SRIWIJAYA
HISTORY, RELIGION & LANGUAGE
OF AN EARLY MALAY POLITY

Collected Studies
by
GEORGE COEDÈS
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Sriwijaya, and from the ambiguity and difficulties of interpretation of the Chinese and Arabic sources describing the region. Although he attempted to integrate the development of these other sites into the history of Sriwijaya, Coedes maintained to the last his initial position: of all possible sites, that of Palembang, despite the relative poverty of its archaeological remains, was the most likely to have given birth to the state of Sriwijaya in the 7th century and to have been its first capital. The first of the two articles is, in particular, a reply to the theories of Quaritch Wales, who had excavated the Kedah sites, and attempted to place the centre of Sriwijaya on the Malay peninsula. The second article, written twenty-three years later, provides an update on the question of the sites found in southern Thailand, based on a new, detailed examination of the Wat Sema Muang inscription in Nakhon Si Thammarat (still known as Ligor at the time).

Can these four articles written by G. Coedes be accepted today without reservations of a scientific nature? This is doubtless true as far as the basic matter is concerned, especially with regard to the long article of 1918, and more particularly, that of 1930: as we can see from the constant reference made to them in recent works, these articles are still of such value that no scholar of ancient South-East Asian history can allow himself not to read them. This does not mean, however, that their detail should not be corrected by reading more recent work. Thus, the date of the Kedukan Bukit inscription was corrected by Damais: it should be 604 Śaka (682 AD) and not 605.3 Thus also, the reading of the text of the Kota Kapur and Karang Brahi inscriptions was improved and completed by the more recent research of de Casparis and Boechari, who took into account similar texts of inscriptions discovered since 1930 in Telaga Batu (Palembang), Palas Pasemah (Lampung Selatan) and Bungkuk (Karanganyar, Lampung Tengah).4 Certain passages whose reading was doubtful have been clarified; other passages are still controversial and the reader must refer to more recent hypotheses, which it would take too long to enumerate here. Some aspects of Coedès' overall interpretation of the contents of the inscriptions are also open to revision, being influenced by his time and by the global theories on the history of South-East Asia and "Indianization" that nobody then dreamed of questioning. The recent analysis by Herman Kulke,5 who examines more closely the text of the 7th century inscriptions in an attempt to reach a better understanding of the structure of the polity of Sriwijaya, proves that re-reading of sources by historians with a different perception of the process by which the early states of South-East Asia were formed has now become necessary.

Regarding the controversial question of the location of the centre of Sriwijaya in Palembang, Coedès always remained faithful to his original theory, which he exposed for the last time in his *Etats Hindouisés* (1964, and English translation revised by the author in 1968). J.G. de Casparis translated and analyzed with the greatest care the inscriptions discovered in Palembang after 1930, especially the long inscription of Telaga Batu (now also known as Sebokingking), a "central" inscription if ever there was one, and he did not deviate...
on this point from Coedes' original hypothesis. O.W. Wolters, who devoted a substantial part of his historical work to Sriwijaya, although the debate about the location of the capital was not one of his major concerns to start with, continued to situate the first capital in Palembang, following in this respect Coedes and those whom he named the "veterans". The recent work of Thai archaeologists in the region of Chaiya, Takuapa and Nakhon Si Thammarat certainly confirms the importance of archaeological sites in Southern Thailand and their close links with Sriwijaya. But the Sumatran origins of Sriwijaya are no longer the subject of serious discussion among them. As for the conclusions voiced by Bennet Bronson after his excavations in Palembang in 1974, according to which the town contained no remains earlier than the 14th century, it is clear today, after work on the site since 1979, that these were based on erroneous premises.

Coedes himself wrote in 1930 that "the almost complete absence of archaeological remains in Palembang is still a mystery whose solution cannot as yet be glimpsed". He did not live to see this mystery solved, but the results of the latest excavations carried out in Palembang by the Pusat Penelitian Arkeologi Nasional, in collaboration with the Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, prove at least that this absence was only apparent, and the lack of visibility of the sites is easily explicable.

The article by Louis-Charles Damais

The very long article by Louis-Charles Damais, as published posthumously in the Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient in 1968, is a study of the mysterious language in which the short imprecation preceding the Old Malay text of the Telaga Batu, Karang Brahi and Kota Kapur inscriptions (and those subsequently discovered in Palas Pasemah and Bungkuk) is written. Although Coedes, in his 1930 article, and de Casparis after him, had not attempted to clarify a language that they reckoned would remain forever incomprehensible, Damais attempted here to tackle this tricky problem. Rejecting the idea of an artificial language, and using a long and rigorous linguistic and philological analysis, comparing the terms of this "language B" with a variety of Austronesian languages (including Cam and Malagasy), he attempted to prove irrefutably that this was simply an Austronesian language, certainly unknown, but not necessarily mysterious. Faithful to his legendary rigour, Damais remained very cautious in his conclusions, leaving the way open for a new approach. His article, however, remains of great utility, both in its methods and in its conclusions. It is sufficient proof that new research is now coming to light among historians and linguists interested in the relationship between the Malay World and Madagascar: the question of the origins of the Malagasy language (of which it is known today that it is close to the languages of the Barito group, while displaying clearly the marks of Malay influence), gives a key role

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