

Dominic Goodall

What Information can be Gleaned from Cambodian Inscriptions about Practices Relating to the Transmission of Sanskrit Literature?

Abstract: This is a short attempt to gather together such epigraphical clues as can be found relating to writing for the purpose of the transmission of Sanskrit literature in the ancient Khmer-speaking world. What Sanskrit works were transmitted? What were the writing materials used? Where were manuscripts kept? Portions of both famous and little-known inscriptions have been adduced, involving fresh consultation of estampages and, where possible, of the stones themselves. The first evidence dates from around 600 CE, and snippets of relevant information may be found scattered throughout the pre-Angkorian and Angkorian epigraphical record, in other words up to the 13th century. Iconographic representations have also been considered. Although no pre-modern manuscripts transmitting Sanskrit works are known to have survived to the present day, it is no surprise to find that the manuscript transmission of Sanskrit works was not only widespread, but was accorded an attention in the surviving politico-religious documents of the Khmers that seems not typical of other areas where the Sanskritic thought-world held sway. As the almost exclusive use of variants derived from Southern forms of Brāhmī script suggests, poetic imagery that alludes to writing seems to confirm that the technology was predominantly that of meridional India: letters were engraved into the surface of palm-leaves.

1 Libraries and the copying of books

The existence of Sanskrit libraries in ancient Cambodia is attested to from an early period: an inscription of c. 600 CE records that a certain brahmin benefactor, who was connected by marriage to a kingly line, gave to the temple of a deity that he had installed there ‘the entire [*Mahā-*] *Bhārata*, along with the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Purāṇa*, and he instigated a daily, uninterrupted practice of their recitation’ (K. 359, verse 4; for this reference-system, see the paragraph of explanation prefacing References). That these were physical books constituting a non-lending library is clear from the damaged concluding verse of imprecation directed at anyone who might damage the religious foundation. This inscription furnishes us with one of

the earliest epigraphical allusions to the creation of a brahminical library in the Sanskrit world. Since it is short and presents a few difficulties of interpretation, we shall begin this article by giving it in full.

The text, as read by Barth (1885:28–31), is given below, followed by a translation that differs from that of Barth on a few points and that is the fruit of discussion between Gerdi Gerschheimer and myself.¹

*śrīvīravarmmaduhitā svasā śrībhavavarmanṇaḥ
 pativratā dharmmaratā dvitīyārundhatīva yā ||
 hiraṇyavarmanajananiṃ yas tām patnīm upābahat
 dvijendur ākṛtīsvāmī sāmavedavidagraṇīḥ ||
 śrīsomaśarmamārkayutaṃ sa śrītribhuvaneśvaram
 atiṣṭhipan mahāpūjam atipuṣkaladakṣiṇaṃ ||
 rāmāyanapurāṇābhyām aśeṣaṃ bhāratana dadat
 akṛtānvaham acchedyāṃ sa ca tadvācanāsthitim
 yāvat tribhuvaneśasya vibhūtir avatiṣṭhate
 yo ya e [...]
 dharmmāñśas tasya tasya syān mahāsukṭakāriṇaḥ
 [...]
 itas tu harttā durbud(dh)ir yya ekam api pusta(kam)
 [...]*

There was a daughter of Vīravarmaṇ, sister of Bhavavarman, devoted to her husband, devoted to duty, like a second Arundhatī, whom the moon among brahmins, Ākṛtīsvāmī,² foremost among those knowing the *Sāmaveda*, married, the mother of Hiraṇyavarman.

¹ A translation of mine of the first three verses has already appeared quoted by Bakker (2014, 142–143, n. 439), but without footnotes justifying the tricky points.

² Barth (1885, 31) took *ākṛtīsvāmī* to be an adjective (‘dont le seul aspect annonçait la noblesse’) qualifying the husband, whose name he assumed to be Somaśarmaṇ. We shall come to Somaśarmaṇ below, but it is clear that *ākṛtīsvāmī* does not naturally bear the sense that Barth gives it; Majumdar, in fact, notes, when speaking about this term (1953, 19, n. 1), that ‘the reading is clear but the sense is obscure’. This difficulty disappears if the expression is taken to be an anthroponym, and it is abundantly clear from the numerous names ending in -svāmī that are attested in pre-Angkorian inscriptions, as well as from many names of a comparable period that are known to us from Indian sources, that Ākṛtīsvāmī is likely to be the name of a brahmin. It may seem abundantly clear that the individual in question was considered to be a brahmin, not simply because he is qualified as *dvijenduḥ* (‘moon amongst the twice-born’) and married to a lady compared to Arundhatī, the wife of the brahmin sage Vasiṣṭha, but also because of the rare and intriguing circumstance that he knew the *Sāmaveda* (*sāmavedavidagraṇīḥ*). Nonetheless, the point needs to be spelled out fully since Vickery has called precisely this point into question, observing (1998, 261) that ‘[t]here is in fact no mention of the quality of Brahman or Kshatriya in that inscription, and we do not know that Indian caste names bore the same meanings, or that such caste distinctions were important’. Vickery tabulates the pre-Angkorian instances of names in -svāmī of

That [Ākṛtīsvāmin] installed [here the *liṅga* called] Śrī-Tribhuvaneśvara,³ together with a statue (*arka*)⁴ of Śrī-Somaśarman,⁵ along with elaborate worship and extremely generous benefactions.

which he was aware (1998, 201), unfortunately including also instances of governors of towns (-*purāsvāmin*) and theonyms, and he makes the interesting observation (1998, 200) that when individuals with names in -*svāmin* occurred in Khmer contexts, they bore the high-status title *mrātāñ*. We may add that one of the names that he cites, Dharmasvāmin (K. 725), occurs in a Sanskrit text in which its bearer is explicitly described as a *brāhmaṇa*. To his list of such Pre-Angkorian anthroponyms we may for the moment add Ākṛtīsvāmin (following Barth, Vickery had not realized this to be an anthroponym), Devāsvāmin (*mrātāñ*, K. 1214), Śikharasvāmin (*dvija*, K. 1141), Kumārasvāmin (*mrātāñ*, K. 1029). (A handful of others may be added once the inscriptions in which they occur have been inventoried and published.)

3 As Éric Bourdonneau has pointed out to me in conversation, it is somewhat tendentious to assume that this theonym is Śaiva and refers to a *liṅga*. Certainly, theonyms ending in -īśvara typically are *liṅga*-names, but Tribhuvaneśvara is an exception: the only other pre-Angkorian instance that we know, in T. 1214, seems to name a Viṣṇu, a point that has been discussed at length by Griffiths (2005, 20–21, n. 34). Furthermore, all other pre-Angkorian theonyms in Tribhuvana may all be Vaiṣṇava. Nonetheless, later instances of this theonym are, as the form of the name leads one to expect, Śaiva (see Griffiths, *ibidem*), and the fact that this Tribhuvaneśvara is linked to what may have been a Pāśupata deity suggests to me that it is more likely to be Śaiva than Vaiṣṇava. We cannot, however, exclude the possibility that Tribhuvaneśvara might instead be a Viṣṇu here.

4 We are not aware of epigraphical attestations elsewhere of *arka* in the sense of ‘statue or worship’, but we may note that Kṣīrasvāmin in his commentary on the *Amarakośa* (3rd *kāṇḍa*, *nānārthavarga* 4d: *arkaḥ sphaṭīkasūryayoh*) observes (p. 189): *arcyate ’rkaḥ, vṛkṣe ’pi*, ‘the word *arka* [is so formed because it means that which] is worshipped; [it is] also [used] in the sense of a [particular kind of] tree’. We have therefore proposed understanding it to mean the same as *arcā*, a statue that is worshipped. Barth (1885, 31) took it instead to refer to the Sun, which is of course not impossible: Ākṛtīsvāmin might have ‘installed Tribhuvaneśvara along with [statues of] Somaśarman and the sun’.

