

Inscriptions from South Thailand

by Kongkaew Veerapajak

This article presents a brief survey of the inscriptions from South Thailand, which have provided us with important cultural and religious data ranging from the early historical period till ca. 13th century A.D..

The pattern of the cultural heritage of South Thailand appears to be fairly complex. Archaeological remains testify to the existence and co-existence of many types of cultures in that area during the past centuries. It is generally agreed that certain parts of South Thailand, for a certain period of time, was part of the great cultural complex of Srivijaya, but the Thai-Malay Peninsula, provided with important sea-ports and trading stations, have always been susceptible to many streams of cultural impact from India as well as from the mainland of Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Inscriptions from South Thailand give us a glimpse of the cultural and religious situations in this area.

The earliest inscriptions from South Thailand represent, at the same time, the oldest inscriptions so far known in present Thailand. They were engraved upon stone and metal seals, discovered at many archaeological sites in South Thailand. The majority of these inscriptions on seals are palaeographically related to those found upon similar types of objects and finger rings from Oc-eo in the delta of the Mekong River, and upon a few seals from Malaysia. Many of the specimens from South Thailand belong to the same period as the earliest epigraphical records from Malaysia and Indonesia. All were engraved, in reversed characters,

which is a feature typical of inscriptions found on seals. My reading of these - based on the photographs made by Mr. and Mrs. Srisuchart of the Archaeological Survey of Thailand - may not be absolutely correct, while the real and profound meanings of the inscribed texts may have eluded me. I will be most grateful for comments, suggestions and corrections.

Inscription no. 1 is carved upon an oval stone seal found at Khuan Lukpat site in the district of Khlong Thom, Krabi province. In my opinion, this is the oldest inscription so far known in Thailand. It is written in the Brahmi script common for North India, of the type which may be assigned to ca. 1st - 3rd centuries A.D. using Prakrit language, or archaic Sanskrit. The inscribed word reads "rūjjo", which possibly means "destroy".

Inscription no. 2 is carved upon a square carnelian seal, discovered at Khuan Lukpat site, Khlong Thom district, in Krabi province. The script can be recognised as closely related to the Pallava script used in the inscriptions of Sivaskandavarman of ca. 5th - 6th centuries A.D. The language is Sanskrit and the inscribed word reads "dātavyam" which may be translated as "suitable to give".

Inscription no. 3 is found upon a rectangular seal made of green stone. The script is similar to that used in inscription no. 2, viz. related to the Pallava script of ca. 5th - 6th centuries A.D. The language is again Sanskrit. The inscribed text reads "apralasanasya", which may be translated as "not to be moved", or "belonging to (a person called) Apralasa".

Inscription no. 4 is carved upon a rectangular seal, also made of green stone, found at the same site, viz. Khuan Lukpat, Khlong Thom district, Krabi province. The script is again related to the Pallava script of ca. 5th - 6th centuries A.D. The language is again Sanskrit. The text reads "vi-

Miss Kongkaew Veerapajak is an epigraphist of the National Library of Thailand, Bangkok.

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Continued from page 6

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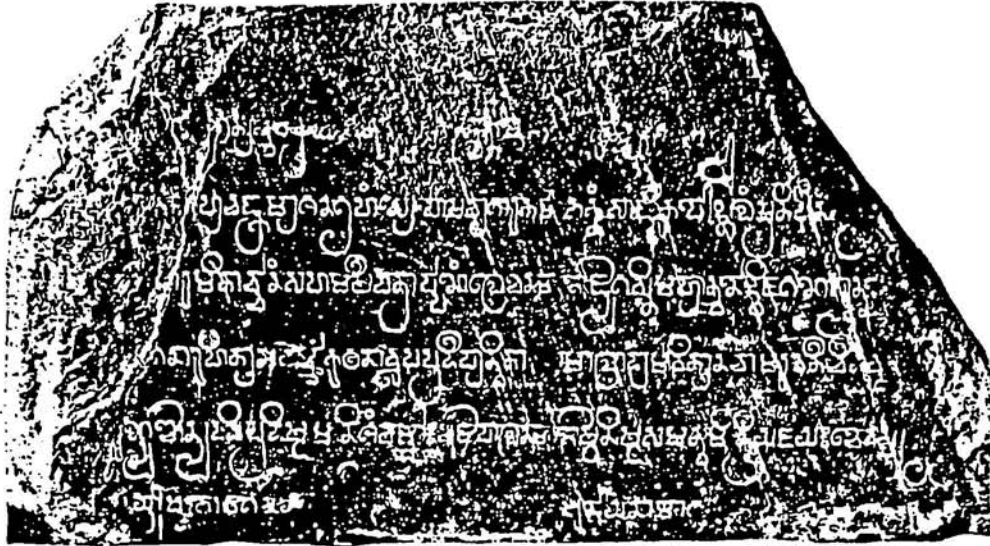
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INSCRIPTION NO. 8 Inscription from Wat Maheyong, Nakhon Si Thammarat.

