

## The city of Luang Prabang

Luang Prabang: the ( city ) capital of fine gold Saint ( Buddha ) currently encounters about 25.000 inhabitants.

Built on a very ancient prehistoric site, at the confluence of the Nam Khane and of the Mekong, the city was called successively:

- Java, from the XIe c. to the XIIIe c. at the apogee of the Khmer empire.
- Xieng Dong-Xieng Thong, from the XIIIe c. to the XVe c. it is the capital of the Lane Xang kingdom, the kingdom of the million elephants.
- Then Mouang Soua for a while.
- And finally, Luang Prabang since 1491; but from 1560 to 1712 it didn't stay anymore the capital of the kingdom, that sindeed Vientiane that is becoming it by the time.

From 1720 to 1946, Luang Prabang is only the capital of the small kingdom of Luang

Prabang, before becoming the royal capital of Laos in 1947.

Totally built in wood, the city was often the prey of flames, as in 1774 when on the Lao New years eve a fire destroyed the city downtown.

The tropical weather with its storms and rains damaged the city monuments as well as wars; that's why on the day before the French intervention in 1887, Luang Prabang was ransacked by the " Black Pavilions ", the Ho from Deo Van Tri.

The reconstruction of the town, its restoration as a royal and religious capital, was almost all the work of H.K.SISAVANG VONG, successively helped by his two vice-kings: the Tiao Maha Oupahat Boun Khong and then the prince Phetsarath. From 1959, S.M.Sri Savang Vatthana, went on with the work of this dad, and made of Luang Prabang, one of the most beautiful jewel of religious architecture in the Indochina Peninsula.

The inhabitants, very proud of their town, have preserved most of the old Laotian traditions, on a religious level as well as on the artistic one; in Luang Prabang for

example, there was no need of foreign experts to renew the arts and crafts, for the good reason that it has always been thriving: from dad to son, uncle to nephew, master to student;

the tradition survived the wars and foreign invasions, while adapting itself to modern material, without losing its amazing creative force.

The Phra Bang, that is to say the Buddha Saint in fine gold, Palladium of the Kingdom which gave it name to the town, is a statue of a standing Buddha in golden bronze, in the attitude Ham Nhat, That is to say “ calming down a family argument “ ( Abhaya Mudra );

It weights 43.4 kg and is 0.83m high.

Melt down in Ceylan between the VIIIe c. and the IXe c, the statue arrived in Cambodia around the XIe c., Probably as a royal gift. In 1358, the Pha Bang is gave by the Khmer king to the Laotian Prince FA NGOUN before it left Cambodia to go to the north to get back its kingdom. FA NGOUM set up its capital in Xieng Dong-Xieng thong ( Luang Prabang ) but let the Pha Bang in Vieng Chan- Vieng Kham ( Vientiane ).

That's I 1489 that the king LA NAM SENE THAY made come the Pha Bang in the capital and set up it at Vat Xieng Kang; two years later, he transferred it at Vat Manorom and took advantage of this situation of the city name into Mouang Luang Prabang.

In 1513, the king ViXUNARATH put down the Pha Bang at Vat Vixun, the statue will stay there for half a century, but in 1560, SAYASETTHATHIRAT, transferred its capital to Vientiane and brought with him the Palladium of the kingdom. That is over there that in 1779, the Siamese will take over the Phra Bang for the first time; they give it back four of reckless Chao Anou, last king of Vientiane.

When the Siamese are finally giving Phra Bang to the Laotian, the kingdom of Vientiane has disappeared, and it's to SOUKHASEUM, king of Luang Prabang, that

they give back the sacred image in 1839: this one is then solemnly set back at vat Vixun.

In 1894, the king SAKHALINE transferred the Phra Bang to Vat May where it stays until the independence of Laos in 1947.

The Phra Bang is then put down at the royal palace, in the gardens of which a special chapel Vat Ho Phra Bang is built to receive it.

## The Laotian monastery

Very religious, Lao people, like their neighbors from Myanmar, Cambodia and Thailand, practice the Buddhism Theravada. Its opponents call it Hinayana or little vehicle by opposition to Mahayana or big vehicle, which is the Buddhism of China and Vietnam, the Buddhism Theravada that seems the most conform to the original taught of the master, Gautama: thera in pali means old, ancient.

Based on the acquisition of personal merits, Boun in Laotian, during successive transmigrations, in realizing pious charity, the Buddhism Theravada presents the state of monks as an essential step on the way to total extinction or nirvana.

Monks have to follow quite strict rules, living in monastery and surviving from the faithful charity, but never pronounce forever wishes.

They can't be compared to priests from the catholic religious: they don't officiate. The laics don't have to follow a strict doctrine but rather morals rules, based on the respect of life and tolerance. From all the big religious in the world indeed, The Buddhism Theravada is the only one that never sparked a holy war in the name of orthodoxy. . . .

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The pantheon of the Buddhism Theravada is reduced to the only historical Buddha, considered and implored as a counselor, a master, a model and not like a god. buddism Theravada indeed, gods are the ones of the Indian mythology and are

simply considered as humans, with a long longevity and gifted with great magic power. Event though they have some advance on the way to Nirvana, they do not participate to the nature or no nature of the Buddha who already reached the final extinction.

That's why only the images of the Buddha are traditionally conserved and honored in the numerous Vat or monasteries of the country whereas images of gods, genius or heroes are only used as decoration ornaments.

How ever, the Laotian monastery is much more than a simple cult site: as the church in the medieval Europe, the Vat is not only the symbol of collectivity but it is also the centre Of

collective life. This definition of the Laotian monastery from georges CONDOMINAS is one of simples but also one of the most complete ever give to these kind of bunch of monuments that we designed in English as " pagodas " This term, whose origin is indo-Portuguese, is actually every imprecise as we are using it indifferently to all the religious monuments in Asia which are not Islamic. The Vat is a complex architectural set centered on the Vihan or sanctuary that surrounds That or Stupa, with vault or funeral characteristics, altar Ho, chapel Chedi, libraries Ho Tay, one or several wells, accommodation for monks Koutti, one or several meeting rooms Sala, sacred banyans, etc. That's the village, the district, which build the monastery, but soon they indentify to it and it happens sometimes that a village changes its name to take the one gave to the mosnastery ( in Luang Prabang in particular it used to be common ).

The Laotian art is mainly religious and the building built in bricks, cement and stones until the beginning of the XXe c. were monasteries and still most of the time, only the sanctuary and the

That's weren't in wood.

We will interest ourselves mostly to vihan, that is to stay sanctuaries rather than That, full monuments with a richness of ornaments less important but however more ancient than the sanctuaries among which they stay.

The detail of the vihan lao architecture have been studies closely by Henri PARMENTIER in

“ the art of Laos “; we then would only have to remember some elements of classification and identification linked to the nave and the roof.

The nave is often preceded on the first front by a column gate and there are only a few monuments with a turning nave, that is to say without a gate like the Vat Pak Khane; rare are also the edifices with a turning veranda, that is to say a veranda with columns on its four fronts like the Vat Phra keo in Vientiane.

Regarding the roof, it has often two breaks in sloping, as in the Vat That, which give an harmonious shape, very soft, what a more, the roof has generally one or several covers

Which get shorter and contribute to give to the sanctuary its slender shape, like in the Vat Si Moug Khoun for instance; sometime, break in sloping and covers are tightly linked together,

Like in the Vat Xieng Thong, and the result is amazing.

The regional styles of Laotian sanctuaries are quite easy to determinate: first, the vihan with a turning nave that we can find in the region of Luang Prabang belongs to this province style. For the other then, it's possible to guess the tree main styles from the global shape of the building and the roof.

The first style, the we would call the Luang prabang styles, is characterized by its huge pointed roof with flat tiles which are going down in successive levels, two or three generally, until arriving at two or three meters from the ground.

The second styles, that we would call styles of Xieng Khouang, has the same characteristics that the precedent style, but more marked: its roof goes down quite to the ground, and its right section is nearly a regular pentagon. We can notice in this style, a provincial version of the Luang Prabang style, indeed the buildings which belong to this style are quite all situated in the province of Xieng Khouang, at the south east of Luang Prabang, WE can notice that on the contrary, the original shape of the

Laotian vihan, the Luang Prabang style, would only represent the end of a slow evolution; it would seem that indeed the ancient vihan from Luang Prabang would belong to the Xieng Khouang style.

Finally, the third style, that we would call the Vientiane style, is more slender, the importance of the roof in the architecture is less present and the openings are higher. The monasteries vihan in Luang Prabang nearly belong to the first style, but we can also find vihan in the style of Xieng Khouang and also in the Vientiane style. And finally to conclude we shouldn't forget to notice a last but very interesting characteristic of the Laotian of monastery: the relative cramped dimensions of those sanctuaries: even in the largest no stones forests like in the Angkor Vat or in Bayon, no long successions of terraces and courts like in Bangkok or Rangoon. The Laotian feels home in his Vat, he is not overwhelmed by the majesty of the place or lost in the labyrinth of temples, or stressed by the threatening divinities: the Laotian monastery is a sanctuary on a human scale. The fact is rare enough in Asian to deserve that we enlighten it here.

