

## SECTION I

# DATING THE PAST



Fig. 1. Crown Prince Maha Vajiravudh. Photographed in 1907.

# A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SUKHOThai ART

## A Framework in Need of Revision

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When, from 4 January to 9 March 1907, Crown Prince Maha Vajiravudh (fig. 1) paid a visit to the cities in the North (Muang Nua), which at that time referred to cities lying between Nakhon Sawan to the south and Uttaradit to the north, comprising Kamphaeng Phet, Sawankhalok, Sukhothai and Phitsanulok, he could have been visiting *terra incognita* as far as the history of the monuments was concerned. After his return, he published in 1908 his attempt to throw light on these northern cities, entitled *Rueng thiao Muang Phra Ruang (Story of An Excursion to the Cities of King Ruang)*. He stated that he was publishing it "in the hope that it would give an opportunity for specialists in archaeology to further their deliberations and to make hypotheses on statements pertaining to the cities of Sukhothai, Sawankhalok and Kamphaeng Phet" (Somdet Phra Borom 1908, 1). He also attempted to date the monuments and to place them in their historical perspective.

It is not my intention to have this book become a textbook. My aim is to set up a framework so that those who are knowledgeable and enjoy archaeological research can make a better picture of it. Hence, even if there are readers who have different opinions from my own, I shall not be disappointed. On the contrary, if any one who does not agree with me on any point, can clarify it for me, I shall be delighted and be thankful to him. Also I would feel that I had learnt more (pp. 2–3)

The Prince probably would have been pleased to know that his "framework" has been in use for over eighty years, and that scholars continue to embellish it just as he wished they would. His methodology for dating was to correlate existing monuments with those mentioned in chronicles and inscriptions. He thought that the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription (Inscription I) was the most dependable and the *Phongsawadan Nua* (the *Chronicle of*

*the North*) the least trustworthy. His hypotheses were accepted and improved by prominent scholars of his time, such as his uncle, Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, and the historian George Coedès. In deference to their works, scholars today continue to build their hypotheses on the opinions of these eminent scholars which in turn were based on the original framework laid down by the Prince.

Prince Vajiravudh spent eight days in Sukhothai using the Prince Patriarch Pavares Viriyalongkorn's transliteration of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription as his guide. First he consulted the inscription, which says "Around this city of Sukhothai the triple fortifications measure 3,400 *wa* (6,800 metres)," so he measured the circumference of the inner walls, which came to 170 *sen* (6,800 metres); this corresponded exactly to the 3,400 *wa* given in the inscription (Somdej Phra Borom 1908, 60). Thus the inner walls had to be the original walls of King Ram Khamhaeng's time and the middle and outer walls must have been later additions.

At the time of the Prince's visit there were three large ponds (*traphang*) inside the city walls: Traphang Thong (Golden Pond) to the east, Traphang Ngoen (Silver Pond) to the west and Traphang So (Lime Pond) to the north (fig. 2). The inscription says

In the middle of this city of Sukhothai the water of the Pho Si Pond is as clear and good to drink as the water of the Khong (River Mekhong) in the dry season (Quoted in Somdej Phra Borom 1908, 61)

The Prince assumed that this passage probably referred to these ponds.

In the middle of Traphang Thong is an island with Wat Traphang Thong on it. A large bell-shaped *chedi* (stupa) stood there, built of bricks on a laterite base with eight subsidiary *chedis*. The latter were mostly in a dilapidated state. There was also an *ubosot* (convocation hall for monks) in the process of

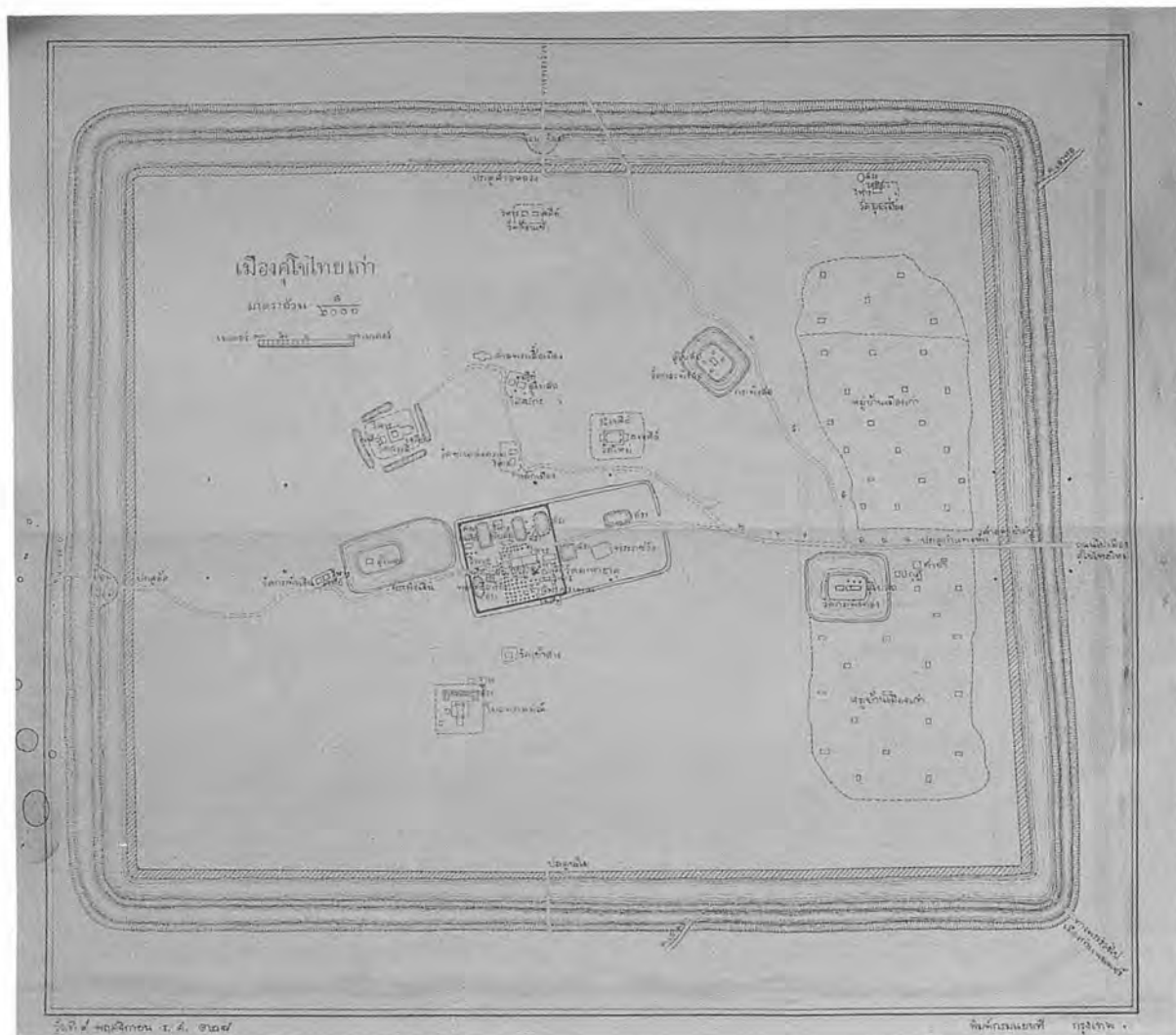


Fig. 2. Map of Sukhothai, published in 1908.



Fig. 3. The wihan of Wat Mai, Sukhothai, showing an Ayudhya prang inside the western porch. Photographed in 1907.

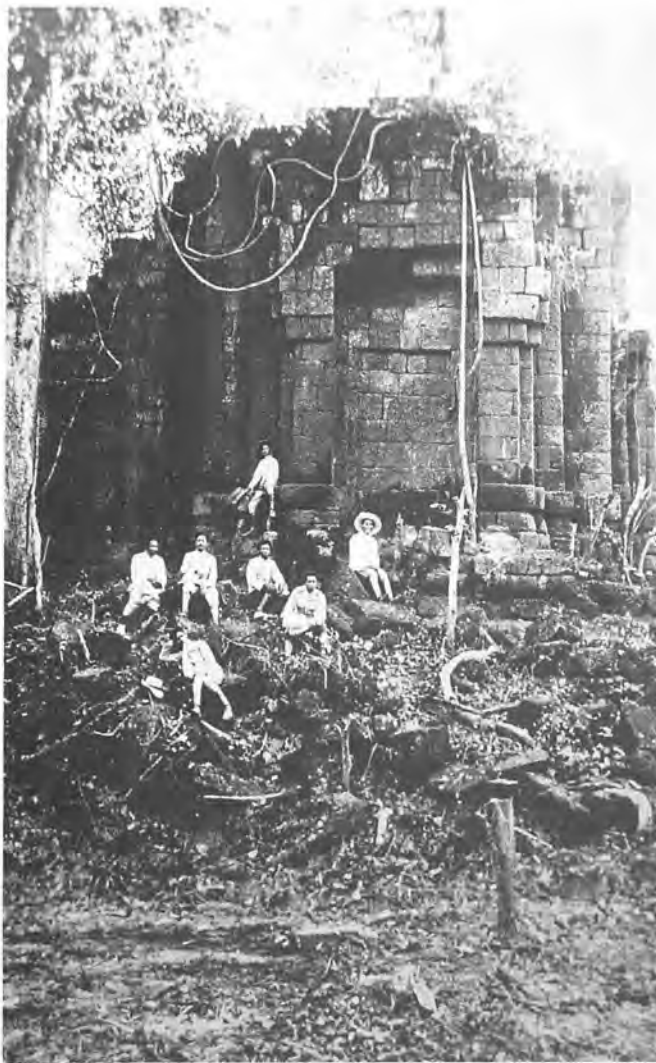


Fig. 4. San Ta Pha Daeng, Sukhothai. Photographed in 1907.

construction. The Prince thought that the monastery might not have been an important one and probably was not very old.

From Wat Traphang Thong the Prince went to see a ruined monastery which the local people called Wat Mai (New Monastery). It had a ditch surrounding it, which led him to generalize that "old monasteries had ditches surrounding them all. The ancients must have thought that the water *simas* [consecrated areas defined by boundary markers or by water] were more durable [than stone markers]" (Somdet Phra Borom 1908, 62). There was a *wihan* (image house used as an assembly hall) with a porch to the east and west. The western porch had a small Ayudhya *prang* (Khmer-style tower) on it (fig. 3). The wall to the north still contained large rectangular windows, "like the windows of the present-day *ubosot*." So the Prince concluded that "having seen the windows, it is possible to guess that the construction is modern" (p. 63).

