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# The Phu Phrabat Historical Park (Thailand) No 1507

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## 1 Basic information

### Official name as proposed by the State Party

The Phu Phrabat Historical Park

### Location

Ban Phue District  
Udon Thani Province  
Thailand

### Brief description

The Phu Phrabat Historical Park is representative of the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period (7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE). In the global context, while sacred boundary markers for areas of Theravada Buddhist monastic practice vary in materials, extensive use of stones is only found in the Khorat Plateau region in Southeast Asia. The arrival of Buddhism in the 7<sup>th</sup> century led to an increase in the erection of Sīma stones throughout the region for over four centuries. Associated with the renewal of the religious places in later times up to the present day, the Sīma stone tradition has been continued by recycling the old Sīma stones to new locations, leaving only a very limited number of the Sīma stones from the Dvaravati period in their original locations. The Phu Phrabat Mountain area preserves the largest corpus in the world of *in situ* Sīma stones from the Dvaravati period, testifying to the Sīma stone tradition that once prevailed in the region. The scale of Sīma stone erection and rock shelter modification has transformed the natural landscape into a religious centre, possibly for forest monastic practices, and the rock paintings on the surfaces of forty-seven rock shelters are the physical evidence of human occupation over two millennia.

### Category of property

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

In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (2023), paragraph 47, it has also been nominated as a *cultural landscape*.

### Included in the Tentative List

1 April 2004 as "Phuphrabat Historical Park"

### Background

This nomination was first submitted for evaluation in 2015, under the same name. The property was nominated as a serial cultural landscape composed of two component

parts, on the basis of criteria (iii), (iv), (v), (vi), for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 40<sup>th</sup> session (Istanbul, 2016).

The leading theme of the nomination was the continuity of the sacredness of the place throughout several centuries.

ICOMOS noted that the justification for the inscription was based on several themes and did not clarify how or to what extent the nominated property would stand out compared to other similar properties with comparable historic, cultural, and religious trajectories.

On this basis, ICOMOS considered that the cultural phenomenon of Sīma stones might have the potential to justify consideration for the World Heritage List, and that a substantial re-scoping of the nomination was necessary. ICOMOS therefore recommended that the examination of the nomination be deferred in order to allow the State Party of Thailand, with the advice of ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre, if requested, to deepen the research on the theme of Sīma stone culture in relation to Buddhism, to bring into focus the potential significance of the nominated property in relation to other similar properties within the region.

In 2016, the property was withdrawn by the State Party before the examination of the World Heritage Committee at its 40<sup>th</sup> Session (Decision 40 COM 8B.23).

In 2023, the State Party submitted the present revised nomination dossier.

### Consultations and technical evaluation mission

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

Comments on the natural attributes of this nominated property, their conservation and their management were received from IUCN on 14 November 2023 and have been incorporated into relevant sections of this report.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the nominated property from 3 to 8 August 2023.

### Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 4 October 2023 requesting further information about the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, the comparative analysis, protection and management of the nominated property, and maps.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 3 November 2023.

An interim report was provided to the State Party on 19 December 2023 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel.

Further information was requested in the interim report on the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period, the continuity of traditional practices in the nominated

property, the carrying capacity, and the protection of the rock paintings.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 7 February 2024.

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

#### **Date of ICOMOS approval of this report**

13 March 2024

## **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**

Located within the Pha Khuea Nam National Reserved Forest at the northern part of the Khorat Plateau in Northeast Thailand, the Phu Phrabat Historical Park is a small sandstone mountain in the Phu Pan Mountain Range. The mountainous landscape is dominated by the megalithic rock shelters dotted within the dense forests. Shaped into unusual forms by the combined forces of glacier movement in the Mesozoic-Cretaceous era and differential erosion of the rock strata, the rock shelters are typically mushroom-like, with a large flat block of rock resting on top of one or several tall rock pillars, some of which are more than ten metres high. Many rock shelters are surrounded by Sīma stones or modified for Buddhist activities, suggesting that the area was once a religious centre. Rock paintings are also found on many rock shelters.

Sīma is the Buddhist term denoting a defined sacred area where Buddhist monks or nuns perform ceremonies. The sacred area can be demarcated using various materials or natural features, such as wooden posts, termite mounds, or a river. Sīma stones are the stones that mark the sacred areas for Buddhist activities. Extensive use of Sīma stones as sacred markers is only found in Southeast Asia, with the highest concentration on the Khorat Plateau. The nominated property has the largest corpus of *in situ* Sīma stones in the region.

Sīma stones are typically arranged symmetrically in eight directions around the sacred place to delineate a square or rectangular area following Buddhist scripture. Sīma stones can be arranged in single, double, and triple concentric circles, according to the hierarchical importance or consecration history of the sacred areas. All three layouts are found in the nominated property. In a mountainous area, a Sīma stone has a main body and a tenon at its bottom. When installing, a mortise hole is carved in the bedrock in which the tenon of the Sīma stone is inserted.

The nominated property comprises two component parts, namely the Phu Phrabat Historical Park (component part 001) and the Sīma Cultural Site at Wat Phra Phuthabat Buaban (component part 002). The name of component part 001 is identical to that of the nominated property. It will therefore be referred to as the Phu Phrabat Historical Park (component part 001), whereas the term “The Phu Phrabat Historical Park” will refer to the nominated property as a whole.

#### **Component part 001: The Phu Phrabat Historical Park**

There are fifty-nine historic sites in component part 001, which can be classified into two broad categories: Sīma stone sites and non-Sīma stone sites.

#### Sīma stone sites

There are eight Sīma stone sites, of which six are surrounded by a single circle of Sīma stones and two by double concentric circles of Sīma stones.

