

AN EARLY BUDDHIST CIVILIZATION IN EASTERN SIAM

by

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The discovery from air photographs of a large series of more or less circular sites, usually with multiple earth ramparts, on the Korat plateau of eastern Siam, will always be associated with the name of the late Major P.D.R. Williams-Hunt. But for his archaeological interest in the products of the wartime survey carried out over Siam by the Royal Air Force, and in which he himself took a leading part, these valuable documents which have opened up a new chapter in the ancient history of Siam, would have been lost in official files. His own article in *Antiquity*¹, in which he presented a first analysis of the photographic material, and called attention to its importance, is the essential starting point for ground investigation; and this is supplemented by the series of unpublished air photographs which he placed for safekeeping in the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford. There they were placed at my disposal, both before and after my visit to eastern Siam, by Mr. J.S.P. Bradford, assistant curator of the museum, whose skill and experience in archaeology from the air greatly helped me to make the best use of them.

Shortly before his article appeared in *Antiquity*, Williams-Hunt had personally discussed with me the possible significance of these sites, and he expressed the wish that I might be able to investigate them on the ground. Though my interest was immediately aroused, five years had to elapse before my wife and I had the opportunity to revisit Siam. The meaning of these distinctive earthworks, which had escaped notice in the well-known ground surveys of Khmer monuments, presented a fascinating problem. Since they were not Khmer, the obvious guesses, covering the apparent alternatives to which choice seemed limited, had quickly been made: Either they were something to do with the Fu-nan empire or else they were prehistoric, the work of the Khmers before they were hinduized. But Williams-Hunt was right in saying "the

1 P.D.R. Williams-Hunt, "Irregular Earthworks in Eastern Siam; an air Survey." *Antiquity*. March 1950.

excavator's spade alone will provide the final answer." In the meantime, theoretical work on the early history of this region was being greatly handicapped by our inability to estimate the probable import of a vast new mass of data that had come so nearly within our grasp. When the opportunity *did* come I knew that limited resources must restrict me to trying to answer the basic question: what was the approximate date and the nature of the civilization responsible for these circular sites of eastern Siam? We knew that anything beyond that would exceed our powers.

On arrival in Bangkok we were received by chamun Manit the adviser and for many years curator of the National Museum, and by Luang Boribal Buribhand, the present curator. It was then arranged that our investigation should be carried out in conjunction with the Museum. A young member of the Museum's staff, Nai Charoen Phanuddhi, who showed himself to be a field archaeologist of promise, was deputed to carry out the investigation with us. Reaching Korat by train, we took up our quarters at the little hotel run by the Siamese Co-operatives, and Nai Charoen made some useful arrangements with a Chinese saw-mill owner known to him there. It was agreed that we should stay two or three nights in the saw-mill in the jungle some 30 miles east of Korat, and should hire a powerful timber lorry with which we hoped to find and make a preliminary inspection of some typical circular sites.

A glance at the distribution map here reproduced from Williams-Hunt (Fig. 1.) shows that the circular sites co-incide with the concentrations of present-day population along the Mun River and its little tributaries, to a less extent along its great northern branch the Nam Si, which joins it at the modern town of Ubon. Near to Korat it is probable that modern irrigation has destroyed some sites, but the area 30 to 50 miles east of Korat is closely sprinkled with circular sites which a comparison with the air photographs of more distant areas shows to be quite typical of the whole. I was satisfied, therefore, that the basic information required, could be obtained as well here as anywhere. This part of the country gets a poor and uncertain rainfall, and is mostly covered with an open mixed forest from which the larger timber is being

extracted. Siamese, Cambodian or Lao villages often occupy the old circular sites, but the population is kept small and shifting by reason of the fact that there is usually no irrigation. Except where there is a good water-course, the raising of a padi crop on a few fields surrounding the village is dependent on the rainfall which often fails.

Tracks were bad and often impeded with tree growth, but we found and made an inspection of two typical multi-ramparted circular sites, Ban Sai Aw and M̄iang Rawn Thong. The former had well-marked triple ramparts, about six feet high, with two moats between them twenty yards wide, i.e. the third rampart was exterior to the outer moat. The remains of old gardens showed that the village had only recently been deserted by modern inhabitants, and padi had been cultivated in the moats. M̄iang Rawn Thong was similar, but was still occupied by a modern hamlet, though the moats were overgrown. Both sites were rather small, with a diameter inside the ramparts of probably not more than 200 yards. But sites of less than a quarter that size, which could have accommodated only a few families, are shown on the air photographs.

This inspection of two sites taken at random confirmed what I had already learnt from examination of the air photographs, namely the general similarity of the basic type of circular sites scattered over the Korat plateau. I also realized that superficial inspection of the sites gave little more information than had already been obtained from the air photographs. It was therefore decided to carry out trial excavations, but for this purpose a third and generally similar site, M̄iang Phet, was chosen. This had the advantage of being situated less than a mile from the little station of Hin Dat on the Korat-Ubon railway line, about 30 miles from Korat. A stopping train took us conveniently to and fro from Korat each morning and evening, and M̄iang Phet was only a short walk across padi fields from Hin Dat station.

M̄iang Phet is roughly circular, with concentric double moats and three ramparts, as in the other examples. The interior of the site had a diameter of about 200 yards, and the ramparts varied from 6 to 10 feet in height. A cart track ran from north to south through the centre of the site, and the gaps through which it

passed may have coincided with the ancient gateways. Another gap penetrated the ramparts about 40 yards west of the south gateway. The interior of the site was somewhat higher than the surrounding padi fields, probably due to accumulated debris. It was partly overgrown, partly cultivated by the present population of 40 people living in 9 houses.

My opinion was that wherever a trench was dug one would be bound to come upon the original living level of the founders of the settlement, for such extensive defences could only have been constructed by a considerable population who must have occupied the whole of the area within the enclosure. Accordingly a site was chosen near the centre, arrangements being made with the owner of this piece of land who also undertook to provide the required manpower. A trial trench 18 ft. long was dug, and after that a small adjoining block measuring 7 ft. by 9 ft. was carefully cleared stratum by stratum.

The object of the excavation was to find *common* things, for it is only common things that one can be reasonably certain of finding in a trial excavation. Such things are bone, stone or metal tools, potsherds—and nowadays carbon for radio-carbon analysis. Unlike rare objects, but like type fossils, they are most reliable and indeed all that one needs when one's objective is limited to discovering the date and character of the civilization of sites of which nothing is previously known.

The information contained in the sectional drawing (fig. 3) embodies the results of the excavation, and shows that our basic questions were plainly answered. The ground was firm and dry, so that no practical difficulties were encountered. There were two distinct habitation levels, the upper of which (Period II) was reached at a depth of 3ft. 2 in. beneath the surface layer of disturbed soil. It was only 1ft. 2in. thick. The clearly marked stratum beneath this (Period I) had a depth of 4ft. 10in. and appeared to indicate a dense population. Natural soil, which was sandy, was reached at a depth of 9ft. 2in. below surface level, but excavation was carried down more than 3ft. further to make certain.

