The gaily painted chariots of kings wear out; so also does the body wear out. . . . But the Law of the Good wears not away; thus do the wise proclaim to the wise.  

*Dhammapada* 151

The pride of the Thai are their beautifully cast bronzes of seated, walking, and standing Buddhas. Such figures are splendidly represented in Art Treasures of Thailand, the first comprehensive exhibition from that country to come to America; it will be shown at the Metropolitan Museum from January 10 until mid-February. The exhibition affords a unique opportunity to compare with other sculptures of its time and place a magnificent bronze statue of a standing Buddha (Frontispiece and Figure 6) that the Museum purchased in New York recently.

Long before the Thai began to descend, toward the twelfth century, into the beautiful country to which they gave their name, Buddhist civilization already flourished in that part of the world. The heart of the country, the region along the lower Menam River, belonged to the kingdom or kingdoms of Dvaravati. The people of Dvaravati were the Mon, related by language and probably by blood to their eastern neighbors, the Khmer. They lived in Dvaravati as early as the beginning of our era, when the first Indian priests, merchants, and adventurers began to arrive; eventually the newcomers established a new ruling class and converted the country to Hinayana Buddhism. Toward the end of the sixth century, as recorded by the Chinese, Dvaravati appeared on the political scene; its earliest surviving art dates from about the same time.

Another Mon kingdom, probably an offshoot of Dvaravati, flourished in southern Burma. Though it was conquered by the Burmese in the eleventh century, the new rulers adopted the Hinayana form of Buddhism, and Mon religious literature and tradition remained alive in Burma down to our own times. So far, however, no early archaeological remains have been found in Burma, and all the glories of Mon art as we know it come from Dvaravati.

Dvaravati art is famous mainly for its stone sculptures, carved from hard blue limestone or quartzite. In the current exhibition there may be seen, for example, the Wheel of the Law (catalogue no. 1), which represents the Buddha’s

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first sermon in the deer park at Benares; Buddha flanked by Indra and Brahma, standing on a fabulous bird (catalogue no. 4); or the standing Buddha explaining the Law (catalogue no. 2). The stone icons, however, are vastly outnumbered by the much more abundant production of bronzes (cf. catalogue nos. 52-56). The latter are generally small, under twenty inches, because, unlike the stone images, they apparently were not the principal cult objects but accessory votive donations offered by the faithful. Stucco was even more common as a sculptural material; stucco ornaments, for instance, are represented by catalogue nos. 26-35.

The original Indian models of these sculptures apparently were assimilated very quickly. Nearly all Dvaravati Buddhas show the fully developed Mon style, characterized by rigid symmetry and frontality, both hands executing the same mudra, or gesture, and a high degree of stylization.

Many share another distinguishing feature, a somewhat negroid facial cast that doubtless reflects an ethnic trait of the Mon.

Due to the extreme rarity of Mon inscriptions, our knowledge of the history of Dvaravati is scant. Faced with the problem of dating Dvaravati art more precisely than “sixth to twelfth century,” we must remember that not a single dated monument exists; the evidence upon which we have to rely is complex and at times tenuous.

One of the earliest and most important centers of Dvaravati was the city now called Nakon Pathom, thirty miles west of Bangkok. With its enormous stupa—nearly four hundred feet high, the highest in Asia—covered with orange-yellow Chinese tiles, it is still an important place of pilgrimage and a site of great beauty. It is here that the earliest Mon inscriptions have been found. And it is in the region of Nakon Pathom, in a ruined temple covered by the jungle, that our Buddha is said to have been discovered.

In 1939 and 1940 the École Française d’Extrême Orient excavated at Nakon Pathom, under the direction of Pierre Dupont, the stupa Wat Pra Men and the chaitya, or shrine, Wat Pra Paton, as well as the architectural remains of another site in this region. Based upon the discoveries made there, Dupont provided, in his posthumous publication L’Archéologie Mône de Dvaravati (Paris, 1959), the first classification and relative chronology of Dvaravati art.

