



佛國

館藏泰國造像特展

The Land of the Buddha: Thai sculptural art from the museum collection.



中國世界博物館
CHINESE WORLD MUSEUM



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03 淺談墮羅鉢底及其鄰近文化之佛教儀式¹

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導言

自二十世紀上半葉起，墮羅鉢底 (Dvaravati) 的研究進展顯著，但其歷史、政治架構及實際分佈範圍，我們仍知之甚少。² 現在能掌握的資訊主要來自考古遺存，例如佛塔、寺廟的建築遺跡、石質、青銅造像、陶土、泥灰製品，以及大量的宗教相關銘文。佛教自傳入墮羅鉢底後，修行與藝術密不可分。而一般大眾對於這些零散的物質文化，其背後所蘊含的複雜義理、儀式等關係，似乎不容易理解。

筆者於本文中，將藉由考古資料和銘文，持續探討物質文化與宗教儀式之間的關係。目的在於考察當今泰國中部與其周圍、東部，以及東北部墮羅鉢底佛教的修行和宗教儀式。筆者將回顧早期研究的考古資料和銘文，以重塑七至八世紀與部分九至十世紀的宗教活動。³ 首先，我們應該先了解到，幾乎所有的文物和銘文，都與佛教的「功德」（梵語：*puṇya*；巴利語：*puñña*）概念有關。儘管這一概念在印度的宗教中非常普遍，⁴ 但重新檢視這些文物和銘文的細節，以及它們的分佈狀況，也許還能揭示出更多的內容。

佛教善行之基

「功德」是佛教固有的概念，自其發軔於印度及東南亞起，便是佛教藝術產生的主因。功德可以通過多種方式累積，而巴利三藏 (*Tiṇiaka*) 記載了許多方法，其中最為基本的方法，就是恭敬 (*apacayana*) 佛教中的三寶 (*tiratana*)，即佛、法、僧)。

這一個基本的善行，也反映在七世紀中國義淨法師行旅至東南亞時，所留下的觀察紀錄：「所有國家的人民，都十分恭敬三寶 (*Ratnatraya*)。」(Takakusu, 1998, 頁 10) 由考古出土的資料，亦可證明此一紀錄的真實性。那空沙旺府帕育哈基里 (Khok Mai Den, Nakhon Sawan) 出土一方佛教陶板 (圖 2a)，其上以巴利語銘刻：「*namo buddhassa namo dhammassa namo sanghas (sa)*」意譯即「敬佛、敬法、敬僧」。(FAD, 2529, I, 頁 287 — 291; 圖 2b)。⁵ 另外一方出土於巴真府能薩拔 (Noen Sa Bua, Prachin Buri) 的銘文，雖沒有詳確紀年，⁶ 但也同樣以華美的巴利語詩句稱頌三寶 (編號 PCh 14 / K. 997)；⁷ 而這些頌文源自於《油壺偈》(*Telakaṭṭhagāthā*) 這篇僧伽羅文 (Sinhalese) 詩偈的開篇敬詞。正因其存在與斯里蘭卡的關聯性，許多人試圖以此證明「斯里蘭卡佛教」早在墮羅鉢底時期就已傳入泰地。然而，這個觀點存在著嚴重的偏頗，以及方法論上的問題，最終無法立足 (Revire, 2012a)。

除了恭敬三寶之外，《福業事經》(*Puñṇakiriyavatthusutta*, A IV 239; D III 218; It 51) 也詳述另外三項累積功德的基本方法：「布施 (*dāna*)、持戒 (*sīla*)、禪定 (*bhāvanā*)」。⁸ 首先提及的「布施」，與本文的關聯最為密切。雖然其他兩項方法具有一定的重要性，但通常較無法見於考古遺存之中。然而，布施的修行方法在所有佛教文化中，都具有相當大的社會、經濟意義；並留下了大

量的考古資料和銘文以供研究。⁹ 事實上，任何佛教文物、圖像或建築等物件，皆源於「散佈、施捨 (Giving)」的重要觀念，由願意布施的功德主而產生。這些通過布施善行的「資助者」，藉此累積功德福報。布施的價值也取決於受施者，也就是說，如果供養佛陀和其他覺悟的聖者，其成就的功德就更大。然而，自佛陀入滅後，嚴格來說，只有證得果位的聖僧 (*Ariyasanga*) 才足以被稱作「福田 (*puñṇakhetta*)」。因為布施供養他們，供養者無疑就能得到殊勝無上的果報。但事實上，幾世紀以來，「布施」一直是所有僧侶，以及佛教僧團重要的經濟來源。

一塊來自烏通 (Uthong) 的陶製浮雕殘片上，描繪了三位正在托鉢化緣 (*piṇḍapāta*) 的僧侶 (圖 1)。這項古老的募化活動可與「頭陀苦行 (*dhutaṅga*)」一同來理解。這種修行方式是指修行者只食用被施予的食物，而不去分別食物的分量和味道。⁹ 在過去，這是印度許多佛教部派 (*nikāyas*) 的修行方式 (Ray, 1994, 頁 294ff)，至今仍常見於上座部佛教的叢林道場之中。根據義淨法師的記載，許多墮羅鉢底的僧侶踐行著「頭陀行 (*dhūta*)」(Takakusu, 1998, 頁 9 — 10、56、n. 3)。據此，信眾會在每日僧侶托鉢化緣時，供養僧侶食物和其他的生活必需品；¹⁰ 或是直接供養寺院。為了回禮，僧侶則向信眾「法布施 (*dhammadāna*)」，即教導佛法和祝願；而這份「回禮」通常會被視為最崇高的回報。

在古代佛教典故中，「布施」常被加以強調。因為它是所有菩薩行波羅蜜 (*pāramitā*，菩薩的六度萬行：布施、持戒、忍辱、精進、禪定、般若) 和證得無上正等正覺 (*sammā sambodhi*，至高無上正確徹底的全面覺悟) 的道路上必修的善德。例如本生 (*jātakas*) 和譬喻 (*avādanas*) 等故事，教化信眾多加行善和累積善德 (如布施)。這樣一來，才能夠利益眾生；並且走向覺悟之道。這些故事還特別讚揚菩薩「無私」的精神，包括向饑餓或需要幫助的眾生獻出四肢、雙眼，甚至自己的生命。代表這種精神的例證，可見於佛統府朱拉帕通寺遺址 (Chedi Chula Prathon, Nakhon Pathom) (Piriya, 2517) 或那空沙旺府帕育哈基里 (Khok Mai Den, Nakhon Sawan) 中著名的本生故事板 (圖 3)。另外，泰國東北部幾塊八至九世紀的界石 (*sema stones*)，以「布施」作為敘事主題，似乎描繪了《太子須達拏經》(*Vessantarajātaka*) 中的故事 (Murphy, 2010, 頁 249 — 253)。故事欲告訴眾人，一位菩薩的布施，不僅僅限於物質的施捨；甚至是自己的妻兒、身體，乃至自己的生命 (Dayal, 1970, 頁 172 — 188)。一般來說，俗眾自然不會做出如此巨大的付出；而是較侷限地，透過以物質上的施予來累積功德。

護持寺院，以為功德

佛經中，強調了「無私」的重要性。許多以古孟文 (Mon)、高棉文 (Khmer) 和梵語 (Sanskrit) 書寫的個人 (一般大眾、國王或貴族) 供養銘記中，多數與護持寺廟或佛教僧團有所關聯 (Prapod, 2010, 頁 86 — 90)；而這是出於僧團幾乎需要完全仰賴信眾的布施之緣故。然而，這些供養紀錄也告訴了我們，平民和王室的布施，對於佛教在近世紀，泰國和其周邊佛教國家的立足、發展的過程中，有相當的重要性。

¹ 本文選自尼古拉斯·雷威爾與史蒂芬·莫非 (Stephen Murphy) 共同編輯出版 *Before Siam: Essays in Art and Archaeology*. Bangkok: River Books and The Siam Society, 2014。

² 本文中的「墮羅鉢底」既指一種考古類型學，也指大致位於泰國中西部，大約七至八世紀左右存在的一個文化體。

³ 這裡所列舉的考古資料及銘文，並不是為了表現詳盡無遺，其中絕大多數均為古文字。大部分銘文都曾於泰國編輯、出版過，但卻很少有令人滿意的英文譯文。印刷出版和「泰國銘文資料庫計畫」的網站所提供的銘文釋讀與翻譯，均需要審慎加以校勘。本文中所有來自泰國和法國出版中的翻譯均由作者本人完成。

⁴ 印度的諸多宗教都有「做功德」的概念，但本文中筆者將只關注於「佛教的功德概念」。

⁵ 素攀府 (Suphanburi) 發現的一塊磚上刻有類似的梵語偈文：「namo vuddhaya」，即「向佛陀致敬」(Kongkaeo, 2541, 頁 45)。

⁶ 銘文開頭的高棉文所列出的日期通常被認定是公元 761 年 (683 *saka*)，但十世紀或十一世紀可能更為準確 (Revire, 2012a, 頁 153, n. 2)。

⁷ 本文中，筆者首先列出了由 FAD 記錄的銘文登記編號，而後列出「柬埔寨銘文語料庫」的「K」編號。如銘文沒有以上兩種編號，筆者會以文物的保管編號或隨機編號稱之。有關銘文引用的更多資訊和參考文獻可參見原文 Table 1 — 4。

⁸ 有關古印度可參見 Nath (1987)；有關近現代和現代泰國傳統可參見 Gabaude (2003) 和 Arthid (2012)。

⁹ 通常比丘修持頭陀行時，不會在居士的家中用膳。

¹⁰ 在一些戒律中，「杖 (*khakkhara*)」被視作行腳僧的十八件隨身物之一。對於義淨法師而言，使用杖僅僅是為在村子化緣時，方便驅趕牛狗之用 (Takakusu, 1998, 頁 191)。杖也是墮羅鉢底及其鄰近文化區中的常見之物。



圖 1：烏通陶製浮雕殘片，描繪了三位站立持鉢的僧侶。約七至八世紀 (?)，高 20 公分，寬 16 公分。現藏於烏通國家博物館 (Uthong National Museum, 編號 65 / 2509)。作者拍攝。



圖 2a：那空沙旺府帕育哈基里佛教陶板正面。七至八世紀，現藏於曼谷國家博物館，編號 923 / 2508。圖片由 Disapong Netlomwong 提供。



圖 2b：圖 2a 底座細節圖，以巴利語銘刻「崇敬三寶」(編號 NW6)。圖片由 Disapong Netlomwong 提供。



圖 3：《六牙本生經》(Chaddanta Jataka) 故事板 (?)，那空沙旺府帕育哈基里，約七至八世紀，現藏於曼谷國家博物館，陶土，編號 813 / 2508。作者拍攝。



圖 4：法輪柱，華富里府三昇，銘刻古孟文（編號 LB 1／K. 409），現藏於曼谷國家圖書館（National Library of Thailand）。作者拍攝。



圖 5a：底座帶有古孟文銘刻的佛立像，現藏於披邁國家博物館，編號 14／2536。作者拍攝。



圖 5b：圖 5a 細部圖，古孟文銘文釋讀為「kyāk punya」。作者拍攝。



圖 6：春武里府的一塊陶土石板背面，上刻有古孟文。現藏於那萊國家博物館，編號 DV36。作者拍攝。

十世紀時，泰國中部和東北部的銘文（參見原文 Table 1），足以說明人民已經了解供養三寶的重要性。這些銘文中有許多平民的供養紀錄，且多半是以古孟文書寫。而王室的供養，則以梵語記錄；其隨附的供養品清單，有時甚至會以古高棉文詳述。功德主通常以姓氏或頭銜辨別，而接受供養的對象可以是佛像、佛塔、僧團或寺廟。在古孟文中，接受供養的對象可以用「*kyāk*」代表，或於名詞前另加上「*kyāk*」一詞，用以尊稱神聖的人或物（即泰文中的 *phra*）。常見的供品有稻田、牛等，甚至是「奴隸」。¹¹ 例如華富里府三昇（San Sung, Lopburi）石柱上的銘文（編號 LB 1／K. 409；圖 4），或寮國萬象山谷（Vientiane valley）中，以古孟文書寫的班達拉銘文（Ban Thalāt，編號 HPK I／33）。近期在沙功那空府（Sakon Nakhon）發現的古孟文銘文（編號 SN 10），甚至提到供養當地寺廟「門窗」的紀錄（Kongkaeo, 2550）。

銘文中也時常提及功德主的祈願，其中多以累積功德為主因。累積功德的觀念，無論今昔，都是影響僧團與寺院運行的基石。在泰國發現的銘文之中，僧侶為功德主的狀況比較少；這可能是因為僧人應該謹遵佛陀的教誨，專注於修行，以證菩提涅槃。相對地，信眾最關切的，可能與涅槃較無關係，而是要積累功德福報。

然而，在呵叻府（Nakhon Ratchasima）卻發現了兩個特例。其中一則銘文（Hin Khon，編號 NM 31／K.389）敘述，將供養皇家寺院的功德，回向給功德主（此人應該是出家為僧的王子，*rājabhikṣu*）及十方眾生，願他們最終都能得到一切種智（*sarvajña*）和成佛。另外，在界石城（Mueang Sema）發現的銘文（Bo Ika，編號 NM 24／K. 400），其中提到，室利堪那沙（śrī Canāsa）的國王供養當地佛教團體，並祈願自己能證得佛果。

嚴格上來說，要證悟菩提佛果，僅能透過禪修；但銘文中的敘述，卻說明了「布施」也是證悟菩提的方法之一。至少，Bo Ika 銘文中所記載的國王，可能以菩薩自許，所以精進地修持布施（*dānapāramitā*）。

造佛像、佛龕，以為功德

筆者羅列佛像、奉獻板、佛龕和佛教建築上，所有關於「功德」一詞的供養銘文。有時候該詞的拼寫方式不同，卻在銘文中反復出現（參見原文 Table 2）。例如 *puñ*、*piñ*、*piñña*、*punya* 或 *puna*。以下列舉幾個重要的例子。

在叻丕府蛇山（Khao Ngu, Ratchaburi）有一則七世紀的銘文。此銘文鑄刻於佛像足部，內容以古孟—高棉文（Old Mon—Khmer）及梵語混寫。賽代斯（George Coedès）曾釋讀該篇銘文：「*puñ vraḥ ṛṣi……śrī samādhigupta, i.e.*」，並譯為：「無上聖者的功績……śrī Samādhigupta」（Coedès, 1961, 頁 19）。¹² 然而，這則銘文的釋譯仍存在著許多問題，因為只有第一個字「*puñ*」和最後一個字「*samādhigupta*」是清楚的。「*Samādhigupta*」應該是指一個人名，而且是一位修行的聖者，因為他如此精進地修行，所以成就了這個殊勝的功德。¹³ 這是為數不多與造像有關的銘文，其造像為一尊刻在石窟洞壁上的倚坐佛像。¹⁴

在七至八世紀佛立像的底座上，出現了一些古孟文和梵語的銘記。這兩則著名的銘文皆出自於華富里府，並由賽代斯與泰國文化部藝術司（Fine Arts Department，以下稱 FAD）出版。第一則銘文來自奎寺（Wat Khoi，編號 LB

9／K. 695），雖然賽代斯無法明確地釋讀：「（……）*rla*（……）*ñ kauñ vi*（……）*y cyāga*」，但卻可推斷該銘文應為孟文。而後，FAD 提出了較完整的釋讀：「（……）*rlī mai koñ vijhay cyāga*」，並譯為：「一位祖父與其孫輩莊嚴了佛像」（FAD, 2529, II, 37）。然而，FAD 的翻譯也存在著問題，因為他們將「*cyāga*」一詞解釋為「*kyāk*」（即指佛像）的變體；但迄今為止，該變體仍為特例，尚無出現相似狀況。事實上，「*cyāga*」較可能是巴利語「*cāga*」與梵語「*tyāga*」的結合，譯為「離棄、放棄」。但銘文殘缺嚴重，尚無法準確譯文。第二條則是梵語銘文，多年前出土於華富里瑪哈泰寺（Wat Mahathat，編號 LB 5／K. 577），其中記述了「*nāyaka Ārjava*（正直的統治者），*Taṅgur* 人的統治者和 *sāmbūka* 王之子，樹立了一尊 *pratimā muneḥ*（釋迦牟尼佛像？）」（Coedès, 1961, 頁 5；FAD, 2529, I, 頁 231）。¹⁵

一則尚未發表的銘文，出自於呵叻府鎮嫩（Sung Noen）地區一尊佛立像的底座上，現藏於披邁國家博物館（Phimai National Museum，編號 14／2536，圖 5a）。根據古文字學研究，造像底部的銘文，可追溯至七世紀到八世紀初，但因銘文殘破而無從得知功德主的頭銜和姓名。僅能由佛像正右方釋讀：「*kyāk punya*（……）」（圖 5b），大致譯為：「這位聖者（*kyāk*，即佛像）是（……）的功德」。因左上角殘缺，功德主頭銜和姓名無從得知。在春武里府（Chon Buri）的兩塊陶土石板背後，出現了相似的銘文（編號 DV 36, DV 38，圖 6），可釋讀為：「*kyāk puñ*（……）（*t*）*rala*」，即「此尊佛像為……（的）主（Lord）之功德」（Bauer, 1991b, 頁 63）。同樣地，由於銘文的殘缺，無法得知功德主的確切名稱。然而，筆者將持續探討孟文「*kyāk punya*」的另一種翻譯。

出土於那空沙旺府塔春蓬（Thap Chumphon）的一些小陶器上，至少見到三則古孟文與巴利語的雙語銘文。¹⁶ 根據古文字學研究，其年代可追溯至八到九世紀（圖 7）。¹⁷ 兩行銘文皆位於陶器的下緣，並以孟文和巴利語組成。其中一則（編號 NW 7）第一行為古孟文，寫著：「*ne'kyāk puṇa tra*（*la*）（……）*wihār*」，即「這座佛塔為（……）精舍領主的功德」（Bauer, 1991b, 頁 65）。雖然看似合理，但 *wihāra*（精舍）的判讀仍有問題。¹⁸ 另一則尚未被 FAD 登記的銘文（編號 NW i）更具完整性，或許能夠解決此一問題，其釋讀為：「*ne'kyāk puñña tara tra'jrap vihāra*」，即「此為神聖之功德（*phra bun*）：殿堂（*sālā*）和精舍（*vihāra*）」（Kannika & Phongkasem, 2542, 頁 145）。如果這個釋讀無誤，那麼就代表孟文中的「*kyāk*」，在這裡並不在指此銘文所在的物件（即供品）。如果這塊陶片上，此詞作為首字來限定後面的內容「*puñña*」，才可以解釋為：「此「神聖的」功德」，¹⁹ 是因為供養殿堂和精舍而成就的。」此外，大多數古孟文銘文均以「*trala*、*trala*、*tarla*、*tirla*」，或其他變體的形式，代表頭銜或敬稱（Bauer, 1991b, 頁 61—63）。因此，人們很容易會將「*tara tra*」讀作「*trala*、*tarla*」。總的來說，銘文最終可翻譯為「這是殿堂與精舍之主（i.e., *trala*）的神聖功德（*kyāk puñña*）」。根據鮑爾（Christian Bauer）的

