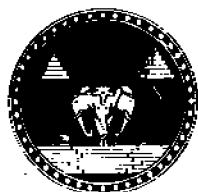


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KINGDOM
OF LAOS

Kingdom of Laos: The Land of The Million
Bernal Rene De

LAO.3734.00

WINTER 2003

France-Asie



KINGDOM OF LAOS

KINGDOM OF LAOS

THE LAND OF THE MILLION ELEPHANTS AND OF THE WHITE PARASOL

by René DE BÉVAL

in collaboration with

Their Highnesses Princes PHETSARATH, Vice-Roy of Laos, and SOUVANNA PHOUMA, former Prime Minister,

Their Excellencies Katay D. SASORITH, former Prime Minister, Thao Nhout ABHAY, former Minister of Education, Dr. Oudom SOUVANNAVONG, former Minister of Health,

Princess SOUVANNA PHOUMA, Laotian Delegate to Unesco, Mesdames Suzanne KARPELÈS, Andrée-Yvette GOUINEAU,

Messrs. George CÉDÈS, Member of the *Institut de France*, Paul LIÉVY, former Director of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, Henri MARCHAL, former Curator of Angkor, François Martini, professor at the School of Oriental Languages of Paris, Charles ARCHAIMBAULT, member of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, Phouvong PHIMMASONE, Minister of Laos to Viêt-Nam, Kruong PATHOUMXAD, Director of Religious Affairs, Pierre S. NGINN, President of the Laotian Literary Committee, Theo KHÈNE, Member of the Laotian Literary Committee, Raoul SÈBÈNE, Adviser to the Oceanographical Institute of Nha-Trang, Tay KEOLUANGKOT, Director General of Education, Marc MAUGER, Director of Second Degree Education, Louis VAISSIÈRE, Director of Technical Education, Claude VERCOUTTRE, Technical Adviser to the Agricultural Department, Bernard B. FALL, professor at Howard University, A. R. MATHIEU and René TISSOT.

*

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We owe an expression of gratitude to Messrs. Raymond Cauchetier and Raoul Coulaud who from the very beginning accorded us their complete support. We appreciate very much, indeed, their courtesy to grant us the right to publish here for the first time the excellent pictures they have provided.

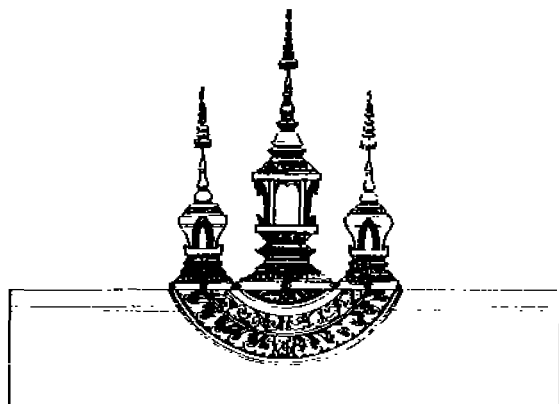


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Our gratitude goes out to the great artist that is Marc Legay. In spite of his innumerable and pressing obligations he was so good as to enhance the quality of this volume with his drawings, bands, and tail-pieces.





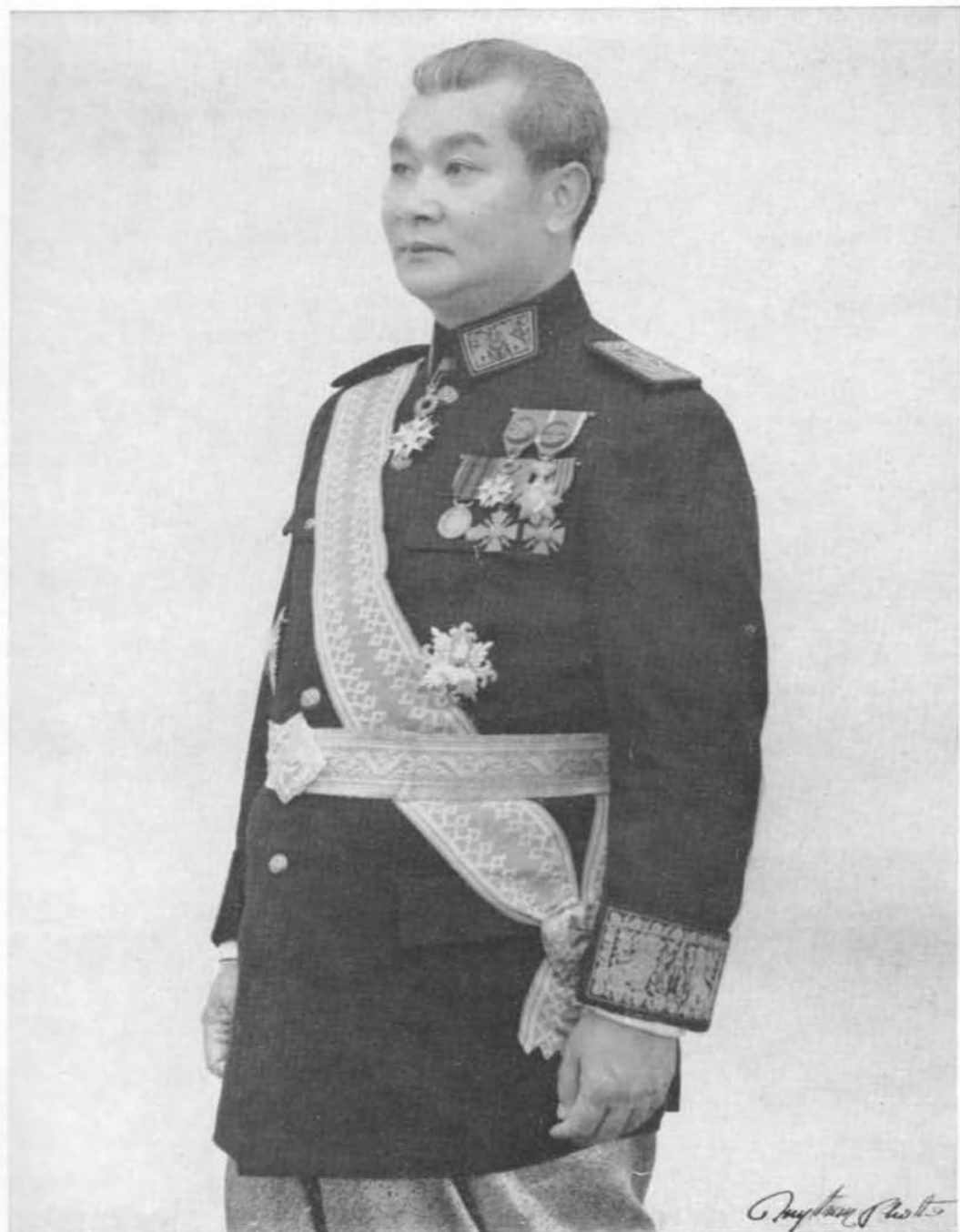
HIS MAJESTY SISAVANG VONG
KING OF LAOS



HIS EXCELLENCY PHOUI SANANIKONE
PREMIER OF LAOS



HIS HIGHNESS PRINCE PHETSARATH
VICE-ROY OF LAOS



HIS HIGHNESS BOUN OUM
PRINCE OF CHAMPASSAK
INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE KINGDOM



HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS SAVANG VATTHANA
CROWN PRINCE OF LAOS



HIS EXCELLENCY KATAY DON SASORITH
FORMER PRIME MINISTER

I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the French Edition

by

René de BÉRAAL.

This special issue is an old dream come true. It is a fact that for a long time now I have been pondering how, by publishing an issue worthy of her, I could give Laos the place in people's hearts and minds that has not, it seems to me, been accorded her. For so long a time indeed that the date of its appearance is also that of the tenth anniversary of France-Asie. The coincidence is not an intentional one; it does however give me pleasure to lay stress upon it. For such a publication as this ten years are so long a period that at first such a term may appear chimerical. And of the few friends who stood about its cradle in April 1946 the most sanguine were far from foreseeing it could ever attain to such an age. And yet here it is at that term; and I hope I may be excused if I pause for a moment, breathless as I am after running so far. At this halting-place, when I look back over the adventure I have gone through, it is a joy for me to note that, fraught with trials though it has been, this has been made up for by its being the occasion of my receiving a great many precious tokens of friendship, and above all the comfort of being assured that the line I have so far followed has always and invariably been a straight one, and that it has never once deviated from the ideal of humanity which was and still is the sole object of my review.

And now that the time has come to set up a new land-mark, it is a pleasure to me that the name I am to trace as that of my halting-place should be that of Laos. There is none other, in my opinion, that could so clearly symbolize this meeting, in which both heart and spirit have their share, of men who dwell on shores that are far apart but who still believe in the permanence and efficacy of the highest human values, those which alone can give us some cause to be proud of our human condition. Perhaps I may be forgiven for repeating

myself by quoting my own words. In introducing the 100th number of *France-Asie* I wrote: « This meeting (of all my French and foreign contributors) on this day is surely an obvious, absolute and conclusive proof that nothing is impossible to one who, humanly speaking, strives to conquer in the battle of minds and hearts? Because, whatever nation or race he may belong to, the heart and spirit in a man are one, and he who would win over the one must bring influence to bear upon the other. The sum of these two entities is called civilization; and is that not, when all is said, the very goal towards which we must all strive? » I can see nothing that needs changing in those lines, summing up as they do the ideal to which, for the last ten years, it has been my constant effort to remain faithful.

Such fidelity, as may well be imagined, has required some effort at such a time and in such a place as ours. But even that effort would have been in vain if it had not been constantly upheld from without by the lever of people's hearts. And these, there is scarcely need for me to say, I have never found lacking, and it is they alone that determined me, in all my moments of discouragement — and they were, alas, many! — to carry on the work I had undertaken.

During those ten years they have reached out to me, innumerable, from the most distant and strangest parts of the world, and it is a joy for me today to run through the list, already long, of all my unknown friends.

From among all the countries which, on the map, I can scan today with the certitude of finding there constant supporters, it is with particular pleasure that I let my gaze fall on the Laotian Kingdom; for there indeed *France-Asie* has from the very beginning formed attachments which have proved themselves unfailing, and I take pleasure here in rendering them the grateful homage that is their due. But is there matter here for surprise? Is this not traditionally the very land of faithful hearts? I have already said that this country is marvellously in tune with the moving spirit of this review, which speaks to the heart as much as to the mind. It may seem surprising that this appears so little evident in the summary of an issue in which an effort has been made to bring together as complete a sum as possible of what is known at the present time about the *Muong Lao*. If the list of eminent names which figures there is sufficient in itself to allow us to measure the degree of erudition, intelligence and talent, what we see less clearly perhaps is that the heart too has had its share in this

work. And yet, however great the knowledge and experience of those who have written these pages, they would be singularly empty if they had not been cemented with a great deal of love. The word, you may feel, is too great a one to be applied to work which, after all, is but the fruit of research requiring normally no more than patience and method and some scientific rigour of approach. And this would no doubt be true in the case of an ordinary, everyday compilation such as might have resulted from investigations among the archives or among those works which are already in existence. I trust however that my readers may find here something different, and that thing is precisely the love that everyone who has contributed to this number bears other men, men who are various but not different, strangers and yet brothers.

If this study had been kept within the limits of a dry geographical, historical and ethnographical enumeration it would not only have been incomplete, it would, in my opinion, have been a betrayal of a people, one of the last to possess and to keep alive the richest and most generous of human qualities. Certainly people have vied with one another in praise of the Laotian country's charm, the kindliness of its welcome, the grace and seduction of its pleasures, not to mention the joys of living under its mild skies. But how many have gone beyond these facile appearances and laid bare its true soul?

It is that soul that we have attempted to reveal in the pages that follow. If my contributors and myself have succeeded in overcoming the far from negligible difficulties of such an enterprise, and in showing how much the Laotian presence contains of heart and of flesh and blood, we will have attained our goal, which was not merely to bring some men to the knowledge of others, but above all to give them new reasons for loving each other.

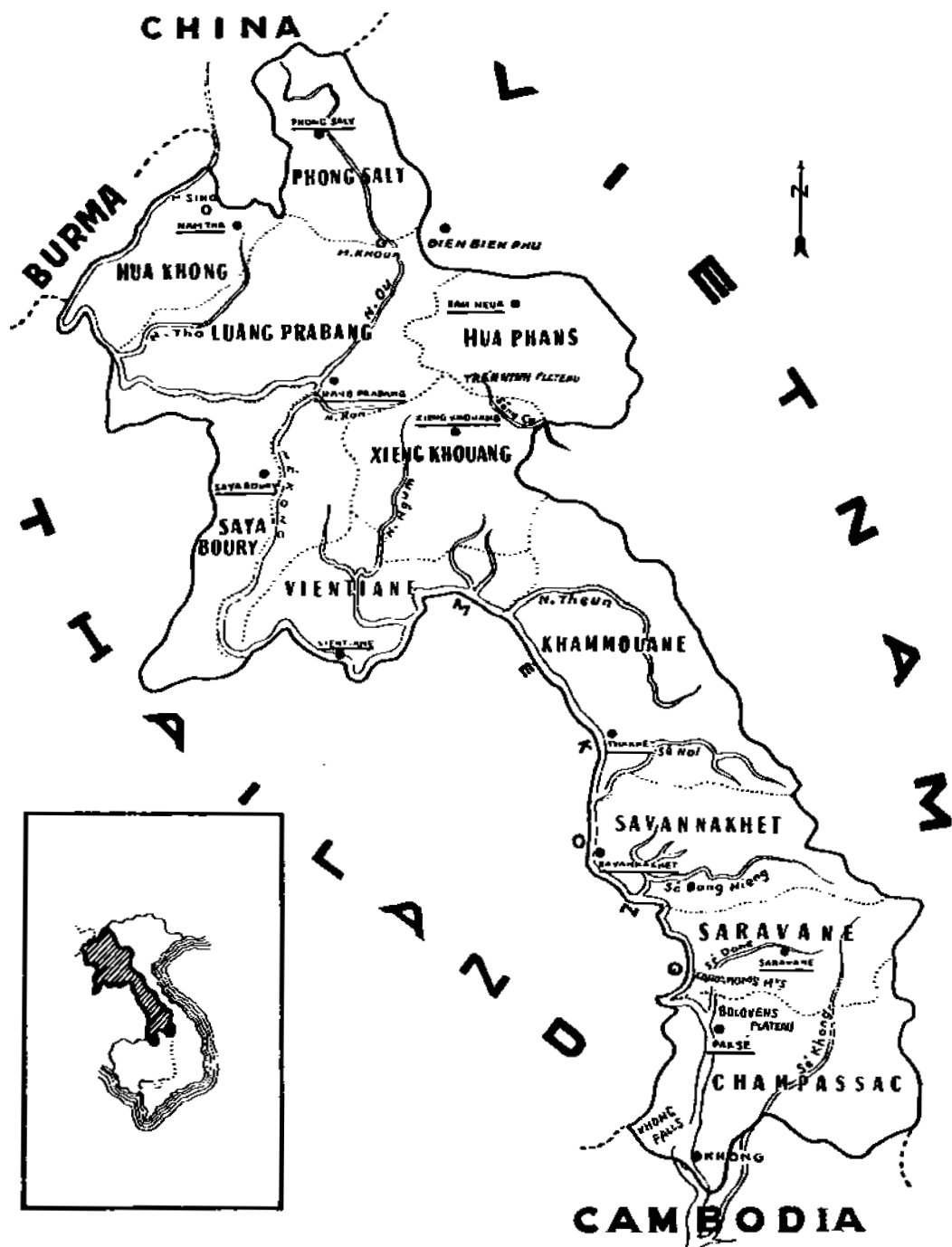


II

GEOGRAPHY



ECONOMIC MAP OF THE KINGDOM OF LAOS



POLITICAL MAP OF THE KINGDOM OF LAOS

Geographical and Human Aspects

by

René TISSOT, M. A., *L. L. B.*

Laos has a fairly marked meridian lie of land and covers an expanse over 620 miles long between latitude 14° and 22.5° North. Its surface is estimated at about 143,000 square miles and its frontier touches Viêt-Nam, China, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia. Although very long in form it is obviously a distinct geographical unit. Its physical unity taken as a whole is masked by comparative regional diversity; therein lies the main characteristic that gives Laos a distinct personality. Its outline is undoubtedly mountainous, but it offers the contrast of sparsely populated table-lands and more densely valleys, both of which life is subject to the double rhythm of rain and water, and bear witness to the fundamental importance of natural factors.

LAOTIAN COUNTRY'S UNITY

Incrusted in South-Eastern Asia whose climatic life it shares, Laos is however not lacking in elements of unity. The first of its original characteristics is the individuality of its relief. Morphological landscapes are to be found in form of table-lands. Backed to the East by the shoulders of the Cordilleras, they turn to the West their great platforms, more or less broken up by erosion, that slope down to the Mekong all along its valley.

The next remarkable feature is the way in which the network of waterways is arranged about the axis of the great river. Its tributaries, which are very numerous on the left bank (the Laotian bank sometimes forms into fans of rivers), thin out on the Thai bank where there are very few influxes. This lack of symmetry strikes you at once when you look at a map. In Thailand the only line running through the plateau is the Semoun, whereas Laos prides itself on innumerable rivers whose beneficial influence makes itself both in time and space as a binding force: they give rise to regional intercourse, facilitate communications throughout the whole length and breadth of the territory, and strengthen the bonds of interest and the need for unity.

Both the high distorted table-lands of the North and the more softly outlined table-lands of the South are watered by the tributaries of the Mekong. The rivers, flowing from East to West like living links, bring life to the various provinces by guiding them towards one of the mightiest rivers in the world.

This, then, is why what we may call the third force for unity is none other than the Mekong itself: tranquil and majestic in the river-basins, somber and seething with foam in the gorges, or again giving voice to its eternal complaint as it flows on its hard rocky bed, it is life's very axis, a powerful and marvellous force for unification that dominates the life of Laos, impresses upon it its original characteristics, and stamps it with its lordly seal as dispenser of the country's natural resources.

REGIONAL DIVERSITY

The Table-Lands. — These present distinct characteristics that enable us to distinguish them from North to South according to the degree of erosion suffered by the relief, and according to the nature of the surface rocks.

1^o. What is commonly known as Upper Laos, the country running from the Sino-Burmese frontier to the Northern extremity of the provinces of Vientiane and Thakhek, is a zone whose hilly landscape is picturesque and full of natural beauties. An ancient paeae-plain which rose considerably during the tertiary era, it has been subject to a violent renewal of erosion which has cut the table-lands up, furrowed the slopes, and increased the difficulties of human penetration. Seen from the air the main features of the country's relief are clearly visible. The orientation is N-W-S-E., and within the framework of hills lie table-lands which are freely divided up by streams and rivers (the Muong-Phuan for example). Deep crevices above which tower sharp-edged mountain ridges, narrow valleys echoing to the sound of waterfalls, all bear witness to the extent of the erosion that was aggravated by the general upward surge following after the appearance of the Himalayan chain in the tertiary era.

It is in Northern Laos that the highest summits are to be found; Phu Bia, for example, emerges to the South-West of Xieng-Khuang. It is, with its altitude of 9,330 feet, the highest point in the whole country.

2^o. In the Centre and in the South the table-lands slope gently down towards the East and West. At a lower level than in the uplands, they are less open to erosion and their surfaces stretch away as far as the eye can see at an average height of 2,300 to 2,600 feet, thus forming a transitional zone between the Northern

heights and the Cambodian hollow. They owe their individuality to the nature of the rocks that cover them.

In Khammon we find all the characteristics of a classical limestone formation with its « causses », or limestone plateaux, varied here and there by a swallow-hole, cave, gulley, or by an arid valley surrounded by steep-sloped crags. It is here that the Nam-Kha-Dinh and the Nam-Hin-Bun sometimes dive underground only to reappear further on in the depths of some canyon, much as the River Tarn does in the calcareous rocks of the *Massif Central* in France.

Further on great masses of sandstone suddenly emerge in the shape of vast stretches of arid, sandy ground to which an occasional calcareous hillock gives variety. These high plains through which the Sebang-Fai and the Sebang-Hien flow are overgrown by an immense but thinly-wooded forest. They give place in the South to a new kind of relief, the plateau of the Bolovens. It is broken up by fissures and has been subjected to tertiary volcanic phenomena. The sandstone vanishes under a covering layer of porphyric and basaltic rock.

The Valleys. — 1°. The very numerous rivers render invaluable services in spite of the imperfections that derive from their irregular flow and the presence of natural dams. It is through their valleys that for centuries Laotian trade has worked its way into the heart of mountain groups that seemed to be impenetrable. Thanks to the tributaries of the Mekong, the Namtha and the Se-Doné, East-West circulation is possible, with the main river serving as a hinge. In addition to this, North-South communications have been opened up from one to another of these valleys, thus dividing the ground to be covered into sections and lessening the drawbacks of distance.

2°. But the « human » part played by these valleys is presided over by the presence of a Royal Road, the Mekong. This river really is on a scale worthy of the Kingdom; however troubled its course, it is the soul of the Land of Laos. The agricultural and commercial life of the country are subject to the same seasonal fluctuations as the river. Through it the Laotian people have gained wider horizons, on its shores they have taken root and prospered.

There are many striking examples in geography of such sovereign streams that by spreading life along their shores have proved to be prodigious catalysers of civilization: the Yang-Tse-Kiang, the Ganges, the Mekong, all three are born on the Roof of the World from whence they flow down through wild narrow valleys. In their lower courses their character softens and they draw men to them, forge their communities, build up their States, and bring the people dwelling on their shores to national consciousness.

Let us follow the river on the map. When it reaches Laos it is a torrent some three hundred yards wide and it has just crossed the Yunnan through a valley in the form of a wild and majestic canyon. The valley broadens here and there between Luang Prabang and Vientiane, but the navigable reaches are cut off from each other by rapids caused by bars of hard rocks or by torrential dejections that bottle-neck the course of the stream. By the time it reaches Vientiane the river is at a height of only about 1,000 feet and it has still a distance of some thousand miles to cover. Nonetheless, and in spite of the fact that the average declivity is slight, the river has not yet succeeded in regularizing its course and at Kemmarat and at Khône it flows roaring over the unyielding rocky outcrop. Every bolt of rock causes the waters to spread out above the dams and quaintly-shaped isles and islets to appear. Then with a rush the water pours through the natural gully, splashing it with foam, before it subsides once more in the calm lower reaches.

These accidents that break up the circulation have had a considerable influence on the Laotian people's historical development. They have often been used as a natural frontier between the Kingdoms that shared the valley. They have never, however, proved a major obstacle to the growth of a feeling of national Laotian unity, and the 20th century has made them lose their character of political frontiers and reduced them to the rank of simple and natural constraints.

In the pleasant river-basins on the other hand, such as Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Bassac, men are inclined to settle, and after having served as axes of penetration they remain the vital centres of the community, the places where towns grow up and where roads meet, the sources whence civilization radiates to the rest of the country. It is from them that Laos, bursting the bonds imposed by its naturally irregular lie of land, has acquired the sense of its unity. The frontier which once was bounded by a mountain pass, a rapid, or a mountain ridge, has at the present time reached out to new horizons, till now the Laotian people own a country that covers 90,000 square miles, which is twice the size of Belgium, Holland and Switzerland put together, almost as big as Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

MODES OF LIFE

The dual rhythm of rain and water decides the people's mode of life.

The Rhythm of the Rains. — Laos, being subject throughout its territory to the monsoon climate, is more favoured than many other lands which are situated on the same latitudes but have far

too dry a climate. It is a phenomenon peculiar to the whole of South-Eastern Asia and is due to an immense continent being in the proximity of an enormous stretch of water. Laos, thanks to this, enjoys an intense and seasonal agricultural life. In June the approach of the rainy season is the signal for the heaviest work on the rice-fields to begin. The same secular and annual gestures are repeated that have been handed down since time immemorial from the shores of the Blue River to the Ganges's banks. The Laotian peasant is busy for months at a stretch, ploughing, pricking out, harvesting. Men and women share alike in the work and whole families toil away under the burning sun, spending weary hours that give an added charm to the winter evenings to come.

This summer monsoon with its beneficial rains gives a sameness of aspect to whole stretches of cultivated land and imposes upon millions of men the same causes for joy and for anxiety: will the harvest be good? sufficient? a failure? The work on the rice-fields is familiar to everyone, but can sufficient stress be laid on the hard, harassing, sometimes even superhuman nature of the work? Rice is the chief culture but it is not the only one. Tobacco, sugar-cane, and maize succeed each other along the streams or on the sloping ground and give variety to the agricultural output. The river banks are divided up in long narrow strips by vegetable gardens that are well stocked with vegetables thanks to their proximity to the water. When the waters subside there is a corresponding increase of activity in the gardens.

It is only too easy to understand the peasants' need to relax; as soon as the harvest is in and their future is assured the holidays of the dry season are a source of unspeakable delight to them. Not that the end of the rains brings the peasants' activities to a close. Subject to the hard law of a closed economy, the villagers have to solve for themselves the problems that arise everyday. Has the plough not been damaged by the work in the fields? There is a twisted handle that needs straightening, a cracked shaft to be replaced, or a blunted ploughshare that must be forged anew. Here the big-wheeled waggon is threatening to collapse. There it is the loom that is out of order, or the roof that has come apart and filters the sun's rays through its dumb and gaping mouth till such time as will bring the first rains pouring through it. Won't it be necessary to plant banana-trees too? or coco-nut palms? and to repair the well, the palings, the entrance? Not only is the peasant constantly called upon to put his hand to some job requiring considerable skill and patience, but like all other human beings he has also to provide for his family, to feed his children, to welcome strangers and entertain the monk of his Wat. He will also have to help his neighbour when in trouble. Do people realize what a force the villagers' mutual assistance is, the powerful and humane feeling of the brotherhood that drives the inhabitants

of each village to come to each other's help, whatever it may cost them in time and in trouble?

However, the life of the countryside is not entirely taken up with the traditional agricultural cycle. As soon as the rice harvest is housed, when the sky is once more serene and the landscape is clear, the people of Laos feel their soul has other needs. The rhythm of the rains gives place to the cycle of travel, of long journeying along the rivers.

The Rhythm of the Waters. — The Laotian is king of the waters. He is worth watching when he launches out in calm or stormy weather, alone or in merry groups. Difficulties are child's play to him. He laughs when the spray bespatters his skin and sings in the heart of danger when like an arrow his canoe shoots the rapids and their reefs and whirlpools oppose him in vain. How pleasant it is to hear the men's shout of triumph when danger is past and they can straighten up and breathe freely again, victorious, always victorious.

The Laotians are great travellers. The caravans of oxen follow along the tracks that cut their way through the forests, while the canoes skim the surface of the waters. When evening falls the camp fires glow on relaxed faces, undaunted by fatigue.

This union between land and water is in some sort symbolized by the Laotian village. It nestles at the foot of the coco-nut palms, and flamboyants, it stretches out along the river bank, invisible but for the greyish roofs of the houses and the brightly-coloured tiles of the Wat that stand out against a background of delicately-tinted greenery. Over all this exuberant and expansive scenery there hangs an atmosphere of quietude and serenity that strikes all travellers. Each village is a refuge, the refuge of buddhist wisdom.

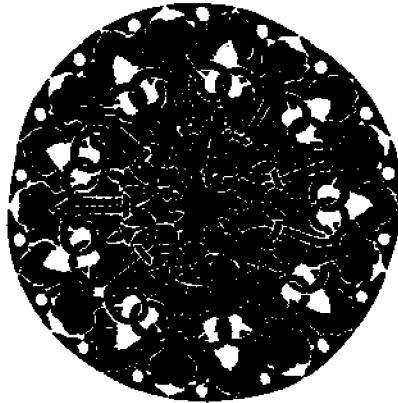
LAOTIAN WISDOM

Laos is a rich and fertile country. There is farming in the valleys, cattle-breeding on the table-lands, and forestry along the banks of the rivers. And we know the hopes that have been raised by the presence of mineral deposits whose exploitation at the present time is only prevented by the distance and the hilly nature of the country. Laos may not be a new Bolivia but in comparison with its nearest neighbours there is no denying its advantages. The efforts made in recent years by a dynamic government bear promising fruit every day. The country is a new one and you can see signs everywhere of its blossoming to life: roads are being opened up, schools and dispensaries built, and an *élite* of young people eager to serve their country is being formed. Vientiane is a concrete example of the expansion that is a feature of

the present time: the administrative capital is reaching out and every month the limits of its suburbs lie further afield.

Laos is rich. But its greatest riches are contained in the lesson proposed to the world by this amiable and hospitable people, always open-hearted and ready to give their best. In the whirl or modern life it is a lesson of wisdom that eternal Laos never ceases to offer those who care to benefit by its essence. It is not a lesson of self-effacement, it is an attitude of understanding towards all problems and towards all solutions.

By combining their resources and their requirements the Laolians, whether of the valleys or the mountains, have succeeded in forming a living community whose growth is proving very rapid. This community, which is eager for peace, has now a voice in the United Nations Organization. It is the voice of a great-hearted people.



III
HISTORY

An Introduction to the History of Laos

by

George Cœdès,

*Member of the Institut de France,
Honorary Director of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient.*

There are people who find it surprising that the Indochinese States, now they have gained their independence, should claim absolute equality in their treatment by the nations of the free world. Others even go the length of feeling irritated when they see them aspiring to a place on the same level as the nation whose protection they accepted until quite recently and whose contribution to human progress, whether material or intellectual, is unquestionably greater than their own.

To this we could reply that France in her foreign relations has never dreamed of contesting the equality of rights of certain countries, in this hemisphere or in the other, whose contribution to history and to world culture is no more substantial at a first glance than that of Indochina. Before the last vestiges of extraterritoriality had been abolished in an Asian Kingdom such as Siam, with its stable government, its sound financial situation and prosperous economy, its millennial history, its art and literature that rank among the most brilliant in Asia, it was a subject of some bitterness to the Siamese élite that certain small States whose history scarcely dates back a century and a half, which often enough are badly governed and which draw attention to themselves by their periodical revolutions, that these small States should enjoy greater consideration and more liberty of action than the « Land of the White Elephant ». 'No doubt', so say the Siamese to themselves, 'it is because those who govern them are considered to be white men, even though they are often as coloured as we are!'

Now nothing is more foreign to the French mind than racial prejudice. Besides, is it not to the honour of France as well as to their own honour that the Indochinese States should feel, as did formerly Siam, that they are capable of governing themselves and of holding their own with honour in international Assemblies? What is it then that people find so astonishing that it sometimes even irritates them?

In the former conception of the French Empire such peoples of unequal development as the Kanakas of New-Caledonia, the black populations of Africa, the North Africans, and the Indochinese, were

all merged together. The tendency was to consider all these populations, whether colonized or under a protectorate, as belonging to a less developed stage of civilization than those of the metropolis. Both these attitudes certainly helped to distort the notion people have concerning the degree of political maturity of the Indochinese and the justice of their claims to equality with other nations of the world. It might indeed seem presumptuous if some African tribe whose stage of human development had remained very backward were to claim equality with the most civilized nation of Europe, and this notion has been carried over and applied to Indochina, forgetful of the fact that with a very few exceptions the tribes of Africa have no past, whereas, in Indochina, the history of Viêt-Nam dates back to before the Christian era, of Cambodia from the 6th century, and of Laos from the 14th century.

Unfortunately most Europeans — and I am not speaking of the French! — are ignorant of practically the whole Indochinese history and are still at the stage of Saint-Hilaire's summary opinion when he wrote in 1861 that India beyond the Ganges was « scarcely worth a historian's glance ». I would like today to recall briefly a few facts which will throw light on the historical part played by Laos in Indochina and show that the smallest and least well-known of those States has no less a right than her neighbours to claim to be considered as a partner, having equal rights within the community of free nations.

At the end of the 12th century the Khmer Empire stretched along the banks of the Mekong as far as Vieng Chan. In the last years of the 13th century the Siamese Kingdom of Sukhothai, which had only recently shaken off Khmer suzerainty, extended its sovereignty as far as Vieng Chan and to the site where Luang Prabang now stands. But for half a century the Khmers retained the territory that lies downstream, and they were only to give it up after the State of Laos had been founded. The forming of this latter State was facilitated by Sukhothai Kingdom's loss of power and its falling a vassal to the Ayuthya Kingdom which was founded in 1349 on the lower reaches of the Menam. Laos owes its existence as a State to prince Fa Ngum, son of an exiled Laotian chief who had taken refuge at the court of Angkor. The young prince was brought up there by a Buddhist monk and scholar from the capital, and when he reached the age of sixteen the Khmer king gave him one of his daughters in marriage. Between the years 1340 and 1350 Fa Ngum took command of the army in order to reconquer his father's principalities in the upper Mekong.

Fa Ngum made his way up-stream, then after working their way round by the Chieng Khuang table-land, the Hua Pans, and the Sip Song Pannas, the expedition descended and once more onto the site where Luang Prabang stands, and there Fa Ngum was proclaimed King. Certain historical sources state that he afterwards started a campaign against Chieng Mai in the upper Mekong valley. It was on his way back that he took Vieng Chan and from thence pushed on across the Kôrat table-lands as far as Roi Et. He finally returned

to Luang Prabang after he had organized the conquered territory. There, in 1353 he was solemnly crowned sovereign of the Kingdom of Lan Chang or the « Million Elephants ».

The consequence of these events was that Khmer civilization, which so far had never penetrated beyond Vieng Chan, and Sinhalese Buddhism, were introduced into Laos. For when Fa Ngum became King he sent for his old master, and the latter came at the head of a group of monks and of artisans bringing with him the famous statue of the Buddha which is known by the name of Phra Bang, whence the capital took its name.

In 1368, Fa Ngum's Khmer wife died and this was the signal for a series of outbursts of debauchery that led to his being deposed by his ministers and sent into exile in 1373. His son, who ruled happily for 43 years, had a census made in 1376 of the population of the Kingdom. The 300.000 males of Thai race which the census showed won for him the name of Phya Sam Sen Thai, or « Chief of the Three Hundred Thousand Thais », and it is by that name he is known. This census also provided him with an opportunity of organizing the army and enabled him to endow the country with an armed force sufficiently strong to impose respect on his neighbours, with whom he had moreover become united through the ties of matrimony.

So ends the period of foundation and organization, on the upper and lower Mekong, of the Kingdom of Lan Chang, whose population was mainly Laotian and closely related, at least linguistically, to the Thais of Menam. Like them it had received the influence of both Indo-Khmer civilization and the Buddhist religion.

A century later Laos was first to attain to her greatest territorial development and then temporarily to lose her independence. King Polisaral, who in 1520 had succeeded to his father, Visun, left Luang Prabang in order to settle in Vieng Chan which was better situated from the point of view of commerce. He had to wage war against Siam although he remained on good terms with Viêt-Nam. As the son of a princess of Chieng Mai, Polisaral, in 1545, asserted his claim to the throne of that Kingdom on its falling vacant. He succeeded in having his eldest son accepted as King and had him crowned at Chieng Mai in 1548. This same year was to mark the climax of Laotian expansion, but her prosperity was to be of short duration for within the year Polisaral was to die an accidental death and the young King of Chieng Mai had to return to Luang Prabang in haste to assert his rights in the matter of his father's succession, and to have himself crowned by the name of Selthathirath. His having to leave Chieng Mai made it easier for the Burmese King, Bayin Naung, to carry out his plans for expansion. He had recently annexed the Shan States and his dream was to extend his authority over all the other Thais. When in 1556 Chieng Mai fell into the hands of the Burmese, Selthathirath gave up the country to a Thai prince who agreed to rule under Burmese authority. The former left Luang Prabang for good

and went to Vieng Chan where he built fortifications and a palace whose temple was to receive the famous Pra Keo, or Emerald Buddha, when it was brought back from Chiang Mai in 1548. He had the That Luang or Great Reliquary built about a mile and a half from the city. It is a masterpiece of Laotian architecture and was built in 1566.

After this brilliant period Laos was in her turn to be overrun by the Burmese armies. The fall of Vieng Chan in 1574 had the effect of establishing Burmese sovereignty for the space of seven years. The restoration that took place early in the 17th century, and the reign of Thammikarat (1596-1622), were followed by a period of complete anarchy and it was not till 1637 that the country was to know peace once more with the coming to power of Suliya Vongsa. He had a long reign of 57 years which were fairly peaceful as regards home affairs and during which only a few brief expeditions into the Chiang Khuang region disturbed the tenor of foreign affairs. It was decided in agreement with Viet-Nam, with which country Suliya Vongsa was on friendly terms since his marriage with a daughter of Emperor Lê-Thân-Tôn, that all those populations dwelling in houses built on piles and having verandahs would be considered as Laotian subjects, and that those who lived in houses without piles or verandahs would belong to Viet-Nam. This distinction was intended to prevent possible encroachments by the Viet-Nam on Laotian territory. It was during the reign of Suliya Vongsa that the Jesuit father J.-M. Leria paid a visit to the country (1641-1647) and also the Dutchman, Gerrit van Wusthoff (1641); the latter left a very interesting account of his journey. Laos at the time was a powerful and prosperous country and the Jesuit father, de Marini, who made use of the observations recorded by his colleague, was able in 1666 to write: « Among so many and such powerful kingdoms in the farthest East of which people in Europe have scarcely heard there is one called Laos, or more properly, the Kingdom of Langians » (1).

There were difficulties over Suliya Vongsa's succession when he died in 1694 and the outcome was that Lan Chan was divided into two rival States, that of Vieng Chan and that of Luang Prabang. This division marked the beginning of the country's decay.

Although Laos is a younger State than Cambodia and Viet-Nam, though it made its entry at a later date into the history of Indochina, and though, when Auguste Pavie stepped in and saved her old King, Laos had been on the point of succumbing under the blows dealt simultaneously by Siam and by the Pavillons Noirs (pirates), for all the part she has played in the history of the Indochinese peninsula has been considerable. It was from Laos that Indo-Khmer civilization and Sinhalese Buddhism penetrated into the valleys of the upper Mekong and the scope of Indian cultural expansion was extended to

(1) Cf. *infra*, Two travel accounts to Laos in the XVIIIth century.

China and Viet-Nam. Laos was the melting-pot in which the old cultural elements that dated right back to Indochinese prehistory were blended together with other elements borrowed from the neighbouring countries whose civilization came to them from India and with whom Laos' destiny was bound up by the hazards of history as we have shown earlier.

Its national religion, Southern Buddhism of Sinhalese origin, came to Laos first from Cambodia, and its practise was kept alive by the fact of the country's being in permanent contact with Siam and Burma. Its art was strongly influenced by that of Cambodia, of Siam, and of Burma, but it retained elements, more particularly in its architecture, that are very old indeed and that bear witness to there having once been an architecture which made use of light materials and which has disappeared out of the country. The Laotian tongue has been considerably enriched by Kkmer words and by religious terms of Indian origin. As for its literature, on the one hand the secular writings derive from Siamese literature, and on the other, the religious texts derive from those of Burma.

What Laos has done has been to combine harmoniously all these elements of diverse origins but which, finally, are all imputable to the cultural influence of India, and to blend them into a typically Laotian whole. Having inherited Indian culture its various Indochinese aspects, Laos has defended it against Chinese culture. The middle valley of the Mekong, protected on the East by the Indochinese Cordilleras and on the North and South by the rapids (which King Sulyia Vongsa was careful not to render practicable so as not to deliver over the keys of the Kingdoms to his neighbours) has formed and still forms a march or out-post of Indian culture which the Laotians, who had become its champions, defended against the pressure of the Sino-Vietnamese populations.

Laos has continued to carry out her mission as defender of India civilization and rampart against Chinese invasion with unflagging courage, and it is this mission, together with her great historical past, that today confers upon Laos the right to be treated as an equal partner in associating with the other countries of the world.



Historical Aspects of Laos

BY

Katay D. SASORITH,
Former Prime Minister of Laos.

According to our thousands of years old legends all the populations that are racially Laotian descend from the same common ancestor, Khun Borom. When we strip these legends of their romantic, poetic, or merely literary elements, we are justified in asserting that Khun Borom was simply a descendant of the Thai kings who ruled at one time in China. Khun Borom divided his Empire among his seven sons. Laos as we know it is formed out of the remnants of the first of these Kingdoms, in other words the ancient Lan-Xang which was conferred upon the eldest son, Khun Lo. As the result of various political changes, the greater part of the territories and populations belonging to Lan-Xang were incorporated into Siam. To this day they form that part of Siam which the Siamese call Phak-Isarn (Siamese North-East), but which some people continue to call the « Siamese Laos ».

In as far as it is possible to guess at the past in the light of what these legends and traditions teach us, we may take it that the country which at first was known by the name of Muong-Xieng-Dông-Xieng-Thong, then by that of Muong-Swa, and finally by that of Lan-Xang, had always been ruled over by Kings from the very earliest times till just before the French intervention in 1893. Khun Borom, and also his six younger brothers, probably owed the Royal Crown to his own personal merit. What people are pleased to call Khun Borom's Empire was no doubt originally a mere accumulation of empires which owed its existence to the genius for organization and for conquest of this Thai prince from China. This would account for the long lists of recommendations which, according to the legend, Khun Borom addressed to his sons:

« You are going to conquer (1) lands according to my instructions,

(1) The Laotian word which is used is « *kin* », « to eat » (« *kin ban kin muong* ») has a double meaning. It can also mean « to rule ». We are, however, translating it by « conquer » for this seems to us to conform more exactly to the spirit of the legend. « *The king eats his royalty as a governor eats his province* » (G. Coedès, *Histoire ancienne des États Hindouïsés d'Extrême-Orient*).

each of you shall carve himself a Kingdom as vast as his own deserts; but no one of you shall trespass on the domains of the others. The Kingdom of the eldest shall remain that of the eldest, the Kingdom of the youngest shall remain that of the youngest. Sons shall succeed to sons, grand-sons to grand-sons, great grand-sons to great grand-sons. Be careful to enquire after each other regularly. If one of you possesses in his Kingdom anything that the others do not possess in theirs, let him not fail to send them gifts of that thing, and let this be reciprocal. Happiness and prosperity shall reward those who shall have followed my advice, misfortune shall befall those who shall not have followed it (...). Respect truth and seek no quarrel with your neighbour (...). Do not get drunk on alcohol nor with opium for they will cause you to lose all intelligence and dignity (...). Inform all the inhabitants what work is due on the rice plantations and on the fields, as you inform them also which days are holidays and festivals (...). I transmit these counsels to you exactly as I myself received them from your grandfather in the Kingdom of the Sky (1)... »

But a great many Thai families that had fled from Chinese tyranny must have been settled in the country for a very long time, for the comparison has been between a flood and « *the march of that extraordinary race, adaptable and fluid as water and with its power of insinuation and of taking its colour from that of the sky and its form from the shape of the river bed, but which never loses its essentially individual character and language however various its aspect, and which spread out in an immense sheet over the whole of Southern China, over Tonking, Laos, Siam and as far as Burma and Assam* »(2). And apparently, if we adhere strictly to the spirit of the legend, it was due to the prayers and entreaties of these numerous and important families of Thai emigrants, who wished to escape the authority of backward native chiefs, that Khun Borom was chosen for the task of conquering the country. The legend, for that matter, tells how Khun Borom (3) when he came down from the Sky (the Celestial Empire, or China) with all the royal insignia for his own coronation and for that of his sons, had to wage war with a rather heavy hand against the Kha chiefs in Muong-Xieng-Tông.

..*

(1) The Celestial Empire, or China.

(2) Louis Finot.

(3) : Mounted on a white elephant, whose eyelids and black lips were of most perfect design and whose transparent curved tusks crossed each other, he was accompanied by his two wives and both preceded and followed by a long procession of horses, elephants, oxen, buffalos, scholars, mandarins, soldiers, pages, and musicians, as well as by more than six hundred ladies and maids of honour walking two by two... ».

The first part of the period that runs from the reign of Khun Lo to the eve of French intervention remains obscure. We refer to the period ending in 1353, date at which Fa Ngum came to the throne. No authentic document that is contemporary with this early period of our national history has reached us. The legends and traditions of our old land have nonetheless handed down to us three or four lists of the names of Kings which on the whole vary very little and which are generally agreed in counting twenty-two Kings prior to Fa Ngum.

From the reign of Fa Ngum until that of Sai Ong Hue (1711) an increasingly clear light is shed on our history thanks to the possibility we have of comparing and confronting our Annals with the historical documents of our neighbouring countries from the 14th century onwards. M. George Coédès, in his *Histoire ancienne des Etats hindouisés d'Extrême-Orient*, quoting in part from Louis Finot, gives the following account of the events that mark the transition from the veiled twilight of the early period to the growing daylight of the second period:

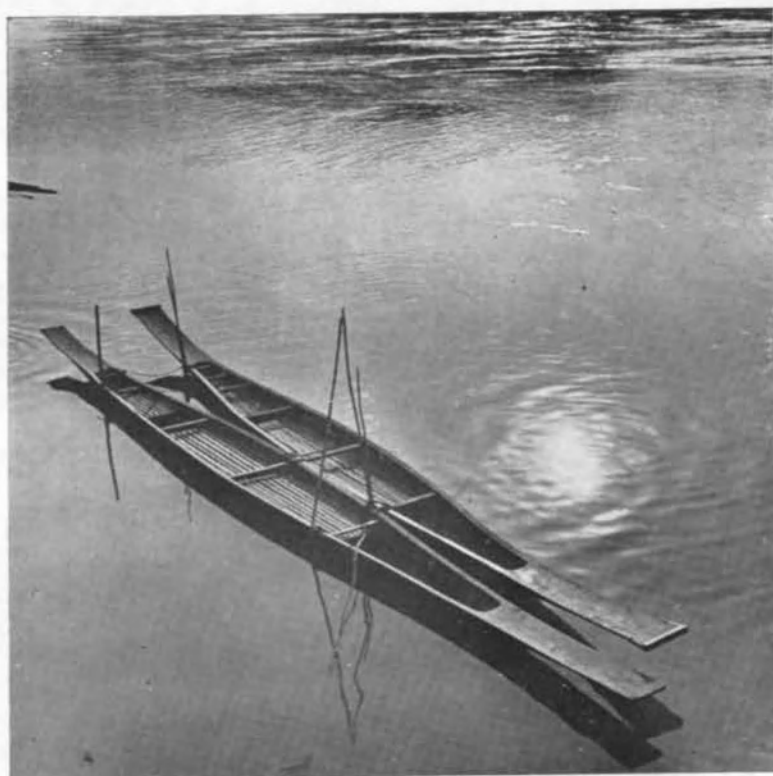
« Having governed his Kingdom badly, Phaya Lang was exiled to the mountains (or shut up in a cage in Pak-U, according to another legend), and supplanted by his son Phaya Khamphong. When a son was born to the latter, he sent a message to the dethroned king asking him what name he wished to be given to his grandson. The old man in his irritation answered only: « Phi fa pha! » (« May Heaven blight you! »). On receiving this answer Phaya Khamphong simply called his son Phi fa (« Spirit from Heaven »). This pompous name was scarcely to be justified, for the only thing Phi Fa had in common with the god whose name he bore was a marked taste for women, a taste that didn't even stop at the doors of his father's harem. He was driven out the country and never reigned. Before he was exiled he had a son, the future Phaya Fa Ngum, who was born in 1316.

« The exiled prince found refuge at the court of the King of Cambodia who, at that time, was probably Jayavarmaparamesvara who succeeded to the throne of Angkor in 1327. Young Fa Ngum was brought up by a scholarly monk from the capital called, in the Laotian Chronicles, Maha Pasaman Chao (Phra Mahāsamana). When he was sixteen the King of Cambodia gave him his daughter, princess Kēo (or Yot Kēo, or Kēo Lol Fa) in marriage. Then at some indeterminate date between 1340 and 1350 he entrusted him with an army destined to reconquer his father's Kingdom ».

..

From Fa Ngum to the dividing of Lan-Xang into three distinct Kingdoms, we can count exactly thirty-two Kings. A brief chronological summing-up of the dynasties brings four essential facts to the surface:

LAOTIAN
HARMONIES



a) WATER HARMONY



b) HARMONY OF LIVING BEINGS



c) HARMONY OF FLOWER-LIKE GIRLS

Photos R. Cauchetier

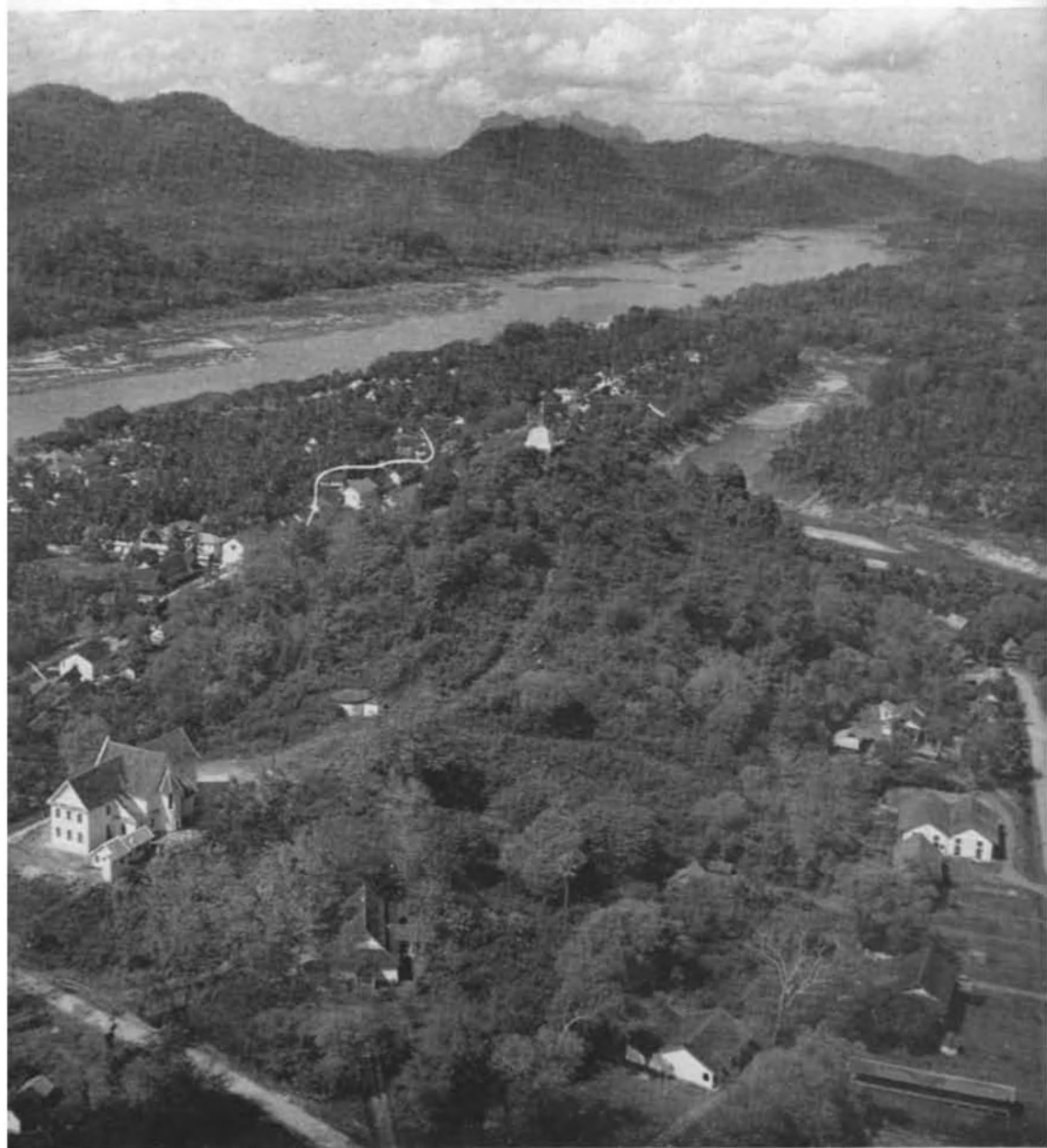


Photo R. Cauchetier

LUANG PRABANG
Capital of the Kingdom

First, Lan-Xang was always, from the earliest times right up to the eve of French intervention, governed by Kings, by a single King when the country was united and the whole nation rallied round a single central ruling-power; then by several Kings when the country was divided by dynastic rivalry and the nation was cut up into as many Kingdoms or Principalities as there were pretenders with more or less legitimate claims. All these pretenders must however have had sufficient prestige to have each his followers among the intriguing aristocrats that lived in the shadow of the throne, and power enough to force submission from a respectable fraction of the nation.

On the other hand, with the exception of a very few usurpers, all these Kings, whether they reigned over the whole of Lan-Xang or over only a part of its vast territories, were of the Khun Lo Dynasty.

But royalty in Lan-Xang was not always transmitted from father to son nor in the order of primogeniture, as it is in most of the monarchies in the Occident. A great many sons never succeeded their fathers or only came to the throne after a number of collaterals, and many younger sons were crowned before their elders.

And finally, girls were excluded from succession to the throne. In the whole long list of Sovereigns that reigned over Lan-Xang we find only one woman's name: Nang Kéo Phimpha, «the Cruel», who began by manoeuvring in the background for some time, and by having a whole succession of young Kings deposed or massacred; she ended by seizing the throne and she reigned for a year, following after the thirty-second sovereign of Lan-Xang, her nephew. «*It is a matter for vain conjecture,*» writes Jacques Le Boulanger, «*what were the motives that urged this princess, who was crueller than Frédégonde or than Marguerite de Bourgogne, to perpetrate such a wholesale slaughter of kings! Was she a sanguinary despot, or simply a royal Lampito whose temperament was too much for her?*» (1). Nang Keo Phimpha was in her turn executed. According to some she was decently shot and «*her corpse was left for the crows and vultures*». Others, doubtless unable to forgive her useless cruelty, take cruel pleasure in telling how they bound the condemned princess and laid her on the bank of a river with «*her head on a rock and her feet in the water, till death intervened.*»

* . *

A thorough study of the Annals of old Lan-Xang, both of their

(1) «*Marriages between brother and sister were always allowed in the royal family of Lan-Xang. On the other hand, they are forbidden to the people of the lower classes.*» (J. Le Boulanger's Note).

form and of their spirit, leads us to make a synthesis of two facts of another order that are also important. On the one hand, though the Laotian Sovereigns did, as a rule, surround themselves with counsellors and had administrators to help them (the *Chao Muong*), they legislated and governed alone and, as is indicated by the title they bore (*Chao Sivil* or *Chao Maha Sivil*, « Master » or « Grand Master of Lives »), they wielded over their subjects the power of life and death.

On the other hand, the successor to the throne was appointed in some cases by the King himself (when he felt that the Royal regime was strong enough to enforce respect for his last will and testament), in others by the suzerain (for example when there was fierce dynastic rivalry for the vacant throne), or else, and this was more likely, by decision of an Assembly composed of the highest personalities in the Kingdom. It is a fact that each succession to the throne is reported in our Annals in the following terms: « *The great Buddhist chiefs, the great Brahmin chiefs, and the great civil and military mandarins agreed (or: reached an agreement) that Prince So-and-so should ascend the throne* ». Does this not show that our ancestors had a high degree both of wisdom and a political sense?

On the whole, we may conclude from the above facts that in Lan-Xang the Government was one of absolute monarchy, that it was semi-hereditary and semi-elective, and at the same time limited to the male descendants of the sole and only Khun Lo Dynasty.

We insist on the term « monarchist », although it can only be properly applied to the Lan-Xang of before the scission; because from 1711 onwards there were as many as three kings ruling simultaneously, one in Vientiane, one in Luang-Prabang and one in Champassak.



But did this scission, when it gave birth to three distinct Governments, have as a result the dividing of Lan-Xang into three entirely sovereign States completely independent of each other, and the Laotian nation into three quite different nations? The question is not without interest though it may appear at first to be so, for on it rests for the main part the legitimacy and legality of the unification of Laos which was accomplished immediately after the Second World War, in favour of H. M. Sisavang Vong, King of Luang-Prabang.

In order to reply to this important question we must remember that although Lan-Xang was divided up at certain periods of its history into several distinct Kingdoms, it never ceased to be unanimously considered, in the eyes at least of its populations, as forming in its entirety one single and same geographical and moral entity,

if not a political one. Whether it were united under the sceptre of a single monarch, as from the time of Fa Ngum to that of Nantharath (1353-1711), or divided up between various descendants of Khun Lo (from 1711 to 1893, the year of French intervention), Lan-Xang remained Lan-Xang, as present-day Laos has remained Laos.

To convince oneself of this it is enough to recall the social and political terminology that has always been in use throughout the whole of Lan-Xang, or what today is Laos. This terminology has remained unvaried whatever the events. From oldest antiquity to the present day we have said in our everyday language:

Sua Sal Lao, meaning Laotian origin and race;
Sal Lao, meaning the Laotian Nation;
Muong Lao, meaning the Laotian Country;
Pathet Lao, meaning the Laotian State.

Even when, as for example after the last partition of Lan-Xang there was a Laotian king at Luang-Prabang (as after 1711), another Laotian king at Vientiane (as after 1712), and still another Laotian king at Champassak (as after 1713), not one of these sovereigns, nor any of their descendants, ever succeeded, as long as the country remained dismembered, in having the inheritance and the exclusive use of the appellations of racial, social, or even political origin attributed to him. So that, although the territories of Lan-Xang taken as a whole continued to be called by the name of *Muong Lao*, the various Kingdoms which were born of the dismemberment of the Laotian State had simply to call themselves by the name of their capital *Muong* Luang-Prabang, *Muong* Vientiane, *Muong* Champassak. The term *Muong*, signifying « Country » is actually fairly generally used. It may apply to the whole of a country or merely to any densely populated urban district of a certain size. This explains why the word *Muong* has, in every day language, come to be synonymous with city, district, or region. Its chief is invariably called *Chao Muong*, the expression *Chao* implying in its general application the idea of ownership, of authority, of sovereignty (1).

It is clear, therefore, that even when *Muong* Luang-Prabang, *Muong* Vientiane, and *Muong* Champassak had each a separate existence, *Muong Lao* nonetheless remained *Muong Lao*. For Lan-Xang, unlike many other empires past and present, but like present-day Laos, lumped together within the limits of its territory a number of populations that were extremely homogeneous.

(1) It was this that led some misinformed French historians to dispute the royal or princely status of the *Chao* of Luang-Prabang and Champassak, putting them on a level with mere regional chiefs.

If we leave out a few ethnological Minorities (Khas, Meos, etc...) that are scattered here and there, generally in the heights, the whole of *Muong Lao* spoke the same language, honoured the same genii, cultivated the same religion and had the same usages and customs. The same can not be said either of any of the ancient empires, nor of India or of the Great China of the present day.



There was another factor besides this community of language, beliefs, religion and customs, that held together and united the Laotian country, and that was its feudal organization which was everywhere alike.

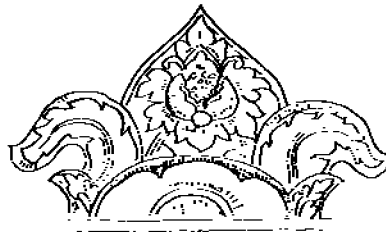
The country was made up of provinces that were all organized on the same model as the capital (which represented the central power) and each of which enjoyed a large degree of autonomy. A chief was set at the head of each of them, called the *Chao Muong*, who was generally chosen from among the worthiest and most representative members of the most influential family in the province concerned. Such a family was as often as not related to the Royal family either by blood ties of more or less ancient date, or through some of the matrimonial alliances that the polygamous Asian monarchs were always willing to contract, even with the least of their vassals if they chanced to have daughters who were famous for their charm or their beauty.

When disturbances occurred to upset the capital and its King they did not necessarily affect the provinces and their *Chao Muongs*. In spite of the violent competition that would every now and then arise around the throne, the princes and feudal lords who acted as *Chao Muongs* did not explicitly take sides, but went quietly on governing and administering their little States or fiefs and agreed in advance to put themselves under the rule of the victor, provided he was of their own race and of the royal line of descent. This unvarying feudal organization is to be found at all periods of Lan-Xang's history. Every time that dynastic rivalry caused the Kingdom to be broken up for a time the provinces simply gravitated round several different monarchs, each according to its geographical situation or the interests of its local policy. If *Muong Lao* ceased after 1711 to exist as an empire in the political sense of the word, its populations and the form of its political and administrative organization was yet so homogeneous that it remained one single nation, a nation that one might qualify as « polycephalous » because it was governed by several sovereigns all of the same Dynasty, each exercising his temporal power within the limits of his little State, but possessing real moral and spiritual authority throughout the whole of the country. In spite of its dismemberment the country could therefore be considered as still in its undivided state until such

time as a great prince whose talent and merit nobody contested, should rally all the petty chiefs of rival States to his name and group them together once more under a single sceptre. In short, it was a sort of Confederacy of States in disguise, latent and unknown to European international law. The absence of a single strong central power, although regrettable, was in this case tempered by the lack of rapid means of communications. This lack inevitably narrowed down the political horizon of the masses to the frontiers of the territory under the direct authority of their own petty King... The absence of a central power was also tempered by the admirable social and spiritual tie that never ceased to bind the Laotian peoples together, and by those other ties of vassalship and of suzerainty that formerly linked the various countries of Asia one to another.

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* *

At the time of France's intervention in the upper and middle basins of the Mekong, towards the end of the 19th century, it was face to face with this polyecephalous nation, this latent Confederacy of States, that she found herself. If she had been better informed France could either have restored the Confederacy in favour of one of the ruling Laotian Kings of the moment, or boldly put herself at its head and take its government into her own hands. Unfortunately she did nothing of the sort. Laos unity was once more sacrificed. It has only just been restored to life, after the Second World War.



Chronological Table of the History of Laos

by

A. R. MATHIEU

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

1. — « *The present study makes no claim to dispel the thick mist that clouds, and will continue for a long time to cloud, the past history of Lan Xang* », wrote Paul Le Boulanger in 1931, at the very beginning of his *History of Laos*. The table that is about to follow requires, unfortunately, the same foreword. The only ambition it has or could have is to set before the reader rather an historical epitome, based wherever possible on an uncertain chronology, than a precise chronological table.

2. — On first thoughts this lack of precision may seem surprising in the history of a people whose civilization is so old. How, for example, is it possible when the Laotian people has at its disposal and has had since ancient times, a remarkable writing system? The answer is to be found in the continual upheavals from which Lan-Xang has suffered across the ages through the pressure brought to bear on it by the neighbouring countries. On several occasions the big cities were put to the sack and sometimes conscientiously razed to the ground. Almost all the monuments and documents of any historical value have disappeared, and those that have been preserved are scattered about the country and are generally incomplete.

3. — The study that follows has adopted the divisions that are usual in these matters and is composed of four parts:

- *Elements of Prehistory* (up to the 14th century A. D.);
- *The struggle of Unity* (from 1353 to 1711);
- *The Scission* (from 1711 to 1885);
- *From the French Intervention* (from 1885 to the present day).

I. — SOME ELEMENTS OF PREHISTORY

a) — PREHISTORIC SITES.

Little is known about the prehistory of Laos, in spite of the fact that it lasts almost up to modern times: 1353 (accession of King Fa Ngum).

A few *prehistoric sites* of great interest:

a) Outskirts of *Luang Prabang*: vestiges of the « Hoabinhian » Epoch (1) and of a race seemingly Indonesian;

b) *Mahaxay* Caves (Khammouane Province): traces of a Neolithic civilization having intercourse with the Indonesian populations of Central Việt-Nam;

c) *The Plain of the Jars* (Xieng-Khuang Province). The recipients in question would seem to have had some funeral purpose. The iron and bronze objects and the pottery found in the Jars, or thereabouts, prove that in the Bronze Age there must have been « a powerfully constituted social organization having a well-ordered hierarchy » on the Tran-ninh (2).

Other sites — more particularly in the Savannakhet-Kheng-Kok region — have not yet been seriously explored. We may at this stage, however, state that they confirm the opinion that the Mekong valley was inhabited many centuries before the Christian era.

b) — SUCCESSIVE ETHNICAL CONTRIBUTIONS.

As regards this matter, innumerable hypothesis have been brought forward, sometimes contradicting each other. There is nothing surprising about this in such a meeting-ground of races, influences, and civilizations. As a rule the following succession of racial contributions and ethnical influences is accepted:

1° — In prehistoric times an *Indonesian* 'race' settled in the Mekong basin whose descendants are the present-day Kha tribes;

2° — The Kha tribes were then driven back by the Chams, whose expansion seems to have taken place in two movements:

(*a*) the Southern extremity of the Laotian territory formed an integral part of the Kingdom of Champa,

(*b*) a second Cham Kingdom seems to have been founded later on in the Nam-Mun basin (a tributary of the Mekong. — Its right bank is higher up the river than Pakse).

(1) The Hoabinhian Epoch derives its name from the vestiges first discovered in the Hoa-Binh Caves (North Việt-Nam).

(2) Madeleine Colani, *op. cit.* in *fine*.

3° — *Khmer Expansion*: the Khmers, a very hinduised people, drove the Chams back and ended by assimilating them. The Khmer influence, which is strongly marked in Southern Laos (the Vat Ph'u ensemble), probably spread as far as North of Luang-Prabang.

4° — *Thai Invasion*: it is difficult to say at what period the Thais arrived in the Mekong valley. It is a moot point whether their arrival took the form of one or more massive invasions of a distinctly marked character, or whether it was in the nature rather of very fluid infiltration; it is probable that it took both these forms simultaneously. We can put no precise date anywhere near the legend of Khun Borom, whatever may be its groundwork of undoubted historical truth. And it will take the reigns of twenty-two more Kings after Khun Lo, Khun Borom's son, to carry us as far as 1316, the beginning of the historical period (birth of Fa Ngum).

II. — THE STRUGGLE FOR UNITY¹

When there is too great a chronological gap between the authors the first column will bear a reference, complementary to P. Le Boulanger, which will be marked: (L. B....).

DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
1316	— Birth of Fa Ngum, son of Thao Phi Fa.
circa 1320-1330	— Thao Phi Fa is driven out of Muong Swa (future Luang Prabang) by his father, King <i>Phaya Souvanna-Khamphong</i> , because of his loose living. Thao Phi Fa, accompanied by young Fa Ngum, seeks refuge in Cambodia.
circa 1338	— Marriage of Fa Ngum (aged about sixteen) to the Khmer princess Nang Keo Lot Fa.
circa 1340-1350	— The King of Cambodia places Phi Fa and Fa Ngum at the head of an army for the purpose of imposing their right to the throne of Muong Swa. — The expedition of the «Ten-Thousand». Victories over the Princes of Champasak and of Xieng-Khuang.
1353	— Victorious over his grandfather at Pak-Ming, Fa Ngum is proclaimed King and gives his States the name of Lan-Xang (which is usually translated as «Million Elephants».) — He starts to wage war against those princes who refuse to yield to his authority, and he beats them at Phai Nam (Vientiane). — Treaty with Annam to agree about the Eastern and Northern frontiers.

¹ The dates given in the following table are those given by H. E. Katay D. Sasorith. When there is too great a gap chronologically between the various historians, the first column will be completed by a reference given in brackets. As for example the one that mentions Paul Le Boulanger: (L. B....).

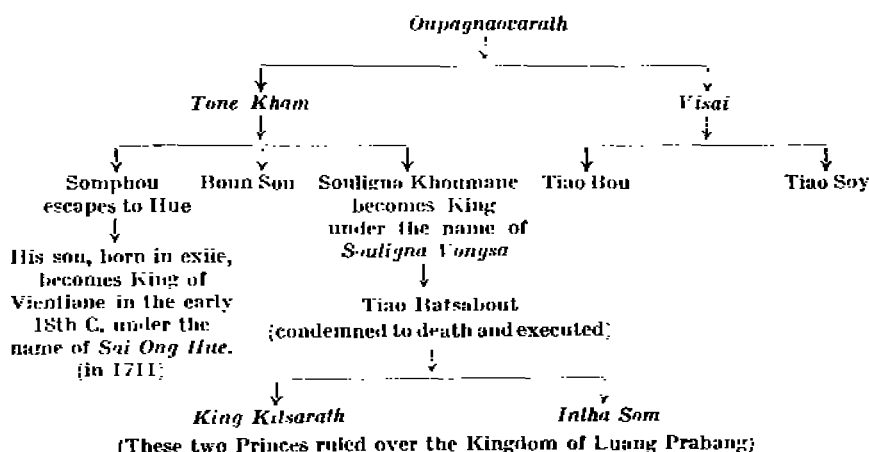
DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
1358	-- Khmer Buddhist mission arrives from Phnom-Penh (Cambodia). It brings with it the Phra Bang (Protector of the Kingdom, which is installed at Muong Swa. Victorious war against the Siamese. Unity is achieved between the populations that are racially Laotian. Lan-Xang stretches from China in the North, to Sombor in the South, and from Khorat (at present in Siamese territory) to Lao Bao.
1368	-- Death of Queen Nang Keo Lot Fa.
1393 (L. B. : 1373;	— Fa Ngum, grown too despotic, is dethroned. He is deported to Muong Nan (where he is to die five years later). --- Coronation of Thao Oun-Hneun, son of Fa Ngum. As a ruler he will take the name of <i>Sam-Sen-Thai</i> ('Three Hundred Thousand Thais'). — Lan Xang grows rich. — Reorganization of the Army.
1415	— Death of Sam-Sen-Thai. — His eldest son, <i>Thao Lane-Khamdeng</i> succeeds to the throne.
1421	- Difficulties with Annam.
1427 (L. B. : 1428)	--- Death of Lane-Khamdeng. -- Nang Keo Phimpha, the eldest daughter of Sam-Sen-Thai starts to intrigue. Her intrigues lead to instability of rule. She installs successively on the throne : -- <i>Thao Phommathut</i> , son of Lane-Khamdeng ; -- <i>Thao Kham Tem</i> , son of Sam-Sen-Thai ; -- <i>Thao Sai</i> , son of Sam-Sen-Thai ;
1428	--- <i>Thao Khai</i> , son of Sam-Sen-Thai ;
1436	— <i>Thao Kone Kham</i> , son of Sam-Sen-Thai ; -- <i>Thao Youkhon</i> , son of Lane-Khamdeng ;
1437	— <i>Thao Khamkeut</i> , grandson of Sam-Sen-Thai ;
1440 (L. B. : 1438)	-- <i>Nang Keo Phimpha</i> (the only woman to mount the throne of Lan-Xang) only reigns for a few months. She is executed by decision of the Cabinet Council. --- <i>Thao Lu-Sai</i> succeeds to the throne. He is the youngest son of Sam-Sen-Thai and he reigns under the name of <i>Phaya Sai-Tia-Kaphut</i> . -- Attempted rebellion at Vientiane.
1477 (L. B. : 1478;	— Armed occupation of the Kingdom of Muong Phoucunh (Tran-ninh) by the Vietnamese, who advance in the direction of Muong Swa (Luang-Prabang). In spite of stubborn resistance on the part of the Oupabat Kone-Keo, the city falls. The old King takes refuge on the right bank of the Mekong. His son, <i>Thao Theng Kham</i> , gathers the remnants of the army together, returns to the attack, and drives back the Vietnamese who are forced to evacuate Muong Phoucunh.
(L. B. : 1479;	--- Death of Sai-Tia-Kaphut and coronation of <i>Thao Theng Kham</i> under the name of <i>Souvanna-Palang</i> . --- Recovery of the country's economy which the war had undermined.

DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
1489 (L. B. : 1486)	-- Death of Souvanna-Palang. His brother, <i>Thao La-Sen-Thai</i> is appointed his successor. The new monarch continues to develop the wealth of the country and to tighten the bonds between his and the Siamese Court.
1503 (L. B. : 1496)	- The King dies prematurely. His son, <i>Somphu</i> , aged thirteen ascends the throne.
1507 (L. B. : 1501)	- After reigning for four years Somphu dies and the eighth son of Sai-Tia-Kaphat succeeds him under the name of <i>Phaya Visan</i> ('Lightning'). -- The King causes a great many monuments to be built and his reign is a peaceful one.
1530 (L. B. : 1520)	- At his death his son Phothisane is proclaimed King under the name of <i>Phothisarath</i> . -- A peaceable and profoundly religious Sovereign. - Edict against the worship of Genii.
1536	- Phothisarath gives refuge to the fugitive Prince of Ayuthya, Ekaracha, and war breaks out once more with Siam. The army of Lan-Xang is victorious at MuongKhuk (right bank downstream from Vientiane). -- Relations with Annam excellent.
1546	- Phothisarath obtains the succession to the throne of Lan Na (Xiang Mai) for his son Settha.
1558 (L. B. : 1547)	-- Phothisarath dies suddenly. Two of his sons divide the Kingdom between them. Settha leaves Xiang-Mai and on reaching Muong Swa he forces his two brothers to abdicate in his favour. He becomes King of Lan-Xang under the name of <i>Than Sai-Setthathirath</i> . - War against the Burmese whose King, Bureng-Naung, troubled that Lan-Xang should be so prosperous, seeks to lay hold of Lan Na.
1559	Setthathirath victorious at Hat Soi. But Bureng-Naung enters Xiang-Mai. Setthathirath prudently refuses battle.
1560	- Treaty of alliance with the Siamese in order to neutralize the threat from Burma.
1563 (Louis Finot : 1565)	- Vientiane becomes the capital of the Kingdom. Fortifications are built; also the That Luang, the Royal Palace, and the Wat Phra Keo. Muong Swa takes the name of Luang-Prabang.
1563-65	-- First Burmese invasion. The Laotians start by being successful at Pak-Hui and at Muong Kem. But the Burmese send reinforcements and cross the Mekong. Vientiane is occupied but Setthathirath « takes to the maquis ». Faced with the difficulties of a rainy country, the Burmese go home.
1568-69	-- New Burmese campaign against the Siamese. Setthathirath goes to the help of his allies.
1569-70	-- Second Burmese invasion. Bureng-Naung besieges Vientiane. But once more Setthathirath breaks off the battle. The discouraged Burmese beat a retreat.

DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
1571	— Setthathirath visits his southern States to re-establish his authority there. He disappears mysteriously during the Attopeu campaign. General Phaya Sen-Soulinthara takes command of the troops and recaptures Vientiane. He has the Prime Minister and his friends killed and proclaims himself Regent.
1574	Third Burmese invasion. The Burmese recapture Vientiane which the Regent has abandoned in order to renew guerilla warfare. But the country is disunited and his plan comes to nothing.
1575	— The Burmese put the Maha-Oupahat on the throne, leave him some armed forces, and return to their country. They take Setthathirath's son, Nokeo, with them as hostage. Lan-Xang becomes a vassal of Burma. — The new King makes the ex-Regent prisoner and sends him to Burma.
1579	— A revolt breaks out in the South against the authority of the Monarch who is considered to be an agent of the Burmese. The latter return and establish order once more. They leave again before the rainy season and the troubles break out again with such force that the Oupahat and his family are forced to fly. They are all drowned at the Keng Chane pass.
1580	The Burmese then raise the ex-Regent, Sene Soulinthara, to the throne, and they send home all their hostages except Nokeo, Setthathirath's son.
1582	Death of Sene Soulinthara and accession of his son, <i>Nakhone Noi</i> , to the throne. Decay of Burmese power. Trouble breaks out against Nakhone Noi. He is deposed by the Burmese at the request of a Loutian delegation. During nine years no king succeeds to the throne and disorder is at its height.
1591	— The bonzes ask the Burmese for Nokeo, Setthathirath's son's, to return. As they are absorbed in their war against the Siamese they agree to this request. — Nokeo becomes King of Lan-Xang. He denounces Burmese suzerainty over his Kingdom.
1592	— Nokeo leads a victorious attack against Luang-Prabang which refused to recognize his authority, and he renews the ties of suzerainty with Muong Phoueuenh.
1596	Death of Nokeo. His cousin Vongsa succeeds to the throne under the name of <i>Thammikuruth</i> .
1622	— This King, seeing the rapid growth of his son's popularity, treats him as a rebel. The son, <i>Ouphagnouvarath</i> , gathers his many supporters together and defeats his father's troops. He is proclaimed King. He orders his father's execution.
1623	— Ouphagnouvarath dies but the circumstances of his death are not known.

The documents so lack precision that it is impossible to give any certain account of what happened during the period of confusion that opens with this death. The dates become more uncertain than ever and the various sources are so divergent that a number of interpretations are admissible, as well shall see:

DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
from 1627 to 1637	1° According to P. L. Boulanger :
	Successive reigns of : — <i>Phothisarath II</i> , son of Sene Soulinthara ; — <i>Mone Keo</i> , son of Oupagnouvarath ; — <i>Oupagnouvarath</i> , son of the above ; — <i>Tone Kham</i> , son of the above ; — <i>Visai</i> , brother of the above ; For the decades that follow the competition between dynasties took the following form :



DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
1637	— <i>Souligna Vongsa</i> ascends the throne. This is extraordinarily fortunate for Lan-Nang as this Monarch acts in such a way as to avoid for a time the inevitable scission. — <i>Souligna Vongsa</i> reorganizes the public services and restores the power of the country. — He gives support to two military expeditions against Muong Phoueuuh whose purpose is to carry off a Princess of that Kingdom whom he wishes to marry in spite of opposition on the part of the King of Xiang-Khuang. <i>Souligna Vongsa</i> will succeed in this enterprise but his dynasty will forfeit the goodwill of the Court of Muong Phoueuuh. — A treaty in which the frontiers are delimited is signed with Annam. — His son commits adultery and by order of the King he is condemned to the penalty attached to this crime and executed, in spite of his being the only son. This act was heavy with consequences for the future of Lan-Nang.

DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
	-- The first Europeans to visit the country arrived during this period. The Dutch merchant, Van Wusthoff, stayed for some time at Vientiane and was followed shortly afterwards by Father Jean-Marie Leria, an Italian Jesuit. Both were very much struck by the wealth and splendour of the Kingdom.
1694	Death of Souigna Vongsa leaving no heirs except his two grandsons who are still young children.
	— His son-in-law, <i>Tian Thala</i>, seizes the Crown.
	— Souigna Vongsa's two grandsons, King Kitsarath and Intha Som, escape to Luang-Prabang.
	Sai Ong Hue, Souigna Vongsa's nephew, persuades the King of Annam to put him in command of an Annamite army to enforce his claim to the throne against the usurper Tian Thala. Sai Ong Hue, in exchange, recognizes Annam's suzerainty over Lan-Nang. After making the most careful preparations Sai Ong Hue sets out. He strikes camp on the Muong Phouenunh where he waits for a favourable opportunity.
1700	-- <i>Nan Tharat</i>, Governor of Nakhone, seizes power. <i>Tian Thala</i> commits suicide.
	<i>Sai Ong Hue</i> takes advantage of the disorder that results from this <i>coup de force</i> to seize Vientiane and has himself proclaimed King.
	-- He sends his half-brother, <i>Thao Nong</i>, to Luang-Prabang where King Kitsarath and Intha Som refuse to recognize his authority.
	-- The two Princes withdraw and escape to the Sip Song Pan Na. There the King, Khamone Noi, puts 9,000 men at their disposal. King Kitsarath and Intha Som attack Luang-Prabang. <i>Thao Nong</i> returns in haste to Vientiane, taking the Phra Bang with him.
1707	— <i>King Kitsarath</i> proclaims himself King of Lan-Xang from Luang-Prabang and declares himself master of the provinces that lie North of Xieng-Khane.
	— Muong Phouenunh refuses to pay tribute to Sai Ong Hue; the latter organizes a military expedition and is victorious.
1713	— <i>Chao Soi Sisamual</i> proclaims himself King of Champassak.
1735	— Death of Sai Ong Hue. His son, <i>Ong Long</i>, succeeds to the throne.
	2* According to H. E. Kalay D. Sasorith:
1623	<i>Pholisan</i> succeeds to the throne; he belongs to the Setthathirath family.
1627	-- <i>Mom Kea</i>, Thammikarath's second son, is proclaimed King. He dies the same year.
1628	— <i>Oupagnouvarath</i>, son of the above, ascends the throne.
1639	— Death of Oupagnouvarath. His eldest son, <i>Tone Kham</i>, succeeds him.

DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
1654	-- Coronation of <i>Souligna Vongsa</i> .
1711	-- Death of <i>Souligna Vongsa</i> .
	-- <i>Phaya Muong Tian</i> , Prime Minister, and <i>Nantharath</i> , <i>Souligna Vongsa's</i> nephew, accede successively to the throne. -- <i>King Kilsarath</i> , <i>Souligna Vongsa's</i> grandson, founds the Kingdom of Luang-Prabang and proclaims himself its King.
1712	<i>Sai Ong Hue</i> , <i>Souligna Vongsa's</i> nephew, becomes King of Lan-Xang and is enthroned at Vientiane.
1731	-- <i>Saysisamoul</i> , <i>Sai Ong Hue's</i> brother, becomes King of Champassak.
	3° According to H.E. Thao Nhouty Abhay: In his study, <i>The Kingdom of Champassak</i>, H. E. Thao Nhouty Abhay refutes in part both the preceding versions by referring back to the Siamese Annals and to those of Champassak. These documents do in fact make mention of the flight of two of <i>Souligna-Vongsa's</i> grandsons, one of them, <i>Chao Ong Lo</i>, to the Court of Hue, the other and younger, <i>Chao Nokasat</i>, to Ngion Phan Lam, with the complicity, and under the protection, of the famous bonze chief, <i>Phra Khou Phon Smek</i>, whose odyssey to Cambodia is well known to all cultured Laotians. We find <i>Chao Ong Lo</i> returning later, under the name of <i>Sai Ong Hue</i>, to drive the usurper from the throne of Vientiane, while <i>Chao Nokasat</i> who sought refuge at Ngion Phan Lam is, on reaching his majority in 1713, called to the throne of Champassak under the name of <i>Chao Soi Si Samout Phouthong Koun</i>. Confronted by these variant readings the author admits his perplexity and hastens to point out that the documents which the various authors have consulted offer no sufficient historical guarantee.
III. — THE SCISSION	
	Lan Xang is divided, then, into three rival Kingdoms:
	-- The Kingdom of Vientiane, suzerain of Muong Phoueunh and vassal of Annam ;
	-- the Kingdom of Luang-Prabang, which first seeks the support of China and then that of Siam ;
	-- the Kingdom of Champassak, which draw closer to Siam and Cambodia, the former's vassal.
	From this point onwards (the early 18th century) and in spite of the fact that a strong resemblance both of civilization and of organization still exists between these three Kingdoms, it is helpful in studying the history of Laos to consider it as turning on the three pivots of Luang-Prabang, Vientiane, and Champassak.

DATES	LUANG-PRABANG	VIENTIANE	CHAMPASSAK
1722	Death of King Kilsarath and accession to the throne of <i>Mom Noi</i> , his cousin and the grandson of the King of Sip Song Pan Na.	Reign of Sai Ong Hue.	Reign of <i>Chao Soi Sisamout</i> .
1731	Coup d'État of <i>Intha Som</i> (1) who seizes power and drives out Mom Noi.		
1737			Death of Chao Soi Sisamout and accession of his son, <i>Sayakoumane</i> .
1753	The Burmese obtain Sai Ong Hue's promise of friendly neutrality as they overrun Luang-Prabang before starting their campaign against the Siamese.		
1754		Expedition against Muong Phoucunh which refused to pay tribute. Xieng-Khuang is taken.	
1756	Death of Intha Som and reign of his son <i>Inthara Vongsa</i> , who dies the same year. His brother, <i>Sotika Koumane</i> , ascends the throne.		
1767		Death of Sai Ong Hue who is succeeded by his grandson, <i>Ong Boun</i> .	
1769	Death of Sotika Koumane. His brother, <i>Tiao Vongsa</i> , succeeds him.		
1771	Invasion of the Kingdom of Vientiane by the King of Luang-Prabang's troops. The Burmese fly to the rescue of Vientiane. On their way they sack Luang-Prabang and meet Tiao Vongsa at Muong Kassy. The King of Luang-Prabang is defeated.		
1774	Tiao Vongsa signs a treaty with Siam.		

(1) Brother of King Kilsarath, according to P. Le Boulanger and H. E. Katay D. Sasorith (See above, p. 38).

DATES	LUANG-PRABANG	VIENTIANE	CHAMPASSAK
1778	The Siamese invade the Kingdom of Vientiane and after a siege that lasts four months they capture and pillage the capital. A Siamese Governor installs himself in the Royal Palace. The Phra Bang and the Phra Keo are carried off to Bangkok and the Royal Princes are made prisoners whilst Ong Boun makes good his escape. The Siamese force Luang Prabang to recognize their sovereignty.		
1781		Ong Boun submits to the Siamese who install his son on the throne of Vientiane under the name of <i>Nanthasene</i> . The Phra-Bang is restored to him.	
1787	Death of Tiao Vongsa who leaves no direct heir. Quarrels break out about the throne which remains vacant for four years.		
1791	Nanthasene, King of Vientiane, invades Luang-Prabang while it is a prey to dynastic dissension. Although victorious, Nanthasene does not dare reunite the two countries for fear of what may be the reaction of the Siamese. He does, however, annex Houa Phan to Vientiane.		Death of Sayakoumane. <i>Chao Fay Na</i> succeeds to the throne.
	<i>Annourout</i> , Souigna Vongsa's brother, proclaims himself King.		
1795		The Siamese depose Nanthasene and put his brother <i>Intharavong</i> in his place. The latter chooses <i>Chao Anou</i> as <i>Onpahal</i> .	
1801		Death of Intharavong. The Siamese appoint <i>Chao Anou</i> as his successor.	
1811			Death of <i>Chao Fay Na</i> . Sayakoumane's grandson, <i>Cha Nou</i> accedes to the throne but dies after two years' reign.

DATES	LUANG-PHABANG	VIENTIANE	CHAMPASSAK
1813			<i>Phromma Noi</i> , the grand-son of Chao Soi Sisamout, ascends the throne.
1815	Death of Anourout. His son, <i>Mantha Thourath</i> , is proclaimed King of Luang-Prabang.		
1817			Death of Phromma Noi.
1819		Chao Anou helps to quell a revolt by the Khas of the Kingdom of Champassak. He obtains from the Siamese, for his son, <i>Chao Nho</i> , the throne of that Kingdom. Chao Anou makes Chao Nho arrange an entrenched camp at Oubone and he orders him to instruct his recruits with a view to shaking off Siamese domination.	
1825		Chao Anou goes to Bangkok where he hears there is anxiety at Court about the advance of the British in Burma. On his return to Vientiane he speeds up the preparations for war.	
1826		The news goes round that the British are attacking Bangkok where upon Chao Anou rebels against Siamese domination. Three armies march against Bangkok from Roi El, from Khorat, and from Oubone. They arrive within three days march of the capital of Siam. There they meet the Siamese troops and beat a retreat after having suffered some slight reverses. Chao Nho is made a prisoner by the Siamese. <i>Chao Houy</i> , Chao Nho's son, is appointed as Sovereign. The Siamese march against Vientiane. Chao Anou attempts to shield Vientiane by taking up his positions at Nong Boua Lam-phou, on the right bank of the Mekong. In spite of their heroic resistance the Lao-tians are defeated and Chao Anou takes to flight.	

DATES	LUANG-PRABANG	VIENTIANE	CHAMPASSAK
1827		Chao Anou takes refuge at Hue (Annam) at the Court of his suzerain. The latter supplies him with some troops.	
1828		Chao Anou marches on Vientiane by way of Vinh and Nieuang-Khouang. The Siamese send 20,000 men.	
	Mantha Thourath sends three thousand men in support of the Siamese under the leadership of his brother, Oun Keo. The latter protests against the suffering inflicted upon the population. The Siamese make him a prisoner and disarm his soldiers.	Chao Anou decides to escape to China, but the Siamese have him arrested by the King of Muong Phoueuah. Chao Anou is carried into captivity at Bangkok. He later dies there under mysterious circumstances. The Kingdom of Vientiane, now emptied of its inhabitants and covered with ruins, becomes part of the Kingdom of Siam. The Phra Bang is once more carried off and taken to Bangkok. Muong Phoueuah is annexed to Annam under the name of Tran-ninh after its King has been executed by his suzerain for having delivered up Chao Anou.	

From 1829 onwards the Kingdom of Vientiane ceases to exist and the only remaining link between Luang-Prabang and Champassak — apart from their common fund of civilization — is a sort of political parallelism resulting from their identical position with regard to Siam.

DATES	LUANG-PRABANG	CHAMPASSAK
1829	Reign of <i>Mantha Thourath</i>	Reign of <i>Chao Houy</i>
1831	An Embassy is sent to Hue whose purpose is to strengthen the ties with Annam and ease Siam's hold on the country. Luang-Prabang recuperates the Houa Phans.	
1836	Death of Mantha Thourath. His eldest son, <i>Soukhaseum</i> , is his successor. (As he was prevented from leaving Bangkok he was only officially recognized by Siam in 1839). The Kingdom is in a critical situation. Soukhaseum adopts a policy of prudence.	
1840		Death of Chao Houy. <i>Chao Nak</i> , Chao Houy's brother, becomes King of Champassak.
about 1840	First Meo migrations.	
1850	Death of Soukhaseum.	Death of Chao Nak.
1851	<i>Tiantha Rarath</i> , Soukhaseum's brother, is crowned King. Patiently and skilfully Tiantha Rarath restores his authority over Tran-ninh. The Delegate of the Emperor of Annam is supplanted by a descendant of the ancient Royal family of Muong Phouemnh.	<i>Chao Boua</i> , Chao Hou's son, succeeds to the above.
1852		Death of Chao Boua.
1856		<i>Chao Kham Nhai</i> or <i>Youtli-Thammathone</i> , third son of Chao Houy, succeeds to the throne.
1858		Death of Chao Kham Nhai. (His successor, <i>Chao Kham Souk</i> or <i>Youtli Thammathone II</i> — brother of the above — succeeds to the throne in 1863).
1861	Journey and death of Henri Mouhot at Luang-Prabang.	
1864	First Ho incursions.	
1866-1868	<i>The Mission of Doudart de Lagrée.</i>	- Doudart de Lagrée, Francis Garnier, and their companions, are appointed by Admiral de La Grandière to explore the Mekong to just beyond Luang-Prabang.
1867	The Phra Bang is restored to Tiantha Rarath by Mongkut, King of Siam.	

DATES	LUANG-PHABANG	CHAMPASSAK
1870 (L. B. : 1869)	Death of Tiantha Rarath. <i>Oun Kham</i> , 4th son of Mantha Thourath, is his successor. He is not officially recognized by Bangkok till 1872.	
1872	Invasion of Tran-ninh by the Hos. The Chief of the Phoueuns, Chao Hung, is killed in battle. Nieng-Khouang is taken by the « Red Flags ». They lay waste the tablelands and push forward as far as Vientiane. The Siamese set reprisal operations on foot. The Hos retreat towards the North where there is a great increase of unrest.	
1876	A revolt of the Khas in the Muong Ngoi region.	
1883-85	Siamese military intervention is a prelude to French intervention.	

IV. — FROM THE FRENCH INTERVENTION ONWARDS (1885)

DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
1885	— <i>Oun Kham</i> is reigning at Luang-Phabang since 1870 and <i>Chao Kham Souk</i> in Champassak since 1863. — Siam, which has the support of various foreign powers, in particular of England, extends and intensifies its influence over Laos. Under the command of Chao Meun Vai Voronut, Siamese forces carry out operations in the North-East of the country. The bonds that unite the Princes of Laos as vassals to Bangkok are drawn daily closer. — France has been expanding her influence over Vietnamese territory more and more and is anxious now to find a means of protecting that country's Western frontiers. — Taking his stand on the clauses of the Treaty of June 6th, 1884, the Emperor of Annam, whom the threatening attitude of Siam on his North-East frontiers has made uneasy, sends a protest to Bangkok with the backing of the French Foreign Office. — In November 1885, with the approval of the Siamese Government, the French Government creates a <i>French Vice-Consulate in Luang-Phabang</i>. This post is given to <i>Auguste Pavie</i> (1847-1925).
May, 7th, 1886	— <i>Provisinal Franco-Siamese Convention</i> which sanctions the establishing of a French Vice-Consulate at Luang-Phabang. France does not ratify this Convention because it might be interpreted as amounting to a recognition of Siamese supremacy over Laos.

DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
February 10th, 1887	— Pavie arrives at Luang-Prabang. Beginning of the « 1st Pavie Mission » (1887-1889).
February 15th, 1887	— H. M. Oun Kham receives Pavie for the first time in audience.
April, 1887	— Pavie leaves in the direction of the North-East with a view to bringing about the first Mekong-Tonking liaison. The attempt fails.
May, 1887	— He returns to Luang-Prabang. — Chao Meun Vai Voronot's Siamese troops retire from the Laotian capital.
June 7th, 1887	— With 600 Ho pirates Deo-van-Tri occupies Luang-Prabang and puts the city to the sack. — King Oun Kham and Pavie retire along the river as far as Paklay.
October, 1887	— A Franco-Siamese Commission is instituted « whose object is to study the frontiers ». In Tonking the Pernot and Oudri columns are formed. Their job is to keep in touch with Pavie.
November, 1887	— Pavie returns to Luang-Prabang.
January 28th, 1888	— A. Pavie-Colonel Pernot liaison. The Mekong and Tonking are successfully linked. The Thai Country (« The Twelve Districts ») is joined with Tonking.
February 17th, 1888	— Pavie returns to Luang-Prabang (March-April). — Pavie's journey to Hanoi. — Deo-van-Tri makes approaches to the French Authority.
January, 1889	— At Luang-Prabang, H. M. Oun Kham renounces his authority by reason of his great age. His eldest son, <i>Sakarine</i> , succeeds him.
1889-1891	— Pavie returns to Luang-Prabang. — Mission to Kammouane and return to France (June 12th, 1889). — « Second Pavie Mission ». — New linking up of Hanoi and Luang-Prabang. — Deo-van-Tri's final submission (April, 1890). — Bangkok conversations (October, 1890).
September 22nd, 1891	— The Tong-Xieng-Kham Franco-Siamese incident. — Pavie is appointed Consul General in Bangkok.
1892-1895	— « Third Pavie Mission ». — Renewed incidents between the French and the Siamese Authorities.
May, 1893	— French occupation of the left bank of the Mekong (Stung-Treng-Khone column; Lao-Bao-Muong Phine column; Vinh-Kammouane column). Siamese opposition. Incident of June 2nd, 1893 (Death of Inspector Grosgrain).

DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
July, 1893	— French reprisals. Naval demonstration before Bangkok (July 12th). Ultimatum of July, 20th.
October 3rd, 1893	— <i>Franco-Siamese Treaty</i> : Siam recognizes France's authority on the left bank of the Mekong.
June 5th, 1894	— Auguste Pavie, General Commissioner in Laos, takes up his quarters once more in Luang-Prabang.
1900	— The Pavie Mission continues its work until September, 1895.
October 7th, 1902	— At Champassak, death of Chao Kham Souk; Chao Nhouy succeeds to the throne and takes the ruling name of <i>Chao Ratsadanay</i> .
1903	— <i>New Franco-Siamese Treaty</i> : it leaves a number of matters still unsettled.
February 13th, 1904	— At Luang-Prabang H. M. <i>Sisavang Vong</i> succeeds his father, H. M. Sakarine after the latter's death.
April 8th, 1904	— <i>New Franco-Siamese Agreement</i> .
March 23rd, 1907	— <i>Franco-British Convention</i> (Definition of French and British zones of influence in Siam).
February 26th, 1914	— <i>Franco-Siamese Treaty</i> . Specifies the exact lie of the frontiers and settles matters subsidiary to this. The frontiers agreed upon by the Treaty of 1907 are those of the Kingdom to this day. This treaty has very serious consequences: except for the populations of Sayaboury-Paklay and those of right-bank Champassak, the Laotians of the right bank of the Mekong, and they are the most numerous, are handed over to Siam.
April 14th, 1917	— <i>Franco-Laotian Convention</i> concerning the legal status of the Kingdom of Luang-Prabang (<i>never ratified</i>).
1940-1941	— New Convention having the same purpose. — Although it is not ratified it constitutes the « Charter of the Kingdom of Luang-Prabang » pending the Treaty of August 29th, 1941. (H. E. Katay).
March 9th, 1945	— <i>Franco-Siamese hostilities</i> . France gives up the territories on the right bank of the Mekong (Sayaboury and rightbank territory of Bassac) to Siam.
September 2nd, 1945	— Japanese <i>coup de force</i> . — The French Authorities are imprisoned. The troops are disarmed excepting those who succeed in taking refuge in the bush and are protected by the population. In Southern Laos H. R. H. Prince Boun Oum of Champassak takes a predominant part in the struggle against the Japanese.
	— Japanese <i>Capitulation</i> . — A « Movement of National Independence » is founded at Vientiane and forms a Provisional Government (1). When Colonel de Crèvecoeur's Franco-Laotian forces recover Vientiane (April 24th, 1946) the Provisional Government withdraws to Siam and there organizes a resistance movement generally referred to by the name of the « Lao-Issara Movement ».

(1) For the detailed chronology of this period see *Le Laos* by H. E. Katay D. Sasorith.

DATES	KINGS, FILIATIONS, AND CHIEF EVENTS
August 27th, 1946	- <i>Provisional Modus Vivendi</i> between the French Authority and H. M. Sisavang Vong. From now onwards the Kingdom enjoys internal autonomy. - A secret Protocol is attached to the Treaty in which H. R. H. Prince Boun Oum renounces his right to the Kingdom of Champassak. Thanks to this sacrifice the unity of Laos is achieved under the high authority of H. M. Sisavang Vong.
December, 1946	--- Following upon conversations in Washington between the United States, France, and Thailand, the territories on the right bank of the Mekong that had been annexed by Siam in 1941 are returned to Laos.
March 15th, May 10th, 1947	--- Meeting of the Constituent Assembly. A democratic Constitution is voted. It is promulgated by H. M. Sisavang Vong on the 11th of May, 1947 (National Constitution Day).
July 19th, 1949	--- <i>General Franco-Laotian Convention</i>, which consecrates the independence of Laos within the framework of the French Union.
October 24th, 1949	--- « Lao-Issara Movement » is dissolved. Most of the members of this movement return to Laos.
February 6th, 1950	--- Supplementary Conventions define what, in the various domains, are to be the modalities of application of the General Convention of July 19th, 1949.
October 22nd, 1953	- <i>Franco-Laotian Treaty of Friendship and Association</i>.
1945-1954	— While year by year the Kingdom of Laos sees its independence grow more definite and gain in strength, it unfortunately becomes mixed up in the « Indochinese war », particularly marked by the <i>Vietminh invasions of April 13th, and December 24th, 1953</i>.
July 20th, 1954	— Geneva Agreements for the cessation of hostilities in Laos.
December 14th, 1955	— The Kingdom of Laos is admitted to the United Nations Organization.

Two Accounts of Travels in Laos in the 17th Century

Prefaced and annotated by Paul LÉVY,
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I. — The Travels of Gerrit van Wusthoff (1641-1642)

Already at the end of the 16th century the Dutch had followed the example of the Portuguese and Spanish and set out to conquer the « spice » market. Their quest brought them as far as the East Indies whence Europe received the greater part of its supplies. Early in the following century the Dutch had settled in the majority of these islands, with Batavia as their capital, and they sent out reconnoitring parties to Indochina where they founded trading centres both in Tonking, in Annam, and in Cambodia. In the latter country, at Lovék, which was then the capital of the Khmer kings, the Dutch East India Company installed in 1616 a complete staff of « merchants », « under-merchants », « assistants », etc... But during several decades the Company was to have great difficulty in keeping these centres going. Shortly before 1641 some Laotian merchants, after making the journey on board the ship of the famous Abel Tasman, had come as far as Batavia to sell there their cargo of benzoin and stick-lack. These merchants asked the Governor of the Indies to send a Dutch mission to their country. It was probably the Director of the Dutch trading-centre in Lovék who suggested the idea to them.

The Governor of the Dutch East Indies was at that time General Antoine van Diemen whose government was memorable for the rebuilding of Batavia and for the wresting of Malacca from the Portuguese in 1641. Van Diemen was moreover a great promoter, and he managed to give his fellow-countrymen a share in the benefit that derived from the economic development in the Dutch Indies that followed the capture of Malacca. It was this same van Diemen that inspired and helped Abel Tasman to make his famous voyage in the course of which he discovered New Zealand, Tasmania, and the coasts of Australia. It will therefore be readily understood that the Laotians' proposal met with a prompt welcome from the General. He wrote a

teller to the King of Laos and charged the under-merchant, Gerrit van Wusthoff, to deliver it, and at the same time to enquire into the commercial possibilities of the country. It was at this point, on the 20th of July, 1641, that a Dutch mission composed of its chief, Wusthoff, two assistants, a barber and two servants, all of them Dutch, left Lovèk for Vientiane with the Laotian merchant, Quan Monlip, for guide, and accompanied by an interpreter called Intsie Lannangh. The sampans on board which the mission set out had a cargo of various materials and cheap wares valued at the exact sum of 6,601 florins 10 cents; this included the value of the presents sent to His Laotian Majesty.

Until recent times the account of the journey that began in this manner was known only in an abbreviated and in parts even distorted version. This account was compiled from archives documents, that were intended to remain secret, and it was reproduced together with other notices concerning Cambodia in a work published in Harlem by Casteleyn in 1669, in other words twenty-seven years after the expedition to Laos. The story of this expedition is contained in the *Distant Journey To The Kingdoms Of Cambodia And Laos By The Dutch, And What Took Place There Before 1644* (such is the title of the little book by Casteleyn); this account was published in French in 1878 by Francis Garnier. The other documents on the subject belonging to the archives of the East India Company had, however, still to be brought to light. They were published in Dutch in 1917, actually on the initiative of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*. For indeed, it was as early as 1908 that Claude-Eugène Maitre, then Director of the *École*, urged their future editor, Dr P. N. Muller, on the occasion of his passing through Hanoi, to publish the Dutch documents on Indochina. And Dr Muller did edit those concerning Laos and Cambodia in a very fine volume that was published by the « *Linschoten-Vereeniging* » Society. The other manuscripts dealing with Annam and Tonking were unfortunately not similarly published although a summing-up of their main contents made by a Dutchman, W. J. Buch, appeared in the *Bulletin of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, volume XXXVII.

The same institution possesses copies of all these documents, whether published or not. After comparing the original version of Wusthoff's *Journal* with his *Travels in Laos*, as published by Francis Garnier, I became convinced that it would be a good thing from several points of view to bring before the public the French translation, still unpublished, of the first document. The superiority, scientifically speaking, of a 'Travel Diary', in which everything is noted down on the spot, cannot be doubted. Whereas the editor Casteleyn's abridged version, compiled with a view to pleasing the public, is inevitably of less value. We have accordingly prepared a new French translation; the few resumé and extracts given below will give some idea of its contents.

After leaving behind them Pnom-pingh (Phnom-Penh), then a mere market-town, the Lao-Dutch flotilla reached Sambabour a few days later. Sambabour used to be called in ancient times Cambhupura, not far from the present day Sambor, on the Mekong, called by the Dutch the « River of Laos ». At Sambabour they changed boats so as to be able to face up to the serious problem the river was shortly to set them, but they obviously made a halt at Bactjong (Bachong), which is still to this day the name given to Khmer ruins that lie near the modern Stung-treng:

« August 17th », notes Wusthoff, « Breeze from the South-West; cool with occasional rain. In the afternoon towards one o'clock we reached Bactjong, and there we spent the night in the ruins of an old stone church in which the Laotians made their offerings to two images with lighted candles. Fifty years ago the Kings of Cambodia had here their regular residence, but as the Laotians were then threatening them with war they forsook the place, and now everything is overgrown with wild plants. The Kings took up their residence further away (at Lovék) and they are still there at the present time. »

This episode of Laotian expansion was one of the last, if not the last, of History. The kings of Vientiane or of Lan-Xang, once they had snatched away the principality of Bassac and the districts of Attapeu and of Saravane from the Khmer protectorate, were little by little to see their prestige diminish and their kingdom crumble away: the wars with Burma and Siam and their own dynastic quarrels were directly responsible for this.

Beyond Stung-treng the difficulties were to begin that had already been foreseen. First came the crossing of the waterfalls of Khône, the « six holes through which the river pierces the mountain between islands of stones... » of which Wusthoff says that « half a mile (Dutch) off... the water makes a tremendous noise like a raging sea against the rocks... We were forced, » he specifies, « to unload our wares from the boats and to carry everything a distance of 2,600 paces; half way there is a plank fastened to a tree on which is written a notice in the Laotian and Cambodian languages which separates the two countries ». To this very day, after three centuries of vicissitudes, the frontier is the same!

Once all the goods had been transported upstream of the falls the boats had to be brought through a channel near the island of Sadam, the same that lies alongside the powerful falls of Papheng. This crossing of the waterfalls of Khône took twelve days and it was not until two months after setting out that the Dutch reached the outskirts of Bassac, and first of all Old-Bassac, « on the spot where the waggons pass on their way to Honcker from Bassac ». Which Honcker is none other than the famous capital of the Khmer kings of the great period, Angkor, of which a Dutch merchant of the 17th century wrote: « A very beautiful and pleasant spot, Anckoor, which the Castilians (Spanish) and the Portuguese call Rome... ».

From Bassac onwards the Wusthoff mission was to meet with the most amiable of welcomes, and for that matter they were never themselves behindhand in returning gift for gift, sometimes even taking the initiative. But to begin with they had to toil their way for a fortnight through the long passage of the Kemmarat rapids. During one hundred miles they had again and again to unload and tow the canoes. After this they at length arrived at the main reach of the Middle-Mekong and navigation became easy.

At That Phanom the Dutch were to greet the high-priest who governed the place and to offer him a gift of a small looking-glass, « *although we were under no obligation to do so, (but) our sole purpose was to show that we respected the local customs,* » as Wusthoff pointed out, though he makes no mention either there or elsewhere in his *Diary* of the famous sanctuary to which the locality owes its name of That Phanom.

On the following day, « *in the evening, by moonlight,* » Wusthoff and his companions reached Lakhon « *...which the Laotians hold,* » so he says, « *to be a big city of great repute although it is scarcely twice the size of Phnon-pingh.* » This city was the residence of a great prince with whom the mission was to make ample acquaintance in Vientiane. Festivities corresponding to the mid-Autumn feast-days in Tonking were being celebrated at the time in Lakhon and the Dutchmen were invited to attend them.

« *... There is no point in relating them in detail,* » writes Wusthoff; « *we attended the sermons in their churches and afterwards, when night had fallen, we were present at their fireworks. The service follows almost the same pattern as in Cambodia... We wandered about all over the village afterwards but had difficulty in making our way through the streets with our servants because of the horrible fornications that were being committed everywhere.* » And honest Puritan merchant that he was, he concluded:

« *This city is undoubtedly the most shockingly pagan spot in all the world. You can pick up a lot of gold in it at a low price.* »

One important detail that the Dutch note in connection with Lakhon is the existence of a road which brought that city within a distance of twenty-two days of the coast of Annam, or Quinam, as the Dutch called it. We may be pretty certain that they refer to the famous road which according to the Chinese texts of the 7th century ran between the region of Vinh and the mysterious Kingdom of Wentan that lay on the borderland of what today is Cambodia. Thrice a year, so Wusthoff tells us, the « Quinamese » came to Laos to sell their silk and carry back fabrics and rhinoceros horns. These latter are highly prized to this very day in Sino-Vietnamese therapeutics.

..

The mission continued its journey along a river now broadened out and grown calmer and they soon reached the region of Vientiane. At Muong-khue, a few miles from Vientiane, the King's followers came, as was customary, to examine the contents of the letter that the Governor General of the Indies was sending to the King of Laos. But Wusthoff refused to conform to this custom and in face of his firm determination the letter was solemnly transported, along with the Dutch themselves, beneath the gilded dome of a huge boat manned by forty rowers. Other equally large boats escorted it while the canoes that had made the journey followed behind. The mission then took up its quarters near to Vientiane, in a *sala* that had been specially prepared for its members.