Next he came to a ruin which some people called Wat Takon (sediments); others called it Wat Ta Khuan (Grandfather



Fig. 5. The *prang* of the Great Relic Monument at Wat Mahathat, Sukhothai. Photographed in 1907.

Khuan); but the Prince thought that it should be corrected to Wat Trakuan (Khmer language for an aquatic plant, *Ipomea aquatica*), because the Khmer language was used in King Lithai's time. Since the Prince decreed that the correct name be Trakuan, Trakuan became the name of this ruin. There was a lone *chedi* with an *ubosot* to the east of it. Here the Prince discovered a head of a *makara* (mythical aquatic animal) which looked to him like a Thai *makara* on account of its facial expression (shown on table in fig. 1). It was made of underglazed black painted pottery like Sawankhalok ware. He thought it must have been a decoration for staircases or for architectural ornaments like roof finials.

North of Wat Trakuan was a shrine for a guardian spirit which the people called San (shrine) Ta Pha Daeng (Grandfather with the red cloth). It had the form of a *prasat* (a building erected on a high foundation with multiple storeyed roof, whose use is reserved for kings or gods) constructed of large blocks of laterite (fig. 4) just like the *prasats* at Phimai and Lopburi. The superstructure had fallen down, but it probably had the





Fig. 6. Niche containing a stucco Buddha image decorating the Great Relic Monument at Wat Mahathat, Sukhothai. Photographed in 1907.

form of a *prang*. Since the *prasat* did not have a covered gallery around it, the Prince thought that it could not have been a Brahmanical temple, but probably was a shrine for a guardian spirit which must have been highly venerated in ancient Sukhothai because it was well built and of excellent workmanship. Hence he gave it the name San Phra Sua Muang (Shrine of the Guardian Spirit of the Kingdom).

Next the Prince visited the ruined monastery which some people called Wat Yai (Large Monastery); others called it Wat Mahathat (Monastery of the Great Relics), located at the centre of the city. He noticed that it was a large monastery with countless buildings. The most important structure there was the Great Reliquary Monument, whose finial was in the form of a slender *prang*, beautiful and curious to behold (fig. 5). On the upper terrace were four *wihans* at the cardinal points whose niches are beautifully decorated with sculpture (fig. 6). To the east of the Great Reliquary Monument was the Wihan Luang



Fig. 7. The three *prangs* at Wat Sri Sawai. Photographed in 1907.

(Large Assembly Hall), which was slightly bigger than the *wihan* of the Chinarat Image at Phitsanulok. He believed that the Srī Sākyamuni image which had been brought down to Bangkok to be enshrined in Wat Suthat originally had been the presiding image there. He speculated that Wat Mahathat must have been the royal temple and must have had the same function as that of Wat Phra Si Sanphet at Ayudhya, since it was located next to the royal palace. He then cross-checked with the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, which says

In the middle of this city of Sukhothai there is a *wihan*. There is a gold image of the Buddha. There are statues of the Aṭṭhārasa [18 cubits or 8.37 metres in height] Buddha. There are Buddha images. There are large images of the Buddha and medium-sized ones; there are large *wihans* and medium-sized ones (Quoted in Somdej Phra Borom 1908, 67).

So he concluded that this passage must have referred to Wat Mahathat, for "... there is a *wihan*; There is a gold image of the Buddha" could only have meant the Wihan Luang and probably the Srī Sākyamuni image. "Aṭṭhārasa" meant standing Buddha images 18 cubits high, many of which were represented there. As for the "large images of the Buddha and medium-sized ones" and "large *wihans* and medium-sized ones," they were all there to be seen. Thus by correlating the ruins of Wat Mahathat with the above passage in Inscription I, the Prince dated the monuments at Wat Mahathat to King Ram Khamhaeng's reign.

To the east of Wat Mahathat the Prince noticed a platform bereft of any sign of walls or pillars, without even a pile of stucco or brick, which prompted him to speculate that it must have been the palace platform (*lan prasat*) on which palace buildings of wood were constructed. Hence the area around the platform must have been the palace of the Sukhothai kings.

Another site worth seeing within the city wall was the ruin the local people called Wat Sri Sawai (fig. 7), whose three *prangs* reminded Prince Vajiravudh of the Prang Sam Yod at Lopburi. Inside the central *prang* the Prince saw two wooden posts which led him to speculate that they must have been the posts which used to support the seat of the presiding official who represented the gods during the Swinging Ceremony. His search also turned up a stone stele depicting the god Śiva, which confirmed his suspicion that Wat Si Sawai had been a Brahmanical temple.

Following the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, which first describes sites within the city's centre, then moves outside the city walls to the west, east, north and south respectively, Prince Vajiravudh traveled in a like manner on his tour of Sukhothai. Close to the city wall on the west was Wat Pa Mamuang (Mango Grove Monastery), accessible from the city by a raised road. The Prince consulted a Khmer language inscription of King Lithai (Inscription IV), which had been translated by the Prince Patriarch Pavares Viriyalongkorn (Somdet Phra Maha Samana 1899, 3566–3574). From this he surmised that the wat had probably been built when the Saṅgharāja (Supreme Patriarch) came to reside at Wat Pa Mamuang at the invitation of King Lithai. The road went on to an *ubosot* with a square platform to the west of it. On this platform stood four square pillars at each of the four corners, and in the centre was a mound of bricks. He thought that the platform had represented a *mondop* (an image house on a square plan) connected to the *ubosot*. The Prince reasoned that had the monastery not been important, the road would not have ended there, so he thought that it was reasonable to assume that this was the Wat Pa Mamuang mentioned in the Khmer language inscription of King Lithai. The Prince inquired whether there were any mango trees left and was told that there was none. Nevertheless, since the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription mentions mango groves, the prince thought that the mango grove must have been planted during that reign. According to Prince Pavares's translation, King Thammikarat (Lithai) liked the mango grove so much that he had statues cast of the gods Naresuan, Maheśvara, and Viṣṇukarma, and of the Hermit Sumedha and the Future Buddha, Ariyametteyya, and had these five images set up in the Thewalai Mahakaset in the Pa Mamuang District. In the present-day translation only Maheśvara and Viṣṇu are mentioned in the text. King Lithai then invited the Saṅgharāja, who had studied Buddhism in Sri Lanka, to come from Burma to spend the rainy season retreat in the Mango Grove, where a residence had been built for him. Prince Vajiravudh, however, was troubled by the difference between the description of the Wat Pa Mamuang, which in the Pavares translation appeared to have been a large establishment, with the modest remains consisting of an *ubosot* and a *mondop*, so he offered an explanation for the disparity by saying that King Lithai did not intend to build a permanent monastery, because the Saṅgharāja only came for a temporary visit. Today the monastery Prince Vajiravudh identified as Wat Pa Mamuang is called Wat Si Thon.

Prince Vajiravudh's identification of Wat Pa Mamuang was made by correlating the ruins of Wat Si Thon with the Khmer language Inscription of King Lithai (Inscription IV). He

thought that the site was an important one on account of the raised road leading to it. He was oblivious of the fact that both the monastery and the road could have been built at any time between 1361, when the Saṅgharāja came to reside at Wat Pa Mamuang, and 1907 when he himself visited Sukhothai. When a discrepancy arose between the present reality and his interpretation of the inscription, the Prince found reasons to support his hypothesis. He did not question the validity of his hypothesis nor the correctness of the translation of his source, for he had complete faith in the inscription and never suspected that the translation might have been erroneous.

Next the Prince visited a *wihan* which the local guide called Wat Tuk (Masonry). It consisted of a square platform with eight laterite pillars, four at the corners and four in between, accessible through two doors. Phra Wichien Prakan, the governor of Kamphaeng Phet, who accompanied the Prince, guessed that it was the Thewalai Mahakaset where the five statues cast by King Lithai were enshrined. Moreover, it probably was in the compound of the mango grove as evinced by two mango trees growing beside the *wihan*. The Prince, however, was sceptical whether the *wihan* had been the Thewalai Mahakaset of the inscription, for he thought that the shrine might have been built of wood, but the Fine Arts Department accepted Phra Wichien Prakan's argument and labeled it the Thewalai Mahakaset.

Another site worth seeing, according to the Prince, was Khao Phra Bat Noi (The Lesser Footprints Hill) where the local people still went to pay respect to the Buddha's footprints. Many roads led to it, so the Prince guessed that they must have been made by King Ram Khamhaeng, for Prince Pavares's translation of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription says

On the day of the new moon and the day of the full moon, the King caparisons the white elephant named Rubasi with ropes and tassels and gold for its tusks. King Ram Khamhaeng mounts and rides him to pay respect to the *wihan* in Araññika (Quoted in Somdet Phra Borom 1908, 81).

So the Prince decided that King Ram Khamhaeng often came this way. On the Khao Phra Bat Noi was a *chedi* having the form of a fishing net (*chom hae*) and with four porches. He thought that it was exemplary of its type (fig. 8). East of the *chedi* was a small *wihan* connected to the former by a platform on which a footprint of the Buddha was enshrined. Nearby on another hill was the large octagonal base of a *chedi* built of laterite on a brick foundation. The Prince attributed its destruction to the human greed of robbers looking for the valuables deposited within it. "Had these people used their ingenuity in the right direction instead of destroying antiquities, our country might have made greater progress," mused the Prince (p. 83).

Descending the Lesser Footprints Hill, the Prince came to Wat Mangkon (*makara*), which at that time was also called Wat Chang Lom (Surrounded by Elephants), since the base of the bell-shaped *chedi* was supported on the four sides by stucco elephants (none survives today). There was also a modest *ubosot*. The prince surmised that someone might have built it not too long ago.



Fig. 8. Stupa having the form of a fishing net at Wat Khao Phra Bat Noi, Sukhothai. Photographed in 1907.



Fig. 9. Buddha image 18 cubits high at Wat Saphan Hin, Sukhothai, Photographed in 1907.

From Wat Mangkon the Prince went to the “Araññika” (residence of the forest-dwelling monks) of King Ram Khamhaeng, where, according to Inscription I,

To the west of this city of Sukhothai is the Araññika ... in the middle of the Araññika there is a large *wihan*, tall and beautiful, and there is an Aṭṭhārasa image standing up (Somdet Phra Borom 1908, 84).

So, following the inscription, the Prince came to Wat Saphan Hin (Stone Bridge), and having walked up the stone path, arrived at a tall *wihan* housing an image of a standing Buddha which exactly correlated with the above passage in Inscription I (fig. 9).

“Now that I have seen the site,” the Prince enthused, “I must admit that King Ram Khamhaeng did have something to boast about.”

