

A Comprehensive Study of Bhadrāsana Buddha Images from First-Millennium Thailand¹

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Abstract

This article presents in detail a study of a particular type of Buddha image, those seated in *bhadrāsana*, that is the posture with both legs extended and the feet firmly planted on the ground or on a lotus pedestal. There are few of these seated Buddha images left from the first millennium CE compared to the large corpus of Buddhas seated crossed-legged or standing images. However, this iconography is often found – albeit not only – in central Thailand during the commonly labelled “art or period of Dvāravātī” (ca 7th-8th c.), one of Thailand’s oldest religious and artistic cultures.

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Introduction

This research is prompted by a simple observation, that nothing substantial has been written thus far on the topic of “Bhadrāsana Buddhas” in Thailand.³ Some earlier works issued by pioneer scholars in the field did touch on the subject,⁴ but new evidence has come to light in Thailand and neighbouring countries after several excavations over the past decades have exposed new materials and contributed to knowledge in first-millennium Southeast Asia. In my own research, I did not come across any significant articles or monographs completely devoted to this iconography apart from an old study which only deals with Indian imagery.⁵ As regards Thai scholarship, I can only mention the unpublished work by Sitthichai Thawipon⁶ and more recently a modest contribution by Chotima Chaturawong,⁷ both from Silpakorn University. The recent Guimet catalogue published for the Dvāravatī exhibition in Paris failed to dedicate a special section on the subject.⁸

This article is therefore a preliminary effort to fill the gap in the scholarship and offer a comprehensive corpus for the images in *bhadrāsana* from first-millennium Thailand.⁹ I shall only attempt

³ Scholars once referred to this seated posture as the “European posture” or *pralambapādāsana*. The Thai formulation is “*nanng hoi phrabat*” (นั่งห้อยพระบาท). For a recent discussion on terminology, see Revire, “Some Reconsiderations on Pendant-legged Buddha Images”, 37-49.

⁴ See, in particular, Dupont, *L’archéologie mône de Dvāravatī*, 268-278. The recent English translation of the latter (2006), however, is often misleading and cannot be completely relied upon. See Revire, “Review Article: Pierre Dupont’s *L’archéologie mône de Dvāravatī*”, 196-225.

⁵ Bourda, “Quelques réflexions sur la pose assise à l’eupéenne dans l’art bouddhique”, 302-313.

⁶ Sitthichai, “Images of Seated Buddhas with Legs Pendant in the Dvāravatī period” (in Thai).

⁷ Chotima, “Indo-Thai Cultural Interaction: Buddha Images in Pralambapadasana”, 55-77.

⁸ Baptiste and Zéphir, *Dvāravatī*. The same holds true in the catalogue prepared for the exhibition in Bangkok. See Fine Arts Department, *Dvāravatī Art* (in Thai).

⁹ The study is part of a larger doctoral research project at the University of Paris 3-Sorbonne nouvelle (France) which attempts to trace the origins, spread, chronology, and meanings of this particular posture from South to Southeast Asia. In the short format of the present article, however, I will not attempt to deal with the controversial question of the identification of these images in Buddhist art.

a complete descriptive account of the Buddha images that are known from Thai public collections.¹⁰ A thorough study of the material presented here would certainly reveal interesting details about specific trends and types in the regional and religious developments of pre-modern Thailand and Southeast Asia. A careful analysis of the stylistic and iconographic features may also result in defining an internal chronology of the images listed. The images of the corpus will be broadly classified and studied in different sections as follows: cave reliefs and other low-reliefs; moulded clay tablets; bronze images; and stucco, terracotta and stone images carved in high-reliefs or in the round (see Appendix for detailed information on each Figure in this article).



Figure 1: Preaching Buddha in *vitarkamudrā*, ca 7th c.

¹⁰ For practical reasons and the sake of credibility, I will not consider here the various images located in foreign museums and private collections or those which circulate in the art market. Many of these antiquities reportedly come from Thailand or neighboring countries and are often dubious and would deserve much better scrutiny than has been generally allowed. For a few published examples kept in Thai private collections, see Snong, *Outstanding Sculptures*, cats 31, 41; Pal, *The Ideal Image*, cats 76, 84; also Dupont, *L'archéologie mène de Dvāravatī*, figs. 503-504.



Figure 2: Inscription in Sanskrit and Mon-Khmer, Pallava character, ca 7th c. (courtesy of EFEO photographic archives, Paris; rubbing n. 1404).

Cave Reliefs

Edmond Lunet de Lajonquière was the first Westerner to mention in 1908 the existence of Buddhas seated “in the European manner” in pre-modern Thailand. He noticed a “cave with ex-voto” of Buddhist inspiration in the Ratchaburi area.¹¹ This cave is called Tham Ruesi (“Hermit Cave”) located in the Khao Ngu chain (“Snake Hill”). In the cave, a rock-cut image of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* displays the teaching gesture with the right raised hand (*vitarkamudrā*) (Figure 1).^{*} Lunet de Lajonquière noticed that the attitude of this image was very close to that of a Buddha found in the surroundings of Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom.¹² His short visit, however, did not enable him to notice the inscription found at the feet of the seated Buddha (Figure 2). The characters of the inscription, similar to those employed in southern India *circa* 7th century CE, were first deciphered by Professor George Cœdès who read “*puñ vrah ṛṣi (... śrī samādhigupta,*” translated as “the meritorious deed of the Holy hermit... Śrī samādhigupta.” Cœdès further gave the following comment:

¹¹ Lunet de Lajonquière, *Le domaine archéologique du Siam*, 43, fig. 21.

^{*} All photographs are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

¹² See *infra* in the “Stone Images” section of this article.

It is to some extent the signature of the author of the image, who was a hermit (*ṛṣi*) having chosen for retirement this cave, whose name of Thām Rūṣi recalls this memory or that of one of his peers. The orthography of the first word, which is neither Sanskrit (*puṇya*) nor Pali (*puñña*), is that which is used in Mon. On the other hand *vraḥ* would be rather Khmer, but this reading is not for certain.¹³

Later, Jean Boisselier was tempted to give the words *vraḥ ṛṣi* a different meaning as “a venerable,” that is a monk, rather than a hermit, although the two terms are not necessarily incompatible. Boisselier also speculated that *samādhigupta* could bear a relationship to the Dharmaguptakas, but later retracted this fragile hypothesis.¹⁴ At any rate, this name “Samādhigupta”, suffixed to *-gupta*, bears resemblance to a cluster of people from the same generation found in South and Southeast Asia throughout the 7th-8th centuries, such as Buddhagupta, from the famous *mahānāvika* inscription of South Kedah (ca early 7th c.),¹⁵ or Dharmagupta and Śrīgupta, resident monks at Nālandā (ca early 8th c.).¹⁶ This observation may be noteworthy and give credence to the fact that this Samādhigupta may be on par with his contemporaries. This would also support my estimated dating of the relief, and indeed many other Bhadrāsana Buddha reliefs discussed below, to approximately the same period (ca 7th c.-early 8th c.).

¹³ Cœdès, *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam* – 2, 19, pl. VIII, nr XXII (my translation from the French). This reading indeed cannot be confirmed even today by specialists. Only the first word *puñ(-)* and the last word *samādhigupta* seem secure, but the word *ṛṣi* is apparently problematic. I am grateful to Arlo Griffiths, Christian Bauer, and Emmanuel Guillon for their assistance and new attempts at reading the inscription. For a different and almost certainly incorrect reading, see Fine Arts Department, *Inscriptions of Thailand, Vol. I*, 68-71 (in Thai); see also Saritpong, “L’art rupestre”, 233, n. 18.

¹⁴ Boisselier, “Quelques enseignements des sculptures rupestres de la période de Dvaravati”, 14; see also Boisselier, “Propos sur Tham Phra Photisat”, 134, n. 11.

¹⁵ The received dating of the Buddhagupta stele used to be the late 5th century, see for instance Le May, *A Concise History of Buddhist Art in Siam*, 24 or Jacq-Hergoualc’h, *The Malay Peninsula*, 216. However, it is now placed in the early 7th century by specialists (Arlo Griffiths, personal communication). The script in the Buddhagupta inscription is identical to that on the stone *chedi* from Nakhon Pathom (N. Th. 3), now located in the Bangkok National Museum courtyard, and also commonly dated from the 7th century. See Fine Arts Department, *Inscriptions of Thailand, Vol. I*, 79-82 (in Thai); also Fine Arts Department, *Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum*, 109 (in Thai).

¹⁶ Hodge, “Considerations on the *Mahāvairocanaḥhisambodhi-sūtra*”, 70.

In the 1960s, other caves found in Khao Ngu also presented the same features. Tham Chin (“Chinese Cave”) and Tham Cham (“Cham Cave”) equally display ancient figures carved in low-relief, as well as the first known reliefs made of stucco. In Tham Chin, for instance, a seated Buddha was probably first carved in *bhadrāsana* before it was renovated with stucco and reshaped seated “in the Indian manner”, probably during the Ayutthaya period.¹⁷



Figure 3: Enthroned Buddha preaching to Śiva, Viṣṇu and other deities, ca 7th-8th c.

In 1965, another cave was discovered in Saraburi province in Kaeng Khoi district. This image, in a cave named Tham Phra Photisat (“Cave of the Holy Bodhisattva”),¹⁸ is sheltered high up on the cave wall in low-relief. It is of the greatest interest in that the Buddha sits with legs down on the *makara* throne and teaches various subordinate gods and celestial beings. Boisselier, who went to visit this cave in 1989, acknowledged these gods as Maheśvara (Śiva) and Nārāyaṇa

¹⁷ Boisselier, “Travaux de la mission archéologique française en Thaïlande”, 40-41, fig. 44; and Boisselier, “Propos sur Tham Phra Photisat”, 134, n. 12. On these reliefs, see also Piriya, “Dvāravatī Period Sculpture in the Khao Ngu Caves, Ratchaburi”, 77-99 (in Thai).

¹⁸ Formerly known as Tham Phra Ngam (“Beautiful Cave”). See Brown, *The Dvāravatī Wheels of the Law*, 30-31; also Woodward, *The Art and Architecture of Thailand*, 56-57.

