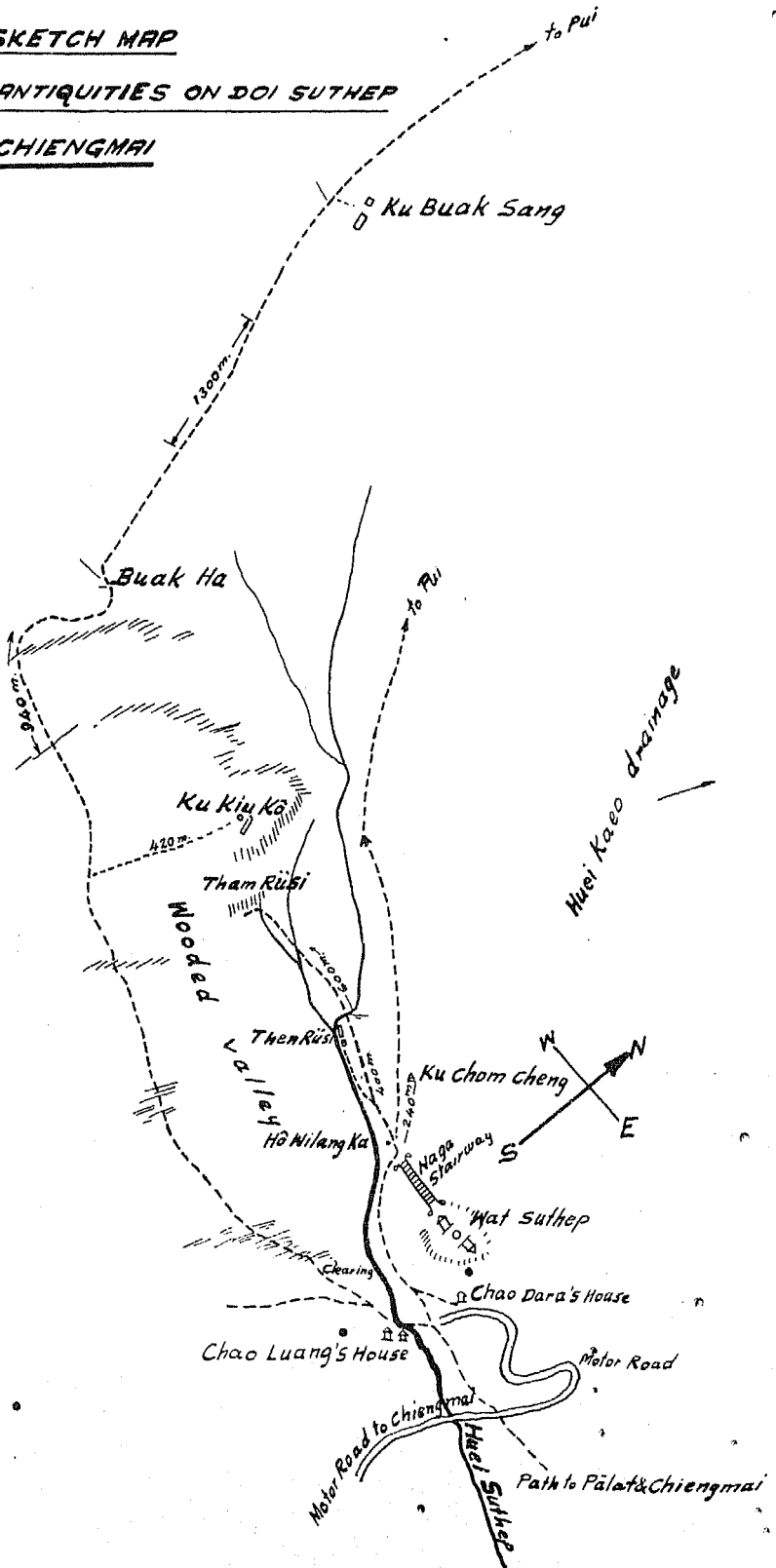


SKETCH MAP

POSITION OF ANTIQUITIES ON DOI SUTHEP

CHIENGMAI



ANTIQUITIES ON DOI SUTHEP.

by

MAJOR ERIK SEIDENFADEN.

