



# Khom/Mūl Script Manuscripts from Central Thailand and Cambodia: Colophons with a Variable Geometry?

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## Part II: **Southeast Asia**

### **Mainland**



Javier Schnake

# Khom/Mūl Script Manuscripts from Central Thailand and Cambodia: Colophons with a Variable Geometry?

**Abstract:** The sacred language of Pali is shared by the varying Buddhist traditions of South-East Asia and in this vast geographical area conveys a whole corpus of religious texts, recorded in differing scripts and copied on various kinds of manuscripts. The forms and features of these manuscripts vary according to local expertise as do their colophons, which differ in terms of structure and content. This paper deals with the colophons written in Khom/Mūl scripts, found in manuscripts from Central and Southern Thailand and Cambodia. Based on the data extracted from catalogue listings and the details of some pertinent manuscript collections, this article discusses aspects such as the colophons' location in the manuscripts, their nature, and linguistic characteristics. A 'syntax' of such colophons emerges that appears to contain a 'variable geometry', driven rather by practical concerns than premade patterns.

## 1 Introduction

Pali is the sacred language shared by the various Buddhist traditions of South-East Asia corresponding with modern Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. This trans-regional language is used to convey a whole corpus of religious texts over this vast geographical area, whether they be canonical scriptures, liturgical chants or public sermons. The texts have been copied on varying kinds of manuscripts and their forms and features vary according to local expertise. They have been recorded in varying scripts, the peculiarity of the Pali language being that it has no alphabet or syllabary of its own. Thus, each local tradition adapted its own syllabary to transcribe the language and its phonetic characteristics.

The colophons of Pali manuscripts differ widely in terms of structure and content, as has been demonstrated by German scholars such as Heinz Braun

concerning Burmese manuscripts<sup>1</sup> and Oskar von Hinüber<sup>2</sup> and Harald Hundius<sup>3</sup> with regard to the manuscripts of Northern Thailand. But, as far as is known, nothing has been formalized for colophons in the Khom/Mūl scripts implemented in manuscripts produced in Central and Southern Thailand and Cambodia. This contribution attempts to organize pertinent information and outline the ‘syntax’ of these colophons and the salient features that characterize them.

## 2 Linguistic and graphic considerations

From the linguistic point of view, Khmer and Tai communities in Cambodia and Central Thailand used primarily Mūl and Khom scripts for the writing of Buddhist texts. These two systems are very close, distinguished as they are by very few graphical variations. They also share a common historical background. The Mūl script is limited to Cambodia and gave early rise to the Khom script in Siam, which in turn was introduced later in Cambodia due to the Siamese influence in the area.<sup>4</sup> However, though graphic differences exist between these two scripts, handwritten practices are not necessarily different. Siamese distinguished at least two sets of Khom characters, Khom bali (ขอมบาลี) and Khom thai (ขอมไทย),<sup>5</sup> and there is a clear division of labour between the two:<sup>6</sup> Pali texts are written in Khom bali, and Thai-language texts in Khom thai. The graphic difference between the two scripts lies in Khom thai incorporating numerous other characters and graphic practices making it appropriate for writing vernacular texts in Thai.

In Pali manuscripts copyists made use of these two scripts in different ways: the Pali texts have been written in Khom bali and some portions of the colophons as well, while Khom thai serves to mention peripheral information in Thai language in the colophons but also in other parts of the manuscripts as evidenced below. Thus, two languages and two different scripts can be found in the same artefacts.

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<sup>1</sup> Braun 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Von Hinüber 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Hundius 1990.

<sup>4</sup> See Antelme 2007, 6–7.

<sup>5</sup> The words ‘bali’ and ‘thai’ are the Thai phonetic for Pali and Thai.

<sup>6</sup> See Skilling 2014, 349.