(Viṣṇu) of the Brahmanical Pantheon on the basis of their iconographic features and attributes (Figure 3).¹⁹ The Buddha is illustrated seated in *bhadrāsana*, with the knees wide apart and the feet joined at the ankles posed on a lotus pedestal. The right hand performs the *vitarkamudrā* and the left hand holds, rather high at chest level, the draped monastic robe (*uttarāsaṅga*). This combination of hand gestures is rarely attested for in this iconographic type and could testify to a certain archaism or, on the contrary, to an important innovation. A nimbus surrounds the head, as it is often the case for representations in relief of the Blessed One.²⁰ In the vicinity, Śiva sitting with one leg pendant in *lalitāsana* is recognizable by its ascetic hairstyle adorned with the moon crescent and his rosary as the only attribute.²¹ Viṣṇu, standing on the Buddha's proper left, is clearly recognizable by the *cakra* and the conch. A prostrate hermit and flying figures (*vidyādhara*s or *gandharva*s) supplement the scene.

At first sight, one cannot make sense of the simultaneous presence of Śiva and Viṣṇu alongside the Buddha. This association with the Buddha is indeed unknown in Buddhist narratives drawn from Pali Canonical scriptures.²² Boisselier thus proposed turning to the *Lokapaññatti*, a late Burmese Pali text believed to have been compiled after various ancient Sanskrit texts, to attempt to resolve the mystery.²³ In this cosmological treaty, there is mention of Maheśvara, that is,

¹⁹ Boisselier "Quelques enseignements des sculptures rupestres de la période de Dvaravati", 15.

²⁰ A close analogy could be made with the relief of monument 6 at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa which represents the visit of god Śakra (Indra) to the Buddha in the Indraśaila cave. See Rosen Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, fig. 218.

²¹ Dhanit Yupho, followed by Quaritch Wales, wrongly proposed to identify the figure as Brahmā. Dhanit, *Brahma with Four Faces*, 9; Quaritch Wales, *Dvāravatī, the Earliest Kingdom of Siam*, 100.

²² For an excellent study of the presence of various gods in Theravāda texts, although no reference is ever made of Śiva, see Wijayaratna, *Le culte des dieux chez les bouddhistes singhalais*, 5-57.

²³ Boisselier, "Propos sur Tham Phra Photisat", 130-131. For the *Lokapaññatti*, see Denis, *La Lokapaññatti*. The latter study, however, is somewhat outdated and it is not certain that the text is originally from Burma. It has a very interesting background, possibly descending from a Prakrit text of the Sāṃmitīyas. See for example the work of Okano, "Lishiapitanlun", 55-91 (in Japanese).

Śiva “most powerful of the gods,” who, being jealous of the Buddha, decides to challenge him before finally taking refuge in the Blessed One and conversion along with his consort Umā.²⁴ However, if the account gives a satisfactory explanation for the subordinate presence of Śiva, no mention is made of Viṣṇu. We could certainly speculate that certain texts explaining this peculiar scene once circulated in the region. In many *mahāyānasūtras*, such as the *Pratītyasamutpāda nāmamahāyānasūtra*, reference is made to the Buddha preaching in Trāyastriṃśa heaven to Nārāyaṇa and Maheśvara, among others gods, as well as other Bodhisattvas and Pañcaśikha, king of the *gandharvas*.²⁵ We should acknowledge, however, that there has been an ancient and independent local Brahmanical presence in first-millennium Southeast Asia and that these aforementioned deities would not necessarily need a South Asian text to justify their presence in this cave.²⁶

The last cave relief where a Buddha in *bhadrāsana* can be found is Tham Khuha (“cave of the cave”) in the peninsular area of Surat Thani, Kanchanadit district. It is found in high relief on the left wall ceiling, immediately at the entrance of the cave and is made of dried clay (Figure 4). The composition is centred on the Buddha, among other figures, and seems to be part of a complex architectural decoration, but unfortunately is much degraded. The central scene is focused on the pendant-legged Buddha. The left hand is placed on his knee while the right one, broken, was undoubtedly originally raised, performing the teaching gesture or *vitarkamudrā* as do the

²⁴ Interestingly, the story of a contest between Maheśvara and the Buddha is also found in later Thai literature (personal communication with Peter Skilling).

²⁵ Skilling, “Dharma, Dhāraṇī, Abhidharma, Avadāna”, 46-47. In the *Lalitavistara*, amongst other texts, the Buddha is regarded as *devātideva* (“God of the gods”). For this reason the Brahmanical gods (i.e., Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva) owe him great respect and are *de facto* considered inferior to the Blessed One. See Khosla, *Lalitavistara and the Evolution of Buddha Legend*, 101-104.

²⁶ Anthropomorphic images of Śiva are extremely rare in mainland Southeast Asian art prior to the late 9th century, in stark contrast to images of mitred Viṣṇu. See, however, Baptiste and Zéphir, *Dvāravatī*, 126, cats 38-39. For a broader discussion on the significant roles of these gods in early Khmer art, see Lavy, “As in Heaven, so on Earth”, 21-39.

other surrounding Buddhas.²⁷ The head and facial features have been described as vaguely “negroid” and compared either to the stone Buddha image of Đồng-Du’o’ng (ca late 9th c.) in Campā,²⁸ or to the Wat Na Phra Men Buddha icon from Ayutthaya to which I shall return below.²⁹ Some Thai scholars have even speculated further resemblance with Chinese and Indian art and assigned to this pendant-legged Buddha from Tham Khuha a date of *circa* 8th-9th century.³⁰ It is not really clear, however, how these possible artistic contacts may have arrived in this part of peninsular Thailand.



Figure 4: The Buddha in *bhadrāsana* surrounded by multiple Buddhas, ca 8th-9th c.

²⁷ The multiplication of Buddha images is a recurrent theme in the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī and in Dvāravatī art. See for example Brown, “The Śrāvastī Miracles in the Art of India and Dvāravatī”, 79-95.

²⁸ See Boisselier “Quelques enseignements des sculptures rupestres de la période de Dvaravati”, 16, although the head of this important Bhadrāsana Buddha from Vietnam is now lost.

²⁹ See Jacq-Hergoualc’h, “À propos de transferts de formes communs au Campā et au Panpan (péninsule malaise) au IX^e siècle”, 57-59; also Jacq-Hergoualc’h, *The Malay Peninsula*, 315-316.

³⁰ See Preecha, “Archaeological Site at Khuha Cave”, 53-60 (in Thai); also Wanakon, “Art Style and Iconography of Unbaked Clay Images on the Ceilings of Tham Khuha”, 139-141 (in Thai).

Other Low-Reliefs

Low-reliefs in a good state of preservation are rather scarce in first-millennium Thailand. They all belong to the Dvāravatī artistic tradition (ca 7th-8th c.) and seem to be indices of specific Buddhist narratives. In what follows, I describe the few remaining reliefs or fragments, most originating from Nakhon Pathom, where the Buddha is seated in *bhadrāsana*.



Figure 5: Enthroned Buddha preaching the First Sermon (Face 1), ca 7th-8th c.



Figure 6: Enthroned Buddha preaching the First Sermon (Face 2), ca 7th-8th c.

The first relief represents the enthroned Buddha in the centre with two celestials at his sides who seem to fan him with fly-whisks. At ground level, five figures are seated respectively on the Buddha's proper right and left with crossed legs and hands in the gesture of respect in *añjali*. The figures on the Buddha's left, almost naked, are capped with chignons and wear long beards, while those on his right have their heads shaved and wear monastic clothes (Figure 5).³¹ This stone carved-block, preserved at the Phra Pathom Chedi National museum, Nakhon Pathom, was inventoried and described by Lucien Fournereau in the 19th century; but he wrote about another more damaged relief where the Buddha is found headless (Figure 6).³² However, Fournereau did not recognize that this was a Buddha and mistook it for "a king seated on a throne [and] speaking to an audience."³³ The scene is now commonly interpreted as a depiction of the First Sermon of the Buddha at Sārnāth, with the five ascetics on his proper left representing his former companions (*pañcavargīya*) during his years of asceticism and preceding the complete illumination and, on his right, the same five disciples after ordination.³⁴ The assumption is very plausible if we consider that this stone fragment belongs to

³¹ Lunet de Lajonquière initially thought that the devotees on the right-hand side represented Thais while those on the left, Hindus. Lunet de Lajonquière, *Le domaine archéologique du Siam*, 36. He does not repeat this inaccurate assumption in his subsequent "Essai d'inventaire archéologique du Siam", 176.

³² Fournereau, *Le Siam ancien*, 120, 122.

³³ Fournereau, *Le Siam ancien*, 121. See also Hennequin, "Nakhon Pathom au temps de Lucien Fournereau", 138-139.

³⁴ See Woodward, *The Art and Architecture of Thailand*, 71-72, who assigns a date around 700. See also Brown, *The Dvāravatī Wheels of the Law*, 31-32. The latter thinks that these figures must be taken as hermits and monks paying simultaneous homage to the Buddha, thus adequately portraying the tolerant religious atmosphere of the period. The presence of *ṛṣi* indeed recurs in ancient low-reliefs, as we have seen above, possibly in Tham Ruesi or in Tham Phra Photisat. Interesting comparisons can also be made with the abbreviated high relief scene of the First Sermon from the Selagiri *stūpa* in Arakan, Burma. See Gutman, "A Series of Buddhist Reliefs from Selagiri", 106, fig. 3. It has also been suggested that the Nakhon Pathom scene could perhaps refer to the conversion of two separate groups of five disciples: the well-known five ascetics led by Ājñāta Kaundinya on the one hand, and the five first laymen led by Yaśas, among who is Gavampati, on the other hand. See Lagirarde, "Gavampati-Kaccāyana", 200-201.

a single unit intended to originally support a pillar on which a Wheel of the Law sculpted in the round (*dharmacakra*), symbolizing *par excellence* the First Sermon, would have stood.

Members of the Thai Fine Arts Department attempted to compare this relief to an Ajañṭā mural in cave 17 from a stylistic and iconographic point of view.³⁵ There are, however, notable differences between the two. First, the Buddha is represented in *dharmacakramudrā* in the Ajañṭā mural whereas he is in *vitarkamudrā* on the Nakhon Pathom relief; his left hand is resting on the lap. The details of the throne in the relief are also different from those in the painting, in which the feet of the Blessed One are placed on a lotus pedestal. Moreover, in the painting, an assembly of richly adorned dignitaries replaces the hermits and their order is reversed when compared to the Nakhon Pathom relief scene. In addition, celestial attendees are represented on the back of the relief, separated from the main earthly figures by a cloud pattern, a detail hitherto unknown in Indian Gupta-Vākāṭaka art. From these observations, it is fair to say that the Ajañṭā mural is clearly not the direct source of inspiration for the relief. Conversely, others have suggested that this Nakhon Pathom relief might have been inspired in one way or another by a Chinese painting on embroidery or silk largely in favour during the Tang dynasty and perhaps circulating in the southern seas.³⁶

A second relief of importance is the stele from Wat Suthat, today in Bangkok, but reported to have come from Nakhon Pathom (Figure 7).³⁷ The stone slab is 2.40 meters high and is divided into two registers narrating two successive episodes of the life of the Buddha. The bottom scene represents the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī where the central Buddha is represented seated in *bhadrāsana* and *vitarkamudrā*

³⁵ Fine Arts Department, *Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum*, 84-85 (in Thai).

