

The Archaeology of Professor
M.C. SUBHADRADIS DISKUL

about

Thailand: Recent Finds at the Sanctuary of
Kampeang Yai

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Thailand : Recent Finds at the Sanctuary of Kampaeng Yai

by M.C. Subhadradis Diskul

A new bronze image was discovered near the southern gate (gopura) of the galleries around Prasat Kampaeng Yai, (Sanctuary of Kampaeng Yai) on 17 May 1989.

Prasat Kampaeng Yai is located in Amphoe Utomporn Pisai, Sisaket Province in the northeastern part of Thailand. In front of the sanctuary are three towers or *prang* built in a row. There is also one in the back, at the southwestern corner. These four *prang* face the east. And facing the west, in the front, are two more structures known as libraries (see plan).

Since Kampaeng Yai is a Khmer sanctuary, one should expect to find another *prang* at the northwestern corner. This, however, cannot be found. And whether or not this *prang* crumbled down and was never constructed, is as yet unknown.

The lintel, on the northern library represents the reclining Vishnu. The one on the south represents Siva and his consort. Both of them are seen riding on the bull named Nandin. Anyhow, the lintel of the central sanctuary, which is still *in situ*, depicts Indra. Indra is the god of the eastern direction. He is seen riding upon his elephant mount, Airavata, among foliage scrolls.

Interestingly, all the *prang* are built in bricks but the pediments, lintels and door-columns as well as



Fig. 1 The 140 cm. high bronze statue found at Prasat Kampaeng Yai in the province of Sisaket, northeast of Thailand.

the surrounding galleries are carved from sandstone. From the stone carving Prasat Kampaeng Yai can be dated back to the end of the 10th and the early 11th centuries A.D. (Khmer Khleang - Baphuon styles).

On a door-jamb of the eastern gate at the galleries, there also exists a Khmer inscription. And as Professor George Coedes has deciphered, its date is equivalent to 1042 A.D. This Khmer inscription is composed of about 35 lines in Khmer language. It relates the buying of lands in 1042 A.D., by Vrah Kammraten An Sivadasa with the help of three other dignitaries. The lands mentioned were marked, as described on the inscription, and were dedicated to the God Vrddhesvara. (G. Coedes : *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. VI (1954) p. 251)

Of all the findings at Kampaeng Yai Sanctuary the standing bronze statue, discovered near the southern gate of the gallery, is most outstanding. The statue, standing 184 cm. high (140 cm. for the body, 10 cm. for the base and 34 cm. for the tenon underneath), was discovered near the southern gate of the gallery. Surprisingly, the statue was only 10 cm. under the ground, the original level of the sanctuary.

No doubt, the statue represents a standing *dvarapala* (door-guardian). Its left hand rests on the left hip. But the upper part of this arm has been

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Fig. 2 The missing “butterfly knot” on the back of the statue’s belt characterizes the Khmer Baphuon style.

is typical of the Khmer Baphuon style as it curves down deeply on the abdomen, and rises rather high on the back. The “butterfly knot” on the back of the belt characterizes the Khmer Baphuon style. It was probably cast apart and then joined to the body but has later disappeared (Fig. 2).

The face again typically denotes the Khmer Baphuon style. The style is especially obvious in the technique of inserting more precious metals, such as gold or silver, as inlay for the eyebrows, the eyes, moustache and the beard (Fig. 4).

Professor Jean Boisselier, a French expert on Khmer art, has written an article on this statue. His article is divided into three sections: technique of the execution, icono-

graphy and problems of conservation, and the presentation of the statue.

In his article Professor Boisselier writes that the statue was casted, with earth and an iron axis inside. According to him, it is the only known example of a large sized Khmer bronze statue formed with this technique of casting. Therefore, one should x-ray the statue in order to find out the nature of the interior parts.

The standing bronze image of Bodhisattva, found at Ban Fai in the province of Buriram, Northeastern Thailand, should also be x-rayed to find out whether it was casted in the ancient tradition of Northeastern Thailand or in an innovation of the Khmer Baphuon style.