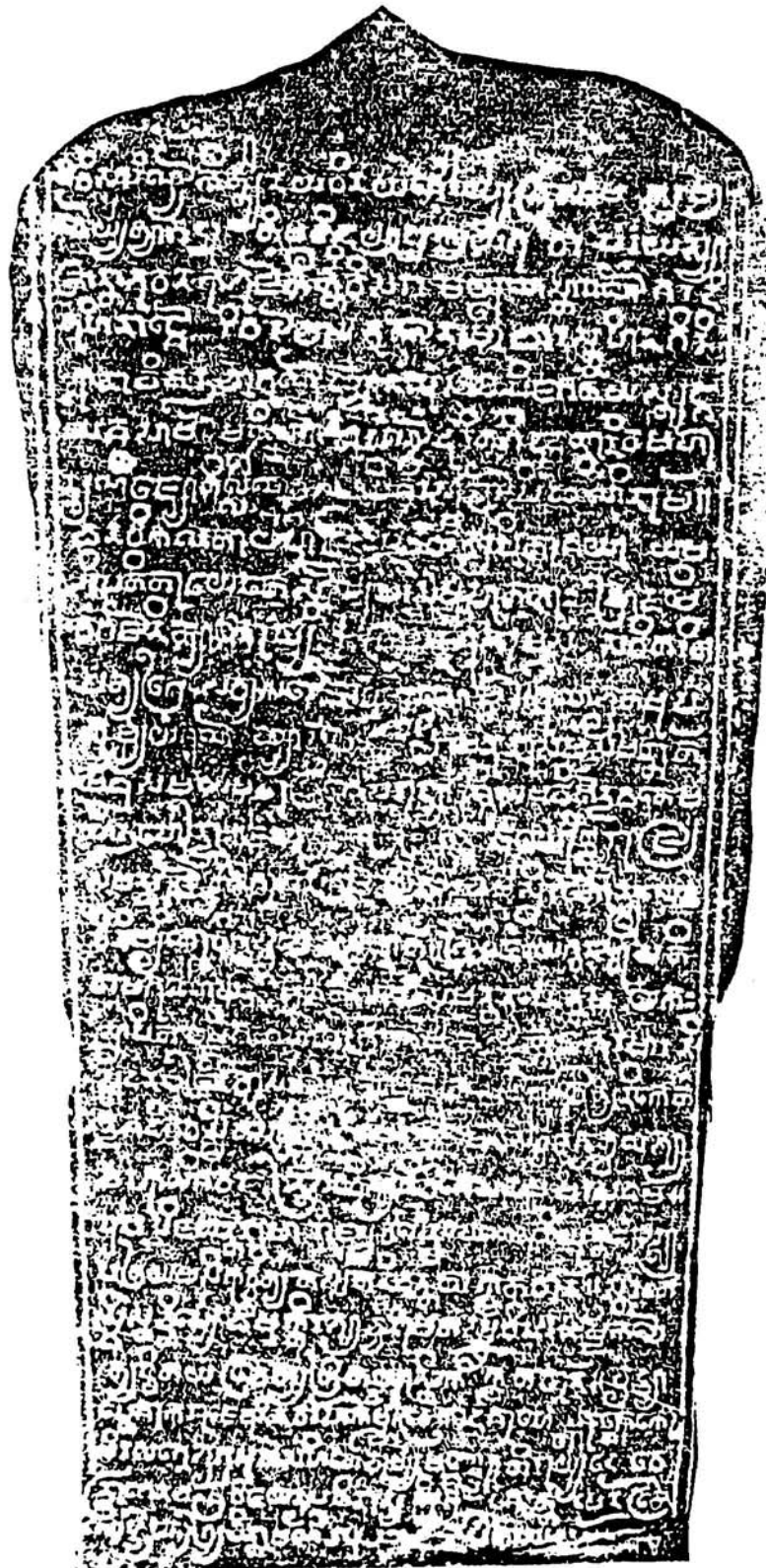
the donation of food and gifts to the Sangha (community of monks or ascetics) and also to the Brahmin community of Agastya. The text also contains a reference to an uposa thagara (ordination hall) and possibly refers to the worship of Paramita (supreme wisdom).

Inscription no. 9 on our list is an inscription from Chong

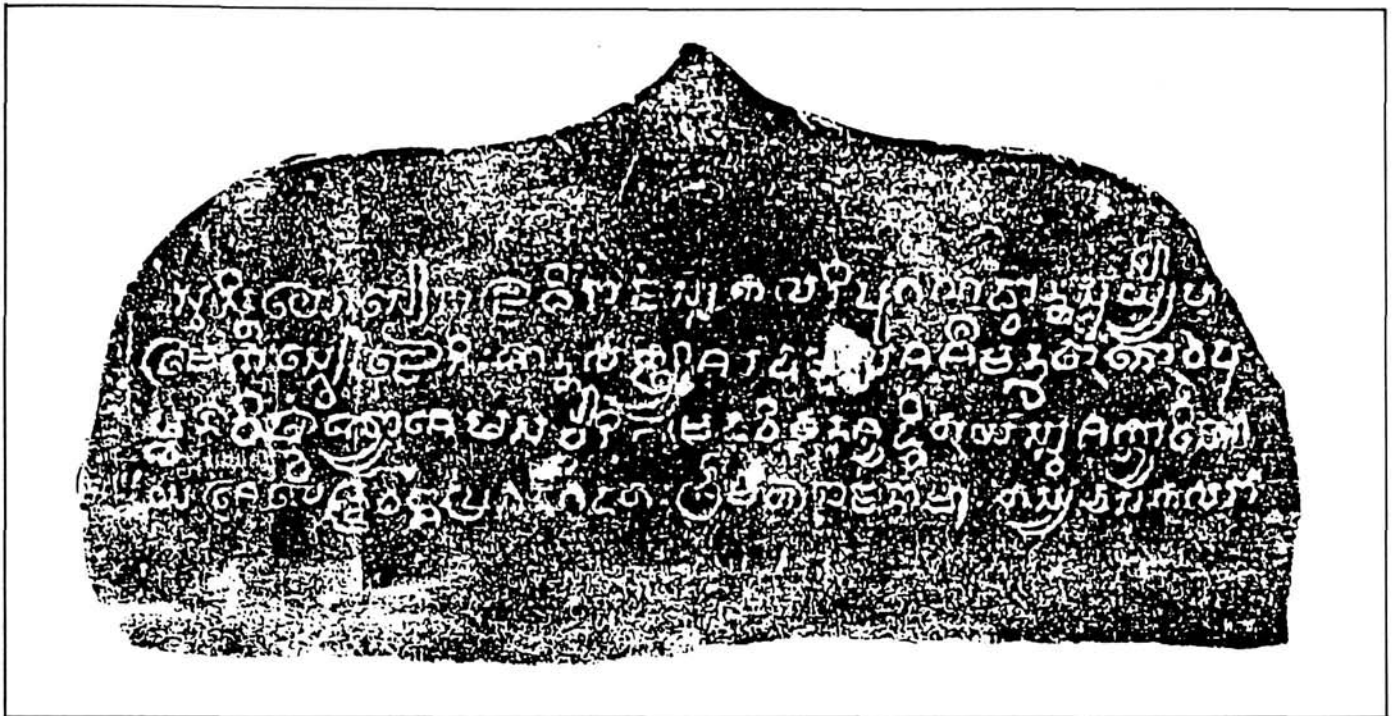
Khoi Valley, Nakhon Si Thammarat province, written in the Pallava type of script of ca. 7th century A.D. while the language is Sanskrit. The text begins with a reference to "Sri Vidyadhikara", believed to be an epithet of Siva, followed by invocations to the Lord of the Forest and the Lord of the Devas, and an utterance of blessings upon

