

CHAPTER 16

AN EPILOGUE TO THE RAM KHAMHAENG INSCRIPTION

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This writer has already proposed in the article "The Date of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription" (in this volume) that King Mongkut might have composed the Inscription between 1851, when he ascended the throne, and 1855, when he informed Sir John Bowring about its existence. Thus there remains one question: the motives for doing it. Some answers to this question would have to be found in King Mongkut's own writings.

As borne out by Western writers, King Mongkut liked to put up inscriptions. When he was a young man he had English language inscriptions inscribed over doorways, for according to an account published in 1837,

"On one side of his punkah is written, or rather printed, 'The House of Pleasure,' with his name, 'T.C. Momfanoi;' and on every door he has written something."¹

After he became king, he continued to put up inscriptions in English over his private apartments, as Sir John Bowring noted:

"Inscribed on the apartments to which his Majesty had conducted me, were the words, "Royal Pleasure" in English, and in Sanscrit characters with the same meaning."²

In 1827, while he was the abbot of Wat Samoe Rai, Prince Mongkut had two stone inscriptions set up at the Phra Phutthabat, Sara Buri Province, one in Thai, written in Thai script, and another in Pāli, written in Khmer script.³ During his abbotship

of Wat Bovoranives Viharn from 1836 to 1851, he had three undated stone inscriptions in Thai put up in his residence, the Phra Tamnak Panya, one attesting to his celibacy⁴ and the other two forbidding women to enter his residence.⁵ After having become king in 1851, he had another stone inscription set up in the same building, commanding that it should be kept free of women.⁶ Thus, when he began the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, he already had experience in composing stone inscriptions. But the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription was to be a challenge worthy of himself. His aim must have been to produce an inscription so convincingly realistic that it could be mistaken for genuine.

Upon his ascent to the throne the king might have conceived the inscription as a votive offering to the gods in gratitude for their divine favour. For it was at Sukhothai in 1833 that the gods first revealed his destiny through the discovery of the stone slab. On account of his accumulation of virtues, *pārāmī*, no harm befell him as he sat upon the stone slab, which was so highly feared by the local people that no one dared to go near it. Thus, in the words of his confidant, the Prince Patriarch Krom Phraya Pavares,

“This was miraculous. It seemed that the gods in that city wanted to tell His Royal Highness that eventually he would be a great king.”⁷

The above remark could only have echoed King Mongkut's own feeling, for on a later occasion, when in 1857 he miraculously escaped serious injury from a carriage accident, he wrote to his ambassador in London the following lines:

“I say that the gods who still favour me with divine protection, have come to my aid...”⁸

Further on in the same letter he wrote,

“The accident has caused me no serious bodily harm but I think that it has been the wish of the gods to reveal to me the innermost thoughts and feelings of various people...”⁹

King Mongkut probably thought that the miraculous event at Sukhothai was worthy of commemoration because it shows that the gods, or the “Superagency of the universe” as he sometimes called it,¹⁰ had manifested to him that he would be king. For in 1833 he had lost hope of attaining the throne. In a letter to his eldest son Krom mu’n Mahesuar Siva Vilas dated 1866, year of the rat, he attributed his becoming king to the divine intervention of the gods.¹¹ According to him, even though formerly his parents were of high rank, fortune had deserted him, leaving him, as it were, buried in clay and sand. Even his servants did not think that he would ever be anybody. But his elevation was probably due to the gods, who helped to inspire the senior officials to discover him and consecrate him king. It might be pointed out that the year 1866 was not the year of the rat, but that of the tiger, a discrepancy of two years. Thus, ironically, the two-year discrepancy appears not only in the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription (Line 4.4), but also in King Mongkut’s own letter to his son. King Mongkut appears to have had some problems in reconciling the two-year difference, as is demonstrated by his telling Sir John Bowring that King Ram Khamhaeng introduced the Siamese alphabet in 1284,¹² and then writing to him that it was first invented in 1282.¹³

The king must have realized, just as Pavares had pointed out, that his own life and achievements were similar to those of Phra Bat Kamraten At Śrī Suriyavaṃsarāma Mahādharmarājādhirāja (Li Thai), whose inscription in the Khmer language (Inscription No. IV) he brought back to Bangkok from Sukhothai together with the stone slab. King Mongkut must have felt some spiritual affinities with King Li Thai for, like himself, that king had studied the *Tiptaka*, had been a monk, and was interested in astronomy to the extent that he could correctly calculate the calendar. Furthermore, King Li Thai was also the author of three other inscriptions: two in Thai, with which King Mongkut must have been familiar, namely Inscriptions No. III and No. V, and one in Pālī, No. VII. King Li Thai’s examples must have inspired King Mongkut to try his hand at producing a Sukhothai Inscription of his own. He probably had it in mind from the beginning that his inscription in the Sukhothai

idiom would have to be written in the earliest Thai script ever devised.

