HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE REGION WEST OF CHIANG MAI

by

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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 Thewi began her reign in Hariphunchai (Lamphun)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, Jinakalamālī, 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

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3. The early history of the Chiang Mai–Lamphun 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. Jinakalamālī, for instance, somewhere mentions the place “Samenga”. This could be present-day Samiang (Som chi), 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 accidently 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 (Lampang), 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.

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

5. นิวอง (n. นิวอง อัยโลกเทียบ). According to northern Thai usage, a miøng is a populated geographic area the borders of which are formed by the surrounding mountains; it is a state in a valley. A miøng can have several villages or settlements, one of which would be the principle place with the seat of the local administration. If the miøng were important enough for a member of the aristocracy or the high bureaucracy to rule it, it had a fortified settlement called wiøng (วัง). Although modern administration ignores the traditional miøng, 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 amphoe (อำเภอ) or tambon (ตำบล). Thus, for example, from Chiang Mai one would not travel to Amphoe Hot, but to Miøng Hot, and even now people travelling from Jom Thong to Hot, would go from Miøng Jom Thong to Miøng Hot, the border being a few mountain spurs reaching the Mi Ping from the west—although technically both miøng are on the Ping! Chiang Mai is still another miøng 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 Nong 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 Māha
Sāmi Satthamma Rācha Rattana⁹ built the jedī and wihān of this monas­	ery called Wat Si Kōṭ¹⁰, 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 Thewi¹² 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
Yōt 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 Thewi 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” (เข้าวียง), “enter the fortified settlement (of Chiang Mai)”,
because here the overlord had his residence.

6 ้วิ вกศรนร (วัง) ร. มั่นอย่ บริ.
7 ้กขยม.
8 See: จันทร์ เหมล, คืนส้าว จุลศิลป์ ทีศาล. โน: ศิลปะกร (ต.ก.) ครอส มาลิน สรุป ๓๒-๓๖.
9 P. Mahāsīmi Saddhammarājaraṭṭana.
10 ้กขิลศิลป์.
11 The inscription calls them พระแม่ทวี.
12 P. Mahādevī.
king, or the mother of the reigning king, or the chief queen of the reigning king. Therefore, the Mahā Thewi in our inscription may refer to either the widow of King Ti Lok (r. 1441-1487), or to the mother of King Phra Yot13, or to Phra Yot's chief queen. It is curious that the Mahā Sāmi, in order to establish the ubosot precinct, should have asked the Mahā Thewi 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.

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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 Khru Khantayaphōn17, who is the abbot of Wat Phra Yot was not the son but the grandson of Ti Lok.

13. Phra Yot was not the son but the grandson of Ti Lok.
14. แม่ทิว (ที่ เมือง ที่ หัวน้ำพร้าว ที่ เขื่อนไยใหม่).
15. บ้านสนบ้าน.
16. น้ำบัว, แม่ป่า.
17. พระครูทันใจอากาศ.
Si Kot 18 in Chiang Mai and is the head monk of the district of San Pà Tông 19, Müang 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 wihan, jedi, ubōsot hall, one or several kuti (P. kāyi, “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 wihan 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 wihan, 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 Khantayāphôn 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

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18. วัดศรีภูมิ ศ. พระธีรศรี ถ. เมือง จ. เชียงใหม่.
19. เจ้าคุณราลิกสิริ ป. ข้าหลวง.

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 Khâm letters. The slab is broken off at the sixth line. The language of the inscription is Yuan; the cyphers belong to the Tham$^{20}$ type, with one exception: the cypher 7 in the horoscope belongs to the Hôra$^{21}$ 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 Mã Páo.

Transliteration$^{22}$

\[ a \] \[ b \] \[ c \] \[ d \] \[ e \] \[ f \] 

20. ฐฐฐ.
21. ฏฏ.
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 "ṭh"; I have rendered it as a question mark.

The Ы 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.
Translation

At the (auspicious) time, when cullasakkadīja had attained 913, in a year (called) Kun according to the Khôm; in the Thai language one says: Year Ruang Kai; in the month Migasira, sukka-pakkha catutti 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 x 33 x 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 ṣī, which could make this the end of an inscription.

23. ṣī: The scribe probably meant ṣī.  
24. The ꞉ has the form of a Yuan subwritten ꞉.  
25. I have not translated ṣī = ṣī = 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. Mrigasirśa) is the third month in the Līn 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 (คำมุขคำสอน). I suppose he meant "according to the language in which the teachings are written", or "in the Pāli language", because ṇī "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 × 30 × 4 cm and contains 11 lines of writing. The letters, once carefully engraved as can still be seen, are of the Fak Khâm 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 ज्ञेक्ष्य being part of the word ज्ञेक्ष्य “cetiya”; that beneath, in 1.2, are the letters ज्ञेक्ष्य which could be part of ज्ञेक्ष्य “to give, to bestow upon”; that 1.4 ends with यू and that 1.5 begins with ज्ञेक्ष्य meaning ज्ञेक्ष्य “to donate (a) male person(s)”; that 1.7 ends with म्न and 1.8 begins with यू meaning यू “person(s) intent upon gain of merit”; that in the middle of 1.8 occur the words ज्ञेक्ष्य “this country”; that 1.9 ends with म्न and 1.10 begins with ज्ञेक्ष्य meaning ज्ञेक्ष्य “to create disorder, to change what has been decreed, to dispossess”; and that 1.11 closes the inscription with the words ज्ञेक्ष्य “every person”, यू 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 jedi; 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 wihân, the jedi, 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 "LL", 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 Mai Pao 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 Miiang 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 Miiang Pai, to the northwest of Chiang Mai, and Miiang 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 Miiang Pai and Miiang 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. Mūang Yuam (Mā Sariang) 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 Mūang Hāang, Bān Kamphans, Bān Mūang 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 Mūang (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. เหมอน ม. (M. นฤติรัตน์ ว. นฤติรัตน์).
30. แม่เนิน.
31. บ้านเมืองเชียง, บ้านกัมพัง, บ้านม่วงโพก.
32. พระบรมข้าพเจ้าดิน.
Figure 2. Piece B
Figure 5. Face II partly reconstructed: pieces A, B, and C in their original alignment.