

## TIME IN TRANSITION: KING NARAI AND THE LUANG PRASOET CHRONICLE OF AYUTTHAYA

In January 1907 an Ayutthayan chronicle, found in a private house, was presented to the National Library of Thailand by *Luang Prasoet Aksornit*. The *Luang Prasoet Chronicle* (LPC), as it is now known, was written 226 years before, in 1681, by Siam's Chief Royal Astrologer (the *Phra Horathibodi*) at the behest of King Narai (r. 1656–1688). Widely recognised by students of the Thai past as the first text in the *phongsawadan* (dynastic) chronicle tradition, the LPC, strongly influenced the way history was written in Siam for the next two centuries.<sup>1</sup>

Extant versions of the LPC are believed to be based on an eighteenth-century copy of the original (Vickery 1979: 129). Unlike previous Thai chronicles, it uses lunar dates to measure the passage of time and contextualise events.<sup>2</sup> Thus as a source of chronological information it is a valuable artefact. Historians have employed the LPC for the dating of events in Siam between 1324 and 1605 and believe it is particularly accurate from the 16th century onwards.<sup>3</sup> Its lack of narrative continuity, however, means that the LPC is of little practical value for a historian trying to develop a picture of the Thai past.

The LPC's chronological accuracy and reliance on lunar dates relate directly to its close association with the records of Siam's court astrologers and it is in this, rather than its having

been widely accepted as Siam's first dynastic history, that the chronicle's true importance lies. By directing his *Phra Horathibodi* to write Siam's history, King Narai blended an astrological concept of time with a notion of historical chronicle's, in which humans were central, to form a new style of historical writing. Siam's kings had begun to assume a central role in the kingdom's historical literature before Narai's reign, but the LPC is recognised as the earliest of an important series of chronicles within the *phongsawadan* tradition written between the seventeenth century and King Mongkut's reign (r. 1851–1868) in the nineteenth century (Vickery 1979: 133).

Though the LPC, a historical text written by an astrologer, occupies a unique place in Thai historiography, it has parallels in both Europe and Asia. In format it is reminiscent of *The annals of St Gall*, a list of events that occurred in Gaul between the 8th and 10th centuries (White 1987: 6ff.), or the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, that begin in the year of Christ's birth (Savage 1982). Closer to Siam, in 1661, the Burmese appear to have added a series of entries to an indigenous dynastic history, the *Nidana Arambhakatha*, most of which was

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compiled in 1538, that closely resemble those in the LPC (Shorto 1961: 71).

The closest foreign parallels to the LPC, however, can be found in China where the links between astrological and historical writing were particularly strong. Joseph Needham's attempt to provide an English rendering of the *Thai Shih Kung* rank illustrates the point. He suggests several possibilities including 'Astrologer-Royal', 'Historiographer-Royal' and 'Chronologer-Royal' (1965: 10). The original meaning of the Chinese character for historian, *shih*, has been linked to astronomical affairs, particularly the selection of auspicious and inauspicious days for undertaking important activities. One result of these close links between astrology and history was the emergence of texts such as the Spring and Autumn Annals (*Ch'un-ch'iu*) which describe the period 722–481 BC. As lacking in narrative continuity as the LPC, and following a very similar format, the Spring and Autumn Annals were believed by Astrologers to be a useful aid in divination (Kierman 1962: 49).

Historians have painted the Han period, beginning in the third century BC, as a time of revolution in Chinese historical writing, exemplified by the emergence of texts such as the *Shi chi*. The *Shi chi*, written in the first century BC, came to be known in the second century AD as the 'Records of the historian', but its original title was *T'ai-shih kung shu* (The writings of his honour the Grand Astrologer) (Hulsewé 1961: 34–35). Astrology and history shared a close and long-standing relationship in China producing a rich historiographical tradition that survived for many centuries.

In Siam, the combination of astrological and historical writing also resulted in an important chronicle tradition. But while the *phongsawadan* texts have been subjected to thorough scholarly scrutiny, little attention has been paid to the genre's origins or the role of Narai, one of Ayutthaya's most well documented monarchs, in its development. Narai's contact with the world beyond Siam and his love of learning left their mark on the LPC, but his interest in astronomy and astrology was particularly influential. This article suggests why Narai assigned the writing of the kingdom's history to the *Phra Horathibodi* and traces the influence

of astrologer's records through the development of later *phongsawadan* texts.

