

for *la belle époque*, this delightful book can be read with pleasure, without being taken, as the visit certainly was not, too seriously.

David Chandler

Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam: Christoforo Borri on Cochinchina and Samuel Barron on Tonkin, introduced and annotated by Olga Dror and K.W. Taylor. Ithaca, NY, Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2006, 290 pp. \$23.95 (paper), \$46.95 (cloth).

One of the standard laments by historians and teachers of early modern Vietnamese history is the relative paucity of primary source materials that can take us beyond the often frustratingly terse style of the various court chronicles. These chronicles tend to emphasize events at the court, descriptions of military conflicts, social upheaval, and other affairs of state. They rarely offer any glimpses into the more mundane aspects of Vietnamese lives, or even much detail regarding life in the capitals themselves. Beginning in the seventeenth century, as increasing numbers of Europeans made their way to the shores of Dai Viet, we begin to have travelers' accounts that offer eyewitness descriptions of some of these sociological details. While often confused in the details and betraying some lack of comprehension of certain elements of Vietnamese society or culture, these accounts are invaluable complements to Vietnamese official court histories.

The volume under review here, *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam: Christoforo Borri on Cochinchina and Samuel Barron on Tonkin*, makes two of the earliest and best-known European accounts of Dai Viet available to a wider audience. This volume

includes the texts of complementary and largely contemporaneous accounts by European residents in the northern and southern Vietnamese courts in the seventeenth century. As such, they are a natural pairing, enabling the reader to compare the situations in the northern Trinh and southern Nguyen realms at this time. Christoforo Borri's account is based on his five years of residence in the southern realm between 1617 and 1622, just prior to the outbreak of the protracted civil war between the Trinh and Nguyen (1627–1672). Samuel Barron's report is based primarily on his residence in Thang Long in the late 1670s and early 1680s, though he had been born in Tonkin, and lived there for some time as a boy. Thus, each represents the insights of a man who had spent substantial amounts of time living in the Vietnamese realms, making them particularly valuable. Barron, who was fluent in Vietnamese, was perhaps the more thorough informant, though Borri's account is also an indispensable source for this period.

This republication of the two accounts is substantially enhanced by the lengthy introduction to the texts, written by Olga Dror for the text by Borri, and Keith Taylor for Barron's account. Furthermore, the editors have richly annotated the texts themselves, offering clarification and commentary on some of the more obscure elements of the texts, particularly the transliterations of certain Vietnamese terms. I was also very pleased that the volume includes twelve illustrations, which were contained in

the original Barron account. These very early images depicting elements of life in the northern capital of Thang Long are invaluable for representing such things as a marriage procession, the civil service examination compound, the courts of the Emperor and the Lord, and military and naval exercises.

Of the two prefatory essays, Dror's is the lengthier and more detailed, offering a substantial survey of Borri's life, peregrinations, scientific inquiries, and the problems he encountered with the Jesuit hierarchy for his scientific views. His sojourn in Cochinchina was only a short part of his life, most of which was spent in Europe moving between Portugal, Italy, and Spain. Although quite intriguing as an account of this complicated man and the difficulties he encountered over the course of his career, Dror's lengthy essay strays well beyond the circumstances of Borri's description of Cochinchina. While it offers some very useful background to the text and its creation, I found the detailed information about Borri somewhat extraneous. Her essay concludes with an exploration of the recently published, selective translation of Borri's work into Vietnamese, which offers very useful insights into the ways in which Vietnamese scholars continue to amend or expurgate historical sources to protect nationalist sensibilities. Taylor's account of Barron's life is much briefer, ten pages versus Dror's fifty for Borri, necessitated by the sketchier material available on Barron. On the other hand, it does offer sufficient context

for understanding Barron's illuminating insights regarding the nature of society and politics in Tonkin. Moreover, it usefully situates Barron's account as being in part a response to Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's 1680 description of Tonkin, which was based on secondary materials and apparently riddled with errors. Overall, the presentation of this supplementary material is very well done, though I lament the absence of an index, and would have preferred more professionally drawn maps than those included here.

