



Thai Images of the Buddha

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THAI IMAGES OF THE BUDDHA

BY
LUANG BORIBAL BURIBHAND & A.B. GRISWOLD



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Seated Buddha, Ayudhya Period

Preface

Thailand is very rich in precious arts and cultural heritage which represents a long-lasting independence, prosperity and stability of the country. These various fields of heritage have been preserved, accumulated and inherited throughout generations until the present. This legacy brings pride, dignity and prestige to Thai people. Therefore, it should be shared with the world so that Thai wisdom can be appreciated.

The Fine Arts Department is responsible for the preservation, promotion, transmission and dissemination of arts and culture of the Thai nation. As such it has compiled and published a book series of 25 volumes written by experts in their respective fields. Their areas of knowledge include artistic works, architecture, music and dramatic arts as well as language and literature. Each series has been reprinted from time to time. In this publication, there are no alterations to the contents although some illustrations have been added for the benefit of the readers.

The Department hopes that this series of books will be a resource among the international community to help them understand Thailand better through its unique arts and culture.

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was Thailand's leading archaeologist. Born in Nakhon Pathom in 2440 B.E. (1897 A.D.) he received the traditional Thai education, serving first as a *samnera* (novice) for six years, and then as a *bhikkhu* (monk) for six years more, at the Great Relic Monastery (Wat Mahathat), Bangkok. He was trained in archaeology, buddhist iconography, and Southeast Asian history by His late Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, the "Father of Thai archaeology". Under the Prince's supervision he collaborated (for the Thai section) with Professor George Coedès in preparing the *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam* (1962). He carried out excavations at Pong Dük (1927, in cooperation with Messrs. Coedès and Manfredi), at Ayudhya (1932), and at Nakhon Pathom (1937/8, with the late Pierre Dupont). He was Head of the National Museum and Chief also of the Division of Archaeology from 1934 to 1952. He was Archaeological Advisor to the Fine Arts Department, and Professor of Archaeology at Silpakorn University.

He was a member of the International Council of Museums, and was a corresponding member of the International Committee on Monuments. He wrote numerous books and pamphlets on history and archaeology.

A.B. GRISWOLD

was born in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A. in 1907. He studied art and archaeology at Princeton University, graduating with honours in 1928 ; he then did post-graduate work at Trinity College Cambridge, England. For several years he was a banker in Baltimore ; from 1940 to 1947 he served in the Armed Forces of the United States. He first visited Thailand in 1945, and later received the Order of the White Elephant of Thailand (Third class). From 1947 he spent several months each year in



Thailand, devoted himself to the study of Buddhism, Southeast Asian Art and the history of Thailand. He was the author of *Dated Buddha Images of Northern Siam* (Ascona 1957). *The Architecture and Sculpture of Siam* (in *The Arts of Thailand*, Bloomington, 1961), *King Mongkut of Siam, Burma* (in the 'Art of the World' Series) and numerous articles. He was the sub-editor of *Artibus Asiae* for Southeast Asia.





Fig. 1 Standing Buddha ; Stone ; height 1.84 m. Dvāravatī style.
Monastery of the Fifth King, Wat Benchamabophit (the Marble Temple), Bangkok.



Fig. 2 The Buddha of Grahi ; Bronze ; height 1.60 m.
Late Srivijaya style. From Chaiya, Southern Thailand. Cast in 1183 A.D.

❖ THAI IMAGES OF THE BUDDHA ❖

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps more than any other country in the world, Thailand is the land of Buddha images. They range in size from tiny miniatures to huge giants. They are made of many different kinds of material-stone, plaster or terra cotta, crystal or jade, wood, ivory or metal. Ever since the arrival of the Thai in Thailand, the overwhelming preference has been for bronze, an alloy of copper with smaller amounts of tin and other metals, to which silver and gold are often added. When the casting is completed the image is nearly always covered with a coating of lacquer and gold leaf; and an old bronze, particularly one that has lain for a long time buried in the ground, takes on a beautiful variegated patina to which the remnants of gilding give added lustre.

For more than 1300 years the artists of Thailand have concentrated on making Buddha images in large quantities.

In such quantities it is hardly to be expected that all examples would be worthy to be called works of art; and besides, the motives for making them were quite different from the motives of artists in the West. From an old-fashioned Thai point of view, these images were made to be worshipped, and to give comfort and protection; from the point of view of the modern Buddhist, they are simply “Reminders of the Doctrine.” In either case “artistic” considerations are secondary; and the traditional Buddhist image-maker had no desire to be original. When he showed originality it was in spite of himself. He always prided himself on being a faithful copyist, though not necessarily an accurate copyist in the western sense; he had to reproduce certain features and attitudes that were deemed essential, but not necessarily the outward appearance, just as the second edition of a book reproduces the essential content but not always the format of the original.



The features he had to reproduce were chiefly those of the “supernatural anatomy,” which we shall discuss later. The dress of a Buddha image is the monastic robe, to which certain elements of the royal attire are sometimes added. The robe may be worn in the *covered mode*, that is, draped over both shoulders, or in the *open mode*, leaving the right shoulder exposed. Four postures (*iryāpatha*) are deemed suitable: walking, standing, sitting, and reclining. If sitting, there are three different ways in which the legs may be placed: the “European” fashion (*pralambanāsana*), which is the ordinary attitude of a person sitting in a chair; the “hero posture” (*vīrāsana*), with the legs folded, one lying on top of the other; and the “adamantine posture” (*vajrāsana*), with the legs crossed in such a manner that each foot rests on the opposite thigh, the footsoles turned upward. The most common hand-positions for standing or walking figures are “dispelling fear” (*abhaya*), the palm forward and the fingers pointing upward, and “giving instruction” (*vitārka*), which is similar but with the thumb and forefinger joined; for seated figures, “meditation” (*samādhi* or *jhāna*), with both hands lying in the lap, palms upward, and “calling the Earth to witness” (*bhūmisparśa*), otherwise known as the “victory over Māra” (*Māravijaya*), which is like “meditation” except that the right hand has been moved over and placed on the right leg, at or near the knee, with fingers pointing downwards. There are several other hand-positions, but they need not concern us here.

