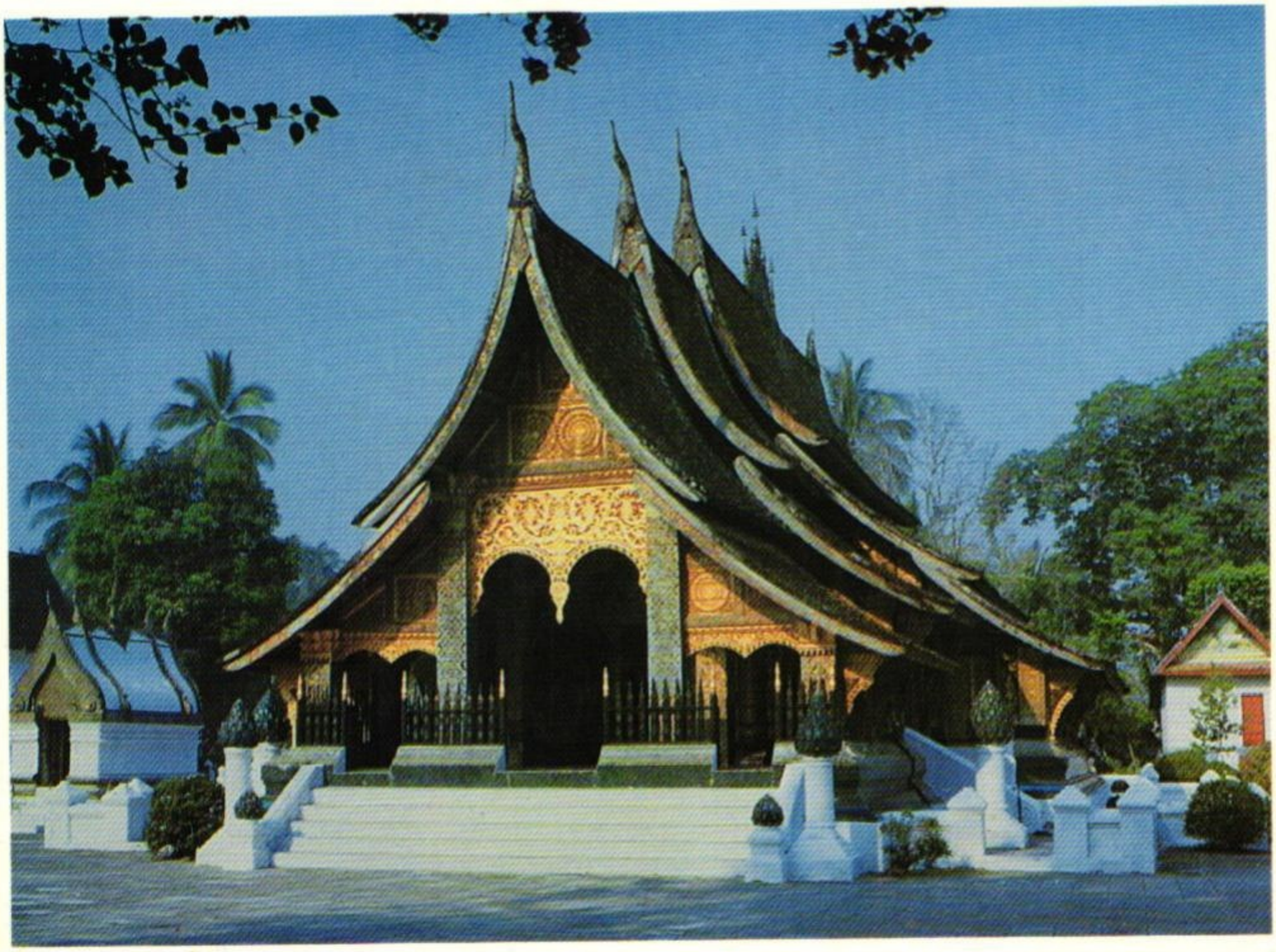
The Lao Kingdom of Lān Xāng: Rise and Decline

Martin Stuart-Fox



White Lotus



Martin Stuart-Fox is head of the Department of History at the University of Queensland, Australia. As a foreign correspondent for United Press International, he covered the Second Indochina (Vietnam) War in both Laos and Vietnam for three years in the 1960s. After further assignments in France, Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh, he returned to Australia where he took his M.A. and Ph. D. degrees in philosophy and theory of history. Since joining the History Department, University of Queensland, he has written widely on the history and politics of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Several research visits have resulted in six books and some fifty scholarly articles and book chapters. His most recent publications are: *Buddhist Kingdom, Marxist State: the Making of Modern Laos* (Bangkok, White Lotus Press, 1996) and *A History of Modern Laos* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Front cover photo: Vat Xiang Mai, Luang Phrabang, 16th century
Back cover photo: Standing Buddha image, Vat Phra Kaeo, Viang Chan, 18th century

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Rise and Decline

Martin Stuart-Fox



White Lotus Press

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White Lotus Co. Ltd.
G.P.O. Box 1141
Bangkok 10501
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Telephone: (662) 332-4915 and (662) 741-6288-9
Fax: (662) 741-6607 and (662) 741-6287

E-mail: ande@loxinfo.co.th

Web-page: http://thailine.com/lotus

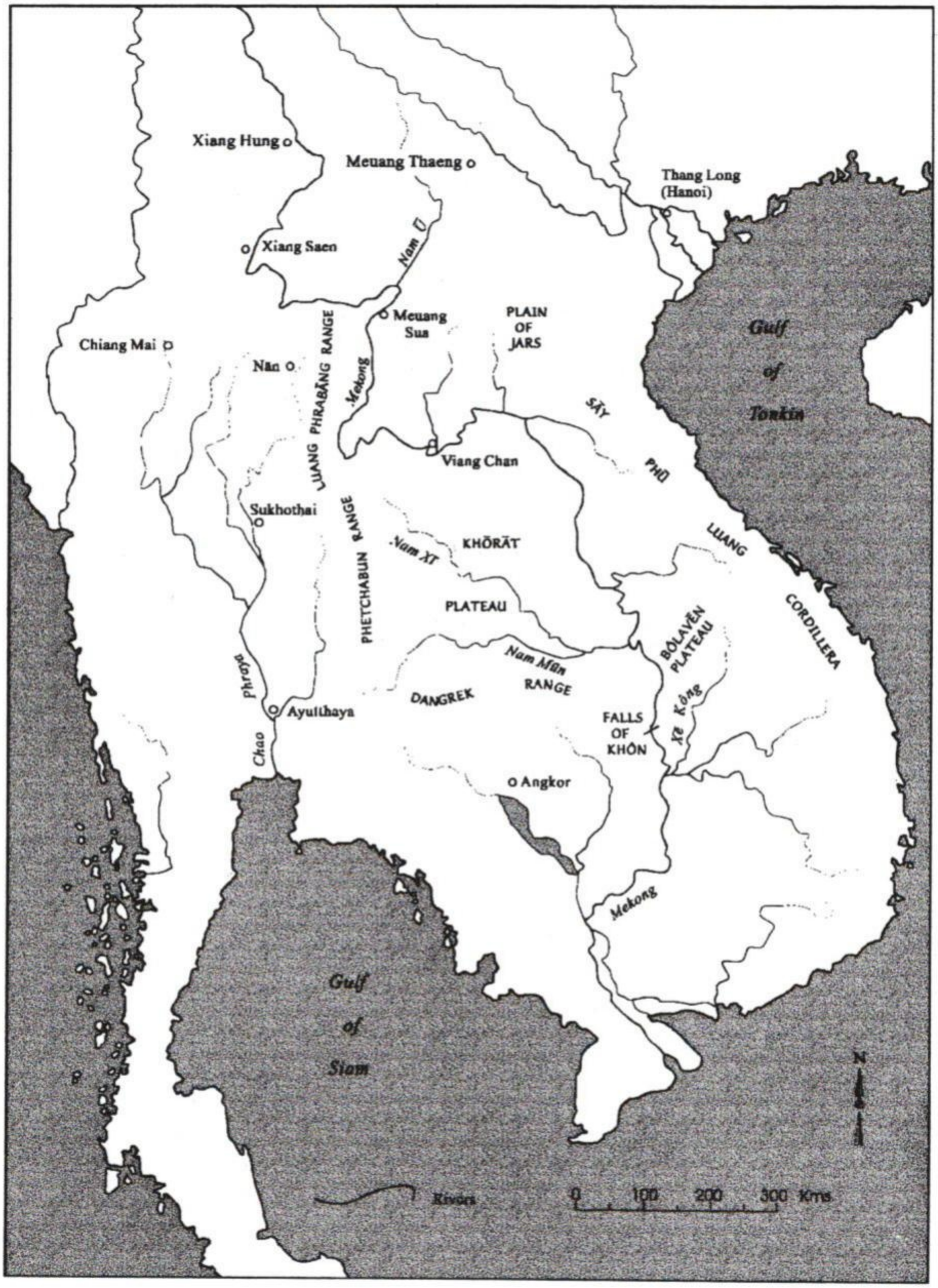
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This book is for all my Lao friends, both in Laos and Australia, who take pride in the history of their country;

and in memory of Claude Vincent,

who died in the land he loved.



Mainland Southeast Asia: Physical Features

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Acknowledgements

My principal debt in writing this book has been to those devoted scholars whose labours over the years have peeled away the shrouds that have for too long concealed the early history of Laos. Their works are listed with appreciation in the Preface which follows, and my debt is extensively acknowledged in the notes to each chapter.

With several of these scholars I have discussed the early history of Laos, but to two in particular I owe a special debt, both for their scholarship, and for the understanding they gave me of the history of their country. For four years Souneth Phothisane worked with me at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, on his annotated translation of the Lao chronicles, during which time we compared texts and argued for hours over interpretations. Had this opportunity not arisen, it is unlikely that I would ever have researched and written on the history of Lān Xāng. I should note, however, that on several aspects of Lao history we still disagree. In no way, therefore, should Souneth be held responsible for anything I have written, and I await with anticipation Souneth's own history of Lān Xāng.

My other debt is to Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn who with Mayoury Ngaosyvathn also spent time in Brisbane while both were Visiting Fellows at Griffith University. While Mayoury pursued her investigations into the Lao community in Australia, Pheuiphanh discussed with me the research both had undertaken on the crucial events surrounding the Lao-Siamese war of 1826-1828, and the impact this has had subsequently on Lao-Thai relations. Their own work when it appears will constitute the definitive account of this important period in Lao history.

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Abbreviations

ASEMI	Asie du Sud-est et Monde Insulindien
BAL	Bulletin des Amis du Laos
BARL	Bulletin des Amis du Royaume Lao
BEFEO	Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient
BSEI	Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises
JAS	Journal of Asian Studies
JSEAH	Journal of Southeast Asian History
JSEAS	Journal of Southeast Asian Studies
JSS	Journal of the Siam Society
NKB	Nithān Khun Bôrom

Preface

Most of what we know about the Lao kingdom of Lān Xāng derives from versions of the court chronicles that have survived the ravages of war, fire, neglect and deterioration. Confirmatory evidence is sparse, in the form of epigraphy recording the names of kings or passing references in the chronicles of neighbouring kingdoms. Even the Chinese dynastic histories have little to say about the Lao kingdom, except to note the arrival of irregular tribute missions and to report on regional relations. No record exists like the one penned by the Chinese emissary Zhou Dakuan on his return from the court of Angkor. Not until early in the seventeenth century did the first European visitors leave accounts of the kingdom, followed by a further gap of more than two centuries before the first French explorer arrived in 1861.

The chronicles of Lān Xāng leave much to be desired as historical sources. To begin with they are court records, written to glorify and legitimize the ruling dynasty. Thus they tell of the doings of kings, whom they married, what wars they fought, and what meritorious donations they made in the name of Buddhism. Virtually nothing is recorded on the state of the economy. No figures are provided on trade or tribute, except what was demanded by Fā Ngum in the fourteenth century from the principalities he conquered to construct his empire — and even these must be treated with some reservation. Nothing is said about the lives of the common people, about political factions at court, or about intellectual or cultural change.

Much information, however, can still be gleaned from these texts. Marriage contracts and wars tell us something about the relations Lān Xāng enjoyed with its neighbours. Early law codes attached to the chronicles provide insight not just into the legal system, but also the structure of society and prevailing norms and values. We know how the kingdom was organized and administered, and something of the complexity of court life. For information on popular beliefs and forms of entertainment we can turn to the cautionary tales and stories that comprise much of classical Lao literature; and for how society was organized and

how people coped with day-to-day problems, to various legal, astrological, medical and other technical treatises.

The Lao chronicles do not form a single textual tradition. The Lao scholar Souneth Phothisane (Sunēt Phothisān) has collected some forty differing versions, not including the regional annals of Champāsak and Xiang Khuang, and grouping as one the so-called "short chronicles" of Viang Chan which survived the destruction of that kingdom by the Siamese in 1828. In his composite translation he has divided these versions into nine groups on the basis of structure, derivation and content, in particular how they treat early mythology, the founding of the kingdom of Lān Xāng, and the reigns of subsequent kings.[1] (For footnotes, see p. 151).

The earliest versions of the chronicles we possess date from the reigns of King Khamkong of Xiang Khuang (in verse, 1422) and King Xaya Chakkaphat Phaen Phaeo of Lān Xāng (in prose, 1479), but a much better known, longer and more literary compilation dates from the reign of King Vixun at the beginning of the sixteenth century (1503). This text, known as the *Nithān Khun Bôrom* (the Story of Khun Bôrom), begins with a lengthy account of the origins of the Lao people, their arrival in the region of Luang Phrabāng, and various dynasties said to have ruled there before the time of Fā Ngum. The reign of Fā Ngum himself, his conquests and establishment of the kingdom of Lān Xāng are dealt with in detail and at length. By contrast, subsequent reigns are sketchily recounted up to the time of Vixun with few dates included. Later texts add brief accounts of reigns subsequent to that of Vixun. The *Nithān* group comprises all those chronicles that derive from the core text, even if in an abbreviated form.

The second major group of texts takes its name from the *Phongsāvadān Lān Xāng* (Chronicle of Lān Xāng). The origins of this *Phongsāvadān* group probably date from as far back or even earlier than the *Nithān Khun Bôrom*, though the earliest version we possess is dated 1656, in the reign of King Surinyavongsā. In general this group shortens the myth of Khun Bôrom, reduces the space allotted to Fā Ngum, and provides many more dates (in the Buddhist Chulasakkarāt era). Later versions in this group add reigns of later kings.

These chronicles, as we shall see, had an important legitimizing function. They were read aloud at the coronations of kings, and were copied and distributed to all major monasteries where they were recited during the New Year celebrations and on other festive occasions. Apart from their association with Buddhism, which will also be examined, their importance lay in their reiteration

both of the origin myths of the Lao people and of the descent of the ruling dynasty from Khun Bôrom.

The first translations of the Lao chronicles into a European language were made under the direction of the French explorer and diplomat, Auguste Pavie, and published in the second volume of the report of the *Mission Pavie en Indochine, 1879-1895*.[2] It was on this translation along with that of the French scholar Louis Finot[3] that the French colonial official Paul Le Boulanger drew in writing his *Histoire du Laos Français: Essai d'une étude chronologique des principautés laotiennes*,[4] a work following closely the sequence of reigns as chronicled in the Lao annals.

Not until the 1960s was any history of the kingdom of Lān Xāng published in English. The first to appear in 1964 was a translation of a work by the Lao scholar Sila Vīravong entitled *History of Laos*,[5] which attempted to reconcile different versions of the chronicles and set the history of Lān Xāng within a regional context. So too did the *History of Laos*[6] by the Thai diplomat and historian Manich Jumsai published three years later, a study notable for its pro-Thai bias.

Serious scholarly study of the Lao chronicles owes much to the pioneering work of Charles Archaimbault on the regional chronicles of Champāsak and Xiang Khuang, and by Sila Vīravong, and after him Kham Champākaeomanī and Saveng Phinith (Savaeng Phinit). Both Sila and Kham collected and edited versions of the Lao chronicles, while Saveng Phinith produced an extensively annotated French translation of the *Phongsāvadān Meuang Luang Phrabāng*, published as *Contribution à l'Histoire du Royaume de Luang Prabang*.[7]

Meanwhile studies of early Lao history were undertaken by the Japanese historian Tatsuo Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire Médiévale du Moyen Mékong*,[8] and the Franco-Lao anthropologist Amphay Doré, *Aux Sources de la Civilisation Lao*.[9] Both hazard some bold speculation: Hoshino on the role of the Mongols in the rise of the Lao kingdom; Doré as to the historicity of some of the earlier recorded Lao dynasties. Both draw heavily on the Lao chronicles to shed important light on the early history of Lān Xāng.

A third significant recent study in French is Michel Lorrillard's doctoral dissertation entitled *Les Chroniques Royales du Laos: essai d'une chronologie des règnes des souverains lao (1316-1887)*.[10] This thorough and scholarly study attempts to resolve discrepancies between differing versions of the Lao chronicles, particularly between the *Nithān* and *Phongsāvadān* groups of texts,

by reference to epigraphy[11] and the chronicles of neighbouring kingdoms.[12]

Other theses and monographs essential for the study of early Lao history include Jean-Claude Le Josne's scholarly translation (from the Dutch) and commentary on the journals of the seventeenth century merchant, Gerritt van Wuysthoff,[13] Anatole-Roger Peltier's work on Lao classical literature,[14] and Lorraine Gesick's examination of the correspondence between King Siribunnysān of Viang Chan and King Taksin of Siam.[15]

For the nineteenth century, the most important studies have been undertaken by the Lao scholars Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn (Manyūrī and Pheuiphan Ngaosīvat) who have, in particular, exhaustively documented the Lao-Siamese war of 1826-1828.[16] Other significant studies include Kennon Breazeale's work on the Phuan,[17] and Constance Wilson's examination of Lao-Siamese tributary relations.[18]

The present work makes no claims to contribute to scholarly exegesis of the Lao chronicles. What it does is to bring together the most recent work of Lao and French, Japanese and American scholars either published but difficult to obtain or in unpublished doctoral dissertations, and to make it available in a readable form to an English-speaking audience. It thus attempts to provide a narrative account of the kingdom of Lān Xāng, its rise, division, and decline, while at the same time examining the principal underlying causes of these developments.

This book is divided into five chapters. Notes have been included for those interested, but can be disregarded by the general reader. Chapter one examines the history of the middle Mekong basin from the earliest traces of human habitation to the early fourteenth century, by which time the Lao were well established as the dominant ethnic group. The next chapter covers events leading up to the founding of the Lao *mandala* of Lān Xāng by Fā Ngum in 1354 and the first century and a half of its existence. This is followed by an account of the kingdom from the time of Vixun in the early sixteenth century to its division following the death of King Surinyavongsā almost two centuries later. The fourth chapter follows the fortunes of the Lao kingdoms until the arrival of the French, and the reconstitution of modern Laos at the end of the nineteenth century. By way of a conclusion, chapter five briefly argues that despite the years of division and decline, an historical thread of continuity links the Kingdom of Lān Xāng with the modern independent state of Laos.

A Note on Transcription and Spelling

Transcription of Lao names into Roman script presents something of a problem, for the system worked out by French writers can be quite misleading for speakers of English. Since no officially endorsed system of transcription exists, this book uses the same system I have applied in two previous volumes: *Buddhist Kingdom, Marxist State: The Making of Modern Laos* (Bangkok, 1996) and *A History of Laos* (Cambridge, 1997). It is essentially a modified version of the one used by Peter Koret in his 1994 doctoral dissertation on Lao literature submitted to the University of London. I have preferred "ch" to Koret's "j" and have retained the French distinction between "x" and "s", despite the fact that both are pronounced as "s". Other consonants are pronounced as in English. An "h" following any consonant simply indicates that it is aspirated. Even though Pathēt Lao cultural czar Phūmī Vongvichit decreed the elimination of "r" from the Lao alphabet, I have retained it on the urging of Lao friends where it indicates Sanskrit or Pali derivation. Thus I have preferred "Xainyaburī" to "Xainyabulī", where "-burī" derives from "-pura" meaning "town".

As words are transcribed as they sound, and certain Lao letters are pronounced differently depending on whether they occur in the initial or final position in a syllable, the same Lao letter may be transcribed in two or three ways. A case in point is the letter pronounced half way between a "v" and a "w" at the beginning of a syllable. I have preferred "v", as in *vat* (temple). But where the same letter represents a semi-vowel, I have transcribed it as "u" when it occurs at the beginning of a glide (as in *Luang Phrabāng*), and "o" where it occurs at the end of a syllable (to preserve the accepted spelling *Lao*).

Vowels in Lao are either short of long. Simple short vowels are pronounced as in about, pet, pit, pot, and put, while their long counterparts, marked by a bar over the letter, are pronounced as in father, dairy (the long e), machine, story, and rule. The "ô" in *Nakhôn* is pronounced approximately as the "or" in corn. As for digraphs, the "eu" in *Attapeu* is a sound which does not exist in English but is approximately the "u" in fur; the "ae" in *Nāpae* is approximately the "a" in

can; while the "oe" in *Khamkoet* is the "oe" in Goethe. Three glides are pronounced as follows: the "ia" in *Viang* as the "ia" in India; the "eua" in *meuang* roughly as the "eu" in masseur; and the "ua" in *Luang* as the "ua in truant. (Note that in glides the long vowels are left unmarked.) Regarding the diphthongs, the "ai" in *Khamtai* is pronounced as the "ai" in aisle; and the "au" in *chau* is the short "ow" as in cow. Finally, although "Lao" is pronounced and more properly written as "Lāo", the long vowel in this and similar combinations has been left unmarked. Where dialectical differences exist, as in *nam* (water, river) where the vowel can be pronounced either long or short, I have adopted the alternative as commonly written in Lao.

Applying this transcription alters some familiar spellings, but corrects pronunciation. Thus the French "Vientiane" becomes "Viang Chan". I have, however, inconsistently retained "Mekong" in preference to "Maekhông". Names of Thai towns have been spelled without accents when located in central Thailand but with accents if previously Lao. (Thus Nôngkhāy, but Saraburi). So too for Siamese as opposed to Lao kings. There is also some inconsistency in how names of kings are written, some as a single word (Surinyavongsā), others as two or more (Fā Ngum, Sām Saen Tai). For Lao authors writing and publishing in English or French, I have retained the spelling they themselves have preferred, while noting its pronunciation in brackets (as in the Preface above).

Chapter 1

The Prehistory and Peopling of Laos

Laos is remarkable, even among the countries of Southeast Asia, for its ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity and the resulting social complexity of its human population. More than one hundred and thirty ethnic groups and sub-groups have been identified which, rather misleadingly, are officially divided into three broad categories on the basis of overlapping criteria — settlement patterns, culture, and language.[1] The largest of the three, known as the Lao Lum (Lao of the lowlands), comprises those ethnic groups inhabiting relatively lower altitudes, practising paddy cultivation of glutinous rice, and speaking Tai (or Daic) languages. In addition to the politically dominant ethnic Lao (Tai-Lao) and sub-groups such as the Phū-Tai of Central Laos, this group includes Tai tribes, such as the Black Tai (Tai-Dam) and Red Tai (Tai-Daeng), inhabiting upland valleys in the northeast of the country, the Tai-Leu and Tai-Yuan of the northwest, and the Tai-Phuan of Xiang Khuang.[2] Some remain animists, but most are now Theravāda Buddhists.

Most minorities fall into the second category, the Lao Thoeng (Lao of the mountain slopes) who farm by slash-and-burn methods in areas of moderate elevation in both northern and southern Laos, and who speak Austroasiatic languages akin to Khmer (Cambodian) and Mon, still spoken by a remnant in southern Burma, but once far more widespread.[3] Most Lao Thoeng live as they have always done in small self-sufficient village communities. The largest of the Lao Thoeng groups living in Laos today is the Khamu. Their social organization comprises exogamous clans, grouped into alliances according to whether the clan totem is a bird, plant, or animal. Status is reflected in ownership of bronze drums and large drinking jars for rice wine. Religion and culture centre on rituals to propitiate a variety of spirits, the most feared of which are the lightning spirit and the dragon spirit of the mountains believed to be responsible for floods and landslides.[4]

Finally there are the Lao Sūng (Lao of the mountain tops) who really

comprise two groups, speakers of Hmong-Mien and Tibeto-Burman languages.[5] Both are confined to northern Laos, where most occupy higher elevations, practise slash-and-burn agriculture, and worship their own gods. The Hmong and Mien in particular cultivate opium as a cash crop. As these groups only began migrating into Laos during the nineteenth century, their cultural characteristics will be discussed in chapter four.

These three groups should not be taken as constituting hard and fast categories. For centuries, interaction between different ethnic groups has encouraged economic exchange, cultural borrowing and a degree of intermarriage. Certain Lao Thoeng communities have adopted Buddhism and the Lao language, and become assimilated into lowland Lao society.[6] Most ethnic minorities have, however, guarded their separate identities, and cultural differences within the three broad categories can be almost as great as differences between them. The terminology, nevertheless, is a useful one, for it emphasizes the common citizenship of all groups in the modern Lao state. Moreover, language, culture and settlement patterns define relations not only between these groups in Laos, but also between the peoples of Laos and those of neighbouring countries.

The three broad ethnic categories in Laos have not occupied their present geographical locations over similar periods of time. The earliest inhabitants of present-day Laos were the Lao Thoeng. Their cousins living at lower elevations included Mon and Khmer, speaking cognate Austroasiatic languages, and enjoying a more sophisticated culture and political organization. Towards the end of the first millenium of the common era (CE), piecemeal migrations of Tai-speaking peoples brought a new ethnic component to the middle Mekong and Chao Phraya basins. Though they borrowed much culturally from Mon and Khmer, their eventual political dominance ensured the use of Tai languages and enabled them to displace those Lao Thoeng tribes that resisted assimilation, forcing them to move to higher altitudes. Intermarriage occurred particularly with lowland Mon and Khmer, so that the Lao Lum of today are, like all other peoples, racially mixed. The last to arrive were the Lao Sūng who migrated under pressure from southern China. Over time these three main groups have reached various accommodations with each other which have been mutually beneficial. How they have done so is central to the history of Laos. To trace these developments, we must go back into prehistory.

The Earliest Human Presence

The earliest human remains discovered so far in Laos have been tentatively identified as belonging to *Homo erectus*, the evolutionary forerunner of *Homo sapiens*, and are believed to date from some 500,000 years ago.[7] They were found associated with a mid-Pleistocene fauna which included several extinct species, together with a crudely chipped quartz "chopper", in a rock shelter in northeastern Luang Phrabāng province. Higher level deposits yielded a later industry of stone tools worked on one face only, which is similar to contemporary industries excavated in Java, Burma, and northern China. Unfortunately, war and revolution have prevented further scientifically controlled excavation, but we may assume that northern Laos remained populated into the late Pleistocene. For most of this time, until the appearance of fully evolved human beings (*H. sapiens sapiens*) some 50,000 years ago, the palaeolithic industries of mainland Southeast Asia appear to have remained virtually unchanged. Indeed, generalized pebble flaking technology continued to characterize hunter-gatherer cultures down to as late as perhaps 3,000 BCE.

The early human population in Laos, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, had to cope with a series of climatic reversals from warmer and wetter to cooler and drier, corresponding to the sequence of ice ages. Some 20,000 years ago lower sea levels reduced summer rainfall, resulting in more open forests. Hunted fauna included pig, deer and wild cattle, while edible flora included roots, nuts and fruits. Camp sites were probably widely dispersed, but relatively large to accommodate the demands of cooperative hunting. Overall population density was, however, low until climatic changes at the end of the Pleistocene brought about a change in environment and stimulated new forms of human adaptation.

The Hoabinhian, named after a type site excavated in northern Vietnam, dates from around 10,000 years ago. It is not well represented in Laos, though enough sites exist to make it certain that the hunter-gatherers responsible for creating this material culture, or "techno-complex",[8] spread over much of the country. Common Hoabinhian tools found in Laos include variously shaped fist-size core choppers worked usually on one, but occasionally on two faces, axe heads, flakes, bone points and spatulae, providing evidence of increasingly sophisticated cultural development. In the later, upper levels stone grinders and edge-ground axes and scrapers have also been found.[9]

Hoabinhian tools are associated with a modern fauna which has led some archaeologists somewhat misleadingly to designate it as a mesolithic culture,

despite the lack of the small worked stone "microliths" characteristic of the European mesolithic. In fact, in Laos as in other parts of mainland Southeast Asia, palaeolithic assemblages merged gradually into neolithic ones, where stoneground tools, pottery, and even bronze metallurgy coexisted with earlier flakes and pebble tools. Thus, as Don Bayard has argued, the Hoabinhian is better thought of not as "a discrete cultural-chronological period in Southeast Asian prehistory ... [but] as a successful and persistent way of life".[10]

Because of the persistence of archaic stone-working techniques, it used to be thought that Southeast Asia constituted something of a backwater in the evolution of human culture. More recent studies, taking account of archaeological and ethnographical data from throughout the region, indicate that this was not so. Early dates have been recorded for such landmark developments as stone grinding, horticulture and the domestication of rice, bronze working, and iron metallurgy, much of the evidence for which comes from excavations in former Lao territories in northeast Thailand. That these developments occurred without apparent external influence[11] indicates not stagnation, but rather a tradition of active cultural innovation. It is now evident that the Hoabinhian techno-complex, in Laos as in other parts of Southeast Asia, exhibits archaic features because these techniques were environmentally economical in the way they used available raw materials.[12] Heavier flaked tools were used to manufacture an array of implements made of organic materials, mainly wood and bamboo, which were easier and lighter to carry in a tropical forest environment — conditions which still apply for modern hunter-gatherers such as the Mlabri, also known as the Phī Tông Leuang (Spirits of the Yellow Leaves), of Xainyaburī province. Studies of wear and retouching of pebble and flake tools confirm their use as woodworking implements. Thus, while stone tool technology remained largely unchanged, substantial innovation occurred in the manufacture of spears, traps, containers, and other artefacts made from organic materials. Such developments, it seems certain, marked the transition from late Hoabinhian to early neolithic cultures throughout mainland Southeast Asia.

Hoabinhian hunting techniques seem to have been effective for a varied range of fauna, including such large animals as elephants and rhinoceros. Plant foods included various lentils and gourds, and there is some suggestion that the Hoabinhians "started down the path towards [their] domestication".[13] Settlements tended to be relatively sedentary, with movement confined to particular river valleys. Rock shelters appear to have been used as base camps to which foraging parties would regularly return.

Because of the wide distribution of the Hoabinhian techno-complex and its generalized nature as an adaptation to a humid tropical environment, it is virtually impossible to relate regional or chronological variations to specific linguistic or racial groups. Thus from the archaeology of Hoabinhian assemblages alone, one cannot postulate with any certainty the movement of peoples into or out of a region. We have to rely instead on the comparative anatomy of human remains.

Excavations at two sites in northern Laos have produced human remains from the middle and late Hoabinhian which indicate that an earlier population with predominantly Australoid characteristics subsequently gave way first to a "mixed" population whose various racial affinities may indicate miscegenation, then to a population in which more typically Mongoloid characteristics came to predominate.[14] One late Hoabinhian skull has been shown to be comparable in important anatomical features to those of modern Lao Thoeng.[15] We thus have some evidence that by at least the beginning of the second millenium BCE, the indigenous population of Laos was ethnically ancestral to present-day Lao Thoeng.

The Geography of the Lao World

The geographical region that was home to these early Lao Thoeng inhabitants comprises three broadly definable zones which extend beyond the confines of present-day Laos: a heavily forested mountainous region in the north whose southeastern extension forms the spine of the mountain range (known to the Lao as the Sāy Phū Luang, the Great Mountains, and to the Vietnamese as the Truong Son cordillera); the narrow but fertile plains of the Mekong valley, almost non-existent in the north where the river rushes through steep gorges, but widening out in the central reaches further south; and the Khōrāt plateau with its thinner soils, lower rainfall, and sparser vegetation. A wet monsoon season lasting from June to November alternates with a cooler dry season before the temperature rises again to complete the cycle.

The mountains of northern Laos are themselves a southeastern extension of the highlands of southeastern Tibet and southern China, comprising range upon range of tortured jungle-clad crests and valleys. The high annual rainfall drains off in a series of rivers flowing southwest into the Mekong — the Nam Thā, Nam Baeng, Nam Ū, Nam Seuang, Nam Khān. The massif of Phū Bia, at 2,850 metres (9,246 feet) the highest peak in Laos, gives rise to the Nam Ngeum which flows south to water the Viang Chan plain. Further east and south another series

of tributaries drains the more openly forested western slopes of the Sāy Phū Luang — the Nam Kading, Xē Bang Fai, Xē Dōn, Xē Kông.

In the north, the gorges cut by these rivers open out into narrow valleys which have formed the principal routes for armed invasion or the more peaceful penetration of population from the northeast. In places the mountains give way to undulating upland plateaux, some limited in extent, others broader. Three, the Xiang Khuang plateau in the north (known colloquially as the Plain of Jars), the Khammuan plateau in the centre, and the Bôlavēn plateau in the south, have historically supported relatively high concentrations of population — Tai-Phuan on the Plain of Jars; Phū-Tai in Khammuan; and mainly Lao Thoeng on the Bôlavēn. In the centre and south, these high plateaux fall away relatively gently towards the Mekong. To the east, only a few accessible passes permit the traveller to cross the Sāy Phū Luang cordillera into Vietnam.

The strategic significance of the plateau of Xiang Khuang, and its relative ease of access both from the Tai highlands of northwestern Vietnam and from the Song Ca valley to the southeast made the region always a contested area. Control of the plateau not only enabled an occupying power to keep some check on the Tai tribes of the Sipsông Chu Tai (the Twelve Tai Groups, or principalities situated in what is now northeastern Laos and northwestern Vietnam), but also to sit astride invasion routes to the Mekong lowlands — west to Luang Phrabāng, southwest to Viang Chan, or south to Pākxan. Moreover, the plateau was the meeting point of important trade routes that Lao and Vietnamese, Phuan and upland Tai, sought at various times to dominate.

Despite abrupt changes in direction from south to east to south again around the northern limits of the Khōrāt plateau, the Mekong follows roughly a northwest-southeast axis, cutting across the line of mountain ridges in the north and paralleling the eastern mountain range further south. Its waters, turbulent after the monsoons, low and placid in the dry season, have historically provided the only means of communication running the length of the country. For most of its length, once it emerges from the gorges north of Bān Huayxāy, the river is navigable, though both the speed of the current in the rainy season and exposed rocks and sandbars in the dry season create hazards. Two sets of rapids, one between Luang Phrabāng and Viang Chan and the other at Khemmarāt, and the thirteen kilometre (eight mile) wide cataracts of Khôn further downstream, divide the river into three reaches. Historically these separate navigable stretches have corresponded to three naturally distinct regions of population and political organization, whose mutual jealousies and antagonisms constantly threatened the

integrity of the later Lao kingdom.

All three regions incorporate riverine plains on both banks that historically attracted a growing population. In the north, settlement centreed on Luang Phrabāng on the east bank. West of the Mekong, Xainyaburī province offered fewer areas for cultivation, though the foothills of the Luang Phrabāng range provided valuable teak forests. Central Laos included not only the Viang Chan plain and river flats in the vicinity of Pākxan and Thākhaek, but also east of the Mekong the broad plains of Savannakhēt, all linked west of the river by the sweep of the once heavily forested Khōrāt plateau. In the south, the junction of the Nam Mūn-Nam Xī river system, the only major western tributaries of the Mekong, formed an extensive flood plain south to the juncture of the Xē Kong with the Mekong at Stung Treng (Xiang Taeng) in present-day Cambodia, and provided a third major region of settlement.

Though they encouraged the concentration of population, the very geographical separation of these three self-contained regions was to act as a constant deterrent to formation of a unified Lao kingdom. What drew the centre and south together was the Khōrāt plateau, dominated eventually by Tai-Lao settlement. This region was well marked off from the central valley of the Chao Phraya further east by the thickly jungled escarpments of the Phetchabun range. Once the plateau fell under the sway of Bangkok and the Kingdom of Viang Chan ceased to exist, northern and southern Laos had little in common. Each region faced away from the other in terms of trade and communications — northern Laos to Yunnan and Vietnam; southern Laos to Cambodia and Siam.

Domestication and Settlement

The early inhabitants of the central Mekong plains were semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers who, as in neighbouring parts of Southeast Asia, preferred to avoid the thick malaria-infested vegetation and dangerous fauna of the river valleys. Shelter was more readily available, and small game plentiful in the open-forested foothills to the east of the Mekong and on the Khōrāt plateau. In such an environment, there was little incentive for the hunter-gatherer lifestyle to give way to a more settled and domesticated existence. Yet available evidence indicates that increasingly rapid cultural development was taking place. By 4,000 BCE, as we have seen, late Hoabinhian sites were characterized by polished axes, cord and basket-marked pottery, flexed burials in which the knees are drawn up to the body, and relatively elaborate grave goods. The people who developed this

culture may have been horticulturalists. Certainly they exploited a wide range of plant foods, including various wild grasses, nuts, lentils and gourds, and supplemented their diet by hunting and fishing. Deer, pigs, primates, and porcupines, as well as fish and shellfish, were among the wide variety of animals eaten, and they had probably domesticated pigs and chickens by as early as the sixth millenium BCE.

Since the late 1960s, excavations in northern Vietnam and especially at Nōn Nok Thā and Bān Chiang (Bān Xiang) in northeastern Thailand have revolutionized our understanding of how settled communities developed in mainland Southeast Asia. Whereas early hunter-gatherers ("Australo-Melanesian", or Negrito) generally inhabited upland areas where limestone caves and rock shelters afforded protection, a new population of Neolithic farmers began to exploit the extensive floodplains of major river systems. No aggressive displacement apparently took place of one population by another. Rather the "Southern Mongoloid"[16] population that came to predominate throughout the region established settled communities at such favourable locations as the confluence of the Red and Black rivers in northern Vietnam, on the Vietnamese central coast, on the plains of the lower central Mekong, and on the Khōrāt plateau. Their settlement sites are characterized by original pottery styles, bronze metallurgy, and the earliest domestic cultivation of wet-field rice.

Who the people were who settled the Khōrāt plateau we do not know, but in all likelihood they spoke a proto-Austroasiatic language,[17] in view of the present distribution of this language group in mainland Southeast Asia. In Laos Austroasiatic languages are widely spoken — by the Khamu, Lamet and other ethnic minorities in the north and by numerous groups such as the Ālak, Lavēn and Brao in the Bôlavēn region in the south. All are related to the Mon-Khmer sub-family, and are believed to have separated from a common source, possibly located in the upland regions of southeastern Laos and northeastern Cambodia judging by the present dialectical diversity of this area, perhaps as early as 4,000 years ago.[18] Linguistic affinities along with conclusions drawn from scanty anatomical evidence would thus seem to confirm the presence of Austroasiatic-speaking Lao Thoeng in Laos at least over this period.

Charles Higham in *The Archaeology of Mainland Southeast Asia* has suggested a broad four-phase cultural-chronological framework which we can use to define the stages in the establishment and expansion of early settled communities.[19] The initial phase (Period A) extends back to the late fourth and early third millenia BCE. Settlements then were small, with little sign of social

differentiation. Pottery was produced, but metallurgy was absent. Rice was cultivated, but only by broadcast methods along the margins of ponds and streams. The second phase (Period B) began with the advent of bronze working. Settlements grew in size, and there is evidence of increased social ranking signified by possession of prestige goods. Trade in metal ores, salt, bronze implements and such prestige items as precious stones also increased. This period lasted roughly from 2,000 to 500 BCE, The third phase (Period C) began with the advent of iron metallurgy and the formation of specialized chiefdoms holding sway over surrounding smaller settlements. Trade had increased, as had social ranking and the division of labour. This period saw the initial adoption and adaptation of Indian cultural forms and ideas, particularly in the domain of architecture and religious and political thought. Finally, the fourth phase (Period D), dating from around the mid-first millenium of our era, was characterized by formation of large-scale kingdoms.

Two foci of cultural development of domestic communities during Period A, the Phung-Nguyen and subsequent cultures of northern Vietnam, and the Khōrāt plateau cultures of northeastern Thailand, evolved as separate centres of innovation. Both undoubtedly influenced adjacent areas through trade and the diffusion of technology. For Laos, the Khōrāt plateau cultures were much the more important. Regional variants of Period A cultures have not yet been identified in present-day Laos, but, with the development of bronze metallurgy, areas to the east of the Mekong came increasingly to be drawn into the orbit of trade relations and cultural influences from further west. It seems likely, therefore, despite the lack to date of scientific excavation, that present-day Lao territories shared in the early cultural developments taking place on the Khōrāt plateau. The foothills of the Sāy Phū Luang cordillera east of the Mekong and the plateaux of north central and southern Laos were equally suitable areas for early taro and dry-field rice cultivation, which provided the basic food crops for these early settlements.

By at least the mid-second millenium BCE bronze metallurgy had evolved from earlier copper working on the Khōrāt plateau. Copper ores occurred locally, but the nearest ready source of the tin needed to form bronze was in the Nam Pā Taen valley, Khammuan province, in Laos.[20] Extensive trade networks therefore must already have existed linking communities on both banks of the Mekong. The next advance came through the discovery and use of iron. By as early as 500 BCE, the Khōrāt communities were using domesticated buffalo and iron-tipped ploughs to increase the area under wet-rice cultivation. As population density

increased, larger fortified settlements began to appear. Although no systematic survey of sites has been conducted east of the Mekong, there is every reason to believe that similar developments were occurring there too, on the plains of Viang Chan, Khammuan and Savannakhēt provinces.

By the mid-first millenium BC, substantial chiefdoms with uniquely different cultural assemblages had developed in different parts of mainland Southeast Asia. In northern Vietnam the Dong-Son culture was remarkable for its large bronze drums, several fine examples of which have been found in Laos. On the south central Vietnamese coast the Sa-Huynh culture was characterized by cremation burials in moderate sized pottery jars. In Cambodia the poorly described Somrong Sen culture was centreed on the Mekong plains west of the Tonle Sap lake. And on the Khōrāt plateau aerial surveys have revealed numerous large moat-defended settlements in the Mūn and Xī valleys. By this time, too, a unique culture characterized by the use of huge stone burial jars had developed in north-central Laos, on the Xiang Khuang plateau. Each of these centres of expansion of organized chiefdoms, though not necessarily their associated cultural assemblages, can tentatively be associated with a specific ethno-linguistic group. For example, Sa-Huynh can probably be associated with an Austronesian-speaking proto-Cham population; Samrong Sen and nearby sites in northern Cambodia with an Austroasiatic-speaking ancestral Khmer population; and the Chao Phraya plains with a proto-Mon population. The identities, both ethnic and linguistic, of the peoples of the Khōrāt plateau and the Plain of Jars, however, are harder to establish.

The culture of the Khōrāt plateau may have extended north up the Mekong valley as far as Luang Phrabāng where bronze artefacts have been discovered that bear some similarites to bronzes from Samrong Sen.[21] This would suggest either an extensive trade in prestige products the length of the middle Mekong, or a process of cultural diffusion between communities sharing cultural attributes, which may have included ethnic and linguistic affinities. Here we are reduced to pure speculation, but in view of later ethnic and linguistic distributions, it seems likely that the people of the Khōrāt plateau, together with the scattered population east of the Mekong, by around 2,000 BCE were all ethnically inter-related and spoke cognate Austroasiatic languages.[22] But if the people of the middle Mekong were Austroasiatic speakers ethnically ancestral to the Lao Thoeng, who were the people of the jars?

The Megalithic Culture of Northern Laos

The megalithic culture of the Plain of Jars in northern Laos was first described in detail by Madelaine Colani in the 1930s.[23] She divided the culture into two phases, an earlier one characterized by upright stone slabs with associated burial chambers situated mainly in Huaphan province, and a later one characterized by massive stone mortuary jars concentrated further to the southwest in Xiang Khuang province.

At both the two most important sites in Huaphan province, slabs of schist from one to over three metres (three to over nine feet) in height stand or lean together beside well-constructed underground burial chambers, each about 1 x 1.5 x 1 metre high (3 x 4.5 x 3 feet), entered by a narrow, stepped "chimney". These chambers contained smaller stone slabs, pots, and fragments of bone. Associated artefacts included rough-hewn stone discs, hand-thrown pottery and bronze rings, but no iron. The date of these burials is uncertain, but judging by the lack of iron they were almost certainly prior to 500 BCE.

The jars of Xiang Khuang were also funerary monuments. They average about 1.5 metres (4.5 feet) in both height and diameter, though some are much larger, the largest weighing an estimated 15 tons. Most were carved *in situ* of light local sandstone using iron implements, though some show evidence of having been dragged considerable distances to higher ground. What apparently differentiated the two cultural phases, therefore, was the discovery and use of iron, mined and smelted on the plain itself. In close proximity to the jars lay a series of large stone discs, many decorated with concentric circles or, occasionally, with animal or human figures in rough relief. Colani convincingly demonstrated that these discs did not serve as lids for the urns or cover the entrances to underground chambers, but rather were placed with the decorated side down over certain ritual objects, such as stone axes. At some sites flat stones were used for the same purpose. Some covered small stone pots, in one of which reposed a bronze male figurine reminiscent of certain Dong-Son bronzes.[24]

In some of the massive stone jars small quantities of charred human bone were discovered, indicating that they were used as receptacles for cremated remains. This conclusion was reinforced by discovery of what appears to have been a central crematorium at Bān Āng in the middle of the plateau. There a natural cave in the side of a low hill was found to contain large quantities of broken fragments of burnt human bone in small containers of baked clay. Two roof vents had been artificially enlarged to act as chimneys to create a draft.

Other finds included fragments of polished stone axes, a few bronze ornaments and a considerable number of iron implements and tools. Associated with the jars themselves were quantities of glass beads, bronze bracelets and little bronze bells. Higham believes these artefacts find their closest parallels with those of the Khōrāt plateau (Period C), and dates the jars to between the third century BCE and the third century CE.[25]

Several hypotheses have been advanced to explain the purpose of these mysterious megaliths, and to reconstruct the rituals probably associated with them. Colani suggested the menhirs of Huaphan formed part of a sun cult.[26] Another suggestion is that they constituted a symbolic link between the living and the dead.[27] It seems more likely, however, that they were erected as memorials to community leaders whose families could afford an elaborate cremation, manufacture of a jar, and donation of associated grave goods. It is clear that this was a wealthy civilization with trading links to the north (Chinese beads and ornaments), east (Dong-Son bronzes), and south (beads and other prestige goods). In return, the people of the jars probably traded salt and perhaps iron smelted from the rich ores mined at Lāt Buak, north of Bān Āng.[28]

The ethnic or linguistic affinities of the people of the jars with surrounding peoples are unknown. Clearly they were a farming community, accomplished workers of iron, with a developed political organization, extensive trading contacts, and elaborate rituals centering on a cult of the dead. Scholars differ on where the closest affinities of the Lao megalithic culture lie. Peter Bellwood believes the "general and specific parallels" were closer to the lower Mekong culture of Somrong Sen than to either Dong-Son (northern Vietnam) or Sa-Huynh (on the central Vietnam coast).[29] Others suggest just the opposite.[30] In the rest of Southeast Asia, megalithic cultures were, and still are, overwhelmingly the product of Austronesian-speaking peoples, and it is just possible that the people of the jars were ethnically and linguistically related to the proto-Cham population of the central coast of Vietnam. It seems more likely, however, that their affinities lay with what was probably an Austroasiatic-speaking population in the middle Mekong region.[31] This would accord with popular Lao myth that the jars were produced by a giant race of "Khā" or "Khôm", apparently Austroasiatic-speaking Lao Thoeng, before the arrival of the Phuan, now the dominant Tai-speaking ethnic group inhabiting Xiang Khuang.[32]

Lao megalithic culture developed from the earlier Huaphan phase to the later, more sophisticated Xiang Khuang phase, the crucial addition from the former to the latter being iron metallurgy. We may hypothesize that the evolution from

menhirs to jars followed upon the discovery and exploitation of the Lāt Buak mines. But why did this flourishing culture disappear? Was it for economic reasons, due to decline in the iron trade as the metal became increasingly available elsewhere? Did the end of the megalithic culture reflect changing beliefs and practices? Or was it due to increasing pressure from upland Tai tribes who were probably well established in the highlands to the north and northeast as early as the last centuries BCE? We may never know, for much valuable archaeological evidence has been destroyed by heavy bombing of the Plain of Jars during the Vietnam war. The decline of the northern Lao megalithic culture must thus remain as mysterious as its rise and the identity of those responsible for creating it.

Mandalas of Mainland Southeast Asia in the First Millenium CE

During the last few centuries BCE and the early centuries CE, concentrations of political power were made possible by increasing population in the more habitable and strategic regions of mainland Southeast Asia. In the Red River delta of northern Vietnam, on the central Vietnamese coast, on the lower Mekong flood plain, in the lower Chao Phraya valley, on the Khōrāt plateau and the middle Mekong, on the central Irrawaddy, and on the Malay peninsula, growing centres of population came to exert political influence and military domination over surrounding territory. The more successful of these built their power and prosperity by monopolizing valuable resources, as well as through exacting taxes and forced, or corvée, labour from their own peasantry. Major resources, apart from population and food production, included the possession of salt deposits or of copper, tin or iron ore; skillful production of prestige goods for trade; and the strategic control of important trade routes. The wealth thus generated through production or taxation enabled petty rulers to arm bands of retainers and enforce their authority on surrounding villages. From time to time, a more powerful chieftain, or "man of prowess",[33] would succeed in imposing his ascendency over neighbouring centres of power, perhaps by forcibly expelling local rulers and replacing them with his own sons. Often, however, such larger agglomerations of power proved unstable and temporary, for sons could always exert their independence or contest their father's succession.

As rulers became increasingly powerful through control of larger populations able to produce an increasing agricultural surplus because of improved technology, they had at their disposal the economic means to retain and arm more

followers to enforce their will. The power thus gained, if it were not to be continually challenged, required legitimation. For this, local rulers borrowed ideas associated with the worship of Indian gods then current in coastal trading communities. Hindu religious practices, including asceticism and devotion, offered the possibility of sharing in or drawing upon divine power and authority. The appeal such practices had for Southeast Asian "men of prowess" as a means of reinforcing their own prestige and authority is easily understood. The process by which the cultural borrowing known as "Indianization" occurred was, however, a slow and complex one which owed more to the needs of local elites than to any missionizing impetus on the part of their Indian informers.[34]

Though Hindu religious beliefs probably spread originally through contact with Indian traders and teachers, they were assimilated by local converts, and communicated along with the appropriate ritual implements and figurines. Worship of the great Hindu god Siva reinforced the belief that kings were imbued with divine powers, and thus carried with it a powerful notion of legitimation. Power centres gained prestige through construction of temple sanctuaries dedicated to Śiva, often on existing sacred sites associated with local fertility cults. Performance of elaborate rituals at such magico-political centres provided proof that rulers could call upon divine power.

The accumulation of economic and military power over large areas is usually known as "state formation". In underpopulated mainland Southeast Asia, however, this process followed a form of its own, for control of population was always more important than control over territory. Rulers needed people to tax and draft into their armies, concentrated as much as possible in the vicinity of the ritual centre and place of residence of the ruler. Competing principalities fluctuated in extent as a direct function of the ability of the ruler to exert control over outlying villages. How much they fluctuated depended on the economic, military and ritual power available to the ruler, and on the relative power of neighbouring centres.[35] Where disparities of power were too great, a weaker principality might be forced to accept the suzerainty of a stronger one. But it would still retain its own identity: it would not be incorporated administratively into the stronger. Dependency took the form of payment of tribute, a transfer of resources that further increased the power disparity.

This process gave rise to segmentary[36] kingdoms in which closely similar structures of power were repeated at each administrative level — local, regional and central. Such kingdoms comprised constellations of power relationships in which outlying principalities were drawn into the tributary orbit of a powerful

centre. The term "state", with its European connotation of centralized administration within a defined territory, is hardly appropriate to describe such "circles of power". To describe these, Stanley Tambiah first coined the term "galactic polity",[37] however a better and now more widely used term is "*mandala*" (Lao: *monthon*), drawn from Indian political philosophy, for this captures both the structure and variable power relationships of such political entities.[38] In the context of Southeast Asia, therefore, it is more appropriate to think in terms of "*mandala*-formation" than "state-formation".

What we find in mainland Southeast Asia during the first millenium CE is a decreasing number of strategically located *mandalas* consolidating and expanding their power by drawing within their tributary reach regional rulers who had themselves built their power in a similar way. Since several of these *mandalas* at one time or another included areas of present-day Laos, the population of the middle Mekong was variously affected by these developments. Yet it was not until the fourteenth century that this region served as the centre for the formation of an identifiably Lao *mandala*.

The first mainland Southeast Asian *mandala* of which we have written evidence was known to the Chinese as Funan, and was located in the lower Mekong delta. Although the earliest Chinese records date from the mid-third century, they trace the origins of Funan back to the first century CE. Its trading centre at Oc-Eo on the southern coast of south Vietnam was strategically located as a port of call for Chinese, Malay and Indian traders plying the sea routes between the Malay archipelago and southern China. Further north, on the coast of central Vietnam, another port of call brought wealth to the developing *mandala* of Lin-Yi, forerunner of the kingdom of Champa.

Neither Funan, nor the *mandala* known to the Chinese as Zhenla that eventually replaced it, should be thought of as consolidated kingdoms with powerful armies and centralized administrations. Rather, they appear to have been relatively loose and unstable constellations of "little realms and princedoms" where power might be temporarily concentrated in the hands of charismatic and ambitious overlords,[39] the more powerful of whom despatched trading missions under the guise of tribute to China. Through the trading ports of early Southeast Asian *mandalas* and along overland trade routes, elements of Indian culture, including the Sanskrit language and writing system, literature, political and legal ideas, religion, art, and architecture, began slowly to penetrate inland areas through a process which continued to be initiated more by the borrowers than the donors.

By the fifth century CE, these influences had reached as far as the middle Mekong in southern Laos. According to Georges Coedès, the earliest inscription found in this region (near Vat Phū in the vicinity of Champāsak, dating probably from the second half of the fifth century), indicates that the area fell briefly under the domination, or at least the influence, of Champa.[40] Indeed, some would claim that the very name "Champāsak" preserves some ancient Cham association.[41] The identification of the king responsible for the inscription, one Devanika, with a Cham king who sent three embassies to China between 456 and 472, rests, however, on questionable evidence.[42] The Cham were a coastal, sea-going people, and it is not easy to see how or why they could have established themselves on the middle Mekong separated from their ports by a daunting mountain range. Devanika could as well have been a local ruler, probably Khmer. All that this early inscription proves is that Vat Phū was at that time the site of a cult centered on the worship of Śiva. The site seems to have been an ancient megalithic sanctuary where an upright stone became identified as the phallic emblem, or *lingam*, of the god. The Chinese *History of the Sui Dynasty* records, long after the event, that in the sixth century human sacrifices were offered in this sanctuary in night-time ceremonies presided over by the king himself, who by then *was* apparently Khmer.[43]

Funan disappeared from history by the middle of the sixth century, conquered, according to Chinese texts, by the ruler of Zhenla, an expanding *mandala* probably centered west of the Mekong on the plains north of the Tonle Sap Lake. The origins of this new *mandala* are obscure. All that we know is that in the second half of the sixth century, a ruler by the name of Bhavavarman I succeeded in extending his domain to the south, at the expense of Funan. Zhenla appears in the Chinese texts as a powerful, centralized kingdom, but analysis of contemporary epigraphical evidence indicates rather the existence of "a number of *mandalas* organised along the principles of the centralising attainment of wealth and power by an overlord".[44] Some suggestion of the fluid struggle for power, wealth and prestige between competing rulers that took place over the period from the fall of Funan to the establishment of the Cambodian kingdom of Angkor is given in the Tang history which records first the inclusion of a number of small principalities, presumably located in the middle Mekong region, into the single kingdom of Zhenla in the mid-seventh century, followed by its division into antagonistic *mandalas*, known as "Water Zhenla" and "Land Zhenla", early in the eighth century.[45]

"Water Zhenla" seems to have been situated to the south in Cambodia, but

"Land Zhenla" evidently extended north of Champāsak into the middle Mekong valley. Its principal centre seems to have been Śreshthapura in the vicinity of Vat Phū. The Chinese also record another *mandala* that apparently soon succeeded "Land Zhenla" to the north by the name of Po Lou, or Wen Dan.[46] We know nothing about the people of Wen Dan, but it is probably safe to assume that they spoke an Austroasiatic language close to Mon. We may, for want of a better term, refer to these people as *Khôm*, a word used by the Lao to refer specifically to the ancient Khmer, and more generally to the Lao Thoeng, particularly of central and southern Laos. By extension, therefore, we can use *Khôm* to apply to the entire early Austroasiatic-speaking population of Laos.[47] In the south, the Khôm would include both the Khmer and various southern Lao Thoeng tribes; in the centre, they would once have included Mon and related groups. In the north, the Khôm comprise notably Khamu and Lawā, both of whom may well have established their own *proto-mandalas*, possibly under early Mon influence — if we can accept what may be ancient historical references in versions of the Khamu/Lao epic poem known as the *Thao Hung Thao Cheuang*.[48]

The first tribute mission from Wen Dan to China arrived at the imperial capital in 717. The Chinese recorded that five years later a force was despatched from Wen Dan across the Sāy Phū Luang cordillera to assist a Vietnamese insurgent leader in his struggle against Chinese domination, which would seem to confirm that Wen Dan was on the middle Mekong. Good relations were subsequently re-established with China, however, for three more missions were despatched to the Tang capital of Chang-an in 753, 771, and 798.[49]

The armies and influence of Tang China actually weighed less heavily on the *mandalas* of mainland Southeast Asia in the later eighth and throughout the ninth century, than did the newly founded independent kingdom of Nanzhao in northern and western Yunnan. In 779, Nanzhao and its Tibetan allies invaded the Tang province of Sichuan only to be defeated by a hastily assembled Chinese army. In 829 the Chinese were again victorious. Defeat to the north seems to have turned the attention of Nanzhao to its southern neighbours, and at this time, if not before, Tai-speaking peoples must have been incorporated into the kingdom. Burma was attacked, and one Chinese text, the *Man-shu*, records that a Nanzhao army descended the Mekong to attack the "two Zhenlas", though it gives no date.[50] Nanzhao remained a powerful kingdom well into the ninth century. In 863 its armies mounted a massive invasion of northern Vietnam, then still under Chinese rule, only to be driven out two years later.

The decline of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia that resulted from the

collapse of the Tang dynasty and the subsequent independence of Dai Viet (Vietnam) coincided with a weakening of Nanzhao. The withdrawal of both powers from the middle Mekong by the late ninth century may initially have provided an opportunity for the Cham temporarily to extend their influence west.[51] More importantly, it opened the way for the Khmer to expand north onto the Khōrāt plateau. The foundation of the imperial *mandala* of Angkor by Jayavarman II in 802 marked a further consolidation of Khmer power. An inscription from the region of Ubon indicates that by the late ninth century parts of the southern Khōrāt plateau had already been absorbed into the expanding Angkorean *mandala*.[52] Thereafter, Khmer control was steadily extended west and north to include first the valleys of the Mūn and Xī rivers (tenth century); then, following the inclusion of Lopburi and the lower Chao Phraya region, the central Khōrāt plateau and central Mekong (eleventh century); and finally the whole of what is now northeastern Thailand and central Laos at least as far north as Viang Chan and Pāklāy, and probably as far as Luang Phrabāng (by the end of the twelfth century).

This Khmer expansion was at the expense of regional *mandalas* extending over not only most of the Khōrāt plateau, but also the east bank of the Mekong. It has been suggested that the people of the upper Mūn valley in the region of Phimāy were by this time "ethnically and linguistically Khmer",[53] but it seems likely that much of the sparse population of the central and northern Khōrāt plateau was Mon, if not in language, then predominantly in culture.[54] Already in the sixth century, the Mon kingdom of Dvāravatī was a flourishing *mandala* centered on the lower Chao Phraya valley. By the late eighth century, Mon influence had been extended as far as northern Thailand, with the founding of the Mon *mandala* of Haripunjaya with its capital at Lamphūn. On the Khōrāt plateau the religious and cultural picture seems to have been more complex. There, one by one, the ruling elites of the small semi-Indianized regional *mandalas* adopted a combination of Mon Theravāda Buddhism, with some early admixture of Mahāyāna elements, and Khmer Saivite Hinduism. The Khōrāt plateau should thus be seen as an "interface" where languages, religions and art styles were eclectically borrowed and mixed.[55]

We know the name of one of the regional *mandalas* that sprang up on the Khōrāt plateau, Śrī Cānāśa, covering the region around Nakhôn Rāxasīmā (Khōrāt). As early as the seventh century, this was a Buddhist principality, almost certainly Mon, but by the ninth century it had fallen under Khmer suzerainty and adopted Hinduism.[56] Even so, continuing Mon influence can be discerned. Further

northeast, in the upper Xī valley, lies the largest archaeological site on the Khōrāt plateau, Meuang Fā Daet, which was probably the ritual capital of Wen Dan. There a vast Buddhist sanctuary was constructed marked out with *sīmā*, or boundary stones, whose relief work affords the only glimpse we have of Mon timber architecture.[57] Later this may have been the centre of the regional *mandala* known to the Lao as Sākēt Nakhôn (Sāketa Nagara).

Further east, on the middle Mekong, another major Buddhist sanctuary was located at Thāt Phanom on the west bank, between Savannakhēt and Thākhaek. Mon influence is less evident here than at Meuang Fā Daet.[58] This important shrine was the ritual centre of the regional *mandala* of Śrī Gotapura, better known to the Lao as Sīkhōttabông, extending across both banks of the Mekong and up the valley of the Xē Bang Fai River. According to the *Thāt Phanom Chronicle*, the capital of this *mandala* was originally located on the Lao side of the Mekong, at its confluence with the Xē Bang Fai. Only subsequently was it transferred to the west bank, where an extensive and well fortified site surrounds the large *stupa*, or *thāt*.[59] The eventual decline of Śrī Gotapura was probably due to its incorporation in the expanding Khmer imperial *mandala*.