## II

When Narai ordered the *Phra Horathibodi* to compile Ayutthaya's history he laid down specific instructions. These appear in the LPC's preamble.

'His Majesty was pleased to give orders to produce the records formerly written by Phra (Hora) and such other records as could be found in the Library and also the Phongsawadan and to incorporate all in this "History" and to copy and arrange them according to dates up to the present time.' (Frankfurter 1909: 3)

Though ordered to use such other records as could be found, the *Phra Horathibodi* clearly based most of his text on astrologers' records (*chotmai het hon*), the source with which he would have been most familiar. The *chotmai het hon* were compiled by Siam's court astrologers throughout the Ayutthaya period; those that have survived leave little doubt about the extent to which they influenced the LPC.<sup>4</sup>

As the records of astrologers, the *chotmai het hon* display an overriding interest in the movements of the planets, and in significant, as well as unusual or unpredictable celestial and earthly events. Entries in the *chotmai het hon* are always preceded by a set of numbers indicating the day, lunar date and year of occurrence. The regular motions of the planets were used by the astrologers to establish a system of time-keeping that has been regarded as Siam's most sophisticated form of temporal measurement. Those responsible for the crafting of the *chotmai het hon* were the inheritors and custodians of this complex system. Reflecting their concern with the timing of events, the *chotmai het hon* have been known as both calendars and as diaries of the Court Astrologers (Cook 1989: 9).

The importance of astrological prediction to court life and ritual, and to the kingdom more generally, ensured that the *chotmai het hon* were highly regarded for their temporal accuracy. In this respect their historical utility is obvious.

Unfortunately, copyists' errors over the centuries have compromised the accuracy of existing *chotmaihet hon* to the point where the dating of even well-known events is open to question. The LPC, however, at no more than a slight remove from the original, retained a greater degree of accuracy (Vickery 1979: 133, 140–41).

### Seventeenth-century Thai dynastic historical writing

Between the fifteenth century and the seventeenth century, before the *phongsawadan* emerged, *Tamnan* historical writing was the dominant form in Siam. Barbara Tuchman's description of certain European texts occupying the "shadowed region between legend and history" (1986: 6), could equally be applied to the *tamnan*. These texts, written by Buddhist monks, span thousands of years blending Buddhist history with fantastic tales of the supernatural. In the *Tamnan* the Buddha travels through time and across continents to make possible the future spread of his religion. The temporal distance that separates the modern reader from events described in the *tamnan*; the lack of contemporary accounts; and the fact that they did not rely upon the dating of events to place the narrative in a chronological framework has created problems for present day scholars trying to understand the early period of Thai history.

The growth of the *phongsawadan* tradition in the seventeenth century, at the expense of the *tamnan*, reflected a changing view of the past as secular affairs came to dominate the consciousness of Ayutthaya's historians. Buddhism continued to feature in Thai historical writing but the life of the kingdom had become the focus (Charnvit 1976: 150). As texts dealing with the affairs of a large kingdom written by court officials the *phongsawadan* differed considerably from the religiously based *tamnan*. King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910) reputedly referred to the *phongsawadan* as tales of dynasties and battles, an observation that neatly describes much of their content. While the *tamnan* were based entirely on a Buddhist view of the historical process, the *phongsawadan*, emphasised the deeds of humans, particularly those with political power.

A well known European work, *The short history of the kings of Siam*, written in 1640 by a Dutch trader, Jeremias van Vliet, contains the earliest evidence of Thai dynastic historical writing. Van Vliet's was one among many accounts of Siam written by foreign visitors to the kingdom in the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> The title of his work reveals its focus, and its origins reveal an interest in dynastic history that predates Narai's reign by several decades. It was an amalgam of many sources. The sections of the *Short history* dealing with the pre-Ayutthaya period appear to derive from Ayutthayan folklore, while descriptions of the years immediately prior to its writing come from van Vliet's own experience and knowledge of recent events (Vickery 1976: 219, 233). He appears also to have drawn on *tamnan* texts. Wyatt, for example, cites some similarities between parts of van Vliet's history and the *Tamnan Nakhon Si Thammarat* (1975: 65).

