

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

The Epigraphic Archives of Wat Pho

(Thailand)

Ref N° 2010-16

PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 SUMMARY

The Epigraphic Archives of Wat Pho (Temple of the Bodhi Tree) in Bangkok is a unique collection of 1,431 stone inscriptions in Thai language and scripts made in 1831-1841 on both religious and secular subjects, representing a wide range of Thai knowledge of Asian and local roots of the time in the context of over five centuries of global exchanges in trade, politics and culture. It was a conscious effort by King Rama III and Thai scholars to preserve and make them visible to the public with the ultimate aim in general education on cultural heritage, diversity and civilizations. In most cases they are accompanied by illustrations such as drawings, paintings or sculptures. The inscriptions are in good condition and are seen by over one million international visitors to Bangkok every year. The knowledge related to Thai yoga has recently become widespread through devoted practitioners, schools, spas and wellness centres worldwide.

The majority of this epigraphic collection was inscribed on the Asia/Pacific Memory of the World Register in 2008. Since then, a new digitized inventory has been made that led to a revision of the number of existing inscriptions, a preservation management plan has been put in place for better security and a variety of educational materials produced for dissemination to the general public and awareness-raising.

2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 Name (person or organisation)

The Thai National Committee on Memory of the World Programme of UNESCO

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

Official supporters for its preservation and dissemination under the MOW Programme

2.3 Contact persons

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2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)

Name, Address, Telephone, Fax, Email

Same as 2.3, 2)

3 IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

The Epigraphic Archives of Wat Pho (Temple of the Bodhi Tree) in Bangkok is a unique collection of 1,431 inscriptions in Thai language and scripts on limestone, marble and slate plates made in 1831-1841 on both religious and secular subjects, representing a wide range of Thai knowledge of Asian and local roots of the time in the context of over five centuries of global exchanges in trade, politics and culture. It was a huge and innovative undertaking by King Rama III and Thai scholars to preserve and present them to the general public by displaying them on 25 buildings and structures around the temple public compound.

The whole Temple complex as well as the inscriptions are registered as National Heritage, as recorded in the Royal Gazette of Thailand No. 66 Part 64 of 22 November 1949.

This nomination is based on a digitized inventory of the existing inscriptions compiled by the Thai MOW Committee in conjunction with Wat Pho and the National Library of Thailand, Ministry of Culture in 2009-2010. Consequently inscriptions taken down during building restorations over the years and hidden away have been added and some missing inscriptions are deleted from the Temple's record of 2001, on which the Archives inscribed on the Asia/Pacific Memory of the World Register in 2008 was based.

3.2 Description

Wat Phra Chetuphon Vimolmangklararam Rajworamahaviharn, commonly known as Wat Pho, is second only to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in terms of importance in Thailand. Situated south of and close to the Grand Palace in Bangkok, it was probably built in the 17th century in the Ayutthaya period. It received major restoration in 1795 during the reign of King Rama I (King Phra Phutthayotfa, 1782-1809) who established the new dynasty in Bangkok, and was regarded as the monarch's temple. During King Rama III's reign (King Nangklao, 1824-1851) another major restoration took place from 1831-41. The King expanded the temple's ground, decorated the buildings with Chinese ceramic tiles, mural paintings, stone sculptures, wood carvings and mother-of-pearl inlaid works.

The King also commissioned the inscribing of texts on various subjects on stone plates in different sizes from 32x14 cms to 200x110 cms. The marble, limestone, and slate plates were placed on the exterior and interior walls, windows, posts or wooden beams of 25 buildings. Most of the inscriptions are legible and in good physical condition.

The texts of surviving inscriptions can be divided into 7 categories:

1. History of Wat Pho's Construction and Restoration Records (12 Plates)
 - 1.1 Record of restoration works in King Rama I's reign (no date, probably 1802), on the west wall of the Eastern Hall (1 plate)
 - 1.2 Verses on the restoration of Wat Pho by Prince Patriarch Paramanuchit Chinorot and

others, written probably between 1831-1845, on the front wall of the Ordination Hall, the walls of the Eastern and Northern Halls, 3 Pavilions and other miscellaneous structures (11 plates)