No bone or stone implements were found. On the other hand eight pieces of corroded iron, some recognizable as fragments of knives, were found at various Period I depths as indicated in the sectional drawing.² The most significant were a fragment of an iron blade found in the trench at 8ft. 8in., only six inches above natural soil, and a small portion of an iron tube found at 8ft. Though no iron objects were found at the very bottom, the unchanging nature of the pottery throughout Period I, and the absence of stone implements, indicated that iron was probably known from the beginning.

This evidence alone was enough to convince me that here was no prehistoric site. Since it is generally supposed that the Indians first introduced iron to South-east Asia, I at once realized that it was on the earlier Indianized peoples that the circular sites of the Korat plateau might be expected to throw light.

This realization was reinforced by the character of the potsherds found in the Period I stratum (Fig 4). Some of these reminded me of the pottery that had been excavated many years ago at Pong Tuk, a site of the Indianized Môn kingdom of Dvāravatī in central Siam, which was perhaps founded in the Vth century A.D. The similarity was confirmed on my return to Bangkok in a very striking manner. The sherds from Mūang Phet Period I were of three kinds: (1) A fine black wheel-turned ware, ornamented with concentric ridges and in some cases rows of small circles; (2) a fairly thin, brownish cord-marked ware; (3) coarse indistinctive red or yellowish ware. Now it so happened that the National Museum had recently acquired a collection of potsherds excavated at Kampong Sen, another well-known Dvāravatī site situated 13 km N.E. of Nakon Pathom in central Siam, and moreover a place that was not again occupied in later times. This collection consisted of a strikingly similar mixture of the same three pottery types, a similarity too complex to be due to chance.

Of the pottery of Period II (Fig. 5) little can be said. The sherds consist for the most part of an indistinctive coarse reddish

² The three iron objects found at 6', 6'11 and 7'6" were found in the adjoining block, not in the trench, but all in the same Period I stratum.

or yellowish ware, sometimes with simple incised striations. But making up perhaps a third of the total was a fine almost white, but unglazed, wheel-turned pottery, which gave an easily recognizable character to the Period II stratum. Comparative data are still lacking, but some day it may confirm the presumption that this is a local ware of the Khmers whose village culture probably replaced that of the Period I occupants.

As to the Carbon-14 dating which I hope to obtain from the carbon specimens obtained from both periods, I can at present say nothing. The reason is that I still await the report of the British Museum laboratory.

After Müang Phet it was thought desirable to make another trial excavation at a site some distance away, as a basis for comparison. Thamen Chai, about 20 miles further east was selected, mainly because it too was near a convenient railway station. But it also commended itself because it was regarded by Williams-Hunt as typical, and its appearance from the air is well-known from the photograph he published of it.³ About half a mile across, including the ramparts it is nearly twice as large as the sites previously visited. It was consequently hoped that a place of such considerable size might provide some evidence as to the religion of the original inhabitants.

The old gateways can be traced in the form of gaps in the ramparts on the North-East, South and South-West. These is a quadruple series of ramparts each about a hundred feet apart. A partly silted stream, the Hué Rét, enters the enclosure on the north-east so that the northern portions of the inner moats still contain a good deal of water. Elsewhere the moats are under padi cultivation. The modern population, mostly Lao, form a thriving village community, and their 200 ~~hundred~~ houses with gardens and yards almost fill the entire site. Besides the moats they cultivate a large area of padi outside, but after the harvest has been gathered in are largely occupied with silk weaving. By the railway station there is a row of Chinese shops.

³ *Antiquity*, loc. cit. pl. V; also *J.S.S.* Vol, XXXVII, 1949, pl. 6.

As one walks to the site the short distance from the railway station, the alternating ramparts and moats (Fig 6) the former eight to ten feet high, give the impression of entering what must formerly have been quite a strongly defended position. No doubt such an obvious type of defensive works was used by various peoples at various ages, so that no historical deductions whatever could be made from the appearance from the air. But now that the character of the early pottery has established the probability that this type of defence in eastern Siam is due to an Indianized people, it may be pointed out that such fortification is in accordance with early Indian concepts. In the case of ancient Indian cities "outside the walls and not very close to them were ditches surrounding the city. The number of ditches is optional, depending on the necessity and security of the place. Thus we read in the *Devī purāṇa* that the number may be two, three, four or eight as the ground requires. But Kautilya fixes the number at three.... According to the *Mānasāra* and *Mayamata* a village, exactly as a fort or town, is defended by a girdle of walls and moats (*Mayamatam*, Ch. 9 1.20).⁴ No certain conclusion can be drawn from relative position of ramparts and moats. In the neolithic in England we find examples of both ditch *inside* (more usual) and outside.⁵ As to shape, whether for town or village, the early Indian texts seem to favour circular ("roughly" or "completely") equally as square or rectangular.⁶ Śrīkṣetra (Old Prome) is an outstanding example of a Greater Indian city which was both roughly circular and, at least in part, had two concentric ramparts.

Owing to Thamen Chai being occupied by such a large present-day village it would not have been easy to find a suitable spot for excavation near the centre. However this disadvantage was compensated for by the fact that certain chance finds had been made by the villagers, about which we were soon informed. In the first place, just inside the enclosure towards the south-western gateway, at a point near where two cart track joined, several

4 B.B. Dutt, *Town Planning in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1925, pp. 91 and 201.

5 R.J.C. Atkinson, *Stonehenge*, 1956, pp. 152f.

6 B.B. Dutt, *op. cit.* pp. 101f, 219.

large stones had been exposed (Figs 7 and 8). The tracks, in the process of gradually eroding deep beds, had acted as trial trenches, coming together at a spot where some ancient remains were located. Thus beside the outer edge of the more westerly of the two tracks, about 37 yards from where they joined, stood a pair of roughly cut stones, 5 feet tall. As they had the bo-leaf shape they were immediately recognizable as Buddhist *sema*, i.e. boundary stones such as from very early times have been placed at the cardinal and sub-cardinal points outside Buddhist buildings. Beside this pair of standing *sema*, which seemed to be *in situ*, the bank stood nearly 5 feet high, so that before the track had laid them bare only their tips would have been visible. At the opposite side of the track were two similar pairs, and beside the track beyond another stone, with fragments of others, but these seemed to have been moved. A further stone, probably from this site, had been placed in the Chinese joss-house outside the south gateway of the village. There were thus not enough stones *in situ* to arrive at the dimensions of the building they originally surrounded.

A trial trench was dug at the only convenient place, across the neck of waste land separating the two tracks, in the immediate vicinity of the stones. There at a depth of 5 ft. pottery of Period I was reached and this extended down to a depth of 7 ft. beneath the surface. From this it could be deduced that the *sema* stones had been set up on, or slightly embedded in, a stratum that at that time had already reached a thickness of 2 ft. Thenceforward the site, being evidently dedicated to a Buddhist structure, had not again been a habitation site.

