

EAP 1123 Collection Surveys

As a preliminary grant, my interest was to visit as many collections as possible in order to get the broadest sense of what kinds of materials were available where and in what quantities. I had to decide which materials to digitize now, as part of this short-term grant and which could be put off for a major grant. Collections were geographically far apart, involving anywhere from an hour to three hours' driving each day. I was accompanied by my research assistant and driver Cip ^{ချိပ်} on most trips. Occasionally, Cip's friend Phloy ^{ဖလှယ်} joined us to help with the actual photographing. Since Cip was a woman, she was not always allowed into the areas where the collections were held, and in any case she could not read Mon. Therefore, with few exceptions, I was working alone. At many temples, given the time constraints, I was unable to do more than go through random samples of texts.

I give general background information common to most of the collections we found—especially regarding the tricky question of collection biographies—before giving information on each individual collection.

I am fairly confident that we visited most of the extant collections of central Thailand. We went to a number of temples we had been directed to because they were identified as Mon or held Mon-language manuscripts. Some of these temples still identified as Mon but no longer held manuscript collections. Others identified as Thai. Some Thai Mons interpreted this as meaning that the temples and lay community supporting them had been completely assimilated to being Thai. Some research conducted in the early 1970s, however, indicates that there have always been Thai temples and villages mixed in among the Thai Mon villages. Due to time and resource limitations, we did not visit the collections apparently held in Chiang Mai and Lamphun in Northern Thailand.

We visited approximately thirty-five collections, almost all of which were in temples, although I have not recorded here the non-Mon temples. There were three collections that we were not granted access to: Wat Muang, Wat Chang, and Wat Chinawārām, detailed below. Some of the information may overlap in some cases, while in others, we were able to find out much more information than at other sites.

Background Information

Site Visits

Nearly all manuscript collections were in temples. In most cases, monks were collection holders and we had to secure permission from the head abbot and then the cooperation of the monk who served as collection guardian. Most temple visits followed the same broad pattern. In most cases, the monks welcomed us and allowed us to look through their collections. Some were very eager to have us photograph them. Very few collection guardians asked much about who I was, or asked for my qualifications. We were not greeted with suspicion (as happens sometimes in Burma) or fear that we might steal materials. Only at one temple did someone seek confirmation that we would be photographing their manuscripts on site rather than taking them away.

Typically, after our initial conversation at a temple we visited for the first time, the abbot or monk-in-charge would bring out a few texts for me to inspect. Then they would often invite me to go into the rooms where the manuscripts were stored and look over the collection more carefully, sometimes accompanied, sometimes not.

In most cases, collection holders had only a broad idea of what their collections held, usually telling us that the texts were religious. In most cases, the monks we spoke to were too young to have any reading ability in Mon, and so they were simply repeating what others had told them. Specificity of knowledge about the holdings held an inverse relation with age: the

older the abbot or head monk was, the more likely he was able to read the texts. In all but perhaps two temples, the texts were not ‘in use’, meaning that they were simply left in storage. In those two temples, the abbots claimed to use or consult them when preparing sermons. Whether or not this was actually the case, I do not know.

Conditions

Collections contained hand-written palm leaf manuscripts, machine-printed palm leaf manuscripts (all in Thai), and accordion-style folding paper books or *parabaik*. Physical conditions varied widely. Almost all manuscripts were stored in chests. Some manuscripts were stacked neatly, some stuffed in chests any which way. Many bundles were wrapped in cloths—yellow cloth of monks’ robes, thin sarong fabrics, or rich brocades—although when these were present, they were in a state of decay. Many bundles were tied with complicated knots. Luckily, Cip and Phloy both knew how to retie these Thai-style knots. In a few places, recent surveyors (see “On Site Records” below) had secured a palm leaf to the outside as a tag, written in Mon or Thai. When present, tags made our work considerably easier.

Some manuscripts had been eaten by insects or gnawed through by rats or mice. Of the accordion-style *parabaik*, all had come apart. *Parabaik* are made of sections glued together to form a volume, and so the seams of most had come loose. Most also had some water damage or staining and were at least partially eaten by insects.

In nearly every collection were texts thrown together at random. Generally little could be done with them, at least in the sense of reordering them into coherent texts. Nevertheless, many of these were still of interest in their own right. I found what appeared to be handwriting from Burma from the early twentieth century; a few unusually old texts; and some colophons (otherwise ‘orphaned’) which included the names of donors. A few of these donor names appeared not to be Thai, indicating that Mon names were still in use among the Thai Mons connected with those texts.

Languages, Dating, Contents

The languages of the texts we found were Mon, Pāli, Thai, and Khmer. The alphabets were Mon, Thai, Khmer, and ‘Khom’, or Thai-language texts written in an adaptation of the Khmer alphabet. Several *parabaik* mixed languages, including Pāli and Mon, or Mon and Thai or Mon and Khom. Several temples had collections of recent machine-printed Thai-language palm-leaf manuscripts. We did not find any texts in Burmese. We also came across no text in Sanskrit written in the Mon alphabet.

The average text was incomplete: colophons were often absent, and when present, there might be no date. The placement of the colophons varied – sometimes it came at the beginning, other times at the end of the text. In the best cases, the colophon contained the title, the date, who commissioned the text and who copied them out, but only a very small handful of texts had all that information. The texts were often also incomplete in the sense that leaves were missing, usually in the sense that a text would start or break off at random. Palm leaf manuscripts usually had pagination in the form of letters of the Mon alphabet. In a few cases, later readers of the texts had written (Thai) letters or (Thai, Mon) numbers on the leaves. The *parabaik* texts had no numbering; given that all of them had come apart, we could not always be sure that the sections were in order, especially when the text was in Pāli.

The average dates of the texts were rather recent, from the late nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth century. A few texts were significantly older, from earlier in the nineteenth century. There may have been texts older than that, but that impressionistic and not based on an actual date on a colophon. The most recent text was copied out in 1949, a much later date than expected. Based on spelling and the occasional use of a ballpoint pen, the Thai texts appeared to be even more recent.

In the absence of other information, the ‘handwriting’ (technically, scribes used styluses on the palm leaves) was especially useful in understanding the origins of the texts. Most of the texts appeared to have been produced locally: Mon writing styles have evolved over time, but a few letter shapes and writing conventions appear largely in texts produced in Burma, while others occur only in what is now Thailand. Some Thai Mon scribes, for example, tend to bring a certain Khom-like angularity to their writing, which is never found in texts in Burma. In a few cases, these more decorative, elaborate hands were rather difficult to read.

