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► **To cite this version:**

Frederic Pain. Brāhmaṇa as an honorific in 'Indianized' Southeast Asia. A Linguistic Approach. 2014.
hal-01009585

HAL Id: hal-01009585

<https://hal.science/hal-01009585>

Preprint submitted on 18 Jun 2014

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**"BRĀHMAṆA" AS AN HONORIFIC
IN 'INDIANIZED' MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA
A LINGUISTIC APPROACH¹**

Frédéric Pain

Academia Sinica (Institute of Linguistics, Taipei)

KULeuven (Belgium) – LACITO (France)

With the editorial assistance of Jonathan Evans, *Academia Sinica*

Abstract. This article demonstrates that the Old Khmer *b/vraḥ* originates from a syllabic reduction of Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* via monosyllabization, a widespread diachronic phenomenon among the Mon-Khmer languages of Mainland Southeast Asia and will show that this term must have been originally used as an honorific for deities and, consequently for royalty. We then respectfully disagree with two other current hypotheses explaining the etymology of this word, that is *b/vraḥ* is an autochthonous Mon-Khmer word or, according to the second hypothesis, that *b/vraḥ* originates in the Sanskrit/ Pāli word *vara-* "excellent, splendid, noble". After being borrowed from Sanskrit, the Old Khmer *braḥ* spread via contact: 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 article are twofold: firstly, we shall propose a pattern for the historical relationships between different peoples of Mainland Southeast Asia; then, we shall propose a first phase of Indianization in Southeast Asia, namely a local reconnotation of Indo-Aryan terms according to the 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

0.- Introduction

The origin of the Old Khmer *vraḥ/ braḥ* is still debated among experts. Most dictionaries, bilingual or monolingual (Myanmar Language Commission 1978-80; Headley 1977; Reinhorn [1970] 2001), trace the word from the Sanskrit or Pāli word *vara-* meaning "excellent, splendid, noble" (Renou *et al.* [1932] 1987:627 for Sanskrit; Davids & Stede [1921] 2001:602 for Pāli)." The other commonly held view is that *braḥ* is an autochthonous Mon-Khmer word (Shorto 2006 ; Vickery 1998). This study demonstrates that *v/braḥ* originated in a reduction of the Sanskrit word *brāhmaṇa* (> *braḥ*). We also find that the Old Khmer *v/braḥ* was borrowed in Thai under the written form *braḥ* [p^hráʔ]. From the Thai *braḥ* [p^hráʔ] may have originated the Burmese *bhurā*: [p^həjá:]/[p^húá:], the written form of which was borrowed by the Tai Ahōm *phūra*: [p^hra:ʔ²].

¹ We would like to thank Michel Ferlus (EHESS, Paris), James Matisoff (Berkeley), John Okell (SOAS, London), Guillaume Jacques (CRLAO, Paris), Alexis Michaud (LACITO, Paris), Michel Antelme (INALCO, Paris) and James Kirby (University of Edinburgh) for their helpful and insightful comments on an earlier draft of this article. All errors are our sole responsibility. The paper was funded by the NSC Grant #100-2628-H-001-008-MY4 (PI Jonathan Evans).

² Unless otherwise mentioned, we give the modern phonetic forms.

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

The semantics of the Old Khmer *v/brah* is not obvious. Was it originally an honorific term of address, or was it a noun meaning "brahmin," "Buddha" or some other deity? This study draws the conclusion that *brah* was initially used as an honorific. To support our hypothesis, we rely on two arguments: (1) *brah* was used as an honorific prefix in its first epigraphic attestations, and (2) there are distinct terms to mean the "Brahmin."

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. The word *brah* precedes names of high-ranking officials as well as those of deities.

We 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 (1067 AD); it is consistently attested that way until present usage in Modern Khmer [prɛəh pùt] "Buddha" (or [prɛəh ʔəiso:] "Śiva," [prɛəh prùm] "Brahmā"). This would indicate that both terms 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 578 AD *vrah kamratān 'añ* "His High Lord." In Old Siamese the Ramkhamhæng stele dated from 1292 AD attests *brah rāmgamhæñ* (side 1, line 10) "The Revered Ramkhamhæng." The first epigraph in Old Burmese, the Myazèdi or Rājakumāra stele (1113 AD) also attests *purhā* used as an honorific prefix: *purhā skhañ* "The Revered Lord, His Lordship" (lines 1, 16, 18, 39).

It is clear that the original 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* could be omitted when the context is clear enough, for example, *brah (buddh)* 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

We must first mention that the role of Brahmins in Southeast Asia was limited to the sphere of the royalty. Their role was primarily to provide some local rulers a new foundation for their power. They were just one of the vectors for 'Power and Knowledge' which allowed some local clans to legitimize, and impose, their power over other clans.

The words *v/brah* and *v/brāhmaṇa* are often found side by side in one edict, which indicates that both terms were semantically distinct; therefore, *v/brah* probably did not mean "Brahmin." Moreover, the title as well as the responsibilities of the Brahmin seem to be lexicalized in the terms *v/brāhmaṇa* or *punṇā*. From an areal perspective, there are two distinct ways to name the Brahmins; a "'Mon-Burmese' area" where the Brahmin is named by the Indo-Aryan term *punya*, etc. meaning "value, merit" on the one hand and a "Khmer-Thai area" where the Brahmin is named with the Sanskrit word *brāhmaṇa* on the other hand.

The Khmer-Thai area utilizes the Sanskrit-Pāli term *brāhmaṇa* to name the Brahmin. This term is still found as such in Modern Khmer and Siamese in its form *brahma[ṇa]* [pɿiam] in Khmer and [pʰra:m] in Siamese.

On the other hand, the "Mon-Burmese area" attests unexpected forms derived from the Sanskrit *punya*, Pāli *puñño* 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 practices³. All Mon or Burmese attestations revolve around the semantics "act of merit, work of merit, meritorious or praiseworthy person."

Old Mon attests *punya* [pʌn] "merit, work of merit" (Shorto 1971:235), obviously from Sanskrit origin, and a semantically similar *puñ* [pun] probably descending from Pāli. The Sanskrit term *punya* gave rise to Old Burmese *phūn* and *'aphun* "wealth, power, work of merit", which originate from the same Sanskrit *punya*⁴, and Modern Burmese *bhun*: [pʰqón] "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* [bəmnaḥ] 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 in Old Burmese *pumṇā/ pumnā* "Brahmin versed in the astrological sciences" (Hla Pe 1967:79), Standard Burmese *puṇṇā*: [pʰqón 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." Only the Sanskrit and Pāli forms are attested, as in Khmer *punya* (*dān*) [bun (t̚ian)] "religious celebration" or in Siamese Pāli *puṇa/ puñña* [bun] "merit, virtue; resulting from meritorious deeds; pure, sacred" (Mc Farland 1960:484; Haas 1964:292).

1.3. *Summing up*

We postulate *braḥ* was originally used as an honorific prefix or term of address before nouns that represent something or someone sacred and divine and by extension the royalty in the quasi-magical or deified status of the royal authority in the old Khmer *ethos*. This Old Khmer use and semantics devolved in Old Siamese and in Old Burmese.

2.- A Mon-Khmer etymon?

Before developing our working hypothesis according to which the Old Khmer *v/braḥ* would be a borrowing from the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa*, it is useful to demonstrate that this term does not belong to the Proto-Mon-Khmer lexical stock.

First of all, H.L. Shorto (2006:524, #2060) connects the Old Khmer *v/braḥ* with the Proto-Mon-Khmer [*braḥ] and glosses it "divine being." However this proposal is problematic. In fact, [*braḥ] is only attested in Khmer and in dialects which have been in long-standing contact with Khmer. The fact [*braḥ] is attested in some Bahnaric dialects

³ It should be noted that Old Mon also attests *brahmano* in non-epigraphic sources (Christian Bauer, p.c.).

⁴ Luce (*ms.* 6574, box 7, folder 44, p. 90).

such *Biat* [brah] "spirit," does not imply a Mon-Khmer origin, because the Bahnaric peoples have been in contact with the Khmers for a very long time; the Bahnaric [brah] is besides rightly identified as a loan from Old Khmer by Sidwell and Jacq (2003:59). We also find it in Katusic (for example in *Chong* [pʰrə̀ʔ pʰüt] "Buddha's statue") or in Khmuic (for example in *Khmu* [praʔ]/[pʰráʔ] "monk") but these terms are late borrowings from Siamese or Lao. Indeed, many Katus or Khmus have access to education by studying in Buddhist monasteries, precisely where the word [pʰráʔ]/[pʰāʔ] is widely used in Siamese or in Lao. The 'avatars' of the Old Khmer *v/brah* are attested in Mon-Khmer and in Thai only in areas which were dominated by the Khmers, a fact which removes support for a Proto Mon-Khmer origin.

