A Comparative Study of Thai and Italian Historic Stone Statues: A Case Study of Khao Mo at Wat Prayurawongsawat and the Apennine Colossus

การศึกษาเชิงเปรียบเทียบประติมากรรมหินทางประวัติศาสตร์ของไทยและอิตาลี: กรณีศึกษาเขามอที่วัดประยุรวงศาวาสและรูปปั้นยักษ์แอเพนไนน์

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: This study analyzes and compares the cultural significance of historic stone sculptures from Thailand and Italy: Khao Mo at Wat Prayurawongsawat in Bangkok and the Colossus of the Apennines in Italy. These monumental works are not merely landscape ornaments but serve as artistic, religious, and cultural symbols that embody profound narratives of cosmology, mythology, and power. The main objective is to understand how such sculptures reflect cultural values, beliefs, and the idea of integrating art with nature. The study also proposes approaches for conserving and presenting heritage that bridges local and global contexts. By comparing works with different origins but similar thematic intentions, this research highlights the role of heritage in transmitting identity, memory, and belief systems.

Methods: The research adopts a qualitative comparative analysis, examining the context, spatial setting, and forms of both monuments via the field surveys, photographic documentation, and analyses of construction techniques, materials, and symbolic elements. These data were synthesized to interpret the interrelations among sculptures, landscapes, and spiritual dimensions.

Results: Khao Mo at Wat Prayurawongsawat reflects Thai Buddhist cosmology, recreating a sacred landscape symbolizing Mount Meru. It integrates natural elements such as water, vegetation, and religious iconography to create an atmosphere conducive to meditation and spiritual reflection. In contrast, the Colossus of the Apennines embodies Renaissance and Mannerist ideals in Italy, employing mythological symbolism, artistic ambition, and architectural integration with nature. Beyond its artistic presence, the sculpture contains functional features, including interior chambers and a working water system, reflecting the era's attempt to integrate art with functionality.

Application of this study: The findings indicate that heritage conservation must give priority to the context and the cultural values embedded within the structure to enhance restoration, interpretation, and communication of heritage significance. Comparative analysis further provides a foundation for cross-cultural knowledge exchange in art and architectural conservation, particularly within the framework of global heritage management, which requires interdisciplinary collaboration to preserve the profound meaning reflected in the works.

Conclusions: The comparison of Khao Mo and the Colossus of the Apennines demonstrates that historic monumental sculptures in public spaces can reflect cultural identity, religious worldviews, and artistic intent in profound ways. Despite differences in origin and style, both exemplify harmonious integration of art and nature, expressing shared human concerns with spirituality, myth, and memory. This study contributes to broader heritage discourse by emphasizing that conservation should extend beyond physical form to encompass intangible meanings. Cross-cultural perspectives on monumental stone sculptures enrich understanding of how societies interpret the relationship between humans, nature, and the sacred. They also highlight the necessity of contextual interpretation and interdisciplinary approaches that link art history, architecture, landscape architecture, and cultural studies. Ultimately, this research establishes a foundation for future comparative heritage conservation studies and promotes global awareness of the diverse ways in which meaning is conveyed through monumental art.

บทคัดย่อ

ที่มาและวัตถุประสงค์: การศึกษานี้วิเคราะห์และเปรียบเทียบความสำคัญทางวัฒนธรรมของประติมากรรมหินทาง ประวัติศาสตร์จากประเทศไทยและประเทศอิตาลี ได้แก่ เขามอ วัดประยุรวงศาวาสในประเทศไทย และโคลอสซัสแห่ง แอเพนไนน์ในประเทศอิตาลี ประติมากรรมเหล่านี้มิใช่เพียงสิ่งประดับภูมิทัศน์ แต่เป็นสัญลักษณ์ทางศิลปะ ศาสนา และ วัฒนธรรมที่สะท้อนเรื่องราวเชิงลึกของจักรวาลวิทยา ตำนาน และอำนาจ วัตถุประสงค์หลักคือทำความเข้าใจว่า ประติมากรรมสะท้อนคุณค่าทางวัฒนธรรม ความเชื่อ และแนวคิดการผสานศิลปะกับธรรมชาติอย่างไร รวมทั้งเสนอ แนวทางการอนุรักษ์และการนำเสนอมรดกที่เชื่อมโยงทั้งท้องถิ่นและสากล การเปรียบเทียบสิ่งก่อสร้างที่ต่างรากฐานแต่มี ธีมใกล้เคียงกันนี้ ช่วยให้เห็นบทบาทของมรดกในการถ่ายทอดอัตลักษณ์ ความทรงจำ และระบบความเชื่อ

วิธีการศึกษา: งานวิจัยใช้การวิเคราะห์เชิงคุณภาพเชิงเปรียบเทียบ โดยพิจารณาบริบท พื้นที่ และรูปแบบของโครงสร้าง ทั้งสอง ผ่านการสำรวจ การบันทึกภาพ และการวิเคราะห์เทคนิคการก่อสร้าง วัสดุ และองค์ประกอบเชิงสัญลักษณ์ เพื่อนำมาสังเคราะห์ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างประติมากรรม ภูมิทัศน์ และมิติทางจิตวิญญาณ

ผลการศึกษา: เขามอ วัดประยุรวงศาวาสสะท้อนจักรวาลวิทยาพุทธศาสนาแบบไทย โดยจำลองภูมิทัศน์ศักดิ์สิทธิ์ แทนเขาพระสุเมรุ ผสานองค์ประกอบธรรมชาติ เช่น น้ำ พืชพรรณ และสัญลักษณ์ศาสนา เพื่อสร้างบรรยากาศ เอื้อต่อการปฏิบัติสมาธิและการใคร่ครวญ ขณะที่โคลอสซัสแห่งแอเพนไนน์สะท้อนอุดมคติของยุคฟื้นฟูศิลปวิทยาและ แนวมานเนอริสมในอิตาลี ใช้สัญลักษณ์ตำนาน ความทะเยอทะยานทางศิลปะ และการผสานสถาปัตยกรรมเข้ากับ ธรรมชาติ ประติมากรรมนี้ยังมีฟังก์ชันจริง เช่น ห้องภายในและระบบน้ำที่ทำงานได้ สะท้อนความพยายามของยุคนั้นใน การรวมศิลปะกับประโยชน์ใช้สอย

การประยุกต์ใช้: ผลการศึกษาชี้ว่าการอนุรักษ์มรดกต้องให้ความสำคัญกับบริบทและคุณค่าทางวัฒนธรรมที่แฝงอยู่ใน โครงสร้าง เพื่อยกระดับการบูรณะ การตีความ และการสื่อสารคุณค่าให้รอบด้าน การศึกษาเชิงเปรียบเทียบยังเป็นรากฐาน สำหรับการแลกเปลี่ยนความรู้ด้านการอนุรักษ์ศิลปะและสถาปัตยกรรม โดยเฉพาะในบริบทของมรดกระดับโลกที่ต้อง อาศัยการบูรณาการหลากหลายศาสตร์เพื่อรักษาความหมายลึกซึ้งที่ผลงานสะท้อน

บทสรุป: การเปรียบเทียบเขามอกับโคลอสซัสแห่งแอเพนไนน์เผยว่าประติมากรรมหินทางประวัติศาสตร์ในพื้นที่ สาธารณะสามารถสะท้อนอัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรม โลกทัศน์ศาสนา และเจตจำนงทางศิลปะได้อย่างเด่นชัด แม้ต่างที่มา และรูปแบบ แต่ต่างก็ผสานศิลปกรรมเข้ากับธรรมชาติอย่างลงตัว สะท้อนความห่วงใยร่วมกันของมนุษย์ต่อจิตวิญญาณ ตำนาน และความทรงจำ งานวิจัยนี้เสริมการอภิปรายด้านมรดกวัฒนธรรม โดยเน้นว่าการอนุรักษ์ไม่ควรหยุดที่รูปทรงทาง กายภาพ แต่ต้องรวมถึงความหมายเชิงนามธรรมด้วย การนำเสนอทัศนะข้ามวัฒนธรรมต่อประติมากรรมขนาดใหญ่ยัง ช่วยให้เข้าใจว่าสังคมต่าง ๆ ตีความความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างมนุษย์ ธรรมชาติ และสิ่งศักดิ์สิทธิ์อย่างไร อีกทั้งยังเน้น ความสำคัญของการตีความตามบริบท และสนับสนุนแนวทางสหวิทยาการที่เชื่อมโยงประวัติศาสตร์ศิลป์ สถาปัตยกรรม ภูมิสถาปัตยกรรม และศาสตร์ด้านวัฒนธรรม งานวิจัยนี้จึงเป็นรากฐานสำหรับการอนุรักษ์เชิงเปรียบเทียบในอนาคต และ ส่งเสริมการตระหนักรู้ระดับโลกต่อความหลากหลายของการถ่ายทอดความหมายผ่านศิลปกรรมขนาดใหญ่

Introduction

The intersection of Thai and Italian artistic traditions became particularly pronounced in the late 19th century with the arrival of Corrado Feroci, later known in Thailand as Silpa Bhirasri, who served as a royal artist under King Rama VII and contributed significantly to art education at the Fine Arts Department of Silpakorn University. His influence was so transformative that he is now regarded as the pioneer of modern Thai art (Poshyananda, 1992). However, artistic parallels between Thailand and Italy can be traced much earlier, particularly in the monumental stone sculptures of Khao Mor in Thailand and the Apennine Colossus in Italy (Fletcher, 2001), both of which reflect the stylistic principles of Italian Mannerism. These sculptures exhibit striking formal similarities, characterized by their colossal scale and mountain-like structures with interior spaces accessible to visitors (Boucher, 1991; Avery, 1993). Despite emerging from distinct cultural and artistic traditions, both works integrate seamlessly into their respective landscapes, demonstrating an interplay between natural and constructed environments (Avery, 1993). Khao Mor, a traditional Thai garden, was meticulously designed to replicate natural scenery through the arrangement of trees, shrubs, and stone sculptures, which often take on geometric or architectural forms, including temples, stupas, and representations of animals and mythical beings (Pinyonatthagarn, 2018). Similarly, the Apennine Colossus, an iconic Italian sculpture, merges elements of the human

form with natural features such as rock formations, vegetation, and water, reinforcing the illusion that the statue is an organic extension of the surrounding landscape (Luchinat, 2004).