### 3 Methodology

Among the various available catalogues of Pali manuscripts, three are focused on here (one kept in Bangkok and the other two in Paris), containing descriptions of texts written in Khom/Mūl scripts. They were all compiled by Jacqueline Filliozat for the École française d'Extrême Orient (EFEO, Paris). They are:

1. *The Pāli Manuscript Collection Kept in the Vat Phra Jetuphon Vimol Mangklaram (Vat Po), The Oldest Royal Monastery of Bangkok.*<sup>7</sup> It presents the collection of Pali manuscripts located in the Wat Pho, one of the royal monasteries of Bangkok. The manuscripts were engraved in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, commissioned by royal order as evidenced both by the royal devices and written statements inside some of these pieces.
2. The second catalogue describes manuscripts belonging to the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), namely the *Catalogue des manuscrits palis des collections françaises, fonds des bibliothèques publiques et privées*.<sup>8</sup> The collection was initiated during the seventeenth century, with the gift of Siamese manuscripts to the king of France, but a very large part of it has been made up with pieces collected later, during the nineteenth century. The manuscripts came from different locations, written in Burmese, Sinhalese, Mūl, and Khom scripts, and kept at the behest of many emissaries.
3. The *Catalogue des manuscrits en pali*<sup>9</sup> at the EFEO library in Paris, where an important collection of Pali manuscripts has been preserved, largely from Thailand and Cambodia, but also from Burma and Sri Lanka.<sup>10</sup> They were collected from different places during the first half of the twentieth century by members of the EFEO. The corpus contains copies dated from the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century.

The advantage of these catalogues is that for each manuscript they reproduce and describe the following information: the beginning and end in exact detail, the different stages in the text – the end of chapters and the end of texts when different ones are put together – and all the kinds of information written on the different leaves in Pali as well as those in vernacular language. As a result it is possible to gain a close look at the colophons of a great number of pothis in terms of their form and content. Furthermore, with direct access to the French collections,

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<sup>7</sup> Filliozat 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Filliozat 2003a.

<sup>9</sup> Filliozat 2003b.

<sup>10</sup> The history of the constitution of this collection is detailed in Filliozat 2000.

those of the BnF and the EFEO, it was possible to check the information reported in catalogues.

The extent of the corpus examined here is limited, amounting to 373 catalogue items, which consist of manuscripts featuring single texts, or various texts that are clearly recognizable in the catalogue-descriptions, adding up to a total of 665 texts. Left out of this study were manuscripts not written in Khom/Mūl scripts, *nissaya* texts featuring commentary-translation in Thai of Pali texts written in Khom, and texts in a fragmentary state or those not described by Filliozat. The 13 manuscripts dated to the seventeenth century offered by missionaries to the king of France were also set aside,<sup>11</sup> to maintain a uniform corpus of manuscripts dated between the eighteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

This is, indeed, a late period, but it corresponds to the prevalent state of preservation of Pali manuscripts over time. The oldest dated manuscript preserved today is located in Northern Thailand and was copied in 1471,<sup>12</sup> and about one hundred fifty surviving in the area and Laos date from the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>13</sup> Manuscripts copied before the eighteenth centuries are very rare in Central Thailand due to historical events, and in Burma and Sri Lanka, a manuscript is considered old if it dates from the first half of the eighteenth century. The situation of Cambodia is more tragic: between 1970 and 1990, 98% of the existing manuscripts were totally destroyed, due to the nefarious effects of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979) and two decades of war. The manuscripts that were saved are clearly limited to the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Two observations must be made regarding these catalogues and their underlying methodology. First, the Mūl script manuscripts described are in most cases Khom script manuscripts, although these Pali manuscripts may follow similar patterns. They were probably identified according to their place of provenance, Cambodia, by Filliozat, rather than on the basis of their graphic differences. Secondly, an important methodological problem must be underlined: the system adopted by Filliozat when dealing with vernacular-language colophons is problematic and quite imprecise. Thai words written in Khom are rendered into Roman characters following the transliteration system in force at the Pali Text Society for the phonemes of the Pali language. Thus, Thai words are very difficult to recognize and comprehend, especially since her method is not consistent, which would have required the adoption of a specific system of transcription of

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<sup>11</sup> See Lee-Fung-Kai 2009, 52.

<sup>12</sup> See von Hinüber 1996, 35.

<sup>13</sup> Trent Walker's personal communication.

