Indo-Persian Influence on Late Ayutthaya Art, Architecture, and Design

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Muslims of India and Persia, collectively called Indo-Iranian or Indo-Persian Muslims, had connections with Siam from the early Ayutthaya era. From the reign of King Ekathotsarot (1605–1610/11) to King Narai (1656–1688), their involvement in Siam increased. Several came to settle and trade. A few became prominently involved in the politics of the court. As a result of their prominence, diplomatic missions were exchanged with Persia (Iran) and Golconda (Golkonda). While the commercial and political involvement of the Indo-Persians has been studied, less attention has been paid to their cultural influence. This article argues that the Indo-Persians served as a channel for an inflow of cultural influences that helped to shape the distinctive art and architectural style of Siam in the late Ayutthaya era. The article first sketches the background of Safavid Persia, which was the most important point of origin for the cultural influences that reached Siam in the 17th century. From there, the article looks at architecture, painting, and finally fine arts and textile design.

Relations with Safavid Persia

In the Safavid era (1502–1722), Persia prospered as an expansive empire, a trading center, and as the origin of a distinctive culture. The Safavid court established relations with many countries, and its influence spread eastward into India, both to the Mughal Empire and other independent states, especially the sultanates of the Deccan. Here Persian styles were adapted into the "Indo-Persian culture" which encompassed language, literature, aesthetics, decorative arts, miniature painting, and music. From India, the cultural richness spread across the Bay of Bengal to Siam in the wake of trading relations and settlement, resulting in the adaptation and absorption of Indo-Persian cultural influence in Siam.

The origins of the Safavid dynasty are a matter of debate, with arguments supporting Turkish, Kurdish, and Arab roots. From the 13th century, the Safavid clan rose in the Azerbaijan area in Persia's northwest. The dynasty founder, Safi al-Din, was a spiritual and religious leader at Adabil on the frontiers of the Mongol domain. The influence of the

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Safavid clan rose as that of the Mongols declined. In 1501, Shah Ismail (r. 1501-1524) drove the remnants of the Turk-Mongols out of Iran. He also founded the Imamiyya or Ithna Asha-riyya sect of Shia Islam, which clove to the line of Imams descended directly from the Prophet Muhammad, giving the new Persia a distinct religious identity, as well as the first indigenous rulers. The Safavid dynasty reached a peak under Shah Abbas I (r. 1587–1629).[2] The capital was moved from Tabriz to Isfahan, which was designed in a blend of Islamic architecture and local Persian inspiration, distinguished by the use of the dome and the structural arch. These architectural innovations made it possible to create expansive interiors uncluttered by pillars, buildings with broad windows and doorways, and large bridges. Under Safavid patronage, Isfahan became a great center of art and crafts. Miniature painting, which had developed under the Mongols with influence from Christian-illuminated manuscripts and Chinese painting, now developed a distinctive style, used especially in Safavid Persian miniatures such as those illustrating the *Shahnameh*, the Book of Kings. At religious buildings, Muslim artists followed the interdiction not to portray human characters, yet in book illustration the portrayal of characters became part of the cultural heritage. Ceramics also developed with technical input from China. The ability to produce tiles with consistent color was exploited in the decoration of domes and other buildings. Exceptionally fine silk thread, produced around the Caspian, was used to make carpets and woven goods traded to east and west. Motifs such as the "Tree of Life" were used to adorn paintings, ceramics, and textiles.[3]

From the 10th century, Islam spread from the Middle East into India. By the 14th to 15th centuries there were Persian traders in all the major Indian cities. They intermarried locally, creating an "Indo-Persian" community with a hybrid culture that acted as bridge between the two regions.[4] When the three great Islamic empires of Ottoman Turkey, Safavid Persia, and Mughal India emerged in the early 16th century, the Safavids warred with the Sunni Ottomans, but developed good relations with the Mughals. The Mughal emperor Humayun took refuge at Isfahan for fifteen years and was helped by the Safavids to regain his throne.[5] Shah Abbas I encouraged Persians to settle in India,

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[2] Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); J. R. I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Sh'ism in Iran and Iraq* (Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1984); H. R. Roemer, "The Safavid Period," in *The Cambridge History of Iran* Vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[3] Ferdowsi, *The Epics of the Kings, Shah Nama the National Epic of Persia*, translated by Reuben Levy (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1967); Barbara Schmitz and Ziyaud-Din A. Desai, *Mughal and Persian Paintings and Illustrated Manuscripts in The Raza Library Rampur* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2006); Yolande Crowe, *Persia and China, Safavid Blue and White Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum 1501-1738* (Geneva: Georg Burner, 2002).

[4] Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 22; Karim Nalafi Barzergar, *Mughal-Iranian Relations during the Sixteenth Century* (Delhi: Indian Bibliographies Bureau, 2001); H. K. Sherwani, "Dekhan," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam Online*, http://www. encislam.brill.nl/start2.asp; Rudolph P. Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran, Silk for Silver 1600-1730* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 115.

[5] Barzergar, *Mughal-Iranian Relations*, 178-9, 272.

both in the Mughal domain and in the independent sultanates of the Deccan, especially at Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, and Golconda which had Shiite rulers.[6]

From the reign of King Songtham (1620–1628), Ayutthaya had contact with Golconda. Siam exported forest goods and elephants, and imported cloth and luxuries from the Islamic world.[7] Ayutthaya developed as an entrepÔt for the exchange of goods between the Muslim empires to the west and China and Japan to the east. As Ayutthaya was open to trade and settlement by foreigners, an Indo-Persian community developed in Ayutthaya. From the reign of King Prasat Thong (1628–1656), some Indo-Persians became involved in the politics of the court. With the accession of King Narai in 1656, this involvement sharply increased. The leader of the community, 'Abdu'r-Razzāq Gilani, was given the title of Okya Phichit and effectively headed the Phrakhlang ministry. After he fell from grace in 1663, another Persian, Āqā Muḥammad Astārābādī (or Okya Sri Naowarat), dominated the Phrakhlang and inserted other Muslims in important posts in the capital and other port cities. The period until his fall from grace in 1676 saw the height of Indo-Persian influence at Ayutthaya,[8] as described in The Ship of Sulaiman by Muhammad Rabi, scribe of a Safavid diplomatic mission that visited Ayutthaya in 1685–86.

Indo-Persian style is a blend of Islamic teaching and the old Persian culture which pre-dates Islam. The merging of these two streams gave birth to many branches of creativity and aesthetics in language, literature, art, and way of life. Indo-Persian Muslims were not only important in trade and politics but also helped to create a cultural hybrid between the Muslim world and Ayutthaya-era Siam.

Architecture

Rest houses and bathhouses

With the settlement of Indo-Persians at Ayutthaya, buildings with new style and function appeared in the city. Simon de la Loubère, a French envoy to the court of Narai, referred to two-story houses which "they call *Divan*, an *Arabian* word which properly signifies a *Council-Chamber*, or *Judgement-Hall*. There are other sorts of Divans, which being built on three sides do want a fourth Wall, on that side which the Sun shines least on."[9] He stated that the accommodation for the French envoys at Ayutthaya was in this style.

In the Muslim world, a *divan* was a rest house at the entry to a house or palace. Such buildings were found at palaces in Persia and in the Deccan Sultanates in India in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Envoys' House at Lopburi was built in this style. Muhammaed Rabi stated that the Persian architect was proud to compare the Lopburi buildings to *Taq Kasra* built by Khosraw I (r. 531–579). The facade, still visible today (Figure ??), has seven windows with pointed arches. At Khavarnaq, the Sassanid ruler Bahram V (r. 420–438) had built a palace with seven domes representing the sun, moon, and five constellations. Subsequently, the use of seven domes or arches became a hallmark of

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[6] Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism,* 22.