The majority of texts were religious, a large number in Pāli, which almost always indicates that the contents are religious. Some texts were bilingual Mon-Pāli *nissaya* texts (*krāy* in Mon). Others were treatises on Pāli grammar. The focus of this research was on ‘secular’ texts, to the extent that such a label can be meaningful in a textual tradition so deeply imbricated in Buddhist learning and Buddhist institutions, which we did find. That category generally indicated Mon-language texts on history, literature, astrology, and medicine. Excluded from this category would be texts explaining Buddhist doctrine and commentaries, and the large number copies of the *Abhidhamma* and *Vinaya*. Such texts exist in great numbers in both Thailand and Burma since they were prerequisites for ordination, and generally are not endangered. Secular texts, in contrast, tend to exist in much smaller numbers and fewer copies.

On-site Records

Few collections had anything like a list of titles. In several temples, I found slips of paper in among the manuscript bundles, which appeared to be attempts at some kind of registry. Some were numbered, though these numbers were not consistent within or across temples. The slips were an attempt to record the contents and titles of the bundles. More often than not, however, there was simply written in Mon <SLARUIT RĀW NHĀW> ‘mixed texts’ which could equally mean, ‘texts all mixed up’.

Some of these slips bore dates in the early 2000s, as at Wat Makhām (Rātburi). The handwriting was in Burma Mon style. I even found a note in the Burmese language, which clearly indicates that whoever made the notes was not a local Mon. I recalled that a Burma Mon friend, Nai Sunthorn, had been involved in a small survey and digitization project run by the French scholar, Dr Emmanuel Guillon around that time. In any case, the descriptions were not complete and many manuscript bundles lacked an accompanying slip. Even these slips showed signs of being eaten by insects.

In 2017, I had also made contact with Nai Phisān, who had been involved in the move of the collection of manuscripts at the various temples on Ko Kret to the library of SEAMEO-SPAFA (Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Art), a regional organization in Bangkok, because of the risk of flooding. He is literate in Mon and so has been involved in the survey of several collections. He has often accompanied staff from the Thai National Library, who appear to be taking some interest in Mon-language manuscripts. We came across his handiwork at a few sites, as at Wat Makhām Pathumthani. He confirmed that although he had helped the National Library survey materials and even in a few cases clean and wrap them in new wrappers, none of them had actually been digitised.

If the collection were small—perhaps only one shelf of texts, or one small case—and time allowed, I opened every bundle. As I went through the bundles, I jotted down the titles from colophons, when present, on a piece of paper. I would then take a picture of each slip to keep track of the contents. Through a chat programme, I sent these pictures to Daw Pyoun Pyoun Ei, one of the librarians at the Mon library in the Mon Pitakattaik in Yangon, to ask whether she had heard of the texts before, and whether the titles were already in a collection in Yangon. Her answers helped me prioritize what to photograph and get a better sense of what to do in a future grant. I put the slips back in with the bundles.

Collection Biographies

One of the goals of this preliminary grant was to write biographies of the collections. Narrowly speaking, this proved impossible. Wherever we went, we attempted to engage collection holders and community members in discussions of the origins of the collections and the history of the communities more generally. People responded in indirect terms, speaking of the manuscripts as part of the religious and ceremonial life of the communities, and therefore not really the work of individual ‘authors’ in the western sense. Local communities were not concerned with who had written them, although the scribe(s) who copied the text, or the donor who sponsored its copying might be noted on the colophon.

By the same token, community members held the collection of texts as a natural outgrowth of temple life, and not the result of any one individual’s actions. Direct questions about the origins of texts invariably got answers of, “the monks here wrote them,” or “they were exchanged through the villages,” or sometimes, “people from the village brought them here.” None of the collections we found were identified with, for example, an individual.

Community members were more interested in telling us about the origins of their temple and village. Abbots could tell us during which reign a temple was founded (the ‘reign’ being the usual way Thais reckon dates since the founding of the current Chakri dynasty in 1782). They could tell us if, for example, a particular village or temple had been founded by people who had left another Thai Mon village. Most temples had brief histories associated with them, often recorded in stone plaques in the temple compounds. These appeared to be recent, since they were recorded in modern Thai, and those few in Mon reflected the usage and spelling of the Mon language in Burma, not of Siam/Thailand. Instead of speaking of the histories of specific collections, people were more often able to speak in terms of the history of a community. Sometimes this was very specific – people could tell me the exact history of a particular temple. Temples were often in geographical clusters, or had a lineage that extended to an earlier temple, from which some people had moved to set up a new one. When temples were clustered, people could speak of the general history of the community.

In Cet Riw in Samut Sākhōn Province close to the ocean, I established a rapport with a local school teacher, Acān Bang’ōn อาจารย์บังอร, who kindly organized a sizeable group of elderly community members to sit with me for a few hours and have an extended conversation about the history and the past. They were able to tell me about the founding of their village, apparently by settlers who had come from a bit further north, at Bān Ko? บ้านเกาะ, where the temple Wat Ko? วัดเกาะ is located. They also told us of their community’s connection with the village of Kmā Wak, some 300 miles to the northwest in Burma, where previous generations had come from. Such stories were typical in Thai Mon villages, where people often maintain a memory of the ‘home’ villages in Burma where their forbears had come from.

The reasons for the Thai Mons leaving Burma were varied. Previous Thai kings had invited some to settle in and around Bangkok after the founding of Chakri dynasty as a way to populate the region. Mons were involved in trade, the Siamese military, and court life. Other communities fled Burma during periodic fighting between what is now Upper and Lower Burma (the latter being where Mon-speaking populations have been concentrated), or other times of unrest as recently as the 19th century. Stories of origins in military conflict appear to have overshadowed the other origins, perhaps reflecting the promotion of Burma as ‘the enemy’ in official Thai state propaganda starting around the 1930s. To be sure, Mon history today in general is deeply caught up in ‘memories’ of trauma, displacement, and war.

Community members in Cet Riw told me that their ancestors were farmers of no particular means. When they were forced to flee Burma, they were not able to bring much over with them. From Nai Phisān, I learned that this situation contrasted with that of Ko Kret,

where intellectual and military elites from Burma settled, and were able to bring many more cultural materials with them.

