

The Date of Compilation of the *Concise Nakhon Phanom Chronicle*

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บทคัดย่อ

“ปีที่เรียบเรียงพงศาวดารเมืองนครพนมสังเขป”

กรมศิลปากรได้ตีพิมพ์ *พงศาวดารเมืองนครพนมสังเขป* ซึ่งรวบรวมอยู่ในประชุมพงศาวดารภาคที่ 70 ในปี พ.ศ. 2484 ในตอนต้นได้ระบุว่าพงศาวดารดังกล่าวได้เรียบเรียงขึ้นในปี พ.ศ. 2457 แต่ผู้เขียนคิดว่า พงศาวดารดังกล่าวน่าจะเรียบเรียงประมาณสามทศวรรษก่อนปีที่ระบุไว้ คือในราวปี พ.ศ. 2430 เหตุผลประการที่หนึ่งก็คือ รายชื่อนุตรธิดาของเจ้าเมืองกรมการระดับสูงที่ได้กล่าวถึงในพงศาวดารนั้นสิ้นสุดถึงเพียงปี พ.ศ. 2429 ไม่ใช่ พ.ศ. 2457 ประการที่สองคือ มีคำแถลงการณ์ปรากฏในตอนต้นของพงศาวดารว่า เจ้าเมืองกรมการเมืองสกลนครได้รับคำสั่งจากข้าหลวงใหญ่ประจำเมืองจำปาศักดิ์ให้เรียบเรียงพงศาวดารขึ้นในปี พ.ศ. 2430 และในขณะนั้นเป็นช่วงที่ข้าหลวงใหญ่อำนาจจัตราธิราชเจ้าเมืองสกลนครเป็นระยะเวลาสั้นๆ เพียงราวสองปี และประการสุดท้ายคือ โดยทั่วไปแล้วจุดมุ่งหมายของการเขียนพงศาวดารก็คือ เพื่อแสดงความขอบธรรมในการสืบทอดอำนาจจากผู้มีบุญญาธิการ ในพงศาวดารฉบับนี้ได้แสดงให้เห็นอย่างชัดเจนว่า มีความพยายามที่จะรักษาอำนาจปกครองไม่ให้บุคคลนอกวงศ์ตระกูลเข้ามามีสิทธิปกครองแทน อันเป็นประเด็นสำคัญที่สอดคล้องกับนโยบายการปฏิรูปการปกครองของรัฐบาลสยามในขณะนั้น และการเรียบเรียงพงศาวดารนี้จะไม่มีความสำคัญเลยในปี พ.ศ. 2457 เพราะการปฏิรูปการปกครองได้เสร็จสิ้นแล้ว

The *Concise Nakhon Phanom Chronicle*, an account of a lineage of magistrates who governed in Meuang Nakhon Phanom, Meuang Mahaxai, and Meuang Sakon Nakhon from the 1760s up until the 1880s, was composed by the last *Jao of Meuang Sakon Nakhon*, probably in 1887, within a few months of his appointment to this office, rather than in 1914.

The *Concise Nakhon Phanom Chronicle* is my translation of *Phongsawadan Meuang Nakhon Phanom Sangkhep* (Phraya Jan Ngonkham, 2512), which is published in Part 70 of the *Collected Chronicles (Prachum Phongsawadan)*. This part, entitled *Concerning Meuang Jampasak*, was prepared by the Fine Arts Department following the Franco-Thai conflict of late 1940 and early 1941, in which Thailand succeeded in regaining certain territories on the west bank of the Mekong River that she had been forced to cede to France early in the 20th century, among them Jampasak, and contains historical docu-

ments dealing with the middle Mekong Basin that were collected or written by officials of the Siamese government during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when France and Siam were contending for control of the region. In addition, a manuscript version of the chronicle kept at Wat Jaeng-saeng-arun in Sakon Nakhon town was brought to my attention by Phra Palat Kittisophano. The text covers 23 pages of a paper notebook and is written, beautifully, in what some scholars call Thai Noi script, which was widely used for secular writings and looks a lot like modern Lao script without tone markers. The text of the manuscript, which is neither signed nor dated, and that of the published versions differ but little. However, at various points in the manuscript text, additional material has been inserted, and to the end, a short statement has been appended; the insertions and statement are written in Standard Thai script, and the statement is signed "Boriban" and dated to B.E. (24)73.¹

The published version of the chronicle (Phraya Jan Ngonkham, 2512: 204) begins as follows:

The Concise Nakhon Phanom Chronicle
compiled by Phraya Jan Ngonkham
on a Saturday, the fourth day in the waxing fortnight of the first month,
in a tiger year, the sixth in a decade, 1276

This heading does not appear in the manuscript. Phraya Jan Ngonkham was Ammat-tho Phraya Prajanta-prathetthani sisakala-nurak-akkadecha-chai aphaiphiriya-bra-krom phahu (Ngonkham Brahmasakha na Sakon Nakhon), more informally known as Jao Khun Jan, the last of the old-style hereditary governors, or Jao of Meuang Sakon Nakhon, who held that office from 1886 to 1923.

