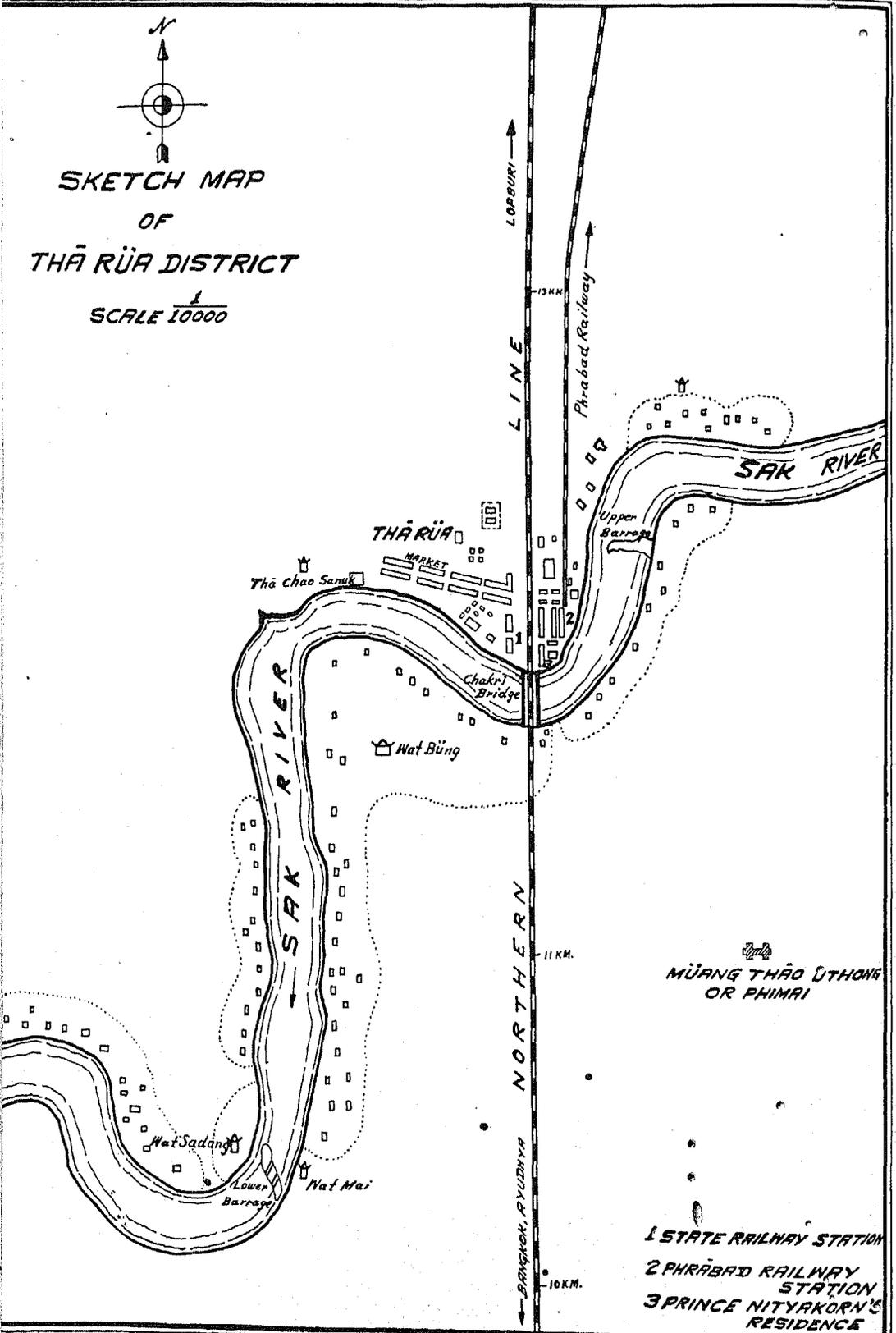


SKETCH MAP
OF
THĀ RŪA DISTRICT
SCALE $\frac{1}{10000}$



MŪANG THĀO ŪTHONG
OR PHIMAI

- 1 STATE RAILWAY STATION
- 2 PHRABAD RAILWAY STATION
- 3 PRINCE NITYAKORN'S RESIDENCE

SOME ANTIQUITIES AT THĀ RŪA.

by

MAJOR ERIK SEIDENFADEN.

