



**HAL**  
open science

## Southeast Asia and the Early Maritime Silk Road

Bérénice Bellina

► **To cite this version:**

Bérénice Bellina. Southeast Asia and the Early Maritime Silk Road. Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Early Southeast Asia, MetPublications, pp.22, 2014, 978-0-300-20437-7. hal-01538905

**HAL Id: hal-01538905**

**<https://hal.parisnanterre.fr/hal-01538905>**

Submitted on 5 Dec 2017

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# LOST KINGDOMS

## HINDU-BUDDHIST SCULPTURE OF EARLY SOUTHEAST ASIA

John Guy

**With essays by**

Pierre Baptiste, Lawrence Becker, Bérénice Bellina, Robert L. Brown, Federico Carò,  
Pattaratorn Chirapravati, Janet G. Douglas, Arlo Griffiths, Agustijanto Indradjaya, Le Thi Lien,  
Pierre-Yves Manguin, Stephen A. Murphy, Ariel O'Connor, Peter Skilling, Janice Stargardt, Donna Strahan,  
U Thein Lwin, Geoff Wade, U Win Kyaing, Hiram Woodward, and Thierry Zéphir



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London

# Southeast Asia and the Early Maritime Silk Road

Bérénice Bellina

By the third to fourth century A.D., Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms were beginning to emerge in the westernmost lands of Southeast Asia. The adoption of Indic political and religious concepts and their display through architecture, statuary, and urban configurations as well as the use of Sanskrit and other imported writing systems represented a sweeping change, which early researchers of Southeast Asian history characterized as the “Indianization” of the region. The definition of this concept has shifted over time, in tune with historiographic paradigms, researchers’ theoretical orientations, and political agendas. The current thinking overall takes a more systemic and complex view of the process and integrates individuals belonging to more diverse social groups.

Trained in Indian linguistics and history, early researchers focused on epigraphic and monumental remains. The late prehistoric period, from the late centuries B.C. to the early centuries A.D., was lacking in both types of evidence and consequently remained a lacuna in their historical reconstructions. The absence of earlier data, as well as what appeared to be a striking contrast in the levels of

sociopolitical organization on either side of the Bay of Bengal, with only South Asia experiencing the growth of empires and kingdoms, seemed to give full credence to the view that Southeast Asia owed much of its civilization to the mere adaptation of Indian traits.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in the 1960s, opponents of this perspective became more vocal, especially proponents of the “internalist,” or “autonomist,” paradigm, which emphasized endogenous factors for cultural, social, and political change in Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup> The region was no longer considered a passive recipient of culture but a politically independent center able to generate its own social, religious, and political organizational structures, many of which survived, and even thrived, when adjusting to later cultural imports. During the 1980s, more hybrid frameworks, such as O. W. Wolters’s “localization” and Sheldon Pollock’s “vernacularization,” combined elements of previous scholarly trends, foregrounding the innovations that resulted from local adaptations of Indian models.<sup>3</sup> These new theories developed during a turning point in archaeology: its new focus on prehistory, primarily following Ian C. Glover’s pioneering



Fig. 25. Exotic valuables found in South China Sea

- A (top to bottom): Carnelian and agate ornaments, dimensions variable. Private collections, Khao Sam Kaeo, Thailand
- B: Glass ornaments, dimensions variable. National Museum, Chumphon, Thailand
- C: *Lingling'o*. Nephrite, diam. approx. 1½ in. (3 cm). Suthi Rattana Foundation, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand
- D: Doubled-headed ornament. W. approx. 2¾ in. (6 cm). Suthi Rattana Foundation, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand
- E, F: Metal vessel fragments. Suthi Rattana Foundation, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand

research at Don Ta Phet in central Thailand.<sup>4</sup> This cemetery complex yielded the first prehistoric evidence of exchange between South and Southeast Asia, thus demonstrating the antiquity of contact between the regions. Excavation of sites belonging to the late prehistoric period increased. Multidisciplinary analysis began to be applied in the field, with geoarchaeology and archaeobotany, and in the laboratory, with materials science. Helping to challenge the archaeological bias that results from the poor preservation of perishable materials in tropical environments, these studies highlighted previously invisible evidence and defined regional production and distribution networks. Their significant reappraisals of Southeast Asia's sociopolitical and economic organization prior to the so-called "Indianized" period advanced our understanding of its role in the first global system linking the West through India to China—the trading system known as the maritime Silk Road.

