
The Ancient Town of Si Thep (Thailand) No 1662

1 Basic information

Official name as proposed by the State Party

The Ancient Town of Si Thep

Location

Phetchabun Province

Si Thep District

Thailand

Brief description

The Ancient Town of Si Thep is a serial property of three component parts that represent Dvaravati culture from the 6th to the 10th centuries, and important phases in the history of Southeast Asia. These are a distinctive twin-town site, featuring an Inner and Outer Town surrounded by moats, the massive Khao Klang Nok ancient monument, and the Khao Thamorrat Cave ancient monument. Together these sites represent the architecture, artistic traditions and religious diversity of the Dvaravati Empire that thrived in Central Thailand from the 6th to the 10th centuries, demonstrating the influences from India including Hinduism, and Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. The local adaptation of these traditions resulted in a distinctive artistic tradition known as the Si Thep School of Art which later influenced other civilisations in Southeast Asia.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is serial nomination of three *sites*.

Included in the Tentative List

11 April 2019

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations and technical evaluation mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members and independent experts.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the nominated property from 12 to 17 September 2022.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 3 October 2022 requesting further information about the boundaries, restoration plans, the management system, and planned and approved development projects.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 28 October 2022.

An Interim Report was provided to the State Party on 21 December 2022 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel. Further information was requested in the Interim Report including: the importance of the Dvaravati period, the name of the nominated property, Si Thep boundary/buffer zone (component part 001), Khao Klang Nok boundary (component part 002), access to the cave monastery (component part 003), community engagement, Heritage Impact Assessment, Indigenous peoples, the area of the component parts and buffer zones, and the implementation of the management plan.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 23 February 2023.

All additional information received has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

10 March 2023

2 Description of the nominated property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report provides only a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

Description and history

Three component parts associated with the ancient town of Si Thep are nominated as representative of the Dvaravati culture in Central Thailand which thrived from the 6th to 10th centuries.

The human history of this part of Thailand is dated to at least 3,000-4,000 years ago. Religious cultures from India were brought to Si Thep between the 1st and 5th centuries, and both Hinduism and Buddhism were established here during the 5th and 6th centuries, marking the beginning of Dvaravati culture. Si Thep is known as one of the oldest and largest of the ancient Dvaravati towns. The distinctive qualities of Dvaravati sculptures found here have been given the name of Si Thep School of Art, which emerged between the 6th and 8th centuries.

Hindu scriptures and more than 112 significant monasteries for Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism have been discovered at Si Thep. The sculptures and figures demonstrate diverse cultural influences, and some forms are unique within Thailand, such as a sculpture with a Tribhanga body posture and the dwarf stucco figures found at the Khao Klang Nai ancient monument. Excavations at Si Thep have revealed many layers of habitation and ornamentation.

Dvaravati culture began to decline between the 10th and the 11th centuries as Khmer political power grew in lower north-eastern and central Thailand. The importance of Si Thep waned following the founding of the Sukhothai Kingdom in 1238, and the town was abandoned in the mid-12th century.

The area of the three component parts totals 866.471 ha, with buffer zones totalling 3,824.148 ha.

Component part 001: the Ancient Town of Si Thep

The Ancient Town of Si Thep is a large archaeological site (474.008 ha). It has a unique twin-town layout with an Inner Town and an Outer Town with shared moats. The Inner Town, known as Muang Nai is round in shape, and the Outer Town, Muang Nok, is oblong shaped. The moats, town walls and gates are evident. Pagoda ruins are located mostly in the Inner Town, and the large Khao Klang Nai monastery is located in the centre of the town. The Inner Town is an Historical Park which has been extensively researched by archaeologists. The Outer Town has not been excavated and is currently used for farming. A small temple in contemporary community use is located within the Inner Town of component part 001, and an annual festival is celebrated at this location.

Component part 002: Khao Klang Nok ancient monument

Khao Klang Nok ancient monument is a smaller site of 10.144 ha. Component parts 001 and 002 share a common buffer zone. This is the largest Dvaravati pagoda in Thailand, square in plan, seventy metres by seventy metres with a large central pagoda on top. Each side is surrounded by smaller subordinating pagodas. These features represent beliefs in the centre of the universe. Dvaravati features have been established through archaeological excavations, including the base structure in the indented corner, the Bua Valai base and the decorative replica Prasats, demonstrating Southern Indian and Central Java influences. This impressive monument represents an important phase within Dvaravati period. There is a symbolic relationship and physical alignment between this monument and the mountain cave (component part 003).

