

NOTES

FURTHER NOTES ON PRASAT MUANG SINGH, KANCHANABURI PROVINCE

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In the *Journal of the Siam Society* Vol. 66 Pt. 1, January 1978, the writer wrote on recent excavations at Prasat Muang Singh, Kanchanaburi Province in western Thailand. Recently the Fine Arts Department of the Royal Thai Government continued the work and excavated a mound on the northwestern side of the Prasat. They also cleared the laterite wall on the eastern side of the town (fig. 1), found the eastern gate (fig. 2) and discovered a laterite terrace in the form of a cross outside the wall around the Prasat in front of a large terrace on the east of the monument (fig. 3 and plan 1). Also the figure of Avalokitésvara Bodhisattva carved on the northern wall of the northern gallery around the Prasat should be here mentioned. The figure might have been originally covered with stucco (fig. 4).

As for the earthen mound 48×64 m. on the northwestern side of the Prasat, after the excavation from 7 March to 31 July 1978 it appears to have a separate gate or *gopura* on the east. This *gopura* is in laterite in the form of a cross with a porch on each side of the four cardinal points. Each porch has a room in front and there is also a terrace paved with laterite 6.50×10 m. on the east (see plan 2). The main building also in laterite seems to have been unfinished. It is composed of one tower in front on the east and two towers at the back on the west. The three towers are surrounded with connecting galleries provided with a *gopura* (?) in the form of a cross on each cardinal point except on the east and small rooms at the two corners on the west. A room also exists between the two towers at the back and in front of the main tower on the east. Two rectangular rooms link the central tower on the east to the two gates (?) on the north and the south. Since this monument seems to have been unfinished and is more or less in a much dilapidated condition (fig. 5), it is rather difficult to make an exact plan. This supposed one (plan 2) is drawn by Mr. Santi Leksukhum, a lecturer in the Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University. The whole structure 34×55 m. was built on a laterite base. Mr. Santi Leksukhm has also kindly taken photographs of the objects discovered in the monument which will be discussed below. It should be mentioned here first that pieces of a broken sandstone Buddha image under the Nāga and some terracotta tiles were unearthed in the separate *gopura* on the east.

Seven large sandstone images of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Prajñāpāramitā in the typical Khmer Bayon style have been discovered from this monument and will be accordingly described :

1. Standing four-armed Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva 161 cm. high found in the northern gallery. He has the figure of Amitābha in meditation on his chignon and his hair which is decorated in front with a small band is in typical Bayon style *viz.* divided into vertical sections and ornamented with crescent moon motifs. His eyes are closed and the lips give a gentle smiling expression. The face is square with rather straight eyebrows. Inverted lotus-bud earrings are worn. The upper right hand is broken but the lower one is holding a lotus. The upper left hand is holding a book and the lower left a water flask. His *sampot* is short with a single flap of cloth in the middle underneath a belt which is decorated with a flower-designed buckle and curved lines on the body with lotus petal motifs on top. The legs and feet are quite heavy after the Khmer Bayon style (fig. 6).

2. The second figure of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva 160 cm. high is more or less the same as the first one. This image was found in the main tower on the east. The four arms have however been all broken as well as the bottom part of both ears and the earrings. The small band on the forehead is beaded and there is a row of beads encircling the bottom part of the chignon. The expression on the face is gentler than the first image. The belt is decorated with a floral buckle and the design on the body of the belt shows an interchange between concentric rectangulars and an eight petalled flower motif. One can see quite clearly here that the *sampot* is pleated with a small band on the lower border, quite typical of the Khmer Bayon style (fig. 7).

3. The third image of Avalokiteśvara, 109 cm. high, has unfortunately lost both legs, the two left arms and the lower right one. The statue was found in the western gallery. The bottom part of the ears and earrings are also broken. The upper right arm which is still in good condition is holding a rosary. The dress resembles strongly that of the second figure except the lotus petal motifs on top of the belt which resemble the first image. A row of beads also encircles the bottom part of the chignon (fig. 8).

