

SECTION IV

EXPRESSIONS



# BODY ORNAMENTATION AND PENILE IMPLANTS IN SIAM AND PEGU

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Enough is known about the minimal dress of the Siamese from numerous commentators in the seventeenth century. Joost Schouten comments but briefly on the subject:

They cloath themselves (both men and women) thin, according to the hot climate they live in; both sexes wear painted petticoats, the men covering their upper parts with a short shirt with half-sleeves, and the women with a thin cloth, both ends hanging over their shoulders to hide their breasts; they wear for ornaments gold pins in their hair, and rings of the same metal on their fingers. (1636/1986, 145)

Gervaise later in the century manages to devote a whole chapter nominally dealing with "the clothes of the men and the adornments of the women" (1688/1989, 91–94), while La Loubère is still more fulsome in his chapter "Of the Habit and Meen of the Siamese" (1693, 25–29). Both indicate that the male shirt was for formal occasions, and King Narai's Persian innovations (Ibrahim 1686/1972, 99), which appear not to have lasted beyond his reign, of slippers, daggers and sugar-loaf "bonnets" are given due place. The Persian Embassy of Husein Beg to Siam in 1685–86 was shocked at the absence of clothes worn by both men and women (Ibrahim 1686/1972, 56).

Important males were accompanied by slaves bearing their *bousette*, or betel boxes, and women's "fingers are laden with rings of diamonds and other precious stones" (Gervaise 1688/1989, 92). La Loubère provides fuller details than Gervaise relating to personal ornaments and the context indicates they apply to both men and women.

They wear Rings on the three last Fingers of each Hand, and the Fashion permits them to put on as many as possibly can be kept on. They freely give half a Crown for Rings with false Stones, which at Paris cost not above two Sols. They have no Necklaces to adorn their Necks, nor their Wives; but the Women and Children of both Sexes wear Pendants. They are generally of Gold, Silver, or Vermilion gilt, in the shape of a Pear. The young Boys

and Girls of a good Family have Bracelets, but only to six or seven years of Age; and they equally wear them on their Arms and Legs. They are Rings of Gold, or Silver, or Vermilion gilt. (1693, 27)

Forbin leaves an image of King Narai at the audience of reception of Chaumont in 1685 covered in rings: "his Fingers were adorn'd with a great Number of costly Rings" (1731, I: 99).

Only La Loubère noted that

some do stretch their Ears at the tip to lengthen them, without boring them any more than is necessary to put Pendants therein. Others, after having bor'd them, do by little and little enlarge the hole, to thrust in bigger and bigger Sticks ... (1693, 28).

Dress changed relatively little in time, apart from the Persian innovations of Narai. Bowring, nearly two centuries later observed there was a universal passion for jewelry and ornaments, "and the men have a metallic ball attached to a belt, to which they attribute the virtue of rendering them invulnerable" (1857, I: 131). We shall return to this ball.

Both Gervaise (1989, 93–4) and La Loubère (1693, 24) speak of the custom of blackening the teeth; as usual, La Loubère is more fulsome:

To blacken their Teeth, they do thereon put some pieces of very sowre Lemon, which they hold on the Jaws or Lips for an hour, or more. They report that this softens the Teeth a little. They afterwards rub them with a Juice, which proceeds either from a certain Root, or from the Coco, when they are burnt, and so the operation is perform'd. Yet it pleases them sometimes to relate that it continues three days, during which it is necessary, they say, to lye on their Belly and eat no solid Food ... It is necessary continually to renew this operation to make the effect thereof continue; for this Blackness sticks not so strong to the Teeth, but that it may be rub'd off with a burnt Crust of Bread reduc'd to Powder. (1693, 24)

Both comment on the hair styles of men and women being the same, extremely short, though Gervaise adds that the women made theirs glossy by rubbing in a *naman hym* [hom] (1688/1989, 92), and La Loubère says the women raised their hair in a kind of fringe "on their Forehead, yet without fastening it again" (1693, 28). Both comment on staining the nail of the little finger; Gervaise points out only "persons of quality" do this, "for working people cut their nails" (1688/1989, 94). La Loubère is more precise in the method of staining:

They love also to redden the Nails of their little Fingers, and for this end they scrape them, and then apply a certain Juice, which they extract from a little Rice bruised in Citron Juice with some Leaves of a Tree, which in every thing resembles the Pomengranate Tree, but bears no Fruit. (1693, 24)

Male beards were sparse and facial hair was plucked (La Loubère 1693, 29). However, King Narai is recorded as having two long hairs "like horse-hair" coming from a wart on the left side of his chin (Forbin 1731, I: 99).

