

# **An Excursion to Phimai**

## **a temple city in the Khorat province.**

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by

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Though we in Siam cannot boast of such splendid and mighty temple ruins as those of Angkor Thom or Angkor Wat in Cambodia, still we have got some which are well worth visiting as for instance those in Sukhothai, Sawankhalok, Lopburi or Phimai—not to speak of others, which to a certain point are still finer, but are far away in the wildernesses of Southeastern Khorat or at the frontier of the Ubon province and Cambodia. Lying in the midst of virgin forest they defy all others than the indefatigable traveller who is prepared to spend weeks in visiting them.

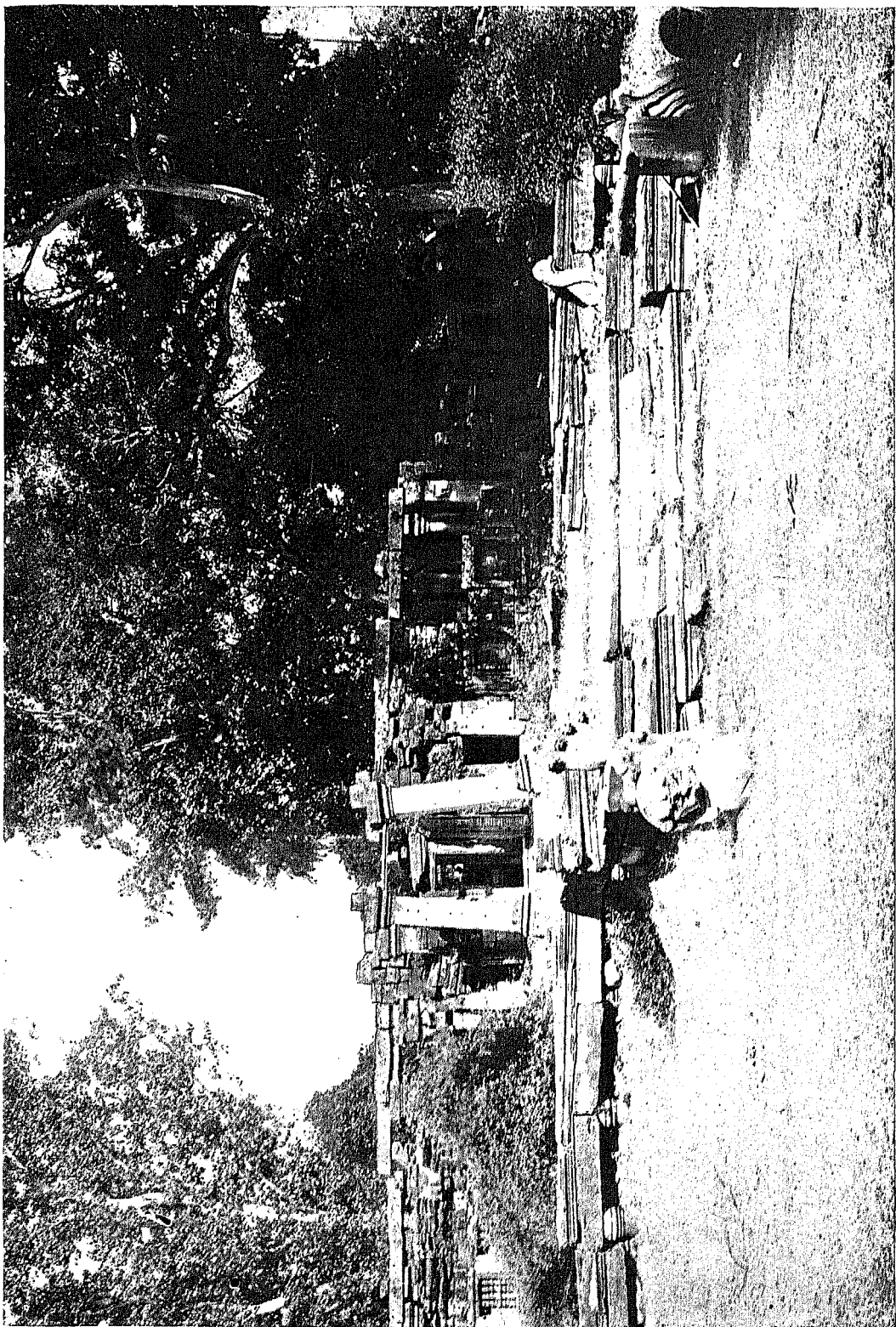
Phimai however is not too far away, and can easily be visited in the course of a few days, being one of the finest examples of Khm̄r architecture which we possess in Siam. It is about the temple in Phimai and how to reach it, that this paper is going to tell.

Phimai or Vimāya as its old name sounds is situated in the province of Nakhon Rajasima (also called Khorāt) about 56 kilometres or 35 miles to N. E. of the provincial capital of the same name. Phimai was no doubt formerly, i. e. in the days when the Cambodian sway extended over the greater part of the present Siam, the capital of a big province and the seat of a vice-roy,—subject directly to the Khm̄r king in Angkor Thom (Nakhon Luang of the Siamese). This fact is proved, not only by several inscriptions on the walls of its grand temple, but also by the existence of the remains of a great chaussée running from Phimai in a S. E. direction down over the Dangrek hills (that formidable barrier between the N. E. Siamese plateau and Cambodia as well as the Prachin province) to Angkor the Great, the ancient and glorious capital of the Khm̄r.

As this paper is intended to serve as a kind of advertisement for the Phimai ruins and thereby induce people interested in architecture, art and archaeology to visit them, I shall now proceed to explain how you are to travel to Phimai. First, a word about equipment: Take with you a campbed, folding table, chairs, cooking utensils some tinned provisions, a cook and a "boy;" a small tent will also come in handy. The best time for doing the trip is the cold season i. e. Decb-February; March-April being too hot. Starting from Bangkok by the train leaving at 9. 48 you arrive in Khorāt at 18. 08. The first part of the journey is not very interesting, the railway running due North through a flat and swampy country intersected with numerous klongs and studded with small lakes and ponds, a home of innumerable water-fowls and a paradise for the birdshooting sportsman. Here and there you see clumps of feathered bambus hiding small villages, and on the banks of the klongs the poor huts belonging to the tillers of the soil, who mostly are in the employ of the big landowners living in Bangkok. Sometimes you get a glimpse of the broad glittering Mānām Chāo Phraya stretching away on your left hand and if you travel in the season when the rice is being brought down to Bangkok from upcountry, you may see passing down the river whole fleets of riceboats which with their bellying white sails resemble flocks of giant seagulls. You pass Bang Pa In, an idyllic island whereon the King's summer palace is situated, and after nearly two hours you arrive in Ayudhya, Siam's old capital (A. D. 1350-1767). From the railway line you just get, to the West, a glimpse of the island on which the oldest city Dvāravatī (Thēvaravadi in Siamese) was built by the early Indian settlers. To the East you look over a vast plain studded with ancient Prangs and Phrachedis, huge reddish piles of masonry overgrown with green vegetation which in the golden days of Ayudhya were rich and splendid temples, since spoiled by the Burmese those true disciples of Huns and Vandals, when they in 1767 conquered and destroyed the old capital. But the train rolls on and the line now swings towards N. E. still passing over lowlying ground but soon afterwards, at Ban Phra Kēo, we meet the high and dry land, the old coastline in reality, of about 1500 years ago. At Ban Pha Chi junction the

Northern railway branches off to the left while we continue going N. E. After having passed Saraburi ("the town at the sea" the name again reminding us about that not so very distant period when the sea rolled its waves near to this place) the landscape changes its character entirely and becomes hilly. To the North you see the outlines of Khao Phra Buddha Bât the famous place of pilgrimage and now we are nearing the Dangrek mountains, the ramparts which to the West and South surround the four big North eastern provinces of Siam. In Gengkoi another locomotive is harnessed to our train to assist in hauling us up over the hills to the plateau of Khorât. Up it goes through the rugged hills covered with impenetrable virgin jungle. Here and there a passage has been blasted through the black or red rocks, and sometimes the line has to make such curves when rounding certain hill promontories that you can see both the locomotives and the last waggon of the train at the same time. The construction of the part of the line, i.e. from Gengkoi, was started in 1897 and the town of Khorât was reached, finally in 1900. The building of that stretch of the railway which climbs up through the jungle covered hills, cost the lives of several thousand Chinese coolies and also of not a few European engineers and overseers. When you pass the station of Muok Lek (which gets its name from a peculiarly shaped solitary hill called Khao Muok Lek i.e. "the ironhatted mountain," near by), you see the tomb of a young Danish engineer, K. L. Rahbek, who died of fever and was interred here. The huge mortality during the construction of the railway was due to the jungle fevers prevalent in this region, the hills being clothed in dense jungle or virgin forest called "Dong Phraya Fai" (i.e. "the forest of the Lord of fire") which has from olden days had a bad reputation for being a feverridden and very unhealthy one. The train climbs on and on, the scenery shifts rapidly, sometimes black and menacing walls of rock encompass the track but sometimes the hills recede, and you then look to the North and South over the top of the dark and luxurious forest to a confusion of distant chains and summits wrapped in a blue haze. Though the forest presents a most luxuriant and wild scenery with its true giants of secular trees hung with lianas, orchids or fantastic creepers, you seldom see any animal life with the exception of small