Early Mon influence in the Viang Chan plain is attested by inscriptions in old Mon and the discovery of Buddha images in what can best be described as a regional Mon style, both dating from as early as the eighth century.[60] Continuing Mon artistic influence is also evident in the series of rock-carved Buddha images at Vang Sang, some sixty-five kilometres (forty miles) north of Viang Chan, bearing an inscription dating from 1,006 CE.[61] This would suggest that Mon influence remained dominant in this small regional *mandala*, known as Candapuri (in Lao Chanthaburī), for over three centuries, until it too was drawn into the expanding Angkorean empire of King Jayavarman VII. The importance of this Mon cultural and artistic influence in the region of Viang Chan can hardly be exaggerated. Along with Haripunjaya, Candapuri provided a major avenue by which both Mon culture and Theravāda Buddhism penetrated the northern reaches of the Mekong, at least as far as Luang Phrabāng, there to lay the cultural and religious foundations for the first Lao principality and the subsequent rise of the Lao imperial *mandala*.

The early formation of a principality in the region of Luang Phrabāng is shrouded in myth. Legend tells of a union between a *yaksa* from Sri Lanka and a local woman, probably a snake goddess, who gave birth to a daughter named Nāng Kāng Hī, progenitress of a line of snake rulers.[62] The sequence of dynasties thereafter is unclear. One is said to have been founded by a betel nut

merchant from Viang Chan named Chanthaphānit. Before voyaging up the Mekong he had a dream which a certain "Mahāthera Chau" interpreted as meaning he would have great wealth upon reaching Meuang Sua (Luang Phrabāng). When he arrived at Meuang Sua, he miraculously discovered silver and gold ingots strewn along the bank of the river, which he gathered up and gave to the poor. Most impressed by this generosity, the people proclaimed him king. Since the "Mahāthera Chau" was probably a Buddhist monk (one version says he came from Lopburi, an early Buddhist centre on the Chao Phraya plain), one could interpret the story of Chanthaphānit as a folk memory of the peaceful extension of political control from Candapuri to Meuang Sua along with the introduction of Mon Buddhism.[63]

A second shadowy dynasty is said to have been founded by a certain Khun Sua, or Lord of Meuang Sua, the first of a line of kings about whom we are told nothing but their names. According to one account, it was during the reign of the second ruler of this line that the region was saved from the ravages of two monsters by the intervention of two brother hermits (*chau ratsī*). These two hermits then called together fifteen "naga-kings", each with jurisdiction over a particular territory — a cliff, or rapid, or reach of a river — and charged them to protect the country, for there Buddhism was destined to flourish. These snake kings (*nāk*) were clearly protective spirits. The two brother hermits then marked out the territory subsequently seized by the first supposedly historical Lao ruler of the region (Khun Lô).[64] If any kernel of historical truth can be discovered in the legendary existence of the dynasty of Khun Sua, it is most likely that it bears witness to a line of local Khôm princes, probably Khamu, who once ruled in the region of Meuang Sua.[65]

If the early history of the upper Mekong is lost in legend, thanks to important archaeological discoveries in northeastern Thailand and on the plain of Viang Chan, we know rather more about the lower reaches. From the eighth to the twelfth century the middle Mekong basin, extending west to take in the central and northern parts of the Khōrāt plateau, seems to have been a prosperous region of small, semi-independent *mandalas*, each centering on an administrative and ritual complex which served as a focus for both economic exchange and the ceremonial legitimation of power. Further afield were outlying settlements, each defended by a circular or oval moat and associated earthworks, and each in turn dominating a number of smaller villages. Settlements were linked by patterns of trade and exchange. The larger centres such as Meuang Fā Daet and Thāt Phanom were important nodes in a trading network which linked them to the

north with China and Vietnam, and to the south with Dvāravatī and the Malay peninsula. From the capital of Dvāravatī at Nakhôn Pathom a major trade route crossed the Kra isthmus to the port of Moulmein at the mouth of the Salween River via the Three Pagodas pass, thus avoiding the long sea voyage around the Malay peninsula.

Its strategic location secured for Dvāravatī a pivotal role in the introduction of Indian religion and culture to mainland Southeast Asia. Along this route travelled not only Indian and Mon traders, but also Brahmins and Buddhist monks carrying with them religious images and texts. From the lower Chao Phraya they followed well-established overland routes north as far as Lamphūn and Luang Phrabāng, or northeast to Nakhôn Phanom and Viang Chan, and on across the passes of the Sāy Phū Luang cordillera to the gulf of Tonkin.[66] For the history of mainland Southeast Asia, the missionary activities of Mon Theravāda monks were of particular importance. Under their influence, Hindu and Mahāyāna Buddhist beliefs gave way to widespread popular acceptance of the Theravāda form of Buddhism with its emphasis on personal morality, the natural law of *kamma* (*karma*), and the making of merit (*bun*) to ensure a satisfactory rebirth. Even Khmer ascendency over the previously Mon *mandalas* of the lower Chao Phraya and the Khōrāt plateau signalled no more than temporary domination by a Hinduized elite, while the further reaches of Mon influence in northern Thailand and the upper Mekong in Laos remained essentially free of Hindu beliefs and practices.

From this brief outline of the history of the early mainland Southeast Asian *mandalas*, it is evident that the three reaches of the upper, middle and lower Mekong were subjected to very different cultural influences. In the south, Champāsak was early incorporated into the expanding Khmer empire, and Khmer influence remained strong. Indeed in the southern Khōrāt plateau popular religious practices still bear witness to deep-rooted Hindu influences. The middle Mekong, by contrast, seems to have been culturally predominantly Mon, with a later Khmer overlay. When it did fall under Khmer rule, it was after the accession of Jayavarman VII, when Mahāyāna Buddhism had replaced worship of Hindu gods as the official religion of the Angkorean empire. Buddhism was thus able to maintain its hold over the increasingly mixed populations of this region. On the upper Mekong, by contrast, both Mon and Khmer influences were attenuated and had to compete with other cultural pressures, including a Tantric form of Buddhism, coming both from the west (via the Pyu kingdom in Burma and beyond from Bengal) and from the north (via Nanzhao). Northern Laos

escaped all but residual influences of Brahmanism that remained marked in the institution of kingship and court ritual in both Cambodia and central Thailand (Ayutthaya) even after they too had accepted Theravāda Buddhism.

The virtual eclipse of Brahmanical Hinduism throughout mainland Southeast Asia, except for a residual role in certain court rituals, coincided with the decline of the imperial *mandalas* of both Angkor and Champa after the thirteenth century. In the case of Angkor, this decline was not primarily due to the impact of the Mongol invasions that challenged both kingdoms and overthrew the Pagan dynasty in Burma. Rather, it was because of internal weakness and the incessant wars between Angkor and Champa, to the pressures created by the expansion of the Vietnamese as they pursued their "march to the south", and to the political ambitions of a new group of fiercely independent peoples who for centuries had been settling the northern valleys and subsequently the central plains of the Mekong and Chao Phraya river systems. These were the Tai-speaking peoples, the Tai-Shan of northeastern Burma, the Tai-Yuan of northern Thailand, the Tai-Sayām (Siam) of central Thailand, and the Tai-Lao of Laos. Soon they were to become the dominant ethnic groups of central mainland Southeast Asia.

The Origins of the Tai-Lao

Of the three broad ethnic categories mentioned above — Lao Lum, Lao Thoeng, and Lao Sūng — the Lao Lum have been culturally and politically dominant. As a group, they comprise, as noted above, not only the Lao of the Mekong valley (the Tai-Lao), but also closely related groups including the Tai-Phuan of Xiang Khuang, the Phū-Tai of central Laos, the Tai-Leu and Tai-Yuan of the northwest, and the upland Tai of the northeastern border areas. All speak closely related Tai (Daic) languages and all share a common cultural heritage based on the cultivation of wet-rice, domestication of cattle and buffalo, propitiation of a variety of nature spirits (*phī*), and political organization in the form of *meuang*, polities of variable extent in which an hereditary aristocratic elite ruled over a free peasantry.

Some scholars believe that the earliest historical references to Tai-speaking peoples are to be found in Chinese texts referring to the "Ai-Lao",[67] a people who inhabited what is now northwestern Yunnan in the first century CE and whose descendents supposedly founded the kingdom of Nanzhao some seven centuries later. It is now generally accepted, however, that the ruling dynasty of Nanzhao was Lolo, a Tibeto-Burman speaking people, rather than Tai,[68] though the

kingdom may well have recruited Tai-speaking peoples for its armies. It would seem unlikely, therefore, that whoever the Chinese referred to as the Ai-Lao were directly ancestral to the Tai-Lao who founded the Kingdom of Lān Xāng well over a millenium later.[69]

Recent historical, linguistic, and comparative anthropological studies suggest that the proto-Tai originally occupied a region extending from western Guangxi and southeastern Yunnan in southern China into northern Vietnam and northeastern Laos.[70] The initial separation and dispersal of Tai tribes was probably associated with the extension of Han Chinese control over southern China and northern Vietnam in the last century BCE and the first centuries CE. In David Wyatt's reconstruction:

> When, in the first few centuries A.D., the Chinese and Vietnamese gradually tightened their administrative and military control ... northwestward up the Red River valley, they in effect divided the early Tai into two major groups. Those remaining to the north and northeast of the Red River valley, such as the Chuang people of Kwangsi [Guangxi] and the Tho and Nung of Vietnam, developed separately both in their language and, under the influence of the Chinese and Vietnamese, in their culture.[71]

The southern group centered on the upper reaches of the Black River, where from the second to the seventh centuries four linguistic sub-groups seem to have evolved which subsequent migrations dispersed. The homeland of the southern group remained the preserve of those speaking upland Tai dialects. Other Tai peoples moved west into the headwaters of the Chao Phraya and Salween river systems in northern Thailand and northeast Burma. This western sub-group spoke dialects which gave rise to Ahom, Shan and Leu. Southwest down the Nam Ū moved another sub-group whose dialects gave rise to the languages of northern Thailand and the upper Mekong valley. Further east and south, speakers of the so-called Xiang Khuang dialect sub-group seem to have migrated south then west, giving rise to Phuan and Phū-Tai dialects. Those of this sub-group who moved west intermarried with existing populations to produce the central Thai (Tai-Sayām, or Siamese). These population movements seem to have taken place at least from the seventh century on, but may have been given impetus by the depredations of Nanzhao.[72]

This overview of the expansion of the Tai peoples is broadly supported by the myths of origin found in the Lao chronicle known as the *Nithān Khun Bôrom* (The Story of Khun Bôrom) as well as in various regional versions of Lao court

chronicles (*Phongsāvadān*) that have survived climatic and human destruction. The oldest of these texts, in their present recensions, date from no earlier than the mid-fifteenth century, though they contain much older, originally oral, material.[73] Three important myths are interrelated, accounting for the origins of the world, the interrelationship of the races inhabiting Lao territory, and the foundation of the Lao kingdom, analysis of which provides the only available evidence for the earliest history of the Lao people.

We read in the *Phongsāvadān* group of texts that there originally existed no clear distinction between the worlds of the celestial deities (*thaen*) and human beings, who regularly visited each other. Human beings were, however, expected to show proper respect for the *thaen* by regularly presenting them with offerings. Their failure to do so, according to this version, so angered the *thaen* that they sent a mighty flood to destroy the earth. Three great lords (*khun*) and their families alone managed to escape on a raft which floated up to heaven. There they performed homage to the king of the *thaen*, who duly relented and caused the flood to recede. The three *khun* were presented with a buffalo as a gift, and sent back to earth. From that time on, however, a clear divide existed between earthly and celestial realms.

Three years after the three great lords and their families returned to earth, their buffalo died. From its nostrils grew a great vine bearing three giant gourds from the interior of which could be heard shouts and cries. One of the *khun* seized a red-hot iron and pierced the gourds. Out of the blackened holes struggled a mass of people. Seeing their difficulties, the second *khun* cut larger holes with a chisel. Thereupon:

> All those who, born in the gourds, came out through the hole cut with the scissors [or chisel] were T'ai, while those who came out through the hole burned [by the hot iron] were Kha [Lao Thoeng]. Both were servants and subjects of the three princes (*khun*).[74]

But the people of the gourds proved unruly, so the king of the *thaen* was eventually forced to send his own son, Khun Bôrom, to bring order and ensure prosperity. He taught the people how to cultivate various crops, make tools and instruments, and perform music and dance. Within a few years, however, the prosperity of the *meuang* was threatened when a giant vine blocked out the sun. An elderly couple agreed to cut down the vine, but died when it crushed them. Their act of self-sacrifice has been remembered ever since.

In another version of this origin myth found in the *Nithān Khun Bôrom*, two hermits (*chau ratsī*) first measured out Meuang Sua. Their work completed, they reported to Lord In (Indra, King of the Gods), who together with the other *thaen*, chose Khun Bôrom and his two wives to descend to rule the *meuang*. Within a few years, however, two great vines grew up, one bearing two giant gourds. Together they covered the sky and blocked out the sun. Two elderly couples were assigned to cut down the vines, which crushed them both. In recognition of their labours they were subsequently venerated as protectors of the kingdom. Holes were then pierced in the two gourds, with a red-hot poker and with some sharp implement. Out poured not only people (Lao Thoeng through the blackened holes pierced by the poker; Tai-Lao through the holes cut by the sharp implement), but also everything from domesticated animals to valuable items such as jewels and sandalwood, fruit trees and food.

In a third version popular in Luang Phrabāng, there were three gourds from the first of which emerged the Lao Thoeng, from the second Lao commoners, and from the third Lao "mandarins" (officials, aristocrats) and, in an oral variant recorded by Charles Archaimbault, even "whites".[75] In this version, the old couple who cut down the vine obscuring the sun, Pū Ngoe and Nyā Ngoe (literally, grandfather and grandmother), were both the creators of the Lao world and its preservers, through their apotheosis, along with their pet lion, as *devatā luang*, guardian spirits of the city of Luang Phrabāng.[76] In this version they were not crushed to death by the giant vine, but died from injuries sustained in capturing a destructive wild beast, an action reinforcing their protective role. As culture heroes the old couple created the dry land, taught farming methods, and established the royal lineage by adopting a member of the aristocracy (Khun Bôrom) as their son and heir. Thus was Khun Bôrom deprived in this oral version of his divine status.

A fourth variant can be found in the *Phongsāvadān Meuang Thaeng* which tells how five divine *khun* and their wives were born from a giant gourd miraculously transported from heaven to Meuang Thaeng. These were the progenitors of five races: Khā Chae (Lao Thoeng), Phū-Tai, Lao, Chinese and Vietnamese. All bathed in a nearby lake, except the Khā whose skin remained dark. In this version the original ancestor was Khun Lô Kham, who sent his seven sons to found seven *meuang*. Khun Bôrom, by contrast, was not divine, but a man of great merit, born in Meuang Thaeng, whose own son Khun Lô founded Xiang Dong Xiang Thong (Luang Phrabāng).[77]

In all versions of these origin myths, Khun Bôrom was the first Lao ruler and

progenitor of the ruling dynasty, and in all but the oral version glorifying Luang Phrabāng, these events took place after Khun Bôrom left Meuang Fā, the *meuang* of the celestial spirits, and "went down" to Meuang Lāng or Meuang Lum, meaning the *meuang* under heaven or the lower *meuang*.[78] This place was called Nā Noi Oi Nū, which may tentatively be identified as Meuang Thaeng, the "Meuang of the Gourd" (now Dien Bien Phu in northwestern Vietnam). There he established himself and sent forth his seven sons to found kingdoms in Laos and Thailand (Luang Phrabāng, Meuang Phuan, Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya) and in the Tai highlands of northern Vietnam (Sipsông Chu Tai) and the Xishuangbanna area of China (Sipsông Phan Nā).[79]

The instructions Khun Bôrom gave to his sons and daughters-in-law are interesting for the light they shed on early Tai political relations and social morality, prior to any influence of Buddhism. The sons were to protect their people, and not be cruel or vindictive. They were not to criticize or fight each other, for the ruler who conquered the *meuang* of another would suffer the consequences. Nothing he did thereafter would come to fruition: even the trees he planted would die before maturity. Thus to each belonged his inherited *meuang*, and inheritance itself was from brother to brother before passing to the next generation. As for women, they were not to be beaten or killed for any fault committed, for if this happened the perpetrator would have a short life and his *meuang* would fall into decline and ruin. In return wives were to come to bed after their husbands and rise before them. They were to look after the house, weave, care for slaves and guests, and supervise work in the rice fields and the garden.

As an historical source, the story of Khun Bôrom with its mythic account of early Tai migration has been summarily dismissed as valueless.[80] Critical examination, however, does suggest that certain historic folk memories may have been preserved. It seems significant that modern anthropological and linguistic studies confirm that the probable original region of dispersal of the southern Tai peoples was the mountainous border area of northwestern Vietnam and southern China. Furthermore, the kingdoms of the sons of Khun Bôrom suggest with some accuracy the directions of subsequent migration of the Tai peoples. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to consider these myths further.

If the ancestral Tai-Lao inhabited the region straddling southern Guangxi and Yunnan, they would almost certainly have received visits from officials of Tang China or Nanzhao. (One Lao text tells how heavenly *khun* who were sent to bring order and civilization — exactly how Chinese officials would portray

themselves to "primitive" peoples — failed in their task because of their addiction to alcohol.) A paramount chieftain (Khun Bôrom?) who succeeded in "pacifying" an unruly population might subsequently have received permission, or instructions, to extend the area under his control (by sending out his sons to found their own *meuang*). Alternatively, he might have led his people to found a new principality beyond official reach. Thus Meuang Fā might originally have been one of the earliest Tai principalities established on the southern frontiers of China, from where a group of Tai, led by their chief, migrated to Meuang Thaeng.[81] That Khun Bôrom, if we can allow him a shadowy semi-historical existence after all, had some contact with China is suggested by the curious naming of his sons in some versions of the Lao chronicles. There each son has a Chinese number before his Lao name: for example, Yī (two) Phālān, Sām (three) Chusong, up to Chet (seven) Cheuang. All this is, of course, pure speculation, but a process of slow migration did take place, and new *meuang* were founded.

Tai-Lao migration into the region of Luang Phrabāng was evidently via the valley of the Nam Ū from the northeast. We are told that the Tai-Lao, represented by Khun Bôrom's eldest son, Khun Lô, encountered some opposition, presumably from Lao Thoeng (Khôm) tribes, before they were able to seize control of the environs of Luang Phrabāng.[82] There they formed the first Lao *meuang* in what is now Lao territory. At the same time, Khun Bôrom's seventh son,[83] Chet Cheuang, is said to have established Meuang Xiang Khuang (Meuang Phuan) as an independent Tai principality covering the Plain of Jars, thereby attesting to the antiquity of the Phuan kingdom. As we would expect, no mention is made of the middle Mekong which would, between the eighth and twelfth centuries, still have been dominated by non-Tai peoples. What cannot be accepted are the early dates that have been calculated for these events based on the Lao chronicles, or the fanciful identification of Khun Lô with Ge Luo Feng who ascended the throne of Nanzhao in 749 CE.[84]

What we do not know is what existed in the region of Luang Phrabāng in terms of prior political organization. It seems very likely, however, that a small Khôm (Khamu?) principality was located there, ruled over by the descendents of the mythical Khun Sua.[85] In the Lao chronicles, this dynasty, as we have seen above, followed that of Chanthaphānit, possibly a Mon adventurer from the region of Viang Chan who may have introduced Buddhism to this region. The likely reason for the early (Mon?) choice of Luang Phrabāng as the site for a centre of power of a Buddhist principality is immediately evident from its

topography. The steep hill (Phū Sī) that rises almost at the centre of the modern town would have struck any Buddhist as a remarkable microcosmic equivalent to the macrocosmic Mount Meru, the divine axis of Buddhist cosmography. As at Vat Phū in the south, it seems likely that Phū Sī was already associated with some autochthonous religious cult. The ruler of Meuang Sua would have drawn divine power both from such associations, and from the newer cosmic symbolism.[86] The replacement of Khôm by Lao rulers both at Meuang Sua and Xiang Khuang (where the local population may well have been descendents of the "people of the jars") created conditions for the further political evolution of the *meuang* from "clan-based" to "principality-like",[87] for their extended jurisdiction included both Tai-Lao and non-Tai populations.

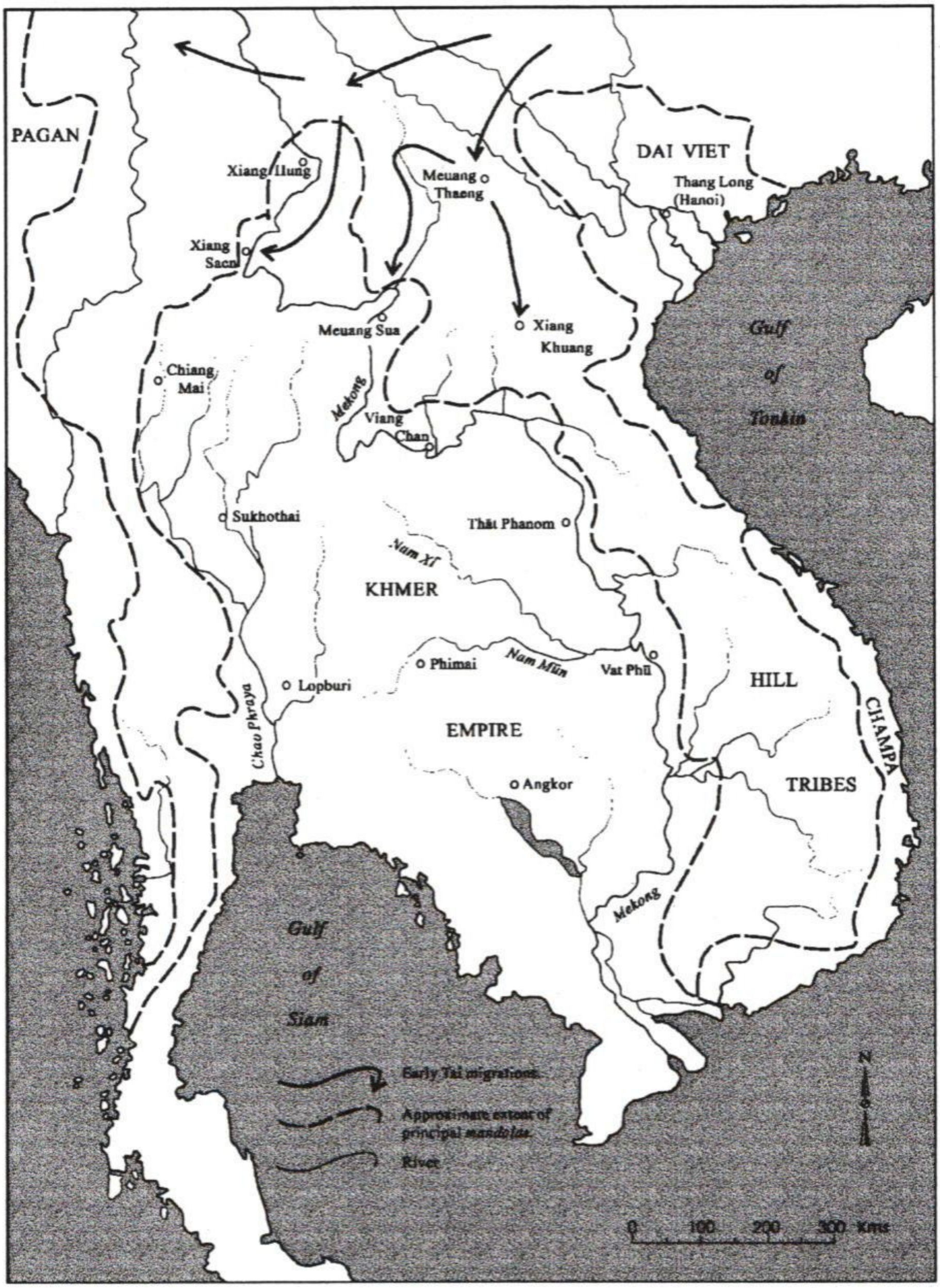
From historical evidence culled from the Lao chronicles, and from anthropological studies of the upland Tai still living in the core area from which much of the expansion of the southern group of Tai peoples probably took place, we can gain some idea of the lifestyle and political organization of the early Tai-Lao tribes during the first millenium CE. They lived in timber, thatch and woven bamboo houses constructed off the ground on piles and grouped together in small villages (*bān*). Several villages, usually connected by common descent and forming a defined geographical unity along the floor of an upland valley, would together comprise a *meuang*. This was the primary unit of political organization above the village level, presided over by a *chau meuang*, or lord, drawn from an aristocracy whose right to rule was legitimized by descent from a semi-divine ancestor. Villagers performed labour and various services and paid taxes in kind to the *chau meuang* in return for maintenance of internal order (resolution of disputes), production (construction of irrigation works), and organization of the defence of the community. Hereditary priestly families performed the necessary animistic religious rites and ceremonies, while slaves, whether debtors or seized from non-Tai ethnic groups, performed domestic labour for the aristocracy.[88] As population expanded, settlers established new villages further afield, which in time might form the core of a new *meuang*, depending on whether the local headman continued to recognize the paramount overlordship of the ruler of the founding *meuang*, or declared his independence. Such *meuang* were clan-based, drawing their social cohesion from ties of kinship and dependency.

The pattern of Tai-Lao expansion is suggested by the Lao chronicles. A powerful *chau meuang* would despatch one of his sons at the head of a band of armed retainers to seize control of a suitable, not too distant, sparsely settled region. Existing populations were faced with the choice of slavery, assimilation,

or being forced to move on — or upward to inhabit higher ground — leaving the Lao to cultivate the valley floor. Communal, and probably also slave, labour was used to build houses and construct rice paddies. During the early years of the establishment of a new village, cooperative relations with the hunter-gatherers of the mountain slopes were probably crucial for the survival of the community, when forest products and wild game would be needed to supplement the first meagre crops of rice. Thereafter trading relations beneficial to both groups became established.[89]

We may conclude that the historic expansion of the Tai-Lao was on the whole a gradual, if at times more rapid and forceful, conquest that took place over centuries at the expense mainly of Austroasiatic-speaking peoples (whom we have called Khôm, but who are referred to in Lao texts as *khā kau*, "ancient savages") already thinly inhabiting much of northern Laos. Some of these, like the remaining Lao Thoeng tribes (such as the Khamu and Lamet), became geographically and politically marginalized. As Tai-Lao population movements continued to the south, they came into contact with more culturally sophisticated peoples, both Mon and Khmer on the middle and lower Mekong.[90] As Tai-Lao political influence increased, existing populations intermarried with, and adopted, or were forced to adopt, the languages of their new overlords. Cultural borrowing, however, occurred in both directions. On the middle Mekong, while language and customs passed from Lao to what was already an ethnically mixed population, Theravāda Buddhism and elements of higher political and material culture passed the other way. This process of racial, linguistic and cultural interfusion took centuries to work itself out. In the process, small clan-based *meuang* became incorporated into expanding principality-like *meuang* in suitable areas such as Luang Phrabāng, the Plain of Jars, the Viang Chan plain, and Sīkhōttabông.[91] The Tai-Lao migrations thus created not only the common cultural and linguistic bonds, but also the political institutions that drew together the three broad reaches of the Mekong basin, and laid the basis for the first imperial Lao *mandala*.

The Lao Kingdom of Lān Xāng



The Khmer Empire: Early 13th Century

Chapter 2

The Classical Kingdom of Lān Xāng

Only tantalizing glimpses are provided in various court chronicles of the earliest Tai *meuang* located in the lowland valleys of what is now southern China, northern Thailand and northwestern Laos. At first these were established, as a result of early Tai expansion, in regions either beyond the effective reach of powerful imperial *mandalas*, or in the "no-man's land" between contiguous *mandalas*. The earliest Tai *meuang* of more than local extent may date from no earlier than the eleventh century on the upper Mekong. This region, known to the Tai as the country of Yōnok,[1] was centered on Xiang Saen (Chiang Saen in the far north of Thailand) and extended east into northwestern Laos, and north into what is now the Xishuangbanna (Sipsông Phan Nā) region of southern Yunnan. Its significance was greater for the history of northern Thailand than for Laos, however, for the Yōnok Tai were not responsible for the establishment of Tai political power further east. That was left to other Tai tribes moving into northern Laos from the northeast.

We do not know when the earliest principality was established in northern Laos, nor who its rulers were.[2] All we know is that there was, in the region of Luang Phrabāng, a principality known to the Lao as Meuang Sua,[3] a name evidently derived from some Indian source. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the story of Chanthaphānit may indicate that Mon influence penetrated the upper Mekong not via Haripunjaya to the west, but from Candapurī (Viang Chan) and the *meuang* of the middle Mekong to the south. This would explain the features of Buddhist images dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries found in Luang Phrabāng.[4] Not only Theravāda Buddhism, however, but also Mahāyāna forms then practised in Nanzhao, seem to have been known in Meuang Sua. At some time between its founding and the first reference to it in a Sukhothai inscription of the thirteenth century,[5] the local, probably Khôm, rulers of Meuang Sua were subjugated by Lao warriors, an event which probably

occurred no earlier than the late tenth century,[6] though Lao settlers had probably been slowly moving down the valley of the Nam Ū for some time. They named their new seat of power Xiang Dong Xiang Thong.[7]

The mid-eleventh century saw the founding of a large and powerful *mandala* on the upper Irrawaddy, the Burmese kingdom of Pagan, claiming hegemony over the Tai-Shan tribes already well-established in the upland headwaters of the Salween where their small *meuang* had been beyond imperial reach.[8] By this time the Sung emperors ruled in China, a new, powerful and independent dynasty had established itself in Yunnan,[9] the Vietnamese had thrown off Chinese suzerainty, and both the Cham and the Khmer were at the height of their power. It was in the upland interspace between these empires that the Tai peoples founded their independent *meuang* from which their sons sallied forth, not to establish a territorial empire, but to seek opportunities for further settlement and migration. Their relatively peaceful penetration of the over-extended Khmer empire continued throughout the eleventh and twelfth and into the thirteenth centuries.[10]

The re-establishment of Khmer power by Jayavarman VII after the Cham sack of Angkor in 1177 delayed any opportunity for Tai peoples, by now widely settled on the central Chao Phraya plains, the northern Khōrāt plateau and the middle Mekong, to found their own regional *mandalas*. The northernmost extent of Jayavarman's empire may have reached as far as the upper Mekong to include Meuang Sua and Yōnok country. This vast region appears to have been controlled from two northern Khmer garrison towns, one at Sukhothai on the middle Chao Phraya, and the other at Sāy Fong, some fifteen kilometres (ten miles) south of Viang Chan, though lasting Khmer influence seems to have been slight.

The thirteenth century was a period of far-reaching change in mainland Southeast Asia.[11] After the death of Jayavarman VII (reigned 1181?-1219), the Khmer empire entered a period of rapid decline. After overrunning all northern China, Mongol armies defeated the independent Yunnanese kingdom of Hou Li, overthrew the southern Sung dynasty, and invaded Vietnam. By the close of the century Pagan had been destroyed, and Mongol influence had been extended south to include all of the middle Mekong and Cambodia. These changing power relations created the conditions for Tai *mandalas* to be established in what is now northern and central Thailand, some at least in alliance with the new Mongol (Yuan) rulers of China. By the mid-fourteenth century, Tai peoples ruled from Assam in the west to Laos in the east, from the Sipsông Phan Nā in the north to the central Malay peninsula in the south. These new powerful Tai *mandalas*

embraced Theravāda Buddhism and absorbed differing amounts of Mon and Khmer culture. But they brought with them their own cultural genius, transforming and enriching earlier traditions, adopting and developing literary forms and artistic and architectural styles. For the Tai peoples — Shan, Yuan, Sayān, Lao — the fourteenth century was a classical age.

Lān Nā and Sukhothai

Apart from the forceful migration and effective organization of the Tai themselves, the principal catalyst for change in the second half of the thirteenth century was Mongol intervention in mainland Southeast Asia. On 7 January 1253 Dali, the capital of the Yunnanese kingdom of Hou Li, fell to the Mongol armies of Kubilai Khan. A further series of conquests extended Mongol rule and gave them control of important trade routes. With the death of Kubilai Khan's son in 1271, Mongol interest in mainland Southeast Asia was temporarily suspended, leaving chieftains, many of whom had allied themselves with and fought for the Mongols, free to take advantage of the political vacuum to carve out their own independent kingdoms.

The two most important Tai *mandalas* that rose to prominence in the latter part of the thirteenth century were Lān Nā and Sukhothai. The founder of the new *mandala* of Lān Nā was Mangrāy, who succeeded his father as ruler of Xiang Saen in 1259, at the age of twenty. Mon weakness and the rapid retreat of Khmer power left Mangrāy free to extend his rule to the south and east. By the time Mongol interest in the region revived after 1280, Mangrāy was the ruler of an extensive imperial *mandala*.

The second imperial Tai *mandala* established in the latter part of the thirteenth century was that of Sukhothai, founded about 1279, at the expense of the declining power of Angkor. Tai settlement was already extensive on the central Chao Phraya plains through migration, displacement of, and intermarriage with, local Mon or Khmer ruling elites. Tai control over Sukhothai probably dates from the 1240s,[12] but it was not until Ramkhamhaeng succeeded his brother as ruler in or about 1279 that it became the centre of an expanding imperial *mandala* through aggressive warfare against the Khmer and incorporation of surrounding *meuang*.

The opportunity for Tai expansion was provided by renewed Mongol incursins into the Indochinese peninsula aimed at subjugating Dai Viet, Champa and Angkor. Between 1282 and 1287, the Vietnamese defeated three Mongol

invasions,[13] during the second of which, in 1285, a Mongol army marched south down the Mekong, forced the submission of Angkor, and attacked Champa from the west.[14] In 1287, the Mongols defeated Pagan. Thus in the space of five years, the regional balance of power had entirely altered, and Tai rulers prudently accepted the suzerainty of the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty.

Under Ramkhamhaeng, Sukhothai became a wealthy and powerful centre. The king was an ardent Buddhist who actively promoted adherence to Theravāda Buddhism in place of earlier animistic spirit worship, and much of his legitimation and political support came from his generous patronage of the Sangha (the Buddhist monastic order). In a famous inscription that tells much about how early Tai kings ruled, Ramkhamhaeng boasted of the prosperity of his realm, the freedoms ensured for commerce and travel, and the fairness of royal justice dispersed. A much quoted passage from the inscription reads:

> He has hung a bell in the opening of the gate over there: if any commoner in the land has a grievance which sickens his belly and gripes his heart, and which he wants to make known to his ruler and lord, it is easy; he goes and strikes the bell which the King has hung there; King Ramkhamhaeng, the ruler of the kingdom, hears the call; he goes and questions the man, examines the case, and decides it justly for him. So the people of this [*meuang* of Sukhothai] praise him.[15]

The type of kingship and society illustrated in this account stands in clear contrast to the hierarchical rigidity of Khmer society and government. Under Ramkhamhaeng taxation was light, and every free peasant (*phai*), in theory at least, could gain access to the king himself. This contrasted with the heavy yoke of Khmer domination, high taxation, arbitrary authority, and a strict social hierarchy which precluded any access by commoners to the presence of the remote, all-powerful god-king (*devarāja*).[16]

Among those who came to pay homage and to acknowledge the suzerainty of Ramkhamhaeng were, we are told, Lao from the Luang Phrabāng region, from the Nam Ū and from the banks of the Mekong.[17] A posthumous addition to the Ramkhamhaeng inscription records that both Viang Chan Viang Kham (the twin capitals of Meuang Viang Chan) and Meuang Sua were among those *meuang* which submitted to the sway of Sukhothai.[18]

In 1292, the Mongols renewed attempts to bring Yunnan and the Tai *mandalas* under their jurisdiction. Mangrāy, who had previously seized Haripunjaya from the Mon, responded by joining forces with Sukhothai to resist the renewed Mongol threat. He also began construction of a new capital further

south which he named Chiang Mai (1296). A substantial Mongol army sent to quell this united Tai opposition was defeated. Mangrāy sent his armies into the Sipsông Phan Nā, provoking a widespread revolt against Mongol domination. After years of continued skirmishing, however, diplomacy prevailed and Lān Nā despatched its first tribute mission to the Mongol court in 1315.[19]

At its furthest extent, Lān Nā under Mangrāy included much of northwestern Laos, the valley of the Nam Ū and parts of Xainyaburī province. It was a powerful Theravāda Buddhist *mandala* incorporating tributary Shan *meuang* to the west, Leu *meuang* to the north, and Lao *meuang* to the east, with the core of the kingdom comprising the valleys of Chiang Mai and Lamphun. Mangrāy died in 1317, and for the next eleven years succession struggles rent the kingdom, allowing renewed Mongol intervention and the imposition of Mongol hegemony.[20]

The Foundation of Lān Xāng

With the death of Ramkhamhaeng, Sukhothai too had succumbed to succession disputes and outlying *meuang* were able to reassert their independence. The disintegration of the Sukhothai *mandala* and the temporary weakness of Lān Nā, coinciding as it did with the continued decline of Angkor, provided opportunities for new centres of power to become established around the middle of the fourteenth century. The central Tai-Sayām *mandala* of Ayutthaya, founded by King Ramathibodi in 1351, was the most powerful of these. With its capital strategically situated on an island in the Chao Phraya River, commanding not only the rich rice lands of central Thailand, but also profitable trading routes, Ayutthaya brought together the princely houses of two important earlier centres, Suphanburi to the west and Lopburi to the east. Succession disputes between these two royal lines at times weakened the state, and it was not until 1438 that Ayutthaya was eventually able to subdue Sukhothai and incorporate it into its imperial *mandala*. This long struggle between the two Siamese *mandalas* permitted both Lān Nā and Lān Xāng by the end of the fourteenth century to establish themselves as powerful competing *mandalas* able to place limits on any further Ayutthayan imperial ambitions: Lān Nā by absorbing the semi-independent *meuang* of Phayao and Nān; Lān Xāng by drawing together the scattered Lao *meuang* of the Mekong basin.

The rise of Lān Xāng was not, however, due simply to the ambitions and military genius of its founder, the Lao prince Fā Ngum. Other powerful forces were at work. The Khmer kingdom was struggling to hold its own against the

growing power of Ayutthaya, and was instrumental in encouraging formation of a competing Lao *mandala*. Less clear is the part played in these events by the Mongols. The Japanese scholar Tatsuo Hoshino has argued that Mongol power lay behind the rise of the Lao *mandala*, that Lān Xāng was subject to the Yuan dynasty, and even that its administration was constructed on the Mongol model under Mongol guidance.[21] Essentially, Hoshino's thesis is that Lān Xāng was established essentially as a client kingdom in order to further Mongol interests in Southeast Asia.[22] His arguments are ingenious, if tenuous at times, and must be given careful consideration. The last major Mongol military incursions into Southeast Asia occurred early in the fourteenth century. The threat of renewed intervention remained, however, and Mongol influence continued to be strong.[23] The question is whether the rise of the Lao *mandala* was due primarily to the realities of regional power relations, or to Mongol machinations. The time was ripe, given the withdrawal of Khmer power, to unite the Lao *meuang* of the Mekong basin. Fā Ngum's dynastic predecessors, from Phrayā Lāng, the first of the Phrayā line of kings, may have accepted Mongol suzerainty for reasons of political expediency, but this does not necessarily make Fā Ngum a mere "element in the Mongol strategy aimed at conquering the whole of the middle valley of the Mekong".[24]

According to the Lao chronicles, the first Lao imperial *mandala* was founded by Fā Ngum in 1353 with its capital at Xiang Dong Xiang Thong (later to be named Luang Phrabāng). The chronicles tell how the conquests of Fā Ngum effectively incorporated a number of previously independent *meuang* situated on the middle Mekong from the Nam Ū to the rapids of Khôn into a powerful, centralized kingdom. It is necessary, however, to treat this account with some caution, for given the reach of neighbouring powers (Champāsak and the Mūn River basin were still predominantly Khmer) and difficulties of communication, the kingdom must at first have been both less extended and more loosely constructed than appears from sources dating from two centuries later.

Very little is known about the Lao *meuang* of the middle Mekong prior to the mid-fourteenth century. The Vietnamese chronicles make occasional reference to forays by or against the Ai-Lao, a generic term referring not to a centralized kingdom, but to what were probably temporary alliances of Tai *meuang* in the region known as the Sipsông Chu Tai straddling the border region between northeastern Laos and northwestern Vietnam.[25] As we have seen, the region of Luang Phrabāng was known a Meuang Sua. According to the genealogies recorded in the Lao chronicles, a line of fifteen princes bearing the title *Khun*

(probably of Chinese derivation meaning "Lord") ruled in Meuang Sua. These were followed by six rulers with the title *Thao* (a Tai word indicating a member of the nobility). Loss of the probably more prestigious title *Khun* may suggest that Meuang Sua had fallen under the control of some powerful *mandala*:[26] possibly the Angkorian empire.[27] A second change of title through the addition of *Phrayā*, literally, "he who upholds", a term derived from Pali, probably indicates not a change of dynasty, for the former title was retained, but a change of hegemonic overlord, and suggests that the rulers may have been Buddhist.

With the line of rulers bearing the title *Phrayā*, we are on firmer historical ground. But if the historical reality of the *Phrayā* dynasty of Meuang Sua is well established, the actual dates and ages of various rulers and even their relationships to each other are less certain. The first to bear the new title was Phrayā Lāng, who supposedly came to the throne in 1271.[28] Amphay Doré argues that Phrayā Lāng managed briefly to assert the independence of Meuang Sua, only to be deposed by his son Phrayā Khamphong in a move that may have been planned and executed in conjunction with Sukhothai.[29] In any case, Phrayā Khamphong apparently recognized the suzerainty of Ramkhamhaeng, in return for which he was given free rein to extend his territories by forcing Meuang Phuan on the Plain of Jars to accept him as overlord.[30] From the fragmentary evidence available, we can conclude that with the Phrayā dynasty Meuang Sua began to extend and consolidate its rule over surrounding *meuang*,[31] a process that Fā Ngum continued rather than initiated, and which may have owed something to Mongol support.

The life and person of Fā Ngum, like so many other founders of great dynasties, has become shrouded in legend. In the Lao chronicles, more space is devoted to his exploits than to events over the next two centuries. The date of his birth (1316) seems well established. He was the grandson of Phrayā Khamphong,[32] but was forced into exile when his father, Phī Fā, was banished from Meuang Sua supposedly for seducing one of the king's concubines. Yet even the legends of the exile and youth of Fā Ngum do not agree.[33] According to another version of events, Fā Ngum was exiled not because of the sexual peccadillos of his father, but because he was miraculously born with thirty-three teeth, a monstrous happening which threatened the prosperity of the kingdom. He was therefore consigned to a raft on the Mekong, accompanied by thirty-three servants, including six special attendants — but not his father. Once again the party ended up in Khmer territory where the young prince was given an education appropriate to his birth.

Of these reasons for leaving Meuang Sua, the former is more likely than the latter.[34] More likely still, however, is that, as often happened, Fā Ngum and/or his father were actually banished either because an unsuccessful attempt had been made to seize the throne, or because Khamphong feared that one or the other harboured such ambitions. Alternatively, it is possible that Fā Ngum was not banished at all, but sent to Cambodia to study the arts of war and administration.[35] In any case, it was during his absence that his uncle, the younger brother of Phī Fā, seized the throne of Meuang Sua, probably upon the death of Khamphong.

The *Nithān Khun Bôrom* tells us that Fā Ngum was exiled at the age of three, spent a year on the raft and a further three years in the care of a Buddhist monk, Phra Pāsman. He then went to Cambodia, where he was educated at court for seven years before, aged sixteen, being given a royal Khmer princess in marriage. He would then have had to remain a further eighteen years in Cambodia before embarking on his northern expedition in 1351. As the *Nithān* provides no actual dates for these events, it seems likely, as the Lao historian Souneth Phothisane maintains, that Fā Ngum was not a child, but twenty-three years old when he was exiled from Meuang Sua in 1339. He would then have spent three years at Phra Pāsman's monastery somewhere on the lower Mekong, probably in southern Champāsak, where he was instructed in what must have been a form of Theravāda Buddhism. For the next seven years he and his father lived at the court of Angkor until 1343-1344. Only in 1351, when playing the Lao card seemed a useful option, did they find themselves in royal favour.

The various versions of what happened thereafter differ in detail but broadly all agree that Fā Ngum was given a Khmer princess by the name of Kaeo Keng Nya in marriage, and that at the head of what was at first a predominantly Khmer army, he marched north, defeated his enemies and claimed the throne of Meuang Sua. Fā Ngum's opportunity seems to have come when Angkor was threatened by the Siamese and the court was forced to flee to the region of Champāsak. The Khmer king[36] may well have despatched Fā Ngum to create a diversion to assist the Khmer in driving out the Siamese and regaining their capital. Fā Ngum's campaign on the southern Khōrāt plateau can thus be seen as the first stage in a counter-attack that was almost certainly undertaken to re-impose Khmer, rather than assert Lao, control.[37] Angkor was not reoccupied until 1355, by which time Ayutthaya had been forced to come to terms with the rising power of Lān Xāng, for Fā Ngum had gone on to raise a Lao army and found a kingdom. In other words, formation of the Lao *mandala* seems to have been a direct result of an

alliance of convenience with the Khmer at the expense of Ayutthaya.

According to the Lao chronicles, Fā Ngum probably began his march north late in 1351, accompanied by his young wife and his Khmer generals. The core of his army may have included descendants of Shan and Yunnanese troops recruited by the Mongols to garrison the middle Mekong until around 1330.[38] His "order of battle" comprised his elephant corps and cavalry, followed by foot soldiers. We are told that Fā Ngum marched north and east, possibly reaching the Mekong in the vicinity of modern Savannakhēt.[39] Further north he subdued Meuang Sīkhōttabông, still a powerful regional *mandala* whose ritual centre was the shrine of Thāt Phanom, but whose reach extended over both banks of the Mekong.[40] After reducing a number of minor *meuang*, and, according to what is almost certainly a later interpolation, turning south to mount a successful attack against Champāsak,[41] Fā Ngum is said to have struck north across the Nam Kading, where he subjugated yet other regional *meuang*.

From each defeated *meuang* he demanded men and tribute in the form of gold, cotton cloth, silk, horses, elephants and slaves to finance his military adventure, provide gifts for his principal commanders, and strengthen his forces. Like all Tai noblemen, Fā Ngum and his generals fought from the backs of elephants, which, in the centuries before the use of firearms, comprised the principal fighting power of Tai armies. The trumpeting charge of hundreds of war elephants must have been a fearsome sight for foot soldiers equipped with no more than pikes or swords. The only set-back encountered by Fā Ngum in his victorious advance was when the ruler of Viang Chan Viang Kham refused to aid him in attacking Meuang Sua. Support was forthcoming, however, from an exiled prince of Meuang Phuan, who offered to join forces with Fā Ngum if the latter would restore him to his throne.[42] To this Fā Ngum agreed. Xiang Khuang, the Phuan capital, was captured, and Prince Khamnyô installed as ruler and tributary ally of Fā Ngum.

Losing no time, Fā Ngum turned his attention to the east where his armies seized three small *meuang* owing allegiance to the Emperor of Dai Viet.[43] The Vietnamese, concerned over the threat of a Cham attack, responded by despatching a diplomatic mission bearing rich tribute to negotiate on the frontier. According to Lao sources two potentially conflicting criteria, clearly reflecting different notions of sovereignty, were used to demarcate Lao and Vietnamese spheres of control. One embodied the Lao priority of jurisdiction over people: all *meuang* inhabited by people living in houses with verandahs built on piles would be recognized as owing allegiance to the Lao king; those living in houses built

on the ground owed allegiance to the emperor of Vietnam. The other reflected concern to define territory: the "flow of rainwater", west or east of the Sāy Phū Luang cordillera would decide which land would be Lao or Vietnamese.[44] The Lao date this significant agreement as occurring in late 1351, but there is no record of it in the Vietnamese chronicles.[45] Attacks by the "Ai-Lao" were, however, recorded five years earlier, in 1346; and before that in 1335, when Vietnamese troops suffered a severe defeat at the hands of what were presumably Phuan forces.[46]

After securing his eastern frontier with Vietnam, Fā Ngum is said by one account to have marched north again, bringing first parts of the Sipsông Chu Tai and then the Sipsông Phan Nā within his expanding *mandala*.[47] Only with these regions secure did he descend the valley of the Nam Ū to seize Meuang Sua. His uncle, Khamhiao, who had succeeded to the throne, is said to have committed suicide, leaving the way open for the aristocratic elite of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong to invite Fā Ngum to become ruler of the *meuang*.[48] The year was 1353, the date which traditionally marks the founding of the Kingdom of Lān Xāng.

The chronicles tell us that Fā Ngum spent the following year organizing the administration of the kingdom, assigning positions of authority to those he could trust, before turning his attention to the further extension and consolidation of his domains. It seems likely that there were two principal factions at court: those who had supported the accession of Chau Khamhiao; and those who had preferred his elder brother, Phī Fā, and thus supported Fā Ngum's claim to the throne. But those favoured by Fā Ngum with the most powerful offices in his administration are described as "foster" relatives, who could well have been adopted, and thus Khmer rather than Lao. At any rate, Khmer influence at court must have been considerable, for when Fā Ngum embarked on further conquests, he left his kingdom in the care of his pregnant wife. Fā Ngum next turned his attention to Lān Nā, obtaining the allegiance of a number of small northern *meuang* west of the Mekong previously tributary to Chiang Mai. The armies of the two imperial *mandalas* clashed briefly at Xiang Saen. Fā Ngum was victorious, and the king of Lān Nā[49] was forced to agree to a division of territories and payment of a substantial tribute. Five apparently Shan *meuang* were also temporarily reduced to tributary status to Lān Xāng.

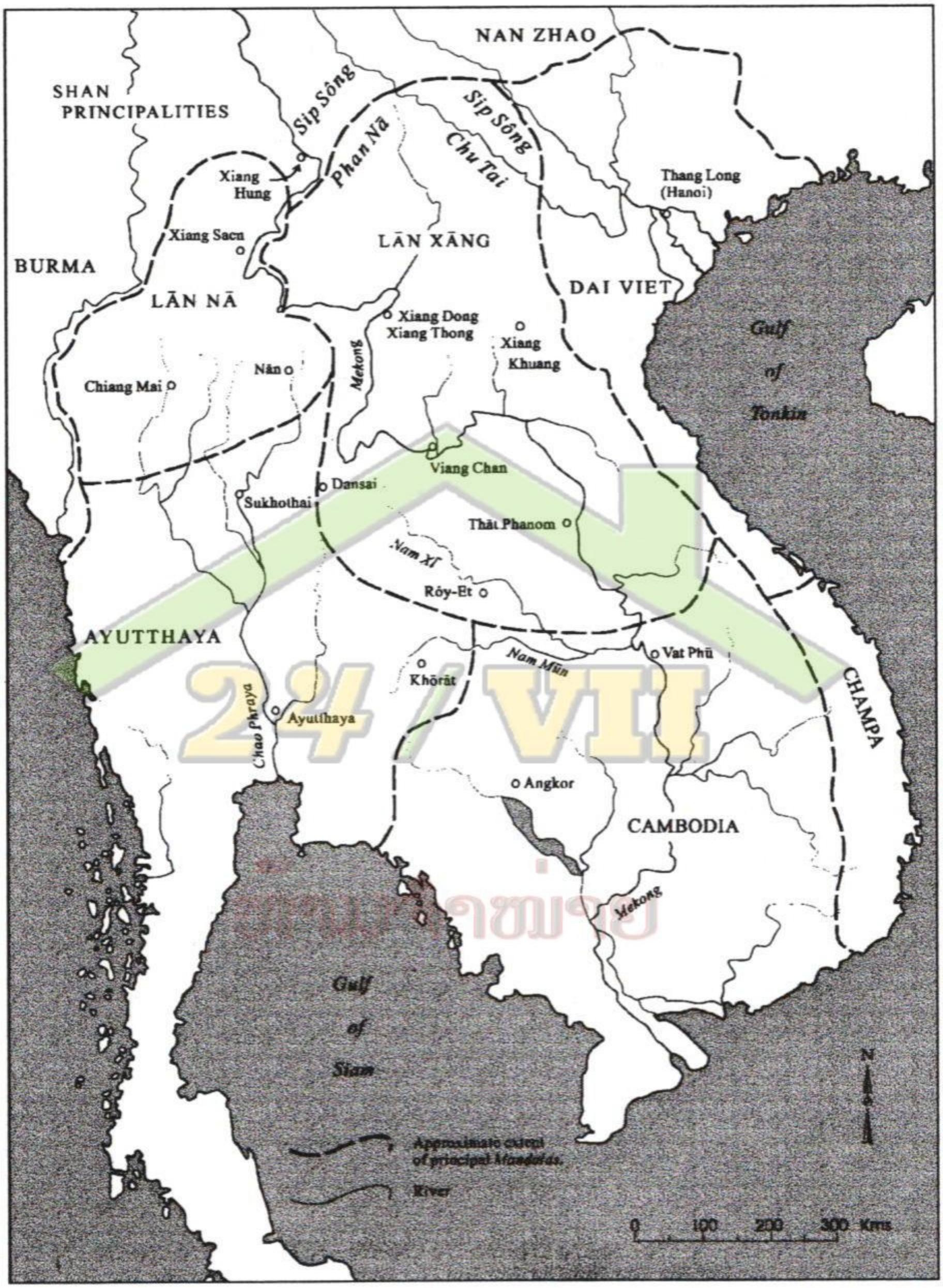
While consolidating his northern possessions, Fā Ngum took the opportunity to carry out a census of able-bodied males. These included 400,000 Lao (probably including Tai-Leu and Tai-Yuan) and 100,000 Yāy and Kaeo, two non-Tai, probably Lao Thoeng, ethnic groups.[50] A later census of the population south

of the capital produced a figure of 600,000 "men", presumably Lao and Tai. The total population of Lān Xāng, excluding Lao Thoeng, was thus one million, comprising 300,000 Tai, probably including all those who spoke Tai languages but were not Lao, and 700,000 Lao.[51] After his victory over Lān Nā, Fā Ngum subjugated Lao Thoeng (*khā kau*) populations closer to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong[52] as a defensive measure to keep them under closer supervision and control, but also to reinforce his capital and to extend the taxation and recruitment base for his armies. Lān Nā, it should be noted, soon shook off its brief tributary dependence on Lān Xāng, for the two *mandalas* were too evenly matched in manpower and resources for one more than temporarily to dominate the other. Thus some of Fā Ngum's northwestern conquests were subsequently lost.

More important was the extension of Lān Xāng to the south to include the *meuang* of Viang Chan Viang Kham and the northern Khōrāt plateau, possibly as far south as Rôy-Et and the northern reaches of the Nam Xī.[53] The chronicles record that, whereas Viang Chan fell easily to Fā Ngum's army, the twin town of Viang Kham held off the siege, secure behind an impenetrable rampart of live bamboo. The story is told that, as a ruse, Fā Ngum withdrew his forces south across the Mekong, giving the impression he was abandoning the fight. Before withdrawing, however, he instructed his archers to shoot a number of gold and silver arrows into the bamboo thicket. When the people saw the army leave, they cut down most of the bamboo to retrieve the arrows. Fā Ngum then promptly returned and captured the town.

Fā Ngum is said to have followed his victory with a major campaign to bring parts of the Khōrāt plateau within the *mandala* of Lān Xāng. Too much credence should not be invested in this further extension of the kingdom, however, for Lao settlement was then mostly confined to areas immediately south and west of the Mekong. Nevertheless, after a number of frontier *meuang* surrendered, we are told Fā Ngum directly challenged the Siamese *mandala* of Ayutthaya. As in the case of Lān Nā, however, the common Tai identity of the ruling dynasties, expressed through common descent from the mythical Khun Bôrom, was sufficient to prevent a major conflict between relatively evenly matched armies. According to the Lao chronicles, King Ramathibodi I of Ayutthaya sent gifts to Fā Ngum, promised him his daughter in marriage, once she was of age, and instructed rulers of the *meuang* of the Khōrāt plateau to pay tribute to Lān Xāng.[54] No mention is made in the Lao chronicles of another neighbouring ruler, the king of Sukhothai, Mahathammaracha I. Yet it is on the stele erected by this

The Lao Kingdom of Lān Xāng



The Kingdom of Lān Xāng: Late 14th Century

king, around the end of the 1360s, that the name of Phrayā Thao Fā Ngum appears for the first and only time[55] — in a context which suggests some conflict between the two mandalas, apparently decided in favour of Lān Xāng.[56]

We should treat the conquests of Fā Ngum with some scepticism, for the founder of Meuang Lao is likely to have been credited with extensions to the kingdom that were probably incremental, and must have taken time to consolidate. Moreover, the impression is given in the chronicles that the spheres of hegemony of Lān Xāng and surrounding *mandalas* were relatively clearly defined. Yet to determine frontiers between neighbouring *mandalas* presents something of a problem. The Lao scholars Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn argue that Lān Xāng always had well defined frontiers specified by listing the *meuang* comprising the "territory wheel" (*kong din*) of the kingdom.[57] Putting aside the problem of identification of listed *meuang*, however, it is not clear that "frontier *meuang*" were anything other than the most remote tributaries. At the time, vast areas of forest and jungle separated "adjacent" *meuang*, even within the *mandala* of Lān Xāng. Neighbouring *mandalas* would only have been in contact along trade routes, at some point on which a frontier post would be recognized, determined by rights of taxation and the direction of flow of tribute on either side. Elsewhere anyone was free to take up virgin land and farm it, so frontiers could and did expand.

What was important was not so much defined territories, except at points of contact on trade routes, but which communities owed allegiance and tribute to which centres of power. If population pressure led a group of families to found a new village, territory expanded, but what mattered most was where their loyalties, and thus their taxes and military commitment, were directed. If villagers were carried off as captives and resettled as tributaries of a neighbouring *mandala*, territory contracted, but more significantly tribute was reduced. Fā Ngum carried out his conquests to assure a flow of tribute. His tributary *meuang* defined the extent of his imperial *mandala*.

Only after appointing rulers of major tributary *meuang* whose loyalty he could trust did Fā Ngum feel sufficiently secure finally to hold his own coronation, first in victory celebrations in Viang Chan, then more formally on his return to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong.[58] He called his kingdom Lān Xāng Hom Khao, literally a Million Elephants and the White Parasol.[59] The name is significant, symbolizing as it does both military power and royal kingship. Until abolition of the Lao monarchy six centuries later, the king was always shaded on public occasions by a white umbrella. The elephant too was a symbol of kingship, especially a white

elephant, ownership of which signified possession of great merit. All white elephants were the property of the king, though any peasant lucky enough to catch one would be generously rewarded. But elephants were more than symbols: they were essential beasts of burden for transportation and trade where roads did not exist and oxcarts were unusable. Elephants were employed for clearing jungle, hauling timber, and even in constructing larger buildings. Their ownership in large numbers was a sign of wealth and power. But most importantly, elephants were engines of war. When Fā Ngum named his kingdom Lān Xāng, he was making a statement about military might. Lān Nā means a million ricefields: it makes a claim about population and taxation. Lān Xāng was the choice of a military conqueror: it named his means of projecting military power, warned of retribution for reluctant tributaries, and challenged neighbouring *mandalas*.

The Organization of the Kingdom

The foregoing brief outline of Fā Ngum's conquests is elaborated in great detail in the chronicles of Lān Xāng. Names of rulers defeated, size of armies, lists of tribute, even the height and names of war elephants are recorded. Since the earliest version of the *Nithān* group of texts which provides this information dates only from the early sixteenth century, and the earliest actual manuscript from three centuries later still, the information contained cannot be taken as historically accurate. It is just possible that the lavish details relating to the reign of Fā Ngum could have been drawn by the authors of the *Nithān* from oral tradition handed down from generation to generation. More likely, however, is that either these details were taken from an earlier manuscript recounting the deeds of Fā Ngum, or much of the embellishment was simply invented. This would not be the first time pious elaboration legitimized a ruling dynasty by exalting the heroic exploits of its founder. Warfare brought its own reward through the capture of slaves and booty, but victory was a sign of greater merit. The story of Fā Ngum's conquests recalls an earlier paradigm provided by the great Indian Buddhist king Aśoka. The conquest had been righteous, for wherever possible bloodshed had been minimized, through recognition of common ancestry. But ultimate justification for establishment of the kingdom had to lie in the conditions it created for the propagation of Buddhism. This may be why Fā Ngum was also credited with the introduction of Buddhism to Lān Xāng.

Consolidation of the kingdom, including reorganization of the administration

of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, and promulgation of a legal framework were both piously ascribed to Fā Ngum. Both, however, certainly built on earlier traditions and must have taken some time to become widely accepted. We are told that when Fā Ngum first conquered a regional *meuang* he would either endorse the previous ruler, replace him by another member of the ruling family, or appoint a new ruler (*chau meuang* or governor) from his own entourage. Tributary *meuang* were classified on the basis of importance, as determined by size and location, into principal *meuang* surrounded by "supporting" *meuang*, "well-populated" *meuang*, and "frontier" (*khop dān*) *meuang* located in strategically important, outlying regions. The kingdom was thus constituted on the *mandala* model, decentralized and segmentary in its political organization.[60] Four principal *meuang* — Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, Xiang Khuang, Viang Chan Viang Kham, and Sīkhōttabông[61] — formed the core, each with its own dependent, secondary *meuang*. From these the greater part of the army was raised. The frontier *meuang* were responsible for immediately reporting any security threat directly to the capital. What held the kingdom together were the personal loyalties that existed between the king and his *chau meuang*.

Every two months, closer *meuang* had to despatch a messenger to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong to report to the king. All tributary rulers (*chau meuang*) had also to submit a written annual report on their *meuang* (none of which have survived) and to present their tribute in person every third year. This required them to leave their *meuang* in the first month of the year in what was for many a long and arduous journey by elephant along narrow jungle paths and across swift-flowing rivers in order to arrive at the capital by the third month. There each paid homage to the king, renewed his oath of obedience, drank the sacred water of allegiance, and offered tribute.[62] Any ruler not so doing would be considered lacking in loyalty, and could be deposed by an armed force sent to exact punishment. A principal requirement was for each *chau meuang* to participate in blood sacrifices to the powerful guardian deities of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, in accordance with rules laid down by Fā Ngum's forebears. Their presence at these ceremonies presided over by the king symbolically recognized the superiority of the *Phī Thaen*, the ancestral spirits worshipped in the capital over the *phī seua* of regional *meuang*. Such rituals not only established a symbolic unity; they were believed to be essential for the preservation of the power and prosperity of the *mandala*, for only such powerful spirits could prevent malign *phī* from destroying Meuang Lao.[63]

No clear distinction existed between the administrative and army command

structures. The "chief minister" (*saen meuang*)[64] was also commander-in-chief of the army, while the second most senior military commander was the ruler of Meuang Sīkhōttabông. Each was at the same time responsible for civilian affairs, respectively, north and south of the capital. For the defence of the *meuang* of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, five of Fā Ngum's loyal generals were given specifically military responsibilities with the new title "*Meun*", commander of 10,000, to replace the honorific "*Ba*", which probably designated a Khmer military rank.[65] These five filled the positions of *Meun Luang* (Great General) and governors of key *meuang* controlling military regions to the right (northeast) and left (southwest), and upstream (roughly northwest from Xiang Dong Xiang Thong) and downstream (southeast) of the capital.[66] To guard the king himself, two officers known as *rāxavat* were responsible for the "front palace" and two for the "rear palace".[67] Each commanded an armed guard responsible for protecting the person of the king in both peace and war. Other officials in the palace held no concurrent military responsibility. The most important, known as the Phrayā Kāsak, was in charge both of relations with the Lao Thōeng and for conducting certain royal rituals associated with the propitiation of powerful *phī*.[68] Officers were also appointed to take charge of the royal pages and the king's musicians.

