

STONE MEMORIALS OF THE LAWĀ (Northwest Thailand)

by

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1. Earlier statements on the Lawā megalithic complex

After the very first anthropological expedition to the Lawā of Umphāi¹ led by M.C. Sanidh Rangsit in 1938/39, Steinmann and Rangsit (1939) have written:

“In most of the settlements of the Umphāi region two carved wooden posts, 3-4 m high, the so-called *sagang*, are put up on the village square at some distance from the assembly house; to these posts are tethered the cattle and buffaloes to be sacrificed (1939, fig. 2). They are exclusively meant for the sacrifice of bovidae and represent the highest village spirit, *Pi-Sapait*, who is asked to protect the village, its inhabitants, the domestic animals, and the fields. At intervals of several years, a buffalo is sacrificed to the *Pi-Sapait*” (1939, 167).

The skulls of the buffaloes slaughtered at these big village feasts are laid on boards running the length of the assembly houses, *yu* (1939, 168).

It must be remarked here expressly that for a buffalo sacrifice to the great village spirit *Pi-Sapait*

“every family of the village has to pay its share of the price of the sacrificial animal” (1939, 171).

These double *sagang*-posts in the Umphāi group of villages remind us conspicuously of the numerous forked posts put up by hill tribes of Assam and Burma as memorials of their buffalo and cattle sacrifices (1939, 169).

1) More correctly designated: omphāi, อมพไ.

Different spellings of place names have been unified throughout.

"The Lawā custom might be similar to that of some Naga tribes, where instead of forked posts often only two trunks or crossed planks are stuck into the earth. Remarkable also are the teeth along the edges of the carved upper part of the *sagang*, reminiscent of the zigzags, teeth and prongs so often found on posts, mostly forked, extending from Further India to the Pacific islands, and called the 'motif of enemy's teeth'. In their lower uncarved part, the high *sagang* posts show strange markings in the form of three rings or notches cut at regular distances from each other but their significance could not be found out" (1939, 170).

The central posts of the assembly houses, *yu*, mostly are carved showing the same motifs known from megalithic art all over Eastern Asia. As examples, the authors cite similar carvings of more or less megalithic peoples: Khasi, Garo, Kachari, Naga in Assam, Batak, Toradja, Nias-and Sumba-islanders in Indonesia.

"The same carvings: lizards in back-view, human figures, and the rosette motif we will find among the ornaments of the central posts in the assembly houses, as well as on the upper part of the high *sagang* posts on the village square" (1939, 168, and figs. 4,5).

"The Lawā, at least nowadays, have no feasts of merit, as are held in Assam and Western Burma, when the wooden forked posts to which the sacrificial buffalo has been tethered will remain standing as a symbol of the offering brought there. They use, it is true, sacrificial posts for their buffalo offerings, but there is no connexion whatsoever between these posts and the feasts of merit, though perhaps this might have been lost" (1939, 171).

"As to the spirit belief of the Umphāi Lawā, these spirits could at least partially be ancestor spirits. At any rate, the origin of a village spirit called *T a-Yuang*—lit. village grandfather—has been hinted at in this direction: it is certainly an ancestor, perhaps even a former village founder. As is well

known, the cult of the village founder with distinct prayers and ceremonies has spread far in the megalithic complex of South-east Asia and is especially characteristic of it" (1939, 165).

"As with . . . other tribes, in the course of death ceremonies for adult men, buffaloes and cattle are also sacrificed; however these buffaloes are . . . not killed at the *sagang*-posts on the village square but near the corpse on the day of burial" (1939, 171).

"The horns of buffaloes slaughtered at a death ceremony are later deposited on the grave, together with other offerings and the belongings of the deceased person. This proves that the Lawā share the conception held far and wide in Southeast Asia that life in the other world is a direct continuation of the life on earth" (1939, 172).

"Among the paraphernalia used at a death ceremony and put up together with the coffin in front of the assembly house is also a so-called *nām*², a small wooden memorial post, about 1 m in length, which, after burial, is erected near the grave yard (1939, 172). Everybody gets after death such a *nām* post . . . Furthermore, there are wooden posts, up to 2 m long, the so-called *mbueang*, which stand separated from the others in a close group . . . These *mbueang* posts are exclusively put up for the male members of those chieftain families who descend from the Lawā prince Milankha of olden times (in which families the chieftainship is hereditary, footnote 1); therefore they are only to be met with in villages where such families live, and this is the case in Umphāi, the most important village of all (fig. 7). Both kinds of posts are undecorated apart from rings cut around them at certain intervals, as with the *sagang* posts on the village square" (1939, 173).