2. Buddhism (310 Plates)

- 2.1 The 41 Arahats, on the interior walls of the Ordination Hall (27 plates)
- 2.2 The 13 Female Arahats, on the interior walls of the Reclining Buddha Hall (12 plates)
- 2.3 The 10 Lay Disciples, on the interior walls of the Reclining Buddha Hall (7 plates)
- 2.4 The 10 Female Lay Disciples, on the interior walls of the Reclining Buddha Hall (7 plates)
- 2.5 The Ten Nyana, on the interior walls of the East Hall (5 plates)
- 2.6 The Bahiranidana, on the beams of the North and South Pavilions (24 plates)
- 2.7 The Atthakatha Jataka, on the interior walls of 8 Pavilions and the old Ordination Hall (178 plates)
- 2.8 The Mahavamsa, above windows inside the Reclining Buddha Hall (32 plates)
- 2.9 The Niriya and Preta Katha, on exterior pillars of the old Ordination Hall (18 plates)

3. Literature (276 Plates)

- 3.1 The *Ramayana*, below bas-reliefs depicting Ramayana scenes around the outer walls of the Ordination Hall (152 plates)
- 3.2 The 12 *Shahnameh* Stories from Iran, on the beams of the West Pavilion of the Mandapa (9 plates)
- 3.3 The *Chan* of Vannavatti, on the inner cloister pillars of the Ordination Hall (49 plates)
- 3.4 The *Chan* of Mattavatti, on the door pillars of the entrants to the outer cloister of the Ordination Hall (8 plates)
- 3.5 Coded *Klon* Verses, on the inner cloister pillars of the Ordination Hall (50 plates)
- 3.6 Coded *Khlong* Verses, on the door pillars of the 4 entrants to the outer cloister of the Ordination Hall (8 plates)

4. List of Ecclesiastical Positions, Places and Ethnic groups (124 Plates)

- 4.1 Ecclesiastical Positions, on windows in the Ordination Hall (44 plates)
- 4.2 Names of Cities, Provinces and Governors in Siam and Tributary States, on beams in the cloister of the Ordination Hall (79 plates)
- 4.3 Thirty-two Ethnic Groups, on exterior wall of East Pavilion (1 plate)

5. Moral Teachings (65 Plates)

- 5.1 *Chan*: the teachings of Krisana, on inner wall of North Pavilion front of the Stupa (11 plates)
- 5.2 *Chan*: the teachings of Bali, on inner wall of South Pavilion front of the Stupa (1 plate)
- 5.3 Phra Ruang's Proverbs, on inner wall of North Pavilion front of the Stupa (5 plate)
- 5.4 *Chan* : Asada Vanara, on inner wall of North Pavilion front of the Stupa (6 plate)
- 5.5 315 Khlong Lokaniti stanzas on exterior walls of 3 Mondop Pavilions front of the Stupa (42 plates)

6. Health : Medicines and Massage (608 Plates)

- 6.1 Verses on Rishi in Yogic Exercises, on interior walls of 2 pavilions (7 plates)
- 6.2 Adhidhai Bodhipada, on exterior walls of Pavilion in front of the Stupa (8 plates)
- 6.3 Medical Texts, on exterior walls and pillars of 19 Pavilions (468 plates)
- 6.4 Massage Texts, on beams of the North Pavilion (125 plates)

7. Royal Customs (36 Plates)

7.1 Royal Kathin Robe Procession on Land, on exterior walls of Twin Pavilions (36 plates)

Although the inscriptions are attached to buildings, most have no intrinsic link to them. The walls and architectural parts are used to expose the texts, most of which have no relationship to their function although some could be interpreted as linking to them, such as the Buddhist texts. In some cases they could also be interpreted as explanatory captions to illustrations. Some of the stone texts in categories 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 are similar to those in manuscript forms kept in the National Library which may have been their drafts. A pioneering study on both types of texts has been made by Professor Niyada Lawsunthara in 2001.

4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1 Is authenticity established?

There are full written records kept at the National Library and the Temple on who was in charge of inscribing which text when they were made in the 1830's. There is no doubt as to their authenticity.

4.2 Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established?

4.2.1 These Archives are unique in their form and content. They were designed as a collection of written knowledge of various kinds and usefulness placed for public display on walls of buildings in a religious institution. As such they probably have no direct equal anywhere in the world. A 19th century Burmese king, King Mindon, created a set of Buddhist Tripitika texts inscribed on large marble slabs in his new capital, Mandalay, but it is quite clear he only focused on religion and not other aspects of knowledge of his time.

