

A NOTE ON OLD TAK

by

Hans Penth

In his book "Towards A History Of Sukhodaya Art" (Bangkok 1967), A.B. Griswold tells on p. 41 how King Kū Na of Chiang Mai invited the Sukhothai¹ monk Sumana to Chiang Mai, and how Kū Na could persuade the monk to have his Buddha relic enshrined in a cetiya (instead of keeping it with him and showing it around) only after promising "the governorship of Dāk to Sumana's nephew Dit, and proposing to make a close alliance with Sukhodaya. In 1373, therefore, the relic was duly enshrined in the stupa."— "As Dit was a subject of Sukhodaya, his appointment as governor of Dāk must have placed the province in effect under Sukhodayan suzerainty. At Old Dāk there is a lotus-bud tower, which I suppose was built by Dit soon afterwards. It was, I think, the last time that this peculiar seal of Sukhodayan sovereignty was ever set on a town."— Griswold shows no photograph of this lotus-bud tower, but refers to one in Chin Yudi, Borana wattu sathan thua phra racha anajak, p. 268 ("Ancient Sites Throughout The Kingdom", Bangkok 1957)².

In august 1971, I had an occasion to visit Old Tak³ and the lotus-bud tower. Some information I was able to gather there, is rendered in the following. Judging from this, it would seem that Tak was subject to Northern as well as Central Thai influences, but that a Northern substratum can be supposed.

Old Tak is situated about 1 km west of the Mä Ping river, approximately 4 km north of Ban Tak Tok ("Western Ban Tak"), in Tambon Kò Taphao⁴, Amphö Ban Tak, Jangwat Tak. Ban Tak, which is divided by the Mä Ping river into Ban Tak Ok ("Eastern Ban Tak") and Ban Tak Tok (Western B.T.) is about 25 road kilometers north of present day Tak.

1) Griswold spells the name Sukhodaya.

2) ชิน อยูดี, โบราณวัตถุสถาน ที่พระราชอาณาจักร, กรุงเทพฯ ๒๕๐๐

3) Griswold spells the name Dāk.

4) เกษตะเกา

The lotus-bud tower is a *cetiya* under 20 m in height. On its upper northern section, i.e. on its most sheltered part, the *cetiya* still shows some designs and remains of embellishments, such as Rahu eating the sun or the moon (stucco), flowers stylized in the form of a cross (stucco), as well as yellow and green mica (Käo Angwa, "Ava glass"). East of the *cetiya* are the ruins of what may have been a small *vihāra*. The *cetiya* and *vihāra* are both situated on a very small hill with rather steep sides which, in former times, may have been an island in the river, close to its western bank. The hill probably had just enough space for a small to medium sized monastery. Chin Yudi, in the caption to his above mentioned photograph, calls the *cetiya* *Phra Jedi Yôt Song Phum Khao Bin*, "Cetiya with a spire in form of a Phum Khao Bin"⁵. On the Thailand 1 : 50,000 map (sheet 4863 III) it is called *That Khun Ram Khamhâng*, "Khun Ram Khamhâng Memorial"⁶, whereas the local population calls it *Jedi Yuttha Hatthi*, "Elephant Fight Cetiya"⁷. The Cetiya was restored by the Fine Arts Department in 1970.

About 200 m southwest to south, on what looks equally like a former island close to the western bank of the river, is a monastery called by some *What Phra That*, "Holy Relic Monastery"⁸, and by others *Wat Phra Bat*, "Hold Footprint Monastery"⁹. The monastery covers about half of the hill top. The steep sides of the hill show remains of what once must have been a strong earthen wall running around the hill. The *cetiya* of this monastery is of modern design and is surrounded by some smaller *cetiya*.— The language of the population is *Kham Müang (Yuan)*, i.e. the Thai dialect spoken in Northern Thailand, and the sermon delivered during the afternoon I visited the monastery (it was a *wan sin*

5) พระเจดีย์ยอดทรงพุ่มข้าวบิณฑ์ A Phum Khao Bin is a ceremonial gift of food to monks. What exactly a Phum Khao Bin has to consist of, seems to be a matter of local tradition. According to one tradition of Northern Thailand, it consists of a round tray made of banana leaf, wood or metal, which is filled with 49 pieces of banana and 49 small balls of glutinous rice. These 98 pieces are arranged in such a way that they fill the tray like a rounded, gently pointed heap, in form similar to a lotus bud.

