

## THE EXPANSION OF BUDDHISM INTO SOUTHEAST ASIA

(Mainly before A.D. 1000)

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**I**n contrast to the wealth of studies on the expansion of Islam and Christianity, it appears that the expansion of Buddhism, third of the world religions in terms of numbers, has hitherto aroused little interest. It is true that most general works on Buddhism devote a chapter or a section to its expansion beyond South Asia but, although such sections often contain interesting and important observations, they do not deal with all the problems in sufficient depth for such studies. The present chapter is intended to call attention to some of those problems.

The first question that springs to mind is a basic one: *why* did Buddhism expand at all? The two other world religions that I mentioned above both contain strong admonitions to their respective followers to do everything in their power to spread the faith to every corner of the earth. The manner of such proselytizing is well known. Muslims, for instance, had and still have a special tax (the *jizya*) imposed on all non-Muslims; and had recourse not infrequently to more violent methods to force infidels to convert to Islam. Christians, for their part, had missionary organizations besides employing different forms of pressure and persuasion to make others adopt their faith. However, no similar forms of pressure exist in Buddhism. There is, of course, a fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity on the one hand and Buddhism on the other, in that the latter is not, or not first and foremost, a religion of faith. Buddhist texts invariably emphasize or imply that Buddhism is above all a matter of understanding the nature of things, which have no

existence of their own (*asvabhava*), since their apparent existence depends on a number of factors. The idea which is sometimes expressed but more often implied is that one is bound to become a Buddhist if one understands the relations between causes and effects, in particular the origin of evil and suffering.

Yet the first conversions are surrounded by an aura of mystery, although they are described in one of the most basic Buddhist texts: the *Mahavagga* of the *Vinayapitaka*. They concern Lord Buddha's first disciples and closest companions: Sariputta (Sariputra) and Moggallana (Maudgalyayana). It is told that one of the original five human auditors of the First Sermon at Sarnath, the Venerable (*ayasma*) Assaji, had an encounter with the wandering ascetic (*paribbajaka*) Sariputta, who posed him a question about the essence of the doctrine revealed by Lord Buddha. Assaji then proceeded to pronounce what is called the "terse expression" of the Law propounded by the Buddha (*dhammapariyaya*), namely, the famous verse inscribed thousands of times in Buddhist countries in Pali, Prakrit, and Sanskrit, although with minor variations:

Ye dhamma hetuppabhava hetun tesam Tathagato avocāt tesam ca yo  
nirodha—evamvadi mahasamana.

On hearing this verse, recounts the *Mahavagga*, "there arose to Sariputta a dhamma- vision, dustless, stainless . . ." and so forth. It was, in other words, a revelation which immediately changed Sariputta's life, for he now understood the origin of suffering and its cessation. A little later Sariputta met another wandering ascetic, Moggallana, and recited the verse that he had heard from Assaji. The effect was the same, for Moggallana too was converted to Buddhism. The same again happened to a certain Sanjaya who subsequently revealed the truth to his two hundred and fifty followers.

The story given here in what appears to be its oldest version is interesting for several reasons. In the first place it follows that this most famous of all Buddhist verses was not revealed in this form by Lord Buddha Himself; it is actually regarded as the essence of the doctrine preached by the Lord at Sarnath as summarized and interpreted by Assaji! In the second place, however, it should be noted that this so-called Buddhist Creed is actually a very difficult text. Much has been written on the meaning and implications of the use of *dhamma* here, while the meaning of the stanza as a whole is by no means clear. Actually, it gives no explanation of the causes (*hetu*), but merely states that these were revealed by Lord Buddha. How then could the "wandering ascetic" Sariputta, who did not attend the First Sermon, understand it? It is therefore clear that the whole story of the "conversion" of the two

first disciples is placed on a superhuman level, as though Sariputta received a clear intuition of the Truth. This is, at least, what the text of the *Mahavagga* would have us believe. What actually happened must remain a secret in the absence of any near-contemporary account. In the third place, and this is the most significant point, it is clear that these first conversions took place at an intellectual level. The first disciples became Buddhists because they *understood* the Truth: in particular the origin of suffering and the manner in which this suffering can be brought to an end. This intellectual approach with its emphasis on correct understanding has always remained characteristic of Buddhism. It is no less evident in two other “conversions.”

The story of the encounter between King Devanampiya Tissa and the Mahinda is rightly famous and does not need to be summarized here. Once again its essence is intellectual: a learned dialogue between the king and the monk who had mysteriously appeared before him. The other “conversion” is that described in the *Milindapanho*—again a non-Indian king (Milinda, i.e., the Indo-Greek ruler Menander)—engaged in a philosophical dialogue with an Indian Buddhist monk, Nagasena. As a result of this dialogue the king not only honoured Nagasena, but even “handed over the kingdom to his son, and after going forth from home into homelessness and increasing his insight, he attained arahantship.<sup>1</sup>

The last example is particularly interesting because of the absence of any superhuman elements: the king was clearly convinced of the correctness of Nagasena’s arguments and realized that Buddhism was the right way to complete liberation. Yet the question arises whether the text presents a true account of a conversion to Buddhism by a foreign king. Although the story itself seems plausible we should be careful before accepting it as evidence. It has been argued that there is no reliable data proving that Menander did become a Buddhist. It is true that Menander’s coinage reflects no influence of Buddhism,<sup>2</sup> but is this clear evidence to refute the story as given in the Pali text? It seems more likely that Menander would have continued with the type of coinage to which his subjects had been accustomed irrespective of his religious persuasion. But it is often forgotten that the Buddhist relic casket with the Kharosthi inscription of the time of King Menander (*Minadra*)<sup>3</sup> is at least a clear indication that the king showed some kind of devotion to Lord Buddha. As to the negative evidence of his coinage it should not be forgotten that the *Milindapanho* clearly stipulates that Menander abdicated in favor of his son; so he would not have issued any coinage after his conversion.

