

**THE MITRED AVALOKITESVARA FROM PALEMBANG  
ITS SIGNIFICANCE ON THE ORIGIN AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF SRIVIJAYAN ART**

NIK HASSAN SHUHAIMI B. N. ABDUL RAHMAN

**SINOPSIS**

*Masalah seperti ciri “kesenian Srivijaya”, pusat kerajaan Srivijaya dan hubungan diantara Palembang dengan kawasan-kawasan takluk kerajaan Srivijaya dari abad ke-7 hingga ke abad 14 Masehi maseh diperdebat. Essei ini cuba mengemukakan satu keterangan baharu bagi menyelesaikan masalah-masalah itu. Kajian yang dibuat keatas arca Avalokitesvara yang dijumpai di Palembang itu, berdasarkan kepada cara arca itu memakai pakaian, bentuk badan arca itu, ikonograpi dan jumpaan sezaman, menunjukkan ia adalah ciptaan ahli seni tempatan pada abad ke 7 Masehi. Pakaian di kepalanya menjadi contoh kepada pakaian di kepala arca-arca Avalokitesvara yang kemudian yang dibuat di Empayar Srivijaya.*

**SYNOPSIS**

*The problems of “Srivijayan Art”, the capital of Srivijaya and the relationship between Palembang and other parts of Srivijayan Empire from 7th to the 14th century A.D. are still being discussed. This essay is an attempt to bring forward a new evidence in helping to solve those problems. The study of the Avalokitesvara image discovered in Palembang, on the basis of the headdress, dhoti, body-shape, iconography and associated finds, shows that the image was made by a local artist in the 7th century A.D. Its headdress was the proto-type of the later Avalokitesvara images made in the Srivijayan Empire.*

In the early 1960s a Mitred Avalokitesvara was discovered in Palembang. It is the most important and major find since Schnitgers' day in Palembang.<sup>1</sup> This standing, two-armed image of about 1.3 meters in height was carved out of a block of sandstone, and is in one piece with the pedestal. It has its right hand in *varadamudra*. The left forearm is raised about 100 degrees from the hip, with the fore-finger touching the thumb, giving the impression that it is holding something; while the other three fingers are curled towards the palm.

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1 The most extensive survey of Sumatra in general and Palembang in particular was carried out by Schnitger in 1935 and 1936 and his work is still the most useful. See F.M. Schnitger, *The archaeology of Hindoo Sumatra*, 1937.

The site where the image was discovered is situated in the eastern part of Palembang, about 500 meters to the west of Telaga Batu or Sabukingking. Telaga Batu or Sabukingking has been classified as a very significant site as far as the history of Srivijaya is concerned. It is there that a number of important inscriptions had been discovered. Among them are 50 small inscribed stones.<sup>2</sup> Most of these short inscriptions contain the word *siddhayatra*<sup>3</sup> either by itself or preceded by *jaya*, or sometimes preceded by *jaya* and followed by *sarvastavah* or by *sarvasatvah*. Besides these small inscribed stones 3 fragmentary inscriptions and a large stone inscription, 118 cm high and 148 cm wide were also found in the area.<sup>4</sup> These inscriptions, palaeographically, belong to the same period as the dated inscriptions of Kedukan Bukit, Talang Tuwo, and the Kota Kapur, of the 7th century A.D.<sup>5</sup> They have been classified as the products of the first period of Srivijaya.<sup>6</sup>

A very significant feature of the mitred Avalokitesvara image is the tall headdress crowning the head. Other parts of the image display various distinct characteristics. The prominent lower lip, for instance, reminds us of the special feature of Gupta images; its rounded but youthful face gives the head a formal air as the characteristic of an Avalokitesvara. The ears are large with extended lobes but with no ear-ring. The neck too is devoid of ornamentation but the shoulder is adorned with a scarf which passes over the flat chest. It has broad shoulders and the slim waist may be compared with what Dr. Stutterheim describes as, "extremely high slender waist beginning in front right under the pectoral muscle."<sup>7</sup> This feature is also typical of the pre-Khmer images. Among these pre-Khmer images are the three Avalokitesvara from Phnom Ta Kream, in Battambang,<sup>8</sup> and Vat Po Veal and Ak Yom, in Siem Rap.<sup>9</sup> These three images have been dated to the 7th century A.D. If we place together the Mitred Avalokitesvara and the three images we would notice that they share a common type of body structure.