³⁶ See Woodward, *The Art and Architecture of Thailand*, 73-74; also Revire, "New Perspectives on the Origin and Spread of Bhadrāsana Buddhas", 132-133, figs. 11.6 and 11.7.

³⁷ Records state that the stone stele was installed at the time of Rama V (1868-1910) behind the pedestal of the great Sukhothai Buddha presiding in the main *vihāra*. It was renovated and gilded at an unknown date. See Pandito, *Wat Suthat-Thepwararam*, 25.

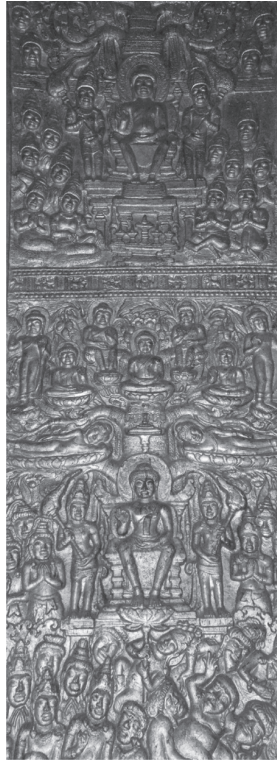


Figure 7: The Great Miracle at Śrāvastī (lower register) and the Buddha preaching the gods in Trāyastriṃśa (upper register), ca 7th-8th c.

and is honoured by King Prasenajit with his princely court in the *añjali* gesture. In the lower right corner of the panel, we can see the heretics in turmoil among who can be found Pūrana Kāśyapa, the naked ascetic leader, in the foreground. Above the enthroned Buddha, other images of “multiplied” Buddhas, in various postures, display the *vitarkamudrā* with one hand or the other in an extreme care for artistic symmetry.³⁸ On the top register, the Buddha is subsequently represented in the

³⁸ See Brown, “The Śrāvastī Miracles in the Art of India and Dvāravatī”, 87-88; Dupont, *L’archéologie mène de Dvāravatī*, 272-273; also Härtel, Auboyer et al, *Indien und Südostasien*, cat. 378.

Heaven of the Thirty-three, seated on Indra's throne³⁹ and teaching the Dharma to the gods and to his mother.⁴⁰

Another low-relief also depicts the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī in a similar manner. This stone slab was found at Wat Chin, Ayutthaya, but most probably came from Nakhon Pathom; today it is kept in the Bangkok National Museum (Figure 8). The relief vaguely adopts the form of a large *sīmā* stone or boundary marker (*sema*, เสมา in Thai), such as those found in great numbers in Isan,⁴¹ and follows the same iconographic conventions as the two previous narrative reliefs. Thus, again, we find the Buddha in the centre seated in *bhadrāsana*, as to enhance his authority over the opponents, and in *vitarkamudrā* with

³⁹ Most likely, the Buddha would occupy the “gem seat”, named *pāṇḍukambasilāsana* in the Pali texts. This seat is said to be located in the Puṇḍarikavana park, under the tree “of desires” (*erythrina fusca*) named *pāricchattaka* or *pārijāta* and standing outside the city of the Thirty-three, in the northeastern direction. This is where the present preaching to the gods is supposed to be held in Trāyastriṃśa or Tāvāṃtisa heaven. The descriptions are shared in all Buddhist traditions, with some differences in the details. For a meticulous description drawn after the ancient Thai tradition, see Coëdès and Archambault, *Les trois mondes*, 154-166.

⁴⁰ According to general opinion, the female figure seated at the right-hand side of the Buddha should be his mother, Māhāmāyā, who died seven days after giving birth; she then was reborn in Tuṣṭita heaven as a male divinity. The discrepancy in these appearances, from male to female between the literary tradition and the imagery on the relief, was noticed by Griswold, “The Architecture and Sculpture of Siam”, 46. Regarding the content taught by the Buddha on this occasion, as recorded in different Buddhist traditions, see Skilling “Dharma, Dhāraṇī, Abhidharma, Avadāna”. Quaritch Wales was clearly mistaken in identifying this scene in the top register with the First Sermon. Quaritch Wales, *Dvāravatī, the Earliest Kingdom of Siam*, 42.

⁴¹ One *sema* stone in particular depicts in semi-profile position the Buddha on his return to Kapilavastu, seated in *bhadrāsana* while his former wife Yasodharā (Bimbā) and son Rāhula are shown kneeling at his feet. Piriya Krairiksh dates the *sema* to the mid-10th century. See Piriya, *Art Styles in Thailand*, 96-97 and Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 338, fig. 2.347; also Fine Arts Department, *Guide to Khon Kaen National Museum*, 92. However, Stephen Murphy assigns it an earlier date of around the 8th-9th century. Murphy, “The Buddhist Boundary Markers of Northeast Thailand”, 270-273, fig. 5.73 (Figure 9).

his right hand.⁴² The Blessed One is flanked by two assistants, possibly the gods Brahmā and Śakra (Indra), each holding fly-whisks. Above the Buddha, we find the mango tree with its characteristic branches and foliage and on which are found other Buddha images in different attitudes, standing, seated, and reclining as mentioned in the texts. The two seated Buddhas at the top corners of the stele each touch a circular form, probably the sun and the moon, with their free hands.⁴³ Undeniably, this carved stele is related to the same artistic tradition as the preceding ones and for which a relative dating would be *circa* late 7th-early 8th century.⁴⁴



Figure 8: The Great Miracle at Śrāvastī, ca 7th-8th c.

⁴² Le May says *abhayamudrā*, but the relief has been lacquered over the years and makes this identification doubtful. Le May, *A Concise History of Buddhist Art in Siam*, 30.

⁴³ Brown interprets these two celestial bodies as a dual representation of the sun. Brown, "The Śrāvastī Miracles in the Art of India and Dvāravatī", 89.

⁴⁴ A certain number of moulded clay tablets located in foreign museums are exact replicas in miniature of this iconography found in the Nakhon Pathom stele. It is very likely that these tablets are modern forgeries.



Figure 9: The Buddha returning to Kapilavastu and meeting Yasodharā (Bimbā) and Rāhula, ca 8th-9th c.

The interest of these various scenes and representation of the “Great Miracle” (*mahāprātihārya*) in Dvāravatī art resides specifically in the details. Upon a closer examination of the reliefs, one observes a mixture of inspirations from various textual sources. On the one hand, for example, we find the mango tree which is characteristic of the Pali account of the Great Miracle as found in the *Dhammapada* commentary.⁴⁵ On the other, some narrative elements depicted in the reliefs are also found in the *Divyāvadāna* in Sanskrit.⁴⁶ Such elements, found in the latter recension but missing in the Pali text, are the multiplication miracle, the appearance of Brahmā and Indra, the defeated ascetic Pūrana Kāśyapa, or the lotus supported

⁴⁵ Burlingame, “The Twin Miracle”, 35-47.

⁴⁶ See Burnouf, *Introduction à l’histoire du buddhisme indien*, 162-189; also Cowell, *The Divyāvadāna*, 143-166.

by *nāga*-kings.⁴⁷ Robert Brown has wondered whether such a conflation of themes, already observed in Indian art, could be explained by the fact that the texts in use at the time were either lost or not yet checked. A second possible explanation he gives is that the artists or the monks “were responsible for the new iconography, one that existed only in the visual, and not in the literary, tradition.”⁴⁸ At any rate, here is a passage of the *Divyāvadāna* offered by Brown recording the crucial episode of the multiplication miracle:

On this [the Lotus] the Buddha sat in *paryaṅkāśana* creating before, behind and on both sides [of him] a group of Buddhas reaching up to the Akanisṭha Heaven.⁴⁹

This translation is a good example of adding something to a text, here the suffix “*āsana*” (posture) to the word *paryaṅka*, in place of the past participle of the verb “to sit”. The original passage in Sanskrit, however, reads “*tatrāpi bhagavān paryaṅkaniṣaṇṇaḥ*,” that is, “the Bhagavant [the Blessed One, i.e. the Buddha] was seated crossed-legged there on [the lotus’s pericarp].”⁵⁰ A problem of interpretation may thus arise with the ambiguous term *paryaṅkāśana* provided by Brown since a certain number of modern iconographic manuals are often mistaken in identifying this crossed-legs posture with the *bhadrāsana* (extended-legs posture).⁵¹ This confusion is probably because the word *paryaṅka* (Skt), *pallaṅka* (Pali), or *ballang* (Thai, บัลลังก์) may secondarily indicate a type of couch or seat used by kings and high dignitaries.⁵² But this is never the sense given for *paryaṅka* in a narrative context, such as in this passage from the *Divyāvadāna*.

⁴⁷ Two *nāga*-kings, Nanda and Upananda, are narrated in the *Divyāvadāna*, but the Wat Suthat relief only depicts one of them and none are represented in the Bangkok National Museum stele.

⁴⁸ Brown, “The Śrāvastī Miracles in the Art of India and Dvāravatī”, 83.

⁴⁹ Brown, “The Śrāvastī Miracles in the Art of India and Dvāravatī”, 80.

⁵⁰ My translation from the Sanskrit text, edited by Cowell, *The Divyāvadāna*, 162-163. See also the French translation of this passage by Burnouf who reads: “Et Bhagavat s’assit [sur le péricarpe de ce lotus], les jambes croisées [...]” Burnouf, *Introduction à l’histoire du buddhisme indien*, 163-164.

⁵¹ See for example Liebert, *Iconographic Dictionary of the Indian Religions*, 216, 225.

⁵² Auboyer, *Le trône et son symbolisme dans l’Inde ancienne*, 194-195.

