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CLAY TABLETS FROM CAVES IN SIAMESE MALAYA.

ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Malay Peninsula. With Plate M. Steffen : Annandale.

Clay Tablets from Caves in Siamese Malaya. By A. Steffen. With 125
Notes by Nelson Annandale.

Last May at Kantang I obtained about forty clay plaques for the Oxford University Museum from Mr. Steffen, who also gave me the following notes. Together with the plaques were the cooking-pot from Kao Sai that is referred to in the notes, some fragments of very coarse and gritty pottery, and a number of Buddhist statuettes and engraved copper plates from Kao Wat Han. The statuettes, which are of bronze and wood, are of rude design and workmanship, but Mr. Steffen, who is well versed in Siamese Buddhism, does not consider them ancient. The plates have one or more Buddhist figures of the current type rudely scratched or engraved upon them. None of them are more than about three inches high, and they have probably been fixed to small wooden obelisks as is still done with similar plates in many of the temples of Lower Siam. There is, then, no reason to believe that these purely Buddhist votive offerings have any direct relation with the clay tablets described in Mr. Steffen's notes. The fact of a Buddhist temple having fallen into disuse and neglect does not necessarily argue any great antiquity, as this commonly happens in Lower Siam when any untoward accident befalls the monks connected with it. I have myself seen a temple that had been left unfinished owing to some occurrence of the kind though a new one was being built a few yards distant. Sheep and goats often make a resting place on the altars of small country shrines that are theoretically still in use. NELSON ANNANDALE.

"During my sojourn in Trang, one of the Siamese provinces on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, clay images, which I recognised to be of Hindu origin, were shown me by natives, and later I found an opportunity to visit Ban Hui Yot, a village about thirty-two miles north of Trang, the capital of the province, and about six west of the limestone cave in which the images had been discovered. The entrance to this is situated in thick jungle in the face of a rock called Kao Wat Han, which is hardly taller than the surrounding trees. I found that most of the natives had never penetrated into the interior for fear of *pi*, or spirits, though they had seen heaps of broken images outside.

"An open dome-like cavity forms the entrance to the inner chambers of the cave, being closed by a low breastwork of bricks with a narrow doorway scarcely three feet high. On the left there is a gigantic statue of Buddha attaining *Nirvana*, with his disciples in attendance round his couch. A raised platform on the right is occupied by several more or less antique bronze statues; a large quantity of smaller images in wood or metal are to be found standing at the foot of the larger figures or partly buried in the ground or in the rocky cavities of the walls. Past the row of buddhas to the right there is a dark recess in which the clay figures are found. Half of the floor of this cavity had been excavated by Chinese pepper planters, who use the deposit of bat-guano as manure. When digging guano they work right down to the rock and afterwards remove stones and the like by sifting the guano through coarse baskets. This explains the broken images at the entrance to the cave. Half of the floor of the cavity, however, was as yet undisturbed, and here the smooth surface of the deposit gave no indication of anything underneath, although the loose soil that had been exposed by digging consisted almost entirely of fragments of clay images. The more perfect specimens were found lying layer upon layer to a depth of almost two feet, one touching the other. Originally there must have been many thousands of them. Having been covered for a long period by guano, and having become saturated with its moisture, they were very soft and fragile, and in some cases the deposit showed greater cohesion than the images. Out of over a

hundred specimens that were dug up I only succeeded in getting about two dozen in a fairly perfect condition.

"In this cave there were three different kinds of images, each kind placed by itself." [There is at least one other type (Fig. 4), but there are only two specimens in the Oxford collection, and both are very much obliterated.—N. A.] "The largest kind (Figs. 1, 2), which was about the size of a small human hand, was generally found in pairs, face to face, as shown in (Fig. 1), and was thus better preserved than the others. The images, or rather tablets, were made of oblong lumps of clay flatted and drawn out to a point at one end, so as to be pear-shaped. They had been worked by hand, as is proved by the finger-marks still clearly visible upon the backs and sides. The material is rather coarse and gritty, but broken specimens show that a finer substance has been spread over the surface, doubtless to ensure sharper outline in the figures, which have been produced by pressure upon the inner side of the tablets. A wooden mould could not have produced the minute detail that some of the figures exhibit, and probably a metal die was used. The largest tablets show nine figures in an attitude similar to that in which Buddha is usually represented at the present day; the other types are purely Hindu. They represent a seated figure with an elaborate head-dress or halo; or a twelve-armed deity holding a captive on either side.

