

A Note on the Source Texts of Cushman's *Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*

Jan R. Dressler

When the Siam Society published a synoptic translation of all major chronicles of Ayutthaya in the year 2000 there was no doubt that this hefty volume, despite the numerous and odd mistranslations contained therein, was to become a classic book of reference for everyone interested in traditional Southeast Asian historiography. Alas, the *Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya* (RCA) pose various challenges to the reader as remarked before by Lagirarde.¹

In his introduction to Cushman's translation, David K. Wyatt frankly admitted that during the preparatory process of the manuscript, certain issues had not been solved satisfactorily. Among the questions left open was the identity of some source texts abbreviated by the translator as "E1", "B1", "B2" and "K". The editor's "best guess" was that the combinations of letters and numerals were intended to point to different manuscript versions of the various chronicles.² Taking Cushman's difficult path through life into account, this was a most unlikely answer to the problem. In fact, from reading and comparing the published chronicle texts with the translation, it turns out that Cushman himself had left certain clues on the sources' identity. Even though some readers might have found solutions to these open questions during the past decade, I want to use this opportunity to propose explanations on those sources that were unaccounted for in the first two prints of RCA.

E1

Among the extant versions of the Ayutthaya chronicles the Chakkraphatdiphong Chronicle occupies a special position due to the fact that it is the only text engraved on a set of seventeen bundles of palm leaves, the last one of which contains a description of Siamese history remarkably different from all the others in style and length. Contrary to common belief, this set of palm leaves is not a *codex unicus* of the Chakkraphatdiphong Chronicle; the National Library keeps an isolated, single

¹ Lagirarde, François. "Chronicle of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Si Ayuthaya). The British Museum Version – Richard D. Cushman: The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya: (Review Article)." *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, vol. 88, no. 1 (2001), pp. 388–394.

² Cushman, Richard D. tr., and David K. Wyatt, ed. *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*. Bangkok: Siam Society, 2000, p. xix; in the following abbreviated as "RCA".

black book holding the exact same content as the particular seventeenth bundle.³ It is yet unknown whether the text of this palm leaf set is a compilation of a major part of the more common type chronicles like “C” or “D” with a copy of the story as given in the black book at the end, or vice versa.

However, a comparison between the printed editions of the Chakkraphatdiphong Chronicle on the one hand and the translation of “E” as proposed in RCA on the other does not hint at any reason why Cushman might have found it necessary to distinguish a single paragraph “E1” of this particular chronicle as different from the rest of the source text.⁴ A possible explanation might be an error that occurred during the optical character recognition, such as a misreading of “E:” as “E1”.

B1 and B2

Further confusion was caused by Cushman’s use of the abbreviations “B1” and “B2”. A cursory glance over the Thai text of the Phan Chanthanumat Chronicle, in RCA usually indicated by the letter “B”, reveals a serious problem Cushman faced while arranging his translation.

The Phan Chanthanumat Chronicle is remarkable in so far as it offers two distinctively differing accounts of a certain period of Siamese history, covering the dusk of the Narai era as well as the entire Phetracha and Suea reigns. In the Thai text these two contradictory descriptions are separated from each other by a royal order of King Rama I to Chao Phraya Phiphit Phichai to bring into an orderly sequence the narrative from King Narai to King Ekathat. The older material, which had received royal disapproval, Cushman referred to as “B1”, while the result of the rewrite is indicated as “B2”.

Judging from the overall arrangement of his work, Cushman intended to present the history of the Ayutthaya kingdom in a reign-by-reign sequence in order to demonstrate the narrative’s stages of development. To this end he divided the doubled plot contained in the Phan Chanthanumat Chronicle into segments and made the corresponding descriptions of the Narai, Phetracha and Suea reigns face one another.⁵ Put into a simple formula, Cushman changed the original order of the chronicle from Narai (B1) / Phetracha (B1) / Suea (B1) / Editorial insertion / Narai (B2) / Phetracha (B2) / Suea (B2) to Narai (B1) / Editorial insertion / Narai (B2) / Phetracha (B1)/(B2) / Suea (B1)/(B2).

³ Ubonsri Atthapan. “*Kan chamra phra racha phongsawadan nai ratchasamai phrabat somdet phra phuttha yot fa chulalok [The revision of the royal chronicles during the reign of King Rama I.]*”, MA thesis, Silpakorn University, 1981, p. 39.

⁴ RCA, pp. 375-376.

⁵ A mistake occurred during the process of rearrangement. The first paragraph of the Phetracha reign of the “B2” version actually starts at “During the tenth month, on Thursday...”; vide RCA, p. 322, l. 47.

K

The published version of the so-called “Royal Autograph Chronicle” (“F” in RCA), edited and issued for the first time by Prince Damrong in 1912, contains an account of Siamese history stretching from the foundation of Ayutthaya to the end of the first reign of the Chakri dynasty. The publication is outstanding insofar as it reproduces the text of a chronicle manuscript presented to King Rama IV, which His Majesty had the pleasure to annotate and correct by his own hand between the lines of the original. During his own editorial work, Prince Damrong changed the internal order of the chronicle by superseding the genuine phrases of the manuscript with the royal additions, relegating the replaced fragments to footnotes.

In RCA, all sections marked by the letter “F” correspond to the original text that once had served as the basis of the royal editorial work, while the latter additions by King Rama IV are designated by the letter “K”. Since Cushman skipped the letters “H”, “I” and “J” as possible further abbreviations for source texts, I assume that the letter “K” was intended to signify “King”.

