

REVIEW OF BOOK.

Les Collections Archéologiques du Musée National de Bangkok,
Par George Coedès, Secrétaire Général de l'Institut Royal de Siam.
Paris et Bruxelles, les Editions G. Van Oest, 1928.

This volume forms the 12th of the series called "Ars Asiatica", published by the well-known firm of G. Van Oest of Paris and Brussels, under the direction of Monsieur Victor Goloubew, and the joint editorship of Professor Louis Finot and Monsieur Joseph Hackin, the two former, distinguished members of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, and the latter, the keeper of the Musée Guinet in Paris. The volume has 30 pages of text, illustrated by 40 plates, and all concerned may be congratulated upon the production, which well maintains the high standard set.

The importance of this work for Siam is manifest. It is the first evidence given to the world in general of the remarkable collections already housed in the recently formed National Museum of Siam, and it is fitting that one of the fine Arts, Sculpture, both in stone and bronze, should assume this introductory rôle. Seeing that the Museum has as yet, in its present form, had a life of barely two years, great praise is due to the Authorities—to H. R. H. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, the President of the Royal Institute, and to Prof. G. Coedès himself, in particular—for having already gathered together such an abundance of national treasures and so many fine specimens of Siamese art and archaeology in all its various forms. These spacious halls and their contents must be seen to be fully appreciated.

Before reviewing the work itself, the writer wishes to remark on the title of the book which, in his opinion, is not altogether a happy one. Archaeology brings to the mind Ancient Buildings, either intact or in ruin, and although "Collections Archéologiques" cannot, it is true, refer to such, still "Collections de Sculpture" would, it is thought, have been a more appropriate title, or at least

more indicative of the contents of the book to the general reader. With this reflection which, it is hoped, will not be thought hypercritical, we may pass to the text itself.

The first ten pages of the text are devoted by the author to a historical summary of the events which ultimately led to the institution of an Archaeological Service in January 1924 by King Rama VI, and to the inauguration of the National Museum in November 1926 by His present Majesty.

From this it appears that King Mongkut (1851-1868) was the first monarch of Siam to conceive the idea of gathering together national antiquities, and it was he who brought down the famous inscribed obelisk of Rāma Gamheng, which might almost be called Siam's "Magna Charta," from Sukhodaya to Bangkok. But his collections were not available to the public, and it was not until 1874 that King Chulalongkorn first opened a small public museum in the outer court of the Royal Palace. Eventually, in 1887, after the death of the last Second King of Siam, this museum was removed to the latter's Palace, a part of which no longer required for use was adapted for this purpose; but it was not suitably maintained and remained almost derelict, until the whole of the Second King's Palace was handed over to the Royal Institute in 1926 for the purpose of creating a real National Museum, of which the halls originally occupied still form part. The whole series of buildings is an almost unique example of a Siamese Prince's Palace of the late XVIIIth century, and forms a setting for a National Museum which must be unsurpassed in the East.

Without going into further details regarding the establishment of the Museum, one may mention that, as Prof. Cœdès remarks, the present collections have not been created 'out of nothing', but are, to a large extent, an amalgamation of smaller collections housed in various Temples and Ministries, and owe their richness, in particular, to a fine collection formed by Prince Dainrong himself while he occupied the post of Minister of the Interior.

A Law was promulgated on May 5th 1927, providing for the administration of the National Museum and placing it under the care

of the Royal Institute; and a point of interest to foreign readers is another Law of October 25th 1926, which provides that no objects having artistic or archaeological value may leave the country without the express authorisation of the Institute.

We now come to a consideration of the Sculpture in the Museum, which is described and illustrated in this volume. Naturally, in a work of this nature which is intended for the general public as well as for the student, the treatment is not detailed and is only designed to give an outline of all the varying racial influences which have played their part in the moulding of modern Siam. But the outline it gives is clear as far as it is known at present, and this is all the more necessary since the only work hitherto published which is devoted entirely to the same subject, and which may therefore be compared with the one under review, is "Sculpture in Siam" by Dr. Alfred Salmony of the Far Eastern Museum at Cologne. Unfortunately, chiefly, it seems, owing to the paucity of material available, judging from the illustrations, this volume, while of merit as a pioneer work, cannot be considered satisfactory in its presentation of the subject. The specimens reproduced are, with a few notable exceptions, of poor quality—indeed, they give no conception of the richness of the material available in Siam—and the author has not been able to avoid a number of errors of major proportions. The present work will, therefore, it is hoped, help to restore Siam's sculptural remains to a higher and truer plane, and, as the text is in French, it will be of interest to give a summary of the conclusions arrived at in English.

From the period of the occupation of Central Siam by the Khmer, that is, from about the beginning of the XIth century, the history of Siam is now fairly well known, in outline at least, but of the forces at work in the thousand years anterior to that period, we are only now beginning to form an idea, thanks largely to the researches of Prince Damrong and Prof. Cœdès.