Only La Loubère notes the male fashion of "bluing" the legs, but expresses some doubts as to whether the mode was followed by the king or not:

The Women use neither Paint nor Patches, but I have seen a great Lord, whose Legs were blu'd with a dull Blue, like that made which the Gunpowder leaves. They that shew'd me it, inform'd me that it was a thing affected by the Great Men, that they had more or less blue according to their dignity; and that the King of Siam was blu'd from the sole of his Feet, to the hollow of his Stomach. Others assur'd me that it was not out of Grandeur, but Superstition; and others would make me to doubt whether the King of Siam was blue. I know not how it is. (1693, 27–28)

The word "tattoo" did not enter European languages (from Polynesian) until the eighteenth century, so La Loubère would not have used it. Clearly "bluing" for him means to tattoo. This is borne out by his reference to the "painted arms" (in Portuguese *braços pintos*), the king's personal bodyguard:

The King of Siam gives the Tcheaou–Meuang some men to execute his Orders; they accompany him everywhere, and they row in his Balon. The Siameses do call them *Kenlai*, or Painted Arms; by reason that they pink and mangle their Arms, and lay Gunpowder on the wounds, which paints their Arms with a faded Blue. The Portuguese do call them Painted Arms, and Officers; and these Painted Arms, are still used in the Country of Laos. (La Loubère 1693, 83)

This is a description of the process of tattooing. Lagirarde points out that the "painted arms" in the sixteenth century had their arms, chest, back and legs tattooed, and the "fashion of tattooing

the legs gradually disappeared among the Thais of Siam to survive among the Thais in the north" (1989, 35–36).

There is a certain consensus therefore among seventeenth century writers on personal ornament among the Siamese. Earlier writers, whose texts are scattered and often contradictory, tend to cover more bizarre aspects of personal decoration.

One such text is that of Jacques de Coutre, "natvral de la ciudad de Brvgas," whose *Vida* was first published in Madrid in 1640 and recently rediscovered (Verberckmoes, Stols, and Teensma 1991). De Coutre left Bruges in 1591 in his teens for Lisbon, together with his brother, to seek his fortune in the Indies; he spent some thirty years in the region, including eight months in Siam in 1595 in the reign of King Naresuan. The details of his stay in Siam have been outlined by Professor Dirk Van der Cruysse (1991, 41–47) but unfortunately de Coutre's important text has yet to appear in English. De Coutre was obliged to withdraw from the Indies after the union between Spain and Portugal, and settled down to dictating his memoirs to his son Esteban, who published them in Spanish.

Among the numerous fascinating details noted by de Coutre, one which occurs in Book One, chapter 13, "Of the barbarities which I saw in the Kingdom of Siam in the period of eight months in which I was prisoner of that king," is a reference to *buncales*, most commonly translated as "penis bells." After describing the statues of the city of "Odia" (Ayudhya), de Coutre notes:

Besides all these things I saw among the inhabitants of that kingdom and of Pegu that all the chief citizens, big and small, wear in their organ, inserted into the flesh, two [jingle] bells, which they call *bunkals* [Spanish: *buncales*]. They are as big as [wal]nuts and make a sound like bells, but very sonorous, and the noblemen wear up to four of them. One day, accompanied by four Portuguese, I went to visit a mandarin, who had sent for a surgeon to remove one of the ornaments he wore, because he had been crushed and his organ was swollen; well, during the visit the surgeon entered, as was the custom in that country; he unconcernedly removed one in front of us, using a knife, and then sewed it up again so that after it was healed he could open it and put in the ornament again. It is frightening to see how they can multiply with that ostentation. They told me later that the author of this invention was a queen of Pegu, because in her day the inhabitants of that kingdom were much inclined to the unspeakable sin [of sodomy], and she made a law, with great penalties, that the women should wear their dresses—which are just like petticoats—open from the navel to the hem, so that when they walked they revealed the whole of the thigh. She did this so that the men would desire them and would refrain from the unspeakable sin. Some of the *bunkals* are made of gold, others of silver, and copper; every one wears what he can afford, and there are an infinite number of shops in all the cities and towns where nothing but these ornaments are sold. Those who do not

wear them are considered to be depraved, and so, even if they suffer pain and torment, everyone makes an effort to wear them. Maidens in this land are not esteemed, nor do they prize their virginity, since as the men use that invention they cannot have commerce with them; so the mothers prepare them from an early age with wooden instruments for that purpose. (1640, 91–92; 1991, 135–6)

