

Travelers, merchants, and foreigners appeared in facial stucco sculptures in Dvaravati humans in Nakhon Pathom Province

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Abstract

This research article is part of the research on innovation in the face of Dvaravati people, a case study of stucco sculptures and antiques in the Dvaravati period by Adobe Photoshop. Nakhon Pathom, originally called 'Nakhon Phra Krit,' was an ancient city which has the largest city plan of all ancient cities in the Dvaravati era. It was also a significant port situated in the western of Chao Phraya River, between Mae Klong River and Tha Chin River. There was a great number of antique evidence discovered. This also showed the evolution of the growth of Nakhon Pathom, the city of significant geographical landmarks and locations, which developed to be a large city since the 12th-century B.E.. This ancient city was a port city that had marine transportation connecting local communities such as Kamphaeng Saen, Phong Tuk, and Khu Bua, as well as communities not far from coastlines. Furthermore, there were also river pathways shipping from the Gulf of Thailand, through Pak Nam to Nakhon Pathom Ancient City. There was a discovery of Phanom Surin shipwreck, around a shrimp pond in Phanthai Norasing Sub-district of Samut Sakhon Province which was around 8 kilometers from the coastline and not far from Nakhon Pathom. The shipwreck was an ancient Arab boat shipping goods such as ivories, betel fruits, coconuts, rice seeds, antlers, and Tang dynasty porcelains. It could be assumed a ship of merchants which was consistent with the discovery of antique evidence in Nakhon Pathom Province such as beads, ancient coins, seals, and Tang dynasty porcelains. This evidence could ascertain the contact of merchants between this city and the Middle East, India, and China. Furthermore, from the antique study of facial stucco sculptures of humans in the Dvaravati period, these sculptures were created to decorate religious sites. A great number of antique evidence found at Wat Phra Prathon Chedi, Chulprathon Pagoda, and Wat Phra Pathom Chedi showed that those facial stucco sculptures had various facial characteristics, i.e., facial appearances, turbans, usage of facial embroideries, which were different from local Dvaravati citizens. These sculptures evidence the traveling of travelers, merchants, and foreigners who focused on seeking fortunes, trading, and propagating religions.

Keywords: traveler, merchant, foreigner, facial stucco sculpture of Dvaravati people

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1. Introduction

Nakhon Pathom is an ancient city in the Dvaravati era which featured a huge rounded corner rectangle of 2 kilometers in width and 3.6 kilometers in length. Without the embankment, there were canals around the city. In the past, Nakhon Pathom was the Dvaravati city that had the biggest canal with an area of 3,809 rai. There was Bang Kaeo Canal running through the city and Phra Prathon Canal in the middle of the city. The size of the city connected the northern and southern canals together while the western side, out of the city, was the location of community and important historic sites. Nakhon Chai Si is the largest ancient city in Thailand, approximately 36,000 × 2,000 meters or about 7 square kilometers, that has a network of ditches and canals connecting inside and outside of the city. There are many religious places both within and outside the city; for instance, Phra Prathon Chedi, Wat Phra Meru archaeological site, and some religious places near Bang Kaeo Canal such as Wat Phra Ngam and Wat Huai Chorakhe, etc. While in the south of Nakhon Pathom Ancient City, it was previously discovered the embankment parallel with the canal dug up in the south, called Khlong Thanon Khat (Srisak Wanliphodom, October-

December 2015: 25) and Bang Kaeo - Bang Khaem River. This was the main transportation route flowing into the sea, assuming that the former coastline was not far from the city, especially at Ban Don Yai Hom (Thiva Supajanya and Pongsri Vanasin 1982: 2 5; Tri Amatayakul 1949: 54 64).