It therefore seems likely that Menander was indeed converted to Buddhism, but this does not imply that the story of his conversion should be accepted as given in the text. For the *Milindapanho* is above

all a doctrinal text in which a number of current problems within the Buddhist community are discussed and dealt with. This is achieved in the form of a dialogue in accordance with ancient Buddhist tradition. Most of the texts of the *Tipitaka* are in the form of dialogues in which Lord Buddha gives discourses on particular points of discipline or of doctrine in reply to questions put to Him by people of all classes. The usual term “dialogue” is perhaps misleading insofar as there is no real discussion (in contrast with Plato’s dialogues, for example). It is rather a method by which, instead of giving an overall systematic view of doctrine and discipline, each discourse deals with one among hundreds or thousands of separate issues, just as parsons do in their Sunday sermons. In the *Milindapanho* we read of questions such as: “What is in the world that is not Born of Cause?”<sup>4</sup> The somewhat surprising reply is that the only two things not born of a cause are Space (*akasa*) and *Nibbana*. Normally *akasa* is considered one of the six elements (*mahadhatu*) subject to the laws of cause and effect in the same way as the other elements (earth, water, and so on). In the brief discussion that follows, however, the king accepts *akasa* as uncaused but *Nibbana* as caused—quite the opposite of what one would have expected! Whatever one may think of this argument, there is here, and at a few other places in the text, at least some real discussion.

Unfortunately such elaborate descriptions of conversions are rare.<sup>5</sup> What strikes us most, however, is the completely intellectual character of the discussions preceding the conversions. This aspect may to some extent reflect the didactic nature of our texts and does not necessarily describe the manner in which large numbers of people came to embrace Buddhism.

As to the conversion of King Asoka, who from a cruel fratricide (*Candasoka*) was transformed into one of the foremost patrons of Buddhism, the account in the *Mahavamsa* (most of Chapter V) inspires little confidence. The account not only mentions philosophical dialogues of the type found in the *Milindapanho*, but also the most decisive episode, which removes all the king’s doubts is the miracle wrought by the thera Tissa Moggaliputta who “caused the earth to tremble” (V-262). The idea that Asoka was converted to Buddhism after the massacres of the Kalinga campaign is a modern view.<sup>6</sup>

Although such examples tend to emphasize the intellectual approach in the process of conversion to Buddhism, it does not follow that this was the general rule. It must, however, have been an important aspect. The monks who went from door to door begging their daily food (at least, before this practice was “institutionalized”) were expected to spread the good word in exchange, delivering a little sermon or, rather, replying to some of the questions posed by the householders. In their replies the monks would talk about the calamities of disease, old age, death and re-

birth possibly in an undesirable state, as well as about the Path which may ultimately lead to the suppression (*nirodha*) of such forms of suffering. In this manner a subtle link between the Sangha and the population in general could be established, which in some cases must have led members of the population to “seek refuge” in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. It is, however, clear that such forms of conversion could only apply to areas where monasteries had already been established. In addition, they could only have success in regions such as South Asia where, centuries before the rise of Buddhism, there had been a long tradition sanctifying the practice of begging.

For Southeast Asia, where such conditions did not prevail, Buddhism was not likely to have spread in this manner, at least not in its initial stages. Probably, the examples of King Milinda and Devanampiya Tissa would be more appropriate. This remains, however, conjectural as long as little is known about the earliest Buddhist developments. A few early traditions may be discussed in some detail.

The story of the two merchants Tapassu (Taphussa) and Bhalluka (Bhallika), the first disciples of Lord Buddha, is well known from the Tipitaka itself. Thus, the *Anguttara* (I, 24) mentions these two as the first who took refuge, while other texts, enumerated in Malalasekara's *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, tell us that the two merchants, “urged by a deity, who had been their relation, ... offered the Buddha rice-cakes and honey provided by the Four Regent Gods. They became the first lay disciples of the Buddha ....” Here is therefore a clear superhuman element in the story, but no indication is given as to *why* they became disciples of the Buddha. This conversion would not be of any great interest were it not for the fact that it had important implications outside India.

The Sanskrit inscription of Tiriya, palaeographically datable to the end of the seventh or the first half of the eighth century, deals with the foundation of the Girikanda-cetiya, dedicated to Avalokitesvara, by the *Trapussakair-Villikakair-Vanig-ganaih*, “the companies of merchants who were followers of Trapussa and Bhallika,” according to Paranavittana, or by the guilds of merchants who “in their devotional ardour ... compared themselves to the two merchants, Trapussa and Bhallika” (as rendered by Chhabra).<sup>7</sup> Although Chhabra's version may be preferable, on account of the use of the suffix (*ka*) and the plural, the idea that there was a tradition tracing the *cetiya* back to the two first disciples of the Buddha is quite plausible. Whichever may be the correct interpretation, the inscription gives clear evidence for the early expansion of Buddhism outside India.

But the story of Taphussa and Bhallika has another implication for Southeast Asia since these names have been associated with the foundation of one of the earliest Buddhist *stupas* in Myanmar (formerly

Burma), namely, the great Shwe Dagon Pagoda at Pagan. The inscription of King Dhammaceti<sup>8</sup> relates a long story of Taphussa and Bhalluka as having originated in an Asitanjuna town and traveled to the Bodhi Tree where they received eight of Lord Buddha's hairs which they subsequently enshrined in a *stupa* on top of Mount Tamagutta in their home country (southern Myanmar). Yet, the inscription goes on to relate, although these were precious relics in the country, there was none who knew the *ceti* of hair-relics and none to worship and revere it, (vide the Mon part of the inscription, B-14 to 15). This only changed in the year 236 after the Nibbana (c. 250 B.C.), when the two *theras* Sona and Uttara came and established the Sasana in the city of Suvannabhumi.<sup>9</sup>

This is the tradition as laid down in the Shwe Dagon Pagoda inscription concerning the beginnings of Buddhism in (central) Myanmar. It is, of course, a mythical account that attempts to trace the beginnings of Buddhism back to the time of Lord Buddha or rather that of King Asoka. There is, however, no evidence to support such traditions because the earliest evidence for the presence of Buddhism in southern Burma dates from about six centuries later, in other words the end of the fourth century A.D. This does not necessarily mean that there were no Buddhists in the country before that time, but if there were they left no trace of their presence.

