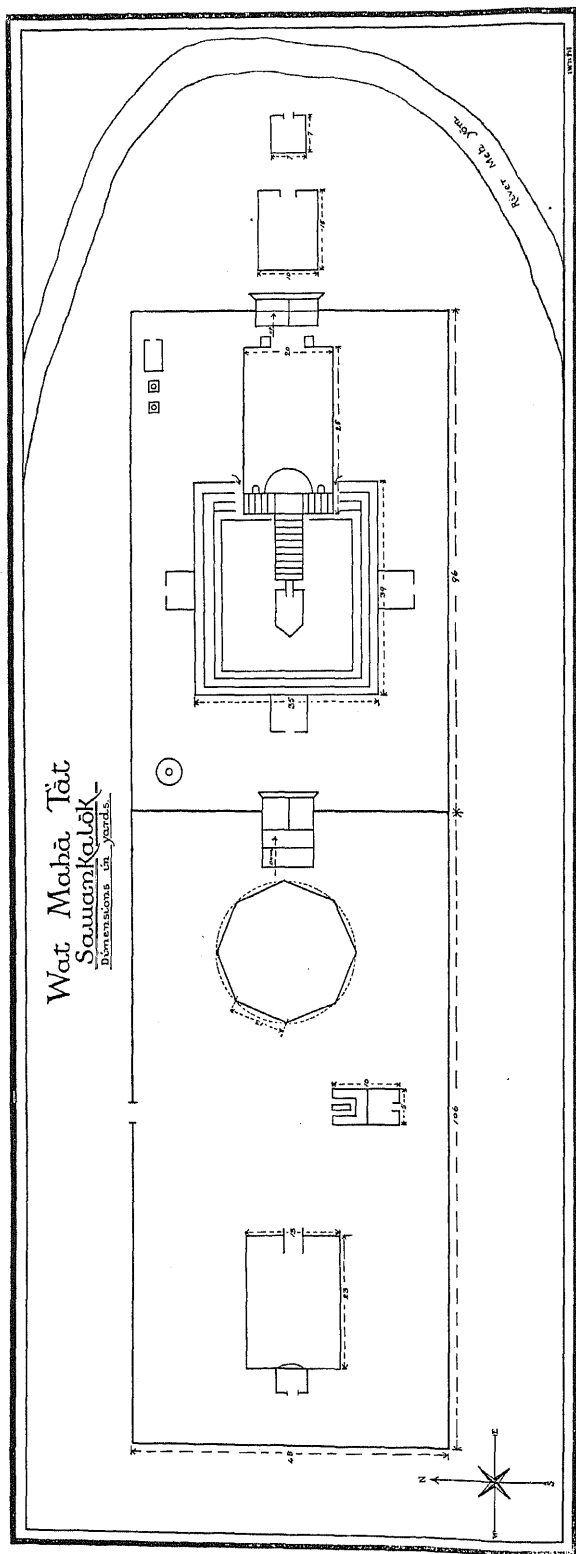


Plate I.



A VISIT TO SAWANKALOK.

Paper read before the Section of Archaeology, History,
Literature and Philology in October 1924,

BY MR. R. S. LE MAY, M. R. A. S.

INTRODUCTION.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your learned Leader and Secretary have both asked me if I would give you some account of the visit I paid to Sāwānkālōk in June 1924, and though I am only too willing to put at your disposal any information I may possess, still, not laying any claims to be considered an archaeologist, it is with some hesitation that I have agreed to do so. As most of you know, His Majesty has written a long, closely reasoned, and most interesting account of the city of Sachanalai (the old name for Sāwānkālōk) in his *การเดินทางไปเมืองสาขานาลัย* (Visit to the Country of Phra Rāang, 1908). In addition, M. de Lajonquière has devoted fifteen pages to the same subject in his 'Essai d'Inventaire Archéologique du Siam'; and, finally, M. Fourneau has put on record a number of excellent plans of the principal temples of the old city, together with a long essay on the Pottery Kilns, which are still to be seen outside the city's walls.

With such formidable names before me, you will understand, therefore, the hesitation I experience in placing before you the few facts which I was able to gather during the short visit that I paid to Sāwānkālōk.

As far as the city itself is concerned, i. e. the walled city of Sachanalai, I spent only an hour or two inside it, during which time I visited the following places in the order given :—*Wāt Chang Lawm* (i. e. the Temple surrounded by Elephants), which I found singularly uninteresting: *Prajeli Chet Tueo*, or the 'Seven Rows of Pagodas,' which entirely captured my imagination, especially a beautiful nichéd Buddha in one of them: *Wāt Sūan Keo Utāyān*, the remains of what must once have been a temple in an unusually picturesque

setting: then, going through the Southern Gate, I came on to *Phra Rūang's Road*, and saw a stretch of the old city wall in a good state of preservation; then returning into the city, I crossed the base of what was said to have been *the King's Palace*, and paid a visit to *Wāt Somdet Nāng Phraya*, or 'The Temple of Her Majesty the Queen', now almost disappearing beneath the undergrowth, but which still possessed some mural decoration in stucco, in fine preservation: and, finally, the '*Lāk Miang*', which one might almost call 'the City's Luck', for no city of olden time was complete without it, and harrowing stories are told of the human sacrifices that were made at the time of its dedication, in propitiation of the 'Phī', and to bring good fortune to the city and its people.

But I had little time to give any of these ancient monuments, now all fast tumbling to utter ruin and decay, more than a passing look, and most of the time at my disposal was divided between *Wāt Mahā Tāt* and the Kilns to the north of the city, outside the walls.

The Temple of '*Mahā-Tāt*', or '*Phră Prāng*' as it is locally called, has been described both by H. M. the King, and M. de Lajonquière; and M. Fournereau gives an excellent plan of it (curiously enough with one small, but important omission) in his '*Le Siam Ancien*', published by the Musée Guimet in 1908.

But still it is, I think, of such interest that a discussion of its details may be carried on for many years yet before the history of its architectural beauties is finally determined.

Also there is no account of it, that I aware of, in English, and these reasons must be, therefore, my apology for speaking of it to-night.

My archaeological notes, then, will be confined to the '*Wāt Mahā Tāt*', which is situated outside the walls, in a narrow bend of the river *Mê Yôm*, and the other remarks which I shall make will be in connection with the Pottery Kilns which existed in former days, and which still require much investigation before their true character and period can be definitely fixed.

This latter is a subject that properly belongs to the Section of Fine Arts, and only recently in February last Mr. Sebastian, who is undertaking a study of *Săwānkālōk* ware, gave us an admirable

lecture on this chapter of Siamese art. But as I have certain interesting objects to show you, and it is not convenient to hold another exhibition of Sāwānkālōk Ware so soon after that given in February, I hope that you will not object to the subject being dealt with in the Archaeological Section. I promise, at any rate, to try and give my words as much of an archaeological smack as will satisfy any possible critics on this point.