Of particular interest was our conversation at Cet Riw about the possibility of ‘oral history’. Previous research had led me to come across short oral narratives recorded in the Thai Mon community of Lopburi in the mid-1980s of Burmese armies forcing Mons into conscription. I was interested in knowing whether anyone at Cet Riw had heard such stories. No one, including a few villagers in their 90s, had heard anything about the conditions of their ancestors’ flight, or really anything much directly about Burma, from previous generations. They thought that too much time had passed for oral histories to have been passed down.

On the other hand, it appeared that connections with Burma had never been wholly severed. Several abbots spoke of monks of previous generations having gone to Burma for learning, or certain community members coming over from Burma and the like. It was not possible to get as clear a sense of the extent to which traders and other people travelled back and forth across the ‘hard’ border which developed between the British colony of Burma (1824-1947) and Siam, later Thailand. At several temples, the abbot spoke of how an earlier abbot had come from Burma (sometimes rather more recently than any of the historical upsets of the eighteenth or nineteenth century). It appears that travel between the two countries was more difficult from the early 1960s-early 1990s, when Burma restricted travel under the earlier military government.

Individual Temple Surveys

The following surveys were conducted over the course of approximately two months, from 6 January to 5 March. The collections at Wat Sirimongkhon and especially Wat Cet Riw have the fullest descriptions. There were three collections which we were not allowed to examine: Wat Muang, Wat Chang, and Wat Chinawārām. The details of each are given under the respective headings. I was in no position to press our point during this iteration of the grant. However, I believe with the right social capital, such as that of a prestigious local partner, that it might be possible to negotiate access.

Temples in Samut Sākhōn Province

Wat Sirimongkhon วัดศรีมงคล

Wat Sirimongkhon was the first temple we visited. I had made a trip to the temple before the start of the project, when I had come across references to some unique historical texts in the collection at Wat Sirimongkhon, as I mentioned above. In the 1980s, a certain Nai Thīra Songsak printed two historical poems whose originals, he said, were in the Sirimongkhon collection.

The temple stands in a large compound at the side of the river. Several wooden rest houses lined the shore. The main hall had a number of small rooms built off to the sides where monks lived. Unusually among the temples we visited, there were both Thai Mon and Burma Mon monks living at this temple, and most of the lay people milling about appeared to be from Burma, probably working in the nearby seafood processing factories which we could occasionally smell. The presence of Burma Mons made the task of going through the manuscripts rather easier in that they had actual reading skills. Also probably because of the presence of the Burma Mons, there is a sizeable Burmese-style hall near the river, complete with Burmese images and iconography. To the side of the main hall stands a large open-air

building used for funeral services. Often community women would be in part of that space preparing food or offerings.

The temple has a sizeable collection of Mon-language palm-leaf manuscripts, which were kept in an image room. Approximately five wooden and glass cases contain the manuscripts, which are hemmed in by altar furniture and images. Once the abbot agreed to let us examine the manuscripts, however, it did not take the monks who gathered to help very much time to give us access them. We went through most of the bundles of manuscripts, the majority of which were religious.

I kept an eye out for the texts which Nai Thīra had mentioned, but found no evidence of them. It is possible that the texts, which were fairly short, are somewhere in the bundles of mixed texts. It is also possible that Nai Thīra created the texts, perhaps based loosely on what he had read elsewhere. On the other hand, there were some unexpected finds, such as the Dhammacetī text from Wat Saladaeng Neua, which appears to be connected to a collection of historical texts published in Nonthaburi in 1911, and another text which appears to be a historical poem.

Wat Ko? วัดเกาะ

We visited Wat Ko? twice. On the first trip, we spoke with the abbot, who agreed to let us see the collection. We had to coordinate with the particular monk who was in charge of the collection, which was kept in his room (see photographs for details).

The collection at Wat Ko? was one of those which was partly kept in a way not easily accessible: there were three cabinets, one of which could be opened easily, and another which was blocked by statuary and altar furniture. A third cabinet, with glass doors held what the guardian told us were only religious texts, so we did not look at those texts. All texts were kept in wrapping cloths in various states of decay. I went through a sample of the texts in the first two cabinets.

Over the course of several hours, I went through as many texts as I could but did not find any of immediate interest for this iteration. There was the usual mix of texts in Mon, but also some in Khom, and one illustrated *kammavācā* text (written in the ‘tamarind seed’ style hand).

Points of interest, which I photographed:

- Examples of unusual handwriting
- Donor names
- Etchings done on the edges of the manuscript
- Handwritten commentary in what appears to be a Burma Mon hand
- A few works with the term <PRAWAH> in the title. I could not identify this is a native Mon term and suspect it to be Thai or possibly Khmer (the *PRA*- prefix found in those two languages is not found in Mon)

There were several bundles of ‘mixed texts’.

Titles included:¹

Pātimokkha
Skem Suttasaṅgh
Prakuhih Smaḥ

¹ Unicode fonts are not fully compatible with Word, so that many of the characters needed for typing Mon will not appear correctly. Given that this survey is not meant to be indicative and a full record, I have provided only the Romanization. My use of V and W are not wholly consistent – I use the former for Pāli and Sanskrit words and the latter for native words. The letter and pronunciation for both are the same in Mon.