In the sort of “copying” we have been discussing, it is obvious that copyist would respect certain things in the original as far as he could. He would try to reproduce the outstanding features of the anatomy; the mode of wearing the robe, covering or open; and the posture and hand position. In this sense, at least until modern times, every image was a copy of an earlier one; in theory it was a copy, at no matter how many removes, of one of the legendary portraits made during the Lord Buddha’s lifetime by some artist who knew him personally.



Fig. 3 Seated Buddha, Stone. From Anuradhapura, Ceylon. Colombo Museum.

In spite of this deliberate lack of originality, or perhaps it would be better to say, these severe limitations placed on originality, many Thai Buddha images are real masterpieces. Such masterpieces are to be found in Bangkok in the National Museum, and in numerous monasteries, including the Jetubanārāma- (*Chetupanaram*) (*Wat Pho*), the Excellent Abode Pavaranivesa- (*Borvonives*), and the Monastery of the Fifth King Wat Peñcamapabitra- (*Benchamabophit*) commonly called the “Marble Temple”). Others are to be found in private collections, in the museums and monasteries of various provincial centers, and still in situ at different archaeological sites.



There are comparatively few examples of Thai Buddha images of the highest quality outside of Thailand, so that until recently Europeans and Americans who wanted to get an adequate idea of this art had to come to Thailand for it. In 1960, however, a travelling exhibition, “The Arts of Thailand.” opened at Bloomington, Illinois.* It was then shown in eight other American cities, and later in Japan; and in 1962-1963 it toured Europe.

The first person in Thailand to take a serious interest in Buddha images from the point of view of the connoisseur and historian was King Mongkut (*Rāma IV*) who reigned from 1851 to 1868. The private museum he started was in later generations expanded into the Bangkok National Museum, whose collections are now among the richest in the Far East. His son, Prince Damrong, was deeply interested in Buddhist art and history, and invited Professor George Coedès, the great authority on Southeast Asian history, epigraphy and archaeology, to become Secretary-General of the Royal Institute in 1914, a position he held until 1926. Prince Damrong and Professor Coedès were the first to put the study of our antiquities on a sound scientific basis.

The earliest schools of art in Thailand were of course pre-Thai; that is, they pre-dated the arrival of the Thai in this country. By far the most important of these early schools, from the point of view of Buddhist art, is that known by the name of Dvāravatī.

Dvāravatī art was chiefly the work of the Mòn people, who were settled around the northern coast of the Gulf of Siam and in central Thailand. (There was also an important branch of the Mòn people in Lower Burma, who were later responsible for some of the greatest artistic triumphs at Pagàn, the capital of Burma from the 11th to the 13th century A.D.).

The Dvāravatī school of sculpture was already in production in the 6th or 7th century. Probably it grew in part from a school that had been established in the same region some generations earlier, whose work has perished, but which was to some extent based on the example of Amarāvātī (certain features of Dvāravatī art, such as the seated position with loosely-crossed legs, suggest such a heritage); but in any case its chief debt, both in iconography and in sculptural style, was to the late Gupta art of India as seen in the cave-temples of Ajñtā Kañheri, Ellora, etc.

In iconography the Dvāravatī sculptors invented hardly anything new; on the whole they followed the example of the cave-temples faithfully. But they introduced a few variations: in the case of standing Buddha images, for instance, Indian art makes the right hand alone perform the gesture, while the left hand grasps part of the robe, but Dvāravatī art usually makes the left hand perform the same gesture as the right. In sculptural style a certain independence of Indian example is always noticeable, and often conspicuous; if slavish imitations of Indian art were the rule at the beginning, they have not survived, and very few images have been discovered in Thailand that would cause us to hesitate whether to attribute them to Dvāravatī or to some Indian school.

The Dvāravatī sculptors were at their best in stone carving (Fig. 1). The modeling follows the Gupta idiom, but tends toward a greater simplification, and forms which are firmer but less massive. Except for the ushñisha or protuberance of the skull, and the distended ear-lobes, the “supernatural anatomy” is not conspicuous. The facial features, which are clearly delineated, often recall a Mòn racial type; and a delicate line, either incised or in relief, accents the silhouette of the lips.

The bronze-casters were less skillful than the stonecarvers, and seldom ventured beyond the statuette size.

Dvāravatī art continued until the 12th or 13th century. But in the meantime all of central Thailand had been absorbed into the Khmer (Cambodian) Empire. For a long time, therefore, the official sculpture of central Thailand was a reflection of the Khmer schools of Angkor Wat and the Bayon.

The Khmerizing sculpture of this and later periods is generally given the name “school of Lopburi.” The school of Srīvijaya in Peninsular Siam (8th-12th century), being largely at the service of Mahāyāna Buddhism, produced numerous images of Bodhisattvas but few of the Buddha (Fig. 2).

* See the illustrated catalogue and handbook, “The Arts of Thailand,” Bloomington, 1960.



Seated Buddha; Bronze; Sukhothai style.

SUKHOTHAI

During this time, if not before, members of the Thai race were leaving their old homelands in China to establish settlements in neighboring countries.* In the 13th century one such Thai settlement in the heart of Thailand threw off the Khmer yoke and made itself independent. This was the beginning of the kingdom of Sukhothai, which grew rapidly until it included most of the present kingdom of Thailand except the north.

It was at Sukhothai that the most beautiful and characteristic Thai art developed. Complex influences went into it. From the Mòns, the Thai adopted Theravāda Buddhism and their basic conception of image-making; from the Mòns, too, they seem to have gotten most their iconography and their plastic manner, so that the art of Sukhothai is closely linked, through Dvāravatī, to that of Gupta India. From the Khmer they learned not only many material skills and techniques, but also a deep affection for the great Indian epics, especially the Rāmāyaṇa and its adaptations. From Ceylon they got a more precise understanding of Theravāda Buddhism: they sent monks to that island to study at the fountainhead of the Pali Doctrine, and they honored above all others the sect of Forest-Dwellers which was led by monks who had been ordained in Ceylon. The Sukhothai image-makers often copied Sinhalese models, and perhaps Khmer models as well as Dvāravatī ones; and there are some reasons to think that they had Khmer instructors as well as Mòn in the formative period, and Sinhalese instructors later. In the present state of our knowledge such matters are difficult to assess; but it becomes increasingly clear that the main forerunner of Sukhothai art was Dvāravatī.



