

A NOTE ON THE DATE OF THE TRAIBHŪMIKATHĀ

by

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In no. 11, part 1, of their "Epigraphical and Historical Studies", entitled, "The Epigraphy of Mahādharmarājā I of Sukhodaya",¹ A.B. Griswold and Prasert ṇa Nagara² make reference to the date of the Tebhūmikathā or Traibhūmikathā, composed by King Lidaiya, "son of King Lōdaiya and grandson of King Rāma Gāṃhēn".³ According to them this work, "was completed in a year of the cock, sixth year of his reign as Uparāja, i.e. 1345 A.D."⁴ They also note that according to the exordium of the work itself, it was composed in *śakarāja* 23, "perhaps meaning the twenty-third year of his life", although this is put forward as a simple conjecture and further reference is made to an article by Prasert for more comment on the subject.⁵

In an earlier note on the same subject G. and P. referred to the colophon of the Traibhūmikathā,⁶ and their switch to "exordium" may have confused others along with the present writer, since the currently available published edition of the work contains only a colophon.⁷ However, as a recent article by Prasert makes clear, the original text contains both an exordium and a colophon, which differ from one another

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- 1) JSS 61(1), Jan 1973, pp. 71-178
- 2) Cited hereafter as G. and P.; and their studies, which began in JSS 56(2), July 1968, will be cited as EHS and number.
- 3) EHS 11(1), JSS 61(1), January 1973, pp. 71-178; see 71-2, nn. 3,4.
- 4) *ibid.*, Although in EHS no. 4, January 1969, vol 57(1), p. 113, n. 6, they give 1340 as the date of its composition.
- 5) *ibid.*
- 6) EHS 10, JSS 60(1), January 1972, pp. 21-152; see p. 61, n. 34
- 7) *traibhūmi braḥ ruoṇ khōn braḥṇā lidaiya*, chapāp hò samut haēn jāti, 4th printing, 2509

in some interesting details,⁸ with the exordium requiring less explanation and emendation in order to fit the accepted picture of Sukhothai history.⁹

The exordium says the work was composed in the year 23, a cock year, and that the author was “*cau brahṇā* Ledaiya, son of *cau brahṇā* Lelidaiya who reigned at Śrīsajjanālaya and at Sukhodaya. This *cau brahṇā* Lidaiya was the grandson of *cau brahṇā* Rāmarāja who belonged to the solar dynasty”.¹⁰

This shows a genealogy which generally conforms to that of the inscriptions, except for corruption of the names, and this is perhaps the reason why G. and P. now prefer it to the colophon.

The latter also gives the date of composition as the year 23, a cock year, but describes the author as “*brahṇā* Lidāya grandson of *pū brahṇā* [grandfather *brahṇā*] Lidāya who reigned at Śrīsajjanālaya and Sukhodaya, who was grandson of *brah* Rāmarāja who belonged to the solar dynasty”.¹¹

Taken literally, the colophon provides a genealogy which is quite different from the received views about the authorship of the Traibhūmikathā, but not completely fantastic for the grandson of the true Lidaiya, or Mahādharmarājā I, was also called Lidaiya, or more properly

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- 8) Prasert na Nagara, “vivāḍhanākār varṇakarm samāy sukhodāy” in *vivāḍhanākār khòñ varṇakarm daiy*, angkār nisit mahāvidayālay kasetṣāstr, Bangkok 2517, pp. 1-22.
- 9) A French translation of the Traibhūmikathā by Mr. Charles Archaimbault will soon be available. The writer wishes to thank Mr. Archaimbault for permitting examination of the proofs of his work thus making available some of the material which has been incorporated here.
- 10) I follow Archaimbault's translation with the exception of names and titles which I leave as in the original. See the page entitled “Préface” and notes 1 and 2 of Archaimbault's translation.
- 11) See Archaimbault p 255 and 255, n. 2. for both the original and corrected text. The Thai text of the part of the colophon under discussion is