A few kilometres to the west of Chiengmai rises the fine forest clad hill, Doi Suthep, which, in the eyes of the northern Siamese, or Thai Yuan, is considered a very holy place, well worth a pilgrimage. The attraction for the pilgrims is the renowned temple, Wat Suthep, whose gilt chedi and white temple walls can be espied from afar on the broad Chiengmai plain.

According to the well-known chronicle called *Phongsavadam Yonok*, the chedi of Wat Suthep contains a holy relic of the Buddha, brought from Sukhothai to Chiengmai by the venerable monk, Sumana, in 1386 A. D., in which year the Suthep temple was also built. Large crowds of pilgrims flock to this temple every year during the hot season (March-April) in order to worship the holy relic. Among these pilgrims may be seen members of several picturesque hill tribes, besides Thai Yuan, Thai Yai (Shans) and even Thai, and other people, from the South.

The Suthep temple stands on a rocky ridge jutting out from the main hill on its eastern slope some 3,000 feet above sea level, the total height of the mountain being some 5,500 feet (1,676 metres).

The purpose of this article, however, is not to give a description or the history of Wat Suthep, but to mention some probably much older monuments, some of which have been recently found by Mr. E. W. Hutchinson of Chiengmai, and some others of which were examined by the writer of these lines during a visit to Doi Suthep made in December 1935.⁽¹⁾

(1) Monsieur Camille Notton, the French Consul at Chiengmai, in his *Annales du Siam, chronique de Suavanna Khamdeng*, p. 7, mentions some of the *Thaens* and *chedis* to be described afterwards in this paper but he does not give any detailed description of any of these monuments.

The name of Doi Suthep is intimately connected with the mythical *rishi* (hermit) Vasudeva, who, according to legend, lived on this hill (in the Pali texts called Mount Ucchapabbata), and who became the founder of Hariphunchai or Lamphun. It is also, and no doubt more rightly, known as the stronghold of the former Lawā Kings of the Me Ping plain during their wars against the Môn emigrants from Lopburi, when these, led by their Queen, Nang Chamathevi, founded the walled town of Hariphunchai in the latter part of the 7th century A. D.

Two roads running almost parallel lead out from Chiengmai to the foot of Doi Suthep. The northern is called the Huei Kao Road and has recently been extended right up the hill to the temple through the efforts of the former abbot of Wat Suan Dok, Phra Srivichai, who seems at present to be exercising a great influence over the minds of the northern Thai.

Near the former terminus of the Huei Kao Road, on the site of Vieng Chet Lin, lies the old Royal Pages School, now transformed into a veterinary station. Here the former head-master discovered some years ago a large rectangular tank (buried) made of laterite blocks. He had the tank excavated, filled with water and used it as a swimming pool for the pages. Mr. Hutchinson thinks that Vieng Chet Lin, must be the site of the reputed Lawā town at the foot of the hill, which opinion is confirmed by tradition and the somewhat confused narrative in the *Chronicle of Svanna Khamdeng*. According to this it seems for some time to have been the common capital of a colony of emigrant Thai and the neighbouring Lawā or Lua who were under the orders of a certain Phraya Wiwo. Later on the Lawā King, Chao Vilangka, resided here during his war against Queen Chamathevi and the Môn immigrants of Lamphun. As stated above, a road has now been constructed from the base of the hill up to the foot of the ridge on which the Suthep temple stands. This road, though somewhat rough and primitive, can be used by motor cars during the dry season. From the back of the temple hill a valley runs westwards for about two kilometres. This valley is watered by a sparkling brook called Huei Suthep. According to a vague tradition a Lawā town in olden days occupied the lower part of the valley where now is a clearing (see attached sketch map), and the débris of burnt bricks, found here and there along the banks of this brook and in other places too, should represent remains of buildings.

