

# Phaniat

**Royal Elephant Kraal and Village Ayutthaya, Thailand**

**text & photos  
by  
Ken May**





A brief history of Phaniat and it's surrounding area

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## Background

**S**iamese history is intrinsically linked with its elephants. This prized pachyderm features strongly in the Royal Chronicles and foreign visitors have long been mesmerized by the animal. Elephants are characters in countless folk stories and they appear on hundreds of temple murals across the country. Elephants have been used as work animals, vehicles of war, and incorporated into religious ceremonies throughout Siamese history.

White elephants were especially highly esteemed; often seen as a Royal incarnate or an auspicious omen. The first record of a white elephant being captured was in 1471 during the reign of King Borommatrailokanat (*Amatyakul* 59). The capture of white elephants continued to be featured in later Royal Chronicle records.

It is debatable when Siamese first began to train elephants and incorporate them into local culture. One theory is that the practice of domesticating elephants originated in India. A Greek ambassador to the court of Hindu Emperor Patna reported the practice as early around 300BC (*Garnier* 57). The art of training wild elephants could have been brought into the region along with migrants from India. The Royal Chronicles points out the Brahmin priests were living in Ayutthaya even before King U-Thong established it as a city (*Cushman* 10). This could partially explain why Brahmin priests still play such an important role in ceremonies relating to elephants – including the replacements of phallic-looking (lingam) wooden posts at the elephant kraal. It may be no coincidence that Siam exported so many trained elephants to India.

Elephants were domesticated in Sukhothai, the county's first capital city, from as early as the late thirteenth century. In the second capital city of Ayutthaya, there was a clear administrative structure pertaining to the use of elephants. H.G. Quaritch Wales (1965) writes that the Elephant Department (Krom Gajapala) included various sub-departments including the "rope department (in charge of the equipment for capturing wild elephants), the elephant physicians, the battalions of elephants-of-the-line, baggage elephants, artillery elephants, and the tame animals used for capturing wild elephants" (p 143). Members of the Elephant Corp had to obey the Law of Treason, which punished them by death for desertion or neglect of duties (p 159). The Cavalry Department (Kram Asvaraja) for horse was attached to the Elephant department, which indicated its lesser importance (p 148).

The number of elephants in old Ayutthaya has never been clear. Van Vliet estimated 400-500 tamed elephants, which were attended to by 2-3 mahouts each (*Van Vliet* 123). Dutch trader Joost Schouten wrote that over 3,000 tame elephants existed in the Siamese kingdom (*Manley* 136). M. de La Loubere reported that there could have been as many as 10,000 elephants, but admitted this could be exaggeration (*La Loubere* 89). Royal Chronicles speak of as many as 800 war elephants being prepared for battle at the same time (*Cushman* 142).

Elephants were often used to for punitive measures. A common form of capital punishment was to have elephants trample someone to death. At other times elephants would

toss a convict into the air or roll them around like a ball. A lesser form of punishment was being sent out to cut grass for elephants.

Kings would use elephants to deliver robes to Buddhist monks as part of the elaborate kathin ceremony connected to Buddhist lent. The king would ride on the back of an elephant, perched on a golden throne, in a massive parade from the Grand Palace to Wat Mahatat (*"Palace Street" on M.de La Marc's map*) in order to donate robes to Buddhist monks. The grand procession was led by 200 elephants with three mahouts each. The march also included musicians, hundreds of men on foot, 200 Japanese soldiers, a large number of royal consorts and courtiers. In total about 15-16,000 persons participated in the procession. The kathin ceremony was witnessed by Dutch trader Joost Schouten in the 1630s and French visitor Nicolas Gervaise in the 1680s (*Pombejra 82-87*).

There are two elephant kraals mentioned in Royal Chronicles. One was located at the Grand Palace (at times referred to as "Paniat Wat Tsong"). The second elephant kraal (Phaniat) was used to capture wild elephants in the forests outside the city. Both played vital roles in Ayutthaya history.

## Chronology of the Kraals

**R**oyal Chronicles first mention of elephants was in relation to a succession struggle in 1424. After the death of King Inthracha, the two elder sons, Ay Phraya and Yi Phraya, fought on elephant back to determine who would inherit the throne. As a result, both princes were severely wounded and died from combat. The youngest brother, Chao Sam Phraya was then proclaimed King under the title of Boromaracha II. He promptly commanded that two chedis be built on the site where his brothers engaged in combat (*Cushman 15*). Both chedi can be seen today in front of Wat Rajaburana.

The original elephant kraal was located on the northeastern corner of the Grand Palace. The adjacent area stretching from Wat Thammikarat to Wat Suwandawat is referred to as Elephant Street on M. de La Mare's map (1751). Other maps by westerners clearly show elephant stables on this street (*Vingboons c.1665, Loubere 1691, Coronelli 1696*). Traces of elephant rope and other equipment were found at one temple located on elephant street, Wat Yannasane.

It is assumed that the elephant kraal at Phaniat was established soon after the foundation of the city. It was built in the Tung Thalay Ya area at Ban Phaniat, Tambon Suan Phrik (*Kasetsiri/Wright 325*). Both kraals functioned more or less simultaneously.

