

COMMENTS ON CHRISTIAN BAUER'S 'THE WAT SRI CHUM JĀTAKA GLOSSES RECONSIDERED'

(*Journal of The Siam Society* 1992 vol. 80 (1): 105–25)¹

Betty Gosling*

It is always gratifying to read the views of experts working in a variety of scholarly disciplines who have directed their attentions to a subject of common interest. Whether the different perspectives complement or contradict one another, valuable insights that cannot be reached from a single scholarly vantage point often emerge. Professor Christian Bauer's epigraphic study of the glosses in Sukhothai's Wat Sri Chum *Jātaka* engravings is an important contribution to a subject that has been researched primarily by art historians and his article is enthusiastically welcomed. Unfortunately, however, the article includes a number of misconceptions that confuse the issues rather than illuminate them, and I would like to take this opportunity to correct some of the errors.

Bauer's premise (p. 105) that the *Jātaka* plaques are 'now assumed to belong the late 14th century' is incorrect. As he notes (p. 109 and nn. 1, 9, 31–32), the late fourteenth-century date is one proposed by Dr Prasert ṅa Nagara and seconded by Michael Vickery, but he provides no evidence that this date is accepted elsewhere. His sweeping generalization suggests a consensus among the scholarly community that simply does not exist.

In part, Bauer bases his assumption of a late fourteenth century date on Prasert's argument that the *Jātaka* plaques were designed to fit into the narrow stairwell of the *mondop* at Sukhothai's Wat Sri Chum (n. 1). Both Bauer and Prasert ignored what seems to me to be irrefutable evidence that the plaques were designed for use elsewhere and moved to the *mondop* at some later date: when the heights of the plaques are taken into consideration (Figure 1), there can be no doubt that they were designed

to be arranged in a 4-foot high panel rather than the single 16.5-inch string-row installed in the *mondop* (Gosling 1981:31; 1983:60; 1991:47; 1996:124). Thus, contrary to Bauer's and Prasert's assumptions, the *mondop*'s stairwell must have been designed to accommodate the uniform width of the plaques, not the reverse.

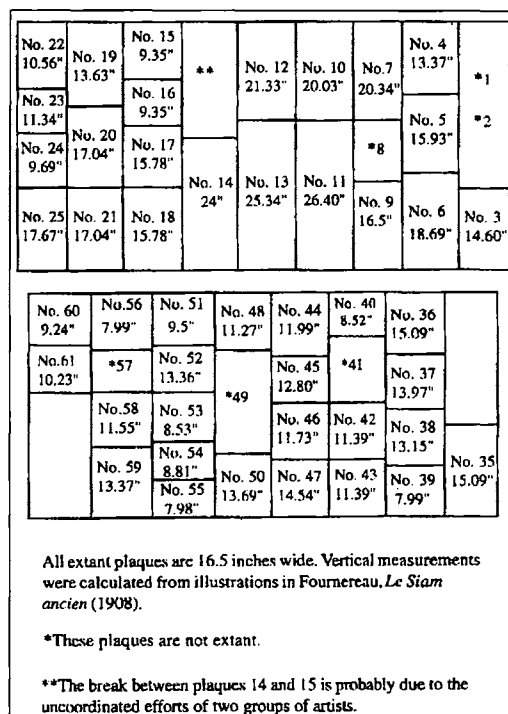


Figure 1 Arrangement of Sri Chum *Jātaka* engravings as they would have appeared on the base of the Mahathat Lotus-Bud Stupa, Sukhothai (From Gosling 1996: fig.4)

* 3000 Glazier Way, #320, Ann Arbor, MI 48105, USA, Visiting Scholar, Horace Rackham School of Graduate Studies, University of Michigan.