1. *Müang Thao Uthong or Phimai.*

During a visit made in July 1933 to my friend, Captain His Serene Highness Prince Nityakorn Voravan, Manager of the Phrabad Railway Co., at Thā Rūa (which really ought to be renamed Nakhon Noi) on the Sak river, he told me that, lying in the midst of the paddy-fields to the south of the river, was a place variously called by the local population Müang Thao Uthong or Phimai. As the Prince thought that there might be ruins of some ancient building in that place we accordingly crossed the river to the opposite (southern) bank and, after having walked over the paddy-fields in a S. S. E. direction for about a quarter of an hour we reached the above mentioned place which can be recognized from a distance by a tall tamarind tree (see photograph I).

The place was, at the time we visited it, overgrown with a maze of thorny scrub, very difficult to penetrate. Besides, the ground was simply swarming with large red ants and vicious looking scorpions.

However, by cutting the jungly growth a little here and there, we soon saw bits of laterite blocks cropping up and, after a cursory measuring up and rough sketch-mapping, I found out that what we had discovered was probably the fundament of a building, shaped roughly like a double cross and of quite a considerable size.

Returning the next day to Bangkok (9/7/33) I reported the find to His Highness Prince Bidyalongkorn, at that time still President of the Royal Institute of Literature, Archæology and Fine Arts, and suggested that the Archæological Service be put to the task of excavating the ruins. A fortnight later Prince Bidyalongkorn, accom-

panied by Luang Boribal Buribhand, Curator of the National Museum, Bangkok, and Mr. A. Forno, the Italian architect, attached to the Royal Institute, paid a visit to the ruins and it was decided to start excavation.

The rainy season, however, soon made such work impossible, and excavation was not begun in earnest until December 1933.

In January 1934, Prince Bidyalongkorn asked me to go up to Thā Rūa and make an inspection of the work of excavation so far carried out. This I did in company with Mr. Forno, and a few days after, I wrote a report to the Prince proposing that the excavations should be continued until at least the contours of the building became clear enough to make possible the drawing up of an exact plan.

The work of excavation was completed during February 1934, though the local people, to begin with, were not much inclined to supply the necessary number of hands, being afraid of the revenge of the *theparaks* or guardian spirits of the ruins.

The following description of the ruins is based partly on personal study and partly on the reports of Luang Boribal, Mr. Forno and Nai Tri Amatyakul (who was in charge of the actual excavations), and I hereby take the opportunity to tender my sincere thanks to His Serene Highness Prince Varnvaidyakorn Voravan, the present President of the Royal Institute, for having kindly allowed me to reproduce the plan of the ruins as drawn up by the Archæological Service. My thanks are also due to Luang Boribal for various valuable assistance rendered. The ruins (see plan) consist of a low earthen platform in the shape of a double cross orientated with its longitudinal axis lying from east to west. On this platform are laterite fundamentals of six separate buildings (or rooms) of which the two largest occupy the longitudinal arm of the platform. The eastern, and longest, of these buildings has two cross branches of two rooms each, altogether four rooms. These arms branch off near the eastern extremity of this building which itself is also prolonged by a single smaller room.

