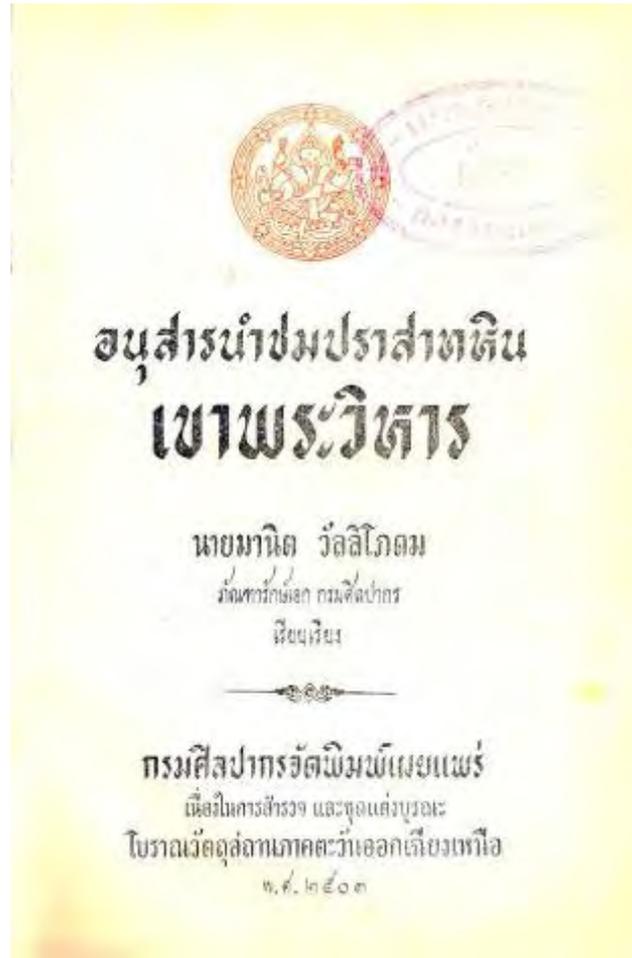


**VISITOR'S GUIDE TO PRASAT  
PHRA VIHARN**



## VISITOR'S GUIDE TO PRASAT PHRA VIHARN

**Mr. Manit Walliphodom**  
**First Curator**  
**Department of Fine Arts**

**Published by**  
**Department of Fine Arts**

**On the occasion of the survey and restoration of**  
**Ancient ruins in the North-eastern Region**  
**2503 B.E. (1960)**

## Preface to the English Translation

The Stone Prasat at the Mountain of Phra Viharn was first found by Prince Krommaluang Sanphasitthi Prasong in the year 1899 when he was inspecting the area while serving as King Rama V's Inspector General.

Since then, the Fine Arts Department, the agency in charge of arts, culture and antiquities under the Ministry of Education and Culture undertook several archeological surveys of the monuments and sites.

In 1940, the Fine Arts Department registered both the group of monuments and the site under the name "Monuments on Phra Viharn Mountain" as national protection area and national monuments, and published the registration in the National Gazette on October 22, 1940.

In 1960, the Fine Arts Department published the first full archaeological survey report written by a senior archeologist, the late Mr. Manit Walliphodom, together with photographs taken by the author during the surveys. The report described in great detail how to travel from Bangkok to the site and gave a complete archaeological account of the monuments and the site, how to ascend the grand stairs from the north of the temple and walk up until one reached the main structure at the peak of the hill in the south. He also reported faithfully the stages of the ruin monuments found at the time of the survey. The report has served as an important reference on the monuments of Phra Viharn to later archaeologists and scholars as well as a guide book for visitors to Prasat Phra Viharn.

ICOMOS Thailand, is happy to have the report translated into English for international readers. It is hoped that the report will provide a clear and interesting picture of this sacred Hindu Temple from the eyes of a respected archaeologist whose works have received recognition in Thailand and by international scholars.



## Foreword

In November 2502 B.E. students from Silpakorn University submitted a proposal to the Prime Minister volunteering and seeking permission to restore ancient ruins at Khao Phra Viharn, Kantharalak District, Sisaket Province. Consequently, I assigned Mr. Manit Walliphodom, First Curator, and Mr. Thaen Thiraphichit, Second Curator attached to the Department of Fine Arts to define the scope of restoration, to supervise and advise the students as well as to facilitate their operation. This restoration coincides with the Department's own survey and restoration of ruins in the north-eastern region, which began at the beginning of the same year and led by Mr. Manit Walliphodom. Phra Viharn ruins are within the area of coverage of the 6<sup>th</sup> Fine Arts Unit headed by Mr. Thaen Thiraphichit.

Successful conclusion of the assignment testifies to both officials' knowledge of and keen interest in ancient ruins. Therefore, I have asked Mr. Manit Walliphodom to write this visitor's guide to Prasat Phra Viharn.

Regretfully, it is not possible to include in this Guide detailed maps of each groups of gopura described therein. At any rate, readers may refer to the map of the ruins at the end of this Guide. I hope that interested readers will find this Visitor's Guide to Prasat Phra Viharn useful.

(Signed) Dhanit Yupho

Department of Fine Arts  
12 February 2503 B.E.

