

“Brāhmaṇa” as an honorific in “Indianized” mainland Southeast Asia: a linguistic approach¹

Frédéric Pain

Laboratoire Langues et Civilisations à Tradition Orale, Paris (LACITO-CNRS, UMR-7107)
frederic.pain2017@gmail.com

Abstract

This article aims at demonstrating that the Old Khmer *b/vraḥ* originates from a syllabic depletion of the Sanskrit word *brāhmaṇa* through a monosyllabization process, a widespread diachronic phenomenon among the Mon-Khmer languages of Mainland Southeast Asia. The paper will also show that this term must have been originally used as an honorific for deities and, consequently, for royalty. It therefore respectfully disagrees with two other current hypotheses according to which *b/vraḥ* would be an autochthonous Mon-Khmer word or would originate in the Sanskrit/Pali word *vara-* “excellent, splendid, noble”. After being borrowed from Sanskrit, the Old Khmer *braḥ* spread via a contact phenomenon: from Old Khmer to Old Siamese, from Old Siamese to Old Shan through the “Thai Continuum”, and from Old Shan to Old Burmese. The implications of this paper are twofold: firstly, it will sketch out a pattern for the historical relationships between different peoples of Mainland Southeast Asia; then, it will propose a first phase of Indianization in Southeast Asia, namely a local reconnotation of Indo-Aryan terms according to autochthonous socio-political contingencies, and consequently bring a draft answer to the “Woltersian” question: what is the local connotation of Indo-Aryan terms?

Keywords: “Indianized” Southeast Asia, Contact linguistics, Historical phonology, Monosyllabization process, Old Khmer, Old Siamese, Old Burmese, Thai continuum

Introduction

The origin of the Old Khmer *vraḥ/braḥ* is still a warmly debated topic among experts. Most dictionaries, whether they be bilingual or monolingual, trace the word from the Sanskrit or Pali word *vara-* “excellent, splendid, noble” (Renou *et al.* 1978 [1932]: 627 for Sanskrit; Davids and Stede [1921] 2001: 602 for Pali). The other commonly held view is that *braḥ* would be an autochthonous Mon-Khmer word (Shorto 2006; Vickery 1998). This study

1 I would like to thank Michel Ferlus (EHESS-CNRS, Paris), Alexis Michaud (LACITO-CNRS), Michel Antelme (INALCO, Paris), John Okell (SOAS, London), James Matisoff (UCLA, Berkeley), Christian Bauer (Humboldt Universität, Berlin) and Paul Sidwell (ANU, Canberra) for their comments on an earlier version of this essay. Remaining errors are my sole responsibility.

demonstrates that *v/brah* originated in a reduction of the Sanskrit word *brāhmaṇa* (> *brah*). It will also be demonstrated that the Old Khmer *v/brah* was borrowed into Thai through the written Khmer form *brah* [pʰráʔ]. From the Thai *brah* [pʰráʔ] may have originated the Burmese *bhurā*: [pʰájá:] / [pʰ.íá:], whose written form was borrowed by the Tai Ahōm *phūra*: [pʰra:^{A2}].

1. Original semantics of the Old Khmer *v/brah*

The semantics of the Old Khmer *v/brah* is not as obvious as it might seem. Was it originally an honorific term of address or, rather, was it a noun meaning “brahmin”, “Buddha” or some other deity? This study concludes that *brah* was initially used as an honorific. Two major arguments are used to support this hypothesis: (1) *brah* was used as an honorific prefix in its first epigraphic attestations; and (2) there are distinct terms to name the “Brahmin”, or the “Buddha”.

1.1. “Brah” used as an honorific in the first epigraphs

In the earliest inscriptions, *brah* is typically used as an honorific, whether in Old Khmer, Old Siamese or Old Burmese (in its Old Burmese form *phurā*). The word *brah* precedes names of high-ranking officials as well as those of deities.

Let us first consider the attestations of “Buddha” in the Old Khmer epigraphy. To name the Buddha, Khmer often adds the prefix *v/brah* before the noun “Buddha” (*buddh(a)*, *vuddha*) in the earliest epigraphs, for example *vrah vuddha* in K.237 dated from 989 śaka (AD 1067); it has been consistently attested as such until its present usage in Modern Khmer [prɛəh pùt] “Buddha” (or [prɛəh ʔəuso:] “Śiva”, [prɛəh prùm] “Brahmā”). This would indicate that *Buddha* and *brah* have been kept semantically distinct.

In Old Khmer, one of the first attestations of *v/brah* is an honorific prefix, e.g. in K.6 from AD 578 *vrah kamratān ’añ* “His High Lord”. The Old Siamese Ramkhamhæng stele dated from AD 1292 attests *brah rāmgamhæñ* (side 1, line 10) “The Revered Ramkhamhæng”. The first epigraph in Old Burmese, the Myazèdi or Rājakumāra stele (AD 1113), also attests *purhā* used as an honorific prefix: *purhā skhañ* “The Revered Lord, His Lordship” (lines 1, 16, 18, 39).

It is quite clear that the original morpho-semantic function of *brah* in each of these languages (Old Khmer, Old Thai, Old Burmese) was that of an honorific prefix. The noun normally preceded by *brah/purhā* can be omitted when the context is clear enough, for example, *brah (buddha)* in (Old) Khmer or *purhā (buddha)* in (Old) Burmese “The Venerable (Buddha)”; *brah (rājā)* in (Old) Khmer or *purhā (skhañ)* in Old Burmese “His Majesty (the King)”, etc. But, otherwise, the term *brah/purhā* does not occur as a bare noun.

1.2. Attestation of distinct terms to name the Brahmin

The function of the Brahmins in Southeast Asia was rather limited to the sphere of the royalty. Their duties were primarily to provide some local rulers with a new symbolic foundation for their power. They were just one of the vectors of “Power and Knowledge” which allowed some local clans to legitimize, and impose, their power upon other clans.

The words *v/brah* and *v/brāhmaṇa* are often found side-by-side in one edict, which would indicate that both terms were semantically treated differently; therefore, *v/brah* is most likely not to have meant “Brahmin”. Moreover, the title as well as the responsibilities of the Brahmin seem to have been lexicalized in the terms *v/brāhmaṇa* or *puṇṇā*. From an areal perspective, there are two distinct ways to name the Brahmins: a “Mon-Burmese area” where the Brahmin is called through the Indo-Aryan term *puṇya*, etc. meaning “value, merit” on the one hand, and a “Khmer-Thai area” where the Brahmin is named through the Sanskrit word *brāhmaṇa*, on the other.

The Khmer-Thai area makes use of the Sanskrit-Pali term *brāhmaṇa* to name the Brahmin. This term is still found in Modern Khmer and Siamese in its form *brahma[ṇa]* [priam] in Khmer and [p^hra.m] in Siamese.

On the other hand, the “Mon-Burmese area” attests unexpected forms derived from the Sanskrit *puṇya*, Pali *puṇṇo* or Prākṛit *puṇṇa*, all of which mean “merit, work of merit”. These various forms were borrowed in the “Mon-Burmese area” to name a Brahmin versed in astrological practices.² All Mon or Burmese attestations revolve around the semantics “act of merit, work of merit, meritorious or praiseworthy person”.

Old Mon attests *puṇya* [pʌn] “merit, work of merit” (Shorto 1971: 235), obviously originating in Sanskrit, and a semantically similar *puñ* [pun] probably descending from Pali. The Sanskrit *puṇya* gave rise to the Old Burmese *phūn* and *’aphun* “wealth, power, work of merit”,³ and Modern Burmese *bhun*: [p^hʊʌn] “glory; beneficent power; merit of good actions in the past” (Bernot 1988: 124). However, the semantics of their Prākṛit counterpart *puṇṇā* is quite remarkable; Old Mon attests *puṇṇa*, “meritorious person, praiseworthy”. From this Prākṛit word would derive the Old Mon attestations *bumnaḥ/bimnaḥ/bamnaḥ* [bəmnah] which were used to name Brahmins prominent in royal rituals (Shorto 1971: 269). The Modern Mon *bamnaḥ* [pənz̥h/hənz̥h] “astrologer” (Shorto 1962: 157) derives from the above-mentioned Old Mon forms. The Old Mon forms were probably borrowed later into the Old Burmese *puṇṇā/pumṇā* “Brahmin versed in the astrological sciences” (Hla Pe 1967: 79), Standard Burmese *puṇṇā*: [p^hʊʌn ná:] “Brahmin”.

The Khmer-Thai area, on the other hand, does not attest any use of a Prākṛit form *puṇṇa* with the meaning “Brahmin versed in the astrological sciences”. The Sanskrit and Pali forms are the only ones to be attested, as in Khmer *puṇya* (*dān*) [bʊn (t̪ian)] “religious celebration” or in Siamese Pali *puṇa/puṇṇa* [bun] “merit, virtue; resulting from meritorious deeds; pure, sacred” (McFarland 1944 [1960]: 484; Haas 1964: 292).

2. A Mon-Khmer etymon?

Before developing the working hypothesis according to which the Old Khmer *v/brah* would be a borrowing from Sanskrit (*brāhmaṇa*), it will be demonstrated that this term does not belong to the proto-Mon-Khmer lexical stock.

- 2 It should be noted that Old Mon also attests *brahmano* in non-epigraphic sources (Bauer, personal communication).
- 3 Luce (no date b, p. 90).

First of all, Shorto (2006: 524, #2060) connects the Old Khmer *v/brah* with the proto-Mon-Khmer [***brah**] and glosses it “divine being”, which is quite problematic. Actually, [***brah**] is only attested in Khmer and in dialects which have been in long-standing contact with Khmer. That [***brah**] is attested in some Bahnaric dialects such as *Biat* [**brah**] “spirit”, does not imply a Mon-Khmer origin *per se*, because the Bahnaric peoples have been in contact with the Khmers for quite a long time; Bahnaric [**brah**] is besides rightly identified as a loan from Old Khmer by Sidwell and Jacq (2003: 59). It is also attested in Pearic (for example in *Chong* [**pʰrəʔ pʰüt**] “Buddha’s statue”) or in Khmuic (for example in *Khmu* [**praʔ**]/[**pʰráʔ**] “monk”) but these terms are late loans from Siamese or Lao. Incidentally, many Katus or Khmus have access to education while studying in Buddhist monasteries, precisely where the word [**pʰráʔ**]/[**pʰāʔ**] is widely used in Siamese or Lao. The “avatars” of the Old Khmer *v/brah* are attested in Mon-Khmer and Thai only in areas that were dominated by the Khmers, a fact that would remove any support for a proto-Mon-Khmer origin.

Second, Pou and Jenner (1980: 284–5) postulate an etymology in a hypothesized Mon-Khmer derived word [***b-rah**] whose base ***rah** would mean “light”, hence Old Khmer *brah* [**brah**] “bright or shining one”. Two objections may be raised though. First, from a morphological point of view, the prefix [***b-**] is not attested in Mon-Khmer. Second, from a semantic point of view, [***b-rah**] “bright or shining one” sounds pretty much like a Judaeo-Christian cultural concept, where “light” may be associated with God (the halo of Christ, the blinding light of Heaven, etc.). However, no similar culture-bred semantics can be associated to a Mon-Khmer reality, nor to any Southeast Asian one.⁴

3. Old Khmer *vrah/brah*

3.1. Semantics and epigraphic attestations of *v/brah*

(1) Semantics

In Old Khmer (pre-Angkorian and Angkorian alike, Jenner 2009a: 477; 2009b: 574), *v/brah* was used as a noun to name a divine or royal being or object, a *linga*, an image, a sanctuary, a shrine housing a divinity; it is also used as an adjective meaning divine, sacred or a prefix preceding divine or royal beings or objects. In Modern Khmer, *brah* [**prəəh**] is also used as a noun to name a deity, as an adjective meaning excellent, sacred or divine; it is also used as a prefix before the members of the royal family, priests, monks, Buddha, God or before deified elements.⁵

A similar semantics is also attested in the various languages in which this *brah* is used. As will be addressed in §5, we might nevertheless wonder whether *brah* would not originally have been an honorific used before any sacred, divine or royal objects or beings. Indeed, in its first pre-Angkorian attestations, *vrah* was used as an honorific and not as a full morpheme, for example in

- 4 The Thai expression [**sə:ŋ tʰam li:ŋ tʰam**] “Light of the Dhamma” is an Indo-Aryan cultural and religious concept rather than a Southeast Asian one.
- 5 Ven. Chuon Nath (1968–69: 807) connects *brah* with the Pali *vara*, Guesdon (1930: 1255–7), Pou (1992: 462–3), or Long Seam (2000: 546–8) can also be consulted.

pre-Angkorian epigraphs K.1 (500 śaka, AD 578) *vraḥ kamratāñ ’añ* “The Venerable Lord”, K.664 (500 śaka, AD 578) *vraḥ kloñ* “The Venerable Master” or K.728 (600 śaka, AD 678) *vraḥ śrībhadreśvara* “The Great Śrībhadreśvara”. Moreover, an abridged form of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* is likely to have been used for a long time as an honorific in Southeast Asia, especially in the 扶南 *Fúnán* confederation that constitutes the core of the subsequent Khmer polities (Ferlus 2005).