From the preceding, it would then seem that we cannot link the *bhadrāsana* type in Dvāravatī art to a specific textual tradition or even exclusively to a particular episode of the Buddha's life. In fact, in South and Southeast Asian art, the *bhadrāsana*, a “royal posture,” was not associated with any single event in particular, but with a large variety of narratives, such as the First Sermon or the Great Miracle. However, no Buddhist texts seem to be prescriptive in that sense and, as we have seen, neither the Pali nor Sanskrit account of the Great Miracle refer to the Blessed One as seated with his legs extended and firmly grounded on a pedestal. On the contrary, it is clearly stated, at least in the *Divyāvadāna*, that the Buddha should have been seated on the lotus with crossed-legs. In conclusion, this affirms the statement that we are unable to attach the hybrid iconography found in the Dvāravatī reliefs to a particular Buddhist tradition and even less so to a specific “sect” or *nikāya*.⁵³

Moulded Clay Tablets

I now undertake the detailed study of various moulded tablets depicting the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* found in Thailand. These small size tablets are often called “clay sealings” or “votive” in Western scholarship and *phra phim* in Thai (พระพิมพ์).⁵⁴ They can be made of baked or unbaked clay and are found throughout the country.⁵⁵

⁵³ It has long been assumed that the accounts inserted in the *Divyāvadāna* were predominantly borrowed from the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya. See Lévi, “Éléments de formation du *Divyāvadāna*”, 105-112. The Dvāravatī reliefs, however, clearly draw their inspiration from a variety of different sources. See Brown, “The Śrāvastī Miracles in the Art of India and Dvāravatī”, 93.

⁵⁴ For a general introduction, see Cœdès, “Siamese Votive Tablets”, 1-23; Pattaratorn, “The Cult of Votive Tablets in Thailand”; and, Pattaratorn, *Votive Tablets in Thailand*. More recently, see Skilling, “Buddhist Sealings: Reflections”, 677-685; and Skilling, “Buddhist Sealings in Thailand and Southeast Asia”, 248-262.

⁵⁵ The majority of the tablets from the central regions are baked and the clay is reddish in colour while the peninsular tablets are generally unbaked with or without mixtures of ashes or relics and the clay is yellowish in colour. See Pattaratorn, “The Cult of Votive Tablets in Thailand”, 125-126.



Figure 10: Preaching Buddha flanked by two standing figures, ca 7th-8th c. (drawing by Nitipun, “A Study of Dvāravatī Votive Tablets”, fig. 13, 106).

I begin with a group of tablets which belong to Cœdès’s type I, also known as the “Phra Pathom Chedi type.”⁵⁶ They all depict a Buddhist triad where the central Buddha is seated in *bhadrāsana* and probably in *vitarkamudrā* with the right hand raised; the left hand rests on the lap as is common on low-reliefs. Within this type, variant sub-types share a related iconography. The first and most common sub-type is represented by small tablets with a square base and arched top. The enthroned Buddha is flanked by two standing figures, most likely generic Bodhisattvas,⁵⁷ in triple flexion; three other Buddhas sit above him with legs crossed and hands in meditation (*dhyānamudrā*). It is often difficult to say whether the draped upper monastic robe (*uttarāsanga*) covers one or two shoulders of the Buddhas (Figure 10).⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Cœdès, “Siamese Votive Tablets”, 7-8, pl. II. Since the latter wrote this pioneering article, many other similar tablets have been discovered in Nakhon Pathom. See Nitipun, “A Study of Dvāravatī Votive Tablets” (in Thai). However, this type is far from being unique to the Nakhon Pathom region as we shall see below.

⁵⁷ There is no consensus as to the identity of the two assistants; gods Brahmā and Indra or the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya are the most common designations.

⁵⁸ Jacq-Hergoualc’h says the right shoulder is bare but Pattaratorn affirms that the two shoulders were covered. Jacq-Hergoualc’h, *The Malay Peninsula*, 156; Pattaratorn, “Development of Buddhist Traditions in Peninsular Thailand”, 178.

In addition to the Nakhon Pathom area,⁵⁹ this sub-type was also popular in peninsular Thailand⁶⁰ and has been found as far as ancient Burma,⁶¹ Batujaya, western Java,⁶² and Châu Sa in Vietnam.⁶³ It is therefore classified as a regional sub-type unknown in India and which was circulated widely in Southeast Asia.⁶⁴ These common tablets, generally assigned to the 7th-8th centuries, will be used as key models to reconstruct the stylistic development and the iconography of the related tablets that follow.

⁵⁹ Nitipun, “A Study of Dvāravatī Votive Tablets”, figs. 11-17 (in Thai); also Pattaratorn, *Votive Tablets in Thailand*, 22, fig. 7. Nitipun Sirisup identified a closely similar sub-type where the composition is divided into three levels instead of two and with only one seated Buddha in meditation instead of three. These seated Buddhas are flanked by a *stūpa* on each side and appear twice above the main Buddhist triad of the lower level. Nitipun, “A Study of Dvāravatī Votive Tablets”, figs. 23-24 (in Thai) (Figure 11). However, I have not been able to observe myself this latter sub-type and it is not displayed either in the collections of the national museums in Thailand.

⁶⁰ O’ Connor, “Buddhist Votive Tablets and Caves in Peninsular Thailand”, 78-81, fig. 17; Piriya, *Art in Peninsular Thailand Prior to the Fourteenth Century A.D.*, 124-125, cat. 23; Jacq-Hergoualc’h, *The Malay Peninsula*, fig. 58; also Pattaratorn, “The Cult of Votive Tablets in Thailand”, 209-210, 250, figs. 84, 135 and Pattaratorn, “Development of Buddhist Traditions in Peninsular Thailand”, 177-178, fig. 2. Other similar clay tablets, albeit slightly larger in size (ca 12 cm high), have been found very recently at Khao Nui archaeological site in Trang province and bear on the back an abbreviated inscription of the Four Noble Truths in Sanskrit.

⁶¹ An identical tablet was found in the Kawgun cave, near Moulmein and some others in Śrīkṣetra, that is in both Mon and Pyu territories. See Luce, “Dvāravatī and Old Burma”, 17; also Mya, *Votive Tablets of Burma*, vol. II: pls 53-54 (in Burmese). More recently, a chance find was made in Winka, in the Mon country near Thaton; see Moore, *Early Landscapes of Myanmar*, 198-199.

⁶² Manguin, “Pan-regional Responses to South Asian Inputs in Early Southeast Asia”, 174, fig. 4.

⁶³ Nandana, “Le bouddhisme du Champa”, 69-70, fig. 4. Nandana conjectures that these tablets were all manufactured in the Malay Peninsula.

⁶⁴ Skilling, “Des images moulées au service de l’idéologie du mérite”, 111-112. It is important to measure the broad regional diffusion of this iconographic type which transcends both ethnic and cultural borders.



Figure 11: Buddhist triad surmounted by Buddhas and stūpas, ca 7th-8th c. (drawing by Nitipun, “A Study of Dvāravatī Votive Tablets”, fig. 24, 113).

A related iconography is a sub-regional type which developed its own local characteristic found only at Thap Chumphon, in the Nakhon Sawan region. Almost similar in size and shape to the following quadrangular type found in the peninsula, the Buddhist triad depicted here is prominently represented in a larger dimension. This makes it possible to observe many details otherwise invisible in related sub-types. The central Buddha sits in *bhadrāsana* and is most likely making the *vitarkamudrā* with his right hand; his left hand, palm upwards, rests clearly on his lap. The Buddha occupies the central place seated on his *makara*-lion throne. Two hieratic assistants flank the Blessed One with fly-whisks. At the Buddha's feet, two facing deer might be meant to recall the episode of the First Sermon in Sārnāth.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Pattaratorn, “The Cult of Votive Tablets in Thailand”, 165. Piriya Krairiksh, however, once interpreted the scene as Maitreya preaching in the capacity of a future Buddha. Piriya, “The Chula Pathon Cedi”, 162-165. He also reported to have found a prototype of this tablet in Varanasi, near Sārnāth, India. Unfortunately, the model he proposed to illustrate this is deteriorated and broken at the head, making dubious any attempt at comparison. See Piriya, “The Chula Pathon Cedi”, fig. 192; also Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 53, fig. 1.23.

In the air, a Buddha in *dhyānamudrā* under a (*bodhi* or mango?) tree floats in company of two other haloed Buddhas fleeing in opposite directions. This may well simultaneously invoke the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī.⁶⁶ Two *stūpas* supplement the picture at the top corners (Figure 12). This tablet sub-type, similar to the preceding one, is assigned on stylistic ground to the 7th-8th centuries.⁶⁷



Figure 12: Enthroned Buddha flanked by two standing figures, ca 7th-8th c. (photograph by Delphine Desoutter).

Another cognate quadrangular sub-type of the 7th-8th centuries, significantly larger, is found only in Phatthalung province, peninsular Thailand.⁶⁸ The composition of the scene is similar to the above tablets, but is a bit more elaborated. The central Buddha in *bhadrāsana* and surely in *vitarkamudrā* is framed by two or three standing Bodhisattvas on each side instead of only one, as in the preceding types.⁶⁹ In the lower part, an anthropomorphic *nāga* supports the lotus stem on which

⁶⁶ Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 53, fig. 1.23.

⁶⁷ Pattaratorn, *Votive Tablets in Thailand*, 22. See also Shirai, “The Buddha Triad *Senbutsu*”, 187, fig. 1.

⁶⁸ Piriya, *Art in Peninsular Thailand Prior to the Fourteenth Century A.D.*, 126-127, cat. 24; See also Pattaratorn, “Development of Buddhist Traditions in Peninsular Thailand”, 181-183, fig. 3.

⁶⁹ Four are definitely visible (two on each side) but considering vacant space six were probably intended originally, three on each side.



Figure 13: Preaching Buddha surrounded by chthonian and celestial figures, ca 7th-8th c.

the Buddha's feet rest. On each side of the *nāga* are found squatted figures, probably in the *añjali* gesture. Above the enthroned Buddha, a kind of tree seems to shelter the Blessed One and on top floats another Buddha in meditation surrounded by several celestial figures (*vidyādhara*s?) (Figure 13).⁷⁰ Pattaratorn Chirapravati reports that a “*ye dharmā* formula” is inscribed in *pallava* character on the inner frame on top of the tablet and can be dated to the 7th-8th centuries on the basis of paleography.⁷¹ The whole picture gives the impression of representing the three spheres of existence: the underground sphere represented by the *nāga*, chthonian creatures *par excellence*; the worldly sphere where the Buddhas appear to preach the Dharma; and the ethereal sphere, perhaps represented by the flying figures or even by the Buddha in meditation, who reached *nirvāṇa* or discovered the eternal principle.⁷² At any rate, this iconography invites useful comparisons with Indian low-reliefs from Mahārāṣṭra, especially at Kaṇherī cave 89 or cave 90, although we cannot find there an exact counterpart.⁷³

⁷⁰ Piriya, *Art in Peninsular Thailand Prior to the Fourteenth Century A.D.*, 34.

⁷¹ Pattaratorn, “The Cult of Votive Tablets in Thailand”, 207, n. 2. The inscription is unfortunately nearly invisible today.

