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THE RAM KHAMHAENG CONTROVERSY

Collected Papers
Edited By James R. Chamberlain

The Siam Society's latest publication brings together a unique collection of papers on a subject of great topical interest. The history of Thailand as a nation relies principally upon evidence from its first capital at Sukhothai where, in the golden age of the late 13th century, King Ram Khamhaeng devised the writing system he handed down to posterity on the stone now known as Inscription No. 1. The stone was discovered by King Mongkut (Rama IV) during a visit he made Sukhothai in 1833 before his ascent to the throne. He had the stone brought to Bangkok where it remains to this day in the National Museum.

In recent years serious doubt has been cast upon the authenticity of Inscription No. 1, some eminent authorities not hesitating to brand it outright as a fake. One distinguished art historian is categoric in presenting evidence that it was the work of King Mongkut himself, performed between the years 1851 and 1855.

If this premise is correct much of the history of the Thai nation would be open to reinterpretation. Perhaps for that reason, and certainly because Ram Khamhaeng is seen as a father figure to the nation he welded into the first Thai kingdom, the idea that the inscription is not genuine has been hotly disputed by more conservative voices.

The arguments and counter-arguments put forward by experts from various disciplines at conferences and seminars, and in papers and articles, have been skilfully assembled by the editor, Dr. James R. Chamberlain, in this illustrated volume of 592 pages. They make a fascinating and intriguing detective story, offering many clues to an historical puzzle yet to be solved definitively.

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UNDER ROYAL PATRONAGE

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The Natural History Section of the Siam Society, which was organized in 1913, sponsors its own programme of lectures and study trips to places of natural interest, and concerns itself with the conservation of Thai wildlife and flora. The Natural History Section publishes the annual Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society as well as aperiodic works of scientific interest.

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