

CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS A REVISED HISTORY OF SUKHOTHAI ART: A REASSESSMENT OF THE INSCRIPTION OF KING RAM KHAMHAENG*

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Ever since Prince Vajiravudh went to Sukhothai in 1907 and identified the monuments there with the relevant passages in the Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng (hereafter referred to as No. 1) in his book *Roeng Thieo Muang Phra Ruang (TM)*, western and Thai scholars have followed his identification without further question (Coedès, 1956; Griswold, 1967; M.C. Subhadradis, 1978; Stratton and McNair Scott, 1981). Griswold, in his *Towards a History of Sukhothai Art*, 1967, simply reinstates Prince Vajiravudh's and Coedès's observations that "The middle section of the inscription is a sort of guide to the city, and a good many of the things it describes still survive" (Griswold, 1967: 8). Dr. Prasert na Nagara reiterated it, when he said that

"Ins. 1 mentioned about old monuments in Wat Mahadhatu only/or those in Sukhothai city as well, and Coedès wrote that Ins. 1 is the best guide book for Sukhothai, which shows that the description of the old monuments in Ins. 1 is correct." (Prasert 1988: 9)

In an article published in the *Muang Boran Journal*, 1986, this writer questioned whether King Ram Khamhaeng could have been the author of Inscription No. 1 because he did not specify the name of any building at Sukhothai (Piriya, 1986: 29). Furthermore, the style of the remaining Buddha images

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mentioned in the inscription cannot be as early as the late 13th century. By 1987 Michael Vickery had taken the stand that the Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng is a later composition, until it is proven otherwise (Vickery, 1987: 209).

Since the dating of Sukhothai art depends on the authenticity of the Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng, the first priority is to establish whether the inscription could have been written in A.D. 1292 as claimed. If not, when could it have been written?

Thus, this writer has chosen the methods of art historical and textual analyses to investigate whether the vocabulary and meaning of the contents of the Ram Khamhaeng inscription are consistent with other Sukhothai inscriptions dating from about 1330 (Inscription No. 2) to 1417 (Inscription No. 49). To aid the readers, Roman letters from A to D are placed in front of each problematical word or phrase to indicate to which of the four points of contention they belong. These are as follows :

- A – The vocabulary and meaning of the content are inconsistent with other Sukhothai inscriptions and from what is known of the cultural contexts of late 13th and early 14th century Sukhothai.
- B – The antiquity of the monuments and sites mentioned in the inscription is not supported by present-day art-historical and archaeological research.
- C – The vocabulary and contents are borrowed from other Sukhothai inscriptions.
- D. – The vocabulary and content are comparable to specific Ayutthaya and Bangkok period literature.

The Thai transliteration is based on the *Sila Charuk Sukhothai Lakthi 1: Charuk Pho Khun Ram Khamhaeng* (F.A., 2520). As for the English translation, it is based on the translations of Bradley (1909), Coedès (1924), Prince Wan's English translation of Coedès (1965), Griswold and Dr. Prasert (G.P., 1971) and the writer's own interpretation. Unless otherwise stated, the words printed in bold letters are not mentioned in other Sukhothai inscriptions.

– Face 1–

- 1.1. พ่อกูชื่อศรีอินทราทิตย์ แม่กูชื่อนางเสือง พี่กูชื่อบานเมือง

My father's name was **Śrī Indrāditya**, my mother's name was **Nang Soeng**, my elder brother's name was **Ban Muang**.

- C – ศรีอินทราทิตย์ (**Śrī Indrāditya**) is mentioned in the inscription of the สมเด็จพระมหาเถรศรีศรัทธาจารย์ (Somdet Phra Mahāthera Śrīsraddhārājaculāmunī), the author of Inscription No. 2, as being the father of พ่อขุนรามราช (Pho Khun Rāmarāja). Inscription No. 2 most probably was the source for Ram Khamhaeng's early life (lines 1-1 to 1-10).

- A – นางเสือง (np. **Nang Soeng**)

นางเสือง **nang** is used as a prefix to the name of a woman, นางมิ่ง (Nang Ming) No. 95-1-4, also in an inscription of 1422, นางทองแก้ว (Nang Thong Kaeo) (CS: 137). While in No. 10-2-30 นาง (**nang**) is coupled with แม่ (**mae**) (แม่นาง) and in No. 102-1-8 นาง (**nang**) is coupled with ป้า (**pa**) (ป้านาง), neither of these is used in the context of a queen. Although พระญา แลนาง (phraya lae nang) is found in an inscription of Phraya Li Thai (No. 8-3-6), it is not certain that the word **nang** here refers to a queen. However, in this context **nang** is used to refer to King Ram Khamhaeng's mother (G.P., 1971: 205, n. 19).

When นาง (**nang**) is used for a wife of a ruler, it is qualified by the title มหาเทวี (Mahādevī) as in นางสิขระมหาเทวี (Nang Sikhara Mahādevī) (No. 2-1-33). Sukhothai inscriptions use the Khmer title สมเด็จพระ (Somdet Phra) to refer to a queen, as in สมเด็จพระราชเทวีศรีจุฬาลักษณ์อัครราช (มเหสี) (Somdet Phra Rājadevī Śrī Cūlālakṣana Agarājamahesī) (No. 93-1-3) and พ่อ (Somdet Phra Rājajanani Śrī Dharmarājamātā Mahātilakaratanarājānāratha) (No. 16-31).

On the other hand, นาง (**nang**) as a prefix for the proper name of a royal consort is a common usage in Ayutthaya literature, such as the *Maha Chat Kham Luang* (p.36), and in early 19th century literature such as นาง นางสีดา นางมณฑิลา นางละเวง as well as in historical writings, such as the *Phra Ratcha Phongsawadan Nua* believed to have been compiled by Phra Wichien Princha at the command of King Rama II, when he was the heir apparent, in 1807 (PN: 4), and *Phongsawadan Lan Chang*, compiled by the command of King Mongkut (PLC: 141).

- A – เสือ (Soeng), is probably the same as เสิง (Soeng), the northeastern word for "dawn" (F.A., 2520: 28). The author probably had in mind that the name of the consort of Sri Indraditya, whose name means "Lord of Light" (PCP, 82), should reflect that of her husband.

- C – บานเมือง (np. **Ban Muang**)

The name of an elder brother of King Ram Khamhaeng. Ban Muang only appears in No. 1. However, a ปู่พระญาบาน (**Pu Phraya Ban**) is listed in No. 45-1-9, dated 1393, as a predecessor of ปู่พระญารามราช (**Pu Phraya Rāmarāja**). A king by the name of บาล (**Bal**) is also mentioned as a father of King Li Thai in the *Sihingani dāna*, a mid-15th century northern Thai work, but this book leaves พระญารามราช (**Phraya Rāmarāja**) out altogether (SN: 54-55). As for the *Jinakālamālinī*, concluded in 1527, King บาล (**Bāl**) succeeded King ราม (Ram) to the throne of Sukhothai (JK: 123). Since No. 45 is the only source for the information that Phraya Rāmarāja succeeded Phraya Ban, the author of No. 1 might have had access to it.

- D – However, in the early 15th century a พระยาบาลเมือง (**Phraya Bal Muang**) is mentioned together with a พระยาราม (**Phraya Ram**) in *Phra Ratchaphongsawadan Krung Sayam*, compiled by Somdet Phra Phonnarat and presented to King Rama I in 1807 (PKS: 28), and also in the *Phra Ratchaphongsawadan Chabab Luang Prasot*. (PLP: 133).