Fig. 4 Walking Buddha; Bronze; height 2.25 m.
Sukhothai style. Monastery of
the Fifth King, Bangkok.

* Not all of them left those homelands, for even today the Thai form large minorities in the provinces of Kwangtung, Kwanghsi and Yünnan. It is uncertain from which part of China the Thai of Thailand originally came. Until lately it was widely believed that they came from Yünnan, and more particularly from the old kingdom of Nan-chao; but recent researches have shown that Nan-chao was more Lolo (Tibeto-Burman) than Thai; and there are some reasons to think that the main migrations into Thailand were from Kwangtung and Kwanghsi, across Tongking and Laos. Again it has been commonly supposed that the Thai, though not in any sense Chinese, were closely related to the Chinese; but recent researches in linguistics make even that relationship seem improbable.

One thing remains mysterious : where did the Thai get their extraordinary skill in bronze? Evidently not from the timid bronze-casters of Dvāravatī. It might be argued they got it from the Khmer, or from some school of art in the Malay Peninsula descended from the great schools of Java, or that they got it from Ceylon or South India—or even that they brought it with them from their old homelands in China (Fig. 3). For the moment the question must be left open.

The Sukhothai artists accepted without hesitation those curious descriptions of the Buddha’s personal appearance as given in the Pali texts—the *uṇhīsa* (Sanskrit: *uṣṇīṣha*), or protuberance on top of the skull; the spiral curls and distended ear-lobes; the arms “long enough for him to touch his knees without bending over” the flat footsoles and projecting heels. (Fig. 4). These things may seem strange to a modern reader; and in fact the late Professor Alfred Foucher has shown that they grew out of a series of misunderstandings of very ancient texts. But they were eventually given a symbolic value, and as soon as that happened their original significance lost its importance. The Sukhothai artists saw in them a deep spiritual meaning, indeed a “supernatural anatomy” which is above and beyond the forms of the ordinary world, and which serves to set Buddha images apart from mere human portraits.*

The artists also made good use of the stereotyped similes by which Indian poets described gods and heroes. So they made the head “the shape of an egg;” they made the eyebrows “like drawn bows” and the nose “like a parrot’s beak;” they made the chin “like a mango stone; they made the shoulders “like an elephant’s head;” and they made “no display whatever of bones, muscles, or veins.” These same similes had long ago been adopted by the various Indian and Indianizing schools of art as guides to anatomical form; so the Sukhothai artists may have got them more through a didactic tradition than direct from poetic recitals.

After all, however, the features drawn from Pali and Sanskrit literature were not in themselves a complete anatomy; they were merely marks and peculiarities that would have to be fitted on to the anatomy of a human being. This the artists of Sukhothai did with consummate skill and poetic imagination. They can only have done it by starting with a “memory picture” in their minds a memory picture of some older, image, Khmer or Môn, Sinhalese or Indian and then, by means of intense mental concentration of the same sort that leads to trance (*samādhi*, *jhāna*), they would be able to visualize such an image transformed to meet the requirements of the texts.

The expression is often wonderfully spiritual, the modeling fluid and graceful (Fig. 4,5). The hair is arranged in spiral curls; and a tall jet of flame—the equivalent of a halo—springs from the protuberance of the skull (Fig. 5; note that the name in Fig. 4 is a modern restoration, and not in proportion to the statue). The face is delicately oval, the eyebrow arching, the nose aquiline, and the chin often incised with an elliptical line suggesting the mango-stone. The body, though suffused with inner energy, is softly rounded on its surface, with bulging breast and prominent nipples: the arms are as sinuous as an elephant’s trunk; and the hands—“like lotus flowers just beginning to open”—are long and slim, with fingertips bent delicately backward. The monastic robe is thin and clinging. Standing figures have it in the covering mode; but walking, seated or reclining figures have it in the open mode, with a narrow flap of cloth over the left shoulder falling to the waist in front, where it ends in a notched design that represents pleatends as if seen in perspective (Figs. 4, 5). The pedestals of seated images are generally plain and unornamented, the front being either straight or slightly concave in plan rather than convex; less frequently they are decorated with a double row of lotus petals.

* The immediate source of the features of the supernatural anatomy adopted by Sukhothai was of course the Pali commentaries composed in Ceylon. In addition to the features we have mentioned they include the *ūṇṇa* (Sanskrit *urna*), a tuft of hair in the middle of the forehead; and also the specification that the four fingers of each hand should be of equal length. These features sometimes occur in Sukhothai art, but rarely.

The majority of Sukhothai Buddha images sit in the “hero posture” (*virāsana*), occasionally in “meditation”, but much more often “calling the Earth to witness” the victory over Mara (*Māravijaya*) (Fig. 5). Standing and reclining Buddha images are much less frequent.

The finest invention of Sukhothai is the “Walking Buddha” really a figure that seems to have come to a momentary pause in the course of a peregrination—with one heel raised while the other foot is planted firmly on the ground, and one hand lifted in the gesture of giving instruction or dispelling fear, while the other arm swings naturally at the side (Fig. 4). Walking Buddhas had appeared in Indian sculpture since early times, but only in relief; the Sukhothai artist deserves the credit for giving them the first complete expression in the round. *

In the middle of the 14th century the political power of Sukhothai faltered, and two other Thai-ruled kingdoms began a long struggle for leadership. One of them was Lanna in the north, with its capital at Chiang Mai; the other was Ayudhyā, with its capital 50 miles from modern Bangkok. Ayudhyā was ultimately successful; but for the better part of 200 years the provinces constituting the old kingdom of Sukhothai were the chief battleground of the two warring powers and the chief prize each strove to secure.

The art schools of Sukhothai did not come to an end with the loss of independence, but continued to flourish well into the 16th century.** Apart from that, whenever one side or the other seized one of the cities of the old Sukhothai kingdom the conqueror was likely to round up all its artists and ship them back to his own capital to work and to impart their skills to new apprentices : the capture of skilled artisans was in those days one of the main motives for waging war. So it came about that the artistic influence of Sukhothai was more widespread after the loss of political independence than before.



Fig. 5 Seated Buddha; Bronze; height 1.41 m. Sukhothai style. Monastery of the Fifth King, Bangkok.

