



REVIEWS

Betty Gosling, *Origins of Thai Art*. Bangkok, River Books, 2004, ill., pp.196, Bt.1,495.

The last few years have been exciting for those in the field of Thai art history because of new publications that shed light on several periods, subjects, and revised attribution of dates. These books range from highly technical books written for specialists such as *The Art and Architecture of Thailand*, by Hiram Woodward, Jr. (Brill, 2003), to less technical books, written by specialists but for general readers, such as Betty Gosling's new book *Origins of Thai Art*. New light has also been shone on the most up-to-date archeological research on prehistoric periods by Charles Higham's book, *Early Cultures of Mainland Southeast Asia* (River Books, 2002).

Both Gosling's and Woodward's books share similar goals: tracing the origins and stylistic connections of what became the iconographic and stylistic appearances of different periods of Thai art (Sukhothai to Bangkok periods). Both books also attempt to trace specific religious sects of Buddhism and Hinduism, which spread to present-day Thailand from other parts of Asia, namely India, Sri Lanka, China, Burma, and Cambodia. Both books cover the periods before the first Thai kingdoms were established. The major difference between these two books is that while Woodward contributes new ideas and

interpretations that convincingly link together various Buddhist and Hindu archeological sites from different time periods, Gosling's book is a summary of other, mainly English language, books written by specialists in the fields of Thai and Khmer cultural and visual studies. Most notable are those of Charles Higham, Hiram Woodward, Robert L. Brown, and Piriya Krairiksh, to all of whom Gosling gives special thanks in the preface for their vital contributions. Unfortunately, unlike her previous publications on Sukhothai art, in this book Gosling provides few new contributions, except in the last two chapters where she discusses what she thinks were the main sources of what would later become the most important architectural symbols of Thai Buddhist art and architecture: the bell-shaped *stupa* and Khmer-derived *prang*.

Origins of Thai Art is divided into ten chapters that cover the pre-historic periods (c. BC 2300) through to the beginning of the Thai periods (thirteenth century). It covers a wide range of material from different regions of Thailand as well as from many countries in Asia. It also includes a variety of visual documents, such as beautiful color photographs, line drawings, plans, and maps.

The first chapter, "The Complexities of Thai Art," explains the complex sources of ideas, philosophical and religious concepts, and decorative elements that later became vital components of Thai art. "Neolithic, Bronze, and Iron Period Art", the second chapter, covers the prehistoric periods when pottery, jewelry, and bronze weapons

and instruments were produced as contributions to funerary practices and to show status.

The third chapter, “The Introduction of Buddhist Art in the Central Plains,” traces the development of Buddhist art in India. Examples are given from the Gandhara region (northwest India and present-day Afghanistan), the Sanchi stupa, and the Amaravati stupa (in south India). Summaries of the Buddha’s life and of different sects of Buddhism are included; however, the sources Gosling uses are somewhat out of date. Gosling also tries to place important Buddhist events precisely within current geopolitical entities and to relate them to specific schools of Buddhism, which she claims are reflected in the architectural forms and motifs of these regions.

Art historians have often tried to pinpoint Buddhist sects for which they think art works were produced. Thus various sects, schools, and lineages (e.g., Sravastivada, Sthaviravada, Theravada, Ariya Buddhism (from Burma), Tantrism, and Mahayana Buddhism), with or without written records, have been employed in differentiating art works. In my opinion, more often than not these attempts have been misguided. Buddhist studies, like other fields, are continually changing, so it is critical for art historians to keep up with current research. Because of limited space, it is not possible for me to address the various problematic sections in this book that deal with the differentiation of Buddhist sects. Rather, I refer the reader to Peter Skilling’s recent article, “Ubiquitous and elusive: in quest of Theravada,”

presented at the conference “Exploring Theravada Studies: Intellectual Trends and the Future of a Field of Study” (National University of Singapore), for the most up-to-date approach to the topic of Buddhist schools in Thailand.

Chapters Four and Five, “The Emergence of Dvaravati” and “Art of the Dvaravati Heartland,” respectively, deal with the earliest remains of Buddhist art from many sites in the central plains such as Nakhon Prathom, U-Thong, and Ku Bua (Ratchaburi). Gosling tries to trace the origin of styles that strongly influenced this region, specific types of Buddhist sects, and the links between some of these sites. The products of Buddhist art, namely stupas, *dharmacakra*, sculptures, and votive tablets, are included.

Chapters Six and Seven, “The Peninsula, the Pasak and Nontraditional Art in the Central Plains - Fifth to Ninth Centuries AD” and “Khmer and Dvaravati-related Art on the Khorat Plateau - Seventh to Ninth Centuries AD,” describe the continuation of Mon culture to the southern and northeastern regions of Thailand. The materials from chapters four to seven form a good summary of excellent works by Brown, Krairiksh, and Woodward.

The eighth and ninth chapters, “Khmer Art on the Khorat Plateau - Tenth to Twelfth Centuries AD” and “Art in the Central Plains and the Northern Highlands - Twelfth to Thirteenth Centuries A.D.,” respectively, focus on the increasing power of the Khmer kingdom of Angkor and its influential religions, architectural forms, and stylistic



appearances, which unmistakably dictated major changes within the region. Hiram Woodward's significant works on Khmer materials (from 1966–1997) clearly influenced Gosling's reading in these two chapters. In chapter eight, Gosling focuses on Prasathin Phimai, an important Tantric Buddhist temple that predates Angkor Wat and gave it various architectural and stylistic elements. Instead of the usual quincunx of towers atop a pyramidal structure like temples in Angkor, Phimai's tower has a unique form: a single tower on a very low base. Gosling overstates its influence by claiming "If there is any doubt as to Prasat Phimai's architectural and iconographic influence on later royal buildings, one does not have to look far." (p.124).

The reign of Jayavarman VII of Angkor and its Buddhist art, with a focus on Prasat Muang Singh (in Kanchanaburi), are the main topics of Chapter Nine. Even though the Mahayana Buddhist triad (seated Buddha protected by *naga* hoods and flanked by Avalokitesvara and Prajnaparamita) became the most revered form, Gosling claims that the Phimai tradition was revived and provided the prototypes for future sculptural pieces in the plains (p. 159). Gosling then concludes in the tenth chapter that *prangs* from other Thai periods derived from Phimai, but that its significant symbolism has long been forgotten because of the predominance of Theravada Buddhism, and because of the nineteenth century quest for defin-

ing "Thainess" in terms of Sukhothai. Although other art historians, such as Jean Boisselier, consider that the main tower of Wat Mahathat at Lopburi was the first true *prang*, Gosling claims that it was Phimai where "incipient prang-like features" came from (p. 166). In my opinion, although Phimai was certainly a significant and influential site in the early part of the twelfth century, there is not enough evidence to convincingly support Gosling's theory that *prang* structures in later Thai periods (from the thirteenth century to present) specifically symbolized Phimai.

In the field of Thai art, there have generally been either books written by specialists that are not easily approachable by non-specialists, or coffee table books with beautiful photos. Gosling's book introduces a new increasingly popular category: a summary of scholarly works that is written in a simple and approachable manner, and illustrated with attractive photographs. However, there are various problematic topics as well as mistakes in the content and captions. For example, a detail of Wat Mahathat, Lopburi (first photo on p. 164), is actually of Wat Mahathat at Ayutthaya. Moreover, Gautama is called a "Nepalese prince" (p.39), identifying him with a country that did not yet exist.

Pattaratorn Chirapravati

Chris Baker, Dhiravat na Pombejra, Alfons van der Kraan and David K. Wyatt, eds., *Van Vliet's Siam*. Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2005. pp. x + 346, illustrations, maps, index.

Historical reprints which allow key primary sources to speak to us directly from the 'foreign country' of the past are always welcome. As the editors point out, the four texts written by Jeremias van Vliet between 1636 and 1640 are undoubtedly key sources, "unmatched in length and detail by anything written on Siam before the nineteenth century" (vii). There are a number of reasons, however, why *Van Vliet's Siam* is especially valuable to those seeking to understand Thai history, Southeast Asian social conditions in the early modern period, or the nature of international relations in the region's past.

First and foremost is the convenience and insight which flows from having all four texts written by this perceptive merchant in the same volume. Three of the four had previously been published in English translation, all at the hands of the Siam Society. The *Description of the Kingdom of Siam* (1636), the best known of the four, was published in Dutch in 1692, and in English in 1910, in a translation by L.F. van Ravenswaay published in the *JSS*. *The Short History of the Kings of Siam*, the earliest version of the Ayutthayan chronicles, was transcribed from its manuscript version by Miriam Verkuijl and translated by Leonard Andaya in a separate short monograph of 1975. Both translations

have been maintained in the present volume with only minimal corrections deemed necessary, though Chris Baker has added numerous notes to the *Description*.

The third item already known to specialists was the *Historical Account of King Prasat Thong* (1640), published originally not in Dutch but in a very imperfect French edition of 1663. This French version was rendered into English by the owner of the *Bangkok Times*, W.H. Mundie, and published as a book in 1904 and an issue of *JSS* in 1934. In the latter year, perhaps stimulated by its republication, Iwao Seiichi found the original in the Rijksarchief. Not until 1958, however, did he publish a transcription of it, as well as reprinting the French version, making clear the inadequacies of the latter. For *Van Vliet's Siam*, Alfons van der Kraan has now provided the first adequate translation of this text, with useful notes by the two Bangkok-based editors.

Bringing these three texts together, alongside a wholly new one in *The Diary of the Picnic Incident*, makes it possible to understand the context of Jeremias van Vliet's writing and the character of the man. The Picnic Incident was the first of the four to be written, and the motivation for beginning the series. As acting head of the Ayutthaya factory of the VOC, Van Vliet had felt obliged to apologize and grovel before the king to save from execution some of his men who had offended some monks and royal retainers by their drunken behaviour on an outing at the



end of 1636. The Governor-General of the time, Antonio van Diemen, thought this a disgraceful humiliation and summoned him to Batavia to answer charges of dereliction of duty. This text is his defence, in the form of a daily diary of events, highlighting Van Vliet's own actions and statements and the reasons for them. It impressed Van Diemen, who then asked him for more information, which resulted in the *Description*, also apparently written while in temporary disgrace in Batavia in 1637–8. This, too, as the editors make clear, had a very explicit political purpose. It aimed to show how the absolutism of King Prasat Thong gave rise to such arbitrary actions, but also to show the essential weakness of the kingdom, combined with its commercial advantages, to argue for an aggressive Dutch strategy towards the kingdom. Chris Baker sagely comments that “The European records have proved invaluable in providing a viewpoint different from that of the royal chronicles. But, just like the chronicles, they too are political tracts” (98).

Jeremias van Vliet (1602–63) emerges as a very capable renaissance man, acute in his observations and broad in his tastes. He served the VOC in Asia from 1628 until he was dismissed on suspicion of corruption in 1646. After initial experience in Japan, he was sent to Siam in 1633 as assistant to his friend and mentor Joost Schouten, the first of the Dutch Thai-specialists unfortunately executed in 1644 for the homosexual practices he picked up in Siam. Apart

from the time he was in trouble in Batavia (1637–8), Van Vliet remained in Siam until 1642, in charge of the factory for the last four of these years. His close relations with the Thai elite were facilitated by the remarkable Soet Pegu, his very well-connected Mon concubine who bore him three daughters. His writing showed appreciation for the tolerance, civility and taste of the Siamese elite, and a shrewd understanding both of commercial opportunities and of political realities. Van Vliet read and appreciated Machiavelli, quoting his dictum “that the wisdom and authority of a single Prince should decide all matters of state” (299). As the editors point out in introducing his text on Prasat Thong, he regards that king as successful despite the terror and bloodshed by which he came to power, much as Machiavelli explained Cesare Borgia (252).

The second particular advantage of this volume is the newly translated text, already mentioned, on the Picnic Incident. Published in Dutch earlier than Van Vliet's other texts, in 1647, this had been largely ignored by subsequent scholars. As a detailed diary of 40 tension-filled days in Ayutthaya it is a wonderful window into court politics and the way various interest groups were handled. Every party to disputes, of whatever ethnicity, deployed their own lobbyists as avenues to the centre of power. Van Vliet himself called on the Phra Khlang, the Shahbandar, the king's brother and his mother (a confidant of Soet Pegu), the chief Chinese

interpreter whom he calls Tjoucko and various others, while a set of other interests, including the Japanese, he sees as ranged against him.

Thirdly, the Thai historical expertise brought to bear by the authors provides a safe guide through problems of translation and orthography of Thai titles and personae in the text. Thai characters, temples and festivals are carefully identified, in both romanised and Thai letters, making this a much more usable version than the older translations. Three of the texts have new introductions and notes, only the *Short History* remaining content with the critical apparatus provided by David Wyatt in 1975. In a perfect world the learned editors might have added to their number authorities on Malay, Mon and Chinese dialects, but they must leave a little for subsequent readers to discover. On the Malay side, *orang kaya* is mistranslated as “big people” (129–87) and the *Laksamana* title of the chief of the Malays is not picked up (149–125). While we are on the slips (of which there is very little to complain of), there are two occasions disconcertingly early in the book (2, 3) where fifteenth century is stated when sixteenth is meant.

Finally, fortified by a generous grant from the Jim Thompson Foundation, the historical introduction to this volume is wonderfully provided with detailed reproductions, many in colour, of the best seventeenth century maps of Ayutthaya.

The editors provide a Cook’s tour of the city in Van Vliet’s time, lovingly illustrating each quarter with details from the Vingboons or Coronelli maps. The Vingboons map is reproduced as a whole in an endpaper, and the large ‘Judea’ painting adapted from it and now in the Rijksmuseum adorns the cover.

The use Chris Baker has made of the Van Vliet version of the chronicles to revise our understanding of Ayutthaya’s origins¹ makes it appropriate to draw particular attention to this fascinating semi-mythical material. In the *Description*, apparently written largely from memory in Batavia, Van Vliet compressed two Chinese interventions into one brief origin myth (103–5). But in the much more elaborate section which begins the *Short History* (196–202) two time-scales are depicted. The first is a clearly mythical story placed 2000 years in the past when a son of the Chinese emperor was sent into exile and established himself at Kui, opposite Tenasserim in the north of the Peninsula, from whence the Siamese kingdom began. The other is a more detailed story of an exiled prince of “several provinces in China”, sent away in junks with thousands of followers some three hundred years earlier (thus the fourteenth century). This prince establishes himself first at Langkasuka a little upriver from Patani, then in Ligor, and then in Kui. There he established a fruitful alliance with the Emperor of China, who sent

¹ Chris Baker, ‘Ayutthaya Rising: From Land or Sea?’ *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34,1 (2003), pp.41–62.



him his daughter as a consort and gave him the title U Thong, the name all versions of the chronicles agree as the founder of Ayutthaya. Then he moved north, discovering the merits of the Thai form of Buddhism at Petchaburi, and finally establishing Ayutthaya after magically clearing its swamp from disease. These maritime origins and Chinese connections are, as Baker has shown, suggestively different from the canonical understanding of Siamese history.

This book will be treasured as an indispensable tool for the historian, and a delightful slice of the past for more general readers.

Anthony Reid

B. J. Terwiel, *Thailand's Political History: From the Fall of Ayutthaya to Recent Times*. Bangkok, River Books, 2005, pp.328.

Bas Terwiel's first contributions to Thai studies were in the guise of an anthropologist with a special focus on religious practice. In the mid 1970s, he researched an important village-based study of the co-existence of Buddhism and spirit beliefs. Subsequent publications widened the focus to treatments of Buddhism on a national scale. However, his interests seem to have been driven by a basic inquisitiveness, and not bounded by academic discipline or national boundary. He wrote on cholera, the Bowring Treaty, tattooing, demography, the local history of Chanthaburi, slavery, Phibun Songkhram, Mon migrations, and the beliefs of the Tai Ahom in Assam. During this inspired ramble, he produced in 1983 a book entitled *A History of Modern Thailand*. It gained a reputation for two main things: first, being rather difficult to find; and second, ending its account at the quirkily chosen date of 1942. Perhaps for these reasons, it was always overshadowed by Wyatt's *Thailand: A Short History* which appeared a year later.

