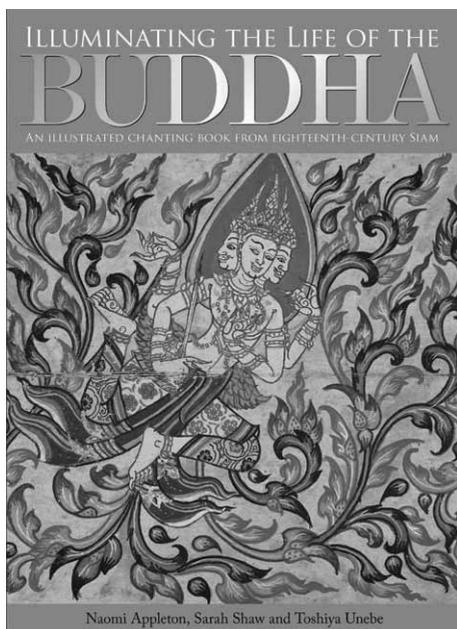


*Illuminating the Life of the Buddha* by Naomi Appleton, Sarah Shaw, and Toshiya Unebe (Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2013). ISBN 978 1 85124 283 2.



With few publications in English about Thai painting, the arrival of a new one that helps to shed light on any variety of information about paintings (dating, function, purpose, etc.) is cause for celebration. In this case, *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha* does not disappoint.

The book is an in-depth examination of an 18th century *samut khoi* manuscript in the collection of the Bodleian Library in England. Scholarship presented in the book is shared equally and successfully by its three authors whose specialties lie in the field of religious studies. The book is rich with color images of the manuscript and related objects throughout. *Samut khoi* are accordion-folded mulberry paper manuscripts that were

carefully and finely created with written text and, often, illustrated with beautiful depictions of popular Buddhist narratives. Dating back to the 16th century, *samut khoi* were particularly popular in Thailand in the 18th and 19th centuries before their production waned, replaced by printed versions.

From the start it is clear that the manuscript will be presented by the authors with great care in relation to its detail. On the first pages the illustrated folios of the manuscript are reproduced with color photographs and on the following two pages, a map of the manuscript is offered that is helpful for gaining a better understanding of how the paintings and text are laid out. Focusing the book on a single manuscript is an excellent approach to expand our understanding of the structure, function, and life of a *samut khoi*.

Each chapter of *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha* explores different aspects of the Bodleian's *samut khoi*, referred to in the book by its accession number: MS. Pali a. 27 (R). Chapter 1 introduces the book and its Thai Buddhist context, exploring *samut khoi* manuscripts, their structure, function, and composition. This chapter compares the Bodleian manuscript with the presentation of Buddhist images at Buddhist monasteries in the region as "principal ways that Southern Buddhists, lay and monastic, have come to appreciate the teaching." (p. 1) It also provides insight into the role of text and image in *samut khoi* in general, and specifically in MS. Pali a. 27 (R). Because *samut khoi* are often a collection of the visual and the verbal, both aspects should be explored in order to give a complete picture of a painted Thai

manuscript. The reader is also reminded, following Peter Skilling’s insightful work, that the paintings in the manuscript are illustrative, yet not specifically illustrations, since they function outside of the written text as a reminder of the Buddha’s perfections.

The *samut khoi* manuscript that is the focus of this book presents paintings of the final ten *jātakas* and the Buddha’s life story in its folded pages. These stories and their significance are explored in Chapters 2 and 3 of *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha*. We learn that the order of the painted narratives and their specific locations throughout the manuscript have significance. Chapter 2 introduces the Pāli text from which the manuscript comes, known as the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* or “Commentary on the *jātaka*” (p. 10), and outlines the importance of the last ten births or great stories. The stories are recounted, explained, and illustrated generously with depictions from the manuscript MS. Pali a. 27 (R) and supplemented with other Thai manuscripts and various works of art. The strength of the chapter is the sequence of information, its accessibility, and the illustrations. I found the discussion of the history of depicting the ten final lives in art and the situation of manuscript MS. Pali a. 27 (R) within Thai manuscript history particularly interesting.