4.2.2 Nearly half of the existing inscriptions in Wat Pho contain medical and massage or Thai Yoga texts composed by royal physicians. The Temple is recognized in Wikipedia as “the birthplace of traditional Thai massage” and by many health experts as a world centre for the teaching and practicing of Thai healing techniques that are sometimes known as “Thai massage”. As explained by an American teacher of Thai Yoga, Mr. Yosel Tarnofsky in the Website http://www.thaiyogabodytherapy.com/about_thai_yoga.html, the “Thai Yoga Body Therapy” appears to be a “combination of energy healing similar to Reiki, acupressure or shiatsu, Hatha Yoga, Reflexology, and deep tissue work but to the intuitive-minded, it is additionally an active meditation, a nectar of healing so entrancing that one can feel its curative impact permeating the entire body.” It is not a massage, but a holistic approach that focuses on balancing not just the physical but the mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of the individual as well. He recognized that “King Rama III had hoped to preserve this powerful form of healing and thanks to his foresight, the Wat Pho is once again a major center for the teaching of Thai healing today.”

- There are many practitioners of Thai Yoga Massage of the Wat Pho school around the world, such as the “Sunshine Network” which has teachers and regular classes in Canada, USA, Costa Rica, Mexico, England, France, Germany, Greece, Rumania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, India, Japan, Lao PDR, New Zealand and Egypt (see website <http://www.thaiyogamassage.infothai.com/index.html>)
- The Wat Pho Thai Traditional Medical and Massage School, founded in 1955, (also known as Chetawan Thai Traditional Massage School) offers regular courses with the approval of the Ministry of Health in Wat Pho since 1962 and 4 other places in Thailand and with partners overseas such as the TonTon TTM Training Center, Inc. in the Philippines (www.watpho.com). The School's traditional methods of holistic health therapy based on the Wat Pho inscriptions have been well received in north America. The School has been

approved in 2009 by the US-based National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) as a continuing education Approved Provider (www.ncbtmb.com). Its Advanced and Professional Thai Medical Massage Therapy Programmes were recognized in 2008 by the Natural Health Practitioners of Canada (www.nhpcanada.org).

- This particular part of the Wat Pho Epigraphic Archives has therefore set a universal model and standard for holistic health care that has been generating economic benefits and inspired a world-wide “wellness” culture which is still continuously expanding.

4.2.3 The inscriptions effectively summarise the nature of traditional Thai medical knowledge and practices which is related to the Indic and Chinese traditions but having its own unique character developed under the royal patronage. There are 5 basic components comprising

- Medical practice, which is the art of holistic healing employing the use of herbal medicine, massage, acupuncture and spiritual therapy. Hirudotherapy or the use of leeches in medicine is also part of the Thai tradition.
- Pharmacy, using herbs found specifically in Thailand. There are over 1100 recipes and 200 single herbal medicines, using over 100 plants. The effectiveness lies in the refined technique of boiling the herbs in several stages
- Midwifery. A whole pavilion is devoted to texts and illustrations on this aspect of health care that cover all the stages from pregnancy through labour, birth and the postpartum period, with special attention to lactation and the quality of milk. As in all aspects of traditional healing, certain rituals are also prescribed to ensure the well-being of the mother and child.
- Massage and acupuncture. Illustrated details are provided on these techniques for a masseur as well as for self-massaging and exercise that is the forerunner of modern aerobic exercise.
- Personal Health Care which is the essence of Thai Yoga with spiritual as well as physical therapy.

4.2.4 Originally there were 32 statues of 32 different ethnic groups or nationalities of Asia and Europe with accompanying inscriptions of short verses on their characteristics in 16 pavilions. Only one plate now remains. This is an evidence of early anthropological awareness in Thailand and a testimony of the country’s cosmopolitan setting. The multi-national gathering is surprisingly comprehensive and unique in the world as it includes practically all the major groups of peoples at that time.

4.2.5. Other highlights of the contents of Wat Pho inscriptions of international importance

Include two of the world’s classical epics

- The *Ramayana*. This Indian epic was appreciated in Siam for its depiction of the ideal king, the devotion between husband and wife, the battles between good and evil, military prowess and loyalty. It was celebrated in dance performances and shadow plays with poetic recitals written by Kings Rama I and II and other court poets. There are 152 bas-reliefs depicting scenes from the *Ramayana* on the outer side of balustrades around the main Ordination Hall. Each one is accompanied by an inscription with verses in the Thai language and script.
- The *Shahnameh*. This Persian literature, known as *Book of Kings*, written by Ferdowsi in the 11th century A.D. was appreciated by Thai kings in the former capital of Ayutthaya for its ethical content and ideal kingship. Parts were translated into Thai in Ayutthaya in the 17th century and handed down to the Bangkok kings. At Wat Pho there should be 12 plates with texts but 3 plates are missing. A version of this epic, the “Bayasanghori Shâhnâme” of 1430 from Iran, has already been inscribed on the MOW International Register since 2007.