Both Thailand and Italy have cultivated distinct traditions in stone statue craftsmanship, shaped by evolving ideological influences over time (Stierlin, 2009). While extensive scholarship has examined the heritage attributes of the Khao Mor and the Apennine Colossus (Cole, 2011; Fisher, 2017), the historical and artistic interconnections between these monumental sculptures have remained largely unexamined. In recent years, the expanding scope of heritage studies and the increasing emphasis on cultural heritage conservation have led to greater governmental involvement in safeguarding Thailand's cultural legacy (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017; Jiajanphong, 1988). This study adopts a chronological framework to analyze how shifting political and governance structures have shaped the perception and preservation of heritage over time (Byrne, 2014). It begins by investigating the role of historic stone statues in Thailand's heritage conservation framework, situating them within broader discourses of cultural identity and preservation (Peleggi, 2002).

Existing research has tended to emphasize the ideological and artistic significance of each monument individually—for example, the Khao Mor in Buddhist cosmology or the Colossus as a Mannerist spectacle (Pallanti, 2006)—yet has rarely considered them together. As a result, most studies treat them in isolation, overlooking shared themes of scale, integration with nature, and cosmological meaning. This lack of cross-cultural analysis limits our understanding of how different societies developed parallel strategies for uniting art, landscape, and spirituality. Addressing this gap, the present study places the Thai and Italian cases in direct dialogue, examining both convergences and divergences in their conceptualization and construction. In doing so, it situates these works within broader discussions of how monumental art communicates cultural values, asserting that comparative study can uncover deeper symbolic logics often obscured when cases are viewed separately.

Rather than viewing these statues as static artifacts, this research explores their transformation over time, emphasizing their broader cultural and symbolic significance beyond immediate historical contexts (Harrison, 2013; Lowenthal, 2015). The study also engages with contemporary debates in heritage and conservation, highlighting how these monuments embody both tangible and intangible dimensions of meaning. By bridging disciplines—art history, landscape architecture, religious studies, and cultural heritage—it demonstrates the value of an integrative approach for understanding how monumental sculptures serve as living expressions of identity, belief, and power. Ultimately, this research contributes to comparative heritage discourse by providing new insights into the shared trajectories of the Khao Mor and the Apennine Colossus and by reinforcing the importance of cross-cultural perspectives in preserving and interpreting monumental stone art.

1. Navigating Significant Elements in Creating the Historic Stone Statues

Any material capable of being shaped in three dimensions holds the potential for sculptural application (Gombrich, 1995). However, certain materials have been historically favored due to their structural integrity, aesthetic qualities, and accessibility (Honour & Fleming, 2009). Among these, stone has long been the preferred medium for statues and monumental sculptures, particularly in outdoor environments, owing to its durability and resistance to weathering (Richter, 1970). In Italy, stone has played a pivotal role in the artistic and architectural traditions for centuries, with artisans producing iconic masterpieces such as the Duomo, the Colosseum, and Michelangelo's David, exemplifying an enduring legacy of craftsmanship. This tradition persists in contemporary design, where artisans continue to meticulously select and refine unique marbles, employing precise cutting techniques and hand-finishing methods to create luxurious pieces that celebrate the aesthetic potential of natural materials.

Beyond Italy, stone has also been integral to the architectural heritage of Southeast Asia, where weathered laterite—a highly durable and locally abundant material—has been widely utilized in Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia. The extensive use of laterite in ancient temple construction underscores its historical significance not only as a structural material but also as an essential medium for artistic expression and architectural innovation. In this context, stone statues serve as more than aesthetic or functional objects; they represent physical embodiments of collective memory, cultural heritage, and societal identity. Their enduring presence reflects artistic and architectural advancements while also serving as a bridge between historical traditions and contemporary cultural narratives.

Analyzing the defining characteristics of historic stone statues across these regions offers valuable insights into how they communicate identity and meaning. This study identifies six fundamental characteristics that inform the identity of historic stone statues, forming the foundation for understanding the intricate relationship between Italy's sculptural traditions and those of Southeast Asia.

1) Context and Setting: The context and setting of a stone statue encompass the broader environmental and atmospheric conditions in which it is situated. The relationship between a statue and its surrounding context is a fundamental aspect of its identity, shaping both its aesthetic and cultural significance (Ruskin, 1853). Effective contextual integration requires a deliberate effort to harmonize the statue with its surrounding landscape—both natural and architectural—ensuring that it enhances rather than disrupts the spatial composition (Kleiner, 2017). This interplay between sculpture and setting not only influences the viewer's perception but also reinforces the historical and artistic narratives embedded within the monument itself.

2) Creation Concept: The creation concept constitutes an abstract framework that underpins the development of more concrete artistic principles (Read, 1956). Fundamental design principles serve as guiding rules that inform the overall composition and structural integrity of a work. The conceptualization of a statue is inherently shaped by the choices of its creator, encompassing stylistic decisions, thematic intent, and material selection. Whether an artist deliberately adopts a specific stylistic approach or unconsciously adheres to an evolving aesthetic, stylistic transformations are often driven by the introduction of new techniques and materials, reflecting broader artistic and technological advancements (Honour & Fleming, 2009).

3) Shape and Form: Shape and form are fundamental to the identity of a statue, as they determine its visual presence and, in some cases, its functional role within a given space. The mass of a sculpture refers to its solid, material volume—the physical bulk enclosed within its surfaces—which defines its spatial and structural properties (Giedion, 1941). The perception of shape and form is inherently dynamic, as it is influenced by the interplay of light and shadow, which alters the visual experience of the sculpture from different vantage points (Janson, 2006). This interaction between materiality and illumination contributes to the statue's expressive qualities, reinforcing its artistic and architectural significance.

4) Internal Space: The internal spatial organization of a sculpture refers to the deliberate arrangement of space within and around its structural composition. Viewers engage with a sculpture's spatial dynamics in three primary ways: through the extension or movement of its material components into surrounding space, the enclosure or creation of voids within its form, and the relational positioning of its elements across space (Gombrich, 1995). These spatial interactions contribute to the perceptual and experiential dimensions of the artwork, influencing how audiences navigate and interpret the sculpture. However, spatial organization as a conceptual and artistic principle should be distinguished from the technical execution of the work, which pertains to the craftsmanship involved in material selection and sculptural techniques (Read, 1956).
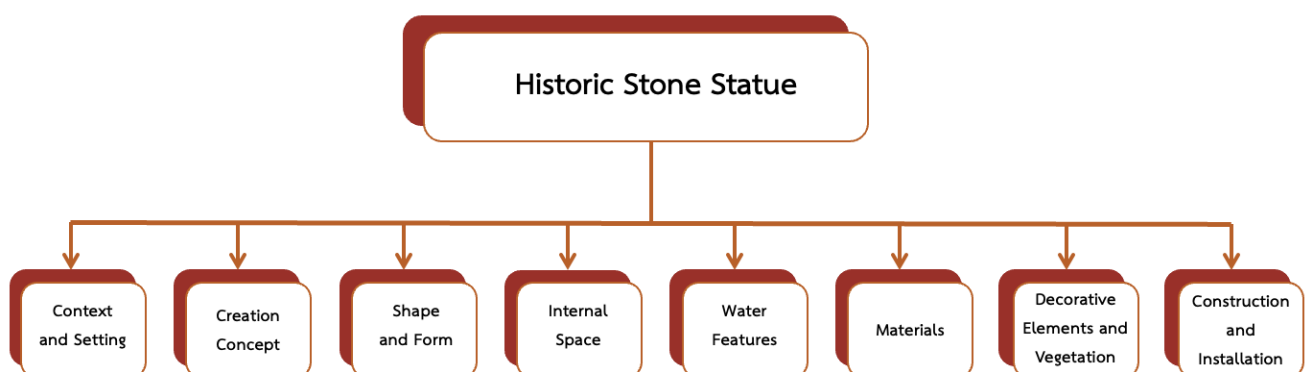
5) Water Features: Water features can serve as integral additions to stone statues, enhancing their aesthetic and

spatial impact. These elements are often designed to incorporate flowing or cascading water, creating dynamic visual and sensory effects. The integration of water with stone statues can take various forms, including fountains, waterfalls, spouts, or tiered water structures, each contributing to the overall composition in distinct ways (Fletcher, 2001). The design of such features is typically guided by two primary objectives: to harmonize seamlessly with the surrounding natural landscape or to function as a striking focal point within a more structured, formal setting (Kleiner, 2017). Through these interactions, water elements not only amplify the artistic and architectural qualities of the statue but also influence the viewer's perception and engagement with the space.