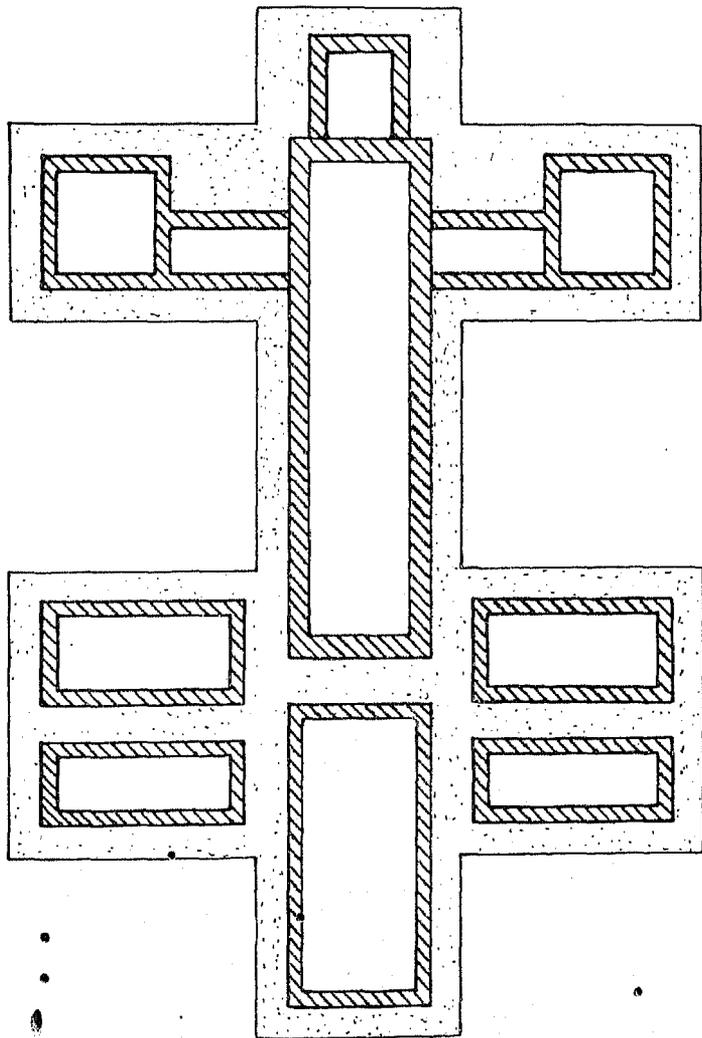
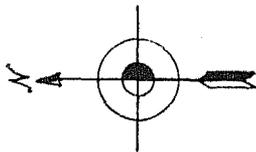
On the branches of the western cross of the platform are the fundamentals of four smaller buildings which flank the second of the two large buildings, two on each side.

The platform was covered with a layer, 50 cm. thick, of laterite gravel bound together with a kind of lime, while the floors inside the various buildings and rooms seem to have been ordinary earthen

PLAN OF THE ANCIENT RUINS

TAMBOL THĒ CHAO SARNUK, THĀ RŪA DISTRICT, CHANGNĀD RYUDHYA.

