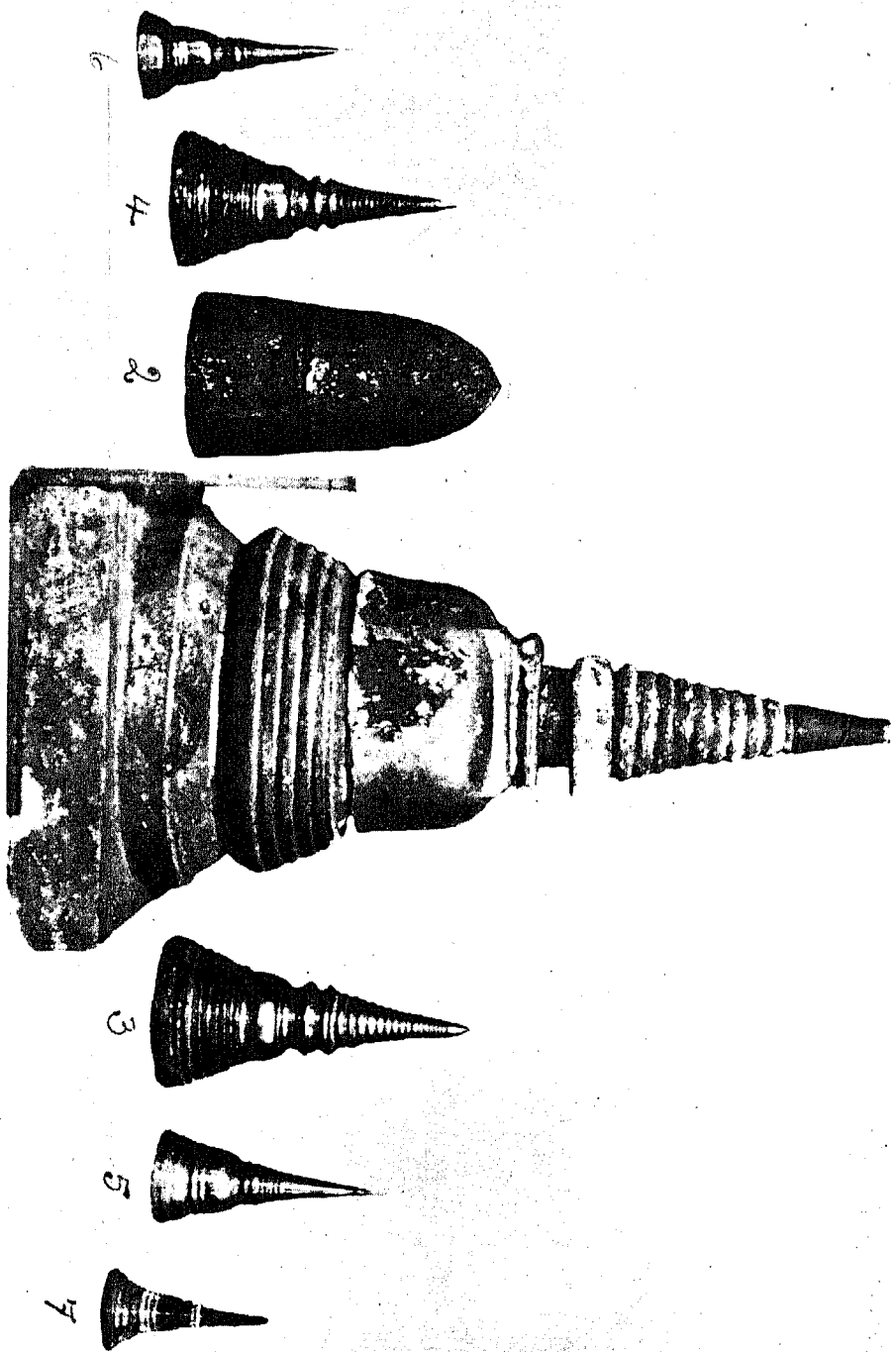


The Group of Monuments of the Chapel Royal of Ajudhya from East to West. 1. The Easternmost Stupa.