¹¹ 梵語中的 *dāsa* 或 *dāsī*、古孟文中的 *dek* 及中古高棉文中的 *kñum* 通常被譯為男性或女性的「奴隸」，但也許「僕人」會是更為貼切的譯法。可參見 Vickery, 1998, 頁 225—227、439—440。

¹² Coedès 所提供的圖片（1961: inscr. XXII）顯然與原始銘文有所誤差。另一則疑似也有訛誤的釋讀和翻譯請見 FAD (2529: I, 頁 68—71)。關於已出版的拓片、圖像與銘文間的關係，可參見 Revire, 2012b, 頁 94—95，圖 1—2。

¹³ 另一則來自烏泰他尼府崩扣常城（Mueang Bueng Khok Chang, Uthai Thani province）中的簡短銘文（編號 AN2），尚無法確定其釋讀和語言辨讀，但文中提到了做功德的相關文字 *puñ*（*ṇ*）或 *puñña*，但並未提及功德主名字（FAD, 2529: II, 頁 48—52）。

¹⁴ 另見孔敬府布萬地區（Phu Wiang）一尊大型臥佛上方的銘文（編號 KhK 25）。*puya*（*ṇ*）這個詞清楚地位於第二行末（Cham, 2544, 頁 58）。

¹⁵ 發現於卡拉辛府（Kalasin）的一尊「佛像」底座上，另一則殘缺的梵語銘文（KS 5），被錯誤地解釋為功德主發願「將幸福傳遞給全人類」（FAD, 2529, I, 頁 278）。銘文其實是《虎戲詩經》（*śārdūlavikrīḍita*），用以敬獻濕婆神，並且與 648 *saka*（年）的 K. 1214 銘文有一些相似之處（Griffiths, 2005）。感謝 Arlo Griffiths 檢查參考文獻，並提請注意。

¹⁶ 筆者傾向避免在文中使用 *stūpa*（即舍利塔）這一具有喪葬功能意味的術語。這些陶製碎片會是建築頂飾嗎？中空的結構和平坦的底部可能暗示著這些陶塊曾用於建築之上。

¹⁷ 據筆者觀察，發現還有更多此類雙語銘文的陶器，但都未獲重視，也沒有被 FAD 登記。至少有兩件保存在曼谷國家博物館（例如編號 277／2504 和 278／2504），一件保存在巴真國家博物館（Prachin Buri National Museum，編號 129／2526）。還有一些碎片則保存在華富里府那萊國家博物館（例如編號 281／2504 和 286／2504），筆者認為博物館庫房、寺廟或私人收藏中可能會有更多實例。這些帶有銘文的文物列表，另見 Bauer (1991, 頁 49，圖 E)。

¹⁸ 同樣的銘文被誤讀為「此舍利塔（*kyāk*）為三位先祖建於寺廟附近」（FAD, 2529, I, 頁 98），從而推測這些所謂的「赤陶甕形窄塔坡」可能是用為葬禮甕器（Woodward, 2003, 頁 101—102）。

¹⁹ 梵語中可能可對應之詞為「*brā hmapuya*」，意為「崇高的功德」（cf. Skilling, 2008, 頁 512）。



圖 7：那空沙旺府塔春蓬的小陶器，上有古孟文及巴利語銘文。現藏於那萊國家博物館，編號 286／2504。作者拍攝。

觀點，代詞「*ne'*（即：這個）」在上述兩則銘文中均有出現，疑似為高棉方言。因為「*ne'*」不常見於古孟文銘文中，而是用「*wo'*」或「*awo'*」（Bauer，1991a，頁 40 — 42）。但也可能反映出當地有高棉—孟雙語並用的狀況（Bauer，1991b，頁 66 — 67）。第三則銘文（編號 LB 26），記述了一行相似的古孟文，但很可惜銘文被侵蝕得非常嚴重，只剩下兩個單字，「*puṇa*」和「*vihāra*」（Phimphan，2013，頁 13）。在這些陶器上，銘文的第二行均刻寫著巴利語《緣起法頌》（*Ye dhammā*），筆者將在下文繼續探討。

前文提及的石製、陶板和陶器殘片上的古孟文銘文，似乎與呵叻高原（Khorat Plateau）上發現的小型奉獻板與界石有所關聯。奉獻板與界石上經常出現「*kyāk*」和「*puṇya*」等詞，即「神聖」和「功德」。假設「*kyāk*」（神聖）一詞是指佛像、寺廟或聖物，那就可初步推測它們皆是為了「*puṇya*」（功德）」

而生。為證明此一觀點，就不得不提到卡拉辛府法得城（Mueang Fa Daet，Kalasin）可上溯到八至九世紀的兩塊陶板（編號 KS 1，KS 2）。這兩塊陶板雖然被出版多次，但其背面的銘文卻從未被翻譯完全過；這兩塊陶板的內容基本相同：「*wo'*（或 *wo*）*kyāk piñ (u) pajhāy ācāryya guna wikhyāt*（或 *wikhyā (t)*）」（Bauer，1991a，頁 66）。據鮑爾的觀點，這是古孟文中首次以「*piñ*」的變體拼寫「功德」之案例。另外，「*upajhāy ācāryya*」一詞顯然是源自巴利語「*upajjhāya*」及梵語「*ācārya*」，意思為「傳戒師」與「和尚（出家時的親教師）」。兩段銘文可大致可譯為：「這是德行崇高的傳戒師和／或親教師的神聖功德」。至於兩段銘文中所指的僧侶究竟是同一人，還是不同人，尚無法確定。

位於法得城的銘文（編號 KS 4，KS i）和納敦（Na Dun）的銘文（編號 MKh i，iv，vii），從風格和古文字研究判斷，可上溯至八到九世紀。其銘文以古孟文記述了領主（*tala* 或 *tarla*）、統治者，甚至自稱為轉輪王的供養銘文（編號 MKh iii）。銘文編號 MKh2 及 MKh3 (?) 可釋讀為：「*naī vo' puṇya kamrateni pdaī karom'or skum das jāti smar*」（Bauer，1991a，頁 42），即「這是國王的功德，願我不再出生卑賤」。鮑爾主張代詞「*naī'*」（即：這）」可能源自高棉文的變體，再次說明該地區與高棉族群存在著聯繫；而銘文中首次出現以孟文撰寫的高棉王室的頭銜「*kamrateni p (h) dai karom*」，無疑地再次驗證了這一觀點（Bauer，1991a，頁 46）。

出土於猜也蓬府（Chaiyaphum）、卡拉辛府和孔敬府（Khon Kaen）的界石上，記述了八到十世紀的國王、僧侶和一般民眾的供養銘文。²⁰ 其中可見功德主發願：「願出生在彌勒佛（即未來佛）的時代」（編號 KhK 16 和 KhK i ?）。這些銘文常見到孟—高棉文的混合詞彙，例如瓦帕拆寺（Wat Pho Chai，編號 KS 7）中的銘文，寫到：「*puṇya pragata kanmun kasmui kyāk cak*」，即「此為 Cak 國王賜予的功德」（Uraisi，1995，頁 200）。鮑爾將「*pragata*」一詞定為高棉文（Bauer，1991a，頁 43）。而這個詞彙也同樣出現在巴真府考朗山（Khao Rang，Prachin Buri）的銘文中（編號 PCh 1／K. 505）。在卡拉辛府發現的另一塊界石上，可見「*kasmui*」或「*ka smui*」此一代表頭銜的詞彙，可能是「*smiñ'*（即國王、王子）」的變體，雖然變體寫法為「*ksmui*」（編號 KS ii），但應該是孟—高棉文的混合詞（Bauer，1991a，頁 46）。另外一個頭銜代稱「*kurui*」（即國王、統治），也大量出現在猜也蓬府（編號 ChY i）和孔敬府（編號 KhK 17）的高棉文界石上。這些泰國東北部所使用的詞彙，如「*pragata*」和「*kurui*」等，應該是借用高棉詞彙的古孟文（Bauer，1991a，頁 44 — 47）。²¹ 這一現象再次說明，該地區可能是孟、高棉雙語區。

泰國中部和東北部顯然應存在著「多語並存」的狀況。值得注意的是，目前尚未發現任何十世紀的巴利語供養銘文（參見原文 Table 1 — 2）。²² 絕大多數有關功德的銘文都是以孟文書寫，有時候會摻用高棉—梵文，偶爾會借用部分巴利語詞彙，但也有出現完全使用梵語書寫的狀況。²³ 而在泰國東部及東北部，則出現高棉銘文。在下文中，筆者僅探討分佈於泰國中部（地圖 1）七至八世紀巴利語銘文。這些銘文具有極高的「正典性（canonical）」，並通常與「緣起」（*paṭiccasamuppāda*）、《緣起法頌》，以及佛教四聖諦（*cattāri ariyasaccāni*）有關聯。

緣起與四聖諦

「緣起」²⁴（梵語：*pratītyasamutpāda*；巴利語：*paṭiccasamuppāda*）是佛教對於眾生為何會面臨苦難，以及如何消除苦難的解釋。其內容通常分為十二節，述說著佛陀在覺悟過程當中的體會。這個重要的教義，遍及所有佛教傳統和其相關的經典，包括巴利三藏。²⁵ 例如，上部座佛教傳統中，佛陀的上首弟子舍利弗尊者（Sāriputta）曾說：「人若見緣起即見法，人若見法即見緣起。」（M I 190f；trans. Horner，1954，頁 236 — 237）。

依據《自說經》（*Udāna*），佛陀經過七日禪坐，夜睹明星而證悟，悟到諸法皆為緣起性空的道理，了解到苦的生起及止息的方法。於是，在優樓頻螺村（Uruvelā）尼連禪河（river Nerañjarā）邊的菩提樹下，宣說「緣起」（編號 Ud 1 — 3）。佛陀開悟七週後，在鹿野苑宣說佛法，被稱為「初轉法輪」。此時佛向首批弟子解釋如何通過「四聖諦」，成就解脫之路。佛陀對生命的剖析，認為世間皆為「苦（*dukkha*）」，而苦有其「集（*samudaya*，集起苦之因）」，即慾望（*taṇhā*），而苦可「滅（*nirodha*）」，其方法為「道（*magga*）」。四聖諦的內容也可以從「緣起」來理解，因為兩者都屬於基本的「因果法則」。而眾生離不開苦，是因為有十二種環環相扣的因緣——無明、行、識、名色、六處（六入）、觸、受、愛、取、有、生、老死。若去其一，便能打破這個循環，脫離輪迴（*saṃsāra*）的苦境。而這便幾乎是每位佛教徒修行的目標。

墮羅鉢底文化區內所出土的法輪像、法輪柱和法輪底座上，可見到以巴利語刻寫的緣起和四聖諦（Brown，1996，頁 99 — 113；Phasook，2008，頁 24 — 29）。法輪與緣起和四聖諦銘文的組合並非巧合，因其可為法輪像帶來更明確的象徵意義。²⁶ 然而，一塊華富里府瑪哈泰寺所藏的法輪碎塊（編號 LB14），其銘刻著部分的緣起內容，而布朗（Robert Brown）藉此提到：「……有趣的是，法輪柱上銘文所引用的內容，是佛陀前往鹿野苑之前的思維，當時還並未成為教義。然而，從這裡可見到「因果法則」被更完整地理解，並且與四聖諦一樣，說明苦的起因和止息的論點。」（Brown，1996，頁 104）

緣起中所談到的「順序緣起（*anuloma*，「苦」生起的順序）」，可用以解釋四聖諦中，集結苦因之第二諦「集諦」；而第三諦「滅諦」，則可以用「逆序緣起（*paṭilom*，「苦」止息的順序）」加以闡釋。華富里府薩占婆（Sap Champa）有一則與上述觀點相關的銘刻（Phuthon，2529，頁 18，圖 14），目前存於華富里府的那萊王國家博物館（Phra Narai National Museum，圖 8）；其中一面，試圖說明「逆序緣起」的內容。²⁷

A 面： (1) (*ta*) (*ṇ*) (*hā*) (*niro*) (*dhā*)
(2) *upā nirodho*

²⁰ Stephen Murphy 記錄了泰國東北部發現的二十六則銘文，其中包括古孟文、高棉文及梵語銘文（Murphy，2010，頁 90 — 95，附錄 1，表 A5）。然而，這些銘文大多殘損嚴重，因此仍未被釋讀或缺少準確的翻譯。

²¹ 情況也可能恰恰相反。例如，至少有兩則來自呵叻府的高棉銘文（NM 28／K. 388 和 NM 31／K. 389），也顯現了孟文外來詞的痕跡，如 *kyāk*。

²² 能薩拔（Noen Sa Bua）銘文中巴利語的部分（PCh 14／K. 997）不應該被視為具「捐贈性」，因為只有高棉文的一部分，提及向寺廟捐贈牛和佛足印像。Prapod 認為這段銘文應是引用了一段非正典文本，並歸類為「頌詞」（Prapod，2010，頁 82 — 83）。

²³ 請見來自猜也蓬府的幾則讀頌銘文（ChY 1、ChY 4 和 ChY 5）。來自泰國東北部的其他佛教梵語銘文請見 Bauer，1991a，頁 56，圖 H。

²⁴ 英文譯名可見「dependent co-arising」、「chain of causation」、「conditioned co-production」、「conditioned genesis」等。

²⁵ Brown（1996，頁 104，n. 44）提供較完整的巴利詩句文本清單，包括了《自說經》及《小部》（*Khuddakanikāya*）。該文本最新英譯本可見 Masefield（1994）。

²⁶ 具體銘文可見 KTh 29、NTh 1、SPH 1、SPH i、LB 19、ChN 14、ChN 15、PhCh i 和 82.183（參見原文 Table 3）。薩占婆發現的法輪柱殘片上的銘文（LB 8），最初被定為梵語本（FAD，2524，頁 26 — 27），最近則被重新定為以巴利語所寫的「初轉法輪」（U-tain，2556）。

²⁷ 筆者對難以辨認或缺少的字母或音節（*akṣaras*）會嘗試校正和還原，並以括弧另行標識。雖然第二行的字母非常清晰，但因為第一行筆者推測其引用了緣起的內容，所以重新調整了整句話。遺憾的是，筆者一直沒有機會看到這個碎片的背後 B 面。

布朗另外鑒別出一則，可能也是節選自緣起的銘文。該銘文位於席貼 (Si Thep) 的圓形石質底座上 (編號 PhCh i)，而此底座尚無法確定是否為法輪的一部分 (Brown, 1996, 頁 105, 圖 41)。另一則同樣地發現於席貼的圓形底座上，其巴利語銘文 (FAD, 2550, 頁 127)，雖尚未登記，但從古文字學研究判斷，應為七至八世紀的銘刻。表面雖破碎殘缺，但其內容卻與「緣起」相關。由於本人未能親眼看到這件石刻，其釋讀是根據圖片所寫 (圖 9)，如下：²⁸

- (1)*vedanānirodho vedanānirodhā taṇhāniro (dho) ti* (.....)
(2) (*pa*) *ccayā jarāmarāṇa (m) sokaparidevadukkhadom* (.....)

