

## **U-THONG PERIOD BE 17 TH TO 20 TH CENTURY - EARLY AYUTTHAYA KINGDOM**

### **MAP**

One should talk about style rather than period – for a map see “Ayutthaya period”

### **HISTORY**

U-Thong stands as an archaeological and ecological testament to the passage of time, substantiated by evidence dating back an impressive 2000 years from 500 BE. Nestled upon the dune of a fluvial deposit, this ancient city grappled with the challenge of waterway management, a dilemma that, despite the leaders' efforts, eventually led to its decline. The bustling U-Thong, once a vibrant metropolis, gradually transformed into a modest community. This transformative era saw the ascent of Supanburi, which, by 1600 BE, emerged as a major and influential city.

King U-Thong, also known as King Ramathibodi I, held sway over Ayothaya from 1857 to 1876 BE and marked the inception of the renowned Ayutthaya Kingdom. Believed to be a descendant of Mangrai, he embarked on a remarkable journey that extended his dominion over Korat, Chantaburi, Tavoy, Tenasserim, and a significant portion of Malaya. Establishing the new capital in Ayutthaya, King U-Thong played a pivotal role in shaping the region's political landscape.

The flourishing U-Thong art scene, spanning the 17th to the 20th century BE, coincided with the waning influence of the Khemer empire and the early stages of the Ayutthaya Kingdom. Influenced by both preceding and contemporary styles in the region, U-Thong art emerged as a unique fusion. According to prominent sources, King U-Thong, or Ramathibodi I, was believed to be of ethnic Chinese origin, having navigated south from China. Initially finding success in mercantile trade, he ascended to a position of influence in the city of Petchburi before journeying to Ayutthaya.

The passing of King Ramathibodi I marked a crucial juncture, ushering in a power vacuum and triggering a succession conflict. In the ensuing turbulence, his son, King Ramaesuan, ascended to the throne of Ayutthaya, navigating the complexities of leadership in the aftermath of his father's legacy. The rich historical tapestry of U-Thong, woven with ecological and archaeological threads, continues to captivate scholars and enthusiasts alike, offering a glimpse into the dynamic evolution of ancient civilizations in Southeast Asia.

### **AMULETS**

#### **Phra Pong Supan Family**

The main amulet which is believed to have been made in the U-Thong Period is the Phra Pong Supan, which is ranked as one of the Top 5 Amulets.

Phra Pong Supan has the artful characteristics of the U-Thong Period and was made of holy clay as its main material. This fine-grained clay was infused with herbal liquids, while other herbs and flowers were ground into a powder which together were blended into a special mix that caused these clay amulets to dry particularly hard creating a smooth and shiny surface.

Phra Pong Supan Amulets were first found at the main “Prang” or Pagoda of Wat Phra Sri Rattana Maha That in Suphanburi by Chinese immigrants who were trying to farm vegetables around the Prang, when they encountered a number of sunken earth holes with amulets of various sizes and varieties including the Phra Pong Supan.

Later, in the year B.E. 2456 (A.D. 1913) the Suphanburi ruler presented most of the amulets found there to King Mongkut, whom in return distributed them to his officers and followers. Phra Pong Supan also was said to have been made by 4 Hermit Gurus who composed the materials and minerals for the mix, then pressed to the mold by finger leaving fingerprints behind on the back side of the amulets. The Amulets were baked in a kiln result them to have different colors from light tan, brown, gray, and some rare black, depending on the heating period and their position in the kiln.

The appearance of Phra Phong Suphan is the sitting Buddha Image with the gesture of Subduing Mara. It has serious face, big nose, protrude chest and slender hand. From the gold plate, found in Phra Sri Rattana Maha That Temple’s chamber, it is believed that Phra Phong Suphan was created by 4 holy hermits in U-thong period. Pimpilai Lersi was a president of team. Phra Phong Suphan is a fine soil substance amulet, compared to Phra Nang Praya but coarser than Phra Rhod. Even though Phra Phong Suphan is a soil substance amulet, it is called Phra Phong or Powder amulet because it is made from holy herb, holy carpel flower and other materials.

There are 4 colors of Phra Phong Suphan, yellow, red, green and black. And there are 3 prints, classified by the face appearance and artistic style of the Buddha Image. 1. Pim Na Kae (Old Face print) 2. Pim Na Klang (Middle Aged Face print) 3. Pim Na Noom (Young Face print)

***Phra Phong Suphan Pim Na Klang***



***Phra Phong Suphan Pim Na Noom***



Phra Pong Supan Amulets are believed to bestow the virtue upon worship for withstanding danger and harm, success in all works and particularly in sales, being respected and gaining power for leadership.