It was reported that close to the place where the Mitred Avalokitesvara

2 *Ibid*, p. 1.

3 *Siddhayatra* is believed to be a reference to a journey to acquire supernatural powers. J.G. de Casparis, "Selected inscriptions from the 7th century A.D. to the 9th century A.D.", *Prasasti Indonesia II*, Bandung, 1956 pp. 2 discusses the views put forward by other scholars regarding the significance and meaning of the term.

4 *Prasasti Indonesia II*, 1956 p. 15.

5 *Ibid*, p. 2.

6 For further information on the discussion of the chronology of the Srivijayan Empire, see N.H. Shuhaimi Nik, "Buddhist Sculpture from Sumatra, Peninsular Malaysia and Peninsular Thailand during the Srivijayan period (7th-14th C.A.D.)" *M.Phil. Thesis*, London University, 1976 Chapter 1.

7 W.F. Stutterheim, "Note on the newly found fragment of a four armed figure from Kota Kapur, Bangka", *Indian Art and Letters*, New series, Vol. XX pt. 2, London, 1937 pp. 107.

8 Madeleine Giteau, *Khmer Sculpture and the Angkor Civilisation*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1965 Pl. XIII.

9 *Ibid*, Pl. IV.

was recovered was a stone wall which was believed to be part of an ancient building. Unfortunately, the wall had been destroyed by the time I visited Palembang in July, 1974. Presumably it was the shrine which had housed the image because the image was believed to be fixed to the ground. This belief is based on the fact that the image is top heavy.

A number of votive stupas with the Buddhist creed, *Ye Dharma*, inscribed on each, were discovered about 100 meters away from the spot where the Mitred Avalokitesvara was recovered. The discovery took place in the early 1960s but all the tablets were given away to various people as souvenirs by the finder. Dr. Alastair Lamb during his researches on the Mahayana Buddhist votive tablets in Perlis in 1961, had enquired from Dr. C.A. Gibson Hill if he knew of any discovery of Mahayana Buddhist tablets in the neighbourhood of Palembang.<sup>10</sup> To this enquiry he received a positive reply in the form of some photographs of a small collection of tablets from the neighbourhood of Palembang. Dr. Hill did not mention from which part of Palembang he obtained them nor did he disclose the source of his photographs. I am quite sure that the photographs were those of the tablets discovered near the spot where the Mitred Avalokitesvara was recovered.

The same type of tablets, was subsequently discovered by a team from the Indonesian Archaeological Survey led by Dr. Bennet Bronson from the Pennsylvanian Field Museum in July 1975 at the site. I was fortunate to see personally those tablets. They are in the form of stupas made of unbaked clay in two sizes of 5.08 and 7.62 cm. in diameter approximately. Each stupa carries an inscription stamped in mud with a cover. At a glance it would appear that the cover too was inscribed. In reality, however, the markings were from the stamped inscription. The mud pad, on which the inscription was made, is round in shape. The bigger type is about 5.08cm. while the smaller type is about the size of a twenty-cent coin. The *two facing* tablets containing the inscription were placed at the level of the base of the stupa and was concealed from view by a roughly shaped lump of clay placed under the base of the stupa. They were apparently made from moulds and then dried in the sun which explains why a slight shake was sufficient to break them open and release the tablets containing the inscription. Professor Coedes in his study of the Siamese pra-Bimb, was of the opinion that tablets had been brought by pilgrims and possibly from India.<sup>11</sup> The Palembang tablets are so fragile that it would have been impossible to transport them over long distances so that I am convinced they were produced locally.

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10 Alastair Lamb, "Mahayana Buddhist Votive Tablets in Perlis," *JMBRAS*, Vol. 37 pt. 2, 1964, p. 59.