From about the end of the fourth century (a date established on the basis of the palaeography of some inscriptions, not that of actual references) there is evidence for the presence of Buddhism in the ancient Pyu kingdom of Sriksetra with its center at Hmaw-za, not far from present Prome. The capital city must have been large, as appears from the city walls which still surround much of the ancient site. The inscriptions are written in a script resembling that of the Pallavas of South India but also show some particular features.<sup>10</sup> One of the most interesting is that inscribed on twenty gold plates recovered from what is described as Khin Ba's Mound Relic Chamber. Each plate is inscribed with three lines of about 25 *aksaras* each (except for no. 19 with four lines and no. 20 with two).

As already stated, the type of script can be defined as Pallava, but of a type not found in this particular form in India where the earliest Pallava inscriptions found in present Andhra Pradesh are written in a cursive type of script. However, in Sri Lanka the Ruvanvalisaya Pillar Inscription of King Budadasa (Buddhadasa), son of Jetatisa (Jetthatissa),<sup>11</sup> who reigned between c. 341 and 370, would appear to provide the closest parallel, although there are differences. Thus the three vertical strokes of the *ha*, the third of which is very short in the Sri Lankan inscription, are of equal height in the Hmaw-za script, and a similar feature is apparent in the form of the *sa*. These and some other

features may suggest a slightly later date for the Hmaw-za gold plates, which would therefore probably belong to about the beginning of the fifth century.

The texts inscribed on the gold plates all belong to the Pali *Tipitaka*. It is again striking that *Abhidhamma* and other “learned” texts are well represented, whereas more popular stories, such as *Jatakas* and *Avadanas*, episodes of the life of Lord Buddha, are absent. This clearly suggests the presence in Sriksetra of Buddhist scholars from the early fifth century A.D., if not earlier. Such scholars could not have existed in a vacuum but must have been supported by a significant Buddhist community, probably including the royal court. This would imply that this élite would have embraced Buddhism at a time well before these texts were written down, that is by the end of the fourth century A.D. at the latest, and well before the time of Buddhaghosa. This again raises the problem as to how Buddhism expanded into southern Burma.

Apart from the tradition of Sona and Uttara, mentioned above, which would place the introduction of Buddhism half a millennium before the earliest inscriptions, there is, unfortunately, no written data about this important development. This is not surprising since the same applies to the “expansion of Indo-Aryan culture,” to use Chhabra’s terms, in general. The expansion of Buddhism is part of this early expansion, but with a major difference. The use of Pali in the texts of Sriksetra clearly shows that this Buddhist “current” must have come from Sri Lanka where the *Tipitaka* and many commentaries had been written or translated into “Magadhi.” The same may apply to the script used in Sriksetra in this early period. Several scholars, such as Duroiselle,<sup>12</sup> have emphasized the likeness of this script to that of the Kadambas of Vanavasi and the Pallavas of Kanci but, as explained earlier, the closest similarity is with some of the Sri Lankan inscriptions. The script shows, however, a few special features not found elsewhere. In this connection I may mention the form of the initial *i*, that of the *ca* and the *ba*. The *jha*, not as rare in Pali as it is in Sanskrit, is expressed by a ligature of *ja* and *ha*, a method I have not met elsewhere. This shows an independent development already at this early stage. It is therefore likely that the script of South Indian origin (further precision does not appear possible at the present stage) had been introduced into Sriksetra at some stage, probably several generations before its earliest known appearance in inscriptions.

The fact that most such Buddhist idealists must have joined merchant ships to cross the oceans indicates that there was a close link between Buddhism and trade. This is hardly surprising since we know that Lord Buddha Himself received a good deal of aid and encouragement from rich traders. The best-known case is that of Anathapindika,

the wealthy Sravasti (Savatthi) merchant who made a donation to the Sangha of the famous Jetavana, site of most of Lord Buddha's discourses. One may justifiably conclude, therefore, that the efforts of missionaries were particularly important during the periods of lively trade between South and Southeast Asia. The fifth century A.D. must have been such a period, the time of the "Expansion of Indo-Aryan Culture during Pallava Rule" (Chhabra's title),<sup>13</sup> when a number of Indian-style kingdoms emerged in several parts of Southeast Asia. A typical example of the links between Buddhism and trade is the case of *Mahanavika* Buddhagupta, inhabitant of Raktamrttika. The latter is considered to be the name of a monastery in Eastern Bengal (present Bangladesh) or that of the area in present Kedah, where he had settled. This Buddhagupta has left two inscribed stone slabs. The first of these, found at Gunung Meriah near the estuary of the Merbok river, Kedah, Malaysia, carries an interesting engraving of a stupa and several inscriptions, one of which mentions Buddhagupta's name and function.<sup>14</sup> The term *mahanavika* probably indicates the captain of a merchant ship.<sup>15</sup> The script is a kind of Pallava script, not unlike that found in several Sanskrit inscriptions of Sri Lanka such as that of Kucchaveli<sup>16</sup> and of Western Java (the stone inscriptions of King Purnavarman), which can be dated back to the fifth century A.D.

If Buddhagupta was not only a pious Buddhist but also endeavored to spread the Good Doctrine, he may have been successful, as we find several Buddhist inscriptions in the area which all appear to belong to the same period. Yet, Buddhism did not make a lasting impact in that part of the Malaysian Peninsula, for the later antiquities are all Saiva, as far as their religious basis can be determined.<sup>17</sup> At least, no clearly Buddhist statues or other symbols are found there.

The same, incidentally, is true of maritime Southeast Asia as a whole. Unlike mainland Southeast Asia, where Pali can be traced back to the fourth century A.D., not a single Pali text or inscription has been discovered in the maritime part. On the other hand, all known written evidence for Buddhism is in Sanskrit and belongs to Mahayana. This is a remarkable dichotomy, which is not limited to the early period. From the end of the thirteenth century Islam spread over the major part of maritime Southeast Asia, but made little impact on the mainland, with the exception of Campa which occupies a special place in other respects too.<sup>18</sup> It should be added that those parts of maritime Southeast Asia which were not Islamized by the sixteenth century were mostly converted to Christianity: these included southern Maluku and most of the Philippines except southern Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago. On the other hand, neither Islam nor Christianity made any real impact on mainland Southeast Asia. The possible causes of this dichotomy are no



doubt quite complex and cannot be studied here. The main point to note is the fact that maritime Southeast Asia, namely, the present states of Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia also constitute a linguistic community in that (almost) all of the languages used in the region belong to the great Austronesian linguistic division.<sup>19</sup>

After this brief diversion it is proper that we should return to the period under discussion, in other words the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. It is to this period approximately that we should date the so-called "Amaravati" Buddha statues found in different parts of the region. These consist of a small group of some eight bronzes found in Celebes, Java, Sumatra, Thailand, and Viet Nam. They are always represented standing and are further recognizable by the many-folded *samghati*, which, except for one example, leaves the right shoulder uncovered. Such representations of Lord Buddha are well known in Amaravati and other sites in Andhra Pradesh from where they also spread to Sri Lanka.

