

TWO DVARAVATI FIGURINES

by

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Early in 1967, the Fine Arts Department became aware that farmers in Chansen, Nakhon Sawan province, were turning up potsherds, figurines, amulets and other objects of unusual or unknown types. A study of aerial photographs of the area showed that there had once been an ancient town one kilometer northwest of the present village, of about 700×700 meters contained within a moat. This was the type of small site which might be well worked in one or two seasons, and in 1968 and 1969 the University Museum, Philadelphia, team of Dales, Bronsen and Weatherill joined with members of the Fine Arts Department and Silapakorn University to make a study and excavation of the area.

The site of old Chansen seems to have had no special advantages for either defense or communication with other centers. The land does have adequate fertility and is not as much plagued by drought as the area to the north or northeast. It was never a large or wealthy city but there was a continual inhabitation from the Late Metal Age to around 1000 A.D. when there was a break or an extremely limited land use until relatively modern times.

The excavators will eventually issue the full technical report which will include some valuable material on the typeology and chronology of Dvaravati pottery backed up by the thermoluminescence and C14 analysis of Chansen material taken to the University Museum laboratory. This article is concerned merely with the identity and historical significance of a group of unusual figurines from the site.

The molded, terracotta figurines, 6-7" high, are of two main types: a standing, nude, youthful male, and a standing full-busted female wearing a long skirt.

The first male figure which appeared in 1966 was a surface find at Chansen and was rapidly followed by another find at U'Thong. Several of these are now known.

Fig. 1 is a good example of Type A. The figurine, about 7" high, cast in a mold, shows a stocky, boyish male, nude except for the adornment of bracelets, amulet, and belt. The face is round with large oval eyes, arched eyebrows, a broad nose and a broad smiling mouth. His hair is dressed in strands, pulled up to a center topknot and bound with a fillet around the forehead. Closely fitting around his neck, like a torque, is a band or chain to which is affixed a pendant. He wears several plain bracelets on each arm and a knotted or link belt low over his hips. He stands on a rough base and between his legs squats a monkey clinging to the boy's thigh.

In other examples, Fig. 2, it is clear that in one hand the boy holds a rope which is fastened to the monkey's harness, and usually in the other hand he has a bit of fruit for the animal.

There is another version of the "monkey boy", Type B, which is far more crudely made and wears a somewhat different neck ornament. The broad, smiling face and the treatment of the hair are the same as in Type A, as are the low slung belt and the arm bracelets. The trefoil-shaped pendant, however, is suspended from a thick cord which is draped around the shoulders and tied in the back. The ends of this neck sash are tasseled and hang down nearly to the waist.

In one example excavated at Chansen, Figs. 3-4, no monkey appears although there is room for him between the legs. He does exist in other Type B figures and in this case may have been made separately and not well affixed. The boy holds a grape-like cluster in one hand, perhaps the *lom yai* or *maprang* fruit. The object in the other hand may also be fruit tied by the stem, or perhaps a small water bottle.

The female figurines from Chansen are about the same size as the male ones. A typical example, Pl. 5, shows a figure of heavy proportions. The face is round, the eyebrows prominent, the nose broad, the mouth parted to show the teeth. The hair is in large flat curls. She wears large earrings and a neck ornament with a double loop in front, a single one in back. There is one heavy bracelet on each arm. She wears a long sarong with a pocket fold on the right side and the skirt bells out slightly, hiding the feet on a small base.

In the collection of the Chansen wat there is an interesting fragment which may have some relation to this figure. It is the lower half of a female with a child pressed against her simple, lapped skirt. The hair of the child, a small girl, is dressed in strands and pulled into a topknot similar to that of the monkey boy.

The excavation records show that the two types of male figures and the female come only from the level called Phase V in the Chansen chronology which dates between A.D. 600 and 800. No material suitable for C14 tests was found here, the dating being established by a number of C14 dates between A.D. 450 and 600 for Phase IV, and 250-400 for Phase III, and also by the similarity of Phase V potsherds to those from other Dvaravati sites.