Vickery, however, concludes that the single major source on which van Vliet relied was a text in the *Sangkhityavamsa* tradition (1976: 207–236, 1979: 134).<sup>6</sup> While much of the *Sangkhityavamsa* has been placed in the same tradition as antecedents of the Thai *tamnan*, chapter seven is recognised as an early recension of the dynastic annals of Ayutthaya (Reynolds 1979: 96). Unlike its later counterparts this recension did not list events by date; the few dates that do appear are widely believed to have been a later addition. In the original chapter seven, time's passage was measured purely in regnal lengths. Much of the information in both this chapter of the *Sangkhityavamsa* and van Vliet's *Short History* is biographical. A picture of Ayutthaya's history emerges almost incidentally as the texts follow the lives of succeeding rulers.

We do not know what the source for this chapter of the *Sangkhityavamsa* was nor do we know its author. Neither, however, played a significant role in influencing Narai's dynastic history. In the LPC astrology's influence dominates, reflecting both Narai's personality and the times in which he ruled.

### *Narai's Siam and the writing of the LPC*

In 1569, only a little more than a century before the LPC was compiled, Ayutthaya was captured

by the Burmese after decades of warfare. Burmese rule continued for another 15 years and it was not until 1605 that Siam emerged from years of protracted conflict into a period of relative peace. With peace came the opportunity for increased trade and Ayutthaya's power grew under a succession of kings. When Narai was crowned in 1656 he inherited a large and powerful kingdom in the centre of mainland South-East Asia. His realm reached south to the kingdoms of Pattani, Ligor, Phattalung and Songkhla; in the east Cambodia had acknowledged Ayutthaya's suzerainty, and in the west the port of Tenasserim on the Bay of Bengal was under Thai control. Narai's Ayutthaya was a cosmopolitan city frequented by foreigners from as far afield as northern Europe, the Islamic sultanates of west Asia, the Indonesian archipelago, India and north Asia. Some were directly employed by Narai or lived in the kingdom as missionaries and merchants. Other visitors; traders and diplomats, formed a more transient foreign population that occasionally came into contact with the royal court (Jeosiwong 1980: 29–36).

Aged in his mid-twenties when he became king, Narai immediately challenged tradition by refusing to move into the king's palace after his coronation. He also took the unorthodox step of spending a large part of each year in Lopburi, fifty kilometres to Ayutthaya's north, removing himself from the royal capital that was the symbolic centre of his power. Nithi writes that Lopburi, not Ayutthaya, was the real seat of power during Narai's reign, and it was here that many foreigners were granted audiences with the king (1980: 25).<sup>7</sup>

Like his predecessors, Narai realised the value of cultivating ties with foreigners for the trade they could bring to the kingdom. He increased the Crown's participation in the maritime trade with China and Japan as well as the Indian Ocean region, and continued Thai involvement with the Indonesian archipelago. Not content to simply maintain previously established commercial relations with the Dutch and Portuguese, Narai sought also to establish trading links with other European powers (Na Pombejra 1984: 41).

Even as a youth Narai had formed alliances with foreigners. He was particularly close to the

Dutch, with whom he shared the enmity of rival princes. After Narai became king, members of Ayutthaya's Dutch community drank the water of allegiance believing that they were held in high regard by Siam's royal court. Many high-ranking Siamese officials were friendly towards the Dutch and Narai sent valuable gifts to their Governor General (Na Pombejra 1984: 255–6, 258). Within a few years of Narai's becoming king, however, relations had soured to the point where he feared a Dutch attack on Siam. To counter the threat, he sought to establish stronger relations with other European powers. His approaches to the English having met with little success, Narai turned to the French who, hoping to both convert the Thai to Catholicism and establish Ayutthaya as a regional trading base, seized the opportunity to establish a presence in Siam. (Love 1999: 19).

Whatever its implications for Siam's foreign policy and internal political situation, Narai's contact with foreigners also contributed to his education. His reign coincided with European advances in the sciences associated with navigation, astronomy and horology. He lived in an age when humans were first beginning to grasp the nature and extent of the cosmos and his exulted position afforded him access to both news of scientific discoveries in Europe and to some of the most modern scientific and astronomical instruments then available. From the beginning of their involvement in Siam the Dutch had provided gifts for reigning kings. Narai's broad interests demanded a more varied selection than the traditional range of cloth, spices and jewellery sent to his predecessors and he specifically ordered many of the gifts himself, including "luxury goods such as clocks, telescopes (and) military materiel such as cannons and munitions" (Smith 1974: 132, 290, Na Pombejra 1984: 256).

