

## NOTES AND QUERIES.

## RECENT ARCHEOLOGICAL RESEARCH WORK IN SIAM.

Dr. H. G. Quaritch Wales, Field Director of the Greater India Research Committee, whose activities have been made possible through the munificent assistance of several interested maecenae among them His Highness the Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda, has spent a series of cold seasons on excavation and research work in different parts of Siam during the years 1934 to 1936. The object of this work being to study the influx and penetration of the ancient Indian culture into Indochina and Insulinde.

The reports of this research work have been published in *Indian Art and Letters* Vol. IX, No. 1 and Vol. X, Nos. 1 and 2. (I have not read No. 1 of Vol. X which treats of further excavations at Phong Tük).

The first season's work was confined to the Siamese part of the Malay Peninsula and consisted of some diggings at Thung Tük, Takuapa; <sup>(1)</sup> a survey of the ancient Indian emigrant's route from Takuapa across the hill range and down the Menam Luang to Bandon; further excavations at Vieng Sra and Nakon Sri Thammarat and a study of the architectural and art forms of the temples in and around Chaiya. The conclusions of Dr. Wales' researches are, among others, that Professor Coedès was wrong in placing the capital of the hinduized Malay Empire of Srivijaya at Palembang on the East coast of Sumatra. Dr. Wales opines that Chaiya was the capital of Srivijaya and that from Chaiya radiated the cultural influence which produced the various art and architectural schools that flourished in Cambodia, Champa and Java.

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(1) This site has already been described, though not in detail, by the late Mr. H. G. Scott in *Notes and Queries—Remarks on the land routes across the Malay Peninsula* by Mr. F. H. Giles, *JSS*. Vol. XXVIII, Part 1, 1935, pp. 82-84.

Prof. Cœdès has, however, in his admirable and concise paper *A propos d'une nouvelle théorie sur la site de Srivijaya*<sup>(1)</sup> shown that the Javanese influence in the temple architecture of Chaiya may very well have been due to a reflux, from south to north, of Indian culture which had then already been stamped with the impress of that particular art form which we call the Javanese. Furthermore, and this is the decisive point, the position of Chaiya in a cul-de-sac could never have enabled it to play the rôle as the capital of thalassocracy from where the Maharaja could dominate the States of Malacca. As Prof. Cœdès says:— It is a geographical impossibility! To which all unbiassed students of Indonesian history must agree.

With regard to the famous Sailendra dynasty Prof. Cœdès says that it was probably a Javanese dynasty of which a branch became the sovereigns of the Srivijaya Empire.

As far as we understand the placing of Palembang as the capital of Srivijaya may now, in view of recent finds, have to be given up in favour of another place more rich than Palembang in archeological remains from that time but as this new place is also situated in Sumatra and on the East coast of that island it does not in the main weaken the position of Prof. Cœdès.

Dr. Wales is of course quite right in stressing the importance of Chaiya, which in the 7th–8th century A. D. was most probably a large and populous town situated perhaps at a former outlet of the Menam Luang, and because of its being the terminus of the ancient overland route from Takuapa it must have been a thriving trade emporium.

The numerous ruins of formerly imposing and noble temples as well as the remains of innumerable dykes of ancient paddy fields which overall in the jungle stretching far away to the west of the present town are eloquent witnesses to Chaiya's erstwhile greatness.

The second expedition organized by the Greater India Research Committee, during the winter 1935–36, took Dr. Quaritch Wales and his plucky wife to the ancient now deserted town of Mu'ang Sri Thep (Sri Deva) which is situated on the left bank of the Sak river on its lower course. Here Dr. Wales has done real and meritorious pioneer work. This ancient site had not previously been visited by any competent archeologist with the exception of His Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanubhab who made a brief survey of the old

(1) *JRAS.*, Malayan Branch, Vol. XIV, Part 1, December 1936.

town in the year 1901. Mr. F. H. Giles, the present President of the Siam Society, visited Mu'ang Sri Thep in 1907 but did not study the ruins there; and the Dane, Lieutenant-Colonel J. P. Andersen of the Provincial Gendarmerie, just missed seeing it when on a lengthy inspection tour in 1925.

Dr. Wales is thus the first one to undertake a more thorough-going study of this very interesting ancient place.

Dr. and Mrs. Wales spent 3 weeks at the old town which they mapped out while studying the various temple ruins found there. Dr. Wales recognised two cultural epochs of Sri Deva, as he prefers to call the place: namely, an early one of the 6th century which was Indian and Brahmanical, and a later one which was Khmer and also Brahmanical.

