An Additional Note on Nai Mot's Printing of the *Three Seals Laws* in 1849/50

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Abstract—This research note presents additional information on Nai Mot Amatayakul's 1849/50 first printed edition of the *Three Seals Laws*: the law texts assembled by King Rama I and the kingdom's earliest banned book. The volume sent to Paris was probably a proof copy amended before the main print run. The volume in the National Library of Thailand, once believed to be the sole surviving copy, has, as of 2026, gone missing. Nai Mot claimed to have sold or distributed up to 200 copies, so perhaps additional copies may yet survive.

Keywords: Censorship; Early Printing in Siam; Nai Mot Amatayakul; National Library of Thailand; *Three Seals Laws* (*Kotmai tra sam duang*)

Background

In 1849/50, Nai Mot Amatayakul (โหมด อมาตยกุล; 1819–1896) printed the *Three Seals Laws* (*Kotmai tra sam duang*; กฎหมายตราสามดวง) for the first time; in response King Rama III (r. 1824–1851) ordered that the books be seized and destroyed. One copy of the first volume survived in the National Library of Thailand (NLT), as described by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1862–1943), Yoneo Ishii (1929–2010), and others. In the *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 113, Part 2, we traced this incident in detail (Baker & Pasuk 2025) and revealed that a second copy of the first volume had been lodged at the Bibliothèque national de France (BnF) in Paris since the 1850s and is now freely available on the net. Since then, there has been a discovery and a disappearance; the historic Mot volume has gone missing.

Discovery

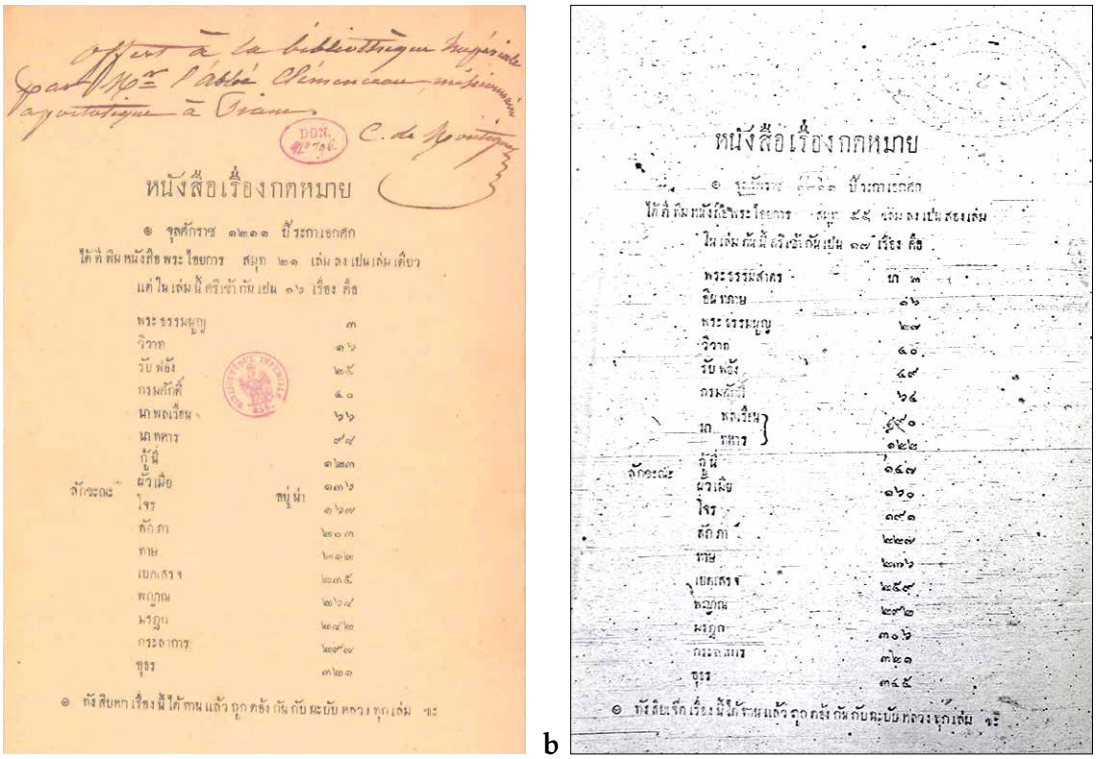
Junko Koizumi (2026) consulted a copy of the NLT volume made by the late Yoneo Ishii and kept in his memorial collection in Kyoto;[3] she noticed three differences between the title pages of the Paris volume and the NLT volume. First, in the NLT volume, the *Phra thammasat* (พระธรรมสาตร) and *Lak inthaphat* (หลักอินทภาษ; Sayings of Indra) have been inserted at the head of the contents; the pagination of the rest has consequently changed but the text and the typesetting are the same. Second, in the upper strapline, the BnF Paris volume states, "printed 21 law texts as one volume, but in this volume there are 16 items" while the NLT volume states, "printed 55 law