Secondly, Pou and Jenner (1980:284-5) postulate an etymology from their hypothesized Mon-Khmer derived word [*b-rah] whose base *rah means "light," hence Old Khmer *brah* brah "bright or shining one." Two objections may be raised. 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 like a Judeo-Christian cultural concept, where "light" may be associated to God (the halo of Christ, the blinding light of Heaven, etc.); however, no similar culture-based semantics can be associated to a Mon-Khmer reality, nor to any Southeast Asian one⁵.

In conclusion, connecting the Old Khmer *brah* with the Mon-Khmer lexical stock is problematic because (1) it is only attested in areas which have been dominated by the Khmers, (2) the derived word [*b-rah] is morphologically impossible and (3) the semantics implied by the derived form corresponds to a Judeo-Christian reality and not a Mon-Khmer one.

3.- Old Khmer *vrah/ brah*

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

(1) Semantics

In Old Khmer (pre-Angkorian and Angkorian, Jenner 2009¹:477 ; 2009²:574), *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 as a prefix preceding divine or royal beings or objects. In Modern Khmer (Headley *et al.* 1977:683)⁶, *brah* [prə̀əh] ([prə̀h] in Trà Vinh Khmer⁷) 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.⁸

⁵ The Thai expression [sɛ̀:ŋ tʰam li:ŋ tʰam] "Light of the Dhamma" is an Indo-Aryan cultural and religious concept and not a Southeast Asian one.

⁶ We don't use the enlarged edition of this dictionary released in 1997, as this enlarged version does not provide etymological data (1997:863).

⁷ We quote some Khmer of Trà Vinh forms (Mekong Delta, Vietnam) because it maintained some Middle Khmer archaic features. Data collected by first author *in situ* during field research in April-June 2011.

⁸ We could multiply the glosses from various dictionaries, but they would teach us nothing more. The *vacanānukram khmæ̀r* (1968-9:807), which connects *brah* with the Pali *vara*, Guesdon (1930:1255-7), Pou (1992:462-3), or Long Seam (2000:546-8) could also be consulted.

Some examples from the Trà Vinh Khmer dialect:
pràh l̀ò:k kr̀ù: (or **pràh saŋ**) "Venerable monk"
pràh p̀ùt "Buddha"
pràh "Buddha" or "image (of Buddha)"
pràh caŋ (or **pràh l̀ò:k kʰɛ:**) "moon"
pràh ʔi:so: "Śiva"

The same meanings are also found in the various languages in which this *braḥ* is attested. As will be addressed in §5, we might nevertheless wonder whether *braḥ* was not originally an honorific used before any sacred, divine or royal objects or being. Indeed, in its first pre-Angkorian attestations, *vraḥ* was used as an honorific and not as a full name, for example in pre-Angkorian epigraphs K.1 (500 śaka, 578 AD) *vraḥ kamratāñ 'añ* "The Venerable Lord," K.664 (500 śaka, 578 AD) *vraḥ kloñ* "The Venerable Master" or still K.728 (600 śaka, 678 AD) *vraḥ śrībhadreśvara* "The Great Śrībhadreśvara." Moreover, an abridged form of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* might have been used for a long time as an honorific in Southeast Asia, especially in the 扶南 *Fúnán* kingdom which allegedly represents the core of the subsequent Khmer states (Ferlus 2005).

(2) Epigraphic attestations

The prefix *v/braḥ* is attested almost four thousand times in the Khmer epigraphy, from K.1 (500 śaka, 578 AD) to K.261 (1561 śaka, 1639 AD). There are more than 3800 attestations of *vraḥ* stretching from K.1 (500 śaka, 578 AD) to K.470 (1249 śaka, 1327 AD). The form *braḥ* is attested more than 150 times between 844 śaka, 922 AD (K.99) and 1561 śaka, 1639 AD (K.261). Other epigraphic attestations, rarer if not marginal, are *vraḥh*, *vrah*, *vrāḥ*, *braḥh*, *brah* and *vras*.

In the next section, we shall demonstrate that *v/braḥ* originates from Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* through a monosyllabization process. We shall also explain why an etymology with the Sanskrit-Pāli *vara-* is not convincing.

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

Our hypothesis consists of deriving *braḥ* from *brāhmaṇa* and is based on three arguments. First, the tendency of the Mon-Khmer languages to monosyllabization, then the retention of the Sanskrit [h] 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 *Fúnán* kingdom, a confederation of Indianized city-states ethnically dominated by the Khmers.

(1) Monosyllabization process

The evolutionary trend of the Mon-Khmer languages⁹, and the languages in contact with Mon-Khmer, is the syllabic reduction from two syllables to one syllable through an intermediary sesquisyllabic stage. The evolution affects both Mon-Khmer words as well as loanwords from Indo-Aryan. The syllable drop can be predicted by the location of stress: as the second syllable is stressed in Mon-Khmer, the first one deletes and when the first syllable is stressed in Indo-Aryan, the second is dropped.

⁹ On the areal process of monosyllabization in Mon-Khmer, see Pain (2012).

In Mon-Khmer (second syllable accented):

Vietic languages

Arem	Việt	gloss
ʔütʰok	tóc	"hair"
ʔăkə:ʔ	cá	"fish"
tăko:k	gốc	"stem"

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

In Khmer:

Trisyllabic Skt. *yavana* "foreigner, Greek" > monosyllabic Khmer *yuon* [jùəŋ] "Vietnamese"

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

In Mon:

Trisyllabic Skt. *vihāra* "monastery" > monosyllabic Mon *bhā* [pʰɛa] "monastery"

Disyllabic Skt. *rāṣṭra* "country" > monosyllabic Mon *raḥ* [rɛh]

The first syllable *brāh-* carries heavier phonetic weight than the last two syllables *-maṇa* because (1) it carries the stress in Indo-Aryan ['brafi-maṇa] and (2) its phonetic structure is reinforced by a medial trill [-r-] and a final laryngeal [-fi].

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

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

Some could object that such a phenomenon would also explain the monosyllabization of the Sanskrit-Pāli *vara-* to the Old Khmer *braḥ*. This counterargument can be properly raised, but it would pass over the retention of the Sanskrit voiced laryngeal [fi] (*brāh-maṇa* [brafi-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 *vraḥ*, *vraḥh* or *braḥ*, *braḥh* and *brah*.¹⁰

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

As we shall see 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 probably politically and ethnically dominated by the Khmers.

¹⁰ The form *vras* with the final voiceless alveolar sibilant attested in K.571 (969 AD) can easily be explained by the change [s] > [h], which is totally 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.

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

The use of a popular reduced form of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* as an honorific seems quite old. Indeed, from the Chinese annals reporting political facts on Indianized Southeast Asia we learn that a reduced form of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* might already 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 AD Fúnán attested at least three rulers whose royal name consisted of a prefixed reduced form of *brāhmaṇa*.¹¹ Ferlus (2005) reconstructs Early Middle Chinese (EMC) [brʌm] for the local title transcribed 范 *fàn* in Chinese.¹² The EMC pronunciation of the first Funanese sovereign's name, 范帥蔓 *fàn shīmàn*, mentioned in the *nánqí-shū* ("History of the Southern Qí" [479-502]) describing facts dating from the third to the fourth centuries AD can be reconstructed [brʌm sri: ma:n] and we can infer from this reconstruction that the transcribed name might have been *brāhm sṛimāra* "His Venerable Highness Māra," as Cœdès (1989:81) thought. In that case, a reduced form of *brāhmaṇa* would have been used as an honorific prefix as early as the third or fourth centuries AD.

We prefer to see in *fàn* the Old Chinese transcription of Sanskrit *brāhm[āṇa]* rather than the god *brahma*. It should be noted that the Brahmins didn't belong to the socio-cultural stock in Southeast Asia, 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 likely lost (if ever had) its Indian connotation and did not have any local sociological root, as demonstrated by Khmer inscriptions which indicate that *there were interethnic and interclass marriages with good levels of interaction between social groupings* (Harris 2005:27). Furthermore, the very word *caturvarṇa* ("the 4 castes") was besides only used rhetorically (Pou 1998:127) and in the Khmer context the word *jāti* meant nothing else than "birth, origin" (Harris *Idem*). 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 and enjoy therefore a position of prestige / power should remind us of this fact. As Pigeaud (1962:IV:8) wrote, the notion of caste in the Old Javanese world was not used in a similar manner to that in India. When dealing with Indian representations in Southeast Asia, one must always question the local use of Indian lexical items (Wolters 1999:109-110)¹³.

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

¹¹ The same title is also attested in 林邑 *Línyì* from the third century to the seventh century.