<sup>14</sup> See de Bernon 2004, 769.

Khom characters for the Thai language. For instance, the transliteration *paripura* misleads the reader when the word is in fact Thai *boribun*<sup>15</sup> (บริบูรณ์).<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, as this work relies on the catalogues compiled by Filliozat, we have kept and respected the indications as they appear, while identifying and treating items in this work for what they are (Thai words).

## 4 Physical description of the manuscripts

A variety of forms record these Buddhist texts that were most frequently inscribed with a stylus on palm leaves or *bai lan* (ใบลาน).<sup>17</sup> These long-format palm-leaf manuscripts are generally between 50 and 60 cm in length and around 5 cm in width, and are not specific to Pali texts, but also record a variety of texts in Khmer, Lanna, Lao and Thai, including religious sermons, moral instructions, and vernacular narrations.

The leaves are strung together with a cotton string through the holes of a pair of string-holes, making one fascicle or *phuk* (พูก) containing between 20 and 30 leaves (Fig. 1). Each bundle has a title page providing bibliographic details, the title and bundle number, often on both the front and the back leaves. There are some exceptions, but generally the distribution of the text into *phuk* is entirely physical, in as much as it does not correspond to chapters, sections, or natural text breaks.

The text is written on five lines per leaf, the letters are widely spaced and easy to read compared to Burmese and Sinhala script manuscripts, which regularly have ten or more lines per leaf. Each leaf bears a folio number centred in the left margin of the verso, the numbers are formed from the consonants of the Indic alphabet in combination with twelve vowels, (*ka kā ki kī ku kū ke kai ko kau kaṃ kaḥ*).

Palm-leaf manuscripts generally contain only one text, but compilations of various texts are very common to find, such as a text and its commentary, or a selection of different sermons assembled for liturgical purposes. If a text is too long to fit into one fascicle, then multiple fascicles, usually between two and ten,

<sup>15</sup> We follow here the official Royal Institute of Thailand Transcription System as summed up in Kanchanawan 2006.

<sup>16</sup> See more examples below ('5.4 Indication of the state of completeness', § 2).

<sup>17</sup> A more precise description of these manuscripts can be found in Schuyler 1908 and Skilling 2014, 349–351.



but they can be up to thirty, may be grouped together to form a single set, wrapped in a separate cloth called a *mat* (มัต) (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1: Paris, EFEO, Pali 50.



Fig. 2: Paris, EFEO, Pali 77.

## 5 The colophons

The corpus selected for this study forces one to break from the formal definition of a colophon, understood as a specific spatial location (the end of a text) combined with a specific contents (date, scribal maxims, etc.). As we will see, in the case of Mūl and Khom manuscripts the location of the information is not fixed and mandatory, and the set of information is equally heterogeneous.

Indeed, a little less than half of the entire corpus has no clearly delimited colophon, but the expected information is present. However this proportion decreases further if one takes into account multiple-text manuscripts, where the information is given at the end of texts. The proportion increases considerably if we consider that in certain manuscripts the expected information comes not at the end but on the first leaf of the manuscript along with the title. This is more commonly found in long multi-fascicle manuscripts, than in manuscripts containing short texts, which may consist of less than ten or twelve leaves. The information can also be inserted in other parts of the bundle, generally at the end of texts in case of multiple-text manuscripts.

The colophon, when it exists, follows the end of the composition generally marked by the Pali words *niṭṭhito* -ā -aṃ, meaning ‘finished’, or *samatto* -ā -aṃ for ‘completed’. From the spatial point of view the colophon is usually not clearly delimited and follows the end of text (Fig. 3), but it is not a definitive rule and possibilities exist to draw a larger margin indicating the end of the text where the relevant information is included (Fig. 4).

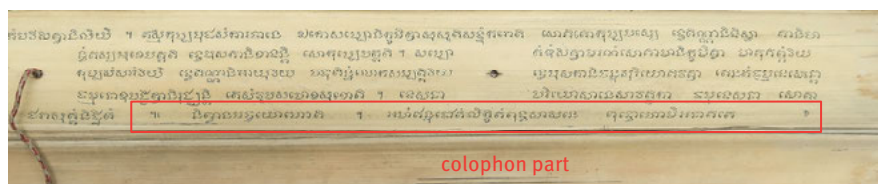


Fig. 3: Paris, EFEO, Pali 30.