Based on the geography over a thousand years ago, Nakhon Pathom was located near the seaside of the ancient Gulf of Thailand. When sailors and merchants from abroad set on dock to rest and ship the goods, they spread beliefs and cultures, especially the Indians who disseminated Buddhism into Suvarnabhumi since 300 BC. The natives accepted their influences and beliefs from time to time, then developed and inherited prosperity from the eleventh century to the sixteenth century. During this period, many worships and Buddhist religious places were built called Dvaravati Art. At present, there are Dvaravati antiques and archaeological sites found in Nakhon Chai Si or Nakhon Pathom City, which are important evidence of being a seaport state in the Dvaravati period. From the study, there is a greater number of stucco sculptures of human faces decorated many religious places at various archaeological sites both within and outside the city than in other cities in the same period. It was found that the number of those faces was different from natives' faces. There were the faces of outlanders and

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foreigners which were assumed that those people have traveled to Nakhon Pathom Ancient City for various purposes. It can be said that Nakhon Pathom has been the ancient port city over a thousand year as seen in the ancient map showing that Nakhon Pathom is the city near the sea.

2. Objectives

1. To study stucco sculptures of people in Dvaravati era found in Nakhon Pathom
2. To compare the face of Dvaravati people and foreigners who traveled in Nakhon Pathom during that period

3. Research Hypothesis

1. Stucco sculptures of people in Dvaravati period found in Nakhon Pathom can be studied as the important port city in Dvaravati period.
2. Stucco sculptures of people in Dvaravati period found in Nakhon Pathom has featured the face of Dvaravati people and the face of foreigners different from those of Dvaravati people.

4. Research Scope

In this research, the researcher has determined the scope of research by hypothesizing the port city of Nakhon Pathom Ancient City in the Dvaravati Period. 150 pieces of stucco sculptures of Dvaravati people's face found in Nakhon Pathom were studied, then the complete and less damaged pieces were selected. Finally, there were 95 pieces to study.

5. Methodology

The research about travelers, merchants, and foreigners appearing in facial stucco sculptures of Dvaravati humans in Nakhon Pathom is the study to analyze the face that found in Nakhon Pathom Ancient City. More than 150 pieces of sculpture were chosen and 95 pieces were found with completely clear face. From the analysis of the structure of face that looks like foreigner, 15 pieces were found as details described below.

5.1 To study Nakhon Pathom ancient port city, the primary and secondary documental evidences were analyzed. It was found that Nakhon Pathom has developed the prosperity and it is the archaeological site reflecting the settlement during prehistoric period around 2,000 3,000 years ago. The archaeological sites were found at Bo Sai Sub-district in Don Tum District and at Huai Khwang sub-district in Kamphaeng Saen District (The Fine Arts Department, 2005: 22-39), including Khok Plup Community in Pho Hak Sub-district, Bang Phae District, Ratchaburi Province. It evidenced that many people had lived in those areas for thousands of years. Later, the community developed into the country and traded with foreign countries. With the dominant feature of Nakhon Pathom Ancient City that did not have the embankment, it was different from other Dvaravati cities that had around 1-2 floor high embankment. Without the embankment, it was beneficial for sailing the junk boat into the city and it was considered as the physical factor to promote Nakhon Pathom ancient city to become one of the important

trading port cities in the Dvaravati period (Phasuk Intrawut, 1999: 101), Nakhon Pathom ancient city was located in a low-land. Therefore, there was water transportation to connect inside communities such as Kamphaeng Saen Community, Phong Tuk Community, Ku Bua Community, etc., and to connect with outside communities with maritime trade since Nakhon Pathom had some inner area that was not far from the coastline. In addition, there was the water pathway for shipping from the Gulf of Thailand to the estuary and Nakhon Pathom Ancient City. As shown in archives of Somdet Krom Phraya Damrong Rajanuphap, dated March 9th, 1932, saying "I try to find out the reason to build Nakhon Pathom Ancient City. Why was it built there? After researching the evidence for more than 30 years, I discovered that when the city was created, it was near the sea because of the excavation of marine engine at Thammasala Sub-district" (The Prince Narisara Nuwattiwong, 1993: 184). There was evidence of the excavation of an ancient shipwreck Phanom-Surin Boat at the shrimp pond in Phanthai Norasing Sub-district, Mueang District, Samut Sakhon Province which was about 8 kilometer far from the coastline and not far from Nakhon Pathom Ancient City. The result of the excavation and the study revealed that Phanom-Surin ancient boat was large with 25 meters in length. The bow of the ship was facing to the south in which the characteristic of Arab boat. There were a wooden keel of 17.65 meters long and two mainmasts. It was found antiques in the boat such as betel fruits, coconuts, ivories, rice seeds, and antlers, as well as Tang dynasty porcelains. It can be assumed that this boat was probably around 14th 15th century (Saritpong Khunsong, 2016: 175 176). As previously mention, there is more clearly evidence of marine trading of Nakhon Pathom Ancient City in harmony with the evidences of antiques found in the ancient Nakhon Pathom such as glass beads, Tang Dynasty porcelains, including a ship-shaped terracotta seals and bricks as well as stucco sculpture with Muslim faces. It also showed the trade contact between travelers and merchants who traveled via ship between the regions from the West (Arab) to the ancient port of Nakhon Pathom City.