The monasteries in Luang Prabang.

## **The monsters in Luang Prabang**

If we consider only the city with its surrounding walls with five doors at the XVIIIe c. that is to say if we exclude the new districts, Luang Prabang has counted up to 65 monasteries; nowadays there are only left about thirty of them.

All of them don't have the same interest, but at least about twenty deserve that we stop for a while and eight of them deserve a complete visit.

The aim of this book is actually to guide the visitor in his discovery and to make him know, so that he can better understand, this special ended form of the Laotian civilization which is the monastery from Laos.

How ever in the actual state of our knowledge and with the lack of any serious archeological search, it would be rather careless to even try to make a chronological filing, because it could only be supported by each monastery traditions, traditions that

are sometimes wrong or incomplete. That's why we have preferred to present the monasteries in the geographical order that the visitors would follow when coming from the aerodrome and arriving to the town by si savang vong bridge: that's why from the vat mune na to the vat praphoutabath we'll follow the east –west itinerary, then when backing up from the vat that to the vat xieng thong, we'll cross the town from south to north. Of course this presents itinerary of maximum visit, but if we have only time to visit one monastery, that's at the Vat Xieng Thong that we should devote our time.

The best time of the year to visit the monasteries in Luang Prabang is at the beginning of the dry season, from October to November, but if we really want to feel the city intensively living, that's at the period of Pimay, the Laotian New Years day, that we have to visit the royal capital.

The Laotian New Years day is moving in the Laotian moon **solar calendar**, between the 5<sup>th</sup> days of the 6<sup>th</sup> month, but in the **gregarious calendar** it's always on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April.

The Luang prabang, New Year festivities last on two weeks and are centered on the three big days in pimay: the day the tutelary divinity of the past year is going or "Mu nao" and the day

when the tutelary divinity of the coming year is arriving, "Mu sang khang khun" the religious ceremonies consist in the ritual throwing water on the monks and the picture of the Buddha; there are also popular celebrations during which boys and girls are throwing big amount of the water on each other, under the recitation of texts of purification for the Pimay , a big evening party of theatre and art is organized at the royal palace . These various manifestations are partly described in the following chapters, during the study of the monasteries where they occur.

## Chapter I

### Vat Mune Na

A beautiful building in the style of Luang Prabang: simple roof, two breaks in sloping lateral galleries, red front wall with golden ornaments in relief, back squared pillars with a golden ornament in stencil.

Vat Mun Na was built by the adoptive father of Thao SOMPHOU, son of the king La Nam Sene Thay in 1533 under the reign of Phothisane. According to the local legend, its name reminds that to finance its construction, each villager has to bring a " Mune " rice from his rice field: " Na ".

Restored in 1920, its painting and exteriors ornaments have been restored again recently.

We should notice in particular the decoration mi-lineous, mi-vegetal of the fronton totally representative of the Laotian decorative art.

## Chapter II

### Vat Aphay

Sanctuary built in a Luang Prabang style, pretty close from the one of Vat Mune Na: simple roof with double covers, red front wall with golden ornaments in relief, red circular pillars with stencil.

Built under the reign of Photsane, the legend says that the monastery used to be call Vat Hay Phay Padek, the monastery of the phay padek jar; the phay was by the time a small bronze currency worthing 2/100e of piastres, because to finance its construction, the padek

( padek is a kind of thick salted fish paste that the Laotians Love and particularly the Luang Prabang inhabitants ) merchants gathered those currencies in the jars. Since then the name has been changed into Vat Aphay from the Sanskrit-Pali: ' A ' means ' without ' and ' phay ' means danger, bad luck, fault, sin.

Restored in 1923, a Pali school was set up there in 1937. Paintings and exterior ornaments were restored recently. We can notice on the back of the vhan, the beautiful golden That rebuilt in 1969 on the exact model of the ancient ruined That.. Next to the Vat Aphay there was before the Vat Mune Xang ( Mune means the number 10.000 and by extension ' a lot ' ; Xang means the craftsman ). Built in 1808 by the king Anourouth, this ' monastery of the 10.000 craftsmen ' was actually a real polytechnic school for the monks. It was destroyed in 1871.

## Chapter II

### Vat Aham

This building was typically built in the XIXe Lao century style: roof which double covers, no lateral galleries, wooden front wall without ornaments, circular pillars painted with lime.

This monastery was built by the king Mangthatoulath in 1822, next to the Ho Seua Muong, the temple of the two big genius of the city: Pho Nheu and Nha Nheu. Since the FA NGOUM period, the district was called Ban Ho Seua Muong, but after the construction of the monastery, the inhabitants changed the name of the village into Ban Aham.

Aham means: be at ease, endeavor ourselves. Vat Aham, restored between the two wars, has not been yet restored regarding the paintings and external ornaments. In 1875 the Tiao Ratsavong SOUVANNA PHOMA, leader of the Lao army and Phagna PHISAY, leader of the Thai army tried together to fight the ' black Pavilion ' to push them back to Muong Phouane ( the province of Xieng Khouang ). But because of the anticipated retreat of the Siamese army on Bangkok, the Laotian army had to withdraw to Laung Prabang. The supervisor of the Vat Phia Vat in Xieng Khouang, S.Em Boun MI, took refuge in Luang Prabang

where the Tiao Ratsavong set him up to Vat Aham. When he became the supervisor of this monastery, under the reign of OUN KHAM, he ordered to build a small chapel, nowadays destroyed, inside the surrounding walls of the monastery.

You could notice in front of the Vihan, two statues that frame the stairs; the first one represents Ravana and the second one Hanuman, two heroes of the well known Indian adventure Ramayana.

As we have pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, Vat Aham was built next to the main altar of the city genius: Ho Phi Khon or Ho Thevata Luang. The altar of those genius is now incorporated in the monastery, next to the monks accommodation, that's over there that are kept the ritual masks of phouneua, nha neua and sing keo singkham, famous ancestor of Laotian people in the legend.

Luangprabang counted by the time about twelve altars preserved to the cult of the protective genius of the city, there only four nowaday.

- the one we have just talk about vat aham and which is the more important;
- the ho xieng thong, still in construction in its ancient site, next to the vat si muongkhoun.
- the ho ngou vang na, altars of the genius ngou(snake) protected of the city and the vice king of the family as well , that we can find in the property of tiao kham manh , in front of the provincial hospital.

## Chapter iv

The vat vixun museum

Very curious building, the only one like that in luangprabang: its parallelepiped shape with a turning nave can be explained by the fact that the actual building is the reproduction in bricks of the original one. This has been burn down by the black pavilion in 1887.

Built in 1512 on the king vixunarath's order, the full name of the monastery is vat mahavixunarath ; built on the side of the rice field according to the legend, 12 wooden

pillars of 25 meter high were necessary to maintain the roof ,each one of those pillars had a name and came from different forest across the country.

The vihan, made in wood. Was according to travelers, amazing: Francis garnier who was one of the last people that could contemplate it and event draw it, in 1867 used to say that its walls, which slightly leaned forward the exterior, gave to it the shape of the huge Chinese coffin

In 1513, vixunarath brought over there the prabang that was by the time kept at vat manolom.

In 1560, the king sayasethathirath, who grand father was vixun narath transferred the prabang to Vientiane, but when in the middle of the xix e c.the Siamese who had took it in 1828, gave it back and it was once again moved to vat vixun where its stayed, despite the fire, until 1894, when king sakhaline solemnly transferred it to vat mai.

The building, in its actual stage, date from 1898; he didn't get important restorations since 1898 and in particular didn't get external ornaments, which is giving him a sober and cold appearance.

In 1942, the Maha Oupahat PHETSARATH, after the gathering of Vientiane, Muong Phouane, Houa Phan province to the kingdom of Luang Prabang, decided to turn the Vat Vixun into a museum of religious arts.

That's why he gathered in this monastery many statues and ancient objects which were dispersed all over the capital, in particular a very beautiful collection of Khmer coins from the XIe c. and XIIe c. as well as Laotian images of Buddha, pretty representatives of the art in Luang Prabang, especially Buddhas in golden wood in the ' Hirk Fone ' calling for rain ' attitude', from the XVIIe c.

The museum can be visited every day if we ask before for the authorization of its supervisor, but there are no guides. Currently, the Khmer coins are not anymore at Vat Vixun: they have been transferred to the royal Palace. We can however admire various ritual objects, especially a wonderful candleholder in carving wood, which represents the fight of the HANUMAN monkey's army against the giants, a very famous episode of the Ramayana, offered to the monastery by the Tiao Maha Oupahat BOUN

KHONG in about 1915. we can also notice ' holy prints ' ( Phra Patima ), pulpits to preach, chairs, ' hang lin ' used in the rituals of throwing water, frame of doors among which some are 400 years old, 5 written stones from the XVIIe c.

