George Cœdès, “A propos d’une nouvelle théorie sur le site de Srivijaya,” Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society 14, no. 3 (December 1936): 1–9.

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On a New Theory Concerning the Site of Śrīvijaya

by G. Cœdès

Dr. H. G. Quaritch Wales has just published in Indian Art and Letters (vol. IX, no. 1) the results of a mission financed by His Highness the Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda, whose aim was to investigate on the Malay Peninsula one of the routes by which Indian culture penetrated into Insular Southeast Asia.

Dr. Wales explored, in Siamese territory, the archaeological sites of Takuapa, Chaiya, Vieng Sa, and Nakhon Si Thammarat (Ligor), which were already known from the researches of Gerini,[1] of Bourke,[2] of Comte de Lajonquière,[3] and of J. Y. Claeys,[4] not to mention the Siamese scholars, especially His Royal Highness Prince Damrong. From the strictly archaeological point of view, Dr. Wales’s mission contributed little that was truly new, except perhaps concerning the remains of T’ung T’uk at Takuapa, the temple of Śiva at Ligor, and above all the deposits of ancient ceramics associated with the sites that were studied.

The interest and novelty of his article lie in the historical conclusions which he draws from his observations, and these are two in number:

1° The route from Takuapa to Chaiya by way of the valleys of the Takuapa River and the Girirāṣṭra was an important route for the penetration of Indian culture from west to east, and Chaiya, which corresponds to the kingdom of P’an-p’an of the Chinese historians, served as a relay point and a center for the diffusion of this culture toward Indochina and Insular Southeast

[1] Siamese Archaeology, a synoptical sketch, *JRAS*, April 1904, p. 233; Historical retrospect of Junkceylon Island, J. Siam Soc., II (1905), p. 117.

[2] Archaeological Notes on Monthon Puket, *J. Siam Soc.*, II (1905), p. 49.

[3] Le domaine archéologique du Siam, *BCAI*, 1909, p. 188; Essai d’inventaire archéologique du Siam, ibid., 1912, p. 19.

[4] L’Archéologie du Siam, *BEFEO*, XXXI (1931), p. 361.

Asia, whose various kingdoms, once Hinduized, then each continued along its own separate development.

2° Chaiya, later replaced by Ligor, was the capital of the empire of the Śailendras.

On the first point, I believe that everyone agrees with Dr. Wales in admitting that the Malay Peninsula served as an intermediary between India on the one hand and Indochina and Insular Southeast Asia on the other. M. Pelliot was the first to put forward this opinion,[5] which I myself have supported on several occasions.[6] Even if Chaiya does not in fact correspond to the P'an-p'an from which Kauṇḍinya, the Indianizer of Funan, came, Dr. Wales offers good arguments based on material facts to show that the region of Chaiya was a fairly important center of Indian culture. But—

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…as it is presented, with a map in support, his theory seems to be far more ambitious, even if one fully takes into account the reservations by which he seeks to guard against any suggestion that he wishes to reduce the importance of other overland routes still to be explored, and of the maritime routes by which Indian culture penetrated very early into the Far East. For the impression that emerges from his article and from his map is that of the leading role attributed to Chaiya, where he finds "the survival of very ancient, as yet undifferentiated, types of Indian colonial architecture." In other words, the common source of the Indian architectures of Java, Champa, and Cambodia would be—if not Wat Kaeo at Chaiya itself, which Dr. Wales does not believe to be earlier than the ninth century—at least the local type to which that building belongs. If these views were correct, the architecture of Wat Kaeo ought to be more archaic and closer to that of India proper than that of the monuments of Dieng in Java, of Mỹ Sơn in Champa, or of Sambor Prei Kuk in Cambodia. But is that really the case? And might one not just as well ask whether the more or less deep resemblance that has been noted between Wat Kaeo at Chaiya and certain monuments of Cambodia, Champa, and Java[7] might not be explained by Javanese influences that had made themselves felt in southern Indochina and the Malay

[5] Le Fou-nan, *BEFEO*, III (1903), p. 290–291.

[6] Les collections archéologiques du Musée National de Bangkok (*Ars Asiatica*, XII, 1928), p. 23; *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam*, II, p. 4.