In regard to the Pottery Kilns, it may not be known to all of you that in 1900 Sir Thomas Lyle, K. B. E., C. M. G., then H. B. M. Vice Consul in the north of Siam, made a study of the Sāwānkālōk Kilns, at the instance of a Mr. Thomas Boynton, and wrote a report which was afterwards, in April 1901, printed in "Man," a monthly record of Anthropological Science (No. 41): and that a few years afterwards, as the result of a second visit, he supplied to the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain a most detailed account of the Kilns and the situation. This report was made the subject of a paper read before the Japan Society by Mr. C. H. Read on November 10th. 1909.

I will now deal with each of these two subjects in turn.

I. THE TEMPLE OF MAHĀ-TĀT.

For your information, I may say that new Sāwānkālōk lies mostly on the east bank on a bend of the river Mē Yōm, a tributary of the Menam Chao Phraya, and is an hour's run by rail, going almost due west, from Bāndārā, a station on the Northern line, 450 kilometres, or 280 miles, north of Bangkok.

For those desiring to visit Sāwānkālōk nowadays, the mail train on Wednesday or Sunday will bring one to Bāndārā on Thursday or Monday morning at 6.25, or if one prefers to wait at Pitsanulōk, to Bāndārā at 10.21 a. m., and thence to Sāwānkālōk at 11.38 a. m.

To catch the mail train on the return journey, one must leave Sāwānkālōk on Tuesday or Friday at 1 p.m. and wait 3 or 4 hours either at Bāndārā or Pitsanulōk, arriving in Bangkok on Wednesday or Saturday morning. Thus, by leaving Bangkok on Sunday and returning the following Saturday, one can have four full days at Sāwānkālōk.

The town of Sachanalai lies about 18 kilometres, or 12 miles, north of the new town, on the west or right bank of the river, and can now be reached by motor-bus running along what passes for a road by the river bank.

To reach 'Wāt Mahā Tāt', however, you must branch off to the right shortly before you come to the old town, and the tall spire of the 'Prā Prāng' will soon be seen among the trees, standing, as I have said, outside the walls on a peninsula caused by a sharp bend of the river.

Here is a sketch plan of the Temple (*Plate I*),* from which you will gather a fairly clear idea of its general outline.

Going from West to East we have

(1) A 'Wihān', or Assembly Hall, about 70' x 40', with a small chapel attached to it behind: both now complete ruins, except for two Buddhas sitting, one in front of the other, on the main altar, and a part of the wall behind it.

Broken fragments of pillars lying on the floor show that they were formed of round blocks of laterite, from 6 to 8 inches thick, placed on top of one another and covered with cement. I was told by one of the local ancients that the cement in olden times was composed of pulverised stone, mixed with sand, together with 'nam oi' (molasses) and the bark of a certain tree, the name of which was not remembered.

The roof had been of timber, with long eaves, and there were most probably no side walls.

(2) A standing figure of the Buddha, minus the head, surrounded on three sides (i.e. only open in front), and with a small chapel attached to the back. This is called 'Phra-Ong Sao Sip Ha Pee', i. e. 'The 15 year-old girl Buddha,' so called either because the Buddha was erected by, or in honour of, the young daughter of one of the Kings, or because the Image was supposed to represent a girlish figure. Personally I incline to the former view.

Both the above are characteristically 'Thai' in design and feeling.

* The plates for the illustrations to this paper have been made by the Arts and Crafts School, Bangkok.

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(3) *A Stupa or Pagoda*, of a construction most unusual to Siam. The base is octagonal in shape, though this is not very apparent to the casual observer, as the upper portion appears circular. I measured it to be 105 steps in circumference, but M. de Lajonquière states each face to be 15 metres, which would give a total of 120 metres.

The height is, perhaps, between 45 and 50 feet, and the summit, which goes to a point, is reached by a steep, narrow stair-way leading up on the Eastern side to a chamber open to the air by means of four apertures facing the cardinal points.

The building, which is made of bricks of laterite and has no ornamental carving, is composed of a series of terraces, some deep and some quite low, leading up to the chamber, which is surmounted by the 'Yawt,' or pinnacle. As far as I know, it has no counterpart elsewhere in Siam, and in style is more like the great Stupa at Borobodur in Java than any other building known to me. It certainly does not convey any impression of being of 'Thai' architecture, but appears to be much nearer to the original Indian type of stupa.

These three buildings are enclosed by a long but low wall of laterite, measuring 106×48 steps, with an opening in the centre on the north side, and a fine massive double entrance on the eastern side. The low wall is formed of vertical blocks of laterite, with horizontal blocks placed on top.

(4) *The gateway* is formed of three enormous round equidistant blocks, the whole surmounted by two more enormous blocks laid horizontally, with pointed gable ends, and in the centre a splendid pinnacle, showing what I take to be a four-faced Brahma (or Siva), on the analogy of the great figure at Baion, Angkor. At one end the gables have now disappeared.

Going down some steps, which are made of round blocks of laterite placed side by side, and passing through this entrance we come into the second enclosure on a lower level, which contains the great '*Phrā Prāng*,' with the principal '*Wihān*' on the other side.

(5) This '*Phrā Prāng*,' which itself is Brahman-Buddhist in the Thai-Khmer style, is said to be about 200 feet high (though I doubt this) and has no especial features to be observed, except that

there are three small chapels attached, on the south, west, and north sides respectively. It consists of a series of five terraces, then of a platform running round the '*Phrā Prāṅ*' with niches for Buddhas, one on each side except the eastern, and then of another series of terraces finishing in a spire.

Encircling the '*Phrā Prāṅ*' are two ambulatories, both of which once had roofs, with a roofless passage between them. The outer ambulatory, which is 120' × 106', has long slits for windows. Running through the '*Phrā Prāṅ*', at the height of a man, are small rectangular holes, said to have been made for ventilation during and after construction.

I picked up tiles which had fallen from the ambulatory roofs, and found them to be of red semi-stoneware, very strong and resounding, one kind rectangular about 8" × 4" with a ledge, and another of a large semi-circular type.

To the eastern side of the '*Phrā Prāṅ*' the main '*Wihān*' is attached, and behind the central Buddha in the *Wihān* is a double stairway continuing as a narrow flight of steps up to the chamber near the top of the '*Phrā Prāṅ*'. At the top of the steps was once a pair of heavy carved wooden doors (which are now in the Offices of the Administration at New Sāwānkālōk)—then a passage, at the end of which is still a massive teak door, and behind the door a vaulted chamber containing the replica of a '*Phrajedī*', or '*Stupa*', surmounted by a large lotus-blossom, evidently in memory of the builder of the Temple, or some famous King.