In connection with this site an interesting find had been made a short time previously. About 31 ft. towards the track junction from the standing pair of stones, and opposite some of the other stones, a tall tree had grown on the edge of the bank. Its roots had gradually become loosened by exposure on the side of the track, and one day it had fallen. An old woman cultivating her garden on the bank above appears to have looked down and seen a small bronze image of the Buddha which had been entangled in the roots. She had duly donated it to the modern *wat* in the village, and thence it was brought for our inspection.

The image (Fig. 9) was about 6 inches high, the Buddha being represented seated in India fashion with the legs in *virāsana* (calves superimposed not crossed), the right hand in *vitarka mudrā*, the left hand resting on the knee. The strongly marked *uṣṇīṣa*, style of hair, facial features with long ear lobes, and the above mentioned *mudra* and position of sitting, are all characteristic not of the art of Fu-nan but of the art of Dvāravatī.⁷ A crudely made village image no doubt, yet quite unmistakable. Had this image been produced merely as a chance find, little documentary value could have been attached to it. But taken in conjunction with the pottery it acquires good evidential value; it is indeed exactly the type of image that one might have expected.

Another site at Thamen Chai gave useful complementary information. This was situated close to the inner moat, towards the south-eastern gateway, and at this point the moat appeared to have been considerably widened by padi cultivation. Here the tops of *sema* stones, many of which remained in pairs *in situ*, appeared only a little above the ground surface. A plan of them was made which showed that they had enclosed an area of ground measuring 54 feet by 34 feet 5 inches, large enough to have once been the site of a small Buddhist building, the longer axis of which would have been east-west.

Trial trenches showed that typical Period I pottery level was reached at a depth of 1 ft. 4 ins. below present ground level. This Period I stratum extended down to a depth of 3 ft. 10 ins. at which natural soil was reached. The nearness of this Period I stratum to the surface was doubtless due to much of the surface soil having been washed into the nearby moat. Above the Period I stratum a few sherds of the white pottery typical of Period II were recovered. The *sema* stones were much smaller (3 ft. 6 ins.) and rougher than those of the other site, and their bases were embedded about 6 ins. beneath the surface of the Period I stratum, i.e. 2 ft. below ground level. In the trial trenches a few fragments

7 As defined by P. Dupont, *BEFEO*, Vol. XXXVII, p. 682; *La Statuaire Préangkorienne*, p.p. 207 ff.; and doubtless also in his posthumous work *L'archéologie de Dvāravatī*, which I have not yet seen.

of broken bricks were found at the lowest level, but the Buddhist building was probably entirely of light construction.

That is as far as direct evidence from the circular sites at present takes us. But I now propose to take into consideration certain previously made discoveries which, standing in isolation, seemed inexplicable. Taken in conjunction with the circular sites they become parts of a recognizable whole, and extend our understanding of this civilization. I shall also consider some of the unpublished air photographs of more complex sites which I studied at Oxford after my return. These moreover afford indications as to the lines on which future field work might be pursued.

First I will mention three groups of *sema* stones situated some 25 miles west of the town of Chaiyaphum, a provincial capital situated on a tributary of the Nam Si, about 60 miles almost due north of Korat. The modern village near which they are situated is called Kasetr Sombun. This is not far from the western edge of the Korat plateau and is probably on a route from central Siam. It is not far from Chaiyaphum that Williams-Hunt located one of his "metropoli" (of which more later), though I have not been able to find this photograph among the incomplete set at Oxford.

It was sometime in 1953 that Nai Charoen had seen and photographed these groups of *sema* stones when on a visit of inspection to the Chaiyaphum area. When he saw the larger of the *sema* stones at Thamen Chai he was immediately struck with their resemblance to those at Kasetr Sombun, and he afterwards showed me photographs which indicated their similar size and arrangement. Of course no deduction could be drawn from this since *sema* stones of very similar appearance have been made at many periods. But one of these stones was inscribed with four lines of archaic script. As this inscription had not yet been read I obtained a photograph from Nai Charoen and sent it to Prof. Coedès. He informs me that it is a hitherto unrecorded inscription and should be legible throughout, but he prefers to wait until a rubbing is available before making a translation. In the meantime he states that the text is in Sanskrit, in script of the VIth century A.D.

It is highly improbable that the Khmers reached such a remote point in the VIth century, and all their inscriptions of that century are Hindu. So here we may have an important inscription of this early Buddhist civilization such as the Dvāravatī kingdom in central Siam has so far not yielded. Further research in the neighbourhood should be directed to testing the pottery correspondences, and to discovering if the *sema* stones are related to any circular sites, which the air photographs show to exist in this area.

Now as to another site discovered by a Siamese revenue official, Phra Phahirath Phibun, in 1938, and who had taken photographs and made certain measurements. His information was not placed on record until 1954, by Major E. Seidenfaden in an article entitled "Kanok Nakhon, an ancient Môn settlement in northeast Siam and its treasures of art", *BEFEO*, Vol. XLIV, pt. 2, pp. 643-647. This ancient place, known as Kanok Nakhon, is an enclosure with moat and rampart situated about 3 km. west of the amphur or district office of Kamalasai (Kalasin province), which is on or near the Nam Si river. The photographs taken by Phra Phahirath were of *sema* stones, of which a very large number were in rows in a field adjacent to the old site. However the inhabitants of a near by modern village, Ban Mak Gom, had collected up many and placed them round their modern temple. The stones were often carved in relief with Buddhist scenes and, though many were weathered, the best of those photographed revealed an early style of art, clearly of the Dvāravatī school. According to a legend preserved by the present Lao population of Ban Mak Gom the *sema* stones were not temple boundary stones but had been intended by its independent Môn ruler, who is said to have founded the town in 621 A.D., to be set up as embrasure stones on the rampart. As Seidenfaden says, the date is remarkable, in view of the style of the sculptures. From the measurements supplied by Phra Phahirath, Seidenfaden (loc.cit. fig. 13) produced a curiously shaped plan of the city, virtually an isosceles triangle.

It was fortunate that on his tour of inspection in 1953 Nai Charoen had visited Kanok Nakhon and obtained some further information. He showed me a series of photographs of those *sema*

stones which remained in a good state of preservation, and after examining these I feel sure that they all belong to the same Dvāravatī style. With their free and subtle modelling they can hardly be dated later than the VIth or early VIIth century A.D. By comparison with the small bronze Buddha from Thamen Chai they are obviously the work of far more skilled urban craftsmen. Their full study and publication will greatly enlarge our knowledge and appreciation of the earlier Dvāravatī art. Nai Charoen also told me that he found the remains of a stone Buddha image of Dvāravatī style in the enclosure.

As to the original mode of employment of these stones, it is their large numbers that prevents one from dismissing out of hand the embrasure stone explanation given by the legend. Moreover the legend has established a claim to our serious attention by its curiously probable dating of the city, also by the fact that it states that the city was unfinished, which seems likely in view of the imminence of Khmer expansion over the region.