如果釋讀無誤，那銘文第一行 (*vedanānirodhā taṇhānirodho*) 大致與上文瑪哈泰寺法輪殘片 (編號 LB 14) 的內容一致，譯為：「受 (*vedanā*，情緒) 止息時，慾望也便停止」 (Brown, 1996, 頁 104)。就此推論，圖片中的最後一個「*ti*」可能有誤。最後一段可重新調整為「*taṇhānirodhā*」。因為首字母「*t*」後可能緊隨「*upādānanīrodho*」，如同薩占婆殘片 A 面的情況 (編號 86 / 2529)。而剩下的句子應為：「*upādānanīrodhā bhavanīrodho, bhavanīrodhā jātinīrodho*.....」，即「慾望止息時，執著 (*upādāna*) 便停止；執念止息時，有 (*bhava*，存在) 便停止；有止息時，生 (*jāti*) 便也停止.....」。第二行開始則刻寫著導致「苦 (*dukkha*)」的「因 (*paccayā*)」，包含衰老 (*jarā*)、死亡 (*marāṇa*)、悲傷 (*soka*) 與哀悼 (*parideva*)。如果銘文沒有破損，在左邊應該能讀到「*jāti* — (出生)」；其前應該是「*paccayā* (導致的)」；而其右邊，則應該是「*domanassupāyāsā* (即沮喪與絕望)」。根據緣起，「出生」是衰老、疾病和死亡的先決條件，伴隨著悲傷、痛苦和失望。總的來說，這篇銘文的第一行引述了苦如何終止的「逆序緣起」，而第二行則引述有關苦產生的「順序緣起」。

其他泰國中部的巴利銘文，全部列於 Table 2、Table 3 (參見原文)，並標注於地圖 1 中。下文筆者將另行討論《緣起法頌》。除了緣起和四聖諦，刻寫在法輪及其他相關構件上的經文，也見於《自說經》(Ud 1ff, 亦見於 Vin I 2)²⁹ 及《法句經》(*Dhammapada*, Dhp 153f, 191)。³⁰ 例如，在薩占婆一支刻有銘文的石柱上 (編號 LB 17 和 LB 22 ?)，就寫有《自說經》第一品至第三品和《法句經》第一五三至第一五四偈頌的內容。前述已說明《自說經》的經文，即闡述佛陀在菩提樹下證悟後的事蹟，其與「緣起」之間，均存在著教法上的連繫。因此，《自說經》第一品不管在巴利三藏、梵語藏經，乃至所有的佛教傳統中，均被視為首個「喜悅詩節」或佛陀傳達的「感興語 (*udāna*，無問自說)」 (Skilling, 2002, 頁 164 — 167, 175)。然而，在巴利三藏中沒有任何敘述交代《法句經》第一五三至第一五四偈頌是佛陀在何時何地宣說的。但出於某些原因，後來的注釋 (例如 Dhp-a III 127 — 129; Sp 17; Sv 16; Ud — a 4) 都認為《法句經》第一五三至第一五四偈頌才是佛陀的真正「首言 (*paṭhamabuddhavacanam*)」，因此賦予其高於《自說經》第一品的地位。這似乎也是認為《法句經》的偈頌，是佛陀早在腦海中形成的教義；而《自說經》的內容，只是佛後來再用口頭表達出來的。同樣發現於華富里府蓬欣台 (Phromthin Tai) 的銘文 (編號 LB 24)，內容不僅引自《自說經》第一品，同時也引用《經集》(*Suttanipāta*, Sn 558) 中，佛陀證悟後不久與婆羅門塞拉 (Sela) 會面交談的佛傳故事 (Brown, 1996, 頁 118 — 119; 圖 10)。同樣的經文 (Sn 558) 還出現在佛統府出土的四面銘文上的 C 面 (NTh.i; Skilling, 1997, 頁 126)。顯然，這些經文對於上部座佛教相當重要，因為這是剛開悟的覺者所宣頌的「首言」。



圖 8：華富里府薩占婆的巴利語銘刻殘件。現藏於那萊國家博物館，編號 86 / 2539。作者拍攝。

圖 9：席貼發現的圓形基座，上有巴利語銘文 (0966) 圖片由泰國銘文資料庫計畫提供。

總而言之，筆者完全支持布朗對於墮羅鉢底法輪和法輪柱上巴利銘文的觀點 (Brown, 1996, 頁 115)

這些引自 (巴利文本) 的銘文，均與佛陀對於緣起和四聖諦的見解，佛陀在菩提伽耶的證悟，以及隨後佛在鹿野苑初次啟教的內容有關。這些內容對法輪有一定的適切性；但特別的是，這些經文都是精心挑選過的，甚至有時候還經過編寫。有趣的是，薩占婆 (Sab Champa) 石柱上《法句經》的節選，與佛陀的「首言」(即《自說經》第一品) 並列排放。



圖 10：華富里府蓬欣台發現的巴利語銘文。現藏於那萊國家博物館。作者拍攝。

這些銘文可能是從巴利三藏中編寫、縮簡而來的，狀況十分有趣。例如，賽代斯 (Cœdès, 1956, 頁 225 — 226) 已經注意到佛統府發現的法輪 (編號 KTh 29)，其所銘刻的四聖諦，並非是從巴利三藏上逐字逐句摘錄。史基林 (Peter Skilling; Skilling, 1997, 頁 135 — 150) 已經證實，一些與四聖諦相關的銘文內容 (編號 Sph 1; ChN 14; ChN 15; LB 17; LB 22)，只能見於五世紀之後的注釋或著述。但也有可能是，這些銘文所引用的經文現已失傳 (Prapod, 2010, 頁 77)；或者，如布朗所言 (Brown, 1996, 頁 103)：「銘文是由記憶所組成的，並不一定有確切的文本與之相對應。」

《緣起法頌》

這部具有典範性的偈頌經文，幾乎不需多作介紹。嚴格地來說，它既不是佛語 (*buddhavacana*)，亦不是佛陀直接「口述」之詞；但它在所有佛教傳統中卻承擔著如此巨大的作用。巴利《律藏》(*Vinaya*) 中提到，佛陀最重要的兩名弟子——舍利弗與目犍連 (Mogallāna)，他們僅僅聽了馬勝比丘 (Assaji) 宣頌《緣起法頌》之後，便決心皈依佛門出家 (Vin I 39f)。以下就是以巴利語記錄，所謂最簡潔的四行經文或是「佛法精要」，與其對應的譯文如下：

Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā 諸法從緣起，如來說是因；
Tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha / 彼法因緣盡，是大沙門說。
Tesañ ca yo nirodho
Evaṃvādī mahāsamaṇo ti //

據說，舍利弗和目犍連尊者，僅僅聆聽了這段偈頌和佛教法要，便證得了阿羅漢果 (脫離生死輪迴之苦的聖者; Horner, 1951, 頁 52 — 56)。《緣起法頌》對於兩位尊者證悟的經歷十分重要，是他們的覺悟之泉，代表了「緣起」的精要，並使人得以理解前文中所提的「四聖諦」。接下來的幾個世紀裡，任何一個佛教聖地，都出現了《緣起法頌》；這也等同於此地，傳承著佛教傳統上覺悟的根本方法。因此，從五到六世紀起，《緣起法頌》開始以不同的語言和變體，出現在佛塔上，或是供奉在塔中；或是佛像、小型陶板與寺廟上。最先出現在印度北部和西部 (Boucher, 1991)，而後遍及古代的緬甸、泰國、馬來半島、越南南部和印尼 (Skilling, 1999, 2003-04, 2008; Griffiths, 2011, 頁 142 — 146, 圖 1a-b)。

²⁸ 特別感謝 Arlo Griffiths 對釋讀上所提供的幫助。

²⁹ 在柬埔寨下游的吳哥波雷縣 (Angkor Borei) 及緬甸下游的崑澤 (Kunzeik) 發現了《自說經》第一至三品 (Ud 1-3) 的案例，這一情況證實了這些文本在七至八世紀東南亞大陸的上座部佛教傳統中很受歡迎 (Skilling, 2002, 頁 162 — 164)。

³⁰ 《法句經》第一九一偈頌 (Dhp 191) 總結了四聖諦的內容，並被銘刻於烏通的一塊陶塊上 (Sph. I: A 面; Prasan, 2009, 頁 82; Skilling, 1991, 頁 243 — 244) 和佛統府的一件石條上 (Nth i: D 面; Skilling, 1997, 頁 129 — 130)。另外，同樣撰寫 Dhp 191 的文本也被發現於越南南部溝帥 (Go Xoai)，以巴利—梵語混寫的金板銘文 (Skilling, 1999, 頁 172 — 173, 175) 和印度安德拉邦的貢圖帕勒中發現以普克里特文 (Prakrit) 撰寫的偈頌。



圖 11:佛統府發現帶有《緣起法頌》銘文的磚塊。現藏於曼谷國家博物館，編號為 22 / 10。作者拍攝。



圖 12: 佛統府帕岩寺 (Wat Phra Ngam) 發現帶有《緣起法頌》銘文的小陶器。現藏於大佛塔國家博物館 (Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum)，編號 305 / 2519。作者拍攝。



圖 13: 破碎石像 (佛立像?)，底座帶有《緣起法頌》銘文 (LB i)。現藏於那萊國家博物館。作者拍攝。



圖 14: 帕門寺帶有刪節過的《緣起法頌》模印陶板。現藏於曼谷國家博物館，編號 DV6 — 2。作者拍攝。

這段偈頌在墮羅鉢底文化圈中，以巴利語大量銘刻、壓印、雕刻於陶板、磚塊、赤陶殘件、寺廟石雕、法輪立柱、佛像和石板碎片上。這些七到八世紀的銘文，證實了亞洲佛教地區，會在不同物件上書寫偈頌的傳統作法。³¹ 筆者羅列泰國中部最新發現的《緣起法頌》銘文 (參見原文, Table 4)。按照史基林的文本分類標準 (Skilling, 1999, 頁 180 — 184)，這些銘文可以分為兩組，一組取決於第二行的首字是否與前文之標準版本一致，即正典籍的「*tesaṃ*」組；另一組則是經過證實，只出現在泰國中部的「*yesaṃ*」組。

《緣起法頌》在泰國仍陸續出土。最新以泰文發表的銘文，出現於薩占婆的石塊上 (編號 LB 54)，石塊兩側銘文釋讀如下 (Amon, 2551, 頁 56 — 60)：

A 面： (1) (.....) *hetuṃ*
(2) (.....) *āha*
B 面： (1) *tesaṃ ca yo* (.....)
(2) *nirodho ca* (.....)

由於石塊破碎，無法確定該銘文應屬於哪一組，³² 但可注意到的是，B 面第二行出現字樣變體，即在「*nirodho*」之後添加了「*ca*」。佛統府和華富里府發現的銘文 (編號 NTh 10 和 LB 16 ?)，出現了類似的字樣變體，而兩者皆屬 *yesaṃ* 組 (Skilling, 1999, 頁 181)。

另外有幾篇《緣起法頌》銘文至今沒有出版。一塊據稱來自佛統府的磚石，現存於曼谷國家博物館 (Bangkok National Museum)。磚上銘文幾乎難以辨認，但第二行開頭的音節「*ye*」非常清晰，故將其歸類為 *yesaṃ* 組 (圖 11)。除了據稱來自那空沙旺府塔春蓬的幾塊雙語 (孟文和巴利語) 陶土碎片 (編號 LB 26, NW 7, NW i) 之外，兩件據稱來自佛統府的陶片，均僅以巴利語銘刻《緣起法頌》 (圖 12)。儘管在撰寫本文時沒有機會讀取這些銘文，但它們應屬 *yesaṃ* 組。³³ 除了殘石碎片外，一尊破碎的石像，推測為佛立像的足部，底座上有一段幾乎無法辨認的銘文 (編號 LB i)。雖然第一行殘存的字母可與偈頌對照鑒別，但仍不足以判定其屬於 *tesaṃ* 組還是 *yesaṃ* 組 (圖 13)。

除此之外，在泰國中部，還發現了大量帶有巴利語《緣起法頌》的模制陶板。目前尚無法確定這些陶板的確切數量和來源，它們均為長方形陶板，其中描繪著中央坐佛被周圍人物像所圍繞，它們主要分為兩種類型：第一種類型主要出自佛統府的帕門寺 (Wat Phra Men; 圖 14; Dupont, 1959, I, 頁 47 — 49, II, 圖 34 — 40)，³⁴ 此種陶板均使用同一種模具製作，偈頌文一般直接印壓在主要圖像下緣。以下兩行為依據杜邦 (Pierre Dupont, 1959, 頁 49) 的釋讀：

(1) *ye dhammā hetupprabhavā*
(2) *tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha*

值得注意的是，這裡只出現偈頌的第一部分 (1. 1-2)，並故意遺漏其餘的內容 (1. 3-4)。泥板上的文字相當模糊，但似乎出現了兩次「*pa*」及下寫「*ra*」，構成了「*hetupprabhavā*」一字中的複合詞「—*ppra*」。這段銘文應有略微梵語化，因「*hetupprabhavā*」被視為「正統的」巴利語。這段經文顯然屬於 *tesaṃ* 組，但第二行末尾很難辨認，因此不能完全確定。杜邦認為，這則銘文相當精要，因為在其可利用的空白處上，幾乎都刻滿了符號；甚至這個偈頌很可能被刪減過。

第二類陶板主要出自叻丕府、佛統府和素攀府，上面均銘刻著完整的《緣起法頌》。³⁵ 此類陶板的偈頌文可能是在陶土尚未乾時，在背面以草寫刻劃完成，因此較難閱讀。以下的釋讀是根據宋卡府瑪琪瑪瓦寺 (Wat Matchimawat, Songkhla) 收藏的一件泰國中部地區的精美陶板 (圖 15b)：

(1) *ye dhammā hetupprabhavā*
(2) *yesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato*
(3) *āha tesaṃ ca yo niro-*
(4) *-dho evaṃvādī mahāsama-*
(5) *-no*

可能是因為「*akṣaras*」一詞在行內平均分散的關係，造成銘文分為五行，而不是常見的四行，其中第二、三、四行的句尾音節也略微出現偏差。此銘文屬 *yesaṃ* 組，其在結尾處出現了變體字樣，即省去了「*mahā-samano*」後面的「*ti*」，從而使結尾拼寫變成了齒音「*n*」，而不是標準的捲舌音「*ṇ*」。這種拼寫特色在 *yesaṃ* 組中其他的《緣起法頌》中相當常見 (例如編號 NTh 5, LB 26, NW 7, NWi)，因此不能簡單地將之歸咎拼寫錯誤。

這首神聖的偈頌在泰國似乎出現了兩種不同巴利語的拼寫方式，並且系統性地分佈於所屬之區域 (參見原文 Table 4)。我們發現大多數正典籍組 (*tesaṃ*) 的銘文來自於佛統府，僅有一個樣本來自碧武里府 (Phetchaburi, 編號 PhB 2)，另一個則來自烏通 (編號 SPh 2)；但 *yesaṃ* 組的銘文則分佈較廣，遍及中部諸府，如叻丕府、佛統府、素攀府、華富里府，甚至遠及碧差汶府席貼 (Phetchabun, 編號 LB 23)；此外，還可能分佈於呵叻府的界石城 (編號 K. 987) 及猜也蓬府的農博登 (Nong Bua Daeng, 編號 K. 1166 ?)。從這一觀察結果可證明，兩種不同偈頌文本的分佈區截然不同，顯然 *yesaṃ* 組文本分佈最廣，擴張至泰國東北部。

巴利經文禮拜儀式之功用

前文中所探討的巴利語銘文，都與四聖諦密切相關。它們都是佛陀一系列的重要宣說，並常以「引語」或「引述銘文」的形式出現 (Skilling, 2002; Prapod, 2010, 頁 72 — 81)。

這些承載著經典的文字，其出現的地方也許不是一般人所能見到的。許多經文都能利益其功德主和信眾，並能庇蔭經文所在的場所或附著之物體上。《緣起法頌》為緣起的精要，並與佛陀在鹿野苑所宣揚的四聖諦密切相關。³⁶ 經文的長度與完整度並不是最重要的，如同我們在前文中所見之被刪節的例子。換句話說，這些精選過的佛經即使不完整，但仍能體現佛法的精髓。



圖 15a: 模印陶板正面，背面有《緣起法頌》銘文 (圖 15b)，可能來自泰國中部。作者拍攝。



圖 15b: 圖 15a 背面，現藏於宋卡府宋卡府瑪琪瑪瓦寺，編號 MW / 458。作者拍攝。

³¹ 墮羅底迄今尚未見到將這段神聖經文寫在貴重金屬上的作法，但確實存在於其鄰近地區。例如，越南南部溝帥出土的金質雕版 (Skilling, 1999, 頁 171 — 177, 圖 1)；一件藏於巴黎吉美博物館 (Musée Guimet) 的一件不明出處的金版 (編號 MA 4649B; Skilling, 2003 — 04, 頁 284, 圖 13)；以及蘇門答臘島巨港 (Palembang) 出土的另一案例 (Griffiths, 2011, 頁 143 — 145, 圖 1a)。

³² FAD 釋讀銘文的專家將此銘文歸類於 *yesaṃ* 組 (Amon, 2551, 頁 59)，但卻未說明分類原因。

³³ 菲諾 (Louis Finot) 將佛統大佛塔上的陶瓶 (vase en terre cuite) 上的銘文定為 *yesaṃ* 組 (Finot, 1910, 頁 148)，但賽代斯則建議分類至 *tesaṃ* 組 (Cœdès, 1912, 頁 29)。然而，依據拉洪基耶 (Lunet de Lajonquière) 出版的圖片，清楚地顯示應分類至 *yesaṃ* 組。特別感謝 Laurent Hennequin 所提供的參考資料。

³⁴ 該類型的完整石板案例原存於曼谷國家博物館，現保存於洛坤國家博物館 (Nakhon Si Thammarat National Museum, 編號 19 / 246 / kho)，其確切來源尚不明確。此外，在枯磨 (Khu Bua) 發現的一個殘塊 (編號未知) 現存於叻丕國家博物館 (Ratchaburi National Museum)；另一件可能來自佛統府的殘塊現藏於猜耶國家博物館 (Chaiya National Museum, 編號 DV 244)。

³⁵ 兩件樣本的精美圖片請見 Baptiste and Zéphir, 2009, 頁 56-106, cats 13 — 14，其中一件來自叻丕府 (編號 242 / 2533)，另一件則來自素攀府 (編號 64 / 2511)。此外，還有一塊疑似來自佛統府的銘文，現保存於曼谷國家博物，編號 151 / 2511，另一塊藏於華富里的那萊國家博物館，編號 225 / 2526)。另還有一塊藏於英國牛津阿什莫林博物館 (Ashmolean Museum, 編號 EAX.170)。有關這些石塊的最新圖像學研究 (例如圖 15a)，請見 Woodward, 2009。

³⁶ 泰國蒙固國王或拉瑪四世 (King Rama IV, 約 1851 年 — 1868 年在位)，作為一位曾出過家的佛教學者，曾提出《緣起法頌》為「緣起」和「四聖諦」的概要。見 1856 年蒙固王在佛統府佛統大佛塔上留下的泰文銘記，全文請見 (Cœdès, 1961, 頁 43 — 4, 泰文版)。

這些刻於物體上，並用於儀式中的偈頌文字，其功用不在於傳達文字內容訊息。這些銘文甚至以小字「藏匿」在佛像及小型陶板背面，或被供奉於大型佛塔內。一般人是無法讀取這些銘文的，只有少數具備相關語言能力和古文字學知識的學者或僧侶，能夠認讀或銘刻這些內容。

然而，有充足的考古證據表示，十世紀中期的南亞已有在陶土、磚石、金屬等物體上銘刻偈頌的儀式，而後也傳至東南亞。銘刻經文的儀式應由具備宗教儀禮知識的人來執行，但他們究竟是未出家的佛教徒還是僧侶，目前仍無法得知。近幾十年來，許多專家學者強調這些偈頌文字具有神聖化的力量 (Sacralizing power)，所以在聖化儀式 (consecrating ceremony) 中，會將偈頌放入寺廟、佛塔、佛像，或其他聖物內 (Boucher, 1991; Bentor, 1996, 頁 42、114 — 117、217; Skilling, 2008, 頁 507)。而緣起和《緣起法頌》均與建構佛塔和佛舍利崇拜的信仰有著密切的關係。因為它們不僅能代表佛法的精髓，同時，亦能代表「法身 (*dharmakāya*)」和「實相 (*dharmadhātu*)」。由此又能呼應巴利三藏中：「見佛者，即見法；見法者，即見佛」(S III 120)。³⁷ 換言之，這些經文理應被恭敬供養，因它們就如同佛陀一般。

