

NOTE

A BRICK FROM OLD WAT PA DĀNG (CHIANG MAI)

by

Hans Penth

Old Wat Pa Dāng¹ is about 4 km west of Chiang Mai, on elevated ground but not quite at the foot of Dòì Suthep, about halfway between the University and Wat Umong Thera Jan. Only the impressive jedi (cetiya) remains of the monastery² which, in the 15th and 16th centuries, was of great importance to Chiang Mai and the North, because it was the centre of a famous chapter of Sīhaḷabhikkhus, i.e. of Thai monks of the Ceylonese school. One among them, Ratanapaṇṇāthera, became the author of the renowned chronicle Jinakālamāli.

Until a few years ago, the jedi of Old Wat Pa Dāng was freely accessible, standing among trees, shrubs and tufts of tall grass. Since, new settlers have arrived in the area, and they have been hacking their way towards the jedi. Now, the base of the jedi is surrounded by private houses and gardens, and to visit the monument, one has to ask for permission to pass through.

While the new settlers were putting up their houses and preparing their gardens in the immediate environment of the jedi, they found a number of objects in the ground, and promptly sold them. I have seen none of these objects, with the exception of a beautiful brick, which I asked for and then gave to the National Museum, Chiang Mai.

The brick is of reddish-yellow colour and measures 30×20×7 cm. It shows, from left to right, a flower, a butterfly, and a deer; above and below are friezes of garlands. I have been told that the flower to the left cannot be a natural flower. It is therefore possible that the artist meant to reproduce one of the heavenly flowers. However, I have no explanation as to the meaning of the design as a whole.

I am inclined to think that the brick once embellished some wall. Since the brick obviously was cast in a mould, there must have been quite a number of them; indeed the Chiang Sān National Museum has several more specimens, most or all of them broken, said to originate from Wat Pa Dāng in Chiang Mai.

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- 1) วัดป่าแดง Nowadays, there are two Wat Pa Dāng : The old monastery, which is dealt with in this paper, and the new one, founded probably in the 19th century, about 500 m to the west, on the first elevations of Dòì Suthep.
 - 2) I have been told that the ruins of the wihan (vihāra), the ubosot (uposatha building), the monks residences and of other buildings, together with the monastery's paved court(s) and its walls, being a huge mass of bricks and laterite stones, were carried away to be used as the foundation for the runway of the airport.



A brick from Old Wat Pa Dǎng (Chiang Mai). Foto : Hans Penth 1974.

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