

Prasat Kamphaeng Yai in Northeastern Thailand

BY PROFESSOR M.C. SUBHADRADIS DISKUL

P_{rasat}

Kamphaeng Yai is situated in Amphoe Utumphorn Phisai in the province of Sisaket, northeastern Thailand. It is a Khmer monument. According to one inscription on a door-jamb of an eastern *gopara* (gate) of the eastern gallery surrounding the monument, it was founded in Hinduism. The inscription is composed of about 35 lines in Khmer language which reports the purchase of pieces of land in 1042 A.D. by Vra Kamraten An Sivadasa and three other dignitaries. These pieces of land were marked and dedicated to the sanctuary of Vrddhesvara (Siva). After listing the names of the slaves dedicated to the sanctuary, the text enumerates the animals and objects given to the former owners, by those who bought the land. (G. Coedes: *Inscriptions du Cambodge* Vol. VI, pp. 251-253, 1954).

Prasat Kamphaeng Yai is built on a strange plan (fig. 1). In the front stand three towers facing east and built on the same laterite base (fig. 2). The walls of the central *prasat* are composed of stone and brick which are characteristic of Khmer temples in northeastern Thailand (fig. 3). In the back stands one isolated tower of brick instead of two, in the south. The north tower might not have yet been built or perhaps has already collapsed. On the east of the plan exist two so-called libraries facing west towards the main *prang*. All the towers are surrounded by rectangular laterite galleries 54x62 meters, provided with four gates, each in one direction of the compass (fig. 4).

Though the restoration of this Prasat Kamphaeng Yai by the Thai Fine Arts Department has created much controversy, during the excavation many sculptures on stone pediments and lintels were discovered, which I will describe here.

As has been said the walls of the central *prang* are composed of brick and sandstone (fig. 3). The lintel on the east side had not yet been carved but on the pediment exist some figures which are difficult to identify. The central figure might represent a dancing Siva, to whom the monument is dedicated. The

door-columns, the pilasters on both sides of the main doorway and the base of the building are well-carved. The inner lintel of this main shrine is a superb piece of work, perhaps one of the best in Thailand, featuring Indra, the god of the east, riding a one-headed elephant towards the south (fig. 5). Beneath Indra is depicted the Kala (a monster face without the lower jaw) head flanked by two standing lions

remains a reminiscence of a vertical floral pendant this lintel should be attributed to the early 11th century as denoted in the stone inscription.

The pediment on the south side of the main *prang* depicts Siva riding on the bull Nandin and flanked by attendants. There is a most extraordinary lintel underneath. This lintel depicts in a garden at Langka, Hanuman, the white chief monkey in the Ramayana epic, presenting a ring to Sita, the heroine, who is accompanied by Trijata, depicted here with three heads and a female attendant (fig. 6). This scene has been carved on pediments in Cambodia but this is the first time it has been discovered in Thailand. Below the scene exists a face of Kala who spews a garland towards each side of the lintel. This design can be again dated to the Khmer Baphuon style (11th century).

