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A DATED CROWNED BUDDHA IMAGE FROM THAILAND

In the exhibition entitled "The Arts of Thailand," which recently completed a tour of the United States and which will later be seen in Europe, there is a bronze image of the standing Buddha wearing the crown of royalty (fig. 1). The image, which is 1.87 m. high and belongs to the Monastery of the Fifth King (Peñcamapabitra), Bangkok, is of unknown provenance; and until recently its date was a matter of doubt.

In preparing the catalogue for the exhibition — *The Arts of Thailand*, Bloomington, 1960 — I was at first inclined to date it in the 16th/17th century. The crown, the rather stiff attitude, and the modeling of the body, all indicate the Ayudhyā period (14th–18th century A.D.); but in certain features there are obvious survivals of the "high classic" style of Sukhodaya (c. 14th century); and as the piece is admittedly superior to the crowned Buddhas of the late Ayudhyā period, which are commonly dated in the 17th and 18th century, an intermediate date seemed indicated.

Mr. A.B. Griswold, my co-author for the catalogue, preferred a somewhat earlier date, and wrote (*op.cit.*, p. 94): "Images of the Buddha standing still [in contrast to walking] are rare in the [Sukhodaya] high classic, at least in bronze; but there are some fine examples in stucco. In the post-classic, on the other hand, there are a great many examples in bronze. One of the finest, a Buddha wearing a crown but not the rest of the royal attire, is in our Exhibition [cat. no. 94 and fig. 76]. Though crowned Buddhas are rare in Sukhodaya art, it is clearly a work of that school. We can be sure from the face, the suave modeling, and especially the 'hallmark' in the form of the little hooks at the lower corners of the robe. I should guess this figure ought to be dated in the 15th century, a time when Sukhodaya had already lost its political independence [to Ayudhyā], but not its artistic inspiration."

When I was correcting the last proofs of the catalogue, I tried to compromise with Mr. Griswold's view and changed my own dating from 16th/17th century to 15th/16th (*op.cit.*, p. 193).

Our difference of opinion has now been happily resolved, midway between my original dating and Mr. Griswold's. When the exhibition was being installed at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, some time after the publication of the catalogue, the image was set up on quite a high pedestal; and Mr. Sompòn Yû-pó, my colleague, was the first person to notice that there is an inscription on the base of the image. It consists of two lines of Tai, in a script that is intermediate between that of mid-14th century Sukhodaya and that of 17th-century Ayudhyā.¹ I am indebted to Mr. Cham Tòngkamwan, the epigraphist of the National Museum, Bangkok, for the following reading:

¹ The characters for *kba*, *ga*, *pa*, and *va* are typical of Sukhodaya; those for *na*, *ma*, and *a* are typical of Ayudhyā; see Text-figure A. Most of the other characters might be either.

	<i>kha</i>	<i>ga</i>	<i>pa</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>a</i>
Sukhodaya 14th century	๒	๓	๔	๕	๖	๗	๘
Inscription on Crowned Buddha	๒	๓	๔	๕	๖	๗	๘
Ayudhyā 17th century	-	-	๒	๓	๔	๕	๖

Text-figure A
Details of script

Text. — (1) vānsuk tuān pēt khīn sōn gāṃ chlū nāksātra trīnīsaka sātsanā ban pai 2084 pī òk pun prajñābhagā [or prajñābhagāṃ?] mā gè cāndapūn sān (2) braḥ rājādirāja vai ṇa vāt pūrbārāma lè vai ba kōat mè yīn ba dèn ba in śrī si gan pen nōn jān cet taṃliṇ hai rāksā bra cau ta sīn sāt(sanā)

Translation. — On Friday, the second day of the waxing moon of the eighth month, in the year of the ox, third of the decade, when 2084 years of the religion had elapsed, the Lord Puñ Prajñābhagā (or Lord Puñ Prajñā and Mr. Gāṃ?), coming from Candapūra, founded (this image of) the Buddha King of Kings to be installed at the Monastery of Pūrbārāma, and donated (as slaves) the man Göt, the woman Yün, the man Tèng and the man Ing, four persons in all having a value of one catty and seven damlūng (= 108 ticals), to maintain (the image of) the Lord Buddha until the end of the religion.