In the excitement of having found an Aṭṭhārasa image where the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription says it would be, it could not have occurred to the Prince that the image he saw might not have been the same one mentioned in the inscription. His correlation not only confirmed that the image had existed since King Ram Khamhaeng’s time, but that its existence supported the trustworthiness of the inscription.

The Prince was disappointed that the inscription did not mention any site worth seeing east of the city. Nevertheless, he visited Wat Traphang Thong Lang (Coral Tree Pond) which had a *mondop* and a *wihan* similar in plan to Wat Si Chum. He identified the stucco decoration on the south face of the *mondop* as the Buddha descending the stairs from Tāvātimsa Heaven (fig. 10). Since this sculptural panel exhibited fine workmanship and was well preserved, the Prince pronounced that





Fig. 10. Stucco relief showing the Buddha descending from Tavatimsa Heaven at Wat Traphong Thong Lang, Sukhothai. Photographed in the 1950s.

This *wat* appears to be truly ancient because the workmanship has not degenerated. If it had been made in later times, it probably would have nothing worth seeing, for our contemporaries no longer seem to know what is beautiful (p. 90).

Like other scholars of his time the Prince equated age with workmanship. It never occurred to him, nor to his contemporaries, that workmanship is a subjective criterion that cannot be used for dating a work of art.

Next the Prince misinterpreted the direction given in the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription which says that "In the direction of a man's feet when he is sleeping... there are *basars*. There is the *acana* image. There are the *prasats* ..." He took "In the direction of a man's feet when he is sleeping" to mean south when it should have meant north, for it is a custom for a Thai when



Fig. 11. A gateway at Wat Chetuphon, Sukhothai. Photographed in 1907.

sleeping to lie on his right side facing east, so that his head faces south.

Thus, to the south he identified Wat Chetuphon with its stucco Buddhas in four postures as the "*acana*" image mentioned in Inscription I. He also corrected the word "*acana*" to "*acala*" to mean "immovable." Since he thought that the *wihan* with four porches housing these images would have had a *prasat* roof, so this *wihan* would have corresponded to the "*prasat*" of the inscription. He surmised that Wat Chetuphon must have been built before King Ram Khamhaeng's time, because had King Ram Khamhaeng built it, he would have boasted and spoken about it at length. The Prince was greatly impressed by the use of massive slabs of slate at this monument (fig. 11), for it reminded him of "seeing the sites of the monuments of Egypt." He recommended that "If anyone goes to Sukhothai and has no time to see other monuments, he should at least try to visit this *wat*" (p. 99).

Prince Damrong later remarked (National Archives 1927) that the governor of Sukhothai had put up a sign giving the name of this monastery as Wat Thep Chumphon (Divine General) but Prince Vajiravudh changed it to Chetuphon (from the Pāli *Jetavana*). The Prince reasoned that the name should be corrected to Chetuphon because the monastery had been built in the forest outside of the city just as its original Pāli namesake *Jetavana* had been constructed outside the city of *Srāvathi*.

To the east of Wat Chetuphon is a monastery that the locals called Wat Chedi Si Hong (Four Bays), on account of the four recesses that used to decorate the base of the stupa's bell-shaped dome, one on each side. Although the Fine Arts Department has reconstructed the dome, it has left out the original four recesses at its base. Since the Prince could not find an *ubosot* at Wat Chetuphon, he surmised that the *ubosot* at Wat Chedi Si Hong also served as the convocation hall for Wat Chetuphon, so he concluded that Wat Chedi Si Hong probably represented the residential area for monks, whereas Wat Chetuphon was the sacred area.



Fig. 12. (Far left) The north *prang* at Wat Phra Phai Luang, Sukhothai, Photographed in 1907.

Fig. 13. (Left) Detail of the stucco decoration of the north *prang* at Wat Phra Phai Luang. Photographed in 1907.

Since the Prince mistook “the direction of a man’s feet when he is sleeping” for south, so that “the direction of a man’s head when he is sleeping” became north, he could not find correlations for Wat Si Chum and Wat Phra Phai Luang, the two most important monuments north of the city. Nevertheless he did find an entry for Wat Si Chum in the *Royal Chronicle of Ayudhya* which mentions that King Naresuan set up camp in the District of Wat Si Chum (Hermits Assembled) while on his way to quell a rebellion at Sawankhalok in 1567. King Naresuan then commanded court Brahmins to draw up water from the Sayambhuvanath and the Poe Si ponds to be drunk by his military commanders during the ceremony of Drinking the Water of Allegiance. At the *mondop* of Wat Si Chum the Prince climbed up the stairs to the top of the walls and discovered four holes, one at each corner, which led him to speculate that these were for the wooden posts that held up the timber superstructure and roof tiles. As for the shape of the roof, he thought that it would have resembled that of Wat Sa Pathum at Sawankhalok, which today is called Wat Phaya Dam (see fig. 21). The Prince described the roof form there as a bowl turned upside down.

As for Wat Phra Phai Luang (Great Wind), which originally had three *prangs* similar to Wat Si Sawai of which only one survived (fig. 12), the Prince found a sandstone base for a *linga* (*snānadroṇī*), so he speculated that originally the building must have been a Brahmanical temple but had been transformed into a Buddhist monastery in recent times. He was sure that the change must have taken place not long ago on account of the poor workmanship of the wooden statues of the Buddha discovered inside one of the *prangs*. However, the sole remaining *prang* had beautiful stucco decoration, so he had a photograph of it printed in his book “to testify to the beauty of the designs” (fig. 13).

The Prince’s reliance on inscriptions to identify historical monuments caused him some difficulties when he came to Wat Sangkhawat (Monks’ Residence). According to the translation of Inscription IV by Prince Pavares, King Lithai had a great reliquary monument constructed in the form of a *prang* and had a monastery built complete with an *ubosot*, *wihan*, and *kan parien* (preaching hall). Then he had a bronze image of the Buddha cast to preside over the *ubosot* and gave the name “Sanghawas aram wihan” to the monastery, which “today the Northern people call Wat Sangkawat.” Unfortunately, the Wat Sangkhawat which the Prince visited did not meet the requirements of a great monastery mentioned in the translation, for it consisted of one *wihan* (fig. 14) and a fallen-down *chedi*. The Governor of Kamphaeng Phet, Phra Wichien Prakan, suggested that this passage refers to the Wat Mahathat inside the city, for the inscription also says that after the rainy season retreat for monks was over, King Lithai celebrated the casting of the bronze image and set it up at the centre of the city of Sukhothai to the east of the Great Reliquary Monument. The Prince speculated that the Wat Sangkhawat he had visited was not the same as the one mentioned in the inscription, but the “Sanghawas aram wihan” of the inscription was the same as the Wat Mahathat. Nevertheless he deferred to the archaeologists to decide on it. The Prince did not realize that the passages referring to the Great Reliquary Monument having the form of a *prang* and the monastery given the name “Sanghawas aram wihan” were interpolations by Prince Pavares into Inscription IV. Thus Prince Vajiravudh’s confusion was caused by his reliance on an erroneous translation.

From Sukhothai Prince Vajiravudh went to Sawankhalok by the Phra Ruang Road, which at some places measured six *wa*

Fig. 14. (Right) The *wihan* at Wat Sankhawat, Sukhothai. Photographed in 1907.



Fig. 15. (Far right) The *chedi* at Wat Chang Lom, Old Sawankhalok. Photographed in 1907.

(twelve metres) wide. At one point a canal about eight *sok* (four metres) wide and four *sok* (two metres) deep ran parallel to the road. Having searched through all available written sources, he found that the road is mentioned in Prince Pavares's translation of Inscription IV, which says that King Lithai had a canal dug and a road constructed linking Sukhothai with Si Satchanalai. However, reasoning from the belief that Sukhothai was a prosperous kingdom during King Ram Khamhaeng's reign and that King Ram Khamhaeng had built a *chedi* at Si Satchanalai, he preferred to think that the road had been constructed in King Ram Khamhaeng's time and that King Lithai was responsible rather for repairing his grandfather's old road.

The Prince commented that it was difficult to find dependable historical records for Sawankhalok, since no stone inscriptions were found there. He regretted that King Ram Khamhaeng did not have much to say about Sawankhalok or Si Satchanalai because he resided at Sukhothai. On the other hand, the *Phongsawadan Nua* (*Chronicle of the North*), which the Prince cautioned against using, gave a lengthy and detailed account of Sawankhalok, but only mentioned Sukhothai once. It says that the Hermit Satchanalai founded the city of Sawankhalok, hence the Prince thought that Si Satchanalai must have been an earlier name of Sawankhalok.

Prince Vajiravudh compared the ruins that the local people of Sawankhalok called Wat Chang Lom (Surrounded by Elephants; fig. 15) to Wat Chang Rop (Encircled by Elephants) at Kamphaeng Phet (fig. 22). The Prince thought that it was most unlikely that they resembled each other by coincidence; therefore, one must have inspired the other, so he reasoned that the one at Kamphaeng Phet must have been later than the one at Sawankhalok, because King Lithai had resided at Si Satchanalai

when he was a prince. After he became king at Sukhothai, he founded the Great Reliquary Monument at Kamphaeng Phet, so he must have built the *chedi* at Wat Chang Rop in imitation of the one at Si Satchanalai.

Since Prince Vajiravudh thought that Si Satchanalai was an earlier name for Sawankhalok, he placed Wat Chang Lom at Sawankhalok and Wat Chang Rob at Kamphaeng Phet in the historical time period of Sukhothai. So pervasive was his preconception of Sukhothai's past that it made him oblivious of the fact that both Sawankhalok and Kamphaeng Phet flourished right through to the Bangkok period and that both of these monuments could have been built at a later time.

Prince Vajiravudh identified the ruins that local people called Wat Chedi Chet Thaeo (Seven Rows of Stupas) with the Great Reliquary Monument that King Ram Khamhaeng had constructed at Si Satchanalai because he had consulted Prince Pavares's translation of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, which says

In 1209 *saka*, year of the boar (1287), he (King Ram Khamhaeng) had the sacred relics dug up for all to see. He venerated and attended to the sacred relics for a month and six days; then he buried them in the middle of the city of Si Satchanalai and built a *chedi* over them. It was completed in six years. He erected stone walls around the Great Reliquary Monument. It was completed in three years (Quoted in Somdej Phra Borom 1908, 177–178).

Since the Prince thought that the principal stupa at Wat Chedi Chet Thaeo (fig. 16) was a copy of the Great Reliquary





Fig. 16. The *prang* at Wat Chedi Chet Thaeo, Old Sawankhalok. Photographed in the 1890s.