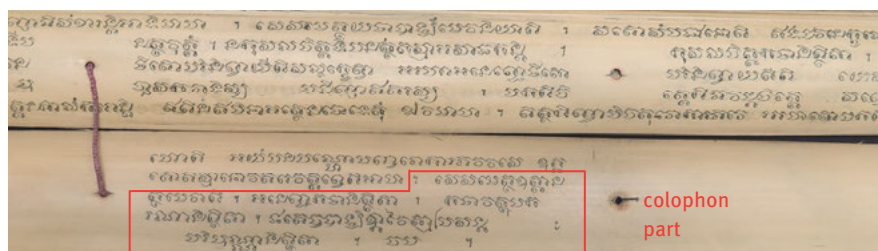


Fig. 4: Paris, EFEO, Pali 5.

Various items can be identified as part of the colophons and are present in one place or another.

## 5.1 Date

Only 33 of the pothis considered in this study bear dates and most are not written within the limits of the colophon but in other parts of the manuscript: 1. on the first leaf, 2. in one of the other bundles when there are many bundles, or 3. at the end of a chapter, not necessarily corresponding to the end of the bundle.

Dates are very often given in the simplest way, only providing the year of the end of copying, with no information about the month, day of the fortnight, or time of the day. For instance:

*bra buddhasakkarāja 2347* (Paris, EFEO, Pali 57).

In (the year) 2347 of the Buddhist Era.

To come across a full date composed in Pali is rare, but does occur. Here it is inscribed on the first leaf below the title (Fig. 5):

*buddhassa parinibbato aṭṭhapaññasādhike catusatadvesahassane byagghasaṃvacchare sijesena likkhāpitam idaṃ* (Paris, EFEO, Pali 28).

This [manuscript] was caused to be copied [i.e. was sponsored] by Sijesa [i.e. a Thai name] in the year of the tiger, 2458 years after the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha.

Another kind of mention is related to an interval of time. This is the case for manuscripts copied in series, as in the Wat Pho collection in Bangkok. For instance, in one of these manuscripts (n° 4/137) a label explains in Thai language that ‘it has been copied under the reign of Rama V’.<sup>18</sup>

It is quite exceptional to find additional information as in the colophon of manuscript Paris, EFEO, Pali 77, where the expression of the date includes the term *bra vassā*, *vassā* being a Thai word of Pali origin serving as a grammatical classifier (i.e. words to count objects) for years in the Thai religious or royal context:

*bra buddhasakkarāja 2379 bra vassā | iti pi so bhagavā arahaṃ sammāsambuddho vijācaraanasaṃpanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro puri[sadammasārathi].*

In 2379 of the Buddhist Era. Thus, the Blessed One is accomplished, fully enlightened, perfect in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of the worlds, incomparable leader of persons to be tamed (...).

Given the representativeness of this information in the corpus it is fair to consider the notification of the date not as imperative information. Moreover, the way the elements referring to time are given, varies and does not conform to a single scheme.

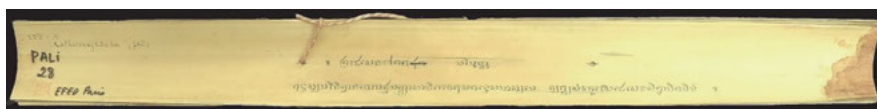


Fig. 5: Paris, EFEO, Pali 28.

<sup>18</sup> Filliozat 2002, 14.

## 5.2 Name of the copyist

Mention of the scribe's name or the name of a specific sponsor appears not to be an information item of primary importance either. Very few manuscripts record them as here where a formula in mixed Pali-Thai (Thai in bold) clearly indicated a name:

*bra Visuddhimagga phūk 36 cap paripuṇṇa*<sup>19</sup> *Dhammābhisekācariyena poṭṭhakaṃ likkhitaṃ mayā* (Paris, EFEO, Pali 10).