Pallava Script		Dewa-Nagari Script
part 1	శ్రీవిద్యాధికార్య	श्रीविद्याधिकारस्य
part 2	<div>Line 1</div> <div>Line 2</div> <div>Line 3</div> <div>Line 4</div>	<div>నమోస్తు తస్మై పతయే వనానాం</div> <div>నమోస్తు తస్మై పతయే సురాణామ్ ।</div> <div>ప్రయोजनाచ్ఛివనభా గతాస్ते</div> <div>దాతవ్యమిత్యత్ర భవద్భిరేభయః ।</div>
part 3	<div>Line 1</div> <div>Line 2</div>	<div>येषान्निलयदेशेषु तिष्ठन्ति मनुजावराः ।</div> <div>यदि तेषां प्रसादाच्च कार्यन्तेषां भविष्यति ॥</div>

TRANSCRIPTION OF INSCRIPTION NO.9. Inscription From Chong-Khoi Valley, Nakhon Si Thammarat.



INSCRIPTION NO. 12 Inscription from Wat Semamuang, Nakhon Si Thammarat = Ligor Inscription = Wiang Sa Inscription. Face I



INSCRIPTION NO. 12 Face 2

text commemorates the excavation and donation of a tank near a place called Nangura.

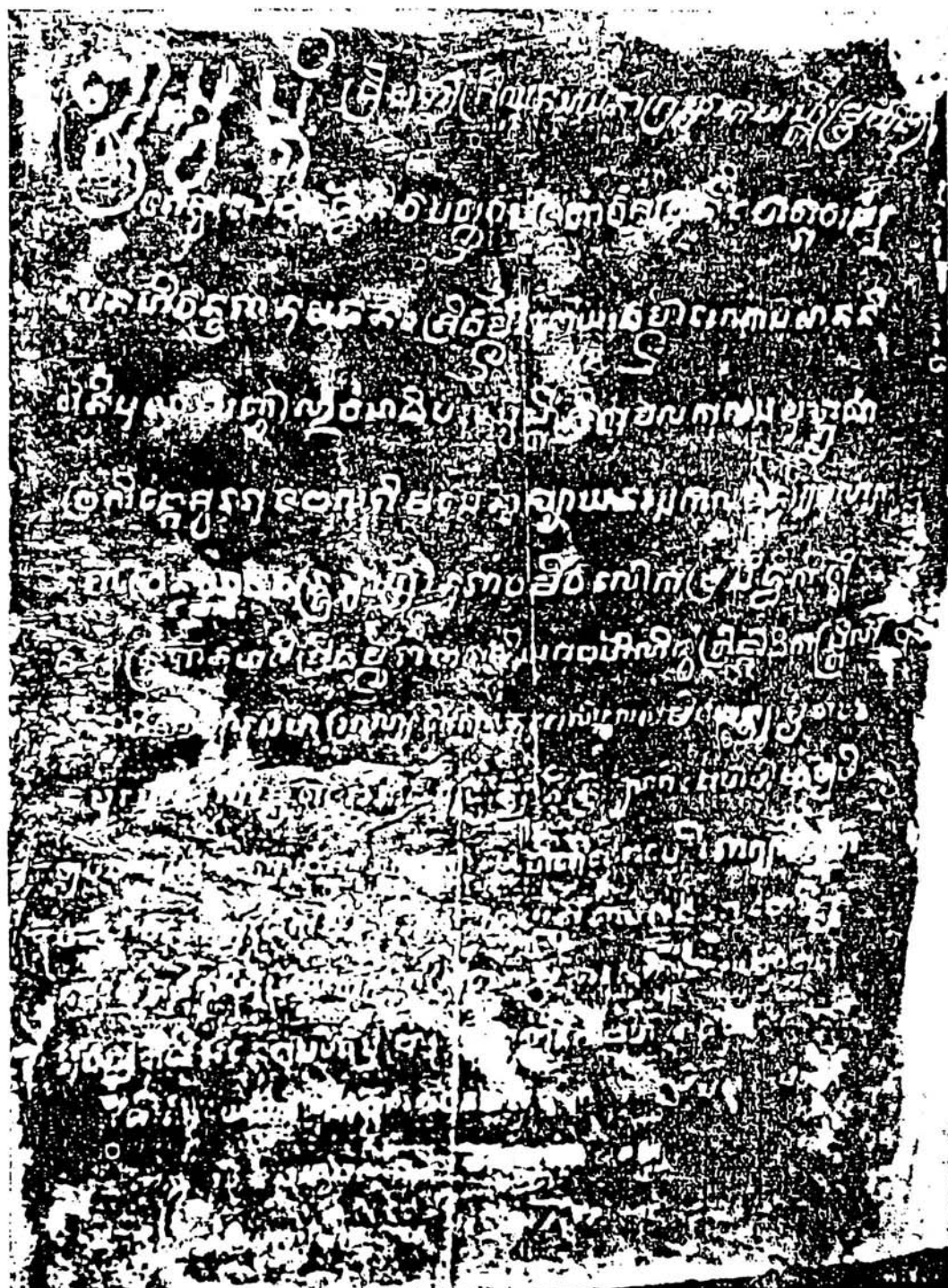
Inscription no. 11 on our list is an inscription from Wat Mahathat, Nakhon Si Thammarat province. It was also published by Coedes in his Collections of Inscriptions, vol. 2, together with a tentative reading. Many attempts

have been made to decipher and read this inscription and my own reading probably would not be the last. In my opinion the language is Old Mon, while the script is related to the Pallava type of ca. 7th century A.D. The text reads "bha // tamayalan gesvarah" which may be translated as "replica (or image) of Mr. Māyā of the rural town,

