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ON SOME SIAMESE  
INSCRIPTIONS.

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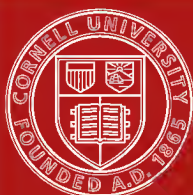
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ON SOME SIAMESE INSCRIPTIONS.

BY DR. A. BASTIAN.

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*On some Siamese Inscriptions.*—By Dr. A. BASTIAN.

[Received 12th May, 1864.—Read 1st June, 1864.]

Of the Indo-Chinese alphabets, the most interesting one is that of the Siamese. The others, as those of the Cambodian, the Lao, the Shan, the Talein, &c., are all derived, more or less directly, from the Pali characters, which connect them with the circular alphabets of South India and the vernacular Singhalese. The Siamese flows more immediately from the Sanscrit and has, for instance, preserved the three sibilants, whereas there is only one in the Pali and its cognate languages. For a great many of those terms, which all the Buddhistic literatures of eastern India have purloined from the Pali, the Siamese possesses two forms, one taken from the original Sanscrit, and the other modified by its passage through the medium of the Pali. In writing the sacred books of the Trai-Pidak, the Siamese do not employ their vernacular letters, but have borrowed the Pali ones from the Cambodians, and call them therefore *Akson* (*Akkara*) *Khom* or *Khamen* letters. The Birmese use only one alphabet, (with the single exception of the square characters), whereas the Laos and Cambodians have varied a little the

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forms of their Pali alphabet for profane uses, but have never employed two distinct alphabets, as has been the case in Siam. The introduction of the Pali alphabet in Ultra-India, is connected everywhere with the arrival of Buddhaghosa, the Brahmin of Maghada, who visited Ceylon to translate the Atthakatha, but the invention of their vernacular alphabet is ascribed by the Siamese to their favourite king Phra-Ruang, whose exact date is a great point of controversy amongst them. In the Phongsavadan Múang nua, or the history of the northern towns, it is said, that Phaya Ruang, (who was carried by his kite to foreign lands, like the Raja of Dewaju), invented for the nations, subjected to his rule, the Xieng thai (Siamese strokes or letters), the Xieng mon (Peguan letters), the Xieng khom (Cambodian letters), and the now unusual employment of the word *Xieng* (inclined or oblique) seems to have reference to the straight and angular shape of the Siamese letters, (recalling the ancient alphabets of the Bugis and Battas in the Eastern Archipelago), in contradistinction to the circular one of the Pali. But without going farther into the claims of Phaya Ruang to the invention of the alphabet, a subject which would require a dissertation by itself, I shall lay before you the translation of an old stone-inscription, found at Sukhothai, (the ancient capital of Siam during the reign of Phaya Ruang and before him,) and placed at present in the palace of Bangkok, by the order of the reigning king. You will see that the king mentioned in it under the name of Ramkhamheng, assigns to himself the honour of having invented the written character, which he, (a very interesting circumstance,) calls *Lai-sú*. The present word for books in the Siamese language is Nangsú, pronounced by a fanciful whim and against all rules of Siamese grammar, as *Nong-sú*. Nang-sú means verbally the writing on skins (nang), and thus illustrates in a striking way, the old traditions of the Lawa, Karen, &c., regarding the former existence of parchment books, and it appears that the Siamese, a people of quite recent growth, as they could not understand the reason for the appellation, gave intentionally a different pronunciation, although they retained the original spelling, a manner of proceeding, which could be illustrated by many similar examples in the Siamese language. The other term *Lai-sú* "would, according to the same analogy, mean writing in (various) colours, or writing in stripes." A Chinese officer who visited Cambodia in the year 1295, says of the



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Nº 4 ANOTHER KIND.

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Nº 5 STONE INSCRIPTION, IN AN ANTIQUATED PALI CHARACTER FROM  
 THE PAGODA PATHOMMA-CHEDI IN SIAM CONTAINING THE BUDDHISTICAL CREED.

Ye dhamma hetuppa bhava  
 Yesam hetum tathakhatv dha  
 Te sonja yo nirodho evam  
 athi maha sammamoti.