5 Barth (1885, 31), as we have remarked in an earlier footnote, took Somaśarman to be the name of the founder, and it is indeed attested as an anthroponym in an inscription of 930 śaka, namely K. 989, where the man in question is a *bhāgavata* servant with the Khmer title *chloñ*; but, as we have demonstrated above, the founder’s name here appears clearly to be Ākṛtīsvāmin. Furthermore, we now know that Somaśarman may be used as the name of a Brahmin form taken by Śiva in order to teach the Atimārga. Bakker (2014, 140–145) has set out clearly what little we know about Somaśarman as the notional ‘fountainhead’ of Pāśupata teachings according to a small handful of sources. As Bakker observes (2014, 142), ‘Statues of Somaśarman have not come to light, or have not been recognized as such yet’. Nonetheless, this is not the only passage in which one appears to be mentioned, for we find Somaśarman as the name for a deity in K. 1073 (of 847 śaka) and also in one other pre-Angkorian inscription, K. 54/55 (of 589 śaka). Once again, the passage (stanzas V and VI in Cœdès’ edition) is not easy to interpret:

*punas saṃskṛtya tenaiva śrī[maḍā]mrātakeśvare
yojitāśeṣavibhavaṃ śiva[li]ṅgadvayaṃ kṛta[m ||]*

He gave the entire *Mahābhārata*, along with the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Purāṇa*,⁶ and he instigated a daily, uninterrupted practice of their recitation.

For as long as the wealth of Tribhuvaneśvara remains, whoever [...]

[...] just a part of the merit of such a person of great good deeds.

Whichever ill-thinking person should take even one book from here [will] [...]

The blessing and the curse for future supporters and violators of the foundation can no longer be reconstructed, so that we no longer know what punishment in which hell or hells was threatened to impious miscreants; but what remains gives us enough information to conclude that the gift of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Purāṇa* was a gift of physical books, presumably several manuscripts for each of these lengthy works, since we know that the curse was to blight the existence of anybody who should steal so much as a single book.

The materials with which these manuscripts were produced is not alluded to here, a point to which Barth draws attention (1885, 31–32, n. 2): ‘D’après la relation chinoise, les Cambodgiens se servaient, pour écrire leurs livres, de peaux de daim noircies. (*Nouv. Mélanges asiatiques*, I, p. 122) A présent, ils font usage des feuilles d’un palmier qu’ils appellent *treang*.’ We shall return to this question below, after pursuing the investigation of libraries in ancient Cambodia.

somaśarmā jaṭālīṅgaṃ hariś caite tathā ~ –

teṣāṃ tena ca dattaṃ yo devasvaṃ harttum iccha[ti ||]

Barth (1885, 58), who drily remarked ‘Comme il arrive parfois, la partie du texte restée intacte est ici plus embarrassante que celle qui est mutilée’, cautiously proposed ‘(Plus) un chignon où repose la lune, un *liṅga*’ for the first quarter of the second of these verses. Cœdès (1951, 162, n. 2) was able to improve upon this by recognizing that a *jaṭālīṅga* was very probably a sort of *mukha-liṅga* upon which, instead of a face, we see the ‘silhouette d’une coiffure’. He then assumed that Somaśarman was the name of a deceased Brahmin venerated in the *liṅga*: ‘Ceci admis, il n’y a plus aucune difficulté à considérer Somaśarman comme un nom propre, celui d’un brāhmane défunt, vénéré sous l’aspect d’un *liṅga* sur lequel il était représenté par son chignon (*jaṭā*)’. We now propose a further tentative advance upon the two earlier interpretations by translating as follows:

Having consecrated them again, the same man [scil. Vidyāvinaya] made two *liṅgas* of Śiva, equipped with all the requisite wealth [for their worship], in [the temple of] the venerable [Śiva called] Āmrātakeśvara; [he] also [put there] these: a [statue of] Somaśarman, a *jaṭālīṅga*, a [statue of] Viṣṇu. Whoever should steal the divine property given by this man to these [deities], [...]

⁶ Such early allusions to the one *Purāṇa* are probably to an early *Vāyupurāṇa*: see Vielle 2005, 545, who explains that references to multiple *Purāṇas* begin to appear in works of the late 7th century.

The mention in stone inscriptions of instituting the practice of reciting or expounding learned works in temple-premises is of course not uncommon in the Indian epigraphical record. Among the very many examples that could be cited, an endowment for the recitation of the *Mahābhārata* (Tamil: *pāratam*) in a *maṇḍapa* of the Śaiva temple called the Vidyāvinitapallavaparamēśvaragṛha is recorded in lines 74–75 of the 7th-century Kuram Plates (Hultzsch 1890, 151 and 155), and, to cite a later example, a mid-11th-century inscription from the Varadarāja-Perumāḷ temple of Tirupuvaṇai (*Pondicherry Inscriptions* 102 in Vijayavenugopal 2006, 21f and 2010, 50) gives the details of endowments for the teachers and the students of numerous disciplines (Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta) and Sanskrit works (including the epics, the *Manuśāstra* and several Vedic texts), as well as for the reciters of Tamil devotional literature (*Tiruvāymoḷi*).⁷

But Indian allusions to the copying of specific texts or to the maintenance of manuscripts of them appear not only to be relatively rare, but also to date from some centuries later than this and they tend not to mention specific texts or even genres of texts. Thus of the half dozen such allusions mentioned by Chitra Madhavan in her book on Sanskritic learning in Southern India, the earliest (Madhavan 2013, 14) is a record from Gulbarga district dating from the 11th century (1058) that mentions the employment of six librarians (*sarasvatībhaṇḍārīga*), but most date from the 13th century or later (Madhavan 2013, 136, 138–139, 143–145), including the most detailed case, a pair of inscriptions of the late-13th-century reign of Jaṭāvarman Sundara Pāṇḍya I (Madhavan 2013: 108 and 132–135) that describe the activities of a library (*sarasvatībhaṇḍāra*) maintained in the Chidambaram temple. To these we may add hitherto unpublished inscriptional evidence of the 12th and 13th centuries edited by Veluppillai that appears to speak of the restoration of (manuscripts transmitting) Tamil devotional literature (*tirumuraikaḷ*) stored in a part of Śaiva temples that is frequently called by the as yet unexplained name *tirukkaikkōṭṭi* (Veluppillai 2013, 140–141 and 296ff).

Chitra Madhavan herself remarks on the paucity of such references (2013, 132), commenting that '[r]eciting the Vedas by looking into books and writing the Vedic texts have always been looked down upon in ancient times and therefore the Veda *pāṭhaśālās* that imparted the knowledge of the Vedic text alone need not acquire or organize a library'. She notes however (ibid.) that the inscriptional corpus mentions *pāṭhaśālās* and *ghaṭikās* that taught also non-Vedic texts and that such establishments might therefore have maintained libraries, but that there is curiously no mention of these 'at the important educational centres at Eṇṇāyiram, Tribhuvanai, Tirumukkūḍal and the like'.

7 Further South Indian examples may be gleaned from Madhavan 2013.

In contrast, the rather smaller Cambodian corpus, of less than 1500 pre-Angkorian and Angkorian inscriptions in Sanskrit and Khmer, provides several allusions to written transmission, and these allusions not only begin much earlier, but they tend to be more specific about the texts copied. Thus, to the early 7th-century allusion to manuscripts of the two epics and of the *Purāṇa* that we have examined above, we may add a handful of others. One of the single richest sources for information about Sanskritic learning in Cambodia is arguably the foundation inscription of its most exquisite surviving Śaiva temple, Banteay Srei (Pandāy Sṛī), namely K. 842 of 890 *śaka*. This beautifully engraved document explains at some length the erudition of the founder, Yajñavarāha, the non-brahmin *rājaguru* who gave Śaiva initiation to Jayavarman V (K. 842, verse XII).⁸ Such accounts, fascinating though they are, are not the subject of this paper, although we shall have occasion to quote something of Yajñavarāha's remarks about his education below, but what we shall examine briefly now is what is said about Yajñavarāha's education of his own younger brother Viṣṇukumāra. Here Yajñavarāha refers not merely to the disciplines that were taught, as one might expect from a conventional description of a Sanskritic education, but also to the copying by Viṣṇukumāra of two particular texts in manuscript.

