



The Pong Tuk site.

Scale 1 : 250,000, 2516 B.E. (1973).

# THE PONG TUK LAMP: A RECONSIDERATION

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In an article published in 1928 in the *Journal of the Siam Society*, George Coedès presented a report of the archaeological remains from Pong Tuk, a village on the Meklong River some 110 kilometers (as the crow flies) northwest of Bangkok.<sup>1</sup> Among the finds was a bronze lamp, notable both for its large size (H: 27 cm, L: 21.5 cm) and excellent condition (figs. 1A and B). The lamp was not found in the excavations that the Archaeological Section of the Royal Institute had carried out in 1927, but had been found earlier in the area by two local inhabitants, one of whom had the body of the lamp while a second had the handle. Neither of the two owners was aware of the other's find, and it was Coedès who recognized that the two pieces fit together and acquired the complete lamp for the National Museum in Bangkok, where it is on display today. (color plate, p. 42).

Coedès realized that the lamp was of Western manufacture, calling it "Greco-Roman" and suggesting that it had been imported from Italy, Greece, or the Near East. He dated it to the first or second centuries A.D.<sup>2</sup> It was 27 years later, in 1955, that Charles Picard published the most detailed study to date of the lamp, "La lampe alexandrine de P'ong Tuk (Siam)."<sup>3</sup> As the title suggests, Picard placed the manufacture of the lamp in Alexandria, Egypt. He disagreed with Coedès as to its date, arguing that the lamp is "un produit de l'art ptolémaïque," and was made sometime before the birth of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Many scholars have followed Picard in his attribution and approximate dating of the lamp;<sup>5</sup> others have followed Coedès, calling it a Roman lamp.<sup>6</sup> The latest date for the lamp that we have found suggested is the 2nd century A.D. It is the object's early date of importation into present-day Thailand (most often stated to be the 1st or 2nd century A.D.) that is



Fig. 1A. The Pong Tuk lamp.



Fig. 1B. The head of a Silenus on the lid of the Pong Tuk lamp.

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\*Authors' note: The authors' names are listed alphabetically. We would like to thank Dr. Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, Dr. Susan Downey, and Dr. Bennet Bronson for reading drafts of this paper and for their comments. We would especially like to thank Dr. Vimala Begley for information regarding the Indian lamps. Finally, Dr. Macdonnell wishes to thank Mr. Phuthorn Bhumadhon, past director of the Phra Naraí Rajanivet National Museum in Lopburi, for his kindness and help during her visit to Thailand.

considered of greatest importance. Scholars present the lamp as the most significant evidence of early relations between Thailand and the West, a relationship suggested in various literary sources but supported by very few archaeological finds.<sup>7</sup> Almost every general work on art found in Thailand, and many specific studies, mentions the Pong Tuk lamp, making it one of the most widely illustrated and discussed, and thus best-known, objects found in Thailand.

It is our position, however, that Coedès's and Picard's dating of the lamp is too early, and that the lamp in fact dates to the 5th or more probably the 6th century A.D. In what follows, we will present the evidence for our redating of the lamp and discuss the implications the new date has on relations between Thailand and the West.

## Date of the Lamp

As mentioned above, the lamp is composed of two parts, the body and the handle. The oval body terminates in a large saucer-shaped nozzle from which a wick would have been lighted. The body, or reservoir, is supported on a raised base. The filling hole on top of the reservoir bears a hinged lid decorated with the head of a Silenus. The elaborately decorated handle, which received much attention from both Coedès and Picard,<sup>8</sup> is composed of an ornate palmette flanked by two heraldic dolphins; the leaves of the palmette terminate in large pearls.

While Greco-Roman lamps from the Hellenistic to the Byzantine period (ca. 4th c. B.C. to 6th c. A.D.) share many common characteristics, the chronology of these objects is so firmly established that, although the Pong Tuk lamp comes from a non-stratified context, accurate dating is possible through comparison with archaeologically dated material from other areas. In fact, scholars at both the Louvre and the British Museum recognized the Pong Tuk lamp as a product of the Byzantine period when Picard was writing his article, and, although he duly noted this view,<sup>9</sup> no one, including Picard himself, seems to have paid it much attention. He even published in his article photographs of a Byzantine-period lamp (fig. 2), now in the Louvre, that is stylistically very similar to the Pong Tuk lamp, using its Alexandrian provenance as an argument for Alexandria's being the likely place of manufacture for the Pong Tuk lamp as well. However, despite the obvious similarities between the Louvre and Pong Tuk lamps, and the opinion of Mme. G. Cart, a curator at the Louvre,<sup>10</sup> that it was Byzantine in date, Picard insisted that the iconography of the Pong Tuk lamp was inconsistent with a Byzantine dating, and that the dolphins on the handle could be nothing other than "pagan." His argument was that the dolphins and the Silenus on the cover of the filling hole indicate a pre-Christian, Dionysiac religion.

Prior to a discussion of the comparative material, it is therefore relevant to dispel the notion that with the advent of Christianity all pagan symbols were removed from the artistic



Fig. 2. Byzantine-period lamp in the Louvre, stylistically similar to the Pong Tuk lamp. After Picard (1955).

repertoire. Quite the contrary; the new religion was given credibility by a careful and conscious adaptation of these same symbols into the Christian context.<sup>11</sup> The dolphin is not antithetical to Christian beliefs. An example of its assimilation from its original pagan context into Christian lore is the legend ancient sources tell of the body of the murdered poet Hesiod being brought to shore by a dolphin, and the parallel story of the Christian saint, Lucian of Antioch, also being carried by a dolphin.<sup>12</sup> In art, the classical Greco-Roman representation of Eros and the dolphin is transposed into Christian iconography intact, but with its meaning altered to suit the new religion. The winged child becomes symbolic of the soul, and the dolphin becomes the conveyor to the afterlife, thus preserving even the funerary connotation already present in the pagan symbolism. This motif carries on into the Renaissance.