(2) *Epigraphic attestations*

The prefix *v/braḥ* is attested almost 4,000 times in Khmer epigraphy, from K.1 (500 śaka, AD 578) to K.261 (1561 śaka, AD 1639). There are more than 3,800 attestations of *vraḥ* stretching from K.1 (500 śaka, AD 578) to K.470 (1249 śaka, AD 1327). The form *braḥ* is attested no fewer than 150 times between 844 śaka, AD 922 (K.99) and 1561 śaka, AD 1639 (K.261). Other epigraphic attestations, rarer if not marginal, are *vraḥh*, *vrah*, *vrāḥ*, *braḥh*, *brah* and *vras*.

In the next section, it will be shown that *v/braḥ* most likely originates in a monosyllabized form of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa*. We shall also address the issue of why an etymology with the Sanskrit-Pali *vara-* is not as convincing as it might first seem.

3.2. Monosyllabization process: from Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* to Old Khmer *v/braḥ*

It will be posited that *braḥ* might derive from *brāhmaṇa*; this claim is based on three arguments. First, the inclination of the Mon-Khmer languages towards monosyllabization, then the retention of the Sanskrit voiced glottal [ḥ] through the Khmer visarga *-ḥ* [-h], and finally the trace of an ancient use of an abbreviated form of *brāhmaṇa* as an honorific in the Fúnánese polity, a confederation of Indianized city-states ethnically dominated by the Khmers.

(1) *Monosyllabization process*⁶

One of the diachronic features of the Mon-Khmer languages, and the languages in contact with Mon-Khmer, is the syllabic depletion from two syllables to one through an intermediary sesquisyllabic stage. The evolution affects both Mon-Khmer words and loanwords from Indo-Aryan. The syllable loss can be predicted by the location of the stress: when the second syllable is stressed in Mon-Khmer, the first one falls and when the first syllable is stressed in Indo-Aryan, the second is dropped.

In Mon-Khmer the second syllable is stressed, as shown in Table 1.

The monosyllabization of Indo-Aryan polysyllabic loanwords in the everyday language is widely attested in Khmer (as well as in Mon):

In Khmer:

Trisyllabic Skt. *yavana* “foreigner, Greek” > monosyllabic Khmer *yuon* [jūəŋ] “Vietnamese”

6 On the monosyllabization process, see Ferlus (1996), and Pain (2011), among others.

Table 1.

Arem	Vietic languages		Gloss
	Việt		
ʔũtʰok	<i>tóc</i>		“hair”
ʔăkæ: ⁷	<i>cá</i>		“fish”
tăko:k	<i>gốc</i>		“stem”

Disyllabic Skt. *kīrti* “reputation, honour” > monosyllabic Khmer (in compound names) *ker(r)ti* [ke:]

In Mon:

Trisyllabic Skt. *vihāra* “monastery” > monosyllabic Mon *bhā* [pʰɛ̃a] “monastery”

Disyllabic Skt. *rāṣṭra* “country” > monosyllabic Mon *raḥ* [rɛ̃h]

The first syllable *brāh-* supports a heavier phonetic weight than the last two syllables *-maṇa* because: (1) it is stressed in Indo-Aryan [**brah-maṇa**]; and (2) its phonetic structure is strengthened by a medial trill [-r-] and a final laryngeal [-h̥].

The tendency to reduce polysyllables to monosyllables is consistent with the hypothesis of a monosyllabization of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* in an Old Khmer *v/braḥ*.

(2) *Retention of the Sanskrit laryngeal [-h̥] in the Old Khmer -ḥ [-h]*

It might be counter-argued that such a phenomenon would also explain the monosyllabization of the Sanskrit-Pali *vara-* to the Old Khmer *braḥ*. This counterargument can be properly raised, but it would pass over the retention of the Sanskrit voiced laryngeal [h̥] (*brāh-maṇa* [**brah-maṇa**]) in the Old Khmer forms in final laryngeal [-h] (written with the visarga [-ḥ]) *braḥ* [**brah**]. Indeed, the laryngeal is retained in all Old Khmer attestations, be they *vrāḥ*, *vraḥ*, *vraḥh* or *braḥ*, *braḥh* and *brah*.⁷

Sanskrit *brāh-maṇa* [**brah-maṇa**] > Old Khmer *braḥ* [**brah**]

As will be tackled in the next paragraph, a reduced form of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* may have been used for quite a long time in Khmer in Fúnán, which was likely dominated by the Khmers, politically and ethnically.

(3) *Ancient use of a shortened form of brāhmaṇa as an honorific*

The use of a popular reduced form of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* as an honorific is rather old. We learn from the Chinese annals reporting political facts on

7 The form *vras* with the final voiceless alveolar sibilant attested in K.571 (AD 969) can easily be explained by the change [s]>[h], which is regular in Khmer; the form *vras* must have been pronounced [**brah**] and not [**bras**] and confirms the retention of a final laryngeal [-h] in Old Khmer.

Indianized Southeast Asia that a reduced form of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* might have been used as an honorific in royal titles in Fúnán as early as the third century AD. According to Vickery (1998: 50), third-century Fúnán attested at least three rulers whose royal name consisted of a prefixed reduced form of *brāhmaṇa*.⁸ Ferlus (2005) reconstructs Early Middle Chinese (EMC) [bram] for the local title transcribed 范 *fàn* in Chinese.⁹ The EMC pronunciation of the first Funanese sovereign's name, 范帥蔓 *fàn shīmàn*, mentioned in the 南齊書 *Nánqíshū* ("History of the Southern Qi" [479–502]) reporting events dating from the third to the fourth centuries AD can be reconstructed as [bram sri: ma:n] and we can infer from this reconstruction that the transcribed name might have been *brāhm srīmāra* "His Venerable Highness Māra", as Cœdès (1948 [1989]: 81) thought. In that case, a reduced form of *brāhmaṇa* would have been used as an honorific prefix by the third or fourth century AD.

范 *fàn* is quite likely an Old Chinese transcription of Sanskrit *brāhm[ana]* rather than of the god *brahma* even if the Brahmins did not belong to the Southeast Asian socio-cultural stock, unlike in India. This Sanskrit term was emptied of its Indian connotation and was probably used as a term denoting a position of prestige. The caste system in Cambodia most likely lost (if it ever had) its Indian connotation and did not have any local sociological root, as demonstrated by Khmer inscriptions according to which "there were interethnic and interclass marriages with good levels of interaction between social groupings" (Harris 2005: 27). Furthermore, the very word *caturvarṇa* ("the four castes") was only used rhetorically (Pou 1998: 127) and in the Khmer context the word *jāti* meant nothing other than "birth, origin" (Pou 1998: 127). This observation also seems valid for "Indianized" Southeast Asia as a whole; anthropological studies on the Balinese realm where the Brahmins are supposed to be the descendants of the Javanese *Majapahit* invaders who therefore enjoyed a position of prestige and power should remind us of this fact. As Pigeaud (1962: 8) wrote, the very notion of caste in the Old Javanese world was not used in a similar manner to India. When dealing with Indian representations in Southeast Asia, one must always question the local use of Indian lexical items (Wolters 1999: 109–10; Pain 2017a).

In the languages of Southeast Asia, *śrī māra* was pronounced [sri: mar]; the final Indo-Aryan unstressed *-a* [ʌ/ə] regularly falls in Khmer and Mon (*māra* [marʌ]>[mar]). Early Middle Chinese no longer had trill codas, and the Chinese observer-listener must have interpreted the rhyme [-ar] (in [sri:

8 The same title is also attested in 林邑 *Línyì* from the third to the seventh century.

9 Chinese characters were used here to transliterate local words, as in 婆羅門 *pó-luó-mén* [ba la mən] "Brahmin"; 留陀跋摩 *liú-tuó-bá-mó* [lu da bat ma] "Rudravarman"; 質多斯那 *zhì-duō-sī-nǎ* [tʃit ta se naʔ] "Citrasena"; 刹利 *chà lì* [tʃʰet li: / kʃʰet li:] "ksatriya"; 烏弋山離 *wū-yì-shān-lí* [ʔ lik ʃe:n li:] "Alexandria". Vickery (2003–04: 108) connects this *fàn* with the Old Khmer title *poñ* [ʃɔ:p/ʃɔ:ŋ] on the basis of the Old Chinese (OC) reconstruction by Karlgren (1957) **b'iwdm*. The OC reconstructions are drawn from Baxter and Sagart (2011); Early Middle Chinese (EMC) and Middle Chinese (MC) reconstructions from Pulleyblank (1991). All the reconstructions have been slightly modified according to Ferlus (2009).

mar]) by the EMC rhyme [-a:n] in which the coronal-alveolar articulation of the trill was kept (EMC [sri: ma:n]).¹⁰

That [br̥am sri: ma:n] is mentioned in the stele of Vō Cạnh in its Sanskrit counterpart *śrīmārarāja* as an illustrious ancestor by local lords to justify their power should not be surprising; as Bourdonneau (2007: 131) pointed out, the importance of Fàn Shīmàn's (śri māra) conquests at the turn of the second century AD should not be underestimated. Local oral traditions made of him a charismatic figure, as evidenced by the fact that pretending to belong to his descendants seems to have been sufficient to legitimate some local lords' power. We should not misjudge the prominence of the local oral traditions in legitimating the power;¹¹ according to the tradition, *brāhmaṇa kauṇḍinya* would have been the founder of the Funanese dynasty, and the first of its lords had titles beginning with *hùn* 混 (OC [*ɣan]), which is a mere Chinese transcription of an abridged form of *kauṇḍinya* transcribed *hùn-tián* 混滇 ([*ɣan diən]) or *jiāo chénrú* 僑陳如 ([*kiw ɕin ɲa:ʔ]). I believe that *hùn* [*ɣan] (*kauṇ[ḍinya]*), *hùn-tián* [*ɣan diən] (*kauṇḍiny[a]*) and *brahm* *br̥am (*brāhm[ana kauṇḍinya]*) are all honorific titles referring to the mythical founder of the Funanese dynasty: *brāhmaṇa kauṇḍinya*. The Old Khmer honorific *braḥ* may be part of this trend.

3.3. The graphic alternation *v~b* in Old Khmer

It could be objected that the form *vraḥ* (or, as we shall see, its preponderance over the form *braḥ* in the Old Khmer epigraphic attestations) might attest a stronger link with the Sanskrit etymon *vara-*. In this section it will be demonstrated that the forms *vraḥ* and *braḥ* can be accounted for by a “Prākritism”. Furthermore, the writing system reached the Khmer realm with Indians reading Sanskrit through a Prākrit phonetics where the phonemes [b] and [v] merged or were merging.

The Khmer epigraphy attests *vraḥ* and *braḥ* with a clear inclination towards the forms in onset <v->. So, there are more than 3,800 epigraphic attestations of *vraḥ* in Old Khmer between 500 śaka (AD 578, K.1) and 1,249 śaka (AD 1327,

10 The OC rime [-ar] yielded EMC [-a] in *tense* OC syllables whereas it evolved in >[-a:n] in an OC *lax* syllable. For example, in a tense syllable: OC [*p̥ar] > EMC [pa] > Mandarin 番 *bō* “bold, martial”; in a lax syllable OC [*p̥ar] > EMC [pa:n] > Mandarin 蕃 *fān* “hedge” (Ferlus 2012).