¹² 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 sɛ naʔ] "Citrasena;" 剎利 *chà lì* [tʃʰɛt li: / kʃʰɛt li:] "kṣatriya;" 烏弋山離 *wū-yì-shān-lí* [ʔɔ lɪk ʃɛ:n li:] "Alexandria." Vickery (2003-4:108) connects this *fàn* with the Old Khmer title *poñ* [ᨀ᩠ᩅᩁᨁᩃᩅ] on the basis of the OC reconstruction by Karlgren (1957) **b'iwəm*. Old Chinese (OC) reconstructions are drawn from Baxter&Sagart (2011); Early Middle Chinese (EMC) and Middle Chinese (MC) reconstructions are from Pulleyblank (1991). All the reconstructions have been slightly modified according to Ferlus (2009).

¹³ See author on that question.

interpreted the rhyme [-ar] (in [sri: mar]) by the EMC rhyme [-a:n] in which the coronal-alveolar articulation of the trill was kept (EMC [sri: ma:n]).¹⁴

The fact that [bram sri: ma:n] is mentioned in the stele of Vō Cạnh in its Sanskrit counterpart *rājā śrīmāra* as an illustrious ancestor by local lords to justify their power should not be surprising; as noted in Bourdonneau (2007:131), one should not underestimate the importance of Fàn Shīmàn's (śri māra) conquests at the turn of the second century AD. Local oral tradition obviously made of him a charismatic figure, as evidenced by the fact that pretending to belong to his descendants seemed sufficient to legitimate some local lords' power. We should not misjudge the prominence of the local oral tradition in the legitimation of power¹⁵; 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 [*ɣʌn]), which is merely the Chinese transcription of an abridged form of *kauṇḍinya* transcribed *hùn-tián* 混滇 ([*ɣʌn diɛn]) or *jiāo chénrú* 橋陳如 ([*kiw dʒin ɲʌ:ʔ]). We postulate that *hùn* [*ɣʌn] (*kaun[ḍinya]*), *hùn-tián* [*ɣʌn diɛn] (*kaunḍiny[a]*) and *brahm* *bram (*brāhm[āṇa kauṇḍinya]*) are all honorific titles referring to the mythical founder of the Funanese dynasty: *brāhmaṇa kauṇḍinya*. The Old Khmer honorific *brah* may be part of this trend.

3.3. The graphic alternation v ~ b in Old Khmer

It could be objected that the form *vrah* (or, as we shall see, its preponderance over the form *brah* 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 *vrah* and *brah* can be explained by a 'Prākritism'. Furthermore, the writing system arrived to 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 *vrah* and *brah* with a clear inclination for the forms in onset <v->. So, there are more than 3.800 epigraphic attestations of *vrah* in Old Khmer between 500 śaka (578 AD, K.1) and 1249 śaka (1327 AD, K.470). To those we add about thirty epigraphic attestations such as *vrāh*, *vrah*, *vras* or *vrahḥ* stretching from 500 śaka (*vrahḥ* in K.38) to 1041 śaka. (*vrāh* in K.194). On the other hand there are only some 150 epigraphic attestations of *brah* ranging from 844 śaka. (922 AD, K.99) to 1561 śaka. (1639 AD, K.261).¹⁶

¹⁴ The OC rime [-ar] yielded EMC [-a] in tense OC syllables whereas it evolved in >[-a:n] in a OC lax syllable. For example, in a tense syllable: OC [*pàr] > EMC [pa] > Mandarin 番 *bō* 'bold, martial'; in a lax syllable OC [*pār] > EMC [pa:n] > Mandarin 蕃 *fān* 'hedge' (Ferlus 2012).

¹⁵ We should add that the foundation myth of the Fúnán by *kaunḍinya* actually belongs to a local mythological tradition. Some authors, among whom Porée-Maspero (1969:795), preferred to identify the myth of *kaunḍinya* to the cult of the Ancestors and to the worship of local deities rather than to an Indian-like tradition. As we see it, 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 did that way legitimize an increasingly 'indianized' type power. Moreover, the Funanese foundation myth consisting of an alliance between a local deity and an 'indianized' foreign lord (*liüyè* 柳葉 - *jiāo chénrú* [kaunḍinya] 橋陳如) has an equivalent in the Angkorian thirteenth century Cambodia where *zhōu dáguān* 周達觀 relates the union of a 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.

¹⁶ Data from the Khmer corpus on line: <http://sealang.net/classic/khmer/>

The Old Khmer lexicon shows some inconsistency 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 causes confusions between the phonemes [b]~[v] at the Old Khmer level. It is only at the end 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)¹⁷.

Old Khmer	Standard Khmer	Gloss
<i>ver, vera, vyar, vyara, ber, byar</i>	<i>bīr</i> [pì:]	"two" (Old Mon <i>bār</i> [b̥a:r])
<i>vave</i>	<i>babae</i> [pəpə:]	"goat" (OM <i>baḥe</i> [baḥeʔ])
<i>vuddha, buddha</i>	<i>buddh</i> [pùt]	"Buddha"
<i>vinau, bnau</i>	<i>bnau</i> [pʰnəw]	"kind of tree"

This etymological inconsistency between the graphs and <v> can show up in one single epigraph as, for example, in K.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. The 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 lately in epigraphs —the first epigraphs carved in India were in Prākṛit and not in Sanskrit¹⁸—, made this language vulnerable to various 'prākṛitisms'. One of these prākṛitisms is precisely the merger of the phonemes [b] and [v], already attested in Vedic Sanskrit where the phonemes *-bh-* [b̥] and *-v-* [v̥] were merging. This kind of merger is also sporadically attested in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (Edgerton 1953:17, §.2.30 and 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 for *vraḥ* demonstrates that the Khmers were initiated to the Pallava alphasyllabary (from which the modern Khmer writing system derives) by Indians who pronounced Sanskrit through a Prākṛit phonetics in which the phonemes [b] and [v] had merged or were merging. The predominance of *vraḥ* over *braḥ* in the Old Khmer epigraphy doesn't constitute a decisive factor in opting for an etymology with *vara-* instead of *brāh[maṇa]*.

¹⁷ Besides, according to Jacob (1960:352-3) and Ferlus (1992:82), we should not reconstruct distinct phonological units for the writing dichotomy <v> vs. and <v> vs. <hv> in Old Khmer.

¹⁸ It is what Louis 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).

3.4. Origin in Sanskrit-Pāli "vara-"

The word *vara-* means "excellent, splendid, best, noble; as attribute it either precedes or follows the noun which it characterizes" in Pāli (Davids & Stede [1921] 2001:602) and in Sanskrit (Renou *et al.* [1932] 1987:627).

For Headley *et al.* (1977:684), the Khmer *braḥ* originated in the Sanskrit-Pāli *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 MLC (1993:323) for the Burmese *bhurā:*. However, this etymology is not convincing. Although an origin in *vara-* is not to be categorically rejected, the hypothesis of a reduced form of the Sanskrit *brāh[maṇa]* seems linguistically more relevant, as we have just seen.¹⁹

The following paragraphs show that the Sanskrit-Pāli *vara-* has a different history in these languages²⁰.

The Mon words *wuiw* and *lwuiw* correspond to *vara-*. The graph < *l-* > in *lwuiw* [wɔ̃] "blessing" (Shorto 1962:187) is a graphic hypercorrection. The Mon form has long been attested through Old Mon *war* and the Middle Mon *wuiw* (Shorto 1971:346). The final graph < *-w* > is nothing but a spelling attesting the phonetic change the Old Mon final < *-r* > [-r] underwent: [-r] > [-w] > [-Ø]; it doesn't play any role in determining the reading²¹.

In Khmer, *vara-* was borrowed as *bar* [pə̃:] "wish, blessing; best, most excellent or eminent; preferable; according to wish" (Headley *et al.* 1977:637). In the contemporary Trà Vinh Khmer, the form is pronounced [pə̃r]: [lɔ̃:k kʰrù ʔõ:j pə̃r] "the monk gives his blessing."

The Modern Lao reflex of the borrowing corresponding to *vara-* is [pʰɔ̃:n] "wish, blessing; excellent" (Reinhorn 2001:1591). The final nasal [-n] is regular: lengthening of the open-mid vowel [ɔ̃] before the final trill [-r] in Khmer; merger of the labial plosive [v] in 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* [tʰæ̃] ([tʰɛ̃:r] in Trà Vinh Khmer) was borrowed in Siamese [tʰɛ̃:n] "to walk;" Modern Khmer *vihāra* [pə̃hɪa] ([pə̃hɛ̃:r] in Trà Vinh Khmer) was borrowed in Siamese-Lao [wɪ̃:hɛ̃:n] "convent, monastery, playground."

3.5. Conclusion

The data presented thus far suggest that the Old Khmer *v/raḥ* originated in a popular reduction of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa-* through monosyllabization. Furthermore, we reject a proposed etymology with the Sanskrit-Pāli *vara-*, primarily because of the retention of the

¹⁹ It is worth mentioning that the Southeast Asian languages never borrowed a declined form of a Sanskrit or Pāli word but always the radical form (hence stripped of its case ending). Therefore, Southeast Asian languages borrowed the radical form *vara-* and certainly not a declined form *varas* (*varaḥ* in saṃdhi).