(6) The nave of the '*Wihān*', which itself is obviously of much later date than the '*Phrā Prāṅ*', has two rows of five pillars on either side forming side aisles, the inner rows taller than the outer, and is enclosed by side walls, with slit windows like the outer ambulatory. Most of the pillars still stand, and the Image of the Buddha sits in ever imperturbable contemplation on the altar, while to either side of it is a standing Buddha, in good preservation. That to the left, if one faces the Buddha, has a very close resemblance to the type of Supānburi Buddha found on '*Phrā Phim*', and is very graceful in appearance

That to the right is of the formal, more conventional type; but what is remarkable is that immediately behind it there is half of a second standing Buddha to be seen, the lower half of which has sunk deep into the ground. It is difficult to offer any adequate explanation of this singular circumstance.

On a pillar close by the standing Buddha to the left I was shown what appeared to be marks of fingers on the cement, said to have been left by one of the masons. Such imaginative touches do but show how the people cling to the romance of life, and one would not disturb their beliefs for all the archaeological exactitude in the world, for whenever their hands touch this pillar, they are brought into affectionate contact with their forebears of seven centuries ago.

(7) Outside the steps of the '*Wihān*,' going eastwards, are two more pillars of laterite and cement, one on either side, and then we come to the second double-entrance, exactly similar to the one previously described.

The '*Phrā Prāṅg*' and the '*Wihān*' are contained in an enclosure of low laterite walls, which are a continuation of the other enclosure, and in the north-eastern corner of this second enclosure is

(8) a small shrine, containing a beautiful image of the Buddha seated on the seven-headed cobra, beneath the protection of its mighty hood. Behind this shrine, near the low wall, are a series of finely carved, short pillars now mostly in ruins. But there is one intact, with figures in relief of Hindū gods.

Going through the eastern entrance we see the back of

(9) The '*Bōt*,' or 'Consecrated Building,' which in this case is situated outside the main enclosures.

All that is now left, besides the back wall, is the Image of the Buddha on the Altar, portions of pillars, and remains of the eight '*Séma*,' most of them now fallen, which are placed round the '*Bōt*' and mark the limits of the hallowed ground. They are usually flat slabs of stone, shaped like a Bishop's Mitre, set up on stone plinths. The '*Bōt*,' from the remains that are left, appears to have been 'Thai' in style.

Beyond this to the east, at a distance of only some 25 to 30 yards, is

(10) a small building about 20' square, with a vaulted roof, which is called 'Kūt' (कुट) *Phrā Rūang* or 'Phrā Rūang's Sanctuary,' from the fact that it is supposed to have contained an image of the former Phrā Rūang himself, whoever he may have been.

The original image is said to have been stolen, but afterwards a second image was placed in the sanctuary, and this is now in the small Museum attached to the Offices of the Administration.

This building is the "small but important omission" from Fournereau's plan. De Lajonquière says that it is built of laterite, but this is not the impression I have carried away with me of the 'grey stone' appearance of the building. Perhaps it is laterite completely covered with stucco.

There is only one entrance, to the East, with a high pointed arch, and inside there is nothing now but a small altar heaped with remnants of bygone offerings and the usual miscellany of broken articles found in such ruins, although many of these being modern show that the chapel is still used on occasion. The style and decoration of this little sanctuary seemed to me particularly Chinese in appearance and to have but little affinity with the Brahman-Buddhist and 'Thai' structures, to which it is in such close proximity. You have only to look at the rectangular panels on the front of the building (which still show faint traces of Chinese decoration) to become aware of this. It is surrounded by thick jungle, in which I saw lying the heavy knob-like stone pinnacle of the roof of the building.

This completes the tale of the buildings to be seen at 'Wāt Mahā Tāt,' except for one or two unimportant structures, one near the entrance on the north side of the first enclosure, now used as a 'Wihān,' and another ruined 'Phra-jedi' in the north-western corner of the second enclosure.

I would add, as a matter of interest, that the river bank on the southern side is being fast eaten into by the water, and that that portion in the vicinity of the Temple is now strongly buttressed with supports, to obviate any possible danger to the buildings.

Having thus described the Temple of 'Mahā Tāt' with such objects as seemed to me to be worthy of more than passing interest, I would like to draw the attention of the Society to two points, viz.

- (1) the period, or periods, and order of its construction ;
- (2) the architectural types employed.

In his 'Essai' M. de Lajonquière makes no attempt to discuss either of these questions, confining himself to a description of the various temples visited, and obviously leaving the matter open for such discussions as I am raising now : while in M. Fournereau's work there is no text relating to the plan which he gives. His Majesty gives an interesting description of the Temple, which, as He says, is one of the finest monuments in Northern Siam (or, for that matter, in the whole of Siam), and discusses the references to it in the 'Pongsāvēdān Nūa', those mysterious, fascinating, but unreliable Annals of the North.

One of these allusions states that the King "Phraya Dharmaraja Chao (Ba Dharmaraja)" convened a meeting of five Brahmins and gave them orders to build a magnificent Brahman-Buddhist "*Phrū Prāng*."

In His Majesty's opinion, the "*Phrū Prāng*" was built either by Brahmins, as the form is certainly an early Brahmin one, or else by the Khmer, who were very fond of using the Hindu form in the construction of their Stupas. But, in any case, His Majesty considers this Pagoda to be the oldest building of the series, and possibly more than 1,000 years old.

The circular Stupa in the adjoining enclosure His Majesty considers to have been built later and, as it resembles the style of Rāhmān (Môn) Pagodas, to belong to the period round about 1361 A. D., a time when the Môn form of Buddhism was in the ascendant at Sukhōthai. This is the period of one of the Sukhōthai stone inscriptions of the grandson of King Rāma Kāmhaeng. It is said that Rāma Kāmhaeng was under the influence of Buddhism and Buddhist priests from Nakon Sritammarat, but his grandson, King Lū Thai, found his spiritual mentors in Môn priests from Pegu.

There remain for consideration the two '*Wihān*' and '*Phrā Rūang's Sanctuary*', on which His Majesty does not offer any opinion regarding the dates of their construction: but, as He very rightly remarks, it is practically certain that all these buildings were not erected at one and the same time.

I am not here to-night to inflict upon you my own amateur speculations on this subject, but I consider the question to be a most important one, and I wish to suggest to this Section that the whole series of buildings would well merit detailed investigation by some competent critic, versed in the architecture of Siam and the neighbouring countries.

As a rule, the usual order of buildings, if a '*Bōt*' and a '*Wihān*' are both included in a Temple, is for the '*Bōt*' to face the east, with the '*Wihān*' or '*Assembly Hall*' behind it, and with the '*Phrā Prāng*', '*Phrajedi*', or '*Stupa*' behind the '*Wihān*' towards the West, since the '*Stupa*' is always a memorial to somebody who has gone, as we say nowadays, 'towards the West.' But here we have, so to speak, a double series in the form of "*Kūt, Bōt, Wihān, Phrā Prāng, Phrajedi and Wihān.*" I should like to see more light shed on this matter, and especially on the Octagonal Stupa and on the small sanctuary of Phrā Rūang which, as I have mentioned, to me shows a good deal of Chinese influence.