"All these tablets have stamped upon their back inscriptions in some Indian language." [Mr. Wichreme Singhe, of the Indian Institute, Oxford, who has only had time to make a cursory examination of the plaques, gives the following information concerning them. All the inscriptions are in the Nāgarī characters, and probably consist of the Buddhist creed, "*Ye dhamā betuppabhavā*," &c.* They are not earlier than the tenth century. Numbers of votive offerings of this kind have been found in India and Ceylon.—N. A.]

"The current idea of the Siamese that these images, which they call Pra Pi-tām (corrupted from Pra Pi-tam, "Idols made by spirits"), are of supernatural origin is not so absurd as it seems, for when first removed they are of a dark yellowish colour, as if they had just left the maker's hands. On being exposed to the air they soon become harder and assume a paler colour. As they are evenly distributed and constantly met with in the places where they are to be found, the Siamese are convinced that, however many are taken away, an equal number will replace them, and that those which are taken will return of themselves to the cave." [Somewhat similar images, but on rectangular tablets, and of purely Buddhist design, are found in the limestone caves of Jalor and Pahang, and are there attributed by the Malays to the *Hantu Parai* or Peris, whom they regard as spirits of the crags. An intelligent Siamese nobleman, who was well acquainted with the East Coast Malay States, informed me that the tablets were undoubtedly deposited in the caves by the Siamese armies who invaded the Malay Peninsula in the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, and who made them as votive offerings, because they were afraid of being surprised by the Malays. In Jalor the Malays believe that those on which figures holding their hands in front of their faces are stamped render their finders invulnerable if worn on the person. I have not seen specimens of this type. Inscriptions are said to have been noted on some specimens, but I have not myself been able to find any that were not almost entirely defaced.—N. A.]

"Some time after visiting Kao Wat Han, I visited another cave in a mountain called Kao Sai, west of the Trang river. Here I found images of a different kind (Figs. 9, 10, 11), with an inscription surrounding the upper part of a single figure and without stamps on the back of the tablets. The face of the tablets is sunk very deep, and the

* The formula is an abbreviation of that on the Wat Han figures. Mr. Singhe believes them to be synchronous.—N. A.

figure, which stands out boldly, is not so high as the edges. The design and execution are superior to those of the Hui Yot figures." [The greater sharpness of some of the Kao Sai figures is only due in part to the fact that they have been protected from rubbing against the backs of other tablets. Their attitude is that in which modern Siamese buddhas are represented, but they have each four arms, and their features are Indian. They have not all been made with the same stamp.—N. A.]

"These figures were found mostly in a small inner cavern approached by a low and narrow passage from a larger cave, which was dark, and did not contain Buddhist statues. It had been one of the first worked for guano, and so the few figures that remained in the larger compartment were broken, the majority having been reduced to small fragments. Those in the inner chamber were more perfect, though they had been thrown down in heaps, apparently in great haste, and many of them were broken. I succeeded in getting about fifty specimens, together with a small cooking-pot that was found among the *débris*. The shape of the latter is unmistakeably Indian, and I have never seen examples of antique or modern Siamese or Malay pottery of a material so coarse. Even to the naked eye it seems to consist principally of tiny pebbles." [The first part of this statement is rather bold. I agree with Mr. Steffen, that this pot differs in shape, ornamentation, and material from modern Malay and Siamese pottery, but the material is only a very little more coarse than that of a handmade pot which I collected, fresh from the workman, in the state of Nawngchik, near the East Coast.—N. A.]

"The Malays on the coast occasionally dig up jugs, dishes, and basins, which in shape and material scarcely admit of any doubt as to their being Indian antiques, resembling the remnants of pottery occasionally found by me in the caves of the interior." [From Mr. Steffen's verbal description, I cannot help thinking that some of these dishes found on the coast must be either Chinese or Cambodian.—N. A.] "In the interior of Trang I found a short stone pillar that carried some animal on the top and was recognisable, even in its mutilated state, as a fair representation of the pillars near temples in India. In the north-west part of the province, near a fairly large lake called Talèh Song Hong, or 'Lake of the Two Chambers,' there are still, on the banks of a small river, heaps of large bricks overgrown with vegetation. Neither Malays or Siamese are known ever to have used bricks of a similar shape, but they are common in Indian buildings. On the mountain range Kao Chawaprabh, which separates Trang on the east side from Lakon on the west, and is at present very difficult of access, tin has been worked at some period in such an efficient manner and on so great a scale that the workings must have been made by thoroughly experienced miners. This fact points again to India.