Fig. 3. Christian lamp featuring a dolphin and griffin as well as a dove and cross. Wadsworth Atheneum.

Dolphins also regularly make their appearance on Christian lamps. One of these, an ornate bronze example of the Christian era now in the Wadsworth Atheneum (fig. 3), sports not only a dolphin whose tail functions as one of the loops of the suspension chain of the spout, but a "pagan" griffin as well, surmounted by the universally Christian symbols of dove and cross. This lamp is clear evidence of the compatibility of Christian and non-Christian (or pre-Christian) symbols on the same object.

Throughout the ancient world examples of co-mingling of Christian and pagan are plentiful. In Palestine, craftsmen appeared to have catered to patrons of the Christian, pagan, and Jewish religions in the same workshops, often creating glass and ceramic objects alike in all ways except for certain decorative

motifs, from which a patron might select the appropriate menorah, cross, or other symbol, according to his or her religious persuasion.<sup>13</sup> However, assigning the Pong Tuk dolphins to either the pagan or Christian belief system may be unnecessary because even if Picard is correct in attributing the iconography of the Pong Tuk lamp to pagan sources, that alone does not preclude a Byzantine date, as paganism survived well beyond the founding of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>14</sup>

Far more accurate than iconography in assessing lamp chronology is a comparison of lamp profiles. The most readily discernible stylistic difference between the Pong Tuk lamp and its Hellenistic predecessors is in their proportions. If one compares the length and width of the nozzles, one immediately notes the slenderness and elongation of the Hellenistic example



Fig. 4. Hellenistic predecessor of the Pong Tuk lamp, with slenderer, more elongated proportions and a more horizontal positioning of the handle.

as opposed to that of the plumper, more squat Pong Tuk lamp (compare figs. 1A and B with 4).<sup>15</sup> The manner of attachment of the handle of the Pong Tuk lamp and the heat shield of the Hellenistic lamp differs also: the Hellenistic craftsmen favored a more horizontal positioning of these elements to the body, whereas the handle of the Pong Tuk lamp, like that of the Byzantine lamps in general, is usually almost perpendicular to the body.

Although very well made and obviously quite costly in its day, the Pong Tuk lamp is nonetheless of a common Byzantine type found in numerous excavation sites in the Mediterranean area. Of particular interest is an example found at Corinth and dated 4th-6th century A.D. (fig. 5). Although far more crudely executed, the rather disgruntled face on the filling hole cover is obviously a relation to the Silenus on the Pong Tuk lamp. Proportions, body type, and bases of the lamps are also comparable, as is the vertical positioning of the handle. The Corinth lamp, however, like many of its Byzantine cousins, bears the undisputedly Christian symbol, the cruciform handle. The Corinth lamp was excavated in a clearly Byzantine context in which other finds included pilgrims' flasks, glass, and Byzantine pottery.<sup>16</sup> There are, in addition, many other Byzantine lamps that can be compared closely to the Pong Tuk example, confirming the latter's date.<sup>17</sup>

The shifting of the date of manufacture of the Pong Tuk lamp to the 5th or 6th century, and thus of its importation into Thailand at that date or later, changes our perception of the early contacts Thailand and, as we shall argue below, Southeast Asia, had with the West. This change comes about because the Pong Tuk lamp has been the most significant object found in mainland Southeast Asia that supports an early (1st-3rd century A.D.) contact with the Roman world.

Before discussing the full ramifications the redating produces, however, we should mention another Roman-style metal lamp rumored to have been found in Thailand.<sup>18</sup> It was given to the Bangkok National Museum by the Bangkok Dealers' Association<sup>19</sup> (figs. 6A and B). The dealer who had the lamp reported that it came from a runner whose territory was exclusively the Ban Chiang area in Northeastern Thailand.<sup>20</sup> Ironically, this lamp fits almost precisely the dating Picard proposed (incorrectly, we have argued) for the Pong Tuk lamp, as the Dealer's Association lamp dates quite clearly to the 1st century B.C.-1st century A.D. Furthermore, it probably was made in Alexandria, or at least in Egypt. We may use it here as a good example of the type of lamp that enables us to give a later date to the Pong Tuk lamp.

It is much smaller than the Pong Tuk lamp (12.5 x 5.5 cm). It sits on a low ring base with a globular reservoir that tapers



Fig. 5. Lamp from Corinth, 4th-6th c. A.D., with characteristics of design similar to the Pong Tuk lamp.



Fig. 6A.



Fig. 6B. Views of another Roman-style lamp rumored to have been found in Thailand, dated quite clearly to the 1st. c. B.C. - 1st c. A.D. Bangkok National Museum.

slightly toward the central filling hole, which was originally covered by a now-lost hinged lid. The ring handle is covered by a leaf-shaped heat shield and the nozzle is rather long and slender, decorated with narrow double volutes. The lamp bears an interesting side-lug fashioned in the form of a dolphin. Pierced side appendages first appeared on lamps during the second half of the 4th c. B.C. and were used to suspend the lamp by a cord when not in use. The earliest lamps bearing the side-lug were otherwise without handles. The lug soon lost its functional use but remained as a decorative element, usually unpierced, until the 1st c. A.D.<sup>21</sup> A few examples, such as the Dealers' Association lamp, bear side-lugs modelled into zoomorphic forms. The only other published examples of dolphins used as lugs are found on lamps excavated in Egypt.<sup>22</sup> This feature, combined with the general characteristics of lamp as described above, points to a date not later than the 1st c. A.D. and probably not earlier than the 1st c. B.C. The use of the dolphin suggests a relationship to the Ehnasya lamp, and thus a possible Egyptian origin.