In a short article that has deservedly become famous,<sup>20</sup> Dupont demonstrates that these statues, though closely related, can be further divided into several groups. The main point is that six of these "Amaravati-style" images show features which relate them to Sri Lankan Buddha images. Although the ultimate source of this style has to be sought in or around Amaravati, there seems to be little doubt that the direct prototypes were some Buddha images in Sri Lanka of the Anuradhapura period. This conclusion carries important implications for the chronology. It is generally thought that the direct influence of Amaravati did not extend far beyond the fourth century A.D. If the Southeast Asian Buddha images originated in Amaravati, they would probably belong to the first few centuries of the Christian era. If, on the other hand, they were made in or were directly influenced by Sri Lanka, they could well be dated to several centuries later. Actually, Dupont distinguishes several groups among these so-called Amaravati-Buddhas, some of which do not predate the fifth or sixth century.

Dupont also emphasized that these Buddha statues were found either at isolated spots or in areas with no contemporary vestiges (as at Dong-duong where there is a ninth-century Cham temple). This clearly suggests that these (bronze) Buddhas were once placed in wooden temples. In addition, Dupont rightly concluded that some stylistic features leave no doubt that these Buddhas belong to Hinayana, which seems to have prevailed throughout Southeast Asia before the end of the seventh century, when the early Sriwijaya inscriptions testify to the presence of Mahayana Buddhism, which henceforward would remain the only form of Buddhism attested in maritime Southeast Asia.

In this context mention should be made of the basic religious dichotomy in Southeast Asia with Theravada triumphant in the main-

land part, whereas the Mahayana of the maritime part finally gave way to Islam in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the southern Philippines (the Sulu archipelago and Mindanao). An enquiry into the causes of this dichotomy would raise problems that are outside the scope of this chapter.

These scattered Buddha statues, whatever their importance, give us little insight into the nature and penetration of Buddhist ideas in South-east Asia. We have considerably more data for some areas, as we have seen in the case of Sriksetra. This is particularly true for the Mon kingdom of Dvaravati which flourished from at least the middle of the seventh century till the fifteenth century and laid the foundations of Buddhism in present Thailand.<sup>21</sup>

Apart from a small number of inscriptions in Mon, there is evidence too of the use of Pali, especially at Nakhon Pathom. Following the publication of Dupont's work, an important inscription was discovered at Vat Sa Morakot at Prachinburi, dated A.D. 761.<sup>22</sup> Although the inscription itself is in ancient Khmer, it contains three verses in Pali. It is the great merit of Mendis Rohanadeera that he was able to identify the Pali verses as belonging to the *Telakatabagatha*. From this inscription the learned author concluded that "it can now be established that the Sri Lankan Theravada literature found its way to Southeast Asia, even before the eighth century A.D. through Dvaravati, and not in the eleventh century though Ramannadesa as had been greatly believed." Although we can fully agree with the general tenor of this statement, there is however one difficulty. As has been argued by Dupont, Coedes, and others, Dvaravati was a typically Mon kingdom, yet the Prachinburi inscription is in Khmer (apart from the Pali quotation). It either belongs to Dvaravati, but was drafted in Khmer because that was the language of the local population or, more probably, can be attributed to one of the early Khmer kingdoms which dominated this part of eastern Thailand in the confused period preceding the campaigns of Jayavarman II.<sup>23</sup> In either case, however, this important document marks the easternmost expansion of Theravada Buddhism up to the twelfth century, when the unification of the Sangha during the reign of Parakramabahu I gave a fresh impulse to the expansion of Theravada.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the few inscriptions, the numerous ruins and the rich iconography of Dvaravati, with its characteristic style of the Buddha image,<sup>25</sup> testify to its great importance for the expansion of Buddhism. As often happens in such cases, the new faith, once it was fully established, became a focus for further expansion. It not only became the principal faith of the Thai who founded a new kingdom at Sukhothai (Sukhodaya) in the thirteenth century, but also expanded into Cambodia. The importance of Dvaravati in this development can hardly be underestimated.

Already at an early date (c. seventh century) we find inscriptions in Mon, no doubt inspired by Dvaravati in Lopburi, and from the eleventh century farther north in Haripunjaya (Lamp'un). These are votive inscriptions attesting to the expansion of Theravada into northern Thailand. This area also became a great center of Pali studies where important texts, such as the *Jinakalamali* and the *Camadevivamsa*, were composed. It is also of particular interest because of the dated Buddha images.<sup>26</sup>

The unification of the Sangha in the time of Parakramabahu I, even if it did not completely put a stop to its partitionist tendencies, appears to have had great influence in Southeast Asia. Whatever the circumstances of the Sangha may have been in Sri Lanka, it did present an image of unity to the outside world. In addition to increasing the political strength of the island in the second half of the twelfth century, it enhanced its prestige as the center of the (Theravada) Buddhist world. This in turn increased and strengthened relations with large parts of mainland Southeast Asia. It is likely therefore that this intensification contributed to the lasting predominance of Buddhism in the region, where it successfully survived Muslim and Christian pressures, as well as the evils of colonialism. This stands in sharp contrast to developments in maritime Southeast Asia where such pressures led to the almost complete disappearance of Buddhism.

