

RUINS AT MUANG SING, KANBURI.

When I first suggested to the Council of the Siam Society that it would be well to put on record the existence of the ancient ruins at Muang Sing, I was unaware that they had already been described. His Royal Highness Prince Damrong has, however, kindly lent me a copy of M. de Lajonquière's book:¹ and now all that remains for me to do is to point out errors in the plan and consequently in the description, add one or two important facts—namely the existence of statuary—and give some description of the locality and whereabouts of these ruins, so perhaps enabling others to arrive at conclusions as to their origin and period.

Muang Sing is situated on the east bank of the Quaa Noi river in North Latitude 14°2' and East Longitude 99°15'. It lies 20 miles due west of the modern Muang Kanburi, the latter town being situated at the junction of the Quaa Yai and Quaa Noi, the two branches forming the Meklong river.

The great outer walls measured approximately one kilometre on the side, and are now almost entirely covered with earth and bamboo jungle, remaining merely as huge mounds. At some points, perhaps in the vicinity of gate openings, there were inner walls running parallel to the outer walls but not so large. Without extensive clearing and digging it would not be safe to say whether the original wall was composed of laterite or brick as both occur, or whether an earthen wall was faced with these materials. On the western side the wall is adjacent to, and may have overlooked the river. This is not certain, however, as more detailed levelling might show that the depressed area to the east of the ruins had once been the river bed.

The Temple occupies a fairly central position within the outer walls and is rectangular in plan and oriented truly north and south. The exterior north and south faces measure 41 metres and the eastern and western faces 33 and 33½ metres. On the south face the centre of the doorway is 17 metres from the south-west

¹ "The archaeological possessions of Siam" by M. le Commandant de Lajonquière. Paris 1909.

corner. The block plan made in 1915 shows no opening at all on the outside face of the north wall, nor do I remember one; yet on the internal face of the cloisters exist the "set-offs" for thickened walls, such as would support the "gopura" or tower surmounting a doorway. If there was a doorway on the northern face it was therefore nearly opposite the southern doorway.

The western doorway, of which I made a sketch² in 1914 (Plate I), is in fair preservation, and the centre of the doorway is 16 metres from the S. W. corner of the rectangle, and $17\frac{1}{2}$ metres from the N. W. corner. On the eastern face these measurements are reversed, the centre of the doorway being 16 metres from the N. E. corner. Thus the eastern and western doorways are not opposite one another, and this is I believe an important point in assigning a period to Brahminical work.

The measurements given above are of importance, as apparently M. de Lajonquière made only a hurried survey and measured only one face (probably the western, being in fair preservation) on which he has erected a hypothetical plan of an absolutely square building measuring 33 metres on the external faces, and which he describes as follows:—

"In the centre the square Sanctuary in laterite is open on all its sides; around it extends a system of four galleries, intercepted at the set-off of the axis of the Sanctuary by gopura with lateral halls following the four sides of a quadrilateral; covered galleries unite these gopura with the Sanctuary, the additional rectangular structure opening towards the west is placed in the south-east angle of the enclosure; on the outside, a laterite wall with a coping, which forms the second enclosure, has not been completed but the sras (tank) has been regularly dug out on the west.

"All this is very much in decay, chiefly the Sanctuary and the converging galleries. However when I was able to distinguish the outstanding lines of the building under the mass of fallen stones I perceived, first, that the quadrilateral of the

² I have compared the sketch with a photograph, and find I have omitted the socket holes at the sides wherein formerly was bedded the wooden lintel of the doorway.



Cloisters along the North Wall; view from inside the walls.

(H. N. V. O.)

MUANG SING, KANBURI

“galleries was square and not rectangular; 2nd, that the north and south axis of the Sanctuary was on a median line and had not been turned towards the West; 3rd, that there was no trace of decoration on the doors; 4th, that all the structures had been covered both outside and inside by a layer of lime; 5th, that a fragment of this layer still adheres to the outside cornice of the second terrace of the eastern gopura. There were traces of ornamental design not to be found in the Cambodian decorations. Here we have traces which do not permit of the complete identification of this temple with those built by the Kambujas. Although there was no statue at Muang Sing, only some sunk pedestals of washing basins, one may say that considering its arrangement, this temple was consecrated to the cult of Brahma.”