**The holy Visuddhimagga (having) 36 bundles is completely finished.** The manuscript has been copied by me, master Dhammābhiseka.

It is difficult to give precise reasons for this quasi-absence of dates and names. One possible explanation is that Khom-script manuscripts were being produced on a mass scale during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many of which were inscribed in one location over a long period of time for the purpose of completing large library projects as with the Wat Pho manuscripts' collection. Hence many manuscripts were the work of professional scribes and the necessity to indicate this information was superfluous as they would have been well known by all those in the monastery and were perhaps given record elsewhere in some sort of administrative documents. Furthermore, it is possible that the manuscripts were not intended for any kind of dissemination beyond the walls of the library.

## 5.3 Title

Pali titles are always indicated on the first leaf of the manuscript, but also appear in the colophon in about one fifth of the corpus. They are almost always preceded by the Thai adjective *phra* (พระ), written with different spellings, meaning 'holy, august, sacred', and qualifying the high value of the text. Two modes of presentation are possible:

- Pali titles are given in an inflected form, here in the nominative case:

*bra Temiyajāṭakaṃ niṭṭhitaṃ* (Paris, BnF, Pali 153).

The holy Temiyajāṭaka is finished.

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<sup>19</sup> We sincerely thank Trent Walker for giving us the key to understand all the Thai portions that follow.

- Or, more often, in the stem form of the nouns:

*bra Lokaneyya paripūraṇa* [sic] (Bangkok, Vat Phra Jetuphon 4/153).

The holy Lokaneyya is complete.

It is also very common to find orthographic mistakes in the title, due to various reasons, such as the influence of oral pronunciation, as well as titles being given in alternative or truncated forms. For example, *Saṅgini* is an alternative name for *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*:

*bra Saṅgini cap lee* (Paris, BnF, Pali 287).

The holy Saṅgini is finished.

These titles can circulate under these forms and be found as such in other Pali manuscript collections. The absence of standardization does not facilitate the electronic research of certain Pali titles.

Copyists can also name the text on the basis of its contents or nature. Some texts are identified by the number of *gāthās* or stanzas they contain, like this title to one chapter of the *Vessantara Jātaka* as mentioned on the first leaf:

*bra gāthā 36 bra gāthā* (Paris, EFEO, Pali 70).

The holy stanzas, [numbering] 36 holy stanzas.

It is likely that this kind of indication needs to be matched with what is read on the first leaf (*Chakhattiyapabbam*, i.e. a section of the *Vessantarajātaka*), and that copyists used such a type of denomination because it was certainly in common use and everybody knew to what it referred.

When titles are available, their position in the colophons varies greatly and does not seem to obey any specific rule. They can appear alone, as *bra Mahāpaṭṭhānapakaraṇamātikā* (Paris, BnF, Pali 263), ‘The holy matrix of the work that is the Mahāpaṭṭhāna’, but when included in a sentence they can be located:

- At the beginning of the sequence, e.g.

**Suttasaṅgaha** capp paripūṇṇe (Paris, EFEO, Pali 66).

**The Suttasaṅgaha** is finished and complete.

- At the end of the sequence, e.g.

cap donī lai | **80 bra gāthā** (BnF, Pali 204).

Here it is finished. **The 80 holy stanzas.**

- But they can also be inserted in the middle of the sequence, here between two scribal formulas:

*nibbānapaccayo hotu | cap bra Mahāpaṭṭhāna<sup>20</sup> te doni le | buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi dhammaṃ dutiyampi buddhaṃ tatiyampi buddhaṃ* (Paris, BnF, Pali 237).

(This copy) is a support (to attain) Nibbāna. There **the holy Mahāpaṭṭhāna** is finished. I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, (the Saṅgha), for a second time in the Buddha, for a third time in the Buddha (...).

