

The Archaeology of Professor
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about

The new national museum at Ubon Ratchatani,
Northeastern, Thailand

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The New National Museum at the Town of Ubon Ratchathani Northeastern, Thailand

by M.C. Subhadradis Diskul

The Thai Fine Arts Department has recently created many national museums in the various provinces of Thailand. Here, a new national museum in the town of Ubon Ratchathani, Northeastern Thailand, will be described. The collection of the museum contains objects, mostly of local origin.

Originally the government house of Ubon province, the building of the new museum was probably used in the fifth reign of Bangkok (1868-1910). It has been renovated for use as a museum (Fig.1). On both sides of the entrance into the building, are two stone boundary markers belonging to the Dvaravati Period (eighth-tenth century A.D.). Taken from Wat Pho Sila, these markers represent a stylized stupa in the middle (Fig.2). The shape of the boundary markers was probably derived from the prehistoric period. Many of the same type have been found in Northeastern Thailand.

The stylized stupas were created after Buddhism was accepted by the Thais, for use as worshipping objects. Scenes from the life of the Buddha were also carved on these stupas.

Nevertheless, inside the museum building is a row of rooms with an



Fig. 1. The new museum in the town of Ubon Ratchathani, Northeastern Thailand.

inner verandah, running around a rather large central room. The central room is now used as a lecture hall. It has a Buddha image on an altar flanked by two book cabinets. These cabinets, at the back of the room are painted in gold on black lacquer.

On the left of the inner verandah is a stone inscription in Sanskrit, dating back to the seventh century A.D. It came from the right bank of the Mun river in Amphoe Khong Chiam, province of Ubon. An epigraphist of the Thai National

Library deciphered the inscription as, "The king whose name is Chitrasena is the son of Srivarman and grandson of Sri Sarvagauma. He is an elder brother of Sri Bhavavarman and receives the name after his coronation as Sri Mahendravarman. After he has conquered the whole land of Kambu, he has the Sivalinga established on this mountain as the monument of his victory". King Chitrasena-Mahendravarman was a

Khmer king and his reign probably started from the early 12th century. His power extended to the northeast and the east of present-day Thailand.

And now, the first room on the left, is the Geography-Geology room of Ubon Ratchathani Province. This room shows the maps, mineral resources and gems of the province (Fig.3).

The second room is the prehistoric room, displaying implements and pottery found in Ubon province. Inside are stone tools such as those of Neolithic period (Fig.4) as well as

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Fig. 2. A sacred boundary stone, representing a stylized *stupa*. Found in the middle of Wat Pho Sila, Amphoe Amnat Charoen, Ubon Ratchathani. Eighth-Tenth century A.D.



Fig. 3. The geography-geology room of Ubon Ratchathani National Museum.

cord-marked pottery, about 1,500-1,800 years old, found in Ban Kan Lueng, Tambon Kham Yai, Amphoe Muang. A copy of the prehistoric painting at Pha Taem on the Mekhong river hangs on one wall. It depicts fishes and the implements for catching them. One of the interesting objects displayed in this room is a small bronze kettledrum from Ban Na Pho Tai, Tambon Na Pho Klang, Amphoe Khong Chiam.

It is about 1,500-1,800 years old (Fig.5). A bronze bell for a cattle is also exhibited here.

The third room is called the Dvaravati room. Displayed here are objects pertaining to the Dvaravati period or those from contemporary epochs, such as the sacred boundary stone, the stone Buddha image in meditation, and the standing Buddha in the room. The standing Buddha is made of the same material, from

Amphoe Muang Sam Sib, and dates back to about the eighth-ninth century A.D. (Fig.6). Included in this Dvaravati collection are a Khmer stone door-column of Prei Khmeng style and two *somasutra* (a piece of stone where lustral water can flow out). One *somasutra* is in the shape of a *makara* (a mythical animal representing a crocodile with an elephant trunk). All of them were found in a deserted Khmer monument at Wat Kaeng Toi, Tambon Tha Muang, Amphoe Muang. They may date back to the second half of the seventh century A.D.

