

## THE WORD JETAVAN IN OLD SIAMESE.

by

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Some years ago a friend asked me about the meaning of a word in the *Corpus* of Laws, of which I was at a loss to give a satisfactory explanation. The word in question is *Phra Jetavan* in the preamble to the old Law of Inheritance. The passage runs thus:—

In 2155, year of the hog, on Thursday the 11th of the waxing moon of the month of Jettha (about June), His Majesty Ekathosaroth Isuen Boromanath Boromabopit, possessor of the tenfold virtues of Kingship, endowed with a boundless accumulation of majesty, a prospective Buddha, a great and righteous sovereign, was present in the golden pavilion to the north of the great *Vihara* in the monastery of Jaya Vardhanaram, presiding over the ceremony of dedicating the great *Vihara*, the *Jetavan* and the great Reliquary, which had been built to perpetuate the Master's Teaching for all time. . . . .

Now, the monarch referred to is usually known as Phrachao Prasat Thong, who from the office of Kalahom had usurped the Crown and was father to King Narai. In standard histories the construction of this monastery is recorded at some length as having been undertaken when the King came to the Throne, without however giving a definite date for the commencement or the dedication of the work. The date 2155 is of course impossible and may be considered as an error of later recension. My experience in verifying the dates in old documents has convinced me that the zodiacal year usually remains correct when the numerical reckoning is tampered with. Supposing therefore that the year of the hog is correct, we have but to find out the dates, in the Buddhist Era, of the years of the hog in that King's

reign. Starting with the King's accession in B. E. 2172, as has been correctly revised by Phya Indra Montri (JSS. Vol. XXX pt 2, page 167), the first year of the hog we meet with would be B. E. 2178, which corresponds to A. D. 1635. This was most probably the year in which the dedication of the monastery and the promulgation of the Law on Inheritance took place, for the only other year of the hog in this reign would be 1647 which is much too late because the erection of the monastery was the first act of the usurper after his coronation. This, however, is but a digression for we are really concerned with the meaning of the word *jetavan*.

According to the *Royal Autograph History of Siam*, the monastery was built on the private property of the King's mother, and consisted of a great Reliquary surrounded by a cloister with a *meru* on each of the cardinal points of the compass, as well as an *ubosoth*, a *vihāra*, a *kān parien* and cells for the monks. The *History of Prince Paramanujit*, from which the former drew its inspiration, gives the same account. None of them, nor any other source as yet available, mentions a *jetavan*.

Now, *Jetavan* was originally the name of a certain precinct in Sāvatti in ancient India, a grove perhaps, where the Buddha was often in residence. The name has been adopted in Ceylon, at the medieval capital of Anurādhapura, for a monastery. It was similarly adopted in some of the old capitals of Siam. Ayudhya, indeed, does not seem to have had a monastery of *Jetavan*. The name was, however, given to Wat Po when that monastery was rebuilt by King Rama I. of the Chakri dynasty in Bangkok.

But the way in which the name is used in the Law preamble quoted above is hardly similar to those in the cases just cited. In the Law, it was not a proper name. Rather was it that of some kind of edifice. The question, therefore, is as to which kind of an edifice used to go by the name *jetavan*.

Let us now compare the accounts as given in the Law preamble with that of the standard histories. The preamble enumerates three edifices as having been dedicated: the great Reliquary, the *Jetavan*, and the *Vihāra*. The histories enumerate four main items, namely an *ubosoth*, a *vihāra*, and a *kān parien* in addition to the great Reliquary. While it is just possible that the authors of the histories, writing as they did without being able to be constantly on the spot, were merely using stock phrases to describe a big monastery with a Reliquary, it is also