King Chakkraphat (1548-1569) placed great faith in war elephants and tried to capture as many of the animals as he could. Evidence suggests that he once sent an envoy to China in 1553 with a white elephant as a gift, but unfortunately the animal died during



passage (*Garnier 16*). White elephants were such a highly valued commodity that an entire war started when King Chakkraphat refused to present a white elephant to an envious Burmese king. This became known as the White Elephant War.

In 1549, the Burmese King Tabinshwehti invaded Ayutthaya. As was the practice of the time, King Chakkraphat charged directly into battle while mounted on an elephant. He met the leader of the Burmese army on the battlefield (northwest of the city island, in the vicinity of Wat Phu Khao Thong), and they engaged in a dual on top of elephants. One local legend is that his wife, Queen Suriyothai, disguised herself as the king and charged into battle atop an elephant, heroically sacrificing herself on the battlefield. Her body was cremated at Wat Suan Luang Sopsawan. Siam won a temporary reprieve from warfare, and spent the following year fortifying the city walls with strong brick ramparts. In 1551, King Chakkraphat ordered an army of 15,000 to be stationed at a stockade in Phaniat (*Cushman 29*).

Burmese troops returned to inflict massive damage in 1564. The newly crowned Burmese King, Hongsawadi, led forces through Pho Sam Ton (Klong Bang Khuat) and advanced to the Phaniat plain. After routing Siamese troops in Phaniat, King Hongsawadi stationed Burmese forces at Wat Sam Wiharn and prepared to attack the city (*Cushman 35*). This time the Burmese forces were successful and King Chakkraphat had to capitulate. Siam swore Royal friendship to the Burmese, and they were forced to surrender Prince Ramesuan as a hostage.

In the aftermath, the Siamese capital became so weak that a party of Malay rebels from Patani seized the palace for a short while in 1564 (*Wyatt 81*). The Muslim leader, Phraya Suratan, defiantly mounted a white elephant in the Palace kraal, and then his troops were attacked by inhabitants with long ropes. Many were killed while fleeing, but Phraya Suratan escaped (*Cushman 49*).

King Chakkraphat made one more attempt to restore Ayutthaya to its former glory, but died before it could be actualized. Invading Burmese troops continued to form a tight siege ring around the city, digging trenches around the city moat. They also built a causeway across the old Lopburi River which connected the Phaniat peninsula to the city island near the Pom Mahachai Fortress. This causeway became known as Thamnop Ro, and Burmese used it to launch more attacks.

The troops of King Mahin, who reigned for only eight months in 1569, made a powerful defensive stance at the Mahachai Fortress. As a result of military failure, Okya Phitsanulok, who had sided with the Burmese, fell in disfavor with the Burmese king and hid at Phaniat while petitioning for a second opportunity to prove himself as a leader (*Van Vliet 221*).

Siam finally lost the war on August 8, 1569, and the city became a vassal state (*Wyatt 82*). The Burmese looted the city and led thousands away as war captives. Okya Phitsanulok was installed on the throne and given the title of King Maha Thammaracha. In 1580, King Maha Thammaracha launched enormous land development projects. Forced laborers

dug a canal from the Mahachai Fortress to the Pom Phet Fortress. Then the city walls were moved to the eastern bank of the city island (*Cushman 82*). The King renovated the Thamnop Ro causeway so that it was six meters wide and made of brick. It was then used for state purposes only. Elephant, horses, and wagons traveled from the city island to the Phaniat plain (*Kasetsiri 328*). King Maha Thammaracha relocated the majority of elephants to Phaniat, where they served more strategically for defensive purposes.

The kraal at Phaniat was a huge enclosure with double walls. The outer wall was made from bricks with a raised foundation. The inner wall was comprised of wooden pillars driven into the ground. An opening allowed elephants to pass through one by one for inspection, and pavilion in the center of the kraal housed an image of Ganesha (*Kasetsiri/Wright 323*).

While King Maha Thammaracha's son, Naresuan, was still a prince, Khmer troops attacked the Siamese border town, Chantaburi, and made off with war captives. This was used as an excuse to rebuilt Ayutthaya's city walls and fortifications while still a Burmese vassal state. Independence was finally won from the Burmese when Prince Naresuan defeated the Burmese prince in a decisive battle while mounted on an elephant.

Prince Naresuan (1590-1605) ordered the Royal boats to take him to Phaniat, where he was to be proclaimed king and an oath of allegiance made to him. While landing at their destination, the rowers made a mistake. Although they were not immediately punished, King Naresuan had them later burnt alive on the same place (near the kraal) to set an example (*Van Vliet 228*).

King Naresuan continued to launch attacks on Cambodia. In 1594, he raised an army of 100,000 fully armed troops, 800 war elephants, and 1,500 horses. He also ordered an army of 15,000 to be stationed at a stockade in Phaniat (*Cushman 142-143*). He then set out on an elephant to attack the Khmer city, Lawaek.

King Songtham (1610/1613-1628) made annual pilgrimages to Saraburi, while mounted on an elephant, to visit a footprint that was believed to have been left by Lord Buddha. King Songtham had three white elephants. While visiting Phaniat to capture more elephants, a white elephant of amazing appearance came to him on its own accord. The animal was missing its right tusk and had a black spot on its coccyx. As the legend was told, a Mon Mandarin cried upon seeing this animal. It was interpreted as an omen that King Songtham would die soon and a wicked man of lowly birth would inherit the throne. Within a year King Songtham had been killed and his usurper, King Prasat Thong, seized the crown. The white elephant was taken captive, but died on the same day. All those that buried the white elephant died a horrible death afterwards (*Val Vliet 236-237*).