The subject of *buncales* or penis balls is extensively covered in the annotated bibliography on penis inserts in Southeast Asia by Brown, Edwards and Moore (1988), though de Coutre is not there listed. There are no less than twenty–three references in Brown et al. to scattered early texts dealing with Burma (including Arakan, Ava, Pegu, Tenasserim and Martaban), Cambodia, and Siam (including Pattani), dealing with the insertion of bells or balls. The practice of penile inserts appears from these texts to have been fairly widespread in Southeast Asia from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century.

The earliest textual date for this practice appears in a Chinese text (cited by Ploss and Baretels 1964, 50–53) dated to about 1392, mentioning in Siam (Hsien-lo) the practice of inserting jewels, balls or bells in the male member. A more elaborate form of incision is cited by Reid (1988, 149–150), quoting the Chinese Muslim author Ma Huan (1433/1970, 104), who says that in Siam

when a man has attained his twentieth year, they take the skin which surrounds the *membrum virile*, and with a fine knife ... they open it up and insert a dozen tin beads inside the skin; they close it up and protect it with medicinal herbs ... The beads look like a cluster of grapes ... If it is the king ... or a great chief or a wealthy man, they use gold to make hollow beads, inside which a grain of sand is placed ... They make a tinkling sound, and this is regarded as beautiful.

The first western source dealing with penis bells in Siam is Galvano (1511/1905, 1–74), which predates by four years the first reference to the practice in Pegu, by Tomé Pires (1515/1944, 102–3). Galvano wrote "the people of Siam wear bells in their privie members" but noted it was forbidden to the king and the religious people. Tomé Pires, cited by Reid (1988, 150) was expansive:

The Pegu lords wear as many as nine gold ones, with beautiful treble, contralto, and tenor tones, the size of Alvares plums in our country; and those who are too poor ... have them in lead ... Our Malay women rejoice greatly when the Pegu men come to their country, and they are very fond of them. The reason for this must be their sweet harmony.

The sea captain Ralph Fitch (ca. 1591/1905, 165–204), who was in these parts between 1583 and 1591 and travelled to Chiang Mai, says the practice of inserting bells was widespread in Southeast Asia, citing Ava, Pegu, Siam and other lands. The men

wear bunches of little round balls in their privy members ... They cut the skin and so put them in, which they do when they be twenty or twenty–five ... [Some were made of] brass and some of silver, but those of silver be for the king and his noblemen; they are gilded and made with great cunning and ring like a little bell ... [The king] sometimes taketh his out and giveth them to his noblemen as a great gift, and because he hath used them they esteem them greatly ... they say women do desire them ... [and were] invented because they should not abuse the male sex, for in times past all those countries were [so] given to that villainy that they were very scarce of people (cited in Edwardes 1972, 123–124).

Francesco Carletti was a Florentine merchant who travelled around the world shortly after Fitch in the late sixteenth century, and wrote his account to the Grand Duke of Tuscany in a series of chronicles called *Ragionamenti*. His text, not cited in Brown et al. in relation to mainland Southeast Asia, but to the Visayas, is still more detailed than that of Fitch, and the attributed reason for the practice of installing bells is the same (1606/1964, 181–183). The Peguans, he notes,

using an ancient invention designed by a queen to rule out and render impossible the practising of venery in illicit parts of the body even with men, ordered that each man must have stitched between the skin and the flesh of his member two or three rattles as large as large hazelnuts, these made in round or oval shape. And in these rattles—which I have seen made of gold—there is a pellet of iron. When these rattles are moved, they give off a dull sound because they are without holes, being like two shells fastened together delicately and masterfully. And they have this little pellet inside, and are called rattles because they make this sound.

