

NOTES & COMMENTS

Betty Gosling's Reply
to Michael Wright's Note on
"Why Were the *Jātakas* 'Hidden Away'
at Wat Sī Chum?"

It is fortunate when a scholar has the interest and critical bent of mind to question the host of theories concerning Sukhothai history and art that have been formulated in recent decades. Because of the sparsity and ambiguity of data that derive from the Sukhothai period, the sources have often led scholars in very different directions. Before viable conclusions can be reached, every "lead" must be investigated; sources must be reexamined many times.

I therefore welcome Michael Wright's comments on my article "Why Were the *jātakas* 'Hidden Away' at Wat Sī Chum?" (*JSS* Vol. 73, 1985; Vol. 72, 1984). It is disappointing, however, that, in Mr. Wright's case, *JSS* has relaxed its requirement that correspondence be "suitably documented." Mr. Wright has introduced some interesting new evidence that could possibly alter our present notions about early Thai history. But, unfortunately, the sources of some of the most controversial findings have not been cited, and the data's usefulness as a reasonable basis for further research is thereby seriously curtailed.

But, as his Note exemplifies, Mr. Wright has an exceptionally probing mind that focuses on vital issues, and he has raised some questions that deserve to be taken seriously. Three points in particular are crucial to the unraveling of Sukhothai history :

1. Identification of Sukhothai Inscription 2's *Mahāthāt Lūang*.
2. Identification of Inscription 2's "large, tall *chēdī*."
3. Reasons for enshrining the engravings of the Five Hundred *Jātakas* in the Wat Sī Chum *mondop*.

I would like to comment on Mr. Wright's arguments concerning each of these points.

1. Identification of Sukhothai Inscription 2's *Mahāthāt Lūang*.

I have already stated my reasons for identifying Inscription 2's *Mahāthāt Lūang* as Wat Mahāthāt, Sukhothai's largest monastery, located at the center of the city: ¹ I will mention these reasons here only in relation to Mr. Wright's objections. Mr. Wright's theory that the *Mahāthāt Lūang* in Inscription 2 refers, not to the Sukhothai Mahāthāt, but to Phra Pathom Čhēdiī in Nakhon Pathom, some 450 kms. away, perhaps deserves consideration that I have not previously put into print.

The Phra Pathom/Mahāthāt Lūang theory is interesting, and Mr. Wright has presented some enticing evidence. Given the wide geographic range that Inscription 2 encompasses, Nakhon Pathom is certainly a possible site for some of Inscription 2's activities. But there are also arguments against Mr. Wright's identification that need to be stated.

a. Mr. Wright bases his identification partially on Inscription 2's statement that the Mahāthāt in question was called by the "Khom," or Khmer, "Phra Thom," ("General" [phonetic] System of Romanization), or "Brah Dham" ("Graphic" [letter-by-letter] System"). ² Inscription 2 spells the word 𑄓𑄣 and the modern spelling is construed as 𑄓𑄣 . Mr. Wright equates *Phra Thom (Brah Dham)* with the *Pathom* in Nakhon Pathom's Phra Pathom Čhēdiī. *Phra Thom (Brah Dham)* and *pathom* do sound vaguely alike, and when the names are Romanized according to various methods of transcription, they can (in Roman letters) be made to look alike. But the meanings of the words are quite different.

King Rama IV, who instigated the rebuilding of Phra Pathom Čhēdiī in the late nineteenth century, reported that *Pathom*, according to local tradition, meant "sleeping" (ປຣະທອມ, ຍທອມ, ປຣຣທອມ), for the local people believed that the Buddha had once slept on the site where the *čhēdiī* was built. The King questioned the story, however, and recalled that he had read in earlier writings that *Pathom*, when referring to the *čhēdiī*, meant "first" (ປຣະທອມ, ປຣຸມ), indicating that the *čhēdiī* was

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1. Betty Gosling, "Once More Inscription 2: An Art Historian's View," *JSS* 69.1-2 (1981): 13-42.
Elizabeth Gosling, "The History of Sukhothai as a Ceremonial Center," University of Michigan Ph.D. Dissertation. Ann Arbor, University Microfilms International, 1983.
 2. Line 2.23. In A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "Epigraphic and Historic Studies, No. 10: King Lōdaiya of Sukhodaya and His Contemporaries," *JSS* 60.1 (1972): 21-152.