The most ancient sculptures to be found in the Museum represent, though they may not belong to, the earliest period of Buddhist art, when the person of the Buddha was represented by symbols only,

before the Gandhara school broke away and began to make images of the Great Teacher himself. There have been discovered at Brah Pathama (Nakon Pathom), and at other places round the North-West corner of the Gulf of Siam, symbolic figures which are attributed for the present to the so-called 'School of Dvāravatī,' an art which has hitherto been almost unknown, but which is undoubtedly the work of Indian sculptors. In addition, both stone and bronze images of the Buddha of Indian style have been found in Siam, in the regions of Ayudhya and Lopburi and in the North-Eastern provinces as well; and it is interesting to note that the stone images are almost always made of blue limestone, and not of sandstone which was the material commonly employed by the Khmer. The present writer has also a small head of this period in granitic rock. They recall the art of the Gupta period, and particularly of that of the Sarnath region in India. From the indications and evidence at present to hand it is thought that this pre-Khmer art dates at the latest from the VIth century, and it is ascribed to the 'Dvāravatī School', since this is the name given by Chinese travellers of that period to a land lying between modern Burma and Cambodia. Prof. Cœdès thinks that they may be largely the work of Mōn sculptors, since there are good reasons for believing that the region round Ayudhya and Lopburi was peopled by the Mōn before the Khmer took possession of it. This may, in the writer's view, well be true of the later productions of this art, but we do not yet know how long the Mōn occupied this district, and some of the sculptures may possibly go back to the IIIrd or IVth centuries of the Christian era, if not earlier, and may, it is suggested, have been brought from India itself or be the work of Indian colonists.

Prof. Cœdès recalls that pre-Khmer statues have also been found in Cambodia, very similar in type to the above, and suggests that it is possible that this realm of Dvāravatī formed a kind of intermediary, from which Gupta art came to Cambodia in the first place. On the face of it, the argument seems feasible. Against it, however, Sir Charles Eliot, the author of 'The History of Hinduism and Buddhism', told the writer

personally that in Bijapur, in Central India, he had found what seemed to him to bespeak the indisputable origin of Khmer sculpture and architecture. If this is correct, it would seem to indicate a more direct intercourse between India and Cambodia in Khmer times, and if in the Khmer, why not in the pre-Khmer period also? But this is, after all, a side issue, and the questions which still remain to be answered are, when did this Indian influence first touch the shores of Siam, and from what part of India, if from India direct, did that influence come? In the writer's opinion, this art of Dvāravatī at its best, as shown by Plate VI (a) in the present volume and Plate XXI of Herr Salmony's work, which is wrongly classed as Khmer, is as attractive as the best Cambodian sculpture, both in breadth of conception and in execution.

In the same districts in which 'Dvāravatī' images have been found, there have also been dug up standing images of Vishnu with a cylindrical head-dress, something like a fez. These were formerly attributed to pre-Khmer art in Cambodia, but it is more likely, from the number found in the northern portion of the Malay Peninsula, that they were of Indian origin also, and that such forms came to Cambodia itself through the Malay Peninsula. Both these and certain other Indian types of sculpture found near Bejraburn (Petchabūn) in Central Siam, have been provisionally labelled 'Dvāravatī', until further evidence is forthcoming to determine the school which produced them.

The next type of sculpture to be considered is another phase of Indian art, which is chiefly represented by the figure of Lokeçvara, and which is attributed to the Kingdom of Çrivijaya, a Kingdom exercising sovereignty over a large part of the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago from the beginning of about the VIIth century A. D. The discovery of this Kingdom is due mainly to the researches of Prof. Coedès himself. The types found of this period, of which the Museum possesses several fine specimens, seem to contain elements allied to pure Indian prototypes, to the VIIth century sculptures of Kanheri and Aurangabad, to the ancient kingdom of Champā, and in some respects to that of Dvāravatī itself. It is not possible to say more of this art at present.

tively, in the writer's mind, of the contention, current still among some writers on Siam, which would date Thai images as far back as the VIIIth century. It may at least be accepted as practically certain that there was no developed Thai School of Buddhist art in Central or Southern Siam before the XIIIth century, until, in fact, we come to the Sukhodaya school. Apart from the Dvāravatī school, there are distinct Môn influences up to the VIIIth century (even later in parts of Northern Siam), and the Khmer reigned supreme in Central Siam until the XIIIth century. What Thai were to be found were only settlements scattered in various parts, and, as Prof. Cédès says, it is incredible that they should have produced in Siam a style of their own by that time. The only possible exception to this might be found in Northern Siam, to which reference is made below.

