



The Mon Prince and the Naga Princess

(Cambodia)

Once the Bhodhisattva arrived at a big tree called Thlok on Kok Thlok island. As he approached, he suddenly sighted a monitor lizard called Trokout going into a hole under the tree. He exclaimed to himself, "This land is going to be the great kingdom of Kok Thlok and this Trokout is going to be reborn as the son of a king."

The Bhodhisattva's prophesy was true. The Trokout died and was reborn as Preah Thaong, son of the Mon king.

One day, Preah Thaong and his servants came to visit the nearby islands. He so enjoyed the islands that he did not realize that the tide was getting high, so high that he could not return to the mainland. He had to spend the night at the sandbar. As he was in deep slumber, a naga princess named Neang Tavottei, the daughter of the naga King, Phuv Chung Neak, and her servants transformed into human forms and came from the underworld to play on the beach.

Just as these maids were playing on the beach, Preah Thaong woke up and saw Neang Tavottei. Their eyes locked and they fell in love with each other. They agreed to be married and lived on the island of Kok Thlok, which was turned into their new kingdom where they ruled together.

However, the naga princess Neang Tavottei explained to Phreah Thaong about her origin. "Dear Preah Thaong, I am not an ordinary human being as



you understand. I am a naga princess,” she said. “According to the rites of my custom, we have to have a wedding ceremony in the underworld as well.”

“I am only an ordinary human being. How can I go to the underworld for this wedding, my dear?” asked Preah Thaong.

“You can hold on to my garments when we travel so you can enter the underworld. You will also receive a wedding garment with a print of a naga symbol for our wedding ceremony.”

And so Preah Thaong went to pay respects to Neang Tavottei's father the naga king, who was more than happy to grant the royal wedding ceremony. The naga king was so delighted to have Preah Thaong for his son-in-law.

Before they left the underworld to return to their kingdom of Kok Thlok, the naga king proclaimed:

“Now my daughter and son-in-law, I will bless you with a great land to rule on earth. From this time on, there will be no more water to separate the island and the mainland. My daughter, from now on you will be known as Tavoththidar, and my son-in-law, you will now be known as Atticcavongsa. You may rule this great land called Krung Kampuchea Thipadej.”

And that is how Cambodia became a country.

Naga



Supplementary information

- In Theravada Buddhism, the term **Bhodhisattva** refers to the many previous lives of the Buddha before he achieved nirvana (freedom from suffering and cycle of birth, death, and rebirth).
- The **Mon** is a group of people living in and around the southeastern part of present-day Myanmar. They are believed to be one of the earliest inhabitants of continental Southeast Asia, and introduced Theravada Buddhism and writing to Myanmar.
- In Buddhist legends and myths, the **naga** is a demi-divine being resembling a large serpent or dragon that dwells underwater. They are believed to have magical powers to transform themselves into human beings. The Cambodians (or Khmers) believe they are descendants of Preah Thaong and Neang Tavottei, and many still say they are “born from the naga.” The naga is also mentioned in the story Phya Khankaak, the Toad King
- The story of Preah Thaong and Neang Tavottei is also the origin of one rite in the Khmer wedding ceremony. In the current practice, the groom holds on to a piece of cloth from the bride’s gown to symbolize that the wedding ceremony has been completed. With the groom clinging to the bride’s clothes, it also indicates that women lead the family and society in Khmer custom.