

THE DATE OF THE GRAHI BUDDHA*

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One of the most interesting dated images of Thailand is the beautiful bronze Buddha from the Vat Hua Vieng at Chaiya¹. Its particular importance is due to the presence on its pedestal of an inscription which, in addition to an elaborate date, gives details about its foundation by *senāpati* Talānai² during the reign of king *hamrateñ añ mahārāja śrīmat-Trailokyarāja-Maulibhūṣaṇavarmadeva*. The language of the inscription, which originates from an area that has been part of Thailand ever since the end of the thirteenth century but probably belonged to the great Malay empire of Śrīvijaya in earlier times (from the end of the eighth century), is Old Khmer. If, moreover, one bears in mind that the style of the Grahi Buddha is closely related to that of the Sukhothai Buddhas, that the script used in the inscription is of an Old Javanese (more correctly Old Sumatranese³) type and, finally, that this area is one of the very few in South East Asia which shows evidence of early Tamil settlements, then it is clear that this Buddha is of unique interest. This consi-

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- 1) Coedès, G., 'Le Royaume de Çrīvijaya' *B.E.F.E.O.* vol 18 no 6, 1918 pp. 33-36. Cf. also the same author's *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam* vol 2, 1929 p. 45. For a most interesting archaeological description of Chaiya and the area in which it is situated see Quaritch Wales, H.G., *Towards Angkor. In the footsteps of the Indian invaders* 1937 pp. 186-97. The ancient political geography of this part of the Peninsula is thoroughly dealt with by Wheatley, P., *The Golden Khersonese* 1961 *passim*. For an up-to-date historical discussion of the historical problems of the area cf. Wolters, O.W., 'Tambra-liṅga' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* vol 21, 1958 pp. 587-607.
- 2) Coedès, G., 'Talānai' *Journal of the Greater India Society* vol 8, 1941 p. 41.
- 3) Damais, L.C., 'Les écritures d'origine indienne en Indonésie et dans le Sudest Asiatique continental', *Bull. Soc. Ét. Indoch.*, Nouv. Sér., vol 30, 1955 pp. 365-82, in particular p. 377 (fig. 15).

deration may be a powerful incentive to a new study of its doubtful date.

This date shows, in fact, several abnormal features. Firstly, the number of (elapsed ?) Śaka years is expressed by no fewer than five figures. Secondly, the different elements of which the date is composed are separated by the insertion between the word *nakṣatra* and the name of the month of the king's names and titles. Thirdly, some words have apparently been omitted or displaced. Thus, there is the word *nakṣatra* without any further precision, while just before the titles of the king one reads the puzzling words *ta tapaḥ śakti*.⁴

The really baffling feature of the date is, of course, the Śaka year expressed by five figures, which were originally read as 11006⁵. The reading of these figures is not doubtful except for the last one. Krom rightly noticed that its shape agrees in all respects with that of the 4 in Old Javanese script⁶. As the type of script is clearly Indonesian Krom's interpretation appears preferable. This correction does not, however, solve the main problem, that of deciding which of the five figures has to be deleted. There are, theoretically, three possibilities yielding Śaka 1104, 1100 and 1004 respectively. As the last date is obviously far too early for the type of script used in the inscription the choice is, in fact, limited to either 1104 or 1100. The choice poses no real problem if one considers that the scribe or artisan could easily have expressed one of the figures twice instead of once, whereas it would be difficult to account for the addition of a 4. This line of argument leaves us with only Śaka 1104 or A.D. 1182.

The date contains, however, another important detail, which proves incompatible with this conclusion, viz. the mention of *thoh*,

- 4) Coedès, 'Le Royaume de Çrīvijaya *op. cit.* suggests: 'par ordre de' (by order of) or 'sous le règne' (during the reign). The literal meaning of the words is, however, 'power of asceticism'. Could they be a displaced epithet or part of an attribute of the King?
- 5) For a detailed discussion with a clear reproduction of the figures of the date cf. Coedès, G., 'A propos de la chute du Royaume de Çrīvijaya' *Bijdr. Kon. Inst.* vol 83, 1927 pp. 459-72 in particular pp. 468 ff.
- 6) Krom, N.J., 'De ondergang van Çrīvijaya' (avec résumé en français) *Med. Kon. Ak. Wet., Afd. Lett.* vol 62, 1926, B, 5 pp. 459-72. Cf. also the same author's *Hindoe-Javaansche Geschiedenis* 2nd ed., 1932 pp. 306 ff.