Fig. 17. A cinerary *chedi* at Wat Chedi Chet Thaeo, Old Sawankhalok. Photographed in 1907.



Fig. 18. "Lak Muang," Old Sawankhalok. Photographed in 1907.

Monument at Wat Mahathat, Sukhothai (fig. 5), and the overall arrangement was similar, even to the extent that the "stone walls around the Great Reliquary Monument" were there to be seen in good condition, he speculated that the main stupa at Wat Chedi Chet Thaeo was the one that King Ram Khamhaeng built over the sacred relics in the middle of the city of Si Satchanalai. Furthermore, he also identified the satellite *chedis* around it as cinerary stupas (fig. 17).

Prince Vajiravudh also made a suggestion that the *prang* with rabbeted corners to the southwest of what he thought must have been the palace site at Sawankhalok was where the city's astrological chart was buried and the *prang* had been built over it, so he named it "Lak Muang" or the City Pillar (fig. 18).

The Prince highly recommended visiting Wat Mahathat outside the walled city, for it was one of the most beautiful sites in the North. The principal attraction there was the Great Reliquary Monument in the form of a *prang* (fig. 19) whose shape reminded the Prince of the Mahathat at Phitsanulok, and an even closer comparison could be made with the *prang* of Wat Phichaiyat in Thonburi. He consulted the *Chronicle of the North* for a clue to its dating and found out that King Thammaracha, or Ba Thammarat, the first ruler of Sawankhalok, had relics of the Buddha deposited in the city and commanded five Brahmins, whose names were Ba Phitsanu, Ba Chi Phit, Ba In (Indra),



Fig. 19. The *prang* of the Great Relic Monument at Wat Mahathat, Old Sawankhalok. Photographed in 1907.

Ba Phrom, and Ba Rit Rocana, to consult with one another and to construct a building more beautiful than and different from the works of other craftsmen in the land. Prince Vajiravudh speculated that it was possible for these Brahmins to have built the *prang* because its form resembled a Brahmanical temple. Yet the *Khoms* (Khmers) also liked to build *prangs*, so perhaps the *Khoms* might have constructed it. He concluded that, at any rate, there were reasons to believe that the *prang* of Wat Mahathat was the earliest building in the region, perhaps over one thousand years old. His reasons were that "the workmanship was excellent and it was in a better condition than other monuments in the area" (p. 189).

The *Chronicle of the North* has further information on Wat Mahathat. It says that

Phraya Abhayagamani made Arun Ratcha Kuman ruler of the city of Satchanalai and received the name Phraya Ruang. Phraya Ruang had a *wihan* built in the five directions, and next to the Great Reliquary Monument with its double covered galleries he had replicas made of images of the Buddha. Then he had laterite made into palisades and lantern posts around the *wihan* (Quoted in Somdet Phra Borom 1908, 195).

"All these constructions were actually carried out," confirmed the Prince. "There are the five *wihans*. The covered galleries can still be seen. There is the *ubosot*. The laterite palisades and lantern posts really exist" (p. 196). However, he did not believe that King Ruang was responsible for all of these structures but that successive rulers of Si Satchanalai must have had this monastery restored from time to time.

In the same direction as Wat Mahathat was the ruin local people called Wat Chao Chan (Prince Chan) (fig. 20), which the Prince recognized at once as a Brahmanical temple because the form of the *prang* was stylistically comparable to those of Wat Sri Sawai and Wat Phra Phai Luang at Sukhothai. Moreover, among the debris he discovered a stone head from an image of Śiva. The existence of this Brahmanical temple correlated with a passage in the *Chronicle of the North* which says that Ba Thammarat had a Brahmanical Temple constructed in the city to house images of Phra Naret and Phra Narai. The Prince mused that the compiler of the chronicle must have known that a Brahmanical temple had existed at Sawankhalok, but there was no way of confirming whether this was the same one as Wat Chao Chan. Evidently the Brahmanical temple had later been turned into a Buddhist monastery because an *ubosot* was situated to the east of the *prang*. Moreover, the workmanship of the *ubosot* was much poorer than that of the *prang*. Hence the *ubosot* had to be later than the *prang*.

Also in the same direction but nearer to the city wall his guide pointed out to him Wat Khok Singkharam, which, according to the *Chronicle of the North*, was the place where King Ruang convened a meeting to change the era. Prince Vajiravudh was sceptical about its identification. Why should King Ruang have chosen a small monastery at which to hold a meeting for many hundreds of people? He decided that either the meeting to change the era did not take place here, or this monastery was not Wat Khok Singkharam. However, he was told that the *ubosot* was still in use to hold ordinations, so he reasoned that since the monastery was well known and seemed to have been important to the local people, they probably had made up a story to account for it.

Southeast of the city was Wat Sa Prathum (fig. 21), whose roof in the form of an upturned bowl led the Prince to speculate





Fig. 20. Wat Chao Chan, Old Sawankhalok. Photographed in 1907.



Fig. 21. Wat Sa Prathum, today called Wat Phaya Dam, Old Sawankhalok. Photographed in 1907.

that the *wihan* of Wat Si Chum at Sukhothai originally had a similar type of roof.

As for the city of Kamphaeng Phet, Prince Vajiravudh found even fewer historical documents than for Sawankhalok to guide him. Neither folk tales nor the *Chronicle of the North* mentioned Kamphaeng Phet. The *Royal Chronicle of Ayudhya* only gives the information that it was a vassal state to the north and the *Tamnan Phra Kaeo Morakot (Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha)* says that the Emerald Buddha image had resided there, but neither tells us who founded the city. Even the stone inscription of Kamphaeng Phet (Inscription III) only mentions the founding of a reliquary monument by King Lithai. The Prince visited a monastery which Phra Wichien Prakan called Wat Mahathat where there was a big *prang* (only the base remains today), and which the Prince on an earlier visit had thought was the same monastery as the Wat Phra Kaeo where the Emerald Buddha had resided. Now he decided to change his mind, for he thought that the Emerald Buddha should have resided in Nakhon Pu instead. (This was a misreading of Inscription III where the name should have been Nakhon Chum.)

Whereas Prince Vajiravudh himself had changed his mind concerning the identification of Wat Phra Kaeo as early as 1908, the Fine Arts Department still retains his discarded hypothesis.

Outside of the city there was a large group of monasteries that Prince Vajiravudh thought was the site of ancient Nakhon Pu (Nakhon Chum). Today this group of ruins is called the Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park. The Prince advised future tourists that "There are so many monasteries in this area that it is impossible to see them all. In truth it is not necessary to see all of them. It is sufficient to choose the larger ones" (p. 26). The largest in this area was the ruins the local people called Wat Awai Yai (Great Residence) with its large reliquary monument raised upon a circumambulatory platform accessible through four sets of stairways. A wall surrounded the circumambulatory platform. He noticed that on this wall as well as on the gateways were relief carvings of laterite of excellent workmanship, well worth seeing, depicting demons and gods. On account of the excellent workmanship and the presence of the big laterite pond outside the enclosure wall, which evinced a large monastic establishment, as well as the form of the reliquary monument



Fig. 22. The Chedi Chang Rob, Kamphaeng Phet. Photographed in 1907.

itself, Prince Vajiravudh correlated this reliquary monument with the one mentioned in Inscription III. According to that inscription, King Lithai had a reliquary monument constructed at Nakhon Chum in 1357 (present reading) to enshrine the “genuine relics” of the Buddha, brought from far-away Sri Lanka. Sadly, neither the wall nor the gateways with laterite carvings in relief nor the relic monument itself, which would have been in the form of a *prang*, survive today. Only the Prince’s account attests to their having existed at all.

Another large monastery, which the local people called Wat Chang Rop (Encircled by Elephants), had a *chedi* whose circumambulatory platform was decorated with standing elephants (fig. 22). The Prince surmised that apart from Wat Awas Yai, the only other appropriate location for the depositing of the “genuine relics” of the Buddha was at Wat Chang Rop.

The Prince also visited Wat Si Iriyabot (Four Postures). The principal attraction was a *wihan* with four chambers housing an image of a standing, a seated, a walking and a reclining Buddha, one in each chamber. The walls had vertical slits for ventilation. He remarked that its form was almost the same as that of Wat Chetuphon at Sukhothai but it was smaller and exhibited inferior workmanship.



Incredible as it may seem today, Prince Vajiravudh’s attempt to date the monuments at Sukhothai, Sawankhalok and Kamphaeng Phet by correlating the monuments he visited with the literature he had read remains to this day the basic assump-

tion for the dating of Sukhothai-period art and architecture. Not one scholar, neither a Thai nor a foreigner, has ever questioned the validity of the Prince’s methodology. For over eighty years scholars have continued to build their own hypotheses over his basic framework. Hence our present knowledge of Sukhothai-period art and architecture is based on a framework built on supposititious correlation and educated guesses.

Prince Vajiravudh was not the only scholar to have used supposititious correlation as his research methodology. Everybody who has ever attempted to date monuments by correlating archaeological sites with literary evidence has also followed the same path. In their enthusiasm to give a historical perspective to the monuments, scholars invariably failed to take into account natural and man-made factors that contributed to the destruction of the buildings. Above all, they rarely questioned the legitimacy of their literary sources.

Buildings in a tropical climate, if left untended, deteriorate faster than those in the temperate zone. If they are completely abandoned, nature soon takes over and conceals them with vegetation. During the dry season they would be subjected to forest fires which would burn the timber supports of the roof and thereby bring down the superstructure, knocking down whatever was beneath it.

In Thailand natural destruction was relatively benign compared to that caused by man. Prince Vajiravudh considered greed and delusion as having been the two principal culprits in destroying nation and religion. It was customary to deposit valuables within the reliquary chamber of a *chedi* or beneath the base of a presiding image in a *wihan* or an *ubosot*, which the robbers

would set out to recover as soon as the structures were abandoned. Indeed, as early as the mid-fourteenth century Sukhothai Inscription II reports that the stone carvings of the five hundred *jātakas* decorating a large and lofty *chedi* had been “pried loose by foolish men to get gold, and ruined” (Griswold and ña Nagara 1972, 125). Apart from gold, robbers also looked for Buddhist amulets and votive tablets, the possession of which the owners deluded themselves into believing would protect them from danger and bring them good luck. Phra Wichien Prakan told Prince Vajiravudh that these robbers knew precisely where the reliquary chamber was located in a particular type of *chedi*, so they did not have to waste time looking for it. He also tells of an ingenious method of bringing down a *chedi* by tying its finial to the top of a tree with rattan vines; the tree is then cut down, toppling the *chedi* as well.