K. 842/890 *śaka* (Pr. Pandāy Sṛī [=Banteay Srei], gopura IV est, face B)
XXVII.

(27) *tasya yajñavarāhasya vidyānām pāradṛśvanah
khyāto viṣṇukumārākhyas sodaryo yo jaghanyajah ||*
XXVIII.

(28) *yasyāmṛtamayiṇi vidyājyotsnām vaktrakumudvati*

8 Coedès describes Yajñavarāha as a brahmin (IC I, p. 148), presumably because verse XIV of K. 842 tells us that his father was a brahmin called Dāmodara; but in two other textually related inscriptions of Yajñavarāha, K. 619/620 and K. 662, he styles himself instead as a *brahmakṣatra*. The first of these inscriptions shares its first 26 verses with K. 842, but the 27th (numbered X of face B by Finot) reads:

(19) *vrahmakṣatreṇa tenedaṃ vidyānām pāradṛśvanā*

(20) *asmin yajñavarāheṇa sthāpitaṃ liṅgam aiśvaram*

Finot (1928, 55) translates: 'Ce brahmane-kṣatriya, nommé Yajñavarāha, qui avait vu l'autre rive des sciences, édifie en ce [lieu] un liṅga d'Īcvara.'

Of K. 662, Coedès (1929, 292) quotes only fragments from the first 7 stanzas in a footnote, but more can be read with the help of K. 842 (which again contains identical passages), with the help of K. 619/620, and from the group of estampages in the EFEO in Paris that are numbered n. 791. Thus we may discover that its 30th stanza records the installation of a statue of Kātyāyini and that its 29th stanza may be plausibly reconstructed thus:

(21) *vrahmakṣatre[ṇa tenedaṃ vidyānām pāradṛśvanā]*

(22) *asmin ya(jñā)[varāheṇa sthāpitaṃ liṅgam aiśvara]m*

nirggatām guruvaktrendoḥ pāyaṃ pāyaṃ ajrmbhata ||

Face B. XXIX.

(1) *kṛtsnāni śavdavidyādiśāstrāṇi sakalāḥ kalāḥ
śaivañ ca gauravaṃ yogaṃ bhrātūr jyeṣṭhād avāpa yaḥ ||*
XXX.

(2) *vidyāsantatyavicchittiyai kṛtsnām vṛttiñ ca kāśikām
pārameśvarapūrvvāñ ca yo likhac chivasamhitām ||*

Of this Yajñavarāha, who had seen the further shore of [the ocean of] knowledge, the younger uterine brother was called Viṣṇukumāra. The water-lily of his mouth opened wide, drinking in again and again the nectareous moonlight of knowledge that came forth from his guru's mouth. He received all the disciplines, beginning with that of grammar, from his elder brother, [as well as] all the arts and the [forms of] yoga taught by Śiva, [and] by the guru [Patañjali].⁹ So that there should be no interruption in the transmission of knowledge, he wrote out the whole *Kāśikāvṛtti* and the [text whose name is] *Śivasamhitā* preceded by [the qualification] *Pārameśvara*-.

One of the two texts referred to here is of course probably the celebrated grammatical commentary of Vāmana and Jayāditya known as the *Kāśikā*, and the other, given the Śaiva context, seems likely to be one of the Mantramārga scriptures that has *Pārameśvara* in its name, the most celebrated of which today is the *Mataṅga-pārameśvara-tantra*. It is to that text that Bhattacharya (1961, 48, n. 3) assumes this to be a reference. But given the absence of any qualifier other than *Pārameśvara*-, it seems more likely to be the early *Pārameśvaratantra* that survives in a fragmentary 9th-century manuscript in Cambridge (Add.1049) and that, from at least the 10th-century in Kashmir, began to be known as the *Pauṣkara[-Pārameśvara]*, no doubt in order to distinguish it from other texts that purported to be recensions of the *Pārameśvara* (see Fig.1).¹⁰

⁹ Cédès interprets this to refer to just one form of yoga, which is both Śaiva and favoured by Viṣṇukumāra's brother: 'le yoga çivaïte (qui était) celui de son guru' (*IC* I, p. 154). This is indeed a possible interpretation, but it makes the qualification *gauravam* seem redundant, since the verse is in any case telling us about what he learned from his guru. If, however, *gauravam* is taken to mean 'of the guru [Patañjali]', then the verse is a testimony to the recognition that both Śaiva and Patañjala yoga could be studied side by side, a state of affairs that was recognised early, for instance, in chapter 1 of the *yogapāda* of the *Mataṅgapārameśvara*, for which see the recent study by Jean-Michel Creisméas, which includes an edition and translation of the whole *yogapāda* of that work (2015).

¹⁰ See Goodall 1998, xli–xliv and Sanderson 2001, 5, n. 1.



Fig. 1: A leaf of the *Pārameśvaratantra* manuscript in Cambridge (Add.1049, fol. 5r), photographed by the University Library as part of the cataloguing project led by Vincenzo Vergiani whose successful completion is celebrated by this volume. © Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Besides the evidence of books that must have been kept in temple-libraries, it is well known that the small buildings on either side of the (Eastern) approach to many Cambodian temples are often referred to in secondary literature as ‘bibliothèques’. This uncertain identification was proposed before any inscriptional evidence had been discovered (Lunet de Lajonquière 1902, xxx–xxxi), but now reposes also upon the combined evidence of two 10th-century Sanskrit epigraphs recording the pious acts of a certain Hiraṇyaruṇi, namely K. 958 and K. 355. The first of these, dated to 869 śaka (947 CE) and found, according to Coëdès, by Bernard Philippe Groslier in 1959 in an incomplete tower at Prāsāt Kōk Čāk, just off the road between Phnom Penh and Siem Reap about 6 km from Siem Reap, records several religious foundations in several towns, including a *pustakāśrama*, ‘a resting place for books’ (Coëdès 1964 [*IC* VII], 141–147).

K. 958 (869 śaka) stanzas XVI–XVIII:

- (31) *hiraṇyaruṇinā tena pure rudramahā[laye]*
- (32) *sthāpitaṃ vidhinā liṅgaṃ śrībhadreśvarasaṃjñakam /*
- (33) *sa pinākipade śreṣṭhapure rudramahālaye*
- (34) *rudrāśramatribhuvanasthāneśānapurādiṣu /*
- (35) *liṅgāny arccās śivādināṃ nyadhāl liṅgapurādiṣu*
- (36) *śrāṇāśrayaṇ ca śraminām āśramaṃ pustakāśramam /*

We may translate, following Coëdès (1964, 145), as follows:

This Hiraṇyaruṇi erected, following the [appropriate] rites, in Rudramahālaya a *liṅga* named Śrī-Bhadreśvara. In Pinākipada, in Śreṣṭhapura, in Rudramahālaya, in Rudrāśrama, Tribhuvanasthāna, Īśānapura and other towns, he set up *liṅgas* and cult-statues of Śiva and other deities, a place [for distribution] of cooked food, an *āśrama* for [the repose of] the weary and a library (*pustakāśramam*).

It is not clear from this passage whether Hiraṇyaruṇi installed only one library or one in each or several of the towns listed.

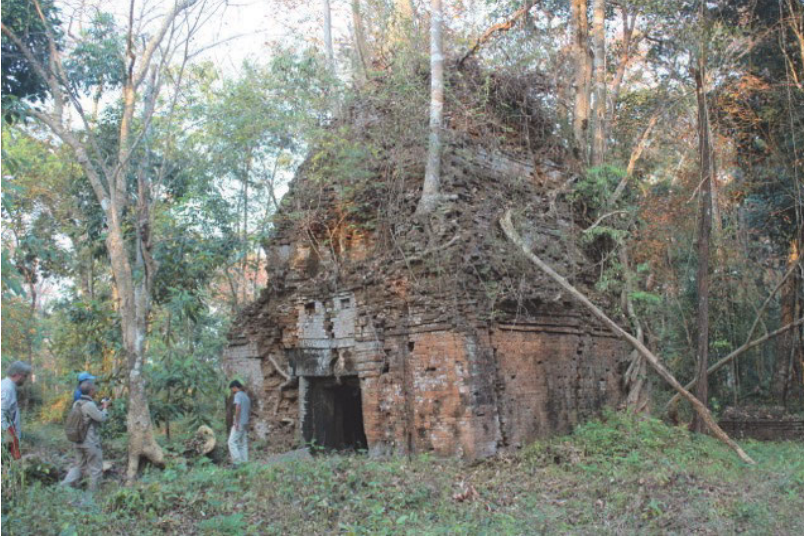


Fig. 2: View of the library (*pustakāśrama*) of Hiraṇyaruṇi at Phnom Khna, taken on the occasion of the visit of Dominique Soutif with a team from the Siem Reap Centre of the EFEO in February 2013. Photo: Julia Estève.