'(year of the) Hare'. Coedès, whose line of argument is followed here, pointed out that neither Śaka 1104 nor 1106 is a year of the Hare but 1105 is and has, therefore a good chance of being the original date of the Grahi Buddha inscription. Although this date, corresponding to A.D. 1183, was initially suggested as no more than a possibility⁷, it would seem that this possibility gradually grew into a probability and then into a near-certainty merely by surviving without being seriously challenged. Thus, in the most recent authoritative account of the early history of South East Asia the date A.D. 1183 is given without any reservation⁸. This increased confidence is not, however, based upon the discovery of new data confirming the hypothetical date. On the contrary, an argument based upon the style of the Buddha image seems difficult to harmonize with a twelfth-century dating of the inscription.

In a most interesting study,⁹ Dupont analysed the style of the Grahi Buddha and found that, whatever the date of the inscription, the Buddha cannot be dated much earlier than the end of the thirteenth century, as its style is closely related with that of the Sukhothai Buddhas. This conclusion was accepted by Coedès, though not without reservation. If however, following Coedès, one admits the possibility that the Nāga and the inscription date back to the end of the twelfth century but the Buddha to about a century later, it is necessary to find a plausible explanation why, just about a century after its official inauguration, the bronze Buddha should have been replaced by a new statue. Even if one succeeds in suggesting a possible answer, it seems strange that there is no additional inscription taking account of this substitution.¹⁰ It should, of course, be

7) Originally the date was left open in the translation with a note stating only that 1105 (Śaka) was a year of the Hare (*B.E.F.E.O* vol 18 no 6, 1918 note 1 to p. 35).

8) *Les États Hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* 3rd ed., 1964 p. 325.

9) Dupont, P., 'Variétés archéologiques. II. Le Buddha de Grahi et l'école de C'aiya' *B.E.F.E.O.* vol 42, 1942 pp. 105-13 and plates VI-VII.

10) Such a substitution, implying the preparation of a new statue, would necessarily involve a new inauguration ceremony, which would most probably be commemorated by an additional inscription. Thus, in the case of the Amoghapāśa (see note 13 below), a new inscription was cut into the back of the statue when it was transferred (without the pedestal) from Rambahan (near Lubuk Balang) to Padang Rotjo' (near Sungai Langsat) in 1347.

conceded that there would be no alternative if the date of the inscription had been established beyond doubt. As this date is, however, the result of two emendations in the actual figures it may seem preferable to proceed from the relatively certain—the date of the Buddha—to the more doubtful, the date of the inscription. As the former is not likely to be older than the second half of the thirteenth century, the latter, too, should be dated approximately a century later than hitherto accepted.

Two different considerations may give strong support to the later date.

One of the most remarkable elements of the date of the Grahi Buddha inscription is the use of a name of the twelve-animal cycle. It is indeed, as Coedès has noted,¹¹ the oldest extant example of its occurrence in South East Asia. For the following examples we have to wait about a century until Rāma Khamheng's inscription and Chuta-kuan's reference to its use in Cambodia (1296). Such a long gap, though by no means impossible, does not seem likely. Here again it is quite feasible to suggest a conceivable explanation; one would, of course, have to find one if the twelfth-century date was unequivocally expressed. As there is, however, a strong indication that the inscription belongs to the second half of the thirteenth century it is no more necessary to search for an explanation: the use of the cycle is then perfectly consistent with the period to which it should be dated.

The second consideration concerns the names and titles of the king. These are given as *kamrateñ añ mahārāja śrīmat-Trailokyarāja-Maulibhūṣaṇavarmadeva*.¹² It has been pointed out long ago that these names and titles are remarkably similar to those given to a king of Malayu ruling in part of Central Sumatra (at least in the area around present Rambahan in the Batanghari district) in A.D. 1286,

11) *B.E.F.E.O.* vol 18 no 6, 1918 p. 36. Cf. Éveline Porée-Maspéro, 'Le cycle des douze animaux dans la vie des Cambodgiens,' *B.E.F.E.O.* vol. 50, 1962 pp. 311-25.

