

Thai and Lao Manuscript Cultures Revisited: Insights from Newly Discovered Monastic Collections in Luang Prabang

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ABSTRACT—In March 2016, a team of researchers of the Buddhist Archives in Luang Prabang discovered more than 800 palm-leaf fascicles in a store room at Vat Si Bun Hüang, one of more than two dozen monasteries which still exist in the former royal capital of Laos. In a project supported by the Centre for the Studies of Manuscript Cultures in Hamburg (SFB 950) these manuscripts were inventoried, catalogued, and digitized until spring 2017. The evidence so far suggests that the bulk of this corpus was originally stored at the monastery library (*hò tham*) of Vat Si Mungkhun and at a later date, probably in the late 1970s or early 1980s, in a time of radical political change, transferred to its present site. It seems that two senior monks of Vat Si Mungkhun – Somdet Rattanapanya or Sathu Phò Hung (1859–1945) and his disciple Sathu Pho Oun Hueane Rattanapanyo (1869–1955) – played a crucial role in building up the library of Vat Si Mungkhun. They were most respected learned monks who worked on the construction of temple buildings and produced many bundles of palm-leaf manuscripts, notably in the 1920s and 1930s. Their names are recorded in the colophons of manuscripts they sponsored and donated themselves. It is the objective of this article to reconstruct the origins of this collection and its history based on a thorough analysis of colophons (of scribes, sponsors and donors) and other paratextual evidence.

The World Heritage Site of Luang Prabang has the highest density of monasteries in Laos, and perhaps in the whole of Southeast Asia. Since the mid-14th century, Luang Prabang has been the main pillar of Lao Buddhism. Even after the transfer of the royal capital of the Lan Sang Kingdom from Luang Prabang to Vientiane in 1560, the city, situated at the confluence of the Khan and Mekong rivers, maintained its prestigious status as the spiritual centre of Lao Buddhism. A total of thirty-three monasteries in a town of less than 50,000 inhabitants, not including an even larger number of abandoned monasteries and many other historical Buddhist sites, give testimony to the city's rich cultural heritage. Until the end of the Lao monarchy in 1975, the Supreme Patriarch (*saṅgharāja*) of Laos resided at Vat Mai, or Vat Si Suvannaphumaram, a monastery bordering the compound of the Royal Palace.

Indeed, the Buddhist cultural heritage of Laos survived the country's vicissitudes of

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the last two centuries much better in Luang Prabang than anywhere else in the country. Inscribed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage in 1995, Luang Prabang has been the site of intensive documentary research on Lao Buddhism over the last two decades (UNESCO 2005). In the last century, many of Laos' intellectually most influential and charismatic monks came from Luang Prabang.



Figure 1. Pha Buaphan Vatsaro, abbot of Vat Si Bun Hūang, reading a palm-leaf manuscript at his abode in Vat Si Bun Hūang. The photograph was taken in the 1990s. Collection of Vat Si Bun Hūang, Buddhist Archive No. D5003.

The case of the Venerable Pha Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thera (1920–2007), the late abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam and one of the most outstanding monks in 20th century Laos, who was also a passionate collector of various kinds of art objects, historical photographs, official documents, manuscripts and religious publications, has been discussed in various publications (Grabowsky and Berger 2015, Khamvone 2016).² Pha Khamchan's impressive personal collection of more than 400 palm-leaf and mulberry paper manuscripts has been inventoried, documented, and digitized—along with similar collections held in several other monasteries—in the project, “Rare manuscripts of great Buddhist thinkers of Laos: Digitization, translation and relocation at the Buddhist Archive of Luang Prabang”, supported by the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme from February 2015 until July 2016 (EAP 691).³

In the final phase of the project, our research team made a surprising discovery: on 15 March 2016, members of our digitization team discovered hundreds of palm-leaf manuscripts in a storage room in the abbot's abode (*kuti*) of Vat Si Bun Hūang, a monastery situated just next to Vat Khili, which houses the Sala Thammavihan, an unusual two-storey building hosting the

² More than 35,000 historic photographs (prints and negatives) have been discovered in Luang Prabang monasteries, dating from c. 1880 to the present. Coming from nineteen distinct monastery collections (with Pha Khamchan's collection comprising half of the whole corpus), this unique photographic “view from inside” documents various aspects of monastic life, pilgrimage, rituals, and social life in Luang Prabang and beyond. An overview of the photographs and their listing is available at <https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP326/search>.

³ eap.bl.uk/project/EAP691/search?page=1. This project built upon the findings of a research project titled “The Lao Sangha and Modernity: A Buddhist Archive in Luang Prabang”, directed by the author, which was part of a research network organized between several German universities and funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research, “The Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia” (DORISEA), see: www.dorisea.net.

Buddhist Archives on the top floor. This discovery was such a surprise as nobody could imagine that a rather small monastery like Vat Si Bun Hüang, which never had a monastic library (*hò tham* or *hò tai*),⁴ would hold such precious documents. The manuscripts were kept in six traditional wooden boxes and in one cabinet. Although seemingly not used for a long time, they were mostly in good physical condition. However, the manuscripts were neither kept in any order nor were any tags attached to the manuscript bundles (*mat*) bearing inventory numbers of the Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme (PLMP), which had made a survey of thousands of monastic repositories all over Laos in the 1990s (Hundius 2009).

After a first survey conducted shortly after the discovery of the manuscripts, it became clear that at least a substantial number of manuscripts from this corpus had been donated by abbots and monks of neighbouring Vat Si Mungkhun, or by monks from other monasteries and laypeople of the surrounding communities, including members of the traditional nobility of Luang Prabang and even by the King of Luang Prabang and other members of the royal family. Although several manuscripts are from the late 18th and early 19th century, the bulk dates from the first half of the 20th century. The overwhelming prominence in this manuscript collection of scribes, sponsors and donors associated with Vat Si Mungkhun makes it most likely that these manuscripts were originally kept in the monastic library (*hò tai*) of Vat Si Mungkhun, which nowadays is used as a monk's dormitory (*kuti*) and no longer contains any manuscripts. Later on, these manuscripts were transferred from Vat Si Mungkhun's library to their present location for still unknown reasons.

According to Pha One Keo Sithivong, abbot of Vat Pak Khan and Vat Xiang Thòng and chairperson of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organisation in Luang Prabang province, the manuscripts might have been moved from the library of Vat Si Mungkhun to Vat Si Bun Hüang for reasons of safety in the 1980s, at a time when Pha Duangta was the abbot of Vat Si Bun Hüang. At that time, Vat Si Mungkhun did not have an abbot, but only a few young monks and novices, and the monastery library was damaged by rain leaking through its defective roof. What we know for sure is that the manuscripts had already been stored in Vat Si Bun Hüang in the 1990s, since we have some rare photographs taken at that time that show abbot Pha Buaphan Vatsaro sitting in his *kuti* while reading from a palm-leaf manuscript. This provides circumstantial evidence that the monks already used the manuscripts during the last decade of the 20th century. Thus, we can conclude that the manuscripts were probably transferred to Vat Si Bun Hüang at some time before the early 1990s.

The twin monasteries

Vat Si Mungkhun and Vat Si Bun Hüang are small monasteries that form part of a cluster of six monasteries lining up on Sakkarin Road in peninsular Luang Prabang.

⁴ Literally meaning "house of the Dhamma", respectively "house of the Triple Gems". As for an in-depth study of monastic libraries in Northern Thailand, the results of which also hold true cum grano salis for Laos and the north-eastern part of Thailand, see Lagirarde 2014.

The other monasteries of that group are Vat Nak, Vat Sop Sikkharam, Vat That Nòi, and Vat Saen Sukharam. The first four monasteries are within the confines of the same wall, one metre in height, that was built along the street, while the wall in front of Vat Nak is with only 70 cm tall. In the course of the early 20th century, two monasteries were abandoned and later integrated into other monasteries: Vat That Nòi became part of Vat Saen Sukharam and Vat Nak merged with Vat Sop Sikkharam. All of these monasteries are supported by the local communities on both sides of Sakkarin Road and demonstrate the belief of Lao Buddhists that a community—a village as well as a town quarter (both called *ban* in Lao)—should possess one monastery as its spiritual centre.⁵

Among the four still existing monasteries of the group, Vat Saen Sukharam is by far the largest and the most prominent; it possesses not only a most beautiful ordination hall (*sim*), but also a large collection of manuscripts kept at various repositories. Vat Si Bun Hüang, at the other end of the street, belongs to the smaller monasteries in Luang Prabang, both with regard to its size and the number of monks and novices it houses.



Figure 2. The kuti of Vat Si Bun Hüang. Photo by Khamvone Boulyaphonh

⁵ Lao village communities, as well as town quarters, usually have a *vat* (as its cultural and spiritual centre). The *vat* is a Buddhist temple-monastery, which is not only the place for the *Sangha*, the community of monks and novices, to live and meditate, but also a place for laypeople to come together for festival celebrations, to take part in religious rituals, to search for spiritual experiences, and to seek the advice of highly respected monks in more worldly matters. The *vat* is a place where the *Sangha* and the laity come together to participate in mutually rewarding and meritorious activities. In addition, the *vat* is an educational centre, which offers the teaching of the Dhamma, the fundamental truths revealed by the Buddha, as well as secular sciences. In other words, it is a repository of traditional knowledge. It is at the very core of every Lao village community. While a *vat* determines the identity of a community, the members of that community have the obligation to maintain the *vat*. The Lao temple-monastery (*vat*) as a social space and the interaction between *Sangha* and laity in the Lao context are discussed in Hayashi 2003: 101–111. See also Holt 2009 and Bounleuth 2016.

Vat Si Bun Hüang

Vat Si Bun Hüang, “Monastery of Glorious Merit”, or Vat Si Bun Hüang Sirimaram, is a small monastery located on Sakkarin Road. When looking from the north to the south, it is the first of a group of six monasteries; it was built in 1758/59, i.e. during the reign of King Sotika Kumman (1776–81), and was restored several times during the 20th century (Khamman 1964: 37). The most prominent buildings in the monastery compound are: the *sim* (ordination or temple hall) built in so-called Luang Prabang style II; a drum shelter close to the street corner; and two beautiful monk’s living quarters (*kuti*).



Figure 3. The wooden inscription at the archway of the entrance door of the abbot’s abode in Vat Si Bun Hüang. Photo by Somsack Thongsavatphon, a Buddhist Archive staff member, 5 September 2017.

The *kuti* on the northern side has a wooden inscription at the archway of the entrance door to the store room where the large repository of over 500 palm-leaf manuscripts is located. This remarkable inscription says that the *kuti* was built in 1940 by a local nobleman and his wife from Ban Khao Khiap (present Ban Khili), Luang Prabang. At the archway of the entrance door of the abbot’s abode there is an inscription engraved on a nicely decorated wooden board. The text of the inscription, written in the Lao variant of the Dhamma script (*tua aksòn tham lao*) reads as follows:

จุลศักราชได้ ๑๓๐๒ พุทธศักราช ๒๔๘๓ ทั่วปีกอดลัน เดือน ๑๑ ขึ้น ๑๕ ค่ำ (วัน ๔) ตรง
กับ วันที่ ๑๕ ออกโตบ (ตุลา) ปี ๑๙๔๐ รจนาแล้วยามกองงาย หมายถึงจารย์มัน พระยา
มหามนตรี และนางเพี้ยแพงศรี อยู่บ้านเขาเขียบ ตาแสงเซียงทอง ได้พร้อมด้วยบุตรตา
บุตร มีใจเลื่อมใสศรัทธาเป็นอันยิ่ง จึงพร้อมกันสร้างกุฎิ ๑ หลัง และสร้างระเบียบกุฎิใส่
หลังเก่าในวัดสิบุญเรือง ถวายไว้กับพุทธศาสนา ขอให้เป็นที่ถาวรตราบเท่า ๕๐๐๐ พระ
วัสสา เจตนากุศลที่พุ่งเข้าทั้งหลาย ได้สร้างสิ่งนี้ ของงบันดาลเป็นผลสำเร็จตั้งมโนระ
ความปรารถนา แห่งพุ่งเข้าทั้งหลาย ในภพนี้และภพหน้า กล่าวคือพระนิพพาน อันที่พุ่ง
เข้าทั้งหลายแลเห็นบัดเดี๋ยวนี้เทอญ อะระหะโต มักกะ อะระโถ นิพพานัง ปะระมัง สุขัง

In the year Chunlasakkarat 1302, Buddhist Era 2483, a *kat si* year (year of the dragon), on the fifteenth waxing day of the eleventh [lunar] month, the fourth day of the week, which corresponds to 15 October 1940,⁶ the writing [of this manuscript] has been completed, at the time of the sunset drum (*nyam kòng ngai*). [The principal initiators], namely Chan Man, Phanya Maha Monti, and Nang Phia Phaeng Si, from [the town quarter of] Ban Khao Khiap of Xiang Thòng sub-district

⁶ In fact, the Lao date corresponds to Wednesday, 16 October 1940, which was indeed “the fourth day of the week”.

(*tasaeng*), along with their offspring, had the religious faith to build one [new] monk's abode (*kuti*) and a veranda of the old abode at Vat Si Bun Hüang to be dedicated to the Teachings of the Buddha. May this have permanent [good results] until [the completion of] 5,000 years. This morally good deed made by intention (*cetanā-kuṣūla*), which is [the *kuti*] we all built here together, may produce rewards according to the wishes of our heart both in this life and in [all] future lives, namely [finally attaining] nibbana as we all now [want to] realize. Arahato-magga-aratho nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ. (The path to Arahantship, Nibbāna [is] the highest [stage] of happiness.)