#### **Sīma stones in a single circle:**

- Tam Rishi (the hermit cave) is a ten-metre-tall natural (unmodified) rock shelter surrounded by seven Sīma stones and one mortise hole (the position of the missing Sīma stone), arranged in a roughly symmetrical manner to form an almost square sacred area. The Sīma stones are not decorated, and are in various sizes and shapes, either a cuboid pillar with a round pointed top or a flat stone slab in an elongated lotus petal shape.
- Nok Krata Rock Shelter (the quail rock shelter) is another natural rock shelter surrounded by five Sīma stones and three mortise holes arranged facing eight directions to mark out a rectangular sacred area with the long axis running northeast to southwest. The Sīma stones are relatively short, flat, thick, and in a pentagonal shape.
- Kok Ma Noi (the small horse stable) is a rock shelter with a rock wall supporting a large rock slab at the top. The rock wall was carved in the middle to form two pillars at the sides to support the top rock. The space between the pillars was made flat, presumably for enshrining an idol. The rock shelter could be used as a residential area for monks or a venue for ceremonial use. Seven Sīma stones and a mortise hole surround the shelter in a symmetrical layout facing eight directions to demarcate a rectangular sacred area with the long axis running west to east with a slight anti-clockwise rotation. The sizes and shapes of the Sīma stones vary, with the majority being cuboid pillars, and a few being flat stone tablets in a rectangular shape topped with a lotus petal.
- Wat Look Koei (the son-in-law's temple) is a rock shelter modified to create a monastery. Its name, derived from local folklore, refers to the temple that Tao Boros (the son-in-law) built in a competition against his father-in-law, Tao Kong Paan. The back

wall and the lower portions of the two side walls were carved from the rock pillar that supports the top rock. The upper portions of the side walls, each with a window, and the front wall with a door in the middle are dry masonry walls. The floor was artificially flattened for placing Buddhist statues. There are three Sīma stones and five mortise holes surrounding the shelter to mark a rectangular sacred area with the long axis running northeast to southwest. The stones are in the form of an elongated lotus petal.

- Hor Nang U-Sa (Nang U-Sa's tower) is a rock shelter with a large, slightly inclined rock pillar ten metres in height supporting a large, thick rock slab. The name is derived from the local folklore that the tower was built by Tao Baros as his residence with Nang U-Sa. The core of the pillar was modified, and stone walls were built underneath the top rock slab to create a room. Rock paintings in geometric patterns are found in the room. Five Sīma stones and three mortise holes were established in a single concentric circle and facing in eight directions.
- Ku Nang U-Sa (Nang U-Sa's ashes storage tomb) is a rock shelter with a single pillar supporting the top rock slab. The name comes from local folklore, suggesting this place was a tomb where the cremated ashes of Nang U-Sa and her chaperone were stored. This rock shelter is also known as "Ki Nang U-Sa" because it looks like a loom that Nang U-Sa used for weaving cloth. Both the pillar and the ground were modified for enshrining religious idols or as a meditation area. Rock paintings are found on the pillar. The shelter is surrounded by eight Sīma stone slabs of the same shape, established systematically facing in eight directions, with their heights varying from 1.60 to 2.60 metres.

Sīma stones in double concentric circles:

- Tam Phra (the monk's cave) was a large rock shelter, but the top rock slab collapsed and broke into several pieces sometime in the past. Its bottom part was carved into a large room, with many Buddhist statues sculpted out of the rock pillar. Rock paintings are found on the walls. The carving might have caused an imbalance and eventual collapse of the top rock, which damaged the Buddhist images and resulted in the roofless room. The area surrounding the shelter was levelled. Sīma stones and mortise holes surround the shelter in seemingly two concentric circles facing in eight directions to form a rectangular sacred area, with the long axis running northeast to southwest. The Sīma stones in the inner concentric circle are in the form of a hexagonal pillar, and those in the outer concentric circle are stone slabs in an elongated lotus petal shape.
- The ceremonial stone courtyard is a square of sandstone bedrock marked by two concentric circles of Sīma stones symmetrically arranged facing in eight directions. It is located in the centre of several rock

shelters. These rock shelters are either marked by Sīma stone circles or have been modified for Buddhist activities, suggesting that the Courtyard was once the focal point of this religious centre.

#### Non-Sīma stone sites

There are fifty-one non-Sīma stone sites, of which eleven rock shelters were modified for Buddhist ceremonies and for living in by monks. The modification methods include the construction of walls underneath the top stone to form a closed space for hosting Buddhist statues. Rock paintings have been found at five shelters. There are thirty-eight natural rock shelters with rock paintings using hematite as the pigment. The themes can be figurative, such as human figures, animals, and human palms, and visual or abstract paintings, such as lines and geometric patterns.

Than Phra Sung is a rock pillar without a top block of rock. It is a quarry site for the Sīma stones of the nearby sacred areas, such as Tam Phra.

Bo Nam Nang U-Sa (Nang U-Sa's well) is an artificial well for storing water for Buddhist ceremonies. Carved into the bedrock, it is two by two metres wide and five metres in depth.

Component part 002: The Sīma Cultural Site at Wat Phra Phuthabat Buaban

The Sīma Cultural Site at Wat Phra Phuthabat Buaban comprises two groups of Sīma stone-marked sacred Buddhist sites. Group One consists of twelve Sīma stones randomly positioned around a rock shelter, which has several rock paintings. The Sīma stones are in various sizes, some of which are cuboid stones, and others are stone slabs with a carved straight ridge in the centre.

Group Two comprises twenty-four Sīma stones organised as triple concentric circles facing eight cardinal directions to demarcate a rectangular sacred place with the long axis running east-west. Each direction has three Sīma stones, with the innermost and middle ones closer to each other. All the Sīma stones are in an elongated lotus petal shape with a narrow bottom and slightly wider top. The innermost Sīma stones are the tallest, while the outermost ones are the shortest. The Sīma stones in the middle and outer concentric circles have a carved straight ridge in the centre and sculptures of a stupa and a water pot at the base. The eight Sīma stones of the innermost circle have low-relief sculptures depicting the *Jatakas*, the stories of Buddha's past lives.

The earliest human occupation at the nominated sites dates back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, as reflected by the rock paintings depicted on the rock shelters and the archaeological evidence near the nominated property. The themes of the rock paintings indicate that the area was a sacred place for ritual ceremonies.

During the Dvaravati period (7<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE), when Buddhism spread from central and east Thailand to

Northeast Thailand, stones were used by the local people for demarcating sacred areas. As a result, the practice of using Sīma stones for marking specific Buddhist areas swept across the entire Dvaravati region, including Northeast Thailand and parts of Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Cambodia.

From the 7<sup>th</sup> to the early part of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the shape of the Sīma stones evolved through six stages, from a simple, more natural style to a more elaborate one. The earliest Sīma stone type was a natural stone. It evolved into a cuboid pillar with a round pointed top; then it developed into an octagonal pillar and further evolved into a stone slab in an elongated lotus petal shape. Later, a carved ridge was added in the centre of the stone slab, and finally, a water pot or a stupa in a water pot was added. In the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, with the influence of the Koh Ker art style, high-relief Buddha images of various sizes and in different postures, as well as a more elaborate form of the Sīma stones with richer decorations than the previous period, were found. In this period, the Sīma stone slab was in an elongated lotus petal shape with sculptures depicting stories about the *Jataka* and the Buddha's life as well as humanoid figures such as the god Indra or the Bodhisattvas.