The incident of the letter was not the only one that set the Dutch at loggerheads with the royal authorities. Another and far more important one occurred after the King had examined and found wanting the presents that H. E. van Diemen had sent him. A long and sordid bargaining transaction ensued in which the Laotian mandarins, to whom a tithe of these presents probably fell as commission, showed themselves no less grasping and crafty than the Dutch. Several pages of the *Diary* of Wusthoff are taken up with this affair. It came to an end when a gift was added of a silver telescope and several pieces of cloth. « *His Excellency the General's gift is accordingly increased in value by 600,8 laëls* », adds Wusthoff at the foot of a minutely detailed addition. The Dutch for that matter were to win by other gifts the good graces of certain powerful people in the King's immediate circle. As a result they were enabled to sell their wares and carry home a cargo of the benzoin, musc, and stick-lack, of which Laos is still the world's chief producer.

Wusthoff and his following had reached Vientiane at the time of the great feast-days of the 12th month. At that time of the year the King was wont to leave his palace and take up his residence some two miles from the city, near a big *stupa*, the *Thal Luang*. At Luang-Prabang the King does the same thing to this very day. At Vientiane it was in the *Thal Luang* that the King, who resided there during the festivities, received the Dutch mission:

« *On the sixteenth of November in the early morning* », writes Wusthoff, « *the elephants arrived to fetch the letter of H. E. the General. The letter was put on the first elephant, in a golden box; after it (came) the rest of us, each on another with his gift.*

In this way we passed in front of the Royal Palace; on either side of the road stood a line of soldiers, and we arrived from the opposite side; as we were mounted on elephants we had a good view of the town which is surrounded by a wall half the height of a man (perched on an elephant); all round there was a ditch full of filth in which all sorts of wild plants grew. When we were within a quarter of a (Dutch) mile of the place where His Majesty was to be given the letter we dismounted

and went into tents that had been prepared for us, where we waited for His Majesty to send for us. Round about us on every side the noblemen had pitched their tents and prepared camps for their soldiers, their elephants, and their horses; there was so much noise and bustle that you could have thought yourself with the army of the Prince of Orange. They kept us waiting during an hour. Then seated on a white elephant, the King arrived from the town and passed in front of our tents; we did as the others were doing, we knelt down on the path; he is a young man of about twenty-three. About three hundred soldiers marched in front of him with lances and rifles; behind him a few elephants with armed men followed behind several musicians. After that came another two thousand soldiers who were followed by sixteen elephants carrying the King's five wives. When the whole of the procession had gone by we returned to our tents. Shortly afterwards His Majesty sent us eight large doulanghs (covered trays with a stand) with food and prepared dishes on them. Towards four in the afternoon we were sent for; we went before His Majesty by way of a large square with a stone wall round it that had apertures on every side for shooting through. In the middle stood a huge pyramid, broad and high, with gilded designs at the top — they told us there were nine piculs of gold there. When they enter this square all Laotians walk bearing lighted candles to perform the customary ceremonies. After we had stayed there for a moment they carried the present before the King; they went through another door and another square and laid the present sixteen paces from him in the open air on mats, after that they gave us each a candle as Tevinia (1) Lanckan had told us yesterday was the custom. We accordingly made our way round the place with our candle and with folded hands and we came in this way in front of His Majesty who was standing in a little church with his nobles all about him; we sat down on our knees a little behind the present and we saluted him by bowing our heads to the ground three times; after that His Excellency's letter was read with the honours due to his rank, and servants relieved us of our candles; we took three or four steps forwards and once more went down on our knees instead of sitting, but the King insisted on our coming nearer still and on our going and sitting beside him under the dome of the church, on mats, which we did, after renewing our salutations; he made us sit some seven or eight paces from him and through the intermediary of a Tevinia he asked after His Excellency the General's health and expressed to us his pleasure at our having been so good as to visit him in spite of the fact that the countries of His Excellency were so distant. He also said that he thought he should send an ambassador with us to His Excellency the General to thank him and ask him to send a letter every year and pay more frequent visits to his country, and that he would always be glad to receive us whether we came as traders or in

(1) *Tevinia* is an ancient title that corresponds to the present title of *Panya*.

whatever capacity; we thanked him effusively and said that His Excellency the General would have great pleasure in hearing of our reception and that he would do everything in his power to be agreeable to His Majesty and to lighten the bonds of friendship; afterwards the Tevinia told us His Majesty agreed to our taking leave of him and begged us to greet His Excellency on his behalf and wish him a long and happy life, and he added that he hoped his power would ever continue to increase and that he would always vanquish his enemies ».

Before the mission left presents were distributed to all its members and they were invited to attend various games that included wrestling, boxing, and fencing.

« At the end of the games each actor was given a garment. In the meantime night had fallen and while they lit the lamps they spread mats about the square; four of the King's wives, the smallest, who were clad in an odd manner, began to dance, and this lasted about an hour; at the end of it they were each of them given two fine white scarves. Then a woman came and danced who held in her hand two peacock's tails; and to finish there were fireworks. We took leave of the King and returned with Tevinia Tahom to our tents and we thus spent the night outside, as did also the King and all the others. The Tevinia told us His Majesty had not paid such honour to ambassadors for a long time and that never before had the King asked an ambassador to come and sit by him under the (royal) dome ».

..

A few days after this particularly complimentary audience the Dutch attended a festival of light on the Mekong. The King was also present *« carried on a throne of gold »*. Our visitors took their places on a raised platform near that of the King and *« shortly afterwards the festivities began: a square scaffolding had been built in the middle of the river made of bamboos tied together and as high as a tall ship; four men threw themselves down from the top, one after another, after making some faces, causing the public to shout with laughter: they might have hurt themselves very badly. When night had completely fallen two hundred sampans floated down the river with the current, and they were full of candles; there were also three sampans on which they had made pyramids of candles which was an original sight. The river seemed all on fire; when all the sampans had sailed past us with the current, which took about half an hour, we returned home, as did the King and the noblemen ».*

As soon as the festivities were over, and while their cargo of cloths and rings and looking-glasses was being rapidly disposed of to the population round about, Wusthoff and his companions attempted to obtain the indispensable permission to set out once more. With great difficulty Wusthoff was given permission to

leave immediately, but alone; he had to leave behind him his two young assistants, Willem de Goyer and Huybert Boudewynsz, who, he wrote, need but *« collect the money (owing to the mission) and keep as quiet as nuns in a convent without doing anything foolish, and wait like that for six months without doing anything but eat and drink »*.

*
* *

Before beginning to recount how his own return journey went off, Wusthoff in his *Diary* plunges into a regular business report on the possibilities of opening up a successful trading-centre for the East India Company in Vientiane. In his opinion it is obvious on the one hand that the Siamese, the Peguans, the « Moors », and even the Tonkinese, have got there first by a long way, and on the other, that the Laotians are pretty careless as regards the quality of stick-lack and benzoin they give in exchange for the manufactured goods they require.

At the same time, as the caravan route through Siam, the one most frequently employed by foreign competitors, was not the best route, Wusthoff considered that the quality of goods sold by the East India Company, their organization, and the advantage of their being installed in Cambodia, might enable the Dutch to get a hold fairly rapidly on all the commerce in Laos: *« I hope »*, he concluded, *« that the Almighty will bestow His blessing upon us and so enable us to achieve our ends »*.

These commercial considerations are followed by quite an accurate geographical account in which Wusthoff gives a rough sketch of the geographical situation of Laos in relation to Siam, Pegu (Shan States of Burma), China, Tonking, and Qui-Nam (Annam). He refers to the fact that Laos was on poor terms politically with its neighbours, and he ends by giving an outline of the Laotian institutions and of the men at the head of them. Among all the people mentioned it has only been possible to identify with any certitude King Surya Vongsa. At the time of the Dutchmen's journey he was twenty-eight according to the Laotian Annals (Wusthoff speaks of him as being twenty-three) and he was the last of the great kings of Laos who ruled over both Vientiane and Luang-Prabang. He governed, according to the Annals, from 1637 to 1694, that is to say during fifty-seven years. He showed himself very rarely to the people and he was seconded in his duty of appearing in public by three powerful personages who did not belong to his family. But what was most striking to the mind of our « anti-papist » Dutchmen was the importance of Buddhism, which incidentally they never name, and of the bonzes, *« ... more numerous than the soldiers of the German Emperor »*, writes Wusthoff... *« These pagan priests make people believe that their god came to this land from heaven and that all his images are made after the descript-*

ion of those who saw him; they are very proud of him and they say accordingly that their god is greater than those of Siam or Cambodia or any other country, that there are nowhere such rich churches or as many holy men, as they call themselves, and that it is in their country that science has progressed most and that it is for this reason that the priests of Cambodia and Siam come every year and remain from ten to twelve years to complete their studies ». In point of fact all this is true and is confirmed by the work of Father de Marini. But in Wusthoff's opinion what drew foreign bonzes to Laos was their being held there in greater consideration and accorded far greater liberty than elsewhere.

On December 20th, 1641, then, Wusthoff left Vientiane and took the direction of Cambodia. The return journey was a toilsome one on the whole, for the river was at a low ebb. Moreover the rumour of a war with Cambodia, which country had apparently sent war-chariots to the frontier, twice held up their convoy, and for a considerable length of time. But finally the Laotian crew were able to offer up thanksgiving in the dilapidated temple of Bachong at Stung-treng, and on April 11th, 1642, Wusthoff landed at the Dutch Trading-centre of Lovêk.

His two assistants who had stayed behind in Laos also kept a *Diary*, and though it is not as interesting as that of their chief it gives nonetheless some items of information that are extremely important. For example, thanks to them we are present at a regular breaking off of diplomatic relations between the king of Laos and Tonking, we dispose of a good description of the festivities of the month of April, the Laotian New Year, we know just how suspicious a reception was then given to a Siamese embassy in Laos, and lastly we learn of the arrival of two Portuguese monks in Vientiane. One of these was almost certainly Father de Leria who provided Father de Marini with the Laotian documentation that he published and which we reproduce in part below. These priests brought the king of Laos *« two little white dogs (...), a rabbit, and other articles »*. But because of their proselytism they were less well treated than the Dutch merchants who write about them: *« They remain in their junk and have no idea when His Majesty will deign to accord them an audience »*.

* *

In August of 1642, when the level of the river was at its highest the Dutch set out on their return journey. They took with them a cargo of merchandise and a letter and presents for H. E. the Governor of the East Indies, for in view of the uncertain relations between Laos and Cambodia the king had thought it better not to send an ambassador to Batavia. The journey down the Mekong that followed was an uneventful one, but the description the Dutch assistants gave of it successfully fills in the gaps in the

documentation given on this subject by Wusthoff, and we can situate on the map all the new points to which they draw attention.

On October 6th, 1642, the Dutch junks left the « *old ruined church of Bachong, where the Laotian country ends* » behind them, on the 24th they land in their turn at Lovèk.

This remarkable mission to Laos was to bear no fruit for over two hundred years either for the Dutch or for any other of the European peoples. What is more, not one cartographer of the West attempted to take seriously into account the admirable information for which we are indebted to publish. It is true that the only text available to them was the publisher Casteleyn's pleasant adaptation. It is also true that Laos, with its small population and so difficult of access, offered no great temptation to European trade, drawn as it was towards other and far more accessible and remunerative markets. And it was not until 1866 that the French Doudart de Lagrée-Francis Garnier expedition in its turn journeyed by way of the Mekong and outdid by far the exploits of the worthy Wusthoff.

II. — Father de Marini's Travel Book.

Father Giovanni Filippo de Marini's work, which was translated into French in 1666 and entitled *New And Curious Story Of The Kingdoms Of Tunquing And Laos*, had already been published in Italian in 1663. Its author, a Genoese who was to die in Macao at the age of seventy-four, achieved above all in his book a work of compilation that especially concerns Laos. Although he fails to give his sources it seems probable, in consideration of the date at which he wrote and the scarcity of Christian missions in Laos at that time, that his chief informant with regard to the latter country was Father de Leria. This Jesuit priest is known to have undertaken a journey to Laos between 1642 and 1647. He stayed especially in Vientiane where his life seems to have been made difficult by the hostile attitude of the bonzes. The French translation only takes into account the strictly exotic part of Father de Marini's work and neglects the importance of the light he sheds on the condition of Catholic missions in the Far-East in his time. The following are a few extracts from the part of the book that concerns Laos:

NEW AND CURIOUS STORY OF THE KINGDOM OF LAOS Its Size, Its Wealth, And Its Strength.

« *Among the many so powerful Kingdoms of the farthest East of which we have scarcely heard of in Europe there is one whose name is Laos, or more properly the Kingdom of the Langians (from the Laotian name of Lan S'ang, « Million Elephants »).*

« It is three hundred miles distant from the sea, and it stretches from North to South, from the fourteenth degree to twenty-two and a half degrees, in other words, on Geographical Maps it occupies eight and a half degrees of latitude, and it lies five hundred miles from the Line if you count sixty miles for each degree. In longitude it is not so extensive for it is surrounded on every side by very high mountains which leaves an expanse of only one hundred and fifty miles of country that is flat and level but very fertile and very delightful, and in which all the things necessary to life grow in abundance.

« (...) Apart from the fact that the mountains that surround it on every side fortify the land marvellously and defend it against the enterprises of Foreigners, they render it so fertile and abundant in timber for every kind of purpose that without their having to seek it elsewhere they have enough left over to provide their neighbours. Whole forests of full-grown timber trees that grow at the foot of these mountains predominate also all round the Kingdom, forming as charming a barrier as it is possible to see; so that all these woods seem to have been planted intentionally to serve as a rempart and a barrier against the great falls of rain that pour down onto them with such extreme violence (1), and which would cause great damage in all the flat part of the country if there were not this natural obstacle to calm and moderate its insolence and thus contribute to the fertility of the countryside through a sustenance so praiseworthy and so necessary to it, and without which there would be no harvest by reason of the excessive heat all the rest of the year (2); so that each takes of it as much as he needs, because when the rains are plentiful and go on for a long time, then the water that falls there never grows stagnant nor forms into marshes; but it flows by given routes and through the most low-lying places, into the great river they call the mother of rivers (Me K'ông), which they split up into several canals that almost all become navigable, for the benefit and service of the Kingdom (3).

The Mekhong

« This great river, which has been incorrectly situated by geographers ancient and modern, has its source in a very deep marsh, shaped like a lake, that lies to the North on high mountains in the province of Iunnan, on the frontiers of China; falling from thence it rushes headlong out from this valley and, forcing its passage through sheer violence, small and narrow though it be, it does not hurry there long; and at the point where the ground begins to grow level it takes on the aspect of a great river, widening out imperceptibly in such a

(1) The rainy monsoons which Father de Marini later notes as beginning in May.

(2) An exaggeration: a large part of Laos has a cold and dry winter season.

(3) Probably an allusion to the network of canals round about the cities of which traces may be seen from the air.

way that without being contaminated by the impurities it washes from various places, and without making much noise, it receives such a large amount of water from a number of small canals that meet by the way that at a level of twenty-three degrees from the Pole and a few leagues beyond Laos it begins to be navigable and even splits up into two great rivers of which one, flowing West, runs through Pegu and from thence into the Bay of Bengal (4). The other begins by working its way through the rocks and among the precipices, then spreads out into several branches throughout the Kingdom of Laos, dividing it from North to South into two great Provinces (5) (...). And finally, however much water flows into it from every side, it never overflows because the embankment that borders the river-bed is fifteen or sixteen feet high, to which level its waters have never attained even in those years in which the rainfall has been heaviest (...).

« (...) The rivers as a rule rise because of the abundant rains which begin in the month of May; and sometimes also because of the quantity of snow that thaws on the mountains of Tibet that can be seen from Laos. As a rule this rising of the rivers continues from the month of September to that of January (6) without its causing any interruption of trade or the transport of merchandise. It is true that those who are obliged to navigate against the current of the river are put to great inconvenience, not only because they are delayed and make little headway as they draw their boat along with the strength of their arms, but also because of the heat of the sun which makes such an impression that a blazing furnace could scarcely be more uncomfortable or more importunate.

« Even as it is a difficult thing to have to row against the violence of this river's current, so it is highly dangerous to abandon and confide oneself to its swift flow; for the boats that so expose themselves seem rather to fly like the shaft from a crossbow than to sail; and such violent and impetuous motion often submerges some of them and sinks them to the bottom, and with them the merchandise and those who accompanied it without there being any hope of their saving themselves from the shipwreck, for the very elephants themselves usually

(4) The non-existence of this lake, the source of the great rivers of South-Eastern Asia, and which is an idea often met with in the mythical geography of India, was only conclusively proved by the work of the Doudart de Lagrée-Francis Garnier Mission in 1868. In the cartography of Father de Mariini's time it is usually the Menam that breaks away from the Mekong. It is true that for a long time the Burmese part of the Mekong and the proximity of the bed of the upper Menam must have misled informants.

(5) These « two great Provinces » which lie to either side of the river are the subject of a paragraph in which Father de Mariini compares them, with extraordinary partiality, to the advantage of the Eastern shore, the present-day Laos.

(6) The spate, corresponding to the monsoon season, actually begins earlier (July-August), but subsides gradually. That is the most favourable time for navigation, for both rapids and submerged rocks are easily negotiated and the transport downstream of heavy loads becomes possible and is rapid.

yield before the force of these waters and cannot bear up against their violence. Then when one reaches the place that separates the two Kingdoms, and from whence one must pass from one into the other, one must of necessity unload the merchandise, destroy part of the boats, and use waggon to cover a distance of only three miles by land, while the mariners drag the rest with extreme difficulty and by strength of arms along these precipices during a period of ten days, the time it takes of this sort of exercise to reach the harbour (7).

A Plan To Be Carried Out

« (...) A father belonging to this Mission presented the King some years ago with a model for the construction of several locks which would facilitate the transit of goods and the freedom of commerce. But the King, who has always been more concerned for the security of his Kingdom, whose favourable situation serves him as a rampart against the insults of his neighbours, than for the contempt for such, approved strongly of the proposition; yet he said that it would amount to giving the key of his Kingdom to his enemies, and by this means the door that was always shut in by these precipices would be open to them as often as they wished; and without their encountering any resistance.

Concerning Rice

« (...) Even the rice there is incomparable, and of a certain odour and savour that is peculiar to everything that grows in this Eastern part of the Kingdom (8) (...). There is a certain narrow strait, and it is as if it were the centre and middle of the Kingdom, which produces a rice so excellent that I think there is none other to be found in any part of the Orient which can equal it (...).

Concerning Fish

« (...) The rivers there are full of a prodigious quantity of fish of various sorts, each fatter and bigger than the last. There are some of them so heavy that two fishermen, however strong, can only carry one with the greatest difficulty. The other and smaller ones are fished at certain times of the year, and in such great quantities that you may buy a hundred pounds's weight of them for the value of a pound of Italian money. They salt them as we do anchovies and herrings; and poor people store them as an accompaniment and seasoning for rice, which serves them as food. The climate, which is milder there and much healthier than in Tunquing, contributes marvellously to good health (...).

(7) This is taken to refer to the passage of the Khône waterfalls on the frontier of Cambodia.

(8) Laos of today.

Vientiane And Its Royal Palace

« (...) *The chief town and that in which the King usually resides is situated in the middle of the Kingdom, at the eighteenth degree parallel from our arctic pole, and is called Langione. On one side it has good moats and extremely high walls; and on the other the great river to protect it against enemy attacks. The Royal Palace, whose structure and symmetry are admirable, can be seen from a long way off. It is true that it covers a vast expanse and is so big it could be mistaken for a town, both as regards its situation and the infinite number of people who dwell there. The King's apartment, which is adorned with a most superb and a magnificent gateway and a quantity of fine rooms together with a great hall, are all built of incorruptible limber and adorned both within and without with excellent bas-reliefs, and so delicately gilded that they seem to be covered with plate of gold rather than with gold leaf. When you go thence into the courtyards which are very spacious you first of all see a great row of houses which have been built near-by with the same symmetry for the Mandarins' officers. I would have to write a whole volume if I were to attempt to describe exactly all the other parts of the Palace, the valuable objects, the apartments, the gardens, and several other similar things.*

Concerning Houses

« (...) *The houses of the chief noblemen and well-to-do people are very high and very fine, all of them made of limber with very cunning art, and ornamented in accordance with the amount of money the people are prepared to spend; but I must admit that the common people and the poor are very badly housed, and that their tiny dwellings are rather huts and collages than houses. Only the Talapoi (9), the priests of the Idols, have permission to build their monasteries and their houses of brick and of stone.*

Concerning The Population

« (...) *Because it is so fertile, and because the necessities of life grow there in such abundance, the Kingdom is so populated that not long since, when they made a census of those who were considered capable of serving the King in time of war and of bearing arms, they counted five hundred thousand, without taking into account the old men who are so numerous and so robust that if necessary an army of considerable size could be formed for the defense of the Kingdom out of those alone who have reached the age of a hundred. I must nevertheless admit that the population is a peaceable one and very little versed*

(9) The buddhist monks. The name is derived from two words of môn or talaing origin.

in the art of war and the exercise of arms, probably as a result of the favourable situation of the Kingdom and of the mountains and inaccessible precipices that surround it on every side like so many ramparts that none can force their way through, and which thus serve as a protection against the insults of their enemies; against which they also sometimes still use poison which they prepare so cunningly and in such large quantities that, by poisoning the waters of the rivers and without their ever having to come to blows with them, they defeat and rout them utterly (...).

Concerning The Customs And Natural Qualities Of The Langians

« (...) The Laotian people or Langians are, generally speaking and as befits their climate and native country, very docile and very good natured and great lovers of rest and quiet; they welcome Foreigners, make much of them, and treat them with great civility. They pride themselves on their great ingenuousness and perfect sincerity, and sure enough they are most frank and sincere, without deceit, most humble and most courteous, of unalterable trustworthiness with regard to all things of whatever sort that are entrusted to them, the which they return in all simplicity whenever it may be required of them, even as they received them, without asking for anything in exchange for the care they have taken of them, except it be a courteous gesture or a mere word of thanks which seems to them sufficient recompense, especially when it takes the form of praise for their trustworthiness which they prize more highly than all the treasures that might be offered them (...).

« Generally speaking they are all very affable, accomodating, open to reason, and very respectful, neither quarrelsome nor obstinate, but obliging and submissive when they are approached in good faith. And although occasionally they may impugn what is proposed them, and bring fairly strong reasons in support of their opinion, it is always in order less to defend their point of view than to gain a true understanding of that of others: and often enough the questions and objections they bring forward have the effect of making Foreigners converse about their customs, their laws, and their Religion, that they prize more highly than all the treasures that might be offered them (...).

Concerning The King The Court, And The Government Of The Kingdom

« (...) The King is absolute and independent and he recognizes none as higher than himself, neither as regards civil affairs nor those of Religion. All land belongs to him as private property, and he disposes as absolute Overlord of all his subjects' possessions. There is not a family in the Kingdom that has the right to inherit nor enjoy

anything whatever that has been left them by will and testament. No mention is made of any sort of nobility; neither of that which may be imparted by birth (10), nor of that which may be acquired by wealth, nor of that either which may be acquired through the practise of virtues and fine and generous actions. Public functions, employment, honours, wealth, all belong to the King, who raises to the highest office in the Kingdom those who best please him; who causes pensions to be accorded them and gives them Governments, according as he esteems them, and who deprives them of these sometimes during their very lifetime, and always at their death, although such honours serve chiefly as their recompense and an exceptional gratification. The most he ever gives up in favour of orphan children consists in challels; but houses, inheritances, fiefs, gold, silver, and arms, all come back to the Chamber, which derive great benefit therefrom. No one in the country can claim to be Lord of a single inch of land. Only the Talapoi are allowed to dispose of that which is inhabited; because the rest is distributed by the King among several Mandarins, some obtaining more and others less according as he thinks proper; and they themselves rent it out to Farmers for three years only, and these are at the same time under the obligation to give the King half the harvest of the third year. The manner in which the inhabitants of the country behave to each other is most courteous and most obliging: hostility and quarrelling are banished from the land; and those Fathers of the Mission who have lived several years among them (11) maintain that in their time they have never heard it said that one of them has spoken evil of another, and that this has never been contested by anyone. I admit that apart from a natural inclination they have for peace, there is a very severe law in the Kingdom which condemns to pay a fine without any other formality not only those who are so carried away by their anger as to abuse and insult another, but also even those who show public contempt for others and who address them in too proud a manner. So that, without waiting to be summoned before a judge, those who are caught out in such a way conform without hesitation to the rigour of this Law.

« The chief Dignities and Offices of the Kingdom number eight. The first is that of Viceroy general, whose function is mainly to deal with part of the affairs of the Kingdom and relieve the King of all those connected with Government: it would, also be his business to call a meeting of Council if the King chanced to die, and to summon the States; and it would be incumbent on him in his quality of Sovereign to make all arrangements, even with regard to the investing with the Kingdom of him who was to succeed to it. On this occasion all the Mandarins owe him obedience. And because the Kingdom is divided into seven Provinces, seven other Viceroys are appointed whose

(10) If we judge by facts as they are today this statement is untrue.

(11) The reference is probably to Father Leria's mission.

purpose is to have each his own Government and whose power is equal : but they are always at Court with the King and they never leave him ; and they figure there as his companions in office and his Councillors, under the title of Government, of whose profit and revenues they dispose, and whose care and management they entrust to Lieutenants which they each of them send on the spot as administrators. There are still other Governments of lesser importance and which are dependant on the former both as regards civil affairs and affairs of war.

« Each of these Provinces has its Militias, consisting of Infantry and Cavalry, which are distinguished according to the Officers of war in command, and which are subject to the Viceroy, Governor of the Province ; and the Viceroys are subject to the first Viceroy, and he to the King. The troops are provided for by the revenues that are assigned to them in every Province, so that the King has no other expense as far as they are concerned ; yet they are all obliged to serve him wherever the affairs of the Kingdom may call them without hope of any further advantage, always supposing they continue to be allowed the benefit of the funds and domains that are earmarked for their support : each Viceroy lives in style and has a great establishment : but the King's Court, whose splendour and brilliance is greatly enhanced by the magnificence of these great men of the Kingdom, stands out more especially for the almost incredible number of Pages of which it is composed. These latter are always in the expectancy of some Office, dancing attendance on the King so as to obtain the gift of one from him, and normally the distribution of such gifts is in accordance with their years of service : but as in all other countries the favour in which the one who is raised to office stands plays often a more important part than the merit of him who aspires to it. Over and above all these Officers there are an infinity of other people in a variety of occupations. In order not to make any mistake regarding the rank and various qualities of the courtiers one has only to look at certain gold and silver boxes of different shapes and sizes which a Page, in virtue of his office, carries after his Master in all public assemblies where his presence is required, and by which they may be distinguished one from the other. The grand Viceroy has yet another advantage over the others in this, that when some sort of pageant takes place he alone of the Viceroys is allowed to ride on an elephant, richly caparisoned ; whereas the others cannot hope to be so honoured on such an occasion and they must be satisfied with being borne on small chairs, ornamented in various manners and magnificently trimmed with cloth of gold, which are all the time accompanied by several armed Flunkies wearing fine liveries. The other Mandarins and Officers, whatever may be their condition, go on foot and without any of the ceremonial with boxes, although they possess them, but not for carrying on these occasions unless they be small and provided with lids.

« But if we go on from there to the King's person and sketch his portrait, there is not a Monarch in existence however powerful that

he does not consider to be beneath him; he apparently even feigns to be unsurpassed by the Emperors of China, and makes clear that he would contest their right of precedence on such occasions as might arise. However important affairs may be he never deals with them except through an intermediary and the services of a Spokesman: and so as to inspire in his subjects a high degree of respect and veneration for his person, he rarely appears in public and withdraws himself more and more from their sight as time passes, preferring that his peoples should adore him rather as a hidden God than be recognized as being a man like themselves and of the same species (12) (...).

« (...) Of all his self-attributed prerogatives, and which emphasize even more the extent of his power, not the least is that which consists in having several little Kings dependent on him and paying tribute to him, who come to his Court to pay him homage and recognize him as their Sovereign, bringing him superb gifts. The King receives these Ambassadors in a great hall, seated on a Throne raised aloft, and clad in his ceremonial garments, and he replies to their civilities through the mouth of his Chancellor, and converses with them only by means of a Spokesman. But the prerogative he prizes most highly is that of being in a position to enjoy independence and recognize none as higher than himself as must the great King of Siam and that of Tunquing and several others who are far richer and more powerful than he is yet are dependent on the Emperor of China. I confess that there are Historians who declare that the King of Laos is subject to that of Tunquing and that he pays him tribute (13); but they are guilty of prevarication; and they would not have strayed from the truth if they had contented themselves with saying that in former times he was subject to the Emperor of China, that the Langians and the peoples of Pegu, Siam, and Tonquing, all recognized him for a long time for their Sovereign; and that since that time the Langians turned the advantages Nature has bestowed upon their country to account and declared war upon him to escape from their subjection; and that with the help of some other mountain-dwelling races that they drew to their cause, they have maintained themselves in the liberty and independence they enjoy at the present time (...). »

(12) The Sovereigns of Siam and Cambodia of older times behaved similarly.

(13) According to the Laotian Annals themselves, this was in fact true.

IV
ARTS



Photo Thao-Xuong

a) LUANG PRABANG. — Wat Sen



Photo E. F. E. O.

b) LUANG PRABANG. — Wat Xieng Tong



a) LUANG PRABANG. — Wat Vixun



b) LUANG PRABANG. — Wat Aram



c) LUANG PRABANG. —
Wat Xieng Muon



d) LUANG PRABANG
Wat Vixun

Photos Thao-Xuong

Decorative Art

by

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The ruling feature of Laotian decorative art is the rhythm of line and colour and the harmonious manner in which they combine to produce an agreeable visual sensation, whereas with the painting and sculpture, although both have nature for their starting-point, the appeal is to the mind, through the intermediary of the eye. Decorative art remains detached from such forms as we see round about us: it is essentially an abstract art.

The people of ancient times and those who have remained at a primitive stage of civilization decorate their everyday objects with line motifs, sometimes with geometrical figures, of a more or less complicated nature — interlacing work, foliation, spirals, etc. — whose visible beauty evokes in our sight no emotion nor conjures up any definite idea. This is true, at least, for ourselves, for we approach it as outsiders; those who created the design in question see in it as often as not some esoteric symbol which is lost to us. I may quote as an example the ritual bronze vases of ancient China of about the 12th century B. C. whose complicated ornamentation is at once skilful and refined. The art of the Marquesas provides similar examples of works of art of great beauty for the harmony of line in their designs and their remarkably well-balanced proportions.

But in the forms of art to which I have just referred the ornamental composition never departs from the domain of pure abstraction, whereas Laotian design, which is what we shall deal with here, has recourse to nature, more or less distorted and stylized, blending together with the foliation and the arabesques elements borrowed from the vegetable and animal worlds. It is fundamentally characteristic of all Far-Eastern art that room is found within the pure design for motifs inspired by the flora and fauna in which vent is given to the exuberance and prolixity of life. This may be taken for a consequence of the animist beliefs of the Laotian,

Siamese and Chinese peoples, who make no distinction between things, beings, and elements: all are a part of nature's never-ceasing transformation, an evolution which never reaches its final term since metempsychosis is at the root of the cosmos.

Laotian ornamentation blends together fantastic beings and bodies whose anatomy is akin to foliation or to plants, heads strangely outlined, with fangs and threatening mouths, eyes with jagged-edged sockets; the quadrupeds have tails twisted in the form of scrolls and tipped with flames. Actually this is what gives such peculiar flavour to these ornamental compositions in which the complexity of the forms gives the impression of a whirl of strange objects. Certain of the carved doors of Wats in Luang-Prabang are remarkable for the wealth of their ornamentation as well as for the vigour with which the lines have been combined.

Until quite recently Laotian art was preserved by distance from the influence of the modern trends in European art that have, generally speaking, been so baneful to Asian arts; in Vientiane a number of temples have disappeared or been replaced by buildings of recent date that are deplorably lacking in inspiration. Even in Luang Prabang I noticed there were unfortunate influences at work; there is some danger of their leading Laotian art astray. The lines of their architecture, the admirable silhouette of the superposed roofs of the old temples, are not always respected in the reconstructions carried out by the monks. The design becomes complicated and loses its vigour and its elegance. And what is even more regrettable is that the superb carved or painted motifs, either on wood or on stone, that are still to be seen in the Wats, are becoming corroded and are gradually falling to bits or else, as sometimes happens, have been covered over in a shocking manner with a coating of whitewash.

The great drawback of Laotian art is undoubtedly its being made of perishable materials, of more or less putrescible wood or of stonework made with bricks fitted together often enough with earthen mortar, materials whose ruin is hastened on by lack of care and upkeep. There is therefore an urgent need to form a collection of drawings of all ornamental motifs of purely Laotian art that may still be found in the various temples, either on the furniture, on the pulpits, the manuscript chests, the lamp-brackets etc., or on the walls, the doorways, the pillar decorations, or on the carved woodwork, the panelling, the gables and folding-doors of the bays. In short, I would like to see the necessary precautions taken to prevent this art from disappearing or from degenerating, and the artists plunged once more in the traditions of their country and provided with the means whereby they may carry on the great achievements of their ancestors.

The preceding lines, which were published in an article on *Le décor laotien* in 1937, in the first issue of the *Bulletin des Amis du*



a) LUANG PRABANG. — Wat Mai



b) LUANG PRABANG. — Wat Paké



c) LUANG PRABANG. — Door of Wat Phon Xai



a) VIENTIANE. — Wat Ong Tu



b) LUANG PRABANG. — Wat Chum Kong

Photos E. F. E. O.

c) LUANG PRABANG
Wat Hua Xieng
Corbel base



Laos, led to the publication by the Buddhist Institute of Vientiane of a volume on Laotian decorative art in which motifs were reproduced from drawings by Mr. Thit Phou who is still working at the present time for the temples of Vientiane. Unfortunately it is impossible now to find a copy of this pamphlet, with the result that the craftsmen who are working at building or restoring temples are deprived of the assistance it would have afforded them.

In the workshops of the Royal Palace of Luang Prabang I have seen a designer and woodcarver, Mr. Thit Tan, at work on the composition of decorative panels that were full of talent and in remarkably good taste. Art is therefore obviously a living thing in Laos, in spite of assertions I have often heard made by Europeans — whose competence in artistic matters was incidentally dubious — to the effect that contemporary art in Laos seems doomed to disappear for lack of craftsmen. To be exact we must however admit that for lack of special schools for the forming of new craftsmen, decorative artists are few, and those there are not given sufficient encouragement and above all find too few opportunities of putting their talents into practise and keeping their hand in professionally.

. . .

I shall now sum up and attempt to show what is that gives Laotian decorative art, too little known to the general public, its value. What is characteristic of this art, which may be compared with its Khmer and Siamese neighbours, is a composition of lines, often richly adorned, whose very clear and vigorous curves run counter to each other in such a way as to form sinusoidal foliations in the shape of flames or foliage; as I mentioned earlier, somewhat fantastically-shaped animals and personages supervene against this ornamental background.

The presence of foreign elements is easily recognizable by indolence and heaviness of the curves whose uncertain outlines are buried in a confused network of plants with round, massif flowers, and the occasional addition of non stylised birds in the foliage. The animals that appear in Laotian decoration are on the contrary always markedly stylised.

One of the most beautiful motifs to be found in a Laotian temple is the one that is sheltered under the peristyle of the front entrance door: its framework is an architectural composition formed by pilasters supporting a pediment, often in the form of a dome, that is terminated at the top by a spire. This is the principle of the temple doors we find in Cambodia in classical Khmer art, with this difference, that the transom and small columns have disappeared and Siamese influence has given to the whole an upward sweep that is characteristic of the art of this latter country.

This harking-back to Khmer ornamental art in the temples of Laos is further accentuated by the presence of the serpent *Nāga* entwined about the pediment. The richness of this motif that frames the bays is still more enhanced by the several superposed pediments projecting the ones on the top of the others, the whole being inlaid with plates of metal that glisten in the sun (PL IX, *a*).

The *Nāga* is not the only creature that forms a part of the decorations on the doors; the Wat Paphay in Luang Prabang displays three successive pediments of which the two upper ones are terminated at their lower extremity by birds in profile whose tails unfurl themselves in the form of volutes.

The side pilasters, sometimes of several thicknesses, have a curvilinear outline that is rather akin to the decorative style of the Burmese pilasters (PL IX, *b*).

It is within this framework that the beautiful door-leaves of carved and gilded wood are set. In their wealth and sumptuousness they are probably the loveliest things to which Laotian art has given birth.

We may sum up the composition of these panels, of which the finest examples are in Luang Prabang, as follows: the elegant figure of a person standing upright on some more or less mythical animal stands out against a background that almost seems perforated so powerful is the relief of the foliation and interlacing work (Fig. 1 and 2, pl. X and XI, *a* and *b*).

The costumes worn by the principal figures in the decorations on the doors would provide matter for a regular study. It is a costume that dates back to rather remote historical times and is to be found again in a more or less modified form on the actors who play the part of king or legendary hero in Siamese and Cambodian dramas. There are traces of Hindu and Chinese influences in it. Certain motifs of the embroidery are reminiscent of Chinese costume in particular the dragons' or monsters' heads at the front of the sash and at knee level.

I am going to dwell for a moment on a detail that is often found on the doors of the Laotian Wats, and that you also come across in Hindu and Javanese sculpture, for it, too, forms a part of the decorative ornaments. I refer to the ribbons that usually fall from the sash, sometimes to quite low down between the legs. These ribbons are already to be found on Sassanian bas-reliefs where they represent the sacred bands that Persian magi wore at their belts. This is one more example of a motif of Iranian origin that has found its way to the Far-East.

It is impossible to overstress the artistic role of Persia, whose influence has spread far and wide beyond the limits of its geographical frontiers, and more specially to Central Asia and China. The nomadic art of the steppes should also be mentioned, for we owe to it the curious motif of fighting or confronted animals which

recurs moreover not only in China and Indo-China but also in Central Europe.

India, considered by many people to be the country where elements of decorative art originated that have spread to the Far-East, either had no knowledge of them or else, more often, had itself received them from neighbouring countries. This was the case for the Sassanian ribbons we have just mentioned. It must



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Wat doors in carved and lacquered wood.

not be forgotten that in the very first centuries of the Christian era a current was established between Greece and China through the intermediary of Persia and that this had distinct repercussions on the art of Eastern Asia.

To return to Laos, some of the decorative compositions on the doors are purely ornamental, with a central fleuron as in the Wat Phon Xai of Luang Prabang (Pl. XI, *c*).

In the temples, the tympana of the triangular pediments, of carved wood and picked out in gold or colour, offer examples of surfaces on which the Laotian artists have allowed themselves to give full vent to their verve and their skill. The volume of decorative motifs which I mentioned earlier shows several examples of these, and three of them are reproduced below (Fig. 3-5).

One of the characteristics of the Wat in Laos is the panel of carved wood, shaped by cutting according to a design. It is a sort of canopy that hangs like a screen between the pillars of the porch and beneath the pediment. Taken as a whole it is often made up of two identical arcades that form a point in the centre. The spring of the arcades where they leave the pillars is often very pleasing in outline (Pl. XII, *a* and *b*).



Fig. 3

Wat pediment.

The latter motif may be compared to that of the carved wooden corbels, often fretted, that bear up the tie-beam of the roof. There is a more or less marked suggestion here of the curve of the Dragon-*Nāga*'s body (Pl. XII, *c*).

On penetrating inside a Wat one's eye is drawn by the decorations, usually very elegant in line, on certain pieces of furniture or on details of the architecture: the pulpits, the panels of the ceiling with their stencilled ornamentation, the mouldings on the



a) LUANG PRABANG. — Manuscript Chest in the Wat Vixun



b) LUANG PRABANG. — Pulpit (detail) in the Wat Vixun



LUANG PRABANG. — Altar base in the Wat Phon Xai



b) Catafalque for a cremation

Photos E. F. E. O.

pedestal of the Buddha's statue. In the Wat Vixun of Luang Prabang a chest already old, used for storing manuscripts shows a design of dancers drawn against a lacquered background that is charmingly delicate and full of fancy. Unfortunately this design is bound soon to wear away and disappear (Pl. XIII, *a*). In this very same Wat I had a photograph taken of a wooden panel which forms the decoration on a monk's pulpit. It shows a rather incongruous mixture of Chinese motifs (dragons shaped like centi-

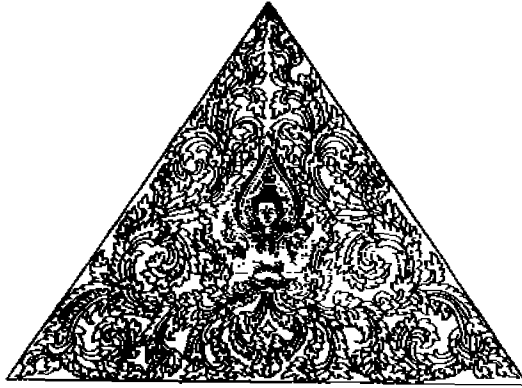


Fig. 4

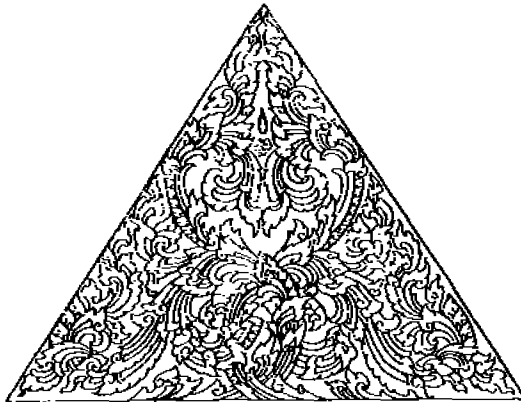


Fig. 5

Wat pediments.

pedes and clouds in the form of volutes) and purely Laotian elements (floral bud in the centre) (Pl. XIII, *b*).

The decoration of the lamp-brackets, of carved and gilded wood, displays an overabundance of very rich ornaments, at times a trifle

excessive in spite of the diversity of the elements included in them. That of the Wat Sisaket at Vientiane is particularly striking.

In the stonework, the stucco model is laid onto the plaster while it is still wet by means of little bands of oil-diluted mortar. This ornamentation, which is usually floral, recalls certain foliated mouldings of our own mediaeval art. The base of the altar in the Wat Phon Xai at Luang Prabang provides a very fine example of this (Pl. XIV, *a*). This type of decoration is unfortunately fragile and cannot last for very long for it ends by falling off, bit by bit. It is especially the basic mouldings, less well-preserved against damp and knocks, that tend to disappear first.

When I was passing through Luang Prabang recently I had occasion to note, through making a comparison with a photograph taken twenty years ago, that a superb pediment tympanum of mortar on a little chapel of the Wat Xieng Muon had already lost part of its ornamentation.

To give some idea of the motifs most frequently to be met with in the temple decorations I have borrowed some of the drawings from Mr. Thit Phou's collection. These motifs are copies of those often to be met with in the various Laotian temples, on the capitals, on the walls, and on the woodwork (Fig. 6 to 12).

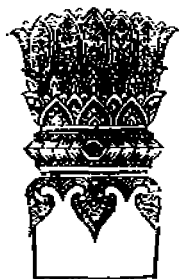


Fig. 6
Capital of
a Wat pillar.

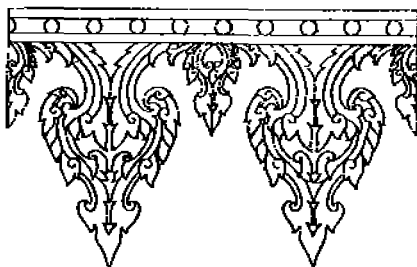


Fig. 7
Ornamentation on lower
part of a Wat tie-beam.



Fig. 8
Lower arsis
of a Wat pillar.

As an example of the Laotian's natural good taste in the matter of ornamental decoration, I shall end by showing a photograph of a catafalque which was taken during a cremation ceremony in Vientiane (Pl. XIV, *b*).

Laotian art should be kept in close touch with its traditions. With this in view I recommended that all sculpture, painting, and designing of every sort in the Wats should be entrusted to experienced craftsmen. Some of the restoring that has been done in



Fig. 9

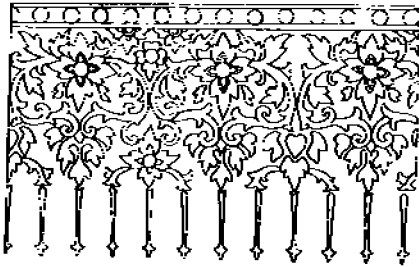


Fig. 11

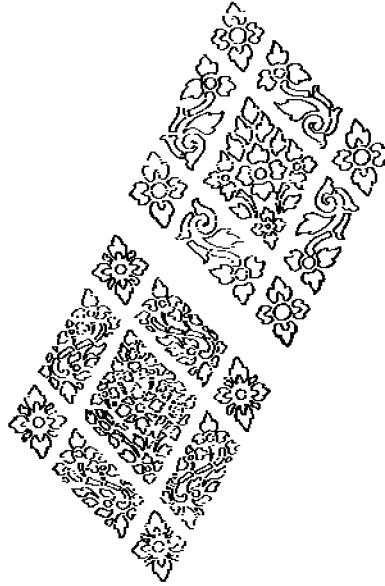


Fig. 10

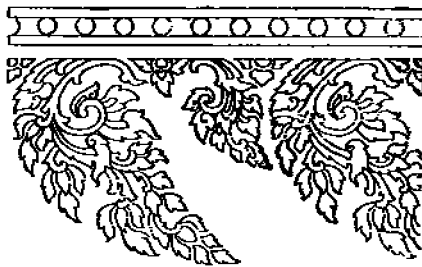


Fig. 12

Figures 9 to 11
Decorative stencil designs for Wat walls, panels, doors,
windows, and manuscript cupboards.

Fig. 12
Ornamental motif for the rim of a racing-canoe.

modern times has been sadly lacking in taste and it brings home to us the danger there may be in leaving the monks to their own devices without either control or guidance. But I would like there to be no misapprehension as to my meaning. There is a world of difference between remaining true to the traditions of an art and making servile copies of early ornamentations. Laotian art must develop and not remain crystallised within forever recurring forms. All things become transformed, and it would be a heresy to wish to set limits to a style and hem it about with fixed rules. But such development, such transformation, must to renew itself be carried out with a profound knowledge of what went before and of the latest manifestations of modern Western art, while seeking inspiration in the traditions and characteristics that gave Laotian art its intrinsic value and the individual flavour that sets it apart from the other arts of the Far-East.

The Sculptured Caves in the Province of Vientiane

by

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Prince Damrong of Siam, who was the first to devote himself seriously to the study of the various manifestations of Buddhist art in Thailand, brought out an article on this subject in 1927, in n° 13 of the review Extrême-Asie. It was this publication, which gave us all the elements that we required for our research-work, that enabled us to put dates to the caves of Tham-Vangsang, thirty-eight and a half miles inland from Vientiane on the Tourakhom road, and also to those of Dan-Sung in the Ban-Ngang neighbourhood, some six miles or so from the milestone that marks the 22nd kilometre on the road lying North of Vientiane, in the middle of the rice-fields.

The least considerable of the Tham-Vangsang caves is composed of two rocks which must once have formed a single block if we judge by the subjects that are sculptured in high-relief. They are now separated from each other by a narrow passage. On the northern side there are four sculptured figures besides a fifth that stands isolated, for it is on the other piece of rock. The central figure represents a Buddha seated in Indian style. It is five feet four inches high and its urna has been emptied of its jewel. The trace of a garment is visible on its breast. The right hand, raised in the gesture of argumentation, is pressed against his chest, and the left hand, palm outwards, is lying on his lap. The four other figures, also seated in Indian fashion, measure three feet seven inches high. They are all in the same attitude; the two hands, palm outwards, are lying in their laps and the ends of the fingers touch each other. The figure to the left of the Buddha, skirting the passage, is unfinished. The western side of the piece of rock with the isolated figure on it was intended to receive the same scene as the one sculptured on the northern side, if we judge by the traces of a rough draft that may still be distinguished. The other cave, occasionally used as a dwelling-place by some hermit or

other, is a little larger. On the western side there are three sculptured figures, two smaller ones each of them in its alcove, and one nearly ten feet high. All of them are sitting in Indian fashion and making the gesture of argumentation. The figure to the right of the larger Buddha is rather badly damaged and the alcove is ornamented on either side with a variety of motifs. In the middle two elephant's tusks may be distinguished over which are two lotus-flowers. Above and below one can make out two banners, two lotus-leaves, two lacyedged hand-screens that resemble the leaves of the Bo Tree and of which one has a long handle. Under the lower oriflamme there are five vertical lines. And finally, on the panel that separates the two small alcoves, to the left of the insignia, there are figures giving the date of these caves: 928 of the Maha Sakaraj era, i.e. 1006 A.D.

On the northern side, on the lower part of a piece of rock and half-buried in the ground, a figure emerges from the waist upwards. The top of the head is damaged and only a trace remains of his uplifted right hand with a stalk and its lotus-flower rising out of it and resting against his chest. The left arm hangs down by his side and his garment is close-fitting in the neo-Indian fashion. Besides this figure there are two others of lesser importance.

The first of the Dan-Sung caves, in the vicinity of Ban-Ngung, is overhung on its western side by a huge mushroom-shaped rock which acts as a shelter to the sculptured figures on the rock within. From right to left we have, first a seated Buddha five feet four inches high, of which only the forearms and the head are original, for all the rest of the body has been restored; then comes a standing Buddha four feet eleven inches high, with shoulders roughly two feet broad, whose head, neck, right hand and left foot have been recently and very badly restored. The left hand hangs down by his side, palm inwards, and the garment that covers the upper part of the body as far as the wrists is composed of material whose frilled edge is held in by a belt in relief, and which falls down to the ankles in a box pleat in front forming a double fold turned back at either side. The right hand and the right forearm, its hand raised palm-outwards, are adorned with bracelets in relief and a necklace in the form of scalloped petals stands out also in relief about the neck. Further on there is a group of three standing Buddhas having one hand raised and the other hanging by their side. They are cut out of the self-same block of sandstone and they measure five feet four inches high. The right-hand Buddha has been entirely restored. As for the Buddha standing in front, there is nothing authentic left of it except its left arm and its bracelet. The bust down to the waist and the double garment falling to the ankles with a box pleat in front, are the only original elements that remain of the statue on the left. There are still other statues of less consequence and of which all have been more or less clumsily restored.

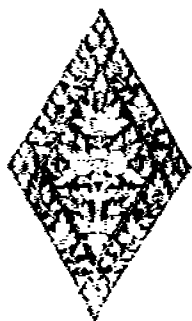
The second Dan-Sung cave, which is only about 1700 feet from the first, is separated from it by a labyrinth of rocks and caverns that

is very picturesque. The only statue worth mentioning is that of a Buddha in meditation, sculptured in the rock itself. It is a little over three feet high and just under three feet broad. There are protuberances on either side that are called the elephants' heads by the population; but the thick coating of plaster that covers them makes all conjecture impossible with regard to them.

If we examine the faces of the various statues in these caves we are struck by the resemblance there is between the style of their execution and that which is characteristic of Khmer art (horizontal superciliary arch, treatment of mouth and nose etc...), whereas the way the curling of the hair is represented and the manner in which the garments are suggested, as also the various attitudes, bear to this day the stamp of the technique of Dvaravati art.

The article to which we referred at the beginning of this note enabled us to classify these caves, for in it Prince Damrong shows us that the art of the so-called Lavapuri period is a synthesis of the Dvaravati and Khmer types, and that it spread to very remote parts between the 10th and the 12th centuries. And the date that was found on one of the walls of these caves brings further confirmation that these are vestiges of the neo-Indo-Khmer art that is characteristic of the Lavapuri style.

It occurred to us that it would be interesting to follow up this short article with a study which a disciple of Prince Damrong, Mr. Luang-Boriban, published in the Bangkok review, *Silpakorn* (n° 1, 1937), and in which he enumerates the various elements which distinguish from each other the various periods of Thai art. H. H. Prince Phetsarath has been kind enough to translate and summarize it for this review.



Synopsis Table of the Various Characteristics of the Buddha Images

EPOCH Buddhist era: B. E. Christian era: A. D.	CHARACTERISTICS of images	REMARKS
DVARAVATI 1000-1200 B. E. 457-657 A. D.	Top of bun short; thick curling hair moulded with head; hairline broken on forehead; projecting eye-sockets; long straight eyebrows; face broad and flat; drooping lower lip; short chin; large hands and feet. <i>Sanghati</i> (overgarment; short, coming down to chest or just above navel. Pedestal worked in lotus-petals with well-marked veins. FIRST PERIOD Images with long bulging faces. SECOND PERIOD Images with flat broad faces.	The Dvaravati Kingdom occupied the lower basin of the Menam with its capital in the Nakhon-Pathom district. Many images of this period are found in the Semun basin, apparently the district of their origin. Many also at Nakhon-Jaysi, Ratburi and Buriram. These images more or less resemble those of the Gupta period (360-1150 B.E.). They were probably introduced from India to Siam and then copied by local artists.
SRIVIJAYA 1200-1700 B. E. 657-1157 A. D.	Very similar to those of the Dvaravati period: top of bun short, but the curls are smaller and more detailed and are usually fastened later rather than cast at the same time as the image. When they are not fastened, the brow is decorated with the <i>urna</i> and behind the head is a plume of leaves from the Sacred Bo-Tree. Straight forehead; arched eyebrows; flat face, normal chin; lower lip not drooping; <i>Sanghati</i> worn long. Sitting figures generally have a screen at their back mounted on the pedestal. The <i>Sivara</i> (loga) is usually not represented when the figure is standing.	The Kingdom of Srivijaya comprised Sumatra, Java and the Malacca peninsula. Its capital was in the island of Sumatra, south-west of Palembang. In carrying out these images, the artists seem to have followed the South Indian style of the Mahāyāna school.
LAVAPURI 1500-1800 B. E. 957-1257 A. D.	Top of bun as in the Dvaravati period. Curls resemble snail-shells or are conical; sometimes they have a <i>Mongkut</i> (crown) shape; broad face; drooping lower lip broad chin;	The first images are the work of Khmer artists, first carried out in Cambodia and then introduced into Siam. Some belong to the Theravāda School, like those of the

EPOCH Buddhist era : B. E. Christian era : A. D.	CHARACTERISTICS of images	REMARKS
XIENG SEN 1600-2089 B. E. 1057-1546 A. D.	shoulders covered or only the left one; long ears reaching shoulders; long thin arms with occasional bracelets. Standing images have both shoulders covered by the toga; <i>Sanghali</i> worn long, falling to navel. The upper edge of the <i>Sabang</i> (skirt) is clearly apparent. Pedestals decorated with lotus petals.	Dvaravati period, others to the Mahāyāna School, like those of the Srivijaya epoch. Later, other images were sculpted in Siam by the Khmers or the Siamese.
	FIRST PERIOD 1600-1800 B. E. 1057-1257 A. D. Indian style of the Pala period (1273-1740 B.E.). Full-chested; bun ending in a ball; rather protruding belly; short full face; arched eyebrows; nose rounded at tip; small mouth; round chin; heavy hair, unattached; curls shaped like snail-shells. <i>Sanghali</i> worn short above the breast. Pedestal decorated with lotus leaves.	Work carried out by Northern artists inspired by models from India (Pala period).
	SITHAMMARATH PERIOD Similar to the images of the first period of Xieng Sen but with broader, flatter face and broader mouth; the bottom of the <i>Sanghali</i> is broad and split; no lotus usually on pedestal; where there is one, petals are treated in a different style from that of the Xieng Sen period.	Though inspired by the same images as those of the Xieng Sen period, these figures are executed by Southern artists who introduce elements from the Khmer style (long mouth and face).
	SECOND PERIOD 1800-2089 B. E. 1257-1546 A. D. Images here differ from those of first period by: Bun long and flame-shaped. This peculiarity dates from the Sukhothai period and copies the Ceylon style; fine hair; long <i>Sanghali</i>; pedestal convex in front.	Work of artists of Lanna and Lan Xang in the Sukhothai style. The end of this period coincides with the departure of King Sayasetha from Lanna to reign over Lan Xang with Vientiane as its capital.

EPOCH Buddhist era : B. E. Christian era : A. D.	CHARACTERISTICS of images	REMARKS
SUKHOTAI 1800-1893 B. E. 1257-1350 A. D.	FIRST PERIOD Bulging face in the Ceylon style. SECOND PERIOD Face lengthened; pointed chin. THIRD PERIOD Egg-shaped oval face in the old Indian style; fingers all of the same size except the thumb; top of bun long, with curls shaped like snail-shells, unattached; arched eyebrows; curved nose; pointed chin; full chest; long <i>Sanghati</i> swallow tailed at end. Pedestal in one piece, concave in front and usually with no lotus; where there is one, the upper row of petals reaches upwards, the lower ones point to the ground.	Work executed by Siamese particularly in the reign of Phra Huang which marks the introduction of Singhalese Buddhism into Siam.
SRI AYUTHIYA 1893-2324 B. E. 1350-1781 A. D.	FIRST PERIOD 1893-2031 B. E. 1350-1488 A. D. Work of artists working in the Khmer style so far as the oval face is concerned. Top of bun long; fine curls forming a kind of cap which fits the skull; realistic chin; long <i>Sanghati</i>; upper edge of <i>Sabang</i> clearly seen; grooved pedestal concave in front. SECOND PERIOD 2034-2325 B. E. 1488-1781 A. D. Lengthened face differentiates these images from those of first period; curls and <i>Sanghati</i> longer; bun piled up.	
RATTANA KOSIN 2325 B. E. - to to-day A. D. 1781	Mixture of styles of Sukhothai and Sri Ayuthiya periods with top of bun longer than those of these epochs; curls finer. Small images resemble those of the Xieng Sen style without being quite similar.	

Music

by

Prince SOUVANNA PHOUMA,
Former Prime Minister
Ambassador of Laos to France

We make no claim to undertake a complete survey of Laotian music, having scarcely the qualifications required for such work. Numerous books have been written on the subject by people more competent than we: Lefèvre-Pontalis (Chansons et Fêtes du Laos), M. Galerne (studies in the Courrier Musical in 1925) and especially G. de Gironcourt (Recherches de Géographie musicale en Indochine), to name only the best-known authors. In the present article we shall endeavour to give a sketch only of the present-day characteristics of a music still unknown to the public.

Fond of gaiety, the Laotian has a true passion for music, and in Laos songs and concerts form part of every festival. But before speaking of musical works, it is necessary to inform the reader of the instruments most commonly used: wind instruments (the Khuy, the Khena), stringed instruments (the Sô I and the Sô O) and the percussion instruments (the Nang-Nat or Rang-Nat and the Khong-Vong).

« The Khene is made from a series of bamboo slicks of small diameter. They are of different lengths, decreasing in size, and arranged in pairs, generally in seven consecutive rows like two sets of Pan pipes placed on top of each other. These bamboo pipes are joined together by two half gourds held in position by wax; they form a cavity for the air and have a small circular aperture for mouthpiece. The pipes on the inside are pierced with holes which vary according to the note required. The palm of the hand covers the half-gourd and the air which produces the notes strikes narrow metal strips situated in the upper part of each bamboo pipe.

« The most curious quality of the Khene is not that several notes can be produced simultaneously but that they can be played in perfect continuity. This is due to the fact that, depending on the fingering, the air can pass through several pipes at once while the player breathes in and out alternately... The very sweet tones of the Khene, the combin-

ation of which depends on the principal harmonies, are halfway between those of the harmonium and the *accordeon* » (1).

The Khuy is a keyless flute, generally of bamboo. It produces very clear notes.

The Sô instruments are two-stringed violins with a neck of carved wood and a sound-box. The sound-box of the Sô O is made of a half coconut sealed with a thin piece of wood. In the Sô I, it is a single cylinder of May-du or May-Kha-Grung(trac) with stretched boa skin over one end.

The Sô Bang, a poor relation of the other two, is a mere bamboo stick on a rustic neck; its register is limited and it has accordingly no place in the orchestra.

The bows of all these violins are made of horse-hair and drawn between the strings.

Among percussion instruments the Nang-Nat or Rang-Nat is certainly the most popular. It is a real xylophone, made of wooden strips of varying thickness, fixed over a concave boat-shaped sound-box also made of wood.

The Khong-Vong consists of sixteen bronze cymbals arranged on a semicircular framework of wood and cane.

To play these two instruments the performer uses two mallets -- in the case of the Khong-Vong, their heads are of elephant-skin --- and the keys are struck by drawing the mallets over them.

. . .

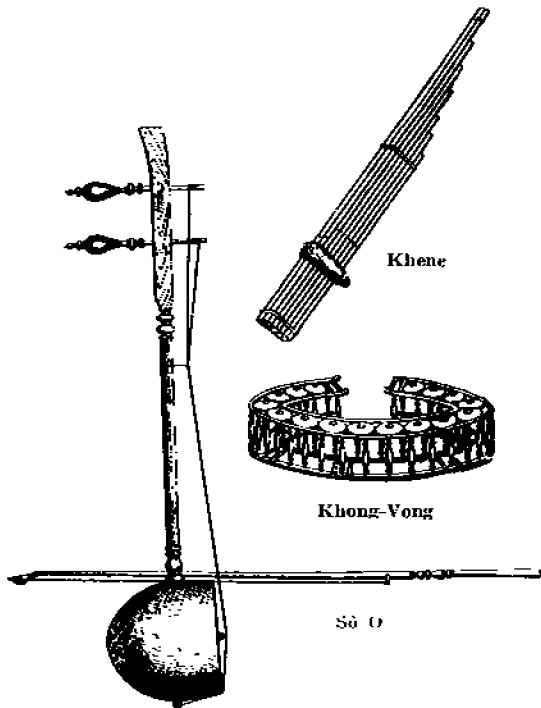
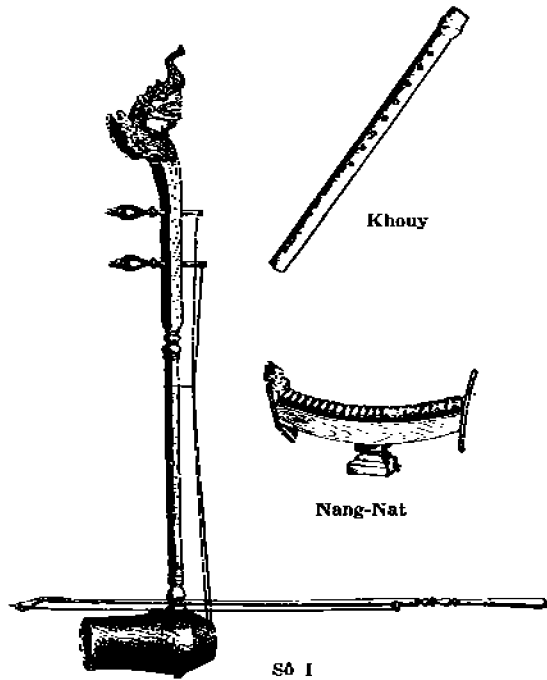
The Laotian orchestra, formed by all these instruments, can be built up in two ways: the Seb-Noi or Ma-Ho-Ry and the Seb-Gnai. The first consists of several Sô, a varying number of Khena, a Rang-Nat, a Khong-Vong and tambourines. A few years ago musicians introduced Western violins and even *accordeons*.

The role of the Seb-Noi is to provide muled accompaniment to a choir or solo; it is also used to introduce or conclude a vocal work.

The orchestral instruments of the Seb-Gnai are the same as those of the Seb-Noi, except for the Sô and Khena. In addition they have also two large drums and a sort of clarinette or pi. This orchestra never accompanies songs, its place being in a royal or religious procession. Sometimes it plays during the war-dances — for example, in one of the Rāmāyāna episodes — where it reveals certain expressive qualities and is able, without a written score, to underline the action and follow its different stages.

Musicians play from memory for there exists no system of written notation in Laos. Musical education depends entirely on aural training and intelligence. Musical sense takes the place of written music and the number of compositions is consequently small, being

(1) M. Gâlerne, *op. cit.*

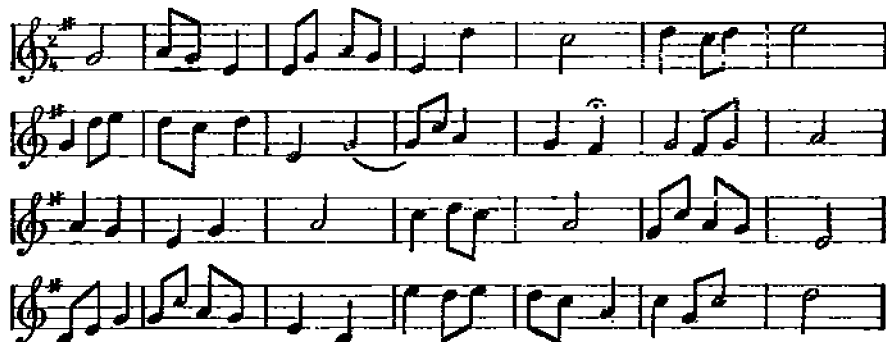


Laotian musical instruments.

restricted to mere transcriptions of folksongs. Symphonic music is unknown in Laos, at least to the best of our knowledge.

Such compositions as there are little more than a repetition of very short musical phrases faintly reminiscent of the flourishes and ritornelles of the Middle Ages. These two melodies, which Mr. Monteil, former Director of the Lycée Pavie, has kindly transcribed, reveal better than any words the characteristics of this music.

POPULAR AIR (NANG-NAT)



LAO-SIENG-THIEN



The collection made by Madame Guillemet of the most popular melodies and the Laotian ballets of Mr. Jacquet provide the reader with further information about this music « so sweet, harmonious and sentimental » (1).

As can be seen, Laotian music has only the pitch of a seven-toned octave, corresponding to the scale of an ordinary Khena, consisting of two rows of seven bamboo pipes. The seventh note is often inaudible in the playing and only people accustomed to hearing local melodies can discern it.

These varied melodies are doubtless the work of highly gifted composers whose names are now lost. Without trying to give a complete list, we may mention the Thum, the Lao-Sieng-Thien, the

(1) Three other Laotian folksongs from Luang-Prabang, Vientiane and Khong Island are given at the end of the article.

Sam-Sao, the Sut-Sa-Nen, melodies enjoying great popularity in Luang-Prabang and Vientiane. The Siphon-Don is only heard in Muong Khong.

* *

There is a great cult of vocal music in Laos — more so, even, than of instrumental music. It is rare to see a Laotian girl playing the Khena or the violin, but in the country especially you often meet women and girls singing folksongs. Laotian songs fall into two categories : some are poems in praise of legendary heroes, handed down from generation to generation and from master to pupil. According to the singer's fancy and spirit, they are often developed by improvisation. Other melodies embroider on the theme of love (1).

In the latter case the song is a succession of strong rhythmical phrases and even occasionally make use of vocalizations (songs of Luang Prabang). The poverty of melodic invention generally derives from the systematic importance of the words. Yet in spite of this, these poetical love-songs do not lack charm for those who know Laos and its people.

« Like the bird of paradise
With its delicate wings,
You flutter around me,
Gaze on me, Oh my friend! »

Is anything more melodious than the delightful melody of the Khena alternating with the notes of love-songs falling from young lips into the limpid night ?

« My beloved is like the turtle-dove
Which cannot bear to be caged.
She flies away, full of joy.
Why not let the friendly bird
Live in your cage and accustom you to it ? »

In the accompaniment of a song, the Khena plays the same leit-motiv, over and over again, the music in this case being only a supporting harmony.

The songs praising the exploits of ancient heroes or legendary figures (Sin Xai, Inn Nao, etc.) are long recitatives in which the singers frequently intersperse meaningless syllables to prolong a note or complete a rhyme.

This practice, like that of repeating the same verse several times in a folksong, shows traces of musical magic still in honour among autochthonous peoples : Thai-Neuas, Phu-Thais, Khas, etc. « Magical incantation », writes Mr. Combarieu in his History of Music, « is the

(1) See below, p. 206, *The Court of Love and Poetry*.

prototype of musical art. First comes magic with its incantations, then religion with its different forms of lyrical expression, liturgical lyrics, odes and dramas; finally we have the emergence of an art which separates itself gradually from dogma to develop parallel to sacred song in three successive stages - - entertainment, individual expression and naturalism... »

Laotian music is still in the first phase of the third stage and only its instrumental music deserves detailed study.

Evidently for Europeans all this has little artistic value, but Laotian folklore is sufficiently rich to provide music with subjects which, if treated by modern techniques, would have originality as well as charm.

FOLKSONGS FROM LUANG PRABANG

Fine

Appel d'amour
(jeunes hommes)

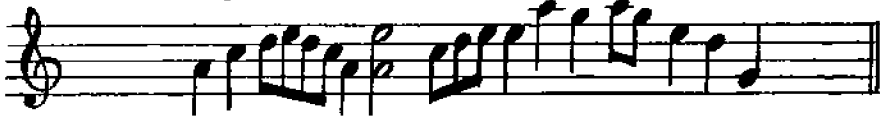
Khène :

« Boun », cour d'amour

FOLK-SONGS FROM VIENTIANE AND KHONG ISLAND



En barque : descente au fil de l'eau



Ile de Khong

Bas-Laos



— id. —



— id. —



— id. —

Compliments d'amour



— id. —



— id. —

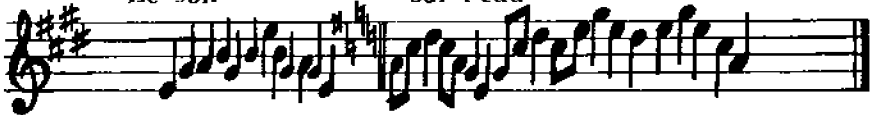


— id. —



Le soir

sur l'eau



V

ETHNOGRAPHY

The Laotian Calendar

by

Tiao Maha Upahat PHETSARATH
of Laos

The calendar plays a highly important part in the life of Laos and in a volume devoted to Lan Xang it seems that an article on this important question is essential.

Though it has always been our rule to print only previously unpublished texts, we have decided to reprint in its entirety the remarkable and erudite study dealing with the calendar, which first appeared in the August, 1940 issue of the Bulletin des Amis du Laos.

We are deeply grateful to the author of this article, H. H. Tiao Maha Upahat Phetsarath of Laos, for his valuable contribution to our knowledge and understanding of Laos.

R. B.

The Laotian calendar has apparently never been published or studied. Despite intensive research, we have come across only the summary notes of Mr. L. FINOT in his *Recherches sur la Littérature Lao* (1) and the Notice included in the *Annuaire Général de l'Indochine* (2) previous to 1925.

This notice contains a serious mistake. It suggests that *the Laotian year* is a *lunar one* with three different successive types — an ordinary year of 354 days, one of 355 days and one of 384 days with 13 months. In fact, the Laotian year is determined by the revolution of the Sun and has 365 days in ordinary years and 366 days in leap ones.

It is obvious that the Laotian calendar is poorly known.

Our aim is to give an account of the Laotian calendar with its system and its bases. The account itself is the fruit of our long studies of the astronomical treatises left by our ancient *Horas*, those of the people of Thailand and also the *Astronomie Cambodgienne* (3) by F.-G. FARAUT.

(1) Cf. Bibliography, in *fine*.

(2) *Ibid.*

(3) *Ibid.*

The following notes fall into two parts, the first dealing with the structure of the calendar and its characteristic elements, the second with the establishing of the calendar itself.

I

STRUCTURE OF THE CALENDAR

The Laotian Calendar belongs to the lunisolar system: its months follow the moon and coincide with each lunation, while the year is determined by the revolution of the sun on the ecliptic in its apparent movement round the earth.

This type of calendar is not peculiar to India and to countries of Indian civilization such as Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, etc. In antiquity it was employed by the Athenians, and the Mongols and Chinese still use it. Its application, however, differs from one country to another, especially in the fixing of the New Year, the cycle of embolistic years (13 months) etc.

Like all other calendars the Laotian calendar counts eras, years, months weeks and days. The notes which follow do not follow this order. The astronomical method on which the calculation of the movement of stars is based has its place in the study of the year and for greater clarity the year will consequently be dealt with last.

ERAS

The eras in use in Laos are:

1° *Buddhasakaraj* (Buddhist Era), previous to 544 B. C. This consists of 2483 years in April, 1940 (1), and is no longer used in Laos except by the Buddhist priests. Since 1913 it has become the official Thailand era;

2° *Mahasakaraj* (The Great Era) dating from A. D. 78. It includes 1872 years in April, 1940 (2), and figures frequently in old inscriptions. It is no more used to-day;

3° *Tiunlasakaraj* (The Little Era), beginning in A. D. 638. It has 1302 years in April, 1940 (3), and before the setting up of the French Protectorate it was only used in official and private acts. To-day it is used only in private agreements and in astronomy. In Laos, official acts are dated in accordance with the Christian era.

(1) 2,502 years in April 1959 (Editor's Note).

(2) 1,891 — — — — —

(3) 1,321 — — — — —

(4) We compute by completed years. This explains why the first years of the last two eras correspond respectively to 79 and 639.

DAYS

The civil day (1) begins at 6 a. m. and lasts 24 hours. These are computed from 1 to 6 in the morning and afternoon and from 1 to 12 during the night.

As a result, noon corresponds to the sixth hour of the morning; 6 p. m. to the sixth hour of the afternoon and 3 a. m. to the ninth hour of the night.

The day is divided into 16 *gnams* (watches) each one and a half hours in the following order:

Day

<i>Tullang</i>	from 6 a. m. to 7. 30 a.m.
<i>Ngay</i>	from 7. 30 a. m. to 9 a. m.
<i>The Kaeu Thieng</i>	from 9 a. m. to 10. 30 a. m.
<i>Thieng</i> (Noon)	from 10. 30 a. m. to 12 noon
<i>Tulsay</i>	from 12 noon to 1. 30 p. m.
<i>Leng</i>	from 1. 30 p. m. to 3 p. m.
<i>The Kaeu Kham</i>	from 3 p. m. to 4. 30 p. m.
<i>Phal Lan</i>	from 4. 30 p. m. to 6 p. m.

Night

<i>Tullang</i>	from 6 p. m. to 7. 30 p. m.
<i>Deuk</i>	from 7. 30 p. m. to 9 p. m.
<i>The Kaeu Thieng</i>	from 9 p. m. to 10. 30 p. m.
<i>Thieng Khun</i> (midnight).....	from 10. 30 p. m. to 12 midnight
<i>Tulsay</i>	from 12 midnight to 1. 30 a. m.
<i>Khua</i>	from 1. 30 a. m. to 3 a. m.
<i>The Kaeu Hung</i>	from 3 a. m. to 4. 30 a. m.
<i>Phal Lan</i>	from 4. 30 a. m. to 6 a. m.

These *gnams* are not used in large centres where watches and clocks are common. They are still used in the country, however, people determining them in the day by the position of the Sun and during the night by that of certain planets or constellations, notably the Great Bear, called *Dao Sang Gnaeu* (The Great Elephant Star).

The *gnam* are always consulted both in country and in town when some important ceremony or event is to take place. Then only the happy *gnam* — and these vary with the different phases of the Moon — are chosen.

(1) The astronomical day, also of 24 hours, begins at midnight. It is not in common use.

WEEKS

The Laotian week is the same as the French one, both as regards the names of the days and their order:

<i>Van Athil</i>	Sunday	Day of the Sun
<i>Van Tian</i>	Monday	Day of the Moon
<i>Van Angkharn</i>	Tuesday	Day of Mars
<i>Van Phul</i>	Wednesday	Day of Mercury
<i>Van Prahat</i>	Thursday	Day of Jupiter
<i>Van Suk</i>	Friday	Day of Venus
<i>Van Sao</i>	Saturday	Day of Saturn

In writing, the days of the week are represented by numerals, number 1 for Sunday, number 2 for Monday... and number 7 for Saturday.

CYCLICAL DAYS. — The days are also designated by other names which have nothing in common with those already mentioned or with the week.

Their names are formed by combining a series of terms designating ten day periods and a series of 12 animal names, the latter being repeated 5 times. The complete combination gives 60 days with different names.

The series of ten day periods is called *Me Mu* (Mother of the days, or principal cycle) and that of animal names, *Luk Mu* (Child of the days, or secondary cycle)

Principal Cycle (denary)	Secondary Cycle (duodenary)
1° <i>Xab</i>	1° <i>Tiaeu</i> : Rat
2° <i>Hab</i>	2° <i>Pao</i> : Ox
3° <i>Huai</i>	3° <i>Gni</i> : Tiger
4° <i>Meung</i>	4° <i>Mao</i> : Hare
5° <i>Peuk</i>	5° <i>Si</i> : Naga
6° <i>Kat</i>	6° <i>Sacu</i> : Snake
7° <i>Kol</i>	7° <i>Sa Nga</i> : Horse
8° <i>Huang</i>	8° <i>Moth</i> : He-goat
9° <i>Tao</i>	9° <i>Sanh</i> : Monkey
10° <i>Ca</i>	10° <i>Hao</i> : Cock
	11° <i>Zet</i> : Dog
	12° <i>Khacu</i> : Pig

The combination of these two series of names forms the cycle of the 60 following days:

KAB	HAB	HUAI	NEUNG	PEUK	KAT	KOT	HUANG	TAO	CA
Tiaeu	Pao	Gni	Mao	Si	Sacu	Sa Nga	Moth	Sanh	Hao
Zet	Khaeu	Tiaeu	Pao	Gni	Mao	Si	Sacu	Sa Nga	Moth
Sanh	Hao	Zet	Khaeu	Tiaeu	Pao	Gni	Mao	Si	Sacu
Sa Nga	Moth	Sanh	Hao	Zet	Khaeu	Tiaeu	Pao	Gni	Mao
Si	Sacu	Sa Nga	Moth	Sanh	Hao	Zet	Khaeu	Tiaeu	Pao
Gni	Mao	Si	Sacu	Sa Nga	Moth	Sanh	Hao	Zet	Khaeu

The names of the days are composed of the terms from the first line (*Me Mu*) and those from one of the corresponding lines following: *Kab Tiaeu*, *Hab Pao*...

The days follow one another from left to right and from one line to another down to *Ca Khaeu*, which is the 60th day.

These cyclical days are used almost exclusively by the Khas (Indonesians) who use week-days only in their relations with the Laotian authorities. They are also commonly used in outlying Laotian districts but pluralistically with the days of the week.

HOLIDAYS. — The 60 day cycle includes the days *Huai* and *Huang* as holidays. These are generally market-days. In the interior of the country the main markets consequently take place only every five days, corresponding to the *Huai* and *Huang* days. This can be seen at the markets of Muong-Sing and Lat-Huang not far from Xieng-Khuang.

The Laotian Buddhists, however, fix their holidays according to the phases of the Moon. The 8th and 15th days of the waxing or waning Moon, *i. e.* the last days of each quarter, called *Van Sinh* or *Van Pha*, are holy days and considered as holidays.

MONTHS

It has been already said that the Laotian month is lunar and coincides with each new lunar cycle (1). As the time interval between each new Moon is about 29 and a quarter days, the ancients simplified matters by rounding off the figure and fixing the length of the month at either 29 or 30 days. To avoid all possible confusion the following rule was established:

1° Even Months (*Deuan Tem* or full months) to be of 30 days; the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th months;

(1: There are also solar months, 12 in all, used only in astronomy and astrology. These solar months are adopted by the official Siamese calendar.

2° Odd months (*Deuan Yut* or reduced months) to be of 29 days; the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th and 11th months;

3° Exceptionally the 7th month will have 30 days whenever the *Avaman* is equal or inferior to 126, thus indicating a year of 366 days.

As 12 lunar months only give a total of 354 days, they are consequently 11 days shorter than the solar year whose average duration is a little more than 365 days. The difference obviously increases each year and it is inevitable that the new year will no longer fall in the usual months but will begin in different successive months. So as to avoid the drawback of a year which would have no correspondence with the seasons, a year was created with a calendar of 13 months. This supplementary month, the date of which is determined by calculation, always falls between the 8th and 9th months and is called the 2nd eighth month. It has thirty days, like all the even months.

In this special case the year is known by the name of *Pet Song Hon* (twice eighth month) or *Athikhamat* in Pāli.

The names, order and duration of the Laotian months are as follows:

<i>Deuan Tieng</i>	(1st month), 29 days	
-- <i>Gni</i>	(2nd month), 30 days	
-- <i>Sam</i>	(3rd month), 29 days	
— <i>Si</i>	(4th month), 30 days	
— <i>Ha</i>	(5th month), 29 days	Period of the New Year
— <i>Hoc</i>	(6th month), 30 days	
— <i>Tiel</i>	(7th month), 29 days	
<i>Pet</i>	(8th month), 30 days,	with two in years of 13 months
<i>Kao</i>	(9th month), 29 days	
— <i>Sip</i>	(10th month), 30 days	
— <i>Sip Et</i>	(11th month), 29 days	
— <i>Sip Song</i>	(12th month), 30 days	

It should be noted that:

1° The year which normally begins in most calendars with the first month begins here now in the 5th, now in the 6th month;

2° Unlike the 10 others, the names of the 1st and 2nd months are not Laotian numerical terms;

3° The word *Tieng* for the 1st month means « early » as applied to vegetable species, and the word *Gni* for the second month means « two » in Chinese.

These peculiarities can be explained only by the existence of another calendar earlier than the present lunisolar calendar of Indian origin. This hypothesis seems to be borne out by the survival of cyclical days and years still in common use.

YEARS

The starting-point of the Laotian astronomical year on the ecliptic is at the intersection of the *Mina* and *Mesa* signs of the Zodiac. At this point the passage of the sun always intervenes for the *Theung Sok* or *Song Karn Khun* day, *i. e.* for the civil New Year in the interval following lunar months:

The 6th day of the waxing Moon in the 5th month and the 5th day of the waxing Moon in the 6th.

The New Year period is determined by calculation and includes three or four days depending on the date.

The first day is the *Song Karn Pay* (the day when the year goes away).

It corresponds in fact to the change of the astronomical year, determined by the return of the Sun to its starting-point on the ecliptic. It is very rarely that this return coincides exactly with midnight which marks the change of the astronomical day; consequently, part of the *Song Karn Pay* belongs to the old year while the other part belongs to the new. The fractions are worked out by calculation.

The second day - - the one following the *Song Karn Pay* is *Munao* (middle or interpolated day). Certain years have two of these; in which case the New Year is of four days' duration.

The third day (or the fourth depending on circumstances) is the *Song Khan Khun* (the day when the year mounts) and it marks the beginning of the civil year.

This choice is no doubt due to the importance of this day in astronomical calculations. It marks:

1° The last day given by the *Horakhun* (1). the day called *Van Theung Sok* (day when the year arrives);

2° The reference for reckoning the *Suthin* in a year, *i. e.* the number of days required for astronomical calculations relative to any given date in the year.

The *Suthin* is counted as 1 on the day after *Van Theung Sok* or *Song Karn Khun*.

The average duration of the Laotian year is 365 days, 6 hours, 12^m 36^s. It is consequently 23^m 24^s longer than the French year. This time difference results from the different principles applied in the different calendars.

The Laotian year is based on a period of 800 years, consisting of 593 years of 365 days and 207 of 366 days. The Gregorian reform, introduced in 1582, adopted a period of 400 years as a basis, the 400 being divided into 303 years of 365 days and 97 of 366 days. Two Gregorian periods consequently total only 292.194 days as

(1) *Horakhun* is the number of days passed from the beginning of the era to the *Van Theung Sok* or *Song Karn Khun* days in any given year.

against 292,207 of the Laotian period. This latter also shows a difference of 13 days, either O. d. 01625 or 23^m 24^s per year.

So far as length is concerned, the Laotian year is situated between the anomalistic and sidereal years:

Anomalistic year:	365 days 6 hours 13 ^m 58 ^s
Laotian year:	365 days 6 hours 12 ^m 36 ^s
Sidereal year:	365 days 6 hours 9 ^m 11 ^s

The Gregorian year has practically the same duration as the tropical or equinoctial year on which it is based:

Gregorian Year:	365 days 5 hours 49 ^m 12 ^s
Tropical Year:	365 days 5 hours 48 ^m 52 ^s

In type the Laotian year is consequently related to the anomalistic or sidereal varieties and not to the tropical or equinoctial one, as the Gregorian year is.

F.- G. FARAUT, who is particularly qualified in this astronomical method maintains that the Khmer (or Laotian) year is tropical.

The ancient *Horas* (astronomers) who succeeded in fixing the factors relative to the movement of the stars with as great a precision as that obtained by the European method made an error no greater than approximately half an hour in their calculations on the duration of the Sun's revolution.

In the case of the Moon and Mars, for example, the revolution of the former, as computed by the *Horas*, is only half a second less than the synodic revolution given by European methods; in the case of Mars, the revolution is of 687 days according to both methods.

If the Laotian year was tropical, it could be calculated only on a quite fictitious Sun, given its yearly lag of 23^m 24^s behind the return of the real Sun to the point of the Spring equinox.

The difference of 23^m 24^s between the Laotian and Gregorian years cannot, we consider, be the result of an error but is simply the consequence of the different types of years to which they belong.

Once every 61 years this difference puts the Laotian year a whole day behind the Gregorian one.

At present, in the year 1301 of the Laotian era, the difference is consequently one of 21 days and several hours.

At the start of the Laotian era the passage of the Sun at its starting-point on the ecliptic, i. e. at the intersection of the signs *Mina* and *Mesa* in the Zodiac, took place on the 22nd March, 639. To-day it occurs only on the 13th April, 1939, in other words with a time-lag of 22 days.

CYCLICAL YEARS

Just as there is a cycle of 60 days, so there is, one of 60 years, both being identical.

Its functioning has already been explained. It should be pointed out, however, that:

1° The people of Thailand and Cambodia do not designate the years of a decade by special terms as the Laotian people do, but use numerical Pāli terms which are repeated at each decade:

LAOS	CAMBODIA AND THAILAND
<i>Cab.</i>	<i>Eka Sok</i> (1st year of the decade)
<i>Hab.</i>	<i>Tho Sok</i> (2nd " " " ")
<i>Huai</i>	<i>Tri Sok</i> (3rd " " " ")
<i>Meung</i>	<i>Tiallava Sok</i> (4th " " " ")
<i>Peuk.</i>	<i>Pantiasok</i> (5th " " " ")
<i>Kal.</i>	<i>Sa Sok</i> (6th " " " ")
<i>Kol</i>	<i>Salla Sok</i> (7th " " " ")
<i>Huang</i>	<i>Athasok</i> (8th " " " ")
<i>Tao</i>	<i>Nava Sok</i> (9th " " " ")
<i>Ca</i>	<i>Samret Sok</i> (end of the decade)

2° The cyclical years are highly important in the checking of dates given in manuscripts relating to the past.

Generally speaking, these dates usually give the name of the year in question. If the date given does not correspond according to the 60 year cycle to the cyclical year mentioned it is false.

These errors are fairly common in writers and copyists owing to carelessness. But thanks to the cyclical years they can easily be spotted and corrected.

II

ESTABLISHING OF THE LAOTIAN CALENDAR

The system of this calendar — a solar one as a whole and a lunar one in its details — requires long calculations to determine:

1° The type of year calculated (a year of 12 ordinary months, one of 12 months with a 7th month with 30 days, one of 13 months and a leap year);

2° The lunar month and its day corresponding to the return of the Sun to its starting-point on the ecliptic. This return makes the change of the astronomical year.

The few Laotians who indulge in astronomical calculations to-day apply the old formulas empirically, without understanding their origin, the role of their elements and the meaning of the operations.

While we apply these formulas we hope to be able to give useful information derived from our own studies and experience.

In order to make the understanding of the following calculations easier, let us first give some idea of the planetary system of this Astronomical Method.

The Laotian year is based on the revolution of the Sun on the ecliptic circle in its apparent movement round the earth.

Now in this method the apparent movement of the sun is based on the following notion:

Mount Meru (of the earth) is considered as a fix point constituting the rotation centre of all the Stars.

The Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus and Saturn all move in an anti-clockwise direction whereas *Rahu* (ascending node) and *Ketu* (descending node) turn in the opposite direction (pl. xviii).

Legend has it that *Rahu* and *Ketu*, enemies of the Sun and Moon try to swallow them on each on their encounters. This causes eclipses and explains why during them the Laotians beat tom-toms or gongs and fire shots, their aim being to frighten these monsters and compel them to let go of their prey.

The Legend of Rahu. — Several legends are associated with Rahu, but we quote only one which seems to be the most ancient and has been least deformed by the imagination of poets:

« Rahu is the personification of the ascending node or the head of the Dragon.

« Rahu is an Asura or Titan who, when the sea was churned and *Amrita* (Ambrosia) made, mingled with the gods to have his share of the liquor which conferred immortality. But when he was on the point of drinking, the Sun and the Moon discovered him and denounced him to Vishnu who, with a stroke of his discus, cut off his head.

« This divine drink, however, had made Rahu immortal, and in revenge, his head tries, from time to time, to devour the Sun and the Moon by attacking them.

« Such is the origin of eclipses according to Indian mythology.

« The trunk of *Rahu*, known as *Ketu*, is the descending node personified or the tail of the Dragon » (1).

Only the Sun and Moon are studied for the establishing of the Laotian calendar.

SUN. — On each daily revolution round Mount Meru the Sun rises for 6 months; he then goes down for a similar period and so returns to his starting-point. In his yearly movement he describes always the same circumference, passing before the same groups of stars which can be used to check his movement.

The average duration of this revolution is 365 days 6 hours 12^m 36^s.

(1) From the note of A. Loiseleur-Deslongchamps, relating to Stanza 110, Book IV of the Laws of Manu (*Manava-Dharma-Sastra*), pp. 113-114.

The circumference described by the Sun serves as a basis for measuring its position in the sky at any given moment and is represented by the Zodiac. The latter is divided into twelve equal parts, called *Rasi*, belonging to fixed groups of stars.

One *Rasi* is 30 *Ongsa* or 30°;

One *Ongsa* is 60 *Lubda* or 60';

One *Lubda* is 14 *Philubda* or 4" 28.

The *Rasi* are numbered from 0 to 11 and have each a name which has the same signification as those of the European Zodiac.

With these graduations, varying from 0° to 360°, this ecliptic circle is used to determine the position of all the heavenly bodies.

When the Sun in its revolution passes this point again, its *Somphut* (its real anomaly) equals zero and the new astronomical year begins (the day of *Song Karn Pay*).

In time measurement the Sun's revolution is calculated in the following units:

Nathi, in which are 4 *Bal*, or 24 minutes;

Bal, in which are 15 *Vinathi*, or 6 minutes;

Vinathi, in which are 6 *Prame*, or 24 seconds;

Prame, in which are 10 *Aksorn*, or 4 seconds;

Aksorn, in which are 4/10 second.

Besides the *Rasi* of the Zodiac (ecliptic circle), the position of the Sun and the planets at any given moment is also determined by the *Ruk*, the 27th part of the *Nakhatharuk* or the Celestial Sphere. A *Ruk* contains 13 *Ongsa* and 20 *Lubda* $\frac{(360)}{27}$ and contains 60 *Vinathi* *Ruk*.

The *Ruk* are numbered from 1 to 27 and have also names relating to the group of stars to which they belong.

MOON. — Its monthly movement round Mount Meru equals also a circle which never varies. The Moon at determined periods passes the same groups of stars.

The average duration of the Moon's revolution on this circle is calculated, according to this method, as being of 29 days 12 hours 44^m 2^s 39, *i. e.* only half a second less than the synodic revolution worked out by the European method (29 days 12 hours 44^m 2^s 9).

This difference and the difference of 1^m 22^s between the Laotian year and the anomalistic year are so small that we may conclude that the Laotian and European methods both give the same results.

Such a conclusion honours our ancient *Horus* who calculated with such precision thirteen centuries ago the factors relative to the formulae of the Sun and Moon's revolution for the *Tiounla* era.

CALCULATING THE FACTORS IN THE « SURYA THEUNG SOK »

To establish the Laotian calendar in lunar months and solar year for any given date, it is necessary first to determine the value

of the following *Surya Theung Sok* factors without which the movement of the stars cannot be calculated:

- 1° *Horakhun*;
- 2° *Kammanchapot*;
- 3° *Ouchaphot*;
- 4° *Avaman*;
- 5° *Massaken*;
- 6° *Dithy*;
- 7° *Vara*.

Let us take a specific case, operating on a given year: the year 1301, beginning on the 16th April, 1939 and ending on the 14th April, 1940.

1°. *Horakhun*

The *Horakhun* indicates the number of whole days which have passed from the beginning of the era until the day known as *Van Theung Sok* or *Song Karn Khun* of the year being calculated.

The following formula appears:

$$\frac{\text{Date} \times 292207 \div 373}{800} = Q + R$$

$$Q + 1 = \text{Horakhun}.$$

Or in the example given:

$$a) \frac{1301 \times 292207 + 373}{800} = 475202 \div \text{a remainder of } 80$$

$$b) 475202 + 1 = 475203 = \text{Horakhun (1)}.$$

(1) In some old treatises the *Horakhun* is calculated as follows:
Multiply the date by 365 days 25875 (average length of the year); the answer, increased by 1,46625 gives the *Horakhun* in its whole numbers.

Thus, for the year 1301:

$$\begin{array}{r} 1301 \times 365,25875 = 475201,63375 \\ \underline{1,46625} \\ 475203,10000 \end{array}$$

This gives the same result as that obtained above for the *Horakhun* and the fraction of the day. The latter (0,10000) is equivalent in fact to the remainder of 80 after the division by 800:

$$\frac{10000}{100000} = \frac{80}{800}$$

To understand the significance of the number 1,46625, split it up in units and decimals.

The number 1 of the unit represents the supplementary day whose quotient is increased in the first method in order to obtain the *Horakhun*.

As for the 0,46625, it is the $\frac{373}{800}$ advance of the Sun in the first method, but reduced

to decimals:

$$\frac{373}{800} = 0,46625.$$

Role of factors. — 1° The number 292207 is the total number of days in the basic period of 800 years, of which 593 have 365 days and 207 have 366;

2° The number 373 represents the Sun's advance at the beginning of the period, expressed in 8/100 of a day:

$$\frac{373}{800} = 11 \text{ hours } 11^m 24^s);$$

3° This advance of $\frac{373}{800}$ does not give the *Horakhun* the number of whole days it should represent and the error is consequently corrected by adding 1 day to the quotient of division by 800.

On the other hand, this addition causes the *Horakhun* to have a fraction of a day extra. This fraction varies from year to year while remaining constant for all the dates in the same year. Its role is indicated by the element *Kammanchaphol*.

Explanation of the operations. — By multiplying the date of the year by the total number of days in the 800 year period, the days are reduced to eight hundredths and then increased by the $\frac{373}{800}$ of the sun's advance.

By dividing this total by 800, the quotient gives the number of whole days, the remainder of the division representing eight-hundredths of a day.

The intervention of the Sun's advance is destined to fix a common reference point on the ecliptic with all the other stars.

Note. — The difference between the *Horakhun* of two consecutive years is of 365 or 366 days, depending on whether they are ordinary years or one of them a leap year.

The number of days given by this subtraction naturally concerns the year whose date is the higher of the two.

2°. *Kammanchaphol*

The *Kammanchaphol* is equal to the difference of the divisor 800 and the remainder of the preceding division --- in others words, $800 - 80 = 720$ (1).

It represents in eight hundredths of a day the complementary fraction of the surplus of the last day of the *Horakhun*.

(1) As a corollary of the 2nd method of calculating the *Horakun*, the *Kammanchaphol* is reckoned by multiplying the fraction of a day in excess of the *Horakhun* by 800 and by then subtracting its whole numbers from 800:

$$0.10000 \times 800 = 80$$

$$800 - 80 = 720$$

The *Kammanchaphol* is used:

1° To calculate the *Mathagnom* of the Sun (1) by being added to the time deducted by the *Suthine* to calculate the *Somphut* (2) of this star;

2° To mark the leap years which are also reckoned by the difference of the *Horakhun*. Each time the *Kammanchaphol* is equal or inferior to 207, the year belongs to one of the 207 leap years in the basic period of 800.

Note. — The *Kammanchaphol* varies from 0 to 800. It lessens constantly by 207 from one year to the other. When it is above 700, the New Year period has 4 days, the two middle ones of which are called *Munao*.

3°. *Ouchaphol*

This element is important in the progress of the Moon's apogee. It represents in days the point of this apogee on the day of *Theung Sok*. It is used to reckon the equation of the Moon (the *Phol*).

It also equals the following division: $\frac{2611 + \text{Horakhun}}{3232}$

Or: $\frac{2611 + 475203}{3232} = 147 + \text{a remainder of } 2710.$

2710 is the *Ouchaphol* required (3).

Role of factors. — The number 2611 is the advance in whole days of the apogee of the Moon at the beginning of the period. It intervenes to establish on the ecliptic a common reference-point for the Sun and the Moon at its apogee.

The divisor 3232, also in whole days, represents the time taken by the apogee of the Moon to make a complete revolution round the twelve signs of the Zodiac.

(1) The *Mathagnom* of a star is the distance covered by it travelling at average speed multiplied by the time. The *Mathagnom* represents what European astronomers call 'the average movement' or 'average anomaly' of a star.

(2) The *Somphut* is the exact trajectory of a star and is obtained by its *Mathagnom* increased or diminished by the *Phol* (equation), depending on whether the latter is positive or negative.

The *Somphut* corresponds to the European term of 'real movement' or 'true anomaly' of a star.

(3) Another method, common among the Siamese, subtracts 621 from the *Horakhun* and then divides the remainder by 3232. The remainder of this division gives the *Ouchaphol*.

In this case: $475203 - 621 = 474582$

$\frac{474582}{3232} = 146 + 2710 \text{ (Ouchaphol).}$

The result is consequently the same as by the other method.

The difference between the two procedures is that the advance of the apogee intervenes in the first (2611); while in the latter it is its delay in a complete revolution of 3232 days.

In fact, $3232 - 2611 = 621.$

4°. *Avaman*

The *Avaman* expresses in minutes of arc the advance of the Moon on any given day. It is used to calculate the *Mathagnom* of the Moon (average anomaly or average movement).

It is reckoned as follows:
$$\frac{\text{Horakhun} \times 11 + 650}{692}$$

The remainder of this division is the *Avaman*.

So, for the year 1301:
$$\frac{475203 \times 11 + 650}{692} = 7554 + \text{a remainder of } 515$$
 which is the *Avaman*.

Role of factors. -- In their advance the Moon gains 11 whole days on the Sun in a period of 692 days. Consequently, in one day the gain is $\frac{11}{692}$, and for the 475203 whole days given by *Horakhun* is
$$\frac{11 \times 475203}{692} = 7553 \text{ days} + \text{a remainder of } 557$$
 which is the *Avaman*.

The divisor 692 consequently stands for a complete revolution of the *Avaman*, equivalent to $\frac{692}{11}$ days.

The number 650, in eleventh parts of a day, is the advance of the Moon at the beginning of the era. When it is added to the *Horakhun*, this advance is taken into account so that the Sun and the Moon in their progress start from the same point on the ecliptic.

Explanation of the operations. — By multiplying the *Horakhun* by 11, the number of days is reduced to the eleventh parts of a day to which are added the 650 eleventh parts of the Moon's advance.

The whole number in this unity $\left(\frac{692}{11}\right)$ is then re-established by dividing by 692, the remainder being the *Avaman*.

Note. — The *Avaman* increases by 11 with each day's progress of the Moon. But once the 692 units are discounted, there results that:

1° the *Avaman* increases by 555 for an ordinary year and by 566 for a leap year;

2° or it diminishes respectively by 137 and 126.

In other words, there is a difference of 11 for the extra day in the leap year.

These two figures, 137 and 126, are generally used to check the calculation of the *Avaman* in any year;

3° When the *Avaman* equals or is below 126, the leap-year has 30 days in the 7th month, a month in which in all other cases there are only 29.

5°. *Massaken*

This element expresses the number of lunations (and consequently of lunar months) which have passed since the start of the era in the time given (in days) by the *Horakhun*.

It is calculated as follows:

a) Add to the *Horakhun* the number of days given by the quotient of the division by 692 required to calculate the *Avaman*;

b) Divide this total by 30 and the quotient gives the *Massaken*.

In the example given:

$$\frac{475203 + 7554}{30} = 16091 + \text{a remainder of } 27.$$

The *Massaken* is 16091 lunar months or lunation.

The remainder, 27, is the 6th element which will be dealt with further on.

Role of factors. — The Laotian calendar has lunar months and a solar year; as the average revolution of the Moon is only 29 days 12 hours 44^m 2^s 39, if we divide the *Horakhun* by 30 days the quotient would give a number of lunar months inferior to the real number of lunations.

The quotient of 7554 days arrived at by division by 692 (the remainder of which gives the *Avaman*) precisely represents the complementary value of lunar months. Added to the *Horakhun*, this figure, once divided by 30, gives a number of months of 30 days equal to the number of lunar months which have actually passed.

Note. — The difference between the *Massaken* of two consecutive years gives the number of months in the year whose date is the higher of the two.

6°. *Dilhy*

The remainder of the division by 30 by which the *Massaken* is calculated is the *Dilhy* — 27, in the case of the year 1301.

This factor consequently represents a fraction (expressed in whole days) of lunations or lunar months. It marks the day of the month on which the last day of the *Horakhun* falls, called *Theung Sok* or *Song Karn Khun*.

It has already been pointed out, when we were dealing with the year, that this day always falls between the 6th day of the 5th month and the 5th day of the 6th month. When the *Dilhy* equals or is greater than 6, the 5th month is indicated; if it is between 0 and 5, it belongs to the 6th month. In our example the *Dilhy* is 27 and the *Song Karn Khun* corresponds to the 12th day of the waning Moon in the 5th month.

Note. — When the *Dilhy* is below 6 or above 24, the year has 13 months. The years of 13 months always begin between the

25th day of the 5th month and from the 5th day on in the 6th month.

When the *Dilhy* is zero, it represents a complete lunar cycle and the New Year occurs on the first day of the waxing Moon in the 6th month.

7°. *Vara*

The *Vara* ('day', in Pāli) indicates the day of the week corresponding to the *Theung Sok* or *Song Karn Khun* day.

It results from the division of the *Horakhun* by 7, that is, by the 7 days of the week. The quotient accordingly gives the number of weeks which have passed since the beginning of the era, the remainder representing the number of days in fractions of the week. This remainder is the *Vara*.

Thus in our example of the year 1301:

$$\frac{475203}{7} = 67886 + \text{a remainder of } 1.$$

The days of the week are represented by consecutive numbers: Sunday, 1; Monday, 2; etc.

The *Dilhy* being 1, the *Song Karn Khun* day is consequently a Sunday.

CHECKING THE RESULTS OF CALCULATIONS

Such are the methods and formulae employed in calculating the value of the various factors in the *Surya Theung Sok* required to establish the calendar and calculate the position of the stars at any given date in a year.

In setting up the calendar, it is also indispensable to calculate the value of the same factors in the two years consecutive to the one in question.

The results are tabulated for the three years as follows:

	1302	1301	1300
1° Horakhun.....	475568	475203	474837
2° Kammanchaphol.....	513	720	127
3° Ouchaphol.....	3075	2710	2354
4° Avaman.....	378	515	641
5° Massaken.....	16104	16091	16079
6° Dilhy.....	8	27	15
7° Vara.....	2	1	6

The exactness of the values obtained in then checked.

1° *Horakhun* :

a) The difference between 1301 and 1300 is 366 days. No error, as 1300 was a leap-year as its *Kammanchaphol* indicates (inferior to 207);

2° *Kammanchaphol* :

a) Difference between 1300 and 1301: $(127 + 800) - 720 = 207$;

b) Difference between 1301 and 1302 = $720 - 513 = 207$.

The result is exact as the *Kammanchaphol* diminishes by 207 from year to year.

3° *Avaman* :

a) Difference between 1300 and 1301 = $641 - 515 = 126$

b) Difference between 1301 and 1302 = $515 - 378 = 137$

Result consequently correct.

4° *Massaken* :

a) Difference between 1301 and 1300: 12 months;

b) Difference between 1302 and 1301: 13 months.

No mistake, since the *Dithy* 15 in 1300 shows that it is a year of 12 months, while the *Dithy* 27, superior to 24, shows that 1301 is an embolistic year (13 months).

Once these results have been checked, make sure that the resultant *Dithy* (days of the month) agree absolutely with the regular order of the days.

1° Following the calculation of the *Dithy* and *Vara*, find the name of the first day of the fifth month in the present calendar.

a) In our example, for 1300, the *Dithy* 15 and the *Vara* 6 correspond to the Friday of the full Moon of the 5th month; hence the 1st day of this month is a Friday (1st April, 1938);

b) For 1301, the *Dithy* 27 and the *Vara* 1 correspond to the Sunday of the 12th day of the waning Moon of the 5th month; hence the 1st day of this month is a Tuesday (21st March, 1939);

c) For 1302, the *Dithy* 8 and the *Vara* 2 correspond to the Monday which is the eighth day of the waxing Moon of the 5th month; the 1st day of this month is accordingly a Monday (8th April, 1940).

2° If we know the name of the 1st day of the 5th month in any year, the name of 1st day of the following 5th month is obtained by adding:

a) 4 days, when the year in question has only 12 ordinary months;

b) 5 days, when it has 12 months, the 7th being of 30 days;

c) 6 days, when it has 13 months.

Thus, for the years in question:

a) 1300 has 12 ordinary months; 4 days are added from Friday, the 1st day of the 5th month (1st April, 1938); Saturday 1, Sunday 2, Monday 3, and Tuesday 4. This agrees with Tuesday, 21st March, 1939, which is deduced from calculation of the *Dilhy* and *Vara*;

b) In the case of 1301, a year of 13 months, add 6 days from the Tuesday in question; Wednesday 1, Thursday 2, Friday 3, Saturday 4, Sunday 5 and Monday 6.

Once again there is agreement with the Monday, 8th April, 1940, which is deduced from the *Dilhy* and *Vara* obtained.

The orders of days is consequently continuous. There is frequently interruption, however, due to the fact that *Surya Theung Sok* factors cause variation from one year to another, producing disagreement in the average progress of the Sun and Moon. To meet this contingency and fix agreement between the two, the following rules have been created:

1° The first has been already mentioned; the reference-point is the 1st day of the 5th month by which we can learn if the calendar follows the regular order of days or not;

2° If this order is interrupted, apply the *Theung Sok On* (lesser age).

Hence, when the *Vara* agrees with the regular order of days and the *Dilhy* does not, increase the *Dilhy* by 1. This becomes the *Theung Sok* day;

3° When the 7th month has 30 days and coincides with a year of 13 months, the 13 months are maintained and the supplementary day (the 30th) is attributed to the 7th month of the previous or following year, depending on which of these two years maintains the order of days by such an addition.

Now that all the operations have been checked, we can now draw the following conclusions for the year 1301 in question, by comparing the values of the factors of the three years:

1° The year 1301 is not a leap-year, for:

a) The difference between its *Horakhun* and that of 1302 is 365;

b) Its *Kammanchaphol* is over 207;

c) The difference of its *Avaman*, compared to the year 1302, is 137 and not 126;

2° It is a year with 13 months:

a) The difference of 13 months between its *Massaken* and that of 1302 shows this;

b) This is also shown by the fact that its *Dilhy* is over 24.

3° Its *Kammanchaphol* being over 700 shows that the period of the New Year has 4 days; there are consequently two *Munaos* or middle days;

4° As its *Dithy* is 27, the *Theung Sok* or *Song Karn Khun* day, marking the start of the civil year, accordingly falls on the 12th day of the waning Moon of the 5th month: 15 days of waxing Moon plus 12 days of waning Moon = 27 days.