Indeed, research has shown that Southeast Asia had already developed extensive and dynamic regional trade routes during the Neolithic period.<sup>5</sup> The importance and intensity of exchange between the area and its East and South Asian neighbors from the Metal Age on (since the mid-first millennium B.C.) have also been reassessed.<sup>6</sup> These reevaluations benefit from increasingly thorough analysis of the early industries and materials of the period, such as glass, stone ornaments, siliceous stones, jadeite, metal, and ceramics (fig. 25).<sup>7</sup> Each study highlights one facet of a preexisting, prehistoric exchange network around the South China Sea, and the results demonstrate some of the ways in which the societies reacted when they became intertwined in exchange with neighboring populations.

From peninsular Thailand to coastal Vietnam and the Philippines, several populations developed and shared elaborate cultural practices thanks to Neolithic networks that traded in a similar set of exotic valuables. These shared items included nephrite ear pendants (*lingling'o*), interrupted rings, double-headed ornaments, and specific types of ceramics such as those of the Sa Huynh–Kalanay tradition (fig. 26).<sup>8</sup> Primarily through acknowledging the connections among ceramics at various archaeological sites dating from the end of prehistory and stretching from the



Fig. 26. Sa Huynh–Kalanay ware found in southern Thailand



Fig. 27. Shard of imported ceramic bearing a Tamil–Brāhmī inscription. Found in Phu Khao Thong, Ranong province, southern Thailand. W. 2 in. (5 cm)



Fig. 28. Gold seal. Found in Bang Kluai Nok, Ranong province, southern Thailand. Private collection

Philippines (Kalanay) to peninsular Thailand (Sa Huynh), Wilhelm Solheim was the first to recognize this tradition. Apart from some morphological differences, these ceramics have in common both decorative techniques and patterns.<sup>9</sup>

As soon as South Asians and Southeast Asians came into contact, the latter superimposed their ideas on certain South Asian industries, thus contributing a distinctly regional perspective to the cultural exchange. In addition to actual commodities, the network circulated South Asian ornamental techniques, which were applied, probably initially by South Asian artisans, to the production of items to suit Southeast Asian tastes. Objects designed for local populations included carnelian and agate beads, glass ornaments, and, probably, metal vessels and other wares not yet identified.<sup>10</sup> Studies of these and other industries help to identify and explain the social contexts that motivated the adaptation of complex knowledge and skilled technologies while supporting the strategies of the Southeast Asian polities in the process. They thus contribute to a better understanding of the connection between political economy and cultural transfers between South and Southeast Asia. In addition to products adapted for Southeast Asian tastes, imports also circulated, including Indian fine ware (fig. 27), such as the famous rouletted ware,<sup>11</sup> seals (fig. 28),<sup>12</sup> and Indian steatite containers (fig. 29). For example, the fragments of steatite containers found in peninsular Thailand at Phu Khao Thong (Ranong province) and at Khao Sam Kaeo (Chumphon province) are comparable to early steatite containers discovered in stupa complexes in the region of Gandhara (present-day Pakistan), among other places, which were used, and at times reused, as reliquaries.<sup>13</sup> Their contents varied from bones to deposits of valuable goods, such as ornaments made of ivory, crystal, bronze, and semiprecious stones.



Fig. 29. Fragments of steatite containers found at both Phu Khao Thong, Ranong province, and Khao Sam Kaeo, Chumphon province, southern Thailand

A better understanding of the complexity of the early networks and of the polities structuring them has also grown out of the analysis of organic materials, many of which—for example, spices, precious woods, textiles, and animals—formed a good part of the inventory of exchanged goods. Current research in archaeobotany<sup>14</sup> and ancient textile studies<sup>15</sup> demonstrates the diversity of subsistence crops and cash crops circulating in routes that originated in various distant lands, from China to India.<sup>16</sup> Some goods, such as spices and silks, were likely luxury items aimed for courts, but others, including foods and other crops, may have accompanied traders for their own personal use. The alleged Indianized period definitely appears to have been preceded by sustained contacts, contradicting the previous assumptions of intermittent interaction and limited cultural exchange.

