

D.T. Bayard: *Non Nok Tha: The 1968 Excavation—Procedure, Stratigraphy and a Summary of the Evidence* (Studies in Prehistoric Anthropology, Volume 4, Otago University Monograph, 1971), pp. 77.

This monograph is the latest report on the archaeological excavation in 1968 at a site called Non Nok Tha in the district of Phu Wiang, the province of Khon Kaen, Northeastern Thailand. The site was first located by the American archaeologist in 1964 during the first season of the program of salvage archaeology which was jointly sponsored by the Fine Arts Department of the Thai government and the University of Hawaii. It was extensively tested in 1965, and as it produced a variety of promising material, a large-scale intensive excavation was conducted in 1966. This excavation unearthed 21 occupational layers producing a sequence of the neolithic or pre-metal period, the bronze-period and the iron-period. The result from radiocarbon dating reveals that the bronze working at Non Nok Tha was older than those found in China and in India, thus it indicates that the Northeast of Thailand is the earliest bronze working area in Southeast Asia at the moment.

In 1968, excavation was conducted again at Non Nok Tha, but this time it was done at about 40 metres east of the former site. The goals of this excavation were to "locate a bronze occupation surface for comparison with the iron-period occupation levels excavated in 1966 with a view toward testing a possible adjustment in settlement pattern and presumably social structure resulting from the shift from the slash-and-burn agriculture to paddy cultivation of rice; we suspect this shift took place during the gap between the bronze-period and iron-period of the site . . . . and to obtain further evidence in the form of additional bronze carbon samples to test the sequence of dates from 1966 excavation which seem to show the presence of a highly developed bronze technology prior to 2,300 B.C."

The publication of the report on the 1968 excavation, as it was written by Dr. Bayard, can be viewed in three main divisions; the first is highly technical in that it is concerned with methods and some limitations in the digging, the stratigraphy of the site, the character and changes in the shape of the mound, archaeological levels, correlation with 1966 sequence, and chronology. This part is also illustrated with figures

concerning the map of the site and its location, sections of the excavation, burials and funerary features, structural features and tables on the correlation of 1966 and 1968 sequences and radiocarbon and thermoluminescence dates from Non Nok Tha. The second division is a brief summary of the 1968 excavation and its relationships with other external sites which have already been excavated; it also includes, at the back of the book, a brief summary in Thai written by the writer himself. The third division contains appendices on the burial vessel types and interim Burial Register which are, in a sense, technical and related to the first part. I think that this section or perhaps the whole book as well would be of greater value if it also included some photographs of the site, the burials and the important items of the finds.

According to this monograph, the result of the 1968 excavation does not satisfactorily explain an adjustment in settlement pattern and social structure resulting from the shift from slash-and-burn cultivation to wet-rice farming. This was due mainly to the erosion of the soil that had reduced the occupational layers to 9 layers when compared with the 21 layers of the 1966 excavation. All traces of the long gap between the bronze-period and the iron-period occupations of the site had probably eroded; and the area excavated was mainly a cemetery. Further, the carbon samples obtained from the 1968 excavation are not technically impressive and the writer has to rely heavily on the thermoluminescence dates in judging the sequence. However, some new discoveries in the 1968 excavation are very stimulating; the copper tool which is probably from cold-working found in Level III indicates the evidence for metallurgy prior to the intensive casting of bronze discovered during the 1966 excavation; and the footed globular and goblet pots as well as the pedestalled shallow bowls which appear for the first times in this excavation are also very interesting for future study and also for comparison in terms of cultural contact with other sites.

So far as the prehistoric archaeology of the Northeast of Thailand is concerned, the report on the excavation at Non Nok Tha has appeared at a time when public interest has been greatly aroused. Dr. Bayard's way of presenting the data is clear and straightforward; it allows the reader to see and distinguish which are the exact evidence and which

are the interpretation based mainly on his own speculations. Apart from the materials presented, his discussion on the limited budget which prevented him from obtaining suitable tools and on the difficulty in interpreting the soil stratigraphically comprises good information for future archaeologists who may want to concern themselves with the digging in this region. The paragraphs on the external relationships are extremely interesting in that they provide the reader with dates from various sites recently excavated in the Northeast and in other parts of Thailand and mainland Southeast Asia. In particular, one can discern to some extent a sequence of dates from the prehistoric period to the proto-historic period in Thailand. The finding from the excavation at Non Nok Tha have helped, in many ways, to check some debatable sequence of the Bang Site at Ban Kao, Karnchanaburi. The revision of the Ban Kao sequence by Parker and Bayard is very interesting and, in many ways, acceptable.