As being the port city located in appropriate geography, it has a positive effect on the development and the growth of the country. It can be seen that Nakhon Pathom Ancient City has a big city plan with many religious sites and antiquities in the ancient city plan which are Phra Prathon Chedi and Chula Prathon Chedi. Moreover, outside Nakhon Pathom Ancient City, archaeological sites in the Dvaravati period are founded all over the city, i.e., Phra Pathom Chedi, Wat Phra Meru Archaeological Site, Wat Phra Ngam Archaeological Site, Wat Huai Chorake Archaeological Site, Wat Thammasala Archaeological Site, Noen Phra Archaeological Site (Don Yai Hom), etc. A large number of found ancient artifacts were built with beliefs and faith in Buddhist and Brahman such as the Wheel of Dhamma and crouching deer, many Buddha images, and stucco sculptures of people's faces. Additionally, ancient antiquities in Hindu were found such as sculptures of gods. Besides, there are antiquities found different from other places which presuming that came from foreign trade. There is evidence of trade dealing with the Middle East in the 13th 16th century or over a thousand years ago. In the early Abbasid dynasty which is the golden age of Muslim world in contemporary with



Figure 1: Picture of Phanom Surin Boat and inside the Arab boat that traveled for trading at Samut Sakhon.
Source: <https://www.naewna.com/lady/555662>



Figure 2: A Ship-shaped terracotta seal at Nakhon Pathom.
Source: <http://thainationhistory.blogspot.com/>

Dvaravati civilization in the central Thailand and Srivijaya in the south. Most of antiquities were found in the southern port city rather than in the central plain. It can be reflected that the southern port city is the port for big cargo; then, transferring to the central region. However, the discovery of an ancient Arab boat, Phanom Surin, at Samut Sakhon, indicated that Muslim people had also visited the Gulf of Thailand. It can be said that there was trade between the Middle East and Southeast Asia before the arrival of Islam. When Muslims governed the Persian Gulf, the original ancient port city, they needed to trade with the eastern world to meet the golden era of fine arts and goods such as clothes, herbs, medicine, and natural product. This pushed Muslims to travel to the central of Thailand. On the other hand, it was also in pursuit of knowledge referring to the words of the Prophet Muhammad that “seek knowledge even if you have to go as far as China” (Phanthip Thiranet, 2018: 45). The land of Southeast Asia, known to the Arabs as “Bilad Ashahab” is Suwannabhumi or Suvarnabhumi.

5.2 Sample Population of stucco sculptures with foreign faces in the Dvaravati period

A large number of Dvaravati stucco sculptures used for decorating Buddhist places were found in Nakhon Pathom Province during the Dvaravati period. Most of those stucco sculptures are of Dvaravati people with various different faces. The study shows that headdresses of each face can identify the difference of natives in the Dvaravati. The appearance of the face are thick eyebrows, bulging eyes, big nose, thick mouth, short hair with center parting and simple side parting, and long hair with high and low bun. But the face shape different from natives is the face wearing conical pointy hat, long face, high nose, big eyes, wavy hair, curly hair, including headscarf and different headdresses. It can be assumed that those faces are of people