12) There are, in addition, some minor orthographic differences such as *b* instead of *v* and gemination of the *r* after the *m*.

viz. *śrī mahārāja Tribhuvanarāja-Maulivarmadeva*.¹³ From this similarity it has been concluded that there must have been some relationship between those two rulers, probably implying that they belonged to the same dynasty, which was then called the Maulivarmadeva dynasty.¹⁴ It has, in addition, not escaped the notice of scholars that this concordance is not limited to these two examples but applies also to a third ruler, viz. Ādityavarman of Central Sumatra (c. A.D. 1347-75).¹⁵ Both the concordance and the differences appear from the following comparison:

- (a) *kamrateñ añ mahārāja śrīmat-Trailokyarāja-Maulibhūṣaṇavarmadeva* (Chaiya),
- (b) *śrī mahārāja Tribhuvanarāja-Maulivarmadeva* (Rambahan I, A.D. 1286),
- (c) *śrī mahārāja Udayādityavarma-Pratāpaparākramarājendra-Maulimañivarmadeva* (Rambahan II, A.D. 1347).

A detailed comparison shows that the agreement between *b* and *c* is not of the same order as that between *a* and *b*. In fact, the agreement between *b* and *c* is limited to the *śrī-mahārāja* title and the *Maulivarmadeva* part, which has been rightly interpreted as suggesting that the two kings belonged to the same dynasty. The agreement between *a* and *b*, however, goes much further than that. It applies, in fact, to all parts of the names and titles with only minor differences. Thus, instead of *śrī* before *mahārāja* in *b* there is *śrīmat* prefixed to the name of the king in *a*, which has also the additional Khmer royal title (*kamrateñ añ*). This is exactly what one would expect since the text of *a* is in Old Khmer. Also the third difference, the additional *bhūṣaṇa* in the middle of the dynastic title, without affecting its

13) The inscription is found on the pedestal of a large Amoghapāśa image. Cf. *Oudheidk. Versl.* 1912 no 51 p. 49; Krom, N.J., 'Een Sumatraansche inscriptie van koning Kṛtanagara' (A Sumatranese inscription of king Kṛtanagara), *Verh. Med. Kon. Ak. Wet. Afd. Lett.* 5de Reeks, II 1916 pp. 306-39; Damais, L. C., 'Ét. d'Épigraphie Indonésienne.—IV. Discussion de la date des inscriptions, *B.E.F.E.O.* vol 47 pp. 99-101 (improved transcription of the text).

14) Krom, N.J., *Hindoe-Javaansche Geschiedenis*, *op. cit.* p. 336.

15) *Oudheidk. Versl.* 1912 no 46 p. 48; Kern, H., *Verspreide Geschriften* vol 7 1917 pp. 163-75.

meaning, could hardly be significant, especially if one also takes the occurrence in *c* of *mani* at the same place into account. These differences are of little importance and may all occur in inscriptions of one and the same ruler. Especially if one considers that (1) Chaiya is separated from Rambahan by a distance of over four hundred miles and at the other side of the Malay Straits and (2) the Chaiya inscription is not an official one (it was issued by a *senāpati*, possibly by order of¹⁶ the king) one would be inclined to identify the two rulers. There is, however, a difference which is apparently much more serious as it occurs in the very name of the king, for which the Chaiya Buddha gives *Trailokyarāja*, whereas the Rambahan inscription reads *Tribhuvanarāja*. The difference is, however, apparent rather than real since the meaning of the names is exactly the same. There was, it seems, a considerable amount of freedom in rendering official names and titles, including the substitution of synonyms for parts of the name of a king. Numerous examples may be found in the *Mahāvamsa*, where the name *Parakkamabāhu*, for instance, is frequently given as *Parakkantabāhu* or *Parakkamabhujā*.¹⁷ The name of king *Viṣṇuvardhana* (c. 1248 to 1268) occurs also in the form *Harivardhana* in inscriptions,¹⁸ just as the first part of the name Air-laṅga, meaning 'water', is occasionally replaced by Sanskrit words for 'water' such as *jala* or *nīra*.¹⁹ One should, of course, be very cautious in proposing identifications of this kind, as there are other cases in which synony-

16) This is a reasonable inference, although it may not be expressed by the words *tapah śakti* (see note 4 above).

17) Thus *Parakkamabāhu*, *Cv.* LXII, 52; LXX, 74, 103, 186 etc.; *Parakkamabhujā*, LXIII, 38; LXVII, 36, 38; LXVIII, 19 etc.; *Parakkama*, LXX, 70, 182; LXXI, 4, 8, etc.; *Parakkantabāhu*, LXX, 315; LXXIII, 55, 72, 78, 205 and 221. Similarly one finds *Vikkamabāhu*, *Vikkamabhujā* and *Vikkantabāhu*. For understandable reasons one does not find forms such as *Parakkantabhujā*, in which both parts of the name are replaced by synonyms.