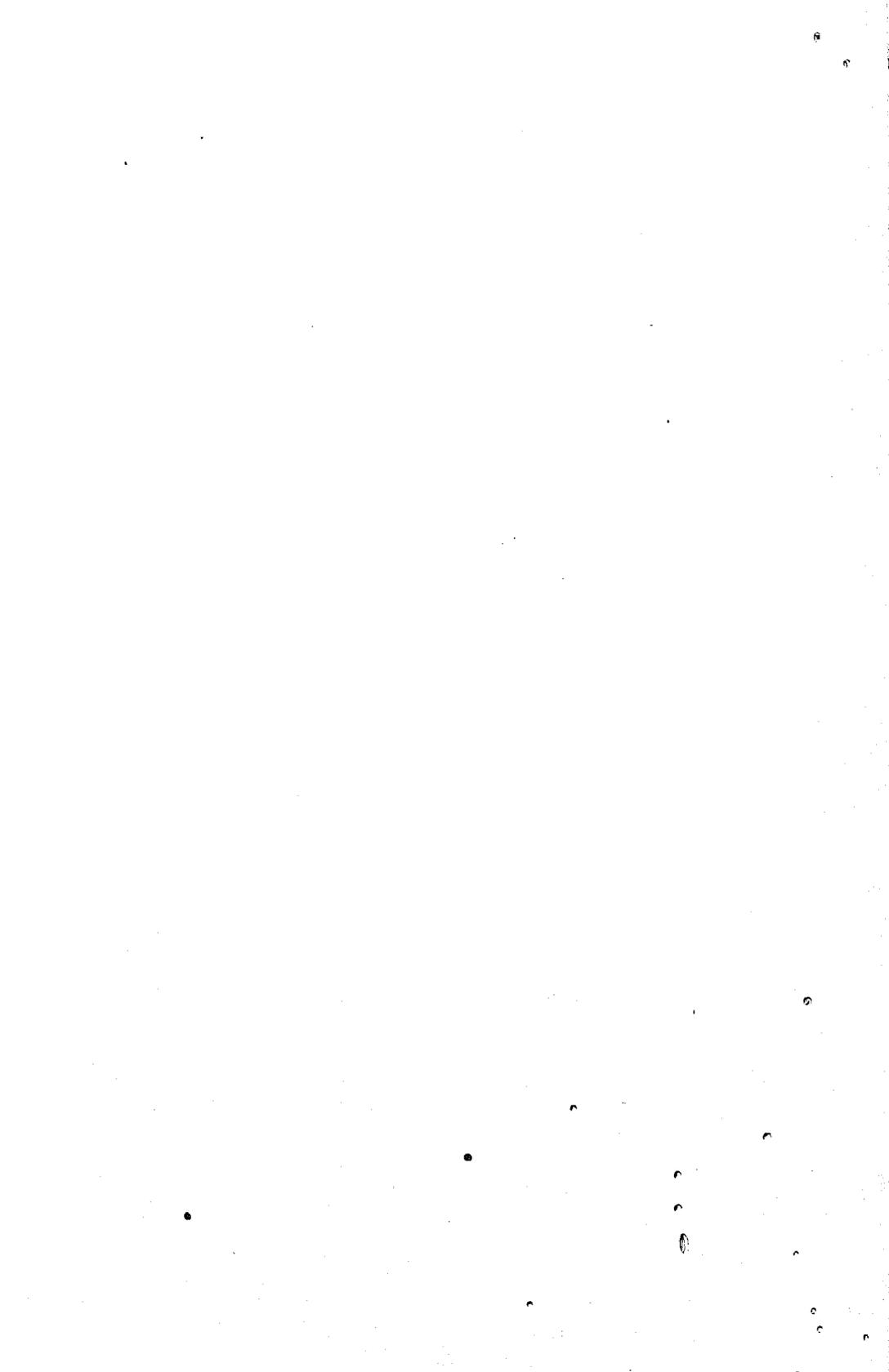
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WALL



PLATFORM COVERED
WITH LATERITE GRAVEL



floors. The platform has a total length (E.-W.) of 86 metres while the two cross branches measure (N.-S.) 56 metres.

When excavation was started remains of the laterite walls of the fundaments were partly visible above ground, and partly hidden under the accumulated earth. By digging it was found that in some places the fundaments had a depth of 1.20 m., in others, 1.00 m. or even 0.50 m. to 0.60 m. only.

The ditches seen at present were dug in order to find the base of the walls, which necessitated in some cases the breaking up of the ground surface of the platform.

The walls are constructed of bricks of laterite bound together by irregular layers of lime mortar of a thickness varying from 3 cm. to 7 cm. The size of these laterite bricks is very uneven, the average being 0.50 m. by 0.25 m., having a thickness of 0.15 to 0.20 m. The laterite bricks are badly made and seem to contain too much earth. At present they are very friable.

In several places the corners of the buildings are not square, which also goes to show that the builders of this place were untrained amateurs or that the building was a temporary structure hastily erected.

As stated in my report (9/1/34) to H. H. Prince Bidyalongkorn, I am of the opinion that the builders were Thai, which is proved by the inferior make of the building materials and the employment of lime mortar for binding the bricks together. If the builders had been Khmer the laterite blocks would have been of a more even size and better finished, and no lime mortar would have been employed as binding material.