Prakuih Tambuih
 Prakuih Koraka
 Prakuih Akhyāt
 Sattamaṅgala Dippanī
 Slapat Mattakunnalī
 Slapat Sujjāt
 Slapat Dhaw Pucchā kuiw Visajjana
 Prakuih Samhaḥ Yāy Puiy Konṅāk [?] Yākā
 Prakuih Kruit
 Pāḷi Prakuih Uṅhāt
 Prakuih Kārakata
 Pāḷi Prakuih Tambuit
 Dhātu Kathā 8 tnaḥ
 Dukkadukka Pathān 5 tnaḥ
 Kathā Vattu 6 tnaḥ
 Yamik Dcām tnaḥ
 Skem Mhāwaṅ 1 2 4 5 6 7 [3 missing – this is the *Mahāvamsa* and may be worth
 digitizing
 later]
 Prakuih Pathān
 Tnoh Mettā
 Slapat Kyāk Ceh Nu Swaw
 Slapat Paduit ʔuit Cah Bā Khan
 Lik Gacem Dāk Mit
 Pali Dhaw Lniṁ Gāthā
 Culawan Chatthama wag
 Jujapaw Pañjama wag
 Chakhattiyya Dwāda 11 wag
 Himawan dutiya
 Prakuih Wibhaṅ
 Nagaroppavesan
 Anān
 Slapat Tuiṅ Rat
 Kummā Dhaw Attha Wagga
 Jāt Can 6 Kummā
 Slapat Sammāsambuddha Cetī
 Prakuih Puggala Paññatti Catuttha wag
 Prakuih Dhammasaṅgaṇī [sic] pathama wag
 Prakuih Tittatitta Pathān
 Nissaya [sic]
 Pāḷi Sandhi
 Rājāpaw 9 Kadasa Khan
 Dasa Wuiw pathama khan
 Jujaka Pabba Khaṇḍa Wagga
 Nan Mahāwan Sattama
 Mhāwaṅṅa Khaṇḍa
 Maddī Paw Nava Khan
 Mahārāja Pabba Khaṇḍa
 Slapat 9 Kaccam Maṅ Wat Ñat Wat
 Nagarop Tera [?] 11 Wag

Pathama Sambodhi
Dhaw Sṛaḥ Dwā Pi
Patham Widhura
ธรรมมัสสวนะมัยปญญกริยา
Sarup Abhidhaw
Skem Suttasaṅgh

Wat Cet Riw วัดเจ็ดริ้ว

Our contact was Acān Bang’ōn, whom I had been in contact with before the start of the grant. She is the headmistress of the school on the temple grounds and was instrumental in our first digitization session and in introducing me to other members of the Thai Mon community.

The grounds were very large, and included a typical Mon-style cetī close to the canal, several large empty spaces, an older wooden main hall, a crematorium with a large shedded area for funeral ceremonies, a then the grounds of the school. The cetī featured some images made in Burma and had a sign up in Mon, *haḷot hanop ñi* ‘please take off your shoes’. The grounds of the school also had some Mon-language signs up, written in a Thai-Mon hand.

Acān Bang’ōn took us over to meet the head abbot in one of the smaller, newer buildings off to the side of the main hall. He was busy working with several community members to wrap up prizes for a competition to be held at the school in the next few days. He readily gave us permission to go upstairs to see the collection.

Upstairs there was, however, almost nothing. There were a few glass cases filled with printed, Thai-language books. I did not see any Mon-language palm-leaf manuscripts. Acān Bang’ōn directed my attention to a wooden manuscript casket which contained the medical texts that we digitized. Carved into the casket was:

sakkarāt lñimḥ bā dcām coh pi cān dapmañ snām
ma yhem mi whan dah dakā

‘year 1283 [1918]
Ma Shem, Mi Hwon were the donors’

Affixed to the inside lid was a list of Mon-language writing beginning with the name of a text, *Slapat Dhaw Sāmha 12*, followed by the names of donors, but also possibly names of other Pāli-language texts, although the writing is rather faded. In any case, no other texts were in evidence.

Wat Cet Riw was one of the few temples where we found out much about the community or the collection, as described above.

Wat Uthayārām วัดอุทยาาราม

We met the abbot, who told us there were no manuscripts.

Wat Thammacetī Siriphat วัดธรรมเจดีย์ศิริพิพัฒน์

We visited the temple, but there were no manuscripts.

Wat Rātsatthākrayārām วัดราชฤๅศรีธากระยาาราม

We made two visits over the course of the grant. The first time we went with Acān Bang’ōn after our first meeting with her at Cet Riw. The head monk was away and so we could not see the collection. We did a site inspection. The *mukh* (archway) was adorned with Mon writing, and there were a few signs in Mon around the compound. Some points of

interest were an extensive number of Buddha images from Burma, and also images of the Burmese (not Mon) *nat* (spirit) Bo Bo Gyi, who apparently enjoys a certain fame in Thailand. There was a bilingual Thai Mon and Burmese sign *hamñ dāk, peintha* for “toilet.”

On the second visit, the abbot was there and we chatted with him. It turned out that the abbot of Kyāk Soe Mon Temple in Rangoon (whom I know) was of the same teacher lineage. The abbot (of Wat Rātsatthākrayārām) pointed to a picture above the reception room and explained that the monk in the picture, was either the founder of the temple or one of its earliest abbots in the late nineteenth century and had come over from Burma to act as head monk. He apparently travelled back and forth between Burma repeatedly over the years. It was not clear, however, whether the temple was founded then or had been in existence earlier.

The head monk described the collection but did not actually let us see it. He said that the texts were all religious and that the monks still used them. Therefore the exact number and the contents of the texts are unknown. Our conversation was cordial and the head monk was interested in our project. He even called out one of the Shan monks from Burma in residence to have a conversation with me in Burmese. On the other hand, by that point, I had heard at one other temple that the manuscripts were in use, which was definitely a polite way of rebuffing us. I am inclined to think that the collection was there more mostly, if not entirely, religious texts. I am not sure whether to take the abbot’s words at face value or whether it would be worth trying to gain access to the collection with some other means.

Temples in Rātburgi Province

Wat Muang วัดม่วง

Wat Muang is at the heart of a cluster of temples all located within a short distance of each other. The compound is extensive, including a sizeable museum (with displays presenting a history, in Thai, of the Mon presence in what is now Thailand); grounds for fairs and such activities; a building where community women weave (there is also small restaurant); and the actual temple buildings.

We visited Wat Muang several times, both in its own right and on the way to other nearby temples. We spoke with the village headwoman and eventually even the abbot himself, who spoke somewhat evasively of the manuscripts still being “in use.” It gradually became clear that we would not be allowed to see the collection. In fact, it appears that the collection and library may not be open to the public at all. Acān Bussaba, a retired official from the Ministry of Education, had already surveyed (but not photographed) the collection and printed a catalogue, a copy of which I have. There appeared to be several hundred titles, both in manuscript and printed form. A number looked very promising. I was in no position to request access to the collection, although with a proper local partner, we may be able to gain access.

The Mon name of the temple is *Bhā Kruk*, which has the same meaning as the Thai name, “Mango Temple.”