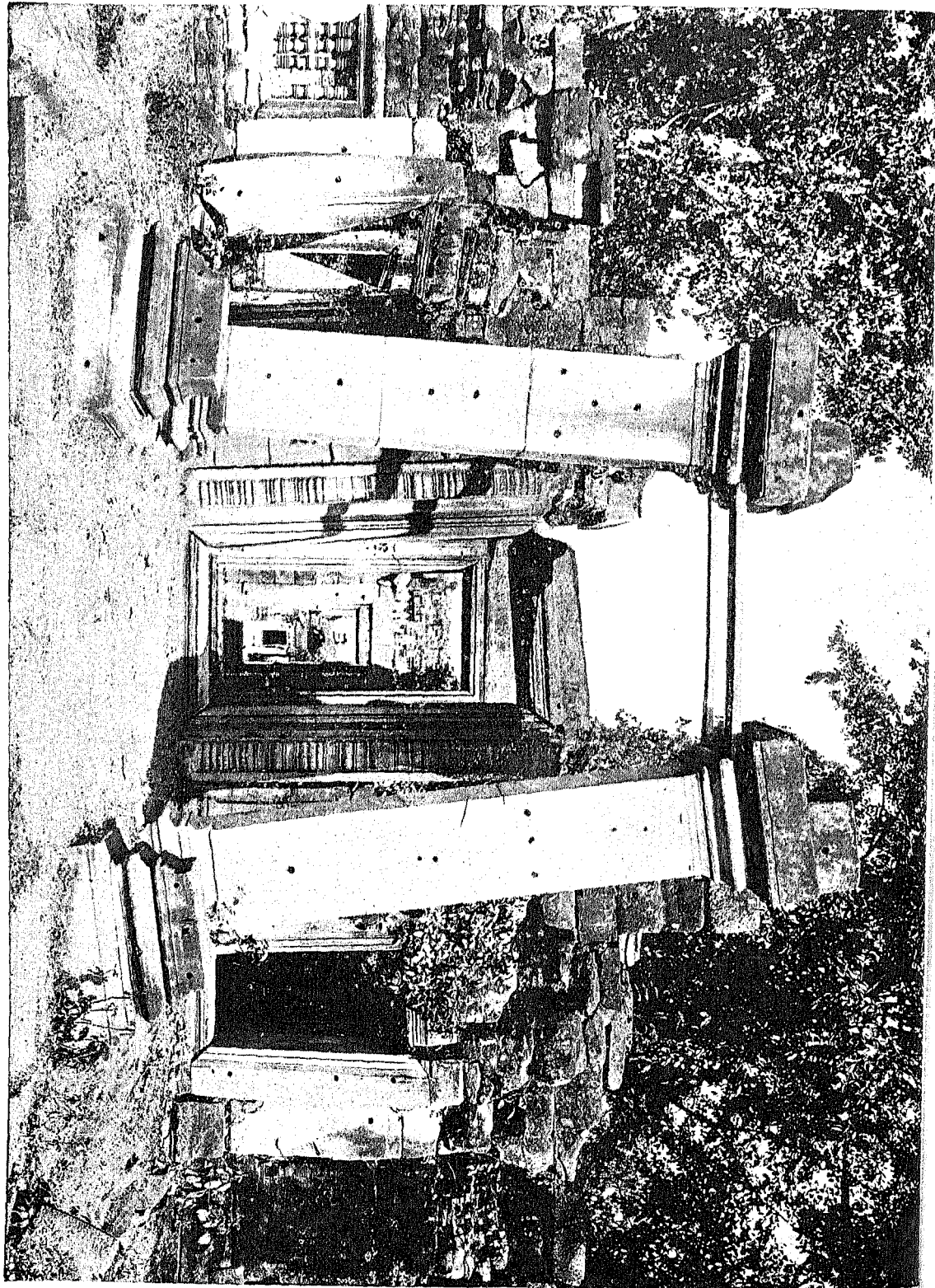
clouds of butterflies. Still there is no doubt that in the mysterious depths of the forest are hosts of big game, wild elephants (which you are not allowed to shoot), tigers, leopards, samburs, wild cattle and even rhinoceroses, indeed Dong Phraya Fai is the paradise of big game hunters. At Pāk Sok the line reaches its highest points: 396.5 metres or about 1300 feet over the sea level. From this point the ground slopes gently down to the city of Khorāt which is only 175 metres or 616 feet over the sea level. Before the construction of the railway a journey from Bangkok to Khorāt was a rather formidable task, the first part from Bangkok to Saraburi or Gengkoi was easily made by boat, but thereafter you had to travel by elephant, pony or by foot, the luggage or merchandise being transported on the back of pack-bullocks. The trip from Gengkoi to Khorāt or vice versa generally took about 11 days and was exceedingly tiring for both men and beasts. Just before emerging from the big forest the train pulls up at a small station called Nakhon Chantu'k. Not far away in the jungle are the ramparts of an old city now deserted, the army keeps a pony stud here. Near by there is also an old copper mine, the working of which has been given up as unprofitable long ago. After this place the country opens up and paddy fields and villages become more and more numerous as we are nearing Khorāt, the line twice passing over Lam Takong an affluent to the Mūn river which born in the wilds of Dong Phraya Fai flows in an Easterly direction and passing North of Khorāt town falls into the Mun somewhere East of the town. Before reaching Khorāt we pass a station called Sung No'n, i. e. the tall hill, near which are lying two ancient cities one to N. W., the other to the East of it: the former is called Mu'ang Sēmarāng, the latter Mu'ang Khorāt Kāo, in both of which are found archaeological remains of considerable interest. Several temple ruins and a huge resting Buddha all made of sandstone and of Cambodian origin are also to be seen there. These old cities may have been Cambodian fortresses dating from a period long before the present town of Khorāt was built. In Khorāt you may stay at the railway station or better, if you can arrange so with the French Legation in Bangkok, at the unoccupied consulate building which is not far from the station and quite a comfortable place at ~~that~~ <sup>the</sup>. The town itself is not very interesting nor picturesque being too dirty







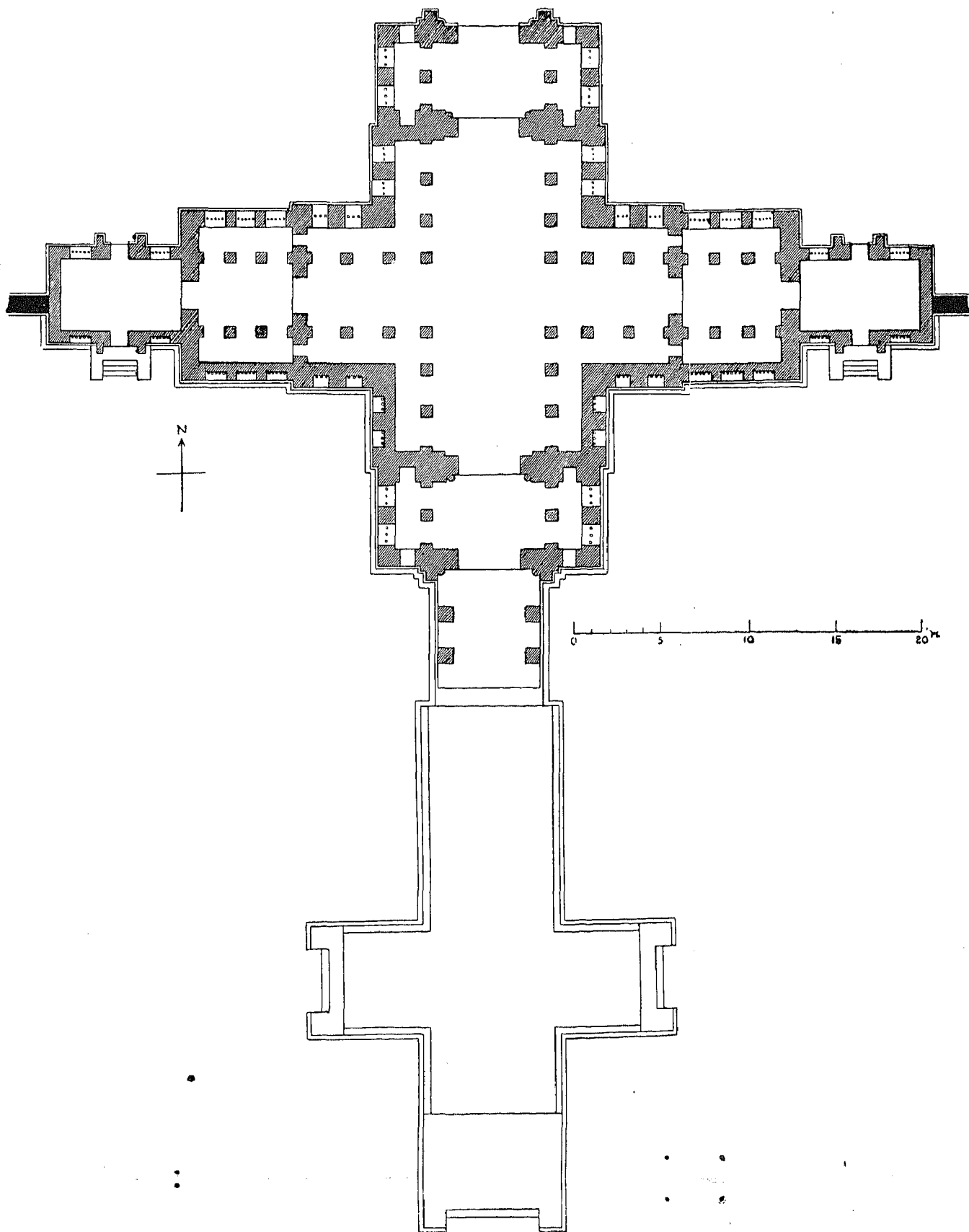




and its roads always in a pitiful state of disrepair. The population seems mainly to consist of Chinese in whose hands is the whole trade of N. E. Siam, the town being so far the terminus of the railway from Bangkok. To Khorat arrive, and from it too start the innumerable caravans of bullock carts which bring the products from the four provinces of Khorāt, Ubon, Roi Etch and Udorn returning to the same loaded with all sorts of foreign goods. From Khorāt also is exported annually a great number of cattle and pigs destined for consumption in Bangkok or for export to Singapore. The non-Chinese population of the town—which really is the most numerous—is called Thai Khorāt or formerly Lāo Klāng, i. e. the middle Lāo, but is for the greater part of Cambodian origin mixed with Thai from the Mēnām valley and especially Lāo from the region of Wiengchan sprinkled with some Mohm exiles. The last named have quite forgotten their mother tongue but not their ancestral spirits who are still worshipped fervently here even by those who are not of Mohm origin: in fact the “phi’s” of Khōrat are “Phi Mohm.”

