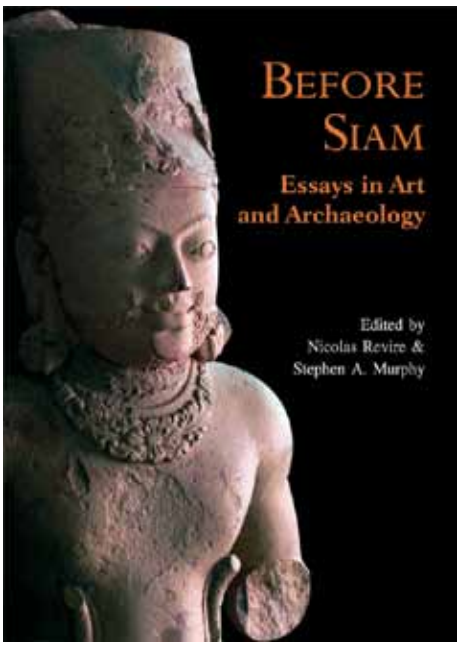
of dissent than the first military regime under Phibun, which itself was much less tolerant than the absolute monarchy it had replaced. What this wonderfully executed biography of Narin's career as a dissident intellectual illustrates so clearly is that efforts to suppress different opinions will ultimately always be unsuccessful. It is in this sense that Narin Phasit's life is, as Koret claims, 'a universal folktale' (p. xv).

James A. Warren

Before Siam: Essays in Art and Archaeology edited by Nicolas Revire and Stephen A. Murphy (Bangkok: River Books and The Siam Society, 2014). ISBN 978-166 733 941 2. 1,495 Baht.



This hefty tome is a comprehensive account of a controversial subject by 33 authors who cover a broad range of academic specialties, with 312 colour illustrations and 56 maps and plans. Yet despite the huge amount of information presented, the subject of Dvāravatī, which many readers might expect to find at the center of the book, is only marginal to the discussion. Most chapters allude to Dvāravatī, but none of them provides an argument in favor of the hypothesis that Dvāravatī was a unified kingdom formed between the 6th and 10th centuries within the borders of what later became Siam. Instead several authors use a footnote to summarize what other writers have called Dvāravatī. This book does not attempt to take a stance on what "Dvaravati" was, thus the title. Some contributors to this book are more concerned to explore this problem than others, but one should not expect to find an answer to the mystery of Dvāravatī in it. The book's focus is rather on a time period and a general area.

The preface by Chris Baker sets the tone by implanting the idea in the reader's mind that at the dawn of history in Thailand there were many localized art styles, which over the next few centuries gradually coalesced into two traditions or cultural zones conventionally called Mon and Dvāravatī, but which were not firmly bounded or differentiated. Many of the authors emphasize differences between the Chao Phraya drainage and the northeastern region and the Mun and Chi Rivers that flow into the Mekong.

This in itself is a statement. It is possible, as this volume shows, to deal with

the late prehistory and early historic era without the need to postulate a conventional entity such as a kingdom which was seminal to later political, religious, and artistic development in the realm which is now the Kingdom of Thailand. It is possible that future archaeological discoveries will unearth more concrete evidence that such an entity existed, but such a development seems increasingly remote. Although it is not explicitly stated, this book implies that Thailand was created through the coalescence of a variety of cultural units: before Siam, these units exerted considerable influence on each other, and exchanged many things including religious ideas, artistic motifs, and economic commodities, but maintained a relationship which might be called a heterarchy or system of peer polities. The regions which became Thailand evolved along closely parallel tracks during the period under study in this book, which began around 2,300 years ago and ended in the early 13th century with King Jayavarman VII of Angkor; in other words, just before the formation of Sukhothai.

This book makes judicious use of three different fields – archaeology, art history, and history. Most of the authors are aware of the benefits of combining data and analysis from more than one discipline, and seek to blend them rather than bow to the concept of the compartmentalization of knowledge. The first chapter, "What There was Before Siam: Traditional Views" by Hiram Woodward Jr. (pp. 17-29), for example, is written by a man whose main reputation is that of an art historian but who deals with the search for vestiges of Dvāravatī in local chronicles, and attempts to understand how people of the Siam period viewed the pre-Tai past. One chronicle, the *Jinakālamāli,* written around 1500, alludes to Queen Cāmadevī, who was born near Lop Buri around 662 CE and later moved north. This may relate to a memory of the transition from Mon to Tai as the dominant language and identity in Lamphun. In fact the situation was more complex, since there was a period of Khmer linguistic and architectural development there as well. There is no folk memory of a Dvāravatī-like entity.