The big Buddha sit in ' Maravixay ' or the winner of Mara ' Conqueror attitude ( Bhumisparsa )

Is the biggest in bricks in Luang Prabang; You can also notice the decoration of the altar, in ancient plaster, mi-ligneous, mi- vegetal which characterizes the Laotiane decorative art. In the garden of the monastery: a cutting, now grower, of the Illuminati's tree, brought back from Ceylan in 1939. On the street, at the left of the main door, we can find one of the three ' elephant pillars ', built back in 1939. Traditionally, there were indeed fours ' elephant pillrs 'next to which, during Pimay parties, the royal elephants came to listen the ' sermon to elephants': one in Vat Vixun, the second one in Vat Monarom ( now lost ), the third one in Vat May, and the last one in Vat Xieng Thong.

Vat Vixun is one of the most important places to celebrate the Laotian New Year: the third day of the Pimay or the Mu sang khan khun ( the day when the tutelary Divinity of the coming year is arriving ). The supervisor of Pali shool, the supervisor of Vat That.

Vat Xieng thong, Vat May, Vat Chom Si and Vat Aham, come on holding chairs, for a solemn procession of throwing water on Buddhas images or assist to the sacred dance of the Pou Nheu Nha Nheu in popular joy.

What's more, the same day in the morning, the King and the Queen, come along with the highest personalities of the court, to throw themselves water on Buddha's images.

## **Chapter v**

### **That Mak Mo ( Water Melon Stupa )**

Plain monument, squared, with a round cupola which justified its name ( ' Mak mo':

the watermelon ), that Mak Mo real name is actually That Pathoum, ‘ the big Lotus stupa ‘.

Situated next to the Vat Vixun, this That was built in 1504 on the Queen’s order, Phan Din Xieng, wife of the king VIXUNHARAT.

Weakened by the rain, the That Mak Mo collapsed the 28<sup>th</sup> of the August 1914, revealing by this occasion numerous bronze, gold, silver objects and precious stones, that we can nowadays admire in the museum collections and at the Royal Palace. Fund raisings were organized all over the country by the King SISAVANG VONG in order to rebuild the monument, which was done under the supervision of Henri MARCHAL who had already restored the Angkor Vat.

As for the anecdote, Tiao Khammanh, the historian of Luang Prabang, kept the memory book of the construction site finished in 1932: the restoration cost 16.752.68 piaster, about 20 millions

Kip and needed 425.697 bricks!

That Mak Mo is now included in the surroundings walls of the Vat Vixun museum.

## Chapter VI

### Vat Manorum

The Vat Manorum Sathharamé has been rebuilt from April 1972. The Vihan takes place on the site of an ancient monastery: Vat Xieng Kang, now disappeared and which was close the Vat Manorum.

From the local tradition, the Vat Manorum was founded in 1375 by the king Sam Sene Thay, the son of FA NGOUM. From the original sanctuary nothing is left except a huge one-armed Buddha in bronze which weights 12 tons and is about 6 meters high.

This statue, which the traditional dates from 1372, raises a problem, as it is unique in Lao; the date given by the tradition is probably right as it presents the characteristics of the Siamese Buddhas of the same period but it must have been melted down in Lao, maybe by Khmer artisans who had followed FA NGOUM; however it presents all the ethnics characteristics of the Laotian Buddha: a eagle nose, ears in the shape of a snail shell. In 1910, when Louis FINOT studied the city of Luang Prabang, the Buddha

was collapsed; rebuilt after the second world war, the Buddhist Institute built in 1928 a small shelter on the site of the ancient monastery to protect it; the shelter was destroyed in 1972 during the transfer of the statue to its actual site.

Vat Xieng Kang was the little monastery whose sanctuary was situated at the actual place of the Vat Manorum. In 1941, the king LA NAM SENE THAY made the Phra Bang ( which was kept in Vat Xieng Kang ) transferred to the Vat Manorum. A nice story is told about this Vat Xieng Kang: around 1390, a young, kind and beautiful princess named Nang Maha Kay, the daughter of SAM SENE THAY, got the smallpox and died; her father who was inconsolable burned his body and built a that in her memory behind the Vat Manorum, and that's how the little unknown princess went to posterity.

It was traditionally the province of Vat Manorum-Vat Xieng Kang that was giving the royal elephants kornacs; that's probably why ' an elephants pillar ' was standing at the monastery entrance.

When going from the Vat Vixun to the Vat Manorum, you can notice just after the prison, a big embankment which was the old town surroundings walls from the reign of ANOUROTH ( beginning of the XIXe century ). There is nothing left now from the door neither from the monastery which gave its name to the door: Vat Bouam Pham.

## Chapter VII

### Vat That Luang

Built on a small hill, south from the city, the whole monastery, under its actual aspect, dates from 1818 from the reign of MANGTHATOULAT.

The Vihan with a turning name, in the style of the Vat Pak Khane, has two decorated blue front walls.

The big That, That Luang, squared, built by MANGTHATOULAT in 1818 around an ancient That, was in ruins when in 1910, Louis FINOT came to examine it; excavations made by the French School of Extreme Orient allowed the discovery in the ruins of

Khmers vestiges, especially a written stone and some statues. The That and the Vihan were restored in 1035 on the order of the King SIVAVANG VONG.

The smallest That at the east of the sanctuary was founded in 1820 by the queen PATHOUMMA, the daughter of the king ANOUROUTH, Very damaged by the weather, having lost its bulb, this That was rebuilt from 1965 to receive the ashes of her majesty SISAVANG SONG who died in 1959. During the work of restoration, important ancient vestiges were discovered: Buddha statues, jewels, etc.

Those vestiges are now part of the Royal collection. As for the That, rebuilt, covered with mosaïque and renamed That Si Thamma Haysokarath, it is the center every year on the 29<sup>TH</sup> of October, on the anniversary date of the King, of a ceremony which takes place with the presence of the King and the queen.

That's at the Vat That Luang that, traditionally, occur the burning ceremonies of the most important personalities of the loyal Family.

Inside the Vihan we can admire a big Buddha in Bronze that weights 300kg and that come from a little monastery now destroyed, called Vat Aham Mounghoun and which was situated at a few meters at the north east of the That Luang. We can also notice the wooden carved candleholder which represents the fight of Rama and Ravana in the Srilanka forest and which was offered the monastery in 1915 by the Tiao Maha Oupahat BOUN KHONG.

## **An in th style**

Not far from the actual sanctuary of That Luang there was by the time the Vat Pasaman, the first religious building strictly Laotian of the capital, This monastery was indeed built in 1359 by FA NGOUM itself for the venerable PASAMAN, a Khmer religious man who had come with him in Laos so that he could reform the local Buddhism which was by the time very tainted of Buddhism Mahayana as well as old indigenous superstitious, the cult of Phi, or local genius, in particular.

## **Chapter VIII**

## Vat Phraphouthabat Tha Phralak

On the west of the That Luang, at the mouth of Houey Hop, there is the Vat Phraphouthabat Tha Phralak, the “monastery of Buddha’s footprint on the bank of the Divin LAKSMANA”; LAKSMANA was the brother of Rama, the hero of Ramayana. The Vihan itself is a curious building probably inspired from Xieng May in Thailand and of recent construction even though the foundations of the monastery were built, according to the legend, at the XV e century, under the reign of SAM SENE THAY.

In 1960, the restoration of the monument, very ruined, was entrusted to the sino-Vietnamese community in Luang Prabang; that’s what can explain the composite appearance of the monastery. The front door dates from 1970, has a Chinese style and features in its center a crude Buddha; on the front door’s right, there is a plain “Prasad” in a Khmer style and on the left a decorated tower that was used as a shelter for the drum as well as an entrance door to the monastery. The whole thing is strongly polychrome and tastes rather unpleasant...

On the geomantic point of view this monastery is both the symmetric of the Vat Xieng Thong, because like that one he has a sacred pier: an anal pier, and the symmetric of Vat Thong, Siphouthabat because he got a Buddha’s footprint: the southern Buddha’s footprint Phrabat Tay. At the New Year period, Phrabat Tay is particularly venerated, and the sacred footprint is watered by the faithful as well as the images of Buddha.

## Chapter IX

### Vat That

Vat That, the stupa monastery, is probably one of the most beautiful monuments in the capital. It has a typical style from Luang Prabang: roofs with a simple break in slender, a red front wall with golden ornaments centered on the law wheel, round pillars with golden ornaments on black.

Built on the order of the king SAYASETTAHTHIRATH in 1548, maybe to get the forgiveness of the inhabitants regarding the abandonment of their town as the capital of the Lan Xang Kingdom, the original sanctuary was destroyed by a storm on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 1900 at 6:00 PM. There were several deaths and wounded people among the faithful who were attending the evening priest. But this Vat which belongs to Tiao Maha Oupahat BOUN KHONG district was built on his initiative from 1907. Half a century later, works of restoration were taken thanks to the generosity of the General Ouane RATHIKOUN (now deputy in Luang Prabang), first under the direction of the Venerable HOUMPHENG, then from 1963-1964 by the General brother: the venerable beautiful restoration of this monastery.

