

# NOTES

## THAI PHALLIC AMULETS

by

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Phallicism and phallic worship have existed in virtually all civilizations and all cultures as far back as we can trace. In general, phallic worship has been related to the importance of fertility to peoples whose lives depended upon either food-raising (crops and livestock breeding) or food-gathering, and, of course the birth of children in sufficient numbers to maintain the family in the face of disease, famine, and other imponderable threats of nature. The following article, however, is not about phallic worship as such, but the use of phallic objects as protective amulets.

Historically, according to Philip Rawson, "evil spirits could be repelled by both men and women exposing their genitals to them"<sup>1</sup>. This relates closely to the Thai belief that malevolent spirits are repelled by the sight of sexual or 'immoral' objects. Further along, Rawson adds that there is "the extraordinarily widely diffused custom of wearing sexual, but especially phallic, amulets". He notes that these amulets may be of various shapes and sizes, and continues "[they] were conceived to carry great power for good, averting disease, the evil eye, and all other supernatural disasters". However, the Thai custom of wearing phallic amulets around the waist seems to be unique and, as far as I have been able to discover, is matched nowhere else in Asia, with the possible exception of Laos.

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1. Philip Rawson, ed., *Primitive Erotic Art* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), p. 76.

The *palad khik* (ปลัดขิก), though defined as a Buddhist amulet by the Thais, is *never* worn above the waist because, being of a sexual nature, it is considered somewhat base. Thus it is not worn around the neck, a part of the body commanding a much higher degree of respect, and which is reserved for more revered amulets.

What is the origin of this custom? Despite some time spent in trying to resolve this question, I have been able to arrive at no definite answer. It appears, however, that the custom derived originally from Shiva worship, and the *palad khik* are closely related to the *lingam* of that Hindu God. Shiva worship and *lingam* were widespread throughout all of southeast and east Asia. In fact, the phallic object known as *ai khik* (อีขิก) or *palad khik* has also been termed (erroneously) by some young Thai men as '*Shiva lung*' (or *lingam* of Shiva).

According to Phya Anuman<sup>2</sup> *ai* is a somewhat derogatory expression for male. He knew no definition for the word *khik*. Another Thai scholar informed this writer that *palad* means 'honored deputy' or 'honored substitute', whereas *khik* means 'penis' or 'phallus'. Other definitions of these terms also exist. In the course of collecting *palad khik* and acquiring information about these objects, however, I found that young men far more frequently referred to them as *palad khik* than as *ai khik*. The term '*Shiva lung*' is not applicable, for it really refers to the large phalluses, usually wooden, used in various forms of spirit worship in Thailand: in shrines by *khlong*, by the oceanside and rivers to propitiate water spirits, and in field shrines to encourage fertility and a rich harvest. The *lingam* of Shiva resembles a human phallus only slightly, being little more than a pole with a rounded end, with no clearly defined glans. Moreover, many large stone *lingam* of one meter tall or more have been reported to be scattered throughout southeast Asia, particularly in Cambodia, where they have symbolized royal sovereignty over important cities and towns<sup>3</sup>.

2. Phya Anuman Rajadhon, *Essays on Thai Folklore* (Bangkok, The Social Science Association Press of Thailand, 1968), p. 287.

3. Robert B. Textor, *Roster of the Gods*, 6 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut; Human Relations Area Files, 1973), vol. 5, p. 626.

The original form of the *palad khik* is extremely simple: nothing but an erect penis with the glans (tip) well defined, with a slit or hole indicating the meatus, having no testicles (figure 1a, b). It can be made of virtually any substance: stone, wood, plaster, elephant bone, ivory, bronze, etc. Thais sometimes have small examples made of gold, and string them around the waist of a son on gold chains.

A magic formula (*khaathaa*: คาถา) is generally inscribed in Old Cambodian language. The inscription gives the *palad khik*, after being blessed by the monk, added efficacy, though a *palad khik* need not necessarily have the *khaathaa* to be considered protective. There are several reasons for the use of Old Cambodian: the value of its mystic quality, and the fact that Pali, the language of the Thai Buddhist canon, does not have its own writing system but must be rendered in some other script<sup>4</sup>.

