

Research Briefs

The Archaeological Sites of Khwae Noi River

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In 1983, some 310 square kilometers of land in the districts of Thong Pha Phum and Sangkha Buri, Kanchanaburi Province will be inundated to form part of the reservoir of the Khao Laem Kam of Thailand which is currently under construction. This includes forested and mountainous areas known to shelter archaeological monuments and artifacts useful in tracing the history of the country. To salvage them, thus preventing their loss to the archaeological world, the Department of Fine Arts launched "The Project to Rescue Archaeological Sites of the Khwae Noi River" in March 1981.

Background

The Project aims to survey and excavate all the archaeological sites within the proposed reservoir before its inundation. This involves evacuation, analysis, classification and exhibition of all the finds and preparation of reports for eventual circulation.

The archaeological importance of the area was expounded in "The Preliminary Report of Archaeological Survey of the Upper Khwae Noi" written by archaeologists of the Silpakorn University. The survey conducted in 1975 mapped more than fifty archaeological sites needing further excavation. Most of them were located on foothills, hills and plains near the Khwae Noi River. The sites were described as both prehistoric and historic.

The Silpakorn report plus those of other authors reveal that prehistoric sites abound in the Kanchanaburi Province, with many situated in the future reservoir area. The excavated artifacts — stone tools, metal tools and pottery wares — date from the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Metal Ages. The initial activity of the present



Ruins of a monument found near the Khwae Noi River.

Project team also uncovered pieces of stone axes of Hoabinhian and Neolithic tradition.

However, full excavation of the pre-historic sites has been deferred.

Currently, the Project focuses on evident archaeological sites or historic monuments which are mostly associated with war efforts during the Thailand-Burma wars and the Second World War.

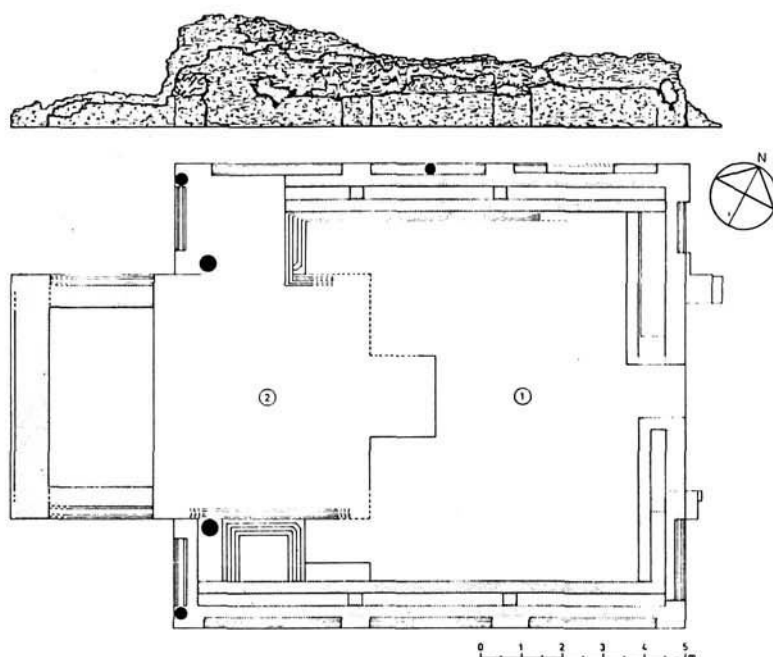


A stone adze uncovered in the Kanchanaburi archaeological sites.

War Route

The strategic location of Kanchanaburi, lying between Thailand and Burma, makes it a logical route between two. Historical records show that Thailand and Burma, from 1538 to 1854, forayed against each other via the Three Pagoda Pass and parts of Kanchanaburi. Both sides of the Khwae Noi River carry proofs of having been used as a war route or a battle field. Ancient army camps, moats and forts have been discovered in the area.

Some of the segments of the of the "Death Railway" of World War II vintage were laid along the left bank of the Khwae Noi River passing through the proposed reservoir area. The railway was constructed by the allied prisoners of war under



Plan of an ancient monument (H. 30).

the supervision of the Japanese Army. It traversed Kanchanaburi and Burma and was used to transport Japanese troops and arms to the Indian war front. The railway line has now been dismantled but the remains of the Japanese army camps, prisoner of war camps, war materials and construction equipment can still be seen.

Aside from war relics, historic monuments of the Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Bangkok (Ratanakosin) Periods are also abundant in the area. Ruins of Buddhist monasteries and stupas have been uncovered. The architectural style of most monuments indicates that they were built in the middle or the late Ayutthaya period. Bangkok-style monuments have also been unearthed but so far in less number than those of the earlier periods.

Important artifacts have also been found. They are, among others, Buddha images, boundary stones, parts of architectural structure and ceramic wares, both indigenous and foreign. All the Buddha images, so far unearthed, show the artistry of the Ayutthaya period. Those found at sites H. 10

and 30 (see map) are small and made of bronze while the others unearthed in site H. 2 are of teak and range in height from 40 to 100 centimeters. The boundary stones found at sites H10 and 30 also belong to the Ayutthaya period. They are made of pink sandstones. The parts of the structures discovered



Location of the reservoir area.

in sites H. 8, 10 and 30 are identified as nails made of irons. The indigenous ceramic wares carry the imprint of the Ayutthaya and Sukhotai periods. Blue and white pieces produced during the Ming and Ching dynasties constitute the imported ceramic finds.

Archaeological work in the proposed reservoir area continues until its inundation in July 1983.

Bais Project Phase II.....

University of Michigan, the University of Hawaii and the University of Amsterdam. I wish to take this occasion to thank the administrators of all these institutions, as well as government officials in Manila, Dumaguete, Tanjay, Bacong, and Amlan for their helpfulness and cooperation. Most of all, I want to express my deep gratitude, in the name of all team members, to the wonderful people of Negros Oriental for their kindness and hospitality.

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