

and indeed it is quite commonly impossible to be certain how given parts of the inscriptions in Old Cam are to be interpreted. The problem is that the Old Cam language is very different *both* from modern Cam *and* from Malay, so that the recourse to these two languages as sources of explanation only leads to a solution some of the time. This problem is worsened by the fact that we have only a limited number of inscriptions in Cam language, so that the number of words that appear only once throughout the entire corpus of Campā inscriptions is significant. And this means we depend for the interpretation of these words entirely on the single context in which they appear.

It should be added, finally, that by contrast with Sanskrit, which is often used in verse-form, the Old Cam language is always used in prose form. We do not have any truly literary texts in Old Cam language. There are many inscriptions where one or more portions in Sanskrit are combined with one or more portions in Cam language. And in these cases, there is a very clear distinction in function between them.

What do the inscriptions say?

The inscriptions, generally speaking, serve both immediate worldly aims, and more distant aims, both worldly and beyond this world, on behalf of kings who are, in most cases, responsible for their creation. And one might say that the distinction between the use of Cam and Sanskrit is a reflection of the worldliness of a given (part of a) text: the more concerned with eternity – the fame of kings and the power of the gods – the more likely that Sanskrit would be used; the more concerned with the immediate exigencies of social life, the more likely that Cam would be used. This generalization of course holds true most specifically in the period of a few centuries, from about the 9th through the 11th century, when the use of bilingual inscriptions was in vogue.

Most inscriptions can be viewed as basically legal documents recording some kind of transaction, with the purpose to make clear which human or divine parties held which rights after the transaction had taken place. Often (especially in the case of Sanskrit inscriptions), this aspect of legal transaction is only implicit. For example, when a king merely records that he has founded the image of a god, we know that such a foundation would normally have been accompanied with donation of land, goods and/or labor to be used in the service of the god,

even if these mundane arrangements are left unmentioned in the text.

We thus learn from the inscriptions which gods were worshipped, and what material means were used to serve them. Since one of the most important ways of supporting religious institutions was by granting them land and tax exemptions, the inscriptions (in Cam language) are particularly rich in information about the ancient system of land tenure. We learn of the foundation of monasteries for monks in at least two different religious traditions, Buddhism and the cult of Śiva. We learn of the personnel – from priests to slaves – who were active in religious institutions. Besides Buddhism and Śaivism, the religion of Viṣṇu also played a role, but much less prominently than Buddhism, which itself was in most periods and regions less prominent than Śaivism. Reading between the lines of some of the Sanskrit inscriptions, we are sometimes able to determine which of the seminal religious texts of these Indian religions were disseminated and studied in Campā, for the authors of the inscriptions occasionally allude to, or even cite from, known Indian Sanskrit texts.

As we have already pointed out above, almost all inscriptions are explicitly stated to have been issued by or on behalf of worldly authorities: the kings, the queens and their high officers. For this reason, the inscriptions are full of the names of royalty and nobility, and they allow us to learn a considerable amount about political affairs, including relations with the immediately neighbouring countries – Cambodia (called *kamvuja* or *kvir*) and Đại Việt (*yavana* or *yvan*) – as well as more distant countries. Such relations seem to have been characterized by a never-ending ebb and flow of war and peace. The inscriptions record the return and departure of armed forces, and the battles in which they had engaged or the enemy they were sent out to meet.

Last but not least, the inscriptions generally record *when* such events happened. And it is this fortunate circumstance that has allowed historians in the French period to write the basic story of the ancient history of Campā, with special attention to the lineages of kings. The task of the historian today is to critically re-evaluate the dynastic history, using newly discovered inscriptions and reinterpreting inscriptions that have been known for a long time.