Considering the above variables, which Prince Vajiravudh was fully aware of, it seems contradictory that he used the state of preservation of a monument to date it, so that a well-preserved structure would be earlier than one in poor condition, when it is obvious that it should have been the other way round. Given the climatic and cultural conditions of this country, it is incomprehensible how scholars could have overlooked these natural and man-made factors and assumed that the monuments existing today could have remained unaltered for over six hundred years. Yet they were oblivious of these incongruities because they were obsessed by the desire to place the monuments within the context of Sukhothai-period history.

Moreover, scholars who correlate archaeological sites with historical documents take for granted the credibility of their written sources. Prince Vajiravudh, who graduated from Oxford University with a degree in modern history, thought that the *Chronicle of the North* was a collection of folktales put together at random. However, he cautioned against disregarding it altogether, since there might be a kernel of truth in it somewhere. He put his trust in the Sukhothai inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng and those of King Lithai, but was unaware that the translator had let him down by not being faithful to the text. Most of all, he never doubted the authenticity of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription itself. Thus, reassured by the trustworthiness of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription and inspired by his own version of Sukhothai history, Prince Vajiravudh painted for posterity a picture of Sukhothai in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The Prince was proud of his own creation, for he exhorted and admonished his subjects to visit ancient cities, saying

Some people even say what is the point of going to see ancient cities now. They are all in ruins. Because our people think this way, the history of our nation is fast disappearing. Our people do not feel ashamed of other nations. Instead of wanting to show that our nation is old, we prefer to forget its antiquity. We only want to begin anew from the time we set out to develop along European lines. We thought this way because we wanted the Europeans to appreciate that we had never been a barbaric coun-

try. Once conceived, we grew up to be their equals. This view is truly mistaken. The Europeans neither respect new things, nor new nations. They prefer antiquities and ancient countries to new ones. European countries always compete with one another in researches to show which country has a longer history (Somdej Phra Borom 1908, 20–21).

Indeed, it was also his avowed intention in publishing his book

... to make Thai people realize that ours is not a new country nor a barbaric nation, “uncivilized” in English. Our Thai nation has had a long development (p. 3).

Thus the Prince was responsible for creating a historical awareness in his people. And although as a corollary to this effort he was also responsible for dating the monuments of Sukhothai, Sawankhalok and Kamphaeng Phet earlier than they actually are, his hypotheses could have been challenged and discarded by later scholars, as was the case with Lucien Fournereau’s hypothesis that Si Satchanalai was located at the present-day Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park.

Lucien Fournereau, an architect in charge of archaeology at the Musée Guimet in Paris, was the first Westerner to make the monuments of Sukhothai and Kamphaeng Phet known throughout the scholarly world by publishing an account of his visit to Siam in 1891 entitled “Le Siam Ancien” in the *Annales du Musée Guimet* in 1895. He disputed the French missionary Père Schmitt’s hypothesis that the ancient capital of Satchanalai was located to the north of Sukhothai in the vicinity of Sawankhalok. He argued that since Thai capitals were all located on major rivers, Satchanalai should not be an exception. He mentioned that the Khmer language inscription of King Lithai (Inscription IV) tells of the digging of a canal linking Satchanalai with Sukhothai, the traces of which could still be seen towards Kamphaeng Phet. For further evidence that Si Satchanalai was located at Kamphaeng Phet he correlated the bronze statues of Śiva (fig. 23) and Viṣṇu discovered at Kamphaeng Phet with the images of Maheśvara and Viṣṇu that King Lithai had cast in 1349 (present reading) and set up in the Thewalai Mahakaset at Sukhothai. According to Fournereau, these two statues were the earliest monuments of Thai art as well as the most beautiful and complete. Later a king named Si Thammasokarat discovered them and had his own inscription, dated to the equivalent of 1510, put up on the pedestal of the Śiva image (fig. 23). Although Fournereau published Père Schmitt’s translation of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, which he believed had been found by King Mongkut in 1834 in the ruins of Wat Yai (Wat Mahathat) together with the Khmer language inscription of King Lithai (Inscription IV), he did not attempt to identify the monuments mentioned in the inscription with the archaeological sites at Sukhothai (Fournereau 1895, 157–158, 183–184).

Fournereau’s identification of Si Satchanalai with present-day Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park was refuted by E. Lunet de Lajonquière, who visited Sukhothai in 1908 and published his





Fig. 23. Phra Śiva.  
Bronze, dated to the  
equivalent of 1510.  
National Museum,  
Kamphaeng Phet

findings in "Essai d'un inventaire archéologique du Siam" in 1912. According to Lunet de Lajonquière, on his entering the gate of the old city of Sawankhalok, which the local people called "Ban Muang Kao (Old City)," his guide exclaimed, "Here are the walls of Si Satchanalai." So he thought that since the Local people did not refer to the old city as "Old Sawankhalok", but as "Ban Muang Kao", the Ban Muang Kao must have been Si Satchanalai. Thus Si Satchanalai was a different city from the present town of Sawankhalok, having been located twelve kilometres upstream from the latter. It did not occur to him that local people referred to the Old City as "Ban Muang Kao" to distinguish it from the new town of Sawankhalok, just as they call the Old City of Sukhothai "Ban Muang Kao" to differentiate it from the new town of Ban Thani.

Unlike Fournereau's hypothesis, Prince Vajiravudh's correlation of the monuments of Sukhothai with the descriptions given in the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription was fully supported by Lunet de

Lajonquière. He agreed with the Prince that the platform east of Wat Mahathat where he had found glazed tiles was the palace platform, on which wooden pavilions were constructed. He thought that Wat Si Chum was the most remarkable monument at Sukhothai and was probably the Araññika mentioned in the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription. Interestingly, he noted the absence of bricks or tiles that would have been used to cover the opening of the *wihan*, so he contradicted Prince Vajiravudh's hypothesis that the building was left unfinished and never had a roof over it. Lunet de Lajonquière repeated Fournereau's statement that King Mongkut had found the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription at Wat Yai together with the Khmer language inscription of King Lithai in 1834.

Prince Vajiravudh's view found a champion in George Coedès, who from 1917 to 1930 was Chief Librarian of the Vajirañān Library in Bangkok, the precursor of the National Library. By that time the Crown Prince had become King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1910–1925). In 1956, long after Coedès had returned to France, he summed up his thoughts on Sukhothai

in an article entitled "Les premières capitales du Siam aux XIII<sup>e</sup>–XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles," published in *Arts Asiatiques* (Coedès 1956). This article is tantamount to an endorsement of Prince Vajiravudh's supposititious correlation of the monuments of Sukhothai with the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription. Coedès simply made a synopsis of Prince Vajiravudh's *Rueng thiao Muang Phra Ruang* and added Prince Damrong's notes for its second printing in 1928, injecting his own interpretations on some minor points (Phrabat Somdet Phra Mongkutklao 1977). By presenting it as his own work, he lent credibility to the Prince's original assumption. So great was Coedès's prestige as a scholar of Southeast Asian history that everyone readily accepted his hypotheses.

Coedès began by praising King Ram Khamhaeng for having been an excellent guide who took us around the city of Sukhothai as it was at the end of the thirteenth century. Coedès was more confident than Prince Vajiravudh ever was, stating

Most of the monuments are identified with certainty. As for those which are not or are not mentioned in the stele, no doubt [this is] because they are later than the reign of Ram Khamhaeng ... (Coedès 1956, 246).

Coedès was certain that Wat Mahathat, with the statues of the Buddha eighteen cubits high, had already existed at the end of the thirteenth century, for they corresponded with the inscription. However, he cautioned against assuming that the Great Reliquary Monument as a whole dated from the reign of King Ram Khamhaeng, for it was possible that the type of slender *prang* which Coedès called a "bulbous minaret-like reliquary tower" was created in the following century (fig. 5). He confidently stated that the presiding image of the Wihan Luang east of the Great Reliquary Monument had been taken to Wat Suthat in Bangkok by the first king of the present dynasty.

Coedès confirmed that the brick platform east of Wat Mahathat, called Noen Prasat, corresponded to the royal palace. Whereas both Fournereau (1895) and Lajonquière (1912) earlier gave Wat Yai (Wat Mahathat) as the location where King Mongkut discovered the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, Coedès identified the Noen Prasat as the location where King Mongkut, while he was a monk, had found the stele of King Ram Khamhaeng and the stone throne in 1833. Coedès believed that Inscription I was set up in 1292 to commemorate the setting up of the stone throne. His view was based on a sermon entitled "History of Four Reigns" given in 1883 by the Prince Patriarch Vajirañāṇavarorasa, who was a son of King Mongkut. Prince Vajirañāṇavarorasa wrote

He (King Mongkut) found a stone throne set in place beside the ruins of an old palace mound .... On his return he had the stone throne brought down [to Bangkok] and set it up as a preaching seat at Wat Rachathiwat. When he became king [in 1851] he removed it to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. In addition he obtained a stone inscription in Khmer





Fig. 24. Phra Maheśvara. Bronze, Bangkok National Museum.



Fig. 25. Phra Viṣṇu. Bronze, Bangkok National Museum.

[King Lithai's] and an Inscription in Old Thai [King Ram Khamhaeng's] which he also placed in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Quoted in Coedès 1924, 13 [Thai section]).

Although Prince Vajirañāṇavarorasa did not specify the location where King Mongkut obtained the two inscriptions, Coedès guessed that it must have been the palace mound where King Mongkut found the stone throne. He then correlated Prince Vajirañāṇavarorasa's "old palace mound" with the bare brick platform that Prince Vajiravudh called "Lan Prasat." This explains how the Lan Prasat became the Noen Prasat and was identified as the site of King Mongkut's discovery of the stone throne and the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription.

As chief librarian of the Vajirañāṇ Library, Coedès might have been familiar with an earlier account of Prince Mongkut's discovery of the stone throne written by the Prince Patriarch Pavares Viriyalongkorn and published in *Rueng aphinihan kan*

*prachak* in 1868. Prince Pavares says that Prince Mongkut only found the stone throne and the Khmer language inscription of King Lithai (Inscription IV) (Somdet Phra Maha Samana p. 3552). Nowhere does he say that Prince Mongkut found the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription as well.