"There is reason to suppose that these wooden memorial posts for the dead are put up instead of stone monuments previously used, a practice often found in neighbouring regions

2) For *nām* read *mbueang* and vice versa (see below).

where wooden posts may substitute for stone monuments. Nowadays no more megaliths are erected by the Lawā, but it seems that they existed in earlier times. Indeed, near a deserted Lawā settlement in the proximity of the iron-ore mines of Māe Thō (มำเฒ) old stone monuments have been found. One of them is a stone worked on four sides and tapering on top to a gabled edge (1939, 173, fig. 8); its height is about 1 m³. According to Lawā people such stone monuments are said to have been erected for the descendants of chiefs. If so, they would be predecessors of the long wooden posts used nowadays; these latter then might be looked at as replacements of the earlier stone monuments" (1939, 174).

In connexion with this, the authors mention the then recent discovery of three groups of monoliths near an ancient Lawā settlement on the Huai Um Pat, south of Hōd, as published by Hutchinson (1939 a).

They add that "presumably they indicated graves or were memorials to the dead, put up in quite a determined and deliberate direction to each other" (1939, 174).

In another paper for which he got information by courtesy of M.C. Sanidh Rangsit, Hutchinson (1939 b, 179) writes of the same group of four or five menhirs near a deserted Lawā village, 2 km from the iron-ore mines of Māe Thō on the road from Bō Luang (Amphoe Hōd) to Umphāi (Amphoe Māe Sariang), which Steinmann/Rangsit had already mentioned; he also reproduces the same picture as shown by Steinmann/Rangsit (1939, 173, fig. 8).

Hutchinson begins his short but important note by correcting, certainly on the advice of M.C. Sanidh Rangsit, the minor error of confusing the two kinds of memorial posts in Steinmann/Rangsit (1939, 172/73); he writes:

3) Hutchinson 1939 b, 179: 1.20 m.

"The Lawā call the burial posts *nām*, and say that in the past their aristocracy, *Khun*,⁴ were honoured by the erection of *nām* in stone to distinguish them from the common people for whom wooden posts sufficed, as is now the case for the whole population. The group of *nām* in stone near Bān Māe Thō... therefore marks the site of a burial ground of highly placed Lawā of earlier days.

The megaliths appear to have been roughly hewn by hand. Many are either recumbent or out of the perpendicular, because the Karēn neighbours of the Lawā, who know the Lawā custom of burying a dead person's personal possessions with him, such as spear, etc., often explore the neighbourhood of these megaliths in the hope of finding hidden treasure, and thus cause the surrounding soil to subside, and the megaliths to lean or fall. Since however the graves are invariably some distance from the stones, the labour of the Karēn desecrators is in vain.

This information throws an interesting light upon the groups of stones at Me Saleeum⁵ and leaves little doubt but that they are *nām* posts erected in days gone by to the memory of the more important inhabitants of the former Lawā settlement said to have existed in their neighbourhood" (1939 b, 179/80).

M.C. Sanidh Rangsit has published a second paper, at the end of which he summarized the megalithic aspects of the Lawā (1945, 496):

"The Lawā have the custom of erecting memorials of simply carved wooden posts at a place near the burial ground specially meant for this purpose; these posts stand there in groups. Wood, more easily procured in forested regions, has here taken the place of stone. That this is only secondary however, is proved by the discovery of stone monuments in

4) *Khun* (ขุน) a Thai word, the Lawā designation is *Samāng*.

5) Māe Saliām (แม่สลียม) described in Hutchinson 1939 a.

old, deserted Lawā settlements. When a wealthy man died his relatives used to sacrifice a bull or a buffalo in his honour, the horns of which were put on the grave. Certainly it is no error to assume that this custom was a part of the.... feast of merit.

If we see in most of the Lawā villages in front of the assembly house two wooden posts standing closely together, which are looked on by the native people as the residence of the highest village spirits, we might ask if their original meaning is not to be found somewhere else, as they are very much reminiscent of the forked posts of some Assamese hill tribes... In fact, at certain times great cattle and buffalo sacrifices are held, during which the sacrificial animals are tethered to these posts and killed with spears. All of these facts are criteria belonging without doubt to the megalithic complex."

As we are quite sure that the Lawā and kindred folks spread in the old pre-Mon and pre-Thai times over all the country, which is now northern and northeastern Thailand, and also into what is now Laos and the Shan States of Burma, we must have a look at more literature on megalithic things in this region.