New interpretations of the region's role within the networks of the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean owe much to revisions of the historical record, which now integrate a larger and more diversified range of actors than were considered previously: socioprofessional groups such as artisans<sup>17</sup> as well as “ethnic” groups—that is, the less politically complex social units that were part of the producing hinterlands.<sup>18</sup> This appreciation of a wider social horizon has resulted from a change in theoretical orientation—including subaltern studies, ideas of a “connected” history, and other postcolonial and globalized approaches—that assigns greater importance to both nonelites as agents of social and political change and to contacts among all groups beyond political boundaries. This broader perspective has also arisen from revised understandings of technological developments and studies of their trajectories through time and space. While much of the evidence is subtle, it can also be direct, as in the case of Southeast Asian ship-building techniques or the spread of Austronesian vocabulary, which is present in many languages around the Indian Ocean.<sup>19</sup>

Other evidence is indirect, such as local variations in South Asian manufacturing techniques and products that satisfied regional and local requirements. All told, some of these analyses grant a leading role to artisans, who actively produced social and cultural forms, especially in a likely context of increasing interpolity competition to control trade and access to foreign prestige goods.<sup>20</sup> A given leader probably had to manage his network of volatile allies and dependents—both of whom provided jungle or maritime goods for trade—by distributing titles and prestige goods, such as ornaments, to build the ruler's power and renown as well as to ensure the wealth of his trading polity. In this scenario, artisans produced various items representing different techniques, qualities, and styles as the political currency to build this pyramidal network. But as the study of stone-ornament industries at Khao Sam Kaeo has demonstrated, artisans there, probably at the request of the leaders, were asked to exceed known standards of technological excellence, pushing productive capacities to their limits. In this way, they would have participated in the prestige apparatus of the elite, who used the artisans not only to show their ability to mobilize labor but also to control skilled labor in the arts, industry, and spiritual realms (such as religious practices and magic).<sup>21</sup>

Different social and socioprofessional groups more or less attached to local elites in port cities and similar transportation hubs may thus have contributed to the ways in which complex and less complex polities interacted as the maritime Silk Road developed. Various ecological niches, whether forested or maritime, and the populations exploiting them may have been linked in this early global network.<sup>22</sup> Overall, current research draws a more balanced picture than was previously possible of the cultural complexity of Southeast Asia and its contributions to the world from the late pre-historic to the early historic period.

(D90). Published in de Casparis 1975; Miksic 2007, pp. 68–69; Trigangga 2009, p. 86, fig. 6.2.

51. Dalsheimer and Manguin 1998, pp. 97–101.

52. For a comprehensive examination of the archaeological evidence for the peninsular region, see Jacq-Hergoualc'h 2002.

53. “Larger Leiden Grant” 1933–34, cited in Guy 1993–94, p. 294.

## SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE EARLY MARITIME SILK ROAD

1. Majumdar 1941; Coedès 1968.
2. Smail 1961; Benda 1962.
3. Wolters 1982; Pollock 2000; Pollock 2006.
4. Glover et al. 1984; Glover 1989.
5. Bellwood 1985/2007; Solheim 2006; Bulbeck 2008.
6. Glover 1996; Bellina and Glover 2004; Boonyarit Chaisuwan 2011; Glover and Bellina 2011; Lam Thi My Dzung 2011.
7. For glass, see Dussubieux 2001; Dussubieux and Gratuze 2010; Dussubieux, Gratuze, and Blet-Lemarquand 2010. For stone ornaments and siliceous stones, see Theunissen, Grave, and Bailey 2000; Bellina 2001; Bellina 2003; Bellina 2007; Theunissen 2007. For jadeite, see Hung et al. 2007; Hung and Bellwood 2010. For metal, see Bennett and Glover 1992; Bennett 2008; Murillo-Barroso et al. 2010; Pryce et al. 2011; Hendrickson, Hua, and Pryce 2013. For ceramics, see Prior and Glover 2003; Bouvet 2011.
8. Solheim 2006; Bellina, Epinal, and Favereau 2012.
9. Flavel 1997; Solheim 2006.
10. For the beads, see Bellina 2001; Bellina 2003; Bellina 2007.
11. Bouvet 2011; Bouvet 2012. Iravatham Mahadevan and Richard Salomon (personal communications) tentatively identified three letters on fig. 27 as part of a fragmentary inscription in Tamil-Brāhmī, which seems to read “*tū Ra o*” and is possibly part of the Tamil word *tūṟavōṟ* or *tūṟavōṟ*, which means “ascetic” or “recluse” (Skt., *ṛṣi* or *śannyāsīn*), but not of a Buddhist kind (Skt., *bbikṣu*; Pali, *bbikkhu*). Alternatively, Emmanuel Francis (personal communication) proposes *tūṟavam*, “common black plum,” or *tūṟavu*, “plum recipient.” The inscription may date to the second century on a paleographic basis and is the earliest Tamil inscription found in Southeast Asia. Parallels have been located in Egypt near the Red Sea (at Berenike), where both Tamil-Brāhmī and standard Brāhmī inscriptions have been found.
12. Once transposed, the inscription on fig. 28 reads *brahaspatiśarmasānāvīkasa*

