

## Dedication of the *Ubōsot* at Wat Sa Bua Kaeo

### Address by Siam Society President Bilaibhan Sampatisiri

Your Royal Highness

I, Mrs. Bilaibhan Sampatisiri, President of the Siam Society Under Royal Patronage, together with members of the Siam Society Council and others present here are greatly pleased that Your Royal Highness, Princess Galyani Vadhana is honoring us by presiding over this ceremony to raise the *phasat sim* atop the ubosoth of Wat Sa Bua Kaeo and to plant the sapling from the holy Bodhi Tree in Amara-pura in Sri Lanka. Buddhists believe that this is the oldest Bodhi Tree in the world and has a history dating from the time of the Buddha. At this time, I ask your Royal Highness permission to begin the ceremony.

At the end of 1998, the Council of the Siam Society received a report that the *Ubōsot* (known in northeastern Thailand as *sim*) of Wat Sa Bua Kaeo, a small temple in this rural village, had mural on its inside and outside walls. We were told these were charming murals that should be preserved to contribute to the heritage of the community and the nation. We learned a newly built roof, which exposed the exterior murals to the elements, had seriously damaged the pictures. Additionally, the new roof, which was not in keeping with traditional northeastern architecture, was causing the walls on which the murals were drawn to crumble. These problems which required urgent action were beyond the ability of the community to solve on its own.

As a result, the Siam Society Under Royal Patronage, which works to conserve Thailand's arts and culture, devised a project to conserve the murals of Wat Sa Bua Kaeo in as short a time as possible. In this effort, the Society received financial assistance from the Netherlands Ambassador in Thailand, H.E. Mr. Korn Dapparansi, Asia Bank, Malifa Company Ltd., Muang Thai Insurance Company, Ltd., and

Royal Thai governmental agencies in Khon Kaen Province. The Society also drew on its own Mural Conservation Fund. The Siam Society also received assistance from many individuals and institutions that kindly contributed advice and labor. The conservation project commenced in 1999 with the Cassina Company, Ltd undertaking the construction. The budget for the conservation work totalled 2,705,000 baht.

Based on the studies of the project engineer as well as experts on traditional northeastern architecture, it was agreed that the most appropriate method in the case of this temple was to remove the upper structure of the room which had been built in 1997–1998. This was because it was out of proportion with the rest of the structure and because its weight was borne by the walls of the *sim*. Thus it was seen as appropriate to build an entirely new roof, one in the traditional northeastern Thai style such as the original roof of the structure. The use of modern technology and appropriate construction materials made it possible to lift the entire weight of the roof off of the walls. Thus the mural walls were no longer likely to collapse. This appropriate technology enabled the preservation of the lovely interior and exterior murals of this *sim*. This is now a model of local architecture consistent with the former structure which was built in about 1931. It was also possible to upgrade the landscaping around the *sim* to make this a beautiful site for the religious activities of the monks here. This new structure, which is now a source of pride for the community and for the country, is becoming a site for tourists to come and admire.

This project, in addition to receiving the cooperation of Phrakhu Wibun Sarakan, the abbot of Wat Sa Bua Kaeo, benefitted from much assistance by the community. When the ambassador of Sri Lanka in Thailand learned of



the royal visit here to raise the *phasat*, he arranged for a sapling of the Holy Bodhi tree in Amarapura to be presented in the name of his government to Your Royal Highness to plant here on the occasion of this ceremony. This continues a long-standing tradition of the people of Sri Lanka.

Your kindness in coming to preside over this ceremony brings a completely successful conclusion to this project. Much cooperation has been received from everyone. The auspicious Holy Bodhi Tree which will be planted today has a history dating to the time of the Buddha and

brings much merit to the temple and its community to complement the merit gained through its traditional actions from long ago in the past.

All of us and those who have come to join Your Royal Highness here today bear witness to your great kindness. The auspicious moment has arrived for me to request Your Royal Highness to initiate the ceremony of raising the *phasat* atop the *sim* of Wat Sa Bua Kaeo. This fitting conclusion will bring much merit to the community, the temple, and to all of those involved.