King Prasat Thong (1629-1656) transferred the Elephant Department from the military division to the civil division (*Wales 81*). This change may have been a tactic to maintain authoritative control. King Prasat Thong was the head of the military (kalahom) before usurping the throne, and he may have been attempting to reduce the military clout welded by

the Elephant Department.

Although the elephant kraal retained its importance, it appears to have fallen into neglect during King Prasat Thong's reign. When Dutch traveler, Gijsbert Heeck, visited Ayutthaya in 1655, he recalled that the elephant kraal was nearly empty. A huge number of elephants had died from a mysterious plague sometime before his arrival. Surviving elephants were moved out of the area. This event forced the city into a panic. Elaborate ceremonies took place to remedy the situation. A string was tied to the city walls and made to encircle the entire island. Music was played and monks chanted prayers to send the evil spirits away.

King Narai (1656-1688) also place great importance on elephants. He issued a proclamation to prepare a building with an assembly hall for the performance of Royal ceremonies by Brahmin priests at the elephant kraal. The following year a white elephant was installed at the Royal kraal with great pomp and ceremony (*Cushman* 245-246). During his reign many foreigners came to Ayutthaya for maritime trade. As host, King Narai often arranged for these guests to visit the city's elephant kraals.

When Persian diplomat Muhammad Ibrahim visited Ayutthaya in 1665, he rode horses to the elephant camp to watch them catch wild elephants in the forest. He noted that mahouts kept a herd of female elephants that they trained to capture wild ones. The trainers especially liked to acquire mothers that had just given birth for this task. These females would charm bull elephants and entice them back to Phaniat, where they were then tricked into ensnarement (*O'Kane* p66-68). Ibrahim also recalls a sport at Phaniat in which a group of elephants battled with a live tiger. The elephants wore leather padding on their heads and trunk while trying to throw the tiger in the air with their tusks. During this sport, mahouts were forbidden from protecting themselves with weapons. The game was over once the tiger escaped back into its cage (p 7-72). Ibrahim also writes about witnessing King Narai riding an elephant to a hunting excursion, accompanied by Greek opportunist Constantine Phaulcon, and of the Persian envoy being presented with elephants as gifts – an offer that the author wasn't exactly pleased with and declined (p 82-83).

The cross-dressing Abbe de Choisy visited Ayutthaya as part of a French embassy (1685-1686). He writes about seeing at least 80 elephants inside the Grand Palace, including two white elephants that had four mahouts taking care of them at all times (*Choisy* p161).

M. de La Loubere noted that King Narai never walked on foot, preferring instead to board an elephant from a scaffold. Loubere witnessed a fight between two war elephants while in Ayutthaya, but he declined to watch match between a tiger and elephant because King Narai would not be attending. The French embassy was presented with three elephants as gifts. The mahouts who went with them on the French ship treated the elephants as companions, whispering farewell prayers into the animals' ears (*La Loubere* p 44-47).

King Petracha (1688-1703) was the head of the Elephant Department before usurp-

ing the throne from King Narai. His reign put an end to the Prasat Thong Dynasty, which led to rebellion.

One of these revolts took place on the Phaniat Peninsula. In 1696, Master Tham Thian pretended to be Lord Aphaithot, who was executed by King Petracha and Prince Sorasak at Wat Kok Phraya before he could inherit the throne. Tham Thian mounted a bull elephant and set out to falsely claim the throne. On route, he stopped at the Residence of the Holy Crown Metropolis (Phaniat Palace) to dress himself as Lord Aphaithot, and then Tham Thian sought assistance from a monastery at the mouth of Klong Chang. A group of about 500 paddy farmers were fooled, so they armed themselves for his defense. Tham Thian maneuvered his elephant to the edge of the Monastery of the Grand World (Wat Mahalok) and proceeded towards the Thamnop Ro causeway in front of the Mahachai fortress. At this point he was identified as an imposter and shot down by Prince Sorasak. King Petracha had the naïve followers flogged and beaten then forced them to build junks, enter prison, or cut elephant grass (*Cushman 322-327*).

A second version suggests that Tham Thian escaped to a flower garden at Wat Si Fan, but was captured and taken away for execution. His followers were forced to reap grass for elephants as punishment (*Cushman 333*). In most versions of this story the elephant survives and is brought to the king.

Engelbert Kaempfer visited Ayutthaya in 1690, shortly before Tham Thian's rebellion. He described an elephant stockade with hundreds of elephants beside the Grand Palace. They were harnessed in long rows. Guard elephants protected the courtyard and a special kraal was designated for King Naresuan's white elephants. Kaempfer also observed that Prince Sorasak, who resided in the Rear Palace (Wang Lang) was the manager of the elephants (p 45-46).

After this prince was crowned, he became known as King Sua (the Tiger King). King Sua was a notoriously cruel leader. He executed several members of the Royal family while assisting Petracha's usurpation of the throne. King Sua was the former commander of the Elephant Department and a skilled soldier. He also enjoyed fishing and boxing. Local legend describes how he often disguised himself as a commoner so that he could participate in Thai boxing tournaments. King Sua is associated with Wat Tuk, which is near to the city's former military base (post-Ayutthaya period).