In the 20th century, Vat Si Bun Hüang had many abbots residing in this monastery, sometimes over an extended period of time. Some abbots disrobed, while others died or left the monastery to pursue higher Buddhist education. The last abbot was Pha Bunlek Rochanayano, also known as Chao Môm Khamlek,⁷ who until recently served as the acting abbot of Vat Si Bun Hüang. He informed the Buddhist Archive about the existence of the manuscript repository in the store room of his living quarters.

Pha Bunlek was born on 5 December 1945 in Luang Prabang. In 1964, he was ordained as a monk at the age of twenty-one at Vat Suvannakhili. He graduated from the Buddhist school of Luang Prabang, finishing the *prian prayok hok* (the sixth grade of Buddhist Pali studies). In 1975, he left the monastic life, married, had a family, and later became a teacher at the Buddhist school of Luang Prabang, where he taught “Dhamma” and “Pali language”. Possessing a sound expertise in Pali and the Dhamma script (*tua aksòṇ tham*), he reordained at Vat Na Sang, Luang Prabang, in July 2014, to become once again a member of the *Sangha*. In 2015, he was invited by the inhabitants of Ban Phon Hüang to take over as the abbot at Vat Si Bun Hüang where he supervised 23 novices. After his disrobing at the end of 2016, Mr. Bunlek Inthalhi resumed his role as teacher at the Buddhist school of Luang Prabang. In his free time, he serves as a ceremonial master for *su khwan* ceremonies for important guests visiting Luang Prabang.

Vat Si Mungkhun

Vat Si Mungkhun, “Monastery of noble auspiciousness”, or Vat Si Mungkhun Xaiyaram, is located on Sakkarin Road, Luang Prabang. It was built in CS 1125 (AD 1763/64) during the reign of King Sotika Kumman (r. 1750–1771) by Phia Kang Mungkhun, who gave the monastery its name (Engelmann 2015: 64). The honorific “Xaiyaram” (“victorious monastery”) was added later to the monastery's name. The most prominent buildings in the monastery compound are a small tapered-arch chapel near the street, and a small two-storey library with a nice roof (now used as a monk's dormitory). An old *kuti*, with three rooms surrounded by terraces, was built in 1926 by Phanya Müang Khang (Thit Un Hüan). This monk's abode is at present under renovation. A wooden inscription at the archway of the entrance door of a *kuti* in Vat Si Mungkhun testifies to the collaborative effort of the abbot of Vat Si Mungkhun, Khuba (also: Sathu Phò) Hung, and leading laypersons to develop the monastery and its supporting town quarter.

⁷ His name on his ID card says Pha Bunlek Rochanayano, but the people call him Pha Khamlek. Pha Khamlek left the monastic order on 7 July 2016 and became a staff member of the EAP691 project.

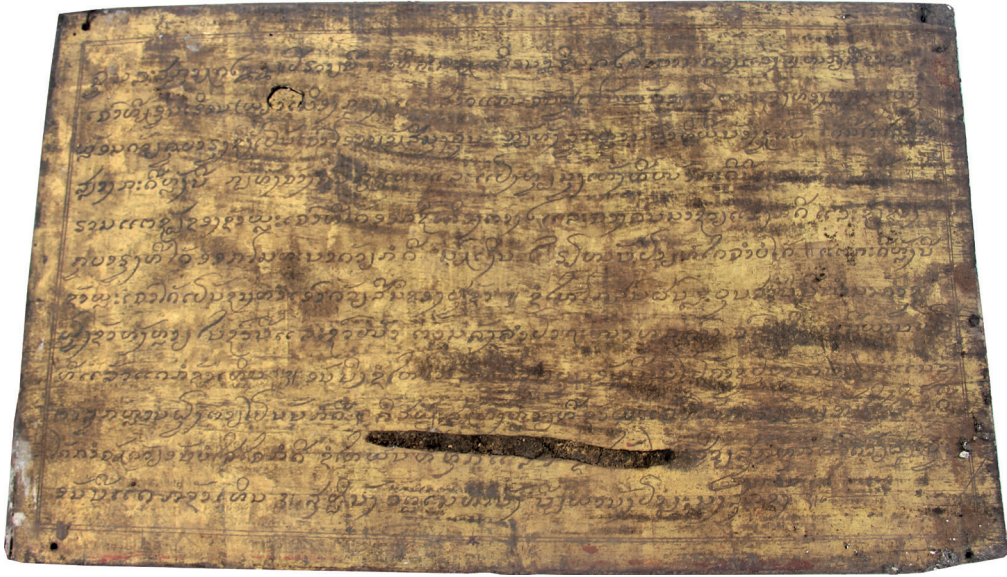


Figure 4. Wooden inscription at the entrance to a kuti in Vat Si Mungkhun. Photo by Khamvone Boulyaphonh 8 September 2017.

จุลศักราช ๑๒๘๘ ปีรวายยี่ อธิกมาส เดือน ๘ ขึ้น ๑๒ ค่ำ ยามกองแลง หมายมีข้าพเจ้า
 ทิดอุ้นเรือน (พระยาเมืองกาบ) และสาวแก่นจันทร์ ผู้เป็นภรรยา อยู่บ้านเชียงทอง หลวง
 พระบาง พร้อมด้วยครอบครัวซึ่งเป็นเจ้าโหวาส (อาวาส) วัดศรีมงคลกับทั้งลูกหลานญาติ
 พี่น้องสูกัน ได้มีใจใส่ศรัทธาสร้างกุฏิหลังนี้ กับทั้งจ้างคนก่อแท่นและแปงทูปมุงเพงที่หน้า
 กุฏินี้ (...) รวมแต่ทรัพย์ของข้าพเจ้าที่ได้ออกซื้อเครื่องต่างๆ และจ้างคนมาช่วยแรงก็ดี
 และทรัพย์ของครอบครัวที่ได้ออกไ้หม่นาด้วยก็ดี หมดเงิน ๔ ร้อยหมื่นปลายเท่าใด จำปได้
 กุฏิหลังนี้ ข้าพเจ้าได้เป็นช่าง ทำเอาด้วยฝีมือของผู้ข้า ขอให้กุศลผลบุญส่วนนี้ นำมาค้าชู
 ผูกษาทั้งหลาย ในชั้วนี้และชั้วหน้า ตามดั่งคำปวารณาทุกคนจนถึงพระนิพพาน (เป็น) ที่
 แลแล้วแต่ก็ข้าเทอญ อันหนึ่ง ขอให้กุศลนาบุญอันนี้ ไปค้าชูปู่ย่า ตายาย พ่อแม่ ลุงตา ลูก
 หลาน ผูกษาไปนั้นก็ดี คือสรรพสัตว์ทั้งหลายที่ข้าพเจ้าได้ก้าจัดด้วยอันใจใจก็ดี ได้ก้าจัด
 ด้วยบ่ใจใจก็ดี ขอให้พ้นทุกข์และขอให้ได้เสวยสุขทุกตน ด้วยผลบุญอันนี้แต่ก็ข้าเทอญ สุ
 ทินนัง ะตะเมทานัง นิพพานัง ะระมัง สุขัง

In Culasakkarat 1288, a *hwai nyi* year (Year of the Dog), *athikamat* (the second eighth lunar month), on the twelfth waxing day of the eight lunar month,⁸ at the time of the sunset drum. I, Thit Un Hüan (Phaya Müang Kang) and my wife, Sao Kaenchan from Ban Xiang Thòng, Luang Prabang, together with Khuba (Monk) Hung, who is the abbot of Vat Si Mungkhun, along with all our children and relatives, had the religious faith to build this *kuti* and also to pay the remuneration for the workers, and we also built the terrace in front of this *kuti*. [...] The grand total of money that I spent on buying materials and workers and the donation of money by Khuba Hung was more than 400 [Indochinese] piastres (*man*), the other amount I could not remember. I was the architect and built this *kuti* by myself. May the result of this merit support all of us through this life and in all future lives according to our desires until finally reaching Nibbāna as the ultimate goal. On

⁸ 1288 Tautyashada 12 = Wednesday, 21 July 1926.

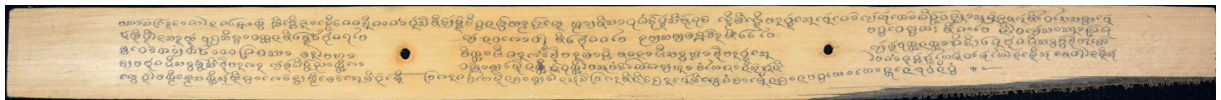
the other hand, may the result of this merit support grandparents, parents, uncles, grandfathers and all descendants who die. All creatures that I killed either willingly or unwillingly. May the result of this merit support them all to escape from suffering and reach happiness. *Suddhinam vatta me dhanam nibbānam paramam sukham* (Well donated is our gift, [a condition for us to reach] *nibbāna* which is the highest stage of happiness.)

Vat Si Mungkhun is renowned for carrying out every year a most auspicious ceremony to honour its own name. The monastery has a small old library (*hò tai*) and an old *kuti*, which is on the western side of the *sim*. The library has been used for storing manuscripts over many years. Later, when the position of abbot was vacant, the manuscripts seemed to have been moved and kept elsewhere, namely—as we were able to demonstrate—to the neighbouring monastery of Vat Si Bun Hūang, thus sliding into temporary oblivion until their recent rediscovery. As mentioned above, at the time when the large corpus of manuscripts was discovered (in the storage room of the abbot's *kuti* at Vat Si Bun Hūang), the library at Vat Si Mungkhun was used as a dormitory. Before, we would have never suspected that the manuscripts would be transferred from this library. The building is simple and small, but elegant with a two-tiered roof and was built by the abbot, Sathu Hung Rattanapannya (Ratanapaññā), in the 1930s to store his collection of manuscripts. It is small in order to fit within the limited space in the compound of the monastery.



Figures 5 and 6. The *sim* and library of Vat Si Mungkhun. The library, built in the 1930s, is now used as a monks' dormitory; photo by Khamvone Boulyaphonh, 24 July 2017.

Sathu Phò Hung or Somdet Rattanapannya (Hung),⁹ whom people preferred to call Sathu Phò Hung, was born in 1859 in Ban Vat Saen, Luang Prabang. He was the son of Mr. Chan Kam from Ban Tha Khok and Mrs. Nang La from Ban Khao Khiap (present-day Ban Khili). When Sathu Phò Hung was still a layman, he took two wives. His first wife was named Mrs. Bua, who came from the city quarter of Ban Khao Khiap; his second wife was named Mrs. Thòngsi, who came from Ban Kang. Sathu Phò Hung was ordained as a monk in 1904, at the age of forty-five, and served as abbot of Vat Si Mungkhun for many years until his death in 1945. We do not know the reasons for his rather late ordination, though the premature death of his two wives might have prompted his ordination in the prime of his life. Among the many manuscripts to whose making he contributed, either as scribe or as sponsor and donor, is a multiple-text manuscript (BAD-21-1-0567), which he dedicated to his parents, his two wives and his children, all of whom had already passed away. The unusually long colophon on folio 26r of fascicle 1 not only reveals details concerning the production of the manuscript and its contents, but also provides brief biodata of its sponsor:



มหาศักราชได้ 1280 ด้ว ปีเป็กสะง่า เดือน 11 ขึ้น 10 ค่ำ วัน 3 มี้อรับมด ोजनाแล้วยาม
กองแลง หมายถึง สาธุพ่อรุ่ง วัดสีมิงคล เดิมทีเกิดบ้านวัดแสน เป็นเค้ากับลูกเต้าพี่น้อง
วงศาสูคน พรอมกันมีใจใสศรัทธาเป็นอันยิ่ง จึงได้สร้างยังบุพพิทกขารรณนา มี 2 มัด 5
ผูก 17 ใบ กับนวนโกวาท มี 2 ผูก 11 ใบ, อุปสัมปทา 8 อย่าง มี 22 ใบ, บัจจเวกขณะมี
10 ใบนี้ไว้กับศาสนาพระพุทธรเจาตราบต่อเท่า 5000 พระพรรษา ทานไปหาบิดาชื่อ (อา)
จารย์กำ อยู่บ้านท่าคก มารดาชื่อสาวหล้า อยู่บ้านวัดแสน กับทั้งบุตร นัดดา ภรรยา
2 คน ผู้หนึ่งชื่อสาวบัว อยู่บ้านเขาเขียบ ผู้หนึ่งชื่อสาวทองลี อยู่บ้านกวาง กับทั้งพี่น้อง
ญาติกา วงศาทั้งหลาย ผู้อันจตุติไปสุปรโลกภายนอก ขอให้อานิสงส์อันนี้ไปค้าชูชกออก
ให้พ้นจากทุกข์ ให้ได้ถึงสุข แมนว่าได้ถึงสุขแล้ว จงไปตีม(เต็ม)แถมสมบัติสุขยิ่งกว่าเก่า
ด้วยหมิ่นเทาแสนทวีจิง [มี] เทอญ ประการหนึ่ง ขอให้ผู้ข้ำทั้งหลายได้สุข 3 ประการ มี
นิพพานเป็นที่แลวก่อข้าเทอญ นิพพานะ บัจจะโยโย โหนตุโน ทูวัง นิจจิง

In [CS] 1280, a *poek sanga* year, on the tenth waxing day of the eleventh [lunar] month, the third day of the week, a *hap mot (met)* day,¹⁰ the writing was finished at the time of the sunset drum. Sathu Phò Hung from Vat Si Mungkhun, born in Ban Vat Saen, as the initiating [monastic supporter], along with his children and all members of his family, had the deep religious faith to sponsor the making of the manuscripts titled: *Pupphasikkha vannana*. which contains 2 bundles, 5 fascicles and 17 folios; *Navakovat* containing 2 fascicles, 11 folios; *Uppasampatha* 8

⁹ *Sadhu* means “good man”; *Phò* means “father”, and *Hung* means “bright”. Sathu Phò was the traditional title given to a monk who had a family before entering into the monastery. Somdet means highness, majesty, the highest title for members of the nobility and for monks; Rattanapannya is his Pali name. Somdet Rattanapannya, found in the colophons of many manuscripts that he sponsored, was the honoured name given him by the local Sangha and laypeople as a highly venerated abbot.