**Prasat Phra Viharn**



Figure 1 View of the east of Phra Viharn



Figure 2 Front stairway



Figure 3 Western naga raj guard rail

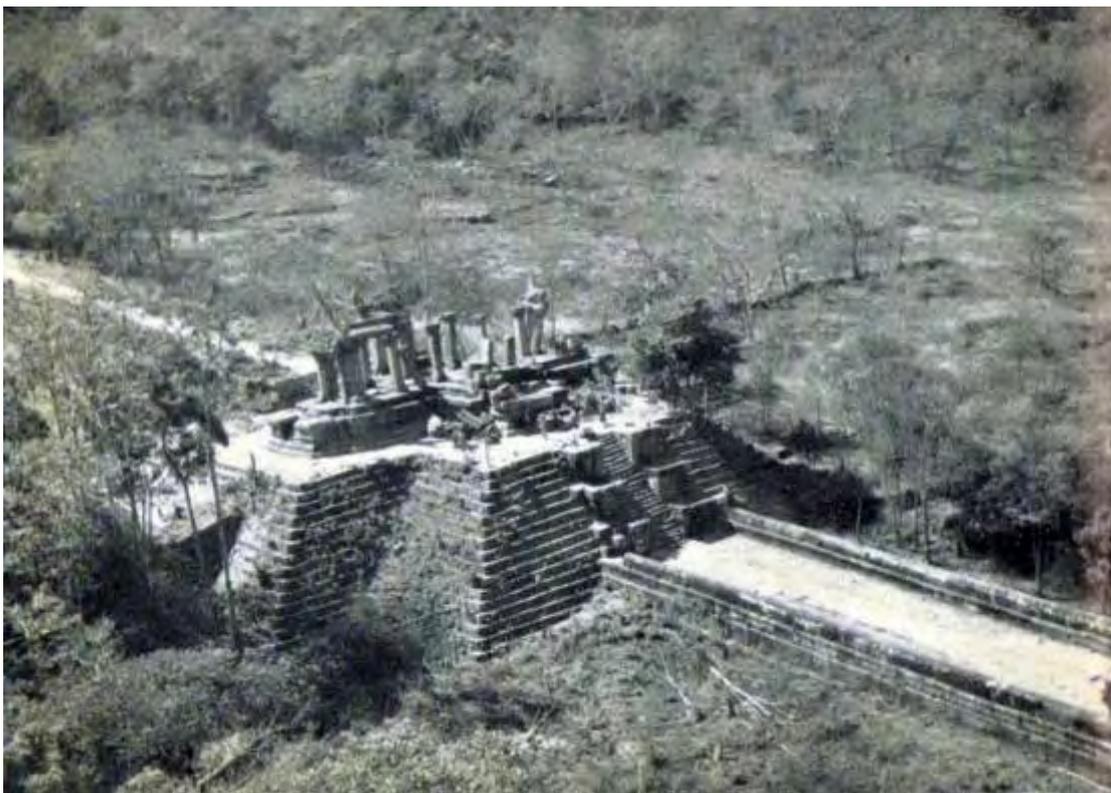


Figure 4 Aerial view of the first level of Monthien

Commonly known as Prasat Phra Viharn, the sacred ruins in Tambol Bueng Maloo, Kantharalak District, Sisaket Province are, according to the stone inscription found in a *prang* (sanctuary) among the ruins, *Bhavalai*. Prasat Phra Viharn was constructed on a peak in the Dangrek Mountains which separates the south-east of Thailand from Cambodia. The highest point of this peak is in the south at an altitude of 657 meters above sea level. The Cambodian plain is approximately 547 meters

below punctuated by a number of small hills (Figure1). The peak slopes down towards the north where its lowest point registers 535 meters above sea level.

Facing northward toward Thailand, Prasat Phra Viharn was built with stones extracted from nearby mountains thus leaving traces of their original sites. Four groups of buildings sprawl from the foothill upward to the peak. Most of them are gabled structures without embellished spire roof structure that is characteristic of *prasat*. Therefore, they should be more appropriately called Monthien.

Phra Viharn ruins are accessible via two routes.

1. By rail via Bangkok-Ubon Ratchathani express train. This express train leaves Bangkok daily at 7.30 p.m. and arrives in Sisaket Province at 8.10 a.m. on the following day. Visitors should travel on by car to Kantharalak District, which is 62 kilometers away, and continue another 34 kilometers past Nam Khuab Village, Phumsalon Village to Khao Phra Viharn. (See road map at the end of this guide.) This sector should take about four hours.

Trains to Bangkok leaves Sisaket Province at 8.04 p.m. each evening arriving in Bangkok at 9 a.m. the next morning.

2. By car. The distance between Bangkok and Khao Phra Viharn is 690 kilometers. Visitors are advised to take Phahonyothin Road to Saraburi (108 kms.) then turn into Friendship Highway to Nakhonratchasima Province (253 kms.). From Nakhonratchasima Province, follow the route to Chokechai District (23 kms.), Chokechai-Nang Rong (62 kms.), Nang Rong-Prakhonechai (28 kms.), Prakhonechai-Kantharalak (188 kms.), and finally, Kantharalak-Khao Phra Viharn (34 kms.).

Visitors coming from Ubon Ratchathani Province should use Ubon-Dejudom route (43 kms), then follow cart tracks through the woods from Dejudom District to Kantharalak District (61 kms.) and Khao Phra Viharn (34 kms.). This 136-kilometer route is passable only in the dry season.