Wyatt's book has just reappeared in a modestly revised edition, and hot on its heels comes Terwiel's.

The book has a new title, and the preface claims this reflects the extent of revision including 'newly discovered sources... sometimes leading to changes in the argument.' In fact, the main text

(up to 1942) has scarcely changed at all. There is an extra page or so of scene-setting at the start of the first two chapters, a handful of added sentences on minor issues, and about twenty-five new footnotes either providing extra background or supplying a source reference to data already present in the earlier version.

There are four other changes.

First, River Books has made the new version much more easily available, and much more beautiful. The copy-editing is much better. There are lots of photos, and the layout is unusually attractive for a history book.

Second, the coverage has been extended to 'Recent Times,' meaning that there is mention of the 1997 economic crisis, the new constitution, and Thaksin's election in 2001. While this extension starts well with an account of Thailand's incorporation into the Cold War, it then loses any thematic thrust and becomes an annotated list of prime ministers.

Third, the chapter names have been changed. In the earlier book, the chapters followed the traditional practice of treating reigns as historical units, and were labelled: First Reign, Second Reign, Third Reign, etc. Now the reigns have been removed, and thematic subtitles have been promoted to chapter titles (Innovation in the guise of orthodoxy, Trade and poetry, etc). But this is purely cosmetic, as the time coverage is still by reign, and the focus of the book remains very much on the kings. Ordinary people appear only as things the



king can tax and send to war. The book might better have been renamed as the Terwiel Chronicle of Rattanakosin, given how closely it follows the traditional style of writing Thai history. Each chapter begins with the king's succession and initial appointments. Then come major events of the reign treated episodically, just like the chronicles. These include the wars, foreign relations, ritual events, and family crises which had always been the focus of the chroniclers, but also things like trade and taxation which started to figure in the chronicles in later Ayutthaya and early Bangkok. Each chapter then ends with the king's demise and a summary assessment of the reign. In the 1986 book's preface, Terwiel admitted that he had been 'influenced' by the chronicle style, and that the book was much more 'a history of kings' than the more social history he would have liked to have written. This admission has disappeared from the new edition.

The fourth change from the 1983 book is eight pages of 'Concluding Remarks', including a note on 'The subtle craft of history writing in Thailand.'

Terwiel claimed in the 1986 version that he was writing athwart the 'hagiographical' tendency in Thai history. He claims in the new edition that he has 'avoided, as far as possible, [having] to rely upon interpretations by fellow-historians.' His account is thus based very largely on his own reading of contemporary sources, including Thai and Western documents. He also draws

heavily on some European secondary works from the 1970s (e.g., Stransky on the Taksin reign).

By this method, he claims to modify the 'standard' account of Thai history. For example, he questions whether Taksin truly became mad, necessitating the overthrow of 1782, and suggests the madness may have been invented later to justify what might have been a coup. He undermines the status of the Bowring Treaty as a 'landmark' by demonstrating how much a money economy had developed prior to mid-century. He questions to what extent the treaty was imposed from outside by drawing attention to strong local interests in favour of such a change. He shows that attempts to present King Mongkut as a nationalist fighting off colonialism have imported later concerns into his reign. He presents a very detailed account of the Front Palace Incident of 1874. He paces through the reforms of the Fifth Reign with less gobsmacked admiration than found in some accounts. He does not spare King Rama VI, but describes his idiosyncrasies and his profligacy in some detail. He notes that the Seri Thai movement during the Second World War did not really get going until late 1943.

In the final four pages, he criticizes Thai historiography in three ways. First, Thai history is always being rewritten 'to serve the purpose of fostering admiration in the reader.' Second, this is part of a general trend in which the state tries to control the production of knowledge. Just as the chronicles were once the sole

repository of the past, now the state tries to ensure there are only standard editions of all literary and historical texts, and approved textbooks for schools. Third, Thai history has been severely perverted by nationalism and the protective attitude towards the monarchy. Anyone who challenges the obviously faulty history that results from these limitations risks being accused of 'ill-will towards the nation.'

There are several individual passages in this book where Terwiel's careful use of contemporary sources make a very important contribution to the understanding of individual events. Overall it is a good narrative, which is easy and enjoyable to read. But the book was written over twenty years ago and has not really been changed at all. Moreover, it was conceived in the traditional style, with the focus on the court, to such an extent that it falters as soon as the king departs from centre stage. The 1932 revolt appears out of a clear blue sky, and the narrative tends to flounder from then onwards.

Terwiel's critique of Thai historiography was largely fair in 1983. But can you justify such a critique today without reviewing the last two decades of this historiography? Terwiel's revision does not even incorporate his own post-1983 research (e.g., on demography), let alone work by other people. His critique of Thai historiography remains true and justified by the 'official' version still found in school textbooks. But it ignores what two new generations of academic historians have produced in both Thai

and English. And it seems unaware of the extra-academic production of history by *Sinlapa Watthanatham* magazine and several publishing houses. These researchers have produced new interpretations on such matters as Taksin's fall, Mongkut's reign, and the context of the Fifth Reign reforms which go much farther than Terwiel in revising the old view. More fundamentally, they have abandoned the focus on the king and the periodisation by reign which tie Terwiel's account firmly to a traditional framing of the course and meaning of Thai history.

This book is, though, an important period piece, and we should be grateful to Bas Terwiel and River Books for this attractive new edition.

Chris Baker



Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 301, illus, GBP 14.99.

Modern Thai historiography was born in the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries when the threat of colonialism and a newly created absolute monarchy demanded a unified, linear, heroic, national myth. The myth was amplified around the mid-century during a flirtation with fascism when the national and racial myth became embedded in the school curriculum and popular imagination. Later the Cold War and military dictatorship required that the myth be perpetuated in the name of national security, so the writing of serious history became well nigh impossible.

Late in the twentieth century of the writing of history was released from its iron cage. Thai thinkers led; others were slow to follow; indeed Baker and Pasuk are the first writing in English to reveal a whole new way of perceiving the history of this country.

In chapter 1 of this volume, Baker and Pasuk deal succinctly with the pre-modern period. What we perceive as “Thailand” today was rather like pre-modern Italy or Germany, a collection of loosely-knit city-states and principalities that juggled for precedence. Gradually those with the greatest economic and strategic advantages came to dominate and draw into their orbit more distant regions.

Chapter 2 deals with the early Bangkok period and describes a crucial, liminal era between the traditional

(Indic) and modern (Western) worlds.

Most historians have supposed that between the fall of Ayuthya in 1767 and the early Bangkok period the Siamese were trying to restore the past. But Baker and Pasuk propose a more radical theory: that the early Bangkok rulers were well aware of the failure of the recent past (Ayuthya) and therefore searched into the distant past to create a new beginning.

By the time of Rama III, however, the Bangkok intelligentsia was looking to the West for new ideas. Baker and Pasuk propose that the new thinking (from Rama I to Rama III) was of one piece and of indigenous origin. I question this view as, long before he came to the throne, Prince Mongkut and several of his contemporaries, though rejecting Christianity, were in dialogue with the missionaries and were interested in Western science and secularist thought.

Chapter 3 deals with bureaucratic reforms between 1850 and 1910. When Rama IV signed the Bowring Treaty in 1855 he brought Siam, economically, into the modern world, which at that time and place meant the British Empire. Under King Chulalongkorn, Siam became a nation-state on the European model, with borders delineated for the first time by French and British geographers.

One of the problems Chulalongkorn faced was proving to the Western powers that Siam was “civilized”. This he achieved with brilliant royal theater both at home and on visits to the West. Another problem he had was choosing how modern Siam should be governed. The

King had what could be termed a “soft choice” and a “hard choice”, and this is one of the key concepts with which Baker and Pasuk interpret the rest of modern Siamese/Thai history.

The “soft choice” was proposed by Prince Prisdang in 1885: that Siam should become a democratic constitutional monarchy on British lines; the “hard choice” was that the country should be ruled firmly from above, along colonial lines, like British India.

King Chulalongkorn rejected Prince Prisdang’s “soft” proposal and embraced the “hard” choice. We do not know why. He may have thought that a Siamese absolute monarch could best protect the nation from colonialist threats; or he may have bowed to the demands of British interests who liked the idea of exploiting Siam without the expense of administering it.

Chapter 4 considers the economic and social changes that took place between the 1870s and 1930s. This is an admirable sketch of the social, demographic and economic changes taking place in Siam at that time. But the authors’ concluding sentence, “In the early decades of the twentieth century, these new urban social forces challenged the absolutist conceptions of the nation-state” is intriguing; if the new urban social forces did that, then they did so ineffectually. Baker and Pasuk do not discuss this matter.

There seem to this reviewer to be a number of interrelated reasons for Siam’s political stagnation through the first three decades of the twentieth

century.

First, the “new urban social forces” were truly new, weak and fragmentary, and they were opposed by a formidably efficient colonial-style administration. Second, the Paknam incident of 1893 was still fresh in mind, so the ruling elite had every reason to beware colonial threats and to prevent any internal disorder that might invite European intervention. Third, this caution was augmented first by the fall of the Romanovs and then the Ching dynasty.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, were relationships within the ruling elite. Rama V had reigned with immense charisma for over 40 years. Thanks to the law of primogeniture (so vigorously insisted upon by the Western powers), he was succeeded in 1910 by Prince Vajiravudh, a well-meaning person without the charisma of his father.

Thus Siam was politically paralyzed for over 15 years. Rama VI had rejected the “soft” policy of democratization in favour of the “hard” policy of absolute monarchy and auto-colonialism.

In the meantime, Siamese society had been changing in ways over which the King had no control, and he himself had subverted what control he had by sending commoners for education in the West, supposing that they would remain loyal to the absolute monarchy, but by 1932, in the reign of King Rama VII, patience had run out.

In Chapter 5 the authors return to roughly the same time-frame as that covered in Chapter 4, but concentrate on ideological developments.



In the late nineteenth century King Rama V had turned pre-modern Siam into a nation-state, unlike the failed states of Asia that had fallen to colonialism. He seems to have achieved this without recourse to ideology. It fell to Rama VI to formulate ideological underpinnings to support, explain and justify his father's achievement.

The writings of Rama VI are didactic, aiming to inculcate virtues like order, obedience, patriotism and loyalty that the king presumably considered lacking in his subjects.

The revolutionaries seem to have intended well, but they had an inherent flaw: they called themselves the "People's Party", but all of them were either senior bureaucrats or military officers, with interests in promoting their own status, power and prosperity. The "People", urban and rural, remained outside the magic circle.

Furthermore, the timing was inauspicious. In the 1930s the liberal democracies like Britain, France, and the United States were widely perceived as effete, while the masterful ideologies of Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and militarized Japan were seen as holding the key to the brave new future. No wonder Siam's new ruling class was seduced by an ideology that provided them with ample legitimacy as champions of the Greater Thailand.

The authors' conclusion is again impeccable: the "hard" mode of governance had triumphed once more, leading Thailand into another disaster, namely, participation in World War II on the losing side.

Chapter 6 covers the War, its aftermath and the beginning of the Cold War.

In 1945–46 a window of opportunity opened for the Free Thai who represented the "soft" option of participatory democracy. But this window was soon closed by the onset of the Cold War. The Western powers needed a "strong" Thailand to oppose the spread of Communism, so members of the Free Thai were stigmatized as Communist sympathizers, and rehabilitated Fascists returned to lead Thailand into the modern world as champions of liberty and democracy.

During this period much material progress was achieved. Urbanization advanced, wealth increased, but not without costs. The arts were trivialized and commercialized, traditional village solidarity was trashed, and rural self-sufficiency became impossible as the cities commanded the market.

Baker and Pasuk conclude here:

"The Second World War proved to be a boundary between eras.....The liberal nationalist ideas of the 1920s and 1930s were first pushed aside by the militaristic nationalism of the wartime era, then crushed by the anti-communist fervour in the aftermath...

"Opposition to neo-colonialism, military dictatorship, and rapid capitalist exploitation also looked for inspiration both backwards into Thailand's pre-American past and outwards to America's Cold War rivals. The crucible for this conflicting mix of new ideas was a new generation of students."

Chapter 7 covers ideologies from the 1940s to the 1970s. Thais reacted to the changes in the period diversely. Some welcomed material progress and the opportunity to make a fortune; others deplored the immorality and injustice of the new order.

These affections and disaffections help to explain the explosion of 1973 and the implosion of 1976, and the laborious process of reconciliation and reconstruction that followed. For instance I suspect that when bureaucrats invited provincial tycoons to mobilize the Village Scouts (resulting in the massacre at Thammasat in 1976), the bureaucracy forfeited much of its aura of authority to an arguably disreputable class that has since then taken over mainstream politics.

Chapters 8 and 9 deal in a masterly fashion with world trends (globalization and mass society) and Thai politics in the late twentieth century.

As American interest in Southeast Asia weakened and China developed a taste for capitalism, in Thailand the Cold War mentality cooled, and intelligent generals and businessmen decided that democracy might be a good idea after all. Thus a window opened once again for a more liberal, civil, participatory society.

The problem was that by this time a few super-tycoons and their allies were in a position to control the state and take over its organs of administration and communication. The result was the triumph of money politics. The present government has reintroduced the

“strong state” concept without, however, any external threat, real or imagined. Its only “wicked other” is internal: a limited Muslim insurgency in the South which might be resolved if approached intelligently and honestly, but which the government has wilfully and consistently exacerbated by resorting to violent oppression while failing to address the real causes of discontent.

In their postscript, Baker and Pasuk meditate upon the conflict between the authoritarian strong state and its liberal, civic, law-observant and participatory alternative.

The authors note how, time and again, the need for a strong state has been invoked to counter a mythical threat, and how often, time and again, democracy has been subverted in order to protect the vested interests of an elite minority.

A History of Thailand is the first attempt in English to write a history of this country in the modern sense of “history”. All earlier attempts, however well-meaning, fell into the twin traps of racism and nationalism prevalent during the colonial and Cold War eras. This book is essential reading for anyone seriously interested in Thailand: how it came about; its present strengths and weaknesses; and its potential in the future of a very unstable world.

Michael Wright



Santanee Phasuk and Philip Stott, *Royal Siamese Maps: War and Trade in Nineteenth Century Thailand*, foreword by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. Bangkok, River Books, 2004, pp.210, ill., hardback, Bt.1,795.

Unlike the West's vast corpus of extant maps and other cartographic artifacts, precious little remains of Thailand's early mapmaking, its geographic thought and cartographic practices. Europe's fondness for the medium of printing exponentially increased any given prototype's chances of survival in some form; its prodigious replication of manuscript maps, use of durable media, relatively benign climate, prevalence of buildings that have survived centuries and wars, and cultural regard for posterity, together insured that enough would survive of her cartographic history that even many of the missing pieces could be extrapolated from the extant corpus. Except for manuscript replication, Thailand enjoyed none of these, and even extensive manuscript copying could be negated by the phenomenon of *chamra*, the periodic purging of documents that were no longer current. As a result, the virtual absence of pre-modern Thai geographic maps (that is, maps neither cosmographic or religious) could never be construed as proof that they were not an integral part of Thai history. Thai civilization did not lack the sense of spatial awareness, geographic perspective, literate tradition, and arguably the practical 'need' that in some societies found expression in the

making of maps, but so precious little is known to be extant that few conclusions could be drawn. Thus we can be especially grateful to Sarinee Manakit and Noppawan Leetachewa, who in 1996 discovered a cache of seventeen intriguing nineteenth century Thai geographic maps, and to Dr. Santanee Phasuk, senior teacher at Chitrlada School, and Philip Stott, Professor Emeritus in the University of London, for writing this excellent book chronicling the maps' discovery and subsequent restoration and analysis.