6) Materials: Materials play a fundamental role in shaping a statue's identity, influencing its aesthetic qualities, durability, and environmental impact. Different types of stone offer varying effects in terms of surface texture, interaction with light and shadow, and coloration, all of which contribute to the overall sculptural composition (Richter, 1970). Among the most defining attributes of stone are its natural colors and textures, which enhance its visual and tactile appeal. Fine-grained stones can be intricately carved to achieve delicate details and a polished finish, while coarse-grained varieties necessitate a more robust, expressive treatment (Honour & Fleming, 2009). Furthermore, the selection of locally sourced stone not only reflects the availability of regional resources but also reinforces the cultural and geographical identity of a statue, embedding it within its specific historical and environmental context (Janson, 2006).

7) Decorative Elements and Vegetation: Decorative elements and vegetation play a crucial role in enhancing the aesthetic appeal of a stone statue, facilitating its seamless integration into the surrounding landscape. Thoughtfully selected decorative features and plantings can complement the statue's form, reinforcing its artistic intent while creating a harmonious dialogue between sculpture and environment. By incorporating these elements, a statue can be more effectively embedded within its setting, enriching both its own visual impact and the overall spatial composition of the landscape (Fletcher, 2001).

8) Construction and Installation: The construction of a stone statue requires a high degree of craftsmanship, combining both traditional sculptural methods and modern technological advancements (Ruskin, 1853). Beyond the creation process, the transportation and installation of the statue are equally critical to ensuring its structural stability and visual impact. Larger sculptures often necessitate the use of structural supports to maintain their integrity, along with careful planning regarding their orientation, lighting, and spatial interaction with the surrounding environment (Giedion, 1941). These considerations are essential in preserving the statue's artistic intent while enhancing its integration into its designated setting.

Figure 1 Six Characteristics of Identity in Stone Statue

(**Source:** Selanon, 2025)

These elements collectively contribute to the distinctiveness and identity of a stone statue. A comprehensive understanding of how these characteristics interact is essential for architects, urban planners, and scholars seeking to preserve historical traditions while fostering innovation in sculptural and architectural design. Future research could further explore case studies that exemplify these defining features, providing deeper insights into their cultural, historical, and social significance. Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the key characteristics that shape the identity of a stone statue, illustrating their interrelationships within broader artistic and environmental contexts.

Research Objectives

This study builds on the framework of six defining characteristics of historic stone statues by applying qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to two cases: the Thai Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas and the Italian Apennine Colossus. QCA provides a structured approach to identify similarities and differences in their historical development while also uncovering possible interrelations between them (Ragin, 1987; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). It allows for a historical examination of how each statue evolved, tracing turning points, artistic and ideological influences, and local elements that shaped their distinct yet interconnected trajectories. From this perspective, the study develops a foundation for understanding how the two sculptures were formed over time and how they engage with ideas of cultural and national identity.

The analysis begins with a review of the six key characteristics—context, creation concept, form, internal space, water features, materials, and decoration/installation—which serve as the systematic framework for comparison. Each monument was examined against these conditions, and their attributes were coded into a comparative matrix. This structured coding made it possible to identify both points of convergence, such as the shared use of stone to convey cosmological or allegorical meaning, and points of divergence, such as the treatment of scale and internal space.

The framework was then applied through a cross-cultural lens that places the Thai and Italian cases in direct dialogue rather than treating them in isolation. This approach reveals how similar artistic concerns—such as scale, integration with nature, and cosmological meaning—were expressed in different cultural contexts. The cross-cultural perspective complements the QCA method by highlighting not only descriptive similarities and differences but also the cultural logics that explain how the two monuments evolved within distinct political, spiritual, and social frameworks (Hannerz, 1992; Jullien, 2011; Said, 1978).

To reinforce this lens, the study draws on theoretical debates in cross-cultural analysis within art and heritage studies. Cross-cultural comparison differs from simple descriptive juxtaposition in that it actively situates cases within a shared analytical space, emphasizing both the convergence of human concerns and the divergence of cultural logics. Scholars such as Edward Said (1978), François Jullien (2011), and Ulf Hannerz (1992) stress that comparison is not merely a catalog of similarities and differences but a way of revealing how cultural systems construct meaning in distinct yet commensurable ways. In this study, this perspective allows the Khao Mor and the Apennine Colossus to be examined not only as parallel monuments but as dialogical expressions of cosmology, myth, and power. This framing ensures that the analysis moves beyond descriptive comparison toward a theoretically grounded cross-cultural interpretation.

Building on this foundation, the study carries out a comparative analysis of the two statues, with particular attention to the processes of their creation and transformation. The analysis also considers their interrelationship, including the extent to which they reflect resilience capabilities, and evaluates how these align with broader conceptual frameworks of cultural heritage (Harrison, 2013; Smith, 2006). By combining QCA with cross-cultural analysis, the study moves beyond narrative description to a systematic identification of patterns. This methodological integration provides deeper insight into how the Khao Mor and the Apennine Colossus relate across historical, cultural, and interpretive contexts, contributing to

a more nuanced understanding of how monumental stone statues have been imagined, shaped, and sustained in different societies.

Beyond applying QCA and cross-cultural analysis, this study develops a comparative interpretive framework that systematizes how context, form, internal space, materiality, and symbolic function interrelate. This framework is intended not only to guide the present analysis but also to serve as a transferable model for future studies of monumental art in diverse cultural settings.

Research Results and Discussion

1. Historical Background

1.1 The Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas, Thailand: According to the Office of the Royal Society (2009), the term Khao Mor originates from the Thai word Khao, meaning "mountain," and Ta-Mor, an adapted term from Cambodian signifying "rock." The design of a Khao Mor garden visually embodies this meaning, featuring artificial stone formations or pebble mountains as central elements. To enhance its atmospheric aesthetics, additional features such as waterfalls are often incorporated. Traditionally, the Khao Mor was conceived as a tranquil retreat within temple complexes, reflecting Thai cultural values that emphasize harmony, contemplation, and reverence for nature. Beyond its role as a decorative feature, it has become a distinctive symbol of traditional Thai temple architecture.

Archaeological evidence suggests that Khao Mor gardens originated during the Ayutthaya period (1351– 1767), initially confined to royal palaces and temple grounds. Over time, their presence expanded beyond the palace walls, becoming significant decorative features in the gardens of Thai noble households. As the concept evolved, the Khao Mor became an integral element of Thai cultural landscapes. By the Rattanakosin period (1782–present), these gardens were increasingly incorporated into temple complexes, making them accessible to a broader segment of Thai society beyond the nobility. A notable example is the Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas (Figure 2), constructed in 1828 by Somdet Chao Phraya Boroma Mahaprayurawong, a prominent nobleman during the reign of King Rama III (Peleggi, 2002; Pinyonatthagarn, 2018).

Figure 2 The Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas, Thailand

(**Source:** Wilailuk, 2024)

1.2 Historical Background of the Italian Mannerism's Apennine Colossus, Italy: The Apennine Colossus is a monumental sculpture situated within the park of Villa Demidoff, near Florence, Italy. Created in the late 16th century, this 35-foot-tall sculpture exemplifies the fusion of rugged natural beauty and artistic innovation characteristic of the Renaissance period (Luchinat, 2004). Designed and sculpted by Giambologna (Jean de Boulogne), a Flemish-born artist renowned for his contributions to Italian Mannerism, the Apennine Colossus embodies the artist's distinctive style. Giambologna, active in Italy during the late 16th century, played a pivotal role in the transition from the classical aesthetics of the Renaissance to the more dynamic, expressive forms of the Baroque period (Pallanti, 2006). His sculptures are distinguished by their dramatic compositions, intricate detailing, and complex spatial arrangements, all of which are evident in the design of the Colossus.

Completed around 1580, the Apennine Colossus was originally conceived as a fountain, symbolically representing the Apennine Mountains, a significant geographical feature of Italy (Luchinat, 2004). This monumental work serves as an allegorical representation of the natural world, merging human and geological forms to evoke both the grandeur and serenity of the landscape. The Colossus—depicted as a hybrid figure, part human and part mountain—embodies the Mannerist theme of synthesizing nature and artifice. Giambologna's innovative approach integrates rock formations, vegetation, and water elements, crafting an organic sculpture that appears to emerge naturally from the terrain.

The commissioning of the Apennine Colossus by Francesco I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, reflects the broader ambitions of the Medici family, who were prominent patrons of the arts during the Renaissance and Mannerist periods. The Colossus was part of a larger landscape design project, intended to symbolize Medici wealth, influence, and mastery over nature (Luchinat, 2004). Its intricate design aligns with the Mannerist aesthetic, which embraced complexity, theatricality, and deliberate artificiality in contrast to the balanced and idealized forms of the High Renaissance (Pallanti, 2006).

Today, the Apennine Colossus is regarded as one of Giambologna's most significant works and a landmark achievement of Italian Mannerism. Its location within Villa Demidoff, originally conceived as a landscape garden, continues to attract scholars and visitors alike. The sculpture's colossal scale, integration with the surrounding environment, and innovative design underscore its historical and artistic significance, demonstrating a revolutionary approach to the intersection of art and nature (Luchinat, 2004; Pallanti, 2006).

