

A NOTE ON PÜN

by

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The question of the date when large cannon were first made or used by Thai military has been much discussed. The prevailing opinion is that the Portuguese brought the knowledge of casting and using artillery to Thailand. Some writers, however, prefer earlier dates, as for instance Sut Sängwichian in a recent article¹ entitled "Could the Thais in the past make big cannon and manage them themselves, or not?" He suggests that the Thais of the 13th century, and perhaps even many centuries before, were able to make or at least to manage big ordinance. His argument is, among others, based on the word *pün* "cannon", and he quotes several passages from Lan Na Thai chronicles, as cited by Thuaihan Yomanak², where this word is used in connection with old warfare.

Without wishing to discuss here the date when the Thais made their first cannon, or when they first used big artillery, nor wishing to discuss the philological and historical value of the sources referred to, I should like to draw attention to the circumstance that in classical Thai Lan Na, i.e. the Thai idiom(s) used in the old Lan Na Thai, *pün* has not the meaning of "cannon", but of "arrow".

In northern Thailand, it is still possible to find old men who remember that formerly, in their language, *pün* meant an arrow.

Besides, there is philological evidence. I shall quote just one passage where it is possible to gather from the context that an arrow must have been meant rather than artillery. In a palm leaf manuscript of the Chiang Mai Chronicle³ in my possession, it is said that "Jao

1) สด แสงวิเชียร ไทยเคยทำปืนใหญ่ใช้เองได้หรือเปล่า, ศิลปากร (13.6) 2513 40-47.

2) ทวยหาญ ขมมาก, ปืนใหญ่กับวิถีการร้อง, รวมปาฐกถางานอนุสรณ์อยู่ยง 200 ปี เล่ม 2, 2510, 157-349.

3) It is undated but was probably copied from an older text around 1930-40 or earlier. It consists of 8 bunches of palm leaves and is written in classical Thai Lan Na script and language. Compare Camille Notton, *Chronique de Xieng Mai*, Paris 1932, p. 26.

Mang Lai⁴ ordered a man by name of Ai Phian, who used to shoot very accurately with a cross-bow, to take a cross-bow and *pün nya*, and to go and lie in ambush at the wayside. When Xun Òng, leading Xun Xüong who was riding an elephant, came (to that point), Ai Phian took the cross-bow and shot Xun Xüong who died". It seems obvious that *pün* here means an arrow; *nya* meaning "drug" in general, is here short for *nya pit* "poison".

The misunderstanding that *pün* in the north must be a cannon, is a relatively old one, and even Phraya Prachakit, compiling the Phongsawadan Yonok⁵ from northern texts, did not always escape it, although he correctly translated *pün* in the passage just quoted, explaining even in parentheses that *pün* meant "arrow", and that the poison was of such and such kind⁶. To cite one more example from the Chiang Mai Chronicle⁷: When King Tilok of Chiang Mai gave an armed escort to the Ruler of Phisanulok, who wished to emigrate with his population to the north, they were attacked on their way back to Chiang Mai. The King ordered "one thousand cross-bow shooters with poisoned arrows" (*pün nya*) against the attackers. In Phongsawadan Yonok⁸, the passage reads "carrying cross-bows and long cannons" (*pün yao*). It is obvious what happened: the original text said *pün nya* which in the eyes of Phraya Prachakit or his assistants did not make sense because they understood "poisoned cannons" So they thought that *nya* in the original text was a wrongly written word, and they corrected it to *nyao, yao* in Siamese, "long".

It would be interesting to know at least approximately when and where *pün* changed its meaning from "arrow" to "cannon", and whether before designating the barrel of a cannon and eventually the whole outfit, it meant "cannon-ball".

4) King Mang Rai, who in 1296 founded Chiang Mai. The event here referred to is placed by the chronicle in the year 1275.

5) พระพงษาวดารโยนก, เรื่องพงษาวดารโยนก, กรุงเทพฯ 126 (พศ 2450).

6) loc. cit. p. 138.

7) Compare Notton, loc. cit. p. 113-114.

8) loc. cit. p. 230.