Component part 003: Khao Thamorrat Cave ancient monument

Khao Thamorrat Cave ancient monument is a monastery with Dvaravati sculptures (382.319 ha), located within a sacred mountain, accessible via a steep path. The mountain is undeveloped. This is the only cave monastery in Thailand or Southeast Asia with evidence of Mahayana Buddhism. It is located approximately fifteen kilometres west of the other two component parts and is aligned on the same axis as Khao Klang Nok. The cave contains evidence of Dharmachakra, Bodhisattva and other Buddha statues. The steep path to reach the cave is part of the belief system of local people that worship here. Some sculptures have been removed from the cave and are in the care of the Phra Nakhon National Museum in Bangkok.

The three component parts are set within a landscape of mountains, valleys, forests, settlements and agricultural land. Five farming villages occur in the buffer zone.

State of conservation

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the three component parts is very good. The Inner Town (component part 001) is managed as an Historical Park, and the elements are well-maintained. The Outer Town remains unexcavated, and the current farming activities are not considered to have an impact on the state of conservation. The potential loss of community support could increase the vulnerability for the nominated property.

Factors affecting the nominated property

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the nominated property are natural deterioration and occasional flooding due to extreme weather events.

Few planned developments occur within or near the nominated property. In the additional information received in November 2022, the only development planned in the next five years is the improvement of the gravel road in the Outer Town (component part 001). Planned developments in the buffer zones include removal and reconstruction of the Si Thep Historical Park Office, information centre and service area, and officer houses; and improvement of the road to Khao Klang Nok. All planned developments will be included in the updated management plan in 2023.

Some past factors that have affected the property are acknowledged by the State Party, including past unlawful excavations. ICOMOS notes that there is an oil drilling rig located in the vicinity of component parts 001 and 002. The State Party has indicated that this project has been cancelled. ICOMOS requested additional information about whether this could be resumed in the future and the potential impacts it could have on the nominated component parts, and whether oil drilling is strictly prohibited in the nominated component parts and buffer zones.

There is a sugar mill located to the west of the buffer zone for component parts 001 and 002 that has created local pollution problems. An Environmental Impact Monitoring Committee has been established and an Environmental Impact Assessment was done. Improvements to the emissions control by the sugar mill have been implemented.

The Pa Sak River Valley Development Project was completed in 2005 and has the potential to have a significant impact on water systems in the nominated property through depletion of ground water levels and ground stability. ICOMOS considers that the monitoring system must account for these potential risks.

The nominated property is periodically affected by flooding, including a serious flooding event in September 2021. The State Party has monitoring and mitigation systems in place in relation to flooding, as well as some safeguarding measures in relation to seismic risk.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the nominated property is good. Unlawful excavations and past and cancelled development pressures have posed threats to the property. There are few factors affecting the nominated property at present, although it is vulnerable to climate impacts, extreme weather events and the potential loss of community support. ICOMOS recommends that the impacts of changes in ground water levels be regularly monitored.

3 Proposed justification for inscription

Proposed justification

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The nominated property demonstrates the important characteristics of Dvaravati settlement, art, architecture and culture.
- The lay-out of the ancient town is intact and distinctive.
- The nominated property contains more than 112 monasteries and Hindu sculptures from the 6th to the 8th centuries. Of particular note are the figures in the standing Tribhanga posture that depict bodily movement.
- The Khao Klang Nok ancient monument is the largest monument of Dvaravati art in Thailand, with a number of unique features.
- Khao Thamorrat Cave is the only cave monastery in Southeast Asia that demonstrates shared beliefs in Mahayana Buddhism and is a sacred natural mountain.
- The artistic elements convey distinctive cosmological beliefs which are both distinctive and drawn from other Southeast Asian cultures.

Based on the nomination dossier and the additional information provided by the State Party, the key attributes of the nominated property are the archaeological and artistic features and materials associated with the Dvaravati periods.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis has been developed in response to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. The State Party has considered other Dvaravati sites in Thailand. Six sites within Thailand that contain Dvaravati art were selected for comparison: U Thong (Suphan Buri Province), Nakhon Pathom (Nakhon Pathom Province), Khu Bua (Ratchaburi Province), Lopburi (Lopburi Province), Sri Mahosot (Prachin Buri Province) and Sema (Nakhon Ratchasima Province). The conclusion of this analysis is that, although these other sites have important

features that demonstrate Dvaravati town design and arts, Si Thep is the most complete ancient town with walls and moats in good condition, as well as its distinctive twin-town layout which is not found elsewhere. Dvaravati art at Si Thep was influenced by Indian traditions, but was further developed into a distinctive artistic style, called the Si Thep School of Art that is not found elsewhere, but later influenced other cultures in Thailand.

