

HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE REGION WEST OF CHIANG MAI

by

Hans Penth*

The mountainous region immediately west of Chiang Mai is nowadays rather sparsely inhabited, mostly by members of the various hill tribes. These are newcomers who have been arriving only since the nineteenth century A.D.¹ There are, however, one or two exceptions. The Lawa were already in the area when, towards the middle of the eighth century, Queen Jāma Thewī began her reign in Hariphunchai (Lamphūn)². Another possible exception are the Karen who, being neighbours across the Burmese border, may have had a few villages here for many centuries. It would therefore seem that, in the historical past³, the valleys and hills west of Chiang Mai were more or less uninhabited, and this impression is enhanced by the fact that the three great northern chronicles, *Jinakālamāli*, *Mūlasāsanā* and the *Chiang Mai Chronicle*, do not seem to mention settlements in that area⁴.

But the idea of a vast and formerly very sparsely populated region beyond Chiang Mai must be abandoned in the light of new evidence which, over the last few years, has come forth from various sources. Missionaries, miners, police and travellers have many times reported that they

* 9 Fai Hin Village, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai.

1. James McCarthy, *Surveying and Exploring in Siam* (London, 1902), pp. 130 ff., 149 ff., 158.
2. Camille Notton, trans., *Chronique de La:p'un* (Paris, 1930), p. 29.
3. The early history of the Chiang Mai–Lamphūn region begins in the eighth century A.D. with the arrival of a group of Mon from Lop Buri, which is commonly thought to be the earliest major event mentioned by indigenous written sources.
4. A careful study of the chronicles may show that this statement is not altogether correct. *Jinakālamāli*, for instance, somewhere mentions the place "Samenga". This could be present-day Samōng (ສະເມັງ), about 30 kilometres west of Chiang Mai.

saw, in the valleys and on top of not-too-high hills, ruins of monasteries constructed in brick and laterite. Hundreds of bronze Buddha images have been dug up, and many other items have been found, such as pieces of glazed and unglazed pottery, and bronze and iron tools, which could only have belonged to the people of an advanced civilization. I myself have accidentally come across or have purposely visited many of these sites, and seen some of the images, pottery, and tools. There can be no doubt that quite a few of the tiny to middle-sized valleys were inhabited by people who professed and practised Buddhism, and who lived a life not basically different from the life in the larger valleys to the east, i.e. in the valleys of the Ping (Chiang Mai), of the Wang (Lampāng), etc.

Who were these people about whom our written sources have nothing or little to say? Disregarding potsherds, tools, and ruins, on which I do not feel qualified to express an opinion, I am tempted to think that a good number of the inhabitants of these minor western valleys were Thai Yuan rather than Lawa or Karen, because the Buddha images found all showed, as far as I know, the traditional Yuan features, and because inscriptions prove that at least in two valleys the people were closely connected with Chiang Mai and its culture.

* * *

Müang Pāi⁵, to the northwest of Chiang Mai, is a place even at

5. เมืองปาย (อ. ปาย จ. แม่ฮ่องสอน). According to northern Thai usage, a *müang* is a populated geographic area the borders of which are formed by the surrounding mountains; it is a state in a valley. A *müang* can have several villages or settlements, one of which would be the principle place with the seat of the local administration. If the *müang* were important enough for a member of the aristocracy or the high bureaucracy to rule it, it had a fortified settlement called *wiang* (เวียง). Although modern administration ignores the traditional *müang*, the word is still in common usage because, I believe, it refers to simple geographical patterns which can easily be understood by the least educated, and because many of them have become modern *amphō* (อำเภอ) or *tambon* (ตำบล). Thus, for example, from Chiang Mai one would not travel to Amphō Hòt, but to Müang Hòt, and even now people travelling from Jòm Thòng to Hòt, would go from Müang Jòm Thòng to Müang Hòt, the border being a few mountain spurs reaching the Mã Ping from the west—although technically both *müang* are on the Ping! Chiang Mai is still another *müang* on the Ping, but its supremacy