King Borommakot (1733-1758) set up an army of 10,000 troops at Wat Chedi Daeng to prepare for battle in Cambodia (*Cushman 449*). Shortly afterward, the Burmese troops would renew their warfare with Siam once again. They returned in 1760 and besieged the city. However, Siam won a temporary reprieve when Burmese King Alaunghpaya was injured by a burst from his own cannon. He later died as his troop were withdrawing back to Burma.

During the renewed conflict, two unique elephants were obtained. One elephant had toenails around its entire foot and the other had particularly short tusks. They were given holy titles and placed in the capital's elephant kraal (*Cushman 487*).

Burmese forces returned once and for all during the reign of King Suriyamarin (1753-1767). Two thousand Chinese masters volunteered to defend the city. They crossed Klong Chang and set up stockades at Wat Chedi Daeng and the Phaniat elephant kraal. Unfortunately, these Chinese warriors did not have enough time to reinforce a sturdy stockade. When Burmese troops advanced, the Chinese had to flee to the land opposite the river. The Holy Throne of the Elephant Kraal was destroyed by fire. Burmese forces then established stockades at the elephant kraal, Wat Chedi Daeng, and Wat Sam Wiharn (*Cushman 482*).

The Burmese gathered up the local families around Phaniat Peninsula and promptly slaughtered them. They boarded their boats, burned them, and threw people's bodies into piles. The bloated bodies of the villagers were floated downstream until the water became undrinkable. Local legend suggests that this is how the Hua Ro market received its name – "the maket of the floating heads".

The Burmese used these stockades on the Phaniat Peninsula to launch full blown attacks on the city. They set up a bridge in front of the Mahachai Fortress, which had walls to conceal their troops from Siamese view. Burmese soldiers then raced across this bridge and dug tunnels to set the city walls on fire. While firing heavy rounds of artillery, the weakened city walls finally collapsed and crumbled. On April 7, 1767, Burmese forced breached the walls and ransacked the city. The ancient Ayutthaya kingdom was destroyed.

## Post-Ayutthaya Period

**T**he new Siamese capital city was first set up in Thonburi, and later moved to Bangkok. The Royal Palace in Ayutthaya had been destroyed beyond repair, so there was no desire to repair the elephant kraal on the city island. However, elephants continued as an important symbol for the new Siamese capital, and so kings continued to take interest in the Phaniat kraal during the Chakri Dynasty.

Some initial repairs on Phaniat were made by King Yodfa (1782-1809). However, King Nang Klao (1824-1851) started to bring the old elephant kraal back to life. He placed Prince Thepapolpak in charge of restorative work at Phaniat and also had him supervise elephant round ups. The building on the site presently used as the Phaniat Palace may have originally belonged to Prince Thepapolpak.

Siam went into a period of isolation after the fall of Ayutthaya. However, King Nang Klao's allowed a French priest to venture inland to check up on a group of Vietnamese Christians in Ayutthaya. Monsignor Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix thoroughly documented the city at that time, including the situation of elephants. He wrote in detail about annual roundups, the process for taming wild elephants, and the near worship of the white variety. Pallegoix also noted that it was prohibited to kill elephants, but a small group of diehards still hunted them for their tusks anyway (*Pallegoix 77-79*).



During the reign of King Mongkut (1851-1868), Siam warmed up to foreign diplomacy with the signing of the Bowring Treaty in 1855. The burgeoning rice trade that followed created a population boom of Chinese merchants and laborers in the Hua Ro market. The treaty also opened up the Ayutthaya to a small trickle of foreign visitors.

King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) took great interest in the Phaniat elephant kraal and restored it twice. During his reign, Phaniat Palace was used as a residence by Prince Maha Mala Krom Praya Bamrab Porapak – the leader of restorative work at Phaniat. This man also donated money for the repair of royal temple, Wat Boromawong, which King Chulalongkorn named.

The quickening of a small tourism industry began during King Chulalongkorn's reign. The Front Palace, its observation tower, and the Phaniat elephant kraal featured most strongly among these guests. Carl Bock and a small group of diplomats traveled to Ayutthaya between 1881-1882, and he was very impressed by the sight of the Phaniat elephant kraal. Also in the 1880s, Florence Caddy, one of the first female tourists in Ayutthaya, had lunch and drank wine in the shade of the elephant stables. In 1882, Elephant roundups were staged for the benefit of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, who was then a Crown Prince, and an encore roundup performance was given one decade later for the benefit of the Grandduke of Russia. Belgian Charles Buls came to Ayutthaya in 1900 via a new train line and raved about the elephant kraal. Marthe Bassenne, one of the first travel writers to visit Ayutthaya, penned a few words in 1909 about the city's elephants for a magazine called *Le Tour Du Monde*.

Despite the relative surge in foreign visitors, the traditional roundup of wild elephants was coming to its end. King Chulalongkorn staged the last official roundup at Phaniat on May 25, 1903 (*Amatyakul* 60). However, a few exhibitions were still held in later years. National Geographic reported on one of these events in its December 1906 issue. The article presented photographs of an elephant herd numbering at least 250. Nevertheless, by this time, the loss of natural habitat and the declining importance of this animal had started to take its toll on wild elephants. The wild elephants were described as “gaunt, weather-worn elephants, with visible ribs and patches of fungus growth” in stark contrast to the well fed and groomed domesticated ones (*Scidmore* 685).