2. Comparative Analysis and Discussion of the Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas Woravihara, Thailand and the Italian Mannerism's Apennine Colossus, Italy

Guided by a cross-cultural comparative framework, this section examines both the convergences and divergences between the Thai Khao Mor and the Italian Apennine Colossus across six dimensions. This lens ensures that the analysis moves beyond simple description, situating each monument within a dialogue that highlights shared themes as well as cultural distinctions.

2.1 Context and Setting: Urban Spiritual Refuge and Aristocratic Landscape Theater
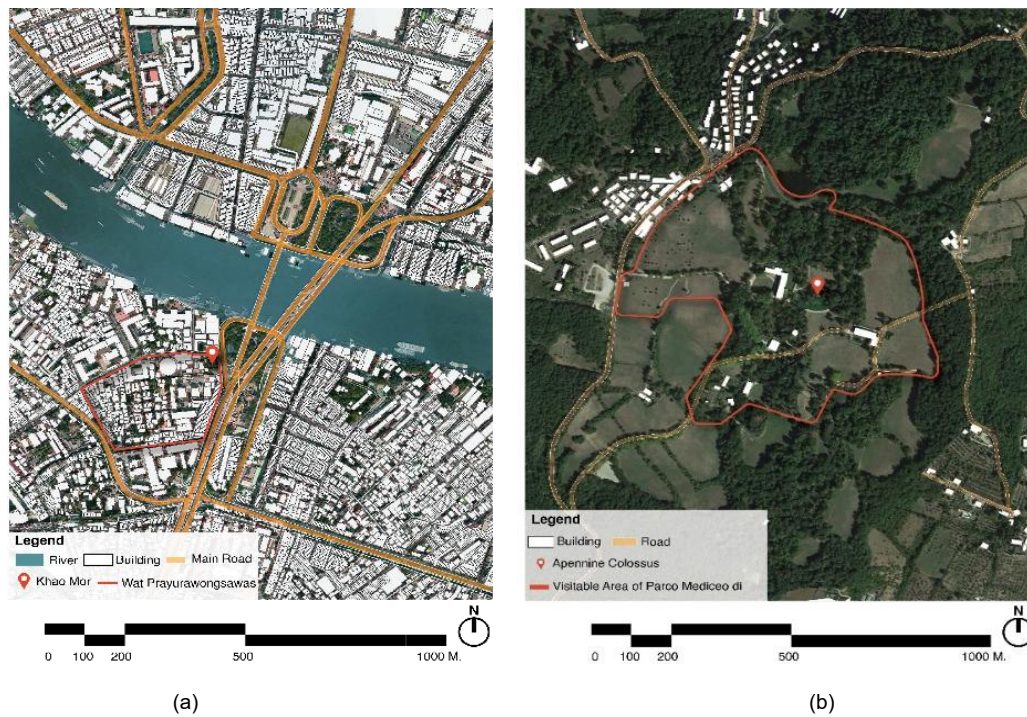
The spatial context of each monument reveals how cultural values are inscribed into landscapes. The Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas occupies a compact temple ground in the heart of Bangkok (Figure 3a), where sacred architecture intersects with dense urban life (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017). Its placement within a pond adjacent to the ordination hall and meditation spaces underscores its role as a contemplative sanctuary within a bustling city (Fisher, 2017). Symbolically, this juxtaposition embodies the Buddhist ideal of creating harmony between spiritual practice and worldly existence (Swearer, 2010). The pond, temple halls, and the artificial mountain together form a sacred microcosm,

where movement through the space is carefully choreographed to guide worshippers from the profane to the sacred (Cohen, 2001). Functionally, the Khao Mor serves as a meditative focal point, shaping ritual circulation within the temple compound and reinforcing the cosmological hierarchy of Buddhist spatial design (Woodward, 1997). From a socio-political perspective, its construction during the early Rattanakosin period reflects the role of elite patronage in consolidating Buddhist authority and visualizing cosmological order within the newly established capital (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2017). Today, the monument's urban location enhances its visibility as a cultural landmark but also poses heritage challenges, as temple grounds face encroachment from traffic, pollution, and mass tourism (Byrne, 2014). These pressures highlight tensions between sacred function and heritage commodification, raising questions about how religious sites are curated in the age of urban expansion and global tourism (Winter, 2007).

In contrast, the Apennine Colossus at Villa Demidoff commands an expansive natural setting framed by the Tuscan hills (Figure 3b). Designed as part of a Medici villa landscape, it embodies the Renaissance aspiration to merge art, nature, and aristocratic display (Avery, 1993; Boucher, 1991). Its secluded location within a park-like estate aligns with Mannerist ideals of theatricality and surprise, where sculpture was meant to be encountered unexpectedly, evoking awe among privileged guests (Cole, 2011). The landscape itself becomes a stage, with the Colossus positioned as both guardian and emblem of Medici authority (Friedman, 1988). Symbolically, its integration with forests, hills, and watercourses makes the giant appear as a living embodiment of the Apennine Mountains, uniting mythological allegory with natural grandeur (Pallanti, 2006). Functionally, its placement also served practical goals: the surrounding park was designed to showcase hydraulic engineering, artificial grottoes, and hidden waterworks, reinforcing the Medici commitment to innovation and spectacle (Fletcher, 2001). From a socio-political perspective, the setting projected the Medici family's mastery over nature and art, displaying their cultural capital to rival courts of Europe (Goldthwaite, 1993). In heritage terms, its distance from urban centers has preserved its environmental authenticity but also creates challenges of accessibility, funding, and interpretation, as its meaning shifts from private aristocratic symbol to public cultural attraction (Choay, 2001).

Viewed cross-culturally, these contrasting contexts highlight two distinct strategies of situating monumental art. The Khao Mor demonstrates how a small-scale sacred landscape can act as a spiritual refuge embedded in urban density, where religious and social functions intertwine within everyday life. The Apennine Colossus, by contrast, illustrates how monumental sculpture transforms a rural villa estate into a theatrical stage of political imagination, where exclusivity and spectacle reinforce aristocratic power. Despite these differences, both reveal the human impulse to situate meaning at the intersection of art, landscape, and belief—whether as an urban sanctuary of meditation or as a rural performance of authority. Together, they underscore how context not only frames experience but also mediates the ways in which societies use monumental forms to articulate identity, spirituality, and power (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

Figure 3 (a)Khao Mor Wat Prayurawongsawas with Its Context of Urban Surrounding and

(b)Apennine Colossus with Its Context of Urban Surrounding
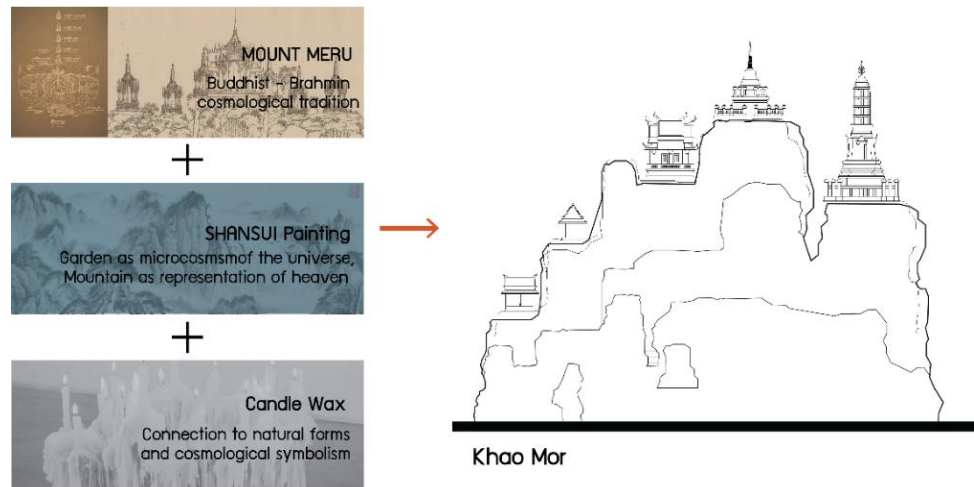
(**Source:** Selanon, 2025a Adapted from Google Maps)

2.2 Creation Concept: Cosmological Symbol and Mythological Allegory

The ideas that shaped the Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas in Bangkok and the Apennine Colossus at Villa Demidoff in Florence illustrate how monumental works of art emerge from different cultural imaginations. Both embody the integration of landscape, sculpture, and meaning, but the conceptual foundations guiding their creation are strikingly distinct. The Khao Mor is firmly grounded in Buddhist cosmology (Figure 4). Central to its design is the symbolic representation of Mount Meru, the axis of the Buddhist universe around which all existence is ordered (Fisher, 2017; Strong, 2005). By constructing an artificial mountain within the temple compound, the builders created a tangible model of the cosmos. Its tiered form, miniature shrines, and surrounding pond are more than aesthetic choices; they serve as spatial metaphors for Buddhist teachings on impermanence, rebirth, and the pursuit of enlightenment (Jermsawatdi, 1979). To move around the Khao Mor was, and still is, to inhabit a symbolic landscape that mirrors the structure of the universe and guides reflection on the path to liberation.