The original purpose to wearing *palad khik* was very simple, as quoted earlier, to protect against objects that might penetrate the body and injure or kill. Another explanation of their purpose which appears to be equally important also serves a protective function, namely to divert the attack of any vicious spirit intent upon striking at a boy-child's genitalia and damaging his virility or potency. Hence the interpretation of *palad* as 'honorable deputy' or 'surrogate'. That also explains why the *palad khik* is worn under the clothes on a string at one side of the body, thus some distance from the organs of generation.

In principle, the *palad khik* is supposed to be removed by the boy-child when he reaches puberty. In practice, however, it frequently continues to be worn by young men and even by men well along in years. The current belief held by many educated, urban Thais (and by Phya Anuman himself), that the wearing of the *palad khik* is a village practice which is rapidly disappearing, and is certainly not to be found in the cities, is incorrect. Not only does the practice persist, but it flourishes.

**Forms.** The original, basic *palad khik* has taken on many more functions than merely protection, and has evolved into numerous

4. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 110.

forms, verging toward becoming a folk art. For example, many men carry small *palad khik* on their key chains, as good-luck charms.

There are four dominant types of *palad khik*, plus a few unusual variants and a number of what we might call 'sports'—that is, unusually shaped ones in which the craftsman applied his own imagination or else conformed to the shape or other peculiarities of the material with which he was working. In connection with this point, we may mention *palad khik* made of black coral, which take on unusual shapes and contours, e.g. a small, double-headed, black coral *palad khik* which resembles two intertwining serpents, like a caduceus (figure 1e).

The four predominant types are:

1. The simple, basic shape as described above (fig. 2a).
2. The same basic shape with legs added, generally just the two hind legs (fig. 3b)<sup>5</sup> but sometimes with all four legs (fig. 1c).
3. The spread-eagled woman type, with the woman lying on her back atop the *palad khik* with legs spread apart (fig. 4a).
4. The monkey-rider *palad khik*. This type takes two forms:
  - (a) the monkey lies atop the *palad khik*, clasping it (fig. 3c);
  - (b) the monkey sits erect upon the *palad khik*, like a jockey riding a horse.

The reader will also note in the illustrations a few others that differ from these four basic types.

**Teachers and information sources.** There are a number of Thai weekly and monthly publications which are devoted to amulets and charms of all sorts, such as *phra phim* (พระพิมพ์), or *phra kruang* (พระเครื่อง), mainly Buddhist but certainly with no discrimination against charms of an animistic or Brahmanistic nature, which are themselves often blessed by Buddhist monks. A reader of such publications will not infrequently find mention of *palad khik*, generally described in an article about a particular monk who is considered especially holy or who has acquired a reputation for the effectiveness of the charms or amulets which he blesses.

5. The image depicted in figure 3 is that of the popular ghost-child Uman Thong, the creation of the monk who also made the two-legged *palad khik* shown in the same illustration.

There is frequent reference to those 'made'<sup>6</sup> by Luang Paw Ee of Sattahip, in Bangkok, in Phuket, in Nakhon Si Thammarat, in Samut Prakan, in Chiang Mai, in Kamphaeng Phet. In Sattahip there is a temple (*wat*) now called Wat Luang Paw Ee where a statue of the renowned monk is so covered with gold leaf that the features of his face are almost indiscernible. The attendant young monk at the Wat was able to produce three wooden *palad khik* for inspection on request, each about eight centimeters long. They were not unusual in shape, but what made them striking was that the magic formula (*khaathaa*) had been stamped into the wood with a metal die. This is the only instance when I have encountered that phenomenon, since almost invariably the *khaathaa* is either inscribed or inked on by hand. It is evident that the *palad khik* produced at Wat Luang Paw Ee are still so widely valued and in such demand that a labour-saving device is employed to apply the cabalistic charm.