The second inscription, K. 355 (Coëdès 1911, 405–406), is the more significant one, for it is inscribed on the badly damaged door-jamb of a building in the South East of a Śaiva temple compound at Phnom Khna and it identifies that particular building upon which it is inscribed as a library. I am most grateful to Dominique Soutif, Julia Estève and the epigraphic team of APSARA for visiting the site in February 2013 and for sending me invaluable photographs of the building (see Figs. 2 and 3), as well as of fresh estampages still pressed against the door-jamb (see Figs. 4 and 5). These enabled us to confirm, unsurprisingly, that almost nothing more can now be deciphered than was visible to Coëdès more than a century ago.¹¹

11 In several places, rather less can be deciphered, but there are just one or two places where we can improve on Coëdès' transcription. The first two visible *aṣṭaras* of the first line, namely *scale*, have oddly not been read by him and these allow us better to understand the first verse:

(1) ***** § *cale jala ivāṇśumān*

bhedābhedātmane tasmai parameśāya no na(2)[maḥ //]

[[Who is]] like the moon [reflected] in moving water— to that Supreme Lord, who is [thus both] multiple and undivided, obeisance!



Fig. 3: View of the library (*pustakāśrama*) of Hiraṇyaruṇi at Phnom Khna, taken on the occasion of the visit of Dominique Soutif with a team from the Siem Reap Centre of the EFEO in February 2013. Photo: Julia Estève.

The moon divided when reflected upon ripples is an oft-repeated image for the paradoxical nature of God found in such Śaiva works as the *Parākhyatantra* (1.42) and the *Devyāmata* (see Ślāczka 2016, 198, verse 86). In Cambodian sources, it is rather more common to find the moon reflected on the surfaces of multiple bodies of water rather than on moving water: see, e.g., K. 225, stanza 1 (where we must understand *naikanīra*^o, perhaps faintly confirmed by EFEO estampage n. 321, in place of *naikanīra*^o, as printed in *IC* III, p. 67), and K. 570, stanza IX, where a consultation of the stone today enables one to correct Finot's metrically impossible reading *vikalpa[n n]o dād* (which seems to be discernible in the EFEO estampage n. 421) to *vikalpa(bhe)dād*. (A discussion of that interesting stanza would cause us to stray too far from our topic here.)



Fig. 4: The epigraphic team of APSARA taking an estampage of K. 355, the inscription of Hiranyaruci on the doorjamb of the entrance to the library at Phnom Khna in February 2013. Photo: Julia Estève.

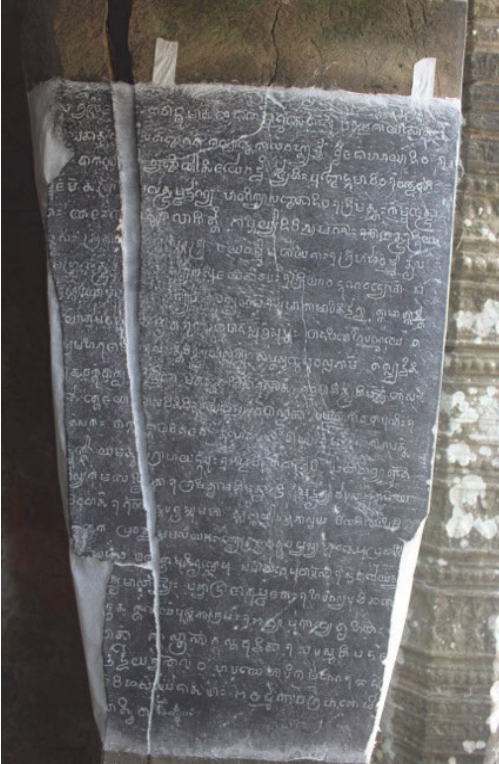


Fig. 5: The estampage of K. 355 taken in February 2013 before being removed from the stone. Photo: Julia Estève.

XXII. *hiraṇyarucinā te(20)[na]* * * * * ~ ~ ~
 * * * * * *jñ[e]na kṛto¹²yaṃ pustakāśramah* //
 XXIII. *adhyāpakādhyetṛhitaiḥ* (21) * * * * ~ ~ ~
 * * * * * *vānām¹³ śāstrāṇām śastabuddhinā* //

That Hiraṇyaruci, of trained intellect (*śastabuddhinā*), who knew ... (...*jñena*), created this library (*kṛto 'yaṃ pustakāśramah*) [[filled]] with [[books]] beneficial for teachers and students [and] belonging to ... disciplines (...*vānām śāstrāṇām*).

It is conceivable that, qualifying these ‘disciplines’, the text might once have had the word *śaivānām* in XXIIIc, since it is clear from stanzas XIII and XVI that Hiraṇyaruci, like Yajñavarāha, laid claim to being a Śaiva preceptor of the Khmer royal family. Stanza XIII can be partly repaired, with the help of stanza VII of K. 958,¹⁴ to read as follows:

* * * * * *nottejayām āsa dhīnidhiḥ*
yo dhaumya [i]va pāṇḍūnām raghūṇām iva vāruṇiḥ //

Who, a [veritable] treasury of intelligence, inflamed (*uttejayām āsa*) [[scil. the fiery energy of those kings]], just as Dhaumya did for the Pāṇḍavas and Agastya for the Raghus.

Stanza XVI is not echoed in K. 958 and we can decipher no more in it than could Coedès, but we may attempt a partial translation, assuming that it refers to Speech (Sarasvatī / Vāgiśvarī) residing in Hiraṇyaruci’s mouth, perhaps dancing upon his tongue:

aṣṭaviṃśatidhā śaivī pañcadhādhyātmanai(15) ~ *
 * * * * * *syakamale sthitā* //

12 Coedès prints *jñana* (?) *kṛto* in XXIIc, which would be unmetrical.

13 Coedès prints *[sar]vānām* in XXIIIc, which would be ungrammatical.

14 Stanza VII of K. 958 reads:

(13) *teṣām uttejakas tejojvalanasyeṣitā vidheḥ*

(14) *pāṇḍūnām iva yo dhomyo raghūṇām iva vāruṇiḥ* /

Coedès translates (IC VII, p. 144) as follows:

Maître de la règle, il attisait le feu de leur tejas, comme fit Dhaumya pour les Pāṇḍava, et (Agastya) fils de Varuṇa pour les descendants de Raghu.

It seems not unlikely, however, that we are rather intended to take *īṣitāvidheḥ* as a compound referring punningly both to their consecration as kings and to their initiation as liberated souls, causing them to realise their innate Śiva-nature:

Who was the one who inflamed the fire of their energy by bringing about their [innate] Lord-ship (*īṣitāvidheḥ*), ...



Fig. 6: Interior view of Hiranyaruci's library at Phnom Khna taken in February 2013, showing the lozenge-shaped holes in the sides of the building. Photo: Julia Estève

[[In whose]] lotus-mouth ([ā]syakamale) Speech [[danced]], twenty-eight-fold in her Śaiva form (*śaivī*); fivefold as [brahmanical] reflection about the self (?).¹⁵

Here Speech is presumably twenty-eight fold as the twenty-eight scriptures of the Saiddhāntika canon.¹⁶

Returning for a moment to the seemingly windowless building that Hiranyaruci's inscription labels as a library, it might appear that it was not intended as a well-lit space for sitting down and poring over books, but rather as a place of storage, for the small diamond-shaped holes in its sides (see Fig. 6) seem, at least to a modern viewer used to the overcast skies of Northern Europe, to be designed for ventilation rather than light. But Lunet de Lajonquière's account of the features typical of such library buildings across the Khmer world suggests that those small openings were in fact intended for lighting the large vaulted spaces within,

¹⁵ If *ādhyātma* refers to a branch of learning that embodies Sarasvatī, it could refer to Upaniṣads or, as in the *Niśvāsamukhatattvasaṃhitā* (4.42–69), to the philosophising of the Sāṅkhyas (see Kafle 2015, 27 and 268ff). It is not clear to me why either of these should be described as fivefold.