The buildings, therefore, seem to belong to that transitory stage when the Thai, after having gained the upper hand in the Menam Valley by the middle of the 13th century A.D., tried to copy the architectural style and building technique of their former masters, the Khmer,—as we know, without any great success.

The double cross form of the platform is well known from a great number of Cambodian temples.

Luang Boribal, the learned curator of the National Museum and Chief of the Archæological Service, is of the opinion that the buildings at Mûang Thao Uthong were never finished, and he may be right.

To my mind, however, these laterite walls may have been used as the sub-structure for one large or several smaller wooden buildings, what in Siamese is called a *tammak*. The non-discovery of any tiles or débris of tiles does not disprove this assumption of mine, as the roofs may very well have been thatched with attap leaves or even with straw. This theory of mine does not exclude the possibility of the foundations having originally been made with the idea of building a temple on them. One must then assume that the work was stopped for some reason or other and afterwards the foundations were used for the constructions of a *tammak*.

The name of (Müang) Thao Uthong no doubt stands for Phra Chao Uthong, later King Ramathibodi I, the founder of the first Ayudhyan dynasty and builder of the new capital of Dvaravati Sri Ayudhya in 1350 A. D.

It is well known that this king, during his wars of conquest and expansion, also conquered Lopburi, at that time governed by another Thai prince who was a vassal of Cambodia. King Uthong probably led his army partly over land, partly by river (the Nam Sak), up to the place where the ruins, called after him, are now situated. Here he could assemble his troops and prepare the advance on Lopburi—which would probably involve the conquest of the temple fortress, now called Khu Müang, (see *JSS. XXVII, 1*)—protected against sudden attacks by the river along whose southern bank his vanguard would have been posted.

The assumed *tammak* built of wood resting on the laterite sub-structure would then have been the king's headquarters during the war against Lopburi.

During the excavations, fragments of Sawankhalok ware were found, which shows that the building was erected at the earliest about A. D. 1300. We do not know the date of the conquest of Lopburi by King Uthong but it certainly took place not a few years prior to his founding of Ayudhya.

