

between the early inscriptions and those of the final phase of production of inscriptions in Campā in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The most important general development in this period is the gradual elimination of descenders and ascenders of the basic signs, so that these signs were made to fit between the baseline and the standard height per sign, corresponding to what is called the 'x-height' in western typographical tradition. Apart from this, different periods of the production of Campā inscriptions show noticeably different 'styles'. In many cases, we see a very uniform style of writing in all inscriptions issued by one king or a closely related sequence of rulers. For this reason, we believe it may be more appropriate to speak of writing styles of specific reigns, than to speak of palaeographic differences between inscriptions of different periods only in chronological terms. But in general it must be admitted that scholars of ancient Campā have not yet undertaken any systematic palaeographic studies, and no studies at all that look at the palaeographic continuities and changes between the corpus of inscriptions and the corpus of Cam manuscripts.

### The languages used in inscriptions of Campā

We have mentioned above that the earliest inscription of Campā is in Sanskrit. With the exception of two old inscriptions in Cam language, one can say more generally that during the early centuries of the production of inscriptions in Campā, the language of expression was always Sanskrit. After a period of several centuries during which Sanskrit was used almost to the exclusion of any other language, from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards Sanskrit has to share space with Cam. In the inscriptions of the 'Indrapura dynasty', Sanskrit is still clearly the dominant language, but in the 11<sup>th</sup> century the roles are reversed, and we see only a minor part of inscriptions reserved for a perfunctory opening in Sanskrit, while the important contents are transferred into the now more substantial Cam part of the text. And in the centuries that follow, the use of Sanskrit disappears altogether. This gradual disappearance of the use of Sanskrit went hand in hand with, and was no doubt partly caused by, a gradual decrease in the competence of local scholars in the Sanskrit language. Later Sanskrit inscriptions of Campā are often clumsy, using only simple vocabulary, and disrespecting the rules of grammar.

Because the notion is widespread in Vietnam that inscriptions of Campā are written in Sanskrit,

it is very important to emphasize that this is true only for a part of them. In fact the majority of inscriptions are written in an ancient form of the Cam language, that scholars conventionally call 'Old Cam'. This language is only known from inscriptions, not from any other types of documents. In giving it the name 'Old Cam', scholars presuppose that it is the ancestor of the language spoken by the various Cam ethnic groups today. Indeed, despite the tremendous differences, there are also many continuities between the language seen in the inscriptions and that preserved in the manuscripts and spoken language of the Cams. It seems that the language has strongly evolved between the 'Old' and the 'Modern' stages, so that a modern Cam person cannot normally understand more than a few words of an Old Cam inscription, even if the ancient Cam script is transposed into modern Cam letter-shapes. Nevertheless, the modern language, which has been described in dictionaries and grammars, provides the essential key for trying to translate Old Cam inscriptions.

The Cam language, which is used today not only by Cams in Binh Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces of Vietnam, but also by Cams in Cambodia and in the Mekong delta, is closely related to a number of other ethnic minority languages in Vietnam and even on the island of Hainan in China. All these languages, together with the language of Aceh on the northern tip of the Indonesian island of Sumatra, make up what linguists call the 'Chamic' language group. This group itself is only a small branch of the great family of Austronesian languages, spoken from the island of Madagascar to Easter Island in the South Pacific Ocean. And within this great language family, the Chamic languages are most closely related to the Malay language, spoken in many countries of maritime Southeast Asia, and forming the basis of the modern national languages of both Malaysia and Indonesia. The connection between Cam and Malay is very close indeed. Many words are identical, such as *ikan* 'fish', *bulan* 'moon' and *urañ* (*urang*) 'man'; other words are very close, and reveal systematic sound correspondences (e.g., Cam *matai* 'die', *marai* 'go', *kakai* 'foot' vs. Malay *mati*, *mari*, *kaki*). The comparison with Malay is another very helpful means of determining the meaning of Old Cam words, whenever the comparison with modern Cam yields no results.

Still, it must be admitted that it is very often difficult to translate the Old Cam inscriptions,