Chapter 3 details the final life of the Buddha, echoing the order of its presentation in manuscript MS. Pali a. 27 (R). His life as a prince and then as the enlightened one is the subject of the manuscript following the *jātakas*. The incorporation of forty illustrations of the final life of the Buddha in the manuscript is unusual for a *samut khoi*, and this fact together with an analysis of their placement is highlighted throughout *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha*. This chapter identifies the *Paṭhamasambodhi*, “an extra-canonical biography of the Buddha composed in Pāli,” (p. 56) as the textual source of the life story paintings. Its history and importance are examined as are discrepancies between the *samut khoi* paintings and the *Paṭhamasambodhi*. Chapter 3 stresses that seeing the Buddha in painted images is an important way of seeing the Buddha and being in the presence of the Buddha and his teachings.

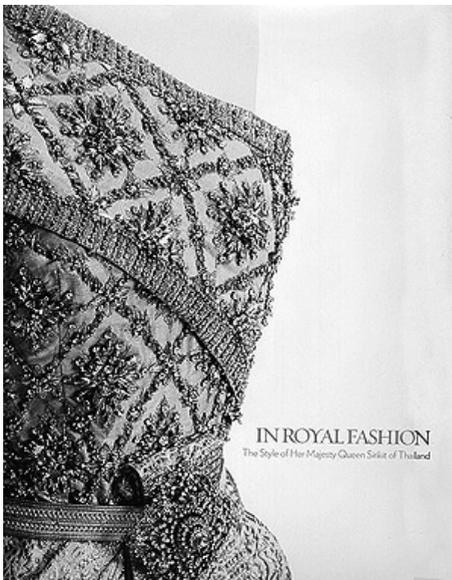
Chapter 4 explores “The lifestory of a manuscript” and gives a great deal of background in the process. Readers learn how the authors dated the manuscript and its possible inclusion in the gifts from Siam to Ceylon in the mid-18th century. The chapter also details the written content of the Bodleian manuscript and, importantly and typical of *samut khoi*, the fact that the written content does not match the subject of the paintings. Of course a manuscript’s life continues after its creation – especially one now residing in a British collection – and Chapter 4 does a wonderful job of discussing the provenance and “travels” of the manuscript. I found this chapter to be compelling because of the analysis involved and the overall discussion of the manuscript, and its particulars were details I found myself missing in the previous chapters.

The authors’ affection for their subject comes through in *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha*. This book is a delightful contribution to the field of Thai and

Buddhist studies and I am thrilled to have it as part of my library. It offers a variety of perspectives and insight for researchers, teachers, or students. I hope its publication is an inspiration to others and that it is just the start of an increased interest of scholars and publishers in the field of Thai manuscripts and painting in general.

Rebecca Hall

*In Royal Fashion: The Style of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand* by Melissa Leventon and Dale Carolyn Gluckman (Bangkok: Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, 2013). ISBN 978-616-91379-0-0 (hard).



When the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles opened to the public on 26 April 2012, the first exhibitions in the grandly renovated former offices of the Ministry of Finance were created in honor of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit. After nine years of study, planning, renovation and assembling collections, the new museum located in the compound of Bangkok's Grand Palace was created to serve as a center for those who wish to study and learn about Southeast Asian and Asian textiles. For the inaugural exhibitions the new museum focused on the exemplary role that Queen Sirikit has played in supporting Thai textiles and included themes on fashion and

Thai national dress. An impressive Thai language catalogue ราชศิลป์พิสดารภรณ์พิพิธภัณฑน์ผ้าในสมเด็จพระนางเจ้าสิริกิติ์ พระบรมราชินีนาถ that featured a forward by the museum's Patron, HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, was produced.

An English language edition *In Royal Fashion: The Style of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand* appeared a year later. Both catalogues cover the displays in two of the museum's principal halls. In the first gallery, the exhibition is entitled "Artistry in Silk: The Royal Style of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit" and a second gallery houses "Fashioning Tradition: Queen Sirikit Creates a National Dress for Thailand". The original catalogue that appeared in Thai in 2012 was written by a committee of museum staff and scholars. Although the photographs and most information in the two editions are similar, the text for the English version was completely rewritten by the authors Melissa Leventon and Dale Carolyn Gluckman.

In comparing the Thai edition and the English version, the changes and additions