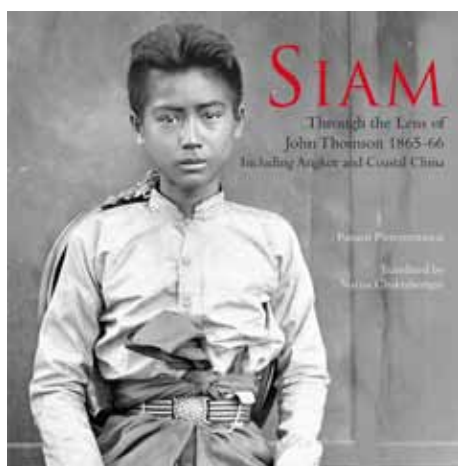


Reviews

Siam - Through the Lens of John Thomson 1865-66 Including Angkor and Coastal China by Paisarn Piemmettawat, edited and translated by Narisa Chakrabongse (Bangkok: River Books, 2015). ISBN 978 616 7339 51 1. 995 Baht/US\$30/£19.50.



River Books and the Wellcome Library of London deserve great credit for producing this sumptuous book to accompany the exhibition of the same name held at the National Gallery, Bangkok from 9 January to 28 February 2015. Attractively priced at 995 Baht, with an intriguing portrait of a young, yet serious, Thai boy as the cover photo, the book, which has been published in Thai and English, contains forty-three of Thomson's photos of Siam together with seven photos taken in Cambodia, including the first ever photos of Angkor Wat, and eleven photos of

Coastal China; it is hardly surprising that the book quickly sold out, leading almost immediately to a second printing.

The Scottish photographer John Thomson (1837-1921) has become legendary among historians and photography aficionados for his superb travel photos and portraiture in Southeast and East Asia that now form an extensive historical record of the region in the decade between 1862 and 1872. Although Thomson visited Siam and Cambodia for only a few months in 1865-66, the unprecedented level of access he was granted meant that he has left a significant photographic legacy, taking the first formal photographic portraits of members of the Thai royal family as well as being the first photographer to visit and record the ruins of Angkor Wat. It should not be forgotten that all of this was achieved by carrying large and heavy photographic equipment, many crates containing glass negatives and highly flammable chemicals across often inhospitable terrain in very hot conditions.

The book offers a foreword by Narisa Chakrabongse explaining the conception, planning and preparation of the exhibition, followed by three introductory essays. *In Photography in Siam – The Crucial Years (1861-66)*, Dr. Joachim Bautze, an eminent art historian who is currently writing his own book on Early Photography in Thailand, provides a short overview of the history of photography in Siam up

to the arrival of Thomson, including brief profiles and photographs of several photographers either then visiting or resident in Bangkok. He notes that Thomson was certainly not the first Western photographer at the Siamese court, but for reasons unknown, King Mongkut permitted Thomson access previously unknown to any other Western visitor. The photos of the people and places are fascinating and the only disappointment is that the chapter ends abruptly without the author being able to examine the impact, if any, of Thomson's visit and photographs on the local photographic industry.

The brief essay titled *The Reign of King Mongkut (R. 1851-1868)* by renowned Thai historian Maj. Gen. M.R. Suphawat Kasemsri, and his research assistant, Rachanee Supvichit, provides a very concise and readable description of the major achievements of King Mongkut's reign. The authors point out that this was truly a remarkable era in Thai history, given the King's reform of the Buddhist Sangha, as well as the series of treaties signed with several foreign powers that signaled the end of the crown monopoly on trade and the opening of the country to foreign commerce.

The last essay, *John Thomson's Photographs of Thailand in the Wellcome Library*, written by William Schupbach, Librarian, the Wellcome Library, London, provides an overview of Thomson's career in Asia and on his return to Great Britain. He explains how Thomson "was in the right place at the right time" to launch his photographic career in Asia, and that his "classic photographs of Beijing, the Chinese Treaty Ports and of street life in London could never have come into existence without his successful beginnings in Bangkok." The author documents the help Thomson received from the British Consul in Bangkok to obtain an audience with King Mongkut, who granted him permission to take formal portraits of himself, members of the royal family and his chief ministers. Thomson was also fortunate and privileged to be invited to photograph the tonsure ceremony of Crown Prince Chulalongkorn, as well as the royal barge procession and a royal funeral (for King Pinklao, the Second King and younger brother of King Mongkut). Thomson was able to stay in Bangkok for several months and photographed "many aspects of the city, river scenes, its surrounding countryside and people". Thomson's collection at the Wellcome Library, which was acquired from Thomson's estate in 1921, consists of nearly 700 photographs, of which 59 are photographs of Siam while 64 are of Cambodia.

Of course, the photographs – many never previously seen in Thailand – are the real stars of this book, and the clarity of print achieved from delicate glass negatives that are 150 years old is almost beyond belief. The photographs in the exhibition (and hence in the book) are divided into four sections: *Portraits: Royalty & Commoners; Ceremonies; Views of Bangkok & Beyond; Cambodia; and Coastal China*. Each photo has a lucid explanation of the subject matter provided by local photography enthusiast and writer, Paisarn Piemmettawat.

This reviewer found the portraits especially absorbing: in particular, the

contrast between King Mongkut portrayed in impressive traditional dress with full ceremonial regalia [3] and his pose in French military uniform [4 and 5] requires repeated viewing; the portrait of a very young, bejeweled princess [6], with her hair in a topknot, looking sternly at the camera with her maid-servant kneeling at her feet with a fan, is an utterly arresting image that must have been difficult for Thomson to accomplish; and two other portraits of the unknown young boy [14] (the cover photo) and an oarsman [15] are equally uncomplicated yet dramatic.

The panoramas [35-37] of the Chao Phraya River and Rattanakosin Island taken from Wat Arun are also fascinating. It must have required considerable detective work on the part of the author to provide a detailed identification of the sites in Thomson's photographs, but his effort has certainly paid off in the enlarged prints.

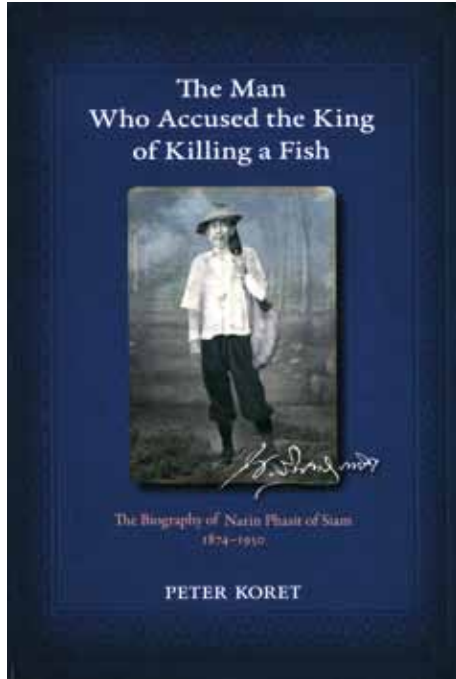
At the beginning of 1866, Thomson spent three months in Cambodia where he took a number of pictures of the area surrounding Angkor Wat and the temple complex itself [45-49], as well as a portrait of King Norodom in full dress naval uniform. Thomson was clearly enchanted by the elephants that he encountered and took various photos depicting these regal beasts [44]. Although the pictures of the Angkor Wat complex now appear quite familiar to the modern reader, they must have seemed breathtakingly fresh and exotic to Thomson's 19th century readership. (His first book, entitled *The Antiquities of Cambodia*, was published in 1867.)

The book concludes with pictures from Thomson's travels in the Chinese coastal provinces of Fujian and Guangdong [50-60], including a superb portrait of the Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi [50], who is clearly holding a snuff bottle in his left hand and appears to have a large jade or ivory archer's ring on his right thumb. As there was a significant growth in Chinese male emigration from these provinces to Siam during the mid-19th century, the photos provide an interesting contrast and backdrop to the successful Sino-Thai traders and entrepreneurs who have since the early 20th century created many of the largest conglomerates that now dominate the Thai economy.

A welcome Addendum at the end of the book provides suggestions for further reading in Thai and English, together with sources for the captions. In summation, this book looks and feels just right, and unlike many photographic albums is not overly heavy, in any sense. This reviewer believes that it will appeal both to serious historians and casual readers, who wish to see for themselves the people, traditions and scenery of mid-19th century Siam.

Paul Bromberg

The Man Who Accused the King of Killing a Fish: The Biography of Narin Phasit of Siam, 1874-1950 by Peter Koret (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012). ISBN 978-616-215-043-2 (soft). 725 Baht.



Based on this fascinating biography of which he is the subject, it is fair to say that Narin Phasit was a very unusual man. Born in 1874 to a family of fruit farmers in Nonthaburi province, he lived through a period of great socio-economic and political change that saw the old kingdom of Siam transformed into the modern nation-state of Thailand through the twin forces of Western imperialism and capitalism. Although Narin's actual impact upon this transformation was slight at best, this was not due to a lack of ambition or effort on his part, but rather to the sheer impossibility of just one man achieving the lofty goals he set.

Narin was among the first generation of commoners to receive a modern, Western-style education that was designed to prepare them for service in the modernized bureaucracy established by King Chulalongkorn as part of his widespread administrative reforms of the Thai state in the late 19th century. After receiving the highest score in the civil service exams, he was appointed as the provincial governor of Nakhon Nayok in 1909. There, Narin led a successful campaign against local bandits, for which he received a royal decoration. However, his promising government career was brought to an end by his foolhardy attempt to challenge the monopoly of a Western shipping company operating on the Prachin River, against the advice of his superior officer. Following his dismissal and subsequent denunciation in court as a fraud, Narin proceeded to spend the next four decades of his life engaged in various quixotic schemes to reform Thai Buddhism, champion the interests of the common man, eliminate government corruption and promote world peace.

With an instinctive understanding of the power of the public sphere, Narin conducted his one-man crusades through a plethora of self-established publications and organizations, often with outlandish names such as *When Will Narin Be Freed of His Crazy, Like Hitler?* and the Pleased to Object Committee. Among his more bizarre acts of self-promotion, he shaved off half his hair and moustache in order to promote a biography of King Taksin, in which he implicitly likened himself to the Thai warrior-king who had been overthrown and executed for his supposed insanity.

