

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF RĀMA I OF THE CHAKRI DYNASTY

By

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On the 27th July 1948 I read a paper before a session of the XXIST Congress of Orientalists held in Paris entitled *Some Aspects of the Literary Revival of Phra Buddha Yodfa of Bangkok*. A summary of the paper was included in the official report of the Congress; and a statement was made therein that the full text would be published in *The Journal of the Siam Society*. As the title of the paper implied, the subject was limited to the literary side of that revival. Since that period *The Journal of the Siam Society* has been sufficiently contributed to. I decided, therefore, to waive for a time my claim for inclusion of the article, as after all the President should not claim precedence over other contributors. Upon revising the paper now after a lapse of several years I have come to the conclusion that it would be more interesting to enlarge the scope by including other channels along which the reconstruction proceeded. As now presented it not only covers the fields of written works whether legal, canonical, historical or literary, but also those of fine art, the drama, music, architecture and court ceremonial. An important field still left untouched is that of economics because of a serious dearth of information.

At the end of this paper will be found a bibliography. There are in this appendix both material in Siamese and in foreign languages generally accessible to the public. It is hoped that the more valuable and indispensable ones have all been included.

Retrospect

The Siamese branch of the great Thai race migrated southwards from the hinterland of East Asia before the XIIIth century and established themselves at various centres in the valleys of the Chaophyā and Mekhong rivers, eventually infiltrating Môn and Khmer territories further south.

Their first centre of any considerable magnitude was around Sukhothai, known by the name of the state of Sajjanālai Sukhothai. Its origin has been recorded in an inscription⁽¹⁾ the gist of which was that a Thai chief, Khun Bāng Klāng Thao, in alliance with another Thai prince rose against the Khmer and proclaimed Thai indepen-

1. cf. Coedès: *Recueil des Inscriptions du Siam*, Vol. I, p. 7.

dence, making the Khmer provincial centre of Sukhothai the nucleus of their new state. The latter reached the zenith of its power towards the end of that century under the leadership of Rāma Kamhaeng, second son of the liberator. He extended his boundaries far and wide, reaching even to the shores of the Indian Ocean on the west. Receiving Theravādin Buddhism from Ceylon through Nakon Sri Dharmarāj, he elaborated a type of culture that seemed to have become in later days the ideal of the Siamese nation Sukhothai nevertheless within less than half a century after. Rāma Kamhaeng's death was superseded by another Thai state to the south which became known as Siam centred around Ayudhyā. For some four hundred-odd years from 1350 Siam developed its culture and civilisation from its radiating point of Ayudhyā. Though once brought under Burmese dominance for a little over a decade, she reasserted herself under the dashing leadership of Prince Nares, who came to the Throne upon his father's death. The state deteriorated, however, under his successors and finally succumbed towards the end of the XVIIIth century to a Burmese raiding party, which to all appearances was not meant to be a campaign of conquest, especially since it made no attempt to hold the country, merely contenting itself with loot and plunder. The spoliation of Ayudhyā then was so complete that it took a long time afterwards to recover. Hardly a building, religious or secular, escaped unburnt and almost everything perished in the flames. What was more important, however, was the fact that it signalled the breakdown of the state, more especially from the spiritual and moral aspects. The Siamese political creed was one in which individuals were bound together by their loyalty to the sovereign. Neither patriotism nor communal loyalty in the modern sense had yet arisen to any extent. With the sovereign in captivity, the political nucleus was gone and the conception of an ordered state just ceased. The whole administration broke down and with it the social frame of the state and the not inconsiderable culture of Ayudhyā Siam was practically obliterated.

Fortunately able men still remained. From reasons ranging from mere desire for gain or personal aggrandisement to a love of independence from a foreign yoke and a natural preference to submit to no illegitimate master, pockets—if a modern terminology may be here permitted—of resistance became evident all over the country, no less than five leaders partitioning the country which had been the kingdom of Siam. The most successful of these factions was the one organised by Phya Tāk with his able generals, notably the one whom he eventually raised to the exalted rank of Chaophyā Chakri and his brother Chaophyā Surasih. In a brief time this faction restored the former kingdom of Siam to its old position of prestige. The work necessitated a long series of wars and the reign of Phya Tāk with his capital at Dhonburi on the Chaophyā opposite Bangkok showed achievements which were mainly martial. As a matter of fact with all his bravery and a brilliant quality of leadership, Phya Tāk, the King of Dhonburi as he is usually known, was highly temperamental. Hard work and responsibility ruined his nerves; and after seven years of successful leadership his mentality gave way to the strain and most of the wars in the next seven years of his reign were accomplished by his generalissimo, Chaophyā Chakri, in the monarch's name. On the cultural side the King of Dhonburi tried to reform the Church, for he was extremely religious, but the reforms were along his own peculiar way of thinking. He had all the monks go through ordeals of long diving to test their purity and moral standard. The Church still remained corrupt when he ceased to wield power. Internal administration and the arts and letters as well as trade and commerce showed no progress and compared unfavourably with the conditions prevalent in Ayudhyā before its fall. A rebellion then broke out and the King's mentality deteriorated. The King became a prisoner in the hands of the rebels under Phya San and was made to abdicate and assume the monastic robes. Hearing of the confusion at home, Chaophyā Chakri, then on a campaign of restoring order in Cambodia, hurried home, suppressed the rebellion and was acclaimed king.

