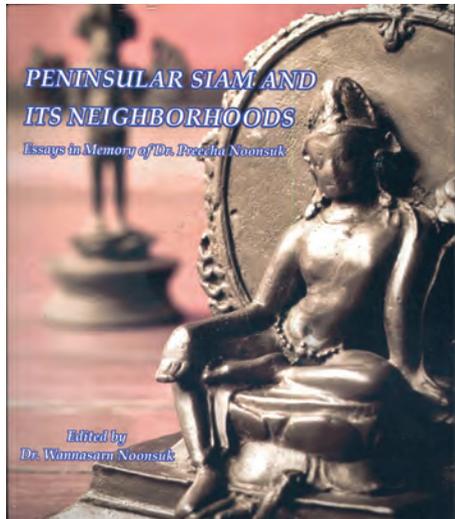


Peninsular Siam and its Neighborhoods – Essays in Memory of Dr. Preecha Noonsuk, edited by Wannasarn Noonsuk. Cultural Council of Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, 2017. Hardback: ISBN 978-616-543-488-1. 1,000 Baht online (bigredbear3@gmail.com); 1,300 Baht retail.



In *Peninsular Siam and its Neighborhoods*, Wannasarn Noonsuk traces his father's life, from humble beginnings in Thailand's southern province of Nakhon Si Thammarat, to an Ivy League university in the USA and a doctorate from Chulalongkorn University. The journey is recounted through essays and research articles by academics acquainted with the late Preecha and his work.

Preecha Noonsuk was exceptionally bright, gifted with a phenomenal memory and ability to "read" the landscape. Born into a farming family in 1949, he lived and dedicated his life's work to the archaeology of Peninsular Siam. He passed away in June 2010 while Wannasarn was

writing up his own doctoral dissertation. The trauma of losing a parent is acutely felt in a fraught phase of a doctoral degree, as I recall when my own father fell terminally ill while I was engaged in doctoral fieldwork in the north-east of Laos.

After a master's degree in archaeology from Silpakorn University, Noonsuk Sr. joined expeditions led by renowned scholars Prince Subhadradis Diskul, Srisakra Vallibhotama and Chin Yudi, the father of Thai prehistory. He first met Stanley O'Connor in southern Thailand and again in 1985 after being awarded a scholarship at Cornell University.

The Prologue by Noonsuk Jr. introduces us to the isthmian tract and the Gulf of Siam. Peninsular Siam refers to the tract between the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea. In the 5th century CE, the area witnessed the spread of the later Vishnu styles and the so-called triangular trade pattern following the south-west monsoon. Central in this discussion is Tambralinga (Nakhon Si Thammarat), on the east coast of the Peninsula. Recognized as a centre of Theravada Buddhist learning in the 12th century, Tambralinga's rich history and culture have come to light thanks to Preecha's commitment to "read" its ancient past through a painstaking documentation of human intentions manifest in the area's material culture.

Stanley O'Connor invites us to view a place as a geographically-referenced, physical location and as a store of memory, imagination, traces of human shaping, and the creative energies of its environments which have moulded the place as an emergent "entity." We need to distance ourselves from the present and float to the period in time when the communities first heard the now badly-damaged bronze drum found at Nakhon Si Thammarat, imagining the various steps necessary to build the object in the dry season, with onlookers curiously scrutinizing its assembly. Since the bronze drum's first sonorous sound was heard 2,000 years ago, the world has become disenchanted with

a form of rationality which denigrates modes of thought we call magical, precluding miracles, witchcraft, the harmony of the earthly and heavenly spheres. We are now removed from the motion of stars as a guide to human conduct or the layout of cities. The drum's powerful experience today is confined to its aesthetic appeal: the *sublime*.

John Miksic's discussion on the people of the beach ridges in Tambralinga and Palembang (Sumatra) takes us back to the material world. Early complex societies left their mark on Southeast Asia's topographical features and it fell on scholars like Preecha to "read" forms of geography and human history such as the beach ridges. A "culture," Miksic argues, does not inherit archaeological, linguistic and genetic groupings, since they are not always identical, particularly in large, complex societies. The Siam-Malay Peninsula and the Straits of Melaka have been traversed by peoples, artefacts, languages, and plants since the beginning of recorded time, challenging anyone attempting to discern how these three strands might have intertwined over the last two millennia.

Pierre-Yves Manguin discusses shipping along the Straits of Melaka and Singapore and asks whether trans-peninsular routes were used for trade in Chinese ceramics. A journey from Kedah to anywhere in the Gulf of Siam would require over two months, excluding time at harbours waiting for the right monsoon winds to settle, before sailing into the Bay of Bengal or the South China Sea. For reasons of speed, argues Manguin, land routes were used only for human journeys or light loads headed for Khmer or Dvaravati polities in the Gulf of Siam. He proposes that in the 1st millennium CE, ships carried their bulky wares from the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and Java Sea (and back), witness the Cirebon shipwreck discovered in 2003 in Indonesia's Northern Java Sea. The cargo, estimated at ninety tons, may have carried up to 300,000 pieces of 10th-century Chinese ceramics, mainly bowls but also platters, incense burners, and figurines. Manguin has argued against the impracticality of transporting heavy cargos on shallow draught boats to the mountain foot and for the process to be repeated on the other side, with the possibility of damage and breakages.