present difficult to reach, and when one arrives from Chiang Mai, after a tiring, 140-kilometre (km) drive in a jeep, one has the impression that, in the past, the inhabitants of this valley must have been completely shut off from the outside. On a small elevation to the east of the valley are the ruins of a monastery, nowadays called Wat Nòng Bua⁶, complete with *wihān* (*vihara*), *ubōsot* (*uposatha* precinct and hall), *jedī* (*cetiya*), well or water tank, etc. A stone slab was found there, inscribed with Fak Khām⁷ letters and in the Yuan dialect, the text being composed in the best Yuan inscription style⁸.

In short, the inscription says that in C.S. 851 (A.D. 1489) the Māhā Sāmi Satthamma Rācha Rattana⁹ built the *jedī* and *wihān* of this monastery called Wat Si Kōt¹⁰, and that he transferred the merit resulting from this action to two exalted persons who were mother and child¹¹. An image of the Buddha was cast (probably to be placed in the *wihān*), and then the inscription seems to say that the Mahā Sāmi asked the Mahā Thewī¹² for a plot of land to be marked as the *ubōsot* precinct of the monastery. The request was granted. In the following year, a considerable number of slaves were given to the monastery.

The two persons called mother and child were probably King Phra Yòt Chiang Rāi (r. 1487–1495) and his mother. Both were pious Buddhists; they are well known from inscriptions as donors of gifts to the religion. The expression “mother and child” is likewise found in some of these inscriptions. The title Mahā Thewī also occurs often in inscriptions dating from about 1500, but its exact meaning has as yet to be found out. It may have designated either the chief queen of the late

is acknowledged by persons who come from other *mīang*, in that they would “*khao wiang*” (เข้าเวียง), “enter the fortified settlement (of Chiang Mai)”, because here the overlord had his residence.

6. วัดหนองบัว (ร้าง) ต. แม่สี อ. ปาย.

7. ผักขาม.

8. See: ชันส์ เพนซ์. ศิลาจารึกวัดศรีเกิด. ใน: ศิลปากร (๑๙.๖) ๒๕๑๙ หน้า ๗๒-๗๖.

9. P. Mahāsāmi Saddhammarājaratana.

10. วัดศรีเกิด.

11. The inscription calls them พระแม่ลูก.

12. P. Mahādevī.

king, or the mother of the reigning king, or the chief queen of the reigning king. Therefore, the Mahā Thewī in our inscription may refer to either the widow of King Ti Lok (r. 1441-1487), or to the mother of King Phra Yòt¹³, or to Phra Yòt's chief queen. It is curious that the Mahā Sāmī, in order to establish the *ubōsot* precinct, should have asked the Mahā Thewī for a grant of land, and not the ruling king. However these details may have to be explained, our inscription clearly shows that Müang Pāi was then politically, culturally and linguistically connected with Chiang Mai (and not with the Shan States nor with Burma), and that despite all natural obstacles such as mountains, rivers or the sheer distance, Müang Pāi was in communication with Chiang Mai.

* * *

Müang Win¹⁴, to the southwest of Chiang Mai, is a much smaller valley than Müang Pāi. Although only 40 km distant from Chiang Mai, it is not easily reached, especially during the rainy season. The main village is now Bān Sop Win¹⁵.

About 3 km from this village, on a hill in one of the northern branches of the valley, close to a brook called Nam Pāo or Mā Pāo¹⁶, are the ruins of a monastery the name of which is not known, but to which I shall refer as Wat Mā Pāo. In 1975, villagers digging there for Buddha images found two pieces of stone (schist), lying about 50 to 100 centimetres (cm) apart from each other, near a mound of bricks. Both pieces, about 15 cm thick, had inscriptions, and one piece also had a horoscope. The villagers, thinking that the stones had inscriptions only on one side, and finding them too heavy for easy transport, neatly flaked off with big knives the stone surface on which the inscriptions were made, and later presented the two resulting much thinner and less heavy inscribed slabs to Phra Khrū Khantayāphòn¹⁷, who is the abbot of Wat

13. Phra Yòt was not the son but the grandson of Ti Lok.

14. เมืองวิน (ต. แม่วิน อ. สันป่าตอง จ. เชียงใหม่).