Nº 6 STONE INSCRIPTION FROM LIGOR

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literary sect, which, according to his accounts, then existed in the country, "Their books and public records are written on buck-skin dyed black, and cut into the required dimensions. They work down a paste, resembling the China white lime. Of this they form little sticks, and taking one into the hand, like a pencil, form characters, which can never be effaced." He must mean the black books, still in use, amongst the Birmese, Siamese and Cambodians, on which they write with a soft chalk-stone. In the convents they employ wooden tablets, covered with a black varnish, on which the writing of the boys, who trace the letters for exercise, can be easily blotted out, and the same material is used afresh. For documents and memorials, these black books are at present made of vegetable substances like the white paper books, and afterwards covered over with a black varnish. The writing is, however, far from being indelible, and can be effaced without difficulty. If the book is written full and not required to be kept, the leaves (folded up in zigzag,) are rubbed over with a preparation of burnt peas and charcoal, and then used again, as if new. In especially valuable books, the letters, for appearance' sake, are traced with a yellow dye, a preparation from gamboge, on a smoothly varnished surface, but gradually crumble off and become illegible, because the fluid does not enter into chemical composition with the material of the substratum. The white books are written on with Chinese ink. On the leaves of the Talipoin-palm the letters are traced with an iron style. The change from parchment to paper took place very likely in the rigorous times of Buddhism, when the pious priests would not allow the killing of animals to carry on its fabrication.

The inscription, translated here, is written in an ancient kind of character, differing from the present one. The vowels are still written in one line with the consonants, and the diacritical points of the modern alphabet are mostly dispensed with. The complicated system of accentuation in the Siamese of to-day, has developed itself only gradually, and can be traced back in old books to that simplicity, which still reigns in the ruder dialects of the Laos, and makes them unintelligible to the polished ear of the low-landers. I was enabled by the help of some learned friends in Bangkok to extract the antiquated alphabet of the inscription, but have not brought it yet to the state of perfection, which would be desirable for publication. The first lines

in the commencement of the inscription, are to be found in the book about Siam by Sir John Bowring, to whom the king had sent it, and as the form of the letters can be looked for there (Vol. I. p. 278), I abstain from giving specimens.

Two other stone-inscriptions from the neighbourhood of Xiengmai, which were obtained by me in Bangkok, are written likewise in an ancient character, related to that of the inscription of Sukhothai, although differing in many particulars. Both speak of royal offerings and the deposition of relics to establish the sacred period of 5000 years, in terms similar to those employed by the Birmese king Mentara, but I have not yet advanced far enough in the explanation of the characters to translate the whole of them. Even the present translation, which I offer here, is still a very imperfect one, but whenever I was at a fault to make out a satisfactory explanation, I was sure to find the best informed Siamese in the same predicament. The inscription of Sukhothai covers the four sides of a conical stone, and in the same court of Vat Keoh in the royal palace at Bangkok, is placed at its side, another stone, which was brought from Kampheng-phet and bears a Pali inscription. Besides these, stone inscriptions are found in the Siamese province of Ligor, and at the old pagoda of Pathomma-chedi at Nakhon-Xaisi, where also brick medallions are disinterred, resembling those of Tagoung and other localities, and containing the confessional formula of the Buddhists.

I have added for comparison, a few specimens of several inscriptions, which I copied at length from the stone monuments in Cambodia. The ancient characters, called *Akson Mihng*, abound chiefly at Nakhon Tom, but are found also at Nakhon Vat, intermixed with inscriptions of modern date. They are believed by the natives to be wholly unintelligible, but seemingly without real foundation, as I have already succeeded, by consulting the more intelligent members of the priesthood, in decyphering the names of gods, kings and towns, mentioned in them.

Some characters in ancient Devanagari, (resembling the Bengal inscriptions of the 12th century,) I found at the side of Cochin Chinese letters on a sepulchre in the plain of tombs at Saigon, a town which belonged for some time to the kingdom of Chiampa. The sepulchre was that of a priest and the Cochin Chinese Buddhists on such occasions, sometimes mix their writings with fanciful letters of their own invention, and intersperse them with Chinese characters