¹⁶ For the names of these twenty-eight scriptures in various old Śaiva sources, see Appendix III of Goodall 1998 (pp. 402ff).

and that they are, in other comparable buildings, replaced by windows screened by balustrades (1902, xxx):

Ils ne renferment qu'une seule salle également rectangulaire, ouverte à l'O., c'est-à-dire dans la direction du sanctuaire. Cette salle est souvent éclairée par des jours pratiqués dans les grandes faces. Ces jours sont, ou bien de petites ouvertures en losange, ou bien des fenêtres larges mais peu hautes et garnies de balustres, toujours ménagés à une hauteur telle qu'ils ne peuvent servir qu'à éclairer l'intérieur, sans permettre de regarder de l'extérieur à l'intérieur ou réciproquement.¹⁷

So these may really have been intended as spaces for study, sufficiently lit, given the strong sunshine of the region, by little more than slits in their sides. One other misapprehension should perhaps be touched upon. It has been mentioned to me, but I can unfortunately not remember by whom, that some comparable and similarly positioned (opening to the West on either side of the Eastern approach to the main sanctuary) buildings at other Khmer sites may bear signs of having had fires lit in them, which might seem surprising if they were really places for the storage and study of books. I do not know if this is true, but if any such buildings did regularly have fires lit in them (the South-East being after all the direction of Agni and the place of the kitchen in South Indian temples, such as in the great temple at Tanjore), this does not necessarily preclude their having been used for the storage of books, for hanging palm-leaf manuscripts above fireplaces, where smoke and dry warmth would minimise the attacks of insects and fungus, was evidently commonly practised in some parts of South India:¹⁸ manuscripts of Tulu-speaking areas kept today in the French Institute of Pondicherry, for instance, typically have blackened edges that appear to be the result of such storage-practices, e.g. RE 43228 (see Fig. 7).

17 Translation: 'These [buildings] enclose just one room, also rectangular, which opens to the West, in other words towards the sanctuary. This room often receives light from windows made in its long sides. These windows may either be small lozenge-shaped openings or windows that are broad but not tall and decorated by balusters, always arranged at a height such that they can only serve to give light to the interior, without allowing one to look from the inside to the outside, or vice versa.'

18 P. Perumal's thesis on manuscript conservation has information on this subject, including, as far as I recall, images of metal frames conceived for hanging manuscripts over kitchen fires, but I do not have access to this document. He mentions the practice in his blog of May 2013 (<https://drperumal.wordpress.com/2013/05/10/preventive-conservation-of-palm-leaf-manuscripts/>), consulted on 25th October 2015.



Fig.7: A palm-leaf manuscript in Tuḷu script, now in the collection of the Institut Français de Pondichéry: RE 43228. The blackened edges of the leaves are consistent with its having been kept above a fire. Photo: Dominic Goodall.

2 Inscriptional references to materials and scripts

Particular attention being accorded to the preparation and preservation of manuscripts, rather than simply to the texts that they transmit, as is common in the Indian subcontinent, is further attested to by inscriptions of the preceding and succeeding centuries. Of particular note are the late-9th-century inscriptions of King Yaśovarman. Among the numerous ashrams founded by this king, those in Angkor include in their inscription-charters (verse 87 of K. 701 and K. 279) the provision that students should be furnished with blank palm-leaves (*riktapattra*), ink (*maṣi*) and *mṛtsnā* (Cœdès 1932, 92 and 103), and the stipulation (verse 98) that each ashram should employ two scribes (*lekhakau*), two librarians (*pustakarakṣiṇau*, ‘book-protectors’) and six preparers of leaves (*pattrakārahāḥ*)

(Coedès 1932, 92 and 104).¹⁹ We shall return below to the question of why *mṛtsnā*, which Bergaigne (1893, 430) and, following him, Coedès (1932, 103) both take to be chalk ('craie'), should be supplied to students.

This same Yaśovarman may well have been personally interested in questions of transmission, for it is he who attempted, it seems, to bring about a change in official script in his kingdom. Alongside the alphabet regularly used in his day for both Sanskrit and Khmer that had gradually evolved from the script often dubbed 'Pallava Grantha' (although actually used across much of South East Asia, along the Eastern littoral of the Indian sub-continent and across a large swathe of the southern end of the Indian peninsula), Yaśovarman championed a new script of Northern type, related to the group of styles usually referred to as Siddhamāṭṛkā, and it seems that he intended it to become a sort of national script.²⁰

K. 290, stance CIX.

*ambuje[ndrapratāpena ka]mvujendrena nirmmitam
amvujākṣe[ṇa tenedaṃ] kamvujākṣaram ākh[ya]yā //*

This lotus-eyed king of the Kambujas, who had the fiery energy of [the sun, who is] the lord of lotuses, created this [script], by name Kamvujākṣara.

Moreover, as Estève and Soutif remark in their discussion (2011, 341–342) of this attempt at an official change of script — an attempt which appears not to have outlasted this king's reign —, Yaśovarman vaunted himself, in the inscriptions he commissioned, not only for his śāstric learning, but also for his prowess in scripts.

K. 323 (*śaka* 811), verse 51 describing the king Yaśovarman
*yas sarvaśāstraśastreṣu śilpabhāṣālipiṣv api
ṇṭtagītādivijñāneṣv ādikartteva paṇḍitaḥ*

¹⁹ For some of the latest discoveries and reflections relating to Yaśovarman's extraordinary campaign of *āśrama*-building, see Estève and Soutif 2011. The description of further archeological discoveries is to be expected in the doctoral thesis of Socheat Chea, '*Saugatāśrama*', *un āśrama bouddhique à Angkor (Ong Mong)*, to be defended at the university of Paris IV. For a discussion of the possibility that *pattrakāra* might refer not to those who prepare palm-leaves for writing but instead to those who use leaves to prepare dishes for eating from, see Chhom 2016, 85–100.

²⁰ For a discussion of this official script-change, see Estève and Soutif 2011, 341–342.

Who was, like the primordial creator, skilled in all disciplines of learning and in weaponry, in arts, languages and scripts too, [and] in such branches of knowledge as dancing and singing.

This emphasis on the written word again would, it seems to me, be surprising in the Indian subcontinent, where knowledge of numerous scripts seems often not to be especially prized today, and where I am not aware of having noticed such knowledge adverted to in royal lapidary proclamations.²¹ Nor is it the only such passage in the Cambodian epigraphical record: returning to the foundation inscription of the temple now called Banteay Srei, K. 842, we find that a similar claim is made for Yajñavarāha in stanza XXI:

(21) *ākhyāyikākṛtir abhūt svadeśe yadupakramam
nānābhāṣālipijñāś ca prayuktā nāṭakasya yaḥ ||*

In Cœdès' translation, this is rendered thus:

Dans son pays, il provoqua la rédaction de petits récits, lui qui connaissait diverses langues et écritures et composait des pièces de théâtre.

But it is possible that we should rather understand as follows:

Inspired by whom, the composition of an *ākhyāyikā*²² was produced in his native place; who, knowledgeable about various languages and scripts, acted in dramas.