This cosmological vision was enriched by Chinese influences. Traditions of *shan shui* (mountain–water) painting, where landscapes symbolize harmony between humanity and nature, resonated strongly with Buddhist ideas (Murck, 2000; Wong, 1991). In Thai culture, these influences blended with Brahmanic and Buddhist cosmologies to produce unique expressions of sacred space (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). The artificial mountain of the Khao Mor thus stands at the intersection of multiple cultural streams, synthesizing Chinese philosophy and Buddhist metaphysics in a form that is distinctly Thai. Functionally, it served as a meditative focus for monks and a didactic model for laypeople, enabling both to grasp cosmological concepts through embodied experience (Fisher, 2017).

The monument also carried a political dimension. Its construction in the reign of King Rama III reflected the role of elite patronage in consolidating Buddhist authority in the early Rattanakosin capital (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017). Temples were not only religious centers but also nodes of social and political order, and the building of a Khao Mor was

a public affirmation of piety, legitimacy, and cosmological alignment (Lertluksna, Pholpoke, & Vongvisitsin, 2013). By recreating the cosmic mountain, patrons symbolically inscribed their role in upholding the moral universe. Today, however, while the Khao Mor continues to serve as a ritual and meditative space, its meaning is increasingly reframed through heritage tourism. Many visitors encounter it as a picturesque garden mountain, a shift that illustrates how sacred landscapes can be reinterpreted when they move into the global heritage arena.

Figure 4 The Creation Concept Diagram of Khao Mor Wat Prayurawongsawas

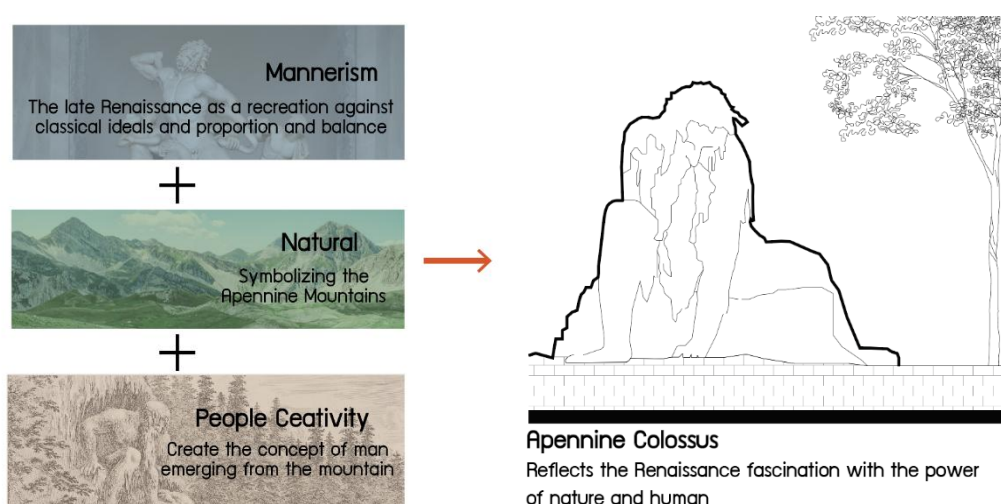(**Source:** Adapted from Lertluksna, et al., 2013)

The Apennine Colossus reflects an entirely different conceptual world (Figure 5), one shaped by Renaissance humanism, mythology, and artistic ambition. Designed by Giambologna in the late sixteenth century under the patronage of Francesco I de' Medici, the Colossus embodies the Mannerist fascination with scale, drama, and complexity (Avery, 1993; Cole, 2011). Rather than modeling the cosmos, it personifies the Apennine Mountains themselves, fusing human and geological forms into a monumental allegory (Pallanti, 2006). Where the Khao Mor symbolized a sacred mountain, the Colossus became the mountain made flesh—a mythopoetic giant rising from stone and earth. This creation concept reflects the Renaissance impulse to merge art, science, and myth (Boucher, 1991). The Colossus was not only an artwork but also a technological marvel. Its internal chambers, grottoes, and hydraulic systems blurred the line between sculpture and architecture, turning it into both a spectacle and a machine (Cole, 2011). Water coursed through hidden pipes to emerge from its mouth, hands, and grotto, dramatizing the Medici mastery of natural forces and their patronage of cutting-edge engineering (Avery, 1993). Functionally, it served as an attraction for aristocratic guests, a place where art and technology performed together in the service of dynastic prestige. Symbolically, it asserted Medici power, presenting the family as both heirs to classical antiquity and pioneers of Renaissance innovation (Pallanti, 2006).

The Colossus also reflects the intellectual spirit of its time. Renaissance humanism celebrated the potential of human creativity to rival and reshape nature (Cole, 2011). By merging man and mountain, Giambologna embodied this aspiration in stone. The Colossus was at once a mythological allegory, a demonstration of technical ingenuity, and a theatrical performance of power. Today, while admired as a striking landmark, its deeper meanings are often obscured. Visitors encounter it as a picturesque curiosity within a park, highlighting the challenges of preserving not just the physical form of monuments but also the symbolic frameworks that originally animated them.

Seen together, these two works illuminate different ways in which societies conceptualize monumental art. The Khao Mor embodies a sacred cosmological order, integrating Buddhist metaphysics with Chinese aesthetic traditions to

create a landscape of meditation and teaching (Fisher, 2017; Murck, 2000). The Apennine Colossus, by contrast, embodies Renaissance mythmaking and political theater, transforming natural forms into a spectacle of human ingenuity and aristocratic ambition (Avery, 1993; Pallanti, 2006). One translates the structure of the cosmos into a temple garden; the other transforms a mountain into a giant that proclaims dynastic power.

Despite their differences, both works express a shared human desire: to give tangible form to intangible beliefs, whether religious or political, spiritual or mythological. Creation here is never just a technical act. It is a philosophical and cultural gesture that anchors abstract ideas in stone and landscape, allowing them to endure across generations. The Khao Mor and the Apennine Colossus, though born of different traditions, demonstrate how monumental art can serve as a bridge between metaphysical concepts and lived experience, embodying values that continue to resonate even as their meanings shift over time.

Figure 5 The Creation Concept Diagram of Apennine Colossus

(**Source:** Adapted from Talbot, 2017)

2.3 Shape and Form: Miniature Mountain and Monumental Giant

The physical form of each monument reveals how artistic choices materialize cultural worldviews. The Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas takes the form of an artificial mountain, modest in scale yet rich in symbolic depth. Constructed from layered rocks, adorned with shrines, and surrounded by a reflective pond, it compresses the vast Buddhist cosmos into a miniature landscape (Fisher, 2017; Jermsawatdi, 1979). Its asymmetrical composition evokes natural rock outcrops, while its tiered arrangement reflects the order of Mount Meru and its surrounding ranges (Strong, 2005). This balance between natural irregularity and cosmological hierarchy creates a form that is both organic and symbolic, drawing worshippers into a landscape that feels simultaneously familiar and transcendent.

Functionally, the Khao Mor's scale makes it approachable and immersive. Devotees can walk around its base, pause before small shrines, and peer into grotto-like niches, engaging with a model of the universe that can be experienced directly (Lertluksna, Pholpoke, & Vongvisitsin, 2013). For monks, its compact form provides a meditative focus; for lay visitors, it serves as a visual guide to Buddhist cosmology, making abstract teachings tangible (Fisher, 2017). The craftsmanship of the Rattanakosin period is evident in the integration of stone, stucco, and decorative motifs that merge religious symbolism with artistry (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017). Yet its delicate construction and modest scale
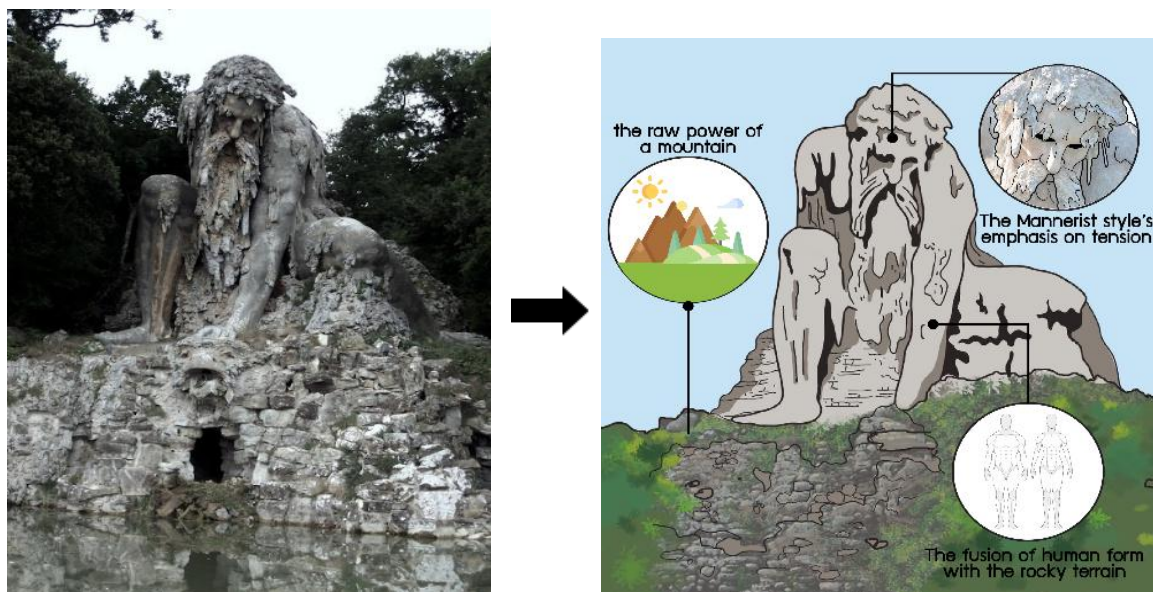
also pose challenges. Weathering, pollution, and mass visitation gradually erode its surfaces, underscoring the tension between sacred practice and heritage preservation in an urban environment (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

The Apennine Colossus offers a strikingly different vision of form. Rising more than ten meters high, the giant fuses human anatomy with geological mass, transforming a mountain into a colossal figure (Avery, 1993; Pallanti, 2006). Its crouched posture, one hand pressed to the earth and head bowed in watchful contemplation, conveys both power and burden. The sculptural details heighten its theatricality: its beard flows into stalactite-like textures, its body merges with stone, and its sheer scale commands awe (Boucher, 1991). This hybrid form exemplifies the Mannerist taste for ambiguity and exaggeration, deliberately blurring the lines between man and mountain, sculpture and geology (Cole, 2011).