In this connection a few words should be added on the expansion of Buddhism in this region. As we have seen—in contrast to mainland Southeast Asia with its division into clearcut linguistic and cultural units, partly reflected in the various nations—maritime Southeast Asia presents a certain degree of cultural unity between the territories that make up Indonesia. Apart from a few small and historically uninteresting tribal pockets, all the languages spoken in the region belong to the great Austronesian family. There is also some degree of cultural affinity apparent in such fields as customary law. Despite the close relations between many parts of maritime Southeast Asia and South Asia—including Sri Lanka—Theravada does not appear to have exerted any real influence there. On the other hand, it may be said that some forms of Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism predominated there in the pre-Islamic period.

It is essential to point out at least some of the factors leading to this difference between these two regions of Southeast Asia. Apart from the purely religious differences between Hinayana and Mahayana, which there is no need to discuss here, there are also some socio-economic differences that had political implications. Thus, one of the most characteristic aspects of Theravada is its strong monastic organization with the Sangha as a powerful factor in the state. It is true that the Sangha depended largely on the piety of the king and the ruling class, but the king depended no less on the support of the Sangha. No king could

hope to reign for any length of time without such support, which had already been necessary for his consecration. Moreover, as the monks were in constant contact with the population of even the most remote villages—the daily alms rounds gave plenty of opportunities—their influence on the loyalty of the subjects had important implications for the stability of royal authority. The ancient Buddhist ideal of the king being a servant of the people, to which he is bound by an unwritten social contract, had not completely disappeared.

On the other hand, the most distinctive feature of Mahayana is the Bodhisattva doctrine urging both the king and his subjects to achieve progress on the Way towards the perfection of Buddhahood by performing good deeds (*punya*) and increasing knowledge (*jnana*). Already in the intermediate state of a bodhisattva the aspirants acquired superior powers raising them above the state of ordinary people (*prthagjana*). On the other hand, to acquire such a high position there was no need to enter monastic life and discipline; the characteristic *bodhisattva* is a man of the world. For kings, this principle created excellent opportunities: by having themselves identified as a bodhisattva, they could enjoy a special position for their achievements in charity and wisdom. Such ideals entailed duties towards their subjects, but also raised their prestige among the population under their authority.

Although the doctrines of Mahayana go back as far as the first or second century A.D., its influence is not clear before about the seventh century in Eastern India where the great *vihara* at *Nalanda* in particular developed into one of its greatest centers. Already at this early stage we find evidence for the spread of Mahayana doctrines even as far as the island of Sumatra, where the Talang Tuwa inscription of A.D. 684 provides a remarkable example of a king aspiring to Buddhahood.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, there are strong indications now that Sumatra was not as deficient in religious monuments as was once thought. Recent research, as foreshadowed in the 1983 SPAFA<sup>28</sup> report, gives the clear impression that both the region of present Palembang and especially that of Jambi were both rich in brick monuments. Those of Muara Jambi, east (i.e., downstream) of the present city of Jambi, datable to the period from the eleventh to the thirteenth century A.D., are particularly numerous and interesting, although frequently problematic. Muara Takus, situated near the confluence of two branches of the river Kampar (Kampar Kanan and Kampar Kiri), has some fairly well-preserved monuments including one large and several smaller *stupas*. Finally, there are interesting groups of Buddhist monuments in eastern Sumatra at Kota Cina near present Medan<sup>29</sup> and at Padang Lawas near Padang Sidempuan.<sup>30</sup> They all attest to the popularity of Tantric forms of Buddhism, often with strong Sivaite influence.

The same holds true for western Sumatra, in particular the Batanghari district of Jambi (province of Riau) and West Sumatra in its narrow meaning (province of Sumatra Barat). Numerous inscriptions, especially of Kings Akarendrawarman and Adityawarman in Old Malay, Sanskrit, and Tamil, have been discovered there, but hardly any remains of buildings and only a few statues. The first is a large composite statue representing Amoghapasa, a Tantric form of the Jina Amoghasiddhi, surrounded by thirteen other deities, including a small Bhairava. As the inscription indicates, these are actually copies of free-standing statues of Candi Jago in East Java, sent to Sumatra by King Kertanagara (1268-92). The second is a huge Bhairava, actually the largest statue ever found in Indonesia, though not as high as the Avukana Buddha,<sup>31</sup> "decorated," if that is the right term, with garlands of skulls, but otherwise nude. At the same time, however, the Bhairava carries a small figure of Amitabha in his crown, usually associated with Avalokitesvara. Whatever the precise identification of the statue may be, it is thought that it represents King Adityawarman himself in a divine but demonic shape, apparently as a magical guardian to one of the roads giving access to the plains of West Sumatra.

As these statues fall outside the chronological limit fixed for this chapter, we may perhaps briefly attempt to determine their significance for maritime communications between South and Southeast Asia. What strikes us most when surveying the different kinds of Buddhist remains in Malaysia and Sumatra is the changing pattern of influences from South Asia. Whereas influences from Andhra Pradesh and Sri Lanka prevail in the earliest period (from the third or fourth century A.D.), Mahayanic influences from northeastern India (Bihar and Bengal) are particularly strong from the seventh to the tenth century. This is also true for Myanmar: influences there from Bengal are strong, particularly in Pagan, whereas those from this island appear to persist in southern areas at Hmaw-za, Pegu, and Thaton. From the eleventh century, however, southern influences, especially those of the powerful Chola empire, are once again apparent. Thus the well-known Buddha statue from Kota Cina is quite South Indian in style, and South Indian influence is even reflected in the use of Tamil in some inscriptions (two from Barus and one from Batu Berpahat near Suruaso). It is, however, difficult to decide whether such influences came straight from South India or via this island. The Tamilnadu was not really noted for Buddhism, although there were important centers of this religion at Kanci and Negapatam. An indication of possible relations between West Sumatra and Sri Lanka is the name Nandanavana which Adityawarman gave to a park near Suruaso, probably following the example of Anuradhapura.

To return to the pre-1000 period, with which this paper is mainly concerned, some attention should now be given to central Java, where

Buddhism in its Mahayana form saw a spectacular development during the time of the Sailendra dynasty. The grandeur and beauty of the monuments built at that time make it difficult to believe that this sudden blossoming of Buddhist creative activity is mainly confined to a period of less than a century (c. A.D. 775-860). The great Borobudur and the enormous temple groups of Candi Sewu and Candi Plaosan, as well as numerous other monuments (such as the candis,<sup>32</sup> Banyunibo, Kalasan, Sari and Sojiwan) and a rich iconography, attest to the wealth of Buddhist culture at that time.