Considered in conjunction with the early Dvāravatī character of the sculptures, the careful plan of the old city of Kanok Nakhon, made at the time of Nai Charoen's inspection, is of special interest (fig. 10). From this we can now see that the narrower northern part of the city really represents an original oval enclosure, of which the southern rampart is indicated merely by a dotted line. The original character of this section was evidently recognized at the time the site was surveyed since the words in Siamese "old part of city" are marked on it. Nai Charoen informed me that the old rampart, though much lower where it was within the larger enclosure, was really quite discernible throughout.

We have thus an original settlement somewhat smaller than Thamen Chai, which may or may not have had multiple ramparts—unfortunately air cover does not extend to all the Nam Si region. On to this nucleus was added a much larger enclosure, in a manner reminiscent of Sī Thep⁸. Furthermore we have an example of a

⁸ Cf. my plan of Sī Thep in *Indian Art & Letters*, Vol.X, No.2, 1936,p.67. An air photograph of Sī Thep was seen by me at Oxford, from which I was glad to see that my plan made on the ground was generally accurate. The main error was in regard to the southern rampart of the secondary enclosure which should not turn in but should connect directly with the southern rampart of the main enclosure, after the manner of the northern ramparts.

similarly extended site situated well within the main distribution of the circular sites: at Ban Sai, Buriram province.⁹ The last mentioned, however, measuring only some 1,100 yards across, would hardly have been a town of much importance. The adding of an enclosure on to one side of an existing one was one of the recognized ways by which in ancient India villages became towns and towns were extended.¹⁰ The extension may have been added very soon after the foundation of the original settlement, because a particularly favoured position may quickly have attracted population and marked it out for prosperity.

When Seidenfaden published what he had gathered from Phra Phahirath, Coedès had commented as follows: "To find the art of Dvāravatī so high up in north is rather unexpected and poses a 'political' problem, because we find ourselves in a region which in the VIIth century should be part of Chen-la." We are surely better able to appreciate the meaning of this discovery if we see it in its context of the circular village sites which dot the Korat plateau. The Dvāravatī style of the sculptures, plus the shape of the nucleus of Kanok Nakhon, can leave us in little doubt that here we have one of the cities of this early Môn civilization of eastern Siam.

Probably Muang Sima, of which the air photograph,¹¹ shows a similar extension of an original oval nucleus, was a more important and older established centre, on the main Mun river. But here later alterations due to its lying in the direct path of Khmer westward expansion, may have obliterated many traces of the earlier culture. It may therefore be that Kanok Nakhon, even if it had only a short duration, is more likely to repay systematic excavation. A first task should be to test the pottery correspondences, and try to discover the original intention as regards the *sema* stones.

The addition of a secondary enclosure seems to involve a rather more angular though still irregular shape. Because of this irregularity it is usually quite easy to distinguish in air photographs these Môn additions from the much more formally rectangular

9 P.D.R. Williams-Hunt, *Antiquity*, loc. cit. pl. VII a.

10 B.B. Dutt, *op.cit.* p. 184.

11 Williams-Hunt, loc. cit. pl. VIII b.

structures sometimes added by the Khmers who in many cases re-occupied the early sites. In that case the rectangle may be grafted on to the original more or less circular site; or another method was to engulf the early circular site by building a larger rectangular enclosure all round it.¹²

The latter method, i.e. the enclosing of a wider area of land all round by a new belt of ramparts and moats was also known in ancient Indian times;¹³ the method chosen in a particular case no doubt depending on the ground available and on strategic considerations. And since this last mentioned method of extending a settlement was known to the ancient Indians it is not surprising to find that there is clear evidence that it was also practised by the Môn makers of the circular sites in Siam.

On his distribution map (Fig. 1) Williams-Hunt marked four such sites which he distinguished as "metropoli". Of these the one said to be near Chaiyaphum (A) was not present among the photographs preserved at Oxford, while the one near Aranya Prathet (D)¹⁴ appears to be rather indistinct. But of the other two, excellent air photographs exist at Oxford. Curiously enough, since most of his plotting was accurate, Williams-Hunt misplotted these two "metropoli", a discovery I owe to Mr. Bradford who took much time and trouble over checking the plotting. The correct localization has brought to light some interesting evidence which might otherwise have escaped notice.

The most northerly "metropolis" (B) is really not north of Korat, as marked on Williams-Hunt's map, but is about half the distance north-east of Korat, at the modern town (*amphur*) of Putthai Song. But a real surprize, and one which enables the making of a deduction of major importance, came with the correcting of the

12 An example of the latter sort Ku Müang, situated not far to the south of Ubon, is known on the ground from Seidenfaden's description of it, "Complément à l'Inventaire descriptif des monuments du Cambodge", *BEFEO*, Vol. XXII, p. 65, where it is stated to be a fortified town, still showing the remains of ditches and ramparts, with a brick Khmer tower and rectangular tank.

13 B.B. Dutt, *op. cit.* p. 180.

14 Williams-Hunt, *loc. pl.* VIII a.

supposedly most easterly "metropolis" (C), which had originally been plotted as on the Nam Si river, east of Ubon. Here it was a simple case of east having been read for west. The corrected position of the site is at Khao Ban Bon, an isolated low ridge near the left bank of the Menam Chao Phya, some twenty miles south of Paknambo in central Siam. We may now compare the appearance of those two sites.

At Putthai Song, (Fig. 11.) apparently occupied by the modern town (though this is not clear from the air photograph), the inner enclosure is an irregular oval measuring about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile by $\frac{3}{4}$, while the outer enclosure is about 2 miles long at its greatest extent. Both enclosures seem to have two or three ramparts and moats.

At Khao Ban Bon (Fig. 12) the ancient site seems to be devoid of modern habitation, though there are considerable areas of padi cultivation. There is a modern town of some size on the bank of the Menam which is at its nearest point about a mile away from the outer enclosure. A striking point about the inner enclosure is that it forms an almost perfect circle. This has a diameter of about half a mile (roughly the same as Thamen Chai). Two concentric ramparts—there may have been more originally—can be clearly seen. The outer enclosure, of irregular shape, has a length of about $1 \frac{1}{3}$ miles. A feature in which this outer enclosure resembles that of Putthai Song is that one side approaches very close to the inner enclosure. Also, at both sites the outer enclosures taper in a very similar manner in that portion that is furthest removed from the original enclosure.

This similarity, as well as the strikingly circular shape of the original settlement in the case of Khao Ban Bon, seems to establish another link between the early Indianized culture of eastern Siam and the kingdom of Dvāravatī. Of course this needs to be confirmed by a study of pottery correspondences etc. Moreover Khao Ban Bon suggests itself as eminently suited for more complete excavation. Unlike so many cities of central Siam it appears not to have suffered from continuous occupation, nor at the hands of modern

depredators. In the early centuries of our era Khao Ban Bon would have been in a good strategic situation in relation to the northern shore of the Gulf of Siam which was then much nearer to it than at the present day. It is practically in the same latitude as Śī Thep, but on a much more navigable river. Perhaps it was the terminus of a land route leading up on to the eastern plateau via the "metropolis" (A) said to exist in the Chaiyaphum region.

