

## COMMENTS on CRITICISM

In an article which recently appeared in the Siam Society Newsletter, Dr. Michael Vickery criticises my ideas concerning the origin of the Thai mai han ākāt (which I think may have derived from the Mon/Khmer virāma and thus may have been used by Thai scribes prior to 1361 A.D.) and my dating of the bronze repoussé Buddha images on the aṇḍa “dome” of the stūpa Phra Thāt Hariphunchai (which I think were made around 1330 A.D.). Dr. Vickery writes that I have no text in support, that I am denying objective evidence, and that my argument does not hold up palaeographically.<sup>1</sup> Here, I would like to make a few comments on Dr. Vickery’s criticism.

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“... but it is entirely another matter to say that the adaptation of virama as mai han akat is older than consonantal doubling for the same purpose in the total absence of any text in support.”

I did not say or write anything like that.

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“Mon has continued to use virama up to the present. The only exception was Hariphunchai Mon around the 13th century which used double final consonants in place of virama ... Dr. Penth’s argument does not hold up paleographically ...”

Quite to the contrary, all of the Lamphūn Mon inscriptions have the virāma (and double consonants). Already Halliday had noted in 1930: “Le virāma est largement utilisé”.<sup>2</sup> The virāma clearly appears on the inscribed stones but usually seems to have been omitted in text editions of the inscriptions. Likewise, in text editions of other Mon (and Khmer) inscriptions the virāma often is not indicated.

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“... the origin of mai han akat was not from the virama, at least not directly ... it more likely derived from ... an identical sign as substitute for the syllable añ (ᳵ)... Of course certain proof of the above hypothesis requires an earlier text.”

In this part of his article, Dr. Vickery makes an interesting and, potentially, fruitful approach to investigating the early history and the origin of the mai han ākāt: studying the diacritical mark during its early stages of use. Such an approach indeed looks promising and may bring tangible, exact results (what is more, the same

method could be applied to investigate other diacritical marks as well). But that approach should be much more comprehensive, more detailed and more organized, listing the shapes of the mai han ākāt, its combinations with other letters, also its position in relation to neighbouring letters; the whole has to be tied to secure dates and should preferably be reproduced on a chart. As long as that is not done, the examples of mai han ākāt quoted by Dr. Vickery hardly have a bearing upon the provenance and the date of birth of the mai han ākāt, but only keep their face value of unprocessed research material: varied examples of the subsequent history and use of the mai han ākāt, after it had come into existence. Convincing conclusions cannot yet be drawn from them.

The “identical sign” that Dr. Vickery refers to and which he sees exemplified in the Wat Pā Dāng inscription of 1406 A.D. (inscr. no. 9) in connection with, i.a., the word sangha, looks exactly like a mai han ākāt and is written over the second consonant. Prima facie, it seems to be a mai han ākāt. However, it may not be a mai han ākāt although it has the outward features of one. That is to say, the scribe may simply have used the same type of stroke for both, the “genuine” mai han ākāt and another similar diacritical mark. Dr. Vickery does not express his ideas on that mark. I suppose it may be derived from, or have connection with, the diacritical mark mai kang lai ไม้กั้งไทร in Tham and Fak Khām scripts. In its earliest stage known to me (1470 A.D.)<sup>3</sup>, it looks similar to an unālōm อุณาโลม lying on its side, the thicker part to the left, i.e. a near-circle with a wave attached. In later inscriptions, up to the present, it looks more like a flattened Tham ṅ ๓ with an additional circle in the upper stroke. I do not know the origin of the mai kang lai, but it seems restricted to certain Indian words, for instance sangha, the n being the mai kang lai (written on top of the gh). In the example of 1470 mentioned, it is used with the word saṅga “lion”, the n here again being the mai kang lai.

In northern Thailand, it is understood that the mai kang lai is more or less the same as the common anusvāra .° (nikhahit นิคหิต, in Lān Nā called mai kang ไม้กั้ง). But there must be something more to it because it does not occupy the same position as the anusvāra. Perhaps the mai kang lai is a contraction of two elements or represents any nasal, as does ṃ in Sanskrit (saṃgha, dānaṃ, etc.).

Thus, the mai han ākāt or “identical sign” in sangha etc. in the Wat Pā Dāng inscription may be a simplified mai kang lai. But to make the mai han ākāt develop from it, as Dr. Vickery hypothesises, would need substantial evidence.

