

Scientific Rebuttal to ICOMOS Evaluation Report
(Document WHC – 07/31.COM/INF8B.1)
on the Nomination of Preah Vihear Temple as World Heritage Site

Office of Archaeology, Fine Arts Department

Ministry of Culture

And

ICOMOS Thailand

2551 B.E. (2008 AD.)

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Preface

Preah Vihear Temple is an important monument of Cambodia, being testimony to the great achievement in architecture and art of ancient Khmer culture.

Since 1992, Cambodia proposed Preah Vihear Temple as a World Heritage Site to UNESCO and had composed a Nomination File for World Heritage List, which was submitted to the World Heritage Centre on 30th January, 2006. The Nomination File was endorsed by ICOMOS and was presented in the 31st session of World Heritage Committee Meeting in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2007.

The Decision of the World Heritage Committee No. 31 COM 8.24 done on 28 June 2007 in its Thirty-First session in Christchurch, New Zealand was that consideration on Cambodian proposal should be postponed to the 32nd Meeting in Quebec, Canada in 2008 because Thailand and Cambodia could not reach a conclusion on the problem of overlapping claim area where the monument is situated, and the inaccuracy of information in the Nomination File proposed by Cambodia to the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS Evaluation Report, a complementary document for consideration presented in the World Heritage Committee meeting.

Nevertheless, Thailand has shown her clear attitude toward supporting Preah Vihear Temple as a World Heritage Site, and has aimed on establishing a full cooperation with Cambodia for the success of this mission by presenting information on Preah Vihear Temple based on scientific facts, while maintaining benefits of the Thai nation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by Department of East Asian Affairs in collaboration with the Office of Archaeology, Fine Arts Department, an organization under the Ministry of Culture, and ICOMOS Thailand have carried out an investigation on ICOMOS Evaluation Report and verification of scientific information to be presented to ICOMOS for consideration on improvement and correction of the document for the 32nd World Heritage Meeting in Quebec, Canada, in 2008. It is intended that the information, which is based on scientific facts as mentioned, will be part of the establishment of goodwill between Thailand and Cambodia, which would lead to future cooperation in conservation and management of Preah Vihear Temple.

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Preamble

The Kingdom of Cambodia has begun its mission on nomination of Preah Vihear Temple as a World Heritage Site to the UNESCO since 1992¹. The Nomination File was submitted to World Heritage Centre on 30th January 2006, which was endorsed by ICOMOS to be added in the agenda of the 31st Session of World Heritage Committee Meeting in Christchurch, New Zealand, in the following year (2007). The Committee had considered the proposal, and had decided to postpone the matter to be reconsidered in the 32nd World Heritage Committee Meeting in Quebec, Canada, in 2008 due to the unresolved problem related to the registration of Preah Vihear Temple as a World Heritage Site concerning the location of the monument which is in adjoining area between 2 countries, Thailand and Cambodia. Furthermore, the Committee had requested Thailand and Cambodia to cooperate in the work required for successful listing of Preah Vihear Temple as a World Heritage Site.

Considering the document proposed by Cambodia to the World Heritage Centre, which is the cause of the problem in the 31st Meeting in Christchurch previously mentioned, the contents of the document has legal effects concerning the border and the exercise of territorial sovereignty of Thailand following the judgement of World Court in 1962, whereas the Cambodian party holds on to the map of Preah Vihear Temple and the territory under sovereignty that the French had specified, which has several areas of overlapping claim with the Thai territory under sovereignty as seen in parts of the Core Zone and Development Zone of the plans included in the Nomination File. It is also noticeable that ICOMOS Evaluation Report which was used as a complementary document for consideration in the World Heritage Committee Meeting (Preah Vihear (Cambodia) No. 1224, pages 32 – 37), has certain information which is diverged from the facts. Such divergences can be categorized into 5 aspects as follows :

- 1. Criteria for consideration of outstanding universal value of Preah Vihear Temple as a World Heritage Site in ICOMOS Evaluation Report is different from the Nomination File without explanation of the reasons for change.**

From a ICOMOS Evaluation Report “Preah Vihear (Cambodia) No. 1224” proposed by ICOMOS to the 31st Session of World Heritage Committee Meeting in Christchurch, New Zealand, page 32, Cambodia proposed Preah Vihear Temple as a Cultural World Heritage Site by giving a brief description on the

¹ Cambodia proposed Preah Vihear Temple to be included in the nomination for World Heritage Site since 1st September, 1992. Detailed document on Preah Vihear Temple for nomination of the site as World Heritage (Le site du temple de Preah Vihear demande d'inscription sur la liste du patrimoine mondial) also known as Nomination File was received by World Heritage Centre on 30th January, 2006, and ICOMOS endorsed the document on 21st January, 2007.

monument that the sanctuary was dedicated to Shiva, located on the edge of a plateau that dominates the plain of Cambodia, were built in the first half of the 11th century AD. and form the most important sanctuary built during the reign of King Suryavarman I (1002 – 50).

The topography of the site of Preah Vihear Temple is on Phnom Dang Rek Range, a sandstone mountain range on Thai – Cambodian border. At present the area is a location of villages, shops and temples. Total population is approximately 550 people.

In the mentioned report, page 34, the State Party and ICOMOS had considered the attributes of Preah Vihear Temple which conform to 3 criteria for Cultural World Heritage Sites :

Attributes which conform to Criterion i “to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius” is specified “The Temple of Preah Vihear is a unique architectural ensemble made up of a series of sanctuaries linked by a system of pavements and staircases on an axis c.800 m. long.

The site of the Temple and its environment today represent a particularly significant example of the Khmer genius for adapting monuments to their environment”

Attributes which conform to Criterion iii “to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared” is specified “the promontory at the end of the Dangrek Range dominating the plain is exceptional testimony to the cultural traditions of the hermitages. The caves in the 500 m. high cliff, which are accessible without too much danger from the crest of the promontory; enabled the hermits to settle there. Their presence led to the foundation of sanctuary of the beginning of the 9th century on the promontory, from which the sacred ensemble visible today developed.”

Attributes which conform to Criterion iv “to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history” is specified “The Preah Vihear ensemble consists of the integrally connected temple and its environment a natural landscape which is exceptional by virtue of its topography and the boundless view that it gives over the Cambodian plain. From whichever direction the temple is approached and viewed, the temple is indissolubly linked with the cliff upon which it sits and of which it is the expression.”

Excerpts from the ICOMOS Evaluation Report previously mentioned conform to that of the Nomination File written in French “Le site du temple de Preah Vihear demande d’inscription sur la liste du patrimoine mondial” , page 2, which was proposed to the UNESCO by Cambodia.