The date given for the compilation of the chronicle is Saturday, November 21, 1914. Around this time, interest in genealogy was likely in a heightened state, for in March 1913, King Rama VI had decreed that henceforth Thais would have surnames, and distinguished official families were honored by being permitted to petition the King for a royally composed last name, in the creation of which genealogical information supplied by the petitioner would be considered (Vella, 1978: 128-133). Phraya Prajanta-prathetthani was so favored, and in June 1914, received from his sovereign the surname Brahmasakha (*Prawat Thrakun Brahmasakha na Sakhonnakhon*, 2516), which seems to have been based

¹ This is equivalent to A.D. 1930. Boriban was probably Rong Ammat-tho Phra Boriban Suphakit (Kham sai Sirikhan), who had a distinguished career in government service in Sakon Nakhon spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries and who was one of the compilers of the Sakon Nakhon Chronicle (Phraya Prajantapratthetthani, et al., 2520).

on the name of his great-grandfather, the Jao of Meuang Nakhon Phanom who first accepted the King of Siam as suzerain.

Nevertheless, there are three reasons for believing that the work was framed in 1887. One is that the recording of appointments to the highest magistracies of the meuang and the listing of each appointee's children do not extend to 1914 but only to 1886 in the published version and to 1887 in the manuscript. The chronicle shows the long relationship between Phraya Prajanta-prathetthani's lineage and the chief positions of authority in Meuang Nakhon Phanom, in Meuang Mahaxai, and in Meuang Sakon Nakhon. This relationship was perpetuated through the investiture of the foremost members of the lineage in certain positions of authority in the meuang. The notables of the meuang together chose one from among their number and proposed this candidate to the lord. Almost always, the will of the suzerain was one with that of the meuang's notables. The candidate traveled to the lord's court, presented tribute and did homage. The liege lord bestowed upon his vassal a position of authority within the meuang, a title, a rank, and insignia, thereby legitimizing his rule. This procedure was in most instances a formal ratification by the liege lord of this family's political primacy in the meuang. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (2471: 32-33) speculated this hereditary basis of government sprang from the fact that government became a speciality of certain families and that the children of these families would be trained in this work; he pointed out however that there was no law specifying who would govern and who would be governed.

The usage current in the meuang of the middle Mekong basin through most of the chronicle period called for investiture of the four supreme rulers, the *anyasi*. In fact, in the earliest annals, only the most senior of these, the *jao meuang*, or governor, is mentioned, but after the Siamese invasion of 1778, the chronicle also records investiture of *upahat*, *latsawong* (*ratchawong*), and *latsabut* (*ratchabut*), the three magistrates following the *jao meuang* in order of seniority.² Later on, to the *anyasi* were added two *phu chuai*

² The spelling of *upahat* is the same in both versions; for the names of other two positions, the spellings in the manuscript are represented first and those in the published version in parentheses. The meaning of *upahat* is "near the king," that of *latsawong* is "the family of the king," and that of *latsabut* is "son of the king, the final syllable in the first, *-hat*, and the initial syllables in the other two words, *latsa-*, probably being derived from Indic *raja*, meaning "king." The difference in the initial consonants suggests that *upahat* is an older word. In Lao and other Tai languages of the middle Mekong basin, the phoneme /r/ no longer exists. At some time in the past, /r/ became /v/. Thus, it seems, /*uparat*/ was already in use at that time and underwent the sound change to become /*upahat*/. In borrowings since that time, /r/ becomes /l/, so /*ratchawong*/ and /*ratchabut*/ became /*latsawong*/ and /*latsabut*/, respectively.

positions, one in 1872 and the other in 1876. The children of these men enjoyed privileged status for life, sons receiving the title *thao* at birth and daughters the title *nang*. The chronicle shows that although there were exceptions, succession was expected to pass in the male line. However, there was no convention of primogeniture, and any of the *thao* might reach the highest position depending on such factors as ability, ambition and longevity.

Another reason for believing the work was framed in 1887 is that the introduction to the chronicle, which, in conformity with the convention in works of this kind, explains why it was written, states that the magistrates of Meuang Sakon Nakhon were ordered to produce the work in 1887.