The new sovereign had been a distinguished commander who could always be depended upon to replace the monarch on the field of battle. As has been stated, he had been in supreme command in the conduct of all wars in the second half of his predecessor's reign. Excepting for a few wars with Burma which were successfully dealt with, his reign was surprisingly free of fighting. The military prestige of the King and his brother, the latter being nicknamed "the Tiger" by the Burmese, seemed to have allayed all thoughts of aggression. He therefore applied himself assiduously to the work of reconstruction which was badly needed ever since the fall of Ayudhyā. In trying to reconstruct the machinery of his new state, Rāma I - to make use of a comparatively recent title which is nevertheless a more convenient one than any other - accepted without question the model of Ayudhyā with which he had been familiar. That model was in fact a paternal monarchy in which the king was the chief executive as well as the generalissimo and the supreme judge. He was, moreover, expected to submit his private life to a model laid down by law and custom. He was bound, in short, by the *Code of the Thammasāt*, which was considered to be inspired and therefore not liable to be changed by mere man even though he might have been a monarch. He was thus limited in his power of legislation, though he had a right to issue edicts and decrees in supplement or in explanation of the inspired Code. To sum up, the Siamese monarchy, like many other monarchies of Buddhist culture in south-east Asia was really neither absolute nor divine in the sense that propounders of democratic ideologies of the West have attributed to their so-called absolute monarchies.

Rāma I did not alter this political creed to any great extent. The extensive work of reconstruction which he planned and carried out was more in the nature of measures to ensure the efficacy of the administration. These measures were concerned with three main lines, moral, legal and literary.

Revision of the Buddhist Canon

His first act was to deal with the ethical side of the reconstruction. He began by financing from his privy purse a new and complete edition, written on palm leaves, of the Buddhist Canon of the *Tipitaka*. It was soon found, however, that this edition had been made from unreliable texts, since authoritative ones were not available, having mostly perished in the destruction of the old capital. The King therefore summoned a Council of the Church in 1788, six years after his accession to the Throne, to revise and collate whatever texts that could be found in this or neighbouring countries. The Council sat at the seat of the Patriarch, now known as Wat Mahāthāt, and worked for five months. It is on record that during this period 250 monks and laymen were employed and fed at the royal expense. The magnitude of the work may be gauged by referring to the latest edition of 1925-8, consisting of 45 volumes of an average of 500 octavo pages.⁽²⁾

Having established, as it were, a code of morals acceptable to his Buddhist subjects, the King set out with energy to see that his lay subjects as well as the members of the monastic orders behaved as good Buddhists, as evidenced by the innumerable decrees issued governing the conduct of monks and by the support given by the administration to the power of the ecclesiastical authorities, upon whom devolved the responsibilities of Church administration.

The position of the King of Siam *vis-à-vis* the Buddhist Church has never received accurate attention in foreign works on this country; and unfortunately a mistaken idea is abroad in many quarters that the King is a sort of a High Priest. The sovereign is in fact nothing more than the "Upholder of Religion", which includes any faith professed by his subjects. The title is, of course, broader than the western "Defender of the Faith", for a Buddhist monarch must be tolerant like every good Buddhist. Moreover, the

(2). The Edition of the Tipitaka sponsored by His Majesty King Prajadhipok and dedicated to the memory of his royal brother and predecessor, Rama VI, 1925-8.

traditional "King of Righteousness" (3) is expected to encourage any moral code that would benefit his subjects. Hence, the sovereign not only tolerates but also gives material support to Hinduism, Islam and Christianity without discrimination.

What the king was expected to do for the Buddhist Church is to give protection in the exercise of its jurisdiction over the large number of monks all over the Kingdom. The protection was not so much against external ills as against the monks' own failings. It was in this line of activity that Rāma I energetically applied himself immediately on ascending the Throne. Within two years of his accession he had already issued seven of the series of ten royal decrees, the *Kotmāi Phra Songh*,⁽⁴⁾ intended to clear the Holy Orders of the moral depravity to which a period of political tumult had brought them. One decree, for instance, required that every monk or novice, on leaving his preceptor, should have an identification paper; another required every abbot to keep a register of all monks under his jurisdiction and to be responsible for their conduct. In support of these decrees government officials were enjoined to see that they were strictly observed by every one concerned. The climax came later when, according to the tenth decree, dated 1801, some 128 profligate monks were rounded up, made to disrobe and conscripted for hard labour as a punishment. Their offence was thus stated :

"Certain monks, taking advantage of their honourable standing, are so shameless as to descend to all kinds of low behaviour such as drinking intoxicants ... wandering out at night to see entertainments, rubbing shoulders with women, engaging in loose talk boarding Chinese junks in order to obtain fanciful objects of merchandise, thus rendering themselves objects of scorn and ridicule to foreign unbelievers ... Some go to Phrabād, where they while away their days in

3. The theory of the King of Righteousness was dealt with in *The Old Siamese Conception of the Monarchy*, JSS. XXXVI, 2, 1947.

4. for *Kotmāi Phra Songh*, see bibliography.

flirting with women excursionists and adopt at night the highwayman's life or attend low and undignified entertainments...."

