

The Chronology of 9th Century Cambodia reconsidered once more

by Karl-Heinz Golzio

In his rejoinder to my article “Considerations on the Chronology and History of 9th Century Cambodia” called “Resolving the Chronology and History of 9th Century Cambodia,” (*Siksācaker* No. 2/2000, pp. 21-25) Michael Vickery wrote a critical evaluation of the observations stated in it.

Before going into detail, there is one point which should be stressed above all: historians are aware that there should be a critique of the sources one works with. In each case it means distinguishing between contemporary and later sources, especially if there is no congruence between them.

This critical point Vickery has hardly taken into account as can be shown in such cases as the inscription of Vāt Samrōñ (K. 956, I. C. VII, pp. 128 ff.) which Cœdès sought to date during the first half of the 10th century (not long after the death of Yaśovarman who is mentioned in line 60 under his posthumous name Paramaśivaloka).

However, because of the record of a wrong date (Śaka 749 = 827/28 A.D.) relating to a donation made during the reign of king Īśvaraloka (the posthumous name of Indravarman I)¹, this seems to be improbable since supplying earlier dates was not the practice in the 10th century, nor indeed during the reigns of Indravarman and his predecessors. Moreover, this inscription also relates the story of the liberation of the country from ‘Javā’ which is otherwise known only from the time of Udayādityavarman II. If this undated inscription- another point not regarded here is that the inscription itself does not claim to be written immediately after Yaśovarman - really belongs to the first half of the 10th century, why did we hear nothing more of this tale “written two centuries later as claims to status by great families” (Vickery) and nothing else for more than 100 years?

In contrast, such postscript datings - whether correct or not - were very common during the reign of Sūryavarman I (1002/03-1049), and the story of Javā seems to refer to Udayādityavarman II. Thus, the “check on Indravarman’s claims about his immediate predecessors” in this “Khmer inscription” is rather doubtful. Moreover, it can be concluded that it was not “apparently written just after the reign of Yaśovarman I (889-900²)” and *not* “by people who had lived during Indravarman’s reign”, but was probably fabricated in the “workshop” (this term embraces both royal inscriptions, and those of officials who were not

uninfluenced by the ideas of the royal court) Sūryavarman I or his successor. This inscription in particular is one of the main pillars of Vickery’s argument, but one cannot decide what is trustworthy and what is not.

Therefore, as the so-called ‘secret history’ of Indravarman’s family seems to be a product of a much later time, here again the demand to distinguish sharply between contemporary and later sources is called for. Without the unavoidable **“Quellenkritik” (Critique of the Sources)** no proper work in the field of history could or should be done. For this reason it is not the “total reliance on Sanskrit inscriptions” which is important, but, on the contrary, the evaluation of the inscriptions, whether incised in Sanskrit or Khmer. The only criterion that counts is their reliability.

From this it follows that the inscriptions of Prāḥ Kô, Bākoñ and Lolei (including their Khmer portions) play an important role for the history of 9th century Cambodia because they give an account of events, i. e. genealogies and relative chronologies, from that century itself. On the other hand, one should have great doubts concerning the reliability of later inscriptions as such K. 956 that record wrong reign dates and stories about family connections never heard of before.

Vickery rightly mentions that Rudravarman and Prṥthivīndravarman were “omitted” and “suppressed” not only by Cœdès and his successors, “but by all of the subsequent Angkor royalty and record keepers”. However, this is not only true for these two personalities: each king after Yaśovarman I presented his own king list, omitting certain kings and thus giving only a selection of Angkorian rulers. For this reason it seems necessary to reexamine all the information concerning reigns of kings, their genealogies and especially their dates. In doing this, one has to distinguish sharply between those given by a contemporary ruler himself, and those dates ascribed in later times to a king of the past.

It is therefore advisable to check first the information given by the kings Harṣavarman I, Jayavarman IV, Rājendravarman II and Jayavarman V, during the period from c. 910 up to 1001 A.D. Noting that Īśānavarman II and Harṣavarman II did not record anything on this matter:

- 1) Harṣavarman I: he only records that he was the son of Yaśovarman (K. 61, I. C. VII, pp. 20 ff).
- 2) Jayavarman IV: he mentions only his three predecessors

Yaśovarman, Harṣavarman and Īśānavarman II, apparently showing no interest in detailed chronologies going further back: no dates and no posthumous names are given.

