

A NOTE ON THE ANCIENT CITY CALLED LAVAPURA

by

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In 1966 in the neighbourhood of the town of Uthong in Province Suphanburi (Northwest of Bangkok; 130 km. by road) an ancient jar was found containing a number of silver coins. As usual with private finds of this kind no proper record was kept of the site of the find or of the various silver coins in the jar. Some are said to have been of the conch-shell type.¹

By permission of the owner, Mr. Chalerm Yongboonkerd (Bangkok), numismat and member of the Siam Society, we are able to here illustrate a coin from the find. This coin constitutes a new type; it appears to be pure silver and, after cleaning, shows a light colour; its diameter is 1.8 cm. The importance of this coin for the early history of Thailand lays in the fact that there is shown an inscription on each of the two faces (see figure) which together form a unit and which is read by Mr. Chalerm Yongboonkerd and the author as:

*l a v a }
p u r a }* *l a v a p u r a²*

That is, the city (fortified) of *Lava*—in Thai: *Lawo*. The script is the usual so-called Pallava script from Southern India of about the 7th century A.D.; a script used during the Dvāravatī period.

This new evidence shows that in the lower Chao Phraya delta of present-day Thailand, there was a city or fortified town called *Lavapura* as early as about the 7th century A.D.

It seems reasonable to hold that from this *Lavapura*, the name of the present-day town Lopburi was derived. The exact location of *Lavapura* is, however, still to be determined; obviously, it need not

1) Guehler, U., 'Essay on the symbols and marks of old Siamese coins' *Studies of Old Siamese Coins* Vol X (Reprint Series) The Siam Society 1961 p. 135, 136, 145, pl II 7.

2) The reading *lavapura* was confirmed as correct by Prof. G. Coedès in a personal communication to the author dated 8 January 1967.

necessarily have been sited where Lopburi is today. Coedès has shown that in the time of the Kingdom of Dvāravatī as from the 7th century A.D., Lopburi, now known under its proper name, *Lavapura*, had been of importance. The people of *Lavapura*—based on the existing Dvāravatī evidence as presented by Coedès—were Mon and their religion was Buddhism.³

This *Lavapura* coin is closely connected with another silver medal or coin bearing the name of the King of Dvāravatī—*çriñdvāravatīçvara*, in Pallava characters of the same period. The latter was found in Nakorn Pathom province which adjoins the province of Suphanburi of which Úthong is a district.⁴

The recently inaugurated National Museum at Úthong contains beautifully arranged exhibits which demonstrate the importance of this area for the Funan and Dvāravatī periods in the archaeology and early history of Thailand.⁵

The *Lavapura* coin indicates that the city called *Lavapura* belonged to the realm of the King of Dvāravatī. It is the oldest known recording of the name of a city in Thailand.

3) Coedès, G., in 'Le royaume mōn de Dvāravatī' *Les États Hindouïstes d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* Paris 1964 pp. 145-47.

4) Boeles, J.J., 'The King of Śrī Dvāravatī and his Regalia' *Journal of the Siam Society* vol 52 pt 1, 1964 pp. 99-114.

5) Boisselier, J., *Ú-thong et son importance pour l'Histoire de la Thailande* Fine Arts Department publication B.E. 2509 (1966): ໂປຣາມວິທາເຮົ່ອງເມືອງອ່ອທະນາ. See also: Quaritch Wales, H.G., 'Dvāravatī in South-East Asian Cultural History' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* April 1966 pp. 40-52.



Silver coin from Uthong, Thailand, showing *lava* and *pura* (*lavapura*) in so-called Pallava script.