A commemorative stone in the memory of the venerable BOUNTHANH has by the way been set up on the back front of the vihan.

The whole monument gets very rich ornaments; the doors and windows frames are local artists work and are amazing. They relate the legend of the king Thao SISOUTHONE and Nang MANOLA the most beautiful of the Kinnari. This legend from Khmer origin, is rarely used in the Laotian iconography, even though very popular as a tale.

At the Vat That, the legend is told through the following episodes;

- a) The king's hunters put traps to catch the Kinnari, little divinities, half bird, half women, well-known for their kindness, their mischievous attitude;
- b) Nang MANOLA, the most beautiful of the Kinnari, falls in love with Thao SISOUTHONE and gets her wing back to her queen, to get the appearance of a girl.
- c) MANOLA says goodbye to her queen and to the palace servants.
- d) MANOLA, in the forest meets an old hermit and gives him her rings for SISOUTHONE.
- e) SISOUTHONE is preparing for the war and is getting weapons;
- f) SISOUTHONE asks his mother the permission to pick up Manola whose he is in love;
- g) SISOUTHONE is entering the forest; next to a water hole he met many aquatic animals such as fishes and turtles;

- h) In the forest: SISOUTHONE is having a rest under the tree of the bird SAKALINE;
- i) In the forest: SISOUTHONE tames tigers and elephants;
- j) Still in the forest: SISOUTHONE meets the hermit who is giving him MANOLA's ring. SISOUTHONE let drop the ring in one of the servants water basket;
- k) MANOLA, refreshing herself, finds the ring and understand that she can come to meet SISOUTHONE who loves her; the wedding preparation in SISOUTHONE palace represents the washing of hair.

We can notice that in the Laotian art, it's common that the disposition of doors and windows are not really symmetrical to the length of the Vihan; inside the Vihan we shouldn't miss to admire the beautiful candleholder in wooden carved offered to the museum by Tiao Maha Oupahat Boun KHONG in 1917. this amazing piece of work represents 24 embraced Luang Prabang Nagas as it was described in the KHOUN BOULOM legend; it also took part of the colonial exposition in paris in 1931, as the Laotian section was lead by the prince phetsarath.

### **An in the style**

The that, behind the vihan, gave it name to the monastery and dates from the xvi e century, but was restored in the modern period.

The stairs, as well as the garden walls of the monastery have been moved in April 1971 during the construction works of Phothisarath Street.

The front of the vat that on the actual site of the khueng hotel, ancient French residence, there by the time the vat sithane. Built in 1866 on the order of the king chantharath by prisoners, the monasteries was destroyed in 1895 on the order of m.vacle, high commissioner of France; the images of vat sithane Buddha were the transferred to the vat that The small First World War monument which was standing in front of the hotel khueng which was destroyed in 1971.

The municipality built the water fountain in this place in 1973, a statute of nang thorany, a protector divinity. In front of the hotel khueng there is the residence of his majesty the prince souvanna phouma, ended in 1973.

The vat that is one of the most popular place for the new year celebration: the third day of pimay or “mu sangkhan khun” (the day the tutelary divinity of the coming year is arriving) the supervisor of the Pali school, the supervisor of the Vat MAY, Vat Xieng Thong, Vat CHOM SI, Vat AHAM, and Vat VIXUN came to proceed to the ceremony of the throwing water on the Buddha’s images and attend to the sacred dance of the Pou NHEU NHA NHEU in the popular joy.

Next to the Vat THAT, on the other side of Pothisarath Street, between two small streets that go down to the Mekong, there is the district of the silver artisans.

According to the tradition in the royal Palace goldsmiths, they are still working on gold and silver in small shops in the back side of their court. We can especially notice the offering bowls called

‘ KHAN ‘ when they have a foot and ‘ O ‘ when don’t have one. The two main silver men are THIT PHENG MANIPHONE and PHYA THONG RATTANAKON.

## **Chapeter X**

### **Vat Ho Sieng**

Vat Ho Sieng, the monastery of the draw pavilion ‘ is called this way because it was in that place that was built the small pavilion where the king SAYASETTHATHIRATH came in 1548 to proceed to the ceremony of the draw of the next vihan Vat That.

Vat Ho Sieng is sometimes called wrongly Vat Houa Xieng, the monastery of the city entrance because of the name of the district it is built on: Ban Houa Xieng. That’s a beautiful building in the Luang Prabang syle, with a double roof with a break in slender, a golden front wall on a blue support centered on a small round character; white squared pillars without ornaments.

The building is curious because of its dissymmetry: the pillars of the norther veranda are squared and in bricks, they are ancient, those of the veranda are round and in wood, they date from the restoration of the monastery in 1923.

On this place, had been built by the time, by SAYASETTHATHIRATH, in the middle of the XVI<sup>e</sup> century a monument called Vat Phara Si Mahat That Ratsabovone Vihan. In 1705, the Court and the Royal family built the actual Vat Ho Sieng.

The Vihan ornaments were recently restored. We can notice inside on the left altar, a big standing Buddha in golden wood in the attitude of OUMBAT, seeking, a very rare attitude in the Lao iconography; the alms bowl ( BAT ) has disappeared.

Not far from the Vat Ho Sieng, in the actual place of the PHOUSI AKHANE hotel, there used to be the Vat PHONE KEO. The dates of its foundation, as well as the name of its founder, are, unknown.

At the beginning of the XX<sup>e</sup> century, there was only a small That left, the THAT NHI NHONG, raised by the Tiao MAHA OUPAHAT BOUN KHONG during the Siamese occupation, because when the French arrived, there was a primary school and the “ Bungalow “ instead.

When the construction work of the hotel PHOUSI AKHANE started, the THAT was destroyed as well, that's why on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 1963 were found inside 3 golden statues of Buddha, precious stones, ancient relics in a small jar.

## **Chapeter XI**

### **Vat Phone Xay**

Vat PHONE XAYSANA SONGKHAM, the “ monastery of the victory hill “, is built on the right in the street that goes down from PHOUSI AKHANE hotel to the river, in the district of BAN PAKHAM.

Built in 1791 under the reign of ANOUROUTH, this small building in the Luang Prabang style, with a simple roof, white squared pillars didn't have any ornaments and its front wall related the legend of phavet.

In 1970, the reconstruction of Vihan was organized on a very ingenious way : the new sanctuary, large of one meter on each side, was built around the old one after that they took of the roof, the doors, the windows and reused the material; that's why the monastery stayed open to the faith of the population despite the construction work.

The big sited Buddha on the altar is the PHRA PHOUTTHA XAYSANA SONGKHAM, the Buddha of the victory that the ancient king from Lane Xang uses to implore before leaving for the war.

## **Chapeter XII**

### **Vat May**

The Residence of the PHRA SANGKHARATH, the supervisor of all the monks in Laos and of the Laotian Buddhist church, Vat May, That is pronounced " Vat Maeu " by te inhabitants of Luang Prabang, which means " the new monastery " but its official name is VAT SISOUVANNA PHOMMARAM, because of the name of the ancient monastery VAT SI PHOUM.

That's a building with lateral galleries and 5 level of roof, one of the beautiful monument in the Royal Capital; golden ornament are finely wrought, but what is very special is its veranda with a portico, with golden and red ornaments and six black pillars and stencil decoration.

The idea of its construction comes from the king ANOUROUTH who wanted, in 1796, give to its capital a new monastery more beautiful than all the other ones. He actually couldn't do it and it's only in 1812, under the reign of MANGTHATOULAT that is construction of started and was achieved in 1891 under the reign of the king SAKHALINE. The decoration of the monastery was restored in 1962and that's why

under the veranda we can admire the wonderful ornaments of the front door of the sanctuary.

This huge golden fresco dates from 1967 to 1968 and relates the legend of phravet in the middle of villager's sceneries and in the typical luangprabang context like vat xiengthong and that chomsi.

The superior part in carved golden wood represents some episodes of RAMAKIEN. The surrounding wall of the monastery is recent; it had before 1910, vaulted doors which have now disappeared. Outside the vat, at the corner of the street that goes down the Mekong, we can notice the pillars of the elephant painted in red, where the royal elephants used to come to listen the "elephant's speech" during the Lao new year.

In 1894, the king SAKALINE with AUGSTE PAVIE solemnly transferred from the VAT VISOUN to the VAT MAI the PHRABANG, palladium of the kingdom.

Actually the PRABANG is in the royal palace, in the gardens where the king built the chapel VAT HLO PRABANG to shelter it.

VAT HLO PRABANG, which foundations start to appear on the floor, is situated next to the main street in the northern angle of the palace. We can't get in with out an authorization.

VAT MAI is one of the most popular places to celebrate the New Year in Laos: the third day of the Pimai or "mu sankhankhun" ("the day that tutelary divinity of the coming year is arriving), the king and the queen come to proceed to the ceremony of the throwing water on the Buddha's images, before going to Vat VISOUN and VAT XIENG THONG to do the some.