Nevertheless, there is, as we have said, no convincing evidence that this lamp was found in Thailand or, even assuming it was, of when it entered the country.

## Thailand in the 5th-7th Centuries A.D.

The redating of the Pong Tuk lamp to the 5th or 6th century places its presence in Thailand (at the earliest) during the period of Funan-related or of Dvāraṭī sites. Does its presence in Thailand at this time make sense? The date fits well with the other archaeological finds from Pong Tuk. The dates of these finds, along with the foundation of the site itself, have been consistently pushed forward since their initial discovery. When Coedès first published the Pong Tuk material in 1928, he placed four bronze Buddha images found there to the Dvāraṭī Period (by which Coedès means 5th-6th centuries).<sup>23</sup> One other Buddha image (his Pl. 17), however, he felt was an Indian import of the Amarāṭī school dating to the 2nd c. A.D.<sup>24</sup> Alexander Griswold has since argued that this image is a locally made copy of a Pāla-style figure and dates to the 8th c.<sup>25</sup> The four Dvāraṭī bronzes that Coedès felt were "not later than the VIth century"<sup>26</sup> have also been redated later, to the 8th or 9th century, by Jean Boisselier.<sup>27</sup> Finally, H.G. Quaritch Wales has suggested that the founding of the site itself is probably not earlier than the 9th c.,<sup>28</sup> that is, about the same date as the bronze Buddha images found there. None of these authors, however, has questioned the early date of the lamp, leaving an eight-or nine-century gap between its manufacture and that of the other material found at the site. While such a time interval is of course possible, our later dating of the lamp puts it, and its possible importation into Southeast Asia, much closer to the dates of the other finds, creating a more plausible association between it and the site's other archaeological material.

The importation of the lamp into Thailand in the 6th century or later is reasonable considering Southeast Asian trading patterns with the West and local interest in exotic goods. It is true that Picard's early dating of the lamp fits nicely with what we know was an active trade in the early centuries A.D. between the Roman and the Indian world,<sup>29</sup> and Coedès could suggest specific 2nd-century events, recorded in Chinese histories, that mention Southeast Asia as a route taken by Westerners at that time on their way to China, when they conceivably could have left the lamp.<sup>30</sup> But it is incorrect to think that contact between mainland Southeast Asia and the Roman West was in any way as extensive as that between India and the West in the early centuries A.D. Louis Malleret argues, based on the archaeological material from Oc-Eo, that connections between the West and mainland Southeast Asia (Funan) began in the late 3rd and 4th centuries A.D., and were never extensive.<sup>31</sup> He finds no support for the theory that Oc-Eo was a Roman entrepot, as, for example, Arikamedu was in India. The Western-related material found at Oc-Eo consists of small, minor objects such, as medallions, glyptics, coins, and beads;<sup>32</sup> and, in fact, many of the finds are probably local copies of imported objects rather than actual Western products. The impression is more one of chance and adventitious leavings of personal property by adventurers than of products systematically left because of trade.

Particularly important for us is a comment Malleret makes

concerning the Pong Tuk lamp. In contrasting the heavy Roman presence in India to that in Southeast Asia, he says that

with the exception of an Alexandrian bronze lamp ornamented with a face of Silenus, found in Ratburi Province in Siam by M. George Coedès, nothing allows us to think that merchandise from the Mediterranean had been able to reach by the sea route the eastern extremes of the Eurasiatic continent.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, it is the Pong Tuk lamp that most strongly among archaeological finds supports a connection between the West and Southeast Asia for the first centuries B.C./A.D. Although since Malleret wrote a few other Western objects have been found in Southeast Asia that perhaps date to the early centuries A.D.,<sup>34</sup> none compares in size and value to the lamp, and the redating of the Pong Tuk lamp suggested here removes it as the most significant support.

On the other hand, the lamp's importation into Thailand in the 6th or 7th century would place it at a time when trade and connections among China, Southeast Asia, India, and the West were well established. We can visualize this interchange as continuing throughout this time, with periods of greater or lesser contact, motivated by trade, diplomacy, and religious pilgrimage.<sup>35</sup> We do not want to speculate that any particular event might have brought the lamp to Thailand. For one thing, the Chinese texts, on which one must rely for this historical information, in no way give us a complete record of the movement of people through Southeast Asia during the period. Rather, we are arguing that as there is considerable evidence connecting Southeast Asia with interchange among the Byzantine West,<sup>36</sup> India, and China in the 6th and 7th centuries, on historical grounds the lamp's importation into Thailand during this time is not unlikely.

The likelihood of its importation is put into better focus by the recent excavations at Chansen.<sup>37</sup> Chansen, a site in Central Thailand roughly 100 km northeast of Pong Tuk, is important because it shows evidence of habitation from the protohistoric B.C. period continuously up to 1000 A.D. and after. One important conclusion drawn from the excavation data is that there was a surprising amount of long-distance trade during the period from the 3rd to the 7th centuries.<sup>38</sup> Imported objects from China, South Vietnam (Oc-Eo), Burma, India, and Ceylon occur,<sup>39</sup> and these are from diggings that covered only a fraction of Chansen's area. Furthermore, Chansen was never a heavily populated area, making the finds of numerous imported objects in what must have been a relatively provincial and unimportant city that much more significant. For our discussion, the Chansen evidence perhaps supports the likelihood of the importation of the Pong Tuk lamp during this period when foreign luxury goods were prized and relatively common.