¹⁰ 1280 Asvina 10 = Tuesday, 15 October 1918. This day was indeed a *hap met* day.

containing 22 folios; and *Patchavekkhana* containing 11 folios to support the Teachings of the Buddha to last for 5,000 years. This is done in dedication to my father, Chan Kam from Ban Tha Khok and my mother, Sao La from Ban Vat Saen, as well as to my children and my two wives, one named Sao Bua from Ban Khao Khiap and the other named Sao Thongsì from Ban Kang, and to all my siblings and relatives who have already passed away to the other world. May this transferred merit support them to escape from suffering and reach happiness. Even if they have already reached a good place, they ought to move to an even better place, with a 10,000 being equal to a 100,000. On the other hand, may we all reach the three stages of happiness with Nibbāna as the ultimate goal. *Nibbāna paccayo hotu no dhuvam niccam*. (May this be a condition for us to reach Nibbāna, forever and continuously.) (...)



Figure 7. An official portrait of two monks who were friends. Left: Pha Hung Rattanapannya, abbot of Vat Si Mungkhun; Right: Pha Un Hūan Rattapannyo, Vat Si Mungkhun. The photograph was taken in the early 1940s. Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam. Buddhist Archive No. B0561.

Sathu Phò Hung's most outstanding achievement is the restoration in 1930 of the *sim* of Vat Si Mungkhun, which still exists today. The two-storey small library with beautiful roof at Vat Si Mungkhun, probably built in the early 20th century, was his work because in the colophons of many manuscripts, the abbot is recorded as “maker” or “producer” (Lao: *phu sang*), i.e., sponsor and donor.¹¹ This abbot not only had a passion for making manuscripts, but also for building the library to store them. The abbot's full title, as stated in the colophons, is Somdet Rattanapannya (Hung). This means that he was considered an important monk, who had been elevated to a position of high rank within the ecclesiastical order of Luang Prabang in the first third of the 20th century. Other recorded names are Sathu Phò Hung and Maha Sangkhasa Rattanapannya. The local people revered him because of his reputation as a fortune teller. He had great expertise in traditional magic practices. People often came to ask

him to prepare and bless holy water because they believed that such holy water could solve their problems and help them achieve prosperity. He also advised people about the auspicious time to organize important events or to leave home on a long-distance journey. One portrait, which has the Buddhist Archive No. B0561R, shows Somdet Rattanapannya (Hung) with Sathu Phò Un Hūan Rattapanyo, his close friend and later

¹¹ As for the meaning of the term *phu sang*, see the discussion in the section “Content of Colophons” further below.

successor,¹² in around 1931 during their first encounter at Vat Si Mungkhun. Sathu Phò Hung passed away in 1945 at the age of eighty-six.

The manuscript collection of Vat Si Bun Hüang

Of the 541 manuscripts in the Vat Si Bun Hüang collection, comprising a total of 861 fascicles (*phuk*), 353 (two-thirds) are dated and only 188 (one-third) are undated. In fact, in the manuscript cultures of the Tai and Lao world most manuscripts—regardless of whether they use palm-leaf or various kinds of paper as writing support—have elaborate systems for providing exact dates when the scribe had completed the writing or copying of his manuscript. This is not something which we should take for granted because in most other manuscript cultures of South and Southeast Asia (for example, Tamil, Mon and Khmer), much less care is taken with a precise dating. Dated manuscripts are, therefore, the exception rather than the rule. The vast majority of the palm-leaf manuscripts from Vat Si Bun Hüang contain one single text running over one palm-leaf fascicle, others contain more than one, some even up to ten fascicles. However, many of the multi-fascicle manuscripts are not complete and have one or even more missing fascicles. A number of manuscripts comprising one single fascicle may have originally been from a larger multi-fascicle manuscript with the remaining fascicles lost. Some manuscripts are complete and in good physical condition while others are lightly or severely damaged, with parts of the text missing.

The oldest manuscript in the Vat Si Bun Hüang collection, which can be dated accurately, is a fragment of the Nagarakhaṇḍa, the thirteenth and last section (*khaṇḍa*) of the Vessantara Jātaka (BAD-21-1-0485); the date when the writing was finished corresponds to Thursday, 5 September 1799 of the Gregorian calendar. One even older extant manuscript—containing a *Maha Vibak* (“Great Retribution”) text—but its dating (January 1783) is less precise and contains internal contradictions (BAD-21-1-0477). More certain is the dating of an untitled manuscript BAD-21-1-0478, which contains a Vohāra text. The colophon records a date whose components point to Thursday, 12 October 1662 as the likely day when the scribe finished the writing of the manuscript. The most recent manuscript is from 1982. Thus, the whole collection covers a time span of 320 years.

The taxonomy of manuscripts varies depending on regulations and the aims of such classifications. Phouvong Phimmasone (1959) demonstrates that in the 16th century, Lao folklore was derived from Indian sources. Buddhist sermons and chants also flourished during this period. They became a source of inspiration for many popular tales in both verse and prose. Some manuscripts, moreover, contain quite diverse texts, which are difficult to classify and place in an appropriate category. McDaniel considers manuscripts containing nissaya, vohāra, and nāmasadda texts as pedagogical manuscripts.¹³

In the 1990s, the Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme (PLMP) divided

¹² As for a biography of Sathu Phò Un Hüang Rattanapanyo (1869–1955), see Pha One Keo Sitthivong and Khamvone Boulyaphonh 2011: 30.

¹³ McDaniel 2008: 109.

thousands of texts—86,000 texts written on 368,000 fascicles, of which about 12,337 texts are currently available for online research—into twenty categories.¹⁴ Of these, the last two categories (“miscellaneous” หลายนวมอด and “undetermined” บัได้อัดหมอดไ้) are remarkable because they illustrate a peculiar feature of Lao manuscripts: specifically that some manuscripts, both palm-leaf and paper manuscripts, contain various texts. Whereas the personal collection of manuscripts kept by Pha Khamchan Virachitto in his living quarters contained a high percentage of such multiple-text manuscripts, in particular among the mulberry paper folding books, they are rare in the Vat Si Bun Hüang collection. Several secular or non-religious texts do not appear in any of the manuscripts from this collection, for example, customary law texts, philological and astrological treatises, and the wide field of secular literature, apart from a few folk tales (*nithan* นิทาน). Texts related to white magic (*sainyasad* โสยศาสตร์) and rites and rituals (*phithikam* พิธีกรรม) are as rare as medical treatises (*tamla ya* ตำรายา). The collection contains several dozen chronicles, all of which have to be classified as “Buddhist chronicles” (*tamnan phutthasatsana* ตำนานพุทธศาสนา).

This scarcity of manuscripts carrying secular texts confirms our hypothesis that the Vat Si Bun Hüang collection is not the outcome of a decade-long collecting of manuscripts by one, or more, senior monk for personal study but that these manuscripts originally belonged to a monastic repository, namely that of the neighbouring monastery of Vat Si Mungkhun. Against this background, it does not come as a surprise that almost 230 manuscript-fascicles contain texts from the Pali canon and thus can be classified as belonging to the categories of Vinaya, Suttanta or Abhidhamma.

The large number of Jātaka texts written on palm-leaf is not surprising either. This suggests that the Jātaka stories, dealing with the previous lives of the Buddha, are not only well known to the Lao people of Luang Prabang, but are also very popular. Among the many Jātaka stories, the Vessantara Jātaka is the most popular one. It tells the story of one of Buddha’s lives immediately before he was born as Sidhartha Gotama. The story is about the compassionate Prince Vessantara, who gives away everything he owns, including his children, thereby displaying the virtue of perfect generosity, or *dāna*. It is also known as the *Thet Mahasat* (Great Birth Sermon), familiar to Lao Buddhists under the name *Phavet* or *Phavetsandòn*. Phavet is also the name of a traditional festival, Bun Phavet, which is held sometime around the fourth lunar month (March/April) of every year. The festival lasts two or three days, with the story of Prince Vessantara being recited all day on the final day of the festivities. The story, composed in verse form and comprising thirteen chapters, or *kan* (กัณฐ์), is chanted aloud by monks and novices with years of experience preaching all of the chapters. The text combines Pali words and phrases with the respective Lao translation.¹⁵ According to tradition, three of them—Himmaphan, Thanakhan, Kumman—are usually divided into two volumes. As a consequence of this subdivision, the story of Prince Vessantara is composed and written on sixteen fascicles of palm leaves. However, many of the Jātaka manuscripts from the Vat Si Bun Hüang collection comprise only one of the thirteen *kan*, not the complete text.

¹⁴ For more details, please visit <http://www.laomanuscripts.net>.

¹⁵ See Bounleuth 2016: 110.

Table 1: Distribution of texts of the Vat Si Bun Hüang corpus according to genres

<i>Genre</i>		<i>no. of fascicles</i>	<i>percent</i>
Customary law	กฎหมาย	---	---
Didactics	คำสอน	20	2.3
Monolingual Pali	คัมภีร์บาลี	4	0.5
(White) Magic	ไสยศาสตร์	7	0.8
Jātaka tales	ชาดก	291	33.8
Buddhist chronicles	ตำนานพุทธศาสนา	69	8.1
Secular chronicles	ตำนานเมือง	---	---
Medical treatises	ตำรายา	4	0.5
General Buddhism	ธรรมะทั่วไป	9	1
Buddhist tales	นิยายธรรมะ	46	5.3
Prayers	บทสวดมนตร์	43	5
Suttanta doctrine	พระสูตร	109	12.7
Vinaya rules	พระวินัย	74	8.6
Abhidhamma doctrine	พระอภิธรรม	46	5.3
Folktales	นิทาน	4	0.5
Philology	อักษรศาสตร์	---	---
Rites and rituals	พิธีกรรม	8	0.9
(Secular) Literature	วรรณคดี	---	---
Astrology	โหราศาสตร์	---	---
<i>Anisong</i> (blessings)	อาณิสงส์	123	14.3
Miscellaneous	หลายหมวด	---	---
Unclassified	ปัดหมวดให้	3	0.3
Total	รวมทั้งหมด	861	100

Besides the Jātaka tales, *Anisong* (Pali: *ānisaṃsa*) texts are featured most prominently in the Vat Si Bun Hüang collection of manuscripts.¹⁶ *Anisong* texts are generally known under the terms *Salòng* or *Sòng* in Lao. These popular texts, inscribed mostly on palm-

¹⁶ As Arthid Sheravanichkul (2009 and 2010) has shown in his seminal study of gift-giving in the Thai and Lao world, the kind of gifts recommended in *Anisong* texts pertain to (a.) giving alms to the Sangha (food and medicine, robes and cloth, ritual offerings, such as flowers and lamps, sponsoring the construction of temple buildings, copying of religious texts); (b.) producing objects of worship (images, stupas); (c.) constructing public works (bridges, roads, hospitals, schools); and (d.) giving gifts in ceremonies or festivals (celebrating a new house, funerals, the Buddhist New Year, etc.). The manuscripts of the Pha Khamchan Virachitto's collections containing *Anisong* are analysed in Bounleuth 2015b and Bounleuth 2016: 130–136.

leaf, mulberry paper and other kinds of paper, are used for performing sermons or preaching. These short homilistic texts, which rarely contain more than twenty folios, are about the rewards of merit, or literally the “advantage”, which a believer may expect to receive from performing a particular religious deed. More surprisingly, collections of manuscripts also include titles referring to non-Buddhist rituals, such as a marriage ceremony (*Anisong taeng ngan*) in which monks are not supposed to intervene in this region of Southeast Asia. In truth, *Anisong* could be seen as a paradigm of the principle of what we might call “Buddhization by means of text”, that is, the legitimization of a given practice by its written record with a sacred script (the Dhamma script) on a sacred object (the manuscript). In this way, any local custom may become unquestionably “Buddhist” if it is included as a subject in an *Anisong*.

Lao palm-leaf manuscripts: material aspects

According to traditional Lao education, the acquisition of knowledge in ancient Lao society is dependent upon the study of manuscripts. Unlike modern textbooks, which introduce script, orthography and grammar of a language to the students in a systematic and structured way, young novices acquire their reading skills by studying religious instructions in manuscripts chosen by their teachers. If the text, or texts, in a manuscript was written in the Dhamma script (*tua aksòn tham* ตัวอักษรธรรม) they would “study Dhamma script writings”. In the same way, if the text was recorded in the Old Lao script (*tua aksòn lao buhan* ตัวอักษรลาวโบราณ), the reading activity would be called the “study of old Lao writings”.¹⁷ The reading of texts in Khò script (a variant of the Khmer script used for the writing of religious texts mainly in Central and Southern Thailand)¹⁸ would be coined in a similar fashion. Traditional monastic education places more emphasis on reading and less on writing. The number of monks who developed advanced writing skills was relatively small. It was not unusual to find young Lao men, who were able to read fluently, but had only poor writing skills. It is a widespread belief, both in the monastic as well as the secular environment, that the skill of “writing” is reserved for people of authority.