11 It should be added that the foundation myth of Fúnán by *kauṇḍinya* actually belongs to a local mythological tradition. Some authors, including Porée-Maspero (1969: 795), preferred to identify the myth of *kauṇḍinya* with the cult of the ancestors and the worship of local deities rather than with an Indian-like tradition. However, there is no incompatibility between an Indian tradition and the worship of local gods; the Indian-like figure *hùn-tián* 混滇 and its myth was just integrated into a local mythological tradition and consequently legitimized an increasingly “Indianized” type of power. Moreover, the Funanese foundation myth consisting of an alliance between a local deity and an Indianized foreign lord (*Liüyè* 柳葉 – *Jiāo Chénrú* [kauṇḍinya] 僑陳如) has an equivalent in Angkorian thirteenth-century Cambodia, where *Zhōu Dáguān* 周達觀 relates the union of an Angkorian sovereign (Indravarman [III]) with a snake-woman, an ophidian figure and female guardian spirit of the territory anchored in local beliefs. The Indianized power in Southeast Asia readily rooted its popular legitimacy in the local mythological tradition.

κ.470). To those, about 30 epigraphic attestations can be added, such as *vrāḥ*, *vrah*, *vas* or *vraḥh*, stretching from 500 śaka (*vraḥh* in κ.38) to 1,041 śaka. (*vrāḥ* in κ.194). On the other hand there are only around 150 epigraphic attestations of *braḥ* ranging from 844 śaka. (AD 922, κ.99) to 1,561 śaka. (AD 1639, κ.261).¹²

The Old Khmer lexicon attests some flimsiness in the transcription of the phonemes [b] and [v]; the Old Khmer phoneme [b] is sometimes attested with the graph <v> and sometimes with the graph , and the phoneme [v] sometimes with the graph <v> and sometimes with the graph <hv>, which yields confusion between the phonemes [b]~[v] in Old Khmer. It is only at the dawn of the Angkorian period that an etymological spelling of the bilabial plosive [b] was introduced, mainly in the autochthonous Khmer lexicon, with the introduction of a new symbol , which might have been borrowed from Mon (Ferlus 1992: 82).¹³

This aberrant etymological use of graphs and <v> regularly occurs in one single epigraph as, for example, in κ.256 dated from 600 śaka (*cu 'ājñā vraḥ kamratāñ 'añ brāhmaṇa*), where an etymologically correct spelling (*brāhmaṇa*) is attested together with an erroneous one (*vraḥ* instead of *braḥ*). The graph alternation between and <v> in Old Khmer is above all a problem of Indo-Aryan dialectology and historical phonetics; indeed, this inconsistency in transcribing the phonemes [b] and [v] originates in the fact that the Khmers were Indianized by speakers of a Prākṛit variety where the phonemes [b] and [v] had already merged or were merging, including in the Indo-Aryan reading of Sanskrit texts. So-called “Classical” Sanskrit was not a homogenous and immutable linguistic entity; it was not a language impervious to dialectal influences as Pāṇini’s grammar would suggest. The very fact that Sanskrit was attested quite late in epigraphs – the first epigraphs carved in India were in Prākṛit and not Sanskrit¹⁴ – made this language vulnerable to various “Prākṛitisms”. One of these is precisely the merger of the phonemes [b] and [v], already attested in Vedic Sanskrit where the phonemes *-bh-* [b] and *-v-* [v] were merging. This kind of merger is also sporadically attested in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (Edgerton 1953: 17, §.2.30; Damsteegt 1978: 39-41), an apparent composite Prākṛit which underwent a Sanskritization process aiming at giving a literary aura to a vernacular.

The alternation of the forms *vraḥ* and *braḥ* with an obvious inclination towards *vraḥ* would suggest that the Khmers were initiated to the Pallava alpha-syllabary (from which the modern Khmer writing system derives) by Indians who pronounced Sanskrit through a Prākṛit phonetics in which the phonemes

12 Data from the Khmer corpus online: <http://sealang.net/classic/khmer/>.

13 Besides, according to Jacob (1960: 352-3) and Ferlus (1992: 82), distinct phonological units for the writing dichotomy <v> vs. and <v> vs. <hv> in Old Khmer should not be reconstructed.

14 It is what Renou (1956: 84) calls “le grand paradoxe de l’Inde” (the great paradox of India). While the Prākṛit dialects were the first to be attested in the epigraphy of India with the Edicts of Aśoka from c. 250 BCE, we have no substantial epigraphic attestation of Sanskrit before the second century AD with king Rudradāman’s Junāgaḍh edict; though written in a *kāvya* prose shape, the Junāgaḍh edict already attested some infringements to the Pāṇinian rules (Salomon 1989: 282).

Table 2.

Old Khmer	Standard Khmer	Gloss
<i>ver, vera, vyar, vyara, ber, byar</i>	<i>bīr</i> [p̄i:]	“two” (Old Mon <i>ḥār</i> [ḥa:r])
<i>vave</i>	<i>babae</i> [p̄əp̄ə:]	“goat” (OM <i>baḥe</i> [babe?])
<i>vuddha, buddha</i>	<i>buddh</i> [p̄ūt]	“Buddha”
<i>vinau, bnau</i>	<i>bnau</i> [p̄nəw]	“kind of tree”

[b] and [v] had merged. Accordingly, the predominance of *vrah* over *brah* in the Old Khmer epigraphy does not constitute a decisive factor in opting for an etymology with *vara-* instead of *brāh[maṇa]*.

3.4. Origin in the Sanskrit-Pali “vara-”?

The word *vara-* means “excellent, splendid, best, noble; as attribute it either precedes or follows the noun which it characterizes” in Pali (Davids and Stede 2001 [1921]: 602) and in Sanskrit (Renou *et al.* 1978 [1932]: 627).

For Headley *et al.* (1977: 684), Khmer *brah* originated in the Sanskrit–Pali *vara-*; the same etymology is also postulated in Reinhorn (2001: 1515) for the Lao *b(r)ah* and in the *Burmese–English Dictionary* by the Myanmar Language Commission¹⁵ (1993: 323) for the Burmese *bhurā*. However, this etymology is not convincing. Although an origin in *vara-* is not to be categorically ruled out, the hypothesis of a reduced form of the Sanskrit *brāh[maṇa]* is linguistically more relevant, as we have just seen.¹⁶ The following paragraphs aim to demonstrate that the Sanskrit–Pali *vara-* has a different history in the Southeast Asian languages.¹⁷

The Mon words *wuiw* and *lwuiw* correspond to *vara-*. The graph <|> in *lwuiw* [w̄ɜ] “blessing” (Shorto 1962: 187) is a graphic hypercorrection. The Mon form has long been attested through the Old Mon *war* and the Middle Mon *wuiw* (Shorto 1971: 346). The final graph <-w> is nothing but a spelling attesting the phonetic change that the Old Mon final <-r> [-r] underwent: [-r] > [-w] > [-#]; it does not play any role in determining the reading.¹⁸

In Khmer, *vara-* was borrowed as *bar* [p̄ə:] “wish, blessing; best, most excellent or eminent; preferable; according to wish” (Headley *et al.* 1977: 637).

The Modern Lao reflex of the borrowing corresponding to *vara-* is [p̄h̄ɔ̄:n] “wish, blessing; excellent” (Reinhorn 2001: 1591). The final nasal [-n] is

15 Henceforth: MLC

16 It is worth mentioning that Southeast Asian languages always borrowed Sanskrit or Pali words in their radical form (hence stripped of their case ending). Therefore, Southeast Asian languages borrowed the radical form *vara-* rather than a declined form *varas* (*varaḥ* in *saṃdhi*).

17 As mentioned in §1.2, *brāhmaṇa* also appears in other forms in Southeast Asian languages, but they keep the Indo-Aryan semantics “Brahmin” (for example *brāhmaṇa* [priam] “Brahmin” in Modern Khmer) whereas the reduced form *brah* is used as an honorific (for example *brah buddh* [pr̄əəh p̄ūt] “Buddha” in Khmer).

18 It should be recalled here that in Mon, the final graph <-w> always appears after the digraph <ui> if there is no final consonant, and originates from Old Mon final [-r] or [-l]; see Shorto (2006), Ferlus (1983) and Pain (2017b) on the phonetic evolution of the trigraphs <-uiw>, <-uir> and <-uil>.

regular: lengthening of the open-mid vowel [ʌ] before the final trill [-r] in Khmer; merger of the labial plosive [v] with the labial fricative [b] (>[pʰ] in Modern Lao) due to the influence of Indo-Aryan speakers, and evolution of the final trill [-r] to the final nasal [-n] in Lao. Other examples: Modern Khmer *tær* [dʰæ] was borrowed in Siamese [dʰɛ:n] “to walk”; Modern Khmer *vihāra* [pʰh̄ia] was borrowed in Siamese–Lao [wí: h̄ǎ:n] “convent, monastery, playground”.

3.5. Conclusion

The Old Khmer *v/brah* originated in a popular reduction of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa*- through monosyllabization. Furthermore, the etymology in the Sanskrit–Pali *vara*- might not be relevant, primarily because of the retention of the laryngeal in the various Old Khmer forms. Moreover, it was made clear that the <v->/<b-> graphic alternation in the forms *vrah* and *brah* are better explained by the fact that some Indian speakers read Sanskrit through a Prākṛit phonetics where the phonemes [v] and [b] had merged.

4. The Siamese *phrá?*

4.1. Semantics

In Siamese, *brah* [pʰráʔ] means a “title given to a priest, a clergyman, a monk; a term indicating the highest respect; a prefix denoting royalty, holiness, perfection; an adjective meaning precious, excellent, noble” (McFarland 1960: 566). In Lao *b(r)ah* [pʰǎʔ] may be a borrowing from Siamese (although a direct borrowing from Old Khmer is not to be ruled out) which means “the Buddha, monk; *pref.* indicating something sacred, referring to God, the Buddha, a deity, a monk or a king” (Reinhorn 2001: 1515).¹⁹

4.2. Old Thai loan from Old Khmer: linguistic considerations

Two phonetic changes will be dealt with: first, the evolution of the proto-Southwestern Tai (PSWT) [*br-]>[pʰr-] and a low series tone and, second, the evolution of the Old Khmer laryngeal [-h] to a Thai glottal stop [-ʔ] to stress on the shortness of the vocalic nucleus.²⁰

(1) PSWT [*br-]>[pʰr-] and a low series tone in Thai

The Thai languages were affected by a devoicing phenomenon of the initial voiced plosives [*b- *d- *j- *g-]>[p- t- c- k-] and a voicing phenomenon of the initial preaspirated sonorants [*ʰm- *ʰn- *ʰl- ...]>[m- n- l- ...]. The word whose onset was an initially voiced plosive evolved into a low series tone word. To be more specific, as far as Siamese–Lao is concerned, a three-level tone paradigm should be reconstructed: (1) a high series after the initials

19 One could multiply the glosses in various dictionaries but they would teach us nothing more; the *bacanānukram chapāp rājapāṇḍittayasathān* ([1997] 2542: 762–4) may also be consulted but it does not provide us with any etymological data.

20 It should be noted that, in Khmer, the vowels are always short before the laryngeal.

[^hm>m ^hn>n ^hl>l] [b̥ d̥] [p̥ t̥ k̥]; (2) a middle series after the initials [p^h t^h k^h]; and (3) a low series after [b>p^h d>t^h j>c^h g>k^h] [m n l].²¹

The Old Khmer *v/brah* [brah] naturally evolved into [p^hrǎʔ] in Siamese, the proto-voiced plosive [*b-] regularly evolved in [p^h-] and a low series tone [brah]>[p^hrǎʔ].

(2) Old Khmer [-h]>[-ʔ] in Old Thai

Linguistically, the Siamese *brah* [p^hrǎʔ] can only be a borrowing from Khmer;²² the Khmer laryngeal [-h] was interpreted as a glottal plosive [-ʔ] in Siamese, which accounts for the shortness of the vocalic nucleus. Visarga forms were carried over from written transmission in Khmer; it should be noted that the visarga is exclusively confined to loanwords (see Table 3).