He also found the time to establish a highly profitable business producing medicinal alcohol in the early 1920s and to run for election in Bangkok in 1948, both of which endeavours fell afoul of the Thai authorities.

The most controversial of his initiatives, however, and the one that forms the heart of this biography, was Narin's attempt to promote greater gender equality in Siam through ordaining his two daughters in 1928, thereby establishing the first female order of monks in the kingdom. Although this was supported by the local community, it was a direct challenge to the religious authority of the Thai state, which responded by prohibiting female ordination and then arresting and defrocking Narin's daughters and other women that had followed their lead. The eldest of his daughters, Sara, also received a short prison sentence for her refusal to defrock willingly. This deterred neither of them, however; upon her release, Narin clothed Sara in monastic robes imported from Japan and then announced the formation of a new Buddhist sect free from the corrupting influence of state control. Unsurprisingly, Narin's outspoken style and confrontational manner earned him the enmity of a succession of Thai kings and prime ministers, leading to his periodic imprisonment and even an extrajudicial order to execute him that was fortunately never carried out. Needless to say, all these attempts to silence him failed and, right up until his death in 1950, Narin persisted in his hopelessly optimistic efforts to make the world a better place. As his biographer, Peter Koret, recognizes on a number of occasions, some of the events in Narin's life were so improbable that if it were a work of fiction, then they would have had to have been omitted for being too unrealistic; his death from natural causes and as a free man being a case in point (p. 287).

Like its subject, this book is a highly unconventional biography and might not be to everyone's taste. Most significantly, in what he explains to be an act of 'creative non-fiction' (p. xvii), Koret has dramatized certain key events and invented some dialogue between his protagonist and other people. All such speculative scenes are listed at the back of the book for those concerned about what is historically accurate and what is not. In another break from convention, Koret starts his story *in media res*, with Narin's appointment as provincial governor in his mid-thirties, and provides few details about his life prior to this. Those readers that wish to know more about what might have influenced Narin in his early years will have to turn to Thai-language sources. Despite this idiosyncratic approach, Koret has based his account upon solid academic research, drawing on a wide range of books and newspapers from Narin's time and extensive interviews with his eldest daughter, Sara. For the most part, though, Koret relies on Narin's own prodigious writings, of which he often reproduces large sections to illustrate Narin's thoughts. Judging from these, it is clear that Koret has imitated Narin's writing style throughout the text to give the reader a deeper appreciation of his subject. This generally works to great effect in recreating Narin's mischievous sense of humour but, since the writing is often long-winded, it can be heavy going; though this reviewer suspects

Koret may have done this to help the reader empathize with the recipients of Narin's lengthy and frequent missives, such as the poor sheriff of Nonthaburi who received the 212-page draft defence of female ordination. Moreover, the text is rich with humorous understatement, witty asides and clever turns of phrase that make for an entertaining read; take, for example, the observation that, after being overthrown as absolute monarch in the coup of 1932, King Prajadhipok could at least console himself with the fact that he would no longer be troubled by Narin (p. 230) or the latter's realization that 'the power of reason is never a match against reasons of power' (p. 324).

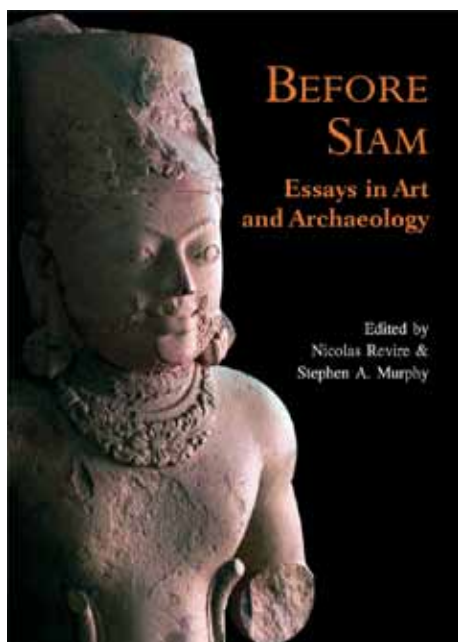
In spite of his constant struggle to be heard or, perhaps more accurately, because his struggle to be heard so antagonized the powers that be, Narin has been almost airbrushed out of Thai history. Being the first English-language study of him, joining a lone Thai-language biography that went through three print runs in the 1990s, this book is thus not just a fitting tribute to a singular man, but an important contribution to Thai studies. It is also of interest because it deals with many issues that are still of relevance today, such as the ongoing debates over female ordination and misbehaviour in the monkhood. For this reviewer, though, what resonates most strongly are the similarities between then and now in how Thai history writing has been manipulated for socio-political ends and how the Thai state deals with dissenting opinions.

In response to the Thai government's efforts in the late 1930s to promote Thai nationalism and legitimize the growing power of the military through the glorification of warrior-kings such as Naresuan, Narin wrote a piece called *The Siamese Generalissimo* in which he praised the same Naresuan for leading his troops into battle and engaging in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy. As he then observed ironically, if world leaders of his time were to do the same, then world peace would be ensured. Today, the military still relies on the martial tradition embodied by Naresuan to justify its role in Thai politics, as evidenced by the free government-sponsored showings of the film *Naresuan: Part 5* in June 2014. It also threatens any who challenge its ultranationalist interpretation of the past, such as the conservative critic Sulak Sivaraksa. Similarly, during the Second World War, Narin was incarcerated in a military-run 'School of Mind Training' for criticizing the Thai premier, Luang Phibun Songkhram, eerily mirrored today by the detention of dissidents in the military's attitude adjustment camps. Indeed, throughout the book, this reviewer kept thinking: what would Narin think of Thailand today? And, just as pertinently, how would the current regime deal with him? It is in answering the latter question that perhaps the key difference between then and now becomes apparent, for it is hard to escape the conclusion that, under the present situation, Narin would have been imprisoned for a much longer term than those he actually served. Given the socio-economic and political progress Thailand has made over the last 100 years, it is unfortunate that the current government is far less tolerant

of dissent than the first military regime under Phibun, which itself was much less tolerant than the absolute monarchy it had replaced. What this wonderfully executed biography of Narin's career as a dissident intellectual illustrates so clearly is that efforts to suppress different opinions will ultimately always be unsuccessful. It is in this sense that Narin Phasit's life is, as Koret claims, 'a universal folktale' (p. xv).

James A. Warren

Before Siam: Essays in Art and Archaeology edited by Nicolas Revire and Stephen A. Murphy (Bangkok: River Books and The Siam Society, 2014). ISBN 978-166733 941 2. 1,495 Baht.



This hefty tome is a comprehensive account of a controversial subject by 33 authors who cover a broad range of academic specialties, with 312 colour illustrations and 56 maps and plans. Yet despite the huge amount of information presented, the subject of Dvāravatī, which many readers might expect to find at the center of the book, is only marginal to the discussion. Most chapters allude to Dvāravatī, but none of them provides an argument in favor of the hypothesis that Dvāravatī was a unified kingdom formed between the 6th and 10th centuries within the borders of what later became Siam. Instead several authors use a footnote to summarize what other writers have called Dvāravatī.

This book does not attempt to take a stance on what "Dvaravati" was, thus the title. Some contributors to this book are more concerned to explore this problem than others, but one should not expect to find an answer to the mystery of Dvāravatī in it. The book's focus is rather on a time period and a general area.

The preface by Chris Baker sets the tone by implanting the idea in the reader's mind that at the dawn of history in Thailand there were many localized art styles, which over the next few centuries gradually coalesced into two traditions or cultural zones conventionally called Mon and Dvāravatī, but which were not firmly bounded or differentiated. Many of the authors emphasize differences between the Chao Phraya drainage and the northeastern region and the Mun and Chi Rivers that flow into the Mekong.

This in itself is a statement. It is possible, as this volume shows, to deal with

the late prehistory and early historic era without the need to postulate a conventional entity such as a kingdom which was seminal to later political, religious, and artistic development in the realm which is now the Kingdom of Thailand. It is possible that future archaeological discoveries will unearth more concrete evidence that such an entity existed, but such a development seems increasingly remote. Although it is not explicitly stated, this book implies that Thailand was created through the coalescence of a variety of cultural units: before Siam, these units exerted considerable influence on each other, and exchanged many things including religious ideas, artistic motifs, and economic commodities, but maintained a relationship which might be called a heterarchy or system of peer polities. The regions which became Thailand evolved along closely parallel tracks during the period under study in this book, which began around 2,300 years ago and ended in the early 13th century with King Jayavarman VII of Angkor; in other words, just before the formation of Sukhothai.

This book makes judicious use of three different fields – archaeology, art history, and history. Most of the authors are aware of the benefits of combining data and analysis from more than one discipline, and seek to blend them rather than bow to the concept of the compartmentalization of knowledge. The first chapter, “What There was Before Siam: Traditional Views” by Hiram Woodward Jr. (pp. 17-29), for example, is written by a man whose main reputation is that of an art historian but who deals with the search for vestiges of Dvāravatī in local chronicles, and attempts to understand how people of the Siam period viewed the pre-Tai past. One chronicle, the *Jinakālamāli*, written around 1500, alludes to Queen Cāmadevī, who was born near Lop Buri around 662 CE and later moved north. This may relate to a memory of the transition from Mon to Tai as the dominant language and identity in Lamphun. In fact the situation was more complex, since there was a period of Khmer linguistic and architectural development there as well. There is no folk memory of a Dvāravatī-like entity.

The rest of the book is divided into four parts. Part I, on the transition from prehistory to history, begins with a chapter by Trongjai Hutangkura, who disputes the assumption that the lack of early sites in the lower central plain of Thailand was due to a higher sea level which only receded around 600-700 CE. Recent geomorphological research shows that the shoreline was already located around Bangkok by that time. This chapter shows that the shoreline of the lower Chao Phraya has not moved very much during the historic period.

It is still possible to refine his hypothesis however. The assumption that the advance of the sea coast was caused by the decline of the sea level rather than sedimentation needs further testing. Probably the lower central plain 2,000 years ago was a shallow swamp in which hummocks of higher ground existed and created an irregular outline, not a smooth straight boundary between land and water. People may well have lived there, like the Marsh Arabs of southern Iraq, but traces of their existence would be difficult to find.