The period of A.D. 600-800 falls within the 7th-10th century span traditionally assigned to the Dvaravati empire, a dating which has been based only on the obvious stylistic derivation of the Buddha images from those of Gupta and post Gupta style in India. In truth, all we know of this period's history, through Chinese references and a seal inscribed "King of Dvaravati," is the fact that such a kingdom existed. We do not know when it was established or where was its capital. Certainly it was not small, rather poor Chansen, and probably not the richer U'Thong, but both had some contact with Indian culture from the 2nd century A.D., and both also had at least a millenium of continuous habitation.

The boy with the monkey, and the female figurine seem to be unique in Southeast Asia for this period, and our main question at this point is what might have been their inspiration and their role in the local culture. Since we can establish that they are of Dvaravati date, which is the period of strongest Indian influence, we could expect to find some clues in India.

There is no exact parallel for the female figure, but there are enough stylistic comparisons to give us some relationship. The terracotta statuettes of Ahichichihatra, 5th-6th century, show a tightly curled treatment of the hair similar to that of our female figure, and a style of strands and topknot like that of the male. There is also from the same site a headless figure of a full-busted woman holding a child.¹ There is

1) Agrawala, V.S. "Terracotta Figurines of Ahichichihatra" *Ancient India*, No. 4, 1948. Pl. L, b., Pl. II, b., Pl. XLIX, a.

another such figure from Jhusi of the Late Gupta period, and also a terracotta head with large curls.²

In the Patna Museum, figurines of the early Gupta period from Belwa show the large eyes and thick lips.³ In Rajasthan, near Udaipur, there are a series of stone figures, Gupta and post-Gupta, of women holding children.⁴ In one example similar to the piece in the Chansen wat, the child clings to the woman's skirt.

These are very general similarities, and what is not found in India at this time is a human figure with the combination of the animal-like round, protruding eyes and bared teeth. The dwarf may have such eyes but not the menacing teeth. In Thailand, these round, pop eyes are known as "crocodile eyes" and are one of the characteristics of a demon. A few examples of this type appear in the Ku Bua site of the Dvaravati period. Certainly the iconography is firmly fixed by the Khmer period, 10th-13th centuries. In both free standing sculpture and relief, the demons who struggle with the gods are clearly identifiable by their round eyes and slightly visible fangs.

The Chansen figurine must represent a female demon, perhaps a local *phi*, perhaps one of Mara's army, or the ogre, Hariti, devourer of children before she was converted to Buddhism and compassion.

The Indian background for the male figurine, the "monkey boy" is more definite and quite surprising.

From Taxila in Northwest India, the area of Graeco-Roman artistic influence, we illustrate the 1st century A.D. figure of a nude boy holding a bird in one hand. Around the boy's neck is a ring suspending the same slightly trefoil ornament as in the Dvaravati figurines⁵, Pl. 6. This same ornament or amulet appears in other examples of 1st to 3rd century Gandhara art. A relief from Lahore illustrated here, Pl. 7, shows the profile of a youth wearing it on a closely fitted neck ring.⁶ In a late

2) Chhabra, B.C. "Antiquities from Jhusi and other sites." *Lalit Kala*, No. 9, 1961, Pl. V.

3) Patna Museum Catalogue of Antiquities, Patna., 1965. Pl. XLIX, Nos. 2870, 1416.

4) Agrawala, R.C. "Some more unpublished sculptures from Rajasthan" *Lalit Kala*, No. 10, Oct. 1961. Pl. XXL, 10, 11. Pl. XXII, 13.

5) Best reproduction in Ingholt, *Gandharan Art in Pakistan*, N.Y. 1957, Fig. 440.

6) Ibid. Fig. 449.

3rd century sculpture of Pancika and Hariti with five children, the nude child between the two adults wears the amulet. Two of the others have no ornaments and the chests of the others are not visible.⁷ It is also found on two caryatid dwarfs from Swat,⁸ and one from Amaravati⁹ wears it on a longer chain as does a figure from Arikamedu.

Another small figure from Arikamedu of the 2nd-3rd century is of a nude boy holding a bird and wearing a low-slung, link belt and a neck ornament like the Chansen boy.¹⁰ Another nude boy holding a bird comes from a Satavahana site at Brahmapuri.¹¹ No jewelry is visible on this badly damaged and headless piece, but at Chebrola, Guntur district, a site dated by Satavahana coins to the 2nd-3rd century, there was a figurine of a nude boy wearing an amulet and a link belt.¹²

The nature of the ornament is solved by the discovery of several examples in clay from Kohlhapur,¹³ Sisupalgarh¹⁴ and other Satavahana sites of the 2nd-3rd century.¹⁵ They are pottery replicas of the Roman amulet known as a *bullā*. Some of them are stamped with Roman coins, making the connection even more clear.