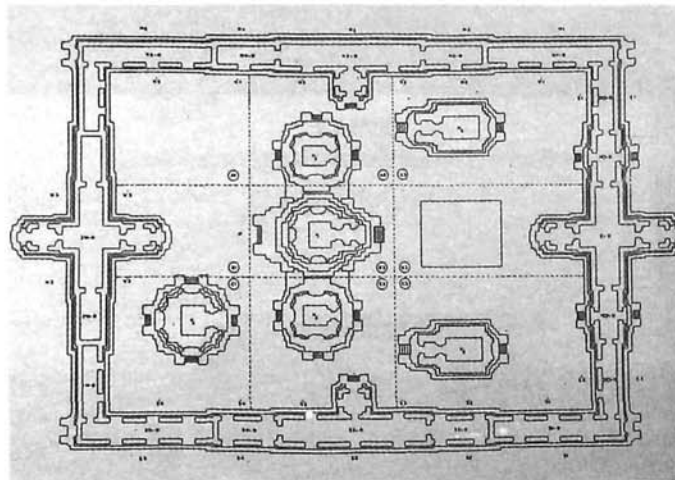


FIGURE 1
PLAN OF PRASAT KAMPHAENG YAI

spewing a garland each. These two garlands terminate into the mouth of a standing lion at each end of the lintel. Indra is flanked by three personages holding regalia. A *garuda* stands inside a frame on each side of Indra. The whole lintel is decorated with scrolls and foliage motifs. Judging from the designs this lintel should belong to the Khmer Baphuon style (11th century A.D.). And since at its quarter there

The western lintel is difficult to interpret. The central motif over the face of Kala might represent the fighting scene of Krishna. The pediment on the northern side depicts Krishna holding Mount Govardhana with his right hand, in order to protect the cows and the cowherds from the rain caused by Indra (fig. 7). The uplifted right hand might again be regarded as unusual because Krishna would normally be depicted holding the mountain with his left



FIGURE 2
FRONT PART OF PRASAT KAMPHAENG YAI



FIGURE 3
WALL OF THE MAIN SHRINE OF PRASAT
KAMPHAENG YAI



FIGURE 4
LATERITE GALLERIES AROUND PRASAT KAMPHAENG
YAI



FIGURE 5
INNER LINTEL OF THE MAIN PRANG REPRESENTING
INDRA.



FIGURE 6
LINTEL ON THE SOUTH OF THE MAIN PRANG DEPICTING HANUMAN
PRESENTING A RING TO SITA.



FIGURE 7
NORTHERN PEDIMENT OF THE MAIN PRANG REPRESENTING KRISHNA
UPHOLDING MOUNT GOVARDHANA.



FIGURE 8
WESTERN LINTEL OF THE NORTHERN LIBRARY
DEPICTING THE STORY OF KRISHNA.



FIGURE 9
INNER LINTEL OF THE NORTHERN LIBRARY
DEPICTING RECLINING VISHNU.



FIGURE 10
WESTERN LINTEL OF THE SOUTHERN LIBRARY
DEPICTING THE SCENE OF GAJALAKSHMI.



FIGURE 11
INNER LINTEL OF THE SOUTHERN LIBRARY DEPICTING SIVA AND UMA
RIDING ON THE BULL NANDIN.



FIGURE 12
STONE SEATED BUDDHA IMAGE
PROTECTED BY THE NAGA UNEARTHED IN
FRONT OF THE CENTRAL MAIN SHRINE OF
PRASAT KAMPHAENG YAI. NOW
INSTALLED IN THE NEW UBOSOTH.

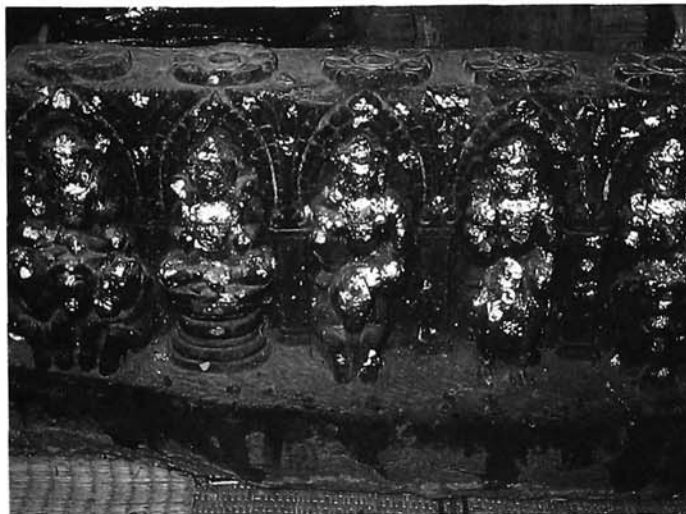


FIGURE 13
STONE SCULPTURE REPRESENTING NINE DIVINITIES (HERE ONLY FIVE FROM
THE RIGHT CAN BE SEEN). PRESERVED IN THE NEW UBOSOTH.

hand. The scene on the lintel below in the upper register above the Kala face and floral motifs, is quite difficult to identify. It probably represents a scene from Krishna's life.