(of the sailor or captain Brahaspati-śarma) according to Oskar von Hinüber and Peter Skilling. Skilling believes it may date to the first to second century, and von Hinüber, to the fourth century at the latest (personal communications). This inscription adds to the known *mahānāvika* references such as the famous Mahānāvika Buddhagupta stele, which was found in Seberang Perai (formerly Province Wellesley; fig. 65), Malaysia; Chhabra 1935, p. 22; Allen 1988, pp. 253–65.

13. Jongeward et al. 2012.

14. Castillo and Fuller 2010; Castillo 2011; Bellina et al. forthcoming.

15. Cameron 2010.

16. Castillo 2011; Castillo in Bellina et al. forthcoming.

17. Bellina 2001; Bellina 2003; Bellina 2007.

18. Junker 1999; Junker 2002; Bellina, Epinal, and Favereau 2012; Morrison and Junker 2002.

19. Manguin 2011a, p. xviii.

20. Bellina 2001; Bellina 2007.

21. Bellina forthcoming.

22. Manguin 2004; Bellina 2013; Bellina et al. forthcoming.

## BEYOND THE SOUTHERN BORDERS: SOUTHEAST ASIA IN CHINESE TEXTS TO THE NINTH CENTURY

*Transliteration of Chinese in this essay follows the Manyu Pinyin standard except where the original name or title being represented by the Chinese characters is uncertain. In that case, syllables of the represented term are separated by hyphens to possibly facilitate identification. A juán is a subdivision of a traditional Chinese text. The author expresses his gratitude to John Guy for the energy, time, and ideas he contributed in preparing this essay for publication.*

1. “From the barriers of Rinan, or from Xuwen and Hepu traveling by ship for about five months, one arrives at the country of Duyuan. From there, traveling farther by sea for some four months, one arrives at the country of Yilumo. Again sailing for twenty-plus days, one reaches the country of Shenli. Then, proceeding on foot for some ten days, one reaches the country of Fugandulu. From Fugandulu, after sailing for about two months, one reaches the country of Huangzhi.” *Han shu*, *juan* 28. For further discussion, see Wang Gungwu 1998, p. 18; Wheatley 1966, pp. 8–11.
2. Missions from Tianzhu 天竺 came to the Eastern Han court in Luoyang in A.D. 159 and 161 through Jiaozhi, located in what is today northern Vietnam, while another claiming to be from Daqin 大秦 (eastern part of the Roman Empire) also arrived in this

period. A mission from Yetiao 葉調, a possible Southeast Asian polity, arrived in 132. We know nothing of these missions other than the names of the polities that sent them but can assert that they sailed through Southeast Asia. For these references, see Wang Gungwu 1998, pp. 24–25. The third-century Roman coin of Emperor Victorinus found in Thailand and discussed in this publication (cat. 2) may well be a product of such long-distance trade during these early centuries. The same is true of the two coins, one of Antoninus Pius and the other of Marcus Aurelius, found in Oc Eo and of the many Roman coins found along the southeast coast of India. For a broader view of such links, see Raschke 1978.

3. The term *kunlun* was a generic reference to peoples of the maritime realm of Southeast Asia. The origins of the term are unresolved. For an overview of the occurrence and use of the term, see Ferrand 1919.

4. *Jiu Tang shu* (Old History of the Tang), *juan* 124; *Xin Tang shu* (New History of the Tang), *juan* 144 (Biography of Tian Shengong 田神功).

5. The most detailed study of Linyi can be found in Stein 1947, while Maspéro 1928 places it in a longer historical context. The *Nan shi* (History of the Southern Dynasties) notes that Linyi was 600 *li* south of Guangzhou, 400 *li* from the southern border of Rinan, and 120 *li* from the sea. For some background on the archaeological vestiges of Linyi, see Yamagata Mariko 2007.