This finding has obvious implications for similar conjectures about other parts of early historic Southeast Asia. There is a similar theory that the coastline of south Sumatra has moved 100 kilometers in the last 1,500 years. Recent discoveries of sites from the early first millennium CE near the coast, combined with the data from Thailand, are beginning to provide strong evidence that the extensive sedimentation around the lower courses of rivers in many parts of Southeast Asia has been in progress for millennia rather than centuries, and therefore *coastal change has not been a significant factor in the evolution of settlement patterns and complex society*. Specialized groups such as the Moken of south Thailand and Myanmar and the Sea Nomads of western Indonesia have probably lived in the marshes for millennia, but left few traces of their activities.

The next chapter by Bérénice Bellina *et al.* provides a detailed account of discoveries in the upper Thai-Malay peninsula at the site of Khao Sam Kaeo. A Franco-Thai project has contributed greatly to understanding the early trade between Southeast Asia and South Asia. It has been suggested that hard stone and glass artifacts may have been made by local craftsmen under the tutelage of immigrant Indian experts (p. 75). It is more plausible that Southeast Asian craftsmen went to India to learn these skills. Southeast Asians were the more accomplished seafarers throughout the early period of contact between Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. The same applies to the high-tin bronze bowls found at Khao Sam Kaeo and Ban Don Ta Phet (p. 76; Ian Glover and Shahnaj Husne Jahan, “An Early Northwest Indian Decorated Bronze Bowl from Khao Sam Kaeo”, pp. 90-97, in this volume). The “South China Sea Indianised” artifacts “display a wide range of morphologies, some of them only rarely or never used for ornaments in South Asia” (*Ibid.*).

The chapter by Brigitte Borell, Bérénice Bellina, and Boonyarit Chaisuwan, titled “Contacts between the Upper Thai-Malay Peninsula and the Mediterranean World,” pp. 98-117, takes us even further west. It also clarifies links to the east, listing finds of Han dynasty pottery and glass from China in the peninsula. Most of the important sites in the peninsula have been looted, but the quantity of seals, cameos, intaglios, coins, and pendants with Roman designs found there is steadily increasing. This chapter concludes that the Roman items here probably came via India. The authors are however willing to consider the possibility that Romans actually did pass through Southeast Asia at least once on the way to China (p. 112); this seems unlikely. The “Roman” embassy was probably from elsewhere, possibly northwest India.

The section concludes with a chapter by Thanik Lertcharnrit on the archaeological site of Phromthin Tai, Lop Buri Province. The site is important due to the long period of activity there. The first phase is marked by a single grave dated to 700-500 BCE. Phase II belongs to the Iron Age (500 BCE-500 CE). The most intensive occupation took place in Phase III: 6-9c CE, “Dvaravati period”. Significantly no break was identified in the sequence between Phases II and III. This chapter is the only one to provide much data on locally-made ceramics. This is an

important subject; more research should focus on local pottery sequences bridging the prehistoric-historic transition.

Part II deals with “The Growing Emergence of Indic Material Culture.” The section begins with a masterful summary by Himanshu Prabha Ray of “Multi-religious Maritime Linkages across the Bay of Bengal during the First Millennium CE.” She provides much valuable information on the relationship between Buddhism and Brahminism in India, the development of religious architecture, and scripts. As she notes, there is no direct correlation between language, script, and religious affiliation. The uses of inscriptions changed in the 1c-2c BCE in India, and again from the 4th century CE onward. This chapter provides much critical information for understanding current thinking in Indian history and archaeology that provides the context for contemporary development in Southeast Asia.

Paul A. Lavy in a chapter on early Vaiṣṇava sculpture in peninsular Thailand and Southeast Asia pays tribute to Stanley J. O’Connor and Robert Brown, and refines O’Connor’s argument for dating these images based on more recent research in India and Southeast Asia. Even if, as Lavy argues, O’Connor’s date is 100 years too early, the Chaiya statue would still be the oldest known Brahmanical image in Southeast Asia.

Brahmanical remains in the peninsular region are also the subject of Wannasarn Noonsuk’s chapter. As in other parts of Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia, Brahmanical and Buddhist remains there are often closely associated, suggesting a mode of coexistence between the two faiths.

With Michel Lorrillard’s chapter on “Pre-Angkorian Communities in the Middle Mekong Valley (Laos and Adjacent Areas)”, the book’s focus shifts to the eastern frontier of what became Siam. Like the other contributors to this volume, he exercises proper caution by avoiding assumptions regarding the linguistic affinities of the people who created various works of art and architecture. He summarizes much new data from the Middle Mekong which support his contention that this region’s importance in the early historic period is underappreciated. Elizabeth H. Moore and San Win, in “Sampanago: ‘City of Serpents’ and Muttama (Martaban)”, deal with similar issues of cross-cultural interaction in the area around the Three Pagodas Pass between Thailand and Myanmar.

Part III, “Early Buddhist Practices, Landscapes and Artefacts”, opens with a chapter by one of the editors, Nicolas Revire, on “Glimpses of Buddhist practices and rituals in Dvāravatī and in neighbouring cultures.” In the author’s words (footnote 1, p. 266): “In this essay, ‘Dvāravatī’ refers to both an archaeological typology and a cultural entity vaguely located in west-central Thailand *circa* the seventh and eighth centuries CE.” It seems that art and common aesthetic values covered broader areas than political units did in this region, and indeed in all of early Southeast Asia. The ideotechnic subsystem of culture, in the terms popularized by archaeologist Lewis Binford, was more stable, and thus, one could argue, more significant than the sociotechnic subsystem (government). This chapter’s main purpose is to emphasize

the role played by *punya*, ‘merit’, in guiding people’s actions. Most laypeople wanted merit, not immediate attainment of nirvana. This chapter contains very useful graphics such as Map 1 (page 248), depicting the locations of Buddhist inscriptions in central and northeast Thailand, in the mid- to late first millennium CE,

Pinna Indorf’s chapter on “Dvāravatī *Cakras*: Questions of their Significance” revisits the subject of stone *cakras* and *stambhas*. One of her important contributions is an exploration of the significance of the *Dighanikaya* and the possible use of the *cakras* as palladia analogous to linggas in Angkor. She also proposes an explanation for the disappearance of these forms. Wesley Clarke displays the fruits of his enterprising study of the unpublished notes of H.G. Quaritch Wales in a major reinterpretation of “The Skeletons of Phong Tuek”, a seminal site in the formation of the Dvāravatī concept by Coedès and Quaritch Wales. Rather than belonging to an earlier phase, the burials found there now seem certain to be contemporary with Buddhist-related construction.

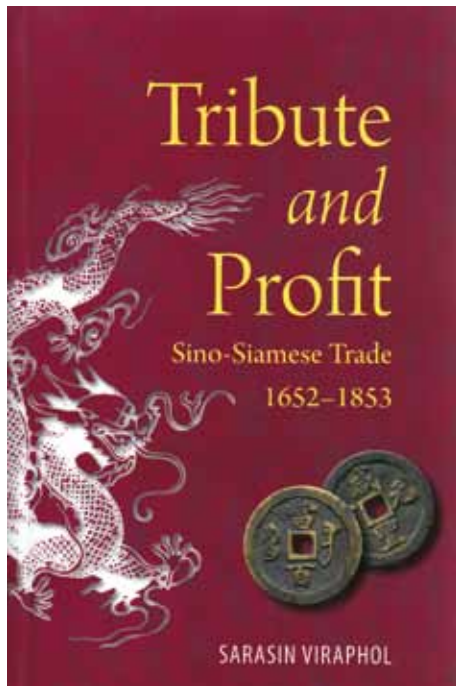
Matthew D. Gallon, in “Monuments and Identity at the Dvāravatī Town of Kamphaeng Saen”, also uses an archaeological approach to the subject of “Dvāravatī”, defining it as an archaeological culture. Next the other editor, Stephen Murphy, employs an art historical approach to comparisons between the *sema* stones in lower Myanmar and northeast Thailand. Contrary to the hypothesis that the *sema* stones in Thailand were a model for those of Thaton, he advances solid reasons for concluding that the two traditions evolved independently, as a result of sharing similar Buddhist traditions and a Pali canon.

Part IV, “Early Khmer Impetus”, discusses a tantric Buddhist inscription found at Sab Bak near Phimai, and suggests that one key function of the enigmatic lintels inside the main temple is to symbolize the unity of body, speech, and mind, and represents the mandala of the *Guhyasamājatantra*. The Khmer section of the Sab Pak inscription deals with the installation of nine Buddhist images of Mount Abhayagiri which were meant to protect the Khmer lands against Java. When the statues deteriorated, Dharanindrapura renovated the statues. His pupil Dhanus reinstalled them in 1066. Arlo Griffiths in an article in *Archipel* in 2013 proposed Ratu Baka in central Java as the site of Abhayagiri. Conti thinks it unlikely that tantric Buddhists traveled to Java for three centuries to maintain a holy place there, but the author of this review in a forthcoming book on Ratu Baka gives reasons why Griffiths’ theory is plausible. In the concluding chapter, Hedwige Miltzer O’Naghten provides a detailed description of the impact of Jayavarman VII’s building program in Thailand, and devotes special attention to Mueang Sing.

In summary, this volume is rich in description and detail. The authors all wisely prefer to allow the reader to decide what Dvāravatī may have been, given the massive amount of information provided herein.

John N. Miksic

Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853 by Sarasin Viraphol (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2014). ISBN: 9786162150791. 795 Baht.



Reading the 2014 edition of Sarasin Viraphol's *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652 – 1853* makes for a curious exercise, at many levels, in the historical discipline. First of all, the 2014 edition, which was splendidly edited by Professor Wutthichai Mulsilpa, who has removed quite a few errors and inconsistencies from the earlier version, actually remains very true to the spirit of the original 1977 Harvard East Asian Monograph version in its perception and presentation of Sarasin's findings as novel and groundbreaking in the academic world of the late Cold War period. For readers who are unfamiliar with the field of overseas Chinese history or even Chinese history of the early modern period, the book, of course, remains quite an eye-opening piece. For

academics and researchers within the field, however, this is a reprint of one of the greatest classics upon which the field itself has been established. There is nothing surprising in the historical content of the book. What is quite amazing is, instead, the retrospective view of what appears to be the almost fantastical shift of the field within the nearly four-decade span between the first Harvard publication and the current edition by Silkworm Books.

