



Ban Lup, Lawa woman spinning cotton.



Ban Lup, carrier.



Ban Lup, Lawa woman and child.



Ban Lup, Lawa women pounding paddy.

Photos by Rev. J. S. Holladay.

THE LĀWĀ OF UMPHAI AND MIDDLE ME PING.

COMPILED BY MAJOR ERIK SEIDENFADEN

FROM MATERIAL SUPPLIED BY

REV. J. S. HOLLADAY AND MR. T. W. BEVAN.

In *The Lawā in Northern Siam* written by Mr. E. W. Hutchinson and amplified by Major E. Seidenfaden, which was published in *JSS*, Vol. XXXVII, Pt. II, 1935, it is mentioned (p. 154) that, lying to the north west of Bô Luang, is a Lawā stronghold called Umphai where the population consists of pure Lawā who are primitive, are potters and weave their own clothing. Two very good photographs representing Umphai Lawā women and taken by Dr. Hugh McCormick Smith, the former adviser to the Department of Fisheries, were also published in that paper. That was in 1932. The Umphai Lawā have now been visited (in May 1938) by the Rev. J. S. Holladay of the American Presbyterian Mission, Chiangmai, and from some notes kindly supplied by him the following is extracted.

In January 1938 three Lawā men came to Dr. Cort of the McCormick Hospital, Chiangmai, and asked for medicine, saying that there was much sickness in and around their villages (Umphai and Ban Loop). They also wanted some one to come and baptize several of their members who had decided to become Christians. Rev. Holladay was anxious to go himself to their villages but was not able to do so before May that same year. He went on foot from Wang Lung (not far from Müang Hot on the Ping river) to Bô Luang, a distance of 31 kilometres, and from there in a north-westerly direction another 70 kilometres had to be covered to Ban Loop. It proved a difficult march because of the early rains and the slippery state of the mountain tracks. The following is taken literally from Rev. Holladay's notes:—

A little farther on we came to *Heart Break Hill*, which seems to have perpetual rain, heavy forest excluding sunlight, and a very slippery clay path. This is the hillside upon which the iron mines were located. We had heard all kinds of stories about these iron mines¹ and the methods of mining. One of the most fantastic was that the iron was mined in a cave or tunnel, and that no man dared enter it. The spirits would allow no one but women to go in, and they could wear no clothing at all.² Our guide was one of the chief iron workers and he told us that they dug the iron out of the hillside just wherever they happened upon it. He found a piece of the ore, and assured us as we examined it that there is nothing mysterious about it except the spirit ceremony which, with but little variation, is carried out before all major undertakings. Timber workers have very similar ceremonies.

That afternoon we decided to stop early and dry our clothing and beds. We had passed through Oompai, and had tiffin in their spirit-house while the rain poured. We camped in the spirit-house at Chang Maw, the pottery village. The only furniture in these houses were huge drums and a fireplace. The drums were made of hollow logs, possibly eight feet long and twenty inches in diameter. The drum heads were evidently green buffalo hides stretched over the ends and laced from end to end with thongs of green hide. They were always directly over the fireplace, probably to keep them dried out. We were told that if we beat one we would have to pay a fine of Ticals 5.00, for the spirits would be angry if we wakened them and did not feed them. They are only used in case of ceremonies and sickness.

We found the front portions of several buffalo skulls placed up over head in both temples, but no one could tell us why, though we asked several times in both villages. There was quite a bit of carving in both spirit-houses but with no discoverable significance. One idea repeated several times was a man standing on a crocodile's nose, though for no apparent reason. There were many geometrical designs whose significance, if they had any, was lost in antiquity. At both places there were two carved boards about 12 feet long planted on end in the cleared space before the temple. These were strongly suggestive of totem poles. I asked if they always had them, and they said *yes*, but could tell me nothing of their significance or the method of making or planting them. There was also a post planted near the entrance to the spirit-house in both villages. Flowers and other offerings were

¹ identical with the mines mentioned in Mr. Hutchinson's paper, p. 164.—*E. S.*

² This same kind of superstition is found among the Khā or Moi Mnong in French Indochina where it is said that only naked women of that tribe are allowed by the spirits to mine the copper from which the Mnong smiths hammer out quite fine figures in the shape of elephants and other animals (see Henri Maitre in his monumental work *Les Jungles Moi*).—*E. S.*

placed upon it. It looked like a phallic symbol $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet high with only the top end carved, and that only slightly and roughly. Here again I could find no explanation. I wondered if it were reticence, but flattered myself that it was really ignorance, or I should have had some clue.