แต่ในสี่ไตรภูมิตามเมื่อใดสี่ ปุริกาศักราชได้ ๒๓ ได้ในเดือน ๑๐ เพงวันพฤหัสบดี
มฤคเสียรนักษัตร ผู้ใครงได้ พระญาติผู้เป็นหลาน ปู่พระญาติผู้เสวยราชในเมือง
ศรีสัชชนาลัยแลสุโขทัย ผู้เป็นหลานแก่พระรามราชอันเป็นสุริยพงษ์ เพื่อได้กินเมือง
ศรีสัชชนาลัยอยู่ได้หกเข้า จึงได้เพื่อความไภอรกพระ ...

Sai Lidaiya.¹² The colophon then, if originally written as it stands today, reflects a belief that the *Traibhūmikathā* was composed by King Mahādharṃarājā III.

Another possibility, and one which permits association of the *Traibhūmikathā* with Mahādharṃarājā I, is that the writer of the colophon, had in mind something like the list of ancestral spirits in inscription no. 45, assumed them all to represent generations, and in addition confused the names *lōdai* and *lidai*. The relevant part of this list is :

pū brañā rāmarāj
 pū sai saṅgrama
 pū brañā lōdai
 pū brañā ṅvva nām tham
 pū brañā mahādharṃarājā¹³

All it takes for this list to fit the information of the colophon is to assume the error of writing *lidai* for *lōdai*, a type of error which we have already noted in the exordium. The writer would, of course, have belonged to a later period, for a contemporary would have known that *sai saṅgrama* and *ṅvva nām tham* did not represent separate generations.

Another interesting point about the exordium and colophon is in the titles they contain. The former, although showing greater conformity to historical "truth" gives the kings the title *cau braḥṇā*, which is not found in any contemporary inscription for Rāmarāja (Rāma Gāṃhēn), Lōdaiya or Lidaiya, and thus indicates composition at a later date, while the latter, although apparently more corrupt, has the more appropriate titles *braḥṇā* and *braḥ*.¹⁴

Whatever the scholarly consensus concerning these points may turn out to be, it should be clear that neither the exordium nor the colophon are unequivocal documents. The remainder of this paper, which is

12) EHS 1, JSS 56(2), July 1968, p. 218, n. 28

13) EHS 3, JSS 57(1), January 1969, pp. 57-108; and *praḥjum silā cāru'k bhāg dī* 3, inscription 45, lines 9-11.

14) The title *cau braḥṇā* first appears in inscription no. 8, dating from the end of Lidaiya's reign, but is not used for Lidaiya himself. It is also found in the somewhat later inscriptions nos. 14, 40, 45, and 49.

concerned with the date they contain, is intended to show that, in their present form, they were composed considerably later than the Sukhothai period and by a scribe who had only a hazy conception of true Sukhothai history.

Prasert has discussed the date of the *Traibhūmikathā* in two different articles. In the first he dealt with the year date 23, and his argument was based on the following points:¹⁵

- Lidaiya was *uparāja* in Śrī Sajjanālāya before ruling in Sukhothai.
- He had ruled there 22 years in 1283 *śaka* and thus assumed the position of *uparāja* in 1262, year of the dragon.
- According to the *Traibhūmikathā*, he had ruled in Śrī Sajjanālāya 6 years when he wrote it.

—Therefore the cock year in which it was composed was 1267 *śaka*. (I am deliberately using *śaka* rather than Prasert's own Buddhist era dates because, as his own note, p. 51, indicates, his Buddhist era calculations were wrong for the Sukhothai period.)

With respect to the *Traibhūmikathā* era he says, "If the era 23 is the era which was already cut, it means that the era was cut and the year 1 established in . . . pig year . . .",¹⁶ thus assuming that 23 is evidence for the existence of a special era established in the 13th century and for which there is no extant evidence in the inscriptions. The latter show use of the *cula* and *śaka* eras, and a few Buddhist era dates, throughout the Sukhothai period.

