

The Abdication of Phayā Tilōk

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It is well-known that Phayā Tilōk of Chiang Mai (r. 1441-1487) died in 1487 at the age of 78 and that he was succeeded in the same year by his grandson, Phayā Yòt Chiang Rāi (r.1487-1495), aged 31. *The Chronicle of Chiang Mai* (CMA) and *Jinakālamālī* (JKM) are in agreement.¹

Neither chronicle indicates that there was anything unusual in the change of reign and the reader would assume that, since succession had been in the direct line in previous reigns, with the King selecting one of his sons and the dignitaries consecrating him after the death of the father, succession in this case clearly had to go to Tilōk's grandson because his son was no longer alive. Though there had been usurpations, soon rectified, there was only one deviation from the traditional procedure when in 1442 Tilōk coerced his father, Phayā Sām Fang Kān, to abdicate. The father solemnly turned the kingdom over to his son, after which the dignitaries, as usual, consecrated the new King.

However, there is evidence to show that Tilōk also abdicated. The King, shortly before his death, transferred the kingdom to his grandson.

While JKM indicates only the year in which Tilōk died and Yòt acceded, all the usual CMA texts² have identical details. Tilōk died at the hour Tharā Rung on Sunday, day 3 of the waxing moon, month 9, year (C.S.) 849 called Mōng Met; for short: Sunday 03/09/849.

A little further CMA specifies the date of Yòt's accession: Monday, day Rawāi Sangā, day 15 of the waxing moon, month 8, year (C.S.) 849 called Mōng Met; for short: Monday 15/08/849.

Apparently, Yòt had acceded to the throne about two weeks before his grandfather Tilōk died, a fact not hidden but also not particularly mentioned by either chronicle.

There is corroboration from the chronicle of Wat Jedī Luang, Chiang Mai.³ That chronicle, of unknown age, clearly states, though without details of the date, that Tilōk abdicated prior to his death in favour of Yòt:

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ทำวก็เวนราชสมบัตินี้ให้แก่หลานแห่งตนชื่อว่าทำวยอดเชียงราย แล้วก็ไปสู่อุปรโลกภายหน้า "The Prince (i.e. Tilōk) then remitted the realm to his grandson, Prince Yòt Chiang Rāi, and went on to the next world."

The event of Tilōk's abdication just prior to his death thus established, it remains to translate the dates mentioned in CMA into the modern Western calendar which is also a convenient way to check their internal consistency.⁴ The result is not immediately reassuring because of certain contradictions. However, these contradictions can be clarified to a certain degree which permits acceptance of the dates as probable within a narrow time frame.

Death of Tilōk

Sunday, hour Tharä Rung, 03/09/849, year Möng Met
= Friday, 25 May 1487.

- Contradiction: day 3 waxing was a Friday, not a Sunday.

The day on which Tilōk died either was day 3 waxing which was a Friday and not a Sunday; or, if it was a Sunday, it should have been day 5 waxing and not day 3. "Sunday" in the chronicle is written out as a word while day, month and year are written as figures. Normally, a word would be less vulnerable to error than a figure when copying. Also, the figures 3 and 5 in the chronicle belong to the *hōra* series and can look quite similar. It is therefore possible that originally the date read "day 5" which a scribe miscopied as "day 3". The date with "day 5" corresponds to Sunday, 27 May 1487 or, given the hour of the day, to early Monday according to our modern usage.⁵

But it is also possible to defend the date as written in the chronicle. A difference of one or even two days between modern theoretical date calculation and local, actual calendar execution is always a possibility. This is, for instance, because the addition of certain days to some calendar years, which was necessary to maintain the calendar year's synchronization with the Sun, was not done at the same time in all regions. For a local calendar that was not a permanent flaw because the various local differences canceled each other out after a span of time since everybody used the same basic calendar system. Such minor short-term aberrations from the norm occurred not infrequently. Therefore, the King might well have died on Sunday, 27 May 1487 (or early on Monday morning) but locally the day was counted as the 3rd day of the waxing moon.

Accession of Yòt

Monday, Rawāi Sangā, 15/08/849

= Monday, Kāp San, 07 May 1487.

- Contradiction: day 15 was not a day Rawāi Sangā but a day Kāp San.