The Successive Stupa found in the Reliquary 1. The external cover in the form of a vase stupa (A.S. 18-43 M.) 2. An iron sheath
3. A stupa of gilt bronze 4. Another stupa of gilt bronze 5. A silver stupa 6. A gold stupa 7. A crystal stupa containing the relics

EXCAVATIONS AT THE CHAPEL ROYAL AT AYUDHYA*

by

Luang Boribal Buribhand

Curator of the State Museum, Bangkok.

The Chapel Royal at Ayudhya, called Wat Phra Sri Sarapech (Sri Sarvajña) was built by King Boromatrailokanath (1448-1488) on the site of the royal residence of Rama I, founder of Ayudhya, now better known by the colloquial name of the King of Uthong. It was no doubt planned on the lines of a regular monastery without actually having had monks in residence.

Rama II of Ayudhya (1491-1529), the son of King Boromatrailokanath who eventually succeeded him, added in 1492 two monumental *stupas*, the eastern one of which, so tradition says, contained the mortal relics of his august father. It was this monarch too who set up a standing gold-plated image of the Buddha, 16 m. high, in the main Chapel where, it is understood, all the more important ceremonies of the Court were held.

On account of repeated attempts at theft and clandestine excavations since these monuments were in a somewhat isolated situation, the Archeological Department of the Government began to make excavations of the monument in 1932, with the hope of transferring whatever relics or treasures which were found to safer custody.

Working their way in by entering through one of the ornamental apertures on the four sides of the big *stupa*, the workers found inside a small *stupa* or tower (*sihvara*). Beneath this tower was a square cavity, the internal walls of which were lined with metallic plates made of an alloy of tin painted over with figures of disciples holding lotuses in their folded hands in attitudes of adoration. Some of these paintings are preserved in the State Museum but most of them are badly obliterated. Within the cavity were a number of votive tablets, Buddha-images of all sizes made of various substances, bronze, tin-alloy, gold, silver, crystal and precious stones.

* Read before the XXI st International Congress of Orientalists at Paris on the 26 July 1948.

All these objects were heaped around a stone miniature of the main *stupa*, within which these finds were discovered. The miniature stood on a layer of sand. It was, 81 m. in height with a diameter of .43 m. at the base. When opened, it was found that the stone *stupa* (No. 1) contained another miniature made of tin-alloy which however crumbled away upon exposure. Within this again was a third *stupa* (No. 2) made of iron which sheathed the fourth and fifth miniatures (No. 3 and No. 4) made of gilt bronze. Within the fifth was a silver miniature (No. 5), containing a gold one (No. 6), which again contained yet another miniature—the innermost one—made of crystal (No. 7). This last miniature contained what has been traditionally regarded as the relics of the Buddha in the shape of minute grains of a whitish substance. The seven miniatures reveal a high standard of artistic conception and workmanship, especially in the case of the gold and silver ones which were shaped out of very thin plates of metallic material.

The problem therefore arises as to the wherefor of these relics and how they came to be found in monuments which have been said to contain the mortal relics of King Boromatrailokanath. It is, of course, well known that the traditions of the Buddha's relics arose in Ceylon which was believed to be the immediate source of such objects of veneration. We know from epigraphy that the Sukhodaya monarchs were able to secure such precious objects of veneration from Ceylon from time to time by a series of diplomatic and cultural relationships. We know also that King Boromatrailokanath, following the precedence of King Lithai of Sukhodaya, invited a high-priest from Ceylon to come over and act as his preceptor in ordination at Pisnulok in 1465. It is extremely probable that the high-priest brought with him in conformation with established custom at the time, the most highly esteemed present in the eyes of Buddhists of those days in the shape of the relics of the Buddha as then generally accepted. When the King who had received those relics died, the precious relics which were his property were then buried with their owner's mortal remains after his cremation.