What is of interest here is that Prasert links the era of the *Traibhūmikathā* to the era of *Nān Nabhamās*, saying that, "If the era of the story of *Nān Nabhamās* is true, *Nān Nabhamās* entered the palace in the year 6, year of the dragon . . . etc".¹⁷ This again implies that the year 23 of the *Traibhūmikathā* colophon represents a hitherto unknown era which began in a pig year corresponding to 1245 *śaka* (1323 A.D.), and for which there is no other evidence but the story of *Nān Nabhamās*.

15) Prasert ṇa Nagara, "kār jāmaṅṅ prahvatīśāstr sukhodāy" (Revising Sukhothai History), *saṅgamśāstr paridāśn* (The Social Science Review), Special no. 3, 1966, pp. 43-52; see p. 46.

16) *ibid.*

17) *ibid.*

In Prasert's second article he discusses the indications of month and day given in the exordium and colophon, in the former, full moon of the 4th month, thursday, and in the latter, full moon of the 10th month, thursday. It is his contention that they were originally the same and indicated the date on which the work was completed.¹⁸ Archaimbault prefers the explanation that the date of the exordium is that on which the work was begun and that of the colophon the date of completion, although there would still be scribal errors in the extant text. According to Billard's calculations, cited by Archaimbault, the cock year 23 should be revised to dog year 24, but no explanation is offered to connect either 23 or 24 with *śaka* 1267 (A.D. 1345), the date which has been assigned to the *Traibhūmikathā* on the basis of information found in the Sukhothai inscriptions.¹⁹

Thus in spite of the recent scholarly attention to the *Traibhūmikathā*, mystery still surrounds the date, *śakaraja* 23. Griswold's conjecture, cited above, does not seem very likely, for there is no example, I believe, of the term *śakarāja* referring to someone's age. Of course, as Griswold wrote, "the text may be corrupt",²⁰ and if it is very corrupt there may be no way of determining what the date should have been.

Before, however, attempting to emend the date arbitrarily to make it conform to the known facts of Lidaiya's life, we should make certain that there is no known dating system into which it fits as given.

It is clear of course that the year 23 in any of the commonly known eras is impossible for the Sukhothai period. In certain other epigraphical studies it has been found that dates were occasionally abbreviated, the unit for hundreds or thousands being omitted, and which, when restored, provided a date fitting into the expected system.²¹ If we do

18) Prasert, *op. cit.* note 8 above, pp. 9-10.

19) See Archaimbault's translation, p. 255, n. 1

20) EHS 11(1), p. 72, n. 4.

21) Pierre Marie Gagneux, "Éléments d'Épigraphie Laotienne (II)" *Bulletin des Amis du Royaume Lao*, no. 2, juillet-aout-septembre 1970, pp. 67-74. Mr. Archaimbault also informs me that such dates are often found in the manuscripts of northern Thailand.

this for the cock year 23 of the *Traibhūmikathā*, we find, for the *cula* era, 23 as a cock year and from then on cock years ending in 23 occur every 300 years, in 323, 623, 923, and so on, none of which are possible for the reign of Lidaiya. The first *saka* era cock year ending in 23 is 223, and from then on they occur every 300 years—523, 823, 1123, etc. Again none are suitable for Lidaiya. As for the Buddhist era and the hypothetical *culāmaṇī* era, there were no cock years ending in 23 at all.