[7] Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, 156.

[8] See Bhawan and Pimmanus in this volume.

[9] Simon de La Loubère, *A New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam* (London, 1793), 31.
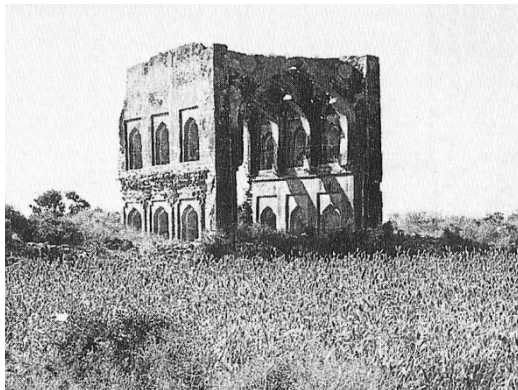
Figure 1. The Envoys' House at Lopburi

Figure 2. The Divan at Firuzabad (G. Michell and M. Zebrowski, *The New Cambridge History of India*, Vol. I: 7, 30.)

Persian architecture.[10] The seven arched windows on the Envoys' House reflect this feature, and occasioned Muhammad Rabi to compliment the building.

For the Safavid mission in 1685–6, the Envoys' House at Lopburi was used to keep the official missive and the Shah's gifts while the mission waited for the official audience.[11] The Persian envoys stayed at another guesthouse, which probably comprises the two buildings now known as *Biju* and *Khotchasan* inside Wat Saothong Thong in the northwest of the city.[12] The preaching hall of this *wat* was probably originally a mosque. Mohammed Rabi describes the guesthouses as follows:

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[10] Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 71-2.

[11] Muhammad Rabi' ibn Muhammad Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaiman*, tr. John O'Kane (London: Routledge, 1972), 57.

[12] The guesthouse is shown on Bellini's 1754 map at the location of this *wat*.

These two buildings which had been specially constructed for us in the Iranian manner contained several rooms and had a hammām off to one side. Each room was well furnished with rugs, cushions, velvet drapes and embroidered coverings from China and Gujerat.[13]

The name *Khotchasan* is probably distorted from Khorazan, a region in northwest Iran, from where so many Persians came to Ayutthaya that Persians were sometimes called *khaek mueang khorasan*.[14] *Biju* probably comes from Bijapur, a Deccan Sultanate and the center of trade in gems and horses in the 16th and 17th centuries.[15] The building is alternatively called *tuek khat phetphloi,* the "gem-polishers building."

Muhammad Rabi also mentions a *hammam* or bathhouse built for the use of the envoys near their rest house. Such bathhouses are a distinctive feature of the Muslim world, often built close to mosques, markets, and public places, with facilities for bathing, massage, and steam bath. The practice spread to Muslim states in India where *hammam* were built in palaces. The presence of the *hammam* at Lopburi suggests Persian engineers had installed a water system at Lopburi,[16] prior to the system built by Westerners at the end of the Narai reign.

Arches and niches

In a pioneering article written in 1994, Pitaya Bunnag showed how techniques and artistic approaches in Indo-Persian culture were adapted into Ayutthaya architecture.[17] A comparative study of monuments in Ayutthaya with old buildings in many sites in Iran and India shows that many building techniques were transferred, including the four-center arch and ogee arch for doorways, windows, and apertures, and the use of water as an architectural element.

The peaked arches found on Ayutthaya doorways and windows were once attributed to Gothic influence, introduced by the French in the Narai reign. In fact, these arches are in the form known as the four-center arch, or the ogee arch if the peak is slightly raised. These two styles can be traced back through Islamic architecture to old Persian architecture as seen on the tombs of Cyrus the Great from the 6th century BCE.[18] This arch is constructed quite differently from the Gothic pointed arch of medieval Europe. In the Gothic pointed arch, there is a large stone or brick as the "keystone" at the peak to

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[13] Muhammad Rabi, *The Ship of Sulaiman*, 57.

[14] Ibid, 99.

[15] Pius Malekandathi, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2010), 57.

[16] See Julispong Chularatana, "Uthokwithaya nai ratchasami somdet phra narai" [Hydrology in the Narai reign], *Warasan withayasat* [Science journal] 61, 3 and 4.

[17] Pitaya Bunnag, "Kham banyai prakop slaid rueang itthiphon khong silpa poersia nai sathapatayakam khong ayutthaya" [Lecture with slides on the influence of Persian art on Ayutthaya architecture," in *Khwam samphan rawang iran-thai thang dan prawatisat lae watthanatham* [Thai-Persian relations in art and culture] (Bangkok: Iran Cultural Centre at Bangkok, 2003), 301.

[18] Michael Hogan, "Tomb of Cyrus" in A. Burnham, *The Megalithic Portal*, www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=18264.

hold the centripetal forces.[19] But such keystones are not found on the doors and windows at Ayutthaya. The Muslim arches do not need a keystone because the weight is directed downwards onto the wall. The bricks or stones are of equal size, the arch is less steep than the Gothic version, and the arch can be made wider than the Gothic pointed arch.[20] Such arches are sometimes called Indo-Persian arches or Mughal arches because they are widespread in both Persian and Mughal buildings.

The starting point of the Muslim-style arches on doorways and windows in late Ayutthaya architecture can be found in the Indo-Persian architecture at Phra Narai Ratchaniwet, King Narai's palace at Lopburi. Although these arches have been ascribed to Gothic influence,[21] the Gothic arch had gone out of fashion in Europe by the 16th century. At the time Narai's palace was built, Renaissance and Baroque styles were in vogue, with doorways and windows surmounted by half-moon or triangular shapes. The French were not likely to have imported styles that were over a century out of date. The brickwork on the doors and windows of Phra Ratchaniwet is more Muslim than Western.[22] Nicolas Gervaise said of Narai's palace at Lopburi:

> It is square in form and its walls, which are of a startling whiteness are decorated with sculptures in the Moorish manner, of great delicacy, and are full of little niches, into which on certain days of ceremony are put numerous pieces of Chinese porcelain.[23]

At the *Divan* of the Bahmani capital of Firuzabad and the *Gagan Mahal* (Palace of Heaven) at Bijapur, both on the Deccan, the main entrance is an arched gateway leading to a courtyard lined with rows of arched niches. A similar main gate with a pointed arch and rows of niches can still be seen at Phra Narai Ratchaniwet (Figure 3). Both here and at Wat Phra Si Rattanamahathat, Lopburi (Figure 4), which underwent a major restoration under Narai, there are parallel lines of arched niches used for lamps to provide lighting at night time. There are also lamp niches in the northern part of the "crystal wall" around the smaller preaching hall in the *wat*. In the palace at Isfahan, there are niches of various sizes for displaying ceramics, for example in the music room of

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[19] John Fleming, Hugh Honour and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture* London: Penguin Books, 1998), 19-20; Louis Grodecki, *Gothic Architecture* (Milan: Electa, 1979), 9.

[20] M. M. Hijazi, *Historical Buildings of Iran: Their Architecture and Structure* (Southampton: Computational Mechanics, 1997)*,* 42-3.