In Roman society the *bullā* seems to have gone through several changes of fashion or emphasis. Probably of Etruscan origin, it was at first a golden insignia or locket worn by patrician men and women, later only by children and finally it was reserved for boys. In Roman times when it was no longer an insignia of rank, it could be made of bronze or even leather instead of gold. It was a kind of childhood charm against

- 7) Marshall, Sir John. *The Buddhist Art of Gandhara*, Cambridge 1960, Pl. 105, Fig. 144. It is in the Peshawar Museum.
- 8) Faccenna, D. *Sculptures from the Sacred Area of Butkara I*. Pt. 3, vol. 2, Rome 1964. Pl. CCCXXXVIII, Pl. CCCXXXIX.
- 9) Barrett, D. *Sculptures from Amaravati in the British Museum*. London, Pl. XXXIX.
- 10) Casal, J.M. *Fouilles à Virampatnam-Arikamedu*. Paris 1949. Pl. XIX, b., Pl. XX, B.
- 11) Sankalia and Dikshit, *Excavations at Brahmapuri (Kolhapur) 1945-46*. Poona, 1952. Pl. XXI.
- 12) *Indian Archaeology 1962-63*, New Delhi, 1965. Pl. XCVIII, b.
- 13) Sankalia and Dikshit, *op. cit.* Pl. XXVI, 6.
- 14) *Ancient India*, No. 5, Pl. L, a, B.
- 15) Also found at Rajghat. See *Journal Numismatic Society of India*. Vol. III, L941, Pl. V.17-19. Also the map.

disaster, and when the boy came of age it was laid with his childish, short garment, the *tunica recta*, on the family altar.

The extent of the impression that contact with Graeco-Roman culture made on India is not yet fully understood. Art historians have concentrated on the obvious stylistic influence over the early Buddhist art of Gandhara, and other specialists have produced a certain amount of information on the Kushan and Satavahana trade relations with Rome during the 1st to 3rd centuries, but for either the Classicist or the Asian scholar it is an area on the periphery of his interest. Very little research has been done on the question of what philosophical, cultural, technical, etc., ideas might have been carried in with the imported pottery, glass, and other trade goods. Certainly there was opportunity for an exchange of information between some Indians and foreigners during the three months or more that a ship's crew had to spend ashore waiting for the monsoon winds to change direction.¹⁶ Perhaps a good example in support of this statement is the site of Salihundam in Andhra Pradesh, very near the ancient port of Kalingapatnam. A Buddhist monastery was on a hill which was known as a landmark for sailors navigating the coastal strip, and some of them must have visited the place during their time in port.

"The discovery of Roman icons and clay bullae at Salihundam show the site was not only a meeting place of the northern and southern cultural waves but also had vigorous contacts with the outside world, particularly the kingdoms around the Mediterranean."¹⁷

Why was the bulla imitated in Salihundam? It may be enough to say that South Asian life was beset with the many dangers of war, famine, disease, ignorance; a child's chances of survival were slim and must have often appeared to depend on sheer fortune. One could guess that an apparently magic talisman, (like an amulet around the neck of a robust young cabin boy), from a famous and powerful foreign nation, would be welcomed and copied.

16) Miller, J.I. *The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1969. p. 19.

17) Subrahmanyam, R. *Salihundam, A Buddhist Site in Andhra Pradesh*, Government Archaeological Series No. 17, Hyderabad 1964.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



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Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