## TRANSLATION OF THE SUKHOThai INSCRIPTION.

"My father was called Sinitharatthija, my mother, lady (nang) Súang, my elder brother, Ban-Múang. I had of the same mother (womb), five brothers and sisters, three being brothers and two sisters. Of my elder brothers, the eldest died and departed at a time, when I was still young. When I became large and grown up to about nineteen, the chieftain (Khun) Samxon of the "myang" (town or country) Xot came up to the place of "myang" Tak. My father went to attack Khun Samxon and fight him on the outworks of his camp. Khun Samxon does not delay, he comes forth from the camp. Khun Samxon spread out his troops, covering the open plains of the fields and chased my father, who fled hastily, being defeated. I do not fly. I (ku) mount the elephant, rushing on upon the army. I push on before my father; I close with Khun Samxon; I myself throw down the elephant of Khun Samxon, mounted on which he had come up to the town. Khun Samxon is defeated; he is beaten and takes to flight, jumping on a horse. My father then raised my title, I was called Phra Ram Khamheng (the courageous Lord Rama), because I had thrown down the elephant of the chieftain Samxon. All the time of my father's life, I gave support to my father; I gave support to my mother; I procured the flesh of stags and fishes; I brought them up to my father. I procured fresh areca, sweet areca, which I had tasted myself to be savoury, tasted myself to be good; I bring this up to my father. I set out against the savages, the tribes provided with elephants, to obtain slaves for my father. I fall on their villages, on their towns. I get elephants, get tusks; I get males and females; I get silver; I get gold; I bring it all up with me and deliver it over to my father. Then my father dies. There is still an elder brother. I give support to my elder brother, in the way, as I had supported my father. My elder brother dies. Now the towns come to me, all the four towns. Of all these towns of mine, of me, the father-benefactor (Pho-Khun) Ramkhamheng, this town here, the town of Sukhotay excels. The waters are full of fish, in the field grows rice. The Lord of the town does not exact any duties, he does not tax the people. Undisturbed they go along the roads, leading oxen to trade in them, mounting horses to trade in them. If they wish and desire to trade in elephants, let them do so. They may trade in them in the same way, as they are used to

trade in horses or in cattle. If they should like to trade in silver, trade in gold, trade in slaves, they are free to do so. Let them fearlessly transact their business before the face of the lords, before the host of princes and young nobles. If death occurs, the property of the father goes to his sons, of whatever it may consist. His children, his wives, his servants, his slaves, the fruit-gardens of betel and areca, all and every thing, what the father possessed, is inherited by his son. Whenever disputes arise between the common people and members of the nobility, they will be examined into and decided with justice, both parties being equally regarded as subjects. The judge must not side with the person who clandestinely steals and defrauds. He must not harm the property of the litigants and take from it by his greediness. Whenever traders to buy or sell come in companies to visit the town, let them come. Such as wait for me at the northern frontier, requiring my assistance, shall have it. If they are in want of elephants, or of horses, or of slaves, or of money, it will be given to them. After the goods have been stapled\* up in the town and stored, there will be made an election of slaves and a rejection of slaves. Such as are clever in spearing, clever in fighting, shall not be killed, neither shall they be beaten. There is under the portico a bell hung up for the use of the people, the royal subjects, in the centre of each village, in the centre of each town. If in quarrels or injuries of any kind, they wish to speak their mind before the lord or complain to the nobleman, it is not difficult. They go and ring the bell, which has been hung up there for them. The father-benefactor Ramkhamheng, the father (sovereign) of the country, takes it up, he has the matter enquired into and the names of the parties searched out.

“Furthermore in this city of Sukhotay there are planted orchards of areca-palms and betel-vines, all over the town. On every place there are groves of cocoanut trees in great abundance. In this town are parks of the resin tree and plenty of them. In this town are mangoes and plenty of them. In this town are tamarinds and plenty of them. In this town there is liberty to build and plant for whosoever wishes. In the middle of this town of Sukhotay there is a stone basin with a bubbling fountain, the water is clean and clear and good to drink without being distilled, clear like the water of the Ganges (khongka).

\* *Sic* in MSS. *Query* [secured] ?—Eds.

There is a river, which surrounds this town of Sukhotay in three windings, even at the dry season, two thousand four hundred fathoms in extent. The people in this town of Sukhotay are addicted to almsgivings, are addicted to observe the precepts, are addicted to make offerings. The father-benefactor Ramkhamheng, the sovereign of this town of Sukhotay, he with all his ladies, with the host of lords, all men and women, the whole of the princely race, the sons of nobles, all males and females, as many as there are, the whole multitude, all of them, persevere piously in the religion of Phra-Phnuth (Buddha). They keep the precepts during the time of Lent, every one of them. When the rainy season is concluded, they celebrate the processions to throw presents to the priests during one month, and then it is finished. To solemnize this festival, they contribute artificial fruits; they collect the fruits of areca; they bring flowers; they bring cushions; they will reap the fruits of meritorious rewards. Those who present cushions, will sleep on costly canopy couches. The variety of the presents in multifarious patterns, heaped up by royal command and by the common folks, are innumerable, glittering in such quantities that they cannot be counted; they block up all places, filling every spot. The lines of presents extend in piles beyond the precincts of the town till to the outskirts of the jungle. If they have to be transported inside the palace, there is one uninterrupted mass of goods stretching around, before and behind, from the jungle outside. Then in praying and ejaculating pious words, the air resounds with the clashing of voices, with the echo of voices, in the passing and repassing of voices, with singing voices. According to every one's liking, he who feels inclined and wishes to gamble, may gamble; who feels inclined to play, may play; who feels inclined to promenade, may walk about. In this town of Sukhotay there are excellent singers with melodious voices. At the height of the festival the people use to come in in crowds, jostling each other and eager to look on, how they light up the fire-works and let them off. This town of Sukhotay contains a gong, split in halves. This town of Sukhotay possesses a temple; possesses a statue of Buddha, 18 cubits high; possesses a large image of Buddha; possesses a holy convent; possesses aged teachers; possesses a high priest. To the west of the town of Sukhotay there is a jungle-monastery (of hermits). The father-benefactor Ramkhamheng bestows alms on the high priest