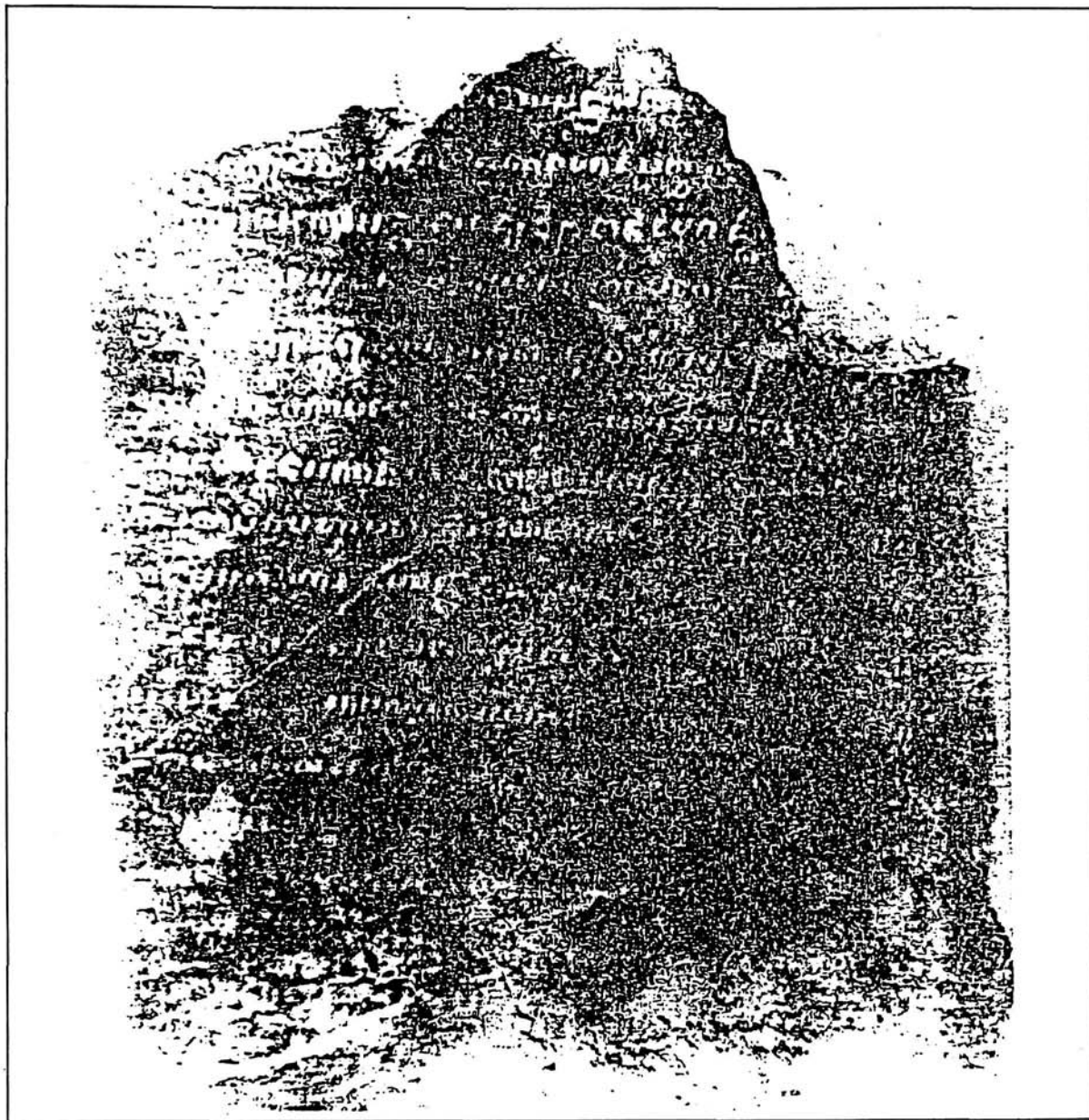
၁၁ဝံဟံလှာကိတိၤ ယဝိယခေါယျံ ဖြဲကဗ္ဗ ဣဗ္ဗ၊
 ခေါယျံကျာဂဒျံ တိမတိယဗျာဗျာယဂုတ ပံယဗျာ
 ဣဗ္ဗာဂုတကုဒ်ကိတိၤ ဝိပက မဗျာအဗျာဂံလံကဒ်
 ဧဟိမာဓိၤ ဝိပဗျာ ၁၁ဂုလံသဗျာ ဧဟိမာဓိၤ
 ဣဗ္ဗာသိဗျာဗျာလံသဗျာပိဗျာတိယဗျာ
 ယဗျာမိ မလိသံကျာလံ သုတိသိသုတိဝဗျာ

A CLOSER LOOK OF INSCRIPTION NO. 12 Face 1

[illegible]



INSCRIPTION NO. 14 Inscription from Wat Wieng, Surat Thani.



