

OLD PHRAO

by

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In the western part of the Phrao valley (A. Phrao, J. Chiang Mai)¹ there are a number of small hills. One of them, which is uninhabited and more or less overgrown, is called *San Wiang*², "Hill with a town". *San* means a hill; *wiang* means a major settlement that is surrounded by brick or earth walls, or a stockade, and a moat.

San Wiang is about 20-25 m above the level of the rather flat bottom of the valley; its shape is longish and shows an approximate north-south direction. The slopes, which are quite steep on the north, east and west sides, have been transformed into a triple earthen rampart which surrounds the hill on all four sides. The crowns of the three parallel walls that form the rampart are about 12 m distant from each other; the depth of the two moats separating the walls is not uniform but at certain places may exceed 5 m. The *wiang* thus formed faces roughly the four cardinal points, and is about 300 m long from north to south and perhaps 250 m wide from east to west. Each side of the *wiang* seems to have had a gate.

Buildings, or their remains, are scarce. Inside the *wiang*, close to the east wall, is the monastery *Wat Jao Lan Thong*³, the *vihāra* of which, constructed in about 1935, shelters an inscribed sitting bronze Buddha 2.86 m high, dated the equivalent of A.D. 1526. The image, from which the monastery takes its name, is called *Jao Lan Thong*, "Lord made of 1 million (units weight) of bronze", thus indicating that the weight of the image is over 1,000 kg. The area of this monastery shows a certain amount of old bricks.— To the south of *Wat Jao Lan Thong* are the ruins of another monastery that include a *cetiya*.— Just outside the *wiang*, at the S-W corner, is a heap of bricks, close to a big *bodhi* tree.— Besides, one occasionally sees a few bricks here and there, the former function of which is not immediately apparent.

1) อ. พร้าว จ. เชียงใหม่

2) สันเวียง

3) วัดเจ้าล้านทอง



Fig. 1. San Wiang. Triple rampart. View from the innermost wall to the south across to the central and exterior walls. Foto : Hans Penth 1971



Fig. 2. San Wiang. Triple rampart. Northern gate, view from outside.
Foto : Hans Penth 1971