Only a couple of years following the conclusion of the Vietnam War, in the bygone era of the first publication of *Tribute and Profit*, one had to argue convincingly that China's role in world trade and commerce of the 18th century was not "primitive in an economic sense and of no importance for modern times." Furthermore, that smaller states in East and Southeast Asia had to negotiate, compromise, evolve and progress around the rules and norms of the Chinese Empire just as much as, if not more than, they had to around the encroaching European powers. Finally, what appears quite ironic from today's perspective is that Sarasin would need to justify the usefulness of his research in terms of a policy recommendation that, "the work can provide a historical perspective on the likely future course of development of Thailand's commercial contact with the People's Republic of China (PRC). At least it should serve as a reminder that trade between the two nations was traditionally cordial and mutually beneficial."

The framing of the preface with the Thai government's announcement of its

intentions to resume trade with the PRC in the mid-1970s underlines the Cold War mentality that was the order of the day, even or perhaps especially, among leading American academics in China-related fields. Even a few years after President Richard Nixon's epoch-making handshake with Chairman Mao, the recent Harvard graduate, Sarasin Viraphol, reported that fear continued to permeate all levels of Thai society—among assemblymen, the military, and the general public—that open trade with communist China could prove detrimental, not only to the stability of Thailand's trade balance, but also the security of her political system and institutions. This statement, so early in the preface, should serve as a stark historical reality check—reminding readers of the present day that, even after the death of Mao and the official conclusion of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the idea that the PRC was on its steady course towards capitalist development remained far, far away from being the general consensus among experts and academics of the so-called free world. Such a concept continued to be seriously problematic and highly debatable even among the most respected China Hands, including Sarasin's own PhD advisor, John K. Fairbank.

In the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, *Tribute and Profit* might also be read as a fable of survival and prosperity for small and relatively powerless states in the shadows of a rising hegemonic neighboring superpower. Today, ASEAN appears to be on the verge of imploding in the very year that the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) was set to be realized. The biggest threat to the wellbeing of the AEC appears to be the PRC claiming the entire South China Sea as its national territory while expanding vast economic influence into the Greater Mekong Sub-region at a seemingly unstoppable rate.

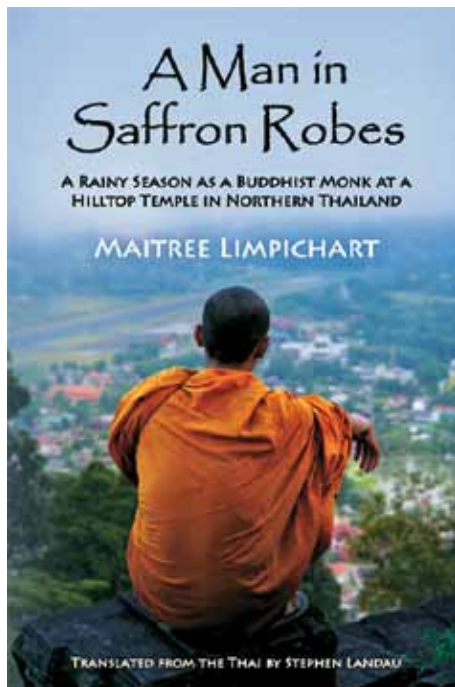
The very bizarre turn of events in contemporary Chinese history since Deng Xiaoping's 'Reform and Opening Up' policy [改革开放] seems to have turned the clock back on the power-relations of Greater East Asia. Not unlike the apex of Manchu power during the reign of Emperor Qianlong in the mid-late 18th century, China has once again risen united among the most influential economic and political centers of the 21st century. Also not unlike Qianlong's Great Qing Empire, China is becoming more and more reluctant to compromise with the trade and political demands of the West while increasingly expecting neighboring ASEAN members to submit to her hegemonic power. Indeed, should China succeed in claiming the South China Sea as her territory and realm of influence, Southeast Asia would more or less have to return to her 18th century status as vassal states within the Chinese tribute system. The expansion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to include India, Pakistan and Iran by the end of 2015 would make the future appear even bleaker for ASEAN in this respect.

If anything can be learnt from *Tribute and Profit*, it is that it is possible for smaller states to outmaneuver superpowers in trade, even within the most established clientelistic system, and that superpowers, no matter how dominant one might appear

to be in the global arena, must also depend on the regular support and cooperation of smaller states and trade networks. Ironically, what rings truest of all to the 21st century reader of this book is that, even back in the 18th century, it was the transnational trade and the business/capitalist networks of overseas Chinese merchants that prevailed despite strenuous state regulations and monopolies of both the Great Qing Empire and Siam under the Ayutthaya kings. At the end of the day, it is trade and capital—which is in itself without nationality and owes absolute loyalty only to the highest bidder—that has the final say on the balance of power, not only within the Greater East Asian region, but also in the wider global arena as a whole.

Wasana Wongsurawat

A Man in Saffron Robes: A Rainy Season as a Buddhist Monk at a Hilltop Temple in Northern Thailand by Maitree Limpichart, translated by Stephen Landau (New York: Middle Way Multimedia & Publishing Services, 2013). ISBN 978-1481863094. US\$15.12.



Titled *Khon Nai Phaa Leuang* in the original Thai edition, published in 1980, Maitree Limpichart's memoir documents his decision and early preparation to enter the monkhood, the reasons why he decided to spend his retreat at the remote hilltop temple, Wat Prathat Doi Kong Mu, in the (then) even remoter province of Mae Hong Son before describing his daily routine, feelings and thoughts during that period. This edition is a translation of Maitree's book by Stephen Landau, a former Peace Corps volunteer and later staff member in Thailand; his company is also the publisher of this book, which has previously published photos of Maitree's ordination and other events during his monkhood. The book is divided into 42 vignettes, or short stories, which makes reading the entire book in

sequence, or choosing particular stories at random, easy enough.

This memoir harks back to a different era, but not that far back. Bangkok was a large bustling metropolis where the pressures of urban life were ubiquitous. By comparison, Mae Hong Son was still cut off from the rest of the country. Yet, in 1974, Maitree Limpichart, the renowned author, newspaper columnist and former

government official, at the advanced age of thirty-three, left his wife and two children in Bangkok to don the saffron robes as a Buddhist monk for a period of three months during *Phansa*, or Buddhist Lent. In order to gain the most spiritual experience from his limited time, he decided to travel as far as possible from Bangkok to Mae Hong Son, situated close to Thailand's north-west frontier with Myanmar. There he participated in the daily routine of the *Sangha*, the brotherhood of monks, and interacted with the local community.

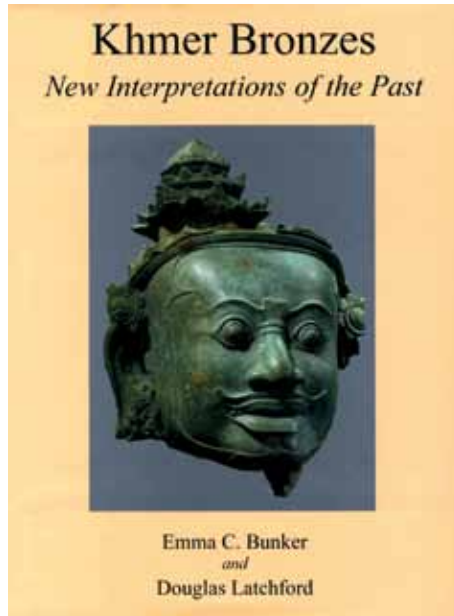
Maitree carefully considers what it means to become a monk in Thailand, the role of the *Sangha* in Thai society, the changes taking place in rural life and the growing dichotomy between agrarian and urban societies. This reviewer has attended several ceremonies for initiates to the monkhood, but had never previously considered the anxiety each man must feel on entering a completely new life with a new set of rules, if only temporarily. Maitree, as a monk, provides plenty of food for thought in this regard, saying, "...we are merely men in saffron robes—with all the frailty and imperfection that that implies—and nothing more." (p. xxi)

Maitree has a keen eye, and his description of his fellow monks, the temple environment and his daily routine during his time in the *Sangha*, not to mention the remote backdrop and stunning scenery of Mae Hong Son, makes for a number of interesting, if brief, storylines. These include among others: preparing for and enduring the initiation ceremony; the trials of putting on the saffron robe so that it does not fall down; the difficulties of learning various prayers; dealing with family and friends as a monk; the terrible hunger pains initiates experience when not eating after noon; interaction with other monks and lay people; the position in society of, and discrimination and poverty endured by, hill tribes peoples; the role and issue of Buddhist faith itself and the position of the *Sangha* in Thai society; and disrobing and returning to lay life.

It is clear from Maitree's positive description of his time in the *Sangha* that, despite his initial trepidation and difficulties, homesickness and actually falling ill, his time as a monk "brought me peace of mind and the greatest happiness I've known." (p. 279) Stephen Landau's translation turns Maitree's narrative into an easy and comprehensible read, even for those not thoroughly familiar with the Thai ceremonies and rituals described. For those considering their routine lives on the treadmill of urban life, this lovely little book certainly provides plenty to contemplate.

Paul Bromberg

Khmer Bronzes: New Interpretations of the Past by Emma C. Bunker and Douglas Latchford (Chicago: Art Media Resources, 2011). ISBN 978 1 58886 111 5 (hard). US\$120.



The study of Khmer bronze sculpture and ritual/ceremonial objects has experienced a groundswell in recent years. Among the most notable developments is the discovery of a bronze-making workshop north of the Royal Palace in Angkor Thom, the only Angkor-era bronze production workshop that has thus far come to light (Polkinghorne 2014-2015). Substantial portions of major international exhibitions in 1997-1998 (Jessup & Zéphir 1997) and 2006-2007 (Lobo & Jessup 2006) were devoted to bronzes, and recent museum catalogues of collections in Phnom Penh (Dalsheimer 2001) and Paris (Baptiste & Zéphir 2008) have included significant coverage of them as well. In 2010-2011 visitors to the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

(Washington, D.C.) and the J. Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles) were treated to *Gods of Angkor* (Cort & Jett 2010), an important exhibit consisting of bronzes selected from the National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh.