INSCRIPTION NO. 15 *Another Inscription from Wat Wieng, Surat Thani.*

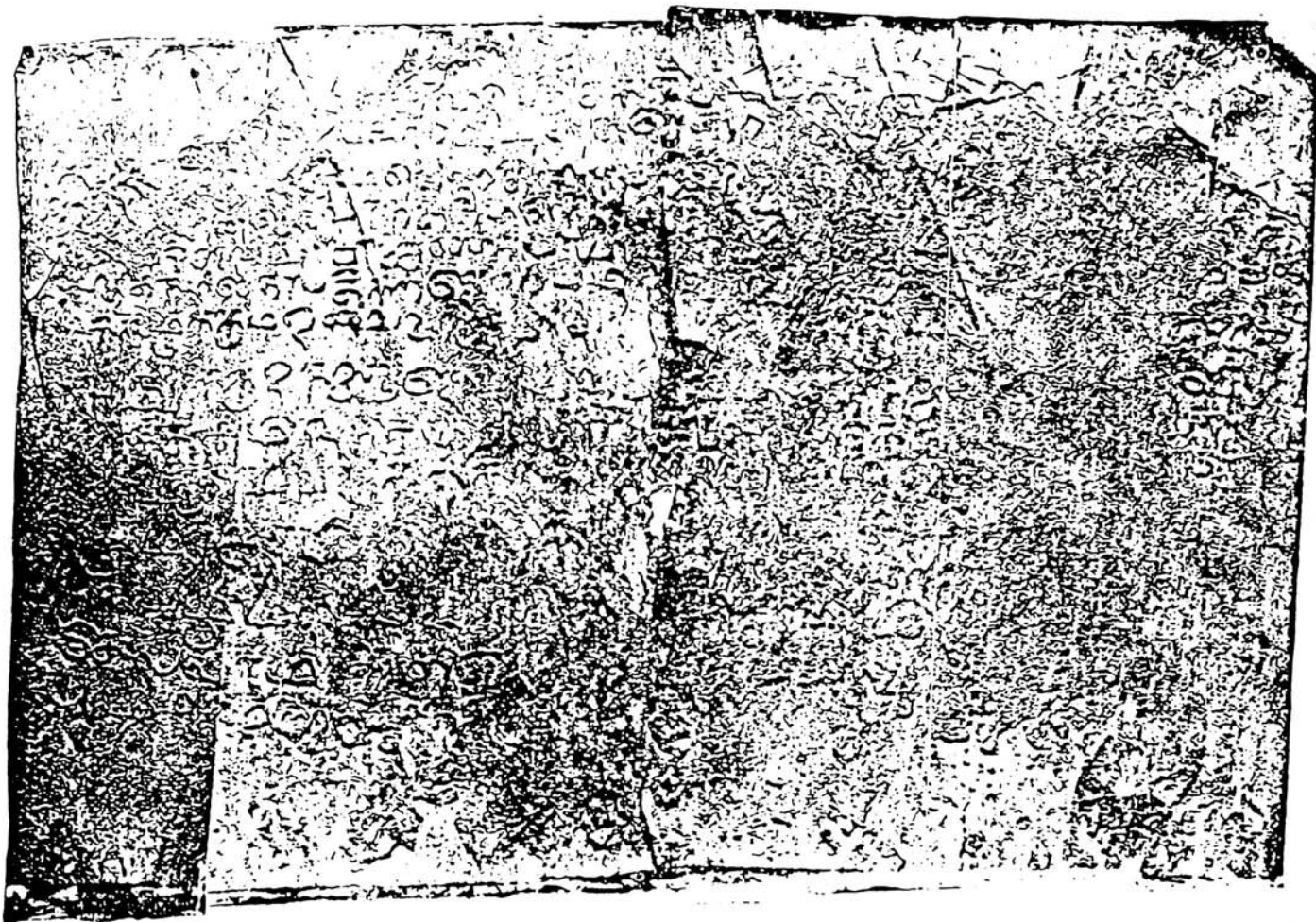
Thani province. The script is Old Khmer but showing again features similar to those of the script used in Haripunjaya inscriptions. The language, however, is Sanskrit. It bears a date of 1230 A.D. and contains praises to Candrabhānu of the Padmavamsa, also called Sri Dharmarāja, the king of Tāmbraliṅga, who was a great patron of Buddhism.

Inscription no. 15 came from the same monastery. It is now labelled 24A and ST 3. The script is Old Khmer bearing features recalling those of the script used in the Haripunjaya inscriptions of North Thailand, but the language is Pāli. It contains no date but the form of the script is similar to that used in no. 14, and may be assigned to the same period. The writing is much damaged and only a few words can be read here and there, telling us of some

worshippers of the Buddha, possessing wisdom and piety, being desirous to make merits and glorify the Master.

Inscription no. 16 came from Wat Mahāthāt, Nakhon Si Thammarat. It is partly written in Tamil and partly in Old Khmer, using Tamil and Sanskrit languages. The scripts are assignable to ca. 13th century. The Tamil part, using the Tamil script, mentions a certain Dharmasenāpati and a prohibition for taking lives. The Old Khmer part, using Sanskrit, is not yet satisfactorily deciphered. The text, however, contains a reference to Tāmbraliṅga.

Inscription no. 17, the last on our list, came from Viharn Pho Lankā in Wat Mahāthāt, Nakhon Si Thammarat. The script is Old Mon of the type which was obviously derived from the script used in Haripunjaya inscriptions,



INSCRIPTION NO. 16 *Inscription from Wat Mahāthāt, Nakhon Si Thammarat Tamil Script*