[21] For example, Plapphlueng, *Khwam samphan thai-farangset sama ayuttthaya* [Thai-French relations in the Ayutthaya era] (Bangkok: Duangdi, 1980), 133–5; MR Subhadradhis Diskul, *Sinlapha nai prathet thai* [Art in Thailand] (Bangkok: Amarin, 1985), 38; No Na Paknam, "Sinlapa ayutthaya samai phra narai" [Ayutthaya art in the Narai era] in *Sinlapa boran nai sayam* [Old art in Siam] (Bangkok: Muang Boran, 1994), 544.

[22] Julispong Chularatana, "Kulap nai ratchauthayan krung sayam: ruproi watthanatham indo-iran nai silapakam thai samai ayutthaya" [Persian rose in Siam's royal garden: traces of Indo-Persian culture in Thai art of the Ayutthaya era], *Sinlapa watthanatham*, 26, 11 (September 2005), 84-6.

[23] Nicolas Gervaise, *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1998 [1688]), 36; see also La Loubère, *A New Historical Relation*, 31

Figure 3. Arches and niches at the gateway of the Phra Narai Ratchaniwet, Lopburi

Figure 4. Arches and lamp niches at Wat Phra Si Rattanamahathat, Lopburi

Figure 5. Arches and niches at Gagan Mahal, Bijapur; from http://isharethese.com/gagan-mahal-bijapur/

Figure 6. Arches and niches in Dusitsawan Thanyamahaprasat, Phra Narai Ratchaniwet, Lopburi

Figure 7. Large arched windows on the rear preaching hall of Wat Phra Si Sanphet, Ayutthaya

the Ali Qapu Palace in Isfahan, and in the Deccani Sultanate palaces at Golconda, Bidar, and Bijapur (Figure 5). Gervaise described this decoration on Phra Narai Ratchaniwet as "decorated ... in the Moorish manner."[24]

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[24] Gervaise, *The Natural and Political History*, 31.

The rear preaching hall of Wat Phra Si Sanphet at Ayutthaya (Figure 7), believed to be built in the Narai reign, also has pointed arches on the windows which are arrayed in a line all round the building, a style often found in Iran not only in palace buildings but also at *caravanserai*, of which 100 exist, scattered all around the country, dating from the 10th century CE onwards, that is prior to the Safavid era.

After the Narai reign, the technique of building Indo-Persian style arches remained in use, for example at Kammalian Residence at Wat Kudi Dao, Ayutthaya (Figure 8), built in the reign of King Borommakot (1732–1758). It is believed that the king stayed in the residence beside the *wat* for a month or two months to observe the renovation of the *wat*.[25] This residence has a distinctive plan, built in two stories, with each side pierced by windows and doorways with pointed arches framed in brick. This same design can be seen at the Khamyat residence in Amphoe Pho Thong, Ang Thong Province, built by King Uthumphon (r. 1758) (Figure 9). On the interior there are still arched niches for placing lamps or displaying ceramics (Figure 10). Such niches are also found at Wat Saothong Thong, which is believed once to have been a mosque for the Persian community during the Narai reign, later converted into a Buddhist preaching hall (Figure 11).[26] The ordination hall (*ubosot*) of Wat Chong Nonsi in Bangkok is similar to

Figure 8. Kammalian Residence, Wat Kudi Dao, Ayutthaya

[25] *Phraratchaphongsawadan krung si ayutthaya chabap phan janthanumat (joem) kap chabap phra Jakraphatdiphong (Jat)* [Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya, Phan Janthanumat and Phra Jakraphatdiphong editions] (Bangkok: Khlang Witthaya, 1962), 447.

[26] Allen Goodman, "The Persian Presence in the Siam of Phra Narai", in *Ekkasan prakop kan sewana wichakan rueang khomun phop mai samai somdet phra narai* [Papers from a seminar on new information on the Narai reign], organized by Rajaphat Thepsatri Lopburi, 28 November 2000, 39.

Figure 9. Khamyat Residence, Ang Thong

Figure 10. Interior of Khamyat Residence

Figure 11. Preaching hall of Wat Saothong Thong, Lopburi, originally built as a mosque

Wat Saothong Thong, with pointed arches on the doorways and windows (Figure 12). The residence of Phra Phutthakosajan at Wat Phutthaisawan in Ayutthaya, dating to the Narai era, is another two-story building where the lower story is pierced by doorways and windows with pointed arches (Figure 14). The Indo-Persian pointed arch was also used on forts and city walls, including the *chong khut,* "tunnel gates", in the walls of Ayutthaya and Lopburi.

Figure 12. Door in old ordination hall, Wat Chong Nonsi, Bangkok; photo by Phrapatson Chuwichian

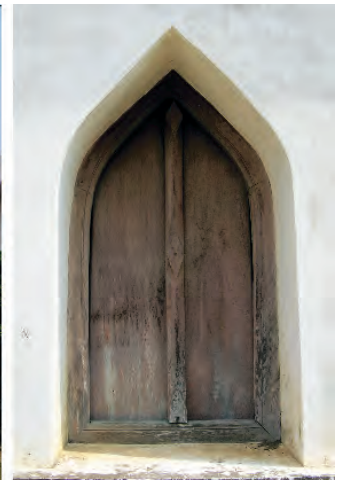Figure 13. Gateway at Wat Kudi Dao, Ayutthaya

Figure 14. Residence of Phra Phutthakosajan at Wat Phutthaisawan in Ayutthaya

The entrances to some religious buildings from late Ayutthaya have an arched gateway with ornamental stucco in wavy curves. Examples are at the entrances to Wat Phra Ram and Wat Kudi Dao (Figure 13), which were probably restored during the Borommakot reign. This style of arch is found in some old buildings in Iran and the Deccan Sultanates.

Another element of Ayutthaya architecture that may be related to Indo-Persian style is making slits in walls to admit light and allow circulation of air within the building. In buildings dating from the early Ayutthaya period, the walls bore the weight of the roof structure and hence had to be constructed of solid brick. If these walls were pierced by slits that were too large there was a risk that the weight of the roof would cause the walls to crack and collapse. Hence such slits are rarely found in early buildings, and those that do exist are tall narrow apertures, arranged in rows. Such narrow vertical slits can be found in the ordination hall of Wat na Phramen, and the main preaching halls of Wat Phra Si Sanphet (Figure 15) and Wat Thammikarat in Ayutthaya.[27]

Subsequently building techniques were developed that allowed wider apertures by supporting the weight of the roof on sections of the wall with additional thickness in the brickwork, and by bracing the wide apertures with beautiful tracery-like patterns made of brick. Such windows from late Ayutthaya are found at Wat Phra Si Sanphet, in several different patterns (Figure 16). This style of patterned aperture, that allows circulation of air and filters the sunlight, is found in Indo-Persian architecture especially in the desert regions of Iran and India (Figure 17). Brick is also used to make three-dimensional

Figure 15. Wall slits from early Ayutthaya at the main preaching hall, Wat Phra Si Sanphet, Ayutthaya