The State Party also selected properties from the World Heritage List that demonstrate several relevant characteristics such as ancient towns from a similar period located on ancient routes between India and China, sites influenced by Indian culture, and Hindu and Buddhist monasteries from similar periods. Five World Heritage properties were selected: Pyu Ancient Cities (Myanmar, (ii), (iii), (iv), 2014), Temple Zone of Sambor Prei Kuk, Archaeological Site of Ancient Ishanapura (Cambodia, (ii), (iii), (vi), 2017), Vat Phou and Associated Ancient Settlements within the Champasak Cultural Landscape (Lao People's Democratic Republic, (iii), (iv), (vi), 2001), My Son Sanctuary (Viet Nam, (ii), (iii), 1999), and Borobudur Temple Compounds (Indonesia, (i), (ii), (vi), 1991). A discussion comparing various attributes between each of these and Si Thep has been provided. The analysis concludes that Si Thep is distinctive because of the diversity of religious beliefs demonstrated in the town plan, and the design of key monuments, sculptures and artefacts.

The comparative analysis also considers several sacred mountains, including: the Hindu sacred mountain, Mount Kailash, and the sacred Buddhist mountain, Mount Wutai (China, (ii), (iii), (iv), (vi), 2009). While other sites could be considered, ICOMOS does not consider it useful to separate the component parts for the purposes of the comparative analysis in this manner.

ICOMOS considers that the most relevant comparisons have been made by the State Party, although there are several Cambodian properties in the World Heritage List and Tentative List that could be included to ensure completeness, including: Angkor (Cambodia, (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), 1992); and the properties of Koh Ker: Archeological site of Ancient Lingapura Or Chok Gargyar; Phnom Kulen: Archaeological Site/Ancient Site of Mahendraparvata; and The Site of Angkor Borei and Phnom Da which currently are on the Tentative List. However, ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis is sufficient to justify the consideration of this property for inscription in the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (ii) and (iii).

Criterion (ii): *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;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property demonstrates interactions between Dvaravati and Indian cultures between the 6th and the 10th centuries. Through these interactions, the town developed a distinctive identity expressed in its artistic and architectural traditions. These subsequently influenced the art and architecture of other areas within Thailand. Together, the nominated component parts represent different belief communities within Dvaravati culture, including Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated serial property demonstrates the important interchanges of cultural and religious traditions that originated in India and were adapted by the Dvaravati Empire. The cohabitation of Buddhist and Hindu beliefs is a distinctive characteristic of Dvaravati architecture, town planning and art, and these are demonstrated by the nominated component parts. ICOMOS also acknowledges that the artistic traditions of Si Thep had an influence on other parts of Southeast Asia (including the later centres of Lopburi and Ayutthaya). The justification of criterion (ii) could be further deepened through research to demonstrate how the layout of the Dvaravati town and structures were specifically influenced by Buddhist/Hindu cosmologies. However, ICOMOS considers that this criterion is sufficiently demonstrated at this stage.

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property bears an exceptional testimony to Dvaravati culture and civilisation which flourished in this location until the 10th century. Known at the time as the Dvaravati Empire, the architectural and artistic forms of Si Thep are not found elsewhere.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property portrays the Dvaravati culture that flourished in Central Thailand between the 6th and the 10th centuries and represents its artistic and cultural complexity in terms of urban planning, religious architecture and monasticism. Additional research could further elaborate the characteristics of the Dvaravati culture and civilisation, demonstrating the ways in which the surviving physical characteristics reflect different phases of the rise and decline of the Dvaravati Empire during this period. However, ICOMOS considers that this criterion is sufficiently demonstrated at this stage.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (ii) and (iii).

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The integrity of the nominated property is based on the rationale for the serial approach, the need for the nominated component parts to contain all the attributes necessary to convey the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, the intactness of the attributes and the management of major pressures on their conservation.

ICOMOS considers that the serial approach is justified and that the property presents a comprehensive understanding of the layout, planning, water infrastructure, various layers of inhabitation and evidence of the Dvaravati city and associated monuments. ICOMOS observes that there is minimal development pressure. There is a current road that facilitates movement within the Inner Town (component part 001) and local access to an actively used temple/shrine; and the Outer Town is used for farming. These current uses do not represent threats to the integrity of this component part.

ICOMOS considers that the integrity of the whole series as well as the integrity of each of the component parts have been demonstrated, although this could be further strengthened through a future extension to the boundary of component part 002 to fully encompass elements of the monument.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the nominated property is based on the ability of the attributes to convey the proposed Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS considers that the authenticity of the whole series as well as the authenticity of each of the component parts have been demonstrated. The Dvaravati town and associated monuments are archaeological sites that are intact and legible. Repairs and other conservation interventions have been sensitively completed, and any new materials (such as replicas created for interpretative purposes) are clearly indicated as such.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the nominated property have been met.