4. The fourth image of Avalokiteśvara, 112 cm. high, was also found in the western gallery. He has unfortunately lost all of the four upper parts of his four arms. The bottom part of the ears and earrings are also broken. The face resembles the three above-mentioned images but the designs on the dress and the belt have mostly been worn off. He has a rather prominent belly (fig. 9).

5. The fifth image also represents Avalokiteśvara but without head. The image is 158 cm. high and was found in the northwestern corner of the gallery. He has lost his lower left arm which probably held a water flask. His upper right hand is holding a rosary, the lower right a lotus and the upper left a book. The dress resembles the above-mentioned images (fig. 10).

6. The sixth image of Avalokiteśvara has lost the four lower parts of the arms and the head. He is 140 cm. high and was found in the southern gallery. He wears a short *sampot* with one flap of cloth in front. The belt is decorated with four-petalled flower motifs both on the buckle and the body of the belt. A series of lotus petals exists on top of the belt (fig. 11).

7. The only figure of Prajñāpāramitā was discovered in the northern gallery. This statue of 119 cm. high is fortunately complete. The triangular chignon on her head is decorated with lotus petals and the figurine of seated Amitābha in meditation in front. The expression on the face is not as serene and meditative like that of the Avalokiteśvara images. The breasts are not prominent. In her right hand she is holding a lotus and in her left a book. The belt with floral decorations and short pendants underneath points to the Khmer Bayon style. However a usual flap of cloth in a triangular form in front of the dress and floral designs on the texture of the cloth might have been effaced or not yet sculptured (fig. 12).

Eleven stone pedestals have been discovered in this northwestern monument : one in the middle of the separate *gopura* on the east, three on the northern terrace outside the monument towards the east, one in the northern *gopura* (?) of the main *prang*, one in the main *prang* on the east, one in the southern *gopura* (?), one in each room on the northwestern and southwestern corners of the western gallery, another one in the western *gopura* (?) of the monument and the last one in the southern gallery. Most of them face the north with their spouts. They still remain *in situ* and the examples can be seen in fig. 13.

It is rather difficult to say whether these sandstone images of Avalokiteśvara and Prajñāpāramitā were carved *in situ* at Prasat Muang Singh or brought from some other sites. Judging from the material used which is greenish-red sandstone unlike the red sandstone of a small unfinished female divinity statue found at Prasat Muang Singh (figs. 18 a and 18 b in Notes on Recent Excavations at Prasat Muang Singh in JSS Vol. 66 Pt. 1), one might suppose that these large sandstone images might have been carved at Lopburi which was a Khmer stronghold during that time or at some other Khmer sites in Thailand. Though the hair-style, the expression on the face, the dress and the heavy legs denote the Khmer Bayon style but some small discrepancies

such as the cylindrical chignon of Avalokiteśvara that expands out on the top, the small lotus petal motifs on top of the belt, the interchanging motifs on the body of the latter and the figure of Prajñāpāramitā holding a lotus in the right hand and a book in the left one instead of the other way around point that these statues were probably carved in Thailand and might be termed as belonging to the Lopburi school or Khmer art in Thailand. Their date is presumably the early thirteenth century A.D. They are now temporarily preserved in the Bangkok National Museum.

Apart from these standing sandstone images, a head of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva of the same material 37.5 cm. high was also unearthed from the monument on the northwestern side of Prasat Muang Singh (fig. 14). The face shows a gentle smiling expression resembling that of the former Avalokiteśvara images. Three bronze five-headed *nāga* pieces, typical of the Khmer Angkor Wat and Bayon styles, were also discovered in the same monument near the northern gallery (fig. 15). They might have originally been used to decorate the wooden palanquins dedicated to these sacred images. The workmanship is probably one of the best ever found in Thailand. Their height is 40 cm.