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[27] Krom Sinlapakon [Fine Arts Department], *Wiwatthanakan phutthasathan thai* [Evolution of Thai Buddhist sites] (Bangkok: Amarin 1990), 161.
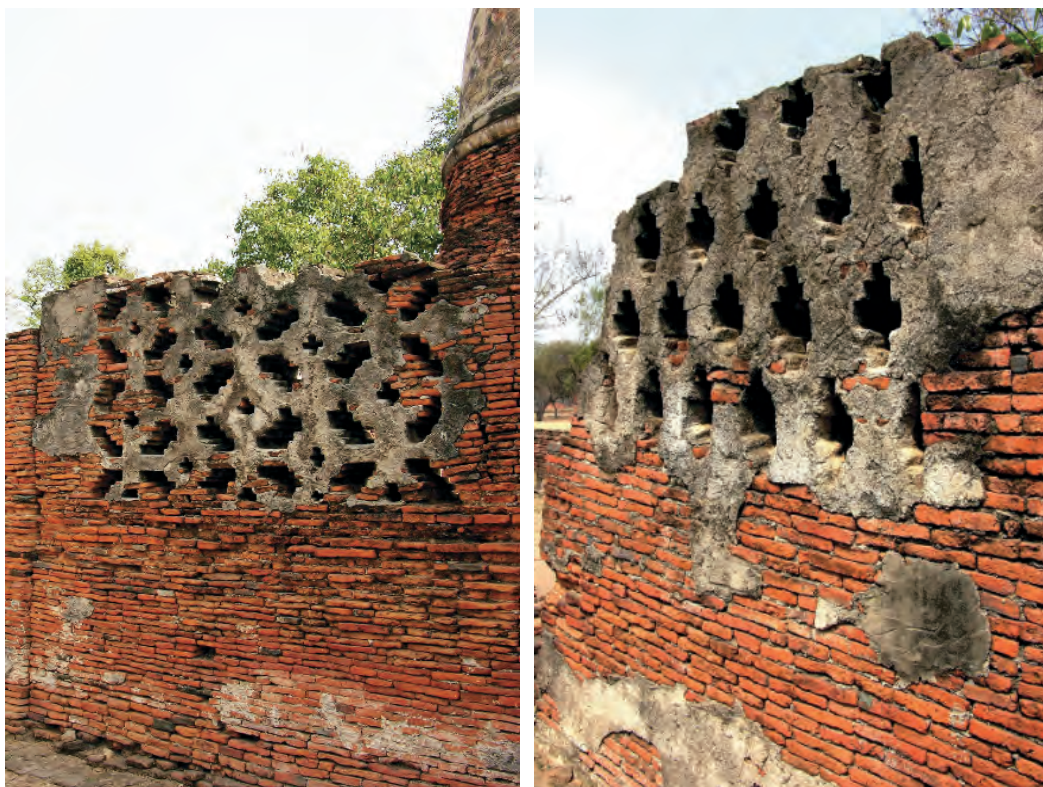
Figure 16. Late Ayutthaya tracery-patterned windows at Wat Phra Si Sanphet in patterns of *dok phikun* (left) and *prajam yam* (right)
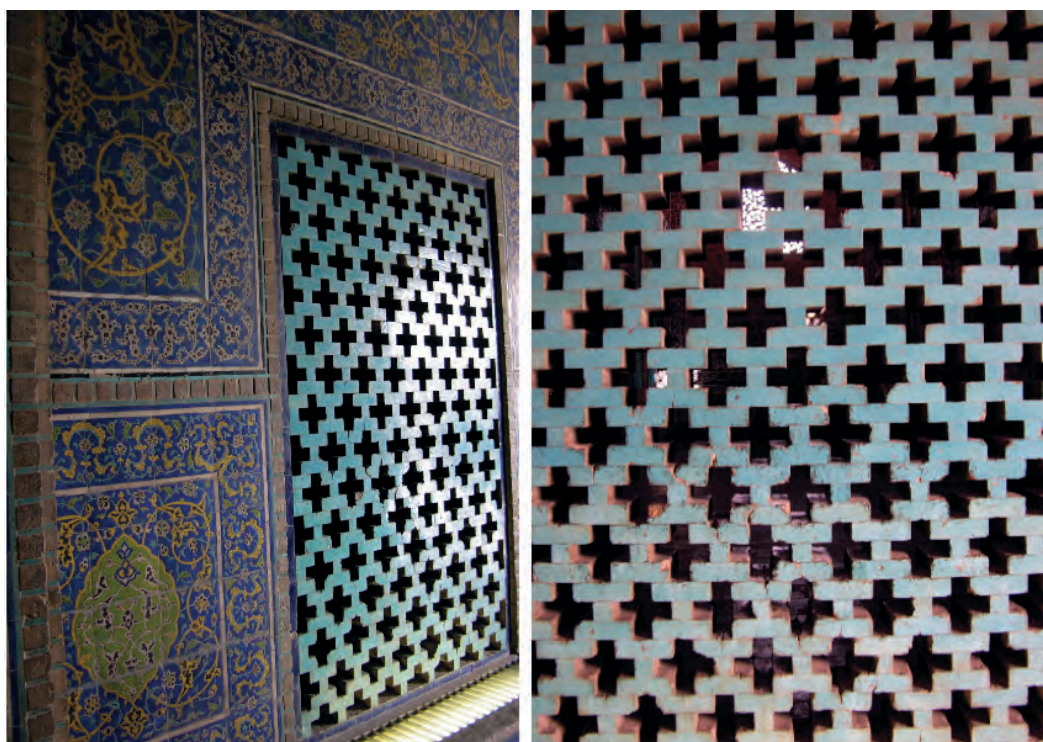

Figure 17. Patterned windows from Isfahan

patterns on the walls. The techniques used for wall slits, doorways, and apertures in later Ayutthaya are found on many religious and other buildings from Safavid Iran, Mughal India, and the Deccan Sultanates.

Roads and bridges

No Na Paknam (Prayun Uluchata) proposed that laying bricks in a fishtail pattern, as found on the roads and main entrances of many Ayutthaya-era sites, was similar to brickwork on roads in Muslim India.[28] The bricks are laid to interlock in a pattern resembling a fishtail, which increases their capacity to bear weight. Fishtail brickwork is found at the entrance to Phra Ratchaniwet at Lopburi (Figure 18), and on the entrance to Wat Mahathat, Patong road, the road behind Pomphet Fort, and the roads inside the Grand Palace at Ayutthaya. This technique is also found in ancient sites in Iran from the Islam-Mongol and Safavid eras, such as the dome of Jamu-e-Masjid or the central mosque at Isfahan (Figure 19).

The *Ship of Sulaiman* records that in Narai's court there were Persian and Indian craftsmen and architects holding official posts who helped to build the palace.[29] Nicolas Gervaise stated that in the quarter of the Moors or Indo-Persian Muslims there were "quite well-built brick houses ... even whole streets of them," some roads were paved with bricks, and there were "five or six [bridges] with arches made of brick, which are beautiful and commodious enough."[30]

Figure 18. Fishtail brick road at Phra Narai Ratchaniwet, Lopburi

Figure 19. Fishtail brickwork on the dome of the central mosque, Isfahan

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[28] No Na Paknam, *Sinlapa lae watthanathm jak dindaen arab muea raek khao su sayam prathet* [Art and culture from the Arab world on first arrival in Siam] (Bangkok: Muang Boran, 1991), 94.
[29] Muhammad Rabi, *The Ship of Sulaiman,* 57.
[30] Gervaise, *The Natural and Political History*, 33.

Figure 20 (left). Remains of Great Khaek Village Bridge, Ayutthaya.

Figure 21 (below). Safavid-era bridge at Qazvin, Iran

Figure 22 (below). Reconstruction of original bridge at Ayutthaya

In the *Description of Ayutthaya*, probably from the 18th century, the city has fifteen brick bridges. For several of these, some remains have survived. Great Khaek Village Bridge (Figure 20), Thesemi Bridge, and Wanon Bridge were ranged along Great Khaek Village Jaosen Road, which appears as Rue des Maures (Moors Road) on French maps.[31] An Indo-Persian quarter was close to Wanon Bridge. These bridges were built with pointed arches to allow the passage of boats. Both the shape and building technique of these bridges resemble old bridges from Persia (Figures 21, 22).