The evidence now at our disposal would seem to establish the affinity, if not the identity, of the civilization of the circular sites of the Korat plateau with the culture of Dvāravatī. Certainly this affinity, extending to the types of potsherds in a complex mixture, seems much too close to have been the result of a separate Indianization of two basic populations. We may rather suppose that the plateau was colonized by the Indianized Mōn inhabitants of central Siam, as indeed the latter region had largely been colonized by Indianized Mōn from lower Burma. Already we have the example of the Mōn kingdom of Haripunjaya (modern Lampun in north Siam), which there is good reason to believe was founded by a colony of emigrants from the Dvāravatī town of Lavo (modern Lopburi), under the leadership of the queen Chammadevi in the VIIIth century A.D. It is a longer trek thither than on to the Korat plateau. Could not the process of Mōn expansion from the Menam valley, therefore, have brought this Buddhist people into occupation of the Korat plateau quite by the VIth century or earlier?

Certainly on the available evidence I should not hesitate to reject any suggestion that the Indianized culture of the Korat plateau reached that area from the opposite direction, i.e. from the Mekong delta or Fu-nan proper. There are three good reasons for saying this: (1) The distribution of the circular sites is most dense in the *western* half of the Mun valley; (2) The pottery types show close connection with that of Dvāravatī (though admittedly we have not yet been provided with comparative material from Fu-nan sites), (3) The Buddhist images or relief sculptures of Thamen Chai, Kanok Nakhon, as well as many previously known from the Korat plateau, show a style which is typically Dvāravatī. On the other

hand the more or less contemporary Buddhas of Fu-nan and early Chen-la are stylistically very different, as has been clearly shown by Dupont in his recent work.¹⁵

Though I have identified this culture of eastern Siam with that of Dvāravatī, I must now make it clear that I do not entertain the idea that the whole formed a political entity, i.e. that the Korat plateau was a part of Dvāravatī. In the early history of the Indianization of South-east Asia, the setting up of small states was the rule, the emergence of an empire the exception. We have already seen that a northern offshoot of Dvāravatī formed the independent state of Haripunjaya, and we might expect that a colony budded off to the geographically self-contained area of the Korat plateau would not be slow to detach itself politically.¹⁶ As it happens there is some historical evidence in favour of this.

According to Ma Tuan-lin¹⁷ in the latter part of the VIth to early VIIIth century A.D., a kingdom called Chu-chiang, the Red River country, bordered Chen-la, the first Khmer state, on the west. It was in close alliance with it. The existence of this kingdom has been overlooked by Coedès, and it remained for L.P. Briggs to give it its due importance and to mark its position tentatively as occupying the territory between the Mun and Num Si rivers.¹⁸ What is more Briggs takes the late VIth century Khmer inscription of Tham Pet Tong, in the upper Mun valley, as representing a cry of victory rather than a conquest.¹⁹ It had previously been regarded by Coedès²⁰, and also by Dupont,²¹ as signifying the conquest of the whole Mun valley in the reign of Bhavavarman I.

15 P. Dupont, *La Statuaire Préangkorienne*, Ascona, 1956, Chap. VII.

16 Possibly Kanok Nakhon, whose ruler is said by the legend to have owed allegiance to none, represents a further and final attempt at budding off.

17 Trans. d'Hervey de Saint-Denys, 1883, pp. 477, 497.

18 L.P. Briggs *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, p. 47 and Map 5; his suggestion that it might have included Śī Thep seems less likely

19 *ibid.* p. 45.

20 G. Coedès, *Les États Hindoisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*, 1948, p. 118.

21 P. Dupont, "La Dislocation du Tchen-la et la formation du Cambodge Angkorien", *BEFEO*, Vol. XLIII, p. 45.

However Brigg had seen from the location of the inscription only just beyond the pass through the Dangrek mountains via which later passed the road from Angkor to Phimai, that it might signify no more than a raid. It was probably not until somewhere about A.D. 630 that Chu-chiang was absorbed by Isanavarman I of Chen-la.²² All this now receives strong support from the archaeological evidence of an Indianized M^on civilization having existed on the plateau before the absorption by Chen-la.

By way of appendix to the above I may mention that when, after my stay in eastern Siam, I revisited Angkor, I spoke of the circular sites to M. Laur the curator. He told me that such places were also known in Cambodia, and he lent me a jeep by means of which I visited and made a superficial inspection of one such site. It was at a modern village named Phum Lovea, about twelve miles west of Angkor. There was certainly a well-defined almost circular rampart and moat (one only). The rampart was much wider (20 yards) but also much lower (3 feet) than we had seen on the Korat plateau. The gateways were on the east and west. These differences from the characteristics of the typical Korat plateau sites are sufficiently impressive to make me feel that we are here in the presence of a different tradition. In fact I am inclined to think that, south of the Korat plateau, the "metropolis" (D) situated near Aranya Prathed, represents the furthest eastward expansion of the M^on culture. At Phum Lovea we may indeed be on the western fringe of an expansion of early Indianized culture from Fu-nan proper, or from the middle Mekong region. We must hope that trial excavations will be carried out before long at Phum Lovea and shall especially await with interest a report on the types of pottery found there.

Finally one may ask what is likely to have been the political relationship of Chu-chiang to the great empire of Fu-nan? Actually the question can only be put on the assumption that Chu-chiang was in existence prior to the break-up of Fu-nan. Speaking

²² L.P. Briggs, *op. cit.* p. 50.

of the early cities of Śī Thep, Phra Pathom and Pong Tūk, Coedès expresses the opinion ²³ that all must have recognized the more or less effective suzerainty of Fu-nan. This view appears to me most probable; but Briggs wishes to exculde Śī Thep, saying that all the vassal states of Fu-nan of which we have any certain knowledge were connected with it by sea, except Chen-la which was above it on the Mekong. ²⁴ At any rate Chu-chiang, as an offshoot from the Mōn settlements around the head of the Gulf of Siam could hardly have escaped Fu-nan suzerainty during its early period of existence, supposing that it had in fact come into being before Fu-nan declined.