Traveling by road is more fun, but visitors are advised to prepare for unforeseen obstacles along the above latterly-mentioned rugged route which may culminate in overnight stay en route.

The sights of Phra Viharn start right at a stone terrace at the foot of Khao Phra Viharn.

**Front stairway.** The main access to Prasat Phra Viharn or Bhavalai is the grand and important stairway situated in the north. The first flight counts 162 stone steps of 8-meter width that span the length of 78.50 meters. Some steps are carved into the stone ground of the mountain on the ground of the peak. Both sides of the steps are punctuated by four-sided pedestals, the first of which stands at the foot of the stairway. Upon these large pedestals were sitting lion sculptures that have fallen to the ground (Figure 2). The second flight stair is 27-meter long and comprises of 54 4-meter width steps. Seven pairs of small pedestals of 2.50 meter width for similar sculptures bordered the steps at regular intervals.

**Sa Trao.** At the foot of the stairway, to the west, are stone embankments filled with sand and gravel winding westward along the slope turning slightly north at its end. This 4-meter wide and 258-meter long embankment path serves as a path and also a dyke to divert rain water through its 4-meter gap near the path's end to the cliff. At the cliff a source of a stream flows to a creek known as Huay Amaria in the west. On the right bank of the stream is a terraced stone embankment path filled with earth and sand. It is 37.20 meter wide and 107 meter long leading to stone terrace in the north. This embankment directs rain water from the cliff to a stream in the west and a rather large reservoir in the east. From this reservoir water flows into a stream, meandering through a stone terrace at the foot of the front stairway into a pond called Sra Trao or Sra Krao, then flows to Huay Ta khob. The water from Huay Amaria, on the other hand, flows past Sawai checking point to join another stream at Huay Ta Khob.

**Nagaraj terrace.** A stone-paved terrace, 7-meter wide and 31.80-meter long, at the top of the front stairway was probably built as rest area for those exhausted from climbing the steps. The terrace is bordered on each side by 2 stone 7-head naga (serpent). These simple heads and tails of two nagaraj are among early designs in animal arts of this type. The head parts of the west nagaraj is quite an impressive sight as it is carved from a single piece of large and long stone (Figure 3). A 7-meter wide and 11.50-meter high stairway brings visitors from the terrace to the first level of Monthien. On each side of the stairway stand three four-sided pedestals for seated lion sculptures. Lion sculptures made for this set of pedestals are smaller than those decorating the first flight of stairs; some of them are now lying on the ground.

**First level of Monthien.** Tetrahedrons without walls constitute this group of buildings located on a slope. Their common characteristics are steps and portals. Terraced stone embankments in the eastern, northern and western corners of the Gopura serve as slope retention. The 1.80-meter high square-based stone with indented corners supports the Gopura (Figure 4). Seated lion sculptures are placed at the steps in front of the four portals. Four-sided pieces of stones are placed on top of one another to the height of 3.50 meters to serve as pillars upholding the gopura. Carved floral motifs decorate the top and the base of each pillar, the eaves, and the portal frames. The roofs are fitted with wind breakers. Tiles are normally used above the eaves, but at Phra Viharn large stone pieces carved in double lotus petals and magnolia patterns are placed at regular intervals. Each stone piece has small holes presumably to accommodate dowels or wooden hooks. Judging from remnants of baked clay tiles called *gabū*, the roof was once covered with them. Lines were carved into stone wind breaker to create whorl patterns. Carved dancing deities grace the tip of wind breakers while at the top is a deity sitting with one knee propped up – a pattern often repeated in Phra Viharn ruins. It is presumed that this deity is Phra Wissukarma, except when he is shown with vehicles or weapons signifying others. The roof edging is decorated with floral motifs. This group of Gopura has wind breakers and portals in tact only in the east. (Figure 5) Its fronton bears a carving of a deity sitting on a lotus seat above Demon's head. Five-head nagaraj was carved on each side of the cornice with their tails interlocked at the top. A floral tassel dangles from the mouth of the middle head of each nagaraj. Above the trunks of nagaraj are floral motifs. The lintel beneath the fronton has a pattern of whorls and a deity sitting with a propped knee above Demon's head.



Figure 5 East of the first level of Monthien  
Figure 6 Candle columns or sao nang rieng

