



Vajrasattva bodhisattva. Khmer, 11th-12th century. Gilt bronze. Ht. 36.9 cm. From The Crucible of Compassion and Wisdom: Special Exhibition Catalog of Buddhist Bronzes from the Nitta Group Collection, Plate 37, p. 131. Taipei; National Palace Museum, 1989. By permission of the Nitta Group collection.

THE SAB BĀK INSCRIPTION

Evidence of an Early Vajrayana Buddhist Presence in Thailand

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The discovery near Nakhon Ratchasima of a stela bearing a text in Sanskrit and Khmer written in Old Khmer script provides the first clear inscripational indication that Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhism was practiced in the 11th century A.D. in the region that now belongs to Thailand.

Tantrism appears to have come to Cambodia in the early 9th century A.D. The Sdok Kak Thom Inscription says that King Udayādityavarman had a spiritual teacher (guru) named Devajayendravarman, who was distantly related to Śivakaivalya, the spiritual teacher (śāstr) of Jayavarman. By King Jayavarman's consent a Brāhmaṇa named Hiraṇyadāman taught Śivakaivalya the siddhi (supernatural accomplishments) together with the sādhanas (means) so as to increase the power of the King. Hiraṇyadāman also taught Śivakaivalya four texts, namely the Śiraścheda, Vināśikha, Sammohana and Nayottara. At the completion of his training, Śivakaivalya undertook to establish the siddhi called Devarāja so as to make the land prosperous (verses 23-29).

The Jayavarman mentioned in the inscription is identified with Jayavarman II, who came from Java to rule in the city of Indrapura (Coedès: 1968, p. 97). He died at Hariharālaya in 850 A.D. after reigning 48 years (*ibid.*, p. 103).

In the reign of King Sūryavarman I (1002-1050 A.D.) Buddhism was favored by the king. The practice of the Devarāja cult introduced in the reign of King Jayavarman II was not, however, disrupted (*ibid.*, p. 135).

"An inscription of 1022-25 tells us that during Sūryavarman I's reign, monks belonging to two schools of Buddhism (Bhikṣumahāyāna and Sthavira) lived side by side in Lavo [*ibid.* p. 137]." Lavo is present-day Lopburi, about 150 km north of Bangkok. Tantrism in some form is practiced in Thailand even today; its mantras generally contain Buddhistic terms. This may indicate the remnants of an ancient practice. However, the Sab Bāk inscription provides the clear inscripational evidence of the

early presence of Tantric Buddhism in Thailand that hitherto has been lacking.

According to information obtained from Khun Yuenyong Thawaraka, the curator of the Mahaveeravong National Museum, Nakhon Ratchasima, this inscription was discovered at the village named Sab Bāk, Tambon Sakae Rat, Pak Thong Chai District, about 25 km south of Nakhon Ratchasima. The inscription is on a stone slab which measures 53 cm in height, 27 cm in breadth on the upper part, 23 cm in breadth on the lower part, and 7.5 cm in thickness. It is written in Old Khmer script. The first part is in Sanskrit and the second in Khmer. The date of the inscription as it appears in both the Sanskrit and Khmer texts is 988 of the Saka Era, corresponding to 1066 A.D. It is clearly mentioned in the Khmer text that the inscription was made in the year 988 in the reign of King Udayādityavarman, who can safely be identified with the King Udayādityavarman mentioned in the Sdok Kak Thom Inscription and who ruled Kambuja between 1050-1066 (*ibid.*, pp. 137-139). The terms Pañcasugata, Vajrasattva, Śrisamāja, Guhyavṛkṣa and Guhyāmṛta, for instance, used in the Sab Bāk Inscription, indicate that Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhism was practiced during King Udayādityavarman II's time.

The Sanskrit text of the Sab Bāk Inscription consists of 30 verses, the metres being Śloka (1-6, 8-12, 14-15), Āryā (7) and Upajāti (13). There are violations of metrical rules (chando-bhaṅga) in verses 8, 9 and 11. Euphonic combinations like SAIVA in verse 6 are clearly not correct according to Paṇini's rules of grammar. The correct combination should be SA EVA. The form NAME in verse 4 is also incorrect according to Paṇini. The correct form should be NAMĀMI. I assume that the author of the inscription might have taken liberties in some other places as well. Parts of my translation have attempted to keep this assumption in view.