The year of the ox, third of the decade, 2084 of the Buddhist Era, is equivalent to 1541 A.D.; and though there are traces of restoration on the base around the feet of the statue, there is no possible doubt that this image of the crowned Buddha, referred to in the inscription as King of Kings (*rājādirāja*), was cast at the date specified. Unfortunately the whereabouts of the Pūrbārāma are unknown, and of course there is nothing in the inscription to tell us whether the artist was trained at Ayudhyā, or at some place like Bishṇuloka in the Sukhodaya region, or elsewhere. Candapūra, the place the donor or donors came from, is probably Chantaburi (Chantabun) on the east coast of Thailand.

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Motifs of jewelry have furnished some of the best clues to chronology in the sculpture of Southeast Asia. As many problems of dating remain unsolved in the art of Thailand, and as this is the only known crowned image of either the Sukhodaya or Ayudhyā style for which a precise date is known, its importance for future studies becomes obvious. It may therefore be interesting to compare the diadem with two other examples, one presumed to be earlier and the other later.

The first is worn by a bronze image of Śiva in the National Museum at Bangkok (fig. 3 a, b, c). The image is of Sukhodaya style, and is thought to date from about the 14th century. The



1 a



1 b

Fig. 1
Bronze Buddha. Ht. 1.87 m. *Collection of the Monastery of the Fifth King (Peñcamapabitra), Bangkok*