18) Thus *Harivarddhanātmaja* is applied to Kṛtanagara, son of Viṣṇuvardhana in the Mahākṣobhya inscription of A.D. 1289. See Kern, H., *Verspr. Geschr.* vol 7 p. 191 and Poerbatjaraka, R. Ng., *Bijdr. Kon. Inst.* vol 78, 1922 pp. 426 ff.

19) Both forms occur in the Sanskrit portion of the Calcutta inscription. See Kern, H. *Verspr. Geschr.* vol 7, 1917 pp. 83-114; Jalalaṅga, v. 17 & 34; Nīralaṅga, v. 15.

mous names clearly represent different rulers.²⁰ In this particular case the arguments in favour of identifying *Trailokyārāja* with *Tribhuvanarāja* are considerably strengthened by the occurrence of a very precise parallel in the name of prince *Tibhuvanamalla*, one of the sons of Parakkamabāhu II (*Cūlavamsa*, 87. 16), who is beyond any doubt identical with *Tilokamalla* (*ibidem*, 88. 20). These examples²¹, particularly the last one, which belongs to roughly the same period, establish at least a strong indication that *Trailokyārāja* and *Tribhuvanarāja* refer to the same king. As the style of the Chaiya Buddha and the use of the twelve-animal cycle had already suggested that the inscription belongs, in fact, to the second half of the thirteenth century the argument based upon the name and titles of the king not only strongly supports it but also makes further precision possible. For, if these arguments are acceptable it follows that the Grahi Buddha inscription must be dated within the regnal period of a king of whom we have an inscription dated 1286 A.D. This would leave still a considerable margin, as the reign of king *Trailokyārāja* *alias* *Tribhuvanarāja* may have lasted thirty years or more and there is no indication to determine whether the Grahi Buddha belongs to the beginning or the end of his reign. It is, however, unlikely that its date should be much later than *c.* A.D. 1292, when most of this area must have

20) Some obvious examples are Kumāra Gupta and Skanda Gupta in the Gupta dynasty or Vikkamabāhu and Parakkamabāhu in Ceylon. It is impossible to give any precise rules as to when substitution of synonyms in names is permissible. The historian should be guided by common sense. He should try to put himself in the place of the court poet or chronicler, who would use only such substitutes as were clear to the erudite and would avoid those that might create any misunderstanding or unintended ambiguity. Until detailed and comprehensive studies on this aspect of our sources are available it is necessary to judge each individual case on its own merits.

21) Did Kulōttuṅga Cōḷa I have a queen *Trailokya-mahādēvī* (*South Indian Inscr.* No. 138 of 1923, dated A.D. 1072) and another queen *Tribhuvanamādēvī* (Nos. 39 and 45 of 1921, dated A.D. 1111) or do the two names indicate the same lady? The thirty-nine years between the two inscriptions are not necessarily an objection against the latter alternative as Kulōttuṅga himself reigned for no less than 52 years. The greatest authority on the Cōḷas, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, does not consider the two identical; at least, he avoids any suggestion of this kind (*cf.* *The Cōḷas* 2nd ed., 1955 pp. 332 ff). It is a pity that the only precise parallel in non-metrical texts is uncertain.

been under the authority of the Thai.²² It is, on the other hand, quite clear that the Grahi Buddha must be later than c. A.D. 1270, the date of the second expedition to Ceylon by Candrabhānu, who probably continued to rule in the area around Chaiya until his power was replaced by that of the kings of Malayu.²³ It is impossible to determine the date of the Grahi Buddha with any greater precision unless one should attach any value to the fact that the year mentioned is one of the Hare. It may seem arbitrary to rely upon some details in a date which is clearly full of mistakes, while mistrusting others,²⁴ on the other hand, it may be argued that the name of the year would have had less chance of going wrong than any of the other particulars of the date. In that case there remain only two possibilities, *viz.* A.D. 1279 or 1291.²⁵ Whichever date one prefers (or neither, if no credit is given to the mention of the Year of the Hare), there is little doubt that the Grahi Buddha should be attributed to the three last decades of the thirteenth century, perhaps the most critical period in the history of South East Asia prior to the coming of the Europeans.²⁶ Partly as repercussions of the Mongol conquests kingdoms declined and collapsed while new states arose on their ruins. In the cultural field this period saw the decline of Hinduism and Mahāyāna but also

