

**WAT BENCHAMABOPIT**  
**AND**  
**ITS COLLECTION OF IMAGES OF THE BUDDHA**

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WAT BENCHAMABOPIT is an old temple. It is not certain whether it was erected during the time of Ayudhya or of Bangkok. Originally it was a very small temple called Wat Lem (แหลม a projection of land), because it stood on a narrow piece of land between gardens and rice fields. It was also at one time called Wat Sai Thong (สี่ทอง), and probably at that time the principal object of interest near by was a "Sai Thong" tree.

In 1827, during the reign of Phra Nang Klao, the Chief of Vieng Chan revolted and brought his army easily and safely down from Vieng Chan, by using the following stratagem. He told the Governors of the provinces along his line of route that he had received an order from the Government at Bangkok to bring down his army in order to help in the war against the Europeans. This was at the time of the first Anglo-Burmese war, and the time when the British Government had sent Capt. Burney on his mission to Siam to conclude a treaty. On account of these two events, the news had spread that the British were coming to wage war against the Siamese. This accounts why the Governors along the route from Vieng Chan southwards believed in the Chief of Vieng Chan's story. The more so, because they all knew that the Chief of Vieng Chan was an old favourite of King Phra Nang Klao. They gave him food and helped his army to come down without difficulty. When he had reached Korat and taken the town, the Chief of Vieng Chan declared himself openly as a rebel, but the Government at Bangkok received the news only after the town of Korat had been captured. An army was equipped in haste to march against the Chief of Vieng

Chan. While these preparations were being made, the news reached Bangkok that the rebel army had come as far as Müang Saraburi, but the Government at Bangkok was still in doubt as to the strength of the rebel forces and still unaware of their intentions, whether their aim was to capture Bangkok or not. So, full preparations were made for the defence of the Capital, and posts were established along the fields from Samsen to Hua Lampong. At that time Prince Krom Phra Bibit, the son of the King Phra Buddha Loes La (Rama II), was placed at the head of the forces at Samsen and established his headquarters in this temple. After the rebellion had been crushed, he restored the temple for the first time, and, together with four of his brothers by the same mother, erected five Phra Chedi in front of the temple, but at that time it was still a small village temple. Later, during the reign of King Mongkut, the latter gave it the name of Wat Benchabopit, that is to say, the temple of the five princes.

In 1899, when King Chulalongkorn began the construction of Dusit Park, he had to take over the ground of Wat Dusit to erect the Dusit Palace and the ground of another deserted temple to make Benyamas Road. King Chulalongkorn wished to follow the ancient custom of his predecessors, and to erect new temples in compensation for the loss of the old ones. But he thought that, if he added to the number of already existing temples by constructing new ones, it would be difficult to preserve them in good repair. He considered that it would be better to spend the money on one single large temple and decorate it elaborately. He selected for this purpose Wat Benchabopit, and ordered artists of fame, such as Prince Narisaranuvattivongs, to design the plan; the latter chose an ancient Siamese design to be executed in first-class white marble. Then His Majesty gave the temple the name of Wat Benchamabopit, which means "the temple constructed by the fifth King of the dynasty."

During the construction of the temple it occurred to King Chulalongkorn that the images of the Buddha to be placed in it should be selected from among numerous old and beautiful images made in various countries at different periods, and should be displayed in such a way that the public might acquire a knowledge of