Painting

Most studies of Thai art argue that painting in the Ayutthaya era received influences from India, Sri Lanka, Bagan, Sukhothai, and China. Yet in late Ayutthaya there were also many changes as a result of influence from the Muslim world. There are several features that are shared between the art of late Ayutthaya and the Indo-Persian painting in the 16th and early 17th centuries, especially from the late Mongol and early Safavid eras.

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[31] Phraya Boranaratchathanin, *Athibai phaen thi phranakhon Si Ayutthaya* [Description of Ayutthaya] (Bangkok: Ton chabap, 2007 [1929]), 104-9.

1. In both Indo-Persian and late Ayutthaya painting, the pictures have no perspective. Buildings are drawn with different dimensions folded out to become two-dimensional, including those sides that would normally be invisible to the viewer (Figures 23, 25). A well is drawn flat with no sense of its depth or shallowness.

2. The picture is a bird's-eye view, looking down from above, including several scenes from a story, allowing more play for the imagination than is possible within real-life perspective. In Safavid art, the sequence of scenes is often organized in a zig-zag or "fishbone" pattern (Figure 24).[32] A similar tendency can be found in late Ayutthaya murals (Figure 25).

Figure 23. Two-dimensional representation, Persia 15th century (Wiki Commons)

Figure 24. Miniature showing Safavid Court, late 16th century, showing the "fishbone" sequence (Wiki Commons)

3. Hills, trees, or buildings are used to separate the different scenes.[33] In a Thai mural, the scenes may be spread across a large wall, while in a Persian miniature they are found on a single page, but the technique is similar (Figure 26).

4. The major and minor characters are limited to a few types—kings, nobles, villagers, townsfolk, with animals where appropriate.

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[32] C. Parham, *The Splendour of Iran,* Vol. III (London: Booth-Clibborn, 2001), 71.

[33] Sheila R. Canby, "Safavid Painting," in Jon Thompson and Sheila R. Canby, *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran 1501-1576* (Milan: Skira, 2003), 110.

Figure 25. Mural of Temiya Jātaka from Wat Khongkharam, Ratchaburi, showing near-two-dimensional representation, folded-out perspective on buildings, and zig-zag sequence of scenes (Muang Boran)

Figure 26 (left) and 27 (above). Use of hills and buildings to divide scenes in Safavid Painting (from Canby, "Safavid Painting," 93), and Wat Chaiyathit, Thonburi (Muang Boran)

5. When the artist wishes to show another realm (such as the heavens), the scene is portrayed in an inset surrounded by a circle made of clouds. An example is found in a Persian painting from the 16th century, the end of the Islam-Mongol period, telling the popular story of the Prophet Muhammad's ascension to Heaven, the *al-Miraj*, on the back of a mythical beast, the *Buraq*, where a group of divine messengers look down on the prophet from a circle made of clouds (Figure 28). In a scene from the Buddha's life story at Wat Chaiyathit, Thonburi, when Siri Mahamaya grips a branch while giving birth to Siddhartha, the god Indra looks down on the scene of the Buddha's birth from a curly cloud-like frame (Figure 29). The presentation is very similar.

Figures 28 (left) and 29 (right). Cloud-ringed apertures to the heavens, from Persia (Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 276), and Wat Khongkharam (Muang Boran)

6. In both cultures, artists draw people in an idealized style without anatomical details, without muscles, and in poses taken from dance or drama. The face is turned to one side, but the body faces forward, while the feet, which should follow the alignment of the body, are turned perpendicularly to one side (Figures 30, 31). The pose is unnatural, if not impossible.

7. The mood of the person is not shown through facial expression but through the pose of the body. The characters in the story are differentiated by their dress and ornaments. The headgear and the position of the characters within the scene indicate their role and importance. Sacred characters are depicted with a flame-like aura around the head.

8. Gold leaf or gold paint is used in Thai paintings to highlight the regalia of a king or god, or to emphasize the importance of a character;[34] Indo-Persian painting uses gold paint in the same way.[35]

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[34] No Na Paknam, *Jittakam samai ayutthaya jak samut khoi* [Ayutthaya painting from *khoi* manuscripts] (Bangkok: Muang Boran, 1985), 13.

[35] Canby, "Safavid Painting," 124.

Fifures 30 (left) and 31 (right). Body perpendicular to feet in Safavid Painting and at Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam, Phetchaburi (Muang Boran)

9. In both Thai painting and Safavid Persian painting, the artists apply solid colors in bright shades, using a fine brush to draw the outlines.

10. The depiction of gods and animals has many similarities between the two cultures, such as trees with sprays of flowers in rows; multiple hills like waves; similar birds and mountain goats (Figures 32, 33).

Besides these major similarities, there are also similarities in the depiction of mountains, rivers, caves, and wilderness, as well as the shapes of certain trees, leaves, and animals. No Na Paknam summarized the characteristics of late Ayutthaya painting as follows:

1. bright colors are used such as yellow, dark blue, light blue, and pink;

2. the picture is filled with flowers, trees, and images, leaving almost no empty space, unlike Bangkok-era painting;

3. fhe fill-in colors are clear because they are laid onto white *khoi* paper, and the line-drawing is done with a brush;

4. gold leaf is applied in places such as on *kranok* designs or on the costume of a deity;

5. details on flowers and trees are drawn with a different color;

Figure 32 (left) and 33 (right). Landscape, foliage and mountain goats from 16th century Persia (Abolala Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts,* New York: Rizzoli, 1992: 243), and Wat Hua Krabue, Bangkok

6. if a deep color is needed in the background, a bluish grey is used, not the solid black found in the Bangkok era.

In sum, in overall design, in technique, and in individual elements, there are many similarities between book illustrations from Safavid Persia and the *wat* murals and illustrated manuscripts from the late Ayutthaya period.

The *Ship of Sulaiman* states that King Narai liked to view portraits of kings from Iran and India brought as presents, and that he appreciated the tales of ancient Persian kings in the *Shahnameh*, which he had an Iranian poet translate and which he listened to regularly as recitation.[36] Most likely Indian and Persian visitors to the Siamese court brought illustrated books to offer to the king as gifts. Through this route, Thai artists may have had the opportunity to study Muslim aesthetics and painting techniques, and may have adapted elements into their own work, which eventually were developed into a distinctive element of late Ayutthaya painting.

Carpets, cloth, and fine arts

During the 15th and 16th centuries, developments occurred allowing for production for large-size woven goods in Turkey, Iran, and India. Various kinds of cloth were exported, both cheap goods such as cotton and jute, and expensive goods such as silk and wool incorporating gold and silver thread. High-quality silk from Arabia, Iran, and the Middle East went on new routes by land and sea to China, Japan, Java, Malaya (Malaysia), and Siam with Indo-Persian Muslims among the major traders. Systems

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[36] Muhammad Rabi, *The Ship of Sulaiman*, 101.

were developed to produce luxury cloth to order for markets in Southeast Asia. From the Muslim world, the Siamese court ordered large quantities of cloth made to designs specified to suit Siamese taste.

Siam imported cheap white cloth from Gujarat for dyeing in Siam, as well as printed cloth which was popular among the better-off. The original printed cloth was *kalamkari* which originated from Persia, meaning "drawn with a pen." Later techniques were developed for large-scale production. *Kalamkari* spread from Iran to western India and onward to Siam.