The rest of the book is divided into four parts. Part I, on the transition from prehistory to history, begins with a chapter by Trongjai Hutangkura, who disputes the assumption that the lack of early sites in the lower central plain of Thailand was due to a higher sea level which only receded around 600-700 CE. Recent geomorphological research shows that the shoreline was already located around Bangkok by that time. This chapter shows that the shoreline of the lower Chao Phraya has not moved very much during the historic period.

It is still possible to refine his hypothesis however. The assumption that the advance of the sea coast was caused by the decline of the sea level rather than sedimentation needs further testing. Probably the lower central plain 2,000 years ago was a shallow swamp in which hummocks of higher ground existed and created an irregular outline, not a smooth straight boundary between land and water. People may well have lived there, like the Marsh Arabs of southern Iraq, but traces of their existence would be difficult to find.

This finding has obvious implications for similar conjectures about other parts of early historic Southeast Asia. There is a similar theory that the coastline of south Sumatra has moved 100 kilometers in the last 1,500 years. Recent discoveries of sites from the early first millennium CE near the coast, combined with the data from Thailand, are beginning to provide strong evidence that the extensive sedimentation around the lower courses of rivers in many parts of Southeast Asia has been in progress for millennia rather than centuries, and therefore *coastal change has not been a significant factor in the evolution of settlement patterns and complex society*. Specialized groups such as the Moken of south Thailand and Myanmar and the Sea Nomads of western Indonesia have probably lived in the marshes for millennia, but left few traces of their activities.

The next chapter by Bérénice Bellina *et al.* provides a detailed account of discoveries in the upper Thai-Malay peninsula at the site of Khao Sam Kaeo. A Franco-Thai project has contributed greatly to understanding the early trade between Southeast Asia and South Asia. It has been suggested that hard stone and glass artifacts may have been made by local craftsmen under the tutelage of immigrant Indian experts (p. 75). It is more plausible that Southeast Asian craftsmen went to India to learn these skills. Southeast Asians were the more accomplished seafarers throughout the early period of contact between Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. The same applies to the high-tin bronze bowls found at Khao Sam Kaeo and Ban Don Ta Phet (p. 76; Ian Glover and Shahnaj Husne Jahan, "An Early Northwest Indian Decorated Bronze Bowl from Khao Sam Kaeo", pp. 90-97, in this volume). The "South China Sea Indianised" artifacts "display a wide range of morphologies, some of them only rarely or never used for ornaments in South Asia" (*Ibid.*).

The chapter by Brigitte Borell, Bérénice Bellina, and Boonyarit Chaisuwan, titled "Contacts between the Upper Thai-Malay Peninsula and the Mediterranean World," pp. 98-117, takes us even further west. It also clarifies links to the east, listing finds of Han dynasty pottery and glass from China in the peninsula. Most of the important sites in the peninsula have been looted, but the quantity of seals, cameos, intaglios, coins, and pendants with Roman designs found there is steadily increasing. This chapter concludes that the Roman items here probably came via India. The authors are however willing to consider the possibility that Romans actually did pass through Southeast Asia at least once on the way to China (p. 112); this seems unlikely. The "Roman" embassy was probably from elsewhere, possibly northwest India.

The section concludes with a chapter by Thanik Lertcharnrit on the archaeological site of Phromthin Tai, Lop Buri Province. The site is important due to the long period of activity there. The first phase is marked by a single grave dated to 700-500 BCE. Phase II belongs to the Iron Age (500 BCE-500 CE). The most intensive occupation took place in Phase III: 6-9c CE, "Dvaravati period". Significantly no break was identified in the sequence between Phases II and III. This chapter is the only one to provide much data on locally-made ceramics. This is an

important subject; more research should focus on local pottery sequences bridging the prehistoric-historic transition.

Part II deals with "The Growing Emergence of Indic Material Culture." The section begins with a masterful summary by Himanshu Prabha Ray of "Multi-religious Maritime Linkages across the Bay of Bengal during the First Millennium CE." She provides much valuable information on the relationship between Buddhism and Brahminism in India, the development of religious architecture, and scripts. As she notes, there is no direct correlation between language, script, and religious affiliation. The uses of inscriptions changed in the 1c-2c BCE in India, and again from the 4th century CE onward. This chapter provides much critical information for understanding current thinking in Indian history and archaeology that provides the context for contemporary development in Southeast Asia.

Paul A. Lavy in a chapter on early Vaiṣṇava sculpture in peninsular Thailand and Southeast Asia pays tribute to Stanley J. O'Connor and Robert Brown, and refines O'Connor's argument for dating these images based on more recent research in India and Southeast Asia. Even if, as Lavy argues, O'Connor's date is 100 years too early, the Chaiya statue would still be the oldest known Brahmanical image in Southeast Asia.

