

SECTION IV

**NOTES AND COMMENTS**



# IRREGULAR YEAR NOTATION IN THE HISTORICAL RECORD

J. C. EADE

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

As Casparis pointed out in these pages some years ago (*JSS* 55. 1, 1967), one strange feature among several in the Grahi Buddha inscription is that the purported Mahasakarat year is apparently given by five digits. No other instances were adduced, and Casparis commented (p. 32) that "the scribe or artisan could easily have expressed one of the figures twice."

Other instances of the usage, however, suggest an alternative explanation. When a year number is being written down, a scribe is more likely to say it in words than in numerals. If I write down a year in numerals, I do not say to myself, for instance, "one nine nine one", but "nineteen (sc. hundred) ninety-one". Similarly, a scribe might say to himself "*pan, x-roy, y-sip z*".

In Dhawaj Poonotoke's *Northeastern Thai Inscriptions* (Bangkok 1988) there are nearly forty dates that "cut" the era at CS 1000: they express the year by using two or three digits, or else by using two digits with the addition of รอย (i.e. ร้อย) Even more interestingly, there are some dates that take the following form:

รอย ๓๑๐๗	(p. 357)
รอยปาย ๔๐๙	(p. 361)
รอย ๖๐๘	(p. 369)
รอย ๖๐๙	(p. 377)
พัน ๒ รอย ๒๐๘	(p. 423)
สองพันสามร้อย ๘๐๘	(p. 426)

Here it is plain that the extra numerals are not errors; but they are not place markers either (in the sense that 3107 and 307 in this notation would not represent different numbers). Rather they are part of the numeric equivalent for the given word.

On the strength of these instances, one is prompted to argue that the figures on the Grahi Buddha represent "one [thousand]-hundred-four". On these grounds, it is not true to say that the Grahi Buddha year was "expressed by five figures" (Casparis)—it was expressed by three words in their numeric form.