⁷² For similar remarks concerning a relief *in situ* at Kārī, see Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, 53-54, pl. 7. Coomaraswamy interprets the central figure in these reliefs as the Buddha in *sambhogakāya*, i.e. the blissful body in Mahāyāna philosophical thoughts.

⁷³ Piriya, *Art in Peninsular Thailand Prior to the Fourteenth Century A.D.*, 34. See also Revire, “Iconographical Issues in the Archeology of Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom”, fig. 12.



Figure 14: Preaching Buddha flanked by two standing figures, ca 7th-8th c.

A last and interesting miniature sub-type of this group is known from the Nakhon Si Thammarat region. The iconographic presentation of this unique round tablet seems to be an abbreviated form of the previous triadic models. Here, only the Buddha is shown seated enthroned in *bhadrāsana* and probably *vitarkamudrā*, and flanked by two Bodhisattvas depicted in the same way as in the previous sub-types (Figure 14). It is noteworthy that an exact replica of this small tablet was found recently on the Indonesian island of Bali, in Gianyar district,⁷⁴ leading to the supposition that they were made from the same mould. Judging from its stylistic and iconographic appearance, this regional sub-type should be similarly dated to *circa* the late 7th- early 8th century.

A second group of tablets displays a single Buddha in *bhadrāsana*. Within this group, two variant sub-types have been recovered in small and fragmentary numbers at specific sites from upper-central and northeastern Thailand. The first sub-type has a flat base with an arched top and is found only in the region between Inburi and Chainat (Figure 15). The second rectangular sub-type comes prominently from Na Dun, near the ancient city “Mueang Champasi”,

⁷⁴ Personal communication with Agustijanto Indrajaya. This tablet is still unpublished.



Figure 15: Preaching Buddha in *vitarkamudrā*, ca 7th-8th c.



Figure 16: Enthroned Buddha under a tree, ca 8th-9th c.

in Maha Sarakham province.⁷⁵ In this latter sub-type, the Buddha sits on a stylized throne and rests under a tree with two branches forming an arch above him.⁷⁶ Two celestial bodies (the sun and moon?) are portrayed in the top corners. The Buddha's nimbus, pearled at the edge, is very refined. The Buddha's garb seems to leave the right shoulder bare and falls down in curved lines between the legs (Figure 16).

⁷⁵ Another rare sub-type, apparently found in the centre of the Na Dun *stūpa*, is reported to depict a Bhadrāsana Buddha sheltered by *nāga*-hoods. See Pattaratorn, "The Cult of Votive Tablets in Thailand", 353, figs. 222-223.

⁷⁶ See Pattaratorn, "The Cult of Votive Tablets in Thailand", 336-338, fig. 206; also Mayurie, "Tablettes votives bouddhiques contemporaines", 222-224, fig. 5; and Baptiste and Zéphir, *Dvāravatī*, 114-115, cats 36-37.

The position of the hands, too eroded, is uncertain, but I incline to think that, as in preceding low-reliefs and tablets, the right hand was also in *vitarkamudrā*, while the left hand, palm upwards, rested on the lap.⁷⁷ These two variant sub-types seem to indicate a local production of tablets most likely based on other aforementioned sub-types found throughout lower-central and peninsular Thailand. It could therefore date contemporaneously (first sub-type: ca 7th-8th c) or slightly later (second sub-type: ca 8th-9th c).



Figure 17: Preaching Buddha in *vitarkamudrā*, ca 7th-8th c.



Figure 18: Preaching Buddha in *dharmacakramudrā* placed within a *śikhara* and flanked by *stūpas*, ca 10th-12th c.

⁷⁷ See also Revire “Some Reconsiderations on Pendant-legged Buddha Images”, fig. 5 (Figure 17).

I will finally mention a group of “alien tablets”, that is of likely foreign origin, in the shape of a *bodhi*-leaf. These are found prominently in central Thailand (Nakhon Pathom, Khu Bua, Phong Tuk) and in peninsular Thailand.⁷⁸ They represent the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā*,⁷⁹ flanked by *stūpas* of various sizes, whose throne is placed within a north Indian pyramidal tower that may represent the Mahābodhi *śikhara* (Figure 18). In fact, the iconography seems to combine two episodes related to the life of the Buddha: the Enlightenment in Bodhgayā, implied by sprays of *bodhi*-leaves depicted on either side of the Mahābodhi tower and the “First Sermon” in Sārnāth, presumably depicted by a pair of deer at the bottom and the teaching hand gesture that the Buddha performs. Brown interprets this Mahābodhi tower as an appropriate place “to house the Buddha in life scenes other than enlightenment.”⁸⁰ Furthermore, an inscription of the “*ye dharmā* formula” type, in what appears to echo *nāgarī* script of northeastern India, always appears below the Buddha’s throne. On stylistic and palaeographic consideration, this type of tablet is usually dated later to *circa* the 10th-12th centuries, which falls outside the timeframe of this study.⁸¹ The type has also been classified

⁷⁸ See Cœdès, “The Excavations at P’ong Tük and their Importance for the Ancient History of Siam”, 196, n. 1; also Nitipun, “A Study of Dvāravatī Votive Tablets”, figs. 35, 37 (in Thai); Baptiste and Zéphir, *Dvāravatī*, 196, fig. 5; and Jacq-Hergoualc’h, *The Malay Peninsula*, 389-390, fig. 195.

⁷⁹ This hand gesture alone enables me to categorically exclude this type from the Dvāravatī artistic tradition. The *dharmacakramudrā* is never attested to in the local art of central Thailand during the first millennium. See Revire, “Some Reconsiderations on Pendant-legged Buddha Images”, 38, n. 12.

⁸⁰ Brown, “Bodhgaya and South-East Asia”, 118, fig. 17.

⁸¹ Lawson, “Votive Objects from Bodhgaya”; Jacq-Hergoualc’h, *The Malay Peninsula*, 390; Pattaratorn, “The Cult of Votive Tablets in Thailand”, 51-52, 75. Let us recall, however, that the attempt at dating these tablets corresponds more to the date when the moulds which produced them in great quantity were first circulated. It is definitely possible that certain moulds were used to print similar tablets several decades, or even centuries, after their initial introduction. Unfortunately, no absolute dating is available for tablets or moulds in Southeast Asia. Even those marked by inscriptions are subject to palaeographic analysis which is far from precise.

as trans-regional⁸² because it is found in Burma,⁸³ India, and beyond.⁸⁴ Thus, this type may testify to interactions between northern Indian pilgrimage sites and Southeast Asia from the Pāla period onwards.⁸⁵

Now I come to the difficult question of identifying the scenes on these aforementioned tablets. How should their iconography be interpreted? Although the iconographic significance often remains elusive and does not seem to match any South Asian prototypes or textual sources, I shall briefly review the scholarship and propose new alternatives. Cœdès was of the opinion that the regional sub-type which he gathered under the heading “Phra Pathom Chedi type” was a miniature representation of the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī (Figure 10).⁸⁶ The next related sub-regional type from Nakhon Sawan, with the presence of the two characteristic deer, is often described as symbolizing the First Sermon (Figure 12). These two episodes from

⁸² Skilling, “Des images moulées au service de l’idéologie du mérite”, 111.

⁸³ For examples found in Pagan, Śrīkṣetra or Twante, see Mya, *Votive Tablets of Burma*, vol. I: pls 57-62, vol. II: pls 87-88 (in Burmese) and Luce, “Dvāravatī and Old Burma”, 16-19.

⁸⁴ For Bodhgayā, see Cunningham, *Mahabodhi*, 51, pl. 24c. See also Lawson, “Votive Objects from Bodhgaya”, fig. 13; for another similar but complete example, see Lawson, “A Catalogue of Indian Buddhist Clay Sealings in British Museums”, 159-160, 170. For Mirpur Khas in Sindh (today Pakistan), see Cousens, “Buddhist *stūpa* at Mirpur-Khas, Sind”, 87-88, pl. 39d.

⁸⁵ Pattaratorn has referred to this type when found in Thailand as the “Pala/Pagan-style” in her PhD dissertation, thus inferring that the tablets reflect more stylistic similarities with the Burmese examples and are somewhat later than the original Indian prototypes. See Pattaratorn, “The Cult of Votive Tablets in Thailand”, 68-69, 75. A related sub-type, somewhat smaller, is found only in the Nakhon Pathom region. In this category, no *stūpas* surrounding the main Buddha in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā* or its overarching architectural structure, nor pairs of deer or inscriptions are found at his feet. Since no similar tablets have been found outside Thailand, these could be the result of a local stylistic development of the Nakhon Pathom region, dated somewhat later than the previous type, thus after the late 11th century. See Pattaratorn, “The Cult of Votive Tablets in Thailand”, 75-76. See also Nitipun, “A Study of Dvāravatī Votive Tablets”, figs. 36, 39 (in Thai).

⁸⁶ Cœdès, “Siamese Votive Tablets”, 9.

the life of the Buddha, with their edifying character, are apparently among the favourite topics depicted in a wide range of Buddhist artistic traditions.⁸⁷

Piriya Krairiksh, however, was the first to dispute the identification for the first sub-type discussed above (Figure 10). According to him, the iconographic elements seen on the tablets are insufficient to assign with certainty these scenes to the Great Miracle. He thus proposed to identify the scene as the preaching of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* or the “Lotus Sūtra” during which Śākyamuni Buddha preached on top of the Vultures Peak (Gṛdhrakūṭa), near Rājagṛha, in company of more than 80,000 Bodhisattvas.⁸⁸ One could, however, reply that there are no additional visual elements here that make it possible to confirm such an enthusiastic and precise identification to link these tablets to sole Mahāyāna practices. Having written this, I am personally open to seeing different layers of interpretations, or multivalent symbolism, in the representations of these iconographic types.

In this light, it would be appropriate to reconsider, for instance, the type of tablets from Thap Chumphon. These have often been reported to depict the First Sermon, widely understood as the “First Turning of the Wheel” (Figure 12). Although we saw with the Nakhon Pathom reliefs that the presence of the *dharmacakra* is not necessary to invoke the episode of the First Sermon (Figures 5-6), the presence of the wheel symbol does not guarantee the scene to be the “First Turning of the Wheel.” In fact, the scene could well depict the “Second” or “Third Turning of the Wheel.” According to some Mahāyānist traditions, the Buddha would have revealed only an incomplete or “provisional” teaching during his lifetime. Some *sūtras* would have thus remained hidden in the underground world of the *nāgas*, while waiting to be revealed later, at the proper time, by various Mahāyāna

⁸⁷ Sometimes the two iconographies are clearly merged into one type such as on a tablet from northeastern Thailand, see Brown “The Śrāvastī Miracles in the Art of India and Dvāravatī”, 90-91. In India, some Kārlī or Ajanṭā reliefs reveal such iconographic amalgam of the two episodes.