It was on a Tuesday, the first day of the waxing fortnight of the eighth month in a pig year, the ninth in a decade, the year 1249 of the Julasakkarat Era,³ that Your Excellency, the Lord Deputy of the Ministry of the North, Privy Counsellor, and High Commissioner overseeing the government of the Eastern Lao and Khmer Meuang headquartered at Meuang Nakhon Jampasak, ordered us, the magistrates of Meuang Sakon Nakhon, to compile a genealogy of the ruling family from the time Meuang Nakhon Phanom separated to become Meuang Mahaxai and Meuang Sakon Nakhon. We are most grateful for your order (Phraya Jan Ngonkham, 2512: 204).

The date of the order was Tuesday, June 21, 1887, and the person who gave it was Phraya Maha-ammatthibodi (Run Siphon), who himself had compiled two chronicles: *The Chronicle of Meuang Nakhon Chiang Mai, Meuang Nakhon Lampang, and Meuang Nakhon Lamphunchai* (Phraya Maha-ammatthibodi, 2506.) and *The Chronicle of Meuang Nakhon Jampasak* (Phraya Maha-ammatthibodi, 2512). This compiling and collecting of chronicles, however fascinating in itself, had practical application, for it informed the work of conducting a general survey to provide a basis for adjusting borders, which was the Commissioner's foremost task (Breazeale, 1975: 126).

At this time Western imperialist empires were replacing Oriental empires on the periphery of the Siamese Empire, and Siam needed information on which to base its claims in presenting its case to the world. On the west, in 1786, just four years after the establishment of the new Chakri dynasty and their new capital, Bangkok, an agent of the British East India Company had leased Penang from a Malay sultan, a tributary of Siam.

³ Only the year is given in the manuscript; the day of the week, the day of the month, and the month are not.

Three decades later, the British had founded Singapore, and in 1824, had defeated Siam's arch-rival Burma and had taken over the lower portion of that empire. Just two years before, in 1885, the British had completed their conquest of Burma, and to the south, were becoming ever more deeply involved with Malay sultanates that were tributaries of Siam.

On the east, the French had taken over the south of Vietnam in the early 1860s, weakening Siam's rival in the Mekong basin and also offering the welcome prospect of a Western power to counterbalance the British (Thompson, 1967: 184). These hopes were soon proved illusory however as the French began to advance themselves as champions of Vietnamese suzerain rights in Cambodia and Laos. In the 1870s, gangs of Chinese bandits, known in Thai as *Haw*,⁴ had begun harassing communities along the northern periphery of the Siamese empire. In 1875, Siam had launched a military campaign which drove a band of *Haw* from Vientiane, and then in 1885 had dispatched armies further north to deal with the bandits but also to make evident Siamese claims to this region, for by that time, the French had taken over the whole of Vietnam and were aggressively advancing claims to all lands lying east of the Mekong, which they held had devolved upon them as protectors of Vietnam. Thus in 1887, Siamese and French armies and survey teams were crisscrossing the Mekong basin, suppressing *Haw* bandits, attempting to extract allegiance from local leaders, confronting one another, laying claim to territories, and making maps of borders.

Centered as it was around the lake Nong Han in the upper basin of the Nam Kam to the west of the Mekong, Meuang Sakon Nakhon itself was somewhat removed from the territory contested by France and Siam. However, it had under its jurisdiction a number of smaller dependant meuang. Six of these were also west of the Mekong: Meuang Kusuman and Meuang Pho Phaisan Nikhom in the Kam basin north of Nong Han and Meuang Phan Na Nikhom, Meuang Akat Amnuai, Meuang Sawang Daen Din, and Meuang Jampa Chonnabot in the basin of the Songkhram to the west of Nong Han. It was its seventh dependency, which was then called Meuang Phuwadonsa-ang and which had formerly been called Meuang Mahaxai, that caused Meuang Sakon Nakhon to become involved in boundary questions; the reason was that it was located on the other side of Meuang Nakhon Phanom on the east side of the Mekong in the Se Bangfai basin. This administrative arrangement would likely have been of interest to the Commissioner, and it is noted that in the chronicle, the only one of Meuang Sakon Nakhon's dependant

⁴ To Westerners, the various *Haw* bands were called the *Black Flags*, the *Green Flags* and so on depending on the color of the banners they carried.

meuang mentioned is Meuang Phuwadonsa-ang. He had probably become aware of the arrangement in 1885.