One more possibility deserves examination. Sometime during the Ayutthaya period the belief arose that an old era had been “cut” and a new one established by Phra Ruang. On the one hand this was said to have occurred in the year 1000 of the Buddhist era, although such an era, beginning in 457 A.D. was never, as far as is known, in use.²² The idea probably had its origin in the belief of a step-by-step deterioration of Buddhism every 1000 years. Alternatively, Phra Ruang was believed to have cut the “old era” and established the *cula* era, a belief which is reflected in the story of *Nān Nabhamās*.²³

This type of story about the cutting of eras, and based on erroneous beliefs about the sequence in which various eras were used, is found in several areas of Southeast Asia. In Cambodia, Thailand and Burma the traditional idea is of one or more ancient eras followed by the Buddhist era, the *saka* era, and finally the *cula* era, each introduced at a time

22) Sir John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, Oxford in Asia Historical Reprints, 1969, vol I, p. 36, translated from Thai sources, including the *Phongsawadan Nō'abānśāvātār hno'a*, “It was in the one-thousandth year of Buddha, A.D. 457, that King Ruang, whose advent . . . had been announced by . . . Gaudama himself . . . introduced the Thai alphabet . . .”; and, p. 40, “In the year 1000 of the era of Phra-Khodom, Phra-Ruang abolished the Buddhist era . . . and ordained a new one, which is the era of the Siamese; and is called *chulusakkarat*—the lesser era”.

See also Thai printed versions of *bānśāvātār hno'a* and the so-called British Museum Chronicle, *brah̄ rājabānśāvātār kruṇ̄ sayām*, Bangkok 1964, pp. 6-17.

23) *nān nabamās hr̄ō' tām̄rāp dāv sr̄i culālakṣn̄*, *silpaparnnagar*, Bangkok, 2513.

corresponding to its year 1.²⁴ Epigraphy, however, shows that for Cambodia and Thailand the sequence was *saka* era, *cula* era, Buddhist era, and although no inscription as early as the period in which *Nān Nabhamās* is situated has been found in Sukhothai, the entire dated epigraphic record of central Siam from the 9th century up to and including the first inscriptions of Sukhothai makes use of the *saka* era.

It is not known at what time the beliefs about Phra Ruang cutting an era arose, but they were held by some people in mid-19th century, and apparently even as late as a few years ago, since Mr. Piphat Sukhatit, in his article on the *culāmaṇī* era, felt obliged to insist that the old stories of Phra Ruang cutting the era were not true.²⁵

Thus although an association of Phra Ruang with 1000 B.E., or with the beginning of the *cula* era is not true, it was for an undetermined period of time part of Thai cultural belief, and it would not be surprising to find reflections of it in traditional literature. As for the origin of the belief, extant contemporary inscriptions indicate that the *cula* era was first introduced into the area of present-day Thailand at Sukhothai in the 14th century, probably from Burma, where its earliest use is recorded, and this may have eventually led to the idea that the era had been devised at Sukhothai.

The chronological system in question is presented most clearly in the story of *Nān Nabhamās*, which, even though in large part a forgery, as Prince Damrong indicated,²⁶ nevertheless reflects beliefs held by late Ayutthayan or early Bangkok individuals regarding the Sukhothai period. Interestingly Prince Damrong made no comment on the dating system of *Nān Nabhamās*.

24) See Thai sources in note 22 above. For Burma, Maung Htin Aung, *Burmese History Before 1287: A Defence of the Chronicles*, the Asoka Society, Oxford 1970, p. 9; Shway Yoe, *The Burman His Life and Notions*, Norton, N.Y., p. 549. For northern Thailand, statements about the sequence of eras, some fictitious, are to be found in "bañśāvatār mo'añ no'h yāi chiañ saen", *prajum bañśāvatār* part 61; and *tāṃṃnān siñhanavatī kumār*, *ibid.*

25) "sakarāja culāmaṇī", *Silpakon* 6(5), January 1963, pp. 47-57; see pp. 47-8.

26) On the first page of his commentary to the Royal Autograph Chronicle, translated into English as "The Story of the Records of Siamese History", *JSS* 11(2), 1914, pp. 1-20.

The chronological statements of *Nān Nabhamās* are as follows :

1. p. 1. The story is set "at the time when the *cula* era was first established, in the reign of *samtec brah ruon*".