The Law Code of 1805

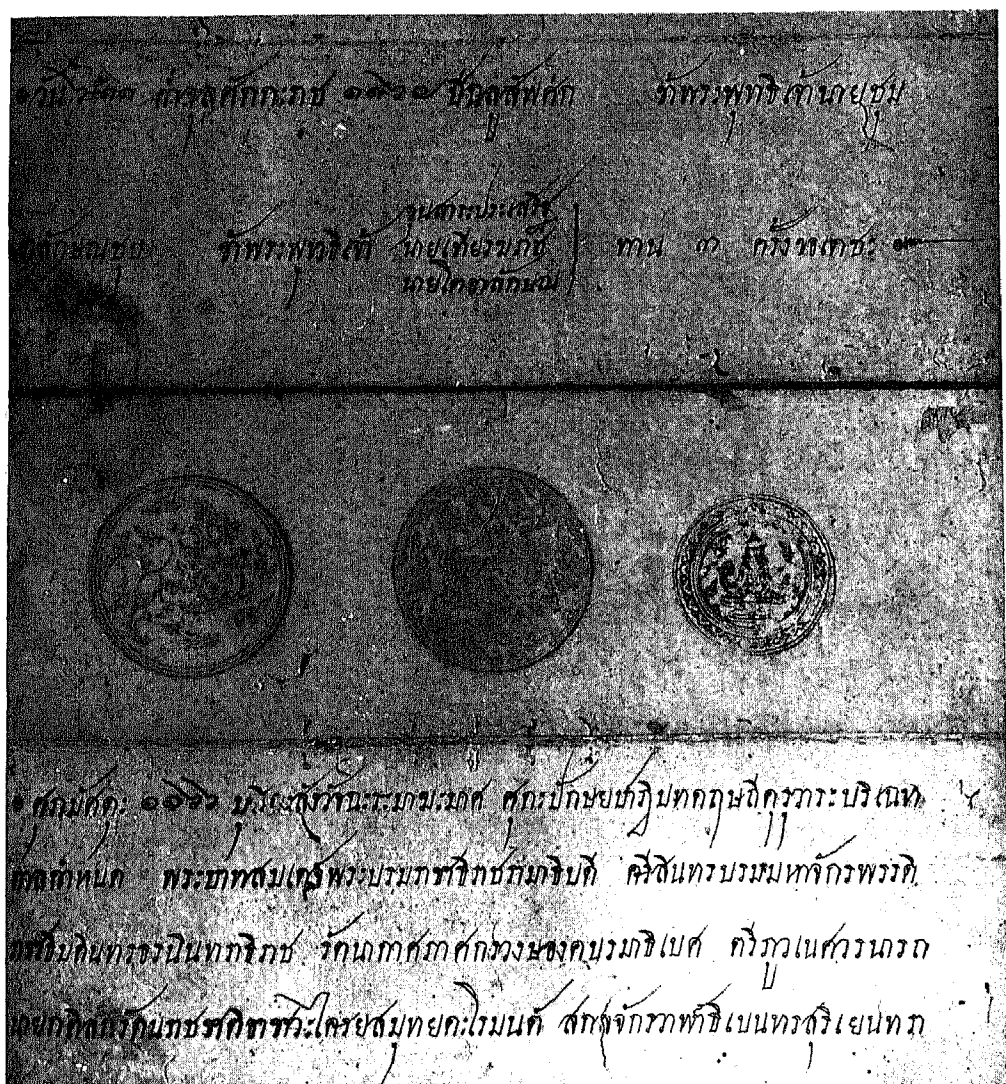
In one of Rāma I's edicts we have the information that only a ninth or a tenth of the state legislation in use in the days of Ayudhyā was surviving (1795). The King was perhaps already contemplating to overhaul what was left. It was not, however, until ten years later that a comparatively insignificant incident of litigation revealed how the prevalent codes of law had strayed from a sense of equity. The Minister of the Treasury, incidentally the famous poet and writer, Chaophyā Phra Klang, whose original name had been Hon, brought to the King's notice the appeal of a certain Nai Bunsri against the granting of divorce to his wife by the Court of Justice. The wife, the appellant maintained, had had adulterous connections with one of the judges. The Court had dismissed his argument of adultery because a woman could always be granted a divorce. The King, realising the injustice of such an unilateral procedure by which the man could not divorce his wife in the same way as the wife could divorce him, and suspecting the authenticity of the texts used in court, consulted the other two copies of the statutes. By tradition one of these copies was kept in the Royal Library and the other in the Royal Bedchamber. All three were found to agree that a divorce applied for by a wife was to be granted without consideration for the husband's impeccability. Finding that the law was contrary to equity, the King, recollecting his great work of revising the Canon of the Church accomplished some years previously, determined upon another great undertaking, this time the revision of the Laws of the Kingdom which had become unreliable and sorely contaminated, bent to suit their purpose by the shameless and avaricious to such an extent as to endanger the maintenance of justice in the land. He therefore appointed a Royal Commission of eleven, composed of lawyers, royal scribes and men of learning. The magnitude of their work may be judged from the fact that in

modern printing it takes up some 1637 pages of octavo size. (5) The members of the Royal Commission were not slow in their work, for they finished the task within eleven months. Three copies of this revised code were written down and stamped with the royal seals used by the three chief ministers and are known to this day as the *copies of the three seals*. Specimens of this revised Code with their seals may be seen to this day, and an illustration of the page with the seals is reproduced here.

Unfortunately for the historian, the old texts which formed the basis for this revision have not been kept. Considering the emphasis laid on the absolute reliability of the new revised Code and the injunction that no other book of law not bearing the three seals of state was ever on any account to be accepted in the administration of justice, it is tempting to suspect that those old laws might have been intentionally destroyed. No one at the time seemed to foresee the possibility that these documents might be of historical interest and the only consideration taken appear to have been the desire to eliminate every possibility of fakes.

The revised Code of 1805 contains not only the inspired Code of the *Thammasāt*, a most interesting document from the point of view of the historical development of law in Buddhist south-east Asia, but also voluminous materials of royal decrees and edicts. The *Thammasāt* gives us a clear picture of the theory of Kingship (6); while the latter contains a wealth of information for the student of Siamese legal history and jurisprudence. Many phases have been studied by Messrs Lingat and Burnay and published in *The Journal of the Siam Society* (7); but much new ground remains to be examined.