²⁰ As mentioned in §1.2, *brāhmaṇa* also appears in other forms in Southeast Asian languages, but maintaining the Indo-Aryan semantics "Brahmin" (for example *brāhmaṇa* [prɪam] "Brahmin" in Modern Khmer) whereas the reduced form *braḥ* is used as an honorific (for example *braḥ buddh* [prɛ̃əh pùt] "Buddha" in Khmer).

²¹ 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 (2010) on the phonetic evolution of the trigraphs < *-uiw* >, < *-uir* > and < *-uil* >.

laryngeal in the various Old Khmer forms. Moreover, we noted that the <v->/<b-> graphic alternation in the forms *vrah* and *brah* could be explained by the fact that some Indian speakers read Sanskrit through a Prākṛit phonetics where the phonemes [v] and [b] merged or were merging.

The following sections examine the Thai *brah* [p^hrǎʔ]. We shall first review its meaning (§4.1) and we shall see that its semantics is identical to the Old Khmer one given above (§4.2). Subsequently, we shall briefly study its first epigraphic attestations in Old Thai (§4.3) and analyze the borrowing of the Siamese form to other languages in contact (§4.4). The section concludes with an analysis of the historical grounds for proposing the loan of Old Khmer *brah* into Old Thai (§ 4.5).

4.- The Siamese *phráʔ*

4.1. *Semantics*

In Siamese *brah* [p^hrǎʔ] 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* [p^hǎʔ] 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).²²

4.2. *Old Thai Loan from Old Khmer: linguistic considerations*²³

We shall discuss two phonetic changes: first, the change Proto Southwestern Tai (PSWT) [*br-] > [p^hr-] and a low series tone in Thai and second, the interpretation of the Old Khmer laryngeal [-h] to a Thai glottal stop [-ʔ] to stress on the shortness of the vocalic nucleus²⁴.

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

The Thai languages were affected by a devoicing phenomenon of the initial voiced plosives [*b- *d- *ɟ- *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 acquired a low series tone. 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 [^hm > m^h n > n^h l > l^h] [ʃ ʈ] [p t c k]; (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 ɟ > c^h g > k^h] [m n l].²⁵

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

²² One could multiply the glosses in various dictionaries but they would teach us nothing more; the *bačanānukram chapāp rājapāṇḍittayasathān* ([1997] 2542:762-764) may also be consulted but it doesn't provide us with any etymological data.

²³ We prefer to see a loan from Old Khmer than a similar monosyllabization process appearing independently in Old Thai and Old Khmer. A mere loan seems more likely to us than two similar but independent developments.

²⁴ It should be noted that, in Khmer, the vowels are always short before the laryngeal.

²⁵ In Lao [*ɟ-] > [s-]. Important articles by André G. Haudricourt (1961) and Michel Ferlus (1979) should be consulted on this. Both are fundamental works.

(2) Old Khmer [-h]>[-ʔ] in Old Thai

Linguistically, the Siamese *braḥ* [pʰráʔ] can only be a borrowing from Khmer²⁶; 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.

Angkorian Old Khmer	Standard Modern Khmer	Thai Siamese	
<i>braḥ</i> [brah]	<i>braḥ</i> [prɛ̀əh]	[pʰráʔ]	"honorific"
<i>thoh</i> [tʰɔh]	<i>thoh</i> [tʰəh]	[tʰòʔ]	"year of the Rabbit"
<i>lvah</i> [lɔəh]	<i>luh</i> [lùh]	[lúʔ]	"to reach; until"
<i>rddeḥ</i> [rədəh]	<i>radeḥ</i> [rətəh]	[rátʰéʔ]	"cart, chariot"

We recall that *braḥ* is a written borrowing from Old Khmer. In the stele of Ramgamhaeng (thirteenth century), the only attestation of the honorific is *braḥ*. Subsequent attestations without *visarga* in the corpus of Sukhothai up to the 16th century²⁷ are also to be found in ligatured forms but this peculiarity can be explained by the 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 triple tonal opposition when the Old Khmer *v/braḥ* [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 *braḥ* was borrowed early in Thai; we find it already engraved in the Wang Bāng Sanuk Stele, the first epigraph in the Thai realm dated from 1219²⁸ written in Pāli (the first lines) and in an Old Thai dialect (the rest of the text). It is also profusely used in the Ramkhamhæng Stele, dated from 1292²⁹, where *braḥ* is used as an honorific. It is used alone in *braḥ rāmgamḥæṇ* (face 1, line 10) "The Venerable Ramkhamhæng" or used together with nobiliary titles as in *bo khun braḥ (rā)mgamḥæṇ* "The Venerable King Ramkhamhæng" (face 4, line 1), a title which is only attested in this stele. The Sukhothai inscriptions also make use of *braḥ* as a member of a compound. For example, the Sukhothai *samṭɛc braḥ* refers to a queen; *samṭɛc* [sǒm̄d̄ɛt] originates from the Angkorian Khmer *samtac/samṭac/samṭec* [səmd̄ac] "noble, prince." This term is also attested in Lao, either alone as in *sōmṭăt* [sǒm̄d̄ɛt] with the meaning "prince" (Kerr 1992:337) or in compound together with a Thai nobiliary title *sōmṭăt cau*² [sǒm̄d̄ɛt cáw] "patriarch, chief bonze" or in *sōmṭăt baḥ cau*² [sǒm̄d̄ɛt pʰāʔ cáw] "His Majesty" (Kerr 1992:464).

²⁶ On the importance of the Khmer language in the formation of the Siamese language, Uraisi Varasarin (1984) should be consulted.

²⁷ Epigraphic attestations are *braḥ*, *bra(h)* [virāma on visarga], *bra*; ligatured forms: *braḥ*, *braḥ*, *braḥ*, *bra*, *bra* (Vickery 1996). We don't indicate the tone mark, as it is irrelevant for the present discussion; it should also be noted that the ligatured forms demonstrate *braḥ* is not to be connected with *vara-*.

²⁸ Penth (1996) and Wyatt (2001).

²⁹ Piriya Krairiksh (1986) and Vickery (1987) put the antiquity of RK1 into question and made of RK1 a piece of work engraved during the reign of King Rama IV (Mongkut) between 1833 and 1855. However, on linguistic grounds there is no reason for such a controversy as the Proto-Thai uvular fricatives are correctly represented throughout the stele.

In the inscriptions from the Sukhothai period (1238-1583)³⁰, the titles *brahñā*, *bañā* and *brahyā* are used as prefixes for naming kings. The Thai *bañā* was borrowed through the Middle Mon *bañā* [bɔ̃ɲa] (Shorto 1971:258). The prefixes *brahñā* and *brahyā* are still used in Modern Siamese. *Brahñā* is attested in the nobiliary title *cau² brahyā* [câw pʰrǎja:] "prefix given to the highest rank of nobility" and in the name of the river Menam *mæ¹ nām² cau² brahyā* [mê: ná:m câw pʰ(ra)ja:]; its second syllable *-ñā* would originate in a popular reduction of *ātyā/ājyā* (Kerr 1992:511), from Sanskrit *ājñā*- "power, authority." In Lao, *yā* [ɲá:] is quite productive and *brah* would have been prefixed to it. Lao attests *bāyā* [pʰaɲá:] "princely title." The Siamese *brahñā* [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 the 南詔 *Nānzhào* to the Menam³¹. Indeed, at the beginning of the first Thai chiefdoms in southern China we can find some *khun* [*xunʰ] and *caw* [*caw^c] whose title 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 going down along the Upper Menam the Thais took on a form of Khmer writing system and Khmerized Sanskrit titles, among them *brah*. In Haudricourt's words (1970:33), *ils oublieront leurs origines chinoises* ('they will forget their Chinese origins') and the socio-cultural content of nobiliary terms such *caw* and *khun* lightened³² relative to Sanskrit titles (such *indrāditya*) or Khmerized Sanskrit titles (such *brah*).

Old Thai *brah* was borrowed from Angkorian Old Khmer. Some languages — including Lao, Middle Mon or Old Burmese— then borrowed the title *brah* from 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 *brah* [pʰrǎʔ] was borrowed in languages belonging to the Siamese area of linguistic and socio-cultural influences. First of all, *brah* was borrowed in Lao where the Proto-Southwestern Thai consonantal group [*pʰr-] became [pʰ-], even while it was preserved in Siamese. The reading [pʰrǎʔ] or [pʰāʔ], and the archaic spelling of *Luang Phrabang* clearly shows the political influence Thailand exerted on Laos.