3) Rājendravarman II: in the inscription of Bāksēi Caṃkrōṅ (K. 286) Jayavarman II and Jayavarman III are named, thereby omitting Rudravarman and Pṛthivīndravarman - Indravarman, Yaśovarman, Harṣavarman I, Īśānavarman II, Jayavarman IV, Harṣavarman II and then Rājendravarman II himself follow (the same list can be found in the inscription of Kūk Slà Kèt = K. 522). In the Prè Rup inscription however only Jayavarman II, Indravarman and Yaśovarman are named: no dates are given except the defective date Śāka [7]12 (= A.D. 790/91) for Jayavarman II under his posthumous name Parameśvara.

4) Jayavarman V: in the stele of Bāsak Romduol (K. 425) he mentions only Yaśovarman and Harṣavarman under their posthumous names, but this is by no means a genealogy. However, in the famous inscription of Bantāy Srēi (K. 869) he gives a kind of chronology starting with Indravarman; after whom he names Yaśovarman and Harṣavarman I and his father Rājendravarman II, but omits Īśānavarman II, Jayavarman IV and Harṣavarman II. It is significant that here as well as in the inscriptions of his predecessors not a single date was attributed to these kings. This fact is even true for the inscriptions of Indravarman and Yaśovarman who were much closer in time to Jayavarman II and his successors.

But then, surprisingly and unexpectedly, began the great era of dating remote events and even of narrating events of the past never heard of before the time of Sūryavarman I, with the possible exception of K. 339, a Buddhist inscription probably written during the reign of Jayavarman V as he is the last king mentioned. It was in this period that we can observe the emergence of the date Śāka 724 (A.D. 802/03) as that of the accession of Jayavarman II, and another date, sometimes read as Śāka 791 (A.D. 869/70; according to K. 521) and sometimes as Śāka 772 (A.D. 850/51; according to the faked text of K. 834), stating in the first case - this was made clear by Vickery - that Jayavarman III reigned at that date for sixteen years, while the forged text says that Jayavarman III became king in that year at the age of 16. To make it clear once again: the translation is not the main point of the critique, but rather a secondary one.

The main point is the vast bulk of dates produced during the time of Sūryavarman I (and some during that of his successor Udayādityavarman II) which seemingly came out from nowhere, probably with the goal of giving the past an historical framework which served in more than one case to demonstrate to his contemporaries that he (Sūryavarman I) was as pious as his predecessors by giving donations to places and temples as they supposedly (according to his

records) had done. I referred in my paper to some of these examples, i. e. to the inscriptions K. 256 and K. 774. If Vickery had read my paper carefully he would have been aware that I never “unnecessarily confused the issue of the dates of Jayavarman III” with events of his reign. As I showed clearly on p. 23 “it is remarkable that there is a tendency in those late inscriptions to fill in the period before and after 877/78 with events - mostly donations - which are not corroborated by contemporary sources.”

The inscription of Prāsāt Kōk Pō, a temple in the area of Angkor proper which became the capital not earlier than during the reign of Yaśovarman, narrates the story of a priestly family and the donations received by it. There is a strong suspicion that the donor of this inscription explicitly wanted to place the origin of this priestly family into the time of the founding father Jayavarman II and to emphasize the antiquity of the donations, since nothing is known of them from earlier documents. Such information as that concerning the donation of an image of Hari (Śiva) dated Monday, at a total eclipse of the moon in the Śāka year 779 from the Prāsāt Kōk Pō inscription (Pillar II, stanza 10) is not really trustworthy despite the fact that the date can be verified as Monday, the 22nd June 856³, which is also confirmed by Oppolzer’s *Canon der Finsternisse*⁴.

And again, referring to K. 175, I clearly distinguished between the date assigned to the inscription (15th December 980) and the other date which refers without any doubt to the commencement of the reign of king Jayavarman V (as the formula “During the reign of His Majesty who enjoyed the Dharmic rule in Śāka 891” suggests); the latter one contradicts the commencement of his reign in Śāka 890 stated in other inscriptions. I never said that Śāka 90[2] has anything to do with the accession, but that 891 refers - against the opinion of Vickery - to the accession date. Despite this, Vickery rightly stated that it is irrelevant for the dating of Jayavarman III.