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5. *The Code of the first Reign*, C.S. 1166: publ. by the University of Moral and Political Sciences from the original copy of the Three Seals, 3 Vols, oct. 446-503-567 pages, Aksoraniti Press, B.E. 2481 (1938).
 6. cf note 2 above.
 7. cf. bibliography.



First page of the Law Code of 1805, one of the original "Copies of the Three Seals." From left to right the seals are : 1. The Royal Lion of the Minister of the Interior ; 2. The Trunked Lion of the Minister of Defence ; and 3. The Crystal Lotus of the Minister of the Port.

This code of 1805 is prefaced by the preamble already mentioned above. Then comes the *Phra Thammasāt*, literally the *Excellent Treatise of the Law*, tracing the origin of law along lines of Buddhist tradition by giving a genesis of the world. This theory of the genesis is over 25 centuries old. It develops the world in which we live from a fire-ball which gradually cools until life commences. It is thus curiously in harmony with modern scientific theories. Life was developed from aromatic vapours to which celestial beings from outside of the earth were attracted and they descended from the heavens to partake of the products of the earth. Thus irrevocably attracted to the earth they became its denizens losing their divine status. The *Thammasāt* then goes on to recount how primitive men agreed to elect a leader among themselves, a model king of righteousness, called "The Great Elect", who "abided steadfast in the ten kingly virtues, constantly upholding the five common precepts of morality and once a week observed the eight precepts, living in kindness and goodwill to all beings. He took pains to study the *Excellent Treatise of the Law* and to keep the four principles of justice, namely: to assess the right or wrong of all service or disservice rendered to him, to uphold the righteous and truthful, to acquire riches through none but just means and to maintain the prosperity of his state through none but just means." His progeny has been ruling the world since. One day a minister of the king, the "Seer of the Manusāra", who had retired and gone forth to the confines of the world, discovered inscribed on the mountainous extremities this *Excellent Treatise of the Law*. Learning it by heart he came back and wrote it out for the use of the king his sovereign. It then goes on to enunciate the main principles of this system of the law, which consisted of the *mūlakadi*, trunk or elemental matter, and the *sākhākadi*, branch or subsidiary matter. The former was divided into legislation for the guidance of the judicature, such as procedure; and legislation for the guidance of the people. The main headings of this latter division were: laws for the reception of complaints, law of evidence, of ordeals by fire or water, of the conduct of the judicature, of appeal, of husband

and wife, of slavery, of abduction, of inheritance, of debt, of quarrels, of robbery, of offences against the state, of offences against private individuals, of treason and of miscellanies. The *sākhākādī* is made up of royal edicts and decrees, among which may be mentioned the Palatine Law, or *Kot Monthierabāl*, and the voluminous edicts occupying roughly one third of this code of 1805. Many of these edicts were as late as the ones promulgated by Rāma I himself. Their general tone bespeaks an earnest attempt on the part of their promulgator to inculcate a more moral standard of living among his subjects, especially among the courtiers and officials of the government, who should set examples to which the people could look up to for guidance. The time was no doubt a difficult one, the country having all too recently emerged from the turmoils which affected so deeply not only the political but also the physical and moral welfare of the people.

This revision of the law code in 1805 was justly compared to the revision of the Buddhist Canon of 1788. The pair formed one great accomplishment of which its royal promoter was fully entitled to be proud. King Rāma I had thus set a standard for the spiritual and temporal government of the Kingdom. It singled him out as a broadminded reformer, who was nevertheless a staunch traditionalist, a combination of ideals which has hardly ever failed in the world's history.

Literary Revivals

The third field in which the King exerted much effort was to revive the national literature, the greater part of this having presumably disappeared since the fall of Ayudhyā. In days prior to printing such a catastrophe was easy to come about for most of the best in writings probably existed in manuscripts centred round the headquarters of the administration. In King Rāma I's revival he gave impetus to the literary movement in various ways. First of all, he initiated what was known as *Phra Rājanibondh*, i.e., royal writings, which might have been personally written by the

sovereign himself or composed in an intimate circle of friends and kindred spirits under the King's leadership. He also used his influence and power to have foreign masterpieces translated into Siamese; and he gave encouragement to individual writers like the above-mentioned Chaophyā Phra Klang (Hon) and many others.

Among royal writings the best known is the *Rāmakien* of 1798. The story of Rāma, the ancient Indian hero, was of course an old theme in this country. It permeated almost all branches of Siamese literature and arts. In the dramatic field there exist parts of the story in *chanda* verses, which were the recitatives employed in the shadow-play. The shadow-play probably developed in due time into the masked play, or *khôn*, of the type which was performed before the screen, thereby retaining its original characteristic as a shadow-play. This type of the *khôn* retained also the *chanda* recitatives of the shadow-play. The *khôn* before the screen is believed to have been invented in the days of Ayudhyā and its *chanda* recitatives were later developed into *klôn* verses for singing in accompaniment of the action. There are fragments of early *klôn* verses on the story of Rāma which are believed to have been composed by the King of Dhonburi. No complete story has, however, been found that antedates the *Rāmakien* of 1798. The plot of this is prefaced by preliminary tales describing the origins of the three main races inhabiting the world, the human, the demoniac and the simian. These three formed the principal actors of the epic drama. The main story does not correspond to the world famous *Rāmāyana* of Vālmiki entirely, for it has many important interpolations which have been traced back to south India and other sources, several probably having arisen in nearer parts of south-east Asia or even in Siam itself. The prefatory matter, too, could not have been an integral part of the original story in this land but was probably developed from such Siamese prose works as the *Nārāi Sibpāng*, the "Ten Incarnations of Vishnu", which appears to have been inspired by traditions, possibly oral, of the classical Sanskrit *Purāna*. This standard version, called the *Rāmakien*, was written in *klôn* verse in the form of recitatives for singing in accompaniment

