

A STONE INSCRIPTION FROM WAT DONG BUNNAK (PHAN)¹

by

Hans Penth

In 1969, the monastery Wat Umong Then Jan at the foot of Dòì Suthep near Chiang Mai was presented with an inscribed slab of grey sandstone, measuring 40×29×7 cm, which was said to have come from somewhere in Amphö Phan, Jangwat Chiang Rai.

The inscription covers one face only, and consists of 9 lines of Thai language written in Sukhothai characters. Since the original text must have been longer than 9 lines, as is clear from the contents, one may assume that the slab is just one fragment, the upper one, of an originally longer stone. However, the slab is so neatly cut beneath the 9th line, which is not severed at all, that one is tempted to surmise, that the inscription continued either on the back of the slab (now flaked off), or on another slab which is now lost.

The inscription deals with events which occurred at a date equivalent to A.D. 1462. The text, which says that a senior monk (*mahāthera*) requested something from secular authorities, breaks off just before introducing the main subject, i.e. what the monk requested. One may safely deduce that this was something of importance for Theravāda Buddhism of the region, and that the slab was meant to record the details. One may also assume that the inscription was made in the same year the events in question took place. If so, the inscription would be the third-oldest in Thai language originating from Lan Na Thai; two older ones being those of Wat Phra Yün (Lamphun, 1370)² and of Phrä (1456)³.

What remains of the inscription is not long enough to permit a thorough study of the language used, nor to draw any definite conclusions. Therefore, I shall venture only a few remarks.

1) I gratefully acknowledge help received from the Ven. Sai Mahawiro of Wat Umong, Chiang Mai, Mr. Alexander Griswold and Dr. Prasert na Nagara.

2) ประชุมศิลาจารึก ภาคที่ 3, กรุงเทพฯ ๗ 2508, 136-144.

3) loc. cit. p. 145-147.

The language is essentially classical Thai Lan Na, as may be seen in the expressions **sakkarāt tai 824 tvǎ** and **pī teā sahnā** which are regularly used only in the north. But there are southern influences as well: there is the use of Sukhothai ciphers and letters, which for engraving stone inscriptions in old Lan Na Thai were generally preferred to the local Hariphunchai letters and ciphers, and there is also the expression **hai khā** where one would expect **hū khā** or **hū khò**. Only occasionally, **hai** is used in classical Lan Na Thai texts. The written characters used are basically those of Sukhothai, but they are more rounded, like the Hariphunchai type used in post-Môn Lan Na. One need not be surprised to note southern influences in the north, especially in religious and other matter of non-material culture; in the 14th century, more than one monk from Sukhothai settled in the north.

It is evident that the author of the inscription pronounced Pali loanwords in about the same way as is done in present-day Thailand: Spellings like **sakkarāt** instead of **sakkarājā** and **maḥbāthen** instead of **mahāthera** are examples. Since he used these local pronunciations even on such a solemn and religion-centered occasion as the setting up of a stone inscription, one may assume that he had firmly incorporated these foreign words into his own vocabulary, spelling them as he habitually pronounced them; their loanword character was not relevant to him.

The history of the Phan region is incompletely known. A significant part of the large valley that runs from north to south seems to have formerly been a lake or a swamp. The ruins of old cities and monasteries are found at the foot of the mountains to the east and west, from Phan down to Phayao. It is still quite uncertain where the former capital of the region was; present-day Phan is said to date only from the 19th century when it was a village called Ban Kat (Market Village).

Some years ago, while doing a survey of the region, I was shown or told of about ten stone inscriptions, two or three of which are now in the museum at Chiang Sǎn. None of them have been published. The slab presented to Wat Umong was new to me, and since it bore such an early date for a Thai inscription from Lan Na Thai, I went to inspect the site it came from.

It then became clear that in 1969, a local farmer, Nai Ta Jampalakhon of Ban Nong Sala (T. Pa Fak), had discovered the slab lying by the side of a pit that had been dug into the base of the altar of a wihan (P. vihāra) in a ruined monastery, now called Wat Dong Bunnak; the name means "Monastery in the forest of Bunnak Trees" (Mesua ferrea, according to McFarland's dictionary). Nai Ta brought the slab to Wat Nong Sala, from where the Venerable Sai Mahawiro of Wat Umong brought it to Chiang Mai.