It was the purpose of my paper to show that different kings of the 9th and 10th centuries produced different king lists and genealogies, but none of them attributed dates to their predecessors, probably for the simple reason that they were not known. If Indravarman and Yaśovarman had known the accession dates of Jayavarman II and his successors, why should they (and all the other kings of the 10th century) have kept these dates secret ?

Coming back now to the king lists of Indravarman and Yaśovarman, the purpose of which was according to Vickery “clearly not to record true ancestry...” However, as “the succession rule of the time, of which we know nothing, ... was certainly not patrilinear primogeniture” this corresponds very well with the list of the Lolei inscription, and there is no need to assume that “Indravarman [and Yaśovarman], like many dynasts the world over who were

not directly descended from previous rulers, posthumously promoted his parents to royal rank”. On the contrary, such behaviour may be true for later generations, but not for immediate successors who could hardly claim such things to their contemporaries, who were themselves eye-witnesses of the related events. In this context, it is surprising, taking into consideration the Critique of the Sources, that later inscriptions should be considered more trustworthy than contemporary ones, thus twisting things instead of following a historio-critical method. Going this wrong way means nothing less than accepting the ‘Donations of Constantine and of Pipin’ as historical facts simply because these documents claim to be written by those rulers.

Of some special interest is the inscription of the brahmin Śivasoma incised in the temple of Pràsàt Kandòl Dò'm in Hariharālaya⁵, which bears the defective date Śaka 80x (i. e. between 878 and 887 A.D.); we learn here that he (Śivasoma) was the grandson of a king called

Jayendrādhīpativarman who again was a maternal uncle of Jayavarman II. This does not help us very much to solve the question of the later genealogies, but suggests - as Vickery says - that Jayavarman II inherited some kind of special status from him. Therefore it seems not unlikely to regard Jayavarman II as a ruler who increased his power in the Angkor region step by step, probably after he came from some other part of Cambodia to that place.

However, the genealogies of the 10th century, partly reaching back to the pre-Angkorian period, are also questionable. Puṣkārakṣa, mentioned in them as king of Śambhupura, can not be verified by any inscription of the 8th century. The identification of that name with a certain Puṣkara of the Prāḥ Thāt Kvān Pir inscription (K. 121), dated 5th January 717⁶ is really just a speculation by Coedès. If this Puṣkārakṣa was a historical figure, he would not have been a king as he was stylized two centuries later.

1. Coedès said that the decimal number was not clearly readable, but shows no similarity to the one-digit number (= 9) at all, meaning that the only possible correct date Śaka 799, was not possible.

2. Although he correctly classified those parts of the inscriptions of Tūol Tà Pé... (K. 834, *I. C.*, V, S. 244 ff.) relating to kings and dates as a faked text, Vickery follows here the date Śaka 822 (AD 900/01) given for the commencement of the reign of Harṣavarman I that contradicts K. 558 (*BEFEO* XXV [1925], pp. 363-365) dated Śaka 890 from Phnom Bākhèñ in which it is said that Jayavarman V copied an inscription of Yaśovarman incised originally in Śaka 829 (AD 907/08).

3. The Śaka year 779 is a current year - the year 857 A.D. mentioned by Coedès and Dupont is based only on the usual addition of the given year [779] + 78, a calculation which is not satisfactory at all.

4. Theodor Ritter von Oppolzer, *Canon der Finsternisse*, Wien 1887, p. 356.

5. K. 809: see *I. C.*, I, pp. 37 ff.

6. *BEFEO* IV (1904), pp. 675-676; Finot believed that the date (Śaka 638, Moon half in Virgo, Saturn in Libra, Jupiter and Venus in Aquarius, Mercury in Makara [as *mīnendra* means “Lord of the Fishes”, not Pisces], the Sun and Mars in an aquatic sign) because of the unspecified statement about the position of the Sun could not be verified (“une vérification est pratiquement impossible”), but this is not true: the position of Jupiter determines that year as an elapsed one, the position of the Moon combined with the position of the Sun in an aquatic sign makes only four dates possible, the 23rd Mārgaśīra (Zodiac sign Cancer), the 17th Māgha (Zodiac sign Capricorne = Makara), the 17th Phālguna (Zodiac sign Aquarius) and the 14th Caitra (Zodiac sign Pisces). By calculating the given positions of Venus and Mercury one can easily decide that the 17th Māgha only is the correct date.