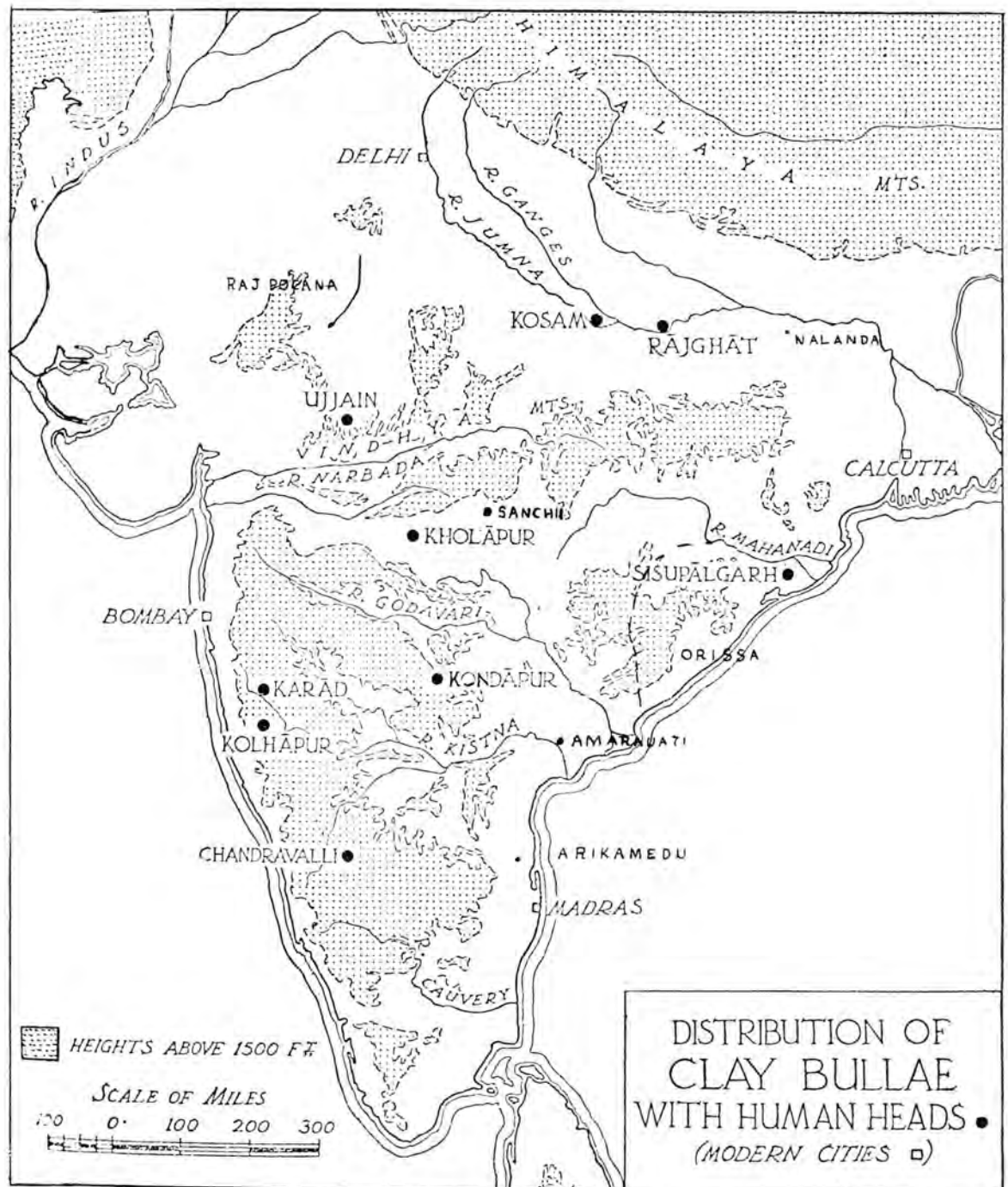


Fig. 10

The Indian figurines of the naked boy wearing a bulla and carrying a bird must surely be explained as votives for a coming of age ceremony of Roman origin. However, the charm must have shown a lack of efficacy as it had a relatively short life between the 1st and late 3rd centuries, and it makes no permanent impact on Indian customs.