Royal officials Ms. Sarinee and Ms. Noppawan discovered the maps while working in the Princess Abbhantri Paja Mansion of the Grand Palace. Recognizing the importance of their find, they brought the maps to the attention of Achan Julathusana Byachrananda of the Royal Institute, who in turn informed Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. The maps now reside in HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's personal library in the Chai Pattana Building of the Chitrlada Palace in Bangkok. *Royal Siamese Maps* is presented as the starting point for future research into the maps, not a comprehensive or definitive work on them, but the handsome volume is a very fine starting point indeed.

Chapter One is a summary of the maps' discovery, and in particular of their painstaking restoration, preservation, and photography. It concludes with a general description of the maps and a table of their characteristics and features, the first of many very useful tables in the book.

Chapter Two confronts the paramount question of the maps' dating, which before the authors' research was presumed by many to be late nineteenth century. But by examining their internal evidence, their orthography, and artistic elements, the authors argue for pushing the date back to the first half of the nineteenth century, and nine of the maps contained sufficient clues to ascribe a likely year of drawing, these ranging from 1809 to ca. 1850. One map believed to date from about 1809, for example, depicts a Western fortress at Penang, which is identified as that built by Francis Light in 1786. Particularly fascinating is the 'Muang Phrataphang' map, detailing the state of a Vietnamese battle against Cambodia, which at that time was changing allegiance between Vietnam and Thailand according to which alignment might afford it a better chance of peace. On the verso of the map is an inscription recording its being brought to Bangkok and reaching the capital on 27 November 1841, which date tallied well when the authors checked historical records of the war.

Since so few readers will have any background in the specialized field of orthography, the authors wisely explain and illustrate the historical changes in Thai consonants and vowels that, they conclude, support the dating of the maps to the earlier Bangkok period, some maps again being more precisely datable than others. Finally, a stylistic and artistic analysis of the maps by Henry Ginsburg also points to an origin in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Although a few isolated statements in this chapter caused me to pause (I easily get squeamish at too much being read into circumstantial evidence used to demonstrate a date *pre*-something), in their sum the authors' arguments in favor of early to mid nineteenth century dating struck me as sound. I finished the chapter comfortable that the evidence supports their conclusions.

Despite the tedious effort that was put into dating the Thai maps, a vastly easier task, that of affixing accurate dates to the Western maps illustrated, falls short. Most images of Western maps are identified only as being 'nineteenth century', a hundred-year margin of dramatic evolution in the West's knowledge of the Southeast Asian interior. This is unnecessary, as the Western maps they chose are printed and are easily datable to a precise year of publication. In the case of one map (page 192), even the century is wrong - it is again identified generically as 'nineteenth century', though clearly it is the Henri Chatelain map of 1719, itself a slavish copy of the Mortier map of 1700, leaving an error in perception of as much as two very critical centuries and creating a misleading juxtaposition of the Western and Thai maps.

Chapter Three, 'Cartographic and Historical Reliability', attempts to decode the maps' internal evidence. In the process, the newly discovered maps help answer existing questions rather than just being the object of questions. For example, one map records 'Wangpor', a place on the frontier between Thailand and Burma of disputed identity, and so



the authors examine the map's depiction of the locale in an attempt to identify more precisely where it was. Another example is the place-name, Sa Si Mum, which was heretofore unknown. This chapter's clever tables were particularly appreciated, concisely presenting data that under lesser hands would have been confusing. There are however some isolated comments that are less than coherent, such as the reference to Map 3's directional compass as being 'possibly unique'. Unique how, or among what, the reader is left without a clue, nor is it even unique among the present group of maps, as another such compass is readily visible on Map 14.

Chapter Four, 'The Royal Maps: a Working Catalogue', comprises well over half the book. Here researchers will find a wealth of useful images of the maps, as well as the authors' commentary about what is shown and conclusions that can be drawn. Inscriptions are translated, serving not only to illuminate the mapmaker's intent and the historical context, but also show them to be working tools of the people who made them. These include notes recording that a strait or sea passage is adequate only for smaller vessels, seashores that disappear at high tide, distances recorded in the typical time (rather than linear) measure, notes recording events in wars, and even editorial comments: the author of the map from the war zones in Cambodia repeatedly used the pejorative 'damn' in referring to the Vietnamese.

The book's cornucopia of fine illustrations includes not just many images

and details of the seventeen newly-discovered maps, but also other diverse images: aerial views and satellite images of the topography they chart, photographs of natural and man-made features they illustrate, other relevant early Thai documents, early views of cities marked, modern maps, and a key map in which images of all seventeen maps are superimposed on a modern map of eastern Asia. The book is so generously and intelligently illustrated that I am being very picky in citing what I feel is its one omission: its lacks full images of the few other surviving early Thai geographic and Traiphum maps, though details are shown.

A concluding essay entitled 'The Maps in the Wider World' summarizes the known inventory of early indigenous Thai maps, which—aside from these seventeen—the authors count as one or two: the extraordinary 'Map of Nakhon Si Thammarat', dating from the early seventeenth century (though it should be noted that other scholars, e.g, Joseph Schwartzberg, place this map towards the end of the seventeenth or early eighteenth century), and the 'Strategic Map' that is ostensibly from the reign of King Rama I (r.1782–1809), but which is probably a later copy. The two extant *Traiphum* with maps are cited by the authors but not included in the tally, presumably because they are not sufficiently empirical. They deem the seventeen newly-discovered maps to be 'the only significant corpus of indigenous Siamese topographic maps currently known.' This is true, though the

only common denominator among the maps is that they all had ended up in the Grand Palace. How these seventeen fit into the 'wider world' is the key question, and is the only significant quibble I have with the book, for here the authors draw more conclusions than the evidence can justify.

The authors contend that the techniques employed in the making of these maps are too developed not to be part of a larger tradition. It struck me that the authors refer to the cartographers of one map as being 'highly skilled in traditional topographical mapping techniques', when the 'tradition' to which they refer is the very mystery in question, and these seventeen maps comprise nearly all the extant pieces of that puzzle. To make the leap that these maps are not only part of, but indeed typical of, a larger indigenous tradition, risks circular reasoning, and should not be ventured even as a theory until the maps are scrutinized for evidence of external influence, an issue which is not addressed. If, as seems evident, non-indigenous sources were tapped, both for geography and mapping techniques, one must consider to what extent the maps' cartographic 'tradition' may be a *foreign* tradition. Even the flaunted directional compasses (one accompanied by what appears to be a Western-style linear distance scale) should have raised a red flag here; and we know, for example, that Westerners had been hired by the Thai government for help in mapping the kingdom in the nineteenth century, accurate mapping being particularly im-

portant at the time due to the specter of Western imperialism among Thailand's neighbors. The very fact that, with virtually no precedent, seventeen turn up in one place is curious and worth exploring. Simple happenstance? Or for a reason that itself makes them atypical, something akin to the relative abundance of extant Burmese maps, which were made by request for Westerners?

As exciting as these Thai maps are, they are quite late even at the optimum dating proposed and, showing as they do signs of outside influence, they are insufficient pieces of the puzzle to make broad conclusions. Thailand's early cartographic tradition, whatever it was, remains an enigma. Imagine that only one pre-modern topographic European map was known, and then seventeen nineteenth century European maps were discovered in London or Paris which bore foreign cartographic and geographic elements; what conclusions would we draw from them about the early indigenous European mapping tradition? In short, the discovery of these seventeen maps does not, as stated in the foreword, 'prove the existence of an extensive and hitherto unsuspected cartographic tradition in Thailand.' On the contrary, to both points: that tradition has long been 'suspected', but remains more conjecture than fact. Even if we assume that mapmaking was an integral part of Thai civilization, are these maps typical of a coherent tradition of mapmaking? Or was mapmaking more static and isolated, varying markedly with era and region?



On balance, my criticisms of the book are minor, and indeed may become moot if, as the authors believe, this cache of maps represents only the ‘tip of the iceberg’ of early Thai maps that may yet come to light from obscure hiding places. Let us hope they do. If more maps are discovered, further afield in both time and place over what is now Thailand, we can begin to piece together its cartographic past. Encouraging the hunt may be a bonus of the book. *Royal Siamese Maps* is a most welcome volume, well-researched, and beautifully produced. More than simply illuminating Thai mapmaking in the early Bangkok period, it succeeds in the daunting task of doing justice to a most remarkable discovery, these seventeen extraordinary maps.

Thomas Suarez

Philip Cornwel-Smith, *Very Thai, Everyday Popular Thai Culture* by photographs by John Goss. Bangkok, River Books, 2005, pp. 256.

For eight years Philip Cornwel-Smith was editor of *Bangkok Metro*, one of the first publications to offer up-to-date listings of activities in the city. Possibly as a result of such journalistic experience, this comprehensive examination of popular Thai culture is written in a breezy style that is far more accessible to the average reader than most scholarly works on the same subject. Similarly, some 500 brightly-coloured photographs by John Goss and the general layout (the cover displays a range that extends from Buddha images and a beauty-contest queen to street food and a motorcycle taxi driver) suggest a light-hearted, attention-grabbing approach not very far from that of many magazines, including *Metro*.

But appearances (and style) are misleading in this case. If it is not exactly the “pioneering” work promised on the jacket blurb (most of the areas have been covered before by other writers), it is also not just another of the countless superficial books now being produced, presumably aimed at tourists looking for a souvenir of their visit to Thailand. Cornwel-Smith has been diligent, even obsessive, in his research, and no matter how well-informed a reader may consider himself he is certain to come across something new and provocative in nearly every chapter.

Very Thai is divided into four general sections—Street, Personal, Ritual, and Sanuk—which are further sub-divided into a broad spectrum of individual categories. The extent of these can be gathered by mentioning only a few of the titles. Under *Street*, for example, among the entries are “Dinner on a Stick,” “Drink in a Bag,” “Tiny Pink Tissues,” “Blind Bands,” and “Truck and Bus Art.” *Personal* encompasses “Uniforms,” “Katoey and Tom-Dee,” “Sniff Kiss,” “Potted Gardens,” and “Cute,” while the *Ritual* entries include “Royal Portraits,” “Amulet Collectors,” “Magical Tattoos,” “Fortune Tellers,” and “Ghost Stories.” *Sanuk* ranges from “Temple Fairs” and “Festivals” to “Soap Operas” and “Songs for Life.”

Even from this partial selection it should be clear that there is a good deal of overlapping, as well as some inevitable repetition. One has the sense that Cornwel-Smith got a little carried away by all the oddities he unearthed and was determined to squeeze as many of them as possible into his narratives. That, combined with the small type-face decided upon by his designers, can be somewhat daunting to a reader, who may feel that he is getting rather more than he really wants to know about, say, “Motorcycle Taxi Jackets” and “Gambling.” Probably the best way to read *Very Thai* is little by little, making it an ideal book for bedside tables.

Many of the entries go considerably beyond the subject matter indicated by their titles. In the one called “Greco-Roman Architecture” (subtitled “Dress-



ing Thailand in classical chic”), for example, far more is covered than just the Thai penchant for blending architectural styles with a wild, sometimes surrealist abandon. (Not a new phenomenon, incidentally; Geoffrey Gorer commented on it back in the 1930s.) Cornwel-Smith goes back into the history of similar blendings in other countries like India and Indonesia, discusses the influences of King Chulalongkorn’s trips to Europe, and guides the reader to a few outstanding examples of what he calls “camp panache” like Rangsan Torsuwan’s mind-boggling Chatpetch Tower on the Chao Phraya River, which manages to incorporate a medieval rose window (without the stained glass; it serves as an air vent for the car park), classical columns, and a gothic dome. Such structures, Cornwel Smith says, are just “plain skyscrapers and malls sporting brazenly preposterous drag.”

Similarly “Blind Bands (Bringing joy to the street)” not only discusses the different kinds of music offered by these sightless pavement performers but also Thai attitudes towards the handicapped in general and the reasons for discrimination by the police in particular. “Encountering a blind band is a life lesson,” writes Cornwel-Smith in a characteristic observation. “A triumph of beauty over pain, of spirit over body, of talent over intolerance, they perform a true social service. Blind buskers more than play the blues; they really live it.”

“Beauty Queens” claims that there are nine contests per week somewhere in the

country, ranging from the national trinity of Miss Thailand, Miss Thailand World, and Miss Thailand Universe to local ones like Miss Durian. “Further expanding the definition of beauty, Miss Jumbo Queen has since 1999 selected women over 80kg who display the grace of an elephant... It aims to promote elephant conservation and increase self-esteem among large women.”

Even the coverage of standard guidebook subjects like “Festivals” can include amusing revelations. “To attract tourists,” Cornwel-Smith notes, “new festivals may focus on wacky activities. Farmers turned casual water buffalo contests into the staged Chonburi Buffalo Races. Surin revived elephant corralling into an Elephant Round-Up, along with costumed ‘battles’ and elephant football. Even the scientific Elephant Conservation Centre in Lampang hosts an annual *satoke* (Northern feast) for pachyderms.” (He also finds space to mention such related matters as “the horrific Songkran road toll—which in 2003 outstripped allied deaths in the Iraq invasion.”)

Now and then a seemingly unsubstantiated statistic—for example, that Bangkok has 25,000 stray cats—may prompt one to raise a questioning eyebrow, but these are remarkably few. At the end of the book Cornwel-Smith meticulously lists his main sources for each chapter, and in the text he constantly quotes from assorted experts, among them the founder of a gay disco on why so many such places enjoy success for only a short time, the scholar

Vithi Phanichphant on the origins of Buddhist amulets and their evolution into magic charms, and the late Pimsai Amranand on the Thai fondness for the topiary creations known as *mai dut*. In other words, he has done a vast amount of reading, interviewing, and on-the-spot observation. As a result *Very Thai* deserves a wide readership, not just foreigners who live in any large city in Thailand, but also Thais who may be surprised at some of the things they will discover about their own culture.

William Warren



Donald M. Stadtner, *Ancient Pagan: Buddhist Plain of Merit*, photography by Michael Freeman and Donald M. Stadtner. Bangkok, River Books, 2005, pp. 286.

Gordon Hannington Luce, whose magnificent *Old Burma - Early Pagan* (3 vols., Artibus Asiae, Ascona and New York 1969) brought Pagan to scholarly attention, would be delighted to read this new and masterly work by a scholar well-known for his work on Burma. Stadtner was commissioned to write a guide book, but this is a volume which will be welcomed not only by the discerning traveller but also by art historians.

The introductory section, which covers history, religion, materials, architecture, painting and sculpture, is well-worth reading before a visit. While much earlier material is brought together in an accessible way for the first time, it also incorporates recent research on some subjects, including divisions within the *sangha* and the role of women. Thirty-three monuments, conveniently divided into five groups, are then described in detail. These include many of the major monuments and others well-chosen to tell a different part of Pagan's larger story. The book is profusely illustrated throughout, each image appropriately reflecting the text. Two of Colesworthy Grant's delightful nineteenth century watercolours are reproduced at the ends. The frontispiece by Michael Freeman is the most evocative I have seen, and his lighting and

treatment of detail throughout the book is, as always, exquisite.

Stadtner approaches Pagan as a living entity and does not restrict himself to those remains dating from its days of glory from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. He refers to the evidence of the Pyu, whose remains pre-date the city as we know it, as well as to the renovations and new buildings dating from the fourteenth century until today's travesties. Both the pre- and post-Pagan phases have often been misunderstood or ignored in the literature, and the book makes a significant contribution in this area.

Stadtner treats his historical sources with great caution, wisely, as research on Pagan intensifies and many earlier views have come into question. Strachan (*Pagan: Art and Architecture of Old Burma*, Kiscadale, 1989: 37) already queried Luce's assumption that the early temples were derived from Mon prototypes, and proposed Pyu. More recently, Michael Aung-Thwin has sought to further minimize Mon influence at Pagan (*The Mists of Ramanna: the Legend that was Lower Burma*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2005). The book deals with this subject circumspectly, stating that the Mon cultural influence was strong, that political influence from Pagan probably extended into Mon territory in the time of Anawratha (1044–1077), and that the Mon were perhaps accorded special religious and cultural status despite their relatively low numbers.