Erik Seidenfaden (1939, 37/38) and Hutchinson have found a large quadrangular pool constructed from blocks of laterite and parts of buildings at Wieng Chet Lin at the base of Doi Suthep near Chiangmai. One is reminded that with some Naga tribes the giver of a series of feasts of merit, having reached the highest degree, may dig a big water tank, as water is identified with fertility (Kauffmann, 1953). The two researchers guessed that perhaps they might have found the ruins of Khun Luang Wilangka's residence, who, as a great Lawā leader, fought the Mon of Haripunjaya in the 8th century. To this day the Thai yuan of Chiangmai every year perform the sacrifice of a buffalo before planting out their rice, a custom which, according to Krajsri Nimmanhaeminda (1967, 197), they have taken over from the Lawā.

In 1959 a commission from the Fine Arts Department in Bangkok found two oval cromlechs at Bān Hin Tang (บ้านหินตั้ง, village-stone-erect), Amphoe Sūngnoen, Changwat Nakhon Rājāsīmā. The northern group consisted of three menhirs and two lying stones; the highest menhir measured 2 m, the lowest 1.30 m (Chin Yoo-di, 1959, 28).

Later on, Manit Vallibhotama (1962, 12/13) writes of a double *hin tang* at Mueang Sema, north of Lam Takhong, Amphoe Sūngnoen. He relates that there are many *hin tang* or menhirs, often in pairs, in the northeast of Thailand. Sometimes they are arranged in circles, sometimes in straight lines, similar to the stone groups near the Huai Um Pat (s. above) of which one is an oval and another one a straight line.

Finally Wilhelm G. Solheim II and Chester F. Gorman (1966, 158/59), who executed an archaeological salvage program, have found in Amphoe Kumphawāpī, Changwat Udonthānī, two types of standing stones, three of which have a motif of lotus flowers around their base (plate XV a-b and d). Near Bāng Nong Mak Kha, Amphoe Sahadsakhan, Changwat Kālasin (east of Khōnkāēn) a small mound is encircled by stones in an oval (plate XVII a). Their form is reminiscent of the menhirs near Māē Thō (Steinmann/Rangsit 1939, fig. 8).

If we thus find a relation between the forms of the stones, and if we assume that the aborigines were Lawā, in the northeast of the country as well as in the north, we are inclined to think that the stones found in the provinces of Nakhon Rājāsīmā, Udonthānī, and Kālasin must be attributed to the Lawā. However, real proof is lacking. The stones sculptured with lotus flowers at their bases and their frequent erection on temple areas might go back to Dvāravatī influence, which, as suggested by Quaritch Wales (Dvāravatī, the earliest kingdom of Siam. London 1969), might have extended to the Khorat plateau towards the end of the 7th century. Srisakra Vallibhotama in his review of Quaritch Wales' book sketches this author's ideas as follows (1970, 131/32):

"The distinctive feature of the culture in the north-east is the sema stone cult of which the stones either singly or in pairs were placed at the cardinal or subcardinal points of the Buddhist sacred enclosures The stone cult, as it was not found elsewhere during the Dvāravatī period, is probably an independent and original development in the northeast region."

I opine that this 'stone cult' might well have arisen there, where the Lawā in former times had erected their megaliths. Such a supposition would be in accordance with a personal communication by Dr. H.H.E. Loofs, Canberra, who himself was digging at archaeological sites in Thailand from 1966 through 1970, that in Central Thailand some ancient temples, today in ruins, had possibly been built on foundations of megalithic stones.

2. The megalithic problem

Before we proceed we must recall the summary that the greatest authority on Southeast Asian megaliths, the late Professor Robert Heine-Geldern of Vienna, has written in 1959, after having worked at the problem for more than 40 years. He speaks of a framework constituted of monuments, religious ideas, rites and social institutions. He cautions against believing that all of these elements must be assembled everywhere, as it might be quite possible that some of them are lacking in some locations or that their composition varies from one people to another. According to Heine-Geldern the main traits of the megalithic complex are:

1. Monuments in stone: menhirs, dolmens, cromlechs, alignments etc. (1959, 163, 167).
2. Monuments in wood, especially forked posts, supplementing or replacing the stone monuments; originally they served for tethering the sacrificial animal (1959, 174/75).
3. Feasts of merit: a series of very expensive sacrifices of bovidae by a single man to his community. Following this he is entitled to have monoliths erected and will ascend in social rank and

prestige, acquiring the privilege of wearing special clothes and adorning his house, e.g. with carvings or paintings at his house front or, with the Angami Nagas, by putting up huge wooden house horns on the gable (1959, 167).

4. Eschatology: the erection of a monument assures the feast giver of a better life in the other world. His name and, strongly attached to it, his soul will survive forever (1959, 168).

