Journal
of the
Malaysian Branch
of the
Royal Asiatic Society

Printed for the MBRAS by
Times Printers Sdn. Bhd.
SINGAPORE.
KDN 5993 — MC(P) 4705
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Malayan Archaeology of the “Hindu period”: some reconsiderations

by H. G. Quaritch Wales

When I was invited, early in 1969, by the University of Malaya, to edit a revised version in book form of my “Archaeological Researches” I responded affirmatively, only to hear almost immediately that the cost of the project with its many illustrations had been found to be prohibitive. Since the facts adduced in my Malayan excavations still speak for themselves (apart from the Bukit Batu Pahat site where extensive further work has been done) it is mainly my “historical conclusions” which require revision after the passage of thirty years. This I feel can well be achieved within the modest compass of an article which can be read in conjunction with my original publication, accessible in any Oriental library.

I would first make a distinction between those conclusions which stem directly from my archaeological work, and those which merely consisted of expressions of opinion on such perennial problems as place names, which are not the primary concern of archaeological research, although the existence of a solid framework is of value to it. Unfortunately the time when I wrote coincided with an upheaval in historical geography, specious new ideas were in the air, and could claim a hearing because the sound foundation laid by Pelliot had been followed by a bias in favour of purely linguistic comparisons of an obviously unsatisfactory nature. My own attempt to apply a cultural method, based largely on the grounds of relative wealth of archaeological remains, showed its fallibility in my proposed substitution of Ch‘aiya on the Isthmus for the generally accepted Palembang in Sumatra as capital of Srivijaya, while I followed Majumdar in believing that a case could be made out for this part of the Peninsula being the headquarters of the Sailendra dynasty which had come from India. However it was also on cultural grounds that I later found independent reasons for abandoning this untenable theory.

That such questioning was to some extent justified is indicated by the fact that even M. Coedès, the discoverer of Srivijaya, was still maintaining that the Śailendras, who we now know were of Javanese origin, had always been a Śrivijayan dynasty, while, of more immediate moment to the Peninsula, he continued to hold on the inadequate evidence of the Kedah Annals that Lankasuka was Kedah. But the storm that temporarily brought chaos to the whole subject really burst upon us in 1937 with the publication of J. L.

2. H.G. Quaritch Wales, “Culture Change in Greater India”, *JRAS*, 1946, p. 31.
Moens’ “Ṣrīvijaya, Yāva en Kaṭāha”. Since there had as yet been no time for its full critical examination—and as Dr. de Casparis has later remarked “Moens’ articles always require careful consideration”—this could not fail to leave its mark on my “historical conclusions.” Hence we note in them such evident signs of indecision as (p. 68) “unless we accept Moens’ views” and (p. 69) “we have not therefore sufficient evidence to dismiss on purely archaeological grounds Moens’ views on this matter”; but at least it is satisfactory that on the spot observation enabled me to come down definitely against Moens’ proposed location of Kadāram on the Johore river. Most of his fragile though ingenious structure, which would have transferred much of Java and Sumatra to the Malay Peninsula, has now been swept away, and Coedès could rightly speak of it as representing a regression. But in 1939 that would have been a too hasty judgment.

As is well-known, the historical geography of South-east Asia, and especially of the Peninsula, has now been placed on a far sounder footing, mainly thanks to the work of Sir Roland Braddell and subsequently of Professor Paul Wheatley. It will need only occasional reference here. Apart from where they touched on historical geography, others of my conclusions that I myself never took very seriously are my proposed solution of the Black Stone Fort mystery, and the same applies to my section on “later Kedah history”, though it may be that some will find them, as I did, intellectually entertaining.

On the other hand I consider essentially important the interpretation of the cultural material deriving directly from these archaeological researches in the light of my own subsequent work and that of others. I mean especially its interpretation from the point of view of understanding the role of the Peninsula in the development of Indianized culture in South-east Asia generally. The re-evaluation of how far my essential cultural conclusions stand the test of time or need to be modified will be the purpose of this article. For this we have to consider the Peninsula as a whole and indeed to look beyond it.