It is not clear what specific Buddhist activities were conducted at the nominated property during the Dvaravati period. Considering the scale of rock modification and the amount of work and manpower involved in erecting the Sīma stones, the nominated property was undoubtedly a regional religious centre of the time, possibly linked to the Dharma or forest monastic tradition, which are important sects of Buddhism.

During the Khmer culture period (from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards) and the Lan Chang period (15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries), the local religion changed to worshipping Buddha's footprints. It was believed that Buddha once visited the region and left several footprints on the mountain, such as at Phra Phuthabat Bua Bok, Phra Phuthabat Lung Tao, and Phra Phuthabat Buaban. The name "Phu Phrabat" is given as this mountain bears several Buddha's footprints. Furthermore, the Buddhist myth of "U-Sa Baros" was widely spread in the region.

The shift in the theme of Buddhist belief is well demonstrated by the construction and reconstruction of several monuments that host the Buddha's footprints in the buffer zone and near the nominated property (component part 002). At the same time, the Sīma stone tradition has continued in the region by the removal of the Sīma stones from their original locations and their reuse to mark the newly established sacred areas. The nominated property is the only site in the region that has preserved the largest corpus of Sīma stones in their original locations, possibly due to the continuous use of forest monastic practices of Buddhism.

The Phu Phrabat area was protected as an ancient monument in 1935. Since the late 1960s, several archaeological and research campaigns have been

carried out in Thailand on the Sīma stone tradition, including archaeological surveys and excavation, iconographical studies, and studies on inscriptions and artistic forms. Furthermore, a limited number of surveys and research projects on the Sīma stone tradition outside Thailand have been conducted. All these academic activities have shed light on the understanding of the Sīma stone tradition in terms of geographical distribution, historic development, and artistic styles. However, none of these studies is specific to the Sīma stone tradition as manifested at the nominated property. In 1981, the legal protection was extended to include further monuments, and in 1989, Phu Phrabat Historical Park was established under the Master Plan for Development. In 1992, the Park was officially opened.

The total area of the two component parts is 585.955 ha, with the buffer zones totalling 598.806 ha.

### **State of conservation**

The information on the conservation history of the nominated property is scant in the nomination dossier. This is due partly to the stable nature of the Sīma stones and rock shelters; thus, no interventions were needed in the past. Since the nominated property is located within the Pha Khuea Nam National Reserved Forest and the Phu Phrabat Historical Park with national-level legal protection, disturbance by religious activities or by the harvesting of forest products is minimal. Furthermore, the landscape has been considered sacred and hence venerated by the local populations; therefore, powerful voluntary protection of both natural and cultural attributes has been in place. Shelters have been constructed over the Sīma stones at Wat Phra Phuthabat Buaban to protect them from natural erosion since these stones have delicate carvings of Buddha's life and the *Jataka* stories. A wooden walkway has been constructed to protect historic trails and hikers.

As indicated in the photographs, the rock paintings may suffer from rainwater running over their surface, washing away the pigments. ICOMOS raised this concern to the State Party in its interim report in December 2023, requesting information on whether protection measures have been adopted for these rock paintings and what monitoring techniques are in place to assess their condition. The State Party responded in February 2024 that a comparison between the photographs taken in 1987 and 2021 of the rock painting at Tam Chang indicates that it has not been greatly damaged by weathering. The rock paintings have been protected and regularly cleaned, and their condition has been assessed on a quarterly basis since the establishment of the Park. The monitoring includes condition assessment, affecting factors, colour monitoring, and periodic photographic recording. Based on the results of the monitoring, remedial actions may be taken. Studies show that the rock paintings have not been affected by temperature and humidity fluctuations, or by surface water, and that they are safe from landslides and rockfalls. Warning signs have been put in place at all the rock painting sites to advise visitors not to touch, engrave, or damage the rock

paintings. ICOMOS considers that while the current monitoring is commendable, the condition assessment can be improved by high-precision instrumental monitoring.

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 nominated property is overall good.

#### **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 hazards and the progressive deterioration of the materials of the heritage sites.

The main natural hazards are summer storms, hailstorms, and bushfires. The risk preparedness plan is in place to minimise the impacts of natural hazard events, and regular drills are held to improve the emergency response. The forest is prone to burning during the dry season. However, since most of the natural rock features are isolated from the forest, no special protection is needed. Furthermore, assisted by the local communities, the fire team has been effective at controlling wildfires. As observed by the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, there are no notable fire impacts on any of the historical or archaeological features, nor anywhere else in the landscape.

The progressive deterioration is mainly caused by the fluctuation of temperature and humidity and the growth of tree roots. The process is effectively slowed down by planting trees next to the Sīma stones to shade them from sunlight. The rainfall is mildly acidic, and the bas-reliefs and other carved features on the Sīma stones might be subject to some degree of erosion. The Sīma stones at Wat Phra Phuthabat Buaban were thought to be more subject to chemical weathering, so shelters were built to protect them from rainfall.

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ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is overall good and that factors affecting the nominated property are under effective control.

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### **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 Sīma stone tradition, derived from mixing Isan Dvaravati art and local beliefs in establishing the sacred Sīma stone markers to demarcate the sacred areas, is not found in other cultures.
- The Sīma stones are found around the natural rock shelters and the stone courtyard.

- Some natural shelters were modified to create living spaces and venues for performing Buddhist ceremonies.
- The nominated property is an outstanding cultural landscape illustrating the combined works of nature and of man.
- The sacred landscape has been continuously used since prehistoric times until the present.

Based on the nomination dossier and according to the State Party, the key attributes of the nominated property are: Buddhist sites and non-Buddhist sites. The natural morphological and biological features and the local religious practices at the nominated property are also regarded as attributes.

ICOMOS considers that, in relation to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of this nominated property, the key attributes are the Sīma stones, their original locations, and the spatial layouts of their arrangements. The landscape within which the Sīma stones are erected and preserved, including the natural formation of the landscape, the rock shelters, and the artificial well, provides the context for the Sīma stones.

#### **Comparative analysis**

The comparative analysis has been developed around two parameters: the Dvaravati period towns or sites with Sīma culture, and sites related to beliefs in worshipping sacred mountains or sacred areas marked with stones. It has examined five Sīma cultural sites in Thailand. Outside Thailand, twenty-six megalithic and burial sites are selected for a brief comparison, including eighteen World Heritage sites outside Southeast Asia, two Tentative List sites, and six cultural heritage sites in Southeast Asia.