* For a discussion of the probable development of the walking Buddha en ronde bosse, through a long evolution from a prototype such as is to be seen at Kanheri, cf. “The Arts of Thailand,” pp. 91-94.

** The only Sukhothai images we know of with dated inscriptions of their bases all belong to the 15th and 16th centuries.



Seated Buddha; Bronze; Lanna style.

LANNA

The Thai who settled in northern Thailand were not so early favored by circumstances as Sukhothai had been; neither the Buddhist religion nor technical skills advanced so quickly among them.* As far as we know, the Thai Yuan (as this particular branch of the Thai are called) produced no Buddha images at all before the end of the 13th century! In 1292 they captured Lamphun a northern colony of Dvāravatī that had remained independent under a Mòn dynasty after the Khmer absorbed the parent kingdom. Four years later the Thai Yuan founded a new capital, Chiang Mai; but Lamphun remained the chief cultural center for the next 75 years; and during all that time, so far as we can tell, they were content to echo the sculptural style of Lamphun.**

In 1369 an event occurred that had far-reaching religious and artistic consequences among the Thai Yuan. A monk from Sukhothai, the Mahāthera Sumana, who had studied under a Ceylon-trained Mòn master in Lower Burma, accepted an invitation from the King of Lanna to settle in the north and preach the Sinhalese form of the Theravāda Doctrine to his people. The King received him with the greatest honors and built a monastery for him near Lamphun less than two years later, desiring to have Sumana within easy reach at all times, the King invited him to transfer his residence to the newly established Flower Garden Monastery (Wat Suan Dòk) at Chiang Mai. From this time on, Chiang Mai began to supplant Lamphun as the chief cultural center of Lanna.



Fig 6 Seated Buddha; Bronze; height 1.33 m. Lion Type; style of the Lanna Golden Age; cast in 1470. Kalakot Monastery, Chiang Mai. (see Dated Buddha Images of Northern Siam, plate I.)

* It has sometimes been surmised that the Burmese King Aniruddha of Pagan (11th century) conquered northern Thailand and converted the Thai there to Theravāda Buddhism. We now know that neither he nor any of his dynasty conquered that region, for in all the inscriptions of Pagan in which the kings boast of their conquests not a single one lays claim to any territory east of the Salween. Recent research, moreover, shows that Aniruddha was a follower of the Mahāyāna, not the Theravāda.

** The only Buddha images that can be ascribed to this period with any certainty are the old terra cotta figures that stood in the niches of the Chedi Si Liam, near Chiang Mai, until its restoration in the present century. A number of these are still preserved in private collections, and they are hardly to be distinguished from those in the niches at Wat Kukuṭa, Lamphun. The Chedi Si Liam, built by the King Meng Rai around 1300, was of exactly the same type at Wat Kūkuta, which had been built (or rather rebuilt) by the Mòn ruler of Lamphun in the early 13th century. (For illustrations of these monuments, see “The Arts of Thailand.” figs. 2, 19, 94).

It stands to reason that Sumana brought with him from Sukhothai many of the sculptural ideas that prevailed there regarding Buddha images; and he may have brought craftsmen with him as well. His arrival seems to have been part of the great Buddhist missionary movement that fanned out from Sukhothai under the auspices of its pious ruler, Lü Tai. The same movement brought images and sculptors, it seems, to Nan, Luang Prabang, and other places.

The legend of the “Buddha Sihing”, a famous image supposed to be of Sinhalese origin, which arrived in Lanna from the Sukhothai region, contains many hints that Sukhothai art and artists, as well as Sukhothai techniques and craftsmen, began to exert a strong leadership in Lanna at about this time.*

In 1430 a group of twenty-five monks from Lanna, who had gone to Ceylon to study and be re-ordained, returned to Chiang Mai and tried to implant a new version of the Sinhalese tradition of the Theravāda. The Doctrine, of course, was exactly the same as Sumana had brought in; but he had received it indirectly through the Ceylon-trained Mōn master. The new arrivals said that he had received it in a very imperfect form, and that the sect stemming from Sumana had completely wrong notions about monastic discipline. A violent quarrel ensued, and for a time the new sect was banned from Chiang Mai. Opinions differ regarding the motives of the king who imposed the ban: according to one chronicle, the *Jīnakālamāli*, he was a rank heretic who favored the old animistic cults at the expense of the Buddhists; according to another, the *Mūlasāsanā*, he simply expelled the monks of the new sect because he regarded them as troublemakers. In any case he was deposed in 1441, and his son Tiloka, a devout Buddhist, mounted the throne. This was the beginning of the Golden Age of religion, art, and letters in Lanna.