No Western-manufactured objects were found at Chansen. As we have said, the number of Western-made objects found in Southeast Asia is very small, making the Pong Tuk lamp, whenever it was imported, highly unusual. For Central Thailand, we can mention only a Roman medal of Emperor Vic-

torinus who reigned from 269-271 A.D. found at U-Thong<sup>40</sup> (Colour plate, p. 42), and possibly three Western intaglios, one found at Kanchanaburi and two at Dong Si Maha Pot.<sup>41</sup> Even more ambiguous than the medal in their implications for Central Thailand's connections to the West are the so-called Roman beads found at U-Thong, as there is the possibility of their local, or at least Southeast Asian, manufacture.<sup>42</sup> We can, nevertheless, suggest an intriguing possible connection between Central Thailand and the West around the time of our proposed importation of the Pong Tuk lamp. Among the finds at another site in Central Thailand, Ku Bua, were terra cotta figures that wear highly unusual clothing (colour plate, p. 42). This clothing includes a pointed cap, blouse, pants boots, and identifies the figures as foreigners. The pointed cap, apparently a Phrygian style cap similar to those worn by Semitic merchants as depicted in Tang-period Chinese figurines, led Elizabeth Lyons to suggest that the Ku Bua figures were Semitic traders who "used Ku Bua as a purchasing center and supply depot between the 8th and 10th centuries with the peak of activity in the early 9th century."<sup>43</sup> She says there are at least three pairs of these figures, arranged so that the figures in each pair face one another in what may be "an attitude of paying respect to a divinity placed between them."<sup>44</sup> It is true that some figures appear even to be holding an object in their hands in front of their chests as if bearing a gift or offering (fig. 7, proper left figure). Would such Western traders as these have been the importers of the Pong Tuk lamp, giving it in honor of the Buddha to a monastery?<sup>45</sup> Today in Pong Tuk the local monastery has a bronze copy of the lamp on the altar in the *vihāra*, a gift of the Fine Arts Department, in what might ironically be a replication of its original setting at the site.

## Local Copies

The Pong Tuk lamp type has served as a model for copies in Thailand both in antiquity and in modern times (Colour plate, p. 42).<sup>46</sup> Within a two-hundred kilometer radius of Pong Tuk, excavations and chance finds have produced a number of mostly fragmentary clay lamps that echo the technology and form of the Pong Tuk lamp. Many of the nozzles have indications of burning, and all are wide and upward-curving, reminiscent of the Pong Tuk lamp nozzle.<sup>47</sup> A nearly complete terra-cotta lamp from Nakhon Pathom (fig. 7) shows how closely these copies follow the Pong Tuk type.

Judging by the date of the Pong Tuk lamp, a comparable 5th or 6th century date can be proposed for the appearance of the clay copies. It is our assumption that before the introduction of the Pong Tuk lamp type, the lamps used in Thailand were of the type common to all ancient people: a simple bowl filled with fat and ignited by a floating wick, or a wick that was partially stabilized by a pinch in the rim of its clay bowl.<sup>48</sup> This simple type of lamp continues to be used in Thailand today, while the nozzle-type lamp appears to have died out by the end of the Dvāraṭī period (ca. 11th century).<sup>49</sup> The date of 5th-11th century A.D. for the locally-made clay lamps with nozzles would thus confine them to approximately the Dvāraṭī cultural period. Some support for this dating comes from the Chansen excavation, as it is during Phase IV there (450/500-600/650 A.D.) that these lamps begin to appear.<sup>50</sup> Based on the style of the terra-cotta copies and the date of the Pong Tuk lamp, this is, in fact, precisely when one might expect them to appear.



Fig. 7. Terra-cotta copy of the Pong Tuk lamp style. Nakhon Pathom; 5th-6th c. A.D.



Fig. 8. Roman-style (nozzled) lamp excavated at Tha Kae in 1983, unique in its narrow, straight nozzle. The level in which it was found dates stratigraphically to c. 6th c. A.D.

It is also important to realize that the terra-cotta Roman-style lamps in Southeast Asia are confined to areas of present-day Thailand.<sup>51</sup> Considering the continuity of material culture between Central Thailand (U-Thong, Tha Muang, Chansen, etc.) and Oc-Eo during the Funan period (up to ca. 600/650),<sup>52</sup> the absence of terra-cotta lamps at Oc-Eo might suggest that the lamps are not part of the original Funanese cultural matrix but a later development in Thailand at sites, such as U-Thong, that were to develop into Dvāravatī cultural centers.

There is one other Roman-style (that is, nozzled) ancient terra-cotta lamp which deserves mention here (fig. 8). It was excavated at Ban Tha Kae in 1983. It is very small (H: 2.8 cm, L: 8 cm) with a round body, open bowl and tapering nozzle. When news of the find was first published, Phuthorn Bhumadhon correctly noted that it is different from other lamps that have been found in Thailand, specifically mentioning its unusual narrow, straight nozzle shape.<sup>53</sup> He repeatedly says it is modeled on a Roman lamp type, and specifically that it is closer in appearance to Roman clay lamps than are other lamps found in Thailand. Unfortunately, he is not specific in identifying the Roman lamps he has in mind, merely saying that they cover a period of more than a thousand years from the 7th century B.C. to the 7th century A.D. Furthermore, he accepts a B.C. date for the Pong

Tuk lamp, yet does not attempt to place it in relation to the Ban Tha Kae lamp or the Roman clay lamps that he mentions. Even the fact that the Ban Tha Kae lamp was found in level three of the excavation, which stratigraphically dates to ca. the 6th century A.D., does not elicit an attempt to situate the lamp more securely as to date or sources. In short, while Bhumadhon legitimately notes that the Ban Tha Kae lamp is unique, he fails to identify its sources or relationships.