The rest of the trip was uneventful except that on the morning of the third day we struck our only leeches and they served to hurry the carriers along until we were able to make what we had expected to be one and a half day's march in one day. The entire way from Baw Luang to Ban L'oop was through very mountainous country. We saw very few rice fields in the valleys, though the steep hillsides around the L'wa villages which we passed were all covered with rice fields which have evidently been used for a century or more—perhaps for many centuries.

These fields are very interesting, for one hears of other tribes using one hillside for three years, and moving on from ruined fields to ruin new ones. But the oldest L'wa cannot remember anything about when his village was first settled. He has heard no story of his tribe ever having lived elsewhere. They seem to have very little tradition indeed. The fields are cultivated for one year only. All brush and young trees are cut down and burned. Rice is planted and cultivated by hand with a short, peculiarly shaped, cultivating knife. They keep their fields as clean as a garden until the rice is quite high. After harvest, the field is allowed to grow up to grass and weeds and brush and trees. The stumps never die in one year, and soon send out lusty sprouts. The field is then left for seven years before it is planted again. If it can be left for ten years so much the better, but this can seldom be done. This means that each village must have enough fields for seven years without replanting.

There are regular rice fields in the valleys which these people plant, but they are not extensive and are used as insurance against the complete failure of the hill rice. The people do not like the rice grown there as well as they like the hill rice. I must say that I admire their taste, for none other is as good as the rice grown on the very steep hillsides.

In cultivating their fields they seldom if ever walk up and down the hillside, but usually back and forth in ascending or descending zig-zag paths. This may partially account for the fact that though these hillsides have been cultivated for scores of years, they are still not badly eroded. In fact many of the fields show not the least signs of erosion. It is a lovely sight to see the young rice crops across the hillsides so steep that it seems as though they must slip into the gorge far far below except for the network of paths which bind them in place. The low hills are never chosen, only the highest and seemingly the steepest. I wonder if in ancient times this might not have proved the best protection against marauding bands, perhaps also the farthest from mosquitoes, and so the healthiest place to live in.

Some of the finest jackfruit trees I have ever seen were growing on the tops of these high mountain fastnesses. The pomalo seems to thrive, though judging from the sourness of the oranges brought me, I should say their sugar content was probably as close to nil as possible. Otherwise I saw very little of any fruit or vegetable. Their food is very poor, and this no doubt accounts for most of their sickness. Their rice is apt to run short, and they plant little besides peppers and corn in their garden spots. They seldom kill a pig aside from their ceremonial feasts, and for meat depend upon the mountain crab, frogs and toads. Many of them eat dogs, but this is not universal, for I believe it is true that no one at Ban L'oop eats dogs.

In the matter of pleasures, they all smoke pipes and are as free in lending their pipes as we are in lending our pencils. The babies cut their teeth on big brother's pipe, when big brother is hardly large enough to carry both baby and pipe. Almost all of them drink a home-made liquor, and this is one of the big items in their feasts and ceremonies. The Government does not try to stop them, but collects one baht per year from each house for the privilege of making all they can use. This may be one reason why they are apt to run out of rice. About the only play among the children was walking on stilts. Of course I was there when they were all busy with the rice crops, and so I probably did not see all of their pleasures and pastimes. However I feel sure that they have very little in the way of amusements aside from those mentioned.

Their clothing is quite different from that of most of the other hill tribes. The women wear a large loose shirt which looks like an inverted sack with holes for the arms and neck. They can sit down on the floor and pull the shirt down over their feet, pull their arms inside and really be quite snug and warm in spite of a cold wind. Pulling the shirt down over their knees also seems to be a matter of modesty, for the skirts are quite short. As a protection against gnats which are quite voracious, they wrap a piece of cloth around each arm above the elbow, and around each leg below the knee. These are tied with a string. They love strings of silver or glass beads, and are often quite loaded down with them. The beads of silver are the old Siamese tical shape—that is the bead-shaped tical. Heavy silver bracelets are also worn quite generally, these ornaments probably representing their savings banks.