5° The day of the 5th month is a Sunday, the *Vara* being 1.

EXACT MOMENT OF THE BEGINNING OF THE ASTRONOMICAL YEAR

The time of the Sun's advance being obtained for the *Theung Sok* or *Song Karn Khun* reference-day (Sunday, the 12th day of the waning Moon of the 5th month), we have now to determine the exact moment of the start of the astronomical New Year on the *Song Karn Pay* day.

This moment is given by the *Somphul Athil* (true anomaly of the Sun).

To find this *Somphul*, calculate its *Mathagnom* and add or subtract the *Phol* (equation), depending on whether the latter is positive or negative.

SUTHIN. — To do this, first calculate the *Sulhin*, in this particular case the number of days which have elapsed from the day after the *Song Karn Khun* of the year 1300, *i. e.* from the 1st day of the waning Moon of the 5th month (16th April, 1938) up to and including the *Song Kharn Pay* day of 1301, or till Thursday, the 9th day of the waning Moon of the 5th month or the 13th April, 1939.

This *Sulhin* contains:

5th month.....	14 days	Carried forward...	191 days
6th month.....	30 days	12th month.....	30 days
7th month.....	29 days	1st month.....	29 days
8th month.....	30 days	2nd month.....	30 days
9th month.....	29 days	3rd month.....	29 days
10th month.....	30 days	4th month.....	30 days
11th month.....	29 days	5th month.....	21 days
	<u>191 days</u>	TOTAL	<u>363 days</u>

The *Sulhin* has accordingly 363 days, including the *Song Kharn Pay* day of 1301.

MATHAGNOM ATHIT. — This is obtained as follows:

1° Multiply the *Sulhin* by 800, then add to this result the *Kammanchaphol* of the year to which the *Sulhin* days belong. Divide the total by 24350. The quotient represents the *rasi*.

Thus for our example:

$$\frac{363 \times 800 + 127^{(1)}}{24350} = 11 + \text{a remainder of } 22677.$$

(1) It is the *Kammanchaphol* of the year 1300 to which the *Sulhin* days belong.

This gives 11 *rasis*;

2° Divide the remainder of the previous division by 811; the quotient represents the *ongsas* (degrees)

$$\text{Thus: } \frac{22677}{811} = 27 + \text{a remainder of 780.}$$

This gives 27 *ongsas*;

3° Divide the remainder of the above division by 14; the quotient gives the *lubdas* (minutes);

$$\text{Thus } \frac{780}{14} = 55 + \text{a remainder of 10.}$$

4° Subtract 3 from this quotient: $55 - 3 = 52$ *lubdas*.

The *Mathagnom Athil* of the *Song Kharn Pay* day is 11 *rasis*, 27 *ongsas* and 52 *lubdas*.

Role of factors and meaning of the operations: The figure 24350 is the twelfth part of the 292207 eight-hundredths of a day corresponding to the average time of the year required by the Sun to revolve round the ecliptic circle of 360 degrees:

$$\left(\frac{292207}{12} = 24350 + \text{a remainder of 7} \right)$$

These 24350 eight-hundredths of days accordingly represent the time the Sun takes to pass through a *rasi* (sign) of 30, and this is why division by 24350 gives the *rasi* in the quotient.

Since the Sun covers a sign of 30 degrees in 24350 eight-hundredths of a day, it takes $\frac{24350}{30} = 811 + \text{a remainder of } \frac{2}{3}$ to cover a degree or *ongsas*. Hence the quotient of division by 811 gives the *ongsas* or degrees.

And if these 811 eight-hundredths represent a degree, a minute of arc is 60 times less: $\frac{811}{60} = 13 + \text{a remainder of 51.}$

This quotient of 13. 51 has been rounded off at 14 to compensate for the remainders of $\frac{7}{800}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ neglected in the division of 292207 by 12 and 24350 by 30.

SOMPHUT ATHIT. — The *Somphut Athil* (true anomaly of the Sun) is calculated by complicated formulae which cannot be explained and analysed in so short an article.

These formulae will be applied and their main rules given without entering into explanations as to the role of the various factors.

KEN. — To calculate the *Somphut*, the *Ken* must first be calculated, *i. e.* the sign where the Sun is to be found.

The *Ken* is arrived at by subtracting from the *Malagnom* (average anomaly) 2 from the *rasis* and 20 from the *ongsas*.

Thus, for the *Mathagnom* already worked out:

<i>Mathagnom</i>	11 <i>rasis</i>	27 <i>ongsas</i>	52 <i>lubdas</i>
Figure to be subtracted.....	2	20	
KEN	<u>9 <i>rasis</i></u>	<u>7 <i>ongsas</i></u>	<u>52 <i>lubdas</i></u>

Rule of the Kens. — The *Kens* follow the following rule:

a) When the *Ken* has 0, 1 or 2 in the *rasis*, its value remains unchanged;

b) When the *Ken* has 3, 4 or 5 in the *rasis*, its value is subtracted from that of the *Althaliak*: 5 *rasis*, 29 *ongsas* and 60 *lubdas* (or 180 degrees);

c) When the *rasis* of the *Ken* are 6, 7 or 8, subtract 6 from the *rasis* (or 180 degrees);

d) When the *rasis* of the *Ken* are 9, 10 or 11, subtract its value from that of the *Thevalhos Monthon* (or 12 *rasis*, 360 degrees).

These results of these subtractions will be negative when the *Ken* has a number of *rasis* equal or inferior to 5, positive when the number of *rasis* in the *Ken* is above 5.

The application of this rule in the present case gives the following results:

<i>Thevalhos Monthon</i>	11 <i>rasis</i>	29 <i>ongsas</i>	60 <i>lubdas</i>
<i>Ken obtained</i>	<u>9 <i>rasis</i></u>	<u>7 <i>ongsas</i></u>	<u>52 <i>lubdas</i></u>
REMAINDER.....	2 <i>rasis</i>	22 <i>ongsas</i>	8 <i>lubdas</i>

KHAN. — The *Khan* represents a half-sign of the Zodiac and consequently 15 *ongsas* (15 degrees). It is obtained as follows:

1° By multiplying the number of *rasis* in the remainder by 2;

2° By adding one unit to this product whenever the number of *ongsas* in the remainder can be subtracted from 15.

In this case: $2 \times 2 = 4$ *Khans*

$22 - 15 = 7$ + a remainder of 7 *ongsas*

Total: 5 *Khans*

PHUTTIALUB. — By multiplying by 60, the number of *ongsas* below 15 or the number remaining after subtraction of 15 is changed into *lubdas*; this product, increased by the number of *lubdas* from the remainder of the subtraction required by the *Kens* rules, gives the *Phullialub*.

Thus, in our example:

$$7 \text{ongsas} \times 60 = \frac{420}{8}$$

to add

Phullialub: 428 *lubdas*.

TCHAGNA ATHIT (1). — This represents the table of the Sun's equation, calculated successively in the order of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th *Khans* (half-sign)

KHANS	CORRESPONDING OF VALUE	DIFFERENCE OF VALUES
1st	35	32
2nd	67	27
3rd	94	22
4th	116	13
5th	129	5
6th	134	

Rule of the Tchagna Athit.

1° Depending on the number of the *Khan* obtained, the difference in value between the *Khan* concerned and the following *Khan* is used as the multiplying factor of the *Phullialub*;

2° When the *Khan* in question is zero, the value 35 of the first *Khan* is used as the multiplier.

Here we have a *Khan* of 5, the multiplier of the *Phullialub* of which is 5, this being the difference between the values of the 5th and 6th *Khans*.

Thus $428 \times 5 = 2140$.

PHOL. — The *Phol* is the equation of the star and is worked out as follows:

Divide the product of the previous multiplication (2140) by 900; add the quotient to the corresponding value of the *Khan* and then divide this sum by 60. The quotient represents the *ongsas* and the remainder the *lubdas* of the *Phol*.

Thus, in our example: $\frac{2140}{900} = 2 + \text{a remainder of } 340$.

$$2 + 129 = 131$$

$$\text{Phol } \frac{131}{60} = 2 \text{ ongsas} + 11 \text{ lubdas.}$$

When the *Khan* is zero, after multiplication of the *Phullialub* by the corresponding value of the *Tchagna* and division by 900, the quotient represents, without increase, the *ongsas*, while the remainder gives the *lubdas* of the *Phol*.

Sign of the Phol. — Once the *Phol* is determined, it must be seen if its sign is positive or negative.

(1) There is a *Tchagna* for every star.

According to the *Kens* rule, when the *Ken* 's number of *rasis* is superior to 5, the *Phol* is positive; otherwise the *Phol* is negative. In the present case, the *Ken* has 9 *rasis*; the *Phol* is consequently positive.

Somphut Athil. — This *Phol* must consequently be added to the *Mathagnom* (average anomaly) which we have already calculated:

This gives:

<i>Mathagnom Athil</i>	11 <i>rasis</i>	27 <i>ongsas</i>	52 <i>lubdas</i>
add the <i>Phol</i>		2	11
SOMPHUT ATHIT.	11 <i>rasis</i>	29 <i>ongsas</i>	63 <i>lubdas</i>

60 *lubdas* make 1 *ongsa* and 30 *ongsas* make 1 *rasi*; hence we get the following:

The *Somphut Athil* = 12 *rasis*, 0 *ongsa* and 3 *lubdas*.

And as 12 *rasis* represent a complete revolution of the Sun, they disappear, and of the value of 12 *rasis* 0 *ongsa* and 1 *lubda* above, there remains only 0 *rasi*, 0 *ongsa* and 3 *lubdas*.

The *Somphut Athil* (true anomaly of the Sun) of the *Song Karn Pay* day is consequently:

0 *rasi* 0 *ongsa* and 3 *lubdas*

This value of 0 *rasi* and 0 *ongsa* indicates a complete revolution of the Sun and consequently its return to its starting-point. This marks the change of the astronomical year.

As the *Somphut* has not a zero *lubda*, the passage of the Sun at the intersection of the *Mina* and *Mesa* signs does not occur exactly at midnight.

Verification. — Once the *Somphut* is calculated, it should be checked to see that it corresponds really to the *Song Karn Pay* day for which it has been calculated.

To do this, calculate the *Somphut Athil* of the following days:

1° The day before the *Song Karn Pay*;

2° The *Munao* day or days;

3° The *Song Karn Khun* day.

The day when the *Somphut* has a value of 0 *rasi*, 0 *ongsa* and 0 or a small number of *lubdas* will be the *Song Karn Pay* day.

These calculations are carried out in the way indicated above with the *Southin* corresponding in value to each of the days in question.

Thus: 1° *Southin* 362 for the day preceding the *Song Karn Pay*;

2° 364 and 365 for the first and second *Munao* days;

3° 366 for the *Song Karn Khun* day

The results can be calculated as follows:

Somphul of Days

	BEFORE SONG KARN PAY	SONG KARN PAY	1st MUVAO	2d MUVAO	SONG KARN KHUN
Rasis.....	11	0	0	0	0
Ongsas.....	29	0	1	2	2
Lubdas.....	4	3	2	1	58

From this table it is clear that the return of the Sun to its starting-point effectively occurs on the *Song Karn Pay* day when its *Somphul* has only the value of a *lubda*.

Note. — It should be remarked that the *Somphul* increases from one day to another by from 57 to 61 *lubdas*. This led the ancient *Horas* to take 59 *lubdas* as the average speed of the Sun (59 minutes of arc) in its daily progress.

Exact Moment of the Change of the Astronomical Year. — As the *Somphul* (true anomaly) is worth 3 *lubdas*, the time should be calculated on the basis of there being 60 *lubdas* or 60 *nathys* or 24 hours or 240 *bats*. In other words, there are 4 *bats* in 1 *nathy*.

The *bat* is worth 6 minutes; the time of the *Somphul* of the Sun when the *lubda* is 3, is consequently 1 hour 12 minutes.

The change of astronomical year consequently occurs at 1 hour 12 minutes in the morning.

Note. — The position of the Sun (its *Malhagnom* or average anomaly and its *Somphul* or true one) is also calculated in other numerical values which give more precision than those employed. The latter methods are much more complicated, however, and are only used for the calculation of eclipses.

We have been able to check its accuracy on many occasions and will cite only one example, the eclipse of the Moon which occurred in the night of the 7/8th November, 1938. This was worked out in August 1937 and published in the Franco-Laotian Calendar of 1938. The instant of contact of the umbra with the Moon and also the duration of the eclipse, as worked out by these old formulae, were proved exactly right to within a few seconds.

PRESENTATION OF THE CALENDAR

We have now concluded all the calculations necessary for the establishment of the calendar in any given year. We trust that the principles and operations are sufficiently clear from the example given to enable those who wish to fix the Laotian calendar to do so.

The calendar itself is presented in the following manner:

Because of the old beliefs which are attached to the influence of the stars depending on their position in the celestial sphere and the distances which separate the planets, the conclusions drawn from them are of the highest importance in all practical matters. The calendar always includes predictions which are drawn from the results of the calculation of factors, and these predictions precede the actual table of months and days.

The calendar for the year 1301 (to continue our example) is presented as follows (1):

CALENDAR

of the year *Kat Mao* (the Hare)

Tiounlasakaraj 1301

Bhuddhist Era 2482 — Christian Era 1939-40

The *Song Karn Pay* day, marking the change of the astronomical year will occur on Thursday, the 9th day of the waning Moon of the 5th month (13th April, 1939). The Sun, finishing its revolution will pass at the intersection of the *rasis Mina* and *Mesa* at 1 hour 12 minutes.

Then the divinity *Kirini Monlha*, the guardian of the New Year, will appear. Adorned with emeralds and mounted on an elephant, the goddess holds in her left hand a diamond goad with which she drives the elephant and in her right a gun.

The year will have two *Munaos* (middle days), Friday, 10th and Saturday, 11th days of the waning Moon of the 5th month.

The *Song Karn Khun* days (the civil New Year) will fall on Sunday, the 12th day of the waning Moon of the 5th month (16th April, 1939).

The year 1301 will be *Pet Song Hon* or *Alhikhamat* (13 months, the 8th being repeated twice).

PREDICTIONS OF THE INFLUENCES OF THE SONG KARN

A. — *Predictions from the days when the New Year occurs:*

As the *Song Karn Pay* is a Thursday, it is predicted that the priests will be sore tried.

The *Munaos* (middle days) being Friday and Saturday,
 1° Peppers and rice will be scarce and prices will be high;
 2° Cattle will suffer from epizooty;

(1) See end of article for reproduction of calendars for the years 1318 and 1320 of the Tiouns Era, corresponding to A. D. 1956 and 1958 (Editor's note).

3° There may be troubles in the country and civil servants may find themselves subject to sanctions.

As the *Song Karn Khun* falls on a Sunday, it is said that the Sovereign will be honoured and favoured by fate in his disagreement with all his enemies, no matter where they come from.

B. — *Predictions resulting from special calculations* (1):

The calculations to determine the tree which will be king this year show a remainder of 5. This represents the *May Oi Sang* and means that the rivers will be in spate and the paddy fields submerged.

The spates are confirmed by other calculations which also indicate that the early varieties of paddy will give a good crop; the late varieties will suffer.

Calculations on the rain show that the *Nāgas* will play in the Oceans and provoke 500 heavy showers:

- 200 on the other continents;
- 150 on the forest of Hymaphan (Himālayas);
- 100 on the great Oceans;
- 50 on our part of the globe.

Calculations show that the rainy periods will be normal at the beginning of the season, abundant in the middle and rare towards the end.

Calculations indicate that so far as food-stuffs are concerned the yield of the crop will be only one fifth of the normal.

∴

Such are the kind of predictions which accompany every calendar.

As we have been unable to observe them over a long period of years, it is impossible to determine their worth. But one fact is certain: the people of Laos attach great importance to them, especially to those which give indications on the rainfall during the rainy season. Depending on whether the rains are heavy at the beginning or at the end of the season, they vary the quantity of the early or late paddy they sow and hurry on or slow up the thinning out of the high or low rice-fields.

(1) These calculations are part of Astrology rather than Astronomy and have no place in these notes. We indicate only their results and significations.



ກະຊວງໜັງສືພະກຳນົດ

ພູທະນິກອາດ	ໄລຍະ - ລວມ
ຈຸນລະນິກອາດ	ຕົວຕາ - ຕຊ
ນິພາຍະນິກອາດ	ຕຊຕາ -

ଗଉଡ଼ି - ୧୨୫୬-

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108. 109. 110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115. 116. 117. 118. 119. 120. 121. 122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128. 129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134. 135. 136. 137. 138. 139. 140. 141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146. 147. 148. 149. 150. 151. 152. 153. 154. 155. 156. 157. 158. 159. 160. 161. 162. 163. 164. 165. 166. 167. 168. 169. 170. 171. 172. 173. 174. 175. 176. 177. 178. 179. 180. 181. 182. 183. 184. 185. 186. 187. 188. 189. 190. 191. 192. 193. 194. 195. 196. 197. 198. 199. 200. 201. 202. 203. 204. 205. 206. 207. 208. 209. 210. 211. 212. 213. 214. 215. 216. 217. 218. 219. 220. 221. 222. 223. 224. 225. 226. 227. 228. 229. 230. 231. 232. 233. 234. 235. 236. 237. 238. 239. 240. 241. 242. 243. 244. 245. 246. 247. 248. 249. 250. 251. 252. 253. 254. 255. 256. 257. 258. 259. 260. 261. 262. 263. 264. 265. 266. 267. 268. 269. 270. 271. 272. 273. 274. 275. 276. 277. 278. 279. 280. 281. 282. 283. 284. 285. 286. 287. 288. 289. 290. 291. 292. 293. 294. 295. 296. 297. 298. 299. 300. 301. 302. 303. 304. 305. 306. 307. 308. 309. 310. 311. 312. 313. 314. 315. 316. 317. 318. 319. 320. 321. 322. 323. 324. 325. 326. 327. 328. 329. 330. 331. 332. 333. 334. 335. 336. 337. 338. 339. 340. 341. 342. 343. 344. 345. 346. 347. 348. 349. 350. 351. 352. 353. 354. 355. 356. 357. 358. 359. 360. 361. 362. 363. 364. 365. 366. 367. 368. 369. 370. 371. 372. 373. 374. 375. 376. 377. 378. 379. 380. 381. 382. 383. 384. 385. 386. 387. 388. 389. 390. 391. 392. 393. 394. 395. 396. 397. 398. 399. 400. 401. 402. 403. 404. 405. 406. 407. 408. 409. 410. 411. 412. 413. 414. 415. 416. 417. 418. 419. 420. 421. 422. 423. 424. 425. 426. 427. 428. 429. 430. 431. 432. 433. 434. 435. 436. 437. 438. 439. 440. 441. 442. 443. 444. 445. 446. 447. 448. 449. 450. 451. 452. 453. 454. 455. 456. 457. 458. 459. 460. 461. 462. 463. 464. 465. 466. 467. 468. 469. 470. 471. 472. 473. 474. 475. 476. 477. 478. 479. 480. 481. 482. 483. 484. 485. 486. 487. 488. 489. 490. 491. 492. 493. 494. 495. 496. 497. 498. 499. 500. 501. 502. 503. 504. 505. 506. 507. 508. 509. 510. 511. 512. 513. 514. 515. 516. 517. 518. 519. 520. 521. 522. 523. 524. 525. 526. 527. 528. 529. 530. 531. 532. 533. 534. 535. 536. 537. 538. 539. 540. 541. 542. 543. 544. 545. 546. 547. 548. 549. 550. 551. 552. 553. 554. 555. 556. 557. 558. 559. 560. 561. 562. 563. 564. 565. 566. 567. 568. 569. 570. 571. 572. 573. 574. 575. 576. 577. 578. 579. 580. 581. 582. 583. 584. 585. 586. 587. 588. 589. 590. 591. 592. 593. 594. 595. 596. 597. 598. 599. 600. 601. 602. 603. 604. 605. 606. 607. 608. 609. 610. 611. 612. 613. 614. 615. 616. 617. 618. 619. 620. 621. 622. 623. 624. 625. 626. 627. 628. 629. 630. 631. 632. 633. 634. 635. 636. 637. 638. 639. 640. 641. 642. 643. 644. 645. 646. 647. 648. 649. 650. 651. 652. 653. 654. 655. 656. 657. 658. 659. 660. 661. 662. 663. 664. 665. 666. 667. 668. 669. 670. 671. 672. 673. 674. 675. 676. 677. 678. 679. 680. 681. 682. 683. 684. 685. 686. 687. 688. 689. 690. 691. 692. 693. 694. 695. 696. 697. 698. 699. 700. 701. 702. 703. 704. 705. 706. 707. 708. 709. 710. 711. 712. 713. 714. 715. 716. 717. 718. 719. 720. 721. 722. 723. 724. 725. 726. 727. 728. 729. 730. 731. 732. 733. 734. 735. 736. 737. 738. 739. 740. 741. 742. 743. 744. 745. 746. 747. 748. 749. 750. 751. 752. 753. 754. 755. 756. 757. 758. 759. 760. 761. 762. 763. 764. 765. 766. 767. 768. 769. 770. 771. 772. 773. 774. 775. 776. 777. 778. 779. 780. 781. 782. 783. 784. 785. 786. 787. 788. 789. 790. 791. 792. 793. 794. 795. 796. 797. 798. 799. 800. 801. 802. 803. 804. 805. 806. 807. 808. 809. 810. 811. 812. 813. 814. 815. 816. 817. 818. 819. 820. 821. 822. 823. 824. 825. 826. 827. 828. 829. 830. 831. 832. 833. 834. 835. 836. 837. 838. 839. 840. 84



ຈັບມະຫາວິຖານ -

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ນະໜາສຶກາມ

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ព្រះបាទសីហនុ

- ພຣະຍົວເປັນອະພິນັດ ມາຄລະມ້າກໍ່ ກໍ່ໂຕບໍ່ມີການປະສົບຕົກ ໕໐໐ ຫ່າ, ຄົນໃນຈັກກະເລກ ໒໐໐ ຫ່າຕົກໄປໃນ
ຫໍບໍ່ມີຂະໜານ ໑໕໐ ຫ່າ. ຕົກໄປໃນທະເລເມດ ໔໐໐ ຫ່າ, ຄົນໃນທະເລເມດ ໓໐໐ ຫ່າ ບໍ່ມີຕົກອາຍຸທຸກ.

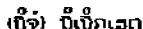
ព្រះហស្តសិរី

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ທຸກກາລະໂຍກ

— **ວັນເຈົ້າຊື່ຍອມທິບຳ - ວັນຈັດຕັ້ງວັນຫາໃຈ ແລະ ໄລຍະວິນາຍ - ວັນຮກອກທດ ຮກຂາຈານໂດຍເດີມຂບ.**

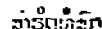
Calendar for the year 1318 (1956) of the Tionula Era (Cyclical Animal: the Monkey)



| | | |
|-------------|---|------|
| បុរេវិភាគ | — | ៩៥០៦ |
| ក្រុមវិភាគ | — | ១៧៩០ |
| បង្គោលវិភាគ | — | ១២២៧ |

ଗରବିୟା - 1958

5. *See* *supra* note 1, at 173.



ໝໍ້ ນໍ້າຂາມວ່າ -

ເດືອນ ໕ ແລະ ໙ ຄໍ່າ ຈັນຍາທິດ ພ.ສ. ໒໕໐໐ ກົງກັບວັນທີ ໑໓ ເມສາ (ອາຊີບ) ເລຂະໂຂງ
ເລກ ໓໓ ໄປ ໑໒ ທີ່ (ກາກິນ)

ນົດ -

ព័ត៌មាន ៩ ប្រភេទ ១០ គា់ ចាប់ផ្តើម ឈ.ស. ២០០៧ ក្រោយពី ៨៤ ខែ (ចាប់ពី ២០០៣) ដល់ ២០០៧

តំណភ្ជាប់
ឯកសារ

ເດືອນ ໕ ແຮມ ໒໒ ຄຳ ວັນນິຄານ ພ.ສ. ໒໕໐໒ ກຳກັນວັນທີ ໑໕ ເມສາ (ອາວຸໂສ) ໑໙໕໙
ເວລາ ໓໑ ໂມງ ໓໓ ທາທີ ໓໒ ວິມາທີ ກາກຊັງ.

ဝိနည်း

ហាវន័រខាប

ເປັນອາດີຊະນາດ (ເມັດຕື້ຍ ໓ ຂອງເທຣ) ອີກຕື້ວານ ອີກຕື້ຮະຍຳ ນານພາກສຸກິດານທີ ໒ ຈຸ່ງ
ທຸນເທວີ ທັດວາອາພິພາອາພອນ ວິຊາບັດວິຍາເກົາ ບັດຮາດ ພະນັດຂວາຖືຈັກ ພະທັດຈຳບັດວິ
ລເວຍາກະເດືອນເປັນະກິຊາບານ ລເວັດມະນເບົາທັກຄ.

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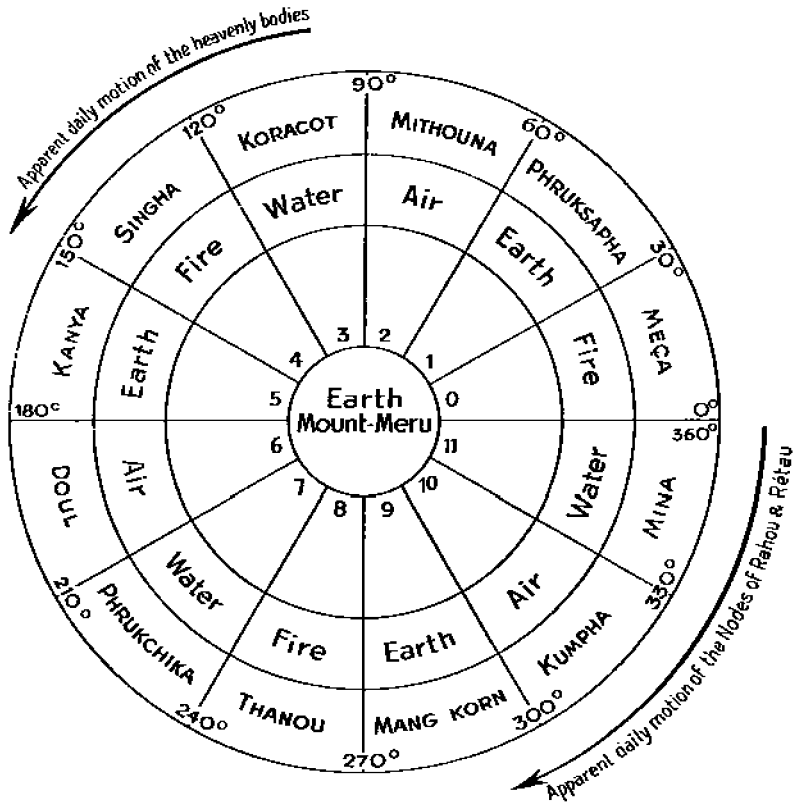
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ເກມກາລະໂຍກ

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ຮກຂະໜາດເປັນວັນເຈົ້າ ເປັນວັນ.

Calendar for the year 1320 (1958) of the Tiounla Era (Cyclical Animal: the Dog)



Zodiac

Fig. 18
Revolution of the Laotian Zodiac.

Profane and Religious Festivals

by

René de BÉRAL

The Laotian is often portrayed as a great lover of festivals and a keen boun-goer (1).

This is true, but to do him justice it must also be said that the Laotian can work just as hard as anybody else, and some of it can be very hard and rough for some of the tasks he has to perform are very toilsome indeed. To realize this, there is only to watch him sowing the spouts in his rice-field under a scorching sun, chopping off old tree trunks or hauling his boat across the violent whirlpool of a rapid...

Yet most of his jobs are regulated by recurring natural events. Each new season, each new full moon of the Laotian calendar, brings back both the cares of a job to be done and the fun of some feasts to be celebrated.

To these days of obligation, set in advance and of a general character, are added numerous special bouns and ngans (2), which must be celebrated to emphasize every important event of one's private life...

This shows how numerous the Laotian festivals can be. Anything in life can be a pretext to a boun, a festival, be it in honour of the Buddha or of the Departed, to celebrate a birth or a wedding, the attaining of Nirvāṇa by a deceased parent or friend, or for calling the blessings from beneficent genies upon the replanting of rice or in thankfulness for an abundant harvest. The boun will generally go with an admixture of Buddhist prayers, incantations and propitiatory rites in honour for the phi and include a ngan, a profane night vigil giving an opportunity to phubaos and phusaos of organizing a court of love full of liveliness and poetry.

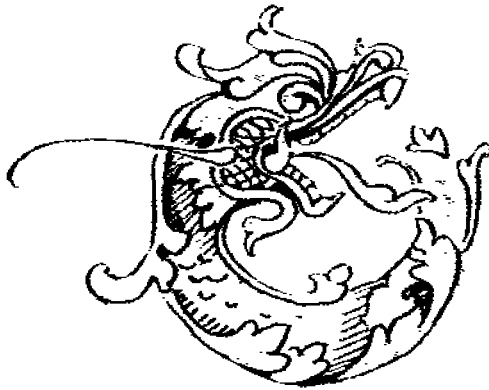
To study Laotian festivals more in details, one should adopt some kind of classification — in so far as this is possible — either in accordance with their chronological order, or with their more or less

(1) *Boun*: festival.

(2) *Ngan*: night vigil.

religious and profane nature, or according to their character of obligation or otherwise, common to all Laos or pertaining to certain province.

As the scope of such a study must be limited in an article of this kind, we shall restrict ourselves to the more important ones as they occur during a year, dividing them into two main groups: (1) profane; (2) religious. As a matter of course, they will find their place in the following chapters, and we are going to deal with the first one.



The Baci

by

Thao Nhouy ABHAY,
Former Minister of Education.

The *baci* is the Laotian ceremony *par excellence*, the one with which this kind people expresses its *joie de vivre* and warmheartedness.

Whether magnificent or modest, grave or familiar but always ardent and sincere, the *baci* is an expression of welcome which greets the official on his tour of duty as well as any traveller on his way.

A *baci* is celebrated to wish both good health and long life to a new born child « whose eyes have just open to the light », to the young mother at the end of her confinement, or to a sick person on her way to recovery, to a traveller about to undertake a long journey or who is just returning home. There are New Year *bacis*, wedding *bacis*, *bacis* offered to high officials passing through the country, to friends met again after a long separation or to an official upon whom honours have been bestowed; *bacis* of welcome or *bon voyage*, of happiness and prosperity.

A generous ceremony if ever there was one, where everyone can find the wishes most agreeable to one and from which everyone comes out with added luster; at the end of his *baci* the common ox has grown into a *usuphalat* (1) and a snake into a *nag* (2).

Let us add besides, that the *baci* offers young people an excellent opportunity for acquiring a foretaste of marriage under the kindly supervision of the mothers. It is a smile to life, a forgiveness of trespasses and the unshakable confidence in the supreme powers of the gods and the Buddha.

Baci is a pompous and kingly term. It is also commonly called *sukhuan*.

Sukhuan means both calling and welcoming the soul, for the soul is of a roving nature and is only too glad to leave one's body. The following story is told:

« Two travellers walked across a forest. At the end of the

(1) "Great Bull".

(2) *Nāg* or *Nāga*, great sea Serpent in Indian mythology.

day's march, one of them feeling tired, decided to lay down and fell asleep. A short while later, his companion saw a cricket coming out of his friend's head... Slowly the insect crawled among the trees, followed the bank of the river nearby, and after hopping here and there came back to its starting point. At that moment the sleeper awoke and said: « Ah, what a sleep and what a dream! I walked in forests and bathed in rivers... »

The other one had no difficulty in establishing the relation between what he had seen and what he was told by his companion. And the thought occurred to him that when leaving the body, the soul is fond of assuming various animal forms... »

Indeed, the soul loves to roam about so much that it must be kept or recalled home as often as possible, since it is liable to haunt unwholesome places or to be led astray by evil companions.

We should, it is said, offer once a month at least, a *sukhuan*, a « treat » to that problem child whose absence is at the origin of our sicknesses or misfortunes — often both!

. . .

Then comes the choosing of the lucky day and hour.

The households have been preparing a *phakuan* (1), which consist of a tray covered with *ô* bowls and of *khans* (smaller trays) which are dressed with cupped banana leaves filled with flowers. On the top, as a symbol of happiness, a bigger bouquet of champa flowers, proudly stuck on little wooden sticks.

Moreover, the *phakuan* contains alcohol, eggs, cakes, rice, silver, candles and cotton threads.

The parents then arrive, some bringing along similar or smaller *phakuans*, others bringing modest cups filled with rice and flowers.

Thus spread over a red carpet, the multicolored *phakuans*, fill the air with all the lovely perfumes of Laos, while awaiting the celebrant. The ceremony is usually performed by a white-haired old man, dressed in white, and preferably, by an unfrocked monk of *thil* or *chane* (2) rank.

Here he comes, sits in the appropriate place, *i. e.*, facing the guest of honour. The candles and incense sticks are lit and while a light mist of perfume and incense arise, the venerable old man addresses the guardians gods.

INVOCATION TO DIVINITIES

« *Sakké who dwells in the Paradise of the sixteen regions;*

« *Kamé who dwells in the Kamaphob,*

(1) 'Tray' or 'Repast for the soul'.

(2) Rank of unfrocked monks.

dew, where the cock do not crow and where the sun does not shine (1).

« Come back this day, oh soul who has gone to a new birth in the uninhabited village, where live the twin-tails snakes, and where reign the goddesses with two knots of hair;

« Do not linger on the way, neither with the Phis or in the mountains;

« Come home, to your home made of smooth planks, covered with thick hay and of which the foundation piles and the timber of its framework has been pulled by the mighty elephants;

« Come back to this stately abode where you shall not be short of anything, where you shall not be ill-treated either by your uncles or parents, where all will love you as gold and cherish you as a precious stone;

« Come back, stand before the phakuan and stay home from now on! ».

When these incantations and prayers have been said, it is believed that the divinities are presiding over the ceremony and that all the souls have gone back into the body. The wishes formula is then recited.

WISHES

« Be as strong as the antlers of a stag, as the jaws of a wild bear or as the tusks of an elephant!

« May your life last a thousand years, may your riches be abundant in every kind, elephants, horses, victuals and wealth!

« Should you suffer with fever, may it disappear!

« If you are a servant, may you be free, for a sukhuau offered to a khun makes it a phagna, and a phagna turns it into a king!

« May you be all-powerful the world over!

« May everything yield before you and may you be free from want!

« May you have long life, health, happiness and strength! »



The audience which had remained silent and with palms together at the forehead, now acquiesce by murmuring: *« sa! »* (2).

Then someone comes to fasten a cotton thread to the celebrant's wrist. He, in turns, does the same to the person to whom the *sukhuau* is offered. Each in turn receives a lucky thread.

The *sukhuau* always extends into a *ngan* (3).

(1) Metaphors for the Kingdom of Death.

(2) Short for *'sathou'* ("So be it").

(3) Night vigil or court of love.

Birth Rites¹

by

Charles ARCHAIMBAULT,

Member of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient.

In the pale light thrown by two candles burning on the top of the tray of offerings, the reciter fastens around the young bride's wrist the cotton threads which will bind her souls and murmurs:

« May you have a house full of children, and grand-children the bedroom full... »

Some months already have elapsed since this wish was formulated, and now the young wife knows that it will soon be partly fulfilled. Henceforth, bound to her future child by a magical participation as much as by a biological one, the young mother-to-be has to observe rigorously many taboos.

First, she must abstain, in her meals, from certain dishes which she particularly likes: larva from bees, tamarinds, bananas containing seeds, aubergines. If she should be tempted eating them, she might very well give birth to a child, as turbulent as the honey flies, and the « bladder containing the waters » would be so swollen and hard that the birth would prove to be extremely difficult. She must not step over the head-rope of a horse or an ox lest the child would be greedy, nor to sit on the upper step of the stairs as it might delay the birth, such as the child's head blocking the entrance. Should she want to dry her skirt in the sun, she must see that the bottom of it is placed in the direction of the sun so that the head of the child would come first. If she wants to attend some festivities, she must not dress up or wear make-up, or else the child would grow up to become vain.

Apart from all these « don'ts », she must also observe certain practises in order to facilitate her labour. Thus, when she goes up in the morning, she must hit her loins with her two fists, saying: « Let the *placenta* fall, may the membrane envelopping the child, be expelled! » At the end of the day, when she takes a bath, she must

¹ Rites observed in the region of Vientiane (Sai Fong-Tadeua).



a)



b)

BIRTH RITES



c) DRIVING OUT THE SCAPEGOAT

Photos R. Coutard



a)



b)

Mothiem and Melam dance round the « Victory Pole »

Pl. XVI

**SACRIFICE OF
A BUFFALO
AT WAT PH'U**



Photos R. Coutard

c) « ... The blood poured into little bowls the number of which is settled by tradition... »

face the setting sun and smooth her hair with stalks of muraenae. This will enable the child to come out easily, just as if it were an eel.

At last, the day of deliverance has arrived. The man-midwife sent for immediately, bows three times before the cup of offerings presented to him and he then invokes the master's spirit who taught him the formulas and the techniques. With this invocation, he will recall at the right moment the *gālhās* or magic words.

Holding a long rope tied to the roof, the pregnant woman tries to facilitate the descent of the foetus. The man-midwife rubs the her and lays on her belly grated tubers; he also tries with a betel's stalk to make her vomit. From time to time he drinks a few mouthful of perfumed water which he then spits on the woman's body, after reciting the *gālhā Phab Phi*, formula to drive away all evil spirits preventing the birth.

Suddenly the patient let go the rope and falls on the mat; her nostrils and lips locked tight, her strength so far gone that she cannot even go on moaning. The expert in midwifery gives her a worried glance. He warns the parents in a muffled voice: « There is something unusual about this case; better call for the *Mo Sado*. »

Squatted next to the patient, the *Mo Sado*, a witch doctor who possesses the mysterious power to « force locked doors open », fixes the flickering light of the candle burning above the cup dedicated to his master. While doing so, he mumbles invocations to the spirits of the famous witch doctors of the past. Then bending over a cup of scented water, he recites the *gālhā Sado*, a formula of such a power that it loosens the tightest knots: « *Pivaliti...i...i...Pivaliti* » Having forced the patient's lips open, he makes her sip a few drops of the sacred liquid.

From then on there remains nothing to do for him but to wait. All of a sudden, the man-midwife rushes to the patient; one of the hands of the child has just come out. In the little hand, the witch doctor places a little ball of pasty rice and a few grains of salt while saying: « Child, not your hand first, but your head! » Then he pushes the hand back and tries to alter the position of the child. « Ah, now it is a foot! » Quickly, the expert gets hold of an old shoe and softly pats on the foot, saying: « Not your foot first, it is your head you must show first... »

Immediately upon delivery, an old relative specially chosen for his or her honorability and behaviour — shall not his character be reflected in that of the child? — cuts the umbilical cord with a sharp blade of bamboo. In the meantime, after having been washed and salted, the *placenta* is enclosed into a tube of bamboo, before being buried at the foot of the stairs or abandoned to the current of the river.

Meanwhile, the *Mo Sado* after having wound some red and black cotton yarn around the mother and the child's neck, recite a

last formula. This magical protection will prevent any return of evil spirits.

Relatives and friends fuss around. Some of them are making a big hearth of clay, reinforced with banana tree trunks. On it they place the cauldron used for the preparation of the decoctions and infusions; the others make the young mother to sit on some salt or on a bassin containing a few drops of alcohol so as to speed up the healing of lacerations and wounds.

These preparations being over, one of the child's grandmothers takes a *kadong* which is a kind of rice strainer, and after having passed it through a flame, stands on the doorstep, saying to the dangerous *Phi P'ais*, kidnappers of children:

« Kou, Kou ! you Phi P'ais, who can assume the shape of nocturnal birds, the shape of those hooting owls, kou, kou, go away ! From now on this child is ours ! »

She then puts the child in the rice strainer, after having placed according to the sex of the child, under the tiny mattress, a dagger or a needle, a pencil, a book or some kitchen utensils, so that when growing up the child should be brave, studious or skilled in household duties.

Near the new-born child, separated from the hearth by a small bamboo fence, the mother is resting on a low couch. Against this fence, the witch doctor has fixed an oar on which he has drawn in lime a human silhouette for the purpose of frightening evil spirits away. This is an indispensable precaution, since during the two or three weeks following the birth of the child and which is called the *Kam* period of penance, mother and child could become an easy prey of the *Phi P'ongs*, *Phi Hungs*, *Phi Paos* and other evil spirits.

On the eve of the *Kam*, at least in certain regions of Laos, a decoction of roots is prepared by a witch doctor at the expectant mother's home for the reestablishing of a normal blood circulation. On the banana leaf used as a cover on the cauldron, he places a cigarette, a quid of tobacco, flowers and a nail to ensure the efficacy of the medicine. Around the hearth he places *taleos*, signs aiming at preventing evil spirits to lessen the efficacy of the brew. When the liquid is boiling, a cup full of offerings is placed next to it, and while scooping the liquid he recites a long formula for the recovery of the young mother.

The next morning, while the young mother gets a bath, one of the child's grandmothers, wearing a huge pointed hat, places on the veranda or at the foot of the stairs a cup of scented water and a bamboo vessel filled with earth, straw, a broken piece of china and a comb. She washes the child with scented water, then places his feet on the earth contained in the vessel, saying:

« Stamp the earth, stamp the straws. This day is propitious. Here is your comb, here is your mirror (she then hands over to the

baby the comb and the piece of china). *You have trampled on the ground, you are now a human being!* »

Henceforth, the child is integrated in the human and family communities. There remain only to promote some formal association with the children who will be his game companions.

That is the purpose of the traditional rite of the grandmother giving balls of rice dipped in the egg-yolk to the children attending the ceremony. Don't we give away sugar-almonds for the same purpose?

« Come along children, she seems to say, come in great number, since the more numerous you will be, the more friends my grandchild shall have. »

After having bathed and put on all her finery, the young mother welcomes the guests in the inner room where the rite for the calling and the strengthening of souls will be held.

The celebrant or *Mo P'on* lights the candles of the *phakhuan* — tray covered with offerings, dedicated to souls —, then folding his hands, he recalls to the child the sufferings the young mother had to go through:

« On the ninth month, he says, terrible pains shot through the womb of your mother; relatives and friends flocked to your home in order to assist her, it seemed as if her heart was going to stop. Then, you were born, oh child out of your mother's womb. A knife was got hold of to cut the cord, then you were washed and dressed in beautiful cloths. And then you were placed in a large sieve and all the evil phis were chased away. Your mother then sat next to the hearth and slowly rocked you to sleep. She drank hot water and her scorched mouth became full of sores. All her body was burning, so great was the heat from the hearth! »

The reciter begs the souls of the baby not to leave the fragile body. Even in his mother's absence, the child should not be frightened:

« Frail soul, dear child, your mother is gone to the rai; she might bring back some bird's eggs; your mother is gone to the paddy: she might bring you some fish's eggs. Sleep! When your mother has finished feeding the silk worms, you can then wake up to suck! »

But maybe some souls have already left and are wandering around? It is necessary to call them back:

« May your soul dwelling in the clamp of bamboos come back to-day May the soul who dwells in the bamboos of the fallow rai, come back to-day. Your mother is waiting, child. If she dresses you in beautiful clothes, it is to make sure you will remain at home next to her. »

The last stanzas exalts the strength and the loveliness of the child:

« When you will be a few months older, when your teeth will grow, your strength will come to you and you will be able to dominate the phis. You will grow handsome, your body will be beautiful, you will be the idol of all your family. »

After reciting this invocation, the *Mo P'on* binds cotton threads to the wrists of mother and child, while one of the attendants determines the child's future by concentrating on the lower part of the beak of a chicken offered to the souls.



Marriage Rites

by

Thao Nhouy ABHAY

The Laotian Code lists in several long articles, the conditions concerning the age, the consent between the married couple and the parents, which are necessary to render the marriage valid. The legislator lays down that the ceremony must be performed before witnesses and in accordance with « ancient Laotian customs ».

In Laos, it is customary to marry during the even months : second, fourth and twelfth in particular. The most propitious is, however, the sixth month since it is during that period that the long bang fai (1) are celebrated in order to coax spirits to go to Heaven and beg for some water for the thirsting earth, the month when, under the bright moonlight the gay phubaoos wander along the silent dark streets singing softly :

I am a valiant *Phubao*, the perfect son-in-law!
If the little sister would love me, I would be her husband.
I am the *Phubao* who wants to serve
Walking in front, with the red bag on my back (2),
And when the harvest will be over
I shall ask to lend a hand in the paddies!

The sixth month is also the last limit to enjoy oneself and to get married, for in the eighth month the 'valiant would-be sons-in-law' wouldn't dare interfering with the work in the fields and, from then on up to the twelfth month, the Buddhist Lent must be observed (3).

Therefore, marriages are, as a rule, performed only during the even months and only within the first fortnight of the moon so that the fate of the married couple may rise and grow like the ever more brilliant and immaculate disk of the planet Venus...

(1) Rockets. See below, p. 272, *The bonn Bang Fai*.

(2) Distinctive mark of the convoy leader.

(3) From the 15th day of the waxing moon of the 8th month to the 15th day of the waxing moon of the 11th month.

MARRIAGE CONDITIONS

The Laotian customs require the preliminary proposal, the compulsory handing over of the Kha Khun Phi, tribute paid to the guardian gods and the optional Kha Dong, kind of dowry which, unlike what is done in Europe, is paid by the future husband to his future wife or to her parents.

The Kha Khun Phi is fixed by the Code - - which, in this respect, has approved previous customs - according to a progressive scale, going from 10 piastres for a girl of lower condition to 150 piastres for the daughter of a high official, covering all the ranks of the social ladder.

The Kha Dong, which from the legal point of view, is optional, is compulsory in practice; as its amount is not determined by law, it affords human pride an excellent opportunity to run free... Thus, we have heard of Kha Dongs going from 30 piastres - which is a bare minimum - to thousands of piastres, to which several bats (1) of gold were added...

But whatever they may be, these rates are always accepted, subject to prior arrangement having been reached; the more extravagant ones only serving to impress people.

For several months the phubao's mother, accompanied by one or two old relatives, or only themselves, frequently came to the phusao's mother for a chat; during the conversation about the weather or on the qualities of the monks, the importance of the harvest and the virtues of the girl, they have asked if she was not yet of marriage age. To this question which did not leave any doubt in the minds of those present, the girl's mother has answered quite frankly and without hurting anybody's feelings apparently, that her daughter was too young yet and would have to wait a while before getting married. Or on the contrary, she may say that no young man had taken any interest in her, and that certainly she would not find a husband... No one present has failed to understand the implicit meaning of her reply, it is a sort of acceptance and, while talking about the village's eligible phubaos, the young man's name has slipped more than once in the conversation, and to his advantage. With many of congratulations, they then parted: a few glasses of wine might even have been served while chewing quids...

Some diligent, but not always discrete go-betweens, have been sent over from both sides in order to settle the actual arrangements. At last, the day of the formal proposal has arrived, accompanied by bouquets, candles, betel nuts and cigarettes... the day of the wedding is agreed upon.

(1) Gold unit of 15 grs

Thrown about as a seed in the wind, in next to no time, the news has gone round the village; relatives come to congratulate the fiancés, who in turn, have to put up with a lot of teasing from the other phubaos and phusaos respectively. As to the young couple they remain silent and resigned to the unavoidable decision of their parents. Until their wedding, they shall not exchange a single word with one another.

To 'modern' minds it might seem rather surprising that the young couple's opinion on the matter has not been sought. Yet although the Laotian Code requires that both the future husband and wife be consulted on the proposed marriage, in many families — and not only in the lesser ones — this fact is overlooked completely. It is not deemed necessary that the two young people should know something about each other's character, and a fortiori, that they should love one another. In our beautiful country the idea still prevails that man and wife are like sand and water, meaning they cannot do otherwise than get together... or like wax and fire, or like oil on a carpet...

Let us not hastily invoke the name of tyranny. Laws as a country is not big, and neither are its villages: the young people have had many opportunities to meet one another at the numerous bouns and ngaus, and no doubt more than once they have gathered flowers for the Wat or played Mark poun ya at funeral vigils...

OM

Now, at last, we come to the formal proposal which is made on the very eve of the Sukhuan proper.

It consists of offerings of all sorts: betel nuts, cigarettes, cakes and many kinds of foods. And in certain regions, on this particular occasion, it is accompanied by the Kha Dong.

At the appointed time, a number of young women — other than widows and divorcées — are sent by the young man's parents to the fiancée's home with the required number of traysfuls (1) of betel quids and tobacco first, then with the cakes followed with the meats and fish, all these covered with big paper cones placed upside down.

The procession of gifts bearers proceeds slowly, among the wails of brass gongs, which take Heaven as a witness, the merry trills of khene, and the shouts of men applauding the tireless male and female singers.

At home, surrounded by half a dozen young girls of her own age, her friends and neighbours, the bride is waiting in her wedding dress. Adorned as she will be on the next day for the Sukhuan,

(1) Hundred or two hundreds, according to the requirements of the girl's family. See below, 'Questions and answers'.

she will, in person, receive the offerings and make a small gift to each female bearer, but only after a number of questions will have been put by one of her relatives to a man speaking on behalf of the other family and satisfactory answers received..

— *The woman :*

« Where does the master come from? What mountains did he come across, and what is his wish? »

— *The man :*

« We are coming from a Palace built of stones, where innumerable quantities of gold and silver are piling up. Every new day brings us treasures of gold, and each new night, silver. We are bringing you happiness and may you enjoy it till the end of your days. »

— *The woman :*

« Are there not any women beautiful enough in your country? Since it appears that your Sovereign has many daughters, why should you leave your country and who shall look after it? »

— *The man :*

« There is a great number of girls in that country, but none of them has succeeded to appeal in any way to our master's eyes; and thus he was compelled to cover countless distances in order to come and beg for the hand of the pearl of this country. We, his servants, have gone up hills and down dales for miles and miles. We could not resist the orders of our master burning with desire, as we are his servants. It is said, and her fame has reached us, that it is the Sovereign's daughter of this country who is the most beautiful and whose complexion is like the light of day. We are asking you for *sampot* and clothes to dress our master. »

— *The woman :*

« O you, illustrious messengers, know that there is only one girl in this house ! If she were to leave it to join your master the house would be empty, but, on the contrary, if he would be willing to come over and to carry on with our traditions, I shall not oppose it (1). The town and its inhabitants are pleased and accept to place themselves under your master's protection. Invite him to come to this country and I will give him my young daughter. O, messengers, are you satisfied? If you are not, I tell you plainly, that we shall oppose you. »

(1) The bridegroom is in fact obliged to come to live and work for some time in his in-laws' home.

— *The man:*

« Yes, yes, we thank you for your unambiguous words and we shall abide by them. Let a bridge be thrown between our two cities, and we shall come here to continue to serve our lord and master. »

— *The woman:*

« We say, according to our custom: 'Hundred gifts can only, served to coax the *phis*; and if you really want to marry a girl, you will need a thousand'. »

— *The man:*

« Pity, we ask you for your pity! Allow us to bring hundred gifts only as we are living far away and should you insist on a thousand, you would put us into great predicaments. »

— *The woman:*

« O, messengers, can you really bring immediately hundred gifts, from hand to hand? »

— *The man:*

« If it is only hundred gifts, we cannot refuse them, and shall bring them. »

— *The woman:*

« The dagger with the glass handle and golden hilt, have you brought it? »

« The head cloth which measures eight spans in length, have you brought it? »

« The *sampot* of silk and strange garments, have you brought it? »

« The bouquet of bright multicoloured flowers, did you bring it? »

— *The man:*

« The dagger with the glass handle and golden hilt, we have brought it along ; »

« The head cloth which measures eight spans in length, that too we have brought it along ; »

« We have brought the *sampot* of silk and strange garments ; »

« The bouquet of brightly coloured flowers, we have it too ; »

« All in innumerable quantities ; »

« We have baskets full of silver, others full of gold, and others full of clothes ; »

« All, we have all these things, victuals, meats, that two men are required to carry, fish carried on poles ; »

« We have everything, and by the hundreds to offer you. »

« We are offering them to you solemnly, and now ask you, for pity's sake, to let us see your daughter. »

— *The woman:*

(*addressing her relatives and friends*) « What are we to do? The messengers of the master are asking to see our daughter... »

(*to the man*): « Are you sincere, my lords, and do you really wish to see her? Even though she would be all black? »

— *The man:*

« Even though she would be as black as the crow, as black as the fruit from the *Mak Va*, or misshapen, we shall not give up! »

— *The woman:*

(*calling the girl*): « Come now, servants, all of you and dress up our daughter so that she may be shown to the messengers of the master. »

SUAT MON LOT NAM YEN

On that same day, in the evening after dinner, the young man goes to his fiancée's home, and together they attend the prayers of the monks invited to bless the water contained in alms bowls. A piece of white cotton thread is used to unite together the monks, the bowls and the two fiancés.

The holy water is looked after during the night with the utmost care. In the early hours of the morning after, it would be used by the same monks, their parents and friends to sprinkle abundantly the two young people. Then after having dried themselves and changed their wet clothes for new ones, they will return together to distribute morning alms to the monks and receive further blessings.

THE « SUKHUAN »

Then come the Sukhuan (1), which is celebrated at the bride's home. The time has been fixed by soothsayers after a careful study of the horasats of the two fiancés.

After an informal Sukhuan held in his own home, the bridegroom goes to that last ceremony with his retinue made up of bearers of beddings — matting, mattresses, cushions — of a phakhuan rocking to and fro, male and female singers, sword and sabre bearers and all the other attendants at his service. Walking at his sides are two phubaos, his friends, protecting him against the sun with two sun-shades.

(1) Wedding ceremony proper. See above, *The Baci*.

On reaching the bride's home, there is a short pause.

Keen watchmen, who have already had many glasses of wine, are defending jealously and comically the entrance to the house; the new-comers are allowed to open it only after giving a small sum of money... or some alcohol. This must be carried out. It is carried out. And both sides drinking and toasting together, break in, not without much joking and jeering.

The bridegroom reaches the staircase to the house (1). But he won't be allowed to go up unless he has placed his feet on a piece of stone covered with a banana leaf, in order that servants or, in certain cases the younger sisters of the bride, may wash them clear. This service must be paid right away before being allowed to sit in front of the two formal phakhuans, at the side of his fiancée who has already taken place.

The Wedding Sukhuan is very similar to the plain baci which has been dealt with in a previous article. There are only two phakhuans at a wedding because everything in this ceremony must go by even numbers; but these phakhuans are bigger and better filled than the ordinary ones, there are seven, sometimes nine layers high piled up with silver bars and gold medals.

The wedding is performed by two attendants who recite together the traditional formulas.

* *

When all the parents, notables and old people attending the ceremony have twisted lucky cotton threads around the wrists of the newly weds, the two young people kotow before them expressing their thankfulness and gratitude, offering to these present in remembrance, small bouquets of flowers and bundles of candles.

The newly married couple is then led to the wedding chamber by a lady, who in order to ensure the happiness of the couple, is chosen among the most virtuous women in the village. She can in no case be either a widow or a divorcée.

In the meantime, surrounded by bottles of wine and victuals of all kinds, the guests go on feasting, joking, laughing and singing.

(1) Let it be remembered that in Laos all houses are built on pilings and that the staircase is a kind of ladder.

Death and Funeral Rites

by

Thao Nhouy ABHAY

Among the Laotian customs there are none which come as a greater surprise — or as a shock, no doubt — to Europeans traditionally imbued with the respect for death and for the departed, than the contrast between the pomp of the great funerals of Western Christianity and the popular rejoicing which at home accompanies the last farewell to our beloved ones. Yet, it is not by far, a sign of indifference towards the departed. The explanation of this conflict can be found in the different concepts of life and death, particular to our people, and which is, moreover, in accordance with the tenets of Buddhism.

To die, in Laotian is: to enter Nirvāṇa (Sanskrit) or Nibbāṇa (Pāli). In fact, Indianists do not agree on the meaning of this word. For some, it means blowing a flame (Nir, « to blow »), (Vāṇa, « fire », « flame »). Others give a privative meaning to the prefix and Nirvāṇa takes the sense of an extinguished flame. Whatever the meaning, Nirvāṇa for Laotians is generally a place of enjoyment where all desires are fulfilled. Therefore, to die means entering a new and better life. And so desirable seems to be the fate of the deceased that the home where a funeral vigil is held is called a hucun dī, literally, a « happy home ».

Death is therefore a happy event. The complexity of the funeral rites shows how important this event is looked upon. A written tradition reveals that these rites were actually laid down in the remote past by King Sommutirāj. He edicted rules applying to different types of death, distinguishing between the cases where cremation applied and those to which burial only was allowed. This time-honoured manuscript fixes six different kinds of deceased: those who drowned, those thunder-strucked, those who fell from trees, those killed by tiger, those by hanging and lastly, those who died of disease. Many of these cruelly and inhuman rules are no longer observed, e.g. those relating to women who had died during pregnancy and to whom the monk's prayers were denied and who, not only were not allowed to be cremated, but could not even be buried in the cemetery.



Among all these different causes of death, the natural one from disease, confers the right to great privileges. Those who suffered violent death shall not be cremated, but buried without delay. According to religion and customs their mortal remains shall not be kept at home more than 24 hours. What is the reason for this ban? Various explanations can be found. In particular, the assumption for such prescriptions for sanitary purposes cannot be overlooked. Besides devoting to this matter a passage in his Teachings, the Buddha gives advice on the subject, showing himself to be a fully qualified hygienist and experienced physician.

Blessed is the virtuous Mandarin who breathe his last among his folks. During his lifetime, he was a fervent Buddhist, respectful of the Dhamma, a conscientious civil servant in the carrying out of his duties, of an easy approach and of a pleasant disposition. After having led such a meritorious existence, he deserved a death which would insured him of a happy rebirth. On the contrary, if he had died accidentally, his body hastily put in a coffin, would have been carried to the cemetery and his soul would have failed to reach the Happy Land of the Blessed One. His natural end allows the rites to be performed immediately.

His parents having closed his eyes then wash him with a profusion of warm and scented water. They will not have failed to insert a silver coin or a piece of gold between his teeth, to emphasize that no value should be attached to worldly goods and that of all his past wealth, this negligible amount placed in his mouth is all death has allowed the deceased to take away with him. The white cotton threads twisted around his neck, his wrists and his feet only show how fragile are the bonds holding man to the earth; material interests, affections, love, so many fleeting links that death has come to put an end to without any regard to possible consequences. At last, covered with an immaculate shroud, the deceased will be placed in a coffin made of six wooden boards assembled with some bong, kind of sticky resin which has been fetched from the nearby forest. This is used as a temporary coffin. Later, his children will have another one specially made to be used during the cremation.

Then, the coffin is placed on trunks of banana trees; this softer wood is chosen instead of the harder kind, thus symbolizing the brevity of life and as these trunks lack heart wood it also means that... henceforth, man is without any consistence. In the « happy home » the monks have arrived and as in the case of the preceding rites, their prayers will emphasize life's vanity which is the great truth that death teaches us. With bend heads, they recite the Words of the Buddha:

« The body is nothing once the soul has left it. Soon it will be as worthless on the earth as the trunk of a dead tree.

« Life is fleeting. The recurrence of birth and death is an endless and normal process. Once you are born, you must die. It is a blessing to enter into the nothingness of death.

« All animals die, have died and will die. We too, must die; there is no uncertainty about death. »

For seven days and seven nights, the « happy home » will become a center of gatherings where the ngans will follow one another in a noisy and gay sequence. From now on no one seems to pay any attention to the deceased. His fate, in fact, is not enviable! The monks alone are tirelessly repeating their prayers :

« Death, oh death, follow your destiny! Run to Heaven or be born to a better life. Oh, invisible shadow, do not keep on haunting our homes and partaking in the life of the living. Those you have left behind, realize how happy you are in your liberation from life's miseries. They are awaiting their turn patiently and joyfully. They do not miss you. They are living happily without you. Follow your destiny, then !

« You performed many good deeds while on earth; may they be taken into account ! »

To send on its way the unwelcome shadow of the deceased, and direct it to Heaven so that he may be reborn once again and as soon as possible — since there is no worst condition than that of the phi doomed to an eternal life in the Underworld, put in irons in Hell under the guard of the fierce Phagna Nhomphibane (1) — and above all, so that he would not come back and haunt his own people, his family sends him food and presents through the monks. These offerings to the monks, or chek will be repeated as long as the parents of the deceased fear that his rebirth might be delayed or that he is short of something. Shame to the family who, failing to give these alms, would let the deceased follow his tragic destiny as an ever roaming shadow.

And, while the monks are praying and the parents keeping a night vigil over the mortal remains laying in the coffin, and the workers preparing the calafalque and putting the last touch to the ornements of the bier, life goes on around in joyful animation. Girls are rolling cigarettes and preparing cakes. Gathered around a tobacco chewing set for Mak Poun Ya, brought together by the Mak thot and all kinds of games appropriate to these night vigils — which are banned in any other circumstances, owing to some superstitions, no doubt — phubaos and phusaos, seem to give a denial to

(1) The Pluto of Laotian mythology.

the strict admonishments of the monks. in making at the very sight of death an outburst of life and youth. How many new lives were thus shaped in the very shadow of death, how many matches were thus formed beside the coffin. The parents of the deceased are themselves involved in this outburst of life and are taking part in the general liveliness. This must not be interpreted as indifference towards the loved one who has just passed away, but if they would show their grieves too openly, this would not only be a breach of good manners; but their regrets too loudly expressed might hold back the soul of the departed and prevent it from flying to the blissful land of the great beyond. At the sound of the orchestras, which sometimes drown the laughers of the crowd, people drink, dance and play... The feast is in full swing, the great feast of life proves itself stronger than death which is, after all, the gateway to a new life.

* * *

Seven days have gone by, the coffin is brought to a hut erected for that purpose in a corner of the paddy field of the late owner. Everyday his kinfolk will come to this temporary mausoleum, clearing away termite-hills around it, destroying wood bugs, protecting the remains from becoming a prey to insects. On every eighth and fifteenth day of the waxing or waning moon, they offer chek to the monks and invite them to partake the morning meal of the family. This will continue until the fourth month, generally chosen to perform the cremation ceremonies. It is now the dry season and work in the paddies is over. In this fourth month which is dedicated both to death and marriages, all hearts are overflowing with joy.

Over the wide stretch of rice-fields laying bare after the harvest, a great pavillon is first built. Under its roof, workers are busy erecting and decorating a mem, last resting place of the deceased prior to his body being reduced by fire to a few handful of ashes. After being taken out of his temporary bier, the body of the deceased is placed into a new coffin specially prepared for the funeral pyre. Before sealing the remains for ever, some fresh perfumes are poured over the face of the corpse.

Both the style of the coffin and of the mem vary in different areas. In certain regions, the decoration is limited to a few sheets of gilded paper pasted on nam kieng (lacquer) and representing divinities or flowers. Sometimes the walls of the pavilion are decorated, and quite often with realistic drawings bordering on lewdness, so true is it that in Laos, even next to death, life never loses its rights.

And again, the feast of death is celebrated among the shouls and laughers of youth. Long before the date fixed for the cremation, the pavilion housing the mem and the sheds built around it ring with happy songs or with strains of the khene accompanying the

dances by which phubao and phusaos express their « *joie de vivre et d'aimer* ».

At last, comes the date fixed for the cremation ceremonies. They will last not less than six days and six nights, filled with processions and religious services alternating with fireworks, night games and feasts. Only on the sixth day is the awning partly open so as to give passage to the catafalque which is mounted on two giant birds and which are being pulled symbolically with a white cotton string, but actually pushed by a team of men, specially chosen for their strength. At this moment, when final separation is near, the wife and the children of the deceased, who as a sign of mourning, have had their heads shaven clean, stand by dressed in white robes. The catafalque is placed under a dome of paper, resting on four fragile posts and soon the fire wood which will serve to burn away what is still left of the mortal remains of the deceased, is going to be piled up under him in the bellies of the giant birds.

This last night vigil preceeding the cremation, brings the feast to its very climax. Then comes the supreme moment. The funeral pyre is set afire by a last rocket, while the monks repeat their incantations: « The body is nothing once the soul has left it..., life is fleeting... » From the funeral pyre a huge flame is rising straight towards the sky like a blissful soul. During that night and the following ones, some men will keep watch and stir the fire up. And every night till the second day of the waning moon, the house of the deceased will still welcome young *ngan-goers*, who will keep on dancing, singing and drinking till dawn.

The second day of the waning moon, puts an end to this long period of rejoicing. Once again, the family offers a chek dedicated to the deceased, and the monks are invited to a morning meal. At an early hour, before sunrise even, relatives, friends, monks, the whole village will go to the site of the cremation and pick up what has been left over by the flames: some ashes, just enough to fill a small urn which will be deposited at the Wat until the moment when, at a final rite, it will be carried to the Chat erected in lasting memory of the virtuous man of whom nothing is left but these insignificant remains.

It is said in the funeral hymns of the Rig Veda: « Leave behind what could be blamed in you, and return home. Enter into a world of glory. Let your soul go to the wind. » The rite of cremation answers to this last wish since it is a complete physical destruction in the presence of which any Buddhist must feel the *samvejhana*, this unfathomable bliss arising from Knowledge.

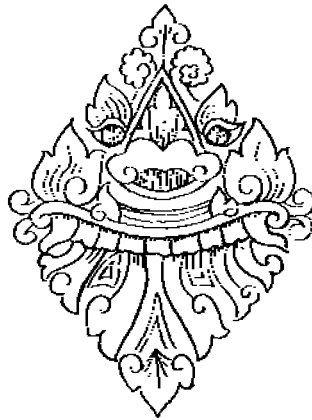
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What becomes of us? What shall I become after death? Is this the end of my round of rebirths? Shall I go to a world where

suffering is unknown, awaiting in the company of the blessed arahats the advent of the future Buddha? Or, on the contrary, shall I come back to this world of miseries, and drag once again under another unknown label this house of flesh, always identical in itself since it is doomed to pursue this unending cycle of rebirths? To this question men in every countries, of all races and since time immemorial have sought an answer. I do not know the answer anymore than they do. My countrymen, are as ignorant on this matter as I am, and what is more, most of them seem to care very little for it.

More than any other race, our own is carefree and doubt is its « soft pillow ». Odd contradiction it is: to die is hard, to die is painful, and yet, death is a feast!

A feast, yes, of course, and one whose sight is shocking in its inhumanity and cruelty. Like many others, I deplore this public indifference towards those who grieve. But, while blaming these unfortunate excesses, one can still appreciate the beauty of a tradition. It is contrary to our way of life to show our grief when we lose someone dear. Let us, therefore, abstain from theatrical lamentations and from shedding tears in public. To remain quiet in our grief will be all the more dignified. Let us be Laotians even in the face of death.



The 'Boun' Khoun Khao (Harvest Festival)

by

Marie-Daniel FAURE

Because it gives us a glimpse of the mutual help that is traditional among the Laotians, this festival is the most interesting of the *bouns* that are given on private initiative. It is also the most ancient of them, for its origin is linked directly to the old, old legend of the *Nang Khosop* or *Story of the Grain of Rice*.

The *boun* Khoun Khao occurs immediately after the harvest, in the course of the first and second months (December-January), and is held in the open fields. It is not by any means considered as an obligatory festival by the Laotian calendar, and it is held by a farmer who feels himself satisfied with his harvest (for a *boun* is an expensive thing and only those whom fortune has favoured can afford to hold one) and wishes to « glorify the Spirit of the Rice » and at the same time procure himself the labour and the carts he is going to need to bring his paddy harvest all home at once to the granaries. It is a *boun*, then, in which only farm people and *ngan* enthusiasts take part.

When the paddy has been threshed and gathered together in a heap, the master of the harvest consults his neighbours and together they fix upon the first auspicious day and ask a number of young girls to go from house to house in the village with his invitation, while he himself requests the presence of the monks from his Wat. He then has some light shelters built for his guests on the field round about the threshing-floor. On the top of the paddy heap he fixes up a sort of pulpit to which the monks will climb up to recite their prayers.

When the day arrives the mistress of the house or her eldest daughter, accompanied by friends or servants, will go to market very early in the morning to make their provision of red pimentoes, condiments and vegetables. At the same time the young men will disperse themselves about the ricefields to catch fish in the ponds, and the owner, aided by some of his friends, will slaughter an ox

whose raw flesh is required for the confection of the traditional *lap* (1).

In the evening the guests arrive, each with his cart to help to transport the paddy on the following day. At nightfall the village monks make their appearance. Taking turns in the pulpit they recite the prayers, and all the people present listen in devout silence, seated on their heels, while the flame from the lighted candles in bowls of flowers in front of them plays upon their faces.

Then the *ngan* begins to get under way...

While in the kitchens the women are beginning to prepare the meal for the following day, the *phusaos* take their places in the shelters and, not unmindful of the practical purpose of this festive occasion, they busy themselves with a number of small tasks. Some of them roll cigarettes, others prepare quids of betel. But busy though their hands may be, their minds are on the rove; and they are all of them impatient for the *phubao*s to arrive.

Which they very soon do!... Formed into teams, each of which comprises one or two performers on the *khene*, they start by doing the round of the shelters, taking a good look as they go at the groups of *phusaos*. Then when each team has settled its choice they sit down facing the young girls. The music serves as an introduction and while the *khene* glides from one snatch of song to another in its search for a theme, the young men ask for cigarettes or quids which the silent *phusaos* hand to them with a smile. Some of the *phubao*s even pluck up courage enough to ask for the flower from a girl's chignon; it would be a precious token of interest and a gentle form of encouragement.

But these are preliminaries... Soon, after a few melodious measures have sounded, played in lively rhythm, a voice rises up. It is that of the most eloquent of the *phubao* team and he is entering into conversation... The court of love is open.

In harmonious recitative to the soft accompaniment of the *khene* the *phubao* enquires, in poetic metaphor, whether « *in the forest on which he gazes there is not some frozen tree that longs to be warmed by a gentle ray of sunshine...* »

To this the *phusao*, who has had most practise through attending *bouns* assiduously, or the one most gifted with imagination, makes answer that « *there are many cold trees that long to be made warm but they fear lest the sun, instead of warming them, should burn...* »

The team of young men punctuates this neat answer with joyful and admiring cries of « *you...ou...!* » and the singer, warming to the game, replies in his turn that he « *knows a garden where the*

(1) *Lap* is a substantial Laotian dish composed of raw meat and finely chopped pimientos mixed together with other vegetables similarly chopped and the whole bound together with *padek* stock (See below : *Laotian Cookery*).

sun does not burn and where he could, he, Si-Nouane (1), transplant the tree if the tree would only consent... »

Once more « you...ou...! » sounds out in approval of this veiled invitation to which the girl unhesitatingly replies that « Surely the tree would consent if it weren't that it knows that a fierce tiger (2) inhabits the forest, the jealous guardian of the trees, and that he would be certain to attack Si-Nouane and might, perhaps, kill him... »

Better and better! The dialogue is now in full swing and there is little danger of its running dry, for Si-Nouane will answer with a long list of all the tricks he knows for eluding the vigilance of tigers. And God knows he speaks the truth... and invents as many more! The best of them are greeted with long shouts of « you... ou!...! » which give the singer and the *khene* player a chance to take breath or to toss down a mouthful of alcohol.

Occasionally one or two of their comrades in the team take their turn at improvising, and the *phusaos* do the same thing in their group. The court of love is warming up, the oratorical jousting gathers speed, high spirits and gaiety overflow, and till dawn breaks the rapid interchange of metaphors, punctuated by bursts of joy, never ceases.

If the owner is a well-to-do man he will bear in mind that the older people also need entertaining and he will have sent for two *mô-lams* (3) chosen from among those whose reputation stands highest for repartee, for volubility, and for knowledge and imagination never found wanting. Leaving the young people to their court of love, the parents sit down in a circle round the singers and are soon caught in the spell of the conundrums they set each other and parry with some subtle answer. No problem is too intricate or too delicate for such a famous *mô-lam* as Tiam-Pa (4), cleverer than any scholarly astronomer at explaining such phenomena as the eclipse, or the motion of the stars, or the creation of the world. And while the guests wax merry over his ingenious answers, Tiam-Pa the *mô-lam* underlines his success by taking a small lighted candle in each between index and middle-finger and miming the graceful dance of the candles with his upper body and his fingers.

The *ngan* draws to a close when the first pale shimmering of dawn announces that night is over. Young and old come out from the shelters and go and sit round the heap of paddy while the senior monk mounts the pulpit to read aloud, before dawn breaks, the legend of Nang Khosop:

(1) *Si-Nouane* : "Checks as soft as velvet".

(2) The young girl's father.

(3) *Mô-lam* : professional singer.

(4) *Tiam-Pa* : 'Red Jasmine'.

« Long, long ago the Grain of Rice was as big as a pumpkin. People used axes to hack off their daily ration. Weary at last of this barbarous treatment Nang Khosop (the Spirit of the Rice) grew angry and flew away. It is since that time and in the hope of persuading him to return among mankind that this festival is celebrated. »

The reading finishes as dawn breaks. The master of the house brings a *kan* (1) in a hollow dish to the monk who did the reading. This offering consists of a piece of banana-leaf shaped into a horn, filled with flowers and pure waxen candles, and into which a twenty-cent piece has been slipped. It is a modest enough reward but so full of grace and offered with such infinite respect that it gives expression to all the poetry and all the mysticism of the Laotian soul.

The monks leave the paddy-heap and return to their shelters where they each lay down their alms bowl in front of them. The men and women who have all been to the kitchens to fill their bowls with sticky rice, come forward and lay a handful piously in each *bat* (2). When all the faithful have opened their day with this charitable act the monks in chorus recite a *sulla* of blessing and those who are present all listen with devout respect. When the prayer is ended each of the congregation sprays the ground before he rises with a few drops of water (3), thereby calling Nang Tholani (4) to witness that he has made his offering so that the Goddess may not forget to count it among the merits he has acquired for the Life To Come.

Then the young girls appear carrying trays laden with victuals which they first offer to the monks and then distribute among the various shelters for the innumerable guests.

Leaving the gathering to the pleasures of breakfast, the owner then takes a basket and fills it with food: boiled chicken, alcohol, sweet potatoes, tubers of every sort, manioc, areca and sugar-cane buds. He sets out alone for the rice-fields and goes the round of all the plantations, calling upon the Spirit of the Rice to give it thanks for having rendered the fields fruitful and to implore it to show him the same generosity in the coming year. He offers it all the victuals contained in his basket, saying:

« Spirit of the Rice, here for thee are tubers, here are buds of the areca palm and good alcohol made from your grain. Spirit of the

(1) *Kan*: present; a generic term applied to any offering made to a monk by way of charitable alms.

(2) *bat*: the alms-bowl used by the monks for their morning begging.

(3) The rite called *gat-nam*, literally 'to let water fall on the ground, drop by drop'.

(4) Goddess of the Earth.

*Rice, come down to earth! Come and preside over the festivities
I am giving in your honour! »*

When he returns home after this morning invocation the owner lays his basket at the foot of the heap of paddy and the old women come hastening up to bid their welcome to the Rice, whose spirit the owner is supposed to have brought back with him. They speak familiarly to it and pay it endless compliments, flattering and caressing it, and all the time they keep running the paddy through their wrinkled fingers. Next their attention is drawn by a magnificent manikin made of straw which the owner brings them. At once, just as they would do for some friend on his return from a journey, they make him a *Sukhouan* — tying white cotton threads to the golden wrists they congratulate the Rice on his having returned among them, bid him welcome in the most affectionate manner and beg him never to leave the granary.

In the meantime an old man, famous for his powers of divination (and invited for this precise purpose), has drawn the boiled chicken out of the basket and after a careful examination of its beak and feet he foretells from the signs he sees there how the crops to come will fare. When he has finished prophesying he slips the creature's entrails into the belly of the straw manikin, and all the others victuals from the basket as well.

Now that Manikin Rice has been adorned and refreshed with food, the owner takes and hoists him up onto the top of the paddy-heap where he will preside over the rest of the festivities.

When all these rites have been performed without any hurry, the guests are allowed a moment longer of *farniente* and quiet conversation to enable the housewives to finish their luncheon preparations. Then the people form themselves into groups of their own choice. The meal is now served and its menu will be all the more copious if the owner feels satisfied with the result of his harvest. Each cook has made a point of preparing the dish she considers her speciality and she comes and sets an abundant portion of it on every tray.

Alcohol has by no means been forgotten and the owner has been careful to prepare several pitchers of it. Gaiety soon rises to the pitch of exuberance. The *phubao*s exclaim between every mouthful that they have never tasted more savoury cooking and they ask who the expert cook is in order to congratulate her and point out that their bowls are already empty and they are ready for more.

When the appetite of everybody has been amply satisfied the work begins. In an atmosphere of cheerful coming and going broken in upon by one call answering another, some go off in

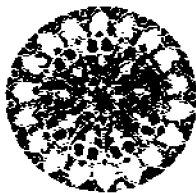
search of oxen, others see to the carts, and soon they are all yoked and ready. The first of them is already drawing up beside the heap of paddy ; the owner's son climbs up to the top of it to remove the straw manikin from his throne for the time being, and everyone sets to and fills the carts. When this is done and Manikin Rice is hoisted atop the first of them, the procession gets underway. Soon a cloud of dust, golden in the sun, rises up over the rice-fields and from it comes the creaking of wheels and the joyous tinkling of the bells on the oxen. Undisturbed by the jolts, trusting in the instincts of their animals the wagoners rest on their mattresses of paddy, enjoying their siesta.

As each cart in turn reaches the granary the harvest-master sees to its unloading. Little by little the heap of precious grain mounts higher and higher, and when the last load has been housed the owner installs the manikin on top. Personifying as he does the Spirit of the Rice he will watch over the granary, will drive away fire and lightening and make in sort that « *the heap, however many baskets may be filled from it, will not diminish and will never sink to the level of the floor* » (1).

Before the last rite has been performed the owner is careful to take away enough paddy to last him for several weeks, after which he carefully closes the granary door. While the guests are making their way home after a last drink, he decorates the granary door with flowers and with certain branches, *khotun* (2) and *som-seune* (3), which — as their names suggest — will keep happiness and gaiety alive within the home. And from that moment, come what may, the door of the granary must not be opened till the third day of the third month, a day that is propitious because:

« *The Frog has no mouth
Nor the Dragon an anus* » (4)

It is a day, therefore, on which there is no danger of a ravenous beast coming to devour the harvest.



(1) *Kin bu bok, hok bu sieng* (Laotian saying).

(2) Lucky charm.

(3) Gaiety.

(4) *Kop bu mi pak mi hou khi*.

The Sacrifice of the Buffalo at Vat Ph'u

(Southern Laos)

by

Charles ARCHAIMBAULT

As early as in the 6th century of our era, long before the Khmers on the mountains slopes had begun to build Vat Ph'u, there was already a sanctuary standing on that very hill. It was dedicated to the god Bhadrésvara and it overlooked the land where at that time Śrēsthépura lay, the brilliant capital of the Tchen-la. And once a year, so a traveller of ancient times tells us, the Head of the Kingdom climbed the steep slopes by night, made his way into the temple guarded by a thousand soldiers, and proceeded to offer up human sacrifices.

The oral tradition has kept the memory of these bloody deeds alive. And although it does not associate them with the monarchs of Tchen-la, it does attribute them to the legendary founder of Vat Ph'u, the Pya Kammatha: « In the sixth month, when the red jasmine begins to shed its flowers, he would go up to the sanctuary and preside over the sacrifice of a pair of virgins. Dedicating the victims to the genii of the place, he would insert a red flower behind their ear and offer them a bowl of alcohol. Scarcely had they drunk than they fell to the ground as though thunderstruck. »

The generations that followed bear him no resentment for these holocausts, and every year when the red jasmine is in flower young boys and girls scale up the mossy slabs, of rock and bring their offerings of candles and incense to the gigantic *Dvarapala*, which according to popular belief is neither more nor less than his petrified body. And though his effigy is now fallen from its pedestal and lies mutilated among the thorns, his *phi*, or « spirit », haunts to this day the hill-top and the altar of the « guardian spirits » that rises to the North of the temple, not far from the great Lake where he once loved to come and watch the canoers jousting. Once in the year a call comes and shatters his solitude: Chao Noi, the genius of the village, invites him along with all the other « spirits » of the South to a quarry. But since it has been laid down that the « blood of a buffalo is of equal value with the

blood of a man », an animal suffices to conciliate the « spirit » of him who never feared in olden times to offer up human beings.

On the fourth day of the waxing moon, in the sixth month, the *Cham* (« Master of Ritual ») makes his way at dawn to the *ho* (village shrine) to give the spirit of the place notice that the ceremony is imminent. He lays the candles and the flowers on a little temporary altar, then pours the alcohol into a bowl and says :

« Lo! The propitious month has come, the propitious day on which, as was of old the custom, dancing and feasting will soon take place. Bear it well in mind! »

Having been thus notified the guardian spirit will invite all his relations and friends from Ayuthia to the Annamite Chain, from Kong Sedon as far as the Papheng and the Somphanit Falls.

From Bassac, from Nongsa, from Nongvien, along the little dykes and the dusty tracks the peasants come, the ones behind the others, and install themselves in the big pavilion adjoining the shrine: the spirits' ballroom. While the women make ready their offerings the men, by the entrance into the building, make a barrier with their lances, their halberds, and their rifles, the insignia of the guardian spirit's dignity. Before the shrine two parasols are planted in the ground. They mark the place of the servants of the great « spirits » that have been invited to the feast. Only the high dignitaries, their masters, may penetrate to the threshold of the *ho*, having first tied their heavenly mount to the « Elephants' Post » that has been erected beside the sanctuary. When these preliminaries have been accomplished, weighed down under the torpor of a boiling afternoon, the men and women smoke and chew tobacco to pass the time till the arrival of the sacrificers who are to perform the rites.

A semi-transparent mist gives a blue tint to the mountains. The foliage, like seaweed glimpsed deep down in translucent waters seems to vanish as though drawn irresistibly to some remote depths. One by one the members of the sacred personnel arrive: here come the *Cham* (« Master of Ritual ») and the *Molhiem* (« Medium ») followed by the *Melam* (« Secretary of the Genii »). And finally, a little behind them come the *Khoum Ho* (« Auxiliaries »).

The sacred official in charge of the rites salutes the assembly and then enters the shrine and lights there, on the altar, a big red candle. Other candles are fixed on the « Elephants' Post » and on the « Victory Pole », central beam of the pavilion. Then, when the path leading to the holy places is thus dotted with lights, he proceeds to welcome the illustrious guests. On the veranda of the sanctuary he lays mats and pillows — on these the genii will sit — and he carefully arranges in a straight line the sabres that were set aside for the distant « Border Chiefs » and other war

spirits. Surrounded by dazzling and gorgeous stuffs, the *k'ais* of the *Molhiem* and *Melam* hold the place of honour; they are the magic bowls which are to enable Medium and Secretary to get in touch with the Beyond.

To the crash of gong, tomtoms, and drums, the *Molhiem* lights the candle and raises his bowl to dedicate it to the *phis*. He then strips off his clothing, the last human obstacle that might hinder the spirits' coming, and with his upper body bare he throws three pinches of rice into his *k'ai*, thus forming a bridge between himself and the genii. In the pavilion, behind the curtain made of arms, the *Melam*, a witch glimpsed at some basement venthole, performs the same ritual. All of a sudden Medium and Secretary lower the hands they were holding clasped: a spirit has just entered their bodies. The first puts on a scarlet *sampot*, the second a motley skirt. The latter throws a red scarf about her shoulders and on her head she sets a gilt crown topped with red jasmine flowers. The *Molhiem*, incarnating the great spirit of Bassac, Chao Teng, steps gravely down from the shrine. A member of the sacred personnel hands him two sabres on whose point lighted candles have been fixed. Sabres in hands the Medium bows in greeting, his face to the shrine, then dances round the « Victory Pole », smiting the air with his sabres which he uses like whips. The « Secretary of the Genii » hastens to follow in his tracks, turning and turning about indefatigably to the rhythm of *khenae* and drums, with slow-revolving arms. The red glow from the resinous torches plays on the sabre blades. Brandished, they emerge from the shadows and flash with lightening speed, then back they plunge in blackest darkness only to flash forth once more, longer and sharper than ever. With fixed look, strangely remote, the « inspired ones » cease little by little to appear like « beings of the flesh » and take on the aspect of « shades » (1).

The rhythm suddenly stops dead, as though broken. *Molhiem* and *Melam* emerge from the sacred circle, salute the shrine with the points of their lifted sabres, then hand their arms to an assistant who receives them reverently with bent head. They then return to their place and throw three pinches of rice onto their bowl to dismiss the spirit. Their faces relax, their limbs are no longer rigid. The « Sacred Rider » of whom they were but the « earthly mount » has just set them free.

...Free, but with an insecure freedom, for already they are bending over their *k'ai* as if it were a radar to sound the Beyond for a sign that some new divine presence, a new « Rider », is about to sweep down upon and bestride them, and fling them sweating, prancing, into the arena, beneath the gaze of a public that is drunk

(1) See Pl. XVI, *a* and *b*.

with alcohol and avid for sacred sport. At one moment caught up, at the next released by the celestial flux and reflux, they turn in this way all night, in incarnation of the genii of the hill-tops, of the rapids, of the humble villages: Chao Teng K'am, Pya Kammatha, Chao Noi, Nai Dam, Nang Ekhai, etc...

Now it is hours since the last torch burned out. The mist that hung about the hills and drowned the landscape has been torn apart by the cool morning breeze and from place to place blue sky is breaking through. A rock here and there is beginning to turn rose-coloured. One of the *Nang Teng*, the old women whose task is to see to the offerings, breaks through the circle of people and goes towards the great trees that overhang the pavilion. By each of them she lays little twists of banana-leaves containing simple offerings such as roasted rice and flowers. This food is intended for the little wandering « spirit » folk that have been attracted by the ceremony. On the « Elephants' Post » where the high dignitaries tie their mounts, on the pedestal they use when they dismount, everywhere she lays bananas and sticky rice. The « Master of Ritual » then enters the shrine and lays in a row on the altar the seven trays of sweetmeats (1) which the « guardian spirits » receive for their morning meal. The little flame of the candles that dedicate this dessert to the spirits wavers and turn blue. The *Cham*, taking these signs as proof of an invisible presence, bows down to the ground and murmurs:

« Respect be to you! I your humble servant whose task it is to make candles, I your humble servant whose task it is to light them, I come to announce to you that a buffalo is about to be offered up to you in accordance with the annual rite. Protect... »

From back there behind the thicket he is cut short by a muffled lowing that echoes against the first line of hills. Careless of the movements of the « inspired ones » the silent crowd waits, its eyes fixed on the thin white line on a level with the bamboos that marks the path. A footstep sounds slow and heavy, its pauses marked by short, hoarse breathing, there is a sound of snapping twigs and the one whose death is to give the ceremony its whole meaning appears, his great stupid head framed in its hoop of greenery. The slayer, a native of one of the neighbouring Mon-Khmer tribes, busies himself about the sacrificial tree. He fixes to its trunk the magical emblem of interdiction, the bamboo hexagon that marks out the sacred area. From now on only he and his aids may enter this enclosure. His assistants slowly haul in the buffalo and keep it motionless. Loaded with lianas and its head pressed against the tree, the victim stamps and blows and bellows and struggles, then

(1) On this subject see below, p. 166, note 1.

at length, with foaming muzzle, it waits in resignation. There is the flash of a knife and the animal collapses, its hamstrings severed. Before it has so much as attempted to rise, a blow of the axe opens a wide vent at the back of its neck through which the sticky reddish liquid starts to flow as though the great skin had been swollen with it. Between the gaping lips of the severed artery they fix a bamboo drain-tube. Distilled to the last drop, then poured into little bowls the number of which is settled by tradition, the blood, nectar for genii, is at once handed over to the « Master of Ritual » and offered to the « guardian spirits » (1). The *raksa sin* (« Keepers of the Meat ») busy themselves among the bloody mass of carved-off meat with the insects buzzing round them and their heads in a halo of flies: while the soothsayer, apart, bends over the « gall-bladder » like some arboriculturist weighing in loving hand some gigantic brown-gold fig, and announces his meteorological forecasts: « There is a little more gall than last year... On the other hand the buffalo fell parallel to the course of the Mekong... We shall escape drought! »

Squatting on the ground, the old men shake their heads while they roll enormous cigarettes between their fingers: drought? From times immemorial has it not weighed upon them like a curse? Is it not the ransom of the original sin, the sin committed long ago by the first queen of the land, the legendary Nang Pao whom a princely elephant-hunter seduced and who brought a bastard child into the world? The old men who have deciphered the ancient manuscripts sometimes discuss among themselves the terrible imprecation she uttered when the hour came for her deliverance, and by which she bound her subjects for all time:

« If any young girl follows my example and lets some young lad make love to her to the extent of becoming a mother, then let her offer up a buffalo to the guardian spirits... If not, then may the rice in the *rays* perish when the ears are forming, may the rice in the rice-fields dry up and die! »

Generation has followed generation, but the fault uncleansed has left a stain. That is why every year ineluctably, before the first agrarian rites are performed, unmarried mothers are forced to make atonement.. Crowded together in the inhuman setting we have already seen, innocent and guilty must take part collectively in the great purification, and must listen in anguish while the soothsayer lets fall the forecast of their destiny.

The air is saturated with the heavy insipid odour of boiled meat. The thronging crowd presses forward in quest of leavings, like paupers round the door when the feast is over. Beneath the trees, on the « Elephants' Post », on the pedestal, in the shrine,

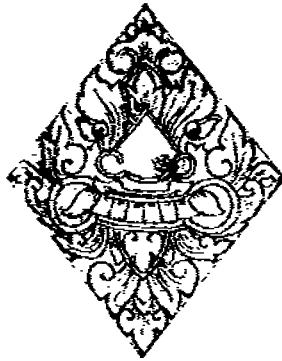
(1) See Pl. XVI, c.

everywhere are meat and flies inextricably mingled, an offering to the voracity of « spirits »...

Against the lilac-coloured background of the sky the sacred mountain lifts its sable mass and already the evening mist is creeping up the valley; it is the hour at which, having eaten their fill, the genii make for home. Armed with rifles, with pikes and with halberds, the sacred personnel forms into a procession and accompanies them as far as the pond:

« The ceremony is ended. A buffalo has been offered up to you in accordance with the traditional rite. Receive the ten divine blessings and return ye then to your palaces! »

Bending over the raft which is to carry them back to their destination by the distant shadowy pools, the « Master of Ritual » invites them to their return journey, while slowly, sabre in hand, the « inspired ones » decant into the water dyed now a dark violet their whirling shadows.



The Sacrifice of the Buffalo and the Forecast of the Weather in Vientiane

by

Paul LÉVY

One may well be surprised to learn that the sacrifice of the buffalo, which appears so characteristic of Indonesia to us in Indochina (1) should also be prevalent among the Laotians in Vientiane, which nobody could accuse of being an old-fashioned capital.

There have, as far as I know, been no cases of such sacrifices reported in connexion with the Laotians of Vientiane. Moreover they are practically unheard-of among the Laotians of Luang Prabang (2), and yet, although this practise was recently abandoned in the Royal City, it still survives in other parts of Laos, though coming more and more under the civilising influence of Buddhism and of Western ideology. The other Thai peoples in Indochina, who live in more remote parts, also keep up the practice of sacrificing the Buffalo, although they, in turn, are coming under the influence of the above-mentioned factors (3).

(1) Cf., on this question, a very well-informed study by P. Guilleminet: *Le sacrifice du buffle chez les Bahnar de la province de Kontum — La fête*, in the *Bull. des Amis du Vieux Hué*, n^o. 2, April-June, 1942.

(2) At Luang Prabang two buffaloes — a white and a black one — are offered each year to the guardian spirit called Phi Seua Muong at the Lak Muong (the central post in the town, nowadays lying outside the town). This custom has not been practised in Xieng Mai for some fifteen years. (Cf. Notton, *Annales du Siam*, 1st part, p. 205). This sacrifice has not taken place in Luang Prabang for a number of years. The last known took place at the *ho* of Xieng T'ong, the oldest site in Luang Prabang. Yet buffalo meal constitutes the *plat de résistance* during all ceremonies in honour of the spirits.

(3) At the present moment, although the élite has been won over by Western influence — in particular that of France — the masses, who have to a certain extent lost contact with the élite, are falling back into old, primitive concepts from which Buddhism had gradually been freeing them. Although this religion has made some progress in Laos, for example, there is no doubt that Western culture will eventually win over the young. However, during the hiatus generally prevalent in Indochinese society, the so called 'sacrificed' generations are coming to view the most primitive religious feelings with sympathy. That is why there is so much to observe in this field in Indochina.

I have detached these notes on buffalo-sacrifices and weather-forecasting in Vientiane from the main work I am preparing on Laotian ceremonies, in order to show what can be gained from a study of the survival of ancient religious customs amongst an otherwise civilised population. Obviously I have chosen the most sombre and 'barbarous' of these customs in order to bring out the peaceful side of a people which nowadays is quite rightly considered as being very peace-loving. Again, this study of a religious rite which is very widespread in Indochina as well as in South East Asia, will perhaps enable other investigators to undertake research in places where it was thought that the last word had been said on such matters. This will not fail to throw light on a number of details which in Laos have lost their mystical virtue and no longer have more than a purely decorative value. It is probable, however, that Laos, thanks to its writing and its more solid social structure, has been able to maintain a firmer grasp on certain traditional rites and myths. In this case, the schematical study I am offering might be of help to those who may be tempted to try to investigate the oral traditions of peoples who have known no other means of communication. Naturally we must take into account when considering the facts reported here, the tendency towards systematisation and eclecticism inherent in all cultures based on the activities of scribes.

DESCRIPTION

The sacrifice of the buffalo in Vientiane takes place at a time when the Festival of the Genii is celebrated in town (1) and country alike as in Luang Prabang. The dates of these ceremonies are not rigidly fixed; they depend on the occupations of those taking part and the will of the genii. However they have to take place in the months of May and June, at the beginning of the rainy season, when the water should be rising in the rivers and the paddy-fields, but not so violently as to drown the people and their crops. So it is during a break in the weather and in the men's work that the Higher Powers are invoked. On them depends the turn of events, for good or for evil.

At this time the Laotians endeavour to propitiate their spirits and to use their doublesighedness to find out something about the near future.

Vientiane is a modern town, built by the French Protectorate on the ruins of the greatest capital the Laotians of the past had ever known. The small number of its inhabitants, which the first French missions at the end of the last century found when they went through Vientiane, were for the most part Thai-Phu-uns, that is to say, Thais from the

(1) In the past, it appears, there were, in Vientiane alone, nine *ho* or spirit-sanctuaries. (Information provided by Thao Phinmasone, an excellent Laotian connoisseur of things Laotian).

Tran-ninh Plateau and the district around. Since then, the town which the French rebuilt has been inhabited by Laotian groups either from the Menam Valley, where they had been deported by the Siamese in 1827, or from the Mekong Valley. At the present time, Vientiane is a large administrative, commercial and agricultural centre which the Vietnamese, who went there in large numbers, have, together with the Chinese, helped to transform through their activities. The Laotians have remained what they always were — farmers and seamen.

As I have said, the Spirit Festivals of the Genii take place in almost every district, either in a special house, the *ho*, or else in the house of a hospitable inhabitant. The latter case is more prevalent in Vientiane itself. These festivities are of an unofficial nature and generally interest only the inhabitants of one particular district. However, if the genii invoked have a certain reputation — acquired through the status of the person through whom they are incarnated — then the ceremony, in the course of which they appear, attracts a crowd, with people sometimes coming great distances to attend. The *Ho Nia* ceremony (1), during which a buffalo is sacrificed, is not only a popular event of this kind but also enjoys official support, for the Laotian authorities contribute financially and either attend in person or send representatives (2). It is a ceremony which affects the future of the province, of the whole Muong. It must be admitted, however, that much less importance is attached to it nowadays. This is clear from a study of the circumstances under which it is performed by the Vientianese at the present time.

The *ho* (the Laotian ritual edifice) of the *Ho Nia* no longer exists (3).

(1) Although this ceremony now takes place at the end of the 7th Laotian month, it used to take place in the 6th-7th months, at the same time as that of the other *ho* in the town, the 'little *hos*', which have remained faithful to the old practices.

'Formerly', told me Thao Phimmason, 'the *Ho Nia* ceremony was given during the 7th month before the thinning-out of the rice. Nowadays it takes place afterwards, and people realise the importance of the ceremony when there is a watershortage'.

Among the White Thais (Cf. Silvestre, *Les Thaï blancs de la région de Phong-tho* in *B. E. F. E. O.*, vol. XVIII, n° 4, pp. 50-51) the buffalo is sacrificed on two occasions; at the beginning of work on the rice-fields (5th-6th months) and after the thinning-out. Thus, in Vientiane, the first sacrifice has been neglected — that of the 'desacralisation of the earth' — and only the second observed, — that of propitiation. The fact that it was not performed in the past shows the importance that was attached in Vientiane to the inaugural sacrifice and all its manifestations.

(2) All civil servants, important people and even quite modest folk, are asked to contribute to the collection made to cover the expenses of the *Ho Nia* ceremony which takes place a few days later.

(3) According to Thao Phimmason, the *Ho Nia*, the greatest of all the *hos*, together with the one situated at the mouth of the Nam P'a Sak (stream flowing from the town's ditches), was situated next to the Wat Si Muong, in the Phia Wat district. This Wat is of great mystical interest because it contains the *tak muong*, the 'Pillar of the Town', a large square stone column under which, we are told, a pregnant woman was buried alive, and became a powerful *genius loci* (Cf. below, *The Ceremonies of That Luang*). This spirit has, it appears, no connexion with that which haunts the *Ho Nia*.

It was there that the incarnation of the genii and the forecasting of the weather used to take place. Some dwelling-houses and two Vietnamese temples have been built on the sacred spot. In the old city, the Ho Nia stood just inside the ramparts along which there now runs the boulevard called the 'Avenue Jules-Bosc'. Was it here, to the N. E. of the city (1), that buffaloes were sacrificed to the Muong genii before 1827? We cannot say for certain. At Luang Prabang a similar sacrifice took place in the very heart of the old city, at Sieng Tong, this time in a field covered with trees, quite extensive and isolated, a place reminiscent of the Sacred Wood (2) and the secluded spot where the other Thai groups still sacrifice their victims. In our day, at Vientiane, the Vietnamese live in the vicinity of the former Ho Nia, but have respected the consecrated place of the Laotians by adopting it. What is more, the Vietnamese have built an edifice to protect the great stone which the Laotians worship as being a huge petrified grain of rice. (I shall have more to say about this later.) As a pendant to this miên, the Vietnamese have built another one, dedicated to their earth-deity, *Thổ công*. The practical collaboration of the Vietnamese and the Laotians goes still further. In the entrance-hall of the dinh, dedicated by the former to the protecting genius of their district — a general of the Gialong period — the most important part of the ceremony is to take place. Moreover, the banquet during which the flesh of the sacrificial buffalo is eaten takes place on the veranda of the *dền*, a Taoist temple dedicated to the 'Three Mothers'.

But to return to the ceremony: in the hall of the dinh, at the foot of the table of offerings are laid cushions and a mat; towards the entrance, two jars, supposedly containing rice-beer, and a pitcher containing rice-alcohol, are placed at the base of a small mast bearing a talao or six-pointed star woven in bamboo. A screwed-up banana-leaf containing offerings (wax candles and flowers) and a pineapple-flower are attached to the middle of the talao which shows, by its very presence, the sacred nature of the ceremony. A copper gong and a wooden Vietnamese drum with skin facings — the normal adjuncts of the dinh, at least as far as the drum is concerned — must be used during the ceremony. Laotian sabres, clothing and numerous trays and vases

(1) Are we to consider this direction as another example of the importance attached to the North East in Indochina? (Cf. P. Paris, *L'importance rituelle du Nord-Est et ses applications en Indochine*, in *B. E. F. E. O.*, vol. XLI, pp. 303-333).

I do not think so, considering the information provided by Thao Phummasone concerning the former site of the Ho Nia, near Vat Si Muong. In general it does not seem as though direction has unduly influenced the Laotians and other Thai peoples in the erection of sacred buildings, except Buddhist ones. At Sukhothai, for example, one gathers from the inscription of Rāma Kāmheng that the place corresponding to the Ho Nia was to the South of the town.

(2) On the role of this sacred wood, see the account in my *Doublets onomastiques au Laos et ailleurs dans l'Asie du Sud-Est*.

containing alcohol, sweetmeats (1), candles and flowers placed on the mat or round about, make up the rest of the accessories. The place where the buffalo is to be sacrificed is situated behind the dinh, to the South. There we find a fairly large tree, a kok dua, or ficus which plays a certain part in Laotian legendary, near which the buffalo, which has been fastened to some small trees -- sago-palms -- will be slain. In the past, the buffalo was sacrificed at the foot of a tamarind-tree which still exists and near a small bamboo erection where the holy stone, the 'Grain of Rice', used to be. The tamarind is a tree which has a mystical significance in Laos and elsewhere in South East Asia (2). It enjoys particular favour as it is a favourite haunt of phis (3), also because it is the sacrificial tree among the Thais (4). Consequently I do not think the above-mentioned trees were chosen haphazard.

The principal character of the Ho Nia ceremony, the ho of the little allic (5), is an old woman, the Nang thiem. This term, which means 'the lady sitting next to, or joined to...' is the name given to all women through whom the genii reveal themselves to their worshippers. Sao Phuy is the name of the Nang thiem of the Ho Nia and she lives in the Si Khay district of Vientiane. She is assisted by men -- and women -- servants who help her to dress and undress, pass her the offerings, and serve as a link between her and the public. The chief of these acolytes is the Taseng, the head of the district in which the Ho Nia is to be found. The rudimentary but tireless orchestra is composed of a kkena-player and his standbys -- for they blow away until they are exhausted -- and two performers on the castanets

(1) These dishes consist of sweets and fruits. In fact, the spirits do not feed like human beings for whom sweets, cakes, etc. are not basic foods but 'extras'. What is normal appears only slightly sacred, but what is exceptional appears highly sacred. In the same way we learn from the history of the names and shapes of our cakes that they once had mystic qualities which have generally disappeared nowadays.

(2) For example, in Ceylon the tamarind is considered as the home of a demon; during the night this tree is supposed to give out a fatal odour: in Bengal its shadow is thought to be pernicious. (According to Schintger, *Forgotten Kingdom*. Appendix II by Ch. von Föhrer-Haimendorf, p. 223, no. 2).

(3) The tamarind (in Laotian, *kok mak kham*), according to Thit-Pheng of Luang Prabang, when planted on a Tuesday, has a black heart and its wood has magic powers. With it they make magic sticks about 30 cms. long containing formulas written on strips of silver which are used to 'count spirits'. The bonzes make canes with them (Indian *kakkara*) from 80 cms. to a metre in length for their 'night walks', and they make use of them to strike 'even those who have been rendered invulnerable by incantations'; they are also used to avoid meeting demons. Finally the Laotians use this wood to make sheaths for their daggers, sabres, etc., for it makes them efficacious even against 'those who have rendered themselves invulnerable'.

(4) This was at least the information I received among the Thai Dam (Black) from the valleys of the Nam Nga and the Nam Bac, tributaries of the Nam U (commonly called Nam Hou or Nam Ou).

(5) According to Thao Phimmasone, 'Tiao Ho Nia, the prince of the Ho Nia, is a man and probably a former king'. Nia is the name of the left and this is probably the source of the name Ho Nia.

which are made of two trips of bamboo struck together. From time to time, during the moving passages, before and after the incarnation of the spirits, a little boy from among the crowd present gets up and puts in a few strokes on the copper gong. The public — mainly composed of Laotians — sit on either side of the hall, the men on the left and the women on the right. Vietnamese attend also the ceremony, partly out of curiosity and partly because it interests them. The Laotian authorities are, as we said, present at the sacrifice and at the beginning of the ceremony, in the shape of the Chao Muong of Vientiane. All day long, on the boulevard, young Laotian girls sell sweets, cigarettes and alcohol, holding what the Laotians call the 'phis market', or *lat taleo*, 'the *talèo* market', 'the market of forbidden things' (1).

The ceremony begins early in the morning with invocations of the genii, which are requested — with the additional temptation of the offerings — to be so good to let themselves be incarnated by the Nang thiem, who is sitting on the mat. The gong and the castanets provide a lively, rhythmical accompaniment to the tune played on the *kheua*. A spirit comes, while the woman puts on a long, many-coloured tunic with broad sleeves, a Laotian skirt (*sin*) — which in certain parts of the country is nothing more than a sarong — and a turban the ends of which fall on the right side, a little behind the face. After drinking some alcohol, she stands up, dances — or rather, hops about — each step counting two beats, whilst she makes the traditional arm-movements of the most usual Laotian dance (2), the *lam-vong*.

At nine o'clock in the morning, she gives orders to kill the male buffalo which has been attached to the sago-palms by a buffalo-hide strap. Offerings of flowers and alcohol have previously been made to the *kok dua* (3) near which the buffalo is attached. The animal is hit twice, once on the head — which is lowered by pulling on the strap — and once on the neck.

(1) It should be noted that exceptional things are sold in this exceptional market. Articles which the Laotians consider superfluous constitute the basis (cf. note 1, p. 166) of the offerings to the spirits for whom they are essential. The Laotians themselves buy their food in this market, or at least they are supposed to, for they are not allowed to cook or eat ordinary things during the three days' festivities. The *talèo* properly refers to the kind of star woven in bamboo which is also placed at the entrance of Thai villages and districts to keep people out during festivities or in cases of mourning or epidemics, etc. (Cf. H. Robert, *Notes sur les Tay Deng de Lang-Chanh, Thanh-hoa — Annam*, pp. 38, 68, and particularly plates XXXVIII-IX and notes, p. 179). These *talèos* no longer appear in Vientiane, because there is no longer any taboo on the festivity in question, but the memory of it is still vivid and all the other groups of Northern Indochinese Thais still observe these practices, which correspond to religious concepts expressed in the form of myths.

(2) Cf. Jeanne Cuisinier, *Danses magiques de Kelantan* (Paris, 1936), in which the author, who is very well-informed and observant, has carefully described similar dances performed by Siamese women from Malaya (pp. 118-126).

(3) The *figus kok dua* is, like all the *figus*, a tree that is respected. The figs it provides are edible but it is not a particularly popular fruit, except among the *Khas* (Indonesians), as is proved by the legend we shall quote among the texts concerning Luang Prabang.

During this time, the orchestra plays continuously. The buffalo is beheaded and cut into pieces. The head and tail are then brought to the foot of the little miên in which we find the 'Grain of Rice', and are set out according to ritual — the muzzle turned towards the sacred stone and the tail placed on the buffalo's forehead, with the hairy tuft at the end lying on the ground. The carcass is then carried on to the threshold of the dinh and placed with the feet on one side with the carpenter's axe — the sacrificial weapon —, the breast and viscera on the other; slightly in front of the dinh, the freshly flayed hide is laid out.

With the flesh of the buffalo, a lap (1) is made, and on the hearth they cook a keng (broth) and grill meat which is eaten by the Nang thiem and the assistants on the veranda of the dên at ten o' clock in the morning. Then, towards eleven o' clock, the incarnations of the genii begin again. This time, it is a Vietnamese spirit which has come 'to play with' the woman in trance. This is the genius of the Vietnamese ho (that is, the dinh). In their turn, the Vietnamese present in the audience offer Vietnamese dishes, rice, alcohol and flowers to their genius which has taken on the form of an old Laotian woman to come and speak to the faithful, to foretell happy days and to answer any questions they may care to ask. Then the old woman, 'spirit-ridden', shores the alcohol and flowers with the faithful of another race and while she speaks, muttering fortunes and good wishes, ties white threads round their wrists to give a more lasting effect and more visible form to her verbal efforts.