3a



3b



3c

Fig. 3 (a-c)
Details of bronze image of Śiva. National Museum, Bangkok

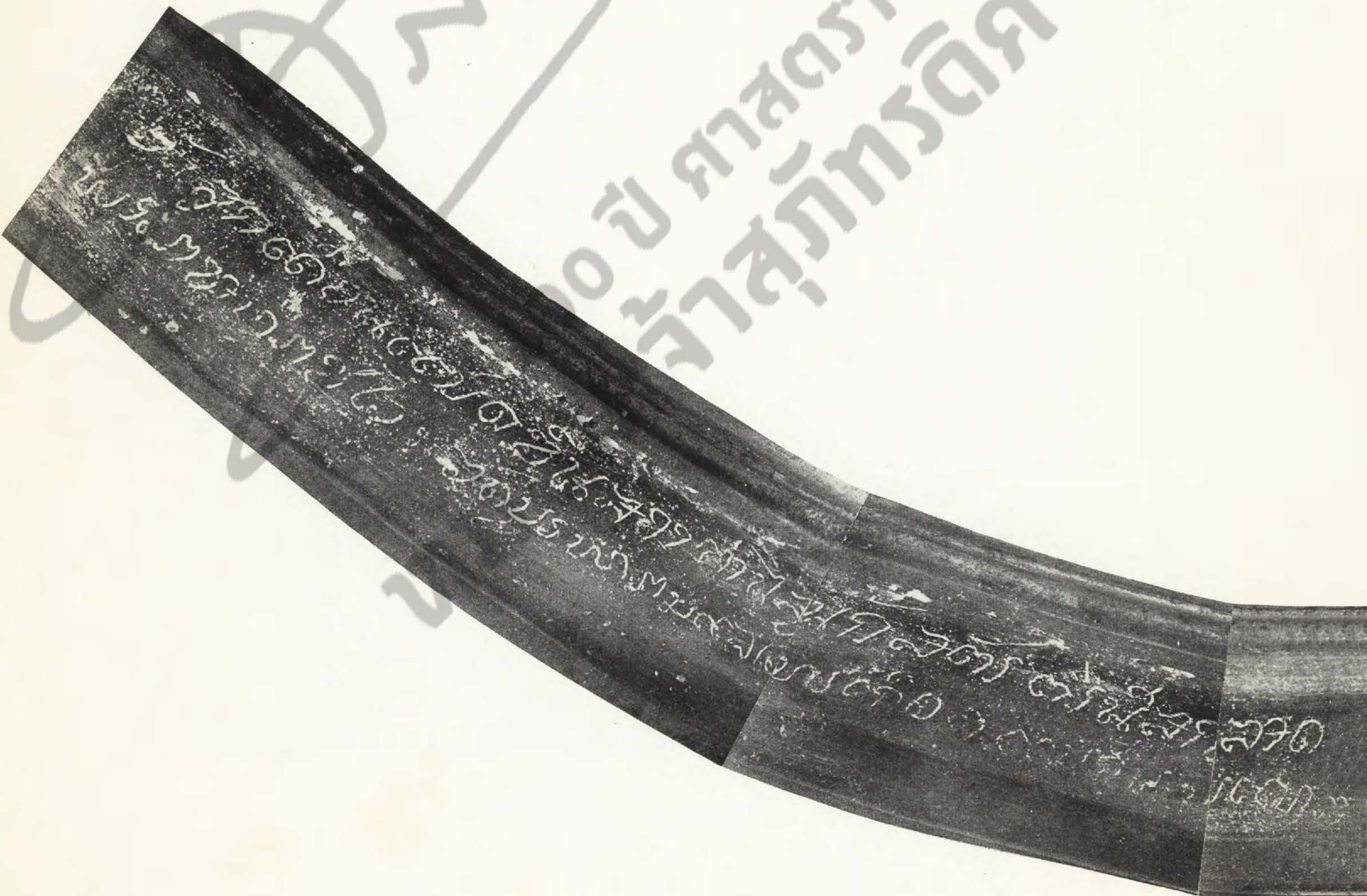
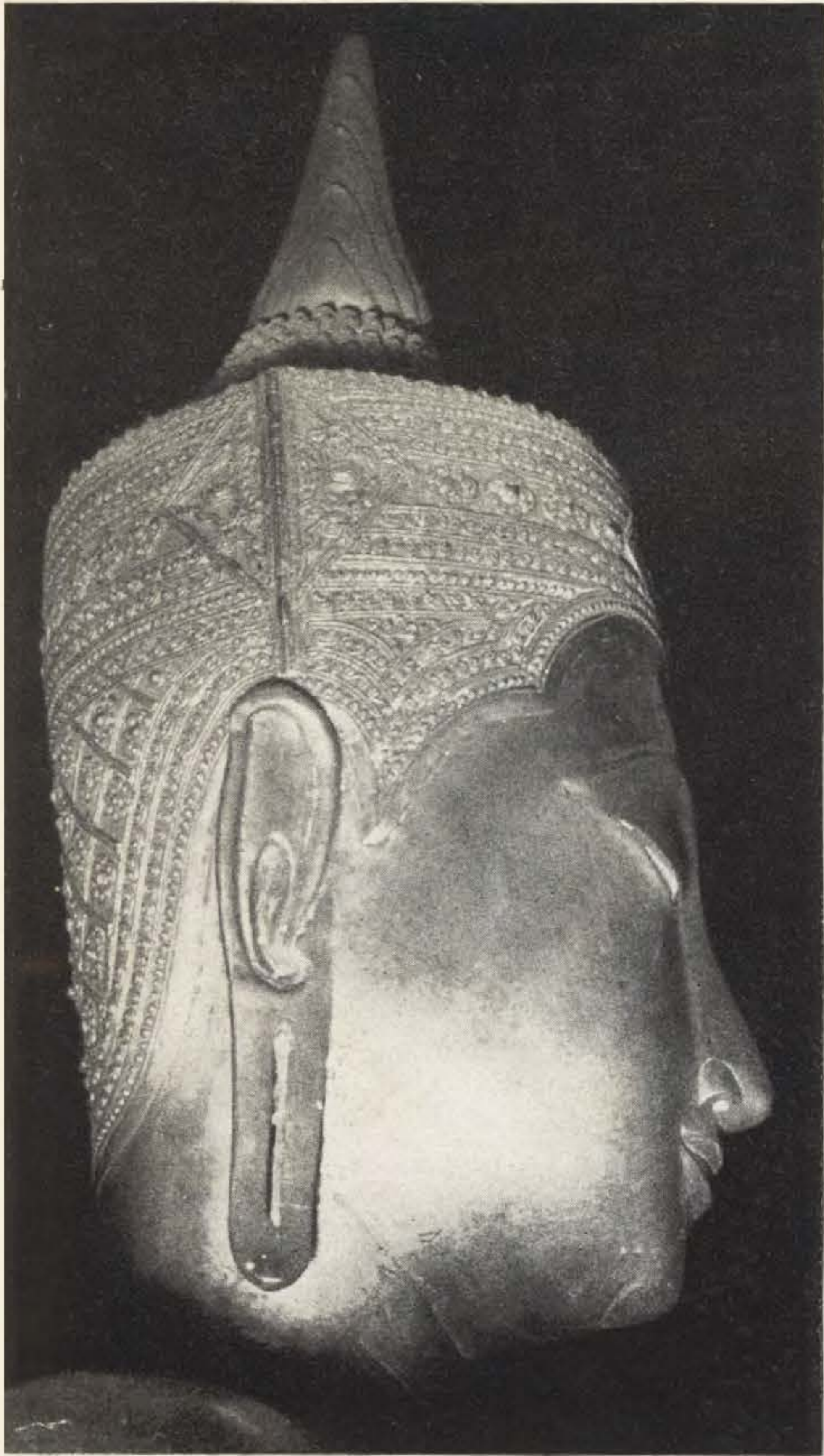
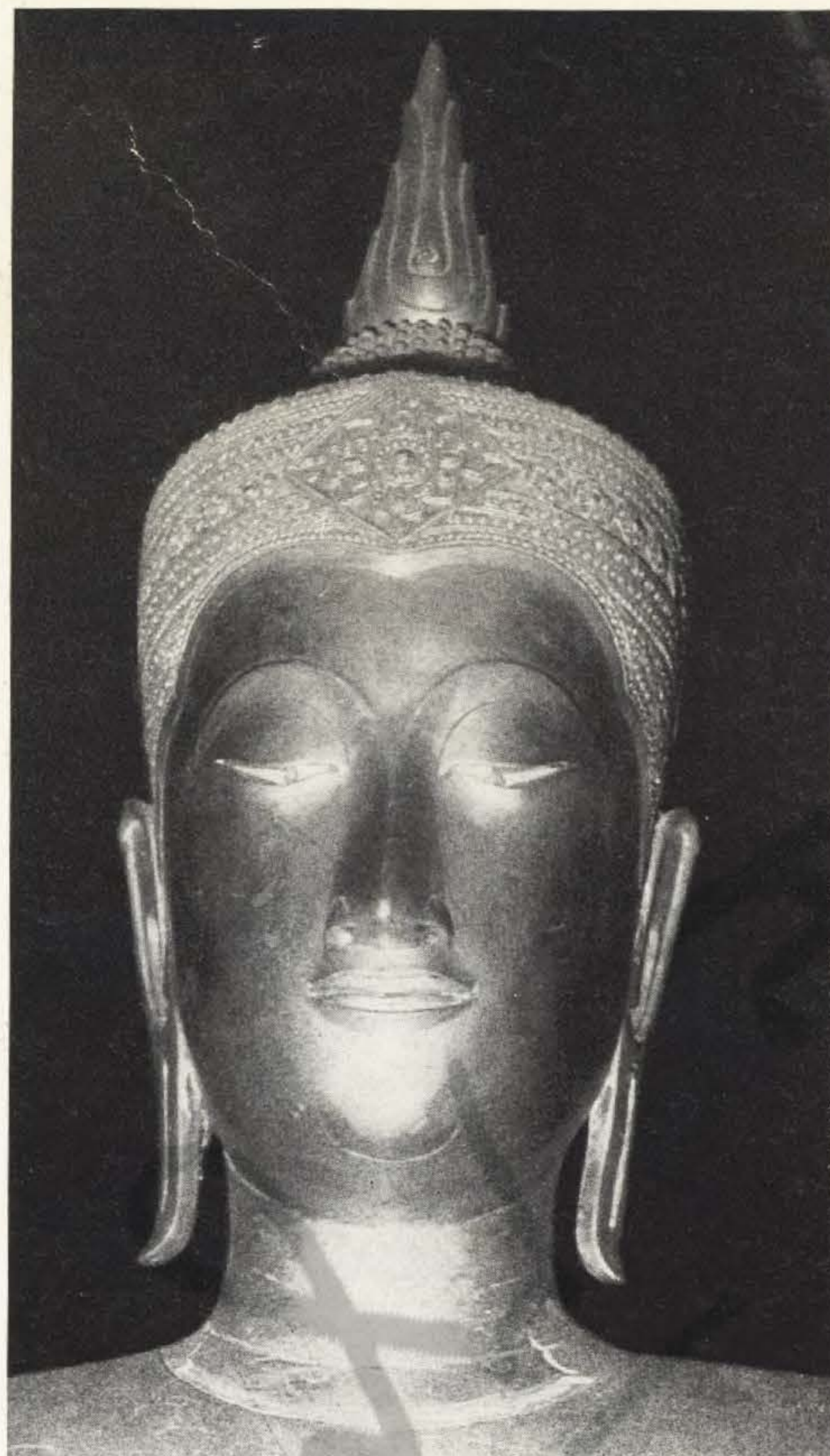