⁸⁸ Piriya, *Art in Peninsular Thailand Prior to the Fourteenth Century A.D.*, 33-34, pls 23-24. See also Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 83, fig. 1.70.

masters who acquired sufficient knowledge.⁸⁹ The same surely holds true for the trans-regional type of tablets (Figure 18).

In summary, the iconography of these various tablets can obviously take dual meanings according to the interests of Buddhist devotees. For the *śrāvakas* of original Buddhism, the iconography may well be interpreted as depicting the First Sermon or the Great Miracle, while it could also represent the preaching of any *mahāyānasūtra* for disciples of the “Great Vehicle.” But at all events, we should refrain from concluding too hastily regarding the presence of the Theravāda or any other monastic lineage (*nikāya*), or even the Mahāyāna, after the discovery of such tablets at a given place. The basic function and production of the tablets based on the ideology of merit goes well beyond any “sectarian affiliation” or religious boundary.⁹⁰

Bronze Statues

I will be less prolix in the analysis of bronze sculptures representing the Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* from first-millennium Thailand. The few examples known to us were initially studied very carefully by Pierre Dupont in his monograph on Mon archaeology.⁹¹ No secure new samples have come to light since then to disturb his analysis.⁹² I shall however draw some tentative comparisons with bronzes in the same attitude that have been found in Indonesia and Burma (Myanmar).

⁸⁹ The most edifying figure in this regard may be Nāgārjuna (ca 2nd century CE), the great Indian Buddhist philosopher who, according to the legends, went to the world of the *nāgas* to rediscover the *prajñāpāramitā* literature, formerly professed by the Buddha and fallen into oblivion. See Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 55-56. See also Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 79-109.

⁹⁰ See Skilling, “Buddhist Sealings: Reflections”, 677-685 and Skilling, “Des images moulées au service de l’idéologie du mérite”, 112-113. Various attempts have been made to trace art styles in Thailand with “sectarian affiliations.” See for instance Piriya, “A New Chronology of Buddhist Art in Thailand”, 37-38 (in Thai) and more recently Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*. For reasons stated above, however, the latter theories do not seem likely.

⁹¹ Dupont, *L’archéologie mène de Dvāravatī*, 273-276.

⁹² On my reservations regarding items kept in foreign and private collections, see fn. 10.



Figure 19: Enthroned Buddha in *vitarkamudrā*, ca 7th-8th c.

My overview of this section begins with a bronze of fine aesthetic treatment currently kept at the Bangkok National Museum, reputed to have come from Inburi (Figure 19).⁹³ The low cranial protuberance (*uṣṇīṣa*) forming one piece with the hair and the atypical facial features, such as the modellings of the nose, mouth and arch of eyebrows, do not correspond to the usual native “Dvāravatī-Mon type.” The almost transparent drapery is also rendered differently from the “Dvāravatī-Mon type,” leaving the Buddha’s right shoulder bare and completely covering the left and right thighs, slanting toward the left hip instead of describing a curve between the legs. The extended legs are slightly apart with the knees a little wider than the feet. But especially striking in this model is the highly stylized and adorned throne back with prancing lions and *makaras*. This compares

⁹³ See Le May, *A Concise History of Buddhist Art in Siam*, 17, n. 4, fig. 13; Dupont, *L’archéologie mène de Dvāravatī*, 278, fig. 501; also Revire, “New Perspectives on the Origin and Spread of Bhadrāsana Buddhas”, 129, fig. 11.4.



Figure 20: The Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, ca 7th-8th c.

well with the upper part of a bronze figurine kept in the Radya Pustaka Museum in Solo, central Java (Indonesia), which may possibly have been ultimately modelled after a South Indian “prototype.”⁹⁴ As expected, this elaborate iconography troubled Dupont who legitimately questioned the attribution of this bronze from Inburi to “Mon art.”⁹⁵ Yet the sculpture is important because the Buddha is in *vitarkamudrā* instead of the *dharmacakramudrā*, most common in the northern Indian tradition. Another bronze found long ago in central Java resembles this one very closely, except for its back slab. Unfortunately, this latter piece was heavily damaged in a fire at the Dutch pavilion of

⁹⁴ See Fontein, “A Buddhist Altarpiece from South India”, 18-19, figs. 17-18.

⁹⁵ Dupont, *L’archéologie mène de Dvāravatī*, 278.

the Paris colonial exhibition in 1931 and is now lost.⁹⁶ From its general resemblance with this Inburi bronze, despite the absence of the throne, I would relate to this tradition another sculpture found in Nakhon Pathom, also kept at the Bangkok National Museum, but for which a detailed analysis is no longer permitted because of its high oxidization (Figure 20).⁹⁷

The majority of other bronzes studied by Dupont belong to what he called the T2 sub-group, i.e., the right hand is in *vitarkamudrā* and the left hand, palm facing upwards, is raised nearly to the same level as the right hand so as to adopt a quasi-symmetrical position.⁹⁸ On the example shown here, kept at the Bangkok National Museum,⁹⁹ the extended legs tend to be in exact parallel. Here, the monk's robe covers both shoulders, a new feature, and reveals the typical "Dvāravatī style" curve between the legs. The Buddha's facial features also appear to be cruder and more provincial Mon; the ear lobes extend to the shoulders, the hair curls are in large loops, and the conical *uṣṇīṣa* is surmounted by a lotus bud, a later innovation. A broken circular halo, emerging from his shoulders, is fastened to the back. In addition, his hands are disproportionately larger when compared to the body.¹⁰⁰ The throne is a simple low seat or stool, decorated at the four corners

⁹⁶ Roorda, "Zur Erinnerung", pl. 19, no. 7.

⁹⁷ Dupont, *L'archéologie mène de Dvāravatī*, 274-275, fig. 502. A bronze reportedly from Burma in the hands of a private European collector shows striking resemblances with the Nakhon Pathom example, although its authenticity is not without doubt. See Revire, "New Perspectives on the Origin and Spread of Bhadrāsana Buddhas", 129.

⁹⁸ Dupont, *L'archéologie mène de Dvāravatī*, 273-275, figs. 503-507.

⁹⁹ Cœdès, *Les collections archéologiques du Musée national de Bangkok*, pl. 5. See also Dupont, *L'archéologie mène de Dvāravatī*, figs. 505-507; Griswold, "The Architecture and Sculpture of Siam", 47, fig. 21; Bowie, *The Arts of Thailand*, 189, cat. 53; Boisselier and Cœdès, *Trésors d'art de Thaïlande*, cat. 44, pl. 17. Unfortunately, this bronze (DV 23) is no longer on display.

¹⁰⁰ A fragmentary bronze excavated in Thagara, Lower Burma, near Tenasserim in 2003, shows similar uneven proportions, perhaps another provincial Mon expression during the late first-millennium. See Moore and Than Shwe, "Early Walled Sites of Dawei", 290-291, fig. 27.11.

with four heads, presumably of lions (Figure 21). Dupont did not hesitate to regard this bronze in *bhadrāsana* as “extremely late” in the series, undoubtedly contemporary with the last production of standing Buddha images in first-millennium Thailand.¹⁰¹



Figure 21: The Buddha in *vitarkamudrā*, recto-verso, ca 8th-9th c. (photographs by Bernard Philippe Groslier, courtesy of EFEO photographic archives, Paris; refs. G.1009, G.1010).

In terms of chronology, there are good reasons to believe that the first bronze (Figure 19) is the earliest (ca 7th-8th c.) while the last example (Figure 21) was produced later (ca 8th or 9th c.). This claim is based mainly on stylistic differences between the sculptures regarding facial features, the drapery, and throne motifs. Whilst it clearly shares the same iconography with Figure 19 and may be contemporaneous, the bronze in Figure 20, however, shows a stronger localized pattern in facial expression. In addition, the former bronze image from Inburi reveals some remarkably close affinities with other sculptures found in neighbouring cultures and countries.¹⁰² Perhaps echoing a certain

¹⁰¹ Dupont, *L'archéologie mène de Dvāravatī*, 275-276.

¹⁰² I have attempted elsewhere to link this image within a larger tradition of famous icons labelled “Udayana,” primarily found in Longmen, China, and attested by inscriptions to be dated around the late 7th century. See Revire, “New Perspectives on the Origin and Spread of Bhadrāsana Buddhas”.

regional type of moulded clay tablet discussed above and previously referred to as the “Phra Pathom Chedi type,” I argue that this bronze is neither of Thai or Mon origin and may better deserve the more encompassing label of “Southeast Asian.”

Stucco, Terracotta, and Stone Images

The total number of first-millennium stucco and terracotta images in *bhadrāsana* from Thailand is unknown because many may have been lost over the centuries or in the course of modern excavations. On the one hand, the few remains under study are, or were, from Nakhon Pathom, U Thong, and Khu Bua. On the other, the only models in stone that we have for the entire first millennium are the five colossal Buddha images reputed to come from Nakhon Pathom. I have elsewhere re-evaluated extensively the discovery, provenance, renovation, and iconography of the latter.¹⁰³ In the following, therefore, I shall only give a brief summary of my previous findings.

Only a few Buddhas in *bhadrāsana*, made of stucco and carved in high-relief, were documented from Chedi Chula Prathon in Nakhon Pathom during the first excavations by Dupont in 1940. These stucco reliefs dated from the renovation of the central elevation during the enlargement of the monument, that is when standing Buddhas (state I) were covered by seated ones, either on a *nāga* and in *bhadrāsana* (state II).¹⁰⁴ At the base of the niches containing these reliefs, a few bronze and silver objects were uncovered in the terrace platform. I have discussed these “deposits” elsewhere, acknowledged that they must be from the time when the monument was enlarged, and proposed on the basis of style a date of the 8th or 9th century for both the final state of the monument and the deposits.¹⁰⁵ Presumably the

¹⁰³ Revire, “Introduction à l’étude des bouddhas en *pralambapādāsana* dans l’art de Dvāravattī”; see also Revire, “Iconographical Issues in the Archeology of Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom”.

¹⁰⁴ Dupont, *L’archéologie mène de Dvāravattī*, 73-75, figs. 126, 137-138. See also Fine Arts Department, *Ancient Artifacts in the Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum*, 141 (in Thai).