Then the foreign spirit goes away; the Nang thiem shows this by rolling on her mat and changing her clothes, which are all alike except for their colours.

There is thus a series of spirits whose identity does not interest the public, except for the ethnographer. And even when the strange European manages to get a name, he is often unable to extract further information, even from the medium. This may be a case of wilful silence or ignorance, the latter being, in my opinion, the more likely explanation, for example in the case of historical names, about which the medium can give no information at all, no even legendary. Yet there are cases which I have witnessed at Luang Prabang, in which the incarnations take place in strict, rational order.

Until two o' clock in the afternoon there is a series of incarnations and disincarnations accompanied by the above-mentioned ceremonial. Then comes the dividing up of the flesh of the buffalo, the biggest share going to the Nang thiem and the officials who run the Muong of Vientiane. Later, towards six o' clock in the evening, the head and tail will also be given to the Nang thiem; the skin, which is to be divided between her and the officials, will be eaten or used as leather.

(1) See below, *Laotian Cookery*, and p. 329.

At about four o' clock they perform a sword-dance with a little lighted candle on the blade of the swords. On this occasion, the dancing-girl wears a yellow turban, a green tunic, a mauve bell, and a very dark violet skirt. The spiril she is incarnating is a warrior. Shortly afterwards, at a quarter to five, they proceed to water the 'Grain of Rice' which, together with the sacrifice of the buffalo, is a highlight of the ceremony. On a little table, set between the medium and the cut-up buffalo, they have put a big stone called the 'Grain of Rice', with a piece of white material over it. On this stone they have laid offerings to the genius it contains: a rolled-up banana-leaf full of guava leaves, a flower like an ear of corn (or dok kap) usually from an areca-palm, and a lighted candle. Near the stone is a teapot full of water and under the table a petrol-can also full of water. Leaving her swords with the lighted candles, the medium takes the teapot and dances three times round the table with the pot in her hands, while the assistants tell her that she must help them to make a good rice-field and a good crop, by obtaining a good season for them. All this to a musical accompaniment — the khena, the castanets and the funeral note of the gong.

At the end of the third dance, everything stops. Then she silently begins to pour water onto the stone from the teapot, followed immediately by the assistants who inundate the stone with the contents of the can, splashing all those present. The latter rush forward to help the experts — who have quickly turned over the stone — look to see how much of the under surface has been moistened. « The end of the year will be dry », they say, for two patches, two 'grains of rice', have not got wet (1). The stone is then carried back to its miêu, covered

(1) Since my mission, I have been able to obtain further information on this subject thanks to the good offices of H. E. Outhou Souvannavong. According to the position of the dry spots on the big stone, deductions are made concerning the topography of rice-fields which will be flooded or remain dry and whether it is better to 'make' the rice-fields 'high or low'.

According to Thao Phimmasoné, this is how the ceremony used to take place:

'They put a kind of "stone tortoise-shell" in a basin of water and danced. Then they looked to see whether the water had risen inside the "shell". According to the water-level, prophecies were made about rainfall and drought. This "shell" was called the old grain of rice (nuei khao bulan).' There is a marked difference between this version and the present state of affairs. It is hardly possible to doubt the truth of this information, however, when one considers the personality of my informant and the details provided. Apparently this was a system of divining similar to that of certain diviners, based on the length of time it takes for a perforated vase to sink in a receptacle full of water. The « tortoise-shell » must have been some fossil or, more simply, a *lulus naturæ* which perhaps looked like the empty shell of a giant grain of rice. What were the circumstances which brought about the substitution of the present stone for that formerly used? I have been unable to discover this. What is more, it is not certain whether it is really a question of a substitution at all; a superposition seems much more likely and the Khmer and Indonesian practices, which we shall quote, justify this belief. The polishing of talismans and large spirit-stones regularly accompanies the sacrifice of the buffalo among these peoples, and requests are added for

with a piece of folded red material, and the blind used to protect it from the roving eye is lowered, while the spirit-dancer goes on dancing tirelessly and the music becomes very excited. But a countercheck of this weatherforecasting by means of the 'Grain of Rice' is about to be made. The medium dips the points of her swords in the urns of rice-beer; if the alcohol remains on the blade, it will be a dry year, otherwise it will rain. The answer is similar to that obtained from the 'Grain of Rice'.

Finally, the phi ban, or local deity, becomes incarnate in the Nang thiem; someone asks him his name on my behalf; he refuses to answer. Yet we had followed the correct procedure by offering the deity a bowl full of betel leaves and tuberoses, lit up with a candle.

The spirits depart. The Nang thiem undresses, prostrates herself, and, raising the above-mentioned bowl, asks pardon for the sins she and the faithful may have committed; she also begs the deity to carry out all the wishes that have been expressed, and points out that he has been well paid with the buffalo, whose head and tail only have been given to the 'Grain of Rice', the rest of the animal having fallen to the lot of the deity. Night falls at last and everyone turns towards home.

REMARKS:

It is not the sacrifice of the buffalo in itself that is surprising, for it is still current in Indochina, but the place chosen for it. Yet formerly in Luang Prabang, the King used personally to contribute money to the maintenance of this sacrifice, memories of which are still vivid in many people's minds. Some say that the severe pillaging of the town in 1887 by Deo-Van-Tri's forces was caused through the abandonment of this blood-sacrifice. In Western Laos, where a Buddhist influence has been predominant for long years, according to a Pāli chronicle published and translated by Mr. George Coedès (1), a Laotian King of Sieng Mai 'lacked faith and, favouring heretics to the detriment of the faithful, worshipped demons and sacrificed buffaloes and oxen to (the Spirits) of gardens, trees, *celiqas*, mountains and woods.'

A significant detail links these Indochinese buffalo-sacrifices together. At Vientiane, we saw that the head and the tail of the buffalo were offered to the 'Grain of Rice' still in its little temple. The head of the sacrificed buffalo is also placed in front of

coolness, damp and rain. The large "grain of rice" stone which perhaps existed alongside the "stone tortoise-shell" took over, after the disappearance (?) of this ritual accessory, the prophetic procedure which accompanied the ceremony. This change could have taken place very easily, if the large stone was polished during the same ceremony.

We should not fail to notice the mythological significance of the tortoise which, as a support of the Earth or of the Central Mountain (Meru), the Earth's Axis, is connected on the one hand with the origins of the world, its genesis, and, on the other, with the liquid element. The tortoise (or turtle) is the solid element in a liquid — water — and this characteristic of the go-between, brought out by its amphibious existence, makes the animal play the role of a prop, a pivot of the world. The strange form of its body, its great age, have added to the mythical importance of the tortoise or turtle.

(1) In *Documents pour servir à l'Histoire du Laos Occidental*, p. 104 of the B. E. F. O., vol. XXV (1925) 1-2.

the ritual dwelling of the family of stone-gods at Kampot, while among the Thais — the Thai Dams for example (1) — this head is attached to the sacrificial tree, where the spirit dwells, or else to the mast raised during funerals. This mast is moreover very much like the sacrificial mast of the Ka-tus or the Bahnars, with branches stretching out from the base and with a bird-shaped top (2). The Samres places the head of the sacrificed buffalo between two anthropomorphic posts (man and woman). To conclude this list of comparisons, I would point out that the sacrificial post among the Roengaos (3) is an offshoot which, when it grows into a tree, will perpetuate the sacrifice just like the megaliths and forked poles of the Nagas of Assam, on which Bucranes are carved as well as the Bucranes of the victims themselves. Among the Ka-tus, what in my opinion is being made of the *sinur* or sacrificial pole, is a veritable schema of the buffalo itself. Indeed, young men skillfully throw the tail of the sacrificial buffalo into a basket fixed at the top of the pole, while the head and feet are attached to the bottom in such a way that the body of the victim is virtually represented by the post, with the tail above the head. This is the general idea, it seems, behind the practice of offering the head and tail of the buffalo to the 'Grain of Rice', and it would appear that the Laotians are in fact offering the entire animal to the spirit, when they place the tail of the sacrificed animal in a life-like position in relation to the head. To complete the offering to the spirit, some mountain folk bathe their fetishes in a mixture consisting partly of the blood of the sacrificed buffalo (4).

There is little doubt that this is the equivalent of the ablution of stone-spirits in Vientiane and Cambodia, where a rite takes place, basically similar to that of the *Neak-la hkleang Muong*, the guardian spirit of the Centre of the Country, which resides in the Royal Palace at Phnom-Penh. When the sixth month comes round (April-May) the Brahmans, after attending to the enthroning of the most important Brahmanese deities, invite all the deities and spirits of the Kingdom to attend the ensuing consecration. The Brahmans bathe the statues of the gods, wash elephants' tusks and rhinoceros' horns in the same water then, in the presence of all the divinities of the Cardinal Points, and of the principal spirit of the Kingdom, they express wishes for long life, peace, perpetual calm for the Sovereign, his family, ministers, mandarins and the whole people. They also request the gods, in their bounty, to assure a regular rainfall during the different seasons.

Elephants' tusks and rhinoceros' horns are less powerful talismans than those which the Mountain folk normally hang from the main beams of their houses (5), and the water in which they are washed, even when sanctified by contact with a whole collection of Brahmanese deities, certainly has not the qualities of the complicated concoction based on blood, with which the Roengaos anoint their spirits, until they give off a 'sweat' so dangerous that the women and children (*i. e.* the weak) hide at

(1) In the village of Muong Bom on the Nam Bac, a tributary of the Nam U.

(2) There is a picture in *Un Empire colonial français: l'Indochine*, published under the direction of Georges Maspero, vol. I, p. 245, fig. 174, Paris, 1929.

(3) See J. E. Kemlin, *Rites agraires des Reungao* in *B. E. F. E. O.*, vol. X, p. 152.

(4) The Roengaos, for example. According to Father Kemlin (*Rites agraires...*, pp. 54-55 of vol. X), at the time of the sacrifice of the buffalo to *làng Nori*, the Rice goddess, and to other deities, in a state of grace after the harvest and immediately after giving the *làng* their portion of the victim, the 'fetishes' - protecting the town are washed by turning them upside down: the liquid used for this is a mixture of the buffalo's heart-blood, wine (rice-wine), bamboo-water and the sap of two kinds of liana, the *hopel* and the *pak dao*. 'Tsu, I wash the spirits so that they may become fresh again, (...), that they may eat and drink, for I wash them with the blood of the buffalo, wine, bamboo-water *hopel* and *pak dao*!'

(5) See J. E. Kemlin, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

this critical moment. In any case, the requests are always for cool, damp weather.

In Laos, the watering of the petrified grain of rice brings back memories of a myth, of which the following is a version recorded in Luang Prabang:

« It is said that, in the past, the Sky at night used to drop down to roof-level and that in daytime it rose gradually with the rising sun until it reached its normal place. Very early each morning, the first inhabitants of the Earth climbed up ladders and scraped the Sky to remove the *Kamfa*, a kind of manna which was at that time the staple diet. One day, a widow woke up too late to reach the sky with her ladder, so, picking up a long bamboo-pole, she poked at the sky, cursing and shouting: 'Rise as high as you like, I don't need you any more!' Whereupon the Sky rose to its present height. On the same day, when the widow was still angry, the grains of rice, which grew untended to the size of pumpkins, entered the barns of their own accord, filling them right up to the roof. But the crossgrained widow scolded them: 'Why do you enter so quickly? I am not ready and I have other work to do. Go back to the *rai* and the paddy-fields, become little grains no bigger than that, for big grains like you tire me out when I have to peel and crush you for the pot. When I need you I'll come and fetch you from the *rai* or the paddy-field.' Ever since then, rice has been small and it no longer grows untended. »

Henri Maspero recorded the following interesting variant of this legend among the Black Thais of Nghia-lò (Tonking):

« I remember that when the Earth was created, the Sky was narrow and low and very flat. When people shelled rice, the Sky got in the way of their pestles. At that time, grains of rice were as big as vegetable marrows. Rice, when it was ripe, came back home to the village all on its own. In those days there was a widow who had no barn. The grains of rice came fluttering up and settled behind her ears and under her eyes. So she grew angry and she took the grains of rice and she went to fetch a knife to cut the grains of rice into little pieces. Then she chased the rice to the dry rice-field (*rai*) saying: 'Wait till they come and pick you!' And she chased the rice to the wet rice-field, (saying): 'Wait till they come and pick you!' Then the widow took a little knife and with the knife she cut the moorings of the sky. Then, its moorings cut, the Sky rose up to the firmament, and now we can see nothing but sky everywhere (1). »

Except for the detail about manna, the two legends tell how, after a period of semi-confusion when Earth and Sky were so close together as to be both a help and a hindrance to mankind, this chaotic Golden Age came to an end as a result of the actions of a cross old woman who on the one hand pushed back the sky to the place it occupies nowadays, and on the other hand reduced the produce of the earth — until that time truly gargantuan — to the size and conditions that are obtain at the present time.

Thus the buffalo-sacrifice in Vientiane has more than an oracular significance. Its aim is not merely to obtain favours from the guardian spirits of the country and to support their prophecies. There is another side to the question: these ceremonies form a link with the past. The stone, a giant grain of rice, is the lasting token of a fabulous past and this token, which is given its full value by the ceremony, provides almost tangible evidence of past abundance, which will thus be preserved. For what this ceremony tries to recreate is the past, before the seasons change and reveal to mankind the surprises they have in store. Man desires to approach the Unknown with the maximum of foresight and forewarning; all that is most exceptional about the past is therefore resuscitated and relieved during the exceptional period that begins with the ceremony. That is how a myth lives, grows and develops, with its initial

(1) Henri Maspero, *Légendes Mythologiques...*, p. 95.

themes emerging during the festivities. The Samres relate their sacrifices to the legend of the murderous brothers and sisters. The Ka-tus and the Bahnars must do the same for it seems incredible that collective actions like their sacrifices should not be linked in their minds with myths. It would be most useful for the purposes of our study to discover these myths because sacrifices such as that of the buffalo are very characteristic of the collective activities of the Indonesians in Indochina. Moreover, the Thais, who recently invaded the country, say that it was from the Indonesians that they acquired the practice of sacrificing the buffalo. I have even been able to ascertain that in certain parts of Northern Laos there is real cultural and sacrificial collaboration between Laotians, Thais and Khas, at a time when the festivities in honour of the local guardian spirits are being prepared and when most of the spirits are notable characters of Indonesian origin (1). Should we conclude from this that the sacrifice of the buffalo comes from outside the Thai country and is characteristic of the Indonesians? It is particularly difficult to say, because we know so little about the ancient Thais. However, although the sacrifice of the buffalo is certainly the greatest homage the Thais could pay their spirits, it fits in with a definite ritual which means that it stands out less than in the Indonesian ceremony.

It is through a study of the way in which this autochthonous cult is adopted that we can grasp the characteristic features of the religious practices of the Thais, for although a large number of their tribes practice blood-sacrifice of all kinds, throughout the year, we find in every case a tendency to regulate the festivities, which are essentially seasonal and agrarian. This is an easily understandable tendency in the case of populations with a fundamentally agricultural economy. In all Thai religious ceremonies we find the spirit incarnated in a human being who specialises in this kind of function. This is 'chamanism', a fact also explained by the close ethno-linguistic ties between the Thais as a whole and the ethnic groups which have remained in Central Asia, amongst which chamanistic practices, together with blood-sacrifices, constitute the chief means of establishing contact with things sacred (2).



(1) This I observed in the village of Ban Xieng Da (tasseng of Nam-Nga).

(2) The authors of what is now a classic study (H. Hubert and M. Mauss, *Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice* in *Mélanges d'Histoire des Religions*, p. 124, Paris, 1909) clearly defined the fundamental unity of sacrifice: 'If the sacrifice is so complex, wherein can its unity lie? The fact is that, underlying all the various forms it may assume, we find the same process used for different ends. This process consists in establishing contact between the sacred and profane world by means of a victim, that is to say, a consecrated thing destroyed in the course of the ceremony'.

Fishing and the Ang Festivities

by

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Living as they do in close proximity to the banks of rivers, all Laotians are fishermen. But fishing never assumes with them the proportions of a profession, still less of an industry. Though all of them, more or less, fish, I think that none of them live solely from the proceeds of their fishing; it is a family affair and no one seeks to do more than satisfy his particular needs. On the occasion of an especially good catch someone may be tempted to go and sell part of it in the market, but more usually they will preserve it for their personal consumption. This is no doubt one of the chief reasons why there is so little fish for sale in the markets of Laos.

The passion for fishing is very marked in all Laotian people, from the princes to the least of the villagers: the joy of plunging and seizing free hold of the fish that has been imprisoned in the sparrow-hawk or held fast by the harpoon; the shouts of delight and admiration for whoever plunges to the bottom of the water and comes up at last with a fish in either hand and another between his teeth. Better than a sport, it is a survival of the old primitive instinct of fighting the prey one feeds on.

All through the year, in obedience to the rhythms imposed upon him by nature, the Laotian tills his rice-fields and his river-side cultures, hunts, and fishes for his pleasure; and it is not easy to estimate what place exactly the latter activity occupies in his life. In an attempt to do so we must make a distinction between the Laotians who live some distance from the rivers — we may call them peasants — and those who live on the river-banks.

During the rainy season and while working at the same time in the rice-fields, the former lay down lines and nets so that, from the 1st of May to the 31st of December, they may procure themselves the fish they need for their own consumption. From January onwards the rice-fields are standing dry which means they have to go fishing once a week in the neighbouring ponds (*bung*) or pools

(*nong*). They usually join forces with a group of other families, sometimes even several villages together, and they organize collective fishing parties. Over and above their daily food, these fishing-parties procure them enough fish to prepare *padek* (1), which they eat on the days when they have no fresh fish. Each household needs about 90 to 110 pounds a year. This means that the peasants only fish enough for their own needs, and often, when they have the means, they buy a little *padek* to tide them over.

Those who live by the river-banks are in a much more favourable position: in the dry season, while they are tilling the ground they cultivate along the sides of the river, they put down nets and lines. Actually they can go on doing so the whole year round so that they practically supply enough fish for all their needs. As soon as the first storms come, round about the 15th of April, certain of the sheat-fish, for example the *pa kot*, begin to make their way upstream in the Mekong and its tributaries and may sometimes be caught in large quantities; they make it into *padek*. The level of the water rises from June onwards and you can fish with a *bet lao* (floating bait). In October when there are signs that the level of the rivers is going to fall, those who live along the banks of the tributaries start putting up dams: *ly*, *tonh*, *tip*; they catch the fish that are coming down by then in fairly large quantities and these also are made into *padek*.

Those who live by the Mekong river-banks can do little to dam the waters of that immense river when they begin to subside, so they spend the year watching the migrations of certain species of fish which they catch in large quantities: in March in the rapids when the *pa liok*, the *pa va* and the *pa sa nak* come upstream, and in May the *pa pho*. In April and May, in Vientiane and Luang Prabang, the *pa leum* when they migrate. And the same thing goes on all over the country when the young fish is migrating.

In Vientiane in the month of November small scaly fish come up the Mekong in shoals and a fisherman working alone can haul in from about 130 to 260 pounds in one day; every family can make, then, roughly from 90 to 180 pounds to *padek* with the small fry they catch. It obviously the riverside populations that supply fish to the markets in Laos.

Main Sorts of Fishing

As we have just seen, several main types of fishing succeed each other throughout the year and vary from one region of Laos to another. There is a close link between the methods of fishing used and the habits and customs of the fish to be caught; there are

(1) Fish preserved whole in salt along with ricebran. See later: *Laotian Cookery*.

about a hundred different sorts in Laos and there is a different gadget and method of fishing for all of them. We shall attempt no more than a general survey here in which we shall distinguish between fishing by hand, which is done with small gadgets such as lines, harpoons, scoop-nets, small nets, weels; fishing with nets, and fishing by means of dams.

Fishing by hand is carried out all the year round and everywhere, on the banks of the rivers and streams and in the pools and ponds. It may suffice to feed a family but brings very little to the market. It yields very little except at certain seasons, as when the small fry migrate in shoals. As a rule the Laotians organize fishing in groups to increase the yield. For example, in the dry season the Mekong's waters fall, leaving huge stretches of sand full of pools in which the fish, especially the young fish, remain imprisoned. They usually wait till March to fish these pools. On a prescribed day the villagers all meet there, including the women and children. It is fishing on a collective basis and it is true that as a rule only small fish are taken. In the case of pond fishing, it is collective and organized by a traditional custom called the *pha pa*.

Fishing by net is not practised on a wide scale because a good deal of money is required to cover the cost of the net. Fishing is done with a ground-seine when the waters are low on the sand-banks in the region downstream from Paksane, and more especially in the Thakhek and Savannaklet regions.

Fishing with a big net (*nam*) stretched across the current is practised in Luang Prabang in April and May to catch *pa leum* and *pa bæuk*, and in July for *pa va*; in Vientiane in February, March, and April for *pa leum*, in May and June for *pa suai* and, especially for *pa pha*.

Dams are used only on the tributaries of the Mekong. The three main sorts of dam to be distinguished are the *tip*, the *ly*, and the dams with weels (*lop*, *sai*, or *ka lo*). The first are by far the most important especially in the region of Luang Prabang. These dams form regular fisheries and they are exploited according to an unwritten law.

In as far as it is possible to compare such different sorts of fishing and to form an estimate regarding them, in the region of Luang Prabang it is the *pa keng* fishing by means of a dam (*tip*) that is the most important in the year and that has the greatest yield. It is carried on along the tributaries of the Mekong: Nam Kan, Nam Suong, Nam U, and it lasts from the end of October to the beginning of December. Next comes the *pa leum* fishing which lasts from the beginning of April to the end of May, then the *pa va*, the *pa bæuk*, etc. In Vientiane *pa leum*, *pa suai*, and *pa pha* fishing are the most important; but hand fishing, when the young fish come up the river, and the *pa duk* fishing are also important.

Ways and Customs of Fishing

In Laos as elsewhere the gadgets are nothing; what counts is the fisher himself. It is not enough to have a sparrow-hawk or to know how to cast (1), you must be familiar with the fishes' habits, you must know where they live and what their behaviour is. It is because they are ignorant of these elemental things that novices fail, even when their gadgets are of the best: such and such a kind of fish in fact can only be caught in certain places, in a certain way and during a very short period in the year. The Laotian fisher knows this and rarely misses them as they go by; in fact, he can often say in advance exactly when that will be. This knowledge, usually rooted in customs, is transmitted from generation to generation along with the rites and legends with which they are closely linked (2).

As an example I am going to describe a *pa bæuk* fishing-party in which I was fortunate enough to take part some years ago at Ban-Ang.

Pa bæuk is a sheat-fish that sometimes grows to the length of six and a half feet and is the biggest of the fish in the Mekong. It is known in Cambodia under the name of *trey reach*, but almost nothing is known about its life which is shrouded in innumerable legends (3); in Laos its fishing is an occasion for important ritual festivities.

At Ban-Ang, which is a small village upstream from Vientiane, in the immediate vicinity of a huge hollow where the Mekong suddenly spreads out to a width of a little under a mile forming a circular lake, the Ang, one of these big traditional fishing expeditions takes place every year. It is a rocky region composed of vast slabs of horizontal sandstone which, displaced and overlapping, form a chaos above the Ang that is partially stopped up with the alluvia (sand and clay) from the Mekong, and in which a few caves are still to be found; some of them have their openings on the bank of the river, other probably in its bed. Their presence on the very spot where the *pa bæuk* fishing takes place seems a basis of reality

(1) See pl. XVII, *a* and *b*.

(2) For example there are legends, about which I have unfortunately been able to learn nothing, which tell of *pa bæuk* migrations towards the Lake Tali. Pavie (p. 455) even writes that the *pa bæuk* « swim up the Mekong and go and spawn in the lake Tali »; after him we have Darboux, Cotte, and Van Gaver (p. 294) who specify: « The Laotians assert that only the females are to be found in the river, whereas the males with their golden scales remain in the Lake Tali ». Now unless I am mistaken Lake Tali belongs to the Blue River basin and not to that of the Mekong. And the *pa bæuk* is a bare-skinned fish (silure) whose males would in consequence scarcely have scales, even golden ones!

(3) The Vietnamese of North Viet-Nam are not without knowledge of the existence of this Laotian fish which is supposed to live in a cave and about whom a spirit every year decides, in the course of a ceremony, whether it is to allow the fishermen to catch one or several of them.

sufficient to account for all the observations and suppositions that, with distortions and embroideries, have given rise to so many legends (1).

According to some of these legends the cave of Ang opens on the summit of the Phou Koua Kai which is more than thirty miles distant. Others suggest more modestly that it opens on a hill in the vicinity of the Ang. There actually is a cave near the top of this hill but it nowhere communicates with the Mekong. It is situated from 200 to 230 feet above the river and is merely one of those caves that the water has hollowed out as it seeps between slabs of sandstone similar to those you find on the shores of the Mekong. A little above this cave, on the side of the hill, I was able to discover a leakage from the torrent where the water runs between these slabs and ends precisely at the back of the cave in question; it is probably this water as it trickles through that has hollowed out the passages I explored and in which the only things I found were the bones of animals and the quills of porcupine.

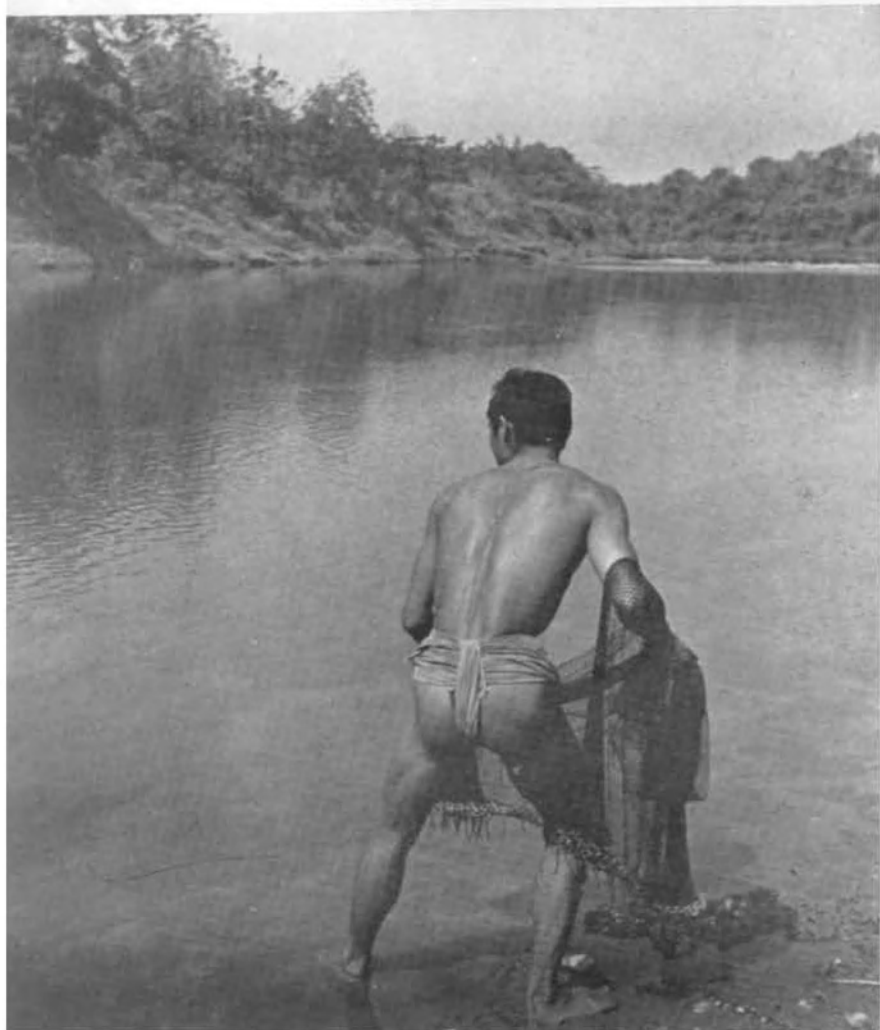
Fishing in the Ang lasts three days and is always fixed for the 15th day of the new moon in the 3d month of the Laotian calendar, the *Makha Buxa*; it is forbidden to fish the *pa boeuk* at any other time. It is indispensable to settle on a fixed date because of its being necessary to fulfil certain conditions in order to fish in a place of this sort: the assistance of a great many fishermen, sufficiently low water, a slow current, all of which is possible only once a year.

A few days before the fishing is to start it is the Laotian administration that appoints someone as Mandarin to direct operations; he is called the Chief of the Waters. He leaves Vientiane on the 10th day and takes three days to reach the sandbank of Ban-Ang for he has to interrupt the journey by stopping several times in compliance with the ritual to consult and make offerings to the genii. Unfortunately these customs are beginning to die out. In the old days the first stopping-places were Si-Khay and then Ban-Cao-Lieu; it was there that the Mandarin made his first contact with the witch who presides over all fishing rites. He

(1) Here is one of them, exactly as I took it down : « Two dragon-spirits lived as good neighbours. One of them having killed an elephant, he had the half of it carried to his friend. A little later, as the latter had killed a porcupine, he wished to pay back the other's courtesy. The first of them, seeing from afar the servants carrying the present and judging by the length of the animal's quills, was already rejoicing at the prospect of being given part of an animal that must be bigger than an elephant. When he became aware of the truth he flew into a great rage — « How can one return part of a porcupine for part of an elephant! » and he sent a challenge to his neighbour : — « Which of us two will be the first to reach the sea? » And their rival courses hollowed out two valleys. The spirit who hollowed out the Mekong arrived first and he brought back the *pa boeuk*; the other hollowed out the Menam where there are no *pa boeuk* ».

FISHING

a) Motor canoes
and punting
canoes



b) The casting of
the net

Photos R. Cauchetier

ARTS AND CRAFTS



a) Young Laotian's shawl and *sin*

Photos R. Cauchetier



b) Loom

led her to the spirit's little temple and they brought the spirit offerings (two years running a pig and on the third year a buffalo) and consulted it. They would only start out again on the morning of the 11th day and would stop again at midday at Hinh-Siou where new offerings were made and the spirit was once more consulted. The gathering of the fishermen usually takes place on the sandbank that lies about a mile downstream from Ban-Ang, on the same day at about six in the evening.

Finally, on the morning of the 12th day the procession makes the last stage of the journey and reaches Ban-Ang at about nine o'clock. In the afternoon more offerings are made and the spirit is consulted yet again. After which, at about five in the evening the fishermen appear before the Chief of the Waters and he proceeds to check the list. In the old days there were often as many as 200 or 300 canoes on the list, and to all of them, and still now, little alcohol is distributed for the guardian spirit. This alcohol is received in a flask and while the fishing is in progress this flask is placed in the middle of the canoe and a piece of new cord is wound round it several times. The purpose of this ritual cord, which is plaited from a particular liana (*sen phanh*) especially for the fishing, is to hamper the *pa boeuk* once it is caught. The fact is that they do not kill the *pa boeuk*, they pass a cord through its mouth and out again by the gills, tying the head tight to the tail so that the fish cannot make the slightest movement.

When the fishermen have been checked and the alcohol has been distributed the fishing is still not pronounced open. First the evening and then the night is spent in eating and drinking and playing and smoking, and it is only at about three in the morning, just as the moon disappears behind a certain mountain, that a blow of a gong gives the fishermen the signal to lower their nets into the water. The moon is always there and it always disappears behind the same mountain at the same moment, for the date of the fishing expedition has been settled in accordance with the Laotian months which are lunar months. A Laotian told me that when he was young and lived in Vientiane his parents used always to wake him on the night of the 13th day, at the hour when the moon disappeared behind the mountain of the Ang, so that he might hear the sound made by the doors of the caves when the spirit opens them to let the *pa boeuk* out.

They fish throughout the 13th, 14th and 15th days, and then they go down again to Vientiane. Because there is so much ceremonial and because so many people travel for the occasion, the fishing of *pa boeuk* has become a great annual festival and all the inhabitants of the region gather for it. The people of Laos have few opportunities for travel. In the old days they used to come from afar, punting upstream in their canoes for whole days at a time. Some of them used even to get underway a fortnight in

advance and visit the region to cut the straw and the bamboos for their huts. Others took advantage of the occasion to bring with them and sell the products of their fields.

THE ANG FESTIVITIES

On reaching Ban-Ang that year on the 12th day at about four in the afternoon, I found the camps already installed on the sandbank that joins the two shores of the Mekong, the Laotian and the Siamese. When the *pa boeuk* fishing is in progress the frontier disappears and the Laotians from both sides join forces. The larger group is that from the Laotian shore. With the little stalls which the tradesmen have set up in a row on either side, there is already a suggestion of a street: there are restaurant-keepers, there are traders in foodstuffs, in sweetmeats and in fruit. The « Chief of the Waters » Mandarin, the militia, a *laseng*, they too have all made themselves straw huts where they can spend the four or five days that the fishing lasts. The fishermen are all together in little encampments, often three fishing-canoes together; roofed over with the canoes which they have brought to the beach and fixed on a few stakes, they have a comfortable shelter. Others are camping on bamboo rafts. The *pa boeuk* nets are stretched in the vicinity, white and well-washed; the ritual cords lie close to them. Everyone is busy with the last preparations, making fast the stones with which they weight their nets.

As soon as the fishermen arrive in the morning they wash their canoes; they sink them keel upwards at the edge of the river; fore and aft little bunches of flowers are fixed with white thread as an offering to the spirit of each of them.

At the farthest point of the sandbank stands a little shrine: a platform set on two stakes and sheltered under a roof with a double ridge, the whole of bamboo. Before the fishing starts the spirit of the village, *Phi Ang*, has been invited to come down to the sandbank and to spend the three days there; a camp shrine has accordingly been set up for him and on it the fishermen have laid coco-nuts, bananas, flowers, and other offerings. The first of the fishermen to take a *pa boeuk* will come and sacrifice it before this shrine and offer up the head to the spirit.

In front of the shrine, in the waters of the Mekong, a bamboo is planted that has still all its leaves at the top and which bears a bamboo star in the middle of its stem. This *taleo* is placed there by the village *Cham* (1) on the 3rd day of the 3rd month, that is, ten days before the fishing starts; it is a sign to warn canoeists

(1) The *Cham* is a sort of game-keeper; in olden days he used, they tell me, to be free of taxes and prestations, and it was he who watched over the Ang during the whole of the fishing expedition.

both from the South and North that they must not go beyond it. In the old days the interdiction was strictly observed: no one crossed the Ang any more and traffic was completely held up on the Mekong. Later it became necessary to allow the motor-canoes of the postal Services (1) to pass, and little by little this was extended to everyone. Nowadays no one pays any attention to the sign which still in theory marks the boundary between the two fishing camps.

* *

This year there are twenty-six canoes to be checked. Spirits are doled out to everyone. They have not yet introduced themselves to the *Nang thiem* (2), and the village chief is delegated to hand over to her the offerings that the Chief of the Waters has set aside for the genius. Night falls. The meal is made ready. Round the fires the young girls get busy and the lads start singing: *khenae* and violins and a can turned drum on the spur of the moment. In front of the straw hut of the Chief of the Waters a little boy starts dancing... The evening is filled to the brim with laughter and singing. Towards midnight silence falls, broken only by an occasional blow on a gong or a few belated cries of the sort Laotians utter when one of them makes a joke or says something witty.

At three o'clock in the morning the gong announces that the fishing may now begin; almost all the fishermen cast their nets into the water. At ten o'clock everyone is back indoors for a meal and a rest. Numerous are those who start fishing again at midday. At three in the afternoon the Chief of the Waters goes and calls on the *Nang thiem* in the village of Ban-Ang and begs her to consult the genius. The *Nang thiem* lives in a house no different from any other; moreover she is a woman on whom no particular duties devolve except during the *pa boeuk* fishing when she is under an obligation to inform the fishermen how many fish the genius is willing for them to catch. To become a *Nang thiem* there is no need for any preliminary initiation; all they have to do is declare themselves such (3).

The one I find this year has only been in office for three years. She is the daughter of the *Nang thiem* they used to consult at Ban-Cao-Lieu and who is now too old.

But what genius is it? There are at least two at Ban-Ang: *Phi Ang*, the genius of the village, and *Phi Pak Tham* — literally « Genius of the Cavern Mouth », no doubt because of the legend

(1) Hence no doubt the opinion so often to be met with among Laotians, that if there are no *pa boeuk* left, or at least that if few are nowadays caught, it is the fault of the motor-canoes.

(2) See above, page 166.

(3) Phenomenon of mediumistic possession as the result of a mere assertion.

that speaks of the *pa boeuk* as dwelling in the caves of the Mekong as we saw earlier. I was unable to discover by which of these two spirits it was that the *Nang thiem* was possessed; it may be by both, but in that case is it simultaneously or in turn? I may add that there can be several *Nang thiem*; when there are they get along so well together that the one who is consulted calls in the others to assist her.

The *Nang thiem* is at home, dressed in a new costume which has been given her by the Chief of the Waters and which he sent to her the moment he reached Ban-Ang. She is seated on a Laotian mattress laid out in front of a little altar; this latter, which is placed underneath the shelf bearing the genius of the house, is composed of three triangular cushions laid one on top of the other. The floor of the house is covered with matting. The Chief of the Waters with his councillor (an old *taseng* with innumerable fishing seasons behind him), a man to sound the gong, two *khene*-players and three young girls, all then enter the house and sit down some little distance from the *Nang thiem*. All the other inhabitants of the village gather round the hut and try to peer through the door and window; they are more inquisitive than respectful.

The *Nang thiem* then kneels down in front of the altar and the first thing she does is to burst into tears. Then she rises to her feet and dresses herself: a violet-coloured *sampol*, red caraco, and a white cotton sash covered with little violet-coloured flowers. The Chief of the Waters hands the offerings over to her and she lays them on the altar. She arranges little wax candles round the edge of the trays that hold the offerings; these trays are plain plaited baskets, except one of them which is an enamel basin. Pressed hard against the edge, the soft wax sticks to it and the candle remains fixed. The offering-up consists in lifting these trays and describing a few circles with them on the altar. They are handed to the *Nang thiem* from the right, and she lays them aside to her left.

When the offering-up is over, the *Nang thiem* sits down and turns round, facing the room. She takes a quid, has a drink from the spout of a kettle, and begins at last to speak: the genius is displeased, so she says, because the fishing was started without their having come to see him the day before. The Chief of the Waters answers that as soon as he arrived he had the offerings brought her through the intermediary of the village chief. To this she replies that the genius is displeased because last year the Chief of the Waters promised to build him a little temple if he caught a *pa boeuk*; he did catch one, but the little temple has not been built. The Chief of the Waters is troubled at this and says nothing; but the old *taseng* whispers to him to answer that if they catch one this year two little temples will be put up; this he does.

† The *Nang thiem* now takes off her costume and puts on another one: a white caraco with the same sash, the same turban, and the same *sampot*, after which she kneels down once more. Fresh offerings, fresh quids, fresh libations, a little small talk of a more amiable nature; she even laughs, and ends by dancing, first in a sitting position, then upright. Next she proceeds to consult the genius: an egg has to be stood upright on the ground, resting on its broader end. It is a difficult operation; she warms it a little by passing it rapidly through the flame of a candle. She has to go on trying for quite a long time before she succeeds; at last the egg is standing upright. With her fist she then strikes the floor just beside it, and the egg falls at the first blow. She repeats this three or four times. Then she kneels down again. Fresh changing of costume (1): orange caraco, this time. Offerings, egg consultations; the same long patient efforts, the same results. The genius is obviously displeased: there will be no *pa boeuk* taken this year. The whole ceremony has lasted less than an hour.

Outside the news has spread rapidly and they give up fishing; they will wait, of course, till the last day to leave, but they will spend the time playing and having fun. The nets will not be put back into the water till next year.

PHARMACOPAEIA AND WITCHCRAFT

The place held by fishing in the social life of Laos has its corollary in that accorded to fish in the feeding, the cookery, in a word: in Laotian economy. This is not however the object of this article. An example of the place occupied by fish in pharmacopaeia and in witchcraft will show in conclusion how present fish is in all the various aspects of Laotian life.

Thus it is that we find the spiny dorsal fin of the *pa liat* being used in Laotian pharmacopaeia in cases of mumps and septic throat; they grate it and dilute it and mix it with other products such as the spurs of a wild cock, and they make it into an ointment which they apply by plastering it on to the sore place. The spine of the

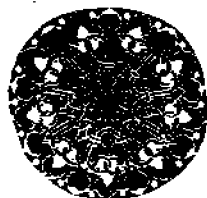
(1) I was told by one of my informers that the three costumes, the offerings and the consultation, corresponded to the visits paid to the *Nang thiem* by three distinct geni: the first was the son of *Phi Ang*, the second was *Phi Ang* himself, and the third was a genius from South of the Mekong; this the people present guessed from the fact that she spoke in his name with the accent of the inhabitants of Lower Laos.

Another informer who read these notes drew my attention to the fact that the three costumes probably corresponded to one and the same genius. A genius is in fact supposed to wear a variety of costumes, the implication being that he possesses several because they are given him by his devotees. That is, with food, one of the things that is considered as a pre-eminent suitable offering to be made to a genius for the more costumes he has the richer, in other words the more powerful, he is.

pa ja lai is used in the same preparation to replace the dorsal fin of the *pa tial*.

Laotians are familiar with the danger from the sting of this spine, which in some cases causes death. They treat the wound by applying plasters made with sugar. As soon as they catch a skate they cut off its spine; this to a Laotian is one of the most important items of witchcraft. They use it against the *Phi Pop*, an evil genius (1). The women wear the spine of a skate in their knotted hair to protect them against him. It is this dart that the sorcerers use in their divining practises.

In the New Year festivities in the month of April live fish are used as scape-goats. After having as it were unloaded onto them the full weight of the sins committed throughout the old year, *pa duk*, *pa kheng* and other pond-fish are thrown into the Mekong. In this way, on the threshold of the New Year, people free themselves of any evil spells that may have been cast on them during the foregoing year. This custom, which is said to exist also in Cambodia, has died out practically everywhere except in Luang Prabang. It is above all the rich people that keep it up; the poor people content themselves with selling them the fish to be used for this purpose.



(1) I give below the little I was able to gather about this genius :

The *Phi Pop* is an evil spirit who may take up his abode in the body of a man or woman. By extension the name *Phi Pop* is given also to the persons possessed. This form of possession by a devil makes people bad, unkind, ill, and capable of having a maleficent influence on others. The result is that when someone falls ill an attempt is made to discover whether some *Phi Pop* is not responsible. To this end a sorcerer — or a relative — pricks the sick person with the spine of a thornback skate and asks him : « *Who are you?* » If the sick person replies by giving the name of someone then this latter is suspected of being possessed by a *Phi Pop* and therefore of being the one who cast the spell.

In olden times Laotian law gave credence to such a suspicion and authorized the turning of individuals suspected of being *Phi Pop* out of the village. Such people, banned as they were from communal life, would make a common cause of their misfortune and it seems that there were once whole villages of *Phi Pops*.

Temple Drums

by

Charles ARCHAIMBAULT

In Laos, music is considered as one of the arts belonging to « P'isanuk'ukan », in other words to the god of Techniques, and musical instruments are supposed to possess a khuan, a soul one must be careful not to offend. The instruments belonging to the royal and princely orchestras, sacred receptacles, are laid aside in out-of-the-way pavilions or rooms to prevent their khuan from coming and disturbing the inhabitants, and when on great ceremonial occasions they have to be brought out, numerous rites are involved which must on no account be neglected for fear of the most serious dangers.

The percussion instruments that mark the rhythm have a place apart in the Laotian orchestras. Their khuan is a powerful one and at the beginning of a ceremony they must be presented with candles, victuals, flowers and incense, for otherwise they will make the players and the audience delirious. In Southern Laos at the Fire-works Festival (boun Bang Fay (1)), the big Kong Seng (assembly drums) with their covering of red cloth, are dedicated to the guardian spirits of the village. The Master of Ritual smears yoke of egg over the skins stretched taut, then soaks them in alcohol. If these offerings of egg and spirits were omitted, if the Kong Seng skins were allowed to remain dry and crackled, then drought — so they say — would parch the young rice-plants.

Among percussion instruments a special place must be accorded to Kong Vat, the fat drums that hang like goatskin bottles under a small pavilion called a Ho Kong by the entrance to the Wats. In the Luang Prabang region their manufacture and the pulling them in place used to be the occasion of numerous rites. They are described in one of the old manuscripts in the Royal Library (2).

(1) See below, *Religious Holidays*, p. 272.

(2) This manuscript was given us by Chan Si Sup'an of the village of Ban P'an-Luang. It had been bequeathed him by his father, Chan Ku P'eng, of the same village. The Royal Library has had a copy made of this text. According to our informers, all the rites described died out, at any rate in the Luang Prabang region, some fifteen years ago.

According to the text not just any tree could be used for making drums. The species must be chosen with the greatest care :

« Take teak-wood and the drum will be worth a precious stone.
Take *Mai du* and the drum will be as rare as any diamond ».

But the choosing of the wood was not enough in itself ; the drum-maker must be familiar with the list of the lucky and unlucky months :

« The first month is lucky. Beat a drum that was made in this month and the villagers shall live in peace.

« The second month is lucky. Beat a drum that was made in this month and all your enemies will be overcome.

« If you beat a drum that was made in the third month fire will break out in the village.

« If you beat a drum that was made in the fourth month wealth will come flowing in.

« Beating a drum made in the fifth month will draw down punishment at the hands of important people.

« Beat a drum made in the sixth month and your children will be remarkable, your wife devoted.

« The seventh month is unlucky.

« A drum that was made in the eighth month will be productive of herds of oxen and buffaloes.

« A drum that was made in the ninth month will bring riches pouring in... »

In making a drum, moreover, certain precautions recommended by the Ancients must be taken into account :

« A drum whose diameter measures 3 *kams* (1) and whose height is 2 *kams* is called *S'aya Mangk'ala* (Victory-Happiness). Such a drum is lucky.

« If you beat a drum whose diameter measures 4 *kams* and which is 4 *kams* high you will be loved by the people...

« A drum whose diameter measures 8 *kams* and whose height is 8 *kams* is called *Uttamo* (« The Supreme »). It is a perfect drum.

« A drum whose diameter measures 7 *kams* is maleficent. It brings punishment in its train. The same is true of a drum whose diameter is 1 *kam* and whose length is 10 *kams*. Every time it is beaten punishment will follow. »

The beneficent or maleficent nature of a drum could be calculated mathematically (2) :

« Measure the diameter of a drum with the help of a bamboo stick, then divide the resulting length into eight equal parts.

(1) A unit of length that is equal to four finger breadths when the hand is closed.

(2) The hand-books on building connect their ritual techniques with mathematical calculations :

« In building a house, add together the ages of the owner and his wife and divide the

Taking one of these as your unit, measure the height of the drum. Multiply the number obtained by 3 and then divide the result by 8.

« If the remaining number is 1 then the drum's name is *Mangk'ala P'eri* (« Drum of Happiness »).

« If the remaining number is 2 the drum is called *Winat P'eri* (« the Drum of Ruin »), it is harmful.

« If the remaining number is 3 then the drum's name is *S'aya P'eri* (« Drum of Victory »), it is beneficent.

« If the remaining number is 4 the drum is called *P'anyat P'eri* (« Drum of Sickness »), it is harmful.

« If the remaining number is 5 it is the Drum of Felicity, it is beneficent.

« If 6 remains it is the Drum of Ruin, it is harmful.

« If 7 remains it is the Drum of Victory.

« If nothing remains the drum is harmful, its name is *Morana P'eri* (« Drum of Death »).

The text adds that all harmful drums must be thrown into the water immediately.

. . .

When the log of wood had been hollowed out they would paste a piece of paper inside with a magic formula written on it in Pāli and addressed to the various genii and mythological animals, such as the bird Karawik. The drum-maker would then pierce little holes in the skin and in the wood, at regular intervals, then he would stretch the skin by means of strings and would pronounce three times :

« Om! May good luck rise from out the depths and remain flush! May the branch (the divining-branch which the Hora breaks when foretelling marriages) guide the young girls to their husbands! May the old people remain peacefully at home ! »

At either end of the drum they would then paste other gāthas. These magic formulae invoke the Devata, begging them in their goodness to make certain that the leather and the wood adhere perfectly. The only thing that then remained to be done was to fasten the skin to the body of the drum by means of small wooden pegs and to loosen the strings that do the stretching.

While this delicate operation was in progress the drum-maker had to stand by his drum a wide bowl containing twelve cornels made

result by eight. If nothing remains then do not undertake any construction at all, for if you were to build a house it would bear the name of « House that revolves » and such a dwelling would be harmful.

« If one remains, then be sure not to build for this house would bear the name of « house that is crooked »...

« If two remains it is the « house of the nabob » ; build this dwelling for it will be beneficent... »

of betel leaves, an areca-nut ligature, a packet of salt, a white scarf and a black scarf, ginger and spirils and also three eggs laid by a black hen (1). This bowl was dedicated to the soul of the drum, the *khuan* that would spring into being automatically like a sort of epiphenomenon as soon as the last peg was in place.

When all the pegs were in and the skin had been sprinkled with water drawn at day-break, « before the ravens wake » (2), the drum was finished at last. All that remained to be done was to carry it in great state to the Wat.

Dressed in their richest attire, two old men of the village walked at the head of the procession, carrying the precious drum. When they reached the Ho Kong they had to stop at the foot of the staircase to answer the questions asked them by one of the leading men of the village who stood guard on the threshold of the pavilion, sabre or cutlass in hand:

« What is your purpose in coming here? Are you intentions benevolent or malevolent? If you come seeking to do us harm we shall strike out; if you come with hostile intent we shall kill you with this cutlass and this sharp-edged axe! »

One of the bearers speaks in the name of the drum, saying:

« Brother, I come with the purpose of doing good, I come to bring prosperity to the chief of the Wat and to avert all illness and sorrow from your door. Sempiternel, my sound rings out harmoniously. The King of the demigods, as well as all humans and divinities, the Yak, the Gandharva (3), the Naga and the Garuda, hear it with pleasure. Joyfully they bow down before me and offer me flowers. Brother, I am the King of Precious Drums, I come to bring prosperity and ward off all danger... My purpose is benevolent, relinquish then cutlass and sharp-edged axe! »

The sabre-bearer would then declare:

« If that is how it is we shall admit you into this temple. Spread religion and prosperity throughout the land! » *and he would step aside, leaving the entrance to the pavilion clear for the two notabilities.*

(1) The text mentions only « three eggs laid by a black hen with black legs ».

We give the various items contained in the dish as they are enumerated in Chan Si Sop'an's commentary.

(2) The text simply says « with water that has not been freshly drawn ». Our informant tells us that the reference is to *Nam Kon Ka*, that is to say water that has been drawn before the hour at which the ravens go and drink. According to Laotians water that has been sullied by crows is unfit for ritual aspersions. In the region of Luang Prabang *Nam Kon Ka* is used in particular for sprinkling over the rice-stacks before threshing.

(3) The *Gandharvas* are demigods which according to the Brahmanical and Buddhist texts dwell in the air or in the depths of the waters. In Buddhist mythology they appear as the protectors of procreation and as fervent musicians. They constitute the customary escort for one of the four great Kings of the Universe.

Inside the Ho Kong, in front of the drum and of a large dish containing candles and bowls of Sompoi water, some monks were sitting. After lighting the candles they would arrange a long cotton thread right round the drum with one of its ends resting in the dish. Holding the other end in their hands, the monks would recite the Buddhist prayer of the Sut Mongk'on and then return to the Wat while the notabilities proceeded to perform the rite of the Baci (1). They laid beside the drum three outfits for tobacco-chewing and a large tray containing bananas and sweetmeats. Above this tray there rose a silver dish full of paddy, of rice-balls in place of eggs, and of Som Sun flowers and leaves. At this point one of the old men lighted the two long candles that rose above the tray of the Baci, and recited:

« Prosperity! Health! This day is a lucky day, it is the day of good-fortune! Unanimously do we invite the precious Drum to enter the precincts of the temple. In view of its fame and its beauty, its title of King of the Drums is not a usurped one. It may remain here permanently as master of the premises. We implore its aid: may glory and good-luck come our way!... and may we live a thousand years! The sound of this Drum will penetrate into the Kingdom of Brahma and with joy will Indra and his followers bow down when they hear its harmonious tones... Thanks to the sound of this precious Drum, religion will light up the World of the Nāgas and all the lands that stretch as far as the Four Orientals... We ask of it that riches now may be granted us and mountains of diamonds. Thanks to its supernatural power, may all our wishes come true!... »

The reciter then tied cotton threads to either end of the drum and they afterwards hung it up in the Ho Kong.

Throbbing in time to the various phases of religious life, announcing to the monks that their meal-time had come round again, summoning the faithful to a sermon on public holidays, the « King of the Town of Sandal-wood » (2) regulated the peasants' life by that of the Wat. By reminding each of the respect due to the Precepts, it accorded to all, if not prosperity and wealth then at least a quiet mind.

(1) See above, p. 128.

(2) The drum had several surnames. Before the last peg was put in place it was called « *The Lion without jaws* » or « *The Nāga without head* ». When it was quite ready it went by the name of « *King of the Town of Sandalwood* ».

People's Names

by

Thao Nhouy ABHAY

Civil status only came into existence in Laos a little over twelve years ago. It was on July 28th, 1943, by a Decree of the Governor General of Indochina, that it was instituted. On the same day a second Decree rendered this reform complete by making the use of surnames compulsory from January 1st, 1944 onwards. Before there were no such things as surnames. « Christian » names also were unknown, at any rate in the sense in which they are used in Europe. Actually the names that people were given at birth, although no precise rules were observed, were very few in number. Thousands of people were called Red, Black, Stone, Gold, or Palm-tree. Some people had several names but until 1943 no child had ever been given the same name as his father. That being so several people could have the same name, so that it was really rather by a sort of first name -- corresponding in France to the Johns, Peters, and James's, or other saints in the calendar among which people are free to choose -- that each individual was known. It is easy to imagine to what confusion this was apt to lead. It was, in fact, impossible to distinguish between two people whose names were the same. If, however, it were absolutely necessary to do so then one added on to the person's name that of his child, and distinguished Mr. Red, father of Lion, from Mr. Red, father of Palm-tree. On other occasions the wife's name was tacked on to her husband's and vice versa. In the case of bachelors the problem remained unsolved.

TITLE-FIRST NAMES

There was another custom which did, however, enable one to avoid mixing up two people whose names were the same. I refer to what we might call a « title-first name », a name which served to specify the origin or social rank of the person indicated. These first names were:

For men:

Chao (sometimes *Sulhu* in the spoken tongue) and, in Champasak, *Agna*, used only for princes and noblemen ;

Thao, for mandarins or sons of mandarins;

Nai, or the disparaging *Bak*, for people of low estate. These latter — but never noblemen — would also prefix their names with titles recalling the rank they had reached in the Wats: *Nieng*, for former monks of lesser degree, *Thit*, for those who had been full-fledged monks, or again *Chane*, *Chane Xa*, *Chane Khu*, *Chane Khu Lak Kham*, according as they had been *Somdet*, *Xa*, *Khu*, or *Lakkham*. And finally, those students of Pāli who had obtained a diploma had a right to the title of *Mahā*.

For women:

Chao, *Agna*, or *Nang*, for princesses who were the wives or daughters of mandarins;

Mom, for girls of the lower class who were married to mandarins or to foreigners of corresponding social rank;

Sao, or the disparaging *Y* for girls of low estate.

The « title-first name » is sadly fallen from its former splendour. The extreme courtesy of the Laotians has led in recent years to the gratifying of all State employees with the title of *Agna*. It is, after all, a custom to which one cannot take exception. It gives pleasure to a great many people and does harm to none.

DIGNITIES AND GRADES IN MANDARIN STATUS

In the former Kingdom of Luang Prabang the five highest traditional dignities were recognized by the Franco-Laotian Treaty of August 29th, 1941: *Chao Maha Upahal*, *Chao Ratsavong*, *Chao Ratsabul*, *Chao Ratsamphamthavong*, and *Chao Ratsapakhinai*. Those princes who had been appointed head of a department could be raised to the dignity of *Chao Krom*.

As regard the various grades of mandarin status, they were conferred by the King in the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, and by the *Résident Supérieur* in the provinces under the French direct administration. Since Laos has obtained her independence it is the King, and the King only, by virtue of Article 15 of the Constitution of the Kingdom, who confers the titles of the mandarinates.

Children of mandarins, as also those people of modest condition whose merit the King wishes to reward, may receive the mandarin titles enumerated below in decreasing order of importance: *Chao Phagna Luang*, *Chao Phagna*, *Phagna*, *Phya*, *Sen* and *Mun*.

These various titles are usually followed by an appellation which takes into account the owner's profession and even his character and which by completely eliminating the person's original name. For instance, Mr. Kham, if in the course of his career he rises from simple secretary to the rank of *Chao muong*

and then accedes to ministerial status, will be called first *Phia Kanaraj*, then *Phagna Sisong San*, and finally *Chao Phagna Khamthongphet*.

SIGNIFICATION OF NAMES

The names of persons have as often as not no particular signification at all. This statement holds good especially in the case of the surnames which became compulsory for every family under the Decree of July 28th, 1943. Children on the other hand are often called by pet names of the sort given to babies by mothers all the world over. Names of this sort are obviously not of an original nature. We may mention from among a great many others: *Bak Ke* or *Bak Noi* (« The Little One »), *Bak Kham* (« Gold »), *Bak Deng* (« the Red One »), etc... But it may also come about that some children are given unflattering and even coarse names: *Bak Men* (« Bad-smelling »), *Bak Ling* (« the Monkey »), etc... With the result that a great many men already in their prime of life are afflicted with names that were given them in childhood to avert evil genii but whose meaning is a crude challenge to good-breeding.

It is true that this evil is not without a remedy for the same man in the course of his life may be given several quite different names in succession, the changes taking place more especially when he comes of age or has had a serious illness.

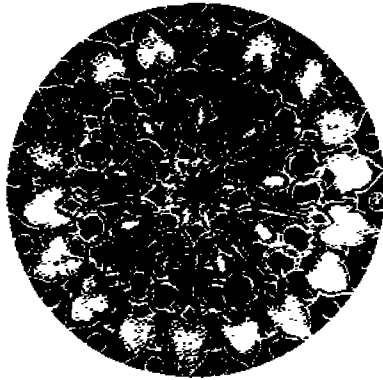
And finally, in Laos as elsewhere, love and poetry never lose their prerogatives. How many names have flowers, or perfumes, or colours, or rare metals, or some precious essence for their origin. There are families in which you still find names that are assonant or that rhyme with each other: *Chuy*, *Ouy* and *Phuy*; or again: *Phimphone*, *Chansone*, *Khamlone*.

PATRONYMIC NAMES

Since 1943 it is compulsory for every citizen to have a family name over and above his personal name. This family name was determined at first by the name of the oldest male member of the family in the direct line of ascent who was alive on January 1st, 1944. As even this name could give rise to confusion a second one is added to it so as to avoid homonymy, and sometimes even a third, in accordance with the rules laid down by the Decree. The proper name — or, let us say, the first name — precedes the family name. And finally, everyone continues to wear the appellation belonging to his rank, his function, or his social status, but these titles are not part and parcel of the person's name.

These provisions are still in force. But applied as they are with an equal degree of freedom and fantasy, they have given rise to a most astonishing crop of surnames. Pāli or Sanskrit in

their general style, and which are made up of three, four, or even as many as five syllables. It matters little, when all is said and done. The 1943 Decree has been fortunate in its results and it is now possible to find one's way about among the multitude of *Khams*, *Phengs*, and *Phanhs*. There is no denying that in village and in private life the old habits persist and people do as a rule hail each other by the old-fashioned first names. But the fact remains that the adopting of the patronymic name, by simplifying the task of the registrar's office, has rendered a very great service to the administration as well as to the courts of justice. It will some day be possible, thanks to this wise measure, to write the history of Laos' two hundred families.



Childhood in Laos

by

Princess SOUVANNA PHOUMA,

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Until within the last few years the children of Laos were very happy because completely free, but they were also very much left to themselves.

Not a single festivity is set aside for them by Laotian tradition. The little Vietnamese and the little Chinese child have their day, the Children's Festival, which is to some extent a national holiday; in France the little ones have Christmas, not to mention All Fools' Day, Easter eggs, birthday candles and so on; for the children of Laos there is nothing, not even birthday celebrations. They take part in the young people's enjoyment when they drink and sing at the bouns they luck into the tit-bits and the meals that are prepared by their mother or by the whole family with a view to obtaining the protection of the spirits. They may take part in everything, but there is not a particular day specially set aside for them. However, since 1942, following the example of other countries, at the time of the Laotian New Year a distribution of toys for the small children has been started in all the educational centres.

* *

Left to his own devices, loved and yet somehow neglected, the Laotian child goes or doesn't go to school, and if he goes he does what he likes there. There is no pressure exerted by his family to encourage him to work. His parents and his country provide him with the possibility of education; it is up to him to take or not to take advantage of it. In Laos there is nothing to compare with the supervision that Vietnamese, Chinese and French families exercise over their children's progress. It is true that customs have evolved through the contact with the West. There are parents who give thought to the future of their children, but how few there are who really make it their business that there should be some connection

between the child's possibilities and its results or that a rational choice be made between the various possibilities of orientation.

At an age when a small French child finds himself the object of a whole family's attention and is constantly spoken to, the little Laotian is carried about by young servants to whom his development is a matter of complete indifference. Where other children have toys of every colour for building, for developing their attention and their observation, the child of Laos potters about in the gardens empty-handed. There is not a book in his mother-tongue — and few enough French books, and only for those who go to the French schools — to waste away his leisure hours. He grows up with his mind unformed except during school-hours, which does not tend to make things easier for his masters. But nature he has, and the local traditions, the religious and family festivities — and in such an environment it is especially his artistic sense that develops.

He has a very sense of colour. A child coming to the children's classes without any sort of previous formation does at least know the names often composed of comparatives, by which the various shades are known: « Ash-coloured » for grey, « sky tint » for blue, « young banana-leaf colour » for a tender green. It is a first education in poetry which they acquire from hearing the grown-ups make use of all these colours when they are weaving sins and sampots.

The constant leisure enjoyed by the children in the heart of adult life gives them a certain sense of observation. It is noticeable if one of them happens to do a drawing. It comes fairly easily to him to reproduce movement. He prefers living creatures as models to inanimate objects because his life is spent with the former rather than with the latter.

* .

The children of Laos are above all musical. The fact is that as a people they live on music from their earliest infancy. What little girl has not sung her baby brother to sleep with:

« Sleep quickly sleep, shut your eyes up quick,
If baby brother (or baby sister)
Doesn't close his eyes
The gecko will come and eat them. »

or:

« Sleep my little one,
Sleep while mummy's away
Fetching us fish, etc... »

The rhythm is a slow one, the music is simple and harmonious, and more than one European has been surprised at the sweetness of these songs which are always improvised.

The most insignificant children's game, the dream of a moment, they are all pretexts for songs.

On the swing you get a succession of long-drawn syllables and easy-flowing rhymes in time to the swinging to and fro of a big plank hanging from solid cords fastened to either end. Three or four children sit astride on this plank singing:

« On the swing,
Of a plank 'tis made,
Fourteenth moon,
Wood-flowers soon,
Second moon,
Kapok bloom... »

or :

« Ouesā lum
Umlum makteng
Thai Na Seng
Khao ma Kieo mak
Khieo mak leo
Leng ngua, leng khuai...

*(« On the swing
Round is the melon
Folk from Na Seng
Quids are chewing
When they've done
Tie up the oxen
Tie up the buffaloes »)*

Khuai sa yeu.
Au khuai ton mi
Sik khon khi
La noi kot eo
Khao seo seo
Khao pay kep ung
Ung bo hong
Phay khong
Pung dang

*(« O buffaloes
Buffaloes in the « jacquier »
Jerk up your behind (1)
The little one clings round your waist
They are noisy
They go frog-hunting
The frogs keep silent
Empty-handed »)*

(1) When a woman carries her child on her back by means of a strip of material, she gives a sudden jerk with her back so as to make the child rest a little higher every time he has slipped down somewhat too low. Hence the expression "to jerk up your behind".

All the children's songs are incoherent and are made up rather of onomatopoeiæ and rhythm than of music. They remind one of those little English poems that are easier to remember by their rhymes than by their meaning.

A proof of the musical ability of the Laotians is given by the ease with which they can reproduce an air they have heard only once or twice at the cinema or on the wireless. Western airs whose harmony they appreciate and which they play, without ever having studied music, on the mouth-organ, the accordion, and even on the violin. Without going the length of attributing musical genius to them, one cannot but marvel to find such aptitudes in a people many consider to be « primitive », whereas so many others who consider themselves as « civilized people » possess no such gifts.

Let us hope that some day a school of applied arts, music lessons and schools of music will develop these spontaneous qualities along rational lines.



The Game of Phay-Tong ⁽¹⁾

by

KATAY D. SASORITH

Card players are often said to be rude people with whom it is difficult to get along, people even whose behaviour is apt to be brutal. Not every card game ends in a brawl, but still it not infrequently happens that a player disappointed in his hopes blames his partner for the mistakes he made in terms wholly unrelated to courtesy. *Phay-long*, the game that is popular all over Laos, differs in this from other games for it is played in a curiously serene atmosphere. It gives rise only to the joyful shouts of « *Song! song!* » from the lucky winner when he has collected all the cards he requires for winning. Apart from this, few gatherings are as quiet and discreet as a gathering of *phay-long* players.

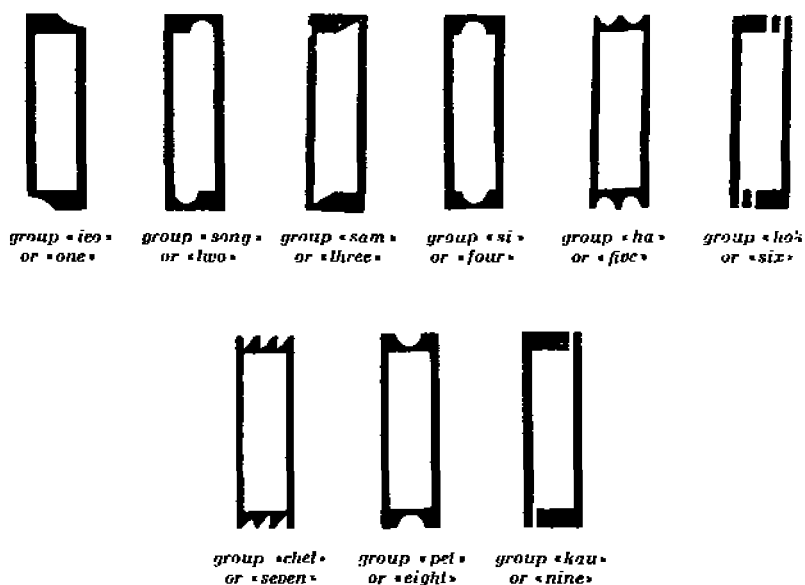
I am wrong in saying « he » in referring to the players. Women are especially prone to this game in which elegance and accuracy are the rule. By adding to these qualities their own native grace they turn *phay-long* into a game we might qualify as aristocratic if it were not so popular in all classes of society, both in town and country. If I may use a comparison to make my meaning clear, I would say that *phay-long* is to certain other games (that shall be nameless for fear of incurring the fury of their adepts) rather what tennis is to rugby. Six people at most may take part in it. They sit in a ring on a mat with 11 cards in their hands and the players of both sexes keep so still that the uninitiate often compare them to praying monks (*yeng khanlalabal*). Or else, especially of beginners who hold their cards in a fan (the others give them one look and then close their hands for fear of indiscreet glances) they say they are gazing at themselves in a looking-glass (*yeng ven*).

Popular all over Laos, *phay-long* is equally in favour in Thailand where it goes by the name of *phay-thai*. Siamese women, like Laotian women, are passionately fond of it and no young men or girls could claim to be « up to date » if they were ignorant of the complicated rules of *phay-thai*.

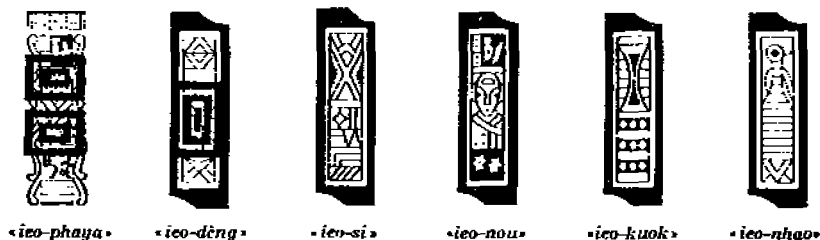
(1) An abridged version of the booklet referred to in *fine*.

THE CARDS

Phay-long is played with 120 rectangular cards, like the Chinese or Vietnamese cards of the same sort. They fall into nine groups numbered from one to nine. There is therefore the group *ieo* (one), the group *song* (two), and then in succession the groups *sam* (three), *si* (four), *ha* (five), *hok* (six), *chel* (seven), *pet* (eight), *kau* (nine). Each group is composed of 3 series except group *ieo* which has six. And each series is composed of 4 cards of the same pattern. All the cards belonging to the same group are recognizable by their having the same form of edging.



Here first of all are the six series of group *ieo*, or «one»:



Now come the 3 series of the eight other groups:

Group *song*, or two:



• song-khon •



• song-khong •



• song-la •

Group *sam*, or three:



• sam-khon •



• sam-nok •



• sam-la •

Group *si*, or four:



• si-khon •



• si-so •



• si-mak-khua •

Group *ha*, or five:



• ha-khon •



• ha-nok •



• ha-mo •

Group *hok* or six.



«*hok-khon*»



«*hok-so*»



«*hok-ta*»

Group *chei* or seven:



«*chei-khon*»



«*chei-nok*»



«*chei-phat*»

Group *pei* or eight:



«*pei-khon*»



«*pei-so*»



«*pei-ta*»

Group *kau* or nine:



«*kau-khon*»



«*kau-deng*»



«*kau-chan*»

Within one and the same group every card — or more exactly every series — has its own particular name and, of course, its own distinct pattern. Thus the first group contains the six following

series: *ieo-phaya*, *ieo-deng*, *ieo-si*, *ieo-nu*, *ieo-kuok* and *ieo-nhao*. In the second group we have the three series: *song-khon*, *song-kong* and *song-la*. The third group series are: *sam-khon*, *sam-nok*, and *sam-la*. And similarly in the fourth group we have: *si-khon*, *si-so*, and *si-mak-khua*; in the fifth group: *ha-khon*, *ha-nok* and *ha-mo*; in the sixth group: *hok-khon*, *hok-so* and *hok-la*; in the seventh group: *chet-khon*, *chet-nok* and *chet-phat*; in the eight group: *pet-khon*, *pet-so* and *pet-la*; and finally, in the ninth group: *kau-khon*, *kau-deng* and *kau-chan*.

It obviously requires a good deal of practise to learn by heart these thirty names and the patterns that correspond to them. The reader will already have observed that the first series of each group (excepting the first) is called *khon* (man). You also frequently find the word *nok* (bird) and *la* (eyes). But this is a rule that is subject to exceptions. Other cards have been given rather curious names. Some of these have no meaning at all. Others, although they do mean something, are not the less fantastic for that, as will be seen from the following straight-forward enumeration: *Phaya* (*ieo-phaya*) a high-up title of the mandarinale, « grand-dee »; *Deng* (*ieo-deng*) « red »; *Nu* (*ieo-nu*) « rat or mouse »; *Nhao* (*ieo-nhao*) « long »; *mak-khua* (*si-mak-khua*) « tomato, egg-fruit »; *Mo* (*ha-mo*) « melon »; and finally the term *chan* (*kau-chan*) stands for a variety of flowers that is very common in Laos. For those who are interested in botany I may mention that the three species of flowers grouped together under this common title are endowed in serious works with the respective names of *diospyros decandra*, *polygonum persicaria* and *myristica aromatica*. But the knowledge of these Latin names, interesting though they may be, is not indispensable to the practise of *phay-long* nor is it even of any appreciable advantage. It is open to doubt that this game dates back before Virgil and Cicero; but there is very little doubt at all that *chan* existed long before it was given its scientific label.

I must point out one other exception. I mentioned that all the cards belonging to the same group (that is, 24 for the first group and 12 for each of the others) are recognizable by their having the same form of edging. This is not true of the *ieo-phaya* whose edging is different from that which distinguishes the other series of the first group. In Pakse in the old days irreverent players used to refer to this card under the name of « Bertron », which apparently was the surname of an excellent man whose corpulence was not unconnected with the unusual dimensions of the pattern peculiar to *ieo-phaya*.

DEALING

The number of players, as I said, must not be more than six. When the cards have been shuffled the player whose turn it is to

deal distributes them from left to right, starting with himself. It is customary to deal two rounds: six cards for each player in the first round, and five cards in the second. The player who dealt, and he only, will then keep for himself a sixth card since he must have twelve whereas the other players only have eleven. The undealt cards are then laid down in the middle of the players, face downward.

At the end of each game the winner is allowed the advantage of dealing. His left-hand neighbour is responsible for preparing the cards. This job is considered as a penalty. The fact is that in the course of the game the cards are handed round from left to right; this being so the player on the winner's left is considered to be responsible for the latter's having won. He was unequal to the task of preventing his doing so by handing him cards unlikely to improve his hand. In spite of being considered a penalty, the task of the player who has to prepare the cards may prove to have certain advantages. It gives him an idea of the order in which the cards are arranged and of the make-up of the « neutral » heap of cards that were not dealt out at the beginning of the game. This knowledge is a considerable advantage throughout the rest of the game.

If by an error a player has had more than 11 cards dealt him he is obliged to draw attention to the fact and to put the extra cards back in the centre. If he does not do so he incurs the sanction of *kin-kum-tua*. If the dealer himself has more than 12 cards he also must declare them and the superfluous cards will be taken from him before the game starts, the choice being made by another of the players. If he fails to do so he too will incur the aforesaid sanction. But if several cards have been dealt out, over and above the correct number, then any one of the players may require that the dealer forfeit his right to deal; he is then declared *lok-chaomuong* in other words as having forfeited his title of *chaomuong*. The « governor » fallen from power thus finds himself obliged to prepare the cards, for it is his right-hand neighbour who takes over the dealing.

THE GAME

When the dealing is over the player who dealt has 12 cards in his hand; each of the others players has 11 cards. In the centre of the ring of players the undealt or « neutral » cards have been laid. The dealer starts the game by handing one of his 12 cards to his right-hand neighbour. The latter may then choose between the card offered by his neighbour and the first of the neutral cards. Three situations may then arise:

- (1) the player takes the card his left-hand neighbour offers him and passes one of his own cards to his right-hand neighbour;
- (2) the player does not take the card he is offered; instead of

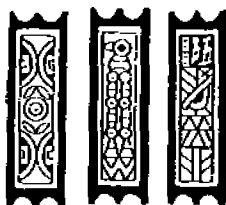
this he takes the top neutral card and passes one of his own cards to his right-hand neighbour;

(3) the player wants neither his left-hand neighbour's card nor the top neutral card and he hands the latter card straight on to his right-hand neighbour.

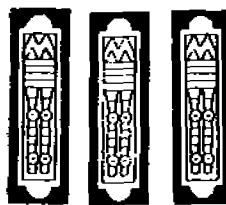
And the handing on of the cards, always from left to right goes on this way until a player turns up out of the neutral pack the card he needs to complete one of the groups of the sort that can make him win.

TONG AND SONG

There are two ways of winning: the *tong* way and the *song* way. A *song* victory is the most sought after because it is the more advantageous. A *song* is actually worth, as a rule, five *tongs*, so that the player who succeeds in collecting 2 or 3 *tongs* only wins $\frac{2}{5}$ or $\frac{3}{5}$ of what a *song* would bring in. In order to make these two ways of winning clear it is necessary first to define some of the terms used in the game. When three cards of the same group are got together it is called a *sam-sien*; a *tong* is the name for a set of three cards of the same series, in other words three identical cards. Two cards of the same group form a *song-sien* and two cards of the same series a *song-sien-khu*.



a • *sam-sien* •



a • *tong* •

To win a *tong* victory you require either 2 *tongs* and 2 *sam-siens*, or 3 *tongs* and 1 *sam-sien*. But the player who succeeds in this need not necessarily bring the game to an end. He may in fact try to gain a *song* victory, which as we said earlier is much more advantageous.

Whether *song* or *tong* the victory is obtained with the 12th card; it changes the last *song-sien* into a *sam-sien* or the *song-sien-khu* into a *tong*. A *song* may be composed of 1, 2, 3, or 4 *tongs*. Its name depends on the number of *tongs* it is made up of: *song-hua-ton*, *song-long-song*, *sam-long-song*, or *si-long-song*. The last of these is the least common; it is also the most advantageous for its owner. For the value of the *song* is added on, of course, to that of the *tong*.

Let us suppose, for example, that the value of a *tong* has been fixed at 1 piastre. The *song* will be worth 5 piastres. The winner

of the *song-hua-lon* will gain 1 *song*, that is: 5 piastres from each of the other players; but the player who has managed 4 *longs* together, in other words the *si-long-lanh* winner, will receive 1 *song* + 3 *longs* from each player, that is: 8 piastres since the first *long* is never counted, or rather, since it is already included in the *song*.

The *si-long-lanh*, which is obtained by grouping 4 *longs* together, is therefore, theoretically, the highest gain that is possible to make in a game. But there are players who manage to go even higher by deciding to play according to the rule called *thok*. If the neutral card is turned up by the player to whom it brings victory he is said to have brought off a *song-thok*, and it is often an accepted thing for the *thok* to have the effect of doubling or even trebling the *song*'s value. And finally there is another way of winning by means of the *song*; it is called the *song-si-to*. The conditions it requires are very rarely fulfilled and if we attempted to explain them it might involve us in excessively complex formulas.

SONG! SONG! SONG!

In fact, the above rules only give a sketchy idea of the game which is in reality more complicated than may be gathered from this account. For the original rules of the game have had other regulations added to them, many of which have been widely accepted, and there is nothing to prevent one from inventing others. The above will have sufficed to show that the interest of the game — and its difficulty — lies in the matter of knowing how to get rid in time of the cards played one by one's adversary, of only handing on to one's right-hand neighbour such cards as will be useless to him, and of keeping for oneself those that are able to help one to form a *long* or a *sam sien*. Both memory and perspicacity are required. But then, what pride and emotion, what joy are expressed in the cry uttered by some lady player who till then has remained silent and whose face comes to life and turns radiant at the sight of the longed-for card she at last has turned up: « *Song! song! song!* »... It is one of those words that, quite apart from its meaning, have inherent in them some incomparable, and inexplicable virtue.

The gracefulness of this game, its patrician elegance, have tempted more poets than one. Undoubtedly I should have turned to them for help in putting the final touch to this article. But I would be fearful lest my translation should prove too cruel a betrayal of the pristine beauty of the poem. Besides, is it not enough to point out that *phay-long* is possessed of this poetic vocation for it to be clear that it stands apart from all other card-games, and to endow it with a peculiarly marked quality of charm and seduction? In which, no doubt, it is strictly in keeping with the native disposition of the Laotian people.

Courts of Love and Poetry

by

THAO NHOUY ABHAY

Tourists and state officials who turn their footsteps towards Laos, scholars, or merely people with enquiring minds, who ask for information about the country, all are told about the Courts of Love. Fascinating, nostalgic expression that carries us right back to the customs of mediaeval France, to the time of *Trouvères* and *Troubadours*, of grand ladies and noble knights...

What exactly is the Court of Love in Laos?

It was and still is above all a love duet between a *phubao* (1) and a *phusao* (2).

At that happy time when Laos, with tranquil eyes, watched the hours slip past, tradition allowed that every young girl of over sixteen might work alone on the verandah in the evenings, whilst her parents slept. And whether the surroundings shone silver in the moon-light, or whether, submerged in darkness, the village yielded to its fear of malicious *Phi* (3), still the *phusao's* spinning-wheel would creak and groan and make heard its call, whilst down the paths the *phubaos* on their round would attune their lovesongs to the *khene*. (4)

Then the *phubao*, having made his choice, would go up beside his chosen one, and start making sweet overtures to her:

« In all the world there is one flower I love... »

or:

« Of all the girls in this land, not one is so dear to my heart as you... »

And the humble horse asks the clear stream for a draught of water, and the glow-worm dare not compare itself to a star...

And so it is that love-knots are tied and marriages are made in Laos. That is the first form of the Court of Love.

(1) *Phubao* = Young Laotian boy.

(2) *Phusao* = Young Laotian girl.

(3) *Phi* = Tutelary spirit.

(4) *Khene* = Laotian national instrument of music ; rather like an organ.

But Laos is a land of generous freedom, where all *phubaos* are brothers. Here it is hardly a question of excessive love; nature's flowers belong to all.

The *phubao* who climbs the ladder of the house of some *phusao* has often with him a comrade or a friend, sometimes several. And then a chivalrous contest takes place, a bandying of graceful compliments, a verbal tilting-match in which each tries to discover the young girl's true inclination — a flowery, arch conversation in which gaiety carries the day. The young girl, queen in her own house, distributes to each a kind word and a glance of her eye, and it sometimes happens that, when the rosy-fingered dawn recalls to the young men life's reality, each with regret descends once more the rickety house-ladder, carrying with him, in the depth of his heart, the secret conviction that he is the chosen one.

Then when the fine season comes and work in the rice-fields is over and the harvest in, the wealthy people organize rejoicings and the villages large-scale « *bouns* ». The young girls from the villages and round about are invited to these gatherings. And the *phubaos*, singing to the sound of their *khenes*, run after them.

And so the Court of Love grows in importance, and the duet becomes a chorus.



During the fine season which lasts, in Laos, from November till February, the blissful period when the tropical sun has become a sun of Provence, in that period when the evenings are so mild and the sky is so pure, we go walking in the Laotian paths at moon-rise. We are far from the lights of the town: far from the vibrating of the modern machines for locomotion; far from political worry and the threats of world conflagration.

Violin and *ranat* (1) thrill to the musicians' fingers; the singers are singing their love-stanzas; the young girls reply. And in the silence of nature, which here is still and serene, you will hear clamours of joy and content. The Court of Love is in full swing. Laos, happy country, where love and joy are king!

The young man:

*« I ask for news of you,
Oh young and lovely girl,
So lovely one could believe
Pra In (Indra) created you.
How are your parents,
And all your family?
Your harvests must be fine,
And food in your home plentiful? »*

(1) Xylophones. See above, p. 87.

The young girl:

*« The midge lives as it may,
From Nature's bounteous store,
But how can the white elephant
Be concerned about the bamboo tuft? »*

The young man:

*« Oh fair young girl,
Great are my merits
Which have made me know you,
You whom I love already as my eyes.
For already my heart thinks only of you.*

*Forgive me now at once,
I put my life in your hands ;
Do with me what you will,
Like a slave shall I be your servant,
Without protest, just as the feet
Obey the master who commands them. »*

The young girl:

*« Oh! the flatterer and simulator!
Feign not to fall
On an unslippery floor:
You love another,
Do not say' this me! »*

The young man:

*« O fair young girl,
Fish in the river and crabs in the field,
Fowls and ducks in the poultry-yard,
You care for all, give food to all ;
Why then with me
Do you show yourself cruel? »*

The conversation, whether sung or not, goes on in this way, punctuated by the joyous cries and clamour of their companions in good fortune. No one is in a hurry. Each dips into the repertory to fish up a flowery phrase, whilst his girl-companion, attentive or mistrustful, keeps the flickering flame of the torch alive. It sometimes happens that the young girls are at a loss, and then some old aunt or « dowager », from where they are seated behind, helps her out and saves the situation. They quote on these occasions the great poem of *Sine Xay* or the incomparable love-poems of the *Som Thi Khut* 'All my Thoughts' or the *Sut Thi Ao* 'The Object of my Desires'. Ah! if youth but knew, if age but could!...

The men and women of Laos are artists and poets. And although it is a long time since genius has graced the mind of any, yet more than one flowery verse forever sings in the heart of one and all. The leaves of the Bourbon palm upon which our poems are written may wear thin, but the treasure of hearing some old manuscript sung in one's own home remains intact. That is the best way to learn by heart for someone who cannot read.

Someone once said, and rightly, that poetry may be « felt » but « not explained ». And so I shall not attempt to explain Laotian poetry, whose versification moreover lends itself to all themes, whether lyrical, comic, epic or didactic (1). I would only like to wind up this short study, for the better understanding of our sentiments, by quoting the two first quatrains of an « adaptation » which was published many years ago by Dr Guillemet in his booklet: *On the Paths of Laos*.

*« For those our sins committed in another life
How cruel is our punishment today ;
But, for hearts deep in love, there is no distance,
And parted still, we still united are.*

*Absence lies heavy on my aching heart,
In torture's fire which burns me night and day,
Forgetful, in my pain, of very food,
Love-sickness wastes my wearied heart away ! »*

Love, of course, is the be all and the end all; but who will reproach us with that? Have not the richest strains and finest verses of poetry been inspired by those feelings since the beginning of time?

And how could one do other than speak of love in this land, that lies so close to nature, where women crown their beauty with such grace and amability?

And if, to close, I might allow myself to parody the poet Ronsard, then I would say:

*« Love, ah ! believe me, wait not for tomorrow,
Pluck, pluck life's roses whilst yet it is today. »*

(1) See below, *Versification*, p. 345.

The Code of Good Behaviour

by

Pierre S. NGINN,

President of the Laotian Literary Committee.

Nearly a century of life in common with France has left its profound mark on Laos. Its very traditions bear the stamp today of this permanent contact with the customs of the West. But it would be a mistake to believe that as a result those traditions have disappeared. Amended, mollified, they have retained their vigour and their grace. True enough, our country has its impatient « young Turks » too, who seek to speed time on its course and who would be only too glad to overthrow the old customs. So far they have failed to do away with the gestures, often so charming, of a code of good behaviour whose origin dates back to times immemorial.

In Laos as elsewhere good behaviour may be recognized by its being inoffensive to the eye. Well-bred people speak with moderation, have a regard for the rules of social hierarchy, and above all are mindful always to say « khop chai » (« thank you ») and « kho tót » (« I beg your pardon »). To give greater stress to one's gratitude one will add « Khop khun » and « khop phadet phakhun », which are in some sort a form of super-thanks. Similarly a well-bred Laotian will never omit to express his embarrassment by the words « pathan tót » or « kho aphaythôt » every time he makes a slip in speaking or passes close to some person of quality or is obliged to go first through a doorway.

It is an act of real discourtesy to touch someone's head, be he your best friend. And to hit anyone over the head with a mâk kok is to insult him in the worst possible way. To be precise, this word whose literal meaning is « olive » is suggestive of a closed fist with the middle-finger sticking out.

Another sign of bad breeding is to point an object out with one's foot. It is with one's right hand that one must show things.

Any visiting to a friend must be accompanied by a complicated ritual. And to begin with, it would be unseemly to knock at the door. A visitor who is well up in the ways of polite society will announce himself by a discreet cough. He will then come in on tip-toe, his hands clasped in the Laotian way. Courtesy requires, of

course, that one keep one's appointments punctually. Yet it is often playfully said of a person who has only a vague sense of time that he is keeping « Laotian time ». Now, the « Laotian time » in question is an hour late on the specified time. If you arrive at 9 p. m. when you were invited at 8 p. m. you are keeping Laotian time. This strange way of behaving is tending, most fortunately, to disappear.

If decent behaviour is a sign of breeding, an unseemly or unnatural comportment soon classes him unfavourably who is guilty of it. Eccentric people who wear glasses when their sight is perfectly normal, who pull their hat down to the right when the sun is shining on their left temple, women make up who lift up their sin above the level of their knees, who make up their faces and dress as though they were actresses, expose themselves to the sarcastic comments that greet ridiculous people and odd behaviour in the way they deserve. It is only fair to add that such people are fortunately very rare in Laos.

* *

With the passage of time Laotian customs have become more democratic. Nowadays important people no longer feel they lose caste by accepting the invitation of a mere nobody. And if their host organises some form of entertainment such as dancing, singing, music, or lam vong, they are not afraid to mix with the crowd and take part in the fun; like other people they sing and dance, and even make mild love to some charming phusao. It is no longer a dishonour for a mandarin to go walking in the street alone, though it used to be. The ministers of the Royal Government have discarded the suile that should, by tradition, accompany them. Indeed, those who meet them are no longer obliged, as once they were, to crouch humbly down, and it is no longer the correct thing to walk on all fours if you have to pass in front of them. Deference finds expression in gestures which remain within the bounds of a healthy simplicity without being any the less traditional for that. To show the respect he feels for an eminent person, a Laotian joins his hands together and bows slightly, without forgetting to smile; which is correct and, what is more, extremely gracious.

When one greets a person with clasped hands he must reply with the same gesture. Not to do so, or to content oneself with merely nodding, would be a sign of low breeding. In the case of an associate or an intimate friend? You accost him with a friendly: « sombay » (« good-day »), or « pai saima? » (« where are you coming from? »). Or you may greet him in the French way. But one must be careful to avoid following in the footsteps of certain loutish persons who, priding themselves on being versed in the manners of the West, thrust boldly towards you, as soon as they set eyes on you in the distance, their left hand.

And finally, to receive something from a superior a courteous Laotian will rest on his left hand the right hand he is holding out.

. . .

The same courtesy is the rule in family intercourse. A Laotian wife may sometimes be angry, as are her sisters all the world over. On such an occasion her husband must control himself and try to pacify his spouse. For according to an adage of ours, if one of the couple is « fire » then the other must be « water ». The Laotian language has a charming image to express this piece of courtesy which man and wife owe each other mutually. We call it: « Stroking the heart with a hand dipped in cool water. »

It would be a mistake to imagine Laotian men to have a sort of contempt for their wives. Doubtless old sayings advocate that « the wife must sleep with her head lower than the husband », « must go to bed after him only and must rise the first », and finally, « must not eat till he has swallowed three mouthfuls of rice ». These advices of our fathers do not signify that woman is inferior to man. It is merely a reminder to the wife that she is supposed to be obliging and gentle and render conjugal life agreeable. This is a point, moreover, on which one should not hesitate to improve upon traditions that are not always good, and the Laotian of today owes it to himself to accord his wife her true place. We must no longer see women seated on the floor when men are lolling in armchairs, nor, at a banquet, the wives grouped together and separated from their husbands.

And finally, if the old customs are to be preserved this must have as a condition that there is no confusing, as there so often is, of tradition and superstition. For in this latter domain strange practises are still rife whose disappearance would be all to the good. For example, the following taboos, from among many others :

- It is forbidden to cut the hair on a Wednesday because it is the day on which the Buddha had his own hair cut ; and for the same reason it is forbidden to wash one's hair on a Thursday ;
- forbidden to walk on all fours in a forest for this may attract tigers ;
- forbidden to eat in a reclining position lest one becomes a serpent ;
- forbidden to eat the liver and the gizzard of a chicken for that would deprive us of our intelligence ;
- forbidden to open by night a safe or a casket of jewelry or other precious objects, for it is a practise that brings poverty on the rich ;
- forbidden, finally, to married people to sleep in the same bed on the birthday of either.

Let us close this list that could go on for a long time. Our only wish in writing this article is to make people familiar with some of the characteristics of Laotian courtesy. The time has no doubt come for some of the characteristics to be modified so that foreign visitors may be spared embarrassment. But would it not be a pity if certain of those customs, which help to give Laos her smiling and gracious aspect, should be condemned to disappear? If we Laotians have to be versed in Western customs, it is also desirable for our Western friends to be ignorant of none of the customs which will be preserved from oblivion by their nobility and their charm.



Weaving

by

Pierre S. NGINN

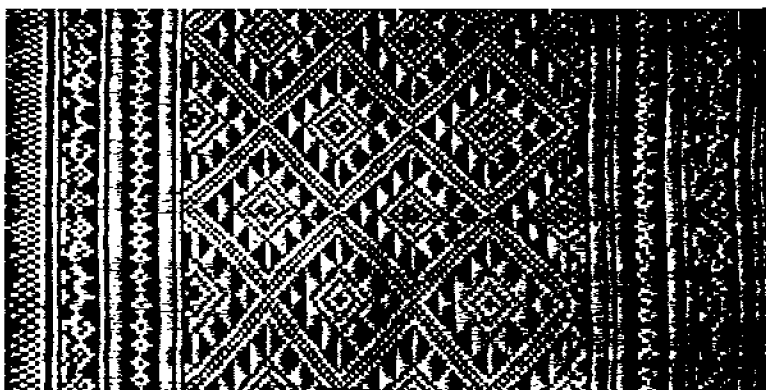
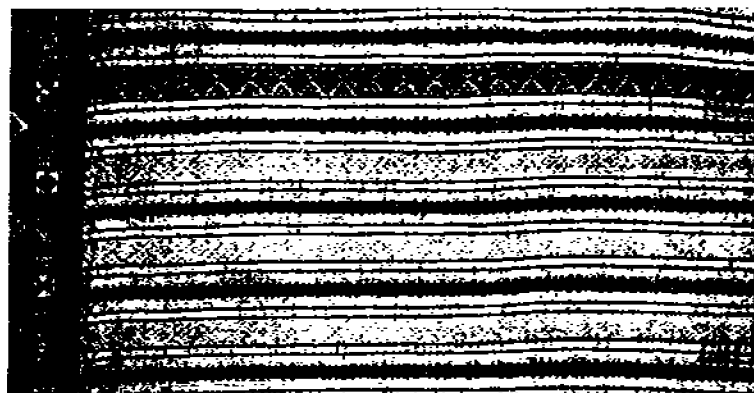
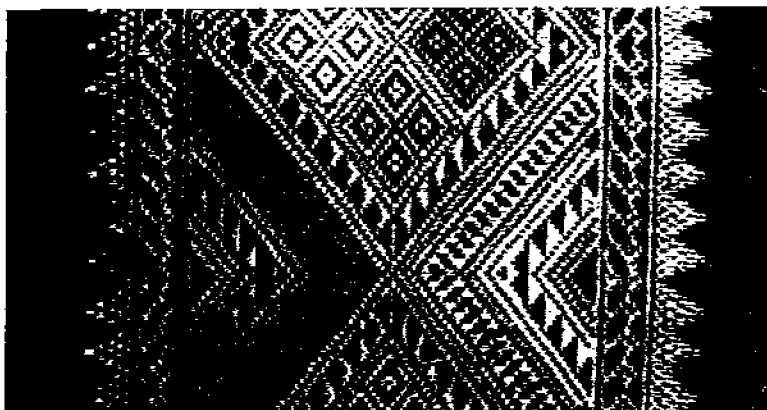
No country in the world knows better than Laos how to dress its women and young girls nobly for their daily tasks however humble. You have only to have met them clad in the *sin* on one of the dusty tracks that run alongside the tumultuous or lazy Mekong; you have only to have plucked, like some flower of love sketched, at the turn of a mountain path in Xieng Khuang or Luang Prabang, the open or saucy smile of some *phusao* draped in a bright red or emerald scarf, to understand how it is that these peasants are princesses.

Yes, princesses, for the women of Laos have made of weaving, of which they have the monopoly — no man ever sits down in front of a loom — a fine art. From her earliest childhood a little girl helps her elder sister at the spinning wheel and to prepare and dye the threads. As a *phusao* she goes on with the same tasks, sitting on her verandah and dreaming of some *phubao*, who will court her in a court of love...

First as a married woman, then as a mother, the Laotian woman carries on her task as weaver to the family, in spite of her household cares. She wants her husband to possess the finest *sampol* in the village, her sons to wear the prettiest *sarongs*, and her daughters to deck themselves out with the loveliest scarves. And at the market in the neighbouring town once every year, or to the Chinese on their way through the country districts, she will only sell, or exchange for a few knick-knacks or glass trinkets, what small surplus remains, so as to raise a little the family's standard of living. But how long an apprenticeship it requires, and how arduous is the task of preparing fine cotton and silk materials enhanced with gold and silver.

At her husband's side, often like him bare-foot, the woman of Laos goes out and sows the cotton, pell-mell along with the *ray* rice, in April when the first heavy rains begin.

In November when the nights turn chilly and the cotton has grown to more than man's height, the Mountainers have their harvest.



In the plains, on the rich alluvial soil of the Mekong, the rhythm is not the same: the cotton seeds are sown in September and the harvest brought in February.

But, here and there, it is the women that shell the cotton with the help of a *iu*, an archaic instrument composed of two wooden cylinders worked by a handle and that turn in the opposite direction. As it passes between the cylinders the cotton comes clear of its grain. On a bamboo bow whose cord the young girls pluck with their fingers till it vibrates, one long day after another, the cotton is converted into airy snow-flakes. These are prepared into little rolls which are stretched tight and drawn out little by little into an interminable thread; after winding itself round minute spools this is then wound off onto skeins with the help of a *khuang*, an instrument composed of two pieces of wood through the centre of which runs an axis with a handle.

These large skeins are put round an apparatus called a *kong* which is placed parallel to a sort of wooden drum called an *ak*. As they pass from one apparatus to another the threads are calibrated and refined and the rough surfaces smoothed out with the help of the nail or a small knife. And so at length we have the thread finished and ready to be put in place on the loom.

The loom is in the form of a parallelepiped. The threads forming the woof pass between the teeth of a comb and cross those of the horizontal web thus constituting the woven material by means of an alternating up and down movement. The double vertical cotton-comb is worked by pedals. The threads pass through the wooden comb and are fastened to the double vertical comb. At the first touch of the pedal the first series of the web-threads rises as the second descends, while the shuttle passes right through the whole width of the woof. The next touch of the pedal causes the threads to cross each other while at the same time the weaver actions the comb with her left and right hands alternatively, according to whether the shuttle is to one side or the other.

The tropical night is about to fall and the sun has sunk in a purple blaze in the middle of the waters of the Mekong. A marvellous evening to be within the precincts of a temple, where the richness of colour and the variety of the arabesques with which the *sin* and the *sampol* are decorated mingle with the thousandfold lustre of the silken scarves. The tree-tops are as though engraved against the sky. A strange charm fall upon all those present. Is the flowering Orient resurging once again, or is it simply that the sumptuous cloths restore to us the love of the women who wove them? Are they a looking-glass for their pure hearts, or do they suddenly reflect the dreaming looks of the *phusao* who bent above the looms? Or do they imperceptibly quiver in the evening breeze, remembering how soft and tender were the women's hands that made them of threads and laughter, of tears too, perhaps?

The 'Khene'-Maker

by

THAO KENE,

Member of the Laotian Literary Committee.

Like all other small craftsmen the *khene*-maker only practises his art occasionally. Most of his time is taken up by the work in the rice-fields and by fishing. At the same time, whether he be husbandman or fisherman, he is first and foremost a fervent musician, and it is to music and to the techniques associated with it that he gives up all his leisure. From earliest childhood he showed an aptitude for music and in the *bouns* the only platform that interested him was that of the *Mo Lams* and *Mo Khens* (singers and *khene*-players). One day a relation of his, grandfather, uncle, or close cousin, surprised at finding him so gifted, determined to teach him the craft of making *khenes*. The young apprentice had to offer his master a *Khan ha Khan pet* (which are bowls containing five and eight pairs of *sueis*, or small banana-leaf cornets filled with flowers and candles of yellow wax), six piastres of silver good and true, a *sin*, and a scarf. These offerings, which are made in ritual payment of the cost of apprenticeship, were intended for the spirit of the « Master craftsmen » which had, in bygone times, taught the techniques.

After a few months of apprenticeship the young man leaves his master, but he will have for him a feeling of profound gratitude ever after. As soon as he has acquired a perfect knowledge of his art he sets up a little altar in his dwelling, just over his mat. On this altar dedicated to the « masters » he will never fail, on the 7th, and 8th, days of the waxing and waning moon, to lay a modest bunch of flowers interspersed with candles. If he were to neglect this rite the « spirit of the *khene* » would be prompt to punish him by inflicting some slight illness upon him.

When he has some spare time our craftsman dives into the forest in search of *Mai hia noy*, *Mai du*, *Mai hia Khay*, and *Mai O*, the fine-stemmed bamboos some eight or ten feet high that are required for *khene* making. After first drying these bamboo stems in the sun for a week, the craftsman then leaves them for a time in

front of the fire so as to give them a perfectly straight appearance. Armed with his *Mil tok*, a little knife with a short blade which he manipulates with the handle pressed against his armpit, he cuts the bamboo into sections, avoiding the knots; then with the help of a white-hot awl he forms a rectangular opening at either end of the bamboo to allow the sound to escape. A third of the



Fig. 20.

Khene making

way up he pierces another hole and in it he inserts the little tongue of silver or brass. When he has regulated the resonance, if he finds the opening is too large for the tongue he stops up the crevices with a little quicklime. Next he puts the bamboos together in such a way that they get smaller and smaller by regular intervals, starting at the top, and he inserts them into a «summer» made from the root of the *Mai du*, and destined to receive the air and distribute it among the pipes. All that now remains for him to do is to stop up the crevices with a little black wax (*Khi sut*).



Fig. 21.

Profile of a bamboo

Profile of a *Khene*

There are three different sorts of *khenes*: the six-hole, the fourteen-hole, and the sixteen-hole instrument, and they vary in length from a cubit and a half to seven cubits. Some *khenes* which are plain white have no decoration on them at all: they are called: *Khen puak*. There are others on the other hand that are covered with brown stains; these are the costly *khenes* and are called *Khen lay*. The value of these instruments varies of course according to their size and quality.

The *khene* is one of the characteristic elements of Laotian culture. As the old proverb says: « Those who eat sticky rice, live in dwel-

lings mounted on piles, and play the *khene*, these without any doubt are Laotians.» And so the inhabitants of the mountains and of the plains, the villagers and the peasants, all learn in early childhood to draw at least a few sound from that instrument. In his free time when he wants to relax (is not the literal translation of *khene* «rest», «relaxation»?) the player lets his fingers wander over the stops. Sometimes he is accompanied by the plaintive voice of a woman singing: *Œui noy, œui Ngay* :

« The sound of the waterfall, little sister mine, is like the humming
[of your spinning-wheel,
The cataract that spurts from the mountain-top, from the crest
[of the precipice, is like the flickering of your eyes,
The lightning-flash, the flickering of the sky is like, little sister
[mine, the swinging of your arms ».

Sometimes the singer takes for his theme some legend or epic. And then the *Mo Khen* plays the tune of *Sul Saynen* («Beyond love») which, starting on the lowest notes of the scale ends on the very top register:

« Then it was that the dazzling beauty of nature as sung by the
[Devata appeared before his eyes,
Steep slopes and golden-crested heights grew dim as twilight
[stole upon them;
Weary was the journey, and all about was promise only of fatigue
[and danger;
Gigantic peaks they had to scale whose heights are known to none,
Conquer they must. And the prince, victorious, reached the
[the highest summit... »

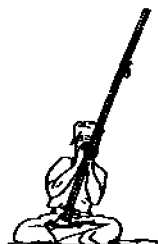


Fig. 22.
Khene-player

From North to South the *khene*-player has a varied repertory at his disposal; it includes melodies from Xieng Khuang or from Sam Neua, as well as the *Thang Khab Ngum* («Down the Nam Ngum») and the *Thang Si Phan Don*, the air of the «4000 Isles of the South» that has such a special flavour:

« *When she leaves her love the dove does sing. When it leaves its perch the kavao (1) too moans in complaint, but when you left me, little sister mine, not a word you said.* »

The *Mo Khen* is a feature of all popular festivities, of all evening gatherings (*ngan*), and it also plays an important part in the ceremonies in honour of the genii. Dispenser of inspiration, its airs charm the spirits and one after another they embody themselves in the Medium or *Nang thiem*. The player first fixes two red flowers and a candle at the tip of his *khene*, and then waters it with a few drops of alcohol, saying: « O give me joy, health, prosperity and happiness ». Dedicated from then onwards to the guardian spirits of the village, the *khene* will be able to put the world of men into communication with the world of the spirits.

Illustrations by the author.

(1) A bird whose song is monotonous and which figures in a great many Laotian poems.

Laotian Cookery

by

Andrée-Yvonne GOUINEAU

An atmosphere of intimacy, fresh green stuffs, mysterious-looking creams, pimentoes everywhere, pretty rice-baskets (fig. 23 and 25), these are the first things that strike one about a Laotian dining-table.

For several months now Vientiane has had the advantage over the Cambodian capital of possessing a « Laotian Restaurant » where tourists can order two or three of the local dishes. But it is only in the intimacy of a Laotian home that day in and day out one can enjoy the innumerable preparations this original « cuisine » has to offer.

For here the traditional food still forms the basis of the people's everyday fare both among the working-people and the great of the land. These « rice-eaters » (1) are original enough, compared to their neighbours, to eat their rice « sticky » (2). You pick this rice out of a delightful basket which stands beside your plate, and you knead it in your hand. It is used in exactly the same way as a piece of bread in Europe as regards both gesture and taste: it accompanies the main dish and enhances or attenuates its flavour. There is no question of filling one's bowl three-quarters full of this rice and then seasoning it with a few scraps of this or that. The Laotians do not use their main dishes as mere condiments. Actually, in comparison with the rest of their food rice is more expensive for them than for their Vietnamese, Siamese, and Cambodian neighbours, with their rich deltas.

The guest can enjoy the full flavour of the innumerable dishes that have been laid all at once on the table before the beginning of the meal, each of them in several plates so as to be within reach of all those at table. You help yourself to whatever tempts you, jumping from one thing to the other without any sort of order.

(1) Cf. François Martini's excellent article : *Cambodian Cookery*, which appeared in the review *France-Asie*, N° 114-115, consecrated to the Kingdom of Cambodia.

(2) Sticky rice is steam-cooked in a conical basket (fig. 23) after first soaking it for at least six hours in water to make it swell.

If you show too much of a tendency to hold back your hosts will jokingly reproach you with « behaving like a son-in-law ». When the meal is over there will scarcely, in a well-to-do family, be any reduction of volume in the rice-baskets, which you are supposed to close as soon as you feel you have eaten enough — any forgetting of this gesture is held to be a sign that there will be a divorce within the year. The little buffalo-herd, it is true, will take more rice with him than fish when he goes off for the day, just as the French peasant, who is naturally economical, and has never heard of « Parisian baguettes » (1), will put a small piece of cheese on a large slice of bread cut from a substantial loaf!

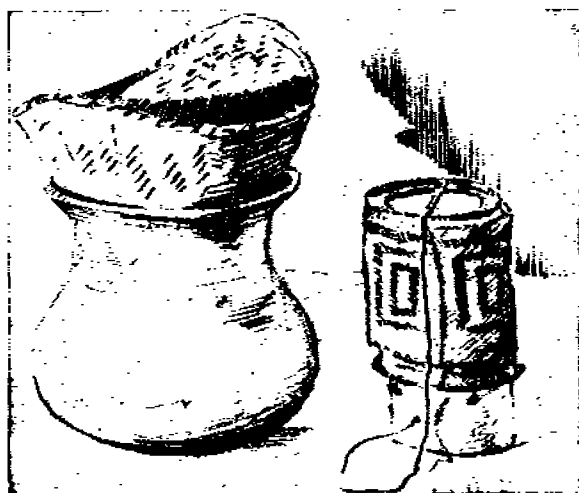


Fig. 23.