I have no reason to doubt the measurements given above, which have been taken off a large scale block plan made by the Royal Survey Department in 1915 and which I spent several hours checking myself. M. de Lajonquière's premises may therefore be considered incorrect:—the temple is rectangular. Secondly:—the mass of stones representing the Sanctuary and a small portion of the north-east external corner of the Sanctuary still intact, are immediately north of the southern doorway, and thus the Sanctuary was not on a median line but was some seven metres nearer to the western doorway than to the eastern.

It is doubtful, too, whether the covered galleries, or cloisters, ran the entire length of the outer walls as shown on M. de Lajonquière's plan. In the south-east angle, there would certainly have been room for a gallery, but it would have blocked out all light from the grille window of the isolated library or treasury, and my plan shows no trace of any second wall containing galleries such as occurs on the north side, and also the heaps of fallen masonry diminish in volume at this point.

The gallery in the N. E. corner of the north wall is in good preservation (Plate II) and the plate affords some idea of the size of the laterite blocks employed and of the scheme of decoration.

In the north-west angle the arrangement was somewhat different, the gallery on the western wall having only one doorway, and on the north the gallery wall was thickened out considerably

and projects beyond the general line of the gallery wall in the N. E. angle.

At a point near one of the gallery doorways I dug down a short distance hoping to discover paving, but at a depth of 18 inches the first step of the foundations appeared, and nothing was found save lime mortar and a few broken pieces of coarse red pottery.

The ground level within the temple walls was raised some two or three feet above that of the surrounding courtyard, the latter again being raised slightly above the general level. The doors must therefore have been approached by stairways now obscured. The courtyard is enclosed by a dwarf wall above one and a half metres in height, and portions of which are still standing on all save the western side, but on this side the foundations remain. This wall varied in distance from the temple, on the west being 15 metres distant, on the north and south side 22 metres and on the eastern side 37 metres.

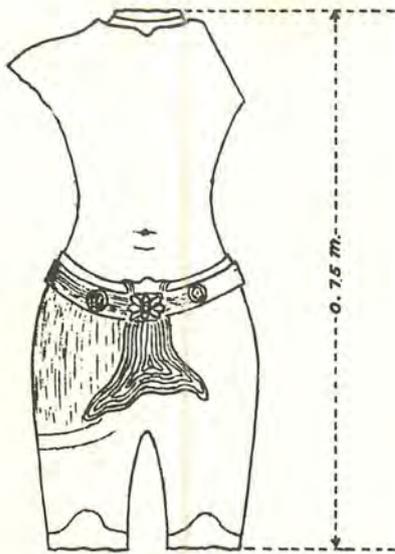
The wall was substantial and had a plinth, and a coping of peculiar design, but I regret to say the sketches have been mislaid.

Outside this dwarf wall on the north side is a square platform composed of laterite blocks, and on these are the remains of a large and a small "Prachedi."

These have fallen in and now present the appearance of hollow craters. In front of these again to the east is a considerable area of low ground, and also to the west of the Temple are other similar areas, which probably indicate "Sahs" or tanks. A little digging was done in these, but again only red pottery was found.

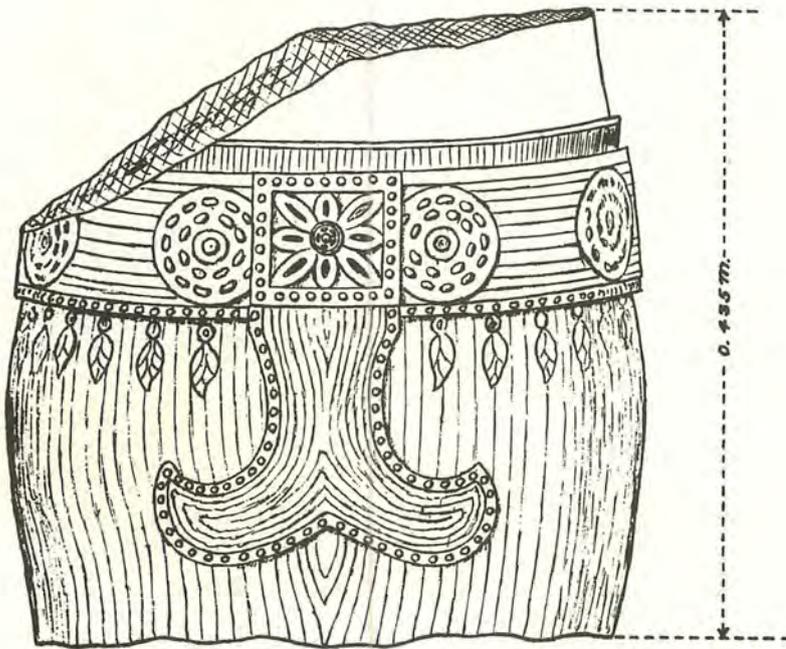
Some time in May 1915, priests or villagers excavated two stone figures (Plate III), the ornamentation still surprizingly sharp. The stone employed was a hard grey sandstone. These were found on the eastern front.