因為這些偈頌代表著佛陀，所以它們可被銘刻在一些特定的位置上。這些銘文和咒語 (*mantra*) 均被視為具有聖化物品和場所的作用。史基林曾提出關於「禮拜儀式」的論述，嘗試解答為何在十世紀的泰國中部、緬甸、柬埔寨會出現許多銘刻的巴利經文 (Skilling, 2002, 頁 173)。而賽代斯以一篇有關「奉獻板 (Votive tablets)」的開創性文章，指出在古代佛教徒眼中，《緣起法頌》可能具備了一定的神奇妙用，它可使任何人聽聞後皈依信仰佛教 (Cœdès, 1926 — 27, 頁 6)。由於上述種種原因，這些偈頌承載了更多意義，而不僅僅是從巴利三藏中摘錄的「引用銘文」。因此，在墮羅鉢底文化圈內，這些只以巴利語出現的偈頌，或在東南亞其他地區出現的梵語及普克里特文偈頌，被挑選銘刻的原因，應為文字本身具有的「儀式性」、「禮拜性」，以及神奇妙用的力量。³⁸

在此，也許值得再回顧拉洪基耶早期對墮羅鉢底法輪的闡釋 (Lajonquière, 1909, 頁 36, 圖 17)，學者認為法輪可能具有界石的功能，即標界佛教聖地的範圍。儘管這一觀點很快被賽代斯駁斥 (Cœdès, 1956, 頁 225)，但如果以巴利偈頌具有聖化物件、地點作用的角度重新審視，似乎又十分合理。

最後，與當今的情況相較，這也引出了有關當時巴利語識字率的問題。在過往和現今某些儀式上，可以觀察到古代巴利語有趣的使用方式。少數佛教研究學者 (Skilling, 2002, 頁 166、173 — 174; Swearer, 2004, 頁 88ff、107、115 — 118、218 — 219) 發現泰國在聖化佛像和佛塔的儀式中，會誦讀某些同樣見於墮羅鉢底的巴利經文或護咒 (*parittas*)；(例如 Ud 1ff; Dhp 153f) 來驅除邪惡或轉移負能量。這項具保護作用的儀式可能自十世紀一直流傳至今。

抄寫與背誦巴利經文，以為功德

儀式具有重大的功用。這些經文的另一項功能是，讓信眾透過抄寫和背誦，來累積功德福報。這些功德的受益者為雕刻經文的抄寫者和背誦經文的信眾。目前尚無法確定抄經的傳統出現於印度的確切時間及地點，但據義淨法師的描述，此種傳統與造佛像相伴而生：

造泥制底及拓摸泥像，或印絹紙隨處供養，或積為聚以磚裹之即成佛塔，或置空野任其銷散，西方法俗莫不以此為業。又復凡造形像及以制底，金銀銅鐵泥漆甄石或聚沙雪。當作之時，中安二種舍利：一謂大師身骨、二謂緣起法頌。其頌曰。「諸法從緣起，如來說是因；彼法因緣盡，是大沙門說。」要安此二，福乃弘多。由是經中廣為譬喻，歎其利益不可思議。³⁹

抄寫一段偈頌，就像複製一尊造像 (*pratimā*) 一樣，是被視為具有功德的行為；而且這不僅僅能利益抄寫者或造像者，對其功德主亦是如此。這種複製的作法不再是出於保存佛陀所說的「確切文字」或佛的真實「面容」，而是為了積累功德福報。⁴⁰ 因此，大量生產製作和複製佛陀圖像，例如小型陶板或相關陶器 (Guy, 2002; Skilling, 2009, 頁 108 — 109)，並於其銘刻巴利經文，必然會帶來巨大的功德利益。

結論

本文以墮羅鉢底及其少數臨近文化的考古發現、銘文紀錄為依據，分析這一文化區的佛教儀式。本著回顧過往的學術著作，並試圖從歷史和教義的角度重新審視這些古代物質資料及銘文。從這項研究，能清楚地了解到佛教基礎概念下的「功德」與「布施」，經常是為了祈求能有美好的來生；而這也造就了「積累功德」，成為當今泰國佛教徒最為重要的修行目標。

被視為最有效的功德累積方式，包含製作聖物，以及在物件上銘刻某些特定的經文，也強化對於佛教中積累功德的基本理解，特別是地區性的出土與銘文使用語言分佈 (地圖 1)。在發現的大量佛教文物中，帶有巴利語的文物多出自現今泰國中部 (參見原文 Table 3 — 4)，而帶有古孟文的則多來自泰國東北部 (參見原文 Table 2)。梵語和古高棉文的一些供養銘文也出現在墮羅鉢底文化區周邊，並應證周邊地區出現了雙語區的狀況 (例如：孟—巴利，孟—梵，孟—高棉)。這一語言分佈狀況，可能顯示當地存在著兩大主要民族 (即孟族和高棉族)，其地所使用的宗教語言為巴利語和梵語。儘管不能完全肯定位於泰國中部的墮羅鉢底統治者為佛教徒，但一些銘文顯示，在七世紀至八世紀間，有相當一部分的人口護持著佛教寺廟和寺院。這清楚地表示，佛教是從這一時期才開始於泰國落地生根，而不是像當地傳統觀點或學校教科書中所描述的那樣，追溯到大約公元前 250 年的阿育王時代 (Revire, 2018)。(朱瀚林 譯)

參考文獻請見原文末



地圖 1: 泰國十世紀中葉至末，中部與東北部佛教銘文分佈圖。作者製表。

³⁷ 完整引文為「*yo kho (vakkali) dhammam passati so mam passati yo mam passati so dhammam passati*」，亦可見編號 M I 190f 和 It 91。

³⁸ 《緣起法頌》後來漸漸與咒語融合，在東南亞的中南半島發現的梵語縮寫「*om ye te svāhā*」(Cruisjen et al., 2013, n. 50)。在藏傳傳統中，阿底峽尊者 (Atiśa, 約 982 年—1054 年) 也提到了《緣起法頌》這篇經文被咒語化地使用 (Bentor, 1996, 頁 115; Skilling, 2008, 頁 514)。

³⁹ 中文譯文引自《南海寄歸內法傳》CBETA 2023.Q1, T54, no. 2125, p. 226c23 — 24。

⁴⁰ 探討素可泰後期 (1238 年—1438 年) 所出現的複製受人尊敬的人的肖像，請見 Pattaratorn, 2009, 頁 176 — 181。

03 Glimpses of Buddhist Practices and Rituals in Dvāravatī and Its Neighbouring Cultures

Nicolas Revire



Fig 1: Terracotta relief from U Thong showing three standing Buddhist monks going on an alms round, 7th–8th c. (?); 20 cm. wide x 16 cm. high. Currently located in the U Thong National Museum, inv. no. 65/2509 [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].



Fig 2a: Obverse of a clay Buddhist tablet found in Khok Mai Den, Nakhon Sawan province, 7th–8th c. Currently located in the Bangkok National Museum, inv. no. 923/2508 [Photograph courtesy of Disapong Netlomwong].



Fig 2b: Base detail of Fig. 2a, engraved in Pāli with homage to the three gems (NW 6) [Photograph courtesy of Disapong Netlomwong].



Fig 3: Jātaka plaque from Khok Mai Den (Chaddantajātaka?), Nakhon Sawan province, 7th–8th c. Currently located in the Bangkok National Museum, terracotta, inv. no. 813/2508 [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].

Introduction

The study of Dvāravatī has developed significantly since its beginning in the first half of the 20th century, but little still is known about the history, political organisation, or the geographical extent of this polity.¹ What we do know derives mainly from archaeological remains, such as *stūpa* or *caitya* (Thai: *chedī*) foundations, stone and bronze sculptures, clay and stucco artefacts, and a fair amount of inscriptions, mostly religious in character. Although Buddhist practices and art have been inseparable since Buddhism arrived in the region, to the casual observer it can be difficult to make sense of this—often fragmentary—material culture, and the complex relationships between art, ideology and rituals that are at its basis.

In this essay, I shall explore this constant dialogue between the material and ritual cultures, as gleaned from archaeological and epigraphic evidence. The purpose is to examine the kind of Buddhist practices and liturgies that were observed in the Dvāravatī culture of today's central Thailand and beyond in the neighbouring regions and near contemporary cultures of east and northeast Thailand. In doing this, I will review early archaeological material and inscriptions to reconstruct certain religious activities of the period spanning approximately the 7th and 8th centuries with some extension into the 9th and 10th centuries.² It should be stated from the outset that nearly all artefacts and inscriptions under scrutiny are clearly the products of the ideology of merit (Skt., *punya*; P., *puñña*). While this concept is common in Indic religions,³ a closer look at the details, as well as the regional distributions of these artefacts and inscriptions, may be revealing.

The Bases of Meritorious Actions in Buddhism

The ideology of merit is an intrinsic concept in Buddhism and has been a major motivation for the production of art since its inception in India and Southeast Asia. Merit can, of course, be gained in a number of ways and the Pāli Canon identifies several bases of merit, the most basic of which is showing humility and paying respect (*apacayana*) to the three gems or *triratana* (i.e., the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the Saṅgha).

Probably echoing this belief, the 7th century Chinese travelling monk Yijing (635–713) reported for mainland Southeast Asia that “the inhabitants of all these countries greatly [pay] reverence [to] the Three Jewels (Ratnatraya) [sic]” (Takakusu 1998: 10). Archaeological evidence supports this statement. A clay Buddhist tablet found in Khok Mai Den, Nakhon Sawan province (Fig. 2a), is engraved in Pāli with the following homage: *buddhassa namo dhammassa namo saṅghassa* (sa), i.e., “Homage to the Buddha, Homage to the *Dhamma*, Homage to the Saṅgha” (FAD 2529: I, 287–291; Fig. 2b).⁴ Another “eulogy inscription” of uncertain date,⁵ found at Noen Sa Bua, Prachin Buri province, gives a similar salutation to the three gems in ornate Pāli verses (PCh 14/K. 997).⁶ These verses come from the opening homage of the Sinhalese *Telakaṭṭhagāthā* and, because of this correspondence, various attempts have been made to demonstrate the early “establishment of Sri Lankan Buddhism” in Thailand during the so-called Dvāravatī period. This effort, however, has not been devoid of important biases and methodological problems and the above assertion has ultimately been refuted (Revire 2012a).

In addition to showing humility, the following three foundations of meritorious actions have been identified in the *Puñṇakiriyavattthusutta* (A IV 239; D III 218; It 51): giving (*dāna*), virtue or morality (*sīla*), and mental development or meditation (*bhāvanā*). The first, *dāna*, is of greatest relevance to the present essay. While the importance of the other two foundations cannot be denied, archaeological remains do not usually speak to their presence. The practice of *dāna*, however, has had considerable social and economic significance in all Buddhist cultures and has left a large corpus of archaeological material and inscriptions for study.⁷ “Giving” is, in fact, essential to the production of any Buddhist artefact, image, or monument. In order to be produced, all material objects must have patrons and donors as sponsors who thus obtain merit depending on the recipients of the donation. The value of any act of giving depends not just on the person making the gift, but on the beneficiary as well, that is to say, more merit is accrued by giving to Buddhas and other enlightened or worthy beings. Since the death of the Buddha, however, only certain spiritually qualified members of the Ariyaśaṅgha are technically described as the worthiest “field of merit” (*puñṇākhetta*), that is, people can only obtain great positive karmic results in giving to them. But in reality, “giving” has always been a key method for providing economic support to all monks and nuns alike and to Buddhist establishments for centuries.

A fragmented terracotta relief from U Thong shows three standing monks going on an alms round (*piṇḍapāta*; Fig 1). The relief may well echo this ancient exercise combined with one of the austerities known as *dhutaṅga* in Pāli. This is the austerity of eating only what is donated as alms, regardless of amount or taste.⁸ Common today among the forest monks of the Theravāda tradition, it was also practised in various Indian Buddhist lineages or *nikāyas* of the past (Ray 1994: 294ff). Yijing reported that many of the monastics present in Dvāravatī performed “the begging *dhūta*” (Takakusu 1998: 9–10, 56, n. 3). Accordingly, the laity gives food and other requisites to monks and nuns through daily alms rounds⁹ or through making offerings at monasteries. Monks and nuns, in exchange, offer the gift of teaching (*dhammadāna*) or blessing, often exalted as the highest gift.

The act of giving is also emphasised in ancient Buddhist stories and tales. It is the supreme virtue perfected by all Bodhisattvas in their long path toward perfection (*pāramitā*) and the perfect self-enlightenment (*sammāsambodhi*). These stories, such as *jātakas* and *avadānas*, clearly serve a didactic purpose by presenting to the laity the moral ideal of living a life conducive to the highest realisation, through the action of doing good deeds and perfecting one's virtues (e.g., giving). Celebrated acts of a Bodhisattva's generosity include occasions in which he offers up his limbs, his eyes, and even his life to those in hunger or in need. Fine artistic examples of this ideology can be seen in the famous series of *jātaka* plaques from Chedi Chula Prathon in Nakhon Pathom (Piriya 2517) or from Khok Mai Den, Nakhon Sawan province (Fig. 3). Several *sema* stones from northeast Thailand, dated to the 8th–9th centuries, seem to depict the *Vessantarajātaka* where the act of giving is the central theme of the narrative plot (Murphy 2010: 249–253). The lesson of these stories is that a Bodhisattva is willing to give more than material objects, even his wife, his children, parts of his body, and even to sacrifice his life (Dayal 1970: 172–188). Naturally, the average layperson is not expected to make so great a sacrifice. For most people, the practice of *dāna* is limited to material support in order to make merit.

Sustaining Monasteries as an Act of Merit

While Buddhist texts stress the need for generosity, a number of ancient Mon, Khmer, and Sanskrit donation inscriptions dedicated by individuals (common people, kings or high officials) relate to lists of meritorious offerings for the benefit of monasteries or Buddhist communities (Prapod 2010: 86–90). This, again, should be understood within the context of the relationship of the near complete dependency of monks and nuns on gifts and the alms of laypersons. Records of such gifts underline the importance of lay and royal patronage in the establishment, development, and preservation of Buddhism in pre-modern Thailand and neighbouring Buddhist countries.

A few examples drawn from the list given in (Table 1) suffice to illustrate this ideology prevalent in central and northeast Thailand during the first millennium. What is significant in these inscriptions is the record of common people in donations. The epigraphs are often written in Old Mon, while royal donations are recorded in Sanskrit with the list of offerings sometimes given in Old Khmer. The donors are identified either by proper names or titles; the recipient can be a Buddha image, a *stūpa*, a community of monks, or a monastery. In Old Mon, these terms are given as, or preceded by, the word *kyāk* which equally refers to any sacred object or person [i.e., *phra* in Thai]. Among the common offerings, we find items suitable for alms, such as plots of rice fields, cattle, and so on, as well as the donation of “slaves”¹⁰ as, for example, on the inscribed pillar from San Sung, Lop Buri province (LB 1/K. 409; Fig. 4), or the Ban Thalut inscription, written in Old Mon, from the Vientiane valley in Laos (HPK I/33). A recently discovered inscription from Sakon Nakhon in Old Mon (SN 10) even seems to refer to the offering of “doors and windows” to a local monastery (Kongkaeo 2550).



Fig 4: Wheel pillar from San Sung, Lop Buri province, inscribed in Old Mon (LB 1/K. 409). Currently located in the National Library, Bangkok [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].

¹ In this essay, “Dvāravatī” refers to both an archaeological typology and a cultural entity vaguely located in west-central Thailand *circa* the 7th and 8th centuries CE.

² The archaeological material and inscriptions presented here do not pretend to be exhaustive or, in most cases, original. The majority of these have been edited or published in Thailand, albeit rarely or satisfactorily in English. Several readings of inscriptions and their published translations in print or available online through the “Inscriptions in Thailand Database Project” website warrant caution and emendations. All translations from Thai and French publications in this essay are mine.

³ The notion of merit-making is shared by several Indian religions but in this essay, I will focus only on the “Buddhist concept” of merit.

⁴ A brick retrieved from Suphanburi is inscribed in Sanskrit with the following similar verse: *namo vuddhāya*, i.e., “Homage to the Buddha” (Kongkaeo 2541: 45).

⁵ The date in the opening Khmer portion of the inscription has usually been given as 683 *śaka* (761 CE), but a 10th or 11th century date is much more likely (Revire 2012a: 153, n. 2).

⁶ In this essay, I give first the registration numbers of the inscriptions as recorded in Thailand by the Fine Arts Department (FAD), followed by the K. numbers if known in the “Corpus des inscriptions du Cambodge.” When the inscriptions are not recorded as such, I give the artefact inventory numbers or an arbitrary number. For further information and references to the inscriptions cited here, see Tables 1–4.

⁷ For ancient India, see for instance Nath (1987); for pre-modern and modern Thai traditions, see Gabaude (2003) and Arthid (2012).

⁸ Often, the *bhikkhu* observing this *dhutaṅga* declines invitations to take meals at the houses of lay people.

⁹ In certain *vinayas*, the *khakkhara*-staff was considered one of the eighteen possessions of wandering monks. For Yijing, the function of using such a staff was merely “to keep off cows or dogs while collecting alms in the village” (Takakusu 1998: 191). The *khakkhara* was also a familiar object in Dvāravatī and neighbouring cultures (Revire 2009 and 2015).

¹⁰ The terms *dāsa* or *dāsī* in Sanskrit, *dek* in Old Mon or *kñum* in Old Khmer have often been translated as male or female “slaves” but perhaps “servant” would be a better rendering. In the same vein, see Vickery (1998: 225–227, 439–440).



Fig5a: Standing Buddha bearing an Old Mon inscription at its base (Fig. 5b). Currently located in the Phimai National Museum, inv. no. 14/2536 [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].



Fig 5b: Detail of Fig. 5a with the Old Mon inscription reading kyāk puṇa [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].



Fig 6: Reverse of a clay tablet found in Chon Buri province, bearing an inscription in Old Mon. Currently located in the Phra Narai National Museum, Lop Buri, inv. no. DV 36 [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].



Fig 7: Miniature earthenware from Thap Chumphon, Nakhon Sawan province, bearing an inscription in Old Mon and Pāli. Currently located in the Phra Narai National Museum, Lop Buri, inv. no. 286/2504 [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].