What about the contents of these accounts themselves? Borri's account is valuable on numerous fronts. He offers a brief description of a wide range of aspects of Cochinchinese society and culture. He describes local produce, common elements of diet and drink, and dress — largely in silks. The work includes explanations of local habits and practices (such as marriage rituals), and the roles of scholars and physicians in society. Borri provides an account of the role and training of elephants and offers a description of the rhinoceros. He talks about education, government structures, and the Nguyen arts of war. He describes language, climate, and trade. In short, Borri offers brief snapshots of many significant elements of Nguyen material life. He also addresses their spiritual lives, for, being a Jesuit priest, Borri was particularly concerned with such issues. His account of Vietnamese religious practices offers a rather confused depiction of Buddhism and Daoism, as Dror points out in her preface, intermin-

gling the two belief systems in ways that extended well beyond the existing Vietnamese syncretism of the two. Not surprisingly, the description of religious beliefs and practices is very much set in the context of the Christian mission and its attempts at gaining converts. Thus, the lens Borri uses substantially skews his depiction of religious practices. Nonetheless, it is useful when read with the cautions provided by the annotations.

Samuel Barron was the son of an English trader and a Vietnamese woman, and apparently lived for some years in affiliation with the English factory outside of Thang Long. His account reflects an informed knowledge of significant elements of early seventeenth century Vietnamese society. Fortunately for us, it parallels Borri's account in numerous aspects, similarly examining trade, local produce, geography, habits, medical practices, and the status of scholars and education. He provides a more detailed account of the political structures in the north than Borri did for the Nguyen realm describing the nature of the divided rule between the Trinh lords and the largely ceremonial Le Emperors. He gives particular attention to numerous state rituals, including the annual "heaven and earth" sacrifice, which was overseen by the Emperor, and also imperial funerals and their elaborate processions. His account concludes with a brief survey of religious beliefs, which diverges from Borri's in that it makes virtually no reference to Christianity or to the Catholic missions, only offer-

ing a confused account of the alleged early Chinese exposure to Christianity. Mostly, it consists of basic descriptions of the two chief 'sects' he sees in Tonkin, namely, Confucianism and Buddhism.

In sum, this volume is a very welcome contribution to the study and teaching of early modern Vietnamese history. While many historians of Vietnam are acquainted with these two accounts at second hand, I would guess that few have read them in their entirety, an opportunity that now presents itself. Furthermore, these are welcome in the classroom as well, for they offer readily accessible texts that enable students to gain insights into some of the more ordinary aspects of seventeenth century Vietnamese life. The editors are to be greatly commended for combining these texts and through their context-setting prefaces and annotations bringing them to life for a new audience.

George Dutton

Virginia Morris with Clive A. Hills, *A History of the Ho Chi Minh Trail: The Road to Freedom*. Bangkok, Orchid Press, 2006, 180 pp., ill.

The book is the outcome of the author's year-long journey along the tortuous Ho Chi Minh Trail, which runs through Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, although she spent much of her time travelling in Laos. It is a well-balanced travelogue intertwined with history and weaves a clever dialogue between the past and the present. One of the main purposes of the book is to give Laos a place in the history of the Vietnam War, or, as the author rightly refers to it, the Indochina War, because 'Laos was written out of its history' (p.26).

The history of the Ho Chi Minh or Truong Son Trail dates back to 1959. The violation of the 1954 Geneva Accord by the United States of America and the South Vietnamese regime by the failure to hold a general election in Vietnam in July 1956 led North Vietnam in 1959 to reinstate Resolution 15, which revived the revolutionary war to unify the North with the South (p.6). This marked the beginning of the history of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which, until the end of the Vietnam War, was known among the North Vietnamese as the Truong Son Trail or Duong 559 (p.11).

In May 1959, the Special Military Action Group, or the 559th Transportation Unit, was formed, with the responsibility to build the road which would transport men and military supplies to