Recent research on early Pagan has addressed the question of continuous occupation of the site from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages (e.g. Bob Hudson, “The Origins of Pagan” Doctoral Dissertation, University of Sydney, 2005, http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/adt/public_html/adt-NU/public/adt-NU20050721.144907/index.html) and the beginnings of urbanism, and has queried the role of the Burmans in the foundation of the city. Indeed, King Kyansittha (c.1084–1112), in his palace inscription, alludes to the role which the Mon and the Pyu played in its cultural development. The influence of the Mon in early Pagan art and architecture, while over-stated by Luce, still remains to be clarified satisfactorily.

Stadtner is prudent when discussing the range of influences on painting and sculpture, attributing not only the usually-discussed Pala style, but also its variants as far north as Ladakh. While the Pala practiced Mahayana Buddhism and in Pagan Theravada dominated, he notes that such religious distinctions mattered little to Pagan’s artists and residents. The reason why, in a basically Theravada context, certain Mahayana themes are accepted and others rejected (as in the Kubyauk-gyi [Myinkaka] and the Abeyadana) remains a subject for investigation.

The paintings at Pagan, which are still subject to UNESCO restoration, are today far more visible to scholars and other visitors than before. While the identification of many subjects is dependent on the pioneering studies of Luce

and Ba Shin, Stadtner has also consulted the more recent work of Pratapaditya Pal, Than Tun and Bautze-Picron, and, together with his own observations, makes a considerable contribution to the history of painting in Burma. He has been able to clarify many details and also offers suggestions for future research. Following Brown, he rejects the idea that the paintings had a didactic function, and suggests that they were considered an important part of the efficacious nature of the donation. In discussing the variations in the Jataka series, he notes that comparison with the earliest surviving examples in Sri Lanka and in Thailand will perhaps reveal interesting connections.

The discussion of mural technique and stylistic development will be of particular interest to both scholars and travellers. Unlike many earlier writers, he has assessed the paintings made after the capital moved to Ava in the fourteenth century, when Pagan remained a pilgrimage destination. Of interest are the many Buddhas painted intrusively within the corridors of a number of important temples in the fourteenth century by the monk Anandasura, fifteenth century murals at monastery 225 and the eighteenth century Konbaung mural work represented at the Upali Thein and the Ananda Brick Monastery.

The Abeyadana (eleventh to twelfth centuries), with its depictions of Hindu and Tantric deities and its prominent Bodhisattvas often juxtaposed with Jatakas, has long intrigued scholars of art and of Buddhism. Stadtner asks



whether this amazing pantheon is sourced from a specific text or an iconographic manual from Eastern India, Nepal or Tibet, or whether the artists or patrons chose themes from a variety of sources such as artists' sketchbooks from India. He concludes that the borrowing from eastern India was not so much an absorption of Mahayana beliefs as a cultural and artistic appreciation. It could be said that the iconography is one of the more interesting experiments of early Pagan, but one which bore little fruit. There may well be some truth in the legend that it was built by Kyansittha's wife Abeyadana, a princess from east Bengal, especially as a central painting of the sanctum depicts what Luce, followed by Bautze-Picron, identified as the pregnant Maya, mother of the Buddha-to-be. Described here (p.189) as probably representing Maya holding the Buddha in her lap, both hands are actually raised outwards above her knees with an embryonic Buddha seated in her transparent womb clearly depicted. If Kyansittha regarded himself as a Bodhisattva (Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: the Origins of Modern Burma*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1985, p.49), a Buddha-to-be, why should his queen not have seen herself as mother of a Buddha-to-be? Coming from east Bengal she may well have engaged artists familiar with her own tradition to illustrate the cult she endorsed. But in this book, which is after all an introductory guide, Stadtner has been careful not to indulge in such speculation.

He does however challenge several orthodoxies. He suggests that the four majestic gilded Buddhas standing in deep tall niches within the central core of the Ananda date to the Konbaung period in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries, as wood was never used for central images in the Pagan period. If there were originally standing images in these shrines they would probably have been made of brick and stucco. He concludes that it is more probable that there were originally seated Buddhas in these four niches. Given the proportions of the niches this appears to be unlikely. In the case of the Manuha temple, associated in Burmese legend with the Mon king captured by the Burmans and brought to Pagan, Stadtner dates the current structure to some time around the early Konbaung period, given its uncharacteristic ground plan and the large reclining Buddha in the hall attached to the rear, which, together with the example in the *Shwe-san-daw* compound, is of comparatively recent origin. In these cases, as in many others, we would have to agree. Reclining Buddhas of this scale do not seem to have been part of the Pagan repertoire in the days of its greatness.

It is important to mention the many restorations and the looting which have taken place since the fourteenth century, and especially since the 1990s. The average travel writer is ignorant of these, and without a book like this mistakes and inaccuracies will be perpetuated. Some earlier restorations, such as the eighteenth century renovation of the

Pitakataik, are quite sympathetic, others, like the East Hpetleik made in the early twentieth century, much less so. Stadtner sadly remarks on the “deeply scarred landscape” that the recent controversial rebuilding has created, its reconstructions “too often based on conjecture that many times borders on fantasy”. The ugliness these impose, together with the insensitive building of hotels and roads, may eventually repel rather than attract the “cultural” tourists they were meant to lure. A number of these 1990s mockeries are enumerated: the ridiculous reconstruction of the Nga-Kwe-Nadaung and the speculative tower of the Kubyauk-Gyi (Wetkyi-In) among many. We are indeed fortunate in having Pierre Pichard’s magnificent 8-volume *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan* (UNESCO, Kiscadale 1992–2001), produced following the 1974 earthquake, to remind us of the original form of a great many monuments, and this is often acknowledged in the book.

In describing the decline of Pagan, Stadtner rejects many accepted causes, saying that

There is no evidence of destruction brought on by an invasion, pestilence, climatic change, a massive earthquake or a peasant revolt. Loss of patronage was almost certainly the chief culprit in explaining why Pagan’s monuments fell into ruin, but the reasons for the loss of support remain conjectural.

It remains to be seen whether a future historian will have to cite the ignorance, greed and lust for power of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as a cause of its final demise.

Pamela Gutman



Sheila E. Hoey Middleton *Intaglios, Cameos, Rings and Related Objects from Burma and Java: the White Collection and another small private collection*. Oxford, BAR International Series 1405, 2005, £32.00. pp. iii+204, ill.

This well-researched book describes two important private collections acquired in Burma and twenty rings from Java. The author, who has published widely on engraved gems from Europe and the Middle East, has attempted to examine these in their regional context, making comparisons with similar material from India, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia and elsewhere. In this she pays particular attention to materials and shape, style and technique, use and iconography. A brief introductory section places the collections in their historical context. Each item in the collections has been photographed, as have impressions made from the intaglios and seals. Of particular interest are the comparisons of each object with similar items from the region or beyond. Notes on the materials used are appended, together with indices of materials, objects and inscriptions, all of which scholars and collectors will find valuable. The book is an important contribution to our knowledge of Pyu culture, a sorely neglected field, and to its relations with mainland Southeast Asia and beyond. The collection of rings from Java, while mostly of the better-known type, also contains a number which may have been imported and can be connected with the

mainland and with Sri Lanka.

Both Burma collections are said to come from Pyu sites in central Burma. Traditionally finds such as these have been attributed to Sriksetra, the most “Indianized” of the Pyu sites, and a well-known dealer and scholar who may have been the source of both collections has told me that Sriksetra was indeed the provenance. Archaeologists will point out the limitations imposed by a lack of context, but in the Southeast Asian archaeological environment such finds are rare. The great majority of similar engraved objects at Oc Éo described by Malleret were not found in context, and the recent ÉFEO excavations there reportedly uncovered none at all. Moreover, dealers usually eschew fragmentary objects in materials such as terracotta or bone in favour of semi-precious gems. Fortunately the second collection described in the appendix (“another small private collection”) includes a number of the former.

Middleton acknowledges Malleret’s work as the benchmark on the subject, and through rigorous comparative analysis is able to suggest some interesting connections. For instance, many standing figures engraved on carnelian in Sri Lankan collections are close to examples from Oc Éo, some close enough to come from the same workshop.

Middleton points out that the dominant motif in both collections and in Sri Lanka is the recumbent bull, and rightly points out that this does not necessarily signify the presence of Shaivism. The

bull is the best-known device on royal seals in India, where Shiva's Nandi does not appear until the fourth century. A symbol of wealth and of power, the bull still plays an important role in ritual exchange amongst some Southeast Asian peoples who have received little, if any, Indian influence, and the depiction of a bull would resonate with pre-Indic practice. Those bulls juxtaposed with a crescent moon may be more Shaivite in intent. Middleton has made an interesting comparative study of the variations of the bull motif from its early Greek, Roman and Indian forms on seals and coins and its diffusion in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

Similarly, the conch need not necessarily denote Vaishnavism, but as one of the auspicious symbols common to Brahmanism and Buddhism usually suggests water and its association with wealth and fertility. Animals represented in the Burma collections also include the lion (some forms dependent on Greek and Indian and, interestingly, Nepalese precedent), elephants, boars, deer, and horses. Geese show similarities to those found on stamped bricks from Pyu sites. Many symbols are well-known from coins and medals found at old sites throughout Southeast Asia, not all of which have been satisfactorily identified. Middleton has attempted to identify one major group as "fire altars", although she has not explored the implied significance of Vedic or Zoroastrian ritual in early urban Southeast Asia.

Middleton has noticed that the designs on two rings in the White collec-

tion (106, 107) can be read either as a *kāla*, or monster, mask or as a pair of *pūrnakalāśa*, or vases of plenty, standing on a lotus base, and in one case (107) the reversed design could be interpreted as a vase of plenty. Similarly, 108, described as a *triśula* or trident over a lotus pad, could also be read as a *śrīvatsa*. This multiple reading of motifs is also found in Pyu architecture. Temple 996 at Pagan, a Pyu shrine encased in a later structure, has at the base of the extant stucco pediment an ornate lotus throne for a Buddha image which can also be read as a *kāla* mask (Gutman and Hudson 2005:21). The vegetal volutes on either side of the stucco design closely resemble those on the rings. Further investigation of Pyu art may bring further examples of this interesting trait to light.

The inscribed objects in the collections are of particular interest. The White Collection No. 62 is a tabloid blue-green glass inlaid with a Sanskrit inscription in gold *apramāda* "non-negligence" "care", which also appears at Oc Éo and in Vataka inscriptions. Other Deccan-style inscriptions paleographically datable to around the fourth to fifth centuries appear on agate and carnelian stones and read *nanditavyam*, "rejoice", *jīvadayā*, "compassion for life", and *dayadanam*, "gift of compassion", some of which have parallels at Oc Éo and elsewhere and suggest religious intercourse with southern India. A clay sealing (App. 58) is inscribed in what is described as "Pali written in Pyu script". Different scripts were used by the Pyu



for Pali, Sanskrit and the Pyu language; those used for Pali and Sanskrit were close to Indian prototypes. This script should be more precisely described as Pyu Pali. The reading *nagara Thiri*, “auspicious city”, is spurious. Red glass beads inscribed with “Mohammed” or “Ali”, similar to examples from Oc Éo and to Malay and Javanese charms, were tested as selenium ruby glass and must date to after 1891.

The “small private collection” described in the appendix complements the White Collection, some intaglios so close they may have come from the same workshop. It also contains some interesting stamped pottery sherds, similar to those recorded by U Aung Thaw at Beikthano and other Pyu sites, and at Chansen. A few sherds (e.g. App. 63) appear to be similar to the fine moulded ware noted at Oc Éo sites (Tan 2003: 111–112). A couple of European intaglios with monograms dated to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries illustrate the continuing movement of such objects throughout history.

This book supplements the recent research on trade and trade objects by Glover and Bellina, in particular. The attention paid to the symbols illustrated on the range of objects will be of interest to those concerned with the nature of religious belief as it evolved in the early urban period. On the whole, however, it would appear that the motifs

used are usually derived from Indic and non-Indic symbols of prosperity, appropriate in a society fast developing its regional and international trade.

Pamela Gutman

Sanskriithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden. Teil 9: Die Katalognummern 2000–3199 beschrieben von Klaus Wille, herausgegeben von Heinz Bechert. [Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Band X, 9]. Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004. pp. xi, 471 (ISBN 3-515-07346-9). € 80,-.

Birmanische Handschriften. Teil 5: Die Katalognummern 901–1015 bearbeitet von Anne Peters, herausgegeben von Heinz Bechert. [Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland Band XXIII, 5]: Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag 2004, pp. xxix, 159, 4 Tafeln. (ISBN 3-515-04860-6). € 60,-

Handschriften der Yao. Teil I: Bestände der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München Cod.Sin. 147 bis Cod. Sin. 1045 in Verbindung mit Michael Friedrich herausgegeben von Thomas Höllmann mit Beiträgen von Lucia Obi, Shing Müller, Xaver Götzfried. [Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Band XLIV,1]. Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004, pp. 723 (ISBN 3-515-08403-7). € 90,-.

These three volumes continue an ambitious project to catalogue all oriental manuscripts preserved in libraries in Germany. Although the overall programme has been very briefly sketched by Peter Skilling in his review of “Singhalesische

Handschriften Teil 2 (Singhalese Manuscripts part 2) [1997]” in *JSS* 86, 1998, p. 247f., it may be useful to recall that, according to the original plan as conceived by Wolfgang Voigt (1911–1982), late chief librarian of the Collection of Oriental Manuscripts, Preussische Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, and announced by him in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 107/1957, p. 1 as “Katalogisierung der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland (Cataloguing of Oriental Manuscripts in Germany, KOHD)”, cf. K. L. Janert, *KOHD* Volume II, 11, p. 413, only those manuscripts are included which have never been properly catalogued before. This huge project is divided into 45 groups with occasionally numerous parts. The material is grouped together according to the respective language of the manuscripts described: I. Mongolian, II. Indian, III. Georgian, IV. Armenian, V. Syriac, VI. (XXXIV.) (Illuminated) Hebrew, VII. Nakhi, IX, Thai, X. Sanskrit Mss. from Turfan, XI. Tibetan, XII. Chinese, XIII. Turkish, XIV. Persian, XV. (Illuminated) Athiopan, (XVI.) XXXVII. (Illuminated) Islamic Manuscripts, XVII. (XLIII.) Arabic, XVIII. Middle Iranian, XIX. Egyptian, XX. Ethiopian, XXI. Coptic, XXII. Singhalese, XXIII. Burmese, XXIV. African, XXV. Urdu, XXVII. Japanese, XXVIII. Batak, XXX. Kurdish, XXXI. Javanese, XXXII. Lao, XXXIII. Nepalese, XXXV. Malay, XXXVI. Khmer, XXXIX. Shan, XLI. Tocharian, XLII. Mon, XLV. Korean.



The volume by Höllmann and Friedrich begins a new group of manuscripts (XLIV), and may be considered as a pioneer effort, since this is the first time that manuscripts of the Yao, living in China, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Burma, have been catalogued in accordance with present day standards. After the outward appearance of the individual manuscripts is described, the title, the beginning and end of the text are given, both in Chinese characters and in *pinyin*. Moreover, the content of individual manuscripts is briefly placed into its cultural context, then the scribe, date and owner are given where these data are available. The lengthy introduction discusses the general features of the manuscripts, which, written in Chinese characters, sometimes are accompanied by glosses in other languages such as Thai or Lao.

The authors, Höllmann and Friedrich, who earlier published a study on the Yao under the title “Botschaften an die Götter. Religiöse Handschriften der Yao (Messages to the Gods. Religious Manuscripts of the Yao)” in 1999, succeed in this catalogue in paving the way for further research on the Yao by presenting an unusually rich and extensive material in an exemplary way.