Next, the Middle Mon attestation *bra taja* [braʔ tɔ̃jaʔ] "a nobleman who completed the rebuilding of the Kelatha pagoda (*kyāk kelāsapaw*), c. 1450" might be a borrowing from the Siamese *brah teja* or *brah tujha* [pʰrǎʔ tɔ̃t:] "high form of address, lit. 'lord majesty'" (McFarland 1944:567)³³.

³⁰ Ishii *et al.* (1989).

³¹ It should be recalled here 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 (1998:22-29) should be consulted.

³² Condominas (2006:274, n.2).

³³ We connect the Middle Mon attestation *bra taja* [braʔ tɔ̃jaʔ] with the Siamese form *brah teja* or *brah tujha* [pʰrǎʔ tɔ̃t:] tentatively; *bra taja* [braʔ tɔ̃jaʔ] does not seem to be a word that entered the vocabulary of the language apart from its use as personal name (anonymous peer-reviewer's personal communication).

In Laos the Khmus name the monk [praʔ]/[pʰráʔ]³⁴; although they were not Buddhist, the Khmus used to go and study in Lao monasteries (Michel Ferlus c.p. ; Suwilai Premasriat 2002:159). Chong (a Katuic language of Thailand) also borrowed the Siamese *brah* through its [pʰrəʔ pʰùt] "Buddha's statue" (Suwilai Premasriat 2009:102).

In China, the Tai Dehong, a Shan ethnic group practicing Theravada Buddhism, use the term [pʰa:ʰ² ka:ʰ¹] to name the young Buddhist monks or [pʰa:ʰ² la:ʰ²] for a Buddha's image (Luo 1999:129). In Assam and in Upper Burma, the Tai Khamtī read [pʰa:ʰ²], while the written form was *phrā*. The change [*br-]>[pʰ-] and a low series tone is regular in Shan and in Lao: [*bra:k]>[pʰa:kʰ²] "to separate" (but [pʰrâ:k] in Siamese); [*bra:]>[pʰa:c²] "long knife" (but [pʰrá:] in Siamese).

It should be noted that the Tai Paw and Tai Yo from Nghệ An (Vietnam) rarely use [pʰaʔʰs²] as an honorific and prefer using the term [ʔo:ŋʰ¹], from Vietnamese. The use of [pʰaʔʰs²] is due to the Lao influence and indicates a higher social status as Lao is the prestige language used by the Thai nobility in the border regions with Laos. The forms [ʔo:ŋʰ¹ cawʰ¹] and [ʔo:ŋʰ¹ cawʰ¹ huaʰ¹] to name "Buddha" and "monk" respectively are then much more frequent than their Laocized counterparts [pʰāʔ cáw] and [pʰāʔ cáw hǔa].³⁵

We postulate that the Burmese *bhurā*: [pʰəjú:]/[pʰjú:] "Buddha, sacred, particle of respect" may have been borrowed from Thai.

- To sum up:** the Khmer *brah* was borrowed into Siamese and then from Siamese:
- (1) to Lao [pʰ(r)āʔ] (and from Lao to Khmu [praʔ]/[pʰraʔ] and Tai Paw/ Tai Yo [pʰaʔʰ²]);
 - (2) to Middle Mon [braʔ] (?);
 - (3) to Chong [pʰrəʔ pʰùt];
 - (4) to Khmu [praʔ]/[pʰráʔ];
 - (5) to Burmese *bhurā*: [pʰəjú:]/[pʰjú:].

4.4. Historical basis for the proposed borrowing

The historical relationships that link the Thais to the Khmers are quite old; they start at 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 *yuán* Dynasty at the end of the thirteenth century (Cœdès 1958); the Thais were the major beneficiaries of the collapse of the old Indianized kingdoms³⁶.

The expansion of the Angkorian Empire to the north of Thailand is well known. This influence was quite old in northeastern Thailand as steles mention pre-Angkorian kings'

³⁴ Khmu [ḡa:ʔ] may be unrelated, cf. Kammueang [ḡà:ʔ] "teacher, master" (anonymous peer-reviewer's personal communication).

³⁵ The Tai Yo and Tai Paw data were collected by the author *in situ* during field research (February-March 2006 and April-June 2011).

³⁶ According to Cœdès (1989:346), Jayavarman [VII]'s death just before 1220 can be considered the starting point of a great effervescence in the southern borders of Yunnan and, traditionally, of the founding of Thai principalities even though the Thai *avaient déjà fortement « noyauté » les groupes khmers, môns et birmans hindouisés des vallées du Sud [...] (Cœdès 1989:347)*; this would demonstrate that the Thai had firmly settled in the margins of the Angkorian, Mon or Burmese kingdoms before the thirteenth century.

names such Bhavavarman (second half of the sixth century)³⁷ or Citrasena (or Mahendrarvarman) attested in lots of steles stretching from Ubon to Khon Kæn³⁸. Oral literature from northeastern Thailand also echoes these influences in various royal legends (Varasarin 2007:211-5). Angkorian archeological vestiges are also to be found in the northeast of Thailand (in the Isan Land), such the Angkorian temple complex of Phanom Rung in Buriram province or the Phra That Dum in Sakhon Nakhon province. The Siamese architecture of Sukhothai also clearly shows Khmer artistic influence as exemplified by the Wat Phra Phai Luang. It appears that the Khmer influence probably extended to the Sino-Burmese border, as even faraway cities such as Möng Yong exhibit a Khmer artistic influence³⁹.

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 been conveniently situated in the Middle Mekong, Middle Menam and Upper Irrawaddy valleys 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 (1050 AD); from this stele we discover that king Jaya Parameśvaravarman [I] (1044 – 1060) restored the Po Nagar sanctuary and made a donation of some *syam* ("Thais")⁴⁰, *kvir* ("Khmers"), *lov* ("Lao") and *vukām* ("Pagán Burmese") *hulun* ("slaves")⁴¹. 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 a lot of *syam* or *syam* (Luce 1958; 1959; 1985). The Old Cham epigraphic attestation in particular indicates 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.

Whatever the exact chronology of the Thai expansion to the south may have been, the influence of the Khmers on the Thais⁴² was significant in the organization of the Thai ruling class and in their ideology⁴³. 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 Borom⁴⁴, a mythical lord, whose seven sons were claimed to be the ancestors of each *caw*. Thus, it is a typical sort of Thai kinship which characterizes this first migration stage and which legitimates each *caw* in the power he claimed. The second phase is characterized 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 the Angkorian royalty (Condominas 2006:269). This change clearly displays the political importance the Angkorian empire had on the Thai ruling class. It is in this context where we

³⁷ Si Thep inscription (K.978).

³⁸ K. 377, 496, 497, 508, 509, 514, 1102 and 1106.

³⁹ Rispaud (1966:221).

⁴⁰ As Ferlus (2006:108-9) demonstrated, the first epigraphic attestations *syam*, *syām* and *syam* are most likely Thai living at the margins of the Angkorian empire, and not Sui as proposed in Groslier (1981).

⁴¹ See the edition of the stele by Aymonier (1891:28-31) and particularly Schweyer (2005²:94).

⁴² Particularly on the Siamese, Lao and Tai Yuan. We 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).

⁴³ The Mons were also of great importance in the Thai cultural evolution.

⁴⁴ On the *Khun Borom* myth, Archaimbault (1959:383-416) should be consulted.

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 Middle Mon, Lao, Khmu and others borrowed their [braʔ], [pʰaʔ], and other autochthonous reflexes of the Siamese *braḥ*. It also appears that the Old Burmese *purhaḥ* (Modern Standard Burmese *bhurā*: [pʰəjʉ́:] may be a borrowing from an Old Thai dialect in Upper Burma; e.g., a Shan dialect.

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

5.1. Meaning and epigraphic attestations in Old Burmese

Modern written Burmese attests *bhurā*: (read [pʰəjʉ́:]/[pʰjʉ́:]/[pʰjʉ́:]) "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 pronunciations are [pʰəjʉ́:], and its substandard variants [pʰǎjʉ́:], [pʰǎjʉ́:] or [pʰjʉ́:] in Standard Burmese. In the conservative dialects: *Intha* [pʰrʉ́:] and *Arakanese* [pʰəjʉ́:] or [pʰjʉ́:].