Right on its heels, and covering some of the same objects but also many more, came this hefty volume, by far the most thorough and ambitious study of Khmer bronze art ever published. It is the third and reportedly final installment of Bunker and Latchford's series on ancient Khmer art (Bunker & Latchford 2004, 2008). The finest of the three, *Khmer Bronzes: New Interpretations of the Past* exhibits many of the same strengths, challenges, and risks of the previous books as noted, for example, in a review of Bunker and Latchford's *Adoration and Glory: The Golden Age of Khmer Art* (Baptiste & Zéphir 2004). Because several bronze sculptures featured in this book were previously published by Bunker and Latchford, many for the first time and often with extensive discussions scattered across their publications, it is helpful to read *Khmer Bronzes* with the previous two volumes close at hand.

Like their previous books, a main strength of *Khmer Bronzes* is its multifaceted perspective that bridges art history, archaeology, technical analysis, and art connoisseurship. *Khmer Bronzes* is a collaborative effort that includes, in addition to the main text by Bunker and Latchford, contributions by TzeHuey Chiou-Peng, Pieter Meyers, Peter D. Sharrock, and Hiram Woodward. The first three chapters examine different aspects of bronze metallurgy in Southeast Asia and Yunnan prior to the

mid-1st millennium CE. Chapter 1, by Bunker and Latchford, provides a summary of “The Beginning of the Use of Metals and Alloys in Cambodia.” Chapter 2 by TzeHuey Chiou-Peng discusses “The Technical History of Early Asian Kettledrums” with a primary focus on Yunnan. According to her, the bronze kettledrum tradition originated with the Wanjiaba drums. The earliest of these is often argued to date to the 7th century BCE, a date supported by Chiou-Peng, but international scholarly consensus regarding the chronology and influence of the Wanjiaba drums is lacking. She argues that “a distinct Yunnan metallurgical tradition” relying on piece-mold casting led to the development of the famous Heger I type kettledrums, including those associated with Dong Son (or Đông Sơn) civilization in northern Vietnam, and that lost-wax casting commenced in Yunnan during the 4th century BCE, but only then as a supplementary technique for casting plaques and figural scenes on the lids of Dian drums and cowry shell containers (p. 25).

In Chapter 3, “Casting Technology in Cambodia and Related Southeast Asian Civilizations,” Pieter Meyers builds on the data provided by Chiou-Peng to argue, contrary to the opinions of many scholars, that the lost-wax casting technique (or a variation of it) was not used to produce the kettledrums associated with Dong Son civilization (Heger I type drums). Instead, according to Meyers, these drums, and related bronze objects like bells and gongs, were all produced with the piece-mold casting technique derived from Yunnan. This technique, he says, disappeared in Vietnam ca. mid-1st millennium CE around the time that lost-wax casting was introduced to Southeast Asia from South Asia. As discussed in Chapter 4 by Bunker and Latchford, the lost-wax casting innovation first occurred in parts of Southeast Asia ca. 6th century to facilitate the production of three-dimensional Hindu and Buddhist figures, large sculptures of which were equipped with an internal “iron armature to support the wax-covered clay core during the casting process...” (p. 53).

These essays are often quite compelling and provide a useful overview of some aspects of prehistoric Southeast Asian bronze traditions, but the picture they paint is rather incomplete. The well-known nationalistic debates over the origins, chronology, and stylistic sequence of bronze drums aside, the early chapters of this book give extremely short shrift to evidence from Vietnam and the role of (northern) Vietnam in the development of Southeast Asian metallurgical traditions. Other than a handful of references to key sources on Dong Son culture and bronzes published in Vietnam, there is little engagement with Vietnamese scholarship or with Vietnamese language sources. Given the immense scale of archaeological research in Vietnam, much of it in Vietnamese, this is indeed a major shortcoming. A higher level of reader confidence might have been attained had the authors engaged more comprehensively and directly with differing interpretations of the data advanced by Vietnamese scholars, as well as by scholars of other nationalities who have worked

extensively in Vietnam (e.g. Japanese scholars).¹

Similarly, the essays would have been strengthened had the authors included relevant archaeological evidence found in Vietnam and Laos and had they made more than a cursory reference to objects held in Vietnamese collections. For example, given the welcome attention by the authors to the technical aspects of bronze objects and their manufacture, it is striking that no mention is made of archaeological evidence that indicates the casting of bronze drums in northern Vietnam, including two fragments of a clay mold excavated in 1998 (discussed with citations in Calo 2014: 39-40). Pieter Meyers stresses detailed firsthand examination and technical analysis and states that his observations “were made based upon careful study of dozens of drums and associated objects” (pp. 36-37). Yet all of his examples of kettledrums said to be from Vietnam are drawn from a private collection in California (Chan Kieu Collection) with no information provided about either provenance (documented history of ownership/custody) or provenience (find spot). It is unclear whether his conclusions were at all informed by firsthand analysis of any of the “classic” examples of Dong Son (Heger I type) drums in Vietnamese museums or any of the bronze drums that have been discovered at known locations or by archaeologists in controlled excavations. However experienced or capable the analyst, technical arguments based on objects of unknown or undisclosed origin, rather than unimpeachable examples with known histories, is not sound methodology – if that is indeed what has occurred here; readers are provided no way of knowing otherwise. Given the potential impact of the arguments that Meyers makes, this reviewer eagerly awaits their confirmation by additional scholarship employing a more transparent, inclusive, and systematic methodology.

Chapters 4-9, written by Bunker and Latchford and comprising the bulk of the book, present the history of Khmer and Khmer-related bronze art traditions, mostly Brahmanical and Buddhist, from the 7th through the 13th century. The main topics are the following: Pre-Angkorian images, primarily examples found in Cambodia and northeastern Thailand (Chapter 4); the “Early Angkor Period” (Chapter 5); the “Golden Age” of the Baphuon style (Chapter 7); the “Angkor Wat Period” (Chapter 8); the “Bayon Period” (Chapter 9); and “exotic Buddhist bronzes” (Chapter 6)

¹ Three examples will suffice here. Imamura (2010) offers somewhat differing opinions regarding the dating and significance of the drums known variably as the Wanjiaba type, pre-Heger I type drums, or Dong Son type D. In addition to the piece-mold and lost-wax casting methods, expertly discussed by Meyers, a “lost fiber” method has been suggested for the handles of a few Heger I type bronze drums (Imamura 1989). In several publications Nishimura Masanari (e.g. 2008: 76-78) observes the predominance of the piece-mold technique for so-called Pre-Heger I type and Heger I type bronze drums, but he argues that several early examples of these two types of drums were likely to have been produced using the lost-wax casting method, which he associates with localization occurring in Thailand and Vietnam (e.g. in Binh Định province). Did Meyers examine these drums? In any case, arguments such as these potentially complicate relatively straightforward theories of cultural transmission, sequences of style and technique, and attempts to date these developments. None of these perspectives are acknowledged or discussed in *Khmer Bronzes*.

found in “Khmer territory” but imported from China, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and perhaps other parts of Southeast Asia. A major contribution of Chapters 6-9 is the rich information provided on the development of Khmer esoteric Buddhist artistic traditions beginning perhaps as early as the late 8th century and culminating in the strongly Vajrayāna Buddhist milieu of King Jayavarman VII in the late 12th and the early 13th century.

Specific aspects of the development of tantric/esoteric Buddhist art are treated in several of the book’s appendixes. In Appendix 2, Peter D. Sharrock identifies the naga-enthroned Buddha images of Angkorian art as the Buddha Vairocana. In Appendix 3, Sharrock examines the iconography of a ca. 11th-century Buddhist bronze sculpture in the National Museum of Cambodia and identifies it as the supreme cosmic Buddha Vajrasattva. Appendix 4, by Hiram Woodward, argues that several stone and bronze figures, seated and holding a *vajra* and bell, should be identified as Bhaiṣajyaguru, the Medicine Buddha. Related triadic images and image pedestals can, he furthermore argues, be associated with the Medicine Buddha flanked by the bodhisattvas Sūryaprabha (Sunlight) and Candraprabha (Moonlight). These appendixes introduce important information for understanding the iconography of late Angkorian bronze sculpture, but the issues are complex and are best approached with knowledge of other publications by Sharrock and Woodward, many of which are cited. Appendix 5, by Bunker, examines five-headed Śiva images in Khmer art. She argues that they need to be distinguished according to their iconography as “the great deity Mahesha, Shiva’s supreme manifestation, and Bhairava, his horrific aspect” (p. 503) and that at least one late example of Mahesha displays iconography indicating “the deity’s complete Vajrayana transformation” (p. 508).

According to their introduction, the goals of *Khmer Bronzes* are to highlight the “Khmer genius” in copper-alloy metallurgy “by studying the actual bronzes as unique records in themselves,” to highlight the uniquely “Khmer qualities” of the objects, and to examine “early Khmer bronze sculpture in its own cultural context with merits of its own” (p. x). Certainly, these are worthwhile and laudable aims, but the insistent linkage of a monolithic Khmer ethnicity with styles of art and ancient polities is naïve and anachronistic. The authors write, for example, that “[t]housands of bronzes created by Khmer artisans have been recovered from all over Cambodia, southern Laos, southwest Vietnam, and northeast Thailand, regions that once belonged to the great Khmer Empire...” (p. x). Sweeping assertions about the supposed ethnicity of ancient artists working across a vast and culturally variegated territory are not only unverifiable, but are also unintentionally problematized by the authors themselves in a brief discussion (pp. 461-2) of the famed iron-working tradition of the Kuy ethnic group, inhabitants of northern and northeastern Cambodia, northeastern Thailand, and southern Laos.

It is, of course, not my intention to question the predominantly Khmer character of Angkor; I am not at all seeking to resuscitate the French Colonial discursive

specter of a supposedly vanished or degenerate Khmer race (Edwards 2007: 10-39), nor a return to the Thai nationalist use of the term “Khom” to disassociate the Khmer from Angkor (Keyes 1991: 277-278). But I am advocating greater critical sensitivity to the “dynamic and situational aspects of ethnicity” (Jones 1997: 72-83) vis-à-vis archaeology and art history, particularly in an age of heightened tensions over national heritage often construed in stridently exclusivist terms. Thankfully the rather extravagant ethnic essentialism that occurs in the Introduction and the Concluding Remarks (Chapter 10) of *Khmer Bronzes* is not characteristic of the rest of the book.