By the 1680s Narai was adding French scientific equipment to his collection. King Louis XIV sent him globes depicting the heavens and earth along with a model showing the relative motions of the sun, the moon and the planets. The Siamese ambassador to France requested maps of the heavens for Narai. And, during the 1680s two observatories were built at Narai's behest, one in Ayutthaya the other in Lopburi, to assist Jesuit astronomers in their observations

of the heavens. On many occasions Narai himself was present when important astronomical observations were taking place.<sup>8</sup>

Narai's willingness to challenge tradition, his exposure to foreigners and an openness to new knowledge all influenced the LPC. Other aspects of Narai's personality that may account for his breaking with traditional forms of historical writing are also suggested in works about seventeenth-century Siam. His life-long interest in learning, for example, provided the intellectual atmosphere in which the LPC was compiled. Narai received an education typical of that provided to the children of Ayutthaya's elite in the seventeenth century. European visitors reported that it was common practice for Siamese boys to obtain their education in Buddhist temples, the centre of all learning. Students were taught art, law and philosophy by Buddhist monks while other subjects including astrology, mathematics and medicine were taught by lay experts (Wyatt 1969: 9, Yupho 1979: 11). The more gifted beneficiaries of this specialist education were then recruited by the royal court. One such person was Narai's teacher and the LPC's author, the *Phra Horathibodi*, who came to Ayutthaya from Phichit to complete his studies before rising to the position of Chief Royal Astrologer (Schouten 1636: 15, Wyatt 1969: 10, 17).

His intelligence enabled Narai to profit from his privileged education. He made his palace a haven for poets and writers who gathered to compose works and participate in literary competitions, and he provided prominent members of Ayutthaya's literati, including the *Phra Horathibodi*, with food and lodgings. He became an accomplished poet himself and is recognised as one of the three authors of the *Samut Khot Khamchan*. Narai's reign was a time of significant literary achievement and the authors of some of the better known works of this period were his teachers.<sup>9</sup>

Not surprisingly Narai was also an avid reader, or rather listener. Nicolas Gervaise wrote that after 4.00 p.m. each day the King's personal reader was called to duty. This unenviable task was described thus:

'There is no employment in the royal palace more exhausting than that of the reader. He must

often spend three or four hours reading prostrate on the ground and leaning on his elbows, hardly daring to breathe and unable to adopt a more comfortable position.' (Gervaise 1989, 209)

La Loubère also made note of Narai's love of reading, describing him as "curious to the highest degree." (de La Loubère 1969: 99)

Here we see a king with a love of literature and art who encouraged those gifted in these areas and it is easy to imagine why one of this group was assigned the task of writing the Kingdom's history. That it was the *Phra Horathibodi* is not surprising. As a youth Narai had been taught by the astrologer and he knew his teacher to be both capable and worthy of respect. The *Phra Horathibodi*'s reputation for accuracy in his forecasts carried over into his other endeavours. Records which he compiled reflect this concern for chronological accuracy and the LPC is still recognised today as among the most reliable of Thai historical texts for the dating of historical events.

The development of historical writing around a temporal system based on astrological knowledge and the movements of the planets coincided with the reign of a king who had a strong interest in the study of the heavens as well as access to the latest scientific equipment from Europe. Ultimately, though it was indigenous astrology, rather than European technology, that most profoundly influenced the LPC.

### III

The *chotmai het hon* were a product of Brahmanism, a specialised branch of Hindu knowledge that served Sukhothai's kings and remained a powerful force in Ayutthaya. Brahmans were esteemed by the Siamese court for the ritual functions they performed, some of which persisted into the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

Siam's court astrologers were traditionally drawn from the ranks of court Brahmans who, as practitioners of a privileged science, held a powerful position in Thai society. Every important ceremonial or civil function, including the casting of calendars, the founding of cities, coronations, funerals and the launching of military expeditions had to begin at the most

auspicious moment as determined by the astrologers. To aid in their prognostications, they kept records of the timing of past events, the *chotmai het hon*. For Siam's royal court, astrology, in essence a scientifically based system of calculating the rotations of the sun, the moon and the planets, provided a means to interpret the universe (Winnichakul 1994: 58).

