

rare survivals of ancient writing were clearly exceptional even in their own day in relation to the wide variety of other texts now lost, but they were intended to last and be remembered.

Stone stelae were usually placed in front of brick temples dedicated to Buddhist or Hindu deities and often recorded the foundation or restoration of the temple, as well as the fields and personnel dedicated to its maintenance. Many architectural features on the temple itself were also inscribed with text. Primary among these was the main temple doorway or entrance. Early Cam temples were built entirely of brick, with stone only being used for sculptural decoration. At the end of the 9th century however, massive stone door pillars and doorframes were introduced to support the entrance and these were increasingly inscribed from the 11th century onwards. The most important surfaces were the sides of the outer entrance or porch, but the lintel or broad stone above the doorway could also be used for text.

In addition to the doorway itself, stone relief sculpture placed by the side of the stairs or around the base of the temple were also inscribed. In these cases, the writing is in several cases used to describe the scenes depicted in the carving. The bases and pedestals of free standing sculpture, placed either at the entrance or inside the temple, could also be used to record the names of the donors.

From Southern Brāhmī to modern Cam script: palaeographic changes over time and place

Only one alphabet was used in ancient Campā, both to write Sanskrit and Old Cam. What was the writing system in question? As in most neighboring civilizations in Southeast Asia that have left inscriptions, the history of the production of inscriptions in Campā begins with texts in Sanskrit, written in a form of script borrowed from India. All alphabets of Indian origin that came to be used in ancient Southeast Asia are descendants of an alphabet conceived in the 3rd century BC under the north Indian ruler Aśoka. The name of the writing system, known from ancient sources, was *brāhmī lipi*, which means 'writing system of Brahṁā'. The writing system was named after the god of learning. Perhaps its fundamental characteristic is that the basic sign-unit is the syllable, so that one sign in the original script often corresponds to more than one letter in transcription. For example, the words *brāhmī lipi* comprise just four units: *brā-hmī-li-pi*. These units are called *akṣara*.

During the first few centuries of the use of the Brāhmī script in India, certain developments occurred that eventually led to a clear distinction between forms of Brāhmī used in North India, and those used in the South. Since the adoption of writing in Southeast Asia happened after the crystallization of this distinction, but before further developments led to even greater diversity of scripts in India, scholars technically call the most ancient form of writing seen in Southeast Asia 'Southern Brāhmī'. The oldest example of Southern Brāhmī writing in Southeast Asia is the famous Vō Cánh inscription (C. 40), entirely written in Sanskrit language, held at the National Museum of History in Hanoi.

In many publications in Southeast Asian history, and particularly on inscriptions, we also find the term 'Pallava script' denoting the same early phase of writing. This name refers to the important Pallava dynasty, which came to power on the East coast of South India towards the end of the third century AD, in the area that now lies north and south of the border between the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Scholars at the beginning of the 20th century indeed attributed a very important role to this Pallava dynasty in the spread of cultural features – chiefly the use of Sanskrit and a particular form of writing – from India to Southeast Asia. But there is no direct evidence of any Pallava involvement and the Pallava dynasty was by no means the only South Indian dynasty to issue inscriptions in this script during the early centuries of our era. Moreover, the inscriptions of other dynasties show writing that looks just as much like the script of the ancient inscriptions of Southeast Asia, as does that of the Pallava inscriptions. For all these reasons, we think it is not good to emphasize the role of the Pallava dynasty too much. We prefer to use more neutral terminology.

In the early centuries of the historical period, the similarities between the script used in Campā and in other ancient kingdoms, such as that of the Khmers, or that of Śrīvijaya in the Indonesian island of Sumatra, are so striking, that one can speak of a common script. Only gradually did this common script develop in different ways in the different parts of Southeast Asia, and only from the 8th and 9th century onwards do differences become so incisive, that a scholar specializing in one area may not easily read inscriptions from another area.

Looking at the development of writing in Campā, certain trends can be distinguished