Dr. Wales describes the town plan as typical Indian and non-Khmer. To this we would like to say that the ordinary Khmer towns were generally built in a square and so were the Indian towns too to be in accordance with the *çāstras*.<sup>(1)</sup> The plan of Mu'ang Sri Thep, as given by Dr. Wales, thus rather suggests the outline of one of these prehistoric, more or less circular or eggshaped, fortified places of which a number are met with in the big forest, Khok Luang, that extends to the south of the towns of Khorat, Phimai and Buriram on the north-eastern plateau, and which were probably the work of primitive Khmer or Chaobun (Niakuol).

When the Indian emigrants reached the place where Sri Thep's temples later on were to raise their pinnacles they probably found a not wholly uncivilized Chaobun population living in such an earth-walled town.

Dr. Wales discerns between monuments of pure Indian and of Khmer origin. We shall not occupy ourselves with those of the latter style which are well known to all students of Cambodian art. With regard to the buildings classified by Dr. Wales as being of pure Indian style and said to be strongly reminiscent of the brick temple at Bhitargaon in the Cawnpore district (5th to 6th century A. D.) I would, though not questioning Dr. Wales' or Dr. Stella Kramrisch's authority on Indian temple architecture, suggest that a detailed comparison with the elements of the primitive Khmer style be made

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(1) See Monsieur Victor Goloubew's *Cosmologie et urbanisme chez les Khmers* published in the report on the Congrès International des Sciences anthropologiques et ethnologiques, London 1934.

before the Sri Thep temples are adjudged to be of a purely Indian origin and as such "the ancestral form which, as the result of evolution and the effect of late Pallava influence, produced the rich type of primitive Khmer architecture, and that it alone is the one certain example that remains to witness to the nature of the ancient architecture of Fu-nan" (1) I have not been to Mu'ang Sri Thep myself but by comparing the plan and transverse section given by Dr. Wales (2) with similar plans and transverse sections given by M. Parmentier in his monumental work *L'Art khmer primitif*, (3) and lately in his *Complément à l'art khmer primitif* (4) I was struck by the almost identical traits and even details of the Sri Thep temples and those now recognized to belong to primitive Khmer art.

The above suggestions of mine also hold good with regard to the sculptures as found and described by Dr. Wales.

A visit to Mu'ang Sri Thep by one of the trained archeologists of the École Française d'Extrême Orient would no doubt help to clarify the position, proving or modifying the views as set forth by Dr. Wales.

The author mentions the "Imperial route of ancient Funan" following the Mūn river from east to west and crossing a pass in the hills that form the western escarpment of the Khorat plateau, just opposite Mu'ang Sri Thep. A closer study of that ancient route would perhaps explain the reason for the existence of that row of old strongholds which stretches from Ubonrājadhani in the east to the fortress of Mu'ang Semā Rāng (situated to the north-west of Sung No'n in Khorat) in the west. Were they erected as a protection for that ancient route? I hope in a later paper to be able to treat of the many old fortified places found on the Khorat plateau (as far as memory serves there are more than one hundred of them) of which a certain number might have been constructed for the purpose of protecting the navigation on the Mūn river at a time when this water course was navigable the whole year round and as such constituted an important military as well as commercial high-way.

(1) See *The Exploration of Sri Deva, an Ancient Indian City in Indochina* by Dr. H. G. Quaritch Wales in *Indian Art and Letters*, Vol. X, No. 2, p. 21.

(2) Op. cit. pp. 12 and 18.

(3) Reviewed by the writer in *JSS*, vol. XXII, part 1, 1928.

(4) *BEFEO*, Tome XXXV, 1935.

Dr. Wales, in treating of what he calls the four Main Waves of Indian Cultural Expansion, says that the third wave, which lasted from the sixth to the middle of the eighth century A. D., radiated from the Bay of Bandon on to Cambodia (and Siam?) where in combination with the pre-existing Gupta style of Funan it developed the pre-Khmer or primitive Khmer art.

In my *Complément à l'Inventaire descriptif des monuments du Cambodge* p. 34-35 under "Hin tang," I mentioned a number of standing Buddha images of red sandstone which are found on the plain that expands to the south-west of the road connecting King Ampho' Ban Chuan with Ampho' Chaturat. These images are no doubt in the Gupta style, perhaps modified into the so-called Dvāravatī art, and may go back to the Funan period. In the same treatise I mention also (p. 36) the find of a stela with a Sanskrit inscription hailing from Mu'ang Phu Khio Kao. Prof. Cœdès opines that the form of the letters of this inscription shows that it dates back to the 7th-8th century A. D., and that the king mentioned, Çri Jayasimhāvāmarāja, may have been a local r'chen-la prince.

