordained in the Theravāda tradition in 1995 and received higher ordination the following year. Being already familiar with Indian languages from his stay in India, in his first Rains Retreat he began an intensive study of Pāli. For a couple of years he worked for the Sri Lanka Tripitaka Project, correcting and re-editing the databases of the Sinhalese edition of the Canonical texts, and since then he has also studied Sanskritized Prakṛt and Classical Sanskrit. Ānandajoti started the website [Ancient Buddhist Texts](#) in 2002 as a way of publishing material from the broader early Buddhist Tradition in the original languages. The website, which is still expanding, includes texts, translations, and studies from both the early and medieval periods, in Pāli, Sanskritized Prakṛt (BHS), and Classical Sanskrit, with a special emphasis on the collection and organization of the texts, and also their grammar and prosody.

⁷² Note that in verse 46 above Mahinda is said, in the eighth year of King Uttiya's reign, to have lived sixty years in the caves at Mahintale. Evidently these figures cannot be reconciled with what is now said here.

⁷³ The third time this phrase has been used about the elder: first when she told her father, King Asoka, she was going to Laṅkā, and next when she actually left for the island, never to return.