with other nationality, not Dvaravati, which most of scholars assumed that they are Arab merchants, called Semitics in the ancient Middle East region. On the other hand, some scholars argued that Semitics did not wear those mentioned hat. People who wear top-hat like the stucco sculptures are Parthain or Parthia or the Arsacid Empire that prospered during 247 years BC 224 AD. Nowadays, it is located in Iran. This conforms to the discovery of Arab coins in Abbasid dynasty from U-Thong Ancient City. This discovery evidences the contact with people from the Middle East since the Dvaravati period, about 1,200 years ago. However, due to the limited number of coins, it is assumed that those coins may not be mediated the exchange or trade but being the souvenir brought with the Middle East merchants who traveled to U-Thong Ancient City during that period (Saritpong Khunsong, 2015).

From the evidence of stucco sculptures found in Nakhon Pathom Province, it can be assumed that about 1,500 years ago there were the merchants from The West such as Arabs, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, as well as traders from the East such as China and India, came to trade in Nakhon Pathom seaport. When those travelers arrived, they took note of the story which has become important evidence for subsequent studies of many ancient Indian literatures such as Ramayana Epic, Jataka epic, Phra Mahachannok, and Milinthaphan. The land named “Suvarnabhumi” means the land of gold, meaning the richness of natural resources in the Southeast.

From the discovery of a ship-shaped terracotta seal, it represents the vehicle of travelers, merchants, and foreigners who traveled into Nakhon Pathom seaport for shipping from the west to the east. The important thing is the “southwest monsoon” between April and September that blows boats from the starting port city in the Persian Gulf, along the coast of South Asia,



Figure 3: Compare stucco sculptures of people resembled with Chinese and Persian faces.
Source: Phrathom Chedi National Museum, Nakhon Pathom



Figure 4: Comparison of the faces of foreign sculptures found in Nakhon Pathom before and after using Photoshop.
Source: Phrathom Chedi National Museum, Nakhon Pathom

passing Sri Lanka to the Malay Peninsula, across the Strait of Malacca. Some boats go further to Java Island or up to the South China Sea to the destination of Chinese port cities with the main products as silks and Chinese wares. On the return, it relies on the northern monsoon wind between October and February in the following year. Sailing through Southeast Asia back and forth, Persian and Arab merchants can buy spices, forest products, including animal products to sell in the West. According to the geography of Nakhon Pathom in a thousand years ago locating near the Gulf of Thailand, the cargo vessels from the West, traveling to the East to the destination of China, traveled along the coast passing various port cities in Southeast Asia. Nakhon Pathom was the port city that travelers and merchants stopped for resting and exchanging goods and culture. It can be seen from archaeological evidence including various antiquities found in the ancient port cities such as Khu Bua Ancient City, Nakhon Pathom Ancient City, and U-Thong Ancient City. They are beads, Roman coins, Roman lamps, seal, etc. With this reason, various ports had the prosperous development. When the merchants had made the successful trade, they had the faith to donate their money to local religious places. The arts arose from the faith were created and represented the journey. Moreover, it evidences that Nakhon Pathom was an important port city in the Dvaravati period.

From the research of stucco sculptures of Dvaravati people's face found in Nakhon Pathom, more than 100 pieces rather made for religious places decoration at Phra Pathon Chedi, Chula Prathon Pagoda, and Phra Pathom Chedi. It was the evidence of Nakhon Pathom as a port city and the journey of

foreigners. Fifteen pieces were found different from the Dvaravati natives. They wore tall hats with headscarf, had big eyes and high nose, and some had wavy hair, which were different from the faces of Dvaravati people who have round face, thick eyebrows, bulging eyes, and thick mouth. With the number of discovered faces, it can be the evidence to assure the importance of Nakhon Pathom as an ancient port city over a thousand years ago where various nationality travelers and merchants came to trade and exchange cultures. This is in harmony with the hypothesis that Nakhon Pathom was the biggest seaport city in the Dvaravati period.

