

ARCHAEOLOGY IN THAILAND – WHAT'S NEW?

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Last year the Division of Archaeology of the Thai Fine Arts Department took a major and welcome step by publishing works related to archaeological surveys and excavations in Thailand. Three of the publications which I would like to introduce especially to non-Thai readers are summarized below.

1). ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN THAILAND, VOLUME I, Division of Archaeology Publication No. 6/2531, Fine Arts Department, edited by Amphan Kijngam. 1988 (in Thai).

This publication is a report of over one hundred registered prehistoric and historical sites distributed in the ten western, eastern and coastal provinces of Thailand. The ten provinces are Kanchanaburi, Ratchburi, Suphanburi, Nakhon Pathom, Ayutthaya, Prachinburi, Nakhon Nayok, Chachoengsao, Choburi and Rayong. This publication is a useful index of what has been discovered and where, with some offerings of absolute and relative dates. The locations of the sites are well illustrated with maps and some of the important artifacts are well illustrated with photos and drawings. "*Archaeological Sites in Thailand, Vol. I*" is a very important and useful publication in gaining a basic and general understanding of the development of prehistoric and historical cultures and societies in this part of Thailand.

2). BAN BANG PUNE KILN SITE, Division of Archaeology Publication No. 9/2531, Fine Arts Department, reported by Jaruk Vilaikaew, 1988 (in Thai).

This second publication deals specifically with a historical kiln site located at Ban Bang Pune near the capital city of Suphanburi Province. The site reveals interesting findings such as stamped and incised stoneware jars and also earthenware pots. The unique designs on the stoneware jars include human figures riding on an elephant or attending cattle as in plowing, human faces, and other animals such as rabbits and horses.

Most of these designs are framed with decorated lines and are arranged in rows. The decorations are to be found from the wide rim down to the broad shoulder and the main body of the jar. The repetitious heart-shaped design around the shoulder of stoneware jars is also common at the Ban Bang Pune kiln site. Judging from the designs, distribution and associated findings at other sites, the author of this report suggests that the date of the decorated stoneware jars at Ban Bang Pune may be around the 13th-14th century A.D. and this type of stoneware jar may be called the "*Suwannabhume Group*." The origin of Ban Bang Pune village may go back beyond the Lopburi and Dvaravati periods as evidenced from the decorated earthenware pottery found here.

3). LAEM PHO SITE: SRIVIJAYA'S ECONOMY, Division of Archaeology Publication No. 15/2531, Fine Arts Department, reported by Khemchart Thepchai, 1988 (in Thai).

The third publication is an archaeological study of Chaiya city. It includes the area of the Laem Pho site at Tambon Phumriang, Amphoe Chaiya, Surat Thani Province. The survey and excavations reveal that this area has been inhabited since prehistoric times. The archaeological site at Laem Pho is a historical site where hundreds of monochrome and polychrome glass and carnelian beads and Chinese ceramics were found. Most of these artifacts, according to the report, are dated to around the 9th-10th century A.D. or during the time of the T'ang Dynasty. It was during this period that the Chinese Buddhist monk Ei-jing recorded the name of "Srivijaya" and described it as a stop-over place where he spent six months studying the Sanskrit language. The author of this publication hypothesizes that the city of Chaiya might have been one of the important cities of Srivijaya that professed Mahayana Buddhism. The city of Chaiya was also an important maritime entrepot for both east and west, involving Chinese, Javanese, Arab, Persian, Indian and even Roman merchants.