15. บ้านสบวิน.

16. น้ำป่า, แม่ป่า.

17. พระครูขันตยาภรณ์.

Sī Kōt¹⁸ in Chiang Mai and is the head monk of the district of San Pā Tōng¹⁹, Mūang Win being part of this district.

The Phra Khrū kindly invited me to visit the ruins of Wat Mā Pāo with him, and we did so in July 1976.

The ruins of Wat Mā Pāo seemed to cover an area of at least 3,000 square metres and were overgrown with tufts of grass, bush and a secondary forest. Although the entire place had been pilfered and destroyed by indiscriminate digging, one still could recognize *wihān*, *jedī*, *ubōsot* hall, one or several *kuti* (P. *kuṭi*, "monk's living quarter"), and perhaps a toilet, each of them being represented by mounds of bricks or earth. We noticed the high quality of bricks of various sizes, and that both the *wihān* and the *ubōsot* buildings had had tiled roofs. One piece of tile had a greenish-brown glaze. We saw remains of rather flat earthen pots (ca. 30 × 12 cm) with a double rim; these vessels obviously were used to contain food, and when the space between the two rims was filled with water, ants could not reach the contents of the pots. While looking the place over, we discovered yet another part of an inscribed slab of schist with letters on one side, lying to the south side of the *wihān*, the letters facing upwards. Villagers told us that the other two inscribed stones had been found on the same spot.

In what follows, I shall refer to the two broken stone slabs which were presented to Phra Khrū Khantayāphōn as pieces A (having the horoscope; see figure 1) and B (figure 2), and to the one which was found last, as piece C. (figure 3).

There is no doubt that all three pieces are parts of a single flat stone slab originally inscribed on its two faces. Pieces A and C, when placed on top of each other, form very nearly the complete obverse side of the slab (face I; see figure 4) which, reconstructed in this manner, measures 93 × 33 cm. Piece B is part of the central section of the reverse side of the original stone (face II; see figure 5); it fits exactly on the back of the upper half of C, and when B and C are thus placed together, it becomes apparent that the original slab was 14 – 15 cm thick.

Obviously, in 1975, the villagers found pieces B and C still connected with each other, being one big piece of stone, but they recognized

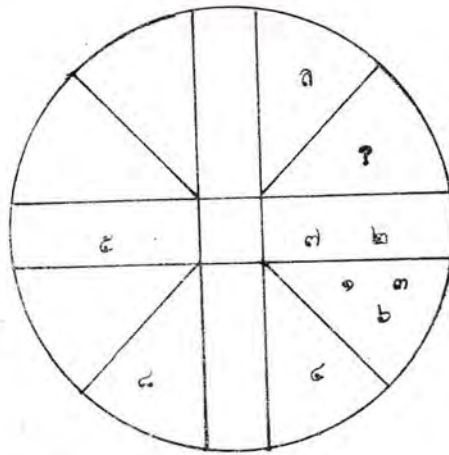
18. วัดศรีเกิด ต. พระสิงห์ อ. เมือง จ. เชียงใหม่.

19. เจ้าคณะอำเภอสันป่าตอง.

an inscription on only one side of it. This side they flaked off (piece B) and left the remainder behind in the ruins of the monastery, where we found it (piece C). One cannot really blame them for the error because the traces of the letters on C are very faint indeed.

