Which Ratanapañña Composed
The Jinakālamālī?

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Summary
The text and colophon of the chronicle Jinakālamālī (JKM) say that the author was the monk Ratanapañña who wrote the work in Wat Pā Dāng (Chiang Mai) in 1516-17. At the beginning of this century it was noticed that the chronicle mentions two further monks with the same name—Ratanapañña—one from Phayao and one from Lampāng, and it was thought that the author of JKM was one of them, not the one mentioned in the colophon and text. This was countered by the argument that the author should indeed be the monk mentioned in text and colophon, but perhaps he had moved from Lampāng or Phayao to Chiang Mai. A stone inscription from Phayao confirms that there was a Ratanapañña at Phayao and it reports on the monk’s official contact with the King of Chiang Mai. Besides, the inscription and internal evidence from JKM itself point to the possibility that ‘Ratanapañña’ was not, or was not always, a proper monastic name but a sobriquet for a clever, learned monk. The name and identity of JKM’s author remain uncertain.

In 1907, Phraya Prachakit Kōrajak stated in his Phongsīwadiin Yōnok, on page 200, that the monk Ratanapañña of Wat Bodhārāma (i.e., Wat Jet Yōt), Chiang Mai, composed the chronicle Jinakālamālī. He gave an inscription from Phayao and a list of more than twenty monks present, among whom were a mahāthera Ratanapañña from Phayao and another mahāthera Ratanapañña from Lampāng. The phraya evidently had obtained this episode from JKM which has a great many details on this ceremony and from which it is apparent that the event actually took place in Wat Jet Yōt (Mahābodhārāma).

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The errors are understandable because at the time JKM was available only as palmleaf manuscript copies, written in Khmer letters and the Pāli language. Neither the original text nor a translation had yet been published.

In his Preface to the first printed edition of JKM in 1908,3 Prince Damrong Rajanubhab referred to the ‘end’ of JKM ข้างท้ายหนังสือ (i.e., the colophon) where, according to him, it is said that in 1516 the monk Ratanapaṇīṇa พระรatanาปณี , who lived in the Ratanamahāvihāra วัดรatanมหาวิหาร (i.e., Wat Pā Dāng, Chiang Mai), wrote the Jinakālamālī หนังสือรัตนกิจมล.

In the next paragraph the Prince referred to the above-mentioned episode of 1511. He noted that according to Phrayā Prachākit’s Phongsāwadān Yōnok, page 263, there were two Ratanapaṇīṇa, one from Phayao and one from Lampāṅ, who in that year assisted in a ceremony at Wat Bupphārām. He concluded that Ratanapaṇīṇa, author of JKM, must have been one of these two, and not the one who lived in Chiang Mai: พระรatanาปณี ผู้แต่งหนังสือรัตนกิจมลีน คงเป็นอีกหนึ่งในสององค์นี้ ผู้ที่เป็นผู้อยู่ในเมืองนครเชียงใหม่.

That conclusion was rejected by Cœdès in 1915 on the grounds that the mention of two Ratanapaṇīṇa in 1511—one from Phayao and one from Lampāṅ—does not weaken the testimony of JKM’s colophon, which clearly states that Ratanapaṇīṇa lived in the Rattavanavihāra (of Chiang Mai) and wrote the book in 1516. Cœdès added that even if one does not believe in the existence of three monks of the same name, one could always assume that one of the two Ratanapaṇīṇa of Phayao or Lampāṅ had come to live in Wat Pā Dāng between 1511 and 1516.4

It is indeed surprising that the numerically rather small and somewhat elitist school of Sihalabhikkhus5 should have had three monks of the same name in three cities. Also, JKM’s author presumably attended the ceremony in Wat Jet Yōt in 1511 where, according to the list of monks attending, there was no Ratanapaṇīṇa from Chiang Mai. The conclusion that Ratanapaṇīṇa, author of JKM, was either from Phayao or Lampāṅ, at least originally, is therefore not unjustified.

At present, after seventy-five years, the question of whether JKM’s author was from Chiang Mai, Phayao or Lampāṅ, is still unsettled. If anything, an inscription has added a new twist to the argument. To understand this better, we will first have another look at what is found in the chronicle about its author.

In the JKM text proper, the author says of himself: “I wrote this (book) Jinakālamālī during these 2 years (i.e., 1516 and 1517).”6 Since the context deals with Wat Pā Dāng at Chiang Mai, the passage implies that he wrote the chronicle in that monastery.

The colophon elaborates: "In 1516, Ratanapañña, a monk for 23 years and living in Wat Pà Dâng (Rattavanavihāra), wrote the book Jinakālamālī."\(^7\)

These two statements permit the composition of a short biography of the monk:

- c. 1473 born
- c. 1493 ordained a full monk
- 1516-17 wrote JKM at the age of c. forty-three, having been a monk for twenty-three years, and lived in Wat Pà Dâng, Chiang Mai
- 1527 discontinued updating JKM at the age of c. fifty-four.\(^8\)

It is unknown what later became of him.

‘Ratanapañña’ perhaps was not his proper monastic name or chhāya ข้าyar, but an additional given name alluding to his great abilities or qualities because the colophon also says:

Vasanto yati yo tattha tena raññūpaththambhito
Paññāratanam asseti Ratanapaññasaññito.\(^9\)

This somewhat delicate passage was translated slightly differently by Cœdès, Jayawickrama and Sàng.