However, despite my great admiration for this monograph, there is one point that makes me feel less happy with the writer namely that there are a few references in the book that are based on personal communications. They are ambiguous and debatable; for instance, Bayard writes, "While the association of the 4,630 B.C. date with the bronze artefacts encountered in burials at Ban Chiang is uncertain in the opinion of the excavator (Vidya Intakosai, personal communication)". It seems to me that such a reference needs more concrete evidence in support before ruling out the previous understanding of the date of the bronze materials at Ban Chiang.

In conclusion, I would say that Bayard's *Non Nok Tha: The 1968 Excavation* is an up-to-date and valuable volume for the study and research of prehistory and proto-history in Thailand as well as in Southeast Asia.

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Charles Burleigh, *The Living Mekong* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1971), pp. 137, illustrated.

The Mekong, with UN committees to back up its existence, is now an 'in' thing after a century of disillusion following the exploration by Garnier of its potential. Although already attacked as an ecological menace, and threatened by the political uncertainties of the region more than most international projects, the grandiose scheme to make the seventh largest river in the world a permanent asset rather than a rainy season liability is already under way, though we must wait to see whether it will ever be completed. Charles Burleigh, an engineer by profession and a photographer by inclination, has produced a handsome picture book showing the Mekong as it is now, before the attempts to tame it get under way, and the life of the people whose existence depends on the river and whose culture is possibly threatened by the dubious benefits of technological achievements (shistosomiasis included).

Mr. Burleigh has in mind a very general audience with little or no knowledge of the peoples and customs of the area, and so includes chapters in the text on Buddhism, the current political situation, the cultivation of rice, the history of foreign intervention, and the Ramakien. The last probably has the least justification, for it could hardly be claimed that the Ramakien exercises a vital role in the daily lives of the riverine peoples. But for what they set out to do, these short chapters are quite well done.

Reading the book though is not that easy, in spite of the generality of its approach. The textual chapters are given irrelevant marginalia complete with line drawings of well-dressed tarts performing acts like "Loy Gating [Kratong, presumably], a custom" and a gloss with a description of these mores. When customs are exhausted, we are given most if not all of the seals of the different Thai ministries or departments. These are extremely distracting, but not as much perhaps as the intrusion of the factual summaries of towns and places, as well as related photographs, with their captions running into each other, in the middle of the general chapters, with the result that the book is divided into four totally different genres, though all are mixed together.

Political difficulties prevented the author from gaining any material on the considerable stretch of the Mekong that flows through China under the name of Lantsang, and of the very short section where it forms the boundary between Burma and Laos. Similarly, we are told nothing of what happens to the river after it leaves Phnom-Penh to flow through Vietnam. There are a few inaccuracies in the text, but they are relatively minor (for example, the *mawu* itself is not a musical instrument, but the *kong mon*, or *khawg mawn*, is) though Mr. Burleigh confuses Tosakan with Rama when he says categorically "Pra Ram's face is always green". The random samples of scripts as marginalia are irrelevant and to translate anything word by word (as is done here with a note in Thai by the author's assistant) and say it shows the difficulty of translating that particular language is uncharacteristically naive on the part of Mr. Burleigh.

Essentially, this is a picture book, and the photographs, both black and white and colour, are of a high standard, giving a broad coverage to the different peoples along the river and their daily activities. One wonders why the picture of Prabuddhabhat near Saraburi is included and why Oudong is not given as the location of "the old royal burial Jeddies... not far from Phnom Penh"; it was after all a Cambodian capital in fairly recent times. Mr. Burleigh's camera is a sympathetic and candid machine and it is a pity his publishers would not let it tell more of the story, or allow the author to write more of his personal impressions of trips up and down the river, which are far more interesting than the conventional chapters on 'Princes and Insurgents' and the like.

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H. Ulbricht, *Wayang Purwa, Shadows of the Past* (Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, 1970).

There exists a fairly large body of scholarship about *wayang purwa* (classical Javanese shadow play) in several languages, including Dutch and English. Yet, ironically, nothing seems to have been written about the shadow itself. The present volume, therefore, is an interesting interpretation of the significance of the shadow as a medium of dramatic presentation. As the author points out, the shadow is the only natural phenomenon which is both non-material and visible. Being so, it is, "... from a philosophical point of view, suitable for the visible interpretation of non-material forces," such as the ongoing process of evolution, mystical experience, and the medium which ancestors provide between man and his creator. These forces are the motivational core out of which *wayang purwa* emerges (as distinct from other "wayangs", both human and puppet, which exist in Indonesia).<sup>1</sup> The stories performed by *wayang purwa* are taken primarily from the Mahabharata and also the Ramayana.