to the classical dance. It is a long story without any attempt at subdivision, another proof of its independence from the Sanskrit *Rāmāyana* of Vālmīki which was divided into 7 cantos. It was written primarily for the stage and was marked with directions as to the tunes to which it was to be sung as well as indications regarding the musical accompaniments during intervals between the singing. The subject matter, though written without subdivision, consists of three well-defined sections. The first deals with the origins of the human, the demoniac and the simian characters which form the principal rôles in the epic drama. The second is a narration following fairly accurately the well-known theme of the story of Rāma with considerable interpolations in the latter part of the war in Lonkā, culminating in the death of Thosakanth, the chief villain of the story, and the hero's reunion with the abducted heroine Sīdā and their return home to Ayodhyā. The third section deals with another long war which looks like a local interpolation retelling the preceding war with substitutions of the principal figures in the drama, followed by perhaps older material which can be identified with some Indian originals. Shortly speaking, the plot is as follows:

In a contest of skill in manipulating the bow of Siva, Rāma, the hero, had won his bride, Sīdā, who proved a most faithful and devoted wife. In order to honour a vow made in an unguarded moment by his father, the King of Ayodhyā, to a minor young Queen, Rāma exiled himself from the capital for 13 years, during which his wife was abducted by Thosakanth the demon-king of Lonkā. Rāma waged a long war to restore his faithful wife, in which he had two whole monkey-armies as allies. Thosakanth and his numerous allies and relatives were eventually vanquished and Sīdā was restored. Rāma returned to Ayodhyā and assumed his rule. The other war was then started by remnants of the villain's allies and was won by Prot and Satrud in the name of Rāma, their brother.

Three other voluminous poems, in *klôn* verse and in the form of dramatic recitatives like the *Rāmakiën*, date from this period and are classed as "royal writings". They are *Dālang*, *Inao* and

Unaruth. The first two are Javanese in origin and in all probability came up to Siam from Islamic Malacca together with a few other Islamic literary pieces; whilst the last is clearly of Indian origin.

Dālang, or the "Greater Tale of Inao", conforms more to the majority class of Panji tales of Java but is less popular in this country than the lesser tale which will be mentioned next. The main plot is woven around the adventures of Inao, better known in Java as Panji, who has been identified with the historical figure of Kāmesvara I of the Kurepan-Dāhā state (1115-1130).

Inao, the "Lesser Tale of Inao", exists in fragments in *klôn* for the purpose of dramatic-dance performances. It was judged by King Chulalongkorn to have belonged to late Ayudhya days because of its description of the capital city and its royal palace. The fragments were secured from Nakon Sri Dhammarāj and were published in Prince Damrong's *History of the Drama of Inao* in 1921 (pp. 85-93). An epilogue was discovered later confirming the fact that the above was a relic of the late Ayudhya period and that King Rāma I wrote the concluding section of it in the royal chamber of Chakrabartibimān, thus qualifying it as a royal writing of the first reign. This version of the romance of Inao was the subject of a much more popular drama from the pen of His Majesty's successor, Rāma II, under the identical name of *Inao*.

Unaruth was written in 1783 and is the only vestige of the Mahābhārata in Siamese literature. The hero was Unaruth (Sk. Aniruddha) grandson of Krishna. It is believed to have been dramatised from the poem of Sri Prājña of the XVII th century.

The King wrote also a *nirās*, a type of poetry based supposedly on a separation from a lady-love while on travel, called *Nirās Tā Dindaen* after a famous spot which was a battle ground in that campaign. The poem is dated 1786, when the King and his brother had just repelled a Burmese invasion which had entered Siam by the Three Pagodas pass on the western border. Schweisguth in his *Etude sur la Littérature siamoise* commented (p. 190) "elle est écrite dans un

style grandiloquent et elle contient peu de détails intéressants; c'est un bref journal de route plus qu'un *Nivat*; on n'y trouve pas trace d'émotion amoureuse".

A *History of Siam*, now known as the version of Phan Chandanumās, contains a preface with the date of C.S. 1157 (1796) as being the year when it was written. The preface has the further interesting information that the part commencing with the founding of Ayudhya down to the reign of Phrachao Sūa (pp. 1-378) had been written under the direction of Kings Petrājā and Phrachao Sūa; and that the continuation down to contemporary times had been written by Chaophya Bibidhabijai under Rāma I's direction. The latter writer was probably identical with the nobleman who was an authority on court etiquette and ceremonies and headed the royal commission to draw up details of the King's coronation in 1786.

Of the category of translations from foreign masterpieces instigated by the King there were many. In the very first year of the reign there was a royal command to write down the old tale of the *Sibsongliem*, a name which can be paraphrased as "The Duodecagon". This copy was written in gold on the old-style Siamese folio paper. Another version has recently (1928) been discovered and published showing an Ayudhyan date of C.S. 1114 (1753). It is more than probable that this was the original from which the gold-lettered copy of 1783 was made. The gist of both versions concerns an old Persian tradition of King Mahmoud of Baghdad of the Abbasid dynasty who went in quest of an old duodecagonal monument erected by Nushirwan Al'nddin of the Persian Sassanid dynasty on which he found maxims of polity which form the main topic of this work. The source of the story was Iran and no doubt it formed one of the works, like *Inao*, which were brought from Islamic Malacca to Ayudhya.