It seems, however, much more likely, as is also suggested by Mr. Hutchinson, that these bricks represent remains of former kilns, and that the bricks used for building the temple were made here where the necessary material, an excellent clay, is found in abundance. The look of the valley shows that there were one or more small paddy fields here in former days.

A long brick-built stairway, flanked by the sinuous bodies of Nagas (serpents), leads down from the back of the temple to the northern rim of the valley. At a distance of about a hundred paces from the foot of the Naga stairway, and in a straight line from the same, I examined (December 1935) a mound which by one learned European resident in Chiangmai has been called a *Royal Lawā tomb*. Digging revealed nothing, however.

From this point two well defined paths issue, a lower one on the left hand, which runs westwards, leading ultimately to the so-called Tham Rūsi, of which more anon, and an upper path branching off on the right hand which, climbing the hill in a north-westerly direction, finally brings one to the very top of the hill, called by the local people the *Pui*.

Following the lower path, which runs along the bubbling Suthep brook, one soon sees, on the left hand and at a distance of about 30 metres from the path, what is called Hô Vilangka. This consists of two small spirit shrines, now in a deplorable state of disrepair. A few rotten pieces of wood and some enamelled tin plates are all that is now left of a former Sān Chāo Thi (shrine of the local guardian spirit), which, seemingly, is no longer held in honour. Still its name shows the connection with the otherwise long forgotten Lawā King.

Continuing along the path to Tham Rūsi, an ill-defined track takes off on the left and follows the stream to a point 400 metres from the foot of the Naga stairway. Here the first antiquities are encountered. About sixty metres below the path the slope on the left bank of the stream is terraced in two places. The two terraces are on the same plane and are 15½ m. apart.

In both cases the face of the terrace is composed of stones and boulders piled up to form a wall 80 cm. high facing the stream. The interior appears to be filled up with earth, but the forest growth is too dense to permit exploration in the centre.

The largest terrace is 20 m. long and from 4 m. to 5 m. deep. The smaller one, east of it, is 8 m. long and about 3 m. deep.

The local name for these terraces is given as Thaen Rūsi.

When continuing along the path for another 400 metres one reaches, at the bottom of the valley, a rock shelter formed by the overhanging of the rocky cliff face, producing a shelter $3\frac{1}{2}$ m. deep, at the base of which is a further cavity $3\frac{1}{2}$ m. deep.

Running water is at hand, but the cliff forms a cul-de-sac to the path from the outside world, so that the shelter would only be attractive to a person desiring isolation from his fellow men.

It therefore bears its name Tham Rūsi, or the hermit's cave, with reason. And as a matter of fact almost every year the cave is inhabited for a shorter or longer time by a Buddhist monk who retires here for meditation in the sylvan peace on the precepts of the Great Teacher. It truly is a most enchanting and idyllic place, fresh and cool with the shadow of large trees, and the gushing waters of the little brook falling down in cascades over big moss-grown boulders.

Some way below Thaen Rūsi in an E. N. E. direction, at a distance of 240 metres up the slope, stands a ruined stupa. It is close to the path which runs up the ridge dividing Huei Suthep from the Huei Kaeo drainage, leading ultimately to the Pui (the top of the hill), and at a distance of 250 metres from the foot of the Naga stairway by this path.

The stupa or chedi, called Ku Chôm Chaeng, is at the west end of a vaguely defined platform of earth (20 m. long from the centre of the stupa to the platform's eastern extremity). In the centre of the platform is an excavation surrounded with heaps of bricks, which appear to mark the site of a second and smaller stupa, now no more.

The base of the western stupa is roughly $4\frac{1}{2}$ m. \times $4\frac{1}{2}$ m. near the ground; its height is about 2.85 m. and at this level the dimensions have tapered to 2.80 m. \times 2.60 m., which are roughly those of the central body of the stupa. This consists of three *steps* each 45 cm. high, with two well preserved *fillets* in cement still extant between them. Above them are the beginnings of the ruined dome.