A detailed comparison of the five Sīma culture sites in Thailand is made in terms of similarities and differences.

In the first part, two sites are discussed, namely the Sīma Culture site at Muang Sīma and the Sīma Cultural Site at Ban Hin Tang Village. The Sīma stones from these two sites are believed to be a prototype of the early Sīma culture in Northeast Thailand in terms of creating the Sīma stone by integrating the primitive beliefs with Buddhism, the establishment system, and shapes that were developed over time. The Sīma stone tradition was subsequently spread to other areas across Northeast Thailand, including the nominated property. It is argued that the nominated property distinguishes itself from these two sites by its cultural landscape features, mountainous location, and high degree of integrity and authenticity.

The third site compared is the Sīma Cultural Site at Muang Fa Daet Sung Yang, a Dvaravati ancient town with a surrounding moat. Most of the monuments in the town are ruins. The Sīma stones in this town have their own artistic character known as the Fa Daet Sung Yang School of Art. The Buddha images have a distinctive local style, and the narrative sculptures cover the entire Sīma stone. It concludes that the nominated property is different

for its mountainous location, high degree of integrity and authenticity, and cultural landscape features.

The fourth comparator is the Sīma Cultural Site at Ban Tanod. The unique features are the non-decorated natural stone as well as the stone slabs in the elongated lotus petal shape. Again, the difference between the nominated property and the comparator is its mountainous location, high degree of integrity and authenticity, and cultural landscape features.

The final site compared is the Sīma Cultural Site at the Ancient Town of Si Thep. The Ancient Town of Si Thep and its Associated Dvaravati Monuments was listed as a World Heritage site in 2023 (Thailand, criteria (ii) and (iii)). It is concluded that although Sīma stones are found surrounding monasteries or monuments, they are incomplete. The nominated property is different because it consists of a cultural landscape located in a mountainous area, with rich forms of Sīma stones, and high integrity and authenticity.

A comparison is made against twenty-six megalithic and burial sites at regional and global levels outside Thailand. It is concluded that since these sites have different purposes and functions, they are not comparable with the nominated property.

ICOMOS considers that the rationale for the comparative analysis should aim at establishing the position of the Sīma stone tradition of the nominated property in its relevant geo-cultural context. The comparative analysis in the nomination dossier failed to fulfil this purpose for two reasons. Firstly, the comparison with other Sīma stone sites is confined to Thailand; therefore, it is unable to demonstrate the universal importance of the nominated property in the global context. Secondly, the comparison with international properties is made against sites that are irrelevant to the nominated property in terms of purpose and functions.

To address this issue, in October 2023, ICOMOS requested the State Party to submit additional information providing a contextualised description of the Sīma stone tradition in Southeast Asia and to explain what aspects make the nominated Sīma stone sites stand out from those in other regions in Thailand and beyond. To further clarify the context in which the nominated property is positioned, ICOMOS requested that the State Party extend its comparative analysis to the Sīma stone sites outside Thailand.

The State Party responded in November 2023, with a detailed description of the Dvaravati culture, the Sīma stone tradition in the Dvaravati period, the culture in the Isan Dvaravati art, and an expanded comparative analysis to include the Sīma stone sites outside Thailand. It is concluded that there are Sīma stone sites of the Dvaravati period in Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Cambodia, and that they were influenced by the Dvaravati culture from Northeast Thailand. While more Sīma stone sites can be found in other regions of Thailand,

Myanmar, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, they are not contemporary with the Dvaravati culture and thus not relevant for the comparison.

The additional information provided valuable contextual insights into the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period. It is unusual for a place such as the nominated property to have so many areas marked by Sīma stones, arranged in single, double, or triple concentric circles, and with such diverse stone forms. In addition, a considerable number of rock shelters have been modified for the Buddhist religion. All these phenomena suggest that the nominated property had been a religious centre during the Dvaravati period (from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE).

However, the type of religious activities conducted in the area remains unknown. Considering that the forest monastic tradition had revived in the region in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and the modified shelters might have been the residential places for the monks who practiced Dharma, it could be assumed that the forest monastic tradition might have been carried out at the nominated property. In order to deepen the understanding of these issues, ICOMOS requested in its interim report that the State Party provide more information on the main characteristics of the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period in general, what specificities or facets of the nominated property best illustrate these characteristics, and whether there is documentary evidence or inscriptions that still survive that would tie the past forest monastic tradition to the nominated property.

The State Party responded in February 2024 with a general description of the Dvaravati culture and a detailed account of the Dvaravati culture in Northeast Thailand, including the origin of the Sīma stone tradition, the Sīma stone tradition in the Dvaravati period in Northeast Thailand, the six forms and three arrangement patterns of the Sīma stones at the nominated property, the spatial relationship between the rock shelters and the Sīma stones, and the modification of the rock shelters. Furthermore, a detailed introduction to the Sīma stones at Muang Fa Daet Sung Yang and the Fa Daet Sung Yang School of Art was provided. It was concluded that the Sīma stone tradition is a unique identity of the Isan Dvaravati art. Of more than one hundred Sīma stone sites, the nominated property is the only site (with two component parts) that preserves a large number of Sīma stones *in situ* and, therefore, has maintained integrity and authenticity at the highest level. In addition, at both components where the Sīma stone tradition is manifested, there are rock shelters that were modified to serve as shared places to practice Buddhism.

ICOMOS notes that Sīma is the foundation of Buddhism. In the global context, Sīma boundary markers have been made with many materials and in various forms. The extensive use of stones as sacred boundary markers is a practice that is only found in Southeast Asia. The Dvaravati period is the origin and major development phase of this Sīma stone tradition. The great majority of Sīma stone sites are found on the Khorat Plateau and

neighbouring regions, including Northeast Thailand and parts of Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Cambodia. The nominated property preserves the largest corpus of *in situ* Sīma stones of the Dvaravati period, representing the most complete trajectory of their evolution and the diversity of their typologies, which testifies to this unique Buddhist tradition in Southeast Asia and the world.

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

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#### **Criteria under which inscription is proposed**

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

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 is an excellent representative of over a hundred sacred sites exhibiting the Sīma stone tradition in Northeast Thailand. The Sīma stone sites of the nominated property are the only sites in Thailand and Asia that are situated on a mountain. They demonstrate the combination of beliefs associated with Theravada Buddhism and the demarcation of the sacred area, involving the establishment of the Sīma stones around the rock shelters and the stone courtyard to determine the boundaries of the sacred area used for performing Buddhist rituals.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property is an exceptional testimony to the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period in a global context.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion is justified.