The epigraphic corpus also often provides information regarding the expected results of such donations. Most of the time, making merit is the main purpose. The belief in merit was, and still is, a cornerstone for sustaining the Saṅgha and their monasteries. Monastic donors were relatively few in number when compared to the laity in local inscriptions found in pre-modern Thailand. This is only too natural for whilst the monk is expected to follow the highest teaching of the Buddha, having renounced the world and directed his activity toward meditation and the gaining of *nirvāṇa* or *nibbāna*, the immediate concern of lay Buddhists is not *nirvāṇa* but rather the accumulation of merit.

Two exceptions, however, are found from Nakhon Ratchasima province. One of the Hin Khon inscriptions (NM 31/K. 389) states that the fruits of merit from this donation to a royal monastery would ultimately lead the donor, most likely a prince who became a monk (*rājabhikṣu*), and all living beings to attain omniscience (*sarvajña*) and become a Buddha. Similarly, the well-known Bo Ika inscription (NM 24/K. 400) found at Mueang *Sema* refers to a donation to the local Buddhist community by the king of Śrī Canāṣa, who hopes to achieve *bodhi* or “Buddhahood” by this gift.

These statements seem at odds with the rigid tenet which asserts that *bodhi* can be realised only through meditation and, on the contrary, support the idea that self-enlightenment was also attainable by all including by making merit or giving. At any rate, the king who is commemorated in the Bo Ika inscription probably saw himself as a Bodhisattva and was hence supposed to practise diligently the perfection of giving (*dānapāramitā*).

Making Buddha Images or Shrines as an Act of Merit

Other dedicatory inscriptions and inscribed artefacts related to this ideology of merit through the production of Buddha images, miniature tablets or shrines, or the sponsorship of Buddhist buildings are listed in (Table 2). Repeatedly, the word “merit” appears on these, albeit in variant spellings such as *puñ*, *piñ*, *piñña*, *puṇya*, or *puna*. A few significant examples are given below.

The short 7th-century inscription from Khao Ngu, Ratchaburi province (RB 1), found at the feet of a Buddha image, is possibly a mixture of Old Mon–Khmer and Sanskrit; it was first read by George Cœdès as follows: *puñ vraḥ ṛṣi ... śrī samādhigupta*, i.e., “the meritorious deed of the Holy hermit ... Śrī Samādhigupta” (1961: 19).¹¹ This reading, however, cannot be confirmed since only the first word *puñ*(-) and the last word *samādhigupta* is certain. It is likely that *samādhigupta* refers here to a name and an adept of Buddhist meditation (a recluse monk?) and that merit was thus generated because of his practice or his dedication.¹² It is one of the few epigraphs that also relate directly to an iconic form, a pendant-legged Buddha image carved on the cave wall.¹³

A few other inscriptions in Old Mon or Sanskrit are found on the bases or pedestals of standing Buddha images dated on stylistic grounds to the 7th or 8th century. Two well-known examples from Lop Buri have been published by Cœdès and the Fine Arts Department (FAD). The first one is from Wat Khoi (LB 9/K. 695) where the reading is, according to Cœdès (1961: 6), rather uncertainly as follows: [...]*ṛlla (...)ñ kauñ vi(...)y cyāga*. While Cœdès provided no translation, he deduced that the language was probably Mon. The FAD, however, later proposed a slightly improved reading: [...]*ṛl mañ koñ vijhay cyāga* and offered the following translation: “A grandfather and his grandchildren beautified the Buddha image” (2529: II, 37). The Thai translation is not without problems because the FAD epigraphists interpreted the word spelt *cyāga* as a variant of *kyāk* (i.e., “Buddha image”) which remains so far unattested in the whole corpus of Mon inscriptions. In fact, the word *cyāga* is most likely a blend-form of *cāga* in Pāli and *tyāga* in Sanskrit which means “abandoning, giving up, renunciation” and the like. But given the fragmentary nature of the inscription, a proper translation cannot yet be offered. The second dedicatory inscription is clearly in Sanskrit and was found long ago in Wat Mahathat, Lop Buri province (LB 5/K. 577). It records the installation of a *pratimā muneh* (Buddha Śākyamuni?) by a certain nāyaka Ārjava, ruler of the Taṅgur people and son of the king of Śāmbūka (Cœdès 1961: 5; FAD 2529: I, 231).¹⁴

One so far unpublished example from Sung Noen district, Nakhon Ratchasima province, is far less ambiguous. The inscription, in a script paleographically datable to the 7th or early 8th century, is found on the lower base of a standing Buddha now kept in the Phimai National Museum (14/2536; Fig. 5a). It is fragmentary and can only be read on the Buddha’s proper right. The reading in Old Mon is *kyāk puṇa* [...] (Fig. 5b) which may roughly be interpreted as “this ‘Holy One’ [*kyāk*, i.e., “Buddha image”] is the merit of [...]” where the title and/or the name of the donor is lost with the break on the proper left of the image. A comparable inscription is found on the reverse of two clay tablets found in Chon Buri province (DV 36, DV 38; e.g., Fig. 6). The inscription reads:*kyāk* puñ [...] (*ṛrala*, i.e., “this Buddha image is the work of merit [...] (of) Lord [...]”) (Bauer 1991b: 63). Similarly, the proper name of that “lord,” the donor, is missing due to the incomplete nature of the inscription. As we shall see from the following examples, however, an alternative translation for the standard Mon expression *kyāk puṇya* is possible.

At least three reported bilingual inscriptions in Old Mon and Pāli were found on miniature earthenwares¹⁵ from Thap Chumphon, Nakhon Sawan province, dated on paleographic grounds to the 8th-9th centuries (e.g., Fig. 7).¹⁶ The inscriptions comprise two lines around the lower rim in Mon and Pāli. On one occasion (NW 7), the first line is written *ne’ kyāk puṇa tra[la] [...] wihār* in Old Mon, translated as “this stupa is the work of merit of the lord (of) [...] *vihāra*” (Bauer 1991b: 65). While this interpretation is within the realm of possibility, it does not really account for the presence of the word *vihāra*.¹⁷ Another more complete example, although still unregistered by the FAD (NW i), could perhaps shed light on the matter. It has been read as *ne’ kyāk puṇa tara tra’ jrap vihāra*, and rendered in Thai as “this is the holy merit [*phra bun*]: *sālā* and *vihāra*” (Kannika & Phongkasem 2542: 145). If this rendition is correct, we would then have an occurrence where the Mon term *kyāk* does not refer to the actual object on which it is inscribed, for example here a terracotta fragment, but acts as a prefix to qualify what follows, i.e., *puṇa*, hence the “holy”¹⁸ merit obtained by the gift or the sponsorship of a *sālā* and a *vihāra*. Moreover, given the many examples where the word *trala*, *trala’*, *tarla’*, *tirla’* or other minor variants occurs in this context in Old Mon inscriptions as a title or honorific meaning “lord” or “master” (Bauer 1991b: 61-63), it is tempting to amend the reading to *tara tra’ for trala*, *tarla’*, or the like. All in all, we would thus have something like “this is the ‘holy merit’ [*kyāk puṇa*] of the ‘lord’ [i.e., *trala*] of the *sālā* and *vihāra*.” According to Bauer, the pronoun *ne’* i.e., “this,” found in the two above examples, may be a Khmer calque since it is rarely attested in Old Mon inscriptions, where *wo’* or *āwo’* normally occurs in its place (1991a: 40-42). It could also point to Khmer–Mon bilingualism (Bauer 1991b: 66-67). A third example (LB 26) is similarly inscribed with one line in Old Mon but has unfortunately become much deteriorated. Only two words remain: *puṇa* and *vihāra* (Phimphan 2013: 13). The second line engraved on all these earthenwares is the Pāli *ye dhammā*verse, to which I shall return in a subsequent section.

The above short dedicatory inscriptions in Old Mon found on stone or clay images or hollow terracotta fragments seem to link to similar inscribed miniature tablets and *sema* stones originating from the Khorat Plateau, where the most frequent words are *kyāk* and *puṇya*, “holy” and “merit.” Put another way, if *kyāk* is taken to be a Buddha image, a *caitya*, or a sacred object, it is thus merely produced for *puṇya*. Two clay tablets from Mueang Fa Daet in Kalasin province (KS 1, KS 2), dated stylistically to the 8th or 9th century, come to the fore in this regard. These have been published several times but the inscriptions on their backs have never been fully translated into English. The inscription as *wo’[or wo] kyāk piñ* (’u)*pajhāy’ ācāRyya guna wikhyāt* [or *wikhyā(t)*] is virtually the same on both tablets (Bauer 1991a: 66). According to Bauer, this is the first time that the variant spelling *piñ* for “merit” is attested in Old Mon. The terms *’upajhāy’ ācāryya* in Old Mon are evidently derived from Pāli (*upajjhāya*) and Sanskrit (*ācārya*) and refer to a monk’s preceptor and a religious teacher. The two inscriptions may thus be approximately translated as “this is the ‘holy merit’ of the preceptor and/or teacher who is/are well known by his/their virtue.” It is not known if the inscriptions refer to one or two distinct individual(s) in this case.

A number of other inscribed tablets from Mueang Fa Daet (KS 4, KS i) and Na Dun (MKh i, iv, vii), similarly dated to the 8th or 9th century on stylistic and paleographic grounds, record in Old Mon the merit of certain lords (*tala* or *tarla*), rulers or even self-proclaimed universal kings or *cakravartī* (MKh iii). The inscription numbered MKh 2 (and possibly also MKh 3) reads *nai vo’ puṇya kamratenṇ pdai karom’or skumṇ das jāti smar* (Bauer 1991a: 42) and could be translated as “this is the work of merit of the king. May I not be born to a mean existence.” Bauer argues that the term *nai*’for “this” may be a variant of a similar Khmer word which again would suggest contact with Khmer populations in this region. This is certainly reinforced by the use of the Khmer royal title *kamrateni p(h)dai karom* which appears here for the first time in Mon inscriptions (Bauer 1991a: 46). Several inscriptions on *sema* stones mostly found in Chaiyaphum,

Kalasin, and Khon Kaen provinces refer to merit-making activity performed by kings, monks, or commoners from the 8th to the 10th centuries.¹⁹ Some donors also express the wish “to be reborn again in the time of Ārya Maitreya,” the future Buddha (KhK 16 and perhaps KhK i). The inscriptions often display the use of a hybrid Mon–Khmer language. The inscription from Wat Pho Chai (KS 7), for example, reads *puṇya pragata kanmun kasmuñ kyāk cak* and has been translated as “this is the work of merit bestowed by King Cak” (Uraisi 1995: 200). Here, the word *pragata* has been interpreted by Bauer as Khmer (1991a: 43). It also occurs in the Khao Rang inscription from Prachin Buri province (PCh 1/K. 505). The title kasmuñ or *ka*

¹¹ The eye-copy provided by Cœdès (1961: inscr. XXII) is clearly not faithful to the original. For another, yet likely incorrect, reading and translation, see FAD (2529: I, 68–71). For a published rubbing and the relationship between the image and the inscription, see Revire (2012b: 94–95, figs. 1–2).

¹² Another short inscription from Mueang Bueng Khok Chang, Uthai Thani province (AN 2), whose reading and language are not certain, refer to a similar cultivation of merit where the word *puñ*(-) or *puṇa* seems to appear but not the name of the agent (FAD 2529: II, 48–52).

¹³ See also the inscription (KhK 25) above the head of a large reclining Buddha located on top of Phu Wiang, Khon Kaen province. The word *puṇya(m)* is clear at the end of line 2 (Cha-em 2544: eye-copy on p. 58).

¹⁴ Another fragmentary inscription in Sanskrit, found at the base of an alleged “Buddha image” from Kalasin province (KS 5), has been erroneously linked to the donor’s aspiration of “transferring happiness to all mankind” (FAD 2529: I, 278). The inscription, a *śārdūlavikrīḍita* stanza, is in fact dedicated to *Śiva* and shows some similarities with K. 1214 dated to 648 *śaka* (Griffiths 2005). I thank Arlo Griffiths for checking the reference and drawing this parallel to my attention.

¹⁵ I prefer to avoid the term *stūpa* (i.e., a reliquary) often used in the literature and which implies a funerary function. Could these terracotta fragments be finials? The hollow structure and flat base could suggest that these were used in an architectural capacity.

¹⁶ From my personal observation, I have noted that more bilingual inscribed earthenwares of this kind have survived, but have been left unnoticed and are not registered as inscriptions by the FAD. At least two are kept in the Bangkok National Museum (277/2504 and 278/2504) and one is in the Prachin Buri National Museum (129/2526). There are also several models or fragments kept at the Phra Narai National Museum, Lop Buri (e.g. 281/2504 and 286/2504), and I suspect that there could be more in museum storages, temples or private collections. See also Bauer (1991: 49, fig. E) for a tentative list of these inscribed objects.

¹⁷ The same inscription has been misinterpreted as “this *stūpa* [*kyāk*] was made for the three ancestors near the *vihāra*,” (FAD 2529: I, 98) giving rise to speculations that these so-called “terracotta *kumbha*-type stūpas” possibly served as funeral urns (e.g., Woodward 2003: 101–102).

¹⁸ A possible parallel in Sanskrit would be *brāhmapunya*, meaning “sublime merit” (cf. Skilling 2008: 512).

¹⁹ Stephen Murphy recorded twenty-six inscriptions in total on *sema* stones from northeast Thailand with the languages employed including Mon, Khmer, and Sanskrit (2010: 90–95, Appendix 1, Table A5). Many of these inscriptions, however, are very worn and therefore still unread and/or left without a proper translation.

smuñ, possibly a variation of *smiñ*’(“king,” “prince”), is found on another *sema* stone from Kalasin, albeit with the variant spelling *k-smuñ* (KS ii), and is understood as a Khmer-Mon contact word (Bauer 1991a: 46). Likewise, the title *kurunī* (“king,” “to rule”), attested on *sema* inscriptions from Chaiyaphum (ChY i) and Khon Kaen (KhK 17), appears in profusion in Khmer inscriptions. The distribution of such terms or titles as *pragata* or *kurunī* in inscriptions from northeast Thailand suggests that these may be Khmer loan words in Old Mon (Bauer 1991a: 44-47).²⁰ They could also indicate Mon-Khmer bilingualism in the region.

While cases of multilingualism are thus possibly attested in central and northeast Thailand, it may be significant that not a single donation or dedicatory inscription in Pāli is recorded during the first millennium CE (Tables 1-2).²¹ Most epigraphs recording this ideology of merit are written in Mon, sometimes with Khmer and Sanskrit or, to a lesser extent, Pāli loan words, while a few donations or installations are written in Sanskrit alone²² or in association with Khmer in east and northeast Thailand. In what follows, however, I shall deal only with Pāli inscriptions of a different kind. These have been found essentially in central Thailand (Map 1) and are roughly dated to the 7th and 8th centuries. They are almost exclusively “canonical” and are often related to the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and *ye dhammā* verses, closely connected to the teaching of the Four Truths of Buddhism.

The *Paṭiccasamuppāda* and the Four Truths

“Dependent Origination”²³ (Skt, *pratītyasamutpāda*; P., *paṭiccasamuppāda*) is a Buddhist description of how the human state of suffering comes about and how one can extinguish it. This exposition is given in a verse usually divided into twelve links and contains a significant teaching of the Buddha closely connected to his awakening experience. It is found throughout all Buddhist traditions and their correlated texts, including the Pāli Canon.²⁴ For example, the Theravāda tradition portrays Sāriputta, the Buddha’s chief disciple, as saying that “whoever sees conditioned genesis [i.e., *paṭiccasamuppāda*] sees *dhamma*, whoever sees *dhamma* sees conditioned genesis” (M I 190f; trans. Horner 1954: 236-237).

According to the *Udāna*, the genesis of the verse took place with the Buddha at Uruvelā, at the root of the *bodhi*-tree on the bank of the river Nerañjarā, just after he had reached enlightenment (Ud 1-3). While the Lord was seated there for seven days and experiencing the bliss of liberation, he suddenly emerged from that concentration in the first watch of the night and paid attention to “dependent co-arising in direct order and reverse order” (trans. Masefield 1994: 3). Seven weeks after his enlightenment, the Buddha decided to preach the doctrine at the Deer Park in Isipatana (i.e., Sarnath, India). This “First Sermon” or *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta* (Discourse on “Turning the Wheel of the Law”) explained to his first disciples the path to salvation via the so-called “Four Noble Truths” (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*). Accordingly, the Buddha’s diagnosis of life sees everything as suffering (*dukkha*); suffering has an origin (*samudaya*), namely craving (*taṇhā*), which can be extinguished (*nirodha*) only through the “Path” (*magga*). In this specific context, a description of the “Four Truths” is also understood in terms of the causal theory of Dependent Origination since this complex chain of causation always gives rise to suffering. Alternatively, the deactivation of any of the twelve links of this chain is bound to break the causal process of *saṃsāra* and eliminate suffering, the ultimate soteriological goal of Buddhists.

That both Dependent Origination and the Four Truths are found inscribed in Pāli on some *cakras*, *cakra* pillars or *cakra* bases from the Dvāravatī realm (e.g., Brown 1996: 99-113; Phasook 2008: 24-29) is probably not pure coincidence and the wheel symbolism should be clear.²⁵ Yet, as Robert Brown wrote regarding the spoke-fragment found at Wat Mahathat, Lop Buri, inscribed with a portion of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* (LB 14):

[...] it is interesting that an inscription has been used on the wheel that refers to the Buddha before he went to Sārnāth, and that gives a doctrine that is only thought, not yet taught, by the Buddha. The chain of causation can be seen, however, as proposing, only in more detail, the same arguments for the origin of suffering and for its cessation as in the four noble truths. (1996: 104)

More precisely, the second truth concerned with the arising of suffering is simply explained by the *paṭiccasamuppāda* in direct orde (*anuloma*), while the third truth of cessation of suffering is defined by Dependent Origination in reverse order (*paṭiloma*). A similarly inscribed spoke-fragment has been found at Sap Champa, Lop Buri province (Phuthon 2529: 18, fig. 14), and is now kept at the Phra Narai National Museum in Lop Buri (Fig. 8). One side of the inscribed spoke tentatively reads the following passage from the verse in reverse order:²⁶

Face A: (1) *(ta)[n]/[hā]/[niro]/(dhā)*
(2) *upādānanirodho*

Brown identifies another surviving sample where other excerpts of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* possibly appear. It is inscribed on a circular stone base or pedestal from Si Thep (PhCh i) which may or may not have belonged to a wheel (1996: 105, fig. 41). A further unregistered Pāli inscription from Si Thep, similarly found on a circular stone base or pedestal (FAD 2550: 127) an d possibly dating to the 7th or early 8th century on paleographic grounds, argues for the same identification with Dependent Origination despite its fragmentary aspect. Since I have not been able to see the piece myself, my transliteration of the inscription is from the eye-copy (Fig. 9) as follows:²⁷

Fig 8: Pāli inscribed spoke-fragment found at Sap Champa, Lop Buri province. Currently located in the Phra Narai National Museum, Lop Buri, inv. no. 86/2529 [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].