The role of elephants in Siamese culture was changing. Elephants were ineffective for modern warfare, and paled in comparison to equipment such as airplanes and tanks. Modernization of the country also took its toll. The development of a major canal system in Rangsit encroached on land once enjoyed by wild elephants, and trains collided with this animal on the newly constructed Bangkok-Ayutthaya route.

Elephants remained important as work animals, especially for the country's logging industry. Unfortunately, profits from timber sales led to over-harvesting, and the forests that once existed around the Phaniat Peninsula were cut down. This destroyed the natural habitat of wild elephants. As a result, attempts were made to protect the country's national heritage by preserving the elephant kraal at Phaniat. The elephant kraal and its gargantuan



wooden posts were registered as a national art monument on March 18, 1941 (*Suthon Sukphisit*).

As part of his nationalist movement, Field Marshall Phibunsongkhram renovated Phaniat once again in 1957 and restored the wooden posts that had rotted. At the same time, Field Marshall Phibunsongkhram redeveloped major sections of the National Park, where the city's most important temples and palaces were located. In the decades that followed, squatter communities poured into this area and became entrenched. King Bhumibol Adulyadej staged an elephant catching ceremony on January 15, 1962, to honor a visit by the King of Denmark. Her Majesty Queen Sirikit accompanied the event.

During the 1980s, restrictions were placed on the logging industry, so the importance of elephants as work animals declined. Modern construction equipment gradually replaced them as well. For elephants this presented a dilemma. How could they adapt to modern demands when their value as beast-of-burdens was dwindling? Domestic elephants could not survive if they returned to their natural habitats, which had been cut down to make room for human development. Likewise, the mahouts that trained elephants lacked skills to derive income from other means.

The Ayutthaya Historic City Conservation and Development Project was first conceived in 1987, but it took until 1993 to get Cabinet approval. In the meantime, improvements were made at the elephant kraal. On October 15, 1988, the Fine Arts Department financed a program to replace the wooden posts at the elephant kraal and to make other restorations at Phaniat. Brahmin priests performed complicated rituals to appease the spirits of the old posts (*Suthon Sukphisit*).

In 1991, Ayutthaya's Historical City became listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The local tourism industry began to thrive. However, efforts were still being made to clear slum dwellers out historic zones. Estimates suggest that as many as 200 families were living on illegally occupied land even as late as 1996 (*Yingyord Klangsombut*). At the same time, industrial parks were established outside the city as a means to create jobs and generate revenue.

In the same year, Laithongrien Meepan established an elephant camp, Ayutthaya Elephant Palace (Wang Chang), within the new world heritage national park. Mahouts and their elephants promoted the country's national heritage by dressing in traditional styles while giving rides to tourists around the temples. This new elephant camp, built in close proximity to the site of the original palace kraal, was created to give elephants safe and legal work. In addition, Meepan further developed the elephant village at Phaniat with the aim to restore elephants to their rightful role as a well-respected animal in Thai society. From this base in Phaniat, he has launched many innovative programs to improve the quality of life of elephants and to promote a sustainable future for them to thrive.

Laithongrien Meepan, also known as Pi Om, has created new programs for breeding elephants. As a result, he has experienced one of the most successful rates for breeding captive elephants. In addition, Meepan has launched programs to rehabilitate injured

or deadly elephants. One recent innovation is to use elephant dung for fertilizing crops that the elephants can later consume; and to recycle this byproduct to make strong and fibrous paper. The younger Phaniat elephants paint original artwork on this very paper – and many have discovered creative ways to express themselves through art.

Elephants from Phaniat also play an important role locally by acting in Ayutthaya's Sound and Light show every year. This event brings thousands of tourists into the city and introduces many people to various chapters in Thai history. The important role that Phaniat has played in Thai history has not been forgotten. In coordination with the Fine Arts Department, a 16 million baht restoration program was launched in 2007 to repair and rebuild the wooden posts that ancient kings once used to trap wild elephants at Phaniat kraal.

Another recent innovation was the establishment of Elephantstay – a program designed with the goal of supporting old, retired elephants. Visitors are given the opportunity to participate in hands-on elephant care while learning about the lifestyle of mahouts. This program generates revenue for retired elephants and helps provide them with some extra caretaking. One long-term goal of Meepan is to buy up land in the Thung Luang area, known as "Thung Thale Ya", which was formally used by elephants during Ayutthaya period. He would like to return elephants to original sites where they once prospered.

As a result of these efforts at Phaniat, the historical importance of elephants has been brought into the limelight once again. There is hope that these precious animals will survive in modern times; despite their changing roles as beast of burden, their rapidly declining rate of birth, and their ever-dwindling natural habitat. There is now a renewed hope that elephants can retain their importance in a sustainable future.

## List of local areas of interests

### • Monument of Four War Elephants



There are four large bronze monuments that feature war elephants in full battle gear with armed mahouts beside them. They are oriented toward each cardinal direction. The monuments are all cast to actual size.

These monuments were originally located at Thung Makham Yong battlefield as a component of Queen Suriyothai Park. They were molded after the second World War by esteemed artist, Khun Kaimuk Chouto, who was one of the first female sculpture in the country. The four monuments resided at Phaniat elephant kraal until they were moved to this current location.