We should recall that *brah* is a written loan from Old Khmer. In the stele of Ramgamhæng (thirteenth century), the only attestation of the honorific is *brah*. Subsequent attestations without *visarga* in the corpus of Sukhothai down to the sixteenth century²³ are also to be found in ligatured forms but this peculiarity can be explained by the very fact that Old Siamese had to render a final Old Khmer laryngeal [-h] (**bra-h**) lost for long in Old Siamese; the pSWT final [-a -ah -aʔ] had already evolved into a three-tone opposition when the Old Khmer *v/brah* [brah] was borrowed in the thirteenth century. The final glottal stop [-ʔ] just marks the shortness of the vowel nucleus.

4.3. First epigraphic attestations

The word *brah* was borrowed quite early in Thai; we find it engraved as soon as in the Wang Bāng Sanuk Stele, the first epigraph in the Thai realm dated from AD 1219²⁴ written in Pali (the first lines) and in an Old Thai dialect (the rest of the text). It is also frequently used in the Ramkhamhæng Stele, dated from AD 1292,²⁵ where *brah* is used as an honorific. It is used alone in *brah rāmgamhæñ* (face 1, line 10) “The Venerable Ramkhamhæng” or used together with nobiliary titles as in *bo khun brah (rā)mgamhæñ* “The Venerable King Ramkhamhæng” (face 4, line 1), a title which is only attested in this stele. The Sukhothai inscriptions also make use of *brah* as a member of a compound. For example, the Sukhothai *samtēc brah* refers to a queen; *samtēc* [sǒmǎt̚] originates from the Angkorian Khmer *samtac/samtāc/samtēc* [sǒmǎt̚] “noble,

21 In Lao [*j-]>[s-]. Important articles by Haudricourt (1961) and Ferlus (1979) should be consulted on this topic.

22 On the importance of the Khmer language in the formation of the Siamese language, Uraisi Varasarin (1984) should be consulted.

23 Epigraphic attestations are *brah*, *bra(h)* [virāma on visarga], *bra*; ligatured forms: *brah*, *brah*, *brah*, *bra*, *bra* (Vickery, personal communication). I do not indicate the tone mark, as it is irrelevant for the present discussion; it should also be noted that the ligatured forms demonstrate that *brah* is not to be connected with *vara*-.

24 Penth (1996) and Wyatt (2001).

25 Vickery ((1987) put the antiquity of _{RK1} into question and made of it a piece of work engraved during the reign of King Rama [iv] (Mongkut) between 1833 and 1855. However, there is no linguistic reason for such a controversy as the proto-Southwestern Tai uvular fricatives are correctly rendered throughout the stele.

Table 3.

Angkorian Old Khmer	Standard Khmer	Thai Siamese	
<i>braḥ</i> [braḥ]	<i>braḥ</i> [prəəḥ]	[pʰrǎʔ]	“HONORIFIC”
<i>thoḥ</i> [tʰəḥ]	<i>thoḥ</i> [tʰəḥ]	[tʰəʔ]	“Year of the Rabbit”
<i>lvah</i> [ləəḥ]	<i>luḥ</i> [lùḥ]	[lúʔ]	“To reach; until”
<i>rddeḥ</i> [rədəḥ]	<i>radeḥ</i> [rətəḥ]	[rátʰéʔ]	“Cart, chariot”

prince”. This term is also attested in Lao, either alone as in *sōmtāt* [sōmđét] with the meaning “prince” or in compound together with a Thai nobiliary title *sōmtāt cau*² [sōmđét cáw] “patriarch, chief bonze” or in *sōmtāt baḥ cau*² [sōmđét pʰǎʔ cáw] “His Majesty”.

In the inscriptions from the Sukhothai period (1238–1583),²⁶ the titles *braḥṇā*, *bañā* and *braḥyā* are used as prefixes to name kings. The Thai *bañā* was borrowed through the Middle Mon *bañā* [bǎjǎ] (Shorto 1971: 258). The prefixes *braḥṇā* and *braḥyā* are still used in Modern Siamese. *Braḥṇā* is attested in the nobiliary title *cau*² *braḥyā* [cǎw pʰrǎja:] “prefix given to the highest rank of nobility” and in the name of the river Menam *mæ*¹ *nām*² *cau*² *braḥyā* [mê: ná:m cǎw pʰ(ra)ja:]; its second syllable *-ñā* would originate in a popular reduction of *ātyā/ājyā*, from Sanskrit *ājñā*- “power, authority”. In Lao, *yā* [jǎ:] is quite productive and *braḥ* would have been prefixed to it. Lao attests *bāyā* [pʰajǎ:] “princely title”. The Siamese *braḥṇā* [pʰaja:] has simplified into Lao *bia* [pʰiǎ], which spread to the Thais in Vietnam.

A study of the Thai nobiliary titles reveals the influences to which the Thais were subjected during their journey from 南詔 *Nānzhào* to the Menam.²⁷ Indeed, at the beginning of the first Thai chiefdoms in southern China we can find some *khun* [*xun^A] and *cau* [*caw^C] whose titles are both of Chinese origin (Haudricourt 1970: 28); moreover, the title *khun* is prefixed to the first Thai lords’ name, starting from their mythical ancestor Khun Borom. While snaking down along the Upper Menam, the Thais took on a form of Khmer writing system and khmerized Sanskrit titles, among them *braḥ*. In Haudricourt’s words (1970: 33), “ils oublieront leurs origines chinoises” (they forgot their Chinese origins) and the socio-cultural content of nobiliary terms such *cau* and *khun* lightened²⁸ relative to Sanskrit titles (such *indrāditya*) or khmerized Sanskrit titles (such as *braḥ*).

Old Thai *braḥ* was borrowed from Angkorian Old Khmer. Some languages – including Lao, Middle Mon or Old Burmese – then borrowed the title *braḥ* from

26 Ishii *et al.* (1989).

27 It should be mentioned that the alleged Thai political preponderance in the *Nānzhào* belonged to what could be called an ancient historiographical myth; as far as the *Nānzhào* 南詔 is concerned, Backus (1981) should be consulted. There are numerous works dealing with the descent of the Thai peoples southwards: among many others, Wyatt (1984: 9–15), Sarassawadee Ongsakul (2005: 11–52) and Stuart-Fox (1998: 22–9) should be consulted.

28 Condominas (2006: 274, n. 2).

Old Siamese, either directly or through other Thai dialects, including Northern Thai or Shan.

4.4. From Thai Siamese to other languages in contact

The Siamese *braḥ* [pʰrāʔ] was borrowed in languages belonging to the Siamese area of linguistic and socio-cultural influences. First of all, *braḥ* was borrowed in Lao where the proto-Southwestern Tai initial consonant cluster [*pʰr-] evolved to [pʰ-], and was preserved in Siamese. The reading [pʰrāʔ] or [pʰāʔ], and the archaic spelling of *Luang Phrabang* clearly shows the political influence Thailand exerted upon Laos.

The Middle Mon attestation *bra taja* [braʔ tajaʔ] “a nobleman who completed the rebuilding of the Kelatha pagoda (*kyāk kelāsapaw*), c. 1450” might be a borrowing from the Siamese *braḥ teja* or *braḥ tujha* [pʰrāʔ d̪eːt] “high form of address, lit. ‘lord majesty’” (McFarland 1944: 567).²⁹

In Laos, the Khmu name the monk [praʔ]/[pʰrāʔ];³⁰ although they were not Buddhist, the Khmu were used to going and studying in Lao monasteries (Ferlus, personal communication). Chong (a Pearic language of Thailand) also borrowed the Siamese *braḥ* through its [pʰrāʔ pʰüt] “Buddha’s statue” (Suwilai Premsrirat *et al.* 2009: 102).

In China, the Tai Dehong, a Shan ethnic group practising Theravada Buddhism, use the term [pʰaː^{A2} kaː^{B1}] to name the young Buddhist monks or [pʰaː^{A2} laː^{A2}] for a Buddha’s image (Luo 1999: 129). In Assam and Upper Burma, Tai Khamṭi reads [pʰaː^{A2}] the written form *phrā*. The change [*br-] > [pʰ-] and a low series tone is regular in Shan and Lao: [*braːk] > [pʰaːk^{DL2}] “to separate” (but [pʰrāːk] in Siamese); [*braː] > [pʰaː^{C2}] “long knife” (but [pʰrāː] in Siamese).

It should be noted that the Tai Paw and Tai Yo from Nghê An (Vietnam) rarely use [pʰaʔ^{A2}] as an honorific and prefer the term [ʔoːŋ^{B1}] borrowed from Vietnamese. The use of [pʰaʔ^{A2}] is due to Lao influence and indicates a higher social status, for Lao is the prestige language used by the Thai nobility in the regions bordering Laos. The forms [ʔoːŋ^{B1} caw^{C1}] and [ʔoːŋ^{B1} caw^{C1} hua^{A1}] to name “Buddha” and “monk” respectively are then much more frequent than their Laocized counterparts [pʰāʔ cáw] and [pʰāʔ cáw hũa].³¹

4.4. Historical basis for the proposed borrowing

The historical relationships that bridge the Thais to the Khmers are quite old and well-known; they start on the margins of the Angkorian empire in the Middle Mekong and the Upper Menam, from where the Thai expansion began at the expense of an enfeebled Angkorian power crumbling on its foundations under the weight of its over-expansion and harassed by the Mongol hordes of the

29 I would tentatively connect the Middle Mon attestation *bra taja* [braʔ tajaʔ] with the Siamese form *braḥ teja* or *braḥ tujha* [pʰrāʔ d̪eːt]; *bra taja* [braʔ tajaʔ] does not seem to be a word that entered the vocabulary of the language apart from its use as a personal name.

30 Khmu [ʔaːʔ] may be unrelated, cf. Kammueang [ʔaː] “teacher, master”.

31 The Tai Yo and Tai Paw data were collected by the author *in situ* during field research (February–March 2006 and April–June 2011).

yuán 元 Dynasty at the end of the thirteenth century (Cœdès 1958); the Thais were the major beneficiaries of the collapse of the old Indianized kingdoms.³²

The expansion of the Angkorian Empire towards northern Thailand is well known. This influence was quite old in northeastern Thailand as steles mention pre-Angkorian kings’ names such as Bhavavarman (second half of the sixth century)³³ or Citrasena (or Mahendravarman) attested in lots of steles stretching from Ubon to Khon Kæn.³⁴ Oral literature from northeastern Thailand also echoes these influences in various royal legends (Uraisi Varasarin 2007: 211–5). Angkorian archaeological vestiges are to be found in the northeast of Thailand (in the Isan Land) as well, such as the Angkorian temple complex of Phanom Rung in Buriram province or the Phra That Dum in Sakhon Nakhon province. Furthermore, the Siamese architecture of Sukhothai clearly shows Khmer artistic influence as epitomized by the Wat Phra Phai Luang. The Khmer influence most probably extended to the Sino-Burmese border, as faraway cities like Möng Yong attest some Khmer artistic influences.³⁵

The southward expansions of the Thais from China and the chronology of their settlement in the Middle Mekong, the Middle Menam and in Upper Burma are on the other hand poorly documented. Old Cham, Old Burmese and Old Khmer epigraphic attestations encourage researchers to postulate that the Thais had already settled in the Middle Mekong, Middle Menam and Upper Irrawaddy valleys as early as in the eleventh century AD. The first known attestation of *syam* (here: “Thai”) is to be found in the Cham inscription c.30 in Po Nagar (AD 1050); from this stele we learn that king Jaya Parameśvaravarman [i] (1044–1060) restored the Po Nagar sanctuary and made a donation of some *syam* (“Thais”),³⁶ *kvir* (“Khmers”), *lov* (“Lao”) and *vukām* (“Pagán Burmese”) *hulun* (“slaves”).³⁷ Two twelfth-century short inscriptions engraved below the bas-reliefs of the “Royal Parade” at Angkor Wat attest some *syām kuk*. The Pagán Old Burmese epigraphy (twelfth to thirteenth centuries) also attests many *syam* or *syām* (Luce 1958; 1959; 1985). The Old Cham epigraphic attestation in particular indicates that the Thais had already been in close contact with the Khmers (and the Burmese) at least since the first half of the eleventh century AD.

32 According to Cœdès (1989 [1948]: 346), Jayavarman [VII]’s death just before 1220 can be considered the starting point of a great effervescence in the southern borders of Yúnnán and, traditionally, of the founding of Thai principalities even though the Thai “avaient déjà fortement « noyauté » les groupes khmèrs, môns et birmans hindouisés des vallées du Sud [...]” (Cœdès [1948] 1989: 347); this would demonstrate that the Thais had firmly settled in the margins of the Angkorian, Mon or Burmese kingdoms by the thirteenth century.

