

A PROPOSED CHANGE IN THE SIAMESE ERA CHULASAKARAJ 1000 (A.D. 1638)

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The first year of the Chulasakaraj (638 A.D.) and the 1181st year of the Buddha era in the cycle of the twelve animals was the year Kun (pig) and consequently the year 1000 of the Chula era, completing the millenium was the year Khan (tiger).

From the mistaken notion that the year 1000 was the first of the new millenium (instead of being the last of the old one) and that as such the name of the year as that of the "tiger" was inauspicious, the King reigning at that time in Siam Phra Prasad Thong (1631—1656 A.D.) intended to change the name of the year into that of Pi Kun the same with which the Chulasakaraj had commenced. — He informed of his intention the Sovereign of Burma who however would not follow this suggestion, and a letter was sent in reply by a special ambassador which being translated and read in public audience elicited according to the Siamese Annals the remark of the King: "If this vile Burman will not follow us, never mind".

The result of this letter however was that the change was not made, and happily for the future historian another pitfall in chronology was avoided. Perhaps that the evil omen had been averted

and the necessity for a change had then ceased. Whatever it may have been, we owe to this whim of the King the description of a very elaborate festival which was held at Ayuddhya and of which the Annals give a very full description. — In translating it, we may be allowed to point out that there is no reason to doubt the correctness of the description, and it may serve as another proof of the great influence of Indian Brahmanic culture on Siam. The Annals with regard to the dates of the years require strict revision. — The facts recorded, based on tradition, may be relied upon as tradition is very active. — It is also well known that great value is placed in the countries affected by Indian civilization on auspicious days, that very elaborate calculations are made to find out the propitious moment even with regard to minutes and seconds and consequently the days on which a thing occurred may be considered correct. The great difficulty in chronology therefore is to find out the year in which a certain event took place and nothing remains but to reconstruct the whole calendar. Happily the Monarchs of Siam have not as those of Burma interfered unduly with the era with a view to avoid unauspicious days. — The Burmese Annals relate even with regard to the Chulasakaraj that as under the King who reigned in the year 637 something unlucky was apprehended the prince of Nat struck out of the era 642 years and ordered that the 644th year should now be called the second. — Ever since this time, it has been the custom of the Burmese Monarchs to order similar corrections whenever according to the prejudices of their judicial astrology any year was considered ominous of misfortune. (Sangermano, *Burmese Empire* ed. Jardine, page 50). The initiation of the Chulasakaraj is accounted for in the Siamese Annals by Phra Ruang the half mythical liberator of Siam from Cambodian yoke instituting the new era 1000 years after the Buddhist era. This of course does not agree with the date of the commencement

of the Buddhist era, as accepted in Siam and other Buddhist countries but in it perhaps another clue may be found according to which the definite date of the Nirvana may be fixed.

In Siam from ancient times by a method which has been fully described by Cassini in La Loubère, *Description du Royaume de Siam*, Règles de l'Astronomie Siamoise, vol. II, page 242, ed. Paris 1691, the astrologers have calculated the eclipses of the sun and moon the intercalary months and days, further the time at which the sun is in a zodiac songkran and have noted them down in the so-called Pūm. These Pūm have unfortunately owing to the destruction of Ayuddhya not been preserved intact but enough of the fragments remain to reconstruct the calendar from them. This is now done and it is intended to publish the whole series showing the initial day of the year, the commencement of the solar year, intercalary months and days, the Buddhist year, the name of the animal and the eclipses of the sun and the moon i. e. the solar lunar calendar. We shall then have in hand a very precious aid in finding the date of the events as recorded in the annals and in the laws.

In the year 1000 of the Chulasakaraj the year of the tiger the last of the decade His Majesty consulted with the Ministers, the High Councillors and the Royal Astrologers saying: "Now the Chulasakaraj has completed 1000 years and the Kaliyuga will in future extend to all states great and small. We think it will be of good augury for the Realm to strike out the era. Now is the last of the decade the year of the tiger, and we think to make the year of the pig the last of the decade, the new year to commence on a Monday, so that all countries may enjoy happiness, prosperity and plenty more than formerly in this second age, and we wish your opinion on this point".

The Ministers and Councillors then submitted: "Your Majesty's opinion based on pity for the world may be considered as excellent

in thought based on knowledge of future ages. Further Your Majesty is intent on meritorious works as supporter of the faith, and you have shown purity and thus everything inaugurated by you will bear good fruit. We think therefore that Your Majesty's desire to change the era will be for the benefit of the people, and will be favoured by the gods so that Your Majesty may carry out your design according to your wish".