23 G. Coedès, op. cit, p. 101.

24 L. P. Briggs, op. cit. p. 30.

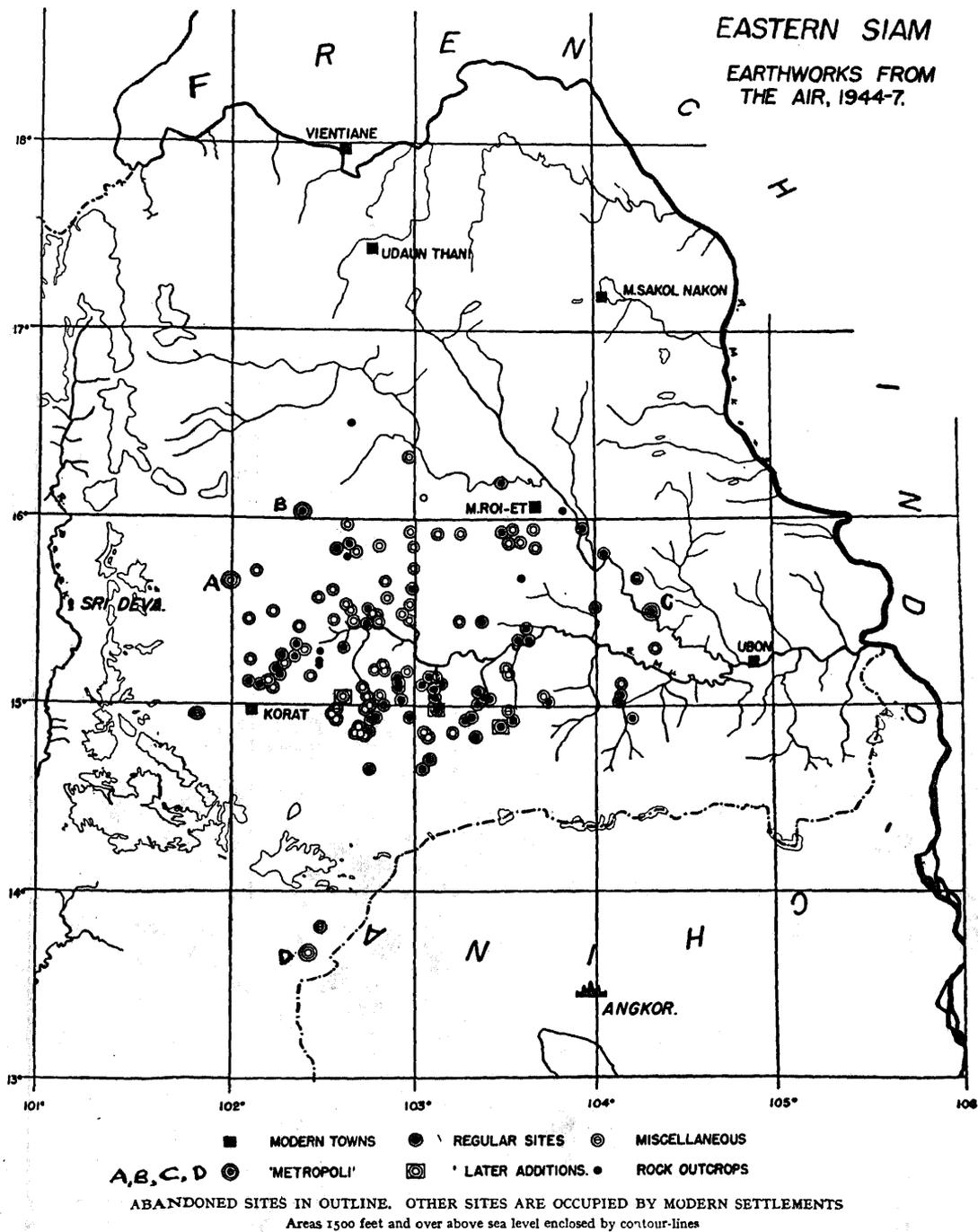


Fig. 1. Distribution map of "circular Sites" in Eastern Siam, after P.O.R. Williams-Hunt, *Antiquity* No. 93, March 1950 P. 31. Reproduced by permission (the four "metropoli" have been lettered A, B, C, D, for reference).

SECTION AT M. PHEI

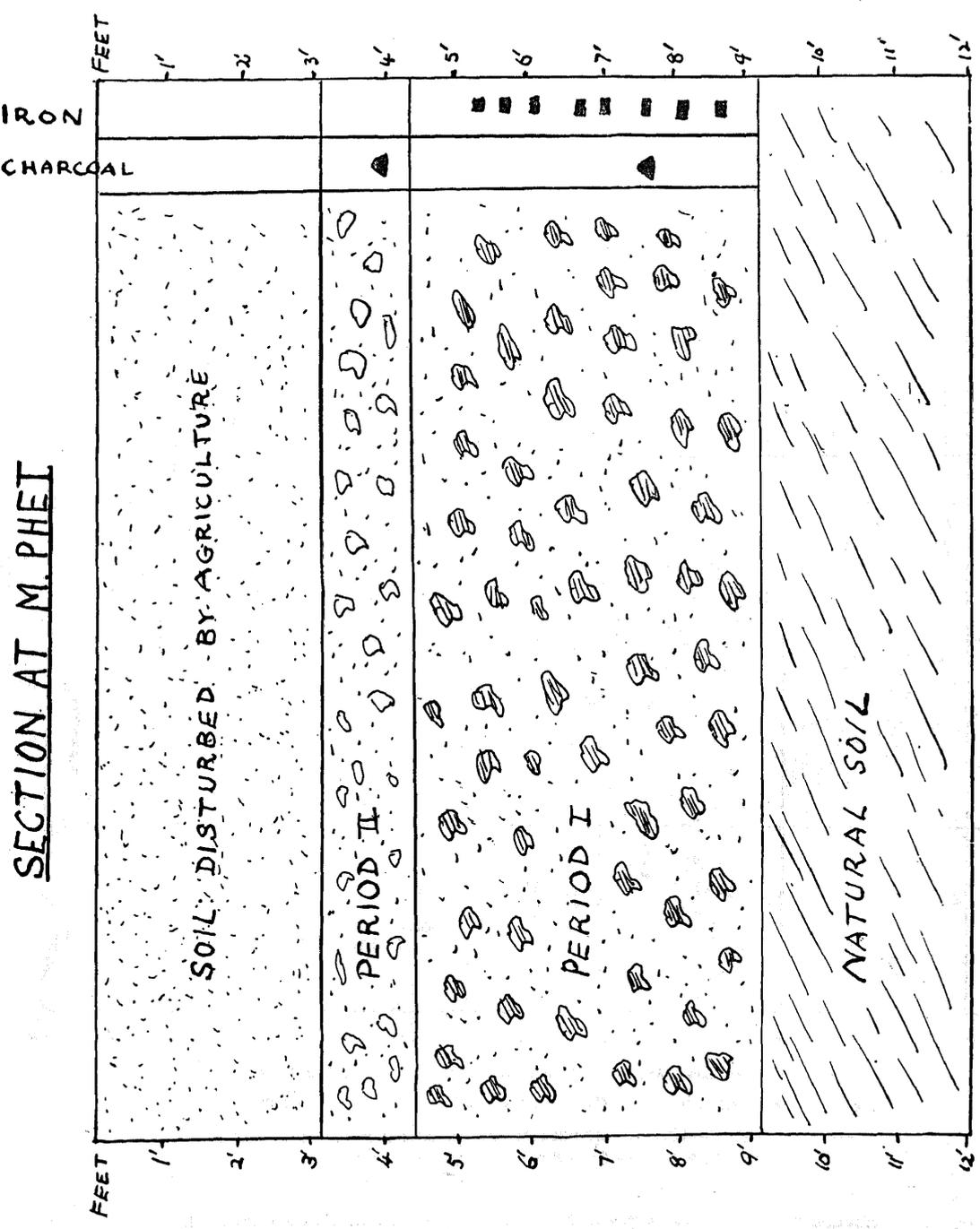


Fig. 3. Section at Mtiang Phei.