When the Commissionership at Jampasak was created in 1882 (Mom Amorawongwijit, 2506: 319-20), Meuang Sakon Nakhon was beyond its jurisdiction (Breazeale, 1975 : 126), but as the situation on the frontier grew graver, the government employed it for action further north. In July 1885, the deposed Emperor of Viet Nam Ham Nghi fled from Hue into the mountains to the west and called for an uprising to expel the French. The Government of Siam ordered Meuang Sakon Nakhon to set up border posts in Mueang Phuwadonsa-ang to deny Ham Nghi and his partisans access to Siamese territory, and a subordinate of the Commissioner, Ja-meun Monthianphithak, was dispatched to erect border markers in that area (Phraya Prajantaprathetthani, 2520: 13-14; Prayut Sitthiphan, 2520: 177-178). In March 1887, the circumscription of the Meuang Nakhon Jampasak Commissionership of Phraya Maha-ammatthibodi was expanded to include Meuang Sakon Nakhon and Meuang Phuwadonsa-ang (Breazeale, 1975: 137), for Prince Prajak Sinlapakhom, the Commissioner at Nong Khai, who had had jurisdiction over Meuang Sakon Nakhon, was recalled to Bangkok (Breazeale, 1975: 130). Accompanying him to the capital was Phra Upahat (Ngonkham) (Phraya Prajantaprathetthani, 2520: 14), who was there invested as Phraya Prajantaprathetthani (Ngonkham), the Jao of Meuang Sakon Nakhon. About the same time came the request of the Commissioner for an account of the relations of Meuang Nakhon Phanom, Meuang Mahaxai, and Meuang Sakon Nakhon, and since the Commissioner held one of the highest Siamese government offices at that time directly concerned with the affairs of the meuang of the middle Mekong Basin, it would be expected that the magistrates of Meuang Sakon Nakhon would do their best to fulfil the order as expeditiously as possible. Furthermore, the official relationship of the Commissioner and the magistrates of Meuang Sakon Nakhon did not last for very long. Early in 1889, Meuang Sakon Nakhon and Meuang Mahaxai were again placed under the Commissioner at Meuang Nong Khai (Breazeale, 1975: 137), so Phraya Prajantaprathetthani was under the jurisdiction of Phraya Maha-ammatthibodi for only about two years.

A third consideration is that the chronicle seems to address a situation that existed in the meuang of the middle Mekong Basin in the late 1880s. The growing intensity in the confrontation with the French along the eastern frontier had persuaded the government of Siam that it must take a stronger hand in governing the meuang in this area, which previously had enjoyed a great deal of freedom in conducting their affairs. The agents of central control were the commissioners. These men were outsiders:

they did not belong to the aristocracy of the meuang in which they were posted. They nevertheless resided in the meuang, familiarized themselves with internal affairs, and held authority that they could exercise to the detriment of the interests of the local nobility. For example, the commissioner in Meuang Ubon had recently freed certain categories of slaves there and had prompted the central government to outlaw the trade in slaves in the region (Mom Amorawongwijit, 2506: 332-33). Furthermore, the number of commissioners was growing, for, in addition to those at Meuang Nakhon Jampasak, Meuang Nong Khai, and Meuang Ubon, by 1887, there were also commissioners at Meuang Luang Phrabang, Meuang Xiang Khouang, and Meuang Khamkoet. This turn of events likely alarmed members of the local aristocracies, who likely saw the commissioners as threatening their positions and their livelihoods. A few years later, when the commissioners began to undermine the powers and privileges of the aristocrats, alarm gave way to hostility, and some nobles declared themselves prepared to die in defense of what they viewed to be their birthright (Tej Bunnag, 1977: 37). However, in 1887, events had not yet reached this pass. The traditional forms and practices were still in force, and the nobles, however threatened, still controlled their meuang.

In June 1887, Phraya Maha-ammatthibodi was the senior commissioner. He had been posted at Jampasak for five years; however, his circumscription had only been extended to include Meuang Sakon Nakhon and Meuang Phuwadonsa-ang in March of that year, and thus his official relationship with the magistrates of Meuang Sakon Nakhon was just beginning. At this juncture, he requested the leadership of Meuang Sakon Nakhon to provide him with background information on the relationship of Meuang Sakon Nakhon, Meuang Mahaxai, and Meuang Nakhon Phanom.