### **Phra Sum Rakhang**

The revered Phra Sum Rakhang, also known as Phra Sum Semathat or "Phra Sum Aranyik," hails from the sacred grounds of Wat Aranyik in Phitsanulok Province. This exquisitely crafted amulet, standing at a pristine 5.0 cm in height with a width of 2.5 cm, is a testament to perfect condition and solid craftsmanship.



Wat Aranyik, an ancient temple of profound importance in the realm of Vipassana meditation, has its roots dating back to the era of Somdej Phra Maha Dharmaraja Lithai of Sukhothai. The splendid Phra Sum Rakhang, fashioned in the distinguished Sukhothai art style, is housed separately from the Lanka-shaped chedi within the temple premises. Remarkably, this chedi stands as the oldest pagoda in the city of Phitsanulok, bearing witness to the enduring legacy of Wat Aranyik.

The artistic finesse of Phra Sum Rakhang at Wat Aranyik is a sight to behold, meticulously crafted from a silver alloy. The amulet features intricate details, showcasing a blackened patina, subtle rust, and delicate crow's feet. Notably, both openwork and solid print variations exist, with wide-brimmed cut prints adding to the diversity of this esteemed

collection. The lineage of Phra Sum Rakhang extends beyond Wat Aranyik, with counterparts found in revered temples such as Wat Ratchaburana, Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, Kamphaeng Phet, Phichit, Phetchabun, and Suphanburi, each encapsulating its unique essence.

In the spiritual realm, Phra Sum Rakhang, classified within the Akkaraphonupap series alongside "Phra Khon Samo," is associated with the esteemed Ajarn Triyampavai. Renowned for its profound Buddhist virtues, this amulet has stood the test of time, providing exceptional protection and invulnerability against dangers since ancient days. However, in contemporary times, Phra Sum Rakhang has become increasingly elusive, with genuine specimens challenging to find and rarely glimpsed. The rarity of this sacred artifact only adds to its mystique, preserving its allure and significance through the ages.



## **Phra Pathummat**

Following the Khmer art that was mixed into U Thong art, and Suphan Buri is one city where this type of art has flourished a lot.

The Buddha is sitting in a meditation posture. The lotus flower frame has a total width of 3.5x5.4 cm. and the outer edge is jagged. Found to be made of silver like Phra Mahesuan.



The Buddha's face is reminiscent of Khmer art; he is sitting in meditation pose. There is something to note: He is seated above the seat line in a flat meditation posture. If you use a telescope to look at the front, the upper edge will be a thin, thread-like line. His hair is characterized by wearing a cheebo hat.

The top of the hair is short, and the forehead has a deep indentation similar to that. His face has a round appearance. The Angsanoon almost appears in the center of the Buddha. His neck is short, almost touching his chest. His chest is wide at the top and narrows at the bottom. If we think

of the body of Phra Phong Suphan, it is easy to understand because it is compared to the head of an elephant with the trunk extending downwards.

Yet, for this 'Phra Pathummat', the body is not as clear: his arms were slender and angled, giving him a proud look. And it is surprising that the notches around the outside are the highlight of the lotus flower. It does not make the Buddha look inferior or suppressed. But they encourage each other to look completely perfect. It is difficult to find a Buddha amulet that has an appearance that is as unusual and perfect as it is.



## **Prathan Luang Por Niam**

Reverend Father Niam, born in 1829 during the reign of King Rama III of Rattanakosin, was a venerable clergyman whose legacy extended well beyond his time. His earthly journey concluded on November 17, 1910, at the venerable age of 80 years. Hailing from Wat Noi in Suphanburi Province, he left an indelible mark as a preceptor and scholar, having studied under the esteemed Somdej Phra Buddhacara at Wat Rakhang.

Under the guidance of Luang Pho Aum from Wat Chee Pakao, Luang Pho Nong of Wat Khlong Madan, and Luang Pho Pan of Wat Bang Nom Kho, Reverend Father Niam's spiritual journey embraced a rich tapestry of experiences. His disciples, including Sahathamika and Phra Upachaya (Sun) of Wat Bang Pla Mo, and Phra Upajaya (Pun) of Wat Phikun Sokhan, were integral to his spiritual lineage.