Among the monuments within the city wall, not mentioned by King Ram Khamhaeng, that Coedès thought probably were later than his reign, were two having a Brahmanical origin and Khmer in style. One was the San Phra Sua Muang (today called San Ta Pha Daeng), which is a laterite temple accessible through two doors, one to the east and the other to the west (fig. 4). Coedès accepted Prince Damrong's speculation that "There should have been found here, at the beginning of the last century, one statue of Śiva in bronze facing east (fig. 24) and one statue of Viṣṇu facing west (fig. 25); these are kept in the Bangkok National Museum" (Prince Damrong's note in Phrabat Somdet Phra Mongkutklao, p. 43). The other monument of Brahmanical origin is Wat Sri Sawai, where he accepted Prince Vajiravudh's view that during the Sukhothai period it was used as a Brahmanical temple by court Brahmins to hold royal ceremonies and had the same function as the Bot Phram near the Giant Swing in Bangkok.

Coedès, following Prince Vajiravudh, identified the only monument mentioned by King Ram Khamhaeng outside the walls to the west with Wat Saphan Hin (fig. 9). Thus he thought that this monastery must have been begun in King Ram Khamhaeng's time. Outside of Ram Khamhaeng's Araññika are ruins of monuments which are later than his reign. Coedès mentioned the Mango Grove which was planted by King Ram Khamhaeng where his grandson, King Lithai, constructed a monastery. He also stated that Lithai's three inscriptions, one in Khmer (Inscription IV), one in Thai (Inscription V), and one in Pāli (Inscription VI), all of which described the reception of the Sangharāja coming from Burma and the ordination of King Lithai in 1361 (corrected reading), have been found at this site. Coedès's memory must have failed him, for both Fournereau and Lunet de Lajonquière reported that King Mongkut found the Khmer language Inscription (No. IV) at Wat Yai. As for the Thai language Inscription (No. V), he himself had said that it was found near Ayudhya. Only the Pāli Inscription (No. VI) was found at Wat Pa Mamuang in 1908 (Coedès 1924, 103, 111).



Following the direction given in the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, Coedès accepted Prince Damrong's correction that "In the direction of a man's feet when he is sleeping" meant "north", when in 1907 Prince Vajiravudh mistook it for "south" (Prince Damrong's note in Phrabat Somdet Phra Mongkutklao, p. 60). Thus the "*acana*" or "*acala*" image mentioned in this direction refers to the colossal seated Buddha image at Wat Si Chum (fig. 26). According to Coedès, "It is 'immovable' by its height, its material, and also by the narrowness of the doors of the *mondop*, barely two metres wide, through which it would be impossible to pass" (Coedès 1956, 253). He also agreed with Prince Vajiravudh that the roof might have been similar to that of Wat Sa Pathum (Wat Phaya Dam) at Sawankhalok (fig. 21). Coedès attributed to Burma the prototype of this type of square brick structure.

As for the *Jātaka* slabs decorating the ceiling of the stairway within the wall of the *mondop* (fig. 27), he pointed out that there are parallel series at the Ananda and Hpetleik at Pagan. Unlike those in Burma, the ones at Wat Si Chum were not meant to be seen, so he speculated that originally they had been parts of a more complete series decorating an earlier state of the Great Reliquary Monument at Wat Mahathat, but were later removed for safekeeping and placed on the ceiling of the stairway of the *mondop* of Wat Si Chum.

The "*prasat*" mentioned in the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription corresponded to the pure Khmer monuments at Wat Phra Phai Luang. Coedès agreed with Prince Damrong that the Khmer administrative centre was located in this area.



Fig. 26. (Above) Phra Acana at Wat Sri Chum, Sukhothai. Photographed in 1889.

Fig. 27. (Below) A *Jātaka* slab at Wat Sri Chum, Sukhothai.





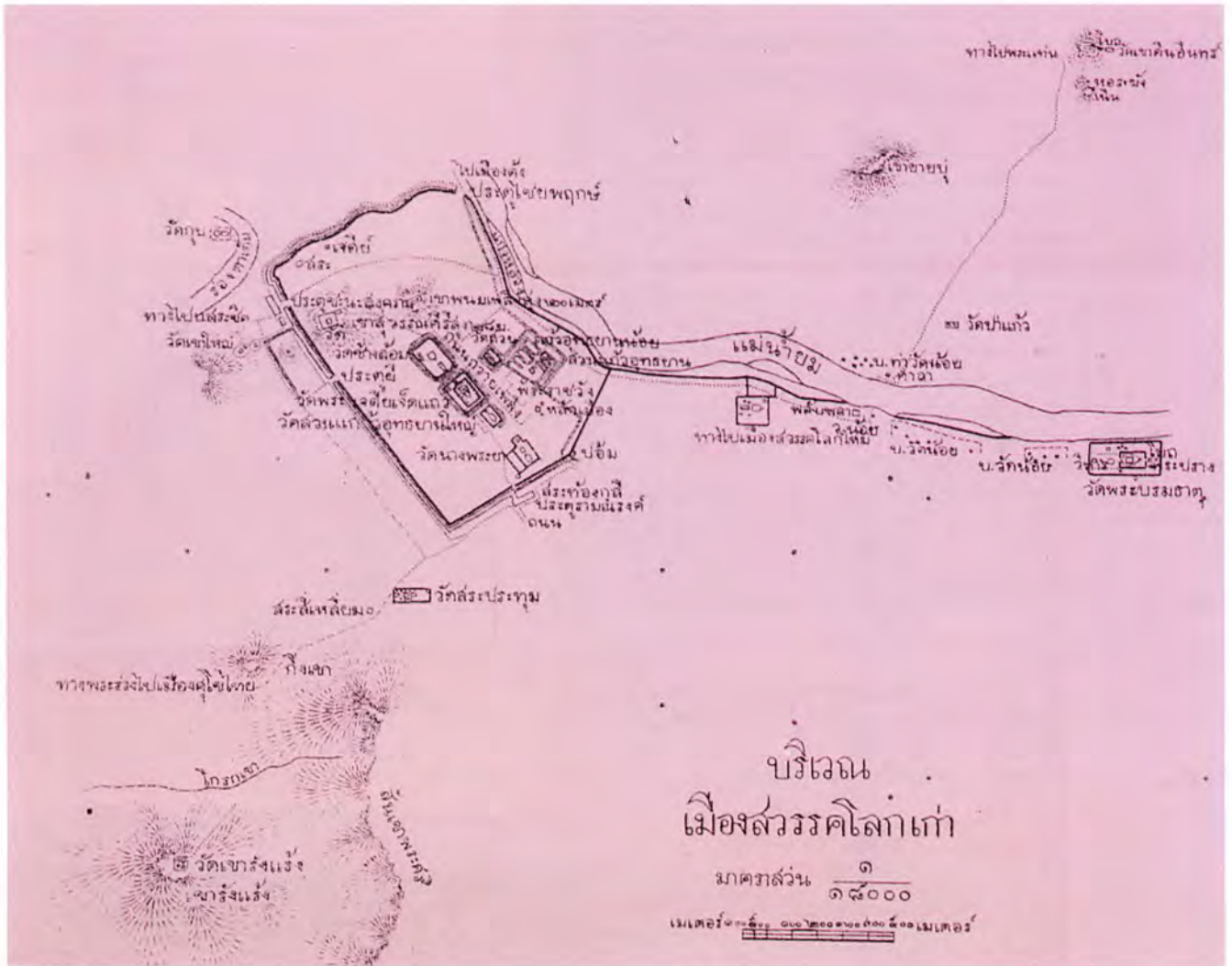


Fig. 28. Map of Old Sawankhalok. Published in 1908.

Since the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription did not refer to any particular monument to the east and south of the walled city of Sukhothai, Coedès had little to say regarding monuments which might be later than 1292, his date for the King Ram Khamhaeng Inscription. To the east he singled out the *chedi* at Wat Chang Lom as being a twin of that at Wat Chang Lom at Sawankhalok. The latter had a good chance of having been constructed in the reign of King Ram Khamhaeng. To the south, he contradicted Prince Vajiravudh's argument concerning Wat Chetuphon (fig. 11), that despite its importance, it was not mentioned by King Ram Khamhaeng, hence it must be later than the inscription of 1292. Coedès took the opposite view to that of Prince Vajiravudh, that if a monument is not mentioned in Inscription I, it must be later than King Ram Khamhaeng's time.

Having visited King Ram Khamhaeng's Sukhothai, Coedès followed Prince Vajiravudh to Sawankhalok. Here Coedès accepted Prince Damrong's division of Old Sawankhalok into two separate cities (fig. 28). According to Prince Damrong, Chalieng

was a Khmer city older than Sukhothai. It was located where Wat Mahathat is today. Then either King Si Intharathit, or one of his sons, founded a new city about twenty *sen* (800 metres) to the north of it, built laterite walls around it, and named it Si Satchanalai (Prince Damrong's note in Phrabat Somdet Phra Mongkutklao, p. 80).

Accordingly, Coedès differentiated two groups of monuments at Sawankhalok. One corresponded to the Khmer establishment at Chalieng which consisted essentially of Wat Mahathat (fig. 19). He also repeated Prince Vajiravudh's view that it was the earliest *prang* built by the Thais, but he also mentioned that it had been restored in the eighteenth century, which could have modified its original appearance. Wat Mahathat is enclosed by laterite walls with gateways constructed of monolithic blocks. Above the centre of the coping over the east and west gates there are small *prangs* decorated with four human faces (fig. 29), which Coedès thought were inspired by the gateways at Angkor Thom. He was almost certain that



Fig. 29. A gate at Wat Mahathat, Old Sawankhalok.  
Photographed in 1907.

the coping was erected in the reign of King Ram Khamhaeng because it may well have been mentioned in Inscription I in connection with Ram Khamhaeng's works at Si Satchanalai, for we read, "He [Ram Khamhaeng] erected a stone wall around the Great Reliquary Monument, which was completed in three years."

The other group of monuments is located above the Kaeng Luang (Great Rapids). According to Coedès, "Here is the ancient city of Si Satchanalai, the twin city of Sukhothai" (1956, 260). All that King Ram Khamhaeng had to say of this city was that he had sacred relics dug up, venerated them, and then buried them in the middle of the city and built a *chedi* over them. The question was which of the monuments constructed at the centre of the city corresponded to this passage. Coedès decided against Wat Chedi Chet Thaeo, as proposed by Prince Vajiravudh, because he thought that the bulbous minaret-like reliquary tower would be later than King Ram Khamhaeng's reign (fig. 16). Thus he opted for Prince Damrong's identification with Wat

Chang Lom (fig. 15), proposed in 1926, whose enclosure walls recall those of the Mahathat at Chalieng, where they were probably erected by King Ram Khamhaeng (Rajanubhab 1973, 19). Coedès also attributed to Ram Khamhaeng's reign stupas surrounded by elephants, identical examples of which were constructed at Sukhothai and at Kamphaeng Phet (fig. 22). He thought that this type of stupa was directly inspired by the Ruvanweli Stupa at Anuradhapura, which corresponded to the Mahathupa, or the Grand Stupa of the Buddhist tradition of Sri Lanka.