Since his inscription was meant to represent the earliest Thai script, it would have to be earlier than those of King Li Thai. The inscription of Phra Mahāthera Śrīsraddhārājaculamuṇi (Inscription No. II) gave him the genealogy of Sukhothai rulers and the idea for the name Ram Khamhaeng. He thus coined the name Ram Khamhaeng from that of King Li Thai's grandfather, Phraya Rāmarāja, and Śrīsraddhā's father, Phraya Khamhaeng Phra Ram. The name Rāmarāja probably struck him as being close to his own heart. For even though there was nothing remarkable in Rāmarāja's reign beside the building of a Mahathat at Si Satchanalai, King Mongkut found a congenial spirit in the epithet "the sage who knew the dharma."¹⁴ Ram Khamhaeng was his own alter ego to whom King Mongkut could transfer his own wishes and aspirations so that King Ram Khamhaeng could accomplish them for him.

The first three lines of the Ram Khamhaeng inscription seem to have been based on the life of King Mongkut. Firstly, after he gave his mother, whose proper name was Boonrot, the posthumous name of Śrī Suriyendrā (Suriya + Indrā), which might have been inspired by that of Rāmarāja's father, Śrī Indrāditya (Indrā + Āditya), for both Suriya and Āditya are the names of the sun god. Allusion to the sun is repeated in the name of Ram Khamhaeng's mother, Nang Soeng, which means "sunrise." Secondly, King Mongkut, like King Ram Khamhaeng, had three brothers, born of the same mother, and just like Ram Khamhaeng, his eldest brother died when he was still a child.¹⁵ Thirdly, his other brother also became king, since King Mongkut raised his younger brother to the rank of the second king. This veiled autobiographical aspect of the inscription is borne out by the coincidence in the date of crucial events in the life of Prince Mongkut with those of King Ram Khamhaeng so that the same date when read in the Christian era refers to an event in Prince Mongkut's life but when changed into the Buddhist era applies to that of King Ram Khamhaeng, which is discussed in the article, "The Date of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription."

King Mongkut probably had it in mind to use the Ram Khamhaeng inscription as an instrument to facilitate reforms in the areas of the trade, legislature, religion and customs of Siam. Even before his having been consecrated king, he confided his plan to Lieutenant Colonel W.L. Butterworth in a letter dated 21st April 1851:

“I hope on my (part) the affairs of trade & ca. will be well regulated with the foreign and native people, betterly that upon the time of my predecessors, but I hope you will allow me the time for reformation of custom of country...”¹⁶

Since, as he openly admitted, he owed his position to the grace of powerful officials, he would have to be careful not to antagonise them. According to him,

“A king derives his power and prestige from the support of the powerful officials...If he offends them or does anything against the wishes or does anything against the wishes of the majority of those same people he will lose his authority.”¹⁷

Thus the Ram Khamhaeng inscription could be used as a device in bringing about his intended reforms. For, if these officials should question his departure from the norm of tradition, he could show them that similar customs had already existed in the time of King Ram Khamhaeng and that he was simply reviving old customs. A king of Siam is expected to uphold tradition for the sake of stability, otherwise there will be chaos.¹⁸

He could point out to his opponents that his reforms in trading practices, such as the permission to export rice and opium and the abolition of many state monopolies, had their precedents in the time of King Ram Khamhaeng. For the inscription says that whoever wanted to trade in whatsoever was permitted to do so. Furthermore, the reduction of the duty by basing it on the measurement of foreign ships instead of custom duties was insignificant when compared to the generosity of King Ram Khamhaeng, who did not levy tolls on his subjects. Thus the inscription set up a precedent for free trade that had not hith-

erto existed, but which made trading relations with Western nations possible.