6) ธาตุ ชุมนวมค้ำแหง

7) เจดีย์ชุกชหัตถ์

8) วัดพระธาตุ *That* (dhātu) can also mean "memorial" (*cetiya*); see note 6.

9) วัดพระบาท

or *wan phra*, a Buddhist "Sunday"), was also in *Kham Müang*. There are a number of small wooden Buddha images in the monastery, of the kind one sees in Northern Thailand. Their inscriptions are in Yuan characters (*tua müang*), and the language used is classical *Kham Müang*. The monastery buildings such as the *vihāra* and *uposatha* hall are of Northern Thai type and include a typical Lan Na Thai preaching tower, *thammat*¹⁰. At least one of the main Buddha images, made of stone and stucco (?), is of the Burmese type found also in Chiang Mai; other items like walls and their gates remind one of the earlier Bangkok era.

The local population believe that they have "always" been there, i.e. have not migrated there from other places. They have a few historical reminiscences concerning the two sites mentioned above, which I render here for what they are worth¹¹.

In the earliest times, Müang Tak (the city state of Tak) was situated on and around the hill with the *Phra That*; the earthen wall running around it is a relict of this time. Pieces of old pottery can still be dug up in the area. In about the time of a king called Phra Maha Thammaracha (16th century?) the town was transferred south to nearly opposite the present day Tak, in order to block the way of attacking Burmese armies coming from Mä Söt¹². During the Bangkok second reign, the town was transferred to the eastern bank of the river where it still exists.

In Sukhothai days, two rich persons, husband and wife, both Thai, were living in Tak right behind the present *cetiya* Phra That. They spent a significant part of their riches in hiring a Burmese architect by name of Män Ta Thök or Män Ta Thö to construct the Phra That, which he did, taking the Shwe Dagon as his model. However, the construction of the Phra That was not happily finished because, during the construction period, when everybody concerned had to observe strict religious rules, the rich man's daughter fell in love with the Burmese architect, and they used to have intimate relations without the parents' knowledge.

10) อรวรรณ

11) For the following information, I am indebted to Phra Si Ratanophat พระศรีวัดโนนภาศ of Wat Nam Pu, Head Monk of Amphö Ban Tak.

12) แม่สอด

When finally the father knew of it, he was very much afraid of the sin committed and he feared for the merit he had hoped to gain by constructing the cetiya Phra That. When the construction of the cetiya was finished, he sent her away with her lover, but she and her elephant died before reaching Burma. Her ashes were not brought back to Tak, but placed in a shrine near the spot where she had died.— The cetiya seen at present in Wat Phra That was constructed by the late abbot around and about the cetiya built by Män Ta Thò.

As for the lotus-bud cetiya called Yuttha Hatthi, there are two traditions. One has it that Khun Si Intharathit from Sukhothai and Khun Sam Chon from Müang Chòt had agreed to fight an elephant duel near the cetiya called Phra That. Fearing however that this might damage the Phra That and thus constitute a grave sin, they had their elephants fight on the present site of the cetiya Yuttha Hatthi. After Khun Sam Chon had been defeated, the cetiya was erected in honour of Khun Si Intharathit.— Another version says that Khun Ram Khamhång and Khun Sam Chon fought an elephant duel on the spot and that later, after Khun Ram Khamhång had won, the cetiya Yuttha Hatthi was erected in his honour.

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After this paper had been completed, appeared A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara's article "King Lödaya of Sukhodaya and his contemporaries" (JSS (60.1) 1972) which contains valuable additional information concerning the subject treated here. I would like to direct the reader's attention to this article.



Fig. 1 The so-called Elephant Fight Cetiya (เจดีย์ ยุทธหัตถ์) at Old Tak, restored in 1970. West face.



Fig. 2 North west upper section.



Fig. 3 North upper section. All photographs by Hans Penth 1971.