Piece A, which forms the upper part of face I, is of light grey-brown colour and measures $29 \times 33 \times 4$ cm. As already mentioned, it has on its top a horoscope; beneath are six lines of partly well-preserved script in nicely formed Fak Khām letters. The slab is broken off at the sixth line. The language of the inscription is Yuan; the cyphers belong to the Tham²⁰ type, with one exception: the cypher 7 in the horoscope belongs to the Hōra²¹ series. The entire contents of the inscription on A is the specification of a date in A.D. 1551; this was certainly an important day in the history of Wat Mā Pāo.

Transliteration²²



20. ๕๕๕๕.

21. โห.

22. Brackets indicate uncertain readings.

In the horoscope, there is one cypher or letter which I cannot identify. Its form is similar to a Tham "2" or to a Yuan "th"; I have rendered it as a question mark.

The ๕ in this inscription, as in other Yuan inscriptions, is placed over the second consonant; in the transliteration, I have placed it according to modern usage.

- (๑) โฉ่กาสุลลสักราชะไค ๙๑๓ ตว
 (๒) วุเขามาในเบ็ญตามะพิ²³ ขรอมะพิไ
 (๓) สย²⁴ ไท²⁴ ภาสวาบรวงไคเขามาในมะริ
 (๔) ก [คสิ] รมา [ส] สุกปักข [ะ] จะตุ [ถิ] ตามพุทธ [ะ]
 (๕) สาสนาไทย²⁴ ภาสวาเคิน ๓ ออก [สิ.ำพรำ]
 (๖) ไควันอ้ง [คาน] . . .

Translation

At the (auspicious) time, when cullasakkarāja had attained 913, in a year (called) Kun according to the Khôm²⁵; in the Thai language one says: Year Ruang Kai; in the month Migasira²⁶, sukka-pakkha catutti²⁷ according to the teachings of the Buddha; in the Thai language one says: third month, fourth night of the waxing moon; otherwise put: Tuesday. . .

Piece C is the continuation of piece A and thus forms the lower part of face I. It measures $67 \times 33 \times 10$ cm and is of much darker colour than piece A, which is probably the result of its having been exposed to the elements and forest fire. Piece C is in such a bad state of conservation that just a small amount of information can be gathered from it: it has about 14 lines of writing; only a few letters here and there can be read; the last line seems to finish with the word แล, which could make this the end of an inscription.

23. ะภิ: The scribe probably meant อภิ.

24. The ย has the form of a Yuan subwritten ย.

25. I have not translated ะภิ = อภิ = *abhi*, being uncertain what idea the author had in mind. The word was probably meant to indicate respect for the way in which the Khôm (Khmer or 'khmerized' Mon) count the years.

26. Migasira (P. Makasira, Sk. Mṛigaśīrṣa) is the third month in the Lān Nā, but the first month in central Thailand.

27. "The fourth of the waxing moon". I do not really understand why our author says that this is according to the teachings of the Buddha (ตามพุทธศาสนา). I suppose he meant "according to the language in which the teachings are written", or "in the Pāli language", because ปาลี "Pāli" often designates the holy texts as well as the language in which they are written.

Piece B, being part of face II, is similar in colour to piece C; it is broken off at both its top and bottom ends, measures $34 \times 30 \times 4$ cm and contains 11 lines of writing. The letters, once carefully engraved as can still be seen, are of the Fak Khām type; the language is Yuan. Although it looks as if the majority of the letters could be read easily enough, I have only been able to recognize about two dozen words, half of which are doubtful.

I am, however, reasonably certain that towards the end of the first line occur the letters จตยะ being part of the word เจติยะ "*cetiya*"; that beneath, in 1.2, are the letters เวนไ which could be part of เวนให้ "to give, to bestow upon"; that 1.4 ends with an ไ and that 1.5 begins with วัชย meaning วัชชาย "to donate (a) male person(s)"; that 1.7 ends with นั and 1.8 begins with บุน meaning นักบุญ "person(s) intent upon gain of merit"; that in the middle of 1.8 occur the words เมืองนี้ "this country"; that 1.9 ends with ยาก and 1.10 begins with ลวชา meaning อย่างกลัอย่างเกล้า "to create disorder, to change what has been decreed, to dispossess"; and that 1.11 closes the inscription with the words ชุคินแล "every person", แล serving as a final "full stop".