And these rattles, placed, as I have said, under the skin, which then is sewed together and allowed to heal, have the result of enlarging the member, as anyone can imagine. And the women desire them for these reasons and others that are to be thought of rather than spoken, as being helpful to pleasure. And that this is an invention of women is proved particularly by the fact that women are masters of placing and adjusting these rattles. And this is confirmed by Nicolo di Conti, who, during his voyages, which he described in the year 1444 by command of Pope Eugenius IV, says that in the kingdom of Pegu, in the city of Ava, certain old women had no other calling than that of selling these rattles, which were of gold, silver, or gilded copper and were as small as small nuts (I said that they were large because that was true of those which I saw, but perhaps in those earlier times they were content with these small ones, or, as he says, placed a number of them, up to ten or twelve, inside the member, a thing that does not seem possible).

And this was done when the youth was at the age to be able to indulge in venery or to marry, performed by

the hands of the aforesaid women, who placed these rattles between the flesh and the skin, they being made of gold or other metals according to a man's station. And without them a man would be rejected, but with them he would be accepted in marriage and to the woman's intimacy. The women much fondled men thus equipped, but the contrary with others. And the aforementioned Nicolo says that he was asked if he wished to be equipped with these rattles, but answered that he had no desire to do harm to himself so as to be able to give pleasure to others ... But I have brought some of these rattles as proof, and they also have been taken to Holland by those who travel in those regions. And it is a certain thing and absolutely true that this diabolic invention was made and is used by the women of that country.

In chronological order, two later texts follow: Herbert (1634, 195–6) attributes the custom to a queen of Siam who, in order to curb sodomy, ordered on pain of death that all boys be fitted at birth with a gold bell in their member and which at puberty was adjusted by an expert midwife. The queen is unnamed and the details so colorful as to make the account suspect. The next text covering Siam, as well as Burma, appears to be that of Bulwer (1654, 347–51), who generally discusses bells and balls, but gives no cause and no initiator. Three accounts are specific to the nominal Siamese dependency of Pattani: Purchas (1617, 562), who writes of the Siamese (but not Muslim) practice of wearing penis balls, and Commelius (1646/1920, 289) who again speaks of the wearing of penis balls. An earlier text, that of the Dutch admiral Jacob van Neck (1604), who does not make the Brown et al. bibliography, is cited by Reid; when the surprised naval officer asked the purpose of the wealthy Siamese in Pattani carrying "sweet-sounding little golden bells ... in their penises, they replied that 'the women can obtain inexpressible pleasure from it'" (Reid 1988, 150).

There are numerous accounts relating to the practice in Burma, more particularly Pegu. A word is perhaps necessary to explain the frequency of references to Pegu. The ancient Mon kingdom, with Pegu as its capital, fell to King Tabinshwehti of the Burmese Toungoo dynasty in 1539 and again in 1550. There Tabinshwehti had himself crowned and set up his capital. In 1555 he conquered the northern kingdom of Ava, which had been in disarray since the Shan attack on the city of 1527. Thus all references to Pegu and Ava from 1555 until the mid-eighteenth century appear to be in fact to the united kingdom of Burma (not including Arakan) under the Toungoo dynasty.

Seven accounts listed in Brown et al. (Pires 1515, Duarte Barbosa 1518, Garcia de Resende 1554, Gabriel Rebello 1569, Luis de Camões 1572, Jan van Linschoten 1596, Manuel de Faria e Sousa ca. 1675) are nominally specific to Pegu; in addition two (Galvano/Galvão ca. 1544, Fitch ca. 1591) throw in Siam as well.

Fitch and Linschoten attribute the reason for the fashion to prevent sodomy; Camões, Faria e Sousa, and Valentijn (1724, writing of Arakan) claim in addition that the practice was initiated by a queen; Galvano says the balls were introduced by a "virtuous noblewoman." A further reference of 1668 (Alzina

1970, 4, 17–28) cites the custom among the Cambodians and the Malays and again gives the cause of the practice as the prevention of sodomy. Where sodomy is not cited as the reason for the custom, the authors usually maintain that the balls or bells give greater sexual enjoyment to women, as with Duarte Barbosa (1518/1921, 154) and van Neck (1604/1980, 226).