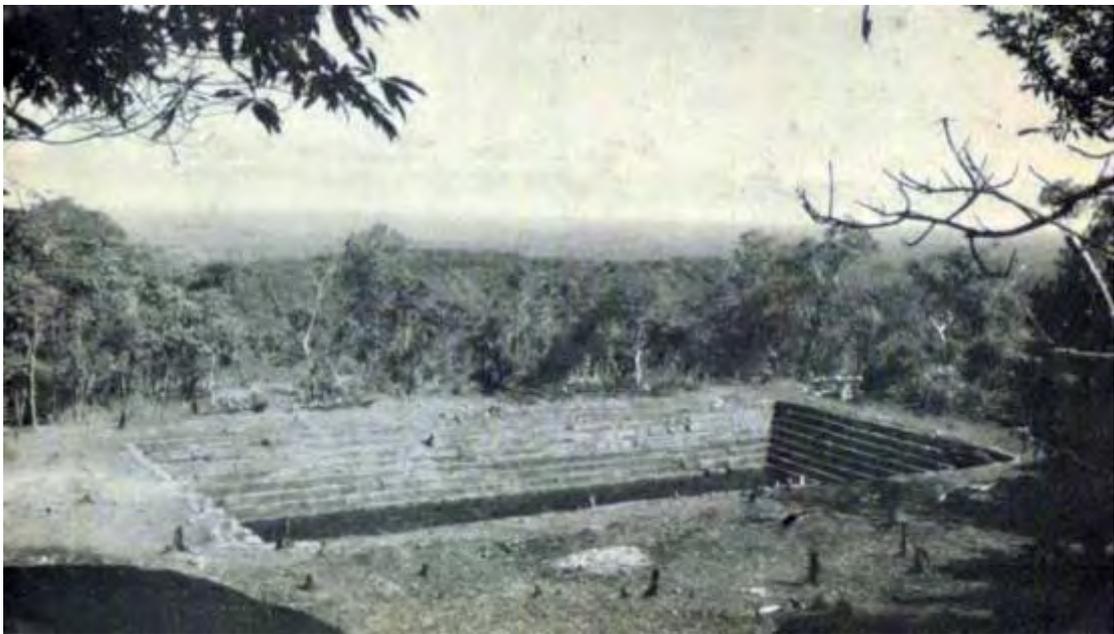


Figure 7 Sa Song (Pond for ablutions)



Figure 8 Unfinished lion sculpture found east of Sa Song

Figure 9 Northern outer portal of the portico in front of the second level of Monthien



In front of the eastern portal is a 340-meter terraced stone embankment stretching to the slope from where stone steps lead to lower areas. Both the embankment path and the steps have mostly been eroded and destroyed by rain water, giving them the name 'broken step path'. This is the only access to Phra Viharn from Cambodia.

**Sa Song.** South of the first level of Monthien and above it are five stone steps of 2-meter height to a road 10-meter wide and 275-meter long leading to the second level of Monthien. This road is a double embankment filled with sand and paved with stone. The pavement is, in parts, natural stone terrace. On the border are four-sided stone columns 2.15-meter tall with lotus bud-shaped tops. Seventy such columns were erected on each side, but most of them have already toppled. It seems they are called candle columns or *sao nang riang*. (Figure 6) Nearer the steps leading to the second level of gopura, approximately 12.40 meter on the side of the eastern path is a rectangular pond 18.30-meter wide and 36.80-meter long that tapers toward the centre. Stone steps line the sides of the pond. This is known as Sa Song (Figure 7). Rain water flowing from the slope above is trapped in this pond that now has cracks. Future repair to seal the cracks will help to restore the pond to its former condition so that it can once again retain rain water well into the dry season. On the landing must have been sculptures of seated lions since their broken pieces were found nearby. To the east of the pond, in the grass, was found a large unfinished sculpted lion (Figure 8). The steps leading to the second level of Monthien are 1.50-meter wide and rise to 9.40 meters. On their sides are five pedestals for lion sculptures.

**Second level of Monthien** is situated on a terrace on a slope. Terraced stone embankments were built to retain certain parts of the slope. The Monthien itself was erected on a cruciform base. It comprises four porticos in four directions. From its eastern to its western tip, the Monthien measures 39 meters, and 29.50 meters from its northern to southern tip. Stone walls stretch the whole length of the southern side while the northern part is lined with columns. This Monthien seems to have been used for recreation and relaxation. It is presumed that the roof was covered with light grey enameled tiles since a number of them were found on the ground. Eaves and columns are decorated with the same patterns as those found on the first level of Monthien. The floor is paved completely with stones.

a. **Front portico.** The front portico is divided into two sections. A seated lion guards the outer portal which is directly in front of the stairway. (Figure 9) At the centre of the front fronton is a stone carving of floral motifs and a deity sitting on a seat above a lion standing on its two feet. The deity, flanked by two pairs of five-head nagaraj, sits with one knee propped up holding a weapon in his right hand. Above the doorway is a lintel bearing carved patterns (Figure 10). The columns of the portal are decorated with carved patterns. At the base of the column is a seated yogi with his palms touching in front of him. Above the inner portal is a lintel with the same pattern of deity sitting on Demon's head, holding a weapon in his right hand. Above him on both sides are five-head nagaraj and floral motifs. Between the outer and inner pairs of nagaraj are seven square holes to accommodate roof cross-beams and purlins (Figure 11).

b. **Eastern portico.** This portico is divided into three sections. Next to the outer portal is a lion sculpture. Similar to portals of the front portico, frontons and

lintels of portals of eastern portico depict the deity in the same sitting pose. The only difference is that the deity depicted on the lintel of the inner portal sits among the heads of nagaraj. Between the outer and the inner pairs of nagaraj are also seven square holes.

c. **Western portico.** Like the eastern portico, the western portico is divided into three sections. All lintels have the same design as those on the outer portal of the eastern portico.

d. **Main hall.** The main hall is divided into five sections. On the door leading to the southern portico are holes for dowels indicating that there were once door panels.

e. **Southern portico.** Divided into two sections, the southern portico has an inner portal with the same carved pattern as that of the northern portico. Beautiful carvings are apparent on frontons and lintels. Fronton carvings depict an incarnation of Narai – Guramavatar churning the sea of milk. Others on lintels depict sleeping Narai on the back of Ananta Nagaraj with a lotus growing on his belly. At the centre of the lotus is Brahma. Handless Garuda, a god's vehicle, spreads his wings showing off many avian features.