Reverend Father Niam's spiritual repertoire was adorned with sacred objects, notably Buddha amulets crafted from a unique blend of lead and mercury. These amulets manifested in diverse forms, such as the distinctive bald head amulet, pointed head print, sugar cane budget print, leather perforated print, Five Kings print, Klong Takhian bell print, Naga Prok print, large-small Buddha image print, Tiger Cave print, and more. Additionally, he bestowed his followers with protective takrud and blessed candy, imbuing them with virtues of Buddha, immunity, and invulnerability.

Historically, Luang Phor Niam Thammachoti emerged as a revered monk, renowned for his profound mastery of Buddhist and magical knowledge, as well as miraculous powers. Ordained in 1850, he journeyed to Bangkok to delve into Dhamma, Vinaya, Vipassana, and Wisdom across various schools. Though specifics of his lineage remain elusive, it is widely acknowledged that he gleaned wisdom from Wat Rakhang and other reputable institutions.



Luang Phor Niam garnered respect not only from fellow monks but also from influential figures like Somdej Phra Sangkharat Phae of Wat Suthat, Luang Pu Bun of Wat Klang Bang Kaeo, and Luang Pho Thap of Wat Thong. Passing on his profound knowledge to the next generation, he mentored eminent figures such as Luang Pho Nong, Luang Pho Pan, and Luang Por Sod.

Upon assuming the role of abbot at Wat Noi, Luang Phor Niam played a pivotal role in the temple's prosperity. The fervent support of the villagers, inspired by their unwavering belief in his teachings, fueled the growth of Wat Noi. Today, the sacred amulets crafted by Luang Por Niam Wat Noi remain highly coveted among collectors, bridging the spiritual connection between past and present. Though these sacred objects are scarce, their profound significance endures through generations, testifying to the enduring legacy of Reverend Father Niam.

### **Phra Kim Tung**

Set of Phra Kim Tung is composed of 4 amulets as follows:

- 1. Phra See Korn (Four-Handed Amulet)**
- 2. Phra Mon Plang**
- 3. Phra Pra Kum Rob**
- 4. Phra Prok Chum Phol**

All of them are made of soil substance. Previously, it was called “Set of Phrai Chum Phol” and the name was changed during Phraya Choduk Ratcha Setthi period. Phraya Choduk Ratcha Setthi ordered 4 beautiful porcelain teacups from China and they were called “Kim Tung Hokki”. Thus, it was brought to the name of 4 amulets.

Set of Phra Kim Tung has blessing power in term of invincibility, but the wearer had to wear all 4 amulets together. They are very popular to the extent that if someone brings Somdej Wat Rakang to exchange with Set of Phra Kim Tung, the owner of Phra Kim Tung will not accept the proposal.



**Phra Tham Suea**

Phra Tham Suea, a revered Buddha image, traces its origin to Khao Tham Suea, later aptly named the "Tiger Cave," nestled in U Thong District, Suphanburi Province. Crafted from pollen-pollinated clay, this exquisite amulet showcases the distinct artistry of U Thong Wheel Dvaradee.

Various prints abound, presenting a rich array of options, and the amulets come in three vibrant colors: yellow, red, and green. As more discoveries unfolded in the cave vicinity, additional sightings were made atop mounds and within pagodas, including sites such as Khao Nok Chot Cave, Khao Phra Chedi, Khao Wong Phat, Wat Luang, and Khao Di Salak.



Evidently created by a hermit and housed in diverse caves, Phra Tham Suea stands as a multifaceted Buddha amulet, divided into numerous types. To facilitate categorization, it can be broadly classified into four main groups:

- 1. large print, 2. medium print, 3. small print, and 4. miniature print.

Regardless of the specific print, all feature seated Buddhas in the Maravichai posture, creating a unified yet diverse collection. Notably, Phra Tham Suea Taek Kru made its debut in 1927 and continued to be discovered over subsequent years, with the last sighting recorded at Khao Dee Salak in 1992. The consistent Buddhist virtues associated

with Phra Tham Suea center on its exceptional power of invulnerability. Revered for its Maha Ud qualities, this amulet is considered a crucial possession, reflecting its enduring significance among believers.



### **Phra Khun Krai**

Discovered in the crypt of Wat Phra Rup, Suphanburi Province, and also found in Ayutthaya Province, Phra Khun Krai is a revered monk celebrated for his longevity and popularity. Known for bestowing invulnerability, safety, and compassion, Phra Khun Krai shares the crypt with other esteemed monks, including Khun Phaen Khai Phaen, Phaed Cucumber, and the monks adorned in Kim Tung costumes. This temple, constructed out of the kings' faith of that era, serves as a testament to their commitment to perpetuating the Buddhist faith. Phra Khun Krai embodies pure artistic and spiritual excellence.



## DATA SOURCES

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