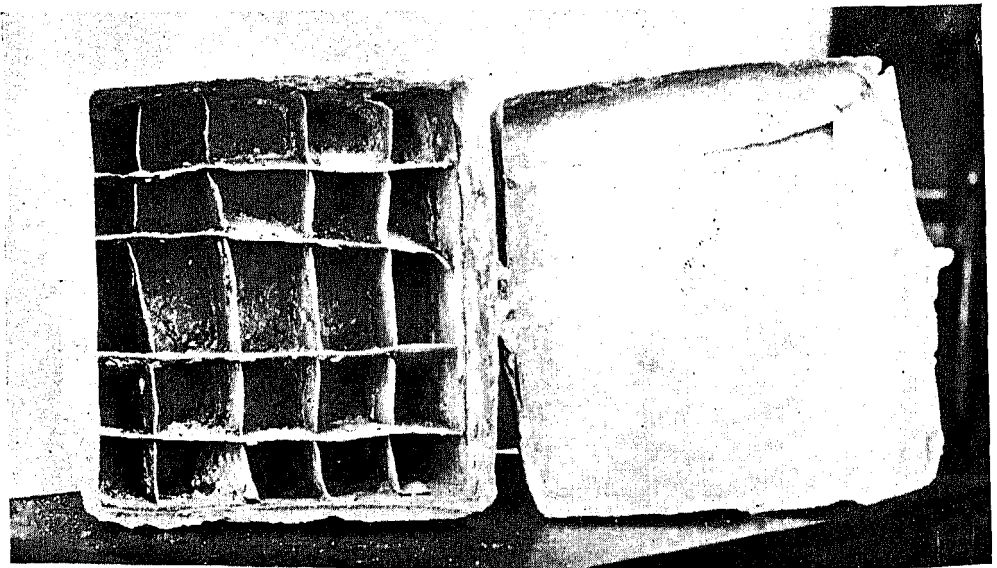




1. The Pondicherry copper casket, a cube measuring $9 \times 9 \times 9$ inches approximately, and at present kept in the Pondicherry public library. (Photo : A. Lamb)



2. View of the Pondicherry copper casket with lid open, showing the 25 compartments. (Photo : A. Lamb).

A STONE CASKET FROM SATINPRA :
SOME FURTHER OBSERVATIONS

by

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In the July 1964 number of the *Journal of the Siam Society* Dr. H.G. Quaritch Wales pointed to some interesting parallels between a stone casket from Satinpra, now preserved at Wat Majjhimāwās, Soṅ-klhā, and some caskets from Kedah, Malaysia, of which Dr. Wales excavated two damaged specimens just before the 2nd World War and I recovered six intact specimens in 1958 and 1959.¹ Dr. Wales also drew attention to similarities between the Satinpra casket and Ceylon, in the process commenting on my "tendency" to "magnify the importance of 'Indonesian' as against Indian influences in the ancient cities and routes of the Malay Peninsula". As an example of this tendency, Dr. Wales pointed to my use of the word *chandi* to describe the Kedah temple whence came the eight caskets mentioned above. In all this, I think, Dr. Wales has somewhat misrepresented my arguments: and it is for this reason that I venture to make these observations.

Both the Kedah caskets and the specimen from Satinpra are the product of an Indianised civilization, that is to say a civilization much influenced by the religions, philosophies and cosmologies of India. This does not mean that in either case they were, of necessity, the product of *Indians*. I have no doubt at all that what Dr. Wales calls "multi-chambered foundation deposit receptacles" (I have generally used the term "reliquary" as being shorter) have an Indian origin in

1. H.G. Quaritch Wales, 'A stone casket from Satinpra', *JSS* LII Pt. 2, July 1964, pp. 217-221. Simultaneously with Dr. Wales, it now transpires, I published some account of the Satinpra object. See: A. Lamb, 'Notes on Satingphra', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Society*, XXXVII, Pt. 1, July 1964, pp. 74-87.

Dr. Wales' two Kedah caskets are described in his paper, 'Archaeological Researches in Indian Colonization in Malaya', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, XVIII Pt. 1, 1940.

The 6 Kedah caskets found in 1958 and 1959 are published in detail in A. Lamb, *Chandi Bukit Batu Pahat*, Singapore 1960.

that they are the product of a scheme of religious thought that derived from the Indian subcontinent. I cannot see, however, how the statement of this fact advances particularly our investigation of any specific object or structure. It really is very like observing, after much scholarly discussion, that a Buddhist temple is *Buddhist*. In this context a typological, rather than metaphysical, approach might perhaps be more useful.

It has been in an attempt to establish typological relationships that I have compared the Kedah caskets with specimens of similar objects from Java: and there can be no doubt that here parallels of some possible significance can be drawn.² The Kedah caskets are small stone boxes, rectangular in plan, virtually without decoration. The boxes are provided with simple feet at the corners of the base, and with lids, likewise plain except for chamfered edges and a hole pierced right through their centres. Inside the boxes, on their floors, are nine circular depressions, being eight smaller depressions arranged around a larger central depression. To these objects the Javanese parallels are very close, though by no means perfect. Javanese caskets, of which a number are preserved in the Indonesian National Museum at Jakarta, are stone boxes, often extremely plain, with 9 depressions either in their floors or in a block which is then located inside the casket. The Javanese lids are frequently pierced as in the case of the Kedah specimens. I saw no Javanese casket with feet on the Kedah pattern; but, with this exception, the Kedah caskets could easily lose themselves among the Javanese caskets in Jakarta. The same cannot be said for other categories of "multi-chambered foundation deposit receptacles" from Ceylon and South East Asia.