Writing in 1935 Braddell, while recognizing that the Peninsula was still “a dark spot in the ancient history of South-eastern Asia” foresaw “the foundation of a possible future university ... with the consequent attraction to the country of teachers and scholars”, a promise which after the war was fulfilled. How far this new academic element would have been stimulated by the vague indications of Col. Low in the thirties of last century, followed by those of I.H.N. Evans nearly a century later it is impossible to say. Certain it is that they would not have drawn much encouragement had they received

the sort of advice passed on to me by Sir Richard Winstedt (who had enthusiastically given his blessing to my project), from prehistorian van Stein Callenfels just as I was planning my campaign of exploration. On July 24th, 1936, Winstedt wrote to me as follows:

"I have seen Callenfels, who knows the sites you have in mind. He is by no means sanguine. He says that Evans' Selinsing site has been exhausted. He points out that the Kedah finds were very small and give evidence of no large sites. He thinks that some sites should exist in Batang Padang on the Slim river where slab graves of Indian [sic] type are common. But he is of opinion that the quest in Malaya will be a heartbreaking search for a needle in a bundle of hay.

"I fear he is right, but I thought I should let you know."

What the newly founded University of Malaya would have done in the face of such advice I do not know. Winstedt at the time greatly respected Callenfels' judgment; but somehow I preferred to risk following my own.

There is no doubt that my results served to fire the enthusiasm of the newcomers, and from being at first a guiding light rapidly turned into "pioneer" work which must be criticized and improved upon. This was a commendable spirit, even though the University explorers were handicapped by the fact that none of them had been appointed for their qualifications either as Orientalists or as trained archaeologists. Fortunately one of two leaders acquired the necessary technique, and to a certain extent the theoretical background. Here I refer particularly to Dr. A. Lamb who soon showed himself to be possessed of a real flair for archaeology. For his field work, and some of his stimulating economic hypotheses, I have nothing but praise. Where I shall differ from him will be in the matter of his conclusions, to which I took immediate exception in reviewing his publications; and, as will be seen in what follows, the passage of time has opened up new lines of thought.

Some thirty sites were explored and excavated by me in Kedah, but as the funds at my disposal were as limited as was the interest of the Government of the day, it was inevitable that the remotely situated Bukit Batu Pahat site would not receive the same attention as did most of the others. On the other hand Dr. Lamb, with unlimited time and funds, rightly concentrated on this site which was always realized to be exceptional in its careful stone construction. The results, both in terms of finds and of the reconstruction he was able to undertake with the aid of a French expert, proved his efforts to be entirely justified. It was only when he turned his attention to the more easily accessible sites, especially on the middle Bujang, that he was less well rewarded. Many had entirely disappeared during the Japanese occupation, and I myself could find no trace of them when I revisited Kedah in 1963. But from the more thorough-going treatment that these had received (though often with limitations imposed by enforced respect for rubber tree roots) I

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think that the reader need be less worried than was Dr. Lamb at having to resign himself to "seeing them through my eyes".

It is hardly surprising that Dr. Lamb soon began to consider the possibility of the University of Malaya turning their attention to excavation in the apparently more promising neighbouring areas of Peninsular Siam. That was indeed the part of the Peninsula that had first attracted my attention. A preliminary survey carried out there by myself, which in turn had been stimulated by Lajonquière early in the century, gave reason for the belief that systematic excavations would help towards clearing up some of our problems. But the actual carrying out of thorough excavations in that region gives rise to its own problems; consequently beyond a tour of inspection or two, nothing seems to have eventuated; and Dr. Lamb has left the Peninsula. 8

During this period of post-war archaeological activity in Malaya, my attention was mainly turned in other directions: to central Siam where, when opportunity offered, I was helping to accumulate knowledge on the ancient Buddhist kingdom of Dvaravati, and also to the wider theoretical problems concerning the differentiation of the cultures of Indianized Southeast Asia. Now that, for the time being, the dust in the Peninsula has been allowed to settle, and awaiting those much to be desired definitive excavations at some of the sites of the Siamese South, it seems opportune to undertake a re-appraisal of what has already been acquired.