Wat Yai Nakhorn Chum วัดใหญ่ นครชุมน์

Wat Yai is part of a cluster of temples, and is just across the river from Wat Muang. We visited Wat Yai several times before actually being able to see anything. The abbot had been sick, and so it was not until towards the end of the grant that we finally got to see the collection. On one of our visits, we found several monks visiting, so I chatted with them briefly in Mon. The temple grounds had some beautiful banyan trees, intricately and

delicately carved spirit houses, a few signs in Mon, and another statue of the Burmese *nat*, Bo Bo Gyi.

On our final visit, I was given access to the collection. The room where the manuscripts are kept is behind the image platform of the main temple. Cip, as a woman, was not allowed inside the area, something which has happened before on a few occasions. There were two glass cases full of manuscripts kept in wrappers. I estimate there were only perhaps two dozen manuscripts, which were not in any kind of order. I surveyed them briefly and they were all of a religious nature.

Wat Makhām (Rātburi) วัดมะขาม

We visited the temple twice, which is right near Wat Yai and Wat Muang. On our first visit, the abbot was not there, and so we spoke at some length with the groundskeeper. A few weeks later, we made contact with the abbot. He was very encouraging and allowed us free reign of the collection, which was kept in one large wooden cabinet. All the manuscripts were Mon-language palm leaf manuscripts, and were wrapped in orange monks' robes.

This was one of the very few collections which had any kind of attempts at numbering or cataloguing, as described above under 'On Site Records'. This was the temple where I found some slips with some titles and some numbers, written in a Burma Mon hand, which I realized was the hand of my friend Nai Sunthorn. These slips had been made in the early 2000s under the project of Dr Emmanuel Guillon. The slips, like the wrappers and manuscripts themselves, were partly disintegrating.

We went through all the bundles. In addition to a fair number of more-or-less complete manuscripts, there was also a substantial number of texts out of order. I made a list of as many texts as I could identify:

Maddī Paw Kaṇḍām [sic] Nava
Sakka Pabbam̄ Khaṇḍam̄
Kummāra Paw Khaṇḍam̄ (dcām̄)
Slapat Dhaw Pḍai [?]
Mahāwaṇṇa Pabbam̄, Yañ Nan Mahāwan, Mnuṛm̄ Imih kāthā
Dhulawaṇṇa Khaṇḍam̄ (Ma Ñhuk, Mi Brai [names of donors with unusual Mon names])
Wanappawesana Khaṇḍam̄
Himawan Kāthā Klam̄, 4 Gāthā
Pālipāti Muk Ḍot
Mahosadha tat.hiya, Saṅghamma catut.ha Wassadānapati 3
Slapat Lokividu
Prakuih Sārasaṅghāha Sam̄m̄ De[pa]
Prakuih Kathā Vatthu 5, 3
Prakuih Tikkatikka Pathān 6 tnaḥ
Prakuih Dukka Pathān 7 tnaḥ
Nāgarappavesana gwak 3
Dasavara Khaṇḍa Pathamam̄, khan dasa wah
Slapat Lokasamutti 68
Thai-language manuscript
Prakuih Dhammasaṅghaṇī
Slapat Nissamsa Kammathān
Slapat Saṅgāyana Wag Upāli
Slapat Jāt Mhākappin
Slapat Cattamūlananda Kummā
Slapat Nāy Khaṇot [Slapat Lakkhaṇa Paññā]

Mūlakammathān
Slapat Mulinda Bwai Khamnan
Lik Doñ Keh Thaw
Skeṃ Jāt Lñiṃ Gāthā, pathama wag
Sarup Sikkhā Puin
Pathamabodhi, chattama wag
Bodhipaluh, pathama wag
Slapat Aridduhmati [?]
Vanappavesa Khaṇḍa catuttham
Ān Ju Nān pañcamha [sic] wagga, catuttha wagga
Slapat [sic] suc cañ [sic – but also possibly sus wañ]
Slapat Sud [sic] khaṇ
Prakuih Dhammasaṅgaṇī
Prakuih Vibhaṅga
Prakuih Dhātukathā
Prakuih Tikka Pathān
Prakuih Kathā Vattu
Prakuih Sabba Dān
Slapat Nissam sam Pitakat pi
Pāḷi Parājikaṇḍa
Pāṭimokkha Puripuṇṇe [?]
Pāḷibimba Yasodhara pathama wag
Slapat nū mwai duiw cah
Trāy slapat prui, tattiyya
Prakuih Dhammasaṅgaṇī pathama wag
Lik Pāramī kān [sic]
Pathama Sambodhi
Maddī Pubbaṃ Khaṇḍa
Nārada Jātakam
Skeṃ Jāt Mahosadha
Slapat Dhāt Smiṃ Wesantaw, pathama, tatiya wagga
Sakeṃ Sabbadān
Pwam Slapat Māleyya The
Slapat Wibhaṅ dutiyya
Slapat Pubbasam paṇap
Abhidhaw
Kyaṃ Thup
Mahāwaṅ pathama
Trāy khaṅkhā dutiya wak
Slapat Mahā Sammaya
Skeṃ Surabha kummā tattiya
Skeṃ Maṅ.gala Dippāṇī, dutiyya wag
Muggala Paṇap Catuttha phuk [sic – Thai term]
Vidhura tatiya
Saddavutti dutiyya
Slapat Mhāthe Buddhaghosa
Slapat Acī Reṅ Kyāk Lguṅ
Lapat [sic] Sabbapamā

Slapat nhāw rāw

Wat Khao Chawng Phrān วัดเขาช่องพราน

At first glance, this temple built up against a hill, appeared to be fairly typically Thai and fairly new. On closer inspection, however, we saw a Burmese/Mon style *ceti* (most Thai Mon temples have this as a distinguishing feature, even if all the other architecture, especially if it has been rebuilt recently, is in central Thai style). I found a hand-written sign in a Thai Mon hand following Thai Mon usage: <KÑA GATHO? PAMÑ SU KŪ SNĀM TÑAI KTUIW MNIH>, which apparently means ขอเชิญทอดผ้าป่าวันเดือนปีเกิด in Thai or ‘Cast a *phā pā* for your birthday’ in English, in reference to a custom related to monk’s robes.