(Maha-thero or the great Thero). Amongst the aged teachers there is a learned one, who has read through the *Pidok* in all its three parts. He is the head of the tribe of savans, excelling above all others in this town of Sukhotay, and there is none like him, from the town of Srithammarat to here. In the midst of the jungle there is a monastery. It is very large and roomy and exceedingly beautiful. At the eastern side of this town of Sukhotay there is a monastery with venerable professors; there is a royal lake; there is a forest of areca-palms and betel-vines; there are fields and cultivated tracts; there are homesteads with gardens; there are houses, large and small; there is a forest of mangoe trees; a forest of tamarinds handsome to look at and carefully kept. At the south of the town of Sukhotay there is a market and a school-room; there is the palace; there is a forest of cocoa-palms, a forest of thorny areca; there are fields and cultivated tracts; there are homesteads and gardens; there are houses, large and small. To the north of the town of Sukhotay, there is a convent with the cells of venerable teachers, who live by alms; there is a pretty lake with plenty of fish; there are plantations of cocoa-palms, plantations of resin trees, plantations of mangoes and tamarinds; there is water in a cistern. There is also the lord Khaphung, the demon-angel, who is the mightiest in that mountain and above every other demon. In this country every one of the nobles reverences the town of Sukhotay, and observes the rules of adoration in his worship, paying homage. This town is an upright one. This town stands well with the demons. If mistakes are committed in the worship, if the sacrifice is not correct, the demons in yonder mountain do not guard and protect the town; they disappear.

When the era was dated 1214, in the year of the dragon, the father-benefactor Ramkhamheng, the sovereign of this country (town) of Sisatxanalai-Sukhotay planted a palm tree, and after nineteen rice crops had gone by, he ordered the workmen to prepare the smooth surface of a stone, which was fastened and secured on the middle of the trunk of the palm tree. In the days of the dark moon, at the beginning and at the end, for eight days, and on the days of the full moon and the quarters, the assembly of the aged teachers and the priests ascend the surface of the stone to rest; and the whole circle of pious laymen accomplish the holy law in remembering and observing



the victorious precepts. The father-benefactor Ramkhamheng, the sovereign of the country of Sitxanalai-Sukhotay, ascending to the surface of the stone, sat down; and the host of the lords and the sons of the nobles, the whole multitude, paid homage to him for their villages, paid homage for their towns. On the first and the last day of the dark moon, on the extinguished moon, and at the full moon, the white elephant was adorned in its trappings of costly gold, as it has always been the custom to do. Its name is Ruchasi. The father-benefactor Ramkhamheng, having mounted on its back, proceeds to worship the image of Phra-Phuth in the jungle. He has brought forth the engravings from the town of Xolajong, to place them in the foundation, together with the glorious relics, the jewels holy and splendid from the cave on the source of the waters, the cave on the river's bank, from the precious fountain in the middle of the palm forest. Of the two halls, the one is called the golden, the other the strength of the protecting Buddha. The flat stone, called Manang-sila, in the form of an alms-bowl, is placed (as Dagob) above the relics, to close the foundation formed by the stone. Then all men saw and acknowledged, that the father-benefactor Ramkhamheng, son of the father-benefactor Sinitharathiya, had become king in the country Sri Satxanalai-Sukhotay and over the Ma-kao, the Lao and the Thai; over all towns, below and above, under the vault of heaven.

All the inhabitants of the mountain U, the dwellers on the banks of the river, were called out in the year of the pig, when the era dated 1209. They were ordered to dig and take out the holy relics. Having come upon them and seen them, they made offerings and worshipped the holy relics. At a favourable day of the sixth month, they took them out and brought them, to be buried in the centre of the town of Sisatxanalai. A pagoda was placed upon them and stone-towers were erected in a circle around the holy relics.