Boundaries

There are no inhabitants inside the boundaries of the component part, and nearly 10,000 inhabitants living in the five villages in the buffer zones (2020 figures).

The State Party has explained that the boundaries of the component parts align with their designation as ancient monuments within the national legal framework. In the additional information received in February 2023, the State Party confirmed that the boundary of component part 001

is more tightly drawn around the moat than the legal designation because the extent of the Dvaravati mounds and moat is considered to provide a stronger rationale for the town. ICOMOS concurs with this judgement but has concerns about the potential for confusion about the extent of the component part for local communities. The boundary of component part 001 is otherwise clearly delineated. It is marked by concrete posts and contains the two ancient towns and their features.

The boundary of component part 002 is based on the extent of the monument that is legally protected but does not correspond to existing land parcels, and important elements of the monument have been identified on private land located beyond the current square-shaped boundary. Mapping by the Fine Arts Department suggests a larger future extent, which depends on additional land acquisition. The process for land acquisition was outlined by the State Party in the additional information received in February 2023, and the Fine Arts Department has submitted the relevant budget proposal for the fiscal year of 2024. ICOMOS acknowledges the importance of taking the time needed to carefully negotiate and implement these changes. At this stage, the boundary is considered adequate for the protection of the monument and it should be extended through the procedure of minor boundary modification in future once the land acquisition can be successfully negotiated with the surrounding private owners.

The boundary of component part 003 is drawn around the base of the mountain. The pathway leading to the mountain traverses the buffer zone and the wider setting.

Delineation of the buffer zones has taken into account various natural boundaries (such as waterways) as well as existing roads. ICOMOS notes that there are some elements associated with the Dvaravati history of Si Thep located in the buffer zone for component parts 001 and 002, including water structures and a monastery. Implementation of the legal protection and management systems will need to ensure that these features are protected. ICOMOS notes that the delineation of the buffer zone on its northern edge is based on a road alignment that passes through a village. The additional information provided by the State Party in February 2023 has satisfactorily explained the rationale for this delineation.

A distance of approximately ten kilometres separates the two buffer zones. This area contributes to the significance of the wider setting of the nominated property, including the visual links and alignment between component parts 002 and 003, and the pathway to reach the steep climb to the cave site in component part 003. The current designation of this land for environmental protection is therefore an important contributor to the integrity of the nominated property and should be maintained.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property are clearly delineated and contain all the features necessary to express the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. As part of the ongoing engagement with local

communities, it is recommended that the boundaries of the component parts and their buffer zones are clearly explained. A future extension of the boundary of component part 002 once the needed land acquisition has been completed is recommended through the procedure of minor boundary modification as a means of further strengthening the integrity of the nominated property.

Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of the nominated property for inscription on the World Heritage List, and that criteria (ii) and (iii) have been met. The conditions of integrity and authenticity of the nominated property have been demonstrated. The boundaries of the component parts and buffer zones are considered to be adequate, although a future extension to the boundary of component part 002 through the procedure of minor boundary modification is recommended following consultations with neighbouring landowners regarding the acquisition of land with important elements associated with the monument.

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Documentation

Detailed baseline documentation is an essential element of the management, conservation, monitoring and protection of World Heritage properties. In addition to the drawings and photographs presented with the nomination dossier, the State Party provided documentation examples in the additional information received in November 2022. The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission observed that there is a detailed inventory for each of the elements and structures within the nominated property (including drawings, models and sketches), but that more efficient means of storing, archiving and retrieving this data is needed.

The management plan aims to build a complete knowledge base for the nominated property, and various databases are envisaged.

Conservation measures

Research at Si Thep was first published at the beginning of the 20th century, and the designation of Si Thep as a national ancient monument occurred in 1935-1937. Conservation of the sites has been undertaken by the Fine Arts Department for the decades since the establishment of the Si Thep Historical Park in 1984, and includes site surveys, archaeological excavations, repair and stabilisation of structures (including anastylosis). Some materials were removed from the Khao Thamorrat Cave ancient monument and are held and exhibited by the Phra Nakhon National Museum in Bangkok. Conservation decisions are guided by the principles established by ICOMOS Thailand.

The Dvaravati features of the three component parts are well-maintained and systems are in place for regular maintenance, repointing, removal of invasive vegetation,

replacement of dislodged fabric, repairs using historic bricks and stones, and interventions such as metal ties or straps to ensure structural stability. These works are undertaken by skilled and experienced practitioners.