The masterpiece of the Ubon National Museum is located in the third room. It is a stone image of Ardhhanarisvara (Siva, one of the greatest Hindu gods, mixed with his consort, Uma or Parvati, into a single statue). Discovered at Ubon, it dates back to about the eighth or ninth century A.D.. It was preserved in the Bangkok National Museum for some time before it was returned to Ubon. The statue represents a seated divinity. On the right side of this divinity is a male consort and on the left side is a female (Fig.7). The female consort is considered a *sakti* or energy of the god. As one looks closer, one notices that the right and the left sides of the headgear and the belt are also different. The statue, although rare in Southeast Asia, is rather common in India.

The fourth room might be called the Khmer room because of the Khmer objects displayed. The most interesting object here is probably the lintel in Kompong Preah style, eighth century A.D. (Fig.8). It was given to the Fine Arts Department by a man in the Sisaket Province, Northeast Thailand. It is as yet unknown

whether this stone lintel was discovered in Thailand or in Cambodia.

Historically speaking, Cambodia was in turmoil in the eighth century. Because it was divided into Land and Water Chenla, Khmer art during that period hardly expanded to present-day Thailand. What was actually given to the Fine Arts Department were only the two lateral sides of the lintel. The central piece has disappeared. So far, this lintel is the only known Khmer lintel in Kompong Preah style ever found in Thailand, that is, if it was not imported from Cambodia.

Apart from the above-mentioned lintel, other objects are also displayed. They are the stone figure of Ganesa in Koh Ker style (first half of the tenth century A.D.), found in Tambon Non Ka Len, King Amphoe Samrong; a piece of a stone pediment which may be in the Baphuon (11th century) or Angkor Wat (first half of the 12th century) style; a group of Buddha images found in the province of Ubon Ratchathani. Three large Khmer jars, a stone *somasutra*, a Sivalinga from the 11th-12th century, and another stone lintel in the Khmer

Fig. 6. A Dvaravati stone: a standing image found in Amphoe Muang Sam Sib, Ubon Ratchathani. Eighth-Ninth century A.D.



Baphuon style (11th century) are also found in the Khmer or the fourth room.

The fifth room contains Buddha images created by Ubon Ratchathani craftsmen. The most interesting pieces here are the bronze and wooden images. The seated bronze Buddha image, in the attitude of subduing Mara, has an inscription on the base dating it back to the 18th century A.D.. This Buddha image was lent by Wat Chaiyatikaram (Fig.9). The seated wooden Buddha image is also in the attitude of subduing Mara. But it is protected by a three-headed *naga* with a large floral motif on a lower base. It belongs to the same period as the *naga* (Fig.10). This latter Buddha effigy may belong to the early 20th century. It is loaned from Wat Luang Khemarat.

The sixth room is right behind the central lecture hall. It is separated from the hall by an inner verandah and a small surrounding lawn. This back room displays local tradition and objects. A model of a group of male musicians (Fig.11), playing musical instruments from Northeast Thailand is displayed here. A *khaen* (a group of flutes tied together, typi-

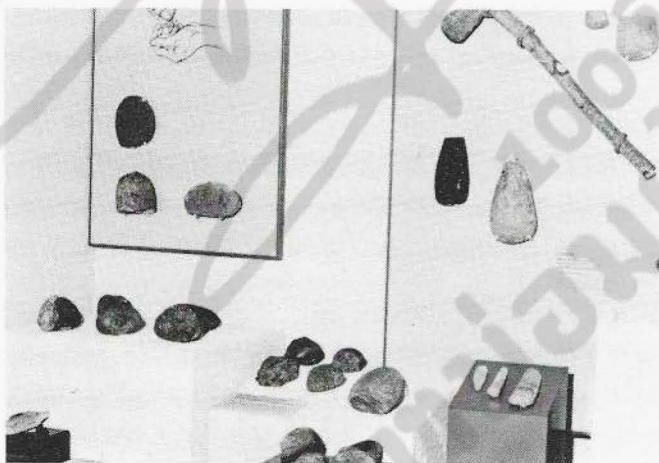


Fig. 4. Lithic tools in the prehistory room of Ubon Ratchathani National Museum.