The Colossus was designed to be more than sculpture. Its body housed chambers, grottoes, and staircases, allowing visitors to enter the giant itself (Figure 6). This inhabitable quality extended its meaning, turning the statue into a landscape of exploration and surprise (Avery, 1993). Hydraulic systems animated the figure further: water once poured from its mouth, hands, and jug, giving the impression of a living presence (Pallanti, 2006). These effects served not only to delight guests but also to reinforce Medici authority, presenting the family as patrons whose power encompassed art, science, and nature alike (Cole, 2011). In heritage terms, its monumental size has helped it endure as a landmark, yet the complexity of its mixed construction materials and hydraulic systems makes its restoration particularly demanding (Boucher, 1991).

Viewed together, the two monuments embody contrasting strategies of form. The Khao Mor miniaturizes the cosmos, inviting intimacy and reflection through smallness, while the Apennine Colossus enlarges myth into a giant that overwhelms with awe (Avery, 1993; Fisher, 2017). One relies on compact scale to foster meditation; the other on monumental scale to stage spectacle. Yet both pursue a shared aim: to make intangible beliefs visible and lasting. The Khao Mor turns doctrine into landscape, grounding Buddhist cosmology in stone, while the Colossus transforms landscape into body, turning myth and political ideology into theatrical form (Jermsawatdi, 1979; Cole, 2011). In their differences, they reveal the breadth of human imagination in shaping monuments that translate faith, myth, and power into enduring physical presence.

Figure 6 The Physical Characteristic and Components of Apennine Colossus

(**Source:** Adapted from Talbot, 2017)

2.4 Internal Space: Sacred Niches and Inhabitable Chambers

The treatment of internal space in the Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas and the Apennine Colossus at Villa Demidoff illustrates two very different cultural approaches to how monuments are experienced from within. Both use interiority not merely as a structural feature but as a medium of meaning, though they do so in contrasting ways. In the Khao Mor, interior space is modest and contemplative (Figure 7). Small grotto-like cavities punctuate the rocky surface, each housing miniature shrines, statues of deities, or symbolic motifs drawn from Buddhist cosmology (Fisher, 2017; Swearer, 2004). These niches are designed less for bodily occupation than for spiritual engagement, inviting worshippers to bow, make offerings, or quietly reflect. They embody the principle of the microcosm: just as the entire mountain represents Mount Meru, the cosmic center of the Buddhist universe, each cavity holds a fragment of that sacred order in miniature (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017). For monks, these niches provide meditative focal points; for lay visitors, they act as visual gateways into Buddhist teachings, translating abstract cosmology into accessible images and spaces.

The design of these grottoes reflects cross-cultural influences as well. Chinese gardens often incorporated caves and rocky chambers as symbolic thresholds between the worldly and the transcendent (Keswick, 2003; Clunas, 1996). In the Khao Mor, such elements were woven into Buddhist practice, turning small cavities into liminal zones where sacred images could be encountered in intimate ways. Functionally, the scale of the niches encourages close bodily gestures—kneeling, bowing, peering into small openings—that cultivate humility and reverence. Yet this intimacy brings fragility: repeated contact, combined with the pressures of urban pollution and heavy visitation, gradually erodes the delicate interiors (Fine Arts Department, 2018). Preserving their symbolic power while maintaining access has become a growing heritage challenge.
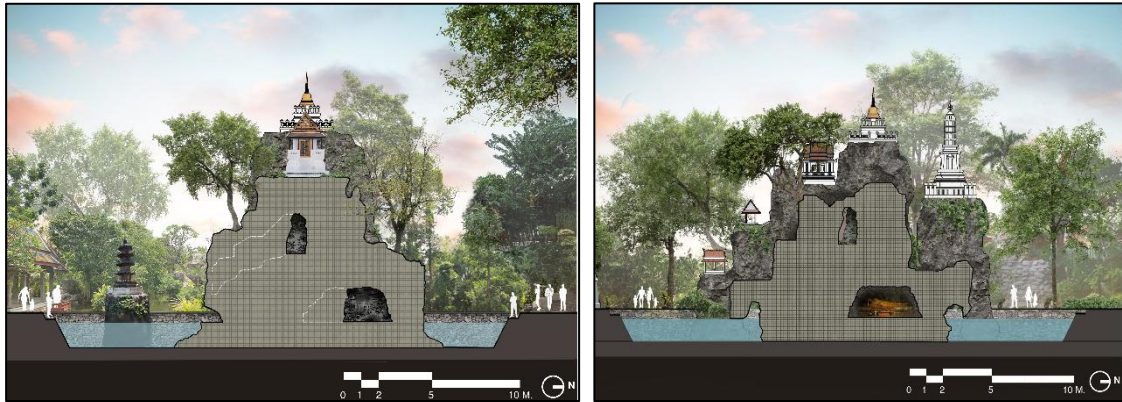
The Apennine Colossus presents a strikingly different vision of interior space (Figure 8). Giambologna conceived the giant not only as a sculpture but also as an architectural shell, its body designed to be entered and explored (Avery, 1993; Baldini, 2000). Within its torso and head were chambers, staircases, and grottoes that transformed the statue into a building. These interiors were often embellished with frescoes, fountains, and artificial stalactites, producing an immersive environment that blurred the line between art and nature (Boucher, 1991; Cole, 2011). Entering the Colossus was itself part of the artistic experience, allowing visitors to journey through the body of the giant and encounter a landscape staged within stone.

Hydraulic systems heightened this theatricality. Water coursed through hidden pipes to emerge in grottoes or drip from ceilings, creating sensory effects of sound and movement. Some accounts even describe fireplaces installed in the giant's head, releasing smoke through its nostrils and reinforcing the impression of a living being (Pallanti, 2006). These playful mechanisms delighted guests but also served a political purpose: they displayed Medici wealth, ingenuity, and control over natural forces (Baldini, 2000). The interiors thus became a stage for aristocratic entertainment, where art, science, and power converged.

Symbolically, the inhabitable chambers extended the allegory of the Colossus. To walk inside the giant was to move through the Apennine Mountains themselves, experiencing the landscape from within (Avery, 1993). In this sense, the Colossus inverted the logic of the Khao Mor: while the Thai monument compressed the universe into a miniature mountain, the Italian giant expanded myth into an inhabitable form. In heritage terms, these interiors remain both invaluable and problematic. They preserve traces of Renaissance innovation, yet their complex mix of sculpture, masonry, and hydraulics makes restoration especially demanding (Boucher, 1991). Curators must decide whether to restore functionality or conserve them as silent witnesses of past ingenuity.

Viewed together, the two monuments reveal distinct cultural logics of interiority. The Khao Mor employs small, symbolic spaces that encourage intimacy, reflection, and humility, while the Apennine Colossus creates vast, inhabitable

interiors that astonish, entertain, and proclaim dynastic authority. One invites quiet devotion; the other stages spectacle. Yet both show a shared human impulse to experience monuments from within, to be drawn bodily into spaces where belief, myth, and power are made tangible. By shaping how visitors kneel, bow, or wander through their interiors, these monuments transform abstract ideas—whether Buddhist cosmology or Renaissance allegory—into lived spatial experience.

Figure 7 Internal Space of the Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas Woravihara, Thailand.
(**Source:** Adapted from Lertluksna, et al., 2013)

Figure 8 Internal Space of the Italian Mannerism's Apennine Colossus, Italy
(**Source:** Adapted from van der Ree, 2012)

2.5 Water Features: Symbolism, Function, and Cross-Cultural Significance

The role of water in both monuments carries deep symbolic and cultural significance while also fulfilling practical and aesthetic functions. In the Thai context, the still pond surrounding the Khao Mor (Figure 9a) embodies the Buddhist ideals of serenity and reflection. Its calm surface mirrors the meditative mind, reinforcing the temple's identity as a place of spiritual refuge (Fisher, 2017; Swearer, 2004). On a practical level, the pond moderates the microclimate by cooling the surrounding space and provides a habitat for turtles, creatures associated in Thai Buddhism with longevity and merit-making (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017). Politically, this design reflects the Rattanakosin-era ambition to inscribe cosmological order into temple landscapes, thereby affirming the moral authority of religion in Bangkok's urban fabric (Fine Arts Department, 2018; Thongchai, 2000). In the present day, the pond continues to function as a sacred setting

for ritual practice and as a heritage feature under pressure from urban pollution and climate change, posing new challenges for conservation (UNESCO, 2021).