not unlikely that what they were calling an *ubosoth* might well have corresponded to what the Law preamble called Phra Jetavan, for after identifying the Reliquary and the *vihāra* in both sources and deleting the *kān pariien* in the histories as being part of the stock phrase *vihāra kān pariien* we have left on the one hand the *Jetavan* and on the other the *ubosoth*. For me the point remained thus far unsolved, until on one of my inspection tours of the river districts six or seven years ago I came across the model of an edifice about two feet long and one foot high lying about the court of a Mon monastery a little to the north of the town of Pathum on the left bank of the Menam Chao Phya. Little suspecting any real enlightenment, for I half imagined that it was a sort of a shrine to the Phra Phum usually to be found in the compounds of private houses, although this model was not made of wood as these shrines usually are, I asked the old Mon incumbent of the monastery. To my surprise I was told that it was a *jetavan*, which he pronounced *jetaworn*. He did not know exactly himself what the stone model was meant to signify, but he had an idea that it was a replica of the famous *hall* at Savatthi where the Master was wont to preach on so many occasions. The incumbent seemed to have lost sight of the real nature of the original *Jetavan*; and instead of a grove he probably imagined it to have been a regular *wat* as we know it nowadays with perhaps a central assembly hall, or *ubosoth*. This in fact might have been in the mind of the incumbent when he said that it might have been a replica of the Master's preaching hall. At this stage, it seemed, we had got something a little more definite, *Jetavan* was *probably* the name of a class of edifices in ecclesiastical architecture; and its venue was more than likely the Mon country and its people.

My attempt at an interpretation of this word remained stagnant for some six years, until I was privileged to read an account of his trip to Burma in 1936 by His Royal Highness Prince Damrong. This account is highly interesting especially on historical grounds, and is most detailed. Unfortunately it is not accessible to the public for it has not yet been published, and I have to record my gratitude to the royal author for letting me read it and make this reference to it. The Prince says that within the royal palace at Mandalay there is a building where the images of the Buddha were kept, and the name of this building was Zedawan, the Burmese counterpart of the word *Jetavan*. On further reference to the *Gazetteer of Upper Burma*

and the Shan States (J. G. Scott, 1900, Part II Vol. II, p. 88) and F. O. Oertel's plan of the Mandalay Palace Stockade and Buildings which faces page 176 of that Gazetteer, I found that this building contained figures of royal ancestors and also the Hansa throne. The figures of royal ancestors were doubtless images of the Buddha cast to perpetuate the memory of individual monarchs who had passed away, such as the images in the Chapel Royal of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok, called respectively Phra Buddha Yodfa and Phra Buddha Loesla. This opinion has been accepted and confirmed by Prince Damrong. Thus far it would seem that the word *jetavan* is more likely than before to have signified a sanctuary where effigies of the Buddha were housed.

Before proceeding further with my arguments I hope I may be allowed to digress a little to explain the custom of casting images of the Buddha to perpetuate the memory of sovereigns who have passed away. We know for certain that in honour of his royal predecessors on the Throne, King Rama III erected, in 1843, the two standing effigies of the Buddha in the Chapel Royal and named them as above stated. These names came to be adopted posthumously for each of those two Kings. We know also (*Phra Rāja Kamnod Mai*, §40, dated 1785) that in Ayudhya there used to be an image called Phra Jettha Bidorn (i. e. Jettha Pitara, or the Venerable Ancestor) which occupied a place of honour in the ceremony of taking the Water of Allegiance. This image was said (op. cit.) to be one of Phra Rāmādhīpati, the monarch, one is led to presume, who founded Ayudhya. In the ancient Khmer inscriptions we find that almost every king was given a posthumous name signifying his connection with whichever sectarian deity he might have been inclined to favour. Thus, Yaśovarman was posthumously known as Parama Sivaloka from his having been a Sivaite; Sūryavarman I., a Mahayanist, was Parama Nirvānapada; and Sūryavarman II., a Vishnuite, received the name of Parama Vishnuloka. One might suppose, although concrete proofs are lacking, that the memory of these monarchs was perpetuated by effigies of Siva, Vishnu or Avalokitesvara in accordance with whichever cult they preferred. Even a Buddhist King could be reconciled to the cult of the Devaraja or Divine Sovereignty, for in Mahayanist Buddhism there was plenty of room for deities and their incarnations. Jayavarman VII, whose fame as a tireless builder is established, act-

ually has such an image to his honour, though his posthumous name does not seem to be known.