The text on the front side

Line

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. śrīpañcasugatāyādau | śrīghanānām vibhāvikaḥ |
| 2. śrīghanās ca sudevānām | śrīpradātīn namāmi tān |
| 3. vajrasattvas tu śaṣṭha sa- | dbodhisattvaprabhur varaḥ |
| 4. ādhāraḥ sarvabuddhānām | tan namāmi vimukṭaye |
| 5. śrīsamāje parā yasya | bhaktiḥ śraddhā ca nīramalā |
| 6. tasya dāsasya dāso'ham | bhaveyam sarvajanmasu |
| 7. ity ājñā paramaguroḥ | śrutvā stutyā namaskṛtā |
| 8. anukathyā mayā bhaktyā | śrīsamājān name sadā |
| 9. jayantrapuranāmādau | chpārransīti tataḥ param |
| 10. deśas tatra sthitas tāyī | śrīsamantaprabheśvaraḥ |
| 11. saiva bauddhabhayam hatvā | kambuje buddhasāsanaṁ |
| 12. cakāra dṛḍham adyāpi | tan namāmi punaḥ punaḥ |
| 13. ācāracano bagava- | ccuñviścaraṇas śuciḥpracuraceṣṭaḥ |
| 14. vācyacyutavāk vāgmī | dharmmī jīnapūjanaḥpaparaḥ |
| 15. bhagavaccampapakapādo | gurupādabhakto 'bhivanditas saiddhaiḥ |
| 16. chpārransīsvadhyāpayitā | sthalāsvāysthāneśam gataṁ |
| 17. dharmmī dhīddho bhagava- | d dharmīndrapurāṅghrīr alankṛtvān |
| 18. dhīran sudhanair dhanyo | bodhau vidadhau dhautam hṛda- yam |
| 19. prajñāpāramitānikā | tarkabhāṣyādivāridhim |
| 20. uttīryya guhyavṛkṣe te | śrāntas tattvaphalāśinaḥ |
| 21. vraḥ dhanus samprajñako dhīro | dhīmān siddhāntaśiṣyakaḥ |
| 22. varāṇān trigurūṇān tri- | gurum vande sadā mudā |
| 23. kāśikākāvyaṅyāhyādi- | śikhīaptamanaḥpīvan |
| 24. guhyāṁṛtañ ciraṁ homa- | japayogarasodyataḥ |
| 25. aṣṭāṣṭarandhre sitasaptaśukre | tapasyamāse sugatādikādikārcchā |
| 26. teṅpāsnaḥ bhāgyaviśeṣatirthe | sa vraḥ dhanus sūrir atiṣṭhipad yaḥ |
| 27. śrīśaktikīrtidevendrā | bhūyas tāsām hṛter mayā |
| 28. yair vijñātaḥ hṛtaḥ sāḥṣā- | tkiñcid atrety amutra hi |
| 29. cet phalam me'sti puṅyānām | jāto'ham kambuje drutam samājasamkhyā- |
| 30. api ca | yā deve'trārtham kurvas tu nānyathā anyaprañidhayo'nekāḥ |

The text in Khmer

31. ri vraḥ vuddhalośvara ta praṁ pvānn ti kamsteñ śrīsatya-
varma ta mān siddhi sthāpanā vreñ
32. le abhayagiri teṁ kampi javā ākrānta sruk khmer vraḥ
noḥsyanta nu tvālla dau
33. hoñ kamrateñ añ ta guruharaṅīndrapura jīrṇoddharaṇa
thve pi pravai sthāpa-
34. nā iss vraḥ noḥ viñ tel noḥ syanta ayat vighna ri ācāryya
vraḥ dhanu
35. ta śiṣya gi ta sthāpanā vraḥ neḥ āy ta aṣṭa aṣṭa nava ta gi
rājya vraḥ pāda kamrate-
36. ñ kamtvan añ śrī udayādityavarmadeva creṅ śrī sthira
śakti ta rāp phdai karom