Bauer states that, following Boisselier, I dated the Sri Chum engravings to the mid-fourteenth century (n. 33), a date he summarily dismisses as 'previous opinion.' Apparently, he did not read what I wrote: my opinions concerning the date of the engravings do not follow Boisselier's, and they are not ones that I have abandoned. My date—ca AD 1330, a couple of decades earlier than the date proposed by Boisselier—derives from my own inscriptional and art historical studies and a reconstruction of the cultural and art historical changes that appear to have taken place at Sukhothai between the late thirteenth and early fifteenth centuries (Gosling 1982; 1983; 1984; 1991; 1996).

Briefly, the results of this research indicated a progression from a period of diverse, intermingling cultural ingredients—Tai, Khmer, Mon, and Sinhalese—to a time that was more unified and Sinhalese. The *Jātaka* engravings, which appear to have been executed by different artisans with a variety of aesthetic and epigraphic talents (Griswold 1967; Wray 1972; Brereton 1978; Stratton 1981), seem to reflect the cultural ambience of Sukhothai's formative period rather than a later one. (In this respect, Bauer's research into the similarities between the Sri Chum glosses and Old Mon inscriptions in Pagan is an invaluable contribution). My more precise, ca 1330 date was reached by an analysis of Sukhothai's Inscription 2, in which the *Jātaka* plaques are mentioned: the last Sukhothai ruler mentioned in the inscription is Loethai, a sure indication that the inscription was written sometime before 1347, the undisputed date of Luthai, Sukhothai's next ruler's accession. Inscription 11, which elaborates some of the details in Inscription 2, provided additional information that suggests that the engravings had been executed, at the very least, a decade before Inscription 2 was written (Gosling 1981; 1984; 1988).

Contrary to Bauer's statement that I argued 'that superscript—ă—occurred in rhymes containing obstruents by the mid-14th century' (p. 109), I never said that. Would that I were qualified to offer learned opinions on obstruents and rhymes! Finally, for the sake of clarification, it should be noted that I have never published as

'E. M. B. Gosling', the name that Prof. Bauer has chosen for the citation of my works.

Notes

¹ This note was submitted to *JSS* in October 1994, mislaid and then revised and resubmitted in January 1998. The Hon. Editor apologises to the author for the long delay in publication.

References

- Brereton, B. P. 1978. *The Wat Sri Chum Engravings and their Place within the Art of Sukhothai*. University of Michigan M.A. thesis.
- Gosling, B. 1981. Once More, Inscription 2: An Art Historian's View, *Journal of the Siam Society* 69 (1 & 2): 13-42.
- Gosling, B. 1982. Some Thoughts on the Early Stages of Thai Buddhism Relevant to the Art and Architecture of Sukhothai. In *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, (ed.) B. J. Terwiel, *Southeast Asian Review* 7 (1 & 2): 11-23.
- Gosling, B. 1983. *The History of Sukhothai as a Ceremonial Center: a Study of Early Siamese Architecture and Society*, 2 vols. University of Michigan Ph.D. dissertation, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International.
- Gosling, B. 1984. Why were the *Jātakas* 'Hidden Away' at Wat Sri Chum? *Journal of the Siam Society* 72 (1 & 2): 14-8.
- Gosling, B. 1988. On Michael Vickery's from Lamphun to Inscription No. 2, *Siam Society Newsletter* 4 (1): 5-7.
- Gosling, B. 1991. *Sukhothai: Its History, Culture, and Art*. Oxford, Singapore, & London: Oxford University Press.
- Gosling, B. 1996. *A Chronology of Religious Architecture at Sukhothai, Late Thirteenth to Early Fifteenth Century*. Association for Asian Studies, Monograph and Occasional Paper Series, No. 52. Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- Griswold, A. B. 1967. *Towards a History of Sukhodaya Art*. Bangkok: Fine Arts Department.
- Stratton, C. and Scott, M. McNair 1981. *The Art of Sukhothai: Thailand's Golden Age*. Kuala Lumpur, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wray, E., Rosenfield, C. and Bailey, D. 1972. *Ten Lives of the Buddha*. New York & Tokyo: Weatherhill.