The Wat Maheyong inscription is analysed by Peter Skilling together with other evidence for the state of Buddhism in the central and upper Thai-Malay peninsula in the 6th-7th century CE, when donations were a source of spiritual merit (*punya*). The Sanskrit verse inscription, engraved in Southeast Asian Brahmi letters on one side of a large block of black schist, is a record of offerings made to a monastery, possibly originating from Nakhon Chaisi/Nakhon Pathom or Nakhon Si Thammarat. The stone, already severely damaged, bore six incomplete lines of letters but the missing *pādas* suggest the inscription must have been considerably longer. In 1893, Auguste Barth (1834-1916), the French indologist and epigrapher, translated the inscription and dated it to the 8th century CE,¹ although earlier and later dates have been suggested. Despite the uncertainty about its provenance, the inscription testifies to the physical components of a well-endowed monastery and its ritual capacities in the area of the Thai-Malay peninsula.

Leonard Andaya's essay on "The Northern Malays" is a thought-provoking

¹ A. Barth, A. Deux inscriptions récemment rapportées de Siam par M. Fournereau, *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 37/2 (1893), pp. 64-5. On p. 64, the temple is referred to as Vât Mahyeng or Prapathom.

discussion on meaningful boundaries, rather than the borders which are artificially constructed for modern-day political purposes. His treatment of the archaeological, linguistic, and ethnographic features of Peninsular Siam argues that the northern parts of the Malay Peninsula evolved differently from the southern parts. The Malays' history was never a straightforward evolution. The two distinct ramifications of "northern" and "southern" became separated with the formation of the nation-states of Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, with the southern Malays inheriting the mantle of what was considered the acceptable norm. Andaya's argument recalls the "shared heritage" argument surrounding the 11th-century Khmer temple of Preah Vihear, an accident of colonial history rooted in incorrect border maps drawn up by European officers in Indochina at the turn of the 20th century.

Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit contribute to this volume with an essay adapted from their critically-acclaimed book, *A History of Ayutthaya* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), by tracing the history of Ayutthaya and the Peninsula from the 13th to the 17th century CE. From the 1280s, Ayutthaya appears as Xian in the Chinese records, chiefly as a trading port but with a side-line in trade-and-raid activities down the Peninsula and across to Sumatra. Xian's aggression was curbed in the 16th century by increased Malay settlements in the southern Peninsula and the arrival of Islam, but not before other port polities petitioned China to intervene about her rapacious stance. From the 1290s to the 1490s, Xian/Ayutthaya sent armies and fleets southwards, in part to subjugate local rulers for resource exploitation and to profit from the brisk trade with Melaka, involving Siamese rice, dried salted fish, vegetables, benzoin, silver, gold, ruby and diamond rings, while male and female slaves, muslins, rosewater, carpets and white cowries filled the junks on the return journey to Siam.

Craig Reynolds discusses Thailand's amulet market, worth an estimated half a billion dollars a year. Michael Wright, a columnist fluent in spoken and written Thai, linked the Jatukhamramthep, or Jatukham, fever to Thaksin's ousting in September 2006, as a popular hope for immediate, boundless riches. The image, created in the mid-1980s, is a composite or "bricolage" from diverse sources that include Hindu and Buddhist representations. Over three decades, the Jatukham has assumed several postures and *mudras*. Late in 2005, a special edition of Jatukham personified the "Take back the nation" movement, allegedly instructing Yellow Shirts to free Thailand from prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's capitalist hold. Other "props" were invented and associated with Jatukham images for added potency, contributing to a significant rise in the value of the amulets when some political aspirations materialized. The Jatukham is a devotional object conjured from local lore, elements of Southeast Asian, Indic, and Lankan deism, promises of prosperity and safekeeping, and a good measure of Nakhon Si Thammarat chauvinism, quips Reynolds.

We remain in the sphere of imagery with Hiroshi Kano's essay. Meeting Noonsuk Sr. at an archaeological site in southern Thailand in 1995, Kano asked him about the origin of *Nang Kwak*, the image found on market shelves and lintels in Thailand. Noonsuk Sr. had documented the image during the great boom of "Chatukam Ramatthep" amulets (the Jatukhamramthep discussed by Reynolds), in a book subsequently translated into Japanese by Kano and published in 2009. Religious implements are important elements

of the material culture of the “lived religion,” including fortune-telling slips. Although Thailand’s religious history has received ample attention from scholars, studies on the meaning and history of everyday artefacts from a lived religion, like the *Nang Kwak*, have received scant attention from Thai scholars, with the late Preecha being a notable exception.

