Art Institute of Chicago stone Buddha statue, tank foundation, Śaka year 1580

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Summary

17th-century inscription recording the foundation of a tank. Engraved on the back of a 12th-century stone Buddha statue first noticed in Pōḷakkuṭi, possibly brought there from Nākappaṭṭiṉam, and presently kept in the Art Institute of Chicago (access no. 1964.556).

Edition

〈1〉 **svasti śrī**

cāli-vāka〈2〉ṉa-(ca)kāt=tam 1000 5 100 8 10〈3〉 Itan mēl-c cell(ā) [ni]〈4〉ṉṟa pi(ṟa)māti ൭൩൰ Āṭi ൬൭〈5〉 mutal ൭൨

rācamā(nya)〈6〉rāca-**śrī**-mallāri-rāyar〈7〉 peḷai〈k〉kuṭi-〈k〉 kuḷam ve〈8〉ṭṭivicca paṭiyiṇālē〈9〉 Inta k¡o!〈u〉ḷattilē tai〈10〉 mātam mutal yā(t)ām ¿e?〈o〉〈11〉ruvar

kūṭai-〈t〉 taṇṇīr〈12〉Ē(r̲)ṟaccālum cuṟṟi ma(ra)〈13〉ṅkaḷai veṭṭ(i)ṉ̲(ā)lum〈14〉 keṅkai-karaiyi(l)ē (kār-ā)〈15〉m-pacuvai-k koṉ̲(r̲)a tō〈16〉**ṣa**ttiḷē pōka-k-kaṭavar ā(kavum)

Apparatus

〈2〉 1000 5 100 8 10 ◇ *1000 500 〈60〉* C • The figure is clearly legible to me in an online video from the Art Institute of Chicago.

〈4〉 pi(r̲a)māti ◇ *piṟamāti* C.

〈7〉 peḷai〈k〉kuṭi〈k〉 ◇ *peḷaikuṭi〈k〉* C.

〈12〉 Ē(r̲)ṟaccālum ◇ *eṟaiccalum* C.

〈13〉 veṭṭ(i)ṉ̲(ā)lum ◇ *veṭṭiṉ̲alum* C.

〈16〉 pōkakkaṭavar ◇ *pokakkattu [?]* C.

Translation

〈1〉 Prosperity! Fortune!

〈1–5〉 Year 1580 of the Cālivākaṉ̲a-Caka 〈era〉, (that is), date first of the month of Āṭi of the year Piṟamāti,[1] which was current upon it.

〈5–16〉 According to the manner in which the glorious Mallārirāyar[2], king honoured by kings, had the tank in Peḷaikkuṭi dug, at this tank, starting from the month of Tai, if one, whoever (*yātam oruvar*), lifts up water 〈with〉 baskets or cuts sourrounding trees, he should be deemed to undergo the sin of killing a black cow on the bank of the Ganges.

Commentary

The date is problematic. Śaka 1580, that is 1658/59 CE, does not match any Jovian 60-year cycle year Piṟamāti, that is, Pramāthin (1639/40 CE) or Pramādin (1603/04, 1663/64 CE). See discussion in Cox 2025 (p. 491), who suggests that "the simplest solution is thus to understand the year as *pramāthin*, equivalent to Śaka 1560 or 1638 CE."

[1] That is, Jovian 60-year cycle year Pramāthin or Pramādin, as pointed out by Cox 2025 (p. 491).
[2] On this possibly being the Tamil rendering of the Marathi name Malhār Rao, see Cox 2025 (p. 492).

Bibliography

Reported in ARIE 1950–51 (ARIE/1950-1951/B/1950-1951/255); in Ghose 2022, with photograph.

Edited and translated in Cox 2025 (pp. 493-494), with photograph (fig. 10, p. 504).

This digital edition by Emmanuel Francis based on documentation kindly supplied by Nicolas Revire (including an unpublished reading by the late Michael Rabe) and on Cox 2025.

Primary

[C] Cox, Whitney. 2025. “Bricks from a Tamil Pagoda.” In: *For the Love of Tamil: Essays in Honor of E. Annamalai*. Edited by Margherita Trento. Napoli: UniorPress, pp. 479–504.

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