The State Party has advised that there are intentions for conservation and presentation of a number of excavated features. In the additional information received in November 2022, the State Party explained that six archaeological excavations were initiated in 2022, and that associated works are planned in 2023, including temporary roofing, detailed ground laser survey to make a 3D model, and preparation of detailed plans for the 2023-2024 fiscal year, following the standards established by the Fine Arts Department.

The State Party has long-term plans to install Buddha and Bodhisattva replicas in Khao Thamorrat Cave ancient monument, for the restoration of the original irrigation systems of the town, and additional archaeological research in partnership with universities.

Monitoring

The nomination dossier set out a monitoring plan for the nominated property, including the key indicators that will be used and the storage of records. An explanation of how monitoring is conducted, particularly in relation to construction and development projects, management of weeds and natural vegetation, riverbank erosion, industrial waste and pollution and natural hazards, was provided in the additional information received in November 2022.

ICOMOS considers that the indicators are usefully oriented toward the identified factors and processes that could affect the property, but that there are few direct measures of trends in the state of conservation over time.

ICOMOS considers that the required documentation and conservation measures are in place, and that the State Party plans for ongoing improvements.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring system could be further enhanced by introducing measures of the state of conservation of the nominated property and adapted for easy integration of its outcomes into the Periodic Reporting questionnaire.

5 Protection and management

Legal protection

The nominated component parts have been registered as ancient monuments in accordance with the Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums, B.E.2504 (1961), and the Amended Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums (Issue No.2), B.E.2535 (1992). For component part 003, only the cave site is protected through this mechanism. The remaining area within the boundary of the component part is protected by the National Reserved Forest Act, B.E.2507 (1964). These designations ensure the legal protection of the component parts at the national

level. Activities within 2,000 metres of the ancient monuments are restricted and there are height controls on new buildings.

The buffer zones are protected through the implementation of several national laws including the National Reserved Forest Act, B.E.2507 (1964), the Agricultural Land Reform Act, B.E.2518 (1975) and the Ministerial Regulation regarding the Enforcement of Unitary Town Plan of Phetchabun Province, B.E.2560 (2017). A Memorandum of Understanding on cultural heritage preservation of the ancient town of Si Thep has been agreed by the government agencies implementing these laws.

The wider setting of the three component parts is considered important, especially given the symbolic connection and physical alignment between component parts 002 and 003. This area currently includes a transport route, the Khok Sa-ard Sub-district Municipality, waterways and small hills. The laws applying to the buffer zone also apply to this wider setting, and its visual integrity is not considered to be vulnerable.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection for the nominated property is adequate and well-coordinated.

Management system

The three component parts are in government ownership. For component part 001, the Fine Arts Department (Ministry of Culture) and the Treasury Department (Ministry of Finance) are the custodians. Areas around component part 003 are under the custodianship of the Royal Forest Department (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment) and the Agricultural Land Reform Office (Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives), and the cave site is under the custodianship of the Fine Arts Department. Component part 002 is surrounded by privately-owned land, and the Fine Arts Department is currently negotiating further land acquisitions.

The day-to-day management of the nominated property is the responsibility of the Si Thep Historical Park Office, which has eighty-two employees. The functions of the Office are organised according to archaeological, academic and educational services; ancient monument conservation; administration and finance; maintenance, cleaning and landscaping; and security. The Si Thep Historical Park Office is further supported by the professional expertise of the Fine Arts Department and of the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP).

ONEP is responsible for the preparation of the management plan. The draft Management Plan for the Conservation and Development of the Ancient Town of Si Thep 2020-2022 was submitted as part of the nomination dossier. It identifies seven priority areas: Academic studies and research support; Archaeology and conservation of ancient monuments; Land utilisation; Public utility and public facilities development; Promotion of learning, tourism and public relations; Community engagement; Natural disaster risk management. Detailed programs have been

developed for each of these areas. The programming outlined in the management plan covers the period 2020-2022, and the updated status of the actions was provided in the additional information received in November 2022, and an updated timeframe and process for finalising the draft management plan was provided in the additional information received in February 2023. According to this timeline, the draft management plan will be finalised in December 2023. A draft archaeological research plan was also provided in the additional information received in February 2023.

ICOMOS considers that some aspects of the planned work are key parts of the management system, such as fully developed plans for risk management and sustainable tourism. In addition, there are no formal processes for Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) in the management system at present. In the additional information received in February 2023, the State Party acknowledges this gap, indicating that the recently released *Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context* will be reviewed in consultation with ICOMOS Thailand. ICOMOS recommends that formal processes for HIA be developed and implemented to assist future development processes, including the relocation of the visitor centre and museum.