33 Si Thep inscription (κ.978).

34 κ.377, 496, 497, 508, 509, 514, 1102 and 1106.

35 Rispaud (1966: 221).

36 As Ferlus (2006: 108–9) demonstrated, the first epigraphic attestations *syām*, *syām* and *syam* are most likely Thai living at the margins of the Angkorian empire, and not a Sui ethnic group as postulated in Groslier (1981).

37 See the edition of the stele by Aymonier (1891: 28–31) and particularly Schweyer (2005: 94).

Whatever the exact chronology of the Thai expansion to the south may have been, the influence of the Khmers on the Thais³⁸ was significant in the organization of the Thai ruling class and in their ideology.³⁹ The first phase of their southward expansion from China was that of *caw*'s, lords, symbolically related to one another by a myth of origin, that of Khun Borom,⁴⁰ a mythical lord, whose seven sons were said to be the ancestors of each *caw*. It is a typical sort of Thai kinship that characterizes this first migration phase and that legitimates each *caw* in the power he claimed. The second phase is featured by a highly Khmerized symbolic type of kinship in the sense that the *caw*'s power was *de facto* legitimized by matrimonial and matrilineal ties forged with the female members of Angkorian royalty (Condominas 2006: 269). This change clearly displays the political influence that the Angkorian empire had upon the Thai ruling class. It is in this context that we can locate the borrowing of the Old Khmer *braḥ* as a title symbolizing a kind of power which combined the sacred, the divine and the royal.

4.5. Conclusion

The Thais borrowed the title *braḥ* from Angkorian Old Khmer when they were on the margins of the Angkorian Empire, while Sukhothai was still under Khmer suzerainty. Afterwards, languages such as Middle Mon, Lao, Khmu and others borrowed their [braʔ], [pʰaʔ], and other autochthonous reflexes of the Siamese *braḥ*. The Old Burmese *purhaḥ* (Modern Standard Burmese *bhurā*: [pʰəjɑ̀:]) is, I would suggest, a borrowing from an Old Thai dialect in Upper Burma, that is, a Shan dialect.

5. The Old Burmese *phurā* (Modern Burmese *bhurā*·)

5.1. Semantic and epigraphic attestations in Old Burmese

Modern written Burmese attests *bhurā*·: (read [pʰəjɑ̀:] / [pʰjɑ̀:] / [pʰjɑ̀:]) “the Buddha, image of the Buddha, sacred, deity; stupa, pagoda; respectful form of address towards monks, royalty, etc.” (MLC 1996: 323; Bernot 1988: 93). The various phonetics are [pʰəjɑ̀:], and its substandard variants [pʰəjɑ̀:], [pʰəjɑ̀:] or [pʰjɑ̀:] in Standard Burmese. In the conservative dialects: *Intha* [pʰrɑ̀:] and *Arakanese* [pʰəjɑ̀:] or [pʰjɑ̀:] .

The *Epigraphia Birmanica* (Duroiselle et al. 1919: 26–7), Than Tun (1959: 50), the *Burmese–English Dictionary* (MLC 1996: 323), Luce (no date b: 85)⁴¹ and the *Mranmā' Abidhān* (1991: 323)⁴² connect *bhurā*·: with the Sanskrit-Pali *vara*·-. The

38 Particularly on the Siamese, Lao and Tai Yuan. I do not include the Thai of Vietnam (White Tai, Black Tai, Tai Deng, Tai Paw, Tai Yo and Tai Lü), although their writing probably derives from a type of pre-Angkorian Khmer script (Ferlus 1999).

39 The Mons were also of great importance in Thai cultural evolution.

40 On the *Khun Borom* myth, Archaimbault (1959: 383–416) should be consulted.

41 Luce's manuscripts were downloaded from an online source (<http://sealang.net/sala>). Moreover, according to Luce (*ibid.*) the Pyū *bā*·: *hra* would also originate in Sanskrit/Pali *vara*·- but as we know very little about the Pyū phonology (we do not even know which Tibeto-Burman branch it would belong to), it is quite difficult to hypothesize about the etymology of this attestation.

42 This dictionary also proposes *pūjarha* as a plausible origin.

Mranmā’ Abidhān (1978–80, 3: 118) just indicates a Pali etymology but provides no further specific etymological information.⁴³

This word has long been attested in Burmese; it was already attested in the first important Burmese epigraph, the stele of Myazèdi dated from AD 1113 under the form *purhā*. It was also attested in an Old Burmese epigraph dating from AD 1145, where King Alaungsithu (Cañsū [i]) was named *purhaḥ hrañ taw*; the word *hrañ* is an honorific prefix used when referring to a monk or a member of the nobility (MLC 1996: 419) and the term *taw* is an honorific affix; the translation we could propose would be “the Venerable and Noble King Alaungsithu”. Its various attestations are the following (Luce no date b: 85 and Nishi 1999: 75):

pre-Standard Old Burmese: *purha*, *pūrha*, *puhrā*, *purhaḥ*
 Standard Old Burmese: *purhā*, *phurā*
 Middle Burmese: *puhrā*, *purhā*, *phuhrā*, *bhurhā*, *bhurā*
 Standard Modern Burmese: *bhurā*: [p^həj^áː]/[p^hɹáː]

The word *preñā* is also attested in Old Burmese (Luce no date b: 86). According to Luce, this term originated in the Middle Mon *bañā* “Mon royal title”. However, I would rather hypothesize that *preñā* would be a borrowing from the Old Thai *braḥñā* because of the initial consonant cluster [pr-] in Old Burmese *pre-ñā*. According to this hypothesis, Old Burmese *pre-* reflects the Old Thai *braḥ-*. The medial trill [-r-] would then be adequately rendered in both languages (in the Old Burmese *pre[ñā]* and in the Old Thai *braḥ[ñā]*). Moreover, I would also postulate that *preñā* might be a borrowing from Tai Ahōm, because this Shan language did not undergo the “yodisation” of the nasal palatal [p>j], unlike the other Shan dialects.

5.2. Old Thai braḥ in Old Burmese: linguistic issue

(1) The problem

The problem of the etymology of the Old Burmese (OB) *purhā*, *phurā*, etc. is not simple. Did it develop directly from Sanskrit independently of Old Khmer and result from a reduction of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa*? It seems unlikely that such a reduction process developed independently, for the Burmese realm was in contact with socio-cultural fragments of the Khmer world through the Thai cultural and linguistic continuum.

Another possibility is that the various OB *purhā*, *phurā*, etc. originate from a common Tibeto-Burman or Lolo-Burmese lexical stock. However, this hypothesis seems unlikely as this word does not have any cognate, either in Tibeto-Burman (Matisoff 2003), or in Lolo-Burmese (Bradley 1979).⁴⁴

It could also be postulated that the OB *phurā* would eventually be a borrowing or a “burmanization” of the Sanskrit-Pali *vara-*. Though this hypothesis has its

43 Though they do not provide us with etymological data, Judson’s *Burmese–English Dictionary* (2006 [1893]: 802) and U Hoke Sein’s *Universal Burmese–English–Pali Dictionary* (1978: 558) could be consulted.

44 The etymon #360 (Bradley 1979: 328–9) clearly shows the various unrelated forms for “God, holy being”; no Lolo-Burmese proto-form can be reconstructed for this etymon.

merits, the Old Burmese *phurā* probably has the same origin as Old Khmer *v/brah* and Old Thai *braḥ* because the semantics of the Burmese attestation is identical to the Old Khmer and Old Thai forms.

It might also be suggested that the OB *phurā* could be a direct borrowing from Old Khmer. This seems quite unlikely, as the Burmese world was not in fact in direct contact with the Angkorian Empire. On the contrary, I postulate that the Old Burmese forms were an indirect borrowing from Old Khmer through an Old Thai oral form of the Old Khmer *braḥ*. The Thai linguistic and socio-cultural continuum stretching from the margins of the Angkorian Empire in the east to Upper Burma in the west (see Figure 1 below) would rather point to this conclusion.

(2) *Old Burmese phonetic transcription of an Old Thai word*

I believe that the Old Burmese *phurā*, etc. is an Old Burmese phonetic transcription of a borrowing from an Old Thai dialect spoken in Upper Burma. It was an honorific which came into the Old Burmese lexicon through oral transmission rather than through some written supports.

One challenge is to explain the actualization of the Old Thai labial plosive [b-] ([braʔ^A > bra:^A)]⁴⁵ through its voiceless counterpart in the Old Burmese *puhrā* [pʰra:] or *phurā* [pʰəra:] rather than an expected OB form *buhrā*. This graphic oddity can be explained in two ways. The first explanation is that the Old Burmese consonant paradigm did not have initial voiced plosives and interpreted the Old Shan voiced plosive [b-] as its voiceless counterpart [p-]: Old Thai (Old Shan) [bra:^A] > *puhrā* [pʰra:] (or *phurā* [pʰəra:]) in Old Burmese. The second explanation is that the Old Thai dialect from which Old Burmese borrowed its form had already undergone the devoicing of its voiced initial plosives ([b-] > [pʰ-]). In this view, the Old Burmese *puhrā* [pʰra:] (or *phurā* [pʰəra:]) would have been an attempt to transliterate the Old Thai [pʰra:^{A2}]. Both hypotheses are presented below, as it is not possible at this time to choose one hypothesis over the other.

1.- *First hypothesis: Lack of voiced plosives in Old Burmese*

When Old Burmese borrowed its *puhrā* from Old Shan, *braḥ* should still have been pronounced [bra:^A] and not yet [pʰra:^{A2}] because the devoicing of the initial voiced plosives [*b- *d- *g- *j-] > [p- t- k- c-] had not yet happened. We can then wonder why Old Burmese transcribed the Old Shan voiced initial plosive [b-] ([bra:^A]) in an Old Burmese voiceless initial plosive [pʰ-] ([pʰəra:]). The explanation that can be put forward for this oddity is simply that Old Burmese had no voiced plosives, as demonstrated by the comparison with Tibetan or other Tibeto-Burman languages. As Luce (no date a: 31) and Nishi (1999: 75) pointed out, the plosives written *g, gh, j, jh, d, dh, b, bh* in Old Burmese are almost exclusively attested in loans, and there is no phonemic

45 The sporadic lengthening of the vocalic nucleus [-aʔ>-a:] is one of the diachronic features of the Thai dialect spoken in Upper Burma (Shan), precisely where the Old Burmese and the Old Thais had been first in contact in Burma.



Figure 1. Angkor, Pagán and Thai Continuum (twelfth century)

contrast between voiced and voiceless plosives. The Old Burmese *purha*, *pūrha*, *puhrā*, *purhaḥ*, *phurā* must have been pronounced [pə^hra:] or [p^həra:], acceptable phonetic interpretation of the Old Shan [bra:^h].

The modern orthography with the written initial *bh-* can be explained by the fact that *p-* and *ph-* were still merging in Middle Burmese.⁴⁶ Furthermore, *bh-* was often used instead of *ph-* or *p-* (as both were merging). This spelling was established during the third spelling reform in the eighteenth century, which ushered Burmese into its modern standard literary period.

2.- *Second hypothesis: The Old Thai dialect had already undergone the devoicing process*

The alternative explanation would be that the Old Shan dialect from which Old Burmese borrowed its *purhā*, etc., had already undergone the devoicing process of its voiced initial plosives at the beginning of the twelfth century AD; in other words, [bra:^A] had already changed to [p^hra:^{A2}] in the twelfth century. The Old Burmese *puhrā* [p^hra:^{A2}] or *phurā* [p^həra:^{A2}] would then be an accurate transcription of a [p^hra:^{A2}] from an Old Shan dialect spoken in Upper Burma.

Not all Thai languages underwent the devoicing process at the same time. Siamese completed its devoicing process of the initial voiced plosives around the seventeenth century; a chapter from Simon de La Loubère's *Royaume de Siam* (1691), in which he defined the attributions of the Siamese *phra khlang* [p^hrá? k^hlanŋ] allows us to reach that conclusion.