Another voluminous translation was the *Mahāvansa* from the Pali of Ceylon. From the days of Rāma Kamhaeng of Sukhothai our nation has been deeply inspired by the Theravādin

Buddhism of that country. At the King's command Khun Sundaravobār, acting Chief Scribe, wrote down in 1797 the translation of the great work undertaken, by a certain Phyā Dharmapurohit. The copy was submitted, by royal command, to and duly approved by the Patriarch and Lords Abbot of the Kingdom.

Two other voluminous works, this time from the Chinese, belong to this period. The *Saihan*, an historical novel of Chinese source, was translated under the supervision of the King's nephew, Čaofā Kromaphra Anuraks-deves, Prince of the Palace to the Rear, who died in 1807. As the translation is not dated it may be presumed that it antedates that year. The romance deals with a period of Chinese history prior to the IIIrd century A.D. The other work translated was the *Sāmkoek*, another novel dealing as its name implies with the period of the Three Kingdoms (from 186 A.D. to about 265). The work is also undated, but as it was placed by royal command under the supervision of Chaophyā Phra Klang (Hon) who died in 1806, it may be presumed likewise to antedate that year. This has become one of the most popular prose works of olden times which, however, is still read by people at large and forms a schoolbook. Its prose is easy and it has a style of its own.

Another large translation is the *Rājādhirāj*, said to have been dated 1784 and attributed again to Chaophyā Phra Klang (Hon). The dating of this work is complicated by the way the preface was written. It mentioned that the translation was made under the royal command of Phrabūd Somdeč Phra Buddhayodfā, which name has only been in use to designate the founder of the dynasty since about the middle of the XIXth century in the reign of his grandson, now known as Rāma III. In any case, the historical romance treats of the exploits of the Môn line of monarchs ruling from the end of the XIIth century, first at Martaban and then at Pegu which they named Hongsāwadi. The main theme was the struggle of the Môn against the Burmese of Ava. The title of the work is the name of the Môn hero, son of King Fārūa, who before his accession to the throne of Martaban was Magato, son-in-law of Rāma Kamhaeng of Sukhothai. The style of its prose is fine and easy.

Towards the end of the reign, the King's son and heir, later Rāma II, directed a royal scribe named Phra Vijienprijā to write an *Annal of the North*, which actually, however, is a collection of traditions purporting to give a history of the pre-Ayudhyan period. It seemed to contain some good material but it is so indifferently compiled that it is but a jumble of fantastic tales.

As for individual writers who wrote more or less on their own, we may mention the abbot of Wat Phra Jetubon, who later became Somdech Phra Vanarat, Patriarch of the Kingdom, a man well known for his scholarship. He was the preceptor of another, perhaps more famous, scholar, Prince Paramānujit, who later also became head of the Buddhist Church of Siam. Three works in Pali verse are attributed to him. Of the three, the only complete one, is the *Saṅgītiyavansa*, written in 1789. It deals with the history of the Buddhist Councils convened to standardise the Canon of the *Tiṭṭakā*, beginning with the one which took place immediately after the death of the Buddha and concluding with the ninth Council summoned by His Majesty which had just ended. It was a tribute from the Church in acknowledgment of the royal initiative and support in the already mentioned Council for the standardisation of the Canon in 1788. The other two were histories, also in Pali verse, of which only a few fragments have been found. The story of their discovery as recently as 1918 should be told. Prince Damrong had heard of the existence of the two works and had been told that they were written in mediaeval Pali in which Siamese historical names were curiously Pali-fied. He was, however, unable to locate these works till 1918, when acting upon the information of the then abbot of Wat Phra Jetubon, he sent an official to examine the contents of old book-cases in that monastery and found manuscripts in a bundle which contained, among other works, fragments of the histories in verse, one called the *Mahā-yuddhakāravansa* dealing with the wars against the Burmans carried on by the Môn hero, known as Rājādhirāj, "the King of Kings", and the other *Cullayuddhakāravansa*, a history of Ayudhyā with special reference to the Burmese wars. The texts were incomplete

and the preambles, so usual with literary compositions of that period, were missing in both cases. The subject-matters were easily identified with the missing works of the Patriarch.

Other writings of this period include the *Kotmāi lilit*, "the law in verse" (1801), an abridgement of the law of appeal, etc. by a certain Luang Thammasūt; the *Byuḥayātrā Bejraphuang* of Chaophyā Phra Klang (Hon) describing royal progresses by water, by elephant and by horse, the latter two specifying that the destinations were the Phrabād of Saraburi, and concluding with a statement of the date of the composition of the poem as being the tenth month of C.S. 1159 (1798); other poetical works by the same author, namely some chapters of the *Mahājāti*, considered to be the most eloquent poetry of its kind, and the *Song of Kākī*, both undated like several others attributed to the same poet; the *Trailokyavinichai* (1803), a cosmological treatise by the learned Phyā Dharmapriyā, who when a monk with the name of Kaeo had voted on the side of those monks who were in favour of treating the King of Dhonburi as a supernatural personality to be bowed down to by the monastic order in accordance with that monarch's wish but had been disgraced for his undignified plausibility and duly disrobed though retained in royal service as a learned layman or a "Rājapandit"; lastly, there was the *Nirās Nakon Sri Dharmarāj* and another poem by the King's brother, Surasih, the first occupant during the Chakri dynasty of the Palace to the Front.