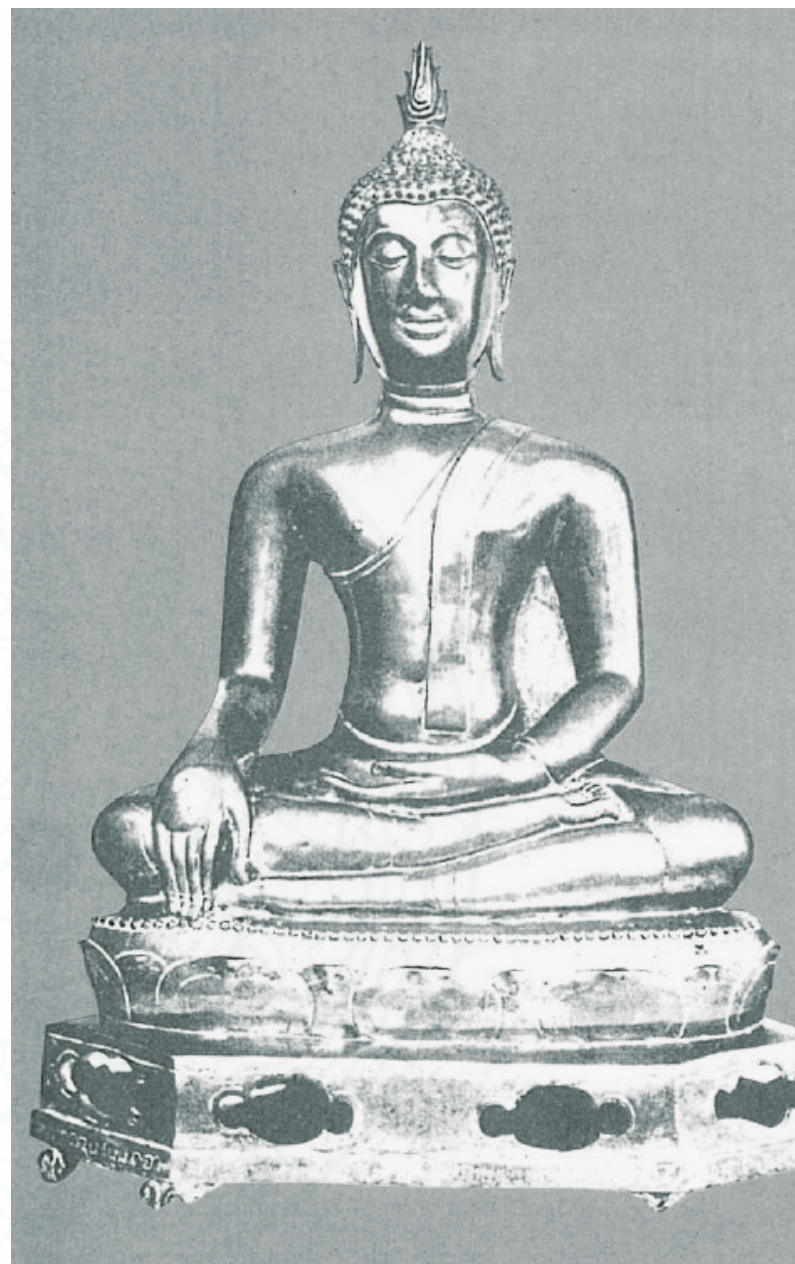


Fig. 7 Seated Buddha; Bronze; height 71 cm. Mixed Type; style of the Lanna Golden Age; cast in 1500. National Museum, Bangkok.

* For historical reasons we can hardly escape the conclusion that the sculptural influence of Sukhothai was paramount in Lanna between 1370 and 1440; but we must add that we do not know of a single image for which we have positive proof that it dates from this period. On the basis of style, we could point to dozens of examples, such as the huge bronze walking figure in the Kalakot Monastery, Chiang Mai (“Arts of Thailand,” fig. 104), but we have no objective proof.

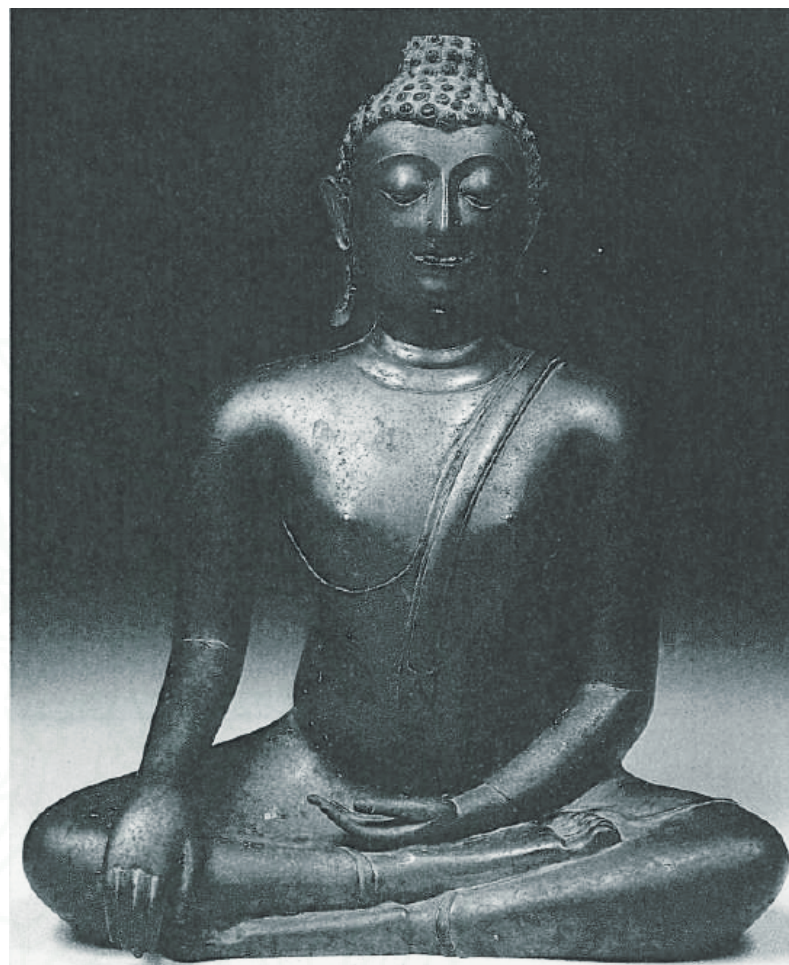
Tiloka immediately invited the new sect to return to the capital. He gave it his chief favor, but he did not neglect the older ones. He pacified the sectarian quarrels, and did everything possible to advance the cause of Buddhism. He built many monasteries and sharply expanded the production of Buddha images.

In order to do this, he sought sculptors from the greatest contemporary source of Buddhist art, the Sukhothai region. In 1449 he conquered the city of Nan, where a competent school of image-makers carried on the Sukhothai tradition. He celebrated his victory by commanding them to see how quickly they could cast a huge Buddha image, and they completed the work in less than a hundred days.*

A decade later he took the city of Sawankhalok (Si Satchanalai), where the Sukhothai tradition was deeprooted and the love of sculpture amounted to an obsession. It stands to reason that both at Nan and at Sawankhalok he collected as many skilled craftsmen, including sculptors as he could and sent them back to his capital. (Among them, incidentally, were potters : it appears that from about this time the production of “Sawankhalok ware” ceased at Sawankhalok itself and began in Lanna.)**

The sculptors from Nan and Sawankhalok would naturally mingle with others who had been trained by an earlier generation at Chiang Mai, so that the Sawankhalok tradition in Lanna was correspondingly reinforced.