11 G. Coedes, "Siamese Votive Tablets," *Journal of the Siam Society*, Bangkok, Vol. XX, 1927 pp. 1-6.

In trying to assess the antiquity of the Mitred Avalokitesvara and the practice of Mahayana Buddhism in Palembang, the testimony of epigraphy is of interest. It is true that the image bears no inscription but it is true also that it was recovered from an area where the majority of inscriptions discovered in Palembang came from. The inscriptions found in Sumatra, although far from abundant, make up a large proportion of the total number of Sumatran artifacts that can be securely dated to the early historic period, that is, from the second half of the 7th century onwards. According to the Archaeological Report of Sumatra,<sup>12</sup> there are 67 inscriptions known in Sumatra of which the majority have been dated to the 7th century period. Of these the largest number came from Palembang. We owe our knowledge of the inscriptions to Professor Coedes, L.C. Damais, and Dr de Casparis.<sup>13</sup> A preliminary study of the inscriptions found on the base of the votive stupas has been done by Drs. Machi Suhadi, the epigraphist, in the Archaeological Survey team which discovered the tablets in 1974. He believes that the inscriptions may be dated to a period in 7th century A.D. on the basis of the epigraphy.<sup>14</sup> The inscriptions are in Sanskrit belonging to the same style as those on 30 inscribed stones, which had been ascribed to the 7th century A.D.

It is not surprising to find this practice of making votive stupas and depositing inscribed tablets at the bases as early as the 7th century A.D. in Palembang. This practice was not restricted to Palembang only but has been known to occur in other parts of the Buddhist world during this period. Hiuen-tsang recorded that it was a general practice in India to make small stupas of sweet-scented dough and to deposit an abstract of a sutra, called *dharmasarira*, in their interiors.<sup>15</sup> I Tsing who was in Palembang in 671 A.D., 685–689 A.D. and 689–695 A.D. besides stating that there were Mahayanists in Palembang also mentioned the same practice<sup>16</sup> and so did Fa-hsien.<sup>17</sup> The votive stupas and other inscriptions belonging to the period of the 7th century A.D. obviously suggest the existence of a holy site in or near the spot where the people had deposited such objects in the course of many years. It is possible that the Mitred Avalokitesvara came from such a site

If we consider the chronology of the votive tablets discovered in other

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12 Bennet Bronson, Basoeki, *Laporan penelitian arkeologi di Sumatra, 20 Mei–8 Julai, Jakarta, 1973*, edisi II, 1974. Yayasan Purbakala Indonesia. See Appendix 1 and 11.

13 For discussions on the inscriptions see the following studies: G. Goedes, "Les inscriptions Malaises de Crivijaya", *BEFEO*, XXX, 1930, pp. 29–30; L.C. Damais, "Etudes d'epigraphie Indonesiennes", *BEFEO*, XLVII, pp. 7–290, 1955; J.G. de Casparis, *Prasasti Indonesia II*, 1956.

14 This information was communicated to me when I visited Palembang in 1974.

15 S. Beal, Si-yu-ki: *Buddhist record of the Western World translated from the Chinese of Hiuan-Tsiang (A.D. 629)*, London N.D.

16 J. Takakusu, *A record of the Buddhist religion as practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (671–695 A.D.)*, by I-Tsing, Oxford, 1896, p. 150.

17 J. Legge. *A Record of Buddhist Kingdom*, Oxford, 1886, p. 44.

parts of the Srivijayan Empire,<sup>18</sup> it would help to elucidate further the dating of the inscriptions of the votive stupas from Palembang. From known archaeological evidence, so far, it is apparent that the votive stupas from Palembang are the oldest. This is based on a comparison with the result of Professor Coedes's study of "Siamese Votive Tablets"<sup>19</sup>. The oldest votive tablets found in the Peninsular Thailand and Malaysia belonged to what Professor Coedes classified as Type II. His dating for Type II is 10th century A.D. on the ground that the style of the representations of Buddha and Avalokitesvara recalls the style of the images of Bodhisattvas found at Jaiya.<sup>20</sup> He attributes these images to the Indo-Javanese style of the Sailendra dynasty to which the rulers of the Srivijayan Empire were related.

