

Vajrayāna Buddhism in Early Thailand from 8th to 13th Century CE as evidenced by inscriptions and archaeological artefacts”

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Vajrayāna, a sect of Mahāyāna Buddhism, germinated in India as early as cir. 3rd century CE. The later evidence of the Guhyasamājatantra being composed by Asavga. With the support of Pāla and Sena dynasties and by the seats of learning like Nālanda, Vikramaśīla, Odantapuri etc. the teaching and arts related to Vajrayāna Buddhism flourished not only in eastern India but also in Southeast Asia. The earliest inscription in Thailand that seems to hint at the existence Vajrayāna in the southern part of Thailand is the inscription of Wat Semamuang.

The importance of Vajrayāna was felt in the northeastern part of Thailand when a Vajrayāna’s Buddhist temple known as Vimāya, the present day Phimai, 66 km northeast of the city of Nakhon Ratchasims, of which the presiding Buddhist deity was Kamratev Añ Jagat Vimāya, was erected as early as 1046 CE if not earlier. The inscription found at Bān (village) Sabbāk, around 25 km south of the city of Nakhon Ratchasima, which belongs to 1066 CE throws much light on the state of affairs of Vajrayāna Buddhism in the region. This paper will focus on inscriptions mostly in Sanskrit and Khmer and on archaeological artefacts that are found in Thailand in the period from 8th to 13th century CE so as to throw some light on the situations of Vajrayāna Buddhism in the above mentioned period in Thailand.