²¹ A counter example brought to my attention by Melinda Fodor: a very much later boast in quite a different context may be found in verse 5 of the prologue to the *Ānandasundarī*, a Prakrit play about the 17th-century warrior-king Sivaji, which describes its author in these terms:

*īso jassa khu puvvao uṇa mahādevvo piḍā ajuḍā
kāśi jassa a suṇḍarī piaamā sāambharī a ssasā
sattaṭṭhottilivippahū guṇakhaṇī coṇḍājibālājīno
potto bāvisahāṇo caūrahī jo savvabhāsākāi*

The *chāyā* of Bhaṭṭanātha reads:

*īso yasya khalu pūrvajāḥ punar mahādevaḥ pitā, ambā
kāśi yasya ca suṇḍarī priyatamā śākambharī ca svasā/
saptāṣṭoktilipiprabhur guṇakhaṇiś cauṇḍājibālājeḥ
pautro dvāviṃśatihāyanaś caturadhīr yaḥ sarvabhāṣākaviḥ*

We may translate :

Whose elder brother, as is well known, is Īśa, whose father is Mahādeva, whose mother is Kāśi, whose beloved is Sundarī, whose sister is Śākambharī, master of seven or eight languages and scripts, a mine of virtues, grandson of Cauṇḍājibālāji, twenty-two years of age, clever-minded, a poet in every language.

²² How exactly an *ākhyāyikā* is to be defined is something about which there has been disagreement from the time of Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin, and the only ancient surviving work agreed to be

3 Post-10th-century evidence

Moving forward in time to the 11th century, we find another donation of a physical book, this time not identified, to a religious foundation by a certain Śivavindu, whose grandfather received from Sūryavarman I the hereditary priesthood of a Kapāleśa temple (K. 278, stanza 23):

*śāstrasandarśśanābhyāsād vyatārid²³ rāmaṇīyakam
pustakam yo vimānārthaṃ śrībhadreśālayeśvare ||*

Barth translates (1885, 116):

Appliqué à faire connaître les saints livres, il fit hommage à l'Īçvara du sanctuaire de Bhadreça d'un splendide volume au contenu vénéré.

Given the presence of the word *abhyāsa* here, it seems conceivable that the verse is intended to mean that Śivavindu himself copied a book (or books, if we assume a generic singular) before donating it, for we might interpret as follows:

Motivated [by a desire both] to cause [others] to see the *śāstras*/scriptures and to practise them [himself], he gave a beautiful book [that he had copied] to the Lord of the Bhadreśa temple, for [keeping in] the *vimāna*.

Finally, the 12th-century biographical poem of K. 364 from Ban That (Finot 1912), about a certain Subhadra who took the Śaiva initiation name Mūrddhaśiva, furnishes further evidence of the emphasis in Cambodia on the physical book rather than the discarnate text, for here too we find a reference to a library.

[...]Last face of K. 364 (continuous numeration of the stanzas is impossible because of damage):

*nīśśeṣaśāstrair likhitaṣ sanāthā[n] (54) = - ~ - ~ ~ ~ - ān |
sa pustakān adhyayanācchidārthaṃ tatrāśrame nekavidhān acaṣīt ||*

Dans cet āçrama, pour que l'étude y fût poursuivie sans interruption, il réunit un grand nombre de manuscrits traitant de toutes les sciences... (Finot 1912, 28).

an *ākhyāyikā* is the *Harṣacarita*; what is clear is that it should be either an autobiographical Sanskrit prose poem or one based on facts that were directly experienced by the author (see De 1924, in particular p. 517).

23 We must of course understand *vyatārid*; Barth notes (1885, 107, n. 18) that 'L'i bref est ici parfaitement net'.

Furthermore, the same inscription offers us a fine four-verse vignette of the edifying spectacle of a scholarly debate in which the judges have their books laid out in front of them for reference.

XVIII.

(35) *dikṣāvidhau sati na kevalam eva somam*

āmantrito sakṛd apāyayad ānṛṣaṃsāt

(36) *yo nyāyasāṃkhyakāṇabhūṃmataśabdaśāstra-*

bhāṣyārthasomam api sūrijanān pipāsūn (corr.: pipāsūr Finot)

When he accomplished a *dikṣā* [for performing a Vedic sacrifice], he caused, when invited to do so, thirsty learned folk to drink repeatedly (*asakṛt*), not only Soma-juice, but also, out of kindness, the juice that was the expounded meaning²⁴ of the disciplines of Nyāya, Sāṅkhya, Vaiśeṣika and grammar.

XIX.

(37) *vidyāpavarggavihitāpacitiprabandhe*

yasyāśrame 'navaratāhutidhūmagandhe

(38) *durggāgameṣu matibhedakṛtārthanīyā*

vidyārthināṃ vivadatāṃ dhvanir utsasarpā

Above his *āśrama*, in which there was a constant stream of [donative] acts of honour performed [by graduating students] at the moment of concluding their studies, which was fragrant with the smoke of an uninterrupted sequence of sacrifices, there rose [constantly] the sound of students debating over difficult [passages of] transmitted texts (*durgāgameṣu*) in a fashion that was successful in accordance with the various schools (*matibhedakṛtārthanīyā*).²⁵

XX.

(39) *athādhvare śrījayavarmmadevas*

satkartukāmo guṇinān nikāyam

(40) *guṇānurodhena parikṣaṇāya*

niśśeṣaśāstrārthavido nyayunīkta

Now Śrī-Jayavarmadeva, desirous of honouring an assembly of persons of merit, appointed scholars of all the śāstras to examine, in accordance with his good qualities, [Mūrdhaśiva].²⁶

²⁴ Instead of taking °*bhāṣyārtha*° in this way, one could understand °*bhāṣya*° to refer to the *Mahābhāṣya*, as Finot has done (1912, 25).

²⁵ This expression seems not straightforward to me and I am not certain of having interpreted it correctly. Finot (1912, 26) translates: ‘discutant sur les textes difficiles avec la dextérité de contro-versistes éprouvés’.

²⁶ I have assumed that it was Mūrdhaśiva/Subhadra whom the king wanted to have examined for the amusement and edification of persons of merit, but Finot’s translation (1912, 26) suggests a

XXI.

(41) *teṣāṃ purassthāpitapustakānām* (corr.; *puras sthāpita*^o Finot)*saṃpraṣṭum udyuktavatān nikāmam*(42) *ciccheda pakṣaṃ mativajrapātād**yaḥ parvatānām iva vajrapāṇiḥ*

With the thunderbolt of his understanding, he slashed their arguments (*pakṣam*) as they began eagerly to interrogate him, with their books placed in front of them, just as Indra [slashed] the wings (*pakṣam*) of the mountains.

4 Materials

Before bringing to a close this small collection of allusions to manuscripts and textual transmission in ancient Cambodia, we should return for a moment to consider the question of materials that were used. We saw above that the earliest reference to books tells us nothing about the materials of the books in which texts were written and that Barth, citing a Chinese source, mentioned blackened deerskin leather. We have no basis for excluding altogether the possibility that leather was used for text-transmission, but it would be culturally surprising; given the Southern script-type adopted in Khmer-speaking territory, we might reasonably expect other aspects of the writing-culture to be shared. Moreover, such later indications of materials as can be found invariably point to the use of palm leaf. These indications include textual references, such as those in the 9th-century *āśrama*-inscriptions of Yaśovarman that we have alluded to above, and sculptural representations of books: for an example in which the book seems clearly to be a regular bundle of palm-leaves tied together, see Fig. 8.²⁷

Sculptures can of course be deceptive, as many South Indian examples demonstrate, since the convention there seems typically to represent palm-leaf books as being so implausibly floppy that they hang down from the sides of the holder's hand (see Fig. 9). In other words, one might even ask oneself whether these 'palm

slightly different scenario: 'Un jour, dans un sacrifice, le roi Jayavarman, voulant honorer une réunion d'hommes de mérite, chargea des connaisseurs en toutes sciences de les examiner selon leur mérite.'

²⁷ As Brice Vincent has kindly pointed out to me, one of the nearly 2000 celestial ladies carved in bas-relief at Angkor Vat is described by Goloubew (1930, 8) as holding such a palm-leaf bundle: 'Elle tient, entre le pouce et l'index de la main droite un livre en feuilles de latanier sur lesquelles sont gravés des caractères.' But to me examining the images in question (Planches 223 and 224), it is not clear whether the sculptor has tried to represent a tablet or a book of palm-leaves or some other inscribed object.