It is not easy to explain its re-appearance, or at least the appearance of a figure of similar style and presumably similar purpose, some four centuries later in central Thailand. The first answer, of course, is that the type may exist in sites of intermediate date which have not yet been discovered. In their early stages Chansen and U-Thong were part of the Funan culture which covered a large part of present Thailand, Cambodia and South Vietnam. Roman coins of 1st and 2nd century date were found at Oc-Eo, the best known Funan site,¹⁸ and objects of early Indian manufacture come from all three places.¹⁹ The number of known sites dating between the 3rd and 7th centuries is utterly negligible for knowledge of the civilization that must have preceded the full flowering of Dvaravati. Prototypes for the Chansen figures may also turn up in Ceylon or Indonesia. Both had ties with Gupta India, and Ceylon had some early contact with Rome for Pliny mentions the visit of Ambassadors from Ceylon in the time of Claudius.²⁰

The little figurine of the boy with the monkey may be the earliest portrayal in Thailand of an ordinary being. It is certainly not an individual portrait, but a great deal of skill has been used to create a naturalistic image of a boy who appears to be twelve to fourteen years old, but perhaps is intended to be a few years younger. He has a round, quite engaging face, and his body and arms are stocky, almost chubby like a child. He is also nude, which is the normal and comfortable estate of children in tropical countries, and also sometimes is the only way one can identify a small figure as being a child and not an adult of minor status or who belongs to a back-ground scene. It would, for example, in the Vessantara scene on the gateway arch of Sanchi, be very

18) Malleret, *L'archaeologie du delta du Mekong*. Paris 1960 T. 2, Pl. LCIII, 1 shows the type of medallion or amulet found in Oc Eo.

19) Boisselier, J. *U-Thong et son importance pour l'histoire de Thaïlande*, Bangkok 1967.

20) Bk 6, Ch. XXII.

difficult to identify the small son and daughter of Prince Vessantara among the tightly packed crowd except for the fact that they are the only unclothed figures.

There are very few representations of children in Asian sculpture; this is an art in the service of religion and there is no place for children unless they have a definite iconographic role. Even in Gandhara, the garland bearing putti or amorini borrowed from Rome are quickly turned into dwarfs having an earth spirit connotation.

The role of both the Indian and the Dvaravati figurines must be a votive one, and the bird or the monkey must have some symbolic importance. The former may have come along with an original model as it is a frequent attribute of children in Roman sculpture, particularly from the provincial stations of Palmyra and Dura Europos.²¹ Evidently its meaning was lost or had no significance for Thailand and a monkey was substituted. This appears at first to be a puzzling choice; if it is meant to be a symbol of a boy's pet, one would expect a more usual domesticated animal. And surely, one will not find Hanuman, hero of the simian army in the Ramayana, or even a monkey from a jataka tale at the end of a rope held by a mere boy.

Thai Theravada Buddhism provides the most probable explanation for the presence of the monkey. In the long path toward enlightenment or salvation, man must learn to be the master of his mind and senses. In the early stages his mind is like a monkey; it is agile; restless, greedy, and difficult to discipline. An occasional illustrated manuscript portrays the first step toward salvation by a scene of a man trying to capture the elusive creature.²² The text says that the mind is like a monkey, the body like a clay pot (worthless and fragile).²³

21) Hopkins, *Excavations at Dura-Europos*. V. New Haven, 1939. pp. 56-58.

22) Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Teaching Dhamma by Pictures*, Bangkok, 1968. Pl. 2 (Translation of an illustrated manuscript from Chaiya).

23) *Ibid.* "Body is represented by the earthenware vessels . . . while mind is shown as the whimsical, swift and restless monkey. (The same symbolism of the monkey representing mind is found in the Lord Buddha's discourses, (Sutta) . . .) The monkeys prove themselves adept at avoiding capture and the hunters have difficulty in spearing and shooting these agile creatures. The meaning is that the monkey (mind) is difficult to control . . ." p. 15.

The Dvaravati figurine must represent a boy, his youthfulness emphasized by his nudity, and perhaps by the bulla, who is at the threshold of manhood. He has harnessed the monkey. The time has come to train his mind to follow the Eightfold Path. Almost certainly a votive, the figurine might have been placed on the family or wat altar to symbolize either the boy's safe passage to manhood, or that he has entered the monastery as a novice. In either case, the figurine of the female demon may represent one of the dangers which the boy must overcome.

Until the first part of this century, the education of the common people was still largely under the administration of the monastery and it was customary for young boys to become junior novices for a period of schooling, and one still sees many very young novices in Burma and Laos. In the earlier days of Buddhism such a custom must have been widespread, perhaps as the first requirement in learning to master the monkey-like appetites born into the ordinary human character.