It is our suggestion that the Ban Tha Kae lamp is derived from Indian copies of Western lamps and probably found its way into Thailand at approximately the same time as the Pong Tuk lamp.<sup>54</sup> The Ban Tha Kae lamp is stylistically related to those excavated at Ter in Western India that date from the 1st century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D.<sup>55</sup> Vimala Begley, who is currently researching the Ter lamps, feels they are based on Greek rather than Roman prototypes. The exact function of the Ter type vessel is somewhat in question. While some of this type in the West functioned as lamps, as proven by the evidence of burning on the nozzles, others, because of the tapering configuration of the nozzles, may have been lamp fillers or infant feeders.<sup>56</sup> For us, what is important is that the Ban Tha Kae lamp type, even if imported into Thailand at an early date, does not appear to have inspired local copies.<sup>57</sup> In addition, any argu-

ment that the Roman-style locally made clay lamps in Thailand derive from Indian lamps<sup>58</sup> cannot be maintained, as the specific Byzantine type of the Pong Tuk lamp, which is reflected in the vast majority of clay copies, does not occur at all in India (based on the presently available evidence).

## Conclusion

The redating of the Pong Tuk lamp from the 1st century B.C. to the 5th or 6th century A.D. seems secure. While we cannot say when the lamp was imported into Thailand, a date within a century or two of its manufacture is most reasonable, and we have argued that in terms of other artistic finds at Pong Tuk, archaeological evidence from other Central Thailand sites, and general interregional and economic conditions at the time, this date makes sense. Furthermore, while we of course cannot argue that the Pong Tuk lamp engendered the numerous Dvāravatī period terra-cotta lamps, it does appear that the "copies" are based on Byzantine rather than Roman-period lamp types. It also appears, based on the limited evidence available, that the source for the Dvāravatī lamps is not Indian terra-cotta copies of Roman lamps but bronze Western lamps (like that found at Pong Tuk) imported into Thailand, and that, therefore, the Dvāravatī terra-cotta lamps are an indigenous development.

Finally, the lamp's later dating will force scholars to reconsider the past attempts made to delineate early contacts

between Thailand—and, more generally, Southeast Asia—and the West. We are obviously not arguing that there was no contact. Rather, it is the nature and date of the contact that may be in need of reconsideration, or at least of interpretation. Prior to the 4th-5th centuries A.D., Southeast Asia's Western contact was with India, not directly with the West. What "Western" material is found in Southeast Asia that dates to this early period is probably best regarded as Indian, in the sense that it consists of Indian-made objects based on Western models, or of ones which, even if ultimately of Western manufacture, were probably regarded as "Indian" by the Southeast Asians.<sup>59</sup> The point is that we cannot in any meaningful way say that Southeast Asia was in contact with the West at this time, when in reality there was no cognizance of a relationship. It is likely that even between India and Southeast Asia little was known at this time.<sup>60</sup> Voyages by Indian merchants appear to have been exceedingly chancy, perhaps once-in-a-lifetime undertakings, which, if successful, could reap enormous profits.<sup>61</sup> The successful voyages did introduce Western manufactured objects, albeit in a haphazard and small-scale manner, into Southeast Asia.<sup>62</sup> Again, however, the point is that this does not, to our minds, indicate a contact with the West as would, for example, the introduction into Thailand of such an object as the Pong Tuk lamp by Western traders (as those from Ku Bua) who were active during the Dvāravatī period. Ultimately, we are suggesting that a simple listing of early Western objects that have been found in Southeast Asia does not tell us very much about contact, and that the famous "Roman lamp" from Pong Tuk—one object that appeared to have a clear context of Alexandrian manufacture, early date, and perhaps early historical associations—must now be reconsidered.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>G. Coedès, "The Excavations at P'ong Tuk and their Importance for the Ancient History of Siam," *Journal of the Siam Society* 21 (1928):195-209. Republished in *The Siam Society Fiftieth Anniversary Commemorative Publication* Vol. 1 (1904-29) (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1954):204-238. References will be to the original *Journal* publication.

<sup>2</sup>See his discussion in *ibid.*, pp. 204-207. It should be pointed out that Coedès supplies no references to support his date.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Picard, "La lampe alexandrine de P'ong Tuk (Siam)," *Artibus Asiae* 18 (1955): 137-149.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 142. The Ptolemaic Period extends from the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. when the general Ptolemy Lagus was appointed ruler. In 304 B.C. he founded the Ptolemaic Dynasty which lasted until the death of Cleopatra VII in 30 B.C..

<sup>5</sup>For example, M. C. Subhadradis Diskul, *Art in Thailand: A Brief History* (5th ed; Bangkok: Amarin Press, 1981):2 and Elizabeth Lyons, "Dvāravatī, a Consideration of its Formative Period," in *Early South East Asia: Essays in Archaeology, History, and Historical Geography*, ed. R. B. Smith and W. Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979):355.

<sup>6</sup>For example, A. B. Griswold, "Imported Images and the Nature of Copying in the Art of Siam," in *Essays Offered to G.H. Luce by His Colleagues and Friends in Honour of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Ba Shin, et al., vol. 2 (Ascona: *Artibus Asiae*, 1966):71 and Janice Stargardt, "The Isthmus of the Malay Peninsula in Long-Distance Navigation: New Archaeological Findings," in *Trade and Shipping in the Southern Seas: Selected Readings from Archipel 18* (1979) (Bangkok: SPAFA, 1985):5.