Then three years went by. In former times there was no written character of the Thai. When the era dated 1205, in the year of the horse, the father-benefactor Ramkhamheng, having consulted with the learned teachers, established the letters of the alphabet for the Thai, which exist since that time, when the king arranged them for use. Then it was, that the father-benefactor Ramkhamheng became verily the king and royal lord to all the Thai, because then verily he became

their teacher and instructor, enlightening the Thai, that they might know truly the merits and understand the law. But amongst the people, living in this country of the Thai, there is nobody equal in regard to firmness and boldness, in regard to courage, pre-eminence and strength, equally powerful to overcome the host of enemies.

The country stretches far and wide, being enlarged by conquests. On the side of sunrise, it extends to the royal lake, stretching in two lines through the low grounds along the banks of the river Khong (Mekhong), up to Viengchan and Viengkham, which two forts have been placed there to form the boundary posts. On the south side it comprises the people who inhabit the district Phrek in Suphannaphumiraburi, the boundary line being marked by Petchaburi and Srithammarat on the shores, which are washed by the waters of the sea. On the side of sunset, it extends to the countries of Xot and Bangkapadi, and there are no frontiers along the waters of the ocean. In a northerly direction it comprises the town of Phleh (Pre), the town of Nahn, the town Phlua, stretching to the banks of the large river, where the country of the Xava (Xao) constitutes the boundary. There are eatables cultivated in this territory, that the multitude of villagers and citizens may be provided with food, as it is right and just, according to the laws of line men."

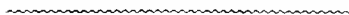
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The discussion of the many important points, alluded to in this interesting inscription, I must leave for another occasion. It has been remarked above, that this truly enlightened king, under whom, the people might with more propriety than now, have been styled "the free" (Thai), appears to be identical with the famous Phra Ruang, (at least with one of the different representatives of this name). The Siamese chronicles place his reign generally in the seventh century, but the Peguan history confirms his having reigned at about the epoch here mentioned, which has to be reckoned most probably in the Mahasakkharat: if not, as the era appears to be counted backwards, it begins with the holy period of 5000 years. The first king of Siam makes the date of the inscription 1193 of the Christian era. The town of Sukhothay is one of the oldest capitals of Siam and continually celebrated in the Phongsavadan muang nua, where one of the Brahminical ancestors is called by the name of Satxanalai. The town of Tak

lies now in ruins, in the neighbourhood of the present Rahein, and belonged to the kingdom founded in Kampengpet. The mentioning of the ocean, in defining the frontiers there, recalls the traditions of the Taleins; and Sukhothai itself is said to have been formerly a seaport. According to the Siamese legends, Phra-Ruang sailed from it to conquer China (Krung Chin), in the same year in which the Chinese historians (616 P. D.) speak of a tribute brought from Siam. The mythic traditions of the Damdukban place the residence of Phaya Ruang in Nophburi or Lophburi, the ancient capital of the aboriginal occupants of the soil, before the emigration of the Thai. The demon-worship, mentioned in the inscription, continues still in various forms in all Buddhistic countries, and the processions to make presents to the priesthood may still be seen repeated every year at Bangkok, in the way here described. The presents are called Kathin, on account of their variegated components, in remembrance of the checkered garments of the monks, which, according to the founder's institution, had to be sown together in incongruous patchwork. The royal custom of hanging up a bell, which might be rung by complainants seeking access, occurs also in the history of Hongsavadi and is known all over the orient. From the remark, that the stone placed over the relics had the form of an alms-bowl (*bátr*), one would have to conclude, that the shape of the Dagoba is only indirectly connected with the lotus it is supposed to represent. In Cambodia, one often sees pots with bones and ashes of priests, placed under the Pho-tree, the peepul. The town of Xalang is perhaps Jonk-Ceylon (the shipping of Ceylon), a place formerly in intimate connection with the island of Ceylon, where relics were cheap as mushrooms. The places mentioned to define the boundaries of the kingdom, are all still in existence, and can be easily traced by the directions given. The kidnapping of the mountaineers to carry on the slave-trade is still continued at the present day by the Laos. The northern trade, the inscription speaks of, may have been in the hands of Chinese merchants, and the king promises them, (as protection for their valuable cargoes), a safe conduct through the territory occupied by hostile and predatory tribes. The years are counted by crops of rice, as it is often done by the present Siamese, who at other times employ the enumeration of the yearly inundations in their reckonings. The names given to the years are those of the Dodecade.

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It is said in Siamese history, that Phra Ruang changed the succession of the series, in which the two cycles intersected each other, and since that time the Siamese have continued to observe two festivals of the new year.







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