In addition to his administrative reforms, the account of which probably also reflects later practice, Fā Ngum is said to have promulgated a code of laws. The earliest law code to have survived in Laos is known as the *Law of Khun Bôrom*, written in verse in Xiang Khuang in 1422, and is similar in several respects to "The Laws of King Mangrāy" of Lān Nā.[69] The code opens with a series of instructions on precautions to take in protecting the concubines of the wealthy and powerful from adultery. Several laws enjoin proper behaviour for officials concerning everything from the seating of the *Sēnā Amāt* (Council of Nobles) to paying visits at night. Relations between the nobility and freemen are defined. Marriage, divorce and inheritance find little mention, but a graduated series of fines for forms of sexual misconduct is set out, depending on the culpability and rank of the offender. Fines, and in some cases flogging with a rattan cane, were the penalties for assault and theft, and for both accidental and deliberate damage to property. Great attention was given to restitution for damage caused by domestic animals, either through fines or ritual gifts. Where an animal continued to offend, it could be killed. Those unable to pay their fines would have to work for the person wronged until the amount was paid.

Some reluctance to exact the death penalty is already evident in the Lao code,

though the *Law of Khun Bôrom* reflects less Buddhist influence than does the code of King Mangrāy. In the latter many forms of homicide were punished by fines rather than execution, though capital punishment was allowed for in six cases of murder of superiors by inferiors. The Lao code reflects pragmatic rather than religious considerations. On the occasion of his victory celebration, Fā Ngum warned the powerful Lao nobility not to fight each other and to rule justly, and told them:

> Even if your servant or your wife does wrong, do not kill them. Other people must consider first if there is a serious crime. You must punish fairly according to the crime. If the case is not serious you must put them in prison according to their faults. Then you must release them [when they have served their terms], so they can return to work. There must be people in our land before we can produce the things we need. For this reason you must not kill people.[70]

In the *Law of Khun Bôrom*, those found guilty of murder had to "take the place of the dead person", which might mean either that the murderer should become a slave in his victim's household, or that he should be executed.[71] As for the king himself, though wielding absolute power (as *Chau Sīvit*, Lord of Life), he was increasingly expected to abide by the Buddhist tenfold code of royal conduct (the *Thammasāt*) which stipulated that a ruler should be without hatred, should not oppress people, and should be charitable, honest, wise and kind.[72]

The laws themselves reveal much about the structure of early Lao society. There were three classes: nobility, free men or commoners (*phai*), and slaves. At the apex stood the king, surrounded by his powerful lords comprising the *Sēnā Āmāt*. Members included the rulers of larger tributary *meuang* who maintained residences in the capital commensurate with the wealth of their *meuang*, and heads of leading families of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong. Below the nobility came the free peasantry who were valued as productive farmers and soldiers, for every able-bodied free man was expected to fight. Other ethnic groups, the Lao Thoeng, abided by their own laws and customs. They stood entirely outside the pale of Tai-Lao society, their status even lower than slaves (*khā*), let alone domestic servants (*khôy*).[73] Interestingly, in the *Law of Khun Bôrom* there is virtually no mention of slaves (unlike the code of Lān Nā), and when "*khā*" are referred to at one point, it is as owners of ricefields — surely evidence that slavery at the time was not common.

The cohesion of the *mandala* of Lān Xāng depended not only on oaths of loyalty and offering of tribute, even when reinforced by the powerful symbolism

of kingly worship of deities superior to those of constituent *meuang*, it also depended on military might underwritten by the wealth generated through economic activity, tribute, and trade. While barter exchange was usual in larger villages, only in close proximity to the principal power centres were there regular markets in cattle and horses, salt and spices, iron and precious metals, silk and handicrafts. The principal unit of exchange (standard of value) was the cowrie shell, the earliest reference to which in the Tai world can be found in the Ramkhamhaeng inscription, and by the mid-fifteenth century silver ingots known as "bullet coins".[74]

In most villages, production remained at a subsistence level. Agricultural labour was shared by the family. Men did the ploughing; men and women together planted out the rice and harvested the crop. Hunting for plentiful wild game was a male preoccupation, while both men and women fished in the numerous streams and rivers. In most villages women wove cotton or silk on looms under their houses, and made baskets, mats and various domestic utensils, while men shaped ploughs and other implements, or made traps and nets. Some of these items were exchanged within the village, but few were traded any distance. A bountiful climate, fertile soil and abundant land ensured that most families could meet their own subsistence needs, and few would have experienced real want, except in times of severe floods or drought, or in the event of war.

Though slavery as an institution was not at first widespread, as in other parts of the Tai world one could become a slave as punishment for some crime against person or property, for debt, or by being captured in war. Children born of slaves became slaves themselves, and had the lowest status in society. Some sold themselves into slavery to ensure their own welfare. Thus debt slavery would fluctuate, being greater after famines. Some debt slaves were probably, as later, redeemable while others were not. Slaves could be sold, exchanged, or donated to a temple. On the whole, judging from laws relating to slaves, they were well cared for. While slaves did perform productive labour, their numbers were not great and most performed domestic duties. Lao society could never be described as a slave society, nor the economy as a slave mode of production.[75]

The generation of wealth came from other pursuits: craft production, the exploitation of particular resources, and especially trade. Villages of specialized hereditary craftsmen in the vicinity of major centres manufactured tools, weapons, pottery and paper, made jewellery, worked silverware, and wove dyed cottons and silk. Other villages exploited local resources, mined tin or iron ore,

panned for alluvial gold, or trained elephants. Valuable forest products such as benzoin and other resins, sticklac for making lacquerware, cardamom and beeswax were collected mainly by Lao Thoeng, along with ivory, rhinoceros horns, pangolin scales, porcupine quills and a variety of hides and skins. Together these formed the principal items of trade in a network that linked not only mountain villages with the trading centres on the Mekong, but also with the world beyond.[76]

Trade was the principal means of generating wealth, for Lān Xāng was at the crossroads of intersecting trade routes. Tai-Lao middlemen (known as *lām*) developed traditional relationships with Lao Thoeng villages, paddling their canoes upstream once or twice a year to exchange cotton cloth, iron, and silver for forest products which they towed downstream on bamboo rafts. Rivers were thus principal trade routes. Other means of transport were by buffalo cart where villages were closer together on the riverine plains, or by pack animals — elephants, ponies — and human porters in more mountainous parts. By well travelled routes, the principal Lao centres of commerce — Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, Viang Chan, Sīkhōttabông, and Xiang Khuang — maintained trading relations with neighbouring *mandalas*: Yunnan, Burma, Lān Nā, Ayutthaya, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Trade in valuable items was not apparently a royal monopoly, as it was to become in Ayutthaya. It was, however, a principal source of wealth for the king, through both participation and taxation. Part of the tribute paid by *chau meuang* was in the form of goods for consumption, including gold and silver, but part was in the form of goods for trade. Taxes were imposed on elephants and horses, on personal slaves, and on cotton, silk, silver and gold production. These were not applied uniformly, but depended on the principal products of a region. In Meuang Phuan (Xiang Khuang), for example, iron and weapons production were taxed.[77]

War was another means of generating wealth. Wars in mainland Southeast Asia were largely fought to exact tribute and take captives. Whole populations were forcibly resettled closer to the capital region where they could more easily be taxed, and forced as war slaves to perform corvée labour. As a result, whole areas became depopulated, only slowly to be resettled as those who had managed to flee into the jungle returned to repopulate their land.

In terms of the production and extraction of wealth, Lān Xāng can be said to have had a semi-feudal tributary mode of surplus accumulation in which a hierarchy of local rulers channelled a proportion of whatever surplus wealth they

could extract to their immediate overlord in the form of tribute, along with provision of so many armed men in time of war. Provided these commitments were met, *chau meuang* were free to administer their fiefs as they saw fit, within the limits imposed by accepted codes of conduct. (Taxes and fines were not to be excessive.) Under the *mandala* system, regional administration remained indirect. Nowhere in Lān Xāng were there vast irrigation works requiring a trained, centrally appointed bureaucracy to administer. Power was thus always shared between the king and regional rulers drawn from the Lao nobility: it was never concentrated in an absolute monarchy along Chinese or European lines. This constituted a weakness that was never overcome, even given the legitimacy provided by the Lao socio-religious order.

The Socio-religious Order

The *mandala* constructed by Fā Ngum was created through conquest, voluntary submission to superior power, alliance on the basis of common descent, matrimonial relationships, and patronage. Initially royal legitimacy rested primarily on a combination of traditional Lao notions of kingship through royal descent, and veneration of a hierarchy of territorial spirits of the soil (*phī meuang*) reflecting the segmentary structure (and religious topography) of the kingdom. Over time, however, belief in Theravāda Buddhism came to predominate in what eventually evolved into an integrated, characteristically Lao worldview. It would seem that this process had already begun before the time of Fā Ngum, and took the best part of a century after his accession to become finally accepted. The victory of Buddhism was not sealed until King Vixun transfered the *Phra Bāng* Buddha image to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong to serve as palladium of the dynasty, and Phōthisārāt eliminated the sacrificial rituals associated with worship of the *phī meuang*. At the time of Fā Ngum, however, the legend of Khun Bôrom establishing the right of royal descent and possession of territory, together with communal worship of powerful spirits associated with natural forces and the land itself probably counted for more than Buddhist conceptions of kingship, *kamma* as moral destiny, and the accumulation of merit as the basis for rebirth.

The mythic content of the early Lao worldview centered upon the creation of the Lao world, the origin of its people and divine ancestry of the royal house, the regulation of ethnic relationships, and the control of supernatural, especially demonic, forces. The ritual reiteration of these various components had the

purpose both of reinforcing the social order and of legitimizing territorial rights. The former was effected through commemorative re-enactment of the discovery by the mythic Lao ancestral couple Pū Ngoe and Nyā Ngoe, of the three gourds from which emerged, in one version referred to in the last chapter, three separate groups — the Lao nobility, Lao Lum commoners, and the Lao Thoeng. The social divide between nobility and peasantry, who originated from separate gourds, was thus as great as the ethnic divide between Lao Lum and Lao Thoeng, who exited through different holes pierced by different instruments.

The distinction between the royal clan and the nobility or aristocracy was established through descent. The royal lineage derived from Khun Bôrom himself, who according to different traditions was either of heavenly origin, or was the adopted son and heir of the mythic couple apotheosized as guardian deities of the city (*devatā luang*) and thus of the *meuang*. Only the king, as direct descendant of Khun Bôrom, could officiate at ceremonies ensuring continuing protection for Meuang Lao. He alone was responsible for maintaining harmonious relations with the spiritual realm whose influence over natural forces determined fertility, harvest and health. Only the king, therefore, could guarantee the prosperity and security of the kingdom, whose lands were his alone to allot as *Phra Chau Phāen Din* (Sovereign Lord of the Soil). Powerful as the king was, however, he was no absolute autocrat. Political, military and economic power were all contested, and thus shared in the sense that the king was always dependent on the allegiance and support of rulers of the principal *meuang*.

Territorial rights were legitimized through the ritual re-enactment of Khamu submission to Tai-Lao authority,[78] along with "a divinely sanctioned transfer of land rights".[79] Thus the relationship between Tai-Lao and Khamu remained ambivalent. On the one hand, the Khamu were considered inferior and socially subordinate: on the other hand, the historical priority of their possession of the land was implicitly recognized. The opposition between Tai-Lao and Khamu was ritually played out in a game like hockey, which the Lao always won. Such ritual contests, along with Khamu (Kāsak) participation in annual ceremonies designed to ensure the regulation of seasonal change and protection of the kingdom from demonic forces[80] presupposed shared responsibilities that necessarily rested on a measure of mutual respect, if hardly of ethnic equality. In recognition of an existing diversity, the Khamu were included in the predominantly Lao political structure as tributaries with their own chiefs and their own responsibilities.

These forms of legitimation rested on an animist worldview that owed nothing to Buddhism, a worldview similar in many respects to that still held by the tribal

upland Tai of northeastern Laos. Eventually this Tai worldview was subsumed within the more comprehensive cosmology of Buddhism, through its claim to teach a superior truth (*Dhamma*). Establishment of a powerful and unified monastic order in close reciprocal relationship with monarchical authority came to provide additional weighty legitimation for Lao kings — but powerful social forces had first to be overcome. Opposition was not to Buddhism *per se*, for its beliefs were known and practised already. Rather it was to the establishment of a Sangha under royal patronage displacing existing animist cults and their powerful priesthoods that was so strongly resisted.

Something of this struggle for religious power is evident from the story of the *Phra Bāng*. According to the Lao chronicles, the *Phra Bāng* was brought to Lān Xāng from Cambodia at the instigation of Fā Ngum's Khmer queen Kaeo Keng Nya.[81] They tell how a contingent of some twenty monks, led by the venerable abbots Thēphalangka and Pāsman, the latter Fā Ngum's own preceptor, accompanied by four Brahmins learned in astrology, medicine and other occult sciences, together with musicians, craftsmen and numerous "attendants", all escorted the sacred image and copies of the Buddhist Tipitaka (scriptures) on the long trek from the Khmer capital.[82]

Though the *Phra Bāng* itself may be a fine example of Khmer sculpture,[83] the *Pheun Phra Bāng* (Story of the *Phra Bāng*) tells how the image was miraculously cast in Sri Lanka, and from there transported to Cambodia before being brought to Laos. Many such popular stories of revered Buddha images were invented to assist in spreading belief in Buddhism through awe of the magical powers these images were believed to possess and their ability to "save humankind from sin". But the association of great Buddhist kings with such images also fulfilled a powerful legitimizing function, for the stories of their miraculous provenance served, like courses in Western civilization in American universities, to anchor Lao culture firmly to its religious and intellectual roots in India and Sri Lanka. Lao history was thus universalized by becoming part of the universal history of Buddhist redemption.

Though the venerable Pāsman was eventually installed in a monastery in Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, in the reign of Fā Ngum the *Phra Bāng* itself got no further than Viang Kham. The chronicles relate how the *Phra Bāng* miraculously made known its desire not to proceed further because it could foresee the future sins Fā Ngum would commit. This suggests that some conflict may have arisen, either, as seems most likely, between practitioners of the *phī* cults still apparently favoured by the king and adherents of probably competing schools of Buddhism;

or possibly between a formerly influential northern Tantric form of Buddhism (favoured by Fā Ngum as an ally of the Mongols?) and the new Theravāda.

Once Xiang Dong Xiang Thong became the capital of an imperial *mandala*, separate schools of Theravāda Buddhism may have been encouraged and patronized by different factions at court for their own political ends. Two new schools may well have been in competition: a Khmer school introduced from Cambodia by Kaeo Keng Nya and her pro-Khmer party (possibly led by the Cambodian/Sri Lankan monk Phra Thēphalangka); and a "forest monastery" school from the middle Mekong in the figure of Phra Pāsman.[84] Both would have encountered opposition not only from any already established form of Buddhism, but more importantly from practitioners of the *phī* cults. Competition between opposing schools was probably behind the calling of a monastic council in 1359. But not until the death of Kaeo Keng Nya in 1368, and the arrival at court of Princess Kaeo Lot Fā, daughter of the King of Ayutthaya, does it seem likely that adherents of an invigorated Sri Lankan school of Theravāda Buddhism then dominant in Sukhothai and Ayutthaya finally gained the upper hand.[85] Only then could a "purified" and unified Sangha provide, in return for royal patronage, its powerful legitimation in support of the king as *Thammarāxa* (*Dhammarāja*), one who rules in accordance with the *Dhamma* for the benefit of people and religion.

The power of the Sangha was ideological. The Buddhist texts established a cosmology that defined the way in which all Lao came to understand the world and their place in it. The monastic order monopolized knowledge of cosmology (in the case of Buddhism, the system of multiple heavens and hells centered on the axis of the world and situated above and below a flat earth)[86] as completely as the medieval Catholic church monopolized knowledge of the Christian heaven and hell, or present-day physicists the structure of the universe. The influence of the Sangha rested, as Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor well understood, on the same basis as any religious hierarchy — that is, on the triple foundation of mystery, magic, and authority.

Buddhist cosmology and belief thus provided the universal context for both provision of meaning and legitimation of power, one that could comfortably incorporate rather than displace traditional Tai notions of legitimation through descent from Khun Bôrom and ritual propitiation of *phī meuang*. As a Buddhist monarch, the king ruled because of the merit he had accumulated in previous existences. Moreover the king reinforced his claim to superior *kamma* through the ever greater merit made by giving generously to the Sangha. Through his merit the king was popularly believed to have the power to perform miracles — as in

medieval Europe, though for quite different reasons. Patronage of the Sangha assured legitimacy, and vice versa. Similar justification applied to members of the aristocracy, down to the local *chau meuang*. The law of *kamma* thus legitimized and reinforced the existing social order, with the king at its apex. At the same time, however, it offered the possibility of "delayed" social mobility: righteous conduct and the making of merit could ensure future rebirth higher in the social scale.

Similar systems of legitimation had earlier developed in the Yōnok country, Lān Nā and Sukhothai, elements of which must have been borrowed by Lān Xāng.[87] As Buddhism in one form or another had been known in Meuang Sua centuries before Fā Ngum established the imperial *mandala* of Lān Xāng, ample time had elapsed for some synthesis already to have occurred between Buddhist beliefs and Tai-Lao animism. How this synthesis was worked out, we shall probably never know. What we do know is that increasingly from the time of Fā Ngum on, ritual legitimation of the social order presupposed a Buddhist framework of belief and ceremonial. The defining constructs of the Lao-Buddhist worldview that evolved were ceremonially reiterated in an annual series of rituals and festivals in the royal capital which re-enacted pre-Buddhist myths, but at which Buddhist monks officiated.

The ritual cycle annually performed in Luang Phrabāng until the abolition of the Lao monarchy in 1975 effectively reiterated the claims of the royal clan to the office of monarch, of the nobility to its position of social authority, and of the lowland Lao to dominate all other ethnic groups. The legitimacy of the traditional social and political order did not, however, rest solely on the ritual re-enactment of myths of origin and domination, still less on the oath of loyalty and drinking the water of allegiance by which the king attempted to bind his *chau meuang* to the throne.[88] After all, these ceremonies were held in the capital far from the gaze of most of the population. In village Laos, acceptance of the prevailing socio-political order rested on the teachings inculcated by popular Buddhism, centering on the making of merit (*bun*), both for oneself and to transfer to others. This constituted the moral framework of the Lao-Buddhist worldview that justified disparities in social status.

Buddhist temples formed the setting where Buddhist symbols and ideology were communicated to the common people. Buddhist monks presided on every ceremonial occasion. Their missionary activities introduced Buddhist teachings into ever more remote lowland Lao villages, bringing to them a cycle of festivals which both integrated and modified widely held animist beliefs. Local *phī* were

subordinated not to the higher truth of Buddhism so much as to the superior magical powers of its images and rituals. In its higher mystery, more potent magic, and the authority of its monks, gained through alliance with secular power, lay the appeal of Buddhism for the Lao peasantry. But Buddhist missionary activity seldom extended to the Lao Thoeng. In the hills, animist rites and beliefs remained largely unchallenged. Only those minority groups living in close proximity to Lao centres came to adopt the dominant religion and culture as a means of achieving some measure of social acceptance.

In the Lao Lum villages, building a temple or *vat* was a communal act providing opportunities to accrue individual merit through giving or working. Larger *vat* would include an assembly hall (*vihān*, from the Pali *vihāra*), a *chedī* (stupa), dwellings for the monks (*kutī*), an ordination hall (*bōt*) marked out by eight *sīmā* stones, and a drum and bell tower. Once established, the *vat* became not only the centre of the religious but also of the social life of the village. All the festivals (*bun*, providing occasions to make merit) that marked the cycle of the year came to include a Buddhist religious dimension. The lunar New Year festivities (*pī mai*), the festival marking the end of the rice harvest (*bun phra vēt*), the "rocket festival" (*bun bang fai*) with its obvious fertility component, even the specifically Buddhist *bun ok phansā* signalling the end of the three-month Buddhist Lent from July to October, all included vestiges from an earlier stratum of culture and belief. These observances were occasions to reinforce social solidarity as villagers gathered to eat, drink rice wine, dance the *lamvong*, and listen to the notes of the *khaen*, the bamboo mouth organ beloved by all Lao. While the elderly, women and men, sat chewing their betel nut, the young men of the village flirted with what one text refers to suggestively as "beautiful girls of the *meuang*".

The *vihān* or the *sālā*, an open pavilion located in the grounds of the *vat*, was the venue for all important meetings, often presided over or attended by the monks, whether called to plan a *bun*, discuss the affairs of the village, or resolve a dispute. Through such shared discourse and participation in festive occasions, a sense of community was developed and sustained. But the social role of Buddhism went much further than providing a venue for worship and festivities. The relationship between the monastic order and lay society was much closer than in medieval Europe because those entering the Sangha did not take vows for life. Youths traditionally became monks for the three months of the Buddhist Lent before marrying. A longer period as novice and monk was the only means of education for a village boy. As a novice, he learned to read and write Lao and

Pali, chant from texts, and copy palm leaf manuscripts (*bai lān*) with a metal stylus. After ordination, under tuition from senior monks he also learned to perform ceremonies, practise traditional medicine, and even interpret omens and dreams. The Sangha thus provided the only means of social mobility in a highly hierarchical society. For the brilliant and ambitious who came to the attention of a powerful patron, transferral to a *vat* in the capital, perhaps even a place as a page at court, offered a rare opportunity for advancement. For those not so endowed, life as a monk at least ensured social respect and status. Even the lowliest village monk received the veneration of the highest member of the local nobility.

The Legacy of Fā Ngum

We can imagine what daily life at court must have been like at the time of Fā Ngum. The wealth of the kingdom went to support not only religious ceremonies and festivals, the elephant corps and palace guard, but also a large retinue of servants and performers, including dancers, storytellers and musicians. All activity centered on the person of the king, his administrative responsibilities and his entertainment. Buddhism brought its own literature of admonitory tales, stories of the Buddha and his disciples, and accounts of great Buddhist sages and kings. Most popular would undoubtedly have been the *Jātaka* stories purporting to tell of earlier incarnations of the Buddha. Though the great age of classical Lao literature dates from the sixteenth century, an early version of the Lao *Rāmāyana*, the Hindu epic that became widely known throughout most of Southeast Asia, may already have been recited and performed, for according to the *Pheun Phra Bāng* this too was introduced from Cambodia. Certainly stories such as the *Nithān Khun Bôrom* and perhaps an early oral version of the epic poem *Thao Hung Thao Cheuang* with their echos of past heroic deeds would also have been recited.

In the last years of Fā Ngum's reign the chronicles tell of increasing dissipation on the part of the king, who no longer interested himself in the administration of the kingdom. Power gravitated into the hands of his former companions-in-arms, who used their positions as regional rulers to oppress the people. When the king began taking at whim the wives and daughters of the aristocracy as his concubines, he was deposed (in 1374 or 1375) by a coalition of nobles and exiled to Meuang Nān.[89] Different texts give different dates for these events, but if Fā Ngum was born in 1316, he was 57 or 58 when deposed.

Chagrin seems to have killed him, for within a year (or two) he was dead.[90] His last wish was for his ashes to rest in Meuang Lao, a wish which, so the chronicles tell us, was miraculously fulfilled soon after through divine intervention.[91]

Whether or not Fā Ngum was deposed for failing to practise the precepts of Buddhist morality as the chronicles maintain, we can be sure that his banishment could only have come as the climatic resolution of a serious political crisis, provoked in all probability by factional disputes between his companions-in-arms who had fought their way north with him from Cambodia and whom he favoured in his appointment to administrative office, and the old aristocracy of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, who had seen their traditional prerogatives usurped by Fā Ngum's Khmer retainers.[92] Two events probably swung the balance of power against the Khmer faction: the death of Kaeo Keng Nya in 1368, and the overthrow the same year of the Yuan dynasty by the Ming. Ming armies did not occupy Yunnan until 1382, but news of the collapse of Mongol power in northern China may have been sufficient to undermine the position of those most closely identified with promoting the Khmer-Lao tributary alliance with the Mongols.[93] It may not be too farfetched to see the influence of Ayutthaya also in these events, exercised through Queen Kaeo Lot Fā and the courtiers and monks who accompanied her to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong. At any rate, victory in this struggle for power, in which influential monks joined the faction opposing the king, went to the old nobility and their allies who placed Fā Ngum's eldest son, Unheuan, better known as Sām Saen Tai, on the throne of Lān Xāng.

Lao historians, led by Sila Vīravong, have been reluctant to accept what would appear to be convincing textual evidence that Fā Ngum was tough, ruthless, arrogant, and anything but the model Buddhist monarch they would like the founder of the Lao *mandala* to have been. Thus the myth that Fā Ngum was born with thirty-three teeth has been more readily accepted than the possibility of his father's adultery. Likewise there is reluctance to entertain the possibility that Fā Ngum may have ordered the assassination of his father before the latter could challenge him for the throne of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong. Sila Vīravong even suggests that Fā Ngum was the victim of the unscrupulous actions of those he had trusted, and not really an immoral tyrant in his old age.[94]

What seems clear from the texts, however, is that Fā Ngum was a strong king who forced his will on the Lao nobility, and who, despite the influence of his preceptor, Phra Pāsman, and his Khmer queen, was little more than a nominal Buddhist. The significant, indeed central, role that he gave to the animist *phī* cult

with its bloody rituals can hardly have endeared him to the monastic chroniclers of his reign who must have been torn between their condemnation of the king and their need to glorify him as founder of the kingdom. Such stories as the miraculous refusal of the *Phra Bāng* to proceed to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong were thus included to serve as Buddhist-inspired condemnation of Fā Ngum's immorality, and as a warning to subsequent kings to abide by the *Dhamma*.

No matter what we may conclude about Fā Ngum's moral character, however, his achievement in constructing the Lao *mandala* of Lān Xāng stands as a major triumph, and a landmark event in the history of mainland Southeast Asia. He was a warrior king, who owed his position as *primus inter pares* among his generals not just to his ancestry, but to his valour in war. The kingdom he founded endured for the next three and a half centuries, binding together the Lao people of the middle Mekong basin with tributary ethnic minorities in a powerful political union that matched its forces against surrounding kingdoms, and established for the Lao an historical identity that has endured through more turbulent times to undergird the present Lao state.

Consolidation of the *Mandala*

After the reign of Fā Ngum, there is a qualitative change in the Lao chronicles which must make us suspicious of the historical validity of some of the earlier parts. The detailed account given of the foundation of the kingdom contrasts strongly with the minimal information provided for later reigns. From Sām Saen Tai on, little more than ages and titles, names of queens and numbers of children, and such significant events as wars and the construction of temples are included. We know next to nothing about the characters of kings, let alone other powerful officials. No independent memoires or histories have come down to us, if any were ever written. There are no personal papers or pamphlets which might provide the historian with insights into the social and cultural life of the court, let alone the popular culture of markets and villages. No records remain of court finances or trade flows (until the nineteenth century when Lao principalities sent tribute to Bangkok). Occasional glimpses of Lān Xāng can be gleaned from the chronicles of neighbouring *mandalas*, most often during times of war. The only two European accounts date from the seventeenth century, and even these can hardly compare with the detailed descriptions we have of Burma or Siam. Simply for lack of sources, therefore, it is all but impossible to write the history of Lān Xāng other than as a narrative of the reigns of kings.

The traditional dates for Sām Saen Tai are given as 1373 to 1417, but there is some reason to believe that he may not have been formally crowned until his father died. His long and relatively peaceful reign was a time of consolidation during which Buddhism began to flourish as new monasteries were built, notably Vat Kaeo,[95] and respected abbots appointed to preside over them. One effect of the growing acceptance of Buddhism was to undermine the status of women in Lao society, which, as the influence of Fā Ngum's two queens indicated, had been both political and cultural. Although an order of nuns was eventually established, Buddhism relegated women to an inferior religious position, for it was popularly believed that religious advancement for a woman required her to be reborn a man and become a monk.[96] The class structure of Lao society also became more marked, reinforced by the division of labour. The nobility ran the administration; commoners were peasant farmers (*phai*), artisans and traders; and domestic servants (*khôy*) and slaves (*khā*) served the nobility. While more remote Lao Thoeng tribes pursued their shifting subsistence agriculture in the hills mostly unmolested, those closer to Lao centres of power were progressively brought within the tributary system of annual taxation in kind plus compulsory labour.

Only early in his reign did Sām Saen Tai find it necessary to enforce his rule over outlying *meuang*. When the prince of Meuang Saen refused to recognize the hegemony of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, a short military expedition was sufficient to bring the recalcitrant ruler to his senses. In 1402 Lān Xāng entered into relations with the new Ming dynasty in China, perhaps reflecting concern over the rising power of Dai Viet, but more likely simply in continuation of the tributary relationship previously established with the Mongol Yuan dynasty.

The *Ming Shi-lu* (Ming dynastic chronicles) records that in 1404 Dao Xian-dai (Sām Saen Tai) was officially appointed "Superintendent" of the newly established "Laos Military and Civilian Pacification Superintendency", in effect a tributary "barbarian" ruler responsible for maintaining peace and security on China's southern frontier.[97] The Lao king was sent a specially cast seal, along with brocades and other fine silks "as appropriate". Subsequently instructions were issued detailing what information was required by the imperial court and how it was to be provided.[98] The more or less regular tribute from Laos included elephants and "local products" in exchange for which the Chinese conferred "paper money" and bolts of silk.[99]

The Ming chronicles provide a fascinating glimpse into regional relations in mainland Southeast Asia. Chinese relations with both Vietnam and Lān Nā were

strained, and the Chinese were concerned that the Lao might assist one or the other. New Chinese standing forces were raised in case intervention should prove necessary. In the meantime the Lao were warned not to harbour any fleeing rebels.

Judging by the Lao chronicles, peaceful relations were established between Lān Xāng and major adjacent *mandalas* not as a result of Chinese admonitions, but through the time-hallowed means of marriage alliances and the exchange of gifts. The kings of Ayutthaya, Lān Nā and Xiang Hung (Sipsông Phan Nā) all sent princesses to be royal wives of Sām Saen Tai. Four of his sons[100] were given high administrative posts when they came of age, the eldest as *uparāt*, or viceroy, others as regional governors.

In 1376, three years after his accession we are told the king ordered a census taken of all free, able-bodied male inhabitants of the *mandala* of Lān Xāng who could be called upon for military service.[101] The round figure arrived at was 300,000 Tai, a number considerably less than the one million Lao and Tai combined recorded in the two censuses conducted earlier by Fā Ngum. The discrepancy is not easily accounted for unless we accept that, as the French scholar Michel Lorrillard has argued, the semantic difference between "Lao" and "Tai" at this time was "extremely blurred".[102] If "Tai" was a generic term then obviously this included Lao; or perhaps Fā Ngum's census included all *potential* conscripts, while Sām Saen Tai's counted only the army he could actually raise from *meuang* under his own direct control.

An alternative interpretation advanced by Souneth Phothisane is that at the time three broad ethnic groups were recognized.[103] These were Lao inhabiting the Mekong basin from well north of Luang Phrabāng at least as far south as Savannakhēt; Tai inhabiting the upland fringes of this Lao world, from Meuang Phuan and the Sipsông Chu Tai in an arc around to the Sipsông Phan Nā and the Shan principalities; and Khā, originally an ethnic term to designate Austroasiatic-speaking tribes of northern Laos, but later by extension meaning "slave" as Khā people provided the principal source of slaves in the Lao world. By taking Sām Saen Tai as his title after this census, therefore, Unheuan was claiming to be a great king to whom 300,000 Tai paid tribute.

By combining the censuses of Fā Ngum and Sām Saen Tai, the population of Lān Xāng can be calculated as comprising 700,000 Lao, 300,000 Tai and 400,000 Khā.[104] Excluded, besides women and children, were all monks, foreigners and slaves. Since this was a military census, it may have counted only males of military age. If so, the total population must have numbered more than five

million, a figure much too high for that time. Even a figure of 300,000 Tai/Lao and 400,000 Khā would indicate a total population approaching three million. While this is a more acceptable figure for what was then a sparsely populated area, quite clearly these census figures should be treated with considerable scepticism.

On the basis of his census, Sām Saen Tai reorganized military recruitment. Each of the five armies for the four directions and the centre was made up of 50,000 Tai-Lao, of whom 30,000 were armed soldiers and 20,000 were unarmed supply troops. The remaining 50,000 were assigned to the defence of the capital.[105] Lao Thoeng were not apparently recruited for military service.

Sām Saen Tai died at the age of sixty in 1416 to be succeeded by his son, Lān Kham Daeng. The new king's short reign of little more than a decade[106] coincided with the uprising of the future Vietnamese emperor Le Loi against the occupation of Dai Viet by Chinese armies of the Ming dynasty. Although Lao sources make no reference to the incident, the Vietnamese chronicles recount that Lān Kham Daeng offered Le Loi an army of 30,000 men and 100 war elephants to help drive out the Chinese, an offer which Le Loi gladly accepted. No sooner had they arrived in 1421 on Vietnamese soil, however, than the Lao army joined forces with the Chinese in what may well have been a prior agreement.[107] Le Loi forced the Lao to withdraw, but fighting continued and bitterness over what the Vietnamese saw as betrayal of their national struggle soured Lao-Vietnamese relations long after Le Loi's final victory against the Chinese seven years later in 1428.[108]

That same year Lān Kham Daeng died suddenly, plunging Lān Xāng into the most serious of its many succession crises. The elder of Lān Kham Daeng's two sons, Phommathāt, still a minor at the time, was immediately crowned king, but the real power behind the throne was Mahā Thēvī, the Great Queen, who with the assistance of her husband (lover? co-conspirator?), the *Saen Luang* (principal minister) Xiang Lô, was responsible, so the chronicles record, not only for the death of Phommathāt within a year, but for the assassination of a succession of kings thereafter.

Differences in the accounts of these events make it impossible to establish the order of succession of the kings who reigned over the decade from 1428 to 1438.[109] Whatever the order, each ruled for only a year or two before being murdered on Mahā Thēvī's orders. Different versions of the chronicles do agree that Vangburī, Sām Saen Thai's third son, ruler of Viang Chan Viang Kham, was offered the throne but refused, though he may just have been passed over.

Finally a certain Khamkoet, who claimed to be an incarnation of Sām Saen Thai, and may have been an illegitimate son, was placed on the throne by Mahā Thēvī. He is said to have died two years later of some intestinal disorder, which suggests that he was poisoned. At this point, we are told, "no-one dared to become king", leaving Lān Xāng to be ruled for the first and only time by a woman. The tyranny of Mahā Thēvī was brought to an end when soon thereafter the *Sēnā Amāt* (Council of Nobles) deposed her. The old queen and her lover were tied to rocks on a river bank with their feet in the water, there to die a slow death.[110]

This brief account of Mahā Thēvī's ascendancy pieced together from conflicting versions of the Lao chronicles leaves a number of questions unanswered. Throughout this "time of confusion", the Great Queen is portrayed as the dominant political figure in the kingdom. Her husband is but putty in her hands. But Mahā Thēvī was an old lady — reportedly ninety-five years old at the time of her death. It is unlikely she could have wielded such power through sheer force of character, or that she could have been acting alone. The *Saen Luang* must also have enjoyed considerable influence. Who else supported the two conspirators? Against whom? And what outside powers were then meddling in the affairs of Lān Xāng?[111] In order to get a clearer picture of these events we need to know first who Mahā Thēvī actually was.

Mahā Thēvī has been variously identified as the principal wife, sister, or eldest daughter of Sām Saen Tai. But there are problems with all three possibilities, both in terms of her age and title. Mahā Thēvī was a title usually reserved for the principal queen of a ruler, but which could exceptionally be conferred on another member of the royal family. Mahā Thēvī is more likely, however, to have been a queen than either the sister or daughter of Sām Saen Thai. Yet it is unlikely that she was Sām Saen Thai's principal wife, Nôy Nong Hiao, mother of Lān Kham Daeng, for Nôy Nong Hiao was a member of the old aristocracy of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong and is hardly likely to have killed two or three of her own grandsons to ensure the eventual succession of an unrelated line.

Amphay Doré argues convincingly that Mahā Thēvī was in fact Kaeo Lot Fā, the Ayutthayan princess who became the second queen of Fā Ngum, and that she could have assumed the title Mahā Thēvī on the death of his first queen, Kaeo Keng Nya.[112] Both age and title support this identification, and she would also have had the motivation to ensure that succession went to the Ayutthayan line. But Doré further identifies Kaeo Lot Fā with Sām Saen Tai's third wife, also an

Ayutthayan princess with the very similar name of Kaeo Nyot Fā, who was mother of Vangburī, last of the sons of Sām Saen Tai to succeed to the throne of Lān Xāng. This seems less likely, both because of prohibitions against Sām Saen Tai marrying his father's wife, and because Kaeo Lot Fā would have had to have given birth to Vangburī at an advanced age.[113] It is more likely, therefore, that there were in fact two Ayutthayan queens with the very similar names given in the chronicles. Both would have been equally determined to ensure that the succession went to the Ayutthayan line, that is to Vangburī. Their willing co-conspirator in achieving this end was the *Saen Luang* Xiang Lô, the powerful consort of the old queen, who as the son,[114] so we are told, of one of the former comrades-in-arms of Fā Ngum, would also have been opposed to the old nobility of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong.[115]

If we accept the identification of Mahā Thēvī as Kaeo Lot Fā we must assume either that the authors of subsequent accounts did not know her true identity, or that they deliberately tried to hide it. But if the latter, why? The earliest extant account of this confused period is found in the *Nithān Khun Bôrom* dating from the time of King Vixun in the early sixteenth century, a text probably personally edited by the king. Vixun was a son of Vangburī, the principal beneficiary from Mahā Thēvī's unscrupulous activities and would obviously have wanted to protect his grandmother. But in that case, why tell the story at all? Vixun could easily have edited it out. The reason may have been that it was too well known. Better to include it for two political reasons: first, by falsely implicating Nôy Nong Hiao, opponents of Vixun's pro-Ayutthayan policies could be discredited; second, the story served as an object lesson of the danger of allowing women a role in politics.[116] The image of Mahā Thēvī that has come down to us is of the quintessential scheming woman intruding into the male domain of politics to the detriment of the *mandala*. The lesson was clear. Succession to the throne should be decided by men in council, as eventually happened once Mahā Thēvī was overthown.

We can best understand the events of these years by seeing them as the reflection of a desperate power struggle between opposing factions at court, each endeavouring to manipulate the succession in their favour. Who, then, were these opposing factions? As we have seen, the deposition of Fā Ngum signalled a victory for the old aristocracy of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong over the "Khmer faction" composed of Fā Ngum's former comrades-in-arms. Both Sām Saen Tai and his eldest son Lān Kham Daeng[117] were identified with the old aristocracy, who would have favoured the succession of Lān Kham Daeng's sons. Their

opponents sought to counter the influence of this powerful faction by preventing that succession. Opposition coalesced around the figures of Mahā Thēvī and Xiang Lô. Together with the mother of Vangburī, they and their followers would have constituted the "Ayutthayan faction" whose eventual triumph Mahā Thēvī assured.

According to the Lao chronicles only after an interregnum of four years, during which Lān Xāng was administered by a Council of Ministers consisting of two senior abbots and four "learned men", probably court Brahmins, was the throne finally offered to Vangburī, the only surviving son of Sām Saen Tai. The delay probably reflected the reluctance of the old aristocracy to accept the victory, even after Mahā Thēvī's death, of the Ayutthayan faction. But the *mandala* needed a strong king, and Vangburī was by then the only candidate. That Vangburī's ties with Ayutthaya were particularly close is evident from the lavish gifts despatched by kings of Ayutthaya on the occasions of both his coronation and cremation.[118] That he was eventually offered the throne was due to the intervention of both court officials and members of the nobility, and more importantly of powerful monks, for relations were close between the monastic orders in Lān Xāng and Ayutthaya.[119]

At his coronation Vangburī took the throne name of Xainya Chakkaphat Phaen Phaeo.[120] The title is significant for it translates the Pali term *cakkavattin* (Sanskrit: *cakravartin*) meaning "universal Buddhist monarch".[121] Vangburī was thus claiming to be ruler of a *mandala* still powerful despite the recent upheavals, and with ambitions to extend his power. The religious legitimation of his rule was reinforced by his first act upon becoming king, the appointment of new abbots in two important monasteries. The move was designed to unify the Sangha after the political turmoil of the previous decade, and to reward his own monastic supporters. The increased influence of the Sangha during the reign of Xainya Chakkaphat is evident. Senior abbots were given exalted titles (such as *Rāxakhrū* and *Mahā Sāmī*) and invited to serve on the Royal Council, and all monks thereafter were addressed as *chau*, a title of nobility.[122]

The king also gave his attention to reinforcing the unity of the kingdom. An amnesty was declared for all those who, fearing retribution, had taken refuge in various monasteries. Royal power was concentrated by appointing the king's eldest son, Kon Kaeo, as *Saen Meuang*, and five other sons as regional governors.[123] According to one account, two daughters were also named as governors, indicating the continuing high status birth still conferred on women despite the impact of Buddhism.[124] Most *chau meuang*, however, were still

chosen from the powerful regional nobility, and no attempt was made to introduce the kind of administrative reorganization of the kingdom undertaken about this time in Ayutthaya.[125] Nor was the formal corpus of law as well developed. As a result, the king's measures were only moderately successful in reimposing central authority over outlying regions. They did not prevent a subsequent attempt by the powerful ruler of Viang Chan to divide the kingdom. The revolt was eventually put down in 1470, but that it had broken out at all signified the continuing weakness of centralized power in Lān Xāng, especially when compared with neighbouring kingdoms.[126]

Lān Xāng at this time was surrounded by three powerful imperial *mandalas*. To the west rough power parity existed between Lān Xāng, Lān Nā under King Tilok and Ayutthaya under King Borommatrailokanat, with whom Xainya Chakkaphat continued to enjoy good relations. An attempt by Lān Xāng in 1449 to seize control of Nān from Lān Nā was defeated, but the two *mandala* were again skirmishing against each other five years later.[127] It was to the east, where the Vietnamese Le dynasty reached the apogee of its power during the reign of Le Thanh Tong (1460-1497), that an altogether more serious threat materialized. Vietnamese armies had defeated Champa, and forced division of its remaining territory into three tributary principalities,[128] leaving the emperor free to turn his attention to the west. Indeed the rising power and expansionist ambitions of Vietnam may have been one reason why Xainya Chakkaphat was punctilious in despatching regular tribute missions to China.

The Vietnamese were in a strong position to threaten Lān Xāng. Already the Tai highlands west of the Black River had been brought within the Vietnamese tributary *mandala*.[129] The Phuan territories had followed, perhaps down as far as the upper valley of the Nam Kading.[130] In 1448, Meuang Phuan was formally designated a Vietnamese *chau*, or outlying district, though the ruling Kham dynasty was confirmed in office in return for the despatch of an annual tribute mission.[131] An attempt in 1471 to draw Meuang Phuan more closely into the Vietnamese administrative system by converting it to a prefecture (*phū*) and appointing two Vietnamese mandarins as administrators, led to a Phuan revolt and massacre of Vietnamese in 1478. An angry Le Thanh Tong held Lān Xāng responsible. The following year he ordered a full-scale invasion of the Lao *mandala*.[132]

The Lao chronicles explain the Vietnamese attack as Emperor Le Thanh Tong's response to what he believed to be insulting behaviour on the part of the Lao king. In reply to a request for samples of hair from a recently captured

sacred white elephant, the emperor is said to have received only a small box of dung, which had been substituted, according to one account, by a Phuan prince who wanted to provoke conflict between Vietnam and Lān Xāng.[133] If this was indeed the reason for Le Thanh Tong's invasion, rather than the massacre the previous year of Vietnamese forces sent to occupy Meuang Phuan, then Le Thanh Tong may simply have seized upon an excuse to repay Lān Xāng for its earlier treachery during Le Loi's war of liberation. Whatever the cause, the Vietnamese despatched a considerable army said to have numbered 180,000 men in five separate columns[134] in a coordinated attack which, despite hasty Lao defensive measures, succeeded in capturing the capital Xiang Dong Xiang Thong.

The war of the "elephant the colour of taro", as the animal in dispute is described in the Lao chronicles, had a profound impact. The battle to protect Xiang Dong Xiang Thong is the only section of the later chronicles related with the same kind of detail we find in accounts of the campaigns of Fā Ngum.[135] But these are events which happened a bare twenty-five years before the earliest (1503) version of the *Nithān Khun Bôrom* and there must have been many still alive who remembered them vividly. So when we are told the names of opposing commanders and their elephants, we could perhaps give them credence, were it not that the size of the Vietnamese force is grossly exaggerated, and even Lao troop strength bears no relation to what must have been the reality.[136] What we can be sure of is that losses were heavy on both sides, especially among the elephant corps.[137] The pillage, rape and destruction wrought by the invading army can only be imagined, as hard-won food supplies were seized, houses burned, and whole village populations fled into the jungle. As Lao defences collapsed, the elderly King Xainya Chakkaphat fled south to Xiang Khan where he abdicated in shame, leaving his second son, Prince Thaen Kham, to rally the shattered Lao forces.[138]

According to the Lao chronicles, all credit for the eventual heroic defeat of the Vietnamese was due to the young prince.[139] The Lao were ultimately victorious at the battle of Pāk Phūn, after which the demoralized remnants of the Vietnamese army could do no more than straggle back to Vietnam. The *Chronicle of Chiang Mai* and the *Nān Chronicle*, however, give a different story. According to both, the Vietnamese were defeated by a force raised by Kha Kan, the governor of Nān, a tributary of King Tilok of Lān Nā.[140] From what can be pieced together from these and Chinese and Vietnamese sources, it would seem that after capturing the Lao capital, one Vietnamese army followed the Mekong north as far as Xiang Hung, while another headed downstream, perhaps with the

idea of mounting a pincer attack against Lān Nā. It was probably the latter that was defeated by Kha Kan, with the assistance of re-grouped troops from Lān Xāng. The northern army was either prevailed upon to withdraw through negotiation,[141] or received orders to retreat, perhaps following expressions of Chinese displeasure over the invasion.[142] At any rate, remnants of the Vietnamese force withdrew. The following year they laid waste Meuang Phuan as punishment for aiding Lān Xāng. Thousands fled. Of 90,000 families, only 2,000 people are said to have survived.[143] Little wonder that even the puppet prince the Vietnamese installed revolted against his overlord.[144]

In Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, monks from five major monasteries that the Vietnamese had spared took the lead in organizing the returning population to reconstruct the city.[145] When the old king refused to return, however, Prince Thaen Kham was invited to ascend the throne, taking the name of Suvanna Banlang. But a mystery surrounds this king. Despite his apparently heroic efforts in expelling the Vietnamese, and the labour and ability that must have been needed to repair the damage done and to reorganize the administration of the kingdom, all that we know about Suvanna Banlang is that he erected a *stupa* for the ashes of his father (Vat Sop), and that he died at the age of forty-one. Also after his reign the kingly title "Phrayā" was replaced by "Phra", used for senior monks.[146] Most surprising is that the earliest extant recension of the *Nithān Khun Bôrom*, which dates from the subsequent reign of his younger brother King Vixun (Vixunnarāt, 1501-1520), makes no mention of Suvanna Banlang at all. According to this text, when King Xainya Chakkaphat abdicated, the throne was offered not to his second son, Thāen Kham, but to his third, Lā Saen Tai.[147] Hoshino offers the hypothesis that Lān Xāng at this time actually may have had two kings, one recognized by the Ming emperor in China and the other by neighbouring *mandalas*.[148] It may be, however, that later texts (in the *Phongsāvadān* group) record the actual succession recognized by the Chinese, while the *Nithān* reflects Vixun's refusal to accept the validity of Suvanna Banlang's succession, whether out of jealousy or anger we can only guess.

When Suvanna Banlang died childless, probably in 1486, he was succeeded by his younger brother, Lā Saen Tai, thus overcoming any problem of succession that may have arisen.[149] Lā Saen Tai appointed another brother, the future Vixunnarāt, then governor of Viang Chan, as *Saen Meuang* (principal minister), because his own eldest son, Xumphū, was under age. During the reign of Lā Saen Tai, Lān Xāng enjoyed close relations with Ayutthaya, and probably also with Lān Nā. A high-ranking delegation from Ayutthaya attending the coronation

concluded a treaty establishing a point on their common frontier, known thereafter as "the ricefield of double affection", where all commercial transactions were subsequently to be conducted.[150]

Not only were commercial and political contacts encouraged, but there is evidence of equally close regional religious and cultural ties. Dated bronzes in Luang Phrabāng and Viang Chan show marked influence of the schools of Chiang Mai and Ayutthaya.[151] Indeed, Lān Xāng seems to have experienced an efflorescence of Buddhist art, probably stimulated by the re-building programme which followed the Vietnamese invasion and which continued during Lā Saen Tai's peaceful ten-year reign.

From this period also dates the earliest known dated inscription in Lao (rather than Pali). It is incised on a Buddha image in a script known as *tham* (from *Dhamma*) used especially for writing religious texts. The earliest inscription in the "lay" Lao alphabet used to write secular texts dates from twenty-nine years earlier.[152] Of the inscriptions on stone and bronze collected by Pierre-Marie Gagneux dating from the fifteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, sixty percent are written using *tham* (for both Pali and Lao inscriptions), while forty percent use Lao script.[153] The lines of evolutionary development of these two scripts are not entirely clear, but they are closely related both to each other and to Lān Nā orthography. Like other Southeast Asian alphabets, they derive ultimately from south Indian (Pallava) script, most probably via Mon.[154]

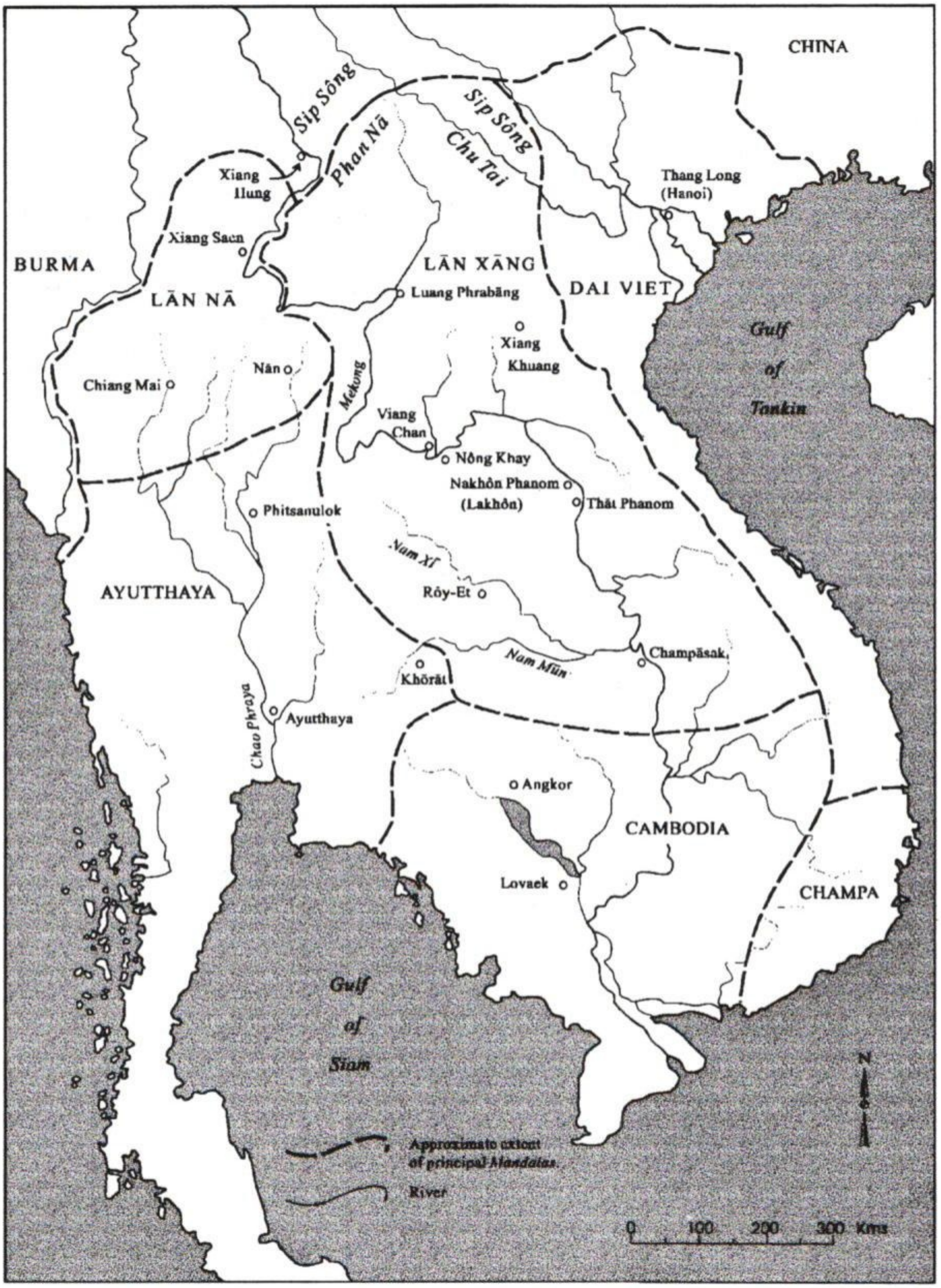
The Buddhist Sangha seems to have gained in influence in the years following the Vietnamese invasion. The abbots of three major monasteries — Vat Kaeo, Vat Manōrām and Vat Pāsman — were given judicial powers, and the three *vat* declared sanctuaries where those accused of wrongdoing could undergo rehabilitation free from the threat of arrest. Perhaps not surprisingly, people were said to be happy during the reign of Lā Saen Tai.

Various versions of the chronicles differ over whether Lā Saen Tai's son, Xumphū, ever reigned in his own right. He seems to have inherited the throne as a minor under the regency of his uncle Vixun, and probably had not yet come of age when he died under what appear to have been suspicious circumstances.[155] According to the Ming chronicles, the tribute mission of 1499 was sent by a certain Zhao Lan-zhang (Chau Lān Xāng) who claimed to be "due heir" to the throne requesting "conferral of headwear and a belt as well as a gold warrant ..." The cautious Chinese sent back silks and other goods, but withheld the official regalia until it had been confirmed that the claimant had actually inherited the throne.[156] Only Vixun could have sent such a mission seeking Chinese recognition

of his claim to the throne; and although that recognition was withheld, he does seem to have received some encouragement. At any rate, the untimely death of Xumphū (followed four months later by that of his sister) left the way open for the powerful *Saen Meuang* to be invited to ascend the throne.

In the century and a half that had elapsed since the founding of the *mandala*, Lān Xāng had weathered a series of crises, from succession disputes to invasion. On each occasion, however, it had found the inherent strength and internal resources to rebuild its power and cohesion. This period saw the initial forging of what was to become a uniquely Lao worldview as Buddhism absorbed and transmuted the *phī meuang* cult to create, along with dynastic descent, an effective legitimizing ideology in support of the social and political order. In the process Lān Xāng emerged as a significant variable in the power equation in mainland Southeast Asia, able to hold its own against surrounding *mandalas*, and as determined as they to exploit any weakness to extend its hegemonic influence.

The Lao Kingdom of Lān Xāng



The Kingdom of Lān Xāng: 17th Century

Chapter 3

Lān Xāng at its Apogee

For the two centuries from the accession of Vixun to the death of Surinyavongsā, Lān Xāng remained a powerful and united *mandala*, whose subsequent disintegration and decline in the eighteenth century could hardly have been foreseen. The kingdom was severely tested by the Burmese invasions of the second half of the sixteenth century, but recovery under the guiding hand of Surinyavongsā was impressive. Yet in retrospect we can discern those broader historical developments — altering patterns of population increase and expansion; relative trade flows stimulating economic change; use of new technologies — that shifted the balance of power in mainland Southeast Asia at the expense of the Lao. The implications of these factors were hardly evident to the ruling elite of Lān Xāng, however, and certainly not in the early years of the sixteenth century when Vixunnarāt came to the throne.

Vixun was a strong and ambitious man in his mid-thirties with considerable administrative experience when he gained the throne of Lān Xāng in 1501. Already he had been governor of Viang Chan, *Saen Meuang* and Regent. That he apparently felt it important to defend and legitimize his accession would seem to reinforce the suggestion noted in the last chapter that as Regent he had disposed of his young nephew and usurped the throne. The internal evidence, though circumstantial, comes both from the *Nithān Khun Bôrom*, the text Vixun himself ordered composed,[1] and from his devotion to the *Phra Bāng*.

The *Nithān Khun Bôrom* brought together the ancient Tai-Lao origin myth of the two gourds, the story of Khun Bôrom and the founding of Meuang Sua, but placed them within the context of a Buddhist world order. The text emphasized the importance of both royal descent of all legitimate rulers of Lān Xāng from Khun Bôrom, and of devotion to Buddhism through performance of meritorious acts to reinforce legitimation of power. Michel Lorrillard has argued that it also "expanded" the importance of Vixun by deliberately pushing back the reign of

Lā Saen Tai and eliminating that of Suvanna Banlang (the brother Vixun detested?).[2] The text thus served to reinforce Vixun's royal legitimacy through the double means both of divine descent and of devotion to Buddhism, the latter symbolized by Vixun's cult of the *Phra Bāng*.

The king had become an ardent devotee of the *Phra Bāng* statue of the Buddha while governor of Viang Chan, and at long last ordered it to be transported overland to the capital.[3] There he built a magnificent new richly endowed temple to house it, after his wish for a son and heir had been granted. Known as Vat Vixun, or the "watermelon vat" for the shape of its *stupa* or *thāt*, it remains even in its present rebuilt form one of the finest examples of classical Lao religious architecture.[4] It was there that the king himself briefly donned the yellow robe. Worship of the *Phra Bāng* as the palladium both of the kingdom and of the ruling dynasty dates from this time. The cult had important political as well as religious significance. For all his friendship with Ayutthaya, Vixunnarāt was aware of the need to reinforce the independence and internal cohesion of Lān Xāng. This was achieved by inauguration of a royal cult, centred on the *Phra Bāng*, before which regional rulers took oaths of loyalty to the king.[5]

In promoting the cult of the *Phra Bāng*, Vixunnarāt may have deliberately been defining, as David Wyatt suggests, a distinctly Lao identity within the greater Tai world.[6] But the means chosen also effectively reinforced the institution of Buddhist kingship. The image of the *Phra Bāng* provided a focus for royal support of the *Dhamma* and Sangha, in return for the legitimation of the king as *Thammarāxa*, literally one who rules in accordance with Buddhist principles. This was a powerful reciprocal relationship. The king, through his own merit, ensured the moral and political order essential for propogation of the *Dhamma*. Royal patronage of a Sangha unified through royal intervention in periodic monastic councils elicited in return religious justification of the monarchy. In this and the following reign, the spirit worship so prominent under Fā Ngum was all but eliminated from the state cult.

The legitimizing role of Buddhism in reinforcing social structure and monarchical authority at the level of the *meuang* was reinforced in annual New Year festivities held in March/April in Xiang Dong Xiang Thong. From the early sixteenth century on, these ceremonies centered on the *Phra Bāng* were presided over by the king himself. The image thus became not only the palladium of the ruling dynasty, but also the principal symbol of the unity and power of the Kingdom of Lān Xāng. We should thus probably credit Vixunnarāt rather than Fā Ngum as the primary architect of the synthesis of beliefs that came to

constitute the Lao worldview.

Despite the legitimacy provided by Theravāda Buddhism and Tai-Lao mythology, the power of the *mandala* of Lān Xāng still rested principally on mililtary might and economic prosperity. Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, laid out in relation to both Mount Phū Sī and the flow of the Mekong, stood as the sacred centre of the Lao *mandala*, symbolizing on earth the divine Mount Meru of Buddhist cosmology.[7] Possession of both palace and capital in itself reinforced royal legitimacy, but their construction and upkeep required substantial resources. Cheap labour came from conquered and resettled populations; wealth from tribute and trade. Any weakness could lead outlying *meuang* to withhold tribute. Territorial consolidation was thus a priority. The great kings in Lao history were those powerful enough both to subdue the factious nobility in the capital and to retain the allegiance of outlying *meuang*.

From the *Nithān Khun Bôrom* we can gain some idea of the reorganization of Lān Xāng carried out after the war with Vietnam during the reigns of Suvanna Banlang and his brothers.[8] The increasingly complex central administration was in the hands of officials responsible for specific services, such as defence, registration of population, religious affairs, justice, internal security, public works, finance, foreign contacts and trade. Other officials were in charge of the collection of taxes, and of the network of spies who informed on the activities of tributary rulers. All officials, from the king's close advisers who made up the *Sēnām Luang* (Royal Council) on down, were given appropriate ranks and titles in a graded hierarchy. The capital region directly under royal administration was divided into districts and sub-districts, each with its headman and his deputy charged with keeping the necessary records. Theoretically the king had sole right of appointment to office, even of the rulers of the larger tributary *meuang*. Vixun appointed a number of his own relatives, including a certain Nāng Mahā Thēvī, probably his sister-in-law, to rule important *meuang* on the Khōrāt plateau, and married off his sisters to regional governors. But even appointment of relatives by blood or marriage did not guarantee loyalty, as revolts by both Mahā Thēvī and the governor of Sīkhōttabông proved.[9] As many positions became hereditary in powerful families, the effectiveness of administrative controls ultimately depended on the power of the monarch to ensure his commands were obeyed. In other words, power still depended more on religious legitimation and military might than on administrative structures. At the time of Vixun's death, however, the *mandala* of Lān Xāng was more stable and more powerful than at any time during the previous century.