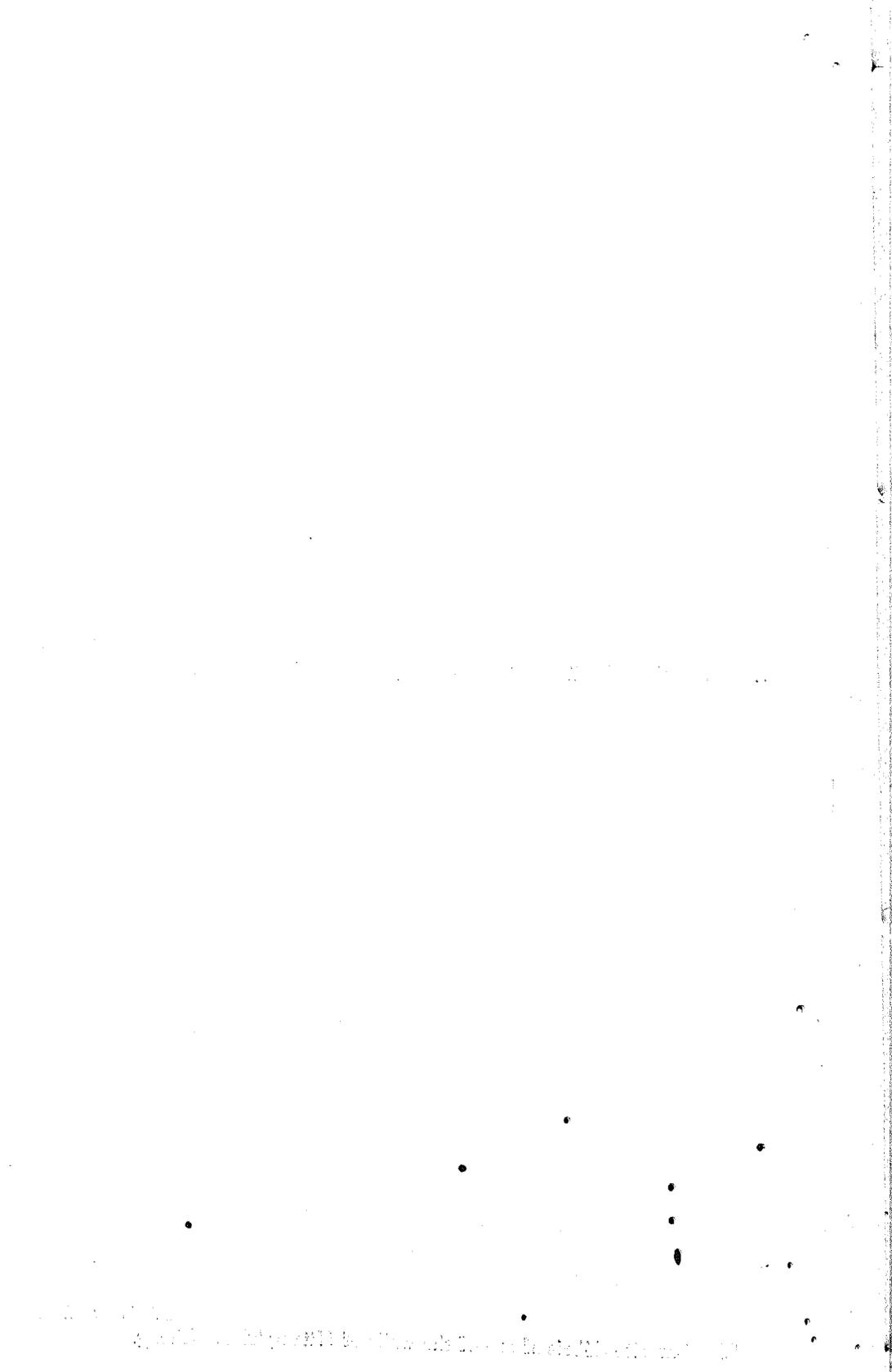
With regard to the other popular name of the ruins, Müang Phimai, the explanation is more difficult to give. The name Phimai is found, as far as I know, in two other places in the kingdom: first of all as that of the well known temple city in Changvad Nakhon Rajasima, and next within the confines of Changvad Khukhandh, Amphoe Huay Nüa, where there is a *tambol* called Phimai after a small Khmer village so named.



I. The ruins of Mûang Thao Uthong or Phimai, seen from the west. *Photo by E. S.*



II. Laterite débris of one of the walls of Mûang Thao Uthong. *Photo by E. S.*



The word Phimai is a corruption of Vimaya, the name of a god, or rather Bodhisattva, whose image was formerly placed in the central sanctuary (tower) of the Phimai temple about 1108 A. D. (vide *An excursion to Phimai* by Major Erik Seidenfaden, *JSS. XVII, 1, p. 10.*) As the cult of Bodhisattvas was very popular at certain periods in ancient Cambodia the name of the said village may have some connection with this cult. I have not yet been to that village myself, but it might be useful to investigate whether or not there are any temple ruins nearby.

Though the predominating form of Buddhism in ancient Dvaravati was that of Hinayana, the cult of Bodhisattvas may have been introduced here when the Khmer, about 1000 A. D., brought this old Môn kingdom under their rule. As already stated above, due to the amateurish manner of construction and the poor materials used, I do not believe that the ruins at Müang Thao Uthong or Phimai are of Khmer handiwork. There may, however, have stood on the same place a wooden sanctuary, hallowed by a Bodhisattva which had disappeared before King Uthong's *tamnak* was constructed.

The peasants in the region of Thā Rūa were unable to give any explanations whatever with regard to the origin of the names of the ruins.

Lying on the right bank of the Sak river, not far below the Chakri railway bridge, spanning the river at Thā Rūa, and in the same tambol as Müang Thao Uthong or Phimai, are a few remains of the former Royal palace at Thā Chao Sanuk.