Basket for steam-cooking rice Rice-basket (Vientiane)

If there is a difference between Laotian cookery and that of the neighbouring countries it lies in the place assigned to rice and in the quality of this latter; it is different, too, in being less influenced by Chinese cookery. Here there is no mixing of sweet tastes with acid. There are a number of minced dishes and sauces that require to be prepared with a pinch of sugar, as with our garden-peas, to « bind » them as it were, but the predominating taste is undoubtedly the burning flavour of the pimentoes. On the other hand a stranger will be astonished to come across, in the same sauce or soup, a mixture of fish and meat. And yet the result is agreeable, perhaps because the flavour of both of them is dominated by the

(1) A long thin crusty loaf sold in Paris (T. N.).

powerful taste of the aromatic herbs that accompany them.

The Laotians are never far from their forests with their wealth of edible plants, and they adorn their dining-table with all sorts of green-stuff: salad, mint, sensitive water-plants, water-lily stems, fennel, the leaves of certain marguerites, little branches with bitter berries, delicate lianas, and a great number of leaves from local bushes. It is all charming to the eye, even before it refreshes the palate which will be burning from the pimentoes Europeans find so abominably strong though they are indispensable to local taste.

One item of Laotian fare is a raw dish — but how much work it requires! — and it may be prepared in the open air. It goes by the pleasant name of « tiger food ». Similarly, certain of the cooking is done without a cooking-utensil. For example, you wrap a large fish, duly stuffed, in a long piece of bark from the banana-tree. You tie up the ends with strips of the same bark and bury the parcel thus obtained in red-hot ashes, under the fire. The result is a roasted fish that is never dried-up, deliciously flavoured with the sap (1). Or you may coat a fish with clay after having simply cleaned it and filled it with condiments, but without removing its scales. You confide this improvised piece of pottery to the hot ashes and when it is cooked tear off both clay and scales. No need for any scouring!

Here is another everyday method that is more practical still: you impale a fish on a bamboo stick whose two ends are resting on the bricks of the fire-place. You turn it round and round so as to grill it on every side.

Simplicity of methods, the survival of a perfectly natural way of life of hunting and fishing; very healthy and safe food whose every element is constantly at hand.

* *

But it is food, that is delicate, and more and more elaborate as you rise in the social scale. There is a gastronomic hierarchy as there is a hierarchy of words, and those dishes whose reputation stands highest can only be prepared if we dispose of an aristocratic amount of leisure. A dish you may serve to a king, or a monk, or any really important person, is the *lap* (2), the traditional party dish, a sort of « Tartar steak » (3) made of very finely minced

(1) The sort of packet it forms may also be steam-cooked; it is then called *ho mok pa*. With a certain kind of fish, pounded together with coco-nut milk after taking all the bones out, it is called *ho mok pa fok*. Fish wrapped in a banana-leaf and cooked over an open fire is called *khanap pa*. The intestine of a pork may be cooked in the same way, as may certain flowers.

(2) See detailed description further on.

(3) Minced steak often bound together with an egg (French dish). (T. N.).

venison or beef — or failing either, buffalo — and seasoned with a number of ingredients; better still, you may serve the *sa* (1), the most complicated of the raw fish dishes, the *koy tium* (2) and the *koy liu* whose basic element is grilled fish in the first case and scalded fish in the second, and which are different in taste because of the subtle combination of raw vegetables that go along with the fish and the acidulous sauces that bring out its flavour. The *phaneng kay* (3) is fare for really great occasions; it is chicken filled with stuffing made largely from pea-nuts, and it is cooked in coco-nut milk. If one happens to have some very good meat at hand such as some sort of venison or fillet of beef, then one could offer an important guest *pha-lam long song*. You put a little cooking-stove on the table and everyone dips thin strips of meat into the stock that is boiling away on the table in front of them, and that has been duly seasoned with aromatic herbs. They enjoy each mouthful the more that they eat them coated with raw vegetable and rice vermicelli and dipped in a rich sauce whose main element is pea-nuts.

Dried or stuffed frogs, ants eggs, cow's placenta — immediately after calving —, the skin of the Indian buffalo dried, all of these may be made into choice dishes. And finally, people in Laos are very fond of *som khay* (4), or «Laotian caviar». It is a delicate, rose coloured cream made from the roe of the *pa-boeuk*, an enormous fish they catch in the Mekong and which sometimes grows to length of five or six and a half feet. A single one of these fish is good for as much as twenty-two pounds of roe, etc.

Khao poun (5) is considered much more ordinary as a dish. It is composed of rice vermicelli served with a variety of chopped raw vegetables, and seasoned with a sauce made with meat and fish and which owes its flavour to the coco-nut milk which is its main element. It is an excellent dish, well-known to foreigners and much appreciated by them. *Tom pon* (6), so beloved of the inhabitants of Vientiane, and *o pa*, are both fairly quickly made out of fish that has first been boiled and is then pounded together with aromatic herbs. In *su si pa* the fish is broiled. *Mok pa* has the appearance of a small dry patty and is made of fish that has been well pounded together with aromatic herbs and the whole steam-cooked in banana leaves. *Gnu mak kheua* derives its name from the local egg-plants that play such an important part in this fish purée. *Tom lieo* is made either with fresh or with dried fish, sometimes even with pork offal, etc.

Pork is pounded in making *sa mu*, along with the heart, liver, rind, with onions, pimentoes, etc.; in *mu nem* (7) it is literally

(1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7) See detailed description further on.

reduced to a powder along with an equal quantity of roasted rice, finely ground. *Khua* is a little *sauté* of meat, garlic, and onions. *O lam* is as popular with the inhabitants of Luang Prabang as *pon* is with those of Vientiane; it is a dish made with birds if the shooting season is a good one, failing that beef may be used. The meat is boiled along with vegetables which are then pounded together with very strong spices, among which pimentoes play an important part, making an agreeable thickening for the sauce.

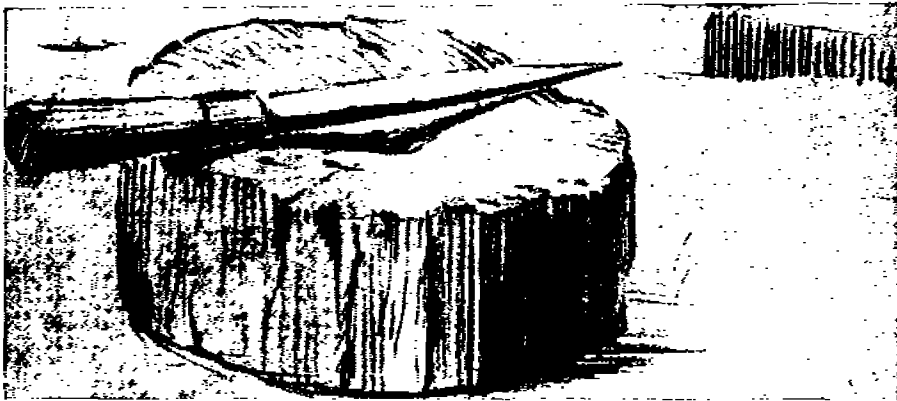


Fig. 24.
Chopping board

A Laotian meal always includes soup; it is eaten in the middle and at the end of the repast, never at the beginning. One of these is the *keng no may*, a bamboo shoot soup; the *keng khi lek*, vegetables and buffalo skin; *keng chul*, without pimentoes; *keng kalampi*, a cabbage soup with fish or pork; *keng het bot*, with little mushrooms; *keng suraman*, highly spiced, etc... The ones that take least time to make are those whose chief element is fish, meat, or tomatoes.

The basic elements of this sort of food are, as we observe, limited. Fish is the most usual; then come game, beef or buffalo, and poultry. Sparing use is made of eggs because chicken is more profitable. We may as well, however, mention *phan khay* as an egg dish; it takes the form of thin pancakes which are stuffed with raw meat and cooked in steam wrapped in banana leaves. *Khay khuam* are a sort of stuffed eggs.

The local vegetables, egg-fruit, tomatoes, cucumbers, stick-beans, bamboo shoots, salad, are an accompaniment to other food and are used in soup and for salads (*soub*), but they are never served separately except in the *gnam gnuan*, which is a sort of Russian salad made with a mixture of raw and cooked vegetables.

Laotian food owes its variety to the sauces and stuffings, to the degree of fineness in the mincing of the meat, to the rich smooth quality of the creamy purées, the result of long pounding, to the combination of the spices where now the pimentoes dominate, now the fennel, mint, southernwood, ginger, *mak khi hout* (*citrus hystrix*), galanga or carambola; it varies, too, with the dosing of the coco-nut milk, the mode of cooking (in water or over wood-ash, by steam or on charcoal, in earthenware or wrapped in leaf tissue).

* .

This all goes to prove that Laotian cookery is an art, a subtle, traditional art. For women of the best society it is considered a pleasure and an honour to exercise their culinary talents, not as a task unworthy of them. The best dishes are never the work of servants. Their working-tools are of the simplest: a chopping-board (fig. 24), usually a piece of tree-trunk, with either a « coupe-coupe » or a large knife; and the little hand-mortar (fig. 25) where so many pimentoes are pounded and in which food is reduced to powders so fine they are a challenge even to the best of « mixers ». The only fats used are bacon fat, which is chopped up as required, and coco-nut milk.

The quality that is most required for excellence in this form of cooking is patience, as becomes obvious the moment we examine in detail the recipes for a few of the dishes that we give further on. It will be observed that fish is almost always served boned and the same holds true for chicken in a number of the recipes (for example: chicken with ginger...); all this requires hours of careful labour. On the other hand, the meals are very quickly eaten. It is somewhat staggering to see meals, that took several people a whole morning to prepare, disappear in about ten minutes. But one cannot but appreciate a hospitality whose tradition is so high it requires more places to be set than guests are expected, and the lavishness thanks to which there is plenty of food left on the table when the meal is over.

Another quality of Laotian housewives is their foresightedness. A family is fed exclusively on the natural resources of the land; which being the case, it is necessary to take season and opportunity into account. This leads to their doing a good deal of preserving: first you have *nam pa*, pickling brine of the same sort as the Vietnamese *nuoc mam*; then there is *padek*, or fish preserved whole in salt with rice bran, which is used for seasoning a number of dishes and for making *mok padek* when fresh fish becomes scarce; *som pa* is made with well-pounded fish flesh that has been acidulated with fermented rice. Pork is preserved in the same manner; this is called *som mu*. *Sin heng* or dried

meat, may be kept for two or three months (1). The dried skin of the Indian buffalo is a thing that is brought out with pride; but failing this the ordinary buffalo may be used. Water-plants from the Mekong, carefully prepared, may be used during the whole of the dry season, etc... Salted bamboo-shoots and dried pimentoes are more indispensable in a Laotian home, for the pimento is the king of this type of gastronomy (2).

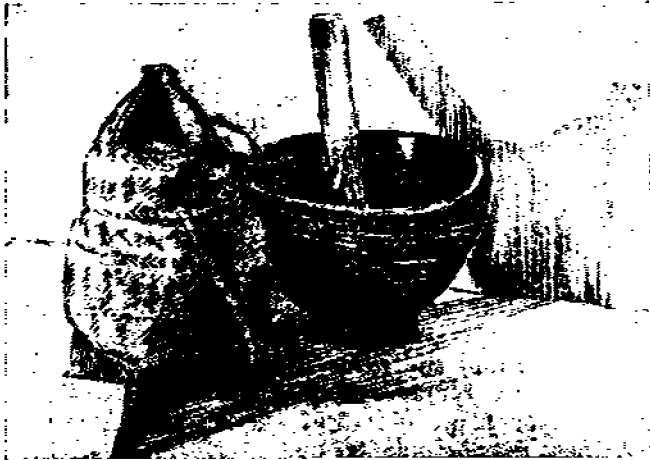


Fig. 25

Rice basket (Luang Prabang)

Hand mortar and pestle

Generally speaking the dishes take so long to prepare that necessarily only a short time is set aside for preparing the dessert. It is in any case quite pleasant enough to finish off the meal with a banana or a piece of papaw or water-melon, a few tamarind pods or a slice of grape-fruits...

But on feast days or when there is a reception then the young girls know how to prepare pleasant sweet meats, without either milk or butter or flour, but with rice, bananas, taro — and water-lily-roots, coco-nut milk, etc. There is *khao lom* (3), for example, rice stuffed with bananas and steam-cooked in a piece of banana leaf; *lom nam van hua bua*, made with coco-nut milk and lotus-flower; *foy thong*, which is thin filaments of beaten egg cooked in

(1) See detailed description further on.

(2) The various pimento purees whether of dried or fresh pimentoes are called *tiao*. For example there is *tiao khon*, *tiao bong*, *tiao mak phet dib*, *tiao nam pa*, *tiao iké* with garlic and lemon, shrimp *tiao*, *tiao pone* etc. The most usual breakfast is sticky rice with *tiao* seasoning. At meal all dishes are served with *tiao*.

(3) See detailed description of this dish further on.

a sort of boiling syrup; *khanom mo keng* with eggs, sugar and onions; *sang khaya mak u*, which is a preparation of eggs cooked in a pumpkin, etc. Tamarind jam made with coco-nut milk is, to a French palate, rather reminiscent of quince cheese. In Laos it is possible to obtain a sort of mango cheese in thin layers simply by drying the very sweet juice of this fruit on banana-leaves in the sun, etc.

One is nonetheless obliged to admit that, though Laos has been more successful in preserving its traditional cookery than certain of its neighbours, it cannot compete with Thailand in the matter of variety in sweetmeats.

The predominance of such and such another sweetmeat, the dosing of the aromatics and the way the dishes are served varies from one region to another. It is said — dare we repeat it? — that it is in Vientiane that cooking is least good. Luang Prabang and Pakse, on the other hand, vie with each other for the subtlety of their cooking.

* *

Obviously Laotian taste is not above borrowing from neighbouring or friendly countries. It gladly takes over the pork, fish with caramel, and the *nems* of the Vietnamese; the Indians' curry; some of the Siamese sauces; lobsters «à l'Américaine», when there has been an arrival of lobsters from Bangkok; French beans, potatoes, roast chickens, and above all good French wine, without prejudice on feast-days to the alcohol made from rice and drunk before the meal, along with the *lap*.

In making their own dishes Laotian housewives are often glad to use flour to bind their sauces as more practical than puffed and pounded rice, and vinegar if they are short of lemon.

The further away from the towns, the simpler and more monotonous grows the food: rice, dried meat and fish, pimentoes, leaves. They would be found sadly wanting by the complex calculations of American dieticians, but they suit the inhabitants very well. Medical examination boards are struck by the high proportion of healthy peasants and town-dwellers and by the fact that Laotians are far less subject to beri-beri than their Vietnamese neighbours, so long as they are not deprived of their customary food.

Illustrations by Marc LEGUAY.

At the close of this article I should like to express my thanks to those of my personal friends who have been treating me for the last two years with such excellent Laotian cookery, and also to my older pupils of the *Lycée Paoie* (2 M 1) and the Laotian primary school-teachers who provided me with so much excellent information.

Some Recipes

collected by

Andrée-Yvette GOUINEAU

LAP

(Laotian « Tartar steak »¹)

This dish, like all the other dishes that are fundamental to Laotian cookery, the koy, the sa, the pôn, the o sul etc., is made with fish, chicken, beef, buffalo or game. It is always served along with a soup, meat stock if it is a meat lap (lap sin), fish soup with the fish lap (lap pa).

It calls for a variety of preliminary preparations that are made separately:

1° *Roast some sticky rice and pound it to a fine powder in a mortar; put this aside;*

2° *Fry some padek (2) in a frying-pan, adding a little water to thin it down;*

3° *In the ashes of the fire cook some ten egg-fruits, a few cloves of garlic, and five or six pimentoes.*

Next pound all these ingredients in the mortar adding some galanga, until you get a very fine powder in which there remains not a trace of an egg-fruit or pimento seed;

4° *Chop up the onion stalks and mint leaves;*

5° *For a beef lap, for example, you boil some pieces of liver and tripe and then cut them up into fine strips;*

6° *And finally, chop the meat up very fine after whitening it with lemon — the simple addition of lemon juice whitens the meat.*

The various powders and mincemeals are each in a different utensil. When everything is ready it is the head of the family whose business it is to do the final mixing in a large receptacle. First he malaxates the mincemeat, diluting it with a cupful of stock from the soup. He then adds the powdered rice and stirs this first mixture for a long time. Then he adds the pimento powder, the garlic and egg-fruit puree and some salt, and he thins it down with the water strained from the padek.

(1) See above, p. 223, note 3.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 226.

If it is a fish lap it will be more liquid than a meat lap, always more consistent. At the end the minced aromatics are added and the mixture is well stirred.

When finally the mixture is judged sufficiently fine and as creamy as is desirable, the resulting puree will be divided into two or three dishes and each of these will be decorated on the top with finely chopped leaves and intestines cut into strips.

A dish of green salad and fresh aromatics is always served along with the lap.

SA TON PA

(Mincemeat of raw fish)

1° *Take some two pounds of raw fish, very fresh, and reduce it to mincemeat after having first removed all the bones. Put the mixture in a basin;*

2° *In half a glass of water melt a tea-spoonful of salt and then add the juice of 5 or 6 lemons. Pour this acidulated water into the basin containing the fish and leave it to soak for a quarter of an hour;*

3° *Take five plants of southernwood, 5 onions, the same number of cloves of garlic that have been cooked for a few moments in hot ashes, 3 or 4 pimenloes and a little galanga; chop them up very fine;*

4° *Press out the water from the fish. Boil up the juice thus obtained and leave it to cool;*

5° *Mix this juice with the chopped up fish and season with salt and brine according to taste. Next add the equivalent of two table-spoonfuls of aromatic herbs finely chopped up: fennel, Laotian parsley, shallot leaves.*

The resulting dish is a pale pink mincemeat of fish, with green speckles from the added condiments.

Sa, loo, is served accompanied by a green salad and the leaves of aromatic herbs.

KOY TIOUM

(Fish cornets)

There are three elements to be taken into consideration:

1° *The preparing of the fish itself; 2° the sauce with which it is served; 3° the fresh leaves in which every monthful is wrapped before eating.*

1° *Fairly large fish are first skewered through with bamboo skewers and then grilled over hot embers. It is better to avoid fish with too many bones;*

2° *The grilled fish is pounded in the mortar after the bones have first been removed;*

3° Next a mixture of finely chopped aromatics is prepared (Southernwood roots, mint);

4° A volume equal to about half the fish of Khao poun (rice vermicelli) is then cut up;

5° The pounded fish is lightly mixed with the chopped herbs and vermicelli; the dish itself is now ready.

The sauce is made by boiling some nam pa (brine) mixed with water; add a very little dried pimentoes, well pounded, with roasted garlic and chervil.

Prepare also salad leaves, cabbage will do, and every variety of bitter, sharp and sweet forest leaves. Each of the guests takes a large leaf, lays on it some of the other greenstuff and a good spoonful of fish, he then folds up his verdant cornet and dips it in one of the little individual sauce-dishes that has been placed in front of him.

PHANENG KAY

(Chicken with coco-nut milk)

Proportions: one dry coco-nut to a chicken.

1° Prepare the stuffing by pounding pea-nuts, raw pork, onions previously fried, grilled pimentoes, aromatic herbs (fennel, cinnamon, mint, etc.); bind the stuffing with the first coco-nut milk (1);

2° Introduce the stuffing into the well-cleaned chicken;

3° Place the chicken in the second coco-nut milk (2) and salt with nam pa. Cook over a low fire until the coco-nut milk is reduced to a cream.

SOM KHAY

(Laotian caviar)

Good quality som khay is prepared from the roe of the pa boeuk. A coarser quality may be obtained from the roe of the pa leum.

1° Fill a small jar with the roe of one or more fish, malaxate with salt, and close the jar hermetically with a wooden cork covered with ashes;

2° Cook ordinary rice by steam until it has swollen properly. Put in while still hot into a jar which must be closed in the same manner;

3° Chop up fresh fish and after having salted it fill a third jar and close as previously.

(1) The first coco-nut milk is obtained by adding luke-warm water to the grated coco-nut pulp, which is then pressed hard to extract the milk.

(2) The second coco-nut milk is obtained by adding luke-warm water a second time to the pulp, which is again pressed.

Let the contents of the three jars ferment for a month. If an excellent quality of som khay is desired use three jars of the same size, the formula being for an equal volume of roe with the volume of rice and fish;

4° After allowing them to macerate separately for a month, mix the contents of the three jars and knead them until a very light cream is obtained;

5° By adding a glass of sticklac this cream is given its pale pink colour.

Som khay can be kept for about six months in hermetically closed receptacles.

It is served along with the other food on a well-stocked table. It is marvellously good spread over butter on cocktail sandwiches.

KHAO POUN

(Vermicelli in coco-nut milk sauce)

This is a dish of vermicelli served with raw vegetables and a special sauce; it is very nourishing.

To prepare the sauce:

Take two good pounds of not too fat pork and the same of fish.

1° After chopping up the pork cook it in a little boiling water with salt, garlic, and onions;

2° A little later on cook some fish till soft in the same stock. Withdraw, remove bones, and replace in the stock to continue cooking;

3° Now add to the sauce:

— about one cupful for each person of second coco-nut milk,

— dried roasted pimentoes pounded to a fine powder, or fresh red pimentoes raw,

— the equivalent of two cupfuls of roasted pea-nuts, ground.

Complete the seasoning with nam pa or padek.

Allow this to boil for about three quarters of an hour until the fish and meat are reduced and completely amalgamated. A thick sauce is obtained which is grey and speckled with red from the pimentoes, and which may be further reddened by the addition of a little tomato purée.

When serving, pour into a soup tureen.

The khao poun itself is a sort of vermicelli made from rice which may be bought on the market ready for use.

It is served along with banana flowers finely chopped up, bean sprouts, salad and mint also cut up into very small pieces.

Each guest fills the bottom of his soup-plate with vermicelli, adds several pinches of the various raw vegetables according to his taste,

and bathes the whole in a generous helping of the creamy sauce his hosts have prepared for him with such care.

PON or TOM PON

(Fish with aromatics)

- 1° *Boil the fish with some of the local egg-fruits ;*
 - 2° *Reduce the fish and the vegetables to a purée in a mortar in which a layer of pounded pimentoes has been prepared ;*
 - 3° *Thin the mixture by adding some of the stock in which the fish was cooked and that has been well salted with padek.*
- Serve with fresh vegetables.*

MOU NEM

(Pork mince with salad leaves)

- Take two volumes of rice to one of pork.*
- 1° *Chop up the pork raw, then fry the mince obtained till it is quite dry and forms a meal powder ;*
 - 2° *Roast the rice separately, then pound it in the mortar till a fine powder is obtained ;*
 - 3° *Now pound some galanga, an amount equal to the volume of your thumb, and mix it with the powder previously obtained ;*
 - 4° *Cut up pork rind (that has first been boiled) into thin strips hardly bigger than noodles ;*
 - 5° *Mix this rind and the pork powder together with the galanga and rice already prepared. Season with brine and a pinch of sugar ;*
 - 6° *Decorate the dish with red pimentoes cut in the shape of flowers, and with green onions.*
- Is best eaten in salad leaves.*

SIN HENG

(Dried meat)

- 1° *Take a piece of good quality meat, leg of buffalo or better still venison (deer or roebuck) ; cut it into strip as thick as the thumb and about six inches long ;*
 - 2° *Salt the meat thus cut up, and then leave it in the sun ;*
 - 3° *When it has dried properly bury it in ashes for about 5 or 10 minutes, under the embers ;*
 - 4° *Now beat the meat with a mallet against a wooden board so as to knock off the ashes and obtain perfectly smooth pieces of meat before serving them ;*
- This meat will keep for 3 or 4 months.*

KHAO TOM

(Rice with banana stuffing)

- 1° Soak in cold water some sticky rice that has been well washed ;
- 2° Pour the milk of one or more coco-nuts into a sauce-pan and let it boil till it has the consistency of thick oil ;
Now add the rice to the coco-nut-milk. Salt slightly and stir.
- 3° After four or five minutes withdraw the mixture from the fire ;
- 4° Cut thin slices of banana lengthways ;
- 5° Take a piece of banana-leaf, spread the prepared rice about half an inch thick on it, then put a slice of banana, then another layer of rice. Cover carefully with the banana-leaf. Close it well and tie both ends of the little parcel thus obtained ;
- 6° Put the little packets to cook either in boiling water for an hour and a half, or by steam, which takes longer.

This cake is offered to the monks on certain feast-days. It is much appreciated at certain family gatherings.



VI
RELIGION

Buddhism in Laos

by

Thao Nhouy ABHAY

About six centuries B. C. there was at the centre of the Gangetic India, between Benares and Patna, a country called Magadha. Brahmanism was its national creed; yet, people's mind had become restless. By the hundreds and thousands, both young and old were leaving their homes and families in search for an immortality which their traditional creed failed to give them.

At that time, a Sage was born, who founded a new doctrine, Buddhism, and for 40 years he taught it to enthusiastic populations.

In the middle of the 3rd century B. C. Asoka, the most pious of all the Buddhist kings of Magadha, propagated the Doctrine to the far corners of his Empire, and spread it to the Punjab in the West and to Ceylon in the South.

In the 2nd century of the Christian era, « under the reign and auspices of the bearded Scythian Kanishka, whose authority extended from India proper and the Pundjab to Bactria and to the basins of the Oxus, the Yaxarte and the Tarim, Buddhism opened the gates leading to Higher-Asia. Through the Turkestans, it swept over China, Tibet, and later the Northern Steppes and Japan » (L. de La Vallée Poussin).

While sanskritising monks were conquering greater Asia, another school of Buddhism which used Pāli as a mean of expression and was known as the « Smaller Vehicle » passed from Ceylon and Continental India into Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia and the Thai countries of the Menam and the Mekong basins.

In India proper, Buddhism flourished until about the end of the 6th century C.E.; but from that date and for « both internal and external causes » (L. Finot), the Doctrine gave way to other ones and from the 8th century began to « founder into a gradual oblivion » (*ibid*).

Of all the countries which had witnessed its birth, Ceylon remained its sole sanctuary.

Having disappeared from India, the country of its birth, Buddhism was to find one of its surest havens on the banks of the

Mekong and the Menam, among the areca palm-trees and the coconut groves, amidst the Thai people, who descending from the Northern mountains, had at last found in the plains and valleys, a land suited to their temperament and their dreams. The bonds between the Sinhalese and Laotian peoples, go far beyond physical resemblance and moral affinities.

The few times I have gone through this island, the sky in Ceylon, swept by soft breezes, reminded me of the sky in Laos. Our traditions are in keeping with the assertion that the Phra Bang — the actual Palladium of the Kingdom — and the Phra Keo — the Emerald Buddha — have been casted and shaped in Ceylon. It is also from Ceylon that we received the *Tripitaka* and other canonical Texts. Our poets and our religious fervour evoke numerous references to this happy island which, despite the vicissitudes, went on preserving the treasures of our faith.

Laos, like Ceylon, is truly the land of monks.

Either on bright mornings, when the first rays of the sun light up the tree tops, or in rain or mist, the monks draped in orange robes, with downcast eyes, can be seen walking along the streets of towns and villages, begging their rice and food. One by one, they file past before men who remain standing, their robes drawn across their shoulders, and the kneeling women carrying bowls filled with offerings. To each of them they present their begging bowls, tipping them slightly. After having received the ball of rice and the piece of cake, which men and women slip in their bowl with the deepest respect, they cover it and hide it again under their robes and still remaining silent and with downcast eyes they proceed on their round.

Since in Laos, as in all Theravādin Buddhist countries — Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, Ceylon — the monks beg for their food, thus enabling the faithful to acquire merits through their charity. Buddhism always had two types of followers: the clergy, representing the Buddha and forming the Community (*Saṅgha*) with the duty of keeping and giving instruction in the Doctrine (*Dhamma*), and the laity, still attached to worldly goods; the former existing on alms and the support by the latter.

On Buddhism and the monks numerous scholarly studies have been published. Everyone living in this country knows the distinction between the Lesser and the Greater Vehicle.

My knowledge on this subject is limited. But brought up in the Buddhist faith, I should like to bring in this short account an evidence drawn from the very life of the Laotian people.

I should like to tell, not of the scholarly discussions and learned theories, but of what we, Laotians, know of the Buddha and the Doctrine, of what we think of it — and of the monks — and of what I know of their influence on our character and our life.

BUDDHISM IN LAOS

In his historical work, P. Le Boulanger basing himself on the Charter of the founding of Vat Gnod Keo at Luang Prabang, states that Buddhism was introduced in Lan Xang in the middle of the 14th century, shortly after Chao Fa Ngum had achieved the unity of Laos.

Nothing seems more risky to me for such a statement since Buddhism was flourishing many centuries before in Cambodia as well as in Siam and Burma, Laos being surrounded by these countries, could not have shut itself from the Good Doctrine.

On the other hand, M. Paul Lévy, former Director of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, discovered some years ago in Luang Prabang, images of the Buddha showing a different style and undeniably anterior to the style characterized by the Cambodian religious Mission school of 1356.

It can, therefore, be said that Buddhism was known and practised in Laos long before history had thrown its light on the past of our country.

However that may be, it is officially admitted that Buddhism, overcoming the genii and superstitious beliefs, reached its height in the Mekong valley in the 17th century of the Christian Era.

At the time, under the reign of the best of the Lan Xang Kings, Chao Set'thathirath, some seventy temples, not mentioning the Wat Phra Keo and the That Luang, were erected in Vientiane to the glory of the Buddha and of His Teachings. One of his immediate successors, Souligna Vongsa, took in hand the organization of those places of worships which became, in Van Wuthhoff's own words, schools of Buddhist Culture and Arts. The monks were respected and well looked after, their morals were of a high standard and they strictly adhered to the rules of the Community.

In the smallest of villages, night and day, the gongs would never failed to strike the hours. Every seventh day, the people flocked to the temples. Everyone aspired to the merit of giving and the monks received these alms with pure hands and righteous heart. They knew the Texts and the rites, the life of the Buddha and the Doctrine. They were prompted by a genuine emulation; scholars and holy men inspired the people and their behaviours were on everyone's lips. They would be consulted on every occasion of everyday life: about birth, sickness, death, dreams and the omens of the sky. They would answer either in parables or quote the Sayings of the Master, their advice was scrupulously followed and respected. In brief, they gave consolation and encouragement, exercising a beneficial influence on all, Kings and Princes, commoners and peasants.

Unfortunately, the death of King Souligna Vongsa, in 1694, brought out both baneful ambitions and internal dissensions which

split the country open to anarchy and invasion. Buddhism thus suffered a fatal counterblow.

The Kingdom of Vientiane, vanquished and devastated for a first time in 1778, by the Siamese general Chao Mahakrasad « Suk » (Chulalok), lost its Emerald Buddha as well as the Phra Bang which had been brought in around 1707. Later, Chao Anu, having tried to shake off the Siamese yoke was defeated in 1828, and the Kingdom once again subjected to sack and put to fire and sword. Finally in 1873, people from Yunnan, destroyed the temples and broked into the *thats* which had escaped the cupidity of the 1828 invaders.

All the temples disappeared, both the Wat Phra Keo and Wat Phiavat, which were the wonders of the capital and even the That Luang which was considered as the national shrine.

The monks, with a feeling of unrelenting fatality which had swept down upon all the people, kept on reciting their prayers without understanding them, and the faithful would go to the temples if only by a subconscious atavism.

Finally, and as a last blow, the *Phi*, the fiercest enemy of Buddhism, reappeared and began to regain the lost ground since, in fact, « its cult had never died. Good or evil, the *Phi* was everywhere, mingling with the deities and the Buddha, dwelling in the statues themselves ». (R. Lingat).

An inextricable mythology took hold of the people's minds, a mythology made of superstition and religious faith, which, in its confusion, mixed all the creatures of Hell and of Paradise, of the Heavens and Interheavens. Over the country of Laos, hovered ignorance and restlessness.

LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

But the flame of faith was not extinguished.

Children of the French peace, we have been able to realize how much our forefathers were earnest in their faith and how deep Buddhism was rooted in their minds.

Since an early age, during those peaceful evenings — as of old, when our ancestors lived in that fortunate era of Lan Xang — we were able to acquaint ourselves and to learn the Life of the Buddha and of his main reincarnations, as well as the *Dhamma* and the rules of the *Saṅgha*.

Memories of our childhood have never been associated with anything like the Christian catechisms with their fair amount of ornaments, illuminatings and illustrations. No, it was not through reading and study of the Scriptures that we became initiated with the Life of the Highest Sage, but through oral tradition, when, in the quiet afternoons we used to go with our mothers to the temples or when, later, we used to escape from their not too jealous care, and went frolicking and fluttering to the contorsions

of our bards. Since the Lives of the Buddha are read and commented in the temples; put into verses, they are then, on feast nights, sang by our minstrels, acting on high perched platforms, to the music of the *khenes*.

How could we ever forget those serene nights of our happy and free childhood, during which, in the moonlight or in the falling dew we learnt not only the charm of our poetry, its spirit and its rhythm, but also the Lives of the Sage whose Doctrine is enlightening our whole existence.

The opening verses of a song runs thus: « There lived in a city of India, known as Kabilaphat (Kapilavastu), a magnificent and wealthy Prince named Sisutho (Suddhodana). His wife, lovelier than a picture was called Māyā ».

Its legendary birth and magnificent life, we knew it all. We knew of the dream of Queen Māyā and of the predictions foretelling the birth of the One who was to become the most powerful Emperor on earth, the Buddha.

We knew of his miraculous birth in the heart of the forest, while deities from the four directions came to receive him in a golden



Fig. 26
Laotian Wat

net and of the two streams of divine water which poured over both Him and his Mother to purify Them.

We knew that after being delivered she died a few days later, and that the name Sithad (Siddhartha) was given to the newly born Prince.

We knew he married at the age of 16; that disgusted with the licentiousness of the women in the Palace, left it on the very night his son was born. He forsaked wealth, wife and child to don the robe of the mendicant under the name of Gotama. He was 29.

The circumstances which had preceded his departure were known to all: the four sights which he encountered, an old man, a sick person, a corpse and a wandering ascetic; the first three having given him a feeling of the existence of human sufferings and the last one that of serenity of one who has given up everything and has no more desires.

Oh! Those pictures which delighted our youth! The scenes of pleasure the young Prince surrounded himself with, his marriage to the one who waited and desired only him, his victory won at the last minute over his cousins and his rivals, over this Thevathad (Devadatta) in particular, who never forgave him, and who became his most sworn enemy and who on three occasions, during his life, did all he could to kill him.

We admired the ascetic Gotama fasting for years and years, torturing himself in self-experiment, denying himself food until he became no more than a skeleton; we grew wise and understood the excellence of Right Action and Right Way, when we heard of Indra coming to prove to the Bodhisattva that a violin cannot give right sounds if its strings are either too tight or too loose; we could feel ourselves relieved from our anguish and overcome with happiness, when at last, having thwarted the temptations and threats of Māra, the Bodhisattva would take the goddess Earth as witness of his uprightness and that we could hear her answer in a voice that put the army of Evil into a rout.

The Bodhisattva had become a Buddha; he was forty-year-old.

And with what fervour prompted by our mother's advice did we adore and revere the goddess Earth; and then with what feelings of pious gratitude, would we invite the precious goddess to step aside when called upon to pour some hot water on the ground.

A train of irrational pictures maybe, but so engaging and soft to our hearts! Without asking who the Buddha was, nor what India was, we loved the Man whom, we were told, had left traces nearly everywhere; the greatest and wisest Man on earth — whose images adorned our temples and whose lessons filled our souls!

THE LAOTIAN AND THE DOCTRINE

We heard our fathers repeating all day long that life is suffering, that nothing belongs to us, that this present existence is only one among a thousand others, that we were reaping the fruit of our past actions in former lives, that death could overtake us unexpectedly at any moment and that our salvation depended

on ourselves alone. And then our fathers enjoined us humility and gentleness, kindness, justice and charity.

Oh Laotian charity, how many errors were committed in thy name !

In Laotian, « To do charity » is « *hed boun* » (« To do good, to give alms »), i. e. acquiring merits for the next existence and, if possible, to reach final Nirvāṇa.

And to whom should the alms be given if not to the monks, those direct representatives of the Buddha, his living images on earth : since the Buddha himself advised it :

« The worship of the deceased Buddha is as useful and meritorious and as compulsory as that of the living Buddha, since even after the Buddha had entered Nirvāṇa, he is a life source of great merits » (L. de la Vallée Poussin).

Therefore, the best of good deeds is a religious act :

« No comparison can give an idea of the immortal value of the least offering. Whoever, with a pious soul, shall walk around the *thats* and other monuments containing relics, shall light candles, and bring flowers. whoever shall go on pilgrimage, will plant the deep roots of merits, keep out of Hell and go to Heaven » (*ibid*).

That is why since our childhood we were taught to walk around the temples, with flowers and candles in hand ; that is why as soon as we were able to talk, we, as well as our sisters and friends, pledged ourselves to offer our hairs, our bones, our body and our heart ; again that is why, and in this we are following the tradition of our elders and mothers, we never dared to soil the floor of the temples, nor even dig the smallest hole in it.

Expectantly we would await the feast days which, with a full moon in cloudless skies, would afford us the opportunity of working for a better life, thus showing some gratitude to our parents, e. g. by being well-behaved on the 6th month on the occasion of the Triple Revelation, by charitable deeds, distributing cakes, fruits, cigarettes and quids of betel nuts, either in the temples or at crossroads, during the 9th and 10th months.

By constantly hearing and repeating the Precepts in Pāli, we would come to know them by heart, keenly impatient to hear our mothers repeating them to us as soon as we became monks, since we were told that such action was a source of great merits.

And when finally, we turned twenty, our parents would ask us to don the frock, with perhaps less apprehension than a Frenchman about to put on his military uniform, we let our head and eyebrows be shaved off, convinced — even though it would be only for a few weeks — we would be coming nearer the *Tathāgatha* (the Accomplished One) and work out our own salvation and that of our people. Since, as I have already pointed out, if there are two kinds of followers of Buddhism, the clergy and the

secular, there are also two different Roads to salvation: the one leading to Nirvāṇa for both abstinent and contemplative adepts, and the one leading to happy rebirths for those still attached to worldly pleasures, but who give alms and revere the Relics.

The *bouns* find their origin in the second form of faith.

«To do a *boun*», is to give a disciple to the Buddha in organizing an ordination or a private baptism of monks; «to do a *boun*», is to contribute to the offerings made for the *Pavārana* festival at the end of Lent (1); it is to give food and garments; it is, on the main events of the Life of the Buddha, to meditate on one's deeds, to follow processions — which are pilgrimages — around the shrines, it is to offer candles and flowers at the *Thats* and to the statues erected to the glory of the Perfect One, while formulating wishes.

But, as with the Roman Catholic Church's festivals which are accompanied by profane rejoicings — at Christmas or at mid-Lent, for instance — so are our ceremonies celebrated in temples preceded or followed by demonstrations of our attachment to life: songs and Courts of Love, music performances and sometimes banquets.

Whoever sees only one aspect of such festivals is making a mistake: the deep devotion of the Laotian people presides over both the most profane rejoicings and the loftiest of religious ceremonies.

The Laotian has given himself heart and soul to the Good Law.

To be convinced of this fact, there is only to observe the imperviousness of the population to any new religious doctrine.

The Laotian is tolerant, a tolerance sometimes verging on indifference.

It is said that pastors, while on their rounds of proselytism, even stop in Wats and the monks were helping them to call meetings of villagers. But these same villagers, after listening to records and taking advantage of the pastor's distribution of pamphlets return peacefully home to prepare the meals of their monks, saying in a non-committal manner: «They may be right, but are we in the wrong?».

The Laotian has given himself body and soul to the Good Law of which the monks are the representatives. As an image of the Buddha, the monk is respected and revered; everyone prostrates before him and no one suspects his good faith. No one dares to accuse nor even criticize him, since none of us has any idea of the extent of his knowledge.

The monks are the masters and the inhabitants listen to them.

During the blessed era of Lan Xang, as I have already said, monks were consulted about the smallest action of the public and moral life; to-day with the restoration of peace and prosperity

(1) See below, *Lent and the Water Festival*, p. 283.

NEW YEAR (1)



Photo R. Cauchetier

ARRIVAL OF HIS MAJESTY THE KING AT THE WAT SANGKALOK

NEW YEAR (II)



Photo R. Cauchetier

THE SERMON TO THE ELEPHANTS AT LUANG PRABANG

At Luang Prabang, on occasion of the New Year, a parade of the King's elephants takes place. Here they are, in front of the Elephant Gate, enjoying the distribution of sugar cane for having patiently listened to the Sermon which is delivered every year.

(Notice the elephants' Kha-keepers' uniform, entirely in red as on plate XIX)

the existence of the peaceful villagers is once again regulated by the Buddhist calendar.

THE LAOTIAN AND THE BUDDHIST YEAR

Allow me to describe the life of a good Laotian in the course of a year.

Let us take him first on the day when the earth being at the end of its revolution; he sets himself by giving a last once-over to his belongings packed in trunks and gives a last clean up to the house.

It is the New Year. He opens it by accomplishing, before anything else, the keenly awaited pious deed of cleaning, washing and perfuming the innumerable images found in houses and Wats; then, together with the rest of the village, he carries to the nearby river the sand required for the erection of *thals*, a propitiuous gesture, if any, since every grain of sand washes away a sin and fulfills a wish.

During the following month, every night, whilst praying at the sound of the gong, he visits all the temples and prostrates himself in front of all the Buddhas still gleaming from their recent bath: on this occasion, young and old alike make pledges and wishes for the opening year and for their lives to come.

Soon after, it is the full moon of the sixth month, important date, if any, since it witnessed the Birth, the Enlightenment and the Decease of the Buddha. Who has not seen the fireworks and carnivallike dances, has no idea of the religious spirit by which all minds are then carried away. He should, on the very same day, witness the pious processions organized to escort the *Nāga* to the ordination or the monks to private baptism (1); he should then have a look inside the temples to see the squatting men and women, repeating the holy Precepts and devotedly prostrating themselves after each peroration of the preaching monk.

Outside, amidst the shouts of the crowds, rockets and fireworks are set alight to the accompaniment of explosions of popular rejoicings (2); but it should be realized that it was those very rockets which set fire to the funeral pyre of the Holy One, and that they are a sign of happiness, as Death means Deliverance and that the Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha could only be achieved by fire.

A little later, there come the rains reminding men of the forthcoming cycle of agricultural work. I cannot help digressing somewhat in order to ask those who assert that the Laotian is lazy, to kindly accept the evidence of a son of this country.

(1) See below, *The Boun Bang Fay*, p. 272.

(2) *Ibid.*

In Laos, industry is still inexistant; everyone must satisfy his own needs and, in the country, the division and specialization of labour are unknown.

The Laotian farmer is expected to forge and process his ploughshare; he cannot expect anyone but himself to straighten the handle of his plough, to make shafts and yokes; to repair the cart which has been stored under the house for several months;



Fig. 27.

The That Luang, National Shrine.

to make harrows and knives; to go to the forest in search of extremely strong fibres which are only known to him, and out of which he will make traces for his bulls and buffaloes; to make from bamboo, hemp and ramee, the fishing tackle needed to catch the fishes the rains have brought back to life... To repair the damaged roof of his house, to find new dwellings when necessary, to repair the weaving loom and look after the sick buffalo...

Moreover, he has to provide the everyday food needed to feed his children and the monks.

However, there is no market in a Laotian village, servants and hired labour are unknown; it is therefore, only on himself that he can rely for his upkeep and his subsistence.

It must also be added that a Laotian would consider it a sin in failing to provide food to his monk, or to offer him only *padek* (1), the poorest of food.

(1) See above, p. 226.

For the monks, he will rear chicken and ducks; the best fruits and early vegetables are for the representatives of the Buddha, who for him — and this is the popular conviction — are sources of all merits and the links between his deads and himself.

At last, should we like the French poet La Fontaine, try to draw of the Laotian a complete picture, which would include, besides his wife, his children and his monks, a reference to the taxes he is called upon to pay, the fatigues and compulsory road repairs he must perform, and also the helping hand he has to lend to neighbours in any circumstances, e. g. for the building of a house or other important agricultural tasks? All these jobs never entered the minds of those who readily brand our man as being lazy. With an ever smiling face, the Laotian tackles them all, rising at cock-crow and going home after dark. In return, once his provisions are made, the repairs to his house done and his loft filled, has he not got the right to dream sometimes of the moon or to bask in the sunshine?

Then comes the festival for the departed, preceded by an imposing ceremony which sets the whole village agog with excitement. The monks on peregrination have all returned to their temples; these having being cleaned, as well as the houses and the village streets.

In the beginning of the rainy season, during which the Buddha retired to the Garden of Jetavana, everyone indulges in serious reflexions over one's conduct and, like the monks who go on their weekly public confession, thus each villager keeps watch over his conscience and works for his salvation. On the way to the temple, tired hearts find some comfort in the thought of Universal Suffering and on the possibility of attaining *Nirvāṇa*.

I don't think anything needs to be said about the full moon of the eighth month; this solemn day is marked by a great procession of candles and robe offerings, the purchase to which everyone has contributed; but I should like to lay special stress on the three fasting months during which, regularly every week, everyone goes to the temple to make offerings, to listen to the sermons, and to observe the Eight Precepts.

It is during this fast that are celebrated the two festivals for our departed, the *Hokhaopadap Dink* (end of the ninth month) and the *Hokhao Slak*, at the full moon of the tenth month.

As far as I can recall, it is to my mind a most dignified period during which my countrymen's behaviour is at their best. My eyes are still full of the weekly procession of men and women of all ages going to the temples; and my ears still ringing with the reading of the monotonous moral lessons and the narratives of the Lives of the Bodhisattva; every day, I can still hear the gong of the temple striking four and its sounds brings back to me some vague legend of a captive princess and evokes the reappearance in the world of the living of people who died long ago. Through

their deep and grave vibrations, the gong of the temples speak to our hearts and to our imagination as peals of the bells speak to the Christians; this gong is our history and our inner life, it is our moral comfort and a stage in every day life.

The Festival of the Departed is marked by an abundance of offerings: cigarettes and quids of betel nuts, cakes and fruits; long since have the former been bought and long since have the latter been prepared for the purpose.

It is in vain, that greedy children cry over so many desirable and good things; their mothers will merely answer that they



Fig. 28.

...around the *thats* and the monuments
containing relics.

cannot be served before the monks and that all these excellent things are intended for a departed sister or brother, or again for a great-uncle or grand-father who are no more.

To understand the merriment of children and the general rejoicing during these two eventful days, we should, in the Christian calendar, refer to Easter or Christmas. On these holy days, more than a child has taken to the taste of rare delicacies !

In an atmosphere glittering with dust in the sunshine, dainty foods, cakes and gifts of all kinds can be seen hanging everywhere; at door steps of houses, in the temples, at the gates, and even on the tombs... During these two days, all work stops in the fields and, the Laotian putting into practice the Precepts of the Perfect

One, meditates on the deeper sense of life whilst pottering around.

Then we come to the end of the fasting period, to the Shrines Festival which marks the fortunate period of the harvest, and then at last to the third month Festival, during which the Laotians free from any urgent tasks, give themselves unreservedly to both pleasure and devotion.

We then come to the fourth month, which opens the period of the Great Renunciation, the *Pha Vel* (1) festival, the Bodhisattva abandoning his wife, his children and his horse. Following his example, every one deprives himself by making offerings. These village festivals can be compared only to the *Kan Thin*, during which religious vestments are offered to the monks (2).

The Buddha said: « Wealth on earth must be sought only for the purpose of food and alms... The dead cannot take these wordly goods with him; it would, therefore, be unreasonable to seek too much for oneself ».

Faithful followers of the Doctrine, the Laotian is content with little and gives much alms; profusely, he quotes examples of natural justice proving that ill-gotten gains seldom prosper.

BUDDHISM AT HOME

As I have already said, the Laotian gets up at cock-crow. His rice must be cooked when the sound of the gongs warn him of the forthcoming alms round of the monks. When the latter reach the village, all the inhabitants are ready to fill their bowls with hot rice.

Whilst those who have given their first alms of the day, drink to the goddess Earth to bear witness of their good deeds and make their first wishes, the servants, elders or the youngest girl in the house is sent to the temple with the morning meal for the monks.

On these typically Laotian village paths, calling gaily to one another, the food bearers walk in single file, carrying on their shoulders a bamboo pole loaded at one end with a basket of food and at the other end with a basket of rice. These people too are performing deserving deeds, and will not have to wait very long for their daily blessings.

Gna'Tha: « *Rivers are ever flowing, they are feeding and filling the oceans. In the same way the alms you are giving now, will reach those who are no more.* »

« *May the rewards you are expecting soon be granted to you. May all your desires be fulfilled as fully as the moon on the 15th day. And may they sparkle like the precious stone which is ever shining with all its glitter.* »

(1) See below, *The boun Pha-Vel*, p. 294.

(2) *Ibid.*

Sapphi: *May all malignity disappear. May all illnesses and fevers disappear. May all dangers disappear.*

« *May you enjoy a long life. The Four Jewels of the Teachings: Longevity, Health, Happiness, Strength, shall be your attributes — oh, you who has always acted with humbleness and gentleness towards old folks.* »

Phavatou sab: *Through the power of the Buddha, of His Teachings and of the Community, may all blessings befall you. May the gods protect you for ever and may you always enjoy the best of health.* »

Then, these people too, drink to Nang Thorani, the goddess Earth. They hand over the alms to those who are no more, to their dead and the wandering dead who are without any families still alive and, therefore, uncared for; they wish them a prompt rebirth, asking for themselves a better human life as they can hardly expect to reach that of *arahat* or supreme state, i.e. the condition of the Blessed One who shall be reborn only with the Buddha to come.

Then, and only then will the Laotian, after having kotowed, have his breakfast and go about his business.

In the evening again, before going to bed, either alone or with his family, he will put some flowers before the statues of the Master standing on the shelves above his bed, and recite a prayer by which he puts his confidence and his salvation in the Buddha, his Doctrine (*Dhamma*) and his Community (*Saṅgha*). Once a week, according to his possibilities, he observes the Five or Eight Precepts: not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to lie, not to drink spirits, not to eat after mid-day, not to adorn or perfume himself, not to lay on mattresses or on high beds.

Thus runs the life of the faithful, yet his religious fervour still impregnates every important circumstances of his life and so expresses itself at birth, adolescence, marriage and death (1).

Although monks do not call at houses where the first wails of a new life can be heard, and although we do not have at home anything similar to Christian baptism, in most cases it is the monk who is consulted about the name to be given to the child, since he is practically the only one to know how to combine the letters and syllables of the name with the conjunction of stars, the day and the hour of birth. As the fairies in the French fairy-tales, he and he alone knows how to read the infant's future in his little hand and to fill mothers' hearts with optimism; he alone knows how to prescribe remedies and other steps to be taken to ensure the newly born child's happiness and longevity.

Among the small pieces of jewellery given by the parents, which are to be fasten around the neck or the wrist of the child, there is always a golden or silver plate on which a few sacred

(1) See above, *Profane and Religious Festivals*, p. 126.

characters or even a whole *gālhā* has been engraved by a monk.

The child belongs to the monk. As soon as he can make himself useful, he will accompany his mother whenever she goes to pay respects to the image of the Buddha; it is he, the *lad*, who gives away water, cigarettes and betel quids. Upon reaching the age of ten, the child will leave his parents to go and live at the temple at the service of the monk who then becomes his tutor. On this occasion, the father never fail to tell the master: « Do what you like with him and treat him (understand, ill-treat him) as you please, so long as you do not cripple him ».

While learning the letters of the alphabet, the child will be trained as the monk's servant and, whether unknowingly or not, he will learn the elementary *suttas* by heart.

With the child in the hands of the monk, the parents are relieved of any care, not only regarding his immediate future, but also regarding his future lives.

In this country, a gentleman is one who « listens to the monk's advice ». The monk is in fact the *guru* (*khru*) whose word carries authority and whose opinion will be preferred to tradition even though it would run counter to it.

Thus, every Laotian grows up under the supervision of a monk, his *khru*, who even after leaving the pagoda will remain his guide and friend, his consoler and sometimes his confident.

Since it must not be forgotten that the monk — and every Laotian has been one, without exaggeration — has served three masters: the monk (*upaja*) who presided over his ordination ceremony and the two witnesses (*kammavacha*) who were responsible for him in the same circumstance.

Monks also preside over marriage and death.

On the eve of the wedding ceremony proper, the two fiancés are united by a cotton thread to a chapter of monks who then bless the water in which the young people will be bathed early next morning. Immediately after, the couple offer food to the monks and receive their blessings. This is the ceremony known as the *suaṃ mon lod nam yen*, by which the two young people are joined in wedlock before their monks (1).

Laotian funerals and the role played by the monks in that circumstance have already been described, I shall therefore not refer to it again.

Blessed is the Laotian who has a male child, he can then organize a ceremony of ordination and offer him as a disciple to the Buddha.

One of the greatest joys I gave to my mother in the Autumn of her life, was when upon my graduation, I told her of my wish to make — if only for a few weeks — a retreat at the temple. At last she had found her child again; she considered herself

(1) See above, *Marriage Rites*, p. 137.

repaid for all her sacrifices and miseries; she was rewarded for all her days of fasting and for the long hours of silence and meditation she had devoted to us, when on *sin* days, after returning from the temple she would, in spite of her tiredness, sit among us to recite the lives of the Bodhisattva in order to make us share her enthusiasm and her faith.

On entering a temple, man saves himself as well as his family. That is why, at all ages, the Laotian turns to his temple as a Christian turns to his church.

In the Autumn of life, every Laotian seeks refuge in the silence of the sanctuary. Tête-à-tête with the smile of the Buddha, every Laotian tries to find solace in the atonement of his past mistakes. Through meditation everyone prepares himself for his death to come.

The Laotian is humble. The terms he applies to himself when talking to an equal is *khoy* (« slave »), and when he addresses a superior *kha noy* (« little slave »). In officialese or when addressing a crowd, the term *kha pha chao*, or « slave of Buddha », is used.



Fig. 29.

...in the bright mornings, they go, draped in their orange robes.

Thus, when he doesn't want to admit being anybody's slave, Laotians are not afraid to state openly that they are the servants of the Master. It is to the Three Jewels — the Buddha, the Doctrine, the Community — that he pays tribute and expresses

his gratitude, when in his correspondence he writes that he is well or that some good fortune has befallen him; again it is to the Three Jewels that the poet appeals when he is short of inspiration or for help when his learning fails him.

Laotians are deeply devout.

They have given themselves heart and soul to the Buddha and sincerely believe that all the actions of their daily life are consistent with the Precepts of the One who will never be reborn.

THE REFORMATION OF BUDDHISM

Laotians, however, have created a Buddhism of their own.

Once more we find how strong is man's subjection to nature and to historical events. Now in this country, nature is friendly and easy; and as a result of its influence we are inclined to softness and peace; history has lead us to seek for comfort and solace within a Buddhism both peaceful and good natured.

But what is there behind this pleasant setting of religiousness, behind our monks in eternal prayers and our faithful so piously heedful to the performance of rites? There is — with a deep religious feeling — ignorance, much fatalism and an inexhaustible resignation. Yet all this, unfortunately, lead us to death.

How much ignorance among the monks! the Pāli tongue which is less and less understood has become a screen behind which they hide their ignorance. Temples have become the centers of endless discussions on childish details. Our monks, like the physicians of Molière, believe they can explain everything by quoting more or less correctly sentences in Pāli or some references to which the common people has no access. All axioms and sophisms are considered good enough to come to the aid of their poor reasoning. And they go on repeating endlessly the same platitudes about the vanity of life, the inevitable sufferings of existence and the inescapable nature of death.

This lack of reasoning goes with a daily slackening in the performance of religious rites. Monks relax their discipline, and it can be noticed in temples as well as in the streets, in cemeteries and in homes. In its essence, Buddhism is deeply tolerant; but ours has in fact lost too much of its authority. Prayers are badly known and difficult passages, are marked by pauses... leaving it to the other fellows « to manage »... to take it up again after a short pause. People will smoke during religious ceremonies or even talk or walk about without any order or dignity. In the field of manners, as in religion, our monks are far from being the elite they are supposed to be

Ordinations and even private baptism have been initiated in a haphazard manner, and we know a great many *Thits* and *Chans* who cannot even sign their names

We have a maxim which says: « The lotus flower floats on the water of the lake ». Like laity, like monks.

In reality, the disillusioned Laotian people convinced of the futility of any action is taking life easily. Life is a test which has to be endured and the best way of going through it with a view to a better life is to preserve what there is, altering it as little as possible lest one should do wrong.

Laotian Buddhism therefore preaches a disheartening individualism — a disheartening egotism, I should say. « Seek your own salvation », the Buddha said, and so Laotians take no interest in others.

What does it matter if the monks fail in their moral or social rôle; what does it matter if they no longer teach; what does it matter if they unfrock themselves and again smile at life under their robes! It is their business. Everyone does what one can: man is weak; too much cannot be expected of him...

Expressions of despair and resignation, expressions of neglect and defeat; every Laotian has an ample supply of them and which he ascribes to the Doctrine.



A contemporary author has written: « Who abandons is lost ».

I love the religion of my forefathers and wish to serve my country: may I be permitted to point out to the great danger which is threatening us; we have made Buddhism a doctrine of apathy, which is leading us to our doom.

However, our race has the will to live and is proving it. The magnificent revival of Laos, which since 1941, is pulling our old country out of its sleep, has deeply affected our youth. The souls of our youth of to-day are not open to expressions of discouragement and resignation. Inspired with hope, these souls are opened to the call of life.

Will this eager youth preserve the faith of our forefathers if it finds in it only ignorance and resignation? It is highly improbable.

Reforms are needed; they are urgent and must be deep.

It is not for me here, as a new Luther, to launch a complete programme intended to save a religion which is slowly going off to sleep.

After long years of illness, can a man be saved if he has only faith in the old remedies of quacks and refuses to listen to modern treatments and therapeutics? And if perchance our man agrees to place himself in the hands of modern physicians, it is often too late. The disease has done too much harm and the physician can only delay the end. Is it not what is actually happening nine times out of ten with our patients who drag themselves to hospital when they have given up all hopes? Will this occur in the case of our Buddhism?

Is hope needed to act? In certain cases, too much foresight leads to pessimism. The physician who knows that his patient is doomed will, nevertheless, keep on prescribing the medicine which his condition requires.

It is in that spirit that I shall outline, if I may, some of the reforms of which our sinking Buddhism stands in need of.

In the first place, we should devote ourselves to the education of the higher clergy in Pāli, in Laotian language and in general knowledge.

A small group of enlightened monks — those who should be our religious leaders — should realize the part they are to play as educators and the duties they should perform; as moral guides, let them set an example of dignified behaviour and of cardinal virtues.

The day when a chosen body of educated monks will put into practise what they preach, will stigmatize the bad shepherds and talk to their flock with a language of everyday life, on that day maybe shall we see once again processions of young and old return to the temples, with hearts full of hope and faith.

All Laotians can and must co-operate to this effort of revival of our clergy. Since the monks are chosen among the faithful and live on their charity.

In order that Buddhism should flourish anew in this country, the Laotian people must desire a more learned, dignified and austere clergy; and to back up its wish, it must refuse to support and to respect ignorant monks who stagnate not so much in lofty meditations than in laziness.

This is not impossible, since in my own village, I have seen genuine and worthy monks who being both active and industrious were respected by the population and in turn respected it.

To bring about this revival, everyone must be prompted, officials and ordinary people alike, with a more active religious feeling, if not increased, and we should not lose interest in the life and actions of our monks. They should keep longer to their vows and not unfrock themselves whenever they please.

Shocking behaviour in religious ceremonies must no longer be tolerated; nor laxity in monks who stroll about in the streets while shouting and gesticulating like plain people, who are only one step from participating in Courts of Love and who during festivals and ceremonies, laugh at the often spicy jokes of the crowd, and who are more concerned with profane entertainment than with their actual condition.

It is necessary that everyone of us has a better knowledge of the rules of the *Saṅgha*, and expects a stricter observance of these by the monks, so as to make religious life impossible to undesirable elements, who should be expelled in the interest of the Order.

Temples should be well kept and their appearance improved, a task primarily for its inhabitants, i. e., the monks. They should

no longer remain unconcerned while walls and columns are in a state of collapse, not even bothering to remove fallen bricks or to sweep dust away.

Such are the main features of the reforms which to my mind ought to be imposed to save Buddhism. But are they adequate? I have no illusion about it.

When a temple falls in ruin, the faithful bring their contributions towards its repair. I am bringing mine too, but it is insufficient; we need also those of our *mahas* and *pandits*. The time has come to convene a Great Council for a new leadership, I should say.

How many times, as sad witness of certain religious ceremonies, while musing in the shade of the *thats*, have I dreamt of such a man who would come to new Laos and give a new life to its Buddhism.

. . .

This admirable Doctrine, appealing to the heart as well as to reason, has rightly been celebrated as one of the purest jewels in the world. The new-born Doctrine achieved that miracle; in a few decades it conquered half of the then civilized world, from Greece to the East Indian Archipelago and from Tibet to Japan.

It triumphed, not by means of an enterprising proselytism — nothing could be more contrary to its tenets — but by the sole virtues of the Truth it taught men and the confidence it gavethem.

Twenty-five centuries after the first Sermon of the Master, scholars from both East and West still ponder over his Words extolling all the beauty of their quintessence.

Those forebears of ours, Laotians, have heard the Word of the Wise One. They opened their hearts to his Teachings. His Doctrine has been their consolation, their hope and the light of their life for generations. At that time the fame of Laos extended far and wide. All along the Mekong valley, innumerable and magnificently built temples sang both the greatness of the Perfect One and the glory of Lan Xang.

Will Laos break away from a Doctrine which has forged the soul of our forefathers? Will it break away with a faith which has been so intimately associated with the labours and struggles of our ancestors, with their dreams and their hopes and which presided over the finest centuries of our history?

I cannot believe it. Now that in all fields this country is marching forward on the road to life, I am sure, it will also lead its religion and its monks on that same road.

Drawings by Marc LEGUAY.

Organization of the Sangha

by

KRUONG PATHOUMXAD,
Director of Religious Affairs.

The Sangha in the Laotian Kingdom is governed by a regulation which has received Royal Ordinance. The main objects of this regulation are as follows:

— to ensure the preservation of the regular cult, the maintenance and restoration of Wats and other monuments which are either of a Buddhist or religious nature;

— to develop religious education in order to promote higher intellectual and moral culture of the people and of the Sangha;

— to renovate the Buddhist institutions and other welfare organizations and to enlarge the scope of Buddhist action.

HIERARCHY OF MONKS AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

In the Kingdom of Laos, the Sangha is divided into six grades in decreasing order: *Nholkeo*, *Loukkeo*, *Lakkham*, *Khru*, *Sa* and *Somdel*. The conditions upon which they are determined are laid down in a Royal Ordinance.

All members of the Sangha in the Kingdom, monks and novices are placed under the authority of a Superior, the *Phra Sangharaja* whose seat is, as a rule, established in the capital of the Kingdom.

In administering the Sangha of the Kingdom, the *Phra Sangharaja* is assisted by a Religious Council consisting of five high dignitaries (*Chao Rajakhana*).

Each province of the Kingdom forms a diocese. The Wats and all the members of the Sangha, monks and novices, are placed under the authority of a Leader, the *Chao Khana Khueng*, who resides in a Wat in the provincial capital in order to remain in a constant contact with the *Chao Khueng*. The Heads of the dioceses are placed under the direct authority of the *Phra Sangharaja* whom they represent in each provincial diocese.

All the Wats located within the *Muong* (district) make up a *Khana Muong* which is placed under the authority of the religious

head of the *Muong* (*Chao Khana Muong*) who is directly placed under the Head of the diocese and who resides in a Wat of the district capital (*Muong*) in order to keep in permanent contact with the *Chao Muong*.

All the Wats located within a *Tasseng* (subdivision of a *Muong*), make up a *Khana Tasseng* placed under the authority of a *Chao Khana Tasseng* directly dependent upon a *Chao Khana Muong* residing at the main Wat of the *Tasseng*.

Each Wat, including resident monks and novices, is under the authority of a head of Wat (the abbot), the *Chao Athikane Wat* who is directly under the orders of the *Chao Khana Tasseng*.

APPOINTMENT OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

When a Wat loses its abbot, either through death or any other causes, the senior monk assumes the responsibility of the administration of the Wat; he immediately notifies the *Chao Khana Tasseng* who in turn informs the *Tasseng* without delay.

The *Chao Khana Tasseng*, shall within three days go to the Wat for the purpose of nominating a new *Chao Athikane Wat* in consultation with the monks, the chief of the village and other officials. As soon as agreement has been reached, the *Chao Khana Tasseng*, through the *Tasseng*, submits a written nomination to the *Chao Khana Muong* who then transmits it with his observations to the head of the diocese through the *Chao Khueng*.

In agreement with the *Chao Khueng*, the Head of the diocese decides in favour either of the ratification or the rejection of the nomination which has been submitted to him.

In the first instance, the *Chao Khana Khueng* delivers to the new abbot a certificate of appointment bearing both his signature and seal of office as well as the confirmation of the *Chao Khueng*. In the second instance, the *Chao Khana Tasseng* is ordered to select a new candidate according to the same procedure.

The installation of the new abbot and the presentation of his certificate of appointment is performed by the *Chao Khana Tasseng*, assisted by the *Tasseng* and the Chief of the village where the Wat is located.

When a *Khana Tasseng* is deprived of its leader, this fact is immediately notified to the *Chao Muong* (District Leader) by the *Tasseng* (Chief of the *Tasseng*). In turn, the *Chao Muong* must notify the *Chao Khana Muong* without delay. The latter then, in agreement with the *Chao Muong*, calls a meeting of all the monks of the *Khana Tasseng* concerned for the purpose of nominating with the agreement of the *Tasseng* and *Naibans* a new *Chao Khana Tasseng*. The nomination being agreed upon, it is then notified to the Head of the diocese through the *Chao Khueng* together with the observations of the responsible officials.

In agreement with the *Chao Khueng*, the Head of the diocese then takes the decision to accept or reject the proposed candidate. In case of acceptance, a new certificate of appointment, bearing the *Chao Khana Khueng*'s signature and seal, as well as the confirmation from the *Chao Khueng*, shall be delivered to the new *Chao Khana Tasseng*. In case of rejection, a new nomination shall be made in accordance with the same procedure.

The ceremony of installation of the *Chao Khana Tasseng* and the presentation of his nomination certificate shall be performed by the *Chao Khana Muong* or his delegate, assisted by the *Chao Muong* or his delegate, who can be either an official from the *Muong* or from the *Tasseng*.

In the case of a *Chao Khana Muong*, the whole body of the *Chao Khana Tasseng* of the *Muong* is responsible for the nomination. This meeting is presided over by the *Chao Khana Khueng*, assisted by the *Chao Muong*.

The Head of the diocese shall decide in agreement with the *Chao Khueng* on the confirmation or rejection of the proposed candidate. If it is accepted by the Religious Council, the *Phra Sangharaja* shall deliver to the *Chao Khana Muong* a certificate of appointment bearing the confirmation seal of the Minister of Religious Affairs; if rejected a new nomination will have to be made.

The installation of a new *Chao Khana Muong* in its functions and the presentation of a certificate of nomination is attended by the Head of the diocese or his delegate, assisted by the *Chao Khueng* or his delegate.

In the case of a vacancy at the head of a diocese, the new candidate is nominated by all the *Chao Khana Muongs* of the province.

This nomination can be effected by correspondence. The nomination papers should be sent to the *Chao Khueng* in sealed envelopes by the *Chao Muong* responsible for the nomination. The *Chao Khueng* shall transmit the documents concerned, together with his comments, to the Minister of Religious Affairs, who in turn submits them to the Religious Council for consideration. The nomination is approved by Royal Ordinance on the recommendations of the *Phra Sangharaja* and of the Minister of Religious Affairs.

The installation in its functions of the newly appointed Head of diocese and of the presentation of his certificate of appointment is attended by the President of the Religious Council or by his delegate, assisted by the Director of Religious Affairs or by his delegate and by the *Chao Khueng* of the province.

The *Sangharaja* is chosen by all the *Chao Khana Khuengs* of all the provinces of the Kingdom and by the members of the Religious Council, among a list of candidates presented by the Minister of Religious Affairs. Polling can take place by corres-

pondence in sealed envelopes sent by the *Chao Khuengs* to the Minister of Religious Affairs responsible for the nomination. The results of the election for the *Phra Sangharaja* are submitted for consideration and comment to the Council of Ministers. The nomination of the *Phra Sangharaja* is pronounced by Royal Charter on the proposition of the Cabinet.

The installation of the *Phra Sangharaja* and the presentation of his certificate of appointment shall be attended by His Majesty the King, assisted by the Members of the Council of the *Hosanam Luang* and of the King's Council.

The *Chao Rajakhanas* or members of the Higher Council of the Sangha assisting the *Phra Sangharaja*, are appointed by the King on the joint recommendation of the *Phra Sangharaja* and of the Minister of Religious Affairs. The installation of the *Chao Rajakhanas* and the presentation of their certificate of appointment are attended by the *Phra Sangharaja*, assisted by the Minister of Religious Affairs.

The religious authorities we have just mentioned (*Phra Sangharaja*, *Chao Rajakhana*, *Chao Khana Khueng*, *Chao Khana Muong*, *Chao Khana Taseng* and *Chao Athikana Wat*) are chosen among the members of the Sangha of the following grades respectively: *Nholkeo*, *Loukkeo*, *Lakkham*, *Khrou*, *Sa* and *Somdel*, which have already been mentioned above.

In the absence of monks of the higher orders, administrative authority may be — in the conditions laid down hereunder — entrusted to monks of directly inferior orders, provided that they have, at least, diplomas or certificates of religious education:

Firstly, diploma of higher studies for the first three grades (*Phra Sangharaja*, *Chao Rajakhana* and *Chao Khana Khueng*);

Secondly, secondary and elementary certificate for the last three posts (*Chao Khana Muong*, *Chao Khana Taseng* and *Chao Athikane Wat*).

DUTIES OF NOVICES, MONKS AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

On the pain of sanctions as laid down in the religious rules, every member of the Sangha (monks and novices) is bound to observe discipline and Buddhist rules, to study the Teachings of the Buddha and to facilitate the task of the head (the abbot) of the Wat.

The abbot shall either by himself or with the assistance of another monk, accepted for that purpose by the administrative authorities, open Wat school where the children of the neighbouring villages may attend in order to learn how to read and write, arithmetic and the history of Laos. He is responsible before the higher religious authorities :

— for the regular observance of the worship and Precepts of the Buddhist religion;

— for the discipline of monks, novices and school children at his Wat, as well as for the good-behaviour of laity who, for a while, might stop over at his Wat;

— for the safe keeping, preservation and maintenance of the Wat's property (land, temple, dwellings of the monks, images of the Buddha and other objects of worship or for other purposes at the Wat).

In exercising his responsibilities and in the performance of his duties with regard to the cult, discipline or upkeep, the abbot may, whenever his own authority has failed or has proved to be inadequate, call for the assistance of the Chief of the village or even the higher administrative authorities.

The abbot must carry out the order issued by his superiors and make a quarterly report to the *Chao Khana Tasseng* on the following matters :

1. the number of monks and novices of his Wat, and the number of children attending the school;
2. the results of the teachings given at his Wat;
3. the behaviour of his clergy and any breach of the laws of the Kingdom committed by monks and novices;
4. the admissions to the Sangha, as well as all reduction in the number of monks either through death or departures;
5. the posting to his Wat of members of the Sangha from other Wats;
6. the postings to other Wats of members of the Sangha who were under his orders;
7. the condition of his Wat, of the images of the Buddha and of all other objects belonging to the Cult;
8. the discovery and disappearance of images of the Buddha and other religious relics, wherever they occur.

The *Chao Khana Tasseng* is responsible for :

1. the carrying out by the abbots of Wats and the members of the Sangha of his *Khana* (parish) of the orders issued by the higher authorities;
2. the observance of Buddhist Principles by abbots and other members of the Sangha of his *Khana*. Moreover, he should, at frequent intervals, visit the various Wats of his *Khana* with a view to inspect Wats' schools and to supervise the education of the members of the Sangha and the preservation of religious property.

He should send the *Chao Khana Muong* a report of all the information which shall be given to him by the abbots, and of all other information in general, that he might have picked up personally during his inspection tours.

The *Chao Khana Tasseng* must keep up to date, in agreement with the *Tasseng*, a nominal roll of the Wats and of all the

members of the Sangha in his *Khana* and to report to the *Chao Khana Muong* any infringement committed by the monks of his *Khana* together with his observations on the matter.

The *Chao Khana Muong*, within his own *Muong*, is the official representative of the *Chao Khana Khueng*. He is placed under the supervision of the *Chao Muong* and exercises his authority over all the *Chao Khana Tassengs* and *Chao Athikan Wats*, as well as over all the monks in the *Muong*.

In agreement with the *Chao Muong*, he is responsible to keep up to date a nominal roll of the Wats and of all the religious of the *Muong*. All the *Chao Khana Tassengs* must keep him informed of all questions pertaining to the members of the Sangha, the Wats and other matters of worship arising in every *Khana Tasseng* in the *Muong*. He must report to his *Chao Khana Khueng* all important matters within his jurisdiction together with his own comments. He is responsible for a periodical inspection of the *Khana Tassengs*, their Wats and schools, so as to ensure that they are well administered and run, and also to appraise their needs.

The *Chao Khana Khueng* is, within his province, the official representative of the *Phra Sangharaja*, and is responsible for the carrying out of his instructions.

In agreement with the *Chao Khueng*, the *Chao Khana Khueng* exercises his authority — either by personal contacts or through representatives or by correspondence — over all *Chao Khana Muongs*, *Chao Khana Tassengs*, *Chao Athikan Wats* and all other members of the Sangha at provincial level. He keeps up to date, in agreement with the *Chao Khueng*, a nominal and numerical roll of all the Wats and of all the monks in the province. The *Chao Khana Muongs* are requested to keep him inform on all matters relating to the conditions of the Wats, the members of the Sangha and the exercising of the cult in each *Khana Muong* of his province. He keeps the *Phra Sangharaja* inform of all important events within his jurisdiction and submits proposals under the responsibility of the *Chao Khueng* and the Minister of Religious Affairs.

In religious councils, the *Phra Sangharaja* exercises his authority and initiative in all fields pertaining to the Sangha, Discipline and Cult, so that the Rules and observances of the Buddhist cult should be kept in conformity with the texts of the *Tipitaka*.

The five *Chao Rajakhanas* or members of the Religious Council, perform the following functions, the first one acts as President of the Council, Delegate of the *Phra Sangharaja* and Director of the Sangha of the Kingdom; the second acts as Secretary of the Council and the three others as Heads of Departments of the Directorate of the Sangha of the Kingdom.

In principle, the Consultative Assembly of the Sangha of the Kingdom, which consists of the Heads of dioceses and their

deputies, and of the Principals of the Pali schools of the Kingdom, meets in the capital during the twelfth month. It is convened by the Minister of Religious Affairs at the request of the *Phra Sangharaja*, in order to be consulted on any matter raised by the Religious Council.

ADMISSION TO THE SANGHA

No one may be admitted to the Sangha as a novice under the age of 10, and under the age of 20 as a monk.

Anyone wishing to take up the robes as a novice must be presented by his parents to the head of the Wat, who will then proceed with the ordination. If he has no family, the postulant then may be presented by the local administration authorities, which will vouch for his identity and moral conduct.

Two years after admission to the Sangha, any novice must be able to read and write Laotian. If after taking the robes, the novice does not prove to have sufficient intellectual capabilities or manual skill, the abbot of the Wat then refers the matter to the Religious Disciplinary Board which pronounce on the sanction to be taken.

Anyone at the age of 18 and over, anxious to don the robes of novice or monk, must first obtain the *Chao Muong's* written authorization. Such authorization to enter the Sangha can only be given to postulants who:

- are presented to him by the local authorities as being of good reputation and domiciled within the district for no less than six months;
- are of sound body and mind and show no symptoms of contagious diseases;
- are within the age limits;
- have the required knowledge on Buddhism.

The knowledge required of the postulants to become novices must be attested by the *Chao Khana Tasseng* under his own responsibility. Those required for the postulants to monkhood must be attested by the *Chao Khana Muong* under his own responsibility.

The *Chao Muongs* are personally responsible for any illegal or irregular authorizations delivered by them.

Only abbots of Wats and higher Buddhist officials are qualified to proceed with the ordination of candidates to the noviciate. Any qualified member of the Sangha shall only proceed with the ordination of postulants provided with the authorization delivered by the *Chao Muong*. Any member of the Sangha who would have admitted into the Sangha a postulant not provided

with the authorization from the *Chao Muong*, may be liable to sanction by the religious tribunal.

The ordination of monks and novices must be performed in accordance with the rites of *Theravada*.

The authorization to leave the Sangha must be granted by the *Chao Khana Khueng* in agreement with the *Chao Khueng*. The latter then informs the *Chao Muong* who had previously delivered the authorization.

IDENTITY OF MEMBERS OF THE SANGHA

Any member of the Sangha responsible for the admission to the flock of candidates (at least 18 years old) must, at the end of the ceremony, issue to the new member of the Community a *Sa-Gna* of a model approved by the Administration, which is used in lieu of an identity card by the person concerned. The *Sa-Gna* is issued to any monk or novice who is reaching 18 years of age.

POSTING OF MEMBERS OF THE SANGHA

When any monk or novice leaves his Wat for good, the abbot shall mention the change of residence at the back of the *Sa-Gna* of the person concerned and shall inform the *Chao Khana Tasseng* by letter of the member's date of departure and also of his new posting. The *Chao Khana Tasseng* in turn must inform the *Chao Khana Muong* who keeps up to date the nominal roll of all member of the Sangha in his *Muong*.

No monk or novice must travel in the Kingdom, even temporarily, without his *Sa-Gna*. Any member of the Sangha who plans to leave the province, either temporarily or to take up permanent residence in another province of the Kingdom, must inform in advance the *Chao Khana Muong* and the *Chao Muong*. He must also comply to police regulations.

Any member of the Sangha who wants to go abroad, either temporarily or to take up permanent residence, must have a passport and other papers as laid down by police regulations.

Any monk coming from abroad either for the purpose of residing temporarily or permanently in one of the Wats of the Kingdom, must report to the Headquarters of the National Police, where he will be issued with a temporary residential permit, provided a Laotian member of the Sangha is willing to answer for him, upon the recommendation of both the *Chao Khueng* and the *Chao Khana Khueng*. Such authorization is issued only on very serious grounds.

RULES OF THE SANGHA

Any infringement of the Religious Rules committed by any monk or novice is sanctioned by penalties provided for in the Buddhist Law.

The Board or Discipline which sits in each *Khana Tasseng* is made up as follows :

| | |
|----------------|---|
| President..... | The <i>Chao Khana Tasseng</i> |
| Member..... | A head of Wat |
| Members..... | Two members of the Sangha |
| Members..... | The local <i>Tasseng</i> |
| Member..... | A layman holding a degree in Pali (<i>Maha</i>)
and in <i>Dhamma (Nak Tham)</i> or fail-
ing, a layman with sound knowledge
of Buddhist Law. |

It is the duty of the President of the *Khana Tasseng's* Board of Discipline to forward the opinions given in each case to the *Chao Khana Muong*, who shall pronounce upon the decision to be taken.

If, according to the decision, the member of the Sangha involved is to be expelled from the Sangha, the *Chao Khana Muong* must refer the documents of the case to the *Khana Muong's* tribunal within which the *Tasseng* is situated.

In the case of similar violation by the higher religious authorities (*Chao Athikane Wat*, *Chao Khana Tasseng*, *Chao Khana Muong*, *Chao Khana Khueng* and *Chao Rajakhana*), the accused monks are brought before the religious tribunals sitting in its capacity of a higher Board of Discipline. The *Chao Athikane Wat* and *Chao Khana Tasseng* must be brought before a religious tribunal of 1st instance within the jurisdiction of the *Khana Muong*; the *Chao Khana Muong* before the tribunal of 2nd instance (that of the *Khana Khueng*) and the *Chao Khana Khueng* and *Chao Rajakhana* before the tribunal of the 3rd instance (that of the highest religious court in the Kingdom).

In each *Khana Muong* a religious tribunal is established as follows :

| | |
|----------------|---|
| President..... | The <i>Chao Khana Muong</i> |
| Member..... | The <i>Chao Muong</i> or his delegate |
| Members..... | Two members of the Sangha |
| Member..... | A layman holding a degree in Pali (<i>Maha</i>)
or in <i>Dhamma (Nak Tham)</i> or failing
that, a layman with sound knowledge
of the <i>Vinaya</i> . |

It is the duty of the President of the *Khana Muong's* religious tribunal to forward the opinions to the *Chao Khana Khueng*, who pronounces upon the decision to be taken in agreement with the *Chao Khueng*.

The composition of the religious tribunal of the second instance and that of the Highest Tribunal of the Sangha are similar to that of the religious tribunal of the first instance, except for the following modifications:

— the religious tribunal of the second instance, which is presided by a *Chao Khana Khueng* includes a *Chao Khueng* or his delegate and a *Chao Khana Muong*, representing the civil and religious authorities;

— as to the Highest Tribunal of the Sangha of the Kingdom, it is presided over by the *Phra Sangharaja*. The civil and religious authorities being represented by the Director of Religious Affairs and a *Chao Khana Khueng*.

The opinions of those tribunals are transmitted to the higher authorities through the official channels.

On the express request of the accused the case shall be sent with the *Chao Khana Khueng*'s opinions to the *Phra Sangharaja* who shall adjudicate upon the matter with the Minister of Religious Affairs, sitting in the Highest Religious Tribunal.

If the member of the Sangha concerned has infringed both the religious rules and the penal law, the Civil Authorities (*Chao Muong*, *Chao Khueng*, Minister of Religious Affairs) shall refer the matter to a tribunal.

When a member of the Sangha has been charged with an infraction to penal law and that his guilt has been proved, the abbot of his Wat shall be notified. In the event of legal prosecution against the member of the Sangha accused, he shall, prior to his arraignment, be immediately expelled in accordance with the award from the religious tribunal.

The expulsion of monks is decided upon by the higher Buddhist authorities acting in conformity with the Buddhist code of discipline; that of novices by the abbot of their Wats. The *Sa-Gna* of the member of the Sangha concerned is withdrawn from him and sent to the *Chao Muong* with a reference to the date of his striking-off and with a view to have his name entered in the ratepayers register. When this is done, the *Chao Muong* forwards the *Sa-Gna* to the *Chao Khana Muong*.

Any member of the Sangha who has been expelled either by disciplinary measures or under the provisions of the Penal Code, cannot be admitted again in the Community. Any member of the Sangha who, in spite of this interdiction, takes orders again or attempts to do so will be liable to an imprisonment of six months to two years, as laid down in the Penal Code.

Is expelled automatically:

— any monk addicted to spirits or opium;

— any monk wearing the robes without been regularly admitted to the Sangha. Moreover, the latter is liable to an imprisonment of six months to two years, as provided in the Penal Code.

RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS

Any member of the Sangha or layman who wishes to build a new Wat, must apply to the Minister of Religious Affairs through the *Chao Muong* for the necessary authorization. The latter immediately opens an enquiry to determine:

— whether the founding of a new Wat is justified and indispensable in the district;

— whether the founders have secured a sufficient number of faithful and sufficient financial resources for the building of the projected Wat;

— whether the inhabitants of the village where the Wat is to be built will be in a position to ensure its maintenance and that of the residing monks.

On completion of the survey, the *Chao Muong* sends the application to the provincial authorities, with his observations and those of the *Chao Khana Muong*. The latter sends it with his observations and those of the *Chao Khana Khueng* to the Minister of Religious Affairs.

The authorization to erect Wats is granted by His Majesty the King on the opinion of the *Phra Sangharaja* arrived at in Religious Council and that of the Minister of Religious Affairs.

The authorization to restore a Wat falling in ruin or to build a *Stupa* or any other building on the ground of the Wat is issued by the Minister of Religious Affairs on the advice of the President of the Religious Council and of the Historical Monuments Department.



Fig. 30. — Taking the monk's robe

New Year Festivities

(5th month Festival)

by

Pierre S. NGINN

New Year festivities, better known in Laos as the «5th month Festival» is the cause of manifold rejoicings which take place during the month of April.

I believe it would be useful to digress somewhat, to explain the reasons of an anomaly which, although not the result of arbitrariness, may appear somewhat surprising.

In fact, the first month of the lunar year does not correspond to the month of April of the Western calendar, but rather to December. In deciding to delay by several months, the opening of the official year, the *Horas's* (astrologers) idea was to place the New Year under more favourable auspices. From the zodiacal sign *Thanu* (Sagittarius), nights become longer to the detriment of days and consequently lead the world towards darkness, and symbolically to unhappiness. On the contrary, from the *Rasi Mel* (Aries) which correspond to the 5th month of the lunar calendar, days get longer and longer to the detriment of nights, till the *Rasi phrusop* (Taurus) and the *Methun* (Gemini). Thus, a year beginning in April offers excellent prospects of brightness and prosperity.

The present year, or Year of the Dog (Capricorn), to be succeeded by the Year of the Pig is to end on the 13th of April or day of the *Song Karn Pay* (which marks the departure of the Genius of the year) (1). The following day the *Munao* which is an intercalary day, during which all work is forbidden.

It follows that the New Year (2502 of the Buddhist era) begins on the 15th April which corresponds to the 6th day of the waxing moon (2). It is called *Song Karn Khun* (or return of the Genius). It varies from year to year and is determined in accordance with a method adopted by the ancient *Horas*, whose knowledge must have been quite extensive, since the laws on universal gravitation

(1) See above, p. 103.

(2) The 1st day of the present year occurs exceptionnally in the 6th month.

NEW YEAR (III)
a) OFFERINGS
IN THE NORTH



Photo R. Cauchetier

b) PRAYERS
IN THE SOUTH



Photo R. Coutard



Pl. XXII

ON OCCASION OF THE NEW YEAR, H. H. PRINCE BOUN OUM OF
CHAMPASSAK FREES THE EMPRISONED BIRDS

Photo R. Coutard

they formulated at the time are still now confirmed by the works of scientists having much more important means at their disposal (1)

Thus, the 1st day of the Laotian New Year is situated between the 6th day of the waning moon in the 5th month and the 6th day of the waxing moon of the 6th month. Certain years include two « neutral » days (*Munao*), which are determined by astronomical computations.

We should, however, observe the fortunate coincidence of the date thus obtained with the rebirth of nature: trees and flowers are once again springing up, the earth, lifeless and barren by many months of heat and drought, is reborn and turns green again under the first showers.

It is therefore, amidst general rejoicings that the ritual feasts are celebrated throughout the Laotian country-side.

On the last day of the closing year, each house is carefully cleaned and put in order, so as to banish disasters and evil genii.

On New Year's day, all the population makes for the Wats, in order to sprinkle the images of the Buddha with lustral water. Both men and women bow before them and beseech the gods to make the new year propitious in bringing them health, wealth and happiness.

It is on that day that visits are paid to relatives and friends. In the case of high officials, this is taken as an opportunity to celebrate, what we call a *baci*, ceremony which is unknown in other parts of the world (2).

The subsequent days are devoted to various forms of rejoicings: in the streets, *phubaos* and *phusaos* sprinkle one another generously with water on the commendable pretext of purification... no doubt, that is why they pay so little attention as to the cleanliness of the water they use for the purpose!

As these festivals draw to a close, small mounds of sand shaped like *thals* are erected both in Wats and on the banks of the Mekong; they are topped with paper streamers, ornamented with zodiacal signs. Their builders beg the gods to grant them the favour of a long life, of wonderful days filled with happiness and wealth as numerous as the sands they are made of.

The relatively recent Children Festival — which in fact was first celebrated in 1941 — is held at Vientiane on the day of the *Munao*, either at Wat Ong-Tu on certain occasions or generally at the municipal Stadium. It consists of a general distribution of cakes and toys to the *Dek Nois* lined up in front of the *Phagna Song Karn* (Genius of the Year) who, in a long speech, advice them to be good, to work hard and to obey their parents and their masters, etc.

(1) See above, *The Laotian Calendar*, p. 97 *passim*.

(2) See above, p. 123.

Little does it matter, since the children are much too interested in the gifts which are being distributed to pay the least attention to the sound advice of the wise Genius.

But it is at Luang Prabang that the 5th month festivities are at their brightest. They spread over two full weeks and besides the various ceremonies which have been described above, they are marked by numerous festivities.

Among the more spectacular ones are the purchasing, at the Great Market, of various offerings and mainly of live animals with the intent of setting them free (1), the procession of Royal elephants, the *Baci* at the Royal Palace and the stately visit of the King and his retinue to the Wats of Visun, Xieng Thong, Vat Mai and Sangkhalok (2) for the aspersion of the images of the Buddha. The crowd massed all along the route sprinkles the King and his suite with scented water.

These ritual processions take place amidst general excitement and enjoyment of the populace thronging along the route, especially at Wat Mai for the aspersion of the Phra Bang which, on this occasion, is removed from its pedestal and placed under a dais in the courtyard of the Wat. The aspersion is carried out by means of a *Hang Lin* or wooden tube carved in the shape of a dragon, the faithful pouring the lustral water in a small gutter cut in the dragon's tail which conveys it out of the dragon's mouth onto the images of the Buddha which have been placed under it.

Preceding the *Song Phra Bang* (aspersion of Phra Bang) comes the dance of the *Pou Gneu Gna Gneu*, i.e. the first male and female Laotian ancestors: wearing a mask and a coat of coarse flax they dance with a Lion (3); all three of them, at a given moment, kowtow to the Sovereign and present him with the best wishes of all the Laotians past, present and to come.

On the 9th day of the New Year and on the 15th of the festival, the King and Queen give their offerings to the monks and entertain them to a banquet at the Royal Palace during which the latter are also sprinkled with lustral water.

With the exception of the *Pou Gneu Gna Gneu* dance which is performed in the North only, similar demonstrations of religious fervour take place in Southern Laos (4).

Merriment and general good humour prevail over all Laos during these festivals, where the sacred aspersions extend joyfully to all and sundry. Although at home, the New Year retains its deeply religious character it is nonetheless celebrated in an atmosphere of

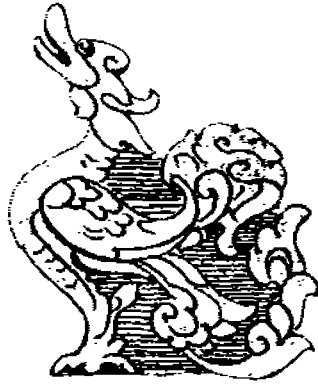
(1) See pl. XXII.

(2) See pl. XIX.

(3) See pl. XXVI.

(4) See pl. XXIII, b.

joy and brotherhood. On this occasion, it is the special wish of the good people of Laos to see everyone participate in the general rejoicing without any distinction of race or origin. Woe to those whom, ignoring its customs, take offence at the shower which is so kindly bestowed upon them!... Their anger will make them all the more the target for new aspersions...



The 'Boun' Bang-Fay

(Rockets Festival - 6th Month)

by

MARIE-DANIEL FAURE

The most dichotomous, lively, colourful and gay of the festivals of Vientiane, is the one which is celebrated on the 15th day of the waxing moon of the 6th month (full moon of May) and which is known as the boun Bang-Fay, which literally means « Rockets Festival ».

Dichotomous, yes! since important religious ceremonies and profane rejoicings follow one another in turn, and without the least transition; the people attending them both passing effortlessly from the deepest piety to the most exuberant merriment.

It cannot be denied that it is a religious festival, since its foremost object is to glorify the Buddha, His Birth, His Doctrine and His Death (Parinibbāna) — and for this reason it includes both a procession of the whole of the Buddhist Clergy, piously followed by the crowd, and by a public Buddhist ordination ceremony conducted in order to elevate to higher office (1), monks already ordained.

But it is also a profane festival, which, in many respects, may be compared to our Carnival and which affords participants an opportunity for fancy dresses, dances, songs and lively puppet shows whose undisguised realism carry their audiences to the very opposite of the procession and sacred rites.

And what about the rockets? They have the privilege of participating to both at the same time; as pious offerings they are carried in the procession, as objects of rejoicings they play such a vital part in the profane festival that their names is the only one which, in popular language, is always applied to the complex boun.

It may be wondered — and some have done so — how an association of such dissimilar elements ever came about. An explanation shall be given later; but for the moment let us go and see the festival!

The festival is held at the Wat Kang of Vientiane. After preliminary agreement with higher officials, the inhabitants of the city who are in charge of the organization of the boun, have shared among

(1) See above, *Organization of the Buddhist Clergy*, p. 257.

themselves the work involved as well as the attention to be given to their guests, i.e. the monks and inhabitants from neighbouring villages, up to fifteen to twenty kilometres around.

Bamboo sheds covered with straw matting have been built around the main square. One of them, bigger in size than the others is to serve as a grand stand reserved for the monks and parishioners from urban Wats. At the back of it, a kind of dais is built to accomodate the members of the Clergy; and at the front of it, mallings are placed on the ground for boys and girls who will attend the court of love.

The other sheds of simpler construction but at least as comfortable, will be used by the guests.

In the middle of the square, a ring, surrounded by thick foliage, will serve on the following day as a chapel for the ordination.

The actual festival begins from the afternoon of the 14th day with the arrival of the rockets. Each one of them is the work of the monks of a Wat. No doubt that all the parishioners, with the intention of making a pious offering, have done their best to provide the necessary materials or contributed to its construction. But the very difficult task of artificers is always reserved to the monks who, according to tradition, are masters in pyrotechnics.

Each rocket, attached to a light support, is carried by its team of constructors. It is made of a long and strong bamboo, the lower part is pointed forward and is used as a muzzle loaded with the precious nitre, while the thinner part swings gracefully. The whole thing is decorated with ribbons, garlands and multicoloured paper, cut into geometrical shapes, glued or pinned pennon fashion. The name of the Wat responsible for its construction is inscribed on a piece of silk of rectangular or triangular shape, which is placed in evidence and carefully unfurled.

As soon as they arrive, the rockets are placed in good order on the square before the sheds; they will be kept under constant supervision and given the most careful attention, since on the following day, the good name of the Wat and the popularity of the village will depend on its rocket's colourful aspect and the height of its trajectory.

But now, in the distance, the blueish line of the Luang Prabang mountain range is set ablaze by the deep golden rays of the setting sun; the waters of the Mekong turn into a sumptuous mantle of mollen metal...

At this moment the phusaos have taken to the road to come to the festival. They come in graceful groups or in laughing parties, each one of them wearing her prettiest sin, her brightest scarf and all her jewelry. Each one of them carries a silvercup or a small basket in which, under some flowers, are stored the betel leaves, the areca-nuts, the lime and the sisiet, the tobacco and cigarettles which she will offer to merry young men or consume themselves during the ngan.

They are accompanied by the village elders and some of the mothers, the latter carrying gifts for the monks, whose long yellow and silent file follow at some distance in the golden sunset. All these groups head towards the Wat Kang and while the monks proceed at a slower pace, the women, on the contrary, hurry along to settle down in the sheds and take their evening meal before nightfall.

. . .

However, the night has come. The sun has gone down behind the mountains and the moon is rising triumphantly, bathing the whole scenery in its soft silver light. The waters of the Mekong are no longer aglow, the ruins of the Wat Kang stretch towards the deep sky their mysterious and nostalgic remains. The inexpressible peace of the Laotian night hovers serene, luminous and silent.

But the phubaos have not arrived yet. Their restlessness and merriment are unleashed at the moment in the city and its suburbs. They tour the streets in groups, each one of which always includes several khenes. They go from house to house, singing a few verses from that famous boun Bang-Fay song which is an appeal addressed to «mothers-in-laws» soliciting for the «son-in-law» firstly, wine, rice and padek, and secondly, extolling in lewd terms, the sensual pleasures of love...

« Oh mother-in-law
Here is your son-in-law,
Open your window to see him,
Open your door,
To give him a glass of wine.
If you have no wine
Give him rice
And if you have nothing else
Give him some padek.
Open, oh mother-in-law, for if you don't give anything
Your stairs (ladder) will fly away. »

When the boys have had their fill of wine and food, when they have fired their spicy jokes at the unfortunate «mother-in-law» who refuses to open, and broken her steps (ladder) down, they proceed towards the Wat Kang.

Still accompanied by the music of the khenes, dancing, stumbling and singing, they go round the sheds. The boys of each group sit down opposite the phusaos of their choice. The court of love, noisy, full of rythm, melodious sometimes, but always wild, will fill the evening shadows. In the background, the monks in meditation, musing or possibly smiling at the budding romance, act as chaperon to the youth.

When, in the East, night fades away with the coming dawn, the court of love ends on a last repartee, a last burst of laughter.

Phusaos and phubaos then stand up awakening the grand-mothers and the mothers who had fallen asleep. The monks then depart from their unmoved countenance and stand up while straightening the folds of their robes.

The square begins to fill with the joyful clamour of the crowd made out of calls, shouts, cries, exclamations, a few lingering notes of the khenes... Everyone is attending to his washing — somewhat quickly — and while the monks and the young men go and have a look at the rockets, the women fold up the blankets, shake the mats and lay them down for breakfast.

This doesn't keep the people waiting for long, since it has been prepared in town and is a real hot meal. Certain districts, certain blocks of houses, have been instructed to get it ready for the guests, the monks and laymen, who have come over from some far distant village.

As befits them, the monks are served first and by the time the rising sun caresses the ruins, everybody is sitting in small groups around trays full of dishes, with the little baskets of steaming rice within easy reach.

The breakfast is no sooner finished that, under the leadership of the Chief of the diocese, the inhabitants and the monks of the city flock to the square. The grand stand, built alongside the Wat Kang, is rapidly cleared up and from then on it will be reserved for all the religious who assemble there, and also for the gifts, big or small, which are deposited by the faithful.

The most important of the gifts are those for the monks about to be ordained. These are offered by their parents, their friends and neighbours; it consist of a complete outfit: new robes and sandal, *bat* (1) and *talabat* (2), a pilgrim's staff, mattress, blankets and pillows, rice basket, gurglet (water cooling vessel), bowl, spoon and knife, in short, all the things which are indispensable in the daily life of the Wat.

But in the circumstance, the ritual gift which is never forgotten, consist in a freshly cut bamboo, cleared of its leaves except at one end and to one extremity of which one or more sheets of gold or silver, weighing one tical are attached, while the other extremity is decorated with cotton skeins of different colours.

The smaller gifts, of which all the monks present at the feast will get their share, consist of baskets of rice or paddy, of rustic cups containing fruits, candles, josticks and cotton threads, or some other pieces of their outfit. The parents of the monks to be promoted to higher office and most of the women who have brought valuable gifts, stay in the sheds so much to keep an eye on the presents as to increase

(1) Begging bowl.

(2) Fan.

their merits by listening to the prayers of the monks lined up around the Head of the diocese before the procession.

The other donors, and above all the young people, only pay attention to the rockets which are carried with pride from hut to hut and in the adjoining streets.

Escorting the rockets, are groups of phubaos; disguised, made-up, accompanied with khenes, cymbals, drums and gongs, some singing, others dancing, all making noises, their carnival like procession surrounds the fire-work pieces and give them a rousing welcome. They burst with joy and admiration at the prettiest ones, whilst their music becomes louder, their dances quickening the pace of their motions. But around the smaller and less decorated ones, the scoffing and ironical comments fuse from all parts: the bearers never miss an opportunity to fire back with sharp, cutting remarks...

Meanwhile the puppets have made their appearance. They are made of soft wood, roughly carved with a jungle knife, naively painted, and mounted on a bit of bamboo, all of them are enlivened. Some represent boxers fighting. More numerous are the others of a somewhat daring character, about which the less said the better.

From the rockets, the phubaos's attention is immediately turned to the puppets, which revive their humour and encourage them to tackle the groups of phusaos passing nearby, becoming the target of their racy catcalls and lewd advances.

. . .

But the procession has started organizing itself in front of the grand stand.

Some fifteen gilded palanquins filled with cushions are lined up in a single file, the first three for the Head of the diocese and his two coadjutors, the following ones for the monks-to-be. The strongest among the parishioners will be found at the shafts, since it is considered an offering to the Buddha to carry His servants.

With the exception of the elder women, who are left in the grand stand to keep watch over the gifts, the younger ones leave the place to go and fill their silver cups to the jars of scented water specially prepared for the ordination. Other cups arranged by the young women, with flowers, fine candles of pure wax and josticks are set on trays.

As soon as the Head of the diocese considers that all these preparations have been duly carried out, he then draws near to his palanquin and the procession takes shape. Gradually the clamour of all this profane merry-making, the music and the dances die down. Slowly the coming and going of the various groups comes to a close: everyone goes to take his respective place in the procession. Before long, the palanquins are lifted and the procession gets under way...

On their palanquins and thus overlooking the crowd, which they do not even see, the church dignataries sit under sunshades with expressionless faces; solemn, gazing in the distance, they remain absorbed in meditation... They are preceded by the other monks who are on foot and followed by the crowd, men, women and children loaded with cups filled with water and flowers. The fire-crackers bringing the procession to a close. After walking at a slow pace three times around the old Wat, the head of the procession comes abreast of the ring surrounding the improvised chapel for the ordination; the palanquins are lowered and the clergy, preceded by its Head, enters the chapel.

At man-level, on light bamboo poles, wooden tubes have been installed; they are ornamented with dragon heads and pierced at each extremity. Under the hang-lins, duckboards have been placed for the postulants to kneel on.

The Head of the diocese then pours in the middle of each tube, a cup filled with scented water handed over by his coadjutor. The water runs, shimmering in the sun and falls onto the bowed head of the monk. Immediately after the Head of the diocese, the same rite is performed by the abbots (heads of Wats) who in turn are followed by parents, friends, neighbours, and the whole crowd of the faithful, each one bringing along his cup of lustral water and pouring it devotedly.

After such a generous baptism, which symbolizes a complete purification, the newly ordained monk who has been surrounded by his parents and the Head of his Wat, casts off his wet robe and puts on a new one handed to him by the donor. Henceforth, his status will have changed and he will have the right to the higher title in the Order which has just been bestowed upon him.

As soon as he has donned his new robe, he takes in one hand his new talabat (fan) and in the other the pilgrim's staff which have been given to him. The Head of his Wat then takes hold of the other end of the staff and leads the new dignitary out of the enclosure. Both, one leading the other, walk pass in front of the kneeling women, who, whilst inwardly praying, place flowers, candles and josticks on the talabat (fan) of the newly promoted monk who is holding it out as a begging plate. This slow progress leads the clergy to the grand stand where all the other gifts are then presented to the new dignitary.

* * *

The end of these manifestations brings the religious rites to a close. As to the monks, they retire to nearby Wats where their meal is going to be served, whilst the crowd, who had spent the last few hours meditatively passes almost without transition from the imposing calmness of the religious ceremony — which for a while had eclipsed the profane festival — to its boisterous merry-making.

And the midday-meal affords the crowd its keenly awaited opportunity. As with the morning meal, it has been prepared by some of the housewives who hurriedly serve it amidst the growing din of intermingled calls and laughter. Under the sheds the pitch rises rapidly and the early hours of the afternoon are spent in that relaxed and merry atmosphere of picnic.

*
* *

About 2 p. m., after the meal, the rockets once again become the center of attraction and dancing is resumed in their honour.

The monks too have returned and under the watchful eyes of their team mates, each artificer puts a final touch to his preparation.

For the job is of consequence!

First a thorough check must be made of the powder to see if it has remained properly lamped and if the firing bore — a kind of tunnel dug in the middle of the charge — has not become obstructed.

Then comes the trickiest part of the job, the one on which final success depends: the soaking with water along the greatest part of the edges of the tunnel so as to render it fire-proof against the advancing flame of the fuse which is running through it. But it is essential to keep the bottom perfectly dry, so as to allow the flame, which is quickening the powder, to spread from the bottom to the top of the charge.

The fuse should then be threaded through the tunnel, without getting it damp and making sure that it is in good contact with the dry powder at the bottom of the load.

It is during these final preparations that the monk's mastery must reveal itself. It is, so to speak, his signature which he sets on the rocket. And that will be all for him. Presently, his team will take charge of the piece and he will then hand over his command to his « right-hand man » (the most experienced of his parishioners), since as he cannot mingle with the crowd, he will have to remain in the grand stand with the other members of the clergy.

During all this prologue to the launching, chief attraction of the festival, the crowd has deserted the sheds and left the square. It has massed itself on the higher bank of the Mekong, on either side of the ancient tree, leaning naturally over the river, which will serve as a launching site. A primitive ladder with widely spaced rungs has been tied on the old tree trunk. The more agile among the phubao will soon have the opportunity of displaying their mastery in selling the rockets to the admiring eyes of their girl friends.

Each rocket is brought along as soon as it is ready. Its team carries it with utmost care, protecting it against the over enthusiastic gesticulations of the turbulent dancers, who are escorting and cheering it. The rocket's name, the name of « its » Wat is on everyone's lips.

The rocket bearers dust it, pat it, flatter it and inwardly make the most ardent wishes so that the Buddha, to whom it is offered, gives it a flying start and make it flash higher and higher.

They then get it near the ladder. Phubaos from « its » village, get hold of it, climb the steps and pull it up to the very top of the tree, slowly, lovingly and without the least jerk.

The rocket having been set on its launching site and aimed at the sky, becomes the target of all eyes. As graceful, slim and adorned like a phusao, it is awaiting the firing...

It is the thrilling moment when the crowd becomes almost silent. The monk's « right-hand man » draws the flame near to the long hanging fuse... the crackling noise of the flame running up to the powder can be heard. It's inside now... let's hope that the tunnel is still smooth and damp! and that the powder is quite dry!... Yes! it is... the rocket is moving, its long tail shivers; hardly noticeable at first, the ascent is more pronounced; roaring the rocket slides on its launching site; it is freeing itself head first, it shoots up, fast, straight, triumphant, cheered by the immense roar of the crowd, whose enthusiasm has reached its climax.

It has scored a triumph for the Wat, for the village... The team is literally hopping wild with joy, the phubaos are dancing madly, and on the square where, lost amidst other yellow robes, he was anxiously waiting, the monk artificer from now on famous, is giving thanks to the Buddha.

. . .

However, here comes another rocket. Will it not shoot even higher, fall even further way? Its team claims that it will.

Subjected to the same cares, carrying the same load of wishes, it is in turn set on the launching site. The flame is running along the fuse, it has reached the charge...

Horror! the rocket instead of ascending is splattering and back firing and tends to shoot downwards. The frightened crowd step aside and fall backward, its clamour is made up of endless booing... « What wretched village is this? » « What kind of blundering monk is he who didn't damp the tunnel enough? » « The powder was set afire from the top of the charge and pushes the rocket's tail downwards, instead of shooting the head upwards! » « Has anyone ever seen a rocket shooting backwards? » « Is it a custom of the men of that village to walk backward? How do they set about to have children? »

The jeers fuse from all parts and find a ready response around the unfortunate team, which is hurrying to escape... as for the monk, its captain, he runs to hide in his Wat. And that is the end of his reputation!

. . .

A third rocket is brought up and thus creating a diversion, and another, and another again; they follow one another in great numbers, often having a fortunate fate, sometimes not. The crowd is more and more excited, going alternatively from joy to deception, from waggish scorn to frenzied admiration.

When the last rocket — and generally the most powerful one (1) — has been fired, the feast is over.

Slowly, as with regret, the crowd disperses away. The groups of people who had come together, reform again on their way home and take to different streets...

If, at that moment, a winning team meets a defeated one, it lays hold of it to inflict on them a last insult. The poor chaps are walked around on the quay and offered as some goods to all the shopkeepers:

« Hi! merchant, I sell you this man. He is from such a village. He can't fire a rocket, but perhaps can he sweep your shop... I do not want much for him. I'll exchange him against a bottle of wine or even just a glass. Come on, will you buy him? »

Of course, the shopkeeper is not willing. The poor fellow is then compelled to buy his facelious torturer the coveted bottle. The scene is repeated in other shops, everytime improved with some new jokes and of which the antics make everybody happy.