"In Lakon, again, we do not depend on possible or even probable suppositions. Siamese history, verified by undeniable proofs, mentions some Indian race as having invaded Lakon from the west, and the traditions of the descendants of these people, still living on the east coast, will have it that Trang was where their ancestors landed." [Until recently there appear to have been families in Trang itself who claimed descent from *Pram* or Brahmins. There are still several *Pram* villages in the adjacent state of Patalung, and the *Prams* are said to have a temple at Lakon. The *Prams* of Siam are a religious caste, professing Buddhism and regarded as sacred by all classes. In Patalung and at Bangkok they take a leading part in all important religious ceremonies. Their Indian blood, if it ever existed, has become so diluted by constant marriage with Siamese women that it would probably be impossible to diagnose it by physical characters. I believe that they even allow adoption into their caste.—N. A.]

"To conclude, I will give a free translation of the facts as mentioned in the old palm-leaf scriptures of the Siamese:—'In the year 687 of the *Maha*, or "Great" era (A.D. 765), great political disturbances took place all over India, and the inhabitants finding it impossible to make a living, were forced in large numbers to leave their

' home and country and settle amongst other nations. . . . At that time four tribes of Brahmins, consisting of a considerable number of persons, made their way eastwards from "Wanilara" to Burma, Pegu (then independent), the Laos States, Siam and Cambodja. Those coming to Siam went partly to the north-west and settled in Sukotairajatani and Lawò (the present Lopburi), others went from Pegu to Tanawassi (Tenasserim) and across to Pechaburi, and still others came to Lakon (at that time called Sai Pet or Kai Pet), where they built a temple and erected their *sao ching cha* or posts for the swinging ceremony. These pillars still exist in the town as a proof that the Brahmins came to Lakon before they reached Bangkok.' As to there being no descendants of these Indians in Lakon: 'In the year 1130 of the *Chula* era (A.D. 1766), Phya Tak usurped the throne of Siam and founded a new capital, calling it Tanaburi Sri Ajuthaja.' (Part of the present city of Bangkok on the west bank of the Menam occupies the site of this capital.) 'He then collected an army and went to war against Lakon. The country was vanquished and the inhabitants taken to Tanaburi in the year 1131 (A.D. 1769).'

"It may be supposed that a certain number of the inhabitants made their escape."

A. STEFFEN.

India : Gypsies.

Risley : Sinclair.

The Origin of the Gypsies. *Extracts from Correspondence relating to the Origin of the Gypsies, communicated by H. H. Risley, C.I.E., Census Commissioner for India. D.O., No. 627.* **126**

A.—*Extracts from a semi-official letter from Mr. A. T. Sinclair, of Boston, U.S.A., to His Excellency Lord Curzon of Kedleston, dated 21st July 1902.*

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Para 5.—Baluchistan gypsies are called Lúrí. Their numbers are uncertain, perhaps 1,000 or 2,000. . . .

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7. India.—A large number of Europeans and natives, scholars, officials, merchants, tradesmen, &c., who have lived in India many years, or were born there, all write or tell me they never saw a *single gypsy* in India. So many Englishmen there have been interested in this question, and nobody yet has found there even *one* gypsy. There are many tribes, gypsy-like in their habits, trades, and tricks, but their languages are all either the vernacular of the district where they roam or whence they come, a kind of thieves' jargon, but never gypsy. Curiously, when their dialect varies from the vernacular, it always seems to differ from gypsies' more than that does. Dr. Grierson, who has been of much service to me, put the thing admirably (and he is a gypsologist himself): "There are numbers of so-called gypsy tribes in India. The best known are "the Doms (whose language is not gypsy). Most of the other 'Indian gypsy' "dialects are not languages at all, but are perversions of other well-known Indian "languages, much as 'thieves' Latin' is a perversion of English."

8. We have, then, 500,000 gypsies in Old European Turkey speaking a pure gypsy tongue in words and grammar. Between that and India thousands of gypsies, their language growing more corrupt, until on the confines of India it is nearly gone. Still, everywhere, everybody, Vambéry, General Ivanhov, General Aminoff, Major Sykes, and hundreds of others, at once recognise them as gypsies just as you do a gypsy in England. As soon as we cross into India nobody can find a gypsy. . . .

* * * * *

10. As to how you can aid me :—

(a.) I should like your own views on the gypsy question as to origin and any suggestions about it. I should value them as the judgment of a scholar who has investigated similar questions with enthusiasm, vigour, and success. It will not do to