Since both pronunciation and spelling are relevant to the present discussion, I have used both the Graphic and General Systems of Romanization. Elsewhere, I have stuck with the General System.

thought to have been the first one built in Siam.³ This is the interpretation that is usually given today.

If these are the meanings traditionally associated with Phra Pathom *chēdiī*, then it is difficult to see how Inscription 2's *Phra Thom (Brah Dham)* is relevant. *Thom (dham)* is a Khmer word meaning, "large", "massive", "royal," "regal."⁴ and is, therefore, a reasonable Khmer translation of Inscription 2's "Mahāthāt Lūang"—*mahāthāt* meaning great *chēdiī* or great relic;⁵ *lūang* meaning "great," "royal," "chief," "superior."⁶ *Phra (Brah)* is an honorific term often placed before the names of monasteries, *chēdiīs*, Buddha images, etc. It is difficult to see how *Phra Thom (Brah Dham)* can be construed to mean "first" or "sleeping."

On the other hand, Mr. Wright reports having found "Ayutthayan and early nineteenth century references" to Phra Pathom Chedi, which give its name as *Phra Dam*. Unfortunately, Mr. Wright does not give the Thai spelling of *Phra Dam*, his method of Romanization, the definition of *dam*, or the names of the Ayutthayan and early nineteenth century works in which he has found the name. Without further information it would be foolish to try and guess just what he has in mind. Of course, *Pathama*, which Mr. Wright believes to be the "modern" spelling of *Pathom*, is a Romanization of the Pali root word from which the Thai word derives. With a diacritical mark *paṭhama*), it is simply the Graphic System's equivalent of the General System's *pathom*.

b. Mr. Wright thinks that since Nakhon Pathom is "connected by folk tale" to the Indian god Krishna, Inscription 2's "Krishna's city" (nakhōn Phra Kris) refers to that association.

Mr. Wright bases his theory largely on a mutilated phrase in Inscription 11, lines 2.20-21, for which he provides a "re-reading." According to the re-reading, the phrase in question, *nakhon...ris* or *nakhon.....ris*, should be translated as "Nakhon Kris" or "Nakhon Phra Kris"—there seems to be some uncertainty about the

3. Cāwphrajaa thīphaakorawong, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, The Fourth Reign (B.E. 2394-2411 (A.D. 1851-1868))*, trans. Chadin Flood, (Tokyo, The Center for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1966), p. 496.

4. George Bradley McFarland, *Thai-English Dictionary* (Stanford University Press, 1944), p. 431.

5. Griswold and Prasert, "Studies 10," p. 121, n. 122.

6. McFarland, *Dictionary*, p. 919.

7. *Line 2.23.*

number of missing letters. (The two transcriptions I have at hand render the phrase as⁸ and ๙⁹.)

What is significant is that the phrase occurs in a sequence of place names that suggests a geographic location for the city somewhere in the vicinity of Nakhon Pathom. Mr. Wright reports that Dr. Prasert ๙ Nagara, basing his reasoning on the recent appearance of *nakhon.....ris* or *nakhon...ris* in Inscription 11, has “tentatively” accepted the Phra Pathom/Mahāthāt theory. I look forward to this respected epigrapher’s non-tentative judgement when he has arrived at firm conclusions concerning this interesting new evidence.

But, in any case, whether or not Inscription 11’s new translation can be used as reference to the *Phra Kris* of Inscription 2 is questionable. In his arguments, Mr. Wright has ignored important internal evidence. For Inscription 2 reports explicitly that the “Phra Kris” found in the text refers to the inscription’s author, the monk Siī Sathā¹⁰—not to the Indian god associated with Nakhon Pathom. Inscription 2 leaves no doubt that the city to which Siī Sathā/Phra Kris held allegiance was Sukhothai.

c.. Inscription 2 states that it was at the center of Phra Kris’s city that the Mahāthāt Lūang (called by the Khmer “Phra Thom”) was located.¹¹ Like other inscriptional evidence, this bit of information suggests Sukhothai rather than Nakhon Pathom. Both the ancient cities of Sukhothai and Nakhon Pathom were surrounded by moats and ramparts that make a center point easy to identify. Wat Mahāthāt is located at the center of Sukhothai’s walled, moated city, whereas Phra Pathom Čhēdiī is located a kilometer or so to the west of Nakhon Pathom’s moat and ramparts.¹² That this point outside the old city could have been considered the city center in the fourteenth century needs some substantiation. (The monastery at the center of the old city is Wat Phra Pathon [not to be confused with Phra Pathom.])