There are similarities between patterns found in cloth from Persia and India and patterns found in Siamese painting, sculpture and fine arts. An example is the motif called *dao phedan,* "ceiling star", found on ceilings in palace buildings and the ordination and preaching halls of temples from the Ayutthaya era (Figure 34). This motif, along with others such as *dao dok jok,* "water-lettuce star", and *dao jongkon,* "lotus star", are similar to motifs found on old Persian carpets and Indian printed cloth from the 15th century (Figure 35).

The Siamese elite in late Ayutthaya wore cloth from the Muslim world made both in original designs and in patterns commissioned from Siam. Most was ordered from Muslim port cities in Gujarat, the Coromandel Coast, and Bengal. Most cloth from Persia was brocade with gold or silver thread. A popular type was *tat* which originates from the Persian word *tash* meaning "golden cloth." Varieties were named according to the pattern, such as *tat ta takdaen,* meaning "grasshopper check *tat*", or *tat ta dok krit,* "kris-flower *tat*", or *tat khao,* meaning golden silk woven with unplated silver wire. *Tat* cloth was popular among royalty for lower cloths and shirts.[37] *Sarabab*, known in Siam as *yiyarabab*, was a silver or gold brocade using a special technique to interweave the

Figure 34. *Dao phedan* (ceiling star) designs from Wat na Phramen, Ayutthaya

Figure 35. Fragment of 8th century Persian carpet.

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[37] Nathaphatra Chandavij, *Pha phim lai boran nai phiphitaphansathan haeng chat* [Ancient chintz fabrics in the National Museum] (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 2002), 82.

gold or silver with colored silk to glitter in the light, differing from *tat* in having more metal than silk. *Sarabab* was used for both dress and upholstery.[38]

At Ayutthaya, cloth was a marker of status, and some types were reserved for royalty or nobility.[39] The records of Western and Persian visitors state that King Narai wore silks from Persia and India. A motif similar to the Thai *pracham yam* motif (Figure 37) can be found on old examples of *tat* from Persia (Figure 36).

An elite style of dress called *taj-e-haydar*, meaning "lion hat," made of velvet, worn with a long red tunic or robe, was originally the distinctive dress of the Safavid clan, later adopted by the elite of the Safavid era.[40] The *taj-e-haydar* hat was worn swathed with a turban for appearance at court or in religious ceremonies. Nobles wore a long-sleeved shirt falling to the knee or foot over long trousers, with a *kamaban,* "waist sash", or a belt to hold a dagger or short sword, and perhaps another outer robe as protection against the cold and as a sign of status (Figure 38). The dress of the upper class of late Ayutthaya was influenced by this style (Figure 39). The Ship of Sulaiman reports that the king wore a Persian shirt and that the nobles had adopted pointed slippers
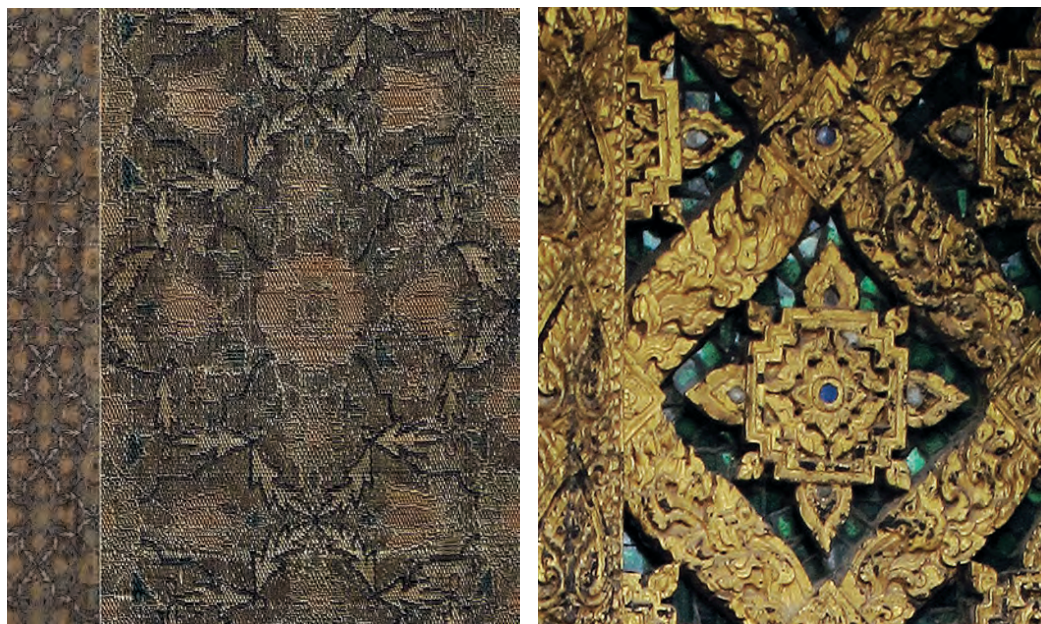

Figure 36 (left) and 37 (right). *Pracham yam*-like design on Safavid *tat* cloth (www.textileasart.com/persian.htm); *pracham yam* motif on a door of Wat Khao Yisan, Samut Songkhram (babdee.com/board/index.php?topic=448.45)

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[38] Ibid., 83.

[39] Ibid., 44

[40] The lion was a symbol of Imam Ali, the first Imam and the founder of the Shia sect. The Safavid clan claimed descent from Imam Ali, and adopted the lion as a symbol of the Ishna Ariya sect of Shia. This style of headgear was first worn by Sultan Haydar, who made it the emblem of his troops known as *qizil-bash*, meaning "red-hat soldiers," in the wars that united Persia under Safavid rule. His son, Shah Ismail I, first Safavid emperor, wore the *Taj-e-haydar* at his coronation in place of a crown. See M.K. Youssef-Jamali, *The Life and Personality of Shah Ismai'l I (1487–1524)* (Esfahan: Afsar, 2006), 29-31.

from the Moors.[41] According to La Loubère, at royal ceremonies Siamese nobles wore a high peaked hat called *lomphok*, a long collarless robe open down the front, and a shirt with sleeves almost to the wrists. He described the *lomphok* as:

> white, high, and pointed Cap which ... is a Coif of Ceremony, whereof the King of *Siam* and his Officers do equally make use; but the King of Siam's Cap is adorn'd with a Circle, or a Crown of precious Stones, and those of his Officers are embellish'd with divers Circles of Gold, Silver, or Vermilion gilt, to distinguish their Dignitaries.[42]

La Loubère also recorded that Siamese nobles wore a long, long-sleeved collarless

Figure 38. A Safavid noble (http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/ item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/dia&CISOPTR=8033& CISOBOX =1&REC=7)

Figure 39. Portrayal of Kosa Pan, ambassador of King Narai to France (Smithies, *The Siamese Memoirs of Count Claude de Forbin,* 140)

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[41] Muhammad Rabi, *The Ship of Sulaiman*, 83.

[42] La Loubère, *A New Historical Relation*, 26

robe, open at the front, over a shirt with sleeves almost to the wrists, and a sash at the waist. The Persian word for this sash, *kamaban*, is probably the origin of the Thai term *pha khao ma*, now meaning a common cloth worn around the waist.