Fig. 2 Inscription on base



4a



4b



4c

Fig. 4 (a-c)
Details of image illustrated in fig. 1



of image illustrated in fig. 1



5b



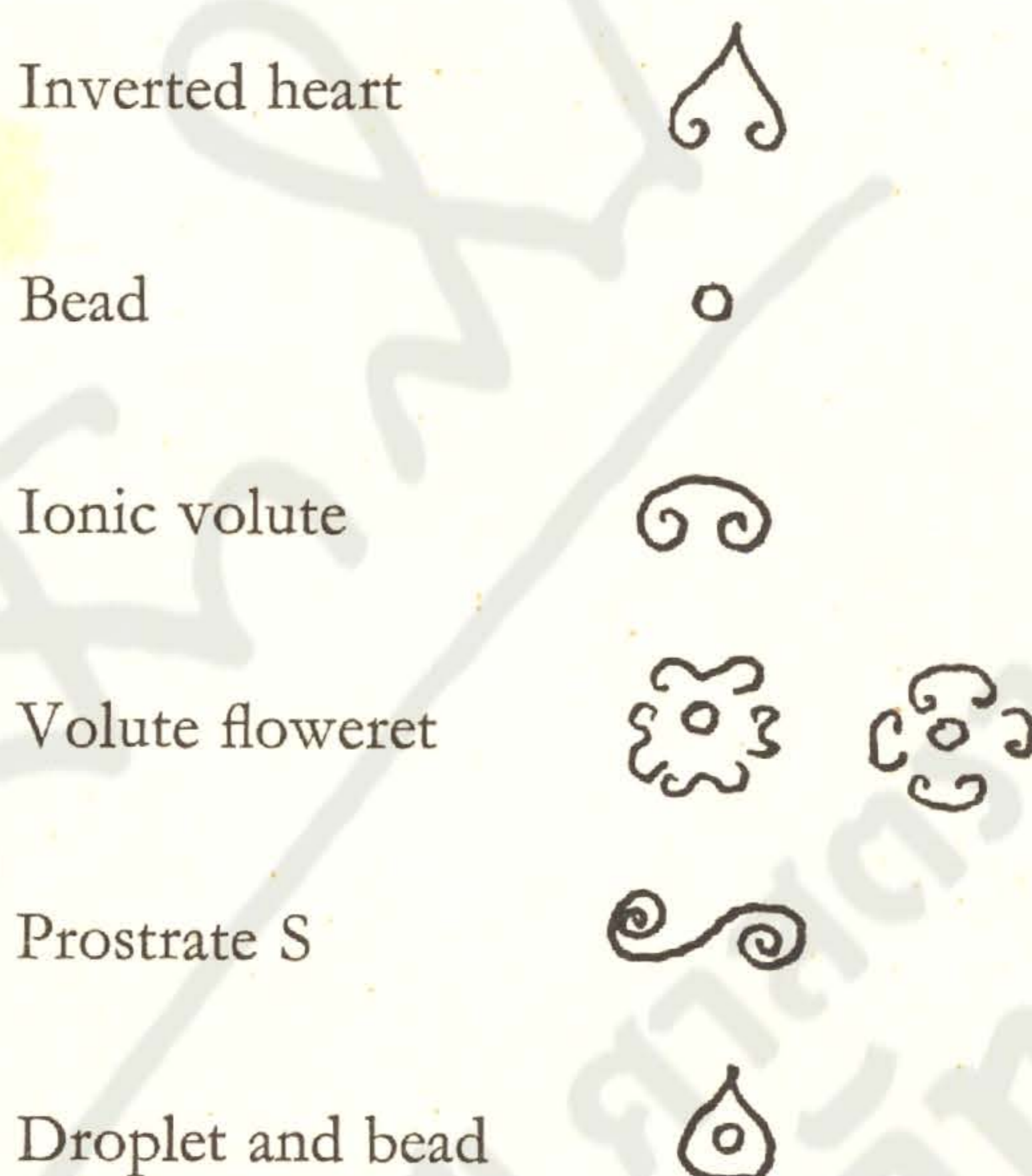
5a



5c

Fig. 5 (a-c)
Bronze head. National Museum, Ayudhya

diadem encircles the head, while the *jaṭāmukuta* protrudes above. The diadem proper consists of a broad band of metalwork, subdivided into several registers ornamented with rows of the following motifs: (1) inverted hearts, (2) beads, (3) double volutes like the capital of an Ionic column, (4) “volute flowerets” consisting of a jeweled center with four petals shaped like Ionic volutes, (5) inverted Ionic volutes, (6) beads, (7) prostrate S’s. The whole design is interrupted at front, rear and each side by a large more or less lozenge-shaped floral motif of four oval gems framed in ogees around a circle of beads with a cabochon in the center.¹ At the back of the head the diadem has a downward “extension”, ornamented with squares containing “volute flowerets” (fig. 3 c). This is bordered at the bottom by a tripartite band containing a row of prostrate S’s, a row of Ionic volutes, and a row of beads. At the sides the tripartite band rises over the ears, falls to a point at the cheeks, and rises again to merge into the diadem proper over the forehead, with a very slight downward projection at the center (fig. 3 a, b).