With *Khmer Bronzes* Bunker and Latchford seek to assemble “a large range” of objects that “will provide a critical mass that can clarify the significance of bronze in the development of Khmer culture” (p. xi). Like another recent book on Khmer bronzes (Zefferys, Zefferys & Stone 2001), but far exceeding it in scope of coverage and caliber of scholarship and presentation, *Khmer Bronzes* includes examples of bronze sculpture, many of them of extraordinary high quality, drawn from numerous public museums and private collections.

Particularly well-represented in *Khmer Bronzes* are the collections of the National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh (approximately sixty pieces), the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (approximately eight featured pieces), and at least a dozen private collections in Thailand, Europe, and the United States (over 145 pieces) with many of the privately held pieces presumably owned by Latchford and/or his family members. Also included are over twenty-five bronzes from a dozen public museums in the United States and several sculptures from museums in Australia and Taiwan. In contrast, European museum collections, many of which have important Khmer bronzes, are poorly served here, with just one sculpture each from the Musée Guimet in Paris and the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin. Other than the National Museum of Cambodia, Southeast Asian museums are also neglected. In spite of the substantial holdings of important Khmer-related bronze sculpture in various branches of Thailand’s National Museum system, only two sculptures from museums in Thailand are included (one each from the Phimai National Museum and the privately run Muang Boran Collection). There is nothing at all from the other branches of Thailand’s National Museum, including the Bangkok National Museum, and there is no coverage whatsoever of Khmer-related material in collections in Laos (e.g. Hawixbrock et al. 2012: 71-79) or Vietnam (e.g. Guy 2014: figs. 92, 96, cat. no. 61). In Appendix 6, however, Bunker helpfully reassembles six 12th-13th century bronzes, first published by Sherman E. Lee in 1943, that were found in 1919 near Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) and are now dispersed in six different collections in the United States.

In general, with the exception of some reservations previously expressed regarding Chapters 1-3, the research on display in *Khmer Bronzes* is thorough, up-to-date, well-annotated, and followed by a lengthy and useful bibliography. Close technical, stylistic, and iconographic analysis of the bronze objects sheds new light on the development of Khmer and related bronze traditions, casting

techniques, regional and period characteristics, artistic and technological influences, and religious changes. The discussion is accompanied by hundreds of high-quality photographs, many of them occupying a full-page, and with numerous featured artworks presented in multiple angles and with close-up detail shots. Presented here are a number of previously unpublished works. Some of them are revelations of beauty and great historical significance. Among the most spectacular are a ca. 7th century four-armed goddess (figs. 4.6a-e) closely related to Cham art and a ca. mid-9th century Lokeśvara (figs. 5.3a-h), both of which are accompanied by copies of authenticity testing and dating documents (presented in Appendix 1).

In contrast to the high-quality photographs of the featured artworks, some of the comparative photographic material, maps, etc. are of rather uneven quality and reflect the original published source from which they were drawn. A book of ostensibly such high production value could have benefited from somewhat more diligent copyediting. It contains quite a few typographical errors and misspelled words (e.g. “clay” often appearing as “^lclay”). Chapter 3 suffers from a rather strange system of multiple sequential superscript notations at the end of sentences (e.g. “^{26, 27, and 28}” and “^{35, 36, 37}”) and, in several instances, unnecessarily complicates matters by placing numbered superscript endnote references within the endnotes themselves. Throughout the book, a number of cross references and abbreviated citations in the endnotes are not listed in full in the Bibliography, which makes certain aspects of the presentation difficult to follow-up.

Overall, *Khmer Bronzes* is both informative and provocative. Some readers may understandably approach it with ambivalence and even some trepidation. Many of the artworks published in this book are owned by one of the co-authors, Douglas Latchford, and/or, it seems, by members of his family. An avid collector and connoisseur of Khmer art for nearly sixty years, Latchford is able, perhaps uniquely, to provide invaluable information about these artworks and their histories. However, he has come under scrutiny for his alleged role in the acquisition and sale of looted Cambodian art (Mashberg 2012). Most notably this was in connection to questions surrounding the now famous Koh Ker Duryodhana statue that, in December 2013, Sotheby’s agreed to return to Cambodia under the pressure of a civil forfeiture suit filed by the United States attorney’s office in Manhattan (*United States v. 10th Century Cambodian Sandstone Sculpture*) (Roasa 2013).

Khmer Bronzes presents many previously unknown artworks held in private collections and museums, provides little or no documentation of ownership history, and, unfortunately, as is so often the case, the authors are able, or willing, to present only the bare minimum information about object location and circumstances of discovery. It collates these newly revealed objects with more widely known examples that may or may not have better understood histories. It skillfully weaves all of these beautifully photographed artworks into a thoughtful and well-researched art historical narrative while simultaneously offering many insights into the technical and stylistic

development of Khmer art. One might well argue that publications such as this, whether intentionally or not, may support questionable acquisition and collecting practices, perhaps stymie heritage management and archaeological research, and could be used to legitimate objects with potentially contested provenance and/or controversial provenience histories.

On the face of it, Bunker and Latchford take a pragmatic approach and conclude by saying that “[a]ny bronze found in Khmer territory should be studied and appreciated, as it may provide evidence leading to significant re-interpretations of Cambodia’s glorious past and encourage future research” (p. 467). As Emma Bunker (2005: 312) writes elsewhere, “[i]gnoring works of art for lack of documentation is a disservice to scholarship. We have an obligation to the object and to the acquisition of any knowledge that it might hold.” We also have an obligation to pursue scholarship and art collecting ethically and with balanced consideration of the often-competing interests of various national public and political constituencies, archaeologists, art historians, curators, collectors, dealers, and others. *Khmer Bronzes*, together with Bunker and Latchford’s two previous books will no doubt fuel debates surrounding these tangled issues for some time to come. It is an important book, both as a source of potential controversy and as groundbreaking scholarship.

Paul A. Lavy

References

- Baptiste, Pierre and Thierry Zéphir, 2004. Review of *Adoration and Glory: The Golden Age of Khmer Art*, by Emma C. Bunker and Douglas Latchford. *Arts Asiatiques* vol. 59: pp. 182-184.
- _____, 2008. *L’art khmer dans les collections du Musée Guimet*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux.
- Bunker, Emma C., 2005. “The Acquisition and Ownership of Antiquities in Today’s Age of Transition.” In Kate Fitz Gibbon (ed.), *Who Owns the Past? Cultural Policy, Cultural Property, and the Law*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, pp. 311-317.
- Bunker, Emma C. and Douglas [A.J.] Latchford, 2004. *Adoration and Glory: The Golden Age of Khmer Art*. Chicago: Art Media Resources.
- _____, 2008. *Khmer Gold: Gifts for the Gods*. Chicago: Art Media Resources.
- Calo, Ambra, 2014. *Trails of Bronze Drums across Early Southeast Asia: Exchange Routes and Connected Cultural Spheres*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Cort, Louise Allison and Paul Jett (eds.), 2010. *Gods of Angkor: Bronzes from the National Museum of Cambodia*. Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institute.

- Dalsheimer, Nadine, 2001. *Les collections du Musée national de Phnom Penh: l'art du Cambodge ancien*. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Edwards, Penny, 2007. *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Guy, John (ed.), 2014. *Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Early Southeast Asia*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Hawixbrock, Christine, Claude Jacques, Marielle Santoni, Viengkèo Souksavatdy, and Valérie Zaleski, 2012. *Collections du musée de Vat Phu / Vat Phu Museum collections*. Champassak, Laos: Département du Patrimoine mondial de Vat Phu – Champassak.
- Imamura, Keiji, 1989. "A Unique Casting Method Discerned on the Handles of Some Bronze Drums of Heger I Type." *Bulletin of the Department of Archaeology* (The University of Tokyo) vol. 8: pp. 99-105 [text in Japanese and English].
- _____, 2010. "The Distribution of Bronze Drums of the Heger I and Pre-I Types: Temporal Changes and Historical Background." *Bulletin of the Department of Archaeology* (The University of Tokyo) vol. 24: pp. 29-44.
- Jessup, Helen Ibbitson and Thierry Zéphir (eds.), 1997. *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art.
- Jones, Siân, 1997. *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present*. London: Routledge.
- Keyes, Charles F., 1991. "The Case of the Purloined Lintel: The Politics of a Khmer Shrine as a Thai National Treasure." In Craig J. Reynolds (ed.), *National Identity and Its Defenders, Thailand, 1939-1989*. Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, pp. 261-292.
- Lobo, Wibke and Helen Ibbitson Jessup (eds.), 2006. *Angkor: Göttliches Erbe Kambodschas*. Munich: Prestel.
- Mashberg, Tom, 2012. "Claims of Looting Shadow Expert in Khmer Art." *The New York Times*, December 12, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/13/arts/design/us-links-collector-to-statue-in-khmer-looting-case.html?_r=0.
- Nishimura, Masanari, 2008. "Bronze Drums Unearthed around the South China Sea and Their Cultural Context." *Vietnam Archaeology* no. 3, pp. 73-83.
- Polkinghorne, Martin, 2014-2015. "The Royal Palace Workshop of Angkor." *In Focus: The Center for Khmer Studies* no. 12: pp. 24-25.
- Roasa, Dustin, 2013. "Fate of a Statue: The Case of the Duryodhana." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, October 20, 2013. <http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/fate-of-a-statue-the-case-of-the-duryodhana>.
- Zefferys, Marlene L., Nicholas S. Zefferys, and Jeffrey Stone, 2001. *Heaven and Empire: Khmer Bronzes from the 9th to the 15th Centuries*. Bangkok: White Lotus.

Auf der Suche nach einer grenzüberschreitenden Wissenschaftskultur. Gesammelte Aufsätze 2001-2013 by Chetana Nagavajara (Nakhon Pathom: Department of German, Silpakorn University, 2013). ISBN 978-974-641-491-3.



Chetana Nagavajara was educated at the University of Cambridge, graduating in French language and literature. He then graduated from the Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen in German language and literature with specialization in comparative literature studies, a discipline known in German as *Komparatistik*. His academic career was spent at Silpakorn University, from which he retired as professor emeritus. The focus of his research and publications has been on comparative studies of American, English, French, German and Thai cultures, especially their literature, performing arts, and music. He was elected an Honorary Member of the Siam Society in 2004. This volume contains nineteen papers, nine of them previously unpublished, compiled as a tribute to his

mentor, Eberhard Lämmert, on his 89th birthday in 2013. The title is perhaps best translated as *In Search of a Transboundary Culture of Humanities*.¹

This compendium is rich in original, seminal contributions to ongoing deliberations on the rationale that underlies endeavors geared toward making progress in enhancing interaction across cultures. Its ultimate goal is to find the common values inherent in the heritage of diverse cultural traditions.