The present city was built during the reign of King Phra Narai Mahārāj (1656-1688) who let French Military Engineers construct the fortifications, which consist of earthen ramparts crowned in part with walls of brick or sandstone, provided with bastions, broad moats, still partly filled with water, and four gates of which last only the Western one has been preserved entirely, looking quite picturesque with its superimposed tower. In Wat Klāng and at the Sān Chāo Lak Mu’ang are interesting relics from the Khmēr time, namely statues of Narāyana (Vishnu), Ganes’a, Nāga’s, etc. pointing to the existence of a Brahmanical sanctuary and a Khmēr settlement long before the foundation of present day Khorāt. The walled part of the town cannot hold the entire population, and near the railway station lies the suburb of Paru with its flourishing fruit gardens, the soil of which is nourished by a sort of irrigation system, while between the station and the western city wall lies another quarter called Poh Klāng mainly consisting of a street  $1\frac{1}{2}$  kilometer long, lined on both sides with a multitude of Chinese shops. Most of the government officials live in their own quarter outside and S. W. of the walled city, and finally to the South of the town are the barracks and the aerodrome of the 5th Division of the army. For the journey from Khorāt to Phimai,

ponies, bullockcarts and a guide are necessary items. When I, some few years ago, was stationed in Khorāt, you could get a pony, including saddle, for 2 Ticals and a bullockcart for 3 Ticals a day; the guide will probably cost you another couple of Ticals a day. To get these things you must approach the governor who no doubt will be glad to assist you. The best thing, however, will be to let the caretaker of the consulate arrange matters. I consider one pony for yourself, one for the guide and two bullockcarts amply sufficient for your trip. The distance from Khorāt to Phimai is, by the road I went in 1918, fifty six kilometres, and you can of course easily cover that distance in one day, if on horse-back and without any luggage, but I recommend you to travel by easy stages; so much the more as the roads are usually in a very primitive state; it will then take you 2½ days to reach Phimai. I will now presume that we are ready to start, so we leave our comfortable residence at 6 o'clock in the morning and ride followed by our guide through the old walled city, entering by the Western gate called Pratu Chom Pou, passing the lively business quarter and leaving by the Southern gate called Pratu Chainarong or Phi. The last name "the gate of the dead" it has got because all dead have to be carried out through this particular gate, to do it by any of the other gates would call down calamity on the town and its inhabitants. Not far from the town we skirt a large swamp called Hua Talē, which stretches far away to the S. E. of the town, and follow the "tāng luang" or government road which goes from Khorāt to Buriram and which is provided with poles on which the distance for every 10 Sen (400 metres) is indicated. At Salā Nok Hong, 12 kilometres from Khorāt, we stop and take our combined breakfast and tiffin and in the afternoon another 7 kilometres bring us to Tā Chāng (Elephantford) the "port of Khorāt", a village with a gendarmerie post lying at a point of the Mūn river, where this—for some few months every year—begins to be navigable. We find accommodation in a resthouse belonging to the Mūn river Navigation Company. While the scenery between Khorāt and Tā Chāng is open country dotted with villages and abounding in broad paddyfields, it is not so between Tā Chāng and Phimai where it mostly is high forest-covered land: indeed we pass through the edge

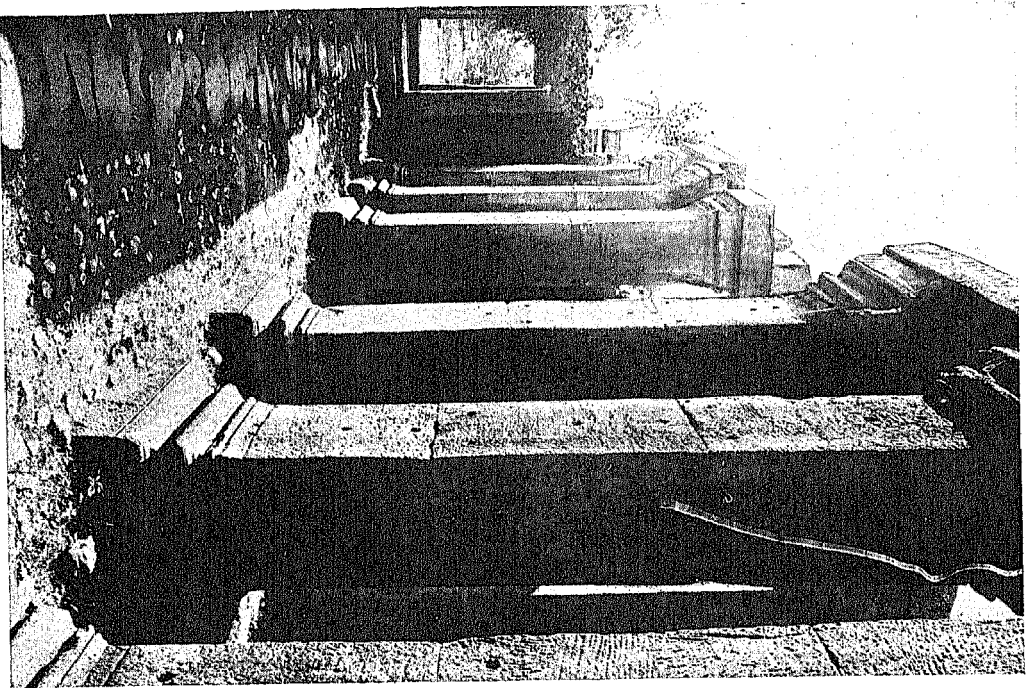


Plan of one the four gopura's (South)  
of the exterior temple enceinte  
(after Lunet de Lajonquière)

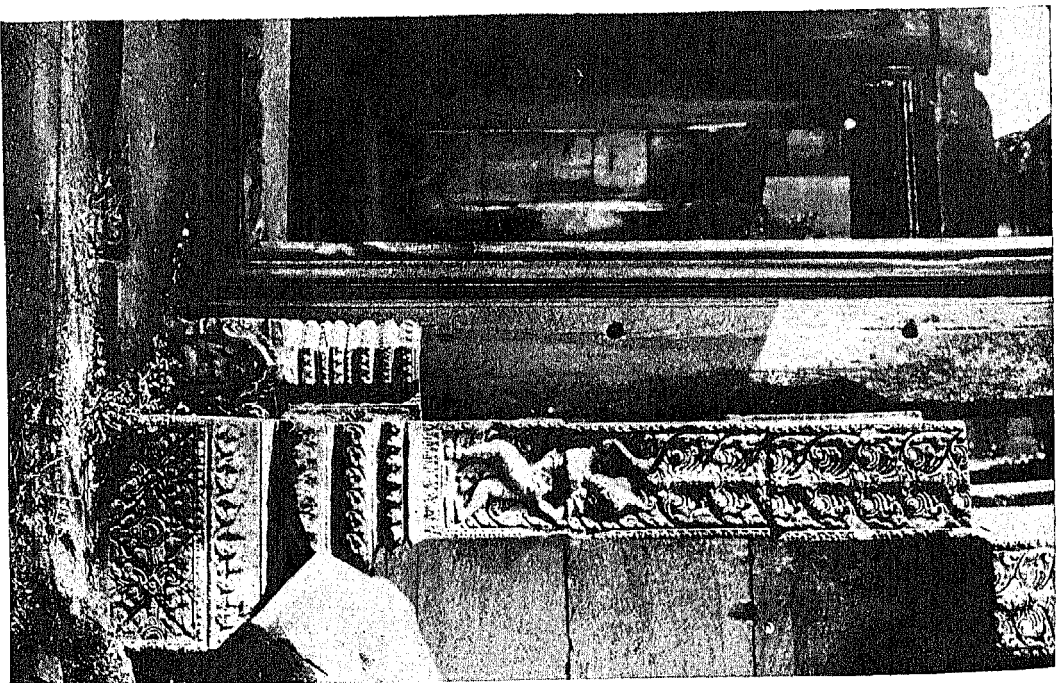




Columns in a gopura.



Carved door frame in Central tower.



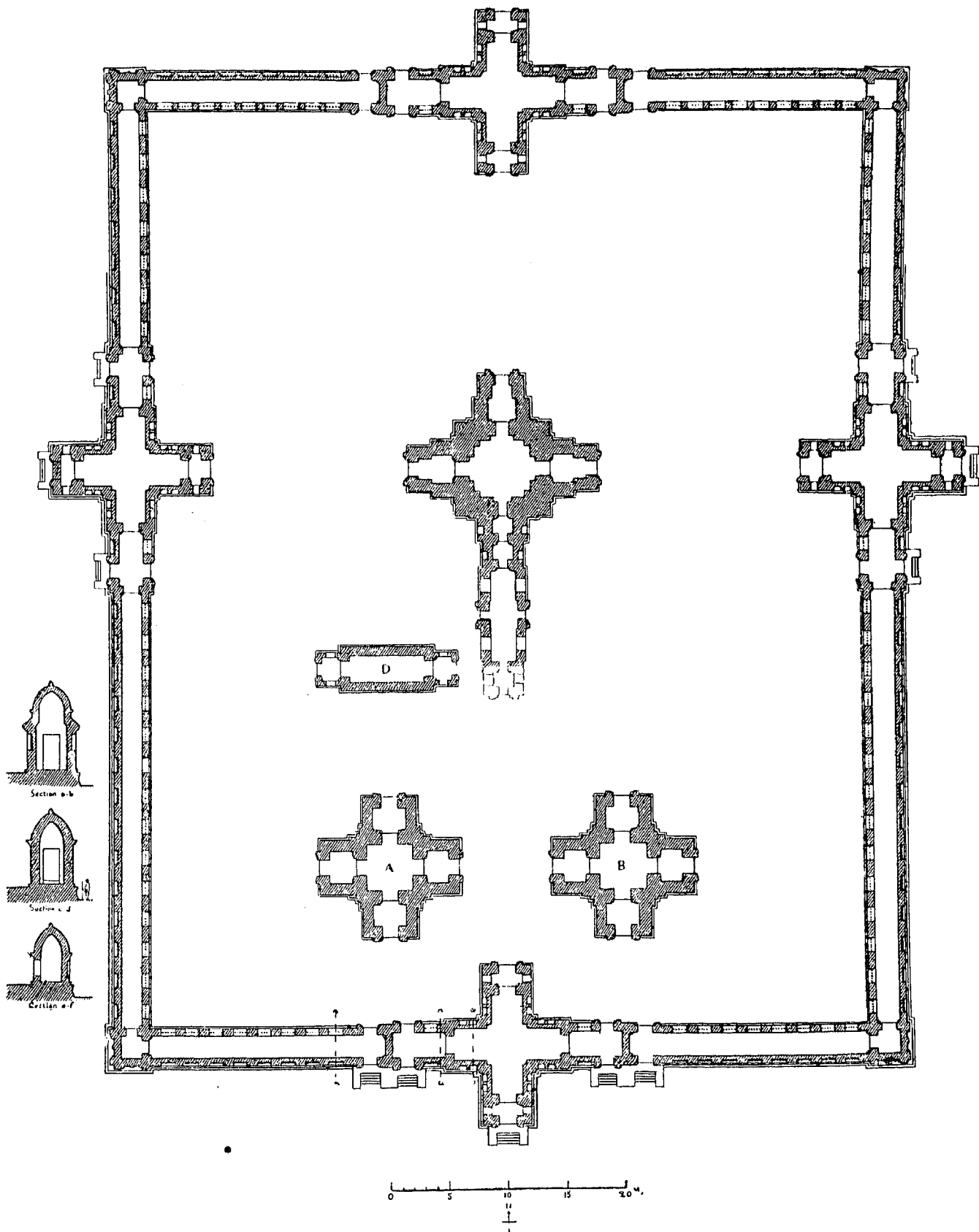
of the great forest Kōk Luang, which from the big Southern plain Tung Kadēn stretches Northwards stopping only at a short distance from the Mūn river, while it Westwards continues until it blends which Dong Phraya Fai and Eastwards till it meets the forests of the Ubon province. This huge forest which seemingly is deserted holds many interesting things not the least being the many old cities, some built in squares, and others in rings, but that is another story. The second day after a ride of 13 kilometres we stop in the village of Nong Tayoi, where we get our tiffin under the splendid shady mango trees in the Wat. In the afternoon, having done another 13 kilometres, we leave the "tāng luang" and, turning N. E. for a short distance, halt at Ban Nong Krasang, where we camp outside the Wat at the edge of the Nong. We have now only 11 kilometres left to reach Phimai. In the early morning of the third day we trot through the dew dripping bamboo jungle, startling numbers of junglefowls and crow pheasants which abound here, and suddenly we meet the telegraph line running Eastwards from Khorāt to Ubon. We follow this for sometime but soon afterwards turn directly North and having crossed a lot of more or less delapidated wooden bridges spanning a number of small streams, we now see the ancient city of Phimai looming up against the sky with its ramparts and tall trees. We enter through the Southern gate—Pratu Chai—built of sandstone and just sufficiently high to let a howdah'd elephant pass through. The gate is an exact copy of those in Angkor the Great. We pass along a long and straight street lined on both sides with the houses and gardens of the inhabitants, besides several rather uninteresting wats. Right at the end of the street you see the Southern Gopura or entrance to the great temple with its terrace in front, S. W. of which is seen a building called "Phra Klang" or the "treasury" built of sandstone blocks or blocks made of "silālēng" this wellknown natural sort of cement. This building is certainly of Khmēr origin and was probably used for secular purposes. We do not enter the temple at once but walk our ponies round the exterior enceinte following the street which leads us to the Mūn river, on the high bank of which a somewhat neglected bungalow will be our residence during the time we stay in the town.