Criterion (v): *be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property has been a sacred cultural landscape on the Phu Pan Mountain Range for more than 3,000 years, as evidenced by the prehistoric rock paintings and the Sīma stones. The combination of these elements gives the nominated property an exceptional identity that cannot be found elsewhere in Thailand. The local communities accepted Buddhism and subsequently integrated Buddhist beliefs with their primitive beliefs in the sacred cultural landscape area and natural rock shelters, and modified the rock shelters into various forms of living areas or Buddhist ceremonial venues. This occurred in conjunction with employing the Sīma stone tradition, which is attested by the twenty-three outstanding, modified rock shelters, either with or without the surrounding Sīma stones. Hence, the nominated property is the only cultural heritage site in Thailand and

Asia that strongly exhibits the beliefs associated with the Sīma stone tradition in a sacred cultural landscape.

ICOMOS considers that, so far, there is no evidence indicating the continuity of the sacredness of the landscape from primitive beliefs to Buddhism. ICOMOS considers, however, that the landscape was modified purposefully and extensively during the Dvaravati period by the practice of the Sīma stone tradition in order to serve Buddhist functions. While such a practice might have been popular at the time throughout the Khorat Plateau region, most of the Sīma stones have been relocated and reused at later times. The nominated property has remained the only physical testimony to a landscape that has been transformed by the Sīma stone tradition in the Dvaravati period.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (v) is justified for the reasons mentioned above.

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

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#### **Integrity and authenticity**

##### **Integrity**

For the nominated property to be the best representative of the Sīma stone tradition, its attributes must cover all forms of the Sīma stones and their arrangement patterns, and demonstrate the most complete trajectory of their evolution. In addition, the serial approach should be justified.

The State Party considers that the nominated property is of adequate size and includes all the attributes that convey the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. The nominated component parts are related by clearly defined links and contribute individually to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property demonstrates a high degree of integrity in terms of the forms of the Sīma stones and the sequence of their development. The nominated property testifies to all the major forms of Sīma stones, and covers the major evolutionary path of the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period. ICOMOS considers that, along with the mainstream development of the Sīma stone tradition, the Fa Daet Sung Yang School of Art, a local style of Sīma stones appeared in the late Dvaravati period, which represents the most decorative and narrative type of Sīma stones. ICOMOS considers that since these stones are no longer in their original locations and only appeared in a later period of the Dvaravati period, in the global context, the nominated property remains the most complete testimony to the Sīma stone tradition during the Dvaravati period, in a way that no other site does.

In relation to the serial approach, ICOMOS considers that component part 001 represents the early and main development stages of the Sīma stone tradition, while

component part 002, with its triple concentric circles of the Sīma stones and the narrative sculptures on the stones with Koh Ker art influence, extends the period of the Sīma stone tradition to a much more mature stage of the Dvaravati period.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property is of adequate size, and all the attributes necessary to express its proposed Outstanding Universal Value are included within its boundaries, with all the adverse impacts under control.

ICOMOS considers that the integrity of the whole nominated series as well as the integrity of each of the component parts have been demonstrated.

#### Authenticity

The State Party considers that the nominated property has maintained its authenticity at a very high level. The Sīma stones are in their original locations. The materials used for the Sīma stones are original and intact. Over thousands of years, the nominated property has been slightly impacted by natural erosion and human activities to add sculptured idols to the venues for ceremonial use. The load-balancing rock pillars at two of the twenty-three Sīma cultural sites were chiselled off, causing an uneven distribution of the weight of the top rock slab. This led to a crack and the collapse of the top slab. The remaining Sīma cultural sites in the nominated property are in their original condition and intact. The mountainous and forested environment of the nominated property and its surroundings also contribute to its effective protection and conservation.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property has a very high degree of authenticity. Although a regional survey undertaken on the Sīma stones in the Khorat Plateau indicates that only twenty-three percent of these stones are preserved *in situ*, of which many were relocated to their present positions, the Sīma stones of the nominated property have all been preserved in their original locations. The stones have remained untouched since they were installed. The natural setting in which the Sīma stone tradition manifested has been well preserved. The nominated property therefore provides an understanding of the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period in terms of form and design, materials, functions, locations, tradition, and spirit and feeling. Since it was converted into a Buddhist religious centre in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the site has continued to be used as such.

ICOMOS considers that the authenticity of the whole nominated series as well as the authenticity of each of the component parts have been demonstrated.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the whole nominated series and of the individual component parts have been met

#### Boundaries

As of May 2022, there are nine inhabitants living in the nominated property and eight in the buffer zones.

The boundaries were demarcated taking into consideration natural features, existing landmarks, and administrative arrangements. The nominated property includes all the necessary attributes that convey the proposed Outstanding Universal Value.

The buffer zone has been significantly reduced in comparison to the 2015 nomination without a clear rationale being provided for this reduction. With the view that visitors will increase if the nominated property is inscribed on the World Heritage List, ICOMOS recommends expanding the buffer zones, through a minor boundary modification request, to protect the property from potential development and ensure effective protection of the wider setting.

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#### Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis succeeds in demonstrating that the nominated property preserves the largest corpus of *in situ* Sīma stones of the Dvaravati period, representing the most complete trajectory of their evolution and the diversity of their typology. The nominated property testifies to this unique Buddhist tradition in Southeast Asia and the world and therefore justifies consideration for the World Heritage List. Criteria (iii) and (v) have been demonstrated. The conditions of integrity and authenticity of the nominated serial property as a whole and of the individual component parts have been met.

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## 4 Conservation measures and monitoring

#### Documentation

The Fine Arts Department of the Ministry of Culture maintains an inventory of features, including rock art and Sīma stones, and regularly updates their research with an active programme of observations. In the Master Plan for Conservation and Development of the Phu Phrabat Historical Park 2022- 2026 (the Master Plan), there are guidelines for regular research programmes at the site and in the region. Phu Phrabat Historical Park maintains a checklist for the conservation of each of the features within the park. An annual evaluation of each archaeological and historical feature is conducted, and routine maintenance is performed. All these documents have been archived. The inventory of ancient monuments is ongoing and identified as a 2023 goal in the Master Plan. The attributes, the Sīma stones and rock shelters in particular are well documented with a high degree of precision, which can be used as baseline information for monitoring.

ICOMOS considers that while the areas immediately around the rock shelters are the bedrock and cannot be archaeologically excavated, many other areas of the nominated property still have archaeological potential. Archaeological research in these areas may shed further



light on the significance of the nominated property. Absolute dating should be performed to date the rock paintings, the Sīma stones, the bas-reliefs and the modified parts of the rock shelters in order to better understand the chronology of the nominated property. Furthermore, the study of the original function and use of the nominated property both before and during the Dvaravati period should be conducted.