Luang Paw Ee, who died a number of years ago, is renowned throughout the country. His powers are alleged to have been virtually unbounded: he could be in two places at one time; coconut oil blessed by him and applied to the skin over a broken bone could cause the bone to heal immediately; and he was able to fly. Some of those who possess Luang Paw Ee *palad khik* have averred that, placed in a river, they would shoot forward upstream as if powered by a jet engine. Such claims indicate the monk's reputation and the reverence in which he is held in Thailand. Luang Paw Ee could be said to be the standard of holiness against which all other amulet-blessing monks are measured.

Another holy teacher who is regarded as having equal stature is Luang Paw Luer of Wat Sao Cha Ngoak, in Chachoengsao Province, who was born in 2406 B.E. (1863 A.D.). One article about him alleges that "if you have a *palad khik* blessed by Luang Paw Luer, it will guaran-

6. Generally the monk does not make the *palad khik* himself, but has them made by temple boys or a lay craftsman. His contribution is generally a Pali incantation uttered over them, and possibly the inscription.

tee that you won't die before your time, according to a saying common in that province forty years ago. His *palad khik* were said to be able to swim against the river current."<sup>7</sup>

Another publication devoted to amulets and charms makes a comparison, and shows pictures of the *palad khik* of Luang Paw Luer and Luang Paw Ee, stating that those of the former are superior: "...with a fine bend to the right, left or just straight. Those accredited to Luang Paw Ee are cruder and straighter."

The article also states that the *palad khik* of both the holy men each bear the two words *gunha* (กุนหา) and *neha* (เนหา), to provide extra luck and protection and a boost in the efficacy of the amulets. *Gunha/neha* is said to refer to the heart of the destructive killer/robber; the inscription of the words on the *palad khik* acts as a countermagic, something like a vaccine, providing an antidote to possible evil and misfortune<sup>8</sup>.

The same article also cites a legend to the effect that Brahman priests first produced *palad khik* by reducing the large Shiva *lingam* to a very small size, to make them easily portable. When the small phaluses were brought into Thailand as a consequence of the spread of Indian civilization, according to the legend, Buddhist spells were put on them instead of Brahman ones, and they became the present-day Thai *palad khik*.

Doubtless, the monk who is currently the most famous for his powers and effectiveness in giving blessings to amulets and charms is Phra Kru Palad Sumon Smitto, of Wat Dao Kanong Booklo in Thon Buri. Interviews with him or articles about him have appeared in at least four different Thai periodicals dealing with Buddhist amulets<sup>9</sup>. Phra Sumon Smitto produces *palad khik* from such materials as ivory,

7. Rungnarung Karuded, "Luang Paw Luer Wat Sao Cha Ngoak", *Chakrawan* 13, October 1975, p. 8.

8. Asoke, "Palad khik from different holy teachers", *Anachak* 40, 1967, p. 75 ff.

9. Banjong Misaengphruang, "Famous holy teachers", *Siang Siam Chabap Achan Choe Dang*; *Anajak Dhamma*, vol. 1 no. 1, January 1976; *Pathuhan Phrakruang* (n.d.); *Sanam Phrakruang*, vol. 1 no. 1.

black coral and wood, in a variety of shapes and names. Their present market prices range from 100 to 6,000 baht, and more. Some of the names he has given his *palad khik* are: "The Twisted Eel", "Hanuman Encircling the Ocean", "The Lady Straddling Eros" (see earlier listing of types, no. 4).

Obtained in Phuket, the very rare *palad khik* illustrated in figure 5b is made of white coral, and intended to be carried in the pocket rather than to be worn on a cord about the waist under the clothes.

An invaluable informant during my stay in Thailand was Phra Chawn, a half-Thai, half-Burmese monk (figure 10) at Wat Thebnimitr. I was accepted as his provisional disciple, and three *palad khik* were made specifically for me, of a light-coloured wood inscribed in blue and red Cambodian letters. (Two of them are illustrated in figures 5a and 5c.) Phra Chawn said the *palad khik* were made from the wood of a coffin, therefore embodying special powers. They were presented in a brief ceremony, in which the teacher chanted for several minutes in Pali and then gave his blessing. He told me that he had learned the Pali incantations and the mystic Cambodian symbols at a *wat* in Chon Buri Province, where he had stayed for several years, but unfortunately he did not know the meaning of the inscription on the *palad khik*.