The men wear a loose bag-like pair of trousers which look as if they had kicked the corners out of a sack and walked off in it. The tailoring is not of a very high order, though the weaving which they do is very durable, and rather pleasing in design,—design being chiefly confined to the women's skirts. The men also wear a coat with real sleeves in it, which is one of the few evidences of an effort at tailoring, but may be a purchased article at that. One of the most noticeable things characterizing this people is that

they always put on their oldest and most ragged clothing when they go to market. I wondered whether they did so because they felt that travelling was hard on clothing, or because they got better bargains when they did not look too prosperous; or is it protection against robbers?

Quite often they wear a head cloth—not a turban—which I belived to be mainly protection for the head when carrying with a head band. They carry everything with a head band, but when going long distances, the men at least have cleverly shaped pieces of wood which protect their shoulders from the cutting of the ropes which they use as shoulder straps to help distribute the weight of the load. This piece of wood is shaped to fit the body, and has a hole for the rope burned through the length of it. By pushing on this piece with the hands, it is possible to take the entire weight off the head and shoulders, and so rest without stopping. The load is carried well up on the shoulders. It is most handy when going through brush, and a good load can be carried without much trouble. The hand can be free when the going gets steep. I carried one for several kilometres, and found it very comfortable,—preferable to the carrying pole.

The funeral customs, with one exception, are not peculiar. In the village where we stayed (Ban L'oop), and I presume in all other villages as well, no one would have anything to do with burying the corpse. They always get someone from outside to come and do the work, preferably from another tribe, or perhaps necessarily so. There are a few Christians in Ban L'oop who do not hesitate to bury their own dead, or in case of need help their neighbours, for they have no fear of the evil spirits. Burying is the method of disposition.

The language is a puzzling thing. It seems that every village has a slightly different dialect, until villages two days journey apart can hardly understand one another. I presume that every village thinks it speaks the purest dialect. Our guide from Baw Luang could hardly understand the people of Ban L'oop. They often conversed in Lao. Most of the men know Lao as well as Karen, though the women and children are not so proficient. I was unable to take down a satisfactory vocabulary, but noted many rough breathings like the Greek aspirate, and several other indistinct and unusual sounds which I could imitate, but not commit to paper.

There are many villages in that district, but they are quite scattered owing to the fact that not every hill seems to be high enough, and water is not obtainable near the summits of others. At Ban L'oop there were two springs within ten minutes walk from the village. These springs had about the same flow the year around, and were said never to fail. Each had a stream about the size of a large finger. The method of carrying water to the house and storing it there was by use of bamboo joints with strings attached by which they could be hung on the wall or placed in a rack. It is a common sight to see a woman with seven or eight such joints, which are two feet long and

six inches in diameter, hung from her head and spread fanwise down her back, as she climbs the steep hill to her home.

There are two metal tablets said to be of gold, and to be buried in or near the village of Oompai, and to contain the following story:—

The loveliest maiden of all the earth, whose name was S'Mang Roh-eh, was much sought after and admired. The loveliest feature of this wonderful beauty was her hair, which hung to the ground. When it was combed, there was such music as had never been heard. It entranced all creation until, as the comb was drawn through it, the birds sang for sheer joy, chickens cackled and crowed, dogs howled, babies ceased their crying to listen in wonder, and the very trees waved their branches in gentle ecstasy.

It so happened that among all of her admirers the only one who caught her fancy and captured her heart was a youth from the spirit world. This was awkward, for no one but the girl herself could see him. After much discussion and many tears, it was decided at last to celebrate the wedding in most elaborate style. The relatives of the bride and groom were all invited, and they were many, but the relatives of the bride could not see nor converse with those of the groom. The feast was set however, and the required number of plates heaped with rice and the most delicious of fruits and meats. The guests fell to with a will, and the plates of the spirit guests had to be refilled as often as those of their more tangible fellows.