In the area of legislature, the Ram Khamhaeng inscription created a precedent for the legal procedure of the king personally receiving petitions from his people. Instead of having petitioners ring the bell to attract King Ram Khamhaeng's attention, King Mongkut had a drum beaten to let the people know that he was ready to receive their petitions. But instead of holding his audience on the eighth day of the waxing moon, the day of the full moon, and the eighth day of the waning moon, as did King Ram Khamhaeng, King Mongkut met his petitioners on the day before these. The notification concerning petitions dated 1858 is translated as follows:

“Should the petitioner be a commoner without any person to assist him in submitting the petition he shall go and wait before the Dudhai Sawariya Palace on any day preceding the Buddhist Sabbath; that is to say, on the 7th of the Waxing or Waning in the full month or the 13th in the incomplete month. There in the afternoon and eventide when not otherwise occupied in other affairs of the Realm and provided that it will not be raining at the time, His Majesty the King, Phra Chom Klao, will appear on the throne in the said Palace or on the Penja throne in front thereof to sit in judgement, whereupon the judgement Drum shall be beaten calling all the petitioners before His gracious presence where they may personally present Dikas to their King by holding the same up over their head, etc.”¹⁹

That King Mongkut cared deeply about his receiving petitions personally could be seen in his farewell speech on his deathbed to one of his half brothers and ministers on the day of his death.

“When I am no more, please go on with our good work in the interest of the people. Be just to them, and see that they are happy and contented. First and foremost, you must see that their petitions are received and attended

to in the same manner as I have always done.”²⁰

King Mongkut cared for his subjects as if they were his own children. As he himself said,

“A king is exalted by the people to protect them. Whoever is in trouble calls him for help just as a child when he is in need of help cries out for his parents. Thus a king perceives that the people look up to him as their own parents, so he takes compassion on them just as parents are truly compassionate of their children.”²¹

With this sentiment in mind he transferred his own paternalistic feeling for his subjects to King Ram Khamhaeng.

Another law that King Mongkut abolished was the law forbidding anyone to look at the royal procession, which was punishable by being shot at by crossbows. In 1857, the king issued a Notification Forbidding the Use of Crossbows During Royal Processions; part of it is translated as follows:

“And whereas it has been brought to the attention of His Majesty King Mongkut that wherever His Majesty should choose to proceed by land or water, the occasion would invariably be taken by the City authorities,...to chase His Majesty’s subjects out of His way and, further, to order them to close all the doors and windows in their houses, boat-houses and shops, whereby not the least little danger is avoided; such a practice is graciously considered by His Majesty to be, in many respects, more harmful than good...Wherefore, it is hereby provided that the practice aforesaid shall be discontinued as from now on.”²²

The abolition of this law made possible his subjects’ participation in festivals such as watching him burning candles and playing with fireworks during the Kathina and the Chong Pariang festivals that heretofore had only materialized in King Mongkut’s fantasy of Sukhothai, such as we read in his article “Origin of Vat Visitations”²³ and in *Roeng Nang Nophamat*.

The Ram Khamhaeng inscription was equally useful in

erving King Mongkut's religious reforms. Among his many innovations was his separation of animistic beliefs from Buddhism, as can be seen in his consecration of the Phra Sayam Thewathirat image, or "The Lord who is King of the Gods of Siam" to be the protective deity of the Kingdom of Siam. Here King Mongkut could point out that the worship of a tutelary deity was not new, for in Ram Khamhaeng's time, there was the divine spirit of the mountain called Phra Khaphung, who, like the Phra Sayam Thewathirat, was "greater than all other spirits in this kingdom." If "Siam" is read instead of "Sukhothai" and "Phra Sayam Thewathirat" instead of "Phra Khaphung," the contents of lines 3.7 to 3.10 could well be applied to King Mongkut's Siam. Indeed, the king must have had in mind that this passage be used as a directive for his successors to continue giving offerings and veneration to the divine spirit who is King of the Gods of Siam, or else "this kingdom will be lost."