Vixun's twenty-year reign also saw a remarkable flowering of Buddhist studies in Lān Xāng. Learned monks were invited to take up residence in Xiang Dong Xiang Thong; sacred texts were copied and studied; and the monasteries became centres of literary culture.[10] Most popular were still the *Jātakas*, to which Lao monks added their own stories of former lives of the Buddha. A Lao collection of fifty of these called the *Hā Sip Xāt* contains twenty-seven that are entirely unknown elsewhere.[11] A Lao version of the *Panchatantra* was produced, and the Lao version of the *Rāmāyana*, known as the *Phra Lak Phra Lam* may also have been given its Lao literary form around this time. Within two or three decades many of the classical Lao "novels", really epic poems, were also composed, borrowing largely from the more developed literature of Lān Nā during what was evidently a period of intense and fruitful cultural exchange.[12] Thus from the first half of the sixteenth century dates a distinctively Lao literature, which, though it drew its inspiration from both common Tai and Buddhist themes, made its own contribution to what was increasingly becoming a recognizably Lao identity.

Other secular literature, especially oral poetry, must also have flourished, while various technical manuals were produced on such matters as astrology, medicine and law.[13] No evidence has come down to us from the early sixteenth century in the fields of dance or music, but we can be sure that both formed part of court performances of the *Phra Lak Phra Lam*, which were probably accompanied by a small classical orchestra (*sēp nyai*), including a set of tuned gongs (*khong vong*), xylophones (*ranāt*), bamboo flute (*khūy*) and oboe-like *pī*.

The mid-sixteenth century saw the rise of Lān Xāng as a major power in mainland Southeast Asia, one equal to its rivals in the Tai world, if not of more distant neighbours. Vixunnarāt was succeeded by his son Phōthisārāt in 1520. The young king was nineteen and a devout Buddhist, and his first act was to build and dedicate a magnificent monastery to the memory of his father. In 1523, a mission was despatched to Chiang Mai, capital of Lān Nā, to bring back copies of the entire Buddhist Tipitaka and other texts, and to invite learned monks to a great monastic council.[14] Two years later the king himself was inducted into the Sangha by its Supreme Patriarch, Mahā Sīchanthō, abbot of Vat Vixun, who personally presided over the king's religious education during his traditional three-month retreat. The king's devoted orthodoxy made him intolerant of the widespread popular worship of spirits, or *phī*, some associated with ancestral cults, others with significant natural phenomena, and others still believed responsible for causing all kinds of accidents and sickness. In 1527 Phōthisārāt

issued a famous decree proscribing the worship of *phī* as groundless superstition, and ordering their shrines to be destroyed and their altars thrown into the river.[15] Although the bloodier propitiation rites were thus finally suppressed, popular spirit worship nevertheless continued to be practised. Apparently in recognition of the king's devotion to Buddhism, the highly venerated *Phra Xaek Kham* Buddha image is said thereafter to have miraculously transferred itself from Chiang Mai to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong.[16] (In fact the image was later carried off, along with another famous statue, after Phōthisārāt placed his son on the throne of Chiang Mai.)

Throughout his reign, Phōthisārāt took every opportunity to demonstrate his devotion to the universal values of Buddhism, and wherever he journeyed religious ceremonies were performed. In 1539 he undertook a pilgrimage to the great shrine of Thāt Phanom, the religious centre of Meuang Sīkhōttabông. There he ordered the erection of new monastic buildings and provided temple slaves and land for the upkeep of the complex. Royal endowment marked recognition not just of the ritual significance of this ancient centre for the Lao of the central Mekong, but also of its increasing economic importance both in terms of population and trade. For the king, and Phōthisārāt was so far as we know the first Lao king to record his gifts to the Sangha in stone in his own lifetime, such meritorious deeds were proof of his divine status as a *bodhisattva*, or Buddha-to-be.

For all the king's piety in the *Dhamma*, however, Lān Xāng did not escape either internal dissension or external conflict. Royal forces took two years to quell a revolt by Meuang Phuan (1532-1533), whose rulers were ever ready to assert their autonomy.[17] With rival *mandalas*, marriage contracts were concluded. Even so, relations between Lān Xāng and Ayutthaya were strained for much of Phōthisārāt's reign. A Lao army intervened briefly in support of an attempted insurrection against King Chairacha. This provoked an invasion of Lān Xāng, but the Siamese were forced to withdraw.[18] The two kingdoms were too closely matched in terms of manpower and resources for either to defeat the other at this time,[19] though the balance was steadily changing in favour of Siam.

Much of the rivalry between Lān Xāng and Ayutthaya centered on their relations with Lān Nā. Phōthisārāt had accepted as his principal queen Nyot Kham, the daughter of King Meuang Kaeo of Lān Nā, thus cementing ties between the two *mandalas*. By the 1540s Lān Nā had become seriously weakened as a result of succession disputes and aristocratic factionalism. According to the *Chronicle of Chiang Mai*, on the death of King Kēt Chettharāt

without a male heir, his mother was proclaimed queen. The kingdom was then subjected to attack by first Shan, then Siamese armies. The former were forced to withdraw after laying siege to Chiang Mai for four months; the latter were defeated with the help of reinforcements from Lān Xāng.[20] One faction at court thereupon offered the throne of Lān Nā to Xētthāthirāt, the eldest son of Phōthisārāt and his Chiang Mai queen. Phōthisārāt lost no time in seizing this opportunity to extend the power of Lān Xāng. Accompanied by a vast army and entourage, he personally placed his son on the throne of Lān Nā. Lān Xāng was at the height of its power.[21]

Throughout most of his reign, Phōthisārāt lived more or less permanently in Viang Chan rather than Xiang Dong Xiang Thong. The immediate reason for this was probably strategic, to distance his capital from the new rising power of Burma and to be in a better position to counter Ayutthayan threats against Lān Nā,[22] but the shift would anyway have been necessary sooner or later for it reflected the changing demographic, economic and strategic balance in mainland Southeast Asia in general, and in the *mandala* of Lān Xāng in particular. Over the previous two centuries, Lao settlers had continued to migrate south and west, down the valley of the Mekong and onto the Khōrāt plateau, through establishment of satellite villages of outlying *meuang*. Even though settlement remained sparse,[23] the Viang Chan plain, the middle Mekong and the Khōrāt plateau as far south as the Xī River basin together supported a far greater population than the narrow valleys of northern Laos. Population growth went hand-in-hand with improved farming techniques and increased internal exchange, not least between upland minorities and lowland Lao. As the balance of population shifted south, so too did the centre of gravity of Lao economic and political power. Viang Chan and Sīkhōttabông were both better situated than Xiang Dong Xiang Thong with respect to the principal trade routes linking Lān Xāng with Vietnam, Cambodia and Ayutthaya (though not with southern China). The move to Viang Chan placed the king in a better position to counter potential threats of regional independence by these increasingly powerful southern *meuang*.

This shift in the centre of gravity of Lao political power paralleled that of neighbouring kingdoms. The Vietnamese "march to the south" at the expense of the Cham had brought all of central Vietnam under imperial control. The kingdom of Ayutthaya continued to extend its hegemony down the Malay peninsula, where even Malacca acknowledged Siamese suzerainty. These changes adversely tipped the balance of advantage against Lān Xāng. Vietnam, Ayutthaya and Burma all benefitted from new resources greater than any available to Lān

Xāng. The wide rich flood plains of the Irrawaddy and Chao Phrayā rivers were able to support far greater concentrations of population than could the relatively restricted Mekong riverine flatlands and the thinner soils of the Khōrāt plateau.

More importantly, moreover, the coastal states were able to profit from new sources of wealth in the form of growing opportunities for trade. As well as expanding trade with China, Ayutthayan control of both coasts of the Malay peninsula south of Moulmein provided direct access to the Indian trade across the Bay of Bengal. The arrival of the Portuguese brought new methods of boat building and military technology. Seaborne trade virtually constituted a royal monopoly in Ayutthaya, for the king had the right to first purchase of any incoming goods, and ensured the sale of all royal trade goods collected as tax and tribute before other products could be exported. The royal wealth thus accumulated was expended in the form of religious monuments and palaces, a larger, more centralized bureaucracy, and an expanded and better equipped army.[24] King Chairacha (reigned 1534-1547) even had the means to employ 120 Portuguese mercenaries as a personal body guard, and to equip and train his army in the use of firearms.[25] Such military innovations fuelled Siamese ambitions, as they did Burmese, and undoubtedly contributed to the devastating wars that shook the Tai world in the second half of the sixteenth century.

The Burmese Invasions

King Chairacha's death in 1547, immediately following his second attack on Lān Nā, plunged Ayutthaya into the turmoil of a succession dispute. By this time a new and powerful kingdom had arisen to the west. Between 1535 and 1547, Tabinshwehti, founder of the Burmese Toungu dynasty, succeeded in reuniting most of Burma. He took as his capital, however, not Toungu in Upper Burma, but the former capital of the Mon kingdom at Pegu in the south, a city strategically situated with regard to trade and with respect to his further designs for conquest. These became clear when he offered to form an alliance with Lān Xāng and Lān Nā against Ayutthaya. Phōthisārāt declined, diplomatically pointing out that Burmese and Mon "were not descendants of Khun Bôrom" (and therefore not Tai) though they were "friends and brothers" (in that they professed the same form of Buddhism).[26]

Tabinshwehti saw himself as a Buddhist *cakkavattin*, or world conqueror, predestined by his *kamma* to be a universal ruler, at least of the Buddhist world of mainland Southeast Asia.[27] When in July 1548, Chairacha's younger brother

was enthroned as King of Ayutthaya and took as his throne name Chakkraphat, Tabinshwehti must have interpreted this as a direct challenge to his own pretensions. He demanded that Chakkraphat hand over his sacred white elephants, pre-eminent symbols of universal monarchy. The demand was no more than a declaration of war,[28] and a vast Burmese army descended from the Three Pagodas pass to invest Ayutthaya. The Burmese were eventually forced to withdraw, but the invasion marked the beginning of half a century of warfare that revealed the chronic failure of the Tai kingdoms to combine to defeat a common foe, and all but led to their destruction.

In 1547, Phōthisārāt died when still in his prime after being crushed under his own falling elephant while demonstrating his riding skills before a gathering of foreign envoys. His two younger sons thereupon disputed the succession, each claiming part of the kingdom with the support of powerful families. Xētthāthirāt hurriedly returned from Lān Nā to stake his own claim, leaving his young queen in Chiang Mai.[29] He defeated his brothers and united the kingdom, but his decision to establish Xiang Dong Xiang Thong as his seat of rule over both Lān Nā and Lān Xāng provided the opportunity for noble families in Chiang Mai to plot the restoration of an independent dynasty. A Lao army despatched in 1551 failed to reassert the power of Lān Xāng. In a last desperate move, according to the *Chronicle of Chiang Mai*, Xētthāthirāt handed the throne of Lān Nā to his principal queen, herself a Chiang Mai princess. Had this tactic succeeded, a close alliance might have been maintained between the two kingdoms. As it was, Queen Chīrapaphā was soon deposed (1546). Five years of turmoil followed before the throne was offered to a Shan prince (Mae Ku: reigned 1551-1564).

Instead of cementing relations between the Shan states and Lān Nā in the face of a powerful, united Burma, Mae Ku's accession led to further conflict. Xētthāthirāt renewed his attempts to reconquer Lān Nā. When the Burmese King Bayinnaung's armies marched east in 1557, the northern Tai kingdoms — Shan, Yuan and Lao — were hopelessly divided. The Shan states were quickly subdued; a Lao army occupying Xiang Saen fell back to Lān Xāng; and Chiang Mai surrendered without a fight in April 1558. When Xētthāthirāt again attempted to reassert his claim to the throne of Chiang Mai later the same year, the balance of power had already shifted in favour of the Burmese, and the Lao forces prudently withdrew. Bayinnaung confirmed Mae Ku on the throne of Lān Nā as a Burmese vassal until 1564 when he was deposed following an unsuccessful attempt to resist Burmese demands. For the next two centuries, until 1776, Lān Nā remained tributary to the Burmese. For Lān Nā, this was a period of decline.

Its immediate effect on Lān Xāng, however, was to stimulate a cultural renaissance as families from Lān Nā fled to Lān Xāng and the centre of northern Yuan/Lao literature and the arts moved east.

Lān Xāng may have benefitted from the transfer of population, but this did not immediately assist Xēttthāthirāt in holding off the Burmese. The occupation of Lān Nā provided Bayinnaung with a strong base from which to renew the war with Ayutthaya, for he was determined to avenge the defeat of his brother-in-law Tabinshwehti's army in 1549. By seizing Chiang Mai, he was also able to draw upon Tai-Yuan levies to reinforce his army of Burmese, Mon and Shan troops.

In the face of this new Burmese threat, both Ayutthaya and Lān Xāng took defensive measures. With the Burmese in Lān Nā, Xiang Dong Xiang Thong had become too vulnerable, and, for reasons given above, Xēttthāthirāt formally transferred the capital of Lān Xāng to Viang Chan.[30] The new capital was not only more centrally situated both within the *mandala* of Lān Xāng (permitting closer control over potentially rebellious southern *meuang*), it was also more strategically located with respect to neighbouring kingdoms. Like Xiang Dong Xiang Thong it was sited on the east bank of the Mekong, and so could be strongly defended against Burmese (or Siamese) attack. According to the Lao chronicles, the move to Viang Chan was made in 1560,[31] when unrest in Chiang Mai again invited Burmese intervention. The actual move is likely to have taken some time. A new palace had to be constructed, along with royal monasteries. Just as importantly, the defensive perimeter comprising a broad moat and earthworks topped by a brick wall had to be massively reinforced. When the city had first been constructed, geomancers determined the exact location of the pillars marking out its boundaries. The story is still told of how a young woman, named Sao Sī, several months pregnant, threw herself into the pit dug for the first pillar. By her sacrifice she became the tutelary guardian of Viang Chan, and over her remains was erected Vat Sīmeuang, the altar of which, as can still be seen today, is built around the original ancient pillar.[32]

Religious politics and the importance of religious legitimation were reflected in Xēttthāthirāt's decision to bring with him to his new capital two of the three most revered Buddha images from Xiang Dong Xiang Thong. These were the *Phra Kaeo*, known as the Emerald Buddha, and the *Phra Xaek Kham*, both previously removed by Xēttthāthirāt from Chiang Mai, not just to save them from the Burmese but to reinforce his own prestige and power.[33] The *Phra Bāng*, palladium of the former capital since the reign of Vixunnarāt, remained in Xiang Dong Xiang Thong which was renamed Luang Phrabāng in its honour. In partial

compensation to local pride in Luang Phrabāng and to ensure continuing loyalty, Xētthāthirāt also ordered construction of Vat Xiang Thong (1561), whose graceful lines confirm it as the finest extant example of northern Lao sixteenth-century architecture.

Like his father, Xētthāthirāt was a great patron of Buddhism. In fact we have more epigraphic records of his gifts to the Sangha (ten between the years 1551 and 1567) than for any other Lao king.[34] Several new monasteries were founded during his reign, not only in the capital, but also in Luang Phrabāng (Vat Thāt) and provincial centres. Royal *stupas* were built in several key *meuang*, and the Thāt Phanom shrine was remodelled and repaired. The extensive building programme undertaken to embellish Viang Chan culminated in the construction of two great monuments. One was the Vat Phra Kaeo (1566) with its elaborate stairways and towering columns to house the Emerald Buddha, the new and powerful palladium of the Lao kings: the other was the Thāt Luang *stupa* (1566-1567) situated in broad grounds one kilometre (less than a mile) east of the city walls, on the site of a former shrine reputed to contain a bone of the Buddha. On a rectangular lower terrace was constructed a base 48 metres (135 feet) square, with offering shrines at the centre of each side. On the second of two upper terraces in the form of lotus petals stood a series of thirty elongated replicas of the central *stupa*, symbolizing the "perfections" (*pāramī*) of a Bodhisattva, the whole expressing a uniquely Lao architectural concept in the form of an open lotus, from the middle of which rose the great central spire. The *stupa* was restored under the French and remains the pre-eminent symbol of independent Laos.[35]

Such large-scale construction required sophisticated technology, not to mention competent architects and skilled craftsmen (some of whom may have come from Lān Nā). We know little about the technology of the age, except that it included the exploitation of natural resources such as minerals, salt, resins, and sticklac for making lacquer-ware. Irrigation was much more extensive on the plain of Viang Chan than in the region of Luang Phrabāng. This required dams to be built, channels dug, and great bamboo wheels constructed to lift water to the rice fields. For the common people, material culture was simple and practical, including such essential items as carts, ploughs, looms, fish traps, and foot operated pounders for husking rice. The finer crafts were confined to the nobility.

At the same time as establishing a more strategically defensible capital, Xētthāthirāt sought to develop a closer relationship with Ayutthaya. This took the form of a solemn commitment between Xētthāthirāt and King Chakkraphat of

Ayutthaya, concluded on 7 July 1560.[36] In the presence of delegations of high ranking courtiers and monks and sealed by a libation of the "water of truth",[37] the two kings vowed that henceforth their realms would coexist in peace and friendship, and that neither would transgress the other's territory. A memorial *stupa* containing a stone inscription recording this event was constructed and dedicated three years later at Meuang Dānxāy (now in Thailand's Loei province) on the boundary between the two kingdoms; that is, the watershed between the Chao Praya and Mekong river systems.[38] Both sides agreed that a "lady" should be presented in marriage to seal the pledge, and it was decided that Xētthāthirāt should take one of Chakkraphat's daughters as his queen. According to Lao accounts, this was to be Princess Thēpkasattrī, daughter of a Siamese queen who had distinguished herself by her bravery fighting the Burmese. When the time came, however, Thēpkasattrī's younger sister was sent in her stead, on the grounds that Thēpkasattrī herself was ill.[39] Xētthāthirāt refused the match. The following year, Thēpkasattrī, by then fully recovered, herself took the road to Viang Chan, accompanied by a thousand attendants, only to be ambushed by a Burmese vassal and sent to Pegu.[40]

The alliance between Lān Xāng and Ayutthaya did nothing, however, to dissuade the Burmese from mounting a major invasion of the Siamese heartland in 1563. As in 1549, the nominal reason was again Ayutthaya's refusal to present Bayinnaung with a royal white elephant, of which Chakkraphat reportedly possessed four. The Burmese army, including a mercenary force of Portuguese gunners, marched east across the mountains from Pegu, and quickly overran the northern Siamese cities, including Phitsanulok, whose governor as a Burmese tributary was later responsible for the abduction of Thēpkasattrī. In the face of this superior Burmese force, Chakkraphat capitulated and accepted Burmese suzerainty. His son was carried off as hostage, and Ayutthaya was forced to pay substantial tribute, including the coveted four white elephants.[41]

A Burmese army then marched north to punish King Mae Ku of Chiang Mai who had failed to provide the military levies demanded by Bayinnaung for his invasion of Ayutthaya. The king was captured, deposed, and exiled to Burma, though some of his nobles fled to Lān Xāng, with the Burmese in pursuit. Burmese forces attacked Lān Xāng early in 1564 while Xētthāthirāt was campaigning in the south.[42] The *uparāt* Vôravongsā, Xētthāthirāt's younger brother, and several other members of the royal family were taken captive and sent to Pegu, along with much booty. As Xētthāthirāt prepared to mount a guerrilla campaign against the invaders, the Burmese withdrew.[43] For the next

two years, Xēttthāthirāt made generous donations to the Sangha through endowment of new monasteries in order to reinforce his legitimacy as a great Buddhist king, and build morale for the struggle ahead. By 1567 he felt strong enough to join Ayutthaya in challenging Burmese power.

The two kingdoms combined forces to attack the Burmese tributary *meuang* of Phitsanulok, but Burmese reinforcements arrived in time to raise the siege of the city. Xēttthāthirāt withdrew his army, pursued by the Burmese, who were decimated in a cleverly contrived ambush.[44] A Burmese response to the combined Lao-Siamese attack on Phitsanulok was not slow in coming. By late 1568 Bayinnaung had amassed a huge army, this time including not only Portuguese gunners, but also Indian musketeers, for yet another attack upon Ayutthaya. King Mahin, who had succeeded his father Chakkraphat when the old king died in January 1569, appealed to Xēttthāthirāt for assistance, the Lao army was lured into a trap, heavily mauled by the Burmese, and forced to withdraw.[45] Ayutthaya fell, through treachery, on 8 August 1569.

Bayinnaung then turned his attention to Lān Xāng, the last remaining Tai state to hold out against him. On the advice of his wily general Saen Surin, Xēttthāthirāt again resorted to guerrilla warfare. The Burmese occupied Viang Chan without resistance, but were unable to bring the Lao army to battle. Lao guerrillas harassed the Burmese at every opportunity. Eventually these tactics paid off. The Burmese ran short of supplies, as foraging expeditions were subjected to Lao attack. Disease and malnutrition took their toll of Burmese ranks, and in April 1570 the remnants of the army were forced to withdraw before the onset of the monsoon. Harassing attacks by Saen Surin's forces inflicted further casualties.[46]

With the defeat of the Burmese, Xēttthāthirāt was at the height of his power. His unexpected death in 1571 at the age of 38, somewhere either in southern Laos or northern Cambodia is one of the mysteries of Lao history. According to one version of events, the king fell into a trap laid by an ambitious retainer, Phrayā Nakhôn, an adversary of Saen Surin. Phrayā Nakhôn is said to have falsely reported that the king of Meuang Lomvan Ongkān had died, leaving no male heir but two beautiful daughters who would welcome marriage to Xēttthāthirāt, and to have urged the king to comply, thus luring him to his death.[47] This whole story of the duplicity of Phrayā Nakhôn can probably be dismissed, however, as a likely later fabrication designed to discredit a man who himself made a bid for the throne after Xēttthāthirāt's death.

Certain Lao texts identify Ongkān with the region of Attopeu,[48] the most

southeasterly province of Laos inhabited primarily by Austroasiatic-speaking tribal minorities. It would seem improbable, however, that a powerful king like Xētthāthirāt would have been lured south by no more than the prospect of conquest of a tribal *meuang*, even with the promise of marriage to two tribal princesses. Far more likely is the identification of Ongkān with Lovaek, then the capital of Cambodia after the abandonment of Angkor in the mid-fifteenth century.[49] The prospect of adding Cambodia to his empire would have appealed to Xētthāthirāt. He had lost Lān Nā, and since Ayutthaya was by then a vassal state of the Burmese, it was essential to open up new trade routes for Lao products.

According to the Lao account the king of Ongkān was not dead at all, and was so affronted by the suggestion that his daughters wanted to marry Xētthāthirāt that he expelled the Lao envoys. Xētthāthirāt thereupon determined to avenge this insult.[50] According to the Cambodian chronicles, a Lao army invaded Cambodia in 1571 and again the following year. On the second occasion, Xētthāthirāt challenged the Cambodian king Barom Reachea I to an elephant duel, only to be ignominiously vanquished.[51] What happened to Xētthāthirāt thereafter is unclear. The Lao were apparently heavily defeated and forced to retreat.[52] Either the king was killed in battle, as reported in the Burmese chronicles;[53] or he was wounded and separated from his troops; or he disappeared or died on the retreat from Cambodia, perhaps via the valley of the Xē Kông from Stung Treng (Xiang Taeng), which would have taken him through Attapeu, a region rich in three essential requirements for continuation of the war: gold, elephants and slaves. But whether he died there or elsewhere, Xētthāthirāt never returned from his ill-fated southern expedition.

Phrayā Saen Surin led the exhausted remnants of the defeated Lao army back to Viang Chan, where a dispute immediately erupted over the succession. One faction at court wanted to place Xētthāthirāt's five-year-old son Nô Meuang on the throne. The boy was the son of Saen Surin's own daughter, one of Xētthāthirāt's queens, which meant that his grandfather would almost certainly have been appointed Regent. Saen Surin, however, had greater ambitions. The able architect of Xētthāthirāt's successful resistance against the Burmese, he was not of noble blood, but the son of the village chief of Nôngkhāy, across the Mekong from Viang Chan. He had been educated as a royal page, and had gained promotion in the king's service through sheer ability.

The succession was resolved in Saen Surin's favour when one of his lieutenants picked a fight with and killed the leading aristocratic supporter of

Prince Nô Meuang, none other than Phrayā Nakhôn.[54] Saen Surin proclaimed himself king, though in popular parlance he was always referred to as "Royal Grandfather", indicating that his only claim to the throne was on behalf of his grandson and rightful heir. For this reason, and because he was not of royal lineage, Saen Surin's succession was resented by certain of the Lao aristocracy and regional governors (*chau meuang*). Opposition took the form of refusal to swear allegiance and migration away from Viang Chan, as noble families settled further south in Rôy-Et and Champāsak, taking their retainers with them.[55]

The succession dispute in Lān Xāng provided a pretext for renewed Burmese intervention. A first Burmese army was defeated, but once Bayinnaung took personal command, Saen Surin was again forced to abandon Viang Chan and resort to guerrilla resistance. The chronicles tell us nothing about the impact these constant wars must have had on the Lao peasantry whose sons were conscripted and whose food stocks were requisitioned. Perhaps the fact that in 1575 Saen Surin and his son were betrayed, captured, and exiled to Burma indicates not simply lack of popular support for a king whose legitimacy was questioned, but also a weariness with war itself. As the new ruler in Viang Chan, Bayinnaung enthroned the former *uparāt* Vôravongsā, a younger brother of Xēttthāthirāt, whom the Burmese had carried off as a hostage in 1565. A Burmese garrison was installed to maintain order.

For the next four years, Lān Xāng remained a vassal state of the all-powerful Burmese, paying an annual tribute of ten elephants and 10,000 units of gold.[56] Burmese intervention in the Lao world did open up new means of communication and trade with the world beyond, from Pegu northeast via Chiang Mai to Lān Xāng. By this route the London merchant Ralph Fitch later travelled as far as Chiang Mai in 1587, where he was fascinated particularly by the cremation rites of the "Langeiannes" (Lao from both Lān Nā and Lān Xāng) and the habit they shared with the Burmese, Shan and Siamese of inserting small metal balls under the skin of the penis to increase the sexual pleasure of their partners.[57] He was also impressed by the beauty of the women, the wealth of the region, and opportunities for trade with China.

Burmese suzerainty was resented, however. In 1579, a charismatic monk from southern Laos said to bear a striking resemblance to Xēttthāthirāt, claimed to be the missing king, gathered together a force of tribal warriors and disgruntled Lao chafing under Burmese suzerainty, and marched on Viang Chan.[58] Vôravongsā was forced to flee, and he and his family drowned when his boat capsized in the Mekong. The rebellion was soon suppressed and a Burmese army restored the

elderly Saen Surin as ruler.[59] When the old man died two years later, his son (Nakhôn Nôy) briefly seized the throne, only to be denounced by the Lao nobility, apparently because of his commoner origins, and deposed.

Effective power in Lān Xāng lay not with the divided Lao nobility, however, but with the Burmese, and for the next eight years Lān Xāng was without a ruler. Eventually, in 1591, the Burmese acceded to a Lao request that Xētthāthirāt's son, Prince Nô Meuang, who had been held hostage since 1574, be allowed to return to Viang Chan.[60] The new king, who took the throne name of Nôkaeokumān, attempted to restore Lao fortunes. The suzerainty of Viang Chan over both Luang Phrabāng and Xiang Khuang was re-established. Though Lān Xāng remained tributary to the Burmese, the former close dependency was reduced. It was during the reign of Nôkaeokumān that the first Europeans arrived in Viang Chan, unfortunately leaving no record of their visit. In 1594, the Cambodian king Setha had been forced to flee to Laos following the Siamese capture of Lovaek. Once the Siamese had withdrawn, two adventurers, the Spaniard Blas Ruiz and the Portuguese Diego Veloso, determined to restore the former ruling dynasty. They arrived in Viang Chan in late September or early October 1596, by way of Vietnam, only to find both the king and his eldest son had died. Accompanied by several thousand Lao troops, they thereupon escorted Setha's surviving second son back to Cambodia where he was duly crowned King Barom Reachea II. Subsequent unrest throughout 1597 provided a pretext for further Lao intervention in Cambodian affairs. Instead of aiding the embattled Barom Reachea, however, Lao troops took to pillage before being driven out.[61]

The history of the next two decades illustrates yet again the perennial problem of succession in Tai Buddhist polities, where the general rule of primogeniture could always be challenged, and where personal ambition often won out over both Buddhist morality and customary law. After the premature death of Nôkaeokumān, another Vôravongsā, this one the son of Xētthāthirāt's youngest sister,[62] was placed on the throne by the factious Lao nobility. As he was then aged only thirteen or fourteen, his father Phra Vôrapitā, was appointed Regent by the Burmese. By then Burmese power was on the wane, and Lān Xāng was emboldened to intervene in a power struggle in Lān Nā. The repercussions were serious, for Lao failure to capture Chiang Mai provoked recriminations in Viang Chan. Civil war broke out between supporters of father and son, by then aged eighteen. As the Lao chronicles laconically record: "Meuang [Viang] Chan was full of lances and swords. Relatives fought against each other for a period of four months and a lot of people were killed."[63] Reconciliation came through the

intervention of senior monks, who convinced Vôrapitā to step aside and permit his son to rule in his own right.

Two decades later civil war again divided the kingdom as Vôravongsā was challenged by *his* son, Upayuvarāt. Families were forcibly relocated and cities burned as nobles and their retainers took sides in the conflict. Villagers, as in all times of unrest, had probably hidden stocks of rice in the forest as a reserve, but the common people must have suffered severely from pillage and destruction. In the end, Upayuvarāt was victorious, taking Viang Chan in 1622 and executing not only his father, but also several other principal opponents and their families. This time even the Sangha was powerless to stop the slaughter.

According to some accounts, Upayuvarāt lived only six months to enjoy his triumph; others allow him a much longer reign. We know less about this confused period in the early seventeenth century, when sons rose against fathers and noble families formed their own armies of retainers, than we do about any other period in the history of Lān Xāng. The chronicles record little more than portents of strife (for those monastic chroniclers who could read them),[64] and the names of kings — Phōthisān, Mômkaeo, Tônkham (who may have shared the throne with his brother, Vixai). The variety of dates given in different versions of the chronicles for when they may have ruled makes it difficult even to sort out the succession.[65]

The Reign of Surinyavongsā

After the death of Tônkham, the kingdom was plunged into yet another succession struggle. Though the youngest of the three brothers who fought for the throne, Surinyavongsā was, at the age of twenty-five, the candidate of the strongest noble faction at court. Upon being crowned king, he forced one elder brother to seek refuge in Vietnam and the second to enter the Buddhist Sangha. Two cousins who might have laid claim to the throne died soon after. This effectively eliminated opportunities for factionalism at court, and created conditions of stability enabling Surinyavongsā to rule Lān Xāng for fifty-seven years, the longest reign in Lao history, and a sure sign in Lao belief of the great merit the king must have amassed through previous existences.

Throughout Surinyavongsā's reign Lān Xāng enjoyed peaceful, if at times strained, relations with its neighbours, and was spared the threat of Burmese invasion.[66] It was a time of prosperity and internal order, after the devastation of the previous years, when the wealth of the kingdom was poured into Buddhist

endowments and embellishment of the capital. Famous for its architecture and its monasteries, Viang Chan gained further renown as a centre of religious learning, attracting monastic scholars from throughout the Tai world, and from as far afield as Cambodia and Burma.

We know something of the magnificence of Viang Chan, its moated walls, its temples and palaces because from the reign of Surinyavongsā date the first European accounts of the kingdom.[67] From descriptions of the Lao capital, we know that the art and architecture of Viang Chan drew inspiration particularly from Ayutthaya, but also from northern Thailand, Cambodia and Burma.[68] Sculpture was highly developed. Both seated and standing seventeenth-century Buddha images show Siamese stylistic influences yet remain characteristically Lao.[69] Temples were constructed in brick and stucco with elaborately sloping, curved and overlapping roofs of golden tiles. Secular architecture, excluding the royal palace, was by contrast mostly built of wood on a brick base. Both religious and secular structures were lavishly decorated with coloured tiles, painted stucco, and carved and gilded panels and pillars,[70] the effect of which was greatly to impress the visiting Europeans.

The fullest account of Lān Xāng at this time comes from the Italian Jesuit missionary Giovanni-Maria Leria who resided in Viang Chan for five years without ever gaining permission to proselytize. The account of his sojourn was published second hand in a book by Giovanni Filippo de Marini which appeared some sixteen years after the missionary had left Lān Xāng.[71] Here is Leria's description of the king's palace:

> The royal palace, of which the structure and symmetry are admirable, can be seen from afar. Truly it is of a prodigious extent, and so large that one would take it for a town, both with respect to its situation and the infinite number of people who live there. The apartment of the King, which is adorned with a superb and magnificent gateway, and a quantity of fine rooms together with a great hall, are all made of incorruptible timber and adorned outside and in with excellent bas-reliefs, so delicately gilded that they seem to be plated with gold rather than covered with gold leaf. From there, on entering the courtyards which are very spacious, one first sees a great series of houses all of brick and covered with tiles, where the second wives usually live ...[72]

The houses of the "great lords" too were "very high and very beautiful, all of wood" and finely carved, contrasting strikingly with the houses of the common folk, who were "very poorly lodged".

The first European to arrive, four years after Surinyavongsā's succession to the throne, was not Leria but Gerrit van Wuysthoff, a merchant employed by the Dutch East India Company. Under orders from the Governor-General Antonie van Diemen at Batavia to investigate opportunities for direct trade with Laos, van Wuysthoff made his arduous way up the Mekong from the Cambodian capital of Lovaek.[73] His party consisted, in addition to himself, of two assistants, a barber and two servants, all Dutch, and a Malay interpreter. They left Lovaek in the company of several Lao merchants returning to Viang Chan in a flotilla of twelve narrow river boats and reached the Lao capital on 3 November 1641.

Van Wuysthoff and his party were accorded a warm welcome. Two weeks after arriving, they were received by the king. Van Wuysthoff described the impressive royal procession from the palace to the grounds of the Thāt Luang:

> The king is a young man, about 23 years old. Before him marched about 300 soldiers with spears and guns; behind him elephants carried armed men, followed by some groups of musicians. They were followed in turn by 200 soldiers and by 16 elephants carrying the king's five wives [and their ladies-in-waiting].[74]

After a lavish meal, the envoys were summoned into the royal presence. Gifts were exchanged, and the visitors shown great favour by being asked to approach to within seven or eight paces of the king. We can imagine the young king's curiosity as he beckoned these strange foreigners to come closer. After the letter from Governor-General van Diemen had been ceremoniously handed over, entertainment by acrobats and dancers continued well into the night.[75]

Music, dance, theatre and the recitation of epic poetry all flourished in the cosmopolitan Lao capital. Leria tells of "comedians" who "recite verses and perform very pleasant and very agreeable farces ... some sing, others dance, and others play diverse instruments".[76] Literature too experienced a second golden age. We can be sure that, though dates of composition of most works cannot be determined with any accuracy, new novels in classical form were composed and edited. We do not know the names of any of the authors of these great epic poems, except for the *Sang Sin Xay* by Pang Kham, about whom nothing else is known but his name.[77] Literature was still as much oral as written. Religious literature, especially the extra-canonical morality stories based on accounts of the Buddha's previous incarnations and lives of Buddhist saints, continued to provide moral instruction for all who thronged the temples to celebrate the great festivals that marked the Buddhist year.[78]

The refinement and richness of Lao material culture, its gold and silver

working, weaving, embroidery and pottery,[79] must also have impressed the European visitors, but van Wuysthoff was more interested in opportunities for trade than in culture, customs or religion. His journal provides a fascinating glimpse of the extent of Lao commerce in the seventeenth century. Even so, some of the hearsay information he collected needs to be treated with caution. It seems unlikely, for instance, that salt, prized though it was, was ever worth its actual weight in gold even in the remote region of Attopeu.[80] Van Wuysthoff was meticulous, however, in recording data on the principal trade items of interest to the Company, notably gold, sticklac and benzoin, with the possible addition of musk, resins, skins and silk. In return Laos imported mainly fine Indian cottons and other materials, the demand for which was considerable.[81] The Lao nobility were particularly eager to purchase "fine cloth, long guns, and other rare objects" including exotic birds and animals for their own use and amusement.[82]

Trade for Lān Xāng was clearly an important source of wealth. Distances were great, however, and travel slow and at times dangerous. Van Wuysthoff reported that the route by oxcart from Vietnam to Lakhôn (Thākhaek) which must have been via the Mu Gia pass took twenty-two days, a trek Vietnamese merchants made three times a year to buy silks and rhinoceros horns. Chinese merchants came only once every two years, leaving their carts in the north and sailing by boat downstream to Viang Chan, while Yunnanese Muslim traders brought their wares by pack horse into northern Laos. The Lao were eager to trade, but movement was slow and difficult. It took the Dutch party a little over three months to reach Viang Chan by boat from Phnom Penh. By contrast, it could take up to five months for heavily loaded carts to cross the Khōrāt plateau to Ayutthaya. Pack buffaloes carrying no more than 70 kilogrammes (155 pounds) usually took a shorter, more mountainous route, across passes in the Phetchabun range and down into the Chao Phraya basin, where goods would be transferred to river barges, a trip that took at least two months.[83]

Difficult though it was to reach Viang Chan, the trade was valuable enough for there to be intense competition between Lao, Siamese and Muslim (Malay, Indian, Persian and Arab) traders. The Dutch intention was to exploit Lao antipathy for the Siamese and what they took to be preference for themselves over the "Moors" to exclude both Siamese and Muslim traders arriving overland from Ayutthaya, and thus gain for the Company a monopoly of trade with Lān Xāng via Cambodia.[84] It is only unfortunate for our knowledge of Laos in the seventeenth, and indeed the eighteenth centuries, that van Wuysthoff's optimistic plans were never realized.

Despite his "meticulous researches", van Wuysthoff has little to say about finance or taxation, except to estimate revenue collection in gold at around 123 kilogrammes (270 pounds) per annum — most of which, he reported, was donated by the king to the Sangha.[85] Nor does he tell us much about the actual functioning of the economy, or the structure of Lao society. We know, however, that production was not through large-scale irrigation, but on extensive family plots, often individually irrigated, for land was plentiful. Surplus production was extracted through taxation and tribute to pay for the cost of the court and the lifestyle of the aristocracy.[86] Below the free, but exploited Lao peasantry came slaves and the ethnic minorities pejoratively referred to as *khā* (slaves). Indebtedness and capture in war continued to be the principal ways of falling into slavery. A slave could be freed only by royal amnesty; through payment of his debt by his family; or by being allowed to become a monk.[87] A special category of slaves were those attached to monasteries (*khā okād*), for donation of slaves as well as land or other forms of wealth to the Sangha were meritorious deeds.[88]

Van Wuysthoff does throw interesting light on relations between Lān Xāng and neighbouring *mandalas*. It would appear that relations were strained not only with Siam, but also with Cambodia and Vietnam. Lao dissatisfaction with Siam centered on the treatment accorded Lao merchants in Ayutthaya. Not only did the Siamese refuse to permit Lao traders to sell their goods freely, forcing them to sell only to certain nobles at artificially low prices, but the same officials actively discouraged access to Laos by foreign merchants and missionaries.[89] This may simply have been in order to retain a Siamese monopoly of trade, but it also effectively deprived Lān Xāng of the wealth and weapons the Lao might otherwise have obtained from direct trade with either the Dutch or Portuguese. Surinyavongsā seems to have been well aware of the effect of these restrictions and was apparently eager to encourage direct trade with the Dutch.

Relations with Cambodia were also strained over matters of trade. The Cambodians would not allow even southern Lao traders from Champāsak further south than Sambor without papers issued by the Lao court officially identifying them as merchants. These could only be obtained from Viang Chan, hundreds of miles upstream. With papers in order, however, they were able to trade freely, without any of the delays encountered at Ayutthaya. Even so, the Lao were sufficiently concerned about relations with Cambodia to request van Wuysthoff to mediate on the king's behalf.[90]

Vietnam was then divided, with the Trinh in the north and the Nguyen in the south both claiming to rule on behalf of the powerless Le emperor. Relations

were strained with the Trinh over what appears to have been a border incursion during which Lao villagers were attacked and robbed. Van Wuysthoff reports that Surinyavongsā was so annoyed that he refused to accept the gifts and credentials of an ambassador from Tonkin, and ordered him to leave the country.[91] Subsequently relations improved. The Lao king was presented with a Trinh princess as a concubine, and an agreement was concluded defining jurisdiction over populations in the border region.[92]

It is significant that the frontiers of Lān Xāng as defined by border posts with neighbouring *mandalas* seem to have been clearly marked. Van Wuysthoff described "a wooden notice fixed to a tree on which was carved in Cambodian and in Lao that this was the division between the two kingdoms".[93] With Vietnam and Siam too the frontier points of contact were well recognized. A version of the Lao chronicles dating from 1656 says that throughout the reign of Surinyavongsā, Lān Xāng extended "from Lī Phī in the south to Phā Dai in the north" and that, facing north, "the left [of the kingdom] came into contact with Ayutthaya at the two Dū trees and the right came into contact with the Kaeo [Vietnamese] at the Sān Sām Ngā [Sān tree with three large branches] and Nam Mā Sām Khae [three arms of the Mā River]."[94] These limits should not be thought of as defining a territorial state in the modern European sense, nor did Lao people possess even a proto-nationalist awareness. The location of these frontier posts does give some indication, however, of the power of Lān Xāng to demand tribute within an area recognized by neighbouring *mandalas*. Even so the frontiers were under pressure, especially in the south where the Siamese outpost of Nakhôn Rāxasīmā (Khōrāt) gave Ayutthaya control of the southwestern sector of the Khōrāt plateau.[95]

Surinyavongsā was an absolute monarch, as remote as he was powerful. Apart from presiding over official functions and festivities, the king apparently secluded himself in his palace, leaving daily affairs in the hands of his nobles. Indeed the picture Leria has left us of the powers of the king reveals the extent to which Lān Xāng had adopted the Siamese, and thus ultimately the Khmer, notion of kingship.

> The King is absolute and independent and he recognizes none as higher than himself, neither as regards civil affairs, nor those of Religion. All land belongs to him as private property and he disposes as absolute Overlord of all his subjects' possessions .... Public functions, employment, honours, wealth, all belong to the King, who raises to the highest office in the Kingdom those who best please him; who causes pensions to be accorded them, and who deprives them of these

> sometimes during their very lifetime, and always at their death ... So as to inspire in his subjects a high degree of respect and veneration for his person, he rarely appears in public and withdraws himself more and more from their sight as time passes, preferring that his peoples should adore him rather as a hidden God than be recognized as being a man like themselves and of the same species ....[96]

Surinyavongsā's pretension to rule as a *cakkavattin*, a universal ruler demanding tribute from lesser "kings", and recognizing "none as higher than himself" was not accepted at face value by Leria. He discounted reports that Surinyavongsā received an annual tribute from Vietnam. He also doubted that Lān Xāng paid no tribute to Beijing, remarking sarcastically that even the rulers of Tonkin and Siam and others "much richer and more powerful" than the Lao monarch acknowledged the overlordship of the Emperor of China.[97] In actual fact, however, for more than a century, from 1614 to 1728, there is no record of any tribute mission from Lān Xāng to China, a period which covers the entire reign of Surinyavongsā.[98]

Though Surinyavongsā enjoyed absolute power he was not a despot, for he ruled in accordance with Buddhist precepts, known collectively as the Nititham.[99] Day-to-day administration of the kingdom was the responsibility of the *uparāt*. Below him in the administrative hierarchy according to Leria, came the seven governors of the seven "provinces" into which the kingdom was divided. These resided not at their provincial seats, but at Viang Chan, where they effectively functioned as central government officials leaving the administration of their provinces to their deputies (the *uparāt* of each *meuang*).[100] Each governor was responsible for collecting the annual tribute of his *meuang*, and for raising an army of retainers when the king commanded, which he would then personally lead into battle.

Van Wuysthoff who remained less than two months in the Lao capital, tells us that judicial and administrative functions were divided between members of a supreme council (evidently the *Sēnām Luang*) composed of five members of the royal family who together with ministers not of royal blood (presumably the principal *chau meuang*) were responsible for administration of the kingdom and relations with foreign states. Of the three senior ministers, the most powerful was "Assen", the Phrayā Saen Meuang, a man about forty years old, commander-in-chief of the army and governor of the capital and northern provinces.[101] To him, according to van Wuystoff, would fall the office of Regent in the event of the king's death. Since Surinyavongsā had at that time no children by his first queen, van Wuysthoff believed "Assen" to be his most likely successor. The second

most powerful minister, the Phrayā Chan, "aged 48 or 50", was the governor of Meuang Lakhôn (Sīkhōttabông), responsible for all of southern Laos.[102] The third minister, the Phrayā Meuang Kāng, named Lankan, was in charge of relations with foreign envoys. While the first two were equivalent in standing, Lankan ("aged about 36") was, in van Wuysthoff's view, much less powerful.[103] Another influential official van Wuysthoff mentioned by name was the royal treasurer, the king's maternal uncle, Komphan, whom he considered to be corrupt.[104]

Both the above accounts confirm what we know of the expanded administrative structure under Surinyavongsā. Below the king, three positions carried the rank of *chau* — the *uparāt, rāxavong* and *rāxabut*. All other senior officials held the rank of *phrayā*. The three chief *sēnā*, of the Right, Middle and Left, were each assisted by officials responsible for defence of the realm (ten), the court secretariat (seven), and administration (ten). Ten Brahmins were employed, mainly in a teaching capacity. Other departments supervised the royal treasury, the royal pages, guards of the palace, and policing of the city. There were also separate departments in charge of the royal drum corps, the royal music, for welcoming official guests, and for dealing with royal correspondence.[105] All officials were ranked, not as in the elaborate *sakdina* system in force in Ayutthaya in terms of rights to the produce of precise areas of land, but in terms of the fines payable for serious transgressions. Those of higher rank paid more for committing the same offence.[106] Thus in Lān Xāng, court officials or *chau meuang* of the same rank could "eat" the revenue of variably sized *meuang*.

Elaborate ceremonial surrounded the court, "whose splendour and brilliance is greatly enhanced by ... the almost incredible number of pages" waiting upon the king. All who sought employment or preferment, Leria noted, depended entirely on the king's pleasure. At court all competed for rank and honour, and the wealth and status that came with them. The relative social standing of the Lao aristocracy, according to Leria, was designated by the size and shape of the gold and silver betel nut boxes they carried in ceremonial processions behind the king and *uparāt* on their richly caparisoned elephants and the regional governors in their ornamented carrying chairs.[107]

If the inner functioning of the court was something of a mystery, the power and prestige of the Buddhist Sangha was readily apparent to European visitors. Van Wuysthoff had little understanding of or interest in "idolatrous" Buddhism, but from his brief comments it is obvious that Viang Chan was a city of temples and a major centre of Buddhist studies. Monks, van Wuysthoff reported in

wonder, were "as numerous as the soldiers of the Emperor of Germany", and included many from Cambodia and Siam who came to spend up to ten or twelve years studying in the Lao capital.[108] We can be sure that others also came from Chiang Mai, Keng Tung and the Sipsông Pan Nā then under Burmese suzerainty. Both Leria and van Wuysthoff remarked on the lavishness of royal endowments. But gifts to monasteries, apart from their religious significance, had economic importance. Monastic expenditure employed large numbers of craftsmen and artists, and thereby circulated wealth in much the same way that monasteries did in medieval Europe.[109] What is unclear is whether or not, and if so to what extent, gifts to the Sangha undermined the tax base in Lān Xāng, as occurred in Burma.

Father Leria, as might be expected, took a much closer interest in Lao Buddhism. Van Wuysthoff's two assistants who remained a few weeks longer than their superior recorded not only Leria's arrival in July 1642, but also the conditions laid down for him to "teach": he was to shave his head, dress like the Lao (probably as a monk), learn to read and write Lao, and teach only what was "within the limits of Lao belief".[110] Though the good Father must have been offended by being told to don the yellow robe of a Buddhist monk, he did learn Lao and, despite the polemical tone of his account, developed a good working knowledge of Buddhist dogma.[111] He understood the structure of Buddhist cosmology, its heavens and hells, its belief that the universe was eternal, not created, and the process of reincarnation. Attempts to refute such beliefs in discussions with the more learned monks got nowhere, and he railed at the "impiety" of those who refused to accept his "true faith". He professed to be scandalized by the wealth the Sangha accumulated (he makes no comparisons with Rome), and was critical of the lax morals of the monks and the fees they demanded for their services. If we can accept de Marini's account as reflecting Leria's sentiments, in the end he came to detest his monastic opponents, condemning "these miserable and blind Talapoi [monks]" as Pharisees.[112]

Leria attempted to have the ban on evangelizing reversed by ingratiating himself with court officials through his technical knowledge, often an effective Jesuit ploy. His plans for locks on the Mekong to improve navigation and facilitate commerce failed, however, to impress Surinyavongsā, who believed it would open Lān Xāng to attack by its enemies.[113] Frustrated at every turn, Leria came to be as resentful of the "Mandarins" he encountered as he was of the monks. Yet he was fulsome in his praise for the honesty, simplicity and courteousness of the common people.

> Generally speaking they are all very affable, accommodating, open to reason, and very respectful, neither quarrelsome nor obstinate, but obliging and submissive when they are approached in good faith.[114]

Leria thought the Lao lazy, however, apparently because they were not unduly acquisitive, though he admitted they had more than enough by way of food and other necessities to live comfortably. Nature was abundant, far more so east of the Mekong, according to Leria who must have done some travelling, than on the Khōrāt plateau. Like van Wuysthoff, Leria was impressed by the wealth of the country. Ivory was available "in as large quantities as any other place whatever, and perhaps in greater",[115] and he mentioned in addition to the products that interested van Wuysthoff cotton, wax, honey, and minerals including lead, tin and iron. Leria may not have considered his time in Lān Xāng well spent, but for all his prejudice against Buddhism and his animus towards monks and "Mandarins", he has left us the fullest account available of Lān Xāng at the time of its greatness.

By all accounts, Surinyavongsā was a just and beneficent ruler who was scrupulous in his enforcement of the law.[116] Internal order was maintained by imposing the death penalty for banditry, theft and adultery. Fines or forced labour (a form of slavery) were more common punishments, however, especially for anyone of rank or status. Those protesting their innocence often had to undergo some test of truth, such as being immersed up to the neck in water (if the river rises, guilt is proved), or being banished to the forest (survival for a period of time proving innocence).

The only recorded conflict or rebellion occurred in 1651-1652 when the ruler of Xiang Khuang refused Surinyavongsā the hand of his daughter in marriage.[117] Infuriated, the king despatched an army which laid waste the Phuan region, carried off some five hundred families for resettlement near the Lao capital, and forced Meuang Phuan to renounce its nominal tributary relationship with (northern) Vietnam.

Despite the order and prosperity of the kingdom, however, life for the common people was far from easy. From the Vat Lingxan version of the chronicles of Viang Chan, we learn of a smallpox epidemic in 1683 that took many lives and lasted over a year. Five years later drought struck of such intensity that rice became extremely expensive and starving dogs were so weak they were forced to "rest against fences". Other droughts are recorded, and in 1691 there was a severe flood.[118] But if natural disasters were keenly analyzed

as portents by the court astrologers, they were part and parcel of everyday existence for the peasantry, for whom war and civil conflict due to the ambitions and cupidity of their masters had similarly severe consequences.

We can gain some insight into the imaginative world of ordinary Lao people from the stories they listened to with such eager attention for hour after hour as the night wore on during some *bun* at the local *vat*. By the time of Surinyavongsā much of the oral folk literature that was the common heritage of the northern Tai world — Yuan, Leu, Lao, Shan — had been given literary form in prose or verse.[119] In the process these stories, copied and recopied by Buddhist monks, were imbued with Buddhist values. Heroes who fought with demons were *bodhisattvas* on the path to Buddhahood, their valiant deeds making spiritual merit. Even those stories which embroidered the historical exploits of kings and warriors, or recounted imaginary episodes in the life of some divine being or royal hero, inculcated Buddhist cautionary morality. Yet the spirit world which played so prominent a part in all these stories was still identifiably Lao, complete with *phī* both malignant and benign.[120]

The most popular classical Lao stories were those Anatole-Roger Peltier has called "novels with an initiatory theme".[121] These tell in stereotypical plots either how a hero-prince learns magical powers which enable him to defeat demons and win princesses, or trace the fortunes of an orphan destined to be king, thanks to the help of a clever and resourceful wife. In all such stories, the secondary characters are immediatly recognizable: the beautiful princess; the hermit who imparts his magical knowledge; the wise interpreter of dreams and omens; the covetous king; and all the supernatural beings from Indra, king of the gods, down to those minor spirits whose intervention ensured the expected outcome that time after time would elicit the approval of the wrapt and attentive audience as the recital came to an end.

To make the recital more immediate for local audiences, stories were often set within a recognizable geographical context. In all, according to Peltier's analysis, we find a distinction drawn between the natural world, the forest and jungle that covered most of Lān Xāng where powerful demons lurked, and the civilized space of village, monastery, and palace. In the Lao worldview, opposites interpenetrate: illusion and reality, spirits and human beings, jungle and cleared land. For the Lao Lum peasantry, the forest was a fearful place of danger to be avoided. But its demons could be vanquished by those with the requisite merit, and whom divine forces assisted. The supernatural was taken for granted. Miraculous happenings, magical powers, the influence of stars and omens, ghosts

and *phī*, were an unquestioned part of everyday life for all Lao. Astrology determined the auspicious times for all major undertakings, so personal horoscopes had regularly to be consulted. The power of evil spirits could only be guarded against by observing the necessary taboos, performing appropriate ceremonies of propitiation, and following the Buddhist precepts of morality and merit-making, which the stories assiduously promoted.[122]

The interpenetration of the real and supernatural is also evident in Lao beliefs about personal health and medicine. Sickness was usually ministered to by monks using a wide variety of herbal cures made by grinding and pounding various roots, bark and leaves, or through heat cupping and massage (though not acupuncture). More serious illness and disease were believed to be due to possession of the body by malign spirits. Even those *phī* associated with natural phenomena could afflict human beings whose vital forces (in the form of thirty-two "souls") were depleted. The most feared, however, were the *phī phop* and the *phī phai*. While the former sought out human hosts, the latter particularly attacked mothers at childbirth when they were most vulnerable. Exorcism of the malignant *phī* was then essential. This was usually done through a combination of sacrifice (of a chicken or pig) at the *hô phī*, the altar of the spirits, located at the edge of the forest beyond the outskirts of the village, along with the incantation of powerful Buddhist *mantras*. Chanting before a magic diagram (*yantra*) was believed to be efficacious, as was circling the patient in a dance to the playing of a *khaen* that could last for two to three hours.[123]

Though the seventeenth century was a time of peace, thanks to Surinyavongsā's unchallenged authority, two developments fatally weakened Lān Xāng during his reign. One was due to his own unbending nature, while the other was beyond his control. When his only son, Chau Rāxabut, was found guilty of adultery with the wife of a palace servant, Surinyavongsā refused, despite pleas by court officials, to make an exception, and ordered his execution. As a result, when the stern old king died he left no legitimate heir of legal age and the kingdom was once again plunged into a crisis of succession.

The development which Surinyavongsā was powerless to prevent was the adverse balance of advantage developing between Lān Xāng, the only remaining independent inland *mandala*, and its coastal neighbours. As the seventeenth century drew to a close, trade to and from Viang Chan continued to be limited and costly. Lao exports were effectively confined to relatively light and valuable products, such as gold, benzoin, sticklac, musk, ivory, rhinoceros horns, rare skins, and embroidered silks.[124] Little trade in bulk produce, such as rice or

timber, was possible. Even what trade there was could too easily be blocked, and its value siphoned off at the point of export. The Lao trade was valuable for Siam, but its benefits for Lān Xāng were never commensurate with its real export value.

As an inland kingdom, Lān Xāng was prevented from entering into direct relations with Western merchants. But for trade with Yunnan, exchange was indirect via neighbouring kingdoms. Among other disadvantages, these circumstances made it difficult to keep abreast of changing military technology and tactics. More powerful and more accurate European firearms reduced the value of elephants in warfare, while the availability of European mercenaries and purchase of European weapons (especially artillery) meant that advantage lay ever more decisively with those kingdoms which had the means to pay for them.[125] What wealth Lān Xāng did possess seems to have been expended primarily on the monastic order and the court, rather than on equipping its army. By the late seventeenth century, the power of Lān Xāng, despite the magnificence of its capital and the pomp and pageantry of its ceremonial, was already in relative decline *vis-à-vis* its more powerful neighbours. The dynastic collapse of the early eighteenth century merely exacerbated an already deteriorating situation.

Chapter 4

Disintegration of the Lao *Mandala*

In the late seventeenth century under Surinyavongsā, the *mandala* of Lān Xāng enjoyed both unity and prosperity. To the east and west, both Vietnam and Burma were divided into antagonistic kingdoms. Neither they, nor the semi-independent *mandala* of Lān Na, still tributary to Burma, offered any serious military threat to Lān Xāng. To the south, Cambodia was in decline, beset by succession disputes. Only the growing power of Ayutthaya posed any challenge to the security of the Lao *mandala*.

The Tai-Sayām population had expanded rapidly as the alluvial plains of the central Chao Phraya were brought under intensive cultivation. More importantly, by the latter half of the seventeenth century Ayutthaya had become a major regional trading port.[1] Siamese tolerance towards foreigners, their readiness to permit the establishment of permanent trading communities at Ayutthaya and other ports, and even to countenance the continued proselytization by foreign missionaries, had encouraged the rapid growth of foreign contacts and trade. Chinese, Burmese, Malay, Indian, Portuguese, Dutch, Danish, English and French merchants sailed their ships up the Chao Phraya, built their warehouses, and loaded their cargoes. In the half-century between the arrival of van Wuysthoff in Viang Chan and the death of Surinyavongsā, no other European traders made their arduous way up the Mekong. Yet during this same period, Siamese trade flourished, Siamese officials were drawn into the international world of commerce, and Siamese kings exchanged letters and embassies with European monarchs. Relations with European powers may not always have been smooth the Mergui massacre of English traders in 1687 and expulsion of the French the following year for interference in the country's internal affairs strained relations - but there was always the China trade, and Siam continued to benefit from its commercial contacts at a time when Laos was more hermetically isolated than Japan.

Lān Xāng was little affected by the profound economic changes occurring throughout Southeast Asia in the late seventeenth century. No European merchants that we know of penetrated as far as the middle Mekong. But as the least known of all the Southeast Asian kingdoms, Lān Xāng continued to exercise something of the same fascination for European travellers as did Tibet. Late seventeenth and eighteenth century European accounts of visits to Siam often included hearsay reports of the mysterious kingdom of the Lao. Engelbert Kaempfer, writing of his visit to Ayutthaya in 1690, included a brief account of "little known" Laos "an Inland Country, and remote from the Sea", describing it as "a large and powerful Kingdom" a month's journey north of the Siamese capital and "very difficult of access". It was, he declared, reputed to be "a fruitful Country" producing "Rice of the best kind in abundance" and renowned for its benzoin, gumlac, gold and precious stones. As a people, Kaempfer reported, the Lao were "of a much handsomer appearance than the Siamites", despite tattooing their legs, and as if to excuse his limited information, he noted that trade was down the Mekong to Cambodia, rather than via Siam.[2]

Apart from its exclusion from international trade, what finally led to disintegration of the *mandala* of Lān Xāng, was the destructive series of succession disputes that followed the death of Surinyavongsā. None of the principal contenders for the throne was able to mobilize the necessary resources, economic, political and military, convincingly to defeat his rivals. No strong leader arose to seize power, enforce his will over the factious and self-interested regional nobility, and reverse the kingdom's slow relative decline *vis-à-vis* more powerful neighbours. Within two decades, Lān Xāng had been reduced to three, at times four, mutually antagonistic kingdoms, each jealous of its independence, yet each eventually falling prey to the interference of outside powers. Vietnamese, Burmese and Siamese all took advantage of intra-Lao disunity to advance their own interests at the expense of those of the weakened and divided Lao *meuang*.

The Legacy of Surinyavongsā

When Surinyavongsā died in 1695, his only direct heirs in the male line were two young grandsons, Kingkitsarāt and Inthasōm, the children of Surinyavongsā's only son whom he had allowed to be executed for adultery.[3] Instead of establishing a regency, however, the throne was usurped by the Phrayā Meuang Chan, who in turn was overthrown six months later by a cousin of

Surinyavongsā, Chau Nantharāt, the powerful governor of Sīkhōttabông.[4] Very little information is available on the confusing events of this period — and what there is is often contradictory. It would seem, however, that Nantharāt too was incapable of controlling the endemic factionalism of the Lao aristocracy, for at this point yet another claimant to the throne of Lān Xāng made his presence felt. Xai Ong Vē, the son of Surinyavongsā's elder brother, had been brought up in Vietnam where his father had sought asylum. In return for a pledge to recognize the suzerainty of the Emperor of Vietnam (Le Duy Hiep) and pay a tribute of silver ingots, elephants, ivory and rhinoceros horns, Xai Ong Vē was given assistance to raise a small army to march against Viang Chan. The city fell, Nantharāt was either killed in battle or executed, and Kingkitsarāt and Inthasōm fled in fear of their lives to their maternal family in the Sipsông Phan Nā. In 1698 Xai Ong Vē mounted the throne of Lān Xāng, calling himself Xētthāthirāt II.[5] For the next five years he fought to establish his rule, particularly over the middle Mekong where he encountered opposition from Sīkhōttabông.[6] In 1706, the king despatched his first triennial tribute mission to Hanoi, obtaining in return the hand of a Trinh princess.[7]

Xai Ong Vē had appointed his half-brother, Chau Nong, governor of Luang Phrabāng. In 1705, however, Chau Nong fled the city in the face of a threatened attack by yet another claimant to the throne of Lān Xāng, taking with him the hallowed *Phra Bāng*. The new player was Surinyavongsā's grandson, Kingkitsarāt (by then come of age) who had been given refuge by his uncle, the ruler of Xiang Hung in the Sipsông Phan Nā. He and his cousin, Chau Ong Kham (also known as Ong Nôk) immediately sought to capitalize on their victory at Luang Phrabāng by attacking Viang Chan. Xai Ong Vē's forces were thrown on the defensive, and it seemed only a matter of time before the northern army succeeded in taking the capital.