4.3 Is one or more of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style (f) social, spiritual and community significance satisfied?

Time:

The early nineteenth century saw the beginning of western colonial and cultural expansion into Asia. In Siam, King Rama III's reign (1824-1851) marked the end of the long wars with Burma as that country had to face colonial threats from Britain and the first phase of territorial annexation after the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1824. At the same time Christian missionaries were bringing in western knowledge, such as the printing press, medicine, mechanical technology, and astronomy. It was a time when traditional Thai and Buddhist values and wisdom came under challenge, but the peace and prosperity brought by trade with China also encouraged the search for fundamental religious texts as well as material and spiritual revivalism. The Wat Pho archives represent the best part of the existing local Asian and Thai knowledge about Buddhism and the world as viewed from the cosmopolitan city of Bangkok in the early and mid-nineteenth century Bangkok, compiled to be used to match with the new western knowledge.

Place:

After decades of long wars, Bangkok emerged as the new city of glittering palaces and temples, the Asian metropolis where international goods were available in abundance. In this commercial hub, the Kings of the Chakri dynasty never abandoned traditional learning and knowledge, especially history, laws, Buddhism, Thai crafts, arts, literature and music. While epigraphic tradition existed in Thailand for centuries, Wat Pho was chosen as the only place in the Theravada Buddhist world that a mixture of texts on various topics were put on public display, inscribed on stones at one time as a testimony of existing knowledge, in order to inform and provide moral and physical instructions for a better life. Many of the texts were already available in manuscript forms, but they were not always easily accessible. The public temple environment provided a suitable context for open-space reading, while the use of several types of artistic media such as sculpture and mural painting in combination with literary texts gave the public a uniquely innovative multi-media approach.

People:

The concept of an "open book" library-temple came from King Nangklao (Rama III) himself. As the late Professor David K Wyatt wrote in his *Thailand A Short History* published in 1984:

"One of the most extraordinary acts of his reign [ie King Rama III] was his renovation of Wat Phrachetuphon (Wat Pho) in Bangkok. He had hundreds of inscriptions and mural paintings placed on public view: writings on every conceivable subject, including poetry, treatises on medicine, warfare, massage, astrology, botany, history, and religion, and lists of ecclesiastical establishments, provinces of the kingdom, and foreign peoples. What was he doing, and why? Apparently Rama III was acutely aware that his country was undergoing rapid change and that traditional culture would disappear unless some measures were taken to preserve it. He does not seem to have liked or approved of the direction of this change, but at the same time he did nothing to stand in its way." (p.175)

To him the inscribed knowledge was invaluable, something whose disappearance would constitute a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of Siam and humanity. Although many of the texts were already available elsewhere on traditional books and palm-leaf manuscripts, but by putting them together in one place, he actually turned the Temple into an open-book public library that visitors could browse through at their leisure. In fact the King had already renovated another Bangkok temple, Wat Ratchaorot, in the 1820's and inscribed herbal medicine texts on 92 marble plates. Wat Pho's collection, however, is bigger, more varied and accessible because of its location. Unfortunately because it was a costly undertaking Wat Pho was never copied anywhere in Thailand, or anywhere else as far as it is known.

The Wat Pho Inscriptions were written by about 50 people from the Court of King Rama III and learned monks led by Supreme Patriarch Prince Paramanuchit Chinorot (1790-1853), the Abbot of

Wat Pho, whose bicentennial anniversary was celebrated by UNESCO in 1990. He was a recognized Buddhist scholar, historian and writer. He was on good terms with American missionaries who helped him with the publication of Thai chronicles.

The references to 32 ethnic groups in the world of 19th century Thais show the awareness of ethnic diversity and identities. It should be noted there were all placed on the same level with no visible arrangement of social hierarchy or classes.