Fig. 5. A bronze Kettle drum found in Ban Na Pho Tai, Tambon Na Pho Klang, Amphoe Khong Chiam, Ubon Ratchathani.

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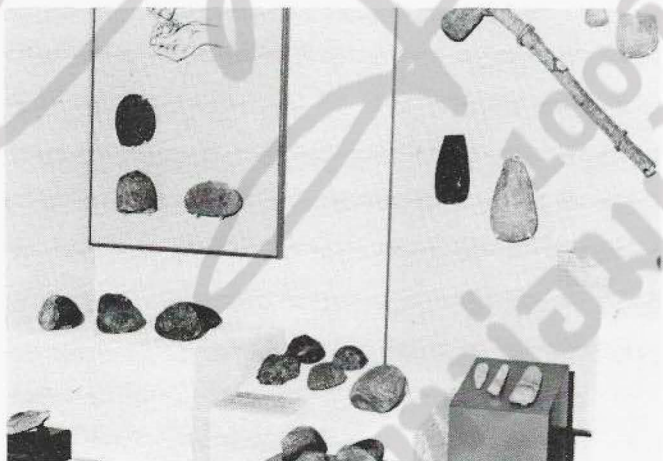


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Fig. 7. Ardhanarisvara stone found in Ubon, height : 71 cm. It represents Siva on the right half and his consort, Uma or Parvati, on the left half. Eighth-Ninth century A.D.



Fig. 9. A bronze Buddha image in the attitude of subduing Mara (the evil spirits) before his enlightenment. The image has an inscription on the base. 18th century A.D. Lent by Wat Chaiyatikaram.



Fig. 10. A wooden Buddha image, subduing Mara and protected by the three-headed *naga*. Early 20th century. Lent by Wat Luang Khemerat.

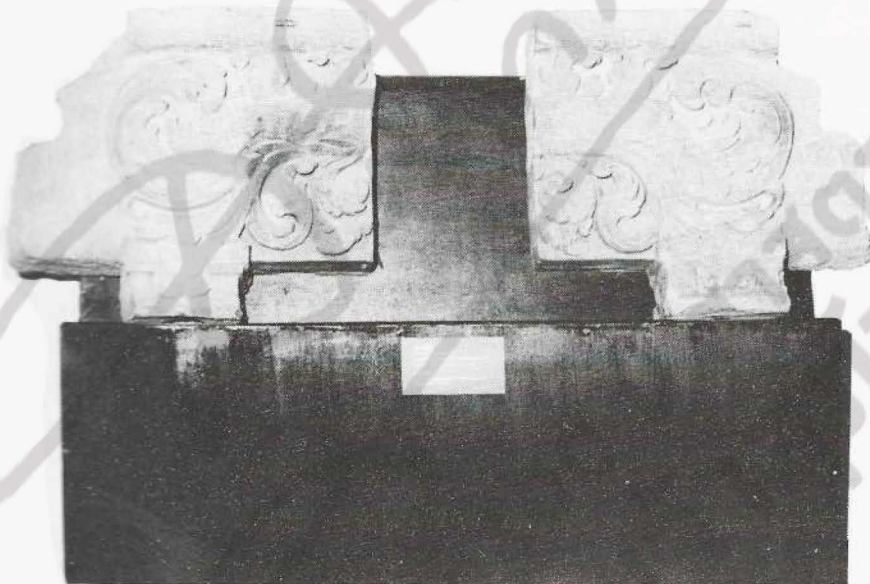


Fig. 8. Two fragments of a Khmer stone lintel in the Kompong Preah style. Eighth century A.D.

cal of northeastern Thailand) is exhibited on the right. A stringed instrument, a rather long drum, two ceramics used as musical instruments and a wooden xylophone, again typical of Northeast Thailand, can also be seen here.