Lao manuscripts are mostly inscribed with a stylus on palm-leaf sheets of rectangular shape varying in length. Each bundle or fascicle of leaves (*phuk* ผูก) is usually fastened together with braided cords (*sai sanòng* สายสนอง) threaded through one or two holes pierced through the entire body of the manuscript. Based on the data collected by the earlier mentioned Programme for the Preservation of Lao Manuscripts, it can be estimated that more than ninety percent of Lao manuscripts are palm-leaf manuscripts

¹⁷ As for the origins and dissemination of the Dhamma script, which originated in Northern Thailand (Lan Na), presumably in the 14th century, and spread from there to Laos in the second half of the 15th century, see Grabowsky 2008.

¹⁸ Up until the beginning of the 20th century, the Khò script was used for works written in Pali. It was also frequently used for religious texts in the vernacular (notably Thai). On the other hand, manuscripts with secular content were only written in the Thai script. Lao manuscripts written in Khò script are rather rare, but not completely unusual as has been shown by Igunma 2013. They are found in southern Laos more than in the north.

(*nangsü bai lan* หนังสือใบลาน). The number of leaves in a given fascicle depends on the length of the text. Generally speaking, numerous palm-leaf fascicles, that contain the same literary text, are fastened together. Such a bundle is called a *sum* (ซุม). A rather widespread method of protecting manuscript fascicles bound together by a cord was the insertion of at least one, sometimes two or three, blank folios both at the beginning and at the end. Sometimes one of these blank folios, usually the front cover folio, would bear the title of the text and the fascicle's number (in the case of texts running over more than one fascicle).

Two wooden boards were frequently added to the bundle for protection. The bundle was then usually wrapped in a piece of cloth and tied with a cotton string. A wrapped bundle of manuscripts is called *mat* (มัด). A *mat* could either consist of a single bundle comprising one single text or consist of multiple bundles with several fascicles and texts. Most palm-leaf manuscripts were inscribed with a stylus and these incisions were made visible by darkening them with a charcoal or soot based black paint. Traditionally, the black paint used for making incisions visible on palm leaves is the wood oil of dipterocarpus, which is known to Lao people as *nam man nyang* (น้ำมันยาง).¹⁹

The spelling of words appearing in Lao manuscripts—both palm-leaf and paper manuscripts—depends greatly on the script because the orthographic systems of the Dhamma and the Lao Buhan scripts differ considerably. It is not unusual for scribes to mix the orthographic systems of both scripts, and in some instances we find idiosyncrasies, reflecting particular multilingual and multi-ethnic cultural environments to which the scribes were exposed. Some of these idiosyncratic or hybrid orthographic features might have occurred intentionally, while others probably came about rather unintentionally. For example, the spelling of Lao words containing the diphthong /u:a/, like in the word /dɯ:an (เดือน), “month”, is often written /dɯ:n/ (เดิ่น) following some local pronunciation. A particular feature of the Dhamma script is the use of subscript and superscript for writing final consonants. The consistent use of tone markers (*mai ek* ไม่เอก and *mai tho* ไม่โท) is expected from modern printed publications, but is a rather recent phenomenon in Lao manuscript culture. In most manuscripts dated prior to the mid-20th century, tone markers are hardly used at all.

Unlike paper manuscripts, palm-leaf manuscripts are mostly numbered by a combination of consonant and vowel graphemes, according to the order used for the arrangement of words written in Devanagari and other Indic scripts (for the sake of simplicity, it shall be called “Sanskrit orthography”). This system of foliation, which is especially used for manuscripts that contain religious texts, uses a combination of consonant and vowel graphemes. The first twelve folios would start with *k* (a voiceless and unaspirated velar), the first consonant of the alphabet, which is then combined with twelve vowels – *a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, e, ai, o, au, aṃ, aḥ* – which are used in Sanskrit. Apart from the last one, these vowels are pronounced similar to the pronunciation of the equivalent vowels in Lao. Thus, the first twelve folios would be paginated: *ka, kā, ki, kī, ku, kū*, and so forth, which correspond to one, two, three, four, five and six, until twelve. Especially in the case of a longer texts, single-fascicle manuscripts would comprise more than

¹⁹ For further details, see Bounleuth 2016: 42–46; and Bounleuth 2015: 54–57.

twelve leaves, the remaining consonants, such as *kh, g, gh, ñ, c, ch, j, jh, ñ*, and so forth, will likewise be combined with the same set of twelve vowels.

Some scribes prefer cardinal numbers to order the fascicle of a palm-leaf manuscript. This approach to foliation is required if the manuscript-fascicle is very large; that is to say, if it consists of hundreds of leaves. The writing of high-digit numbers—comprising several numerals, especially three or four-digit numbers—deserves special attention. Often, both words and numerals are combined to indicate a number above 100. For instance, the number “125” may be recorded as “hundred 25 (*hòi 25*)” or “hundred 205 (*hòi 205*)”. Traditionally, the foliation was only written in the centre of the left-hand margin of the verso side of each leaf, thus demonstrating that palm-leaf manuscripts are divided by leaf, not page. A number of manuscripts were foliated by applying the two systems of pagination in parallel. The numeral was mostly written in the left-hand margin of the first page of each leaf, whereas the numerated word was placed in the traditional manner. Some palm-leaf manuscripts have been foliated twice, first with the combination of consonant and vowel graphemes, as described above, and a second time (mostly not by the original scribe but by a later user) by using numerals.²⁰ There are also some rare cases where the foliation has been realized by using both Lao and Arabic numerals (see BAD-21-1-0401).

Dates and calendrical systems

Lao manuscripts have traditionally been dated according to the so-called “little era” (*cunlasakkalat, chunlasakkarat* or *cuḷasakarāja*), which was first introduced in March 638 AD. Until the early 20th century, this era was still popular among the Thai and Lao. The calendar originated in Burma and from there spread throughout mainland Southeast Asia, replacing older eras. This happened at the time when Burma rose to be the dominant regional power in mainland Southeast Asia during the 16th century. As Eade points out, according to conventions *cuḷasakarāja* (CS) starts in March 639 AD. “That is the date of its year 1, from which it does not follow that it began then. Like all Southeast Asian eras, it had a year 0, unlike the Christian Era, which has no 0 AD.” (Eade 1995: 17). Since the 1930s, the Buddhist era (BE), counting the time that has passed since the Buddha’s *parinibbāna* (“Nirvāna after death”), has replaced the *cuḷasakarāja*. Yet, there are a number of manuscripts where both eras—CS and BE—are recorded (f.e., BAD-21-1-0177).

A few manuscripts, notably from the post-1975 period, even use the Common or Christian era (AD), which is the officially recognized era in present-day Laos. A large number of dated manuscripts only speak of “the Era” (*sakkarat* or *sangkhat*) without specifying it. We can be sure that in such cases *cuḷasakarāja* is meant. In several manuscripts, a “Greater Era” (Pali: *mahāsakarāja*) is indicated. This era, whose “year 1” corresponds to AD 79, has hardly been used in the Tai-Lao world after the 16th century. It seems highly unlikely that 19th century Lao manuscripts would be dated according to this era. A closer examination of the colophons shows that in all cases where the

²⁰ For details, see Bounleuth 2016: 59–62.

scribe records *mahāsakarāja* (MS), “Greater Era”, he in fact means *cuḷasakarāja* (CS), “Smaller Era”. Perhaps in order to elevate the importance of CS, it was elevated to the allegedly “higher” status of MS.

In addition to the *cuḷasakarāja* year, dates in Tai-Lao historical records were also given with reference to the corresponding year of a sixty-year cycle. This sexagesimal cycle is known by almost all Tai speaking groups (see Terwiel 1980) and is composed of two repeating series of terms. The first series consists of ten names, referring to the year numbers of the decade, the second series is composed of the twelve names of the animal cycle. The series of ten is repeated six times and the series of twelve five times. Thus sixty different combinations are generated before the sexagesimal cycle restarts.²¹ The first year of the cycle, for example, is called *kat sai* by the Lao and can be rendered in English as “the year of the small snake, the first year of the decade”. A cross-checking comparison of both dates—*cuḷasakarāja* year and the sexagesimal cycle year—allows us to disclose copyist and other errors in the historical records. This catalogue discusses such errors in the footnotes.

Each animal year consists of twelve lunar months, which are divided into odd-numbered months (เดือนคี่) comprising twenty-nine days and even-numbered months (เดือนคู่) with thirty days. The name of each month begins with the word *düan* and is followed by its number, with the exception of the first two months, called *chiang* (one) and *nyi* (two) respectively. Therefore, one animal year has 354 days. To reconcile the lunar calendar with the solar year comprising 365.25 days, every two to three years an intercalary month is added, making up a total of thirteen months in those years. The added month is the eighth month, a thirty-day month known to the Lao people as *paet sòng hon* (แปดสองหน), literally “second eight month”. The first eighth month is called *düan paet ton* (เดือนแปดตัน), or Pratomāsāḍa, whereas the second eighth month is referred to as *düan paet lun* (เดือนแปดลุน), or Tutyāsāḍa. According to Chao Phetsalat (2011: 13), ancient scholars drew up an extra year, comprising thirteen months, in order to match the Western calendar. A thirteen-month year occurs every two or three years depending on the *dithi thaloen sok* (ดิถีเถลิงศก), or the day on which the New (solar) Year begins. The first day of a year with thirteen months lies between the fifth lunar month—the tenth day of the waning moon—and the sixth lunar month—the fifth day of the waxing moon.

The numeration of months varies from region to region, as in general it follows the agricultural cycle. The first month of the year usually coincides with the end of the rainfall (October-December). It is not to be confused with the first month of the calendar year, which is called *caitra* or *vaisāka*, according to Indian tradition, and starts at the end of March or beginning of April. According to Eade (1989: 11), one has to bear in mind that the new *cuḷasakarāja* years must begin within a span bounded (inclusively) by the sixth day of *caitra* and the first five days of *vaisāka*.” In Laos, like in Thailand (except the upper north), *caitra* is called “the fifth month”, in Lan Na (upper northern Thailand) “the seventh month”, and in the Tai Khün and Tai Lü inhabited areas of the Upper Mekong region “the sixth month”.

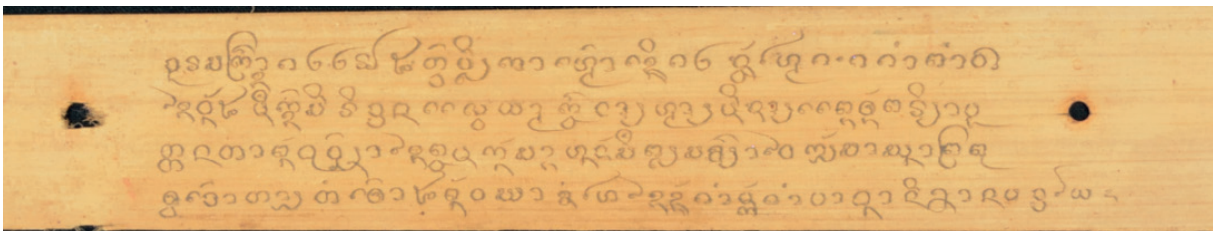
²¹ For the Chinese origins of the sexagesimal calendar and its spread over Southeast Asia, in particular among the Tai speaking areas, see Billard 1963; Davis 1976; Terwiel 1980; and Saimöng 1981.

Each lunar month comprises two fortnights. The first fortnight is called *düan khün* (เดือนขึ้น), literally meaning “the rising moon” or “the waxing moon”. It comprises fifteen days. The second fortnight, comprising fourteen or fifteen days, is named *düang haem* (เดือนแรม), which means “the waning moon”. Days of the week are named by numbers, beginning with the word *wan* (วัน) and followed by ordered cardinal numbers. The first day of the week is Sunday and the last, and seventh, day is Saturday. *Wan sam*—literally, “Day Three”—refers to the third day of the week, corresponding to Tuesday. This way of reckoning days is usually called the “Mon reckoning” of the weekday. In addition, there is also a “Tai reckoning” which divides the days into cycles of sixty days, following the same sexagesimal pattern similar to the one used for the reckoning of years. According to Tai-Lao tradition, the name of a specific year consists of two components. The first component signifies the year of the decade (ten-year cycle) and is called *mae pi* (แม่ปี), literally “mother of the year”. The second component pertains to the Year of the Animal (twelve-year cycle) and is named *luk pi* (ลูกปี), literally “child of the year”. The naming of the days follows the same system; thus, we have *mae mü* (แม่มี้อ), “mother of the day”, and *luk mü* (ลูกมี้อ) respectively. The names of the Days of the Animals begin with the word *mü* (มี้อ), whereas the year starts with *pi* (ปี).

Apart from a dual dating of years and days, colophons of Lao manuscripts very often record the time of the day (*nyam* ยาม) when the scribe finished the writing of his manuscript. It is not surprising that a scribe noticed with pride the moment when his arduous and often painstaking work of copying a long sacred text came to an end. Preferred times of the day for marking the end of the writing process were “the time of the morning drum” (*nyam kòng ngai* = 7:30–9:00 h), “the time of the forenoon horn” (*nyam thae kai thiang* = 9:00–10:30 h), and “the time of the sunset drum” (*nyam kòng laeng* = 13:30–15:00 h).