Wat Dong Bunnak, the original name of which is unknown, is situated in dense forest about 3 km SE of Ban Nong Sala (map 1:50,000 sheet 4946 II). It is surrounded by the ruins of a brick wall which enclosed a rectangular precinct of about 45×30 m, the longer side of which ran approximately east-west. In the western section of the precinct, there is the base of a jēdi (P. cetiya) of about 10×10 m, with numerous redentments. The wihan mentioned above stood east of the jēdi. Its ruins contain fragments of sandstone pillars, each with a hole in the centre. Since these fragments are not numerous, one may assume that they were the sockets for the pillars, and that the latter were made of timber. In front of the wihan, there are the ruins of a smaller building, perhaps the ubosot (P. uposatha). To the south of the wihan was another small building, perhaps a residence for monks, kuti (P. kuṭī). A stream or a moat seems to have run in front of the eastern and southern walls. On the site of the wihan, I noticed fifteen or twenty fragments of seated Buddha images (attitude of bhūmisparśa), made of grey and red sandstone, being 15-40 cm wide at the knees; the fingers are of equal length, a feature which, according to Griswold⁴, does not occur before about A.D. 1425. I also saw the remains of a grey sandstone elephant, about 40 cm long, which probably had been standing in a shallow rectangular stone vessel that was lying nearby. The entire precinct is overgrown with brush and trees. It has been pillaged and is completely ruined.

4) A.B. Griswold, Towards a history of Sukhodaya art, Bangkok, 1967, p. 54f.

Text of the inscription

1. sakkarāt tai
2. 824 tvā pī teā
3. saḥṇā tein 9 òòk 6
4. gām maḥhāthen Sātdām—
5. maḥtraibitavicitṭaḥ—
6. pittakḥaḥsārapeñ—
7. ño ceā hñeā sāsaḥṇā
8. pòk thein ceā ban cā
9. pān hai khā òā (nu) yāt hee

Translation of the inscription

When the era attained 824, a year Tao Sanga, 9th month, 6th night of the waxing moon⁵, the Maha Then Sattammathalaipitawijittapittakasalapengnyo⁶, the religious leader⁷, spoke to the (local) inspector of internal affairs⁸, asking him to request permission from⁹ . . .

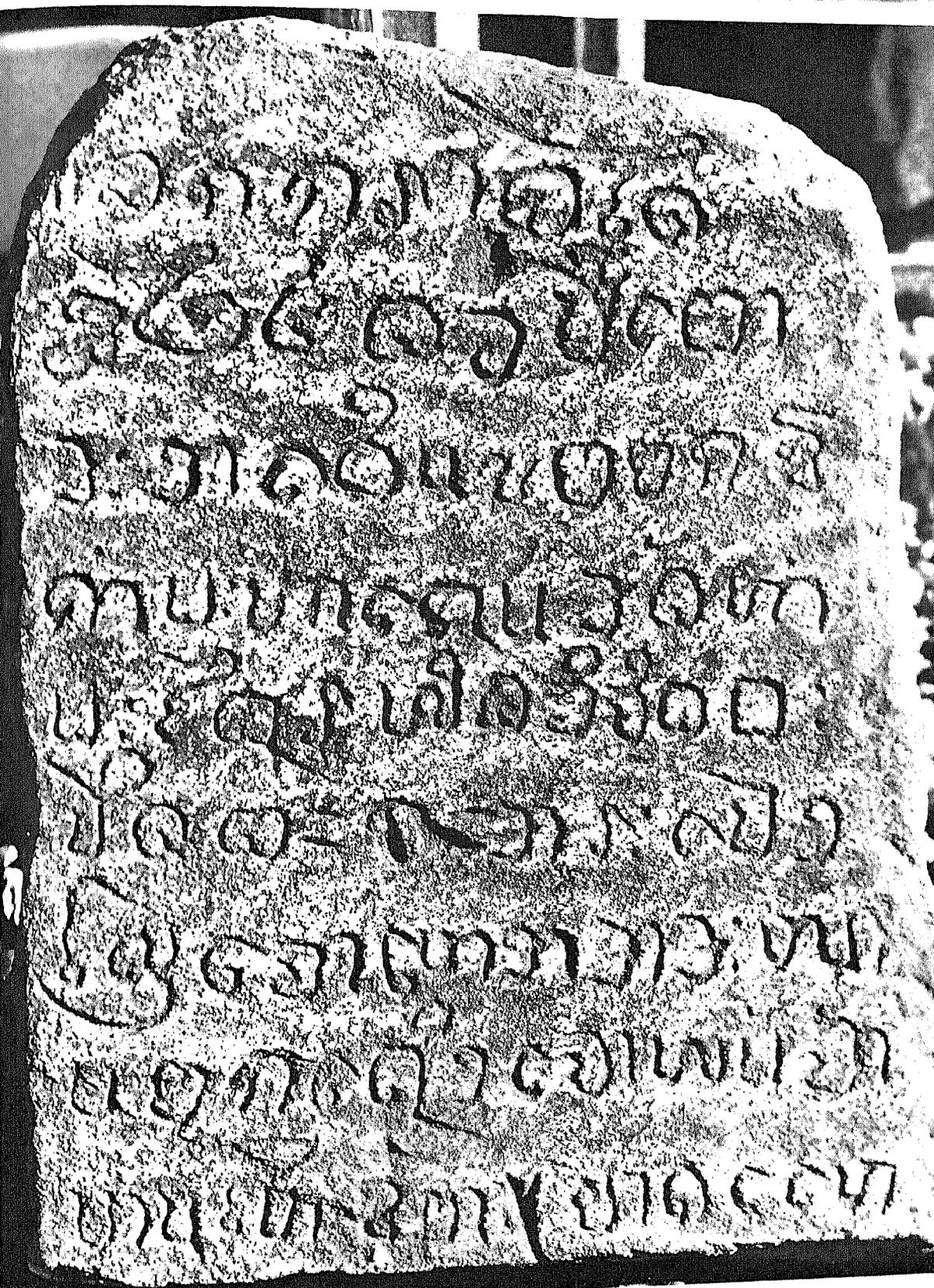
5) May-June 1462. The era is Cullasakkarājā; C. 824 was indeed a year Tao Sanga.

