

HOMAGE TO PRINCE DAMRONG

by

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Before passing on to the main theme of this article, the homage to Prince Damrong paid by the Danish scholar and historian of religion Mr. Frits Pullich I should like to say a few words about Mr. F. Pullich himself and about his activities.

Mr. F. Pullich was born on 4th of August 1888 and died on 19th of July 1980. His father was in his day a very well known mathematician. He began his studies in 1909 and passed his examination in 1920 having studied both in Denmark and in Germany. In Denmark he was a pupil of two renowned professors: Vilhelm Grønbech who was professor of history of religions and Dines Andersen who taught Sanskrit and Pali¹⁾. In Germany his instructors were the professors H. Jacobi and K. F. Geldner. One of his fellow-students in Germany was H. v. Glasenapp who has amiably remembered him in his interesting book: *Meine Lebensreise* (1964) – more than 50 years since he saw him for the last time.

Mr. F. Pullich has written several books; most of them were in the Danish language.

The following titles may be mentioned: *Indian Religions, 1928–30. History of Religions* (1st edition 1935) which has been used at the University of Copenhagen for many years and is still used there. *The Gospel of Life, 1940*, which deals with the earliest history of Christianity (translated into Swedish 1941). *A Raid into the World of Religion, 1957*. *The Buddha's Path to Nirvana, 1961*. *Brahmanism and Hinduism, 1962*.

Frits Pullich used to say that three events overshadowed his whole life: his contact and intimate friendship with Vilhelm Grønbech, his voyage to the Far East, and his profession as a lecturer in Sweden (at the School for Women Fellow Citizens, directed by the headmaster, the Baroness Honorine Hermelin).

He often dwelt on his voyage to the Far East and one of the last times I came to see him in his beautiful home in Hellebæk near Elsinore he spoke vividly about his experiences in Thailand and above all about his visit to Prince Damrong in Bangkok which had been of eminent importance to him.

When I was taking leave that day Frits Pullich presented me with his diary called "Voyage to the Far East 1920–21" saying: This is my diary from the voyage

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1. His Pāli Reader (1st edition 1901) and Pāli Glossary (1st edition 1907) have recently been reprinted in India (Award Publication House, New Delhi, 1979)

to the Far East. I have had a deep interest in Thailand, its religion and history and in this book I have described my visit to the Father of Modern Thai History¹⁾, Prince Damrong. Will you take care of the book?

I promised to do so.

The book starts with the 30th of April 1920 and stops with the 1st of February 1921. It is through and through in Frits Pullich's neat and clear handwriting.

The voyage to the Far East began on 15th of September 1920 and lasted till February 1921. It was organized as an expedition the chief aim of which was to secure cinematographic shootings for educational purposes.

The leader of the expedition was Mr. Pullich's uncle, Alexander Svedstrup. He was a very well-known author who had partaken of an expedition to the Far East already in 1899-1900 and written a book on his impressions ("The Way of the Danish", 1902). As a token of gratitude he had afterwards sent this book to H. M. the King of Thailand.

Mr. Pullich used one of the ships of the East Asiatic Company. Among his travelling companions on board were the Danish Prince Axel and his consort Princess Margaretha who were great friends of Mr. Pullich and a Thai lieutenant, Mr. Çri who was very helpful and amiable to him as an informant about Thailand.

The voyage was far from being a safe one; in fact the ship very nearly went down but was saved in the eleventh hour. This happened on 22nd of December 1920 at 5 o' clock early in the morning when fire broke out on board. At this moment the ship was about 60 miles from land in all directions; the weather was rather stormy and the rain poured down.

The above-mentioned visit to Prince Damrong took place on the 20th of December. two days before Mr. Pullich started his dangerous homeward voyage. He was accompanied by his uncle, Mr. Alexander Svedstrup (in the diary referred to as "Alex"). I quote literally from Mr. Pullich's diary:

"After tiffin Alex and I go to visit Prince Damrong. He lives in a wonderful big villa in a beautiful garden. He welcomes us standing on the steps and is extremely nice and kind. We are invited by him to stay with him for an hour or so and to take tea with him and a small young princess, his daughter. They wear panung both of them. The conversation which the Prince carries on with Alex is interesting. The Prince gives an account of His opinion concerning the cinematograph and states that this may both be of great benefit to people and do much harm to them. He thinks that Alex and I are trying to hit the nail on the head.

1. Frits Pullich thinks of the words about Prince Damrong in the book : "Lords of Life" by H. R.H. Prince Chula Chakrabongse, London 1960, p. 238.

Alex describes the photographs we have made and explains that we have photographed wats and even monks walking around in the morning. The Prince spoke about the beautiful life led by the monks who were not allowed to work for money and he lightly and discreetly touched upon the curious fact that Christian missionaries attached the greatest importance to "conversion".

Alex asks how it can be that Buddhists pray to the Buddha. Buddhism teaches, he says, that the Buddha cannot help. The Prince answers:

"We do not pray to the Buddha. We praise him and adore him. We meditate. I have myself a small chapel where I spend some time daily meditating."

I ask why small images of the Buddha are offered up to the Buddha. The answer of the Prince is that this is done in order to consolidate Buddhism and to secure that it will be still extant in future."

Prince Damrong is well-known in Denmark to everyone who has visited Frederiksborg Castle and its Chapel (in the North of Zealand) for his escutcheon is seen in this chapel, hanging among other escutcheons which belong to different Danish and Foreign Princes.

The inscription of the escutcheon of Prince Damrong runs as follows:

Damrong Princeps in Siam
Manopubbangama Dhamma
13. Juli M D C D X X X

These three lines are in three languages. The first line is in the Latin language and means: Damrong Prince in Thailand.

The second line is a quotation from the Dhammapada and is in the Pali language. According to the late Danish indologist, professor P. Tuxen, the words may be translated into English as follows: "All phenomena are conditioned by thought".

The third line is in the Danish language (excepting the year which is expressed in Latin numbers) and means: The 13th of July 1930.

When Mr. Pullich asked me to take care of his diary in which he had described his meeting with the Father of Modern Thai History, I remembered the escutcheon of Prince Damrong and the motto which constituted its inscription; and I understood that here the sympathy of the scholar for a religion professed by others had met the faithfulness of the true supporter.

So I was led to feel the force of the impression received by Mr. Pullich when he visited Prince Damrong and of the obligation he felt of paying homage to Him.