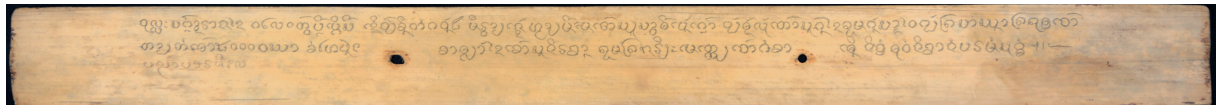
An example for a most elaborate and “complete“ date is recorded in the colophon of manuscript BAD-21-1-0479. This manuscript contains one single fascicle (no. 3) of the Balasāṅkhayā Jātaka, an apocryphal birth story about a previous incarnation of the Buddha which is widely popular in Laos, north-eastern and northern Thailand. The colophon, written in centred position on the verso side of folio 22, states:

จุลศักราช ๑๒๒ ร้อย ๕ (๑๒๐๕) ทั่ว ปีกาเหมา เดือน ๑๒ ออกใหม่ ๑๑ ค่ำ พอว่าไ้วัน
๕ มี้อกตลี รจนาแล้วยามกองงาย (...)



In CS 1205, a *ka mao* year, on the eleventh waxing day of the twelfth [lunar] month, the fifth day of the week, a *kot si* day, the writing was finished at the time of the morning drum. (...)

With the assistance of Lars Gislén’s computer programme based on Chris Eade’s manuals (1989, 1995, and 1996), this date (1205 Karttika 11) could be converted into the following date of the Western calendar: Thursday, 2 November 1843. As this day was indeed a *kot si* day, we can be confident about the accuracy of the date provided in the colophon. In the rather large number of inconsistent recording of days, it is not always possible to decide whether the day of the moon phase, the (Mon) day of the week or the (Tai) day of the sexigesimal cycle is preferable. In the following example, however, the Tai day solves a contradiction between the day of the moon phase and the day of the week. The colophon of manuscript BAD-21-1-0073, titled *Paññā-pāramī*, states (on folio 12 recto):

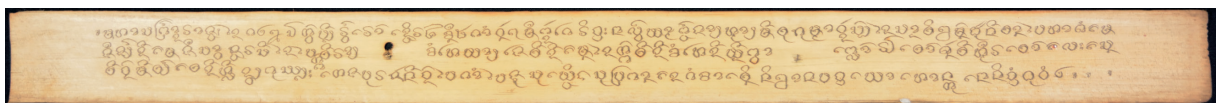


จุลศักราชได้ 1290 ทัพปีเปกสี เดือนเจียง ขึ้น 1 ค่ำ วัน 4 มี้อรวายเส็ด

In CS 1290, a *poek si* year, on the first waxing day of the first [lunar] month, the fourth day of the week, a *hwai set* day,²² [the writing of this manuscript was finished].

Without considering the Tai day (last component), the date “1290 Margasirsha 1” would correspond to Thursday, 13 December 1928, which, however, was a *moeng kai* day and the fifth day of the week. As the preceding day, 12 December 1928, was not only a Wednesday (fourth day of the week) but also a *hwai set* day, it seems evident that this day ought to be taken as the correct date with some plausibility.

As mentioned above, the dating of manuscripts of the Vat Si Bun Hüang corpus almost exclusively follows the Lao calendar. This does not come as a surprise because one would not expect otherwise from Lao monks and laypeople in the old Lao capital of Luang Prabang. Cases where the dating follows another calendrical system are very rare, such as in the case of manuscript BAD-21-1-0344. The colophon (folio 17r) records the following date:



มหาศักราชได้ 1283 ทัพ ปีรวงเร้า เดือน 4 ขึ้น 5 ค่ำ วัน 7 มี้อกตไค้ รจนนแล้ยยามกองงาย (...)

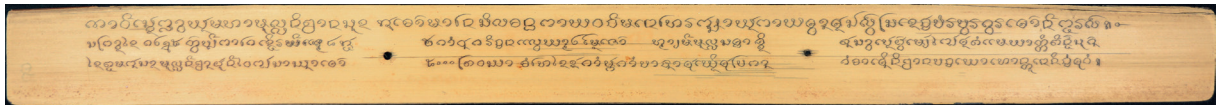
In CS 1283, a *huang hao* year, on the fifth waxing day of the fourth month, the seventh day of the week, a *kot khai* day, the writing was finished at the time of the morning drum. (...)

This date (1283 Phalguna 5) corresponds to Thursday, 2 March 1922 of the Lao calendar, which was a *kat sai* day. Therefore, it contradicts both the day of the week,

²² 1290 Margasirsha 1 = Thursday, 13 December 1928, which, however, was a *moeng kai* day. The nearest *hwai set* day was 1290 Karttika 30 = Wednesday, 12 December 1928.

which is a Monday (“second day of the week”) and the day of the 60-day cycle, as mentioned in the colophon. The problem can be solved if we take the Tai Lü and Tai Khün calendar, which is one month ahead of the Lao calendar. Then the recorded date (1283 Magha 5) would correspond to Wednesday, 1 February 1922 of the Gregorian calendar. Although the week of the day does not fit either, the day of the 60-day cycle, a *kot nyi* day, does fit perfectly. This makes the dating according to the Chiang Tung calendar more likely. Even if the text, including the colophon, is written in the Lao variant of the Dhamma script it could be possible that the scribe was an ethnic Tai Lü, who grew up in one of the Tai Lü villages in the vicinity of Luang Prabang.²³

The last example of a manuscript comprising several fascicles of the same story is not untypical. Either the scribe would record the date when the whole manuscript was completed in a colophon at the end of the last fascicle or he would record that very date in colophons appearing at the end of each fascicle. The instances where each fascicle has its own colophon recording the date of completion of only this fascicle are rare. Furthermore, few colophons record both the date when the writing of the manuscript started and when it ended. One example of such a colophon is manuscript BAD-21-1-0156. It is written on the last two lines of folio 36 recto in smaller-sized letters than the main text (the last three folios of this manuscript, titled *Mūlanibbāna*, are left blank).



ศักราชได้ ๑๒๘๕ ัตว์ ปีกาไค้ เดือนยี่ แรม ๔ (คำ) ออก (ใหม่) ๕ คำ วัน ๑ รัตนาลัยยาม
๒ โมงเช้า

In [C]S 1285, a *ka khai* year, [the writing of this manuscript fascicle started] on the fourth waning day of the second [lunar] month (Friday, 25 January 1924.) and was finished on the fifth day of the following [lunar] month, the first day of the week (Sunday, 10 February 1924), the writing [of this manuscript-fascicle] was finished at eight o'clock in the morning.

Information of this quality is most valuable for estimating the approximate average speed in which a scribe used to inscribe a text on palm-leaf. In our case, it took the scribe sixteen days to complete the copying of a text running over thirty-six folios. As each side of the folio had four lines, the total number of lines was 288. The average speed was eighteen lines or 2.25 folios (recto and verso) per day. At first glance, this is not an impressive performance for an experienced scribe, but we should take into consideration that the scribe, most probably a monk, could devote only a few hours a day to the studying and copying of manuscripts.

²³ Manuscript BAD_VSB_1_0323 is another example of a manuscript most probably dated according to the Chiang Tung (Tai Khün and Tai Lü) calendar although the text has been inscribed in the Lao version of the Dhamma script.

Content of colophons

Table 2: Content of colophons

	BAD-21-1-0185	BAD-21-1-0382
Era	BE 2503	CS 1296
<i>Lunar calendar</i>		
Year	<i>kot chai</i> (Year of the Rat)	<i>kap set</i> (Year of the Dog)
Month	eighth lunar month	eleventh lunar month
Fortnight	tenth waning day	sixth waning day
Day of the week	Monday	<i>van sam</i> (Tuesday)
Zodiac day	<i>poek sanga</i>	---
Corresponding to	AD 1960, July 18, a Monday	AD 1934, October 29, a Monday
Time	<i>nyam thae kai thiang van</i> (time of the forenoon horn, 09:00 – 10:30 h)	<i>nyam kòng laeng</i> (time of the sunset drum, 13:30 – 15:00 h)
Scribe	Chan Bunma from Ban Müang Sün	Bhikkhu Sukhapaññā
Initiator/ Sponsor/donor	Phia Chan Phui and his wife Nang Phi Ōnsi, including their family, from Ban Hua Lat in Vat Nông subdistrict, Luang Prabang	Buddhist laywoman Nanthi from Ban Kang (town quarter)
Title	<i>Maha Vibak Phet</i> (The Great Retribution)	Phutthavongsa Phachao Sao- Paet Pha-Ong (Lineage of the 28 Buddhas)
Objective	To ensure the continuation of Buddhism over 5,000 vassa (rains-retreats)	To ensure the continuation of the Teachings of the Buddha until the end of 5,000 years
Wish	May we both attain the bliss of the human [world], the bliss of heaven, the bliss of Nibbāna.	May we all escape from [the state of] suffering and reach the three states of hapiness and finally reach Nibbāna.
Concluding word (in Pali)	<i>Sudinaṃ vattame dānaṃ nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ hotu anāgete kale arahanto homi nibbāna paccayo hotu.</i> (Well donated is [our] gift, may we reach Nibbāna, the highest stage of happiness in the future. May I be an Arhant in the future. May this be a condition to reach Nibbāna.)	<i>Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ hontu.</i> (Nibbāna is the highest [goal].)

Apart from the dating, colophons reveal a lot more about the background of a manuscript, its production, purpose and usage. Colophons appear at the end of the manuscript. They either directly follow the main text, from which it is separated by a blank line, or by smaller-sized letters, as in the last example, or they appear on the recto side of an additional folio. The Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts, directed by Harald Hundius, coins the following Lao term corresponding to “colophon” as follows: *Kham banthuek khòng phu litcana*²⁴ (literally “note of the scribe”). It defines a colophon as:

a section of writing, usually found at the end of a manuscript, which is added by the scribe, giving details such as the name of the scribe, the donor, the time, date, and place of completion of copying the text, personal remarks, etc. Colophons can also be found at the end of fascicles within a text or on the covers of paper manuscripts.²⁵

Tai-Lao manuscript tradition lacks a clear distinction between the writer or author of a manuscript and a copyist. Lao manuscripts usually use the terms *phu taem*, *phu khian*, or *phu litcana*²⁶ for denoting the scribe, who would call himself *kha* (“serf [of the Buddha]”). In addition, a number of colophons also mention a *phu sang*, literally the “maker” of a manuscript. This term refers to the person who sponsors the making of the manuscript by employing a scribe before the manuscript is donated (*thawai* or *than*) to a monastery or to monks. Veidlinger (2006: 164–165) lists a number of common colophon subjects, which appear in Northern Thai religious manuscripts:

1. Whoever borrows this manuscript should bring it back. If the borrower keeps it, that person will be reborn as a hungry ghost (*peta*) (...)
2. It was very hard to make the manuscript, so take care of it.
3. Take the manuscript to worship (*prasong* or *pūjā*).
4. May the manuscript lead to *nibbāna*.
5. May the donor be born in *Metteyya*'s time [and reach *nibbāna* then].
6. May the manuscript support the *Sāsana* [for 5,000 years].
7. Written in order to get merit.
8. Do not try to alter the manuscript.
9. Please correct any mistakes.
10. Please excuse the poor quality.
11. May the manuscript lead to wisdom and knowledge [of the *Dhamma*, *Tipiṭaka*, etc.]

Although very few manuscripts contain all eleven subjects, a combination of them is typical, at least for all manuscripts—both in Pali and in the Tai vernacular—with a religious content. It is not possible to go into detail here, but it must be mentioned that

²⁴ From Pali: *racati*, 3. Pers. Sg. of *rac* = “to write”, “to compose”.

²⁵ See www.laomanuscripts.net/en/glossary.

²⁶ From Pali: *likhita*, “written”, “inscribed”, past participle of *likhati*, 3. Pers. Sg. of *likh* = “to write”, “to inscribe”.

subject No. 3 is not without doubt. Veidlinger's argument, based on Hundius' translation of the Khmer-derived word *prasong*, "to worship" (from Sanskrit: *praśamsa*), that some colophons suggest a cult of the book (as is known in the Mahayana tradition) is quite doubtful. Hinüber has argued, providing convincing evidence from various Lan Na colophons (f.e., Kaccāyana, AD 1673), that *prasong* had the meaning "to use" rather than "to worship" (Von Hinüber 1993, 228–230). Even in present-day Tai-Lao usage, *prasong* expresses an intention to make an offering, and *pūjā* just means "to offer", as is reflected in expressions like *bucha kan thet*, "to offer a homily".

Some colophons of our corpus are scribal colophons (thirty-two manuscripts), the vast majority of manuscripts (372) with colophons express the wishes of their sponsors and donors. While few manuscripts have colophons which are exclusively scribal, many more record the names of both the scribe and the person(s) who sponsored the making of the manuscript and donated it to the *Sangha*. In general, the intentions for making the donation and the wishes expressed in the colophons pertain to the principal monastic or lay supporters, the religious faithful (*mūlasaddhā*) who took the initiative of making the production of the manuscript possible. This will be explored in more detail in the following section.