<sup>7</sup>Several scholars, beginning with Coedès in his original study, have attempted to link the importation of the lamp into Thailand with specific historical events recorded in texts. Coedès notes, for example, that Chinese texts recount a Roman diplomatic mission to China in 166 A.D. and a group of Greek or Roman musicians and acrobats going from Burma to China in 120 A.D. ("The Excavations at P'ong Tuk," p. 206). In both cases, areas of present-day Thailand could have been on their route. Coedès' point is not that either of these two

groups brought this particular lamp to Thailand, but that with such East-West intercourse, the presence of the lamp in Thailand is not surprising. Scholars have tended, however, to take this historical association as fact. See, for example, H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Dvāravatī: The Earliest Kingdom of Siam (6th-11th century A.D.)* (London: Bernard Quaritch, Ltd. 1969):4.

<sup>8</sup>Coedès, "The Excavations at P'ong Tuk," 205; Picard, "La lampe alexandrine," 140.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, Meyer Schapiro, "Style," in *Anthropology Today* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953):305.

<sup>12</sup>Brunilde Sisonido Ridgway, "Dolphins and Dolphin-Riders," *Archaeology* 23, no. 2 (April 1970):95.

<sup>13</sup>The same practice held for textiles. The well-known Antioch shawl, now in the Louvre, although securely dated to the 4th c. A.D., is distinctly pagan, a record of the life of Dionysos. A piece similar in style and date to the shawl, the so-called Christian veil in the British Museum, uses similar design patterns but replaces the Dionysiac motifs with figures of prophets and apostles. See André Grabar, *The Golden Age of Justinian* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1967):332.

<sup>14</sup>Ernest Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, Tome II (Paris: n.p., 1949):373.

<sup>15</sup>In addition, the similarities between the heat shield design of the Hellenistic lamp and the handle of the Pong Tuk lamp is the most plausible reason for the former misdating of the Pong Tuk lamp. It should be noted that whereas the handle and heat shield on the Pong Tuk lamp are one and the same, on the Hellenistic example the functioning handle is a simple ring covered by the more elaborate palmette of the shield.

<sup>16</sup>Gladys R. Davidson, *Corinth*, Volume XII, *The Minor Objects* (Princeton: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1952): Pls. 53:573-576.

<sup>17</sup>For example, Judith Perlzweig, *The Athenian Agora at Athens*, Volume VII, *Lamps of the Roman Period* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies, 1961):Pl. 48:2948; *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (exhibition catalog) (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1947): Pls. XXXVIII:250 and 251; J. Strzygowski, *Koptische Kunst* (Vienna: Impr. A. Holzhausen, 1904):p. 291, nos. 9137 and 9138; and Renate Rosenthal and Renee Sivan, *Ancient Lamps in the Schloessinger Collection*, QEDM 8 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University, 1978):no. 664, p. 160. For general remarks on the Byzantine type lamps see Heinz Menzel, *Antike Lampen* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1969):106.

<sup>18</sup>The National Museum's label on this lamp gives no provenance, nor does the Museum claim it was found in Thailand. To date we have only the word of the donors, Mr. and Mrs. Tranongsak Boonwarangsrit, that it was found in Thailand. They base their attribution on the fact that the runner who sold it to them deals in objects found exclusively in Northeastern Thailand. Although the Boonyaransrits are obviously well-intentioned and are repeating what the runner told them, there is no assurance that their information is correct because it is likely the lamp passed through numerous runners before it came into their hands

<sup>19</sup>The Association's name in Thai is: คณะกรรมการของสมาคมเผยแพร่และส่งเสริมศิลปวัตถุ

<sup>20</sup>Personal communication.

<sup>21</sup>D. M. Bailey, *A Catalogue of the Lamps in the British Museum. I. Greek, Hellenistic, and Early Roman Pottery Lamps*. (London: The British Museum, 1973):14.

<sup>22</sup>W. M. F. Flinders Petrie, *Roman Ethnasya* (London: The Egypt Exploration Fund, 1905), pl. ix, V., 24.

<sup>23</sup>Coedès, "The Excavations at P'ong Tuk," p. 202.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>25</sup>Griswold, "Imported Images and the Nature of Copying in the Art of Siam," pp. 71-73.

<sup>26</sup>Coedès, "The Excavations at P'ong Tuk," 207.

<sup>27</sup>Referred to in Griswold, "Imported Images," p. 71.

<sup>28</sup>H.G. Quaritch Wales, *Dvāravatī*, p. 65.

<sup>29</sup>See for example, E. H. Warmington, *Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India* (2nd ed.: London: Curzon Press Ltd., 1974); Mortimer Wheeler, *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers* (London: G. Belland Sons, Ltd, 1954):115-171; and Kenneth R. Hall, "The Expansion of Roman Trade in the Indian Ocean: An Indian Perspective," *The Elmira Review* 1 (1977):36-42.

<sup>30</sup>Coedès, "The Excavations at P'ong Tuk," p. 207.

<sup>31</sup>Malleret has presented this material in a series of articles and books that include: L. Malleret, *L'Archéologie du delta du Mékong*, t. III *La civilisation d'Oc-èò et la culture du Fou-nan* (Paris: EFEO, 1962): chapt. xxiii; L. Malleret, "Aperçu de la glyptique d'Oc-èò," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 54 (1947-50):189-199; and L. Malleret, "Les dodécaèdres d'or du site d'Oc-èò," *Artibus Asiae* 24, 3/4 (1961):343-350.