At this point it was the Siamese turn to intervene. At the desperate request of Xai Ong Vē, the king of Ayutthaya assembled a large army and in 1707 marched north. Instead of throwing his support behind Xai Ong Vē, whose daughter he had accepted in marriage,[8] the Siamese king took advantage of his position as power broker to enforce a peace in his own interests by dividing Lān Xāng at Xiang Khan on the great bend of the Mekong west of Viang Chan.[9] Kingkitsarāt had to be content with the kingdom of Luang Phrabāng, while Xai Ong Vē was reduced to becoming king of Viang Chan. Though each continued to claim the mantle of Lān Xāng, both were beholden to Ayutthaya.

Once the Siamese had withdrawn, the weakened state of Viang Chan

encouraged further rebellion. Meuang Phuan refused to pay tribute.[10] An army was despatched from Viang Chan, which, according to the Phuan chronicles, succeeded not only in reducing Xiang Khuang to vassal status, but also in wresting the region of Huaphan from the suzerainty of Luang Phrabāng.[11] In 1709 the ruler of Meuang Sīkhōttabông (known by then more commonly as Lakhôn) renounced his allegiance to Xai Ong Vē, raised an army, and marched against Viang Chan. The rebellion was quelled, but regionalist sentiment remained strong in the south.

In 1713, opposition came to a head in the successful revolt of Champāsak. In the early eighteenth century, the *meuang* of Champāsak still had a substantial Khmer and Lao Thoeng population, though migration of Tai-Lao peasants and traders had been occurring for centuries, and when van Wuysthoff sailed upstream in 1641 the area was already administered by a Lao official. According to the chronicles of Champāsak, at the time of Surinyavongsā's death, an elderly but probably legendary queen named Nāng Phau and her illegitimate daughter are said to have been jointly ruling the *meuang*. As Charles Archaimbault has shown, both play mythic roles in accounts of the foundation of Champāsak as an independent kingdom. If there is any kernel of historical fact to be gleaned from the story of Nāng Phau, it may be that her daughter was the fruit of miscegenation between Lao Lum and Lao Thoeng, and that it was this rather than her seduction (said to have been by a Lao prince) that was responsible for the curse believed to lie upon the country.[12]

We are on somewhat firmer historical ground with later developments. Upon her father's death, Surinyavongsā's elder daughter, Sumangkhala, had been forced to flee Viang Chan in fear for her life. She was pregnant at the time, and gave birth on her way south to her second son, Nôkasāt. While his older brother, Ong Lô, may well have fallen victim to the factional strife in Viang Chan, Nôkasāt apparently grew up in relative obscurity in a village near Nakhôn Phanom. In the meantime, to escape the upheavals in Viang Chan, a charismatic monk named Phra Khū led several thousand of his faithful followers south, settling first at Nakhôn Phanom before moving to northern Cambodia.[13] From there he was invited (supposedly by the elderly Nāng Phau) to move to Champāsak where he became virtual ruler. Only when his authority was challenged did he invite Nôkasāt to become king. To popular local acclaim Nôkasāt was duly enthroned as King Sôysīsamut Phutthāngkūn, thereby symbolically establishing an independent line of descent from Khun Bôrom via the royal house of Lān Xāng (down to Surinyavongsā), while at the same time renouncing allegiance to Viang

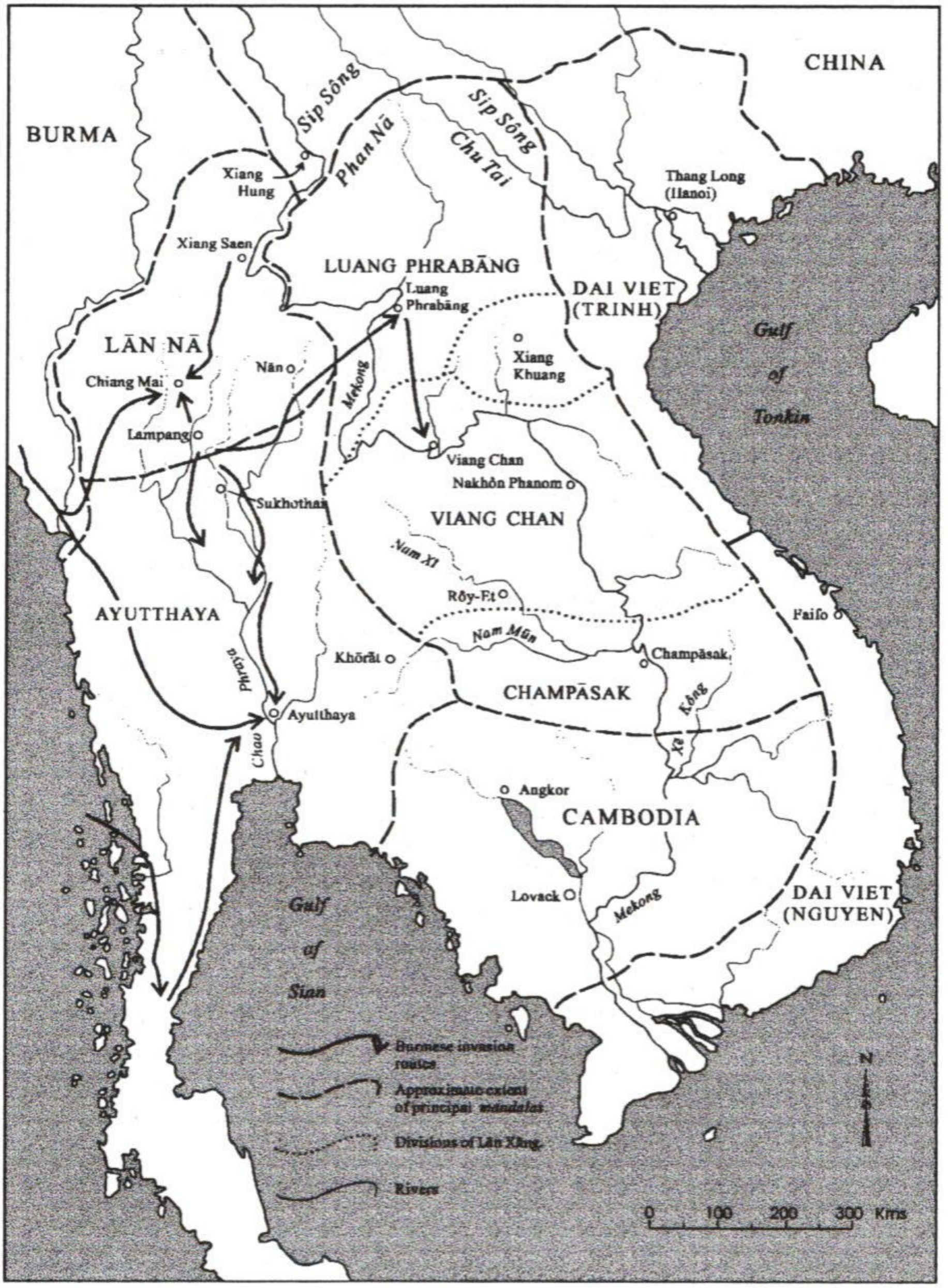
Chan.[14] To this further challenge, Xai Ong Vē was too weak to respond. All the region south of the Xē Bang Hiang River as far as Stung Treng (Xiang Taeng), together with the lower Mūn and Xī river valleys on the Khōrāt plateau, became an independent *mandala*,[15] which within sixty-five years fell easy prey to the growing power of Siam.

Within twenty-three years of the death of Surinyavongsā, the once mighty *mandala* of Lān Xāng had been dismembered by his nephews and grandsons to form three weak and shakily independent kingdoms, corresponding to the natural geographical regions of northern, central, and southern Laos. It was all Viang Chan could do to retain control over Meuang Phuan. The ruling family in each regional kingdom legitimized its succession through traditional means: descent from Khun Bôrom via the ruling dynasty of Lān Xang, reinforced by the magical power of a Buddhist image venerated with the assistance of the local Sangha as the palladium of the kingdom. Through their division and vulnerability, however, the weakened Lao kingdoms invited the interference of more powerful neighbouring *mandalas*. No strong Lao ruler arose to re-forge the unity of Lān Xāng. Only the Burmese invasions of Siam in the 1760s temporarily permitted the Lao kingdoms to play off one contending power against another. Less than two decades later, all three had been forced to acknowledge Siamese suzerainty.

Less is known about the history of the Lao kingdoms in the mid-eighteenth century than about either Lān Xāng under Surinyavongsā or the period following the resurgence of Siamese power after 1767. In large part this is due to the destruction of records both when Ayutthaya fell to the Burmese (1767), and when Viang Chan was sacked by the armies of Bangkok (1827-1828). No European merchant, missionary, traveller or diplomat left any first-hand account of the Lao kingdoms during this period. Indeed, as far as we know, none even paid a visit. All we have to go on are a few brief, sometimes contradictory references in disappointingly sparse regional chronicles, referring almost exclusively to the activities of kings and nobles or religious events. Thus in 1730 and again six years later the Thāt Phanom chronicle tells us that villages in Sīkhōttabông were devastated by warfare, but who was fighting whom, and why, is not recorded.

Though years often go by without an entry, the various versions of the short chronicles of Viang Chan do occasionally provide a glimpse of what life must have been like for the common people. Natural disasters such as floods and droughts were succinctly noted, but would have had devastating effects. In 1765 and again in 1771 eclipses occurred.[16] Also recorded were military expeditions and forced resettlement to concentrate population where people could more easily

The Lao Kingdom of Lān Xāng



The Division of Lān Xāng: 18th - 19th Century

be taxed and conscripted to work or fight, for war captives were still a major source of wealth. While war often depleted food supplies, occasionally to the point of starvation, forced relocation required the burdensome reconstruction of villages, which often meant carting materials considerable distances. Taxation must have been heavy. There are records of costly pagodas and bridges being constructed, requiring corvée labour, which would also have been requisitioned to repair the damage caused by frequent warfare. As usual the common people bore the burden of the folly and ambition of their rulers. Popular attitudes are best revealed in two collections of stories many of which date from this period. While the *Siao Savāt* tells of a commoner whose clever advice leads the king to appoint him as chief minister, the *Xiang Miang* takes a satirical and irreverent view of authority, ridiculing both the nobility and the Sangha for their self-centredness, greed and stupidity.[17]

The chronicles of Luang Phrabāng provide slightly more information about the northern kingdom. After defeating a challenge by his younger brother Inthasōm, Kingkitsarāt ruled fairly and happily, we are told, until his death in 1713, when the throne passed to the *uparāt*, Ong Kham (Ong Nôk). The Tai-Leu prince was, however, immediately challenged by his cousin, Inthasōm, who gathered an army, descended the Nam Ū, and threatened Luang Phrabāng. In order to avoid bloodshed, and to prevent further outside interference, Ong Kham invited Inthasōm to become *uparāt* and share in ruling the kingdom. The rivalry between the two cousins continued, however, and led eventually to Inthasōm's seizure of the throne in 1723 while Ong Kham was on a hunting trip. Ong Kham fled with his family to Chiang Mai where he took refuge in a monastery. On the death of the king, Ong Kham was offered the throne of Lān Nā by a faction at court determined to drive out the Burmese. In this he was successful, and Ong Kham continued to rule Chiang Mai until his death in 1759.[18] Meanwhile in Luang Phrabāng, Inthasōm despatched the first of a number of Lao tribute missions to China for more than a century (in 1729), in an obvious bid to reinforce his claim to his throne.[19]

When Xai Ong Vē died, probably in 1735, the throne of Viang Chan passed to his half-brother Ong Long.[20] It seems that Xiang Khuang once again seized the opportunity to renounce its tributary relationship with Viang Chan. The details of this revolt, which may also have involved a succession dispute,[21] and of Viang Chan's successful reimposition of its hegemony given in some accounts may, however, refer to events which actually occurred some forty years later.[22] In Luang Phrabāng, we are told only that when Inthasōm died (in 1749) he was

succeeded briefly by his ninth son, Inthaphom, who had successfully defeated a Vietnamese expeditionary force despatched to demand tribute — apparently in the belief that acceptance of Vietnamese suzerainty over Lān Xāng by Xai Ong Vē in 1696 extended also to Luang Phrabāng.[23] Within eight months, however, the young king abdicated, apparently willingly, in favour of his oldest brother Xōtikakumāra.[24]

As for Champāsak, we know more about miraculous statues than political developments, for these provided necessary religious legitimation. In 1724, a crystal image of the Buddha was discovered, which, after some misadventure was ceremoniously enshrined as the palladium of the new dynasty. The king responsible, Sôysīsamut, has traditionally been credited with establishing the kingdom of Champāsak on a firm legal and administrative foundation based on the model of Lān Xāng. He also actively encouraged Tai-Lao migration in both southern Laos and the southern Khōrāt plateau, and extended the territory of Champāsak at least as far south as Stung Treng (Xiang Taeng). In 1737, Sôysīsamut was succeeded by his son, Xainyakumān, who proved to be as pious as his father. Another discovery of a miraculous statue of the Buddha was recorded. Xainyakumān also undertook a series of administrative reforms and appointments aimed at strengthening his political control. In so doing, however, he inadvertently prepared the way for ambitious rivals later to contest the throne.[25]

Burmese, Siamese and Lao

The year 1760, when Siribunnyasān succeeded his father Ong Long on the throne of Viang Chan, marked a turning point in the history of the region. Three years before, King Alaunghpaya had restored the unity of Burma by capturing the Mon capital of Pegu. With Burma reunified, Alaunghpaya turned his attention to the ancient enemy, Siam. In a lightning campaign, the Burmese king seized a series of Siamese cities on the Kra Isthmus before advancing north against Ayutthaya. By April, the Siamese capital was under siege and might well have fallen had not an exploding artillery piece injured the king, who died on his way back to Pegu.

The Burmese did not take long to return to the attack. In 1763 a Burmese army took Chiang Mai after a prolonged siege. When a local insurrection expelled the Burmese garrison, swift retaliation brought all Lān Nā once again under Burmese domination.[26] The Burmese king, Hsinbyushin, then turned his attention to Luang Phrabāng, whose king at the time was Xōtikakumāra.

According to the chronicles of Luang Phrabāng, this Burmese invasion was at the instigation of Viang Chan, but it is just as likely to have been for strategic reasons, to strengthen the Burmese position before the subsequent invasion of Ayutthaya.[27] Luang Phrabāng fell in March 1765. The Burmese confirmed King Xōtikakumāra as their vassal, but took the precaution of carrying off six hundred hostages, including the king's younger brother, Surinyavong, as guarantors for his good behaviour. King Siribunnyasān had already prudently entered into alliance with the Burmese, so Viang Chan escaped similar destruction. Reinforced by levies from the Shan principalities, Lān Nā, and the Lao kingdoms, the Burmese next turned their attention to Siam. One after another the northern Siamese cities surrendered. Meanwhile a second Burmese army was again advancing from the south. The two armies met outside the walls of Ayutthaya in February 1766. Siamese resistance had been indecisive and ineffective, and all attempts to lift the Burmese siege failed. Offers of negotiation were rejected by Hsinbyushin, and the city finally fell, after holding out for more than a year, on 7 April 1767. This time Ayutthaya was put to the sack and the great city of palaces and temples totally destroyed. Thousands of Siamese, including most of the royal family, were carried off to captivity in Burma.[28]

Siribunnyasān's response to these events was to make peace with the Burmese, lest a similar fate befall Viang Chan. In July 1769, he sent his daughter together with a number of elephants and other lavish gifts to become one of Hsinbyushin's queens. It took little more than a year, however, for a young military commander, son of a Chinese father and a Siamese mother, to rally Siamese forces and begin to reconstitute the Siamese *mandala*. Taksin was crowned king at Thonburi, opposite Bangkok, in December 1768. It took him a further year and a half to regain control over the northern towns of Phitsanulok and Fāng. By 1771, when King Siribunnyasān of Viang Chan turned to the Burmese for assistance against Luang Phrabāng, Siam was once again a powerful imperial *mandala* dominating all of central Thailand, western Cambodia and much of the Malay peninsula. Within less than a decade, the Burmese had been expelled, and Lān Nā and all three Lao states had submitted to Siamese suzerainty.[29] By the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, further conquests by Taksin's successor, King Rama I, would extend the Siamese *mandala* to include almost all of Cambodia, the northern Malay states, much of the Sipsông Phan Nā, and the eastern Shan plateau. Siam was at the height of its power.

The remarkable recovery of Siam after the sack of Ayutthaya contrasted with

the continued inability of any Lao king to take advantage of events to reconstitute the *mandala* of Lān Xāng. Luang Phrabāng and Viang Chan were too evenly matched for either to defeat the other without support from some outside power. Yet any intervention only added to the bitterness and recrimination that marked the mutual relations of the two kingdoms. Particularly bitter was Surinyavong, the young prince of Luang Phrabāng taken hostage by the Burmese in 1765. He blamed Viang Chan both for the Burmese attack, and for his own fate. When sent by the Burmese as commander of a Lao contingent forming part of a military expedition into the Sipsông Phan Nā in 1768 Surinyavong took the opportunity to flee east to Meuang Thaeng (Dien Bien Phu) in the Sipsông Chu Tai. Not until after Taksin had destroyed Burmese power in central Thailand did Surinyavong judge it safe to return to Luang Phrabāng. His request to do so was rejected by King Xōtikakumāra, who feared his brother's ambitions. Thereupon Surinyavong raised an army (from Huaphan and the Sipsông Chu Tai) and marched on Luang Phrabāng. The king fled — only to abdicate in return for a quiet life — leaving Surinyavong free to plan revenge against Viang Chan.[30]

King Siribunnyasān of Viang Chan meanwhile had more than the hostility of Luang Phrabāng to contend with. Early in his reign, rebellion again broke out in the region of Nakhôn Phanom when the son of the former deposed governor of Sīkhōttabông attempted, with Vietnamese support, to seize the town.[31] He was defeated by a force from Viang Chan which inflicted heavy losses on the Vietnamese. A second rebellion was to have more far-reaching consequences. From "nearly twenty" often contradictory versions of these events, David Wyatt has pieced together a composite account on which the following is largely based.[32] Phra Vôrarāt had been a prominent supporter of Siribunnyasān's claim to the throne of Viang Chan. For this Vôrarāt apparently expected high rewards, which, not being of noble blood, he failed to receive. Together with his followers, he thereupon withdrew to Nong Bua Lamphū, in the region of Udôn, eighty kilometres (fifty miles) south of Viang Chan, where he proclaimed his independence.[33] King Siribunnyasān appealed for help from the Siamese governor of Nakhôn Rāxasīmā to put down this challenge to his authority, but the conflict remained unresolved. Vôrarāt thereupon appealed to the Burmese for support. A Burmese army was despatched from Chiang Mai, but was intercepted by envoys from Siribunnyasān. Apparently under the terms of a secret agreement, the Burmese agreed not to intervene. The Vôrorāt rebellion was eventually put down with Siamese assistance in a joint attack on Nong Bua Lamphū, though Vôrarāt himself escaped and sought refuge in Champāsak.[34]

From what later transpired, it would seem that part of the secret deal Siribunnyasān struck with the Burmese was that Viang Chan would support a subsequent Burmese invasion of Siam by attacking Nakhôn Rāxasīmā. To ensure Lao compliance, the Burmese abducted as hostages a number of Siribunnyasān's children and courtiers. But Siribunnyasān also had to contend with the growing power of Siam. Caught between two powerful foes, he seems to have been forced into playing a dangerous double game. In 1771, he entered into correspondence with Taksin in a fascinating exchange of letters which miraculously have survived.[35] These letters and the events surrounding them are worth examining in some detail for the light they throw on the desperate diplomatic moves by the Viang Chan court faced with the rising power of Siam.

Taksin seems at first to have been suspicious of Lao overtures to renew the earlier alliance between the two kingdoms, and may well have suspected treachery. Perhaps in the hope of neutralizing Viang Chan, however, he agreed in principle to a diplomatic marriage to Siribunnyasān's daughter at some future date.[36] In the meantime, Taksin had "but a single goal: to strengthen Siam".[37] To this end he needed to minimize any possibility of Lao collusion with the Burmese still occupying Lān Nā. His task was made easier by the continuing hostility between Luang Phrabāng and Viang Chan, which meant there was little likelihood of coordinated opposition to Siamese designs on the part of the Lao *meuang*. Surinyavong's first act on becoming king of Luang Phrabāng in place of his brother, had been to seek revenge against Viang Chan.[38] When an army from Luang Phrabāng laid siege to Viang Chan, Siribunnyasān again sought assistance from the Burmese in Lān Nā. Reports that a Burmese army was advancing on Luang Phrabāng forced Surinyavong to raise his siege of Viang Chan in order to defend his own capital. After a battle lasting fifteen days, Surinyavong was forced temporarily to accept Burmese suzerainty,[39] which can have done nothing to reduce the intensity of his anger against Viang Chan.

Taksin's response to these events was to offer Siamese protection to Luang Phrabāng in an alliance against the Burmese.[40] Surinyavong apparently took the opportunity presented by these contacts to undermine the relationship he knew existed between Siam and Viang Chan. He informed Taksin of the secret agreement committing Siribunnyasān to join the Burmese in attacking Siam.[41] Taksin was by then far advanced in preparations for his own military expedition against the Burmese. Towards the end of 1774, Taksin marched north. Even though Siribunnyasān procrastinated sufficiently to avoid committing major forces on the side of the Burmese, the surrender of a contingent of Lao troops near

Chiang Mai seems to have convinced Taksin of Siribunnyasān's perfidy.

Another exchange of embassies and letters then took place, in which Taksin issued veiled threats against Viang Chan unless Siribunnyasān agreed to contribute men and supplies to his struggle against the Burmese.[42] Siribunnyasān pleaded coercion by the Burmese, who still held a number of his children as hostages. He was prepared to cooperate fully, he informed Taksin, but he could not afford openly to take the Siamese side until his children were returned, and he asked for assistance in this regard. Siribunnyasān's letter was accompanied by a fuller explanation from palace officials and a letter from the Supreme Patriarch of the Lao Sangha to his counterpart in Thonburi corroborating the king's account.

In his reply, Taksin seemed unconvinced by these protestations, and became more peremptory in his demands that Siribunnyasān accept Siamese suzerainty, and provide military aid. At the time, Taksin needed all the reinforcements he could command for his northern expedition, and a quantity of gifts for Siribunnyasān and his household accompanied this latest Siamese missive. Throughout these negotiations, Siribunnyasān was careful not to commit himself to either side. Chiang Mai fell to the Siamese in February 1775, but the outcome of the struggle remained in doubt until the last Burmese stronghold of Chiang Saen surrendered in 1804. Not until after the fall of Chiang Mai, when the advantage appeared to be shifting decisively in favour of the Siamese, did Siribunnyasān again offer one of his daughters to Taksin in marriage. He also offered to supply 500 oxcarts of rice for the Siamese army, provided Taksin arranged transportation, and requested 2,000 rifles to be delivered when the Siamese arrived to escort the Lao princess to Thonburi. But the offer came too late: Taksin was tired of Siribunnyasān's procrastination, and was determined to bring matters to a head. Taksin's reply is the last letter preserved in this intriguing correspondence. It was dated September 1776, at a time when Siamese forces were engaged in finally driving the Burmese from Lān Na. Taksin informed Siribunnyasān that he was prepared to provide the firearms, but only if the Lao joined forces with him against the Burmese; he had no need of rice; and it was not a convenient time to escort the princess to Thonburi.[43] The message was clear. Siribunnyasān had avoided acknowledging Siamese suzerainty through refusing to provide any assistance for the Siamese conquest of Lān Nā, but at the cost of deeply angering the Siamese king.

The brief *Histoire de Vien-chan* records that the Princess Khiokhôm herself refused to accept marriage with Taksin "because he was Chinese", and she was

still in Viang Chan when the city fell to the Siamese in 1779.[44] Whether because the marriage never took place, or because Surinyavong provided fresh evidence of contacts between Siribunnyasān and the Burmese,[45] by 1777 relations between Siam and Viang Chan had further deteriorated — and Siam held the upper hand. With the conquest of Lān Nā, Taksin had driven a wedge between Burma and the Lao kingdoms which effectively eliminated the Burmese from playing any part in future relations between the Lao kingdoms and Siam. Nor could the Lao kingdoms look to Vietnam, then caught up in the turmoil of the Tay Son rebellion, to intervene against imperial domination by an aggressively expansionist Siam.

With both the Vietnamese and Burmese excluded from the Tai world, Taksin further demonstrated the superiority of his *kamma* by bringing the Lao kingdoms within the Siamese imperial *mandala*. His first move came when Phra Vôrarāt, the rebellious former official from Viang Chan who had been granted asylum in southern Laos, fell out with King Xainyakumān of Champāsak. Until this time, Champāsak's geographical location had enabled it to avoid becoming embroiled in Taksin's struggle against the Burmese. It was not, however, free of internal strife. Upon Xainyakumān's accession in 1738, he had appointed his younger half-brother, Thammathēvō, as *uparāt*. For the first twenty years of his reign, Xainyakumān, a devout Buddhist, busied himself with good works and administration. In 1758, however, a family feud broke out, for reasons which are unclear. Thammathēvō allied himself with the powerful governor of Khong, raised an army, and marched on the capital. Xainyakumān declined to resist out of concern for the suffering this would cause, and took refuge with Vôrarāt on the defensible island of Mot Daeng just downstream from Ubon.[46] Two years later, as Thammathēvō was preparing to force the issue with his brother, his mother intervened. When she undertook a fast to the death, he agreed to reinstate Xainyakumān as king. The death of Thammathēvō from natural causes in 1768 eased remaining tensions.

In 1777, Phra Vôrarāt and King Xainyakumān fell out over a new palace the former had had constructed when Xainyakumān had sought his protection. Xainyakumān, Vôrarāt felt, had not been properly grateful. In high dudgeon, Vôrarāt and his followers transferred their allegiance from Champāsak to Siam. Siribunnyasān, on hearing that Vôrarāt no longer enjoyed the protection of Champāsak, despatched a punitive expedition to capture and execute his erstwhile vassal.[47] In doing so, however, he played directly into Siamese hands.

Feigning fury at the temerity of Siribunnyasān in executing a vassal of Siam,

Taksin seized the opportunity presented by pleas from Vôrarāt's sons to revenge the death of their father by despatching his armies against the Lao kingdoms. One army of 20,000 men under the military command of Chao Phraya Chakri, the future Rama I, marched east from Nakhôn Rāxasīmā bringing all the towns of the southern Khōrāt plateau under the suzerainty of Siam. Meanwhile a second force of 10,000 men under Chakri's younger brother, Chao Phraya Surasi, crossed Cambodia to the Mekong where a flotilla of boats was requisitioned. Late in 1778, the two armies converged on Champāsak.[48] In the face of this vastly superior combined force, King Xainyakumān fled his capital, only to be captured and taken as a prisoner to Thonburi in 1779. A year later he was escorted back to Champāsak, where he was permitted to continue his rule as a Siamese vassal.

With Champāsak vanquished, the Siamese turned their attention to Viang Chan. As Siribunnyasān's forces withdrew to defensive positions, the Siamese worked their way up the Mekong capturing first Mukdāhān (opposite Savannakhēt), then Nakhôn Phanom, and finally Nôngkhāy, opposite Viang Chan. Word of the Siamese advance provided King Surinyavong of Luang Phrabāng with his long-awaited opportunity for revenge against Viang Chan. He immediately despatched a force of 3,000 troops to attack Viang Chan from the north.[49] After a hard fought siege of four months, King Siribunnyasān secretly fled the city, whereupon the demoralized defenders opened the gates to the Siamese. Viang Chan was thoroughly looted. Prince Nanthasēn, the king's eldest son and commander of the Lao army, and other members of the royal family, were taken as hostages to Bangkok along with the two most sacred Buddha images in the kingdom, the *Phra Kaeo*, or Emerald Buddha, and the *Phra Bāng*, which had been brought to Viang Chan in 1705. According to Thai accounts, Siribunnyasān fled to Khamkoet where he died a year later in 1780.[50] Lao sources maintain, however, that after the Siamese withdrew, the king returned to Viang Chan.[51] In the wake of the Siamese conquest, thousands of Lao families were forcibly resettled in the vicinity of Saraburi some 120 kilometres (75 miles) northeast of Bangkok, in Ratchaburi province, and at Chanthaburi on the Gulf of Siam.

Surinyavong's vengeful contribution to the fall of Viang Chan did not, however, save Luang Phrabāng from also having to accept Siamese suzerainty, symbolized by an annual tribute of small gold and silver trees.[52] Thus 1779 marked the virtual extinction of the once great imperial *mandala* of Lān Xāng. Lao and Phuan families were forcibly resettled west of the Mekong, or closer to Bangkok where they worked on the estates of Siamese nobility. By the time

Taksin was deposed in 1782 and Chao Phraya Chakri took the throne as Rama I of Siam, the Lao kingdoms were as firmly incorporated into the Siamese *mandala* as were Lān Nā or the northern Malay sultanates.

Siamese Hegemony

Over the following decades, the extent of the Lao kingdoms progressively diminished as more and more centres in the southern and central Khōrāt plateau fell under the administrative control of Bangkok and broke their tributary ties with Viang Chan and Champāsak. Prior to 1778, only Nakhôn Rāxasīmā on the southwestern edge of the Khōrāt plateau had been a Siamese tributary *meuang*.[53] By the end of the rule of Rama I, Champāsak had lost Sīsakēt and Ubon, and Viang Chan no longer exercised suzerainty over Rôy-Et, Yasothôn, Khônkaen or Kālasin.[54] Annual revenue payments were made to Bangkok, together with corvée labour as requested, but apart from this the Siamese yoke at first weighed relatively lightly. Members of traditional Lao ruling families were confirmed as governors, or *chau meuang*, of their respective *meuang*,[55] which they were free to administer as they had always done, collecting their own taxes and enforcing their own justice. Only three matters had to be referred to Bangkok for permission or confirmation: the raising of armed forces to oppose a neighbour or discipline a vassal, appointment of higher officials, and sentences of capital punishment.[56] Increasingly, however, Siamese interference began to impinge on traditional freedoms. Lao officials were required to pay annual visits to Bangkok to wait upon their Siamese masters. The Mahatthai, the ministry to which Lao *meuang* were attached, began conducting censuses to enforce higher tax payments. Demands for corvée increased. Boundaries were arbitrarily changed, and new *meuang* created. *Chau meuang* were rewarded for increases in population and production by the award of Siamese titles.[57] According to Thai records, within fifty years (that is, by 1826), the number of Isan *meuang* had increased from thirteen to thirty-five,[58] indicating a substantial growth in population. Large areas of jungle were progressively cleared to make way for cultivation, a process that has permanently changed the ecology and climate of the region.

The reduced territories of Luang Phrabāng and Champāsak continued to extend across to the west bank of the Mekong: the river remained the principal means of communication within each kingdom. Progressively, however, both kingdoms saw their west bank territories reduced. Viang Chan remained a much

more significant kingdom. Its major dependencies included Xiang Khuang, Nakhôn Phanom, Udôn and Mukdāhān, the last three extending over much of the northern and northeastern parts of the Khōrāt plateau.[59] All three Lao kings did, however, enjoy greater powers than the governors of tributary Siamese *meuang*. They could discipline vassals, inflict capital punishment, and appoint their own officials. Only war against neighbouring kingdoms, and choice by the council of nobles of who should succeed to the two highest offices of state, the *chau meuang* and *uparāt*, required the endorsement of Bangkok. They could even conduct relations with neighbouring powers, provided these did not threaten Siam.[60] Tributary obligations took the form of traditional gold and silver trees, and provision of *suai* (tax in kind). The Lao kingdoms were also expected to raise supporting armies in time of war,[61] and to provide corvée labour for special projects.

Rama I, who as the victorious commander of the Siamese army had brought the Lao kingdoms within the Siamese imperial *mandala*, took a lively interest in Lao affairs. On the death of Siribunnyasān, his son Nanthasēn was permitted to return to Viang Chan to rule as a vassal of Siam. He was allowed to take with him the *Phra Bāng* Buddha image, the dynastic palladium which symbolized his inheritance of the mantle of Lān Xāng. Rama I also confirmed Surinyavong as ruler of Luang Phrabāng, and Xainyakumān as ruler of Champāsak. When Surinyavong died in 1791, the Siamese nominated Anuruttha to succeed his brother, but only after a four-year interregnum.[62]

In Champāsak, interference was even more overt. When Xainyakumān executed the governor of Attopeu for maladministration, Rama I despatched a commissioner to look into the incident and summon the king to explain his actions.[63] When a millenarial uprising occurred in 1791 led by a local holy man (*phu mī būn*), the elderly Xainyakumān suffered a stroke. He was eighty-two. Bangkok sent a force to restore order, but by the time it arrived, the rebels had been crushed by loyal troops under the command of Thao Fāy Nā, a son of Phra Vôrarāt. Many slaves were taken. The Siamese thereafter appointed Fāy Nā to the throne of Champāsak. The new king took the name Visanyarāt-Khattinyavongsā. His first act was to move his capital further north to the vicinity of Pākxē. Appointment of royal relatives to office created tensions with the southern nobility, however. Upon the death of Fāy Nā in 1811, the throne passed briefly to his son, but in 1813 reverted to a descendent of Xainyakumān. At the same time, Bangkok divested Champāsak of its more important west bank tributary *meuang*.

The reign of Rama I saw one last renewal of Siam's ancient struggle with Burma. The king had taken the precaution of moving his capital from Thonburi to Bangkok on the opposite (eastern) bank of the Chao Phraya River. In 1785 no fewer than five Burmese armies converged on Siam. Through a series of brilliant strategic defensive measures the Siamese held the north, defeated the principal Burmese thrust from the west towards Bangkok, and mopped up the south. Further attacks via the Three Pagodas pass in 1786 and against Lān Nā the following year were also successfully repulsed, though fighting dragged on in the Tenasserim region into the mid-1790s. The Lao kingdoms sent contingents to aid the Siamese in 1785, commanded by the five sons of Siribunnyasān who distinguished themselves in this northern campaign.[64] Forces from Viang Chan and Luang Phrabāng were subsequently sent to Chiang Mai to repel two further Burmese invasions in 1797 and 1802.[65]

The administrative and military reorganization undertaken by Rama I generally strengthened the Siamese state.[66] Bangkok, strategically better situated than Ayutthaya, rapidly developed into a busy cosmopolitan trading centre, able to take advantage of increased trade not only with China, but also with the major European powers as trade picked up following the end of the Napoleonic wars. By contrast, the isolated Lao capitals were reduced to regional centres with limited wealth and resources, unable to maintain even comparably lavish courts. This did not, however, reduce the pride of their rulers in their ancient lineages, nor diminish the memories of past glories. The Lao kingdoms stubbornly resisted Siamese inroads in areas they considered theirs. Throughout the period from 1790 to 1820, a continuing struggle was waged between Viang Chan and Nakhôn Rāxasīmā on behalf of Bangkok for the allegiance of the *meuang* of the Khōrāt plateau.

When Nanthasēn returned to Viang Chan, however, his first challenge was to reinforce his suzerainty over Xiang Khuang. Hearing that Chau Somphū of Xiang Khuang intended to renounce his allegiance in favour of Vietnam, Nanthasēn ambushed the Phuan prince and placed him under house arrest in Viang Chan.[67] He was released only after Vietnamese intervention,[68] and after agreeing to resume payment of the same tribute to Viang Chan as demanded by Vietnam.[69] It may well be that Nanthasēn's success in reinforcing his suzerainty over Xiang Khuang had the effect of stimulating his ambition to extend the *mandala* of Viang Chan. If so, his next opportunity came when he gained permission from Bangkok to mount an attack on Luang Phrabāng on the grounds that King Anuruttha, who had then but recently succeeded to the throne, had entered into

treasonous contacts with the Burmese. In 1792, Nanthasēn's forces surrounded Luang Phrabāng but were unable, after fifteen days of fighting, to take the town.[70] The chronicles of Luang Phrabāng record that entry was finally gained through intrigue when Nanthasēn secretly offered to marry Surinyavong's widow and make her his queen and ruler of Luang Phrabāng if she would open one of the city gates. This she did and the town fell.[71] King Anuruttha, together with members of his family, was sent to Bangkok where he remained as a hostage for four years. For this period, Luang Phrabāng may have been tributary to Viang Chan.[72] Huaphan and parts of the Sipsông Chu Tai previously dependent on Luang Phrabāng were annexed to Viang Chan,[73] a move which not only strategically weakened Luang Phrabāng, but also provoked a reaction from the Tay Son regime in Vietnam. A Vietnamese army briefly invaded Xiang Khuang, only to withdraw before Siamese forces could respond.[74]

In 1795, the ten-yearly tribute mission from Luang Phrabāng to China appealed for Chinese assistance in obtaining the release of King Anuruttha. He was allowed to return the following year, apparently following Chinese diplomatic representations to Bangkok.[75] The population carried off to Viang Chan was also allowed to return, and began reconstructing the city. Soon after Anuruttha's return, the court of Bangkok was informed of a secret conspiracy between Nanthasēn and the governor of Nakhôn Phanom to throw off Siamese domination.[76] Rama I did not hesitate: Nanthasēn and the governor were both escorted by Siamese troops to Bangkok. The Siamese may have feared Nanthasēn's growing power and independence, and acted on reports of conspiracy to nip them in the bud.[77] In any case, the return of Anuruttha to Luang Phrabāng and the accusations against Nanthasēn further divided the weakened Lao kingdoms.[78] According to some accounts, Nanthasēn was found guilty of plotting rebellion: according to others, he died before his conduct could be fully investigated.[79] In his place, in 1795, Bangkok appointed his younger brothers to rule Viang Chan, Inthavong as king and Anuvong as *uparāt*. They were accompanied by a high Siamese official, a close confidant of Rama I, which suggests that the Siamese doubted Lao loyalty. For the next eight years, however, Viang Chan apparently behaved as a faithful vassal of Siam. Anuvong himself led Lao contingents in support of Siamese armies fighting the Burmese for control of the Sipsông Phan Nā, being twice commended for courage by Rama I.[80] Upon his brother's death in 1804 Anuvong was the obvious choice as next king of Viang Chan.

Ānuvong and the Struggle for Lao Autonomy

Nanthasēn, Inthavong and Ānuvong were all sons of Siribunnyasān, the last independent king of Viang Chan. All three were carried off to Bangkok after the Siamese invasion of 1778 where they served attendance at the Siamese court. All undoubtedly saw themselves as scions of a proud and ancient line of kings, in contrast to the very recent Siamese Chakri dynasty. It would be most surprising had not all three at times yearned for the restoration, if not of former Lao greatness, then at least of Lao autonomy. That said, there is little evidence that the brothers together planned and pursued a secret strategy to throw off tributary dependency on Bangkok. Each responded to the selective pressures and opportunities provided by circumstances as they arose.

If Nanthasēn's actions on becoming king could be interpreted as attempting to re-establish and extend the hegemony of Viang Chan in preparation to challenge Siamese suzerainty — an interpretation reinforced by apparent Siamese doubts as to his loyalty, and his recall to Bangkok — Inthavong was more cautious. While he effectively reinforced the suzerainty of Viang Chan over Xiang Khuang and parts of the Sipsông Chu Tai, he did nothing to alarm the Siamese. Perhaps he was content to be a vassal of Bangkok; perhaps he was deterred by his recognition of superior Siamese might; perhaps he was masking his longer term intentions. In any event his early death left the way open for Ānuvong's accession.

Ānuvong was named king of Viang Chan by Rama I, a man who had known him for twenty-five years and who held him in high esteem as a dependable and courageous military commander in the service of Siam. Evidently Rama I had no cause to suspect that Ānuvong might harbour intentions of renouncing the suzerainty of Siam, or he would not have appointed him king. Any suspicions Rama I might have had of Nanthasēn had been allayed by Inthavong's loyalty when Ānuvong was *uparāt*. Rama II also held Ānuvong in high esteem, as indicated in his personal correspondence inviting the Lao monarch to visit Bangkok and informing him of lavish preparations for his reception.[81] Not until the reign of Rama III, whose relationship with Ānuvong was rather less personal, did relations between Viang Chan and Bangkok reach a dramatic crisis.

Ānuvong began his reign in the manner expected of a Buddhist king, by building a new palace, and then demonstrating his exalted *kamma* by constructing monasteries and Buddhist monuments and presiding over elaborate religious ceremonies, both in Viang Chan and at such major regional centres as Nakhôn

Phanom. In 1813, the king summoned a great monastic council, only the third in Lao history. Instructions were given to carve a new jade Buddha image to replace the *Phra Kaeo*, then in Bangkok. In 1816, this image was ceremoniously installed in the refurbished Vat Phra Kaeo in Viang Chan. An outer cloister was added to the Thāt Luang *stupa*, and Anuvong ordered work begun on Vat Sīsakēt, a gem of Lao architecture and the only building of this period to escape the destruction of 1827-1828.[82] Anuvong also busied himself with improving administration (both civilian and military), revenue collection, and communications, including major bridgeworks. Thus was legitimation reinforced and the capital adorned as befitted a city with a population of more than 10,000 families.[83]

Anuvong's only action that might suggest any more devious ambition than to maintain his friendship with Bangkok was his eagerness to formalize tributary relations with the new Nguyen dynasty in Vietnam. While Anuvong was still *uparāt*, Lao forces had been ordered by Bangkok to aid Nguyen Anh in his struggle against the Tay Son.[84] Upon Nguyen Anh's accession to the imperial throne as the Emperor Gia Long, the Lao kingdoms had as neighbours a powerful unified state to the east. In 1806, after notifying Hue of his accession, Anuvong despatched the first of a series (lasting from 1806 to 1821) of missions to Vietnam bearing tribute consisting of two elephants, two rhinoceros horns and 364 kilogrammes (800 pounds) of cinnamon.[85] In an accompanying letter, Anuvong described Viang Chan as a long time vassal of Vietnam, and noted that it had been the Tay Son rebellion that obliged Viang Chan to submit to the Siamese "who mistreated the people".[86] What is curious is that these tribute missions terminated with the death of Gia Long. Thus when Anuvong sought Vietnamese assistance from Minh Mang in 1827, it was as a "lapsed" tributary.

In 1819, Anuvong performed a service for Bangkok when an army from Viang Chan led by his son Nyō captured a rebel monk who had raised a revolt of Lao Thoeng against Chau Mānôy, the rather ineffectual ruler of Champāsak.[87] For failing to put down the revolt, Chau Mānôy was summoned to Bangkok, where he "mysteriously" died. As a reward for quelling the revolt, Anuvong requested that Nyō be appointed the new ruler of Champāsak. Rama II agreed, despite some dissension among his advisers and discontent on the part of the southern Lao nobility.[88] Immediately upon taking office in 1821, Nyō ordered a census taken in order to raise taxes and forcibly recruit corvée for the construction of a defensive perimeter around his new capital. These measures met with some resentment, as did Nyō's attempts to introduce the cultural traditions of Viang Chan.

With his son as ruler of Champāsak, the possibility of reconstituting the *mandala* of Lān Xāng, surely never far from Anuvong's mind, came closer to reality.[89] He had already reinforced the hegemony of Viang Chan over Xiang Khuang,[90] and made overtures to King Manthāturāt of Luang Phrabāng.[91] But Manthāturāt, who had succeeded his father Anuruttha in 1817, seems to have been reluctant to enter into an alliance with Viang Chan.[92] Relations were very much warmer with Nakhôn Phanom (Meuang Krabong), whose ruler had provided a princess to be one of Anuvong's queens. Yet on the eve of the last great Lao struggle to throw off the hegemony of Siam, unity still escaped the Lao territories.

Early in 1825, Lao tributary rulers, including Anuvong and Manthāturāt, made the long journey to Bangkok to attend the funeral ceremonies for Rama II, who had died the previous year. They were accompanied by "several hundred" servants and officials.[93] Manthāturāt ingratiated himself with the Siamese by entering the monastic order as a sign of respect for the Chakri dynasty.[94] Perhaps in recognition of his pious conduct, Manthāturāt was shown special favour by the Siamese. This may have irked Anuvong, who considered himself the most senior of the Lao kings, but two other incidents are said to have raised Anuvong's ire still more.

Early in his reign, Rama III had ordered a complete census of manpower throughout the kingdom to ensure every peasant performed his prescribed corvée labour, followed by an equally comprehensive land survey for tax purposes. The Lao of much of the Khōrāt plateau were forcibly tattooed as part of this programme, an imposition unknown previously in the Lao *meuang* which caused widespread resentment. Manpower was also mobilized to undertake massive construction works for the new Siamese capital. Substantial defence works were constructed at Pāknam, at the mouth of the Chao Phraya River, popularly known thereafter as the "Lao fortress".[95] The corvée demands thus made on Lao peasants who had never previously had to perform such heavy, prolonged labour caused considerable dissatisfaction, and undoubtedly contributed to growing Lao resentment.[96]

Upon his succession, Rama III ordered another large contingent of Lao peasants to undertake additional onerous corvée labour in and around Bangkok. Some were made to dig a canal; others to cut and transport palm trees and bamboo, and build more defence works. The work was carried out under the supervision of one of Anuvong's sons, the *rāxavong* Prince Ngau, the third ranking official of Viang Chan. Apparently because the work was poorly done,

the Siamese official in charge struck and insulted the Lao prince.[97] Both Ngau and his father were furious.

The second incident which angered Anuvong was the rejection of his request to Rama III that Lao living in or near Bangkok be allowed to return to Viang Chan. These included one of Anuvong's sisters (or daughters, reports vary), a troop of Lao dancers, certain court artisans, and those Lao families who had been re-settled by Taksin some forty-five years earlier in the vicinity of Saraburi.[98] The Siamese court informed Anuvong that he was permitted to take back with him just one singer. This Anuvong took as a deliberate slight. He left Bangkok in anger, determined to avenge the shabby treatment he had received.

Upon his return to Viang Chan, Anuvong immediately began putting into effect a plan[99] to throw off the hegemony of Siam, and re-establish Lao autonomy. He met with eleven senior officials and regional governors to decide upon the best tactics to adopt.[100] New defence works were constructed, and recruiting began in earnest, but the portents were not encouraging. Not only did an earthquake cause extensive damage, but within weeks a severe storm blew down part of the Vat Phra Kaeo.[101] Though some interpreted these omens as portending the destruction of Viang Chan, Anuvong took no notice. Another development of which he was informed, but whose implications he misconstrued, was the conclusion of a treaty (the Burney treaty) between Britain and Siam.[102]

Towards the end of 1826, the Lao made their move. Anuvong had decided on a bold and straightforward plan. Siamese officials were even then continuing to tattoo the Lao population of the southern Khōrāt plateau. Anuvong determined to capitalize on the growing unrest by adopting what Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn have called a "three-pronged strategy"[103] aimed at repatriating ethnic Lao from Siam and uniting all Lao in an anti-Siamese coalition whose independence would be guaranteed through the support of external allies. For Viang Chan, potential allies included not only the northern Tai-Lao and Tai-Yuan *meuang*, but even Vietnam, or Burma — or the British, newly arrived as powerful players in mainland Southeast Asia.[104]

Anuvong may have believed that Siamese power was in decline, judged by the changing balance of power between Vietnam and Siam in Cambodia, regional dissatisfaction with Bangkok, and factionalism at court.[105] Of these, the situation in Cambodia was the most significant from the Lao point of view. The victory of Gia Long had led to renewal of tributary ties between Phnom Penh and Hué, and an increasingly pro-Vietnamese policy on the part of the Cambodian king. The Siamese retained loose control over western and northern parts of present-

day Cambodia, and annual Khmer tribute missions continued to arrive in Bangkok, but there was no disguising the fact that by the early 1820s Siam had lost much of its influence in Cambodia.[106] It is surprising, therefore, that Anuvong did not cultivate relations more assiduously with Hué prior to sending his armies south — especially as a weakened Burma intent on holding the British at bay was unlikely to intervene again in Siamese-Lao affairs.

Anuvong was to gain no assistance either from the British. The first Anglo-Burmese war of 1824 had impressed on the Siamese the power of British arms, and control of the Tenasserim coast gave British Burma a common frontier with Siam. British and Siamese clearly had conflicting interests on the Malay peninsula which needed to be resolved, and Britain wanted improved access for trade with Siam. Captain Henry Burney arrived in Bangkok in December 1825 to negotiate these issues on behalf of the British Government. A treaty and commercial agreement were signed on 20 June 1826, and although the British by no means gained all they desired, they were not so disappointed as to resort to force to achieve their ends. Under the terms of the treaty, ratification was to take place in January 1827 when a British mission would return. Rumour may have confused this with a threatened imminent arrival of a British war fleet. Thus far from being diverted by threatened British intervention, the Burney treaty left Rama III free to focus all his attention and concentrate all his resources on defeating Anuvong.[107]

The first priority for Anuvong was to regain jurisdiction over all Lao under Siamese rule in order to extend his recruitment base. To do this, he had to seize control of the Khōrāt plateau, the key to which was the Siamese garrison town of Nakhôn Rāxasīmā. From there Lao could be repatriated from Saraburi and central Siam. The plan was for four armies to seize the major towns of the southern plateau — including besides Nakhôn Rāxasīmā, Suvannaphūm and Ubon — gather up the entire Lao population and withdraw north, leaving behind nothing but scorched earth. Anuvong apparently hoped that if this daring move succeeded, wavering kingdoms, such as Luang Phrabāng and Chiang Mai, would join Viang Chan. Siamese uncertainty over British intentions, and fear that Viang Chan might appeal to Vietnam would then, he hoped, be enough to deter Siamese pursuit. Bangkok would be faced, in other words, with a *fait accompli* giving Anuvong the time to reconstruct the *mandala* of Lān Xāng.

It was a bold exercise in the classic mould of Southeast Asian *mandala* relationships, focussing on both control of population and balance of power. That it failed was due to several contingent factors, and one serious miscalculation.

Anuvong had not sufficiently taken account of the disparity in military might between Siam and Viang Chan, based on both population (roughly five million, even if a large proportion of them were non-Siamese, to 150,000)[108] and weaponry. In 1822 and 1823, Siam had purchased large quantities of British firearms. The Lao, by contrast, were much more poorly equipped.

The campaign got underway in mid-December 1826, when the *uparāt* Tissa led an army of about 10,000 men to Kālasin, then a Siamese *meuang* where officials were conducting tattooing. A second, larger army under the command of Anuvong himself captured Nakhôn Rāxasīmā without resistance in mid-January, in the absence of the governor who was campaigning in Cambodia.[109] A third, smaller, but more mobile force under *rāxavong* Ngau gathered recruits from Lomsak and Chainyaphūm before heading for Saraburi to evacuate the Lao population. There was never any intention to threaten Bangkok.[110] Meanwhile, a fourth army under Chau Nyō marched west from Champāsak to seize Ubon.

Anuvong had attempted to reassure the Siamese court as to his intentions by sending Rama III a pledge of continued Lao allegiance, and insisting that the Lao army had advanced on Nakhôn Rāxasīmā only in order to assist Bangkok in repelling a reported joint Burmese-British attack.[111] Similar explanations were given to the northern Lao kingdoms, which may, however, have secretly been better informed.[112] The letter to Rama III was dated 15 January 1827. It arrived in Bangkok eight days later, the day before Ngau evacuated the entire Lao population of Saraburi.

Despite Anuvong's protestations that he was not in revolt, this was how events were interpreted in Bangkok, perhaps because they provided an opportunity to deal with the Lao once and for all. There was not, however, undue alarm because the Siamese had already been informed of Lao plans,[113] and were well aware that Anuvong had no intention of marching on Bangkok. While a large Siamese army was assembled, the Lao meanwhile were wasting valuable time. Anuvong had been welcomed by the mixed population of Nakhôn Rāxasīmā, who were told to make preparations to leave. He had not, however, been able to capture the Siamese governor, a man whose meddling in Lao affairs Anuvong was determined to punish.[114] There were conflicting reports on the governor's whereabouts, and all attempts by Anuvong to apprehend him failed. But due to this delay, Anuvong did not leave Nakhôn Rāxasīmā until 20 March, after a stay of almost five weeks.

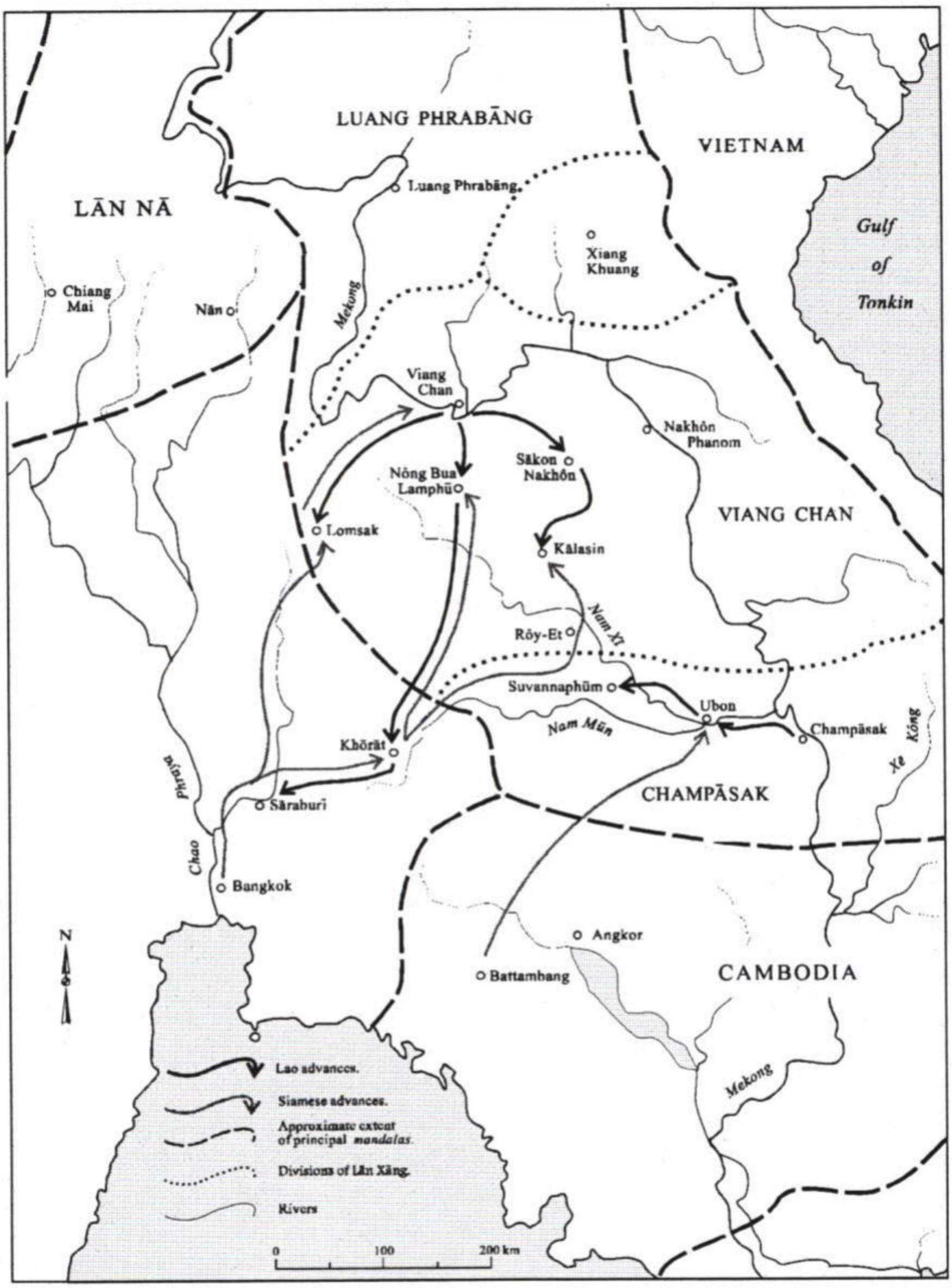
Further west, the two Lao armies under Tissa and Nyō moved hardly more rapidly. Tissa had pushed further south to take Yasothôn and Suvannaphūm,

while Nyō had advanced on Sīsakēt. Their instructions had been to execute any Siamese involved in tattooing Lao peasants, and to evacuate the Lao population north, but progress had been slow. The population of Nakhôn Rāxasīmā had been swollen by refugees from the fighting elsewhere. In the move north, Lao were separated from Siamese, Khmer and Chinese. Ānuvong unwisely permitted two senior Siamese officials to accompany the latter group of evacuees, and a revolt was planned. Guards were plied with drink, and subsequently slaughtered, only a handful escaping to report the disaster. A fifty-man Lao reconnaissance unit sent to investigate was ambushed and massacred; and a 3,000 strong force was resisted so fiercely that its commanders broke off the engagement believing that the governor of Nakhôn Rāxasīmā had joined the evacuees with the army he had used to suppress the Khmer.[115]

The affair of the governor of Nakhôn Rāxasīmā seems to have been largely responsible for the fatal delay in executing evacuation plans. By the time the full-scale evacuation was underway, Ānuvong was handicapped by two things: lack of intelligence as to Siamese troop strength and movements; and failure to recruit sufficient reinforcements for his own army from men more concerned to protect their displaced families. The Siamese initially divided their own forces into three armies, one of which remained in Bangkok in case of hostilities with the British. Of the remaining two, one advanced via Saraburi to Nakhôn Rāxasīmā, while the other executed a flanking movement to the west up the Pāsak valley towards Lomsak. The force which occupied Nakhôn Rāxasīmā divided again. While the main Siamese army pursued Ānuvong north, a second army struck east across the southern Khōrāt plateau capturing Champāsak (where Nyō and his family were taken prisoner), and forcing Tissa's army at Suvannaphūm to withdraw north. While *rāxavong* Ngau delayed the western Siamese army at Lomsak, Ānuvong withdrew to more defensible positions at Nong Bua Lamphū, eighty kilometres (fifty miles) south of Viang Chan. He was hampered by the number of evacuees, and in his haste neglected to carry out his intended scorched earth policy. Considerable quantities of rice were left for the pursuing Siamese army.

At Nong Bua Lamphū in mid-May 1827, the Lao established their first line of defence, only to be forced to fall back to a second line. There they made a stand until outflanked by the arrival of Siamese reinforcements. In the face of vastly superior forces, both numerically and in terms of fire power, the Lao troops "scattered and ran".[116] Realizing that the defence of Viang Chan was impossible, Ānuvong and his family fled downstream by boat and sought asylum from Vietnam,[117] while the remnants of the Lao army fought a desperate rearguard

The Lao Kingdom of Lān Xāng



The Lao-Siamese War of 1827-28

action. Within five days Viang Chan was in Siamese hands and put to the sack, its palaces looted and burned, its defences levelled. Buddha images were confiscated though monasteries were otherwise untouched. The city was not, however, totally destroyed as Rama III had ordered as an example to all of the cost of rebellion. Leading families were carried off, but much of the population who had fled the city subsequently returned.

The sack of Viang Chan and the flight of Ānuvong were sufficient to convince the rulers of "the six princedoms" — five in Lān Nā (Chiang Mai, Lampang, Lamphūn, Nān and Phrae) plus Luang Phrabāng — to re-pledge their allegiance to Bangkok. All had nominally been on the Siamese side, though their armies had arrived (perhaps deliberately) too late to take part in the fighting.[118] In his report to Rama III, the Siamese commander-in-chief, complained that all six had "waited to see the turn of events, and their actions greatly depended on the outcome of the war" [119] All would have welcomed greater independence from Bangkok, but none had been prepared to risk overt support for Ānuvong. The same could not be said for many of the ruling families of the Lao *meuang* of the central and southern Khōrāt plateau, even those who owed their positions to Siamese investiture. Popular dissatisfaction over Siamese tattooing and demands for corvée labour ensured ready recruits for Ānuvong's cause, and the regional nobility of many towns proved loyal to the death to Viang Chan.[120]

The devastation of the Lao areas was horrendous. Apart from the dead, thousands fled into the jungle to escape the fighting. According to a Siamese report, only about nine able-bodied men were taken prisoner for every 200 to 300 women and children.[121] Food stocks had been destroyed and no new crops planted. By mid-year, disease and malnutrition had taken a dreadful toll. Tens of thousands of families were forcibly resettled closer to Bangkok, most in the central Chao Phraya basin. After months of mopping up, tracking down families who had fled Viang Chan, ordering the exemplary execution of those who had given them refuge, and organizing the administration of the region, the Siamese general, Chao Phraya Bodin, returned to Bangkok in February 1828 to find Rama III still far from satisfied.[122] Ānuvong had not been captured; Viang Chan had not been razed. The Siamese feared Vietnamese intervention. Bodin was ordered to return and complete his task of destruction.

In the meantime, Ānuvong had returned from Vietnam accompanied by a small force of around 1,000 men, including 100 Vietnamese assigned him by the Emperor Minh Mang.[123] Various versions exist of what happened next. According to Lao accounts, when Ānuvong returned to Viang Chan his Vietnamese

"interpreters" pleaded with the Siamese garrison in the name of Minh Mang that he be reinstated as king, tributary as before to both Bangkok and Hué.[124] Anuvong, however, was furious at discovering a memorial shrine erected by the victorious Siamese recording their successful defeat of the "rebellion" together with an inscription "depicting the defects and the flaws of the traitor Anuvong".[125] Taking this to be a slur on his honour, Anuvong ordered his troops to attack the Siamese garrison. Only forty out of 300 survived to inform Chao Phraya Bodin of what had occurred.

The Vietnamese version is rather different.[126] When they learned that Anuvong had returned to Viang Chan, troops from the Siamese garrison at Phān Phao seized the rice stocks in the city, and refused to supply Anuvong and his detachment. Shooting broke out, and several Siamese soldiers were killed.[127] Whatever the details of this incident, the initial Siamese response was a cautious withdrawal further south to gather reinforcements. *Rāxavong* Ngau impulsively set off in pursuit coming upon the Siamese on 18 October 1828. In the ensuing battle, both Bodin and Ngau were wounded. The Lao broke off the engagement and retreated to Viang Chan, pursued by the Siamese who by this time must have been aware of how small the Lao detachment actually was. For a second time, Anuvong escaped the city, though more of his family were captured and sent to Bangkok. Anuvong himself fled to Xiang Khuang with Bodin close on his heels. One version of what occurred next says that Anuvong was betrayed by the Phuan prince, Chau Nôy, whom he had held for four years under house arrest in Viang Chan, and handed over to the Siamese.[128] Another account absolves Chau Nôy of guilt, even though he was subsequently punished by the Vietnamese.[129] Together with other members of his family, including his queen, concubines, sisters and daughters, Anuvong was paraded as a traitor on the way to imprisonment in Bangkok, where he was condemned to death. A European account records his final days:

> [The king] was confined in a large iron cage exposed to a burning sun, and obliged to proclaim to every one that the King of Siam was great and merciful, that he himself had committed a great error and deserved his present punishment. In this cage were placed with the prisoner, a large mortar to pound him in, a large boiler to boil him in, a hook to hang him by, and a sword to decapitate him; also a sharp-pointed spike for him to sit on. His children were sometimes put in along with him. He was a mild, respectable-looking, old grey-headed man, and did not live long to gratify his tormentors, death having put an end to his sufferings. His body was taken and hung in chains on the bank of the river, about two or three

miles below Bangkok.[130]

This time the city of Viang Chan was totally destroyed and its entire population deported. Nothing remained but huts among the ruins when Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier visited the site almost forty years later. It was to be another thirty years before a new city began to be constructed from its ashes to serve as the administrative capital of French Laos.