6. Conclusion

According to the data analysis, the result of the research showed that with the geographical characteristic about a thousand years ago, Nakhon Pathom Ancient City is a port city near the coast. Cargo ships of travelers, merchants and foreigners traveled to this region to seek spices and forest products, since this land was plentiful and prosperous. As in the records mentioned about the land of Suvarnabhumi, it was the connection of maritime world trade between the West and the East where traders from the West travel relying on the southwest monsoon to reach the destinations of various port cities of China. However, along the journey, they had to stop shipping at such port city before arriving China for resting, transferring goods, and doing other activities. When the ship docked, the travelers communicated and made a relationship with the natives of each port city, including exchanging goods, spreading religious, culture

and beliefs. It can be assumed that the port cities where they stopped and stayed overnight, the travelers who were fortune-seekers made a wish at local sanctity. If the trade ships had success in traveling, trading, and bringing the prosperity to sailors and merchants, it reflected their faith and confidence in what they made a wish from the local worship in the local port cities. The merchants with the faith donated their money in return and made merit in the important and sacred places where they stopped the boat and made a wish. Therefore, it is not surprising that the ancient port city, Nakhon Pathom, situated the religious places in the city center, i.e., Phra Pathon Chedi, Chula Prathon Chedi, and the pagoda located a bit far from the center named Phra Pathom Chedi. Consequently, there is a discovery of many stucco sculptures of people's faces that assumingly used as the components to decorate the religious places in the Dvaravati period. Thus, those faces varied from the Dvaravati natives who had round face, thick eyebrows, bulging eyes, and thick mouth. If they were an ordinary man, they would not wear accessories, except lead earrings. If they were aristocracy, they usually wore Chada (Thai theatrical crown) or headdresses. Moreover, the foreigners would have specific characteristics of their faces differentiated from the natives in the Dvaravati period, such as wearing a high-shaped hat and headscarf, having big eyes and high nose, and some having wavy hair. It can be assumed that the stucco faces of those foreigners should be important and have the benefaction for the religious places so that the Dvaravati sculptors created their faces to decorate religious places. Additionally, it can be said that those travelers and the rich foreign merchants who succeeded in traveling and trade had the faith in donating money to create a memorial showing that they had been in Nakhon Pathom Ancient Port City. This sort of memorial is passed through a thousand years to the people nowadays and it is the evidence of the arrival of those people to this region.

7. Results and Discussion

This research studied the stucco sculpture of people's face in the Dvaravati period in Nakhon Pathom province. More than 100 pieces of faces were found, 15 pieces having different faces from the natives' faces. The faces with big eyes, high nose, and wavy hair is assumed the Middle East or European traders, while the face with narrow eyes and wearing headscarf might be Chinese merchants. Therefore, it can be seen that Nakhon Pathom is probably the important port city where foreign merchants came to trade in the Dvaravati period. This is corresponding to Worawut Suwannarit who studied the belief and style of Dvaravati stucco sculptures at Ban Khu Bua. He mentioned about the classification of stucco works and utility, and claimed that stucco sculptures were created for decorating the architecture and solving some problem of external form of architecture. Also, Saritpong Khunsong mentioned the international trade in the Dvaravati in the archaeology aspect in Nakhon Pathom and the archaeological excavation in Nakhon Pathom during 2009-2010. It revealed new evidence that could interpret the foreign relationship and trade activities during the Dvaravati period. The results showed that trade contacts in this era were both internal and international with other foreign

communities far away, especially with the prosperous Srivijaya Kingdom around Sumatra Island of Indonesia, and Malay Peninsula in Thailand and Malaysia.

8. Recommendation

Recommendation from further research, the pieces of stucco sculptures of Dvaravati people's faces that were found in other archaeological sites in the Dvaravati period such as U-Thong Ancient City, Khu Bua Ancient City, Thung Setthi Ancient City, Khok Maiden Ancient City, and Fa Daet Song Yang Ancient City should be studied and compared to see the difference. Moreover, it is recommended to study whether or not other foreigners came into contact with other parts of the city during the Dvaravati period.

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