[7] G. Cœdès, "Recent archaeological progress in Siam," *Indian Art and Letters*, 1927, p. 65; Les collections archéologiques du Musée National de Bangkok, p. 25. J. Y. Claeys, "L'archéologie du Siam," *BEFEO*, XXXI (1931), p. 280 and following.

Peninsula? It is probable that each of the countries that, during the first centuries of the Christian era, became Indianized, whether directly by sea or through the intermediary of the Peninsula, in turn became a center of diffusion with respect to its neighbors. That Java or Sumatra may have played this role, in the eighth century, in relation to Indochina is what emerges both from Indochinese epigraphy[8] and from Javanese traditions.[9] And it is to this reflux of Indian culture, already bearing the imprint of Java, coming back from the South as a kind of rebound effect, that I would be inclined to attribute the buildings and statues in Indo-Javanese style found at Chaiya, where nothing that now survives seems to me to have to be dated to a period appreciably earlier than the eighth century.

Dr. Wales's first thesis, on the role of Chaiya in the Indianization of Further India, thus seems to me to be admissible only with serious restrictions. His second thesis, on the political role of Chaiya in the age of the Śailendras, seems to me even much less acceptable.

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The history of Śrīvijaya has undergone the strangest vicissitudes in recent years. Following my article published in 1918,[10] the equation Śrīvijaya = (Che-li-)fo-che = San-fo-ts'i = Zābag = kingdom of the Śailendras = kingdom of Palembang, supported by the authority of Professors Vogel,[11] Krom,[12] and M. Ferrand,[13] was accepted without dispute for about a decade. The first blow against it was struck in 1929 by Dr. Stutterheim,[14] in the pamphlet in which he showed that the Śailendras were a Javanese dynasty. More recently, in 1933–1934, Professor R.

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[8] The epigraphic facts are: 1° the discovery at Ligor of the stele of Wat Sema Mu'ong, dated 775 A.D., in the name of a king of Śrīvijaya; 2° the repeated mention, in the inscriptions of Champa, of Malay or Javanese incursions at the end of the eighth century (G. Maspero, *Le royaume du Champa*, pp. 97–99, 103); 3° the appearance in Cambodia, at the end of the ninth century, of a nāgarī script which does not seem to have come there directly from India, but rather to have been derived from the nāgarī script employed by the Śailendras in their inscriptions at the end of the eighth century (Barth and Bergaigne, *Inscriptions sanscrites du Cambodge*, p. 351).

[9] *TBG*, 59 (1920), p. 417.

[10] Le royaume de Śrivijaya, *BEFEO*, XVIII (1918), VI.

[11] Het koninkrijk Çrivijaya, *Bijdr*. 75 (1919), p. 626.

[12] *De Soematraansche Periode in de Javaansche Geschiedenis*, 1919, and *Hindoe-Javaansche Geschiedenis*.

[13] L'empire sumatranais de Śrivijaya, *JA*, 1922.

[14] *A Javanese period in Sumatran history*, 1929.

C. Majumdar[15] attacked the equation from another angle, trying to prove that the Sumatran kingdom of Śrīvijaya had extended its domination as far as Ligor by the end of the eighth century, and that shortly after that date it was absorbed by the kingdom of Jāvaka, the San-fo-ts'i of the Chinese, with its capital at Ligor and governed by the Śailendras of Indian origin.[16] This name Jāvaka was applied by Arab sailors, in the form Zābag, to the whole of the Śailendra possessions, which from the end of the eighth century included Java and by the eleventh century extended over Sumatra and the whole Malay Peninsula.

