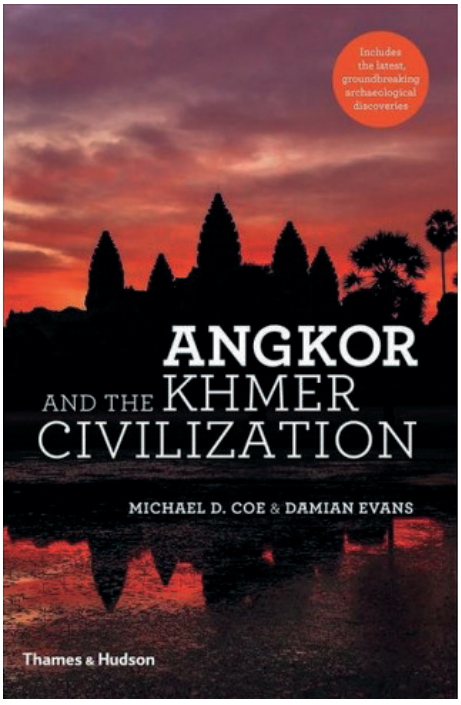
Reviews

Angkor and the Khmer Civilization by Michael D. Coe and Damian Evans, London: Thames and Hudson, 2018. ISBN 9780500052105 (hardback). £24.95.



The first edition of this absorbing book, with Michael Coe as the single author, was published in 2003. I read it at the time and came away convinced that it was the most thoroughgoing, accessible and persuasive synthesis of precolonial Cambodian history, society and culture that I had ever read. Nothing published since then has changed my mind, and the second edition, which Coe has co-written with Damian Evans, the Australian archaeologist, is better than the first. Scholars, non-specialists and visitors to Cambodia will all benefit from this timely, elegantly written and immensely helpful book.

Michael Coe turns ninety in 2019. His long, productive career, spent mostly at Yale University, has focused on the precolonial societies of Central America and, in particular, on the Maya, but he has nurtured an interest in Cambodia since the 1950s when he first visited the kingdom. Soon afterwards, when he was still a graduate student, Coe published a closely argued paper suggesting that a comparison of Mayan and Angkorian settlement patterns might be fruitful. Several years later, in another paper, he compared what he called the social topology of several tropical forest civilizations, including those of Central America and Angkor. He did not revisit these comparisons, on paper at least, until the 1990s when he began work on the first edition of this book. Instead, he wrote a series of path-breaking, accessible books on Mayan and early Mexican civilization, including a history of chocolate. Coe rekindled his interest in Cambodia in the 1990s and, in 2000, he embarked on the fieldwork and synthesizing secondary research that culminated in the first edition.

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Most of the companiable preface to the earlier book, describing his attachment to Cambodia and setting out his intellectual debts, has been cut from the 2018 volume. It is clear from the new, more impersonal preface, however, that Coe's heartfelt enthusiasm for Cambodia and its history is undiminished.

As he worked on the first edition, Coe became acquainted with many of the (mostly young) archaeologists working in Cambodia, including those affiliated with the Greater Angkor Project at the University of Sydney, working under, and alongside, Professor Roland Fletcher. Damian Evans, then a PhD student under Fletcher, had cited Coe's comparative papers in his undergraduate thesis, which was concerned with mapping Angkor. A photograph of the site, taken in 1994 from the space satellite *Endeavor,* borrowed with permission from Evans' thesis, reappears in both editions of this book.

Coe and Evans met in 2003 and soon became close friends. Over the years, they often travelled together in Southeast Asia, where Evans was based. In 2015, they agreed to collaborate on a new edition of *Angkor and the Khmer Civilization.*

The range of exciting developments in Cambodian studies since 2003 fully justified their decision. So did the continuing absence of a competitive book. None of the other comprehensive studies of Angkor deals in detail, as this one does, with the post-Angkorian period, or as thoroughly with the everyday lives, activities and concerns of ordinary Cambodian men and women throughout the kingdom's history.

There are very few substantial cuts in the new edition, which retains the structure of the 2003 volume, and all but a few of the copious, well-chosen illustrations. The revised text, using a slightly larger font, is seventy-two pages longer than the 2003 edition, and twenty-four color photographs have been added, making a total of forty-six. The new pictures include some stunning aerial "X-Rays" of Angkor, obtained since 2003 via the airborne laser scanning process known as Lidar, that has revolutionized Cambodian (and Maya) studies.

Seventy-five pages of the new edition, by my count, contain additional material, while twenty-three pages are completely new. Significantly, the "Further Reading" section at the back of he book has almost doubled in size since 2003. The section now includes eighty-seven post-2003 citations in French and English, a fraction of what has been produced in half a dozen languages. Numerous citations refer to jointly written papers, reflecting the co-operative nature of much archaeological work in Cambodia today, as scholars from several nations and disciplines tackle what Coe has called the "big questions" of precolonial Cambodian history. This level of co-operation, along with the participation of trained Cambodian personnel, was non-existent before the 1990s.

The most far-reaching development in Cambodian historiography since the first edition of this book has been the thrilling, multifaceted repopulation of Angkor, known in its heyday as Yasodharapura. This discovery, using a range of techniques, including Lidar, revealed that Angkor in its heyday was a huge, low density, urban complex, that with its rice-growing hinterland may have housed as many as 750,000 people. Recent scholarship, including a monograph and several papers by Damian Evans, has filled the Angkorian landscape with multiple traces of the men and women, who for several centuries grew Yasodharapura's rice, raised its children, fought in its armies and built its temples.