d. One of Mr. Wright’s most interesting observations concerns Inscription 2’s statement that at the place where the Mahāthāt was being restored, it was

8. *Prachum charyk syām phāt thii 1: charyk krung sukhōthai*, Bangkok, 2467, p.151

9. Griswold and Prasert, “Studies 10,” p. 137.

10. Lines 2.37-8.

11. Lines 2.23.

12. Quaritch Wales, *Dvāravatī, The Earliest Kingdom of Siam (6th to 11th century A.D.)*, (London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd., 1969), p. 32 and fig. 2B.

difficult to fine lime.¹³ The lime was needed to stucco the Čhēdiī, and the statement is usually taken at face value. It is Mr. Wright's contention, however, that "having no lime" is a figure of speech indicating "total ruin, remoteness from other civilized places, and a lack of basic civilized amenities" (source not given). He thinks the passage must refer to Nakhon Pathom, not Sukhothai.

Mr. Wright's reasoning can be questioned on several counts : first, that in the context of the passage, the statement that lime was difficult to find should not be taken literally; and second, because Mr. Wright claims not to know of unfavorable conditions at Sukhothai in the mid-fourteenth century, Inscription 2's evidence cannot apply to those unknowns. In fact, Inscription 3, dating from 1363, provides some evidence that the Sukhothai kingdom had "been torn into many fragments and pieces" and that the fragments had perhaps become "destitute."¹⁴ I do not know what sources Mr. Wright has used to determine conditions at Nakhon Pathom in the mid-fourteenth century.

2. Identification of Inscription 2's "large, tall čhēdiī."

Here Mr. Wright has accused me of misusing evidence provided by George Coedès, who suggested that Inscription 2's "large, tall čhēdiī" was the central monument at Sukhothai's Wat Mahāthāt.¹⁵ According to Prof. Coedès, the engravings of the Five Hundred *Jātakas* now encased in the dark stairwell of the Wat Siī Chum *mondop* are those which Inscription 2 states once surrounded the Mahāthāt čhēdiī. I have already stated my reasons for accepting Prof. Coedès's theory. In part, according to my chronological study of Sukhothai architecture, the Mahāthāt čhēdiī was probably the only large, tall chedi at Sukhothai prior to the 1340s when Inscription 2 was written.¹⁶

Of course, one could suggest that Inscription 2's čhēdiī was not at Sukhothai at all. In fact, in 1980 Mr. Wright claimed that the čhēdiī was in Nakhon Pathom and that the *Jātaka* engravings at Wat Siī Chum had been transported from Nakhon Pathom to Sukhothai.¹⁷ But Mr. Wright appears to have abandoned this theory,

13. Lines 2.23 ff.

14. Griswold and Prasert, "Epigraphic and Historical Studies, No. 11, Part 1: The Epigraphy of Mahādharmarāja 1 of Sukhodaya," *JSS* 61.1 (1973): 71-177. P. 106.

15. George Coedès, *Recueil des Inscriptions du Siam. Vol. 1 (Bangkok, 1924). P. 177.*

16. *Elizabeth Gosling, History.*

17. *Michael Wright, "Phāthai silā charuk sukhōthai lak thiī 2." Mūang Bōrān 6.2 (1980) : 19-31. PP. 27-8.*

and I do not have any reason to doubt that the engravings were executed at Sukhothai. It follows then, that the *chēdiī* they once surrounded was also located there. I will continue to choose the most straightforward explanation and second Prof. Coedès's identification.