II. THE POTTERY KILNS.

But I have taken up enough of your time with my rough survey of '*Wāt Mahā Tāt*', and will now transport you to the other side of the city, to a spot some four to five miles distant, north-west of the old town, where are situated the larger portion of the once-famous kilns of Sāwānkālōk.

I may mention in passing that the old city more or less follows the river, and that there are brick and earthen walls (กำแพง) on all four sides.

On issuing from the western gate you follow a narrow road for about four or five miles fairly close to the bank of the river going north-west, and presently come to a long row of kilns only distinguishable by the amount of débris and innumerable fragments

of pottery and porcelain strewn about in every direction. The place is so overgrown now with jungle that, without a guide, you might easily pass by without noticing it. As a matter of fact, there are two series of kilns, both outside the western wall of the city, the more well-known one just referred to from four to five miles away, called "Tao Tūriang" (เตาทุเรียน), and the other, less well-known, about a mile from the city, called "Tao Chaliang" (เตาฉะลิ้ง). The more northerly series of kilns may be sub-divided into two sections, one on either side of the present road; but the nearer series is only discernible on the left-hand side of the road going from the city.

I could obtain no explanation of any kind from the local folk regarding the origin of either of these names, of which the second, I believe, is now given for the first time, as far as the kilns are concerned; but Fournereau has a most ingenious interpretation of "Tao Turiang", which he gives as follows:—

"*Tortues qui se meuvent en rangs*"; cette traduction nous "peint bien l'aspect que pouvait présenter l'ensemble de ces fours "qui, par leur calotta elliptique, rappelaient la carapace de la tortue "et par leur alignement sur plusieurs rangs, devaient en effet donner "l'illusion d'une compagnie de ces chelonien."

At once there springs to the imaginative eye a picture of rows and rows of tortoises stretching along the river's bank, and the interpretation might well be maintained but for the unfortunate fact that the philological authorities decline to admit for an instant any affinity between "เตา", a stove or oven, which is of Chinese origin, and "เตา", a tortoise, which is pure 'Thai'. So the man of imagination is once more crushed by the cold man of science! Actually the meaning and origin of "Turiang" is still unknown. But "Chaliang", so H. R. H. Prince Damrong informs me, was the name given to the oldest historical settlement at Sāwānkālōk, before the city of Sri Sachanalai was founded and the river changed its course; and the old name has obviously stuck in the popular mind throughout the succeeding centuries.

As regards the kilns themselves, the more northerly series, on both sides of the road, is well-known; and, whether they were eventually abandoned suddenly by the potters fleeing before the attack of some northern horde, who destroyed the kilns entirely, as Fournereau, de Lajonquière and others suppose; or whether they fell into a peaceful, long drawn out decay, certain it is that the work of destruction has been carried out pretty thoroughly since at the hands of generations of peaceful penetrators with an eye to financial profit at the expense of a little manual toil.

But the kilns nearer the city wall, although in places extensively ravaged, are not so well-known (they are further away from the road and not so easy to find), and I myself saw two high mounds, from which tall trees and great clumps of bamboos were growing, which my guide assured me were untouched kilns; and though the fact of their being untouched may not be literally true, still I feel confident that the labour of digging them out under expert guidance would be amply rewarded, and I have accordingly represented both to Prince Damrong, Phya Nakon Phrā Rām, the Governor of Sawankalōk, and to Professor Coedès, the desirability of the Archaeological Department uncovering these two kilns under expert supervision as soon as conveniently possible, before the peaceful penetrators get their fingers well into them, as they assuredly will before long. I know the question of funds is a difficult one, but the cost should not be prohibitive and the most valuable finds, valuable not only materially but historically, may be awaiting us all under these mysterious mounds. I urge the consideration of this question now, because I feel that time is all important if we are to forestall the acquisitive but unlicensed seeker after "Sāwānkālōk Ware". I should perhaps mention that the local inhabitants *are* forbidden to dig in the neighbourhood of these kilns, but it is easy to see that to enforce such a prohibition the Government would have to enclose the kilns within a rampart of walls and put a battalion of soldiers on guard. Even then the soldiers would constantly be searching to find some method of relieving their tedium!

As regards the construction of the kilns and the type of ware they produced, I am not going to enter into a long discussion on these points here, as ample information has been supplied both by Sir Thomas Lyle in the papers I have referred to, and by M. Fournerneau in his essay on the Sāwānkālōk kilns. In this latter will also be found a detailed and most interesting analysis of the ware by an official of the National Factory at Sèvres in France. No doubt all this evidence will be embodied by Mr. Sebastian in the work he is preparing on this subject.

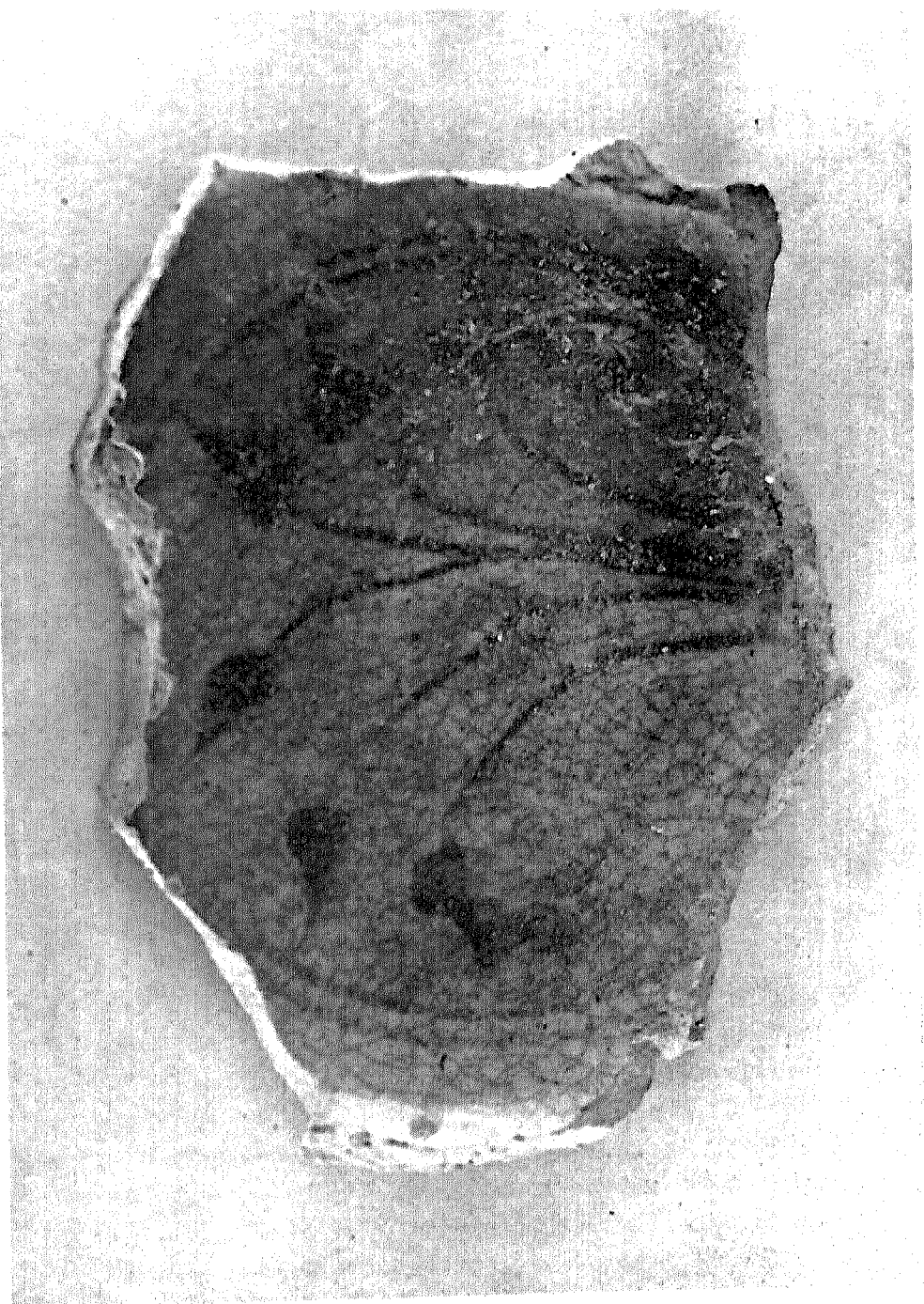
In regard to the types produced, I will only say that I found traces of 'Lai Si' (decorated in colour as opposed to plain celadon) in both series of kilns, but such pieces were far more abundant in that nearer the city wall than in the more northerly one. Also that in the latter, in the section further away from the river, I saw one kiln which had been devoted entirely to the manufacture of a *white-glazed* ware, and another to the manufacture of *covers only* for jars and pots.