*Le Prà-Clang ou par corruption des Portugais, le Barcalon, est l'officier qui a le département du commerce [...].*⁴⁷

We can conclude from this observation that (1) when the Portuguese landed in Siam in the early sixteenth century, the consonantal group [br-] (*Barcalon*) had not yet been affected by the devoicing process, and (2) when de La Loubère (1691) wrote his *Royaume de Siam*, this consonant cluster had already undergone the devoicing of the voiced initial plosive [br-]>[p^hr-] (*Prà-Clang*). The devoicing process had not yet taken place at the beginning of the sixteenth century but was complete at the end of the seventeenth century at the latest.

Tai Yo, a Thai dialect spoken in Nghệ An province, Vietnam, underwent this process much later; handwritten notes taken by Georges Maspero in the 1920s describe a dialect that had not yet completed its devoicing process.

It was therefore a long process which spread across the entire Thai area stretching from the seventeenth century for Siamese to the early twentieth century for Tai Yo. Assuming that the Old Shan dialect from which Old Burmese borrowed its *phurā* had already been affected by the devoicing process means that this phenomenon would date back in time about five or six centuries; this phenomenon would consequently have lasted almost a millennium of areal diffusion to its completion: from the eleventh century in Old Shan in Upper Burma to the twentieth century in the Tai Yo dialect in Vietnam. Such a long duration seems reasonable if we consider, comparatively, that the devoicing phenomenon

46 It should be mentioned that *bhurā* is first encountered in an inscription from Kyaukse dated from AD 1296 (Nishi 1999: 75).

47 de La Loubère (1691: 327) quoted in van der Cruysse (1991: 109).

is still ongoing in some Mon-Khmer languages while it was completed several centuries ago in Mon and in Khmer.

(3) *Monosyllabic pronunciation of the Old Burmese purhā*

The linguistic consideration that will now be dealt with is the syllabic structure of the Old Burmese *phurā*, etc. Was it a dissyllable [p^hura:], a sesquisyllable [p^həra:], or a monosyllable [p^hra:]?

I would postulate a monosyllabic [p^hra:] or a sesquisyllabic pronunciation [p^həra:] rather than a dissyllabic one [p^hura:] for the Old Burmese *phurā*, etc. The comparison of epigraphic variants for the same word in the Old Burmese lexicon strengthens this hypothesis. For example, pre-Standard Old Burmese (that is to say roughly the beginning of the eleventh century) attests *sikhañ* “lord, lady, the reverend, husband, master” which might graphically be represented as a dissyllable together with forms like *skhañ* or *skhiñ*, graphically similar to a mono- or sesquisyllable. This example is quite interesting as it demonstrates that pre-Standard Old Burmese had already become a mono- or sesquisyllabic language as the alternative epigraphic orthographies verify it: *sikhañ* and *skhañ*. We should also add that *pugaṃ* “Pagán” in Modern Burmese is not pronounced [pugàn] but [pəgàn].

(4) *Consonant cluster plosive + [r]*

Having assumed that the Old Burmese *phurā*, etc. must have been a monosyllable or, at most, a sesquisyllable, another diachronic issue should still be addressed: the evolution of the *plosive + [r]* consonant cluster.

The Standard Modern Burmese phonetic actualization [p^həjɑː]/[p^hjɑː] of the written *bhurā*: might be confusing. The initial consonant cluster [p^hj-] in Standard Modern Burmese is just the consequence of a regular phonetic change: Old Burmese [p^hr-]>[p^hj-] in Standard Modern Burmese. In most cases, only the conservative Burmese dialects Arakanese and Intha have maintained the Old Burmese pronunciation for this initial consonant cluster: Arakanese [p^hɹɑː]/[p^hɹɑː] and Intha [p^həɹɑː]/[p^hɹɑː].⁴⁸ The Intha and Arakanese pronunciations indicate that the Old Burmese pronunciation of the written Old Burmese *phurā*, etc. would have been something like [p^hra:] or [p^həra:].

(5) *Why not a creaky register in Old Burmese?*

It may seem rather disturbing that the Burmese form lacks a creaky voice to mark the short vowel of the Old Thai [p^hráʔ]. Why is the Old Burmese form [p^hra:], instead of a short vowel with a creaky phonation-type register [*p^hɹɑʔ]? This long vowel in Burmese is, in fact, not as unexpected as it might seem, if we consider that Old Burmese *phurā* was borrowed from an Old Thai dialect spoken in Upper Burma (a Shan dialect) which sporadically lengthens the final vowel [-aʔ > -a:], as evidenced by the form [p^haː^{A2}] (and not [p^haʔ^{A2}]) in Tai Khamtī and Tai Dehong or in Tai Yai (Burmese Shan)

48 The problematic of the Old Burmese initial consonant clusters “plosive + [r]/[l]” and their actualization in the various Burmese dialects is a complex topic; I mention the actualization of the Old Burmese [p^hr-]>[p^hj-]/ [p^hɹ-]/[p^hr-] quite schematically. Okell (1971) should be consulted for more on this topic.

attesting *phrā*: [p^hra:^{A2}] “deity, object of worship” (Cushing 1914: 464) and not [p^hraʔ^{A2}].⁴⁹

Accordingly, the Old Burmese *purhā* is most likely a loan from Shan since this group of Thai dialects has lengthened the vocalic nucleus [p^hraʔ^{A2}] > [p^hra:^{A2}]. Had the Old Thai vowel from the borrowing been short [p^hraʔ^{A2}], Old Burmese would have most likely pronounced it in a creaky register [p^hrg] because the *Ajawlat* (or *Dhammāraṃ-kṛī*) inscription (AD 1165–66) attests a first attempt to account for the supra-segmental features, which indicates that Old Burmese was already, if not a tonal language, in any case a phonation-type language.

5.3. Historical roots of the loan

(1) *The Thai continuum*⁵⁰

In order to understand how the Old Siamese *braḥ* (from Angkorian Old Khmer) yielded the Old Burmese *phurā* through an Old Shan oral form, it seems reasonably relevant to introduce the “Thai linguistic and socio-cultural continuum”. The “Thai continuum” was the socio-political, linguistic and geographical bridge that connected the various Thai peoples, and which stretched, by the twelfth century, from southwestern Yúnnán 雲南 to the Middle Mekong and Middle Menam in the southeast, and to the Upper Irrawaddy and Upper Salween in the west. The Thai continuum extended further westwards during the thirteenth-century Tai Ahōm migration into northeastern India (Upper Assam). The Thai continuum can be considered to be a loose network of Thai chiefdoms.

The example of the Tai Ahōm nobiliary titles in Upper Assam (and also Tai Yai ones in Upper Burma) illustrates the concept of “Thai continuum”, in particular the attestation of the Tai Ahōm doublet *ph(r)ā* - *phūra*: (Tai Yai *phrā*: - *phyā*:), one of the few Shan words of “Indo-Khmer” origin.

(2) *The Thai continuum: the Tai Ahōm example*

In AD 1228 prince Sukhaphā, quarrelling with his brother the king of Mōng Maw, immigrated to Upper Assam with his army and followers to seek his fortune. Tai Ahōm is noteworthy because it was spoken at the edge of the continuum and represented the Thai last step westwards; it was also somewhat isolated from the continuum and maintained archaic linguistic features. From Indo-Khmer, Tai Ahōm just kept the honorific prefix *phrā* - *phūra*:; its nobiliary titles are strictly Thai and are probably very old, when they were not replaced by Assamese terms. Incidentally, Tai Ahōm, more than any other Thai language, retained Thai titles indicating a hierarchy of rank and social status. For example, the term [caw^{C1} p^ha:^{A2}] (Tai Yai [s^haw^{C1} p^ha:^{A2}]), which is attested quite early in the Tai Ahōm nobiliary titles, resurfaced quite late in the sixteenth–seventeenth century in Siamese. Vickery (1974: 162) and Terwiel (1983: 56–7) connect this term with the pre-Sukhothai tradition.

49 Tai Yai also attests [p^hraʔ^{A2}] (Cushing 1914: 464), but it must be a loan from Lao.

50 The “Thai continuum” closely parallels the concept of the Japanese Karen specialist Shintani Tadahiko, who speaks of the Tai cultural area.

Noteworthy is the existence of the doublet *ph(r)ā - phūra*: in Tai Ahōm. for which we can deduce the pronunciation [p^hra:^{A2}].⁵¹ These words are honorific prefixes with a similar semantics to Old Khmer and Old Siamese; however, they were obviously borrowed from different sources. The word *phūra*: is clearly borrowed from Written Burmese and it probably arrived from Burma into Upper Assam through the Buddhist scriptures along with the Burmese writing system (Pain 2017b: 456–8). On the other hand *ph(r)ā* cannot originate from Burmese and its origin should be sought somewhere on the Thai margins of the Angkorian Empire, which indicates that contacts were kept between the two edges of the Thai continuum, namely from the northern margins of the Angkorian Empire to Upper Assam.⁵² In addition, we can hypothesize that Tai Ahōm *phrā* [p^hra:^{A2}] originates from an Upper Burma Shan dialect (Tai Yai or Tai Khamtī) as Tai Yai attests both *phrā*: [p^hra:^{A2}] “deity, object of worship” most likely originating from the Thai margins of the Angkorian Empire, and *phyā*: (in *phyā*: ‘in [p^hja:^{A2} ?in^{A2}] “Indra”’) which originates from an oral Burmese form. The migration path from east to west for this word may be the following: Siamese or Northern Thai *braḥ* [p^hrá?] > Shan *phrā*: [p^hra:^{A2}] > Tai Ahōm *phrā* [p^hra:^{A2}]. Both edges of the Thai continuum therefore attest the “Indo-Khmer” honorific *v/braḥ*.

This “Continuum” concept is important to understand how a word was carried orally from the Middle Menam in Thailand to Upper Burma. The Thai chiefdoms kept in touch during the eleventh–thirteenth centuries.⁵³

The very fact that the Old Burmese *phurā*, etc. was attested in the epigraphy a century before the Old Siamese *braḥ* might seem to contradict the hypothesis according to which the Old Burmese form would be a phonetic transcription of the Old Shan [bra:^A] (or [p^hra:^{A2}]). The explanation for this paradox is likely both the existence of a Thai continuum from the Middle Menam to Upper Burma in the eleventh and twelfth centuries on the one hand, and the ancient contacts kept up between the Shans in Upper Burma and the Burmese. This linguistic and socio-cultural environment is illustrated in Figure 2.

(3) Upper Burma Thais (Shans) and the kingdom of Pagán

Very little is known about the history of the Thai people in Upper Burma; the chronology of their southward migration from Southern China along the Irrawaddy upper valley and the eastern plateau remains quite obscure. Local chronicles give us some pieces of information but they are often unreliable, contradictory and rooted in the halos of mythology. Some chronicles trace the

51 Assuming that we can rely on the transcription *phrā* in Assamese given in the two *Tai Ahōm–Assamese–English Dictionaries*; both dictionaries are essentially based on the knowledge of a Tai Ahōm priest who served as the informant for both the *Ahom Lexicons* (Barua and Phukan 1964) and the *Ahom–Assamese–English Dictionary* (Borua 1920).

52 It should be noted that *phūra*: and *phrā* are mutually interchangeable as shown by the double attestation *phūra loñ* or *phrā loñ* to name a Tai Ahōm ritual that Gogoi (1976: 16) believes to be a Buddhist one. On the ancient religion of the Tai Ahōm, Terwiel (1992) should be consulted.