On the other hand, the “Burmese Manuscripts” and the “Sanskrihand-schriften aus den Turfanfunden” (SHT), both continue parts XXIII and X respectively of the KOHD series. In “Burmese Manuscripts”, some changes have been introduced to accelerate the cataloging. Thus it was unfortunately, but under-

standably, necessary to abbreviate the often rather long colophons, which were previously given in full, with a regrettable loss of information. Moreover, the numbers of the catalogue now refer to codices, and no longer to individual manuscripts. The change from English used in parts 1–4 to German as the language used in the descriptions is not explained. However, there still is an English version of the introduction facilitating access for non-German speakers.

The different titles of Pāli or Burmese texts are listed in an appendix, which also contains the names of authors, scribes, donors, owners, place names, and dates (the oldest manuscript catalogued here is an Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha-nissaya copied in AD 1760).

The preceding volume 4 has been reviewed by Peter Skilling *JSS* 89. 2001, p. 131f., who also introduced part 8 of SHT in *JSS* 88, 2000, p. 249.

The number of fragments described in part 9 of SHT, 1200, has grown considerably when compared with merely 200 in the preceding part. One reason is the diminishing size of the individual fragments. Almost all the larger ones have been dealt with earlier, leaving the more thankless task to the cataloguer to take stock of occasionally minute remains of texts. In spite of the obvious difficulties with small fragments, K. Wille has succeeded in an astonishingly high number of cases in identifying texts or at least text groups. As he mentions in his introduction, no. 2026, a rather

long fragment, is of particular interest, because an author is mentioned [*krtir bhikṣor aṛya-Dharmatrāṭasya*], p. 53, folio rR, x “the work of the monk Dharmatrāṭa”, whose identity awaits to be ascertained. At the same time, this is one of the birch-bark fragments in the Turfan collection (p. VIII).

Although the texts are written in Sanskrit, there are occasionally glosses in other languages such as Chinese, Soghdian, Tocharian, Uigur, including tiny bits in a so-far unidentified language (nos. 2079, 3069). At the end, there is a long list of additions and corrections to parts 1–8 (pp. 368–432) followed by another list of texts from the Turfan collection, which have been published since part 8 appeared. This may be supplemented now by the major edition of a Turfan text by Eli Franco: *The Spitzer Manuscript. The Oldest Philosophical Manuscript in Sanskrit*. 2 Volumes. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna 2004.

As usual, all these catalogues again contain a wealth of material, which will considerably enrich the study of Buddhist texts in different traditions. The descriptions are presented in a careful and circumspect manner. The task for the future is to describe further collections, manuscripts or fragments—in the case of SHT, another four thousand.

Oskar von Hinüber



Jennifer Took, *A Native Chieftaincy in Southwest China: Franchising a Tai Chieftaincy under the Tusi System of Late Imperial China*. Sinica Leidensia, 70. Leiden, Brill, 2005, pp.xviii+318, 7 ill. EUR 89.- / US\$ 120.-

Tai as used here refers to a trans-national linguistic grouping to which Thai belongs. It includes speakers of other languages who might not refer to themselves as 'Tai', such as the Zhuang people of Guangxi, China, the focus of this book. Recent years have seen brisk activity in Tai studies, with the Siam Society and this journal providing notable dynamism. As academics in Thai universities have taken up new comparative and historical Tai directions in their research, some have been accommodated by the establishment of Thai/Tai studies centres (*thai-khadi-sueksa* units) in their institutions. A few overseas universities also contribute to this research effort, but not necessarily in centres designated as 'Tai Studies'. An Australian example is the University of Melbourne's active Zhuang research group, located in the Department of Chinese Studies. *A Native Chieftaincy in Southwest China* is based on doctoral research undertaken in association with this group. The author, Jennifer Took, is not only highly proficient in Chinese and knowledgeable regarding relevant local sources, but also has a solid professional legal background. These factors combine to make this book one of unique perspectives and innovative sig-

nificance. It is also clearly written, meticulously researched and of the highest critical calibre.

Zhuang is used officially by Chinese authorities to refer to 16 million or more Tai speakers in Guangxi and is increasingly used by local people themselves. The focus of the study is a native chieftaincy or *tusi* of the Tai-speaking Chinese-Vietnamese frontier area. The Zhuang *tusi* of Anping, on the Chinese side of the border roughly between Cao Bang in Vietnam and Longming in Guangxi, was recognised by Chinese courts as a semi-autonomous administrative unit from 1368 until 1906. Unlike many political borders of the current Southeast Asian map, this particular margin is of long standing, with Chinese suzerains seeing Anping's strategic location as a buffer polity with defence and bandit-suppression significance. The chieftaincy is transversed by the Heishui River with nearby low-lying wet rice areas, surrounded by mountains with passes calling for surveillance and control. This geographical conception is convincingly illustrated in the book through traditional maps (pp. 56–61), including reproductions of Ming block prints.

The book summarises the earlier history of the area based on Chinese records. Included is a compelling treatment of the rebellion of Nong Zhigao, the Zhuang cultural hero and subject of local legends who challenged Song authority in the eleventh century. His defeat is considered to be a 'pivotal point in the history of the Zhuang peoples' of

the area (p. 48), important in determining the context of the Anping *tusi*. The formal inception of the native chieftaincy is described and its development traced through the Ming and Qing eras to its relatively recent absorption into the Chinese state system.

A regular reader of this journal would be quick to connect the Anping *tusi* with a Tai *mueang*, noting both similarities and differences. On the local level the native official or chief had many of the core attributes of a traditional *chao mueang* in Tai areas to the south and west. For centuries a Zhuang lineage of Anping, the Li, provided a hereditary line for selection of native officials. Succeeding chiefs were formally enfranchised by the Chinese court and subject to shifting investiture regulations. The Li were clearly bicultural. They came to be externally Sinified in what the author refers to as a 'pragmatic bargain'. Chinese courts imposed judicious exactments and required recognition of imperial sovereignty, along with defence obligations. It is suggested that 'fictive Han ancestries' were sometimes manufactured for official display. However, inside his own realm the local official was supreme chief and was free to make his own regulations and to uphold selected customary Tai-Zhuang norms and practices. The careers of a succession of 23 incumbent chiefs are assembled and summarised in the book, the last official terminated in 1930 in early Red Army activity. As with succession in a typical *mueang*, some contention was predictable, especially when the pal-

able choice to succeed as native official was not the oldest son of the former official's principal wife, or when that son could be removed by other candidates. Unlike Chinese familial norms, matrilineal lines of descent entered into ancestral ceremonies.

Chapters of the book are devoted to relations with the Chinese court, the native official's local power, classes of people in the chieftaincy, village-level administrative apparatus and land tenure, given especially nuanced analysis. Pressures to assimilate to Chinese norms and to form hybrid Han-Zhuang cultural blends are described. These became increasingly significant in the late Qing. Some comparisons are made with non-Tai *tusi* chieftaincies of other Chinese outlying areas, along with a few brief Thai/Tai references, e.g. regarding judicial functions and types of slavery. Some patterns familiar in other Tai areas are examined: the native official's power as realised in control of land tenure, irrigation dams, rice distribution and his leadership in key ceremonial rituals. Over 85 per cent of the population constituted house slaves and serfs, referred to in Zhuang as *loek na*, 'children of the wet fields', with specific agricultural and service obligations. Control of manpower and village administration are described in detail. The official maintained this control through systems of entourage and patronage. Relations with neighbouring towns were not always peaceful. Taiping to the southeast once dispatched an Anping chief with poisoned arrows. Later, the



Taiping rebellion (1850–64) was suppressed with cooperation from Anping forces.

The author's background in law is welcome not only in explicit attention to legal and judicial matters but also in general methodology: alertness to critical sources of evidence and the careful amassing, sifting and evaluating of different strands. Through the long period under review, ideology of various casts has affected the preservation and transmission of documents, as well as specifics of Chinese phraseology, all competently discussed. A vital source located by the author is a set of field interviews and reports dating from a Chinese survey of 1956. Through interviews collected in this source, eye-witness depictions of the last years of the Anping *tusi* become accessible. The data require careful handling, however, given the Marxist frame of reference projected by the researchers. The outlook of the survey was more to emphasise hardship and feudal injustices than to report local Zhuang beliefs and values. In spite of this, the author has gleaned much material of value from this survey. This is translated and incorporated into various sections of the book, providing a wealth of little-known ethnographic material. Those interested in comparing traditional Tai marriage, childbirth, funeral and other cultural practices will find much of interest, some placed in convenient appendices.

Production, including charts, tables, black and white pictures, maps, Chinese glossary and a good index, is highly pro-

fessional. Western and Chinese bibliographies are comprehensive for relevant studies in these languages. There is little negative to be said about this work, but if one had to indicate something, it would be the exorbitant price. In spite of this obstacle, the book deserves a wide readership and stands to make a continuing contribution to Tai studies.

Anthony Diller

Patricia Cheesman, *Lao-Tai Textiles: The Textiles of Xam Nuea and Muang Phuan*. Chiang Mai, Studio Naenna, 2004, pp. 297.

The research, writing and photography for this book have clearly been a labour of love. Patricia Cheesman has been studying the textiles of northern Laos for thirty years. This volume builds on her previous published work¹ and reflects her own love of textiles as a weaver herself. The book is well produced, and includes over 570 photographs, by far the most in colour. For lovers of the wonderfully rich variety of textiles from these two regions of northern Laos, the photographs alone make the book a collector's item.

The book is divided into eleven chapters, with three useful appendices and a bibliography, but there is no glossary or index, both of which would have added to its value, both for general readers and for scholars with an interest in Lao history and culture. The first two chapters cover the geographical and historical setting. The next presents Cheesman's system of classifying the textiles she is interested in, namely the historical textiles (those more than fifty years old) of the two regions of Xam Neua and Xiang Khuang produced by the various Tai groups who live there. Then comes a chapter on the culture of these groups, concentrating mainly on religion and

ritual. Five chapters then discuss in considerable detail the textiles used by women every day, by women for ceremonial occasions, by men for religious rituals and ceremonies, and for household purposes. The last two chapters provide information on the techniques used for dyeing and weaving and on the principal weaving motifs and their symbolism.

This structure may make sense for someone who already knows quite a lot about textiles and weaving techniques, but the general reader really needs to be introduced to the technical terms and what they mean before these are used to classify and identify various categories of textiles—especially since there is no glossary to refer to. The chapter on textile motifs and their symbolism would also have better been placed earlier, since these both reflect Tai culture and are important for an understanding of the significance and use of different designs, and how these help in classification.

The history of the northeastern Lao provinces of Huaphan and Xiang Khuang is extremely complex—both because of the movement of different peoples in and out of both areas (not to mention invading armies), and because of the tributary relations each had with various contending centres of power (neighbouring kingdoms, or *mandalas*).² Cheesman begins this history with some

¹ Patricia Naenna, *Lao Textiles: Ancient Symbols - Living Art*. Bangkok, 1988; Patricia Cheesman Naenna, *Costume and Culture: Vanishing Textiles of Some of the Tai Groups in Lao PDR*. Chiang Mai, 1990.

² See Martin Stuart-Fox, *The Lao Kingdom of Lān Xāng: Rise and Decline* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1998)



highly speculative early population movements of Tai peoples in China. She is on firmer ground with the fourteenth century formation of the Sipsong Chu Tai, centred on the middle basins of the Black and Red rivers and covering territory now part of southern China, northwestern Vietnam, and northeastern Laos (including part of Phongsali province, which Cheesman does not include in her study.) The twelve principalities (*meuang*) of the Sipsong Chu Tai actually comprised many more, smaller, tributary *meuang*, so Xam Neua was never an integral, single entity.

By contrast, Meuang Phuan (or Meuang Xiang Khuang) was a separate small kingdom, with its centre of power and population further south on the Plain of Jars (though it too comprised constituent *meuang*.) It was established by Tai-Phuan, who formed part of the same migrations that brought the Tai-Lao into the middle Mekong basin. For Meuang Phuan, too, the first firm historical references date back only to the fourteenth century. From then on it maintained a fragile independence through paying tribute, when possible, to both of its powerful neighbours—Dai Viet (northern Vietnam) and Lan Xang. Because of its geographical position, it was much more open than was Xam Neua to both trade and invading armies. Textiles were the crowning achievement of high Phuan culture, and Phuan weavers were called upon to produce fine textiles for the Lao court at Luang Phrabang.

Both regions suffered grievously during the past century and a half. In the nineteenth century Meuang Phuan was

affected far more than Xam Neua by the forced depopulation policy of the Siamese court. Tens of thousands of Phuan were resettled closer to the Mekong and in the Chao Phraya basin north of Bangkok. But whereas Xam Neua was separated from other parts of the Sipsong Chu Tai by French-imposed borders that left most of the Tai highlands in Vietnam rather than Laos, Meuang Phuan lost only the upper reaches of the Song Ca River. Both regions were fought over during the First Indochina War (1946-1954). As Xam Neua formed part of the Pathet Lao liberated zone and the Plain of Jars was a contested strategic area, both were heavily bombed during the Second Indochina War (between 1964 and 1973). Most of the population of both regions became internal refugees, or fled into the forest or hid in caves while their villages were destroyed.

What is extraordinary is that throughout all this time women continued to weave under often impossible conditions. Perhaps even more extraordinary is that they saved from destruction so many of their precious textiles. Many of these found their way onto the international market in the economically depressed decade following the Pathet Lao victory of 1975 (when Cheesman bought her first northeastern Lao textiles in Vientiane.) Others have been kept as heirlooms, and for ceremonial occasions. These older textiles are what Cheesman discovered during her years of research, and about which she writes so warmly.

Textiles contribute centrally to the self-identity of ethnic groups, down to the use of different colours and motifs by different lineages and clans. Tai-Dam, Tai-Daeng, Tai-Khao, and other ethnic minorities are distinguished by what they wear. What Cheesman discovered, however, was that so much interaction and borrowing had occurred as a result of so many population movements that it was impossible to classify textiles in relation to ethnography. All that proved possible was to differentiate weaving styles and designs, materials and motifs, according to geographical location. On this basis Cheesman classifies Xam Neua textiles into four sub-styles, and Meuang Phuan textiles into five, all beautifully illustrated. Each of the five chapters on kinds and uses of textiles is sub-divided accordingly.

For many readers the most fascinating part of this book will be the chapters on the shamanic beliefs and rituals of the upland Tai (chapter 4) and the textiles worn by the shamans performing these rituals (chapter 8). Bringing these two together, along with an explanation of the principal shamanic symbols and motifs woven into the cloth, would have strengthened this section even further. Cheesman has had the privilege of witnessing many of these shamanic rituals herself, and there are some wonderful photographs.

Only the Tai-Daeng employ women shamans as well as men. In the other Tai groups Cheesman studied, all shamans are male, though in cases where the spirits which possess them are female, they

dress as women (when they are known as *mô mot*, as opposed to *mô mon*). These shamans perform mainly rituals associated with sickness and appeasement of the ancestors. A special category of shamans performs rituals for the dead, and are always elaborately dressed for the occasion. At funerals, the dead are dressed in their finest clothes. Deceased women wear multiple sets of blouses and special tube skirts (known as *sin phī*, or 'spirit skirts') into which are woven highly schematic motifs of ancestral figures. Mourners, by contrast, wear simple white or very pale indigo mourning clothing, with the exception of daughters-in-law, who wear colourful blouses and multiple *sin phī*. The photographs of these *sin* and the funeral banners and coffin screens (for the animist groups bury their dead) are among the finest in the book.