Besides the three main avenues in which the renaissance progressed, there were also other subsidiary channels. In art the new movement manifested itself to a great extent in the field of architectural decoration. Painting, plaster-moulding and carving were effusively employed for both interior and exterior decoration. The monuments thus decorated were mostly monastic although in a few cases the royal residences were also similarly embellished. Among monastic monuments the beautiful ensemble of the Chapel Royal of the Emerald Buddha stands out more prominent than any other. What we see now was mostly

redecorated though without doubt these buildings have been repaired along original lines. The extensive grounds also of the monastery of Jetubon formed one of the greatest architectural undertakings of this period, without including, of course, the grounds of the Chapel of the Reclining Buddha which was added later by King Rama III. It is understood that the door-panels of both of the main chapels of the Emerald Buddha and Wat Phra Jetubon were typical specimens of inlaying with mother of pearl dating from this period. Of secular monuments, the Mahāmonthien group of royal residences has retained much of its original painting indoors; whilst both this and the audience hall of Dusit to the west of it are typical of the period's architecture.

As for music and the dance they found expression in the *khōn*, the *lakon*, the *hun* or marionette figures which are still to be seen in the National Museum, the shadow-play, etc. Theatrical troupes supported directly by the monarch or his brother, Prince Surasih, were successively giving performances at the more important public festivals such as the inauguration of the building of the new capital at Bangkok, the dedication of the revised version of the Canon of the *T'ipitaka*, the dedication of Wat Phra Jetubon in 1809 and the further dedicatory festival in honour of the Emerald Buddha in 1809 about three months before the King died. These performances were all recorded and in the King's own words in the epilogue of his *Rāmakiēn* his attitude was that the story "should not be regarded as of basic value but is merely a part of His Majesty's dedication to the Master's teachings".

As may be seen from the way he initiated the revision of the law code, Rama I was a traditionalist in that he kept to the old Constitution of the *T'hammasāt*, whereby the King only legislated in explanation of or in supplement to a certain fixed set of legal headings. He was, however, far from being a stickler for forms, in proof of which may be cited his decision in the above-cited case of the divorce in which justice seemed to be in contradiction to equity. Since most of the authentic traditions had been lost, he was in the

habit of taking steps to study and enquire before embarking upon any important move especially in what concerned court etiquette and national ceremonies which he revived on account of their sociological value. Thus before he went through the rite of supreme anointment—in other words his coronation—he appointed a royal commission to study the forms of the ceremony as practiced in the days of Ayudhyā under the presidency of Chaophyā Bibidhabijai, a former high court officer of the Ayudhyā regime. With the celebration, however, of each important ceremony such as the regular annual commencement of ploughing, the exposition of the tale of the Great Birth, or the *Mahājāti* in 1807, the revision of the *Tiṭṭakā* in 1788 and doubtless at others which have not been recorded, he had royal proclamations read out to the assembled court so that the implication of each ceremony might be generally appreciated—again a sociological step. Even his daily life was governed by a routine which may be thus translated from a history written in 1870:

“In the morning the King used to come out to offer alms to monks on their morning rounds, after which he had a set of monks invited by regular turns to partake of food in the Audience Chamber. After the monks had left he received verbal reports of the daily expenditures from the Treasury. He then mounted the throne to give daily audience to the court. Here members of the Royal Family and the Royal Bodyguard of Gentlemen-at-arms entered first, the officers of the latter force taking this opportunity to submit reports of those special judicial cases which had been referred to them for opinion to guide the King's judgment. Then followed the regular audience of the day. This concluded, the King retired, took his luncheon and received the ladies of the Royal Family for a time. A short rest followed. In the evening the King took his meal early and then came out to the Audience Chamber to listen to the daily sermon delivered by a monk. This was followed by the delivery of verbal reports from officials of the Inner Treasury in connection with their duties, verbal reports of royal pages

sent on special errands such as to enquire after the health of members of the Royal Family or ministers or the progress of building constructions which interested him. Then the King again mounted the throne for the evening audience and reports were read to him from the provinces and received the royal decision. The audience usually came to an end by about 9 or 10 p.m. but in critical times as during momentous events it often lasted till 1 or 2 a.m. This routine was regularly kept up until the King became infirm with old age. Then he would appear, instead, at the window of the inner chamber now known as the Baisai building and from up there carry on his business of state with ministers or officials assembled in the courtyard below". (8)

The period of infirmity only lasted two or three years; and the King passed away after a short illness in 1809 at the age of 74.

The King's Colleagues

Rāma I's success in his reconstruction out of nothing was due to two main causes: his own personality which was a combination of sagacity, far-sightedness, moderation, and honesty; and indomitable will which was rendered all the stronger by a physical constitution which yielded neither to old age, sickness nor love of ease. His personality enabled him to enjoy the loyal cooperation of a set of able helpers about whom something should be said in passing.

The most intimate and constant companion who had shared with him from the earliest years his military and administrative careers was his brother Buñmā who served in the Dhonburi regime until he was created Chaophyā Surasih. When his brother Chaophyā Chakri became king, he was raised to the highest rank in the state next to the sovereign and was known as Prince Surasihanād, Prince of the Palace to the Front and virtual heir to the Throne. He, however, predeceased his brother by six years. The Palace to the Front was

8 cf. *History of the First Reign*, by Chaophyā Dibākarakawongs, in Siamese, ed. B.E. 2497 (1936), pp. 308-10.

an old institution prevalent from the days of Ayudhyā. In the new régime of Bangkok it was situated to the north of the Grand Palace beyond the monastery now known as Wat Mahāthāt, then the seat of the Patriarch of the Kingdom. The Prince had an impetuous character with a strong will but he was not always fair-minded. As a fighter he distinguished himself as an offensive strategist. He supplied the element of push while his brother acted as the brake, and the combination turned out successful. In this way the two brothers won their wars both under the leadership of the King of Dhonburi and later on their own while the King stayed at home. In peace, however, he did not shine though he exerted every energy to cooperate with his brother in the great reconstruction work. It is in fact on record that the two brothers even quarrelled very seriously on one occasion and could only be reconciled with some difficulty by the joint mediation of their two sisters.