Another status-defining item from the Indo-Persian world was the carpet, made from cotton, jute, wool, and silk. The most expensive were made from the fine silk produced around the Caspian.[43] Persia had developed the techniques of a dense weave for making carpets that were durable for hundreds of years and with exquisite designs that were considered a form of high art. Foreign visitors to Siam noted that the palaces and houses of the wealthy were laid with Persian carpets.[44]

Motifs

Indo-Persian culture did not influence only the dress and household consumption of the Siamese elite, but also had an impact on certain branches of arts and crafts. Patterns found on Persian carpets and cloth were gradually adapted into Thai design. For example, the Thai motif known as *dok mai ruang,* falling flowers, or *phum khao bin,* offertory rice mound, is found on cloth exported to Egypt since the 14th century and to Southeast Asia since the 17th century. The *phan phrueksa*, foliage, motif showing a vine with entwined branches and flowers of various sizes ending in coils is a popular Indo-Persian design found on Persian carpets, Indian carpets, and ceramic tiles since the 15th century (Figure 41). This motif is similar to the *kan to dok,* stem to flower, design with flowers along a thin branch or vine, which is found in Ayutthaya stucco work and wood carving, such as on the rear tympanum at Wat Chong Nonsi, captured in an old photograph by No Na Paknam (Figure 40).

Figure 40 (left) and 41 (right). Foliage design on the rear tympanum at Wat Chong Nonsi, Bangkok (No Na Paknam, *Wiwatthanakam*, 112) and on Carpet from Meshed, 16th–17th century (www.persiancarpetguide.com/sw-asia/Rugs/Persian/Mashad/The_Perez_Topkapi_Prayer_Rug.htm)

Another similar *kan kot*, coiled branch, design is found on a tympanum depicted in the murals at the residence of Phra Phuthakosajan at Wat Phuthaisawan in Ayutthaya: at

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[43] Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran*, 43.
[44] *Prachum phongsawadan phak thi 47 lem 28* [Collected Chronicles no. 47, vol. 28] (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1968), 293.

the center of the motif is a large flower or bush, from which vines curl outward, drawn as thin lines, forming coils which enclose sprays of flowers in a symmetrical pattern (Figure 42). Similar designs are found on Safavid-era ceramics (Figure 43).
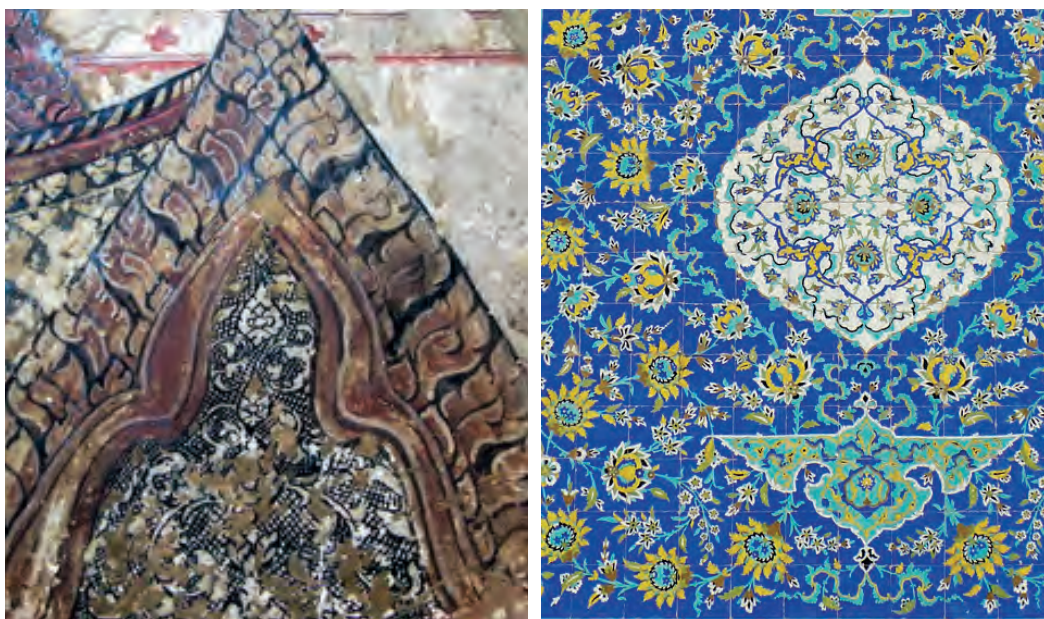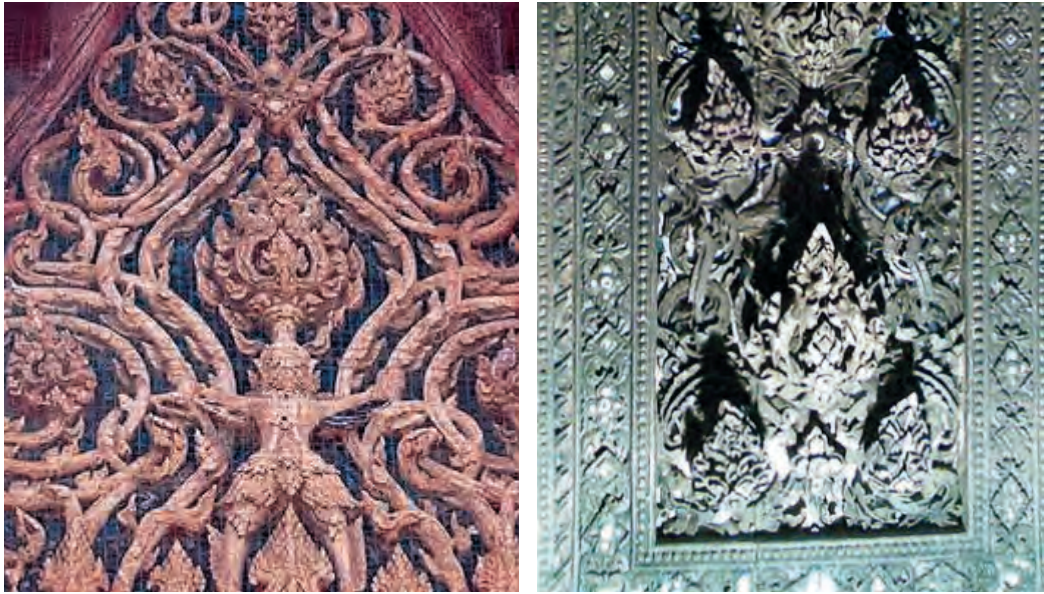

Figure 42 (left) and 43 (right). Foliage design on a tympanum at the residence of Phra Phuthakosajan at Wat Phuthaisawan in Ayutthaya (http://www.reurnthai.com/index.php?topic=2853.15); and on ceramic tiles at the Imam Mosque, Isfahan (photo by the author)

The stuccoed front tympanum end at Wat Yang Suttharam, Bangkok has a *phan phruek,* foliage, design with symmetrical coils (Figure 44), similar to designs found on ceramic tiles and carpets from Safavid Persia (Figure 45), except that the leaves are thicker and larger than in the Persian design, suggesting there has also been some influence of Western design on the craft.