Visitor management

The three component parts pose different levels of access and readiness for increased visitation. Component part 001 has an existing visitor centre/museum within the Inner Town and other visitor facilities. There are future plans to establish a museum within the buffer zone. On-site interpretation is provided by the staff of the Si Thep Historical Park.

Component part 002 has a temporary visitor centre and a plan for more extensive visitation and visitor facilities has been prepared. However, implementation of this proposal will require community agreement and the acquisition of privately-owned land.

In the additional information provided in February 2023, the State Party confirmed that there are no plans for visitation to component part 003 beyond the current community access, although some safety improvements to the access path could be envisaged.

The Phetchabun Tourism and Sports Centre received approximately two million tourists annually (including about 25,000 international visitors) prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The Phetchabun Province plans to promote visitation to Si Thep by connecting it with other World Heritage properties in Thailand and Laos.

While a section of the draft management plan that addresses tourism and visitation to Si Thep has been included in tourism planning at the national level (2017-2021), ICOMOS considers that a structured engagement with the tourism industry does not seem in place at present. Work toward a deepened strategy for tourism should also address traffic and transport/circulation within and between

component parts 001 and 002; the possible need for visitor accommodation in the wider area; other infrastructure implications of increased visitation; monitoring of safety issues; and community benefits from tourism.

ICOMOS considers that visitation to component parts 001 and 002 of the nominated property are currently well managed.

Community involvement

Communities with direct interests and associations with the nominated property include villagers living in the buffer zone of component part 001 and the wider setting, landless farmers from the Si Thep Noi village that use the land within the Outer Town (component part 001), neighbouring landowners (component part 002), and people with spiritual associations and ongoing ritual practices associated within the nominated areas.

The State Party consulted with these communities in the preparation of the nomination, and there appears to be strong community support for the nomination.

As noted, ICOMOS has observed some potential confusion concerning the boundary of component part 001 in relation to the adjacent village, and there are potentially sensitive issues for the landless farming community about future archaeological research of the Outer Town (which will displace the livelihoods of 288 people). There are other issues concerning the rights of neighbouring landowners in relation to the future extension of the boundary to component part 002. Component part 003 is used by local people for spiritual practices, and it was communicated to ICOMOS that communities would not support any future plans to provide access to it by other visitors.

ICOMOS notes that the State Party is aware of the community issues, and that strategies and actions for community engagement are included in the draft management plan. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) agreed by the government agencies will support the participation of local communities in the protection and presentation of the nominated property.

ICOMOS considers that community involvement is a primary issue for the effective future management of the nominated property and recommends that the strategies outlined in the draft management plan for ensuring community involvement are pursued as a high priority. Local communities could be involved in the daily management of the nominated property and current and future tourism plans. ICOMOS also considers that the actions identified in the draft management plan could be further enhanced to include community representation in the management structures.

Effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the legal protection and management of the nominated property are in place, and sufficiently resourced. The draft management plan contains an effective framework for action, including the

needed engagement with local communities. It should be finalised in priority.

6 Conclusion

The Ancient Town of Si Thep represents the Dvaravati culture from the 6th to the 10th centuries, which is an important phase in the history of Southeast Asia. Together, the site of the Ancient Town of Si Thep, the Khao Klang Nok ancient monument, and the Khao Thamorrat Cave ancient monument represent Dvaravati architecture and artistic traditions, demonstrating influences from Hinduism and Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (ii) and (iii), and has made some recommendations about several areas of continuing research that will assist with the further understanding of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, such as research on how the interplay of Hindu and Buddhist influences have shaped the lay-out and architecture of the ancient town. The requirements for authenticity and integrity are satisfied, although it is recommended to extend the boundary of component part 002 through the procedure of minor boundary modification to further enhance the integrity of the serial property. Several recommendations have been suggested to further strengthen the management of the property, including the primary importance of community engagement.

ICOMOS suggests reconsideration of the name of the nominated property to better reflect the significance of the three component parts and to highlight the Dvaravati culture, although the State Party has indicated its preference to retain the original name of the property.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that The Ancient Town of Si Thep, Thailand, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (ii) and (iii)**.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

The Ancient Town of Si Thep is a serial property of three component parts that represent Dvaravati culture from the 6th to the 10th centuries, an important phase in the history of Southeast Asia. The component parts are the unique twin-town lay-out of the Ancient Town of Si Thep (component part 001), featuring Muang Nai (Inner Town) and Muang Nok (Outer Town) surrounded by moats; Khao Klang Nok ancient monument (component part 002), the largest surviving Dvaravati monument; and, the Khao Thamorrat Cave ancient monument (component part 003), a unique Mahayana Buddhist cave monastery that contains important examples of Dvaravati art and sculpture.