What modern Lao historians now refer to as Ānuvong's war for Lao independence has been recounted in some detail both because it marked the last Lao attempt to free the former territories of Lān Xāng from Siamese domination, and because differing perceptions of these events have continued to influence relations between the independent states of Laos and Thailand into the late twentieth century. In destroying Viang Chan, the Siamese succeeded in reinforcing their domination of Lao territories through eventual inclusion of virtually all Lao *meuang* within the Siamese imperial *mandala*,[131] but the destruction of the Lao capital and the savage reprisals inflicted by the Siamese were long remembered by the Lao of the Khōrāt plateau. The heroic exploits of *rāxavong* Ngau became the subject of poetry and song, a popular expression of Lao resistance to Siamese hegemony. The prince himself fled to the region of Mahāxai, where he recovered from his wounds and kept the tradition of Lao resistance alive. When the Pathēt Lao formed their first guerrilla resistance unit to fight for Lao independence from France in January 1949, they named it the "*Rāxavong* Brigade", thus deliberately linking what most Lao today would see as the two great independence struggles in their recent history. For the Thai, however, Anouvong's war has always been interpreted as a treacherous rebellion by a tributary ruler, an interpretation that has continued to inform the "older brother-younger brother" view of Thai-Lao relations preferred by the Thai ruling elite, but intensely resented by the Lao as an anachronistic basis for modern inter-state relations.[132]

Siam Versus Vietnam

Siamese anger was directed primarily against the ruling house of Viang Chan. In Champāsak the succession returned to the line of Sôysīsamut in the form of a great-great-grandson, Chau Huy, who had sided with his Chakri overlords against Chau Ānuvong. Thereafter the southern Lao royal family retained ties with Bangkok that were often warmer than with Viang Chan. Meanwhile the Phuan

territories fell under the suzerainty of Vietnam. Much of the remaining central Lao population east of the Mekong, especially from the plain of Viang Chan, was forcibly resettled towards the centre of the Khōrāt plateau in the region of Rôy-Et, Kālasin and Mahāsārakhām.[133] There they established Lao villages where they kept alive not only their own Lao culture, but also the stories and memories of the war they had been caught up in. Material culture continued to be Lao. The staple diet was glutinous rice and the finely sliced and spiced meat dish known as *lāp*. The Lao ceremony *par excellence*, the *bāsī*,[134] performed to recall the errant soul and concentrate the spiritual powers of participants, drew communities together, as did the larger gatherings for Buddhist festivals. There stories would be recited and songs sung by the ever-popular *mô lām* (folk singers) telling of past tragedies and triumphs.[135] Some of this rich oral literature was written down in manuscripts which were secretly circulated.[136] Thus it was in the Lao *meuang* of the Khōrāt plateau that Lao literary traditions were kept alive, later to contribute to the reconstruction of Lao cultural identity that was an integral part of the nationalist movement of the 1940s.[137]

As the displaced Lao population slowly established new *meuang* west of the Mekong, those to the east turned towards Vietnam. The political fragmentation of the Lao *meuang* which Anuvong had tried so desperately to overcome by throwing off Siamese suzerainty was thus greater than ever. Their very division, however, set the scene for half a century of Siamese-Vietnamese competition for influence and control over both Laos and Cambodia. Paradoxically, Siamese destruction of Viang Chan and incorporation of Lao *meuang* of the middle Mekong, including Champāsak,[138] within the Siamese imperial *mandala*, initially increased Vietnamese influence in Lao territories east of the Mekong as local leaders sought protection against Siam. The intervention of France in Vietnam reduced Vietnamese interest in Laos, however, and temporarily redressed the balance in favour of Siam. For the rest of the century the Lao territories remained an arena for the conflicting ambitions of opposing powers. Yet while regional leaders (*chau meuang*) west of the Mekong fell increasingly under the direct administration of Bangkok to become eventually assimilated into the Siamese state, those of the east bank territories managed to play off one power against another in order to preserve at least some semblance of autonomy. Their successes in so doing created one pre-condition at least for the re-creation of Laos as a territorial entity under French protection after 1893.

Vietnamese assistance reluctantly provided during the last stage of Anuvong's uprising, limited and cautious though it was, led to new tensions in relations

between Bangkok and Hué. By then, the steady imposition of Vietnamese control over all but western Cambodia had seriously eroded Siamese influence there. Siamese and Vietnamese had supported different contenders in Cambodia in 1811-1812, and relations had been further strained by what the Siamese took to be Vietnamese support for a Cambodian attack on Siamese garrisons in western Cambodia in 1816.[139] It was events in Laos in 1827-1828, however, which led to final rupture of the cordial relations that had previously existed between the two states during the reigns of Gia Long and Rama I.[140]

Before the 1820s Vietnamese influence in the Lao territories extended from the Sipsông Chu Tai south to include the Huaphan *meuang* and Xiang Khuang (which had been tributary to both Hué and Viang Chan). From the reign of Inthavong, Viang Chan too was nominally tributary to Vietnam, while some border *meuang* in central Laos also paid tribute to Hué.[141] With the destruction of Viang Chan, Vietnam and Siam found themselves in direct confrontation, in Laos as in Cambodia. A Vietnamese mission actually despatched to urge Anuvong to submit to Rama III was massacred by Siamese troops at Nakhôn Phanom. In a subsequent exchange of letters, Rama III ignored both Vietnamese demands that those guilty of this unprovoked attack should be punished, and the suggestion that a new ruler of Viang Chan should be appointed.[142] Minh Mang's response was to reinforce Vietnam's position in Xiang Khuang, by occupying the capital, arresting and executing its ruler Chau Nôy allegedly for handing Anuvong over to the Siamese,[143] and incorporating the region into Vietnam as the *phu* (prefecture) of Tran Ninh administered by a Vietnamese mandarin.

The more aggressive Siamese policy provoked a reaction both from Luang Phrabāng, where king Manthāthurāt despatched a diplomatic mission to Hué in 1828 to counter-balance growing dependency on Bangkok,[144] and from the east bank *meuang* of the middle Mekong, whose chiefs sought Vietnamese protection from further Siamese incursions.[145] The court at Hué took advantage of these overtures, yet with the exception of Xiang Khuang where a Vietnamese commissioner was appointed, Lao *meuang* on the middle Mekong remained under the control of local Lao leaders, who received their appointment from mandarins in neighbouring Vietnamese provinces.

Lao resistance to Siam initially centered on Mahāxai on the upper Bang Fai River, and was led by members of the former Nakhôn Phanom elite. They were supported and encouraged by Vietnamese troops who early in 1833 penetrated as far as the Mekong and established an armed camp opposite Nakhôn Phanom. Meanwhile, Lao earlier forced to resettle west of the Mekong began returning to

the east bank. Vietnamese encroachment caused considerable concern in Bangkok. Siamese administrative control of west bank Mekong towns from Chiang Khan and Nôngkhāy to Mukdāhān and Khemmarāt was strengthened, and renewed efforts were made to convince Lao elites to resettle with their followers west of the Mekong.[146] Further south there was no Vietnamese presence: Champāsak was a vassal of the Siamese. As punishment for joining Ānuvong's independence struggle, it was shorn of its major dependent *meuang*. Most were placed directly under the control of Bangkok, while others were attached to Khemmarāt or Attapeu.[147]

Siamese-Vietnamese antagonism came to a head in 1833 when a revolt broke out in southern Vietnam. Seizing the opportunity provided, a Siamese army invaded Cambodia and southwestern Vietnam early in 1834, only to withdraw after suffering defeat at the hands of Vietnamese imperial troops. Minh Mang thereupon annexed eastern and central Cambodia. His policy of forced Vietnamization provoked strong Cambodian resistance, however, with the rebels drawing upon Siamese support. Not until 1841 did Vietnamese forces finally withdraw. An agreement with Siam concluded six years later stipulated that the king of Cambodia should receive investiture from each of his powerful neighbours, and pay tribute to both.[148]

While Siamese-Vietnamese hostilities between 1834 and 1847 were fought primarily over Cambodia, they had significant repercussions in the Lao territories, which served as a secondary theatre of conflict. In the last months of 1833 a substantial army was raised from the northern Siamese and northeastern Lao towns and concentrated at three points — Luang Phrabāng, Nôngkhāy, and Nakhôn Phanom. From there attacks were mounted early in 1834 on the Plain of Jars and against *meuang* tributary to Vietnam in central Laos. As no support was forthcoming from the Vietnamese, no resistance was offered by either Phuan or Lao towns. The Huaphan *meuang* voluntarily accepted Siamese suzerainty,[149] while the Nakhôn Phanom elite at Mahāxai agreed to relocate to the west bank "with full honours, authority and their peasants".[150] Substantial populations from both areas were resettled, through a combination of force and persuasion of elites, in satellite villages of Lao *meuang* already tributary to Bangkok west of the Mekong.[151]

It was not long, however, before Vietnamese opposition stiffened to this Siamese policy of depopulation. Following Vietnamese successes in Cambodia in 1834, mandarins from central Vietnam crossed the Mu Gia and Lao Bao passes to urge the Lao population of the upper Kading, Bang Fai and Bang Hiang

valleys to resist Siamese pressures to relocate. Village leaders were invited to visit Hué, to counter the promised gifts and appointment to office they were offered by the Siamese. The Vietnamese established an armed camp on the upper Bang Hiang, as well as guarding the passes, and formally incorporated all the east bank Lao territories from Huaphan south to Savannakhēt as Vietnamese administrative units, thus in theory extending Vietnam's western frontier to the Mekong.[152] Further south, Champāsak remained in Siamese hands.

The Siamese response was to force the pace of depopulation in order to deny any possible support for a Vietnamese invasion. Major military incursions took place in 1839 and 1841, interspersed for over a decade with annual dry season raids into the hills and valleys of east central Laos to seize food stocks, burn villages, and forcibly carry off anyone who could be apprehended.[153] Resistance took the form of flight to seek Vietnamese protection, and withdrawal of whole villages deeper into the mountains, a response used more effectively by Lao Thoeng tribes than by the more sedentary Lao Lum. Those resettled took any opportunity to return, despite continuing Siamese raids. The cycle of misery and destruction was finally broken by the political agreement of 1847, concluded as a result of the change in Siamese policy following accession of Rama IV (Mongkut). By that time, as Siamese records make clear, the east bank was a virtual wasteland of abandoned villages and rice fields.[154]

A similar policy was pursued with regard to the Phuan region. A Siamese invasion in 1834 saw two armies converge on the Plain of Jars. In response, Chau San, whom Minh Mang had appointed ruler of Xiang Khuang in place of Chau Nôy, thereupon massacred the Vietnamese garrison at Xiang Khuang,[155] and cooperated with Siamese authorities to move most of the Phuan population down to the Mekong plain. When the Vietnamese returned to re-establish a small garrison of about 100 men, they found only a fraction of the previous population remaining.[156] Over the next two years, Siamese raids depopulated all of the western Plain of Jars as more Phuan villagers were forcibly relocated across the Mekong. The Vietnamese abandoned Xiang Khuang for a more defensible site at Xiang Kham to the north, while the Phuan elite negotiated their submission. Siamese pressure to migrate was intense, and in 1836 Chau San was prevailed upon to found a new settlement eighty kilometres (fifty miles) east of Bangkok.[157] Siamese intentions at this time were to destroy *meuang* Xiang Khuang as thoroughly as they had Viang Chan. That they were unable to do so was due to a combination of stubborn resistance by the Phuan population, geographical remoteness from centres of Siamese power, and the proximity of Vietnam. The

Vietnamese showed much more tenacity in maintaining a presence on the Phuan plateau than they did on the middle Mekong. Apart from their garrison at Xiang Kham, they strengthened their position on the eastern edge of the plateau in the vicinity of Cua Rao where they pursued a policy of Vietnamese settlement and cultural assimilation.[158] Phuan governors were given Vietnamese administrative appointments in their own territory, in contrast to the Siamese policy of appointing Phuan governors only of resettled villages in regions under Siamese administrative control.

By 1840 a *de facto* division of spheres of influence had come about that included the Phuan territories. In the eastern region Vietnamese influence predominated, though Phuan princes made indirect submissions to Bangkok by renewing their tribute to Luang Phrabāng (whose rulers also maintained tributary relations with Hué).[159] Siamese influence, by contrast, was limited to regions west of the Mekong where Phuan and east bank Lao had been resettled. The central and western parts of the Plain of Jars thus formed part of a depopulated zone running east of the Mekong that formed the real buffer between Vietnam and Siam.[160] But whereas continuing raids during the decade prior to 1847 enforced the depopulation of the middle Mekong (Khammuan, Savannakhēt), this policy was less effective in the Phuan territories because less vigorously pursued.[161] Already in the 1840s, some re-population of the central Plain of Jars was occurring, although Siamese policy even after the 1847 agreement with Vietnam continued to be to persuade, rather than to force, as many inhabitants as possible to move down to the principal area of Phuan resettlement along the Mekong.

The new era in Siamese-Vietnamese relations signalled by the treaty of 1847 led eventually to a renewal of joint suzerainty over the Phuan territory. The following year, the five sons of Chau Nôy, the prince of Xiang Khuang whom the Vietnamese had executed for handing Anuvong over to the Siamese, were permitted by the new Emperor Tu Duc to return home. All had been brought up in Vietnam. In 1851, Chau Pō, the eldest of the five, received investiture from Hué as prince of Xiang Khuang.[162] To forestall any Siamese intervention, Chau Pō thereupon entered into negotiations with Bangkok to renew the arrangement agreed upon in 1837 whereby Xiang Khuang recognized the indirect suzerainty of Bangkok through payment of an annual tribute of traditional gold and silver trees to the ruler of Luang Phrabāng.[163] Rama IV accepted this compromise because the Siamese realized that Chau Pō and other members of the pro-Vietnamese Phuan nobility had no intention of accepting Bangkok's invitation to migrate to Siamese territory. In fact Chau Pō politely refused even to visit

Bangkok to submit in person to Siamese suzerainty. The only recourse for the Siamese was to pretend that indirect suzerainty gave them equal influence with the Vietnamese in Phuan affairs, while tacitly accepting Vietnamese supremacy.[164] It was an arrangement which endured for the best part of two decades.

Siam Challenged

At about this time, new players began to make their presence felt in northern Laos. In the early decades of the nineteenth century,[165] small groups of Lao Sūng, first Hmong, later Mien,[166] drove their hardy mountain ponies loaded with their scant possessions into northeastern Laos from southern China and northwestern Vietnam, both to escape Chinese repression and to discover virgin territory in which to settle. Their movement was peaceful: Lao authorities were often unaware that villages had been established. The Hmong generally settled at altitudes higher than the Lao Thoeng (mainly Khamu) with whom they maintained uneasy relations. Once they decided on a defensible location, they built their houses, cut and burned the forest to grow dry rice, corn and vegetables, along with their only cash crop, the opium poppy, worshipped their gods and kept to themselves. The opium was sold to Chinese (Hô) traders who annually drove their caravans of pack horses south along the mountain trails from Yunnan, paying for their purchases in silver, salt, and the iron from which the Hmong expertly crafted their long-barrelled flintlock guns.

The origins of the Hmong are obscure.[167] Chinese dynastic histories refer to the "Miao" as early as the Han period but the term is a generic one for "barbarian" tribes south of the Yellow River (Huang He) who resisted Chinese expansion and acculturation.[168] The Hmong today are located in scattered groups south of the Yangzi in China in the provinces of Hunan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Guangxi and Yunnan,[168] in northwestern Vietnam, in northern Laos as far south as Khammuan province, and in northern Thailand.[169] Under the Ming, the Hmong were concentrated in the forested mountains of Guizhou. The present pattern of settlement is largely the result of Qing (Manchu) attempts to consolidate their rule over southern China during the eighteenth century. Hmong uprisings took place from 1727-1737, from 1767-1776, and from 1795-1806, the last of which was responsible for the first Hmong migration into Laos. In 1855, the last great Hmong rebellion broke out in Guizhou, in concert with the Chinese muslim Panthay rebellion.[170] The barbarity of the ensuing Chinese repression (1866-1872) set off a new wave of Hmong migration south into northern Vietnam and

northeastern Laos. The first settlement in Laos was at Nông Haet, under a *kiatong* (chief) of the Lô clan.[171] Later new settlements extended westward into Luang Phrabāng province, but the principal concentration remained in Huaphan and Xiang Khuang.[172]

The origins of the Mien are equally obscure. Like the Hmong, most Mien still live in China. They did not begin migrating south into Laos until around the 1860s. Unlike the Hmong, however, the Mien have been much more influenced by Chinese culture. They eat with chopsticks, use Chinese characters, incorporate Taoist rituals in their religious practices, and venerate their ancestors. Like the Hmong, the Mien are divided into a number of clans (twelve) which, unlike the Hmong, are not exogamous.[173] Strictly speaking, the more numerous Hmong are one of three or four (depending on classification) closely related ethnic groups, and in turn are divided into two cultural sub-groups named for the colour of the women's skirts (white or green). More important for the Hmong themselves is their division into patrilineal exogamous clans, of which there are more than twenty-five among the Lao Hmong, and lineage groups. Intense rivalry between leading Hmong clans in Laos later came to play a significant part in war and revolution in the mid-twentieth century.

The tragedy of the Hmong lay in the future, however, and the 1860s were relatively peaceful in the Lao territories. In 1839, three years after the death of his father Manthāthurāt, Sukkhasoem was given Siamese investiture and allowed to return to Luang Phrabāng.[174] Two years later he forced the factious Tai-Leu of the Sipsông Phan Nā to accept the suzerainty of Luang Phrabāng, and thus of Bangkok. They were, however, to prove reluctant tributaries. Sukkhasoem died in 1850 to be succeeded by his brother Chantharāt. In 1852 the decennial tribute mission was despatched to Beijing, but was forced to turn back because of the Taiping rebellion then sweeping China. It was the last time any such attempt was made. Luang Phrabāng continued to act as a faithful vassal of Bangkok in implementing Siamese policy on relocation of population. Following a revolt in Meuang Xiang Hung, thousands of families from the Sipsông Phan Nā were settled within the territory of Luang Phrabāng.[175] In 1867 King Chantharāt had the satisfaction of obtaining the return of the *Phra Bāng* image from Bangkok.[176]

From this period date too the first European accounts of Laos for more than two centuries.[177] First to arrive was the French naturalist Henri Mouhot (1826-1861), who travelled from Bangkok to Luang Phrabāng via Nakhôn Rāxasīmā, the western edges of the Khōrāt plateau and Pāklāy, a journey which took him over three and a half months. Mouhot stayed for only two weeks in Luang

Phrabāng before embarking on further explorations that soon led to his death from malaria in November 1861.[178] Luang Phrabāng pleased him greatly, the setting, in its amphitheatre of mountains making "a charming picture". "The lake of Geneva does not present scenes more beautiful than many here by the river", he wrote. The population Mouhot estimated at seven or eight thousand. His audience with King Chantharāt was conducted "with great pomp", with the monarch seated on a raised platform surrounded by prostrate princes and members of the nobility.[179]

A little more than five years later, members of the Lagrée-Garnier expedition exploring the course of the Mekong made a dignified, if barefooted, entry into Luang Phrabāng. It was a portent of growing French interests in Southeast Asia. In February 1859 France had succeeded in seizing the southern Vietnamese port of Saigon. By mid-1867, all of southern Vietnam (Cochinchina) was in French hands. In the meantime, France had already (by a treaty of protection signed in December 1863) extended its influence west to encompass Cambodia, minus those western provinces at the time tributary to Bangkok.[180]

It was from Phnom Penh, in July 1866, that preparations were launched for the next phase in the expansion of French influence. The exploratory expedition led by Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier was designed to map the Mekong as far as southern China, in the hope that it would provide a navigable inland trading route. At the very gateway to Laos, at the cataracts of Khôn, it was obvious that this hope would remain unfulfilled. Nevertheless, the little band determined to press on. Progress was slow. They reached the ruins of Viang Chan at the end of March 1867, and Luang Phrabāng a month later, where they too were received by King Chantharāt.[181]

In his account of the expedition, Garnier remarks upon the deserted state of much of the territory east of the Mekong. In the south, slavery was endemic, with Attopeau the regional centre for the slave trade. Lao Thoeng captured in the mountains sold in Attapeu for 150 francs, but fetched 500 francs in Phnom Penh.[182] Most trade in this region was in the hands of Chinese who alone maintained regular contact with Phnom Penh and Saigon. Further north, the sparse villages of the middle Mekong were devoid of commerce. Nôngkhāy had taken the place of Viang Chan as a regional trading centre, but not until the explorers arrived at Luang Phrabāng did they find a substantial town boasting a market Europeans could recognize as such.

Despite a combination of Siamese neglect and exploitation, communities managed to survive, through subsistence agriculture and through keeping

traditional commodity trading relationships alive. In addition to slaves, salt, iron, tin, gold, even opium were bartered for forest products, such as sticklac, cardamom and beeswax, hides, ivory and rhinoceros horn, a trade that linked Lao Thoeng, especially in the Bôlaven area, via Lao Lum intermediaries (or *lām*) to the trading centres of the middle Mekong (Stung Treng, Champāsak, Nakhôn Phanom, Nôngkhāy). From there they were despatched by ox cart to Bangkok in payment of the annual *suai*, or tax in kind.[183]

Despite stubborn resistance by the Lao *meuang*, several of which were years in arrear in their payments, by the 1850s Bangkok was receiving annual taxes from the Lao territories amounting to some ten tons of beeswax, 100 tons of cardamom, one ton of ivory and one ton of silk, not to mention payments in gold and silver. Other goods included ramie (a kind of fibre), cotton cloth, and sticklac.[184] As the economy increasingly became monetized, tax was collected in the form of silver currency (*baht*), while the commodity trade fell into the hands of Chinese merchants. As the China trade out of Bangkok dwindled in importance in the face of European competition, however, so too did the demand for Lao products.[185]

In centres east of the Mekong in southern Laos and on the lower reaches of the Nam Kading, Bang Fai and Bang Hiang tributaries, Lao chiefs accepted the suzerainty of Bangkok, while *meuang* on the upper reaches bordering on Vietnam paid tribute to Hué.[186] None, however, of the southern and central east bank Lao *meuang* were more than loosely integrated into the administration of either state. The Vietnamese "indigenous prefectures" in Laos constituted "a sort of protectorate" in which administration was exercised by the local Lao nobility supervised by visiting Vietnamese officials.[187] No officials were appointed by Bangkok to Lao *meuang* east of the Mekong under nominal Siamese control, though inspectors did make occasional visits.[188]

Even to the west of the Mekong, the Lao *meuang* initially retained considerable independence in their dealings with Bangkok. Lao affairs were the responsibility of a senior official in the Mahatthai, the ministry responsible for the northern and eastern provinces, who paid occasional visits to the region. Lao rulers and their retinues made more frequent visits to Bangkok to pay tribute and receive presents in exchange. They were presented with Siamese symbols of office, and were bound to perform twice-yearly ceremonies reaffirming their allegiance to the Siamese throne. Even so the ruling families of the Isan *meuang* traced their ancestry and traditions not to central Siam, but to "rival trans-Mekong dynasties".[189] It was perhaps not surprising, therefore, that so long as taxes were

regularly paid, in the form of levies in kind and troop levies in time of war, and social order prevailed, the Siamese did not interfere. Even the Lao Sangha was independent of the Siamese hierarchy.[190] This rather loose tributary relationship was well understood by both sides, but as Kennon Breazeale notes, "so little [was the] substance in this suzerain-vassal relationship in the Lao states ... that foreigners ... seriously questioned Thai sovereignty".[191]

In Champāsak, Chau Khamsuk, second son of Chau Huy, succeeded his elder brother as princely ruler in 1863. During his long rule of almost forty years, he attempted to revive his family's fortunes in the traditional way, by endowing Buddhist monasteries, drawing up new legal codes, and raising the status of larger villages to tributary *meuang*. Population seems to have increased slowly, and the town remained the principal centre of administration and trade for southern Laos. Khamsuk's standing at the court of Bangkok was greatly enhanced by the capture of two white elephants, which as symbols of kingship had to be presented to his Siamese overlord. Though he was well rewarded with valuable gifts and honorary titles, this did not prevent Bangkok from subsequently raising the annual *suai* tax.[192]

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Lao *meuang* both east and west of the Mekong remained separate and divided. No consolidation through marriage or political alliance took place to create a new political hierarchy. Partly this was due to the Lao social structure, which comprised, apart from the relatively few slaves, a free peasantry and an hereditary nobility determined to preserve their own little fiefdoms.[193] Each noble family sought confirmation of office from Bangkok (where the Siamese court might temporarily withhold appointment), rather than pursuing interests in common. *Meuang* thus remained small, comprising a central town linked to a number of dependent villages. The relationship was a legal one, not necessarily territorial, and was determined by Bangkok.[194] Not until the early 1880s, under pressure from France, were the Lao west bank *meuang* brought firmly under Siamese administration. Siamese commissioners (*khāluang*) were based first at Nakhôn Rāxasīmā, then at Champāsak, Ubon and Nôngkhāy, and subsequently at Rôy-Et, each responsible for one of the divisions into which the Lao territories were divided. Yet not until after the loss of the east bank of the Mekong to France in 1893 was Siamese control fully consolidated and the Khōrāt plateau lost to Laos.[195]

French explorers in the 1860s found a country reduced to extremity. Only in Luang Phrabāng were the vestiges of a great kingdom still evident. Even so the king and his high officials could be summoned as minions to Bangkok, or

instructed to carry out the policies of the Siamese court. The town itself was unpretentious, even if court ceremonial was not. Yet it remained a pale shadow of the pomp and circumstance of the court of Lān Xāng at the time of Surinyavongsā. What wealth there was was generated by trade, principally in forest products though hardly enough to meet the cost of administration and the demands of tribute from Bangkok. For the next two decades Luang Phrabāng remained a peaceful, rather depressed backwater. At the end of that time, its tranquillity was to be brutally shattered.

By the late 1860s bands of Chinese brigands simply referred to as the Hô, the remnants of both the Taiping and Panthay rebellions, were active in the ill-defined border areas of northern and northeastern Laos. Organized into bands by charismatic leaders, they were known by the colours of their battle pennants as "Black Flags", legitimized through alliance with Vietnamese imperial forces, rival "Yellow Flags" chased westwards to the upper reaches of the Black River, and "Red Flags" and "Striped Flags" further north and west. Disturbances in the Lao territories broke out first in the upper reaches of the Nam Ū, exacerbated by continuing civil unrest among the Tai-Leu of the Sipsông Phan Nā.[196] However when Hô rebels and Leu chiefs joined forces to repudiate the authority of Luang Phrabāng in 1869, the court was slow to react as the Luang Phrabāng nobility were preoccupied with the forthcoming cremation ceremonies for Rama IV in Bangkok. The following year King Chantharāt died of malaria, and it was not until the early months of 1873 that the new king Unkham, a younger brother of kings Sukkhasoem and Chantharāt, was able to assemble an army and, with Siamese assistance, reassert Lao control over the upper Ū basin.[197]

Instead of retreating north, however, Hô bands moved east and southeast into the Sipsông Chu Tai and Huaphan. Meuang Thaeng was overrun by about 2,000 "Red Flags", while in the Phuan region "Striped Flag" and "Yellow Flag" remnants extorted "taxes" and terrorized inhabitants.[198] Phuan attempts to drive out these warrior bandits met with defeat.[199] Both Vietnamese and Lao contingents sent at the request of the Siamese governor of Xiang Khuang were routed and the town taken and sacked. Thousands fled south to the Phuan settlements along the Mekong, or west to Luang Phrabāng. By early 1875, bands of highly mobile Hô horsemen were raiding as far as the outskirts of Luang Phrabāng, across the Viang Chan plain and south to Thākhaek, plundering and looting at will. Despite the Hô threat to Siamese sovereignty and security, attention in Bangkok was distracted by the so-called "Front Palace Crisis" of 1874-1875 with its threat of civil war in response to the reform programme of

King Chulalongkorn (Rama V).[200] Not until September 1875 did Siamese armies succeed in driving the Hô from their stockade among the ruins of Viang Chan.[201] Early in 1876 a Siamese army retook Xiang Khuang, and forced the Hô to fall back upon their former stronghold of Xiang Kham. Once again the Siamese took the opportunity to pursue their policy of depopulation. Thousands of Phuan were forcibly marched southwest to the Chao Phraya River where they were shipped downstream to camps near Bangkok.[202] Many more were resettled in the region of Bôrikham, and along both banks of the Mekong between Viang Chan and Pākxan.[203]

Siamese withdrawal left the depopulated Plain of Jars once again vulnerable to Hô attack. A few Phuan who remained maintained their resistance. Those to the east sought protection from Vietnam: others paid to be left alone. Despite their withdrawal the Siamese moved to assert nominal suzerainty over the Phuan territories by appointing Chau Khamthī, son of the former ruler, Chau Ung, as prince of Xiang Khuang.[204] Two years later he was endorsed by Hué as governor of the *phu* of Tran Ninh.

Siamese troops were also required to suppress a revolt of Khamu on the upper Nam Ū in 1875-1876, led by the "energetic and courageous" Phra-Nha Thao-Nhi.[205] After this an uneasy equilibrium prevailed for most of the next decade in the border territories of Luang Phrabāng. On the middle Mekong, forced migration and slave raids into the east bank territories kept the population to a minimum.[206] In the south, Chau Khamsuk of Champāsak seized whatever pretext possible to reconstitute and extend his small kingdom. By 1881, he had managed to establish some ten new *meuang* owing allegiance directly to Champāsak, but with the appointment of the first Siamese commissioner in 1884, his limited freedom of action was curtailed, and he subsequently made little secret of how irksome he found Siamese tutelage.[207]

In the early 1880s, Hô exactions increased against the Huaphan *meuang* and Xiang Khuang, while the Khamu again rose in revolt. Chau Khamthī sought assistance first unsuccessfully from Vietnam, then from Luang Phrabāng, but the kingdom was too weak to respond. An appeal to Bangkok in 1882 resulted in the despatch of a small Siamese force to Luang Phrabāng the following March, and establishment there of a semi-permanent Siamese garrison, an action subsequently described by French writers as the Siamese "invasion" of Laos that provoked France's reaction on behalf of Vietnam.[208]

The following year joint Siamese-Lao forces advanced up the valley of the Nam Ū into the western Sipsông Chu Tai without encountering resistance. Early

in 1884, the government in Bangkok sent a survey mission under the English geographer James McCarthy to map Xiang Khuang, Huaphan, and the Sipsông Chu Tai frontier region, the first of several subsequent mapping missions designed to define the furthest extent of Siamese territory.[209] Though McCarthy's initial efforts were circumscribed, they did serve notice of Siamese intentions with respect to the northeastern Tai highlands at a time when the French were tightening their grip on Tonkin, and taking an increasing interest in the same region. At this time, however, most French exploration was concentrated in southern Laos and the Khōrāt plateau.[210]

In the first half of 1885, joint Siamese-Lao armies again converged on the Huaphan region and the Plain of Jars, only to retreat in the face of modest if stubborn Hô resistance. Annoyed by this failure, King Chulalongkorn determined to annex all regions formerly tributary to Luang Phrabāng, together with as much of the Sipsông Chu Tai as possible, and to incorporate them within the Siamese state. A major military expedition left Luang Phrabāng early in 1886 under the command of the Siamese general Wai Woronat, including Lao levies under the command of the *uparāt* of Luang Phrabāng, Chau Bunkhong.[211] After fighting two engagements, Wai Woronat's northern army succeeded in either dispersing or gaining the submission of Hô bands in the Phuan and Huaphan areas. Chau Khamthī and other Phuan leaders were escorted to Bangkok under the pretext that Chulalongkorn wished to confer new honours upon them. Once there, however, they were prevented from leaving lest they oppose Siamese annexation of Xiang Khuang and appeal to Hué, or worse still, the French.[212] A Siamese governor was appointed to administer the Phuan territories. With Xiang Khuang pacified, Wai Woranat turned his attention to the Sipsông Chu Tai.

In the 1850s, the Kham family, paramount chiefs of the Sipsông Chu Tai, had transferred their capital from Meuang Thaeng (Dien Bien Phu) to Lai Chau and their allegiance from Luang Phrabāng to Hué.[213] In 1886 the paramount leader of the Sipsông Chu Tai was the White Tai chieftain Khamsing (known to the Vietnamese as Deo Van Seng), by then an old man. *De facto* power was in the hands of his eldest son Khamhum, the notorious Deo Van Tri.

By the mid-1880s the Tai highlands that made up the Sipsông Chu Tai were under pressure on two fronts. In 1883, a powerful French expeditionary force had landed in Tonkin to impose French rule. Opposing them was a motley collection of Vietnamese patriots, former Chinese rebels (the Black Flags) settled in Vietnam, and Chinese provincial troops from Guangxi and Yunnan. The latter were subsequently withdrawn under the terms of the Sino-French treaty of June

1885 which formally recognized French sovereignty over Vietnam, resulting eventually in agreed demarcation of the Sino-Vietnamese border. Withdrawal of regular Chinese forces left the Tai hill tribes and their Black Flag allies alone to face the encroaching French. In desperation, Khamhum turned to the Siamese.[214] He was not, however, prepared to surrender all independence to Bangkok. An alliance would need to be negotiated.

The Siamese expedition of 1885-1886 next turned its attention to the Sipsông Chu Tai. Meuang Thaeng was occupied, and the nearby Hô garrison called upon to surrender. When it failed to do so, the Siamese overran it, seizing among their prisoners three younger brothers and a brother-in-law of Khamhum. In his memoirs, Khamhum states that they had been sent to Meuang Thaeng, in response to Siamese overtures, to negotiate on the defence of the Sipsông Chu Tai against the French.[215] Instead of negotiating, however, Wai Woranat carried all four off to Luang Phrabāng as hostages in order, so he intended, to ensure the allegiance of the Sipsông Chu Tai ruler.

This high-handed action had just the reverse effect.[216] Instead of going in person to Luang Phrabāng to make his submission to the Siamese commissioner, Khamhum assembled a force of some six hundred upland Tai and Hô troops and marched on Luang Phrabāng to free his brothers. Outlying Lao positions fell easily to the invading forces. Meanwhile Wai Woranat had left for Bangkok, taking his hostages with him. Fearing to give battle, the small Siamese garrison and their Lao auxiliaries fled along with the two Siamese commissioners. Luang Phrabāng was put to the sack on 7 June 1887, out of vengeance Khamhum later admitted, because he erroneously believed all three of his brothers to be dead.[217] It was with difficulty that the elderly king Unkham was saved from his burning palace by his own sons and his Burmese guards,[218] and ferried downstream to Pāklāy, leaving his sword and seal in the hands of Khamhum. As luck would have it, he was accompanied by the recently arrived French vice-consul, Auguste Pavie, from whom he requested French protection. Six years later this was formally provided, and Laos became a protectorate of France.

Chapter 5

The Continuity of Lao History

The history of the Lao kingdom of Lān Xāng is the early history of the state of Laos, the present Lao People's Democratic Republic. The rise of Lān Xāng to become a powerful kingdom in mainland Southeast Asia and its subsequent decline as a result of division into mutually antagonistic principalities, is as much part of the history of modern Laos as the histories of constituent kingdoms — Ayutthaya, Lān Nā — are of modern Thailand.

This only needs stressing against those who would deny the continuity of Lao history. That a unitary Lao kingdom ceased to exist in the early eighteenth century, and that what was reconstructed by the French nearly two centuries later as modern Laos comprised but part of the former Kingdom of Lān Xāng does not destroy the essential continuity of Lao history. Nor does the fact that historically Lao jurisdiction once spread far beyond the geographical boundaries of present-day Laos, or that many more ethnic Lao now reside in northeastern Thailand, the Īsān region comprising the Khōrāt plateau, than live in Laos. The modern Lao state, even though it comprises territories inhabited by ethnically diverse peoples, almost half of whom are not lowland Lao, looks naturally to the kingdom of Lān Xāng to establish its historical and cultural identity.

Because for some the continuity of Lao history is problematic, however, some justification is perhaps necessary for the claim that Lān Xāng is the historical precursor of the modern Lao state. The most convincing way to do this is to focus on the socio-political organization of power among those people who have historically identified themselves as Lao. Among the Lao, power relations have traditionally existed between individuals, families, clans, and *meuang*. The latter, characteristically Tai political and administrative structures comprise, as we have seen, geo-political concentrations of power of variable extent held together through personal allegiance, religious authority, economic relations of tribute and trade, and where necessary coercive force. The term applies equally to a series

of levels, smaller *meuang* being incorporated within larger ones.
Traditionally *meuang* ruling elites enjoyed internal freedom of action in return for acceptance of tributary dependency on more powerful rulers. Each *meuang* jealously guarded its internal autonomy, while preserving in its political structure the seeds of possible future expansion, if and when circumstances permitted it in turn to impose dependent tributary relations on neighbouring, less powerful *meuang*. By such means, each local prince (*chau meuang*) could harbour dreams of becoming a more powerful ruler by virtue of merit accumulated in his present and innumerable previous existences, while the most powerful aspired to draw all or most Lao *meuang* into a greater Lao "imperial *meuang*", or *mandala*, thereby exercising hegemonic power throughout the Lao world.

During even the worst periods of division, this possibility of reconstituting a Lao *mandala* to include roughly the former territory of Lān Xāng, always remained open. From it derives the twin goals that have been evident since the founding of the kingdom in the fourteenth century, no matter how imperfectly achieved: a desire on the part of Lao rulers to incorporate all Lao *meuang* in a unitary *Meuang Lao*, whose ideal space was formally mapped by reference to four contact points with neighbouring *mandalas*; and a determination to ensure freedom from domination by powerful neighbours. These goals of unity and independence continue to be primary concerns for the political leadership of modern Laos.[1]

These claims can be justified by examining the religious/ideological basis underlying creation of a unitary Lao *mandala*. The Indian Buddhist conception of political relations is well suited to the rapid rise of segmentary kingdoms constructed of constituent parts. The founder is potentially a universal ruler (*cakkavattin*), a conqueror whose conquests are ideally conducted without bloodshed, since his power alone should be sufficient to convince lesser rulers to acknowledge his superior merit and swear allegiance. The might of armies, retinue, and symbols of Buddhist truth (*Dhamma*) are recognizable outer manifestations of the inner merit accumulated by the *cakkavattin* over countless earlier incarnations; that is, of his *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*). Such merit might have achieved the inner religious goal of Buddhahood had it not been directed towards the almost equally commendable outer political goal of creating the universal Buddhist realm that would permit the pursuit of *Dhamma* by all sentient beings. The allegiance of lesser rulers was recognition of that superior merit. Such allegiance could, however, always be withdrawn from a king whose merit failed to sustain the power of his *meuang*. This was most likely on the periphery

where alternative foci of power more easily asserted their attraction. Kingdoms could therefore expand or contract as a function of the power status of the centre.

The component parts of the traditional Lao Buddhist kingdom, the principal constituent *meuang*, were political entities in their own right. Each such *meuang* replicated the structure of the whole of which it formed a tributary part. As these principal *meuang* themselves incorporated several smaller *meuang*, authority was exercised on a series of levels, at each of which the political power structure of the larger entity was explicitly replicated through the titles of the top positions in the ruling hierarchy — in order, in terms of power and status: *chau*, or ruler, *uparāt*, *rāxavong* and *rāxabut*. This political structure conformed to a religious ideology: political office rested on social status which itself reflected religious merit. Moreover, it was repeated throughout every social unit: the village (*bān*) replicated the *meuang* in miniature.

This segmentary political structure was characteristic of all early Tai polities, whose people were thus remarkably free to conduct their own local affairs in return for allegiance, tribute, and manpower in the event of war, contributions sustaining respectively the religio-symbolic, economic, and military bases of the central power of the *mandala* of which they formed a part. The continuity of Lao history derives from the continuity of the Lao *meuang*, whose existence guaranteed the continuity of Lao political culture, even when centralized political structures disappeared. When the kingdom of Viang Chan was destroyed, it gave way to a multiplicity of replicas, *meuang*, even villages,[2] in each of which the political institutions of the centre were reflected, and from each of which, conditions permitting, a new centre might arise. When the French reconstructed Laos, Viang Chan became a French administrative centre. With the proclamation of Lao independence in 1945, it became the political capital of a reunited *Meuang Lao* (though the ceremonial centre remained in Luang Phrabāng, thus ironically severing for the first time these two dimensions of power in the *meuang*). This was accepted as legitimate throughout what is present-day Laos, even by those prepared to compromise with the returning French in 1946, because the continuity of a specifically Lao culture, even under Siamese domination, had ensured the necessary pre-conditions. The discontinuity of central political structures was thus overcome historically by the continuity of political culture anchored firmly at the village level within the socio-religious Lao worldview.

What is evident, therefore, is that the continuity of Lao history lies in the political structure and culture of the *meuang*.[3] The process of expansion or

contraction of *Meuang Lao* through consolidation or division, has rested at all times on the political structure and ideological justification provided by the *meuang*. At any time, developments have depended on interaction between external circumstances and internal conditions. But the process has followed no predictable sequence. The variables have been too many, the interactions too complex. Lao *meuang* have comprised variable territories whose independence has been relative. The historical precursors of present-day Laos as a political entity changed over time, in reponse to prevailing power relations in mainland Southeast Asia. The process leading to formation of the present state of Laos resulted from the intervention of European powers, but these from a Lao (and Buddhist) perspective constituted just additional terms in an equation of continuous change, the outcome of which could never be fixed or final. The history of Laos is a history of the changing fortunes not just of *Meuang Lao*, but of the ensemble of all Lao *meuang*. It is this that constitutes the continuity that justifies the claim that the history of Lān Xāng is the early history of the modern independent and sovereign Lao state.

Appendix

Kings of Lān Xāng from the Phrayā dynasty on

Phrayā Lāng	1271-1316 ?	Son of last king of the Thao dynasty
Suvanna Khamphong	1316-1344 ?	Son of Phrayā Lāng
Khamhiao	1344?-1353	Son of Suvanna Khamphong
Fā Ngum	1353-1373/74	Grandson of Suvanna Khamphong
Sām Saen Tai	1373/74-1416	Son of Fā Ngum
Lān Kham Daeng	1416-1428	Son of Sām Saen Tai
Phommathat	1428-1429	Son of Lān Kham Daeng; ruled 10 mths
Khamtem	1,430.00	Son of Sām Saen Tai; ruled 5 mths
Meunsai	1,430.00	Son of Sām Saen Tai; ruled 6 mths
Fākhai	1431-1434 ?	Grandson of Sām Saen Tai
Kônkham	1,435.00	Son of Sām Saen Tai; ruled 7 mths
Yukhôn	1,436.00	Son of Lān Kham Daeng; ruled 8 mths
Khamkoet	1436-1438	Not of royal descent
Mahā Thevī	1,438.00	Queen of Sām Saen Tai
Interregnum	1438-1442	
Xainyachakkaphat Phaen Phaeo	1442-1479/80	Son of Sām Saen Tai
Suvanna Banlang	1480-1486	Son of Xainyachakkaphat

Appendix

Lā Saen Tai	1486-1496	Son of Xainyachakkaphat
Xumphū	1496-1501	Son of Lā Saen Tai
Vixun	1501-1520	Son of Xainyachakkaphat
Phōthisārāt	1520-1547	Son of Vixun
Xētthāthirāt I	1548-1571	Son of Phōthisārāt
Saen Surin (1)	1571-1575	Not of royal descent
Vôravongsā I	1575-1579	Son of Phōthisārāt
Saen Surin (2)	1580-1582	
Nakhôn Nôy	1582-1583	Son of Saen Surin; not of royal descent
Burmese interregnum	1583-1591	
Nôkaeokumān	1591-1596	Son of Xētthāthirāt
Vôravongsā II	1596-1622	Nephew of Xētthāthirāt
Upayuvarāt	1622-1623	Son of Vôravongsā
Phōthisān	1623-1627	Son or grandson of Saen Surin
Mômkaeo	1627-1633 ?	Son of Vôravongsā
Vixai/Tônkham	1633-1638	Sons of Vôravongsā; ruled jointly?
Surinyavongsā	1638-1695	Son of Tônkham
Phrayā Meuang Chan	1,695.00	Not of royal descent; ruled 6 mths
Nantharāt	1696-1698	Cousin of Surinyavongsā
Xai Ong Vē = Xētthāthirāt II	1698-1735	Nephew of Surinyavongsā

Kings of Viang Chan

Xai Ong Vē	1698-1735	Nephew of Surinyavongsā
Ong Long	1735-1760	Half-brother of Xai Ong Vē
Siribunnyasān	1760-1779	Son of Xai Ong Vē
Nanthasēn	1779-1794	Son of Siribunnyasān
Inthavong	1794-1804	Brother of Nanthasēn
Ānuvong	1804-1828	Brother of Inthavong

Kings of Luang Phrabāng

Kingkissarāt	1707-1713	Grandson of Surinyavongsā
Ong Kham	1713-1723	Son of the ruler of Xiang Hung
Inthasōm	1723-1749	Brother of Kingkissarāt
Inthaphom	1749-1750	Ninth son of Inthasōm
Xōtika	1750-1771	First son of Inthasōm
Surinyavong	1771-1791	Son of Xōtika
Interregnum	1791-1795	
Anuruttha	1795-1816	Brother of Surinyavong
Manthāturāt	1817-1836	Son of Anuruttha
Interregnum	1836-1839	
Sukkhasoem	1839-1850	Son of Manthāturāt
Chantharāt	1852-1871	Brother of Sukkhasoem

Unkham	1873-1894	Brother of Chantharāt
Khamsuk (Sakkarin)	1894-1903	Son of Unkham
Sīsavāngvong	1904-1959	Son of Khamsuk
Savāngvatthanā	1959-1975	Son of Sīsavāngvong

Kings of Champāsak

Sôysīsamut Phutthāngkūn	1713-1737	Grandson of Surinyavongsā
Xainyakumān	1737-1791	Son of Sôysīsamut
Fāy Nā	1791-1811	Son of Phra Vôrarāt; not of royal descent
Nu	1811-1813	Son of Fāy Nā
Mānôy	1813-1819	Nephew of Xainyakumān
Nyō	1819-1827	Son of Ānuvong, King of Viang Chan
Huy	1828-1840	Great great grandson of Sôysīsamut
Nāk	1841-1850	Brother of Huy
Bua	1853-1855	Son of Huy
Khamnyai	1855-1862	Brother of Bua
Khamsuk	1863-1900	Brother of Khamnyai
Nyuy (Rāxadanai)	1900-1946	Son of Khamsuk

In many cases different versions of the Lao Chronicles give slightly different dates for the accession and death of kings. Some reigns are entirely missing (for example, of Suvanna Banlang of Lān Xāng, or Ong Long of Viang Chan). This king list provides, therefore, a best estimate only of dates for the reigns of Lao kings.

Notes

Preface

1. Souneth Phothisane, The Nidān Khun Bôrom: Annotated Translation and Analysis, PhD dissertation, University of Queensland, 1997. See pp. 73-82 for his analysis of the inter-relationship between versions and groups. 2.Paris, 1898.
3. In his "Recherches sur la littérature laotienne", *BEFEO* 17, 5 (1917): 1-218.
4. Paris, 1931.
5. Trans. Joint Publications Research Services. New York, 1964.
6. Revised ed., Bangkok, 1971. A more recent, but less accessible study is Shen Xu, *Lao Wo Shi* [History of Laos] Kunming, 1990
7. Paris, 1987.
8. Bangkok, 1986.
9. Subtitled: "contribution ethno-historique à la connaissance de la culture louang-phrabanaise". Metz, 1987.
10. Paris, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 1995.
11. Besides Lorrillard, the other important work on Lao epigraphy is P-M. Gagneux, Contribution à la connaissance de la civilisation laotienne d'après l'épigraphie du Royaume de Vientiane (XV^{è}-XIX^{è} siècles). Doctoral dissertation, University of Paris, 1976.
12. Of which the most important apart from Chinese dynastic histories (particularly the *Ming-shi*) are the Chiang Mai and Nān chronicles. D. K. Wyatt and Aroonrut Wichienkeeo, trans., *The Chiang Mai Chronicle* (Chiang Mai, 1995); and D. K. Wyatt, trans. and ed., *The Nan Chronicle* (Ithaca, NY, 1994).
13. *Le journal de voyage de Gerrit van Wuysthoff et de ses assistants au Laos (1641-42)*. 2nd rev. ed. (Metz, 1993).
14. *Le Roman Classique Lao* (Paris, 1988).
15. Kingship and Political Integration in Traditional Siam, 1767-1824. PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1976.
16. A Present of the Past: Fifty Years (1779-1829) of Diplomacy and Warfare Among Mainland Southeast Asia Traditional Polities (provisional title), forthcoming.
17. Snit Smuckarn and Kennon Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival: The Phuan of Thailand and Laos* (New Haven, 1988). Also important is Kennon Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States into the Thai Kingdom. PhD dissertation, Oxford

University, 1975.

18. In several articles referred to in Chapter 4.

Chapter 1: The Prehistory and Peopling of Laos

1 How many ethnic groups there are in Laos has long been a matter of debate. Sixty-eight was the number most commonly quoted by spokesmen for the Lao People's Democratic Republic, though no list was ever published. In the 1985 census, over 800 "self-identified ethnic groups" were recorded which were reduced to forty-seven distinct groups forming six "ethno-linguistic groupings" — Tai-Lao, Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Mien, Tibeto-Burman, Vietnamese-Muong, and Chinese. Of these, the last two represent less than one percent of the population each, while the Tibeto-Burman group constitutes just over two percent. Of a total population of just on 3.6 million, the Tai-Lao accounted for 51 percent and all Lao Lum for 68 percent. The Lao Thoeng accounted for 22 percent, and Lao Sūng (combining Hmong-Mien and Tibeto-Burman groups) 10 percent. State Statistical Centre, Ministry of Economy, Planning and Finance, *Population of the Lao P.D.R.* (Viang Chan, 1992), especially 13-14. Most recently the figure of 130 "groups and sub-groups" has been calculated by Laurent Chazee, *Atlas des Ethnies et des Sous-Ethnies du Laos* (Bangkok, 1995).

2 In accordance with what has become common usage, the term "Tai", even though more correctly written "Thai", will be used as a linguistic and cultural prefix to refer to all those related ethnic groups speaking Tai languages, while "Thai" will be reserved for the citizens and language of the present-day state of Thailand. The common prefix "Tai" before the group name signifies recognized affinities. Thus in Thailand, one can differentiate the central Thai (Tai-Sayām) from the northern (Tai-Yuan) or northeastern Thai (Tai-Īsān). Similarly, lowland or ethnic Lao will be referred to as Tai-Lao to differentiate them from other constituent groups comprising the Lao Lum.

3 Austroasiatic languages spoken in Laos are divided by linguists into two groups: a northern group including notably Khamu and Lamet; and a southern group including notably Lavēn and Brao.

4 Damrong Tayanin, *Being Kammu: My Village, My Life* (New York, 1992).

5 The speakers of Hmong-Mien languages refer to themselves thus in preference to the terms Miao (Meo) and Yao. The principal minorities speaking Tibeto-Burman languages are the Phūnôy, a lowland group in Phongsālī province, and the upland Ākhā and Lāhū.

6 For example, the Sō in southern Laos, and the Kāsak, those Khamu in the region of Luang Phrabāng who have "become Lao". F. M. Lebar, G. C. Hickey, and J. K. Musgrave, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, 1964), 113, 149-50.

7 E. Saurin, "Les recherches préhistoriques au Cambodge, Laos et Viet-Nam (1877-1966)" *Asian Perspectives* 12 (1969): 28.

8 C. Gorman, "The Hoabinhian and After: Subsistence Patterns in Southeast Asia During the Latest Pleistocene and Early Recent Periods" *World Archaeology* 2 (1971): 300.

9 P. Bellwood, *Prehistory of the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago* (Sydney, 1985), 164. The status of the Hoabinhian in mainland Southeast Asia is still in question. Cf. T. E. G. Reynolds, "Problems in the Stone Age of Thailand", *JSS* 71, 1 (1990): 164.

10 D. T. Bayard, "The Roots of Indochinese Civilization: Recent Developments in the Prehistory of Southeast Asia", *Pacific Affairs* 53 (1980): 94.

11 The debate over dates and the possibility of cultural borrowing, however, remains an active one. For a recent survey, see Charles Higham, *The Archaeology of Mainland Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, 1989), especially 117, 133, 190.

12 Cf. B. Hayden, "Sticks and Stones and Ground Edge Axes: The Upper Palaeolithic in Southeast Asia?", in J. Allen, J. Golson and R. Jones eds, *Sunda and Sahul; Prehistoric Studies in Southeast Asia, Melanesia and Australia* (London, 1977), 77-86.

13 Douglas D. Anderson, "Prehistoric Human Adaptations to Environments in Thailand", in The Siam Society, *Culture and Environment in Thailand* (Bangkok, 1989), 112.

14 J. Fromaget, "Les récentes découvertes anthropologiques dans les formations préhistoriques de la chaine annamitique", *Proceedings of the Third Far Eastern Prehistory Congress* (Singapore, 1940), 51-59. Cf. Saurin, "Les recherches préhistoriques", 31.

15 G. Olivier, "Révision du crane mésolithique de Tam Pong (Laos)", *Bulletin et Memoires de la Société d'Anthropologie* (Paris) 2^{è} série 9 (1966): 229-53.

16 The terms are Bellwood's from his "Southeast Asia Before History", in N. Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* vol. 1: *From Early Times to c1800* (Cambridge, 1992), 74.

17 Charles Higham, *The Bronze Age of Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, 1996), 3, map (6), 242. Cf. P. Bellwood, *Man's Conquest of the Pacific: The Prehistory of Southeast Asia and Oceania* (Auckland, 1978), 46.

18 G. Diffloth, "Austro-Asiatic Languages", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., vol. 26, 719. Cf. also Robert Parkin, *A Guide to Austroasiatic Speakers and Their Languages* (Honolulu, 1991).

19 Higham, *Archaeology*, 99, following D. T. Bayard, "A Tentative Regional Phase Chronology for Northeast Thailand", *Otago Studies in Prehistoric Archaeology* 16 (1984): 161-68.

20 Higham, *Archaeology*, 147, and map (143); and Higham, *Bronze Age*, 185.

21 E. Saurin and J-P. Carbonnel, "Evolution préhistorique de la péninsule indochinoise

d'après les données récentes", *Paléorient* 2, 1 (1974): 148.

22 Cf. Bellwood, "Southeast Asia Before History", 109.

23 M. Colani, *Mégalithes du Haut-Laos*, vols 1 and 2 (Paris, 1935).

24 M. Colani, "Champs de jarres monolithiques funéraires de Tran-Ninh (Haut Laos)", *BEFEO* 33 (1933): 362, plate 14. The lids may have been struck as "drums", perhaps to recall the spirits of the dead.

25 Higham, *Archaeology*, 229.

26 M. Colani, "Champs de menhirs", *BAL* 4 (1940): 99.

27 R. von Heine-Geldern, "Prehistoric Research in the Netherlands Indies", in P. Honig and F. Verdoorn, eds, *Science and Scientists in the Netherlands Indies* (New York, 1945), 149. This view was modified by Quaritch Wales, who includes ancestral and chthonic elements. H. G. Q. Wales, *The Making of Greater India,* 2nd ed. (London, 1961), 60-80.

28 Colani, "Champs de menhirs", 97. Much more work needs to be done on the iron age in northern Laos, and on early mainland Southeast Asian trading networks.

29 Bellwood, *Man's Conquest of the Pacific*, 190.

30 Saurin and Carbonnel, "Evolution préhistorique de la péninsule indochinoise", 152.

31 Cf.. B. P. Groslier, *The Art of Indochina* (New York, 1962), 31.

32 The Khamu assign the jars to their own culture hero, Cwaq. Frank Proschan, Kmhmu Verbal Art in America: The Poetics of Kmhmu Verse, PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1989, 172. Paul Lévy, on the other hand, suggests the megaliths were the work of Tai-speakers ancestral to the Phuan, since "megalithism" is still practised by certain hill Tai. (*Histoire du Laos,* (Paris, 1974, 33).

33 The term is used by O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore, 1982), 6.

34 Cf. I. W. Mabbett, "The 'Indianization' of Southeast Asia: Reflections on the Prehistoric Sources", *JSEAS* 8 (1977): 1-14.

35 Cf.. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region*, 16-17.

36 In a segmentary state, a centralized government enjoys a monopoly of force, but exercises only limited control over a descending pyramid of regional foci of administrative power, each of which mirrors the central authority. Sunait Chutintaranond, "'Mandala', 'Segmentary State' and Politics of Centralization in Medieval Ayudhya", *JSS* 78, 1 (1990): 91.

37 S. J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against a Historical Background* (Cambridge, 1976), chapter 7.

38 We owe the term to O. W. Wolters: "the *mandala* ... represented a particular and often unstable political situation in a vaguely definable geographical area without fixed boundaries and where smaller centres tended to look in all directions for security. *Mandalas* would expand and contract in concertina-like fashion." Wolters, *History, Culture and Region* , 16.

39 C. Jacques "'Funan', 'Zhenla': The Reality Concealed by These Chinese Views of Indo-China" , in R. B. Smith and W. Watson, eds, *Early South East Asia* (Oxford, 1979), 376.

40 G. Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Canberra, 1968), 65. It is possible that Zhenla adopted Hinduism rather than the Buddhism favoured by Funan as a result of Cham influence. Bhadresvara was a form of Siva worshipped by the Cham.

41 On the etymology of "Champāsak", see P. Lintingre, "Permanence d'une structure monarchique en Asie: le Royaume de Champassak", *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer* 59 (1972): 414, note 7.

42 Tatsuo Hoshino believes there may have existed two Champas, one on the central coast of Vietnam, another on the middle Mekong, each with different etymologies. Tatsuo Hoshino, "Wen Dan and Other Countries in the Middle Mekong Valley in Tang Sources", unpublished MS, 1991, 7-8. This paper is due to appear in Mayoury Ngaosyvathn, ed., *Studies in the History and Historiography of Laos*, forthcoming.

43 Coedès, *Indianized States*, 63-68.

44 Higham, *Archaeology*, 268.

45 Coedès, *Indianized States*, 85-86.

46 Either Po Lou or Wen Dan may have been the name of the capital which Hoshino identifies with Meuang Fā Daet. Cf. Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 26-27. Lao historians believe Po Lou/Wen Dan was situated in the region of Thākhaek, and was the direct precursor of Meuang Sikhōttabông. *Pavatsāt Lao* (History of Laos), MS 1/18-19. The Chinese historian Shen Xu, by contrast, identifies the Viang Chan region with what early Chinese annals referred to as the "Shan" kingdom (of which there were two), and Tang Ming as Xiang Khuang. Shen Xu, "A Rewrite of Lao History by Way of Making Use of Chinese Historical Literature", typescript. See also Shen Xu, *History of Laos*. I am grateful to Rod Bucknell for translating relevant sections of this work.

47 Here I follow Keyes's suggestion that *Khôm* "might perhaps be said to designate Mon-Khmer speaking people". C. F. Keyes, "A Note on the Ancient Towns and Cities of Northeastern Thailand", *Southeast Asian Studies* 11 (1974): 503.

48 M. Ferlus, "Le Récit Khamou de Chuang et ses implications historiques pour le Nord-Laos", *ASEMI* 10 (1979): 327-65. The rather speculative identifications offered by Ferlus (Kaeo = proto-Tai; Khom = Viet-Muong) may not, however, stand up to scrutiny. Condominas argues for the existence of early Lawā and Khamu kingdoms in northern Thailand and Laos prior to the arrival of the Tai. G. Condominas, *From Lawa to Mon, from Saa' to Thai* (Canberra, 1990), 8-10, 41-45.

49 Coedès, *Indianized States*, 86, 93-94.

50 C. Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom and T'ang China's Southwestern Frontier* (Cambridge, 1981), 129. The attack was some time prior to 865. Hoshino, *Pour une*

Histoire, 40-41.

51 Cf. A. Doré, *Aux Sources de la Civilisation Lao: Contribution ethno-historique à la connaissance de la culture luang-prabanaise* (Metz, 1987), 228, 373.

52 When the region of Champāsak was included is unclear. Śreshthapura was considered a "holy city" by the Khmer, according to an inscription dated 835 CE. Cf. Lawrence Palmer Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire* (Philadelphia, 1951), 163. Both Hoshino and Doré believe that Khmer expansion into the Champāsak region of southern Laos was checked by a Cham presence there. Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 44; Doré, *Aux Sources*, 228, 482-483. If so, it was short-lived.

53 D. J. Welch, "Late Prehistoric and Early Historic Exchange Patterns in the Phimai Region, Thailand", *JSEAS* 20 (1989): 23.

54 D. T. Bayard, "Comment on 'The Linguistic Protohistory of Mainland Southeast Asia'" in Smith and Watson, eds, *Early South East Asia*, 279. Keyes, however, warns that "the distinction between 'Mon' and 'Khmer' in cultural and political terms is really not justified before the 8th century and probably not until the 10th century". Cf. "A Note on the Ancient Towns", 504.

55 Robert L. Brown, *The Dvāravatī Wheels of the Law and the Indianization of South East Asia* (Leiden, 1996), 19-41.

56 G. Coedès, "Nouvelles données épigraphiques sur l'histoire de l'Indochine centrale" *Journal Asiatique* no. 246 (1958): 127-28. Brown assesses the evidence in *Dvāravatī Wheels of the Law*, 25-27.

57 C. Higham and A. Kijngam, "Irregular Earthworks in N. E. Thailand: New Insight", *Antiquity* 56 (1982): 106. Paul Wheatley, *Nagara and Commandery: Origins of the Southeast Asian Urban Traditions* (Chicago, 1983), 212.