On the contrary, in the conclusion, page 37, of the ICOMOS Evaluation Report of ICOMOS has specified the attributes of Preah Vihear Temple for cultural World Heritage Site in conformation to 3 criteria, which differ from the previous information as follows :

Attributes which conform to Criterion i is specified “Preah Vihear is an outstanding masterpiece of Khmer architecture. It is very pure both in plan and in the detail of the decoration.”

Attributes which conform to Criterion ii “to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design” is specified “Preah Vihear demonstrates an important

interchange in human values and developments in art, architecture, planning and landscape design.”
(Formerly being attributes which conform to the 3rd criteria).

Attributes which conform to Criterion iv is specified “The architectural ensemble is exceptional in its representation of Buddhist geometry. The position of the Temple on a cliff edge site is particularly impressive. Stairs and historical access surviving for over a thousand years show a sophisticated technological understanding. The whole historic structure demonstrates the highpoint of a significant stage in human history.”

It is noticeable that there have been changes from reference to the Criterion iii that State Party had proposed and ICOMOS had commented, as previously mentioned, to be reference to the Criterion ii in the conclusion without explanation of the reasons for change.

2. ICOMOS agrees with the Nomination File proposed by the Cambodian party that “Preah Vihear is an outstanding masterpiece of Khmer architecture. It is very ‘pure’ both in plan and in the detail of the decoration”, however, several other important elements which are testimony to ingenuity in design, planning and exploitation of natural environment in relationship to the Temple, have not been taken into consideration as monuments and areas in close vicinity, thus it is considered an incomplete presentation of the monument and site.

From the Criterion i : “to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius”, the value of Preah Vihear Temple as an architectural masterpiece, from both the Nomination File and ICOMOS Evaluation Report, only the main sanctuary, Gopuras, and a small pond situated between the 1st and 2nd Gopuras (Gopuras V and IV, according to the sequence of approach on north – south axis as specified in the Nomination File) have been mentioned along the 800 metres length of axis. The information does not cover all elements in the area.



Bird's eye view of Preah Vihear Temple, showing ingeniousness of site selection by builders of the sanctuary.

ICOMOS consideration on the Nomination File for proposal of Preah Vihear Temple as a World Heritage Site was that the Temple is outstanding Khmer architecture in aspects of planning and detail of architectural design.

Therefore, the intention in the design and planning of the entire area of the monument should be completely recorded and compiled for the holistic image of the monument and site which should lead to site management for conservation and development that is based on correct information.

However, due to the single-sided proposal of the monument as a World Heritage Site by the Cambodian party, who holds the right of property over the Temple but not other elements which are part of, and related to the superb creation of the architecture and site planning which involve site selection and ingeniousness in exploitation of topographical features since the times when the border did not exist. Such elements are not in care of Cambodia, therefore, they have not been included in the Nomination File.

From scientific information presented in the document and the existing facts, which reflect the values of the monument, it has been found that, not only the Preah Vihear ensemble in Cambodian territory but there are several other monuments and sites to the north of Preah Vihear in the territory of Thailand.

Consideration of values and distinctiveness based on the Criterion i, therefore, in order to cover the whole group of monuments which reflects the significant of planning, the proposed area should be expanded to include important elements in Thai territory² which would be a means to conserve this cultural heritage site holistically and completely that is critically required in planning of area management for conservation.

- 3. Consideration by ICOMOS did not take into account the dimension of relationship between the sanctuary and communities in its vicinity, both in the fact that the communities were caretakers of the sanctuary and in terms of spiritual bonds, which are intangible values and core indications of spirit of the place.**

ICOMOS document specifies only the communities in the surroundings of Preah Vihear Temple which are in the present Cambodian territory, mentioning the number of population as 550 people, without specifying the relationship between those people and Preah Vihear Temple. In fact, those communities are recent settlements whose population are immigrants, having no relationship to the sanctuary of Preah Vihear. The factors that encouraged settlement in the area are tourism and land claiming. The people depend largely on Thailand for their living necessities, water sources, and healthcare services. However, those communities have also created environmental problems in the aspects of visual images and sanitary conditions.

On the other hand, the history of communities which were contemporary with the Temple and its setting of Preah Vihear Mountain since ancient times is verifiable from several inscriptions discovered

² See appendix : Information on Monuments in Thailand

in the Preah Vihear Temple itself and in other Khmer influenced areas. Evidences clearly indicate that local communities have existed in the area since ancient eras, as seen in prehistoric archaeological sites that are evidences of the natives, not immigrants from Angkor. The local communities had integrated with the capital, making the power of Khmer Kingdom spread over the whole region including most of the area in the Central and Northeastern Regions of present day Thailand as seen in numerous remains of ancient towns and sanctuary of Khmer architecture.

In southern Isan (northeastern region of Thailand), adjacent to Phnom Dang Rek Range and in Si Sa Ket province, there are several Khmer monuments as well as a large number of ancient communities where Khmer cultural heritage, both the language and beliefs, have been transferred to the present communities that have immigrated into the native villages.

In the past, the people who lived in the vicinity of Preah Vihear Mountain could have played important roles in the construction of the sanctuary, as well as serving as slaves to the priests. The communities depended on the 2 streams that flowed from the mountain namely, Huai Tani and Huai Ta Maria. The present communities, whose population is of Khmer-Thai race, have mixed with later immigrants of Laos-Thai race, and have developed their own traditions as seen in the present day i.e. the propping of stones with tree branches generally practiced in Preah Vihear Mountain from the area in Thai territory to the mountain top at Poui Ta Di, indicating the development and continuity of human settlement along the Thai-Cambodian border by blood races and cultures. The development, integrated with external influences along the course of time, clearly reflects close relationship between the community and the monument in spite of separation by the present border.

4. **Descriptions of the architectural features of Preah Vihear Temple that appears in ICOMOS Evaluation Report indicate interpretation and presentation of information that are diverged from the facts in several aspects, which are questionable in terms of scientific straightforwardness due to certain reasons.**

In ICOMOS ICOMOS Evaluation Report page 32, Description - The architecture, there are several problematic descriptions, beginning with the addition of "(Sacred Hermitage Mountain)" after the word "Phnom Preah Vihear", although the phrase in brackets is not the meaning of the name. This can be seen as an attempt to lead the readers to understand that such phrase is the meaning of the site's name that could be linked to the reason for consideration of the information submitted by the Cambodian party based on the Criterion iii "exceptional testimony to the cultural traditions of hermitages". In fact, there are no evidences to support such function of the site apart from imagination in the views of modern people, based on the features of natural caves at the end of the promontory and the worship-making, which is a recent tradition.