Many of the described features are repeated in the next levels of Monthiens. Therefore, the following paragraphs will refrain from repeating the same detailed description. Rather, the ensuing description will focus on the central designs of frontons and lintels and other features unique to only each of the respective Monthiens.



Figure 10 Inner portal of portico in front of the second level of Monthien



Figure 11 Inner portal of the eastern portico of the second level of Monthien



Figure 12 Inner portal of the northern portico of the third level of Monthien



Figure 13 Lintel of the third level Monthien's portal depicting a man and a woman



Figure 14 the third level of Monthien from the south

**Sa Hua Sing.** A stairway from the south portal of the second level of Monthein leads directly to a path to the third level of Monthien. This path is 11-meter wide and 147-meter long. It is paved with stone and lined with smaller but more ornate columns than those in the previous section. Almost all of the 40 columns on each side are broken and buried in the ground. Parallel to each side of the path, 8 meters away, are embankments filled with earth. These embankments divert the flow of rain water away from the second level of Monthien. Not far from where the path begins, on the east, is a pond. Before the pond are two 12-cornered square stone pedestals of 6 x 6 meters probably used as palanquins. One of the two is on an embankment and the other nearer the pond. The square pond has steps on each of its 9.20-meter wide sides. The pond is lined with stone steps and tapers towards the bottom. Almost at the centre of the bottom of the pond on the south side is a pattern of stone lion's head. Water once flowed from a hole in the lion's mouth which is now clogged.

**Third level of Monthien.** Where the path ends is a stairway 3.60-meter wide and 6-meter tall. On both sides are five pedestals of seated lion leading to the third level of Monthien. Terraced embankments like those in the first level of Monthien retain the slope where the Monthien is situated. This level of Monthien comprises:

1. Central gopura
2. Right and left galleries
3. Right and left long halls

1. **Central gopura** is a 34.00 x 35.00 meters cruciform with four walls and four porticos.

A. **Northern portico** has a window each on the east and the west walls. The outer portal has a stairway at the top of which is a sculpture of a seated lion. Carving at the centre of the fronton depicts Krishna under a tree holding a lion with his right hand and gripping an elephant leg with his left hand. Standing in front of the lion and

the elephant is a deer casting a backward look. On both sides of the tree top are flying deities. A deity sitting on the head of a lion standing on its two feet is a scene carved on the lintel. He is sitting with one knee propped holding weapon in his right hand. The carving is embellished by floral motifs. The portal columns are carved with a yogi sitting with the palms of his hands touching.

The inner portal shows evidence of former use of panels. A picture of Krishna (also called Govinda) is carved into the centre of the fronton. He is standing with his left hand on his waist and his right hand carrying Mount Govardhana to protect cowhands from rain storm and lightning. Two cowhands sit at his feet hiding their faces in their hands. Next to them is a crouching cow and a pair of cows and next to them their calf (Figure 12). On the lintel is a carving of the four-armed Vishnu on the back of Garuda above Demon's head. The Garuda has wings like an ordinary bird and no hands. At its sides is a retinue of two deities. The Demon holds a garland in his two hands. The ends of the garland are seated angels.

**B. Eastern portico** has a portal in the north wall and a window with five lathed-stone balusters on each side of the portal. In front of the portal is a stairway with a pedestal supporting sculpture of a seated lion. On the south wall are a portal and a stairway. Both portals have signs of former use of panels. Carving on the fronton of the northern portal depicts an angel or a human standing on Demon's head and touching a horse. The carving on the lintel shows a man and a woman (presumably Shiva and Uma) embracing and standing with their feet intertwined over Demon's head (Figure 13). On the fronton and the lintel of the western portal, which leads to the main hall, are carvings depicting deities sitting on Demon's head.

**C. Western portico** shares the same features as the eastern portico in so far as the chamber, the portals, and the windows are concerned. At the centre of the fronton on the northern portal is a carving of deities dancing above Demon's head. The lintel depicts the same scene and patterns as those on the western portal of the eastern portico. The frontons and the lintels on the southern and eastern portals – a passageway to the main hall - bear the same patterns as those of the western portal of the eastern portico.



Figure 15 Fronton carving depicting Shiva and Uma on a cow



Figure 16 Aerial view of the third level of Monthien



Figure 17 Left portico on the northern side of the Sanctuary



Figure 18 Central hall on the northern side of the sanctuary

D. **Main hall.** Each of the six windows on the northern wall has five lathed-stone balusters. The southern wall has only two windows. The hall is not decorated with any pattern.

E. **Southern portico** has the same features as the northern one (Figure 14). The centre of the fronton of the outer portal depicts Shiva sitting with a knee propped up holding a weapon in his right hand. He sits on Usupharaj standing on Demon's head. Lions standing sideways flank the Demon. They stick out their tongues that bear foliage motifs. The lintel depicts Brahma sitting with his knee propped, flanked by his wives on both sides. They are seated on a seat carried by three swans hovering above Demon's head. On the two sides of the Demon are angels sitting with a knee propped, leaning on an arm and raising a hand. The fronton of the inner portal depicts Shiva and Uma on Usupharaj under a tree whose new leaves are in the form of tridents. His retinue of six deities sits with their palms together holding a parasol (Figure 15). The lintel depicts a deity sitting on a seat on the head of a lion standing on its two feet. The deity sits with his knee propped holding a weapon in his right hand. On each side is a lion standing in a garland. Lotus bud patterns are carved into the portal columns, at which the base is a carving of a yogi sitting with his palms pressed lightly together.