After the feast, the bride disappeared and was not seen again for some time. At last however, she did come back bringing her young child with her for a visit. She also brought a chest of gold as a gift to her parents, who were more delighted to see their lovely daughter and her child than to see the gold. However they ran their hands through the gold and admired it too, for it was not only pieces of gold but golden ornaments as well,—more gold than they had seen in all their lives. Their joy was short lived however, for their daughter announced that she and her child must return to her husband in the spirit land. Even the thought of all the gold could not comfort them in the least.

After S'Mang Roh-eh and her child had disappeared, her parents were sad and lonely. Thinking to take pleasure in the only thing left to remind them of their daughter, they went into the house and opened the beautiful chests in which the gold had been brought to them, but the gold, even as their hearts, had been turned into wood and dust and dry leaves. There was nothing left but a sad memory.

It is said that S'Mang Roh-eh and her husband Kho-era Glawm Sai had a large garden at Doi Câm, near Maa Chaem, and that whenever a weary passer-by wished for any of the delicious fruits which grew in the garden it invariably seemed to pick itself and come without visible agency to the hand

of the traveller. Mangoes, pineapple, sugar cane and any number of other refreshing fruits thus cheered the heart of the wayfarer according to his wish.

It is also said that the descendants of this woman never eat dog flesh, and that is the reason that the headman of each village and his family may be the only people in that village who do not eat dogs. The headman is invariably a descendant of S'Mang Roh-eh and Kho-era Glawm Sai, and may not eat such things. It is also said that no one in the village of L'oop indulges in this particular delicacy, though I could not find out whether this was because of kinship with the lovely lady of the singing hair or not.

So far Rev. Holladay. Since then the Umphai Lawā have been visited twice and for a longer period by His Serene Highness Prince Sanit P. Rangsit, a young and promising anthropologist from the University of Zürich. Prince Sanit has made a very thorough study of most of the Lawā living there and on the Bô Luang plateau during the latter part of 1938 and the beginning of this year. Besides taking a large numbers of excellent photographs and cinema records the Prince has collected a good number of ethnographica in the form of jewelry, ornaments and household articles. The material collected will be used by the Prince for his doctor's thesis. It will then be possible to obtain a scholarly and well documented description of this very interesting and sympathetic people which once in olden days constituted the bulk of the population of Northern Siam.