A ritual performed under the rock shelter in Preah Vihear Temple area

The beautiful perspectives of the lowland as seen today, from the furthest rock shelter at Poui Ta Di, might have led some members of the assessment team to reckon that the site was intended to face Phnom Kulen, the cradle of the Khmer civilization as specified in the report. However, close investigation proves that the summit of Preah Vihear Temple is the main sanctuary with its spire rising up toward the sky. The building is expected to have enshrined Shival Lingam, enclosed by the gallery and southern Gopura, which is a closed structure, having no openings to the viewpoint at the rear. Besides, the stone cutting sites in the area were left in their rugged state, without having any attempt on finishing to suit the use of a sacred place. It should not be forgotten that, before Phnom Kulen, an older evidence of Khmer civilization in this region had already existed, that is, Wat Phu, situated on eastern direction.



Stone cutting site at Poui Ta Di

Concerning the access to the Temple in the present day, the report mentions only that which is a steep path connecting a new village at the foot of the mountain in Cambodia, although the main access used by most tourists is via the gentle slope, easy access from Thailand.

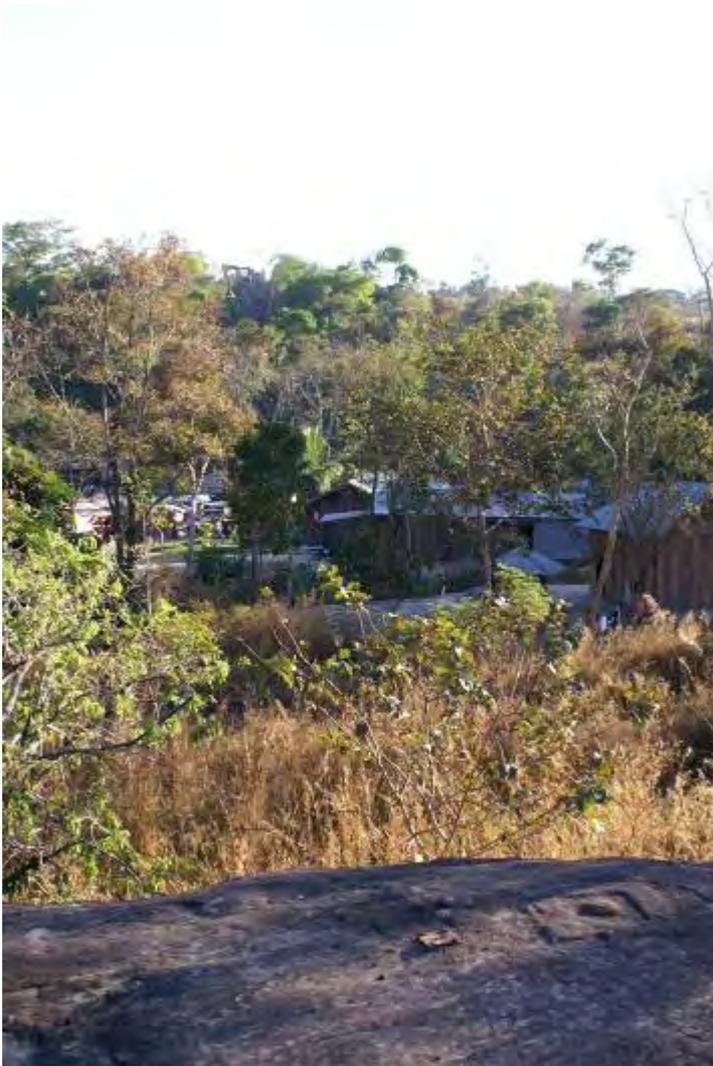
The description of Preah Vihear Temple that it possesses characteristics of monuments in the Northern and Eastern Regions of Cambodia is different from the accepted scientific knowledge in Khmer art, by which comprehensible references of the features of the monuments are based on the style of the period or the reign. Furthermore, there has never been a definite conclusion of the characteristics of the Northern or Eastern Regions whether their specific identities differ from those of Angkor. Considering the features of Preah Vihear Temple, it is distinctively Baphuan style. Beside its certain common features with monuments in Cambodia, most of the Khmer style monuments in Thailand also belong to Baphuan style i.e. Prasat Sa Kamphaeng Yai, a large monument of Si Sa Ket located near Preah Vihear Temple.

The main axis for construction of Preah Vihear Temple has not been specified in the report, although the 2 entrances are described that, an entrance is from the Main Stairs in the north, which meets with another entrance from the stairs that links to lower plain on the east at the lowest Gopura. Considering the scale of the access to the temple on the north, which is large, built to create beautiful perspectives seen between levels of stairs and causeways laid along the mountain slope, as well as conforming to the location of communities in lower plain, it is certain that the north – south axis is the main axis that participants of religious ceremony should take as entrance to the temple. Such omitting of information might have occurred because the information proposed by the Cambodia party specifies that the main entrance to the temple is to the east, from the “Bandai Hak Pass”, which is an access to the side of the Gopura and conflicting with the overall site planning of the temple. The reason behind this proposal is probably because the main access via the Main Stairs is from Thailand, whereas the Bandai Hak Pass is entirely located in the territory of Cambodia.

The concept of establishment of a religious place on the mountain is comparable to Prasat Phnom Rung in Buriram. The causeway flanked by rows of pillars, elevated in various levels, marked with Gopuras which represent heaven of different levels, guarded by Singhas (lions), protectors of the place and the pilgrims, and, most importantly, the Naga Bridge, which indicate the concept of a rainbow bridge that links the earth to the heaven, or the summit of Mount Meru represented by the main sanctuary, therefore, the principal access should be on the sequentially planned axis as mentioned. The Naga Bridge of Preah Vihear Temple has distinctive characteristics of Baphuan style; however, the proposed document by Cambodia specifies that the Main Stairs and Naga Bridge were built later in Angkor Wat period, whereas the Bandai Hak is the oldest structure. It is advisable, therefore, that the ICOMOS assessment should apply specialization in each particular art style for accurate verification.

The north – south axis of Preah Vihear Temple, apart from being the true entrance to the sanctuary according to the sequence of religious ceremony, differs from those of other temples which normally face east. This is seen as an integration of the high ingenuity in architecture and engineering of the designers and builders, and the site selection of a mountain with high promontory, which implies Mount Kailas, the

abode of Shiva, supreme god in Shaivite Hinduism. (This has not any relevant to “Buddhist geometry” as specified in the Conclusions of ICOMOS Evaluation Report based on the Criterion iv, which is considered a scientific mistake in assessment.) These characteristics, in accordance with information obtained from survey that an engraving of Shiva Lingam enclosed within a square frame similar to the Yoni base has been discovered on the stone plain to the north of the Main Stairs. Location of the engraving as mentioned is on a straight axis to the temple entrance on the north. Furthermore, the Shiva Lingam is engraved on a stone plain where water flows through before reaching Sa Trao pond, the reservoir used by the temple, communities in its surroundings and on lower plain (lowland in Thai territory) indicate the blessing of the water that, after passing Shiva Lingam, naturally became holy water similar to that of Phnom Kulen where Shiva Lingams were engraved at the source of water in Siem Reap before the water flowed to Angkor. These traditions show the concept on establishment of Preah Vihear Mountain with a holy stream flowing down to feed the communities in lower area.