A final note must be included on Cheesman's idiosyncratic use of certain terms and spellings, because both crop up in the title of the book. The first is her use of the term 'Lao-Tai', which she uses throughout the text. This departs from the usual scholarly convention of using 'Tai' as the inclusive term for all those groups which speak Tai languages and define themselves culturally and ethnically as Tai (reserving 'Thai'—though it is the same word—to refer to the citizens of modern-day Thailand). Ethnic Lao can thus be referred to as Tai-Lao and the Siamese of central Thailand as Tai-Syam. Cheesman uses Lao-Tai because some, but not all, scholars believe 'Lao' was the earliest term used



by the Chinese to refer to the ancestors of the Tai peoples in China. This has the benefit of giving equal billing to the Lao, now that the Thai have appropriated the general term for themselves—and perhaps also stresses the provenance of these textiles. But it does so at the expense of making it difficult to refer to ethnic Lao. Cheesman never uses the term ‘Tai-Lao’. When she wants to refer to the influence of lowland Lao weaving techniques and designs on those of Xam Neua and Meuang Phuan, she refers to Lan Xang, the name of the Lao kingdom that existed in the middle Mekong basin from the mid-fourteenth to the early eighteenth century. But this is a political, not a cultural or ethnographic term, and so seems inappropriate.

My other quibble is with transliteration, always a problem for Lao because there is no officially endorsed system, as there is for Thai or Chinese. Cheesman uses a modified Library of Congress transcription, with a doubling of the letter to indicate long vowels. This results in some inconsistencies (Lan Xang, but ‘saang’ for elephant as a motif), but is acceptable overall—except for one diphthong, the sound as in *hearse*, to use Cheesman’s example. This is usually transliterated as ‘eu’, as

in *meuang* (which Cheesman writes *muang*), but Cheesman for some reason reverses the order (to give Xam Nuea, as in her title, instead of Xam Neua, or Sam Neua, the alternatives used on every map of Laos I have ever seen.) This choice is the more surprising in that it cannot be read by an English speaker with anything near the correct pronunciation, while Cheesman goes out of her way to ensure that other combinations closely reflect pronunciation (for example, ‘oa’ as in ‘groan’, instead of ‘oo’ for the long o, and ‘or’ for the *ô* in *nakhôn*.) A personal reason why I do not like Cheesman’s use is that it reduces the *ngeuak* (Cheesman: *ngueak*), the great mythical river dragon that is the commonest motif in all Lao weaving,³ and one of my favourite beasts, to something that appears to rhyme with ‘squeak’.

That said, for anyone interested in the textiles of Laos, arguably among the finest expressions of Lao culture and now represented in many of the great museums of the world, this book will be an essential reference for years to come.

Martin Stuart-Fox

³ *Ngeuak* have been tamed by Buddhism to become *naga* (*nak* in Lao), protectors of the Dhamma. So ubiquitous are they as a weaving motif that Viengkham Nanthavongdouangsy called her little book on Lao woven textile motifs *Weaving Cloth, Weaving Nagas* (Vientiane: Phaeng Mai Gallery, 2004).

Gillian Green, *Traditional Textiles of Cambodia: Cultural Threads and Material Heritage*. Bangkok, River Books, 2003, pp.320, ills, hardback, Bt.1,795.

This book is the culmination of Gillian Green's research, over a ten-year period, into the textile and dress traditions of Cambodia. The book is lavishly illustrated, with over three hundred colour images drawn from important private collections and from museum sources in Australia, Cambodia, America and Europe.

The book begins with a brief history of Cambodia with reference to Khmer, Cham, Malay, Tai, Chinese and Sino-Khmer people, whose weavers contributed to the development of weaving techniques, to the patterning and design of cloth, and to dress styles. The author also cites Hindu, Buddhist and animist traditions that helped shape the iconography associated with textiles produced in this region. Using Khmer sculpture as illustration, she traces the history of Cambodian dress as seen in the exquisitely draped, folded, pleated, sometimes tailored, and patterned garments of Angkor, Bayon and Banteay Srei. This is a necessary historical starting point, as in the tropical climate of Cambodia textiles and dress have not survived beyond one hundred to one hundred and fifty years. What is not so clear is where these fabrics, portrayed in stone, actually came from. India, China, Siam and Java are cited here as possible sources.

There are some intriguing statements in the chapter dealing with raw materi-

als, particularly cotton. Cambodia, it is claimed, exported raw cotton to the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Vietnam and became, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the most important producer in Southeast Asia. Yet, according to the author, the Cambodians rejected indigenous cotton in favour of imported cotton yarn purchased from Chinese merchants. Itinerant Ho were the major buyers of raw cotton in the states of inland Southeast Asia, but did they also deal in cotton yarn for export to Cambodia? A study of trade records might provide the answer.

A comprehensive chapter explains loom types, equipment associated with production, warp and weft patterning methods and the technique of tie-dyeing cloth after it is woven. The illustrations include sets of finely carved loom pulleys, warp board guides, reel stands and warp brushes, and outstanding examples of red and black lacquered weft thread dyeing (*hol*) stands. The beauty of these objects bears testimony to the importance attached to all aspects of cloth production.

Chapter Five comprises an amazing array of Khmer design schemes, patterns and motifs. The author searches for design origins, drawing on Indian silk patola cloths and printed and painted cloth from the Coromandel coast, as well as Indian cotton textiles made for the Siamese market, a Chinese garment with diamond lattice patterns, excavated from a tomb dated to the first century CE, and Javanese and Malay textiles. This chapter focuses particularly on



complex and rich, yet subtle, Khmer hip wrappers and women's skirts, woven in 1/2 twill. Over fifty fine examples are included in the illustrations. There is also a section highlighting resist tie-dyed head cloths that are compared with similar cloths from Malaysia and south Sumatra.

The chapter on Cambodian dress is more problematic because, the author argues, there is little evidence following the ninth to twelfth century stone sculptures described earlier, until actual samples that have survived from the late nineteenth century. She refers to early and late twentieth century Khmer Buddhist mural paintings and contemporary sculptures for clues. Nineteenth century photographs might have provided some further information, if there were such a source. There are photographs of the Royal Khmer Dance Troupe (circa 1900–1930), showing how richly patterned tailored and draped cloth and ornaments were worn at that time. The author's contemporary photographs of the Cambodian diaspora in Australia provide an interesting comparison.

The final chapters deal with Buddhist textiles and ship cloths, explaining their significance in religious practice. Again, the illustrations are excellent, highlighting scenes from the Vessantara Jataka and the Buddhist cosmology. The main types of ship motif and the "tree of life" symbol are explained in useful diagrammatic form.

In conclusion, this book is an important contribution to the study of Khmer textiles and provides a basis for future

research. The beauty of the textiles illustrated here will hopefully provide inspiration to artists and designers, as well as stimulate academic research.

Susan Conway

David W. and Barbara G. Fraser *Mantles of Merit: Chin Textiles from Myanmar, India and Bangladesh*. Bangkok, River Books, 2005, pp. 288, ills, Bt.1,895.

Mantles of Merit is an authoritative reference book on the textiles from the Chin Hills of Myanmar and outlying areas, which include border areas of India and Bangladesh. There are eight chapters, an appendix, bibliography and index. The text is well illustrated with quality photographs and/or diagrams on nearly every page. The American authors have studied textiles for over 20 years and have previously written on this subject in *Arts of Asia* 2003 volume 33. David W. Fraser is a research associate at the Textile Museum in Washington DC and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and has authored "A Guide to Weft Twining and Related Structures with Interacting Wefts" and other articles on textile structures. In order to achieve this in-depth research, the Frasers travelled into many of the areas covered and examined numerous international collections of Chin textiles.

The authors have obviously found great pleasure in analysing weaving structures and unravelling weaving techniques that at first glance appear similar and rather simple. We are led into a world of subtleties, where tone-on-tone fabrics and the width of a stripe can distinguish a textile of high rank from that of an ordinary person. We are told "the skill of the weaver is reflected in the density of these (plain) black weft faced

stripes and the success in hiding the underlying warp colours" (p.95). This is a book steeped in the intricacies of back-strap loom technology, suitable for textile scholars and weavers who will be intrigued by the ingenious ways in which the Chin weavers have accomplished subtle differences in surface decoration and colour with the most simple equipment and limited iconography, while collectors will refer to it to identify their textiles. Indeed, examples of misidentified textiles in public and private collections worldwide are given. The general reader will enjoy the many excellent photographs, which beautifully display their minimal qualities and capture the artistic merit of the textiles, for which the authors make a plea in their first sentence: "As art objects, Chin textiles deserve to be much better known". With the authors' intricate description of each textile, readers will find themselves turning the pages back and forth to follow the recommended illustrations explaining each technique or to find an early photograph illustrating a textile's use in former times.

These early photographs are a compelling part of the book, bringing the textiles into their cultural context and illustrating well the authors' title, *Mantles of Merit*. The authors have successfully matched many early textiles, now in private collections, with those being worn in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs. These photographs were taken by missionaries and British administrators, whose agenda was not the documenta-



tion of the textiles or dress, but nevertheless have proved invaluable to this research. In particular, those of the Rev. J. Herbert of the American Baptist Church taken between 1908 and 1920 seem to have been the most prolific.

The authors have achieved their goals outlined in the preface, one being to present the nineteenth century Chin textiles as art objects by unveiling their “technical virtuosity”, and the other presenting them as cultural objects that “deserve to be understood for their integral role in the core Chin effort to achieve merit in this life and the next”. Missing areas of research have been cleverly covered by reference to other researchers or by interviewing people in some of the main towns. It is obvious that the authors hold the Chin in great respect as they credit “the expert weavers of exemplary textiles” as a central theme to the book and name many people in the figure captions. New technologies such as standing looms and trade items are given minimal coverage, and from the lack of photographic data from the field made by the authors themselves, it is clear that they found little traditional clothing in use today.

Indigenous names of textiles are not always provided and would have been useful, particularly in the captions. Furthermore, it is not easy to understand the inconsistency of the English given in parentheses after some indigenous names, nor the role of bold lettering used occasionally. It is perhaps also apt to mention that the maps provided did not suffice my curiosity and love of good

maps. No legends are provided and the maps at the beginning of chapters 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 fail to show all the towns and locations mentioned in the respective text. Kalemmyo, for example, does not appear on the map of the northern Chin area (p.57), and the reader is forced to turn back to page 10 to find its location. The Chin Hills, so important and often mentioned in the text, are not named on any map, whereas the Chittagong Hills are. There are inconsistencies in spellings and town locations such as Tiddim, which is shown southeast of Falam on p.10 and southwest of Falam on p.57.

The introduction gives a general anthropological background of the Chin peoples as Sino-Tibetans and compares the opinions of various anthropologists, most of whom seem to differ in their analysis of the Kuki-Chin peoples and rely on linguistics for their classification systems. We learn that the Chin originated in the Himalayan Plateau around 4000 BC and came into Southeast Asia approximately AD 1000, with half currently living in Myanmar and the other half in India, with a small population in Bangladesh. They speak at least 44 separate languages, the most common being Lai. An appendix at the end of the book gives the names of 22 loom parts and related items in 32 of these languages, most of which are credited to Bahadur. However, despite the authors’ claim in the preface that “the orthography of the Chin languages is not standardized, so phonetic spellings are the rule”, it is a shame that a specific phonetic system was not specified for

the book, nor a glossary provided for readers with a keen eye for languages. A table of Kuki-Chin languages taken from Grimes, and geographic, topographic and climatic information are given on pages 15–16.

In Chapter 2 the studies of numerous scholars and missionaries are drawn upon for the history and cultural setting of the Chin, but the historical information is minimal. The missionaries' accounts seem to be less useful than their photographs, as "the primary motivation (of the missionaries) was not recording of Chin history but the translation of the Bible" (p.19). More recent anthropological studies made in the 1950s and 1960s have been more useful for cultural information, but these research pockets of Chin culture and cannot be taken as representative of the whole, as such a vast variety of cultural aspects exist. We are told that the primary social aim in the past of the entire Chin population was power by control over land, the ability to demand high bride prices and to organize large war parties. Today many of these standards still exist, and the Chin are preoccupied by status and material wealth that is displayed in feasts of merit, when hosts sacrifice massive *mithans* to feed large numbers of the community. Interestingly, textiles are the only home-produced items included in Chin heirloom items.

Chapter 3 is the crowning accomplishment of these authors, whose magnificent drawings of textile structures and avid descriptions of the weaving

techniques show concise and clear understanding of the subject. We are guided into noticing the subtlest additions to textiles such as laid-in wefts that can hardly be seen but play an important role in the status of a textile, and alternated wefts that give depth to red warps by using a black weft and warmth to black warps by changing to a red weft in the same textile. Although most Chin textiles are warp faced, the authors document numbers of textiles that alternate from warp to weft face in the same piece by bunching warps together or even by cutting them off to reduce the warp count. Interesting techniques such as false embroidery and eccentric weft twining are introduced, and stitching methods have been carefully drawn. Unfortunately the "*vai puan* stripe" is not sufficiently described, given its continuous mention throughout the book, and its discontinuous supplementary weft sections are not seen in the suggested photographic reference of figure 95. Information sadly lacking in this technical chapter is on natural dyes used in the nineteenth century, which the authors admit they were unable to research due to the common practice of chemical dyeing today. It is likely that chemical dyes reached these areas very early, due to the British involvement there since the late eighteenth century, but no information is given of this trade or possible dating of textiles by their dye sources. Bright red, for example, was purportedly made from lac, but it is known that lac does not dye well on vegetable fibres such as cotton, hemp



and flax, the main materials for many Chin textiles. The authors doubt the originality of the red tunics of the Khmau, calling it “a matter of debate”, but fail to suggest chemical dyes as a possible reason for the greater use of red, nor do they analyse the possible significance of silk in red sections of the textiles, as silk dyes easily in lac.

The next four chapters are devoted to a description of the textiles themselves. One wonders why blankets are not included in the sections on “wear”, but are described together with sleeping blankets, whereas they seem in some cases to be one of the few garments worn and are, after all, body mantles. Sub-headings within the textile types would have assisted easier reference and greater clarity. Unfortunately, the marvellous ability of the authors to describe the weaving techniques and structures of each textile was not applied to the methods of dress, perhaps due to the lack of information in the field. Chapter 7 on Ashö textiles describes some of the most fascinating textiles in the book. Despite the relocation of the six Ashö groups south of the Chin Hills in Burmese and Rakhine controlled areas, they seem to have maintained more sophisticated early textiles styles than the Haka, who are often thought of as the creative force behind Chin textiles. It is very interesting that these textiles show a high level of impressive weaving, even though they are only used on ceremonial occasions and the people have adapted themselves to more modern living.

The last chapter, “Wellsprings and Flow of Textile Ideas”, is a summary of the finds made by the authors and is a pleasing conclusion to the book. We learn that resist dyeing may have been the Karen influence, and that the Laytu, an Ashö group, may have been the original creators of the twill technique. The “*vai puan* stripe” is of possible Laytu and Bawm origins. The Frasers’ dedication to detail has been triumphantly rewarded, as illustrated by one of their final statements: “In many cases structural analysis confirmed groupings (of the different Chin peoples) suggested by linguists and anthropological study” (p276). *Mantles of Merit* poses many questions, but has successfully filled an enormous gap in our knowledge of Chin textiles and is a veritable dictionary on the subject.

Patricia Cheesman

Donald K. Swearer, Sommai Premchit and Phaitoon Dokbuakaew, *Sacred Mountains of Northern Thailand and their Legends*. Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2004, pp. 112, Bt. 395.

The mountains of northern Thailand, famous to pilgrims and tourists alike, are associated with monastic asceticism, as well as shamanism and animist beliefs. Drawing on a number of Thai and vernacular sources, this book presents new translations of *tamnan*, legendary chronicles, associated with the mountains of northern Thailand. Two of the translations, the *Tamnan Ang Salung* (Chronicle of Water Basin Mountain) and the *Tamnan Phra Doi Suthep* (Chronicle of Doi Suthep) are the result of collaboration with Thai scholars, Phaitoon Dokbuakaew and Sommai Premchit, respectively. Swearer contributes two thoughtful introductory chapters and introduces the translations, and is the sole translator of the legends of Phra That Doi Kham and Chao Luang Kham Daeng.