Thus were established the rudiments of the dating of Sukhothai-period art and architecture on which succeeding scholars based their research. Foremost among them were Jean Boisselier and Alexander B. Griswold. Boisselier, a Professor of Indian and Southeast Asian archaeology at L'Ecole du Louvre, Paris, made a tour of archaeological sites in Thailand in 1964 and published his preliminary report in *Arts Asiatiques* in 1965 (Boisselier 1965, 137). Boisselier dated the San Ta Pha Daeng (fig. 4) to the reign of Khmer King Suryavarman II (1113–1150) and the *prasat* at Wat Phra Phai Luang (fig. 12) to that of King Jayavarman VII (1181–c.1220). He also attributed the stucco decoration of the *prasat* (fig. 13) to the Bayon style (1177–1230). Furthermore, he identified Wat Chao Chan at Chalieng (fig. 20) as one of Jayavarman VII's rest houses for travelers (*dharmaśālās*). He also discerned Sinhalese influences in the costumes and ornaments of the stucco figures decorating Wat Chedi Si Hong (Four Bays) and Chedi Ha Yot (Five Spires) at Wat Mahathat. By correlating the Khmer-style monuments at Sukhothai with the stylistic chronology of Khmer art at Angkor, Boisselier brought the Khmer-style monuments at Sukhothai into the main line of Khmer art. Thus his findings buttressed Coedès's theory of Khmer influence on the early phase of Sukhothai art (Boisselier 1965, 137).

Alexander B. Griswold was an American investment banker from Baltimore, Maryland, who together with his former classmate at Princeton, James H. W. Thompson, the founder of the Thai Silk Co. Ltd., came to Thailand as an officer of the Office of Strategic Services during the Second World War. After the war both settled in Bangkok and started their collections of Thai art. At in his death in 1992 Griswold's collection was believed to be the most comprehensive collection of Thai art outside of the Kingdom (ṇa Nagara 1991, 157). Griswold, who graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Art and Archaeology, published in 1953 an article entitled "The Buddhas of Sukhodaya" in which he first attempted to use art historical methodology to date Sukhothai-style Buddha images and to classify them in Western terminology (Griswold 1953, 33). In a paper read at a seminar on the archaeology of the Sukhothai period held at Sukhothai in 1960, he presented his methodology:

We picked out a number of examples in which great vitality and nervous energy are combined with the finest technique. This group, which we called the



*high classic*, we thought might be dated chiefly in the reigns of King Lō Tai [Loethai r. 1299–c. 1346] and King Lū Tai [Lithai, r. 1347–1374?]. We guessed that Brah Jinarāja and its companion images should be placed at the very end of the high classic, that is, at the beginning of the post-classic; in these statues the technique is magnificent, but vitality and energy are replaced by sweetness and tranquillity.... The rest of the post-classic, we believed would show a progressive loss of plastic values, with forms drying out and stiffening, and details becoming more mechanical. All this was guesswork, which provided a beginning for study, though it might have to be revised later on (Griswold 1964, 73–74).

As for the identification of the pre-classic, Griswold gave the following advice to aspiring art historians:

Another means of trying to identify the pre-classic might be to choose examples that are an integral part of monuments mentioned in Ram Khamhaeng's inscription (p. 74).

Griswold eventually succeeded in classifying Sukhothai-style Buddha images into three groups: "A pre-classic style dating in the 13th century, a high classic in the 14th, and a post-classic in the 15th and later" (Griswold 1960, 91).

In 1967 the Department of Fine Arts invited Mr. Griswold to write a monograph on Sukhothai art and the result was *Towards a History of Sukhodaya Art*, in which, since "there are still plenty of gaps in our knowledge," he included the preposition "toward, so as to warn the reader that it is still too soon to hope for anything like a complete history of Sukhodayan art." His aim was to "place a number of monuments and sculptures in the context of political and religious history" (Griswold 1967, 1). Griswold used the same methodology as that of Coedès and Prince Vajiravudh before him. But whereas his predecessors confined themselves to correlating monuments with the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, Griswold used his own stylistic classification of Buddha images in conjunction with all known Sukhothai-period inscriptions as well as chronicles and Buddhist literature as his evidence. Thus he succeeded in placing the art and architecture of the Sukhothai Kingdom within the reign period of each Sukhothai king.

Griswold was even more confident of his own judgment than Coedès ever was. Although we do not know who founded the Mahathat at Sukhothai, Griswold pronounced without providing any reason that "it seems reasonable to think it was Śrī Indraditya (r. c. 1220?)" (Griswold 1967, 3). According to Griswold, the original Great Reliquary Monument consisted of a quincunx of five laterite towers.

To the reign of Ban Muang (1275–1279?), Si Intharathit's son, he assigned the pyramidal *chedi* at Wat Phra Phai Luang (fig. 30). "Judging from the form of the arches, they date from the third quarter of the 13th century, therefore probably from



Fig. 30. The pyramidal *chedi* at Wat Phra Phai Luang, Sukhothai. Photographed in 1963

the reign of Ban Muang" (Griswold 1967, 4). These are arches decorating the niches in which images of the Buddha are placed. "These images represent the first Sukhodayan pre-classic style (fig. 31)," wrote Griswold, and he was inclined to think "—but with a large question mark—that they are idealized portraits of Ban Muang" (1967, 5).

However, he had no doubt that Wat Chang Lom at Si Satchanalai (fig. 15) is "the only surviving *cetiya* that we can attribute with virtual certainty to Ram Khamhaeng" (1967, 10). Hence the stucco images of the Buddha at Chedi Wat Chang Lom represent the second Sukhodayan pre-classic style (fig. 32). He also assigned to Ram Khamhaeng's reign (1279–1299) the laterite and stucco walking Buddha executed in high relief at the back of the *wihan* at Wat Mahathat, Chalieng (fig. 33), which he said

may be an idealized portrait of Ram Khamhaeng's towards the end of his reign. At least its simplicity and dignity accord well with what we know of him from his own inscription (Griswold 1967, 12).





Fig. 31. Stucco head and torso from an image of the Buddha found at Wat Phra Phai Luang, Sukhothai. Ram Khamhaeng National Museum, Sukhothai.



Fig. 32. Stucco image of the seated Buddha at Wat Chang Lom, Old Sawankhalok. Photographed in the 1950s

Griswold also endorsed M. C. Subhadradis Diskul's suggestion that a bronze image of Narāyaṇa in the Bangkok National Museum (fig. 34) should be dated to Ram Khamhaeng's or even Si Intharathit's reign on account of its costume and jewelry.

To the reign of Ram Khamhaeng's son, Loethai (1299–c. 1346), Griswold assigned the present form of the Mahathat at Sukhothai (fig. 5) with its stucco decoration executed by Sinhalese craftsmen, as well as the stone engravings of the *jātakas* decorating the ceiling of the stairway inside the wall of the *mondop* at Wat Si Chum (fig. 27).

Griswold assigned all of the slender *prangs* which he called "lotus-bud shaped reliquary towers" in the Sukhothai kingdoms to King Lithai's (Mahathammaracha I's) reign (1347–1374?). He agreed with Prince Vajiravudh and Coedès that the Mango Grove, where King Lithai had invited the Saṅgharāja from Burma to spend the 1361 rainy season retreat, was in the area presently occupied by Wat Pa Mamuang, Wat Tuk and the Thewalai Mahakaset. All of these monuments he attributed to Lithai's reign. Also the *mondop* at Wat Traphang Thong Lang (fig. 10) is "almost certainly" Lithai's work. Also "all the monuments at the Cetiya Jet Theo (fig. 16) are probably Lu Tai's work, some built when he was Uparāja (heir apparent) at Sajjanalaya in his father's reign, and the rest in his own reign" (Griswold 1967, 43). To Lithai's reign Griswold attributed the high classic style of sculpture which is exemplified by the

bronze walking Buddha at Wat Benchamabopit in Bangkok (fig. 35). He also was unequivocal in stating that the bronze images of Maheśvara (fig. 24) and Viṣṇu (fig. 25) in the Bangkok National Museum, dated by M. C. Subhadradis Diskul to Lithai's reign, were "almost certainly" those that King Lithai had cast in 1349 and placed in the Thewalai Mahakaset in the Mango Grove" (Griswold 1967, 32–33). Apparently Griswold did not accept Prince Damrong's and Coedès's suggestions that the above-mentioned images were found at the San Ta Pha Daeng, but instead were taken from the Thewalai Mahakaset. These images, however, were moved from the Bot Phram in Bangkok to the Bangkok National Museum. Their original provenance is unknown.

Griswold admitted that he did not know of a single monument or statue which could be ascribed with confidence to the reign of Mahathammaracha II (1374?–1398). However, he thought that the *mondop* of Wat Si Chum might qualify for it.

To the reign of King Sai Luthai (Mahathammaracha III, 1398–1419) he assigned Wat Asokaram, Wat Si Phichit Kirti Kanyaram, and Wat Sorasak (fig. 36) on account of the dated inscriptions discovered at these sites.

To the last king of Sukhothai, Mahathammaracha IV (1419–1438), Griswold attributes the "Great Masterpiece of the post-classic," the Phra Phuttha Chinarat image at Phitsanulok.





Fig. 33. Stucco image of the Walking Buddha at Wat Mahathat, Old Sawankhalok, Photographed in the 1950s.



Fig. 34. Phra Narāyaṇa. Bronze, Bangkok National Museum (SK. 21).



Fig. 35. A bronze image of the Walking Buddha. Wat Benchamabophit. Bangkok.

The chronology of Sukhothai-period art and architecture as proposed by Griswold is accepted as the official view by the Thai Fine Arts Department and became standard for subsequent works on the subject, such as M. C. Subhadradis Diskul's *Sukhothai Art*, published by UNESCO, and Carol Stratton and Miriam McNair Scott's *The Art of Sukhothai: Thailand's Golden Age*, published in 1981. Stratton and McNair Scott's book so closely adheres to Griswold's *Towards A History of Sukhodaya Art*, that its only disagreement, the dating of the pyramidal *chedi* at Wat Phra Phai Luang to the late fourteenth or fifteenth century, came as the result of a "personal communication" from Griswold (Stratton and Scott 1981, 95, n. 12). In *Sukhothai: Its History, Culture, and Art*, published in 1991, Betty Gosling follows Griswold's chronology, but adds a number of observations based on the author's own original interpretations of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription.