The chronicle is a statement of the traditionalist's position. It is of a genre eminently suited to this purpose: the *phongsawadan*. This Thai word, which means the history or annals of a lineage, dynasty, or kingdom and usually referring to dynastic chronicles (Charvitt Kasetsiri, 1976: 1) is compounded of two Indic words: *bansa* "clan or lineage" and *avatara* "god incarnate"; in the Indian language of courtesy, an illustrious man is called an *avatara*, or incarnation of a deity (Monier-Williams, 1970: 99). In this genre of Tai historiography, the lineage is often shown to be of divine origin or to have risen to eminence through some supernatural event. For example, in the *Lan Chang Chronicle* (2506: 140) the King of Heaven, Phraya Thian, sends down to earth to Meuang Na Noi Oi Nu to rule over all its people Khun Borom, father of the founders of the Tai kingdoms of Southeast Asia. Corresponding to this in the lore of Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom is the skyrocket

contest,⁵ a miraculous event which serves to set the lineage apart from the mass of mankind and provides supernatural ratification of their position of eminence in society.

Genealogy can be a central organizing principle in works of this kind. A case in point is the *Lan Chang Chronicle* (2506: 151), in which for over twenty generations--about 700 years--following the conquest of Meuang Swa by Khun Law, the eldest son of Khun Borom, no events are reported save that the king had a son who succeeded him. Subsequent to this, beginning with the reign of Fa Ngum, the prince of Meuang Swa who is reputed to have conquered most of the middle Mekong basin and who established the empire of Lan Chang, the work gives more information about what took place, but even so, the criterion determining what is included is the effect an event had upon succession. The chronicler's concern is thus a narrow one: he seeks to elevate the lineage above the throng of humanity by showing that for a long time the scions of the lineage held supreme authority over one or more polities and thus glorify the incumbent prince, who is linked genetically with he who was elevated to authority supernaturally. That the work should have such a principle of organization attests to the importance of a hereditary principle in governing the distribution of power within a society, and a work so organized affirms that this principle plays a central role in maintaining order within that society (Vansina, 1961: 78).

The compiler of the *Concise Nakhon Phanom Chronicle* argues that by custom of over a century's *standing*--a custom already well-established when Bangkok became a seat of kings--the supreme rulers of Meuang Nakhon Phanom, Meuang Mahaxai, and Meuang Sakon Nakhon were chosen from one lineage. That this custom was honored by the various sovereigns who at one time or another were able to exercise suzerain's rights in this part of the Mekong basin is illustrated with the claim that for generations, scions of this lineage were accepted as vassals, awarded appropriate titles and ranks, and duly invested with the supreme offices of one or more of these meuang by Vientiane, Hue, or Bangkok, of some combination thereof. When this custom was observed, nothing happened, or at least, the chronicle reports few events. The implication is that the meuang was well governed and that peace prevailed, for under the traditional order, ideal rule was marked by no events of serious consequence (Breazeale, 1975: 40). On the other hand, when this

⁵ In the manuscript, Phra Boriban Suphakit wrote: "The account should begin with the son of the lord of Meuang Rahaeng who marched hither with his retainers and army and built Meuang Marukkha Nakhon." This son and his brother had engaged in a skyrocket contest; each was to launch a skyrocket, and wherever it came to earth, there he would build his meuang. The elder's rocket didn't ignite, so he became ruler of Meuang Rahaeng. The younger brother's rocket came down near the stream that became known as the Se Bangfai, *bangfai* meaning "skyrocket," and so he built a meuang there (Governor of Nakhon Phanom and Provincial Committee 2500, 2500: 4).

custom was violated, things happened. The two narrative high points are the accounts of the rebellion of Thao Ku-kaeo and of that of Thao Julani, Thao Kinghonga, and Thao Khamsai. The chronicle makes clear that both rebellions sprang from the same cause: the attempt by a liege to install an outsider in the supreme magistracy of the meuang without the consent of the members of the lineage. The reader cannot escape the conclusion that the men of this lineage resist, by force of arms or alliance with other powers if necessary, the appointment of anyone they regard as an interloper to high office within their meuang.

An argument of this nature was relevant in 1887, when the question of how local aristocracies might react to infringement on the privileges they traditionally enjoyed was very much a critical concern of the commissioners and the crown. By 1914, however, whether or not a given position in the government should be the preserve of a certain family was a dead issue, and it is difficult to see why anyone would wish to disturb its repose by advancing such an argument, least of all one so astute as Phraya Prajantapraphetthani, who, by the way, when the crisis came, quite unlike what might be expected given the argument of the chronicle, cooperated with the Siamese government in doing away with the old order and in establishing a centralized bureaucratic system of provincial administration, the same in its essentials as that in use today.

Thus, because it was commissioned in 1887, because it is complete only to 1887, and because it seems to address a situation which existed in 1887, I believe the *Concise Nakhon Phanom Chronicle* to have been framed in that year.

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