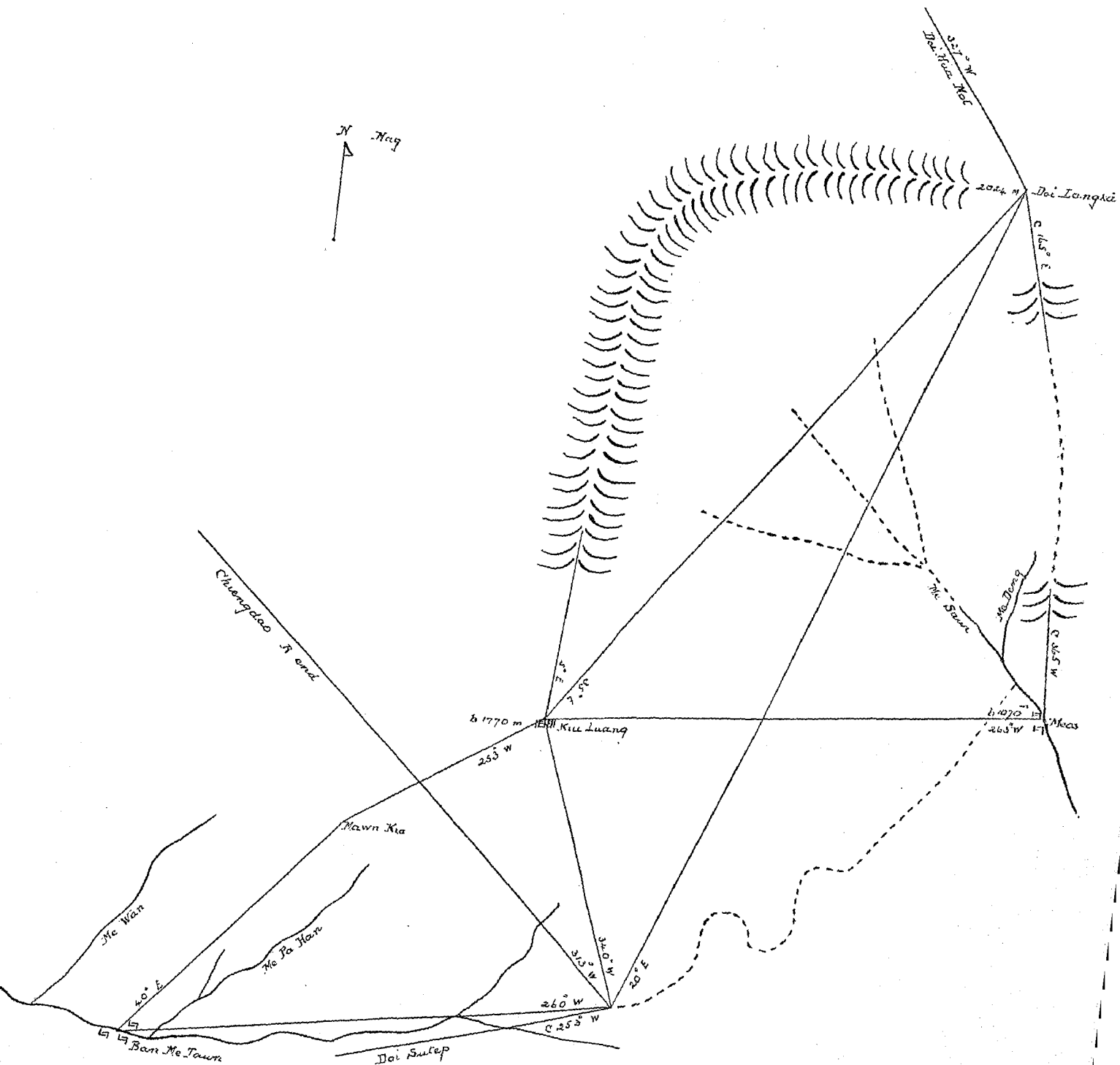
In the above mentioned paper by Mr. E. W. Hutchinson and the writer there is mentioned on p. 182 the so-called capital of the Lawā, Mūang Soi (according to Colonel Gerini), of which remains should still exist not far from Keng Soi in the Me Ping. According to Mr. T. W. Bevan of the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation, Ltd., who frequently does the trip from Raheng to Chiangmai in order to inspect his firm's teak logs, there are, at Keng Soi, ruins of an old temple, behind which are three *prachedis*. From the photos, kindly sent me by Mr. Bevan, it is clearly seen that these monuments are in the ordinary North Thai-Burmese style and therefore cannot be of great age, and they certainly cannot be associated with the Lawā. However, north of Keng Soi and behind it are traces of what look like bunds. A careful examination of these bunds might perhaps prove that this is the site of the much talked of Mūang Soi. The place-names in this region such as Um Lū and Um Pā show their association with the Lawā (*um* meaning *water* in the Lawā language). This part of the country is also full of iron ore. Mr. Bevan in 1936

was given an old iron hammer found on Doi Ngām, and there are evidently many iron mines round about, which were worked formerly by the Lawā who are noted as iron miners and blacksmiths. An old Lawā iron mine is situated at Huei Hom Sen at the Ping river above Kaw. In the photograph illustrating that mine the two persons there are pointing at old crowbar marks where the ore was detached. The Kamnan of Kaw said that the Lawā used to take the ore upstream to be smelted at Um Pā, where the ground was found to be littered with slagheaps. Mr. Bevan also found behind Ban Gaw Chok a piece of pottery which is ornamented with a headless person sitting down with a dog seated beside him. It would be very interesting to have this piece of pottery closely examined by an expert.

Mr. Bevan further mentions that up in the hill country behind Um Pā is rolling land where the B. B. T. C. used to rest their elephants and that the headman told him that there is the remains of an old temple and a round shallow depression in the ground which possibly was a kind of meeting place.

Finally Mr. Bevan was told that about one day's march (from Keng Soi) towards the Burmah border there is said to be the ruins of a city called Mūang Phya Udom. Would this be the fabled capital of the Lawā? or some other old Lawā town? In the temple in Ban Nā there is said to be some information about Keng Soi, but whether in writing or only as an oral tradition (kept by the monks) Mr. Bevan does not say.

Bangkok, 20th June 1939.



Sketch map to illustrate note on
 Hills—North-East of Chiengmai. (H. G. B.)