The day before, in the main street, at the crossroad un to the VATMAI, there is the big market "TALAT NAT "where every year from 6 to 100 am people come to buy pairs of animals such as birds, rats or fishes that they then give there liberty back on a big sandy ground in front of the VAT XIENG THONG, called DONESAY.

This cute tradition symbolizes the respect that Buddhism must have to the life and the freedom of every one.

## Chapter xiii

### The religious building in PHOUSHI

Since the foundation of the city, the small PHOUSHI hill, “the wonderful hill “, dominates LUANGPRABANG from its 150m high, and was a very important cultural centre.

That’s why at the beginning of the xviii century, the PHOUSHI was covered by monasteries; there are only 5 left now. From north to south, we could find:

- VAT XIENGNAM called also VAT PAFANG
- VAT PA KHE
- VAT SAOLIEO now disappeared
- VAT CHOMSI
- VAT PA THIEP, at mi\_way of the royal palace, now disappeared but it’s in that place that was planted a piece of the illumination tree from MYANMA for the 2500 anniversary of the Buddha.
- Vat Pa Houak.
- Vat Thay Phou, at the south of Phousi, now disappeared. In 1895, there was only left one called That Khao Chi because it looked like a small bread. On this place was built in 1962 the new residence, still empty.
- Vat Ho Khouang: at the east of the national radio station, now disappeared.
- Vat That Neug: Next to Phousi, in front of the hotel Phousi Akhane, now disappeared.
- Vat Pa Meo, next to Phousi, at the east, now disappeared; its name used to be “ the monastery of the cats “ because the villagers use to leave their cats over there. . .
- Vat Tham Phousi.

But the interest of the Phousi is not only because of its archeological vestiges, but also because it’s a nice place to walk under trees as well as the departure point to a nice little cliff road that overhangs the Nam Khan from the Vat Aphyay to the Vat Pak Khane.

From the top of the Phousi we can overlook the town which appears as lost in the nature. To the north-west, especially, we can catch sight of the Royal Palace in the shape of a cross with a little bell tower from the Khmer influence; this palace was built under the reign of SISAVANG VONG, right after the first world war; the new buildings in the south date from the 60s.

The Phousi used to be sung by poets and is nowadays used in modern songs, that's why a few years ago, everyone used to sing " Kho Phousi Chong Pen Phranhane " which means " I take the Phousi as witness " .

## **Chapter XIV**

### **Vat Pa Houak.**

A small building built next to the Phousi, just in front of the Royal Palace entrance, the Vat Pa Houak, " The monastery of the bamboo forest ", is built in the Vientiane style; simple roof with a rupture in slender, golden ornaments on a blue background centered on the drawing of a three heads elephant, octagonal white pillars, doors frame with rich floral ornaments.

Built in 1861 by the Phagna SIMAHA NAM under the reign of CHANTHARATH, this sanctuary is decorated inside of frescos that relates the JAMBOUPATI miracle during which, the Buddha, to humiliate an over proud prince, appears in its splendor of " Buddha King of the World "; this miracle inspired the representations of the " wrapped Buddha ", that is to say of the Buddha with outstanding of terrestrial royalty and not dresses as a monks as he used to be.

Since 1945, the Vat Pa Houak is used as a library for the Ministry of Cults in Luang Prabang

Very ancient manuscripts can be consulted over there.

## Chapter XV

### Vat Chom Si

The religious buildings at the top of the Phousi have been totally renovated in 1962, their archeological interest is then very weak, but the sight you get the top on the Luang Prabang plane is really worth it.

The 328 steps of the stair built in 1936-1937 and going to the top, start from the main street in front of the Royal Palace, next to the Vat Pa Houak.

The That at the top, That Chom Si, was built by the king Anourouth in 1804; restored in 1914 by the Tiao Komakhoun DOUANG CHANH, the director of the cults, it is amazing as it get a rectangular shape and not a squared shape like all the other that, which is due to the relief of the top of Phousi.

Immediately next to the That, the little sanctuary of the Vat Chom Si or Vat Phusi, in the shape of a cross, after having been extended in 1796, was restored between the two wars by the EFEO under the direction of Charles BATTEUR.

That's from the Vat Chom Si, that the night of the last day of PIMAY starts the procession of Nang SANG KHAN, the tutelary divinity of the coming year. With the Naga, the sacred snake-dragon, protector of the town, eacorted by hundreds of lanterns that the boys of the procession move, the little girl who portrays Nang SANG KHAN, goes down as in the middle of a long ribbon of fire from the top of the Phousi to the Palace gardens, bringing to the sovereign the help of the sky, the protection of the genius and the tribute of the people.

The Naga followed by all its little candle holders goes three time around the sacred lake, under the trees in front of the Palace, the party starts with the ritual offering of flowers.

But the main interest in this New Year night in the Royal Capital is that it's the only occasion to assist to some Ramayana's episodes representations in the Laotian tradition with classic

Music.

The Luang Prabang court, unlike Bangkok or Phnom Penh, doesn't have its own ballet troop, only a few masters to dance and recite; the dancers come from the school children of the city which gives to the show all its spontaneity: no fixed attitudes or smiles as they dance from all their heart for their own pleasure and for their sovereign. The funny gestures of the Hunuman Monkeys show, more than any folk exhibition, the taste of Lao people for theatre and dance and the gracious silhouette of Nang SITA, the wife of RAMA, predict to the young girl who is portraying it that day, a very beautiful wedding in the year.

## Chapter XVI

### Vat Tham Phousi

On the south side of the hill, next to the Nam Khane, there is the Vat Tham Phousi, the "monastery of the cave of Phousi". A little path goes there, from Vat Chom Si. The sanctuary in itself is built on a large sandstone patch that is inclined to 45 degree and forms a cave. What's more, which is very rare in the Laotian iconography is that the main image of the sanctuary is not the Buddha but the Phra KA CHAY in golden bricks, due to the venerable Houmpheng and dating from 1962.

Slightly down, accommodations for monks are being built for many years.

From Vat Tham Phousi goes a little path that comes from Phrabat Neua to the north and a stair in the east that allow to go down the street next to Nam Khane; decorated from a ramp in the shape of a Naga, this stairs was rebuilt in 1965 with the help of the students of the Luang Prabang high school.

## Chapter XVII

### Vat SIPHOUTTHABAT

The monastery of “ the wonderful Buddha’s footprint “ is the actual name of the monastery that gathers now three cultural buildings that where by the time independents: Vat PA KHE, Vat XIENG NGAM and PHRABAT HEUA.

### Vat PA KHE

Vat PA KHE, the “ monastery of the forest of trees Khe “ was built from 1853 on the order of the king CHANTHARATH. The ashes of this king are conserved in one of the three small that situated in front of the Vihan, one of the smallest recovered with cooper patches and finished by a numerous stages umbrella, according to the supervisor of the monastery.

Inspired from the Siamese, the vihan, built in the Vientiane style, was restored between 1967 and 1969 and decorated in the Luang Prabang style, with golden ornaments on a black backward.

But what makes the interest of this monastery is the legend it gets after that came Francis GARNIER in Luang prabang, 100 years ago: from this date Vat Pa Khe is often called by of the foreigners the “ Dutch Pagoda “ Two curious doors are at the origin of this name: the ones of the southern door on the eastern front, which represent two characters whose suits remember those of the Dutch from the XVII and the XVIII century, and those of the west door on the northern front, which represent two characters whose suits look like the Venitians ones in the XVI century. The Dutch traders Van WUSTHOFF went to Lao in 1658 and the Italian Jessuit J.M.LERIA twelve years before, so some experts conclude that it must be them on the doors.

But neither Van WUSTHOFF no J.M.LERIA went to Luang Prabang that wasn't by te time the capital of the Lane Xang kingdom, and what's more their presence in

the country wasn't that extraordinary to immortalize them on the doors of the royal monastery.

In reality those doors frame were sculpted by a local artist on the order of CHANTHARATH to commemorate the sending in 1861 to Chinese province KUN MING, by the Chinese Emperor TONG ZHIN, of two important mandarins to pay tribute to Tiao Phagna Muong Chanh KHAMPHOU, the ambassador of the king of Luang prabang; this one was looking for a partner against the Siamese invasion in the Champasak and Vientiane kingdoms.

And we can recognize in the four characters on the doors frames European characters on Chinese paintings of the XVII and XVIII centuries; it's then not impossible that the artist get inspired by those drawings to represent those Chinese mandarins that he had never met.

The Chinese inspiration of the original decoration of the Vat Pa Khe is confirmed by the presence of Chinese ceramics in the balcony ornaments as well as by the two “ dogs of Fo “

That guard the stairs. However the frescos inside the sanctuary are from the Siamese inspiration as they relate in pictures, the legend of Rama and Sita in the Bangkok version of the Ramayana: the Ramakien.

## **Vat Xieng Ngam**

The Vat Xieng Ngam, the “ monastery of the most beautiful town “ is also known under the name of “ Vat Pa Fang “, the monastery of the “ the forest of Flame trees “, even though the last Flame tree had disappeared a long time ago.