6. *Jin shu* (History of the Jin), *juan* 97.

7. This reference also accords with the earliest attested inscription recorded for Champa, the fifth-century My Son stele inscription of Bhadravarman I, near the Linyi capital; see Finot 1902. The political affinity of the Vo Canh inscription remains moot.

8. *Nan Qi shu* (History of the Southern Qi), *juan* 58.

9. This reference is repeated in the *Liang shu* (History of the Liang), *juan* 54. Soothill and Houdus 1937, p. 185, notes that the term *nirgrantha* refers to “devotees who are free from all ties, wander naked, and cover themselves with ashes. Mahāvira, one of this sect, called Jñāti 若提 after his family, and also Nirgrantha-jñātiputra 尼乾陀若提子, was an opponent of Śākyamuni.” Here, the reference may simply be to Śaiva Pāśupatas.

10. The unit *wei* 圍 refers to the distance between outstretched arms. Ten *wei* would have been something on the order of 60 feet (18 m).

11. *Nan Qi shu*, *juan* 58; *Song Shu* (History of the Song), *juan* 76.

12. *Liang shu*, *juan* 54. Title/name reconstruction in Maspéro 1928, p. 79.

13. *Sui shu* (History of the Sui), *juan* 82. For example, Senāpati was equivalent to

“master of troops,” while Sarvādhikārin can be rendered as “general superintendent.” See Aspell 2013, p. 9. *Putra* is a Sanskrit term and possibly here represents a prince; see Aspell 2013, p. 9.

14. The Chinese text reads 獲其廟主十八枚，皆鑄金為之，蓋其有國十八葉矣。 *Sui shu*, *juan* 82.

15. Wang Gungwu 1998, p. 84, n. 38.

See also Maspéro 1928, p. 93, n. 1.

16. Wang Gungwu 1998, p. 89.

17. Golzio 2004, pp. 33–35. Subsequently, the inscription informs us, the Cham ruler Śrī Satyavarman reestablished “a *koṣa* with a face” in favor of the god Išvara (an epithet for Śiva). This may have been similar to the *lingakoṣa* included in this publication (cat. 89).

18. *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 (Collected Records for Reference), *juan* 970.

19. *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 222C.

20. Liu Xun 刘恂, *Lingbiao luyi* 嶺表錄異 (A Record of Curious Things beyond the Ranges), *juan* 2.

21. *Sanguozhi* (Records of the Three Kingdoms), *juan* 60 (Biography of Lü Dai). The mission sent to Funan by Sun Quan 孫權, the first ruler of Wu (reigned 222–52), was led by Zhu Ying 朱應 and Kang Tai 康泰, and both officials wrote books about their experiences; *Liang shu*, *juan* 54.

22. Li Rongxi 2000, p. 13.

23. See Manguin 2009a.

24. See Stark et al. 1999.

25. Pelliot 1903. Vickery 1998, p. 36, suggests, somewhat critically, that “all modern syntheses of Funan history are based ultimately on Pelliot’s reading of the Chinese sources, to which Coedès added inferences and interpretations.”

26. Wang Gungwu 1998, p. 35.

27. Writing of the fifth century, the *Nan Qi shu* informs us that “their ships are eight to nine *zhang* [78–88 ft.; 24–27 m] long and six to seven *chi* [6–7 ft.; 1.8–2.1 m] wide. Both front and stern are shaped like a fish.” *Nan Qi shu*, *juan* 58.

28. *Jin shu*, *juan* 97; *Nan Qi shu*, *juan* 58. For a local source, see the My Son stele inscription of Prakāśadharmā (dated 658). See Golzio 2004, pp. 19–20, for Kaundinya references. Another Sanskrit inscription (K.5), of Dong Thap Muoi (known as Prasat Pram Loven in Khmer), refers to a Prince Guṇavarman, younger son of a King [Jayavarman], who was “the moon of the Kaundinya line.” See Coedès 1931, pp. 1–8.

29. *Nan shi*, *juan* 78. The Hokkien (Min) language retains some earlier Chinese pronunciations of characters; thus, it is often useful in reconstructing medieval Chinese representations of foreign terms.

30. Possibly a Buddha seated on a *nāga* (snake) throne.

31. The creation and distribution of such miniature votive stupas, sometimes