### **Buddhist time in the *tamnan***

For centuries before the LPC was compiled, astrology's elaborate horological system and the *tamnan* had existed together, neither form of knowledge conflicting with the other. Astrology's precise calculations stood in contrast to the more abstract sense of time reflected in the Buddhist histories. The *tamnan* typically begin with an explicit statement establishing the lives of the Buddha as the measure of time's passing before proceeding to describe Buddhism's growth and spread across Asia. This relates to a central construct in both the Pali chronicles of Sri Lanka and the *tamnan*: the idea of destiny. The future and past were inextricably linked as previous deeds led to future outcomes. Ayutthaya, for example, became the centre of the Thai world as it

'was chosen by history to fulfil the prophecy of the Buddha, who had at an earlier time flown from India to the central Menam Basin where he left his footprint and a shadow to indicate the location of the capital of a future kingdom, which was to be the centre of his religion.' (Kasetsiri 1976: 70)

Similarly, the perception that astrologers could predict the future based on their understanding of the past underpinned the writing of the *chotmai het hon*.

In the *chotmai het hon* the moment of an event's occurrence was of central importance and the record of days and dates provided a system by which time could be accurately measured. In the Buddhist histories no such system was employed. The goal of the Buddha's successive lives was Nirvana; a state of spiritual attainment transcending time. Thus the *tamnan* were the product of a philosophy that aspires to achieve a state in which the passage and shape of time become irrelevant. This understanding

of time's cycles had a great influence on the way Buddhists wrote history, leading some to ponder the paradox of a religion that aims to transcend time and the historical process itself producing a rich tradition of historical writing known from Japan to the Gulf of Arabia.<sup>11</sup>

As histories of a religion already ancient by the time it reached the Thai speaking people, the *tamnan* are concerned with a far greater timespan than the *phongsawadan*. *Tamnan* describe millenia while even the longest *phongsawadan* cover only centuries.

### ***The phongsawadan—chotmai het hon to narrative history***

Though they are not concerned with prophecy, the earliest *phongsawadan* entries follow exactly the *chotmai het hon* format. Events were dated to give them a context within the kingdom's history, astrological time lent the *phongsawadan* the means by which this could be done. Even as later *phongsawadan* ceased to bear a close resemblance to their antecedents, they retained the method of dating important events inherited from the *chotmai het hon*.

As astrological records, the *chotmai het hon* typically describe single isolated events. Its close association with the *chotmai het hon* means that the LPC largely follows a similar format. Later *phongsawadan*, however, quickly came to exhibit a degree of continuity not apparent in their forebearers. In the LPC we can see the beginnings of this transition towards a more narrative style of historical writing.

Astrological time, as it was employed in the *phongsawadan*, was a useful temporal device for those writing the history of a large kingdom, but historical events could not continue to be recorded as if they were of interest solely to astrologers. Indeed, the notion underpinning the *chotmai het hon*, that celestial influences are the agents of historical causality, quickly became redundant in the *phongsawadan*. The way in which events were recorded in time, and in relation to one another, in these texts soon moved away from the *chotmai het hon* format. After the *Phra Horathibodi*, Siam's chroniclers were drawn from among servants of the court other than astrologers. They began to tell the kingdom's story in more detail than the strictly formatted astrologers' records would allow.

The transition from the *chotmai het hon* format to more narrative historical writing becomes evident early in the *phongsawadan* texts written after the LPC. Descriptions of King Ramesuan's reign include phrases such as "after a full seven days" and "they were there for three days and then attacked and defeated the city", while an entry beginning in 1387 describes the events of fourteen years.<sup>12</sup> No single entries in the *chotmai het hon* record time's passage in such a fashion. In the astrologers' records events are recorded as isolated occurrences confined to single years, in the *phongsawadan*, however, the narrative allows for events to be placed in time, as well as being followed through time. Thus as the *phongsawadan* moved away from the *chotmai het hon* format, the temporal context of events also changed. Differing descriptions of the 1569 capture of Ayutthaya by the Burmese in the *chotmai het hon*, the LPC and the *phongsawadan* illustrate this point.<sup>13</sup>

Ayutthaya's fall was, up to that time, the most devastating defeat suffered by the Thai at the hands of the Burmese. Only one of the *chotmai het hon*, the text known as *Chotmai het Hon*, contains entries reaching back to this date. It describes the fall of Ayutthaya in the following way:

'Year of the Dragon, CS 918: On Sunday, the eleventh day of the waxing moon in the ninth month . . . Ayutthaya was lost to the ruler of Hongsawadi (Pegu).

