

CHAPTER 6

THE DATE OF THE RAM KHAMHAENG INSCRIPTION

Piriya Krairiksh

In the book *Charuk Pho Khun Ram Khamhaeng: kan wikhroe choeng prawatsatsilpa* (The Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng: An Art Historical Analysis), this writer has shown that the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription cannot have been written in the late 13th century.¹ He bases his conclusion on four discrepancies. First, some of the words in the inscription have different meanings from those used in other Sukhothai inscriptions. Also some of its contents do not conform to the usage and what is known of the culture of Sukhothai. Second, the art and architecture mentioned in it are not supported by archaeological and art historical evidence. Third, the author of the inscription freely lifted phrases and sentences verbatim from inscriptions of King Mahadharmaraja of the Sisatchanalai-Sukhothai kingdom. Fourth, many words and some of the contents of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription are found in late 18th and early 19th century literature. Hence this writer has proposed that the date of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription should be between 1833 and 1855.² In this paper, the same writer would like to be more specific with the dating of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, once a mid-19th century date is accepted, for clues to the dating of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription can be found in *Roeng aphinihan kan prachak* written by the Prince Patriarch Somdet Phra Maha Samana Chao Krom Phraya Pavares Variyalongkorn as a memorial to King Mongkut in 1868.³

Prince Pavares, who was born in 1809, entered the monkhood at Wat Mahathat in 1829.⁴ He became one of the earliest members of the Dhammayattika Nikaya, the sect founded in

1826 by Phra Vajiranana Thera, the name taken by Prince Mongkut when he was a monk. After Phra Vajiranana assumed the abbotship of Wat Bovoranives Vihara in 1837, Prince Pavares followed him there and became one of the ten senior monks who took charge of the monastery. When Phra Vajiranana left the monkhood in 1851 to be consecrated king, Prince Pavares became the abbot of Wat Bovoranives, a position he held till his death in 1892.

Roeng aphinihan kan prachak, which might be translated as "An Account of Miraculous Manifestations," records the miraculous happenings that took place between Prince Mongkut's ordination in 1824 and his death in 1868. These miraculous manifestations were signs that Prince Mongkut possessed the *parami*, the perfection of virtues befitting a future king and a Buddha-to-be. A brief summary of "An Account of Miraculous Manifestations" is as follows:

- 1824 While residing at Wat Mahathat, Phra Vajiranana Thera (Prince Mongkut) was disillusioned with the state of the Buddhist monkhood, so he made a vow that if within three to seven days he had not found someone who could guide him in the true teaching of the Buddha he would leave the Order. As if by a miracle, after a few days a Mon monk came to see him and taught him the true path which became the foundation of the Dhammayattika Nikaya.
- 1830 Phra Vajiranana Thera went to stay at Wat Samoe Rai. In that same year he had the stone markers (*sima*) of the consecrated convocation hall (*uposathagara*) of Wat Samoe Rai dug up for him to see. He found that they were not of the correct size and so had new ones put in their places, after which he had the monks at Wat Samoe Rai reordained within the re-consecrated *sima* boundary.
- 1830-1 He had an image of the Buddha cast in bronze and named it Phra Samphuttha Phanni.
- 1831 He made a pilgrimage to the Phra Pathom Chedi.

There he prayed that if there were relics of the Buddha interred therein, the god who protected them might spare him two relics. After more than a month two relics the size of a lettuce seed appeared miraculously inside an image of the Buddha which he had consecrated at Wat Mahathat. He then had these relics enshrined in the Samphuttha Phanni image.

1833

He made a pilgrimage to the north. While spending the night on the river bank in front of Wat Mahathat at Chainat, a loud noise was heard like an elephant's bellow. On asking the local people, he was told that there was no elephant there. It appeared that a large crocodile had come up to witness his parami and had saluted him with a loud voice.

At Sawankhalok he stayed at Wat Mahathat four days. On the afternoon of the second day he went to bathe at the Kaeng Luang rapids but felt dizzy and went to sleep. Even though there were no fish at the rapids because it was stony and shallow, schools of fish miraculously appeared. The local people and those in the royal party caught fish to eat and had their fill.

Then he went to Sukhothai, where a miracle that is crucial to the dating of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription occurred. It is translated in full as follows:

"Arrived at the Thani Landing at noon on the seventh day of the waxing moon. Walked to Muang Sukhothai and reached it in the evening. Stayed there two days. The Prince went sightseeing and found a stone slab at the side of a knoll of a prasat. Someone had set it up as a seat but it had collapsed and had fallen on its side. The townspeople venerated this place as the abode of spirits. They held boxing matches each year in its honor. People could not walk past it disrespectfully, for they would become ill. It was forbidden for anyone to go near it. The Prince saw it and walked straight to the stone slab. The other members

of the party, whose mouths were working with fright, informed His Royal Highness that this place was spiritually potent. The Prince stood still, saying, 'Don't do it, don't do it.' He then seated himself on the stone slab. He said, 'Why should you stay in the middle of the jungle? Come with me to Bangkok so that you can listen to sermons and keep the precepts.' All was quiet and well. Before he left, the Prince commanded that the stone slab be carefully moved. It was set up as a seat beneath a tamarind tree at Wat Samoe Rai together with the stone pillar with an inscription in the Khmer alphabet that is in Wat Phra Sri Ratana Sasadaram and was brought back at the same time as the stone slab.

"If we think about it, this was miraculous. It seems that the gods in that city wanted to tell His Royal Highness that eventually he would be a great king, famous for his royal position and renowned for his good deeds, as was Phra Bat Kamraten At Sri Suriyavamsarama Mahadharmarajadhiraja, who was the sovereign at Muang Si Satchanalai, as is stated in the inscription on the stone pillar, because when the Prince went to stay at that city, he said that on arriving there he felt at home, as if he had been there before. During the night he dreamt that many townspeople, both commoners and dignitaries, came to see him and invited him to prolong his stay there. If we think about it, the gods might have willed the Prince to bring back the stone pillar. Since they could not speak to him verbally, they willed in a roundabout way that he bring it back so that he could learn from it. The story on the stone pillar has many similarities to the events of the present reign. This is only conjectural."⁵

1837

Phra Vajiranana Thera took up residence at Wat Bovoranives Vihara. Those who came to welcome him and watch the royal procession saw that there were two