¹⁰⁵ Revire, “Re-exploring the Buddhist ‘Foundation Deposits’ at Chedi Chula Prathon, Nakhon Pathom”.

stucco reliefs on the facade (state II) would be a bit earlier, perhaps dating to the first half of the 8th century, thus showing a clear revival of interest in the 7th-century stucco traditions observed, for example, *in situ* at Nālandā, Site III.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, these high-reliefs from Chedi Chula Prathon are now lost because of the excavations to recover other stuccos underneath the earlier facade. As a result, the only evidence that remains for the existence of these ancient stuccos are a few black and white photographs taken during Dupont's mission in 1940 (Figure 22).



Figure 22: The Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, ca early to mid-8th c. (photograph by Pierre Dupont, courtesy of EFEO photographic archives, Paris; refs. 25196).

¹⁰⁶ Asher, *The Art of Eastern India, 300-800*, 47-48, pl. 69. The main difference is that for those at Nālandā, the hands are held at chest level in *dharmacakramudrā*, whereas, in Nakhon Pathom, the preaching gesture was most likely in *vitarkamudrā* with the raised right hand (missing).

Other fragments of similar stucco images in *bhadrāsana* are currently kept in the storage of the UThong National Museum (Figure 23). Although the head and hands are missing, there is no doubt that those once belonged to Buddha images, probably in the ubiquitous *vitarkamudrā*. Regrettably, museum records are not explicit about their exact find-spot or provenance and just give the date 2503 BE (1960) when these pieces entered the collection. One may thus wonder if these could be salvaged fragments that were looted from one of the U Thong monuments before proper excavations were carried out in the 1960s. Or, could they be remains that were brought from elsewhere? Speculations aside, one can only appreciate the close similarities between these artifacts and the facade stuccos that were found *in situ* at Chedi Chula Prathon.



Figure 23: The Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, ca early to mid-8th c.



Figure 24: Preaching Buddha in *vitarkamudrā*, ca 7th-8th c.

On a more fortunate note, a number of large terracotta images discovered at Khu Bua, in Ratchaburi province, were safely recovered in the early 1960s. Monument 40, in particular, has yielded an astonishing quantity of terracotta sculptures of different sizes.¹⁰⁷ Seventeen of these represent a series of Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* with the right hand raised in *vitarkamudrā*, while the left hand rests above the lap and is centred on the navel (Figure 24).¹⁰⁸ Presumably, these images were made from the same mould and were perhaps plastered and painted in ancient times. Besides these sculptured Buddhas,

¹⁰⁷ Piriya assumes that “the figures were probably reduced in size as they were placed higher up the building, with those round the base of the stupa being larger than those towards the top.” Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 86. Boisselier, however, thought that these terracottas were possibly brought there at an unknown date from different neighbouring sites; see Boisselier, “Récentes recherches archéologiques en Thaïlande”, 149.

¹⁰⁸ See Fine Arts Department, *Dvāravatī Art*, 142-143, cats 16-17; Fine Arts Department, *The Archaeology of Khu Bua*, fig. 21 (in Thai); Baptiste and Zéphir, *Dvāravatī*, 212, cats 107-109; also Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 77, fig. 1.57.

a few fragments of Bodhisattvas in terracotta were also discovered from the same site. The latter clearly attest in this place to the ancient worship of Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi, perhaps as early as the first half of the 7th century.¹⁰⁹ These Bodhisattvas possibly formed a triad together with the central Buddha in *bhadrāsana* whose identity remains uncertain. On the basis of this reconstructed pantheon, it has long been assumed that Monument 40 once “belonged to the Buddhist monks of the Mahayana sect.”¹¹⁰ While I do not contest the likely, albeit shadowy, presence of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Khu Bua, I wish to delay a hasty conclusion that this monument may have “belonged” exclusively to a particular Buddhist tradition. As Prapod Assavavirulhakarn has rightly underscored, a *stūpa* or a *chedi* is “a public treasure, and any sect could participate in its decoration and veneration.”¹¹¹

Lastly, I turn to the study of stone Bhadrāsana Buddhas carved in the round. These are probably the most outstanding examples from Thailand. Four colossal Buddha images (3.75 meters high), said to be in “quartzite stone,”¹¹² are reported to have originated from Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom. They belong to Dupont’s “group T2” in his typology of Mon sculpture.¹¹³ The images are all seated with the right hand

¹⁰⁹ Boisselier, “Récentes recherches archéologiques en Thaïlande”, 149, figs. 13-14; Nandana, *The Iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Mainland South East Asia*, 158, 183; Zaleski, “Les décors de stucs et de terre cuite”, 173, 176, fig. 8; Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 86, fig. 1.76.

¹¹⁰ Silpa Birasri, “Archaeological Excavations at Ban Ku Bua (Ratchaburi)”, 48. See also Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 84, 86.

¹¹¹ Prapod, *The Ascendancy of Theravāda Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, 104.

¹¹² According to Dhanit Yupho’s terminology, which has been followed by most authors. See Dhanit, *Quartzite Buddha Images of the Dvāravatī Period*. Le May mentions “a light colored-quartz” and Piriya talks of “alabaster” but the stone needs to be scientifically analysed. Le May, *A Concise History of Buddhist Art in Siam*, 26; Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 64, fig. 1.40. This may prove difficult, however, since all the images have been heavily restored with plaster. I believe that the images were simply made of a variety of limestone.

¹¹³ Dupont, *L’archéologie mène de Dvāravatī*, 273-274.



Figures 25-28 (From top left to bottom right) :
Colossal Buddhas in *bhadrāsana*, ca 7th-8th c.

in *vitarkamudrā* while the left is resting on the knee (Figures 25-28).¹¹⁴ These statues are thought to have been seated originally at the four cardinal directions backed against the central elevation of the now ruined monument. On stylistic and iconographic considerations, the proposed dating for the sculptures is close to the last decades of the 7th or early 8th century.¹¹⁵ Today, two of the Buddha images are located in museums, one in the Bangkok National Museum and the other one in Chao Sam Phraya Museum in Ayutthaya. The third Buddha welcomes visitors at the southern entrance of Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom, while the fourth is now in the “ordination hall” (*ubosot*) of the local monastery.¹¹⁶ It should be stressed, however, that the set of images as we see them today were subject to extreme reassembling and remodelling with plaster in the 1960s by the Fine Arts Department after several fragments were found earlier, during the excavations in Nakhon Pathom or spotted by chance in Wat Phaya Kong, Ayutthaya, or even at a Bangkok antique dealer’s shop.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Neither of the hands is authentic; the images were remodelled during the 1960s by the Fine Arts Department (see *infra*). See also Fine Arts Department, *Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum*, 106-107 (in Thai).

¹¹⁵ Härtel, Auboyer et al, *Indien und Südostasien*, cat. 382; also Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 64, fig. 1.40. Pierre Baptiste recently proposed a 9th-century date or even later for this series of four Buddhas from Wat Phra Men, but I do not find his argument convincing. Baptiste, “L’image du Buddha dans l’art de Dvāravatī”, 223. For a similar late dating, see Lippe, “A Dvaravati Bronze Buddha from Thailand”, 126-127.

¹¹⁶ The third image is officially called “Phra Narachet;” the fourth one is often called “Luang Pho Sila Khao” by the local residents because of its presumably white colour. See Chatsuman, “The White Stone Buddha Image”, 20-22 (in Thai).

¹¹⁷ Dhanit, *Quartzite Buddha Images of the Dvāravatī Period*.



Figure 29: Enthroned colossal Buddha with two hands on the knees, ca 7th-8th c.

The fifth Buddha, today located at Wat Na Phra Men, Ayutthaya, is unique in its style and even larger in size (4.20 meters high) (Figure 29). But, as in the previous cases, it has undergone massive restoration over the years. The two forearms, for instance, are certainly not genuine, which may explain the unusual gesture of the two hands resting on the knees.¹¹⁸ Most likely the right hand, by comparison

¹¹⁸ A seated Buddha from Đổng-Du'ơ'ng in Campā (ca. 875 CE) reproduces the same attitude and hand gestures and clearly shows Chinese influences in terms of iconography and drapery style. See Dupont, "Les apports chinois dans le style bouddhique de Đổng-Du'ơ'ng", 267-274. Jacq-Hergoualc'h rather sees affinities in style and iconography between the Buddha from Wat Na Phra Men and the cave-relief of Tham Khuha in the peninsular area, near Surat Thani. Jacq-Hergoualc'h, *The Malay Peninsula*, 315-316 (see also reference in fn. 29).

with previous images, was originally raised in the teaching gesture (*vitarkamudrā*). The head and part of the nimbus, however, are probably authentic. Interestingly, one fragment of a cross-piece with an open-mouthed *makara* turning outward from which a lion appears is currently kept at the Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum, Nakhon Pathom (Figure 30).¹¹⁹ Made of the same limestone, it has been argued



Figure 30: *Makara* throne element (left upper section), ca 7th-8th c.

that the fragment belonged originally to the throne of this latter Buddha image.¹²⁰ But Prince Damrong was mistaken in believing the image now in Ayutthaya also came originally from Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom.¹²¹ The exact provenance of this Buddha remains

¹¹⁹ Lunet de Lajonquière, *Le domaine archéologique du Siam*, 36, fig. 14; Fine Arts Department, *Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum*, 86 (in Thai); Fine Arts Department, *Ancient Artifacts in the Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum*, 141 (in Thai), 185; Baptiste and Zéphir, *Dvāravatī*, 237, cat. 113; Fine Arts Department, *Dvāravatī Art*, 192-193, cat. 42.

¹²⁰ Claeys, “L’archéologie du Siam”, 396-397, pl. LI; Dupont, *L’archéologie mène de Dvāravatī*, 270; Revire, “Iconographical Issues in the Archeology of Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom”, 84-85, fig. 7; Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 67, fig. 1.42.

¹²¹ See Damrong, “Stories about my Third Visit to Java”, 161-163 (in Thai). Corrected by Dhanit, *Quartzite Buddha Images of the Dvāravatī Period*, 4. Other Thai scholars, however, have frequently followed Damrong’s interpretation without questioning his source.

uncertain, although there is no doubt that it may have been transported to Ayutthaya along with other Buddhas from Nakhon Pathom at an unknown date. Before being moved to Wat Na Phra Men, Ayutthaya, this image had been installed in Wat Mahathat in the centre of the city up to 1767. It was only during the reign of Rama III (1824-1851) that an official decided to move the Buddha to Wat Na Phra Men where it is still located. Restoration of the image was also undertaken at the time.¹²² In later Thai art and tradition, the Bhadrāsana Buddhas with the two hands on the knees celebrate the offerings made by a monkey and an elephant to the Blessed One in the Pārileyyaka forest, although, normally, the right hand's palm faces up.¹²³ At any rate, from its craftsmanship, size and material, this icon must be categorically dissociated from the group of four described above.¹²⁴ On the basis of its strong stylistic links with the reliefs of the First Sermon from Nakhon Pathom (Figures 5-6), it may however be assigned a similar date to the late 7th-early 8th century.