Fig.8: Statue of Avalokiteśvara of the 11th or 12th century kept in the National Museum in Bangkok. In his upper hands he holds a rosary and a conch; in his lower hands he holds what looks like a custard apple, but is presumably a lotus-bud, and a palm-leaf book. The statue is on display with no indication of provenance beyond that it is an instance of ‘Khmer Art’. Photos: Dominic Goodall.

leaves’ could not after all have been straps of leather! Furthermore, such evidence does not show us whether the surface of the leaves was written upon with ink and using a nib, as in Nepal and Northern India and some parts of the Indonesian archipelago (see Gunawan 2015), or whether the surface was incised with a stylus and then inked, as in the South of India and along the Eastern littoral. But here too it seems reasonable to assume that the Southern technology of incision was followed from early on, not only because it is that tradition that was employed in Cambodia for writing on palm leaves until recent times, but also because Khmer script derived from ‘Southern Brāhmī’ and in the various pre-modern stages of its evolution seems never to display the thick and thin strokes that are typically associated with a nib rather than with a stylus. (The acquisition of thicks and thins in printed modern Khmer is paralleled in the printed forms of the South Indian scripts used for Tamil, Kannaḍa and Telugu, which all also lacked thicks and thins in their pre-modern manuscript forms.) Even the samples of ‘Northern’ Kamvujākṣara from the reign of Yaśovarman do not seem to display such thicks and thins (see Fig. 10). By way of contrast, well engraved inscriptions from regions in which writing on palm leaves does not involve incision do typically have broader and thinner strokes and often thickened serifs (see Fig. 11), with these features often forming part of the identity of the letters that have them.



Fig. 9: Dakṣiṇāmūrti, holding a book in his lower left hand, on the South side of the circa 9th-century Aṭṭahāseśvara temple in Tiruttāṇi. Photo: Dominic Goodall. Were the leaves really this floppy? Is this not actually a representation of the kind of palm-leaf manuscript we see today? Or is the apparent floppiness an artistic convention for conveying the flexibility of palm-leaves?

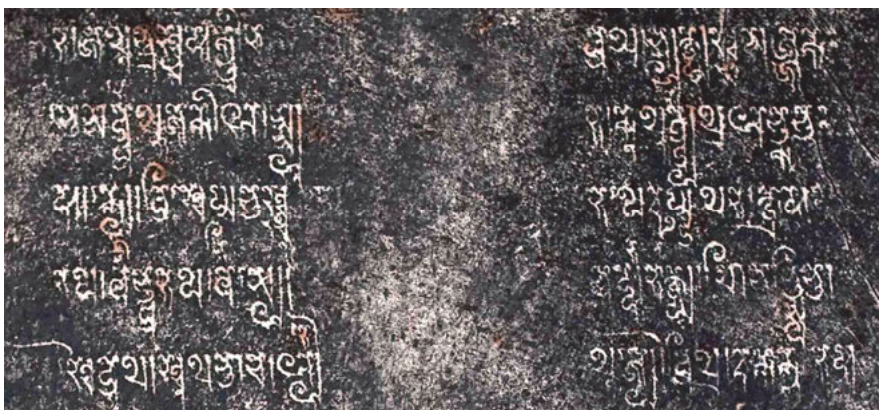


Fig. 10: Detail of an estampe of one of Yaśodharavarman's 9th-century āśrama-inscriptions in 'Kamvujākṣara': EFEO estampe No. n. 352-C of K. 279. Note that there are no thicks and thins and that rather than serifs the letters have the sorts of small volutes that are typical of scripts associated with incision in palm-leaves.

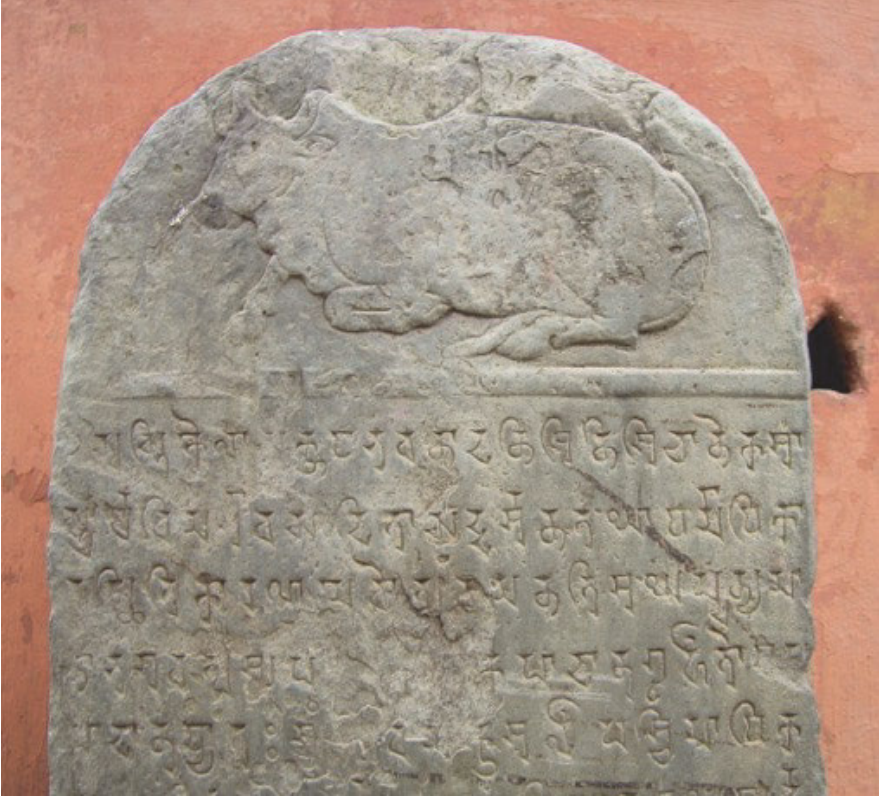


Fig. 11: Detail of a finely engraved Nepalese inscription that displays the serifs and the thick and thin strokes typically associated with writing on the surface of a document using a nibbed instrument. Note, for instance, the *bha* in the first line (which begins [*om*] *svasti kailāsakūṭa-bhavanād*): its serifs are an integral part of the letter; without them, we might not recognise it. Photo: Dominic Goodall. The inscription is that published as No. XLI by Gnoli (1956, 56 and Plate XLII).

I have just asserted that the 9th-century *āśrama*-charter inscriptions of Yaśovarman provide evidence of the use of palm-leaves, but it should be noted that this is not how the passage was interpreted when it was first printed. Here is the half-line in question as it occurs in K. 279:

LXXXVII ab.

(11) *riktapattram maṣiṃ mṛtsnāṃ dadyād adhyeṭṣādhave*

Bergaigne (1893, 430–431), translating a version of this in which the second pāda instead reads *adhyeṭṭṣu diśed api*, interprets as follows:

Des feuillets vides, du noir animal, de la craie, seront fournis aux étudiants.

And he adds a note (1893, 430, n. 8) that begins: ‘Du noir animal pour noircir les feuillets, de la craie pour y écrire.’ He then proceeds to refer back to the footnote of Auguste Barthe (1885, 31, n. 5) mentioned above that records that an ancient Chinese account refers to the use by the Khmers of blackened deerskin. This suggests that Bergaigne imagined that the *āśrama*-charter inscriptions referred to blank ‘leaves’ of deerskin that were blackened and written upon with chalk. Coëdès (1908, 222 and 1932, 103) follows Bergaigne’s translations of all three items with no further comment.²⁸ Now that we have more context than Bergaigne in the 1890s, the notion that ‘blank leaves’ referred to pieces of deerskin and that the *maṣī* was used for blackening the whole surface of those pieces of parchment seems rather less probable than that the ‘leaves’ were simply palm leaves and that the *maṣī* was a blackening agent for rubbing into incised letters. Furthermore, apart from the semantic stretching that would be required to allow ‘leaf’ (*pattra*) at this early date to mean parchment, there would also be the oddity that the charters would charge the students with blackening sheets of parchment even though the same charters inform us, as we have seen above, that a staff of six was to be engaged in preparing the ‘leaves’ (*ṣaṭ pattrakāraḥ*). Assuming then that the leaves are after all unblackened palm-leaves, this leaves the question of the identity and purpose of *mṛtsnā*, which typically appears to mean ‘clay’, but for which Monier-Williams, although he does not mention chalk, also records the sense ‘aluminous slate’.