The Srivijayan Empire extended its influence over the Peninsula from 7th to 12th century A.D.<sup>21</sup> but the practice of making votive tablets became apparent only in the 10th century A.D. Dr. Alastair Lamb, who made a study of the votive tablets discovered at Gua Batang Kurong and Gua Berhala<sup>22</sup> in Perlis, confirms the dating of the inscription on the basis of epigraphy.<sup>23</sup>

The probability that the Palembang tablets are much older than those on the Peninsula can be shown by using typological studies. We have evidence that in South Bali a number of votive stupas were recovered at a place near Pejeng.<sup>24</sup> In every respect they are almost identical to the Palembang votive stupas. But the inscriptions on the tablets belong to the pre-Nagari script, the style of script used in Central Java during the 8th century A.D.<sup>25</sup> The script used on the Peninsula belong to the Nagari script. There is no evidence available at the moment to show that before the 8th century A.D. the tablets produced in South East Asia were in

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18 For the locations of the various parts of the Srivijayan Empire see O.W. Wolters, *The fall of the Srivijaya in the Malay history*, 1970 chapter 2, *Early Indonesian Commerce*, 1967.

19 G. Coedes, "Siamese Votive Tablets", *JSS*, XX, 1927, pp. 1-23.

20 Although Professor Coedes equates the style to the mature style of Avalokitesvara in the Empire of Srivijaya, I am inclined to say that they are more related to the style of images which I dated in my studies, "Buddhist sculpture from Sumatra, Peninsular Malaysia and Peninsular Thailand during the Srivijayan period (7th-14th century A.D.) M.Phil. Thesis, London University, 1976 to the later part of 10th century A.D. cf. Plates 45 and 47.

21 See R.O. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce*, 1967 pp. 227-8.

22 Professor Coede's study of the pra-Bimb found in Thailand was based on the discoveries made prior to 1927. From Peninsular Thailand and Malaysia he discussed the Pra-Bimb discovered at Jaiya, Nakorn Sri Thammaraj, Patalung, Sating Phra Songkhla, Krabi and Trang. See fig. 6, "Siamese Votive Tablets", *JSS*, XX 1937, pp. 1-23 and Alastair Lamb, "Mahayana Buddhist Tablets in Perlis", *JMBRAS*, Vol. 37 pt. 2, 1964 fig. 1.

23 *Ibid*, pp. 56. He had consultations with Sir Chabra, Joint Director of the Archaeological Survey of India, who felt that had the objects been found in India, he would date them to 12th century A.D.

24 F.D.K. Bosch, *Selected studies in Indonesian Archaeology*, The Hague, 1961 p. 179.

25 *Ibid*, p. 179.

other than stupa form. There are reports of finds in Burma of votive tablets dated to the 10th century A.D. on account of the Nagari script used, but none was found on votive stupas.<sup>26</sup>

Among theories advanced so far regarding the functions of the votive tablets is the "momentos and ex-votos"<sup>27</sup> functional theory. They are "momentos and ex-votos" from Kapilavastu, Buddhagaya, Benares, and Kusinagara. The object that pilgrims visited at Kusinagara was the stupa which marked the spot where Buddha died.<sup>28</sup> So the votive stupas represent the most venerable objects connected with Buddha. Professor Coedes regards the making of votive tablets as merit making and according to Dr. Bosch,<sup>29</sup> the tradition of making votive stupas for merit has its origin in the time of Emperor Asoka. It is natural, therefore, that the idea of making votive tablets which could be deposited in stupas should be practiced much earlier than the making of votive tablets with iconographic imprints such as those found on the Peninsula.