I still think it is bold to argue that the mai han ākāt was invented shortly before 1361 because our oldest dated stone inscriptions with mai han ākāt date from 1361. As I see it, the date 1361 is only a terminus post quem. There are many undated inscriptions with mai han ākāt some of which might conceivably be older than 1361. And I still think that with present knowledge, a better tool is the theory that the mai han ākāt derived from the virāma, and that therefore the mai han ākāt may have been used by Thai scribes before 1361.

The virāma is a horizontal stroke over the last consonant of a closed syllable. It is usually slightly curved, either upward or downward. If the virāma was not in the mind of the early Thai scribes, if it had nothing to do with the origin of the mai han ākāt, how is one to explain that (a) the early mai han ākāt not only resemble the virāma in form but are also placed over the last consonant, and that (b) in later inscriptions the mai han ākāt gradually shifts its position to the left, until it occupies its present position /24

I am inclined to go even one step further and to suggest, as a working theory, that the virāma was also involved in the origin of the diacritical mark mai kong ไ้ก้ง. The mai kong, like the mai kang lai, has not found its way into use with central Thai letters, but it is one of the diacritical marks regularly used with Tham and Fak Khām letters. The mai kong is a slightly curved downward stroke not dissimilar to a long comma or to a long accent grave, written over the first consonant of a closed syllable. In central Thai script, it is either represented by the mai han ākāt, for instance in the words hua หัว and wua วัว, or it is not represented at all, for instance in the word khon คน. In the Wat Kān Thōm inscription from c. 1300 A.D.<sup>5</sup> it is written over the second consonant, but later on, in the early examples of Fak Khām script, it has moved a little or extended its position to the left and begins already over the last part of the first consonant. In Tham script, it is always written on top of the first (i.e. the upper) consonant, there being no other space available.

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“Having denied the objective evidence of mai han ākāt, Dr. Penth went on to ...”

To deny evidence implies intention to mishandle facts. Such sweeping statements, touching upon personal or scholarly integrity, do not advance us. I deny that I denied the objective evidence of the mai han ākāt and hope to be open to sober argumentation.

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“In three JSS articles I demonstrated the very strong evidence that Jaya Sangram, Saen Phu, and Nam Thuam are fictitious, and that the only reliable 14th-century king list is that of Wat Phra Yün ... the chronicles have inserted two fictitious generations ... Nam Thuam belongs to a legend found in both Chiang Mai and Sukhothai sources.”

I don't know why the Wat Phra Yün inscription of Lamphün (1370 A.D.), while listing the ancestors of King Kü Nā back to King Mang Rāi, leaves out the names of kings Chai Songkhram and Sān Phū.<sup>6</sup> One could imagine several reasons for the omission, the simplest being that the author of the inscription did not know the names, or that he overlooked them, or that the scribe forgot to copy the names from his draft. That, in turn, could have happened because the author (the monk Sumana from Sukhōthai ?) was in a hurry, or because he was a stranger and not too familiar with the Chiang Mai royal genealogy, or because the scribe was not a Chiang Mai court official, etc.

Whatever the reasons for the omission, the inscription of Wat Phra Suwanna Mahā Wihān from Phayao, dated 1411, contains a list of kings up to that date of 1411, and here kings Chai Songkhram and Sān Phū occupy their usual places.<sup>7</sup> That inscription certainly was made under the direction of a court official. In fact, he was the king's uncle or else was very close to him, and besides he was particularly loyal and capable, wherefore he received the unusual title of Sī Mūn (40,000) instead of the usual Mūn (10,000) and received Phayao as his province. It seems quite impossible that the names of kings Sān Phū and Chai Songkhram were invented between 1370 and 1411 and, within a period of only forty years, became so deeply engraved in the mind of an elderly, highly placed courtier, that this important official listed them as ancestors of his own king.

As for the troublemaker Pho Thāo Nam Thuam (the name means Prince Floodwater; probably he was born in a year with a memorable inundation), the chronicles say that he came up from Tāk and forced his way into Lamphün (which seems to have then been the seat of the Ping State government); but he was quickly overcome and exiled to Chiang Tung. He may or may not be identical with the Sukhōthai troublemaker of the same name: there certainly was more than one flood; or else the same man may have suffered setbacks in Sukhōthai as well as in the Ping State. There does not seem to be a need for a theory that he or they were legendary figures.

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“There must have been in each generation a mahathevi with several sons, at least two of whom were ranked as brañā.”