5. Fertility and prosperity are transferred magically from the wealthy feast-giver to the whole of his community (1959, 168/69).

6. Ancestor cult, by erecting a monument as a memorial to a dead person or, more often, by a feast of merit for the prestige of a living man whose name will be commemorated after his death. The spirits of the ancestors will come to sit on the monuments put up along the path leading to the fields or within the very fields; from there the spirits of the forebears will provide for their descendants' everlasting benefit. This is, as it were, a conception of enduring relation between past and future generations (1959, 164).

7. The village founder is the most important and most revered ancestor (1959, 171).

8. A style of monumental and symbolic art is associated with the megalithic complex (1959, 165).

3. Analysis of Steinmann/Rangsit's statements on the megalithic complex of the Lawā

At first it must be remarked that Steinmann/Rangsit's paper is based only on the situation in the six hamlets of the Umphāi group, possibly including Bān Tūn, the next village to the north. It does not cover the remaining two southern villages, Bān Dong and Bān Pāpāē, not to speak of the ten northern villages (including Bān La'ub seemingly mixed of northern and southern elements), because in many respects they are very different.

If we now go through the eight points of Heine-Geldern we come to the following conclusions:

1. *Megaliths*

According to the testimony given by Steinmann/Rangsit and Hutchinson it is to be supposed that the stone monuments in the northwest have been erected by the Lawā. These menhirs should have served as memorials to men of their feudal class, the *Samang*. As to the stones, which lie flat Hutchinson has given a plausible explanation: they could have been knocked down by Karēn graverobbers, by the heavy monsoon rains, or by wild animals. A real horizontal stone or dolmen, must be laid on smaller stones, and I am not aware of anything of this kind. So we rather assume that all the stones were once standing. If there are stone circles or ovals, generally called cromlechs, not the slightest hint can be found of what they were meant for. The same must be said of the megaliths in the northeast of Thailand, as archaeologists have not yet provided the necessary information.

2. *Wooden posts*

In more recent times these stones have been replaced by high wooden posts, the *nām*, which are standing in groups separated from the short *mbueang* posts. While everybody, men, women, and even small babies get such a *mbueang* at their deaths, the *nām* are only given to male *Samangs* and, moreover, on condition that at their death ceremonies, a buffalo has been slaughtered; if those left behind by a *Samang* are too poor to afford a buffalo no *nām* post is put up. This sacrifice is not executed at the *sagang* posts but near the corpse, and the horns are not deposited in the assembly house but on the grave.

In Umphāi and its dependants there are always double sacrificial posts on the village square, the *sagang* (1939, 167, fig. 2, 3) to which the bulls are fettered only in case of a big sacrifice to the great village protector-spirit, *Pi Sapait*. Their horns are put on shelves in the assembly house (1939, 167/68).

The two posts stuck into the earth close to each other remind one strikingly of the forked or crossed posts of some megalithic peoples elsewhere (1939, 170). One cannot but believe in a relation, though the northern Lawā villages use only single *sagang* posts of

quite a different shape: they are relatively short and sturdy and never carved as beautifully as the southern *sagang*. In Bān La'ub where they have three single posts on the village square the villagers explained to me: "Here it is different, because the great village spirit, owner of the three isolated posts, is not the same as in Umphāi." Thus we may take the single northern posts just as a variant of the double southern ones. Still, if we assume that once the Lawā villages shared a common cultural pattern, then at this time only the Umphāi group holds strongly to ancient customs. The northern villages rather seem to be on a cultural decline, and this makes it all the more difficult to verify if there is still anything preserved of the megalithic complex.

3. *Feast of merit*

The authors clearly state that every family in the village must contribute to the price of the animal to be sacrificed to the great village spirit, and that, consequently, they have no feast of merit in the classical sense, given by a single man for his own prestige and honour (1939, 171). So too nobody can obtain the right to wear special distinguishing marks on his clothes or houses, as is the case with the Nagas.

In Bān La'ub where three buffaloes are sacrificed at the three single posts every 30-40 years and where every family must pay a share of 50 Baht, the informants confirmed that a single man never can give a feast by himself alone as "it would be against the will of the great spirit".

The authors, though, guess that a relation between the offering posts and the feast of merit might have been lost (139, 171). It will be difficult to sustain this supposition, as any possibility of proving it is out of sight. Much nearer to the point has come M.C. Sanidh Rangsit, writing (1945, 496):

"When a wealthy man died his relatives used to sacrifice a bull or a buffalo in his honour.... Certainly it is no error to assume that this custom was a part of the.... feast of merit."