The lower *step* of the main body is roughly as follows:—

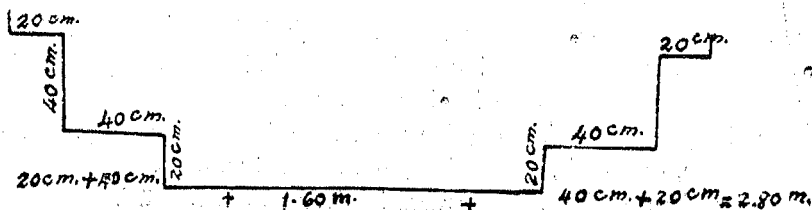




Photo by E. W. H.
Ku Chôm Cheng (South face).

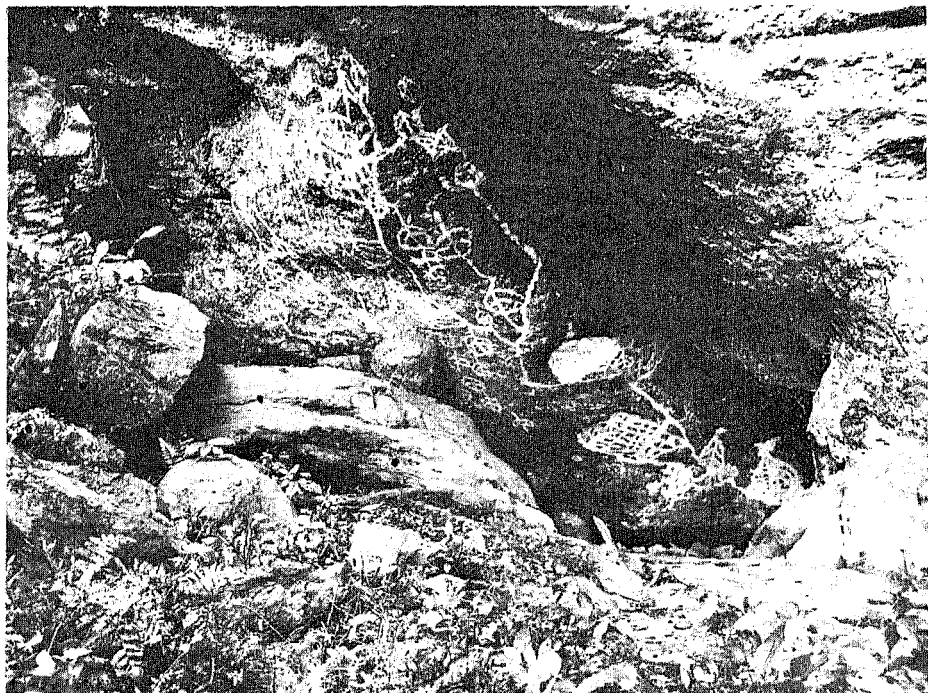
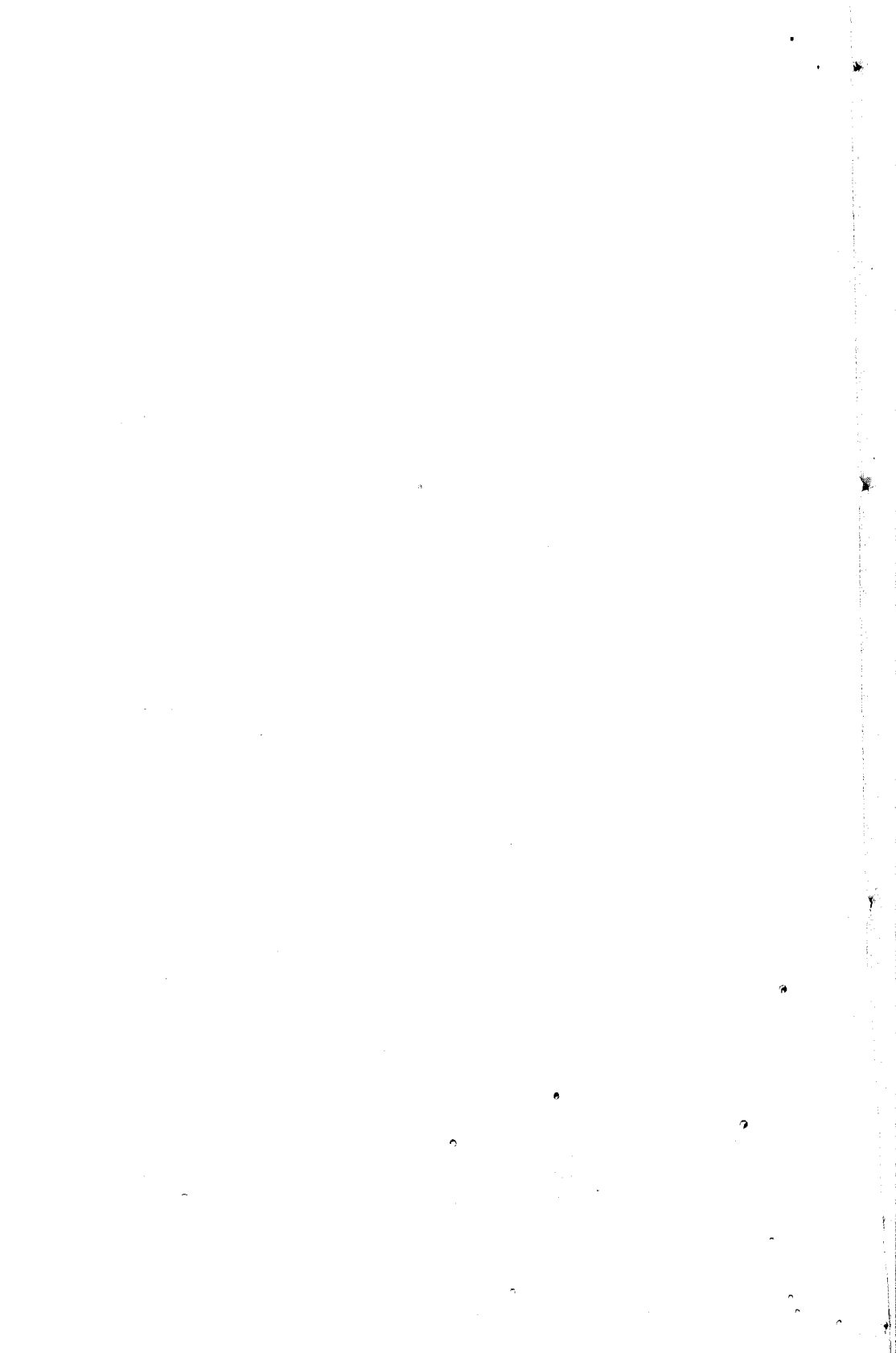