It is this theory that Dr. Wales takes up, modifying it on certain points and supplementing it. He accepts the Chinese testimonies placing in the seventh century a state called Śrīvijaya (I assume he has Fo-che in mind), but he doubts that the suzerainty of this kingdom extended over the Malay Peninsula and that the inscription of Wat Sema Mu'ong of 775 implies such suzerainty. To explain the presence on the Peninsula of this inscription in the name of a king of Śrīvijaya, he proposes one of the following two alternatives: either the peninsular kingdom of Jāvaka had already by 775 absorbed the Sumatran kingdom of Śrīvijaya and taken its name, or else the land of Jāvaka also bore, independently, this same name Śrīvijaya. Whatever the origin of the name Śrīvijaya, insofar as it designated the region of Chaiya, Dr. Wales bases this new geographical localization of Śrīvijaya partly on the archaeological richness of the site, partly on its toponymy (Chaiya = Jaya; Siviʿai = Śrīvijaya, the name of a hill situated to the south of the town), and finally on rather unclear phonetic considerations: "A difference in the native pronunciation of the word Srivijaya in the region from its pronunciation in Sumatra might well account for the Chinese form San-fo-ts'i being applied to the empire from the 10th century onwards, while in the 7th and 8th centuries the Sumatran state of Srivijaya had been referred to by the Chinese as Fo-che = Che-li-

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...fo-che." While admitting as plausible the existence in Sumatra in the seventh century of an independent kingdom named Śrīvijaya, Dr. Wales considers that the researches of Professor Majumdar and his own have clearly demonstrated that this Sumatran kingdom did not in the

[15] Les rois Ś'ailendra de Suvarnadvīpa, *BEFEO*, XXXIII (1933), p. 121; The Ś'ailendra empire, *J. Greater India Soc.*, I (1934).

[16] The comparison proposed by Majumdar between the Śailendras and the Śailodbhavas and the Gāṅga in India was challenged by Professor K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *TBG*, 75 (1935), p. 605.

following centuries possess the importance that I myself and other authors have believed we could attribute to it.

One can see that the problem is becoming more and more complicated, and this is not helped by the very latest hypothesis of Dr. Stutterheim, who seeks to locate Śrīvijaya (Che-li-fo-che [Shilifoshi]) at Indragiri in Sumatra,[17] which does nothing to simplify matters.

It seems to me that the time has come to distinguish between the certain improvements that have, since 1918, been brought to the original equation and the untenable hypotheses whose emptiness urgently needs to be demonstrated. I shall take up one by one the terms of the equation, indicating under each the certain facts that relate to it.[18]

Śrīvijaya.—In 683–686 this name appears in three Old Malay inscriptions,[19] one coming from Kedukan Bukit at Palembang, the second from Karang Brahi in the hinterland of Jambi, the third from Kota Kapur on Bangka: in the latter two texts, Śrīvijaya appears as a state exercising its authority over the territories from which the inscriptions come. In 775, the stele of Wat Sema Mu'ong at Ligor, which Dr. Wales gratuitously supposes to have come originally from Chaiya, bears on its first face an inscription in the name of a king of Śrīvijaya. In 1006, the great Leyden Charter names Māravijayottuṅgavarman, son of Cūḍāmaṇivarman, descended from the Śailendra family, king of Kaṭāha (in Tamil: Kiḍāra) and of Śrīviṣaya. These two kings are mentioned in Chinese texts as kings of San-fo-ts'i [Sanfoqi]. In 1030, an inscription from Tanjore recounts the campaigns of Rājendracola I against the king of Kaḍāram and of Śrīviṣayam, who appears as the suzerain of a series of states located in Sumatra and on the Malay Peninsula.

Che-li-fo-che [Shilifoshi] or Fo-che [Foshi] is mentioned in Chinese texts from 670 to 742. It is a state neighboring Malāyu (Jambi), which it conquered at the end of the seventh century. Phonetically, this term corresponds very exactly to Śrīvijaya.

San-fo-ts'i [Sanfoqi] appears in Chinese texts from the end of the Tang period (beginning of the tenth century) and is mentioned regularly down to the Ming. Phonetically, fo-ts'i [foqi] can represent vijaya, but san remains troublesome.[20] Historically, San-fo-ts'i [Sanfoqi]—

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[17] *Oudheidkundige Vondsten in Palembang* by F. M. Schnitger. *Bijlage A: Verslag over de gevonden inscripties* by Dr. W. F. Stutterheim, Palembang, 1935, p. 4.

[18] All the documents used below are reproduced or mentioned in G. Ferrand, L'empire sumatranais de Śrīvijaya, *JA*, 1922.

[19] G. Cœdès, Les inscriptions malaises de Śrīvijaya, *BEFEO*, XXX (1930), p. 29.