All the buildings proved to be more or less of the same period, Wat Pra Paton, at least in its first stage, being the earliest. Wat Pra Men, the stupa with sanctuaries, is architecturally related to a stupa in Bengal that bears inscriptions of the first half of the tenth century, and to various Burmese temples of the tenth to eleventh cen-

Fig. 1. Buddha from Wat Pra Men. Quartzite, Mon (Dvaravati period), probably 9-10 century
Ordination Hall, Wat Pra Pathom Chedi

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin
Volume XIX, Number 5, January 1961

Published monthly from October to June and quarterly from July to September. Copyright 1961 by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Avenue and 82nd Street, New York 28, N. Y. Re-entered as second-class matter November 17, 1942, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of August 24, 1912. Subscriptions $5.00 a year. Single copies fifty cents. Sent free to Museum Members. Four weeks’ notice required for change of address. Editor: Marshall B. Davidson; Associate Editor: Rosine Raoul; Designer: Peter Oldenburg.
tury, especially the Ananda at Pagan, built around 1090; it is believed to be earlier than the latter. (The Ananda was built by a Mon architect and has Mon inscriptions. Two of its four monumental standing Buddhas in stone are said to be of the period; if they are, they have very little to do with Mon sculpture as we know it from Dvaravati, and also represent a later stylistic development than our bronze. The standing bronze Buddhas from Pagan also belong to a different type: they are obviously derived from Pala models of the tenth or eleventh century which they follow very closely.)

The famous monumental quartzite sculpture of the Buddha seated in European fashion (Figure 1) that is now the main icon of a temple at Nakon Pathom originally came from the Wat Pra Men and is probably of the ninth or tenth century, the same period as our bronze. There once were four of these statues adorning the central niches of the outer wall fronts and facing the four cardinal points.

In his attempt to classify Dvaravati sculpture, Dupont found it necessary to deal with the bronze images as a more or less independent art. Because of the modeling technique involved in both, we might expect to find the bronzes more closely related to the stucco than to the stone sculptures. But of the stucco reliefs attached to the outer walls of the stupas, practically no bodies have survived, and the heads alone do not suffice to establish firm links. The many stucco heads from Wat Pra Paton fall into three groups, to the earliest of which the Museum’s new bronze appears to be most closely related. One such head, called by the late Prince Damrong the most beautiful object in the Bangkok Museum, is illustrated in Figure 3. Its protruding eyeballs and cheekbones, its fine nose and mouth and not yet receding chin are nearly identical with those of our Buddha.

Only one of Dupont’s bronze groups can be derived from a stone series, and cases of complete correspondence between stone and bronze images are exceptional. The beautiful stone Buddha shown in Figure 2, originally from Wat Khoy and now in Wat Benchamabopit in Bangkok, has on its socle one of the four existing Mon inscriptions, in a script which could be of the seventh century. The earliest image of the next group, from which the oldest bronze series is derived, can be attributed to the eighth century.

The bronze images rapidly acquire a stylistic autonomy in relation to the stone sculptures. The general characteristics are the same: joined eyebrows (for the earliest specimens), asexual appearance of the body, hands executing the same mudra, constant tendency toward frontality

Fig. 2. Buddha from Wat Khoy. Stone, Mon (Dvaravati period), probably vii century
Wat Benchamabopit, Bangkok
and total symmetry. Secondary characteristics that appear in stone and stucco sculpture in the course of the evolution of a series, even toward its end, are more frequently represented among the bronzes. It appears, therefore, that the various bronze series began at an already advanced stage of the stone statuary and continued later than the latter. Most of them seem to derive from earlier bronze rather than stone models and are, compared to the stone images, relatively late variations.

Dupont's first bronze series is characterized primarily by the shape of the outer garment, the edge of which describes a curve in front of the body while it flares out on both sides behind. This feature may be observed on the stone Buddha of Wat Khoy and at the very beginning of the next group in the eighth century. The hem of the undergarment, falling close around the ankles below the curve of the outer one, shares the outline of the back of the mantle; the triangles formed by its lateral folds are in relief or engraved. The Museum's new bronze clearly belongs to this group.