Phra Chawn also wrote down as part of his instruction some regulations about the use of the *palad khik*: I must only use the objects for benevolent purposes and to obtain popularity; I must either wear them around my waist or carry them in my pocket (on the right side if I went to see a man, on the left side if I went to see a woman). He also added the *palad khik* would bring good luck, would help me to survive accidents and violent situations, and would propitiate the local water spirit if dipped into a stream before I drank from it. Those instructions illustrate some of the powers that have gradually accrued over the course of time to *palad khik*.

The superb and very large phallus with an embracing woman (far too big to be worn; figure 6) is placed in the office or home, and brings good luck in the lottery or in business. This example is particularly unusual in that the two sides of the woman's head, or two 'half-faces', are carved on either side of the phallus.

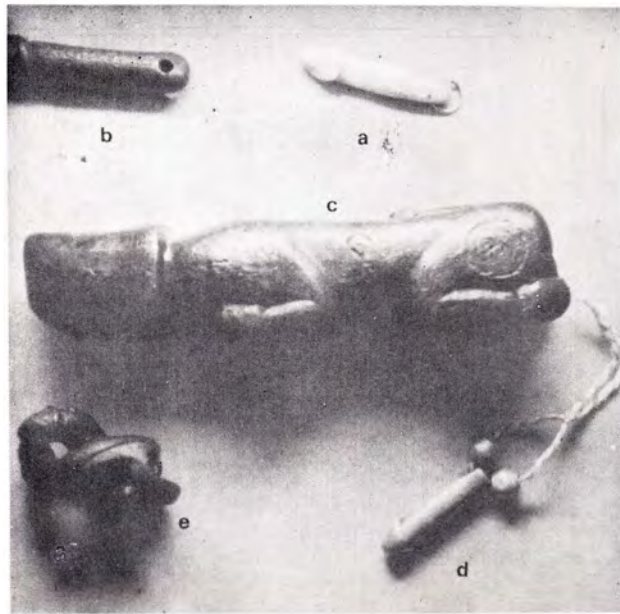
The effectiveness of a *palad khik* is believed to be increased by the number of penis heads it bears. The recently carved *palad khik* shown in figure 2b, for example, has seven penis heads (glans) and should be suspended by a chain from some point in an automobile to provide protection against injury in an accident. The large one (about 20 centimeters long) shown in figure 7 has a total of 13 glans. Surprising as it may seem, considering its size, stain marks on it prove that it was actually worn.

Figure 8 shows how a true believer in the effectiveness of amulets and charms might wear his *palad khik*. Aside from the various stones and beads to which the original owner attributed magical qualities, and aside from the two *takrut* (ตะกรุด)—the string-cloth wrapped cylindrical objects at the right—this cord belt carries six different *palad khik* of varying sizes and shapes. Four are made of wood, one of horn, and another of lead.

The *palad khik* is far from going out of fashion. In the town of Samut Sakhon there is a 61-year old banana-leaf trader, named Prasit Watana Prida, who is perhaps the greatest collector of Buddhist amulets and charms in the world (figure 9). Khun Prasit now has a collection of 8,000 Buddha images (though he is wearing only 1,000 in the photograph), 5,000 medals of Buddhist monks, and "60 or 70" *palad khik*, accumulated over a 30-year period. He proudly affirms that he has 61 *palad khik* made by Luang Paw Ee. (Clearly his arithmetic is a little weak, for he has a great number of *palad khik* in addition to his Luang Paw Ee set.)

Khun Prasit asserts that women wear *palad khik* as well as men. He states that he believes the value of *palad khik* is to bring good luck and to help him be popular with people. He adds that the protective powers of a *palad khik* are increased if it has been inserted into a woman's vagina, and declares that having one *palad khik* is as efficacious as having 1,000.