By contrast, the Apennine Colossus turns water into a dramatic spectacle (Figure 9b). Streams flowing from the giant's mouth, jug, and grotto display the sophistication of Renaissance hydraulic engineering while symbolizing mastery over nature—a theme aligned with Medici political ideology (Avery, 1993; Baldini, 2000). Here water is less about tranquility and more about theatrical display, staged to demonstrate wealth, technological skill, and mythological connections to deities such as Thetis (Boucher, 1991; Cole, 2011). Ingeniously designed pipes once animated the statue with playful jets and cascades, creating an immersive environment for aristocratic guests and capturing the Renaissance fascination with the interplay of art, science, and entertainment (Pallanti, 2006). Today, these hydraulic features require delicate restoration, raising broader debates about whether conservation should prioritize the original mechanical systems or focus on preserving visual authenticity (UNESCO, 2021).

Viewed through a cross-cultural lens, the comparison highlights different but complementary ways of weaving water into monumental art. The Khao Mor treats water as a medium of spiritual contemplation and ecological balance, while the Apennine Colossus stages it as a symbol of human control and political theater. Despite these contrasts, both reveal a shared recognition of water as a vital link between sculpture, landscape, and meaning—whether directed toward enlightenment or spectacle. Together, they underscore the universal human impulse to harness natural elements as bearers of cosmological, social, and cultural meaning.

(a) (b)

Figure 9 (a) Water Feature of Wat Prayurawongsawas Woravihara,

Thailand and (b) the Italian Mannerism's Apennine Colossus, Italy, respectively.

(**Source:** (a) Arunoprayote, 2024; (b) Anderson, 2024)

2.6 Materials: Sacred Stone and Engineered Masonry

The materials used in the Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas and the Apennine Colossus at Villa Demidoff are far more than practical choices of construction; they are the mediums through which cultural values are expressed. Both monuments rely on stone, yet the way it is sourced, assembled, and interpreted reflects very different traditions of meaning. The Khao Mor is built from natural stone arranged to imitate the ruggedness of a mountain (Figure 10a). Rocks of varied size and texture (Figure 10b) are stacked into layered forms, often combined with stucco, mortar, and decorative sculptures (Fine Arts Department, 2018). This deliberate use of irregular stone gives the impression of natural spontaneity while still conveying cosmological order. Symbolically, the stones embody Buddhist notions of permanence and impermanence: enduring in substance yet marked by weathering and change (Swearer, 2004; Fisher, 2017). The addition of miniature shrines, animal figures, and ceramic ornaments enriches the material palette, linking earthly matter to spiritual narratives (Figure 10c) (Strong, 2019).

Functionally, natural stone made the Khao Mor both durable and adaptable. Its porous surfaces encourage moss, lichens, and small plants to take root, creating a living skin that blurs the line between construction and nature (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017). In the tropical climate of Bangkok, this ecological integration strengthens the sense that the artificial mountain belongs to the sacred environment. The choice of stone also made the monument relatively accessible: small rocks could be transported and assembled within temple grounds, making the Khao Mor as much a product of artisanal devotion as of grand architectural ambition (Swearer, 2004).

There is also a socio-political dimension to this material choice. By selecting ordinary stone rather than precious metals or imported marbles, the builders emphasized spiritual authenticity over material wealth. The monument's significance lay in its symbolic resonance, aligning with Buddhist teachings that privilege meaning over luxury (Fisher, 2017). Yet in a contemporary heritage context, this humility poses challenges. The stones are vulnerable to erosion from monsoon rains, pollution, and constant human touch, raising the question of how to preserve their spiritual role while protecting their physical fabric (UNESCO, 2021).

| (a) | (b) | (c) |

Figure 10 Materials Used in Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas
(**Source:** (a) and (b) Adminbenews, 2019; (c) Nokkaew, 2022)

The Apennine Colossus demonstrates a very different material logic. Giambologna employed a composite technique, using local stone, brick, stucco, and masonry to create a figure both massive and detailed (Figure 11a) (Avery, 1993; Boucher, 1991). The brick and rubble core provided structural strength, while stone and stucco formed the sculpted surface. This layered method reflects the Renaissance fusion of engineering and artistry, where stability and visual refinement were equally essential (Cole, 2011). Symbolically, the Colossus's materials reinforced its allegory. The giant appears as if carved directly from the Apennine Mountains. its rough textures blending with the natural landscape. At the same time, the stucco surface and sculpted details assert human mastery, showing how art could transform raw matter into allegory (Figure 11b) (Baldini, 2000). The contrast between the rugged core and the refined finish mirrored Renaissance ideals of art as a civilizing force imposed upon nature (Pallanti, 2006).

Functionally, the combination of brick and stone made the Colossus inhabitable (Figure 11c). The hollow core allowed for chambers, staircases, and hydraulic systems, while the durable exterior supported both sculptural detail and water features (Avery, 1993). Politically, the use of masonry signaled Medici permanence. Unlike ephemeral stucco entertainments, the Colossus projected dynastic endurance, displaying power through both scale and material solidity (Baldini, 2000). Today, the Colossus's mixed construction creates conservation difficulties. Moisture penetrates the brick and stone, while stucco surfaces flake and erode. The hydraulic systems, once integral to its theatrical effect, also accelerate decay (Boucher, 1991; UNESCO, 2021). These issues mirror those of the Khao Mor: both monuments were designed to merge with nature, and this very integration makes them vulnerable to time.

Seen together, the two works highlight how stone serves as a universal symbol of endurance but is interpreted in culturally distinct ways. The Khao Mor treats stone as a humble, living medium through which cosmology is embodied, while the Apennine Colossus uses masonry as a vehicle of engineering and allegory, turning raw matter into a theatrical display of human and dynastic power. In both cases, material choice is not merely technical but a cultural act, embedding values into the very fabric of monumental form.

(a)	(b)	(c)

Figure 11 Materials Used in Apennine Colossus

(**Source:** Timian, 2011)

2.7 Decorative Elements and Vegetations: Symbolic Ornament and Living Embellishment

Decoration plays a crucial role in how both the Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas and the Apennine Colossus at Villa Demidoff communicate meaning. Ornamentation in these monuments extends beyond surface embellishment; it provides symbolic cues that enrich interpretation, while vegetation—whether deliberately planted or naturally integrated—adds a living dimension that binds art to landscape. In the Khao Mor, decorative elements are tightly interwoven with Buddhist cosmology. Miniature shrines, ceramic figurines, and animal sculptures populate the rocky surfaces, each carrying symbolic weight (Fisher, 2017; Swearer, 2004). Mythical creatures such as nagas, garudas, or lions stand guard, embodying protective forces drawn from Buddhist and Brahmanic traditions (Strong, 2019). Smaller stupas or pavilions punctuate the rocky tiers, transforming the artificial mountain into a miniature sacred city (Figure 12a). These elements reinforce the didactic function of the Khao Mor: they translate cosmological and spiritual narratives into visual symbols that ordinary worshippers can engage with directly (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017).

Vegetation also plays a key role (Figure 12b). Trees, vines, and moss grow naturally in the crevices of the stone, softening its surfaces and reinforcing its identity as a living mountain (Figure 12c). In some cases, sacred plants such as bodhi trees or lotus ponds are integrated nearby, linking the monument to Buddhist narratives of enlightenment (Fisher, 2017; Swearer, 2004). The interplay between stone and vegetation creates a dynamic cycle, where the monument is never static but continually reshaped by natural growth. This living quality reflects the Buddhist principle of impermanence, reminding viewers that even sacred forms are subject to time and change (Harvey, 2013). At the same time, vegetation provides ecological benefits, cooling the temple compound and creating habitats for turtles and fish—further extending the symbolism of life and renewal (Fine Arts Department, 2018).

Socio-politically, these decorations also spoke to the cultural exchanges of the early Rattanakosin period. Many ornamental details reveal Chinese influences: ceramic figurines, dragon motifs, and colorful tiles imported through maritime trade (Clunas, 1996; Keswick, 2003). Their inclusion in a Buddhist monument illustrates how Thailand's openness to external artistic traditions was absorbed into religious landscapes, producing hybrid forms that enriched local identity. Today, however, the very abundance of delicate decoration presents conservation challenges. Figurines and tiles are

vulnerable to theft or breakage, while vegetation accelerates erosion of the stone (UNESCO, 2021). Managing the balance between preserving symbolic richness and sustaining ecological vitality has become a central heritage concern (Fine Arts Department, 2018).

The Apennine Colossus, by contrast, deploys decorative elements and vegetation in the service of theatricality. While the giant itself dominates as a single sculptural form, its surfaces were once enhanced with frescoes, grotto decorations, and water features (Avery, 1993; Boucher, 1991). The beard, hair, and skin of the Colossus were sculpted to merge seamlessly with natural textures, suggesting that vegetation might spring from the figure itself (Figure 13a) (Baldini, 2000). Artificial grottoes inside were adorned with shells, crystals, and stucco reliefs, creating a dazzling play of light and texture (Figure 13b) (Cole, 2011; Pallanti, 2006). Water dripping from the figure's hands or jug animated the decoration, making the monument appear alive (Figure 13c).