Shiva Lingam and Yoni Base on stone plain in front of Preah Vihear Temple

Site selection for establishment of this sacred place is similar to the selection of Phu Kao, the mountain whose top part is similar in shape to Shiva Lingam, called Linga Parvata, for building Wat Phu, a

religious site in Champasak, Lao People's Democratic Republic built circa 6th century AD., Chenla period, that had adopted Khmer art influence continuously until circa 13th century. Prasat Wat Phu has been listed as a Cultural World Heritage Site since 2001. Declaration of the site as a World heritage was not limited to the structures which are religious monuments, but including its landscape features and the town of Champasak. Thus the making of Management Plan for Wat Phu World heritage Site is inclusive of the religious place and all complementary elements which have formed its setting, based on factual information of the monument.



Linga Parvata and Prasat Wat Phu, Champasak



The setting of Wat Phu, seeing the Baray situated in the front on main axis

5. ICOMOS Evaluation Report has approved the demarcation of zoning in protection, conservation, and management of Preah Vihear Temple area on condition of a mutual agreement between Thailand and Cambodia on the matter concerning the border, however, the actual problems is not merely the overlapping claim, but certain scientific inappropriateness exists that require improvements of zoning demarcation.

The proposal based on the Criterion iii on the aspect Preah Vihear Temple being a hermitage since ancient times and still remains so nowadays, seen as an indication of authenticity.

The contexts of the entire ensemble of Preah Vihear Temple are outstanding in terms of site selection and planning of sequential approach. Views toward various parts of the monument, as well as views toward the natural surroundings, reflect the relationship between man and nature that is valuable and worth preserving.

Therefore, in management, conservation and development of the area, as well as the construction of new facilities should be carried out based on visual analysis in order to prevent negative visual effects. There should be demarcation of landuse zones in order to preserve the values of the monument.

Considering the proposed zoning and guidelines for presentation, they are not sufficient for preservation the outstanding values of the monument because the lowland, in panoramic view from Poui Ta Di, is disturbed by new structures of Komui village that has been included in the Development Zone. View from the monument, looking toward Thailand, is also disturbed by new structures. These problems are results of planning without taking the values of Preah Vihear Temple as design factors. The reason that the area in Thai territory is managed under the National Park, which is already a measure for conservation, does not guarantee the preservation of authenticity in terms of setting.

Komui village, which is part of the Development Zone, is found to be the location of Prasat Maniwong, an Arokhyasala of Bayon period built in the reign of King Jayavarman VII. Although the monument is Buddhist and belongs to later period without relationship to Preah Vihear Temple, it is an important monument that indicates the link of ancient cultural route to Prasat Sa Kamphaeng Noi and Prasat Thamchan, an Arokhyasala, in Thailand.



Komui village viewed from Preah Vihear Temple, with an Arokhyasala situated in the middle of the village.

The Cambodian party also mentions a large Baray (reservoir) to the east of Preah Vihear believed to be part of the organizing of processions to enter Preah Vihear from Bandai Hak. The Baray, whose dykes on both sides are built over with roads, and whose centre is run through by a road which has been used as a zoning border, thus one part of the Baray in the Buffer Zone and the other in the Development Zone. It is observable that, in order to emphasize on the significant of the Baray and the access to the temple, such zoning demarcation should not be agreed upon.

The mountain and the 2 valleys flanking Preah Vihear are verdant forests which are part of the ecosystem of the entire Phnom Dang Rek Range, regardless of territorial rights of any country. These forests are not only habitats of endangered species such as Kouprey but, also, is a continuing area to Khao Yai – Dong Phya Yen, which has been declared a Natural World Heritage Site, whereas the lowland as seen from Preah Vihear Temple has lost its original state of a verdant forest. From these facts, it should be observed that zoning demarcation as proposed by the Cambodian party may not be appropriate if forests in the same valley are separated into 2 zones, one part is in Buffer Zone and the other in the Development Zone.

The listing of Preah Vihear Temple as a world Heritage Site is an opportunity to declare an area coverage and to re-plan the area for new constructions, as well as to set up a transportation network that would not conflict with the contexts of the monument, regardless of territorial rights, in order to preserve the landscape values which would lead to area management based on the facts of the existing environment.



Large scale asphaltic road in front of Preah Vihear Temple, Thailand



Hot and dry weather in February has led to forest fire which spread to Preah Vihear Temple area

Conclusion

Scientifically, the aesthetics of Preah Vihear Temple in terms of architecture and art are undoubtedly outstanding. Nevertheless, ICOMOS Evaluation Report on assessment of the values of Preah Vihear Temple as a World Heritage Site has depended on information given by the Cambodian party only, therefore, several issues are scientifically questionable, especially the issues on criteria for judgement of the site as a World Heritage.

Prof. Dr. Adul Wichiancharoen, former President of the World Heritage Committee, has given opinions that there are 3 principles which should be taken into consideration.

1. Outstanding universal value of cultural landscape
2. Authenticity
3. Integrity

Scientific integrity of a World Heritage site, therefore, is not limited to the monument itself, but should include its setting and other criteria. In this case, the location of the temple and convenient access is specifically from Thailand side. Furthermore, the area in Thai territory is location of monuments which reflect close relationship between the setting of Preah Vihear ensemble in Cambodian territory and sites in Thailand i.e. Sa Trao, which is considered the Baray of Preah Vihear Temple; or Mo I Daeng cliff where Sathup Khu (Twin Stupas) and the bas-reliefs are located. All of these have stories and significance in relationship with the Preah Vihear Temple.

Based on the reasons as mentioned, one of the resolutions for nomination of Preah Vihear Temple as a World Heritage Site is the implementation as a transboundary property, which has been practiced in several World Heritage Sites. This scheme reflects an important principle of the World Heritage Committee on paying attention to the concerns and issues which would affect all involving parties, so that the criteria for listing a particular monument as World Heritage Site are considered correctly and completely.

Appendix

Information on Monuments in Thailand

Significant elements in Thailand which are relatable to Preah Vihear Temple are :

1. Shiva Lingam Engraving

A Shiva Lingam engraving is situated on top of a sandstone hill in front of Preah Vihear Mountain. Its location is directly in the centre line of the main axis of Preah Vihear Temple, from which the Main Stairs, Naga Bridge, and Gopura of the lowest level (Gopura V) are clearly visible. The image is a bas-relief engraved on natural sandstone, small size, depicting a Shiva Lingam enclosed within a Yoni Base with a projection on northern side as is typical of the setting of Shiva Lingam.