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- 22) This part of the peninsula is mentioned among the areas subject to Sukhothai in the great inscription of Rāma Khamheng dated probably A.D. 1292, but in a part that may have been added a few years later (cf. Coedès, *Recueil des Inscriptions du Siam*, *op. cit.* vol I p. 37; *États Hindouïsés* 3rd ed, p. 372). In any case, the Thai conquest of this area must have been completed long before A.D. 1303, the following year of the Hare.
- 23) Nicholas, C.W. and Paranavitana, S., *A concise history of Ceylon* 1961 p. 285, date this campaign between A.D. 1258 and 1262.
- 24) For the importance attached to this cycle cf. the publication mentioned in note 11 above.
- 25) If the choice is limited to these two years there is little to choose. On balance, there may be a slight preference for 1291, which is nearer the oldest certain example of the use of the twelve-animal cycle and other elements that are apparently associated with the Thai expansion. It is also nearer the date of the Rambahan inscription, though only marginally so.
- 26) Coedès, *États Hindouïsés*, *op. cit.* p. 346. Cf. also the Introduction, p. 7: 'Il y a donc des dates critiques qui correspondent dans l'histoire de l'Inde extérieure à de véritables "tournants" et qui permettent de délimiter un certain nombre d'époques, ayant chacune sa physionomie propre, marquée d'une forte personnalité ou caractérisée par la suprématie politique d'un Etat puissant'.

the beginning of the expansion of Islam and Theravāda. The Grahi Buddha with its inscription, originating from an area likely to feel repercussions of important developments in and around South East Asia, somehow expresses some of the great changes that were taking place. One feature of periods of transition is that not all elements of culture change in the same manner or with the same speed, which may lead to the co-existence, for a limited time, of elements belonging to different periods. Thus, in the Grahi Buddha, the use of the Khmer language points to the past, to the time of Jayavarman VII or even that of Sūryavarman II, when this area was part of the Cambodian empire.²⁷ On the other hand, the use of years named after a cycle of animals and the style of the Buddha image both foreshadow, as it were, later developments when this part of the peninsula would become part of Thailand. This is less strange than may appear at first, because the southward expansion of the Thai, as for instance, that of the Vietnamese, was not a precise event, confined within ascertainable limits of time and place, but rather a lengthy and somewhat vague process the symptoms of which became apparent to the historian only when it had developed to a considerable extent. In this particular case it may be suggested that the remarkable combination of different cultural elements is, in fact, due to the co-operation of men belonging to different generations and versed in different traditions. Thus, the clerk responsible for the draft may have been a Khmer or, possibly, a local man trained by the Khmers, while the astrologer who determined the right date for the inauguration may

27) Chau Ju-kua, translation by Hirth and Rockhill, 1911 p. 53, seems to consider Tāmraliṅga a dependency of Cambodia, whereas Grahi is mentioned as a dependency of Śrīvijaya. As, however, Tāmraliṅga and Grahi both seem to denote the same area around present Chaiya, it is difficult to reconcile the two statements. One possibility is that they are based upon different sources reflecting conditions in the area in different periods (before and after c. A.D. 1200). Another possibility is that Teng-liu-mei of Chau Ju-kua does not represent Tāmraliṅga but some other, unknown, kingdom (Coedès, *États Hindouisés*, *op. cit.* note 5 to p. 329). Although Wheatley (*op. cit.* p. 65) gives some strong arguments against its identification with Teng-mei-liu = Tāmraliṅga, it would be astonishing to find another state with a very similar name also in the Peninsula in about the same period.

have been a Thai (or, at least, somebody trained in the use of the cycle of twelve animals) — working under the orders of a local commander who represented the king of Malayu. All this is no more than a possibility, which is given merely to show that there is nothing inconsistent or unlikely in such a reconstruction. It may, on the contrary, be argued that the Grahi Buddha would, in that case, fit in with the period to which this attempt would assign it.

The present author is fully aware that circumstantial arguments of the type dealt with above, however strong they may appear, can never be a real substitute for an unambiguous date. The foregoing arguments may, however, have shown that the new dating of the Grahi Buddha, though necessarily conjectural, is not based on more assumptions than the accepted date of A.D. 1183 and has some great advantages. In the present state of knowledge the present author would therefore prefer it and accept its consequences for the chronology of the developments in the Malay peninsula and in South East Asia in general.