The town of Phimai is built in a square, surrounded in part by



earthen ramparts and broad ditches, and measures from 3 to 4 kilometres in circumference. The ramparts are provided with stone gateways on their Southern, Western and Northern faces, but on the Eastern Side they are broken by a large water reservoir called Srā Phlēng. A part of the Northern rampart with its N. E. corner missing was probably destroyed by the river which here skirts the town. Parts of stone walls are seen on the top of the ramparts on both sides of the gateways on the Southern and Western face as also on the whole of the remaining part of the Northern one; these stonewalls were probably never quite finished. Outside the town the jungle reaches right up to the moats, the ground between the town and the forest in the South being intersected by numerous klongs and rivulets besides being very swampy. A watercourse called Nām Khem (the salt stream) which is probably an old branch of the Mūn river—or perhaps it was its maincourse long ago, who knows—though partly dry during the dry season, is in the rainy season sufficiently full of water to justify one in calling Phimai an island. This watercourse is a favourite breeding place of the crocodiles and it is not difficult to get hold of their eggs here. The temple lies a little to the North of the centre of the town, the space between its exterior enceinte and the city walls, being divided up in numerous square blocks separated by streets cutting each other rectangularly, testify to the skill of the old Cambodians in town planning. The town itself is like one forest of tall dipterocarpii, mighty broad crowned secular tamarinds or mangotrees and graceful sugar and cocospalms, swaying to and fro in the breeze; over all is cool shade and in many places you find small tanks filled with clear and fresh water. The inhabitants are the wellknown Khorāt Thai, active and industrious people, good weavers of silk and thrifty traders whom you meet with everywhere in Eastern Siam. Though they speak that rude Thai dialect which is peculiar to Khorāt, their dark complexion, and their manners and traditions all point to their descent from old Vīmāya's Cambodian temple builders; some few speaking that tongue still live in the town and not many miles South of the town begins the Khmēr-peopled Ampho'-district of Nangrong.

Two enceintes surround the temple or innermost sanctuary, the exterior one consists of a stonewall from 3 to 5



Plan of the Sanctuary in Phimai







The Sanctuary with towers and galleries viewed from South.

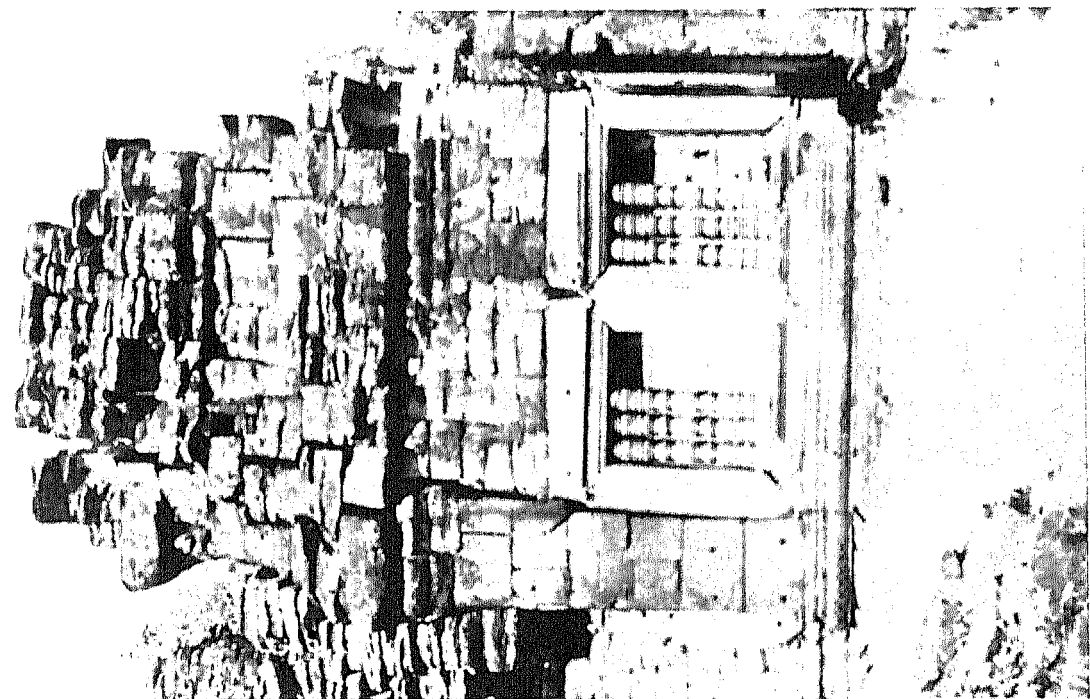
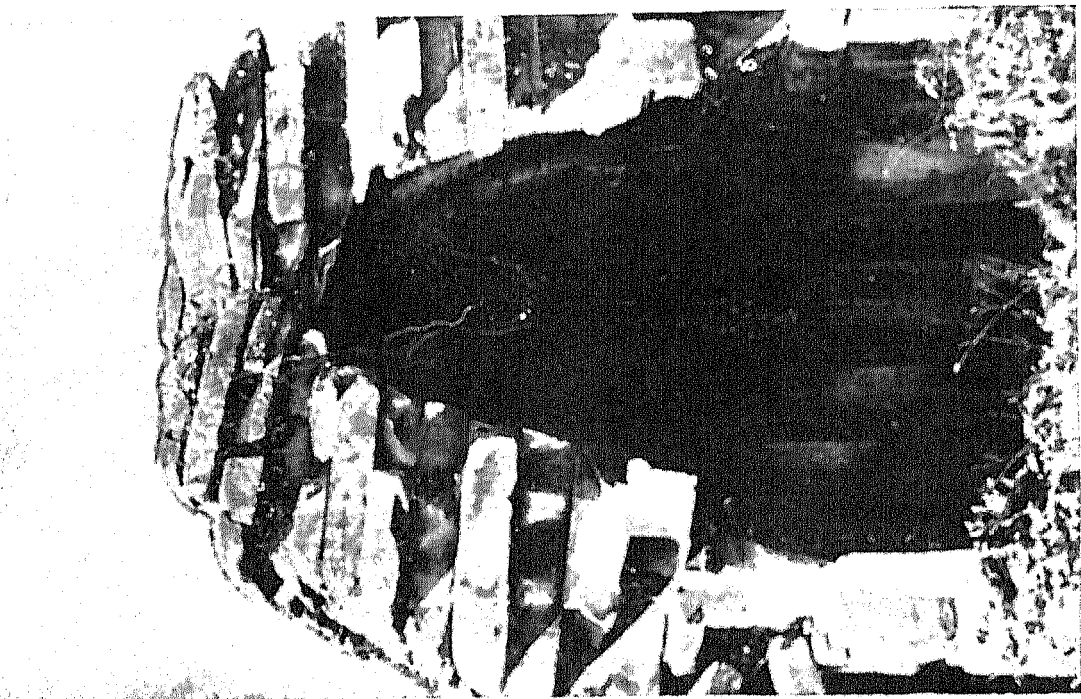


Part of galleries surrounding the three towers.

meters high, built in a square and still well preserved in parts. There are four gopuras or gate-buildings built in the crossform so well known from the Cambodian temple architecture. It is to be regretted that three of them are so badly damaged as to prevent actual passage through them: only the Southern one is in a comparatively good condition. A terrace flanked by lions and nāga's leads up to the last one which is in itself a small temple containing seven narrow chambers; on the faces of two of the pillars in the middle passage are seen short inscriptions in Khmēr. Having passed through this gateway we find ourselves in the first or outer courtyard and there in front of us lies the sanctuary itself enclosed by its galleries and with its three towers soaring up among gigantic old trees, a sight which fills ones heart with delight. Indeed a finer sight than that you will hardly find in this country. Before entering the sanctuary itself, let us cast a glance round the outer courtyard which surrounds the sanctuary and its galleries on all four sides. We notice close to and East of the Southern gopura a small and low terrace on which is lying a stonefigure of superhuman size representing Hari-Hara, a form under which Vishnu and Śiva combined, were adored during a certain period. Another one, also of Hari-Hara, lies close to the causeway leading from the Southern gopura to the sanctuary. Both to the East and West of this are seen some decayed Buddhistic temples of Thai origin, the bases of which are constructed of materials taken from much older buildings of Khmēr origin. Close to the Vihāra lying to the West of the sanctuary are seen remains of two buildings made of sandstone. Major Lunet de Lajonquière in his excellent description of Phimai (see "Inventaire descriptif des monuments du Cambodge" Vol. II p. p. 293-296) thinks that one of these was destined for the king and his courtiers, and the other one for the court-ladies during times of pilgrimage, when the king and his court came to worship here; a theory well worth believing. With regard to the Buddhistic temple lying N. E. of the sanctuary, this was, according to H. R. H. Prince Damrong, built by Prince Thēp Phiphit during his short reign as an independent ruler of Phimai, during the interregnum which prevailed in Siam after Ayudhya's downfall in A. D. 1767. Four big and deep squareformed "Srās" or water basins are also situated in the outer courtyard lying

between the corners of the galleries surrounding the inner courtyard and the enceinte of the outer courtyard. These basins are generally filled with clear and good water used by the citizens for drinking purposes. The building materials used for the different constructions were probably taken from the place where these basins now are as the subsoil here in Phimai—as nearly over all in the Khorāt province—consists of a red sandstone or laterite, just the material wanted by the old Khmērs for their grandiose temple buildings. Inside the courtyard grow many tall and splendid trees: tamarind, dipterocarpii and mango trees giving a welcome shade and adding to the picturesqueness of the place.