More than 112 significant monastery sites have been identified at Si Thep, and the local adaptation of Hindu artistic traditions resulted in a distinctive artistic tradition known as the Si Thep School of Art which later influenced other civilisations in Southeast Asia. The round-relief sculpture without a back-support arch in the standing Tribhanga posture, depicting body movement, is especially distinctive.

Together these sites represent the architecture, artistic traditions and religious diversity of the Dvaravati Empire that thrived in Central Thailand from the 6th to the 10th centuries, demonstrating the influences from India including Hinduism, and Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

Criterion (ii): The Ancient Town of Si Thep demonstrates important interchanges of cultural and religious traditions that originated in India and were adapted by the Dvaravati Empire between the 6th and 10th centuries. Through these interactions, the town developed a distinctive identity expressed in its artistic and architectural traditions. The Si Thep School of Art subsequently influenced the art and architecture of other areas in Thailand. The cohabitation of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism is a distinctive characteristic of Dvaravati architecture, town planning and art, and these are demonstrated by the three component parts.

Criterion (iii): The Ancient Town of Si Thep, the Khao Klang Nok ancient monument and the Khao Thamorrat Cave ancient monument bear an exceptional testimony to the Dvaravati culture and civilisation. Together, these sites demonstrate the complexity and the specific artistic and cultural characteristics of the Dvaravati period in terms of urban planning, religious architecture, and monasticism. The architectural and artistic forms of Si Thep are not found elsewhere, particularly the unique twin-town lay-out, and distinctive Dvaravati forms of sculpture such as the standing Tribhanga posture depicting body movement. The Khao Klang Nok ancient monument is the largest monument of Dvaravati art, influenced by South Indian and Indonesian artistic traditions; and the Khao Thamorrat Cave ancient monument is located in a sacred mountain and the only known cave monastery in Mahayana Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

Integrity

The three component parts contain all the attributes necessary to convey the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. The serial approach is justified, and the property presents a comprehensive understanding of the layout, planning, water infrastructure, various layers of inhabitation and evidence of the Dvaravati city and associated monuments. The attributes of the serial property have a good state of conservation and there are few pressures impacting on the sites and their wider setting.

Authenticity

The authenticity of The Ancient Town of Si Thep is demonstrated by the richness of its archaeological

structures and materials including rare and distinctive Dvaravati artistic elements. Khao Klang Nok ancient monument conveys Dvaravati cosmological beliefs, and features Dvaravati architectural forms of the indented corners system, the Bua Valai base and replica Prasats for the building base decoration. Archaeological recording and continuing research are important contributors to the authenticity of the property. Repairs and other conservation interventions have been sensitively completed, and any new materials are clearly indicated as such. The sites are relatively free from development pressures.

Protection and management requirements

Legal protection for the three component parts is provided by the Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums, B.E.2504 (1961) and its Amended Act (No.2), B.E.2535 (1992). The buffer zones are protected under the National Reserved Forest Act, B.E.2507 (1964), the Agricultural Land Reform Act, B.E.2518 (1975), and the Ministerial Regulation regarding the Enforcement of Unitary Town Plan of Phetchabun Province, B.E.2560 (2017).

A management plan is being finalised. It includes a community engagement plan, a sustainable tourism plan, and risk management. The long-term engagement and support of local communities is a key element of the protection and management of the serial property. The Memorandum of Understanding agreed by government agencies will ensure the implementation of conservation measures and ongoing community engagement.