[20] L. Aurousseau proposed treating the character *san* as an error for another character of very similar form, read che (= Śrī), *BEFEO*, XXIII, p. 477.

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...is to be identified with the Śrīviṣaya/Kaṭāha of the great Leyden charter, since Cūḍāmaṇivarman and his son Māravijayottuṅgavarman are named in the Song Annals as kings of San-fo-ts'i.

Geographically, San-fo-ts'i [Sanfoqi] is located by the Chinese at Palembang. In 1225 Zhao Rugua says that the country is situated in the Ocean and is master of the straits through which foreign traffic from the West to China and vice versa must pass. Among the dependencies of San-fo-ts'i [Sanfoqi] listed by this author are several states mentioned in the Tanjore inscription as having been conquered by Rājendracola during his campaign against the king of Śrīvijayam/Kaḍāram.

Zābag.—This is the empire of the Mahārāja, king of the islands, abundantly mentioned by the Arabs from the ninth to the sixteenth century. Phonetically, this term corresponds to Jāvaka, the name of a kingdom which in the thirteenth century had dealings with Ceylon,[21] and which an inscription from Chaiya of 1230 allows us to locate in the region between Chaiya and Ligor. Geographically, the information provided by the Arab authors, who all too often merely repeat one another, does not permit precise delimitation. According to them, the two principal "dependencies" of Zābag are Sribuza and Kalah: Sribuza, which certain authors, for example Abūl-Fidāʾ, present as "the island of the Mahārāja," corresponds phonetically to Śrīvijaya, and Kalah is either Kra or Kedah, in any case a part of the Malay Peninsula. The pair Sribuza/Kalah is the equivalent of the Śrīvijayam (Śrīviṣaya)/Kaḍāram (Kiḍāram, Kaṭāha) pair in the Indian inscriptions.

Śailendra.—This name appears for the first time in 775 on the second face of the inscription of Wat Sema Mu'ong, which is entirely independent of the first face in the name of a king of Śrīvijaya. Almost at the same date, in 778 at Kalasan and in 782 at Kĕlurak, King Panangkaran, who seems to have belonged to a purely Javanese dynasty, describes himself as a member of the Śailendra family. In 850, the Nālandā charter connects to this family a king of Java (Yavabhūmipāla), who was the grandfather of Bālaputra, king of Suvarṇadvīpa, founder of a monastery at Nālandā. In 1006, the great Leyden charter names as descended from the Śailendra family two kings of Śrīviṣaya/Kaṭāha, known to the Chinese historians as sovereigns of San-fo-ts'i.

By combining these various data, one arrives at the following results:

[21] G. Cœdès, "A propos de la chute du royaume de Śrivijaya," *Bijdr*. 83 (1927), p. 459.

Śrīvijaya, corresponding phonetically to the (Che-li-)fo-che of the Chinese and to the Sribuza of the Arabs, designated a state which, at the end of the seventh century, extended its domination over Palembang, Bangka, and the hinterland of Jambi, conquered Malāyu (Jambi) at about the same time, and in 775 left on the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula a testimony to its domination. At the beginning of the eleventh century, it was governed by sovereigns belonging to the—

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...dynasty of the Śailendras, who are also kings of Kaṭāha (Kaḍāra) and extend their authority over part of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. Two of these kings, named in the great Leyden charter, are known to the Chinese as kings of San-fo-ts'i. It therefore seems to me very difficult to cast doubt on the equation Śrīvijaya (Che-li-fo-che) = San-fo-ts'i = Palembang. The chronology of the documents shows in a fairly clear way the expansion of this kingdom's power, at first confined to the south of Sumatra (end of the seventh century), then establishing itself on the east coast of the Peninsula (end of the eighth century), and finally subjugating almost the whole of it (eleventh–thirteenth centuries).

The Śailendras enter history in Java at the end of the eighth century (778–782), appear at Ligor at a date certainly later than 775, and in 1006 are sovereigns of Śrīviṣaya/Kaṭāha, that is to say, according to the Chinese, of the kingdom of San-fo-ts'i.