It is known that Shiva lingam is symbol of God Shiva, one of the highest Gods in Hinduism. This fact is relevant to the establishment of Preah Vihear Temple as an abode of God Shiva; therefore, the location and meaning reflect the significance of the engraving, which is believable to be related to Preah Vihear Temple. Thus the image should be a contemporary element, circa 11th century.

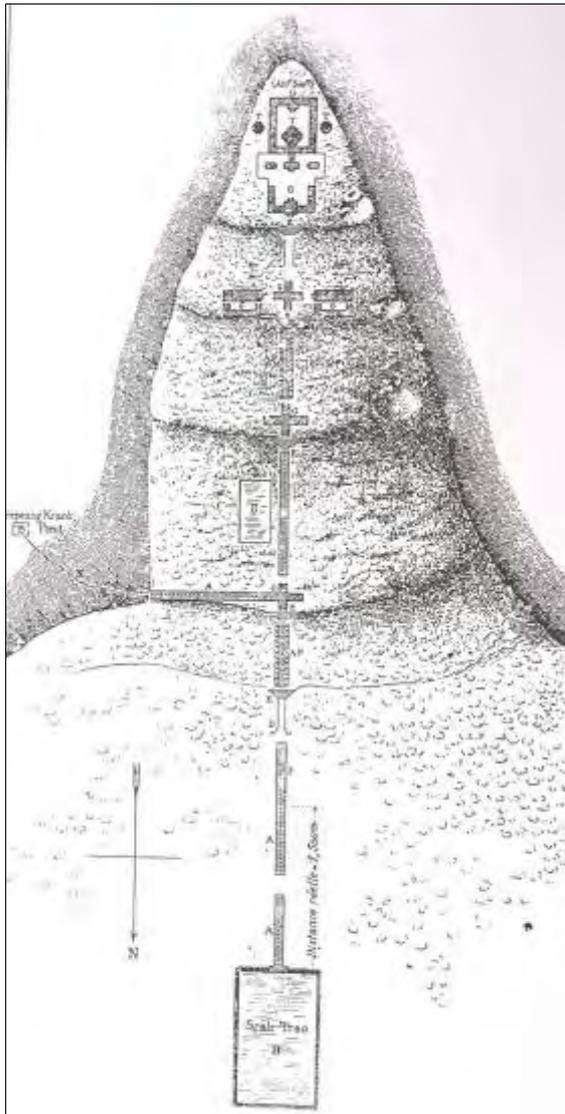
During a ceremony, Brahmins would pour water onto Shiva Lingam. The water flows through the Yoni Base and Somasutra channel and becomes holy water. Thus this Shiva Lingam, apart from being a mark of the main axis, could have been a centre of an open sacred ground where ceremonies were held. The ceremony could be the first ceremony performed before entering the temple, or ceremony performed simultaneously with that held at the temple but participated by people of lower social hierarchy.

All holy water from the stone plain flowed to Huai Tani, passing Sa Trao toward communities and agricultural area at the mountain base. It is, therefore, the same concept as the engraving of Shiva Lingams and Reclining Vishnu at Phnom Kulen and Kabal Sapien in Cambodia. In Phnom Dang Rek area not far from Preah Vihear Mountain, there is also a site of Reclining Vishnu image created by the same belief.

It is also noticeable that the location of this Shiva Lingam is in straight axis to the Twin Stupas on eastern direction.

2. Ancient Dam in Sa Trao Pond Area

Sa Trao, or Sa Krao, is an ancient reservoir situated on the northern axis of Preah Vihear Temple. The pond is visible when looking down from the Naga Bridge. Survey of the area in Siam by E. Lunet de Lajonquiere, 1916, recorded that Sa Trao is a water source near Preah Vihear Temple. Furthermore, Le Cambodge II. Le provinces siamoises by Etienne Aymonier, supports the significance of Sa Trao or Sa Krao as Baray of Preah Vihear Temple by clearly specifying the reservoir in the plan.



Drawing, showing location of Sa Trao and its relationship to Preah Vihear Temple

The reservoir's shape and size vary depending on the amount of water in each season. This pond, or reservoir, was created by building a dam to the north, blocking Huai Tani stream that flows along the valley of Preah Vihear Mountain. The dam comprises 2 parallel walls built of sandstone and the space in the middle of the walls was filled with sandy soil, resulting as a reservoir on stone plain that retained water before letting it overflow to Phum Srol village situated on northern lowland.

This ancient dam measures approximately 220 metres long, 40 metres wide, and 5 metres high (remains of the walls on northern side). Each wall was built by cubic sandstone blocks which could have been obtained from stone cutting sites in the vicinity.

At present, the southern wall of the dam still remains in original condition as seen in its edge on western side. Most of the stone laying also remains as original, although they are submerged under water level. The northern wall remains in its unexcavated state. The middle of the wall has been broken into a hole, which might have been caused by erosion, where small amount of water still flows through in the present day.

The western and eastern sides of the reservoir are traces of double walls built of stone and filled with packed soil, which are believed to be ancient directional walls to control water to overflow to lower streams in flooding season.

From survey and study of ancient dams in Thailand³, 11 ancient dams or water barriers have been discovered. The dams as mentioned were built in Dvaravati, Lop Buri, Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods, circa 6th – 17th centuries, most of which are earthen dams, except the Phra Chao Prasat Thong Dam in Saraburi province built in Ayutthaya period, which is a rockfill dam. Therefore, it is quotable that the ancient dam of Sa Trao is the only dam built of sandstone with earth core, being the oldest dam of this type in Thailand built in Khmer cultural influenced period, circa 11th – 13th centuries.

The stone laying features of the retaining walls of the dam clearly indicates the influence of Khmer culture, both in terms of materials and construction techniques. Furthermore, the stone cutting sites found in its surroundings show the stone cutting techniques which do not differ from those found on top of Preah Vihear Mountain or other stone cutting sites in Khmer culture, therefore, it is believable that the dam was contemporary with Preah Vihear Temple.

In the past, Sa Trao area could have been a natural stone plain similar to that on top of Preah Vihear Mountain. Upon construction of the temple, the area was chosen for building a large retaining wall to block water flowing route to create a large reservoir. Such exploitation of natural feature conforms to the Khmer concept in establishing a temple that, for each temple, a Baray (reservoir) must be built as a public utility for people who lived in the vicinity. Position of the Baray is usually in front of the temple, and in case of Preah Vihear Temple, the reservoir is situated in the north.