(1) [...] *vedanānirodho vedanānirodhā taṇhāniro(dho) tī*[...]
(2) [...] *(pa)ccayā jarāmaraṇa[m] sokaparidevadukkhadam*[...]

If the reading is correct, then a good portion of the first line (*vedanānirodhā taṇhānirodho*) is identical with that of Face B from the Wat Mahathat spoke-fragment discussed above (LB 14) and translated as “from the cessation of feeling [*vedanā*] there is a cessation of craving [*taṇhā*]” (Brown 1996: 104). In this light, I suspect that the final *tī* in the eye-copy is an error. The last portion can indeed be reconstructed as *taṇhānirodhā* where only the initial *t-* subsists, probably followed by *upādānanirodho* as in Face A of the Sap Champa fragment (86/2529); the rest of the sentence would then be *upādānanirodhā bhavanirodho*, *bhavanirodhā jātinirodho* and so on, that is, “from the cessation of craving (*taṇhā*), there is a cessation of grasping (*upādāna*); from the cessation of grasping, there is a cessation of becoming (*bhava*); from the cessation of becoming, there is a cessation of birth (*jāti*)” and so forth. The second line connects to the conditions (*paccayā*) that lead to suffering (*dukkha*) with reference to old age (*jarā*), dying (*marañā*), grief (*soka*), and lamentation (*parideva*). Had the break not occurred, we should read *jāti-* (birth) on the left side, preceding *-paccayā*, and the compound *-domanassupāyāsā* on the right side, that is dejection and despair. According to the theory of Dependent Origination, birth is a prerequisite of old age, sickness, and death, and is fraught with sorrow, pain, and disappointment. This line basically quotes the *paṭiccasamuppāda* in direct order pertaining to the cause of suffering while the first line is in reverse order explaining the cessation of suffering.

Examples of other Pāli inscriptions, all found in central Thailand, are listed in Tables 3 and 4 and are located on Map 1.I will deal with the *ye dhammā* inscriptions separately below, but besides the Dependent Origination and the Four Truths—always inscribed on stone *cakras* or their related components—other canonical verses appear, namely from the *Udāna* (Ud 1ff; also found in Vin I 2)²⁸ *Dhammapāda* (Dhp 153f, 191).²⁹ For example, one inscribed pillar (LB 17), possibly two (LB 22), found at Sap Champa, jointly displays Ud 1-3 and Dhp 153-154. We have already seen the canonical connection between these verses from the *Udāna*, as the Buddha sat under the *bodhi*-tree just after reaching enlightenment, and the origin of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Accordingly, Ud 1, as we have it in Pāli but also in other Sanskrit parallels, came to be regarded in all Buddhist traditions as the first “stanza of joy” or *udāna* expressed by the Buddha (Skilling 2002: 164-167, 175). There is no narrative description in the Pāli Canon, however, as to where and when Dhp 153-154 was uttered. Despite this fact, and for some unknown reason, later commentarial sources (e.g., Dhp-a III 127-129; Sp 17; Sv 16; Ud-a 4) seem to consider that Dhp 153-154 was the real “first utterance” of the Buddha (*paṭhamabuddhavacanam*), thus seemingly giving it precedence over Ud 1. One of the justifications given for accommodating such a view (Pj I 13) is that the *Dhammapāda* verse was only spoken in the mind whereas that from the *Udāna* was uttered in actual speech but only at a later stage. The inscription found at Phromthin Tai (LB 24), also in Lop Buri province, is equally quoted from Ud 1 as well as from the *Suttanipāta* (Sn 558) which likewise relates to an episode of the life of the Buddha shortly following his enlightenment when he meets and talks with the Brahmin Sela (Brown 1996: 118-119; Fig. 10). The same verse (Sn 558) is also attested on Face C of a four-sided inscription from Nakhon Pathom province (NTh.i; Skilling 1997: 126). The importance of these verses for the Theravādins is obviously that they were conceived by many as among the “first words” recited by the newly enlightened being.



Fig9: Pāli inscription from Si Thep on a circular stone base or pedestal (0996) [Courtesy of the “Inscriptions in Thailand Database Project”].

²⁰ The reverse situation is equally possible. For example, at least two Khmer inscriptions from Nakhon Ratchasima (NM 28/K. 388 and NM 31/K. 389) also show traces of Mon loan words such as *Kyāk*.

²¹ The Pāli portion in the Noen Sa Bua inscription (PCh 14/K. 997) cannot be considered “donative” in this regard since only the Khmer portion relates to the donation of cows to a temple and the installation of a *buddhapāda*. Prapod (2010: 82–83) classifies the Pāli section as a “eulogy inscription” citing an extra-canonical text.

²² See in particular the few panegyric inscriptions from Chaiyaphum province (ChY 1, ChY 4 and ChY 5). Other Buddhist Sanskrit inscriptions from northeast Thailand are tentatively listed by Bauer (1991a: 56, fig. H).

²³ Also translated in English as “dependent co-arising,” “chain of causation,” “conditioned co-production,” “conditioned genesis,” and so on.

²⁴ See Brown (1996: 104, n. 44) for a near complete list of Pāli texts where the verse occurs, to which list one can add the *Udāna* from the *Khuddakanikāya*. See Masefield (1994) for a recent English translation of that text.

²⁵ See in particular inscriptions KTh 29, NTh 1, SPh 1, SPh i, LB 19, ChN 14, ChN 15, PhCh i, and 82.183 (Table 3). An inscription on a fragmentary *cakra* pillar from Sap Champa (LB 8), first identified as written in Sanskrit (FAD 2524: 26–27), has recently been reassessed and identified as a portion of the First Sermon in Pāli (U-tain 2556).

²⁶ My emendations and restorations of the nearly illegible or missing letters or syllables (*akṣaras*) are given in parenthesis and square brackets respectively. While the letters are very clear on line 2, my reconstruction of line 1 is very much tentative and based on the strong assumption that it quotes the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Unfortunately, I have been unable to see the reverse Face B of this spoke-fragment.

²⁷ I wish to thank Arlo Griffiths for his assistance in restoring the proper reading.

²⁸ Other occurrences of Ud 1–3 were found in Angkor Borei, lower Cambodia, and Kunzeik, lower Myanmar, thus attesting to the popularity of the verses in the 7th–8th century Theravāda tradition of mainland Southeast Asia (Skilling 2002: 162–164).

²⁹ Dhp 191, which summarises the Four Truths, is inscribed on a terracotta fragment from U Thong (Sph.i: Face A; Prasan 2509: 82; Skilling 1991: 243–244) and on a stone bar from Nakhon Pathom province (Nth i: Face D; Skilling 1997: 129–130). A parallel version of Dhp 191, albeit in so-called “hybrid Pāli-Sanskrit,” is found in line 2 of the gold-plate inscription from Go Xoai, southern Vietnam (Skilling 1999: 172–173, 175), and also in Prakrit from Guntupalle, Andhra Pradesh, in India (Skilling 1991).



Fig 10: Pāli inscription found at Phromthin Tai, Lop Buri province (LB 24). Currently located in the Phra Narai National Museum, Lop Buri [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].



Fig 11: Ye dhammā inscription on a brick from Nakhon Pathom province. Currently located in the Bangkok National Museum, inv. no. 22/10 [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].



Fig 12: Miniature earthenware from Wat Phra Ngam, Nakhon Pathom, inscribed with the ye dhammā verse. Currently located in the Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum, Nakhon Pathom, inv. no. 305/2519 [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].

All in all, I totally adhere to Brown’s own assertion (1996: 115) regarding the corpus of Pāli inscriptions found on Dvāravatī wheels and pillars:

The passages used from these [Pāli textual] sources deal with the Buddha’s realization of the chain of causation and the four noble truths, Śākyamuni’s fundamental understanding that coincided with his enlightenment at Bodhgayā, and with the subsequent first teaching of this insight at Sārnāth. The appropriateness of the subject to the wheels is apparent, yet it is important to realize that the verses were carefully selected, and in some cases edited, from these sources; particularly interesting are the stanzas from the *Dhammapada*, placed beside the parallel “first” words of triumph [i.e., Ud 1] of the just enlightened Buddha on the Sab Champa pillar.

That these inscriptions may have been edited, adapted, or shortened sections from the Pāli Canon is interesting. Coëdès (1956: 225-226), for instance, had already observed that the Four Truths inscribed on the Nakhon Pathom wheel (KTh 29) are not actual excerpts taken verbatim from the *Tipiṭaka* as we have it. On the contrary, Skilling (1997: 135-150) has confirmed that various details related to the truths as we find them in several other inscriptions (SPh 1; ChN 14; ChN 15; LB 17; LB 22) are found only in later fragments of commentaries or literature from the 5th century onwards. It is also possible that the Dvāravatī inscriptions quote from a different source which is now lost to us (Prapod 2010: 77) or else, as Brown suggests (1996: 103), “that the inscriptions were composed from memory and would not necessarily have exact textual counterparts.”

The *Ye Dhammā* Verse

This canonical *gāthā* or verse scarcely needs an introduction. Technically, it is not *buddhavacana* or the word directly “uttered” by the Buddha although it has assumed such a function in all Buddhist traditions. The Pāli *Vinaya* refers to the successive conversions of Sāriputta and Mogallāna, two of the most prominent disciples of the Buddha, just by hearing this stanza first uttered by the venerable Assaji (Vin I 39f). Here is the canonical four-line verse or “terse expression of the *dhamma*” recorded on that occasion in Pāli, followed by its English translation:

<i>Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā</i> <i>Tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha</i> / <i>Tesañ ca yo nirodho</i> <i>Evaṃvādī mahāsamaṇo ti</i> //	Those things which proceed from a cause, Of these the truth-finder [i.e., Tathāgata] has told the cause, And that which is their stopping— The great recluse has such a doctrine. (trans. Horner 1951: 54)
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It is said that having heard this verse and the purport of the Dharma in brief, both Sāriputta and, later, Mogallāna immediately attained the “deathless” state, that is, the knowledge that leads to liberation or the Dharma-eye (*dhammacakkhu*), before joining the Buddha’s Order (Horner 1951: 52-56). The connection here between the awakening experience of the two monks and the verse is explicit. The *ye dhammā gāthā* was the source of their enlightenment as it represents a shorter version of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and allows one to see the Four Truths referred to above. In the following centuries, its written presence at any particular Buddhist site rendered, by extension, that site equal to the traditional source of enlightenment. It therefore began to be inscribed in variant recensions and languages on *stūpas* (or enshrined therein) and on images and miniature clay tablets and *caityas* from the fifth or 6th century CE onwards, first in northern and western India (Boucher 1991), then beyond in ancient Myanmar and Thailand, the Malay Peninsula, southern Vietnam, and Indonesia (e.g., Skilling 1999, 2003-04 and 2008; Griffiths 2011: 142-146, figs 1a-b).

The verse thus came to be abundantly found, albeit exclusively in Pāli, in the Dvāravatī cultural sphere inscribed, stamped, or engraved on several objects of different material: on clay tablets, on bricks or terra-cotta fragments and stone sculptures of *caityas*, *cakra* pillars, Buddha images or pieces of stone tablets. These 7th-8th century inscriptions clearly attest to the pan-Asian Buddhist practice of writing the sacred *gāthā* on various artefacts.³⁰ An up-to-date list of *ye dhammā* inscriptions found in central Thailand is given in Table 4. According to Skilling’s textual classification framework (1999: 180-184), they fall into two distinct groups depending on whether the first word of the second line is *tesaṃ*, as in the canonical version (see above), or *yesaṃ*, a regional peculiarity only attested so far in central Thailand.

New *ye dhammā* inscriptions continue to be found in Thailand. One recent discovery published in Thai occurs on another stone fragment from Sap Champa (LB 54), and reads as follows on two sides of the stone (Amon 2551: 56-60):

Face A:	(1) [...] <i>hetuṃ</i> (2) [...] <i>āha</i>
Face B:	(1) <i>tesañ ca yo</i> [...] (2) <i>nirodho ca</i> [...]

Being fragmentary, it cannot be said with certainty in which group the inscription falls,³¹ but we can notice, however, a variant reading in line 2 of Face B with the addition of *ca* after *nirodho*. At least one inscription (NTh 10), possibly two (LB 16), offers a similar variant reading in Nakhon

Pathom and Lop Buri provinces; both belong to the *yesaṃ* group (Skilling 1999: 181).

Several other *ye dhammā* inscriptions are still unpublished. One inscription on a brick, said to be from Nakhon Pathom province, currently kept in the Bangkok National Museum, is nearly illegible but the syllable *ye* at the beginning of the second line is clear and allows us to classify it in the *yesaṃ* group (Fig 11). In addition to the few bilingual terracotta fragments (Mon and Pāli) allegedly from Thap Chumphon, Nakhon Sawan province (LB 26, NW 7, NW i), two similar earthenwares reported from Nakhon Pathom province are solely inscribed in Pāli with the *ye dhammā gāthā* (Fig. 12). Although a close reading was not possible at the time of writing, these inscriptions seem to fall in the *yesaṃ* group.³² In addition to the corpus, a broken image in stone, presumably a standing Buddha of which only the feet remain, has a nearly illegible inscription on the pedestal (LB i). Though the few letters that remain on the first line allow for identification with the ubiquitous verse, it is not sufficient to say whether it belongs to the *tesaṃ* or *yesaṃ* group (Fig. 13).

Last but not least, a significant number of clay-moulded tablets bearing the *ye dhammā gāthā* in Pāli have been found in central Thailand. While the exact number and precise provenance of these tablets often elude us, suffice it to say that they are mainly of two kinds, both rectangular plaques with a complex iconography depicting various figures around a central seated Buddha. The first type has predominantly been found in Nakhon Pathom at Wat Phra Men (Dupont 1959: I 47-49, II figs 34-40; e.g., Fig. 14).³³ On these tablets, the verse is directly stamped along the base, below the main scene, and is repeatedly made from the same mould. According to Pierre Dupont (1959: 49), it reads as follows in two lines:

(1) *ye dhammā hetupprabhavā*
(2) *tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha*

It is noteworthy that only the first part of the verse (l. 1-2) is given here, leaving the rest (l. 3-4) intentionally missing. Although the reading on the tablets is rather obscure, a double *pa* and a subscript *ra* seem to appear, making the compound *-ppra* in *hetupprabhavā* clear. The inscription would thus be slightly Sanskritised since *hetupprabhavā* is expected in “correct” Pāli. The verse apparently falls in the *tesaṃ* group, but the reading is hard to confirm towards the end of line 2 and is therefore not absolutely certain. For Dupont, the inscription of *tathāgato* is presented in a more condensed way almost as a monogram to engrave all signs on the material available and it is possible that we are dealing here with an abridged version of the stanza.

The second type of tablet bearing the entire *ye dhammā gāthā* has been mainly found in Ratchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, and Suphanburi provinces.³⁴ In this group of tablets, the verse is always inscribed on the back in a rather cursive hand and thus difficult to read, probably made while the clay was still wet. The reading proposed here is based on a fine sample kept in the collection of Wat Matchimawat, in Songkhla, but probably originating from Thailand’s central region (Fig. 15b):

(1) *ye dhammā hetupprabhavā*
(2) *yesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato*
(3) *āha tesañ ca yo niro-*
(4) *-dho evaṃvādī mahāsama-*
(5) *-no*

Probably for reasons of equal distribution of *akṣaras* over lines, the inscription occupies here five lines, instead of the usual four, with a slight deviation of the expected final syllables in lines 2, 3 and 4. It belongs to the *yesaṃ* group with a variant reading at the end of the verse, omitting the *ti*



Fig 13: Broken image in stone (standing Buddha?) bearing the ye dhammā inscription on the pedestal (LB i). Currently located in the Phra Narai National Museum, Lop Buri [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].



Fig 14: Clay moulded tablet bearing a truncated ye dhammā verse, from Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom. Currently located in the Bangkok National Museum, inv. no. DV 6–2 [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].

³⁰ The practice of writing this sacred verse on precious metals is so far unattested in Dvāravatī although it surely existed in neighbouring regions. See for example the engraved gold-plates from Go Xoai, southern Vietnam (Skilling 1999: 171–177, fig. 1), the one of unknown provenance kept at the Musée Guimet in Paris (MA 4649B; Skilling 2003–04: 284, fig. 13), and another sample from Palembang, Sumatra (Griffiths 2011: 143–145, fig. 1a).

³¹ The FAD author who deciphered the inscription reconstructs it as belonging to the *yesaṃ* group (Amon 2551: 59) but the reasons behind such classification, while likely on the basis which follows, are not clearly stated.

³² Finot (1910: 148) read *yesaṃ* on the “vase en terre cuite” from Phra Pathom Chedi but Coëdès (1912: 29) proposed to read *tesaṃ*. The eye-copy published upside-down by Lunet de Lajonquière (1912: 113, fig. 21), however, clearly reads *yesaṃ*. I thank Laurent Hennequin for sending these references.

³³ A complete tablet of this type is kept at the Nakhon Si Thammarat National Museum (19/246/kho) and was transferred from the Bangkok National Museum but its exact provenance is not known. In addition, a fragment found in Khu Bua is currently on display at the Ratchaburi National Museum (inv. no. unknown), and another fragment, presumably from Nakhon Pathom, is kept at the Chaiya National Museum (DV 244).

³⁴ See Baptiste & Zéphir (2009: 56, 106, cats 13–14) for fine illustrations of two samples, one from Ratchaburi (242/2533) and the other from Suphanburi provinces (64/2511). In addition, one tablet probably originating from Nakhon Pathom is kept at the Bangkok National Museum (151/2511), with an additional one on display at the Phra Narai National Museum, Lop Buri (225/2526), and yet another one at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (EAX. 170). For a recent iconographic study on the obverse of these tablets (e.g., Fig.15a), see Woodward (2009).



Fig 15a: Obverse of a clay-moulded tablet bearing the ye dhammā verse on its reverse (Fig. 15b), probably originating from central Thailand [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].