Thus therefore we are again tempted to assume that the cult of the Devaraja which identified the sovereign with an incarnation of the Deity might have had some connection with the custom by which the posthumous effigy of a monarch was made in the traditional form of that deity or incarnation which he individually favoured during his lifetime. This effigy received the name by which that particular monarch came to be known thereafter. Siam, and perhaps Burma too, adopted the custom, but modified it to suit her form of Buddhism in which there was no room for deities or their incarnations. And so it took the form of an effigy of the Buddha! This custom may be said to have been discontinued by King Mongkut in comparatively recent years.

Having thus presumed upon my readers' patience, I shall now resume the narrative of tracing the meaning of our word. The connection between our word and its Mon venue seeming to be certain, I wrote to my friend, Phra Praison Salaraks who now lives in Toun-goo. He was good enough to refer the question to U Lu Pe Win, a Mon scholar, and the latter has sent me much valuable information for which I hope I may be allowed to record here my thanks. He writes:

Jetawan in Burmese architectural parlance is the name given to the Sheldrake throne room of the Palace in which the golden images of royal ancestors were kept . . .

There is an 18th century Burmese book known as the Shwebônndan which gives much useful information about Palace matters and supplies also explanations of the origin of many of the Palace usages and royal paraphernalia. Its author Zeyya-thinkha says that the original Jetavana monastery of the Buddha being of three superposed roofs, any later triple-roofed building came to be called after it.

Further on he gives another interesting fact which bears on some aspects of the case, thus:

The custom of keeping and paying reverence to the golden royal images in the Jetawan was, according to the Shwebônndan, handed down since the time of Alaungsithu (1112-67 A. D.), the grandson and successor of Kyanzitha (1085-1112 A. D.).

Then he says:

It will be remembered that as a result of Anorata's conquest of Thaton the Burmans received their ancient culture from the conquered Mons just as the Romans had from the Greeks. Most of the nomenclature of the royal paraphernalia were borrowed bodily from the Mon to enrich the Burmese language . . . . .

He concludes by saying :

It is very likely therefore that a Jetawan in Mon ecclesiastical parlance would be the same as in Burmese and refers to a structure with three tiered roofs . . . . .

Armed with the information, I went up again to Ayudhya in the hope of exploring the precincts of the monastery of Jaya Vardhanaram in search of some proof of an edifice which might with any likelihood correspond to the Jetawan of the law preamble. In the days of my apprenticeship in Government service at Ayudhya, I had known where the place was but had never been actually on the spot. On this visit we went straight to the place but were told by villagers living on the river in front of the *wat* that there was no such place as *wat* Jaya Vardhanaram. My host at Ayudhya on this occasion was a retired officer of the Gendarmerie, who also knew the place but had never heard it called by that name. It had been a favourite haunt of thieves and bad characters on account of its ruined state and the neglect into which it had fallen. Looking from the river, it formed an imposing group of spires on the west bank. A thick undergrowth of bush and thorn renders the place impenetrable without several hours' clearing. The southern part, however, bordered upon a clearing of villagers and at least the *Great Reliquary* was accessible, though difficult of passage. By dodging between thorns one could work a way into the square enclosing the Reliquary, a *chedi* of a distinctive style the northern side of which was still in fairly good preservation on account of its being sheltered from the south-west monsoon. One was able to recognise the surrounding cloister with its *meru* on each of the cardinal points of the compass. The cloister was pierced on four sides by covered entrances. We were told that to the north of the Reliquary cloisters there used to be remains of the ground floor, without walls or roofs, of two or three buildings, but they are in a most ruined state, and anyhow there was no hope of proving whether the roof was three-tiered or otherwise.

There yet remains another piece of evidence. I do not know what has become of that model in the courtyard of the Mon monastery in

Pathum, but as far as I can recollect it was roofed in tiers. How many tiers there were, I cannot remember.

In any case, we have fairly good grounds for believing that the word *jetavan* of the Law preamble was a Mon usage of the name and referred to a class of buildings of three-tiered roofs in which were housed effigies of the Buddha. As for the *jetavan* of *wat* Jaya Vardhanaram in Ayudhya, it probably existed to the north of the Great Reliquary, and whether it had three-tiered roofs or not, it probably housed effigies of the Buddha. It is also possible that it was the *ubosoth* of that *wat* too.