Figure 44 (left) and 45 (right). Foliage design at Wat Yang Suttharam, Bangkok (No Na Paknam, *Wiwatthanakam*, 115); and on Persian ceramic, 14th to 15th century (http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/il-khanids-iv-ceramics)

Figures 46 (left), 47 (right), and 48 (below right). Vine and spray design at Wat Yai Suwannaram (http://tintagel.multiply.com/photos/album/4/4?&album=4&view:replies=threaded#photo=13), Wat Phra Fang, Uttaradit (http://www.utdclub.com/forum/forum.php?mod=viewthread&action=printable&tid=10122) and on a Safavid-era carpet (www.turkotek.com/misc_00058/fragments.htm)

In Indo-Persian design, there are motifs with a coiled vine which ends in a spray of flowers resembling a flame or a water drop (in Persia this motif is called "the water drop"). A similar motif is found in late Ayutthaya stucco work and woodcarving. In a pattern on the front tympanum of the teaching hall at Wat Yai Suwannaram in Phetchaburi, a *khruea thao* vine coils around and ends in a *cho hang to*, long-tailed bunch, a stylized cluster of flowers rimmed by what looks like flames or splashes of water (Figure 46). On doors at Wat Phra Fang, Uttaradit, a similar design has a *phum khao bin* at the center (Figure 47). These designs, which are characteristic of late Ayutthaya,[45] closely resemble patterns on Safavid-era carpets both in the overall design, the coiled vines with sprays of flowers, and the way the vines merge into something like petals on the central motif (Figure 48).

Another popular design in late Ayutthaya combined the coiled vine with the head of an animal, such as a *singhto,* lion. This design was used in painting, woodcarving,

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[45] No Na Paknam, *Wiwatthanakan lai thai* [Evolution of Thai design], 2nd printing (Bangkok: Muang Boran, 1981), 18.

and mother-of-pearl inlay work found on cabinets and doors. Work from this period is considered especially beautiful, fine, and free-flowing. An example is found on the doors of Wat Bhorom Phuttharam, Ayutthaya (Figure 49). Similar designs with animal heads are found on Persian and Indian carpets from the 15th and 16th centuries (Figure 50), and in books from Safavid Persia (Figure 51).

Figures 49 (above), 50 (lower left), and 51 (lower right). Vine and animal head motifs from door of Wat Borom Phuttharam, Ayutthaya (www.vcharkarn.com/vcafe/55962/1); 16th century Mughal carpet (Jill Tilden, ed., *Silk and Stone, The Art of Asia*, 106); and 15th century Farsi book (Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 128)

Another influential design is the "Tree of Life" featuring a tree with flowers and fruit, and with animals living among the branches and under the shade. The belief underlying the design reaches back to the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. In Ancient Egypt, the Tree of Life was a symbol of birth and life. In Assyria, the tree was associated with a winged god found in many bas-reliefs, a religious symbol still not clearly understood. Beliefs about the Tree of Life were passed down to the Jews and Arabs, and appear in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The Jews believe the tree is an

Figure 52. Tree of Life design on a Safavid-era carpet (tea-and-carpets. blogspot.com/2010/07/portable-paradises-world-of-safavid.html)

Acacia, whose wood was used for the Ark to hold the tablets which God gave to Moses (Musa in Arabic). In addition, the Tree of Life, which is depicted with an aura or flames, is a symbol of the power of God, referring to the aura or flames that the God Jehovah created over the tree when Moses received the tablets. Christians believe the Tree of Life is a symbol of the resurrection of Christ. In the Muslim world, the abundance of animals in the Tree is a symbol of God's power of creation, his compassion for all forms of life.[46]

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[46] Julispong Chularatana, "Ton mai haeng jiiwit nai lai rotnam wat choeng wai" [The Tree-of-life design in inlay work at Wat Choeng Wai], *Krungthep Thurakit,* 30 October 2009; Jumphon Phoemsanesuwan, "Phra ubosot lae phra wihan thi dai rap ithiphon tawan tok smai ayutthaya ton plai php. so. 2133–2310" [Ordination and preaching halls showing Western influence in late Ayutthaya, 1590–1767], *Na jua*, 1, 1 (2014), 93.

The design is found from around the 16th century onwards in Persian painting, textiles, ceramics, carpets, wood panels, and book covers. In the Arab world, it is also found in inlay work and lacquerwork, on book covers and manuscripts (Figure 52).

A scripture chest from Wat Choeng Wai, dating to late Ayutthaya, has the same elements and the same overall design (Figure 53). The design is also used in architecture such as the front gable-end on the ordination hall at Wat Chong Nonsi, Bangkok, and in murals such as those at Wat Chumphon, Nakhon Luang.

Figure 53. Tree of Life design on a scripture cabinet, Wat Choeng Wai, Ayutthaya (www.umarin.com/board/index.php?topic=1205.0)

Although some elements that appear in Thai art match with or are similar to Indo-Persian forms, the painters and craftsmen of late Ayutthaya adapted and combined these elements along with the aesthetics and techniques of Siamese art, and elements from elsewhere such as China and the West, resulting in a distinctive style in late Ayutthaya which is the high point of the Ayutthaya era.

Conclusion: crossing frontiers of creativity

Several art and architectural elements that developed in Persia in the Safavid era spread into India and influenced the Islamic art and architecture in several states, especially the Mughal Empire and the Deccan Sultanates, giving rise to the style known as Indo-Persian. This style spread to Siam along with commercial intercourse and diplomatic relations. As a result, several elements of Indo-Persian architecture were reproduced in Siam in the 17th and 18th centuries, especially in the reign of King Narai. Although it is sometimes believed that the kings of the Ban Phlu Luang dynasty (1688–1767) limited the role of foreigners at Ayutthaya, the architecture influenced by the Islamic world continued to develop and be used alongside elements from other sources. This style was gradually absorbed as one part of Siamese art and architecture of late Ayutthaya, and remained in use thereafter, becoming part of "traditional" Thai style.

At Ayutthaya and Lopburi, several buildings were constructed for new uses, including residences and bathhouses for Indo-Persian residents, and residences for the reception of official guests, modeled on the *divan* from the Muslim world. At palaces and *wat*, several new buildings were constructed and old ones modified with Muslim pointed arches and niches. These included the Phra Narai Ratchaniwet palace, Kammalian Residence, the preaching hall at Wat Kudi Dao, the Phra Phutthakosajan residence, Khamyat Residence, and Jaturamuk preaching hall at Wat Phra Si Sanphet as examples. The use of the Muslim pointed arch on windows, doorways, niches for lamps or display, and apertures for passage of light and air became widespread in late Ayutthaya. In addition, brick bridges were constructed with the Muslim arch, and brick roads laid using a fishtail pattern.

There are several similarities between Safavid-era painting in book illustrations, and late-Ayutthaya painting in *wat* murals and illustrated manuscripts: two-dimensional presentation without perspective, and buildings "folded out"; several scenes presented in a bird's eye view and a zig-zag "fishbone" sequence; hills, trees, and buildings used to separate the scenes; a limited range of characters; heaven shown through cloud-rimmed apertures in the sky; people drawn with bodies face-forward and feet perpendicularly to the side; mood and status of characters indicated by dress and ornament; gold used to highlight the royal and the sacred; paint applied in solid colors painted over with fine brushwork; and many similarities in the depictions of landscape, gods, and animals.

Cloth and carpets imported from the Indo-Persian world not only satisfied elite taste for consumption but also brought motifs and patterns that were absorbed into Thai architecture and fine arts

Late Ayutthaya was a time of creativity in art and architecture, blending earlier styles with new influences that came along with overseas relations. Many branches of art from the Narai era have traces of foreign influence from both east and west. These influences were developed to have a distinctive identity of their own under the patronage of the kings of the Ban Phlu Luang dynasty. The study of relations in art and architecture between Ayutthaya and Indo-Persia shows the capacity of Thai society to open up to outside influences and to adapt those influences into something new, often remote from the original, and absolutely Thai.