Vegetation played a more strategic role in the Colossus's setting. The surrounding estate was designed as a theatrical landscape, where trees framed views of the giant and undergrowth enhanced its sense of emergence from the earth (Avery, 1993). Over time, natural growth has further blurred the boundary between sculpture and nature, covering parts of the figure in moss and ivy. While this reinforces the allegory of the giant as a living mountain, it also complicates restoration, as vegetation damages masonry even as it contributes to the monument's romantic character (UNESCO, 2021).
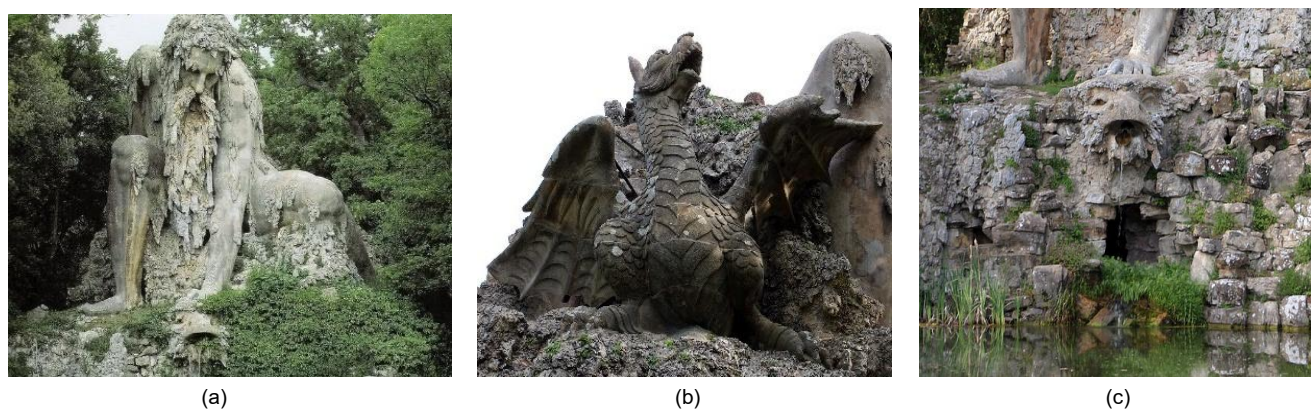
Cross-culturally, these approaches to ornament and vegetation highlight different symbolic strategies. The Khao Mor uses small-scale figurines, shrines, and living plants to create a miniature cosmos populated with sacred narratives. Ornament and vegetation function as teaching tools, embodying Buddhist values and ecological harmony (Swearer, 2004; Fisher, 2017). The Apennine Colossus, in contrast, relies on integrated textures, grotto decoration, and theatrical planting to blur art and nature, staging myth as an immersive spectacle (Avery, 1993; Cole, 2011). One relies on detail and intimacy; the other on scale and drama. Yet both reveal a shared recognition that monuments are never static. Through decoration and vegetation, they are animated by symbols, stories, and natural processes, continually renewing their power to connect human imagination with the living world.

(a) (b) (c)

Figure 12 Decorative Elements and Vegetation Used in Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas

(**Source:** (a) Nokkaew, 2022; (b) Wilailuk, 2024; (c) Pantip, 2021)

(a)   (b)   (c)

Figure 13 Decorative Elements and Vegetation Used in Apennine Colossus

(**Source:** (a) Erbuer, 2013; (b) and (c) Sailko, 2014)

2.8 Construction and Installation: Artisanal Craft and Architectural Engineering

The methods used to construct the Khao Mor at Wat Prayurawongsawas and the Apennine Colossus at Villa Demidoff highlight two very different traditions of technical practice. Both monuments showcase the expertise of their builders, but they also reveal how construction itself was understood as an expression of cultural values—whether rooted in artisanal devotion or in the ambition of architectural engineering.

The Khao Mor was created through careful assemblage rather than monumental carving. Natural stones of varied size and texture were stacked to evoke the ruggedness of a mountain, while mortar and stucco were applied to stabilize the structure and shape its surfaces (Fine Arts Department, 2018). Craftsmen then added miniature stupas, shrines, and figurines, embedding spiritual symbols into the rocky tiers (Fisher, 2017; Swearer, 2004). The result is not a single carved mass but a layered composition where each stone plays a role in building a sacred miniature cosmos. Unlike grand temples designed to overwhelm with scale, the Khao Mor impresses through intricacy and the accumulation of symbolic detail (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2017).

This construction method reflects the spiritual orientation of Thai Buddhist architecture. The act of assembling disparate stones into a harmonious whole mirrors the Buddhist vision of order emerging out of fragments, a metaphor for the alignment of the worldly and the cosmic (Harvey, 2013; Swearer, 2004). The technique also allowed for variation: different temples could construct their own Khao Mor using locally available materials, creating subtle differences that reflected regional identities (Strong, 2019). Functionally, the modest materials made the monument relatively easy to build and maintain, but also left it vulnerable to erosion and collapse (Fine Arts Department, 2018). Today, conservation often requires careful replacement of stones and repair of stucco, a delicate balance between preserving authenticity and ensuring structural stability (UNESCO, 2021).

The Apennine Colossus, by contrast, was a triumph of Renaissance engineering. Giambologna and his team employed a hybrid method that combined a brick and rubble core with stone and stucco finishes (Avery, 1993; Boucher, 1991). This allowed the statue to achieve monumental scale while remaining stable, and the hollow core created space for chambers, staircases, and grottoes inside the body of the giant (Cole, 2011). The exterior stonework, textured to resemble geological surfaces, was complemented by stucco detailing, producing a figure that was both naturalistic and theatrical (Baldini, 2000).

Hydraulic engineering was integral to the construction. Hidden channels carried water into the giant, allowing streams to flow from its mouth, hands, and jug. In some accounts, fireplaces installed in the head sent smoke through the nostrils, adding to the illusion of a living presence (Pallanti, 2006). These features required close collaboration among artists, masons, and engineers, reflecting the Renaissance ideal of integrating art and science (Boucher, 1991; Cole,

2011). For the Medici, this technical bravado was part of the message: the Colossus was not only a marvel of design but also a political performance, displaying their mastery of resources, knowledge, and nature itself (Baldini, 2000).

In heritage terms, these techniques now pose different challenges. The Khao Mor's stacked stones are susceptible to gradual dislodgement, while the Colossus's composite structure and hydraulic systems require highly specialized conservation (Fine Arts Department, 2018; UNESCO, 2021). Both reveal a paradox: the very qualities that made them powerful in their own time—the Khao Mor's openness to natural growth, the Colossus's reliance on complex mechanisms—also make them fragile over the long term.

Cross-culturally, the contrast is striking. The Khao Mor reflects a craft-based, additive method where modest materials and careful placement embody cosmological meaning (Fisher, 2017; Swearer, 2004). The Apennine Colossus represents the fusion of sculpture and architecture, where innovation and scale served theatrical and political ends (Avery, 1993; Cole, 2011). Yet both remind us that construction is never only technical. It is also cultural, a process through which societies inscribe their beliefs and ambitions into forms meant to endure, however precariously, across generations.

Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the *Khao Mor* at Wat Prayurawongsawas Woravihara and the Apennine Colossus demonstrates how monumental stone sculptures articulate cultural identity, religious worldviews, and artistic ambition in ways that transcend geography. The *Khao Mor*, deeply rooted in Thai Buddhist cosmology and temple traditions, embodies sacred symbolism and meditative practice within an urban context. By contrast, the Apennine Colossus reflects Renaissance humanism, Mannerist theatricality, and Medici patronage, transforming landscape into political spectacle. Despite these differences, both reveal a shared human desire to integrate art and nature in forms that endure as cultural landmarks.

For heritage practice, these findings highlight the need for conservation strategies that extend beyond material preservation to embrace intangible cultural meanings. In Thailand, safeguarding the *Khao Mor* requires temple conservation policies that respect both its role as a sacred site and its vulnerability to urban encroachment, mass tourism, and environmental pressures. In Italy, the Apennine Colossus illustrates the challenges of conserving composite structures that integrate masonry, hydraulics, and vegetation, underscoring the importance of interdisciplinary expertise. More broadly, both cases point to the value of heritage management frameworks—such as those promoted by UNESCO—that balance authenticity of form with preservation of symbolic and ritual functions.

The study contributes a transferable analytical framework that integrates six material-spatial dimensions with cross-cultural comparative interpretation. This framework offers heritage scholars and practitioners a systematic tool for examining how monumental sculptures operate as cultural interfaces, enabling future research to extend comparisons across Asia, Europe, and beyond.

The study also offers lessons that extend beyond these two monuments. The cross-cultural comparative framework developed here can be applied to other Asian–European cases, such as Angkor Wat in Cambodia and baroque gardens in France, or Japanese stone gardens and English landscape parks. By examining how diverse societies embed meaning into stone and landscape, comparative heritage research can illuminate shared themes of spirituality, political symbolism, and ecological integration, while also recognizing distinct cultural logics. Such perspectives encourage international dialogue in conservation practice, promoting knowledge exchange that strengthens heritage management in a globalized world.

Ultimately, this study underscores that conservation must be both context-sensitive and globally informed. Monumental stone art should be understood not only as physical form but also as living heritage that sustains cultural memory, spiritual practice, and collective identity. By situating the *Khao Mor* and the Apennine Colossus within a cross-cultural dialogue, this research provides a foundation for future comparative studies and offers practical insights for protecting, interpreting, and communicating the significance of monumental stone sculptures in diverse cultural settings.

Acknowledgments

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