“Monday” for the accession of Phayā Yòt should be correct because a little further in the chronicle, Yòt’s forced abdication (1495) is justified for the reason that his consecration took place on a Monday which was an unlucky day and the cause of much trouble during his reign.

The reason for the contradiction between the Thai days, Rawāi Sangā and Kāp San, is not immediately apparent but could perhaps be explained as a scribe’s error because both word groups do look somewhat similar in *Tham* letters, the alphabet in which CMA is written.

On the whole, therefore, the dates are acceptable and it is likely that Tilōk abdicated on 7 May 1487 before his death occurred on or about 27 May 1487. There is a clear sequence of dates (though some details appear inconsistent or may have become corrupted in our texts). There is the statement in JL that Tilōk turned the kingdom over to his grandson before his death; and there is also the probability that this King, known for his resoluteness, made certain that his successor was a person whom he favoured.

In consequence, it can be assumed that, having fallen ill at the age of 78 and feeling his end near, Phayā Tilōk abdicated just prior to his death and, his own son no longer living, had his grandson installed in order to ensure an orderly succession according to his wishes. That would be in line with what is otherwise known of this powerful monarch – he stayed in control until his end.

One would expect CMA to clearly point out and even to describe the event because the chronicle also has a detailed description of Tilōk’s own accession, which likewise had happened by the abdication of the incumbent. Since CMA, as we have it now, does not do so, and it also does not mention that the dignitaries consecrated the new King, though it later mentions the fact that he had been consecrated, it may be that the item once was included in CMA, or in the documents from which it was composed, and that it was lost at a later stage.

As for the reason for Tilōk’s action, the best explanation may be that he wanted to override a possible opposing faction by creating a *fait accompli* in installing a successor of his own choice because, contrary to the old custom, the successor chosen by him might no longer be automatically accepted by the dignitaries after his death. It appears therefore that Tilōk did not abdicate voluntarily. He was not forced to abdicate by any one individual (as he had compelled his father

to do) but by changing circumstances. The dignitaries of the realm probably now felt that they had a say in the matter of succession and the means to counteract the traditional royal prerogative of choosing the next king. The perception of the king who owns the country⁶ presumably was about to change in one aspect: the king owned it, but who was to be the next king was going to be decided no longer solely by the incumbent. The matter of Tilōk's abdication can be seen as part of a general development at the time which brought about a decrease of the power of the monarch while individual power factions were on the ascent.

Concerning the reason for the choice of the day on which King Tilōk abdicated and on which King Yòt acceded, it evidently was not an ordinary day, calculated by astrologers for its auspiciousness, but had (and has) triple religious significance. Day 15 (full moon) of month 8, today called *wan wisākha būchā* วันวิสาขบูชา (P. *visākha pūjā*), is the day on which, according to traditional belief, the Buddha was born, reached enlightenment and died (entered Nibbāna). Visākha is month 6 in central Thailand but month 8 in the North. In the North, the day was and is known as *düan pät peng* "full moon of month 8". It was a day on which one went to pay one's respects to a famous stūpa, or rather to the relics sheltered in the stūpa, for instance to the Phra Mahā That in Lamphūn. It was not a normal day for transacting purely worldly affairs. One wonders at the ideas then associated with the date, and the reason behind Phayā Tilōk's abdication and Phayā Yòt's accession on that day. Tilōk himself is reported to have been made King on the same day, *düan pät peng*, in 1442,⁷ and already before him his father, Sām Fang Kän, in 1401.⁸