## 5.4 Indication of the state of completeness

One of the frequently mentioned indications, which is probably of primary importance for copyists, is the state of completeness of the copy: it is generally described as being ‘complete’, ‘ended’, or both. Please note, in contradistinction to the other kind of information, this one is not restricted to the limit of the colophon. To this end, the scribes used a small lexicon of Pali and Thai words that can be combined freely and at various places in the colophon. A few terms can be identified:

1. In Pali ‘is finished’ and ‘is complete’ is expressed only by *niṭṭhito -ā -aṃ* and *paripuṇṇo -ā -aṃ* respectively, which may occur side by side like in Paris, EFEO, Pali 121 in addition to the title and the number of fascicles,

*Samkhyapakaraṇa phūk 2 paripuṇṇā niṭṭhitā.*

The Saṅkhyapakaraṇa (having) 2 bundles **is complete and finished**.

2. In Thai the choice of words is larger but somewhat limited, including words of conjunction and adverb with various spellings, very often subject to orthographical distortions due to the misleading transliteration as previously stated. Identified and indicated here are the correct Thai terms,<sup>21</sup> some of their transliterations in catalogues (in small size and brackets), and their meanings:

*boribun* (บริบูรณ์) (*paripuraṇa*, *paripūraṇa*, *paripura*): ‘complete, entire’.

*laeo* (แล้ว) (*lve*, *leev*): ‘it’s over, that’s all’.

*lae* (แหละ): ‘that’s it’.

<sup>20</sup> Here it corresponds to the Pali *Mahāpaṭṭhāna*.

<sup>21</sup> Trent Walker gives many examples of this kind in the description of the Thai manuscripts he studied. See Walker 2018, no. 56/118/215, etc.

*thao ni* (เท่านี้) (*tei doni lei, tee doni lee*): ‘there is only this much’.

*lae* (และ) (*lae, lee, lai, lei, le*): ‘that’s it’.

*chop/chop laeo* (จบ/จบแล้ว) (*cap, capa, capp, camp*, etc.): ‘ended, completed’.

These statements about the completeness of the copied text can be found in the colophon:

- Only in Thai,

**cap** *Yamaka* **tei doni lei** | *nibbānapaccayo hotu | buddhaṃ dhammaṃ saṃghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (Paris, BnF, Pali 247).

**There ends** the *Yamaka*. May (the copy of the text) be a support (to attain) Nibbāna. I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha.

- Only in Pali,

*bra Dhātukathā* **niṭṭhitā paripuṇā** (Paris, EFEO, Pali 121).

The holy Dhātukathā is finished and complete.

- But it can also be a combination of Pali words (in bold) and Thai words, where the Thai portion can repeat the Pali information, a rather common phenomenon in this corpus of manuscripts:

**paripuṇṇā** *doni lee* **niṭṭhitā** (Paris, BnF, Pali 375).

That’s it, it is complete and finished.

or

*bra Yamakaparakarāṇakathā* **niṭṭhitā** *camp* *bra Yamaka* *doni* (Paris, BnF, Pali 271).

The exposition of the holy work [named] **Yamaka is finished**. Thus the **Yamaka** is finished.

## 5.5 Other elements

Other elements appearing less frequently in colophons provide us with valuable information. Although rare in our corpus, two of these can be found regularly in manuscripts. The first being the physical description of the manuscript, in particular the total number of its bundles or *phuks*, e.g.:

*Samkhyapakaraṇa* **phūk 2** *paripuṇṇā niṭṭhitā* (Paris, EFEO, Pali 121).

The *Samkhyapakaraṇa* [having] **2 bundles** is complete and finished.

The other element also found informs on the nature of the script used for the copy, as in the following example, where the scribe indicated the title followed by the specific script he used, namely the Cambodian script/letter (*aksara* for Sanskrit *akṣara*):

*Buddhānuparivatta kambujjaksaranvāta*<sup>22</sup> *cap paripuṇṇo* | *tena buddho homi anāgate* (Bangkok, Wat Phra Jetuphon 4/118).

The Buddhānuparivatta [written] in **Cambodian script** is finished and complete. Because of that (i.e. the copy) I will be a Buddha in the future.