I wish rather to talk about two points which are closely connected with one another, namely, the period of manufacture of this porcelain, and the different designs used in decorating the ware.

In connection with the latter point, I found very little of interest in the museum attached to the Administration Offices, and before I left Sāwānkālōk I wrote to the Governor suggesting that, although collection pieces, i.e., untouched and unbroken, were no doubt hard to find and harder still to "keep"; yet that, out of the mass of broken material scattered all over the kilns, it should be possible to bring together in the Museum, within a short space of time and with very little trouble, an admirable collection (1) of shapes and types, (2) of the different glazes used, and (3) of the different designs in vogue, for the purpose of study; and that, in doing so, the Government would be conferring a great boon on all students of Sāwānkālōk ware in this country.

When I say that I was able, in the few hours I spent among the kilns, to pick up not only the specimens of design which are illustrated here, but also many others, it can easily be imagined

Plate II.



what a splendid collection systematic hunting and grouping would produce in the course of a year or two, if only the necessary interest could be roused in the local officials.

Now, as far as the period of manufacture is concerned, opinions are pretty well agreed that the factories must have been started somewhere between the 11th and 13th centuries of the Christian Era, i. e., during the Sung Dynasty in China which lasted from 960 to 1279 A. D., and that the original potters were Chinese, probably brought from China by the 'Thai' King himself or at his instigation. Even the most cursory glance at the pieces exhibited will show the affinity between the Sung and Săwānkālōk wares, and the influence the former had upon the latter.

Now, if corroboration of these facts were needed, I think the piece before you (*Plate II*) will help to supply it. Here you have a spray of lotus buds and stems drawn in a crude and primitive manner, but also free and unconventional, and showing the art of the Chinese potter at a very early stage, still untrammelled by any of the stifling influences which later attacked it. A few ragged lines with blobs at the ends of them — that is all — but the work of an artist all the same, and a Chinese one at that.

But if this ocular evidence satisfies us that Chinese potters with Sung traditions began the work at Săwānkālōk, still we are left in doubt as to how long these kilns remained in existence, and why they came eventually to grief.

Here in the next series of fragments (*Plate III*) can be seen, I think, the transitional period, when the Chinese influence and tradition still persisted, but was growing weaker in the hands of their Sino-Thai successors.

Three pieces will suffice:—

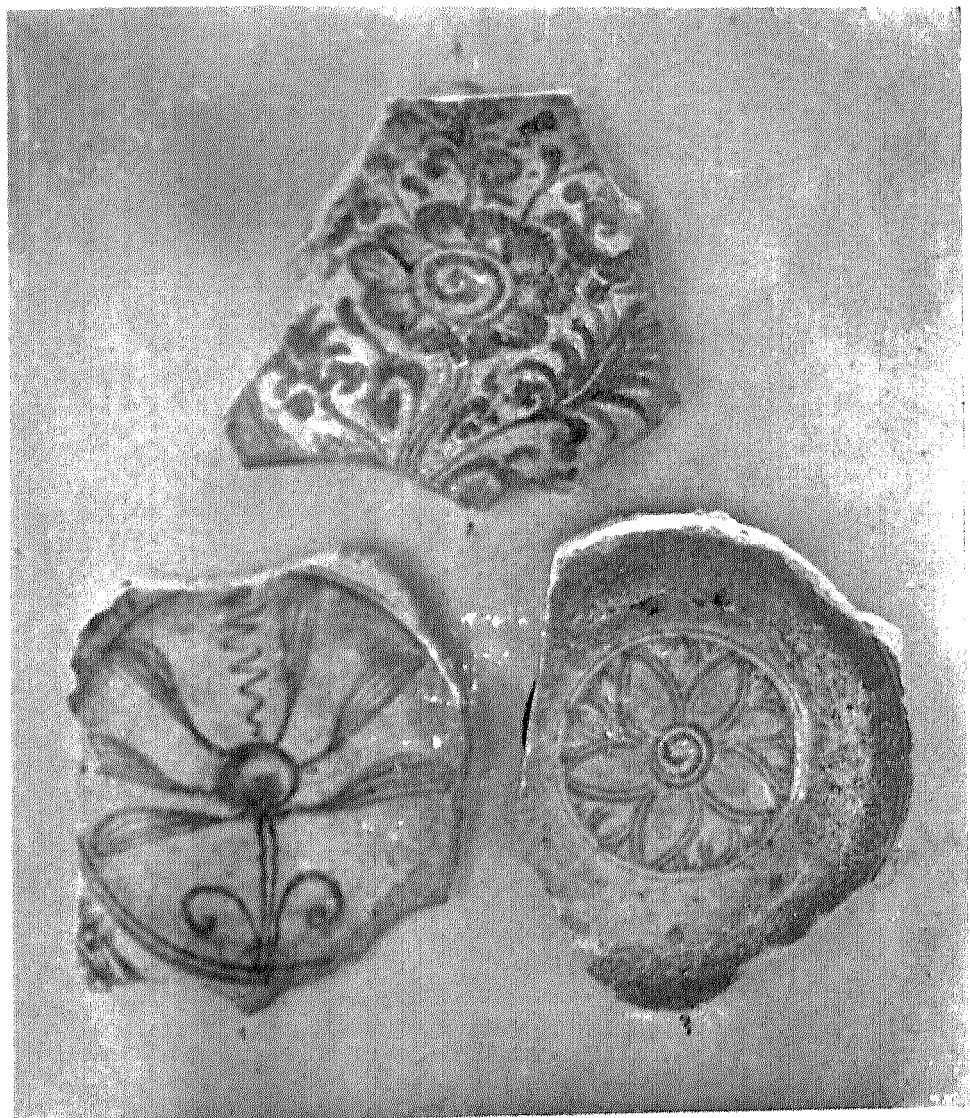
(1) A series of wings like those of a dragon-fly, with a long spiral body, and a geometric head crudely but still more or less freely drawn, i. e., the Chinese influence still predominating.