The monuments are located north of the main island, adjacent to the park in front of Paniat Palace. They are easily viewable from the road.

- **Old pottery kiln/ Brahmin shrine**

An ancient kiln and an accompanying Brahmin shrine can be seen at the same location beside Klong Bang Khuat (the old Lopburi River). They are situated north of the main island on the Phaniat peninsula. The elephant kraal is directly to the east.

The collapsed ruin of a single kiln is still viewable. There is plenty of broken ceramic pieces and roof tiles scattered nearby. The ceramics are mostly for functional purposes in the unpainted local style. A bodhi tree grows over this site, which has been squared off by metal posts and layered with a brick foundation. It is not clear as to when the kiln was built, or when it was last used, but its location provided access to water for processing the ceramics and enabled easy transport of the finished product by boat.

A second feature at this site is a small Brahmin shrine. At the staircase there is a collection of elephant bones. Inside the shrine there are dozens of phallic images (lingam), reflecting the style of wooden posts used at the elephant kraal. These have been carefully wrapped with decorative cloth.

The phallic images at the shrine suggest a Brahmin influence, and these priests were involved with several ceremonies concerning elephants, including ceremonies for replacing the wooden posts. It is one of two shrines in the area (the second was built in recent times on the northwestern corner of the elephant kraal).

The date of the Brahmin shrine is unclear, but it could have been built on an older site. According to the Fine Arts department, a group of Brahmin priests lived on the opposite side of Klong Bang Khuat, in the vicinity of where Wat Praew was once located. A market in this area sold incense, perfume, and scented powder. It is reasonable to believe that they crossed the river and used this site for ceremonies involving the elephant kraal.



photo by Ken May

The kiln and Brahmin shrine have both been renovated recently. Mahouts from the elephant kraal still visit the Brahmin shrine sometimes.

## • Phaniat Palace

Phaniat Palace is located north of the main island on the Phaniat peninsula. It is situated between Klong Chang and the elephant kraal. It is accessible by the Lopburi River. This two story, Rattanakosin period, building is designed in a western architectural style. The brick building is “L” shaped (nearly 24 meters wide by 25 meters long). The floors are made from wood and the roof constructed with tiles. The building has balconies, staircases, and a basement. A walking path and foot-bridge lead to the Lopburi River, which could have served as a docking site. In situ, are also the traces of an older foundation, which may have been constructed during the Ayutthaya period. West of the Palace are two old wooden houses in traditional Siamese styles.

Phaniat Palace may have been used during the Ayutthaya period as an ancient Royal site for witnessing elephant roundups. The Royal Chronicles gives evidence that a palace was burnt down at the site of the elephant kraal in 1767.

A new palace was built on this site during the reign of King Rama II. Prince Thepapolpak (Krom Luang Thao) lived here while renovating the area and supervising elephant roundups. King Rama II might have also used this palace when visiting Ayutthaya with guests.

Prince Maha Mala Krom Bamrab Porapak, who was placed in charge of renovating Phaniat lived at this site during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. After the last official elephant roundup on 25 May 1903, the building was abandoned until 1999. The Fine Arts Department was granted a 7,650,000 baht loan by the Ayutthaya Historical Park to rebuild the palace to its present state.



photo by Ken May

- **Sapan Thamnop Ro**

Sapan Thamnop Ro was the only bridge in the Ayutthaya period that connected the city island to a point across the river. Transportation from one riverbank to another was done by ferryboat instead. Sapan Thamnop Ro appears on both Engelbert Kaempfer's and De la Marc's maps from the late 17th century.

This causeway was located near the confluence of the old Lopburi River (also known as Klong Bang Khuat and Pho Sam Ton) and new Lopburi River. The Mahachai Fortress was located on the side of the city island and Wat Sam Wiharn was situated to its north.

During the White Elephant War (1563-1564), Burmese used rubble to build a bridge that crossed the old Lopburi in order to attack. During the reign of King Chakraphat (1548-1569), the causeway was renovated to include bricks. It was 6 meters in width and had gaps in the middle with removable planks.

King Mahathammarat (1569-1590) used this causeway to move the elephant kraal from the city island to the Municipality of Phaniat, where a camp already stood for the capture of elephants. This causeway was then used for state purposes only. Elephants, horses, and wagons were allowed to cross on it.

Thamnop Ro served a military role for the Burmese during the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767. The Royal Chronicles explains how Burmese crossed a bridge in front of the Mahachai Fortress, while makeshift walls obscured them from view, so that they could dig tunnels to set the city walls on fire (*Cushman 520*).

Thamnop Ro has since been destroyed, but many old bricks and laterite blocks can be seen in the vicinity where it once stood. A metal walking bridge stands in the approximate location, connecting the Hua Ro market to the area in front of Wat Sam Wiharn.

- **Wat Borommarong**

Wat Borommawong is located north of the main island near the present-day elephant camp. It is accessible from the western bank of the new Lopburi River. Its original name was Wat Talay Ya – after the neighborhood in which it was built.