At last, winners and losers drink together, for the Laotian prank is never unkind.

The night soon spreads its velvety mantle over the whole town, and silence once again returns.

. . .

As we said before, one can be reasonably surprised at this mixing of religion and profanity.

The explanation for this is easy if, on the one hand, we consider the time of the year during which the boun is celebrated, and on the other the Laotian's love of « having a good time », in exteriorizing his joie de vivre and, moreover, does not mind cracking broad jokes.

The sixth month draws slowly the dry season to a close; it is the last respite left to the farmers before the rains which will herald the hardwork in the paddies. Before taking to the fields, where they will live for several weeks, the Laotians from Vientiane and environs take this great Buddhist festival as an excuse, gathering the whole population together, for letting their merry-making go free, unrestrained and collecting an ample provision of happy memories, before setting to the work which awaits them.

(1) *Bang-fai-mun* rocket, loaded with 24 lb. of powder.

In the present state of our knowledge, we cannot say for certain, which is the older of the two festivals forming the boun Bang-Fay.

The 15th day of the waxing moon of the 6th month, brings back according to Buddhist tradition, the Triple Anniversary of the three great events in the life of the Buddha: His Birth, the Setting in Motion of the Wheel and His Death (1).

At its origin then, this significant day was sanctified by specifically religious ceremonies: solemn procession, installation of monks in higher orders as they were deemed to have increase more and more their knowledge in the Doctrine of the Wise One, and gifts of numerous bussas (2) by the faithful.

The rockets were very much part of those offerings and if their launching was considered to be the climax of the festival, they certainly were not followed by carnival-like procession. And the people, if not in deep devotion, at least celebrated this feast in a quiet and reserved manner.

Thus the sole religious character of the boun was retained.

Nowadays, however, — and perhaps with the help of a lukewarm piety — the boun Bang-Fay has become as important as the boun Visakha, hence the rockets being the excuse for all the profane rejoicings we have just seen.

Maybe the peculiar origin of this boun may be found in an old legend concerning the birth of the rockets. This is how a monk told it to us:

« Once a certain King Khal-Thanam made a tour of his Kingdom which was inhabited by Nhaks. Wishing to be agreeable and to reserve the King an unforgettable reception, his subjects planned to give him amidst the rejoicings, a grand surprise. They made rockets out of long bamboos, decorated with multicoloured papers and loaded with a powerful powder... »

The legend goes on saying that these rockets fell at the four corners of the Kingdom, thus giving rise to mountains, forming plains, digging wells and caves.... and that the multicoloured papers, getting caught on trees, gave birth to orchids.

This could be the explanation as to why the rockets are considered by many, as offerings to the Guardian Genii of the Earth, so that they may send abundant rain in order to fertilize the rice-fields, and also why the boun Bang-Fay is also called the « Fecundity Festival ».

But this would tend to prove the existence of a third festival, one of Fecundity which was gradually eclipsed through the centuries by

(1) In the Laotian calendar, there is only indicated in regard of the 15th day, the name of the Buddhist Festival, without mentioning the *boun Bang-Fay*. It reads only : « *Van Phra Sul Khong Phra Tiao — Boun Vi Sak Kha — Boussa* », i. e. « Birthday of the Buddha — Feast of His Doctrine — Offerings ».

(2) *Bussa* = offerings. A generic term for everything that is offered to the Buddha.

the two festivals we have just been studying. And we feel all the more inclined to agree with this version, when we consider the lustful shows, the very lewd songs and the unreserved gestures of puppets, all hinting at sexual intercourses intending to bring on the fertility of the land through magical sympathy. It was still prevalent not so long ago; we shall only recall the horrified account of the panic-stricken Guerit van Wusthoff, while passing through Vientiane in 1641.

Whatever were its origin, the boun Bang-Fay of Vientiane, such as it is celebrated nowadays, attracts a great concourse of people and knows of a real success; this may be due to the fact that, more than any other boun, it mixes the religious with the profane, the solemn with the pleasant, it has a great appeal and at the same time retains what there is of piety, superstition and unrestrained joviality in the Laotian character.



Lent and the Water Festival

(8th - 11th Month)

by

Pierre S. NGINN

KHAO VATSA

(Beginning of Lent)

The Laotian equivalent of Lent which marks the period of fast, observed by the monks, begins with the full moon of the 8th month (July) and ends with the full moon of the 11th month (October).

This period recalls the three months of rain during which, unable to go on His preaching rounds, the Buddha and His disciples retired to the Jetavana Grove. Moreover, the rainy season which stimulates proliferation of life everywhere, breeds swarms of all kinds of insects: it is therefore impossible at that time to go about without violating at each step the Precept which condemns the destruction of sentient beings, however small they might be. It follows that during this three months retreat, the monks must not leave their Wats and have to attend the general public confession.

Here is Oldenberg's description of the confession as taken from Pāli texts :

« No monks shall fail to attend unless he should be of unsound mind at the time (...). By torch light, the monks proceed to the assembly hall and occupy the low seats which have been prepared for them. Neither the laity, nor novices, nor nuns may be present, since the Rules of the Order — which are to be recited in the form of a formula of confession — is, in principle, considered as the secret privilege of the monks. This formula of confession known as the Pātimokkha, is recited by the head monk :

« »

« Oh Reverends, anyone who has sinned let him confess (...). The monk who, after the question having being repeated three times does not confess his sins, makes himself guilty of a conscious lie. Now, a conscious lie, oh Reverends, is an obstacle to clerical life. Such is the word of the Blessed One. »

Then begins the calling out of sins which shall be confessed in decreasing order. Intimacy, even with animals. Stealing other people's property. Killing all sentient beings. Having usurped spiritual perfections for personal gains.

Having called out the venial sins, the dean ends the confession with these words:

« Now, I am asking you, Reverends, is your heart pure of such sins? And for the second time, I am asking you, are you pure? And again, for the third time, I am asking you, are you pure? » If everyone remains silent, the reciting head monk adds: *« Pure of such faults are the Reverends, that is why they keep silent, that is how I understand it ».*

Before the beginning of Lent, the faithful meet in each district to prepare the candles. A competition is then organized at a given spot, where lots will be drawn as to the name of the Wat to which the most beautiful candles will be offered. After that a procession will go through the streets on its way to visit the temples. However, in country towns and villages, the offering of candles to the monks is done without any of the ceremonials.

It is during this period of retreat that the Ancestors Day (*Hokhaopadapdin*) is celebrated, on the 15th day of the waning moon of the 9th month. On this occasion numerous offerings go to the monks which are a source of great merits for all participants, since this is in accordance with the Words of the Buddha:

« Anyone who performs charitable deeds on the Ancestors Day, shall attain the Three Blessings: the terrestrial Blessing of being born a king, the celestial Blessing of becoming Indra, and the supreme Blessing of attaining Nirvāṇa. »

Soon after that, in the 10th month, the *Hokhao Slak* festival is celebrated. Here again, offerings are made to the monks but this time by drawing lots. The names of the monks are written on small bits of paper which are then mixed in a bowl. Each donor's gift will go to the monk whose name has been drawn.

BOUN OK VATSA

(Festival marking the end of Lent)

The *boun Ok Vatsa* or *boun Pavārana* takes place at the full moon of the 11th month. The word *vatsa* comes from the Pāli word *vassa* which means « rain ». This then is a ceremony celebrated at the « end of the rains », i. e., the end of the rainy season. *Pavārana* is another Pāli word meaning « to acknowledge the warning », in fact, it concerns any shortcomings either in word or in deeds which the monks might have committed, consciously or not, against fellow religious during this three months period of

fasting. For this reason, at the end of Lent, before parting, they convene a « meeting of monks » at which they recite the *Pavāraṇa* formula. Then, each monk asks any of his comrades to tell him openly of any reprehensible deed he might have committed against any of them, during the three months passed together, and having asked for forgiveness, he then returns to his Wat.

The *Pavāraṇa* formula runs thus:

« I confess, here before all the monks and I ask my elders who might have seen or heard or even have some suspicion of any reprehensible deeds on my part, to tell me. Admitting my faults, I swear never to commit them again. »

These festivals end with the *Kathin* or *Kan Thin* ceremony which consists of offerings, among other things, of robes to the monks to replace the worn out ones.

THE WATER FESTIVAL

To these purely Buddhist ceremonies, correspond other festivities which are popular in character and consist in illumination of temples and dwellings, processions, boat races, etc. These demonstrations are organized in honour of the *Nāgas* and tutelary genii so that they will grant to all health, happiness and prosperity.

The most important of these festivities is certainly the one which takes place on the eve of the boat race, it is the launching on the river of small illuminated rafts made out of bamboo or banana wood (1). In the olden days, *pathips* — small lamps made of a bit of thread dipped in oil or fat and supported by a small blade of bamboo — were used. One of the ends of this wick was plaited into a « crow footed pattern ». In the minds of these people, these illuminations is a propitiation in memory of the « Mother of the Five Buddhas » when, according to the following *Jātaka*, she appeared in the form of a white Crow:

« One day, in the nest she had made on a tree on the bank of the river, a female Crow laid five eggs. Now owing to a sudden gush of wind, the nest fell in the water and was carried away by the current. After having floated for a long time it became stranded on a sand bank. It was discovered by a Hen, a Nāgi, a Tortoise, a Cow and a Snake, each of which took an egg for hatching.

« After a while, five boys were born who when they grew up were so distressed in learning their origin that they decided to live the life of a recluse. Thus keeping the secret of their birth, they lived far away from one another.

(1) See pl. XV, c.

« But in this world as everything must have an end, one day they met in a forest, where each of them had gone to look for berries. Then having told one another of their origin, they learnt they were born of the same mother; a white Crow. They agreed to do their utmost to find the one who had given them birth.

« Now, in the sky where she had become a *Phrom*, the mother-Crow overheard everything. So in order to grant her children their wish, she appeared to them in the form of a hermit and said: « If you want to remember your mother, build illuminated rafts that you will drop in the current every year on the 15th day of the 11th month. »

In fact, this rite observed in all the Asia of the Monsoon, is celebrated to mark the expulsion of a Scapegoat. The evil genii who, during the rainy season, have been in contact with the people, are attracted by the offerings placed on the small rafts which are abandoned to the current.



The That Luang Festivities

(Full moon of the 12th Month)

by

THAO NHOUY ABHAY

Through the trees, the golden arrows of the sun of the 12th month filter through the bamboo partition walls, lighting up the cloud of dust arising from the worn out mattresses, leaving outside a clear trail in the misty morning.

For a fortnight already, the weather has become very mild; at dawn, the sun has much to do to overcome the mist and on the blades of grass growing on the roads, on the rice plants bending under the weight of their ears, the dew drops glitter like multi-faceted crystals. A scented breeze hangs over the ways, there are bright and gay flowers, slightly damp roads, and dust particles floating about seemingly tied up to the same spot.

The story goes that in India, thousands of years ago it was during the same season, that Asoka the Great completed the erection of the 84,000 *stūpas* he had built for the Relics of the Buddha, and celebrated his achievement in the moonlight.

That date is still kept, since in all the Buddhist countries, *thats* are supposed to contain some relics of the Blessed One, ashes, a hair, a nail or an eye-lash.

And at the same time every year, at night under the peaceful rays of a stainless moon, all the towns of Laos celebrate, with the same fervour, the *thats* erected within their walls.

. . .

The That Luang or « Royal That », is located 5 miles east of the « Town-with-the Sandal-Wood-Walls », Vientiane or Vieng Chan as was then called this ancient capital of the Kingdom of Lan Xang. In 1566, King Setthathirath, erected it over a small *stūpa*, built in the 13th century, which, according to tradition, contained a hair of the Buddha as well as fabulous treasures.

Then came the invaders. After miraculously escaping the savage hordes of Chulalok and Phia Bodin's troops who, at the

beginning of the 19th century, put Vientiane to fire and sword, the *That*, one of the Kingdom's principal centre of pilgrimage, was, half a century later, in 1873, almost completely destroyed by Yunnanese pirates.

In 1909, at the beginning of the French Protectorate, Mr. Morin, Government commissioner with the help of the Phagna Sisuvanavong, *Chao Muong* of Vientiane undertook the first repairs. Some minor buildings were restored as well as the decorations, sculptures and stylised lotus leaves. The most shameful marks left by the invaders — holes in the towers, where treasures had been taken away — were covered up, however, the main *That* remained mutilated and no trace was left of the smaller *thats* which had surrounded it.

In 1929, the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* decided to assume the responsibility and direction of the task involved in restoring the buildings. Mr. Fombertaux, who was personally responsible for the job, completed it in two years and in 1931, he was able to present to the Laotians filled with admiration, the *That* of their forefathers, as beautiful and graceful as on the first day of its erection.

Since then, every year, the people of Vientiane, bring to the *That* of his Buddha, the constant and ardent tribute of its devotion and veneration. Every year, the festivals are celebrated with special splendour, observing the same rituals confirmed by centuries old tradition.

THE SIMUONG FESTIVALS

In 1563, when King Setthathirath decided both for political and strategic reasons to establish at Vieng Chan, the capital of Lan Xang, his first concern was to build a temple.

Geomancers were called to choose the most propitious site. This was found to be Phia Wat, and the first hole dug to receive the main column was announced in all the streets of the town by heralds whose announcements were accompanied by cymbals, gongs and tom-toms.

Abandoning her house, her husband and her home, a young woman called Sao-Si, pregnant of a few months, and who claimed to be the predestined tutelary deity of the town, came from Ban Xai, her native place, to throw herself down into the pit. Since tradition requires a tutelary deity for each town, it was on her remains that was built the Wat bearing her name: Simuong (« Town-of-Si »).

It is, therefore, with a tribute both to the Buddha and the tutelary deity that, through an extraordinary and peculiar combination of values and beliefs, the Simuong celebrations open the That Luang Festival.

In the moonlight of the 13th day, these exclusively nocturnal festivities where, moving in a far too limited space, the combination of the reddish and smoky light of resin torches and the crude glare of mantle-fitted lamps, illuminate the multicoloured groups of *phubaos* and *phusaos* and the more uniformly yellow ones of the monks.

From 9 p.m. idlers and lovers hurry to the feast. How beautiful they look these young Laotian girls — hiding their shyness in the shadows away from the artificial lights — when they are revealed by the fugitive lights of the rockets, shooting up towards the stars or by the still more magnificent «flower-rockets», so-called because they explode into sparkling and coloured garlands and stars.

Chinese lanterns illuminate the Wat on all sides. It is within this amazing and extraordinary *melée*, customary to every nocturnal festival held in a Wat, that the long procession of diminutive Wat models made of wax, led by the monks and followed by the laity, men, women and girls, winds up its way, accompanied by the melancholic sound of the gong, which sadly marks each turn of the cortege, while jeers are fusing from the mocking or enthusiastic crowd of spectators. «*Sa*» cry some of them, «*yeu*»! reply the others, bringing to their foreheads both in a submissive and respectful gesture, the flowers and candles they hold in their hands...

The feast will last till the morning, and on the night of the 14th day, all and sundry will go to the That Luang, where on a greater scale and a much more imposing site, they will pursue the unending course of joyful festivities.

THE THAT LUANG FESTIVALS

In Laos, twice a year, civil servants and notables — and at the same time all the population — take the oath of loyalty to the reigning Sovereign. There are two kinds of oaths, the Lesser Oath, whose ceremony is held on the eve of the *Son Karn Pay* (1), and the Greater Oath taken on the 14th day of the waxing moon of the 12th month, i.e. in Vientiane, on the very eve of the That Luang festivals.

All the Mandarins of the province meet at the capital on the 12th and 13th days. Then after gathering together in front of the Governor of the province's official residence, to the rhythm of a band made up of clarinets, flutes and xylophones, they march to the Royal Palace to wait upon the Head of the State or his Representative, who then leads the procession into the Wat Sisaket, where, under the gaze of an enormous gilded Buddha, King Chao Anu, by whom the temple was erected in 1818, would, twice a

(1) No longer in force.

year, receive the Oath of loyalty from his subjects and vassals (1).

The ritual prayers having been recited by the monks, the Master of Ceremony, then dips the extremities of swords and rifles into alm bowls filled with lustral water, and by three times repeats the following Oath written on latania leaves:

« We, Chao Muongs, Mandarins, Chiefs of districts and Chiefs of villages of Vientiane, Borikhane, Tura-khom and Vang-Vieng Muongs, take the solemn oath of loyalty to His Majesty, our August Sovereign. We swear to perform our duties and services loyally and to the best of our abilities, and with all the punctuality required. Not to foment conspiracy with infidels or with foreign enemies, not to harbour revolutionary ideas against the Government, not to try to kill the representatives of the Government by means of incantations, not to secretly harbour rebels ;

« Should one of us not keep this oath, let him be punished and may the following curses be cast upon him :

« May he be put to death immediately by the seven or eight series of dignitary Swords, so as to prevent him from bidding goodbye to his family ;

« May he suffer a swift and accidental death ;

« May his life be as short as that of the leaves and flowers of the banana-tree ;

« May he be engulfed inside the earth as in water ;

« May misfortune overwhelm him during all his life ;

« Should he travel over water, may he be seized and choked by the evil water genii, Ngeuak, as huge as a big canoe ;

« Should he travel by land, may he be devoured by a tiger as big as a horse ;

« May he be crushed by his canoe, and left to drown ;

« May he be struck by lightning when he turns his eyes towards the sky, and may he be devoured by a tiger if he turns them towards the forest ;

« May the ropes of the law serve to tie his hands behind his back and have the noose put around his neck ;

« May his feet be bound in a cangue and may he be beheaded for rebellion ;

« May he become mad and do not know what to do ;

« May he die as dry as an old drum or as swollen as a frog, and may vultures prey on his legs and crows at his bowels, while his head rests upon a stone and his feet are dipped in water :

« May his legs be on the slope of the rice-fields and his thighs on the bank of the river ;

(1) Since the proclamation of independence the ceremony is now held at Wat Ong-Tu.

« After he dies, may his soul burn in the scorching flames of Hell, under the seat of Thevathat (1) during a hundred thousand kaps(2).

« May even the great Buddhas who are as countless as the sands of the great oceans and who in times to come will forgive and save all the wicked, shall have no pity for this infidel and refuse him another life ;

« But should we, on the contrary, remain loyal, faithful and devoted, our happiness will increase and all misfortunes shall be spared to us ;

« May we then, become rich so that we can give alms without restraint ! »

In the olden days, according to tradition, the Kings of Vientiane would take three full days to reach the That Luang. But times have changed. The easy-going Laos is no more. Nowadays, stages are passed without stopping, from Hatsady, Ban-Phai, Phone-Sai and Nong-Bon, and the Royal cortege, followed by the procession of the faithful, arrive at the That Luang in a record time. At about 4 p.m. on the 14th day of the waxing moon, both of them arrive consisting of Khas dressed in short red jackets cracking bamboo poles, of Mandarins bedecked with medals and badges of their ranks, and of the faithful carrying wax *prasats* (3).

* * *

For the last two days already, Chinese shopkeepers in their temporary sheds, are standing behind their steaming cauldrons of soups of which they alone have the secret. Vietnamese standing at the counter of their *cafés*, young Laotians, lined up behind baskets full of fruits and bags of rice, are making good business, some noisily and hurriedly, others with smiling faces and taking nothing seriously.

Nearly everywhere, « bean banks » can be seen, where games of chance will produce some unknown formulas to the inexperienced gamblers, all this amid shouts of pleasure and mumbles of disappointment. Smiling or long face gamblers, *phusaos* slipping, full of curiosity and merriment, among so many both expressive and strange faces there is an intense bustle around the *That*, shining in the moonlight. The crowds are so dense and so many high pitch voices around that a general hubbub can be heard every-

(1) Deformation of Devadatta, who on three occasions attempted on the life of the Buddha : the first time by paying bandits to murder him, the second time by hurling down big rocks upon him, and the third time, by letting loose the elephant Nalagiri, that had been made drunk with alcohol. But all failed ; the bandits became disciples of the Master through his clemency, only a chip of the rocks injured his foot slightly, and lastly, the Buddha had only to put his hand on the head of the mad elephant to make it immediately tame and peaceful.

(2) Age of the earth from its beginning to its final destruction.

(3) Small Wat model made of wax.

where. Men and women, young and old, Vietnamese, Chinese, Mountain People and Laotians, are inextricably mingled, pressed and squeezed together. All of them speak, laugh, shout and swear in hundreds of tongues which fuse and echo from all parts.

At last, the sun of the 15th day rises, catching everybody unaware: the gamblers who have not eaten a single meal in the last 24 hours, and the participants of the courts of love where the *phubaos*, half serious and half drunk, are still telling yarns to the girls, who can hardly keep their eyes open.

Songs can be heard coming out of all the *phams* (1), those from Nam-Ngum, both languid and nostalgic, those of Vientiane, more monotonous, interrupted by short spells of silence, during which religiously before the hurray marking the end of the reply, everybody listens to the *phusao's* answer.

Violins and *ranats* vibrate in the hands of the musicians, the young men sing love stanzas to which the girls reply. And in the silence of nature, both motionless and serene, cries fuse from everywhere: the *courts of love* are in full swing.

Whether in the form of songs or not, the poetic dialogues continue, marked by the cries and shouts of the lucky participants. No one is in a hurry. In the repertory of the flowery tongue, everyone seeks and picks, while neighbours, either attentive or diffident, rekindle the flame of the dying torch. Sometimes, when the girls are caught short, an old aunt or chaperon seating nearby will come to the rescue and save the situation by quoting the great poem of *Sin Xay* (2) or the unequalled love poems of the *Som Thi Khut* (« All my Thoughts » or of the *Sut Thi Ao* (« the Object of my Desires »).

THE GAME OF « TI-KHI »

The 15th day is entirely devoted to public rejoicings: bicycle races, football match, game of « coco », and preceding the horse race, a *ti-khi* game which deserves special mention.

This game, one of the remnants of the civilisation of the Kingdom of Vientiane (3), is played in the huge open square, leading to the entrance of the That Luang. According to the Marquis of Barthélémy, who made it the object of a special study, *ti-khi* would be no other than a primitive kind of polo, and tradition would have it that it was played on horseback by representatives of the upper class. The author added that « it was Vientiane's national game. Burmese only copied it, and it is known that the British after learning it from them, made it the fashionable game in India.

(1) Temporary sheds.

(2) See below, under this title.

(3) See Paul Lévy, *Thi-Khi, un jeu de mail rituel au Laos*, in *Bulletin de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études*.

So it is to the Kingdom of Vientiane that our sportsmen owe this much appreciated form of modern entertainment... »

However it may be, the *ti-khi* is to-day one of the regular features of the That Luang festival. It is played on foot, with a stick curved at the head, the ball is of approximately the same size as a child's head, made out of a knot of wood, preferably the extremity or more accurately the root of a male bamboo tree.

The players are divided into two teams, the home one and the « invaders » one.

Striding and hopping at their best, these grown up children whose bare shins and feet do not feel in the least the wild blows dealt by the other's sticks, run forward, their mind obliterated with wine and fighting spirit, anxious to show that they are taking a very active part in the *Khi*, dangerous game, if any, requiring nothing less than courage...

How can this be explained? Training ground for courage? Test for men said to be invulnerable or impervious to pain, and for the young people formed under their leadership?

The game is played without any rules and there is no referee. It is a mad chase after the running ball, a frantic dash, an undescribable rush punctuated by shouts of victory, or good natured laughter from hefty chaps who obviously never take anything seriously. Only an hypothetical line marks the end of the rival camps.

* * *

At night, when calm has returned, after the passing of the procession of small wax Wats, and that of hundreds of faithfuls carrying offerings of candles and flowers, a bewildered full moon gazes at the daring, noisy and flashy multitude of fireworks climbing the sky towards her. They go off accompanied with the loud bangs of their fuses and their high-pitched whistles streak the heavens in streams of light. Some of them trumpet like elephants, others whinny like horses, others still, looking like candles set flower-like on long sticks, appear to dance like thousand-armed divinities.

And to bring the ceremony to a close, multicoloured flares, flood the whole *That* with light, giving the impression that, taller and slenderer than ever, it is rising towards the Blessed One, to whom a whole nation is showing its veneration...

When silence has returned and the diaphanous clouds of smokes left by gun-powder have vanished, when in its fullness, the moon has triumphed once again, the music of the singers and the *khenes*, suddenly revives, full of renewed keenness and delight...

The 'Boun' Pha-Vet

(4th Month Festival)

by

Marie-Daniel FAURE

Hardly has the harvest been taking in, that the Laotians are looking forward to a new boun: that of the Pha-Vet, whose description will enable us to introduce a new and very particular kind of festival.

Organized by a whole village which on this occasion does not invite individuals but neighbouring villages, the boun Pha-Vet is a collective undertaking. The Wat is the usual place where it is celebrated, and in its origin, its object and its rites, makes it an essentially religious ceremony. Preceded, of course, by a ngan it lasts a whole day, devoted to reading, by the monks, of the Life of the Buddha during His last reincarnation (Pha-Vet), an existence during which distributing all His possessions as alms, the Wise One gave up everything, sacrificed His White Elephant and forsook His children and His wife. This refers to the Jātaka called Vessantara.

The monks have the main role, while on that day, the faithful, inspired by the Master, multiply their alms-giving by heaping presents on the religious.

In the course of the 3rd and 4th months, the village elders invite the heads of families to attend a Council at the Wat in order to determine, with the Tiao (Chao) Athikane Wat (1) the propitious day on which the feast should be celebrated and to draw up its programme; indeed such a programme must necessarily comprise a fair amount of details and must be thoroughly studied. For so doing the convening of the Council is far from superfluous. You will be able to judge.

According to the importance the village is going to attach to the boun, the first question to be dealt with is to fix the number of kans (2)

(1) *Tiao Athikane Vat*: Abbot (head) of a pagoda; see above, *Organization of the Buddhist Clergy*, p. 257.

(2) In the *boun Pha-Vet*, a *kan* normally includes a coconut whose top part has been tapered and filled with a candle of bee wax, to which small silver coins have been stuck; sheets of paper and pencils; — handkerchiefs and articles of general use; — fruits and sweets.

The whole thing is placed in a basket.

to be offered, on the basis of which the number of invitations to be issued will be determined.

Since one kan is to be provided for each of the village's monks or novices attending the lecture there must also be one for each group of three or four monks representing every Wat invited.

Thus the total number of presents usually reaches sixty or eighty. The organizers being responsible for the gifts, they share the responsibility among themselves and each head of family puts his name down for one, two and sometimes even three of them.

This having been settled, the dean of the Council then consults the ancient records of the *Life of the Pha-Vet*, kept on talapia leaves, in which the passage to be read by each monk is chosen. Care is taken, however, to assign the first passages to the monks living in the farthest away Wats who will have to leave before the end of the feast.

After that comes a peculiar divining practice: lots are drawn up by the Council in order to assign a passage to each donor who after the reading of it will be given the opportunity of presenting his kan to the reader; and from the various adventures related in these passages everyone tries to guess their fortunes for the coming year.

The programme of the festival having been drawn up, the invitations are then written and issued; each one bears the address of the abbot of one of the Wats invited (1) and includes besides, the date and place of the festival, the number and the wordings of the passages of the *Life of the Pha-Vet* assigned to that Wat.

At last, before the meeting comes to a close, the Council takes care of the practical arrangements for the guests, and shares out the tasks among the householders.



A few days before the festival, the sheds required are built around the Wat by the menfolk. Then, in the middle of the *Ho Tieck* (2) they set up a pulpit, decorated with flowers and green and of which each panel is naïvely painted with scenes from the *Life of the Buddha*.

At home, however, the housewives have husked an abundant provision of paddy and put to soak the dough required for making the *khao poun* (3); and the boiled rice to be used in the distillation of numerous jugs of alcohol has been put to ferment in jars by some others. It is for welcoming the guests that all these preparations are made since the village makes a point of honour of treating them well.

And here we are on the eve of this propitious day. The teeming and vivid crowd of guests is invading the sheds. The phusaos

(1) The invitation also includes the whole village.

(2) *Ho Tieck*: one of the dependences in the Wat compound.

(3) See above, *Laotian Cookery*, pp. 224 and 232.

getting ready for the ngans are hastily freshening up in the smoky and crackling light of the torches. Soon, squatting on mats, lined up in a single file or gathered in small groups, they are ready for the court of love which, till dawn, will keep them awake, in turn dreamy or smiling.

* .

At dawn begins the first religious ceremony: the Khao-Phan-Kon or the « Thousand-Rice-Morsels » procession.

Headed by the Clergy, women and old people, each one of them carrying some small rice balls, flowers and candles on a plate, circle the Wat three times before returning to leave their offerings in baskets hanging from the pulpit's pillars or in front of the sheds.

Soon after, the housewives of the village arrive bringing the breakfast. In all the sheds, monks and novices whose appetite has been sharpened (1) by the preceding day's fast are eating heartily the copious meal copied by the guests.

After that, everybody goes to the Ho Ticck where the reading of the Life of the Pha-Vet is begun without delay. Their heads bowed low, the faithful listen to the wonderful story with attention and great devotion. Each one having in front of him a plate full of Khao-tok-tek or roasted paddy, whose perfectly white and fully open grains look like flowers of jasmin.

At the exciting passages, those for example describing the Pha-Vet giving up his white Elephant, his coach, his children and his wife, the enthusiastic crowd throws in the air handfuls of Khao-tok-tek which rain down like the flower petals the angels showered on the Pha-Vet in order to glorify him after each of his alms.

In the meanwhile, the devoted believer, to whom the drawing of lots has assigned the passage which is being read listens most attentively and when the monk leaves the pulpit, he follows him to the shed to offer him his kan.

In receiving it, the monk recite a short ritual prayer calling for the blessings of Heaven on the charitable donor who later will not fail to go and do the Yat-Nam at Nang Tholani.

At the pulpit, the monks are succeeding one another and so the sermon goes on... Suddenly, the distant din of a procession is heard, distracting the faithful's attention, and the preacher himself, visibly rejoicing, has paused briefly. It means that a kan-lone (2) is on its way which will be offered to the monk who happens to be preaching at the time of its arrival. Indeed, it is all to his advantage to slow down his reading and to pretend a sudden sore throat which compels

(1) Monks are not allowed to take a meal after midday.

(2) Kan-lone: surprise offering.

him to take frequent sippings, to cough slightly so as to clear his throat, trying to stay as long as he can in the pulpit since the procession before entering sometimes takes the kan-lone through the whole village.

The gift is an important one. Besides the ritual « coco », sweets and articles for everyday use, it consists of a faked horse or elephant made out of white cloth and mounted on a bamboo framework, at the neck of which hangs a rich collar made up of silver coins. The offerings basket is itself adorned with skeins of silk and smaller coins. While the value of a plain kan may vary from 100 to 200 piastres, that of the kan-lone is unlimited and never inferior to 500 piastres. It even happens that some generous donors striping themselves like Pha-Vet, offer a life horse mounted by their own son who will then become the « servant-novice » of the religious to whom the gift is offered.

Continuing even during luncheon which is served by the village housewives like the morning meal, the pious reading will last till nightfall.

However, the monks from far-off hamlets who have preached in the morning do not wait the end to go back.

At sundown, they gather their faithful and as group after group leaves, the Wat is emptied of its guests, being left at nightfall with its own parishioners and some of those living in the near vicinity.

The last episode having been read, the senior monk, i. e. the one who is the longest in religious life, then reads the Lang-Pham (1), which is a moving farewell to the sheds which have sheltered so many believers who came from all the neighbouring villages.

And so the festival has come to a close; while the religious retire, the faithful for the last time commune with themselves under the great banian tree or in the peaceful corners of the yard, to recall to Nang Tholani their pious deeds of the day.

They leave then, with the heart in peace, henceforth certain not to be forsaken by the Master to-Come who, at the end of the world, will come to save all men with a golden Kheung (2)... And while the meshes will allow all unbelievers to fall through them, the devoted ones, the charitable ones, who have at least once attended the boun Pha-Vet, will not fall through but will remain to live together a new and happy life.

(1) Literally : « The Washing of the Sheds ».

(2) A fishing tackle.

VII
MEDECINE

Some Practices of Traditional Medecine

by

Dr. Oudom SOUVANNAVONG,
Former Minister of Health.

As one of the more hospitable lands, Laos welcomed the first Western doctors who came to practice their art on its soil, but they did not even succeed shaking the prestige enjoyed by the traditional healers, trustees of secrets handed down through numerous generations. Thus Western and traditional medecines remain on good terms and can be found side by side. Even in more progressive families, it happens more than once that a graduate from a French Medical School is seen at the bedside of a patient with the local quack-doctor, if not with the magician or the witch-doctor. After having received his injection, the patient will not fail to swallow the potion carefully prepared by the quack and will also pay attention to the incantations of the witch-doctor who performs rituals in a corner of the room.

This coexistence, which after all could be taken as an example to others, may surprise. Should it cause concern? It is not at all certain that it would be a mistake to leave things as they are. Since the worst danger arising from an attitude in direct conflict with deeply rooted customs, would be to jeopardize a medico-social action, which nevertheless remains effective, although developing alongside traditional practices. Prejudices you may say. Maybe. Yet as long as these prejudices do not hinder the carrying out of health schemes, nor impair the development of systematic programme of hygiene, why should they be opposed? All the same, as you will be able to judge, the practices of traditional medecine are, in most cases, perfectly harmless. If they do not always cure the patient, at least they do not make his condition worse; and that is already something.

The Method of the Egg

Of the three types of practioners who hold sway over patients, each one covers only his own particular field which is clearly defined. Among the quack, the magician and the witch-doctor, how are we to know who is to be called at the patient's bedside ? Take an egg, just an ordinary new-laid egg and the answer will be given without any possible doubt. The egg must first be rolled lightly and slowly over the body of the patient, insisting particularly over the aching spot. After a few minutes of this treatment, efforts are made in order to stand the egg on a horizontal board. The operation is repeated until the egg stands somewhat unstably on its appropriate end. At this moment, the operator slightly taps on the board ; if the egg topples over the operation has to be repeated.

If it stands to the test, the shell of the egg is broken on a clean plate, taking care not to spoil the yoke. Henceforth, the diagnosis is easy. All that must be done is to observe the embryo attentively :

1. If it is free of any foreign matter, the illness is due to a pathological cause and therefore is of the resort of the quack.

2. If the yoke is abnormally developed, the illness is due to an evil spirit, and the magician has to be called.

3. If, however, the yoke is found to contain some impurities no doubt then that the sick person is under the spell of a sorcerer. In this case, the disease can only be cured with the help of a more skilful sorcerer (witch-doctor).

Treatment of Illnesses by the Quack

The quack who is called at the sick-bed of somebody receives on his arrival a cup containing some flowers, some candles, a bottle of spirit, an egg and some money wrapped up in a banana leaf. In the case of well-to-do families, they sometimes add a *sin* and a scarf to the present.

The ceremony begins right away. The candles are lit and prayers and magical formulas are recited by the quack. He then requests a cup to be placed on a given spot, where nobody will be allowed to touch it. He then turns to the patient and asks him to give all the circumstances of the illness and where it hurts. It is very seldom that he examines the patient in the medical sense. Having been told, he takes out of his bag pell-mell, roots, branches, bones, horns and among many other things, a whetstone. If some roots or leaves are wanting for the treatment of the patient, they will be send for from the nearby forest. In possession of the necessary ingredients for the concoction of his potion, he dips one of the roots in a cup of water and lightly rubs it on the

whetstone. The same operation is repeated with each of the ingredients needed for the treatment. Drop by drop as the water falls in the cup again a turbid liquid begins to form ; this is the medecine which should cure the complaint. If the quack doubts as to the cause of the disease, he will then prescribe as many potions as he suspects different causes.

Treatment of Illnesses by the Magician

A particular ceremonial must surround the arrival of the magician to the house of the sick. In the middle of the room a large tray is laid down — generally the one used by the family for their meals — on which, according to the prescription of the magician, are placed *cornels* of flowers, rice, spirit, eggs, boiled fowl, candles and a sword or a spear. In conformity with the exigencies of his guardian genius, his head covered with a cap, he wears a red cloth jacket or a piece of red printed material of white flowers.

Preparations having been carried out, the magician then dresses up, lits the candles, gets hold of the sword or the spear and recites prayers and magical formulas. The role of the magician being to scare away men and above all genii, he will certainly not utter them in a low voice but in a very loud one. And so bawling out till he has been able to identify the *phi* responsible for the illness. He then begins endless discussions with the family to find out what angered the evil spirit.

When at last having found out the cause that angered the evil genius, the magician will have no trouble in bringing this irritable spirit to better feelings. However, care will have to be taken not to displease the magician's guardian genius. To him too a propitiatory ceremony, similar to the one performed to appease the evil spirit, must be offered. According to the wealth of the family, the sacrifice of a chicken will be enough or else it will have to be an ox or a buffalo.

Treatment of Illnesses by the Witch-Doctor

In Laos, there are still many people who believe that sorcerers have the power to insert at distance some foreign matter in the body, which may cause a grave illness and even death. To deliver the victim of such a spell, the family will not fail to give a few grams of gold to the witch-doctor who has been called for. The appropriate rituals having been performed, he then holds a betel leaf in one hand and in the other a lighted candle which he passes over the body of the patient until he has located the foreign matter causing the illness. Having found it, he lays the betel leaf over the spot, recites some magical formulas and with a swift bite gets

it out of the body. If it is not visible, the sorcerer blows slightly over the spot in order to get at it more easily.

Sometimes too, the sorcerer limits himself to a recitation of secret formulas, while blowing over the area where lies hidden the foreign matter. This gives nausea to the patient who then vomits it and is thus cured. Should the formulas fail, the expert finger of the witch-doctor will tickle the patient's throat and thus render the incantations more effective. The object maliciously inserted into the body by a vindictive sorcerer, may be a chicken bone, a piece of buffalo skin or even a pebble.

*
* *

No doubt, some will smile at the practices just described. Let us say it again, the authorities have done nothing to stop them, not because the achievements of Western medicine are deemed to be negligible. Quite on the contrary, we hope that little by little the benefits will prove to be sufficiently self-evident, so that the credulous will slowly detach themselves from these antiquated customs. To bring this about, everything will be done to spread more and more the rules of modern hygiene and to facilitate the actions of Western medicine.

VIII

LANGAGE AND LITERATURE

Laotian Writings

by

LOUIS FINOT

In the vast domain of Thai languages (1) we find an extraordinary variety of writings. Some have kept to the same order as the Indian alphabet which by the others have been completely altered. Some are arranged horizontally and read from left to right, others in vertical lines following each other from right to left. Some have remained fairly close to the original form of the characters; others have deformed them beyond recognition. Some seem the result of the normal development of a primitive type, others have been influenced by neighbouring writings (2).

To distinguish the precise feature of Laotian writings, the only ones to concern us here, it will be helpful to situate them in the system as a whole of which they form a part. We shall therefore turn our attention to Thai writing in Siam, Tonking, and the Shan States, before studying it in Laos.

SIAM

It is generally accepted that Thai writing was invented by King Rāma Kāmhen of Sukhodaya, in 1283 A. D.

This opinion is found on a passage written on a stele erected by this sovereign in his capital in about 1296 (3), and which Father Schmitt translates as follows (I. 105-108) :

(1) Following the example of Mr. H. Maspero, *BEFEO*, XI, 153, n° 1, I use the *Thai* form to designate the whole of the Thai group, or the Lao-Siamese sub-group, and the *Tai* form when the tribes of Tonking are concerned.

(2) Besides their own writing, the Thais in settling down their language have used Chinese characters with their phonetic value. Inversely, there are examples of Chinese written in Thai characters (see F. W. K. Muller, *Ein Brief in Pa-yi Schrift* (*T'oung Pao*, V, 329).

(3) This date results from the chronological data given in the lines 101-105, where it is said that in 1209 saka (1287 A. D.) the king had some relics exhumed. He worshipped them for one month and six days, had them buried again then erected on the deposit a *cetiya* which was finished in 6 years' time, and surrounded this monument with a stone wall, finished in 3 years' time. If these two constructions were carried out the one after the other, then the inscription cannot be anterior to $1287+6+3 = 1296$. But Mr. Coedes (*BEFEO*, XVII, 2, p. 32) thinks that 1292 is

« In former times the Thais had no writing: it is in saka 1205 (1283 A. D.) the cyclic Year of the Goat, that King Rāma-Komhēng sent for a master who succeeded in inventing Thai writing; it is to him we are indebted for it to-day. »

If we compare this version with the original text, we immediately see that the translator has to some extent exaggerated its significance. Here is the text (l. 105-106):

« *Mīra kôn lay sur tǎi nī bō mī 1205 saka pī mǎmē phò khūn Rām Kamhēn hǎ krǎi cǎi nǎi cǎi lē sǎi lay sur lǎi nī lay sur tǎi nī cǎn mī pūra khūn phū nǎn [s]ǎi. »*

The translation given by Bradley is very exact (except the unjustified substitution of « Siamese » for « Thai »):

« Heretofore these strokes of Siamese writing were not. In 1205 of the era, Year of the Goat, Prince Khūn Rām Khāmhaeng sought and desired in his heart and put into use these strokes of Siamese writing. And so there are these strokes of Siamese writing, because that Prince [put them into use] » (1).

Accordingly the honour claimed by the king in this panegyric on his reign is not to have created Thai writing, but simply to have himself worked out and brought into use the alphabet he uses in his inscriptions. This assertion does not exclude the possibility of there having existed a different sort of writing either in another Thai group or even at Sukhodaya: it only implies that all writing bearing a resemblance to that of Rāma Kamhēn derives from the latter and

the « probable date » of the inscription, because « nothing obliges us to believe that these works were consecutive; they may very well have been simultaneous ». This is not a very likely probability. First there is nothing to suggest that the king had his stele engraved immediately after the building of the *celiya*: it was not destined especially to commemorate this work; it simply recalls it as one of the outstanding events of the reign it is meant to glorify. In consequence, even if we accept Mr. Coedes' interpretation, the document might be several years later than 1292-1293. What is more, it seems probable that, by enumerating the building of the *celiya* and that of the enclosure one after the other, with the time taken respectively by each, the king had two consecutive periods in mind; otherwise it would have sufficed to say that the work as a whole had lasted 6 years. The time devoted to the achievement of the work is a detail calculated to enhance the value and merit of it; the length of time required for the various portions of the edifice is a piece of technical information which, from the point of view of whoever drew up the inscription, was of little interest. I think it therefore more probable that the stele was engraved only in 1296 at the earliest, and perhaps some years later.

In the preceding lines, I agreed with all the interpreters of the inscription in accepting the initial date of the calculation as 1209 saka. It is however interesting to observe — which, to my knowledge, nobody has done — that the last figure is not 9 but 7; the synchronism of the Year of the Pig does not however fit in with 1207, and it is this discordance apparently that suggested a tacit amendment to Father Schmitt, an amendment accepted by all who came after him.

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that any document having this characteristic is posterior to 1283.

Now it happens that one inscription almost immediately following that of Rāma Kāmhen̄ in the collection of the Pavie Mission, inscription n° IV of Xieng Mai, flatly contradicts this conclusion, or at any rate seems to: for on the one hand it presents the main characteristics of Sukhodaya's writing and on the other hand it is dated 1173 saka = 1251 A. D., that is 32 years before 1283.

Father Schmitt has solved the difficulty by rejecting as false the date of the inscription of Xieng Mai: «The characters are the same as those of Sukhodaya and conform to the model of Rāma Khomheng's inscription. But, though its date is anterior to that of Rāma Khomheng's inscription, it was obviously made later: the already modified writing allows of no doubt on the subject ».

Mr. Aymonier (1) on the contrary thinks the document is authentic. He believes that Thai writing had taken form in the Principalities of North Laos long before the 13th century, and that Rāma Kāmhen̄'s role was merely to give it the improvements necessary to satisfy the requirements of the Siamese language. If this is true, then the Xieng Mai inscription, and probably also that of Wat Vixun in Luang Prabang, would be specimens of this ancient writing.

It is very probable that there was a certain kind of writing in use in the *Muongs* of Laos before the Rāma Kāmhen̄'s reign; but that this ancient writing is represented in existing documents, as for example on the inscription of Wat Vixun and Xieng Mai, that is a thing we find difficult to admit.

We may leave the first of these out, for it is not dated and there is nothing to justify one supposing it to be earlier than the end of the 13th century. On the other hand, the Xieng Mai inscription bears a date that is conveyed with an abundance of chronological facts; but these data do not fit in with each other, as Faraut has made clear (2); the date must therefore be presumed to be false.

Paleography comes to the same conclusions as chronological calculation. The writing of the stele of Xieng Mai, like that of all the Laotian inscriptions of the same period for that matter, when compared with that of Rāma Kāmhen̄, obviously represents a later stage in an evolution that tends to simplify the signs. Let us take as land-marks the three inscriptions numbered I (Rāma Kāmhen̄, about 1296), III (Jum, 1357), IX (Xieng Rai, 1484), as well as the contested inscription, IV (Xieng Mai) and let us make a synoptical table of the letters which have altered most : k, kh, j, ñ, dh, m:

[(1) *Le Cambodge*, III, pp. 702-703.

(2) *Étude sur la vérification des dates des inscriptions siamoises*, p. 11.

| I | III | IX | IV | I | III | IX | IV | I | III | IX | IV |
|----|-----|----|----|---|-----|----|----|----|-----|----|----|
| k | 𑄎 | 𑄏 | 𑄐 | 𑄑 | 𑄒 | 𑄓 | 𑄔 | dh | 𑄕 | 𑄖 | 𑄗 |
| kh | 𑄘 | 𑄙 | 𑄚 | 𑄛 | 𑄜 | 𑄝 | 𑄞 | m | 𑄟 | 𑄠 | 𑄡 |

As we can see, in 1357 the characters are still almost exactly those of Rāma Kāmhēn, except the *k* and the *ā* which have already taken more or less the modern form, whereas in 1484, they have a perceptibly different and more cursive appearance: now inscription IV belongs to this new period; so it cannot be anterior to the 15th century. There is one more important detail to add: in the first two inscriptions the vowel *ā* is noted by means of a repetition of the consonant that follows it (ex. *nann* = *nān*), whereas in 1484 we find the modern sign for abridgement placed over the consonant in *ā*. Now this sign is present in inscription IV. This is a fact we must take into account without necessarily considering it as a decisive criterion, for examples are not lacking in modern Siamese of the old custom of doubling the consonant to indicate *ā*. We are forced to the same conclusion if we compare the numerical signs: those on stele IV are perfectly modern in form.

This apocryphal document once set aside there is nothing to prevent our accepting the inscription of Rāma Kāmhēn as the first existing monument of Thai writing in Siam and Laos.

Apart from a few unimportant details, Rāma Kāmhēn's alphabet is identical to the modern Siamese alphabet. It has the additional vowels *ē*, *o*, *u*, the diphthongs *ai* (in both its forms), *ia*, *ua*, and some other diphthongs formed by the vocalization of a final semi-vowel. Its system of consonants includes the double series of the surd and half-surd (*q*, *t*; *d*, *l*; *b*, *p*; and the high and low *f*). The vowel *ā* is indicated by a doubling of the vowel that follows. The mute *h* already serves, as it does today, to carry a letter over from the lower to the higher class. The tones are determined by the nature of the initial consonant — voiceless or voiced — combined where necessary with the use of accents. There are two of these (instead of four as in modern Siamese): ¹ and +.

The most singular peculiarity of this writing is the way in which the symbols are grouped, for it is no longer done vertically, as in all inscriptions in Cambodia and Champa, but horizontally, so that the superposing of characters — whether vowel or consonant — is entirely done away with. In coming into line with the consonants the vowels have not been brought to adopt the form of the initial vowel; it is the vocalic symbols, written above or below, that have been brought into line with the rest.

The grouped consonants on the contrary, with the exception

of *s*, retain their full form, and their grouping is indicated only, and not always, by the letters being closer together. By bringing the letters thus into line the writing is simplified (the letters being always the same shape) and it becomes possible to avoid the too widely spaced lines that resulted from the superposing of the characters.

The reform only partially survived its author: very rapidly the vowels returned to their old place above and below the lines. But the consonants have kept to their assigned place and do so to this day, not without some loss of security in reading.

These are the main characteristics of Rāma Kāmhen's writing.

It remains to determine which of them served as a model to the royal calligrapher. Not only does he give us no information as regards this, but the terms he uses betray his anxiety to appear to posterity as the first and only inventor of these new « Thai characters ». If we take his word for it, he « sought them in his heart ». More simply, he must first have looked for them round about him. There was at that time in these countries an official writing which could fairly easily have been adapted (with the help of a few additions) to the sound and tone figuration of the Thai language; we refer to the Khmer writing. It answered the purpose of the ambitious monarch badly however, for what he wanted was to endow his kingdom with a *national* writing. The signs which he chose for this purpose do in fact differ from the Cambodian characters. They are none the less related to them by a link that is obvious. We want even to specify the nature of this relationship: Sukhodaya's alphabet represents a cursive form of the epigraphic writing of Cambodia.

The alterations we notice would seem in general to aim at reducing to a minimum the movements the hand requires to make in forming a letter; this aim is clearly shown by the following table in which 10 of Rāma Kāmhen's Thai characters (R) are compared with the corresponding characters taken from the Khmer inscription of Sukhodaya (S) :

S R

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>𑄓 𑄔</p> <p>𑄕 𑄖</p> <p>𑄗 𑄘</p> <p>𑄙 𑄚</p> | <p>A loop links the vertical stroke to the curved upper stroke; ornament omitted. Result: one stroke instead of three.</p> <p>Ornament omitted: one stroke instead of two..</p> <p>Ornament linked up with the right stroke which it carries further with a single movement of the hand: one stroke instead of two.</p> <p>The left-hand portion of the character, simplified by omitting the upper notch, has been linked to the bottom of the right-hand portion by means of an horizontal stroke, and the underwritten appendix</p> |
|---|--|

has been suspended on the right by a loop. This reduces the number of movements from three to one.

ᦺ ᦺ ᦺ ᦺ

- ᦺ ᦺ Upper stroke omitted, straightening of the vertical line, two remaining elements made the same height.

ᦺ ᦺ ᦺ

- ᦺ ᦺ Ornament omitted, characters turned upside down.

- ᦺ ᦺ The upper ornament has been placed beside the character on its right so that it may be written with a single movement, after which the two elements have been made the same size.

ᦺ ᦺ ᦺ

- ᦺ ᦺ One stroke instead of two.

ᦺ ᦺ d°

- ᦺ ᦺ One forms the main part of the letter starting from the left curve; then, instead of closing the circle and adding the ornament by means of a second movement, the hand continues vertically, turns to the left without breaking off, and then makes an horizontal stroke, in place of the ornament.

We think these examples should suffice to explain the nature of the modifications in Thai characters: the ornament is either suppressed or is replaced by a stroke in continuation of another stroke; the characters are simplified by substituting straight lines for broken ones, suppressing a side ornament etc.; independent elements are linked; in a word, what is aimed at is rapidity and economy of movement.

Does this mean that Rāma Kāmhên took as a basis for his graphic system the Khmer writing in use in his time, and introduced into it the innovations just innumeraed? It seems a most unlikely process. Since he was going to borrow in any case, what could be his motive in preferring characters already deformed by vulgar usage to the correct and elegant calligraphy of the Cambodian steles? But the question takes on a new aspect if, side by side with the Khmer writing, there was already in existence

a Thai writing, one that modelled itself on the former as regards the shape of its letters, and was constituted, perhaps without much logic or method, to satisfy the needs of everyday life while at the same time possessing the means of rendering the principal vocalic and tonic peculiarities of the Thai idiom. It would in that case be very understandable that the King of Sukhodaya, anxious to show his independence in respect of Cambodia, should choose that particular writing to be improved and raised to the rank of an official writing. This, no doubt, is only a supposition, but it is not an unlikely one, and it is one that the study of the other congeneric alphabets would seem to confirm.

TONKING

The Tais of Tonking have a writing which is in striking-contrast to those of Siam and Laos. To begin with, the signs have already reached an advanced stage of degeneracy, due no doubt in part to the use of the Chinese paint-brush which lends itself ill to the curves and loops of Indian letters, but which may also be explained by their having been in use for so long. What is more, it displays ignorance of the traditional order of the Indian alphabet; the characters seem to have been jumbled together pell-mell without any principle of classification. And not only is the succession of the letters devoid of all logic, but it even varies within the area, small though it is, where it is in use.

Three alphabets have been published of the same type. One was collected at Lai-châu by Mr. Lefèvre-Pontalis, the second at Nghĩa-lộ and Van-bu by General Diguët, and the third at Hưng-hóa Mr. Silvestre (1). Each of them enumerates the signs in a different order, not one of which is that fixed by tradition (2). This is a peculiarity worthy of note. For nothing is more stable, nothing more tenacious than alphabetic order. As a rule one generation transmits it to another with scrupulous fidelity. From

(1) P. Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Étude sur quelques alphabets et vocabulaires Thai* (T'oung Pao, vol. III, 1892, p. 39); E. Diguët, *Étude de la langue Tai*, Hanoi, 1895, p. 69 sqq.; J. Silvestre, *Notes sur les Châus Lào du Tonkin* (Exc. et Rec., XI, n° 26, mars-avril 1886, p. 169).

(2) It is impossible to conclude anything from the second one which the author has arranged in the order of our own alphabet, as General Diguët himself was good enough to confirm to me when he told me in which centres this writing was collected (it is not specified in his book). But thanks to the kindness of Father Tissot I was able to obtain one alphabet from the same region of Nghĩa-lộ. If we compare it with the two others, which give the impression of total disorder, there is more regularity in this one, in this sense that each high consonant is immediately followed by the corresponding low consonant; but according to what law these couples succeed each other is what it is impossible to make out. I think it of interest to reproduce here this alphabet (fig. 31); it was written down by the chief of the district of Nghĩa-lộ and he specified at the same time that the alphabet can be read either vertically or horizontally!

the father's memory it passes into that of the children, crystallized like a formula. This is so true that in the obscure minds of the Chams the Sanskrit alphabet has been preserved without the slightest alteration, in the shape of a ritual *mantra*, no longer understood today (1). This being so, how can we explain that the Tais of Tonking should have needlessly abandoned the immemorial order of the Indian alphabets, so logical, so rhythmic, so easy to remember, retaining only the dissociated, jumbled elements? Is it not more natural to believe that this incoherent alphabet represents the first attempt made by Indian writing to adapt itself to a tonic language? There is no reason why this attempt, clumsy and empiric though it may have been, should not have succeeded in establishing a rough correspondance between consonants and tones and in determining the two great series of high and low letters that form the basis of Thai writing. Râma Kanhên's work probably consisted in incorporating this rudimentary system within that of the Indian alphabet, in completing it by adding a few new signs and in determining the notation of the tones.

Let us analyse this alphabet of Tonking which we consider by hypothesis to be a more or less distant, more or less altered, representative of the ancient Thai writing.

To begin with the consonants form two symmetric series determined by their tonality. Every consonant, whether aspirated or not, must therefore be represented under a double form, and this result has been obtained in the following way. The symbol for the voiceless consonant has been assigned to the upper series, that for the voiced consonant to the lower series: when the alphabet lacked this double form they supplied the want by creating new characters by means of graphic variants and by adding an initial *h*.

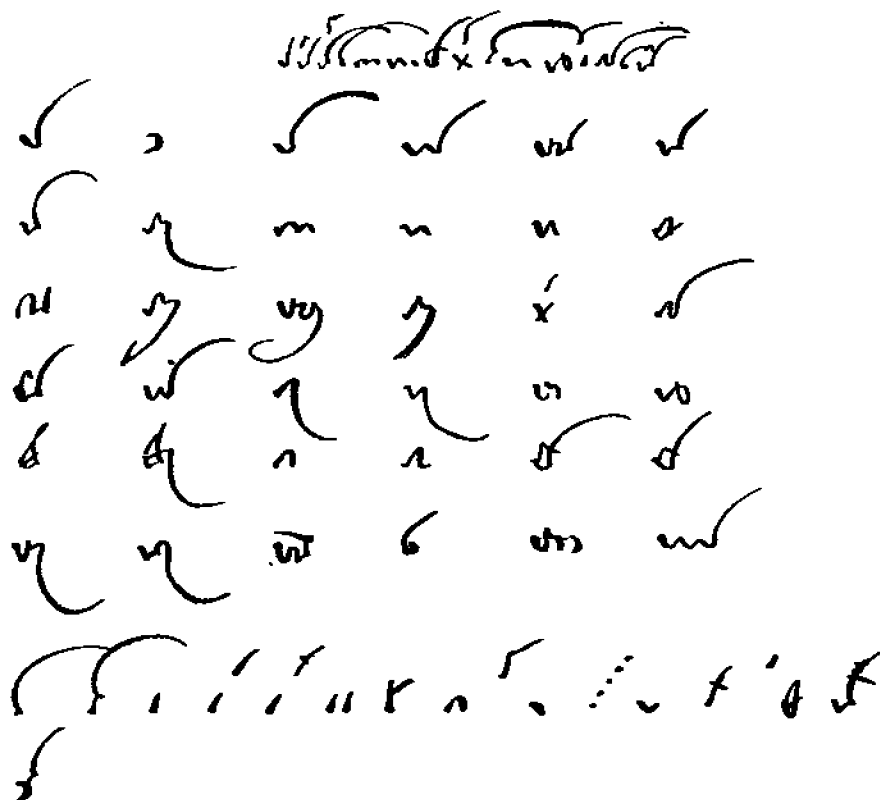
The three alphabets are not absolutely identical. In the Hung-hóa alphabet there is manifestly a Laotian influence (2) and that of Lai-châu bears the mark of contact with Burma (3). Moreover they reflect the slight phonetical differences between the speech of each. For example, I has, compared to the other two, an extra *lcho* sound which is different from *ē* and for which it has invented a special symbol made up of *ē*+*h*. II, on the other hand, makes no distinction between the sounds *d* and *l*, *b* and *v*, *n* and *m*, which causes a certain amount of confusion among the alphabetical symbols.

(1) Cabaton, *Nouvelles recherches sur les Chams*, p. 145 (*Rituel funéraire*).

(2) For instance, the *kh* of the lower series and the nasal *h* have the same form as in Laotian, in which this alphabet differs from those of Cao-hàng and Lai.

(3) Instead of a special notation for the aspirates *kh*, *ch*, *th*, *bh*, this latter alphabet actually makes use of the sign for the non-aspirated occlusive by adding the long comma subscript that is used in Burmese to indicate the aspiration of nasals and semi-vowels.

Fig. 31. — Tai Alphabet of Nghia-Lô



| | | | | | |
|--------|-----|---------|------|----------|------------|
| bó (1) | bo | pó | po | hnó, hmó | no, mo (3) |
| có | co | tó | to | kó | ko |
| khó | kho | hñó | ño | só | so |
| fó | fo | thó | tho | hó | ho |
| ó | o | ló (2) | lo | yó | yo |
| ló | lo | hñó | ño | hvó | vo |
| ô | ăi | ura (4) | ơ | é | è |
| | | | ao | si | ư |
| | | | a | ă(m) | u |
| | | | ia | ăn | ô |
| | | | ă(n) | ua | |

(1) In this transcription, the accent indicates only the letters of the low series.

(2) This *ló* and that of the first column are in reality the signs of *đ* and *l* united when pronounced.

(3) The writing makes no distinction between *n* and *m*.

(4) In Sylvestre, the diphthong *ura* is noted by the following character.

The *p'o* sound is lacking in II, and the *fo* sound in III; in I, on the contrary, both these sounds exist, it follows therefore that the latter alphabet has two extra symbols compared to the other two.

It is with this Tonkinese group most probably that we must link up two alphabets that are in use among the Phu Tai of Nghê-an and that seem to have come there from Cao-bằng. One of these, which is known by the name of *liệp năm* or « from the river-banks », is only to be found in the valley of the Sông Cả, phủ of Tương-dương. The other is in use in the phủ of Quì-châu (1). The latter alphabet has the peculiarity of being written vertically and being read from right to left like Chinese; the vocalic signs themselves are almost all placed under the letter they modify. The fact that two kindred languages, stemming apparently from the same region, should present such marked differences in the form of their letters, in the composition of the alphabet, and in the way the lines are set, is a striking illustration of the particularism of the Thai groups.

We give below (fig. 32) a specimen of this curious writing of Quì-Châu for which we are indebted to Mr. Henri Maspero, who was also so kind as to make the transcription and translation that accompany it.

Text

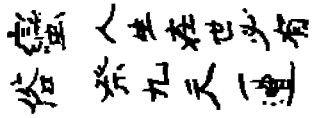
(1) ñwien thoñ mươn lai la (2) tơn kon kuon (3) p'au koñ to kwan (4) thoñ nưn kuon ho ñañ (5) koñ yu si thoñ hăk (6) om keđ pai poñ đai (7) viek kon kwan hăn (8) kuon ho hop kăn ma (9) nañ hươn kôk ho cañ (10) bo non tien su mu (11) kuon viek le hăn (12) men si tô mu ôm (13) son cuk mun oñ (14) ped cuk me-kai ha (15) hoñ me-pa si (16) cuk mak kwan kuon (17) ho mi luk sav 'a (18) phua lev ko men la (19) kon la tô mu san (20) đu kak coñ lev (21) cañ pai tan zai-mo ma (22) hươn kok ho leo cañ...

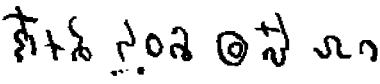
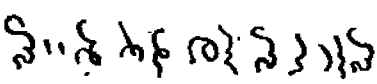
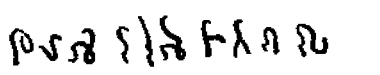
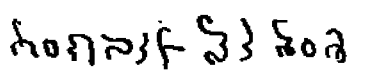
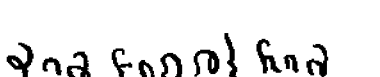
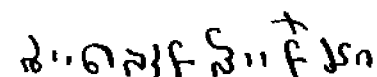
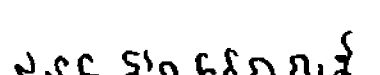
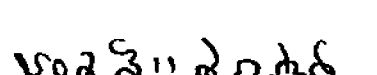
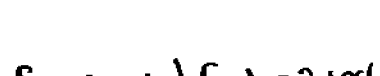
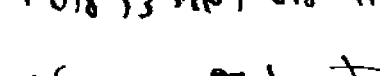
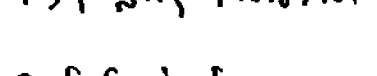
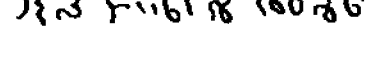
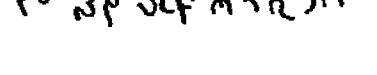
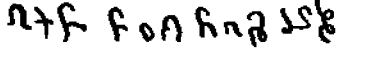
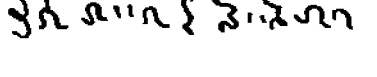
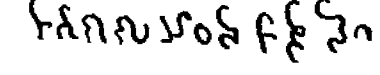
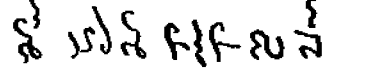
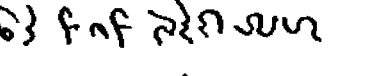
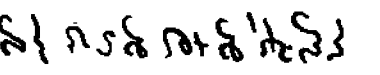
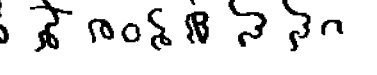
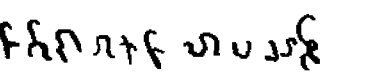
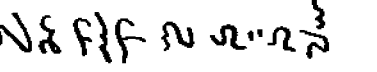
Translation

(1) Original custom of the Tai country. (2) Each generation of men in the family (3) is under the obligation to sacrifice a buffalo (4) of the male sex. In the family, if [everyone is] (5) in good health, it is sufficient. But if [anyone] (6) is ill [they] consult the augurs with regard to (7) this business of sacrificing a buffalo. (8) [The people] of the family assemble and come (9) and sit [in] the family's principal house. (10) [They] immediately allot the sum of money [for] buying a pig. For such a business (12) a large pig is necessary, (13) two lots of ten small pigs, (14) eight times ten chickens, five (15) hundred fish, five (16) times ten bananas. In (17) the family [if] there is [a] young

(1) Th. Guignard, *Dictionnaire laotien-français* (Tableau des alphabets thai).

Fig. 32. — Qui-Châu writing.



| | |
|--|---|
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |
| <p>  </p> | <p>  </p> |

girl [who] has taken to herself (18) [a] husband, for which reason it is necessary that each (19) man [provide] each pig. [When they have] chosen (20) sufficiently all the sorts (of animals), (21) then they go and fetch the sorcerer [to] come (22) to the family's principal home. Then...

SHAN COUNTRIES

If you take the valley of the Irawadi as your basis between 20 and 26 degrees latitude, roughly speaking between the Southern frontier of Upper Burma and the farthest North-East point of the State of Manipur, if you then make the two extremities of this line meet at Laokay you get a triangle which more or less corresponds to the area where the Thai groups called Shan and Lur are to be found. Of these the ones come under the rule of Burma and the others of China, while some belong to Indochina.

The Burmese Shan States are located between the Salween and the Irawadi. In the Southern part they end about a hundred miles East of this latter river; but from Mandalay onwards they draw closer to it, cross it at about the 24th degree and extend as far as the frontier of Manipur. North of the 26th degree only isolated Thai groups are to be found, the Khamtis.

The Chinese Shans (Tai Maos or Tai Khes) are to be found mingled with other races throughout the whole of the Yunnan borderland and along the frontiers of Burma, Laos, and Tonking. They form a particularly dense agglomeration in the Southern part, the so-called *Sipsong-panna* (1), to which the Northern provinces of Laos (Mường Sing, Mường Hou) now belong. Yunnan seems to have been their original habitat; from thence in very remote times they spread to the neighbouring countries, to Tonking, to Laos, and especially to Burma. From thence they progressed on the one hand towards Assam, which they conquered in the 13th century, on the other hand to Siam where at the same period they founded the kingdom of Sukhodaya.

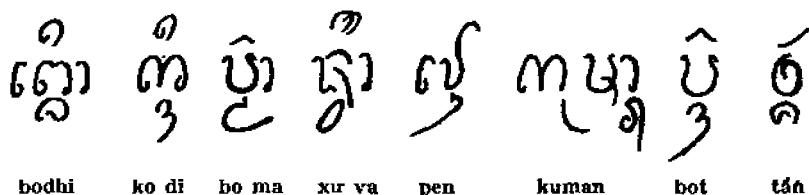
From the point of view that particularly concerns us there is a distinction to be made between the Western Shans (Burma), strongly imbued with Burmese influences, and the Eastern Shans (China), where this influence was less strongly felt. We shall examine the writing of this latter group first.

(1) The Sipsong-panna are a confederation of 12 principalities under Chinese government (with the exception of Mường Hou, a Laotian province) and they occupy both banks of the Mekong in the Northern part of the Kingdom, approximately between 21 and 23 degrees latitude. There are eight panna on the left bank and four on the right bank. On the left bank : Xieng Hong (capital), M. La, M. Pong, M. Noun, M. Yang, M. Bang, M. Hou, M. Heng. Right bank : M. Lem (capital), M. Houng, M. Hai, M. Meng (Lucien de Heiauch, *Le Laos*, first ed., p. 30).

A. — *Eastern Shans*

The *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* has in its possession a large collection of Buddhist manuscripts which came originally from a Lu group settled about thirty miles N. W. of Lai-châu and coming probably from the region of Mưong Hou. Moreover we have positive evidence that the writing of this region is the same as that of the Sipsong-panna in general and of Sse-mao. We may therefore legitimately take these manuscripts as typical of the writing of the Chinese Shan States (1). We give on the next page (fig. 33) the photograph of a page of one of these manuscripts.

It is clear at first sight that this writing is entirely independent of that of Sukhodaya. To begin with the shape of the characters is quite different; moreover instead of avoiding the superposing of letters it makes an exaggerated use of it to the extent of becoming inaccurate and obscure: it actually uses as subscripts even those consonants that do not form a phonetic group. The final *k* on the other hand is often indicated by a superscript that is identical with that on *ă*.



It is evident from the characters we have just defined that the writing of the Shan countries does not come from the same source as that of Sukhodaya. Can it have Burmese writing as its source? We think not. Doubtless there are letters in the two alphabets that bear a strong resemblance to each other; but if we leave aside those whose form is much the same in all the alphabets of Indian

(1) Dr. Gaide, who travelled over all the regions of the Sipsong-panna in 1899-1900, from Mưong Hou to the Burmese frontier (Mưong Lê, Xieng Hong, Mưong Liêm, Sse-mao), bears witness to having found the same writing everywhere. (Manuscript account). It is the one Cushing (*Grammar of the Shan Language*, p. 6) inaccurately refers to as « diamond-shaped » because of its being less rounded than Burmese writing. There is a Chinese Collection of Shan States vocabularies in 7 parts to which reference may be made in this matter, but it is not as accurate as one could wish. (Library of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, Chinese section, n° 1179). This collection has no general title: each part is called: *Yi gu* [譯語 interpretation of language] of Meng Cheu, Meng Ma, Meng Mao, Meng Lieng, Lou-kiang, Kan-yai, Nan-tien. All these countries are on the Sino-Burmese frontier, lying South of Tali. The writing called *guon* which is in use in Xieng Mai is the same as that of the Chinese Shan States. Reference may be made to the publications of the American Mission of Xieng Mai, for example: the Reverend J. H. Freeman, *A Life of Christ for Schools* (Xieng Mai, 1908).

origin, then we really only find two signs, the *ñ* and the *d*, that are closely related.

Shan Burmese

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ñ | ꨀ | ꨁ |
| d | ꨂ | ꨃ |

On the other hand, the dissimilar letters are numerous:

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|----|---|---|---|---|----|----|---|----|---|
| | kh | ñ | c | j | t | th | dh | n | ph | r |
| Shan | ꨀ | ꨁ | ꨂ | ꨃ | ꨄ | ꨅ | ꨆ | ꨇ | ꨈ | ꨉ |
| Burmese | ခ | င | စ | ဆ | တ | ထ | ဓ | န | ပ | ရ |

The difference between the two writings is not confined to the shape of the letters. In Shan the final consonants are written as subscripts; in Burmese they have a virāma added to them. The consonants are quite differently grouped: for example, the group of *h* and a consonant is written in Shan with the sign *h* and the consonant as a subscript, in Burmese with the sign of the consonant and *h* as a subscript.

B. — *Western Shans*

Here we have the alphabet of the Western Shans as given by Cushing (1), with the Burmese alphabet underneath:

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|---|----|---|---|----|---|---|----|---|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | k | kh | n | c | ch | ñ | t | th | n | p | ph | m | y | r | l | v | h | a |
| Shan | ꨀ | ꨁ | ꨂ | ꨃ | ꨄ | ꨅ | ꨆ | ꨇ | ꨈ | ꨉ | ꨊ | ꨋ | ꨌ | ꨍ | ꨎ | ꨏ | ꨐ | ꨑ |
| Burmese | က | ခ | င | စ | ဆ | တ | ထ | ဓ | န | ပ | ဖ | မ | ယ | ရ | လ | ဝ | ဟ | အ |

It is clear from this list that the 13 letters *kh*, *ñ*, *ch*, *n*, *t*, *th*, *p*, *m*, *y*, *r*, *l*, *v*, *a*, are identical or differ hardly at all, and that the only really dissimilar characters are *k* (which in Shan has only one branch, in Burmese two) (2), *c*, *ph*, and *h*.

The notation of the vowels is the same as in Burmese.

(1) *Elementary Handbook of the Shan Language*, Rangoon, 1888.

(2) It may be the result of its having been confused with the sign *g*, due to the fact that the voiced occlusives have disappeared out of this alphabet. In Shan the *k* in *karuṇa*, *kappa*, and the *g* in *gati*, *maṅgala*, are written with the same letter.

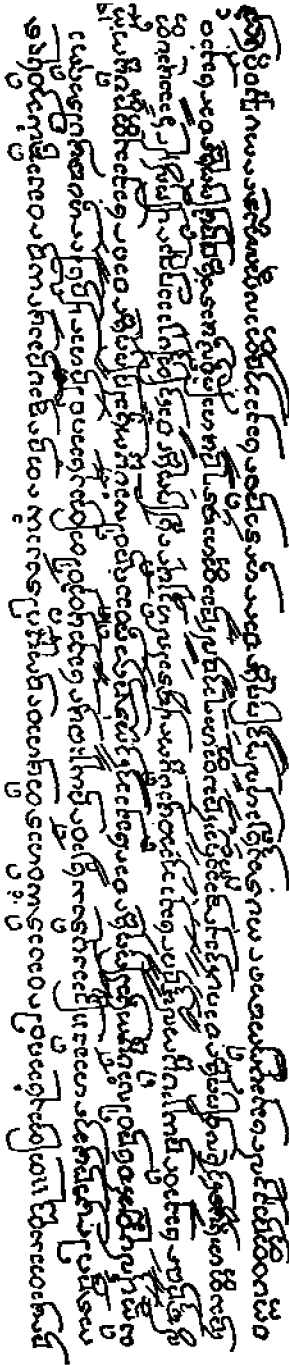


Fig. 33. — Lur manuscript of the Suttavibhanga
(*EFEO*, *Thaï*, no 3, p. 1.)

Transcription

Namo tass' atthu || tatra sudan Bhagavā Vesāriyam vihāreti Mahāvane Kuṭṭagārāsāyam tena kho pana samayena Vesāliyam avidūre (2) Karandagāmo nāma ahosi || dura sapurissa tñh lay vineyyā-dhamma-desāna mi ton va tatra sudan Bhagavā ni hak pen nitan hēn pathama parājikā (3) sikkhabāt lē pucchā codanā va lam piṭṭaka tñh 3 Prā Buddha cao desānā ān dai kōr nān xa pūn visejanā va lam Piṭṭaka tñh 3 nān Prā Buddha cao ko desānā Suttantapiṭṭaka kōr (4) lēo thāt nān ko desānā Vineyyāpiṭṭaka lēo thāt nān ko desānā Abhidhammapiṭṭaka pen thuor 3 lē hi duei mi tē lē Prā Buddha cao dai trāt prānā sabbānū pen pra lēo phu khao sammāpatti (5) nai sattahā tñh muor dai 59 vān Prā Buddha cao ko bo dai sān khao sāk kap nai sattathā 7 ān nān lē nai sattahā thuor 7 nān Mahāprohm cin loh ma raddhanā nimon Pra Buddha cao desānā dhamma (6) cakkapavattana sut lē desānā pubbikathā kē parisāt tñh lay hnān lē pān dūn Prā Buddha cao hēn rao ni ko desānā anattālakkhana sōr kē pañcavaggi 5 ton ||

The writing of the Western Shans is therefore almost identical to Burmese writing; but this identity is probably only the result of their having borrowed, or rather modified, the original Shan characters when under the influence of a ruling people.

We are bound therefore to conclude that the original Shan alphabet comes neither from Siam nor from Burma. This being so, only one origin seems possible, though no historical proof can be brought forward for lack of ancient Shan documents. We know that round about the 6th century a writing from Southern India was in use in Pegu that was an exact counterpart of that which took root in Cambodia at the same period (1). It was probably this Indian writing of Pegu that was imparted to the Shan countries where it developed along independent lines. As for the partial affinities that exist between modern Shan writing and Burmese, they may be explained by the later borrowing of which native tradition seems still to have memories (2).

This writing of Pegu is what the Thais preserved in the place where they originally lived and took with them when they migrated. Its main characteristics remained unchanged in those countries that kept in contact with Buddhist literature through the intermediary of their monks (Chinese Shan States, Northern Laos); in the isolated groups (Tonking) it degenerated; elsewhere it was subject to the influences of a ruling people, but with contrasting results that varied according to political circumstances. In Burma, where the Thais never rose to a position of independence, their national writing was supplanted by Burmese writing. In the Menam valley, where at first they were under Cambodian hegemony, their alphabet was given the recognizable stamp of the Khmer cursive writing; but after their emancipation this writing was co-ordinated by an enlightened monarch and became the official writing of the State of Sukhodaya. From there it was transmitted without any break and with very few alterations to the Kingdoms of Siam and Laos. That at least is the hypo-

(1) Louis Finot. *Un nouveau document sur le bouddhisme birman*, and *Le plus ancien témoignage de l'existence du canon pâli en Birmanie* (J. A. 1912-1913).

(2) «Burmese Shan tradition says that about 300 years ago, after the establishment, or more probably the revival of Buddhism, a Shan priest went down into the Burma country, learned Pāli and Burmese, devised the present Shan alphabet and translated some religious books into his own language». (Grierson, *Linguistic Survey*, vol. II p. 66). Sir George Grierson is inclined to believe that the Shan alphabet derives directly from Ahom. The Ahoms are the Thais who conquered Assam in the 13th century where they continued in domination until the end of the 18th. century. Their alphabet is defined by Sir George Grierson as «an archaic form of the one used today by the Khamtis and the Shans of Burma» (*ibid*). This is not, as a matter of fact, the impression given by the Ahom alphabet. It is not an archaic form of the Thai alphabet of Burma, for the latter is derived almost entirely from the Burmese alphabet. As for the Chinese Shans, far from being a modern form of Ahom, their writing bears on the contrary the stamp of a more remote antiquity.

thesis that would seem to give the most satisfactory explanation of the affinities and dissimilarities to be found in the writings of the various Thai groups which spread from Yunnan to the frontiers of Annam and the shores of the Gulf of Siam.

LAOS

The writings of Laos may be reduced to two main types: the writing of Sukhodaya and the writing of the Sipsong-paanna which we shall more briefly call Shan writing, meaning that of the Chinese Shan States. Here are the chronological data as provided by the dated inscriptions (1).

| WRITING OF SUKHODAYA | SHAN WRITING |
|---|------------------------|
| Xieng Mai \ 1492-1581 (P. VI, V, VII-VIII).
/ 1738-1741 (P. XXII-XXV). | |
| Xieng Rai... 1484-1502 (P. IX, XXVII, XXVI). | |
| Lampun..... 1500 (P. XVII). | |
| Luang Prabang 1548, Wat That (P. XV; F, 27). | 1836 sqq. (P. XI-XIV). |
| Don Ron..... 1577 (F. 36). | |
| Dansai..... | 1560 (F. 28). |
| Vieng Chan (That Luang)..... | 1566 (unpublished). |

We see from this table that, right up till the end of the 16th century and even, in Xieng Mai, until the middle of the 18th, the writing of Sukhodaya was used in all Laotian principalities for the engraving of inscriptions on stone. During all that long period the evolution it suffered was but a very slow one whose last stage is the cursive writing of today. This latter alphabet is distinguished by great simplification: it has left out the series of cerebral letters, the consonants we call «secondary», the voiced aspirates, and finally the tonic signs.

As for Shan writing, it makes its appearance in Vieng Chan in the middle of the 16th century (1560, Dansai; 1566, That Luang). But these remain isolated examples and it is not till the 19th century that we find it used currently in epigraphy. Actually it is probable that the copyists of manuscripts used it long before the stone engravers in their turn adopted it (2).

(1) These inscriptions are marked P. (= Pavie Mission, *Recherches sur l'histoire*), with the number of the inscription; or F (= Finot, *Notes d'épigraphie*, BEFEO, XV, II, p. 27 sqq.), with indication of the page.

(2) This is what happened in Burma where for a long time square characters were co-existent with round ones; the use of the former was reserved for steles, of the latter for manuscripts, bronzes, «votive tablets» etc. In Burma this round writing is a very old one. Certain of the terra-cotta «votive tablets» have an inscription on them that bears the name of Anuruddha (11th century); these are in almost round characters and bear a close analogy to present-day writing. The bell of the Shwesigon temple in Pagan (1557 A. D.) has an inscription on it in round letters.

At the present time there are three local varieties of this writing: *Tham*, in use throughout the whole of Laos; *Lx*, whose use is confined to the Northern extremity of the country, and more particularly in the province of Mưong Hou that was amputated from the Sipsongpanna; *Yuon*, which is in use in Xieng Mai (1). The differences that distinguish them from each other are insignificant, consisting less in the specific form of the letters than in the duct of the writing. Rounder and more regular in *Tham* writing than in the other two, what characterizes *Lx* writing are the longdrawn strokes of the tails and spearheads and of the interlinear signs that often intertwine with each other from one line to the other; in *Yuon* it is the more angular outline and a certain tendency to disjoint the signs. But these details have no effect on the fundamental identity of the writing. *Lx* and *Yuon* more especially form an absolutely homogeneous group that may be distinguished from *Tham* by certain shades of difference of which the chief are given below:



The letter *r* has a double form (1-2) which may correspond to the two phonetic values this sign possesses: *r* and *h*. The peculiar looking consonants are: *n̄*, *j*, *n̄*, *th*, *ph*, *y*, *s* (3-9). Of the subscript consonants the *n̄* is the same shape as the letter in full; the other two nasals are considerably simplified: *kon*, 12; *kamma*, 10.

The two vocalic signs that serve to mark the final *o*, and the *o* followed by a consonant, are shaped like a circumflex accent and a vertical hook instead of like a small circle and a curved horizontal stroke, as in *Tham*: *ko*, 11; *kon*, 12. *ă(k)* is indicated by means of an oblique stroke: *căk*, 13; the diphthong *ao* by the same stroke but double: *cao*, 14, excepting in the word *ao*, «to take», which is indicated, as in *Tham*, by the sign *n̄* with a curved stroke over it, 15. The double stroke is also to

(1) The *Yuon* people live West of the *Laos* properly so-called, in a country that spreads from Mưong Prê in the South, to Xieng Rai in the North, with Xieng Mai a. their chief centre. In the North they are contiguous with the *Nieu* (Xieng Tong) These latter have the *Lx* to the East of them (Sipsongpanna).

be found in the abridged spelling of *tăn hlay*, « all », 16 (1).

The difference between the numerical signs is greater, for although *Yuon* has adopted Burmese numbers, *Lur* has remained faithful to the Thai.

Whilst *Lur* and *Yuon* in their own domain are the only writing that may serve for every purpose, sacred or profane *Tham*, on the contrary, as its name indicates (*Dhamma*, Buddhist doctrine), is used solely for religious inscriptions and manuscripts, while Laotian writing properly so called continues to be used for everything else: poetic and romantic literature, codes, administrative papers, correspondence etc.

What we said earlier about the writing of the Chinese Shan States may also be applied to *Tham* writing in Laos. It has by no means the regularity of Cambodian writing: it makes an immoderate use of contractions, so much so that reading is made uncertain work; some of the abbreviations are even in the nature of regular sigla that have to be known beforehand so as to be read. The chief of these peculiarities are given below :

| | | |
|-----|----------------------|----------|
| lěk | ko mi, bo mi, lê mi | lê |
| hèn | ko ma, pai ma | tăn hlay |
| năn | bodhi, ko di | ao |
| pěn | măk va, kư va, xư va | an va |
| nom | mahā, senā | |
| lūk | dura, khao khôn | |
| căk | | |

(1) From the spelling point of view, observe the form *pai* « to go », with a voiced *p*, in the place of *pai* (voiceless *p*).

(1) The final consonants are usually subscripts : *lèk*, *hèn*, *năn*, *pěn*, *nom*.

(2) When the sign is not required (as it is in the latter example) for shortening the vowel, it may be used for indicating the final *k* : *lūk*. It may even suffice in itself to indicate the syllable *āk* : *cāk*.

(3) Two distinct syllables are expressed, running counter to all the rules of Indian writing, by means of a group of consonants : *ko mi*, *bo mi*, *lê mi* ; — *ko ma*, *pai ma* ; — *bodhi*, *ko di* ; — *māk va*, *kur va*, *xu va* ; — *mahā*, *senā* ; — *dura*, *khao khôn*.

(4) The chief abbreviations are : *lê* « and », *lăn hlay* « all », *ao* « take », *an va* « that is to say » (1).

We shall end these notes on Laotian writings with some information concerning the manuscripts.

Most of the Mss (*Kampi*) are engraved with a point on palm leaves that vary in length and are roughly 20 by 16 inches. They have two holes pierced in them at a third and two thirds of their length; but it is through the left hole only that they put the cord which is to keep them grouped together. A bundle of about twenty of these leaves forms what is called a *phuk* (a part); these *phuks* are grouped in their turn into packets (*mât*) which are wrapped up in a piece of cloth. A wooden label is attached to the end of the cord that is tied round the bundle and the title of the work is inscribed on it.

As a rule the text is on four lines. In the left-hand margin of the first page the copyist writes the title of the work and the number of the *phuk*. The first *phuk* is called *phuk ton*, « initial part », the last is called *phuk pay* (= Siam. *play*) « last part », the others are given a number; *phuk dieu* means that the text is complete in one single part. The same terms apply in numbering the *mâts*.

Novels in verse, such as *Kalakel*, *Lin*, *Tôn*, etc., are not divided into *phuks* and *mâts* : however numerous the cadjans (and I have seen a manuscript that ran to not less than 875) they are piled up and held in place by a board top and bottom, and pierced through to right and left by a double series of holes; a little cord is run through the left-hand holes, passes under the bottom board, and then is brought up again through the right-hand holes; its two ends, tied together in a knot, serve as a handle for carrying this enormous bundle.

(1) This last word is in reality the Khmer particle *rī* which precedes the subject of the clause. In the glosses of Buddhist texts this particle is often to be found coming after a Pāli nominative, for example : *bodhisatto rī praṇ pūthisa*. The Laotians have lost sight of its significance and come to consider it as a word whose function is to usher in the native equivalent of the Pāli word, in the sense of the Latin *scilicet*.

The Lur Mss are written on both sides of a single sheet of thick native paper folded like a screen, as with the Cambodian *krān*. Once been folded the MSS appears in the form of an oblong exercise-book about twelve inches broad and ten inches high, sewn along one of the shorter sides, and with the text written transversally from bottom to top. (EFEQ, Thai Mss, n^{os} 1 and 6).



Language

by

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Laotian belongs to the *Thai* family of languages. This group of languages is widely spoken between the Yangtse and Burma (Shan) and between Siam and the Gulf of Tonking; it is one of the most homogeneous groups and linguistically one of the best known. The Thai dialects, springing as they all do from a common root, are so alike that they form no total barrier to mutual understanding. For example, someone who knows Laotian will learn very quickly to understand and speak Siamese or any one of the Thai dialects of Northern Viêt-Nam.

Like Siamese, Cambodian, and Burmese, Laotian is written in characters (1) borrowed from India. The kinship between these languages is obvious at a glance. This is shown clearly in the following transcriptions of the two syllables *kā* and *lu* in each of these different languages :

| | Sanskrit | Cambodian | Siamese | Laotian | Burmese |
|----|----------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Kā | का | កា | ᩉ᩠ᩅ | ᩉ᩠ᩅ | က |
| Lu | लु | លុ | ᩉ᩠ᩅ | ᩉ᩠ᩅ | လု |

The addition of diacritical signs for fuller indication of the inflections is imitated from the Siamese. For there are as many inflections in Laotian as in Vietnamese, that is: six. By numbering

(1) Like Siamese and Cambodian, Laotian possesses two types of writing. One of them, considered as sacred, is used only for religious texts and for transcribing Pāli.

from 1 to 6 the various inflections with which the « morpheme » (1) *sang* may be pronounced six distinct words are obtained, as follows:

Sang (*) with inflection 1 = Hammock (2).

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---------------|
| — | — | — | 2 = top. |
| — | — | — | 3 = granary. |
| — | — | — | 4 = elephant. |
| — | — | — | 5 = artisan. |
| — | — | — | 6 = to build. |

As we see, the inflection acts as a differentiator: by changing the inflection of a morpheme you turn it into another word, exactly as though you were to change one of its sounds, a vowel or a consonant.

According to the authors there are no settled inflections in Laotian, they vary from one place to another. They are even completely reversed in two localities. But in dealing with Laotian one must be careful to assign limits to the studied area since several dialects will be involved; the Laotian that is spoken on the right bank of the Mekong is not the same as what one hears in the hinterland of the left bank. The language we learn in text-books and in the Guignard dictionary is based on the Luang Prabang dialect.

Laotian is strictly monosyllabic. The words of more than one syllable which we come across are of foreign origin: Sanskrit, Pāli, or Cambodian: *nakhon* « kingdom » from the Sanskrit *nagara*, *niphaan* « nirvāṇa » from the Pāli *nibbāṇa*. The word for « rose », *kulaap*, like the corresponding Cambodian *kolaap*, is Persian.

(1) For the sense in which the word « morpheme » is here employed see G. Edward Roffe : *The Phonetic Structure of Lao in Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 66, n° 4, Oct.-Dec. 1946.

(2) The numbering of the inflections is reproduced from the *Dictionnaire laotien-français* of Theodore Guignard (*Introduction*, p. xx).

(*) VERY IMPORTANT NOTE :

As this essay is not intended for specialists, nor meant to teach the language, we felt we might legitimately avoid reproducing, in the words we quote in the course of the article, all the signs that mark the inflections and the attributes of the vowels. It would have been difficult to give them with the typographical resources at the disposal of this review. Besides, the transcription we use here is a compromise. We ask those of our readers who would like to form an idea of a more exact system of transliteration which could be applied to Laotian, to consult our article on the Romanization of Tay languages in Northern Viêt-Nam (*la Romanisation des parlers tay du Nord Viêt-Nam*) in the *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, t. XLVI. part 2).

INITIAL CONSONANTS

The consonantal phonemes with which a Laotian word may begin are the following:

| | | Bilabial | Alveolar | Palatal | Velar | Glottal |
|-------|---------------------------|----------|----------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Nasals | m | n | ñ | ng (1) | |
| Stops | Voiced | b | d | | | |
| | Voiceless (non-aspirated) | p | t | č (2) | k | ʔ |
| | Voiceless (aspirated) | ph | th | | kh | |
| | Spirants | f | s | | | h |
| | Semi-vowels | w | | y | | |
| | Laterals | | l | | | |

Laotian no longer possesses a single group of consonants. Unless one allows oneself to be misled by the writing into considering as a combination of consonants certain labialized stops which Laotian writing presents in the guise of *consonant + w*: *nw, ngw, ěw, kw, khw, lhw, sw, lw, hw*. For example: *kwađy* « ring » (Guignard: *quai*), *kween* « accustomed » (G.: *quen*), *kwit* « introduce » (G.: *quit*), *kkwaay* « buffalo » (G.: *khoai*) (3), *khween* « district » (G.: *khuen*), *khwit* « embroider » (G.: *khuit*).

(1) For lack of diacritical signs we make use of this double letter to take the place of a phoneme that is peculiar to Laotian.

(2) We represent by č the softened palatal which is equivalent to the sound given as *ch* by the *quč-ngč* and which, in the transcribing Laotian names, is given sometimes as *ti*, sometimes as *ch* or even *thi*: for example: *chan, liane* in Vieng-chan, Vientiane.

(3) It will be observed that the only difference between *khwaay... khwit* and *kwaay... kwit* is in the aspiration. For the sake of coherence in the transcription Guignard should have used *quh* or *qhu* to represent *khw*. He was probably prevented from doing so by the habits of Latin writing which account for the incoherences with which the *quč-ngč* is swarming. But we may also suppose that Guignard did not see the phonological system of the Laotian language in its reality, for there are a great many inconsistencies in his dictionary. For example the same word *khwaan* « leader, chief » figures twice under two different forms: p. 323 *khoan* and p. 343 *khuan*. Now in neither of these two places is there any difference whatever in the spelling of the word in Laotian characters.

However that may be, we must be careful to point out that in the present-day language there is no other sort of consonantal group. There are traces left in the spelling, however, of former combinations of consonants having *l* or *r* as their second element. For example: *p(l)aa* « fish ». The letter *l*, no longer pronounced, is written as a subscript to *p* p_2 (Cf. Siamese *plaa* ปลา).

FINAL CONSONANTS

The only consonants at the end of a Laotian word that can be heard are the following:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|----|---|
| m | n | | ng | |
| p | t | | k | ʔ |
| w | | y | | |

Foreign words ending in *l* or *r* transform their *l* or *r* into *n*. For example: Sanskrit *kār(a)*: Lao *kaan* « business »; Pāli *kusal(a)*: *kuson* « merit ».

VOWELS

| | Anterior | | Posterior | |
|--------|-----------|--|--------------|----------|
| | Unrounded | | Unrounded | Rounded |
| Closed | <i>i</i> | | <i>ū</i> (1) | <i>u</i> |
| Medium | <i>é</i> | | <i>œ</i> | <i>ó</i> |
| Open | <i>è</i> | | <i>a</i> | <i>ò</i> |

The *long-short* opposition, which is characteristic of primitive Thai and which has been so strongly maintained in Siamese, is not so operative in Laotian. It has even completely disappeared out of certain dialects, White-Thai and Black-Thai more particu-

(1) We use *ū* and *œ* respectively to represent the phonemes that correspond to the two vowels called *beared u* and *o* in Vietnamese.

larly. In Laotian the *long-short* opposition tends rather to take the form of an opposition of timbre. For example: *kaan* «sleeve» ∼ *kan* «to close», *miil* «knife» ∼ *mit* «grain, seed».

A Laotian word can have a vowel at the end only if that vowel is long. In other words, a short vowel is never found at the end of a word. The sign like two dots that comes after certain final vowels, for example in the word *pa:* «to forsake», is not to be taken as an indication that the preceding vowel is short, as we are taught in certain text-books: it is the nature of the vowel to be short. This sign stands for a genuine consonant, the glottal stop which it is customary among linguists to transcribe by means of the sign ʔ. For example: *paʔ* «to forsake».

DIPHTONGS

The only genuine Laotian diphthongs are:

ie, ūæ, uo

Coming at the end in open syllable these diphthongs become:

ia, ūa, ua

For example: 1° Inclosed syllable: *lieng* «to purify», *hūæn* «house», *nguon* «trump». 2° In open syllable: *lia* «to lick», *hūa* «boat», *ngua* «ox».

The graphic signs given by Guignard and other authors as diphthongs: *ai*, *oi*, *eo*, *êu*, etc. are not genuine diphthongs. They are to be interpreted as a *vowel* in combination with *y* or *w*. This is actually what Laotian writing indicates, except in the case of *ay* and *oy* which are represented by special signs. It will be noted that the front vowels can only be combined with *w*, while the back vowels only with *y*:

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>iw</i> (Guignard: <i>iu</i>) | <i>uy</i> (Guignard: <i>uy</i>) |
| <i>éw</i> — <i>êu</i> | <i>óy</i> (— <i>ôi</i>) |
| <i>èw</i> (— <i>eo</i>) | <i>òy</i> (— <i>oi</i>) |

The comportment of *ū* and *æ* is that of back vowels, giving *ūy* (G.: *ry*) and *æy* (Guignard: *σ*). The central vowel *a* combines both with *w* and *y*: *haw* «we» (G. *hau*), *haaw* «enclosure» (G.: *hao*), *kay* «moss» (G.: *kay*), *kaay* «body» (G. *kai*).

This interpretation of the so-called diphthongs *iu*, *êu*, *eo*... *oi*, *au*, *ao*, ...*ai*, explains why they always terminate the word and seem always to be in open syllable. The truth is that the word is already terminated by the consonant *w* or *y*, and there cannot be more than one consonant at the end of a Laotian word.

. .

All Laotian words are strictly invariable. Their grammatical function is determined both by the class to which it belongs and by its place in the sentence. It is incorrect to say that Laotian words are grammatically undifferentiated, that they have no knowledge of language categories, and that they change their function indiscriminately as Guignard writes: «Several words serve at one and the same time as *noun*, *pronoun*, *adjective*, *verb* and *adverb*». Unfortunately no proofs are brought forward in support of this affirmation and the author gives not one example of a word possessed of any such polyvalency.

The truth is that Laotian words do not include in their structure any such visible clue to the category to which they belong as the terminations in our languages. But it must be observed that not just any Laotian word can be fitted at will into just any syntactical combination and consequently fulfil all functions simultaneously, being now noun, now adjective, and at other times verb or adverb. Incompatibilities and restrictions do exist with regard to the part a word may play in a sentence. It is precisely in this limitation of a word's grammatical aptitudes that its class consists. It allows us, at least at a first distinction, to oppose the *nouns* to the *verbs* (1). The compartments are water-tight. Thus a verb cannot play the part of a noun unless it has been turned into a substantive by adding the word *kaan* or *kwaam*. For example: *thaam* «to question» is a verb only. To make it mean «question» one must say *khwaam thaam*. The word *dæn* is a verb: «to walk», it can therefore be neither subject nor object since these are functions belonging to the noun; for *dæn* to become «walking» or «journey» we must fall back on one of the above-mentioned «transformers» and say *kaan dæn* or *khwaam dæn*.

Auxiliary words, grammatical words, give the indications that enable one to understand the sentence; they denote the gender (sex), the quantity, the singular and the plural: *luuk* «child», *saay* «male», *ning* «woman», *luuk saay* «son», *luuk ning* «daughter» (2).

Like the other Thai languages and like Vietnamese, Laotian

(1) The readers who are interested in this matter should refer to my essay on *L'opposition Nom et Verbe en vietnamien et en siamois* («Noun-Verb Opposition in Vietnamese and Siamese»), in *BSL*, XLVI, part I.

(2) As it is not a grammar we are writing but a simple introduction to the language, we give very few examples.

makes use of classifying words: *khon*: human being, person; *loo*: animal; *laang*: back; an object shaped like a back, a building:

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|
| For Ten women they say : | <i>ñing</i> | <i>sip</i> | <i>khon</i> (1) |
| | woman | ten | person |
| — Ten oxen — — : | <i>ngua</i> | <i>sip</i> | <i>loo</i> |
| | ox | ten | animal |
| — Ten houses — — : | <i>hüæn</i> | <i>sip</i> | <i>laang</i> |
| | house | ten | building |

The invariability of the verb is not a source of difficulty. The context and the adverbs (*formerly*, *now*, *yesterday*, *tomorrow*, etc.) are sufficient indication of the tense. It is neither less vague nor less clear than with English verbs of the type: to set, set, set, which are also absolutely invariable in all their tenses.

There are special particles which specify what the various verbal aspects are:

daang: action in the process of accomplishment : *khoy daang khien*
« I am writing », I in the act write

day before a verb followed or not followed by *leew*: action accomplished : *khoy day khien (leew)* « I have written, I have finished writing »;

ča': action that is unaccomplished or to be accomplished : *khoy ča' khien* « I shall write »;

day after the verb : possibility, *khoy khien day* « I can write ».

Similarly the other verbal modes have their auxiliaries: *imperative*, *prohibitive*, *consecutive*, etc. And there is an ample supply of conjunctions.

In a normal sentence the order of the words is direct: *subject* — *verb* — *complement*; the determinating word follows the one it determinates:

| | | | | |
|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| <i>khoy</i> | <i>mii</i> | <i>paa</i> | <i>laay</i> | « I have a lot of fish » |
| I | have | fish | numerous | |

The literary and poetic style bears the mark, however, of Sanskrit and Pāli, languages whose construction is diametrically opposed to that of Laotian. This accounts for Guignard's saying, for lack of better knowledge, that: « ... in literature or poetry there is a vast number of strange inversions that are a continual source of astonishment... » (*Dictionnaire*: p. xxvi, footnote).

(1) Our readers will remember that for typographical reasons we have reproduced none of the signs indicating inflections.

In short, the Laotian language is a simple one, clear, easy, and harmonious. The greatest difficulty that arises in the early stages, (and it is a very relative difficulty) resides in the use of «classifiers» and of personal pronouns whose hierarchical arrangement is in imitation of Laotian society and varies both according to the condition of the person speaking and that of the person spoken to.

The vocabulary is rich, especially in concrete terms and nouns of action. In reality it comprises three lexicons, the people's, the princes', and the monks'. You find the same thing among the Siamese and the Cambodians, people whose culture is identical. For that matter the royal tongue and that of the monks, composed as they are almost entirely of Sanskrit and Pāli words, have a great deal in common in all three languages. And if the words of the grammatical apparatus did not vary from one language to another, if the pronunciation of Sanskrit had not been altered in such diverse ways, a Cambodian and a Laotian speaking the noble or religious language would be able to understand each other almost right away. It is true that Siamese monks and Cambodian monks succeed in exchanging ideas very quickly; they have only to accustom themselves to recognizing the common vocabulary through their neighbour's deforming pronunciation and to pick up the scanty handful of grammatical tools that enables them to put a sentence together in their interlocutor's tongue (1). Moreover the number of words in the literary, political, and technical lexicon that are common to Laotian, Siamese, and Cambodian, grows larger every day. For these three languages as they evolve enrich their vocabulary solely by borrowing from the same Pāli source, Pāli being the sacred language that is common to all three of them. And if on the political level a rumour sometimes goes round that there is going to be a Pact or even a Federation between the Buddhist States of South-Eastern Asia, it is true to say that on the linguistic level that union is well on its way to fulfilment.

(1) Between Laotians and Siamese it is very easy. But it is a little more difficult between Laotians and Cambodians for Cambodian is not a Thai language. It belongs to a different group, the mon-khmer, whose basic vocabulary in no way resembles the Thai vocabulary.

Literature

by

Phouvong PHIMMASONE,
Minister of Laos to Viet-Nam.

Laotian literature in its early stages belongs to the domain of epigraphy and the honour belongs to the Auguste Pavie Mission of having collected a first group of inscriptions that date back to before the 13th century. But to be exact, Laotian literature in the true sense of the word can scarcely be said to begin before the 16th century. This was the classical period and it lasted almost until the 19th century. In its beginnings this literature was above all religious and of purely canonical inspiration. As always happens in such cases, it is fairly rigid in structure and obeys the rules laid down by Treatises on grammar and versification.

EXORCISMS

It is especially poetry that gives expression to the various stages through which the evolution of the Laotian people passed. Needless to say that poetry came before prose just as music is said to have come before poetry.

Before Brahmanism and Buddhism were introduced into Laos, the country was bound up with the cult of Spirits and generally speaking with animism in all its forms. All life was dependent on supernatural forces which swayed the destinies of man, one of the weakest among beings, when face to face with nature. This being so it was man's constant care to avoid becoming the victim of the higher powers, and with this in view he tried with all his might to interpret dreams and to win over those hostile spirits which had it in their power to bring all natural and physical ills to pass. It was for this reason that exorcists had such a vogue. In those days — as indeed still in our own time — people had recourse to mediums, the only beings who could serve as a link between the spirits and mankind.

Here is the translation of a magical incantation belonging to that period. It will be observed that the syllable *Om* recurs very often:

« *Om, Oh white herb !
 I use the talisman of the White Angel !
 Om ! Sathatheti !
 Om ! I invoke the power of Pha In,
 I invoke the power of Pha-Prom,
 I invoke the power of the infernal spirits !
 Om ! Maha saming !
 I invoke the Great Genius of living beings !... »*

The songs and invocations of healers constitute the first monuments of Laotian literature. They are at one and the same time genuine incantations and true epic poems whose ruling element is the marvellous and the supernatural. To give some idea of this we quote below the *Oath Invocation* :

« *Divinities
 That people all the trees,
 All mountains and all caves,
 All rivers,
 Indra, Yama,
 Lokapala, the four Guardians of the World,
 Angels and Archangels,
 We implore you
 Come and bear witness
 To this our declaration. »*

The epic songs of the healers belong to the domain of the purely religious. They were one of the sources from which the minstrels drew their inspiration and in which they found the fictions they used to illustrate their accounts of fabulous and legendary beings. Lyrical poetry, and before it epic poetry, took the form of poems that were sung by minstrels, rather in the manner of the minstrels of mediaeval France.

SONGS AND POEMS

One thing we must however bear in mind. As Mrs. Solange Bernard-Thierry writes: « A Laotian sings when he enters the forest to cut wood or gather flowers, he sings when he leads his buffaloes down to the rice-fields, he sings on the threshold of his straw hut when night has fallen. Melancholy and dejection, pureness of heart, a carefree spirit, « karmic » sorrow with a touch of passivity, love of familiar landscapes or a keen sense of the sorrow caused by distance, these as a rule are the themes of their guileless lyricism — guileless at any rate as regards the subject-matter, for the poetical form delights in an accumulation of alliterations and

assonances and even in puns and words that jingle together » (1).

But from the 16th century onwards the ancient stock of Laotian folklore little by little gives place to folklore of Indian source. Laotian of the classical period, strongly imbued with Buddhism, inclines more and more to seek the subjects and themes of its poetry in the literature of India. Actually it is to Indian prosody that its classical poetry owes its rules. Laotian folklore is thus enriched by thousands of new myths.

It is in the 16th century also that the monks' sermon-chants flourished. Collections of these date from that time. They were the source of indirect inspiration for a great many popular tales and novels in verse and in prose which attained their greatest perfection in the beginning of the 19th century.

This dominating Buddhist inspiration must be understood in its broadest sense. Doubtless the works concerned were mainly didactic, but there were satires too, and fabliaux. There is no better introduction to the secret places of the Laotian soul than the songs of this period, for they owe their value as much to their folklore quality as to their specific worth. But the first concern of a Laotian is to sing the beauty and charm of nature, and nothing sheds more light on this fond tendency than the following description. It is taken from the account of Khun Thai's journey which is known by the name of the *Song of Setaphon*:

*« From thence Khun Thai plunged into the forest,
He left the border of the land behind him and pushed on further.
The journey he made by road lasted a month.
They went here and there,
Across mountains and through forests,
Along paths through verdure where no village stood,
Skirling many mountains crowned with trees.
The way seemed longer every day;
The travel-weary pilgrims
Hurried on, but ever further stretched the road.
Fruit of the bread-tree, mangoes, lemons,
Were never lacking but grew there plentiful,
Breathing their perfume as the wind rose and fell.
The forest was full of sweet-smelling flowers.
Great fruits there were as large as granaries,
Their pulp swollen to basket-size.
When they had left this place behind they made their way into
Himaphan.
Countless birds sang, perched on the branches of the banyan-trees.
They saw trees all about, and peacocks too, and herons*

(1) Cf. *La littérature laotienne*, in the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade, Histoire des Littératures*, I, Paris, Gallimard, 1955.

*Walking in single file.
Flowers there were everywhere, in bud or blossom,
Vibrantly odorous.
The air resounded to a flight of wasps,
Intent on seeking the delights of pollen
They disdained the buds. »*

Among the poetical themes most often found needless to say love holds a privileged place. The Laotians do not hesitate to use images that might seem a little excessive to the western mind. We find an example of this in the following declaration of love, taken from the *Song of Mahaxay* :

*« Oh thick-leaved banyan standing in the field,
A bird seeks shelter in your shade.
What say you?
Because it is a starling will you refuse him sanctuary
For fear it eats your fruit?
The scarf matches ill the skirt, the vegetable ill the sauce.
If cooked you would not touch this vegetable with your finger-tips.
For my body 'tis the same,
You would loathe it desperately. »*

TALES AND LEGENDS

This is perhaps not what is most characteristic of Laotian literature. But here we turn aside from poetry in the real sense. To quote Mrs. Solange Bernard-Thierry once more: « The comical tales are particularly popular. The wily and impertinent street arab who in Cambodia goes by the name of Thmenh Chey (1) is here called Xieng Mieng. He stands for the same spirit of scoffing criticism and indulges in the same witticisms, and is the occasion for a humorous satire on society that applies equally to Laos, Cambodia, or Siam. The *Story of the Bald Man who was poisoned by Mushrooms* is a burlesque tale. *Brother Seven-Jars* is a sort of Laotian Gargantua who devours seven jars of rice a day. He is the hero of a comic « gest » written in somewhat archaic verse and full of exploits that are turn and turn about grotesque and miraculous. This output of comical tales bears witness to the people's sense of humour and to their high-spirited originality

(1) See also on this subject : Pierre Bitard, *Essai sur la satire sociale dans la littérature du Cambodge* (« Essay on the Social Satire in the Literature of Cambodia ») in *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, Saigon, 1951, and *La merveilleuse histoire de Thmenh Chey l'Astucieux* (« The Marvellous Story of Thmenh Chey the Wily One ») in *France-Asie*, Nos 116-117 and 121-122, Saigon, 1956 ; Solange Bernard-Thierry, *Le Cambodge à travers sa littérature* (« Cambodia seen through its Literature »), *ibid.*, nos 114-115, special issue in Cambodia, and Guy Porée, *Personnages comiques des contes populaires* (« Comical Characters in Cambodian Folk-Tales »), *ibid.*

that make fun of the monks' lack of discipline, the artlessness of the peasants, the exactingness of royalty, and the avarice of the middle-class. It is a matter of spontaneous comical high spirits that no bitterness ever comes to spoil » (1).