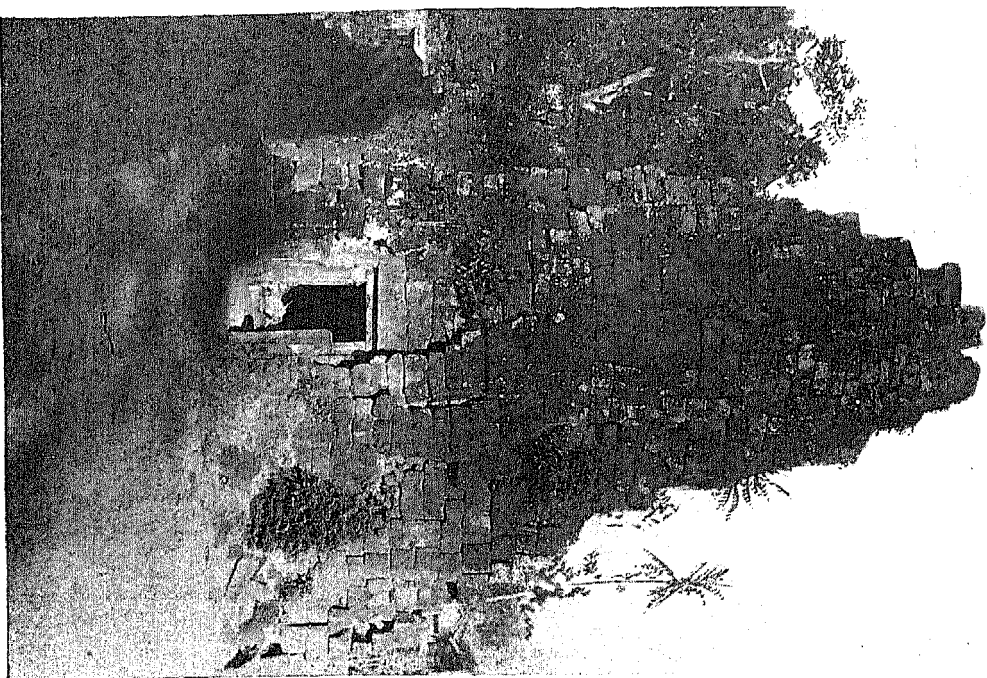
We will now contemplate the sanctuary itself with its three prangs or towers, its library or treasury and the roofed galleries which, built in a square, surround them and which measure 300 metres in circumference. Though most of the galleries have now crumbled away, some parts still in good preservation retaining the roof, give us a good idea of the manner in which they were constructed. The galleries are closed to the exterior and we notice here a row of false i. e. closed windows with curiously turned gratings. On the interior side they were open and provided with a row of columns supporting the roof. There are—or were—four gopuras built cross-wise like those of the temple enceinte already mentioned, but at present the Southern gopura is the only passable one and it is in this that we find the two most interesting inscriptions consisting respectively of 25 and 7 lines, the first one being on your right the second on your left hand, when you enter the gopura. These inscriptions, which are in Khmēr, date from the XI-XIIth. Saka (i. e. Mahāsakarāj whose chronology starts with A. D. 79), and tell us that in Mahāsakarāj 1030 (i.e. A. D. 1108) a certain Virendrādhipati-varman erected in this gopura, in the door of which the inscription is engraved, "The statue of the god Senāpati Trailokyavijaya, who is the senāpati (general) of the god Vimāya." That inscription proves that in 1108 the central sanctuary with its god Vimāy (= Phimai) was already constructed. Another interesting point is that the above date helps us to fix the date of the foundation of Angkor Wat which



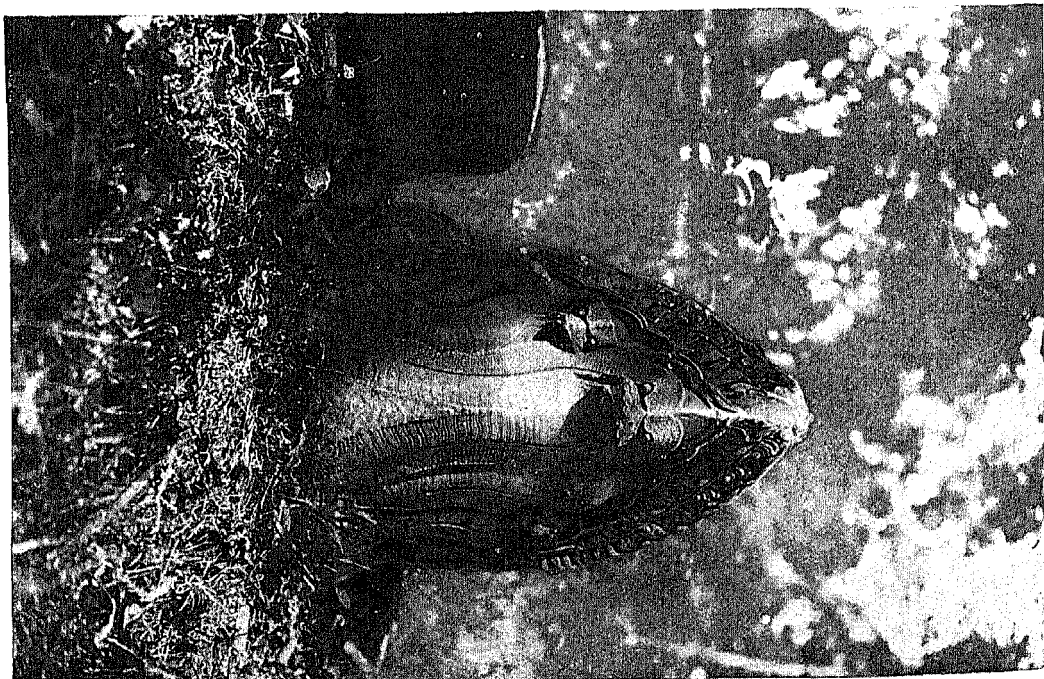








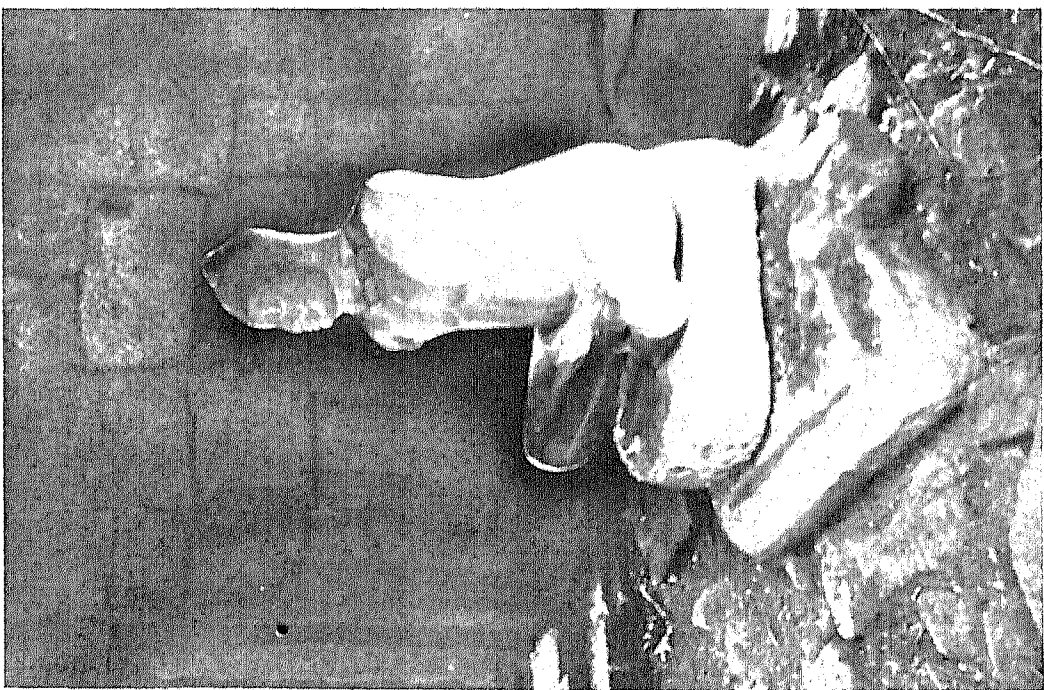
Eastern tower.