### **Conservation measures**

Since none of the proposed attributes are under threat, standard daily maintenance is carried out, including cleaning, rubbish collection, weed removal, and tree pruning. Regular patrols are conducted by the staff. No hunting or gathering is allowed in the nominated property area and buffer zones. Based on the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, these measures are adequate and effective.

### **Monitoring**

The monitoring system has been operating effectively for decades. Key indicators include the condition of the Sīma stones, rock shelters, and rock paintings; threats from human activities such as unlawful excavations and theft; and the number of visitors to the site and the website. The monitoring is undertaken once a year, mainly by the Phu Phrabat Historical Park and jointly by the Fine Arts Department, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Office of the Royal Forest Department, Udon Thani Province.

In addition to this monitoring mechanism, the Fine Arts Department measures the quality of cultural heritage sites using a scorecard based on the Historical Tourism Site Quality Monitoring Standards. This additional monitoring mechanism has effectively improved site management over the years.

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ICOMOS considers that the measures for both conservation and monitoring are adequate. ICOMOS considers, however, that further research on the chronology and original functions of the nominated property and the past activities at the site before and during the Dvaravati period should be conducted. Furthermore, ICOMOS considers that it would be advisable that the monitoring system be adapted for easy integration of its outcomes into the Periodic Reporting questionnaire.

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## **5 Protection and management**

### **Legal protection**

The nominated property is protected by national and local legislation and governmental regulations.

At the national level, the Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums, B.E. 2504 (1961), with its Amended Act (No. 2), B.E. 2535 (1992), is the highest legislation for heritage protection. Under this act, both component parts of the nominated property are registered by the Fine Arts Department of the Ministry of Culture as ancient monuments. The law also

regulates construction activities and prohibits any activities to repair, modify, alter, demolish, add to, destroy, or remove ancient monuments or their parts, or excavate anything within the compounds of ancient monuments. The Fine Arts Department also designated the area of the nominated property as a historical park.

Since the nominated property is located in the national reserved forest, it is protected by the National Reserved Forest Act, B.E. 2507 (1964). The act prohibits any activities to hold or possess the land, make a construction, destroy or burn the forest, do logging, collect forest products, or perform any action to damage or deteriorate the condition of the national reserved forest.

The ministerial regulations determine policies and measures pertaining to land utilisation in order to manage urban development and community growth and support economic development. The Ministerial Regulation regarding the Enforcement of Unitary Town Plan of Udon Thani, B.E. 2560 (2017), classifies the Phu Phrabat Historical Park (Component part 001) as a forest conservation zone, and the Sīma Cultural Site at Wat Phra Phuthabat Buaban (Component 002) is in the Pha Khuea Nam National Reserved Forest.

At the local level, the nominated property is governed by the Sub-District Council and Sub-District Administrative Authority Act, B.E. 2537 (1994), amended by the Act on the Sub-District Council and Sub-District Administrative Authority (No. 6), B.E. 2552 (2009). Under this act, the Sub-District Administrative Authority has duties to protect, look after, and maintain natural resources and the environment. Its duties also include maintaining art, customs, local knowledge, and local culture.

The buffer zones are protected by the National Reserved Forest Act, B.E. 2507 (1964), and the Ministerial Regulation regarding the Enforcement of Unitary Town Plan of Udon Thani, B.E. 2560 (2017). ICOMOS recommends that the buffer zones be expanded, through a minor boundary modification request, in order to protect the nominated property from potential development and ensure effective protection of the wider setting.

### **Management system**

The nominated property is managed under a collaborative framework, with the Fine Arts Department of the Ministry of Culture taking the lead role. On 30 April 2022, the representatives of the Fine Arts Department, the Royal Forest Department, the Udon Thani Province, the Ban Phue District, the Muang Pan Sub-district Administration Organisation, and the Klang Yai Sub-district Municipality signed the Memorandum of Cooperation on Cultural Heritage Management and Protection of Phu Phrabat Historical Park, pledging to establish guidelines and scopes of cooperation, to form a committee (or committees) consisting of the representatives of each party, and to jointly preserve the cultural heritage in the vicinity of Phu Phrabat Historical Park. Under this Memorandum, the Fine Arts Department is responsible for managing the nominated property area, and the Royal

Forest Department is the manager for the buffer zones. The provincial and district-level governments are responsible for providing support in the implementation of various legislation and plans concerning the nominated property.

The management of the site is guided by the Master Plan for Conservation and Development of the Phu Phrabat Historical Park 2022-2026 (the Master Plan). The Master Plan was co-developed with the local communities through a participatory process. It comprises seven programmes, including archaeology and conservation, academic studies and research support, land utilisation, community engagement, promotion of learning and tourism, public utility and public facility development, and landscape development. There are twenty sub-programmes listed under these programmes, with implementation phases varying between three and five years. A comprehensive list of actions has been planned to realise these programmes.

The management costs are covered mainly by the annual budgets of the government. The staff members have access to international and national training. The resource level and staff expertise are adequate but could be improved.

The risk preparedness plan is in place and functioning. However, Heritage Impact Assessment mechanisms are yet to be incorporated into the management system.

#### **Visitor management**

The visitor facilities in place include a tourist information centre, toilets, the Park Office and meeting rooms, a car park, electric vehicles for transportation in the park, a souvenir shop and cafeteria, and other facilities such as sign boards, publications of various forms, and an official website.

The number of visitors is relatively low, with the highest being around 62,000 in 2015. The current visitor management is adequate. Considering the potential growth in visitor numbers and its implications, in its interim report ICOMOS requested the State Party to clarify whether the carrying capacity of the nominated property has been established and used as a tool for visitor management, and what measures will be undertaken to protect the sacredness of the nominated property, as well as the religious practices of the local communities, from disturbance by tourism. The State Party responded in February 2024 that the Phu Phrabat Historical Park would have an estimated fivefold increase in the number of visitors if it were inscribed on the World Heritage List. Tourism management is outlined in the Master Plan. Based on this outline, a plan for area management has been developed. The State Party indicated that the nominated property has the capacity to accommodate the potential increased number of visitors, with a detailed account of the visitor facilities. Regarding the protection of the sacredness of the nominated property and religious activities of the local communities from being disturbed by tourism, the State Party responded with a photograph

taken in 1939, indicating that the nominated property has been used by the local communities as a religious site for a long time. Religious activities are still allowed after the Park was established. A detailed account of the key Buddhist ceremonies allowed at the property is provided, with information on the approval procedure and the rules for using the site for Buddhist activities.