The nature of the exalted position of the Prince of the Palace to the Front was a peculiar one. Though he was the most exalted figure after the monarch he was not theoretically heir to the Throne, for in the old theory of the Siamese monarchy each monarch was chosen to rule by the Council of the Lords of the Realm, made up of elder members of the Royal Family and ministers of state. Foreigners have been in the habit of calling him the "Second King", though in reality there have been only two "Second Kings" in our history. One was the younger brother of King Naresvara, who had been his royal brother's constant companion and comrade in arms; and the other was the Prince Chudamani, brother of King Mongkut, who was created "His Majesty Phra Pinklao" by his royal brother. Prince Surasih though he had also been his brother's constant comrade in arms and a colleague in the service under the King of Dhonburi was never raised to the exalted rank of a Majesty. He was merely the Prince of the Palace to the Front. This office was, moreover, not hereditary, the occupant being individually appointed when a vacancy occurred. He nevertheless had his own court and in most cases wielded tremendous power. In the days of Ayudhyā this led in

many instances to serious rivalry. In the case of Prince Surasih fraternal ties prevented such a possibility though their differences of opinion were now and then no doubt taken advantage of by their ambitious followers. Nothing serious, however, developed.

Next in rank was the Prince to the Palace to the Rear (Wanglang). The Palace was on the other side of the river, part of which was up to some three decades ago the Wanglang School for Girls operated by the American Presbyterian Mission but now forms the front of the Nursing School under the direction of the Sirirāj Hospital. The rest of the palace grounds is either included in that hospital or occupied by descendants of the only occupant of that exalted office in history, who, by the way, was a nephew of Rama I by his elder sister who married a nobleman in the Ayudhyā régime long since dead. The King had two elder sisters who were highly respected by him and were often consulted in important matters, especially the one just mentioned. Her son served under the Dhonburi régime and rose to be a Phyā, a governor of one of the north-east provinces before being raised to the exalted position of Prince of the Palace to the Rear in the present régime.

Outside his own family the King was fortunate in being able to secure men of about his age and social circle for the key positions in his government. Those were pre-Parliamentary days and the King was his own Chief of the Cabinet Council. Naturally he held this position for life; and its membership was also more or less permanent. Thus a greater continuity of action was secured. The more prominent of these ministers were:

The so-called co-Prime Ministers were not really Prime Ministers in the modern sense of the term at all, for they were individually responsible for their own department only and had no legitimate jurisdiction over the other departments of the government. They were merely considered as being higher in rank than the other four Ministers; but that was all.

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One of these two, the *Samuhanāyok*, charged with the department or portfolio of the Mahādthai, exercised jurisdiction over all the north and north-east provinces. This was the very post which was occupied by the King under the Dhonburi régime. In exercising his jurisdiction he was responsible in his area for all the three main activities of governance which the monarch exercised over the whole state, namely, executive, judicial and military. Upon his accession to the Throne the King appointed his former secretary, Phra Akkharasundara, whose personal name was Son, to succeed him with the title of Chaophyā Ratnābibidh. For the other co-Premiership, called the *Samuha-Phra-Kalāhōm*, with similar jurisdiction over the south, he appointed the governor of Pechabūn, personal name Pli, and promoted him also to the rank of *Chaophyā* with the traditional title of *Mahāsenā*.

Among less important officials of that first government, who later attained to ministerial ranks, were two men who have since perpetuated their names. One was Luang Saravijit, personal name Hon, who eventually became Chaophyā Phra Klang Minister of the Treasury, whom we have twice mentioned by name. His office was identical with the old one which was called by foreign writers the *Barcalon*, which is in fact a mispronunciation of the same title. This nobleman was the famous poet and literary man to whom were attributed so many works of the first reign renaissance. The other was a Nai Bunnag who was sixth in the direct line of a family of noblemen of Ayudhyā, descended from the Persian Sheik Ahmad who settled down in this country in the early years of the XVIIth century and rose in the service of King Songdharm to be a Phyā. Nai Bunnag was the husband of the Lady Nual, younger sister of the Lady Chakri, who eventually became Queen when her husband ascended the Throne. In his younger days he had lived at Dhonburi with his brother-in-law who became Chaophyā Chakri as the latter's personal attendant and did not seem to have aspired to officialdom in the King's service. When his brother-in-law became King he made this man his Master of the Robes with the title of Phyā Udayadharm. When the *Samuha-Phra-Kalāhōm* died, he

was promoted to that exalted post and created a *Chaophyā* with the title of *Mahāsenā*. This nobleman had a large family, which produced generations of distinguished servants of the state among whom were three Somdeč Chaophyā and several Chaophyā, all attaining to ministerial ranks. One of the three Somdeč Chaophyā even became a Regent of the Kingdom. This Nai Bunnag was the founder of the present well-known Bunnag family.

Like the senior princes of the Royal Family, most of the Ministers predeceased their leader and sovereign by a few years, and the ones singled out for mention above proved no exceptions.

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