Apart from local musical in-

struments, there are also local domestic articles as well as many examples of silk and cotton cloths produced in Northeast Thailand (Fig.12). Other interesting articles are ancient wooden coconut scrapers, attached on stands, carved in the form of rabbits (Fig.13). These manual scrapers are

hardly used nowadays because of the introduction of electrical scrapers.

Buddhist objects and photographs of ancient administrators of Ubon Ratchathani Province are displayed in the seventh room. A long decorative wooden rod, in the form of a *naga* is one interesting Buddhist object. The *naga* here is for receiving scented water, poured on an image of the Buddha.

Another interesting object is the stone block representing the figures of nine divinities. These divinities are supposed to be the four planets (the sun, the moon, Rahu and Ketu), the four guardians of compass directions, and Indra shown in the midst

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Fig. 11. Model of a group of male musicians playing local instruments from Northeast Thailand.



Fig. 12. Samples of silk and cotton cloths produced in Northeast Thailand.

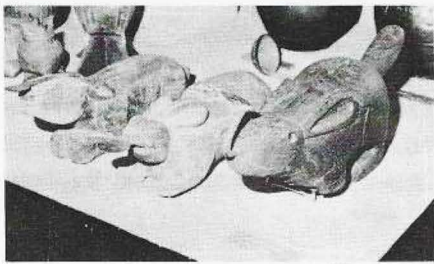


Fig. 13. Coconut scrapers attached on wooden rabbit stands. Far Left



Fig. 14. A piece of stone representing the nine Khmer divinities: four planets and the five gods of the compass directions. Tenth century A.D.

of the four guardians. Indra, god of the east, is shown riding an elephant. This piece of stone sculpture was discovered at Ban Ben, Amphoe Detudom, Ubon Province. Found near the doorway of a ruined Khmer temple, this stone block has been suggested to be a lintel. The writer, like Professor Jean Boisselier in his *Manuel d'Archéologie Khmère* (1966, pg.292), believes that it is a votive relief placed in the southeastern building of a Khmer monument (Fig.14). Dating back to the tenth century A.D., the stone block is now kept in a storeroom of the museum.

In the inner verandah around the exhibition rooms a wooden pediment from Wat Pra Rot, dating back to the Bangkok period (19th century), a sacred boundary stone of Dvaravati style (ninth century), a stone lintel of the Khmer Khleang style (second half of the tenth century), wooden brack-

ets and a wooden pediment frame of the Bangkok period (19th-20th century) are gathered in this area. All these objects were discovered in the province of Ubon Ratchathani.

Though this museum is rather small, it is worthwhile visiting because of the many interesting objects displayed in an orderly manner.

In a description of the national museum in the town of Ubon Ratchathani, one should also include the temple of Supattanaram, locally known as Wat Supattanaram, located in the same district. There are two important objects preserved in this temple: a Khmer stone lintel and a stone pillar. The Khmer stone lintel was removed from Wat Noi in Sapue Rapids, also in the province of Ubon Ratchathani. This stone lintel probably belongs to the transitional period: from the Khmer Thala Borivat style (late sixth century) to the Sambor

Prei Kuk style (early seventh century). The other interesting object, the stone pillar, is from Prasat Si Khoraphum, or Si Khoraphum sanctuary in Surin province. The stone pillar represents a male divinity on one side and a female on the other. This pillar was, probably, originally near the door of a Khmer sanctuary. The two flanking divinities were used as guardians. The pillar dates back to about the beginning of the 12th century.

The monks of Wat Supattanaram are now trying to build their own museum, within the vicinity of the Wat or temple. Apart from these two important objects there are also others. To mention a few, they are: a broken stone image of Ganesa (a god with an elephant head) probably dating back to the tenth century, some stone inscriptions and two Dvaravati boundary stones. □