(2) A large open bloom (possibly an aster) with sprays of leaves surrounding it, less freely drawn but still showing clearly its Chinese origin.

Plate II.



Plate III.



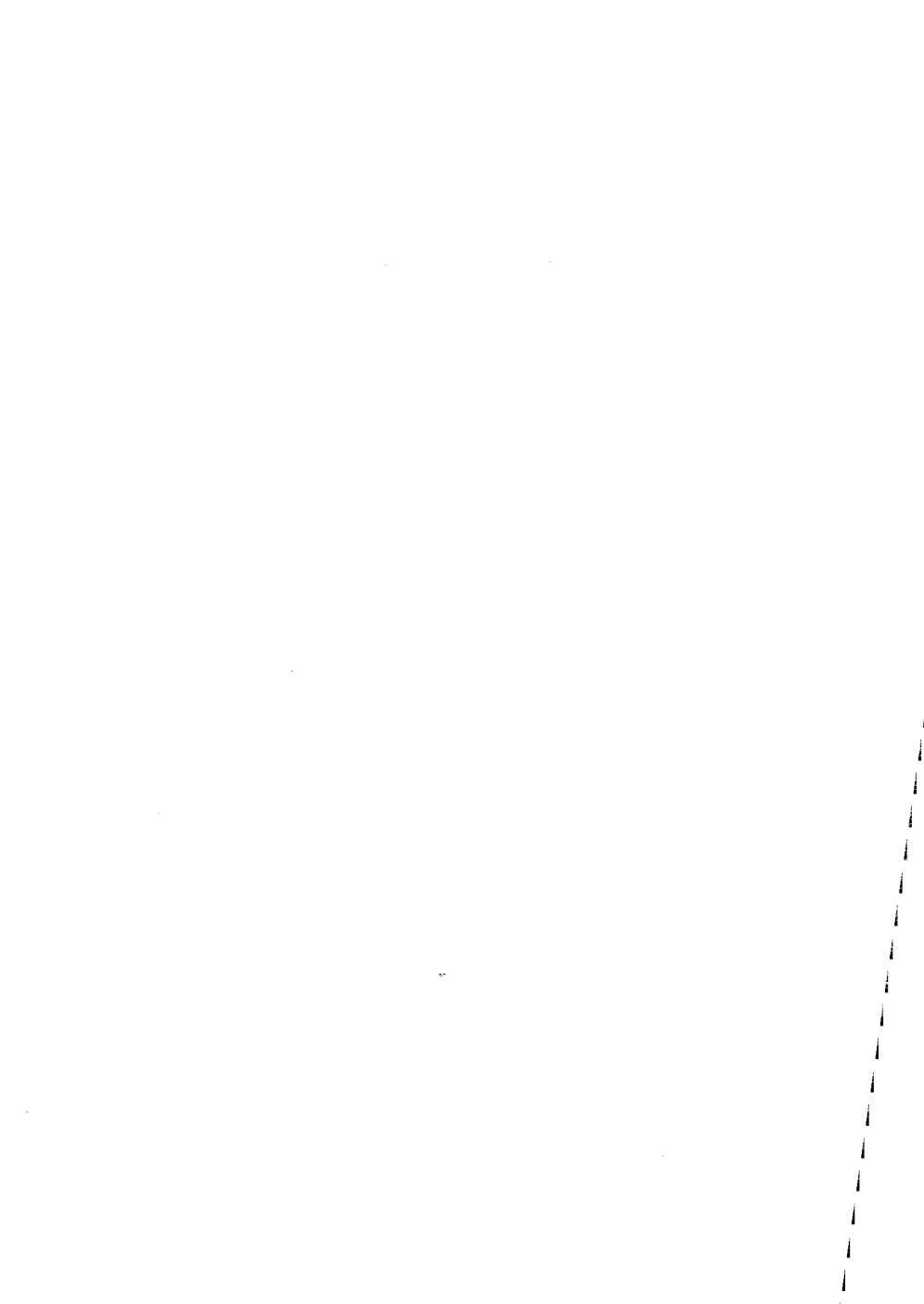


Plate III.