After a rather uninspiring chapter describing an actual performance, Ulbricht further elaborates his conception of the esoteric significance of *wayang purwa*. He defines four groups of puppets which represent successive stages of human development, namely servants, bastards (mermaids, centaurs, etc. which appear rarely), giants, and "humans" (the "human" puppets are far from literal representations of the human form, since this is proscribed by the Koran.) According to the esotericism adhered to by the author, before sexual differentiation occurred

1) In the context of the shadow *per se*, Ulbricht might well have mentioned the magical significance it has for the (rural) Malay people in general, regardless of its connection with the shadow play. Every person, animal, object, location, etc. is a vehicle of "vital force" (*semangat*), and this extends to one's shadow. In many areas reapers are enjoined not to let their shadows fall upon the newly harvested rice, builders should not let their shadows fall upon the house posts, the ritual for obtaining a spirit-familiar includes capturing one's own shadow, and certain snails are said to suck the blood of cattle via their shadows. Such potential danger inherent in the *semangat* of shadows, then, probably extends to those under the *dalang's* control as well, and offerings of incense, candles, and rice are an indispensable beginning to any performance. See *Malay Magic*, by William Walter Skeat, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1967, and *The Malay Magician*, by R.O. Winstedt, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1961.

there existed hermaphrodites, represented in *wayang purwa* mainly by the chief servant-clown, Semar. In his Preface, Ulbricht claims the idea of introducing Semar as a hermaphrodite as his own, which it undoubtedly is, but not originally so. One of Ulbricht's own references says. "... Semar... is... a being who is neither man nor woman and thus personifies the undivided whole, the divine mystery itself."<sup>2</sup> Ulbricht does, however, explain the significance of the hermaphrodite more fully than other sources do.

Sexual differentiation having taken place, he continues, man did not mate exclusively with his own species, thus accounting for the appearance of a few "bastards" in *wayang purwa*. The third stage of development, that of the giants, has some anthropological evidence to support it in the discoveries of *meganthropos paleojavanicus* and *gigantopithecus* in Java and China respectively.

The characters of the fourth, or human, stage who triumph in the conflicts portrayed by *wayang purwa* do so frequently because they attain higher development through *semadi* (meditation), advancing them toward the level of *dewas* or deities. This progression is graphically represented by placing the characters of previous stages of development, along with certain human characters who represent the link with man's past, on the left side of the screen as seen by the *dalang* (puppeteer), and the victorious characters on the right. In this context, Ulbricht says that it is not merely the triumph of good over evil, for *wayang purwa* "never moralizes," but he leaves the reader to reconcile this statement at the beginning of the book with another at the end which says that the battle of the hero against the giants does represent the victory of good over evil.

2) *On the Wayang Kulit (Purwa) and Its Symbolic and Mystical Elements*, Mangkuningoro VII of Surakarta, DJAWA, vol. XIII, 1933, translated by C. Holt, Data Paper no. 27, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1957, p. 11.

Claire Holt, in a publication which precedes the present one by three years, quotes a *dalang's* own description of Semar: "Designate him as a man, his face looks a woman's; say that he is a woman, his appearance is that of a man." *Art in Indonesia*, by Claire Holt; Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1967, p. 144.

One sentence, in particular, makes his position most difficult to comprehend clearly: "The *wayang* on the left side represent an evolutionary phase of man which has already completed itself and is bound to become extinct." He has placed the completion of this "phase" first in the past and then in the future in the same sentence. Are we to suppose that it is an evolutionary phase the preeminence of which has passed and can therefore be extinguished within each *individual* through efforts of his own? Ulbricht says that the characters in the stories can *not* so alter their fate, but what of mankind? He says that present mankind is a spectator "between those who go and those who are to come," thus obscuring rather than clarifying the issue.

A closer comparison of Mangkunagoro's paper, *On the Wayang Kulit (Purwa)* . . . , and Ulbricht's book makes an interesting study: Both treat the subjects of mysticism and esotericism in *wayang purwa*, but while Ulbricht makes a clear distinction between them based on the fact that esoteric knowledge is communicable whereas mystical knowledge is not, Mangkunagoro treats them as one. Here some clarification of the relationship between mysticism and esotericism in *wayang purwa* is in order, because neither author has provided it for us. The two are not coincident, but neither are they totally divergent. Mystical experience, in the form of *semadi*, is what leads one to an awareness of the divine unity at the core of the esoteric scheme of things. Through *semadi*, the heroes of many plays suspend the disparate functions of the physical body, preparing themselves for the apprehension of universal spiritual commonality. Because the first stage of human development, represented by Semar, and the future stage, that of the deities, are opposite paths to the same realm, we see that the source of man's existence is identical with its purpose. Both the hermaphrodite and the deities are nearer than man himself is to the source of creation. Man cannot revert to the hermaphroditic stage, however, and mysticism therefore stands as the means to the divine, esoteric, end.