Here we may point out that the Indian and Laotian traditions are strictly adhered to in these tales: the servant's respect for his master, the sovereign's absolute authority, and loyal obedience to the king's will except in those cases that are sanctioned by Custom.

They are real dramas in shortened form, and as a rule they are comical. Every class of society is represented in them: the king and his court, the ministers, the councillors, the clergy, the middle class, the peasantry, the craftsmen, the doctors and sorcerers, etc. Each individual — and they all stand for some typical characteristic: the seduction of women, the fidelity of slaves, filial piety, maternal love, etc. — each of them is depicted going about his daily occupations: hunting, fishing, trading in convoy by water or by land, etc.

By allowing us to penetrate into the daily life of the Laotian people, these tales lay open to us their beliefs and their superstitious practises. They show us both the power and the benevolence of Indra (Pha In) aided by his Devata, sometimes confounded with the local genii. The heroes are often supernatural beings endowed with miraculous strength, like the Giant *Ai chet Hai* (« Brother Seven Jars ») and his seven road-companions, all strong enough to carry a whole tree or an elephant on their shoulders, just as the Ox *Phijisan* can drag an hundred loaded carts.

These fabliaux inevitably bring La Fontaine to mind, and the reason for the resemblance is known to us and owes nothing at all to chance. The French fabulist was not the first to have found fault with « the frog who wanted to make himself as big as an ox », — although in this case it was a bull-load — and the « frogs who wanted a king », nor was he the first to prove that « unity is strength », as is shown by the story of the King of the Rats who succeeded in driving away a wild Cat thanks to the help provided by his whole tribe.

These tales (and they constitute the main part of profane literature) may be divided into three categories. The pleasantest and most typical are probably those to which we have just referred. But it is only right to mention also the legal Tales; they are usually commentaries on the various articles of the ancient Laotian Code. Then there are the *Panchatantra* tales, which stands in a place apart. As regards subject matter and form they are reminiscent of the *Thousand and One Nights*; Queen Tantai plays the part of the

(1) *Op. cit.*

sultana Scheherazade, but instead of addressing the king, she talks to her servant, Kulatthi, during the long evenings spent together in the royal chamber.

And finally we must on no account omit those legends usually unmarked by Buddhism, which are a transposition of certain chapters of the Annals of the Laotian principalities, as for example the *Story of Khun Borom*, the *Annals of Laos*, or the *Chronicle of the Kings of Vientiane*.

RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

But on the whole it is the religious literature that is the richest. It contains the canonical texts and the extra-canonical works. Canonical literature is represented by the Buddhist canon (*Tripiṭaka*) which is composed of the three collections: Speeches, Discipline and Dogmatics (*Sutta*, *Vinaya* and *Abhidhamma*).

To the canonical works may be added the works of later compilation, which include the hymns and the sermons taken from the *Tripiṭaka*, and which form what is called the *Parittam*.

The *Jālakam*, a collection of accounts of the former lives of the Buddha Gautama, forms the central core of all the Buddhist literature of Laos. It is made up of stories of every sort: moral, comical, satirical, parabolical tales, and even fabliaux, which record the various stages traversed by the Master in his long career as Bodhisattva as he went from one to the other of the diverse conditions of his animal, human and divine lives. This collection contains 550 *jālakas*. Of the last ten the *Vessantara* is the richest in sermons and metaphors; this accounts for its being the favourite work in Buddhist circles where it is used for purposes of edification both in certain religious ceremonies (1) and for the frescoes on monastery walls.

The *Parittā* or *Manṭa* (*Mantra*) are magical formulas usually in Pāli verses. They are extracts from canonical works and people recite them to preserve themselves from the dangers that threaten human life: illness, want, snake-bite, fire, and so on. The old collection has however been enriched by new elements of more recent composition so these works occupy an intermediate place between the canon and post-canonical literature.

Another name for these recited texts is *Sut* (*Sutta*). Their action is not direct but takes place through the intermediary of the *devatā*, those gods and genii who rule the forces of nature. For that reason the reciting of the sacred texts is always preceded by an invitation to the deities to come and hear the wishes they are expected to fulfil.

(1) For example during the Pha-Vet Festivals; see above, p. 294.

Extra-canonical literature is made up of Buddhist works about the gods, the Buddhas and the saints, the places of worship, the teaching of Doctrine, merits and demerits.

Buddhism accords but a secondary role to the gods both in its beliefs and in its legends. Yet Indra (Pha In) holds an important place in the domain of literature in which he is considered to be a sort of Providence. He is the protector of pious men, he favours the good and punishes the wicked. He is a god benevolent and just who causes order and peace to reign over the world. This is why so many works are devoted to him: *Story of Indra*, *Story of Indra Questioning the Hare*, *Indra Roams the World*, *Question of Indra*, *Indra Commands the Star to Fall*.

The tales inspired by the lives of the saints make a greater appeal to popular imagination than the divine legends; hence their vogue, especially when they treat of the problem of after-life and of the other world.

The stories about the Buddha's relics are also much appreciated.

The rest of post-canonical literature is made up of treatises on doctrine and piety: *Abstract of Doctrine*, *Treatise of Cosmology*, *Notions of Doctrine*, *Works of Improvement and Merit*, and *Texts for Recitation*.

The texts treating of the practical advantages of the various acts of piety (*Son*) explain what reasons should encourage Laotian Buddhists to accomplish such acts: alms and offerings in the form of flowers, candles, food and clothes, the observance of religious precepts, the copying and reciting of sacred texts, etc.

More austere are the books of general instruction and the essentially technical Treatises. Grammatical or metrical hand-books, however, undoubtedly form with lexicons an annex to canonical literature since they are intended to be learned by heart with a view to enabling the disciple to penetrate the meaning of the Word of the Master, which is taught in Pāli in the religious communities. The number there is of grammatical and lexicographical works is particularly remarkable. Most of them, like certain of the religious texts, are said to have been introduced into Laos from Pegu some time between the 12th and the 14th centuries. Needless to say they only appeal to a limited number of readers.

NOVELS IN PROSE AND VERSE

These remarks hold good especially for the literature of the past. But in Laos as elsewhere there is a kind of literature that, on condition of its being modified and transformed, may prove even more lasting, for it may claim a place in the general field of modern civilization. I refer to the novel, a literary form of long standing and which came into being for the double purpose of

**LAOTIAN
BUDDHAS (I)**

a) IN THE WAT
SISAKET
(VIENTIANE)

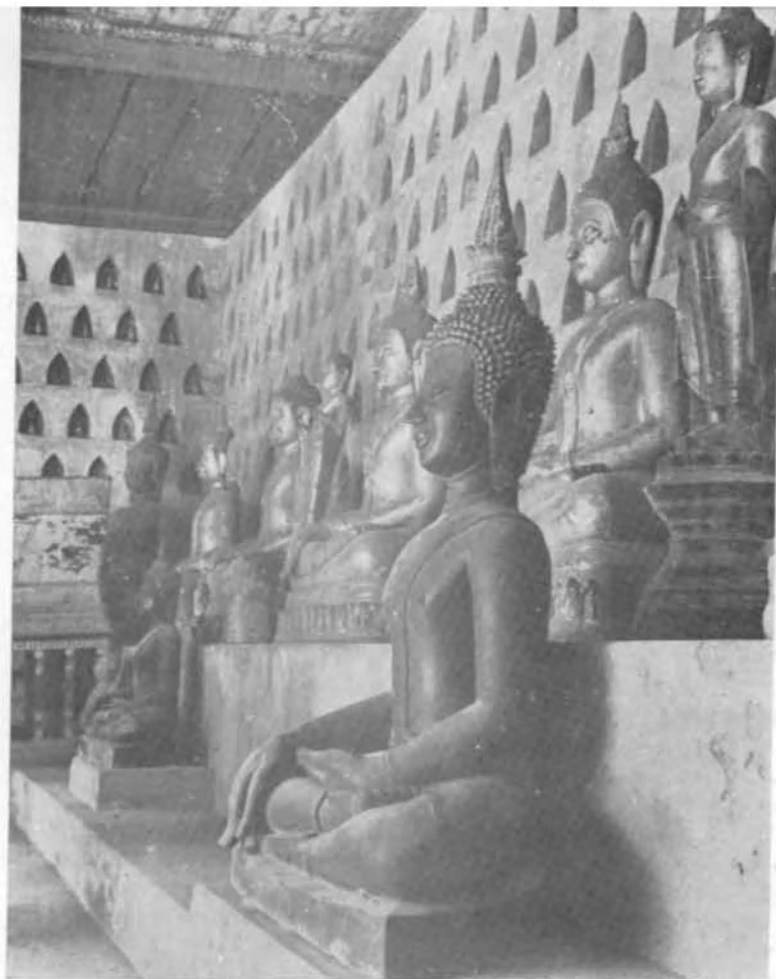


Photo R. Cauchetier



b) IN THE WAT PH'U
(CHAMPASSAK)

H. H. PRINCE BOUN OUM
PERFORMS THE
RITUAL ASPERSION
OF THE BUDDHAS

Photo R. Coutard



a) IN GILD WOOD

(Collection R. de Berval)



b) IN BRONZE

(Collection R. de Berval)

Photos R. Cauchetier

amusement and instruction. But who can define what a novel is, seeing that it can take the most varied and unexpected forms? This was true even in the beginning, when it was considered to be efficacious as a means of vulgarization since it had as fortunate an influence on the mind of the masses as singing and Buddhist preaching.

The accounts we have of the novels are derived from the Buddhist Texts. At first they were written in *Tham* (1) characters and in prose, for religious instruction. Judging by the shape of the writing, — unless the copies have been made according to modern hand, without taking the characters of the original text into account — we are justified in asserting that those manuscripts of novels that are in Laotian characters are not earlier than the 19th century, whereas the poems of the popular tales seem to date back to before the 14th century.

The first novels written in *Tham* are *Champa Silon*, *Bouddhasen*, and *Usaparot*.

These prose novels, born of Buddhist literature, are therefore of earlier date than the novels in verse in their transcription in Laotian characters. Whereas the sole purpose of the former was the religious teaching that in theory took the form of preaching, the latter is thought to have been for more everyday use. It is in this second form that the novels entitled *Kalabel*, *Lin Thong*, *Teng On*, *Surivong*, *Thao Be*, *Sin Xay*, present their stories of adventure whose rhythm makes such a wide appeal; they are the joy of the Laotian people and it is to them that their preference goes. Their main theme is love. The chief characters are depicted under a great variety of different aspects:

— the gallantry and courage of the hero, who is generally a prince; he is of course handsome, is helped along by his own merits, and as a rule he represents an all-powerful Bodhisattva with magic arms at his disposal that enable him to fight and to gain the victory;

— the might of Indra, which takes various forms and often intervenes in combats or other difficult circumstances to come to the help of the hero;

— the coquetry of the *Kinnaris*, who are dancing girls of outstanding beauty, always gay and shameless;

— the violence and voracity of the *Yaks*, who are giant monsters all possessed of the magical powers that permit them to fly through the air, to change into any shape while fighting with magic weapons, and who are the hero's irreducible enemies;

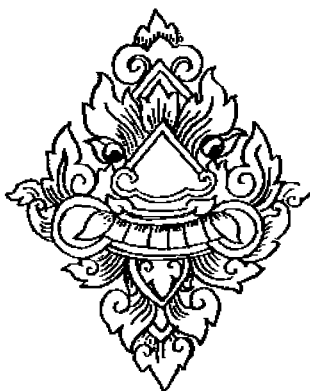
(1) See above, *Laotian Writings*, p. 324.

— the benevolence of *Rusi (Rushi)*, a hermit-magician who transmits to the hero his own knowledge of the occult sciences that enable him to fly through the air, to fight victoriously with miraculous arms, etc.;

— the fidelity of the heroine who is always beautiful, loving, gentle and faithful, but who is also capable of showing a bold spirit in order to save her lover.

These are the characters that are most often to be met with in Laotian novels.

These few remarks apply especially to the past. Not that the past is dead. But certain of the forms and certain of the literary styles are already doomed to lose some of their popularity as a result of an evolution that is unavoidable. It is probably through the novel, in Laos as elsewhere, that the renewal which the national literature requires, will be accomplished. I leave it to others, more qualified than I, to show by their example, their inspiration and their talent, what the Laotian literature of tomorrow will be.



Versification

by

Thao Nhouy ABHAY

Much as we regret it, it is not possible for us to introduce this study with a sketch, however short, of the history of Laotian Literature. For history is impossible without chronology and we are bound to admit that its very elements of this latter are lacking to us. The chief reasons for this are the following:

— there are no reliable literary texts in existence at the present time which give us any indication however summary of the date of their composition or of their authors;

— epigraphy has not yet reached a stage of development that enables it to deduce from a study of the writing the date at which a work has been recopied, and *a fortiori* that of its composition. On the other hand we must take into account firstly the regions (whose speech varies from one to the other) in which the texts were transcribed, — and secondly, what can have been the intellectual worth of the copyists, and as often as not their sole merit was that they wrote « a good hand ». Hence the innumerable difficulties in the matter of tracking down the insertions as well as the alterations that ignorant scribes have made in the texts;

— and finally the subject-matter which, as it is always connected with Buddhism, contains no indication that is helpful from the literary and historical point of view, and can therefore do nothing to dispel the incertitude in which we find ourselves.

It would seem however — so true it is that the mind only bears fruit when the body is in a state of well-being — that Laotian literature cannot have flourished as long as the country was still divided into rival principalities, constantly warring with each other, but only after it had been pacified, if not united; nor yet before Buddhism was introduced, whose hagiography (1) is, we repeat, the source and subject of every sort of inspiration and all « genres ».

(1) Brahmanism also should be given its due, and all the other pre-Buddhist beliefs.

Now we know that the unity of Laos (which coincided with the introduction of Buddhism (1) into the country) was the achievement of Chao Fa Ngum (1316-1374), which enables us to situate it in the second half of the 14th century of the Christian Era.

This being the case, everything combines to suggest that the first fund of Laotian literature was constituted immediately after that period, and especially under the reign of Fa Ngum's successor, Sam Sên Tai (1373-1416) an enlightened sovereign who succeeded in ensuring the peace and prosperity of his Kingdom.

Like all the other kings who in the course of the centuries have ruled in different parts of the world, ours, too, had their historiographers who wrote their lives, related all the details of their reigns, and gave magnified accounts of their exploits. Unfortunately these Chronicles, which would undoubtedly have been of the greatest interest both from the historical and the literary point of view, have suffered the fate of the defeated. Lost or destroyed, they can nowhere be found, and what we today call « Annals » as often as not are nothing but texts that date back to the 18th century, when they are not even more recent than that.

The canonical writings on the other hand are of minor interest for they are mere translations from the Pāli. Without going into the matter of religion or studying to discover what methods were used by the first apostles to introduce Buddhism into Laos, we may safely assert that one of their main preoccupations was to teach the new religion along with its normal vehicle, Pāli. They adopted for this purpose a curious method which consisted in placing side by side with the Pāli terms the corresponding Laotian equivalents, so that the first documents we possess appear in bi-lingual form. Now as the Laotian words and the Pāli words they translate have almost always the same radical, or at least are formed with the same consonant, these texts are strongly stressed and full of alliterations. This mnemonical method makes a deep impression on the minds of a people who receives their first — and only — intellectual training in the Wats. As we shall see as we proceed, it is characteristic of Laotian prosody.

Immediately after the vanished Chronicles and the canonical works only half Laotian come the texts in popular form — telling the story of the Buddha's life and his incarnations — which make up what may properly be called Laotian literature. Like all other literatures, ours seems to have had its beginnings in poetry, and our poetry began in epic form.

(1) The Phra Sumana, a monk who was ordained in Ceylon, and who introduced Theravāda Buddhism into Laos, is actually said to have entered the country only in Cakraj 713, that is 1351 A. D.

THE POEMS

Like the mediaeval epic poems of France, these Laotian poems are intended to be spoken rather than read. And so, in their gatherings, both men and women, *phubaos* and *phusaos*, have frequent resort to the quotations they have learned from their elders and which satisfy so well their taste for speaking in images, metaphors, comparisons and rhythm; so, too, in houses where a *boun* is being held (*Pha Vel*, *Kan Thin*, festivals in celebration of one or more of the Buddha's lives (1)), and in Wats during the same festivities, professional singers are hired for the occasion, as *trouvères* and minstrels were in bygone times; and to this day, standing on a platform, they still recite rhythmic, stirring passages from *Kalakēt*, *Māhavel*, of *Sīn Xāi*. And finally, so also at lyke-wake ceremonies or lyings-in, young men with « fine voices » wrangle with each other for the trays on which they lay the heavy, voluminous manuscripts.

They are long poems: what they chiefly contain are descriptions of landscapes, accounts of love-scenes (dialogues), gigantic combats waged by the hero against all sorts of enemies, Nak, Nhak, Serpents and so on.

Mythical epic poems, we might call them, although, the characters in them are invariably: a hero, the Buddha in one of his incarnations, his friends, his disciples, his enemies, Mara who right up till his last incarnation was to seek to bring about his downfall.

We shall not give here either the number nor the titles of all these poems, of which there are a great many and of which the chief ones are fairly well-known (2): actually they are all pretty much alike as regards the subject matter and also the form, which is always distorted or inadequate, either because the texts have been transmitted to us through the medium of incompetent copyists, or because they were the work of colourless versifiers... One of them only, the *Sīn Xāy*, (3) deserves special mention for the qualities briefly stated below:

— it is the only poem, practically speaking, in which the author gives his name at the beginning and end of the work (4);

— its form is perfect. It consists of fifteen chapters or cantos each of which has its own precise title: 1. — Invocation (*Sommūtlībān*). 2. — The Yāk's amorous desire (*Yāk Ksān bān*). 3. — Pāya Kūsālat's Dream (*Sūpina bān*). 4. — The Rape of Sumūnta (*Vivāha bān Sumūnta pāl pak*). — 5. The Ordination of Pāya Kūsālat (*Babbāja bān*). 6. — The Wedding (*Vivāha*

(1) Religious holidays as distinct from profane holidays. See above, p. 126.

(2) See list of manuscripts in Louis Finot, *op. cit.*

(3) See below, p. 359.

(4) We are reminded here of certain fabliaux of the French Middle Ages.

mañkāra bān). 7. — The Birth (*Pāli Sontī bān*). — 8. The Journey (*Kô con bān*). — 9. — Minor Combats (*Anū Yūlakām bān*). — 10. — The Great Combat (*Māha Yūlakām bān*). — 11. — The Great Fight with the *Nhaks* (*Māha Yūlakām bān*). 12. — Sîn Xăi's Departure (*Mūtlumān bān*). 13. — The Attempt on Sîn Xăi's Life (*La tho bān*). 14. — The Arrival and Reign of Sîn Xăi (*Thàna bān*). 15. — The Lamenting of the King of the *Nhaks* (*Bān Nak Sduñ*);

— the descriptions of landscapes are short but extremely expressive and even suggestive. The author dwells on them just enough to situate the action and create an atmosphere. The verse keeps step with him, the landscapes are so to speak dynamic and the action is never held up;

— the vocabulary is very rich; there are no repetitions, no unsuitable expressions: the Pāli words that are slipped into the text are always exactly right. For example, the author has succeeded in inventing a really astonishing number of pronouns, or more exactly substantivized adjectives, to distinguish the various characters, so that the repetition of names or pronouns is avoided;

— each character is quite distinct and speaks a language of his own. This latter feature is particularly surprising when one considers that the Laotian vocabulary varies according to whether the speaker is a priest, a king, a prince, a mandarin, a rich man, or a man of the common people;

— the speeches are always given in direct style. Here we may point out that — just as in the *Iliad* — when a message is brought by a messenger the latter repeats word for word the message that was entrusted to him. One has the feeling that the author is in no hurry but wishes to keep close to the truth;

— and finally, not once does the author allow you to catch a glimpse of himself through his text by allowing the shadow of a personal opinion to escape him: Pañ Kam throughout the poem remains hidden behind the action and the characters in the story (1).

VERSIFICATION (2)

Alliterations. — Intended as it is to be read aloud or sung, Laotian poetry, or verse, is essentially musical and rhythmic. This is achieved through the metre especially, and also by repeated use of the same phoneme.

(1) The qualities we have just enumerated are to be found in no other work. It is for this reason that we devote so much space to the study of *Sîn Xăi* and give this poem pride of place over all others. We even claim for it that it is in every way comparable to the most perfect of French poetry.

(2) In the present study, in transcribing Laotian words, we adopt the equivalents of Louis Finot, except in the matter of so-called grouped consonants.

(1) Vowel repetition (*Kap*):

Nămô nama vānda kapsi
Kaplii kaplō kapkō penkan
Pentām nan kap lan sōn pu
Lan hak nu hel pu sǎn sōn
Yǎn avōn lan cām bō dǎi...

(A Grandson's Advice to his Grandfather)

(2) Repeated consonants:

- a) twice (*Kōn sōn*)
Léo lao lǎn kun kop leñ yó (S. X.)
- b) Three times (*Kōn sam*)
Pu dōn tǎt hel hen hum su (S. X.)
- c) four times (*Kōn si*)
Thuai bat cǎo cai cēn cōn pōn (S. X.)

Attention should be drawn at once to the fact that the same consonant is seldom repeated four times; this is understandable, for such repetition might rapidly degenerate into cacophony. In *Sin Xai* we did however find examples of the same consonant repeated more than five times, but it was done with the set purpose of producing an effect of purely imitative harmony. What the author was trying to do — and he succeeded — was to catch the feeling that accompanies departure: farewells, promesses, gestures, calls, all were flying hither and thither and mingling together in a confused, inextricable hubbub...

The reader may judge for himself:

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Sōn sǎn cǎo</i> | <i>Cǎo sǎn sōn si</i> |
| <i>Sōn si sam</i> | <i>Sǎn sōn si cǎo</i> (1) |

(« The two messengers say farewell (to the Setthi) and while he is answering them they both reply, bidding him farewell »).

Sōn spǎn Kiñ Kum Kǎn Kañ Kēñ

(« Combat: the two (men) clasp each other and roll about on the plain ») (2).

(1) Variant : *Sōn sǎn cǎo Cǎo sǎn sōn si Sōn si khan Sǎn la cōm cǎo.*

(2) One might be tempted to explain this technique by two main causes : first by the influence of the first canonic works in which the Laotian words, as we saw, are placed side by side with the Pāli words they translate, and have necessarily almost always the same radical ; then by the Laotian habit of speaking in double words whose meaning is almost identical and whose simultaneous use serves the double purpose of underlining the idea expressed and pleasing the ear. When these words are monosyllables they are always formed with the same basic consonant. The effect produced seems to me a happy one.

COUNTING THE SYLLABLES

A characteristic of Laotian verse is therefore its alliterations, and another is the number of its syllables (for it must be written on one single line) and the place and use of certain phonic accents.

Before studying Laotian verse as regards the number of its syllables, we feel it is indispensable to make some preliminary digressions.

1° *Adverbial Expressions*

We said that verse was meant to be read aloud or even sung; this being so, it often begins or ends with adverbial or conjunctive expressions (introductory or final), whose values vary: exclamatory, interrogative, supplicatory, etc. They serve as much to modify the ideas or the other words as to attract the listeners' attention, to help the minstrel to remember, or to spare the reader's breath. These expressions are usually composed of two syllables - which must not be included in the verse - and they form a special caesura and usually only add some subsidiary idea that is not essential to the general theme.

These are :

a) *the introductory locutions*: *Tênăn* (henceforth); *mua năn*, *gam năn* (at that moment); *băt nĩ* (now); *len du*, *phô du*, *phô hen* (to be seen, to be looked at);

b) *the final locutions*: these have often an exclamatory value, they are especially useful to the reader or minstrel in his vocal effects, forming in some sort « passages » that lengthen the period. They are: *kôdũhôn* (were it); *dêlhôn*, *dênô* (I beg you (1); *kôn lôn* (before); *kôn lêu* (before); *pũn yô* (over there); *cĩn lêu* (surely); *tieu lôn* (quickly); *kăn dai* (that's all it is); *lênô* (in truth); *yĩn lêu* (immensely); etc...

2° *The Vowel « ă »*

In the second place we must not lose sight of the fact that a great many Laotian words come from the Pāli and that the first phonetic law that presided over their transformation was that of least resistance. We may even go the length of saying that in this business of shortening the words, all the vowels have been dropped except those no doubt on which the tonic accent fell. The dropping of the consonants is more difficult to study, but when it happens as a result of the dropping (2) of an intercalary vowel, what appears between them is a sort of epenthetic vowel which

(1) It is the exact equivalent of the English « do » which serves to stress an idea.

(2) It is rather a muted vowel than a real dropping out.

is always in *ă*, shorter than the ordinary short *ă* and which you pronounce by barely breathing it (1).

This vowel, then, though it is pronounced fairly clearly, must not be counted as a syllable, except of course when it comes at the end or is of purely Laotian or Chinese origin (in monosyllabic words), in which case it will be pronounced quite clearly.

In this way *snăn* (thus); *khmen* (fluttering movement of the eyes); *skăn* (manly); *sdel* (to go); *phōb* (to suit); etc... all count as one syllable (1).

3° The vowel « *i* »

And finally, the short *i* in the auxiliary *xī*, which in everyday language takes the place of the *că* that indicates the future, must not be counted either.

2+3+4 = *Kăn va phō căi căk (xī) Kai xoi xom xôn*
Hiem khō yôm yăn căk (xī) kôi pôn păn mien (S.X.)

4° The auxiliary « *kō* »

The same remark may be made with regard to the auxiliary *kō*, which serves to mark the beginning of any action and which might be fairly accurately translated into English as « to begin to ». Thus *hel* means « to do », *kō hel* « to begin to do (something) ».

In reality this auxiliary is of no actual use as regards the meaning, for it adds nothing to the idea expressed by the verb that follows. Yet certain readers (and consequently certain copyists) seem to have a real predilection for it. The reason is that, as it is formed of a single syllable — a short one — it does not really alter the verse's metre, but it does allow the minstrel to take breath and — because it provides this breathing-space — the reader to look on ahead and see what word comes next.

It is therefore a good thing to drop it right out of the verse whenever possible, except where it saves one from having to use an expletive.

5° Counting the Syllables

(a) Seven syllable verses :

With these exceptions, the classical Laotian line of poetry, or *pāthhāvāḷ*, is an imparasyllabic line of seven feet, divided into

(1) Spelling rule : « The vowel *ă* (short *ă*) must be suppressed in all syllables except the final one in words of Pāli or Sanskrit origin. Actually what we have here are consonants like *st* in « statue » or *sp* in « special », etc.

The faulty pronunciation in French that causes people to say « statue » in Laotian makes them say (and spell) *sānan* for *snăn*, which shows how pronunciation may influence spelling. It is for this reason that we have avoided using Louis Finot's method of transcription for the grouped consonants : *sānan*, *sānil*, etc. which should be : *snăn*, *snīl*, etc.

two naturally unequal parts, the second hemistich having always four feet.

For instance:

| | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Pdăb xō fa</i> | <i>Muk mad dao kăm</i> |
| <i>Muñ lôn dên</i> | <i>Lō tăn tăn fa</i> |
| <i>Mhe si cảo</i> | <i>Căn da thiêm lat</i> |
| <i>Som yĩn yêm</i> | <i>pũn pãn pek khien</i> |

(« Adorned with egrets and with mother-of-pearl inlaid, the Palaces shine bright like golden stars,
Roofed in with massive gold instead of thatch.
The Queen is named Canda,
Graceful as any drawing »).

(b) *Nine syllable verses* :

However, it may happen sometimes that the introductory or final locutions mentioned above have a meaning that is essential to the verse, especially when they stand for adverbs of place or time. When this occurs we may be said to have nine-syllable verses. (These adverbs, which are always placed at the beginning of the verses, are made up of two syllables and are bound to be the occasion of a distinct caesura):

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Căk va pen xat xư</i> | <i>Nam mnō nêo diao (nì lư)</i> |
| <i>Hư mên nảo nãi mnũt</i> | <i>Slok kon nkôn kuan</i> |
| <i>Hu va kem poñ xư</i> | <i>Na kô kut lnak</i> |
| <i>Săn ma lăipi vai</i> | <i>De dìn dăn diao (nì de)</i> |

(« Is she of the same race as I am?
Or lives she among human beings — wide world?
Or is it with the Nak and Khut she mixes?
Why does she let me rack my soul alone? »)

(c) *Eight and ten syllable verses* :

There are such things as eight and ten syllable verses, but they are rare; their second hemistich is necessarily of five feet.

| | | |
|-------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 5+4 | <i>Mư năn sãn xăi lao</i> | <i>lôn thlên hlai val</i> |
| 5+4 | <i>Pũn dăn thôn thiêu xon</i> | <i>xom xu suak sne</i> |
| 5+5+2 | <i>Cảo nì mị phua lư</i> | <i>lư yĩn pôi pak ku (năn hoi)</i> |
| 3+4+2 | <i>Hiem kai hu</i> | <i>bon ban bok ma (liao loi)</i> |
| 5+5+2 | <i>Khăn va pak ti xôn</i> | <i>hiem căk kai koi du (un hoi)</i> |
| 5+5 | <i>Khăn va pō cẩ cẩ</i> | <i>xỉ kai xoi xom xôn</i> |
| 5+4 | <i>Hiem căk pun pen tẩ</i> | <i>mhe si sẩk yai</i> |
| 5+4+2 | <i>Pi kô dăn mưn mư</i> | <i>thôn cảo ti sthan (nì lêu)</i> |

(« So then, in diverse manners, Sỉn Xăi started to converse
[(to deceive his aunt)]

As though he were in love:
 'Whether you are a married woman — or single —
 I do not know. Tell me then quickly.

If you have no husband I would like to see something of you.
 If you appeal to me I shall bind myself to you.
 I shall make of you my wife — illustrious honour —
 After all, I travelled thousands of days to reach you' »).

ARRANGEMENT OF THE LINE OF POETRY AND RULE FOR ACCENTS

In French a stanza is defined as: « A group of lines forming a complete system of rhymes » and being moreover « complete in meaning », although this latter condition is not essential and « our great lyrical poets have not made an inviolable rule of this observance » (1).

The same may be said of Laotian verse which is generally grouped in stanzas of two (couplets) or four lines (quatrains). On the other hand, in quatrains the following rules must be applied as regards where to place the vocalic accents:

First rule. — The third syllable (end of the first hemistich) of the first, third and fourth lines, and also the last syllable of the second line, must be given the accent *tô*.

Second rule. — The third syllable of the second line, and also the last syllable of the fourth line, must not have any accent.

Third rule. — The last syllable of the third line must always be:

(a) given the accent *ék* (ascending)

or

(b) formed with a consonant of the lower series and a vowel composed with the finals *k*, *d*, *b*, (*p*), *n*, *ñ*.

NAMATHU (2) (Invocation)

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Sisuph(ă) măn kl(ă) lot lăm</i> | <i>săt ti del lư xa</i> |
| <i>Na thô sul</i> | <i>yôl yan tai kẻo</i> |
| <i>Svăt sđi nôm</i> | <i>nãi lăm Pătł bal</i> |
| <i>Kăn p(ă) yok sai kảo</i> | <i>x(u) li lăm yôl yan</i> |
| <i>Khuap mưa huan huan ƣa</i> | <i>hôn nao lưom ƣon (pun yơ)</i> |
| <i>Va yơ phlien</i> | <i>luan kuai kum dao</i> |
| <i>Pưk shla sieo</i> | <i>sên kô kan kip</i> |
| <i>Ldu pil spôt pôm</i> | <i>peñ thuan thuran thèo</i> |

(1) See M. Grammont, *Petit traité de Versification française* (« Short Treatise on French Versification »), Paris, Armand Colin, 1927.

(2) *Sín Xái*.

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Mha mek kǎo</i> | <i>khñōn neñ bǎñ bol</i> |
| <i>Su lpa ien</i> | <i>uai lēn loñ mǎi</i> |
| <i>Văn nǎn aīl cōn cuan cén</i> | <i>duan sam sǎll pīt</i> |
| <i>Slu lup nua</i> | <i>nau xōi xōp yam</i> |
| <i>Mua nǎn Pañ kǎm kum</i> | <i>khniñ lām loñ mak</i> |
| <i>Hen huñ yan yōt kēo</i> | <i>tiēo xǎi xat ph(ǎ) oñ</i> |
| <i>Kǎi cǎk tok tēn lǎñ</i> | <i>pē pan pen lǎi</i> |
| <i>S(ũ) li xon xuan</i> | <i>xōi yan yam kēn</i> |
| <i>C(ǎ) lǎ ló ka kǎm</i> | <i>Āi suan sēn thip (kōdi)</i> |
| <i>Kǎp lǎñ khut nak hnǎo</i> | <i>nañ tao tep kun</i> |

(« Today is the propitious day, far-famed for power,
When to the Buddha was revealed the Threefold Knowledge.
Obedient to His Law I venerate,
I take shelter in His Goodness and lift my joint hands towards
[Him, the Supreme Enlightened.

« Roaring, the sky breeds torrents of rain,
Wind and storm roam the quaking Universe,
About the world thousands of fruit-trees quicken to green.
And all around the flowers open like the waxing moon.

« Great clouds resound, veiling the light.
The sun above the trees towards evening sinks.
'Tis Sunday of the third month, the lunar mansion *sāt-ǎ-pīt*.
The *Salū* year, how favourable a moment!

« Meantime *Pañ kām* muses deeply on the Dharma
And sees the Buddha fulfil His destiny.

« Meaning to compose and translate into *Tǎi*,
He joins his fingers to pray and in this delicate moment to invite
Pǎyǎ Cātulok, *Āi suan*, dwellers everywhere,
And the *Kul* and the *Nhak* and the great-powered Divinities »).

.....
We have thus found in this first song from *Sin Xǎi* seventeen
quatrains and five couplets arranged as follows:

a a a b a a a a b a a b a a b a a a a b a a

(« a » representing a quatrain and « b » a couplet).

As we see, the arrangement of the stanzas (position of the quatrain group in relation to the couplets, or vice versa) would not seem to obey any precise rules. The copyists of *Sin Xǎi* have not so far adopted this recognized method of grouping the lines, so we have not been able to enumerate the number of quatrains and couplets in each of the cantos as we have done in the one above. It is a thing that should be possible but it would take a good deal of time, and besides, would present no very great advantage.

We shall end by pointing out that Laotian verse, like French verse, must be written on one line. If this arrangement has not been adopted by copyists any more than they have adopted the method of grouping the lines in stanzas, it is for purely material reasons, for the ollas of the Laotian manuscripts are held lengthways and can only be written on four lines. Good copyists — there are very few of them and they never keep up the effort — separate the stanzas by means of two little strokes called *kōlā* in Laotian.

Kōn Săppākōl

The *săppākōl* (« embracing ») lines of poetry, which are ordinary seven syllable lines, are also called *săppāsōt* (« which are interlaced like the laths of a trellis »). However, in the second hemistich, which as we saw is always composed of four syllables, the *fourth foot rhymes with the second*. They are, so to speak, echoing verses:

*Bālñi săppkōt kiego
Xư va tepa vā
Bun guan yăn
Dĩ kê sãn pen phai*

*Liñ hen mãi lao lom
Pulôn lō
Hen pha kuan
Dôi nãn In tẽn lãn*

*Tuk pāda su
Pu onat cảo*

*Yưan yak tao
Dơn dôi huan
Lưi khieo khun
Kưt mẽ pu*

*Lin dok mai
Ba ko yin dĩ phai
Com cai cao
Kham khop dao
etc... etc...*

*kōn káo ma thlên
vat pñom pãi kuan
xảo kèn kao nưn
phan ba kōn ba*

*lien hōm khảo hōm pun yo
liệp pñom nãm nōn
khao kãm kōi kãm
khao huan hun huan*

*Svãn ti tuk ti
cãi stãn huñ lãn*

*tañ hên hoi hên
kua kãi lư kãi
khảo ngơn mưa ngơn
pũn hải ham hải*

*kan kōn In kōn pũn go
huan xôn xom xôn
don đieo đăn đieo
pãi na nuan na*

Kōn Lilit

Besides the *pālthăyavāt*, which are classical verse of the first water and which, we repeat, must always be grouped in couplets or quatrains, we have the verse called *lilit*. This verse is used in didactic or comical poetry (*kap*).

Lilit verse has five or at most six syllables. Its distinguishing

feature is that the third syllable of a line must always rhyme (*sāmphāt*) with the last syllable of the preceding line:

Om pu tô namô kao
Kha cak vao luon kap nirpan
Tam tam nan kam son ôvat

The lines in *lilit* verse, like those in *pāthāyavāt*, are always divided in two; they are shorter, however, and rhyming or assonant¹, and a poem composed of them gains in speed and becomes when recited if not majestic then at least very stirring.

ART IN VERSIFICATION

After what has just been said about the material structure of Laotian verse, one might be tempted to suppose it presents all the monotonous characteristics of which the classical French alexandrine was once accused, for it always falls into two hemistiches whose rhythm is 3+4 or 5+4. This is not however the case, and a Laotian poem is as varied from the point of view of metre and rhythm as a romantic poem.

And to begin with — and this has probably been noticed from the examples quoted above —, if we leave aside the lines of eight or ten syllables, which are rare, the seven and nine syllable lines often transform themselves, so to speak into eleven and even thirteen syllables according as one adds on an introductory locution (2+3+4) or a final one (3+4+2) or both at the same time (2+3+4+2).

Then again, lines having the same number of feet do not by any manner of means follow one after the other for more than two or three stanzas. It often even occurs that a quatrain is made up of lines of different metres.

In this matter what is remarkable, even if we look no further afield than the lines of seven and nine feet, is that we should have the same combinations, as regards their arrangement within the stanza, as in French rhyming, that is:

(a) rhyming in couplets:

a a b b (1)

(b) Alternated:

a b a b

(c) Interwoven:

a b b a

We may point out, however, that the alternation of seven and nine feet lines is not the invariable rule.

(1) a) Line of seven feet; b) Line of nine feet.

And finally — and no doubt this too has already struck the reader —, because of the words formed of short vowels *which do not count as syllables*, though in theory the lines have the same number of feet, they are never really of the same length. This is because the short vowels which do not count (for example: *ă, ĭ, ŭ*) are nevertheless pronounced, if only in a breath.

We should also point out that authors often succeed in making reading more rapid which (makes it less monotonous) by repeating certain word-pairs, but with their order reversed:

(a) either at the end of a line:

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Huan hua lão</i> | <i>lōrni peñ pañ</i> |
| <i>Săpp lət lăm</i> | <i>pun pha lak lai</i> |
| <i>Lai lak pha</i> | <i>si mal môm pai (kō mi)</i> |

(« Scattered and gleaming on the ground, like the full moon,
Are *Sampots* perfect and innumerable,
Sampots of every colour... some are even yellow »).

(b) or at the caesura:

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Ba kō pŭn pun xăi</i> | <i>thurk măn mảo ba</i> |
| <i>Mua mảo kum</i> | <i>kum sôn sên lao</i> |

(« The Prince then hurled an arrow that struck him full, making
He staggered, his eyes veiled, and he strove to pluck the
[him shudder,
[arrow out »).

ENJAMBMENT

Enjambment or *Yălipăñ* is said to occur when a polysyllabic word is divided at the end of the first hemistich, out of respect for the caesura. The result is that one or more of the syllables of that word are carried over into the second hemistich:

$\tilde{5} + \tilde{5} = Năp lē pulōn Lŭn \quad nă lai loñ la lăi$

(the name *Lŭnnălat* (the name of the King of the *Nak*) is here divided, and the syllables of which it is made up fall one at the end of the first hemistich, the two others at the beginning of the second):

Similarly:

Pŭn dao dia \quad rdat kur kuan ʃa

in which *diardat* is one single word and means « strews ».

. . .

In our opinion Laotian poetry reached its highest peak during the prosperous reign of King Setthathirat (1534-1571). It is in

that period, no doubt, and during the reign of the most eminent of his successors, Suligna Vongsa (1637-1694), that we must presume first *Sîn Xăi* to have been written, and then the other poems, both epic, lyrical and didactic.

The fact is that, besides obliging the poet to obey the very precise rules we have just passed in review, Laotian versification is delicate work because of the alliterations it requires: without a knowledge of Pāli it is impossible not to put the wrong terms beside the Laotian words they are supposed to translate!...

Poetry is not a thing you understand, it is a thing you feel. In our opinion certain passages of *Sîn Xăi* (if not the whole work, for the form in which it has come down to us contains obvious falsifications) are worth the best poems of Lamartine and Hugo. This has never been a matter of doubt to the Siamese, and during the last twenty years or so various publishers have produced a great many Laotian poems: *Sîn Xăi*, *Kalāket*, *Sūlivōṇ*, *Xieñ Mieñ*, etc..., in Siamese characters, naturally, — under the generic title of « Poems of Eastern Siam ».

These re-editions are to our disadvantage on two accounts:

— first because they deform not merely Laotian prosody, but the very music of the verse. For when it has been transcribed into Siamese characters a great many of the sounds which normally should be rendered as consonants of the upper series are rendered in Siamese by consonants of the lower series;

— then because these various publishers have not scrupled — either intellectually or from literary considerations — to pose as the « authors » of these poems.

May this however serve us as a lesson. If it is true that Pāli is once more being studied in Laos, and that the Buddhist Institute is asking for work, then let a Committee be appointed for revising the texts which at the present time are unfortunately too full of alterations, and in which it is almost impossible to discern the interpolations...

May a Committee be appointed, but along with the former spirit of the old schools whose prime argument was that of authority, may it also be infused with the modern spirit of criticism which uses discussion as a means to understanding and appreciation.

And if ever any Society or Association should take up this work of restoring and renewing one of the most precious heritages of old Lan Xang, it will beyond all question have earned the right to the gratitude of generations to come.

Sĩn Xăy

by

Thao Nhouy ABHAY

Sĩn Xăy (Sininjaya) is a very great Laotian poem, justly held in esteem by everyone for its high philosophical, moral and literary standard. All well-educated people in Laos are familiar with it, and the singers and the young people in their courts of love vie with each other in quoting from it.

According to its author, Pang Kham, who gives his name in the very first lines of the poem, *Sĩn Xăy* has its origin in the Hindu Paññasajātaka; this runs counter to the opinion given by Louis Finol in his *Recherches sur la Littérature Laotienne*, where he holds it to be a mere jālaka.

Sĩn Xăy in unversified form exists in the *Ha sip sat* (« Fifty Lives ») collection to be found in Siamese and Laotian Wats libraries. Its story is also told by Auguste Pavie in *Les Contes du Cambodge* (« Cambodian Tales ») (1). It would be most interesting to study the differences between the Cambodian and the Laotian versions, as also the characters themselves according as they are dealt with by the one or the other country.

According to Auguste Pavie *Sĩn Xăy* is supposed finally to have married Sompot (translation of Chanh or Sida), the daughter of Soumuntha (Montēa) and Kum Phan (Kompon), whereas in the Laotian version he takes to wife one of the five hundred Kinari, Nang Kieng Kham, with whom he spent a week during his journey to the land of Kum Phan. Nang Chanh's marriage with the King, of the Nāga, which could not have been able to take effect, must actually have been consummated since the Laotian poem ends with Lūnvālet lamenting his separation from his wife.

On the other hand there is a difference between the Laotian and Cambodian texts with regard to the part the Sang Thong is made to play. The Sang Thong (Golden Snail) is considered to be a real person, level-headed and eminently powerful; he cuts down trees with his teeth, clears the ground to allow his brother passage, and changes

(1) See Sanselkey, p. 135.

himself into a ship to sail across the seas. In the Cambodian version, on the contrary, mention is made of the intervention of Vannula (Vanrēach) who comes to the rescue of Sin Xây, his aunt and his cousin, and who helps them to cross a turbulent river.

One might argue from these different readings in a variety of ways. In any case, the Cambodian version seems in my opinion to have sought to give the legend a more real and logical setting than the Laotian which, while lacking neither logic nor judgement, makes the story take place entirely in the supernatural world of gods and Nhaks and of Men possessed of extraordinary powers and conscious of their destiny.

And finally, like all those poems that have won popular favour, Pang Kham's Sin Xây had two continuators. One was a poet of Khong who wrote some forty pages describing how Siho and his parents went in search of Sin Xây after the six brothers had murdered him by casting him into the abyss. The other brings Khum Phan back to life and takes him once more to Peng Chan, whence he carried off Sumuntha. More pursuing follows, and more wars, and so the tale goes on right down to the descendants of Sin Xây and of the six brothers. To avenge their fathers the cousins wage merciless war upon each other.

As much the first edition is good and, rightly, highly esteemed, the second edition is long, involved empty and also scarcely read. This latter gives us moreover an impossible mixture of passages that are too exactly reminiscent of Pang Kham's text and low jokes common to the authors of the other Laotian narratives of a trivial and vulgar nature.



Fig. 24

Kum Phan, King of the Nhaks

Sin Xay

At the time when the Bodhisattva was fulfilling his destiny, the land of Peng Chan (1) stood surrounded by water, resplendent with its thousands of granaries and palaces covered with precious stones. The Sovereign of this land, the Phaya Kutsalai, beloved of gods and men, practised the Teaching of the Blessed One and weekly observed the Ten Precepts of the Buddha. Rich beyond heart's desire, he lacked for nothing, but he had only one sister. An only sister, dear as the apple of his eye, and to whom he gave as her share the revenues and government of half his Kingdom. She bore the name of Nang Sumuntha.

Life in this peaceful and prosperous land ran a tranquil course. In the morning the Ministers assembled together to discuss the affairs of State; the ships of countless merchants ploughed the waters, and when evening fell the nostalgic calling of the brass *lang khang* (2) summoned the monks to their prayers.

At this same time there lived in Anolat (3) a lonely *Nhak*, Kum Phan, the most powerful of all the *Nhaks*, and one who owed allegiance only to Phaya Vetsuvan (4) himself. But he lived alone and every morning found him groaning and lamenting with longing for the Unknown One who was to be his life's companion. Then one day, having heard that Nang Sumuntha was his predestined wife, though warned that she would prove nefarious to him, the *Nhak*, blinded by passion, left for Peng Chan. There in the form of a great bird of prey, he carried Sumuntha off to the consternation of all, both men and beasts of the land.

Ye muses, and ye gods and goddesses of the four horizons, come help me tell how this monarch despaired, bereaved of his beloved sister. Life became such a burden to him that he, King of millions of men, abdicated in favour of his wife and became a monk. Then he set out in search of his sister.

(1) A distortion of Punjab. A great many capitals are given this name in Laotian texts that tell of the Buddha's various incarnations.

(2) Cymbals.

(3) Name of a star.

(4) The reference is to the Cambodian *Raksha*. All legends, whether their source is Indian or Buddhist, both in Siam, Cambodia and Laos, attach great importance to the *Nhaks*, gigantic and misshapen animals that fed mainly on human flesh, the *Khut* (Garuda), huge birds that fed on *Naks* (*Nāgas*), snakes, but especially water-snakes. We show in our illustrations how popular imagination represents these beings.

The journey was long, the roads were strange to him and difficult. After walking three months he reached at length a Wat on the outskirts of a forest. There, so they told him, was the extreme limit allowed to human beings...

He had reached, then, his journey's end. Next day, full of despair, while going about his daily begging, he saw coming to give him alms seven sisters each as beautiful as the last. He fell at once madly in love with them. Glimpsing here a means of recovering his sister, since he could not succeed in doing so alone, he returned to his Kingdom, unfrocked himself, and sent to the *Sellihi* (1) asking for his daughters in marriage. The latter agreed to accept him as his son-in-law.

Having gathered his wives about him, the King begged them to grant him a brave son of great strength who could help him win Sumuntha back from the hands of Kum Phan.

The Queens made offerings and implored the gods: the Sovereign would no doubt raise to highest rank the one who bore him the strongest man of all. They were brought to bed all on the same day. But Queen Nang Chantha, and the youngest of them all, Nang La, had dreamed too favourable dreams; they drew down on their own heads the jealousy of Heaven. And so the soothsayers had foretold they would give birth to monsters.

The first gave birth to a splendid gold-tusked Elephant, and the second to a Snail and a Boy bearing a bow and arrow. Such extraordinary occurrences could bring down only misery and cataclysms on the land. Mad with love for his other wives, the King took no time for thought but instantly ordered the two Queens into exile. They set out, their faces bathed in tears and carrying their infants in their arms. The compassion of the whole fearful population went with them.

Up hill and down dale they wandered, with at night only the pale glimmer of the stars to guide them, and roused in the morning by the sounds of apes and *thanis* (2). They nursed their children and fed them on such husks and roots as they gathered by the wayside, leavings of birds and beasts. At last one day exhausted, all hope in human kindness abandoned, they cried aloud for mercy; falling on their knees they offered up a wretched but ardent prayer to the all-powerful Pha In (3). He, knowing they were divinities descended on earth to fulfil their destinies, came to their rescue: at once he conjured up in the huge forest a great Palace bearing the inscription: « This is the Palace set apart for the sons of God. The eldest shall be called Sihalat (« Great Elephant »), the second

(1) A very rich man.

(2) Gibbons.

(3) Indra, sovereign of all the divinities, next in power after the Buddhas to whom spiritual power belongs.

Sin Xay (« He who triumphs through his Merits »), the third Sang Thong (« Golden Snail »).

Years passed. The children grew in strength and beauty, in lissomness and in intelligence. When he was nine, Sin Xay was



Fig. 35
Khul (Garuda)

peerless in his excellence. One day he asked his mother for the bow and arrow he brought into the world with him. In spite of his tender years he bent without effort the brazen bow and let it go with a sound of thunder. The arrow came to rest at the feet of Phaya Simphali, King of the *Khuts* (1), devoted from all time to the service of the Buddhas. Recognising the All-Powerful's arm, Phaya Simphali lost no time but assembled his people and came to worship the King of the Worlds, offering his services to soothe his exile. And so it came about that the *Khuts* lulled with continuous sweet music Sin Xay and his divine family. And his mother, and his aunt, and the three brothers, feared and beloved of all the forest fauna and escorted by the Mountain divinities, let the days slip past in perfect quietude.

The Phaya Kutsalat in the meantime never ceased thinking of his sister, and was still bent on the same purpose. When his six children were nine years old he called them all together and bade them go and study that they might acquire the power necessary to overcome the terrible Kum Phan. Reluctantly they set out, renouncing the gentle pleasures of the Court, and erred for whole

(1) See p. 361, note 4. When he wages his war against the King of the Serpents (*Nak*), Sin Xay called these Birds to his help.

months together in the unending forests. But the Pha In who rules men's destinies guided them towards the Palace of Sin Xay.

Once they had become aware of the latter's overwhelming strength, but also of his guilelessness, they found it easy enough to fool him and they told him their father had given them the task of carrying off Sumuntha from the hands of the Great Nhak. In spite of all their mother and aunt could say, Sin Xay and his brothers set out, accompanied by the six others.

* * *

At a turning of the road they met a Serpent. Lifting up high its poisonous jaws, from whence there issued fiery flames, the beast rose up before them. The six brothers were filled with fear and begged to return the way they came. But Sin Xay reassured them: this Serpent was of little danger. And at the beast he launched his powerful arrow. The arrow shattered the reptile's head which changed itself into seven new heads, spitting forth flames fiercer than ever; the air was murky with their poisonous breath. Sin Xay then hurled his bow and this time clove the Worm in two. Its head rolled on the ground and Siho crushed it to a thousand pieces that burned themselves out in a roaring blaze of fire.

The fight was over. But setting out once more they soon came to a sea, one *nhosana* (1) broad; and confessing they were afraid, the six brothers refused to go on further.

« That is impossible », said Sin Xay with a smile. « The son of God cannot abandon half-way the mission he was entrusted with! ».

And he commanded the six timorous lads to wait there till he returned; the Great Siho would bear them company.

Sin Xay accordingly embarked on his young brother, Sang Thong, transformed for the occasion into a giant ship, and the great sea was crossed at record speed. Oh! what thick forests stretched away, as far as eye could see; what frantic crying of *thanas* and echoing voices of a thousand unseen beings rang from the caves and shadowy depths! Sin Xay followed where his brother led and his thoughts were ever with his mother and aunt.

Oh! how the sun gilded the mountain-tops at evening! what insects, swift as arrows, sped through the air! what trees Sang

(1) *Nhosana*, from the Sanskrit *yojana*. « According to the Commissions of *Fleet Imaginative Yojana* in JRAS, 1912, p. 229, there were two *yojanas*: the long one, equal to nine miles, which was generally used in India and regularly used by astronomers; the short one, half as long as the first, that is: four and a half miles, which is peculiar to the Nagandha and is the one most to be met with in Buddhist books... » (Quoted by Louis Finot in *Le Bouddhisme*). Compare with the Cambodian tale (*Pavie, op. cit.*) in which all these seas are merely rivers.

Thong cut down in ordered rank! and what flowers of every sort perfumed the air, recalling in their sweetness the smell of his mother's milk!

Alone, he followed in his brother's footsteps, skirting the mountain slopes and clambering where peaks rose sheer. And ever an undefinable feeling of melancholy gripped at his heart! Were they unending, then, these paths that seemed so short at a first glance but proved, in fact, so long!



Fig. 36
Nhak Khini

They crossed seven seas, the last always a *nhosana* broader than the one before. New dangers came with every stage.

The first, after the Snake with poisoned breath, was a solitary and arrogant *Nhak* who, hitherto invincible, scarce thought to perish at the hand of so puny a being. Then Sin Xay met a herd of pachyderms, who set the forest ringing to their trumpeting and whose footprints formed hollows several cubits deep and measured quite two fathoms broad. Then came a group of four *Nhaks*, frontier guards, who flung themselves together on the animal of human kind whose flesh had been held in high repute among them from remotest antiquity.

At the fifth stage the danger took on a new form. During this stage Sin Xay was pursued by a *Nhak Khini*; having turned herself into a woman of matchless loveliness, she sought to keep him with her as her husband. The burning gleam of her hard Ogress' eyes betrayed her.

(1) *Nhak Khini*, feminine form of *Nhak* (see p. 361, note 4). The *Nhak Khini*, however, in Laotian legends, are always represented as being perverse creatures who live alone and seek a husband.

At the sixth stage Sin Xay put an old *Phaya Thone* (1) to flight, who sought to keep for his sole use the « Flowers of Nature » freely offered to all.

At the seventh and last stage Sin Xay, having succeeded in escaping from a woman who had carried him off by surprise, met



Fig. 37

Kinari

a group of five hundred *Kinaris* (2). He yielded to their charms for a whole week.

At length, when the last sea, seven *nhosana* wide, was crossed, Sin Xay and his brother entered into the Kingdom of Kum Phan.

A light wind blew on clusters of clouds.

• • •

When they had rested from the fatigue caused by the journey, Sang Thong made his way into the precincts of the abductor's Palace. Left to himself Sin Xay fell fast asleep and had a dream:

« A hurricane swept the earth and the waves in fury rose high as the pillars of Heaven. He saw himself armed, wielding his bow in desperation and demolishing bold mountains by the thousand. Sihalat roared and the world was deafened by his

(1) An intermediary species between the *Nhak* and mankind. The *Phaya Thones* are bachelors and live in the forests. In what follows « Flowers of Nature » is a poetical metaphor used by Laotians as a term for women.

(2) Etymologically *Kinari* means : « What woman is this ? » As a rule the *Kinaris* are depicted as having a human body from the waist upwards and the body of a bird from the waist downwards.

trumpeting. The all-powerful Pha Ins were teaching magic formulas whereby one's strength is multiplied. Sang Thong was everywhere at once. Like a spinning ball both deadly and elusive, he kept watch on the whole Universe and bade him enter the country of Nha Nheu (1). The *Nāgas*, crossing each other to and fro above his head, covered him like a roof of bronze. *

That very day the two brothers carried Sumuntha off, while Kum Phan, back from his hunting, slept. Dead tired he was, benumbed and prostrated, all through Sin Xay's power. Then

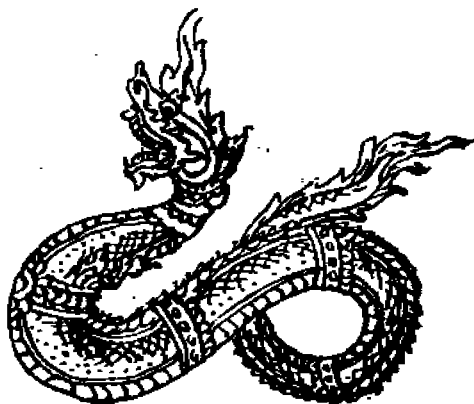


Fig. 38

Nak

having confined the princess in a cave that stood half-way, they returned to face Kum Phan, and open war began.

The *Nhaks*, gigantic, horrible monsters, stuck out great tongues all red with blood from the animals they had torn to pieces. Their nose and mouth breathed fire, and they bumped into the mountains like human beings stumbling against the stones that strew the road. They flew to and fro in the air, taking the form of every sort of beast, strange, fierce and terrible. And they marvelled that they should have to fight a child not even weaned yet from his mother's milk!

Neither Sin Xay nor yet his brothers were afraid. They awaited the attacks with a stout heart and their calm was equal only to their courage: a man has nothing to fear from the barking of a pack of furious hounds. When the monsters came too close they were met by the divine arrow, and the horde, their ranks thinned out, but full of courage, returned to the charge again and again, bolder each time, more arrogant and clamerous. Their shouts

(1) See below, *Legendary Origins*.

of joy were mingled with threats and insults qualifying Sin Xay as a «diminutive toad that would scarce suffice to break their fast».

But one by one all the valorous captains of the powerful Kum Phan perished; at length he himself fell, after more than once mangling his own breast in a gesture of powerless rage. His dying look was for his wife. And with him died the Kingdom's last defender.

Sin Xay and his people raised a *celiya* (1) on the ashes of the Great Nhak and handed the Kingdom solemnly over into the hands of his brother, Vanula, sole survivor of the great carnage (2). Then at the request of Sumuntha they turned their footsteps towards the Kingdom of the *Naks* (3) to set her daughter, Nang Chanh, free. Lovely as the moon, she had been married to Lunvalat, King of that land.

Another war took place in which Lunvalet fought fiercely to defend his treasure; but what indeed could he have done against the conqueror of Kum Phan? Aided by the *Khuls*, in the end Sin Xay bore off Nang Chanh after putting the *Nāgas* all to flight. They then joined the six brothers by the sea-shore.

These latter had had plenty of time to lay their heads together and decide that if they went home with a victorious and triumphant Sin Xay they would certainly be made a butt of and would be deprived of all their rights. And what was more, their father would hear about all the lies they had told. So having decided that Sin Xay must be done away with, they invited him to come and bathe with them. The latter having accepted, they led him as though in sport to a precipice they knew of and pushed him over the edge.

With Sin Xay gone, Siho who hitherto had had magical eyes that could see in the dark and right through mountains, became all but blind with despair. He rushed off in search of his brother and Sang Thong did likewise.

As for the six wicked brothers, they returned alone to Nang Chanh and her mother. They told them of the terrible tragedy of which, so they said, Sin Xay had been the unhappy victim, and they bade them go along with them: what was the use of waiting any longer since Sin Xay was dead?... And later on, while they were underway, they put the finishing touch to their scheme by pretending to be surprised at the tears of their aunt and her

(1) *Stūpa*.

(2) The brother of Khum Phan, Vanula, had slept throughout the whole duration of the war. When Khum Phan came to rouse him by means of an arrow in the hollow of his ear, all he did was to scratch himself furiously and drop off to sleep again. His name, which has remained famous, is used to designate all those who turn a deaf ear to sounds and outside, events, however tragic.

(3) The Water People (see above, p. 361, note 4).

daughter, who regretted their young hero: he had never existed, they insisted, except in their own mad and ungrateful imagination.

And so at last they all reached Peng Chane, to the great joy of Phaya Kutsalat and his people, amazed at so much power. But in the course of the conversations she had with her brother, Sumuntha unfolded the true story to him; she added that, on the edge of the precipice, she had left a wig and a loin-cloth: if Sin Xay were still alive and were to return then the two objects she had thus entrusted to the vigilance of the gods would be brought back to her.

It so happened that one day gods dressed as merchants brought them back. The Phaya Kutsalat threw his six children into irons and, full of repentance, set out in search of Sin Xay whom he found, though not without difficulty, surrounded by his entire family; he had been restored to life by the divine Pha In. And in great pomp they entered Peng Chane amidst general rejoicing.

Meanwhile King Lunvalat, bereaved of his wife, was pining away with despair.

LUNVALAT'S COMPLAINT

*A long time has passed
Since the day when
Assembling his subjects all
And taking leave of the Great Master,
King Lunvalat,
Flying through the air,
Came back to his own country.*

*But his heart lingered behind,
Clinging to the beloved.*

*The Heavens from East to West
Thunder, and thunder echoes back.
Slowly the clouds slip singly by
On the landscape of his soul
In prey to wracking thoughts
That turn to the beloved.*

*Tears sometimes bathe his face,
Thoughts come that scourge his mind
Like countless poisoned darts:
Love, burning love that paring kills,
That yet is deathless still.*

*« Is then thine image fled
« Save to the mind's eye,
« Thine image ever dear
« And graven in my heart?*

« *Oh sorrow, sorrow absolute*
« *And great beyond all measure !*
« *Oh Chanh, heart's darling,*
« *Left I thee for ever?*

« *I think of moments spent*
« *Beside thee on our royal bed,*
« *Thousands of vassals came*
« *To pay us homage there.*

« *Oh vanity of things !*
« *No purpose then was served*
« *When I raised thee to the rank supreme*
« *Of Queen undisputed of the Water Kingdom !*

« *Honour and Power*
« *Come all to nought,*
« *To nought the love my people felt for thee*
« *As for one born of mine own royal stock !*

« *Oh thou, so powerful.*
« *Who warded off*
« *Like a steel rampart*
« *All enemies who sought our downfall !*

« *Oh thou compared to whom*
« *The precious stone was nought,*
« *The secular Palladium*
« *Of our antique city !*

« *And all this land so vast*
« *That is my very own,*
« *These thousands of Ministers,*
« *These lovely serving-girls*
« *About me, bright with jewel and robe,*
« *Fair as fair images,*
« *Whose bracelets and rings meet,*
« *All this is nought*
« *Without thee !*

« *My spirit remains bound to thee ;*
« *My loving heart clings fast to thee.*

« *Oh thou, golden-bodied*
« *Like some ripe fruit,*
« *May thy thoughts turn to me !*

« *In vain I strive to struggle to my feet*
« *And clothe myself in my right mind ;*
« *My spirit remains severed from my body ;*
« *I stagger, finding no support,*
« *Mad through thine abandonment.*

« Oh sorrow, speechless and unspeakable,
« Oh my soul, my heart, my Chanh beloved !

« When the light flakes of cotton
« Bestrew and whiten the sky,
« In the middle of the season,
« When a light breeze blows me the sweet scents of Nature,
« Then my heart turns to thee,
« Loving a thousand-fold.

« The wind of the third month at its close
« Blows on the tender leaves ;
« How long ago is it
« Since thou wentst from me ?

« Has thy matchless beauty
« Already drawn to thee
« New lovers ?

« Dost thou not think sometimes
« Of the hours we spent together,
« How I showered caresses on thee ?

« Oh thy body so young and lovely,
« Thy breast so full !
« Where wilt thou find on Earth
« A love comparable to mine ?

« When I took thee on my knees
« Thy body yielded to me,
« Thine hair bedecked with jewels,
« Thy ring-adorned fingers,

« When my hands caressed thy shoulders,
« A smile flowered on thy lips.
« A shiver then of joy
« Ran through my body.

« How lovely wast thou with thy flowing hair,
« So plentiful, so black, so glistening !

« Of all the women of thine age,
« And of thy race,
« That ever I saw in the Three Worlds,
« Let no ill-jesting tongue suggest
« Any may be compared with thee !

« Though virgins in thousands came
« And offered me their bodies,
« Not for a moment could
« My thoughts be turned from thee ! »

The country was desolated and grieved to see its King so ill that his body, turned yellow, was wasting visibly away. The altar rails and the temple stairs were strewn with candles and with jewels offered up to the benevolence of the deities. But nothing availed. The sick King held his peace and never ceased to invoke with regret his lost beloved.

- « *At this moment, Oh my companion,*
- « *Where art thou and with whom?*
- « *Dost thou still think, however little, of me?*
- « *Or covered with honours and with fortune blessed,*
- « *Dost spend thy time admiring and adorning thyself,*
- « *Perplexed to choose between the thousand Lords*
- « *That all adore thee?*
- « *Dost ever think of me*
- « *Who am sick with too much thought of thee?*
- « *Morning and eve*
- « *I scarcely touch my meals.*
- « *Remembering the time when thou wast by me,*
- « *My throat contracts*
- « *And food is poison to me ;*
- « *Then I can swallow nothing.*
- « *What man upon this Earth*
- « *Knows sorrow such as mine?*
- « *Sorrow that turns to madness*
- « *When the sun at evening sinks...*
- « *The season of rains is at hand,*
- « *That pour in torrents down on Earth,*
- « *I think of thee,*
- « *Of the many times together*
- « *When we went and bathed.*
- « *Thou couldst go on fool,*
- « *It was just as safe,*
- « *But hadst rather be carried in my arms...*
- « *If thou wert but a thing*
- « *I could carry in my mouth,*
- « *And never be deprived of thee !*
- « *Oh woe is now upon us ;*
- « *We are separated,*
- « *My heart lives by thine image and delights*
- « *In thy lost perfume. »*

Day followed day, night followed night, and the seasons passed. The Monarch, never ceasing to lament and weep, confided in no one. His ill was nameless and mysterious, and it obsessed the thoughts of Ministers, Court, and all the population. They sent for soothsayers.

Of these, some sought to explain things, saying the year was ill-starred, and they demanded offerings, to ward off the evil spirits. Others suggested it was the Sovereign's very destiny, and that its course must be turned aside by means of the proper rites. Those who lived close to him said he was sick of the stomach, others said jaundice, and those who were versed in numbers said the year had been a bad one (1).

When some however asserted that the Sovereign's mind still clung to the young Queen, the King smiled and flinging wide the cloth that covered him he rose. And they set out for Peng Chane to ask of the great Sin Xay that the beloved be restored to him.

. . .

After Nang Chanh' return, the Kingdom of the Nagas enjoyed once more the happy days of yore in the practise of the blessed moral precepts of the Perfect One.

(Retranslated from the French version of Thao Nhoy ABHAY).



(1) An amusing satire and most unexpected in such a melancholy passage.

IX

ANNALS OF LAN XANG

Legendary Origins

The Flood

The Legend of the Pumpkins

The Descent of Khun Borom

The Severed Creeper

Legendary Origins

THE FLOOD

We are back at the very beginning of the world. Heaven and Earth communicate with each other. In Heaven the ruler is the Phya Thêng (1); on Earth there are three chiefs: Khun Khêt, Khun Kan and Khun Pu Lan Xong, and they govern a brutal and unruly humanity. Civilization has not yet made its appearance; men live by hunting and fishing. The Phya Thêng wishes for a share of their prey; he demands it of them several times without success. Deeply angered, he takes his revenge by causing a flood. The three Khuns had foreseen this catastrophe and had built themselves a floating house. Borne upon the waters they arrive in Heaven, offer the Phya Thêng their apologies and obtain permission to remain with him.

After a certain lapse of time the flood begins to subside and the Earth appears once more. The three Khuns beg to be allowed to return to the « Lower Land » (*muong lum*): on taking leave of them the Phya Thêng presents them with a buffalo.

THE LEGEND OF THE PUMPKINS

The three Khuns settled at Na Noi (Muong Thêng) (2) and with the help of their buffalo they began to lay out rice-fields. But at the end of three years the buffalo died. From his nostrils there sprang a Creeping Plant that bore three Pumpkins. These fruits grew to be enormous. When they were ripe a loud noise was heard inside them. Pu Lan Xong took a piece of red-hot iron and pierced a hole in the Pumpkins: immediatly crowds of men came pouring out. There were so many of them that the opening was too narrow to allow them through; seeing this the Khun seized a chisel and cut new openings for them. Such is the origin of the two races that people Laos: the Khas are those that came out

(1) *Theng*: heavenly Spirits (*Editor's note*).

(2) Another variant: « The place was called Muong Sinkalassi, we call it since Muong Theng, Land of the Theng » (*Pavie*) (*Editor's note*).

through the holes made with a red-hot iron; the Thais are those who passed through the openings hacked out with the chisel. The Khas are dark and wear their hair done up in chignons (*klao phom*); the Thais are light complexioned and wear their hair short (1).

Khun Pu Lan Xong then set about civilizing the Sons of the Pumpkin. He taught them how to build houses, he explained the marriage and funeral rites, the respect due to parents and the cult of the ancestors. But these men soon multiplied to such an extent that the three Khuns no longer sufficed to govern them. In answer to their prayer the Phya Thêng, or Fa K'un, sent down to Earth as Tao Phya, Khun Ku and Khun Kon, but they were a failure; so he called them back and sent in their place his own son, Khun Borom.

THE DESCENT OF KHUN BOROM

The King of Heaven first sent down the Thêng Ten and P'issanukan (Visvakarman) in advance of his son, and they taught men agriculture and the mechanical arts. Then the celestial procession got under way. Khun Borom, clothed in the royal insignia, rode on an elephant whose tusks crossed each other and who went by the name of Nga kieu gna kôt, son of Airâvana; and at his side were his two wives, Yammapala (Yomakara), daughter of the Thêng Kom, and Ek Kêng, daughter of the Thêng Xang. He had also a marvellous horse called Xat xua p'on ro hok. With him were the Khuns Thammarat, Seng Manôsat, Un, K'li. Before him walked the Phu Thao Yô and his wife, Mê Ya Ngam, bearing the axe; behind him went the Thao Lai and his wife, Mê Mot, carrying the coupe-coupe (*pa*) and the spade (*siem*). It was a Sunday, a day which is *kap yi*. They landed at Na noi oi nu. The two Thêngs, Tên and P'issanukan ascended into Heaven once more to render an account of their mission to Fa K'un. It was then that it occurred to them that from among the useful arts that had been taught to mankind, music had been overlooked. Fa K'un at once sent the *Devra Si K'anthap* (Gandhabba) to supply this want. And then, to preserve himself against the importunities of mankind, he severed the rattant bridge that linked the Earth to Heaven. And ever since that time all intercourse between gods and men has ceased.

THE SEVERED CREEPER

While Khun Borom was organizing the Lower Country, a *Kua khao kal* Creeper was seen to rise from the Ground. It

(1) The legend of the Pumpkins is one of the most popular in Laos: later it will be seen that the person who drew up the Charter of Vat Keo went so far as to derive from it the Kingdom's very name (Editor's note).

grew so fast that it soon covered the whole Earth with its shade. Men could no longer see the Sky and were deprived of all light and warmth. The King gave orders for this monstrous Creeper to be cut, but none dared to risk it. At last the old married couple who, armed with axes, had preceded the Son of Heaven on his coming down to Earth, Phu Thao Yō and Mē Ngam, declared themselves ready to attempt this perilous task. But they stipulated that after their death they should receive offerings and be invoked at the beginning of meals and of other occupations. To this everyone pledged himself (1). They then started chopping away the creeper with their axes: at the end of three months and three days it fell, crushing them beneath its weight. But the sun shone out once more on the world (2).

Freed from its deadly shade, men set to till the land which was given the name of Muong Thêng, since it had been created by Thêng.

(From Louis Finol's French translation)

(1) This pledge was respected. Ever since it has been the custom, on beginning work or sitting down to table, to say : « *Ma Yō kin Yō!* » (« Come, Yō! Eat, Yō! »). The married couple is familiarly referred to as Phu Yō Ya Yō. Moreover, an essential feature of every Laotian festival is a dance in which the performers, wearing enormous cardboard masks, play the part of Phu Yō Ya Yō (See pl. XXVI).

(2) We have kept to the version of the *P'ongsavadan*. The *Khun Borom* gives us another one in which the legends of the Pumpkins and the Creeper are amalgamated. A pumpkin-plant with two fruits growing on it appears in the middle of a pond and fastens on to a fig-tree growing on the bank : both are of gigantic size and they obscure the light of day. *Khun Borom* sends Phu Thao Yō and his wife to *Phya Thêng* to ask his advice. They go up to Heaven by climbing the trunk of the fig-tree (and not by a bridge). The *Thêng* orders the old people to sever the Creeper once the Pumpkins have been pierced by the two *Thêngs* who are going to return to Earth with them. The two *Thêngs* pierce a hole in the Pumpkins and out come men, women, animals, plants, etc. Then Thao Yō and Mē Ya Ngam sever the Creeper; Thao Lai and Mē Mot cut down the fig-tree. And thus all intercourse between Heaven and Earth is put to an end, which found itself none the worse off. (L. F.).

The Testament of Khun Borom

The Testament of Khun Borom

Being now truly King, Borom ordered rice-fields to be laid out; he chose the best of the new men to be chiefs and the most gifted of the new women to be the wives of his seven sons.

The elephant, his father's gift, being dead, Borom made the tusks into seven pieces and gave them to his children; he then distributed among them the sabres and precious objects he had brought down from Heaven at the very beginning.

He next divided the immense crowd of people into seven large groups and gave one of his sons to each of them as King.

Having chosen an auspicious day, he summoned to him the seven princes and their companions and called upon the whole population to assemble with their chiefs.

As he had done in the past, Phya Fa Kun bade the young men to sit in the middle.

They brought him a golden vessel full of consecrated water, his children drew near, the men and women all clasped their hands together and the King, pressing them in his own, plunged them into the lustral water.

Then speaking to the Princes, he said :

« I ask you to be good Kings to your peoples; to do your best to earn their love; to avoid quarrelling and live in friendship together and to see to it that your peoples look upon one another as you yourselves look on one another between elder and younger brothers, and that the rich help the poor; always to take advice before action, and never to fight against each other.

« Never kill your wives for their transgressions, for such is the will of Phya Thêng; they were the first to be born, to cause their death would be to bring down trouble on the country, and make short the rule of your Kings.

« May those who respect my words and are mindful of my counsels be happy in all their descendants, may those who are forgetful be short-lived. »

Addressing himself to their wives :

« Go to rest before your husbands, and be always the first to rise; always forestall their commands, do not wait for them to order you to prepare food, fabrics, whatever is necessary to their welfare: be mindful of their servants, watch over the plantations, the gardens.

« Whatever you may hear in your home, tell it not beyond your walls, whatever you hear beyond your walls, tell it not in your home.

« Suffer the wicked in your house as well as the good; what knowledge you may have of good or evil, think well before you make it known to your husbands, then act according as your heart guides you.

« In the countries where you will reign, have four, three or two friends to advise you; when they are of a different opinion from you, think well before you follow your own counsel.

« When the Kings, your husbands, will have judged or condemned someone, never make it your business to examine their reasons with a view to making them change their mind.

« Do not dispose of what belongs to your husband, do not give your love to another man.

« And finally, all you my children, who are human beings, refrain from lying in speaking of your possessions, do not drink spirits to the point of forgetfulness, and do not smoke opium for these are shameful things. Seek to imitate the Pra Pul (1), our Master, who when he sees a poor man does not wait for him to beg for alms. »

Having finished speaking Borom took their hands out of the holy water. He bade all the chiefs draw near for the coronation ceremony of his sons.

They were invested with the five Insignia (2) and their father did everything with the same slow stateliness as had the Phya Thêng Fa Khun at his own coronation long ago.

He then showed them, all fourteen at once, to the seven peoples who stood motionless and without speaking a word, and taking sheets of gold, as did also the Queens Yomakara and Et Keng and all the chiefs, they wrote that Khun Lô, the eldest Prince, would go and rule over the Muong Swa Lan Xang.

They took other sheets of gold and set down that Khun Lan would rule over the Muong Howang, Sai-Kam and Vitilat.

The Khun Chuc Son over the Muong Laniphom Nahalaras.

The Khun Kamphuong over the Muong Khum-Kham Nho Nocaral.

The Khun In over the Muong Luvo.

The Khun Chet Choeung over the Muong Pu Eun.

The Khun Chet Cheang over the Muong Un (3).

(1) A corruption of *Pra Buddha*, the « Lord Buddha ».

(2) The five royal insignia were : the Crown ; the Nine Sabres ; the Gongs ; the Couches and all musical instruments ; the Tables, the Bétel-Box, Kitchen Utensils, Crockery, Bowls and Cups ; a Carpet of cloth of gold for the Elephant's head (*Editor's notes*).

(3) This dividing of the country between the children of Borom would seem to refer, besides Luang Prabang, to Yunnan, Nghê-An, the Sip Song Panna, Siam, Tran-ninh and Western Laos.

In another manuscript, *An Abridged History of the Land of Lan Xang Kom-Khao*, the dividing out is done as follows : Luang Prabang, Nghê-An, Xieng-mai, Yunnan Sip Song Panna, Siam and Tran-ninh.

As each in his turn was appointed, the young men went and took up their place at the head of their people.

Their father ended with the following words :

« Go and rule over your countries and keep my counsel in your hearts.

« Store up riches in order to share them ; set a portion of them aside in case of famine, and if that scourge does occur then give the said portion to the women to be distributed in alms.

« Set another portion aside for hermits and old monks.

« Set a third one aside for those chiefs who have been of assistance to you in the conduct of affairs.

« A fourth for those exiles who come and ask you to give them shelter.

« Another for the blind, the crippled and the wounded.

« And lastly, one that you may have the necessities if some evil neighbour attacks you or forces you into war.

« If you receive gifts, give equivalent presents back. »

Khun Borom having thus spoken to his fourteen children in the presence of their peoples, his words were repeated and respectfully observed right up till our own time.

Since the time of his leaving Heaven, twenty-five years had gone by.

(From Auguste Pavie's French translation)

**Fondation of the Kingdom
of Lan Xang Hom Khao¹
(A Million Elephants and White Parasol)**

The following events are recorded in detail
in the donation Charter in favour of the Wat
Keo (1602 A. D.) which forms the first part
of the 'Story of the Phra Bang'.

(1) *Lan* or *Lean* (Khmer) = million; *Xang* or *Chhang* (Thai) = elephant; *Hom khao* means 'The Storied Parasol', one of the Royal insignias in Buddhist Indo-China. It is white in Laos, and yellow in Cambodia.

Fondation of the Kingdom of Lan Xang

We shall tell the story of the foundation of the Monastery of Wat Keo, which was the first here.

In olden times the Phya Fa, before he was even born, had thirty-three sharp teeth. All the Mandarins of the Palace said: 'He is an evil creature'. They took him, put him on a raft and set him adrift. He came to the landing-stage of the Mahā Pasaman Cao (1), who asked those who had accompanied him for a detailed account of the affair. When he had received this information, he invited them all to stay (with him). Some time afterwards, the Phya of Intapath Nakôn Luong (Cambodia) learned that the monk had with him the son of the King of Xieng Dong-Xieng Tông. He sent for him and brought him up as his son. When the Prince reached the age of 16, he gave him for wife his daughter called Nang Kêu Lôt Fa. Then he swiftly raised an army and sent the Prince to reign at Xieng Dong-Xieng Tông with Nang Kêu Lôt Fa as Queen. The latter took the name of Deva-Ratana-Vijita-Mahī-Dhipati-Rājadevī Sṛi-Indapatha-Rājaputti. (The Phya Fa) took all the towns and villages and then reigned at Xieng Dong-Xieng Tông (2).

At that time people did not know much about religion in the Kingdom of Lan Xang. The Phya and his wife sent to Nakôn Luong to ask their respective father-in-law and father for religion, the Phra Bang Cao and the Mahā Pasaman who had brought up (the King). So the King of Nakôn Luong gave them the Phra Mahā Pasaman and his brother, who belonged to a local family, then Mahādeva Langka Cao, the elder brother, Phra Mahādeva Langkā, the younger brother, and Mahā Nandipanna Cao, all three natives of Lankādīpa and who had come from there with the Phra Bang. These five *Mahātheras* were learned and wise and had a thorough knowledge of both the esoteric and exoteric Doctrine (religious and profane), and in particular of all the *hora sāsstras* (Treatises of Astronomy). With the five monks came four novices. The Pra Mahā Pasaman and the Pra Mahādeva Langkā

(1) *Mahā Pasaman* is probably another version of *Mahā Pra Samana*.

(2) The conquests of Fa Ngum are recorded in great detail in the *Khun Borom*.

were the chiefs. People from outside (1), relations of the five monks, came with them from Nakôn Luong: there was a group from Nay Salanakôn, one from Nay Xieng Pao, one from the Acan Yana noi, one from the Acan Thammaculla, one from the Acan Sumetha, one from Nay Supe, one from Nay Râhula, and one from Nay Pôtha. These people, 500 families in all, were all related to the five monks and were sent by the King of Nakôn Luong. He sent with Nang Kêu Lôt Fa: Norasing, one group; Norasan, one group; Noranaray, one group; Noradet, one group, four men well acquainted with the *Vedasâstras*, the *sins (silpas)* and the *mantras*, skilled in the art of carving, and painting ornaments and figures, writing, and casting images of the Buddha in hundreds of thousands, even millions, and skilled in all the sciences. These groups of men, all related to one another, — a thousand of them — came with Nang Kêu Lôt Fa's nurse maid. All these men came with Norasing, Norasan, Noranaray and Noradet, and with the nurse maid, all citizens of Nakôn Luong, sent to serve Nang Kêu Lôt Fa.

The King of Nakôn Luong also sent the Phra Bang with men, the *Tripitaka* with men, all accompanying the Phra Mahâ Pasaman and the Phra Mahâdeva Langkā. The famous brothers, when they reached Vieng Chan, stopped there for seven days; then they made the Phra Bang and all the men continue on their way. When he reached Vieng Kam (2), the Phra Bang did not wish to go any further, for it was impossible to lift him. The oracles having been consulted, announced: 'The Phra Bang stays here.' So they left him there. Then the Phra Mahâ Pasaman went up by the inland road with all the parties and reached the Phu Ming (3), (near) the capital. The Phya Fa and Nang Kêu hastened to receive him with open arms and settled their famous brothers in a place called Na Khao Cao (4).

They had brought from Intapath a story which they read out to the inhabitants, and which told how :

(1) *Kon pay nôk*. The end of the document shows that this expression is meant to refer to laymen.

(2) Vieng Kam is the former name of Ban Ban, about 20 miles North and slightly East of Xieng Khuang. They show, near the village, the site of the former *muong* (Krung Kao) of which there are no traces left. The road from Vieng Chan (Vientiane) to Luang Prabang certainly did not pass this way, which is much too far to the East. We must therefore suppose either that travellers took the inland road down stream below Vieng Chan, towards Muong Borikan, or that there was another Vieng Kam. According to information which was given me, but which I have been unable to check, the former Vieng Kam was in a district which is nowadays deserted between the Sanakam *muong* and the mouth of the Nam Mi, towards the upper section of the Keng Chan.

(3) Phu Ming, to-day Doi Ning, mountain 7 ½ miles. East of Luang Prabang.

(4) On the site of Wat Vixun. *Na khao cao* = Ricefields with non-sticky rice.

« This Muong Xua Lan Xang owes its origin to the Cao Losi (*Rishi*) who set up posts as boundary marks for the Kingdom of Xua Lan Xang: to the North, they chose the Phu Xang as a landmark, to the East the Phu Xuang, in the centre the Phu Khao Kla (1), and to the South the Phu Xang Luong: (that is why) it is called the Lan Xang Kingdom.

« It was also called Muong Lao. In this country everybody was a ruler. In the past these men came out of a Pumpkin; they became *Tao*, *Phya*; they were called Tao Khun Lo, which gave the name of Lao to the Kingdom.'

(From Louis Finot's French translation).

(1) The Côm Si or Phu Si, near the meeting of the Nam Kan and the Mekong rivers (See pl. VIII).

The Coronation of Fa Ngum

The Coronation of Fa Ngum

Fa Ngum, after having put these provinces in good order, brought back his soldiers towards the Lan Xang and stopped at Vieng Chan (1).

In the Sena-Amat, there was an old servant by the name of Sen-Muong, whom he raised, together with the Moeun-Kobang, above all the others.

Then he chose five chiefs to take command of the army. One was Moeun-Luong, above the four others, the Chaos Khoa and Sai, the Khuns Nheua and Thai, who were given the following titles: Moeun-Na, Moeun-Pen, Moeun-Nheua and Moeun-Thai. The first two were in charge of the vanguard and the two others of the rearguard.

Then, for service in the Palace, there was the Nai Luong-Nheua, in charge of the front and the Chaos Khun-Nheua and Nai Luong-Thai in charge of the rear. They were to serve by the King's side in war as well as in the Palace.

The highest-ranking provincial chief was the Moeun Chang. Then came: the Chao Vieng-Kang, the Chao Vieng-Ke, the Moeun Pha-Nam Hung, the Chao Pak Hue-Luong and the Chao Muong Xiang-Sâ.

For the Lan Xang itself he chose four high-ranking officials: the Chao Muong Ken-Tao, Chao Muong Nong-Bua, Chao Muong Sai-Kao and Chao Muong Dan-Sam-Moeun.

Then the Moeun-Chang, the Moeun-Kobang, the Moeun-Luong, all the Chaos and all the Phyas, all the chiefs, all the officers, all the army and the whole people raised their hands to the King, saying: 'You have made us great, proud, and victorious over other countries. We thank you and wish to raise you once again to the throne of Lan Xang.'

The Phra Chao Fa Ngum, having heard the people and his warriors speak thus, replied: 'You speak thus, I am pleased, I accept.'

At once the whole Sena-Amat set about preparing the ceremony on the site later occupied by the Wat Passac (2).

(1) Vientiane.

(2) Vat Passac = Royal temple.

When this was finished, they came to fetch the King, and during seven days and seven nights, there was feasting in the Palace and among the people. They killed 10 elephants, 1000 oxen and 2000 buffaloes which were to be carefully prepared for the table. Then the King spoke thus to the chiefs, in the presence of the army and the people who had come along by all the rivers:

« You will attend to all the usual practices and administer justice in the Lan Xang; see to it that there are no pirates, thieves, murderers or rebels.

« See to it that the masters are kind to their slaves, that they do not strike them but forgive them their evil ways.

« If any chiefs or their children behave badly or are unjust, the chief who arrests them must submit them to the decision of other judges so that he himself may not be suspected of being unjust.

« The guilty ones must be punished according to their offences and released from prison on the day fixed by the judge so that they may return to their families and try to live with them once again.

« In the country there are rich and poor alike. Everyone must accept his station in life so that we may never have to condemn anyone to death.

« If enemies from abroad form evil designs against the country, as soon as these things come to your knowledge, give warning and do not keep such grave news to yourselves.

« During the year send me reports on the state of affairs in your provinces and come to Xieng-Dong Xieng-Tông every three years to bring the taxes you have gathered.

« We offer thanks to Theng Fa-Kum, Theng Ten, Theng Chhang, Theng Teuk, Thao-Yeu, Thao-Lai, Mê-Ngan-Ngam, Mê-Mot, and will make offerings to them (1).

« We shall offer greetings to the guardian spirits in Pa-Tung, Sup-Hu, Sup-Senan, Sen-Kao-Kha, Sup-Kan, Sup-Op, Sop-Dong, Pakap-Kê, Pa-Tang-Nai, Lac-Man, Thai-Kan Na-Rai-Diho, Pu Khao Kha, Pa-Koang, Kan Fan-Yep and Kan-Khai-Pha.

« To these guardian spirits we shall sacrifice, upon arrival, the flesh of 36 buffaloes.

« You will prepare for this journey during the first month, for we must arrive in Muong Swa (2) by the third month. He who will not obey these orders will not be considered an upright man. »

Thus spoke King Fa Ngum in Vieng Chan. Everything he ordered was respected subsequently and the feasts and offerings

(1) Indra, the Four Celestial Protectors of the country and the four Ancestors of the people.

(2) Luang Prabang.

to ancestors and guardian spirits revealed the good and evil-spirited among the Chaos and Phyas of the Muong Lan Xang.

He also said that the people of the Kingdom should not be enslaved, that their faults should not be severely judged, that murderers should not be killed, for one victim was enough and that it was wrong to kill another. Adultery was to be punished by a fine of 5 *bats* and, finally, that chiefs should not accept money offered by men called for service to secure exemption. He who accepts one or two *bats* is as guilty as if he had received 100 or 200. « Such bad chiefs deserve to be reduced to the status of ordinary people. »

The King also said a number of things which were not recorded and dismissed all those who had to return to the provinces.

Then he went back to Xieng-Tông by the inland road with his soldiers.

The great coronation ceremonies were renewed so that the King's reign might be long-lasting and the King and Queen might have beautiful children and the peoples be as happy in the future as they were then.

After conquering so many provinces, the King Fa Ngum had come back to the country to enjoy a rest.

(From Auguste Pavie's French translation)

Birth of the Phra Bang

Birth of the Phra Bang

At that time the people had no knowledge of religion, Phra Put (1) was unknown, the priests were never referred to and prayers were addressed to the Spirits of Ancestors.

They were armed with lances and sabres, they had gone victoriously through the land, they feared and respected nothing; ex-soldiers said they were 'invulnerable', and did what they liked.

Nang Kéo could not bear to see the land oppressed by warriors, and so she said to the King her husband: 'I can see that no doctrine is followed, no rules are obeyed, nor any practices either. The strong oppressed the weak, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Allow me, King and Master, to go and see my father.'

Fa Ngum answered Nang Kéo, the daughter of King Nakôn Luong: 'No, listen. We shall send to the King of Inlapath, your father, ask for the Writings and for monks to teach religion.'

Immediately he chose an ambassador to whom he gave presents intended for the great King: 3 mœuns of gold, 3 mœuns of silver and the jewels called Nam-Dong, Pu-kha and Chompeth.

When the mission came to Nakôn Luong, the old King said: 'Since my children do not possess the Precepts, I shall send them and to all other countries as well.'

He told the Mahā Thêng, Mahā Pasaman Cao and Mahā Thêng Têpa Lanka (2) to prepare to leave with 20 disciples at the same time as the envoy of the King Fa Ngum and informed them that they would take with them the statue called Phra Bang (3).

The Phra Bang had not always existed. The pious folk of Lanka (4), after gathering together their offerings, had set off to greet the Phra Mahā Cholla Nakaleng (5) and had said to him:

'We should like a statue of the Phra Put and, for the purpose of making it, have gathered together this treasure. Please advise us. It includes diverse objects which do not normally go together, such as gold bracelets, diamond rings, silver, copper and iron objects, precious

(1) The Buddha.

(2) Buddhist monks.

(3) See pl. XXV.

(4) Ceylon.

(5) The 'Monk with the Little Snake'.

stones and pewter. Each of us wishes his particular contribution to be included in the whole.'

The monk listened to them, then said :

'Very well', and disappeared.

He came to the land of the Hemovan (1); near a rock called Pralom Okap (2), there were twenty hermits.

He explained the purpose of his visit to the two eldest and, while he was speaking, Phra In and all the spirits of Heaven heard his words and they thought :

'Phra In is the first here, Mahā Cholla Nakaleng is the first on earth. It is for him to send the two hermits to fetch the treasure, after which Phra In will consider the matter.'

When this idea had been conveyed to the monk of Lanka, he added, at the end of his pronouncement : 'I would therefore ask you to leave as soon as possible.'

During this time, the offering of the inhabitants of Lanka had been placed in the Royal temple. The hermits arrived, took it, without leaving even a fragment, and when the King of Lanka had added 100 nikas of gold for the heart and feet, they returned to the Hemovan after having told him to prepare the celebrations to welcome the statue which would arrive soon.

Phra In and all the gods each added a contribution of gold to the treasure, then the Phra Mahā Cholla Nakaleng and the hermits weighed it and the Tevada Visakam (3) cast it.

This operation took place early, on the 15th day of the fourth month.

Then Phra In and the inhabitants of the Heavens accompanied the image as far as the capital of Lanka.

Mahā Nakaleng informed the King. At once the festivities began, and rich offerings poured in.

Among those which the King laid at the foot of the holy statue there were, in a gold vase, five small bones of the Phra Budom, our Master.

Kneeling on the ground, in front of the Sena-Amat and the monks, in the presence of a vast crowd which had gathered, the pious monarch said :

'We all ask that this Phra, the handiwork of Heaven, should protect the people of Lanka, that he should propagate the true Doctrine and should make all peoples happy. If our wish is granted, may the five bones of the Phra Budom immediately enter the image.'

(1) *Hymāvana* = Himālaya.

(2) *Prathama Kalpa* = 'first-born'.

(3) Vishnu-Varma, one of the architects of Indra.

As he finished speaking, the little bones attached themselves to the forehead, bosom, stomach and the two hands of the glorious Phra.

The ground all around was strewn with flowers which the joyful angels cast as they left.

After the image had been exhibited for seven days, with great festivity, the King had a temple built in a very propitious spot called Sra Bang Kata, — whence the name Bang given to the new image.

There were other reasons for giving this name, including the two following:

Khao-bang is what they call the act of collecting objects as in the case of the offering and the casting of the image. Also the name bang (lightened) is given to the state of sick people or those who have sinned and who, after praying at the foot of the Phra, are either cured or forgiven.

During the reign of the seven Kings, Phra Bang showered earthly blessings upon Lanka.

At that time, the Mahā Putta Kossa Chan Chao (1), of Enthipal (Intapath) having come to Lanka to learn, told his King, when he returned home, about the presence of the Phra Bang in the Great Island, and how all wishes were granted by the image.

That was how they came to learn, in Nakôn Luong, of the existence of a Phra in Lanka made of gold, iron, silver, copper and precious stones and weighing four mœuns, two pahns and five rois, an all-powerful deity (2).

The King, having the interests of all at heart, asked his friend in Lanka for the image. The latter, remembering the wishes of his ancestor granted this request and the Phra Bang arrived shortly afterwards at Enthipal (Intapath).

When it was decided to send the image to Xieng-Dong Xien-Tông, the Phra Bang had been in the great capital during the reign of seven Kings.

(From Auguste Pavie's French translation)

(1) Prince of the monks of the Great Buddha.

(2) 42,500 (?).

**Establishment of Buddhism
Foundation of the Wat Keo
and of the First Monasteries**



Photo R. Cauchetier

LUANG PRABANG. — WAT MAI
The Phra Bang, Palladium of the Kingdom

Pl. XXV



Establishment of Buddhism Foundation of the Wat Keo and of the First Monasteries

The Phra Mahā Pasaman then said: 'Our Lord the Sabbannu Gotama came and left his footprint at Nôn Sop Rôp. The four Arahanta Cao left their footprints on the top of Mount Kľa, the starting-point in the history of all the countries of the past.'

From that time the Phra Mahā Pasaman Cao was ready to establish religion. He asked Phya Fa for permission, saying: 'We have brought back an entirely true story from Nakôn Luong: what does the King now authorise us to do?' The Phya Fa said: 'All the provinces of the Muong Lan Xang, whichever they may be, are (propitious) places to establish religion. I will allow the Cao Ku to establish religion in the land of this Muong Lan Xang. As for the woods and bamboo plantations, I authorise the Cao Ku to take supplies whenever they like wherever they like, except for gardens, parks and the sacred trees (mai ming) in towns and villages. With those restrictions, I will allow the Cao Ku to take all they want. Any man who commits an offence against me, the Queen, or the Senā Amāts, and who manages to enter the confines of the Three Jewels or of the Cao Ku, I will grant his life?'

Then the Mahā Pasaman Cao called for the chiefs, beginning with Norasing, Norasan, Noranaray, and Noradet, as well as the clans of the four Cao and settled them in a place called Nôn Sop Rôp in the North, where history tells us there was a Phra Pādalakkhana (1) of the Phra Gotama our Lord.

As for those who were the servants of Nang Kéo Lôl Fa, he handed them over to her.

When the Mahā Pasaman Mantavanavāsī Cao went and settled at Nôn Sop Rôp, it was the fourth month, the third day of the waxing moon, a Saturday.

The famous brothers waited six days; then they took shoots from the Bo tree and planted them there for the purpose of building a

(1) The Phra Bat is on the banks of the Mekong, a little to the North of the confluence of the Huei Rôp.

mahāceti and a vihāra; they planted this Bo tree in the 4th month, the 9th day of the waxing moon, a Friday.

The day the Bo tree was planted, the Phya Fa and the Queen, the Palace officials, the merchants, and the people of the Muong spent seven days in adoration. Then, in the 6th month, on the 7th day of the waxing moon — a Sunday — they built a mahāceti on the spot where they had planted the Bo tree.

The Mahā Pasaman took a relic, the knuckle-bone of the right hand of the Buddha, together with the precious stones which the King of Nakôn Luong had given the Phya Fa, and placed them (in the ceti) with the relic. Such was the state of things for two whole years. In the third year, they built Wat Kêo, finishing it in the same year. Nang Kêo Lôt Fa took an emerald which she was wearing and placed it on the breast of the Great Buddha. She made offerings to the Three Jewels in this place of many rice-fields (ray na). She gave serfs to feed the monks, 20 families with the lands of the villages in which they lived. Also serfs to look after the gongs, 5 families; serfs to sweep and look after the Wat, to keep the rice-offerings and the wax for candles used in the worship of the Buddha, 5 families. She gave the nurse maid who had come to serve her, to the Mahā Pasaman together with all her servants.

On their way they had stopped at a village forming part of the Muong Kê; this place was called Kôp Phai. The Cao Mun of Muong Kê gave this land to the nurse-maid: it was, 1,000 royal span wide by 2,000 long. The Cao Mun had rice-fields prepared to nourish the nurse-maid. Then he sent word to the Phya and Nang Kêo Lôt Fa. The Phya said: 'The Cao Mun Kê has given land to the nurse-maid to be made into villages and rice-fields. We are pleased. Moreover, we gave the nurse-maid as a gift together with all her possessions; (therefore) the places forming part of this heritage will all belong to Wat Kêo.' That is why this place was called Ban Phai mê nom kap Vat Kêo.

From that time the villages were very generous and very good; the religion of the Buddha flourished; the Kings distributed liberalities to Wat Kêo and showered charters and favours on the Phra Mahāsāmi Cao.

Seventeen years after the foundation of Wat Kêo, the Phya Sam Sên Tai Trayabhuvanānātha, son of Phya Fa, ascended the throne. A year later, he built the Wat Manorom and had a copper image of the Buddha cast, which still exists in the Wat Manoratha. This Buddha, according to an inscription in stone, weighs 9 lan 7 sen. The Phya Sam Sên Tai, during his reign, erected the Wat Uposatha, opposite Vat Kêo; there were then three Wats in the Muong Xua.

(From Louis Finol's French translation)

X

FOLKLORE



Sayings

When one has heard, one must listen, and when one has seen one
[must judge with one's heart.

One should only believe with one ear and keep the other in reserve.

Three cubits go in and three spans come out.
(meaning the exaggerations of gossips).

A single fish makes a basketful turn bad.

We take on the colour of the Good by living in their company,
We are soiled by living in the company of the Bad.

A beautiful soul is better than a beautiful form.

Ability is worth less than experience.
Ten sons-in-law are not worth one father-in-law.

*When one acts one should act with all one's heart and soul and not turn
round even if the loved one tickles one's ribs a thousand times.*

We must bear with the mud to eat the eels (in it).

*(Even) those who have four feet may slip up,
Those who know may (therefore) make mistakes.*

One has to cross upstream, higher up,
to come downstream properly.

A tray full of money is not worth a mind full of knowledge.

Do not let us worry about ten *salungs* (coins) on the opposite bank.
But we should hasten to take two *salungs* which fall into our hands.

We rush wherever the wind blows.

Some are brave in the village but coward in the forest.

*To judge an elephant you must look at its tail,
In the case of a girl you must see her mother.*

A man's stripes are inside him
 Those of a tiger are outside.
(he doesn't conceal his real nature).

It's like the hare that thinks it could kiss the moon.

Low-lying places sink even lower while high places rise even higher.
(this is the situation of the rich and the poor).

The rich man becomes richer and the poor man becomes poorer.

The voice of the poor has no carrying-power.

A single log cannot make a fire.

Without subjects, the lord's boat cannot move forward
(Variant in Sam-Neua:... the village is not built.)

Like the eel trying to get blood out of a crab.
(Trying to get blood out of a stone).

The hurricane (the red wind) is not so strong as the winds of the
 [mouth (slander).

The man who has eaten warm food feels warmth in his belly
(cf., 'If the cap fits...').

The old buffalo only likes tender grass
(allusion to an old man running after a young damsel).

Let us eat while it is hot and dance when we are drunk.

The elephant's foot closes the bird's beak.

(Collected by Paul LÉVY).

Our money will reach 'hundreds' because we love and look after
 [number 'one'.

Nine patiences and nine perseverances will bring us ingots.

Work is the source of all properly.

When one is among vultures one becomes a vulture;
 When one is among the crows one becomes a crow.

Ten mouths speaking are not as good as seeing with one's own eyes;
Ten eyes that see are not as good as what one has in one's hand.

Paradise is in the breast and Hell is in the heart.

To build a palace in the air.
(cf., 'Castles in the air').

To cut water with a sword.

When the buffaloes fight it is the grass that suffers.

To eat while it is hot;
Dance whenever one likes.

To pour water drop by drop into a large pitcher.

An empty pot makes a loud noise
(*Empty vessels make the most noise*).

*The cock's beauty lies in his feathers,
A man's in his clothing.*

To nourish a snake so that he will bite you
(Cf. 'To nourish a viper in one's bosom').

*Table-companions are easy to find;
But death-companions are rare* (those who consent to risk their
[lives for us]).

When we go away we lose our ground
When we leave our house we lose our columns (*house*)

Silk-worms are not fed while they are asleep.

Luck does not follow him who wants too much.

Gold which falls to the ground does not get tarnished.

To want to take the moon and the stars
(*To cry for the moon*)

The meal goes off and the fish arrives.

Animals may slip;
Wise men may make mistakes;
Golden swans may be caught in a trap.

*When the water-level falls, the ants eat the fish;
When the water-level rises, the fish eat the ants.*

Fish swarm in cool water;
They leave hot water.
(*A fly is not caught with vinegar*).

Fruit do not fall far from the tree.

It's no more difficult than peeling a banana
(*It is not so very difficult*).

*To leave with your eyes,
and come back with your body* (to return empty handed)

A child does not know about bird-lime; a *pa kang* fish does not
know about a net but enters it following the current.

To write like a scratching hen
(Scrawling writing)

To leave for the village where the cock does not crow (*to die*).

*To have a pain in the breast as if it had been burnt,
To have a pain in the heart as if it had been struck by a thunderbolt.*

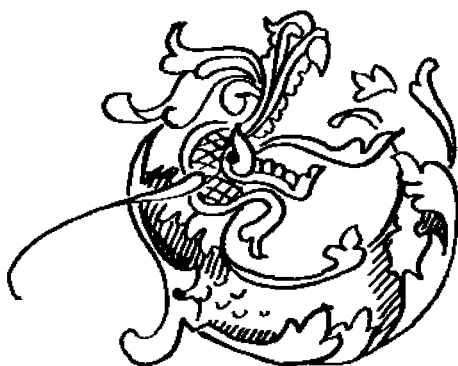
To play the flute in a buffalo's ear.

*To put roasted rice in a monkey's paw
(*'To cast pearls before swine'*).*

When a man falls we do not pass over his body;
When a tree falls we can step over it.

*A mouth that acts (speaks) too quickly makes one lose confidence;
Feet which are too nimble make one fall from the tree.*

(Collected by Pierre S. NGINN)





Legends and Fables

Two Legends

collected by
Banyen LÉVY

THE PHI-KONG-KOY (1)

Once upon a time, a man lived in a village at the foot of a mountain. To feed his family he used to fish in a little river nearby. One morning, when he went to look at his net, he noticed that it was empty. He came back in the evening but it was still empty; the next day also, but, as there were still some remains of a fish in it, he was intrigued and, upon looking at the sand all round, he discovered traces of a child's footprints. 'Ah', he said to himself, 'I'll catch him and give him a good hiding.'

Then he followed the footprints, which led him to a cave. He entered and it closed behind him. There he saw a little girl, quite naked, with reddish hair and feet turned backwards. He realized then that it was nothing more or less than a *phi-kong-koy*. He at once begged her not to eat him up. This the demon promised provided that he would obey her and become her husband. As a reward all the riches of the *phi* would belong to him. He would also have to guard the cave during the frequent absences of the demon who went off to find their daily pittance. The man was obliged to promise whatever she wanted in the hope that he would be able to escape from her. And, as he had noticed that she always said the opposite of what she meant, he took advantage one evening, when she had gone out 'for a little while', of this excellent opportunity to run away with a sack full of gold.

But, being of a suspicious nature, the demon had come back earlier than expected and, seeing that the cave was empty, ran

(1) *Phi-kong-koy*: *phi* = which makes : '*kong koy*', a cry one might hear in the night and which terrifies the Laotians, especially when the demon ends his cries with that of '*kak!*', for at that moment, so they say, the spirit penetrates the buttocks of the human being of its choice and devours his entrails.

off after her husband. She soon caught up with him. Then he stopped, squatted down, and stuck his head into a yam hole (1), shamming dead. The *phi-kong-koy* came up and said: 'Come back with me quickly or I shall punish you severely.' He did not move. She spoke to him sweetly, promised him a thousand things, but he still remained unmoved. Then she tickled him but he managed to resist this treatment. But, as she was smelling him, he broke wind. 'Oh', she said, my dear husband is certainly dead since his body already smells bad! She wept for a long time then buried him with the bag of gold beside him. Then she went away.

The man waited till it was light, then went home. He told people his story and one of his neighbours, full of envy, decided to do the same. He put his bownet in the river, followed the tracks of the *phi-kong-koy* and was shut up in the cave with her. The demon told her story and offered him the position of her late husband. The neighbour naturally accepted and waited for an opportunity to run away with the treasure. The demon followed him, so he tried to lighten his load by dropping some of the sacks and finally reached a *rai* where yams were growing. He popped his head into a hole and remained motionless like his predecessor. The *phi-kong-koy* said the usual things to him then, in desperation, began to tickle him. The poor man was not able to stand it long and burst out laughing. She laughed too, then, exclaiming: '*Kong koy! Kong koy!*' ate up his entrails.

The next day when they came to the *rai*, people, discovered the poor man lying there with his belly stuffed with bamboo chips and realized who had killed him.

THE GOLDEN TURTLE (2)

There was once an old couple who lived on their own, without any children. The man lended his rai and his garden, in which there grew rice, melons, maize and vegetables. He also used to go hunting while the old woman span, prepared the rice and also fished with her khoeng (3).

One day, while she was fishing, she found a little Turtle. She set it free, went further afield and... caught the same Turtle again. She at once threw it back into the stream. The Turtle let itself be caught for the third time. It must be admitted that it was a sweet, pretty Golden Turtle.