When we look for its other distinguishing features we find that they too, with a few modifications, are those of the earliest bronzes of this series. The face is large and flat, with prominent cheekbones. The eyebrows are not joined, but they remain very strongly marked in relief. The eyelids and the lower lip are rimmed; the eyes are elongated toward the temples; lower lids and both lips are curved. The ear lobes are long and separated from the neck; they flare out a little at their lower ends. The curls, set in staggered rows, not one directly above the other, are strongly modeled in high relief. The hair is not flat and jutting out horizontally as it was later to become (cf. catalogue no. 52). The lower part of the ushnisha forms a single cone with the hairdo; its upper part now is a small, nearly cylindrical tube that probably once carried a lotus bud. The lower garment is marked at the waist by a slight protuberance and, in addition, by a groove. The figure shows none of the typical late Mon features, nor any of the Khmer influence that was later to assert itself in Dvaravati art.

No other Dvaravati bronze of comparable size and quality is known to us. Dvaravati bronzes
on the whole were of mediocre quality; they cannot compare with the bronzes of Śrivijaya, the Indonesian kingdom that reached from the central Malay Peninsula (now part of Thailand) south to Sumatra, or even of the Khmer. The Indonesians and later the Thai were surely the best bronze casters of southeast Asia, and under the latter the numerous large bronze images also played a more important role in the cult. But the exceptional size of the Museum’s new Buddha, its superb quality, and moving spiritual beauty prove that a Mon artist also could reach perfection in this medium.

The Mon communities, organized in small principalities unified chiefly by religion and culture, began to disappear during the eleventh century. The great Khmer king Suryavarman I conquered Luvo (modern Lopburi) and Dvaravati about 1020. After the conquest Lopburi became the seat of the Khmer viceroy. In the old political and religious center of the south, Nakon Pathom, decline soon set in. The votive tablets of the Wat Pra Men, however, made on the spot, are divided into three types of which the latest shows influences of classic to late Khmer art; this would indicate that the sanctuaries were used as late as the twelfth or thirteenth century before they were finally abandoned.

Suryavarman was a follower of Mahayana Buddhism which, together with the court cult of Hinduism, he introduced and protected in Lopburi. But he also showed tolerance toward the local Hinayana religion, and this may account for the fact that Dvaravati art, bronzes in particular, continued and asserted influences upon the new school of architecture and sculpture that arose in Lopburi around the eleventh century. (Examples of the Lopburi style in stone are represented in the Thailand exhibition by catalogue nos. 11-16; in bronze by catalogue nos. 61-73 and 108-123.) Dupont places the end of his stone series and the latter part of his bronze series in this period. The temples of Lopburi represent the late Khmer style with some Dvaravati influences. So does the temple of Pimai, northeast of Lopburi, which was built in 1108 and is the earliest datable monument constructed by the new rulers. Its frontal standing Buddhas show a late Mon feature developed toward the tenth or eleventh century: the belt which soon develops a vertical frontal flap. This appears in Angkor during the second half of the eleventh century. We now recognize Mon influence in various Angkor monuments, especially a Hinayana sanctuary of the early twelfth century. The fact that Hinayana Buddhism spread into Cambodia after the twelfth century is surely a parallel development. Khmer bronze icons of the standing Buddha (see Figure 4), often with crown and necklace, always with the typical ornamented belt and vertical flap, belong to the schools of Lopburi and Angkor Vat, between

![Fig. 4 (left). Buddha. Bronze, Khmer (Lopburi period), xii-xiv century](image)
National Museum, Bangkok

![Fig. 5 (right). Buddha. Wood, Thai (Ayuthya period), xvii-xviii century](image)
James H. W. Thompson Collection, Bangkok

the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries. The Dvaravati belt even turns up on one of the Buddhist bronzes found at a sanctuary in southeast India which, because of the style of its inscription, is attributed to the twelfth century.

The Mon principality of Haripunjaya, around Lampun in northern Siam, was an offshoot of
Dvaravati that the Khmer never could conquer. Founded in the eighth century, it existed until 1292 when it was overrun by the Thai. The most prominent temple of Lampun, architecturally related to the Wat Pra Paton, is an example of twelfth to thirteenth century Mon architecture and sculpture, though a provincial variety. Its Buddha images are later in style than our new bronze and wear a belt, though not yet with the fully developed frontal flap.