I firmly believe that he is right insofar as a buffalo must be sacrificed at the death of a male *Samang* to obtain the right of erecting a *nām* post to his memory. It means, to be honoured and commemorated, a man must be rich. This, of course, is a typical megalithic conception, and we really can associate this custom of the Lawā with the idea of the feast of merit of other peoples.

4. *Eschatology*

Name and soul of a *Samang* man for whom at death a buffalo has been sacrificed will survive for ever. Again, only for men and not for women a bundle of 25 thread-squares (thread-crosses) are hung up at the grave according to Umphāi rule. By means of these thread-squares the spirit of the dead man will be able to climb up to heaven. It is a strange fact that in Further India all peoples with megalithic traits use the thread-square, generally in funeral rites. However, there is no definite proof yet that it really belongs to the megalithic complex (Kauffmann, 1968, 283-294, 309).

The doctrines of heaven and hell are of Buddhist origin, but before the Lawā were influenced by these conceptions they believed, and many of them still believe it now, that after death they will live in a realm of the dead. This idea was indicated by Steinmann/Rang-sit (1939, 172) when they wrote of the dead person's belongings being put on the grave and of food-offerings given to the dead.

5. *Fertility and prosperity*

To win fertility and prosperity there must be given, often at intervals of many years, a big buffalo sacrifice to the great village spirit as well as annual offerings to the ancestor spirits, and to the spirit of the field actually planted. In the same way the northern Thai acquire fertility and prosperity when they follow an old Lawā ritual of a yearly buffalo sacrifice near Chiangmai (s. above). On the other hand we do not know if a dead *Samang* honoured by the sacrifice of a buffalo is believed to have any influence on the thriving of his people.

6. Ancestor cult

No doubt, the ancestor cult is strongly marked. In the houses hang small woven bamboo baskets, the *talaeo gob*, into which are laid yearly offerings for the forefathers of the husband's and the wife's lineage. That in this, as in other respects, husband and wife are status-bound as an equally honoured unity again is a trait of megalithism. To the *phī la'māng* or ancestor spirits yearly offerings of food etc. are also given in the plates nailed on top of the *mbueang* posts.

7. Village founder

Steinmann/Rangsit have envisaged the possibility that the *Ta-Yuang*, the 'village grandfather'⁶, might be identical with the village founder. If this should prove correct it would be a strong argument for the Lawā's megalithic tendencies. Unfortunately we are here at a loss as we do not have any conclusive evidence on this point. This question does not seem to have been elaborated enough yet.

8. Art style

The motifs of the art of carving in the Umpāi villages repeat time and again rosettes, circles, zigzags, lines of triangles, small squares, points of spears, lizards and possibly human figures. On the double *sagang* posts and on *mbueang* posts, rings of small squares (1 × 1 cm) are neatly cut out, as are also found in Naga art (Kauffmann 1962, 94, fig. 6; 95, 96, fig. 8 C 1; 101, fig. 12). The rings cut in at a distance of about 30 cm around *sagang* and *nām* posts remind one of the "torus" posts I described as belonging presumably to megalithic art (Kauffmann 1962, 90, fig. 1-3).

Though we recognize that there are enough characteristic motifs to qualify as megalithic art, still we acknowledge the serious absence of two most frequent and important megalithic motifs: buffalo horns and women's breasts. I doubt whether the little horns on top of the *sagangs* symbolize buffalo horns and whether the small projections at the sides of the *sagangs* are similar to the indentations on some forked posts of other peoples.

6) *tā* ๓ in Thai is the maternal grandfather but also a deferential syllable before first names of elderly men.

All three places are located in Changwat Chiangmai, Amphoe Hōd, Tambon Bō Luang. The word Khun in the names is said to mean a higher place, a small hill, where a rivulet takes its origin.

A survey from 28.1. to 2.2.1969 had the following results:

1. Looking for old Lawā graves near *B. Māeo Māe Thō* was of no avail. No more megaliths could be traced. It seems certain that these megaliths, now having disappeared, were those which have been mentioned by Steinmann/Rangsit (1939, 173) and Hutchinson (1939 b, 179).

But at the other two places erect stones still exist:

2. *B. Khun Māe Sa'nām* (sketch 1)

There are six menhirs (*sau hin* เสาหิน) standing north of the path leading from the water-rice fields of *B. Māe Sa'nām* first in a northerly then in a westerly direction through open forest to the iron-ore mines of Dōi Bō Hāe (ดอยบ่อแฮ่). The distance from these fields is about 500 m. The stones nos. 1 and 2 (fig. 2) are about 2 m, nos. 3-5 (fig. 3) about 3 m north of the path, no. 6 (fig. 4) about 30 m north of no. 2. Nos. 1 and 2 are 80 cm distant from each other in east-west direction, nos. 3-5 are standing about 6 m west of nos. 1 and 2. No. 1 is so heavy that four men would be required to carry it.