53 For example, Lān Nā was important for the introduction of Buddhism in Lān Xāng (Lorillard 2001).

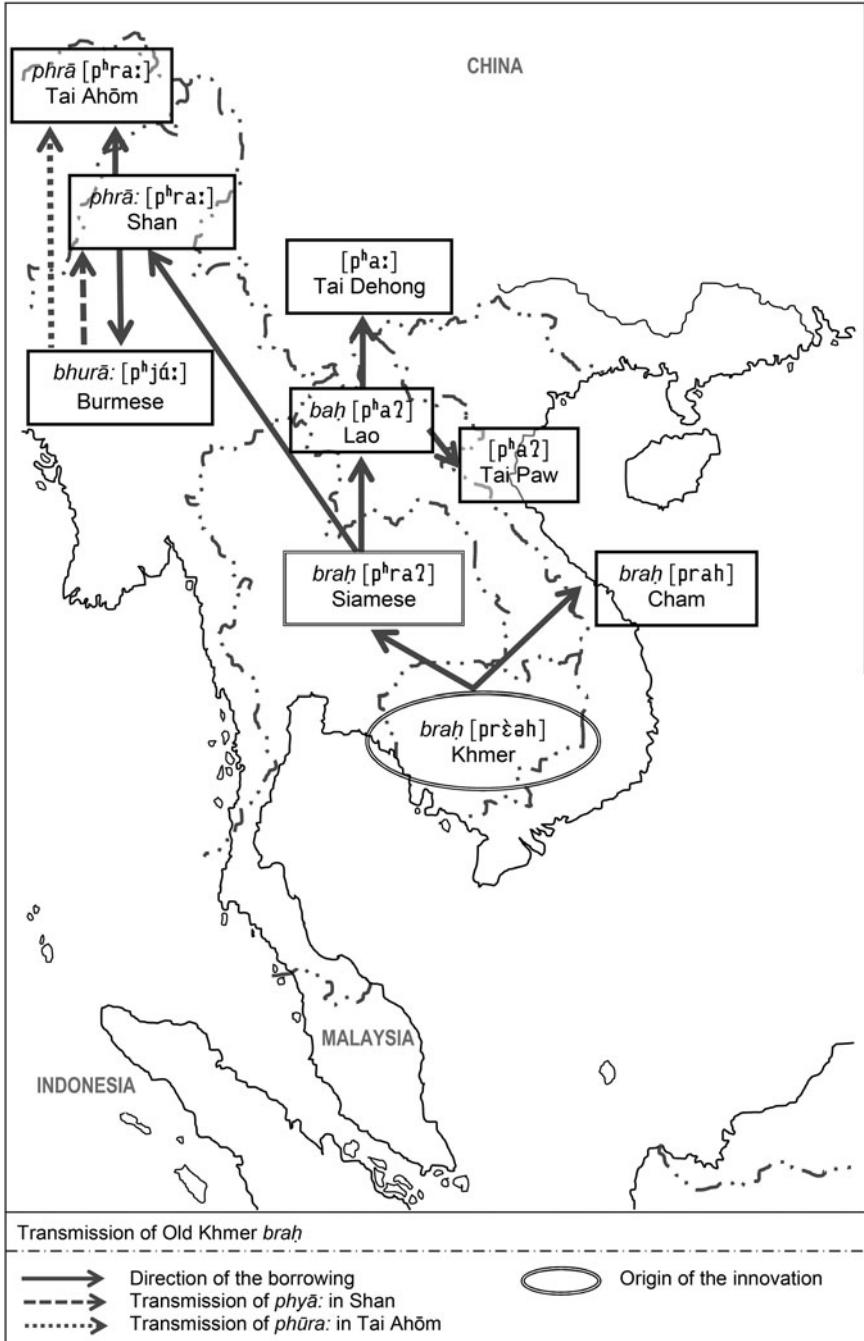


Figure 2. Transmission of Old Khmer *braḥ*

Thai (Shan) settlement in Upper Burma around the seventh century AD, others trace their settlement during the reign of the first Shan lord Khun Lai around AD 568. On the other hand the *Hsenwi Chronicle* reports that a Shan kingdom

would have developed at the border area between Yúnnán and Burma in AD 763 under the lead of its king, Khun Tung Kham, while Khun Lai would have been the third Shan king whose reign would have begun in AD 951. Whatever the accurate dates might have been, the Chinese annals from the Táng 唐 dynasty (AD 618–907) alluded to the existence of a Thai political entity in the border region, but the date of the formation of the kingdom remained somewhat vague. Be that as it may, a decentralized Thai power, the authority of which was slipping from one lord to another (Fernquest 2006), was to be found in the border regions between Yúnnán and Upper Burma by the ninth or tenth century AD. For our purposes, what matters is the antiquity of the contacts between the Burmese and the Upper Burma Thais or Shans.⁵⁴

The Burmese and Shans were in constant and conflicting contact for quite a long time. As early as Anoratha’s reign (1044–77), the king felt it necessary to protect his kingdom from the Shan chiefdoms by setting up a line of defence in 43 military posts along the eastern plateau; it was also crucial to defend the rice perimeter of the new kingdom of Pagán against the Shans. This information can be gleaned from the *Glass Palace Chronicle* (Pe Maung Tin and Luce 1960: 96–7) and is confirmed by archaeology (Berliet 2010). Moreover, a donation of Shan workers (together with fields and cows) to a monastery is mentioned in AD 1081 (Aung-Thwin 1985: 43). The Burmese and the Shans have thus been in contact since the eleventh century at the latest. As we learn from Robinne (2000), oral traditions in the eastern plateau are prolix on conflicts which opposed the kingdom of Pagán to various Shan chiefdoms; the Inle Lake region is furthermore dotted with shrines where the guardian spirits of the villages (*rwā con. nat*) are associated with Shans who fought against the Burmese.

The Shan lords’ or *shaw phā*’s power, quite hierarchical, was considered a serious threat by Pagán, and they constituted a serious opposition force to the central power. Matrimonial alliances were soon regarded as an honourable compromise to these conflicting relations. The Burmese chronicles relate that Anoratha married a Shan princess named Saw Hla Mon, a Shan lord’s daughter, to ensure the allegiance of the Shan *shaw phā*.⁵⁵ The kingdom of Pagán may be regarded as an entity which was politically dominated by three main ethnic groups: Burmese, Mon and Shan. The last two had some political prestige, for the Burmese kings would address the Mon and Shan lords with the honorific *noñ tō* “elder brother” while the Mon and Shan lords addressed Burmese kings with the expression *ñi tō* “younger brother” (Aung-Thwin 1985: 62), which demonstrates that the relationships to the Shan and Mon lords were clearly respectful.

The transmission of the Old Shan [**bra**:^A] ([**p^hra**:^{A2}]) and its transliteration in Old Burmese as *phurā* must have occurred in this context of relationships with the Shans, that can be traced back from the beginning of the eleventh century, if not earlier.

54 On Thai ethnonymy in general and Northern Thai and Shan in particular, Pain (2008) might be consulted.

55 Metaphorically, the Burmese chronicles dealing with this Shan wife emphasize the unity of the Burmese kingdom and the allegiance of the Shan principalities toward Pagán. As a matter of fact, when Saw Mon Hla had the Shwezayan pagoda built, the pagoda was to point to the Shan country and the gateway toward Pagán (Robinne 2000: 51).

6. Conclusion: *braḥ*, the word which travelled from Angkor to Assam

Throughout this paper it was hypothesized that the Old Khmer *v/braḥ* resulted from a reduction of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* through a monosyllabization process. Some doubts were also uttered about a connection between *v/braḥ* and the Sanskrit–Pali *vara*. The socio-political situation, sometimes favourable to the Khmers, sometimes to the Thais and sometimes to the Burmese, facilitated the transmission, from the margins of the Angkorian Empire, of the “Old-Khmerized” Sanskrit *braḥ* [**brah** > **prèəh**] into Siamese *braḥ* [**braʔ^A** > **p^hráʔ**], then from Siamese into Burmese [**p^h(ə)ra**: > **p^h(ə)já:**] through oral transmission and a phonetic transcription of a Shan dialect in Upper Burma [**bra:^A** > **p^hra:^{A2}**] and finally from Burmese into the Tai Ahōm *phūra*: [**p^hra:^{A2}**] in Assam.

Moreover, as *v/braḥ* is assumed to be a shortened form of *brāh[maṇa]* used as an honorific term of address, the question of the importance of the Brahmin in the Old Khmer world has been raised. A first attempt to use a reduced form of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* as an honorific may be evidenced in the word [**bram**] found in the name of the first Funanese ruler that the Chinese sources mention: 范帥蔓 *fān shīmàn* is, in Early Middle Chinese, a phonetic transcription [**bram sri: ma:n**] of *brāhm śrīmāra*, or “His Venerable King Māra”. We do not think that the Ancient Funanese Khmers used a reduced form of *brāhmaṇa* to show respect to the status of the Brahmins in general, but rather to show their reverence to their dynastic myth according to which the Funanese ruling clan would descend from, and legitimize its power by the degree of affiliation with, *brāhmaṇa kauṇḍinya*. More than an expression of interest for the alleged status of some obscure Indian Brahmins, it was most likely a mark of respect and reverence the first clan to have ruled over an embryonic state dominated by the Khmers. Some Indo-Aryan words arrived in Southeast Asia emptied of their Indian connotation; a signifier emptied of its signified in some way. When, in Modern Burma, reverence is openly shown to a monk by addressing him with the honorific term [**p^hjá:**], it is actually, etymologically, to the first Khmer lords of Fúnán that deep reverential respect is uttered.

Finally, one might wonder why an Indo-Aryan word such as *brāhmaṇa* originally designating a human being yielded the Old Khmer honorific *v/braḥ*, a term which refers to both humans and deities. This might be related to the issue of terms of respect associated with the erection of a new type of statecraft. It must have been a way to render the sanctity of the royal figure in the establishment of an innovative type of power. This is a frequently recurring feature in the formation of the first Indianized states in Southeast Asia (including Ancient Java). The Indo-Aryan word *brāhmaṇa* was emptied of its Indian (Hinduistic) culture-based semantics and was re-connoted according to Southeast Asian socio-political contingencies. It ultimately comes down to the question that Wolters (1999: 109–10) raised: What is the local connotation of Indo-Aryan terms?

References

- Archaimbault, Charles. 1959. “La naissance du monde selon les traditions lao. Le mythe de Khun Bulom”, *La naissance du Monde*, pp. 383–416. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

- Aung-Thwin, Michael. 1985. *Pagan. The Origins of Modern Burma*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Aymonier, Étienne. 1891. “Première étude des inscriptions tchames”, *Journal Asiatique* 17, 5–86.
- Backus, Charles. 1981. *The Nan-chao kingdom and Tang China's Southwestern frontier*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baxter, William H. and Laurent Sagart. 2011. *Old Chinese Reconstruction (Version 1.00)*. [Available online: <http://crlao.ehess.fr/document.php?id=1217>].
- Barua, B. and Deodhai Phukan. 1964. *Ahom Lexicons. Based on Original Tai Manuscripts*. Gauhati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam.
- Bernot, Denise. 1978–1992. *Dictionnaire birman–français*. Leuven, Paris: Peeters. (15 fascicules).
- Berliet, Ernelle. 2010. “Kausambi, ancien royaume mao. Les traces archéologiques du peuplement shan sur les hauts plateaux de Birmanie”, *Aséanie* 26, 11–30.
- Borua, Chandra. 1920. *Ahom–Assamese–English Dictionary*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press.
- Bourdonneau, Éric. 2007. “Réhabiliter le Funan. Óc Eo ou la première Angkor”, *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 94, 111–58.
- Bradley, David. 1979. *Proto-Loloish*. London and Malmö: Curzon Press.
- Ven. Chuon Nath (ed.). 1968–69. *Vacanānukram khmæc*. Phnom Penh: Institut Bouddhique. (2 volumes.)
- Cœdès, Georges. 1958. “Une période critique dans l'Asie du Sud-Est: le XIII^e siècle”, *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises* 33/4, 1–14.
- Cœdès, Georges. 1948 [1989]. *Les États hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*. Paris: De Boccard.
- Condominas, Georges. 2006. *L'Espace social. À propos de l'Asie du Sud-Est*. Paris: Les Indes Savantes.
- van der Cruysse, Dirk. 1991. *Louis XIV et le Siam*. Paris: Fayard.
- Cushing, Josiah N. 1914. *A Shan and English Dictionary*. Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press.
- Damsteegt, Theo. 1978. *Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Davidson, T.W. Rhys and William Stede. 2001 [1921]. *Pali–English Dictionary*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- de la Loubère, Simon. 1691. *Du Royaume de Siam*. Paris: J.-B. Coignard.
- Duroiselle, Charles et al. (eds). 1919. *Epigraphia Birmanica. Being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Burma*. Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing. [=“Archæological Survey of Burma”]. (Volume 1, Part 1.)
- Edgerton, Franklin. 1953. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary. I: Grammar*. New Haven: Yale University.
- Ferlus, Michel. 1979. “Formation des registres et mutations consonantiques dans les langues môn-khmèr”, *Mon-Khmer Studies* 8, 1–76.
- Ferlus, Michel. 1983. “Essai de phonétique historique du môn”, *Mon-Khmer Studies* 12, 1–90.
- Ferlus, Michel. 1992. “Essai de phonétique historique du khmer (du milieu du premier millénaire de notre ère à l'époque actuelle)”, *Mon-Khmer Studies* 21, 57–89.
- Ferlus, Michel. 1996. “Evolution vers le monosyllabisme dans quelques langues de l'Asie du Sud-Est”, communication to the Société de Linguistique de Paris, Paris, November 23rd, 1996.