Photo by E. W. H.
Tham Rûsi.



The interior of the stupa has been much destroyed by the hands of impious treasure hunters.

It may be added that close to the path and quite near the stupas is a brick-lined well.

By following a path which starts from the summer residence of the Chao Luang (the reigning prince of Chiangmai), and which climbs the hill in a west-south-westerly direction (see map), one reaches, after a march of approximately two kilometres, the place called Buak Ha.

From a point on this path 940 m. below Buak Ha, a straight line N. N. E. leads in 420 m. to a ruin near the extremity of a spur above a precipice. The ruin, named Ku Khiu Khô, consists of a terrace of piled stone, 20 m. \times 50 m., similar to Thaen Rûsi. In its centre rise the remains of a small stupa built of rough unfashioned stones, similar to that of the terraces. On the north side only are traces of one or more rows of bricks let into the stone.

At a point 1,300 m. north of Buak Ha on the path to the summit of the hill, and at 50 m. east of the path are the ruins of a stupa and the brick foundations of a rectangular building measuring $14\frac{1}{2}$ m. \times 6 m. called Ku Buak Sang. A space of $2\frac{1}{2}$ m. separates the stupa on the north from the brick foundations of the building on the south.

The stupa measures about $6\frac{3}{4}$ m. at its base. It is built partly of brick, and the bricks are double the thickness of those in the foundations, which are all that remain of the building to the south of the stupa. The principal constituent, however, is dried laterite, *sila laeng*, in blocks of roughly $38 \times 19 \times 9$ cm.