Zābag is an expression without much geographical precision, but its two principal dependencies, Sribuza and Kalah, are precisely those which South Indian epigraphy makes known to us in the eleventh century as constitutive elements of the Śailendra empire, in which, I repeat once more, the Chinese have taught us to recognize the kings of San-fo-ts'i. If the name Zābag is really borrowed from the kingdom of Jāvaka attested on the Peninsula in the middle of the thirteenth century, its use by the Arabs to designate the whole of the possessions of the Mahārāja, king of the Islands, is merely one more example of the common habit of designating a country by the name of the first province or the first tribe with which one comes into contact.

From the objective observation of these facts, it seems difficult not to conclude that the geographical terms Śrīvijaya, (Che-li-)fo-che [Shilifoshi], San-fo-ts'i [Sanfoqi], Zābag, kingdom of the Śailendras, kingdom of Palembang, simultaneously or successively designated a state whose cradle was situated at Palembang, and which, through its expansion northward as far as Kedah (Kaṭāha, Kaḍāram) or the Isthmus of Kra (Kalah), succeeded in commanding the straits. The equation among these terms therefore remains valid, subject to the following remarks, which

constitute certain improvements to the thesis presented by me in 1918 and developed by G. Ferrand in 1922.

1° (Che-li-)fo-che [Shilifoshi] and San-fo-ts'i [Sanfoqi] are attested at different dates; the first name designates the Sumatran kingdom at its beginnings, and the second applies to the empire at the moment of its apogee. I recently wrote on this subject[22] that the identification of Che-li-fo-che [Shilifoshi] with San-fo-ts'i [Sanfoqi] was certain neither phonetically nor historically. I would say here more precisely: historically, the two terms succeed one another; phonetically, they are not exactly superimposable.

2° Zābag corresponds phonetically to the Jāvaka of the Peninsula, and the identification would be more or less certain if this name of—

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...Jāvaka were attested there as early as the ninth century, the period when Zābag appears in the Arabic texts. Be that as it may, Zābag nonetheless designates the whole of the empire, including Sribuza = Śrīvijaya.

3° The Śailendras were probably a Javanese dynasty[23] whose one branch became, by way of conquest or by right of succession, sovereign of Śrīvijaya, perhaps as early as the end of the eighth century or the beginning of the ninth (second face of the Wat Sema Mu'ong stele), in any case before 1006 (great Leyden charter).

4° The center of the kingdom of Śrīvijaya, which was at Palembang at the end of the seventh century, may at a certain moment have been doubled or rivaled by another center situated on the Peninsula: it is this duality that is expressed by the pairings Śrīvijaya/Kaḍāram = Sribuza/Kalah. And it is in this sense that I was able to "recognize the force of Professor

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[22] "On the origin of the S'ailendras of Indonesia," *Journal of the Greater India Society*, 1 (1934), p. 63.

[23] On the origin of this dynasty, in the article cited above I proposed a hypothesis linking the Śailendras of Indonesia to the kings of Funan. I am obliged to acknowledge that this theory has been rather poorly received, notably by M. J. Przyluski (The S'ailendravaṃśa, *Journal of the Greater India Society*, II, 1935, p. 25) and by Professor Nilakanta Sastri (Origin of the S'ailendras, *TBG*, 75, 1935, p. 605). I shall refrain from entering here into a discussion that would carry me too far. I will simply note that these two authors were mistaken in believing that I based my thesis on a passage from an inscription in which the king of Cambodia Īçānavarman I, destroyer of the last remnants of the power of Funan, is qualified as S'ailarāja. I simply believed that this text was "an example of more of the title of 'mountain king' borne by the sovereigns of Funan." If my interpretation is inaccurate, it remains the case that this title, in the form parvatabhūpāla, is mentioned twice in another inscription already pointed out by L. Finot (*J.A.*, 210, 1927, p. 186).