Other less important objects have also been found from this northwestern monument of Prasat Muang Singh such as a gold ring of 2.7 cm. diameter with hooks to hold a now lost gem found outside the western gallery; two white sandstone finials of a *prang* in the form of an inverted lotus originally covered with stucco unearthed in the northern gallery (fig. 16); a dark-brown glazed pottery 9 cm. high and some stucco decorations.

From the separate eastern gate in front of the northwestern monument have been found an unfinished sandstone antifix representing two standing female figures 34.5 cm. high (fig. 17) and also a gold ring of 2.3 cm. diameter with hooks holding a lost gem found on the west.

Sixty-seven Buddhist votive tablets cast in lead were also unearthed from a small earthen mound about 200 m. on the southwestern side of Prasat Muang Singh on the ninth of September 1977. They can be divided into four groups: the Buddha in meditation protected by the Nāga 7.5 cm. high; standing crowned Buddha in the attitude of dispelling fear with the right hand 8 cm. high; seated Buddha in the attitude of meditation 4.3 and 3.4 cm. high respectively and the figures of Saṅgaccāyana (a fat disciple of the Buddha) (?) 2.7 cm. high (fig 18). These Buddhist votive tablets were probably cast at the same time with the foundation of Prasat Muang Singh about the beginning of the thirteenth century. With these Buddhist votive tablets were also found some pieces of brick.

A broken fragment of a large white sandstone head of the Buddha was also discovered inside the wall around the main monument of Prasat Muang Singh at the southwestern corner. The head however probably dates back only to the Ayutthayan period. An inscription on a stone pedestal was also discovered inside the western *gopura* of Prasat Muang Singh. According to Dr. Uraisi Varasarin, a Thai epigraphist, this inscription in Khmer characters probably dates back to the post-Angkorian period and only the two first characters can be deciphered as “Brayā” (fig. 19). These evidences suppose that the town of Muang Singh was not abandoned immediately after the Khmer had lost their control over central Thailand but presumably the Thai during the Ayutthayan period might have also occupied this site.



Fig. 1. The eastern laterite wall of the town of Muang Singh.



Fig. 2. The eastern gate of the town of Muang Singh.



Fig. 3. A terrace in the form of a cross on the east of Prasat Muang Singh.



Fig. 4. Figure of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva carved on a laterite wall of the northern gallery around the main sanctuary of Prasat Muang Singh.



Fig. 5. The northwestern monument taken from the east.



Fig. 6. Sandstone standing Avalokiteśvara. 161 cm. high. Found in the northern gallery of the northwestern monument.



Fig. 7. Sandstone standing Avalokiteśvara. 160 cm. high. Found in the main tower of the northwestern monument.



Fig. 8. Sandstone standing Avalokiteśvara. 109 cm. high. Found in the western gallery of the northwestern monument.



Fig. 9. Sandstone standing Avalokiteśvara. 112 cm. high. Found in the western gallery of the northwestern monument.



Fig. 10. Sandstone standing Avalokiteśvara. 158 cm. high. Found in the northwestern corner of the gallery around the northwestern monument.



Fig. 11. Sandstone standing Avalokiteśvara. 140 cm. high. Found in the southern gallery of the northwestern monument.



Fig. 12. Sandstone standing Prajñāpāramitā. 119 cm. high. Found in the northern gallery of the northwestern monument.



Fig. 13. Stone pedestals in the southern gallery of the northwestern monument. Taken from the east.



Fig. 14. Sandstone head of Avalokiteśvara. 37.5 cm. high. Found in the northwestern monument.



Fig. 15. Three bronze five-headed *nāga* pieces. 40 cm. high. Found near the northern gallery of the northwestern monument.



Fig. 16. Two sandstone finials of a *prang* (the two smaller ones in the picture). Found in the northern gallery of the northwestern monument.