## 5.6 Formulas

Finally, approximately a quarter of the corpus studied contains scribal maxims. In the Buddhist context the making of manuscripts and the writing of texts was closely connected to the ideology of benefits and blessings, the copyists expressing their aspiration for merit and dedication in usually quite short formulas. These aspirations are normally located in the colophon, whereas the other information, may be found elsewhere in the manuscript aside from on the first leaf, thus indicating quite clearly the end of a significant part or the whole.

Their presence and location within colophons is also variable:

- Alone without any other component:

*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ* (Paris, EFEO, Pali 28).

Nibbāna is the ultimate bliss!

- At the beginning, in the following example indicated before the title:

*buddho bhavissāmi anāgate* | *bra samantabhaddakā* (Paris, EFEO, Pali 84).

**In the future I will be enlightened!** (This is) the holy Samantabhaddakā.

- Or at the end of the sequence:

*bra Uṇhissavijaya cap paripuṇṇa doni* | *nibbānapaccayo hoti* (Bangkok, Wat Phra Jetuphon 4/147).

Thus the holy Uṇhissavijaya is finished and complete. **(This copy) is a support (to attain) Nibbāna!**

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<sup>22</sup> The sense of *nvāta* is unclear. The proximity in Khom script of *nvāta* and *chvāt* (likely an old word meaning ‘to write’) could explain this word, however this is still hypothetical.



This last example allows us to specify that short statements expressing the wish to attain Nibbāna are the most common and widely shared with the other Buddhist traditions.<sup>23</sup> Other formulas relating to the Buddhist scholarly milieu are also manipulated in various ways, such as the classical formula to take the three-fold refuge (*tisaraṇa*) or extracts of protective texts (*parittas*). All these elements suggest the constitution of stock formulas that circulated in South-East Asia in one way or another. Other kinds of formulas, few in number, are particularly interesting because they make a direct correlation between the act of copying and soteriological goals. They are usually marked by the verb *likkhito -aṃ* ‘has been copied’, such as:

*buddhasāsane Ammaraḱaṭabuddho mayā likkhito nibbānapaccayo hotu* (Paris, EFEO, Pali 122).

May the Amarakaṭabuddha, which has been copied by me in the dispensation of the Buddha, be a support [to attain] Nibbāna!<sup>24</sup>

This kind of phrase is probably composed by the copyists, but finds its conceptual origin in late Pali literature, as in the example of the following stanza:

*akkharaṃ ekam ekaṃ ca buddharūpaṃ samaṃ siyā  
tasmā pari<sup>25</sup> paṇḍito poso likkheyya piṭakattayaṃ* (Paris, EFEO, Pali 83).

Every letter should be like a statue of the Buddha,  
Therefore only a wise man should write the Tipiṭaka (i.e. the Pali Canon).

Although it appears rarely in our corpus, this stanza is of interest for two reasons: first, it is a quotation from a Siamese Pali text written in the fourteenth century, the *Saddhammasaṅgaha*,<sup>26</sup> which is one of the most ancient literary witnesses of the high value ascribed to the act of writing the Tipiṭaka, and metonymically the Pali texts, giving to the script itself a sacred character. It is of some use to note the continuous transmission of this stanza through centuries. Secondly, these verses are typical of Burmese colophons,<sup>27</sup> and circulated more sporadically in

<sup>23</sup> The most common is *nibbānapaccayo hotu*, but it is known under many variants such as *nibbānapaccayo hotu te* / *nibbānapaccayo hotu anāgate kāle* / *nibbānapaccayo homi anāgate* / *nibbānapaccayo hotu puripunno sukkhaṃ balaṃ* / etc.

<sup>24</sup> The Amarakaṭabuddha corresponds to the *Amarakaṭabuddharūpanidāna* composed by Ariyavaṃsa (sixteenth century, Laos), relating the peregrinations of the Emerald Buddha from its elaboration to its arrival in Luang Prabang/Laos (critical edition in progress by Schnake).

<sup>25</sup> It should be *hi*. The confusion is easy to occur in Khom script for *hi* and *pari*.

<sup>26</sup> Nedimāle Saddhānanda, 1890, 65.

<sup>27</sup> Braun 2002, 150–151.

Sinhalese manuscripts.<sup>28</sup> Its presence in various Pali traditions bears further evidence of the circulation of some conceptually oriented scribal formulas.