Five headed Naga.

has hitherto been uncertain. The discovery of the two inscriptions (made by me, when I, in company with Messrs. R. Belhomme and J. J. McBeth, visited Phimai in December 1918) enables us to identify king Paramavishnuloka with Sūryavaman II (A. D. 1112-1162) and to locate the construction of Angkor Wat in the course of the XIIth. century. When I say that I found the inscriptions just mentioned, I am perhaps not quite right because Major Aymonier, the famous French archaeologist, *did* find three inscriptions, when he visited Phimai in 1884 (see his book "Cambodge II p.p. 122-124), but his impressions must have been very bad as he was unable to decipher more than a few words. The impressions taken during my visit in 1918 are not perfect, but still Professor Coedès has been able to decipher and translate a great deal of them, the contents of which are given above (See also Professor Coedès' article in "Journal Asiatique", Jan-March 1920 p. 96). When Major L. de Lajonquière visited the ruins he was not able to find any inscriptions at all and it seems as if he did not even believe in the existence of them. It is to be hoped that some exact impressions of all four inscriptions will soon be obtained to enable the experts to give us a full and complete translation of their contents. We are now in the innermost courtyard facing the three towers which, we notice, are built in two lines, two towers in the first and a third, the main tower, in the second line. The two foremost appear by their more primitive construction to be much older than the third and biggest one, being built of rugged laterite blocks and being quite unadorned on the exterior. While the Western tower is now empty, not so the Eastern one, inside which we find a splendid sitting male statue of superhuman size, the material of which it is made being a dark green stone polished smooth as marble. The execution of this statue with its powerful body and impressive but somewhat brutal looking face is so masterly done, that I venture to say, it easily holds its own with many of the statues from the old Hellas. It is a great pity that its arms and neck have been broken and its nose rather damaged, else, it would have been perfect. On its right hand is seen a female statue in a kneeling position, the execution of this statue is also very fine, but the head placed on its broken neck does not belong to it being too big and quite out of proportion. The

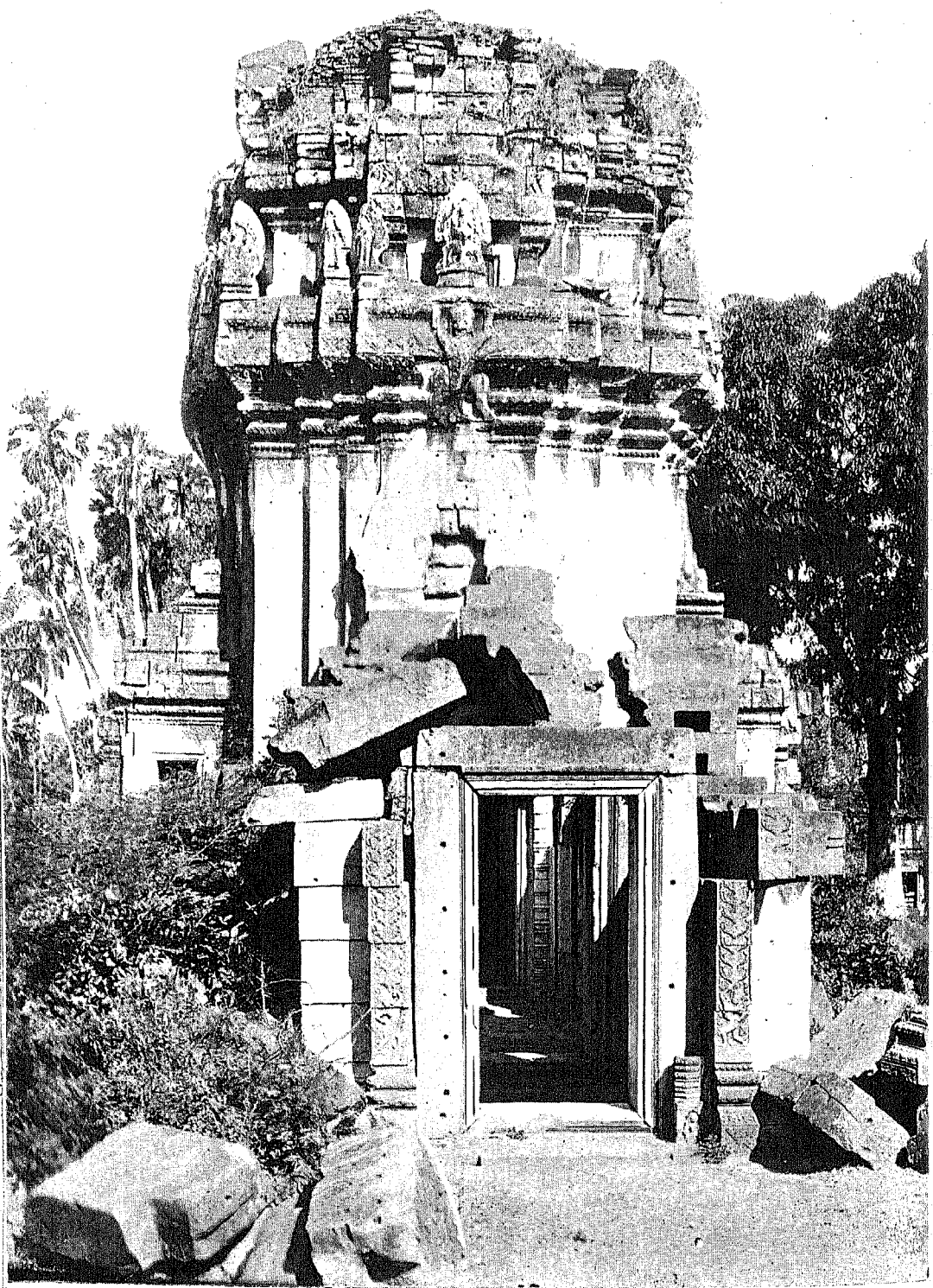
inhabitants of Phimai believe that the statues represent Thao Phromathat (Brahmadatta) and Nang Orapin (Aravinda = Lotus), the former being a legendary king of Phimai, the latter a capricious but fascinating girl of surpassing beauty won by Thao Phromathat after many tribulations. Quite a lot of places in the Khorāt province, as well in the Central as in the Western and Southern part, remind one by their names of this legend, as for instance Mu'ang Nangrong (Nang = girl, rong = cries) to take one, and the Lāo and Khmēr bards still sing to day about the king and his love. As far as I understand it, this legend has its counterpart in a much older Indian myth from which it probably is derived (like that about Phraya Pān and Phraya Kōng in Nakhon Chaisri), but one is perhaps allowed to believe that there is a substratum of truth in the local legend, Thao Phromathat being a Cambodian viceroy in Phimai and founder of the oldest sanctuary. We will now examine the main tower which is a superb example of the noble Khmēr architecture, resembling the towers of Angkor Wat and being of a much superior design and execution than that of the two other towers, and consequently of a more recent date than those. The height of the tower must originally have been not less than 18 metres, but the top having been destroyed, it now measures only about 13 metres (according to a tradition, the top was pulled down by invading Lāo hordes, which cannot have been others than the armies of the famous king Fā Ngom, who by the middle of the 14th century extended his sway from Luang Phrabang and Wiengchan Southwards over the Mēkhong valley and the territory of the four big North eastern provinces of Siam.) The tower is built of a finely cut sandstone of reddish or yellowgreyish colour which, when exposed to the changing light during day time, develops a whole scale of delicate tints finest to look upon at sunrise and sunset, or better still when the rays of a brilliant full moon streaming down through the wonderful tropical night is at play with its dazzling silverlight, creating a fairyland of the ruins and repeopling them with ancient Cambodia's splendours. On the top of the prang formerly crowned with the lotusflower some brickwork is seen. H. R. H. Prince Damrong in his small but excellent guide book to Khorāt ( เที่ยวตามทางรถไฟเมืองนครราชสีมา ) to whom I am indebted for certain historical information, says that









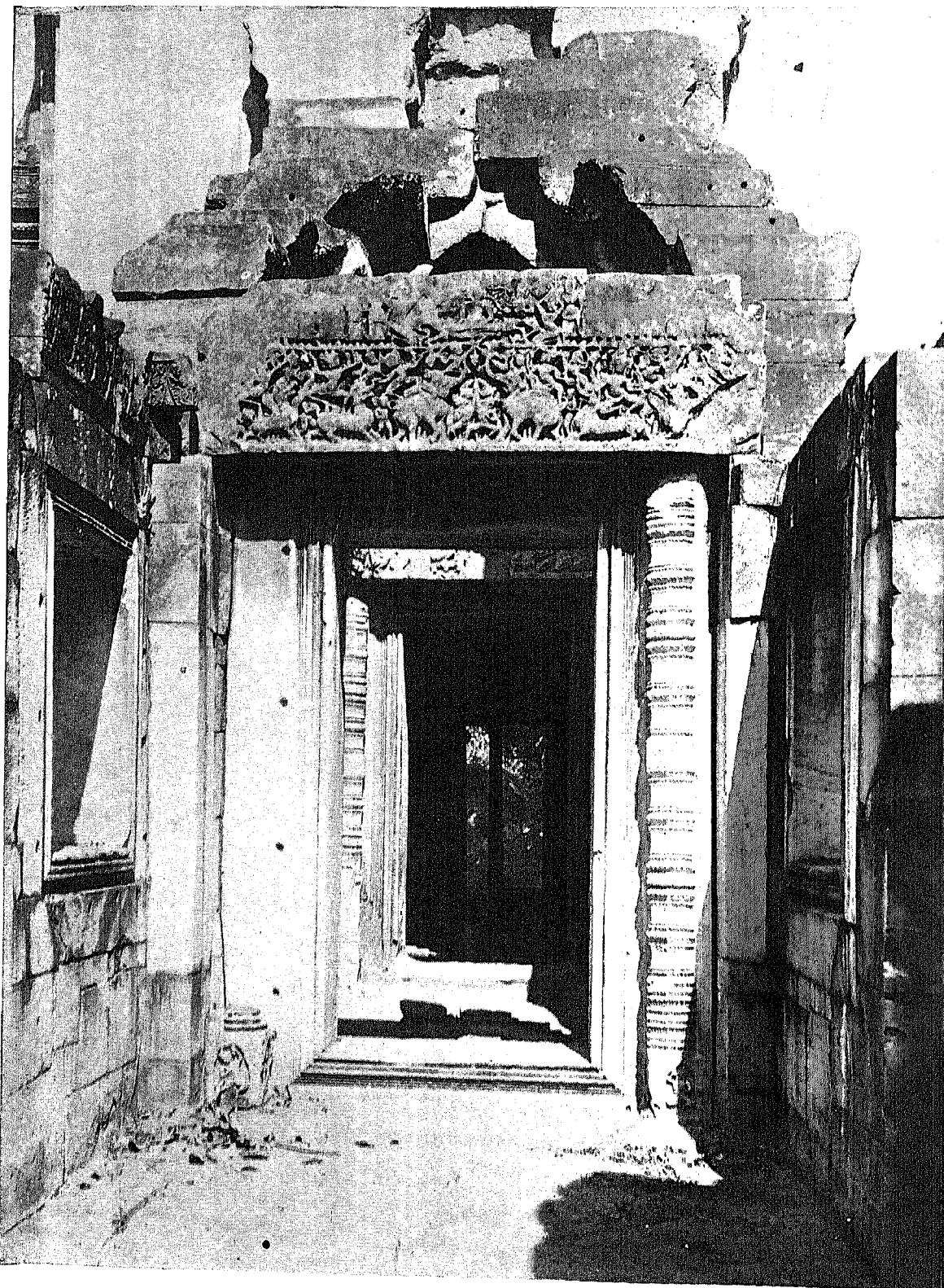


Central tower viewed from South.