The 2000th anniversary of the Buddha’s death, as it was calculated in those days, fell in the year 1456. According to an old prophecy, which King Lü Tai had set forth in an inscription a century earlier, this anniversary would be attended by a sharp decline in the Buddhist religion; and it seems that the Buddhist monarchs of Southeast Asia strove, by great acts of merit, to prevent the prophecy from coming true. The Mòn king of Pegu in Lower Burma, for instance, sent a mission of architects and craftsmen to Bodhgayā



Seated Buddha; Bronze; Sukhothai style.

in India, to get the plans of the Mahābodhi Temple which marked the spot of the Buddha’s Enlightenment, and then reproduced it on a smaller scale near his own capital, complete with the memorials of the seven weeks following the Enlightenment: this operation is recounted at length in the Mòn chronicle, and the ruins of the building can still be seen today. Tiloka did the same thing at Chiang Mai. In 1455 he began the architectural masterpiece of his reign, the Seven Spires Monastery (“Wat Chet Yòt), officially called

* This image illustrated in “ The Arts of Thailand,” fig.105.

**See Spinks, Siam and the Pottery Trade of Asia. Journal of the Siam Society, vol. XLIV/2; also Kraïsm Nimmanaheminda, San Kampaeng Glazed Pottery, Chiang Mai, 1960.

Mahābodhārāma and manifestly a copy of the great Indian Mahābodhi Temple.* Though the chronicles do not specifically say how he got plans, it is evident from a study of the monument that he got them from Bodhgayā. ** He must have done so by sending a mission there, just as the King of Pegu did.

The chronicle of the Seven Spires tells us that Tiloka had the main monument and the lesser memorials made “exactly as they are in the Majjhimadesa [Bihar, India], where the Lord gained his victory over Māra. It lists the statues installed at the Seven Spires, and adds that the principal one, which occupied exactly the same relative position as the principal statue at Bodhgayā, represented the Buddha seated in the “adamantine posture”, with the right hand resting on the knee performing the gesture of Victory over Māra.

Now we know from other sources that the same description would fit the principal image at Bodhgayā, which was regarded as the holiest image in the Buddhist world. The “Lion of the Sākyas,” as it was named (Sākyasinha), is no longer extant; but innumerable copies of it—black stone slabs carved in high relief, and dating from the Pāla period (8th-12th century)—have been found in the temple precinct at Bodhgayā, and they display precisely this iconography.

Can it be doubted that the principal image installed by Tiloka at the Seven Spires, though it too has disappeared, was a copy of the “Lion of the Sākyas” ? Evidently it was either one of the Pāla black stone copies brought back by the same mission that got the plans, or else a copy of such an image made by Tiloka’s own sculptors.

If further evidence is needed, we have a large series of bronze images from Lanna with just this iconography, including the “adamantine posture” which is otherwise extremely rare in Thailand (Fig. 6). Twelve of them have dated inscriptions on their bases, the

dates ranging from 1470 to 1565; and at least one of the inscription refers to the image as “this Lion Lord” (*Brah Sihinga aṅga ni*). To anyone in the least familiar with the habits of copyists and inscription writers in Buddhist art, this is a clear statement that the image is a copy, at one or more removes, of an image bearing the name “Lion”; and because of the fame of the “Lion of the Sākhyas” no less than the similarity of the iconography, there can be no reasonable doubt as to the ultimate model.

There is another bronze image at Chiang Mai called the “Lion Lord” (Phra Sing), in a chapel in the monastery of the same name (Wat Phra Sing). It bears no inscription, but it is similar in iconography and in style to the dated series, and attributable to the same period.

Because of all these similarities, we have given the name “Lion Type” to all the bronzes of Lanna having this iconography (e.g. fig. 6). The flame surmounting the protuberance of the skull is in the form of a lotus bud; the monastic robe is worn in the open mode, with a short flap of cloth over the left shoulder, descending only as far as the nipple. The Lion Type is similar to the standard Sukhothai type in that the right hand performs the gesture of Victory over Māra (i.e. Earth-calling) and that the robe is in the open mode; but it differs from it in several conspicuous respects: the form of the head-flame, the shortness of the shoulder-flap, and the adamantine (*vajrāsana*) instead of the hero posture (*virāsana*). In all these features the Lion Type resembles the black stone reliefs of the Pāla period that are copies of the Lion of the Sākyas.

* A misreading of the Jinakalamali has led some scholars to believe that the Seven Spires was an old monument (13th century ?), merely restored by Tiloka—in other words, that the laterite core was old, and the brick and stucco facing was Tiloka’s work. But Mr. Hutchinson proved that the entire monument was built by Tiloka ab initio. (See Hutchinson. *The Seven Spires*, Journal of the Siam Society, vol. XXXIX/1). As to the different materials, nearly every monument of any size in Lanna has a laterite core with a facing of brick and stucco : such has been the practice from the Mōn period at Lamphun right up to modern times, so it proves nothing about the date.

** Mr. Hutchinson suggested that he got the plans from another copy at Pagan; but a study of the architecture of the three monuments shows this to be impossible : the Seven Spires monument has several features in common with Bodhgayā that are absent in the Pagan copy. See Griswold. *The Holy Land Transported*. Parnavitana Felicitation Volume (1962). Cf. “*The Arts of Thailand*,” p. 122 and figs. 95-99.



Stylistically, however, the Lion Type is closer to the Sukhothai. It is made of bronze, and modeled in the full round, instead of being a stone relief as in the Pāla. It has the same fluency of modeling as Sukhothai, and the same lotus-bud hands, and the same notched design to indicate the pleat ends of the shoulder-flap as if seen in perspective. Yet a few of the more conspicuous stylistic features of the Pāla model are appended to it, such as the plump forms and the majestic, almost imperious expression of the face.

In other words the Lion Type is exactly what we should expect if sculptors who were trained in the Sukhothai tradition were required to copy a Pāla model— something completely unfamiliar to them, as it was made by an alien school three hundred years or more before their own time.

Sometime between 1455 and 1470, we must believe, Tiloka's agents returned from Bodhgayā bringing with them the plans of the Mahābodhi and a small replica of the Lion of the Sākyas. It was either this Indian replica, or else a bronze copy of it made by Tiloka's sculptors, that was installed as the principal image at the Seven Spires. In either case it soon gave rise to other copies, of which twelve examples bearing dated inscriptions are known, plus a much greater number without inscriptions, including the Lion Lord at Wat Phra Sing.