Definitely not. Phayā (branā) means “King” in northern parlance of that period, and usually king of Lān Nā in inscriptions from Lān Nā. There were one or two possible exceptions which I took into consideration in the conference paper quoted by Dr. Vickery.<sup>8</sup>

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“More significant is the evidence of these dated inscriptions that in 1489 a Maharajathevi donated thong sako, the material of which the controversial Buddha reliefs are made.”

Dr. Vickery is referring to the stone inscription from Wat Khuang Chum Kao of 1489 A.D. (inscr. no. 68).<sup>9</sup> The inscription says that in 1489, the mahā rācha thewī มหาราชเทวี donated a certain amount of the metal alloy thòng jangkō (here called tòng sakō) with which to cover the top of the stūpa of Wat Khuang Chum Kao. This monastery has not yet been identified, but it certainly was at quite some distance from the city of Lamphūn, not in Lamphūn. As for the lady, the stone inscription calls her a mahā rācha thewī (queen of the ruling king), not a maha thewī มหากษัตริย์ (widow of the deceased king mother of the ruling king) as the title reads on the Buddha image inscription. A mahā thewī was infinitely higher in rank.

The matter recorded in that stone inscription is nothing out of the ordinary, we know of many donations of the kind, and it has nothing to do with the thòng jangkō Buddha images on the stūpa Phra Thāt Hariphunchai.

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Dr. Vickery offers the suggestion that the thòng jangkō Buddha images on the Phra Thāt Hariphunchai were made at one time, and that the inscriptions on the images were added later by other persons, not by the original donors of the Buddha images. That appears quite impossible. Of the several thousand inscribed Buddha images and other inscribed religious objects that I have examined, I have never come across anything like that. A person makes an image or an object, inscribes it or not, and offers it to the Three Gems or the Sāsana. No other person would claim it as his donation or inscribe it with his name, because that would be trying to steal the puñña or kusala from the real donor, trying to improve one’s own kamma by

cheating, something that cannot be done. As for the Buddha images on the Phra Thāt Hariphunchai, the inscriptions on two of them say clearly "I made the image", and the other two inscriptions leave no doubt that the scribe (or the scribes) was a contemporary of the donor and wrote down what he was told by the donor. Inscriptions and images cannot be separated, they belong to the same period. If Dr. Vickery dates the inscriptions on the images to around 1400 A.D. and perhaps as late as 1500, he will have to take up the matter with art historians too.

*Hans Penth*

## Endnotes

1. Michael Vickery: From Lamphun to Inscription Nr. 2. Summary of a Lecture Given at the Siam Society on 14 October 1986. The Siam Society Newsletter (3.1) 1987 p.2-6.
2. R. Halliday: Les inscriptions môn du Siam. BEFEO (30.1-2) 1930 p.86.
3. ยันส์ เพนธ์ "คำจารึกที่ฐานพระพุทธรูปในนครเชียงใหม่" กรุงเทพฯ สำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี พ.ศ. 2519 พระพุทธรูปองค์ที่ 2 วัดพระเจ้าเม็งราย ภาพ 2.ข และ 2.ค.
4. Hans Penth: Mai Han Ākāt. JSS (73) 1985 p.176-181.
5. ยันส์ เพนธ์ "จารึกวัดกานโถม" ศิลปวัฒนธรรม (6.3) 2528 หน้า 77-80.
6. ฉ่ำ ทองคำวรรณ "หลักที่ 62 ศิลปินวัดพระยืน จังหวัดลำพูน" ประชุมศิลาจารึกภาคที่ 3 กรุงเทพฯ สำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี พ.ศ. 2508 หน้า 136-144.  
A.B.Griswold/Prasert na Nagara: The Inscription of Wat Pra Yün. JSS (62.1) 1974 p.123-141.
7. เข็ม มีเต็ม/ประสาน บุญประกอบ/ประเสริฐ วัฒนคร "คำจารึกศิลาจารึกกษัตริย์ราชวงศ์มังราย ลพ./9" ศิลปากร (24.2) 2523 หน้า 46-51.
8. Hans Penth: Inscriptions and Images on the Phra Mahā Thāt in Lamphün. Paper presented at the International Conference on Thai Studies, Bangkok 1984, Conference Volume No. 6: Art and Archaeology. - The matter is also treated in an article with the same name currently (1987) under press with Artibus Asiae.
9. ฉ่ำ ทองคำวรรณ "หลักที่ 68 ศิลปินวัดหนองหนาม จังหวัดลำพูน" ประชุมศิลาจารึก ภาคที่ 3 กรุงเทพฯ สำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี พ.ศ. 2508 หน้า 166-173.