On Saturday, the sixth day of the waxing moon in the twelfth month Phramaha Thammaracha became king (*Prachum Phongsawadan* 8: 110–111).<sup>14</sup>

These entries are typically brief and the narrative is interrupted with each change of year. The preceding entry in *Chotmai het Hon* describes a solar eclipse that occurred seven years previously while the succeeding entry describes unrelated events five years later on. Ayutthaya's defeat is accorded no greater importance in the astrologers' record than either of these entries. In the *chotmai het hon* there is no narrative, just a record of events listed in chronological order.

The LPC's description of Ayutthaya's defeat varies from the typically *chotmai het hon* format that characterises this text:

'In 930 the year of the dragon in the 12th month the King of Pegu proceeded from Pegu. . . . When this became known to Somdet Phra Mahindradhiraj, he did not trust this Prince, and so he made him prisoner and had him executed at Wat Phra Ram.

From that time on the defence of the capital got weaker and on Sunday the 11th of the 9th waxing moon in 931, the year of the snake, at about 6 o'clock Ayuddhya fell into the hands of the King of Pegu.' (Frankfurter 1909: 14)<sup>15</sup>

This passage, in which a clearly noted year change is incorporated into the narrative, marks the first instance in which the depiction of time's passing in the LPC differs from that in the *chotmai het hon*.

In the later *phongsawadan* the fall of Ayutthaya is treated in essentially the same way as it is in the LPC though at much greater length. The date of the event in these texts is also included as part of the narrative:

'the sound of the guns made the earth quake, the armies of *Phra Maha Thammaracha* and *Phra Maha Uparacha* were beaten . . . They . . . retreated to meet [the Burmese] at *Tambol Na Wat Kho* and *Wat Krabue*. They were defeated again and then regrouped at *Tambol Wat Phao Khao*. After that they were routed and separated, they could not regroup and the enemy were able to enter the city.

When Ayutthaya fell to the King of Burma on Saturday the eleventh of the waning moon in the ninth month CS 918, the year of the Dragon eighth year of the decade, at nine a.m. the *Phramaha Uparat* and King *Maha Thammachathirat* went and stood at the side of the throne.' (Phonnarat 1970: 119).

In this passage the build up to the Siamese defeat and the events that followed are linked over several clearly listed years.

Both the LPC and the *phongsawadan* make a clear move away from the *chotmai het hon* treatment of events in their description of Ayutthaya's fall. Even the *Phra Horathibodi* appears to have felt that associating the fall of Ayutthaya exclusively with its moment of occurrence, as he would have done in a *chotmai het hon*, was inappropriate for a text that was commissioned as a history.

Though the *phongsawadan* retained the temporal system inherited from the *chotmai het hon* throughout their existence, the genre also evolved some important modifications. For example, when the *phongsawadan* describe a war between Siam and Burma that began in the 952nd year of the *chulasakarat* era (1590) time is portrayed in a novel way.<sup>16</sup> At this point the years run as follows; CS 952, 953, 954, 955, 953, 954, 955, 956 (Phonnarat 1970: 302). This type of sequencing constitutes a break in the *phongsawadan*'s treatment of time as significant as the above descriptions of Ayutthaya's capture. It is explained in the *phongsawadan* at the beginning of the second listing for CS 953. Here the reader is told that the author wished to describe the war from the Thai point of view before returning to the beginning to tell the Burmese story of the conflict (Phonnarat 1970: 319).

This repetition of a series of years to describe an event from two sides is unusual in the *phongsawadan*.<sup>17</sup> From CS 1047 (1685) they resume an unbroken chronological order, but the presence of such sequences in the *phongsawadan* is of greater significance than their frequency implies. These examples represent a conceptualisation of time and history on the part of the *phongsawadan*'s authors that was not expressed in either the *chotmai het hon* or the LPC. It is, nonetheless, equally significant that in their treatment of time, the post seventeenth century *phongsawadan* retain many traces of the *chotmai het hon*.

The astrologers' system of measuring time set a temporal framework for the *phongsawadan*. However, the need for these dynastic histories to develop a narrative and follow the events they record through time rendered the *chotmai het hon* format inappropriate. Thus, rather than being the summary of a more detailed work, as Vickery (1979: 132) suggests, the LPC is, in fact, a slightly embellished version of one or several *chotmai het hon*. In so far as events in the LPC bear little causal relationship to each other, it resembles far more an astrologers' record than it does the post seventeenth-century *phongsawadan*. However, the *phongsawadan* genre quickly came to reflect both a view of history in which human actions, rather than the heavens, were the driving force behind events

and in which narrative continuity enabled the development of a coherent story.