King Maha Thammaracha (1569-1590) ordered that the previous elephant camp be moved to this new site from the Grand Palace area – shortly after Ayutthaya lost in a war with the Burmese and became a vassal state. It is believed that Wat Borommawong was built around the same time, but a camp did already exist at the site for the capture of elephants. In 1767, the Burmese fired upon this temple, but they did not completely destroy it. Wat Borommawong was abandoned after the city finally





fell to the Burmese.

A few monks lived here during the early Rattanakosin period, but the temple was not fully revitalized until a wealthy citizen (Somjet Khromphraya Bamrab Prorapak) donated money for its repair. Wat Borommawong was restored as a royal temple during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) who gave the temple its present name. It continues to enjoy Royal patronage today. Jane Bramley wrote that its monks did not need to take walks for alms because of donation made by Royal family members.

Wat Borommawong's present-day architecture mostly reflects the Rattanakosin period. Its ubosot and other structures are relatively new. A large bell-shaped chedi can be seen west of the ubosot. There are still viewable remains from the older site as well. Two ruins are located south of the ubosot. The walls and foundations of these two small buildings have been encased with a protective wall, since flooding is common in this area. Bodhi trees grow from both structures today.

- **Wat Chedi Daeng** (Monastery of the Holy Red Funeral Monument)

Wat Chedi Daeng is located north of the main island on the Phaniat peninsula. Klong Bang Khuat (the Old Lopburi River) flows to its west, and Klong Chang is situated directly north of the monastery. Wat Chedi Daeng is an active monastery. It is prized by many locals who believe the monks have special powers for casting spells that can protect motor vehicles. Many people come here from all over the city to have monks bless their cars and motorcycles.

In contrast to its name, there is not actually a red chedi in situ at the temple. A bell tower (painted red) and a small bell-shaped chedi are viewable by boat from Klong Bang Khuat. There is also a large redented chedi behind the sermon hall, which is in the late-Ayutthaya period style. A number of smaller monuments exist at this site with unusual designs. For example, there is a statue of Erawan with four faces pointed in each of the cardinal directions. There is also an odd statue of a turban-wearing Brahmin priest with a



photo by Ken May



cat-like creature perched beside. The date of these structures is not clear, but most of them reflect the Rattanakosin period.

Historically, Wat Chedi Daeng played an important role in a number of conflicts. King Borommakot (1733-1758) set up an army of 10,000 troops at Wat Chedi Daeng to prepare for battle with Cambodia (*Cushman* 449). In 1767, a group of 2,000 Chinese troops volunteered to cross Klong Chang and set up stockades at the elephant kraal and Wat Chedi Daeng to protect the city from Burmese invasion. Unfortunately, these professionally-trained soldiers lacked enough time to reinforce proper stockades. When the Burmese attacked, the Chinese troops were forced to flee to land opposite the river (p482). The Burmese army of King Mengra then set up army camps around the city of Ayutthaya.

One of the stockades was reinforced with bastions at Wat Chedi Daeng. Nemiao, the general of the armies in the stockade at the Three Fig Trees, had the Burmese troops burn down that palace at the Elephant Kraal at the Monastery of the Holy Red Funeral Monument, at the the Monastery of the Three Preaching Halls, at the Monastery of the Spired Building, at the at the Monastery of the Tent, at the Monastery of the Glorious Fig. Bastions were constructed in each and every stockade, large and small guns taken up into them, and then these were fired at the Capital (*Cushman* 517). Ayutthaya fell soon afterward.

- **Wat Chumphon**

Wat Chumphon is located on the Phaniat peninsula north of the city island. It was situated near Klong Chang east of Wat Chedi Daeng. It was accessible by the new Lopburi River.

This “disappeared” temple appears on the Fine Arts Department map of 1997. Several temples in the city share the same name. There is no historical record of when it was built or what it once looked like. However, most of the other temples on the Phaniat Peninsula suffered greatly from warfare during invasions by the Burmese.

Very little has survived of Wat Chumphon. A mound can be seen next to an electrical tower, which has some old brick and traces of Buddha images. The construction of the electrical tower, as well as seasonal flooding may have expedited the temple’s demise.

- **Wat Mahalok** (Monastery of the Grand World)

Wat Mahalok is an active temple. It is situated north of the main island, just east of Wat Sam Wiharn. This monastery is accessible from the Lopburi River, and there

photo by Ken May



are clear traces of a moat that once marked its boundaries. The original architectural structures at this monastery were destroyed after the Burmese invasion of 1767; therefore, most of what is viewable today has been rebuilt during the modern Rattanakosin period. A sermon hall with a number of Buddha images is viewable at this monastery, and there is also an outdoor sala containing many Buddha images as well. A small community has grown around this monastery, which provides a school for the neighborhood children.

Royal Chronicles suggest that Wat Mahalok existed as early as 1696. This monastery is connected to a revolt waged by Master Tham Thian, who pretended to be Lord Aphaithot – a claimant to the throne that was executed by King Petracha and Prince Sorasak. Tham Thian mounted a bull elephant and set out to falsely claim the throne with the help of about 500 paddy farmers. Thian maneuvered his elephant to the edge of the Monastery of the Grand World (Wat Mahalok) before proceeding towards the Thamnop Ro causeway in front of the Mahachai fortress (*Cushman 322*). Tham Thien was then killed near Wat Mahalok and the revolt put to an end.