Nos. 1-5 have been measured by Khun Khrū Suchāt Tinnalag (สุชาติ ทินนาลักขณ์), headmaster of Bō Luang:

	height/m	width/cm	depth/cm
No. 1	1.35	35	on top 7.5 below 15
No. 2	1.00	25	on top 5 below 7.5
No. 3	0.50	20	5
No. 4	0.825	20	7.5
No. 5	0.60	15	7.5
No. 6	0.20	10	5

About 35 m south of the path and the stones are old grave holes. This was the burial ground of a former Lawā village called *Yuang Mō Tam Tōi*, once situated on a low hill but the site has totally disappeared now.

The discovery of these stones gains importance because to two of them are attached the names of *Samangs*, for whom they have been erected:

- no. 1 is the *nām* post or *lagnām* of Khun Sā (หลักนามของขุนสา) and
no. 2 is the same of Khun B5 Khwā (ขุนบ่อขวา).

Nobody could remember for whom the stones nos. 3-6 had been put up.

A great grandson of Khun Sā, named Nāi Lun Sunantha, headman of B5 Luang until his death and brother of the still living *Samang* Nāi Sug Sunanthā, a very old man, has handed down the following tradition about these stones:

About four generations ago people under the leadership of two *Samangs*, Khun Sā and Khun B5 Khwā, emigrated from B5 Luang to build the new village Yuang M5 Tam Tōi because they wanted to be nearer to the iron-ore mines of Dōi B5 Hāe. It was a small *Samang* group which took common people along as workers.

They stayed there for some decades until a small-pox epidemic decimated them. A great many of them died, among the first were the two *Samang* leaders, and the survivors fled back to B5 Luang. The people said they had been punished by the great village spirit for not erecting the double *sagang* posts in the village centre.

3. B. Khun Khuna' (sketch 2)

Not far from the Karēn village Bān Yāng Omlong (บ้านยางอมลอง) two menhirs are standing in open forest about 100 m east of the path leading up north from B. Khun Māe Sa'nām to B. Māe Thō Luang, a walk of four hours. They are 1.30 m apart in northwest-southeast direction. About 100 m south of the two stones is an area of old *Samang* graves. To the west of the path are the old graves of the Lawā commoners.

The stones (fig. 5) have these measurements:

	height/cm	width/cm	depth/cm
no. 1	67.5	22.5 measured in centre	on top 10 below 7.5
no. 2	30	15	10

No. 1 is the *nām* stone of Khun Bō Sāi (ขุนบ่อซ้าย) who was the first ancestor known of the Khun Gaeo family and founder of the village Yuang Mō La'āc. The former situation of this village is not known, nor where the people came from, but it is assumed that they were of Bo Luang origin also.

The names or titles, Khun Bō Khwā and Khun Bō Sāi, which could be translated as Lord of the Mine (*bō*) to the Right and Lord of the Mine to the Left, are not explained topographically by Khun Suchat. He rather thinks that, like nowadays, the Palad Khwā (ปลัดขวา) and the Palad Sāi (ปลัดซ้าย, *khwā* = right being higher than *sāi* – left) are the two assistants of the Nāi Amphoe or district chief, so in earlier days the Khun Bō Khwā and Khun Bō Sāi might have been assistants of the village chief who moved from him to found independent villages.

Archaimbault has given more evidence of this ambivalence between "right" and "left" from Laos. According to him at the boat races on occasion of the That festival in Luang Prabang always the oarsmen (*sip'ai*) "to the right" are winning over those "to the left". In the great procession walk five high officials, two of whom are called Mueang Khwā and Mueang Sāi (1966, 20).

There is a queen to the right and one to the left, a chief of the guards to the right and one to the left (1966, 21).

The right and the left assistant of the chief of the elephant hunters have the title Pākām (1966, 30 note 13).