On the basis of the above, I have posited that the original arrangement at Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom, consisted only of four Buddhas seated against the central structure of the monument, not five. It is difficult to determine which arrangement this group of Buddhas might have originally represented. However, drawing on different Buddhist traditions and popular practices, I infer that they might have corresponded to a fourfold duplication of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, or the group of past Buddhas or, even perhaps, the transcendental Jinas found in esoteric Buddhism. My hypothesis is that the original scheme at Wat Phra Men actually included five

¹²² For the whereabouts of this image, see Boribal, "Comments on the Stone Buddha from the Small Vihāra at Wat Na Phra Men, Ayutthaya", 41-52 (in Thai) and more recently Sakchai, *Dvāravatī Art*, 196-199 (in Thai). See also Piriya, *The Roots of Thai Art*, 64, fig. 1.41.

¹²³ Khaisri, *Les statues du Buddha de la galerie de Phra Pathom Chedi*, 240-241, fig. 51.

¹²⁴ Boisselier concluded that this Buddha at Wat Na Phra Men, Ayutthaya, almost certainly did not come from Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom. He also noticed the step in ogival form under the feet which he speculated to date to an even later "Khmer period". Boisselier, "Récentes recherches archéologiques en Thaïlande", 140.

Buddhas, the fifth necessarily embedded symbolically in the central structure. This architectural scheme would hence have formed a three-dimensional *maṇḍala*, possibly reflecting both exoteric and esoteric practices at the same time.¹²⁵

Conclusion: A Peculiar but Widespread Iconography

This article has examined a largely unexplored field of Buddhist iconography and has attempted to give it a place in a larger perspective. As we have seen, the Bhadrāsana Buddha images were popular in several sites in first-millennium Thailand. They were found in different mediums such as bronze, clay or terracotta, and stone or stucco and were made in the round or in relief. Additionally, their regional distribution was not uniform. Some were depicted in caves and can still be observed *in situ*. A variety of bronzes and moulded clay tablets displaying a related iconography can also be found. A certain number is known from central, northeastern and peninsular Thailand. However, similar types are also found in neighbouring Burma and as far away as Java and the Vietnamese coast. Many of these images do not belong to a restricted “Mon” or “Dvāravatī type”, but rather fit into a more “regional category” from Southeast Asia and can be dated to between the 7th and 8th centuries. These artifacts thus provide evidence of sustained contacts between pre-modern Thailand and neighbouring countries by way of land or sea routes. Clearly, the production of Bhadrāsana Buddha images found in Thailand is time and culture specific, but yet they cannot be studied in isolation.

Of note, the images in *bhadrāsana* found in Thailand all display the teaching gesture with the raised right hand (*vitarkamudrā*), except for the colossal statue from Wat Na Phra Men, Ayutthaya, which has been heavily restored. This iconography contrasts strikingly with similar Bhadrāsana Buddhas from Ajanṭā, Ellorā, Kaṇherī, and other western Deccan caves in India, where the icons are always depicted in the gesture of “Turning the Wheel of the Law” with both hands

¹²⁵ Revire, “Iconographical Issues in the Archeology of Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom”, 97, fig. 13.

(*dharmacakramudrā*). The argument of a direct Indian borrowing, therefore, cannot be maintained.¹²⁶ In fact, this peculiar iconographic combination (*bhadrāsana* and *vitarkamudrā*), seems to have been also popular to the south and east, in Java and China, around the early Tang period, and as far north as Japan during the late Asuka or early Nara periods, that is, from the late 7th and early 8th centuries. These less-studied areas of interaction during the first millennium, especially between East and Southeast Asia, should be further explored as they may yield interesting results.¹²⁷

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¹²⁶ Here, I go against certain frequent assertions such as those made by Chotima Chaturawong, for instance, who sees a close relationship between Indian and Dvāravatī images in *bhadrāsana*. Chotima, "Indo-Thai Cultural Interaction: Buddha Images in Pralambapadasana", 55-77.

¹²⁷ In this vein, see Revire, "New Perspectives on the Origin and Spread of Bhadrāsana Buddhas".

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Appendix: Database of Figures

Figures	Inv. No.	Provenance (if known)	Current location	Size	Technique and Material	Condition
1	—	<i>In situ</i>	Tham Ruesi, Khao Ngu district, Ratchaburi	ca 250 cm high	Cave low-relief (stone, gilded with gold)	Good
2	รป.๑ (RB 1)	<i>In situ</i>	Tham Ruesi, Khao Ngu district, Ratchaburi	26 cm high; 47 cm wide	Inscribed on stone	Illegible
3	—	<i>In situ</i>	Tham Phra Photisat, Kaeng Khoi district, Saraburi	ca 120 cm high; ca 240 cm wide	Cave low-relief in stone	Fair (some details are illegible)
4	—	<i>In situ</i>	Tham Khuha, Kanchanadit district, Surat Thani	ca 100 cm high	Cave high- relief in dried clay	Fair (right hand broken)
5	19-635(a)	Wat Sai, Nakhon Chaisi district, Nakhon Pathom	Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum, Nakhon Pathom	60 cm high; 110 cm wide	Low- relief in limestone	Fair (broken at the two top right and top left extremities)
6	19-635(b)	Wat Sai, Nakhon Chaisi district, Nakhon Pathom	Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum, Nakhon Pathom	ca 50 cm high; 80 cm wide	Low- relief in limestone	Poor and fragmentary (the Buddha is headless)
7	—	Nakhon Pathom	Wat Suthat (Viharn), Bangkok	240 cm high; ca 90 cm wide	Low- relief in limestone with gilding	Good

Figures	Inv. No.	Provenance (if known)	Current location	Size	Technique and Material	Condition
8	นว.๓ (DV 3)	Probably Nakhon Pathom, found in Wat Chin, Ayutthaya	National Museum, Bangkok	127 cm high	Low- relief in limestone with traces of lacquer and paintings	Fairly good
9	225/2516	Wat Phothichai Semaram, Mueang Fa Daed, Kalasin	Khon Kaen National Museum	204 cm high; 68 cm wide	Low-relief in <i>sema</i> sandstone	Good
10	นว.๔๕ (DV 45)	Phra Prathon Chedi, Nakhon Pathom	National Museum, Bangkok	6 cm high; 3.8 cm wide	Moulded tablet, baked clay	Heavily eroded
11	—	Found near Chedi Chula Prathon, Nakhon Pathom	Unknown	ca 9 cm high	Moulded tablet, baked clay	Unknown
12	1005/36	Thap Chumphon, Nakhon Sawan	Thai Ceramic Collections, Sirindhorn Anthropological Center, Bangkok	13 cm high; 9.5 cm wide	Moulded tablet, baked clay	Fairly good
13	นว.๔๙ (SV 49)	Khao Ok Thalu cave, Phatthalung	National Museum, Bangkok	9 cm high	Moulded tablet, unbaked clay	Fairly good (inscription in <i>pallava</i> illegible)
14	19/7/ 2528/1	Wat Kamphaeng Thom, Nakhon Si Thammarat	Nakhon Si Thammarat National Museum	4.1 cm high	Moulded tablet, unbaked clay	Slightly eroded

Figures	Inv. No.	Provenance (if known)	Current location	Size	Technique and Material	Condition
15	๑๒๓๔๕๖ (OB 3386)	Ban Khu Mueang, Inburi district, Singburi	Inburi National Museum, Singburi province	ca 10 cm high	Moulded tablet, baked clay	Eroded, broken in two
16	324/2522	Na Dun district, Maha Sarakhm	Khon Kaen National Museum	14.5 cm high; 8.5 cm wide	Moulded tablet, baked clay	Slightly eroded, traces of break
17	18/2536	Probably Mueang Sema, Sung Noen district, Nakhon Ratchasima	Phimai National Museum	47 cm high; 42 cm wide	Low- relief in limestone	Fragmentary (the Buddha is headless), four pieces reassembled
18	๗๖.๕๓ (DV 53)	Dong Sak, near Phong Tuk, Thamaka district, Kanchanaburi	Ratchaburi National Museum	12 cm high; 9 cm wide	Moulded tablet, baked clay with gilding	Good, inscription in <i>nāgarī</i> eroded
19	๗๖.๓๕ (DV 35); 153/2511	Inburi district, Singburi	National Museum, Bangkok	30 cm high	Bronze sculpture (lost wax)	Fairly good, part of the halo broken
20	๗๖.๓๖ (DV 36)	Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom	National Museum, Bangkok	19.5 cm high	Bronze sculpture (lost wax)	Badly oxidized
21	๗๖.๒๓ (DV 23)	Collection of Phraya Kamchad Sotanutara- chit	National Museum, Bangkok (storage)	14 cm high	Bronze sculpture (lost wax)	Fairly good, halo broken
22	–	Chedi Chula Prathon, third niche on the northwest side of the central elevation, Nakhon Pathom	Lost	118 cm high; 40 cm wide	High- relief, stucco	Fragmentary

Figures	Inv. No.	Provenance (if known)	Current location	Size	Technique and Material	Condition
23	278/2505	Unknown	U Thong National Museum (storage)	45 cm high; 22 cm wide	High- relief, stucco	Fragmentary (the Buddha is headless and harmless)
24	441/2504 (129/1)	Khu Bua, monument 40, Ratchaburi	National Museum, Bangkok	41 cm high; 17 cm wide	High- relief, moulded <i>terracotta</i>	Fairly good, right hand slightly broken
25	–	Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom	Phra Pathom Chedi (Southern entrance), Nakhon Pathom	375 cm high	White limestone sculpture	Reassembled from several fragments and with plaster
26	–	Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom; removed in 1861	Wat Phra Pathom Chedi (<i>ubosot</i>), Nakhon Pathom	375 cm high	White limestone sculpture	Reassembled from several fragments and with plaster (covered with lacquer and gilding)
27	594/2509	Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom	National Museum, Bangkok	375 cm high	White limestone sculpture	Reassembled from several fragments and with plaster
28	ทว.๔ (DV 4)	Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom	Chao Sam Phraya National Museum, Ayutthaya	375 cm high	White limestone sculpture	Reassembled from several fragments and with plaster
29	–	Probably Nakhon Pathom; removed from Wat Mahathat, Ayutthaya, in 1838	Wat Na Phra Men, Ayutthaya	420 cm high	Grey limestone sculpture	Largely renovated (forearms and hands, lower drapery, upper part of the nimbus)
30	626/2519	Nakhon Pathom	Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum, Nakhon Pathom	49 cm high; 98 cm wide	Grey limestone sculpture	Fragmentary