- Ferlus, Michel. 1999. "Sur l'ancienneté des écritures thais d'origine indo-khmère", communication to the *Colloque "George Coedès aujourd'hui"*. Centre d'Anthropologie Sirindhorn, Bangkok, September 9–10, 1999.
- Ferlus, Michel. 2005. "L'intérêt linguistique des transcriptions chinoises concernant le Cambodge Ancien (Fú-nán et Zhēn-là)", communication to the *Dix-neuvièmes Journées de Linguistique, Asie Orientale*. CRLAO (EHESS-CNRS), Paris, June 30–July 1 2005.
- Ferlus, Michel. 2006. "Sur l'origine de la dénomination *Siam*", *Aséanie* 18, 107–17.
- Ferlus, Michel. 2009. "What were the four divisions of Middle Chinese?", *Diachronica* 26/2, 184–213.
- Ferlus, Michel. 2012. "Remarques sur la pharyngalisation en chinois archaïque (*Old Chinese*) dans le système Baxter-Sagart", communication to the *25ème Journées de Linguistique de l'Asie Orientale*. CRLAO (EHESS-CNRS), Paris, June 28–29, 2012.
- Fernquest, Jon. 2006. "Crucible of war: Burma and the Ming in the Tai Frontier Zone (1382–1454)", *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 4/2, 27–90.
- Gogoi, Padmeswar. 1976. *Tai Ahom Religion and Customs*. Gauhati: Publication Board, Assam.
- Groslier, Bernard Philippe. 1981. "Les Syām Kuk des bas-reliefs d'Angkor Vat", in *ORIENTS, pour Georges Condominas*, pp. 107–26. Paris: Sudestasie.
- Guesdon, Joseph. 1930. *Dictionnaire cambodgien-français*. Paris: Plon (2 volumes).
- Haas, Mary R. 1964. *Thai-English Student's Dictionary*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Harris, Ian. 2005. *Cambodian Buddhism. History and Practice*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Haudricourt, André Georges. 1961. "Bipartition et tripartition des systèmes de tons dans quelques langues d'Extrême-Orient", *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 56, 163–80.
- Haudricourt, André Georges. 1970. "Les arguments géographiques, écologiques et sémantiques pour l'origine des Thai", *Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Monograph Series* 1, 27–34.
- Headley, Robert K. et al. 1997. *Modern Cambodian-English Dictionary*. Kensington, MD: Dunwoody Press.
- Ishii, Yoshio et al. 1989. *A Glossarial Index of the Sukhothai Inscriptions*. Bangkok: Amarin Publications.
- Jacob, Judith M. 1960. "The structure of the word in Old Khmer", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 23/2, 351–68.
- Jenner, Philip N. 2009a. *A Dictionary of pre-Angkorian Khmer*. Canberra: The Australian National University.
- Jenner, Philip N. 2009b. *A Dictionary of Angkorian Khmer*. Canberra: The Australian National University.
- Judson, Adoniram. 2006 [1893]. *Burmese-English Dictionary (Revised and Enlarged by R.C. Stevenson)*. New Delhi and Chennai: Asian Educational Services.
- Karlgren, Bernhard. 1957. *Grammata Serica Recensa*. Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities Bulletin 29.
- Long Seam. 2000. *Dictionnaire du khmer ancien (d'après les inscriptions du Cambodge du VIè-VIIIè siècle)*. Phnom Penh: Phnom Penh Printing House.
- Lorillard, Michel. 2001. "D'angkor au Lān Xāng: une révision des jugements", *Aséanie* 7, 19–33.

- Luce, Gordon H. 1958. “The early *Syām* in Burma’s history”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 46/2, 123–214.
- Luce, Gordon H. 1959. “The early *Syām* in Burma’s history. A supplement”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 47/1, 59–101.
- Luce, Gordon H. 1985. *Phases of Pre-Pagán Burma. Languages and History*. Oxford: Oxford university Press (Volume 1).
- Luce, Gordon H. No date a. Memoranda on Old Burmese. *Luce Collection*, MS 6574, box 7, folder 52, p. 31. National Library of Australia. (downloaded from <http://sealang.net/sala>).
- Luce, Gordon H. No date b. Typescript lexicon: Pre-Standard Old Burmese – Standard Old Burmese – Modern Burmese. *Luce Collection*, MS 6574, box 7, folder 44, pp. 16–135. National Library of Australia. (downloaded from <http://sealang.net/sala>).
- Luo, Yongxian. 1999. *A Dictionary of Dehong, Southwest China*. Canberra: The Australian National University.
- Matisoff, James A. 2003. *Handbook of Proto-Tibeto-Burman*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- McFarland, George B. 1944 [1960]. *Thai–English Dictionary*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Myanmar Language Commission (= MLC). 1978–80. *Mranmā ‘abidhān*. Rangoon: Myanmar Language Commission (5 volumes).
- MLC. 1991. *Mranmā ‘abidhān*. Rangoon: Myanmar Language Commission (1 volume).
- MLC. 1996. *Myanmar–English Dictionary*. Rangoon: Department of the Myanmar Language Commission/Kensington, Maryland: Dunwoody Press.
- Nishi, Yoshio. 1999. *Four Papers on Burmese. Toward the History of Burmese (Myanmar Language)*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies).
- Okell, John. 1971. “K Clusters in Proto-Burmese”, *Communication to the Sino-Tibetan Conference*. Bloomington, Indiana, October 8–9. 1971.
- Pain, Frédéric. 2008. “An introduction to Thai ethnonymy: examples from Shan and Northern Thai”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 128/4, 641–62.
- Pain, Frédéric. 2011. “Processus de monosyllabisation en chinois et évolution phonétique en mōn-khmer: un phénomène de propagation par contact”, *Les Cahiers – Faits de Langue*, 3, 259–75.
- Pain, Frédéric. 2017a. “A local vs. trans-regional perspectives on Southeast Asian Indianness”, *Anthropological Forum* 27/2, 135–54.
- Pain, Frédéric. 2017b. “Towards a panchronic perspective on a diachronic issue: the rhyme <-uiv> in Old Burmese”, *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 37/4, 424–64.
- Pe Maung Tin and Gordon H Luce (trans.). 1960. *The Glass Palace Chronicle*. Rangoon: Rangoon University Press.
- Penth, Hans. 1996. “The date of the Wat Bāng Sanuk inscription”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 84/2, 5–16.
- Pigeaud, Theodore G. Th. 1962. *Java in the 14th century. The Nagara-Kertagama by Rakawi, Prapanca of Majapahit, 1356 AD, Volume 4, Commentaries and Recapitulation*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Porée-Maspero, Éveline. 1969. *Étude sur les rites agraires des Cambodgiens*. Paris and The Hague: Mouton.
- Pou, Saveros. 1992. *Dictionnaire vieux-khmer–français–anglais*. Paris: Cedoreck.

- Pou, Saveros. 1998. "Ancient Cambodia's epigraphy: a socio-linguistic look", in Marijke J. Klokke and Thomas de Bruijn (eds), *Southeast Asian Archaeology 1996*, 123–34. Hull: Centre for South East Asian Studies, University of Hull.
- Pou, Saveros and Philip Jenner. 1980–81. "A lexicon of khmer morphology", *Mon-Khmer Studies* 9–10, 1–517.
- Pulleyblank, Edwin G. 1991. *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Rājapāṇḍitayasathān. (2542 [1997]). *Bacanānukram Chapāp Rājapāṇḍitayasathān* "The Royal Institute Dictionary". Kruṇḍeb [Bangkok]: Rājapāṇḍitayasathān.
- Renou, Louis. 1956. *Histoire de la langue sanskrite*. Lyon: IAC.
- Renou, Louis et al. 1978 [1932]. *Dictionnaire sanskrit–français*. Paris: Maisonneuve.
- Reinhorn, Marc. 2001 [1970]. *Dictionnaire laotien–français*. Paris: Éditions You-feng.
- Rispaud, Jean. 1966. "Contribution à la géographie historique de la Haute Birmanie (*Mien, Pong, Kosambī et Kamboja*)", in Ba Shin, Jean Boisselier and A.B. Griswold (eds), *Essays Offered to G.H. Luce. Vol. 1: Papers on Asian History, Religion, Languages, Literature, Music, Folklore, and Anthropology*, pp. 213–23. Ascona: Artibus Asiæ.
- Robinne, François. 2000. *Fils et maîtres du Lac. Relations interethniques dans l'État shan de Birmanie*. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
- Salomon, Richard. 1989. "Linguistic variability in post-Vedic Sanskrit", in Colette Caillat (ed.), *Dialectes dans les littératures indo-aryennes*, pp. 275–94. Paris: Collège de France.
- Sarassawadee Ongsakul. 2005. *History of Lanna*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books.
- Schweyer, Anne-Valérie. 2005. "Po Nagar de Nha Trang, seconde partie: le dossier épigraphique", *Aséanie* 15, 87–119.
- Shorto, Harry L. 1962. *A Dictionary of Modern Spoken Mon*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Shorto, Harry L. 1971. *A Dictionary of the Mon Inscriptions from the Sixth to the Sixteenth Centuries*. London: Oxford University Press. (London Oriental Studies).
- Shorto, Harry L. 2006. *A Mon-Khmer Comparative Dictionary*, edited by Paul Sidwell, Doug Cooper and Christian Bauer. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.
- Sidwell, Paul and Pascale Jacq. 2003. *A Handbook of Comparative Bahnaric. Volume 1: West Bahnaric*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.
- Stuart-Fox, Martin. 1998. *The Lao Kingdom of Lān Xāng: Rise and Decline*. Bangkok: White Lotus.
- Suwilai Preamsritat. 2002. *Dictionary of Khmu in Thailand*. Bangkok: Mahidol University.
- Suwilai Preamsritat et al. 2009. *Chong–Thai–English Dictionary*. Bangkok: Mahidol University.
- Terwiel, Barend J. 1983. "Ahom and the study of Early Tai society", *Journal of the Siam Society* 71/1–2, 42–62.
- Terwiel, Barend J. 1992. "La déesse Tara et la religion ancienne des Ahoms", in Georges Condominas (ed.), *Disciplines Croisées. Hommage à Bernard Philippe Groslier*, pp. 337–50. Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.
- Than Tun. 1959. "Religion in Burma, ad 1000–1300", *Journal of Burma Research Society* 42/2, 47–69.

- U Hla Pe. 1967. "A tentative list of Mon loan words in Burmese", *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 50/1, 71–94.
- U Hoke Sein. 1978. *The Universal Burmese–English–Pali Dictionary*. Rangoon: Mañjūsaka.
- Uraisi Varasarin. 1984. *Les éléments khmers dans la formation de la langue siamoise*. Paris: SELAF.
- Uraisi Varasarin. 2007. "Traces de rois khmers anciens dans la littérature orale connue du nord-est de la Thaïlande", in Yoashiaki Ishizawa, Claude Jacques and Khin Sok (eds), *Manuel d'épigraphie du Cambodge*, pp. 211–5. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Vickery, Michael. 1974. "Review of B. Jones, *Thai Titles and Ranks Including a Translation of Traditions of Royal Lineage in Siam by King Chulalongkorn*", *Journal of the Siam Society* 62/1, 159–74.
- Vickery, Michael. 1987. "From Lamphun to inscription no. 2", *The Siam Society Newsletter* 3/1, 2–6.
- Vickery, Michael. 1998. *Society, Economics, and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia*. Tokyo: The Centre for Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, The Toyo Bunko.
- Vickery, Michael. 2003–04. "Funan reviewed: deconstructing the ancients", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 90–91, 101–43.
- Wolters, Oliver W. 1999. *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*. New York: Cornell University Press, Southeast Asia Program Publications (first edition 1982).
- Wyatt, David K. 1984. *Thailand. A Short History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Wyatt, David K. 2001. "Relics, oath and politics in thirteenth-century Siam", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32/1, 3–66.