Cœdès: “Les religieux habitant dans ce (monastère) disaient: «Ce religieux qui est protégé par ce roi est son joyau de sagesse (paññāratana)»; c'est pourquoi il fut nommé Ratanapañña.”\(^10\)

Jayawickrama: “Whosoever sage who was living there receiving that king’s active patronage, was given the name Ratanapañña as wisdom (paññā) to him was a jewel (ratana).”\(^11\)

Sàng: “พระกิจมาภิเชษฐา จักวา 机(Application เพาะมาภิเชษฐาเพย่งดังเจ้า จักวา จักวะ.” (“The monk was named Ratanapañña because he had paññā like a jewel”).\(^12\)

Whichever translation one prefers, it is obvious that the passage tries to explain the name Ratanapañña as a word-play which refers to the monk’s bright intellect, and it is also possible to understand that the others called him Ratanapañña in addition to, or replacing, his correct monastic name which is not mentioned. Ratanapañña may have been a sobriquet—an honourable nickname.

The two notions, that Ratanapañña (author of JKM) originally perhaps was from Phayao, and that ‘Ratanapañña’ perhaps was not his real monastic name but a later popularly given one, receives some corroboration from the stone inscription of Wat Wisuttha-Ārām near Phayao, dated 1506.\(^13\) The inscription records certain donations to the monastery and says at the beginning: “Somdet Mahāsāmi Śri Vimalabodhiṇāṇa, Abbot in (= of Wat) Pà Dâng Luang, ordered the Mahāthera Jayabāla Ratanapañña to request permission from the Mahādhammarājādhirāja (= Phayā Kāo, King of Chiang Mai) to set up an inscription (confirming grants) in Wat Visuddha-ārāma, Mōng Phayāo.”
The mahāsāmi presumably was the superior, somdet, of the Sihalabhikkhus in the Phayao region and Abbot of Wat Pā Dāng Luang at Phayao. The senior monk, a mahāthera, whom he charged with the administratively not unusual, yet always delicate, mission to the King in Chiang Mai, most probably also was a Sihalabhikkhu, perhaps of the mahāsāmi's own monastery, or of Wat Wisuttha-Ārām. This monk had a curious name, Jayabāla Ratanapañña. It does not seem to be one long name, the different parts of which normally have one overall sense, but rather two names, the first the 'real' monastic name, Jayabāla—"Guardian of the Victory," and the other a descriptive addition, Ratanapañña—"who has a clever mind."

It is therefore possible to surmise that this adept monk, who resided at or near Phayao and perhaps was a native of that region, while on his mission to Chiang Mai in 1506, attracted the attention of the King and of the abbot of Wat Pā Dāng and that later he moved to Wat Pā Dāng in Chiang Mai. In 1511, he took part in the ceremony at Wat Jet Yôt. In Chiang Mai, his descriptive sobriquet—"the clever one"—Ratanapañña, became the name under which he was commonly known. He used it twice in his Jinakālamāli, in the Wat Jet Yôt episode of 1511 and in the colophon (if he wrote the latter himself) where both times he referred to himself in the third person as Ratanapañña. However, on one occasion, in the text, he spoke of himself in the first person without adding his name.

But this is speculation. The Phayao inscription in fact only confirms what JKM states, viz., that at the time there was also a Ratanapañña at or from Phayao, and it may confirm something already suspected from the colophon, viz. that the name 'Ratanapañña' was either a proper monastic name or a very honourable sobriquet that could be applied to more than one monk.

Since the Wat Pā Dāng monks certainly were smart and learned, several among them could have been known as a 'Ratanapañña', among them one Chiang Mai monk who wrote JKM. It is not really necessary to have one come from Phayao or Lampāng in order to reduce an improbably high number of namesakes. But then the question arises, did the author of JKM not attend the ceremony in Wat Jet Yôt in 1511 since his name is not mentioned?

Assuming that Ratanapañña (author of JKM) was at Wat Jet Yôt in 1511 and that his name is included in the list of monks attending the ceremony, he was either from Phayao or from Lampāng (one of the two Ratanapaññas listed), or else he figures in the list under another name, viz. under his correct monastic name which we ignore.

Thus, the question remains: which Ratanapañña wrote JKM? Further, a new question arises: was Ratanapañña his monastic name or his sobriquet?
Notes

1. Either Wat Suan Dök (Pupphārāma), west of Chiang Mai, or Wat Bupphārām (Pubbārāma), east of the walled city, on today’s Thā Phā Road. The Thai spelling used here can indicate either.


3. JKM.W.


5. ‘Sihalabhikkhus’ is JKM’s appellation for the Wat Pā Dāng monks, a new school of reformed forest-dwelling or araṇīṇavāsi monks, the first chapter of whom had been re-ordained in Lanka in 1424.

6. JKM.C: 129-30; JKM.J: 165; JKM.S: 133.

7. This is a condensed translation. JKM.C: 4-5; JKM.J: 185-86; JKM.S: 152-53.

8. The last statement is hypothetical. JKM ends with the year 1527, but it is not known whether Ratanapañña himself or another person continued the chronicle from 1517 to 1527.


10. Cœdès 1925 Documents: 5. Unlike Jayawickrama and Sāng, who print the colophon at the end of their translation, Cœdès prints it as a footnote in his ‘Introduction’.


12. JKM.S: 152.

13. ALI 1.5.1.1 Wat Wisuttha-Ārām 1506; with some errors in Silapākōn, 17.6, 1973. The ruins of the monastery are still visible in the compound of the school of Bān Huai Bong, about twelve kilometers north of Phayao, west of the road to Chiang Rāi.

14. About one and a half kilometers north of Phayao, on a little elevation called Dòn Chai (< jaya). JKM calls the monastery Vijayavihāra.

15. At least I suppose that the monk went to Chiang Mai, but perhaps the request was made in writing, through the official channels.

16. The inscription spells this part of the name according to the Thai pronunciation, Chayabān [สะท้ายاءบาน สะทะบ้าน]. The name could also be derived, for instance, from Jayapāna “Victory-Drink” (?).

17. Referring to Buddha’s victory over Māra.

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