Another note concerning these formulas and their circulation is based on an example taken from a Wat Pho manuscript which ends *siddhir astu subham astu kalyāṇam astu* (Bangkok, Vat Phra Jetuphon, 6/ta.8). This kind of maxim, with its variants, is not common to Thai manuscripts but common to Pali Sinhalese colophons.<sup>29</sup> This kind of ‘signature’ of a specific tradition also exists in the Burmese field, the letters *pu di ā* very often punctuating Burmese colophons.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, please note, as has always been the case during this overview, that these formulas are frequently subject to grammatical or syntactical faults and are sometimes truncated, suggesting that the copyist was quite frequently not an expert in Pali. Scribes probably had some form of external support at their disposal, perhaps a kind of lexicon in which formulas were recorded. It could be interesting to identify them in the different Pali manuscript traditions and attempt to organize these data.

## 6 Conclusion

In brief, the colophons of these three Pali manuscript catalogues are dry and succinct. They contain a deal of information presented, at first sight, in a confused manner that clearly sets them apart from the Burmese and the Sinhalese manuscripts, whose arrangements and presentations are more systematic.

The first observation notes how the different elements pertaining to colophons can be placed not just at the end of the manuscript, but elsewhere within it, to the extent by which it is argued, that the colophons are somehow ‘extended’ in their whereabouts. In considering the copyists’ point of view, it is essential not

<sup>28</sup> Somadasa 1996. See manuscripts WS. 9, WS. 52 and WS. 61 in the catalogue of the Wellcome Institute (WS. for Wellcome Sinhala).

<sup>29</sup> In Somadasa 1996 see for instance *siddhir astu* WS. 9, WS. 16, WS. 17, etc. *siddhir astu subham astu* WS. 138, WS. 166, WS. 251, etc. In Filliozat 2003a see *siddhir astu* (Paris, BnF, Pali 5, 20, and 507, etc.), *siddhir astu subham astu* (Paris, BnF, Pali 367), *siddhir astu subham astu arogyam astu* (Paris, BnF, Pali 497), *siddhir astu subham astu* (Paris, BnF, Pali 17, 496, and 505).

<sup>30</sup> Braun 2002, 151–152. They are abbreviations of Pali words: *pu* is for *pubbenivāsānussati* (‘knowing one’s past abodes’), *di* is for *dibbacakkhu* (‘the divine eye’), and *ā* stands for *āsavakkhaya* (‘destruction of the taints’). This formula is more than a simple convention. It encapsulates or embodies the described qualities, a system that is widespread in Thai culture and practices (see Schnake 2018), but not used on a large scale in manuscripts.

to specify and find elements of information in one location, but simply to find them, wherever they are.

Indications of names of places, scribes, and dates are rare. This clearly demonstrates how scribes during this period (from the eighteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century) did not focus on circumstantial or contextual information concerning the act of copying itself. The practical or pragmatic aspect appears to have been their main concern. Indicated in their copies is a set of information that is sometimes redundant referring essentially to the nature of the copied text and the final result of the copy process, to which religious aspirations are often added. These categories of information are summed up here:

1. The title of the Pali text;
2. The state of completeness of the copy (complete, ended);
3. The wishes of the copyist that are formulated in stanzas/formulas.
4. The date, name, number of bundles, script used, etc.

However, these data have some peculiarities. Firstly, the ‘extended’ colophons are not homogeneous in terms of the quantity of information provided, meaning that all these elements are rarely present in a single manuscript. In that sense, colophons present a variable geometry, giving the impression of not having a systematic pattern of information. Secondly the scribes composed phrases or sequences mixing Thai and Pali words with two close but distinct scripts, assembling the whole information in an order that is not fixed. The grammatical and orthographic rules governing Pali and Thai languages are very often set in the background giving rise to a distinctive syntax, which an observer may consider wrong, but is perfectly understandable by the environment of scribes. At that time they shared a kind of neo-language, and created a most original and puzzling colophon, in its spatial and linguistic aspects, mainly turned towards practical preoccupations.

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