

THE GOLDEN PAVILION AT WAT SAI.

BY

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Translated from the Siamese by B. O. Cartwright.

On the 23rd and 24th of July 1921, the National Library was specially opened for the Priests and Novices' visit. Phra Khru Thavara Samanavamsa of Wat Sai, amphur of Bangkhunthian, district of Thonburi, came to visit the National Library and stated that at Wat Sai there was a Pavilion the walls of which were covered with designs in gold, just like lacquer and gilt bookcases in the National Library, and that the oldest inhabitants relate that it is a Pavilion built by King Khun Luang Súa of Ayuthya. On the 28th of July 1921, I went to look at the Pavilion at Wat Sai, and saw that it was a genuine antique and of historical importance, and ought to be reckoned as an important memorial of the past. I, therefore, have published this explanatory pamphlet in order that those interested in relics of the past may read about this Pavillion.

(1) Wat Sai is situated near Klong Sanamchai (commonly known as Klong Dan) on the western bank near Bangkhunthian. It can be reached from Bangkok by the Tachin railway, alight at Bangkhunthian Station, and walk a short distance in a southerly direction, and the boundary of the Temple will be reached, the railway line passes behind the temple. Besides there are two ways of reaching Wat Sai by boat, one by Klong Bangkok Yai, the other by Klong Daokhanong, but care must be taken to go when there is plenty of water in the canals. This ancient pavilion is situated near the canal, by the side of the priests' cells. It is a wooden pavilion with three rooms. Its length is 8 meters 50, width 4 meters 50, the long side faces the canal. On the southern side one room is divided off by a partition wall, having a window with carved frames forming the point of an arch. On the northern face the walls are open in order to place curtains for converting into two rooms. The posts and beams are all rotten and have been replaced; the walls are the only original part left. The outer face of the walls are decorated with "Kranok" designs in gold, but the gilding is left only on the eaves.

The lower part exposed to the sun and rain has lost its gilding, and has been repainted. The original rafters remain, but only one of the carved frames remains. Inside the pavilion the walls are whitewashed with " Phum Khao Binda " designs in colour, and it is doubtful whether they were not made at the time when the lower part was repaired.

The Priests say that the original posts were painted in gold similar to the outside walls. The partition walls that still remain are painted in gold like the outside walls. There are two doorways in the partition wall, having the doors painted with figures of Devas in gold, but they appear to be the handiwork of Bangkok craftsmen who repaired the lower part. The style of the pavillion is as related above, and on examination it seems certain that it was a pavillion built by some King or other. This type of structure called a golden pavillion, other people may not build for their own use, or if it be built, it is as an offering to the Temple such as a shrine for the Image of the Buddha or a library for the sacred texts, for it is not customary for other people to make a golden pavillion as a building for the use of the priests or as a Sala. There is a reference to this matter in the history of the First Reign of the present dynasty. H. M. Rāma I considered that a recompense should be made for the injury inflicted by the King of Thonburi on Somdech Phrasangkharat Si for refusing to pay homage, and so was pleased to pull down the golden pavillion of the King of Thonburi, and to set it up again to be the residence of the said Phrasangkharat and to be a mark of honour to him. Thus it can be seen how in ancient times a golden pavillion was a mark of great honour. A coloured pavillion only was the mark of a Prince of the Royal Family, as for example the pavillions of the elder sisters of Rāma I, were merely called the green and the red pavillions. Thus from what has been said there can be no possible doubt but that the golden pavillion at Wat Sai was built by a King.

(2) The villagers in that district say that this pavillion was the pavillion of King Khun Luang Sia. There is a strange historical allusion to this in the royal history to the effect that Somdech Phra Naresuan Maharat liked to journey to the Gulf going down to the place Tanot Luang in the district of Petchaburi. For the journey at

that period, the fleet of Royal boats had to pass through this canal Sanamchai which was the ancient course, but afterwards these royal trips were discontinued for a while, namely from the reign of Somdech Phrachao Song tham B. E. 2163 (A. D. 1620) until the end of the reign of Somdech Phra Phetracha B. E. 2246 (A. D. 1703), that is to say from about the time of the discovery of the Buddha's footprint, when the course of the Royal trips was changed from the North to the Phrabat Hills and Lophburi, and were not made to the sea as in former times, until the reign of Somdech Phrasuriyentratibodi who reigned in Ayuthia from B. E. 2246 to B. E. 2251 (A. D. 1703 to 1708). The common name for this King was Khun Luang Sĩa or Phrachao Sĩa and he was pleased to journey to the sea. Royal trips to the sea and back occurred from that reign until the reign of Somdech Phra Phumintracha, commonly known as Khun Luang Thaisara, and the reign of Somdech Phramahathammaracha II commonly known as Khun Luang Boromakot, both of which princes were sons of Phrachao Sĩa.