It can also be said that the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription was written for the consumption of the European powers as a documentary proof that Siam was not a "Savage and Barburious nation like those occanican of Sandawed Island & c."²⁴ His letter to Mr. & Ms. Eddy of New York, dated 1849, shows that he probably had in mind the reasons for writing the Ram Khamhaeng inscription before his becoming king in 1851, for he wrote,

"But our country is not like those nation as here were longly some knowledge of morality & civility bearing legible wonderful accurate system & believable consequences..."²⁵

King Mongkut was conscious all the time that Westerners looked down upon the Siamese as less than human beings, for he wrote,

"the British and the French can entertain no other feeling for each other than mutual esteem as fellow human beings, whereas the likes of us, who are wild and savage, can only be regarded by them as animals."²⁶

Thus, it was necessary to show them that Siam too was a civilized nation with a "long and continuous history"²⁷ and had

customs that were acceptable to the Europeans. For in his letters to Lieut. Col. W.J. Butterworth, written before and after his consecration ceremonies, King Mongkut was emphatic in his use of the words "crowning" and "enthronement" so that the ceremony would conform to the English concept of kingship, as in "My crowning and enthronement."²⁸

King Mongkut must have had the European concept of "enthronement" in mind when he composed the inscription. For central to the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription is the stone slab "called Manangsilabat" that King Ram Khamhaeng had used as a throne, on which he first held audience in B.E. 1851 (1308 A.D.). Coincidentally, 1308 A.D. was the year that King Edward II of England was enthroned upon the Stone of Scone.²⁹ He was the first English king ever to sit on the stone throne that was formerly used in the coronation of Scottish kings. If 1308 A.D. is converted to the Buddhist Era, it becomes B.E. 1851, which, if the Christian Era is read instead of the Buddhist Era, becomes 1851 A.D., the year of King Mongkut's enthronement. Thus a parallel is drawn between the Stone of Scone which had been used by the Scots, who live to the north of England, with the Manangsilabat throne of King Ram Khamhaeng of Sukhothai, to the north of Siam.

King Mongkut, upon ascending the throne, could have looked back to the days when he was a monk visiting the ruins of Sukhothai, where the gods first manifested to him his destiny that he would be king by showing him that his *pārāmi* was equal to that of the original owner of the stone throne. He must have read of the Stone of Scone on which English kings are crowned. Here, by chance, he happened to be the first Siamese king to sit on the stone throne of Sukhothai. The parallel in coronation dates between himself and the king of England could not have been lost on him. Since he was the abbot of Wat Bovoranives Viharn for 14 years before ascending the throne, he gave the number 14 to the interval between the time that King Ram Khamhaeng planted the grove of sugar-palm trees and his ascending the Manangsilabat.

In summary, then, King Ram Khamhaeng became King

Mongkut's alter ego, whose early life is a veiled autobiography of his own. King Ram Khamhaeng is shown to be a conscientious Buddhist king who treated his subjects as if they were his own children and taught them to be righteous in the *Dharma*, which could also be said of King Mongkut as well. King Ram Khamhaeng also initiated many reforms that King Mongkut eventually put into practice, and, just as King Ram Khamhaeng invented the Thai alphabet, so did King Mongkut write in the "Ariyaka" alphabet,³⁰ which he invented, and even tried out the Romanization of the Thai language, as in his letter to Reverend Larnaudi.³¹ Thus, the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription encompasses the hopes and aspirations of a recently enthroned King Mongkut. It outlines his policy and reforms which he would put forth in practice. Above all, it takes the place of a national constitution and serves as a covenant between a king and his subjects.

Finally, the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription should be seen as a secret testimony of King Mongkut, for only a few of his closest relatives would have known about it. Facing progress and modernization, the king nostalgically looked back to the time when life was simpler, when "in the water there are fish, in the fields there is rice." So in order to prepare his people for the onslaught of Westernization, he used the inscription to reaffirm traditional values and utilized Buddhism as the foundation for the building of the new Siam. Thus, through the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, King Mongkut bequeathed to the Thai people a sense of nationhood and pride in their past.