The first chapter, entitled “Buddhism, Nature, and Culture”, examines the contribution of religion, particularly Buddhism, to debates surrounding the “global environmental crisis”. Swearer proposes that the attempts to tackle the environmental crisis have neglected “humanistic, ethical and religious perspectives” (p. 1), and that these dimensions urgently need to be addressed in order to move the debate forward. Swearer suggests that the teaching of the historical Buddha can be interpreted as

directly relevant, and the doctrinal justifications used by the Buddhist environmental movement are briefly explored. These are put into a Thai-specific context by a short review of the late Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of the relationship between nature and the Dhamma, the Buddha’s teachings.

In Chapter 2 we turn to a more detailed examination of the many meanings and roles ascribed to the mountains of northern Thailand. Illustrated by a simple diagram on page 22, we see how the mountain has been linked with notions of kingship and cosmology, Buddhism, Brahmanism, legends and deities. Here we examine the apparent tensions between nature and culture, a false opposition in the opinion of the author, who suggests that “when culture is perceived as a total way of life of a group of people, then nature becomes part of the way in which a people understand and construct their very existence” (p. 23). Swearer goes on to examine some of the similarities between the *tamnan*, discussing ways of understanding the Buddha’s travels around northern Thailand and his encounters with local peoples and places, giving names to places and distributing relics. The Buddha’s presence and journey serve to create an order, “within which particular locations derive meaning as a result of being integrated into a larger scheme of things grounded ultimately in the Buddha.” The signs, relics, place names, stories, folklore and legends he leaves in his wake serve as reminders of his “continuing presence”.



Chapter 3 contains the translation of the *Tamnan Doi Ang Salung*, the Chronicle of Water Basin Mountain, Thailand's third highest mountain. The text is translated from palm leaf manuscript in northern Thai script, from a monastery in the Chiang Mai district kept in microfilmed copy in the Social Research Institute's archive at Chiang Mai University. The manuscript used is dated Chulasakarat 1306 (1944 C.E.), though the author suggests this version probably dates from the early nineteenth century. The authors have slightly altered the order in which the elements of the original are organised in order to make the text more straightforward and readable, meaning that elements can work independently of the main narrative. The text comprises three elements, arranged into five shorter sections for ease of reading. In this type of legendary text, which draws together figures of religious authority who may be diachronically separated by centuries, and places which may be geographically far apart, into a single synchronic narrative of localised sacred place, literal interpretation is not the intention. Thus, we read of the Buddha being accompanied by King Asoka and attended by his disciple Ananda, and events from his biography are transposed from an Indian to a northern Thai context. The *tamnan* relates the Buddha's journey around northern Thailand and his encounters with various ethnic groups, including the Lawa, Tai and Burmese, converting the people and the land and distributing relics and leaving his mark

(in the form of a footprint) as he goes. Often these relics are of a rather surprising nature, as when a Lawa farmer is presented with a relic from the mucus which drips from the Buddha's nose. The chapter concludes with the Legend of Chao Luang Kham Daeng, Lord Burnished Gold, in which we learn how the son of the king of Champa's mysterious death at the hands of a *yakkha* (demon) lead to him becoming the guardian spirit of the cave in which he disappeared. He still "rules over the spirits and lords of the forest and the mountains in northern Thailand all the way to the Burma border" (p.67).

In Chapter 4 we turn to that most famous of Thai mountains, Doi Suthep. The *Tamnan Phra Doi Suthep* is translated from a microfilm copy in the Social Research Unit, Chiang Mai University. The manuscript was palm leaf, written in Lan Na script and dated C.S. 1186 (1824 C.E.). This legend again gives an account of the Buddha visiting northern Thailand, and includes the well-known story of the journey on an elephant's back to the summit of Doi Suthep of the Buddha relic brought from Sukhothai by the holy monk Mahasumana Thera. This text also incorporates the lineage of the kings of Chiang Mai and the building of the *chedi*, and details the correct way in which to make offerings. The chapter concludes with the translation of the Legend of Doi Kham, the golden mountain. This includes the legend of Chamathewi, and the history of the *yakkhas* Pu Sae and Ya Sae, and their

son, the ascetic Wasuthep, whose story explains the annual buffalo sacrifice held at Doi Kham.

This is a short book and is of interest to anyone who cares about Thailand's cultural and physical heritage. Of course, it will be of particular interest to historians and scholars of Buddhist studies, but it is written in accessible language appropriate to the general reader. It is an ideal companion volume to Swearer and Sommai Premchit's *Legend of Queen Cama* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998). There are thirteen colour plates which accompany the text; however, the inclusion of a simple map would have aided readers unfamiliar with the location. The decision to convert the distances described in the text from Thai *wa* to metres seems rather strange and jars somewhat with the rest of the translated text. The fact that footnotes are kept to a minimum and there is no separate bibliography means that pointers to further reading on Buddhist environmentalist movements in Thailand and beyond are minimal. These minor points notwithstanding, this book makes a fascinating read for scholars and interested individuals alike, and is a welcome addition to the body of work of Professor Swearer.

Catherine Newell



Donald K. Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha: The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, pp.336, USD 37.95.

This wide-ranging study has as its focus the *abhiseka* ritual to consecrate a new Buddha image. Although Professor Swearer concentrates upon the ritual as it has developed in the Chiang Mai area of northern Thailand, he engages in a variety of scholarly debates about the nature and history of Buddha images and image consecration. He also explores at length the person and nature of Gotama, the historical Buddha, as understood by monks, scholars and lay devotees since his miraculous birth. The study considers the Buddha image from its manufacture by skilled artisans to its installation in the temple setting in a lengthy and complicated ceremony rich with meaning, which culminates in the ritual opening of the image's eyes. As well as the author's considerable descriptive and analytical study, a number of *suttas*, sermons and other ritual texts appear in whole or in fragments, many of them in new translation. The text is supplemented by 49 pages of footnotes, plus a glossary of selected Thai and Pāli terms. 21 black and white photos accompany the text, the majority of them showing scenes from image consecration rituals in the Chiang Mai region.

The book is arranged into three sections and eight chapters. Part 1 incorporates three chapters, which consider the Buddha image itself from a number

of scholarly and theoretical angles. Drawing on Pali and Thai and vernacular sources, Chapter 1 explores the ways in which the Buddhist tradition has accounted for the existence of Buddha images. This discussion sheds light on the nature of the Buddha image and how it should be treated, themes which are developed later in the book. Swearer then turns to the art historical debates, which have sought to agree on the origin of the first Buddha image, its style, dating and location, as well as the suggested impetus for this development. Chapter 2 considers the location of the Buddha image within its physical context, the Thai *wat* (temple-monastery), and explores a number of scholars' interpretations of the nature and significance of the *stupa* (the ancient Indian memorial mound in which relics are enshrined). Chapter 3 is largely given over to the translation of three northern Thai texts concerned with the proper construction of a Buddha image. There is also a description of the image-making itself, followed by a discussion of the notable features and themes drawn from the texts, including a fascinating discussion on the nature and use of *yantras* (Thai: *yan*), magical diagrams with protective properties.

Part 2 begins with a description of the image consecration ceremony. Its location, various elements and actors are described and discussed in context. Swearer explores the relationship between Gotama Buddha and his relics, images and "material signs", asking if the Buddha may be said to be present in

such objects (pp.108–115). In order to “become the Buddha’s double” (p.122), the image needs to be instructed in the life story of the Buddha, by the recital of texts which relate key events in the Buddha’s life. Two such texts, the *Pathama Sambodhi* (Thai, *Pathom Somphat*, The Buddha’s Supreme Enlightenment) and *Sittāt Ōk Buat* (Siddhatta’s Renunciation) appear here in translation (pp.129–137 and 138–151 respectively). As well as being “instructed” in the life of the Buddha, the image must also be empowered by the ritual implanting (Thai: *plūk*) of the knowledge, qualities and powers of Gotama Buddha. This is done by the monastic recital of texts which describe in detail the circumstances, and, crucially, the precise nature of his enlightenment.

In part 3 the various elements of the book are brought together. There is an illuminating consideration of image consecration ceremonies in other Buddhist countries. While there are many (often surprising) similarities, Swearer argues that what makes the northern Thai ritual under consideration unique is “the charismatic intervention of monk-meditators” (p.230). It is the emphasis on the life and, particularly, the enlightenment of Gotama Buddha which leads Swearer to conclude in the final chapter that the *buddhābhiseka* ceremony “transforms the image into the living reality of the Buddha...[the ritual] creates a cult icon by the mimetic repetition of the events that constitute Buddhahood” (pp.230–231).

The epilogue considers the role of the Buddha image in contemporary Thailand and includes the reflections of the late Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu on popular misinterpretation of the concept of “taking refuge” in the Buddha. It also includes a short response from well-known Thai scholarly monk P.A. Payutto (Phra Dhammapitaka) on the question of “Sacred Objects, Efficacious Deities, and Miracles”. The book closes with the efforts of Santi Asok (the Thai utopian Buddhist movement which eschews all Buddha images) to reinterpret the traditional amulet consecration ritual as a ceremony to morally empower the movement’s members.

Although this study concentrates on one ritual in one region of Thailand, Swearer extrapolates from the relatively small area of focus to illuminate a large area of debate. Swearer is not afraid to wade into some of the thorniest issues to have occupied scholars of Buddhist studies since the inception of the discipline, and makes a timely and intelligent critique of the overly simplistic view that paints Buddhists and Buddhist history in terms of iconic/aniconic, Hinayāna/Mahāyāna, and popular/monastic polarities.

Catherine Newell



Martin Jelsma, Tom Kramer, and Pietje Vervest, eds, *Trouble in the Triangle: Opium and Conflict in Burma*. Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2005, pp. 231.

This book is the result of research on drugs and conflicts in Burma. A conference on the subject was organized in 2003 by the Transnational Institute (TNI). The book contains ten papers grouped into three sections, one each on local, regional, and global perspectives.

In their introduction, the editors call for a more humane drug policy in Burma. They express concern over the drug ban initiated by the Wa Authority in June 2005, as well as plans by the Government of the Union of Myanmar to eliminate drugs throughout the country in 2014. Seeing such bans as efforts to bring about “quick solutions” to complex problems, the editors suggest that easing the deadlines while increasing international humanitarian assistance would be more appropriate.

Paper writers included journalists, the son of a Shan prince, social scientists, and one person working in a development project. Also contributing, in an appendix at the end of the first section (but left unmentioned in the introduction, as well as in the contributors’ section, the latter at their own request), were accounts by two opium poppy growers, one from southern Shan State and one from Kachin State. Eight papers are on Burma, while two provide balance by examining drug situations in Columbia and Afghanistan, respectively the world’s largest producers of cocaine and

opium. Two authors are from Burma, while the rest are from elsewhere, except, of course, the two anonymous poppy growers.

Although the editors want to “move the debate forward”, it is not clear what the pros and cons of the debate are. But based on clues in different texts, the debate is between the proponents of the war on drugs conducted by the United States since 1971 and those who authored the articles in the book calling for the more humanitarian approach.

One side of the debate was presented convincingly on 6 October 2005 in Paris by Professor Al McCoy. He concluded a meeting on “Drug Production and State Stability” by charging that the war on drugs was failing. Referring to what he called a donor-driven US-United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) partnership, McCoy claimed that since this war began, drug production had increased, the substances used had multiplied, while usage had both soared and entered new sectors of society. He added that harsh control measures, such as fumigating crops in Latin America, created negative social and environmental impacts.

The United States has shaped UNODC policy since 1971, when President Nixon began actively trying to control drugs. That year, White House deputy for Domestic Affairs, Egil (Bud) Krogh, traveled to Chiang Mai with the message that the United States would fund drug control work in Thailand. Soon a workplan was drafted for the first project of then newly-formed United

Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (now UNODC) that adopted the crop replacement approach pioneered by King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Prince Bhisatej Rajani directed both the UN and the Royal Project, although they later diverged. Until 1984, when the Thai government began eradicating the poppy crops, law enforcement was secondary to development work. Even then, as dozens of international, bilateral and NGO projects worked in poppy-growing areas, economic development was the focus. Later, similar projects began in Laos, Vietnam and Burma.

The biggest drug-related project in this region now is the UNODC Wa Project, operating with a total budget of about US\$16 million since 1998. Major activities include agricultural development to increase food production, feeder road construction, and health and education components. This project is discussed in the papers by one of the editors, Tom Kramer, and a lonely project official, Jeremy Milsom.

Despite efforts by the editors to remain neutral in the debate, they sometimes distort its parameters. For example, Kramer shows too close a link between US/UNODC policy (and implicitly the war on drugs) and the 2005 ban in the Wa region. Although he writes that the United Wa State Army (UWSA) proclaimed the Wa region drug free, the article also states that “particularly” China, Thailand, and the US pressured the Wa into the ban. He overlooks the fact that the ban was planned in 1990. When the Wa leaders did this, neither

the US or UN had any influence on this decision and the Burmese government influence there was not strong.

Neither he nor any of the other authors explain that China has been waging its own war on drugs for over 40 years. After Mao Zedong took power in 1949, China aggressively reversed conditions that had started a century earlier, when the British fought wars for opium from 1839 to 1842. Many in Mao’s government disdained the aggression that had forced them to cede Hong Kong, as well as starting what they saw as an outrageous part of a century of aggression against them.

When the Chinese Communist Party suppressed opium, neither the US nor the UN played any role. For over 25 years, without UN or US involvement, China remained virtually drug free. The impetus for the ban in the Wa is seen clearly in the Wa leader, Bao Yuxiang’s, answer when questioned whether he was serious about the ban in 2005: “If I do not carry out the ban, you can send my head on a platter to Beijing.”

China’s concern over opium exports from Burma changed in the 1980s, when poppy cultivation from the Shan State increased as one result of the US war on drugs that shut down poppy cultivation in the Middle East, leading drug cartels to find new sources. By 1985, when public notices were posted in Jinghong announcing the execution of drug dealers, China was facing a new drug problem that grew to over a million opiate users in China in a decade. Beijing sees China’s problems as flow-



ing east from Shan State, into Yunnan and thence elsewhere in China.

By not recognizing these factors, the frame of the debate in the book is skewed. This is understandable to some degree because, as the editors note, many constraints impede knowing the drug situation on Burma, such as gaining access to opium poppy growing areas. No journalists from anywhere except China have been able to visit the Wa region for over a year, causing many observers to rely on Shan border groups that are often politically motivated. Such constraints contribute to some papers focusing on the oft-told story of ethnic conflict and Burmese warlords. With little current information on the area (despite brief trips by two editors to the Wa region in 2003), the book continues the discussion in terms of hurried UN and US wars on drugs, which force deadlines on the growers.

The present drug control situation is more prosaic. Almost all the old opium armies and rebel groups have signed ceasefire agreements and laid down their arms. Both UN and American estimates of opium production find decreased poppy cultivation over the last decade. Priorities now include increasing rice production, providing better health care, expanding education, and other development activities.

As for the articles themselves, the veteran journalist Adrian Cowell presents an authoritative background to the situation by correlating the production of opium and the rise of anarchy in Shan State. Basing his account primarily on

trips he made at four intervals with different Shan guerrilla groups, from 1964 to 1992–1994, he balances the information gained first-hand from, as he calls them, “the principal predators” of the trade, with data from other sources. He reviews the growth of the opium trade, showing its connection with the principal Shan State rebel groups. He leaves the issue of the ceasefires and bans to the other authors.

The late Chao Tzang, descended from a leading Shan princely family and to whom the book is dedicated, does address this issue, considering ceasefires and bans more as business arrangements by which the opium trade can continue. He suggests that only political changes that “restore a functional relationship between the state and broader society in Burma” will accomplish this.