5. Conclusions

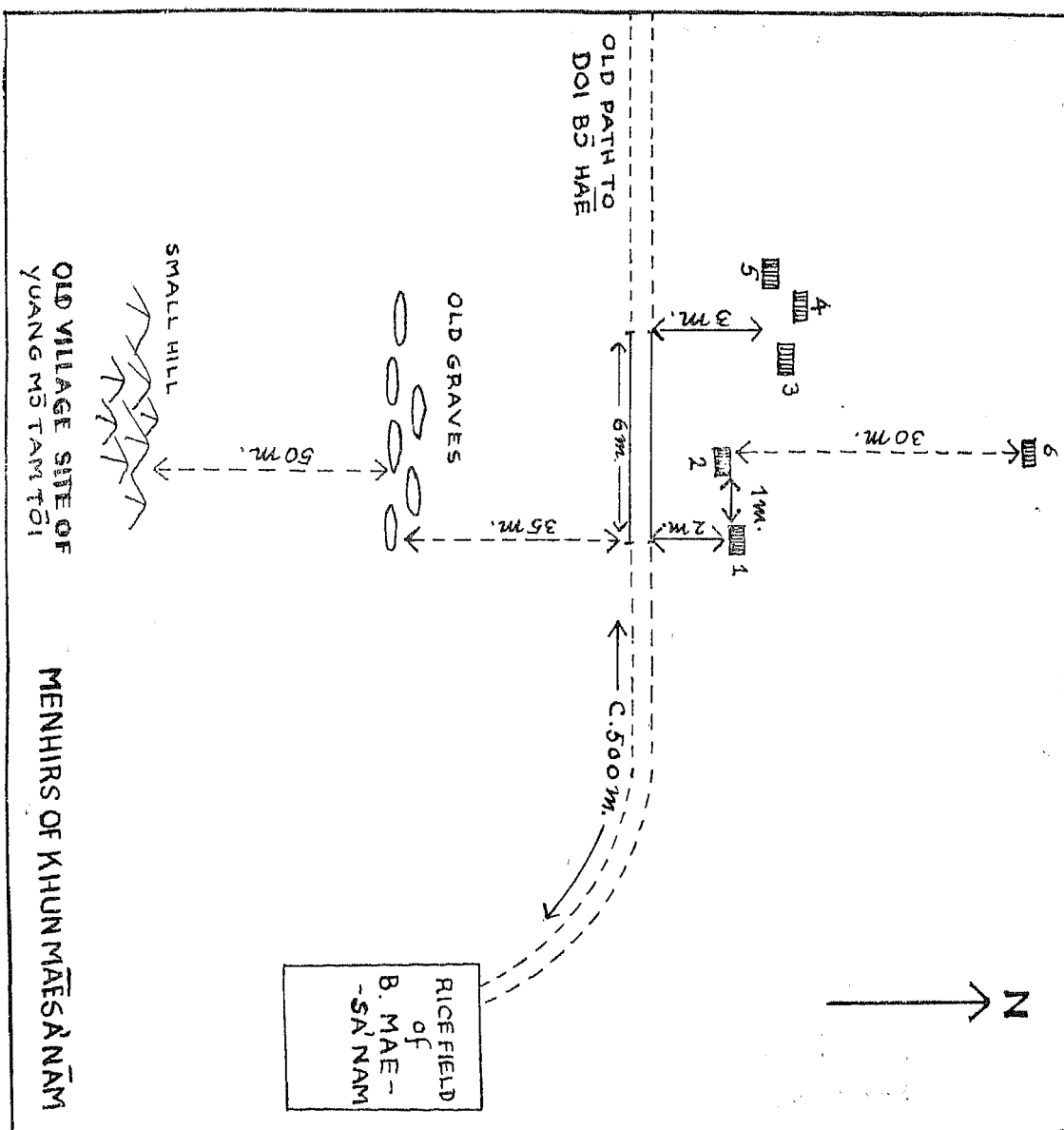
Summing up our investigations we can state:

1. that we have discovered two groups of menhirs and know the names of the Lawā villages which raised them,
2. that three of the menhirs are named, i.e. the names of the *Samangs* at whose death they were erected are known,
3. that the two villages must have been founded approximately six generations ago as the narrator of the story, to whom two to three generations might have been known, has spoken of a lapse of four