Brahmanical remains in the peninsular region are also the subject of Wannasarn Noonsuk's chapter. As in other parts of Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia, Brahmanical and Buddhist remains there are often closely associated, suggesting a mode of coexistence between the two faiths.

With Michel Lorrillard's chapter on "Pre-Angkorian Communities in the Middle Mekong Valley (Laos and Adjacent Areas)", the book's focus shifts to the eastern frontier of what became Siam. Like the other contributors to this volume, he exercises proper caution by avoiding assumptions regarding the linguistic affinities of the people who created various works of art and architecture. He summarizes much new data from the Middle Mekong which support his contention that this region's importance in the early historic period is underappreciated. Elizabeth H. Moore and San Win, in "Sampanago: 'City of Serpents' and Muttama (Martaban)", deal with similar issues of cross-cultural interaction in the area around the Three Pagodas Pass between Thailand and Myanmar.

Part III, "Early Buddhist Practices, Landscapes and Artefacts", opens with a chapter by one of the editors, Nicolas Revire, on "Glimpses of Buddhist practices and rituals in Dvāravatī and in neighbouring cultures." In the author's words (footnote 1, p. 266): "In this essay, 'Dvāravatī' refers to both an archaeological typology and a cultural entity vaguely located in west-central Thailand *circa* the seventh and eighth centuries CE." It seems that art and common aesthetic values covered broader areas than political units did in this region, and indeed in all of early Southeast Asia. The ideotechnic subsystem of culture, in the terms popularized by archaeologist Lewis Binford, was more stable, and thus, one could argue, more significant than the sociotechnic subsystem (government). This chapter's main purpose is to emphasize

the role played by *punya*, 'merit', in guiding people's actions. Most laypeople wanted merit, not immediate attainment of nirvana. This chapter contains very useful graphics such as Map 1 (page 248), depicting the locations of Buddhist inscriptions in central and northeast Thailand, in the mid- to late first millennium CE,

Pinna Indorf's chapter on "Dvāravatī *Cakras:* Questions of their Significance" revisits the subject of stone *cakras* and *stambhas*. One of her important contributions is an exploration of the significance of the *Dighanikaya* and the possible use of the *cakra*s as palladia analogous to linggas in Angkor. She also proposes an explanation for the disappearance of these forms. Wesley Clarke displays the fruits of his enterprising study of the unpublished notes of H.G. Quaritch Wales in a major reinterpretation of "The Skeletons of Phong Tuek", a seminal site in the formation of the Dvāravatī concept by Coedès and Quaritch Wales. Rather than belonging to an earlier phase, the burials found there now seem certain to be contemporary with Buddhist-related construction.

Matthew D. Gallon, in "Monuments and Identity at the Dvāravatī Town of Kamphaeng Saen", also uses an archaeological approach to the subject of "Dvāravatī", defining it as an archaeological culture. Next the other editor, Stephen Murphy, employs an art historical approach to comparisons between the *sema* stones in lower Myanmar and northeast Thailand. Contrary to the hypothesis that the *sema* stones in Thailand were a model for those of Thaton, he advances solid reasons for concluding that the two traditions evolved independently, as a result of sharing similar Buddhist traditions and a Pali canon.

Part IV, "Early Khmer Impetus", discusses a tantric Buddhist inscription found at Sab Bak near Phimai, and suggests that one key function of the enigmatic lintels inside the main temple is to symbolize the unity of body, speech, and mind, and represents the mandala of the *Guhyasamājatantra*. The Khmer section of the Sab Pak inscription deals with the installation of nine Buddhist images of Mount Abhayagiri which were meant to protect the Khmer lands against Java. When the statues deteriorated, Dharanindrapura renovated the statues. His pupil Dhanus reinstalled them in 1066. Arlo Griffiths in an article in *Archipel* in 2013 proposed Ratu Baka in central Java as the site of Abhayagiri. Conti thinks it unlikely that tantric Buddhists traveled to Java for three centuries to maintain a holy place there, but the author of this review in a forthcoming book on Ratu Baka gives reasons why Griffiths' theory is plausible. In the concluding chapter, Hedwige Multzer O'Naghten provides a detailed description of the impact of Jayavarman VII's building program in Thailand, and devotes special attention to Mueang Sing.

In summary, this volume is rich in description and detail. The authors all wisely prefer to allow the reader to decide what Dvāravatī may have been, given the massive amount of information provided herein.

John N. Miksic