In order to illustrate the nature and extent of these annotations, I have chosen two representative examples from the reigns of King Suea and King Thai Sa, accompanied by Cushman’s somewhat peculiar renditions thereof:

FK: แล้วดำรัสให้เอา [F:กเพ็ชร] [K:ศพ] พันท้ายนรสิงห์นั้นมาแต่ง [F:การฉาปนกิจ] [K:ตั้งที่ไว้โดยสมควรแล้ว] พระราชทานเพลิง⁶

FK: Then the King ordered the [F: remains] [K: corpse] of Rear Phan Narasing brought and [F: the preparations made for the business of cremating the corpse, and] [K: , after it had been prepared as appropriate,] the King made a holy royal gift of the flame.⁷

FK: นักเสด็จกับพระองค์ทองพานบุตร [F:ทารา] [K:ภรรยา] ข้าคน [F:แห่งตน] [K:เป็นอันมาก] หนีมายังกรุงเทพมหานคร [K:ขอให้ท่านเสนาบดี] กราบพูลพระกรอุมาให้ ทราบ [K:ได้ฝ่าลของอุลีพระบาท] ทุกประการ [K:ขอพระบารมีเป็นที่พึ่ง]⁸

FK: His Eminent Majesty and His Holiness Thong led their children, [F: spouses] [K: wives], servants and people in fleeing [K: in great numbers] to the Celestial Capital and Grand Metropolis and [F: prostrated Themselves] [K: requested His Worship, the chief marshal, to prostrate himself] to tell His

⁶ Damrong Rachanuphap, Somdet Kromphraya, ed. *Phra racha phongsawadan chabap phra ratcha hatthalekha [The royal autograph edition of the royal chronicle]*. Bangkok: n.p., 1912, vol. 2, p. 191.

⁷ RCA, p. 393.

⁸ Damrong Rachanuphap. 1912, p. 199-200.

Holy Compassion so He would be informed [K: of events beneath His soles in the particles of dust of His Holy Feet] in every detail [K: and to beg His Holy Accumulated Merit to become Their refuge.].⁹

As demonstrated by these examples, King Rama IV was predominantly concerned with questions of stylistic propriety rather than factual substance. None of the eighty-nine marginal additions and corrections (labelled “K”) to the older manuscript “F” changes plot or content to a noteworthy extent.

The question about the authorship of the basic text (“F”) underlying the Royal Autograph Chronicle is still disputed. Publications in commemoration of Krom Luang Wongsathirat Sanit’s 200th birthday list the said chronicle among the literary achievements of this doubtlessly gifted savant-aristocrat. However, more substantial evidence points to Phra Paramanuchit Chinorot as the actual author. Among these is a list of manuscripts, which had belonged to Phra Paramanuchit, that were sent to the royal library after the prince-patriarch’s death in 1853. Besides works of literature, such as *Rachathirat*, the highly revered monk had also collected a number of volumes of *phongsawadan*.¹⁰ Further reference to Phra Paramanuchit is contained in a complete set of chronicle manuscripts almost identical to the basic text (“F”), which the National Library received in 1939.¹¹ The colophon attached to this set explicitly states that the work was the result of revisions made by Phra Phonnarat of Wat Chetuphon and Prince Phra Paramanuchit Chinorot, who probably worked on the text one after the other.¹² It therefore seems appropriate to attribute this most elaborate version of the Ayutthaya chronicles to the latter monk and refer to this text as the Phra Paramanuchit Chronicle accordingly.

Commentary

It is above all the synoptic outline of Cushman’s translation that establishes the value of this publication by illustrating the development of the narrative from the rather meagre Luang Prasoet Chronicle into the extended versions.

But, in this time of ever closer contacts between Southeast Asian nations, Cushman’s work also makes the Siamese elite’s past stance on a variety of political issues accessible not only to an interested audience of non-Thai speakers at large, but to historians from neighbouring countries in particular.

Comparisons between the texts translated by Cushman with their Cambodian

⁹ RCA, p. 401.

¹⁰ NLT, CMH, R. 4, C.S. 1215, No. 138.

¹¹ Ubonsri Atthapan. 1981, pp. 34-38, 47-50.

¹² Chanchai Phakathikhom. “Somdet phra maha samana chao krom phra paramanuchit chinorot song chamra lae riap riang phra racha phongsawadan krung si ayutthaya? [Did Somdet Phra Maha Samana Chao Krom Phra Paramanuchit Chinorot revise and arrange the royal chronicles of Ayutthaya?]”, *Warasan ramkhamhaeng chabap manusayasad* (2004).

equivalents (e.g. Moura 1883, Leclère 1914, Khin Sok 1988) reveal the extent to which Cambodian annalists borrowed scattered information and longer passages concerning their nation's long-standing relations with Ayutthaya. Eventually, the Siamese chronicles were accorded so high a credibility that during the latter half of the 19th century Cambodian writers went so far as to superimpose the erroneous chronology of the Ayutthaya chronicles, which had been devised during the First Reign of the Bangkok kingdom, on their still unblemished Cambodian tradition.¹³

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¹³ Moura, Jean. *Le Royaume du Cambodge*. Paris: Leroux, 1883. vol. 2, pp. 45-59; RCA, pp. 76-190.