The text on the adjoining face to the right

Line

1. 990 gi nu nuk
2. 996
3. ...
4. ...
5. mai ro va
6. svādhyā

Line

7. maika
8. vata
9. dvaya rārdho
10. gra
11. ...2

Translation of the Sanskrit text

Verses

1. First, I salute the five Buddhas, who are the manifestations of the celebrated elements, who are the celebrated bodies of gods and who are the bestowers of fortune.
2. For salvation I salute the Vajrasattva who is the sixth [Dhyānibuddha], the bearer of all the Buddhas and the highest master of the holy Bodhisattva.
3. In all my births, may I become the slave of that slave, who has great devotion to and impeccable faith in the Śrīsamāja.
4. "Having saluted with praise, I must hear and repeat the teacher's command devotedly.": thus is the command of the supreme teacher. I constantly pay my obeisance to Śrīsamāja.
5. The protecting lord of the all-around lighted sphere stayed in the country the name of which begins with Jayantrapura and ends in Chpārransī.
6. After having got rid of the threat to the Buddhists, he himself consolidated Buddhism in Kambuja even to the present day. I repeatedly pay my obeisance to him.
7. The most revered and adorable Cuñvis, who is famous for his good conduct, is pure and possessed of many exploits. His speech is unblemished. He is devoted to the worship of the Buddha and to religious chanting.
8. The most revered and adorable Campaka, who is devoted to his teacher's feet, who has been saluted by those who have become Siddhas [accomplished beings] and who is the teacher of the country of Chpārransī, has gone to the lord of the place the name of which is Sthalāsvāy.
9. The virtuous, most revered, and adorable Dharaṅīndrapura, effulgent on account of his intelligence, who became fortunate after having decorated the Firm One by means of great wealth, purified his heart in the Bodhi [Enlightenment].
10. Those whose army is Prajñāpāramitā, who have striven strenuously after having crossed the ocean in the form of the commentary on philosophical thought, have become the enjoyers of the fruits in the form of the truth on the secret tree.
11. Vraḥ Dhanus, who is possessed of clear perception, firm and intelligent, is a student of the Siddhanta [accomplished being]. I salute the three teachers among the three teachers with joy.
12. He whose mind is scorched by fire in the form of texts like the Kāśikā, poems, external texts, etc., while drinking the nec-

tar in the form of the Guhya for a long time, is ready for sacrifice, religious chanting, Yoga and taste.

13. It is the learned Vraḥ Dhanus who has installed the images of the Dhyāni Buddhas and Ādibuddha at Teṇpāsnaḡa, the specially fortunate sacred place, on Friday the seventh of the bright fortnight in the month of Phalguna [February-March] in the year 988.

14. A certain knowledge has been arrived at by me in this world on account of many gods and goddesses, namely Śrī, Śaktis, Kīrti and the lord of gods [Indra], being brought. Certainly the same should take place in the next world.

15. If I should have the fruit of my meritorious act I should soon be born in Kambuja. We both do good for the sake of the god here for the benefit of the Samāja, not for anything else. In addition, there are several other entreaties.

Rendering of the Khmer text

Indeed, the images of Vraḥ [the adorable] Buddhaloḡesvara were installed by the Venerable Śrisatyavarman, who had supernatural power, in the past, on Abhayagiri, with the intention that Javā may not attack Kambuja. Later on, the nine images deteriorated. The venerable teacher by the name of Dharaṇīndrapura has renovated the deteriorated images and reinstalled them once again. In this way, they became free from harm. Indeed, his pupil, Vraḥ Ācāryya Dhanu, has installed these images in the year 988, which is in the reign of His Majesty King Udayādityavarmadeva. May he live long and remain powerful for the rest of his reign.

[The text on the adjoining face cannot be translated as it appears to be incomplete.]

Notes by verse on the translation of the Sanskrit text

1. The term Pāñcasuḡata seems to refer to the five Dhyāni Buddhas, namely Akṣobhaya, Vairocana, Amitābha, Ratnasambhava and Amoghasiddhi, whose colours are blue, white, red, yellow and green respectively (see Bhattacharyya: 1972, p. 16; see also Bhattacharyya: 1980, pp. 100 ff.). This stanza seems to be well illustrated by passages quoted hereafter: "According to Guhyasamāja, when the Bodhicitta secures oneness with Śunya or the Infinite Spirit in the highest state of meditation, its mind-sky is filled with innumerable visions and scenes, until at last, like a spark, the Bodhicitta visualizes letters of the alphabet as germ syllables, which gradually assume the shape of deities, first indistinct, then changing into perfect, glorious, living forms, the embodiments of the Infinite. The deities appear before his mind's eye in bright, effulgent, gorgeous and divine beauty in form, dress and ornament." (*ibid.*, 1972, p. 16). "From these five Dhyāni Buddhas originate the families of deities named in the Guhyasamā Tantra." (*ibid.*, 1972, p. 16.)