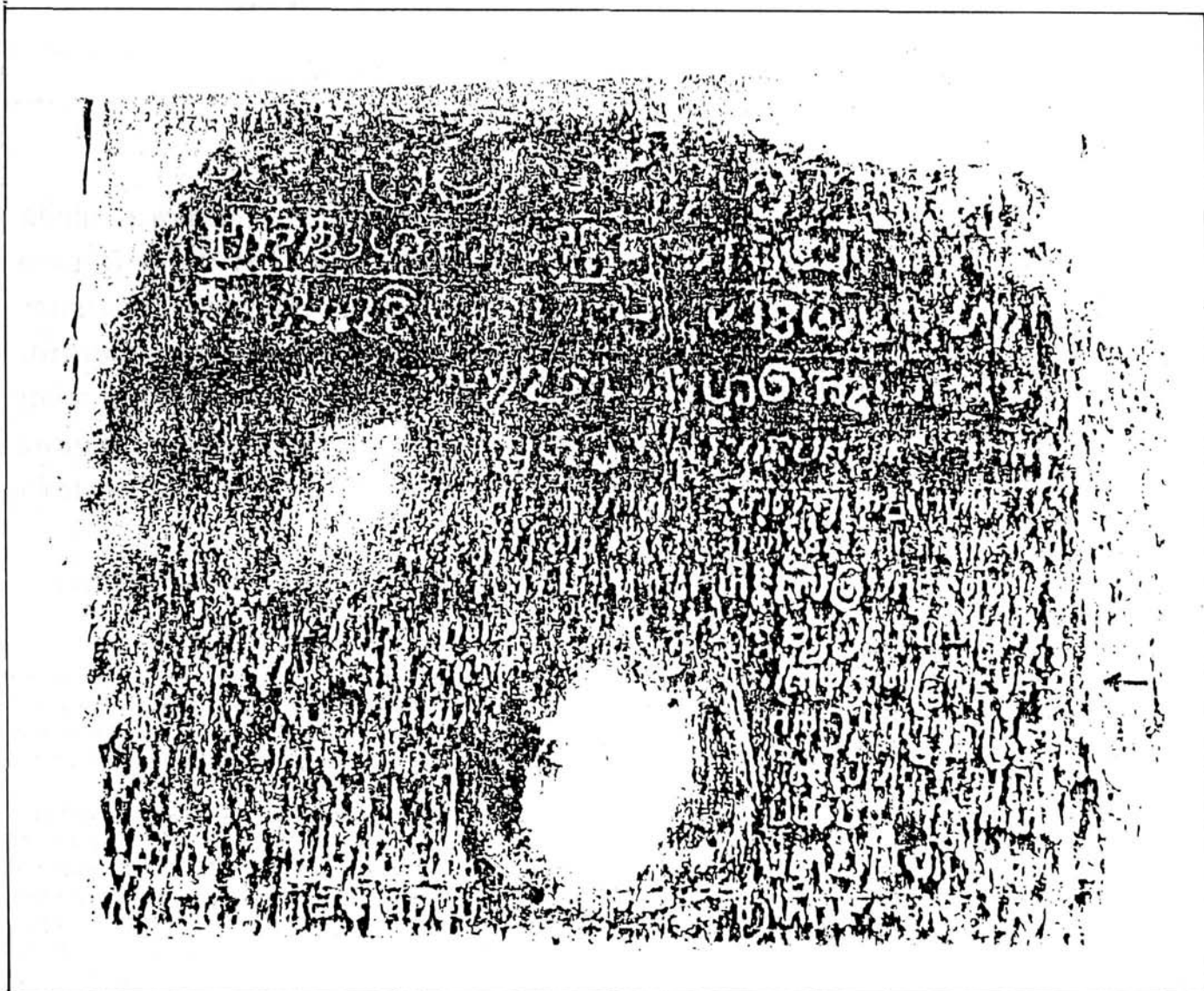
but showing at the same time features similar to those of Pagan inscriptions of Burma of ca. 13th century. We may assign this inscription to the 13th century on palaeographic grounds. The language is Old Mon and the text contains a praise to two excellent nāgas who are perpetual worshippers of the sun.

These inscriptions, besides being interesting palaeographically, also provide us with informations on the cultural and religious spheres. The data which can be drawn from those inscriptions on seals nos. 1-7 in our list are admittedly quite vague. The inscribed words or texts are too short to tell us about the lives, thoughts and religious inclinations of the makers of these seals. They are datable palaeographically, and we can trace the Indian sources of the scripts which are used, but we have no way of knowing when and how these inscribed seals were brought to South Thailand. Being portable objects, we may argue that they could have been brought to that area by trade, and thus do not necessarily represent direct cultural links between South Thailand and the country of their origin. They have been found at the

archaeological sites which have yielded abundant evidence of overseas trading but these objects were presumably personal seals, used by Indian merchants to seal their documents or merchandise and may be cited at least as evidence to indicate the presence of Indian merchants in South Thailand.

The earliest inscription (no. 1 in our list) is written in the Brāhmi script, typical of North India during ca. 1st - 3rd centuries A.D. It can not be regarded as evidence of an early cultural contact between Thailand and that part of India, since we do not know how and when it arrived at the present finding spot. However, the inscription itself is most interesting, since it is one of the earliest - if not the earliest - inscriptions found in Southeast Asia including Indonesia. The Brāhmi script, moreover, has never been found in the inscription of maritime Southeast Asia.

The majority of the inscriptions on seals from South Thailand (nos. 2-7) are written in the script which is closely related to that used by the Pallava dynasty of Southeast India during ca 5th - 7th centuries A.D. Though we have no way of knowing when these seals were brought to Thailand,



INSCRIPTION NO. 16 Old Khmer Script.

it seems possible that there was already a cultural contact between South Thailand and South India during that time, since the Pallava type of script was evidently used in locally inscribed stone inscriptions in Malaysia and Indonesia as early as in the 5th century A.D. Sanskrit - which is constantly used in these inscriptions on seals - was presumably understood by a number of people living in South Thailand at that time. It is not possible to learn from these short inscriptions about the prevalent religious systems. A number of uninscribed seals found in the same area bear symbols, such as a śrīvatsa and śaṅkha, which could have been used by the Buddhists and Hindu alike. Sculptural remains from South Thailand, which are assignable to this period of ca. 5th - 7th centuries A.D., also consist of Buddhist as well as Hindu figures.

The 7th century lithic inscriptions of South Thailand (nos. 8-11) testifies to the popular use of the Pallava type

of script during that time. The fact that these inscriptions were undoubtedly locally made tells us that South Thailand must have had a close cultural contact with South India already at that time. Sanskrit was probably a sacral language which is widely used and well-understood during this century as is attested by the fairly long Sanskrit inscriptions of Wat Maheyong and Chong-Khoi Valley (nos. 8 and 9). The use of the Tamil language in Khao Phra Nārāi inscription (no. 10), and Old Mon in the Wat Mahāthāt inscription (no. 11), however, indicates that there must have been some Tamil and Mon communities in this part of Thailand at that time. We possess no evidence of the usage of the Malay language, such as found in the contemporaneous Srivijaya inscriptions from Indonesia, in these 7th century records from South Thailand. The religious sphere of the time, according to the reading of these epigraphical records seems to have been predominantly Hindu, though there