Built in 1799 under the reign of ANOUROUTH, in a style close to the Xieng Khouang one, with a very beautiful roof that goes down to the ground and massive round pillars. We can notice that the windows have painted bars.

The Vihan is actually in a very bad state; its interior frescos that represent the main episodes of the Ramakien are now very damaged. Next to the Vihan there is the Pali school of Luang Prabang.

## **Phra Bat Neua**

Phrabat Neua, “ the holy north footprint of Buddha “ is called so by opposition with “ PHRABAT TAY “, the “ holy south footprint of Buddha “ which is on the other side of the town in the surroundings walls of the Vat Phraphoutthabat Tha Phra Lak.

The footprint of around 3 m long is inside a small vaulted chapel in which arrives a natural abyss, digs into

The mountain and which tradition uses to tell that it join the Nam Khane down to it. A little modern Sala was built next to the chapel to shelter the faithful. We can get to the Phrabat Neua either by a little path to the Vat Pa Khe or else by a stair that goes down to the Vat Tham Phousi.

Vertacally down to the Phrabat Neua, along the street that follows the Nam Khane, have been sculpted recently two Nagas getting out of the rocs and that frame small niches with statues of “ Lusi “ ( hermits ).

At the New Year period, Phrabat Neua, like Phrabat Tay is the subject of a special veneration and the sacred footprint is watered by the faithful as well as the images of Buddha.

## **Chapter XVIII**

### **Vat Pa Phay**

The Vat Pa Phay is a little building in the style of Vientiane: a roof with a simple rupture in slender; a golden front wall on a red color backward that represents the Buddha organizing its community, surrounded by its five first disciples. There is a very beautiful main door with colored glass incrustations.

Built by Phya SAMLAT in 1815, the building did had until 1966 only one roof; Vat Pa PHAY, which name means the “ monastery in the Bamboo forest “ was entirely rebuilt between 1966 and 1969.

In front of the Vat Pa Phay, on the other side of the street, you can notice a building that now shelters the offices of the Primary Inspection of Laung Prabang, that’s very nice example of the Franch colonial architecture of the 30s; it used to shelter by the time the local Indochinese of the security services.

## Chapter XIX

### Vat Sieng Mouane

Nice building in a style close to the one in Xieng Khouang: a roof with a simple break in slender, a golden front wall, round golden pillars; numerous That and chapels in the surrounding walls of the monastery.

Built under the reign of SOUKHASEUM in about 1840, the Vat CHOUM KHONG, like the Vat SIENG MOUANE its neighbor, gets its name from: “ the monastery of the central point of the gong “ because of the melodious sound of this instrument. Its official name is now Vat PHRA KHONG RATTANARAY NHARAM; the exterior frescos tell the legend of PHRA VET.

One each side of the stair that go to the sanctuary, there are two statues named “ Chinese Ho From Muong Nong He “ By the time, they were offered to like king

CHANTHARATH probably at the occasion of the Kun Ming Embassy and those two statues represent in reality the two main Boddhisattva of the Chinese Buddhism: the left - hand one wears the

“ vajra “, that is to say the bell, the female symbol.

At the end of the XIXe century, M. VACLE, High Commissary Of France , took them as ornaments in front of this residence; after the 1914-1918 war, the Tiao Mha BOUN KHONG brought them in the outbuildings of the Royal Palace and it the Ratsavong SISOUPHAN, when he was director of the cults, that brought them in the 30's at the Vat Choum Khong.

The sanctuary was restored in 1933 and its decoration totally restored as well from 1962, the doors and the windows in particular are the work of the venerable HOUMPHENG.

## Chapter XXI

### Vat Nong

In the same street that the Vat Choum Khong and the Vat Xieng Mouane, but a little further

In the north, there is the Vat NUONG, the “ monastery of the pond “

Built in 1729 by the Phra POUM LOUM, the monastery was then called Vat Si KHOUN MOUANG and the founder had made come from Xieng Sene ( Siam ) a big picture of the bronze Buddha. During the fire of 1774 that, on the Pimay day, damaged the biggest part of the capital, the monastery was destroyed except the wall where was the Buddha and this miracle got it a big fame.

While built in 1804, the inhabitants included in the surrounding walls of the monastery the little pond (“Nong”) that was next and then everyone used to call it Vat NONG.

Built in the Luang Prabang style, with a roof with a simple break in slender one; squared golden pillars, the Vat NONG gets mural frescos relating the legend of Phravet. But from 1965, the Vat Nong is being rebuilt and had now a structure in concrete and the roof is a double break in slender one; there are the inhabitants of the district who, under the direction of the monks, participated to the construction works of their monastery.

On the right of the vihan, behind a bamboo's hedge, there is a delicious little garden in the style of the "priests garden " in French presbyteries.

Vat Nong had always been the most famous monastery and that's why the Tiao Maha Oupahat BOUN KHONG went there in his prime youngness.

Not far from the Vat NONG, on the right of the monastery, in the same street, there is the residence of the Queen, which two amazing parallel roofs. It's one of the last examples of last century Royal Palaces, built half in wood, half in bricks and very finely decorated.

## Chapter XXII

### Vat Sene

A magnificent building in the Luang prabang style: a double roof with break in slender, red front wall, golden decorated front wall, octagonal pillars, red painted frescos decorated on stencil.

The Vat Sene is the first monastery in Luang Prabang which Vihan has been recovered with golden and red tiles on the modern Thai way and this innovation wasn't appreciated by everyone. . . . .

The Vat Sene which full name is Vat Sene SOUKHARAM was built in 1718 by the king KITSARATH on the ancient site of a sanctuary that dates from the reign of SOUVANA

BANLANG. The Vihan which ground used to be laquer painted is surrounded by eleven small That: three on the Mekong side, three next to the Nam Khane, two at the south and three at the north.

Restored for the first time in 1932, the Vat Sene was restored a second time in 1957 for the 2500 anniversary of Buddha; it was also devoted a second time: four leaves of Sima buried in the four direction of the monastery.

On the right of the Vihan there is the shelter for the race pirogues of the monastery: the two beautiful pirogues are finely decorated on stencil, and can normally get 50 oarsmen and one leader.

Various monasteries own their own pirogues, the Royal Palace as well, its pirogues being sheltered in along building next to the Mekong, behind the palace. In Luang Prabang, the pirogues races take place on the 9<sup>th</sup> month during the Ho Khao Padap party. A small pirogues race is also organized on the 12<sup>th</sup> months during the party of That Luang.

We should remember that in Vientiane those races take place during the 11<sup>th</sup> month during the end of the Buddhist lent.

Until 1972, in the surroundings walls of the Vat Sene there were, from 1914, the ruins of a small ancient sanctuary: Vat That Noy. There are only left a big statue of Buddha in bricks,

Very ruined from the XVIII century, which was in front of the sanctuary, next to the main road. The Buddha whose head had disappeared was standing, his arms along his body in the attitude of " Hiek Fone ", calling for the rain. In May 1972.

the ancient Buddha was destroyed and another one in concrete, in the inhabitants of the district. . . .

He is from 1974 sheltered under a high squared chapel, covered by red tiles of modern style.

Vat Sene is the most southern monastery of the four ones gathered along the main street and which represent a very rich cultural gathering:

- Vat Sene.
- Vat Sop.
- Vat Si Moung Khoun.
- Vat Si Boun Heuang.

## Chapter XXIII

### Vat Sop

Second monastery in the group, Vat Sop is right next to the Vat Sene. Very ancient sanctuary, Vat Sop has a long history: in 1480, THENE KHAM, the son of the king CHAKAPHAT PHENE PHEO, fought the Vietnamese invaders in Muong XIENG KHANE, but the king, his father, died from his wounds. Next year, back to Luang Prabang, Thene Kham who has just become king under the name of SOUVANNA BANLANG built his first monastery of his dad: the Vat SOP XIENG KHANE, the “monastery of the funerals in

Xieng Khane “.

In 1485 he built another one: Vat SOP XIENG THOG and he died over there the next year. The two monasteries were gathered in one, under the name of Vat SOP at the XVIII century.

The actual vihan date from 1909, it is in the Luang Prabang style with a roof at double breaks in slender and round white pillars.

Behind the vihan, next to the street, we can notice the amazing offering altar, “ ho Bouxa “,

Covered by plane tiles and which roof is carried by wooden uprights of Naga and fishes, even though fishes are rarely represented in the Laotian iconography.

At the north of the sanctuary there is a little shelter which protects two images of Buddha.

This shelter built in 1933 in the Luang Prabang style is all that was left from a small monastery called, Vat Nak founded in 1768 under the reign of SOTIKAKOUMANE and destroyed at the end of the XIX century.

## **Chapter XXIV**

### **Vat SI Moung Khoun**

At the east of Vat Sop and Still on the border of the main road, there is the monastery of Vat SI MOUNG KHOUN. The sanctuary is the basic building of LUANGPRABANG style: a simple roof, round white pillars which golden ornaments have disappeared.