<sup>32</sup>Perhaps the most impressive Western-related object found thus far in the Mekong Delta area is a bronze male figure now in the Guimet Museum in Paris. Found in an excavation in Tra Vinh District in 1897, the figure, which is broken below the knees, is 23 cm high. It was Charles Picard, the author of the Pong Tuk lamp article discussed above in the text, who identified the figure as "made somewhere in the East, in imitation of an imported Greek type" and thus "one more evidence of the eastward penetration of Mediterranean art and commerce. . . ." The Greek type Picard refers to is the Lysippian Poseidon. (Charles Picard, "A Figurine of Lysippian Type From the Far East: The Tra Vinh Bronze 'Dancer,'" *Artibus Asiae* 19, 3/4 (1956):342-352.) It may well be, however, that this bronze is not of Western manufacture at all, but is a locally made Khmer figure that was originally placed on a standard and would date to the 11th-13th centuries. Compare for a similar posture the figure in the Thompson Collection (Jean Boisselier, "Note sur quelques bronzes khmers d'aspect insolite," in *Essays Offered to G.H. Luce by his Colleagues and Friends in Honour of his Seventy-Fifth Birthday, Vol. II, Papers in Asian Art and Archaeology* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1966): fig. 1, proper left hand figure). The arm positions (the right arm raised and left lowered and in front of the body) are seen on a wide variety of Khmer figures; compare *ibid.*, fig. 1, as well as the figures illustrated in J. J. Boeles, "Two Yoginis of Hevajra from Thailand," also in *Essays Offered to G. H.*

*Luce, Vol. II*. It is the Tra Vinh figure's posture combined with its extremely worn condition, in which all details of dress and facial expression have been erased, that allows for its interpretation as a Poseidon.

<sup>33</sup>... à l'exception d'une lampe alexandrine en bronze ornée d'un visage de Silène découverte au Siam par M. George Coedès, dans la province de Ratburi, rien ne permettait de penser avec assurance que, par la voie de mer, les marchandises de la Méditerranée avaient pu attendre les extrémités orientales du continent eurasiatique." Malleret, *L'Archéologie du delta du Mékong*, t. III, pp. 379-380.

<sup>34</sup>For Thailand some "Roman" seals and a coin have been found. See note 40 below and Sri-sakra Vallibhotama, "Development of Archaeology in the South: A Comprehensive Evaluation," *Muang Boran Journal* 4, no. 3 (1988):49; in Thai: ความก้าวหน้าของโบราณคดีในภาคใต้ : การประเมินเพื่อเสนอภาพรวม. p. 43.

<sup>35</sup>The bibliography that discusses the relationships among these areas is very extensive. It includes the references given in note 29 above. From a Chinese perspective, the following three books are helpful: Paul Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980); Wang Gungwu, *The Nanhai Trade: A Study of the Early History of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea, Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 31, pt. 2 (1988); O.W. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce. A study of the origins of Śrīvijaya* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

<sup>36</sup>See G. Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, ed. by Walter F. Vella, trans. by Susan Brown Cowing (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968):46-64, for an overview of the specifically Southeast Asian relations. That India, and thus by extension Southeast Asia and China, was directly connected to the Byzantine realms is evidence by the Barberini Diptych, a probably 6th-century carving that shows a Byzantine emperor with images of Indians bringing tribute. (See Gustave Schlumberger, "L'Ivoire Barberini," in *Monuments et Mémoires, Fondation Eugene Piot*, vol. VII (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1900):89-91.) It is possible that the emperor depicted on the ivory is Justinian (527-565). Justinian held a virtual monopoly on the very active silk trade with China, and his capital, Constantinople, was the principal market for wares from Asia. It is indeed just at this time that we feel it most likely that the lamp was made and imported into Thailand. (See J. M. Hussy, ed., *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. IV, *The Byzantine Empire*, Part 1 (Cam-

bridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966): 40-41.)

<sup>37</sup>See Bennet Bronson, "The Late Prehistory and Early History of Central Thailand with Special Reference to Chansen," in *Early South East Asia*, eds. R.B. Smith and W. Watson (New York and Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979): 315-336; Bennet Bronson, "Excavations at Chansen, Thailand, 1968 and 1969: A Preliminary Report," *Asian Perspectives* 15, no. 1 (1973):15-46; and Bennet Bronson and George F. Dales, "Excavations at Chansen, 1968-1969," *Silpakorn* 14, no. 1 (1970):41-58.

<sup>38</sup>This includes Bronson's Phase III 200/250-450/500 A.D. and Phase IV 450/500-600/650 A.D.

<sup>39</sup>There is some question regarding the origin of some of the objects.

<sup>40</sup>M. Christian Landes, "Pièce d'époque romaine trouvée à U Thong, Thaïlande," *Silpakorn* 26, no. 1 (1964):113-115 (also in Thai, เกรียมนุสมัยโรมัน พบที่เมืองอุทอง จังหวัดสุพรรณบุรี pp. 110-112).

<sup>41</sup>J. Boisselier, "Travaux de la mission archéologique française en Thaïlande (juillet-novembre 1966)," *Arts Asiatiques* 25 (1972):52.

<sup>42</sup>See นายชิน อยู่ดี. "ลูกปัดที่เมืองเก่าอุทอง." in โบราณวิทยาเรื่องเมืองอุทอง (กรุงเทพฯ : 2509): 51-60.

<sup>43</sup>Elizabeth Lyons, "The Traders of Ku Bua," *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 19 (1965):56.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>45</sup>A gift to a temple by the Western traders, of course, needs not imply that they were Buddhist converts. Buddhism then, as now, was not exclusive, and the political advantage the traders might have gained by such an action is obvious.

<sup>46</sup>There are numerous modern bronze copies of the Pong Tuk lamp for sale in Thailand. One Los Angeles collector even purchased a copy in a Singapore antique shop and was told that it came from Indonesia.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Phasok Indrawooth, *Index Pottery of Dvāravatī Period* (Bangkok: Department of Archaeology, Silpakorn University, 1985) Pls. 3, 29-33, figs. 13 and 14 (Also in Thai: ครอบนักขณดินเผาสมัยทวารวดี).

<sup>48</sup>For this type of lamp found in Thailand see *ibid.*, Pls. 3, 29-33, figs. 13 and 14.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 25 (in Thai) and 51 (in English).