The Khmer were destined to be conquered in their own turn. As early as the eleventh century "Syam" prisoners are listed in Khmer inscriptions of Cambodia, and in the twelfth century they appeared on the reliefs of Angkor Vat—which they were eventually to conquer. In Siam the Khmer were replaced by the "Syam," or Thai, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The Thai school of Sukhothai in the north, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, developed bronze images of the Buddha seated in the Indian fashion (cf. catalogue no. 75) that show the influence of Ceylon, and of the walking Buddha (cf. catalogue no. 77) that are a Siamese invention. In the south the influence of Dvaravati art lived on. The Thai schools of Uthong (represented by catalogue nos. 88-92) and of Ayuthya (catalogue nos. 93-102) developed during the fourteenth century, when the Thai arrived in the region of Nakon Pathom. The Ayuthya sculptors created in the fourteenth or fifteenth century a well-known type of the standing Buddha. It is derived from the Khmer school of Lopburi, but partly through the latter and partly through the survival of local traditions or models also received impulses from the art of Dvaravati: witness the frontality and symmetry of the image as well as the belt and vertical flap. This type (see Figure 5) continued until the destruction of Ayuthya by the Burmese in 1767.

Our comparisons of the new Buddha with other Dvaravati as well as Khmer and Thai images warrant the conclusion that it was cast before the Khmer conquest and at about the time the sanctuaries at and near Nakon Pathom were erected and enlarged, that is, in the ninth or tenth century. It probably was not the main icon of a principal shrine but may have been used for processions. Its size and importance make it unlikely that anyone except a ruler could afford to donate it—not a Khmer ruler, however, for the Khmer belonged to the Mahayana and would hardly have donated a Hinayana icon in pure Mon style.

This date seems to be confirmed by comparable bronzes from the countries surrounding Dvaravati.

The kingdom of Srivijaya, in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, and the Sailendra kingdom of Java followed the Mahayana school of Buddhism, and images of the standing, preaching Buddha are relatively rare. (A beautiful bronze Bodhisattva, catalogue no. 58, is included in the exhibition.) The Indonesian artists, like the Dvaravati ones, quickly developed a distinct style of their own, even though both schools of sculpture originally had been formed by much the same influences, especially that of Amaravati coming through Ceylon. There are, however, bronze and gold images of the standing Buddha from Borneo and Java that can be dated about 800 and 900. Stylistically and iconographically they are not directly related to the Museum’s new image, but they illustrate a parallel phase of development.

Ceylon belonged to the Hinayana form of Buddhism and consequently had fairly intimate relations with communities of the same faith. Besides Dvaravati, these extended to Burma and the early Thai kingdoms—for the Thai too were followers of the Hinayana. Among the Buddhist images found in southeast India there are two remarkable standing Buddhas in bronze, of about the same size as our figure, which show a strong Singhalese influence. Though perhaps not directly related to Dvaravati art, these two images show, within the stylistic development proper to Singhalese sculpture, a comparable degree of stylization, especially of the mantle and undergarment. They are attributed, by the style of their inscriptions, to the tenth century.

The Mon, like their heirs the Thai, belonged to the Hinayana branch of Buddhism. While the Mahayana or Great Vehicle became more and more concerned with the liberation or salvation of humanity, the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle continued to concentrate on that of the self.

*Fig. 6. The Museum’s Dvaravati Buddha*
“He who has reached the goal, who does not tremble, who is without thirst and without sin, he has broken all the thorns of life: this will be his last body.” (351)

The followers of Mahayana Buddhism can lay claim to the philosophical and theological superiority of their schools. The Hinayana or, as they call themselves, the True Way (Therawada) Buddhists are justly proud that their religion has remained closest to the teaching of the historical Buddha. Our icon shows the Buddha’s hands in the gesture of argument or explanation (vitarka mudra): “As a fletcher makes straight the arrow, so does the wise man make straight the mind which, trembling and unsteady, is difficult to guard and restrain.” (33)

The chariots of the Mon kings have moldered long ago. But their religion survives and speaks to us through this image which is transfused with the inner beauty and serene majesty of the sage who found Enlightenment. “The sun shines by day; by night doth the moon shine; resplendent in his armor appears a warrior; lustrous in meditation a Brahmin. But the Buddha shines radiant by day and by night.” (387)