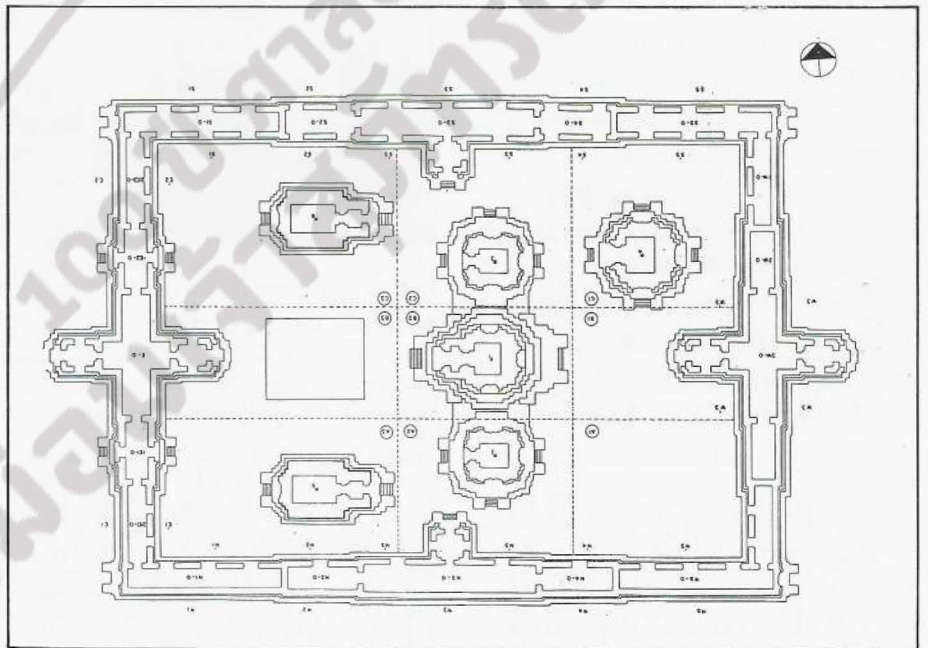
The professor reminds that the large reclining Vishnu image, discovered at Prasat Western Mebon in Cambodia, was casted in the *cire perdue* method. It is hollow inside. The bronze images of the Bodhisattva, found at Prakhon Chai in the

broken and the lower half of the right arm has disappeared.

The statue is standing straight but, curiously, the front part of its right foot protrudes out of the pedestal (Fig. 1). This statue must have, originally, worn a diadem. Anyhow, on the back part of the head one can still see vertical lines of braided hair, bordered by a small beaded rim.

The statue is wearing a necklace, two armlets, a belt and two anklets. The necklace has no pendants on the front but is decorated with nine of them on the back. The necklace and the two armlets are ornamented with large floral motifs at the middle but the anklets are simple.

The belt is decorated with oval designs, hanging floral pendants underneath, and a buckle. The dress



Plan of the Sanctuary of Kampaeng Yai

same province of Buriram, used the same method of casting. It also has a small iron axis inside.

From these small sized statues, 45 to 50 cm., it seems this method of casting was already used in North-eastern Thailand between the eighth to the ninth centuries A.D.

Then Professor Boisselier explains further on the statue at Kampaeng Yai Sanctuary. Because of the attitude and gesture of the statue, he says it could be identified as a *dvarapala*.

The form of the statue's hair might be a *jatamukuta* (crown of hair) or a *Kintamukuta* (a cylindrical hat), decorated with semi-precious gems. As for the attribute on the right hand, noticeably, there is no trace of it on the pedestal. The front part of the arm might have been hanging down. But this gesture, although it exists in the Indian Chola style, has not been found in the Khmer art.

The front part of the statue's right arm might be folded and may be jutting out at the same level with the waist. If so, this latter gesture is for a *dvarapala*. A *dvarapala* holds a club. But as has been said there is no trace of a club on the pedestal, neither on top nor on the lateral side.

There is one *Durga Mahisurasuramardini* (Uma killing a buffalodemon) in bronze, dated about the middle of the tenth century. In this statue, the club rests on a lotus, the stem of which is attached to the lateral side of the base. From here there are now two possibilities :

1. The statue at Kampaeng Yai Sanctuary might be holding a small club vertically. There are many bronze examples of Khmer divinities holding a club vertically. These statues date back to about the 12th century A.D.