Mangkunagoro distinguishes mysticism from symbolism, saying that the hero's desire for knowledge of his origin is a symbol of that same

longing in all of us for mystical union with the source of creation.<sup>3</sup> From these distinctions we get a picture of *wayang purwa* as being an allegory of *semadi*.

Because *wayang purwa* seems to be so thoroughly suffused with mysticism and esotericism, one might suppose that the puppets themselves have acquired their present forms and details through a similarly subconscious process. But as the author clearly demonstrates in his next two chapters, the iconography is the result of known historical forces—the introduction first of Hinduism and then of Islam into Java—and the will of specific rulers. Ulbricht gives a chronological account of these influences on the form, clothing, and decoration of the puppets, showing how certain characters were invented by certain kings, etc. There occurs in this section on the history of *wayang purwa*, however, a sentence which, due to its brevity, is misleading in two areas: “. . . *wayang purwa* could not have been introduced into Java by the Hindu conquerors, as there was never a traditional shadow play in India.”<sup>4</sup> First, Java was not “conquered” in the usual sense, but rather “heavily dominated” culturally and economically, due to the influence of Indian traders. Secondly, there is a possible reference to the shadow play in the first century B.C. Pali canon, the *Terigata*: “You throw yourself, oh blind one, upon something nonexistent . . . a shadow play (*rupparupakam*) amidst a human crowd.”<sup>5</sup> This being the case, one cannot so easily dismiss the possibility that there was, in fact, a traditional shadow play in India, which country influenced

3) This desire for knowledge of origins may not be so purely mystical as both these authors would have us believe. A great many protective charms and incantations not yet extinct among some Malay peoples specify what is believed to be the origin of the spirit, genii, etc., in question. Understanding is an efficacious antidote to fear. “I know the origin from which you spring,” followed by the specifications thereof, is a frequent motif in recited charms. These, clearly, are magical, with no suggestion of mystical or esoteric overtones. As Ulbricht points out, performances of *wayang purwa* are and always were used to ward off evil influences at times of birth, marriage, sickness, etc. The allegory of *semadi* (mysticism) that is *wayang purwa*, then, serves a fundamentally magical function. This duality is symbolized by the magically potent thumbnail which protrudes from the fist of Bima, one of the five Pandawa brothers of the Mahabharata, clenched in an image of mystical “oneness” because, through *semadi*, his five senses (fingers) have ceased to impress their individual perceptions on him, thereby affording him with yet greater power, the thumbnail. (See W.W. Skeat, *Malay Magic*, *op. cit.*, for quotations of Malay charms.)

4) Italics ours.

5) Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

which, or whether there was independent origination in both, however, remains an open, and probably insignificant, question.

Another, and more important, shortcoming of the present volume concerns the illustrations of the puppets. There is one which, though beautiful in its own right, is nowhere referred to in the text; in another instance there is a reference to an illustration which doesn't exist; and the illustrations of the last and most important *wayang purwa* story summarised at the end of the text (the summary is enjoyably told as a story) are all originally drawings of figures like puppets (in which there appears some scenery, unlike *wayang purwa* itself), not actual puppets. All plates of puppets are black, with no grey tones, not to mention color. This is particularly unfortunate since in reality all puppets are highly colored, the colors contributing to one's identification of the characters they represent. In some cases the colors help to identify the stage of development of a particular character where more than one puppet is used to represent a single personality. Ulbricht, in fact, briefly describes three different puppets which represent Arjuna in three different stages, but doesn't take the opportunity to show them to us. Perhaps we should add, parenthetically, that these colors are not visible through the screen during a performance because the puppets are opaque, unlike some *wayang kulit* (Malaysia) and all Thai shadow puppets.

This is a book, then, which on the surface appears to be rather comprehensive in that it does treat the many aspects of *wayang purwa*, as the title suggests that it should. Yet on closer scrutiny one finds that it does not necessarily constitute a step forward in actual research regarding the Javanese shadow play. Some of the author's statements are manifestly inaccurate, others leave the reader wondering exactly what he means, still others are dubious due to their lack of documentation, and, finally, other sources have covered much of the same material in a more readily acceptable fashion. Most of these sources are either expensive or difficult to obtain, however, and the present volume does serve the function of bringing generally accurate information about *wayang purwa* to the English reading public.

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