The *Epigraphia Birmanica* (1919:26-7), Than Tun (1959:50-1), the *Burmese-English dictionary* by the MLC (1996:323), Luce (*ms.* 6574, box 7, folder 7, p. 85)⁴⁵ and the *Mranmā 'Abidhān* (in one volume, 1991:323)⁴⁶ connect *bhurā*: with the Sanskrit-Pāli *vara-*. The *Mranmā 'Abidhān* (in five volumes, 1978-80, 3:118) just indicates a Pāli etymology but provides no further specific etymological information.⁴⁷

This word has long been attested in Burmese; it was already attested in the first important Burmese epigraph, the stele of Myazedi dated from 1113 AD under the form *purhā*. It was also attested in an Old Burmese epigraph dating from 1145 AD, where King Alaungsithu (Cañsū I) was named *purhaḥ hrañ taw*; the word *hrañ* is an honorific prefix used when referring to a monk or noble (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 (Luce⁴⁸ nd. 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*: [pʰəjʉ́:]/[pʰjʉ́:]

⁴⁵ Luce's manuscripts were downloaded from an online source (<http://sealang.net/sala>). Moreover, according to Luce (*ibidem*) the Pyū *ḥā:hra* would also originate in Sanskrit/Pāli *vara-* but as we know very little about the Pyū phonology (we even don't really know which Tibeto-Burman branch it would belong to), it is quite difficult to hypothesize about the etymology of this attestation.

⁴⁶ This dictionary also proposes *pūjarha* as plausible origin.

⁴⁷ Though they don't provide us with etymological data, Judson's *Burmese-English Dictionary* ([1893] 2006:802) and U Hoke Sein's *Universal Burmese-English-Pali Dictionary* (1978:558) could be consulted.

⁴⁸ Luce (*ms.* 6574, box 7, folder 44, p.85).

The word *preñā* is also attested in Old Burmese⁴⁹. According to Luce, this term originated in the Middle Mon *bañā* "Mon royal title." However, we propose that *preñā* is instead a borrowing from Old Thai *brahñā* because of the initial consonantal complex [pr-] in Old Burmese *pre-ñā*. According to this hypothesis, Old Burmese *pre-* reflects the Old Thai *brah-*. The medial trill [-r-] would then be adequately rendered in both languages (in the Old Burmese *pre[ñā]* and in the Old Thai *brah[ñā]*). Moreover, we also propose that *preñā* could be a borrowing from Tai Ahōm, because this Shan language didn't undergo the 'yodization' of the nasal palatal [ɲ > j], unlike the other Shan dialects.

Summing up, the various meanings of the Burmese *bhurā*: are,

1. "Buddha" as in *bhurā*: *loñ*: [pʰəjáj: laón] "future Buddha, boddhisattva" (Bernot 1988:96); *loñ*: [laón] means which is nearing completion (Bernot 1990:113).
2. "pagoda, stupa" as in *bhurā*: *kyoñ*: [pʰəjáj: caón] "monastery" or in *bhurā*: *kywan* [pʰəjáj: cəñ] "(not used anymore) slave pagoda; class of person considered descendants of temple servants" (Bernot 1988:94).
3. "honorific affix for sacred objects, for monks, for important laymen such as high-ranking officials or members of royalty, etc.," as in the king Bodawpaya's royal title (*bui*: *to bhurā*: [bó: dò: pʰəjáj:] [1745-1819]) or in the *bhurā*: *kui*: *chū* [pʰəjáj: kó: zù:] "Nine Venerable Planets."

The last example above shows the difficulty in identifying the relevant semantics of *bhurā*: [pʰəjáj:]. Which semantics should we actually attach to it? Does it mean "Buddha" or is it used as an honorific particle? If we translate the expression term by term: *bhurā*: [pʰəjáj:] "Buddha, sacred, honorific affix," *kui*: [kó:] "nine" and *chū* [sʰù:] "classifier for sacred object," the semantics "honorific affix" for *bhurā*: (instead of "Buddha") and the translation "the Venerable Nine Planets" impose themselves, essentially because of the presence of the numeral *kui*: "nine."⁵⁰

5.2. Old Thai *brah* in Old Burmese: linguistic consideration

(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 resulting from a reduction of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa*? It seems unlikely that such a reduction process developed independently while the Burmese realm was in contact with some socio-cultural fragments from 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).⁵¹

It could also be proposed that OB *phurā* is a borrowing or a Burmanization of the Sanskrit-Pāli *vara-*. Although this hypothesis has its merits, it appears that Old Burmese

⁴⁹ Luce (*ms.* 6574, box 7, folder 44, p. 86).

⁵⁰ The translation "Buddha and his eight disciples" perfectly valid and widespread.

⁵¹ The etymon # 360 (Bradley 1979:328-329) clearly shows the various unrelated forms for "God, holy being;" no Lolo-Burmese proto-form can be reconstructed for this etymon.

phurā is likely to have 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.

One might suggest that OB *phurā* is a direct borrowing from Old Khmer. This appears unlikely because the Burmese world was actually not in direct contact with the Angkorian Empire. On the contrary, we tentatively 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 map below) leads us to make this proposal.

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

We propose that the Old Burmese *phurā*, etc. is an Old Burmese phonetic transcription of a borrowing from an Old Thai dialect 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^{0s} > bra:ʔ]⁵² through its voiceless counterpart in the Old Burmese *puhrā* [pʰa:ra:] or *phurā* [pʰəra:] rather than an expected OB form *buhrā*. This graphic oddity can be explained in two ways. (1) The first explanation is that the Old Burmese consonantal 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:ʔ] > *puhrā* [pʰa:ra:] (or *phurā* [pʰəra:]) in Old Burmese. (2) The second explanation is that the Old Thai dialect from which Old Burmese borrowed its form had already undergone the devoicing process of the voiced initial plosives ([b-] > [pʰ-]). In this view, the Old Burmese *puhrā* [pʰa:ra:] (or *phurā* [pʰəra:]) would have been an attempt to transliterate the Old Thai [pʰra:ʔ⁰²]. Below we present both hypotheses, as it is not possible at this time to prefer 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:ʔ] and not yet [pʰra:ʔ⁰²] 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:ʔ]) in an Old Burmese voiceless initial plosive [pʰ-] ([pʰa:ra:]). The explanation that can be put forward for this oddity is simply that Old Burmese had no voiced plosives, as shown by comparison with Tibetan or other Tibeto-Burman language cognates. As Luce (n.d.)⁵³ and Nishi (1999:75) wrote, 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 contrast between voiced and voiceless plosives. The Old Burmese *purha*, *pūrha*, *puhrā*, *purhaḥ*, *phurā* must have been pronounced [pʰa:ra:] or [pʰəra:], acceptable phonetic transcription of the Old Shan [bra:ʔ].

⁵² 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.

⁵³ Luce (ms. 6574, box 7, folder 52, p. 31).

The modern orthography with the written initial *bh-* can be explained by the fact that *p-* and *ph-* were still merging in Middle Burmese⁵⁴. Furthermore, *bh-* was often used instead of *ph-* or *p-* (as both were merging). This spelling was consecrated during the third spelling reform in the eighteenth century, which ushered in the Modern standard literary Burmese 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:^h] had already changed to [p^hra:^h] in the twelfth century. The Old Burmese *puhrā* [p^hra:^h] or *phurā* [p^həra:^h] would then be an accurate transcription of a [p^hra:^h] from an Old Shan dialect 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 khlung* [p^hrá? k^hlaŋ] 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 [...].*⁵⁵

We can conclude from this short passage that (1) when the Portuguese arrived in Siam in the early sixteenth century, the consonantal group [br-] (*Barcalon*) hadn't yet been affected by the devoicing process, and (2) when de La Loubère wrote his *Royaume de Siam* in 1691, this consonantal complex had already undergone the devoicing of the voiced initial plosive [br-] > [p^hr-] (*Prà-Clang*). The devoicing process hadn't already happened at the beginning of the sixteenth century but had completed 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 which had not yet completed its devoicing process.

It was then 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 the Old Shan dialect from which Old Burmese borrowed its *phurā* had already been affected by the devoicing process is putting this phenomenon back in time by about five or six centuries, hence postulating almost a millennium of areal diffusion for the completion of the process: from the eleventh century for Old Shan in Upper Burma to the twentieth century for the Tai Yo dialect in Vietnam. Such a long duration seems reasonable if we consider that the devoicing phenomenon is still ongoing in some Mon-Khmer languages while it was completed several centuries ago in Mon and in Khmer.

⁵⁴ It should be mentioned that *bhurā* is first encountered in an inscription from Kyaukse dated from 1296 AD (Nishi 1999:75).

⁵⁵ de La Loubère ([1691] 1987:327) quoted in van der Cruysse (1991:109).

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

The linguistic consideration we are now proposing to discuss is the syllabic structure of the Old Burmese *phurā*, etc. Was it a dissyllable: [p^hura:], or a mono-/ sesquisyllable [p^hra:]/[p^həra:]?

We 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 note that the form *pugam* "Pagán" in Modern Burmese is not pronounced [pugàn] but [pəgàn].

(4) Consonantal group *plosive* + [r]

Having assumed that the Old Burmese *phurā*, etc. must have been a monosyllable or, at most, a sesquisyllable, we still have to mention another diachronic issue which is the evolution of the *plosive* + [r] consonantal complex.