Perhaps the dating of the Mitred Avalokitesvara on the basis of association with votive stupas is not convincing enough. So the next consideration is the style of the image itself. The tall smooth headdress is reminiscent of several Visnu figures found in various parts of South East Asia running from Cochin-China to the Peninsula,<sup>30</sup> Sumatra,<sup>31</sup> and Tjibuaja.<sup>32</sup> Dr. O'Connor has argued convincingly that they are the products of South East Asian Workshops. The oldest of these images, that is, the Jaiya Visnu can be dated to the 4th century A.D. while the latest of these images may be dated to the 8th century A.D.<sup>33</sup> It is believed that the impulses received from Mathura via Andhradesa greatly influenced the stylisation of the products<sup>34</sup> which were later modified by Gupta and post-Gupta influences. On the basis of the headdress alone we can date the Mitred Avalokitesvara to a period between the 4th and 8th century A.D.

Other factors such as the modelling of the waistline convince us that the treatment is almost identical with the Bangka Visnu.<sup>35</sup> We have seen earlier on that the same kind of waistline is also found in the pre-Khmer images of the 6th and 7th century A.D. Dr. Stutterheim considers that the Bangka Visnu on the basis of its association with the inscription of

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26 See M.C. Duroiselle, *ARASB*, 1912-3, p. 17 for report on the finds.

27 A. Foucher, "Les debuts de l'art bouddhique", *Journal Asiatique*, Paris, 1911, p. 65.

28 "Siamese Votive Tablets" *JSS*, XX 1937, p. 3.

29 F.D.K. Bosch, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-1, and "Siamese Votive Tablets" *JSS*, XX, 1937, p. 4.

30 G. Coedes, *Etudes d'Orientalisme (Musee Guimet)*, Vol. 1, 1932.

31 W.F. Stutterheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-9.

32 Bernert Kempers, *Ancient Indonesian Art, Amsterdam*, 1959 Pl. 23 and also see R.M. Wirjosuparta, "The second Visnu image of Cibuaja in West Java", *Madjallah Ilmu-Ilmu Sastra Indonesia*, Vol. 1 pt 2, pp. 170-44.

33 Stanley J. O'Connor, *Hindu Gods of Peninsular Siam*, Ascona, 1972. pp. 39-40.

34 *Ibid.*

35 W.F. Stutterheim, *op. cit.*, figs. 1 and 2.

Kota Kapur may be dated to the end of the 7th century A.D. Before one can date more precisely the Mitred Avalokitesvara, other supporting evidence must be shown.

Perhaps it is strange to compare a Mahayana image with that of a Visnu. We have, however, evidence of inter-religious borrowings in terms of stylisation and attributes of gods. If we look at the history of the development of Buddhism from its beginnings as it spread, the converts carried into their new religion much of their reverence for the old Hindu Gods so that their new tradition embraced Indra, Brahma, and others of their former divinities.<sup>36</sup> In the Gandharan art, *Jataka* scenes were depicted and in the early stages Buddha's attendants were recognised as Brahma and Indra. With the coming of the Mahayana Brahma and Indra took the forms of Vajrapani and Maitreya. Indra or Sakra became Satamanyu and Vajrapani, and his heaven of *Swarga* was named *Trayastrimsaloka*. Brahma had his attributes transferred to Maitreya or possibly to Manjusri. Avalokitesvara or Padmapani has some affinity to the attributes of Visnu or Padmanabha.<sup>37</sup>

These inter-religious borrowings did not end at Gandhara but went on even to the Medieval period in India. C. Sivaramamurti quoted an example of carving belonging to the Medieval period, now in the Indian Museum, where Harihara is flanked by Buddha and Surya.<sup>38</sup> This is also true in Java where Buddhism and Saivism went hand in hand.<sup>39</sup> In Palembang the Buddhism practised there was found to be tinted with Tantricism as early as the last quarter of the 7th century A.D. according to Professor Coedes<sup>40</sup> and Dr. de Casparis who made a study of the inscriptions found in Palembang particularly the Kota Kapur inscription.<sup>41</sup> In the Ligor inscriptions of 775 A.D. of side "A" the king of Srivijaya ordered the building of three brick buildings, as abodes of Padmapani, Saykyamuni and Vajrapani while on the face "B" of the same stele the name of the king was Visnu.<sup>42</sup> This again shows that there were elements of syncretism in the religion of the empire of Srivijaya as early as the 7th century A.D. and it would follow that in art too such elements found their way.