In the golden days of Ayudhya, *the incomparable*, the Siamese Kings, when going on pilgrimage to the temple of the holy footprint of the Buddha in the hills at Phrabād, used to rest over night in their palace at Thā Chao Sanuk (The landing place of royal pleasure). The journey from Ayudhya to Thā Chao Sanuk was made by boat in one day (and a whole fleet of magnificent war canoes was commandeered for that purpose) with a halt at noon at Nakhon Luang, that miniature imitation of Angkor built by King Narayana (1657-1688). From Thā Chao Sanuk the royal procession went by elephant right up to the gilt *wandapa* containing the sacred footprint. Nowadays very little is left of the former royal rest house. A few scattered bricks is all that remains of a place once teeming with life and courtly splendour.

II. The stone barrages in the Sak river.

Some years ago Prince Nityakorn drew my attention to two peculiar submerged stone barrages, by local people called Saphan Hin, i. e. Stone Bridges, which cross the river from bank to bank in two different places. The first one is situated above the railway bridge at Thā Rūa at a distance from the latter of 500 m. (as measured along the northern or right bank of the river): the second is situated about 3 km. below the railway bridge spanning the river between the two temples, called Wat Sadang (right bank) and Wat Mai (left bank). These stone barrages are always submerged but it has nevertheless been possible to examine and study them in some detail.

The following measurements have been mostly taken by Prince Nityakorn to whom my sincere thanks are due for his interest and kind co-operation in many ways. The sketch map accompanying this note is also drawn by the Prince.

The upper barrage or submerged wall had originally a length of about 50 m. (from bank to bank of the river), but a gap 20 m. wide was blasted through the portion nearest to the right bank in 1917 by the Royal Irrigation Department. This was done in order to enable their steam launches to pass through when towing the cargo boats heavily loaded with materials for the construction of the great sluice works at Thā Luang. As the water level over the barrages during the months from February to April is often less than one metre it will be seen that the operation carried out by the R. I. D. was very necessary. There is also a gap of some 10 metres between the barrage and the left bank of the river. This seems, however, to be a natural one caused by the collapse of the original river bank. This gap is not navigable for launches, the water being too shallow.

The height of the barrage, measured from the river bottom to its top, is 1.40 m. and has an average breadth of 12.40 m. The barrage is constructed of large laterite blocks measuring 3.15 m. by 1.00 m. (the thickness is unknown, measurement having been omitted). In the middle of the barrage is a rectangular hole 5 m. by 3 m. and having a depth of 1.10 m. During the month of February 1935, when the water-level was particularly low, about 70 cm. only over the top of the barrage, I walked barefooted over a portion of it and by the help of my hands I convinced myself that this barrage was really man-made and not a natural rocky reef, as I could feel the regular joints between the blocks of which it is constructed.

The second lower barrage between Wat Sadang and Wat Mai is of about the same dimensions as the upper one, being also provided with a gap in the portion nearest the right river bank. This gap was blasted by the R. I. D. too in order to facilitate navigation during the dry season. Besides this gap there are three others made by the boat-people frequenting this river. These passages were made by removing the laterite blocks by hand power. Furthermore it must be noted that this lower barrage does not span the river in a straight, but in an oblique line.

We now come to the question:—Who were the builders of these barrages, which represent a no mean effort, and for what purpose were they built?

The reply to the first part of the question is that the Khmer were probably the builders as they excelled in laterite constructions and were not afraid of undertaking even difficult engineering work.

With regard to the second part of the question, the answer is more difficult to give.

If the barrages were destined for irrigation purposes, then their present height would have been far from sufficient, but the barrages may, of course, have had a super-construction of wood, a weir in fact, which would enable their constructors to lift the water level up to that required for irrigation purposes.

Another possible explanation is that as, at the time when the Khmer seized the power over the Menam plain, i. e. more than nine hundred years ago, the tide bringing the salt water with it went much higher up than is now the case, these barrages were constructed in order to keep the river water sweet during the dry season. I am indebted for this latter suggestion to Mr. C. D. Gee, Consulting Engineer to the Royal Irrigation Department.

Bangkok, May 1936.