An account occurs in the Royal History that in B. E. 2247 (A. D. 1704) Phrachao Sĩa made a trip along Klong Sanamchai (at this time he had reigned one year and it is likely that this was the first trip). When passing Khokkham the steersman steered badly and the Royal barge ran aground so that the prow was broken and the barge was in danger of sinking. According to the laws of those days, the steersman was liable to execution, but Phrachao Sĩa was merciful and did not condemn the steersman, as he considered that the accident was due to the windings of the canal. That steersman was a native of Norasingh in the district of Ang-Thong and was known as the steersman of Norasingh, so he begged that he might be executed in order that the Royal Edicts should not be transgressed, and so the King was obliged to have him put to death. There is still a shrine 'San theparaks' at the place Khokkham which is said to be built on the spot where steersman Norasingh was executed, and it still remains to be seen because the Royal barge ran aground there.

When Phrachao Sĩa returned to the capital, he ordered Phrarajasongkhram (who succeeded in removing the Sleeping Buddha

at Wat Pamok in the following reign) to be the Chief Engineer to dig that canal straight. Phrarajasongkhram dug from the mouth of the canal by the Tachin river up as far as Khokkham, but the rest of the digging was completed in the next reign, so that the canal was straight, large and wide and is now called Klong Mahachai.

During the space of 55 years from B. E. 2246 until B. E. 2301, this Sanamchai canal was traversed frequently by the Kings of the three reigns and hence pavilions for resting both during the daytime and by night had to be erected at several spots. The people of Petchaburi have shown me that there was a pavilion of the Ayuthya period at Paknam Bangtabun, but the fabric of that pavilion is completely ruined. This pavilion at Paknam Bangtabun was a place for the King to rest on this very journey. The pattern of the golden pavilion at Wat Sai which is a pavilion divided into three rooms, one of which has walls and the other two open, seems certainly to be a resting place for the King during the daytime, and was certainly erected during the reign of Phrachao Sua as the natives of the place assert, or if this is not the case, was without doubt built during the next two reigns of the Ayuthya Period.

(3) There is still another point to be considered, namely for what reason was the golden pavilion placed at Wat Sai, whether it was built originally in that spot or pulled down and removed from some other place. On enquiry from the head-priest he answered that he had never heard that the pavilion had been removed from anywhere; also when the head-priest built the quay of the temple, during the digging operations a row of hardwood posts was found leading down from the pavilion which must have formed part of a landing stage for the pavilion. Taking this point into consideration it is obvious that if the pavilion had been built originally in that spot, the said spot must have been out the temple boundaries.

That a golden pavilion should have been built for the King in the Wat seems to be impossible, and if the situation of Wat Sai be considered it will be seen that it occupies two plots of land. In