The Standard Modern Burmese phonetic actualization [p^həjá:]/[p^hjá:] of the written *bhurā*: might be confusing. The initial consonantal group [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 consonantal complex: Arakanese [p^həjá:]/[p^hjá:] and Intha [p^hərú:]/[p^hrú:]⁵⁶. 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 creaky register in Old Burmese?

Finally, it may seem unusual that the Burmese form lacks creaky voice if it reflects the short vowel in the Old Thai form [p^hrǎʔ]. Why is the Old Burmese form [p^hra:], instead of a short vowel with creaky voice [*p^hrgʔ]? This long vowel in Burmese is, in fact, not unexpected, as we consider that Old Burmese *phurā* was borrowed from an Old Thai dialect in Upper Burma (a Shan dialect) which sporadically lengthens the final vowel [-aʔ > -a:], as evidenced by the form [p^ha:ʔ⁵⁷] (and not [p^haʔ⁵⁷]) in Tai Khamtī and Tai Dehong or in Tai Yai (Burmese Shan) attesting *phrā*: [p^hra:ʔ⁵⁷] "deity, object of worship" (Cushing 1914:464) and not [p^hraʔ⁵⁷].

Accordingly, Old Burmese *purhā* is likely a loan from Shan since this group of Thai dialects have lengthened the vocalic nucleus [p^hraʔ⁵⁷] > [p^hra:ʔ⁵⁷]. Had the Old Thai vowel

⁵⁶ The problematic of the Old Burmese initial consonant clusters "plosive + [r]/[l]" and their actualization in the various Burmese dialects is a complex topic; we 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.

⁵⁷ Tai Yai also attests [p^haʔ⁵⁷] (Cushing 1914:464), but it must be a loan from Lao.

from the borrowing been short [p^hraʔ^{DS2}], it is likely that the Old Burmese would have pronounced it in creaky register [p^hrg] because the *Ajawlat* (or *Dhammāraṃ-kṛī*) inscription (1165/6 AD) attests a first attempt to account for the supra-segmental features, which indicates Old Burmese was already if not a tonal language, in any case a phonation-type language.

(6) Conclusion

The Old Khmer honorific *braḥ* reached Upper Burma through an Old Burmese phonetic transcription of the Old Shan [p^hraʔ^{DS2} > p^hra:^{A2}]. We postulate that *phurā*, etc. originates from Shan and not from Northern Thai or Siamese because the Old Burmese word was not transcribed in creaky register which would have been a convenient way to transcribe the shortness of the Thai vowel. Through its *phurā* [p^həra:], etc., the Old Burmese attempted to transcribe the Old Shan form [bra:^A] or [p^hra:^{A2}].

5.3. Historical basis of the borrowing

(1) The Thai continuum⁵⁸

In order to understand how Old Siamese *braḥ* (from Angkorian Old Khmer) became Old Burmese *phurā*, etc. through an Old Shan oral form, we find it necessary to introduce the concept of the Thai linguistic and socio-cultural continuum. The "Thai continuum" was the socio-political, linguistic and geographical link which connected the various Thai peoples, and which stretched, in the twelfth century, from southwestern Yúnnán 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 to the west 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

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

⁵⁸ Our "Thai continuum" closely parallels the concept of the Japanese Karen specialist Shintani Tadahiko, who speaks of the *Tai cultural area*.

Vickery (1974:162) and Terwiel (1983:56-7) connect this term with the pre-Sukhothai Tradition.

Noteworthy is the existence of the doublet *ph(r)ā* - *phūra*: in Tai Ahōm for which we can deduce the pronunciation [p^hra:ʰ²]⁵⁹. These words are honorific prefixes with semantics similar to the Old Khmer and Old Siamese forms; however, they were obviously borrowed from different sources. The word *phūra*: is clearly borrowed from Written Burmese and it is likely that it arrived from Burma into Upper Assam through the Buddhist scriptures along with the Burmese writing system. 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 contact continued between the two edges of the Thai continuum, namely from the northern margins of the Angkorian Empire to Upper Assam.⁶⁰ In addition, we can hypothesize that Tai Ahōm *phrā* [p^hra:ʰ²] originates from an Upper Burma Shan dialect (Tai Yai or Tai Khamtī) as Tai Yai attests both *phrā*: [p^hra:ʰ²] "deity, object of worship" certainly originating from the Thai margins of the Angkorian Empire, and *phyā*: (in *phyā*: 'in [p^hja:ʰ² ʔinʰ²] "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^hráʔ] > Shan *phrā*: [p^hra:ʰ²] > Tai Ahōm *phrā* [p^hra:ʰ²]. Both edges of the Thai continuum then attest the "Indo-Khmer" honorific *v/braḥ*.

This continuum concept is important for understanding how a word could have been carried orally from the Middle Menam in Thailand to Upper Burma. The Thai chiefdoms kept in touch during the eleventh – thirteenth centuries.⁶¹

That the Old Burmese *phurā*, etc. was attested in the epigraphy a century before the Old Siamese *braḥ* might appear to contradict our hypothesis, according to which the Old Burmese form would be a phonetic transcription of the Old Shan [bra:ʰ] (or [p^hra:ʰ²]). We think the explanation for this paradox is 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 Upper Burma Shans and the Burmese. This linguistic and socio-cultural environment is illustrated in the following map.

(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 migration from southern China southwards 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 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 568 AD. On the other hand the *Hsenwi Chronicle* reports a Shan kingdom would have developed at the border area between Yúnnán and Burma in 763 AD under the lead of its king, Khun Tung Kham, while Khun Lai would have been the third Shan king whose reign would have

⁵⁹ 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 the same Tai Ahōm priest who served as the informant for both dictionaries, the *Ahom Lexicons* and the *Ahom-Assamese-English Dictionary*.

⁶⁰ It should be noted that *phūra*: and *phrā* are mutually interchangeable as shown by the double attestation *phūra loṅ* or *phrā loṅ* 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.

⁶¹ For example, Lān Nā was important in the introduction of Buddhism in Lān Xāng (Lorillard 2001).

begun in 951 AD. Whatever the accurate dates might have been, the Chinese annals from the Táng dynasty (618 – 907 AD) alluded to the existence of a Thai political entity in the border region, but the date of the formation of the kingdom remained imprecise. In the limited scope of this paper, it is enough to know that a Thai decentralized power, the authority of which was slipping from one lord to another (Fernquest 2006) should have existed at the latest by the ninth or tenth century AD. For our purpose, what matters is the antiquity of the contacts between the Burmese and the Upper Burma Thais or Shans⁶².

The Burmese and Shans maintained conflicting relations for quite a long time. As early as Anoratha's reign (1044 – 1077), the king felt it necessary to protect his kingdom from the danger the Shan chiefdoms represented by setting up a line of defense in forty-three military posts along the eastern plateau; it was also crucial to defend the rice perimeter of the new kingdom of Pagán against this Thai people. This information can be gleaned from the *Glass Palace Chronicle* (Pe Maung Tin & Luce 1960:96-7) and is confirmed by archeology (Berliet 2010). Moreover, a donation of Shan workers (together with fields and cows) to a monastery is mentioned in 1081 AD (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 Lake Inle 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 taken seriously by Pagán, and they constituted a serious opposition force to the central power. Matrimonial alliances were soon regarded as an honorable compromise to these conflicting links. 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*⁶³. The kingdom of Pagán may be regarded as an entity politically dominated by three main ethnic groups: Burmese, Mon and Shan. The last two had some political prestige, as the Burmese kings would address Mon and Shan lords with the honorific *non tō* "elder brother" while the Mon and Shan lords addressed Burmese kings with the expression *ñi tō* "younger brother" (Aung-Thwin 1985:62); it was a relationship of clearly marked respect toward the Shan and Mon lords.

The transmission of the Old Shan [bra:^ʰ] ([p^hra:^{ʰ2}]) and its transliteration in Old Burmese as *phurā*, etc. must have occurred in this context of relationships with the Shans, which dates to at least the beginning of the eleventh century, if not earlier.

5.4. Conclusion

The path followed by the word *brah* from Angkor to Upper Burma is as follows: Angkorian Old Khmer *v/brah* [brah] > Old Siamese *brah* [braʔ^{ʰs}] > Old Shan [bra:^ʰ/p^hra:^{ʰ2}] > Old Burmese *phurā* [p^həra:^ʰ].

⁶² On Thai ethnonymy in general and Northern Thai and Shan in particular, Pain (2008) should be consulted.