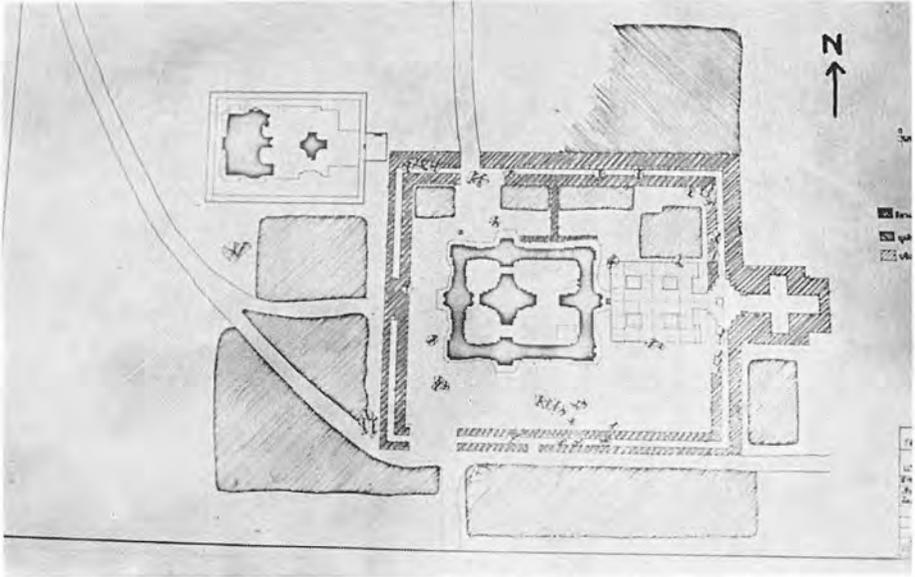
Fig. 17. Sandstone antifix representing two standing female figures. 34.5 cm. high. Found in front of the separate eastern gate of the northwestern monument.



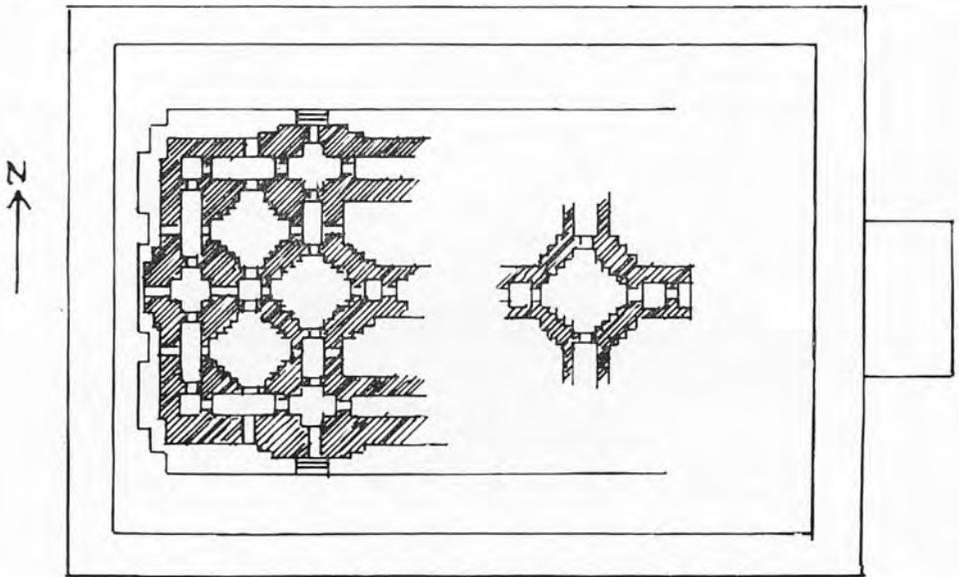
Fig. 18. Lead Buddhist votive tablets. Found in the southwestern mound of Prasat Muang Singh.



Fig. 19. Inscription on a stone pedestal found inside the western *gopura* of Prasat Muang Singh. Photograph taken from the paper rubbing.



Plan 1. Plan of Prasat Muang Singh showing the northwestern monument outside the walls around the Prasat.



Plan 2. Plan of the northwestern monument.