58 Even so, Gagneux argues that this was probably a Mon *mandala*. P-M. Gagneux, "La culture lao et ses origines: des faits nouveaux", *ASEMI* 9, 1/2 (1978): 182, 185. The Thāt itself appears to date from the late ninth or early tenth century. J. Boisselier, "Récentes recherches archéologiques en Thailande", *Arts Asiatiques* 12 (1965): 153. Lao scholars, basing themselves rather uncritically on the *Urankha Nithān*, believe that Sikhōttabông was a major centre in its own right, and was Lao rather than Mon.

59 J. B. Pruess, ed., *The That Phanom Chronicle: A Shrine History and Its Interpretation* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1976), 7. Hoshino maintains that Thākhaek on the east bank was in the seventh-eighth century the administrative capital of the Chinese prefecture of Tang Zhou. Cf. Hoshino, "Wen Dan and Other Countries", 28. Waning Chinese influence would have permitted the *meuang* to gain its independence. Change of location to the west bank might then have been a protective measure, by which time the population may well have been predominantly Tai rather than Mon. Doré believes the move was due to Cham pressure from Lin Yi. (*Aux Sources*, 208).

60 E. Guillon, "Recherches sur quelques inscriptions mon", *BEFEO* 61 (1974): 344-

46. See also P-M. Gagneux, "Vers une révolution dans l'archéologie indochinoise", *BARL* nos 7/8 (1972): 83-105. The most complete account, however, is P-M. Gagneux, "Les sites ancien de la plaine de Vientiane (VII^{e}-XI^{e} siècles)", *Péninsule* nos 11/12 (1985-6): 27-111.

61 S. Karpeles, "Les grottes sculptées de la province de Vientiane" *BAL* 4 (1940): 141-48; P-M. Gagneux, "Les sculptures rupestres de Vang Sang", *La Revue Française* no. 203 (1967): 40-43.

62 Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire du Royaume de Luang Prabang* (Paris, 1987), 36 and 99, note 118. The royal line to which she gave rise practised incestuous brother-sister marriage.

63 While Doré agrees that the dynasty of Chanthaphānit represents the extension of Mon influence and political control from the region of Viang Chan to that of Luang Phrabāng, his reconstruction of the sequence of dynasties in order to incorporate an earlier "Tai conquest" is not convincing. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 257-76.

64 There is no evidence that the dynasty of Khun Lô was anything but mythical, despite the date 698 CE given in one version of the chronicles of Xiang Khuang. Charles Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Khwang", *BEFEO* 53, 2 (1967): 564, note 2.

65 Hoshino interprets evidence from Chinese sources to imply that a principality known as Sa Lu referred to a "powerful Khamu kingdom" in the region of Meuang Sua. "Wen Dan and Other Countries", 39.

66 On the importance of these early trade routes, see Doré, *Aux Sources*, chapters 2, 3, 4; and C. Taillard, *Le Laos: Stratégies d'un Etat-tampon* (Montpellier, 1989), 16-18, and maps on 186, 187.

67 This is the earliest historical reference to people called "Lao", though for the Chinese the Ai-Lao probably referred to several different "barbarian" peoples in southwestern China. The confusion engendered by equating the Ai-Lao with ancestors of the modern Lao may have arisen because the same term was later adopted by the Vietnamese to refer to the Lao. The *Tamnān Vat Kaeo Luang Phrabang*, dated Culasakkaraj 964 (1602), derives the name "Lao" from the Pali for "gourd". Thus the Lao are those "born from giant gourds", though this is not a generally accepted derivation. (I am grateful to Souneth Phothisane for drawing this derivation to my attention.)

68 Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 47-49. B. J. Terwiel, "The Origin of the T'ai Peoples Reconsidered", *Oriens Extremus* 25 (1978): 240. Cf. E. H. Parker, "The Early Laos and China", *China Review* 19, 2 (1890): 72.

69 Cf. L. P. Briggs, "The Appearance and Historical usage of the Terms Tai, Thai, Siamese and Lao",*Journal of the American Oriental Society* 69 (1949): 63-64. The connection has recently been resurrected by Amphay Doré, "Did the Tai People Contribute to the Foundation of the Nan Zhao Kingdom?: Some Chronological

Elements", *Péninsule* no. 23 (1991): 65-83. Also *Aux Sources*, chapter 8.

70 This is argued strongly by Chen Lufan, *Whence Came the Thai Race? An Inquiry* (Kunming, 1990). Cf. also Terwiel, "The Origin of the T'ai Peoples Reconsidered", 252-53; and D. K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven, 1984), 5-6.

71 Wyatt, *Thailand*, 6.

72 For the dispersal of the southern Tai, see Wyatt, *Thailand*, 11. Some evidence confirming the direction of these population movements can be gleaned from the histories preserved by various Tai groups. J. R. Chamberlain, "A New Look at the History and Classification of the Tai Languages", *Lanxang Heritage Journal* 1, 1 (1996): 113-16. Hoshino believes that Tai peoples began settling the middle Mekong as early as the fifth or sixth century, and were widespread throughout the Khorat plateau by the ninth century. Hoshino, "Wen Dan and Other Countries", 11, 14-15, 18, 22. But as Chamberlain shows, linguistic evolution suggests later dates (early tenth to twelfth centuries) ("A New Look ...", 112-13, 116-17.)

73 Cf. Vo Thu Tinh, *Les Origines du Laos* (Paris, 1983), 49.

74 C. Archaimbault, *Structures Religieuses Lao (Rites et Mythes)* (Vientiane, 1973) 100 (my translation). Significantly the Lao Theung exited first through the burnt hole. According to one version, different groups leaving the gourds bore the patronomics of Black Tai families. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume", 600, note 2.

75 The "whites" are clearly a late addition to include the French.

76 Rituals associated with these mythical protectors were enacted in annual ceremonies not only in Luang Phrabāng, but also in Viang Chan, Xiang Khuang and Champāsak, but in forms which Archaimbault has interpreted as demonstrating "the disintegration of the original cosmology" ("Religious Structures in Laos", *JSS* 52, 1 (1964): 61) as each supported attempts to establish independent *mandalas*.

77 My thanks to Souneth Phothisane for bringing this variant to my attention.

78 Meuang Fā is also known as Meuang Thaen — both *fā* and *thaen* refer to celestial deities — and has often wrongly been identified with Meuang Thaeng, the region centered on Dien Bien Phu.

79 Different versions of the Lao chronicles give different names and destinations for the seven sons of Khun Bôrom. (For the full list, see Souneth Phothisane, The Nidān Khun Bôrom, appendix I.) There is general agreement that five sons went to Meuang Sua, Lān Nā, Sipsông Chu Tai, Ayutthaya and Meuang Phuan. According to some texts, the other two went to Burma (presumably the Shan area) and Vietnam (the Tai highlands); but other versions say they went to Meuang Chulanī Phommathāt, which some identify with the southern Īsān region of Thailand, and to Meuang Xiang Khom Khamkoet, in central Laos.

80 Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume", 561.

81 Souneth, "NKB", 377.

82 The great Lao/Khamu epic, the *Thao Hung Thao Cheuang,* tells a story of Lao Thoeng resistance, which according to Sila Vīravong's rather fanciful historical interpretation harks back to the struggle of Thao Hom, king of the Khôm Xava (Sua) (Lao Thoeng), against Khun Lô. J. R. Chamberlain, "A Lao Epic Poem: Thao Hung or Cheuang", *Péninsule* nos 11/12 (1985/86): 193. Aijmer suggests that Khun Lô, by giving his eldest son the name of the Khôm chieftain he had defeated, made him "chief of the Kha", thereby expropriating Khā rights to the land. Göran Aijmer, "Reconciling Power with Authority: An Aspect of Statecraft in Traditional Laos", *Man* 14 (1979): 739. For the entirely different Lān Nā version of the story of Khun Cheuang, great-grandfather of King Mangrāy, see Wyatt and Aroonrut Wichienkeeo, *The Chiang Mai Chronicle* , 11-14.

83 All versions of the Annals of Xiang Khuang agree in making Chet Cheuang the *second* son of Khun Bôrom. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume", 564 and 602, note 2.

84 Cf. Manich Jumsai, *History of Laos* , 2nd ed. (Bangkok: 1971), 36.

85 Prior Khamu occupation of northern Laos is recognized in both Lao and Khamu mythology. See also note 64 above.

86 Just as the first capital of Lān Nā, Xiang Rāy, was chosen because of Mt Doi Chom Thong. Also symbolically important in the context of Luang Phrabāng was the relationship between upstream and downstream (cf. that between mountain and sea in Bali). Cosmic symbolism in Luang Phrabāng needs much more investigation. On the symbolism of the city as a sacred centre in Theravāda Buddhist polities, see Diana L. Eck, "The City as Sacred Center", and Donald K. Swearer, "The Northern Thai City as Sacred Center", both in B. L. Smith and H. B. Reynolds, eds, *The City as a Sacred Center: Essays on Six Asian Contexts* (Leiden, 1987), 1-11, 103-13.

87 I owe this terminology to Souneth Phothisane. See Souneth, "NKB", 342-351.

88 This sketch is drawn primarily from anthropological studies of the Black Tai. Cf. K. G. Izikowitz, "Notes About the Tai", *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* (Stockholm) 34 (1962): 73-91. Also Georges Condominas, "Essai sur l'évolution des systèmes politiques thaïs", *Ethnos* 41 (1976): 20-21; and P-B. Lafont, "Religion et Pouvoir dans les Principautés Tay du Nord Indochine", in Forest *et al.*, eds, *Cultes Populaires et Sociétés Asiatiques* (Paris, 1991), 147-55.

89 For the kind of reciprocal relationship that developed, see J. M. Halpern, "Trade Patterns in Northern Laos", *Eastern Anthropologist* 12 (1958-59): 119-24.

90 In southern Laos, the Tai-Lao encountered well established Lao Thoeng populations which, as in the north, they displaced and exploited, a process echoes of which still find expression in southern myths and legends. Cf.. P. Lintingre, "Légendes du Sud Laos", *BARL* nos. 7/8 (1972): 213-28. For example, in the area of Sāravan the Tai-Lao recount how they were led to settle the area by a "warrior princess". M. Colonna, "Monographie de la province de Saravane", *BAL* 2 (1938): 82.

Notes

91 Condominas uses the term "emboîtement" to refer to the way in which smaller *meuang* fitted into similarly structured larger ones, like Chinese boxes. Condominas, *From Lawa to Mon, From Saa' to Thai*, 35-36.

Chapter 2: The Classical Kingdom of Lān Xāng

1 Wyatt, *Thailand*, 30-34. Ronald C. Hill, "Where and What was Yōnok?", in *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Thai Studies*, vol III (Kunming, 1990), 282-86.

2 Doré, following Sila Vīravong (*History of Laos*, 25) argues for a Khmer presence in this northern region as early as the mid-seventh century (*Aux Sources*, 424-63). This seems unlikely. So too does the early date Doré gives for the seizure of Meuang Sua by Khun Lô (late seventh century) (373, 491). If some form of political organization existed in northern Laos as early as this, which is by no means certain, then in all likelihood it was due to Austroasiatic speaking predecessors of the northern Lao Thoeng (Khamu) as Hoshino maintains. Hoshino, "Wen Dan and Other Countries", 39. In this context, it is worth noting that all ritual re-enactments legitimizing the kings of Luang Phrabāng included a role for the Khamu. Cf. Archaimbault, *Structures Religieuses Lao*, 77-87.

3 Sometimes written Sva or Swa, it is cognate with "Java". Doré believes that the earliest principality of this name centered on Bān Chiang in the northern Khōrāt plateau, (Doré, *Aux Sources*, 228). This is pure speculation, as is Hoshino's contention that there existed two kingdoms named Sua. Hoshino, "Wen Dan and Other Countries", 37.

4 Paul Lévy, "Les traces de l'introduction du Bouddhisme à Louang Prabang", *BEFEO* 40 (1940): 411-24. See also P-B. Lafont, "Introduction du Bouddhisme au Laos", in R. de Berval, ed., *Présence du Bouddhisme*, (Saigon, 1959), 889-92.

5 In the famous Ramkhamhaeng inscription, if it is accepted as genuine. See J. R. Chamberlain, ed., *The Ram Khamhaeng Controversy: Collected Papers* (Bangkok, 1991).

6 In order to make sense of various versions of legendary Lao dynasties, Doré draws on Hoshino's thesis on the influence of the Mongols on the founding of Lān Xāng, to propose a sequence of events from the seventh to eleventh centuries which makes northern and central Laos the cockpit of contending empires — Nanzhao, Wen Dan, Angkor (*Aux Sources*, chapters 8, 9 and 10). My suggestion that Meuang Sua was subjugated by Tai-Lao only in the eleventh century roughly coincides with Doré's dates for the overthrow of the dynasty of Chanthaphānit (527), and is based on king lists from Khun Lô to Fā Ngum. Thirty kings ruled over the 350 years from the accession of Fā Ngum to the accession of Xēttthāthirāt II (Xai Ong Vē). It seems reasonable, therefore, that if the earlier Lao king lists have any historical validity at

all, which is unlikely, then they cover a period of not more than 300 years. Also sufficient time would then have elapsed for cultural and racial merging of the encroaching Tai-Lao with the indigenous Austroasiatic-speaking population.

7 For alternative etymologies, see Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 131, note 250. Lévy believes the double name derives from earlier Austroasiatic usage reflecting the existence of exogamous groups. Paul Lévy, "Doublets onomastiques au Laos et ailleurs dans l'Asie du Sud-Est: A propos de S'ien Don-Sien T'on, un ancien nom de Luang Prabang", *Institut Indochinois pour l'Etude de l'Homme: Bulletins et Travaux* 5 (1942): 139-50.

8 The Shan Hsenwi Chronicle records early attempts to draw the Shan *meuang* together under the leadership of a single ruler (Wyatt, *Thailand*, 34).

9 The Da Li dynasty ruled Yunnan from 937 to 1094, after which it was replaced by the kingdom of Hou Li (1096-1253), both successors to Nanzhao.

10 The earliest references to Tai slaves occur in Cham and Burmese inscriptions of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. (Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 55). In 1159 and again in 1183, Vietnamese records recount how military expeditions had to be sent to quell the Ai-Lao (56).

11 Cf. Georges Coedès, "Une période critique dans l'Asie du Sud-Est: Le XIII^{e} siècle", *BSEI* 33, 4 (1958): 1-14.

12 Wyatt, *Thailand*, 52. Srisak Vallibhotama maintains that Sukhothai was originally founded by people from the Viang Chan area and the northern Īsān ("Chao sayām thī wiangchan lae īsān neua pen phūsāng khwaen sukhōthai" [Siamese from Viang Chan and northern Īsān were the founders of Sukhothai], *Sinlapa watthanatham* 13, 1 (1991): 220-228.

13 Le Than Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam des origines à 1858* (Paris, 1981): 182-89.

14 *Le Dai-Viet et ses Voisins* (traduction par Bui Quang Tung et Nguyen Huong des mémoires historiques du Dai-Viet au complet) (Paris, 1990): 39. Cf. Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 64. Doré believes that Champa then controlled the central Mekong following the withdrawal of Khmer forces by 1271, but cites in support only a later Chinese text. *Aux Sources*, 575.

15 A. B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "The Inscription of King Rama Gamhen of Sukhodaya", *JSS* 59, 2 (1971): 208. Whether or not this inscription is authentic, the picture it gives of early Tai kingship seems broadly accurate.

16 On which see, H. Kulke, *The Devaraja Cult* (translated by I. W. Mabbett) Cornell Southeast Asia Program Data Paper No. 108 (1978).

17 Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "The Inscription of King Rama Gamhen", 216, note 115.

18 Both had recently shaken off Khmer domination (*ibid.*, 220) and may have been seeking allies to ward off a Vietnamese attack (Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 67). *Le Dai-Viet et ses Voisins*, 40, records that in 1290 the Emperor Tran Nhan Tong

decided personally to conduct a military campaign against the Ai-Lao.

19 Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 70. Yuan interference continued until the elimination of Mongol influence in Yunnan in 1382. The first tributary mission to the Ming arrived in 1388. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 581.

20 Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 73.

21 Hoshino maintains that the official at Meuang Sua known as the *Ho luang* was a Mongol appointee, part of "a new Mongol policy [which] consisted in substituting Tai commissioners for Mongol administrators" in the less important southern tributary kingdoms. Tatsuo Hoshino, "Introduction à l'histoire événementielle du Lan Sang", *Sheroku* no. 11 (1979): 22.

22 For an extended analysis of Hoshino's thesis, see the anonymous review in *Péninsule* no. 2 (1981): 289-337.

23 For Mongol influence on political organization in the Sipsông Phan Nā, see Jacques Lemoine, "Tai Lūe Historical Relations with China and the Shaping of the Sipsong Panna Political System", *Proceedings of the International Conference on Thai Studies*, Australian National University, Canberra, July 1987, volume III, part l, 131-32.

24 Doré, *Aux Sources*, 694.

25 At various times both the Sipsông Chu Tai and the Sipsông Phan Nā have included more than twelve principalities, though the number twelve has always been retained in the title of both confederations. For the cosmological significance of the number twelve, see Condominas, *From Lawa to Mon, from Saa' to Thai* , 39, and note 18.

26 Doré, *Aux Sources*, 514.

27 That this humiliating event seems to have been explained in the Lao chronicles as due to the moral shortcomings of the ruler may indicate Chinese influence. Abandonment of the capital may have been due to conflict with the Sipsông Phan Nā which Doré believes occurred in 1183, *Aux Sources*, 529.

28 We have nothing to confirm this date, which occurs in only a late version of the Lao chronicles. Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 92.

29 Meuang Sua was thus aligned with the Mongols. Phrayā Khamphong was not enthroned until 1316 or 1317, on the death of his father. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 693.

30 This subsequently had repercussions on relations with Vietnam. Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 68; Doré, *Aux Sources*, 593.

31 There may well have been internal opposition to a policy of expansion, since it violated the instructions of Khun Bôrom which forbade attacks against one brother's *meuang*. See Souneth, "NKB", 155, note 223.

32 In an ingenuous attempt to work out these family relationships, Doré argues that Fā Ngum was the great-grandson of Khamphong. Cf. genealogical table, *Aux Sources*, 598.

33 These differing accounts are discussed in Lorrillard, Les chroniques royales du Laos,

24-32.

34 The legend of Fā Ngum's thirty-three teeth clearly reflects Buddhist influence, for the Buddha himself was supposedly born with the same number.

35 Souneth, "NKB", 159, note 236.

36 Souneth, "NKB", 159, note 233. The Cambodian king is variously named in the Lao chronicles ("NKB", 158, note 232), but Coedès identifies him as Jayavarman Parameçvara. G. Coedès, *Les Etats hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* (Paris, 1964), 288.

37 Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 124-127.

38 Doré, *Aux Sources*, 655.

39 The first centre attacked was Phrommathāt which Souneth identifies with Phimai ("NKB", 161, note 243) rather than Preah Vihar or Pāk Kôp or Ubon. Phimai was a Khmer centre which had probably earlier fallen to Siamese attack. From there a well defined trade route ran northeast via Rôy-Et (Doré, *Aux Sources*, 446, map), though Fā Ngum's line of march seems to have avoided this *meuang*.

40 There is some debate over the identity of the ruler of this *meuang* (Phayā Phet Bō = Nanthasēn) who still figures in the oral histories of the region. Charles Archaimbault, *Contribution à l'Etude d'un Cycle de Légendes Lau* (Paris, 1980), 56-57.

41 Doré argues that Fā Ngum must first have subdued Champāsak before following the Mekong north (*Aux Sources*, 607). Hoshino suggests rather implausibly that Meuang Sikhōttabông may then have been situated in the vicinity of Champāsak (*Pour une Histoire*, 99). It seems far more likely, however, that at the time Champāsak was a regional centre of Fā Ngum's Khmer allies, and thus did not need to be subdued. Accounts of its capture by Fā Ngum would have been inserted later into the *Nithān Khun Bôrom* to legitimize the subsequent inclusion of southern Laos within the Lao *mandala*.

42 According to the chronicles of Xiang Khuang, the two *meuang* had been in conflict since 1308. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Khwang", Version D, 604-06.

43 Then Tran Du Tong (1341-1369). The Emperor of Vietnam was referred to as Chau Bua Luang (Great Lotus).

44 Souneth suggests the first criterion applied in the north and second further south ("NKB", 168, note 279). Pavie's translation, *Histoire du Pays de Lan-Chhang, Hom Khao*, in *Mission Pavie*, vol. II (Paris, 1898), 19, makes no mention of house styles. According to Saveng Phinith, another Lao text places the frontier on the Black River. Saveng Phinith, "La frontière entre le Laos et le Vietnam", in P-B. Lafont, ed., *Les Frontières du Vietnam* (Paris, 1989), 197.

45 Most authorities accept an alternative tradition that dates the agreement on house styles to the reign of Surinyavongsā in the seventeenth century. Le Boulanger,

Histoire du Laos Français, 104. Also Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam*, 261; and Wyatt, *Thailand*, 122.

46 *Le Dai-Viet et ses Voisins*, 47-48, 49. See also Nguyen The Anh, "Etablissment par le Viêtnam de sa frontière dans les confins occidentaux" ,in Lafont, ed., *Les Frontières du Vietnam*, 190-191, and Saveng Phinith, "La frontière ...", 197.

47 One text says Fā Ngum made straight for Xiang Dong Xiang Thong via the Nam Khan. One account places the northern expedition under the command of Fā Ngum's father, Phi Fā. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 51. Doré believes it was commanded by Fā Ngum's older brother, and that it was he and not Fā Ngum's father who was murdered on his arrival at Xiang Dong Xiang Thong. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 653.

48 Khamhiao might have expected help from Sukhothai, had that *mandala* not fallen under the domination of Ayutthaya. The fate of Fā Ngum's father, Phī Fā, is a bit of a mystery. By some accounts he died during the conquest, while others ignore him. The Annals of Xiang Khuang say he was murdered on the orders of Fā Ngum. In any event, he disappeared from history in or about 1353.

49 Chau Pha Yū (1334-1367), though he is referred to in the Lao chronicles as Phayā Sām Phrayā.

50 Kaeo here does not refer to Vietnamese. Souneth, "NKB", 175, note 314.

51 Souneth, "NKB", 182-83.

52 According to the *Nithān Khun Bôrom*, 100,000 "*khā kau*", or "old *khā* (Lao Thoeng)" were resettled. Another version calls them "Khôm", whom Sila Vīravong (*History of Laos*, 31) wrongly took to be Khmer. That they comprised different tribes of Lao Thoeng is evident from Fā Ngum's admonition that they should not fight among themselves. Cf. Vo Thu Tinh, *Les Origines du Laos*, 71, note 81. Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 118.

53 The extent of these conquests is debatable. The sparse population then probably included both Mon and Khmer, whose loyalty Fā Ngum may have suspected as there is some suggestion that previously conquered *meuang* may have revolted under the leadership of Viang Chan. Cf. Saveng Phinith, Histoire de Luang Phrabāng, 82. Perhaps this is why Fā Ngum ordered the resettlement of several thousand Lao families on both banks of the Mekong in the vicinity of Viang Chan. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 34.

54 Souneth, "NKB", 185, and note 370 suggesting that Ramathibodi bought off Fā Ngum because of his own internal difficulties at the time. There is no confirmation of this agreement in the Siamese chronicles, but the *meuang* of the Khorat plateau, with the exception of the region of Khōrāt itself (which remained Khmer until falling under Siamese control), remained Lao until after the Siamese-Lao war of 1827-1828. Cf. P-M. Gagneux, "La frontière occidentale du Royaume de Lan-Xang: quelques documents", *Péninsule* no. 1 (1980): 3-21. Saveng Phinith (*Contribution*

à l'Histoire, 177, note 431) suggests that Fā Ngum may still have been tributary to his Khmer father-in-law.

55 A. B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "The Epigraphy of Mahadharmaraja I of Sukhodaya: Epigraphic and Historical Studies 11, part II", *JSS* 61, 2 (1973): 122.

56 Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 114. The "frontier" *meuang* mentioned above may formerly have been tributary to Sukhothai. Cf. Souneth, "NKB", 180, note 343.

57. Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, "Et pourtant, elle avait duré presque la moitié d'un millenaire: la frontière entre Ayutthaya et le Lan Xang (1357-1827)", in *Les Frontières de la Thailande*, forthcoming.

58 The chronicles indicate that the organization of the kingdom and administrative appointments were carried out at Viang Chan, where a great victory celebration was held before Fā Ngum returned to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong. Not surprisingly, military considerations took precedence over civilian concerns.

59 See Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, "Lan Xang: The Name of the Classical Kingdom of Laos, Its Inception and Its Reception by Neighbouring Countries", *Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter* no. 20 (March 1993): 9-12. The Lao chronicles also refer to Meuang Srī Sattanāganahuta Uttama Rājadhāni, a Pali title meaning literally the "most wealthy [kingdom] with millions of elephants".

60 Doré, following Hoshino, argues that the socio-political reorganization introduced by Fā Ngum "reproduced on the scale of Lān Xāng, the organization of the Yuan empire with a central kingdom and peripheral territories administered by governors". (*Aux Sources*, 674.) This is to go too far. The Mongol administration was closer to the Chinese model than the tributary rulers appointed by Fā Ngum (e.g. in Meuang Phuan). Lān Xāng was a *mandala* constructed on the Tai model, with perhaps a Khmer overlay, rather than a Yuan clone. Cf. Wyatt, *Thailand*, p. 83.

61 Doré, *Aux Sources*, 659. The region of Champāsak almost certainly remained under Khmer suzerainty at this time, despite Fā Ngum's earlier "conquest".

62 The oath was essentially similar, but for references to the Constitution, to that sworn by government ministers in independent Laos. Cf. P. S. Nginn, *Les Fêtes Profanes et Religieuses au Laos* (Vientiane, 1967), 42.

63 Doré rightly argues that this represented a compromise in the struggle between ancient animist cults and Buddhism (*Aux Sources*, 676-81). There is evidence of a similar struggle at Sukhothai. B. Gosling, *Sukhothai: Its History, Culture, and Art* (Singapore, 1991), 27.

64 Literally "Commander of 100,000 men", the highest possible military rank.

65 Hoshino believes the title *Meun* was of Chinese (Yuan) origin. *Pour une Histoire*, 111. Lower level officers commanded 1,000, 100 or 50 men, though titles may have been more honorific than accurately reflecting the number of troops.

66 Identified by Souneth Phothisane as Meuang Khua on the river Ū (controlling all *meuang* to the right of the centre); Meuang Xāy, present-day Xanakhām, rather than

Dānxāy (those to the left); Phūm Neua in the vicinity of Bān Huayxāy (those to the north); and Phūm Tai, probably Meuang Kae on the Khorat plateau (those to the south). ("NKB", 187, note 374).

67 For the king and the *Saen Meuang*, later the *uparāt*.

68 Doré believes the Phrayā Kāsak was a minor administrative official responsible for relations with the Kāsak and other Lao Thoeng groups modelled on the Yuan administration of minority groups in Yunnan. *Aux Sources*, 675.

69 The earliest version of the "Laws of Khun Bôrom" is that appended to the *Nanseu Pheun Khun Bôrom Rāxadhirāt* composed in verse during the reign of Phrayā Kham Kong of Xiang Khuāng in 1422. The contents are summarized in Appendix IV in Souneth, "NKB", 483-485; and in Mayoury Ngaosyvathn, "An Introduction to the Laws of Khun Borom: An Early Prototype of the Organisation of T'ai Society and Life", in A. Huxley, ed., *Thai Law: Buddhist Law: Essays on the Legal History of Thailand, Laos and Burma*. Bangkok, 1996: 73-80. For Lān Nā, see *The Laws of King Mangrai (Mangrayathammasart)* translated and edited by Aroonrut Wichienkeeo and Gehan Wijeyewardene (Canberra, 1986); and the apparently later, more structured version in A. B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "The 'Judgements of King Măng Rāy'", *JSS* 65, 1 (1977): 137-160.

70 Souneth, "NKB", 189.

71 Souneth, "NKB", 192, note 396. But cf. Mayoury Ngaosyvathn, "An Introduction to the Laws of Khun Borom", 75-76, who has no doubt that the death penalty was applied.

72 Others are to endure, to be humble, to make merit, to be moral at all times, and to preserve the traditions of the *meuang*.

73 The word *khā* originally referred to someone socially subordinate. As Lehman notes: "Everyone is *khā* to the king, even a noble; all commoners are *khā* to some master or other". (F. K. Lehman, "Freedom and Bondage in Traditional Burma and Thailand", *JSEAS* 15 (1984): 235.) As such it applied to all ethnic minorities. Only later did *khā* come to mean 'slave'. The chronicles refer to three levels of nobility, from *Phrayā* down to *Thao* and *Khun*, and four kinds of common people: *khôy* who served the nobility, *phai*, or common people, and *yai* and *tai* who inhabit different parts of northern Laos, and may refer respectively to inhabitants of the Sipsông Phan Nā and the Sipsông Chu Tai. Souneth, "NKB", 116, note 75. There is no indication that they were organized in a hierarchical decimal system of social responsibility of the kind that applied in Lān Nā. Cf. A. Thomas Kirsch, "Cosmology and Ecology as Factors in Interpreting Early Thai Social Organization", *JSEAS* 15 (1984): 257.

74 Robert S. Wicks, *Money, Markets, and Trade in Early Southeast Asia: The Development of Indigenous Monetary Systems to AD 1400* (Ithaca, NY, 1992), 171-173.

75 Cf. Keo Manivanna, "Aspects socio-économiques du Laos médiéval", *La Pensée* 138 (1968): 56-70.

76 The economic basis of early Lān Xāng is discussed by Keo Manivanna, "Aspects socio-économique", 56-70, especially 60-63.

77 Doré, *Aux Sources*, 656.

78 Frank Reynolds, "Ritual and Social Hierarchy: An Aspect of Traditional Religion in Buddhist Laos", *History of Religions* 9 (1969): 84-85.

79 Aijmer, "Reconciling Power with Authority": 739.

80 Symbolically, through annual ritual exorcism of spirits from the palace. Archaimbault, "Religious Structures in Laos", 65-66; Aijmer, "Reconciling Power with Authority", 41. Amphay Doré, "Les joutes mythiques entre l'aîné Kassak et de puiné Lao: Contribution à l'étude de la fondation du Lane Xang", *Péninsule* no.1 (1980): 65. Cf. also Charles Archaimbault, "La Fête du T'at à Lūong P'rabang", in *Structures Religieuses Lao*, 20-63.

81 Or alternatively at the urging of his father-in-law. Cf. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 51-52. Doré, following Hoshino, believes that Fā Ngum was probably originally a follower of Tantric Buddhism, which was known and practised also in Lān Nā. *Aux Sources*, 649, 676.

82 Souneth, "NKB", 199-200. More than 5,000 people in all are said to have accompanied the *Phra Bāng*.

83 The statue is 80 centimetres (31 inches) in height, weighs just over forty kilogrammes (176 pounds), and is in *abhāya mudra*, the gesture of fearlessness. H. Deydier, *Lokapala: Totems et Sorciers du Nord Laos* (Paris, 1954), 155-156.

84 According to Doré, while Thēphalangka, as his name suggests was from Sri Lanka, Pāsman is likely to have been Mon rather than Khmer. *Aux Sources*, 645. Hoshino maintains that at least three and perhaps four accounts of the arrival of different monks at different times have been combined in the account of the introduction of Buddhism into Laos as recounted in the *Nithān Khun Bôrom. (Pour une Histoire*, 146-47).

85 Very likely through promotion of gift-giving rather than asceticism as the basis for merit-making, a development which may reflect "more intense status competition". R. A. O'Connor, "Cultural Notes on Trade and the Tai", in Susan D. Russell, ed., *Ritual, Power, and Economy: Upland-Lowland Contrasts in Mainland Southeast Asia* (Urbana, 1989), 44. This reconstruction of sectarian competition differs from those of Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 142-162, and Doré, *Aux Sources*, 639-651. Emmanuel Guillon believes there existed a "triple influence, Mahayanist, Mulasarvastivadin, and of Buddhism in the Pali language". E. Guillon, "Jalons pour une histoire du Bouddhisme en Asie du Sud-est", *Péninsule* nos 8-9 (1984): 132. Migot earlier argued for three "waves" of Buddhism in mainland Southeast Asia; first Theravāda, then Mahāyāna, followed by a second Theravāda influx. O. Migot,

"Le Bouddhisme en Indochine", *BSEI* 21 (1946), 32-33. All must remain speculative until a scholarly history of Buddhism is pieced together for this period (covering the rise of the early Tai *mandalas*). The triumph of the Sri Lankan school may have opened up the possibility for Lao monks to be sent to study in Sri Lanka or India, undated references to which can be found in some Lao temple chronicles (*pheun vat*). The title *Mahā Sāmī Chau* was often given to monks who had returned from extended study abroad.

86 See the excellent translation and analysis of the *Trai Phum* of Phya Lithai by F. E. Reynolds and M. B. Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology* (Berkeley, 1982).

87 Wyatt believes a Buddhist "religious revival" occurred in the Yōnok region in the late tenth or early eleventh century which provided an important earlier impetus in the "Buddhization of the northern Tai". Wyatt, *Thailand*, 31.

88 For the oath as administered in Luang Phrabāng, see P. Nginn, "Invocation aux Devata dans le cérémonie du serment", *France-Asie* 7, 66/67 (1951): 573-76. Cf. David Wyatt, "Three Sukhothai Oaths of Allegiance", in his *Studies in Thai History* (Chiang Mai, 1994), 60-69.

89 According to a stele from Sukhothai dated 1369, Nān had managed to maintain its independence. Lorrillard, Les chroniques royales, 69, note 2.

90 Hoshino and Doré both maintain that Fā Ngum lived in exile for twenty-two years rather than two, and that he died in 1394 instead of 1374. They base this on the grounds that the chronicles say that Fā Ngum took shelter with Chau Khamtan, who ruled Nan from 1386-1396, and that names are more likely to be accurate than numbers. David K. Wyatt, "The Chronology of Nan History, A.D. 1320-1598", *JSS* 64, 2 (1976): 204.

91. Souneth, "NKB", 207-208.

92 According to the *Nithān Khun Bôrom*, they were punished for the slightest offence, whereas the faults of Fā Ngum's Khmer companions were overlooked. Souneth, "NKB", 206-207.

93 Cf. Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 154-157.

94. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 38.

95 Named after the great emerald set in the chest of the principal Buddha image, donated either by the king's mother or his wife, and not to be confused with the Vat Phra Kaeo built much later in Viang Chan. Under Phra Thēphalangka, Vat Kaeo served as a place of asylum for those fleeing the king's wrath or justice.

96 Mayoury Ngaosyvathn, "Buddhism, Merit Making and Gender: The Competition for Salvation in Laos", in W. J. Karim, ed., *"Male" and "Female" in Developing Southeast Asia* (Oxford, 1995), 145-60.

97 Ming Shi, Tai-zong, juan 44.5b-6b, 10-10698 which confirms that as Sām Saen Tai was also named Superintendent of Che-li (Sipsông Phan Nā) that this region was

part of Lān Xāng. (I am most grateful to Dr Geoff Wade of the University of Hong Kong for making translations of the Ming Shi available to me.)

98 Ming Shi, Tai-zong, juan 12B.5a, 9-0219, juan 30.11b, 10-0554, and juan 35.1a-2b, 10-0607/10.

99 In 1407, Laos was reprimanded for failing to send regular tribute. Sām Saen Tai responded two years later with gold, silver, rhinoceros horns and ivory. Ming Shi, Tai-zong, juan 72.1a-b, 11-1001/2, and juan 92.3a, 11-1203.

100 Accounts differ as to the number of Sām Saen Tai's sons. Souneth, "NKB", 212-213, note 474.

101 Hoshino wants to date this census to 1395-1396 in response to the order of 1389 by the Ming emperor Hong Wu to prepare a cadastral survey for the whole empire. Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 159.

102 Lorrillard, Les chroniques royales, 330.

103 In discussions with the author.

104 Cf. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 39.

105 These were not standing armies, but the number of able-bodied men available for military service; that is, by the 300,000 Tai/Lao.

106 Great confusion surrounds the offspring of Sām Saen Tai, which Lorrillard tries to sort out in Les chroniques royales, 77-81. See also Souneth "NKB", 212-13, note 474; and Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Khwang", 608, note 1. One version of the chronicles makes Lān Kham Daeng reign for thirty years (1417-1447) making no mention of the "period of confusion" while Mahā Thēvī was the power behind the throne (see below).

107 The Ming chronicles worry about Lao collusion with Vietnamese rebels fleeing to Laos, both to avoid Chinese retribution and to recruit troops. (Tai-zong, juan 233.1b-2a, 14-2248/49) In 1420, according to Chinese sources, Le Loi was "defeated" when he retreated to Lao territory. (Tai-zong, juan 230.2a, 14-2231) Lao envoys were sent to request that Chinese imperial forces not invade Lao territory, but in 1424 Le Loi again took sanctuary in Laos. Not until 1428 when a new emperor was on the throne and relations with Vietnam had been patched up were the Lao forgiven their suspected involvement. (Xuan-zong, juan 42.2a-b, 18-1025/26).

108 *Le Dai-Viet et ses Voisins*, 64-65.

109 Different texts record five, six or seven kings ruling over a period of seven to nine years. Souneth, "NKB", 214-20 and notes; Lorrillard, Les chroniques royales, 86-95; cf. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 709; Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 190-91, 235-37. In two late versions this whole period with its dramatic events is entirely passed over, as if too shameful to mention. In 1434 Vietnamese troops were sent to assist one claimant, only to find another on the throne. For what seems the most likely list of these kings, see appendix.

110 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 42, attributes the death of Mahā Thēvī to a popular

uprising by the "Lao people", a somewhat anachronistic interpretation.

111 Neighbouring kingdoms may have attempted to take advantage of Lān Xāng's temporary weakness to seize territory, for the *Ming Shi* records conflict with Lān Nā in 1437. (Ying-zong, juan 25.4a-b, 23-1497/98).

112 Doré, *Aux Sources*, 714-16. Souneth Phothisane, by contrast, argues strongly that Mahā Thēvī was Nāng Kaeo Phimpā, the eldest daughter of Sām Saen Tai. (Souneth, "NKB", 215-17, note 483). See also Michel Oger, "La Légende de Mahathevi", *BARL* nos 7/8 (1972): 107-19; Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 41; Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 59, note 1.

113 Doré mistakenly calculates that Kaeo Lot Fā would have been forty-three, which allows him to identify her as Mahā Thēvī. *Aux Sources*, 718.

114 Sunēt Phothisān identifies Xiang Lô with Fā Xiang, *Sen Meuang* under both Sām Saen Tai and Lān Kham Daeng ("NKB", 219, note 492).

115 This discussion of the identification of Mahā Thēvī, the court factions of the period, and the way she is portrayed in the Lao chronicles draws upon Martin Stuart-Fox, "Who was Mahā Thēvī?", *JSS* 81, 1 (1993): 103-08.

116 Mayoury Ngaosyvathn makes a similar point in *Lao Women: Yesterday and Today* (Viang Chan, 1995), 24-26.

117. Through his mother Noy Nong Hieo. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 39.

118. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 43, 46.

119 Contacts had been established between monastic orders in Lān Xāng and Sukhotai, before the latter was absorbed into the *mandala* of Ayutthaya. Cf. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 676-77.

120 The dates of his reign are uncertain. He may have been enthroned as early as 1438-1439 at the age of 41. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 719; but see Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 195, and Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 43, for alternative dates. Wyatt gives 1442 (allowing for the three-year interregnum) to 1479 which seems the most likely. *Thailand*, 84. Souneth prefers 1438-1480 ("NKB", 509).

121 Sanskrit: *cakravartin*. See Sunait Chutintaranond, "Chakravartin: Ideology, Reason, and Manifestation of Siamese and Burmese Kings in Traditional Warfare (1538-1854)" *Crossroads* 4, 1 (1987): 46-56.

122 Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 195. Emmanuel Guillon has pointed out that no record remains of celebrations in Lān Xāng to mark the 2000th anniversary of the *parinirvāna* of the Buddha. It seems certain, however, that monks from Lān Xāng would have attended the great Council held at Chiang Mai from 1455 to 1457, and that this event was responsible for reinforcing the status of the Sangha. Guillon, "Jalons pour une histoire du Bouddhisme", 131.

123 Different lists of these appointments are given in different versions of the chronicles. Cf. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 724-725.

124 Souneth, "NKB", 225.

125 Wyatt, *Thailand*, 71-73.

126 The revolt was serious enough to have been recorded in both the Chinese (Xian-zong, juan 91.6b, 43-1770) and Vietnamese annals (Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 202). There is some confusion between this revolt and an earlier attempt by the then *chau meuang* of Viang Chan to secede when Vangburī came to the throne. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 188, note 461.

127 Wyatt and Aroonrut Wichienkeeo, *The Chiang Mai Chronicle*, 81, 83.

128 Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam*, 243.

129 *Le Dai-Viet et ses Voisins*, 73; 30,000 Lao troops fought in support of the upland Tai meuang. Cf. also E. Gaspardone, "Annamites et Thai au XV^{e} siècle", *Journal Asiatique* no. 227 (1939): 405-36.

130 Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 192, 196.

131 Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam*, 245; Nguyen The Anh, "Etablissement par le Vietnam ...", 191. *Le Dai-Viet et ses Voisins*, 75-76, 77.

132 Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 202. The chronicles of Xiang Khuang say only that during the reign of Lān Kham Kong, administration was "the concern of Luang P'rabang and Annam". The king was remembered for his patronage of Buddhism, and promulgation of the earliest extant code of law based on Buddhist principles, the so-called Law of Khun Bôrom (see above). There is no mention of a Phuan revolt. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Khwang", 570-571.

133 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 44. By some accounts, the Lao king simply refused the request. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 53. No such reasons appear in the Vietnamese annals, which describe the conflict as the response to an invasion by Lān Xāng and Phuan forces linked to the revolt of Kham Kong. Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 200; Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam*, 245.

134 *Le Dai-Viet et ses Voisins*, 86. Other Vietnamese sources say 90,000 men invaded along three routes, which seems more likely. Sokichi Kimura, "An Annotated Translation of Dai-nam Chinh-bien Liet-Truyen So-tap, Nam-Chu'o'ng-truyen (Description of Luang Phrabāng)", *Southeast Asia* 1, 1/2 (1971): 157. The Ming account says the Vietnamese attacked in two waves of 60,000 and 90,000 troops, the second after the first suffered reverses. (Xian-zong, juan 210.7b-8a, 47-3666/67). *The Chiang Mai Chronicle*, 99, puts the invading Vietnamese force at 200,000.

135 Souneth, "NKB", 227-233.

136 The Lao chronicles put Vietnamese forces at twenty million as against 1,244,000 Lao. Souneth, "NKB", 228-229.

137 Casualties, according to the Lao, were fifteen million for the Vietnamese. No Lao figure is given. Souneth, "NKB", 231-32. The Ming records put Vietnamese casualties at 50,000, one-third of the combined invading forces, and Lao casualties at 20,000. (Xian-zong, juan 210.7b-8a, 47-3666/67; and juan 206.1b-2a, 47-

3592/93). Vietnam was sent an imperial reprimand, but denied mounting a full-scale invasion of Lān Xāng.

138 The *uparāt* and several Lao generals were killed in the defence of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, leaving Thaen Kham as the oldest surviving son. Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 204-05.

139 This is the version of events preferred by Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 46. However the *Nithān Khun Bôrom* makes no mention of Thaen Kham.

140 C. Notton, *Annales du Siam: vol III: Chronique de Xiang Mai* (Paris, 1932): 136; David K. Wyatt, ed., *The Nan Chronicle* (trans. Prasoet Churatana). Data Paper 59, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program. Ithaca, N. Y., 1966, 19. The Ming chronicles record that the Vietnamese attempted to coerce Lān Nā, whose forces helped repel the invaders. (Xian-zong, juan 228.4a, 48-3907).

141 Notton, *Annales du Siam*, III, 137.

142 Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 209.

143 *Le Dai-Viet et ses Voisins*, 88.

144 Meuang Phuan traditionally had closer tributary relations with Lān Xāng than with Vietnam, whose claims of suzerainty were often more theoretical than real. Cf. Nguyen The Anh, "Etablissement par le Vietnam ...", 191.

145 According to the *Nithān Khun Bôrom* wounded Vietnamese who had been cared for by Lao monks settled in the vicinity of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong. Souneth, "NKB", 234.

146 Souneth, "NKB", 237, note 560. The late text translated by Saveng Phinith states that after Xumphū the title of the king changed from Phra to Chau (*Contribution à l'Histoire*, 54).

147 Souneth, "NKB", 237, note 563. Earlier verse versions of the chronicles written in Xiang Khuang do, however, make mention of Suvanna Banlang.

148 Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 215.

149 Doré suggests that Lā Saen Thai, Vixun and a third brother were sons of a different mother than Suvanna Banlang, and that she, like Kaeo Lot Fā before her, was a princess of Ayutthaya. This would explain the gifts presented by Ayutthaya upon Lā Saen Thai's succession, the omission of Suvanna Banlang's reign from certain versions of the chronicles, and the subsequent close relations between Ayutthaya and Lān Xāng. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 728.

150 The *Nithan Khun Bôrom* (Souneth, "NKB, 237) says the two kingdoms "were united from that time", meaning in friendship.

151 Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 215-216.

152 The earliest inscription in Lao recorded to date is in the Nāng An grotto in the vicinity of Luang Phrabāng. It is written in a script close to that of Sukhothai. M. Ferlus, "L'inscription rupestre de Nang An (Louang Phrabang)", paper presented to the First Franco-Thai Symposium, Bangkok, 18-20 July 1988. Dhawaj Poonotoke,

Silachāreuk Īsān Samai Thai-Lao (The Northeastern Thai Inscriptions) (Bangkok, 1987) argues that Lao scripts derive from two sources: Tautam characters from Mon letters, and Thainoi characters from Sukhothai. (unpaginated English summary).

153 P-M. Gagneux, "Les écritures lao et leur évolution du XV^{è} au XIX^{è} siècles" *ASEMI*, 14 (1983): 75-95.

154 Not from the north Indian *devanāgari* alphabet as J. R. Chamberlain maintains in "The Literature of Laos", in J. K. Whitmore, ed., *An Introduction to Indochinese History, Culture, Language and Life* (Ann Arbor, 1979), 58. The best account of the evolution of Lao/Thai orthography is in A. Diller, "The 'Extra Y' in Northern Thai Script", in G. Wijeyewardene and E. C. Chapman, eds, *Patterns and Illusions: Thai History and Thought* (Canberra, 1992): 199-235, diagram at 209. See also J. F. Hartmann, "The Spread of South Indic Scripts in Southeast Asia", *Crossroads* 3, 1 (1988): 9; and A-R. Peltier, "Les littératures lao du Lān Nā, du Lān Xāng, de Keng Tung et des Sip Song Panna", *Péninsule* no. 21 (1990): 36.

155 More than one version says he was killed, which Souneth interprets to mean "deposed". Souneth, "NKB", 239, note 571.

156 *Ming-Shi*, Xiao-zong, juan 153.5b, 57-2712. Hoshino believes that this Chinese response provides evidence that Vixun was responsible for his nephew's death (*Pour une Histoire*, 220).

Chapter 3: Lān Xāng at its Apogee

1 What is remarkable about this earliest recension of the *Nithān Khun Bôrom* is that Vixun himself is included as one of the compilers. If the *Nithān* is taken as a production of the pro-Ayutthayan faction of which Vixun was a prominent member, as suggested above, this goes a long way towards explaining the anomalies already noted in the text such as the failure to mention the reign of — Suvanna Banlang. The chronicles of the kingdom became an integral part of the royal regalia (Archaimbault, "Les annales de l'ancien royaume de S'ieng Khwang", 557, 561), perhaps an innovation introduced by Vixun himself. We are told that records (*phaen chum*) were kept for successive reigns, though all are now lost.

2 Lorrillard, Les chroniques royales, 119.

3 Other versions credit Lā Saen Tai with transporting the *Phra Bāng* to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 200, note 497.

4 The image was installed first in Vat Manoram until Vat Vixun was constructed. Regretably the "immense wooden *vat*" was destroyed in the sack of Luang Phrabāng in 1887 and the original *thāt* collapsed in 1914. Both were well described by Delaporte in the 1860s. Parmentier, "Esquisse d'une étude de l'art laotien", 142-43.

5 The extent of Lān Xāng can be gauged from the list of those governors expected to be present. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 733.

Notes

6 Wyatt, *Thailand*, 84.

7 The classic account of the symbolism of the palace and capital in Theravāda Buddhist politics is Robert Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, Cornell Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper 18, April 1956 (New York, 1956). But see also the essays collected in Smith and Reynolds, eds, *The City as a Sacred Center*. No study yet exists of the symbolism of Luang Phrabāng as a sacred centre, but as already suggested, Phū Sī, once probably the abode of the protective *phī* of Meuang Sua, probably symbolized Mount Meru.

8 It is entirely likely that much of the account given in the *Nithān Khun Bôrom* of the organization of Lān Xāng by Fā Ngum reflects contemporary (i.e., late fifteenth and early sixteenth century) rather than mid-fourteenth century practice, transposed in order to increase the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty.

9 The revolt by the *chau meuang* of Sikhottabông may have occurred as early as 1504/5, though the Annals of Xiang Khuang give a later date (1511 and 1517 in different versions). The failure of the revolt was in part due to lack of outside assistance. Both Ayutthaya and Vietnam refused to become involved. Hoshino, *Pour une Histoire*, 224-26.

10 Most of this literature at the time would have been in Pali. See H. Saddhatissa, "Pali Literature from Laos", in A. K. Narain, ed., *Studies in Pali and Buddhism* (New Delhi, 1979), 327-40.

11 This may have been first compiled in Chiang Mai. A-R. Peltier, *Le Roman Classique Lao* (Paris, 1988), 28. The most popular Jataka of all for the Lao has always been the *Pha Vēt* (the *Vessantara Jātaka*). Cf. Deydier, *Introduction à la Connaissance du Laos* (Saigon, 1952), 27-29.

12 Peltier, *Le Roman Classique Lao*, 26. Lao classical literature was thus in a sense derivative — in fact Peltier mentions only two historical novels that are undoubtedly Lao in inspiration (pp. 20, 38, 246). Peltier believes that Yuan texts which served as models for most Lao classical literature were probably themselves adaptations of earlier Mon texts (pp. 29, 247). Khmer influence, by contrast, appears to have been minimal.

13 Peter Koret, Whispered So Softly it Resounds Through The Forest, Spoken So Loudly It Can Hardly Be Heard: The Art Of Parallelism In Traditional Lao Literature, PhD dissertation, University of London, 1994, 11-13. A. Venkasubbiah, "The Pancatantra Version of Laos", *Adyar Library Bulletin* 33 (1969): 195-283; Sengsay Giau, "Mille et une nuits Lao: La légende de Nang Tan Tay", *Sudestasie* no. 13 (1981): 45-48.

14 For what would appear to be a later reconstruction of this decree, see *The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha* (Bangkok, 1931), 31-32. The text is not included in any of the Lao chronicles, which do, however, record that "Vat Sisuvanna Devalōk" (Vat Suankhalōk) was built in place of the great shrine (*hô phī meuang*). Souneth,

"NKB", 249.

15 Souneth, "NKB", 249-50. The disappearance of the image was greeted with dismay by King Meuang Kaeo of Chiang Mai, who despatched twenty men to steal it back. All were apprehended, but relations were subsequently patched up. The story, apochryphal though it may be, tells us something of the inter-relationship between politics and religion at this time.

16 Stele translated by Lorrillard, Les chroniques royales", 365-67.

17 In 1533 Phōthisārāt concluded an alliance with Vietnam leaving him free to suppress the Phuan revolt. *Le Dai-Viet et ses Voisins*, 92. The Ming chronicles record that a Vietnamese prince had fled to Laos in 1530 (Shi-zong, juan 205.4b-5a, 80-4282/83), but it is unclear whether, and if so how, these incidents were related.

18 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 50-51. There is no mention of this incident in the Siamese annals.

19 In a striking metaphor, the *Ming Shi* refers to the "pacification superintendencies" ringing the empire's southern frontiers as "approximately equal in terms of territory and strength, each consider[ing] itself the most powerful and greatest", and therefore able to "exercise mutual control over each other like a dog's inter-locked teeth" — at least until the balance was disrupted by the Burmese invasions. (Xi-zong, juan 83.10b-12a, 133-4032/35). (This entry dated 28 May 1627 is the last referring to Laos in the Ming chronicles. In fact there is no reference to Laos in the Chinese imperial annals for the next century. Shen Xu, *Lao Wo Shi*, 201.)

20 Notton, *Les Annales du Siam*, III, 155.

21 Cf. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 51; Notton, *Les Annales du Siam*, III, 157. It was about this time that Portuguese adventurers first heard tell of Lān Xāng. Fernao Mendes Pinto claimed to have visited the mysterious kingdom of "Calaminhan" in 1545. His description of how he got there and what he saw is so fanciful, however, that it seems most unlikely that "Calaminhan" refers to Lān Xāng. Pinto is in any case almost certainly repeating hearsay accounts rather than relating his own experiences — especially as much that he describes is reminiscent more of India than the Tai world. R. D. Catz, ed., *The Travels of Mendes Pinto* (Chicago, 1989), 337-64; and M. Vickery's review in *Asian Studies Review* 14, 3 (1991): 251-53.

22 Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 213, note 542. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 736.

23 Champāsak may not have been founded, *as a Lao meuang*, until the early seventeenth century, while the first Lao *meuang* in the Xī valley was not established until 1718. C. F. Keyes. "In Search of Land: Village Formation in the Central Chi River Valley, Northeastern Thailand", *Contributions to Asian Studies* 9 (1976): 47. Xētthāthirāt's foray into the area in the mid-sixteenth century does, however, suggest earlier Lao migration.

24 Evers argues that "formation of the state of Ayutthaya was primarily based on profits from trade which in turn were used to set up an oppressive apparatus to

exploit the peasantry". H-D. Evers, "Trade and State Formation: Siam in the Early Bangkok Period" *Modern Asian Studies* 21 (1987): 756. Tribute from outlying *meuang*, including later Lao areas, was in the form of goods which Ayutthaya could then trade.

25 Wyatt, *Thailand*, 89.

26 Doré, *Aux Sources*, 742. Lefèvre Pontalis suggests that Tabinshwehti's embassy to Lān Xāng was to ensure that the Siamese would not take advantage of his assault on Ava to attack his rear. Pierre Lefèvre Pontalis, "La lutte des Thais contre les Birmans au XVI[e] siècle", *Revue Indochinoise* 7 (1914): 10.

27 Cf. Michael Aung-Thwin, "Divinity, Spirit, and Human: Conceptions of Classical Burmese Kingship", in L. Gesick, ed., *Centers, Symbols, and Hierarchies* (New Haven, 1983), 45-81.

28 Tabinshwehti may have chosen to attack Ayutthaya believing that it presented a less daunting opponent than the combined power of Lān Xāng, Lān Nā and the Shan *meuang* in the north. Cf. Doré, *Aux Sources*, 742.

29 The Chiang Mai chronicle dates the death of Phōthisarāt as 1547 or 1548 and bewails the "calamitous" effect the return of Xētthāthirāt to Lān Xāng had on Lān Nā. Notton, *Annales du Siam*, III, 158. Some Lao texts say Phōthisarāt died in 1550. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 54.

30 Anthony Reid argues that the prosperity of Lān Xāng under Surinyavongsā derived from increased trade with the maritime states. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680* Volume Two: *Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven, 1993), 57. By the seventeenth century he estimates that Viang Chan had perhaps four times the population of Luang Phrabāng (as much as 50,000 for Viang Chan as against something over 10,000 for Luang Phrabāng) (73, 75). Much of this disparity was due to the transfer of the court, but Viang Chan is also likely to have benefitted from population movements from Lān Nā to escape the Burmese. Reid estimates the overall Lao population, on both banks of the Mekong, at 1.5 million by the beginning of the seventeenth century, a figure only slightly less than the 1.7 million for Siam. Anthony Reid, "Economic and Social Change, c. 1400-1800", in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* vol. 1, 463.

31 Different dates are given in different versions of the Lao chronicles, some manifestly incorrect. Souneth, "NKB", 257-58, note 645. Wyatt prefers 1563 (*Thailand*, 93). This and the alternative of 1564 may reflect the time lapse between the order (1560) and the move.

32 She may in fact have been ritually sacrificed. Mayoury Ngaosyvathn, *Lao Women*, 12-13. She is still universally venerated by the citizens of Viang Chan. Cf. Nhouy Abhay, "The That Luang Festivities", in R. de Berval, ed., *Kingdom of Laos* (Saigon, 1959), 288-89. Souneth argues that the ritual sacrifice dates from a much earlier period, from the time of a semi-mythical ruler called Burīchan (referred to

in the *Urangathāt*). Personal communication.

33 For the *Phra Kaeo*, see K. S. Narula, *Voyage of the Emerald Buddha* (Kuala Lumpur, 1994); F. E. Reynolds, "The Holy Emerald Jewel: Some Aspects of Buddhist Symbolism and Political Legitimation in Thailand and Laos", in B. L. Smith, ed., *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma* (Chambersburg, 1978), 175-93.

34 Lorrillard, Les chroniques royales, 325.

35 L'Ecole Nationale d'Administration et de Gestion, *Le That Luang de Vientiane* (Vientiane, 1995). Also Phouvong Phimmasone, "The That Luang of Viang Chan: An Historical and Bibliographical Study", *Asia* 3, 9 (1953): 91-101. The word *thāt* comes from the Sanskrit *dhātu*, meaning reliquary. The thirty surrounding smaller replicas stand for the ten perfections achieved on the way to Buddhahood, multiplied by the three levels of their attainment.

36 Sila Vīravong unaccountably places this event in 1670. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 76. For a translation, see A. B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "An Inscription of 1563 A.D. Recording a Treaty between Laos and Ayodhyā in 1560", *JSS* 67, 2 (1979): 54-69.

37 Made by mixing holy water from Hamsavati (Pegu) brought by both sides. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara suggest this indicates that both Lān Xāng and Ayutthaya may have thereby accepted nominal Burmese suzerainty. This seems rather unlikely given that their alliance was against the Burmese. ("An Inscription of 1563", p. 60, note 11.)

38 Griswold and Prasert, "An Inscription of 1563", p. 68. This should not necessarily be taken to indicate that all the Khōrāt plateau was Lao territory, most of which was heavily forested and of little value to either kingdom.

39 According to the Ayutthayan account, the Lao requested "a" princess, but then objected to the Siamese choice. Michael Theodore Vickery, Cambodia after Angkor, the Chronicles Evidence for the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries. PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1977, II, 123. Wyatt believes it was a shabby attempt by the Siamese to fob off the younger princess on Xētthāthirāt. *Thailand*, 93.

40 For the Lao version, see Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 59-60.

41 George Coedès, "Une recension palie des Annales d'Ayuthya", *BEFEO* 14, 3 (1914): 21.

42 Lorrillard argues that the Burmese on this occasion took Luang Phrabāng, where many members of the royal family were still living, and not Viang Chan. (Les chroniques royales, 157.)

43 Probably because Lao leaders, though not Xētthāthirāt himself, had agreed to pay an annual tribute as a sign of submission (of ten elephants and ten *meun* — about 124 kilogrammes or 273 pounds — of gold). Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 217, note 559.

Notes

44 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 63.

45. Nai Thien, "Burmese Invasions of Siam, Translated from the Hmannan Yazawin Dawgyi", *Selected Articles from the Siam Society Journal* vol. 5 (Bangkok, 1959), 63-65.

46 Burmese sources substantially confirm the Lao account. Nai Thien, "Burmese Invasions of Siam", 77-82. For an evaluation of Xētthāthirāt's tactics during these years, see Lefèvre Pontalis, "La lutte des Thais", 183-87. Also U Aung Tein, "Our Wars with the Burmese. A Work in Thai language by Prince Damrong and Translated", *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 38, 2 (1955), 156.

47 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 67-68. Why Sila believes Phrayā Nakhôn to have been responsible for Xētthāthirāt's death is not clear (82c, note 60).

48 Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Khwang", 615, note 5. Cf. A. Pavie, "Histoire Abrègé", in *Recherches sur l'Histoire*, 96, note 3.

49 Ongkān is cognate with Angkor. One version of the Lao chronicles does say the king attacked Meuang Khmer. So too do Burmese sources. Nai Thien, "Intercourse Between Burma and Siam as recorded in Hmannam Yazawin Dawgyi", *Selected Articles from the Siam Society Journal*, vol. 5 (Bangkok, 1959), 89.

50. The story is told in Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 67-68.

51 Bernard P. Groslier, *Angkor et le Cambodge au XVI^e siècle d'après les sources portugaises et espagnoles* (Paris, 1958), 15-16. Vickery maintains that the details given in the Cambodian chronicles on events surrounding the death of Xētthāthirāt were displaced from a later Lao intervention in the 1590s. Vickery, "Cambodia after Angkor", 254-57.

52 According to one account, he went off hunting and never returned. Pavie, *Histoire Abrègé*, 89. Cf. Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 90.

53 Nai Thien, "Intercourse Between Burma and Siam", 89. The *Phongsāvadān Meuang Luang Phrabāng* (Viang Chan, 1969), 24, gives the precise day of the battle, but says Xētthāthirāt lost his army, not his life.

54 Other accounts say Saen Surin himself had Chanthāsīharāt, the leader of the opposing faction, treacherously assassinated. Cf. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Khwang", 615.

55 Wyatt, *Thailand*, 120.

56 Souneth, "NKB", 272.

57 R. Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation*, vol. 3 (London, 1927), 307-08.

58 Souneth, "NKB", 272-273. In Meuang Xaixētthā, Attapeu province, there is a *stupa* believed locally to have been built over Xētthāthirāt's ashes. The Lao Thoeng of this region recount a legend that the king is still alive. Manich Jumsai, *History of Laos*, 71-77. But the name in both cases probably refers to this impostor, who was something of a local hero for his raid on Viang Chan, and not to the great king

himself.

59 This is according to Lao accounts. Souneth, "NKB", 273-74. According to the Burmese chronicles, Voravongsā was restored to the throne, and only died in 1588. Nai Thien, "Intercourse Between Burma and Siam", 119, 135.