Tom Kramer also discusses the ceasefires. He is concerned that international assistance to the country, due to reluctance by donors since 1988 to provide aid to the country, is insufficient to provide much help to the opium farmers. Fearing that there will be much suffering in the Wa region when the ban goes into effect (as it now has), he hopes that the authorities extend the deadline (which they have not and will not).

The paper by Jeremy Milsom, presently the manager of the UNODC Wa Area Development Project, is the only one (besides the appendix noted above) that presents the point of view of the Wa leaders and ordinary farmers.

Although the politics of the region has led to many in Thailand and the West

seeing the Wa as purveyors of all manner of drugs, they are in fact a diverse group with many factions. Despite the Wa leadership having been indicted as drug dealers by the United States last year, the UN Wa Project has continued. It seeks viable alternatives to opium production, which impoverishes more growers than it enriches. Milsom's paper presents the most up-to-date account of changes in the Wa region ever written.

In the second section, Don Pathan discusses Thailand's war on drugs. After reviewing Burma-Thai border relations, he details the policies introduced by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to aggressively reduce drug problems in Thailand that led, according to the Ministry of the Interior, to 81,000 suspected drug dealers being detained, about 270,000 drug users entering treatment programs, and over 2,000 deaths. Pathan focuses on the internal politics of Burma, suggesting that drug exports to Thailand were facilitated by the ongoing presence of warlords and a state of lawlessness that the ceasefires (which he says were not political settlements) did not eliminate, thus ensuring continued drug production.

Guilhem Fabre discusses the recent rise of heroin use in China, which, he says, creates a demand for opium larger than the supply reported by the UNODC. Although he believes that increased imports from Afghanistan might be filling any decline in exports from Burma, his figures of usage in China may also be wrong, because he

does not estimate dosage levels which might in fact be less than he thinks. Although he calls on China to avoid finger-pointing and to cooperate in drug control, he seems to ignore the fact that China signed the 1992 UN Sub-regional Memorandum of Understanding and has joined other international groups to counter the spread of drugs and has, as noted above, pressured the Wa to ban drugs in 2005, a ban that is indeed being enforced, although poppy cultivation may, as Fabre suggests, be moving elsewhere, such as Kachin State.

Soe Myint examines the trade of Burmese drugs across the border into India. It is precisely because China is clamping down on the trade across its borders that drug cartels have begun shipping in the other direction, through central Burmese towns such as Mandalay and Monywa on newly-improved roads to India. His calls for increased awareness, educational initiatives, and increased international assistance for this region are appropriate, but may be difficult to implement.

Martin Jelsma begins the third section by assessing the global market for opium in the past and shifts in supply and demand. Despite variations in individual countries, he states that the combined world production has remained relatively stable for over a century. He also reviews the opium ban in the Wa region, which he, too, incorrectly links to the initiatives promoted by the United States and the United Nations since the late-1990s. He correctly notes, however, that the humanitarian consequences of



rapidly banning opium may be severe, particularly on the poor farmers who are least able to find alternative livelihoods.

The final two papers, in the third section, cover the situation in the two major narcotic crop producing areas in the world: Afghanistan (by Alain Labrousse) for opium and Columbia (by Ricardo Vargas M.) for coca, which is processed into cocaine. Because both countries seem to have more serious problems with armed groups and civic unrest than Burma, they offer some hope that the problems in this country may be on the road to repair.

The book itself is well produced, though an index would have been useful, especially since many authors discussed overlapping topics as well as the same people and locales. Overall the book contributes to our knowledge of drug issues in Burma, while at the same time indicating difficulties in keeping abreast of conditions in this country.

Ronald D. Renard

Andrew C. Willford, Kenneth M. George (eds), *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Ithaca, NY, Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2005, pp. 210.

Beginning in the early 1980s, certain anthropologists have shifted their attention from face-to-face communities to the study of the culture of the public world. Considering the rise of middle classes, the press and public opinion about nationalism, political affairs, justice and the shape of tomorrow throughout the twentieth century, this shift of focus came rather late. Since then, however, the unfolding of the cultural space between the state-owning elite and the little people, as well as the globalization of the media, the economy, and travel, has created a legitimate field of cultural analysis; the book to be reviewed is a fine example.

The contributions to the volume focus on the interconnections between the state, politics, religion, society and individual life-worlds. Gone are the days of the theatre of religious pomp to lend glory to the state and its ruling class. It has been replaced by rhetoric about the nation and by religious discourse manipulated or on its own as major sources of legitimacy. In its current mobilization, there is nothing non-modern about religion that, in *Spirited Politics*, is seen as an enduring and increasingly significant precinct of Southeast Asian politics and public life (p.9) (which may, at a certain point of time, appear as a bold overstatement).

The eight chapters that comprise the book vary enormously in their contents and focus, even as they show the entwining of the state, or politics, and religion. Sometimes this happens in unintended ways, as Brenner's essay on Islam and gender politics in Indonesia demonstrates. When Suharto came to power, he not only wanted to destroy communism, but also to emasculate political Islam. With the gradual disillusionment with the New Order, Islam became a symbol of opposition and even a moral stance. This, combined with global impulses, led to an impressive revival of the religion, which in turn led the New Order to accommodate it. The subsequent efflorescence of Islam resulted in various internal debates on its role in politics and the state, modernity, democracy and gender, and whereas Brenner focuses on the last, she also demonstrates that any generalization about "Islam and its role in the modern state", or in the world, for that matter, is a dangerous simplification.

If Islam as a social force was powerful enough to struggle free from New Order rigidity, the creation of an alien other within through the denial of its own religiosity continued the colonial practice of setting the Chinese apart while denying them assimilation into the multi-ethnic Indonesian nation. It is only in the post-Suharto era that the people of Chinese descent may be "admitted", although they still have a long way to go. This is illustrated in Abalihin's chapter on Confucianism and the negotiation of Indonesian-Chinese identity that



takes its point of departure in the long struggle of a couple to have their marriage recognized by the state even if it was sanctified through Confucian ritual.

The self-contradictory nature of nation-building through the exclusion of minorities is also highlighted by the marginalization of the Hindu Tamil community of Malaysia. To illustrate the non-accommodation of Hindu practices in an ideology of national purity, Willford focuses on the vicissitudes of a single spirit medium who, in his treatment, becomes an icon of the “private”, non-national space of Hinduism in the country: that space is a cage or a zone of confinement into which subjects (not citizens) have been coerced by the state.

In the Philippines something of an opposite nature takes place when ardent academic nationalists, not the state, proclaim certain popular religious sites and practices as eminently national, as epitomizing the kernel and secrets of Philippine identity and culture. On the lower slopes of Mt Banahaw this gave rise to the appropriation of a cult, the Ciudad Mistica de Dyos, that, as Lahiri shows, grew out of its local boundaries and became a vehicle for a politician in search of publicity.

In a way, the interest of said nationalist academics reflects in the 1980s the opinions of equally zealous Americans bound to civilize the Filipinos through denying that the latter had any culture worth noting, apart from a tendency toward idolatry, mimicry and imitation. By way of often circumstantial but equally humorous facts and stories,

Cannell is convincing in showing that American colonial prejudices found their roots in a “Protestant” mentality, yet what she further wants to demonstrate with her discussion of “idolatry” and “fetishism” remains both far-fetched and unclear. The point, however, that lowland Christian Filipinos think of themselves as having no culture and no identity is a lesson they learned well from their colonial masters and an opinion I still encounter every day in spite of the nationalists’ appropriation of Banahaw “mysticism”.

In the same vein as a politician seeks an audience and his advantage through banking on a cult’s popularity, Thai politicians exploit the opportunity of seeking the limelight at wakes and cremations. As Fishel demonstrates, this phenomenon could arise through the shift of venue of funerary practices from the forest to the urban temple and the consequent “domestication of death” in the wake of the growth of Thai middle classes.

The other piece situated in Thailand is White’s discussion of fraudulent popular religiosity in the public sphere. The State campaign to outlaw spirit mediums whose prophecies led to arson lead him to argue that although such mediums persist (in the margin of popular religiosity), “the State”—or is it politics—is currently too weak, too unorganized, too unwilling and uninterested, to campaign for the eradication of irrational, pre-modern mediumship—whose focus, by the way, has changed from arson to enhancing middle-class prosperity.

As far as I know, in Thailand anything having to do with the appropriation of the supernatural still goes and those who bank on the gullibility of the public hold on to their positions even as there are significant shifts of focus, such as the newspaper pages devoted to amulets and supernaturally powerful monks giving way to sports and pictures of pretty girls. Be that as it may, the deep-down interest in the mysterious remains a fact of life, at the same time that Buddhism lives on for the sake of merit-making, auspiciousness, visibility, family and funeral rites (rather than because of the attractions of modern reformism).

Even so, the state—or politics—keeps a watchful eye on public manifestations it finds displeasing, as exemplified by its suppression, in the 1980s, of the “Bureau of the Heavenly Grandfathers”, where, in my days, quite a few Chiang Mai academics sought guidance from Napoleon, the Fifth Reign or certain long-departed *luang phi*. It is unfortunate that White does not give any attention to the other instances of state or political interference in popular religious manifestations, such as the said Bureau (1980s) or the esoteric Dhammakaya sect (1990s), or even the reformist Santi Asoka sect (1970s); had he done, he could have made a case.

Of the eight authors, Laheri, Willford and George seek to see the universe in a grain of sand, a procedure I am in sympathy with. Perhaps this is most pointedly so in the last chapter by George on the reaction to violence and religion of the Acehnese painter Pirous. Through

focusing on the growth of his political and religious awareness in parallel to his artistic development, we get a fascinating commentary on the tragic story of Aceh and the predicaments of Indonesian citizenship.

On the whole, *Spirited Politics* does what it sets out to do, namely, to give insight into the complex relationships between state, religion, society and individuals, and into a public sphere filled by the cacophony of their voices that sometimes result in discursive space and also in the headstrong desire to exclude and not to communicate. In much of the book, however, the message is cloaked in academic esotericism and a flood of verbiage relished by old-fashioned German professors. I doubt whether this is a service to the reading public and the English language.

Niels Mulder



Pratapaditya Pal, *Art from Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia* (Asian Art at the Norton Simon Museum, Vol. 3). New Haven and London, Yale University Press in association with the Norton Simon Art Foundation, 2004, pp.255.

This is Volume 3 in the set *Asian Art at the Norton Simon Museum*. Volume 1 (2003) described 'Art from the Indian Subcontinent', while Volume 2 (2003) dealt with 'Art from the Himalayas and China'. All three books, written by Pal, are sumptuously produced, and have detailed indexes and bibliographies.

Norton Simon (1907–1993) had a passion for Asian art, which led him to amass what must be one of the biggest and most extraordinary private collections in the world, now housed in the handsome Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena, California. The collection covered in this volume includes objects from all of the countries and cultures of the region. The Introduction discusses the nature of the artwork and its relations to the Indian subcontinent and to Buddhism and Hinduism. The lucid and balanced essay sets the stage for the catalogue, which presents the objects according to region or type.

The first section is 'Pottery of the Ban Chiang and later periods'. The collection has several very fine pieces, remarkably intact. Next is 'Drums'—fourteen bronze 'rain drums' of various provenances and dates. This is followed by 'Sri Lanka'. Noteworthy are an ivory fan handle, an extraordinary sword made of silver inlaid with gemstones,

and a pair of silver manuscript covers with intricate decorations.

The next section is devoted to Indonesia. Here there is a fine small bronze of the goddess Chunda. As Pal's brief note shows, Chunda was an important deity. Unfortunately she has been rather neglected by modern scholarship; an exception is a recent article by Robert Gimello, 'Icon and Incantation: The Goddess Zhunti and the Role of Images in the Occult Buddhist of China', (Chapter 7 in Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara, ed., *Images in Asian Religions: Texts and Contexts*, Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2004). Both this image and a bronze Tara are inscribed with the *ye dharma* stanza, which connects them with a ritual practice widespread in the greater Buddhist world by the Pala period.

The pride of the collection is the objects from Thailand and Cambodia. In his long and useful introduction to the section, Pal briefly touches upon one of the most puzzling icons of the 'Dvaravati' culture: the so-called Banaspati images, or images of a Buddha, often flanked by a pair of deities or bodhisattvas, riding on a garuda or a mythical creature. The icon is not explained by any inscription or extant text, and many theories have been proposed. None of these has been convincing, including a recent proposal by Sarah Tiffin and Martin Stuart-Fox ('Dvaravati 'Buddha on a Monster' stela: a possible interpretation', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 12, Part I, April 2002, pp. 47–65), which is

flawed by some basic misunderstandings. Pal cites a ‘Javanese prayer to the Buddha to avert a smallpox epidemic’ which, as he notes, ‘sheds light on the *possible* identification of the creature’ (italics mine). That is, the prayer, from another culture and context, cannot solve the mystery, but it offers a new perspective to consider. My own position remains agnostic: that is, in the absence of any contemporary and local inscriptional evidence, the issue cannot be decided. I suspect that Dvaravati had a rich literature of its own, including narrative or ritual texts that may have explained the icon, but that no longer survive.

Among the especially fine objects from Siam are a stone standing ‘Hindu deity’, and several gold plaques depicting deities, all believed to be from Si Thep. Two masterful bronzes are from the Prakhon Chai finds: an Avalokiteshvara and a Maitreya. In contrast, there are several images which to me appear clumsy and of doubtful authenticity (see e.g. Cat. nos. 90, 92, 99, 100). From Cambodia are eight stone lingams — objects notoriously difficult to provenance or date — and a representative collection of stone deities, most in good condition.

The final section brings together a miscellany of objects from Laos, Burma, and Vietnam. The ‘Buddhist Manuscript with covers’ is not in Pali, but in one of the Tai dialects used in the Shan states, Northern Thailand, Northern Laos, and Yunnan. It is finely calligraphed in the ‘Tham’ script, and

has a pair of handsome covers. Among the rare inscribed objects in the collection are two betel boxes from Burma.

As in volumes 1 and 2 of the series, the photography is superb—colour close-ups bring out the sensuous beauty of the artifacts and the texture and patina of their surfaces. Together, the photographs and the intelligent and well-written text provide an excellent survey of the Norton Simon Museum collection.

Peter Skilling



Books received for review

- Baker, Chris, and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005
- Chouvy, P.-A., and Joel Meissonnier, *Yaa Baa: Production, traffic and consumption of Methamphetamine in Mainland Southeast Asia*, Singapore, Singapore University Press, 2004
- Gilquin, Michel, *Muslims in Thailand*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2005
- Marchal, Sappho, *Khmer costumes and ornaments of the Devatas of Angkor Wat*, Bangkok, Orchid Press, 2005
- Ismail Marcinkowski, M., *From Isfahan to Ayutthaya: Contacts between Iran and Siam in the 17th century*, Singapore, Pustaka Nasional, 2005
- Morrell, Elizabeth, *Securing a place: small-scale artisans in modern Indonesia*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2004
- Owen, Norman G., ed., *The Emergence of modern Southeast Asia: A New History*, Singapore, Singapore University Press, 2005
- Pompe, Sebastian, *The Indonesian Supreme Court: a study of institutional collapse*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2004
- Poole, Colin, *Tonle Sap: The Heart of Cambodia's Natural Heritage*, Bangkok, River Books, 2005
- Roveda, Vittorio, *Images of the Gods: Khmer mythology in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand*, Bangkok, River Books, 2005
- St. John, Ronald B., *Revolution, reform and regionalism in Southeast Asia*, London, Routledge, 2005
- Sarassawadee Ongsakul, *The History of Lanna*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2005
- Ibrahim Syukri, *History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2005
- Walker, Andrew, *Merit and the Millennium: Routine and Crisis in the ritual lives of the Lahu people*, New Delhi, Hindustan Publishing, 2003
- Wattana Sugunnasil, ed., *Dynamic diversity in southern Thailand*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2005
- Younghusband, G. J., *The Trans-Salwin Shan State of Kiang Tung*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2005