Modern Mon	Modern Thai	Thai Translation
၇၁ကံဝါဒီ တေကံတါ ကွံသဝါယေ ကွံဝိရုဒ္ဓိရုဇ္ဈာ ကိဇ္ဈာဘရဉ္စ ဟိကံလဉ္စရုဝ္ဋ ချေကပ္ပသမ္ပာ နုဝိသ္မယတိရုဇ္ဈာ	นากบานิ เตกตา ภาสวาเย กววิทรนเน กเตลาภรณ ปาหิถุเนวณ เขยกปยาสมยา เนาสวยติเน	พระยานาค 2 ตน ชูเศียรเล็กฟ้งพาน มีเกล็ด สีแดงดังเปลวเพลิง เคลื่อนไหวไปมาดุจพัดใบตาล ที่กำลังโบกสะพัดด้วยอากาศปฏิกิริยาอันสง่างามและ กล้าหาญ มองดูเหมือนกับพระยานาคทั้งสองนั้น กำลังเปล่งเสียงร้องคำรามก้องป่า พร้อม ๆ กับ การเคลื่อนไหวไปอย่างเข้มข้ม เป็นภาพที่แสดง ความเคารพนบถต่อพระอาทิตย์ตลอดกาลชั่ว กัปแห่งพระยานาค เบื้องซ้ายนั้นเป็นภาพบ้านเมืองของพวกเขา

may be allusions to Buddhist practice in the Wat Maheyong inscription. The reference to Agastya in the same inscription reminds us of the popular worship of that great ascetic which once prevailed in South India and Indonesia. Sculptural finds which are assignable to this century are preponderantly Hindu, and show artistic influences from the Pallava region of South India. The possible relationship with the Mon Kingdom of Dvāravati in Central Thailand is suggested by the use of Old Mon in the Wat Mahāthāt inscription (no. 11), and also by the sculptural style of some Buddhist antiquities found in South Thailand.

SRIVIJAYA AND SOUTH THAILAND

Side A of the Wat Semāmuang inscription (no. 12) tells us of the involvement of Srivijaya with South Thailand while Side B of the same stele gives reference to the Sailendra dynasty which we know from many 8th - 9th centuries inscriptions from Central Java. Sanskrit probably remained a sacral language in South Thailand during this time, and the script which was widely used in the area maintained its association with the Pallava script. In relation to Srivijaya and the Sailendras, we should mark that Side A of the Wat Semāmuang inscription contains the only lengthy Srivijaya inscription which uses Sanskrit instead of Old Malay, and Side B of the same bears the only known Sailendra inscription (besides that of Sojomerto in Java), written in the South Indian type of script instead of in the North Indian Nāgari script. The predominant religion in South Thailand at that time was probably Mahāyāna Buddhism, the main religion of Srivijaya and of the Sailendras. The

fact that sculptural finds from South Thailand during this period are predominantly Buddhist gives support to this supposition. The sculptural style appears to be closely related to that of Sumatra and Java of the same period.

We possess no epigraphical record of the 10th and 11th centuries. The inscription on the Mucalinda Buddha from Wat Wieng (no. 13) reveals a high degree of Khmer influence in South Thailand. This region may still have had some political and cultural relations with Sumatra, but the impact of the cultures of the main land apparently began to predominate. The Old Khmer script and language are used in this inscription, while some elements of the culture of Haripūnjaya of North Thailand are detectable in the form of the script.

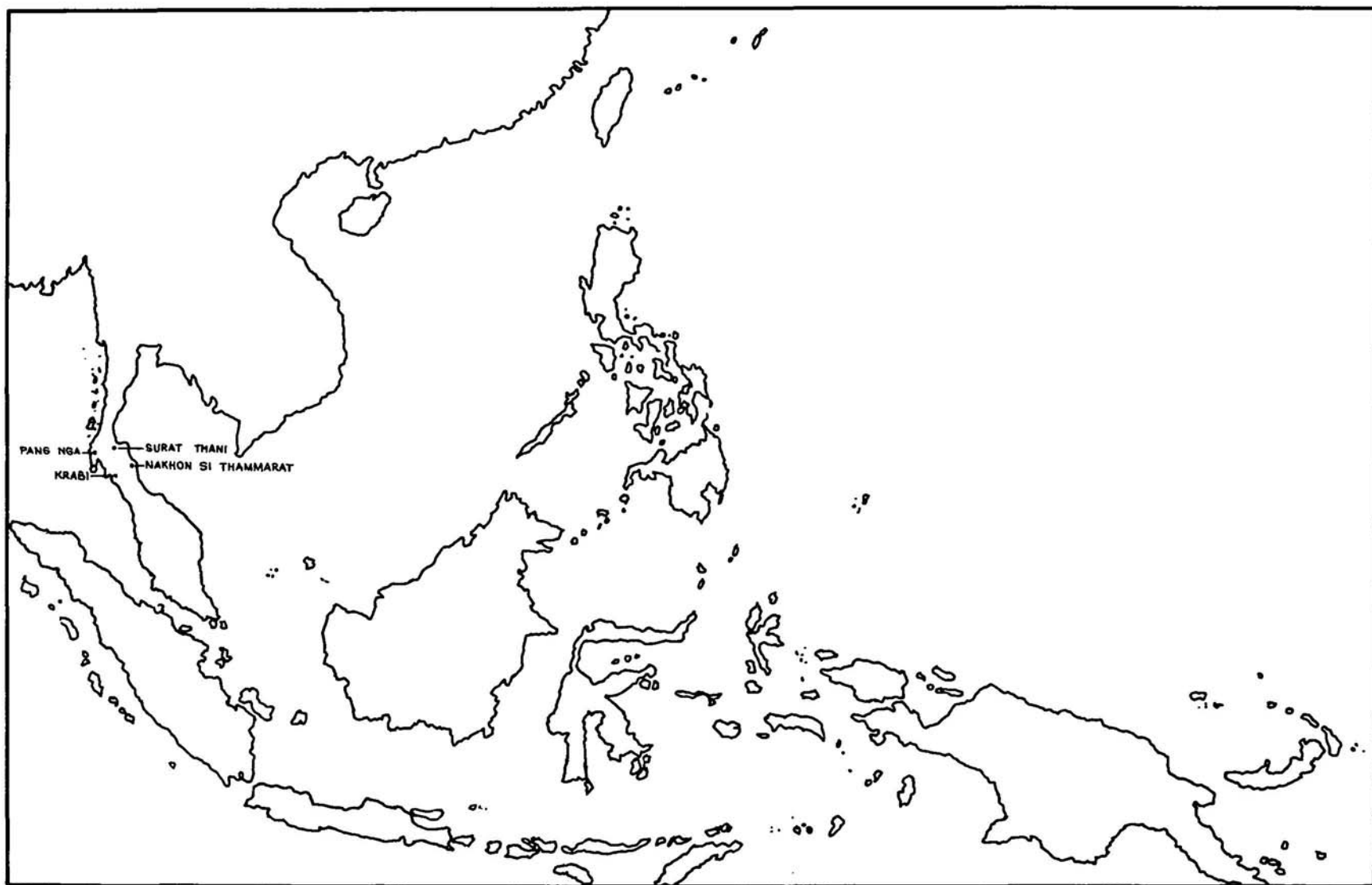
Khmer influences remained strong in South Thailand during the 13th century, as is attested by the use of Old Khmer script in the 2 inscriptions from Wat Wieng (nos. 14 - 15) and in that of Wat Mahāthāt (no. 16). The use of Pāli in one of the Wat Wieng inscriptions (no. 15) suggests cultural and religious influences either from Sri Lanka or Pagan, while the occurrence of the Tamil script and language in the Wat Mahāthāt inscription (no. 16), points to the continuing contact with South India. The use of Old Mon script and language in the Viharn Pho Lankā inscription (no. 17) may have been due to the lingering influences of Haripūnjaya, or the contact with Burma during the Pagan period. Sanskrit still appeared in two inscriptions (nos. 14 and 16), but its significance as sacred language apparently decreased. Inscription no. 15 tells us that Theravāda Buddhism, using Pāli as its sacred language, was already