Majumdar's arguments, drawn from my own works, which tend to place the seat of Zābag in the Malay Peninsula."[24]

But the error of Professor Majumdar and Dr. Wales is to seek there the single and permanent center of the empire; and it is above all against this conception that I wish to protest here. One of their principal arguments is the archaeological poverty of the site of Palembang compared with the richness of the Malay Peninsula. It is true that the archaeology of Palembang is not yet very abundant, although recent research, ignored by Dr. Wales, has notably enriched it.[25] But Dr. Wales makes a factual error in saying that the rare sculptures that come from there are almost all of late Javanese style. For the large stone Buddha unearthed by M. Westenenk, and whose head M. Schnitger has just rediscovered in the Batavia Museum, is a remarkable production of the Amarāvatī school. Moreover, Professor Krom emphasizes the non-Javanese character of the sculptures discovered in the environs of Seguntang. Finally, the small—

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...bronze statues found at the mouth of the Komering; if they do indeed belong to Javanese art, they nevertheless display no "late" character. The apparent richness of Chaiya, which moreover cuts quite a poor figure beside certain sites in Champa, Cambodia, and even central Siam, is perhaps due to the fact that this locality was the object of extensive excavations following Prince Damrong's discovery of the beautiful bronze Bodhisattvas now in the Bangkok Museum.[26]

In support of his thesis, Dr. Wales draws an argument from toponymy, connecting to Śrīvijaya the names of Chaiya and the hill Sivic'ai, and asking whether the name of the river Girirāṣṭra, "kingdom of the mountains," might not recall that of Śailendra, "king of the mountains." In Siam, it is imprudent to make use of Sanskrit geographical names, especially when their form is as correct and as well preserved as in the case of *Girirāṣṭra*. For there is every chance that they were coined by one of the three scholar-kings who succeeded one

[24] Ibid.

[25] F. D. K. Bosch, Verslag van een reis door Sumatra, *O.V.*, 1930, p. 133; N. J. Krom, Antiquities of Palembang, *Ann. Bibl. I.A.*, 1931, p. 29 (with a bibliography); F. M. Schnitger, *Oudheidkundige Vondsten in Palembang*, Palembang, 1935 and Leiden, 1936.

[26] G. Cœdès, Collections archéologiques du Musée national de Bangkok, pl. XV-XVII.

another on the throne of Siam from 1851 to 1925. This is notably the case with *Pračuap Khirikhan* (*Girīkhaṇḍa*), the recent official name of the southernmost district of Ratchaburi province, where the word giri, “mountain,” appears explicitly. The names Chaiya and the hill Sivic’ai are more likely to be old, but when, on the basis of them, Dr. Wales raises the question of whether there might not have been two Śrīvijayas, one at Palembang, the other at Chaiya, one is tempted to remind him that Siamese historical tradition places Sivic’ai at Phra Pathom, that there is in central Siam a locality called Pic’ai (Vijaya), and that one of the capitals of Champa in the twelfth century was at Vijaya (in the present province of Bình Định in Annam).

The toponymic argument therefore seems to me of little value, since (Śrī)vijaya is attested not only at Palembang and Chaiya, but in many other places. To decide between Chaiya and Palembang, which are the only places currently at issue, there is a geographical fact that Dr. Wales takes no account of and that nevertheless seems decisive.

Chaiya lies at the head of Ban Don Bay, which itself is situated in the Gulf of Siam. I am willing to admit that Chaiya’s position at the outlet of a transit route across the Peninsula may have conferred on it a certain commercial importance. But how could this locality, situated several days’ sailing from Singapore, have controlled the traffic of the straits?

For it was its privileged position in the archipelago, at the entrance to the straits, that, according to the Arabs and Zhao Rugua, made the fortune of the Mahārāja of Zābag, “king of the islands,” and of the sovereigns of San-fo-ts’i. Even if the progress of research should come to show that Palembang was not always the capital of the empire—which is possible—or indeed was never so—which seems to me much more difficult to reconcile with the texts—the testimonies...

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...the converging testimonies will necessarily lead one to seek that capital in the archipelago, within reach of the straits.

That Chaiya played an important commercial role in the northern provinces, corresponding roughly to the Kaṭāha (Kaḍāram)/Kalah of the texts, is something I am, I repeat, entirely ready to admit. But that this locality, situated in such an eccentric position, at the end of a cul-de-sac, could have been the capital of a thalassocracy from which the Mahārāja exercised supervision over and profited from maritime trade through the straits—this is a geographical impossibility which seems to me sufficient in itself to condemn Dr. Wales’s thesis.

Hanoi, December 1935.