The local traditional assures that this monasteries was founded in 1763 under the reign of SOTIKAKUMMANE by phraya kang MOUNGKHOUN.

## **CHAPTER XXV**

### **VAT SI BOUNHEUANG**

A small building in a LUANGPRABANG style, the last one of the group of the four monasteries on the main road; simple roof; wooden carved golden front wall; round white pillars, golden frescos on black color pretty damaged.

Built in 1758, under the reign of SOTIKAKOUMMANE, the VAT SI BOUHEUANG, which frescos tell the detail of PHRAVET, was restored between the two wars but the external decoration has been restored yet.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### VAT KHILI

Very nice building in the style of XIENGKHUANG, a simple roof; wooden carved front wall but not painted; round white pillars; golden ornaments or the red brick color.

If the VATKHILI style remember the one of XIENGKHUANG; it because this sanctuary was built by PHOUANE, the inhabitation of this province. From 1773 indeed, their prince, TIAO KHAMSATTHA got married with a LUANGPRABANG princess NANGVENE KEOSAMPHOU, the daughter of the king INTHASOM; the PHOUANE then, on a small hill, where was supposed to live the protective genius of their army, built the VATKHILI which full name is VAT SOUVANA KHILI, the sanctuary of the golden mountain.

We can notice next to the road the small library in wood, golden ornaments or the red backward, still pretty preserved; it's still on the rare of that kind left in LUANGPRABANG.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### VAT PAK KHANE

Small building with the turning nave, in the style of VAT THAT LUANG, roof with a little golden front wall on the red color.

Built by phraya CHANTHEP, in 1737 under the reign of the king INTHASOM, in the very beautiful confluent site of the NAMKHANE, the VAT PAKHANE or PAK NAMKHANE got the name of this site, PAK mean mouth.

The decoration of the door , very ancient, is of Chinese inspiration regarding the animals and characters. We can notice the wood golden bars on the windows which are typical of the decorative art kin LUANGPRABANG, especially the royal furniture of the last century. Down to the monasteries along the NAMKHANE, there's an official tribune where, on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the decreasing moon on the 9<sup>th</sup> month, the king comes to watch the pirogues races.

If we are lucky to be in LUANGPRABANG a " holy day "VANSIN, that is to say the 8<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> day of decreasing moon, we have to go at night time at the monasteries of the main road to listen the prayer; from VIHAN to VIHAN; from VAT MAI to VAT PAK KHANE there are charming melodies "NAMOTHASA PHAKAVATO ALHATO SAMA SAMPUHASA" , "I am grateful toward the master, the holy illuminated, the wise man"

## CHAPTER XXIII

### VAT XIENGTHONG

VAT XIENGTHONG, the " monasteries of the golden town", situated at the extremity of the small island between the NAMKHANE and the MEKONG, is the biggest and more beautiful of all the monasteries in LUANGPRABANG.

ROYAL FOUNDATION, the royal palace has always contributed the care and the preservation of the several building of the VAT. VAT XIENGTHONG is indeed the head quarter of the "diocese" of LUANGPRABANG. It is also the "monasteries of the coty entrance", because it's by the time, by the pier built next to the gardens that the officials arrival and leavings of the sovereign happened and that's where

were coming from important visitors traveling from the river or coming from the SIAM by the road in BANXIENGMENE.

On the geomantic point of view, we could consider VAT XIENHONG as the symmetric of VAT PHRAPHUTHABATH THAPALAK on the south that get the other pier of the town.

VATXIENG THONG is a very important place for the celebration of the LAO new year: the second day of PIMAI or 'MU NAO', the superior of the VAT THAT, VATMAI, VAT CHOSI, VAT AHAM AND VAT VISOUN come on chair holders for a big solemn procession to water ritually the images of Buddha and watch the sacred dance of the "POU NHEU NHA NHEU" in popular joy.

That's also on that day that next to the VAT XIENGTHONG, many families are taken on pirogues board to joint the opposite bank, the sandy DONESAY MOUNGKHOUN. Over there in the middle of songs and laughs, we built small THAT in sand for Buddha that we sprinkle with lime and the top and decorate with multicolor flags, bought in the morning in the big market in front of the VATMAI, and which represents the eight protective animals of cardinal and intercardinal points ; every member of the family is symbolized by a sandy ball next to the small VAT and the old beliefs said that we will get during the year as many luck as there are grains of sand in the THAT...

On the next day, the king and the queen with the important personalities of the court come to water the images of Buddha at the VATXIENGTHONG.

When we entered into the VAT by the VAT by the east through the vaulted door front the path that goes to the main road, we notice outside, right on the left of the entrance the third and last "pillars of elephants" of the town.

If we entered to the monasteries by the south of the entrance, we can notice on the left, the small alter of offerings"HO BOUXA" which shelter has a curious small character that could be the hermit or "LUSI", this altar has the horoscope slate stone date from 1922.

VAT XIENG THONG presents a gathering of amazing building on a archeological point of view as well as on the iconographic and esthetic point of view , that's why we will study in details:

- The sanctuary
- The chapel of the funeral char
- The drum shelter
- The chapel of the standing Buddha
- The red chapel

The sanctuary

It's the beautiful building in the pure style of LUANGPRABANG: complex roof with superposition of stages, golden front wall on the red backward, squared back pillars with golden decoration on stencil.

VAT XIENG THONG was built by the king SAYASETHATHIRATH in the 1560 in the aim to commemorate the memory of THAO CHANTHAPHANITH, this trader from Vientiane, that well before the arrival of FANGUM, was according the legend , elected king of LUANGPRABANG.

After three century of the calm history, VAT XIENG THONG was lucky enough to escape from the fire in 18187 marked by the loot of LUANGPRABANG by the "black pavilion "DEO VANTRI, their chief had been a monk at the VAT XIENGTHONG and then he set up its residence up there ...so the VAT XIENG THLONG was neither loot nor burned as the rest of the town.

In 1928 Governor General PASQUIER, in official visit in Luang Prabang, accepted, according to the King SISAVANGVONG, that the general government in Indochina financed the restoration of the sanctuary. Nevertheless the decoration was totally restored from 1960

Inside the Vihan, the frescos tell the ringed of THAO CHANTHAPANITH. Outside, the decoration is very rich: the golden frescos on black or red backward represent

the legend of Thao SISOUTHONE and on the left side the one of Thao SOUTTASOM; the back wall represents the (Bodhi tree), the illumination tree, life tree: on a left backward, a colorful glass mosaïque incrusted in the wall is very ancient Laotian technic as we can find it at the XVI century on the Doors of the That Ing Hang.

We can finally notice at the top of the roof, the very beautiful Laotian decorative pattern with 17 points that we call in Laotian (dok so fa), the (sky bunch flower),

Behind the Vihan, there is an elegant small chapel of simple construction. The door frames, of modern facture, are curious: they represent two fisher men whose hairs remember those of the KHAS, the Porto Indochinese who where living in the MEKONG.

Valley before the arrival of the Laotian: the episode represented is indeed extracted from the legend of THAO CHANTHA PANITH who must be a descendant of the KHA. The chapel date from the foundation of the monasteries when it was rebuilt before 1957 inside: a Buddha has been recently restored. It is indeed chapel that the ashes of THAO SISALEUMSAK, who died in 1969, were deposited.

The external decoration is being restored on the model of the red chapel, but the frescoes tell the legend of THAOTAO.

The chapel of the funeral chars

Right to the right in coming in to the VAT XIENGTHONG by the east door. There is a wonderful little building totally golden. Built in the XIENGKHUANG style. This chapel, which construction started in 1962, will become a kind of royal museum. They are indeed conserved over there the funeral char of the king SISAVANGVONG which dates from 1959 as well as various relics that belong to the royal family.

The golden char in carved wood has the funeral twelve faces jar of the king around which have been deposited the funeral eight face jar of the queens.

The external decoration of the chapel is being achieved and is richly decorated: totally in carved and golden wood, the panels represent the legend of LAMA. They

have been realized by artist from LUANGPRANABG working under the orders of the artist\_master of the royal palace. The main episodes of the RAMAYANA are easily recognizable especially the one of the “golden doe” and the one of the judgment of SITA by the fire. We can also notice the right panel that represents the fight of the vulture SATAYOUT against the adductor of SITA: impression of movement of really amazing through the 100 arms of RAVANA, each one holding a different weapon.

#### The drum shelter

In the bottom of the monastery garden. In the corner north, there's the drum shelter or” HOKONG” this little modern building has a perfect shape simple roof in the LUANGPRABAGN style carved front wall richly golden, round black pillars which golden ornaments in stencil.

The drum, right on the drums of the pagodas, is piece of trunk, cylindrical, from about one meter of diameter, empty inside and with two buffalo skins tendered its extremities on with the monk hit with a wooden mallet to announce time of priers.

#### The chapel of the standing Buddha.

Ancient library, this small and curious building is built on the left hidden side of the VIHAN; it has a roof in the shape of a spade ace which is usual in the Laotian religious art. Richly decorated outside, the chapel shelters a modern Buddha in bronze, in the attitude of “HAMNHAT”: calming a family quarrel. This statue is a girl from the king of Thailand to the king SISAVANGVONG. The inside decoration of the chapel is gilded with stencil on a red backward.