ICOMOS considers that although, currently, the nominated property has the capacity to accommodate a large number of visitors, the carrying capacity still needs to be developed in order to understand the limits of the site, not only in terms of the physical space and services, but also in terms of the implications brought by the visitors, such as their negative impacts on the religious atmosphere, visitor experiences, and environment. ICOMOS notes that the current management allows Buddhist activities at the nominated property without damaging the site, which is commendable. However, measures for protecting the sacredness of the nominated property and religious practices of the local communities from being disturbed by the sharp increase in visitors remain unclear.

The presentation and promotion of the nominated property are encouraged by the central and provincial governments, as reflected in the national policies of the Royal Thai Government, the Udon Thani Province Development Plan for the Upper Northeast Provinces (2018-2022), and the Plan for the Udon Thani Provincial Development (2023-2027).

#### **Community involvement**

Policies for enhancing community engagement are in place and have been incorporated into the Master Plan, but this could be improved.

The communities have been informed of the nomination process and consulted on the Master Plan. Statistics indicate that except for the years affected by Covid-19, over 1,000 monks, priests and nuns visited the site in the past years. The sacred sites are also frequently used by the local communities for religious purposes. Voluntary activities by the local communities, such as cleaning and maintaining the sites, have helped the Park manage the site.

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#### **Effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property**

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the legal protection of the nominated property is adequate and the management is effective. The visitor management is satisfactory. The engagement of local communities has been incorporated into the site management plan, but their involvement could be improved. The Heritage Impact Assessment mechanism should be incorporated into the management system. The buffer zones should be expanded, through a minor boundary modification request, in order to protect the property from potential development and ensure effective protection of the wider setting.

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## 6 Conclusion

The State Party has profoundly revised the nomination of the Phu Phrabat Historical Park, focussing on the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period, based on the recommendation made by ICOMOS in 2016.

In the global context, the extensive use of Sīma stones for demarcating the boundaries of sacred areas is found only in Southeast Asia, with particular concentration on the Khorat Plateau. The nominated property represents the largest corpus in the world of *in situ* Sīma stones from the Dvaravati period (7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE), testifying to the early stage of the Sīma stone tradition.

In prehistoric times, the megalithic rock shelters located within the nominated property were venerated by the local people, as evidenced by the rock paintings of diverse themes that cover their walls, some of which have yet to be understood. Local beliefs evolved towards Buddhism during the 7<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, sacred areas were marked by the Sīma stones according to Buddhist scripture, and rock shelters were transformed into venues for Buddhist ceremonial activities, or residences for the monks. During the Dvaravati period (from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century CE), extensive Sīma stone installations and rock shelter modifications were undertaken, suggesting that the nominated property was an important religious centre, possibly associated with the forest monastic tradition. Later, with the shift in local beliefs to the worship of Buddha's footprints, these activities stopped, leaving behind the Sīma stones and rock shelters in their original state, as they were during the Dvaravati period. Some of them were still occasionally used for Buddhist practices, some of which may be associated with the revival of the forest monastic tradition in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Whilst the Sīma stone tradition has continued up to the present day, most Sīma stones were seen as movable objects and were relocated or reused for other purposes, such as museum collections, leaving only a very limited number of these testimonies to the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period in this region in their original location.

The nominated property stands out from other Sīma stone sites for four reasons. It preserves the most important number of *in situ* Sīma stones in the world; includes the most stone forms and complete arrangement patterns of the Dvaravati period; represents the most complete trajectory of their evolution and the diversity of their typologies; and is the only Thai site in a mountainous area.

The comparative analysis justifies the consideration of this property for the World Heritage List. Criteria (iii) and (v) have been demonstrated, and the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the nominated serial property as a whole, as well as the individual component parts, are met.

The legal protection and management system are adequate to protect the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, and the monitoring system is effective to inform the

decision-making process by the site management body. The local communities still use the nominated property for their religious activities and are actively involved in site management, conservation, and maintenance, although their engagement could be reinforced.

A number of additional measures should be addressed, including on archaeological research, absolute dating, studies on the original function and use of the nominated property both before and during the Dvaravati period, the monitoring and protection of the rock paintings from natural deterioration and rainfall, as well as the buffer zones.

## 7 Recommendations

### Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that The Phu Phrabat Historical Park, Thailand, be inscribed, as a cultural landscape, on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (iii) and (v)**.

### Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

#### Brief synthesis

The Phu Phrabat Historical Park is the best representative of the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period (7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century CE) in the world. In the global context, while boundary markers for sacred areas of Buddhist activities vary in materials, extensive use of stones is only found on the Khorat Plateau in Southeast Asia. The megalithic rock shelters at Phu Phrabat, which were shaped by the combined forces of glacier movement and differential erosion of the rock strata, were venerated by the prehistoric populations two millennia ago, as evidenced by the rock paintings covering the surfaces of forty-seven rock shelters depicting human figures, hand palms, animals, and geometric patterns. Following the arrival of Buddhism in the region in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, numerous Sīma stones were erected in the Khorat Plateau region, transforming the landscape of Phu Phrabat into a sacred Buddhist site used as a religious centre. Whilst the Sīma stone tradition has continued to the present day, most Sīma stones have been relocated and reused. However, the property area preserves the largest corpus in the world of *in situ* Sīma stones from the Dvaravati period, testifying to this tradition that once prevailed in the region.

**Criterion (iii):** Phu Phrabat preserves the largest corpus in the world of *in situ* Sīma stones from the Dvaravati period, with all the types of establishment patterns as prescribed in Buddhist scripture, and exhibits the majority of forms and artistic styles of this particular type of sacred boundary marker with a very clear evolutionary path. It is an exceptional testimony to the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period in a global context.

**Criterion (v):** The landscape of Phu Phrabat has been purposefully and extensively transformed by the erection

of the Sīma stones over more than four centuries to fulfil Buddhist ceremonial functions, possibly linked to the forest monastic tradition. It is an outstanding example of land use that is representative of the Sīma stone tradition that once prevailed in the Khorat Plateau during the Dvaravati period.

#### Integrity

The property testifies to the major forms of Sīma stones and all the spatial arrangement patterns, illustrating the major evolutionary path of the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period. In the global context, the property is the most complete testimony to the Sīma stone tradition during the Dvaravati period. It is of adequate size, and all the attributes necessary to express its Outstanding Universal Value are included within its boundaries. All the adverse impacts are under control.