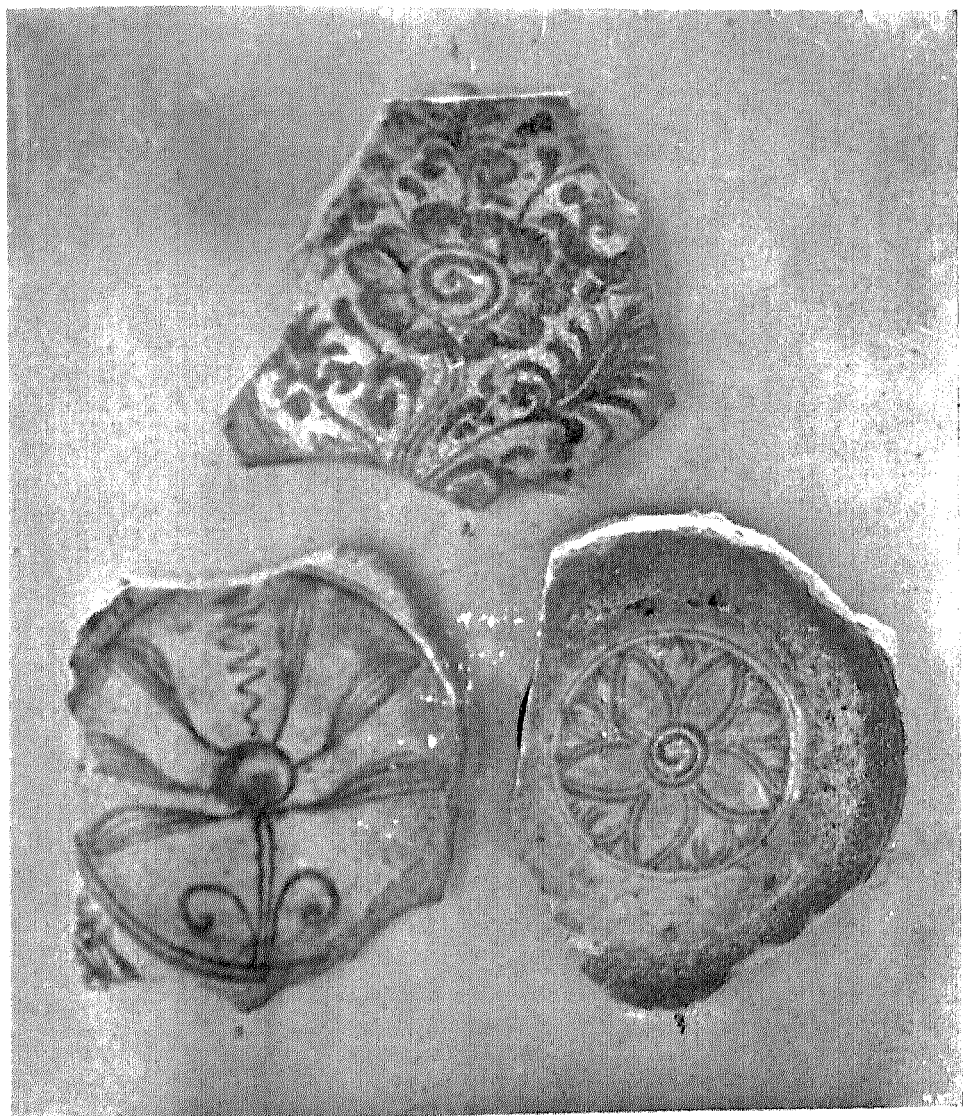
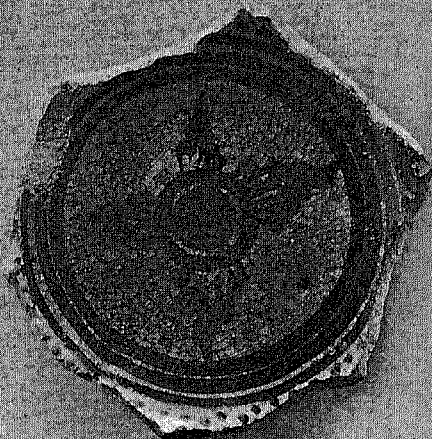
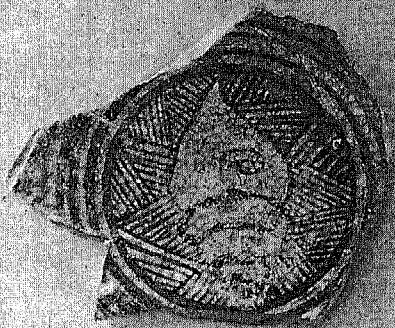
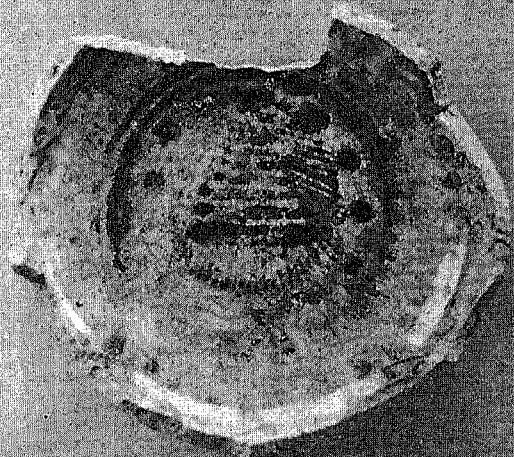


Plate IV.



(3) An open lotus medallion, still showing signs of Chinese influence, but almost conventionalised and fast becoming Siamese or rather "Thai."

Note the Siamese figure 1 (๑) in the centre of the medallion; I am told that this figure is meant to denote '1st class,' or possibly, 'made for Royalty', and although this may have been the case in the first instance, it is probable that its use became general at a later date.

Finally we come to the period when almost the last traces of China have disappeared, and India has come to usurp its place in the mind of the Sāwānkālōk potter. Here in *Plate IV* you may see typical "Thai" motives of Indian origin which have persisted up to the present time — (1) the "Mongkut," or Crown, with rays, which seems to strike a very modern, almost incongruous note among the other ancient symbols; (3) the "Hoi-Sang" or Conch-shell, the decoration around which recalls the "cubist" of to-day; as well as (4) another characteristic 'Thai' motive, borrowed from an Indian source. No. 2 on the Plate will be referred to later, and shown again on a separate Plate.

You have seen enough now, I think, to be satisfied that:—

- a. Sāwānkālōk pottery is a lineal descendant of Sung ware:
- b. the original influence was entirely Chinese; but that
- c. this influence gradually waned in the course of years until the transition was complete and the admixture of Indian influence transformed it into "Thai."

The other question which occupies students now, and which I wish to put before you to-night, is "How long did these kilns remain in working order?"

"Records of the relations between Siam and Foreign Countries," which have been published by the National Library, show that in the latter half of the XVII Century, and possibly before that, this country was exporting to Java and the other islands "Siam jars for green ginger (of good quality and tight)". From this one might infer that the Sāwānkālōk factories were still in existence about 1670; but it is also known, from the same records and from other

sources, that a junk trade had grown up long before with China and Japan, by which large quantities both of Chinese and Japanese porcelain were brought to Siam, both for use in the country, and also for further export to the Middle and Near East generally—Siam acting in this respect in every much the same way as Singapore and Hongkong do now in regard to trade generally. It has, therefore, still to be definitely determined whether these “Siam jars” were actually of Siamese origin, or were made in China and imported here first.

Sāwānkālōk did turn out both ordinary earthenware and also porcelain; or at any rate, if not true porcelain, a very hard ‘porcellanous stoneware’: and would therefore be in a position to export both Siam jars and celadon porcelain; but whether there was any export of the Siamese ware after, say, the year 1500 is a point which to my mind is open to question.

During the course of investigation of this subject I have been much struck by the quantities of rough early Chinese porcelain still to be found in Bangkok to-day — porcelain obviously not imported into Siam in modern times for sale as decorative ornaments but for domestic use at the time of their manufacture. The shapes seen do not appear to be Chinese but to have been made for the Siamese market, in just the same way as were the Chino-Siamese porcelains of the XVIII and XIX centuries. One type frequently seen is a hookah-looking bottle, not, however, intended as a hookah for the Indian market, but as a bottle, or “Phra Tao,” to be used by the King or the Priest for sprinkling holy water. Another type is a round pot, which might very well be called a “Siam jar for green ginger”, for it is of a suitable shape and is covered on the exterior with the Siamese figure 1 (๑) (as in the pieces of Sāwānkālōk ware in Plates III and IV). Yet it is unquestionably of Chinese origin, and probably belongs to an early period, for it shows clearly its kinship with its Sung ancestors. So with the other types met with — most of them appear to have been made for this market, and to be of an early period.