A comparison of the stylisation of the dhoti of the mitred Avalokitesvara with the dhoti of the bodhisattva from Bukit Seguntang gives further indication of the date of the image. The Bukit Seguntang image has a broad band which extends from the left shoulder across the chest. The

36 Albert Gurnwedel, *Buddhist Art in India*, 2nd edition, 1965, (translated by A.C. Gibson). He traces the derivatives of Buddhist Gods from Hindu Gods, pp. 183-4.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 183.

38 C. Sivaramamurti, *Art Asiatique*, I, 19 4, fasc. 2, p. 109, fig. 1.

39 W.F. Stutterheim, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

40 "Les inscriptions Malaises de Crivijaya" *BEFEO*, 30.

41 J.G. de Casparis, *op. cit.*, pp. 29 ff.

42 Nilakanta Sastri, *History of Srivijaya*, 1949 pp. 42 f.

lower part of the trunk is dressed in a smooth kind of dhoti, fastened around the waist by means of a flat belt which is tied in front and producing a loop which hangs down. The way the dhoti is worn is similar to the way the *sarong* is worn during the present day by Malay women. Although the dhoti of the Mitred Avalokitesvara is worn in the same style, the sculptor was not able to give as much naturalism as the way the dhoti of the bodhisattva trunk was treated. In view of this fact, we can say that the result was rather mediocre *and regression* from the product of the trunk. Technically too the Mitred Avalokitesvara is very inferior especially in the sense of proportion. We find that it is top heavy, and so has to rely on a heavy and tall pedestal for balance; also the image is not totally *in the round* since the right and is still not free from the hip and both the legs are attached to a back support. This feature again reminds us of the pre-Khmer sculptures where a majority of them have supports either in the form of struts or mandorlas.<sup>43</sup>

On the basis of comparative study of the stylisation of the way the dhoti was represented in the art of Khmer, J. Boisselier was able to date the trunk of the Bukit Seguntang image. He is of the opinion that the image must have been made during the last quarter of the 7th century A.D.<sup>44</sup> It is possible too that the style of representing the dhoti of the Mitred Avalokitesvara is, although slightly inferior, of the same class as that of the Bukit Seguntang image.

### INDIAN AND CEYLON ANALOGIES

The closest example of the Mitred Avalokitesvara is the Avalokitesvara image discovered on the ancient site of a monastery called Situlpavuva in Ceylon.<sup>45</sup> The material for both the images is sandstone. Both of them are standing and each has a miniature effigy of Buddha represented in headdress. The similarities do not end there for the elongated headdress, the rounded outline of the face, the broad shoulders, the high slender waist and the smooth slim lower limbs are features common to both. The treatment of the dhoti, which is both transparent and clinging to the body with angular corners, is remarkable in both images.

According to Paranvatana, the style of the Ceylonese Avalokitesvara shows a close affinity with the Pallava school of art.<sup>46</sup> But in Pallava art, Avalokitesvara does not wear the headdress in the form of a cylindrical mitre. A bronze image of Avalokitesvara<sup>47</sup> dredged up from a canal in

43 Sherman E. Lee, *Ancient Cambodian Sculpture*, The Asia House Inc New York, 1969, p. 1 .

44 J. Boisselier, *Art Asiatique*, fasc. IV, Tome IV, 19 5 p. 267.

45 S. Paranavatana, "Recent archaeological work in Ceylon" *IAL*, Vol. XI, pt. 1, 1937 pp. 24-35, pl. 11, fig. a.

46 *Ibid*, p. 28.