There is no good reason to believe that any of the undated Lion Type images are more than a few years older than the oldest dated example (1470); in any case they are no older than the founding of the Seven Spires in 1455.

Standing Buddha; Bronze; Sukhothai style,
Wat Chang Kham, Nan.

Many Bangkok scholars, however, argue otherwise. In the 1920's Prince Damrong and Professor Coedès, when they were beginning to sort out the various styles of Buddha images, noted the resemblance of the Lion Type to Pāla models, and tentatively attributed it to about the same date. They gave it the name "Chiang Saen," after a place where several excellent examples were discovered, and which was supposed to have been a Thai capital before the capture of Lamphun. At the same time the "Mixed Types," which we shall discuss in a moment, were recognized as attributable to Chiang Mai; but as they all came from Lanna, Bangkok connoisseurs fell into the habit of calling the Lion Type "early Chiang Saen." and the Mixed Types "later Chiang Saen". Professor Coedès has accepted the revised chronology, but Bangkok scholars hesitate to do so.*

King Tiloka also commanded his sculptors to make copies of models from other schools of art Ceylon, Cambodia, Sukhothai, and U-Thong.

So several different series arose, which are superficially very different from the Lion Type, and from one another as well. Though their iconography is so eclectic, their style is reasonably uniform, as we know from nearly a hundred dated examples. The finest examples of these "Mixed Types," as we have found it convenient to call them, are copies or imitations of Sukhothai models (Fig. 5).

Such was the art of the Lanna image-makers during the Golden Age: on the one hand the Lion Type, commonly called "early Chiang Saen;" on the other hand the Mixed Types, commonly called "later Chiang Saen"; but both, according to all the evidence, about contemporary with each other. Though both types were produced all over Lanna—at Lamphun, Chiang Saen, and other cities as well as at Chiang Mai—the center of production was naturally in the capital. That is where the finest examples are to be found in the greatest number; and there is no reason to associate either type particularly with Chiang Saen.

The Golden Age lasted until some time after the Burmese conquered Lanna in 1556, and even as late as the 17th century and occasional masterpiece was produced.



Phra Sing, Wat Phra Sing, Chiang Mai.

* For the argument, see "The Arts of Thailand" pp. 121-126, and the references cited therein.

U-THONG AYUDHYĀ AND THE NATIONAL STYLE

In 1350 the Prince of U-thong founded Ayudhya, which became the strongest and most prosperous kingdom in the Southeast Asia Peninsula.

Around 1430 its armies invaded Cambodia and captured Angkor, but retired soon after. A few years later Sukhothai, long since reduced to vassalage, was incorporated into the kingdom. The rulers of Ayudhya thought of themselves as inheritors of both the Thai tradition of Sukhothai and the Khmer tradition of Angkor. Though they were Theravāda Buddhists and gave generously to religion, they also honored the Brahmins and took over the Hindu ceremonial of the Angkorian Court.

It is the custom to classify under the name U-Thong a very numerous category of bronze Buddha images. Though it was recognized that most of them might be more correctly termed “early Ayudhya”, some of them might be pre-Ayudhya; so the less specific appellation was chosen. They combine Mōn, Khmer and Thai ingredients in varying proportions. If we wish to subdivide them, we can call those that most resemble Dvāravatī Group A (Fig. 8), those with Khmer looking faces Group B (Fig. 9) and those with oval faces Group C (Fig. 10).

The dates of the three groups, which no doubt overlapped to some extent, are uncertain. For reasons with which we need not trouble the reader, and which in any event are not conclusive, we may propose the following as a working hypothesis:

Group A: 13th-14th century

Group B: 1350-1425

Group C: 1400-1475

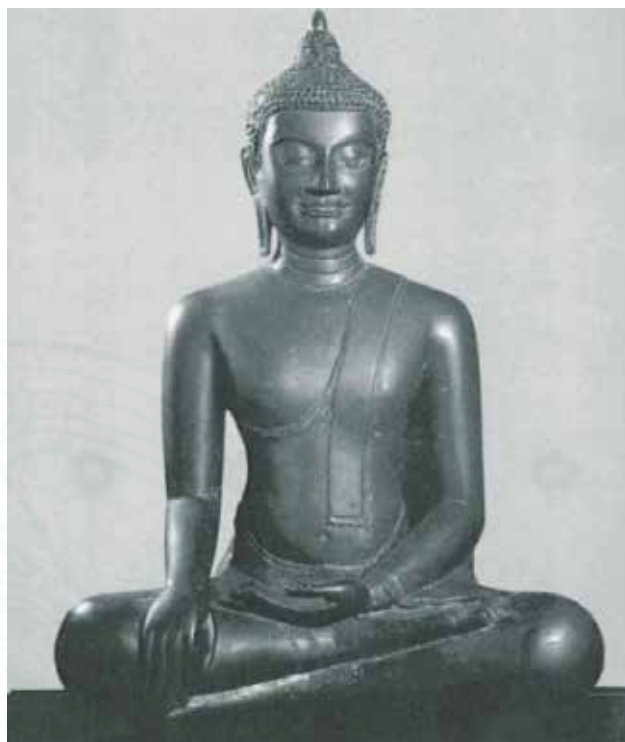


Fig. 8 Seated Buddha; Bronze; height 49 cm. U-Thong style, Group A National Museum, Bangkok. (“Arts of Thailand” fig. 124).



Fig. 9 Seated Buddha; Bronze; height 28 cm. U-Thong style, Group B. (early Ayudhya); from Wat Ratchaburana, Chao Sam Phraya National Museum, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya.





Seated Buddha; Bronze; U-Thong, Group A.

A deposit of images recently discovered in the crypt of Wat Rājapūrana Ayudhyā, would tend to corroborate these guesses. The monument, according to the annals, was founded in 1424; we do not know how many years it took to finish, but the deposit would be placed in the crypt when it was nearing completion. A few of the images found in the deposit are obviously much older than the monument; as to the rest, it is reasonable to assume that those found in the greatest quantity were almost new when they were deposited, while those found in lesser but still large quantity were a little older. There were two or three dozen examples of Group B, and several hundred of Group C.