Fig. 4. Müang Phet Period I potsherds: Above, the urd-marked ware; below, the black ware.
(The examples of the black ware illustrated are actually from the corresponding stratum at Ban Thamen Chai)
(Author's copyright)

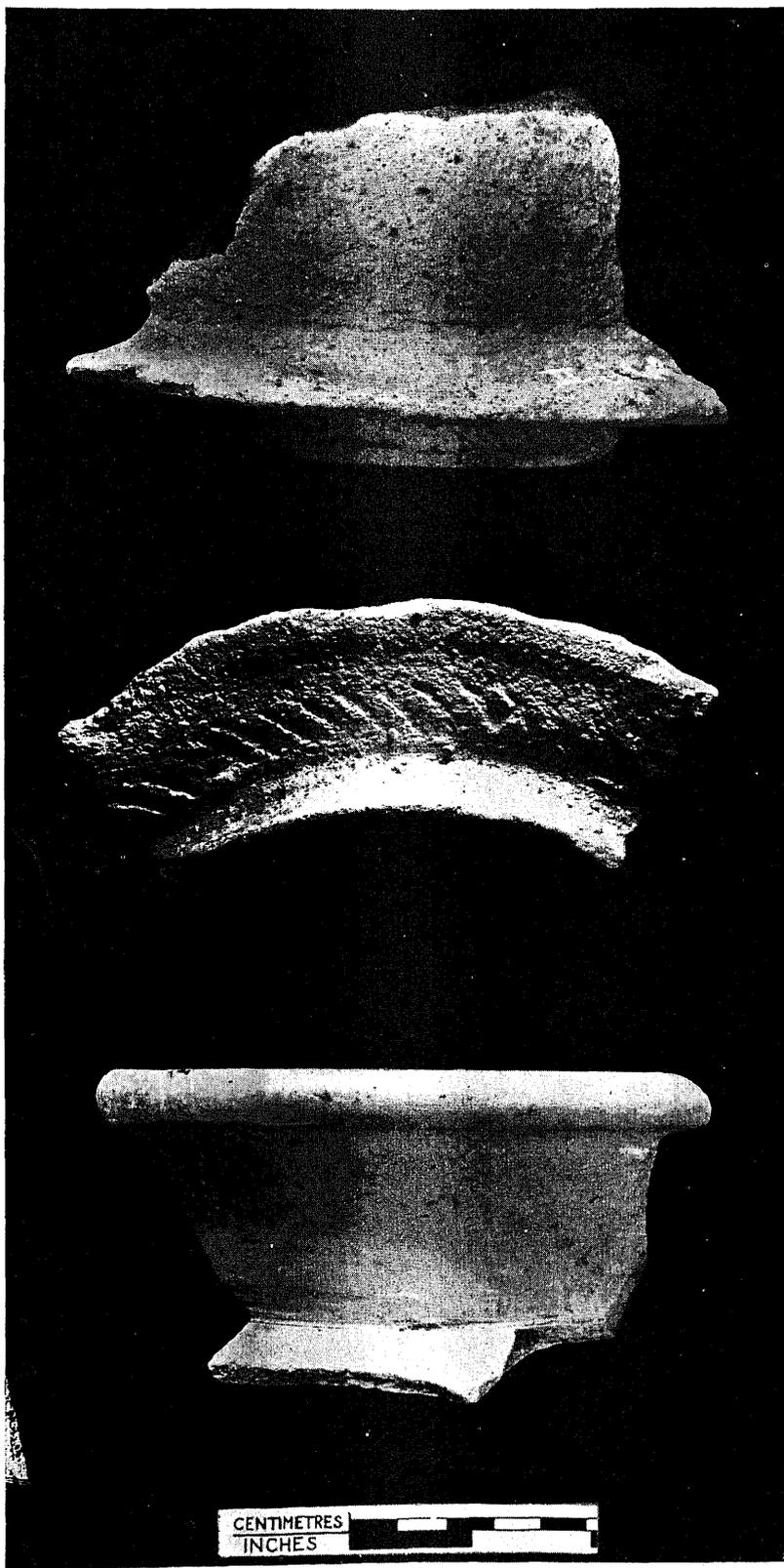


Fig. 5. Müang Phet Period II potsherds. The white ware is below, the red ware centre and above. (Author's copyright)



Fig. 6. The curving moat and ramparts at Thamen Chai (Author's copyright)



Fig. 7. Sema stones beside the track at Thamen Chai (Author's copyright)

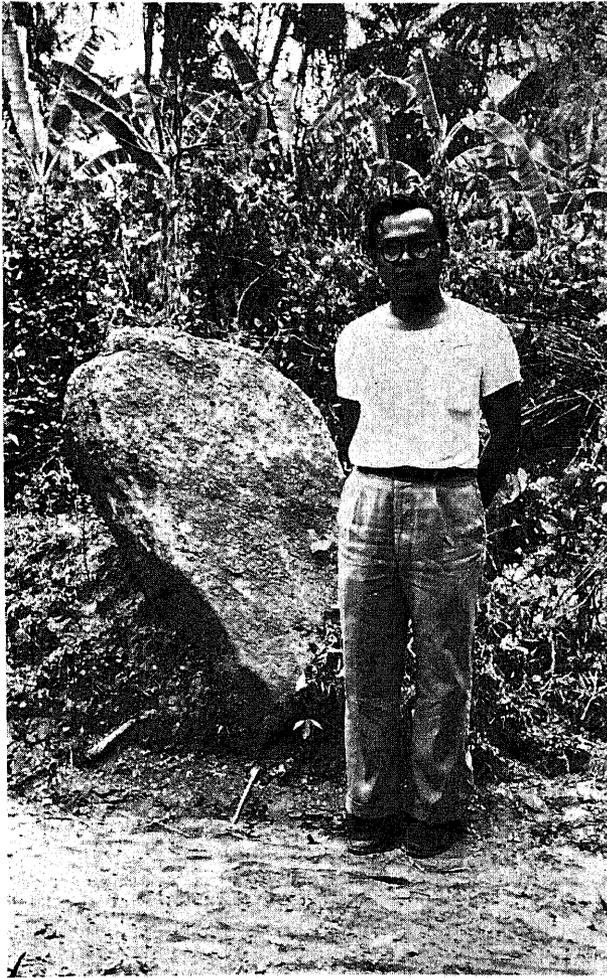


Fig. 8. Thamen Chai: Nai Charoen standing beside a sema stone (Author's copyright)