#### The red chapel

On the right of the main sanctuary, be hide the chapel of the standing Buddha, there is the red chapel, beautiful building in the shape of a parallelepiped: a double stage roof, red front wall with golden frescos.

This little chapel shelters a very rare Laotian bronze image of the lay\_of Buddha in nirvana "PARINIPAN". This picture of two meters long and which has and ancient inscription on its stand was melted in 1569 on the order of the king.

SAYASETHATHIRATH. It is a long story: it leaves Asia in 1931 to be exposed in the Indochina pavilion of the colonial exposition in PARIS; back in Laos is stayed in Vientiane in a living room of the superiors residence; in 1949 it was transfer to the VATPHRAKEO in three years later is came back to LUANGPRABANG. The "unnisha" flame unpainted concrete is not original but was painted in the VAT PHRAKEO.

In front of the laying Buddha there is a standing Buddha in the attitude of "HAM NHAT" like the one of the precedent chapel; this object should be very ancient (xvi century) but the stone incrustations are moderns. We can notice the intern decoration of the chapel which represents the miracle of SAVATI, during which outrageous Buddha multiplied his image to infinity in the sky to convince an incredulous prince.

But the main interest of this chapel, it is the amazing decoration it get in 1957 for the 2500 anniversary of Buddha. The red mosaïque that decorated the four walls of the chapel are recent and the technique used is the same that the one of the mosaïque on the back wall of the VIHAN. This long mosaïque tells the story of SIEOSAVATH, story in poetry that LOUIS FINOT in its "researches on the Laotian literature classifies in the category of judicial tales "SIEOSAVATH" date probably from the end of xvii century, under the reign of SOULINGA VONGSA, a period of unity and splendor of Laos.

The author, by the way unknown, tells the adventures of SIEOSAVATH, the son of a rich trader that takes on board one day on a big ship and seduced by his personality, the daughter of the captain marries him; he becomes a famous character well known for his fair judgments and people come from very far to listen to him. One of his judgments, close from the one of Salomon, between two mothers fighting for a kid is very famous. But the interest of this tale is. Like a mosaïque, in the description of the every day life in testimonies.

The Laotians the read the whole tale known by heart the life maxims that SIEOSAVATH used to talk about; especially the two followings that have strongly marked the Lao soul that we could say now that they are part of the Laotian mentality and attitude, which is sometimes surprising for and European talkative, busy and self assured about the efficiency of his work:

“Don’t talk before being ask to”

“Before helping someone, make sure he desires and really needs it”.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE MONASTERIES FROM RIGHT TANK

The monasteries from the right tank are easily accessible in pirogue from the pier be hide the royal palace. The most interesting monasteries are: the VAT THAM, VAT LONGKHOUN, VAT CHOM PHET and VAT XIENGMENE.

#### VAT THAM

Situated just in front of the VAT XIENG THONG, the VAT THAM, the “monasteries of the caves” is constituted by a lime stone cave very important which entrance has been developed: a stone stairs, a little bell tower of Birdman facture with three stages, that an altars. The interior of the cave is slightly lightened; what’s more some corridor go quite far underground; the legend used to say that an underground secret passage allow us to get to the royal palace.

The VAT THAM is usually used as a ware house for the old images of the Buddha that come from destroyed monasteries; that are why we can find, piled of ten wooden statues of the Buddha, most of the time in very bad stage of preservation. THE VAT LONGKHOUN,” the monasteries of blessed song, has a curious VIHAN, a small building built in two times in the LUANGPRABANG style the back part is ancient and date from xvii century, whereas the gate, which roof doesn’t extend the VIHAN one, was rebuilt in 1937, a very nice carved front wall the frescos inside

represent episodes of the anterior lives of Buddha; and the gate, the front wall is decorated the two Chinese warriors paints on the wall on each side of the door. Because of its situation in front of VAT XIENGTHONG, VAT LONGKHON plays great role in the ceremonies of the coronation of the sovereign. It's in the vat Long Khoun indeed that the sovereign must do this three days retreat before getting in to the city, the day before coronation, by the pier the vat XIENGTHONG. By the way the ritual of the coronation of the sovereign currently raises problems, indeed, the last king being invested according to the local tradition was ANOUROUTH in 1791...since then his successors, includingSISAROUTH got their crown from Bangkok, and then Paris from 1890. Around the Vihan of the vat Long Khoun: numerous that and among all, (Koutti), accommodation of the novices, which construction dates from the last century and which are amazing examples of mix architecture: wood for the structures and stones for the foundation and the stairs.

#### The Vat CHOMPHEH

At the top of a isolated hill, overlooking the river, the Vat CHOMPHEH, the (monastery of the diamond point) is amazing by its situation and its quiet and serenity atmosphere.

The Vihan rebuilt at the beginning of the century is from a Luang Prabang classic style with round white columns and decorated wall front in stucco.

#### Vat Xieng Mene

Hidden in nature, the Vat XIENG MENE, the (monastery of the city of paradise) is the last important monastery on the right bank. With its very ancient foundation (the XIV century?), the actual Vihan, with its completed roof, dates from the end of the last century

The decoration of the gate was restored recently; we can notice the extremely fine. Decoration of the octagonal pillars as well as the one of the axial door; the chair to preach is modern but very beautiful.

Ban Xieng Mene was by the time situated at the end of a very busy dusty road that went to the Siam and Myanmar; that's why village was important and the monastery so rich. This road is known under name of the "Prabang road" because it's from it that the Phra Bang came back from Bangkok in the middle of the XIX century.

At about 100 meters from the pier, on the hill side, we can find the ruins of the Vat CHOM CHENG, the "monastery of the clear top", which dates from the XVIII century.

At two kilometers for Ban SIENG MENE , on the left of the Prabang road, in a clearing in the middle of a teak forest, there is the Royal Cemetery "Pa Xa Luang". That's over there that there are the graves and sepultures of the Royal Family members that couldn't have been burned for religious reasons: women died in giving birth, people died from contagious diseases, young children... We can notice that the the sepulture of the Queen KHAM OUANE (1885-1905) the wife of the king SISAVANG VONG and the sepulture of Tiao SOULYVONG (1891-1918), the young brother of the Sovereign.

## Chapter XXX

### The monasteries extra muros

Except from the monasteries that we have just studied and that are all situated either inside the ancient walls of the of the XIX century or on the right bank of the river, there are numerous monasteries outside the surroundings walls, on the left bank, more or less ancient and included in the new borders of the royal capital.

We can then find at the north of Nam Khane:

- The Vat BAN KHOY, Vat PA KHA, Vat PHONE XANG
- The Vat PHA LUANG is the monastery of a village famous by the time for its potters that used to made "name tao" , pretty little potteries in black clay.

- Vat TAO HAY
- And Vat PHOU DO MAY, the “monastery of the mountain of flowers”, that escaped to recent construction work to extend the airfield and which Vihan stands up at the top of a desert hill.

At the south of Nam Khane we can find:

- The Vat PHOU KHOUAY, the Vat SA KEM
- The Vat PA NHA THUP: this monastery, also named Vat BOUPHA VIPASANARAM, has incinerators, and that’s over there that occurred most of the cremations, including those of the Royal Family, excepted Kings and high personalities who are cremated in the Vat THAT LUANG. None of those monasteries present, in the actual stage of our knowledge, a big archeological interest.

In the Luang Prabang suburb, Ban PHANOM, well know from the European under the name of “the village of scarves” has a famous monastery although its foundation is recent (XIX century). It was by the time this village, which inhabitants were the “Lu”, and ethnic minority of Thai race close from the Lao that was providing servants for the Royal Palace. From 1947, the villagers free from this constraint recovered in the weaving of scarves in “mentis” which means silk and cotton.

Not far from the center of the village, overlooking the steep banks of the Nam Khane, stands up a big tree, the grave of Henri MOUHOT, a young French scientific, dead in 1861 who loved so much the Laos that he wanted to be buried over there. The monument is very simple, in the shape of a Chinese coffin and was restored in 1970 by the French Embassy in Laos.

Down to the town, at about 6km, we can visit Vat SANGKHALOK. The Vihan, built in 1957 by King PHOTHISANE on the site of an ancient altar for the protective genius of the town, was destroyed by a storm in 1883. The actual building dates from 1904.

The king goes every year to the Vat SANGKHALOK, for the New Year, to proceed in the ritual watering of the images of Buddha.

Vat SANGKHALOK is built next to the mouth of the Nam Dong. It's on this river that, 15km ahead, there are hydroelectric installations that provide water and energy to the Royal Capital. A pretty road allows reaching easily the dam.

Finally, 30km up the city, we can travel in pirogues to the famous caves of PAKOU, at the mouth of the NAMOU: VAT THAM TING and VAT THAMLOUM. The king used to go there every year for PIMAI to water the image of Buddha.