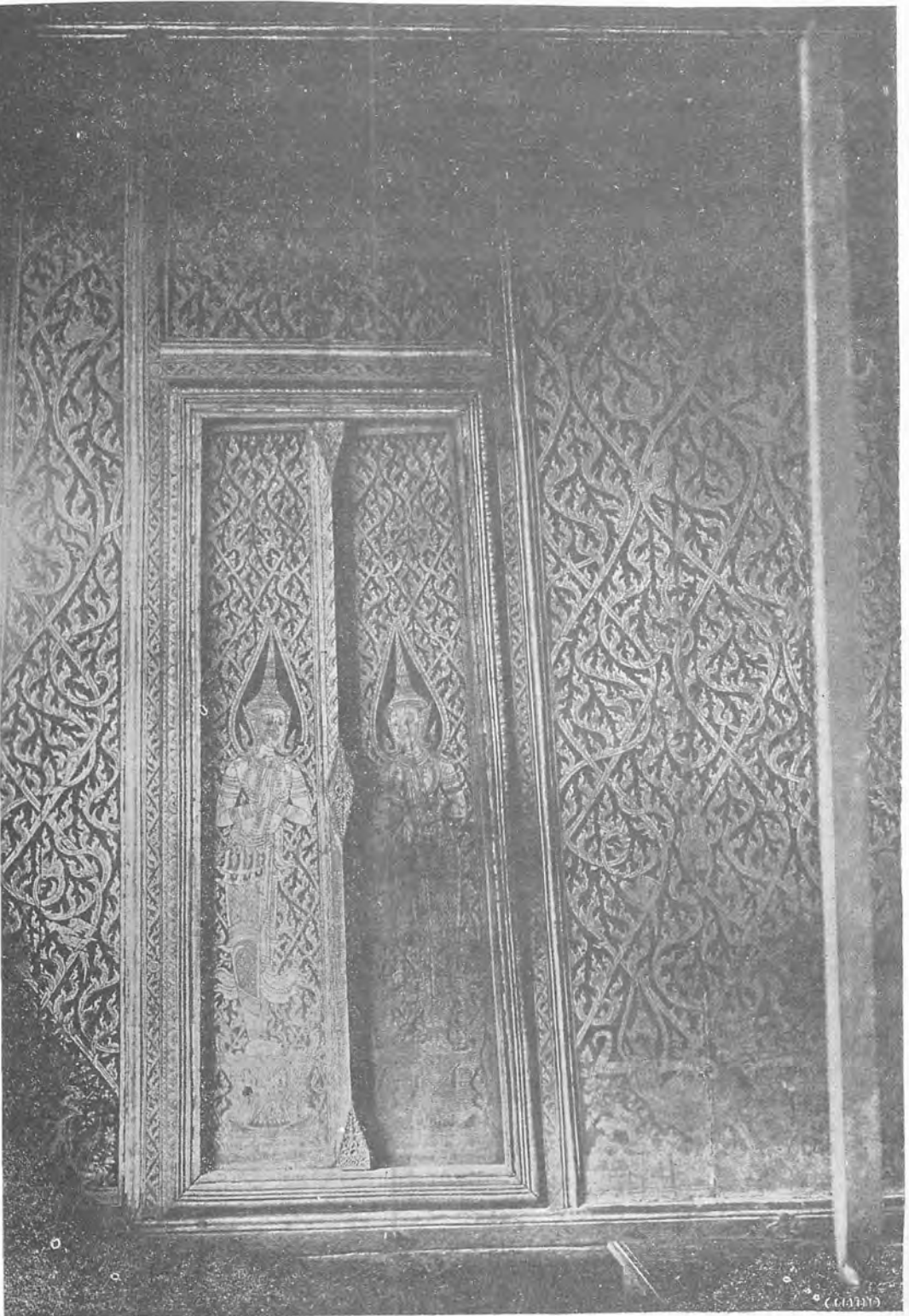
the larger plot to the south are built the temple proper and the Preaching Hall which are somewhat damaged, but have been greatly repaired by the chief priest, but there is a prachedi in front of the temple and a pulpit in the Hall which are the work of the Ayuthia period or prior to that shown in the gold pavilion, and this is a proof that Wat Sai is a very old Wat and that Wat Sai was built before the golden pavilion. To the North is the smaller plot on which the golden pavilion is built, it is divided from the larger plot on which the temple proper is built, by a canal. It might be that the smaller plot was outside the temple boundaries when the golden pavilion was built, but was presented to the temple at some later date, but on inspection, the golden pavilion is very close up to the temple. If that plot of land had been outside the temple boundaries at the time of the building of the golden pavilion, the pavilion would have been built in the middle of the plot and would have been further to the north from the canal, and would not have been built up so close to the temple boundary.

Therefore it is clear that this golden pavilion was originally built somewhere else, but must have been near this spot along the Klong Sanamchai. The approximate position of the pavilion for night use must have been at Thonburi. The Royal boats left Thonburi in the morning and travelled along this canal till midday, and the golden pavilion for the midday rest must have been built at the spot which would be reached by the boats at midday. In the afternoon the boats would have started from that spot to reach the night resting place at Tha Chin. This consideration fits in with the nature of the pavilion at this time its shape being changed, the walls and gables being the only parts of the original left due to the fact of the pavilion having been allowed to go to ruin for a period, until it was nearly in a state of complete decay. There must have been some person who regretted this and so he pulled it down, removed it and rebuilt it at Wat Sai, retaining the walls and gables and gave it to be temple property, and thus the present shape of the pavilion is unlike its original shape. There are signs of its having been repaired in the Ratanakosindr Era, for example the figures of the Devas on the door in the partition wall, and the

various figures of the Buddha painted in colours on the eaves. These show clearly that they were drawn when the pavilion had been re-erected in the temple grounds. The reason why it was erected in Wat Sai was because the head-priest of the Wat at that time was the person who removed the pavilion and repaired it to be a house of prayer and thus had it erected near the cells of the priests.

The history of the golden pavilion at Wat Sai is, I believe, as has been related. The action of the priests in preserving this golden pavilion and that of the head-priest in repairing it and keeping it in a good state up to this day are worthy of all praise, and I feel sure that everyone who goes to see it will think so too without exception.





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