The three wishes that seem evenly distributed over all periods are that the writing of the manuscript will eventually lead to *nibbāna* ("the splendid city, the peak of *nibbāna*"), that it will lead to obtain merit (*puñña*) or rewards of merit (*phala ānisaṃsa*), either for the writer, the sponsor and donor, his family or other people, and that the copying of the manuscript and/or its sponsoring and donation to the *Sangha* will be a support (*khamchu* ค้ำชู) for the Teachings of Buddha (*sāsana*) to stay until its completion of 5,000 years, counted from Buddha's entering of the *parinibbāna*. This basic purpose is grounded in the widespread belief among the Tai and Lao that the complete degeneration of Buddha's Teachings will be reached after 5,000 years (see also Grabowsky and Apiradee 2013, 32). The endowment with wisdom, or the wish to be born again in the age of Buddha Metteyya, are also among the most common wishes (See Von Hinüber 2013, LV). This wish is expressed in different phrases, such as:

- May we all enter *Nibbāna* together with Buddha Metteyya (ขอให้ผู้ลงข้าทั้งหลายได้เข้าสู่นิพพานพร้อมพระอรหันต์ไตรยางค์ข้าเทอญ). [BAD-21-1-0073; cf. BAD-21-1-00403]
- May I become an Arhant in the presence of [Lord] Metteyya. (*Arahanto homi metteyya niccam santike*). [BAD-21-1-0221]
- May I meet the excellent Dhamma of Pha Ariya Metteyya. [BAD-21-1-0221]
- May we all be reborn together in the age of Pha Ariya Metteyya (ขอให้ผู้ลงข้าทั้งหลายได้เกิดพร้อมพระศรีอรหันต์ไตรยางค์ข้า). [BAD-21-1-0234]
- May we all reach Arhantship by the means of the vehicle of the path and the vehicle of the results in the institution (*sammak*) of the *pādamūla{pāda}* of the Enlightened whose name is Ariya Metteyya (ขอให้ผู้ลงข้าทั้งหลายได้ถึงอรหันต์มรรคญาณและผลญาณ ในสำนักบาทมูลบาทแห่ง สัพพัญญูเจ้าองค์ชื่อว่าอรหันต์ไตรยางค์). [BAD-21-1-0284]

The length of the colophons varies considerably: many are rather short, providing only the date when the (often unnamed) scribe completed the writing of the manuscript, followed by a brief statement that the merit gained from the making and donation of the manuscript might support the Teachings of the Buddha (*phuttha-satsana*) until the end of 5,000 years. That does not mean that the shortest colophons are always the least interesting. The very brief colophon of manuscript BAD-21-1-0594 (folio 34r), for example, states that the female sponsor initiated the making of the manuscript to celebrate her birthday, an intention which she shared with other sponsors of manuscripts, such as Pha Khamchan Virachitto, the late abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, who used to sponsor the making of manuscripts on the occasion of his twenty-fourth, thirty-sixth, forty-eighth, and other important birthdays.

มหามูลนิพนธ์ สาวจำปา บ้านหนองทราย สร้างไว้ในพระศาสนาเมื่อวันที่ ๔ ออกใหม่ ๑๐
ค่ำ เดือนเจียง พ.ศ. ๒๔๙๙ เพื่อเป็นที่ระลึกในคราวอายุครบ นิพนธ์นี้ ประระมัง สุขัง โหนตุ
นิรันดร์ อัง

This *Mahamulanipphan* (Mahā Mūlanibbāna) manuscript was sponsored by me, Sao Champa from Ban Nong Sai, on the fourth day of the week, the tenth waxing day of the first [lunar] month, in BE 2499,²⁷ in order to commemorate [my] birthday. *Nibbānaṃ paranaṃ sukhaṃ hontu niccaṃ dhuvam dhuvam*. (May this be [a condition for us to reach] Nibbāna, continuously and forever.)

Other colophons are relatively long and may even run over more than one side of a palm leaf. Apart from the dating, the recording of the names of scribe and principal sponsor, the mention of the motives and intentions for making the manuscript, the aspirations a scribe or sponsor/donor had for the good results of the acquired merit, some of the longer colophons also contain some personal expression, including biographical details. The structure of such colophons is analyzed in Table 2, which discusses two samples from different periods whose sponsors/donors come from different social backgrounds.

One of the most interesting colophons, with regard to the wishes and aspirations of a sponsor/donor, is recorded in the unusually long colophon of the manuscript BAD-21-1-0085 (titled *Suphasit kap lok*, i.e. “Moral teachings for the world”). The manuscript’s sponsor and donor was a monk, who had not yet been invited to undergo a consecration ceremony called *thelaphisek* (Sanskrit: *therābhiṣeka*) and is thus mentioned under his honorific title, “Mòm”.²⁸ Khamdi, as was his name, expresses his concern that he might be unable to recognize sinful acts (*pāpa*) and thus asks to be endowed with *sati-paññā* (consciousness and wisdom) in his present life and all future existences. It seems that

²⁷ 1318 Margasirsha 10 = Wednesday, 12 December 1956.

²⁸ The *thelaphisek* ceremony, also known as *bun kòng hot*, is a Buddhist ceremony for the veneration of monks, which is organized by lay Buddhists to promote and celebrate monks, so as to pay their respects to, support and encourage the monk to remain in the Sangha community while disseminating Buddhist teachings. The term literally refers to the watering ritual and the offering of new robes to the monk. This ceremony is popularly organized in Theravada countries in Southeast Asia. For details, see Khamvone 2016: 36 and 58–59.

Mòm Khamdi, who completed the writing of his manuscript on Saturday, 12 June 1852, was of modest social background, as indicated by his repeated wish for economic wealth. The key passages of the colophon (folios 19v–20r) read as follows:



(...) ครั้นผู้ข้าได้เกิดเป็นคน ครั้นผู้ข้าย่างแล้วขอให้หมีใจจะลึกลับคิดถึงบาป ขอผู้ข้าเว้น ขอ
 ได้กระทำบุญ สืบเมื่อทุกชาติตราบต่อเท่าเข้าสู่นิพพานเจ้าดวงล้ำยิ่ง อันหนึ่งขอให้ได้เกิด
 ในตระกูลเศรษฐีมีมั่งมีเป็นดี ขอให้ได้กินได้ทานได้สร้างสา ขอให้หมีขาวของเต็มเลมเลม ขอ
 อย่าได้บกบางสักชาติ ขอให้มั่งคั่งอันชอบธรรม มีอันใดขอให้ประกอบชอบธรรมทุกอัน
 ก่อเข้าเทอญ สาธุ สาธุ อุโมทามิ อันหนึ่งขอให้ผู้ข้ามีสติปัญญาอันเล็ก(เล็ก)แลบทุกชาติ
 ขออย่าให้มีใจอันเกียจคร้านจักชาติ ขอให้หมีใจอันมั่นอันเพียรอันมีใจเมตตาแก่สัตว์ทั้ง
 หลาย ขอให้ได้เว้นจากบาปทั้งมวลกรรมทั้งมวล ขอให้ผู้ข้าได้บวชในศาสนาพระพุทธรเจ้า
 ทุกชาติ (...)

(...) If I am reborn as a human being may I recognize, as soon as I am able to walk, bad actions and avoid them. May I always make merit until finally reaching Nibbāna. If I were reborn as a human being, may I always be aware of sinful acts (*pāpa*) as soon as I am able to walk. May I always do meritorious acts and accumulate them in each existence to come until finally entering Nibbāna. Moreover, may I be born into a family of wealthy merchants (*setthi*), so I would always have plenty of food to eat. May my storehouses always be filled with property (*khao khòng*), so I would never suffer any shortages in all my future lives. May I have a family full of righteousness observing the Dhamma in every aspect. *Sādhu sādhu anumodāmi*. May I be endowed with profound wisdom in each [future] life. May I never become lazy in any of my next lives. May I be industrious and emphatic to all sentient beings. May I constantly avoid all kinds of sinful acts. May I be ordained as a monk to serve the Teachings of the Buddha in all my future lives. (...)

Such unusual, and even idiosyncratic, wishes are not frequently expressed in Lao colophons. However, a manuscript from the small Tai Lü village of Ban Dòn Chai in the district of Müang Sing in Luang Namtha province, close to the border with China, contains a rather similar colophon. The monk-scribe of the mulberry paper manuscript, dated to 1983 and titled *Khiao song mon* (“Two excellent parrots”), expresses his long-held wish to enter *nibbana*, but also the fulfilment of a more modest goal: “May I be able to go to America in this or my next life. May I be born again as the child of wealthy people” (Grabowsky and Apiradee 2013: 34). That wishes of this kind are not confined to the present is testified by Hundius, who cites a colophon of a Pali manuscript from Wat Lai Hin in the Northern Thai province of Lampang. The colophon of a manuscript, titled *Sivijayapañha*, dated CS 942 (AD 1580/81), states: “[M]ay I above all not be reborn as a poor man (...)” (Hundius 1990: 134).

Scribes, sponsors and donors

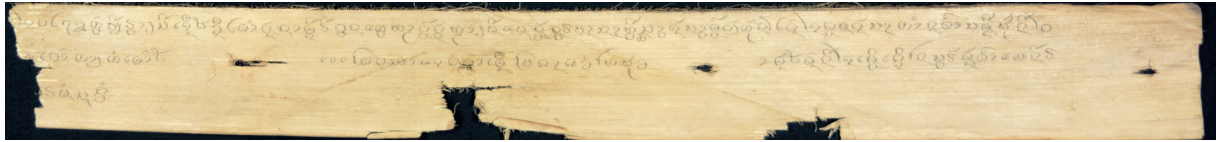
Only a small amount of colophons in the 541 manuscripts of the Si Bun Hüang collection record the names of scribes. The vast majority just state that the writing was accomplished on a certain date, directly followed by the names of the leading and initiating monastic or lay supporters (*mūla-saddhā*) and their intentions for sponsoring the making of the manuscript. Only thirty-two colophons explicitly mention the scribe's name and, in some cases (eleven), also his affiliation to a certain monastery or village, or respective town quarter. Four-fifths of the known scribes were members of the *Sangha*, either abbots or other monks, and in some cases also novices. Only six scribes were laymen, of whom two are called *chan*, a short form of *achan* ("learned man") while the other four lay scribes were former monks (*thit*).

On the other hand, laypeople formed the large majority of sponsors and donors of manuscripts. Here, the ratio is the reverse: four-fifths were laypersons and only one-fifth members of the *Sangha*. Among the initiating monastic supporters (seventy-eight) exactly one half (thirty-nine) were monks and novices based at Vat Si Mungkhun, followed by those from Vat Sop Sikkharam (eleven), Vat Si Bun Hüang (eight) and Vat Saen Sukharam (seven). One monk alone, namely Sathu Phò Hung alias Somdet Rattana Panya, initiated the making of at least twenty-one manuscripts, four of which he had written himself.²⁹ Not surprisingly, most of the laypersons who acted as sponsors came from town quarters such as Ban Khili, Ban Vat Saen and Ban Kang, all situated in the neighbourhood of the "twin monasteries", Vat Si Mungkhun and Vat Si Bun Hüang. With roughly two-thirds of all dated manuscripts falling into Sathu Phò Hung's tenure as abbot of Vat Si Mungkhun (1904–1945), it seems likely that it was due to this venerable abbot's initiative that the bulk of the manuscript collection in the monastery library (*hò tai*) of Vat Si Mungkhun was established.

The principal lay supporters who sponsored the making of manuscripts were mostly couples, with the name of the husband mentioned first, followed by the wife's name. The couple would include their children (*luk* ลูก), grandchildren (*lan* หลาน), great-grandchildren (*len* เหลน), or simply the "whole family" (*phanthavongsa* พันธวงศ์) as beneficiaries of the merit resulting from the donation. A surprisingly large number of colophons (in eighty-seven manuscripts) mention a woman as the principal lay supporter, either alone or together with her husband, whose name would be listed at second position. These women are recognizable by their titles: *sao* or *nang* for younger or middle-aged women, *pa* ("aunt") for elderly women, or simply *mae-òk*, which means "laywoman". One is tempted to speculate that in cases where a woman was the only leading lay supporter, she was either an unmarried woman or a widow; in the latter case, children and other family members would explicitly be mentioned as beneficiaries. In the colophon of manuscript BAD-21-1-0337, for example, three women decided jointly to sponsor the making of a manuscript. The first woman was probably an unmarried or widowed elderly woman, whereas the other two, called *sao*, were young women with two little children who might have already been widowed or divorced. The colophon,

²⁹ See Appendix: Corpus of manuscripts from Vat Si Bun Hüang (according to scribes).

appearing on the recto side of folio 7 of the fragment of a manuscript recording a Buddhist chronicle (*Tamnan Fa Samang*), reads:



(...) ได้ ๑๒๗๘ ทั่ว ปีรวายสี่ เดือน ๕ ขึ้น ๒ ค่ำ วันอาทิตย์ ोजनाแล้วยามกองวัด หมายถึง มีแม่ออกอ้วน บ้านช่างหวี และสาวพัน สาวทอง กับลูกน้อยสองคน ได้พร้อมกันสร้าง ตำนานฟ้าสะมัง (ตำนานฟ้าสะมัง) ผูกนี้ไว้ (...) เจ้า ๓ ๒๐๐๐ พระวัสสา แต่ก็ ข้าเทอญ ประการหนึ่ง ขอให้ผู้ข่าทั้ง ๕ นี้ ได้เมื่อเกิดในสวรรค์ชั้นฟ้า และ (...) ะมัง สุขัง

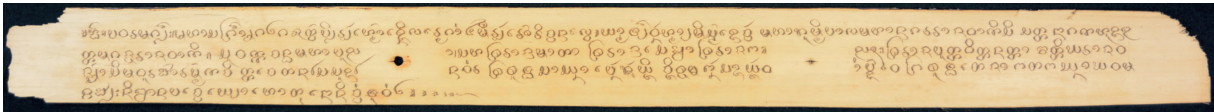
In [CS] 1278, a *huai si* year, on the second waxing day of the fifth [lunar] month, a Sunday,³⁰ the writing was finished at the time of the monastery drum. Mae-òk (laywoman) Uan [from] Ban Sang Vi (“hair comb village”) as well as Sao Phan and Sao Thòng, along with their two little children, jointly sponsored this manuscript-fascicle [titled] *Tamnan Fa Samang* [to ensure that the Teachings of the Buddha will last] until the end of 5,000 years. Furthermore, all five of us wish to be born in heaven. *Nira[bāna pa]ramam sukham*. (Nibbāna is the highest stage of happiness.)