There are several contradictions in the cited texts: some say that kings wear the bells or balls (Fitch, Ma Huan), others that they do not (Galvano); some maintain that women insert the bells or balls (Conti and Carletti), others that male specialists do this (Ma Huan). Sometimes the practice is confined to the insertion of balls, sometimes bells. The Chinese certainly knew about the "Burmese bells" and some apparently wore them (van Gulik 1961, 165–6). Yule (1858/1968, 208) provides confirmation that the practice indeed existed in Burma. Bowring's "metallic ball attached to a belt" (Bowring 1857, I: 131) worn by men, and mentioned earlier, appears to be a vestige of the practice of penis bells, though none of the earlier writers attribute invulnerability to the wearing of the bells. One assumes Bowring was not confusing metal balls with *palad kik*, the miniature penis images worn around the waist by some Thai men today, and which are also supposed to confer invulnerability to the wearer should he encounter ghosts, disasters, etc. Lagirarde (1989, 34) notes that the practice of penis implants had magical aims for protection and invulnerability, and continues today in northeast Thailand and Laos, where it is called *kan bong*, meaning piercing. Fraser-Lu has recently commented on the past Burmese practice of wearing penis bells, and quotes Duarte Barbosa (1518) when describing Peguans:

They wear in their members certain hawk-bells, round, closed and very large, which are joined and fixed inside the skin and the flesh so as to make it very large. Of these they wear as many as five, some of gold, some of silver or other metal according to those who carry them, and when they walk they give out a loud sound which they hold to be a distinction and to be admired, and the more of them, the more honourable. The women delight in this and do not like men who have them not. I say no more of this on account of its indecency. (1994, 164)

The first person to claim the practice was instituted by a queen was the poet Camões (1572/1950) in describing "Pegu:"

On generation's instrument they wear  
The sounding brass, a custom that was shown  
This people by the cunning of their queen  
Who thus put down their practices obscene.

History supplies only one queen likely to have had the authority to impose such a painful practice. This was the Mon Queen Shinsawbu of Pegu, a devout Buddhist, who reigned from 1453–60 in her own right, after the kings her father and her son had died and no male members of the line were left. She not only chose her successor, the monk known by his regnal name of

Dammazadi, but forced him to leave the monastery and marry her daughter (Hall 1981, 181). She handed over power to him and spent the last twelve years of her life in retirement at Dagon, where she raised the height of the Shwedagon stupa as an act of merit. Faria e Sousa (1675) may simply have repeated the information of his national poet. Valentijn's attribution of the practice to a queen of Arakan may simply be confusion; it is also a suspiciously late text (1724).

But one text, that of Herbert, of somewhat doubtful authenticity it is true, cites a queen of Siam as the source of the custom. Unlike Pegu, there were no Siamese queens reigning in their own right. The one person who might be a candidate for initiating the practice is Si Sudachan, a non-royal consort of King Chairacha (reigned 1534–47); she, however, was so busy as regent intriguing to have her lover, Worawongsa, placed on the throne, and poisoning her own son, the eleven-year-old king Yot Faa (reigned 1547–8), that she scarcely had time, or the authority, in the six weeks she and her lover reigned (Wyatt 1984, 91) before being murdered at a royal banquet, to worry about such details as instituting penis bells.

It is not inconceivable that a queen not reigning in her own right, but having sufficient powers of persuasion over her king, could have succeeded in having him issue a royal edict requiring the wearing of penis bells. But it seems extremely unlikely that any consort could persuade her lord to require the mutilation of all his male subjects for the supposed satisfaction of the women. Another resolute historical character was Suriyothai, the queen of King Chakkraphat (the successor to Si Sudachan and her lover, and an uncle of her murdered son), who led a foray against the Burmese from the besieged city of Ayudhya in 1549; doubtless strong-minded queens existed in Pegu from time to time.

While there seems little doubt that it was indeed the practice to wear penis bells or balls in Siam and Burma, whether it was instituted on the orders of a queen is, on present evidence, doubtful. While the persistence of its attributed origin is striking, Ma Huan's writing about Siam (1433) and Conti's about Ava (1444) predate the reigns of Shinsawbu and Si Sudachan, should they be the initiators of the fad. This also makes suspect the stated cause of the practice. The time frame for the fashion of wearing bells seems quite limited, with written records from the early fifteenth to the early eighteenth century, but the references after the mid-seventeenth century are somewhat suspect, as later authors may simply be relating earlier accounts. However, the lack of textual references prior to the *Record of Strange Nations* and Ma Huan does not mean that the practice of penile inserts did not exist before this date; it may simply point to the lack of known earlier documentation (there were no prurient Westerners around to comment, either). It seems almost impossible for such a detail to have been glossed over by the numerous French commentators on Siam (even though several of them were clerics) in the late seventeenth century had the practice still continued then. But the myth of a queen at the origin of bodily scarification survived in Burma to 1871, when Vincent (1874/1988, 14–15) described Burmese males being "all tattooed from above the hips to the knees with a blackish-blue pigment" and wrote that