The result from reading the inscription on piece B is thus rather meagre. Still, if compared with other inscriptions which use similar expressions, one is able to grasp the main sense. Piece B contains the final part of an inscription. In this part, the inscription deals with a *jedī*; it may have been newly built, or renovated, or may have received some other kind of attention. Various objects were bestowed upon the monastery. It also received one or several slaves to work for or look after either the monastery in general, or the main Buddha image, or the *wihān*, the *jedī*, or the monks in particular. Reference is made to persons intent upon gain of merit, viz. pious followers of the Buddha's teachings. The last words of the inscription are part of an exhortation which frequently occurs in Yuan inscriptions: "Whoever comes to rule this country shall not alter the donations", for example, shall not use the monastery slaves for his own benefit. The words "every person" may refer to either the subject, viz. the future rulers, or to the object, i.e. the donated slaves.

Since the inscriptions on both face I and face II end with *ua*, and since the written characters are similar, it is not possible to decide whether these inscriptions are parts of the same text, or whether they are different inscriptions written on two sides of the same stone. I am inclined to think, however, that they are parts of one text, because when pieces C and B are joined together in their original positions, one can see that the inscriptions on faces I and II both ended at approximately the same level, i.e. about 30 cm from the bottom end of C. This may indicate, on the part of the scribe, a deliberate attempt to balance the space needed for one text.

It is therefore apparent that Wat Mā Pāo once was of a certain importance. The monastery was generously endowed and perhaps luxuriously built; it had at least one carefully executed stone inscription; the inscription almost certainly recorded royal donations and favours; and the mere size of the monastery compound makes one think of quite a large number of monks and attendants.

From all this it can be deduced that at one time Müang Win had a numerous and prosperous population which could afford the construction and maintenance of a great monastery and which, notwithstanding the difficult access to its valley, was in close contact with Chiang Mai.

* * *

With the proof that Müang Pāi, to the northwest of Chiang Mai, and Müang Win, to the southwest, were once politically and culturally important places which were oriented towards Chiang Mai, and with the additional evidence of monastery ruins, etc., in other likewise difficult-to-reach valleys in between Müang Pāi and Müang Win, it becomes evident that the valleys immediately west of Chiang Mai were neither as devoid of population nor as unimportant as chronicles and present-day conditions suggest.

Concerning the valleys still farther west, close to the border with Burma, our knowledge is more sketchy. I am not aware that either inscriptions or major religious buildings have so far been reported. Still, also this region seems to have been populated and to have main-

tained close contacts with Chiang Mai. Müang Yuam (Mā Sariang)²⁸ is now and then mentioned in various chronicles since the time of King Mang Rāi (around 1300 A.D.). A cave near the Salween River contained a great number of Yuan manuscripts, the oldest dated C.S. 1000 (1638 A.D.)²⁹. To the north, on the upper course of the Mā Tāng River³⁰, are a number of villages such as Bān Müang Hāng, Bān Kamphāng, Bān Muang Pok³¹, which either show remains of ancient strong fortifications or preserve old Yuan religious manuscripts. In these villages, some members of the older generation took considerable pride in telling me that they were Khon Müang (Yuan) and not Ngeo (Shan), that their families had "always" lived there, and that their forefathers had been subjects of the great Phra Pen Jao Phān Din³² in Chiang Mai—which is exactly the expression for "king" as used in some of the Yuan inscriptions.

There is yet another item worth mentioning. The region west of Chiang Mai at present is partly either denuded of forest or is covered by secondary forest. Primary forest seems to be rare. I have been told by forestry experts that the secondary forest in many places is already centuries old, and not recent, which means that people had lived there and cut down the primary forest, presumably to make room for paddy fields.