2. p. 32. Her birth was in the 3rd month, year of the rat, seventh of the decade, and in that year they were still using the ancient era (*porān śakarāja*). "His Majesty the King had not yet cut the era to establish the *cula* era". Note that in known eras a rat year is always even-numbered, never seventh of the decade.

3. p. 93. "In *cula* era 6, year of the dragon, 6th of the decade" her age "by years" was 17 and "by months" 15 years in the 12th month. This difference is due to counting first by current years as in traditional Thai practice and then by completed years as in modern western usage. The 12th month of *cula* era 6 would have been just 3 months before her 16th birthday, modern style.

4. p. 158, at the end of the book. The date was, "*cula* era had completed 18 years".

Worked out in tabular form these statements prove to be perfectly coherent and in all details fit the *cula* era projected back to its theoretical point of origin. Continued beyond the date of *Nān Nabhamās* we find *cula* era 23, year of the cock, fitting easily into the lifetime of the "Phra Ruang" of the *Nān Nabhamās* story.

<i>era</i>	<i>animal year</i>	<i>decade</i>	<i>remarks</i>
<i>porān</i>	rat	7	—Birth of <i>Nān Nabhamās</i> in 3rd month, 2 months before end of year
	bull	8	
	tiger	9	
	hare	10	
	dragon	1	
	snake	2	
	horse	3	
	goat	4	
	monkey	5	
	cock	6	
dog	7	—Last year of <i>porān</i> era	

<i>era</i>	<i>animal year</i>	<i>decade</i>	<i>remarks</i>
cula 1	pig	1	—number of decade changes to conform to new era
2	rat	2	
3	bull	3	
4	tiger	4	
5	hare	5	
6	dragon	6	—Nān Nabhamās age 17 by years, 15 by months
7	snake	7	
8	horse	8	
9	goat	9	
10	monkey	10	
11	cock	1	
12	dog	2	
13	pig	3	
14	rat	4	
15	bull	5	
16	tiger	6	
17	hare	7	
18	dragon	8	—End of the story of Nān Nabhamās
19	snake	9	
20	horse	10	
21	goat	1	
22	monkey	2	
23	cock	3	—Date of the <i>Traibhūmikathā</i>

The date in the *Traibhūmikathā* exordium and colophon would seem to be explicable in this way. As G. and P. emphasized, this work has been known popularly, and from before Sukhothai history had been reconstructed with the aid of inscriptions, as the *Traibhūmi Braḥ Ruṅ*. The genealogical data also appear to have been distorted in one way or another, and the best explanation would seem to be that the date in the exordium and colophon, whatever the age of the text as a whole, is due to an Ayutthaya period copyist at a time when true knowledge of Sukhothai chronology had been lost.

This conclusion has certain implications for the value of the *Traibhūmikathā* as historical source material. It seems that its attribution to the Sukhothai period is based on the colophon and on its popular designation as the *Traibhūmi Braḥ Ruon̄*. All scholars admit that its language may be corrupt. Now if the date and genealogy of the exordium and colophon are also corrupt, there is no way to attribute the text to any period without philological study and close comparison with the certain Sukhothai language of the inscriptions. Let us hope that competent Thai linguists and literary historians will soon undertake this task, for until it is done the *Traibhūmikathā* is not a proper source for the history of Sukhothai or any other period anterior to 1778 when the manuscript under discussion was copied.²⁷

27) This date comes from the same colophon which gives the date of copying as "4th month, year of the dog, Sunday . . . when the Buddhist era had completed 2321 years . . .".

Very recently an older manuscript of the *Traibhūmikathā* has been discovered in Chiangmai and may provide valuable clues to the history of the work. It was composed or copied in 1051 (A.D. 1689) and is listed as no. 3/5 in the library of Wat Pra Singh. See *A Catalogue of Palm-Leaf Texts in Wat Libraries in Chiangmai (Thailand) Part I*, by Sommai Premchit, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiangmai University, April 1974. Mr. Archambault called my attention to this catalogue.