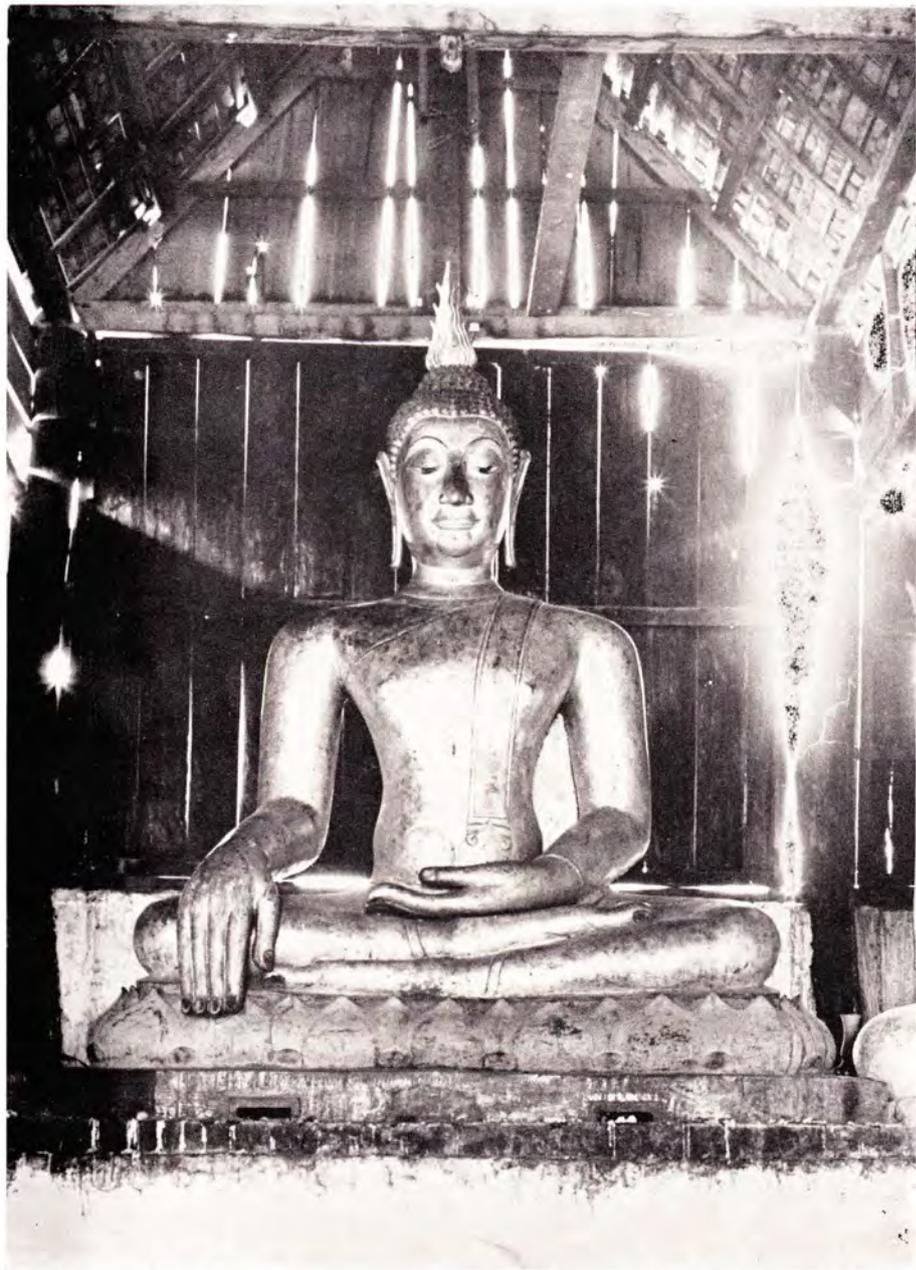
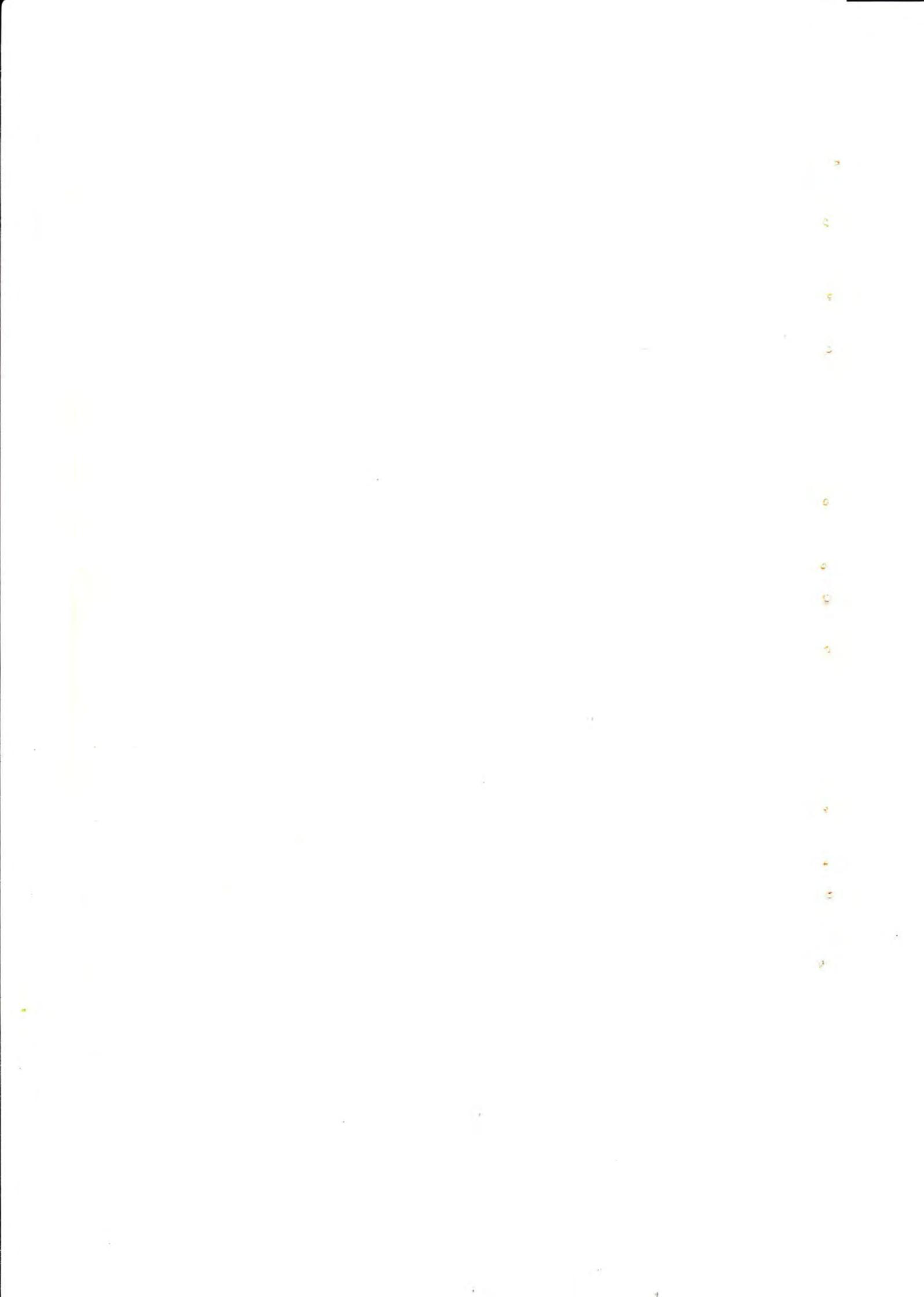