60 The Vat Lingxan version of the *Chronicle of Viang Chan* dates Nô Meuong's return as 1584 when according to the same account he would have been thirteen years old. The *Phongsāvadān Meuang Luang Phrabāng* agrees with the date (1583-1584) but says Nô Meuang was aged twenty-four and ruled only two years. The 1646 version of the *Pheun Khun Bôrom* dates Nô Meuang's six-year rule from 1591, after an eight-year interregnum (compared with a ten-year interregnum according to the *Phongsāvadān Meuang Luang Phrabāng*, and none at all for the *Chronicle of Viang Chan*. Cf. Souneth, "NKB", 275-77, and notes; and Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 59 and 227, notes 589-91. The whole period from the disappearance of Xētthāthirāt to the accession of Surinyavongsā is chronologically confused.

61 Groslier, *Angkor et le Cambodge*, 44; André Migot, *Les Khmers: Des origines d'Angkor au Cambodge d'aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1960), 242. According to Spanish accounts, the wealth of Cambodia depended on its being "a gateway to Laos". David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 2nd ed. (Sydney, 1993), 87. The Portuguese Dominican Gaspar da Cruz noted Lao traders in musk and gold in Cambodia in the 1550s. C. R. Boxer, ed., *South China in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1953), 76.

62 Souneth, "NKB", 278, note 724. Lorrillard notes that some confirmation of written accounts is provided by the limited epigraphy of this confused period. (Les chroniques royales, 186, note 1.)

63 Souneth, "NKB", 280.

64 The *Chronicle of Viang Chan* records several such portents: a palace was struck by lightning, a severe smallpox epidemic broke out in Viang Chan, and for two years the kingdom suffered drought. (Vat Lingxan version.) One event not mentioned in the Lao chronicles, but recorded in Dutch sources, was an abortive attempt early in 1612 to take advantage of an uprising by Japanese mercenaries to invade Ayutthaya. (G. V. Smith, *The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Thailand* (DeKalb, 1977), 14.) The Lān Xāng army was forced ignominiously to withdraw. The establishment of Khōrāt as a Siamese military garrison may have been in response to this Lao adventure.

65 Lorrillard makes a valiant attempt to sort out the muddle (Les chroniques royales, 211-14) by arguing that Tônkham and his brother were "secondary personages" who, rather than the mysterious Phōthisān, may have seized the throne between 1623 and 1627 during the reign of King Mômkaeo. This would mean, as one version of the chronicles maintains, that Mômkaeo should be recognized as the legitimate ruler for the whole period from 1627 to 1638. Furthermore, Lorrillard argues that Surinyavongsā was the younger brother of both Upayuvarāt and Mômkaeo, and that all three were the sons of Vôravongsā. The "elder brothers" Surinyavongsā defeated

for the throne would thus have been his older cousins, sons of the usurper Tônkham, while the younger cousins who conveniently died (were killed?) would have been the sons of Tônkham's younger brother and co-ruler.

66 Van Wuysthoff reported that Burmese envoys had arrived at Ayutthaya to ask permission for an army to cross Siamese territory in order to attack Lān Xāng, and that Burma and Lān Xāng considered themselves still at war. Permission was refused by the Siamese king. Jean-Claude Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage de Gerrit van Wuysthoff et ses Assistants au Laos (1641-1642)*, 2nd rev. ed. (Metz, 1993), 90.

67 For an account of previous unsuccessful attempts by European adventurers or missionaries to reach Lān Xāng, and early references to Laos in European texts, see Lejosne, *Le Journal du Voyage*, 27-28.

68 The temples of Viang Chan today are, of course, much later reconstructions. Care must be exercised in drawing parallels between Lān Xāng and Ayutthaya, especially since by the end of the seventeenth century disparities in wealth, especially from trade, must have been evident. Some idea of what Viang Chan must have been like can be gained, however, from de la Loubère's account of Ayutthaya in the years 1687 and 1688, which is much more complete than anything recorded about Lān Xāng. See particularly on architecture Simon de la Loubère, *A New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam* (Kuala Lumpur, 1969): 29-33.

69 Groslier, *The Art of Indochina*, 218, 223-224. Gagneux considers the mid-seventeenth century to be the high point of Lao art, judged by the number and quality of Buddha images dedicated. P-M. Gagneux, Contribution à la connaissance de la civilisation laotienne d'après l'épigraphie du Royaume de Vientiane (XV^{e}-XIX^{e} siècles). PhD dissertation. University of Paris, 1976, 28, 65, 71. One interesting image is the standing form, arms to the side, fingers pointed down, known as "Buddha calling the rains". Boun Souk (P-M. Gagneux), *L'image du Buddha dans l'art lao* (Vientiane, 1971), 18, 24.

70 Henri Marchal, "Decorative Art", in de Berval, ed., *Kingdom of Laos*, 71-80. Marchal claims to discover not only Siamese, Khmer and Burmese influences in Lao decorative arts, but also Indian, Persian and Chinese.

71 Leria's account was published in G. F. de Marini, "Relation nouvelle et curieuse du Royaume de Lao" (1660); reprinted in *Revue Indochinoise* nos 8/10 (1910): 152-81, 257-71, 358-65.

72 de Marini "Relation nouvelle ...", 158 (my translation).

73 Dutch attempts to tap the Lao trade were hampered by their bitter competition with the Portuguese, who were well established in Cambodia. J. Nepote, "Le Voyage de Van Wuysthoff au Laos (1641-1642): Les contextes", *Péninsule* no. 13 (1986): 9-42.

74 Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 79-80. In fact, Surinyavongsā would have been almost twenty-nine years old, but would have seemed younger to European envoys. In addition to his official wives, the king is reported to have had "more than a

hundred" concubines. de Marini, "Relation nouvelle ..." 163.

75 Lao officials stressed the honours shown. Six elephants were sent to fetch the Dutch delegation, whereas the ambassadors of neighbouring *mandalas* ranked only three. The Dutch were told by Surinyavongsā three times to approach closer: no other ambassador had ever been seated as close to the king. Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 80. Later, at celebrations for the Lao New Year, other entertainments were provided, including horse races, buffalo fights, boxing, and armed combat between young warriors (107).

76 de Marini, "Relation nouvelle ...", 362.

77 For an English translation, see Ronald Perry, "The Sin Xai after the Lao of Pang Kham", *Hudson Review* 20 (1967): 11-48.

78 Phouvong Phimmasone, "Literature", in de Berval, ed., *Kingdom of Laos*, 341-42. Koret, Whispered So Softly, 14.

79 These are traditional Lao crafts. Seventeenth-century pottery kilns producing a characteristic grey stoneware have been excavated at Viang Chan. D. Hein, M. Barbetti and T. Sayavongkhamdy, *An Excavation at the Sisattanak Kiln Site, Vientiane, Lao P.D.R.* (Sydney, 1992) and the review discussing dating by D. Bulbeck in *Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter*, no. 26 (September 1994): 19-20.

80 Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 65. Other items of trade into the highlands included dried fish and sugar.

81 Twenty different kinds of textiles are referred to in van Wuysthoff's journal. Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 172-77.

82 Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 112. Some of the species favoured included cockatoos, pigeons and rabbits (85). Leria brought with him a parrot and a rabbit as gifts (111).

83 Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 91, 95, 118. Dangers encountered included brigands, tolls charged by local officials and even warfare.

84 Van Wuysthoff envisaged purchasing approximately 123 kilogrammes (270 pounds) of gold, 18,500 kilogrammes (over 18 tons) of best quality benzoin, 9,250 kilogrammes (almost ten tons) of sticklac, plus copper gongs and other articles from Lān Xāng every two years. Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 94.

85 Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 96. The tax in gold was estimated at about two "piculs", or 123 kilogrammes (270 pounds). Cf. Francis Garnier, "Voyage lointain aux Royaume de Cambodge et Laowen", *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie, Paris*, serie 3, 6 (1871): 277, note 63.

86 In the form of "presents" twice annually and corvée whenever required. de Marini, "Relation nouvelle ...", 171.

87 Keo Manivanna, "Aspects socio-économiques", 64. The nature of slavery "in historical Thailand" (in this respect little different from Laos), in the words of one authority "resembled much more closely a patron-client relationship than bondage

as the Westerner habitually thinks of it". Some poorer families voluntarily preferred this status for it ensured them a continuing livelihood. Steven Piker, "Sources of Stability and Instability in Rural Thai Society", *JAS* 27 (1968): 87.

88 Slaves were a form of wealth, and wealth had value only insofar as it could assure spiritual merit. Hence slaves were often donated to monasteries. Leria records that the Viceroy (*uparāt*) under Surinyavongsā gave 160 slaves to the temple where he went to recover from a grave illness. de Marini, "Relation nouvelle...", 359-60. Ironically, as Keo Manivanna points out, Buddhism both ensured that slaves were relatively well treated, while at the same time justifying the social inequality of their status. "Aspects socio-économiques", 66-67.

89 Lao traders were confined as virtual prisoners in Ayutthaya, much to Lao annoyance. Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 84, 90, 92, 110. Cf. George Vinal Smith, "Princes, Nobles, and Traders: Ethnicity and Economic Activity in Seventeenth-Century Thailand", *Contributions to Asian Studies* 15 (1980): 6-14.

90 Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 63-64, 87-89, 96. In January 1642 on the Lao-Cambodian border, a rumour of pending war between Cambodia and Laos prevented van Wuysthoff from obtaining a boat downstream (100-01).

91 Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 95, 107. Ambassadors from neighbouring kingdoms came on specific missions: they did not reside in Viang Chan. For information from beyond their borders, kings relied on paid informers (spies).

92 Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Française*, 104; Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam*, 261; Wyatt, *Thailand*, 122; all place this ethnographically-based agreement in the seventeenth century, rather than in the reign of Fā Ngum three centuries earlier. Saveng Phinith believes the agreement concluded by Surinyavongsā reiterated the terms of the earlier agreement. Saveng Phinith, "La frontière entre le Laos et le Vietnam", 198-199. Relations with Vietnam must have further deteriorated, however, for the Lao chronicles note laconically that in 1648 there was war with Annam. Souneth, "NKB", 290.

93 Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 67.

94 Souneth, "NKB", 291. These locations defined the territory of Lān Xāng in a symbolic sense from the the mid-fourteenth to the early nineteenth century. Thus Lao space stretched from the falls of Khôn in the south to cliffs about a hundred kilometres upstream from Luang Phrabāng, and from roughly Dānxāy separating Lān Xāng from Ayutthaya to Meuang Khua in the northeast — even though the actual extent of the kingdom must have fluctuated over the centuries.

95 Originally Khmer, this region seems never to have been Lao territory. No Lao inscriptions from the period of the kingdom of Lān Xāng have been discovered in the Mūn basin. This compares with forty-seven inscriptions from the Xī river north. Dhawaj Poonotoke, *Silachāreuk Īsān*, unpaginated English summary. Some suggest that Siamese control dates only from the reign of King Narai (1656-1688) when a

single fortified outpost was established. Charles F. Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*. Data Paper 65, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program. Ithaca, N. Y., 1967, 6-7. However the predominantly Khmer towns in the region are likely to have acknowledged the suzerainty of Ayutthaya well before then.

96 de Marini, "Relations nouvelle ...", 164-65, 166 (translation Paul Lévy, "Two Accounts of Travels in Laos in the 17th Century", in de Berval, ed., *Kingdom of Laos*, 64-65, 67).

97 This is confirmed by Vietnamese accounts. Nguyen The Anh, "La frontière sino-vietnamienne du XI^{è} au XVII^{è} siècle", in Lafont, ed., *Les Frontières du Vietnam*, 67. Van Wuysthoff reported that the "King of Tonkin" (presumably the Trinh in the name of the Le emperor) sent an annual gift of silks embroidered with gold and silver; while the king of "Quinam" (the Nguyen in the south) sent 200 guns and some silk. Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 75. While the former in return for Lao "tribute" to Hanoi may have amounted to no more than an exchange of gifts, the latter more substantial "gift" may have been genuine tribute to ensure Lao neutrality while Vietnam was divided between the two warring families. Van Wuysthoff's assistants who stayed on in Viang Chan reported, however, that in 1642 an ambassador from Tonkin also brought guns and silk (perhaps in order to improve then strained relations between the two kingdoms) — only to be told to depart from Lān Xāng (see above).

98 Shen Xu, *Lao Wo Shi*, 201. The last missions to the Ming were in 1599, when a seal was presented, and in 1612 when the Lao envoys "humbly begged" for its replacement (it had been "lost" in warfare, thus indirectly confirming the internecine conflict at that time) Shen-zong, juan 493.3a-b 118-9279/80. When relations did resume (in 1729) with the Qing after the division of Lān Xāng, they were only with Luang Phrabāng, never with Viang Chan or Champāsak.

99 These include notably the five precepts and eight precepts. For the full list, see Souneth, "NKB", 388-90.

100 de Marini, "Relation nouvelle ...", 165; Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 73.

101 Lévy maintains that "Assen" is an abbreviation for *Mahāsēnā*, the commander-in-chief of the army. P. Lévy, "Identifications et commentaires", *Péninsule* no. 13 (1986): 49. Le Boulanger identifies "Assen" as Tian-Thala, Surinyavongsā's son-in-law which is manifestly impossible. (*Histoire du Laos Français*, 109.) As *uparāt* he was probably an uncle of the king.

102 Lejosne, *Journal de Voyage*, 96. Van Wuysthoff estimated that Lakhôn boasted twenty to twenty-five temples, and was about the size of Phnom Penh (73).

103 These were respectively in charge of the Right, Left and Middle *Sēnā*. Van Wuysthoff was correct in his estimation of their relative power. While the Meuang Saen and Meuang Chan were Phrayā of first rank, the Meuang Kāng was a Phrayā of the third rank. See Souneth, "NKB", 493-96 (Appendix VI), for the full structure

of Surinyavongsā's administration.

104 Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 88-89. Leria mentions eight high officials, but gives no names. de Marini, "Relation nouvelle ...", 165.

105 Sila Vīravong, ed., *Khamphī Phra Thammasāt Būhān* (Code of the Phra Thammasāt) (Viang Chan, 1956). I am grateful to Souneth Phothisane for providing me with a summary of this text.

106 For the full list of ranks, see Souneth, "NKB", 495.

107 Noted also at Ayutthaya. de la Loubère, *A New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam*, 81. The most splendid ceremonial processions witnessed by Leria were when the king paid a formal visit to one of the great temples to present royal gifts. "One can say that the king on these occasions carries on his person the riches of a kingdom, and an infinity of priceless gems". de Marini, "Relation nouvelle ...", 168. Rank was also indicated on less ceremonial occasions by bands of cloth around the waist.

108 Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 96-97. Van Wuysthoff believed that the principal reason foreign monks came to Viang Chan in such numbers was that they were "considered as gods" and enjoyed the laxer moral discipline — a comment that can perhaps be discounted given van Wuysthoff's jaundiced view of Buddhism (97).

109 The discussion by Hall of Buddhism as an economic force in Burma applies equally to Laos. K. Hall, "Economic History in Early Times", in N. Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* vol. 1, 240-45.

110 Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 111, 113.

111 More than half of Leria's account is devoted to Buddhism and the activities of the monks, whom he held in low regard. de Marini, "Relation nouvelle ...", 133-81, 257-71, 358-65.

112 de Marini, "Relation nouvelle ...", 364-65. Apart from polemical debate over points of doctrine, Leria does shed some interesting light on Lao Buddhism at the time. For example, monks demanded the weight of a person in rice to cure them of serious illness. Punishment of monks for serious breaches of morality was at least sometimes by the ordeal of being sent into the jungle. If after a certain time they had not been attacked by savage beasts, they were deemed innocent. Leria also reveals that there existed doctrinal divisions between "sects" that even a monastic council failed to overcome (270-71, 259).

113 de Marini, "Relation nouvelle ...", 154.

114 de Marini, "Relations nouvelle ...", 162 (translation Lévy, "Two Accounts ...", 64).

115 de Marini, "Relation nouvelle ...", 156.

116 As both van Wuysthoff and Leria noted. Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 103; de Marini, "Relation nouvelle ...", 172. From this period derive both the very similar Lao legal codes (*Thammasāt*) that have come down to us (of Viang Chan and Luang Phrabāng). For the contents of the five books in the Viang Chan code, based on the

five major precepts to be adhered to by all lay Buddhists (forbidding adultery, theft, murder, lying and drunkenness), see A. Raquex, "Les lois laotiennes", *Péninsule* nos 24/25 (1992), 3-67. The largest section of this code (77 articles) has to do with sexual transgression.

117 Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Khwang", 571, note 7 (for various versions). De Pelacot gives differing details drawn from the Phuan oral tradition in "Le Tran-Ninh historique", *Revue Indo-Chinoise* (1906): 574-75.

118 These were taken to be natural portents, recorded along with earthquakes (1642), eclipses, and other strange observations (in 1618 "two stars emit smoke"). *Chronicle of Viang Chan* (Vat Lingxan version).

119 Peltier, "Les littératures lao ... , 29-44.

120 Peltier, *Le Roman Classique Lao*, 231-43. Peltier makes the point that Lao classical literature was a product not of the palace, but of the *vat* where its audience would have included both noble and peasant (p. 246). See also A-R. Peltier, "Le roman classique lao" *Péninsule* nos 11/12 (1985-86).

121 Peltier, "Les littératures lao ...", 31. Two recent translations by Jean Lichtenstein are *Sieng Hmieng* (Paris, 1983) and *La reine exilée at son fils: Nang Tèng One* (Paris, 1989) both published by *Péninsule*. Lao novels are amusing to read, but one can hardly endorse the exaggerated claim of Chamberlain ("The Literature of Laos", 57) that Lao literature is "one of the truly great traditions of the world". Peltier provides a more balanced assessment.

122 Peltier, *Le Roman Classique Lao*, chapters 4, 5 and 6. Van Wuysthoff refers to a number of taboos and superstitions. Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 104-105. Mayoury Ngaosyvathn points out that traditionally in Laos women had access to the supernatural and were adept at mediating magical powers. *Lao Women*, 13-15, 21-22.

123 P. Souk Aloun, *Médecine traditionnelle bouddhique du Laos* (Montpellier, 1988) explains the Buddhist theory of the composition of the body in accordance with the five elements (twenty of earth and twelve of water making up the visible part, and four of fire, six of air and ten of space making up the invisible), and the forty-two causes of sickness (29-30, 37). See also Souk Aloun Phou Ngeun, *La médecine bouddhique traditionnelle en pays théravada* (Limoges, 1995).

124 Even so, van Wuysthoff worried that the transport costs for shipment of benzoin and sticklac downstream would be as much as the value of the merchandise. Lejosne, *Le Journal de Voyage*, 89.

125 As Anthony Reid has pointed out, it was the new military technology, and the expenses involved in its purchase or manufacture, that stimulated the rise of a small number of powerful kingdoms in Southeast Asia. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce* Volume 1: *The Lands Below the Winds*, 128. Reid's thesis that Southeast Asian trade and prosperity declined after the 1680s (*Southeast Asia in the*

Age of Commerce Volume 2: *Expansion and Crisis*) has been questioned with respect to the mainland kingdoms. Victor Lieberman, "An Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia? Problems of Regional Coherence — A Review Article", *JAS* 54 (1995): 796-807. As Lieberman points out, Siamese trade with China continued to be of great value and importance (801), and this was the crucial component in the continuing power disparity between Ayutthaya and Lān Xāng.

Chapter 4: Disintegration of the Lao *Mandala*

1 Ayutthaya was trading not only luxury products. As early as the late sixteenth century, the Siamese were exporting 10,000 tons of rice annually. Even Cambodia was exporting 7,000 tons by the early seventeenth century. Lān Xāng, by contrast, was entirely excluded from bulk commodities trade. Cf. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680* Volume 1: *The Lands Below the Winds*, 21.

2 Engelbert Kaempfer, *A Description of the Kingdom of Siam, 1690* (London, 1727) reprint (Bangkok, 1987), 40-41.

3 Sila Vīravong calls them nephews of Surinyavongsā. (*History of Laos*, 83).

4 By one account, Chau Ong Lô, a grandson of Surinyavongsā by his daughter Sumangkhala was placed on the throne following the death of Phrayā Meuang Chan. If so, Ong Lô would have been a minor (Manich Jumsai, *History of Laos*, 91, says he was at most thirteen years old, "or even much younger") manipulated by powerful court factions. He may have been assassinated in the factional coup led by Nantharāt.

5 According to the Lao chronicles this was in 1698. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 84. Vietnamese sources say that Xai Ong Vē (whom the Vietnamese chronicles refer to as Trieu Phuc) was provided with a Vietnamese force in 1696 but took four years to capture Viang Chan. Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam*, 261.

6 According to Vietnamese sources, the region of "Lac-Hon" (Lakhôn, or Sikhōttabông) asked to become tributary to Vietnam in 1700, in return for Vietnamese assistance in deposing Xai Ong Vē, but the request was refused. Cf. Philippe Langlet, "La Tradition Vietnamienne: Un état national au sein de la civilisation chinoise", *BSEI* n.s 45, nos 2/3 (1970), 259-60.

7 Tribute consisted of 400 silver ingots, ten elephants, ten pairs of tusks and ten rhinoceros horns. Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 131.

8 Sila Vīravong identifies the Siamese king as Phetracha, but according to Siamese sources, Phetracha died in 1703 (Wyatt, *History*, 126), in which case it would have been his successor, Süa, who intervened.

9 The account here follows Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 84-85, who draws on Thai sources. According to the *Phongsāvadān Meuang Luang Phrabāng*, division of Lān Xāng was agreed upon amicably at the suggestion of Kingkitsarāt, with no mention

of Siamese intervention. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 62 and 247-49, notes 665-72. Various dates are given for the division of Lan Xang (1699, 1703), but most authorities accept 1707. Cf. Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 133; Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 109; Wyatt, *Thailand*, 123.

10 The Phuan kingdom was already paying an annual tribute to Hanoi.

11 Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Khwang", 573-74. Other texts include Meuang Phuan, the Huaphan Tang Hok and the Sipsông Chu Tai in Luang Phrabāng. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 62 and 248, note 671.

12 According to the chronicles of Champāsak, Nāng Phau was made pregnant in 1638 by a visiting prince from Nong Būa Lamphū (though as Archaimbault surmises he may well have been Lao Thoeng). (Charles Archaimbault, *The New Year Ceremony at Basăk (South Laos)*. Abridged trans. by Simone B. Boas. Data Paper 78, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program. Ithaca, N. Y.: 25, note 10). Nāng Phau subsequently gave birth to a daughter, Nāng Pang, who later jointly ruled Champāsak with her mother. Supposing Nāng Phau was as young as fifteen in 1638, she would have been at least ninety in 1713. As Archaimbault has pointed out, however, mythic elements in the story of Nāng Phau, as well as age, cast doubt on her historicity. Charles Archaimbault, "L'Histoire de Campasak", *Journal Asiatique* no. 294 (1961): 523-34. Themes of guilt, female pollution and the inadequacy of the royal house to maintain the stability and prosperity of the *meuang* continued to be prominent in the rituals performed in Champāsak by Prince Bunum, last of the royal line, up until 1975 — especially at the New Year ceremonies.

13 Phra Khū had formerly been abbot of Vat Phōnsamek in Viang Chan. After Surinyavongsā's death he had given refuge to Sumangkhala, and during the succession struggle that followed was forced to flee the capital. At Nakhôn Phanom he repaired the *stupa*, before fleeing to northern Cambodia to escape his enemies. After moving to Champāsak, Phra Khū played a key role in the establishment of the royal line of southern Laos and the independence of Champāsak. Subsequent accounts endowed him with magical powers. The story is told in Preuss, ed. *The That Phanom Chronicle*, 65-67, and critically examined in Archaimbault, "L'Histoire de Campasak", 534-50.

14 The differing traditions concerning the foundation of Champāsak as an independent kingdom are examined in Archaimbault, "Religious Structures in Laos", 71-73, note 19.

15 The ten *meuang* then comprising the kingdom are listed in Pierre Lintingre, *Les Rois de Champassak* (Pakse, 1972), 15. The marriage of Soi Sīsamut to a Cambodian princess extended the kingdom south to Stung Treng (Xieng Taeng).

16 Short Chronicle of Viang Chan, Vat Hô Phra Kaeo version.

17 For the *Xiang Miang*, see Jean Lichtenstein, *Sieng Hmieng* (Paris, 1983), and for the *Siao Savāt*, A-R. Peltier, *Le Syvsvat: un texte classique lao* (Paris, 1971).

Notes

18 This is according to Lao accounts. The Chiang Mai Chronicle suggests rather that Ong Kham owed his throne to his readiness not to oppose the Burmese, but to collaborate with them. The matter is discussed at length by Lorrillard (Les chroniques royales", 232-36).

19 Kimura, "An Annotated Translation of Dai-nam Chinh-bien Liet-truyen So-tap Nam-Chuong-truyen (Description of Luang Prabang)", 157. More embassies followed in 1734, 1739 and 1745, after which tribute was sent every ten years.

20 Sila Vīravong makes no mention of this king, and gives 1730 as the date of accession of Siribunnyasān. (*History of Laos*, 85; but cf. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Kwang", 576, note 1.) This would give Siribunnyasān a reign of fifty years, which seems unlikely. Le Boulanger and Manich Jumsai both give 1760 as the date of Siribunnyasān's succession. Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 151; Manich Jumsai, *History of Laos*, 84.

21 P. Grossin, *Notes sur L'Histoire de la Province de Cammon (Laos)* (Hanoi, 1933), 16.

22 Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 149-51; cf. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 109-10 who dates these events at 1787. Archaimbault too prefers the later date. ("Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Khwang", 575-577, especially 576, note 1.)

23 Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 192-193, dates this invasion to 1750. Cf. Histoire de Louang Prabang, 100.

24 It is far from certain whether Inthaphōm ever reigned, for different dates are given for both his father's death and his brother's accession. Cf. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 105; Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 64 and 258, note 710.

25 Archaimbault, "L'Histoire de Campasak", 554-58.

26 In 1765, according to the Chiang Mai chronicle. Wyatt and Aroonrut Wichienkeeo, *The Chiang Mai Chronicle*, 133.

27 The Nān chronicle places the invasion two years earlier (in 1763), immediately following the capture of Chiang Mai. Wyatt, *The Nan Chronicle*, 83. But cf. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 64; and Damrong Rajanubhab, "Our Wars with the Burmese" (Trans. U Aung Thein) *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 11, 2 (1958), 312, 314.

28 For these events, see Wyatt, *Thailand*, 134-37.

29 Hans-Dieter Evers argues that "Taksin's government depended on foreign trade as the only source of revenue", rather than exploitation of a depressed peasantry devastated by the Burmese wars. Cf. Evers, "Trade and State Formation: Siam in the Early Bangkok Period", 759. Taksin sought to establish control of (monopolies over) all valuable items for export. This meant controlling those regions producing these trade goods, which were the Lao kingdoms and Lān Nā. Thus there were important economic incentives for Taksin to bring the Lao kingdoms within the

Siamese *mandala*.

30 Different texts give dates ranging from 1771 to 1785 for these events. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 262, note 726.

31 Various versions of the Annals of Viang Chan agree that this occurred in 1767. Cf. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 86.

32 David K. Wyatt, "Siam and Laos, 1767-1827", *JSEAH* 4, 2 (1963): 16-20. Cf. Archaimbault, "L'Histoire de Campasak", 558-60.

33 According to Sila Vīravong (*History of Laos*, 86), this occurred in 1766.

34 Sila Vīravong dates these events to 1768 (*History of Laos*, 87), but Wyatt prefers 1770-1771 ("Siam and Laos", 17, note 14). The difference depends on whether Burmese intervention was in any way linked to the attack by Luang Phrabāng on Viang Chan in 1771. Wyatt believes it was, though this seems doubtful.

35 This was the first of a series of letters between Siribunnyasān and Taksin over the years 1771-1775. Translations of this correspondence in Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 87-100, have been described by Lorraine Gesick as "*extremely* unreliable" (italics in original). Gesick's reading will be followed in this account. See L. M. Gesick, Kingship and Political Integration in Traditional Siam, 1767-1824. PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1976, 91-102.

36 Gesick, Kingship and Political Integration, 93-94, notes that the Lao princess was to become Taksin's chief queen. The Lao may have angered Taksin by delaying the marriage. Cf. Lorrillard, Les chroniques royales", 283.

37 Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 15.

38 Variously dated between 1770 and 1773. Cf. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 89, 105.

39 The *Phongsāvadān Meuang Luang Phrabāng* says that the city was captured by the Burmese. (Cf. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 66.) But according to Thai sources, Luang Phrabāng was not taken, and instead negotiated acceptance of the suzerainty of Ava. Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 15-16.

40 This was in 1774. Histoire de Louang Prabang, 102; Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 18. A "treaty of alliance" was eventually signed in Bangkok in 1776.

41 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 90.

42 Gesick, Kingship and Political Integration, 98-99.

43 Gesick, Kingship and Political Integration, 101.

44 Traduction de l'Histoire de Vien-Chan Tha-Bouli-Sisata-nakhanabout Lan-Sang-Hom-Khao, MS of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, Laosien P2(3), 14-15. The Lao original of this text has since disappeared. Nāng Khiokhôm was later escorted south after the fall of Viang Chan by the future Rama I, with whom she fell in love. Having got wind of the affair, Taksin refused to receive her in Thonburi. Subsequently she became Rama I's "queen of the left"

45 Gesick argues that "Thonburi's vigorous expansionism" was due to Taksin's

determination to recreate a powerful centralized kingdom modelled on the Ayutthayan *mandala*. Expansionism was essential since "the possession of tributaries was one of the most visible indications that a king possessed great merit". Gesick, Kingship and Political Integration, 102-03.

46 Archaimbault, "L'Histoire de Campasak", 558.

47 The story of Phra Vôrarāt is told in Mom Amorawongwichit's *Tamnān Meuang Nakhôn Champāsak*, in vol. 44, part 70 of *Prachum Phongsawadan* (Bangkok, 1969), 198-202. Neither Champāsak nor Nakhôn Rāxasīmā answered Vôrarāt's pleas for help. Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 19; cf. Archaimbault, "L'Histoire de Campasak", 560.

48. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 101. Alternative versions record that Chakri led a military expedition onto the plateau in 1777 to put down a revolt by the *meuang* of Nāng Rong, 80 kilometres (50 miles) southeast of Nakhôn Rāxasīmā, and that in 1778 his army marched directly north towards Viang Chan rather than via Champāsak and the Mekong (Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 20, note 32). Manich Jumsai believes Chakri dealt with Nang Rong and Champāsak on the same expedition (*History of Laos*, 98).

49 Histoire de Louang Prabang, 103. Siribunnyasān's appeal for Burmese assistance went unanswered.

50 Manich Jumsai, *History of Laos*, 100. Cf. *Phongsāwadān Muang Nakhôn Phanom Sangkheb* in vol. 44, part 70 of *Prachum Phongsawadan*, 206-07.

51 Where he died in 1781. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 109.

52 Luang Phrabāng may have made overtures to Taksin after the fall of Chiang Mai in 1774. (Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 269-70, note 753.) Thereafter tributary relations with Burma terminated, though tribute continued to be paid to China and "friendly ties" were maintained with Vietnam.

53 Founded and fortified by the Siamese during the reign of King Narai (1656-1688). Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, 7 and note 5. Revolts against Ayutthayan control occurred in 1691 and 1698-1700. Wyatt, *Thailand*, 125.

54 Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 22.

55 Called by the Siamese *huameuang*, or "head *meuang*". They existed at two levels, major *huameuang* being directly responsible to Bangkok, and minor ones responsible to the major. Between 1767 and 1882, 95 to 100 were formed on the Khōrāt plateau, mostly of minor extent. Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeast Thailand*, 15 and note 3.

56 Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeast Thailand*, 16.

57 Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 22. The creation of new *meuang* was an administrative act, establishing a local centre of administration for an existing population.

58 Paitoon Mikusol, Social and Cultural History of Northeastern Thailand from 1868-1910, PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1984, 229-245.

59 Cf. Michael Vickery, "The Historical Records of the Kingdom of Vientiane", typescript, which shows the extent to which Viang Chan ruled over much of what is now the Thai Isan" (MS, 9).

60 According to Thai sources, communications between Vietnam and Viang Chan had to pass through Bangkok during the reign of Nanthasēn, but not during the reign of Inthavong. Luang Phrabāng entered into tributary relations with Vietnam upon the accession of Emperor Gia Long. Personal communication from Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn.

61 Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 22.

62 Just what happened during this period is unclear, though it seems likely that some struggle for power was taking place. Cf. Klaus Wenk, *The Restoration of Thailand Under Rama I, 1782-1809*. Trans. Greely Stahl (Tucson, 1968) 96, note 341.

63 The old king fell ill on the way and was allowed to return home. Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 23.

64 Traduction de l'Histoire de Vien-Chan, 16.

65 Wyatt, *Thailand*, 153.

66 For a discussion of early Chakri administration, see Constance M. Wilson, "Nineteenth-Century Thai Administration: Are Our Models Adequate?", *Contributions to Asian Studies* 15 (1980): 29-40

67 Various versions and dates are given for these events. See Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Khwang", 575-77, especially 576, note 1. According to Thai sources, Nanthasēn secured the submission of Xiang Khuang in 1782. Kennon Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States into the Thai Kingdom, PhD dissertation, Oxford University, 1975, 6.

68 Including threatened invasion. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 110.

69 Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 151, note 1.

70 Sila Vīravong, (*History of Laos*, 110, 136) gives two possible dates for this attack (1789 and 1792) while the Short Chronicle of Viang Chan says it occurred in 1788. The *Phongsāvadān Meuang Luang Phrabāng* gives 1791, immediately following the enthronement of King Anuruttha. It seems likely that Nanthasēn was taking advantage of divisions and bitterness over Anuruttha's succession.

71 Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 67. Other accounts say the town was stormed. In any case there seems to have been heavy loss of life. Cf. Wenk, *The Restoration of Thailand*, 97.

72 Traduction de l'Histoire de Vien-Chan, 18.

73 Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 67-68. Huaphan had apparently reverted to the suzerainty of Luang Phrabāng some time previously. Cf. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Kwang", 574, note 1.

74 Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam*, 329. Subsequently Xiang Khuang requested permission from Bangkok both to channel tribute via Luang Phrabāng rather than

Viang Chan, with whom relations were strained, and to continue traditional payments to Vietnam. Gesick, Kingship and Political Integration, 131-33.

75 Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 68. Cf. Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 25, note 49. Some accounts place the date of Anuruttha's return as early as 1793. Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Francais*, 200.

76 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 110. According to the Nakhôn Phanom chronicle, Phra Bôromarāxā of Nakhôn Phanom was instigator of the plot, though this is not borne out by other accounts. Cf. Wenk, *The Restoration of Thailand*, 97, note 351. Rama I was apparently informed by the Vietnamese that Nanthasēn had sought their assistance. *Phongsawadan Muang Nakhôn Phanom Sangkheb*, 207-08.

77 Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn argue that Nanthasēn was deliberately betrayed by the Vietnamese. See their introductory essay in Crisis Management and Techniques of Power in Imperial Vietnam, forthcoming.

78 Wenk, *The Restoration of Thailand*, 98.

79 Thai accounts make it clear that Nanthasēn was guilty. Chao Phraya Thiphakorawong, *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, The First Reign* vol. I (Trans. T. Flood) (Tokyo 1978), 208, 213.

80 Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 25.

81 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 112-113.

82 Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn have suggested that Vat Sīsakēt was constructed, in Michael Vickery's words, as "a piece of sympathetic magic" whose elaborate symbolism was designed to draw upon divine forces to defeat the Siamese. The interpretation is outlined in Vickery's review "*Chao Anou 1767-1829 pasason lao lee asi akhane* (Chao Anou 1767-1829, the Lao People and Southeast Asia) by Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn (Vientiane, 1988)" , *JSEAS* 21 (1990): 443.

83 Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 161. The Lao chronicles report construction of two bridges across the Mekong, the first by the Burmese during their second invasion around 1570, and the second by Chou Anu in 1812. Lorrillard, Les chroniques royales, 167, 293.

84 Chronicle of Viang Chan, Vat Hô Pra Kaeo version, entries for 1800 and 1801. Cf. also Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam*, 341.

85 Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 160, note 1. Cf. Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam*, 364. This relatively nominal tribute compares with the far heavier demands made by the Vietnamese court for aiding Xai Ong Vē a century before. Cf. Philippe Langlet, "Le Tradition Vietnamienne", 245, note 1. Luang Phrabāng had already despatched a tribute mission to Gia Long in 1803, after which payments were very irregular — much to Vietnamese annoyance. Kimura, "An Annotated Translation ...", 158-62. One should note, however, that far more frequent embassies, bearing gifts, not tribute, were exchanged between Bangkok and Hué.

86 Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 160, note 1.

87 Mānoy, a nephew of Xainyakumān, succeeded Fai Nā in 1813 after an interregnum of two years, during which the crystal Buddha was transported to Bangkok, symbolizing loss of southern independence. Archaimbault, "L'Histoire de Campasak", 563-64. Cf. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 144-145; Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 27, where the date of accession of Mānoy is given as 1811.

88 Cf. Archaimbault, "L'Histoire de Campasak", 566.

89 Nyō remained *rāxabut* of Viang Chan (Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 114). The Siamese were aware of the danger of strengthening Viang Chan, but needed strong rule in Champāsak to keep the Vietnamese out of the middle Mekong. Cf. Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 28.

90 The Phuan prince Chau Noy was held in Viang Chan against his will while attempts were made to replace him by the head of a rival Phuan family. Snit Smuckarn and Kennon Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival: The Phuan of Thailand and Laos* (New Haven, 1988), 7. Cf. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Kwang", 578.

91 This was probably in 1823; he was to try again three years later. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 69 and 291, note 813.

92 Lorrillard, Les chroniques royales", 255-256; Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Francais*, 201-02.

93 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 113.

94 The *Phongsāvadān Meuang Luang Phrabāng* records that Manthāturāt stayed on for another two years in Bangkok, after spending a year as a monk. Cf. Wyatt, *Thailand*, 170.

95. Referred to as such in "Diary of Capt. Henry Burney", *The Burney Papers*, vol I, (Farnborough, 1971), 31.

96 The account of Ānuvong's attempt to throw off Siamese hegemony that follows draws heavily on Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *A Present of the Past: Fifty years (1779-1829) of diplomacy and warfare among mainland Southeast Asian traditional polities*, forthcoming. I am most grateful for permission to consult this work before publication. Siamese tattooing and demands for corvée labour are discussed in sections 29 and 30 of the manuscript.

97 Manich Jumsai, *History of Laos*, 109.

98 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 114.

99 Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn maintain that Ānuvong had been planning for this moment since his accession in 1804. *A Present of the Past*, part III. As early as 1825, on his way to Rama II's cremation, Ānuvong had ordered villagers to hoard supplies of rice. (Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, personal communication)

100 Including the *uparāt* Titsa and *rāxavong* Ngau. Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 114.

101 Sila Vīravong (*History of Laos*, 115) says that the earthquake demolished part of the city walls. The omens were widely known, for they turn up in interrogation

reports of Lao captured in 1827. (Manuscripts (64) 1189/11 khwai and (19) 1189/4 kai, National Library of Thailand. Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, personal communication)

102 Rama III sent a copy of the treaty to Ānuvong when Prince Ngau returned to Viang Chan towards the end of 1826.

103 Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *A Present of the Past*, section 20.

104 The First Anglo-Burmese war had resulted in a British victory in 1825. Meanwhile the British envoy Sir John Crawfurd was in Bangkok to negotiate a commercial treaty. On 19 May 1822, he met with Ānuvong. John Crawfurd, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (London, 1830), 240.

105 Vella sees waning Siamese power as the principal spur to Ānuvong's actions. Walter Vella, *Siam Under Rama III, 1824-1851* (1957), 80. Factionalism in Bangkok was provoked by the succession of Rama III in preference to Mongkut, and a regional uprising had already occurred in 1824-1825. When Ānuvong was encamped at Nakhôn Rāxasīmā, he was visited by "agents" of Mongkut, though what was said is unknown. Thus Ānuvong may well have believed that Rama III was in a weak position.

106 Cf. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* , 118-122.

107 Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, "World Super Power and Regional Conflicts: The Triangular Game of Great Britain with Bangkok and the Lao During the Embassies of John Crawfurd (1821-1822) and of Henry Burney (1825-1826)", *JSS* 76 (1988), 124-125.

108 Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *A Present of the Past*, section 20. Crawfurd was told the Lao population (from Chiang Mai to Champāsak) was equal to the Siamese, but estimated it at one-third less (840,000). Crawfurd, *Journal of an Embassy*, 120, 218. Larry Sternstein, in a careful analysis of all existing sources, has concluded that the population of Viang Chan about 1825 was just over 100,000. This compared with 458,000 on the lower Chaophraya plains. "Population of Siam on the Eve of European Colonisation of Mainland Southeast Asia", paper presented at 5th International Conference on Thai Studies, London, 1993, map, fig. 2.

109 Lao forces were reported in Siamese accounts to number 80,000 men (Vella, *Siam Under Rama III*, 82), though this was almost certainly an exaggeration.

110 Thai historians make much of the fact that Lao forces were within three days' travelling time from Bangkok, but there was no road from Sāraburī. The only way was by boat, and the Lao never made any attempt to requisition transport. Cf. B. J. Terwiel, *History of Modern Thailand 1767-1942* (St Lucia, 1983), 131.

111 Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *A Present of the Past*, section 20..

112 Histoire de Louang Prabang, 106; Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 115.

113 Titsa had provided a senior Siamese official with a pass to return to Bangkok,

though this was not, as Sila Vīravong alleges, in order to betray Ānuvong (*History of Laos*, 116-118). The Siamese may have secretly welcomed Ānuvong's move. According to an American observer who visited Siam six years after Ānuvong's defeat, the Siamese deliberately provoked Ānuvong "for the purpose of taking into possession his territory". Edmund Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat* (New York, 1937), 282.

114 On the murky role of the governor of Khōrāt, see Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *A Present of the Past*, section 28.

115 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 118. Manich Jumsai (*History of Laos*, 112) says a certain "Lady Mo" was responsible for organizing resistance to the Lao, though no contemporary Siamese documents mention her name.

116 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 122. For details of this battle based on Siamese sources, see Manich Jumsai, *History of Laos*, 112-14.

117 Ānuvong's request led to anguished debate in Vietnam over the proper response to take. Viang Chan was a tributary state of Vietnam, but more importantly it acted as "a bamboo hedge" between Vietnam and Siam. Some at the court at Hué wanted to preserve the independence of Viang Chan; others were more concerned to maintain cordial relations with Bangkok. Cf. Michael Dent Eiland, Dragon and Elephant: Relations between Vietnam and Siam, 1782-1847. PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, 1989, 103-07.

118 This is according to Siamese accounts. The Histoire de Louang Prabang, 106-107, says forces from Luang Phrabāng did take part, but Wyatt believes their participation was "minimal". Wyatt, "Siam and Laos", 31.

119 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 123, 125.

120 For example, the nobility of Yasothôn, Sakôn Nakhôn, Lomsak, and the evacuees of Saraburī, to name but some. Cf. M. Vickery, "Thai Regional Elites and the Reforms of King Chulalongkorn", *JAS* 29 (1970): 868-69.

121 The report is in manuscript (49) 1189/4khai in the National Library of Thailand. (Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, personal communication.)

122 Sir John Bowring estimated in 1855 that of 46,000 war slaves held by Rama III, 20,000 were Lao. *The Kingdom and People of Siam* (London, 1857), 190. Chao Phraya Bodin took with him the *uparāt* Unkaeo, brother of King Manthāturāt and commander of Luang Phrabāng forces assisting the Siamese. His crime was to have criticized the harshness and brutality of Lao resettlement and the retribution metered out. Unkaeo died in prison in Bangkok. His son Suvannaphomma later returned to Luang Phrabāng as *uparāt* under King Unkham. He died in the sack of Luang Phrabāng in 1887, to be succeeded by his son Bunkhong, father of princes Phetsarāt, Suvanna Phūmā, and Suphānuvong. Cf. Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 202, note 1.

123 Bui Quang Tung, "Chao Anou: Roi de Vientiane, à travers les documents

vietnamiens", *BSEI* n.s. 33, 4 (1958), 404, note 1. Vietnamese troops were also sent to Xiang Khuang at the request of Chau Noy. Emperor Minh Mang's decision to support Ānuvong stemmed in part from disquiet over Siamese occupation of Lakhôn, which Hue considered tributary to Vietnam. Cf. Eiland, Dragon and Elephant, 109-10.

124 Vietnamese forces remained at Xiang Khuang. Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 9. Meanwhile a Vietnamese ambassador travelled to Bangkok by boat disclaiming any interest in Viang Chan, but for the three-yearly tribute: Eiland, Dragon and Elephant, 114. Cf.also Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 131-32.

125 Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 126.

126 Cf. Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, Crisis Management and Techniques of Power in Imperial Vietnam.

127 Bui Quang Tung, "Chao Anou", 403.

128 Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Kwang", 579-81, especially 580, note l.

129 According to James McCarthy, Ānuvong was captured by the Siamese when he lost his way. J. McCarthy, *Surveying and Exploring in Siam* (London, 1900), 14. The Nān chronicle credits an official from the *meuang* with apprehending Ānuvong. For the role of both Nān and Luang Phrabāng in the destruction of Viang Chan, see Wyatt, *The Nan Chronicle*, 113-14.

130 Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, vol. 1, 62. For another European account, see Charles Gutzlaff, *Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China in 1831, 1832, 1833, with notices of Siam, Corea and the Loo-Choo Islands* (London, 1834), 28-29.

131 The definitive study of this process is Breazeale, The Integration of the Laos States into the Thai Kingdom.

132 For an excellent study of the complexities of the relationship, see Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, *Kith and Kin Politics: The Relationship Between Laos and Thailand* (Manila, 1994).

133 By 1860, the number of Īsān *meuang* had increased to around seventy. The people of Mahāsārakhām still speak with a Viang Chan accent. (Personal communication Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn.

134 Nhouy Abhay, "Le baci", in *Aspects du Pays Lao* (Vientiane, 1956), 11. For the importance of the *bāsī* for Lao national identity, see Mayoury Ngaosyvathn, "Individual Soul, National Identity: The Baci-Soukhuan of the Lao", *Sojourn* 5, 1 (1990): 283-307.

135 For a study of the *lam* as an art form, see Phiouphanh Ngaosyvathn, *Khab* et *lam*. Thème et structure, PhD dissertation, University of Paris, 1986. A good idea of the often risqué content of Lao popular songs can be gained from J. Ajalbert, *Les*

Chansons de Sao Van Di: Moeurs du Laos (Paris, 1988). It is ironic that later in the century Lao music became so popular in Bangkok that it was actually banned in an effort to encourage and preserve central Thai musical culture. Terry R. Miller, *Traditional Music of the Lao* (Westport, Conn., 1985), 38-39.

136 For example, the opening section of the *Sān Leup Phra Sūn* warns that the contents are highly secret. The text goes on to express the author's sadness in not being able to speak freely of his country, but of his hope that powerful divine forces might yet come to the help of the Lao people. The original text is believed to date from the late eighteenth century after the Lao kingdoms were brought within the Siamese *mandala*, but was subsequently reshaped and understood by its readers to refer to later events. The most popular stories, however, were the *Pheun Rāxavong*, telling the story of Ngao in many oral versions, one of which is recounted in Thao Laokham, *Pheun Chau Rāxavong* (Viang Chan, 1973); the *Pheun Viang* on the reign of Chau Ānuvong, versions and studies of which have been published in Thailand, but oddly never in Laos; and the *Kab Phagna Siengsa*, better known as the *Kab Chau Rāxavong*, an epic re-telling of the war by one of Ānuvong's ablest commanders, whose verses are still quoted by Lao school children. I am grateful to Souneth Phothisane and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn for bringing these texts to my attention.

137 A large proportion of the Lao language manuscripts collected and examined by Peter Koret for his PhD dissertation on parallelism in traditional Lao literature came from northeastern Thailand where they continue to be known and read, and are now being studied at the Institute for Lao Studies at Mahāsārakhām.

138 In 1827, Chau Huy was appointed *chau meuang*. Consistently loyal to Siam, he was the progenitor of the subsequent line of rulers of Champāsak, culminating in Prince Bunūm, who relinquished all claims to the throne in 1946.

139 Chandler, *History of Cambodia*, 119-20.

140 Rama I had supported Prince Nguyen Anh in his struggle against the Tay Son. In 1788, Nguyen Anh had sent symbolic tribute to Bangkok in the form of gold and silver trees. In 1802, Nguyen Anh declared himself Emperor of Vietnam, taking the throne name Gia Long. Relations between the two kingdoms thereafter rested on this personal relationship until Gia Long's death in 1819. Cf. Eiland, Dragon and Elephant, 47, 76-78.

141 *Meuang* in the upper Bang Hiang valley paid tribute only to Hue, and no longer to Champāsak, as early as the 1820s. Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 18. Cf. Eiland, Dragon and Elephant, 109.

142 On this incident and its aftermath, see Eiland, Dragon and Elephant, 116-20; Vella, *Siam Under Rama III*, 87; Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 13.

143 Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn suggests that the Vietnamese may have used reports that

Chau Nôy handed Ānuvong over to the Siamese as an excuse to annex Xiang Khuang. Personal communication.

144 One Lao source gives the date of this first mission as 1831. Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 203. The date 1828 accords with Vietnamese sources. Cf. Nguyen The Anh, "Etablissement par le Vietnam de sa frontière dans les confins occidentaux", in Lafont, ed., *Les Frontières du Vietnam*, 192. The last mission was sent in 1833. Tributary relations with China (the last mission was in 1852) served the same end.

145 Nguyen The Anh, "Etablissement par le Vietnam", 193.

146 Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 21. See also Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 12-16.

147 Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 31 and map 5.

148 For these events, see Eiland, Dragon and Elephant, 127-63.

149 Siamese suzerainty over Huaphan and the Sipsông Chu Tai was exercised through Luang Phrabāng, but was little more than nominal and had virtually lapsed by the 1850s. Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 12.

150 Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 16.

151 Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 45-63, and 341, map 6.

152 Four new prefectures and nine districts were created extending south from Xiang Khuang to include Savannakhēt. Cf. Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam*, 364 and map (365).

153 Most such raids were carried out by Lao from west bank centres who benefitted from increase in their own population base through resettlement. Nobility were usually treated better and won over, bringing their service peasants with them. Cf. Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 22; and Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 18.

154 Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 19. Depopulation seems to have encouraged Vietnamese migration into the upper Kading and Bang Hiang basins. Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 29.

155 Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Kwang", 583.

156 John K. Whitmore, "The Thai-Vietnamese Struggle for Laos in the Nineteenth Century", in Nina Adams and A. C. McCoy, eds, *Laos: War and Revolution* (New York, 1970), 62.

157 Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 27-28.

158 Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 25.

159 The last tribute from Luang Phrabāng to Hue was in 1839. In Eiland's view, the only thing the Siamese campaigns into Lao territory did accomplish was to bring Luang Phrabāng firmly "into the Chinese orbit". Eiland, Dragon and Elephant, 135.

160 A similar policy was adopted by Luang Phrabāng with respect to the Sipsông Phan Nā, where a depopulation raid was carried out either in 1841, or later. Saveng

Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 71 and 305, note 862.

161 Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 38-39.

162 Le Boulanger, following de Pélacot, says that Chau Pō was not accorded royal title, but ruled as representative of the emperor. Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 235. By contrast the Xiang Khuang chronicle calls him king. Cf. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Kwang", 587. The date of his investiture is equally uncertain. One version of the Xiang Khuang chronicles gives 1851; de Pélacot gives 1852; while Vietnamese sources say 1855. Cf. Langlet, "La tradition vietnamienne", 244, note 2.

163 Or triennial. Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 236.

164 The subsequent prince received his title from both the Vietnamese emperor and the king of Luang Phrabāng. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Kwang", 587. Tribute to Vietnam was more valuable than that paid to Luang Phrabāng. Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos Français*, 236. Cf. also Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 46-47; they conclude that from the Siamese point of view: "The experience of the 1850s showed that indirect suzerainty [over Meuang Xiang Khuang] was the only practical form of accommodation; it fell short of real control but was acceptable within the overall objective of both sides."

165 Yang Dao places the first arrivals of Hmong settlers at somewhere between 1810 and 1820. Yang Dao, *Les Hmong du Laos face au développement* (Vientiane, 1975), 7. Others date their arrival as late in the 1860s.

166 The Hmong are also known as Meo, from the Chinese Miao, a pejorative term meaning "savage". They call themselves Hmong, meaning "free". The Iu-Mien, or Mien, are more commonly known as Yao in Laos. See J. Lewis, ed., *Minority Cultures of Laos* (Rancho Cordova, Ca., 1992)

167 For various legends and speculations, see Jean Lartéguy and Yang Dao, *La Fabuleuse Aventure du Peuple de l'Opium* (Paris, 1979), 45-56.

168 Cf. Tsu-ging Ch'eh, The Miao Frontier in Hunan: A Historical Study, MA dissertation, University of Washington, 1947. It is therefore misleading to suggest that a substantial "Hmong kingdom" existed for half a millenium in central China. Cf. K. Quincey, *Hmong: History of a People*, 2nd ed. (Cheney, 1995), 44-48.

169 There are over five million Hmong in China. Nicholas Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand* (Singapore, 1989), 18 — a substantial increase from the three million in the 1960 census. Lartéguy and Yang Dao, *La Fabuleuse Aventure*, 77 and map (opposite 47). In Vietnam, the Hmong number about 400,000. Yang Dao, "The Hmong: Enduring Traditions", in J. Lewis, ed., *Minority Cultures of Laos*, 254. In Laos in the early 1970s, they numbered just under 300,000. (Yang Dao, *Les Hmong du Laos*, 30). Even after the exodus of around 100,000 Hmong from Laos since 1975, numbers were believed to have returned to about 300,000 by the early 1990s (Gary Yia Lee — personal

communication). In Thailand the Hmong number only around 50,000. Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, 18.

170 Quincey, *Hmong*, 52-59; Lartéguy and Yang Dao, *La Fabuleuse Aventure*, 67-73.

171 Whose authority was later challenged by the Ly and Mua clans. Quincey, *Hmong*, 60-64. Not only the Hmong, but the Tai-Daeng too moved into Laos about this time (first in the 1840s) to escape Chinese and Vietnamese oppression.

172 For distribution of the Hmong in Laos, see Yang Dao, "The Hmong", map, 256. Cf. also R. Cooper *et al.*, *The Hmong* (Bangkok, 1991)

173 E. Crystal, "Iu-Mien", in J. Lewis, ed., *Minority Cultures of Laos*, 327-401.

174 This followed a dispute between Sukkhasoem, the *rāxavong*, and the *uparāt*, Chau Aphai, in which the former accused the latter of secretly attempting to re-establish tributary relations with Vietnam — enough to convince Bangkok not to appoint the *uparāt* as king. Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 71 and 303, note 852.

175 For an account of relations between Luang Phrabāng and the Sipsông Phan Nā over this period, see Saveng Phinith, "Bnsāvtār Moeean Jieyn Run (Un text siamois relatif à l'histoire du sud des Sipsongpanna de 1836 à 1858 E.C.)", *BEFEO* 94 (1977): 115-150. Also Sila Vīravong, *History of Laos*, 138-39.

176 According to Thai sources. Sila Vīravong dates the return a year earlier. (*History of Laos*, 139).

177 Laos was not unknown to Europeans during these two centuries. Bowring and Crawfurd both refer to it, as do several missionaries. Cf. M. Pallegoix, "Notice sur le Laos", *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* 2[e] série 5 (1836), 39-58. C. Gutzlaff, "The Country of the Free Laos", *Journal of the Geographical Society* (1849), 33-41. For the most part these reports restrict themselves to descriptions of the country, the people, their customs and culture and religion. For a study of early European accounts of Laos, see Mayoury and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, "Mapping the Southeast Asian Heartland: Western Ancient Charts and Writings about the Lao People." Paper presented at the 41st Annual Conference of the Association for Asian Studies, Washington DC, 17-19 March 1989.

178 Three years later, his brother published, in English, a two-volume account of Mouhot's travels based on his letters and journals. H. Mouhot, *Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China, Siam, Cambodia, and Laos, During the Years 1858, 1859, and 1860* (London, 1864).

179 H. Mouhot, *Travels in Indo-China, Siam, Cambodia, Laos* (Bangkok, 1986): 137, 272-273.

180 Including notably Battambang and Siem Reap in western Cambodia, but also Stung Treng in the north, where there was a substantial Lao population.

181 Recounted in Francis Garnier, *Voyage d'exploration en Indochine* (Paris, 1985). See also Milton Osborne, *River Road to China: The Mekong River Expedition, 1866-73* (New York: 1975).

182 Garnier, *Voyage d'exploration en Indo-Chine* , 48. On slaves and slave trading at this time, see Bruno Larker, *Human Bondage in Southeast Asia* (Chapel Hill, 1950) 61; and Andrew Turton, "Thai Institutions of Slavery", in James L. Watson, ed., *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Oxford, 1980): 251-92.

183 Two recent studies of the *suai* trade during this period are J. Koizumi, "The Commutation of *Suai* from Northeast Siam in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century", *JSEAS* 23 (1992): 276-397; and C. M. Wilson, "Revenue Farming, Economic Development and Government Policy during the Early Bangkok Period, 1830-1892", in J. Butcher and H. Dick, eds, *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming* (Kuala Lumpur, 1993), 142-65.

184 Constance M. Wilson, "The Northeast and the Middle Mekong Valley in the Thai Economy: 1830-1870", in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Thai Studies*, Canberra, 1987, vol. III, part I, 171.

185 Wilson ("The Northeast ...", 173-75) suggests that the reduced demand for Lao products as China "fell apart" resulted in the relative economic decline of the Khōrāt plateau and middle Mekong in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It also led to the progressive commutation of *suai* to payment of an equivalent in *baht*. See Koizumi, "The Commutation of *Suai* from Northeast Siam", 276-307. Neither tax farms nor land tax were applied in the Lao territories. See also Wilson, "Revenue Farming, Economic Development and Government Policy", 142-65.

186 Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 27. As of 1852, six meuang on the upper Bang Hiang negotiated dual suzerainty with Bangkok as well as Hue (28).

187 Langlet, "La tradition vietnamienne", 244, note 2.

188 Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 30.

189 Vickery, "Thai Regional Elites and the Reforms of King Chulalongkorn", 879.

190 Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 34-38.

191 An obvious enticement to the French. Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 41-42.

192 Constance M. Wilson, "Champassak in the Nineteenth Century: The Survival of Southern Lao Culture". Paper presented at the conference *Laos: Cultural Crossroads of Asia*, Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute, University of Washington, July 1992.

193 The status of the nobility was determined by ancestry traced to the former ruling dynasty of Viang Chan.

194 On Siamese administration of the west bank Lao *meuang*, see Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, 45-56.

195 This process is examined in detail in Breazeale, The Integration of the Lao States, chapter 8-11. Also Keyes, *Isan*, 16-17.

196 For the origins of this unrest which went back more than twenty years, see Saveng Phinith, *Contribution à l'Histoire*, 305, note 862.

Notes

197 Lorrillard, Les chroniques royales", 268-71; Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 47-48.

198 Andrew D. W. Forbes, "Red, Black, Yellow and Striped Banners: The Siamese Military Expedition to Laos and Sipsongchuthai of 1884-85", *JSS* 76 (1988), 135.

199 Chau Ung, ruler of Xiang Khuang met his death in this campaign. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Kwang", 588, note 1.

200 Wyatt, *Thailand*, 193.

201 Where they desecrated the Thāt Luang by destroying the central spire in their lust for booty.

202 With considerable loss of life. C. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Kwang", 589.

203 Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 55-56.

204 Chau Khamthī received his investiture from Luang Phrabāng. Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Kwang", 590. Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 57-59, 61.

205 A. Boutin, "Monographie de la province des Houa-Phans", *BAL* 1 (1937): 71, 96.

206 Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 86-87. The destructive effects of slave trading in southern Laos were remarked upon by the French explorer Jules Harmand in "Les Laos et les sauvages de l'Indo-Chine", *Le Tour du Monde* 38, 2 (1879): 28; 39, 1 (1880): 305-06.

207 As he told Garnier. Cf. Archaimbault, "L'Histoire de Campasak", 574-77.

208 Grossin, *Notes sur l'Histoire de la Provence de Cammon*, 24.

209 On the significance of mapping as a weapon in the struggle between Siam and France, see Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu, 1994), 122-27. For McCarthy's expeditions, see McCarthy, *Surveying and Exploring in Siam*; and anon. (J. McCarthy), *An Englishman's Siamese Journals 1890-1893* (Bangkok, no date) reprinted from J. McCarthy, *Report of a Survey in Siam* (London, 1895).

210 Explorers included Jules Harmand (1877), Etienne Aymonier (1882-1883), Paul Neis (1882-1884) and Camille Gauthier (1887-1888). Auguste Pavie was the first Frenchman to return to Luang Phrabāng in 1886.

211 Andrew D. W. Forbes, "The Struggle for Hegemony in Late Nineteenth Century Laos: The Third Siamese Military Expedition to the North-East (1885-1887)", in A. Buller, compiler, *Proceedings of the International Conference on Thai Studies* (Canberra, 1987), 81-88.

212 Archaimbault, "Les Annales de l'Ancien Royaume de S'ieng Kwang", 592-93. Chau Khamthī died in Bangkok.

213 Snit Smuckarn and Breazeale, *A Culture in Search of Survival*, 82. There is some doubt as to the rights of the family to their paramount position. Cf. C. Delaporte, "Les origines de la famille de Dèo-Van-Tri", *BAL* 4 (1940): 65-94.

214 Envoys from Khamsing had earlier given McCarthy tokens of loyalty to Siam. Cf. Forbes, "Red, Black, Yellow and Striped Banners", 141.

215 A. Raquez and Cam, "Memoires de Deo-van-Tri", *Revue Indo-Chinoise* n.s. 7, 4 (31 August 1904). 270.

216 As McCarthy clearly recognized. McCarthy, *Surveying and Exploring in Siam*, 106; cf. *An Englishman's Siamese Journals*, 194.

217 "Memoires de Deo-van-Tri", 271. The *Phra Bāng* was saved by being hurriedly buried.

218 This is McCarthy's account. McCarthy, *Surveying and Exploring in Siam*, 108; *An Englishman's Siamese Journals*, 202. Pavie credits his Cambodian servant Kèo with apparently single-handedly rescuing the king. August Pavie, *A la Conquête des Coeurs* (Paris, 1947), 104-05.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

1. See Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (Cambridge, 1997).
2. Barber calls the village "the most significant unit of political organization among the ethnic Lao". Martin John Philip Barber, Migrants and Modernisation — A Study of Change in Lao Society, PhD dissertation, University of Hull, 1979, 221.
3. I have argued this at greater length in Martin Stuart-Fox, "On the Writing of Lao History: Continuities and Discontinuities", *JSAS* 24 (1993): 106-21.

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