#### Authenticity

The property preserves the largest corpus in the world of Sīma stones in their original locations, with their spatial arrangement patterns unchanged, and their physical forms and decorative art untouched, providing a truthful and credible source of information for understanding the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period in terms of form and design, materials, function, location, traditions, and spirit and feeling. Since it was converted into a Buddhist religious centre in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the site has continued to be used as such.

#### Protection and management requirements

The property is protected by national and local legislation and governmental regulations, including the Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums, B.E. 2504 (1961), with its Amended Act (No. 2), B.E. 2535 (1992), and the National Reserved Forest Act, B.E. 2507 (1964).

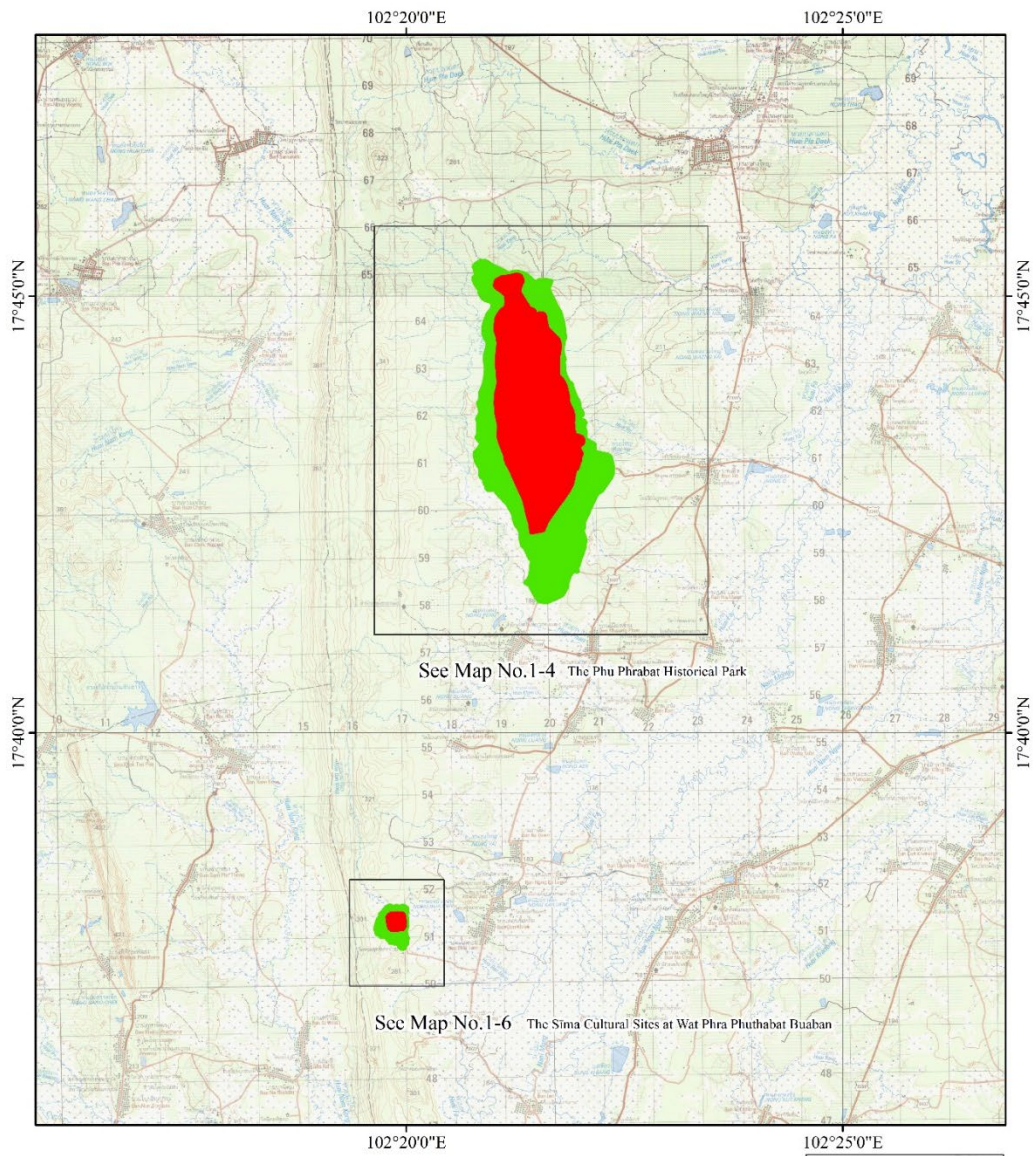
The property is managed by a collaborative mechanism, with the Fine Arts Department of the Ministry of Culture taking the lead role, joined by representatives of the Royal Forest Department, Udon Thani Province, Ban Phue District, Muang Pan Sub-district Administration Organisation, and Klang Yai Sub-district Municipality. Mechanisms for local community participation are implemented in the management system. The site management is guided by the Master Plan for Conservation and Development of the Phu Phrabat Historical Park 2022-2026, which was developed in collaboration with the local communities. A risk preparedness plan is in place and functioning. However, Heritage Impact Assessment mechanisms need to be incorporated into the management system. Tourism management is adequate, but the carrying capacity should be established to guide site management, and measures should be adopted to prevent the spirit of the site from being disturbed by tourism.

#### Additional recommendations

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

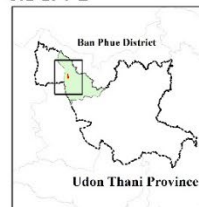
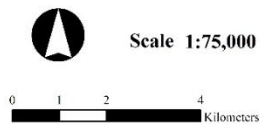
- a) Enhancing the condition assessment of the rock paintings with high-precision instrumental monitoring,
- b) Undertaking an archaeological survey and excavations where possible within the property and buffer zones to better understand past human activities,
- c) Conducting an absolute dating of the rock paintings, the Sīma stones, the bas-reliefs and modified parts of the rock shelters, in order to understand the chronology of the property,
- d) Undertaking research on the original use and function of the property in the Dvaravati period,
- e) Incorporating Heritage Impact Assessment mechanisms into the management system of the property,
- f) Establishing the carrying capacity to guide site management and adopting measures to prevent the spirit of the property from being disturbed by tourism,
- g) Expanding the buffer zones, through a minor boundary modification request, in order to protect the property from any potential development and ensure effective protection of the wider setting;

ICOMOS recommends that the name of the serial property be changed to: "Phu Phrabat, a testimony to the Sīma stone tradition of the Dvaravati period".



**Legends**

- Nominated property
- Buffer zone



Map showing the location of the nominated component parts