We met the abbot, who let me into the part of the main hall where the manuscripts were kept. There appeared to be a few things, and probably more in a casket, but the abbot appeared to be somewhat reluctant to have me look. The palm leaf manuscripts were mixed Mon and Thai. He did allow me to look at a few. Titles included:

Slapat Lokut Tuiw ñbho [uncertain]
Slapat Sabba Ptai [uncertain] Dān
Slapat Cīreñ Bandhasim Abandhasim

There appeared to be no non-religious texts, and so this temple was not a priority for this iteration. A few days later I met the abbot at the monk’s funeral at Wat Khongkhārām.

Wat Khongkhārām วัดคงคาราม

Wat Khongkhārām is one of the best-known Thai Mon temples in Thailand. In addition to its large compound, there is a sizeable museum which includes a substantial collection of Thai Mon manuscripts. The Princess Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre has been part of an on-going project to digitize these manuscripts. These efforts—which appear to be not yet completed—have led to the creation of a catalogue. The images have begun to appear online on the SAC website. Included in this collection are a number of the non-religious, ‘secular’ texts which form the focus of this EAP grant. I understand that this includes several historical texts.

It took several visits (including two nights on the occasion of a monk’s funeral, as described in the main and supplemental reports) and repeated conversations to establish the following: I would not be granted access to the manuscripts; the historical manuscripts that I was interested in have already been digitized, although it is not clear that all of the secular texts have been digitized; and that the SAC project digitization standards are not as high as those of the EAP.

For this iteration, I did not pursue any kind of digitization. Perhaps in a future iteration, it might make sense to see about reshooting some of the images in a lossless format.

The Mon name of the temple was *Bhā Adow*, “Middle Temple.” As in a few other temples, there was a sign in the compound giving a brief history of the temple, which said that the exact dating and founding of it were uncertain, but that it was some time at the end of the Ayutthaya (1350-1767AD) or beginning of the Thonburi (1767-1782 AD) periods. Some Mons had “migrated” along the Mae Klong river and arrived to the north of Wat Phothārām. Subsequent kings donated monks robes to the temple.

Wat Sai Ārīrak วัดไทรอารีรักษ์

This temple is fairly close to Wat Khongkhārām, and so we made several trips there in attempts to make contact with the abbot or any monk. We were told that the abbot was away and could not get ahold of him over the phone. It finally appeared that the temple had no manuscripts.

There were, however, two small points of interest. The first was that there was a sign in Thai explicitly forbidding women to climb on or enter the main hall (bot in Thai). We had come across similar strictures in other places, but this was one of the most explicit.

The other is the name of the temple. A monk at another temple explained that although the first part of the name *sai*, appears to be a perfectly legitimate Thai word meaning “sand,” perhaps in reference to how close the temple is to the river. The name is in fact a rendering of the Mon word *say* “bee” in reference to the fact that there had been beekeepers and honey production in previous decades. We saw no evidence of that now.

Wat Phothārām วัดโพธาราม

We had been told repeatedly that Wat Phothārām was a prominent Thai Mon temple located close to Wai Sai Ārīrak. When we visited, the monks we spoke to did not know it was a Mon temple and said there were no Mon manuscripts. In fact, the temple appeared to be serving the local Chinese community. It is possible that we were misled, that we spoke to the wrong monks, but in any case the temple was not a priority for this iteration.

Temples in Pathumthānī Province

Wat Sālādaeng Neua วัดศาลาแดงเหนือ

We visited this temple several times. I had already visited the temple once some time around 2013 or so, not long after the floods of 2011. I had spoken to a village elder who showed us how high the water had risen – he house was next to the river (as is the temple) and the high water mark nearly reached the floor of her house (Thai and Mon homes are traditionally built on stilts). We had also gone to see the temple library, a recent, concrete-and-tile building on stilts.

This temple was somewhat unusual in that although there were several monks on the premises, we did not have to speak to them to gain access to the collection – a group of about three or four men in early old age appeared to be the guardians. We saw the separate temple library. The guardians could not find the key; we offered to buy them a new lock if they wanted to cut the old one off, but they were able to open the wooden doors and let us see through the still-locked grill that in fact the texts were not of interest. Even though we could not gain direct access to the texts, we could see that the palm-leaf manuscripts had gilded edges—gilding is applied only to sacred texts, usually in Pāli.

It was, rather, the few texts which the guardians brought out to us that were of interest and which were digitized. These included portions of a historical palm leaf manuscript (which was badly curved and therefore hard to photograph correctly) and several handwritten *parabaik* texts.

The main challenge was that we could not get a clear sense of the size of this informal library. As is the case with most Thai Mon temples, there are several buildings in the compound, but even within one structure, “rooms” are often built in a way that they are more like a separate building. On our last visit, the guardians let us into one of these rooms, which was in total disarray as there appeared to be painting and renovation going on. This was the room where the historical manuscript had been. It was not clear whether there were more manuscripts in that room, or elsewhere on the compound. Even direct questions did not clarify the situation: when asked, the guardians did not have a clear answer. My reading was that this was not deliberate evasiveness.

A final note is that one of the guardians in early old age appeared to be able to read Mon and could sing a number of songs in Mon. I had not found that elsewhere in the communities we visited. I would like to record him in future. In any case, it would be worth visiting the

temple again to see whether there are any more historical manuscripts, or if just possibly more leaves of the one I digitized might be found somewhere.

The name of the temple in Mon is *Bhā Prān*.

Wat Muang (Pathumthānī) วัดม่วง ปทุมธานี

We came across this small river-side temple not far from Wat Sālādaeng Neua by accident. Although it appeared to be a Mon temple, there were no Mon manuscripts.

Wat Makhām (Pathumthānī) วัดมะขาม (ปทุมธานี)

Wat Makhām is yet another riverside temple, this one fairly well-known because it has a shrine dedicated to a Chinese deity. Many Sino-Thais and Chinese tourists visit the shrine to make offerings and ask for help – there was considerable infrastructure, including a dock, food stalls and other hawkers to take advantage of the business the Chinese drew.

We made contact with the abbot, who was interested in having us visit and look through the collection. There were two remarkable points about Wat Makhām: the first is that the Wat houses a rather sizeable library of Thai-language books, apparently for the use of the community.