⁶³ 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. Indeed, 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 article we have tried to demonstrate that Old Khmer *v/braḥ* resulted from a reduction of Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa* through a monosyllabization process. We also expressed our doubts about a connection between *v/braḥ* and the Sanskrit-Pāli *vara*. The socio-political situation, sometimes favorable 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* [braḥ > pr̥əḥ] into Siamese *braḥ* [braʔ^{ps} > p^hráʔ], then from Siamese into Burmese [p^h(ə)ra: > p^h(ə)jú:] through oral contact 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 a reduced 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 the Chinese sources mention: 范帥蔓 *fān shūmàn* is, in Early Middle Chinese, a phonetic transcription [bram sri: ma:n] of *brāhm śrīmāra*, or "His Venerable King Māra." We don't think the Ancient Funanese Khmers used a reduced form of *brāhmaṇa* to show respect for the status of the Brahmins in general, but rather to show their reverence for 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, we believe it was a mark of respect and reverence for 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^hjú:], 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 *brāhmaṇa* originally designating a human being yielded an Old Khmer honorific *v/braḥ*, a term that refers to both humans and deities. In our view, this is 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 Oliver W. Wolters (1999:109-10) raised: What is the local connotation of Indo-Aryan terms?

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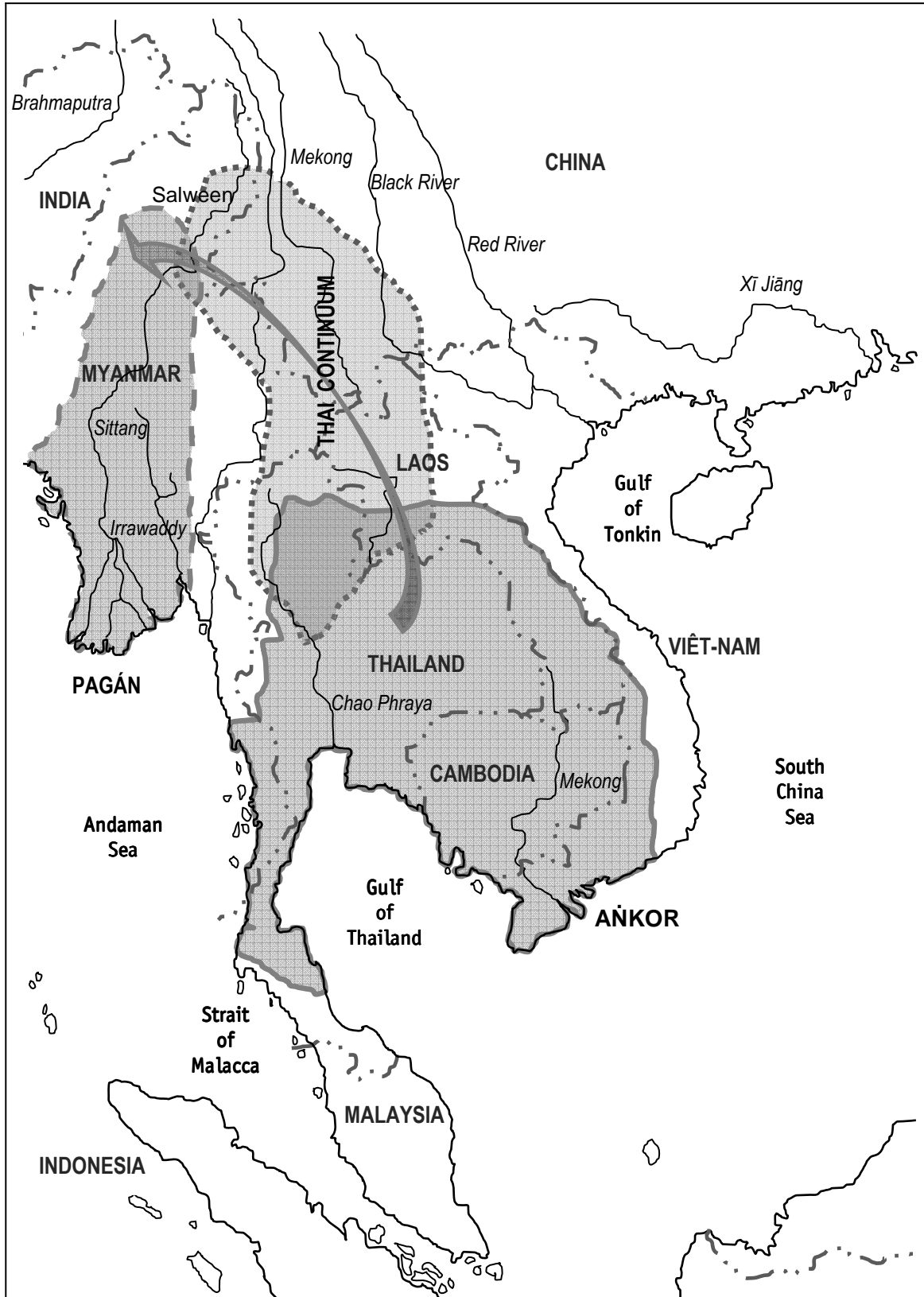
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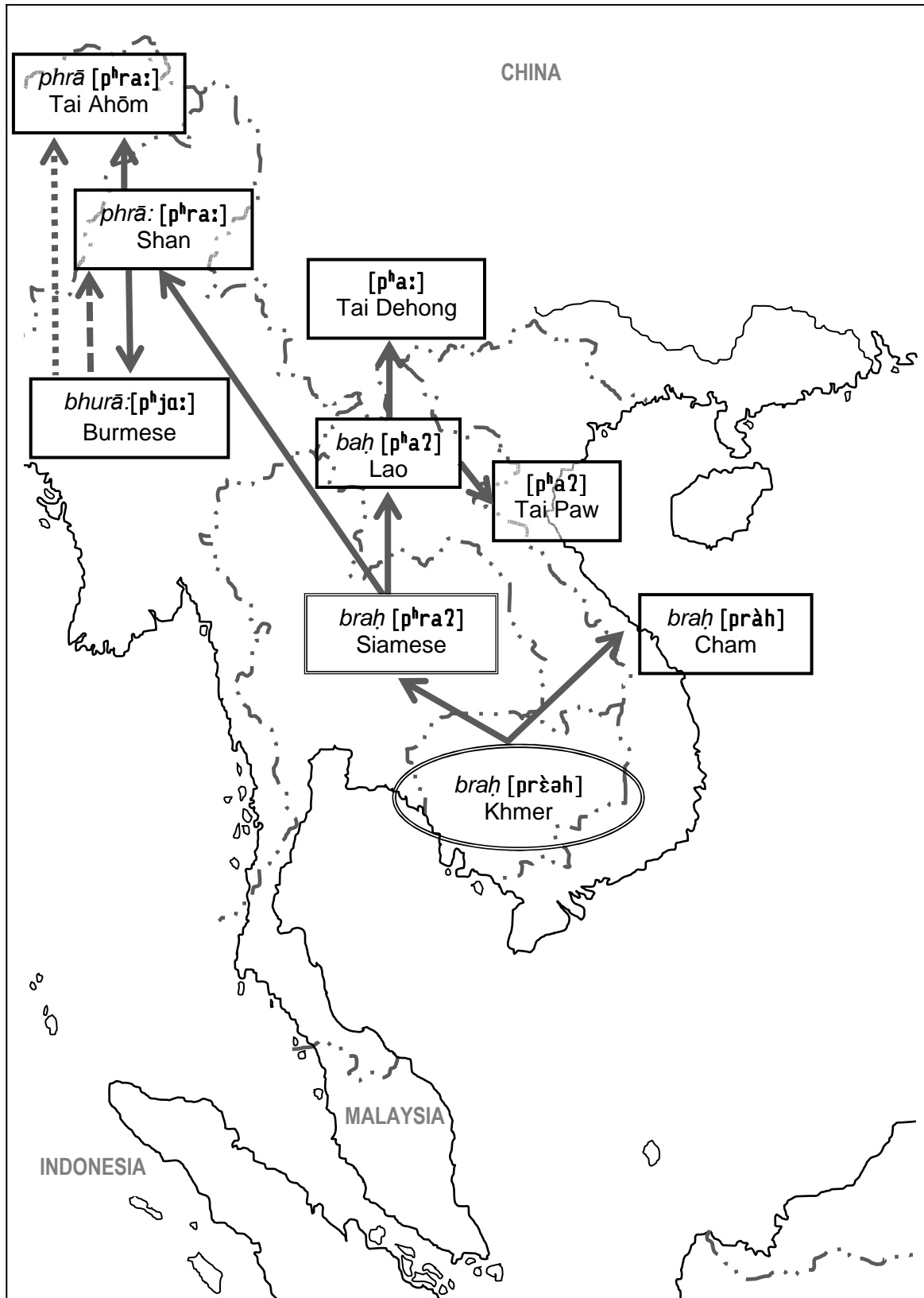
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Añkor, Pagán and Thai Continuum (XII century)

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Transmission of Old Khmer *brah*

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- Direction of the borrowing
- - - - -> Transmission of *phyā:* in Shan
-> Transmission of *phūra:* in Tai Ahöm

○ Origin of the innovation