First, we have the School of Chieng Saen, which covers the north of Siam and to which an Indian origin, through the intermediary of Pagan, the ancient capital of Burma, is ascribed. An interesting point in this connection, which will no doubt lead to further discussion, is made by Prof. Cédès when he says that, of all Thai images of the Buddha found in Siam, those which approximate most to the Chieng Saen type are found in the Nakon Sritammarat district in Southern Siam, and he considers this to be due to a common origin of both types, namely the Magadha type of the Pāla period in India (VIIIth to XIIth centuries). Whether this proves to be correct or not, some interesting problems arise, when we consider the question of the advent of the Thai in Northern Siam. Although the illustrations which Dr. Salmony ascribes to the VIIIth & IXth centuries (Plates IX to XIII of his work) are clearly not northern types, yet the question remains whether there were not earlier types of Buddhist art created in northern Siam before the rise of the 'Chieng Saen School'. The problem is concerned with the arrival of the Thai in the north. As far as the writer knows, the first more or less authentic date given to a Thai settlement of any importance is about the IXth century in the neighbourhood of Chieng Rai. When these Thai arrived, were they Buddhists already?

We now pass to those manifestations of Khmer art which were either brought to, or made in, Siam during the centuries of the Khmer dominion, from about 1000 to 1300 A. D. Of pre-Angkor Khmer art but little has been found, but the Angkor period is well represented in the Museum both by bronze figures and objects, which have already been described by Prof. Cœdès in 'Bronzes Khmèrs' (reviewed by the present writer in Vol. XVII, pt. 2, of this Journal), and also by stone sculpture.

The Khmer, it is believed, occupied Lopburi about the beginning of the XIth century, and made it the Capital of their colony. It is from that district and its neighbourhood that most of the specimens in the Museum have come, for which reason they are classed as belonging to the 'School of Lopburi.' This school goes through a gradual transition period, and it is of interest to trace the transformation of the art from the pure Khmer type through a range of varying forms until it emerges about the XVth century into the pure Thai type.

There are in the Museum two beautiful statues of the Buddha (Plates XX & XXI), and another traditionally reported to be of a King (Plate XIX), which recall the classical period of Khmer art in their proportions, if not altogether in their physiognomy, and are probably of a period anterior to the XIIIth century. There are also a large number of the later types which developed in the succeeding centuries.

Prof. Cœdès discusses at some length the differences in detail which occur between the pure Khmer style and the 'Lopburi School', and asks the question, whether the latter, i. e., the most ancient of them, were made by provincial Khmer artists or by foreign (i. e. Thai) artists copying the Khmer traditions? In the writer's opinion, the answer is—both.

The most interesting feature of Thai art, to which we must now turn, is that it is by no means homogeneous, but is divided into a number of schools with a common Thai influence, of course, but each showing particular features of its own. This is not the place to go into a detailed examination, but Prof. Cœdès disposes very effec-

the present volume, which, as will be seen, stops at the period of the rise of the National Art of Ayudhya.

One point may be noticed before we close. The Khmer, it is clear, cast but few images in bronze, compared with the monumental works which they carved or moulded out of stone. The Thai, on the other hand, though not neglecting stone altogether, obviously preferred bronze as a medium for expressing their religious art. Where did the mass of metal required for the composition of all this bronze come from?

In conclusion, it is suggested that, when a second edition is called for, the value of the book would be much enhanced by the addition of a sketch map, showing the distribution of the different schools of art as known at present, as well as a tabulated list of the schools themselves.

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They probably did not come direct from China, but from the Southern Shan State of Chieng Tung, which is still inhabited by a Thai people, the Shan. At that time Pagan had not risen to any particular eminence as a centre of culture in Burma, and if the Thai were then Buddhist, their Buddhism must probably have come from Tagaung, if not from China itself. Tagaung is a still more ancient capital of Burma than Pagan.

Coming south, there is the Sukhodaya school, which is characterised by the feminine grace of the body and a peculiarly long, hooked nose, at least in its earlier stages of development. This school, in which there is probably a large amount of Sinhalese influence, may be taken, it is suggested, as the classic Siamese (Thai) type, of which the magnificent Jinarāja Buddha at Pitsanulok is the acknowledged masterpiece. There is little doubt that the Sukhodaya school in time spread its influence over the whole country, from Chieng Saen to Ayudhya.

Next, there is the School of Ū Thong, the name of an ancient Thai city which has been chosen to represent the period to which appear to belong certain images which still possess Khmer influence but which show unmistakable Thai characteristics. Most of these images come from the vicinity of Supanburi and Ayudhya, but have also been found as far north as Sukhodaya. As they have practically no affinity to the recognised Ayudhya school of Siamese art, and as Ū Thong was a Thai capital at least a hundred years before Ayudhya was founded, it is probable that they belong to a period prior to the founding of the latter, and represent a true transition period in *bronze* from the Khmer to the Thai. Most of the images of this period are of a very pleasing character, and the quality and the modelling of the bronze is sometimes remarkable.

The last type to be considered is a series of imposing statues in bronze, ranging from 1½ to 2 metres in height, one of which was made in the 'Khmer Style' at Kambaeng Bejra at the beginning of the XVth century. There are two long rows of these images in one of the main halls of the Museum.

This concludes the survey of the schools of art contained in