Notes

1. CMA.B(2): 58; CMA.HPms: 5.11V; CMA.N: 144; CMA.T: 68; JKM.C: 116; JKM.J: 146-147. Both chronicles say that Phayā Yòt was born in 1456 but CMA states that Phayā Yòt was 32 years old when he acceded in 1487. The difference of one year is due to different ways of counting. JKM only counts completed years as one year. CMA sometimes uses the same method (as with the age of Phayā Tilōk) but sometimes counts part of a year as one year and follows the tradition that when a person is born, his age is 1.
2. CMA.B(2): 58; CMA.HPms: 5.11V; CMA.N: 144; CMA.T: 68.
3. JL.S: 163. I owe the information to *ājān* Phanphen Khrüathai, Social Research Institute, who also kindly checked two more versions of the chronicle on microfilm in the SRI (81.66.01L.077 1 / 44 p. 40; and 78.020.01L.044-044 1 / 32 p.27) which were found to agree with JL.S.
4. I did this with the help of *Faraud 3*, a computer programme developed by Dr. J.C. Eade, Canberra. The Chronicle of Chiang Mai seems to use throughout the so-called "Chiang Mai-style" of counting months. It is one number ahead of the "Chiang Tung-style" and two numbers ahead of the "Sukhōthai-style" (which is presently used throughout Thailand): for instance, month 6 "Chiang Mai" is month 4 "Sukhōthai". The toponyms are not meant to indicate that the particular "style" was invented there; we ignore the origin of the three methods.
5. The hour indicated, Tharā Rung, means the early morning period 03.00 h - 04.30 h. In the traditional Thai way, the civil day begins at 6 o'clock in the morning and runs to 6 o'clock on the morning of the next day. Therefore, Sunday 03.00 h - 04.30 h in the traditional Thai way means early Monday morning in modern, western-based time-reckoning because it lets the next day begin at midnight. However, old dates with a time in the early morning before sunrise sometimes appear to suggest that occasionally local astrologers / astronomers counted their astronomical day from midnight to midnight. If that were the case here, the King's death would have occurred in the early hours of Sunday, in both western and old local time calculation.
6. King Sām Fang Kän, on the occasion of his abdication in 1442: "I own the entire *müang* Chiang Mai" (CMA.B(2): 27; CMA.HPms: 4.3R; CMA.N: 103; CMA.T: 49).
7. Friday, Kot Jai, 15/08/804, year Tao Set (CMA.N: 104). However, CMA.B(2): 20, CMA.T: 49 and CMA.HPms: 4.3R-4V have "Saturday". Whether "Friday" or "Saturday", the date seems inconsistent in itself because 15/08/804 was a Tuesday, Dap Kai, 24 April 1442.
8. Friday, Kot Sangā, 15/08/763, year Ruang Sai (CMA.B(2): 19; CMA.HPms: 3.17R; CMA.N: 92; CMA.T: 44-45). The date seems inconsistent in itself because 15/08/763 was a Wednesday, Kā Mao, 27 April 1401. JKM corroborates the year. But a nearly contemporary inscription from Phayao, dated 1411, has a very different date: Monday, 06/07(?) / 764, year Tao Sangā, Mamia, perhaps Monday, 22 May 1402 (ALI 1.5.1.1 Phra Suwanna Mahā Wihān 1411; Thöm et al. 1980 Silā Järük Kasat Lò Phò. / 9).

Abbreviations and Bibliography

ALI

Archive of Lan Na Inscriptions, Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University.

CMA.B

บาลี พุทธรักษา ๗๗ "ตำนานสิบห้าราชวงศ์" สถาบันวิจัยสังคม มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่ เล่มที่ ๑ (ผูก ๑-๒) ๒๕๒๔ เล่มที่ ๒ (ผูก ๓-๕) ๒๕๒๕, เล่มที่ ๓ (ผูก ๖-๗) ๒๕๓๒.

CMA.HPms

Palmleaf ms of the Chronicle of Chiang Mai, 8 fascicles, in the possession of this writer.

CMA.N

Camille Notton: Annales du Siam, 3e volume: Chronique de Xienḡ Mai. Paris, 1932.

CMA.T

ทน ตนมั่น (ปริวรรต) "ตำนานพื้นเมืองเชียงใหม่" กรุงเทพฯ สำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี ๒๕๑๔.

JKM.C

G. Coedès: Documents sur l'histoire politique et religieuse du Laos occidental. BEFEO, 25, 1925; JKM is on p.36-72 (Pāli) and 73-140 (French).

JKM.J

N.A.Jayawickrama: The Sheaf of Garlands of the Epochs of the Conqueror. London, 1968.

JL.S

The Chronicle of Wat Jedī Luang, version of Sanguan. In: สงวน โชติสุขรัตน์ "ประชุมตำนานลานนาไทย", เล่ม ๒, กรุงเทพฯ ๒๕๑๕ (1972).

Thöm et al. 1980 Silā Jārūk Kasat Lò Phò./9

เทิม มีเต็ม / ประสาร บุญประคอง / ประเสริฐ ณ นคร "ศิลาจารึกกษัตริย์ราชวงศ์มังราย ลพ./๙" ศิลปากร, ๒๔.๒, ๒๕๒๓, ๘๕ ๘๘.