

## CHAPTER 15

# DIFFICULTIES WITH INSCRIPTION NO. 1

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Inscription No. 1, known as the inscription of King Rām Khamhāng (text edition and translation i.a. in: Coedès 1924 *Recueil*; Griswold/Prasöt 1971 *Inscr. Rām Khamhāng*), generally is held to have been written by King Rām Khamhāng of Sukhōthai in 1292 (with the exception of one ((Coedès)) or two ((Griswold/Prasöt)) postscripts on face 4); to be the oldest specimen of Thai writing the letters of which, according to the inscription, had been invented by the king in 1283; to give an adequate description of Sukhōthai at the time; and therefore to be a trustworthy source for conclusions in the fields of history, art history, religion and linguistics.

As for the stone on which the inscription is written, a short, black, square pillar with a pyramidal top, inscribed on all its four faces, it seems generally accepted that Prince Mongkut, the future King Mongkut, in 1833 saw the stone in Sukhōthai and had it brought to Bangkok, together with a stone slab which is now known as the stone throne Phra Thān Manangkha Silā (มณังษีลาบาตร Manang Silā Bāt as it is called in the inscription), and another stone inscription with Khmer letters which is now known as the inscription of Wat Pā Mamuang or Inscription No. 4. Certain ruins to the west of Sukhōthai, outside the town, have been identified as the former Wat Pā Mamuang. But Prince Mongkut is said to have found all three items together on

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the Palace Hill of Sukhōthai, called Nön Prāsāt. At the time, Prince Mongkut was a monk, making a journey through some of the old towns of northern central Thailand.

Inscription No. 1 has at times less than enchanted its readers. Prince Narit, in a letter to Pring Damrong dated 4 August 1939, wrote that inscriptions were rather perplexing; for example, the inscription was a mixture of Rām Khamhāng's own words and those of others, and if everything was so well in Sukhōthai as the inscription says, then what was the use of saying it? (แม้คำที่จารึกก็น่าพิศวง เช่นหลักศิลาครั้งขุนรามคำแหงสังเกตเห็นเป็นคำขุนราม-คำแหงเองก็มี เป็นคำคนอื่นก็มี ปะปนกันอยู่ และถ้าจารึก เมื่อบ้านเมืองดี บอกว่าบ้านเมืองมีอะไรบ้างจะมีประโยชน์อะไร; Narit 1939 Letter 9).

Prince Chand (1976 Guide 29-31) and Michael Vickery (1978 Guide 205-209) were the first, as far as I know, to publish their difficulties with the inscription and its date of 1292, and to advance arguments for a lower age, suggesting that the inscription was written in the time of Phayā Lü Thai (c. 1347-1374). I myself have tried to show that King Rām Khamhāng did not actually invent the Thai alphabet but modernized an already existing Thai alphabet which apparently had been based on Mon letters (Penth 1985 Wat Kān Thōm Inscriptions; 1985/1988 Jārūk Wat Kān Thōm; 1985 New Evidence; 1986 Thai Scripts). In 1986, Piriya Krairiksh concluded that, for art historical and other reasons, the inscription must have been written after 1400 (Piriya 1986 Silapa dān neramit). In 1987, Vickery, chiefly using linguistic evidence, again concluded against a high age of the inscription and even questioned its authenticity (Vickery 1987 Inscr. Rām Khamhāng). Finally, in August 1988, during a lecture at the Siam Society, Piriya Krairiksh compared certain expressions and passages in the inscription with other Sukhōthai inscriptions and also with some Thai classics, and concluded that the inscription must have been written between 1833-1855.

Even if one disagrees with some of the arguments advanced against the traditional interpretation and understanding of Inscription No. 1, the fact remains that at present scholars from various fields are not satisfied. The combined weight of their

critical arguments should be reason enough to prudently review the position of the inscription as an authoritative source and to try to solve the problems it poses.

Many difficulties and uncertainties in connection with the inscription have not been publicised. For instance, the sources that deal with the discovery of the inscription in Sukhōthai and its subsequent deciphering in Bangkok need some clarification. The earliest sources seem to be two works by the Supreme Patriarch, Prince Pawaret, a contemporary of King Mongkut. In his biography of the king, the Prince Patriarch refers only to the discovery of the stone throne and Inscription No. 4, but not to the discovery of Inscription No. 1 (Pawaret 1962 *King Mongkut Biography* 11-12; Pawaret 1968 *King Mongkut Biography* 50-51). It is reported that an unpublished notebook of the Prince Patriarch contains the same story, again omitting the discovery of Inscription No. 1; but that elsewhere in the same notebook reference is made to some of the contents of Inscription No. 1 and to its Sukhōthai origin (Krom Silapākōn 1983, *Jārūk samai sukhōthai* 4-5). On the other hand, the biography of King Mongkut written by his son, the Prince Patriarch Wachirayān, says that Prince Mongkut found the stone throne, Inscription No. 4 and Inscription No. 1 in Sukhōthai (Bradley 1909 *Oldest Siamese Writing* 7; Coedès 1924 *Recueil ((Thai part))* 51). A good publication of all original sources would help to dissipate doubts about the history of the stone and its inscription.

In this article, I shall deal with three particular difficulties. (1) The date and objective of the inscription; (2) the “Mongol passage” in the inscription which has been interpreted as showing Mongol influence on Sukhōthai; (3) the Jindāmanī evidence which is sometimes used in discussions to back up the date 1292 for the inscription.

## **Date and Objective**

Inscription No. 1 is undated in the sense that it does not state the year in which it was written. But it mentions three

different years which are expressed in the Mahāsakkarāja era (M.S. + 78 = A.D.) plus three more years which are expressed by stating that such and such an event happened a certain number of years (khao ໙) before or after an already mentioned M.S. year. The inscription thus contains a total of six dates: three by direct indication of the year, and three by reference. In theory, the inscription could have been written at any time after the most recent date. The six dates are, in the order in which they appear in the inscription:

14 years before M.S. 1214 = A.D. 1278

Planting of sugar-palm trees. This is the usual translation of the text. Another possible translation, dating the event to 1292, will be discussed at the end of the chapter. (Face 3, lines 10-12).

M.S. 1214 = A.D. 1292

Installation of the stone throne Manang Silā Bāt among the sugar-palm trees. For a different translation, dating the event to 1305-06, see at the end of the chapter. (Face 3, lines 12-13).

M.S. 1207 year Kun = A.D. 1285 or 1287

Excavation of relics and their reenshrinement in Mōng Sī Sachanālai. The date is not certain because the figures and the name of the year are incompatible: M.S. 1207, year Kun "*Pig*." In fact, M.S. 1207 = A.D. 1285 was a year Rakā "*Cock*," and the year Kun would be M.S. 1209 = A.D. 1287 (or earlier/later by X number of 12 years because there is a year Kun every 12 years). In the absence of corroboration, either may be correct, the numeral or the name of the year. (Face 4, lines 4-6).

After 6 years = A.D. 1290-91 or 1292-93

Completion of a stūpa built over the re-enshrined relics. The dates calculated by reference are approximate because in the old way of counting years, any date beyond the local "New Year" could be counted as "one year later." (Face 4, line 6-7).