Edmund McKinnon discusses Burmese wares in Aceh and North Sumatra. Pre-modern Burmese ceramic export wares have been documented in Southeast Asia, including southern Thailand and Sumatra, as well as South Asia (India’s Kerala), and in numerous shipwrecks of the 16th and 17th century. Mid-14th and mid-17th century Thai export wares have been found in Aceh and north Sumatra, as well as Ayutthaya earthenwares and Thai stonewares, testifying to an established relationship between the



The late Preecha Noonsuk (left) with Prince Subhadradis Diskul during a fieldtrip (*Peninsular Siam*, p. xi).

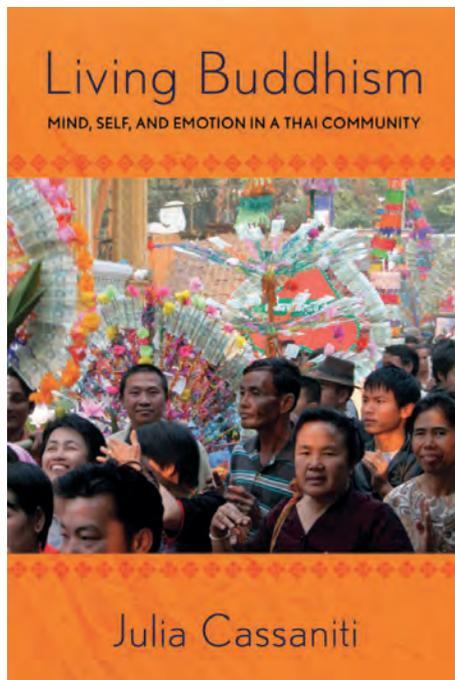
pre-sultanate Acehnesse polity of Lamri and Ayutthaya by the mid-late 14th century. The presence of utilitarian Burmese wares as sherds and whole vessels provides tangible evidence for earlier commercial relationships with Aceh between the ports of Martavan and Moulmein on the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal, in the 16th and 17th century, corroborated by historical sources for the presence of traders from Pegu.

Kaja McGowan met Noonsuk Sr. at Cornell University in the mid-1980s, where Stanley O’Connor taught a class on the archaeology of Tambralinga. Her involvement with Tambralinga was reinforced when Noonsuk Jr. enrolled for a PhD at Cornell. Like O’Connor in the opening essay, McGowan invites us on a dreamy journey, to Khuan Luk Pat, the “Bead Mound” in Krabi province’s Khlong Thom district, identified by archaeological research as a production centre for glass, tin, and semi-precious stones. In the early centuries CE, “Bead Mound” became an important centre within the trading sphere comprising the Roman Empire, India, Southeast Asia and China, as documented by finds which have included a Han dynasty bronze mirror, Indian and Roman gold and bronze coins, Indian seals, and Roman intaglios. The so-called “bird beads,” depicting

a lone bird and a sun burst, are among the beads transported from Bead Mound to the Thalang National Museum in Phuket.

Noonsuk Sr.'s premature death deprived his family of his affections and precluded more excavations to enrich our knowledge of Peninsular Siam. His son, Wannasarn, is left with the childhood memories of accompanying him on fieldwork to one of his favourite sites: the largest Brahmanical complex in Sichon, now dated to the 4th-8th century CE. We are glad that the impressionable eight-year old followed in his father's archaeological footsteps, forging academic associations with esteemed scholars whose respect for his late father is reflected in the warm and generous tributes in this informative and eminently readable commemorative volume.

Lia Genovese



Living Buddhism: Mind, Self, and Emotion in a Thai Community by Julia Cassaniti. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8014-5400-4 (hardcover), US\$69.95; ISBN: 978-0-8014-5671-8 (paperback), US\$22.95.

In *Living Buddhism*, Julia Cassaniti demonstrates how the idea of *anicca* (impermanence), more often considered a prerogative of lofty monastic Buddhism, is actually central in formulating the psychological as well as social life of the people in a rural village in Northern Thailand. How is emotional and religious life entwined in the everyday experiences of people in the remote village? The approach to Buddhism as it is lived among ordinary people is in line with recent works in Theravada Buddhism which focus, not on the monastic or doctrinal Buddhism, but on the everyday practices of lay people. The

uniqueness of this book is that it does so by seeking out how Buddhists in rural villages live the seemingly high and remote tenets of Buddhist teachings.

The book is an outcome of Cassaniti's involvement in the lives of people in a village over a ten-year period, including a long-term stay for eighteen months in 2005-6. In this village which she calls "Mae Jaeng", a two-hour drive northwest of Chiang Mai, Cassaniti became especially close with two families. She conducted sixty interviews in this village with the Buddhist northern Thai inhabitants, and for comparative purposes, she also ventured into a Karen Christian village nearby where she conducted sixty further interviews. These interviews with questions regarding people's religious lives and ideas constitute the basis for Cassaniti's understanding of her theme, while the main storyline revolves around the two families in Mae Jaeng with whom she had the closest relationship. The process of her field research is explained clearly from its