## • Wat Nak

Wat Nak appears on the Fine Arts Department map of 1997. It was located off the city island on the Phaniat peninsula. It was situated between Wat Borommawong and the elephant kraal, toward Kong Bang Khuat (the old Lopburi) to the west. The map shows it at the intersection between the road parallel to Klong Bang Khuat and a (now defunct) road leading to Wat Boromawong.

This temple's history is unclear. Other temples in this area suffered greatly during Burmese invasions. This temple has suffered due to heavy flooding in the vicinity and gen-

eral disuse. The remains are presently located on private property, which is guarded by a large group of rather fierce dogs.

Locals recall seeing Wat Nak in their youth. Many remember a large head from a Buddha image, that was mostly buried underground. Local legend is that a voice was heard calling from a swampy area in the neighborhood, and the inquisitive locals discovered a partially submerged Buddha image. A small sala was built on site to display three Buddha images that were found. Excavations could reveal some traces of a foundation and other artifacts.

- **Wat Sam Wiharn** (Monastery of the Three Sermon Halls)



photo by Ken May

Wat Sam Wiharn (the Monastery of the Three Sermon Halls), also known as Wat Sam Phihan, is an active temple. It is located north of the city island on the Phaniat peninsula. It is accessible by Klong Bang Khuat (also known as Pho Sam Ton River or the Old Lopburi River). The Maha-chai Fortress stood in front of it.

This monastery has a variety of architecture that survives from the Ayutthaya Period. A rather large bell-shaped chedi is viewable from various points across the city. The monastery's boat-shaped viharn houses a large reclining Buddha images and a variety of artifacts. This image is advertised as being over 600 years old. A small late-Ayutthaya period chedi lies to the west of this viharn. It has many redentations and a full upper terrace. The ubosot has also survived. It has a full set of sema stones, two for each pillar. Outer walls are also present. There has been

some recent excavations at this site, which revealed ancient foundation layers underneath one of the structures.

The location of this monastery gave it great historical importance. During the White Elephant War (1563-1564) Burmese King Hongsawadi led his forces across Pho Sam Ton (now Klong Bang Khuat) and advanced to the Phaniat plain. He stationed forces at Wat Sam Wiharn and prepared to attack the city (*Cushman 35*).

Another story concerns a Mon from Pegu, who self-immolated himself at this temple due to a family dispute. He sat cross-legged and smeared thick oil over his entire body. After the fire was ignited and his body thoroughly charred, his mother

had it coated with plaster and a gilded statue was made from it. This image was put on an alter at Wat Samana Kotharam (*Loubere 127*).

Just before the fall of Ayutthaya, in 1767, Burmese forces set up a stockade in front of Wat Sam Wiharn and used this strategic location to launch an assault on the Mahachai Fortress. They set up a bridge (with walls to conceal troops from view) to cross the river. They then dug tunnels and filled them with wood, which they could light on fire. This weakened fortress walls and enabled Burmese the breach the walls to the city (*Cushman 520*). The city collapsed afterward and the new capital was moved to Thonburi/Bangkok.

- **Wat Si Fan**

Wat Si Fan is a former monastery that was once located north of the city island on the Phaniat peninsula. It was situated between Klong Chang and Wat Mahalok. Wat Si Fan has been destroyed during the process of modern urbanization. An empty lot is all that remains of it today, and it has been flattened by bulldozer to make way for the development of future housing.



photo by Ken May

Royal Chronicles mention Wat Si Fan in relation to a rebellion that took place in 1696. A man named Tham Thian pretended to be Lord Aphaithot, who was executed by King Petracha and Prince Sorasak at Wat Kok Phraya before he could inherit the throne. Tham Thian mounted a bull elephant and set out to falsely claim the throne. A group of about 500 paddy farmers were fooled into joining the rebellion, and they armed themselves for his defense. Tham Thian maneuvered his elephant to the edge of the Monastery of the Grand World (Wat Mahalok) and proceeded towards the Thamnop Ro causeway in front of the Mahachai fortress (*Cushman 322-327*). In one version of this story, Tham Thian is shot and killed by Prince Sorasak. In a



second version, Tham Thian escapes and hides in a garden at Wat Si Fan, where he is later captured and executed.

- **Wat Kuti Song**

Wat Kuti Song is a deserted ruin located north of the city island on the Phaniat peninsula. It lies roughly between Klong Chang and Wat Mahalok. It was once accessible by boat from the new Lopburi River, but it is now hidden from view by a great amount of overgrown vegetation and private property.

In situ is a sermon hall with an eastward orientation. The basic foundation and its walls have still survived. A large square-shaped chedi tower stands to the west of this, and a small bell-shaped chedi is located in front. There have been some recent renovations done on Wat Viharn Song.

Royal Chronicles show that Wat Kuti Song existed as early as 1548. During the reign of King Chakkraphat, “a herd of elephants, breaking out of the cover of the jungle, came in toward Mae Nang Plum monastery and entered a corral at Song monastery (*Cushman 24*). The following day they were led toward Phaniat where they could be properly captured and broken in.

This monastery is presently located on fenced property. There is evidence that someone lives at this site. An automobile is perched on blocks next to the sermon hall and clothing hung on lines connecting to the temple. Livestock was recently raised here at one point. Wat Si Fun can partially be seen from a small, unpaved, side street leading to a residential area, but a forest surrounds most of the site. There is a hole in the fence that allows better access.



photo by Ken May

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