(1) The voluminous roots of the yam leave deep holes in the mounds of earth in which they grow.

(2) The Laotians generally consider the Turtle to be of the masculine sex, but we shall use the neuter "it" in English.

(3) *Khoeng*, a half-sphere in bamboo work which is generally used by women for fishing in shallow water.

— *Keep me, it said to the old woman. I shall be useful to you.*

— *Very well, said the old woman, I'll take you. You will bring a bit of life into our sad, childless home. You will belong to us and we shall be very fond of you.*

The old man was very pleased with his wife's find and both of them spoiled their Golden Turtle. The Turtle, in return, was all kindness, gratitude and good advice for, apart from its gift of speech, it also had the gift of prophecy.

One day it said to the old man :

— *Father, in a week's time, a terrible flood will devastate the country ; it will be so terrible that all the houses and all the trees will be covered with water. So you must prepare a raft and provisions.*

The old man made haste and, in less than a week, the skiff was ready. Then it began to rain heavily. On the seventh day the river overflowed and everything was submerged. There were only a few crafts afloat, attached to trees and the water carried away tree-trunks, debris of all kinds, animals and human beings, both dead and alive.

The Golden Turtle said to its adopted parents :

— *Father and mother, I shall dive down to look after the rope that fastens our raft to the tree ; if you need me, strike the rope and I'll come to the surface.*

The two old people never took a decision without first asking the advice of their adopted child and never slept at all on the raft but kept watch in turns.

One day they saw a Tiger swimming towards them.

— *Have pity on me, said the Tiger, and take me on board until the end of the flood. I shall be grateful to you.*

The old people struck the rope and the Turtle appeared :

— *A Tiger is asking for protection, said the man. Shall we take him on board?*

The Turtle agreed to this idea and dived again.

Shortly afterwards, a huge Snake came alongside and said :

— *For pity's sake, take me on board until the end of the flood, and I shall be grateful to you, old woman.*

The old woman called the Turtle which once again accepted the idea, so they kept the Nāga. Then the Turtle went back to its observation-post. The next time it was a man who grasped the raft saying :

— *I am exhausted, old man and woman, keep me till the end and I shall be grateful to you.*

The man got onto the raft and they called the Turtle.

— Since he is a human being, you cannot let him perish, father and mother, said the Turtle, adding: In seven days time the waters will go down and we shall see the earth once again.

And so they did. The three survivors bade the old people and the Golden Turtle farewell, promising to come back and see them.

* *

Several months elapsed and life returned again to the country. The Tiger had been able to get back to the forest. Now, on one occasion when the King's daughter was going to visit the Queen of a distant country, she and her suite halted for the night in the forest. While they were asleep, the Tiger came and stole the Princess' jewel-case and went and hid it carefully while they looked for the thief throughout the Kingdom. Shortly afterwards, the Tiger brought the case to the old people, saying:

— Here is something to repay you for your kindness to me.

The old folk, who did not know where the case had come from, put it right in the middle of their main room. Shortly afterwards the man they had saved came to see them and, when he saw the case, ran off to report them to the King. The old couple were arrested and thrown into prison.

Then the Snake went to see the Turtle, which told him the whole story. The Snake went off to the Palace, crawled into the Princess's chamber and, while she was asleep, injected poison into her eyes to blind her.

For many long days the Princess howled and writhed in agony. In vain did the King send for all the healers of that country and the neighbouring lands; not one of them could do anything for the Princess.

— Let all people come and try to cure my daughter, said the King, and he who succeeds shall have half of my Kingdom.

Then there came nobles, peasants, merchants and canoe-men but nobody was successful in curing the Princess. As the whole Kingdom had tried and there was nobody left except the two poor old prisoners, the King ordered them to be brought in as well. Now, in the meantime, the Snake, which had come back to see them in their prison, had told them what he had done and gave them a root which had the power to cure what he had done.

— In this way, you will be repaid for your generosity towards me, he told them.

So the Princess was cured and the old people, by receiving half the Kingdom, became King and Queen in their turn.



The Pupils of the Lycée Pavie in Vientiane tell you some Fables and Legends of their own Country, handed down by word of mouth

Texts assembled by
Andrée-Yvette GOUINEAU,
Teacher of Literature at the Lycée Pavie.

*Thao Bounnaphol (1st M. 1, 1954-55) from Luang Prabang
tells you the story of:*

LIKE A STAR

Three friends were travelling in the Upper Region. One evening they lost their way and at nightfall found themselves lost in the heart of the forest. They were frightened, terribly frightened.

How could they rest without running the risk of being devoured by wild beasts or attacked by brigands? They quarreled for a long time, each one wanting to lie between the two others so as to be less exposed to danger. Finally, one of them found a solution:

'Let us sleep head outwards and feet to feet, in the shape of a star', he said.

That is what they did. At midnight, an elephant came towards them. He was stupefied and went off to tell the monkey:

'I have just seen an extraordinary creature. It has three separate heads and feet in the middle of its body.'

The monkey wanted to see this wonder, so the elephant led him to the three travellers. He was so frightened of this living star that he ran away at full speed, crying:

'Let us run away. It is the devil. He will eat us up.'

All the wild animals ran away terrified in the same direction as the monkey, as far as possible from the three men, who were thus able to pass a very pleasant night...

Houmpheng Sirathana (1st M 1, 1955-56) from Luang Prabang, tells you the story of

THE GOLDEN JAR

Once upon a time there were two friends who lived in the country. The first had a charitable nature and many fine qualities. The second was insolent. Both of them were poor and worked hard to earn their living.

One day, the one who had a charitable disposition found an old man who was tired and ill and had fallen into a ditch.

He lifted up the old man kindly and took him to his own house where he offered him food and then his own bed.

At midnight the old man had the belly-ache. The young man brought him a jar. It was quickly filled with excrements. The young man put a board over it. At dawn the next day, he wanted to lift it up to throw away the contents but was unable to do so: the jar had become too heavy. He was surprised, and took off the lid, only to find that it was filled with pieces of gold.

He turned round to question the old man, but the latter had already disappeared, for he was a genius.

So the young man became very rich.

But his friend wanted to become rich too. He received the old man, behaved in the same way, and even went so far as to offer him two jars...

But this insolent and selfish man was unlucky. The next day he discovered that the excrements had not turned to gold...

Seune Phelsanghane (2nd M I, 1955-1956) from Savannakhet, tells you

ANOTHER VERSION OF THE 'PHI-KONG-KOY'

Once upon a time there were two poor peasants who lived in their fields. During the thinning-out season, one of them, to catch some fish, put a bownet into the stream which flowed across the rice-field. Every morning he went to the spot where he had set up his trap and caught fish. One day he found his trap, woven of bamboo, out of the water: all the fish had disappeared. He thought he had been robbed, but was surprised to see tiny footprints in the muddy soil. The foot did not seem to be longer than three toe-joints. 'No man could have such small feet and a child of that age could not walk', thought the peasant. And he put his bownet back in the water without managing to solve this mystery.

The next day, the same thing happened. This time he was very annoyed and, driven on by thoughts of revenge as well as curiosity, he decided, on the following night, to hide behind a leafy bush.

At dawn, after a long night's vigil, he heard light footsteps, then noticed a *phi-kong-koy* on the banks of the stream. It was a female dwarf with a dark complexion and long flowing hair, like a witch. She was completely naked.

The man bellowed angrily: « I shall cut you up into a thousand pieces, you abomination », and rushed at the *phi-kong-koy*. But the latter was so strong that the man was powerless to carry out his threat and was in fact finally captured himself. The witch took him to her home, which was a closed den, and forced him to become her spouse. Each time the *phi-kong-koy* went off in search of food, she would close the door carefully with an enormous stone that weighed 3 or 4 tons.

After a year of married life, they had a child. The peasant had to look after it during his wife's absence. Three years of imprisonment went by... Then, one day, as the child was leaning against the slab which blocked the entrance, it rolled over: the child had inherited its mother's supernatural strength, and in this way the peasant was freed.... and ran away.

After running a long way, he reached the path leading to the village, but the *phi*, which had set off in pursuit of him, very nearly caught up with him. Then he played a cunning trick: he laid down on the ground and shammed dead. When his wife came up to him, she tickled him... but unsuccessfully. On the contrary, he relieved himself, thus causing such a horrible smell that his wife thought he was really dead.

Then she wept and brought him a gong, giving him the following instructions:

« Any time you need anything you have only to strike this gong. »

So the man returned home and, when he found his friend again, he became very rich.

His friend asked him where he had spent the last three years. When he heard the strange story, the friend exclaimed: « I should like to get rich too ». So he let the *phi-kong-koy* catch him, then escaped. Unfortunately for him he was unable to keep still when she tickled him, and so was eaten up.

When somebody fails in an attempt in which another person has been successful, we call him a *phi-kong-koy lô lun*, that is to say: an unsuccessful imitator of the *phi-kong-koy*. This very often happens, for where one gets through, the next one gets caught.

Issara Katay Sasorith (1st M. 1, 1955-56) from Pakse, gives a very brief account of the legend of the

FOUR FRANGIPANES (1)

Once upon a time there was a powerful King called Maha Sivil. He had a peaceful reign and was loved by all his subjects. He had two wives in his Palace, one of which was the official Queen, the other the second Queen.

One day, a forester came and told the King that there was a herd of wild elephants in the locality. The King would have preferred not to go out, as his wife was in confinement. But, in order to defend his people in time of danger, he decided to go and hunt the dangerous animals.

The King had been away for three days when Mahesi, the Queen, gave birth to four children — four boys. The second wife, in a fit of jealousy, immediately thought of a cunning trick. As she was keeping Mahesi's eyes shut during childbirth, she took advantage of the situation to substitute four little dogs for the four human babies. She had the children put on a light raft on the river, being convinced that they would soon sink.

When the King returned and found out about the birth of the puppies, he drove his first wife out of the Palace.

As for the four babies, they were found by an old woman-gardener, Mechamchouane, who brought them up with great joy because she had no sons of her own. The four brothers grew up contentedly under her wing.

. . .

One day, the wicked Queen learned that the children were not dead. So she ordered a servant to find them and poison them. Her orders were carried out, and Mechamchouane wept for her adopted sons who had been killed.

But four frangipanes sprang up on the four tombs. The Queen, who was furious when she learned of this, sent her soldiers to cut down the four bushes and throw them into the river. This they did.

Now it came about that a young monk saw, floating on the water, the flowers of the four frangipanes, which were still fresh. He took one of them in his hands and was horrified to see, instead of sap, a drop of blood ooze out at the end of the stem. He went to see Phra

(1) *Champa si taunk* in Laotian. The very long text of this legend — one of the most famous in Laos — will be published in its entirety by the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*.

Reusi, the prophet, and told him this story. The prophet at once realized that these were the flowers of four bushes embodying four Saints from Heaven. He watered them with holy water and the four frangipanes changed into four young men who were both handsome and wise, and who studied under him.

. . .

After learning the arts of warfare and of the Holy Texts, the four brothers set off in search of their father's Kingdom. One day they came to a large town. They asked who was its chief, and as it so happened, it was Maha Sivil. By requesting an audience for four ordinary people, the King felt he had been mocked. He sent his soldiers out to arrest the four brothers.

They put up a brave defence and even repelled the armed men. The King, in a rage, attacked them himself. He fired arrows at them but the arrows changed into cakes, while the arrows fired by the four brothers turned into flowers.

Then the King realized that it was his own four sons who were fighting against him. So he welcomed them into his Palace, sent for their Mother who had been banished and exiled the second, wicked Queen for ever. The Royal family, united at last, lived happily ever after.

Tiao Pouang savath (1st M 1, 1955-56) from Luang Prabang, tells a legend about two mountains of the Royal capital:

PHU THAO AND PHU NANG

Once upon a time there was, they say, an ogress by the name of Kinna who lived in a very large, magnificent house on the slopes of a little hill. This ogress had neither husband nor children. She was always alone, her sole companion being the vast forest stretching out at the foot of the hill. Every morning, Kinna used to go for a walk amidst the trees and did not come back to the house until meal-times. She used to gaze at the river which flowed among the flowering herbs. Often she would sit down near a tall banyan tree whose branches threw huge shadows over the vast, damp stretches of ground.

The fact that she spent all her time in the forest meant that she gradually became very popular with the wild animals. Sometimes she would be seen playing with the birds which came in great numbers to sing for her; at other times she would climb onto the neck of a wild elephant or stroke the does and hinds.

One morning, Kinna saw a young man coming into the forest. He was as handsome as Indha (1). The stranger had a gun in his hand, with a bandolier slung over his shoulder. Kinna, who for a very long time had been dreaming of a husband, felt very happy. But, thinking that her ugliness would certainly fail to attract the young man, she uttered some strange words that nobody could understand. Suddenly she turned into a very beautiful girl, more beautiful than anyone could imagine. Then she went up to the boy and asked him:

— What brings you to the forest, big brother?

— I have simply come here to hunt, replied the young man in some astonishment. Do you live here all alone?

— Yes, I am alone among the birds and trees.

The girl's charm and grace soon won the young man's heart. He went up to her and asked her to listen to what he had to say. So they talked together for a while on the banks of the limpid stream, sitting on the green grass. The young man told her his name: Phuthasene, and spoke about his life and family. Kinna then asked him to stay with her for ever, and Phuthasene agreed to do so.

. . .

(1) Indha or Intha : God of Beauty who lives in Heaven.

In the company of his beautiful companion, Phu led such a life of luxury and happiness that he quite forgot his mother who was living in poverty.

One day, Kinna told him in confidence:

— Phu, my friend, I forgot to tell you that in this chest I have some unripe lemons which were left to me by my grandparents. This fruit has magic powers. Have you ever visited my garden?

— No, he replied. Where is it?

— Oh, continued Kinna, it is two miles from our house. But I must beg you never to go and visit it, for that would be dangerous!

Phu did not answer. He remained thoughtful.

One day when Kinna had gone out, Phu took advantage of her absence and went to the forbidden garden. There he discovered a large, deep ditch half filled with human remains. He ran to the house, went into the room and came out again with all the lemons. Then he went off in the direction of the forest.

As she could not find the lemons again, Kinna thought her husband had betrayed her and set off in pursuit of him, with gigantic strides. After a little while she had almost caught up with him. She called out to him, but all in vain. The man quickened his pace and threw a lemon behind him. Suddenly a huge fire broke out, covering nearly all the earth. Kinna's voice could be heard through the flames. Finally she succeeded in mastering the blaze and continued running. Phu threw another lemon, which formed a fresh obstacle: this time, an enormous lake. Kinna, who was breathless, burst into tears. She plunged into the water and began to swim bravely. When she reached the opposite bank, she collapsed, utterly weary and despondent. She could no longer speak. She prayed to Heaven to punish her ungrateful husband, and her eyes closed for ever.

Under the influence of Dheva (1) Phu's heart was stirred to pity and love. He felt he had been unmanly in causing so much suffering for the woman to whom he owed so much. He made his way back, only to find Kinna lifeless on the banks of a river. He threw himself on to her body and tried to bring her to life. But all in vain; he lost hope and fell back lifeless on the dead woman.

The bodies of Kinna and Phu remained for ever on the edge of the water and, some centuries later, became two legendary mountains called Phu Thao (2) and Phu Nang (3) which can be seen near Luang Prabang (4).

(1) *Dheva* or *Theva*: Queen of Beauty who lives in Heaven.

(2) *Phu Thao*: 'Mountain of the Man'.

(3) *Phu Nang*: 'Mountain of the Woman'.

(4) The complete text of this legend has been published by Louis Finot. A very similar version can be found in other Cambodian stories.

Here, told by Marie-Thérèse Lamache (1st M 1, 1955-56) from Vientiane, is

THE GIRL WITH THE SWEET SMELLING HAIR (1)

Once upon a time there was a childless widow who used to work hard in the rice-field near the forest.

One day, as she was thirsty, she looked for water all over the place. Finally she discovered some in a puddle hollowed out by the large, footprint of an elephant.

She drank thirstily and a few months later she was pregnant. She gave birth to a little girl whose soft hair gave forth a deliciously fragrant odour. She called her daughter Nang Phom Hom, the 'Girl with the Sweet Smelling Hair'.

The next year, the widow was once more faced with a shortage of water one hot day when she was very thirsty. She saw some drops of liquid in the tracks of a tiger. The woman swallowed them and was soon expecting another child. This was also a little girl.

The mother had explained her adventure to all those who had shown astonishment at these mysterious births, for she was not known to have any lovers. And people laughed at her; she was very unhappy.

When the girls were old enough to understand, they were mystified by the jokes of the village children. They were called 'The Elephant's Daughter' and 'The Tiger's Daughter'. They were laughed at and scorned and they pestered their mother with questions.

The poor woman wept and pined away, and, when she felt she was at death's door, told the girls how they had been born.

* * *

When the funeral ceremony had come to an end, Nang Phom Hom took her little sister far away from the village into the forest and began to look for her father. No wild beast harmed this child whose hair smell so sweet, nor the younger sister who was under her protection. She asked all the animals where she could find the King of the Elephants, whom she finally met.

The 'Girl with the Sweet Smelling Hair' — so tiny in front of the huge beast — told her story and gave the Elephant to understand that her younger sister had the same origins as herself.

The Elephant let out a long trumpeting sound — for in those days the animals could speak — and said:

— If you are my daughter, I shall soon know, for you will be able to walk on my back.

(1) The complete text of this legend will be published subsequently by the Bulletin of the *Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*.

The younger sister tried at once, but fell. The Elephant in his fury stamped on her and crushed her with his heavy feet. Phom Hom wept bitterly over the death of her sister, then attempted the ordeal in her turn. She walked steadily along the broad back from head to tail, without falling off.

The Elephant, who was now satisfied and indeed delighted, recognized her as his daughter.

. . .

From then on she lived very happily in the luxurious Palace where her father had taken her. Her father, who was terrifying to others, would spend hours gazing at his daughter, admiring her and smelling the sweet fragrance of her hair.

When he realized he was at death's door, he asked her to promise, that she would protect the honour of his Royal family.

. . .

Phom Hom remained alone in her Palace for some time; then as she had grown up to be a big girl, she began to dream of a worthy husband.

One day, as she was bathing in the river, it occurred to her that she might put a lock of her sweet-smelling hair in a tiny net and leave it to the tender mercies of the wavelets. Whoever brought it back should marry her, she thought. And she prayed Heaven that he would be handsome and good.

. . .

A young Prince on a distant shore found the net and could not resist the pervasive perfume of the fine hair. He set off at once in search of the girl to whom the hair belonged and at last met the Elephant's Daughter and became her happy spouse.

Lang-Sanh Souvannasoth (2nd M 1, 1955-56) from Savannakhet, recalls an old legend:

THE WEDDING OF THAO BUTSABA (1)

In Laos, our grandparents often tell the tale of the marvellous wedding of Thao Butsaba, a young man who was loved by the Heavens.

When Butsaba was old enough to take wife, he went through many lands in search of happiness. He was liked by everybody, because of his kindness and simple ways. He had indeed received a multitude of gifts at birth.

One day, after a tiring walk, this young man with the ever-smiling face stopped on the banks of a stream near a Royal Palace to quench his thirst. In the far distance, he caught sight of a girl carrying two pails of water. Without a moment's hesitation he went up to her to ask her for a drink.

— Where are you taking this water? he asked.

— To my mistress, a charming young Princess known and loved by everybody.

— Will you give me a drink? asked the young man.

The girl handed him her pail. The traveller quenched his thirst, thanked her warmly, and the servant girl went off.

When she reached the Palace, she told her mistress, while washing her hair, about everything that had happened. As the water was being poured over her hair the Princess suddenly felt something strike her lightly and a small object slipped down her neck. It was a ring, which she hid in her hand, and did not say a word about it.

She thought to herself: « Perhaps this jewel is a sign that I shall find a suitor ».

— Go and see, she said to the servant, if the man about whom you spoke is looking for something. If he is, you will say to him: 'Do not trouble yourself any longer. What you have lost will be returned to you if the King grant you the hand of his only daughter, Princess Kêo-Fa'.

The servant-girl ran after the stranger and gave him the message. Butsaba, who had been looking everywhere for his ring for it had precious memories for him — suddenly felt infinitely happy, and his sole thought was... to present himself to the King.

(1) In *Laotian Đông Kinh Kháng Thao Butsaba*. A version of this legend has been published, under the title of *Rothisen*, in the *Contes* transcribed by Maurice Boucher.

* *

The next day, he appeared at Court with a confident expression and a face pale with joy, hope and fear. The King could see clearly that his daughter had reached the age when she should marry, but he could not bring himself to part with her, and so he obliged all her suitors to undergo extraordinary tests so that he could have an excuse for refusing them.

When he saw Butsaba, he felt that this time he was in serious danger of losing his daughter and tried to think of the most difficult tests in order to make him fail.

The King ordered his servants to bring a basket full of grains of rice and warned the young man:

« Every one of these grains has been counted and they will all be thrown into the gardens and woods in the vicinity. If you can bring them all back tomorrow and if there is not a single grain missing, you will have passed the test. »

Butsaba, after leaving the Palace, knelt down and murmured this prayer:

« Oh, all you birds, insects, and ants, my friends! Do not eat the grains that have just been thrown on the ground, but, rather, help me to pick them up. »

At these words, joyful twitterings could be heard in the branches of the trees. The prayer had been heard, for Butsaba was very kind, and all the animals loved him. At once the birds, insects, and the ants in particular, set to, and, dashing hither and thither, soon brought back all the grains that had been scattered.

The young man caressed some of them, smiled at the others, and said to every one of them: « Thank you, thank you! »

He brought the basket full of grains back to the Palace, and there was not a single grain missing. The King was greatly surprised and declared to the suitor:

« Very well, I see that you are loved by the Heavens. But you must undergo other tests. »

* *

The following day, he took Butsaba to the banks of a wide river. His servants brought the same basket and he gave orders for all the grains to be thrown into the foaming waters.

« Bring me back the basket this evening with all the grains, without a single one missing. »

When the King had gone, the young man spoke to the fishes, begging them with all his heart to help him to find all the grains

again. Then he invoked the Spirit of the river. All the fishes quickly answered the prayer of their kind friend and, in the evening, Butsaba brought the King the basket with absolutely all the grains in it. The King was greatly astonished and said to the young man:

« Very well, I see that you are loved by the Heavens. But there is one last trial that you must undergo. Tomorrow, all the girls in the Palace will put their fingers through a hole in a wall. You will be on the opposite side of the wall and will be able to see all the fingers. You will have to guess which is my daughter's. If you guess rightly, the Princess will be yours; but if you make a mistake, you must give up all hope. »

The next day, Butsaba passed in front of the fingers, each one prettier than the next. His heart leapt with joy as he stopped in front of one of them, having recognized the missing ring... He knelt down, pressed the finger to his lips, and humbly kissed it.

. . .

The King then understood the wishes of the Heavens. He agreed to the marriage of the young people and, in order that his beloved daughter, Princess Kéo-Fa, should not go away, gave his Kingdom to Butsaba, the young man who was loved by the Heavens, by the animals and by men.

Only Siamnouay (2nd M 1, 1955-56) from Pakse, tells you

THE STORY OF THOUKATA

In a far distant age there lived a young man called Thoukata. He was so poor that he had to go begging in his own village in order to make a living. But soon the villagers began to hate him. One fine day they drove him away, calling him a good-for-nothing idler.

Thoukata, with tears in his eyes, had to leave his own village. « Where shall I go? » he asked himself sadly. He set off at random, walking until he came to a large town.

There he learnt that, in that part of the country, otter skins fetched a high price. So, driven by hunger, he set out to look for otters. He was walking along the banks of a river, not far from the town, when he saw a magnificent otter. He went towards the animal, but it ran into a hole. When he saw the otter's head, after digging out the hole with his knife, he took the piece of material he was wearing on his body and tried to wrap the animal up in it. But the otter sprang up so violently that it carried off the material into the middle of the river. Thoukata picked up his knife and threw it at the otter. Poor Thoukata! He never looked before he leaped! Without even reaching its target, the knife sank to the bottom of the river and the otter, which had had a narrow escape, calmly swam off. Thoukata had lost all his belongings at one and the same time — the knife and the piece of material in which he was clad.

« What can I do now that I have lost everything? » he thought, and began to cry like a child.

At that very moment a rich merchant came by, carrying a pot of honey in his hands.

« Why are you crying, young man? » he asked Thoukata; then, noticing that he was naked, he added:

« Ah, I see that you have been stripped by robbers. »

« Oh, my Lord, » answered Thoukata, « it was not thieves that left me in this sorry state... » and told him the sad story. Then he said, in conclusion:

« My Lord, I should like to go into business, but for that purpose I need money and I have none. »

Now it so happened that the merchant had need of an assistant.

« Take this pot of honey, » he said, « and come with me. If you run my business well, you shall become my son-in-law. »

Thoukata took the pot of honey and joyfully followed the merchant but suddenly he stumbled and dropped the pot of honey.

The merchant was surprised at such clumsiness:

« Thoukata, you are big and strong. How is it, then, that you are unable to carry a pot of honey? »

« I am going to become a big tradesman and that frightens me », answered Thoukala.

They reached the merchant's house without further mishaps. Some weeks later, Thoukala was running his master's business as well as the merchant himself. So that he was soon able to marry his master's daughter.

. * .

Several months elapsed. Then, one day, Thoukala said to his wife:

« Go and tell your father that I need money to go to a certain town to do business. Tell him that, when I come back, he will be even richer. »

The young woman went to see her father and told him what his son-in-law wanted.

« Your husband can have all the money he needs, » answered the merchant.

So Thoukala received a considerable sum of money. He took part of it and went by canoe to a very distant town. When he landed, he began to shout:

« Who has dung to sell? »

Everybody thought he was mad. Fancy, buying dung! They brought him great quantities. When his canoe was full, he returned to his town and hid the dung in a safe place.

« Have you brought me any money? » asked his father-in-law when he saw him again.

« Not yet, » answered Thoukala.

Some time afterwards, he brought some paddy and went to the town where he had been the previous time. Hardly had he landed than he shouted:

« Who wants to exchange husks for paddy? »

People recognized him and the exchange was soon carried out.

His father-in-law, when he saw him on his return, again asked him:

« Have you brought anything back this time? »

« No, I haven't got anything yet, » answered Thoukala. « Just be patient, it'll work out all right in the end. »

In the course of another voyage, he exchanged new material for old rags.

« Here's the madman again! » said the inhabitants of the town, when they saw Thoukala's canoe lying up for the fourth time. As soon as he had landed, he announced:

« Those who want gold, bring me silver coins. We shall give you as much gold as you bring silver. »

All the inhabitants of the town rushed towards the canoe with silver coins. In a few minutes, the boat was full. When the exchange had been made, Thoukata quickly left the town, singing and dancing. They all gazed after him as he went on his way.

*. * .*

It was not until then that the inhabitants of the town, somewhat slow-witted, realized that what they had taken to be gold ingots were nothing but a mixture of dung, husks and rags, covered with a thin layer of gold.

The so-called madman had tricked them very astutely. In the mean time Thoukata reached the town and had his treasure taken to his father-in-law's house.

« Where did you get that fortune? » asked the merchant.

Thoukata told him the story of his adventures. The rich merchant laughed loudly and congratulated Thoukata on his cleverness.

Thus ends the story of Thoukata, a poor beggar who grew rich and became the happy husband of a beautiful woman.

From Boun Hom Philhaksounhone (2nd National Classics 1955-56) native of Savannakhat:

BAK TUM AND I TAM

Before you begin to read this story, you should know that the words '*Bak*' and '*I*', when used in front of the names of the two characters, are ironical terms used in our country to show that we wish to make fun of people.

And now here is the story:

Once upon a time, there was a married couple who lived in a village. The man's name was Bak Tum, and his wife's, I Tam. They were both sorcerers. They were not happy because they did not love one another. The man thought that his wife was ugly and the woman thought her husband was horrible. They often quarrelled and their neighbours had to intervene to stop them from fighting. They very much wanted to divorce, but neither of them dared mention this idea to the other.

A few leagues from the village there was a large town where reigned a handsome young King called Kalaket. One day, Bak Tum and I Tam learned that there was to be a great ceremony the following day to celebrate the marriage of the King with Nang Phunathet, the Princess of the neighbouring town. They also knew that the Princess had already arrived with her suite and that she had encamped before the gates of the town, for she had to await a propitious occasion to enter the town. She would spend the night there.

That night, Bak Tum and I Tam could not get to sleep, for their heads were filled with evil thoughts. Bak Tum wanted to marry the beautiful Princess and to have his subjects kneel before him. As for I Tam, she wanted to be the Queen and sit on the throne beside the handsome young King and no longer have to put up with the stifling atmosphere of her smoky kitchen and — most important of all — never to see her husband again. At midnight, she left the hut silently, went through the forest and reached the Princess' tent without being spotted by the guards. The Princess was asleep; I Tam blew on her face after muttering some magic words, so that she would not wake up for a week. Then she picked up the sleeping Princess and threw her into the air with all the might of a magician. The poor Princess disappeared into the darkness, and very likely fell to the ground far from the camp. Then the witch, I Tam, changed into a beautiful young woman who looked just like the Princess.

As for Bak Tum, who was quite unperturbed by his wife's absence — for witches are very fond of midnight strolls — he left the hut in his turn and went towards the town. He went like the wind and thanks to his magic powers, had no difficulty

in getting inside the ramparts, although the gates were locked and guarded. He entered the Palace itself and reached the King's bedchamber. He uttered some magic words which sent the King into a very deep sleep. Then he took the sleeping King and threw him into the air with all the might of a sorcerer. The poor King must have fallen to the ground some leagues from the town. Then Bak Tum took on the form of the young Sovereign.

* *

The cocks were already heralding the dawn when the so-called Princess got up and made herself ready. When the soothsayers had announced that the time was propitious to enter the town, she climbed into a sedan-chair adorned with diamonds and gold. She entered the town followed by a long procession of her 'subjects'. The Court officials came to meet her and conducted her to the Palace. As she went past, the inhabitants, standing on either side of the road, greeted what they took to be their future Queen. I Tam smiled at them and imagined, in her heart of hearts, that everything was going very well.

During the wedding ceremony they had the Baci, and there were many entertainments for the inhabitants of the town.

The couple lived together as King and Queen for a whole week without recognizing one another. But as they were both magicians, they were tormented by their thirst for blood. One night, the 'King' got up, went downstairs stealthily and, finding a drowsy guard in front of the Palace gate, strangled him, bit him in the throat and began to suck his blood avidly. Then he went back to his room, thinking that nobody had seen him. He was mistaken, for the 'Queen' had witnessed the whole scene, and had thus discovered that her husband was a sorcerer.

The following day, they found the body of the unfortunate guard. The 'King's' subjects suspected the 'Queen' and the 'Queen's' subjects suspected the 'King'.

The next night, it was the "Queen's" turn to kill a guard and suck his blood. But the 'King' had been watching her and, when she came back, to the Palace, he asked her:

« You are I Tam, aren't you? »

Instead of answering him, she asked in her turn:

« You are Bak Tum, aren't you? »

At that moment, the guards, whose attention had been drawn by the noise they were making, ran up with their arms. Bak Tum and I Tam, who did not know how to justify their conduct, fled from the Palace, and went back to their village where they spent the rest of their lives, in ever-increasing hatred of one another.

XI
EDUCATION

Traditional Education

The Buddhist Institute and Religious Teaching

by

Phouvong PHIMMASONE

The Royal Buddhist Institute is a heritage of the former Buddhist Institute of Indochina, of which the centre was at Phnom-Penh. It combines the two active centres of this institution in Luang Prabang and Pakse.

It is organized and run in accordance with the original statutes of the Buddhist Institute of Indochina, whose aims and general activities are being carried on by the new Institute.

Its aim is to direct and coordinate the study of Theravāda Buddhism in the Kingdom and in particular among the people of Laos. Its general activities include :

a) *the publication of works in the Pāli and Laotian languages and of reviews in Laotian, particularly those concerning Buddhist art and archaeology, as well as the history of Buddhism and of Buddhist countries, universal history and geography, and the history of Religions and Philosophies. Articles concerning other subjects may, however, at the Government's request, be inserted in these reviews for educational or propaganda purposes.*

b) *Religious education given to the pupils of the Pāli schools. By a rational study of the ancient sacred languages — Pāli and Sanskrit — the intention is to encourage and to extend knowledge of the Buddhist Doctrine and all subjects required for the comprehension and elucidation of religious texts, with a view to preparing the monks for their dual task as preachers and educators.*

c) *Research in, and preservation of, various documents concerning the religion and history of the Kingdom (MSS., paintings, and printed works.)*

These activities of the Buddhist Institute can only be carried out in accordance with a programme of study laid down by the Governing

Body of this Establishment, presided over by the Minister of Cults and approved by the Head of the Government in a Ministerial Council.

Any MSS., which the Buddhist Institute may intend to publish in its own right must be submitted for consideration and approval of the Permanent Commission of the Institute and controlled by the Council of Ministers.

The Buddhist Institute is held responsible for the technical supervision of the following Establishments:

1) *The Buddhist libraries of Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Pakse;*

2) *The local Buddhist museums of Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Pakse;*

3) *The elementary, secondary, and higher Pāli Schools for religious teaching in the Kingdom.*

The running of the services of the Buddhist Institute is in the hands of the General Secretary of the Institute, whose functions have been undertaken by the Director of Cults who at the same time is administrative head of the Service of Religious Teaching.

The Buddhist Institute is represented in each province of the Kingdom by an Annex, presided over by the Chief of the province.

At the present time, the activities of the Institute are confined to the field of religious teaching, which is divided into three levels: elementary, secondary, and higher.

The Kingdom now has 74 Pāli schools, distributed nearly over all the provinces. Of these institutions one is attached to the higher level (the Pāli High School in Vientiane), four to the secondary level (at Vientiane, Thakkek, Savannakhet, and Pakse) and the rest to the elementary level.

Elementary education is divided into two sections: Dhamma and Pāli. There are 2,057 pupils in the Dhamma section, and 255 in the Pāli section.

Candidates who have the Elementary Certificate in Pāli (Pāli section) can continue their Pāli studies on the secondary level in one of the Centres in Vientiane, Thakkek, Savannakhet, or Pakse, where there are secondary schools in Pāli. There are 81 pupils in these schools.

There are about 130 teachers in the religious schools, working in the Pāli schools throughout the Kingdom.

The Pāli High School, whose pupils are chosen from among monks with a Diploma in Secondary Studies in Pāli, and which was formed quite recently, will in the near future become the most important centre of religious teaching in the Kingdom.

As regards teaching in the Pāli High School, the main purpose of the Laotian Saṅgha is to complete the general education of the

members of the religious body and to modernize teaching methods.

After six years of Buddhist studies (three on the elementary level and three on the secondary level), the pupils in the religious teaching establishments have an adequate knowledge of their native language, know a little Pāli, Sanskrit and French, as well as part of the Dhamma and of the Vinaya. After that, it is necessary to complete their education by a course of general studies and Buddhist studies in particular.

Consequently, the teaching syllabus of the Pāli High School includes :

(1) General subjects: Laotian, French, and English, civics, history, geography, drawing, mathematics, applied sciences, and religious history;

(2) Buddhist studies: Pāli and Sanskrit;

(3) Teaching of the Dhamma and the Vinaya.

In the Pāli High School, the monks are taught the duties of the citizen and the importance of religion which is at the source of all social activities. When they leave this institution they will be aware of the importance of the part they will be called upon to play in society in the future, both as teachers and as religious leaders.

Laotian Buddhism is a rich source of study as regards language, customs, civilization, culture, art, and certain sciences of the past which have left their mark on the Laotian people. The old teaching methods did not enable pupils to draw on this national treasure. In order to remedy this state of affairs, the Pāli High School sets out to provide a more suitable technique.

The comparative study of the different religions in the world will enable the pupils to understand the evolution of mankind and of theological thought as well as scientific progress.

The aim of the general course of studies given in the Pāli High School is to give the elite of the Saṅgha a sense of their responsibilities when faced with the dangers threatening the nation in which they play a very important part. Scientific progress should induce mankind to seek ideals and rules, proceeding from a study of Truth to a conception of Becoming.

These are the principal aims of the Buddhist Institute and of Religious Teaching in the Kingdom.

Modern Education

I. — Primary Education

by

Tay KEOLUANGKOT,
Director General of Education.

Primary education, like secondary education, has been making steady progress since 1945. In ten years, the number of pupils has increased from 11,000 to nearly 50,000. This rapid development has obviously given rise to serious difficulties. These are of two kinds: the building of schools and the recruiting of teachers. In both fields, considerable efforts have been made. Encouraged by the public authorities, in many cases the villagers erect themselves school buildings while applying for teachers. Thus building is being carried out rapidly throughout the Kingdom. Every year at least fifty schools are being put up. But this is still insufficient. In order to make up for the lack of official establishments, the Government gives every encouragement to pagoda schools where education is entrusted to monk teachers, and to elementary schools which are built by the village authorities, while teachers and books are provided by the State. In large towns the building of teaching centres is actively encouraged.

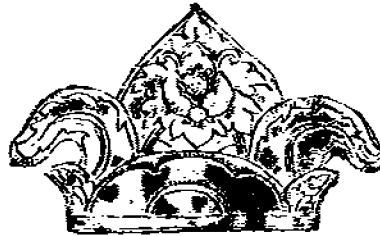
At the same time, the rural education centres — actual outposts of the elementary school system — make it possible to extend teaching considerably. In each of these centres a school master, especially trained for this task, teaches the Three R's as well as the rudiments of hygiene and agriculture. He is also responsible for adult classes, the training of young people, and even the distribution of standard medicine. This system which has proved its worth, was designed to meet the following needs in backward areas:

- Child and adult education;
- Health and First Aid Centres;
- Information Centres for the rural population.

Since the beginning of the school year 1955, a kindergarten has been working in Vientiane, with specially trained school mistresses who have taken a practical training course in Thailand. This is the first experiment in this field and so the Vientiane school will be called upon to train new school mistresses who will subsequently open similar centres in several provincial towns.

This shortage of teachers gives rise to problems which are as difficult to solve as those arising from a shortage of school buildings. Whereas secondary teaching in schools dependent on the Royal Government is given by French teachers, primary education is exclusively in the hands of Laotian school masters. Many centres have been formed to train, not only primary school teachers, but also school masters in the rural teaching centres and elementary schools. In 1947 a Teachers' Training College was founded in Vientiane. It gives teachers a pedagogical training who are given a Lower Middle School education. There are schemes at present under consideration which should make it possible to increase the number of students in this school in order to satisfy the ever-increasing demands of primary education. It is hoped that this college will be able to provide about a hundred new teachers every year.

Consequently, there is still a great deal to be done. But, from what we have said, it is possible to appreciate the efforts that have already been made. The Royal Government allots no less than 16 % of its budget to this task. We should add that the generous and effective support provided by French and American Aid, has been much appreciated. Teaching in Laos has, as we have seen, made a good start. It is quite sound and has a most promising future.



II. — Secondary Education

by

Marc MAUGER,

Director of Second Degree Education.

The increase in the significance of educational problems — and particularly as regards secondary education — is a recent phenomenon in Laos. It was only a few decades ago that it needed considerable official persuasion to make the head of a family allow his children to go to school. Things have changed a great deal. Nowadays the young Laotians, eager to learn, crowd the schools, their common desire being to increase their knowledge. This thirst for knowledge in a country where, as in the other States in South-East Asia, there is a high proportion of young people in the population, makes the teaching problem a very important one. These questions are among the chief preoccupations of the young State of Laos.

At the time of the Japanese coup-de-force on the 9th March, 1945, there were only 11,000 pupils attending the primary schools. As for secondary education for which there was only the Pavie College, it was restricted to no more than 200 Laotians. Until that time, the Lower Certificate (Brevet élémentaire) was as far as studies went in Vientiane. Those who wanted to sit for the Baccalauréat had to attend classes in one of the Secondary schools in Saigon, Hanoi or Dalat. Only the favoured few were able to go to France to obtain diplomas in higher education.

In 1947, the Pavie College was transformed into a secondary school (Lycée), providing classes in the second cycle. From that time onward the numbers of pupils increased continually. In 1947, there were 225, but by the beginning of the school year 1955, their number had increased to 582. Since 1949, after their graduation from school, the students are entitled to sit for the Baccalauréat there. However, the examination itself still had to be passed in Saigon or in Hanoi. It was not until 1952 that the examination took place in Vientiane, for the written part; the oral still took place in Hanoi. At the present time, Laotian students can take both the oral and written examinations of both parts of the Baccalauréat in Vientiane.

This improvement in examination conditions has led to a rapid increase in the number of candidates and in a considerable improvement in results. In 1949, 7 candidates passed the first part; there were 35 in 1955. As regards the second part, there were 3

in 1952 and 18 in 1955. These successes on the part of their predecessors has made the younger ones all the more enthusiastic. In 1952, there were 210 applications to the 6th form (French). Only 50 were accepted after exhaustive examination. At the beginning of the school year 1955, 80 pupils were admitted out of the 527 candidates.

These figures prove the continued popularity of French teaching in Laos. For the Lycée Pavie depends on the French Mission for Cultural Cooperation. It is installed in buildings belonging to the Royal Government, which it shares with the secondary school for the province of Vientiane — the two establishments, with the same headmaster, work smoothly side by side — and is seriously handicapped by shortage of space. Consequently the French Cultural Mission has decided to build new premises. In October 1957, the Lycée Pavie will move to new premises of its own and the provincial establishment will be able to extend by taking over the buildings vacated by the Lycée. For the sole province of Vientiane, the number of students receiving secondary education will increase twofold.

French teaching is now completed by that given in schools and colleges organized by the Royal Government. The first provincial secondary schools, although only formed recently, have made rapid progress. In 1949, the first colleges were opened in Pakse, Savannakhet and Luang Prabang. The total number of students enrolled was 285. With the opening of Thakhek College, numbers increased to nearly 400. By October 1955, when the College at Xieng Kuang was opened, they has risen to 652.

In spite of this rapid development, it is still impossible to satisfy all demands for education. The 652 pupils admitted to secondary education form but 20 % of the candidates seeking admission. So it has been decided to extend these establishments. Now that hostilities have come to an end, freedom of communications will probably cause an increase in the number of students in each college, most of the pupils being village children. Thanks to a generous policy of scholarships carried out by the Royal Laotian Government, the poorest children can henceforth envisage the benefits of culture and many are farmers' sons who attend secondary schools.

Scholarships are also granted by the Government to students who intend to continue their studies abroad. For there is no higher education in Laos at the present time. As French culture is widespread in the country, young men generally go to France to specialize in different branches of study. Most of them go to Paris or Montpellier Universities. In the latter University a student's hostel has been established by the Royal Government for Laotian students.

Finally, some students go to different centres in England, the U. S. A., and Thailand, and some fifty students are at present attending the courses at the Phnom-Penh and Saigon technical colleges.

III. — Future Prospects of Technical Education

by

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Those responsible for the special issue of this review, devoted to Laos, wished to deal briefly with the problems of professional training. This is a favourable sign and once again gives proof of this new country's desire for self-development. Laos, fully conscious of its responsibilities as a sovereign State, is fully aware of the highly important part devolved upon its youth.

The Royal Government, desirous of making the most of this vitality, and of directing it judiciously has, under its first Equipment Programme, provided for the establishment of a genuine technical education scheme.

The purpose of this article is to provide information on these activities and to stress the need for vocational training, to outline its basic scope and to determine its general policy.

The Different Aspects of the Problem.

The word « technical » cannot be considered as having exactly the same meaning as the word « vocational ». In its widest sense, « vocational training » may be taken to mean the initiation into the carrying of any specialized human activity. In this respect we may use the term « vocational training » to describe, not only practical courses completing studies in surgery, but also the basic training given to ordinary craftsmen.

The nature of the particular trade and its social level naturally determine the methods and length of the training as well as the basic knowledge on which it is necessarily based. The different factors also play a part in the choice of the trainee best suited to carry out a particular trade.

It is generally considered that, in this vast occupational field, the so-called « technical » training forms a limited sector including apprenticeship to industrial, commercial, domestic trades, as well as craftsmanship, from basic qualifications up to the highest degree of technology.

To preserve its practical value, this training must continually adapt itself to the progress of modern technique and to the economic circumstances of the country. However, if the profession gives life to the technical training and is the basis of its existence and development, the contrary is also true. Thanks to first-rate training, the increase in manpower creates fresh needs which in their turn provide additional incentive to general progress. Thus the part played by technical training is both a determined and a determining factor.

Although a serious study of the labour market based on an estimate of present resources and the possibilities of development of new resources — is necessary in order to draw up a systematic Programme for the inception of technical training, an early implementation of its first stage might not prove unwise.

At the present, in most sectors of manual activities, Laos has proved unable to fulfil its full needs. Labour is not only numerically inadequate, largely unskilled, but — what is more serious — mainly of foreign origin. This situation, which affects both the home industries and bigger undertakings, is a serious handicap in a country undergoing an intensive phase of development, which requires immediate and large scale practical achievements without running the risk of upsetting the social structure. It appears highly desirable to fulfil most urgent needs requirements in organizing the vocational training of both skilled labour and supervisory staff.

Training Techniques.

The possibility of applying different techniques could be considered, e. g.:

— *Training within Industry* (T. W. I.), within the undertaking itself or on the working site, taking full account of actual production requirements. This trial and error method, which exists in many countries side by side with more orthodox methods, gives the apprentice an immediate grasp of the practical problems of his trade. It can be improved by theoretical training, aiming at logical study of functional movements and practical processes which lead to the formulation of general principles. This type of apprenticeship is valid only under the supervision of a qualified craftsman or in an undertaking where the degree of qualification of the staff is sufficient to pass on the « rules of the craft » to juniors.

— *School training* in specialized technical establishments in which the responsibility for both training pupils and imparting to them the practical know-how is assumed by theoreticians and practitioners.

In the hands of educators with modern means and a wide

range of equipment at their disposal, this training offers the best guarantee and, according to the level of qualification, a more or less important place is given to general education. It goes beyond vocational training proper. Not being directly concerned with the rentability of production, such schools lay special emphasis on developing systematic methods and principles. In a second stage, taking place within the undertaking, apprentices get their final confirmation during practical courses given in the actual climate of the workshop. In most cases in which a considerable amount of theoretical knowledge is necessary for a given trade, the superiority of this type of training is proved by practical experience;

— another method consists in combining these two techniques, the training-school, or school-workshop, being directly administered by a trades association, in the form of a side-line to its main activities. This is an excellent solution — economical from the State's point of view — but only possible in the case of large undertakings;

— as an adjunct to these techniques, a higher training of apprentices and members of the staff can be undertaken through practical and theoretical courses organized after working hours, or through study grants and practical studies.

* *

When listing these possible techniques, it would be appropriate to lay emphasis on those which can be applied immediately and profitably bearing in mind the present situation in Laos.

Taking into account the above-mentioned characteristics, school training has been chosen. Not arbitrarily — as the line of least resistance — but because it seems, initially, to be the most likely, if not the only one, to bring good results owing to the soundness of the means resorted to. While fulfilling imperious needs, this formula expresses our faith in the future.

The solution adopted does not necessarily imply the discarding of other methods which might be applied in due time as supplementary to the present system. Before recommending the application of training within industry process, it is advisable to wait until both bigger undertakings and craftsmen, have adequately trained supervisory staff at their disposal and can bear the financial expenditure involved. But a cycle of refresher courses after the normal day's work, may be initiated in various schools as soon as both instructors and equipment would be available. Grants for study abroad are equally important especially on a very high level and provided they are given to candidates carefully selected for their abilities. For the moment

it would be advisable to choose candidates intending to take up careers in technical training establishments, when they return.

As to the structure of such establishments, it is possible, while avoiding the dangers of servile imitation, to base our work on what has proved its worth in other countries. The preceding remark is justified by a twofold adaptation:

- educational, to make the curriculum dependent on the recruiting level while respecting the nature of traditional activities;

- financial, in relation to the resources available for such work.

Achievements.

The problem of apprenticeship has been approached in the course of the last few years. The Public Works Department in particular would recruit its lowest staff after a period of practical training in the Nam Passac workshops in Vientiane. This school-workshop, which was originally called as «Speeded-up Vocational Training Centre», was attached to the French Ministry of Education at the beginning of 1955. It was the Ministry which decided to transform the school.

From the administrative point of view, technical training is incorporated within secondary education and placed under the Technical Training Inspectorate (*Inspection de l'Enseignement Technique*) which began to function in November 1955.

The initial project includes the installation:

- in Vientiane, the setting-up of a Technical College incorporating an Apprenticeship Centre;

- in Savannakhet, of an Apprenticeship Centre.

The Technical College has the special task of training mid-management personnel and supervisory staff and the Apprenticeship Centre specialize in the training of skilled workers. These definitions are not necessarily strictly adhered to and do not finally limit the possibilities of any pupil attending the courses of those establishments.

The location of these two schools enables them on the one hand to cover the North and the Centre, and on the other, the South.

This project, studied in 1953 by Mr. Brodbeck, an Engineer of the «Arts et Métiers» and UNESCO consultant, has been approved by the Laotian Government. It is financed jointly by the National Budget and Bilateral Economic Aid (France, U. S. A., and the Commonwealth countries within the framework of the Colombo Plan). The United Nations Assistance Organisations (UNESCO, ILO) also give personnel and material assistance. In spite of material difficulties the present achievements include:

— in Vientiane, the partial equipment of the former workshops of the Centre for Speed-up Vocational Training Centre; the building of three classrooms, and repairs to lodgings for administrative staff;

— in Savannakhet, the building of a workshop (an earlier building can be used to house classrooms and dormitories).

For the two establishments, part of the basic equipment (machine-tools and tools) is being installed and material for scientific teaching, provided by UNESCO, has arrived in Vientiane. Other deliveries are expected from Great Britain and Australia.

Since January last, a group of 30 pupils has been receiving essentially practical training in Vientiane; this will be completed during the next school year. The Savannakhet Centre, for its part, is recruiting pupils of the same kind.

So, while building is still in progress, and in spite of very insufficient staff (as regards numbers) an educational experiment is being launched which cannot, it is true, be expected to give brilliant results at the outset, but will provide invaluable lessons for the organization of studies in the future.

In order to coordinate training with the present-day economic structure of Laos, where crafts predominate — minor and bigger undertakings — and not within the framework of industry in the proper sense of the word, over-specialization will give way to a special effort in the field of apprenticeship in the groups of basic trades, the rational practice of which contributes to a greater well-being of the population (building trades, wood, etc.) and the production figures for modern techniques used to equip the country (motor-mechanics for example).

Consequently, men and boys will be the first to benefit by this technical training.

A the same time it is equally important to organize courses preparing for commercial and office work, which can be followed by both boys and girls.

Recruiting.

The effectiveness of technical training depends largely upon the selection of the trainees and, here again, first steps may well prove decisive for the future.

In normal circumstances, the two establishments which are coming into operation will provide courses on the level of the 1st cycle of the second degree (in the case of the Technical College), or slightly below (in the case of the Vocational Centres). Consequently they will chiefly receive candidates who have come through primary schools. Nevertheless, certain pupils studying in secondary schools (mainly in the modern side) may well be transferred to technical classes, not only when they are still

in the 6th or 5th (French) forms (vocational guidance after a course of study common to all types of education), but also when they are in the 4th and 3rd forms (or later stage of vocational guidance) and, much more rarely, in the 2nd form, in the case of boys having received a modern education and wishing to follow higher technical courses.

This recruiting must be carried out carefully with a view to avoiding the serious mistakes which have been discovered rather belatedly in other countries.

It is perfectly normal to guide students who care little for theory and who have a more positive trend of mind, towards practical studies. The opposite process may take place by virtue of the same principle, that is to say, based on the *real abilities* of the pupils.

Unfortunately, this general rule often gives rise to wrong interpretation — and always of the same kind... Technical schools are then faced with an overflowing number of candidates whose sole qualification is their lack of ability for classical and modern studies.

It should be borne in mind that the apprenticeship requires intelligence and a sound theoretical knowledge. A dunce rarely makes good in technical college, and the fact of squeezing through one's Matrics is no guarantee of making a good foreman.

Openings and Employment.

The great shortage of local skilled labour in nearly all branches of industry does not justify any concern as to openings and opportunities.

However, in order to create a favourable climate, the public authorities should devote their fullest attention to the problem of employment.

The survival of certain caste prejudice, considering the workman or craftsman to be an inferior being, traditionally relegated to the lowest rung of the social scale, is very prejudicial to the prestige of these occupations.

On the other hand, many young people are attracted by minor office jobs which do not require any special qualifications, because they are often overpaid in terms of output.

In order to hold these tendencies in check, it is essential to give the craftsman, the foreman, the accountant and the engineer, their rightful place in modern society. This place will only become a desirable one when it is reasonably paid. If Laos is in urgent need for workmen and technical staff, technical education graduates should be less likely to give up their specialized trades if, before leaving the vocational school, they could be given the assurance of appropriate wages in exchange for qualified work: the profess-

ional pride is not something that can be bought, but it can only survive if it is appreciated.

At this point we must refer to the necessity of reeducating the customer who, up to the present time, has of necessity been only too often satisfied with poor quality work. In the relationships between supply and demand a campaign in support of quality will develop taste and finally overcome the lazy attitude of the buyer. The latter will become more critical and exacting and will pay according to the intrinsic value of the work; in the end, good and bad will no longer be lumped together indiscriminately.

Before such a healthy state of affairs comes into being, certain precautionary measures will have to be taken. Apprentices, with sound knowledge of the essentials of their trade must not run the risk of getting out of their good habits when they come into contact with low rated craftsmen and are likely to find it difficult not to fall back into the same routine.

The Technical Training Inspectorate will therefore be obliged to follow them attentively, in agreement with the Works Legislation authorities, during the early period after graduation.

Some of these boys will be given posts in technical training establishments, to train the younger generation. When this happens it will be possible — and, *a priori*, advisable — to form « Rural Craft Centres » or « Manual Sections » attached, for example, to the main primary schools. Gradually, these instructors, carefully selected and tried, grouped together within a national framework for technical training, will contribute to the improvement of the present-day personnel.

Apprentices entering the Public Services, and therefore automatically subjected to control, will be under the careful guidance of the technicians responsible for these Services. The fact that they are grouped round certain schools will make it easier to organize periodical refresher — and training-courses.

Finally, the other apprentices will be:

— either sent in small numbers to work with a « craftsman-employer » who is reliably competent and sufficiently intelligent to wish to improve the quality of his production. In these circumstances they can work as a team and also in competition with the other workmen who have not received so methodical a training;

— or grouped together in « autonomous cooperative organizations » with the financial support of the State — in the form of loans or advances of materials and tools — and certain from the start of having a minimum of customers at least (public authorities for example). To take advantage of expensive existing installations, as well as the constant advice of their former instructors, some of these young people might well work in a production

workshop attached to a technical training establishment making school equipment.

Extension.

As well as ensuring regular improvement, this system of « controlled » employment opens up possibilities of natural development of vocational training. Apprentices, and groups of apprentices, in different parts of the country will gradually give rise to key-centres facilitating the development of high-quality techniques. During this first period, during which the infrastructure of the country will be built up, economic conditions will change and may eventually modify the original conception of technical training itself.

Before going on the next stage, the above-mentioned investigation will be indispensable to define the new objectives, which will give rise, possibly, to new bases of employment policy, at which point it will be possible to determine the geographical layout of the network as a whole.

The extension may be thought of:

— horizontally, by increasing the range of trades and specialization, including domestic training and female trades;

— vertically, by opening new establishments in the future, corresponding to the different levels:

a) at first at the lower levels, in particular « Rural Centres » and « Manual Sections »;

b) then at higher levels, when the importance and quality justify a selection sufficient to train specialized « Technicians ».

Special training classes and courses will also be increased.

Finally, at the base of the organization, it would be useful to have a system of « School and Vocational Guidance ». This scheme, which would normally come into play at the end of primary education, would be able to give useful advice to young pupils and their families, according to their abilities and the fluctuation of the labour market.

It did not seem necessary to dwell on the cultural value which is no longer denied to technical training, for very authoritative confirmation has been given on this point.

Let us hope that this article has brought out the practical usefulness of the present realizations, that it has convinced others of the fact that the task to be accomplished needs first-class measures, especially in the initial stages, and that it will attract young people to occupations with a future.

XII

ECONOMY

Present State of Laotian Economy

by

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I. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

Laotian economy is largely governed by the following features :

Laos is a continental country of which the greater part is mountainous. As a result, transportation gives rise to many major problems due to the nature of the relief, the distance between neighbouring ports (Saigon-Vientiane, 745 miles; Vientiane-Bangkok, 310 miles) and to the fact that the Mekong, this great natural channel, is crossed by falls and rapids which render its crossing from one bay to another difficult. However, it must be borne in mind that the passes of these natural barriers have been improved, and that they form dams without which low water navigation would be impossible.

The density of the population in relation to the area is not very high — 10 to 12 inhabitants per square mile — but it is very unevenly distributed. It can be said that nearly 90 % of this population, an agricultural one, produces nearly all that it needs on the spot, particularly with regard to food.

Laos, therefore, is poorly industrialized and has to rely on imports for all finished goods that its economy requires. Lastly, the characteristics already referred to, explain the great differences of economic development in the various regions.

II. RURAL ECONOMY

Laos is a vast country, thinly populated, a land of extensive agriculture. The traditional economy of the villages is primarily based on subsistence crops, the most important being rice, espe-

cially the sticky variety. Whenever the soil or the economic situation permits, the peasant will add to it some cultivations of a more commercial nature, such as tobacco, cotton, spices, etc.

Besides being a husbandman, the Laotian is also a stock-breeder who owns a few buffaloes, some oxen, a few pigs and small poultry.

The Centre and South of Laos are, however, stock-raising regions where the breeding of antelopes and oxen provide the biggest export quotas. Lastly, nearby forests supply the villagers with timber, bamboos and other produce of picking which they sell, thus adding another source of income. Villages being very often situated near a river, fishing is thus an important contribution to food.

The Boloven Plateau, a rich land of volcanic origin, offers both a character of its own and a considerable development of rich cultures of commercial value, such as coffee, tobacco, ramee, potatoes, cardamoms, spices, etc.

Although of a less fertile soil, the climate of the Xieng-Khuang Plateau admits, however, cultivation of fruits from the temperate zone, of *abrasin* nuts, of market-gardening industry besides that of potatoes.

A. AGRICULTURE

1. *Rice* growing is the most important of the basic crops. The paddies are situated either in the valleys or in the mountains or on the plateaux. The latter are known as dry cultures grown on lands reclaimed from forests of which the timber is burnt on the spot.

These *rays* are cultivated for a few years until the culture is moved elsewhere. But the main production is in the irrigated paddy-fields of the valleys. The total area can be estimated at 185,325 acres, with an average output of a ton per 2.47 acres.

The main areas of production are in Champassak, Saravan, Savannakhet and Vientiane provinces. Rice production which used to be sufficient for the needs of Laos is at the present time slightly on the deficit side owing to the development of towns and the internal situation.

Production is, however, very sensitive to adverse meteorological conditions which sometimes can reduce it in a perceptible manner, import is then necessary. The exact figure of tonnage for the 1957 harvest is not available. It was, however, slightly below average due to a delay in the rainy season and to floods caused by storms over the Savannakhet and Thakhek regions.

2. *Maize* is grown particularly in Northern Laos. It covers an area of 44,460 acres, with a production ranging into several ten of thousands of tons. There is no appreciable trade either inland or foreign.

3. *Vegetables* are grown in all the villages. The climate and the soil of the Boloven and Xieng-Khuang Plateaux are suitable to market-gardening industry, but its development is considerably impaired by transportation difficulties. There is a similar distribution of fruit-growing over the land, where European fruits even can be grown (peaches, strawberries, etc.).

4. *Potatoes* find a suitable soil in Laos. They are cultivated particularly in both Northern and Southern Laos on the Boloven Plateau. The 1950 record crop exceeded one thousand tons.

5. *Coffee* has its principal growing centre also on the Boloven Plateau, where the major part is cultivated in small family plantations. The common quality «Arabica» is the most widely distributed.

In 1950, coffee plantations covered over 6,175 acres. A production of 1,500 tons was the highest of Laos agricultural exports. Unfortunately, the period of hostilities prevented proper attention to the plantations which were then open to attacks from a pest (*Hemileia Vastatrix*), causing considerable devastation. These plantations will have to be restored with a more resisting variety.

6. *Cotton* is to be found everywhere in Laos. It still takes an important part in home-weaving, in spite of an increase of cotton yarn imports. The cultivated area covers 3,705 acres with a yield of about 300 tons.

7. *Tobacco* is at present cultivated along the Mekong, but could become an important culture on the Boloven Plateau. The total production of the country is estimated to be over 1,000 tons of dry tobacco.

8. *Cardamoms* are cultivated on the Boloven Plateau and are the object of an export trade with Thailand, Hong Kong and Saigon.

9. *Pimento* is grown everywhere, especially for local consumption. Production, running into several hundreds of tons, is particularly important on the Boloven Plateau, where a certain variety growing there is highly appreciated.

There is scope for the development of other cultures now growing in a wild state on the Xieng-Khuang Plateau, such as ramee, castor-oil plants, quinquina, pepper and tea.

B. STOCK-FARMING

Stock-farming is widespread in Laos, but though it still retains the characteristics of a family concern, it plays an important part in the country's economy.

1. *Oxen and species of antelopes* are raised for both labour

and meat. Buffaloes are used for labour in the paddies. Dairy-farming is practically non-existent.

Southern Laos has the biggest livestock, particularly in the Sedon, Sebankien and Sebanfay valleys, as well as in the regions of sparsely wooded forests. For want of artificial pastures, these animals, left without much care, live in semi-freedom around the villages.

Owing to the state of emergency, stock-farming has been greatly affected. It will need building-up again before exports to neighbouring countries can be resumed.

Trials have been undertaken for the improvement of oxen by cross-breeding with cattle of Sind breed which seems to acclimatize itself well in Laos.

2. *Horses* are reared especially in Northern Laos, where they are used as pack-horses. They are of smaller size and very resistant. In the upper regions of Laos, their long convoys can be seen treading along difficult paths.

3. *Elephants* are losing their economic importance. They are used only as carriers in certain Northern regions and in the extreme South where they are traditionally captured for domestication.

4. Small livestock (*pigs and poultry*) is widespread. Poultry of *Meo* breed is particularly appreciated. Lastly, sheep-farming met with some success on the Xieng-Khuang Plateau.

Processing and exports of hides are the consequence of stock farming. There exist small handicraft industries in many centres and some export trade.

C. FORESTS

Forests cover the major part of Laos. Of its 90,000 sq. miles of territory, 47,000 sq. miles are forest lands more or less densely wooded.

The economic value of these forests vary greatly as they range from all types of tropical forests, from the primitive densely timbered, with a great variety of mixed species, but in general of good quality, to less densely timbered, monotonous and withered forests during the dry season.

In the more mountainous regions, coniferous plantations (pines, *kelelaria*, *cunninghamia* and *fokenia*) can be found as well as species from the temperate zone, such as oaks and chestnuts.

Forests play an important part in the life of the Laotian population. From these, the inhabitants take out most of their daily needs; bamboos for their dwellings, wood-oil for lighting, plants and roots for food, and raw materials required for their household equipment.

The harvest of minor products, brought by the villagers to neighbouring market places, gives them substantial ready cash without having to invest, which for distant villages is often the only way of collecting money.

With the system of *rays*, agriculture is itself often based on forests.

It is clear that such an economic system leads to abusive exploitations that have to be curbed by both conversion and protective measures. This is the role of the National Waters, Forests and Hunting Conservancy.

The types of Laotian forests are, in general, the same as those of the rest of the Indochinese Peninsula, where varieties representing the flora of both Northern and Southern Laos can be found. The intermediary position of Laos gives a great variety of forest species.

Although the geographical position of Laos makes it difficult to export common timber for construction purposes, there are some products of higher quality which deserve to be mentioned.

The royal forests (Crown property) of the Paklay region contain 172,900 acres of teak plantations, more or less varied. These teaks were actively and methodically exploited before the war. They were then floated down the Mekong, crossing over rapids and falls until they finally reached Phnom-Penh and Saigon. Exploitations have just been resumed and teaks are now exported to Thailand.

Other varieties used in cabinet-work can stand higher transportation costs.

The *May Kha-Nhoung* (a kind of Brazilian rosewood, *Dalbergia Cochinchinensis*) was in olden times in great demand by Chinese cabinet-work, thus giving rise to a fair amount of exports that had to be stopped because of the war.

The *May Kha* (*Pahudia Cochinchinensis*) is in great demand in Vietnam for the manufacturing of furnitures and camp beds where it has become very rare, still exist in Laos in appreciable quantity.

The *May Dou* (*Pterocarpus Pedatus*), whose country of origin is Laos, gives an excellent timber for cabinet-making and would gain to be better known abroad.

The *May Campi* (*Dalbergia bariensis*) and the *May Mank Pa* (*Fagroea*) are splendid timber of quality. The total production of timber of various species is estimated about 2,118,600 cu.ft.

Gum benzoin, a resin obtained from the *Styrax Tonkinensis* or *May Nhan*, is an important product for export. From the Northern Provinces of Laos comes the near-totality of gum benzoin used in the world. Exported to Bangkok for many years, it is then sold in Europe under the name of 'Siamese gum benzoin'.

In Northern Laos and in the border regions of Cambodia, *Sticklac* is produced in great quantity by an insect living on various species of forest trees. It is widely used in the manufacturing of gum lac, varnishes, gramophone records and electrical insulators.

Moreover, leaves, roots and animal remains are exported every year to Saigon-Cholon, where it is used in great quantity in Chinese pharmacology.

Lastly, amateurs of big game hunting will not fail to be attracted in future by the presence of wild beasts such as tigers, panthers, elephants, gaurs.

Laotian forests are, as we see, a traditional source of life, and can bring an important contribution to the economic development of that country.

D. ADMINISTRATION

The Minister of National Economy acts in the rural economy through the three specialized technical Services.

1. The *Department of Agriculture*, organized in agricultural services, aims its efforts at the improvement of cultivation. Three stations of rice-selectioning have been set up, nurseries supply the villagers with fruit trees and seeds. Vegetables protection campaigns are carried out by mobile units.

The Boloven Agricultural Cooperative, comprising a centre for the conditioning of coffee, helps towards the restoration of plantations devastated by the *Hemileia*.

During the course of the last few years, irrigation and drainage schemes have been completed over the whole of the country and the extension of these schemes are, at the present time, one of the major activities of the Agricultural Department.

2. The *Veterinary Service* main efforts are directed in the struggle against epizootic diseases, either by preventive vaccination or by interventions in the infected areas. The principal diseases to guard against are *barbon*, anthrax and *surra*.

The existing livestock is controlled and improved by castration campaigns aimed at eliminating bad breeders. Lastly, breeding and rearing centres are to be set up, of which two poultry-keeping stations at the Veterinary Centre near Vientiane and one at Savannakhet.

3. The *Waters and Forests Conservancy Department* is entrusted with the administration and control of national woodlands. It is chiefly directed towards protection of forests by the creation of woodland reserves, the fight against *rays* and for the enrichment of the national forests by reafforestation with valuable species, with teak in particular.

In order to further economic development, loans have been granted to small farmers, stock-breeders and foresters.

Training of technical staff is carried out either on the spot or by sending students and personnel eligible for a post, abroad.

III. INDUSTRY AND TRADE

A. COTTAGE INDUSTRY AND INDUSTRY

There is no real industry in Laos, but there is a general cottage industry and small plants (brick-fields, rice-factories, etc.) turn out the indispensable products.

Besides an utilitarian cottage industry (basket-making, wood-work, pottery), a more artistic one is practised particularly in sculpture, decoration of Wats and objects of luxuries and jewellery whose centres of Khong and Luang-Prabang are the most renowned as well as for weaving.

There is not a Laotian dwelling without its loom, where the woman or the lady of the house prepares and renew the family's cloths; some of these products present a definite artistic value.

The silk scarfs, embroidered with gold and silver, are multicoloured and of many patterns; the women's silk skirts (*sin*), spangled with precious metals, offer to the girls weavers a vast scope to their imagination. The embroidered strips used for the lower and upper parts of skirts, whether they are made of cotton or silk of various colours, with silver or gold threads, they are perfect friezes of delicate designs. Materials for men's wear have other varieties : large checkered *sarongs* or *sampots* of delicate hues like shot silk used in dress of ceremony.

In former times, weaving was exclusively for home use, but now that they have become better known and appreciated, wider outlets have to be found. With new looms being introduced, production will be faster and cheaper whilst preserving the valuable quality of a hand-made article.

Yet, besides this traditional cottage industry a new economic trend is taking place by the installation of plants of a more commercial character. At this early stage there is a opening up of small transformation industries utilizing local products for the needs of home consumption such as soap and candle factories, mineral-waters, matches, saw-mills, joinery-shops, etc.

Other more important installations are at present under consideration (cement factories, plywood factories, wood-pulp, cigarettes, etc.).

B. MINING RESOURCES

Although present workings are confined to the only tin mine of Phon Tui in Khammuan Province, mining deposits are considerable in Laos. Mining installations have suffered greatly during the hostilities. But rapidly restored with up to date machinery, production to-day comes very near that of 1945. Tin is exported as a 55 % concentrate to the foundries in Malaya.

Gypsum deposits can be found near Donghene (Savannakhet) and silver bearing lead deposits at Tchepon. Nearly 3,500 tons of salt are extracted every year from the salt-bogs of Savannakhet, Husisay, Phongsaly, and especially at Bunkun (Vientiane) Provinces. It is not salt-rock but salt extracted from salt bearing earths.

The ancient practice of gold-washing is still carried out and its production can be estimated at 500kg.

Coal deposits have been found in Saravan and Vientiane Provinces, and copper near Xieng-Khuang and North of Attapeu.

Transportation and labour give rise to considerable problems more than in any other fields, thus leaving untapped mining wealth.

C. TRADE

Trade is centralized in some important trading centres, where local products are pooled. Foreign trade is at present dealt with by Bangkok harbour instead of Saigon as it used to be.

The main exports for 1957 were: tin in 50 % concentrate (18,000,000 kips); forests products (11,147,000 kips) of which benzoin (4,845,000 kips) and sticklac (2,158,000 kips) being the principal ones; agricultural products (5,158,000 kips, of which 3,338,000 are for coffee alone) and livestock products, especially hides (1,282,700 kips).

Inasmuch that the country needs reequipment, foreign trade is badly showing a deficit.

IV. MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

A. *Waterways:*

The Mekong is the natural way of penetration into Laos from North as well as from South. Nevertheless, owing to falls (Khone Falls in the South, Khemarat Rapids between Pakse and Savannakhet and the rapids in the North) some reaches only can be used: Khone-Pakse, Savannakhet-Vientiane in all seasons, and the Northern Vientiane reach during high waters.

B. Roads :

The main axial road is No 13 route that connects Southern Laos to Saigon via Cambodia and which traverse nearly the whole of Laos up to Luang-Prabang with a junction to Xieng-Khuang. The road sections of Thakhek—Paksane, Vientiane—Luang-Prabang and Vientiane—Xieng-Khuang can only be utilized during the dry season.

Route No 9 connects Savannakhet with Vietnam towards Hue. Mention must be made also of the roads to Pakse, Paksong-Saravan and Paksong-Attapeu.

Other road networks are in process to be completed Sam-Neua—Xieng-Khuang, Xieng-Khuang—Paksan, and Pakse—Attapeu with an extension to Khontum in Vietnam. Finally, Vientiane is connected by the ferry of Thadeua where there are railway and road networks of Thailand.

C. Air Transport: There is a daily flight from Vientiane to the international airports of Saigon (Air Laos, Air Vietnam) and Bangkok (Air Laos, Thai Airways). Moreover, there is a weekly flight from Vientiane to Pnom-Penh, Hong Kong and Singapore (Air Laos, C. P. A.).

A well developed home air network, from Vientiane to 15 local airports, makes up for the deficiency in land connections.

V. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A definite economic development is taking place, shown by an increasing and more active participation of the Laotian population in the economy of the country. Commercial and production undertakings are coming into being, a field which used to be the monopoly of foreigners and that now tends to become more and more nationalized.

The principal branch of the economy remains rural economy.

This mass of country landowners, living in relative ease with their simple needs easily satisfied, is for Laos a stabilizing factor.

Unlike many Asian countries, there is no particular problem arising out from land ownership.

It must be taken into consideration that the natural wealth of Laos, of which much is still left untapped, will bring a development to its future economy by an increase in production in all fields. With this in view, a plan for both social and economic development is ready of which the main efforts will have to bear on communications, agriculture, education and health. Major problems arising out from communications and power must be solved. But there appear to be some solutions in sight since

coal deposits have been found and that there is now a hydraulic project of the Upper Mekong Bassin.

However, local realizations, though on a smaller scale but of a more immediate practical use, must be kept in mind.

The implementation of this plan will necessitate important investments for which a continuation of economic and technical assistance from the U.S.A., France, the Colombo Plan, Japan, and the United Nations, will be necessary.

But in the end, the decisive effort will rest upon the determination of the Laotian people to bring out the possibilities of their own country.



XIII

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

International Relations of Laos

by

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Laos, sometimes known as the Country of a Million Elephants, has been described by one of its former Prime Ministers as a landbound island among more powerful neighbours — China, Burma, Thailand, Viet-Nam and Cambodia. A product of Thai ethnic stock and Indian cultural influence, Laos became a political entity in the 9th century A. D. and reached its cultural and political apex early in the 18th century. At that time, the Laotian kingdom, then called Lan-Xang, included sections of Yunnan, of the Southern Shan States, of the Vietnamese and Cambodian mountain plateaux, and large stretches of present-day northeastern Thailand.

Within less than a century, however, feudal rivalries fed from outside began to weaken the central government and Lan-Xang broke into three distinct kingdoms : Luang-Prabang in the North and Vientiane and Champassac in the South. The inhospitable mountain chains and forests of North and Central Viet-Nam for a while shielded Laos from the Vietnamese, but the low hills and open plains of the Mekong valley were an open invitation to attacks from the growing Siamese state. In 1828, the kingdom of Vientiane was totally destroyed by the Siamese, and soon thereafter all of Laos was split into Siamese and Vietnamese spheres of influence, the former predominating in Vientiane and Champassak and the latter controlling most of Luang-Prabang's hinterland.

The arrival of the French, who proclaimed a protectorate over the kingdom of Luang-Prabang on October 3, 1893, was at first greeted with relief, but the French, largely through ignorance of the local situation, accepted the Mekong as the international boundary between Thailand and Laos with the result that the most productive parts of both Vientiane and Champassak became permanent parts of Thailand (1). This error was somewhat

(1) This explains why many Laotian people today claim that more than half the population of Thailand is really Laotian.

corrected by the Franco-Siamese boundary treaties of 1902 and 1907, which restored the provinces of Sayaboury and Bassac to Laos, but the remaining trans-Mekong areas of Laos have now become integral parts of Thailand.

The French colonial administration maintained a dual relationship with Laos. The kingdom of Luang-Prabang, as a protectorate, remained a distinct political entity, while the rest of Laos was ruled, in fact if not in law, as a French colony (1). Successive treaties (2) between France and Luang-Prabang failed to clarify the vague status of those non-integrated provinces. It was only after Laos had again been deprived of its trans-Mekong holdings by Thailand after a brief Franco-Thai war in 1940 (the territories were returned to Laos in 1947) that the French government of Marshal Philippe Pétain signed, as a sort of « moral compensation », a regular protectorate treaty with the King of Luang-Prabang on September 29, 1941, recognizing him as the sovereign over all Laos.

Throughout the sixty years of French colonial administration, all official contacts between Laos and the outside world were channelled through France. This situation changed in March 1945, when Japan overthrew French rule throughout Indochina and began to deal directly with the native leadership of Cambodia, Laos and Viet-Nam. The first act of the occupying Japanese was to compel the rulers to proclaim their « independence » from France and their adherence to the « Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere ». This met with little opposition in Viet-Nam and Cambodia, but the King of Laos (Sisavang Vong) refused to follow suit, and in Southern Laos, Prince Boun Oum of Champassak gathered around him a guerrilla force composed of Laotian followers and members of the dispersed French colonial forces.

The King was finally forced to fall into line, but on August 30, 1945, a few days after V-J Day, he addressed an appeal to General de Gaulle in which he reaffirmed Laos' loyalty to France. This was not to the liking of various Laotian nationalists who had emerged in the meantime. Under the leadership of Prince Phetsarath, Katay Don Sasorith and the Princes Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong, the « Free Laos » (*Lao-Issara*) deprived the King of his powers and placed him under house arrest on October 23, 1945.

This period of total independence, however, was of short duration. French troops had landed in Saigon in September 1945. Light French paratroops, reinforced by the pro-French guerrillas

(1) The Royal family of Vientiane had been wiped out by the Thais. That of Champassak had survived and was given a special status by the French. It is still influential in Laotian affairs today.

(2) Treaties between France and the Kingdom of Luang-Prabang of February 2, 1914, April, 24, 1917, September 21, 1931, and December 29, 1941.

of Boun Oum, began to fight their way North toward Vientiane, the administrative capital, and Luang-Prabang, the royal city. The *Lao-Issara*, sensing the trend, adjusted themselves to the new situation. The King was restored to power on April 23, 1946, while a French column, after a brief skirmish, entered Vientiane on the following day. Luang-Prabang was occupied on May 13, the military posts along the Northern border a few weeks later. French power had returned to Laos. The *Lao-Issara* retreated into exile to Thailand, most of them to return only after the signature of the Lao-French independence Agreements of 1949.

Contrary to the chaotic turn of events in neighbouring Viet-Nam, where the struggle for national independence eventually expanded into a full-fledged war, Laos' progress towards independence proved more leisurely but equally successful. A *modus vivendi* signed by Laos and France on August 26, 1946, reaffirmed Laotian unity under King Sisavang Vong and granted Laos a certain measure of internal autonomy. A Constitutional Assembly was elected in December 1946 and a Laotian Constitution promulgated on May 10, 1947 (1).

Laos relations with outside powers were still restricted to negotiations with France, now represented in Laos by a Commissioner of the Republic. An exchange of letters in November 1947 and January 1948 between the King of Laos and the President of France (equivalent in French constitutional practice to an Executive Agreement in the United States) merely reaffirmed Laos' status as an Associated State of the French Union. Laos, however, with the kind of «gentle firmness» that was to become the hallmark of Laotian diplomacy, proceeded to whittle down French encroachments upon its emerging national sovereignty. For example, the French sought to assure the position of Prince Boun Oum of Champassak by a secret treaty with the King of Laos. Sisavang Vong rejected the idea of a secret treaty but expressed his willingness to submit such a treaty project to open debate in the Laotian legislature. Needless to say, the French desisted.

Since then, and without outside pressure, the Laotian Government has given Prince Boun Oum a place in Laotian affairs that is in keeping with his rank, thus smoothing out much of the potential resentment that could have been aroused in the Southern provinces through a possible slighting of the Prince by the Royal House of Luang-Prabang.

(1) For a full text of the Laotian Constitution and other documents related thereto, see Kingdom of Laos, *L'Assemblée Constituante, 15 mars-10 mai 1947*. Saigon: Imprimerie Française d'Outre-Mer, 1949. For later amendments, see Katay Don Sasorith, *Le Laos*, Paris, 1953. Moreover the whole Constitution underwent an amending process in 1956 to bring it into accord with the now fully independent status of Laos.

Events in neighbouring Cambodia and Viet-Nam were also reflected in the relations between Laos and France. The Elysée Agreements of March 1949, between Viet-Nam and France, which granted Viet-Nam a limited amount of self-government under Chief of State Bao-Dai, were followed by a General Convention signed in Paris on July 19, 1949 by King Sisavang Vong and the President of France.

The General Convention and its Annexes (1) provided for the membership of Laos in the various bodies of the French Union, the joint defense of Laos, direct Laotian diplomatic representation, equality of opportunity for Laotian citizens in France and vice-versa. In addition, certain services in the field of economic planning, foreign commerce, customs, currency and communications, were to be operated on a joint basis by Cambodia, France, Laos and Viet-Nam. A convention on the judiciary gave French citizens a special status in case of litigation or criminal suits.

The organization of the four-power boards was discussed at a conference between the four countries held at Pau in France in the spring of 1950. Instead of lasting a few days only, as at first expected, it dragged on for months, because of clashes of interest between the three Indochinese States and their distrust of the French who were repeatedly — and with some justification — accused of attempting to retain too much power for themselves. The head of the Laotian delegation, Outong Souvannavong, expressed this feeling in his final speech at the last session of the Pau Conference, on November 27, 1950 : « There could be no question, for us, of leaving the palisades of the former Protectorate... if it were to enter into the enclosure of another surveillance whose regime would be even less bearable than that which we have known before... » (2).

From then onward, Laos began to progress more rapidly toward a greater measure of national independence. Britain and the United States recognized the three Indochinese States in February 1950, followed in short order by most West European and Latin American nations. In Asia, only Thailand, in view of its strong anti-Communist stand and close traditional relations with Indochina, extended almost immediate recognition to the three countries and exchanged ambassadors with them. A Laotian

(1) *Accords Franco-Laotiens—Convention Générale Franco-Laotienne du 19 juillet 1949 et Conventions Annexes du 6 février 1950*. Saigon 1950. Plus rectifying Memorandum (No. 4925/Cab.) of July 3, 1950, issued by the Office of the French High Commissioner in Indochina, with regard to Article 22. (Article 22 deals with the Permanent Franco-Laotian Defense Committee. The original text had erroneously mentioned twice the commander of the French forces in Laos as one of the members but had omitted the commander of the Laotian forces.)

(2) French Government, *Présidence du Conseil, Notes et Études Documentaires* No. 1.447, *Conférence Inter-États*. Paris, March 9, 1951, p. 10.

representative was accredited to France; yet, at least for the duration of the hostilities, it was obvious that France's influence over the destinies of Laos would remain preponderant, even if this influence was now clad in the concepts of « *quadrupartisme* » and « independence and association ».

One such « quadrupartite » venture into diplomacy was the negotiation for military and economic aid from the United States, where a clear distinction was made between aid granted to the French Union Forces fighting in Indochina and the aid separately granted to the three Indochinese States (1). Until January 1955 France controlled the apportioning of aid funds, since the dollar portion of such aid went into the joint hard currency reserve of the new *Banque d'Émission des États Associés* which had taken the place of the old *Banque de l'Indochine* as the bank of issue.

On the whole, however, the cumbersome quadrupartite machinery either failed altogether or did not operate efficiently in most other cases (2). In the political sphere, nationalist drives for full political independence in Viet-Nam and Cambodia at times nearly resulted in a breakdown of relations between those two states and France. In Cambodia, King Sihanouk for a time went into voluntary exile to mark his displeasure with French gradualist methods. In Viet-Nam, a congress of various nationalist groups refused to support Bao-Dai in his program of negotiations with France (3).

The Laotians, unlike their two Indochinese neighbours, abstained from raising abstract principles in their negotiations with the French but rather proceeded to discuss precise points of transfer of power. On the basis of the July 3, 1953 Declaration of French Premier Joseph Laniel, promising to « perfect the independence of the Associated States », the Laotian Government promptly sent a note to France on August 24, asking for the transfer of all residual French controls in Laos, with the exception of the judiciary which the Laotians were willing to discuss separately. These negotiations, begun on October 16, ended on October 23, 1953, with the signature of two separate documents: a Treaty of Amity and Association in which France recognized Laos as a « fully independent and sovereign State », and in which Laos « freely reaffirms its membership in the French Union, an association of sovereign and independent

(1) U. S. Department of State, *Mutual Defense Assistance in Indochina. Agreement between the United States of America and Cambodia, France, Laos and Viet-Nam*. Publication No. 5119. Treaties and other International Acts Series 2447. Signed at Saigon, December 23, 1950. Wash. D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1953.

(2) Fall, Bernard B., « The End of the Pau Agreements, » a chapter in *Political Developments in Viet-Nam*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1955, pp. 714-720.

(3) Hammer, Ellen J., *The Struggle for Indochina*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954, pp. 304-307.

peoples, free and equal in their rights and duties » (1); and a brief series of Lao-French Establishment Conventions (2) which, in substance, reaffirm the equality of Laotians and French citizens on a reciprocal basis.

Neither document materially changed Franco-Laotian relations. Prince Souvanna Phouma, the Laotian Prime Minister who signed the Conventions — the Treaty was signed by the King himself — was acutely aware of the problems facing his country, particularly since Communist forces from North Viet-Nam had invaded Laos early in 1953 and had set up a puppet « Laotian State » (*Pathet Lao*) under the leadership of a former *Lao-Issara* chieftain, Prince Souphanouvong, a half-brother of Prince Souvanna Phouma. In his closing speech at the Conference, Prince Souvanna stated: « These accords which return to Laos all the attributes of its internal and external sovereignty, shall permit henceforth to affirm its [Laos'] international personality. But beyond this stage, we shall still need France's help... » (3).

This Laotian appeal for help was soon to become one of the major issues in the Indochinese tragedy. As the Communist forces of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam (DRVN) began their 1953 autumn offensive, the French High Command faced an acute dilemma: either to concentrate its forces in the easily-defensible flatland areas of Indochina (which was the militarily sound solution) and abandon most of Laos in spite of all pledges to defend it, or attempt to defend Laos by offering the enemy an attractive bait (4). The latter course was finally chosen by the French commander, General Henri Navarre. According to his recently-published memoirs — which, on this point, are well corroborated by other sources — French political circles in France felt that to abandon Laos, after it had voluntarily joined the French Union and linked its destiny to France's, would doom outright the whole fragile edifice of the French Union. Navarre was given instructions to defend Laos. He chose the valley of Dien Bien Phu to make his stand (5).

Laos had its first « coming out » in international politics, when, as the smallest (in terms of population) interested party, it

(1) Press and Information Division, French Embassy, Wash. D. C., *Indochinese Affairs*, No. 1, February 1954. This interpretation of the French Union represents a radical departure from the original French concept but is considered a step forward toward the flexibility of the British Commonwealth.

(2) Laotian Ministry of Information, *Lao-French Establishment Conventions* (in English), undated.

(3) *Journal d'Extrême-Orient*, Saigon, October 23, 1953.

(4) For a detailed discussion of the military aspects of the defense of Laos, see « Indochina—The Last Year of the War: The Navarre Plan, » *Military Review*, Fort Leavenworth: Command and General Staff College, December 1956.

(5) Navarre, Henri, *L'Agonie de l'Indochine*. Paris: Plon, 1956.

participated in the cease-fire Conference at Geneva, from April 27 to July 21, 1954. There, its contribution was far from negligible. The Laotian delegation adamantly refused to allow the seating of rival *Pathet Lao* delegations, and the Communist powers yielded on that point. Undeterred by the sometimes hesitant stand taken by many other powers, H. E. Phoui Sananikone, the head of the Laotian delegation, presented Laos' case to the assembly in these terms:

« ... *First Point.* Laos is independent. On October 22, 1953, it signed with France a treaty of independence and association of which Mr. Molotov and Mr. Dong [Head of the Viet-Minh delegation] appear to be ignorant... We do not think that countries which pride themselves on achieving federal unity amidst a variety of nationalities can fail to recognize that our membership in the French Union merely safeguards and strengthens our independence in a world where absolute autonomy can only lead immediately to the worst forms of enslavement.

« *Second Point.* We maintain that in Laos national sentiment, centered in His Majesty Sisavang Vong, is unanimous to a degree which many countries might envy us...

« *Third Point.* We have said, and we repeat, that the military operations in Laos are the work of Vietminh troops, that is to say of troops foreign to the country by race, tradition and ideology. We maintain that the so-called « free government, » which by a gross abuse of language they misterm « the Laos Resistance Government, » has been fabricated lock, stock and barrel by the foreign invaders » (1).

Both Laos and Cambodia were likewise adamant in their refusal to allow foreign enemy forces (Vietnamese Communists) to be permanently regrouped on their soil. While Cambodia was entirely successful, Laos had to pay the price of the deteriorated military situation prevailing at the time of the cease-fire: the two northernmost provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua and a connecting corridor between them remained under *Pathet Lao* control until a final settlement was reached by the two parties on November 18, 1957 (2).

Laos still fared considerably better than Viet-Nam with regard to its political and military situation. While the cease-fire Agreement for Viet-Nam specifically prohibits the introduction of

(1) *Documents Relating to the Discussion of Korea and Indo-China at the Geneva Conference, April 27-June 15, 1954.* London: H. M. Stationery Office, June 1954 (Cmd. 9186), pp. 154-155.

(2) For a brief appraisal of the *Pathet-Lao* integration, see *The Political Situation in Laos after Settlement of the 'Pathet-Lao' Problem* issued by the Royal Embassy of Laos in the United States, January 1958, 7 pp., mimeographed. This study, dealing with foreign affairs only, will not go into the details of the *Pathet-Lao* problem.

certain types of armament (jet aircraft, etc.) and the maintenance of foreign bases, Laos was authorized to retain a 1,500-men French training mission along with two French air and land bases and 3,500 French troops. One of the bases, Seno in Southern Laos, is a modern all-weather bomber base which has been modernized since the cease-fire and reinforced by French armor withdrawn from Viet-Nam in April 1956. Other articles of the Laotian cease-fire Agreement also include convenient escape clauses. Article 9, for example, prohibits the introduction of « armaments... of all kinds » into Laos but exempts from this prohibition a « specified quantity of armament » (not specified elsewhere) « deemed necessary for the defense of Laos » (1). Likewise, the promise made by Laos and Cambodia in the Final Declaration of the Conference not join military alliances is conveniently qualified by the proviso « so long as their security is not threatened » (2). An International Commission for Supervision and Control (better known as « ICC »), composed of Polish, Canadian and Indian members and chaired by the Indians, was to supervise the execution of the cease-fire provisions.

This latter step considerably widened the scope of Laos foreign relations. Moreover, the decline of French military and political power in the Far East compelled Laos to realign its foreign policy in the light of the new power constellations now emerging in the Asian firmament: SEATO, Communist China and the Bandung Bloc.

SEATO had been created in the Manila Pact after the French defeat in Indochina as an attempt to offset the losses of Western prestige and power in the area. By assuring smaller Asian nations of the support of the United States, Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand in the case of a Communist attack (3), SEATO now became the cornerstone of a new defensive system which, through a special protocol, also covered the three states of Indochina (which were prohibited from joining such an organization by the terms of the Geneva cease-fire).

Laotian official opinion with regard to SEATO varies slightly, of course, according to the interlocutor. For example, Prime Minister Sasorith stated in March 1956, when relations with the *Pathet Lao* rebels had reached a new low: « Laos has common borders with Red China and North Viet-Nam and, therefore is much exposed to Communist menaces... Though Laos is not a signatory of the Manila Pact, it lies within the protective orbit

(1) *Further Documents [Relating to the Discussion of Indo-China at the Geneva Conference]*. London: H. M. Stationery Office, August 1954 (Cmd. 9239), pp. 21-22.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 10.

(3) *New York Times*, September 9, 1954.

of the Treaty. It is satisfying to receive the promises of the United States [with regard to] their will to defend the principles of security and mutual aid in this part of the world... ».

However, six months later, after the succeeding Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna, had received Red Chinese and DRVN assurances of non-intervention in Laotian affairs, he declared in an interview with *Viet-Nam Presse* in Saigon, on September 9, 1956: « The Geneva Accords forbid Laos from participating in any military alliance. Not being a member of SEATO, Laos has, therefore, no relations with this organization ».

In actual fact, Laos does benefit directly from the « protective umbrella » of the SEATO alliance in two ways: firstly, through the SEATO Protocol; and, secondly, through its French Union Treaty of 1953, under which France guarantees Laos assistance in case of attack. France, a SEATO member, maintains two military bases in Laos with the full assent of both Peking and Hanoi, a fact which Prince Souvanna did not fail to point out during the same interview.

Joint declarations of amity with Communist China, India and North Viet-Nam have always carefully preserved Laotian freedom of action in national defense. Even the Lao-Chinese Statement of August 25, 1956, clearly leaves Laos the right to join foreign alliances if it deems its security menaced and also leaves unchallenged the retention of French bases and contingents (1). In other words, while the joint statement might have had some propaganda value for Red China, it in no way infringed upon the realities of Laotian reliance on Western support in its stand against Communist pressure.

In addition to mending its fences with the West and Communist China, Laos has also made consistent efforts to win acceptance as an independent state among its Asian neighbours. Though it had gained their diplomatic recognition soon after the Geneva cease-fire Conference, actual contacts with them had remained scanty. But the Asian-African Conference of Bandung, from April 18 to April 24, 1955, opened a new door for direct diplomatic contacts. At Bandung the Laotian delegation expressed its willingness to steer an « independent and neutral » course providing that « more powerful nations » (i. e., Communist China) were willing « to give proofs and guarantees to smaller nations » (2). Here again, without raising philosophical and moral issues, the Laotian diplomats concentrated on getting their opponents down to

(1) « Situation in Laos », *New York Times*, September 9, 1956.

(2) Kahin, George Mc T., *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956, p. 13.

cases. Having roundly denounced DRVN illegal activities in Laos in a White Book whose publication was timed to make it appear on the eve of the Bandung Conference (1) (which no doubt embarrassed the Red Chinese and DRVN delegations), they were now in an excellent position to exact non-interference pledges from Chou En-lai and the Prime Minister of the DRVN, Pham Van Dong (2).

The Bandung Conference also brought about closer contacts between Laos and its fellow-Buddhist neighbours Thailand, Burma and Cambodia. The possibility of forming a pro-Western « Buddhist Bloc » in Southeast Asia with Thailand as its hub had attracted certain American policy planners since 1953, when it became clear that a second line of defense might become desirable should a French military defeat occur in Viet-Nam (3). However, here again Laos drew a clear line between what could reasonably be achieved by such a pact and what it could achieve through direct negotiations. Thus a Thai move in July 1955 to bring the *Pathet Lao* threat to the attention of a meeting of the SEATO Council, caused « resentment among Laotian officials », who considered the matter a domestic affair and expected to settle it—as they eventually did—through the truce machinery of the Geneva Accords (4). Thus far, in spite of good relations with Thailand, the concept of a political « Buddhist Bloc » has not made much headway, although Thai economic influence upon landlocked Laos is steadily growing. Recollections of past Thai incursions upon Laotian soil are, however, still alive in Laos.

Relations with India have been cordial since the Geneva cease-fire and Prime Minister Nehru's subsequent visit to the Kingdom. Laos returned the courtesy in September 1955 with a visit of Crown Prince Savang Vatthana and Prime Minister Katay to India. The Laotian delegation made full use of the opportunity to stress the bonds of common « spiritual origin » as well as unity of views with India in seeking peaceful solutions to outstanding political problems, but H. E. Katay, speaking to an Indian audience, also used the occasion to express strong views concerning Laos, own Communist rebels: « ... Laotian public opinion is vigilant. The Laotian people shall never permit foreign intervention. In the forthcoming elections [of December 1955], its verdict shall ban

(1) Kingdom of Laos, Presidency of the Royal Government. *Memorandum adressé le 13 Avril 1955 à la Commission Internationale de Surveillance et de Contrôle au Laos, Suivi d'un Appendice*. Saigon, 1955.

(2) See Kahin, *op. cit.*, p. 27, for full text of Agreement.

(3) « Le Siam après l'Indochine ? », *L'Express* (weekly), Paris, January 23, 1954. See also Durdin, Tillman, « Southeast Asia States Seeking New Alliances », *New York Times*, January 17, 1954.

(4) Durdin, *loc. cit.*, July 18, 1955.

from the Nation those who have failed to join the Laotian community and have remained agents of the Viet-Minh » (1). It was again certainly no coincidence that Laos, as it had done on the eve of Bandung, issued a new supplement to the Laotian White Book on cease-fire violations (2) on the eve of the delegation's departure for India. Relations with India, however, have in recent months been somewhat less cordial in view of India's refusal, as a member of the International Armistice Commission, to let the Commission be dissolved after the completion of the Laotian national elections of May 5, 1958 (3).

With solid assurances of Indian cooperation and Chinese and DRVN promises of non-interference, the Laotian Government was repeated assurances that they were ready to « consolidate peace and unify the Kingdom of Laos » (4).

Upon his return from India, H. E. Katay met rebel leader Souphanouvong in Rangoon, Burma, and signed a joint Declaration on October 11, 1955. This document, like previous Laotian diplomatic endeavours, dealt with the practical problem at hand—the avoidance of further clashes between the two parties. A buffer zone was agreed upon, and a joint commission to deal with other outstanding problems was to be appointed (5). Last-minute hedging on the part of the *Pathet Lao* (6) again prevented a final settlement of the problem at that time. A new round of negotiations began in 1956 and culminated in August with the arrival of Prince Souphanouvong in Vientiane for the signature of a « final » agreement to integrate his forces with those of the Royal Government.

The Joint Communiqué issued on August 10, 1956, differed little from previous such agreements, except that it contained some face-saving provisions for the *Pathet-Lao*. Thus, the Royal Government promised to abolish « levies practiced during the colonial regime » (which had been abolished anyway) and gave

(1) Speeches by Katay D. Sasorith before the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi, September 20, 1955; and before the Asian Society, Calcutta, September 27, 1955.

(2) Royal Government of Laos. *Supplement to the Memorandum of April 13, 1955*, Vientiane, September 1955.

(3) *La C. I. C. et le Laos*, Editorial in *La Liberté* (daily), Phnom-Penh, June 11, 1958.

(4) See declaration by *Pathet-Lao* Colonel Singkago to the November 4, 1954, meeting of the ICC with the Joint Lao-*Pathet-Lao* Commission at Vientiane, in Dominion of Canada, External Affairs, Supplementary Paper No. 55/2: *First Interim Report of the Int'l Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos* (August 11, 1954-December 31, 1954). Ottawa, 1955.

(5) For the full French text, see *Accord sur la Cessation de tous Actes hostiles dans les Provinces de Samneua et Phongsaly*. Vientiane, 1955.

(6) Lieberman, Henry R., « Laos Says Reds Block Accord and Plans a Vote without Them, » *New York Times*, November 11, 1955.

all citizens « the right to work to ensure livelihood » (which no one had denied them) (1). In terms of concrete concessions, the Laotian Government had to agree to let *Pathet Lao* organizations operate legally throughout Laos. In addition, supplementary elections were to be organized in the border areas and a « Government of National Unity » was to be formed with participation of *Pathet Lao* members.

The Royal Government, already familiar with the somewhat uncertain pattern of negotiations of the *Pathet Lao*, sagely decided to attack the whole problem at the root—by talks with the Communist authorities in Peking and Hanoi. Within a week after the Vientiane communiqué, Prince Souvanna was in Peking, and shortly thereafter in Hanoi. The Laotian delegation was given the usual red-carpet treatment but—in spite of American fears that Laos would « turn east to neutralism » (2)—yielded, in fact, nothing. However, it received in both capitals informal pledges of approval of the Vientiane communiqués and thus could hope that their provisions would be observed this time by the *Pathet Lao*. Integration of the *Pathet-Lao* elements was accomplished in November 1957 and in the May 1958 elections, the political party of the *Pathet-Lao*, the *Neo Lao Haksat*, gained a total of 11 out of 59 seats of the Laotian National Assembly.

In fear, however, that the voyage might be misinterpreted in the West, the Laotian Prime Minister immediately visited strongly pro-American South Viet-Nam, where he was cordially received by President Ngo Dinh Diem, and then continued on to Paris. While Crown Prince Savang Vatthana paid an unofficial courtesy visit to the United States, in the course of which he was received by President Eisenhower. An important ministerial delegation, headed by the Laotian Prime Minister, also visited Washington and Western Europe in January 1958.

Relations between Laos and the United States over the past three years have had their periods of tension. In the United States, Laotian attempts to come to a reasonable settlement with the *Pathet Lao*—and, hence, with its puppet-masters in Peking and Hanoi—have been subject to many misgivings. There is a fear both in the American press and in government circles that Laos grossly underestimates the danger of Communist subversion. The United States has an important stake in Laos. As one of the most isolated and exposed areas now receiving United States aid, a failure of American policies in Laos, whether such a failure

(1) For full English text, see *International Affairs*, Moscow, November 1956, pp. 169-170.

(2) See headline to report by Takashi Oka in the *Christian Science Monitor*, September 1956.

were imputable to such policies or not, could have severe repercussions in other small countries living in the shadow of the Communist Bloc.

Amounting to more than \$50 million a year (\$40 million of which are spent for the 30,000-men Laotian Army and other internal-security projects) (1), American aid to Laos is higher, on a per-capita basis, than that granted by the United States to any other country. Some of the aid projects in the fields of public health and transportation have found widespread and grateful acceptance. However, they had not been able to stave off a serious inflationary trend (the Laotian *kip*, officially pegged at 35 to the U. S. dollar, is sometimes sold at 130 on the « free market ») or to solve the problem of providing capital equipment which the Laotians consider essential if their country is to become more nearly self-sufficient in the future. At the moment, according to official Laotian statistics, this is far from being the case. In 1955, Laos exports covered only 7 percent of the value of its imports, and during the fiscal year 1956 only 3.5 percent (2). To Laotian objections that too much of the aid is concentrated upon consumer goods (ranging from toothpaste to high-powered automobiles) American aid experts reply that a good many such consumer goods are needed to absorb the large amounts of purchasing power generated by payments for public works and by the military establishment which itself represents nearly ten percent of the total labour force and is the largest single wage-earner in the country. They also point out that certain Laotian demands for industrial equipment are unrealistic in the face of world market conditions and local transportation difficulties, which would prevent Laotian producers from competing effectively in price and quality (3).

Progress, however, in many fields has been notable. The number of sawmills has increased from 5 in 1954 to 28 in 1956 and both the American and French economic aid missions have called in private experts to seek means of expanding Laos' industrial activities without further endangering the economic stability of the country.

Relations with France are at present the subject of further negotiations. The dissolution of all « quadripartite » economic organizations as of January 1955 had brought about a change in

(1) Steele, A.T., *New York Herald Tribune*, July 12, 1956 also *Time*, January, 26, 1959.

(2) Kingdom of Laos, Ministère des Finances, de l'Économie et du Plan, *Bulletin Statistique du Laos*, 7^e année, 2^e trimestre 1957, pp. 9-10.

(3) The « unrealistic exchange rate » of the *kip* has come under heavy criticism, along with other practices of U. S. aid. Hearings were held on May 7 and 8, 1958 on various aspects of the aid program. See: 85th Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Program in Laos*, Washington 1958, 78 pages. By Decree No. 308/PC of October 10, 1958, the *kip* was devalued to U. S. \$ 1, and its convertibility made free.

Lao-French relations not provided for in the October 1953 treaty. The new negotiations began on October 22 and ended on November 16, 1956, with the signature of five new Agreements on monetary relations, economic relations, tax problems, the status of French personnel on duty with the Laotian administration, and a new Agreement on relations between the French and Laotian judiciaries (1). In accordance with the Geneva cease-fire Agreement, the French still maintain one air base at Seno, in Southern Laos, and a training mission with the Royal Laotian Army. Their effort in the cultural field is considerable and appreciated. As a French delegate to the 21st Conference on Public Education, held in Geneva in July 1958, stated:

« The French Government is grateful to Laos which, alone [of all the countries which receive educational aid from France], mentioned in its report the fact that it received such aid from France (2). »

All other problems, being of a purely technical nature, were settled without difficulty. The Laotian communiqué emphasized that « the measures taken by the two Delegations do not intend to modify the basis of the Franco-Laotian relations as defined by the treaty of 1953 ». Laos actively participates in the work of French Union organs and has, in fact, requested an increase in the number of its delegates to the French Union Assembly.

Within the United Nations, of which Laos is a member as a result of the sixteen-nation « package-deal » admission of December 1955 after having been a member of various specialized agencies since 1951, the Laotian delegation has adopted an attitude distinctly different from the bloc votes which the other « Bandung nations » deliver on many issues. Thus it voted for the following motions: withdrawal of foreign troops from Egypt; condemnation of Soviet Union for aggression in Hungary; withdrawal of Soviet forces from Hungary; withdrawal of Israeli forces from Sinai and report of U. N. on compliance (but it refused to co-sponsor the motion); separation of hostile forces in Egypt by U. N. Force; admission of South Viet-Nam and South Korea to the U. N. (but it refused to co-sponsor the motion); substitute motion on Algeria proposed by Japan (which it co-sponsored). It stood against the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Sinai without guarantees. It abstained on the motion to condemn Britain, France and Israel for the attack on Egypt and also on the first « Bandung Bloc » resolution on Algeria (which it refused to co-sponsor).

Relations between Laos and its two immediate neighbours, Cambodia and Viet-Nam, are cordial. Laotian students in the fields

(1) *Lao Presse* (daily), No. 1540, Vientiane, December 5, 1956.

(2) *Lao Hakxa Sai* (bi-monthly), N° 1, Vientiane, September 1, 1958.

of medicine and administration, attend higher schools in Phnom-Penh since such schools are not yet available in Vientiane. It remains to be seen how the recognition of Red China by Cambodia in July 1958 will affect Laos' relations with China in the future, outflanked as it is by Communist states along six hundred miles of its border. Early in 1959, several thousand refugee tribesmen from neighbouring Yunnan entered Namtha Province to escape conditions in Communist China. At the present time, Laos has good informal relations with the Chinese Nationalist authorities on Formosa (Taiwan). A Laotian trade mission visited Taiwan in June 1958 in order to further promote trade relations between the two countries (1). Some efforts have been made by South Viet-Nam to improve its relations with Laos in order to attract Laotian trade to the Central Vietnamese port of Tourane, which is connected with Southern Laos via a road which could soon be improved to provide Laos with a foreign commerce outlet that is shorter than the Bangkok-Vientiane trade route. Improvement of the highway leading from Southern Laos to Tourane began in October 1958. Relations with the DRVN have recently taken a turn for the worse. North Vietnamese forces have occupied certain border districts of Laos amid charges from Hanoi of Laotian « military encroachments » in Quang-Tri Province. The Laotian Royal Government submitted the incidents to the United Nations on January 18, 1959 (2).

The ICC in Laos also has had its shares of troubles. Both India and Canada felt that the Commission had fulfilled its duties in Laos after reunification of the country and the holding of free elections in May 1958, where the pro-Communist minority had seen all its rights fully respected. The third ICC member, Poland, nevertheless felt that the ICC should continue its stay in Laos. The Indian Chairman, Dr. Ansari adjourned the meetings of the Laos ICC *sine die* on July 20, 1958 — exactly four years after the Geneva cease-fire. Further British-Soviet conversations on the subject reached a deadlock in August 1958 (3). It seems likely, however, that the ICC will not be resurrected in its old form.

In spite of frequently intense pressure by « bloc » nations on both sides of the political fence, Laos has thus far stuck steadfastly to a policy of what some of its diplomats call « efficacy ». They consider it « inefficient » to propose for United Nations attention a motion or issue whose non-acceptance is a foregone conclusion

(1) *New York Times*, June 20, 1958. Late in 1958, a Nationalist Chinese consulate was opened in Vientiane.

(2) « Laos tells U. N. North Vietnam occupies Parts of Her Territory, *New York Times*, January 19, 1959.

(3) *Dépêche du Cambodge* (daily), Phnom-Penh, August 29, 1958.

or whose sole purpose is to arouse public opinion in the home countries of the various delegations involved. Mindful of their own negotiating experience with France and with stronger powers in Asia, the Laotians seem to see success in negotiation best achieved by concentrating on specific issues.

This effort of trying to deal with problems « one at a time, » without attempting to broach several issues at once, is perhaps the distinctive mark of the relations between Laos and other nations. In spite of its recent entry into the field of international affairs, the little Kingdom on the banks of the Mekong has given an account of itself that larger nations might well envy.



XIV

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