A particular feature of the Sailendra period is the international orientation of the rulers. This is already apparent from the earliest Sailendra inscription of Java, namely the stone of Kalasan which is dated A.D. 778 and is inscribed with a Sanskrit inscription in early Nagari script.<sup>33</sup> From its first verse it follows that the temple was dedicated to the goddess Tara, "who helps the creatures cross (*ya tarayati*) the ocean of suffering without fear." It is quite possible, even likely, that this formulation is an allusion to actual maritime voyages by merchants and pilgrims. "Tara" actually means "Star," and stars were the principle means of guidance for sailors crossing the ocean.

Another inscription, dated a few years later (782), informs us that a statue of the *bodhisattva* Manjusri was inaugurated in the presence of a guru from Bengal or Bangladesh (Gaudidvipa),<sup>34</sup> Kumaraghosa by name, who must have crossed the ocean to perform this consecration ceremony in Java.

Again ten years later, in 792, a Sanskrit inscription from the Ratu-boko plateau in Central Java on the southern border of the plain of Prambanan, tells us of a monastery (*vihara*) of the Sinhalese monks and named Abhayagirivihara.<sup>35</sup> This famous name takes us at once to this island where the great Abhayavihara with its high *dagaba* is one of the three great stupas of Anuradhapura, which is being restored by the Archaeological Survey of Sri Lanka as part of the Archaeological Triangle Project.

This monastery was, however, also known for the influence of "dissident" monks who followed doctrines other than those of Theravada, apparently belonging in part to Mahayana. Such ideas brought them into conflict with the predominant doctrine centered in the Mahavihara and, on several occasions, monks were expelled from the Abhayagiri and sought refuge in South India and elsewhere. It is possible that the monks appearing in Java were among those forced to leave this island, but why should they have traveled so far? It is therefore more likely that the Sinhalese monks were in Java because they had been invited by the Sailendra king, as had been the case with Kumaraghosa ten years earlier. In any event, this example proves the existence of close relations between at least two of the great Buddhist establishments in Sri Lanka and Java.

To make matters even more complicated, another Sailendra inscription (the Pre-Nagari stone inscription of Candi Plaosan)<sup>36</sup> mentions *gurus* from Gurjaradesa as visitors to the Sailendra court, possibly again to take part in the inauguration ceremony of the principal statue or one of the buildings of this great complex, most of which was built in the middle of the ninth century. This would appear to have been the case from the large, but badly weathered, fragment in the National Museum at Jakarta. A few years ago a much larger part of the same inscribed stone was discovered, but this has not yet been read.<sup>37</sup> As to Gurjaradesa, the reading of which is beyond doubt, one may wonder whether it indicates present Gujerat or else the great empire of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, reigning from the city of Kanauj (Kanyakubja). Gujerat with its ports on and near the gulf of Broach has played an important part in commercial relations with Southeast Asia—as far as we know, this was especially the case in and after the fifteenth century when it contributed considerably to the early expansion of Islam. There is no evidence, however, to show that the country had close relations with Southeast Asia before that time. Furthermore, it was not an area where Buddhism flourished particularly, although the great stupa of Devnimori and some other sites show that Buddhism, no less than Vaisnavism and Jainism, had its place in Gujerat.

Although the identification with Gujerat seems to me to be the most likely of all one cannot exclude the possibility that the inscription refers to relations with the Kingdom of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, which was quite powerful in the ninth century during the reigns of Bhoja and Mahendrapala. The latter seems to have controlled Bihar with its great centers of Buddhism.<sup>38</sup> Whichever interpretation one chooses, the Plaosan inscription indicates the existence of relations between Buddhist centers in northern India (not only in Bengal) and Central Java.

In conclusion, it appears that the Javanese Buddhists of the Sailendra period maintained close relations with other parts of the then-Buddhist world in South Asia. There can be little doubt that Sri Lanka played an important part in these relations. Not only were there direct relations between the Abhayagirivihara and the Ratuboko plateau, but it is likely that the relations with the Indian subcontinent, except perhaps for those with Nalanda and Bengal, usually passed through Sri Lanka. It was convenient for sailors to call at this fertile island before taking the big leap to cross the Gulf of Bengal en route for the Straits of Malacca. They would use the south-west monsoon during part of the year and avoid the coast of Tenasserim, where especially the Mergui archipelago offered an ideal refuge for pirates.

Before leaving the subject of Indonesia, a brief mention may be made of two important data from the end of the period under survey. The first of these data is a short inscription on a rock at Pohsarang, west

of the town of Kediri, East Java. It tells us about the planting of a Bodhi Tree on the occasion of some road repairs in Saka 924 (A.D. 1002/3).<sup>39</sup> The term used for "Bodhi Tree" is actually *bodddhi warinin*. The curious thing is that the Javanese "*warinin*" is in fact the banyan tree, called *nyagrodha* in Sanskrit, which is related to, yet different from, the Bodhi Tree. Kern, who edited this inscription, quite rightly pointed out that the true Bodhi Tree (*ficus religiosa*) does not grow in Java and that the *warinin* was used as a substitute. However natural this may seem, it is contrary to Buddhist practice according to which Bodhi Trees were invariably grown from branches of the original Mahabodhi at Bodhgaya. I may add that this is the only known case of a Bodhi Tree being planted in Java.

The second of these data is known from Cola inscriptions of the turn of the millennium (the so-called "Leiden plates" of King Rajendra Cola), which mention the foundation by a Sailendra king of a Buddhist temple at Nagipattana (Negapatnam) in c. 1004.<sup>40</sup> This Buddhist temple was in the shape of a high tower which was used by sailors as a landmark until it was demolished in the middle of the nineteenth century. Fortunately, we still have an ancient drawing of the building which shows a superficial likeness to the Satmahal Prasada at Polonnaruva.<sup>41</sup>

Although the foundation of this temple has no direct bearing on the expansion of Buddhism, it clearly shows that this religion was so deeply rooted in ancient Sriwijaya that its kings even ventured to spread it to its very country of origin. It should, however, be added that this was a part of the country in which Buddhism had, on the whole, precious little influence.