The base is composed of six layers of brick, upon which repose six perpendicular layers of laterite blocks.

The top layer forms a shelf 70 cm. deep behind which rise six more layers of laterite blocks, forming the second *step* of the pyramid. The third *step* rises from a narrower shelf, and only two to three layers of laterite blocks composing it remain, mingled with some bricks. It is not evident whether the pyramid tapered to a point or was crowned with a dome. Its centre has been excavated to below ground level, presumably by treasure hunters.

The fact that the nearest water to both Ku Buak Sang and Ku Khiu Khô is in the Buak Ha region lends significance to the fact that Buak Ha is equidistant between them, approximately 1,300 m.

My attention to the ruins at Buak Ha and Buak Sang was directed by Mr. Hutchinson, but I have not visited them myself. The other

places have, however, been visited by me. With regard to the description of all these places the writer has followed the notes so kindly placed at his disposal by Mr. Hutchinson who also took all the photographs and made the sketch map accompanying this article.

The question is now :— Who were the earliest occupants of the rock shelter, Tham Rūsi, and who were the builders of the stone terraces and the stupas ?

The Tham Rūsi is not a real cave but only a rock shelter, with sufficient space for at most a couple of persons, and as such it can hardly have been a dwelling for primitive man of the stone age. It may, however, have been used by hermits both in Buddhist and pre-Buddhist times. Did the famous Vasudeva live here, if he ever existed ?

The brick built ruins of the two stupas called Ku Chôm Chaeng are most probably Thai handiwork, and may not be older than the original stupa of the Suthep temple. It represents, anyhow, a style which is prior to the Burmese occupation in the 16th century A. D.

With regard to the stone terraces—Thaen Rūsi—and the two stupa-like buildings at Buak Ha and Buak Sang, the case is more difficult. Were their builders Thai, Môn or even Lawā ? The find of one of the characteristic small Lawā clay pipes at Buak Ha may point to a former Lawā occupation there. It is more than probable that the Lawā held the Doi Suthep for a long time after the Môn colonists from Lamphun had conquered the vast river plain. We also know that the Lawā were gradually united with the Môn, their first cousins by the way, by intermarriage—the Lawā girls, when newly washed, are quite comely—and finally, as the chronicle says, Lawā and Môn became one people, with the exception of some few Lawā clans living far away in the inaccessible hills. By doing so the Lawā naturally adopted the Buddhist religion too. The above mentioned stone monuments, including those where bricks are mixed with the stone as building material, may thus be Lawā handiwork. Such clumsy attempts to copy the architecture of a higher standing people are found elsewhere in Indochina ; for instance, in the Bassac province of French Laos there is the so-called Wat Phu Asā, built by Khā people,⁽²⁾ and in Amphce Pakthongchāi, Changvad Nakhon Rajasima, there is a similar building complex called Prasad Champa Thong,

(2) *Inventory descriptif des monuments du Cambodge* par le Commandant E. Lunet de Lajonquière, tome II, pp. 70-72.