2. **Right and left galleries** are rectangles with the two ends jutting out almost into the gopura. Each of the corridors is divided into three rooms. One is 35.50 x 7.00 meters with solid northern wall. Originally, all the doors - at the centre and the two ends - had panels. The interior wall has five windows each fitted with seven lathed-stone balusters. At the end of the wall is a door that once had panels opening onto the end rooms. Both end rooms are 15-meter long and 6-meter wide. Each room has two vents on the southern wall, each of which is fitted with 6 lathed-stone balusters. The interior wall shows traces of door panes. Next to the door is a window on each side and each window is fitted with 6 lathed-stone balusters. An open area stretches from the centre of the corridor to the long hall.

It is believed that these right and left galleries were built after the central gopura.

3. **Right and left long halls** is each 8.50-meter wide and 40-meter long. They are parallel with the corridors and are rectangular both facing the path. They are raised on a 2.40-meter high base. They have front and rear porticos with northern interior wall without windows. However, the exterior wall (in the south) has five windows fitted with lathed-stone balusters. In the front portico are three windows on each side. Both portals in front of the portico have collapsed. In the ruins of the western portico, the excavation team found carvings of Indra sitting with one knee propped up holding a weapon in his right hand and sitting on an elephant that stands on Demon's head.

On a terrace in front of the eastern corridor is a stone Sanctuary that is 4-meter wide and 6-meter tall (Figure 16).

Seven steps lead visitors from the third level of Monthien to a 34-meter long path that leads them to the fourth level of Monthien. Along the sides of this path are nine columns erected at intervals. Next to them on both sides are curb stones bearing carvings of 7-head naga. A little further are the remains of a square-based pedestal with indented corners that is 5-meter long and 5-meter wide. It is not yet known if this is a base of a sanctuary or some other object. At the end of the path are three steps leading to the great Monthien.

**The Sanctuary - Fourth level of Great Monthien.** A walled northern and southern cluster of buildings

**Northern cluster** consists of

1. Front gopura
2. Right and left galleries
3. Central hall
4. Right and left Monthien Dharma halls

**1. Front gopura:** a cruciform of 23.00 x 23.00 meters with four porticos facing four different directions. Northern and southern porticos each has two windows whereas the eastern and western porticos each has two doorways and a window on the front wall fitted with five lathed-stone balusters. The main hall has six windows on the northern wall and four on the southern wall. Each is fitted with five lathed-stone balusters. All portals but the rear one of the eastern portico and the front one of the western portico are dilapidated. Both portals have the same carved patterns on their frontons and lintels, that of a deity sitting on Demon's head with his knee propped up. The remains of the rear portal of the main hall suggest that there was once a panel. On both sides of the portal columns are Khmer inscriptions indicating the era of King Suryavarman I (1545-1592 B.E.). The rear portals of the eastern and the western porticos also show signs that there were once panels that opened on to a passage leading to the right and the left corridors. In the front part of the gopura is a stairway aligned with the three portals. At the base of the exterior walls are carved floral and foliage motifs such as double lotus petals and magnolias.

**2. Right and left galleries:** 6.00 x 32.00 meters rectangles adjacent to the eastern and the western porticos of the front gopura with windowless exterior walls (figure 17) but a roomy open plan interior with ten, mostly fallen, pillars (figure 18).

There are a number of bas reliefs scattered on both right and left courtyards. Figure 19 depicts a King sprinkling lustral water onto Brahmins. Figure 20 shows an image of a 4-arm deity of either Brahmin or Mahayana Buddhism origin. Some show deities dancing (Figure 21). In addition, there is a 4-sided stone having 17 holes of various sizes.

**3. Central hall :** 9.00 x 13.00 meter rectangle with 8 x 5 meter front portico. Each portico has one window while the hall itself has three on each side; all are fitted with 5 lathed-stone balusters. The rear portal has marks indicating that there were once panels. In the centre of the hall are two rows of four pillars each. Above the lotus pattern the pillars are tapered suggesting the presence of a ceiling in the old days (Figure 22). The base of the central hall is unique and more refined than in other places. The carvings are in floral and alternating overturned and upturned lotus-bud patterns. A massive wall from the back portal connects it to the rear cluster of Gopura.



Figure 19 King sprinkling lustral water on Brahmins



Figure 20 Four-armed deity



Figure 21 Dancing deities



Figure 22 Columns of the central hall in the northern group of the 4<sup>th</sup> level Monthien  
 Figure 23 Left cloistered gallery of the 4<sup>th</sup> level Monthien, southern group



Figure 24 Rear Gopura in the southern group of the 4<sup>th</sup> level Monthien

**4. Right and left Monthien Dharma halls :** On the left and the right of the central hall are 6.50 x 11.00 meters libraries facing each other (Figures 17 and 18). Their 3-tiered brick roofs have a vent fitted with 7 lathed-stone balusters on the second tier. A passageway is located at the front whereas a rear door is a false doorway. In the centre of the lower frontons and on the lintels of the right (eastern) library, both on the exterior and the interior, are carvings of Demon's head upon which is seated a deity with one knee propped up. Carvings on the frontons and lintel of the left (western) library are the same as those of the eastern library, except for that on the lintel of the false door at the back which is damaged. The remaining parts show a peacock, creating an impression that the bas reliefs must be of Khanta Kumar.