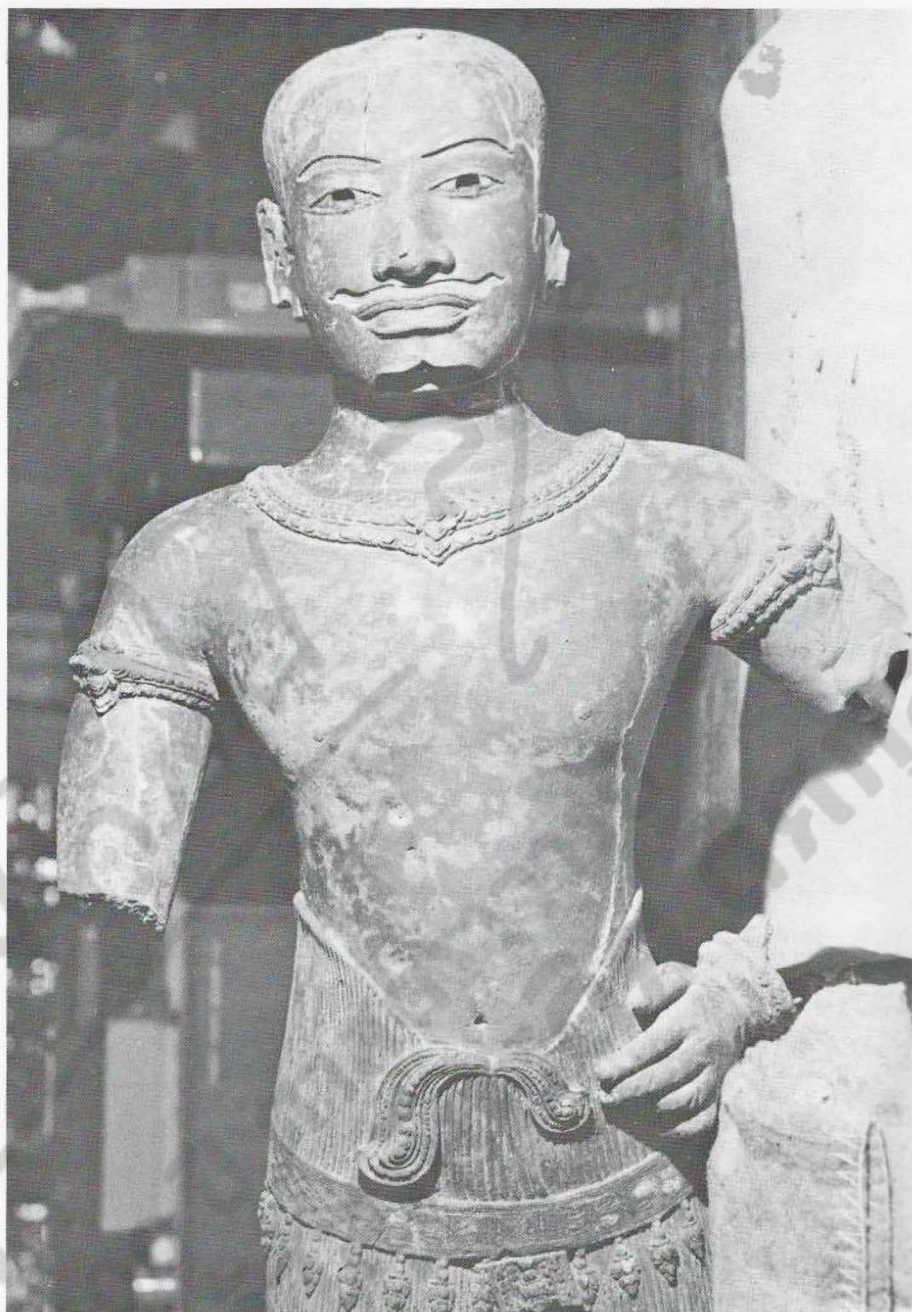


Fig. 3 Because of its attitude and gesture, this statue could be identified as a *dvarapala* (door-guardian).

But they are quite small images.

2. The attribute of the Kampaeng Yai statue is not a club. It is something like a spear, even better, it is a trident (*trisula*). As is well known, a trident has a very short handle. From the end of the eighth century A.D. when statues such as the Hari-

hara of Prasat Trapeang Phong in Cambodia were represented as holding a trident, up to this time tridents only seem to belong to divinities, and not to door-guardians.

