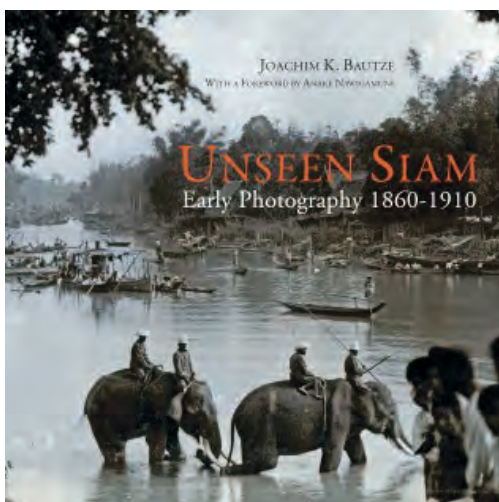


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*Unseen Siam: Early Photography 1860–1910*, by Joachim K. Bautze. Bangkok: River Books, 2016. ISBN 978 616 7339 66 5. 2,000 Baht. Also available in a Thai-language edition: ฉายาลักษณ์สยาม, ISBN 978 616 7339 77 1, same price.



This massive book (280 x 280 mm, 364 pages, 704 pictures, 2.5 kilos) features the work of fifteen photographers in Bangkok between the 1850s and 1900s. While some of the shots, particularly royal portraits, have been reproduced many times, many of the images have been hidden away in collections in Europe, and are made public here for the first time. Likewise, while some of the photographers, such as John Thomson, Francis Chit, Robert Lenz and Joaquim Antonio, are relatively well known, others are very obscure, especially Fedor Jagor, who took some of the most ambitious

and interesting early photographs. In terms of number of images and range of subjects, the publication goes far beyond the exhibition, which launched the book last year. The book is clearly a labour of love by a passionate collector over many years.

Joachim Bautze is a lecturer, writer, curator, and collector, who has focused on early photography in Asia. He has sourced the images for this book from collections in Germany, Italy, England, Belgium, Holland, France, Austria, Thailand and the USA. The fifteen photographers featured are: Abbé Larnaudie, Fedor Jagor, Pierre Rossier, Carl Bismark, Francis Chit, John Thomson, Henry Schüren, Gustave Richard Lambert, Max Martin, William Kennett Loftus, Fritz Schumann. Joaquim António, Robert Lenz, Emil Groote, and Kaishu Isonaga.

The book opens with a short essay on the invention of photography in the early 19th century. However, there are no notes on the equipment or techniques used by the featured

photographers in Siam, and no explanation of the improvements in technology over the late 19th century—improvements which are evident from the photographs themselves.

Organised like a catalogue, with a chapter for each of the fifteen photographers, the book is arranged in roughly chronological order. Each chapter is introduced with a biographical sketch, focusing on the dates when the photographer was present in Siam, the location of his studios, and other professional details. Each photo is labelled with details of date, size and subject, wherever these are available, as well a record of the publications where the shot has been used, and some comments on the content. There is no overview or analysis of the collection. That is up to the individual reader.

The first photographer is the Abbé Larnaudie, who took the famous early photos of King Mongkut and other members of the court in the 1850s. Bautze shows how these images were manipulated when converted into engravings. The little known Fedor Jagor visited Siam for a short time in 1861. He also photographed King Mongkut, in a much more natural pose. In addition, he took several shots of court dancers, perhaps favoured as subjects because they had the discipline to remain still for the long shutter-release times then required, as well as some extraordinary images of ordinary people and Bangkok locations. Pierre Rossier, another photographer here rescued from obscurity, extended the range of subjects with shots of villages and villagers, especially from Ratchaburi (shots which I had always thought were probably by Thomson), as well as one extraordinary nude study of a young lady.

After these early pioneers, a succession of photographers established studios in Bangkok for several years, gained credentials as photographers to the court, made a living by portraits carried on *cartes de visite*, and occasionally ventured out to photograph landscapes and ordinary people. In the 1880s, Gustave Lambert photographed a beautiful collection of Siamese “types”, including monks, young women and families. William Loftus, though little known, took some of the most enduring shots of the era, including views of a royal cremation, a moody landscape of Banglamphu Canal, and some temple interiors. Fritz Schumann’s shots for *cartes de visite* give a glimpse into the *farang* society of Bangkok in this era, as well as a portrait of Prince Damrong in his early 20s.

By the 1890s, photography was an established business, and the range of uses had extended beyond court portraiture and visiting cards to include book publications and postcards. Joaquim António and Robert Lenz both took an extraordinary range of different subjects, including portraits, Bangkok buildings, religious monuments, street views of ordinary people, festivals, canal views and elephants. For Emil Groote, Bautze has thoughtfully provided a slightly different selection of his work to that which appeared in *JSS* two years ago. The book is rounded off with Kaishu Isonaga, who came to Bangkok via Shanghai in 1896 and photographed mainly expatriate society.

This book has been beautifully produced by the River Books team of Narisa Chakrabongse and Paisarn Piemmettawat. Anek Nawigamune contributes a foreword, which rightly commends Bautze for “succeeding in such a tremendous task.” This book is a landmark in the appreciation of photography in early Siam, and a wonderful source of images of Siam prior to the onslaught of modernisation. Joachim Bautze deserves our congratulations and our thanks.

Chris Baker