Although the sponsoring of manuscripts was usually the joint undertaking of married couples for the benefit of their families, other bonds between two or more leading initiators are testified as well. One manuscript (BAD-21-1-0305) was sponsored by mother and son, another (BAD-21-1-0260) by a novice and his abbot, the latter also being the scribe. The joint sponsorship of monks and laypersons, not necessarily their own relatives, is also documented. Many of the sponsors were members of the nobility or aristocrats, as their titles, such as *phia*, *phanya*, *mün* or *saen*, indicated. Unlike the social background and the home village or home monastery, the ethnic origin of scribes, as well as sponsors, is never indicated, with one notable exception: the colophon of manuscript BAD-21-1-0613 states that in September 1927 two Chinese migrants, with the names of Siang (Xian?) and Tong, sponsored together with their Lao wives, “their parents, all relatives and children” (ปิตตมาตามดาญาติกา พันธุรงสา), the making of a manuscript titled *Dhammachak* (*Dhammacakkappa-vattana Sutta*).

Perhaps the most surprising discovery of the Vat Si Bun Hüang collection is the relatively large number of royalty acting as sponsors and donors of manuscripts. A total of eighteen manuscripts can safely be identified as sponsored by members of the royal family. Six manuscripts alone have an unidentified “royal mother” (*pha lasamada*) as sponsor. Since all these manuscripts are dated the same day, namely “CS 1178, a *hawai chai* year, on the ninth waning day of the seventh [lunar] month, the fourth day of the week”, corresponding to Wednesday, 19 June 1816, this “royal mother” might have been the mother of King Anuruttha (r. 1791–1817). Another female sponsor of royal blood was Chao Nying (“Princess”) Buasi, who initiated the making of manuscripts

³⁰ 1278 Caitra2 = Saturday, 24 March 1917.

either alone or together with her husband, Sadet Chao (“Royal Highness”) Si Saloemsak Chao Latsasamphanthavong (in the years 1931, 1932, and 1963).³¹ Even a king of Luang Prabang was among the royal sponsors. King Chantharat (r. 1852–1871), the last king who, throughout his reign, ruled Luang Prabang as a Siamese vassal state,³² sponsored two manuscripts (BAD-21-1-0265; BAD-21-1-0604) in 1855. The second manuscript deserves closer scrutiny, as it comprises nine fascicles, the first four having colophons, each of which bears the following text (fascicle 1, folio 24r):



บวรมงคล มหาศักราช ๑๒๑๗ ๓๖ ปีรับเหมา เดือน ๙ แรม (๘) ค่ำ (วัน) ๔ มี้อรับเจ้า
 วจนา แลวยามเที่ยงวัน หมายถึงสมเด็จพระมหากษัตริย์มหาจักรพรรดิราชธานี ศรีสัตนาคนหุต อุ
 ตมชะครราชธานี สุวรรณจินตมหาบุญญา สหะพระราชมารดา พระราชเชษฐา พระราช
 กัญญาพระ ราชบุตรธิดานัดดา ขัตติยะราชวงศ์ ลิมะรุระพา ระมมนะจิตตะ เจตนา
 ไสสุทธีในวราพุทธศาสนาเป็นอันยิ่ง จึงพร้อมกันสร้างยังธรรมบทไว้พระพุทธรูปเดชา กะตะ
 กัดสะหนายะวะมัคคะพะละ นิพพานะ ปัจจะโย โหตุโน นิจจัง ทูวังฯ

Pavara mangkhala, in [C]S 1217, a *hap mao* year, on the eighth waning day of the ninth [lunar] month, the fourth day of the week, a *haphao* day (Tuesday, 4 September 1855), the writing was finished at noon. Somdet Maha Phummi Pala Maha Nakhala Lasathani Si Sattanakhanahut Uttamakhatas Lasathani Suvannachantha Mahapannya (His Majesty, the King of Lan Sang), along with his royal mother, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters and relatives had the religious faith to sponsor the making of this manuscript titled *Dhammapada* to support the Teachings [of the Buddha]. May the merit of this good deed help us to gain *magga* (path) and *phala* (fruition). *Nibbāna paccayo hotu no dhuvam niccam dhuvam dhuvam*. (May this be a condition for us to reach Nibbāna, continuously and forever.)

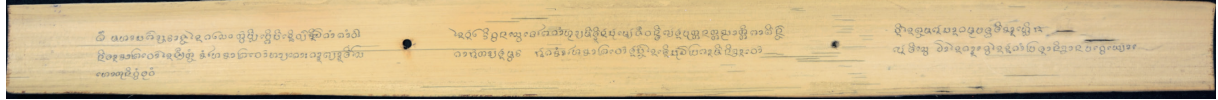
More than seventy years later, two laypersons, along with all their family members, decided to sponsor the writing of fascicles 6–9, which either had disappeared or had been in such bad physical conditions that the text was almost illegible. The colophons, written in small-sized letters at the end of each of the four last fascicles, contain the following identical text (fascicle 6, folio 24r):

มหาศักราชได้ 1290 ๓๖ ปีเปกสี เดือนเจียง ขึ้น 6 ค่ำ ฟ้า(พม่า)ว่าไต่วัน 2 วจนาแล้วแถ
 (แต่จ)ไกลค้ำ หมายถึงทิดจันสุก เมียชื่อจันทิ กับทั้งบุตรนัดดาญาติกาพี่น้อง จึงได้พร้อม
 กันสร้างธรรมบทที่ขาดเรื่องนันทน ได้สร้างแทน มีร้อย 6 (106) ใบลาน ข้าพเจ้าได้สืบ

³¹ Prince Sisaloemssak was a half-brother of King Sisavang Vong (r. 1904–1959). See the royal genealogy in Evans 2009: 60.

³² Under King Chantharat’s successor, King Un Kham (r. 1872–1894), Luang Prabang came under French protection as a result of the Franco-Siamese treaty of July 1893, which stipulated that the Mekong river formed the border between Siam and French Indochina.

ต่อ ขอให้ข้าพเจ้าหายเคราะห์คลาดพยาธิอันตราย โภภัยภัยทั้งมวล อันหนึ่งขอให้ข้าพเจ้า
ทั้งสองได้ถึงสุข 3 ประการ มีนิพพานเป็นที่แล้ว ขออย่าได้คลาดแคล้วได้ดั่งคำปรารภนา
นิพพานะ ปัจจะโย โหตุ นิจจัง ทิวัง



In CS 1290, a *poek si* year (Year of the Rat, the tenth year of the decade), on the sixth waxing day of the first [lunar] month, the second day of the week,³³ the writing was finished at the time of the evening horn. Thit Chansuk and his wife, Chanthi along with their children, grandchildren, and all their relatives sponsored the making of the manuscript titled *Dhammapada*. The missing sections of this story, running over 106 palm leaves have been continued and completed by me. May we all recover from misfortune and escape all kinds of diseases and dangers. Furthermore, may both of us reach the three stages of happiness with Nibbāna as the ultimate goal. May we be safe according to our wishes. *Nibbāna paccayo hotu no niccaṃ dhuvam*. (May this be a condition [for us] to reach Nibbāna, continuously and forever.)

Finally, the colophons provide some insights into the co-operation between different sponsors and between sponsors and scribe. Although the colophons specify that the benefits of the merit derived from the making of manuscripts would go primarily to the sponsors and donors and may even be transferred to their dead relatives, the scribes expect to gain some benefits as well. In manuscript BAD-21-1-0447 the scribe, a monk named Bhikkhu Siddhipaññā, asks the sponsor, Chua (Novice) Phò At, in the final section of the colophon (on folio 10 recto): May you share [the result of your] merit with me, please [do it,] Novice Phò (ขอบุญนำแด่ทอน อ้ายจิวพอเฮย).

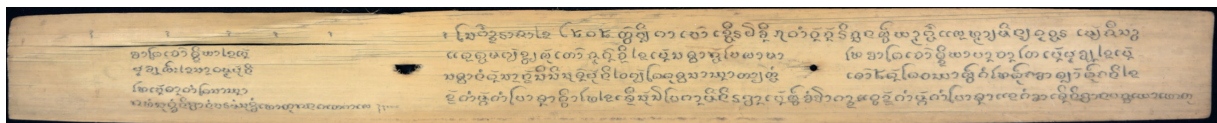
Manuscript BAD-21-1-328 is a good example demonstrating how scribes and sponsors co-operated in the making of the manuscript. The first of two colophons appears directly after the end of the main text (folio 63 verso, lines 3 and 4) and was written by the scribe himself. Noting the year (1964) and the time of the day, but interestingly neither the lunar month nor the day of the moon phase when he finished the writing of the manuscript, the scribe mentions the names of the principal lay supporters, a couple from Ban Thing Hong village, before recording his own name and monastic affiliation: Thu (monk) Phumma from Vat [Ban] Sang Hai (“Monastery of the Potter Village”). Most significant is the final phrase: “I also wish to get a huge amount of merit.” (ขอบุญนำหลายๆ แด่ทอน) This second colophon appears on the recto and verso sides of a separate folio and is written in smaller-sized letters, in a different style, maybe even by a different hand, and running only over three, respectively two lines per side (instead of the four lines which are standard for Lao palm-leaf manuscripts). It seems that this second colophon reflects the production process from the sponsors’ perspective, describing the division of responsibilities between the two principal lay supporters who paid for the

³³ 1290 Asvina 6 = Saturday, 20 October 1928.

ตกให้ยอပ်พอให้หาเอาตีม เอาทอนเจ้าหม่อมเฮย ข้าน้อยใจบ่เที่ยงหลายแต่ ค่อย
พิจารณาเอา ทอน (๑๙๔๓)

If any [text] has been omitted and is incomplete, please complete it, Chao Mòm
(monk)! I was very often absent-minded. Please consider this. (1943).

The next, and last, example demonstrates the co-operation between the scribe, a former monk, who sponsored the making of the manuscript he himself had inscribed, but gives credit to a couple (coming from the same village?) who donated the palm leaves. The colophon of manuscript BAD-21-1-0412, bearing the title *Sisunthon* (as the manuscript discussed above), appears on the recto side of folio 22. Its text runs over four lines and leaves out the space to the left of the left-hand hole. It reads:



ศักราชได้ ๒๕๑๕ ทั่ว ปีกาเป้า เดือน ๖ ขึ้น ๗ ค่ำ วันจันทร์ รจนาแล้วยามกองแลง หมายถึง
มี นายควอน เมียชื่อสาวแพง พร้อมกับด้วยลูกเต่าคู่คน จึงได้เป็นศรัทธาออกไปลานให้
ข้าพเจ้า ทิดยา บ้านจ่านใต้ เป็นผู้เขียน ได้เป็นศรัทธานำกัน สร้างหนังสือศรีสุนทรนี้ไว้
กับพระพุทธรักษา ๕ พันพระวัสสา แล้วก็ขอให้ผู้ข่าทั้งหลายผู้นี้ได้ตั้ง
คำมั่งคำปรารภนา คือว่าให้ได้ถึงสุข ๓ ประการ มีนิพพานเป็นที่แล้ว ขออย่าคาดแคล้ว
ตั้งคำมั่งคำปรารภนาแต่ก็ข้าเทอญ นิพพานะ บัจจะโย โหตุ

In [B]E 2515, a *ka pao* year, on the seventh waxing day of the sixth [lunar] month, a Monday (8 May 1973), the writing was finished at the time of the sunset drum. Teacher (*nai khu*) Vòn and his wife, Sao (Ms.) Phaeng, along with their children donated the palm leaves. I, Thit Nya from Ban Chan Tai, was the scribe. We all together had the religious faith to sponsor the making of this manuscript titled *Sisunthon* to prolong the Teachings of the Buddha until the end of 5,000 years. May we all obtain [everything] according to our aspirations and wishes and gain the three kinds of happiness of which *Nibbāna* is the ultimate goal. May our aspirations and wishes be fulfilled. *Nibbāna paccayo hontu.* (May this be a condition [for us] to reach *Nibbāna*.)

Later, the left third of the recto side was filled by an addition to the colophon above. Written in smaller-sized letters, it pertains to the wishes of the scribe only:

ข้าพเจ้า ทิดยา เป็นผู้เขียน และได้สร้างธรรมผู้นี้ให้เป็นทานคำพระศาสนา อะหัง สุขัง
นิพพานัง ประระมัง สุขัง โหตุ อะนาคะเต กาลे

I, Thit Nya, was the scribe and sponsored the making of this manuscript as a *Dhamma* gift to support the Teachings of the Buddha. *Ahaṃ sukhaṃ nibbānaṃ*

paramaṃ sukamaṃ hotu anakhate kale. (May I obtain happiness in the future, Nibbāna is the highest stage of happiness.)

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that the impressive collection of 541 palm-leaf manuscripts (or 841 fascicles) kept in the storeroom of the abbot's living quarters in Vat Si Bun Hüang originally did not belong to this monastery, but was transferred from the library of a neighbouring monastery, Vat Si Mungkhun, at some time between 1976 and circa 1990 for still unknown reasons. Many of the monk-scribes, of whom we know the names and monastic affiliation from the colophons, were based at this monastery. Many of the sponsors and donors of manuscripts were monks and novices associated with Vat Si Mungkhun as well. They are, in fact, more numerous and figure more prominently than those attached to Vat Si Bun Hüang or any other monastery in Luang Prabang.