6) The supposed Pali name of the monk is Mahāthera Saddhammatividha-vicittapittakāsārapañño, the meaning of which would be "Learned in the essence of the three variegated Piṭakas of the true Dhamma".

7) *hñeā sāsaḥṇā*. *hñeā* now means the bulb or lowermost part of a plant's stem. In Lan Na Thai chronicles, however, I have found this word to mean also "the most important, leader, elder", and to be coupled with *gleā*, "leader, first, beginning". *hñeā* is also found in the approximately contemporaneous inscription no. 40 from Sukhothai where it precedes the name of a high-ranking monk (see : Griswold & ña Nagara, A pact between uncle and nephew, JSS (58.1) 1970 p. 109; their suggested equivalent "patriarch" seems to me quite relevant).

8) *ceā bān cā pān*. From Lan Na Thai chronicles dealing with about the same period, it is evident that a *cā pān* was an official inspecting or controlling internal or domestic affairs (German: Vogt. *cū* = guardian, overseer, inspector; *pān* = settlement consisting of one or more households). In the second half of the 15th century, for example, the man holding this position in the capital, Chiang Mai, had the rank of Mūn (*hmür*), i.e. 100.000; (see : Camille Notton, Chronique de Xieng Mai, Paris 1932, p. 116). An official like the person in the present inscription who had to deal with a relatively unimportant place, Phan, had thus only the rank of *bān*, i.e. 1.000. *ceā* is an honorific.

9) Presumably, the last word of the inscription was *heen*.



Stone Inscription from Wat Dong Bunnak
From Dr. Hans Pentz 1970



THE INSCRIPTION OF KING RĀMA GAṂHĒŅ OF SUKHODAYA (1292 A.D.)

Epigraphic and Historical Studies No. 9

by

A.B. Griswold and Prasert ṇa Nagara

Introduction

The late Professor George Coedès's edition and translation of Rāma Gaṁhēñ's inscription¹ are so authoritative that any attempt to improve on them may seem futile, if not downright impertinent. But almost half a century has passed since they appeared. In the meantime a new generation of scholars, both Siamese and Western, have been able to study the inscription, either from the stone itself or from Coedès's photographs of rubbings; a number of Sukhodayan inscriptions which were unknown to Coedès have been discovered and edited, furnishing comparative material for the interpretation of obscure words and phrases; and much new information on Southeast Asian history and archeology has been gathered. As it is therefore possible to propose a few new readings or interpretations of difficult passages in Rāma Gaṁhēñ's text, we have ventured to undertake a new translation, with copious explanatory notes.

The first reasonably satisfactory translation of Rāma Gaṁhēñ's inscription into a western language is that of Cornelius Beach Bradley, Professor of Rhetoric at the University of California, which appeared in 1909. Professor Bradley's father, the American medical

1) Coedès, *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam*, Bangkok, 1924, p. 37 ff., with text in Romanized transcription, French translation, introduction, and notes; แผนกโบราณคดี, พระบรมมหาราชวังกรุงเทพฯ ภาคที่ ๑, Bangkok, same date, p. 51 ff., text in modern Siamese characters, with translations of Coedès's introduction and notes, prepared by Luang Boribal Buribandh under the direction of Prince Damrong Rājanubhāb; reprinted in พระบรมมหาราชวังกรุงเทพฯ ภาคที่ ๑, for distribution at the cremation of Lady Sin Bhaktinaraśreṣṭha, Bangkok, B.E. 2500, pp. 1 ff. Coedès's translation has been reprinted by the Siam Society, together with an English version by H.R.H. Prince Wan Waithyakon, in a pamphlet entitled *L'inscription du roi Rāma Gaṁhēñ de Sukhodaya*, Bangkok, 1965.