Fig 15b: Reverse of Fig. 15a. Currently located in the collection of Wat Matchimawat, Songkhla, inv. no. MW/458 [Photograph by Nicolas Revire].

after *mahāsamano* which is spelt with a dental *n* rather than the standard retroflex *ṇ*. This spelling peculiarity is rather common with other occurrences of *ye dhammā* inscriptions belonging to this *yesaṃ* group (e.g., NTh 5, LB 26, NW 7, NW i) and cannot, therefore, be simply accounted as scribal error.

An overall pattern seems to emerge in the regional distribution of the two variant Pāli spellings of the sacred verse in Thailand (Table 4). While we find most inscriptions from the canonical group (*tesaṃ*) restricted to Nakhon Pathom with just one *tesaṃ* specimen from Phetchaburi (PhB 2) and another one from U Thong (SPh 2), the inscriptions from the *yesaṃ* group appear to be far more numerous and widespread in the central provinces of Ratchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Suphan Buri, Nakhon Sawan, Lop Buri, and as far away as Si Thep in Phetchabun (LB 23), and possibly Mueang Sema in Nakhon Ratchasima (K. 987) and Nong Bua Daeng in Chaiyaphum (K. 1166?). This basic observation could indicate that the two recensions also have some distinct geographical realities, with the latter *yesaṃ* inscriptions marking the furthest extension of ancient Pāli literacy in northeast Thailand.

The Ritual and Cultic Functions of Pāli Verses

The Pāli inscriptions studied above, all closely related to the Four Truths of Buddhism, point to a well-known group of discourses by the Buddha frequently presented as “citation” or “quotation inscriptions” (Skilling 2002; Prapod 2010: 72–81).

Presumably, the content of these passages, a written expression of the Dharma, would be used in a context in which it would be unseen by most people. The various verses would manifest a presence believed to be highly beneficial for the patrons, donors, and worshippers and would extend its protection to the place or object that contained it. In this vein, the *ye dhammā gāthā* should be understood as an abbreviated version of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* which is, in turn, intimately related to the Four Truths preached by the Buddha at Sarnath.³⁵ It does not really matter how long or complete the sacred verses were, and we certainly have seen examples of truncated versions above. In other words, these selected Buddhist texts may well be fragmentary and yet embody the whole Dharma.

The *gāthās* used for such ritual purposes and inscribed on material objects often no longer functioned as a means for communicating their verbal contents. On the contrary, these inscriptions were frequently “hidden” in small characters, often on the back of the artefacts, be it a Buddha image or a miniature clay tablet often enshrined in a larger *stūpa*. At any rate, common people could not read the inscriptions and only a few scholars or learned monks equipped with the necessary language skills and paleographic knowledge could decipher or engrave them.

There is ample archaeological evidence, however, that the practice of ritually inscribing and presumably reciting such *gāthās* on clay, brick, stone, metal objects, and so on, was well established in South Asia by the middle of the first millennium CE and slightly later in Southeast Asia. The engraving of such verses was probably conducted by ritual specialists, but whether these were laymen or monastics cannot be said.

In recent decades, a number of scholars have also underlined the sacralising power of inserting these verses in caityas, *stūpas*, Buddha images, or other sacred items, as part of a consecrating ceremony devised to empower the artefacts (Boucher 1991; Bantor 1996: 42, 114–117, 217; Skilling 2008: 507). The *paṭiccasamuppāda* and *ye dhammā gāthās*, in particular, have been seen as closely connected to *stūpa* construction and the cult of relics. Because they epitomise the very essence of the Buddha’s teaching, they may also represent the notion of dharmakāya (i.e., “Dharma-body) or dharmadhātu (i.e., “Dharma-relic”) and thus echo the earlier equation, first expressed in the Pāli Canon, as “He who sees me [i.e., the Buddha] sees the *Dhamma*; he who sees the *Dhamma* sees me” (S III 120).³⁶ In other words, the verses must be honoured and respected as if they were a relic since they may represent the Buddha himself.

Once these *gāthās* were accepted as a substitute for the Buddha, they could then be inscribed onto the artefacts at a particular spot. The inscription, along with its incantation, would presumably have the effect of authoritatively legitimising the object and that spot as a sacred and cultic centre. Skilling (2002: 173) has proposed “ritual practices” to answer the question as to why identical Pāli texts were inscribed at different sites throughout central Thailand and neighbouring Myanmar and Cambodia during the first millennium CE. In a different fashion, Coëdès had made clear in his seminal article on so-called “votive tablets” that the *ye dhammā gāthā* “must rapidly have acquired in the eyes of the ancient Buddhists a sort of magic virtue, and may well have seemed to them a quite irresistible charm for the conversion to the faith of any who had not heard it” (1926–27: 6). For all these reasons, these verses seem to represent something more than mere “citation inscriptions”

excerpted from the Pāli Canon. Because of their shared sacredness, it appears that these stanzas found only in Pāli in the Dvāravatī cultural sphere, as well as in Prakrit and Sanskrit elsewhere in Southeast Asia, were deliberately chosen for their “ritual” and “cultic” nature, and thus also for their alleged supernatural power.³⁷

In this light, it might be worth recalling Lunet de Lajonquière’s early interpretation of the Dvāravatī wheels (1909: 36, fig. 17) as possibly serving the function of *sema* stones, that is, to mark the consecration of a Buddhist sanctuary. Although this theory was hastily rebutted by Coëdès (1956: 225), it could make some sense if we accept their frequent association with the Pāli verses described above as having the ritual and cultic function of sacralising an artefact or a monument which, in turn, may sanctify a religious spot or piece of land.

Lastly, this also brings us to the question of Pāli literacy at the time, compared to the situation today. Interesting observations can certainly be made about the ancient use of the Pāli language in certain rituals in the past and today. A few Buddhist scholars (e.g., Skilling 2002: 166, 173–174; Swearer 2004: 88ff, 107, 115–118, 218–219) have observed that chanting certain sacred Pāli verses or *parittas*—some of which are already attested in the Dvāravatī culture (i.e., Ud 1ff; Dhṃ 153f)—occurs regularly during the consecration of Buddha images and *chedīs* in Thailand and is seen as a form of protection against spirits, to ward off evil or deflect negative power. This may well be an indication of ritual continuity from the first millennium to this day.

Copying and Reciting Sacred Pāli Verses as an Act of Merit

We have seen that an investment in ritual actions may eventually yield great results. An additional important function of these sacred verses concerns the religious merit generated by copying and reciting them. The merit accrues for both the scribe who engraves them and the person who recites the *gāthās*. We do not know when and where exactly this practice was first employed in India, but Yijing, in the 7th century, has described this tradition as concomitant with the making of Buddha images:

The priests and the laymen in India make *caityas* or images with earth, or impress the Buddha’s images on silk or paper, and worship it with offerings wherever they go. [...] Any one may thus employ himself in making the objects of worship. Again, when the people make images and *caityas* which consist of gold, silver, copper, iron, earth, lacquer, bricks, and stone, or when they heap up the snowy sand (lit. sand-snow), they put in the images or *caityas* two kinds of *sarīras* [i.e., relics]. 1. The relics of the Great Teacher. 2. The *gāthā* of the Chain of Causation [i.e., *ye dhammā* or *paṭiccasamuppāda gāthās*]. [...] If we put these two in the images or *caityas*, the blessings derived from them are abundant. This is the reason why the *sūtras* praise in parables the merit of making images or *caityas* as unspeakable. (Takakusu 1998: 150–151; with minor stylistic changes)

By this time, copying a verse (*gāthā*), just as copying an image (*pratimā*), was clearly perceived as a beneficial act of merit in itself, not only for the scribe or the image-maker but also for the donor who sponsored the act of copying. This is also to say that this practice of duplicating a religious object was no longer motivated by the intention of preserving the “exact word” or “likeness” of the Buddha but rather was primarily aimed at merit-making.³⁸ Hence, producing and copying a large number of Buddha images, for example miniature clay tablets or earthenwares (Guy 2002; Skilling 2009: 108–109), and engraving them with such Pāli verses would necessarily result in great benefits.

Conclusion

The analysis of these Buddhist practices and rituals, as gleaned from the archaeological and epigraphic records of Dvāravatī and to a lesser extent its neighbouring cultures, has now come full circle. In the spirit of reassessing past scholarship, I have attempted to re-examine the corpus of ancient material and inscriptions from both a historical and doctrinal angle. The study has clearly demonstrated the essential Buddhist ideologies of gift-giving and dedicating that are conducive to merit-making, often directed toward a good “rebirth” in a future existence. The purpose of accumulating merit has become the most important goal of the modern follower of Buddhism in Thailand.

We have also seen how crucial ritual elements include the act of producing, and at times inscribing the objects with certain sacred verses that are deemed most effective. This also adds to our understanding of essential Buddhist approaches to merit-making. Particularly instructive are the regional distribution of such artefacts and the language of the epigraphs (Map 1).

³⁵ In Thailand, King Mongkut or Rama IV (r. 1851–1868), an ex-monk and Buddhist scholar in his own right, first proposed that the *ye dhammā gāthā* was a précis of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the Four Truths. See the inscription left in Thai by the king in 1856 at Phra Pathom Chedi in Nakhon Pathom and reproduced *in extenso* on pages 43–45 of Coëdès 1961 (Thai edition).

³⁶ The full quote is: *yo kho [vakkalij] dhammaṃ passati so maṃ passati yo maṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati*. See also M I 190f and It 91.

³⁷ That the *ye dhammā gāthā* was later blurred with a type of mantra is clearly attested in the abbreviated Sanskrit form *om ye te svāhā* found in (Pen)insular Southeast Asia (Cruijssen *et al.* 2013: n. 50). In the Tibetan tradition, Atiśa (ca 982–1054) also referred to the mantric use of this verse in his *Ritual for Making Miniature Clay Stūpas of the Vehicle of Perfections* (Bantor 1996: 115; Skilling 2008: 514).

³⁸ For a similar analysis regarding the “conceptual copying” of a revered icon during the later Sukhothai period (1238–1438) in Thailand, see Pattaratorn (2009: 176–181).

Among the Buddhist artefacts found in profusion are the objects inscribed in Pāli, from present-day central Thailand (Tables 3-4), or in Old Mon, mainly from the contemporary northeast (Table 2). Sanskrit and Old Khmer are also attested in a few donation inscriptions (Table 1) found in the outskirts of the Dvāravatī cultural sphere where cases of regional bilingualism (e.g., Mon-Pāli, Mon-Sanskrit, Mon-Khmer) are indicated. These linguistic trends may be an indication of the two major ethnic groups living in the region (i.e. Mon and Khmer) and of the sacred languages used (Pāli and Sanskrit). Although it cannot be concretely established that the Dvāravatī rulers of central Thailand were Buddhists, several inscriptions show that a significant portion of the population at least supported Buddhist temples and monasteries by the 7th and 8th centuries CE. This is a clear indication that Buddhism firmly took root in Thailand only from this period onwards and not as far back as the time of King Asoka, *circa* 250 BCE, as is often accounted in local traditions and school textbooks (Revire 2018).

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Abbreviations

Pāli references are made to PTS publications only.

A	<i>Aṅguttaranikāya</i>
D	<i>Dighanikāya</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Dhp–a	<i>Dhammapada–aṭṭhakathā (Commentary on Dhp)</i>
It	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
M	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i>
Pj I	<i>Paramatthajotikā I (Commentary on Khuddakapāṭha)</i>
S	<i>Saṃyuttanikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Suttanipāta</i>
Sp	<i>Samantapāsādikā (Commentary on Vin)</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī (Commentary on D)</i>
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>
Ud–a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī (Commentary on Ud)</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

Table 1: Buddhist Donation Inscriptions Found in First-Millennium Thailand

Inscr. no./ Inv. no.	Provenance/ Location	Date	Languages	Donors	Offerings	Recipients	Expected Results	References
NTh 9/ 40/2519	Wat Pho Rang, Nakhon Pathom/ Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum	6th–7th c.	Old Mon	unknown	list of gifts: land, silver vase	Buddha (kyāk) or a “holy monastery” (kyāk vihār or bihār)	missing (fragmentary)	Cœdès (1952); FAD (2529: II, 27–33); FAD (2548: 196–197)
PCh 1/ K. 505	Khao Rang, Sa Kaeo prov./National Library, Bkk	561 śaka = 639 CE	Sanskrit and Old Khmer	a certain sināhv (name or title? pious hermit?)	32 workers: couples and children as “slaves” (kñum) and guardians	monastery (vihār)	not expressed	Cœdès (1937– 66: V, 23-24); FAD (2529: I, 35-39); Vickery (1998: 129–130, 259, 280–281, n. 66)
PCh 14/ K. 997	Noen Sa Bua, Prachin Buri prov./Prachin Buri National Museum	11th c. (?) (probably 983 śaka = 1061 CE)	Old Khmer and Pāli	a certain kamrateñ Vuddhasiri	cows	temple	make a wish	FAD (2529: I, 179–186); Prapod (2010: 82–84); Revire (2012: 153–154)
LB 1/ K. 409	San Sung, Lop Buri prov./ National Library, Bkk	7th–8thc.	Old Mon	list of names and titles: Cāp Dyaṅgan, [.]idayya, Saṅgha Pathāk, upājhāy, Cāp Sumbañ, Ju Smac Yu (householder) and Cāp Inda	list of “slaves” (dek), robes, cattle, and carriages	“pagoda,” i.e., temple, stūpa, or monastery (kyāk)	merit (puṇya)	Halliday (1930: 82–85, pl. VIII); Cœdès (1961: 7–9, inscr. XVIII); FAD (2529: II, 57–66); Brown (1996: 113–114)
NM 28/ K. 388	Hin Khon, Nakhon Ratchasima prov./current location unknown	8th–9th c.	Sanskrit and Old Khmer	a certain rājabhikṣu or upādhyāya (religious title) also known as Nṛpendrādhipativarman (local prince or king)	10 monasteries (vihāra) with a list of “slaves” (dāsa), food, clothes, betel, garden, etc.	local Buddhist community (saṅgha)	merit (puṇya)	Cœdès (1937– 66: VI, 73–77); FAD (2529: I, 251–262); Kannika (1995: 279, pl. 34)
NM 31/ K. 389	Hin Khon, Nakhon Ratchasima prov./current location unknown	8th–9th c.	Sanskrit and Old Khmer	a certain upādhyāya of a royal monastery (rājavihāra); probably same as in NM 28/K. 388	list of “slaves” (dāsa), lands, cattle (10 pairs of cows), ritual implements, etc.	a temple or a deity? (vraḥ or vraḥ kamrateñ añ)	fruits of merit (vipākapuṇya) + all beings reaching omniscience (sarvajña) and becoming a Buddha	Cœdès (1937– 66: VI, 73, 78–79); FAD (2529: I, 263– 266)
NM 24/ K. 400	Mueang Sema, Nakhon Ratchasima prov./Phimai National Museum	Face A (7th–9th c.) [Face B 790 śaka = 868 CE]	Sanskrit (Face A)	king of Śrī Canāśa (Face A)	10 male and female “slaves” (dāsa and dāsi), cattle (50 cows and 20 female buffaloes with their calves)	local Buddhist community (saṅgha)	reaching enlightenment (bodhi)	Cœdès (1937– 66: VI, 83–85); FAD (2529: III, 23–29); Kannika (1995: 280, pl. 35)
SN 10	Ban Phanna, Sakon Nakhon prov./Ban Chiang National Museum	9th–10th c.	Old Mon	members of Mipa Suraya family	doors and windows (?)	a local monastery (vihāra)	not expressed	Kongkaeo (2550)
HPK I/33	Ban Thalāt, Laos/ Vat Ho Phra Keo, Vientiane	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	a certain lord (trala) Waṇṇa	cattle (cows and buffaloes), list of “slaves” (dek)	a “pagoda,” i.e., stūpa, (kyāk) or Buddha (?)	merit (puṇya)	Gagneux (1972: 92–96); Guillon (1974: 341–344)

Table 2: Buddhist Dedicatory Inscriptions Found in First-Millennium Thailand

Inscr. no./ Inv. no.	Provenance/ Location	Date	Languages	Category of Objects/ Material/Condition	Donors/ Beneficiaries	References
RB 1	Khao Ngu, Ratchaburi prov./in situ	7th c.	Old Mon–Khmer and Sanskrit (?)	Buddha image/ cave wall/fragmentary	Samādhigupta (?)	Coedès (1961: 19, inscr. XXII); FAD (2529: I, 68–71); Revire (2012b: 94–95, fig. 2)
LB 5/K. 577	Wat Mahathat, Lop Buri/Phra Narai National Museum	7th–8th c.	Sanskrit	a “pratimāmuneḥ” (i.e., Buddha image)/ stone	a certain nāyaka Ārjava, ruler (adhipati) of Taṅgur people, son of the king (īśvara) of Śāmbūka	Coedès (1961: 4–5, inscr. XVI); FAD (2529: I, 229–231)
LB 9/K. 695	Wat Khoi, Lop Buri/ Wat Benchamabophit, Bkk	7th–8th c.	Old Mon (?)	Buddha image/ stone/fragmentary	a certain lord (tirla or trala) (?)	Coedès (1961: 6, inscr. XVII); FAD (2529: II, 34–37)
LB 26	Thap Chumphon, Nakhon Sawan prov./Chai Nat Hospital (?)	8th–9th c.	Old Mon and Pāli [ye dhammā cf. Table 4]	earthenware/ fragmentary	missing	FAD (2524: 38–40); FAD (2529: I, 244–246); Phimphan (2013: 13)
NW 7	Thap Chumphon, Nakhon Sawan prov./ Phra Narai National Museum, Lop Buri	8th–9th c.	Old Mon and Pāli [ye dhammā cf. Table 4]	Earthenware	a certain lord or master (trala?)	FAD (2524: 34–37); FAD (2529: II, 95–99); Bauer (1991a: 42); Bauer (1991b: 65–66); Phimphan (2013: 13)
unregistered/ NW i	probably Thap Chumphon, Nakhon Sawan prov./ Wat Nong Kradon, Nakhon Sawan	8th–9thc.	Old Mon and Pāli [ye dhammā cf. Table 4]	earthenware	a certain lord or master (trala?)	Kannika & Phongkasem (2542); Phimphan (2013: 12–13)
unregistered/ 14/2536	Sung Noen dist., Nakhon Ratchasima prov./ Phimai National Museum	7th–8th c.	Old Mon	Buddha image/ stone/fragmentary	missing	unpublished
unregistered/ DV 36 + DV 38	Mon Nang, Chon Buri prov./ Phra Narai National Museum, Lop Buri	8th–9thc.	Old Mon	moulded tablets/ fired clay/fragmentary	a certain lord or master (trala)	Bauer (1991b: 63)
AN 2	Mueang Bueng Khok Chang, Uthai Thani prov./ unknown	7th c.	Old Mon or Prakrit (?)	stone	unknown	FAD (2529: II, 48–52)