We have thus now a second question to ask, if the evidence given above proves to be correct:—"Why should Siam import all this Chinese ware for use, at what must have been more expensive prices, if she had her own kilns still working and able to supply the home market?"

I do not pretend myself to have come yet to any definite decision on the question of the closing of the Sāwānkālōk kilns, but the presence of these apparently early wares, with Siamese shapes and motives, is beginning to strengthen in my mind the conviction that the indigenous kilns must have been more or less moribund round about 1500. At any rate I feel that these two questions are intimately connected with one another, and if we could settle to our satisfaction the actual period of this early porcelain, we should have the clue to the closing of the Sāwānkālōk kilns.

Now I want to show you an interesting fragment of Sāwānkālōk porcelain, which may have some bearing on the subject under discussion (*Plate V*). It is the only fragment which I have ever seen that has upon it "Thai" writing or figures, other than the figure 1 (๑) already mentioned. The illustration is not very clear, but a close scrutiny will reveal four Siamese figures, as follows:—a large 1 (๑) to the left: a large 6 (๖) to the right: a smaller 9 (๙) below the 1 (๑): and a smaller 6 (๖) below the large 6 (๖). The beetle-like figure in the centre is, I am told, a representation of a "*dawk chawn tarwan*", presumably a kind of "sunflower", and the remainder of the space in the medallion is taken up with what may be small, ill-made Siamese 1's (๑).

Now, how are these figures to be read, and what do they mean?

They may be read in six ways, viz., 1966 (๑๙๖๖), 1669 (๑๖๖๙), 1696 (๑๖๙๖), 6196 (๖๑๙๖), 6691 (๖๖๙๑), or 6169 (๖๑๖๙).

As the 'Thai' language naturally reads from left to right, I think we may eliminate the last three. This leaves us, therefore, with 1966 (๑๙๖๖), 1669 (๑๖๖๙) and 1696 (๑๖๙๖). Can any of these possibly refer to the year of manufacture?

The figures cannot represent the "Mahā Sākārāt," which only began in 78 A. D., or the "Chūlā Sākārāt," which started much later still, in 639 A. D. They could only represent the Buddhist Era, according to which 1669 (๑๖๖๙) would be 798 years ago, or 1126 A. D.; 1696 (๑๖๙๖), would be 1153 A. D.; and 1966 (๑๙๖๖), would be 501 years ago, or 1423 A. D.

The first two of these, 1126 A. D. and 1153 A. D., may be, I think, ruled out, as being altogether too early, for at that date the decoration of Sawānkālōk ware, if such were already in existence, would undoubtedly be pure Chinese in character.

But the later date, 1423 A. D., is a possible one, for it is only 73 years after Ayudhya was founded, and the Sukhōthai and Sawānkālōk period of Siamese history was not yet entirely a thing of the past.

If the theory I am propounding, therefore, is correct, here we have a piece of porcelain, on which the decoration is wholly "Thai" in character, which shows (1) that the Sāwānkālōk kilns were still working in 1423 A. D., and that (2) the Chinese influence had by that time entirely disappeared.

The figures may, of course, have an altogether different significance, but I submit that that which I am suggesting is a possible one and worthy of consideration. It is, to me, impossible to imagine that the potter would use four 'Thai' figures of varying size solely for purposes of decoration, or indeed that he would use them as meaningless signs; but if anyone can suggest a more suitable explanation, I shall be happy to consider it. In any event, whatever the figures may signify, this fragment is, as far as I am aware, unique.

This concludes the notes which I have prepared for discussion, but before I actually close, I cannot help drawing your attention to the large vase before you (*Plate VI*), which I obtained in old Sāwānkālōk.

It is made of a heavy red clay with, I should say, an admixture of stone; that is to say, it is too heavy for ordinary earthenware, and yet it has not the appearance of a true stoneware, but is something betwixt the two. It is covered with an oily, rich, opaque,



Plate VII.



brown glaze, very unlike the rather watery, transparent, green celadon glazes usually seen on Sāwānkālōk ware. This brown glaze was, however, pretty extensively used, as many specimens covered with it are still extant. The extreme lip of the vase has been broken, but in shape and proportions it can, I venture to assert, hold its own with the porcelain of any land or of any age, and the potter who could produce such a work of art deserves far greater appreciation of his merits than has hitherto been accorded him. Perhaps he will receive it one day, if only the ceramic authorities abroad can be persuaded that that this vase actually did come from Sāwānkālōk!

It came into my possession by chance, owing to the breakdown of the motor-car near the old city. While waiting for repairs to be made, I was taken into a kind of general shop by the side of the road where a white-haired kindly old gentleman was induced to exchange this vase, as well as other carefully guarded pieces of pottery from his store-cupboard, for certain magic and all-powerful pieces of paper — but only after he had thoroughly satisfied himself that I was genuinely interested in the old ware, and would not, like the last European to whom he had shown his treasures, dismiss them “*en masse*” as *new*!

Since my return to Bangkok I have come into possession of a figure (*Plate VII*) which I think deserves inclusion in these notes. It was obtained in one of the pawnshops of Bangkok, but it was said to have been brought this year by a priest from Sukhōthai, the sister-city of Sāwānkālōk at the time of its splendour, and actually the residence of the King of the country. It is of baked clay, creamy in tone, with streaks of some brown pigment over it in places, and unglazed. If it was actually made in Sukhōthai (or Sāwānkālōk), it is a unique example of that ware. The figure, which is undoubtedly of considerable age, appears to be that of an Indian hero or demi-god standing on two lions which are resting on a bed of lotus blooms. The left hand is raised and resting on the shoulder, while the right hand holds, apparently, a bottle by its neck. The head is crowned, and round the neck is a double-chain of necklaces. The supple, swaying form is full of life and motion, and the impression given is very pleasing from an artistic point of view.

Mr. Hobson, the Keeper of Ceramics at the British Museum, who has seen a photograph of this figure, is of the opinion that the technique is Chinese; in that case we have, in this earthenware form, an early example of Indo-Chinese Art and one which, of whatever period it may be, will always rank high among its Chinese contemporaries.

Author's Note. It is a very curious fact that, although fragments of bowls covered with painted designs, as shown in Plates II, III, and IV, may be picked up at the kilns themselves in considerable numbers, no such painted bowls, either whole or damaged, are known among the various important collections of Sāwānkālōk porcelain to be seen in Bangkok. Bowls with designs incised in the paste under the glaze are sufficiently plentiful, as are also so-called 'Sukōthai' bowls partly covered with a brown pigment, but bowls with *painted* motifs such as those shown are unknown, and apparently no such specimens have survived. This certainly adds to the interest of the pieces now shown, and may have some bearing upon the questions under discussion.