47 *Indian Art*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1969, pl. 10.



the Kistna Delta in Andhra State attributed to the Pallava dynasty and dated to the 7th century A.D. confirms this assertion. It is true, on the other hand, that Hindu gods such as Visnu wear cylindrical mitre on their heads.<sup>48</sup> The similarities between the Mitred Avalokitesvara and the Ceylon Avalokitesvara may be due to sculptors from both areas having been influenced by the prevailing trend in representing the headdress of Hindu gods rather than the headdress of Avalokitesvara. The Palembang sculptor must have been familiar with the popular representation of the headdress of Visnu found in various parts of the Srivijayan Empire which could be dated between 4th and 8th century A.D. and possibly also with the headdress of Avalokitesvara from Ceylon since we have evidence that the Bukit Seguntang Buddha<sup>49</sup> had certain elements of a Ceylon Buddha. The Ceylonese Avalokitesvara must have been influenced by the popular style of the tall headdress of the numerous sculptures of Hindu gods of the Pandya-Pallava period especially from the great centers at Mamallapuram and Kanchipuram. This is because in spite of the fact that the Pandya-Pallava period saw striking developments in religion, literature and art, there was, however, a strong reaction against the growing influence of Buddhism and Jainism. The result of this was the strong increase in the *bhakti* movement evident in the sculptures and temples of the period which register the best and highest form of art attained in South India.<sup>50</sup> It is natural that the best should be followed as examples.

### ICONOGRAPHY

I have stated earlier that the image is that of an Avalokitesvara. This assertion based on the fact that from the 2nd century onwards the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara could be recognised by the presence in his headdress of a small figure of a Buddha.<sup>51</sup> According to the system of the five *Jinas*, each *Jina* corresponds to a certain bodhisattva and *Manushi-Buddha*. In the case of Avalokitesvara its *Jina* is Amitabha and the Manushi-Buddha is Saykyamuni. The Avalokitesvara is the Padmapani-Avalokitesvara. According to Benoytosh Battacharyya<sup>52</sup> in his analysis of the 108 forms of Avalokitesvara as depicted in the Macchandar Vahal, the temple of Matsendranatha, Padmapani-Avalokitesvara is the non-Tantra form of the Avalokitesvara and is supposed to create all animate things by command of his *Dhyani-Buddha* or *Jina Amitabha*. But the question of the

48 There is a fine example of the Visnu image dating 7th century A.D. and now in the Wolff Collection, New York. See Hugo Munsterberg, *Art of India and Southeast Asia*, New York 1970 pls. on pp. 128-9.

49 N.H. Shuhami Nik, *op. cit.* pp. 75-77.

50 Nilakanta Sastri, *History of South India*, OUP, 1971 p. 5.

51 Marie-Therese de Mallmann, "Head-dresses with figurines in Buddhist Art", *IAL*, Vol. XXI, pt. 2, 1947, pp. 80-9. Here she verified the definition of Avalokitesvara.

52 Benoytosh Battacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Oxford University Press, 1924, pp. 32-3 and 188, see no. 105.

image of Vajrapani has yet been found which can be dated before the beginning of the 8th century A.D.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the fore-finger of the left hand appears to be touching the thumb, giving the impression that it is holding something which could not possibly be *vajra*.

### SUMMARY

On the basis of the evidence discussed above, it appears that the Mitred Avalokitesvara from Palembang is probably the oldest Avalokitesvara ever discovered in the empire of Srivijaya. The last quarter of the 7th century A.D. date ascribed to it earlier on could place it to the beginning of the establishment of the empire of Srivijaya from a kingdom with its centre somewhere near Palembang. It can be traced to the period of Indian art when the question of the gesture of the Buddha in the headdress of Avalokitesvara had not yet been codified. This period also coincided with the flowering of the Pandya-Pallava art during which sculptures and temples register the best and the highest form of art in South India. Directly or indirectly, the mitred headdress can be attributed to this art but with adaptations by the sculptor who must have been familiar with the same type of headdress found on Visnu in various parts of South East Asia and particularly in the empire of Srivijaya.

A glance at the image will convey to us the impression that its style is different from the figures of Avalokitesvara found in Java or other parts of South East Asia in terms of the stylisation of the headdress. The strikingly tall headdress may be the prototype of the much more stylised, ornamented headdress of the Avalokitesvara images of a later period found in the empire of Srivijaya. I would regard the image as the product of the local art of the kingdom responsible for the inscriptions discussed earlier, that is, neither Javanese nor Indian but Srivijayan.

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 85-7.