The Leiden plates may not indicate that the Buddhist foundation had any bearing upon trade, yet it should not be forgotten that Sriwijaya was above all a trading kingdom whose prosperity depended to a large extent on the ability of its rulers to control shipping through the Straits of Malacca. Sriwijaya no doubt had its own products, carried to the capital from other parts of Sumatra, but the Chinese notices leave no doubt that most of the trade was on transit to Sriwijaya from other parts of the Indonesian Archipelago and the Malay Peninsula.

This far-flung empire may therefore be regarded as a typical example of the close relations between Buddhism and trade. It may be supposed that Buddhism, just like Islam a few centuries later, spread mainly along the trade routes. More than other human activities, trade connects countries to one another, thereby creating possibilities for the expansion of religion. It is likely that Buddhist monks, as we know in the case of Fa-Xian, traveled on merchant ships. Even if these monks were not missionaries in the narrow sense of the term, they would often have given expression to their ideas, if only as a means of paying their way. Just as



scholars today sometimes serve as guides to travel companies, learned monks would join commercial ventures and offer spiritual guidance to the traders. It may not be pure speculation to suppose that traders in those far-off times may have felt that the presence of holy men on board ships would have a wholesome effect on the conduct of the sailors or even of the weather-gods. In addition, we should not forget that Buddhism enjoyed the favor of traders from its very beginning (Anathapindika of Savatthi, donor of the Jetavana, is the example which first springs to mind) as well as in subsequent centuries when many of the generous sponsors of the *cetiya*s of Barhut, Bhattiprolu, Bodhgaya, and Sanchi were traders or trading guilds.

Despite the importance of trade in the expansion of Buddhism to large parts of Southeast Asia, we should be careful not to overemphasize this factor. There is a tendency among scholars in the trading nations of Western Europe, such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, to point to trade as the only or the principal channel through which religions such as Buddhism and Islam spread, but this is no less dangerous an approach than ignoring the role of trade in the process. As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, Buddhism is based on what is regarded as a correct understanding of the different processes of life and on accepting the consequences of such insight. It is not a commodity that may be offered for sale by traders. Trade, however, was (or was before the age of mass tourism) the most familiar way in which people of different countries or even continents came into contact with one another, and opened the way to closer relations between different peoples. The presence of pious Buddhists among traders may have inspired in those with whom they came in contact a strong desire to know more about a doctrine aimed at liberating man from suffering in all its forms. It is likely that such a desire would have arisen in the minds of those who had reached a certain level of knowledge and understanding. It is therefore not surprising that learned kings, such as the Devanampiya Tissa and Menander, were among the first non-Indians to grasp the meaning of the teachings of Lord Buddha. For Southeast Asia we have no clear examples of the same development, except for the Kashmiri Prince Gunavarman who would have converted the Queen of Cho-po (Java?) to Buddhism. Although there are no other examples available, it seems likely that this was a fairly regular pattern, suggesting that Buddhism generally spread from the king or the ruling classes to other sections of the population.

It is no exaggeration to say that trade, in particular that related to the Silk Road, though by no means the principal factor in the expansion of Buddhism to parts of Southeast Asia, probably provided or facilitated the efforts which subsequently led to the adoption of Buddhism by large sections of the population of Southeast Asia.

## Notes

1. *The Mahavagga*, vol. 1 (Oldenberg, 1929), pp. 23-25, *imam dhammapariyayam sutva virajam vitamalam dhammacakkhum udapadi*.
2. Trenckner, *Milindapanho* (London: William and Norgate, 1880), p. 420; translation by Rhys Davids vol. 2 (1894), pp. 373f.; translation by Horner (1964), pp. 2-304. The question whether this passage belongs to the original version of the text (see Horner's Introduction, p. 30) is not strictly relevant in this context; another passage of the same work (p. 88; translation pp. 122 f.) shows that the king, though aware of the truth of Nagasena's arguments, did not "go forth from home into homelessness" on account of his numerous enemies. This, of course, means that Menander did not become a monk.
3. O. Boperachi, "Milinda's conversion to Buddhism: fact or fiction?" *Ancient Ceylon* 7 (1990): pp. 1-16. We should distinguish sharply between becoming a Buddhist (layman), i.e., taking the Three Refuges, and becoming a monk. I fully agree with A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks* (1957), pp. 19-99, who gives some strong arguments to the effect that the tradition of Menander (Milinda) being converted to Buddhism is reliable.
4. N.G. Majumdar, *Epigr. Ind.* 24 (1937): pp. 1-10; D.C. Sircar, *Epigr. Ind.* 26 (1941-1942): pp. 318-21; *Sel. Inscr.*, I, 2d ed. (1965), pp. 14, 102-6.
5. Trenckner, *Milindapanho* (London: William and Norgate, 1880), p. 268; translation Horner, 86f.
6. See *Dipavamsa*, pp. 6-18: *abhisitto tini vassani pasanno Buddha-sasane* (three years after having been inaugurated a king, he had faith in the religion of the Buddha) in B.C. Law, "The Dipavamsa," *Ceylon Hist. Journal* 7 (1957-1958): p. 171. See also P.H.L. Eggermont, *The Chronology of the Reign of Asoka Moriya* (1956), p. 19. The Kalinga campaign took place in his ninth regnal year.
7. S. Paranavitana, "Tiriyay Rock-Inscription," *Ep. Zeyl.* 4 (1943): pp. 151-60; B. Ch. Chhabra, *Expansion of Indo-Aryan Culture during Pallava Rule*, pp. 109-15.
8. C. O. Blagden, "An Inscription of the Shwedagon Pagoda, Rangoon," *Ep. Birm.* 4 (1936): pp. 15, 20-43, in particular lines B-8 to 13.
9. *Ibid.*, lines 16 to 21.
10. C. Duroiselle, "Excavations at Hmawza," *Arch. Survey of India* (1926-1927): pp. 171-83; U Tha Myat, *Pyu Reader* (n. d.), pp. 25-33.
11. S. Paranavitana, "The Ruvanvalisaya Pillar of Budadasa," *Ep. Zeyl.* 3 (1931): pp. 120-26 and pl. 8; B. Ch. Chhabra, *The Expansion of Indo-Aryan Culture*, pp. 12f. and Fig.2.
12. C. Duroiselle, "Excavations."
13. The connection with "Pallava rule" is, however, not quite clear, as we already noted with reference to the Ruvanvalisaya inscription. On the other hand, the script is closely related to other South Indian scripts and, at least from the seventh century, to that of the Pallavas.
14. B. Ch. Chhabra, *The Expansion*, pp. 20-26.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 23, note 2.
16. Published by S. Paranavitana, *Ep. Zeyl.* 3 (n.d.): pp. 158-61; see also Chhabra, *The Expansion*, pp. 16f.
17. See A. Lamb, "Recent Archaeological Work in Kedah," *Journ. Fed. Mal. St. Mus* 12 (1928); "Report on the Excavation and Reconstruction of Chandi Bukit Batu Pahat," *Fed. Mus. Journ.* 5 (1960); and "Miscellaneous Papers," *Fed. Mus. Journ.* 6 (1961).
18. Thus, unlike the other peoples of mainland Southeast Asia, the Cham belong linguistically and culturally to the great Austronesian (Malay-Polynesian) group; in