*Fig. 9. Bronze Buddha at Ban Thamen Chai
(Photo: Nai Charoen Phanuddhi)*

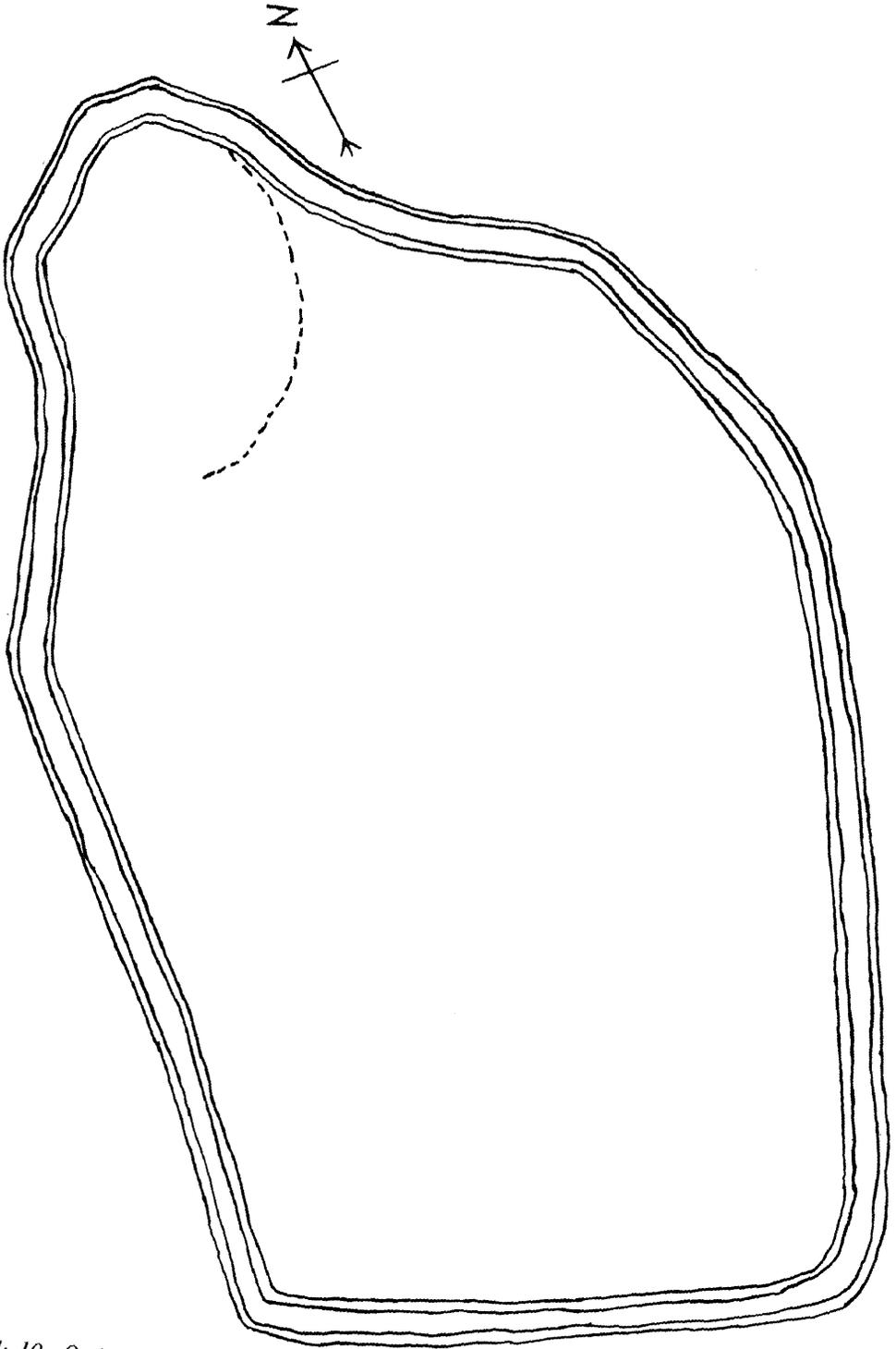


Fig. 10. Outline of Khanok Nakhon, after Bangkok National Museum Survey Plan.

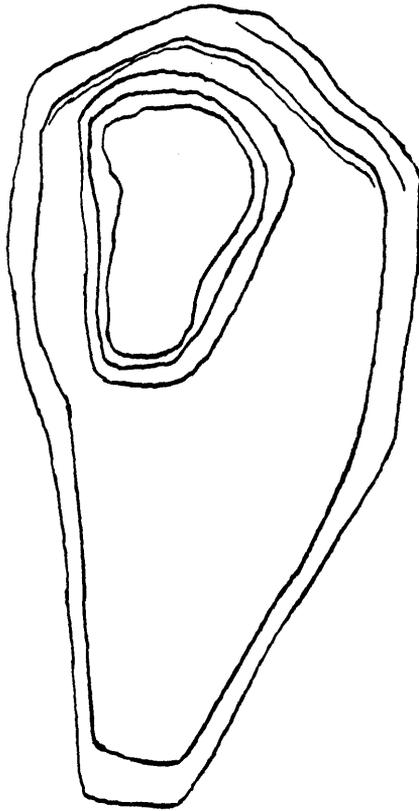


Fig. 11. Outline of ancient site at Putthai Song, north-east of Korat; from an air photograph at Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.

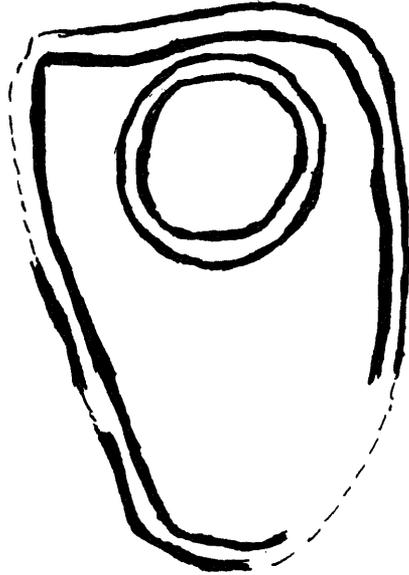
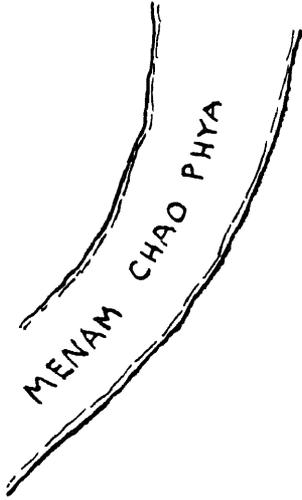


Fig. 12. Outline of ancient site at Khao Ban Bon, near left bank of Menam, about 20 miles south of Paknampo, Central Siam; from an air photograph at Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.