However, Professor Boisselier thinks this bronze statue discovered at Prasat Kampaeng Yai represents Nandikesvara or Nandisvara, chief of the

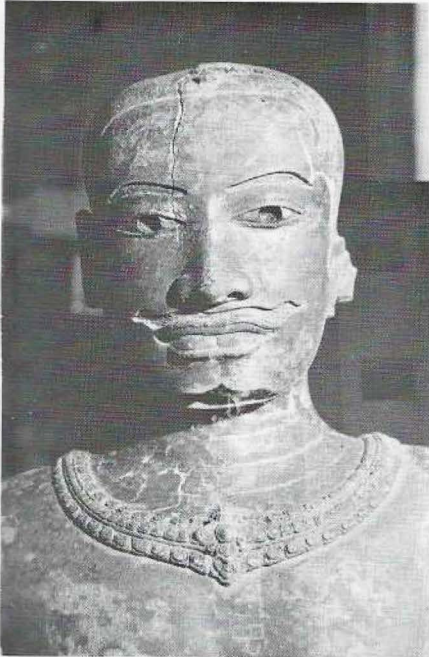


Fig. 4 The statue's face clearly indicates that it was inlaid with another type of metal. The technique of using more precious metals, such as gold or silver, as inlay for eyebrows, eyes, moustache and beard was typically used in the Khmer Baphuon style.



Fig. 5 The cracks on the statue may have resulted from the internal pressure of the earth, caused by the corrosion of the iron axis inside.

gana (attendants of Siva). Because of his loyal services, Siva allowed Nandikesvara to change his primitive appearance, which resembles a monkey, to the likeness of Siva.

The way the statue is depicted, that is, it has no third eye on the forehead, is not surprising. Because in Khmer iconography, all images of Siva are not provided with the frontal third eye (*trinetra*).

And even if the statue is not really Nandikesvara, Professor Boisselier still thinks this bronze statue is a door-guardian. The way it was gilded and its excellent execution are invitations to suppose that this statue must have stood in front of the central sanctuary of Prasat Kampaeng Yai, or even inside its porch.

This bronze statue could have even stood in front of the southwestern sanctuary of Prasat Kampaeng Yai. This structure was probably the most important and sacred place. This place has a pedestal for two images, probably for Siva and Uma. If so, the structure then represents the Kailasa Mountain, their abode. And therefore it should be guarded by Nandikesvara and his mate.

The *dvarapala* normally stand as a couple. The discovered statue then should have a mate on the other side of a door or at a guarded passage.

At the central sanctuary of Prasat Banteay Srei in Cambodia (967 A.D.) there are sculptured statues in front of its porch and false-doors. One of these figures might represent the mate of the Kampaeng Yai bronze statue and may have the same appearance as the Kampaeng Yai statue.

Probably, the mate for the Kampaeng Yai statue more or less

looks fierce and may have some negroid traits. It has much hair and a rather corpulent body. These are the characteristics of Mahakala, a habitual mate of Nandikesvara. These pair of guards are represented, as figures in high-relief, at Prasat Prah Ko, also in Cambodia (879 A.D.). One should also remember that the Nandikesvara-Mahakala are always associated with the sanctuaries of Siva.

The presence of these two guardians, in Khmer art, are so common, sometimes they are no longer mentioned in Khmer iconography for Siva temples. On the contrary, however, they appear in the epigraphy of a Vishnuite sanctuary.

Because of all the foregoing, in addition to the mutilations of the statue, Professor Boisselier thinks there should be a search for the statue of Mahakala. Even if there is very little chance of discovering it, a metal detector could be used in the inner courtyard as well as in the area from the porch of the central sanctuary to the corresponding gate and in front of the southwestern sanctuary until the southern gate. One might find some fragments of the two bronze statues which might have been left or forgotten during a very ancient theft.

Considering the problem of conservation and presentation of the statue, Professor Boisselier thinks there are many problems. Because the long and important vertical cracks on the statue and its base (see Fig. 1) might have occurred from the composition of the bronze, which should be determined.

However, the professor does not think the principal cause of the cracks lie in the nature of the metal alloy. He thinks the composition of the earth inside and the iron axis might have

caused the danger. Although the earth inside the statue is not supposed to be in contact with any material outside, when the bronze statue was mutilated, it fell onto the ground and received water from every rainy season.