Chetana, in his own words, does not like to develop a thought in a single, straight line. He likens his style of presenting thoughts, deliberations, reflections, findings, diagnoses, descriptions, and conclusions to the technique applied by a visual artist in creating a “collage.” Each of the author’s papers is a “collage” in itself, and the compendium is a collection of “collages.”

The strong underlying theme of this outstanding collection is the importance of ethical values, both in distinguishing mere technical expertise from true art, and in providing a common set of standards to unite the world. By using a Buddhist

¹ Chetana Nagavajara also published *Bridging Cultural Divides: Collected Essays and Reviews 2006-2014* (Bangkok: Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University, 2014). This English-language collection, also dedicated to Eberhard Lämmert, contains fifteen essays, which cover the same themes as the German-language collection, and in some cases are translations or close adaptation, along with 25 review articles not found in the German collection.

perspective to analyze classic European works, and using his own Europe-educated perspective to analyze classic Thai works, Chetana builds towards a theory of a transboundary culture of humanities, a *grenzüberschreitende Wissenskulturr* that transcends geographical regions, nation states, religious tenets, languages, and cultures.

In his role as a scholar of comparative culture and especially of literary studies, Chetana appears intent on exploring unbeaten tracks to trace, detect, explore and chart the links, so as to transcend boundaries and to encompass diverse *Wertewelten*, consensually valued socio-cultural phenomena on a global scale, with the implicit intention of describing, diagnosing, analyzing, and ultimately defining a universal science of humanities.

Chetana examines encounters between cultures in order to foster appreciation and to build bridges through mutual understanding. He teases out similarities and relationships across cultures and artistic disciplines. He uses the German word *Ungereimtheiten* which, depending on the context, has a meaning somewhere along a spectrum from inconsistency or irregularity to cheating or even corruption, to highlight the variation in thinking when expressed in German, English, French, or Thai.

Given the location of this review, I will concentrate on the papers relevant to Thailand, which focus on the tradition of improvisation, the search for indigenous theory, and critical discourse.

Chetana highlights the importance of teaching morality, comprising Buddhist principles, words of wisdom derived from the cultures of India, Persia and China, and recorded indigenous wisdom as well. These values, norms and sanctions, which have been internalized and creatively adapted, serve as sources of inspiration for poetry in Thailand's language.

Improvisation is the core of Thailand's culture. Its traditional folk theatre does not know any original text versions. Touring groups rely on well-known stories, tales, narrations, legends, and epic poetry. The director and actors reach a consensus on how to make a drama evolve. As soon as actors are on stage, they must rely on their talent for improvising. Thailand's actors – and musicians as well – are performing artists and creative artists at the same time. Improvisation is not merely a matter of form but an attitude towards living, or even a philosophy of leading one's life. Its guiding principle is an unwavering belief in the inexhaustible spring of human creativity. In traditional music and folk theatre, improvisation has been of vital importance. It might be questioned, whether the talent for improvising is a virtue, across the board, or if it might become a nuisance. Improvisation allows for great flexibility and liberty to invent. The inclination to talkativeness might be related to improvising in literature, for improvisation triggers verbosity rather than encouraging concise expression.

Thailand's traditional orchestra comprises two xylophones, placed at the front.

One is called *ranad ek*, the first xylophone. It is in charge of the leading melody and is usually played by a musician who displays exuberant virtuosity, impressing the audience as the star of the orchestra. Placed alongside is the second xylophone called *ranad thum*, meaning the one with the soft voice. Its player seemingly serves to accompany the melody by interjecting some syncopes, taking care of the rhythm and occasionally paraphrasing the melody. This musician is often called the buffoon or joker of the orchestra. Appearances are deceptive, though. Very often the master of the orchestra himself plays the second xylophone, and in truth is leading the orchestra by availing himself of the greater freedom to improvise. Other members of the orchestra are bound to pay attention to the master who may vary the tempo. Chetana's "theory of the second xylophone" explains some aspects of Thailand's culture, and in the considered opinion of some observers even reflects its national character.

The aesthetic of restraint is paradoxical in that Thailand's people display a tendency towards verbosity, even somewhat annoying chatter. On reflection, however, this exuberance in using words is the root of the great diversity of popular culture. Folksongs often take the form of a dialogue in verse between women and men, delighting the audience members who appreciate the witty repartee. The answer to this paradox lies in the importance of the middle path. After all, in social life the dictum that prevails is "speech is silver, silence is golden."

In social life and particularly public affairs, one may gain the impression that Thailand's population is neither hesitant nor reluctant to improvise their own lives. The perpetual coming-and-going in Thailand's politics, for example, adversely affects society's stability. From an aesthetic perspective, improvisation is a form of rebellion against a fixed script -- in literature, drama, or music -- which may become petrified. This thought is germane to the mode of living according to Buddhist principles. In a world of impermanence, any idea of the immortality of works of art can only be illusion. Improvisation allows expression of the indelible creativity of human beings.

Thailand's oral culture is not merely a literary phenomenon or a principle underlying the arts but reflects an attitude towards living, perhaps even a sort of Asian philosophy of life. This oral tradition conveys its wealth through direct contact and shared experience among human beings, with each generation eager to pass on the heritage, thereby augmenting and enriching it. Any losses are not regretted. What had been said, remains said -- it cannot be revoked or regained. The memory alone shows the path to the future. This mode of thinking shows trust in the creative power of humankind which is not restricted to any particular generation or any specific epoch in history.

Chetana raises the question whether Thailand's literary tradition has any consciousness of theory. Are authors, intellectuals and scholars capable of thinking in theoretical terms? Chetana's search for indigenous theories has not yielded,

in his own words, any solid corpus or set of theorems that could be deemed self-explanatory. Yet Thailand's culture is very rich in implicit theory that deserves to be explicated. Theories that are embedded in the mode of living and the cultural heritage can be discovered by a process akin to archeology, but that should be only a first step. Further stages of systematic reconstruction are needed to arrive at a better understanding of one's own culture as a means of building self-knowledge.

Chetana stressed that literacy does not simply entail "being capable of reading, writing and arithmetic," as propagated by UNESCO. Literacy also implies critical reflection which underpins the doctrine of free speech. According to Chetana, criticism is hardly acceptable in Thailand. Whoever criticizes frankly runs the risk of annoying friends and colleagues alike. A gentle, personal hint about some weak point in one's own work will always be preferred over any published statement. That such attitudes are common is clear from research on criticism conducted by a team under the auspices of the Thailand Research Fund (TRF). These attitudes should not be mistaken for a lack of capability to criticize. Most likely, Thailand's culture of criticism is closely tied to oral tradition. Newspapers accept critical articles by university teachers who are ready and willing to sign their names and shoulder the responsibility for their published text. Professors of high repute write for daily newspapers and popular magazines, instead of concentrating on producing learned papers for publication in journals read by their academic colleagues alone.

Chetana stresses that criticism at its best can become a voice of society and a voice for society. Peaceful demonstrations staged in Thailand's capital city and some provinces from February until April 2006 blasted away at the corruption of the government and bureaucracy. While political rhetoric in parliament is stagnant, eloquence flourishes among the protest movements. While politicians grub around for ways to make money, ethics and morality are the message coming from the mobs on the streets. The combination of enlightening rationality, solid evidence, fervent persuasiveness, and literary refinement that emerged from the demonstrations achieved standards of rhetoric not seen for years. Irrespective of the serious intentions of the movement, there was room for humor. A song, using a folk tune and entitled "Square Face" named the misdeeds of a political leader and his followers in phenomenal language of prosodic perfection.

Karl E. Weber

Exploration and Irony in Studies of Siam over Forty Years, by Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, with an introduction by Tamara Loos (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2014) ISBN hc 978-0-87727-793-4, pb 978-0-87727-763-7. US\$ 51.95 (hard), 23.95 (paper) on Amazon.

EXPLORATION
AND IRONY
in STUDIES OF SIAM
OVER FORTY YEARS

BENEDICT R. O’G. ANDERSON



CORNELL SOUTHEAST ASIA PROGRAM PUBLICATIONS

Between 1977 and 1985, Ben Anderson published three essays which remain among the most read and most referenced studies of modern Thailand. All three focus in different ways on the extraordinary period from the student uprising of October 1973 to the bloody coup and massacre of 6 October 1976. All three are fascinated by the political role and cultural stance of the Bangkok middle class, and the position of the Thai monarchy. In “Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup,” Anderson examines the interplay between the American impact on Thailand, the power of the Thai military, and the political stance of the middle class. The essay ends, rather prophetically, by flagging “the process whereby the right gradually concedes, almost without being

aware of it, that it is engaged in civil war.” In “Introduction to *In the Mirror*,” a collection of short stories in translation, he delves deeper into the rapid creation of a new middle class in the “American era,” and the appearance of radicalized cultural vanguard. In “Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies,” Anderson takes Siam’s proud claim of evading colonialism and turns it on its head—finding this “success” responsible for the parochialism and pervasive conservatism in Thai politics and its study.

At the time of these essays, Anderson was best known as an expert on Indonesia. Over the same span of their publication he also published the book, *Imagined Communities*, which gave him a worldwide reputation. In 1990, he added a fourth stellar article on Thailand, “Murder and Progress in Modern Siam,” which argued that the rise of political violence, especially over elections, signaled that democracy had at last caught the attention of a larger constituency than the students and intellectuals, and “something really new is now in place.”

