THE SAB BĀK INSCRIPTION
Evidence of an Early Vajrayana Buddhist Presence in Thailand

CHIRAPAT PRAPANDVIDYA
SILPAKORN UNIVERSITY

The discovery near Nakhon Ratchasima of a stela bearing a text in Sanskrit and Khmer written in Old Khmer script provides the first clear inscriptive 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 Devajayendravara, who was distantly related to Śivakaivalya, the spiritual teacher (śāstṛ) of Jayavarman. By King Jayavarman's consent a Brāhmaṇa named Hiranyadāman taught Śivakaivalya the siddhi (supernatural accomplishments) together with the sādhanas (means) so as to increase the power of the King. Hiranyadāman 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 (Coedes: 1966, p. 97). He died at Hariharālāya in 850 A.D. after reigning 48 years (ibid., p. 103).

In the reign of King Śuryavarman 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 Śuryavarman 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 inscriptive 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 Saka 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, Śrīsamāja, Guhyavrksa 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 Upājāti (13). There are violations of metrical rules (chadodbhaṅga) in verses 8, 9 and 11. Euphonic combinations like SAIVA in verse 6 are clearly not correct according to Panini's rules of grammar. The correct combination should be SA EVA. The form NAME in verse 4 is also incorrect according to Panini. 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

1. मै सर्वप्रत्येकसुगतायादृष्टि
2. सृवहन्नान्न स्तुत्सुवेंनाम
3. भवलक्ष्य तो शस्त्रहार वर्ताले
4. अधिकस्थार्थ भवाबज्ञाना
5. सृवमाय वर्ताले यस्या
6. तपस्या तास्यास्वामा हाम
7. इत्यादित्वमायुगभरयो
8. आनुकथ्यत्व माय भक्त्याः
9. जयंत्रपरानामादाय
10. देशस्तरी स्थितास्तात
11. सावाय भद्धभायाहम्
12. अधिन सर्वप्रतिवर्ती
13. अचाराणो भगवान्
14. विचारायतवाक्यवेगः
15. भगवायं भवत्कपकपादो
16. चापारस्ववाहैपायतः
17. द्वार्मिक द्विध्यो भगवान्
18. द्विहर शुद्धं द्रह्यो द्वियम
19. प्रायंपारमितातिकाः
20. उत्तिर्याय गुह्यवर्तके
21. व्रत धनुष तीप्तासम्प्रतिको
22. वर्तन तिर्गृहिन त्री-गृहिन वंदे सदा मुदाल
23. कायकाव्यायावह्यः
24. गुह्यमंत्रान प्रीतिष्कीपे
25. अष्टाशारद्देह्र इतिपक्षा
26. तेपिस्नाग्न ह्यविश्वसिन्तिने
27. हसकाव्यवह्ययादिः
28. स्वधिया त्रिपुराणस्तिनाहि
29. स्वधिया स्वधियास्मात
30. या देवतिर्थम् करुवस तन्यायतः
31. स्रिहान यो वर्तमाणी

The text on the adjoining face to the right

1. मै व्रतावत्तुधालोस्वराः
2. अधिना सर्वप्रत्येकम्
3. तृतीय आदिन्यामादाय
4. वैद्याणार्थान्
5. सृवहन्नान्म विह्विवकाल
6. अधिकस्थार्थ भवाबज्ञाना
7. सावाय भद्धभायाहम्
8. अचाराणो भगवान्
9. विचारायतवाक्यवेगः
10. भगवायं भवत्कपकपादो
11. चापारस्ववाहैपायतः
12. द्वार्मिक द्विध्यो भगवान्
13. द्वार्मिक द्विध्यो द्वियम
14. प्रायंपारमितातिकाः
15. उत्तिर्याय गुह्यवर्तके
16. व्रत धनुष तीप्तासम्प्रतिको
17. वर्तन तिर्गृहिन त्री-गृहिन वंदे सदा मुदाल
18. कायकाव्यायावह्यः
19. स्वधिया त्रिपुराणस्तिनाहि
20. स्वधिया स्वधियास्मात
21. या देवतिर्थम् करुवस तन्यायतः

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 master of the holy Bodhisattva.
5. The protecting lord of the all-around lighted sphere stayed in the country the name of which begins with Jayantrapura and ends in Chāpārāṇi.
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 Śrīsamāja.
7. The most revered and adorable Čunvis, 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 Chāpārāṇi, has gone to the lord of the place the name of which is Sthalāśvāy.
9. The virtuous, most revered, and adorable Dharāṇḍrapura, effulgent on account of his intelligence, who became Siddhas [accomplished beings] and who is the teacher of the country of Chāpārāṇi, has gone to the lord of the place the name of which is Sthalāśvāy.
10. Those whose army is powerful, 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. Vraja 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 Vraň Dhanus who has installed the images of the Dhyāni Buddhas and Ādibuddha at Terpāsnaga, 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, Saktis, Kirti 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 Vraň [the adorable] Buddhakośva were installed by the Venerable Śriyavarman, who had supernatural power, in the past, on Abhayagiri, with the intention that Java may not attack Kambuja. Later on, the nine images deteriorated. The venerable teacher by the name of Dharanyāndrapura has renovated the deteriorated images and reinstated them once again. In this way, they became free from harm. Indeed, his pupil, Vraň Ācārya Dhanu, has installed these images in the year 988, which is in the reign of His Majesty King Udayadityavarman. 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 Pāñcasugata seems to refer to the five Dhyāni Buddhas, namely Akṣobhya, 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 one-ness 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 Guhyasamāja 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 sattvaparyākāsana 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 Dhyā nibuddhas.

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

5-6. Chparransi may be identified with Stuk Ransi or Vamśahrada, its Sanskrit equivalent, met with many times in the Sduk Kak Thom Inscription. The literal meaning of both Stuk Ransi and Vamśahrada is Bamboo Lake (see verse 84: Majumdar: 1953, p. 368; Chakravarti: Part II, 1980, p. 75 n8). Śrisamantraprabhāsava seems to be the name of a certain god or possibly a posthumous title accorded to a king. Could it be meant for Suryavarman I, whose favour for Buddhism earned him the title of Nirvāṇapādā? (see Coedes: 1968, p. 135.) The literal meaning of the word Śrisamantraprabhāsava also fits in with the meaning of the word Suryavarman. 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 Cuvīs, 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 Sthālāsvāy and possibly resided there for the rest of his life. Sthālāsvāy is probably Kompong Svāy, which is associated with Suryavarman I (ibid., p. 136).

9-10. Dharanyāndrapura, the Blessed One, seems to have restored some image which is designated as the Firm One. Could it be the Buddha image representing either Cuvīs, the Blessed One, or Campaka, the Blessed One? Both of them, including Dharanyāndrapura, 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 Dharanyāndrapura 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 Dharanyāndrapura.

11-12. Vraň Dhanus seems to be Dharanyāndrapura'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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BHATTACHARYYA, BENOYTOSH. *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism.* Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1980.


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The transliteration of the text was done with the help of Miss Kanikar Vimolkasem, Lecturer in Palaeography, Department of Oriental Languages, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University, Bangkok. The rendering of the Khmer text was done with the help of Dr. Uraisri Varasarin, Assistant Professor, Department of Oriental Languages, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University, Bangkok.