Notes

- 1 Sir John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam* (Kuala Lumpur & Bangkok: Oxford University Press / Duang Kamol Book House, 1977), Vol. 1, p. 442.
- 2 Sir John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam* (Kuala Lumpur & Bangkok: Oxford University Press / Duang Kamol Book House, 1977). Vol. 2, p. 279.
- 3 สำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี, **ประชุมศิลาจารึก ภาคที่ 6 ตอนที่ 1** (พระนคร : โรงพิมพ์สำนักทำเนียบนายกรัฐมนตรี, 2517, หน้า 24 - 28.
- 4 Ibid., หน้า 77 - 78.
- 5 Ibid., หน้า 70 และ 71.
- 6 Ibid., หน้า 68-69.
- 7 สมเด็จพระมหาสมณเจ้า กรมพระยาปวเรศฯ, “อภินิหารการประจักษ์” **วชิรญาณ**, ตอนที่ 36 (กันยายน, ร.ศ. 116), หน้า 2553.
- 8 M.R. Seni Pramoj and M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, *A King of Siam Speaks* (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1987), p. 208.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid. p. 139.
- 11 พระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว, **พระราชหัตถเลขาในพระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว รวมครั้งที่ 2** (พระนคร : โรงพิมพ์ไทย, 2464), หน้า 55 - 56.
- 12 Sir John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People...*, Vol. 1, pp. 278-279.
- 13 Sir John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People...*, Vol. 2, p. 444.

- 14 สำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี, *ประชุมศิลาจารึก ภาคที่ 1* (พระนคร : โรงพิมพ์สำนักเลขาธิการคณะรัฐมนตรี, 2521), หน้า 39.
- 15 พระเจ้าบรมวงศ์เธอ กรมพระดำรงราชานุภาพ, *ราชสกุลวงศ์ พระนามเจ้าฟ้าแลพระองค์เจ้าในกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์ ฉบับชำระครั้งที่ 3* (พระนคร : โรงพิมพ์โสภณพิพรรฒธนากร, 2470), หน้า 24 - 25.
- 16 M.R. Seni Pramroj and M.R. Kukrit Pramroj, op. cit., p. 94.
- 17 King Mongkut's proclamation on the difficulty of abolishing slavery and prohibiting trading ventures of officials, translated by Dr. Neon Snidwongsa in *The Development of Siam's Relations with Britain and France in the Reign of King Monkut 1851 - 1868* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, London University, 1961), Vol. 1, p. 221.
- 18 สมเด็จพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ, *เรื่องพระจอมเกล้าฯ* (อนุสรณ์ในงานพระราชทานเพลิงศพคุณหญิงศรีสังกร ต.จ. (ตาม จารุรัตน์) 19 มกราคม 2500 ; พระนคร : โรงพิมพ์ตีรณสาร, 2500, หน้า 55.
- 19 M.R. Seni Pramroj and M.R. Kukrit Pramroj, op. cit., pp. 63 - 64.
- 20 Ibid., p. 231.
- 21 พระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว, *ประชุมประกาศรัชกาลที่ 4 เล่ม 2 (พ.ศ. 2401 - 2404)* (กรุงเทพฯ : โรงพิมพ์คุรุสภาลาดพร้าว, 2528), หน้า 206.
- 22 M.R. Seni Pramroj and M.R. Kukrit Pramroj, op. cit., p. 57.
- 23 Paraphrased in H.G. Quaritch Wales, *Siamese State Ceremonies : Their History and Function* (London : Bernard Quaritch, Ltd., 1931), p. 210 and note 1.
- 24 M.R. Seni Pramroj and M.R. Kukrit Pramroj, op. cit., p. 16.
- 25 Ibid., p. 16.

- 26 Ibid., p. 174.
- 27 Ibid., p. 179.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 93 - 97.
- 29 แอนนา เหลียวนวนวงศ์, “บทความพิเศษ : พระแท่นมั่งคั่งศิลาที่บับลิ่งก์ ราชอาณาจักรของอังกฤษ,” *ศิลปวัฒนธรรม*, 10, ฉ. 8 (มิถุนายน, 2532), หน้า 90 - 91.
- 30 พระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว, *พระราชหัตถเลขา...*, หน้า 68.
- 31 พระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว, *สำเนาและคำแปลพระราชหัตถเลขา ภาษาอังกฤษในพระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวฉบับที่มูลนิธิจุล-จักรพงษ์บุญนิรมอบให้เป็นสมบัติของหอสมุดแห่งชาติ* (อนุสรณ์ในงาน พระราชทานเพลิงศพ หลวงประกอบนิติสาร (ประกอบ บุญยัษฐิติ) 4 กุมภาพันธ์ 2514; พระนคร : โรงพิมพ์ไทยวัฒนาพานิช, 2514), หน้า 50.

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