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[3] Ishii probably had a microfilm made in the NLT and printed and bound in Japan. It is certainly a copy of the NLT volume as the title page at top right bears the accession stamp of books added to the collection of the Watchirayan (Vajirañāṇa) Library, the precursor of the NLT, but the date in the accession stamp is not readable.

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a b

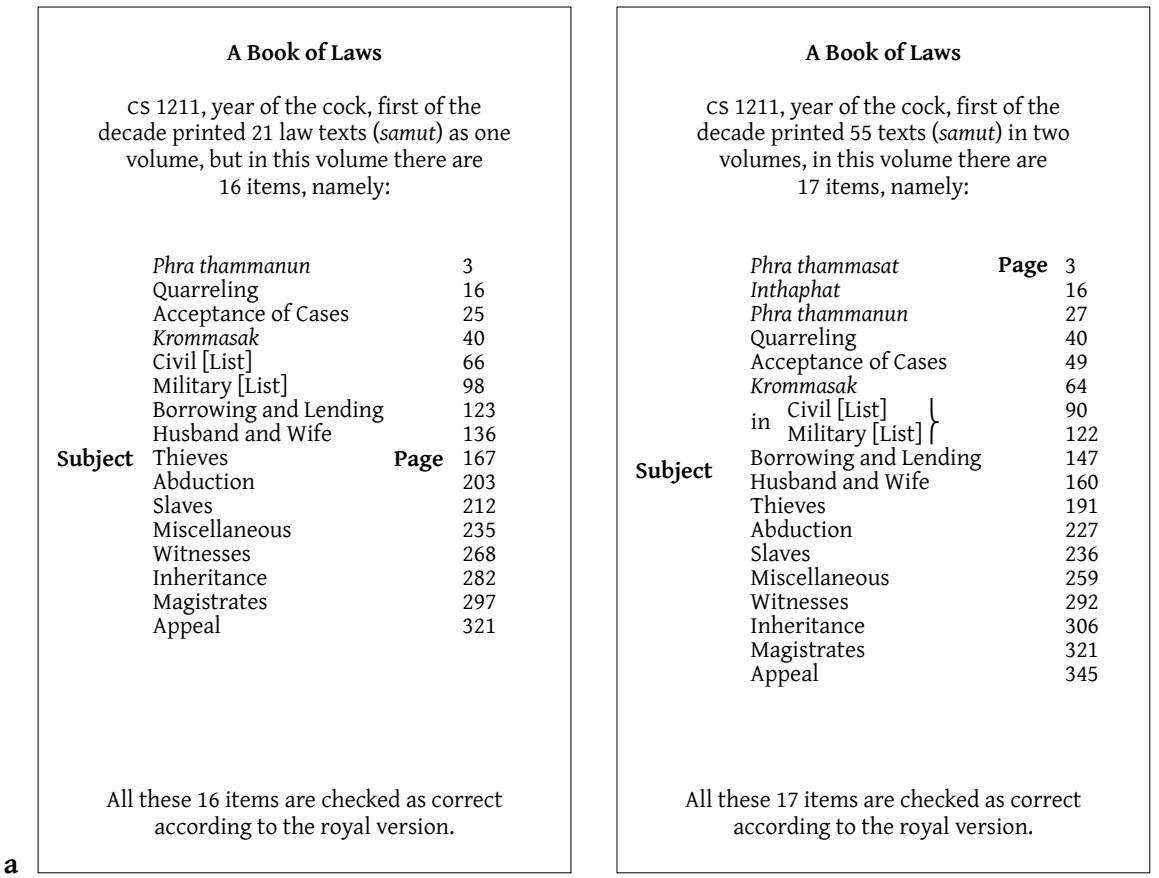
Figures 1a–b: Title page of Nai Mot's edition from the BnF volume in Paris (a); from Yonei Ishii's copy of the NLT volume in Kyoto (b). Public Domain

texts in two volumes, [but] in this volume there are 17 items". Third, some copy-editing is present in the list of contents, including bracketing the Civil List and Military List as one item and changing the spelling and position of the word "Page".