Upstairs from the book library was the collection of manuscripts in Thai, Mon, and Khom. Manuscripts included *parabaik* and palm leaves. There were eight cabinets filled with manuscripts: 1) one glass one filled with *parabaik*; 2) one small open cabinet filled with random manuscripts, which mostly appeared to be printed Thai-language manuscripts; 3) four wooden cabinets filled with palm leaf manuscripts wrapped in cloths; 4) and two cabinets filled with printed (Thai-language) books. Additionally, there were two “thrones” (the seats monks traditionally sat on when delivering sermons) covered with wooden manuscript caskets, most of which seemed to be empty. As is often the case in monasteries, there were a lot of cats wandering around both levels of the library.

Nai Phisān, mentioned above, had apparently come with a team from the National Library in Bangkok to sort through the manuscripts. The team had tagged the *parabaik* and most of the manuscripts, although they had not created a catalogue for the entire collection. This tagging made our work considerably easier because we could see at a glance that none of the manuscripts were of immediate interest, but some of the *parabaik* were. We came back to digitize two of the beautifully illustrated *parabaik* on a second trip. We confirmed repeatedly with Nai Phisān that he and the team had not photographed any of the manuscripts in this collection. It may be useful also to digitize the Khom manuscripts.

The abbot, although friendly and chatty, had little information to give us regarding the history of the temple or the collection.

The Mon name of the temple is *Bhā Maṅglon*, which has the same meaning in Thai and Mon, “tamarind.”

Wat Khōk วัดโคก

Wat Khōk is a small temple also next to the river, and had the prototypical Mon style *ceṭī*, which however appeared to have been rebuilt recently in a somewhat Thai-like style. It was not clear – either the temple sold off part of the compound, or the village sold a lot of land right next to the compound where a factory building had been installed. There was a pervasive humming and vibration throughout much of the compound, and a faint smell of either plastic or possibly food which when noticed, was actually rather pervasive. There was a small hamlet or subsection of the village between the compound and the river. A concrete pier ran from the compound out to the river, where it was connected to smaller piers which boats could pull up to. Several houses on stilts split off from the pier, included two beautiful

wooden houses, one abandoned for some time, one more recently. A giant banyan tree provided shade.

We made contact with the abbot, a man of few words who appeared to understand a little Mon but could not read or write it, agreed to let us inspect the contents of the one wooden cabinet. The manuscripts were wrapped in cloths, which were in the usual state of partial decay. Many of the cloths were pieces of monks' robes, usually a good indication that the texts were religious, and many others had gold edging, which is only applied to religious texts. Our brief inspection of wrapping and unwrapping a few bundles at random revealed religious texts. I photographed the title of one text:

Slapat ṅāy Pnak Re

which had been written on the first leaf in pencil in what appeared to be a Burma Mon hand. Another text was the:

Dhāt Akkhyāt kuiw Kruit

Since this was one of the first temples we visited, we did not linger as we were still learning to gauge the amount of time to spend at each versus the total number of temples we would visit. It would be worth visiting again to do a closer inspection.

Wat Metārāṅ วัดเมตดารังค์

We visited Wat Metārāṅ three times. At the edge of the compound along the river, there was a large project, perhaps the (re)building of a landing or some kind of flood protection. The compound and buildings were full of cats and dogs, inside and out. The main building, where the manuscripts were kept, was congenially disorderly as the monks and their attendants appeared to be either repairing or expanding part of the building. There was a picture of the Mon military and culture hero, Rājādhirāj, in a cabinet in the main shrine room.

On our first visit we spoke with the collection guardians, who explained that a group from the Thammakāy sect had been to the monastery recently. The group had put new wrappers on the manuscript and digitized the manuscripts. The monks did not have any contact information for the Thammakāy, and a visit to their website did not provide an immediately obvious link to any digital images. Some Thai spoke in negative terms about the Thammakāy, which I cannot confirm, but the group appears to have the means to support Thai scholars to do this sort of work, including some active in the UK.

The temple had one wooden cabinet of palm leaf manuscripts mostly in Mon, but with a few in Khom and Thai. The work of the Thammakāy meant that most of the manuscripts were labelled, although in many cases reading the names alone did not give enough of a clue to the contents (and in any case I was still learning about what some of the titled meant). Given the small size of the collection, we unwrapped and inspected every manuscript. I digitized several, but left the multi-volume Pāli grammar for a future major grant. We digitized the Vessantara manuscript in the collection.

This temple was, incidentally, the scene of the technological glitch discussed in the narrative report. We returned to the temple to take pictures of the manuscripts and set up our equipment, only to find that the trial version of the Canon software expired, which resulted in us having to travel into town, during which trip Cip's car broke down and I continued on into town on the train. It was only on our third trip that we were able to complete the planned digitization.

Wat Phlap Sutthāwāt วัดพลับพลาท้าวาส

We visited Wat Phlap Sutthāwāt twice – the first time the abbot was not available. On our second visit, the abbot explained that they had very few manuscripts. He had one *parabaik* which appeared to be a partly *nissaya* medical text, although it was not very well preserved. The colophon appeared to have some information on the donors. I took a picture of a sentence which leapt out at me because it had an example of a Thai Mon syntactic construction not found in Burma Mon, reading:

...wācī ducruit [pan] ymu hā hā wācī kampan ymu...

This repetition of *hā* is a way to say “or” in Thai Mon.

In the event because of time constraints, we did not digitize this manuscript. The main hall of the main building had some rather fine wooden carving with the names of donors etched into the wood.

Wat Chāng วัดฉาง

We visited the temple twice. The first time the monk we spoke with told us that there was a collection, but said the custodian was away. He gave us the custodian’s phone number. After a few attempts, Cip reached him, but his vague answers indicated that he was not interested in having us come around again.

Wat Bāng Luang วัดบางหลวง

The temple is just off a canal and has a dramatic pedestrian bridge crossing over from the compound into the village. There is even a school in the compound, but the monk we spoke with said they had no manuscripts. Interestingly, there was a carved sign up telling the history of the main hall. The first line said, “The history of this temple is not clear, but oral history says that it was first built during the Ayutthaya era and had been called Wat Singh.” There was no mention of Mons.

Wat Chinawārām วัดชินวราราม

The third collection we could not see was that of Wat Chinawārām. The first time we visited, we met the abbot. Despite being probably only in his early 50s, he could speak Mon and I even chatted with him a bit in Mon. He agreed to let us see the manuscripts, but asked us to come back another day. In Thailand, laypeople visit temples to buy protective or apotropaic amulets to have them blessed. The abbot appeared to have a number of such visitors the day we visited. As agreed, a few weeks later, we returned to the temple, only for him to tell us that a team from the National Library had just asked to come and put the collection ‘into books,’ (meaning to put loose leaves into order). The abbot thought it better if we did not look through the collection just then.