Until now, it seems to me, the scholarly literature has not focussed on this difficulty and has therefore not yet drawn into the discussion of this passage another verse, one from a royal panegyric engraved just 70 years later, that also refers to *mṛtsnā* and writing together. The verse in question is 134 on the huge 298-verse stela-inscription commemorating the foundation of the Śaiva temple known today as Pre Rup in 883 *śaka*. It is, of course, part of a description of a king, this time the tenth-century Khmer king Rājendravarman:

yadīyaṃ śaramṛtsnābhīr yyaśaḥ kāmena kāntijam

²⁸ Coëdès attempts, however, to respect number and syntax more literally, rendering the same reading from another charter inscription thus (1908, 222): ‘Qu’on fournisse aux étudiants un feuillet vide, du noir animal et de la craie’. His three other translations (1932, 103) similarly attempt to reflect closely the small differences in formulation in other charters.

hṛdyaṃ hṛdi varastrīṇām lagnaṃ likhitam akṣaram

Following Cœdès interpretation (1937 [IC I], 124) we would understand:²⁹

The glory that was born of his beauty, and that was pleasing to the heart, was a written character (*akṣaram*) that Kāma had engraved indelibly (*akṣaram*) in the hearts of noble women with the powder of his arrows (*śara-mṛtsnābhīḥ*).

This is fine as far as it goes. The verse calls to mind several poetic ideas, such as the convention of heroes marking their arrows with names (usually their own) before shooting them, and the smearing of arrows with poisons,³⁰ and there is an elegant play on the word *akṣara* (letter/indelible). But there are two basic difficulties with this interpretation for me. What can the ‘powder of his arrows’ be? And how would the powder be involved in the writing process?

In Kāma’s case, this powder might be the pollen of the flowers that are his arrows. Sarva Daman Singh (1965, 172) recounts this anecdote about an extraordinary South Indian archer in modern times who was nicknamed Kaliyugī Arjuna:

He smeared exceedingly sharp arrow-tips with chalk dust and shot them at the bare backs of students with a perfect delicacy of control, so that they left only chalk marks on their tender targets without even grazing them.

Now this is not about ancient times, but if the trick was practised recently, then it might have been thought up long ago. So perhaps the pollen of Kāma’s flower-arrows is fancied to be similarly used here. Or perhaps Kāma is after all imagined simply to have dusted his arrows with chalk?

As for the use of powder in the writing process, one can imagine it being rubbed onto leaves to cure them or render them supple, or light-coloured powder being rubbed over certain letters to highlight them, or perhaps even being rubbed into the incisions forming certain letters instead of the soot or blackening agent and thus achieving a sort of ‘rubrication’. But none of these actions seems a natural parallel to powder from Kāma’s arrows producing written letters upon ladies’ hearts.

²⁹ ‘La gloire née de sa beauté, et plaisante au cœur, était un caractère d’écriture que l’Amour avait gravé d’une façon indélébile dans le cœur des nobles femmes avec la poudre de ses flèches.’

³⁰ Cf., e.g., *Mālavikāgnimitra* 2.13: *avyājasundarīm tām vijñānena lalitena yojayitā / upakalpito vidhātṛ bāṇaḥ kāmasya viśadigdhaḥ*, which Balogh and Somogyi translate (2009, 67): ‘When he imbued this innocent beauty with the discipline of coquetry, the creator crafted a poison-smeared arrow for the god of love.’

So perhaps another way of analysing this compound is worth exploring. Would not the compound *śaramṛtsnābhīḥ* fit rather better here if it were a *mukhacandra*-type comparison-compound? In that case *mṛtsnā* could designate a writing instrument such as a stick of chalk or of ‘alluminous slate’ or a sort of crayon of the kind that Aditia Gunawan supposes might be referred to with the expression *tanah* in Old Javanese (2015, 263–264). In that case we might instead understand:

Kāma fixed as indelible (the letter that was) the heart-enflaming fame of his beauty [by rendering it] engraved in the hearts of lovely women by means of the crayons that were his arrows (*śaramṛtsnābhīḥ*).

One might even go a step beyond this and assume that an expression whose primary meaning was ‘crayon’ (of slate, clay, steatite, tailor’s chalk or whatever) came to be generalised to refer to any writing instrument, a bit like the word ‘pen’, which no longer suggests the notion of ‘feathers’ to most people who use it, or the word ‘pencil’, which no longer calls to mind a brush. In other words, one might even hazard the guess that *mṛtsnā* might have come to mean ‘stylus’ in the Sanskrit of the Khmers in this period. In that case, we would have the leaves (*riktapattrāṇī*), the blackening agent (*maṣī*) and the writing stylus (*mṛtsnā*) all referred to together in the sentence of the *āśrama*-charters. But this, as Andrew Ollett has pointed out to me (email of 25.xi.2015) would probably be a step too far, ...‘since it would have been impossible for the king’s glory (and therefore also the letter drawn by Kāma’s arrows) to have been anything other than white’.³¹

I therefore propose that *mṛtsnā* may refer to a crayon of something like tailor’s chalk that was used for tracing preliminary non-permanent marks upon palm-leaves before beginning to incise them.³² Such non-permanent pale crayon marks paradoxically become indelible when traced by Kāmadeva’s arrows, in such a way that they mark the *yaśaḥ* of Rājendravarman, on the hearts of gorgeous ladies.

³¹ Andrew Ollett’s email was a reaction to an exchange of messages on the subject of *mṛtsnā* in these two passages that took place in November 2015 within a thread about ‘rubrication’ on the Indology Bulletin Board. I am grateful also to other participants in the discussion for their remarks.

³² One further possibility should be recorded, and that is that chalk was supplied in fact for writing on a sort of blackboard (*phalaka*), which is then curiously not mentioned among the supplies to be given to students, just as the writing-implement for writing on the palm-leaves is also curiously not mentioned. For attestations to the use of chalk (*khaṭikā*) and such boards in a wide range of Indian sources, see S.R. Sarma’s short but richly informative monograph on *Writing Material in Ancient India* (1985).

5 In lieu of a conclusion

Such a collection of gleanings perhaps does not require a conclusion, but if one is to be drawn, perhaps we may conclude from the above pages that there seems to be a greater attention paid to writing and the written word in the Khmer world than is typical in the Indian sub-continent, where books and learning are certainly revered, but the physical aspects of books often pass unmentioned and might even be said to be sometimes rather neglected.³³ We can produce no statistics for comparison and we are aware that there may be thousands of pre-modern inscriptions (among other relevant documents) from the Indian subcontinent that we have not examined, but it seems from what we have seen that the relatively small corpus of Cambodian inscriptions contains relatively frequent allusions to matters that seem to reflect this heightened attention: allusions to knowledge of scripts, for instance (rather than just to knowledge of languages and of genres of literature), as well as mentions of physical books, mentions of their being copied, and mentions of their storage in libraries. These inscriptions inform us principally about Cambodian court circles and so they suggest the prestige of writing in the ancient Khmer world. There is of course another minor consideration, too obvious and well-known to require treating at any length, that further suggests this. The care lavished upon writing stands out also in the superb execution of the inscriptions themselves, where we typically encounter fine calligraphy and a balanced layout that reveals at once the metrical structure of what is engraved; remarkable calligraphy may be found in the epigraphical traditions of the Indian subcontinent too, but such aesthetically pleasing features seem very much the exception rather than the rule.

³³ Of course this is not to say that care was never accorded to the details of written transmission in the Indian subcontinent or that it was never discussed. For an old account of book-production (and book-worship), see that of the *Śivadharmottara*, whose second chapter, devoted to the theme of *vidyādāna*, has recently been edited by Florinda De Simini 2016.

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Numbers, prefaced by ‘K.’ (for ‘Khmer’), are inventory numbers for Cambodian inscriptions. The inventory, as far as it had reached in 1966, was published by Cœdès in volume 8 of his *Inscriptions du Cambodge* (IC), and from this it can be determined where the various inscriptions published before then had appeared. An online version, prepared by Dominique Soutif as part of the CIK project (‘Corpus des inscriptions khmères’) and periodically corrected is now available here: epigraphia.efeo.fr/CIK.

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