Text-figure B
Jewelry motifs

The crown worn by the Buddha image of 1541 is somewhat similar, but with differences of detail (fig. 4 a, b, c). The diadem encircles the head as before, but instead of the *jaṭāmukuta* appropriate to an image of Śiva there is an *uṣṇīśha* covered with curls of hair and surmounted by a flame finial. The diadem proper is again divided into registers, but the ornamentation is more mechanical and schematized, the modeling sharper and less fluid. It consists of rows of the following: (1) inverted hearts, (2) small beads, (3) prostrate S’s, (4) Ionic volutes, (5) “volute-flowerets,” (6) inverted Ionic volutes, (7) prostrate S’s, (8) beads, (9) conch-like diagrams. The floral motif that interrupts the design at front, rear and sides is set in a lozenge-shaped frame, but is otherwise much the same as before – with one important difference: the

¹ This motif is larger and more elaborate in the rear than at the sides and front. Note that the terminology I use for the various motifs is purely descriptive, and is not intended to suggest what they were originally intended to represent. See Text-figure B.

floral motif at each side of the head is split by a straight vertical line rising from above the ear to the top of the diadem (fig. 4a). This line, which is a very characteristic feature of diadems in the Ayudhyā period, perhaps represents some sort of “fastener.” Instead of squares, the downward “extension” at the rear has lozenges framing the “volute flowerets” (fig. 4c). It is bordered by a tripartite band containing a row of inverted Ionic volutes, a row of prostrate S’s (note the difference in order), and a row of beads. The tripartite band, where it passes over the ears and across the forehead, has much the same outline as before, but sharper.

We may now examine an object in the National Museum at Ayudhyā – a crowned head detached from a bronze Buddha image (fig. 5 a, b, c). The static and expressionless countenance, with its sharply-modeled nose and its general lack of sculptural *nuances*, proclaim this head to belong to the late Ayudhyā period, say the 17th/18th century, an impression that will be reinforced by a study of the crown. The *ushnīsha* and flame have been replaced by a conical entwined hair-style surrounded by four smaller ones, an arrangement typical of the late Ayudhyā crowned Buddhas. The diadem proper consists of a broad band of floral *rinceaux* between two narrow beaded bands, the whole surmounted by a row of “droplets” recalling the inverted hearts, but with the cleft smoothed out and a bead placed in the center of each. The band of *rinceaux*, which is broader in the rear than in the front (see fig. 5a), contains several patterns that are vaguely reminiscent of the large floral motifs of the earlier diadems, but they are much smaller and somewhat differently placed – three at the front (fig. 5b), two at each side (fig. 5 a), one at the rear, and an additional one suspended like a pendent below the latter (fig. 5 c). In addition this band contains large prostrate S’s and miscellaneous scrolls. The downward extension at the rear is ornamented with squares as in fig. 3c, instead of lozenges as in fig. 4c, and the flowerets inside them have become stylized into four detached petals around a central knob. The border of the extension is a beaded band between a single and a double fillet. The general outline of this border rising over the ears, descending to the cheeks, and rising again to the forehead is more or less as before, but just in front of the ears it is interrupted by the vertical “fastener,” which has now become much larger, jutting out in bold relief, placed farther forward, and descending all the way down to the lowest point of the border at the cheeks (fig. 5 a). Nor does the “fastener” interrupt a lozenge-shaped floral motif as in fig. 4a, for that motif has disappeared and been replaced by two much smaller ones at either side of the “fastener.”

On the whole this crown is typical of the late Ayudhyā period, but other examples, not illustrated here, naturally display some differences in detail. The rear “extension” often has lozenges instead of squares, and without the stylized flowerets inside them. Other possible differences are too numerous to be discussed here, but will repay further study.

In any such study, the diadem of the Buddha image of 1541, because of its known date, will be a helpful point of departure.