Wat Chompuwēk วัดชมภูเวก

We met Nai Phisān here. Through his work, he was familiar with the collection and told us that all the texts were religious. The temple is, however, of interest for other reasons: it has the usual Mon-style *ceṭī*, but also has a main hall which still had some of the original frescoes painted on the walls. There were a few places where the Mon script was legible; the pictures (done in what to my eye looked to be Thai style) were sadly rather degraded. The temple also had an impressive shrine to some of the local guardian spirits, although the paraphernalia associated with that was wholly Thai. Before we pressed on, the groundskeeper gave us a *tisane* made with the leaves of one of the large trees growing in the compound.

Wat Thāi Ko? Yai วัดท้ายเกาะใหญ่

We visited this riverside temple to find an enormous sow wallowing under one of the side buildings. It was so large that at first I did not realize it was real. The compound features a golden Mon-style *ceṭī* built with some Thai flourishes.

We spoke with the monks, who were friendly and forthcoming, and brought out a few texts from a store room. We did not actually see the collection and so could not gauge how many they had, although they said they did not have many. The palm leaf manuscripts they showed us were religious, but the actual texts were all mixed up with only sections of coherent texts. No one at the temple could read Mon.

Temples in Samut Prākān Province

Wat Āsā Songkhram วัดอาสาสงคราม

Despite the sizeable compound, a temple school, and Mon writing on *mukh* archway, there were no manuscripts kept here. The Mon name of the temple is *Bhā Kruing Sla*

Wat Khan Lat วัดคันลัด

We met people in the compound, including some older women who spoke some Mon in the main hall. There were no manuscripts. The compound has a museum, which had some interesting displays. There was also a library with a few printed books, including a funeral volume, a few pages of which I photographed. The man in charge of the museum walked us through the small village and showed us a few houses. The giant overpass of the highway and bridge hard by the village shattered what would have been the pleasant atmosphere of the place where the river comes together with the sea.

Wat Songtham Wihān วัดทรงธรรมวิหาร

Within walking distance of Wat Khan Lat stands Wat Songtham. A young, kindly abbot told us what he knew: the temple was founded by men of the name who had migrated to Pathumthānī before moving to Samut Prākān some time during the “second reign” (1767-1824). He then let us into the manuscript storage room, where we saw no fewer than three large wooden chests filled with manuscript bundles. I opened several bundles at random, only to find that they were all out of order. It was not simply that the bundles held many fragmentary texts, as we had seen at Wat Makhām (Rāṭburi) and at Wat Sirimongkhon, but the bundles appeared to be all leaves thrown together randomly.

I am not yet sure how I might approach the logistics of arranging the necessary expertise in Thailand: many texts pagination; texts in Pāli or with Pāli-language sections would require Mons also literate in that language; and most importantly, it would probably require gathering a sizeable team of people literate in Mon, most likely from Burma, and arranging for them to come to Thailand.

We did not linger because the task before us was so Herculean. The abbot gave me a large hardback book about the history of the temple. The name of the temple was written in Mon as *Bhā Phra Khrū*, but this is clearly a Mon rendering of a Thai title of respect for a monk.

Wat Khae วัดแค

Wat Khae had no manuscripts, although the abbot directed us to the home of a village elder. Heavy greenery shaded the village paths and a large school of fish swam in the canal. We did, however, meet a village elder, Nai Sukrī, who could tell us a little about the village and community. During the Second Reign (1767-1824AD), 240,000 Mons [the number seems rather high] were allowed to come from Burma and settle in villages in what is now Central Thailand. He told us that in his community, people under age sixty-five cannot read

or speak; those who can speak can use language for “simple things” but cannot use what he called “book language.” The people were farmers in places like Bāng Phlī and Samrōng. They would typically have two homes – one in the village and then closer to the fields. Everyone would come back to the village at Songkran (the Buddhist New Year).

Home of Mr Thawatphong Monda, Bang Kadi

บ้านของจ.ส.ท.ธวัชพงศ์มอญตะ บางกะดี

Mr Thawatphong, who is in service to the palace, has set up a community museum as part of his home. He has on display a variety of artifacts, some from Burma, including musical instruments and a few manuscripts, none of which was particularly rare of interest for this iteration of the project.

Other Locations

For this iteration, we were unable to visit the Mon temples in the Chiang Mai-Lamphun area, which several people told us also had Mon manuscripts.

Wat Amphawan, Lopburi วัดอัมพวัน ลพบุรี

Lopburi is a four-hour return trip from Bangkok. We ended up visiting three times. On our first trip, we got the contact information of the abbot. On the second trip, I did not realize until after we had arrived that Cip had not in fact contacted the abbot ahead of time. Our trip was not a waste of time, however, as we had the opportunity to visit a village elder, the 98-year old Nai Campī, who showed us some of the books of Pāli and Mon chant which he had handwritten both in Mon and in rendering of Mon pronunciation using Thai script. Although a bit hard of hearing, he was lucid and active. On our third and final trip, he showed up more of the books (which are of some historical interest and might be worth digitizing in future). He invited us to the daily sutra recitation at a nearby temple, where several community members—none probably younger than 70s—met daily, chatted in Mon, and chanted. I was heartened to see Nai Campī ride off on his scooter after the session.

On the third trip we gained access to the modest collection of manuscripts, which are kept in one of the outbuildings of the school which is on the far side of the temple compound. No more than a dozen manuscripts were kept in the office room. Leafing through them, there was nothing of especial interest.

When we asked about the history of the temple and community, we were directed to a sign outside the main hall which said that the temple was under the Thammayut sect or lineage, and that the temple was founded in 1766, although a structure was built a few years earlier (none of the extant structures looked to be anywhere near that old). The sign said something of some of the other temples in the area, giving mostly technical details. Interestingly, the sign identified the people first as “Thais of Rāmañ ancestry,” suggesting that it was erected in an earlier period when identifying clearly as Mon may have been politically problematic or somehow unpatriotic. The sign also provided the name of the temple in Mon script, *Bhā Smaw* “South Temple,” although the Mon was slightly misspelt.