the origin of this custom, as well as that of the immodest dress of the women, is said to have been the policy of a certain queen, who, observing that the men were deserting their wives and giving themselves up to abominable vices, persuaded her husband to establish these customs by royal order, that thus by disfiguring the men, and setting off the beauty of the women, the latter might regain the affections of their husbands.

The frequent citation of the practice of wearing penis bells to curb sodomy seems therefore fanciful, just as their wearing having been ordered by a queen; sodomy seems unlikely to be less or more prevalent in the region than elsewhere. It is perhaps worth recalling, though, that Joost Schouten, whose account of Siam (which makes no mention of penis bells) written in 1636 was one of the earliest and who had spent much time between 1629 and 1636 at the Dutch "factory" in Ayudhya and as envoy of the Governor-General of the VOC in Batavia, was accused in 1644 of the "filthy and vile sodomitical Sin," to which he confessed and admitted to having started when living in Siam. For his honesty he was "condemned to death by strangulation at the stake, after which the body was burned to ashes in the fire and all his property confiscated" (Villiers 1986, introduction to Schouten, n.p.). Whether the fashion of wearing penis bells had already ceased at this period and permitted a return to earlier practices can only be surmised.

Reid states:

Both Islam and Christianity did all they could to get rid of this custom. The Muslim circumcision ritual at puberty provided an alternative initiation to manhood. Spanish officials gave a beating to any Visayan they found wearing a penis pin. By the mid-seventeenth century we hear no more of erotic surgery in the coastal, accessible areas of Southeast Asia. (1988, 150)

On the face of it, foreign disapproval appears a somewhat surprising reason for the supposed disappearance of the practice; objections to common practices in Siam, like, for example, the lying by the fire of post-parturition women, took more than a century to take effect. One is inclined to believe there were additional and possibly stronger reasons; the most frequently offered explanation, that the bells gave greater pleasure to women, is highly suspect and probably male-oriented. The practice must also have caused considerable pain to the males involved, and given the standards of hygiene at the time, death or impotence must have been frequent consequences. But away from the coasts, as Lagirarde has pointed out, the practice of implants has still not entirely disappeared (1989, 34–36).

Nor are survivals of the practice confined necessarily to remote areas. Jackson has recently written:

Concern among heterosexual men to provide sexual pleasure to female partners is shown by some working class Thai men's preparedness to scarify their penis in order to increase women's sexual satisfaction. While

this scarification has a strong element of masculine sexual braggadocio—the incision is typically performed in the presence or with the help of male peers—it is justified in terms of supposedly increasing a woman's sexual enjoyment. The most common form of penile scarification is *fang muk* ("inserting pearls"), where small glass or plastic beads are inserted under the skin of the penis. A less common form of scarification is called *ben* (from "Mercedes Benz"), where a triangular shape similar to the Mercedes Benz marque is cut onto the top of the penis, below the glans. (1995, 48–9)

Perhaps, too, survivals are not restricted to the Buddhist hinterland: there was a flurry of articles in the *Malay Mail* in August 1994 following a case in the Kuala Lumpur magistrate's court on 8 August when "a prostitute was jailed for a day and fined RM600 for using a broom to hit her client's head during

a fight when she refused to have sex after she learnt that he had a ball-bearing implant." Venereologists and urologists made comments against the practice, and the Malaysian Medical Council threatened action under the Medical Act of 1971 if non-medical practitioners performed penile implants.

The practice of wearing penis bells (as opposed to balls, which in spite of gainsay now appears to continue) may, then, be put down to a bizarre fashion, perhaps no more curious than piercing the nose and lower ears today. Whether its occasionally stated origin in a regal attempt to curb sodomy is real or simply a justification for the fashion must remain, for want of evidence, a matter of speculation. It is worth pointing out, however, that all the writers who cite this supposed cause are early Western visitors to mainland Southeast Asia, and their rationalizations probably have far more to do with a desire for exoticism and an expression of their own prejudices and pre-occupations than reality.

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