Fig. 3. San Wiang. Buddha image Jao Lan Thông. Foto: Hans Penth 1969



Phrao, however, is much older than 1871. This is documented for instance by the Chiang Mai Chronicle⁶, where Phrao is first mentioned shortly after 1300 as the city state of Khun Khriia⁷, the youngest son of King Mang Rai of Chiang Mai.— That the valley had been inhabited even before this time, can be deduced from stone tools found there⁸.

It is likely that Old Phrao—or perhaps better, one of possibly several sites of Old Phrao—was situated on San Wiang. At least three arguments can be advanced in favour of this theory.

(1.) Triple ramparts, which indicate important sites of great age, were built not only by Môn (Wiang Tha Kan, Lampang Luang)⁹, but also by Thai: Chiang Mai, as built in 1296 by King Mang Rai, had a triple rampart¹⁰. On the other hand, the modern wiang of Chiang Mai (built in 1796)¹¹, of Phrao, Chiang Dao, Müang Ngai, Fang¹² (all second half of the 19th century according to local tradition), show or showed only one wall or just a palisade plus a moat.

There are, it is true, one or two wiang between km 66 and km 68 on the Chiang Mai—Fang road, that have triple ramparts and are called *Wiang Hò*, “Town of the Hò-Chinese”, by local farmers. But these farmers are recent settlers, the first of whom seem to have arrived there only 2 or 3 generations ago¹³. These wiang could be part of Old Chiang Dao, since present Chiang Dao (km 72) is probably a recent site, and since it is questionable whether the roving Hò bands, which haunted northern Thailand in the 19th century, had enough time or considered it of military use to erect camps with triple ramparts. It is, however, not impossible that the Hò made use of older wiang they found upon their arrival.

6) Camille Notton, *Annales du Siam* III: Chronique de Xieng Mai, (Paris 1932) p. 72; Notton transcribes the name P'ao which seems to be a mixture between the local spelling /¹bāv/ or /¹blāv/ and the local pronunciation *pao*.

7) ชุนเคว้อ

8) Hans Penth, “Steinwerkzeuge aus Phrao”, *JSS* (45.2) 1968.

9) เวียงท่ากาว (อ. สันป่าตอง จ. เชียงใหม่) ลำปางหลวง (อ. เกาะตา จ. ลำปาง)

10) Stone inscription of Wat Chiang Man, in: ประชุมศิลาจารึกภาคที่ 3, กรุงเทพฯ พ.ศ. 2508 หน้า 210

11) Camille Notton, *loc. cit.* p. 247.

12) อ. พร้าว อ. เชียงดาว ค. เมืองงาย (อ. เชียงดาว) อ. ฟาง จ. เชียงใหม่

13) Some of the settlers arrived only a few years ago.

(2.) The presence of a huge inscribed Buddha image dated 1526 indicates that, at this time, San Wiang was a settlement of importance. The inscription, which is mutilated, does not state *expressis verbis* that the statue was cast on the spot. But I have not come across anything that would point to a dislocation of the heavy image, or to a different place of origin. On the contrary, from an additional inscription on the statue (see below), one receives the impression that prior to 1928 the statue was standing on the hill, badly exposed to the weather; thus, the image could not have been, at that time, a new acquisition that had recently been brought from another place.

(3.) An additional, heavily damaged inscription, engraved in gold leaf (or gold colour) on black lacquer applied to the base of the image, states that in 1928, lady Khä¹⁴ and other pious persons had a roof erected over the statue which then was standing on *San Wiang Pao*, "Hill with the town of Pao". *Pao* is the local name for Phrao. Since lady Khä, a member of the Phrao princely family, is still remembered as having died about 1932 at the age of over 70, one can conclude that those aged persons in 1928, who can be expected to have had some knowledge, thought San Wiang the site of Old Phrao.

14) นางแก้ว