- addition, the ancient Cham inscriptions are written in a language which is apparently strongly influenced by that of the Old Malay inscriptions of Sriwijaya.
19. The only exceptions are some of the languages of the northern Moluccas (especially Halmahera), of Irian Jaya and of some tribal pockets in the Philippines and West Malaysia. The speakers of such languages are but a tiny minority of the population of maritime Southeast Asia.
  20. P. Dupont, "Variétés archéologiques—Les Buddha dits d'Amaravati en Asie du Sud-Est," *BEFEO* 49 (1955): pp. 631-36, Pls. 56-64.
  21. There is much literature on Dvaravati, but the basic work is still P. Dupont, *L'Archéologie Mone de Dvaravati*, 2 vols. (EFEO, 1959). See also the detailed review of this work by M.C. Subhadradis Diskul in *Essays offered to G. H. Luce* (1966) vol. 2, and H. G. Quaritch Wales, "Dvaravati in South-East Asian Cultural History," *J.R.A.S.* (1966): pp. 40-52.
  22. M. Rohanadecera, "Telakatabagatha in a Thailand Inscription of 761 A.D. New evidence on cultural relations between Sri Lanka and The Dvaravati Kingdom in Thailand, Vidyodaya," *Journal of Social Science* 1 (1987): pp. 59-73.
  23. Before the time of Jayavarman II, Cambodia was divided into what the Chinese called Chen-la of the Water and Chen-la of the Land, but both of these were again divided into several principalities. In addition to the works of Coedès, see O.W. Wolters, "Jayavarman II's military power: the territorial foundation of the Angkor empire," *F.R.A.S.* (1973): pp. 21-30.
  24. C.W. Nicholas and S. Paranavitana, *A Concise History of Ceylon* (1961), pp. 262-65.
  25. See especially P. Dupont, *L'archéologie mone de Dvaravati*, 2 vols. (Paris: EFEO, 1959), vol. 1, pp. 73-78.
  26. A.B. Griswold, *Dated Buddha Images of Northern Siam* (1957).
  27. G. Coedès, "Les inscriptions malaises de Crivijaya," *BEFEO* 30 (1930): pp. 38-44, pl.3.
  28. SPAFA (SEAMEO Project in Archaeology and Fine Arts), Final Report of Consultative Workshop on Archaeological and Environmental Studies of Srivijaya (I-W2a) (Jakarta, 1982).
  29. E.E. McKinnon, *Kota Cina: an Important Early Trading Site on the East Coast of Sumatra* (1976).
  30. SPAFA, *Final Report of Consultative Workshop on Archaeological and Environmental Studies of Srivijaya*, 1-W2b (1986): pp. 59-66; F.M. Schnitger, *The Archaeology of Hindoo Sumatra* (1937), pp. 16-37; "Forgotten Kingdom in Sumatra" (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964), pp. 85-107; Satyawati Suleiman, *Sculptures of Ancient Sumatra (Arca-arca di Sumatra pada Zaman Purba)* (Jakarta, 1981); and SPAFA, *Final Report of Consultative Workshop*.
  31. F.M. Schnitger, *The Archaeology of Hindoo Sumatra*, pls. 14-16.
  32. I am following the current Indonesian practice of designating all pre-Muslim structural monuments as candi.
  33. F.D.K. Bosch, "De inscriptie van Keloerak," *Tijdschr. Kon. Bat. Gen.* 68 (1928): pp. 1-64, in particular pp. 57-62.
  34. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-56.
  35. J.G. de Casparis, "New Evidence on Cultural Relations between Java and Ceylon in Ancient Times," *Artibus Asiae Ed.*, 24 (1961): pp. 241-48.
  36. J.G. de Casparis, *Prasasti Indonesia* vol. 2 (1956), pp. 175-206.
  37. In addition there are numerous votive inscriptions in the Plaosan complex; see J.G. de Casparis, "Short Inscriptions from Candi Plaosan-Lot," *Dinas Purbakala Indonesia* (1958).
  38. B.N. Puri, *The History of the Gurjara-Pratiharas* (1957), pp. 66-69.

39. H. Kern, "De inscriptie van Puh Sarang (Kediri) uit 924 Saka," *Verspreide Geschriften* 6 (1917): pp. 77-82 (original article of 1883).
40. G. Coedès, "Le Royaume de Crivijaya," *BEFEO* 18 (1918): pp. 51-86, especially 54. For the full text of the inscription, the so-called "Larger Leiden Plates," see the edition by K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer in *Epigr. Indica*. 22 (1933-1934): pp. 213-66, 15 pls.
41. See the reproductions of the drawing in the article by Sir Walter Elliot, "The Edifice Formerly Known as the Chinese or Jaina Pagoda at Negapatam," *Indian Antiquary* 7 (1878): pp. 224-27. A smaller reproduction is found in Subrahmanya Aiyer's article mentioned in note 40 above.