Prince Thēp Phiphit, the same who built the aforementioned Vihāra to the N. E. of the Sanctuary, also tried to repair the tower, to which some masonry bears witness. There are four doors all preceded by porches, the Southern, being the main one, is preceded by a much longer porch (*avant corps* is the appropriate term in French); all the doors are framed by beautifully carved or turned columns adorned with carvings of flowers or the graceful form of dancing girls. The vaulted interior is now empty, save for the modern "Roi Phra Buddha-Bāt", but must without doubt formerly have contained an image of the Buddha as on the lintels of all four doors there are carved scenes of Buddha's life. With regard to this, Professor Coedès has been kind enough to furnish the following explanation: "On the lintel of the Southern door (of which lintel most of the upper half is missing), one still sees clearly Buddha sitting under the Bo tree, his right hand making the traditional gesture calling the earth as witness to his renunciation of all wordliness, under him are seen Māra, the tempter, with his army of elephants and demons riding on *rajasis* attacking Buddha. The scene represents an episode from Bhudda's life i.e. the victory over Māra or Māravijaya. On the lintel of the Eastern door is seen in the centre a god with 8 arms and 3 (or 4) faces dancing on two corpses lying on an elephant's skin. The Buddhistic (Mahayanistic) pantheon possesses a divinity the description of which corresponds well with this figure, with the exception of the number of the arms. This is Samvara (See Getty "The gods of Northern Buddhism" p. 127). This author says "He has four heads..... He is represented with twelve arms. The original ones crossed in *Vajra-hūmkāra mudrā* just as our figure does. The upper arms hold an elephant's skin, which entirely covers his back..... He steps to the left on the nude figure of a..... woman..... and on the right treads on a..... man." But as Samvara is almost unknown outside Tibet and China, I still hesitate to accept this identification though not rejecting it entirely. I ask myself if it is not possible that this figure is a special local form of Trailokyavijaya, because this divinity is mentioned in the inscription found in the Southern gopura. Trailokyavijaya has four faces, *eight* arms (just the number of arms of our figure), he dances on the bodies of S'iva and Parvati, his two nethermost hands making the sign of *vajra-hūmkāra mudrā*.

(See Foucher "Étude sur l'iconographie bouddhique de l'Inde", 2a. part, p. 58). So far good, but the elephant's skin is not mentioned. Still in view of the popularity of Trailokyavijaya in India and Java and the fact that he is cited in the Phimai inscription, I am inclined to accept this last identification. To the left and right of the figure of Trailokyavijaya one notices two rows of figures, the upper consisting of sitting Buddhas the lower of dancing bayadères. The third scene, depicted on the lintel of the Northern door represents the statue of a god sitting in a temple to which god different persons come bringing offerings. The statue is that of a god sitting on the Nāga, the god wears a mukuta (crown), ear-pendants etc. and one is at the first view inclined to identify it rather with Vishnu than with S'iva, but there exist a great number of similar statues where the person sitting on the Nāga certainly is Buddha, though probably under the Mahayanistic form of Ādibuddha which generally is represented decked with the royal ornaments (See Getty "The gods of Northern Buddhism" p. 3). We now come to the last door, the Western, on the lintel of which is seen Buddha standing clad in royal garments in the attitude of the statues which at the present are called "Phra Chao song khruāng" ( พระเจ้าทรงเครื่อง ) It is well known that these statues represent Buddha as Rājādhirāja or the king of kings in the apocryphical legend Jambupati (See the résumé in Finot's "Recherches sur la littérature laotienne," published in Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient, XVII vol. No. 5, p. 66). If it really is this legend which is represented here, I think that Jambupati and his escort are to be seen in the upper row of figures to the left of Buddha, to the right, his palace is seen; the lower row (of dancing girls and musicians) represent perhaps the sensual enjoyments in the gardens (of Jambupati) so treasured by him before he came into the presence of Buddha."

The superstructure, which begins where the pilastershaped walls end with a sort of capital most beautifully executed, must originally have risen gradually like a sort of terraced pyramid up to the top, having on each of its steps rows of "acrotères" i.e. stones formed like "Bai simā's" and carved with



Central tower : Southern door.







Central tower: Eastern door.



figures of rishis (Siamese: rüsi=hermit) or many headed snakes, of which a number are still to be seen in their original places, and finally, on each of the four faces of the tower and just over the porches, a huge Garuda—the mount of the god Vishnu—is seen.

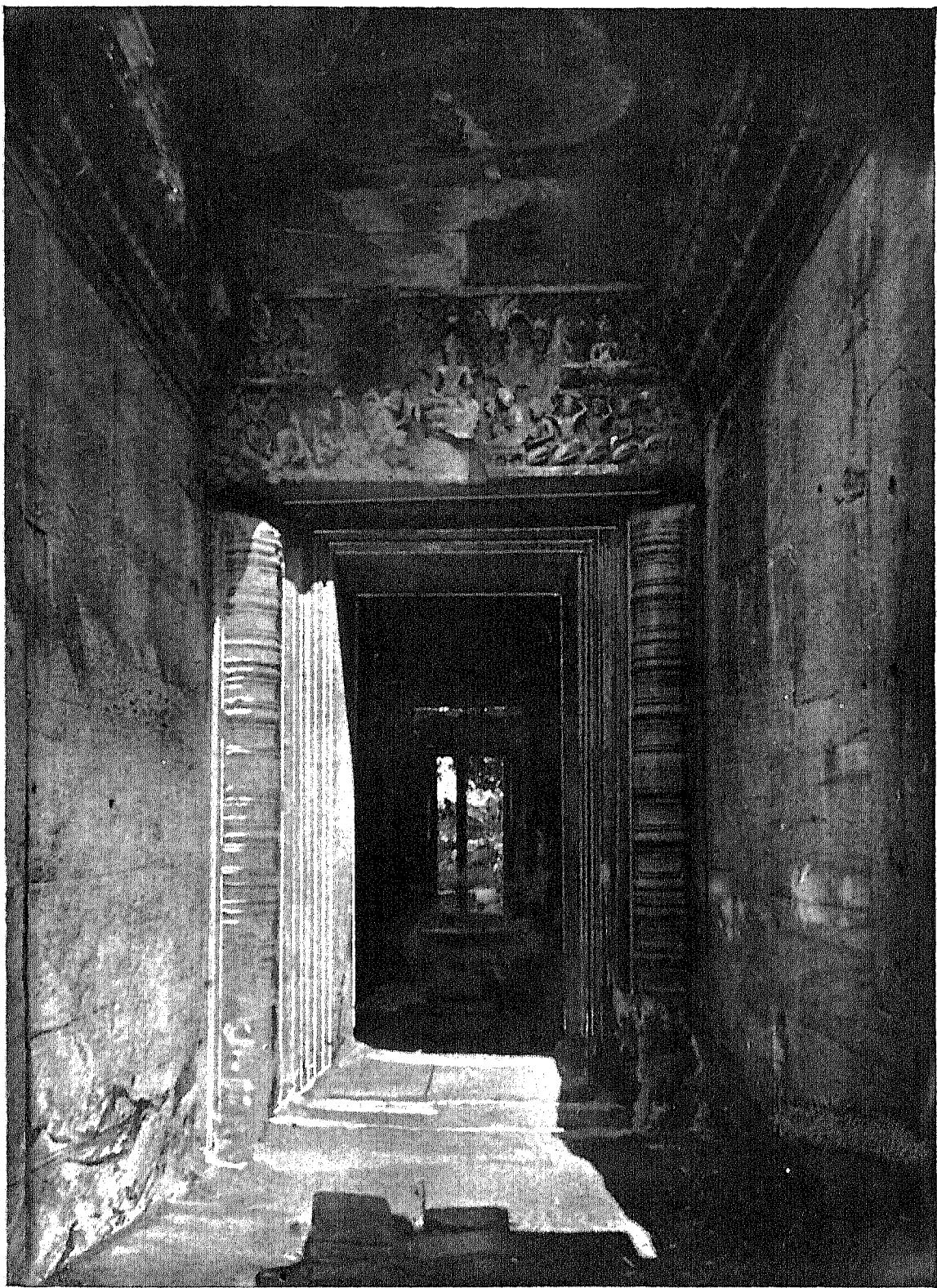
The last building to be mentioned is the library or treasury, a small rectangular structure lying with its longitudinal axis East and West, and close to the West of the Southern porch of the main tower, this building is now quite tumbled down and presents only a confused heap of stones. But strewn on the ground round the building lie a lot of sculptured stones fallen down partly from the top and partly from the porches of the main-tower, among them are lintels on which are depicted different scenes, here the heroic fight between Bāli and Sugrīva with their bows, their human and monkey warriors and the war chariot, a wellknown episode from the Indian epic called Rāmāyana, which is still played by the Cambodian, Javanese and Siamese lakhons of to-day; or there one sees the god Indra sitting on the threeheaded elephant, there again another god sitting on the head of the monster Rāhu and finally a row of standing lions and so on. A patient research will reveal a lot of more beautiful details gladdening the heart of any lover of art or archaeology. It will also be noticed that the present surface of the innermost courtyard does not represent the original one which lay considerably lower; by the care of a former thoughtful Nai Ampho' the earth has been dug away at the base of the Northern face of the maintower, showing the original base of this as well as the stonepaved courtyard and also showing that the porches were approached by flights of steps.