Narai's *Phra Horathibodi* may have been as familiar with the plans and intrigues of the royal court as any subsequent *phongsawadan* author, but his writing was informed by years of seeking causality in the stars and planets. Later authors, while readily continuing to base the temporality of their work around celestial cycles, were far less inclined to attribute historical occurrences to these causes. The development of narrative continuity in the *phongsawadan* led to some changes in the way the passage of time was portrayed but the overall temporal framework of these texts can be wholly traced to astrologers' records and King Narai's *Phra Horathibodi*.

#### IV

##### Conclusion

Despite being widely regarded as the first *phongsawadan*, the LPC, in fact, has far more in common with the *chotmai het hon* than it does with later dynastic histories. Chapter seven of van Vliet's *Short History* provides clear evidence that histories in which the Siamese kingdom was the focus existed in Siam before the LPC. None, however, relied on the lunar calendar to measure time's passage, nor were any compiled by the *Phra Horathibodi*. And although no subsequent history was written by the Chief Royal Astrologer, all relied on the lunar calendar to provide temporal context.

Like any other historical text, the LPC reflects the time in which it was written as well as the attitudes and beliefs of those who wrote it. Narai was an intelligent individual who, like many of his predecessors, studied cosmology and astrology, but his scientific interests were matched also by his love of literature and history. He was possessed of a curiosity that led him to become familiar with European history, foreign dynasties and the latest scientific equipment from the west. Much of this equipment was designed to assist navigation and so was designed to measure time and distance using mathematical principles that were broadly similar to those used by Siam's astrologers in their development of calendars.

All of these factors combined to influence Narai's appointment of the *Phra Horathibodi*

to compile a history of the kingdom. The *Phra Horathibodi* was an accomplished scribe and Siam's senior astrologer; he had been Narai's trusted teacher and later became a member of the exclusive literary circle under the king's patronage. Narai knew that the *Phra Horathibodi* would be able to write a history in which a particular system of dating provided the temporal context. The result was a chronicle that bore all the hallmarks of a *chotmai het hon*. Later texts, whose origins can be traced to the LPC but whose authors were not themselves astrologers,

however, quickly developed a more narrative form in which humans were the principle agents of historical causality.

As in those other parts of the world where histories similar in style to the LPC were produced, historical writing in Siam continued to evolve and change. The *phongsawadan* remained the dominant form until late in the nineteenth century. But like the *tamnan*, the *phongsawadan* also came to be eclipsed as a new understanding of the historical process, based on more western forms, came into vogue.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Luang Prasoet Chronicle is formally known as the *Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Si Ayutthaya chabap Luang Prasoet Aksonit*. *Phra Horathibodi* was the title given to the King's Chief Royal Astrologer rather than the name of a particular individual.

<sup>2</sup> The chronicles referred to here include texts in the *tamnan* tradition such as; the *Chamthewivamsa*, the *Jinakalamali*, the *Tamnan Mulasasana* and the *Tamnan Muang Nakhon Si Thammarat*.

<sup>3</sup> For published versions of the LPC see *Phrachum Phongsawadan* (1963: 128–146) and *Khamhaikan Chao Krung Kao, Khamhaikan Khun Luang Ha Wat lae Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Kao chabap Luang Prasoet Aksonit* (1964). An English translation by O. Frankfurter appeared in the *Journal of the Siam Society* in 1909, only two years after it was donated to the National Library.

<sup>4</sup> Several *chotmai het hon* have been published and two unpublished texts are located in the National Library of Thailand. The published *chotmai het hon* are: *Chotmai het hon* (1965: 107–145), *Chotmai het hon kong Chamun Kongsin* (1965: 146–208) and *Chotmai het Hon chabap Phraya Pramun Thanurak* (1920). The unpublished *chotmai het hon* are both listed under National Library catalogue no. 159. One, covering the years 1758–1826, is untitled and the other, covering 1782–1895, is known as *Phraya Horathibodi's Chotmai het Hon*.

<sup>5</sup> See van Vliet (1640). Other examples of European accounts of Siam include; Ravensway (1910: 1–105), de La Loubère (1969) and Tachard (1981).

<sup>6</sup> Reynolds wrote that the the *Sangkhitivavamsa* belongs to a genre of religious historical writing that has its roots in the Sri Lankan *Mahavamsa*. The

genre is represented in Thailand by the *Mulasasana*, the *Chamthewivamsa*, the *Ratanabimbavamsa* and the chronicle of the Emerald Buddha (1976: 92–93).