These libraries are believed to be depositories of academic texts, hence the name Monthien Dharma. They may as well be called Phra Vedic or Barnalai. Should they not be depositories, they could be shrines where images of deities were kept.

To the west of the northern great gopura is a 20.50 x 36.00 meter pond now filled almost completely with sand making it look more like a plain field. Excavation should be carried out here to reveal its former state.

**Southern cluster** consists of

1. Front gopura
2. Right and left galleries
3. Rear gopura
4. Bhavalai

**1. Front gopura :** a 22.00 x 5.50 meter rectangular room with front and back porticos. The roof could have been covered with tiles. The northern wall has 3 doors, the middle of which connects to a passageway leading to the rear door of the central hall in the northern cluster. The other two doors on its left and right have traces of door panels. Stairways from these doors lead to the courtyard next to the Monthien Dharmma hall. The carvings on the frontons and the lintels of both doors depict a deity sitting on Demon's head with his knee propped. There are 4 windows fitted with lathe-stone balusters. On the southern wall are three doors leading to the lawn towards the shrine.

**2. Right and left galleries,** measured 4.00 x 52.00 meters, join the walls of the front and the rear porticos of the front gopura with those of the front and the rear porticos of the rear gopura. These corridors are walled with only one doorway on each side. Their frontons and lintels depict a seated deity with propped knee. The same patterns are repeated, with addition of Demon's head underneath the deity, on those of the four false doorways on the exterior wall adjacent to the front and the rear porticos of the front and the rear gopuras. An exception is the fronton of the doorway next to the eastern portico of the front gopura which depicts deities dancing among the six heads of naga. Each of the interior walls has 20 windows, but no doorway or stairway. The roofs of the right and the left corridors are covered with curved stones shaped like a boat canopy (Figure 23).

**3. Rear gopura,** a rectangle building with front and rear porticos similar to the front gopura. On the northern wall are six windows fitted with five lathed-stone balusters. At the centre of the wall is a door that once had door panes opening onto the front portico which is a walled in room with a door and a stairway aligned with the southern door of the Bhavalai. The southern wall has no opening and its roof is covered with bricks (Figure 24).

Since the front and rear gopuras are connected to each other and to the right and left galleries form a quadrilateral, they are referred to as a cloistered gallery.

**4. Bhavalai** is located in the centre of the grounds within the embrace of the cloistered galleries. It is a sanctuary that is connected to a hall (Mandapa) in the front or in the north. Supporting the building is a triple-tiered base with indented corners, the first of which is at ground level. Decorated with carved patterns, the second tier is

.75 meter high. Where there is a door above there is a stairway of five steps on this tier. Each step has a tread of .70 meter and a rise of .50 meter. Both bases of the Mandapa and the Prang bear the same carved patterns. The Mandapa, with its roof of boat canopy-shaped stones (Figure 25), stands on a base of 15-meter width, 17-meter length, and 1.50-meter height. The front of the Mandapa overlooks a portico whose eastern and western walls each has a window. At the centre of the room is embedded a rectangular piece of stone. On the fronton of the northern portal is a carved image of 10-arm deity standing on the nodes on an elephant's head. Under the elephants is the head of the Demon who is holding a garland. On the right and the left side are two seated 2-arm deities. From the remains, the bottom pair of hands of the 10-arm deity is holding a skull-topped cane, his fourth right hand a trident, his second left hand a human head, his fourth left hand raising a leg of a 2-arm deity, and the topmost pair of hands raised above his head with the palms touching. Archaeologists are of the opinion that the 10-arm deity is a Shiva's incarnation as Nataraja, based on the gestures and the objects in his hands. Compared to the image of Nataraja found in India, the only discrepancy is that the animal is under his feet. Elsewhere, the animal is a cow, but at Bhavalai it is an elephant. Some said that this image must be that of a Shiva's incarnation as a killer of giants in the guise of an elephant. Further studies should be undertaken to clarify the matter. The same may be said of the image of Trilokayavijaya in Phimai ruins.

From the portico chamber, a small passageway leads to the front door of the mandapa. There are three more doors: the eastern, the western and the southern doors. The ones in the east and the west are portals bearing frontons and lintels depicting a deity sitting with one knee propped up above Demon's head. He holds a lotus or a plumb line in his right hand. The sanctuary chamber is accessible via the southern or the rear doorway. It is not known what was once kept in the chamber. Nowadays, there are a few imperfect pieces of ancient stone objects: an image of Ganesh, a standing deity image, a linga, and a replica prang (Figure 26). The latter has been removed for safeguarding in the City Hall of Sisaket Province. Other objects are relatively new, such as the cast-metal image of the Buddha subduing Mara, which was sent from the National Museum in Bangkok.



Figure 25 The sanctuary of Bhavalai



Figure 26 A replica of the prang found in Bhavalai

Once guarding important sacred objects, the sanctuary has crumbled into a 9-meter pile of stones. Its 7-meter twelve cornered indented square base and eastern, southern, as well as western portals have also dilapidated. The lintel on the western portal is the only piece remaining in tact. On this lintel is a carving of traditional patterns in the background with the Demon's face prominently featured. The Demon holds a garland in his hand and its floral tassel in his mouth. A stone inscription .45-meter wide and 1.25-meter high above the northern sanctuary's door bears testimony to the alphabet and the language.