Thus a picture emerges, still incomplete, which shows that the vast mountainous area west of Chiang Mai was once well populated, and that this population, mainly Thai Yuan, was oriented towards Chiang Mai. Obviously the King of Chiang Mai could draw on far more resources than has hitherto been assumed. The Burmese wars, especially in their final stages during the eighteenth century A.D., seem to have decimated or dislodged the population of this region, and the vacuum thus created has since steadily been filled up mostly by the latterly arriving hill tribes.

28. เมืองฮวม (อ. แม่สะเรียง จ. แม่ฮ่องสอน).

29. Charles F. Keyes, "New evidence on northern Thai frontier history", in Tej Bunnag and Michael Smithies, ed., *In Memoriam Phya Anuman Rajadhon* (Bangkok, Siam Society, 1970), p. 225.

30. แม่แตง.

31. บ้านเมืองแหง, บ้านกำแพง, บ้านม่วงป้อก.

32. พระเป็นเจ้าแผ่นดิน.



Figure 1. Piece A



Figure 2. Piece B



Figure 3. Piece C

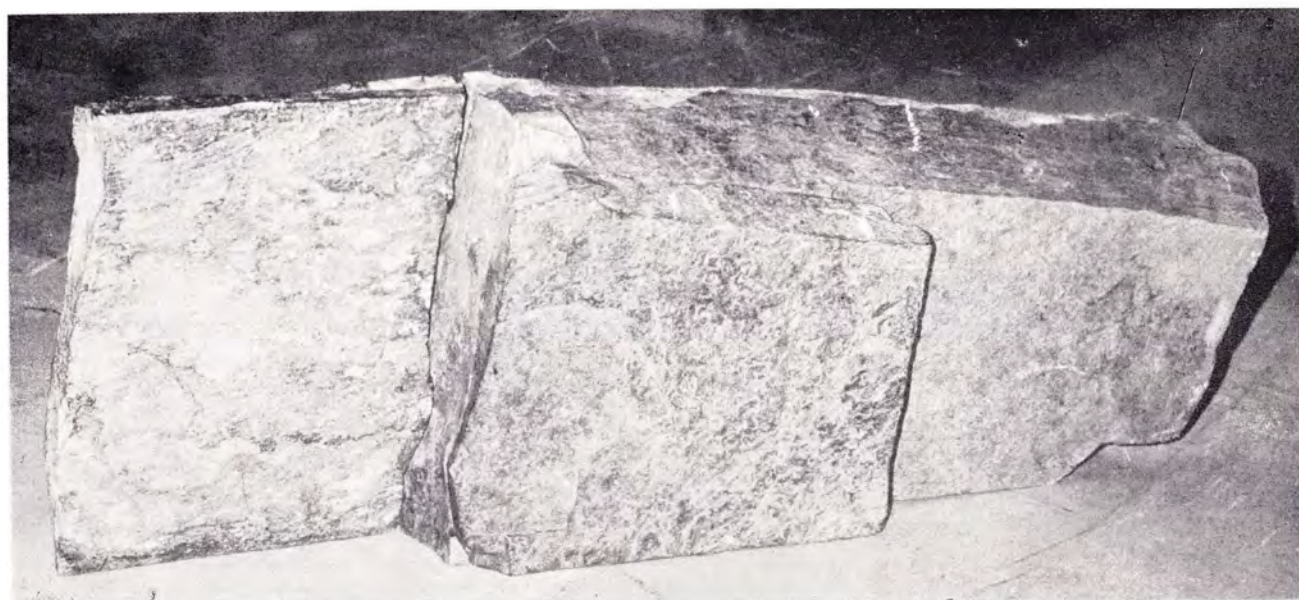


Figure 5. Face II partly reconstructed : pieces A, B, and C in their original alignment