Remains of sandstone dam near Sa Trao

³ By Acting Sub-Lieutenant Phitthaya Damdenngam. Ancient Dams in Thailand. Document for Archaeological Scientific Symposium, 16th – 18th August, 2000. (Photocopy document).



Sa Trao

3. Ancient Dam Near the Main Stairs

In the area near the ground in front of the Main Stairs, a pond and an ancient dam are situated to the west. The dam is located at the western edge of the pond whose construction techniques are the same as Sa Trao Dam, with double stone walls filled with packed sand, but smaller in size. The stream that flows behind this ancient dam has become Huai Ta Maria, flowing northward to villages on the border.

Although this dam is smaller than the dam at Sa Trao, it is an important monument which is related to, and has relevant history of construction with Preah Vihear Temple as clearly specified in the Plan for Registration of National Monument of Preah Vihear Sanctuary made by the Fine Arts Department in 1959.

At present, the dam is unexcavated, however, its stone laying features are clearly visible. It is expected that the dam still remains in its original and complete condition, whereas the pond has become lowland, unable to retain water, and still in minefield area.

4. Rock Shelter and Mo I Daeng Rock Art

ICOMOS Evaluation Report specifies the significant of the area under rock shelter as a hermitage since ancient times until today, without any supporting evidence but hypothesis based on the ritual of present day people. In fact, the natural rock shelter at Mo I Daeng cliff is, apart from being suitable as a “hermitage”, also a location of bas-reliefs in Khmer art depicting 3 deities (circa 10th century), possibly involved with beliefs on the rehabilitation of a natural area as a sanctuary as seen in Phu Phra Bat, Udon Thani in Northeast Thailand, or could be the use of rock shelter since prehistoric times by the native of this area of Phnom Dang Rek Range.

The Mo I Daeng rock art is an archaeological site recently discovered in 1987 by Border Protection Ranger Unit, Amphoe Kantharalak, Suranari Brigade. The art at Mo I Daeng comprises bas-reliefs and engravings, which can be categorized in 2 groups.

Group 1 comprises 4 images in total; 3 images are bas-reliefs and 1 is line engraving. The 1st – 3rd bas-reliefs are human figures sitting in a row, depicting a man flanked by two women in twisted perspective, that is, the lower part of the body is seen from the side but the top part is seen from the front. The man in the middle sits with his right knee up, left leg folded on the floor, right arm laid on the right knee, wrist lifting, holding a whisk-like object in the hand. He wears a frame-like and high, cylindrical headdress which encloses the face, flowers behind the ears, dangled earrings and the face is engraved with moustache and beard. There are ornaments around his neck and arms, which may be seen as collar and sleeves decorations, and wears short pants with high border. The height of the figure is 91 centimetres.

The first female figure, sitting to the right of the man also sits with one knee up, turning towards the man, with raised hand and folded elbow. The details are unclear, probably unfinished but there are traces of headdress, double hair buns, dangled earrings, and an object, probably a whisk, in the hand. The face is not very pretty, having a rather sulky look with downturn corners of the lips. The height is 90 centimetres.

The second female figure is on the left hand side of the man. Sitting with one knee up, left arm straight, right arm laid on the knee, holding a whisk-like object in the hand. Details also appear unfinished, however, the shape of the bosom, the oval face, aquiline nose, pretty, and slightly smiling countenance are perceptible. There are also a headdress, high hair bun, and dangled earrings. The height is 84 centimetres.

At the opening above the heads of the figures is an engraving depicts an animal figure, which looks like a rhinoceros seen from the side, facing north.

The bas-relief of 3 human figures was interpreted by Prof. Jean Boisselier, a French expert, that the human figure represents Kubera, one of Lokapalas who is the guardian of the North direction, indicated by the flowers behind both ears according to the fashion of Yaksha, because Kubera is the Lord of Yakshas. Nevertheless, some scholars interpreted the figures to represent high-ranked people rather than gods. Based on iconography, the figures are dated circa 10th century, or older than Preah Vihear Temple.



Bas-reliefs Group I

Group II rock art is located approximately 4 metres to the north of the first group. This group comprises engravings which depict a seated human figure under Naga flanked by 2 animals, one of which is engraved only the head, probably unfinished. The human figure under the Naga, whose height is 65 centimetres, is probably Varuna, the Rain God, who is the guardian of the West in Hinduism. The Naga appears to belong to Baphuon art style. The engravings are seen to be carried out before cutting the rock into a rectangular frame, which indicate the intention on creating the work, however, the cause of the work being unfinished is unknown. Dating of this group of images is circa early 12th century, after the creation of Group I.



bas-reliefs Group II

5. Tham Khun Si (Khun Si Caves)

Tham Khun Si, or Khun Si Caves are natural sandstone caves where evidences of adapting natural features to serve as dwelling are found. The caves are located on the route of Huai Tani stream before it reaches Sa Trao pond. In flooding season, the stream becomes a 2-tiered waterfall. The site comprises 2 caves, namely, the Upper Khun Si Cave and the Lower Khun Si Cave. The upper cave's mouth is on the west, measures 17 metres in length and 1.75 metres in height at middle, and the cave is 7.2 metres deep. Along the length of the top part of the cave's mouth was cut into a groove to prevent rainwater getting into the cave and upper part and lower part of the cave's mouth were bored into holes, which could have been used for placing wooden rods as structures of a partition in order to use the cave as a dwelling. In the middle part of the ceiling of the cave's mouth is engraved with a long line curving into an elliptical loop at one end. Prof. Kongkaew Wiraprachak, Expert in Ancient Language, Fine Arts Department, gave an opinion that the engraving could be a symbol in Hinduism. Besides, from verbal information obtained from local people, there used to be a brick wall in the cave. The ceiling of the cave is thickly covered with soot, indicating a long period of continuous dwelling.

The Lower Khun Si Cave is located at the lower part of the waterfall. The mouth of the cave faces north, measures approximately 23 metres in length, and 1.70 metres in height at middle, and the cave is 14 metres deep. The upper part of the cave's mouth has 2 grooves cut, similar to that of the upper cave.

Human adaptation of the natural caves for dwelling is hypothesized to have been before, or contemporary with the construction of Prea Vihear Temple.



Rock shelter of Tham Khun Si

6. Stone Cutting Sites

Although Poei Ta Di, the rear of Preah Vihear Temple in Cambodian territory and sandstone plains on Preah Vihear Mountain are scattered with evidences of sandstone cutting for building the sanctuary and several parts of the structures i.e. bases, built elements and stairs, were made by cutting natural stone in situ, the high requirement of sandstone, as well as specific demand of pink sandstone used for making lintels, had necessitated the procurement of sandstone from other areas in the mountain. It is noticeable that the vicinity of Preah Vihear Temple in Thai territory has many stone cutting sites whose stone texture and substance is close to the stone used for building Preah Vihear Temple. Survey by the 11th Regional Office of Archaeology, Ubon Ratchathani has shown that several stone cutting sites are situated in the areas of Mo I Daeng cliff and Sa Trao.