Because water permeated in the earth inside the statue, corrosion of the iron axis followed, causing internal pressure. As a result, the metal gave way and cracks are now visible, both on the length and the width of the statue. The corrosion on the external bronze should be extinguished as soon as possible.

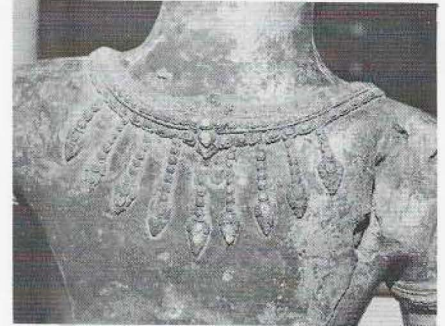
The first thing to do is to observe whether the cracks on the bronze are stable or augmented. But the method to stop the cracks, especially the corrosion, is yet to be found. The present cracks cannot be filled and this should not be executed as it might destroy the aesthetics of the statue and might add to its volume. One should find out the way to stop the causes of these cracks.

Professor Boisselier thinks this method might now be existing. The method used for the restoration of the bronze horses at St. Marc's Cathedral in Venice, Italy, might, in fact, be the answer.

To discover the metal alloy of the statue a small part of the bronze at the back of the right shoulder of this dvarapala could be cut. This should be done before restoration and the selection of the laboratory that will be utilized for treating the statue.

As for the presentation of the statue, a strong inconspicuous metal should be used to support the figure under its shoulders, so that the level at the ankles will not be broken. An x-ray of the statue could reveal more information about the figure.

Right: Fig. 6 The statue's necklace is simple at the front but elaborately decorated with nine pendants at the back.



Below: Fig. 8 The armlets on both arms are ornamented with large floral motifs at the middle but the anklets are simple.

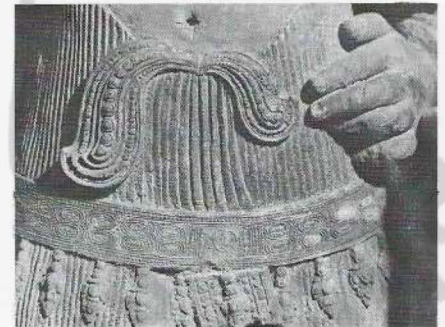
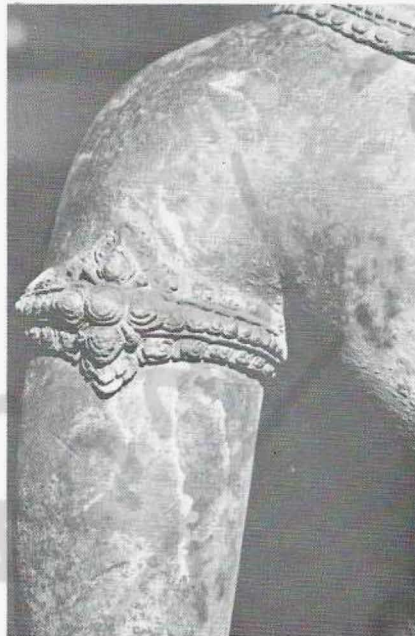


Fig. 7 Because of its excellent workmanship, one is tempted to think this statue must have stood at the most important and sacred tower of Prasat Kampaeng Yai.

Professor Boisselier recommends the use of a closed glass case in the display of the statue. This, he says, will protect the bronze statue from penetrating moisture. The statue should be the only display inside the glass case.

The base and the tenon underneath should also be shown in the display. Well protected, the statue of Kampaeng Yai should be permanently exhibited in the Bangkok National Museum.

At the end of his article, Professor Boisselier, compares the bronze statue of Kampaeng Yai to the torso of Vishnu from the Sanctuary of Western Mebon (now in the National

Museum of Phnom Penh, Cambodia) and the two Bayon Style bronze dvarapala, more or less broken and kept at the Arakan Temple, Mandalay, Burma. He says that though they are larger than our bronze statue from Prasat Kampaeng Yai, they do not present comparable problems for conservation.

Professor Boisselier kindly sent, to the author, a number of pictures of statues resembling the bronze dvarapala at Prasat Kampaeng Yai. And from these pictures, the author opines that the statue that looks closest to it in appearance is the one that is supposed to represent Siva at the Melbourne Museum, Australia!