Outside the temple, between this and the river, i. e. North of the temple, lies the public school (Rongrien Kulanō) on the verandah of which is seen a collection of many interesting things namely a standing four-armed statue wearing S'iva's headdress and a standing fourarmed statue wearing Vishnu's mukuta, both statues are of natural size and, though the arms are broken, of a very good execution. The heads said to belong to Thao Phromatat and Nang Oraphin are also kept here as also a very big female head of a third statue (this last one, as also some other fragments of statues lying in the Eastern tower may have belonged to statues placed formerly in the now empty Western tower). Some ancient pottery: jars of the



kind called "Hai Khā" as well as some tall elongated vasselike ones are seen here too, but the most interesting piece is a fine statue of a woman in a standing position, wearing a skirt ("pā sin"), necklace and a mukuta on her head, the face with its aquiline nose and full lips is smiling with a mysterious and blissful smile. This statue is called Nang Lavu and used formerly to be in a place called Kōk Lavu, some 40 kilometres to the Northeast of Phimai, where a watercourse called Lam Plainas falls into the Munriver. As far as I know there are no traces of any sanctuary there, it was just a solitary statue standing in the forest and though the place was,— and is,— far away from any human dwelling, the statue used to be visited on moonlight nights by young Lāo bards (Moh Lam) who played on their khēns (reedflutes) and sang lovesongs to her, but so fatal were the consequences of this uncanny courtship that the young men once returned to their native villages were attacked by evil fevers, soon afterwards to die. The jealous and resentful Lāo damsels therefore forced the village elders to remove the villages further East to be outside the baneful and magnetic influence of Nang Lavu and finally the Nai Ampho' caused the statue to be brought to Phimai to its present abode, where it seems to have lost its influence. So far the popular tale told me one evening when I sat by the campfire. The name Lavu reminds one about Lophburi's, old name Lvo, of the inscriptions. May be the name has some historical connection with that other old Khmēr city which is still more ancient than Phimai itself! I may add that another curiosity is to be seen near Phimai; about half an hour's paddling upstreams there grows on the left bank of the Mūnriver a huge and splendid Banyantree called Ton Sai Ngām: seen from a distance it resembles a mighty green cupola, and it is said, that under its shade a whole company at war strength can find rest. Her late Majesty the Queen Mother visited it on her trip to Phimai in 1912.

Before concluding this paper some few words about the scanty historical information which we possess about Phimai may prove useful. As will be seen from the inscriptions, this place was undoubtedly the capital of a big province or petty kingdom subject to Angkor the Great about the year A. D. 1100, as it probably had been for several centuries before that time, it is moreover reasonable to



Central tower: Northern door.







Central tower: Western door and the "Roi Phra Phuttha Bāt".

believe that Phimai is a very ancient town of the Khmêrs, who in fact ruled over the whole of the Mûn valley long before they (about A. D. 600) went down and conquered Funan i.e. the present Cambodia which last, inhabited by a kindred race, once embraced the whole of modern Siam as well as the Mèkhong valley. When King Rāmakhambheng engraved his famous inscription in Sukhothai A. D. 1292, the present provinces of Khorât and Ubon were still under Khmêr-dominion. Later on, during the wars between Phra Chao Utong or Rāmātibodi I. of Ayuthia (A. D. 1349-1369) and Phra Parama Lampongse of Cambodia, the Siamese conquered the territory of Khorât but for quite a long time their rule was confined to the Western parts of this province and Phimai may be supposed to have remained Cambodian for some time longer, though it probably once was temporarily conquered by King Chao Fa Ngou's Lāo armies as mentioned above. After this there is a gap in the Siamese chronicles and nothing is heard about Khorât or Phimai before the time of King Phra Narai Mahārāj who, as related in the beginning of this paper, sent French Military engineers to fortify the town of Khorât, making it to one of the Kingdom's strong fortresses destined to guard against possible invasions into the Mênâm valley from the East. Phimai is mentioned at that time as being one of the 5 Mu'angs subject to Nakhon Rajasima. The next time we hear about Phimai is after the fall of Ayudhya in 1767, when Prince Thēp Phiphit of the Royal House of Ayudhya tried to rally some of his countrymen against the Burmese invaders, but having suffered defeat in a battle at Paknām Yotagā (in the Prachin province) he fled to Khorât where he—after many bloody intrigues—was raised to be ruler of Phimai. His kingship was however of short duration, as in 1775 he was defeated and captured by one of the armies which Khun Luang Taksin sent up against him. Since then Phimai has sunk down to the seat of an ordinary Nai Ampho' though it has recently been proposed to make it the seat a governor (phu va rajakar changvad).

The ruins of Phimai are of such beauty and importance that it is sincerely to be hoped the government will soon take steps to have them effectively protected against any acts of vandalism, though it must be said, to the honour of the different Nai Ampho's who have

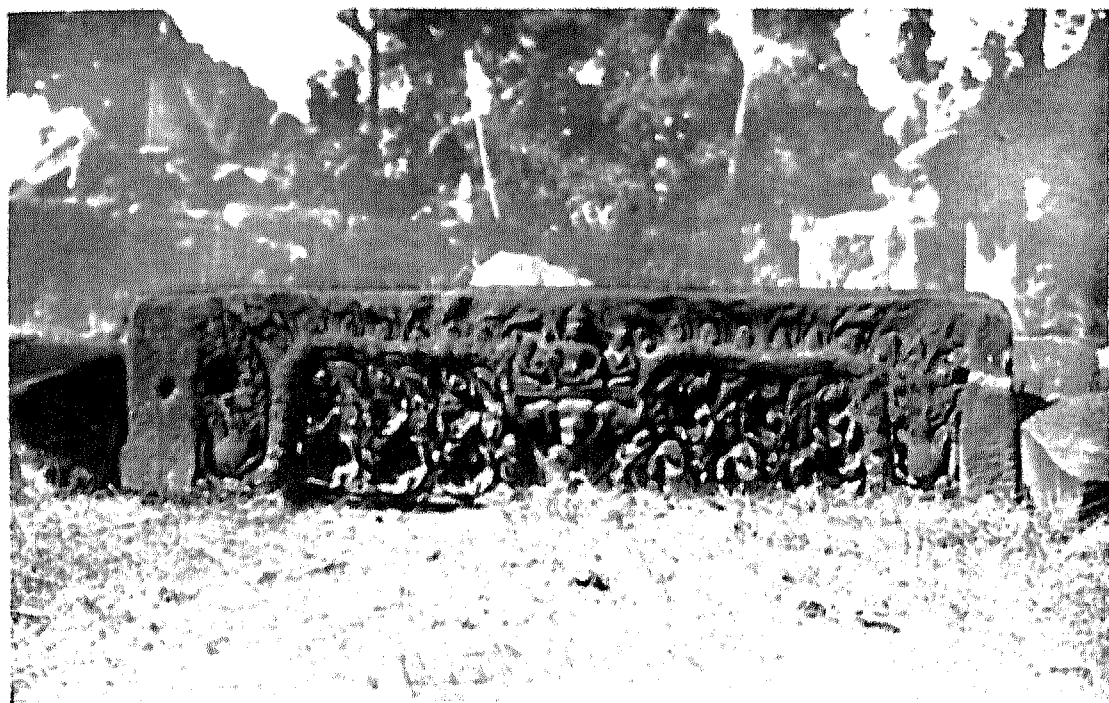
resided there, that they have all taken some interest in the protection of the ruins, and the population itself has still much veneration left for the great achievements of their ancestors. Finally I beg here to express my hearty thanks to my friend Professor G. Coedès, the learned Chief Librarian of the National Library, for all his good advice and for the interesting notes supplied by him, to Messrs. J. J. McBeth and R. Belhomme who allowed me to use their excellent photographs which illustrate this paper; and especially to Prof. Finot, Director of l'École Française d'Extrême Orient who most kindly gave permission to reproduce the map of Phimai and the temple plans published by Major L. de Lajonquière in his "Inventaire descriptif des monuments du Cambodge, Vol. II."

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### Supplementary Note.

As will be seen from the preceding lecture, this was delivered as far back as the month of June 1920, but on account of various circumstances, among them the long delay caused by the reproduction in Europe of the illustrations which accompany this article, the publication was retarded until now. The conditions of travelling in that part of the country, i. e. the Khorāt province have, since the author lectured on the Phimai ruins, changed a great deal for the better by reason of the construction of the North Eastern line of the State Railways which ultimately will reach Ubon. Instead of travelling the whole distance from the town of Khorāt to Phimai by pony and bullockcart, it is now possible to continue by rail from the Khorāt Station to Tā Chāng. As stated in the first part of the lecture the train leaves Bangkok 9.48 a. m. and arrives at Khorāt 6.08 p. m. Here one must change for a train running to Tā Chāng: Departure 6.30; Arrival 7.19 p. m. at Tā Chāng. By doing so, one avoids the tedious journey (19 kilometers) along the cartroad from Khorāt to Tā Chāng. The first night has of course to be spent here at Tā Chāng which probably can still be done, as already indicated, in the resthouse belonging to the Mūn River Navigation Company, or in one of the temporary railway quarters. With regard





Lintel with sculpture representing the god Indra on his three-headed elephant.



Lintel with sculpture representing a scene from the epic of Rāmāyana.





to obtaining ponies and bullock carts for the further journey, the question is perhaps more difficult, but I should think that by approaching in advance the governor of Khorāt, this gentleman would be kind enough to give the necessary instructions for the arrangement of this to the Ampho' Tā Chāng. The second part of the journey is still to be undertaken as formerly described and will take about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  day. When returning from Phimai one has to spend another night in Tā Chāng; leaving this place the next morning by train at 6 o'clock, arrival in Khorāt 6.49 a. m. (i. e. at the railway station), change train for Bangkok leaving 7. 00 a. m. and arrive in the Capital at 3. 16 p. m.

His Royal Highness the Prince of Kambaeng Bejra, Commissioner General of the Siam State Railways, to whose kindness the author is indebted for much valuable information, for which he hereby begs to tender his best thanks, recently stated that there will be constructed a station near Ban Tām (บ้านต๋าม) which is about 32 kilometers South of Phimai, and that construction trains will be running to this station during the beginning of 1923: the whole line, terminating at Ubon, will be completed in 1927. H. R. H. who desires to facilitate excursions to Phimai as much as possible, is however studying the question of finding another station which will be nearer to Phimai than the first one named. A road, possible for motor vehicles, connecting this station with the town of Phimai is under consideration.

We may therefore hope that, within the near future, excursions to the interesting and picturesque temple ruins of this ancient city will be made possible without much inconvenience for the tourist. The traveller may have to make a first break of the journey in Khorāt or at Tā Chāng where we perhaps may expect the construction of one of these comfortable railway resthouses so well and favourably known; the second and third night to be spent in Phimai. Including the return journey to Bangkok the whole trip should easily be accomplished in five days instead of 7 days as now.