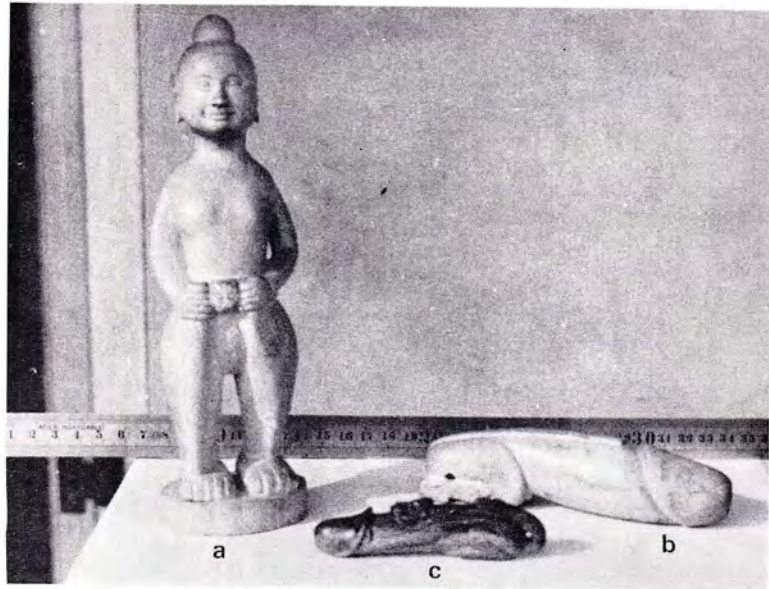
*Palad khik* made of ivory, wood, stone, plaster or other materials are sold by vendors of Buddhist amulets and charms all over the city of Bangkok, including certain branches of the Thai Farmers Bank. At one of those branches I found a *palad khik* of bronze, perhaps three centimeters long, which I bought for 29 baht.



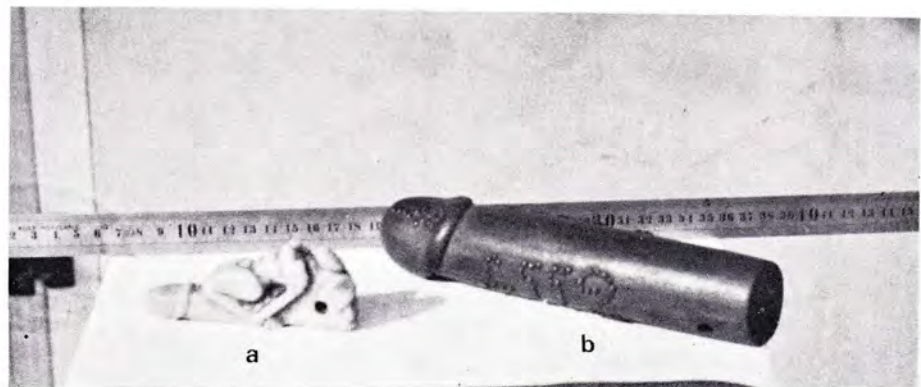
*Figure 1*



*Figure 2*



*Figure 3*



*Figure 4*

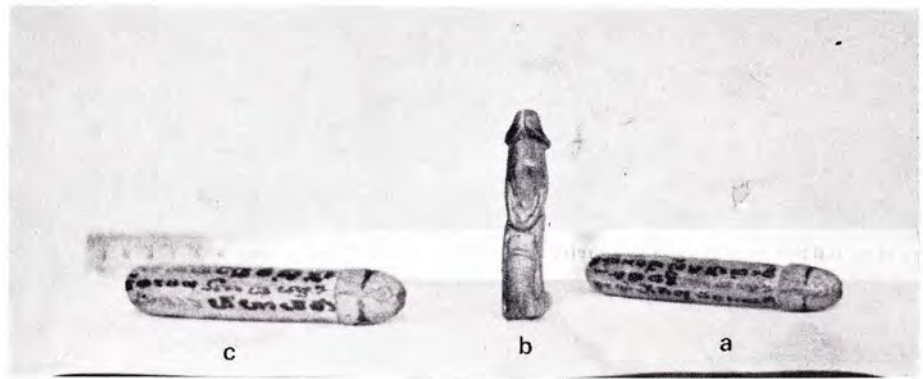


Figure 5



Figure 6



*Figure 7*



*Figure 8*



*Figure 9*



*Figure 10*