The *yantra-galas* from Ceylon, to which Dr. Wales draws attention, are either *structures* or are containers in significant ways different from the Kedah caskets. We need not concern ourselves here with the structures. Another type of *yantra-gala*, of which there is an excellent example from Pabulu Vehera, Polonnoruwa, on display in

2. See: A. Lamb, *Chandi Bukit Batu Pahat: three additional notes*, Singapore 1961, and A. Lamb, 'Miscellaneous Papers on early Hindu and Buddhist Settlement in Northern Malaya and Southern Thailand', *Federation Museums Journal*, (New Series) VI, Kuala Lumpur 1961.

the National Museum, Colombo, certainly invites comparison with the Kedah caskets. It is, however, significantly different. It is not, in fact, a *casket* at all: rather, it is a slab of stone with 17 depressions cut into its upper surface. It was originally covered with a rough stone block and buried in the centre of the foundation of a *stupa*. Also slabs rather than caskets are the wide variety of deposit receptacles, foundation deposit holders, sacred deposit holders located at the bases of *lingga* and so on, which have come to light from Khmer sites. All, one imagines, are related in the last analysis to the deposit holders in early Indian *stupas*, from Amaravati for example, which are rough slabs with a single depression to hold the crystal relic container and covered with a further rough slab.³ Neither the Khmer examples, to which Dr. Wales does not refer in his article, nor the examples from Ceylon are anywhere as close to the Kedah caskets, typologically speaking, as are the Javanese examples. This is the gravamen of my suggestion of a possible relationship between the Kedah and Javanese caskets. As for Dr. Wales' point about the use of the Javanese word *chandi* to describe the Kedah temple on the Sungei Batu Pahat, here it is worth remarking in passing there is no attempt to magnify Indonesian influences. *Chandi*, which may have originally meant tomb, has acquired in Indonesian usage the meaning "a stone temple"; and, when the reconstruction of the Sungei Batu Pahat structure was in progress, we thought that it was a more elegant word to use than the Malay "rumah berhala", literally meaning "idol house".⁴

How does the Satiṅpra object fit into the scheme of things? It is, of course, as Dr. Wales' photograph makes clear enough, not really a casket at all, but rather a stone block with depressions cut in to its upper surface. In this respect it is indeed closer to the Khmer and Singhalese deposit holders than to the Kedah caskets and those from Java. However, in its external dimensions and shape, both of the base block and of the lid, the Satiṅpra object does indeed resemble

3. There is an admirable example of this class of object in the Madras Museum.
4. As for the notice on the site of the partially reconstructed Bukit Batu Pahat Temple, which Dr. Wales appears to lay to my door, I must disclaim all responsibility. It was composed and erected by the Malayan Director of Museums without consulting me.

very closely the Kedah caskets, though it is much more crudely executed than the Kedah examples and is without feet. It may be, perhaps, that the Satippra object was made at a later date than the Kedah caskets when the detailed ritual behind the Kedah caskets had been forgotten. On the other hand, it may be much earlier than the Kedah specimens. We simply do not know; and we are extremely unlikely to know until the site from which the Satippra object came has been located and systematically excavated. It is to be hoped that this is a task which Thai archaeologists will undertake in the near future.

In his article Dr. Wales points to my negative results in a quest for typological similarities between the Kedah caskets and India. This, it seems, Ceylon apart, has also been Dr. Wales' experience. Of course, the main interest in the quest for Indian parallels lay in the light that this might throw on Dr. Wales' hypothesis that the early settlement of Kedah was the work of "Pallava colonists" from Tamilnad. The failure, in this context, to find Pallava parallels for the Kedah caskets appeared to me to be another argument against Dr. Wales' theory which was supported by singularly little concrete evidence. Since the publication of Dr. Wales' article on the Satippra casket in the *Journal of the Siam Society* I have been obliged to conclude that it may be necessary to modify this negative conclusion. While travelling in South India in January 1965 I came across a copper casket in the Pondicherry public library which may well have to be taken into consideration if the casket problem is to be further illuminated.

Two photographs of the Pondicherry casket are reproduced here, and, so far as I know, for the first time. The object is made up of copper sheets. It is a cube with all dimensions measuring about 9 inches. The lid has a single hinge at one side and is provided with a simple hasp at the other. Inside, the floor of the casket is divided into 25 compartments by means of copper strips arranged much as are arranged the partitions of an egg box. This casket, it seems, was discovered a few years ago during the course of well digging in a village on the edge of Pondicherry territory. I was unable to obtain any

precise details about the circumstances of its discovery beyond the fact that this did not occur within the discernable context of any structural remains. There is a possibility, so my information would suggest, that the casket, when discovered, contained a number of gems and other substances along the lines of the intact Kedah caskets I found in 1958 and 1959; but, if so, then the contents of the Pondicherry casket have by now disappeared. I was able to learn nothing about the Pondicherry casket from the Indian Archaeological Survey in Madras, and the Madras Museum appeared to be unaware of its existence. The Pondicherry casket, therefore, remains yet another mystery to be solved in the quest for a full explanation of the origins of "multi-chambered foundation deposit receptacles", of which the Satiṅpra casket is a fascinating example.

