Khmer Civilization in Isan
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Abstract

Follow the footsteps of Khmer civilization from Angkor Wat to the center of cultural heritage in northeastern Thailand, Phimai, Phnom Rung and Mueang Tam. This paper is both an introduction and guide to Khmer temples in Isan. The first part begins with historical details tracing the Angkorean from the 8th to 12th century, and introduces a background to the religious traditions of the Khmer, which both inspired and governed the concept and execution of all their art and architecture.

The second part is an emphasis on architecture and decorative art, which appear in Khmer temples. In its heyday the main concentration of Khmer temples extended far west to the border and associated with an area of the middle Mekong River in the southern part of northeastern Thailand.

Keywords: cultural heritage, Phimai, Phanom Rung, Mueang Tam, the Angkorean, religious traditions, architecture and decorative art

1. Introduction

The name “Isan” refers to the northeastern part of Thailand. It covers an area of one third of the Kingdom. Isan, is also known as the Khorat Plateau. The Phetchabun Rage separates Isan from the Central Region while the Dongrek Mountains in the south separate Thailand from Cambodia. The Mun and Chi Rivers drain the majority of the plateau. They flow to the east and meet the Mekong River in Ubon Ratchathani.

This grate originates in the eastern Himalayas and flows to China, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The Mekong River and its tributaries are dominant features of the waterways have played a significant role in human history.

2. Historical Background

The earliest inscriptions of Khmer history in northeast Thailand date to the end of 6th century AD. The inscription craved by order of Mahendravarman, after he had conquered all the country with many attempts being made to assign a specific location to cities mentioned in other inscriptions found within Cambodia.

The other sources of information on this period are Chinese accounts and references, in these to tributary states such as Funan and Chenla.

2.1 Angkorean (8th-12th century)

The art and architecture of the Khmer has been classified into periods, by French art historians. Each style takes its name from the principal monument built by the ruler at Angkor. The Angkor Period began when Jayavarman II conducted a ritual that installed him as universal monarch and ended with the relocation of the Khmers from Angkor to Phnom Phen in southern Cambodia. The history of this period has been reconstructed from the monuments, reliefs, statuary, excavated artifacts and inscriptions in Pali, Sanskrit and Khmer; all found within the boundaries of the former empire.

During the Angkorean period of Suriyavarman I (1002-50) was the significant king. He strengthened the organization of the government, established internal security, and achieved political acclaim for extending the territorial boundaries southward to Thailand through a series of wars. He conquered the Kingdom of central Thailand, and established a