A stone cutting site in the area of 23rd Ranger Camp near Preah Vihear Temple



A stone cutting site near Sa Trao

7. Sathup Khu (Twin Stupas)

Sathup Khu or Twin Stupas comprises 2 identical structures standing side-by-side on north-south axis, parallel to the main axis of Preah Vihear Temple, on the vast stone plain to the south of Mo I Daeng Cliff. Situated at a distance from the Twin Stupas to the south is a mountain pass called “Chong Bandai Hak” (Broken Stairs Pass), which is another access connecting the Preah Vihear Mountain top to the lowland. The stupas are built of sandstone blocks finely laid to form square-shaped structures, with rounded-top roofs, each one built of a single block of sandstone. Each structure has neither doors nor windows; however, there are large holes in the walls of both stupas caused by illegal treasure seekers. Thus the inside of each stupa is visible as a chamber where an image of worship, probably a Shiva Lingam, was installed on Yoni base made of sandstone. However, the objects have been lost, but a Yoni base still remains in the southern stupa.

The features of the buildings as enclosed structures enshrining Shiva Lingams and Yoni Bases inside clearly indicate that the objects of worship were installed simultaneously with the construction. Furthermore, because the structures were built on natural stone plain, there is no problem of settlement. Thus, apart from the holes made by intruders, the monument still exists in almost perfect condition.

These structures are considered to be highly valuable in terms of history and archaeology because monuments of the same features have never been discovered at any other places or archaeological sites in Thailand. Although the images have been lost, it is believable that the structures were built as part of a sanctuary as a dedication to Hindu Gods. Apart from the Yoni base which still remains in the chamber, the shape of each stupa is also a reminiscence of Shiva Lingam. The fine craftsmanship, using large blocks of materials, indicates the intention in creating the structures. Although the exact date of the monument is still unknown, it is believable to be relevant to certain periods of construction of Preah Vihear Temple complex, possibly during Baphuon and Angkor Wat periods.



Sathup Khu (Twin Stupas)

8. Prasat Don Tual

Prasat Don Tual is an ancient Khmer monument contemporary with Preah Vihear Temple. It is situated on the edge of a cliff of Don Tual Mountain, adjacent to Sattasom Mountain to the east of Preah Vihear Mountain. The monument is a Hindu sanctuary. On the door frame is engraved with inscriptions specifying the year Maha Sakarat 924 (1002 AD.), last year in the reign of King Udhyadhityavarman I before King Suryavarman I conquered Angkor and ascended the throne. The inscriptions mention the order of Boromabophit (the King) to distribute an announcement to arrest 2 slaves of the temple.

Prasat Don Tual comprises a group of buildings, whose principal structure is the main sanctuary. The plan of the main sanctuary is indented cornered square, built of laterite from the base to above the door, and the upper part of the walls and roof spires are built of rubbed bricks. The roof spire is 4-tiered, whose topmost part made of sandstone has collapsed to the ground. The building is has a door on eastern side and blind doors on other 3 sides. Inside the Garbagriha, the base of an image still exists.

Extended from the main sanctuary to the east is a hall with rectangular plan, paved with laterite, the interior is supported by 2 rows of 4 laterite columns with sandstone capitals. The base of the building is built of laterite, extending from the main sanctuary. The walls are made of brick. There are 3 entrance gateways. On the frames of the middle gateway, which is the largest, are inscriptions on both sides. The roof of the hall is believed to have been gable, wooden structured and finished with terracotta tiles indicate by holes at the 4 columns and the grooves made in shape of gable roof on the wall of the main sanctuary. In front of the hall is an entrance hall with rectangular plan supported by 4 sandstone columns with carved capitals, which could have supported the wooden structures of the roof. Furthermore, there are crescent-shaped stone steps placed in front of the middle doorway and the entrance hall.

On the southwestern direction of the main sanctuary situates a Bannalai (library) with rectangular plan. The lower base is built of laterite, and the upper part of the base is built of sandstone, however, all walls had collapsed that the features are non-existence.

To the west of the main sanctuary stands a low laterite base in rectangular shape, the middle of which is cut into a square hole surrounded with square and rectangular holes in 8 directions. At approximately 50 metres away to the east of the main sanctuary situates a pond, whose dykes are the only remaining parts. Besides, to the south in the cliff area is located with remains of stone cutting site.

Prasat Don Tual Inscriptions

Inscriptions on both sides of the main door frame are important historical evidences. The inscriptions specify the date 1002 A.D., the last year of the reign of King Udhyadhityavarman I, who was overthrown by King Suryavarman I who attacked Angkor and ascended the throne. The inscriptions also announce for arrestment of runaway slaves, including the statement on punishments for those who neglect their duties in disseminating the announcement as mentioned. Thus it is conclusive that the date of the monument is circa 11th century, contemporary with the construction of Preah Vihear Temple in the reign of King Suryavarman I.

Prasat Don Tual is an important monument that has been registered as National Monument since 1935. The monument has been excavated and restored by the Fine Arts Department.



Road passing Prasat Don Tual



Base of an image of worship (Yoni base), Prasat Don Tual

Information on Ancient Communities from Inscriptions and Archaeological Survey

The history of ancient communities that existed along with the sanctuary since ancient times has been quoted in several inscriptions, both those discovered in the Preah Vihear Temple and other Khmer influenced sites. Evidences indicate the existence of native ancient communities since prehistoric period who were not immigrants from Angkor but were later integrated with Angkor, making the power of Khmer Kingdom spread

all over the region including most of the Central Region and Northeastern Region of Thailand as seen in the a large number of ancient towns and monuments of Khmer style.

In the lower northeast, near the entire Phnom Dang Rek Range, and the area of Si Sa Ket province, several sites of Khmer art exist including numerous evidences of ancient communities where Khmer cultural heritage i.e. language and beliefs have been handed down to the present communities who immigrated to settle in the area where old communities once situated.

In the past, the people who lived in the vicinity of Preah Vihear Mountain could have played important roles in the construction of the sanctuary, as well as serving as slaves to the priests. The communities depended on the 2 streams that flowed from the mountain namely, Huai Tani and Huai Ta Maria. The present communities, whose population is of Khmer-Thai race, have mixed with later immigrants of Laos-Thai race, and have developed their own traditions as seen in the present day i.e. the propping of stones with tree branches generally practiced in Preah Vihear Mountain from the area in Thai territory to the mountain top at Poui Ta Di, indicating the development and continuity of human settlement along the Thai-Cambodian border by blood races and cultures. The development, integrated with external influences along the course of time, clearly reflects close relationship between the community and the monument in spite of separation by the present border.

