

## ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ETHNOLOGICAL RESEARCH WORK IN SIAM

by

MAJOR ERIK SEIDENFADEN.

The study of anthropology as well as ethnology in Siam offers great possibilities by reason of the numerous and varied racial groups which constitute the population of this country.

While the ethnological problems pertaining to Siam have already been treated by not a few students, such as the late Colonel Gerini, Messrs. W. A. Graham, Evans, Dr. A. Kerr, Professor Schebesta, and myself, about which more anon, those of anthropology have, so far, been paid but scant attention.

About thirty years ago the late Dr. Brengues, a young French physician, carried out a series of interesting anthropometric measurements of individuals belonging to the so-called Chong people, a branch of the Môn-Khmer group of the Austro-Asiatic race, living in the extreme south-east of the kingdom of Siam. Most unfortunately this promising beginning was cut short much too soon by the untimely death of Dr. Brengues. Later on Dr. Congdon of the Rockefeller Institute, while teaching anatomy at the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, succeeded, during the years of 1928-31, I believe, in carrying out anthropometric measurements of no less than 30,000 Thai (i.e. Siamese) conscripts. The results of this stupendous piece of investigation have not yet been published, but the doctor, has promised to contribute an abridged report on this matter to the *Journal of the Siam Society*.

Quite recently, during the winter months of 1932, I myself, in company with my friend, Mr. E. W. Hutchinson, visited a group of the Lawū, the remnants of a Môn-Khmer people, which no doubt formed the bulk of the population of North Siam prior to the Thai conquest of that country during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries

A. D. We obtained measurements of about sixty individuals, besides other ethnological as well as linguistic information. Our joint report on this work will shortly<sup>(1)</sup> be published in the *Journal of the Siam Society*. This constitutes up till now all that has been done in the way of anthropological research work in Siam and is thus only a very modest beginning.

We now come to the ethnological problems.

The population of Siam may be divided into three distinct racial groups—i. e. (1) the Negroids, represented by the Sĕmang pygmies, living in the extreme south of Siam in the jungles of the Malay Peninsula, so ably described by Messrs. Skeat, Blagden, Evans, and Schebesta; (2) the Austro-Asiatics represented by the various Mĕn-Khmer peoples, to which both of the aforesaid Chong and Lawā belong; and finally (3) the Mongoloids, represented by the Thai with their many subdivisions; the immigrant Chinese and some hill tribes in Northern and Western Siam, which are partly of Chinese and partly of Tibetan stock. The Karen people, though undoubtedly of Mongoloid race, have not yet been finally classified whether belonging to the Chinese or Tibetan stock. They probably belong to the latter.

As the above three main groups are split up into more than thirty different peoples and tribes, subdivided again in numerous clans and septs, speaking a great number of languages and dialects, a detailed study of their anthropological and ethnological characteristics would most probably result in the discovery of a number of new and important facts which, besides adding to the total sum of our knowledge of these departments of science, might perhaps even alter our whole view on the origin and distribution of the human race. I beg in this connection to refer to Professor Paul Rivet's recent paper, *Les Océaniens*, (*Journal Asiatique*, tome CCXXII, No. 2, avril-juin 1933, pp. 235-256), from which it seems clear that those mutations of the Primates that resulted in the creation of the various human species took place just in that part of the vast Asiatic continent which is represented by Hither and Further India. That the days of exploration and discovery of extinct or hitherto unknown living species of the human race, as far as regards Further India at least, are not

---

(1) As a matter of fact this report *was* published in the *JSS*, vol. XXVII, pp. 153-182.

yet over, has been amply proved by the recent finds of the petrified skeletons or skeletal parts made by Mansuy in Upper Tonking, as well as by the discovery of a tribe of stark-naked hunting nomads, the so-called Khā Tong Lu'ang, met with for the first time by a European forest official in the jungles of North Siam less than ten years ago.

We do not know who were the earliest inhabitants of Siam. All we know is that the Thai conquerors, coming down from their fastnesses in Southern China, seized the country from the Lawā, Môn and Khmer in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries A. D.

It is probable that the Môn-Khmer people of Siam and the rest of Further India, coming from the north like the Thai, drove out or absorbed a former Indonesian population, to-day represented by the various peoples of the East Indian Archipelago, and, to quote Kern, that the Malays wandered down to their southern habitat from the shores of present-day Annam.

The Jakun and Mawken, the sea gypsies of the west coast of Malaya and the Mergui Archipelago, who have been called Proto-Malays, may also belong to the Indonesian stock.

The Sēmang pygmies of the Malay Peninsula constitute the remains of a much earlier population than the Môn-Khmer or Indonesian. They may have inhabited the isles and coasts of Further India right up to Southern China, if one can believe the narrative of the famous Chinese pilgrim I-Tsing, who skirted those coasts when returning from India in the seventh century.

According to Mansuy, the skeletal finds in the caves of Tongking represent (1) the Negrito race; (2) a race very similar to the Papuans of New Guinea; and (3) that of a tall, well-developed race with large skulls resembling those of the Cro-Magnon.

Among the so-called Khā or Moi tribes in the jungles of French Indochina certain tribes are distinguished by their tall, fair-skinned dolichocephalic members, which may represent a mixture of Indonesians or Môn-Khmer with the large race from the Tongkinese caves. These Tongkinese "Cro-Magnons" were perhaps an offshoot, the most easterly one, of that ancient and splendid artistic race which 20,000 years ago peopled southern France and the Italian riviera. In my opinion these large "Cro-Magnons" of Tongking do not represent the earliest inhabitants of Further India, but must be considered immigrants coming from the north-west. Systematic ex-

cavations of the numerous caves in North Siam would undoubtedly assist us in solving the problem of the habitat of these "Cro-Magnon" immigrants.

Professor Fritz Sarasin, in his papers on his searches for a palæolithic culture in the caves of Siam, suggests that the palæolithic people, whose stone implements were found by him belonged to a Proto-Melanesian race. I would suggest that these Proto-Melanesians have been found by Mansuy, and that they are represented by the Papuan-like skull found by him.

In conclusion, I shall venture to state as my opinion that the earliest inhabitants of Siam, and Further India, were pygmies, the direct ancestors of our present-day Sëmang of the Malayan jungles. Further, that these ancient pygmies may have been the ancestors of the larger-bodied later races in conformity with the now prevailing theory which was first launched by Father Wilhelm Schmidt in his excellent work, *Die Stellung der Pygmäenvölker in der Entwicklungsgeschichte der Menschen*.

Siam of to-day represents a melting-pot of many races, peoples and tongues which, at least outwardly, are in the process of being unified, speaking the same language, wearing the same national dress, and aspiring to the same social and political ideals. As such a process is bound to destroy a great number of ethnological and ethnographical characteristics, a thorough and detailed study of all the various groups, of which the present Siamese population is composed, is necessarily of the utmost importance for science.

Such research work should be taken up *now*, and it is sincerely to be hoped that the enlightened Government of Siam will do their best to assist and facilitate such work before it becomes too late.

---

The above paper was read by Major Seidenfaden before The International Congress of Anthropology and Ethnology held at University College in London from the 30th July to the 4th August 1934. An extract of the paper appears in the report of this congress in *Congrès International des Sciences Anthropologiques et Ethnologiques*, p. 135, the full text having also been published in *The Asiatic Review* for October 1934, pp. 695-697.