On the eastern tower a good deal of plaster still adheres to the stonework, and it looked as though this plaster had been added at a much later date or had been repaired. Only at one point was ornamental plaster observed, and that the remains of a frieze or cornice, the detail of which is reproduced on Plate I. M. de Lajonquière assumes that the whole building was originally covered



(1) *Stone figure.*

Circumference of waist 0.695m.



(2) *Stone figure Back view.*

Circumference of waist 1.31m.

MUANG SING, KANBURI

Stone figures excavated in 1915.

with plaster; but had the original founders intended to cover the building and use plaster ornamentation they surely would not waste labour in carving so unkind a material as laterite stone. Summing up M. de Lajonquière says:—

“In the south-east angle of a regular inclosure formed by raised pieces of ground which limit an area measuring 4 square kilometres we appear to have one of these Hindu-Brahmin Kingdoms which were plentifully distributed in the Siamese valley before the arrival of the Thais. But what was this Kingdom? I have not found either at Muang Sing or in the surroundings any inscription or indication regarding it. Thirty kilometres to the east on the great arm of the Meklong there certainly existed an old Thai town named Kanchanaburi, which was somewhat famous and seems likewise to have been a King’s residence.” M. de Lajonquière then suggests that perhaps these two towns were contemporaneous, neither being very ancient, and that Muang Sing was perhaps the work of some Cambodian colony brought there in exile after the great wars of freedom.

For this suggestion I can see no justification at all, as it was hardly the custom of mediæval kings to allow exiles to build palaces of stone for themselves within a few kilometres of their capitals. It seems far more probable that Muang Sing was already long in existence and was destroyed by the Thai King of Kanburi, who perhaps afterwards repaired Muang Sing with brick, and held it as an outwork at the mouth of the passes from Tavoy.

As to whether the founders of Muang Sing came from the east, as M. de Lajonquière supposes, or from Tavoy in the west, I am not competent to offer an opinion, but it seems a natural spot to choose as a fort or as a halting place.

On the west bank, opposite Muang Sing, is the mouth of the Me Kraban stream, which rises twelve miles away to the south-west. Near the source of this stream, and opposite a hot-spring, the great dividing range or watershed between Siam and Burma drops to 359 metres above sea level—the lowest pass for several hundred miles north or south. The better known “Amla” pass five miles to the south and the “Bongti” pass, followed by the new

telegraph line, 11 miles to the north, are both over 600 metres in elevation.

The rugged limestone mountains dividing the two branches of the Meklong cease in the latitude of Muang Sing, and on the east bank of the Meklong the continuous mountain ranges extending from several hundred miles to the north cease in this latitude also. Thus Muang Sing probably stood on the route all travellers would take coming from Tavoy in the west, and skirting the foothills on their way to Sri Vijaya (Nakon Patom) and Lopburi.

The Quaa Noi river, on which these ruins stand, is far more navigable than the Quaa Yai, for, although the latter has double the discharge of water, it has a far steeper gradient and many more rapids.

Were the builders of Muang Sing as skilled in the use of timber as in hard stone, a further point which may have appealed to them in choosing this site is that, on the Quaa Noi, teak timber grows in considerable quantities and is easily accessible; whereas on the Quaa Yai, it exists only very much further north and is most difficult to extract.

Persons desirous of visiting these ruins should make for the village of Ta-ki-len near by, and there obtain a guide: as the ruins are overgrown and lie in such a tangle of bamboo jungle that some time may be spent searching for the Temple even when the outer walls have been found and crossed. By following the road from Kanburi to Ta-ki-len the site of the ancient Muang Krut will be crossed. This lies under and to the north of Kow Kaaoh, six kilometres due east of Muang Sing. I did not visit this place myself, but so far as I remember the surveyors reported that there was very little to be seen.

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