Vat Si Mungkhun has been lacking a responsible abbot over a period of several decades, which may also explain why the monastery's collection of manuscripts has fallen into oblivion since the 1990s. We know very little about the history of that monastery during the 20th century. Therefore, it is exciting to see how the colophons of the manuscripts from the Vat Si Bun Hüang collection shed new light on the personality of at least one leading intellectual monk, who served as abbot of Vat Si Mungkhun during the first half of the last century: Sathu Phò Hung or Somdet Ratanapaññā, about whom we know little from other historical sources, written or photographic.

Although the structure and content of the colophons of the corpus as a whole are hardly different from what we know from other Lao, Northern Thai or Tai Lü manuscripts which bear religious texts, some aspects are nevertheless astonishing, such as the relatively high percentage of women serving as principal lay supporters or the presence of royalty among the sponsors and donors of manuscripts. Moreover, several colophons also help to sharpen our understanding about the co-operation between scribes and sponsors/donors, but also among different sponsors/donors in the making of a manuscript.

Even though over the last few years, many projects have been carried out to preserve, document, and digitize manuscripts in various parts of Theravada Buddhist Southeast Asia, much still has to be done to identify, either physically or culturally, endangered collections of manuscripts, both in monastic repositories and private hands. The author hopes that this article will help raise awareness to speed up research in the diverse manuscript cultures of the Thai and Lao world, which constitute a most precious heritage of the people in the region.

Appendix: Corpus of manuscripts from Vat Si Bun Hüan

<i>Name of scribe Romanized</i>	<i>Name of scribe Lao</i>	<i>native village or monastery</i>	<i>Code no. of manuscript</i>	<i>Year/date of production</i>
Phommapannya	ພິມມະປັນຍາ	Vat Saen Sukharam	BAD-21-1-0014	27/08/1918
Thit Un Hüan [Phanya Müang Kang]	ທິດອຸ່ນເຮືອນ [ພະຍາເມືອງກາງ]	---	BAD-21-1-0046	17/01/1926
Phothipannya (Bodhipaññā); Chao Nòng Kaeo	ໂພທິປັນຍາ ແລເຈົ້ານອງແກ້ວ	---	BAD-21-1-0054	1922/23
Yothilapannya	ໂຍທິລະປັນຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0071	09/02/1905
Monk Sukhi	ພະສຸຂີ	---	BAD-21-1-0076	19/09/1917 (?)
[Nai] Inthisan	[ນາຍ] ອິນທິສານ	---	BAD-21-1-0158	1901
Achan Khai	ອາຈານໄຂ	---	BAD-21-1-0182	28/08/1895
Chan Bunma	ຈານບຸນມາ ເມືອງຊື່ນ	Ban Müang Sün	BAD-21-1-0185	18/07/1960
Novice Thòngdi Thalap	ສາມະເນນທອງດີ ທະຫຼາບ	---	BAD-21-1-0194	1945
Thu Phan	ທຸພັນ ວັດລືບ	Vat Sop Sikkharam	BAD-21-1-0200	13/05/1929
Mahā Āriya Sukhapaññā	ມະຫາອາລິຍະສຸຂະ ປັນຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0204	---
Mahā Āriya Sukhapaññā	ມະຫາອາລິຍະສຸຂະ ປັນຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0205	07/10/1929
Chao Mañivaṃsa (Manivong) Bhikkhu	ມະນີວັງ ພິກຂ	---	BAD-21-1-0206	09/09/1933
Sathu Phò Müang Kang	ສາທຸພໍ່ເມືອງກາງ	---	BAD-21-1-0250	29/07/1942
Sathu Phò Saen Si	ສາທຸພໍ່ແສນສີ ວັດທາດຫຼວງ	Vat That Luang	BAD-21-1-0260	01/02/1959
Sathu Phò Vat Si Mungkhun	ສາທຸພໍ່ ວັດສີມຸງຄຸນ	Vat Si Mungkhun	BAD-21-1-0288	24/06/1920 (?)
Thit Pa	ທິດປາ	---	BAD-21-1-0298	04/04/1818
Bhikkhu Candapaññā	ພິກຂຸຈັນທະປັນຍາ ວັດແສນ	---	BAD-21-1-0302	20/10/1927
Huachao Khu (monk) Su	ຫົວເຈົ້າຄູ ຊູ	---	BAD-21-1-0306	17/12/1899
Chao Khanan Phommapannya	ເຈົ້າຂະໜານພິມມະ ປັນຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0320	03/03/1807
Thu (monk) Phumma	ທຸພູມມາ	Vat Sang Hai	BAD-21-1-0328	1965

Bhikkhu Mangkhalapannya	ພິກຂຸ ມັງຄະລະ ປັນຍາ ວັດສິບ	Vat Sop Sikkharam	BAD-21-1-0330	29/05/1925
(Monk) Tissapaññā	ດິດສະນະປັນຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0350	---
Mòm (Monk) Phan	ໝ່ອມພັນ	Vat Sop Sikkharam	BAD-21-1-0366	---
Bhikkhu Sukkhapannya (Sukhapaññā)	ພິກຂຸສຸກຂະປັນຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0382	29/10/1934
Bhikkhu Katapunyo (Tü)	ພິກຂຸກະຕະປຸນ ໂຍຕີ	---	BAD-21-1-0384	23/08/1945
Chan Chanpheng	ຈານຈັນເພັງ	---	BAD-21-1-0387	1955/56
Bhikkhu Dissapaññā	ພິກຂຸ ດິດສະປັນຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0390	23/06/1918
Bhikkhu Ditthi	ພິກຂຸ ດິດຕິ	---	BAD-21-1-0401	16/06/1923
Chao Mòm (Monk) Man	ເຈົ້າໝ່ອມພັນ	---	BAD-21-1-0402	20/01/1927
Saen Mai Thit Nya	ແສນໃໝ່ທິດຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0403	28/09/1927
Sitthipannya	ສິດທິປັນຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0410	07/12/1976
Thit Nya	ທິດຍາ	Ban Chan Tai	BAD-21-1-0412	08/05/1973
Chua [Òn] Si	ຈິວ[ອ່ອນ]ສີ	---	BAD-21-1-0413	03/09/1982 (?)
Thit Un	ທິດ ອຸ່ນ	Ban Vat Saen	BAD-21-1-0418	31/12/1937
Thit Sing	ທິດ ສິງ	---	BAD-21-1-0444	19/11/1879
Mòm (Monk) Phim	ໝ່ອມພິມ	---	BAD-21-1-0445	1933 (?)
Bhikkhu Siddhipaññā (Sitthipannya)	ພິກຂຸສິດທິປັນຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0447	07/01/1958
Bhikkhu Siddhipaññā (Sitthipannya)	ພິກຂຸສິດທິປັນຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0448	18/10/1937
Mòm Phila	ໝ່ອມຜິລາ	---	BAD-21-1-0450	11/05/1868 (?)
Pha Khanan Kundalapannya	ພະຂະໜານ ກຸນດະລະປັນຍາ	---	BAD-21-1-0472	---
Sathu Phò Vat Si Mungkhun	ສາທຸພໍ່ ວັດສີມຸງຄຸນ	Vat Si Mungkhun	BAD-21-1-0580	01/06/1920
Sathu Phò Vat Si Mungkhun	ສາທຸພໍ່ ວັດສີມຸງຄຸນ	Vat Si Mungkhun	BAD-21-1-0581	06/12/1919
Sathu Phò Vat Si Mungkhun	ສາທຸພໍ່ ວັດສີມຸງຄຸນ	Vat Si Mungkhun	BAD-21-1-0591	01/06/1920
Sathu Tü, Vat Phumüat	ສາທຸຕີ	Vat Phumüat	BAD-21-1-0597	---
Maha Sangkhasa Rattanapannya	ມະຫາສັງຄະຊາ ລັດຕະນະປັນຍາ(ຮຸງ)	Vat Si Mungkhun	BAD-21-1-0636	08/12/1930 (fascicle 5: 05/09/1850)
Sathu Phò Chanman Munivangso	ສາທຸພໍ່ຈານພັນ ມຸນີວົງໂສ	Vat Khok Pap	BAD-21-1-0646	17/12/1962

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- BAD-21-1-0085: *Untitled* (*Suphasit kap lok*; Moral teachings for the world); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 19 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1214, a *tao chai* year (1852).
- BAD-21-1-0156: *Munlanipphan* (Mūlanibbāna); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 36 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1285, a *ka khai* year (AD 1923).
- BAD-21-1-0185: *Maha vibak phet* (Retribution for the actions of departed spirits of the dead); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 27 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; BE 2503, a *kot chai* year (AD 1960).
- BAD-21-1-0221: *Sin samathi pannya* (Ethics, concentration, wisdom); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 15 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1297, a *hap khai* year (AD 1935).
- BAD-21-1-0234: *Thamma sam tai* (The Three Gems), fascicle 1; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 27 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; BE 2463, a *vòk* year (year of the monkey) (AD 1920).
- BAD-21-1-0260: *Maha vibak phet* (Retribution for the actions of departed spirits of the dead); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 12 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; undated.
- BAD-21-1-0265: *Tamotamasu*; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 24 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1217, a *hap mao* year (AD 1855).

- BAD-21-1-0284: *Akalavattasut* (Ākāravatta sutta; one of the texts for recitation in a ritual ceremony organized for peace and prosperity); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 27 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1248, a *hwai set* year (AD 1886).
- BAD-21-1-0305: *Maha khandhaka vaṇṇana vassupanayika khandhaka*, fascicle 1; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 28 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1292, BE 2472, a *kot sanga* year (AD 1930).
- BAD-21-1-0328: *Pha tai lokavithan* (vithāna); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 64 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1327, BE 2507, AD 1965, a *kap si* year.
- BAD-21-1-0337: *Untitled (Tamnan fa samang; Chronicle of Fa Samang)*; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 7 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1278, a *hwai si* year (AD 1916).
- BAD-21-1-0344: *Thipphamon* (Dibbamanta; A Heavenly Incantation); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 8 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; [CS] 1283, a *huang hao* year (AD 1921).
- BAD-21-1-0382: *Phutthavongsa phachao sao-paet phao-ong* (Lineage of the 28 Buddhas); palm-leaf manuscript; 10 fascicles with a total number of 243 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1296, a *kap set* year (AD 1934).
- BAD-21-1-0401: *Sisuthon*; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 13 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; BE 2486, a *ka mot* year (AD 1943).
- BAD-21-1-0403: *Sòng khao phan kòn* (Benefits [gained from the making] of thousand rice balls [dedicated to the worship of the Triple Gems]), *Sòng pha sai* (Benefits [gained from the making] of a sand stupa), and *Sòng pitaka* (Benefits [gained from the making a copy] of the Three Baskets); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 23 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1289, a *moeng mao* year (AD 1927).
- BAD-21-1-0412: *Sisuthon*; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 223 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; BE 2515, a *ka pao* year (AD 1972).
- BAD-21-1-0447: *Pha pannya palami* (Paññā pāramī); palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 9 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; BE 2500 (AD 1957).
- BAD-21-1-0477: *Pathama vongsamarini*; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 26 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS 1]144, a *tao nyi* year (AD 1782).
- BAD-21-1-0479: *Phalasangkhamya* (Balasaṅkhyā), fascicle 3; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 23 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; [CS 1205], a *ka mao* year (AD 1843).
- BAD-21-1-0485: *Untitled (Maha vessantara; The Great Vessantara Jātaka)*; palm-leaf manuscript; one fascicle of 16 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; CS [1]161, a *kat mot* year (AD 1799).
- BAD-21-1-0567: *Pupphasikkha vaṇṇana* (Puppha sikkhā vaṇṇana), *Navakovat* (Navakovāda), *Uppasampatha* (Upasampada), and *Patchavekhana* (Pacchavekkhana); palm-leaf manuscript; 10 fascicles with a total of 256 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; [CS] 1280, BE 2462, a *poek sanga* year (AD 1918).
- BAD-21-1-0594: *Maha Munlanipphan* (Mahā Mūlanibbāna); one fascicle of 34 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao; BE 2499 (AD 1956).
- BAD-21-1-0604: *Thammapattha* (Dhammapada); 9 fascicles with a total of 231 folios; language: Lao, Pali; script: Tham Lao;
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Photographs

- Official portrait of two monks who were friends. Left: Pha Hung Rattanapannya, abbot of Vat Si Mungkhun; Right: Pha Un Hüan Rattapanayo, Vat Si Mungkhun. The photograph was taken in the late 1920s. Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam. Buddhist Archive No. B0561.
- Photograph of Pha Buaphan Vatsaro, abbot of Vat Si Mungkhun while reading the palm-leaf manuscript at his abode in Vat Si Bun Hüang. The photograph was taken in the 1990s. Buddhist Archive No. D5003.

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Interviews

- Mr. Chanthahom Udomphong, member of the lay committee of Vat Si Bun Hüang, on 15 March 2016.
- Mrs. Buasanit Suksavat, a sister of Mrs. Buasi Suksavat, who was a sister of Sathu Man Muthuchitto, abbot of Vat Si Bun Hüang, from Ban Phon Hüang, on 4 August 2017.
- Mrs. Phaeng Saengchansavang from Ban Khili, wife of Achan Maha Khamla Udomphet (formerly Sathu Maha Khamla Udomphet, abbot of Vat Si Bun Hüang), on 7 June 2016.