The northern *prang* of this group is built of brick and is smaller than the central one. The single lintel on its east side is quite difficult to identify because of its dilapidated state. One can however say that it belongs to the 11th century. As for the eastern lintel of the southern *prang* one can describe the same condition.

The isolated southern *prang* at the back of the three above-mentioned is also smaller than the main central *prang* in front and its only eastern lintel is not yet carved.

Now we come to the northern rectangular library which is built of brick and has a porch on its west side. The stone lintel of the porch represents in the centre Krishna fighting with the king of the Hayas (horses) upon the face of Kala, who spews two garlands, one on each side of the lintel (fig. 8). A deity in a flying position appears on each upper side. This lintel again dates back to the 11th century. The most interesting lintel is located in the inner room and depicts Vishnu reclining upon the five-headed Naga. He is being tended by three wives and two male attendants on his right. Brahma is seated upon a lotus which comes out from the navel of Vishnu. One interesting characteristic is that Vishnu is using his feet to push up the breasts of his second wife, which might be Bhumi

Devi. This scene might be called erotic. This aspect never figures in Khmer art in Cambodia (fig. 9).

The front lintel of the porch of the library on the southern side represents the scene of Gajalakshmi. Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, is seated on a throne and being sprinkled with lustral water by two elephants (fig. 10). This scene surmounts the face of Kala who as usual spews two garlands. There is a dancing figure at each of the upper quarters of the lintel. Two seated figures are also depicted, each at the upper corner of the scene. This Gajalakshmi representation on a lintel can be reckoned as the first one ever found in Thailand. The inner lintel represents Siva and Uma riding on the bull Nandin. They are flanked by five seated attendants both on the right and the left. These attendants are holding *religia* for the god (fig. 11).

As has been mentioned, this temple was originally founded in Hinduism but during the reign of King Jayavarman VII (late 12th - early 13th centuries) who practised Mahayana Buddhism, this Hindu sanctuary was probably converted into a Buddhist shrine. At one time the Buddhist monastery that moved into the Prasat Kamphaeng Yai site at a later date built a *vihara* in front of the main central *prang* inside the surrounding galleries. A seated stone Buddha image protected by the Naga 1.33 m. high was unearthed (fig. 12). The effigy belongs to the Khmer Bayon style of King Jayavarman VII so it can be surmised that the Prasat Kamphaeng Yai Hindu shrine was converted into

a Buddhist monastery during that period. The statue is now preserved in the new *ubosoth* built outside the laterite galleries on the east side. Unfortunately it is all covered with gold leaves.

There is another interesting stone sculpture kept in the new *ubosoth*. This piece depicts nine divinities riding on their mounts, in a row. Unfortunately they are again covered with gold leaves. One can however perceive that there are four planets, two at each end. The right side represents the gods of the sun and the moon and the left side Rahu and Ketu. The five gods of the directions are in the centre led by Indra, the god of the east, riding on the elephant in the middle (fig. 13). This rectangular piece shows clearly that it is not a lintel. Apart from a projecting part at the bottom it also has a lotus carved above each head of the divinity. It is probably a votive offering of the same kind of sculpture with an inscription on it discovered at Prasat Ak Yum in Cambodia. (J. Boisselier: *Manuel d'Archeologie*, Tome 1, Le Cambodge, pp. 292-293, 1966).

At Prasat Kamphaeng Yai was also recently discovered an important bronze image of a *dvarapala* (door-guardian) 1.84 m. high near the southern gate of the gallery. Those who are interested in this statue should read the article of the same writer entitled "Thailand: Recent Finds at the Sanctuary of Kamphaeng Yai" in *SPAFA DIGEST*, Vol. XI No. 2, 1990, pp. 2-6. The statue also dates back to the 11th century.