Having heard the opinion of the Councillors thus expressed, His Majesty was highly gladdened, and he ordered the Councillors versed in and acquainted with the matters of ceremonies to prepare everything.

In obedience with these commands the Councillors issued orders to all Government servants to build the mount Sineruraj (Meru) in front of the grand palace Chakravat Bajjayant. They had the Krailas Mountain and the Sattaband (the seven surrounding mountains) build to surround Mount Meru. They ordered the artificers to make the figures of Asuras Kumbhandas Gandarvas Danavas, the Rishi Siddhividhadyara, the Kinara Nāga and Supanna. They placed them round the mountains and they placed on the summit of the Mount Meru the statue of the Amarindrathiraj (the highest god Indra). They then ordered the twice born to dress figures of Çiva Vishnu Vayu Virunha Plöug (Agni) Yama Baisetbha Chandra and Aditya, the twelve gods of the Zodiac to surround the highest god Indra according to their rank.

Then then took a gold tablet and wrote on it with vermillion the new era on one line and the old era on another line and they placed the whole on a gold enamelled vessel before the god Indra under the great umbrella on the summit of Mount Meru and at the seven surrounding mountains. At the eight points of the compass they first placed the eight kinds of elephants viz: On the east the excellent Svetrakunjor (the white elephant), to the south-east

the Romahastindra the five coloured one, on the south Ratnanagakunja the pearl coloured one, to the south-west to the Añjaña the blue black lotus coloured one, the west Komuda-Kunja the cat eye coloured, on the North west the Saranita-Gojaresr the sapphire coloured, to the North and to the north-east the Svetragajadhar the pale coloured one. Between the elephants they placed the horses and furthermore Royal standards and umbrellas also plantains sugar canes, sweet fragrant flowers of all description so that the whole presented a most excellent appearance. They also had brahmanical ceremonies (sayasatra) at the foot of the mountains on the four points of the compass. Conch shells were blown and musical instruments played, bells and drums sounded and struck so that the sounds were widely heard. To guard the place soldiers with bow and arrows were placed (Kalāpād). Near the grand palace Baijayan there were splendid decorations at the throne hall, and in it were placed the five attributes of Royalty. Under ceremonies a statue of the Buddha a copy of the Tipiṭaka were placed at the summit, and the high priest of Realm both within and without the capital were asked to intone the Parittam and the Mahamangalasutta.

After all preparations had been made the twice born informed His Majesty thereof. At the auspicious moment His Majesty dressed in ceremonial white dress mounted on the brilliantly harnessed elephant accompanied by the Councillors, stopped at the corner of the seven joined mountains and then they ascended Mount Meru. He there paid obeisance to the three jewels in the five customary ways imploring that his request might be granted. He then raised his hands and erased the writing of the old era. At that moment the Brahmanas who presented Īva Narayana and the other deities offered prayers in accordance with the Brahmanical rite. The twice born on Conch and drums raised a mighty sound that was heard throughout the city, and then His Majesty retired to the Palace.

The next morning His Majesty bethought himself of bestowing alms on the poor throughout the capital and Royal orders were issued to the high officials to be ready with the preparations within three days. In accordance with His Majesty commands the roads were levelled, Royal flags were erected, plaintain and sugar cane placed in the ground and at a distance of ten va (20 metres) around the city the celestial trees (Kalvrksha) were placed from which to bestow alms.

At the most auspicious moment at 9 o'clock 36 minutes A. M. His Majesty arrayed in splendid attire mounted on the excellent white elephant, on which golden vessels on silver supports with alms were placed to be bestowed on the people appeared amongst an innumerable array of people attendants. His Majesty having left the palace doors distributed alms to the poor and needy throughout the capital. He then stopped at each of the celestial trees and commanded the officials who had mounted them to throw the alms amongst the people. Having completed the circuit, His Majesty returned to the Palace. In this month His Majesty expended from the Royal treasury in making the seven fold great gifts (Sattamahadana) on the Brahmans the twice born, the poor, 100 elephants, 100 horses, 100 male slaves, 100 female slaves, 100 catties in silver, 100 catties in gold and 100 Royal carriages, whilst in the public places and roads the theatrical were performed for three days and nights.