In the paper in which Dr. Lamb goes furthest in summing up his views on the Indianization of Southeast Asia he proposes that "the Isthmian and Kedah sites need not be an essential stepping stone in the eastward spread of Indianization." 9 He suggests that, although lying astride the sea route from South India to Indochina, the Peninsula was in fact missed out in the spread of early Indian influences and that I and others like me who have seen the Peninsula as acting as a relay in the spread of these influences are wrong, because this is not borne out by the archaeological evidence. Before we consider this we may pause to note a weakness, I believe a fatal one, in Lamb's method: He states at the beginning of this very paper in which he sets forth his tentative conclusions "I do this entirely on the basis of archaeological evidence, and I make no attempt to fit this into the picture of the history of the Malay Peninsula which has been built up largely from Chinese, Indian and Middle Eastern sources ... this literary approach is not always

8. That little more is to be expected from these superficial surveys is well illustrated by the latest example, that of J. Boisselier who in 1965 trod in the footsteps of Lajonquière and Claeys, publishing his report in *Arts Asiatiques*, XX, 1969. I noted little new in his observations, and what seems to me a groundless expression of opinion that Wieng Sra is a Ayudhyan period settlement to which the ancient Hindu images had been brought. Incidentally he made no mention of the early image of Buddha found beside the brick base of a shrine in the centre of the enclosure, where there were no traces of ceramics other than rough local ware.

easy to reconcile with archaeology. 10 But the archaeologist cannot afford thus to shut his eyes to evidence that has a direct bearing on his subject; and if there is a difficulty in reconciliation he must enquire which is most likely to be in error.

Passing beyond the earliest vague literary references to contacts with India, it is of states undoubtedly situated in the Malay Peninsula, and of them alone, that Chinese texts referring to the IIIrd-VIth century A.D. indicate (1) a populous colony of Indians resident in a state, which, nevertheless, I do not suggest was actually ruled by other than an Indianized native and (2) that closer connections were maintained with India than was the case in Indochina or Java. Perhaps the most striking example is that of Tun-sun, which all have agreed is located somewhere in the Peninsula, though that is as far as agreement goes. Of Tun-sun the T’ai-p’ing T’u Lan encyclopaedia, quoting the third century Nan-chou I-wu Chih, states “In the country there are five hundred families of hu (‡ = merchants) from India, two fo-t’u (stupas or Buddhas) and more than a thousand Indian Brahmans. The people of Tun-sun practise their doctrine and give them their daughters in marriage; consequently many of the Brahmans do not go away.” 11 Then there is P’an-p’an, a country which virtually everyone is now in agreement over locating on the Isthmus in the region of the Bay of Bandon; it may well have succeeded to the territory of Tun-sun by the fifth century. The well-known passage in the Liang-shu, about the Brahman from India (Kaundinya) passing this way on his journey to bring Fu-nan its second wave of Indian culture need not be repeated here; I would stress as of no less importance the remark of Ma Tuan-lin that “in the country are numerous Brahmans come from India in search of wealth.” 12 P’an-p’an’s neighbour on the south was Lang-ya-hsiu (Lankasuka) now generally agreed to have been situated in the Patani district, and here Ma Tuan-lin tells us of a dynastic crisis which occurred there in the Vth century A.D. The royal power having weakened there was “in the king’s household a man of virtue to whom the populace turned. When the king heard of this he imprisoned this man, but his chains snapped unaccountably. The king took him for a supernatural being and, not daring to injure him, exiled him from the country, whereupon he fled to India. The king of India gave him his eldest daughter in marriage. Not long afterwards, when the king of Lang-ya died, the chief ministers welcomed back the exile and made him king.” 13 In this case the interest is that even as late as the Vth century there was a close cultural and social connection with India, so much so that a prince would take refuge there and was so acceptable in the Indian ruler’s eyes as to be given his daughter in marriage. His return from exile further indicates the closeness of the relations with India.

10. ibid., pp. 69 and 86.
12. ibid., p. 49.
13. ibid., p. 254.
If by way of comparison we examine Chinese accounts of contemporary Java, Champa or Cambodia, we find a striking contrast to the Peninsula: there are no suggestions of (1) large numbers of Brahmans from India being resident in these countries or of (2) continuing close relations with India, both of which seem characteristic of the Peninsula. There are of course references to Indian religions, however much modified we cannot tell from the Chinese texts, while Ma Tuan-lin speaks of the men of the highest families in Champa as Brahmans, which is not the same thing as specifically connecting them with India. In the case of Chen-ia no actual mention of Brahmans is made, and since we know how much they later became Khmerized, the Royal God being ministered to by a family of Khmer Brahmans of matrilineal descent, it is not surprising if the local Brahmans did not strike the Chinese as so distinct from their co-nationals as to merit specific description as Brahmans from India.