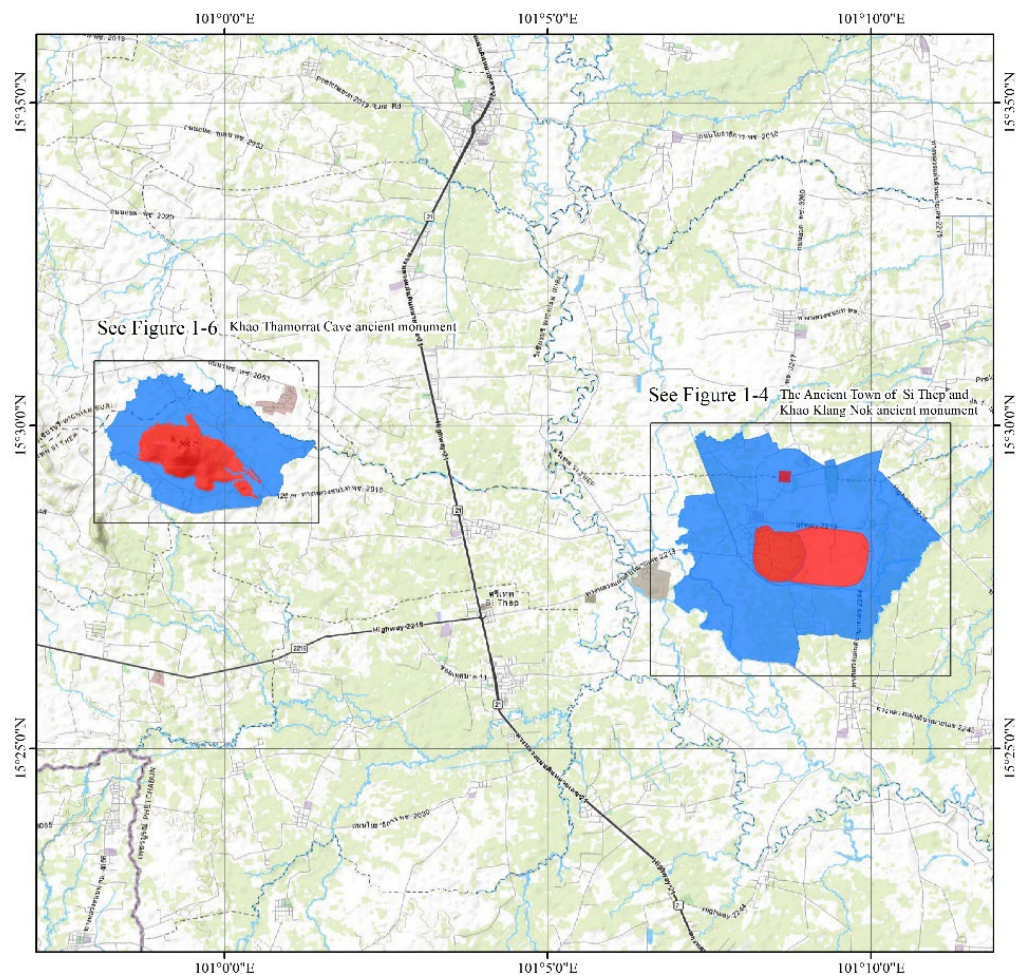
There are few factors affecting the property at present, although it is vulnerable to climate impacts, extreme weather events and the potential loss of community support. Unlawful excavations and development pressures posed threats to the property in the past, but these are no longer current. The monitoring system should be enhanced in relation to changes in ground water, and to development of indicators which more directly measure the state of conservation of the attributes.

Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) Finalising as a priority the Management Plan for the Conservation and Development of the Ancient Town of Si Thep, including fully developed plans for risk management and sustainable tourism, the archaeological research strategy, and more detailed policies and actions for each of the three component parts,
- b) Implementing, as a high priority, co-designed strategies for community engagement which are inclusive, transparent, ongoing, and well-resourced, and ensuring that the boundaries of the component parts are clearly explained to the local communities,
- c) Continuing the negotiations with private landowners regarding the future extension to the boundary of component part 002 to incorporate all key elements of the monument through the procedure of minor boundary modification,
- d) Enhancing the documentation of the attributes of the property using a digital platform that could facilitate more efficient means of storing and retrieving data,
- e) Implementing planned research to more fully understand the layout and history of the property, particularly in relation to the non-invasive archaeological exploration of the Outer Town (component part 001), and research to determine the full extent and spatial layout of component part 002,
- f) Establishing future research projects to deepen the understanding of how Buddhist and Hindu traditions have influenced the residential patterns, street alignments, location of official buildings in the town, as well as a stronger sense of how the attributes demonstrate the founding, rise, and decline of the Dvaravati period,
- g) Enhancing the monitoring system by introducing measures of the state of the conservation of the attributes, ensuring that the impacts of changes in ground water levels on the attributes of Si Thep are regularly monitored, and adapting the monitoring system for easy integration of the outcomes into the Periodic Reporting questionnaire,
- h) Developing formal processes for Heritage Impact Assessment utilising the *Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context* prepared by the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre,
- i) Ensuring that all new developments, including the plans for a visitor centre for component part 002, and a future museum in the buffer zone of component parts 001 and 002 are the subject of a full Heritage Impact Assessment,
- j) Ensuring that new oil drilling projects are strictly prohibited in the property and its buffer zones, and in the wider setting, particularly the area that lies between the buffer zones,
- k) Ensuring that the future uses and developments within the wider setting take into account the symbolic connection and physical alignment between component parts 002 and 003,
- l) Submitting to the World Heritage Centre by 1 December 2024, a report on the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 47th session;

ICOMOS further recommends that the name of the property be changed to: The Ancient Town of Si Thep and its Associated Dvaravati Monuments.



Legends

- Nominated property
- Buffer zone



Scale 1:100,000

0 2.5 5 10 Kilometers



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property