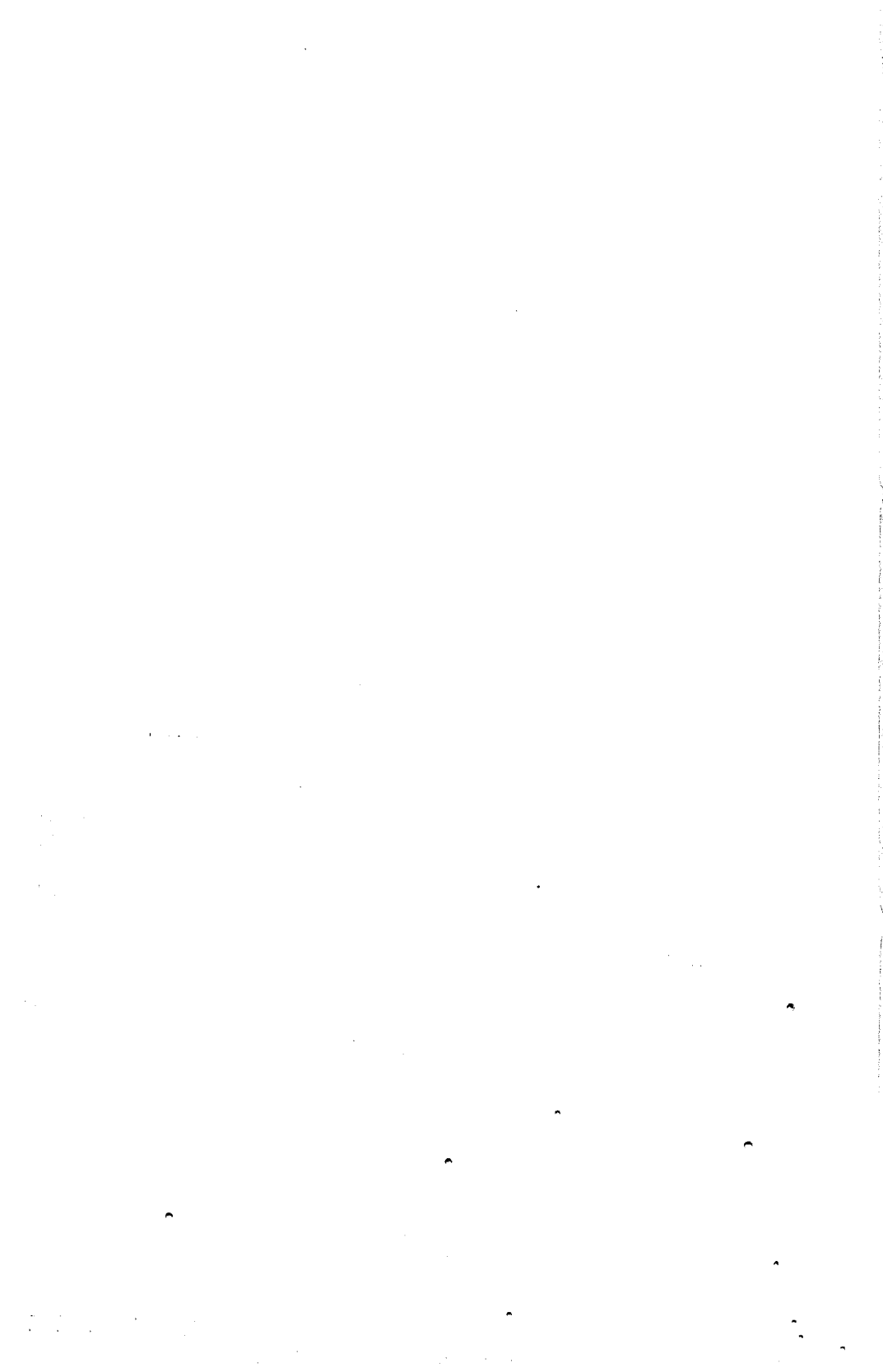
Photo by E. W. H.

Ku Khiu Khô.
(View of stupa from North-East).



Photo by E. W. H.

Ku Buak Sang (South face).



most likely also built by primitive people.⁽³⁾ These are efforts, as Major Lunet de Lajonquière says, *d'un sauvage jouant au civilisé*.

Monsieur Notton in his *Chronique de Suvanna Khamdeng*, already quoted on the first page of this paper, opines that the so-called Thaen Rūsi are Lawā tombs. I think, however, that the learned Consul is wrong here. The Lawā tombs are always built in the form of a tumulus. A great number of such ancient Lawā tombs are still seen to-day in the Mae Hong Sôn district. The *Thaen* were no doubt real altars for sacrifices to the spirits.

A careful search for cultural remains on all the above mentioned sites should be undertaken, as such an undertaking would surely result in finds that would prove helpful for the further study of the origin of these monuments.

Bangkok, April 1936.

⁽³⁾ *Complément à l'inventaire descriptif des monuments du Cambodge* par le Commandant E. Seidenfaden, pp. 30-31.