Probably the Brahmans impressed the Chinese more than did the Buddhists because of their often holding administrative positions; but in general terms we know from the monk Nagasena that in the Vth century both Śaivism and Buddhism were practised in Fu-nan. Chieh-ch’ā (Kedah) was a place particularly well-known to the Buddhists because I-Ching and others had to pass time there waiting for the season when a ship could take them to India. Sumatra, however, which I regard as culturally, as well as geographically, as an extension of the Malay Peninsula, provided the main centre for Buddhist study in South-east Asia. I am speaking, of course, of that “favoured coast” of the south-eastern part of the island where Wolters has shown that on a basis of successful native trading, and as successor probably to the earlier state of Kan-t’o-li, the Śrivijayan empire took its origin in the VIIth century, with capital at Palembang. Regarded as “the coast that faces” China it was ideally suited as a place where Chinese pilgrims might pause awhile before proceeding to their Holy Land. It seems to me that no further reason than this is required for the growth of an intensely Indianized state in this region, whose importance with the passage of time inevitably exceeded that of the city states on the Peninsula which had been, there is good reason to believe, the first to attract the Indian settlers.

One thing of which there is no doubt is that I-Ching, who visited Śrīvijaya in the VIIth century, both on his way to and on his return from India, must have found a thoroughly Indianized community, where the teaching obtainable was scarcely inferior to that to be had in India, where however the visits to the sacred places would have been the overwhelming attraction. He reported that in the city of Śrīvijaya (Palembang) “Buddhist priests number more than 1,000, whose minds are bent on learning and good practices. They investigate and study all the subjects that exist just as in the Middle Kingdom (India); the rules and ceremonies are not at all different. If a Chinese priest wishes to go to the West in order to hear (lectures) and

read (the original), he had better stay here one or two years and practise the proper rules and then proceed to Central India.” Whether the resident monks were mostly Malay is not entirely clear from I-Ching’s statement, but what is important is that we have his highly reliable testimony as to their orthodoxy, a complete freedom from anything in the way of atavistic urges. Some of them had very likely visited India for instruction. Indian Buddhist missionaries, like the Brahman settlers, have rarely had their names preserved for us; they were more likely to be individually remembered if they went on to historically-minded China. Thus the last great Buddhist missionary to China, Vajrabodhi, broke his journey for five months in Śrīvijaya; we do not know how many before him, like Dharmapāla of Kāñcī, had made “Suvarnadvipa” their goal.

For me the Malay Peninsula is a key link in the chain of heavily Indianized territory stretching from the Môn country of Burma to Sumatra. This I have called the “western zone” of Greater India which acted as a relay of Indian cultural influences. The references in the Chinese texts to the intensity of Indian influence there in the early early centuries of our era are too well founded to be lightly dismissed, and the question of reconciling the archaeological evidence therewith must be faced.

Wheatley 16 seems disinclined to accept the time-honoured views as to actual colonization, though certainly not amounting to mass immigration, as conceived by Krom, Coedès and Winstedt. Most of the Indian traders who came, he points out, came from the lower strata of Indian society: “Poor and untutored, they could never have been a medium for the transmission of the subtler forms of Indian ritual and aesthetic sensibility.” But being poor and untutored, if they were Buddhist laymen, might not have been a handicap; and we shall see that it was early Buddhism, with its greater freedom to travel, that in fact spearheaded the Indian cultural invasion. Where Hinduism is concerned no one would now deny that Brahmans soon accompanied the merchants, bringing their desirable magic, while it is now accepted that after a certain time a part in Indianization was played by local peoples visiting the sacred places of India. On the other hand F.H. van Naersen’s hypothesis 17 concerning the existence of “kampongs kling” or ghettos to which Indian traders were confined, and where alone all the aspects of Indian civilization were tolerated, has no evidence to support it. Indeed fatal to it is the complete absence of unmodified architectural remains in the eastern zone (Cambodia, Champa and Java) of Greater India.

If the early voyages of Indians to the east were primarily actuated by the desire for wealth, Coedès certainly did well to point out that Buddhism, abolishing amongst its adherents the barriers of caste and fear of pollution,

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16. op. cit., p. 105.