

ABSTRACT

The Study of Local History in the Chorake Samphan River Valley Area was conducted jointly by three research teams. One team was to apply the ethnological research techniques to the study while another team did the archaeological survey of the area, and subsequently the excavation of some selected sites in the area. However, it was the third team who made use of some historical methods in the study that had the main task of analyzing and integrating all the data and informations into a unified report.

Although the Chorake Samphan River Valley, particularly U Thong, has been a subject of study of many scholars for many decades, there has not been an attempt however to use the interdisciplinary approach to the study. As a result, the history of this River Valley, U Thong included, can be seen only in fragments. This study is therefore aimed at tracing through various research techniques the historical developments of the whole area as well as comparing them with those of the neighboring areas.

It was found that there were many ancient settlements in this Chorake Samphan River Valley which could be traced back at least as far as the Neolithic period. Many of these settlements such as Ban Tha Phra, Ban Chorake Samphan, Ban Na Lao, Ban Yung Thalai, Ban Yang Yi Sae, Ban Don Yai Ket and most importantly U Thong, served for centuries also as significant entrepot along the ancient trade route of Southeast Asia. It is for this reason that historical developments of the entire Chorake Samphan River Valley were closely related with those of Southeast Asia, and more specifically with the area west of the Chao Phya River.

From numerous historical records--Indian, Greek, Chinese and local, placenames such as Suwannaphun, Suwannapura, Chryse, Chryse Chersonesos and Chin-lin, all meaning the "Golden Land," seem to have had close association with U Thong and the area under investigation, especially during the Dvaravati period. From folk tales and interviews with a number of local people, the history of the Chorake Samphan area seems also to have been linked with the history of Sukothai and Ayudhya, although it is not necessarily proved valid in some instances. From archaeological finds, such as slags, shell remains, beads, sherds, skeletons, etc., there is no doubt that numerous sites in the Chorake Samphan River Valley are ancient sites closely connected with many other sites in the Chao Phya River Valley and Southern Thailand, and that the people of those areas had long associations with those in the Middle East, India, China as well as other parts of Southeast Asia.