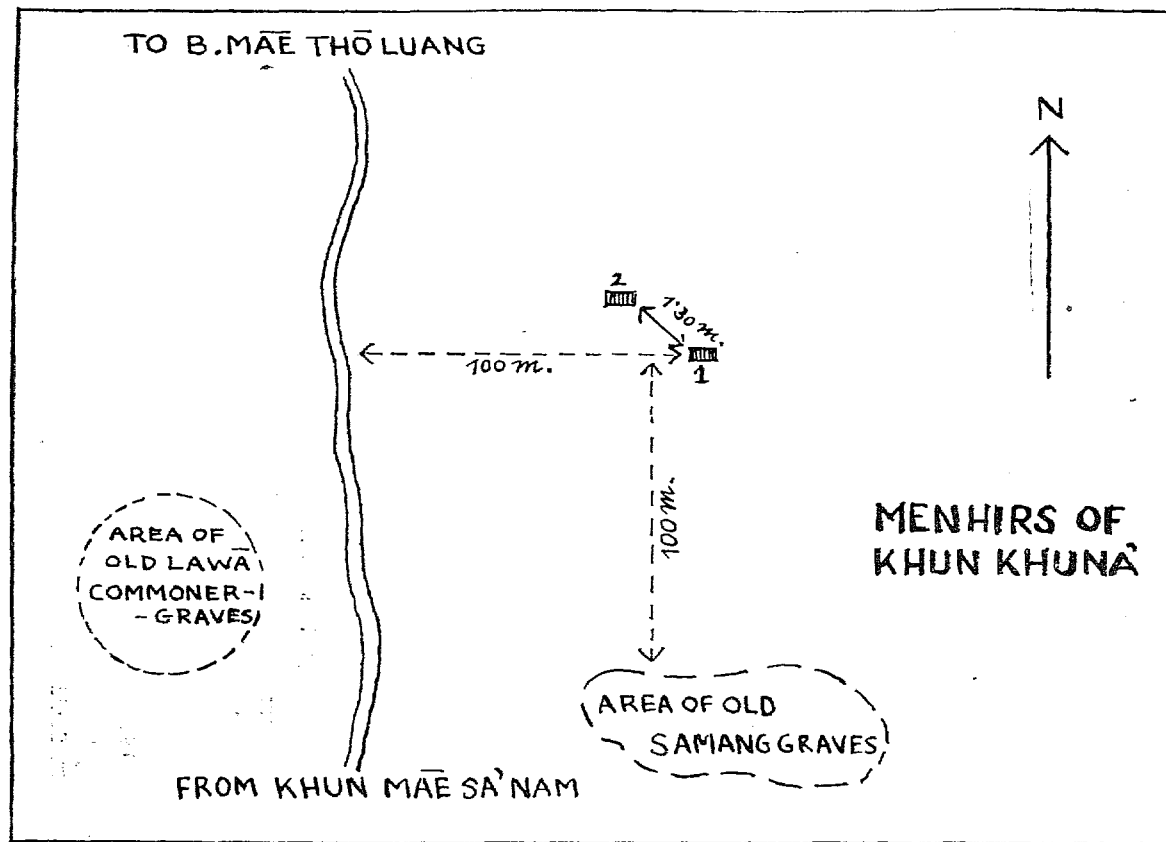
generations. Allowing six or seven generations of 25 years each (instead of the usual 30 years of Western peoples), the founding of the villages could perhaps have been 150-175 years ago, or at about the turn from the 18th to the 19th century. As these people had stayed "some decades" until a smallpox epidemic killed the leaders, their stones might have been put up before the middle of the 19th century. If this would be correct to some extent we could assume that at least until 120 to 130 years ago, taller *nām* stones were erected in honour of dead *Samangs*, while smaller stones are occasionally still given, as at B5 Luang.

With this the theory advanced by Steinmann/Rangsit is proved to be a fact. The explanation for why wood rather than stone was used more and more for the *nām* posts could be the difficulty of finding suitable stones in this region and the high costs of breaking, working, and transporting them. Wood, is readily available and much cheaper, as Hutchinson has pointed out. Strangely enough, megalithic peoples everywhere have in more recent times reduced the number of their sacrifices and the big feasts connected with them. Some say they can no longer afford the high costs. Why their economies are getting worse and whether, in addition, there is a decrease in interest in megalithic conceptions in general cannot be stated unequivocally. This problem would deserve investigation.

One important aspect of this paper is that by now we can surely count the Lawā among the peoples with a strongly marked megalithic complex. This closes definitely the gap between the megalithic tendencies in the western and in the eastern half of the Indochinese subcontinent. If we follow Heine-Geldern's assumption that megalithic thought and ritual have come from the west to Southeast Asia in the neolithic period about the middle of the 2nd millenium B.C., then we must reckon that the Lawā might possibly have acquired the elements of their megalithic complex nearly 3000 years ago.



Sketch 1



Sketch 2

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Fig. 1 One of the *nām* stones with *mbueang* for a *Samang* on the burial ground of Bõ Luang



Fig. 2 The two named menhirs nos. 1 and 2 at B. Khun Māe Sa'nām (no. 1 to the right)



Fig. 3 Menhirs nos. 3, 4, 5 (from right to left) at B. Khun Māe Sa'nām



Fig. 4 Small menhir no. 6 at B. Khun Māe Sa'nām



Fig. 5 The named menhir no. 1 with the menhir no. 2 in the background to the right at B. Khun Khuna'