An inscription found in the area of Preah Vihear Temple called "Shiva Shakti Inscription" following the name of the scribe, relates the history back to late 9th century AD., the reign of King Jayavarman II, that when the King spread his power to this region, he had the natives convert to worship "Shiva the same as Vishnu", thus it is believable that the local communities in the vicinity of Preah Vihear Mountain might have worshipped Vishnu, mixing with the primitive beliefs in ghosts and spirits.

The inscription also mentions a woman named "Prana", who had been renamed "Kampuchlakshmi" when she married King Jayavarman II.

A study of Prof. Louis Finot, a French scholar, compared the texts read from the inscription of Prasat Ta Keao, Angkor, Siem Reap, Cambodia to Shiva Shakti inscription and clarified the relationship of the dynasty of King Jayavarman II and Queen Kampuchlakshmi and other Khmer kings. It is concluded that Queen Kampuchlakshmi is Queen Pavitra, or called by some inscriptions "Yang Pavitra", the word "Yang" is hypothesized to be a title of a lady used only in her specific family, therefore, Queen Kampuchlakshmi is the mother of King Jayavarman III who succeeded his father, King Jayavarman II.

The Shiva Shakti inscription also mentions the relatives and family of Queen Kampuchlakshmi that the family descended from Queen Pinsvargaramvati who had several daughters, however, the family lineage did not include the name of Khmer kings or kings of ancient Chenla, therefore, it is believable that the family was that of local leaders or town rulers who did not have blood relationship to Khmer kings in pre-Angkor periods (before 11th century). Furthermore, the inscription mentions several important places in the area of Preah Vihear, and the establishment of Shiva Lingam in some areas.

The Shiva Shakti inscription calls the area of the present Preah Vihear Mountain “Pavalai”, the sacred area which is exclusive to only the local leaders, original family of Queen Kampuchlakshmi.

Another inscription from at Prasat Ta Keao sanctuary mentions “Queen Yang Pavitra of Haripura”, therefore, based on Prof. Finot’s study, Queen Kampuchlakshmi was the same person as Queen Yang Pavitra thus Queen Kampuchlakshmi should have come from Haripura, meaning “the town of Vishnu”. Thus it may be concluded that the original name of Preah Vihear area was “Haripura”, whose significant area was “pavalai”, existed, at least, from late 9th century, the reign of King Jayavarman II. 200 years later, King Suryavarman had Preah Vihear Temple built which was originally called “Sri Sikhareshvara” as specified by the inscription on door frame.

The people who lived in Haripura should not have been the population of the lowland Khmer, which is the area in Cambodian territory of the present day, and should not have related to the royal family of Chenla who originally spoke the Khmer language. They are believable to have been representatives of the highland Khmer whose blood descendants and culture still exist in Surin, Si Sa Ket, and Ubon Ratchathani provinces of Thailand.

Preah Vihear Inscription No. 4 st the frame of Gopura II, Preah Vihear Temple, where the name of Sri Suryavarman II is mentioned, also mentions the virtue of Sri Sukarma Kammasatengi who built a fence dedicated to Kmartengshakata Sri Sikhareshvara and Kmartengshakata Sri Varidheshavara....King Sri Suryadheva bestowed assets and a village called Vidhebha to Sri Sukarma Kammasatengi and had the name of the village changed to “Kurukashetra”. The features of the village is described as “a land, being an undulating area of lowland and highland...”. The King also ordered the “Dhayadharna” of Phra Sri Sikhareshavara to do rice farming and live in the bestowed land at the foot of the mountain, but they must swear...”

Part of the inscription says “Kmartengkamtuanan gave the sanctuary to the black people, but not to the black people who had been rebels in all reigns, until Phra Kammasatengi the black Thai who was sent to be trained and sent to inspect the black people both those who still lived in the Ashram and those who had moved. Kammasatengi brought his black relatives and weapons to submit to the King and told the King about another group of relatives who were caretakers of the sanctuary. The King told the people to be at peace and advised them to pray. Thus when those people built an Ashram, the King did not object.”

On the 2nd side of the inscription, an interesting part says “The King told the people and village leaders to live like a family, to confirm their loyalty to the Kmartengshakata and all royalties by swearing before Phra Kmartengshakata Sri Sikhareshvara”...”It is compulsory for all workers in the area of Phra Kmartengshakata and at the foot of the mountain and their relatives who perform religious ceremonies to swear to Phra Kmartengshakata before and after work. Even those who have been granted permission to live in the bestowed area at the foot of the mountain must swear to Phra Kmartengshakata.” These excerpts indicate the suspicion that the local black people will rebel again, therefore, King Suryavarman had them swear allegiance to the God Shiva and to himself.

Some Khmer inscriptions described that Prince Jayavardhana (called by some inscriptions “Dharmavardhana”) who, in later time, would reign in the name King Jayavarman III was competent in fighting on elephant back. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Thida Saraya applied this information in integration with some inscriptions in King Suryavarman I period from Preah Vihear Temple that mentioned “Black Rebellion”, and hypothesized that the local people in Preah Vihear area could have been the Kuai, or Kui who have dark skin and are competent in catching and training elephants.

In Rattanakosin period, the Kuai was usually called “Suai”, and also “Khamen Pa Dong” (Jungle Khmer). The evidence of these names has appeared since Ayutthaya period. Both Thai and foreign academics mostly agree that the Kuai have settled in the north and northeast of Cambodia since circa 3,000 years ago.

The information obtained from aerial photographs and field survey of several districts of Si Sa Ket in the adjoining area to Thai – Cambodian border (Amphoe Khun Han, Amphoe Khukhan and Amphoe Kantharalak) reveals that there are several ancient communities scattered in the area.

The ancient towns as mentioned are signified with moats and dykes, noticeable features of ancient towns in the Mun and Chi river basins which can be dated from 6th century onward. The evidences indicate the gathering of people which had developed since prehistoric period until the adoption of Dvaravati culture which flourished in the Central Region of Thailand, and the Khmer culture from Cambodia.

At present, a thorough archaeological study in the area of ancient communities at the foot of Preah Vihear Mountain has not been carried out. Ancient objects have been discovered only by surface survey and digging by local people. The 11th Regional Office of Archaeology Ubon Ratchathani has conducted fundamental surveys in 2 sites namely, Non Nong Krachao and Rai Mae Tam. Both sites are located near the streams which flow from Preah Vihear Mountain. Non Nong Krachao is the place where a bronze Naga head and pottery shards, scattered at the base of a mound, have been found. At Rai Mae Tam, a jar of Khmer style called Buriram pottery has been discovered in a complete condition. This area is an undulating plain where 2 streams meet, conforming to the statement in the inscription.

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