The title of the book and the date are the same. The lower strapline differs only by changing the number from 16 to 17. Overlaying these two title pages shows that they were certainly printed from the same galley tray **[Figures 1–2]**.

How did this happen? Why did Nai Mot go to the bother of resetting the type?

Our guess runs as follows: In 1849 or early 1850, Nai Mot completed the type-setting of the first volume and printed one or more copies for proofing. When he showed these to his associates, someone more knowledgeable on the law than Nai Mot, perhaps Kromluang Wongsathiratsanit (กรมหลวงวงศาธิราชสนิท; 1808–1871), advised him that *Phra tham-masat* and *Inthaphat* should appear at the head of the contents. Nai Mot added these two texts to the set and revised the pagination on all the other pages in the galleys. He took the opportunity to make other corrections on the title page. The upper strapline was evidently faulty. The plan seemed always to print two volumes; "one volume" makes no sense in the sentence. The "volumes of law texts" (พระไอยการ สมุท) presumably refers to the original folding book or *samut thai* (สมุดไทย) and the figure of 21 was perhaps a simple typo for the true



A Book of Laws

CS 1211, year of the cock, first of the decade printed 21 law texts (*samut*) as one volume, but in this volume there are 16 items, namely:

	Phra thammanun		3
	Quarreling		16
	Acceptance of Cases		25
	Krommasak		40
	Civil [List]		66
	Military [List]		98
	Borrowing and Lending		123
	Husband and Wife		136
Subject	Thieves	**Page**	167
	Abduction		203
	Slaves		212
	Miscellaneous		235
	Witnesses		268
	Inheritance		282
	Magistrates		297
	Appeal		321

All these 16 items are checked as correct according to the royal version.

a

A Book of Laws

CS 1211, year of the cock, first of the decade printed 55 texts (*samut*) in two volumes, in this volume there are 17 items, namely:

	Phra thammasat	**Page**	3
	Inthaphat		16
	Phra thammanun		27
	Quarreling		40
	Acceptance of Cases		49
	Krommasak		64
	in Civil [List] / Military [List]		90 / 122
Subject	Borrowing and Lending		147
	Husband and Wife		160
	Thieves		191
	Abduction		227
	Slaves		236
	Miscellaneous		259
	Witnesses		292
	Inheritance		306
	Magistrates		321
	Appeal		345

All these 17 items are checked as correct according to the royal version.

b

Figures 2a–b: English translations of Nai Mot's title page from the BnF volume in Paris (a), and from Yonei Ishii's copy of the NLT volume in Kyoto (b) © Chris Baker

figure of 41. Mot corrected this to 55, also faulty. This same figure of "55 Vols" appears in a reference to the printing by John Taylor Jones (1802–1851) in an article in the *Chinese Depository* for 1850 (Jones 1850: 551).

With these revisions, Nai Mot completed the print run by July 1850. The "panic" (Bradley 1930: 125) over the king's order of seizure began in September of that year. At some point, Nai Mot gave the proof copy to the French missionaries and this found its way to Paris, as described in our article (Baker & Pasuk 2025). We repeat that this is our guess. There may be other explanations.

Disappearance

The NLT volume cannot now be found. Searches carried out in the NLT in April–May 2026 failed to locate the book. At present, Yoneo Ishii's copy in Kyoto is the only record.

This book is a historical artifact. It was one of the first books printed in the kingdom and the first book to be banned in Siam. It had an important part in the transmission of the *Three Seals Laws*. Prince Damrong related how he had the volume lodged in the Watchirayan Library (Narisara & Damrong 2504: 33). It will be very sad if such a historical artifact has been lost.

Although several scholars repeated that this NLT volume was the only survivor of the king's order, in his own memoir Nai Mot wrote that the books were not destroyed and that he sold or distributed up to 200 copies (Mot 2504: 28; Baker & Pasuk 2025: 34). Perhaps another copy has survived elsewhere and will reappear.

Acknowledgments

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