THE INVENTORY OF INSCRIPTIONS OF SOUTH THAILAND

No.	Inscription	Provenance	Script	Language	Chronology (Cent. A.D.)	Content
1.	Inscription on oval seal	Krabi	Brahmi	Prakrit or archaic Sanskrit	1st-3rd	"rujjo" = 'destroy'
2.	Inscription on square seal	Krabi	Pallava	Sanskrit	5th-6th	"datavyam" = 'suitable to give'
3.	Inscription on rectangular seal	Krabi	Pallava	Sanskrit	5th-6th	"apralasanasya" = 'not to be moved', or 'belonging to Apralasa'
4.	Inscription on rectangular seal	Krabi	Pallava	Sanskrit	5th-6th	"Virabendhutrasya" = 'those who are valient may proceed', or 'belonging to Virabendhutra'
5.	Inscription on rectangular seal	Surat Thani	Pallava	Sanskrit	6th-7th	"vrisamudrabodhi" = 'enlightenment is the sign of annihilation of impurities or ignorance' or 'impressed to be known' or 'sealed down to mark'
6.	Inscription on circular gold seal	Krabi	Pallava	Sanskrit	6th-7th	"sarudharmasya" = 'belonging to the good Law', or 'belonging to the delicate or transcendental Law' or 'belong to Sarudharma'
7.	Inscription on oval seal	Krabi	Pallava	Sanskrit	6th-7th	"Śrāmmamo" = 'happiness' or 'joy' or 'protection' or 'refuge'
8.	Wat Maheyong Inscription	Nakhon Si Thammarat	Pallava	Sanskrit	7th	Record of pious donations and Instruction in the theory and practice of Dharma
9.	Chong-Khoi Valley Inscription	Nakhon Si Thammarat	Pallava	Sanskrit	7th	Invocation to Śiva, and blessings bestowed on Śaiva worshippers
10.	Khao Phra Narai Inscription	Phangnga	Pallava	Tamil	7th	Excavation and donation of a tank called Sfi Avaniarnam
11.	Wat Mahathat Inscription	Nakhon Si Thammarat	Pallava	Old Mon	7th	Reference to the image of a male person called Maya
12.	Wat Semamuang Inscription	Nakhon Si Thammarat	Modified Pallava	Sanskrit	8th-9th	Side A: reference to the foundation and donation of the King of Srivi- jaya to a Mahayana Buddhist Trinity. Side B: reference to a Sailendra king
13.	Inscription on Mucalinda Buddha from Wat Wieng	Surat Thani	Old Khmer	Old Khmer	1183	The Governor of Grahi erected this Buddha image at the command of King Śrīmat Trailokyaraja Maulibhusanavarmadeva in 1183 A.D.
14.	Wat Wieng Inscription (No. 24, ST4)	Surat Thani	Old Khmer	Sanskrit	13th	Praises to Candrabhanu of the Padmavamsa, King of Tambralinga and a great patron of Buddhism
15.	Wat Wieng Inscription (No. 24A, ST3)	Surat Thani	Old Khmer	Pali	13th	Some worshippers of Jina (Buddha) express their desire to make merits and to glorify him
16.	Wat Mahathat Inscription	Nakhon Si Thammarat	Tamil and Old Khmer	Tamil and Sanskrit	13th	The Tamil part mentions a Dharmasena- pati and forbids the taking of lives. The Old Khmer/Sanskrit part is now being deciphered; its text contains a reference to Tambralinga
17.	Wat Mahathat Inscription (Viharn Pho Lanka)	Nakhon Si Thammarat	Old Mon	Old Mon	13th	Praise to 2 excellent Nagas who worship the sun

established in South Thailand during the 13th century. This tallies well with the information given by the famous inscription of King Rāmkamhaeng of Sukhodaya that the king invited 'learned teachers and preceptors, well-versed in the Three Pitakas from Nakhon Si Thammarat'. Tāmbralinga, mentioned in two of these 13th century in-

scriptions (nos. 14 and 16) was probably an important cultural and political culture at that time. In the inscription no. 14 from Wat Wieng, Candrabhānu, King of Tāmbralinga, bears the title of Sri Dharmarāja which connects him and his dominion with Nakhon Si Thammarat or Nagara Sri Dharmarāja referred to in Rāmkamhaeng's inscription.



THE MAP OF SOUTHEAST ASIA