<sup>50</sup>Bronson, "Excavations at Chansen, Thailand, 1968-1969: A Preliminary Report," p. 33.

<sup>51</sup>Louis Malleret published a terra-cotta lamp in the Phnom Penh Museum that was found at Angkor Thom. It is almost identical to lamps found in Thailand, such as that in figure 8 from Nakhon Pathom, a relationship that Malleret pointed out; but Malleret thought it was a Roman manufactured object that could have entered Cambodia in the 2nd century A.D. It is the only example of which we are aware from Cambodia, and appears likely to have been made in Thailand sometime after the 6th century A.D. (Louis Malleret, "Une lampe romaine au Musée de Phnom-Penh," *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, n.s. 32, no. 2 (1957): 187-188.)

<sup>52</sup>The cultural similarities between sites in Thailand and Oc-Eo has been suggested by Jean Boisselier, "U T'ong et son importance pour l'histoire de Thaïland," *Silpakon* 9 (1965):27-30; Jean Boisselier, "U-Thong et son importance pour l'histoire de Thaïlande et nouvelles données sur l'histoire ancienne de la Thaïlande, in *โบราณคดีเมืองคูทอง* (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 2509):163-176; and H. H. E. Loofs, "Problems of continuity between the pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Periods in Central Thailand, with special reference to U-Thong," in *Early South East Asia*, eds. R. B. Smith and W. Watson (New York and Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979):343-351.

<sup>53</sup>นายภูธร ภูมะธน. "โบราณวัตถุบางชิ้นได้จากการขุดค้นแหล่งโบราณคดี บ้านท่าแค พ.ศ. 2526." in แหล่งโบราณคดี บ้านท่าแค (กรุงเทพฯ : 2527):16-19.

<sup>54</sup>Bhumadhon feels the Ban Tha Kae lamp did not come directly from the Roman domains, and vaguely mentions Indian traders and the Middle East as sources, but again he is not

specific and gives no references or comparisons (*ibid.*, p. 19).

<sup>55</sup>See, for example, M. N. Deshpande, ed., *Indian Archaeology 1966-67 — A Review* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1975): Pls. XIIB and XIVB.

<sup>56</sup>For possible Greek prototypes see Rosenthal and Sivan, *Ancient Lamps in the Schloessinger Collection*, p. 689, pl. 166. The hypothesis that they were used as infant feeders is strengthened by examples bearing teeth marks. See *ibid.*, pp. 166-168.

<sup>57</sup>It is not clear if the Ban Tha Kae lamp is an imported Indian lamp or is locally made. That it was thrown on a wheel (according to Bhumadhon, "โบราณวัตถุบางชิ้นได้จากการขุดค้นแหล่งโบราณคดี..." p. 18) rather than made by a mold, as was most commonly done in India, may indicate that it is locally made. Nevertheless, it remains, to our knowledge, the only example of this type found in Thailand, making its local manufacture unlikely. The Greek prototypes for the Ter type lamps, however, were wheel-made, making it possible that it is a Western, rather than Indian, lamp. Furthermore, while the influence of this lamp type is not found in Thailand it is evidenced by a preponderance of bronze copies in use in Burma up until the British introduced electricity in the 19th century. We have found no information, however, as to when or how this lamp type was introduced into Burma. Clearly, the issues surrounding lamp types in use in Southeast Asia are complex and cannot be sorted out until further information is available.

<sup>58</sup>This argument is made, for example, by Phasook Indrawooth, *Index Pottery of Dvāravati Period*, pp. 25 (in Thai) and 51 (in English).

<sup>59</sup>In a similar way the Chinese in the Tang period (618-906) regarded several Southeast

Asian countries as famous for their "fire-pearls," when in actuality these were rock-crystal burning-lenses made in India that the Southeast Asians then traded to the Chinese. Berthold Laufer, "Optical Lenses," *T'oung Pao* 16 (1915):208-216.

<sup>60</sup>In the 3rd century A.D. Fan Ch'an, the king of Funan, sent an envoy to India and received in return an Indian envoy at his court. The Chinese diplomats K'ang T'ai and Chu Ying recorded these events while in Funan at the time. Both the Indian and Southeast Asian kings were completely ignorant of the other's country. The Indian king did not even know that such people (as the Southeast Asians) existed, while the Funanese king was ignorant of all details regarding India. This situation has led Kenneth Hall to wonder: "It is remarkable that the Funan ruler had such a high degree of ignorance about India when Indian traders had been following the route to China via Funan for a century." (Kenneth Hall, "The 'Indianization' of Funan: an Economic History of Southeast Asia's First State," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 13 no. 1 (1982):96.) It is likely that in both India and Southeast Asia knowledge of the other area was highly restrictive, both geographically and demographically. For the Funanese references see Paul Pelliot, "Le Fou-nan," *Bulletin de L'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 3 (1903):292-293.

<sup>61</sup>Paul Wheatley, *Nāgara and Commandery: Origins of the Southeast Asian Urban Traditions* (Chicago: Department of Geography, University of Chicago, 1983):263-269.

<sup>62</sup>For a concise review of this material, see Stargardt, "The Isthmus of the Malay Peninsula in Long-Distance Navigation: New Archaeological Findings," pp. 1-25.



Coin of the Roman emperor Victorinus (reigned 269-271 A.D.) found at U-Thong. (U-Thong Museum.) See p. 15.



Clay Dvaravati lamps on Roman models. See p. 15.



The Pong Tuk lamp.  
(Bangkok National Museum). See p. 9.



Terra cotta figures possibly representing Semitic traders, found at the Dvaravati site of Ku Bua. (Bangkok National Museum.) See p. 15.