In order to accept Mr. Wright's new theory that the *Jātaka* plaques originally surrounded a *chēdiī* at Wat Siī Chum, in Sukhothai, one must also accept a complex set of a priory assumptions: 1, that, unlike other Sukhothai inscriptions, Inscription 2 was a verbal communication, and that it was only at a later time that the words "somehow....ended up in the form of an inscription in stone"; 2, that we know precisely where the speaker, Siī Sathā, sat or stood when he made his oral presentation "one hot morning" centuries ago; (i.e., at Wat Siī Chum, although the name does not appear in the inscription); 3, that the Thai who liberated Sukhothai from the Khmer in the thirteenth century attacked the Thai walled city that we know today rather than the old Khmer city just to the north; 4, that a 1980 reading of Inscription 2 (source not given) is more reliable than the transcriptions used by Coedès and Griswold/Prasert; 5, that the *here* that Mr. Wright sees in his 1980 version of the inscription, and which he finds in a passage referring to a number of towns and regions, refers, not to another geographical location, but to a monastic site, 6, that the absence of the phrase *lāng hāeng, used consistently elsewhere in Inscription 2 to denote a change of location, is not significant in the "large, tall chēdiī"* passage; and 7, that prior to the building of the Wat Siī Chum *mondop* there was once a large, tall *chēdiī* at the site for which we have no archaeological or inscriptional evidence. Furthermore, 8, Mr. Wright asks us to believe that prior to Siī Sathā's discourse, he had just built the Wat Siī Chum *mondop*, although the inscription mentions neither the construction of a new building nor the placement of the *Jātakas* in a new location.

Mr. Wright's reasoning provides a good example of what Michael Vickery, in his excellent article on Sukhothai historiography, calls an "epicycle". According to Prof. Vickery, epicyclical reasoning ignores the simplest explanation, and, instead multiplies elaborate assumptions to create a complex theory that cannot pass as more than plausible historical fiction.¹⁸ Mr. Wright has made some interesting speculations, but his new "history" based upon these suppositions is insupportable.

18. Michael Vickery, "A Guide Through Some Recent Sukhothai Historiography," *JSS* 66.2 (1978) : 182-246. P. 185.

3. Reasons for enshrining the *Jātaka* engravings in the Wat Siī Chum *mondop*.

Mr. Wright has suggested in his Note that the engravings were hidden away because they were damaged. According to his reasoning, damaged religious objects are “inauspicious, an embarrassment, a reproach to the owner, and not fit for the eyes of the faithful to behold.” Thus the *Jātakas* should have been “disposed of or hidden away” where they would not “offend the pious eye.”

Given the fact that Inscription 2 is largely devoted to descriptions of meritorious works that involved the restoration of damaged religious architecture and sculpture—not hiding them away—Mr. Wright’s suggestion is surprising.

I am also puzzled by Mr. Wright’s reference to the “ruined Si Samphet [*sic*] image from Ayutthya entombed in the Stupa at Wat Phra Chetuphon in Bangkok.” Mr. Wright cites the Si Sanphet image as providing evidence of the embarrassment and shame that Siamese feel towards badly damaged religious objects.

But the Chronicles of the First Reign provide a very different picture: “On Friday, the tenth day of the waxing moon of the third month, the Year of the Tiger, the sixth year of the decade, the year 1156 of the Chula Era, in the morning, the king, accompanied by members of the royal family, government ministers, elderly government councilors, Brahmin court advisors, court astrologers, and learned men, came to the field where the great *chedi* reliquary would be constructed. Then the Buddha statue known as Phra Phutthapatimakon Sisanphet, which was damaged and brought over from the old capital (Ayutthaya), was moved to the site and placed on the prepared foundation. At the precise auspicious moment, the music played a loud fanfare with gongs, drums, trumpets and conch trumpets.”¹⁹ It is difficult to discern anything inauspicious or embarrassing in the passage.

We do not know if the installation of the *Jātaka* plaques at Wat Siī Chum was accompanied by gongs and trumpets. But we do know that the plaques were invariably placed face outward and were arranged approximately in the order prescribed in the Pali Canon. Apparently, even in the *mondop*’s dark stairwell, they were meant to be seen. I do not think they were considered “offensive” or that they were “suppressed,” as Mr. Wright accuses me of writing.

Finally, Mr. Wright misrepresents me when he says that I appear to suggest that the *Jātakas*’ installation in the Wat Siī Chum stairwell somehow involved a dissent in the Sangha. As I have already stated, I think that the enshrinement of the plaques in the stairwell reflects some of the vast changes in religious and political

19. Chaophraya Thiphakorawong, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, The First Reign*, trans. and ed. Thadeus and Chadin Flood (Tokyo, The Center for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1978), p. 229.

attitudes that took place at Sukhothai during the fourteenth century. But that a dissention in the Sangha was responsible is a theory that goes far beyond any evidence that I have presented. The inference is Mr. Wright's not mine.