In general the U-Thong bronzes are marked by a sort of soldierly dignity, particularly Group B with their square jaws and uncompromising expression (Fig. 9). Group C owe more to Sukhothai, but convey little sense of spiritual fervor; the modeling is firm rather than fluent (Fig. 10). Group C images were produced in enormous quantity. The bronze-casters developed great dexterity in making the metal go as far as possible, often using so little wax in preparing for the casting that the metal is no more than a paper-thin skin over the baked clay core.

Most Westerners find it easy to appreciate the U-Thong bronzes. The human anatomy, though stylized and simplified, is far less amended by supernatural consideration than at Sukhothai. The forms are strong and decisive, though frequently softened by a richly variegated patina which it is worth while examining under a powerful glass.

A large group of stone Buddhas are very similar to the U-Thong B and C bronzes. In spite of this, when we wrote about them several years ago (in *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. XXXV III/2), historical considerations prompted US to date them all in the 17th century. We were wrong; and Dr. R.S. le May, who had previously attributed an earlier date to them, was right. Now, since examples have been discovered in the Wat Rājapūrana crypt (Fig. 11), we can safely date them with their bronze counterparts.



Fig. 10 Seated Buddha; Bronze; height 88 cm. U-Thong style, Group C. (early Ayudhyā) ; from Wat Ratchaburana, Chao Sam Phraya National Museum, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya.

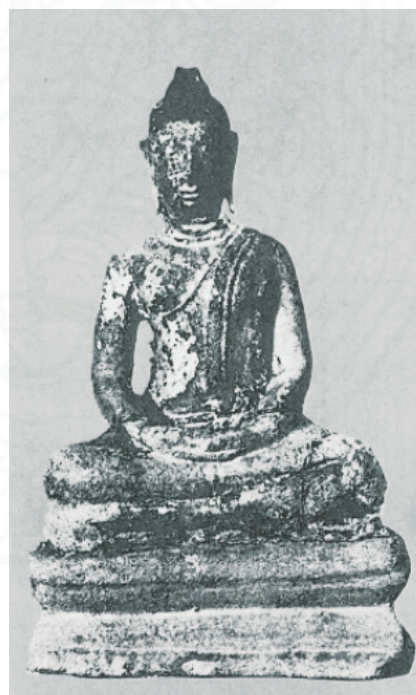


Fig. 11 Seated Buddha; Stone; height 15 cm. Early Ayudhyā (cf. “U-Thong Group C”); from Wat Ratchaburana, Chao Sam Phraya National Museum, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya.



Fig. 12 Seated Buddha; bronze plates over a masonry core ; height 12.45 m. National Style, Wihan Mongkhonbophit, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya.

If we want to go on calling the bronzes U-Thong and it would be difficult to change so firmly-established a custom—we should call the stone figures that resemble them “U-Thong” too, reserving the term “Ayudhyā style” for those that are of demonstrably later date.

Around the middle of the 15th century the U-Thong style began to merge into the “ordinary Ayudhyā” or National Style. One of the most impressive examples is a huge image of bronze plates over a masonry core, over 10 metres in height, and known as Maṅgalapabitra, in Ayudhyā. (Fig. 12) It is thought to date from the 16th century.

The National Style lasted for more than 300 years, and ended badly. Mass production was its downfall : the image-makers, perhaps, forgot how to use the sort of memory-picture and concentration that could give life to “copying”, and became content with mere copying in the Western sense. Some of their best work is in figures of the Buddha wearing the royal attire; but it is the attire, rather than the Buddha, that counts.

THE BANGKOK PERIOD

In 1767 Ayudhyā was captured by the Burmese and stripped of its treasures. During the disorders the city caught fire and burnt to the ground.

The Thai did not attempt to rebuild the old capital; instead they established a new one farther down the river at Bangkok. At first it was on the right bank (Thonburi), but in 1782 it was transferred to the present site of Bangkok, on the left bank.

The outstanding masterpiece of the Bangkok period is the colossal reclining Buddha in the Jetubanārāma (Wat Pho), which is made of gilded lacquer over a masonry core and is over 46 metres long. It dates from the reign of King Rāma III (1824-1851). It is difficult to judge as a piece of sculpture, because the hall in which it lies, vast though it is, is still too small to allow the spectator to get far enough away to have anything like a full view. It is, nevertheless, a serene figure and a deeply moving piece of work.

It was also in the reign of King Rāma III that an attempt was made to standardize the iconography of Buddha images. At the King’s invitation, the Prince Patriarch drew up a list of forty-four episodes from the Buddha’s life that were suitable to be depicted in sculpture, and specified the correct posture and hand-position for each. Some of these were traditional; some were newly invented. Most of the new postures were quickly forgotten, nor have the rules about the old postures been very strictly observed since.

The Buddha images of the Bangkok period, though extremely numerous, cannot be compared to those of earlier days in quality. Nevertheless the tradition is still alive. And the great masterpieces of the past have never lost their meaning for the Thai people. They fulfill the simple man’s need to worship and to be protected; and they fulfill the philosopher’s need to be reminded, in the midst of the modern world, that there is still a Doctrine that can put an end to pain and suffering.





Seated Buddha; Bronze; U-Thong, Group B.

A NOTE ON SPELLING

As most of the proper names in this book were written in the Pali and Sanskrit languages, the editorial board has provided a table comparing them with the spelling according to the Royal Institute's Principles for the Romanization of the Thai Script which is more familiar and widely used today as shown below.

Words written in the Pali and Sanskrit languages.	Words transcribed to the Royal Institute's Principles for the Romanization of the Thai Script
Ayudhyā	Ayutthaya
Buddha Sihinga	Phuttha Sihing
Cetiya	Chedi
Dvāravatī	Thawarawadi
Dhanapurī	Thonburi
Iryāpatha	Iriyabot
Jetubanārāma	Chetuphon
Kūkuṭa	Kukut
Kalakòt	Kalakot
Mahābodhārāma	Mahaphotharam
Maṅgalapabitra	Mongkhonbophit
Māravijaya	Marawichai
Mòṇ	Mon
Pavarānivesa	Bowonniwet
Peñcamapabitra	Benchamabophit
Rājapūraṇa	Ratchaburana
Sri Sajjanālaya	Si Satchanalai
Sukhodaya	Sukhothai
Svargaloka	Sawankhalok



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