Inscr. no./ Inv. no.	Provenance/ Location	Date	Languages	Donors	Offerings	Recipients
MKh 3/ 1106/2522	Na Dun, Maha Sarakham prov./Khon Kaen National Museum	8th–9th c.	Old Mon with Khmer loan words	moulded tablet/ fired clay/ fragmentary	a certain king (kamraten?)	FAD (2529: II, 82–84); Bauer (1991a: 42, 46); Uraisi (1995: 198, fig. 4); Kannika (1995: 255, pl. 12)
unregistered/ MKh i	Na Dun, Maha Sarakham prov./Khon Kaen National Museum	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	moulded tablet/ fired clay	a certain universal king (cakravarti) and a certain lord (tarla) Swayāga	Bauer (1991a: 66); Uraisi (1995: 198, fig. 6); Kannika (1995: 256, pl. 13)
unregistered/ MKh iii	Na Dun, Maha Sarakham province. Now at Khon Kaen National Museum	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	moulded tablet/ fired clay	a certain “holy Pārvati” (kyākpāravati)	Bauer (1991a: 80); Uraisi (1995: 198, fig. 9); Kannika (1995: 258, pl. 15)
unregistered/ MKh iv	Na Dun, Maha Sarakham province. Now at Khon Kaen National Museum	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	moulded tablet/ fired clay	a certain lord or master (tarla)	Uraisi (1995: 198–199); Kannika (1995: 259, pl. 16)
unregistered/ MKh vii	Na Dun, Maha Sarakham prov./Khon Kaen National Museum	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	moulded tablet/ fired clay/ fragmentary	a certain lord or master (tarla)	Bauer (1991a: 66); Uraisi (1995: 198, fig. 8); Kannika (1995: 257, pl. 14)
KhK 16	Wat Non Sila, Khon Kaen prov./in situ	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	sema/stone	a few men and women named Ko’Naḥ Pu, Ko’Mañ Darañ, Ko’ Mañ Subāhu and Ko’ Man Mreñ	FAD (2529: II, 67–72); Bauer (1991a: 65, pls 16–18); Uraisi (1995: 199–200, fig. 15); Kannika (1995: 248, pl. 5)
KhK 17	Wat Non Sila, Khon Kaen prov./in situ	8th–9th c.	Old Mon with Khmer loan words	sema/stone	a certain Mahā Yuta Draṅgana, Ko’ Kuruñ and Ko’ ’Upajhāy Vrahma	FAD (2529: II, 73–76); Bauer (1991a: 65, pls 19–20); Uraisi (1995: 200, fig. 16); Kannika (1995: 249, pl. 6)
unregistered/ KhK i	Wat Non Sila, Khon Kaen prov./in situ	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	sema/stone	a certain Jiv Pāl Mañ Bnaḥ	Bauer (1991a: 65–66, pl. 21); Kannika (1995: 250, pl. 7)
KhK 25	Phu Wiang mountain, Khon Kaen prov./in situ	8th–9th c.	Hybrid Sanskrit (?)	Buddha image/ stone wall	unknown	Cha-em (2544)
KS 1+ KS 2	Mueang Fa Daet, Kalasin prov./current location unknown	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	moulded tablets/ fired clay	a certain ’upajhāy’ācāryya (preceptor and/or teacher)	Prasan (2511: 110–111); FAD (2529: II, 85–94); Bauer (1991a: 66); Kannika (1995: 246–247, pls 3–4)
KS 4 + KS i (unregistered)	Mueang Fa Daet, Kalasin prov./current location unknown	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	moulded tablets/ fired clay	a certain lord or master (tala) Āditya	Prasan (2511: 108–109)ww
KS 4 + KS i (unregistered)	Wat Pho Chai, Kalasin prov./ in situ	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	moulded tablets/ fired clay	a certain lord or master (tala) Āditya	Prasan (2511: 108–109)
KS 7	Wat Pho Chai, Kalasin prov./ in situ	8th–9th c.	Old Mon with Khmer loan words	sema/stone	a certain King Cak (kamuñ kyāk cak)	FAD (2529: II, 100–103); Bauer (1991a: 43); Uraisi (1995: 200, fig. 18); Kannika (1995: 245, pl. 2)
unregistered/ KS ii	Wat Sawang Watthanaram, Kalasin prov./in situ	8th–9th c.	Old Mon with Khmer loan words	sema/stone/ fragmentary	a certain king or prince (ksmuñ)	Bauer (1991a : 46); Uraisi (1995: 200, fig. 19); Kannika (1995: 244, pl. 1)
KhK 19	Ban Don Kao, Udon Thani prov./Khon Kaen National Museum	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	sema/stone/ fragmentary	missing	Bauer (1991a: 66); Uraisi (1995: 200, fig. 20); Kannika (1995: 260, pl. 17)
ChY 1/ K. 404	Phu Khiao, Chaiyaphum prov./Chaiyaphum City Hall	9th–10th c.	Sanskrit	stone/ fragmentary	King Jayasinghavarman	Coedès (1937-66: VII, 73); FAD (2529: III, 57–59)
ChY 4/ K. 965	Ban Hua Khua, Chaiyaphum prov./6th FAD Regional Office, Nakhon Ratchasima	8th–9th c.	Sanskrit	sema/stone/ fragmentary	a certain Candrādityā	Coedès (1958: 131); Cha-em (2537b)
ChY 5	Kaset Sombun, Chaiyaphum prov./6th FAD Regional Office, Nakhon Ratchasima	913 śaka (= 991 CE)	Sanskrit	sema/stone/ fragmentary	the monk (bhikṣu) Amarasiṃha	Cha-em (2537a)
unregistered/ ChY i	Wat Phra That Nong Sam Muen, Chaiyaphum prov./in situ	8th–9th c.	Old Mon with Khmer loan words	sema/stone/ fragmentary	a certain king (kuruñ)	Bauer (1991a: 60, pl. 14); Uraisi (1995: 201, fig. 22); Kannika (1995: 252, pl. 9)
unregistered/ ChY ix	Ban Kut Ngong, Chaiyaphum prov./in situ	8th–9th c.	Old Mon	sema/stone/ fragmentary	a certain teacher (’ācāryya)	Bauer (1991a: 60, pl. 8)
unregistered/ ChY xi	Wat Phra That Nong Sam Muen, Chaiyaphum prov./in situ	8th–9th c.	Old Mon with Sanskrit loan words	sema/stone/ fragmentary	a certain king (śrīrāja)	Bauer (1991a: 60–61, pl. 13); Uraisi (1995: 201, fig. 22); Kannika (1995: 253, pl. 10)

Table 3: Pāli Citation Inscriptions Found in First-Millennium Thailand (Except Ye Dhammā)

Inscr. no./ Inv. no.	Provenance/ Location	Date	Category of Objects/ Material/Condition	Contents of Citations	References
KTh 29	Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom/ Bangkok National Museum	7th–8th c.	dharmacakra/stone	First Sermon/Four Truths	Cœdès (1956); FAD (2529: I, 59–64); Brown (1996: 99–103, figs 5a– b); Skilling (1997: 149–150); Phasook (2008: 24–25); Prapod (2010: 76–77)
unregistered/ NTh i	Nakhon Chaisi, Nakhon Pathom prov./Culture Hall Project, Silpakorn University, Nakhon Pathom (?)	7th–8th c.	stone bar	list of the Four Truths and the 12 links of Dependent Origination (Face A); list of the 37 factors conducive to enlightenment (Face B); Sn 558 (Face C); Dhp 191 and D II 123 (Face D)	Naiyana et al. (2534); Skilling (1997: 123–133)
SPh 1/ 37/2541	Khampaeng Saen, Nakhon Pathom prov./ Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum	7th–8th c.	cakra base/stone	Four Truths	FAD (2529: I, 98–99); Brown (1996: 108, fig. 64b); Skilling (1997: 149–150); FAD (2548: 136); Phasook (2008: 26);
unregistered/ SPh i	U Thong, Suphan Buri prov./ U Thong National Museum	7th–8th c.	brick/fragmentary	Dhp 191(Face A); [ye dhammā on Face B; cf. Table 4: SP 2]	Prasan (2509: 82); Skilling (1991: 243–244)
LB 8	Sap Champa, Lop Buri prov./ Phra Narai National Museum	7th–8th c.	cakra pillar/stone/ fragmentary	First Sermon/Four Truths	FAD (2524: 26–27); FAD (2529: I, 103–105); Brown (1996: 113); U-tain (2556)
LB 14	Wat Mahathat, Lop Buri/ Phra Narai National Museum	7th–8th c.	cakra spoke/ stone/fragmentary	Dependent Origination	FAD (2529: I, 109–111); Brown (1996: 104–105); Phasook (2008: 28)
unregistered/ 86/2529	Sap Champa, Lop Buri prov./ Phra Narai National Museum	7th–8th c.	cakra spoke/stone	Dependent Origination	Phuthon (2529: 18, fig. 14)
LB 17/ L. 2166-67	Sap Champa, Lop Buri prov./ Phra Narai National Museum	7th–8th c.	cakra spoke/stone	ye dhammā; Four Truths; Ud 1–3; Dhp 153f	Uraisi & Anchana (1975); FAD (2529: I, 116–122); Brown (1996: 109–111); Skilling (1997: 149–150); Phasook (2008: 26–27); Prapod (2010: 78)
LB 19/ L. 2161	Wat Mahathat, Lop Buri/ Phra Narai National Museum	7th–8th c.	dharmacakra/stone/ fragmentary	First Sermon/Four Truths	Boisselier (1961); FAD (2529: I, 123–125); Brown (1996: 103, fig. 33); Phasook (2008: 28)
LB 22	Sap Champa, Lop Buri prov./ Phra Narai National Museum	8th–9th c.	cakra pillar/stone/ fragmentary	ye dhammā; Four Truths; Ud 1–3; Dhp 153f (?)	FAD (2529: I, 241–243); Brown (1996: 111)
LB 24	Phromthin Tai, Lop Buri prov./Phra Narai National Museum	8th–9th c.	stone slab/ fragmentary	Ud 1; Sn 558	FAD (2529: I, 237–240); Brown (1996: 118–119); Prapod (2010: 78–79)
ChN 14	Ban Hang Nam Sakhon, Chai Nat prov./current location unknown	7th–8th c.	dharmacakra/stone/ fragmentary	First Sermon; Commentary on the Four Truths (?)	Bauer (1991a: 48, 52–55; pls 1–3); Skilling (1997: 133–151); Phasook (2008: 29, fig. 36)
ChN 15	Ban Hang Nam Sakhon, Chai Nat prov./current location unknown	7th–8th c.	cakra pillar/stone/ fragmentary	Commentary on the Four Truths	Bauer (1991a: 48, 52–55; pl. 4); Skilling (1997: 146–148)
unregistered/ PhCh i	Si Thep, Phetchabun prov./ Ramkhamhaeng National Museum, Sukhothai	7th–8th c.	circular base or pedestal(?)/stone/ fragmentary	Dependent Origination	Brown (1996: 105, fig. 41); Skilling (2002: 168–169); FAD (2550: 126)
unregistered/ 0996	Si Thep, Phetchabun prov./ current location unknown	7th–8th c.	circular base or pedestal (?)/stone/ fragmentary	Dependent Origination	FAD (2550: 127)
unregistered/ 82.183	Si Thep, Phetchabun prov./ Newark Museum, NJ (USA)	7th–8th c.	dharmacakra/stone	First Sermon/Four Truths	Brown (1996: 106–108, figs 6a–b)

Table 4: *Ye Dhammā* Inscriptions Found in First-Millennium Thailand

Inscr. no./ Inv. no.	Provenance/ Location	Date	Category of Objects/ Material/ Condition	Contents of Citations	References
RB 2	Wat Plaeng/Wat Mahathat, Ratchaburi prov.	7th–8th c.	Buddha image (head stolen)/ stone	yesaṃ group (variant ending: mahāsamano ti)	FAD (2529: I, 72–74); Skilling (1999: 173, 180); Skilling (2003–04: 274–275, figs 1–3)
PhB 2	provenance unknown/ rubbing at National Library, Bkk	7th–8th c.	probably stone/lost	tesaṃ group	FAD (2529: I, 65–67); Skilling (1999: 180)
NTh 2/ 76/2519	Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom/ Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum	7th–8th c.	stone slab/ fragmentary	tesaṃ group	FAD (2529: I, 75–78); Skilling (1999: 180); FAD (2548: 195)
NTh 3	Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom/ Bangkok National Museum	7th c.	stone caitya/ fragmentary	tesaṃ group	FAD (2529: I, 79–82); Skilling (1999: 180)
NTh 4	Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom/ in situ	7th–8th c.	stone slab	tesaṃ group	FAD (2529: I, 83–85); Skilling (1999: 180)
NTh 5	Nakhon Pathom prov./ National Library, Bkk	7th–8 th c.	stone slab	yesaṃ group (variant ending: mahāsamano)	FAD (2529: I, 86–88);Skilling (1999: 180)
NTh 6	Nakhon Pathom prov./ National Library, Bkk	7th–8th c.	stone slab	yesaṃ group	FAD (2529: I, 89–91);Skilling (1999: 180)
NTh 10	Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom/ current location unknown	7th–8th c.	stone slab	yesaṃ group (variant ending: nīrodho ca... mahāsamano ti)	FAD (2529: I, 92–94); Skilling (1999: 181)
unregistered/ 22/10	Nakhon Pathom prov./ Bangkok National Museum	7th–8th c.	brick	yesaṃ group	unpublished
unregistered/ DV 1–1	Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom/ Bangkok National Museum	8th–9th c.	earthenware/ fragmentary	yesaṃ group	unpublished
unregistered/ 305/2519	Wat Phra Ngam, Nakhon Pathom/ Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum	8th–9th c.	earthenware/ fragmentary	yesaṃ group	Finot (1910: 148); Cœdès (1912: 29); L. de Lajonquière (1912: 113, fig. 21); FAD (2548: 198)
NW 7, NW I + LB 26	Thap Chumphon, Nakhon Sawan prov./ Phra Narai National Museum, Lop Buri; Wat Nong Kradon, Nakhon Sawan; Chai Nat Hospital (?)	8th–9th c.	earthenware/ fragmentary	yesaṃ group (variant ending: mahāsamano)	FAD (2524: 34–40); FAD (2529: I, 244– 246; II, 95–99); Kannika & Phongkasem (2542);Phimphan (2013: 12–13)
unregistered/ L. 4348	Nakhon Pathom prov./ Bangkok National Museum	7th c.	cakra pillar/ fragmentary	unknown	Finot (1910: 148); Cœdès (1912: 29); L. de Lajonquière (1912: 112, fig. 19); Brown (1996: 108)

Inscr. no./ Inv. no.	Provenance/ Location	Date	Category of Objects/Material/ Condition	Recension Type	References
unregistered/ NTh ii	Chaiya province (?)/Phra Pathom Chedi Temple Museum, Nakhon Pathom	7th–8th c.	Buddha image/stone/ fragmentary	unknown	Skilling (2003–04: 280, n. 17)
unregistered/ DV 5–2 + DV 6–2	Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom/ Bangkok National Museum	7th–8th c.	moulded tablets/ fired clay	tesam group	Dupont (1959: I 47–49, II figs 34–40)
unregistered/ MW/458	Probably central Thailand/ Wat Matchimawat, Songkhla	7th–8th c.	moulded clay/ fired clay	yesam group	unpublished
SPh 2	U Thong, Suphan Buri prov./ U Thong National Museum	7th–8th c.	brick/ fragmentary	tesam group (Face B)	Prasan (2509: 81); Skilling (1999: 180)
SPh 4	U Thong, Suphan Buri prov./ National Library, Bkk	7th–8th c.	brick	yesam group	FAD (2529: I, 100–102); Skilling (1999: 180)
unregistered/ NN i	Dong Lakhon, Nakhon Nayok prov./ current location unknown	8th–9th c.	bowl (?)/ terracotta/ fragment	unknown	Bandhit (2542: 531–532)
LB 16/ 143/2525	Phromthin Tai, Lop Buri prov./ Phra Narai National Museum	7th–8th c.	stone slab	yesam group (variant ending: nirodho ca (?) mahāsamaṇo)	FAD (2529: I, 106–108); Skilling (1999: 181)
LB 23	Si Thep, Phetchabun prov./ Phra Narai National Museum, Lop Buri	7th–8th c.	stone slab	yesam group (variant ending: mahāsamaṇo)	FAD (2529: I, 132–134); Skilling (1999: 181); FAD (2550: 125)
LB 54	Sap Champa, Lop Buri prov./ current location unknown	8th–9th c.	stone slab/ fragmentary	? (variant ending: nirodho ca)	Amon (2551: 56–60)
unregistered/ LB i	Lop Buri prov./ Phra Narai National Museum	7th–8th c.	Buddha image/ stone/ fragmentary	unknown	Unpublished
unregistered/ PhB i	Si Thep, Phetchabun prov./ Ramkhamhaeng National Museum, Sukhothai	7th–8th c.	Buddha image/ stone/ fragmentary	? (variant ending: mahāsamaṇo)	Skilling (2002: 169); Skilling (2003–04: 280–281, fig. 9)
unregistered/ K. 987/ 323/2497	Dan Khun Tot or Mueang Sema (?), Sung Noen dist., Nakhon Ratchasima prov./ Maha Viravong National Museum, Nakhon Ratchasima	8th–9th c.	Buddha image/ stone	yesam group	Cœdès (1937–66: VII, 162); Skilling (1999: 173–174, 181); Skilling (2003–04: 276–278, figs 4–6)
unregistered/ K. 1166/ 46/2536	Nong Bua Daeng, Chaiyaphum prov. or Mueang Sema, Nakhon Ratchasima prov. (?)/Phimai National Museum	8th–9th c.	stone slab	yesam group	Skilling (2003–04: 278–279, figs 7–8)

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(Edited by Drishti Desai)



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