

BANGKOK MUSEUM STONE INSCRIPTION OF
MAHENDRAVARMAN

by

B. Ch. Chhabra, New Delhi.

*Joint Director General of Archaeology,
Government of India*

On my way back from Indonesia to India in December 1960, I happened to stop for a couple of days at Bangkok. While there, I paid a visit to the National Museum of Thailand in company with Mr. Nirmal J. Singh, Press Attache, Embassy of India in Thailand. We were cordially received and shown around by Prof. Luang Boribhand of that museum. I was sad to learn that there had recently been a conflagration in one wing of the great museum, causing considerable damage to valuable records and monuments. The gallery of stone inscriptions had also suffered much from that fire. As we were inspecting the exhibits in that gallery, my attention was suddenly attracted by a stone slab with a short early Sanskrit inscription, beautifully engraved in four lines. The same inscription forms the subject matter of the present paper.

The inscribed slab, I was told, had been newly acquired by the National Museum of Bangkok. I learnt further that it had not yet been published anywhere.

I am editing it at the instance of Mr. Nirmal J. Singh who was to supply me with a facsimile of the inscription as well as with the details as to the find-place and the circumstances of the discovery of the inscribed slab. I received from him an inked estampage of the inscription in February 1961, through the courtesy of Prof. Luang Boribhand. The accompanying photograph is a reproduction of the same estampage. This stone inscription had been found at Aranyaprades District (about 350 kilometres east of Bangkok) by Mr. Serie Naenhna, assistant curator of the Provincial Museum. He found it in the vicinity of Prasat Khao Chongsra Chaeng during his expedition last year.

The inscribed space measures 28×30 cm. The four lines of the inscription constitute but one stanza, each line containing one quarter of the verse, the metre being *Anushtubh*. The alphabet is an ornamental type of what is commonly known as Pallava-Grantha of South India of about the seventh century A.D., and the language is Sanskrit, as already indicated. As to the contents, the inscription records the excavation of a tank, called *Śankara Tatūka*, by Mahēndravarman.

Even though there is no indication in the inscription as to the identity of this Mahēndravarman, it is possible to identify him with the King Mahēndravarman of Kambuja or Kambujadēsa, *i.e.* Cambodia, son of Viravarman and the youngest brother of Bhavarman. This last mentioned ruler is reputed to have founded the dynasty of Kambuja kings, having defeated his rivals, of the earlier kingdom of Fu-nan.¹ It goes without saying that the present Thailand at that time formed part of Kambuja or Cambodia. Bhavarman was succeeded by his youngest brother whose name was Chitrasēna and who assumed the second name Mahēndravarman at the time of his coronation. The practice of assuming coronation names was in vogue in ancient India and was followed also in lands and islands that came under the Indo-Aryan influence. The reign period of this Chitrasēna-Mahēndravarman falls between the closing years of the sixth century and the early years of the seventh century A.D.

It is further of interest to note here that the same Chitrasēna-Mahēndravarman is known to us from two more stone inscriptions that have already been published. The earlier of these two is known so far in three versions and the later in as many as six versions.² Again, the earlier one mentions him only as Chitrasēna, indicating thereby that by that time, he had not yet come to the throne. The later one expressly states 'that he was formerly known as Chitrasēna and assumed the name Mahēndravarman at the time of coronation.'³ Since our inscription makes him already well-known as

1. Compare R.C. Mujumdar's *Kambuja-desā* (or An Ancient Hindu Colony in Cambodia). Madras 1944, pp. 47 ff.

2. *Ibid.* p. 54.

3. *Ibid.*



Mahendrarvarman's stone inscriptions in the Museum at Bangkok, Thailand.

Mahēndravarman, it may be taken to be the latest of the three inscriptions so far known of him. It is quite possible that the present inscription was also made available in more than one version like the other two and that some other version or versions of it may come to light in future.

The two inscriptions already known record each the establishment of a *Śivaliṅga* by the king, which shows that he was a devout worshipper of the god Śiva. His naming the tank, the excavation of which is the object of the present inscription, as *Śaṅkara Taṭāka*, accords well with that.

Text

yaś = śrī-Mahēndravamm = ēti
 Mahēndra iva viśrutah [I *]
 sa Śaṅkaratātāk-ākhyañ =
 chakhān = ēmañ = jalāsāyam [II *]

Translation

“ He, who is known as the illustrious Mahēndravarman, famous like Mahēndra (*i.e.* Indra, the Chief among the gods), excavated this reservoir of water, named Śaṅkara Tank. ”