<sup>7</sup> It is believed that Narai was either 24 or 25 years old at the time of his accession. Yupho (1979: 1, 5) places Narai's birth in 1632 and notes that he was aged 25 at the time of his coronation. See also Ieowsriwong (1980: 18). There is some debate as to the amount of time Narai spent in Lopburi but it is generally believed to have averaged between five and nine months a year. See for instance, Thavornthanasan (1986: 134–135).

<sup>8</sup> Narai's interest in astronomy comes through in a number of works, see for example, Wirabut (1987: 25–27) and Mu'anwong (1987: 65). Narai participated in some French observations of lunar eclipses in the second half of the 1680s. These provided the subject of some of the better known drawings of the King from this time, see for instance Tachard (1981: 230) and Wirabut (1987: 21–23). One of these drawings also graced the cover of Wyatt (1984).

<sup>9</sup> On the *Samut Khot Khamchan* see *Wanakhadi Samai Ayutthaya* (1987: 4). This lengthy verse, written over one hundred and ninety-three years is reputed to be one of the best examples of the *chan* form. In addition to the *Samut Khot Khamchan* Narai compiled another well known work, the *Khlong Pasit*. For a list of Narai's other works see Yupho (1979: 22). The LPC was, of course, written by Narai's teacher, the *Phra Horathibodi*, who also wrote the first educational book in the Thai language, the *Chindamani*. Among other works written during Narai's reign were the *Su'a Khokhamchan*, by *Phra Maharachakhru*, another of Narai's teachers.

<sup>10</sup> On Brahmanism in early Ayutthaya see Terwiel (1975: 15), Winnichakul (1994: 20) and Quaritch Wales (1931). On the Brahmans' role in Sukhothai

see, Griswold and Na Nagara (1973: 61, 75 and 1975: 44, 48–49) and Coedes (1964: 221).

<sup>11</sup> On Buddhism's purported anti-historicism see Nakamura (1968: 82–83) and Perera (1961: 32).

<sup>12</sup> See descriptions of King Ramesuan's reign under the years CS746 and 749. The quotations come from *Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Si Ayutthaya chabap Somdet Phra Phonnarat*, 6, 8. CS is an abbreviation for the *chulasakarat* era which came into use in Siam during the thirteenth century but begins its reckoning from 638 AD, see Eade (1989: 11–12).

<sup>13</sup> There are acknowledged discrepancies in the dating of events between the LPC and later *phongsawadan*. This does not, however, affect the following discussion. Other examples are also forthcoming from the various texts in question, see for instance the various descriptions of King Yotfa's reign in the *chotmai het hon*, the LPC and the *phongsawadan*.

<sup>14</sup> This text incorrectly dates the fall of Ayutthaya in CS 918, the correct year, given in the LPC, was CS 931.

<sup>15</sup> The LPC records this event as having occurred at 9.00 o'clock.

<sup>16</sup> An explanation of the *chulaskarat* era appears at footnote 11.

<sup>17</sup> Its second occurrence begins with the entry for CS 1019 (1567) after which the years are listed in the following order; 1020, 1021, 1122, 1019, 1124, 1022, 1023, 1024, 1044 (For CS 1019 and 1024 only the name of the animal year is recorded. The text suggests that for the two years CS 1122 and 1124 both numbers are misprints and should be CS 1022 and 1024). Listed out of chronological sequence, the second account of CS 1019, which records extensive contact with Europeans, causes some confusion. Here the continuity of narrative takes precedence over chronological order in the *phongsawadan*. Having related one series of events to their conclusion the authors move back through time to follow separate but concurrent events which in this case involved the Siamese embassy to Paris.

There remains a further instance of years being listed out of chronological sequence immediately following the above example. In this case the years are listed thus; CS 1044, 1046, 1045, 1047, 1048. CS 1045's entry is prefaced with the words: "During CS 1045 the year of the Pig . . . which had already passed the king began the ceremonies for his coronation." The reason for this break in the chronological

sequence appears similar to those in the above examples. Rather than interrupt the narrative's continuity as the passage of a particular event is followed the authors have manipulated the shape of time in the text. A concurrent event that does not fit into the narrative is thus recorded out of the chronological sequence to which the text subsequently returns.

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