In connection with the further study of the cultural remains found at Sri Thep it would perhaps be worth while to ponder on the possibilities of a link between Sri Thep and the above mentioned principality.

Dr. Wales has also written an interesting article in "Man" for June 1937 on *Some human skeletons excavated in Siam*. During excavation work carried out at the ancient place at Phong Tük on the banks of the river Meklong in the province of Rajaburi, in Western Siam, during the winter of 1936-37, Dr. Wales' working party dug out at a depth of 4' 8" below ground level 10 human skeletons all lying at full length and with their heads roughly pointing to the west.

Dr. Wales says that according to his calculations this part of the Meklong Valley has been silting up since the 6th century A. D. at the rate of about 1 foot to 450 years, he therefore concludes that these warriors (there were found corroded iron weapons with the skeletons) lived about the 1st century A. D., provided they had not received artificial burial.

In any case he thinks they cannot date from later than the 6th century A. D. As Dr. Cave of the Royal College of Surgeons in London has classified the skulls as belonging to the Thai people. Dr.

Wales draws the conclusion that Thai colonies were already established in the Meklong and Menam Valleys in the early centuries of the Christian Era, a theory which is supported by Mr. F. H. Giles in his *Koh Lak Tradition*<sup>(1)</sup> who goes so far as to say that the existence of these Thai colonies "cannot be doubted". His Highness Prince Dhani Nivat, in *Publications of interest in other Journals* in the same issue of JSS, adds that "in view of Phya Nakon Phra Rām's contentions based upon the evidence of pottery Dr. Wales' contentions would seem to be possible". It will be remembered that the late Phya Nakon Phra Rām in his learned paper on *Tai Pottery*<sup>(2)</sup> contends that Mu'ang Chalieng was founded by Thai emigrants as early as 500 A. D.

Dr. Wales therefore is of the opinion that the existing theories of Thai immigration into Siam should be revised. Instead of a Môn population, as hitherto thought, inhabiting the ancient so-called kingdom of Dvāravatī the finds may indicate that the Môn were only a ruling caste or merely that the Môn language was the fashionable language of that day.

To all this seemingly overwhelming evidence of a Thai people inhabiting even Lower Siam already during the first centuries of the Christian era, instead of a Môn people, there is the following to say:—First of all the position of the above mentioned skeletons, the manner in which they were orientated and the placing of their weapons at their side all prove most emphatically that here is a case of artificial burial. They can not therefore, provided that Dr. Wales' calculations with regard to the deposit of silt are correct, be older than from the century. Next, as long as no more finds of this kind have been made at the same latitude and in the other river valleys, the theory of a settled Thai population in this part of Siam at that far off time should not be accepted in general.

The Thai warriors killed in fighting at Phong Tūk may simply have been a band of adventurers coming down from the far North. Supposing, however, we were to accept the theory that there existed Thai settlements on the lower courses of the rivers Meklong, Suphan and Menam Chao Phya already in the 6th century A. D., then such settlements could only have been few, small and far between. I still

(1) *JSS*. Vol. XXX, part 1, p. 18.

(2) *JSS*. Vol. XXIX, Part 1, p. 23.

believe that the bulk of the population of the so-called Kingdom of Dvāravatī in the 6th century as well as before and after for several centuries, was Mōn or rather a Mōn people mixed with Melanesian or Melanoid elements. For doing so I rely on the evidence of the statuary of that period.

Monsieur Dupont of the Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, Dr. le May and I myself hold that while the earliest Buddha images of Dvāravatī were in pure Gupta style they later on deteriorated and degenerated, taking on a coarse and almost negroid appearance. As M. Dupont says they approached the "national type" in the 9th century. This goes to show that the overwhelming portion of the population inhabiting Siam at that time must have been Mōn and *not* Thai. If otherwise, the images would have born the impress of the features of the Thai.

Finally a word about the date of the foundation of Mu'ang Chalieng. The late Phya Nakon Phra Rām seems to have been very bold in fixing many of his dates for the immigration of the Thai into this country. I believe for instance that the date of the foundation of Mu'ang Chalieng has been antedated by at least a couple of hundreds of years. If there already at 500 A. D. existed a strong Thai power in Chalieng it would hardly have been possible for the petty Mōn kingdom of Lophburi to colonize Northern Siam and establish a kingdom at Harinphūnchai (Lamphūn) and Khelang'kha (Lampang).

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