In the introduction to this collection of Anderson’s writings on Siam, Tamara Loos traces the author’s intellectual biography, starting with a peripatetic childhood, an Eton-Cambridge education in the classics, and a somewhat chance transition to Cornell University and the study of Southeast Asia in 1958. Between 1993 and

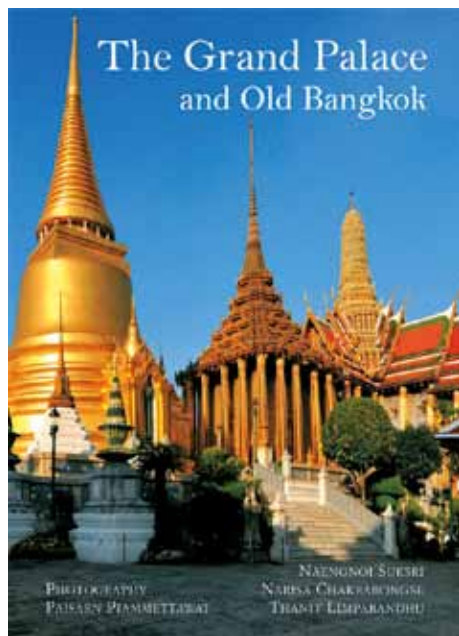
2006, when Anderson's interests returned to Indonesia, and ranged further to the Philippines, he wrote nothing on Thailand. The latter part of this collection contains essays and fragments that appeared between 2006 and 2013. Where the 1976 coup was inspiration for the first set of essays, the 2006 coup hovers in the background of this second set. The middle class and the monarchy are again in the center of the frame. And, depressingly, many of Anderson's themes still work despite 30 years of extraordinary change in Thailand's society.

This second batch of essays is not overtly about politics. There are two articles on film, particularly a long discourse on the reception of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Sat pralaat*, an essay on public iconography from statues to billboards, and some shorter squibs. As Loos notes in her introduction, and Anderson in a bridging essay, the radicals that fascinated Anderson in the 1970s had grown up and calmed down by the 2000s. The spirit of defiance was now to be found amongst women overthrowing male bias, gays cheerfully upending cultural stereotypes, and cultural radicals bamboozling the guardians of middle-class values. These essays appeared first in Thai, mostly in the cultural journal, *An*, and only later in English translation.

This is a very useful publication. The original essays have been slightly corrected but not updated in any way. The introduction to *In the Mirror* contains only the general background, not the appreciation of each of the stories in the collection and their authors (I think this exclusion is a pity). The later pieces may be a surprise to some who know only Anderson's early work. The introduction by Loos provides a lot of background little known outside the ranks of the Cornell mafia, and steers a fine line between eulogy and critical appreciation. In the current context, this collection should be read by anyone moved to ask, "What went wrong?"

Chris Baker

The Grand Palace and Old Bangkok by Naengnoi Suksri, Narisa Chakrabongse, Thanit Limpabandhu, with photography by Paisarn Piemmettawat. (Bangkok: River Books, 2014). ISBN 978-974-9863-41-1 (soft).



Visitors to Bangkok in the old days could scarcely know what to expect as they stepped off the boat. Indeed, the traveler in 1914 had only a Baedeker Guide to turn to—in German—in which Siam was lumped together with India, Malaya, Burma, and Java. Fast-forward a hundred years, to 2014, and the number of books on Thailand would require a fleet of tuk-tuks to transport. In fact, few topics in Thai life have not escaped investigation, from the nation's nightlife to its spiritual life, from its flora to fauna. Even Bangkok's celebrated 'street food' has spawned a few fresh titles. Paradoxically, as the number of books has mushroomed, the caliber has witnessed a corresponding decline. Hence, discerning visitors and

Bangkok residents alike will welcome this new work on the Grand Palace and nearby historical and cultural sites. No single book has hitherto covered quite the same ground and with such depth, thereby filling a tremendous vacuum. Moreover, with special permission accorded from His Majesty the King, River Books was able to photograph the interiors of many royal buildings that are completely off limits to the public.

Bangkok was born from the ashes of Ayutthaya, the former capital besieged by Burmese forces in 1767. A new capital arose the following year in Thonburi, situated opposite modern Bangkok on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River. A coup transpired in 1782 and a general named Chao Phraya Chakri emerged as king, known as Rama I (1782-1809) and founder of the current Chakri dynasty. The royal family identified itself with Rama, the champion of the Sanskrit epic, the Ramayana. The palace shifted from Thonburi across the river to its present location and on 21 April 1782 the symbolic 'city-pillar' was erected, marking the city's birth. The city-pillar lies just outside the palace walls and is protected by a pavilion constructed in 1978. The original wooden pillar still survives, gilded and capped with a lotus finial. Although few tourists are aware of the pillar, it is one of city's major sacred spots, together with the nearby Emerald Buddha and the Erawan shrine in central Bangkok.

The Chakri dynasty's imprint on Bangkok is incalculable in as much as the city's key monuments are tied to the patronage and cosmopolitan taste of its rulers

over a two hundred-year period, much like the Medicis in Florence or the Nasrids in Granada. All of the nine Chakri rulers are captured in a series of rather recent oil paintings, which are reproduced in the Appendices, accompanied by their formal titles, regnal dates and a list of the many monuments for which they are credited.

By the mid-19th century the Chakri monarchs chose to move Siam into the modern world, adopting Western technology, such as steam trains and the telegraph. European-style architecture also first appeared, together with Western modes of dressing. Coexisting with this wave of foreign influence were traditional Siamese court rituals that represented a complex blend of Theravada Buddhism and 'Brahmanism' that had evolved on Thai soil over nearly two millennia. The ancient plough ceremony is but one of these elaborate ceremonies, testimony to the tenacity of these traditions. A ten-page overview in the Appendices reviews the most important of these time-honored rituals, peppered with antique photographs. A long and fascinating description of royal cremations is paired with old and new photographs of processions transporting the funeral urn.

The key monuments open to the public are treated in a long section, "Emerald Buddha Temple Compound". The centerpiece is the Emerald Buddha shrine which merits twenty-three pages, with nearly double that number of photographs. Carved from green jade, this venerated image is emblematic of the Chakri dynasty. Its rich history is recounted on one page, with an instructive map indicating this Buddha's peripatetic progression over hundreds of years and hundreds of kilometers from its original home in Chiang Rai. The precious image was eventually seized in Vientiane and taken to Thonburi in 1784 before it entered the Grand Palace in Bangkok. The image rests on an elaborate high throne dating from the reign of Rama I. Sculptures placed on three ascending tiers are identified in three useful diagrams and the pedigree of each image is noted in the text. A marble throne at the base of the Emerald Buddha, imported from Europe early in the 19th century, appears at first glance to be out of place in this most sacred royal sanctum but is another poignant reminder of how East and West come together effortlessly even within such an environment.

The Emerald Buddha hall and other monuments are encompassed within a covered corridor embellished with 178 large murals devoted to the entire *Ramayana*, the story of Rama's quest for his kidnapped sweetheart, Sita. King Rama I himself produced a version of this classic epic, known as the *Ramakien*, a measure of the dynasty's identification with this ancient tale. Although the original murals from the late 18th century have been extensively 'refreshed' and 'restored' in the last hundred years, the animated compositions are immediately engaging. The panels themselves are numbered and correspond to a synopsis of the story told over several pages. Linking the murals to the narrative of the story is another valuable contribution by the authors, since the paintings by themselves, without explanation, are pleasing but perplexing. That there are no posted explanations for the paintings in languages other than Thai greatly enhances the value of this newly published guide.

Other key structures within the compound wall are the Royal Pantheon, built during the reign of Rama IV (1851-1868) and now dedicated to all of the Chakri kings. Other sites include a Sri Lanka style gilded stupa and a remarkable miniature stone replica of Angkor Wat. Nearby is a group of small open pavilions dedicated to the nine Chakri kings, each represented by an unique insignia. The Second Reign for example is symbolized by a *garuda* holding two snakes, while the Sixth Reign is marked by a three-pronged thunderbolt. A full page shows all nine insignia in their pavilions, each dazzling with gold. Another highlight are pairs of creatures inhabiting the mythical Himaphan (Himavanta) Forest. The delightful demi-gods are depicted in two pages of color photographs. One of the figures, a fusion of a woman with a lion, has been cut out from its background and silhouetted against the white page, a stunning effect achieved by the layout team at River Books.

The remainder of this first section of the guide is devoted to “Throne Halls and Royal Residences.” Less than a handful of the many buildings covered here are open to the public, but River Books takes the reader inside to these generally unknown interior spaces. These photographs illustrate the shift in styles over the various reigns. The most remarkable is a chapel dedicated to a Buddha image conveyed from Champasak, Laos, at the beginning of the 19th century. Restored in 1982, the inside walls are adorned with multiple fresh paintings showing many chief events in the history of the dynasty. A single panel features Rama VI (1910-1925) as a crown prince bidding farewell to troops at the advent of World War 1, beneath which is shown his marriage with great pageantry in 1924. The style is modeled deliberately on 19th century murals, but the compositions and details are executed with a modern flair.

The second part of the guide, “Old Bangkok: The Heart of the City”, covers sites in the environs of the palace. The range is inclusive, from the sacred to the profane. For the latter, a page is given over to Khao San Road, a secular pilgrimage destination for backpackers from all over the world. Other sites include the lively Tha Phra Chan market specializing in a huge variety of amulets and Tha Chang pier with its mouthwatering selection of Thai dishes and fresh fruit. Another section explores the Saranrom Royal Garden, partially laid out by an Englishman, Henry Alabaster, and a segment on Wat Arun.

The longest single section covers the Bangkok National Museum. The authors rightly liken a visit there to a “stroll through an old palace”. A handy plan of the museum makes getting lost impossible and the photographs are carefully selected to highlight both the masterpieces and lesser known works, such as a model steam train gifted to King Rama IV by Queen Victoria in 1855. The spectacular Weapons Room boasts in its center a model of a full-scale elephant surmounted by two men, ready for combat. Other sections describe Silpakorn University and the museum in the university’s compound dedicated to one of its foreign art instructors, Corrado Feroci, from Florence. Wat Pho, or Wat Chetuphon, is another jewel in Bangkok’s crown,

and this section records how King Rama I employed 20,000 workers to replace an older temple built on the same site.

This guide is a treasure trove of information, photographs and helpful maps. Even for residents or those on frequent visits to the city, new surprises unfold across the pages. To properly explore all of the sites covered in the guide would take at least two weeks. It is hoped that River Book intends to issue guides on parts of Bangkok not treated in this volume, specifically the many 19th century temples with mural paintings throughout Thonburi and other important religious complexes, such as Wat Suthat and Wat Saket. The city never sits still and is constantly evolving, but this new book provides a unique window to its past. This book aptly demonstrates that Bangkok has a little something for everyone, from its multitude of historic shrines and museums to its vibrant street life. Dr. Johnson observed long ago, “When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life”. The same needs to be said about Bangkok.

Donald M. Stadtner