Subject and theme:

The subject matter of the inscriptions varies, covering history, government, literature, Buddhism, herbal medicine, physical therapy, ethnology, and morality. They represent a cherished corpus of wisdom that includes

1. A corpus of general knowledge on political geography and cultural diversity
2. The history of Buddhism, the beliefs and practices
3. The holistic approach on how to live a good life, spiritually, physically and morally
4. Thai language craftsmanship and virtuosity

The method of presenting them ensured that they were long-lasting and read by many.

Form and style:

While most of the Buddhist texts were copies from the Tripitaka, the literature texts and poems were composed by Prince Patriarch Poramanuchit Chinorot who is considered one of the best Thai poets and writer of all time. He was an expert in the adaptation of the Indic *chan* meters into Thai meters, playing with words that rhyme. These inscriptions contain at least 4 of his major compositions in the *chan* genre.

The illustrations in the medical and massage texts are similar to those found in Thai manuscripts but they are larger and attract the eyes of visitors. As such they are rare in the world.

Social, spiritual and community significance:

At present Wat Pho is one the world's major tourist sites, with 1,200,000 visitors annually. Its tranquillity and Buddhist environment is an important attraction. The inscriptions and illustrations are essential parts of the visits as they are everywhere in the temple compounds. The highlights are the massage and Yoga practices which can be experienced on site.

For Thai people it is an "open university" where anyone can be in touch with the cherished wisdom of the country as expressed through the Buddhist teachings, the Jataka tales, the Ramayana, the poems and medical knowledge that has sustained the lives of millions through out centuries.

4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination?

Rarity

There seems to be no other surviving collection of this nature any where in the world. The combination of the time, location (a Theravada Buddhist temple), the wide-ranging subjects of religion, the literary, medicine and ethnicity, and the use of marble, makes it a rare holding of documentary heritage.

Integrity

An incalculable number of the Wat Pho inscriptions have been lost since they were made in the 1830's through neglect and carelessness. According to an estimate by the Wat Pho administrators, some 25%

may have been lost or damaged. As far as is known no text has been altered, although some new slabs were made over the years to replace damaged ones using the same texts.

5 *LEGAL INFORMATION*

5.1. Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name

Phra Dhamma Panyabodi
(Thaworn Tissanukaro)

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Sanam Chai Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Telephone

Tel: (662) 225-9595, Facsimile

(662) 222-9779 Email

Website <http://www.watpho.com>

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)

Director-General

Fine Arts Department, Na Phra That Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Telephone

(662) 225-1227

Facsimile

(662) 221-0628

Email

secretary@finearts.go.th

5.3 Legal status:

(a) Category of ownership

The Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture, is the legal custodian of Wat Pho and its cultural contents, including the inscriptions. Legally, the Temple is a juristic body whose Sangha administrators are responsible for the overall administration, finances and care of the temple buildings and all artifacts.

(b) Accessibility

The Temple's compound is open to the public every day from 8 am to 5 pm as normal religious activities take place and it is a popular tourist site.

The Temple has published all the texts of the inscriptions in several volumes that can be bought at the Temple. There is also a Temple website (<http://www.watpho.com>) that provides pictures, maps, descriptions and some texts without restriction. Some buildings containing valuable artifacts may be closed to the public but a request to open can be submitted to the custodians at any time and they are usually opened for viewing without delay.

(c) Copyright status

The whole Temple is registered as national heritage by the Ministry of Culture, but the inscriptions are not registered separately. The texts have been published several times by the Temple and other authorities. The Temple allows them to be copied and photographed without any restriction.

(d) Responsible administration

Wat Pho Temple

(e) Other factors

6 *MANAGEMENT PLAN*

6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage? YES

7 *CONSULTATION*

7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional *Memory of the World* committee

The Thailand MOW National Committee has been working closely with Wat Pho's administrators, particularly the active Assistant Abbot, Phra Rajveti since 2006. After the Archives were inscribed on the Regional Register, a MOW Subcommittee on Wat Pho was created to:

1. Make a new inventory of all the existing inscriptions in the Temple wherever they are (except in the monks' living quarters) and make digital photographs of each one. The National Library was in charge of this task.
2. Make a risk assessment and a preservation management plan. The Fine Arts Department of the Ministry of Culture was responsible for this task.

PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8 *ASSESSMENT OF RISK*

8.1 Detail the nature and scope of threats to this documentary heritage (see 5.5)

9 *ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION*

9.1 Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage (see 3.3)