2. Vajrasattva, the sixth Dhyāni Buddha, is regarded as the Purohita or the priest of the five Dhyāni Buddhas. His worship is always performed in secret and is not open to those who are not initiated into the mysteries of the Vajrayāna (Bhattacharyya: 1985, p. 6). Note the gilt bronze image of Vajrasattva Bodhisattva (p. 10) from Cambodia which appears in Plate 37 on page 131 and is described on page 410 of *The Crucible of Compassion and Wisdom: Special Exhibition Catalog of Buddhist Bronzes from the Nitta Group Collection*, for the exhibition held at the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, from October 10, 1987 to September 15, 1988. The image is 36.9 cm high and is attributed to the 11th-12th century A.D. Vajrasattva has six arms. His two major arms carry a vajra and a vajra-topped bell. The body wears jewelled ornaments, bracelets and a decorated belt sash. On the head the hair is piled high under a jewelled crown with images of five Buddhas. He sits in sattvaparyāñkāsaṇa on a dais shaped like Mt. Sumeru. In each of the four directions on top of the base there is a three-pointed vajra. It is interesting to note that the Buddha image at Thiksey Monastery, Leh, Ladakh, India, bears on its head the five deities, matching the description of the five Dhyānibuddhas.

3. Śrisamāja appears to be the short form of Śrīguhyasamāja which is a form of Tantra (see Hopkins: 1980, p. 21).

5-6. Chpārransī may be identified with Stuk Ransī or Vaṇśahrada, its Sanskrit equivalent, met with many times in the Sdok Kak Thom Inscription. The literal meaning of both Stuk Ransi and Vaṇśahrada is Bamboo Lake (see verse 84: Majumdar: 1953, p. 368; Chakravarti: Part II, 1980, p. 75 n8). Śrisamantaprabheśvara seems to be the name of a certain god or possibly a posthumous title accorded to a king. Could it be meant for Sūryavarman I, whose favour for Buddhism earned him the title of Nirvāṇapādā? (see Coedès: 1968, p. 135.) The literal meaning of the word Śrisamantaprabheśvara also fits in with the meaning of the word Sūryavarman. The meaning of stanza 6 seems to support the above-mentioned speculation as well.

7-8. It appears that Campaka, the Blessed One, is the pupil of Cuṇvis, the Blessed One. The former, as the spiritual teacher of the country of Chpārransi, seems to have gone to the local ruler of a place called Sthalāsvāy and possibly resided there for the rest of his life. Sthalāsvāy is probably Kompong Svāy, which is associated with Sūryavarman I (*ibid.*, p. 136).

9-10. Dharaṇīndrapura, the Blessed One, seems to have restored some image which is designated as the Firm One. Could it be the Buddha image representing either Cuṇvis, the Blessed One, or Campaka, the Blessed One? Both of them, including Dharaṇīndrapura, might have been regarded as having attained godhood as is indicated by the respectful term Bhagavad used for them. This assumption is evidently supported by stanza 10. The Khmer text states clearly that Dharaṇīndrapura refers to a person, not a city. Why the word pura is added at the end is unclear. It could mean that this venerable figure is the spiritual teacher of the city called Dharaṇīndrapura.

11-12. Vraḥ Dhanus seems to be Dharaṇīndrapura's pupil, who is not satisfied with the study of the other texts outside the

Guhyasamāja Tantra, for instance the Kāśikā, which is the commentary on the Pāṇinisūtra. The terms Homa, Japa and Yoga possibly refer to the means of the Tantras, which are divided into four sets, Action, Performance, Yoga and Highest

Yoga, by way of the varying abilities of the trainees to use desire in the path (for details see Hopkins: 1980, pp. 120 ff.). The word Guhyāmṛta may refer to the teaching of the Guhyasamāja Tantra.

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