With the width of 18.50 meters and the length 20.50 meters, the western court hall has porticos in the north, the south and the west. Each portico has three doors. Of note is the doorway leading to these porticos showing that there used to be door panels. On the walls are vents fitted with lathed-stone balusters in the same manner as those in the eastern court hall. Based on the basin-like vessels in the centre of each portico, this could be a place for religious followers to bathe in lustral water.

**Phoeng Ta Dee.** Beyond the Bhavalai to its south is the highest stone terrace. It is 44-meter wide and 50-meter long (Figure 27). Looking downward from this vantage point reveals Cambodia at a distance. A Thai flag flies atop a mast near a

stone cornice underneath which is a deep crevice where visitors can take a rest. According to the story told from generation to generation, an aged Buddhist monk named Dee built a shed on this stone terrace where he stayed until his death. Villagers therefore named this area Poui Ta Dee meaning the shed of 'Buddhist monk Dee'.



Figure 27 Phoeng Ta Dee



Figure 28 Twin Stupas

**Twin stupas.** Besides the Bhavalai at the top of the mountain, there is a pair of stupas on the stone terrace at the head of a path leading to a lower stone terrace in front of the front stairway. These cubicle stupas measure 1.93-meter wide and 4.20-meter tall, with rounded spires. What was once kept inside the stupas is a mystery since the contents have long been removed. (Figure 28)

### **Origin of Bhavalai**

As mentioned, most buildings on Khao Phra Viharn were erected during the reign of King Suriyavarman I. According to the inscription on the door of the Sanctuary or the fourth level of gorupa, this was around B.E. 1851. King Suriyavarman I recorded his name in the inscription as Suraya Varma Deva which approximates to the Thai pronunciation of Suriya Bhrama Dhep. The legend has it that he was a nephew of Phraya Jivaka of Nakhon Srithammaraj who led his troops to overcome Lavo (Lopburi) in 1446 B.E. He might have ascended the Lavo throne or been appointed an heir to the throne. Later on, he wedded Princess Sri Vira Lakshmi Maha Devi and reigned Cambodia around 545 B.E. The inscription on the frame of the Sanctuary recounts his descent from King Sri Nadhara Varma Deva (or Sri Nadhara Bhrama Dhep, 969-993 B.E). Princess Sri Vira Lakshmi Maha Devi herself descended from King Jayavarman II (1323-1397 B.E) descendant of the Sailendra Dynasty of the Srivijaya Kingdom who reigned a territory spanning as far as the Malaya Peninsula and Java during the 12<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century of the Buddhist Era. Phraya Jivaka of Nakhon Srithammaraj was also a descendant of the same dynasty.

A Sanskrit stone inscription offers an insight into the reasons for King Suriyavarman I and his Queen to build Phra Viharn. Stone inscriptions in the chamber of the stupas on Khao Phra Viharn and in Prasat Ta Keo in Siem Reap tell a story of a ruler named Phinsawan Khramavadi who governed a territory near Khao Phra Viharn. She had three sons and four daughters. One of her sons was Vishnuphol or Lakshmindhara and one of her daughters was named Pran. Pran was married to King Jayavarman II and became a Queen known by a new name of Queen Kambouch Lakshmi. Vishnuphol or Lakshmindhara waged wars against King Jayavarman II. According to these accounts, there may be two possibilities. One is that King Jayavarman II came from the Srivijaya Kingdom to reign Cambodia and then invaded the territory of Phinsawan Khramavadi. Vishnuphol or Lakshmindhara battled with him, but they finally reconciled. King Jayavarman II then married Kambouch Lakshmi. Another possibility is that King Jayavarman II ruled the territory of Phinsawan Khramavadi by first marrying Kambouch Lakshmi. Then Vishnuphol overtook him and became a ruler. Whatever the case may be, the stone inscriptions tell of Bhavalai as a sanctuary for kings. This indicates that it was erected, at the latest, during the reign of King Jayavarman II.

Readers are reminded that King Suriyabhrama Deva or Suriyavarman I and his Queen Sri Vira Lakshmi Maha Devi shared the same ancestors as King Jayavarman II. Therefore, King Suriyavarman I expanded the sanctuary of his ancestors which have accounts of them inscribed at both Prasat Phra Viharn and Prasat Ta Keo.

A passage in the Sanskrit inscription tells of a younger sister of Queen Kambouch Lakshmi called Hayang Chandra or Hieng Chandra. She had four daughters one of whom was named Pong or Sam Vedhama Pong. This daughter

married Prince Purush Sotama and gave birth to a son named Govindha and a daughter named Madhavi. The daughter later became a consort of King Rama Bhat and gave birth to sons named Pan, Ua, Aan, and Khrut, which approximate to Thai names. Is it possible that the family of Phinsawan Khramavadi was Thai? To think that these days, it is popular to name people and places using Magadha and Sanskrit, it might be a possibility that this is merely a trend continuing from past tradition. Further study should be undertaken to find out if Thai people had already settled in this area during the 14<sup>th</sup> century of the Buddhist Era.