To King Si Intharathit's reign (mid-thirteenth century) Gosling assigns Wat Araññika, which she states is "the earliest Buddhist temple that the Tai built at Sukhothai" (1991, 22). The author also makes the novel suggestion that the Chedi Kon Laeng (fig. 37) was a shrine dedicated to the tutelary spirit of the kingdom, the "*phi muang*, protector of all Sukhothai's territories." According to Gosling's interpretation of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription, "Sukhothai's *phi muang* dwelt on a mountain called Phra Khaphung, the 'Honoured Lofty Place', located south of the city." Instead of identifying it with the natural mountain, the Khao Luang (Great Mountain) south of the city, like everybody else before her, Gosling identifies it with the laterite base of a *chedi* at Wat Kon Laeng. The author habitually sees the base of a lotus-bud type of *chedi* whose *prang*-type superstructure has fallen down, as a truncated pyramid. Thus the *chedi* at Wat Kon Laeng is a pyramid of four levels with two



Fig. 36. The ruins at Wat Sorasak, Sukhothai, before restoration.

flights of stairs converging at the top, on which ritual sacrifices of animals were performed to appease the “*phi muang*.”

As for King Ram Khamhaeng’s reign (late thirteenth century), Gosling mostly agrees with Coedès’s and Griswold’s identifications, but she differs from them in the attribution of the Mahathat at Chalieng to the *chedi* that Ram Khamhaeng had built in the middle of Si Satchanalai, instead of Wat Chang Lom. She also makes a most original interpretation of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription by identifying the stone slab called “Manangsilabat,” which Ram Khamhaeng had caused to be hewn in the middle of the Sugar Palm Grove, with the base of the Great Reliquary Tower at Wat Mahathat. Thus “Manangsilabat” becomes Ram Khamhaeng’s pyramid, from the top of which “both Ram Khamhaeng and the Sangha [order of monks] roared their doctrines to the people of Sukhothai” (1991, 37).

According to Gosling’s hypothesis, around 1330, in King Loethai’s reign (1299–c. 1346), a reliquary tower with a lotus-bud shaped dome was built on top of the platform of Ram Khamhaeng’s pyramid to enshrine a Buddhist relic. Eight subsidiary towers in Khmer style were built around it, four in the middle and four at the corners, and the base was decorated with stone engravings of *Jātaka* scenes. In the 1340s a Sukhothai monk by the name of Phra Mahāthera Śrīsraddhārājacūlāmuni, who had been to Sri Lanka on pilgrimage, restored the Mahathat. He had the four axial towers decorated with Gampola-style stucco designs by Sinhalese workmen (fig. 6) and had the four corner towers rebuilt in the Sri Vijayan style by workmen from Tenasserim. He also had the stone engravings of the *Jātakas* replaced by a stucco frieze of 168 monks. These engravings of

the *Jātakas* were then put up in the ceiling of the stairway of the *mondop* at Wat Si Chum in the latter part of the fourteenth century. Other Sinhalese influence appearing in this reign is found in the stupa with elephant niches decorating its base, such as at Wat Chang Rob at Sukhothai, which Gosling attributed to Gampola prototypes, such as those at the Lankatilaka (1342) and the Gadaladeniya monasteries (1344). These were built when Gampola was the capital of Sri Lanka from 1341 to 1445.

Gosling attributes to King Lithai’s reign (1347–1374?) the introduction of the *mondop* type of structure, called “Image house,” and adds the *mondop* at Wat Si Thon to Griswold’s list of buildings constructed during this reign. She suggests that in Lithai’s reign bronze sculpture was introduced into Sukhothai from Lān Nā, where there was a longer history of bronze casting, on account of its closer religious and artistic ties with Burma and northern India. Gosling also makes an interesting suggestion that the Phra Phuttha Sihing image in the Bangkok National Museum might have been the palladium image of King Lithai. Contrary to Griswold’s assignment of both the Phra Phuttha Chinarat image at Phitsanulok and the Sṛī Sākyamuni image at Wat Suthat in Bangkok to the fifteenth century, she dates them to Lithai’s reign.

For the reign of King Sai Luthai or Mahathammaracha III, which Gosling dates from 1380 to 1419, she adds to Griswold’s list the Chedi Ha Yot (Five Spires) which is located south of the Great Reliquary Monument in Wat Mahathat. She identifies this stupa with the one mentioned in Inscription XL as enshrining the ashes of King Lithai. However, she assigns the *chedi* at Wat Traphang Ngoen and at Wat Chedi Sung, which Griswold





Fig. 37. The *chedi* at Wat Kon Laeng, Sukhothai.

attributed to Lithai's reign, (1347–1374?) to the 1390s and early fifteenth century respectively. To the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century she dates Wat Mangkon with its ceramic balustrades and Wat Trakuan with its hoard of Lān Nā-style Buddha images as well as the Atthārāsa images at Wat Chetuphon, Wat Phra Yun and Wat Phra Phai Luang.

To the post 1438 period, when Sukhothai became part of the Ayudhya Kingdom, Gosling assigns the easternmost *wihan* of the Mahathat and the *chedis* with rabbeted corners in the same compound as well as the *wihan* at Wat Mai. She also assigns the Wat Chang Lom at Si Satchanalai to the mid or late fifteenth century.

Griswold's revised dating of the pyramidal *chedi* at Wat Phra Phai Luang, Sukhothai, to the late fourteenth or fifteenth century, as quoted in Stratton and McNair Scott's *The Art of Sukhothai*, was challenged by Professor Santi Leksukhum of Silpakorn University, who in a monograph on the stucco sculpture excavated at the pyramidal *chedi*, published in 1987, attributed it to King Lithai's reign (1347–1374?) (Leksukhum 1987). However, in another monograph, entitled *The Chedi Styles at Wat Chedi Chet Thaeo*, published in 1991, Santi fully supported Griswold's dating of the Chedi Chet Thaeo, Si Satchanalai, to the same reign (Leksukhum 1991).



From this brief review of the historiography of the art and architecture of Sukhothai it is evident that scholars have attempted to account for most of the major monuments in the Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai Historical Parks and to place the majority of them within the time frame of the so-called "Sukhothai-period (c. 1220–1438)." It was traditionally understood that Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai were abandoned after 1438 when the Sukhothai Kingdom became an Ayudhyan province. So pervasive was this preconception that even Griswold himself, who had pointed out that seventeenth-century European travelers mentioned the cities of Sukhothai and Sawankhalok, could not visualize that the monuments there could belong to a later period. Hence disagreements among art historians were confined to the differences in their attributions of a given monument to a particular reign of Sukhothai kings. Thus the public owes its knowledge of the history of Sukhothai art to their scholarship. Unfortunately, most of their scholastic endeavours prove to be erroneous, since they are based on a framework built on preconceptions and the supposititious correlation between anonymous monuments and a spurious inscription.

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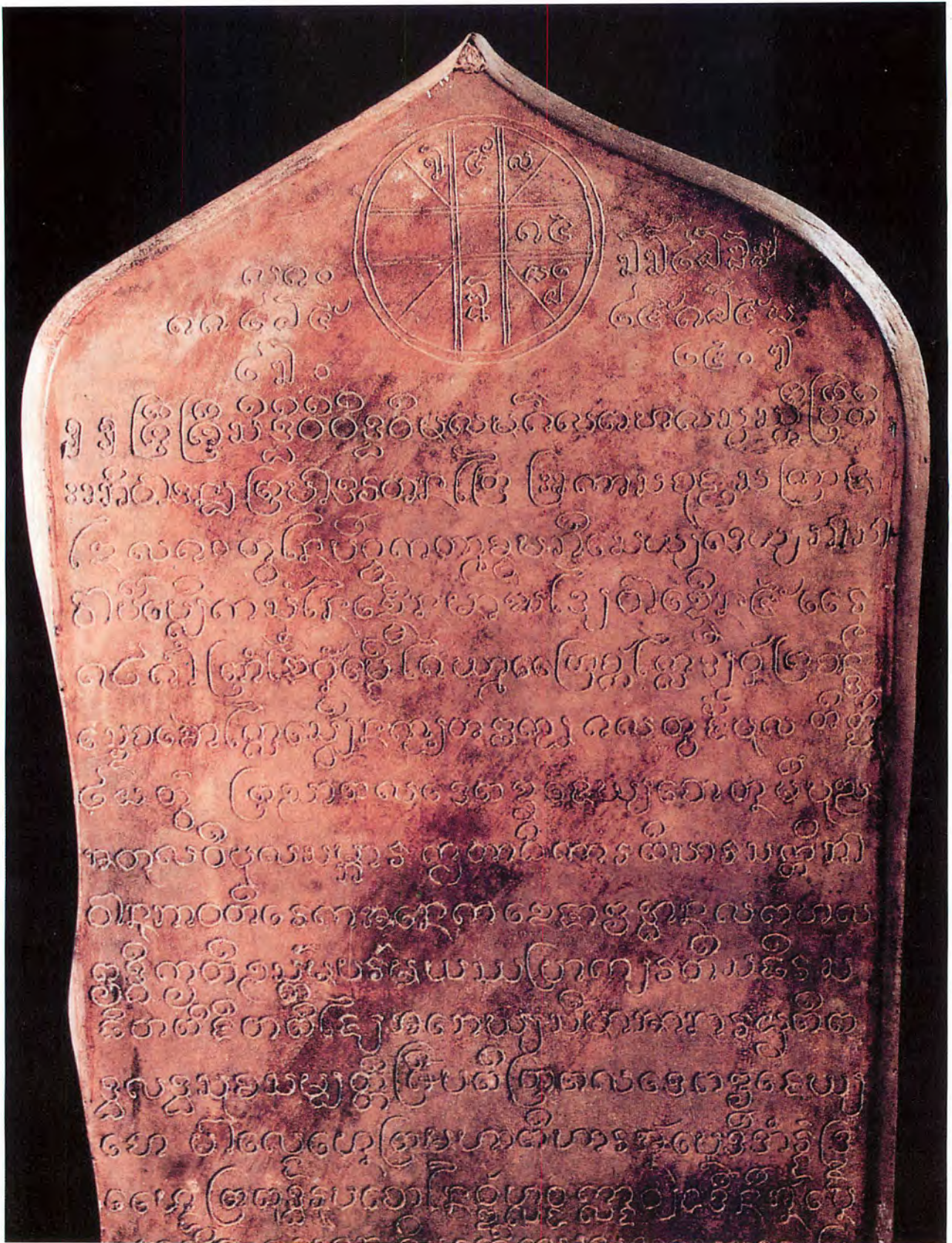


Fig. 1. Inscription of Wat Chang Kham, Nan, dating to 25 January 1549. One of the most elegant and legible in the corpus.