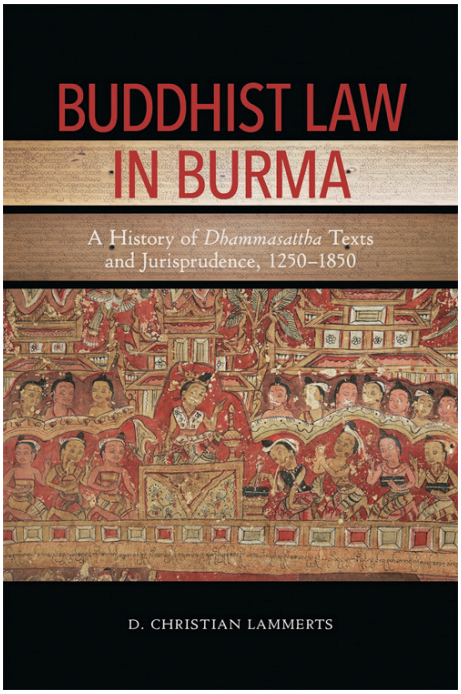
We now know, to give just one example, that in the 12th and 13th centuries CE as many as 4,000 people may have lived on the network of gridded streets recently discovered inside the moat of Angkor Wat. Many other new, Lidar-assisted findings, especially concerning the kingdom's intricate water management system, are just as exciting,

Coe and Evans also deal with the enduring mystery of what events and long-term factors may have combined to cause, and accelerate, Angkor's demise. In both editions, Coe lists "alterations in the religious paradigm, military incursions and overpopulation and ecological collapse" as having "finished off" Yasodharapura and the Classic Maya.

The sympathetic treatment of the poorly documented post-Angkorian period that closes the book allows us to trace continuities, as well as rupture, between the empire centred at Yasodharapura and the small, beleaguered and resilient kingdom (and its inhabitants) that over the centuries survived Yasodharapura's still not entirely explicable splendour and its slow, multifaceted demise.

David Chandler

Buddhist Law in Burma: A History of Dhammasattha Texts and Jurisprudence, 1250–1850 by D. Christian Lammerts. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018. ISBN 9780824872601 (hardback). US$65.



This book is a major contribution to the legal history of Southeast Asia. Although it focuses on one type of document in one country—the *dhammasattha* in Burma—its method, scholarship and findings have importance beyond this sphere.

The study of Burma's legal history has struggled to escape the overhang of the colonial era. On the model adopted for legal systems in other colonial territories, the British identified the *dhammasattha* as the source of "customary" or "native" law applied in Burma to a limited range of social matters. One minor *dhammasattha* was translated rather badly into English, and became the source of not only current law, but also of later scholarship. Early scholars believed the dates in 19th-century legal bibliographies, and pushed the practice of *dhammasattha* jurisprudence back to 12th-century Pagan. A story developed whereby these documents were adapted from the Indian *dharmaśāstra* with transmission through the Mon to the Burmese. Debates arose over the timing of this transmission, ranging across many centuries, with little evidence. Several authorities announced that Burma

had no true "Buddhist law," only the *vinaya* code governing the monkhood and this traditional *dhammasattha* adapted from Hindu India.

Christian Lammerts starts his book title with "*Buddhist Law"* to signal his rejection of this tradition of scholarship. In recent decades, scholars working on many aspects of Buddhist teaching and society have been overthrowing the scholarship which originated from the early colonial encounter with Buddhism by close reading of original texts. Lammerts' work is in this mode. He has collected and consulted an extraordinary number of *dhammasattha* texts inside Burma and elsewhere. He has carefully sifted the evidence on dating and authorship. He wonders why texts were composed when they were and how they were. He announces that "this is the first book to undertake a critical approach to Burmese *dhammasattha* literature," and it does not seem boastful.

Despite the similarity in their names, the Burmese *dhammasattha* documents do not originate from the Indian *dharmaśāstra*. The contents are very different. There was little Sanskrit scholarship and few Sanskrit texts in early Burma. The *dhammasattha* were always part of the Pali tradition. Inscriptions show that *dhammasattha* texts were in use by the 13th century, but no surviving texts can be dated to that era.

Lammerts dates the earliest surviving text, the *Dhammavilāsa,* to "sometime before 1637–38." The text contains advice on judging, advice on witnessing, a long catalogue of laws on various topics, and a story about the origin of this law: Manu, a servant of the original Buddhist king, Mahāsammata, studies to acquire supernormal powers, then travels to fetch the *dhammasattha* from the outer wall of the universe where it is written in letters each as big as a cow. With this story, the law is not made by kings or given by gods (as in the Indian version), but is a natural part of the universe. There is just one version, which is eternal and unchangeable.

Although Manu appears to have the same name as the famed Indian law-giver, Lammerts insists he is part of Pali-based Buddhist tradition. In earlier documents, Manu was an alternative name for King Mahāsammata, but appears as the name of a separate individual in this text. Likewise there is no trace of this origin story in Hindu legal tradition.

Lammerts moves on to a second major text, *Manusāra*, which can be more precisely dated to 1651–52. This text has the same origin story in a slightly more elaborate version, and roughly the same overall content. The main differences are that the core text is in Pali with glosses in Burmese, and that the glosses go beyond the Pali and add new legal provisions. Lammerts suggests that the use of Pali corroborated the claim that the *dhammasattha* was part of the *piṭakat*, the Pali canon, counted among the worldly sciences or disciplines. From this era, debate arose over demarcating the spheres of the *dhammasattha* and the *vinaya* code. While the origin story asserted the natural origin of the law, *Manusāra* and other documents of the late 17th century introduce a role for kings in preserving and transmitting law through history.

Lammerts adds a delightful excursion on the biography of Tipiṭakālaṅkāra, a co-author of *Manusāra*. This excursion gives a unique portrayal of the life of a monastic intellectual of his era, including a mission on behalf of the king to locate two Buddha footprints in the western hills.

In the 18th century, the theory of the natural origins of *dhammasattha* and the

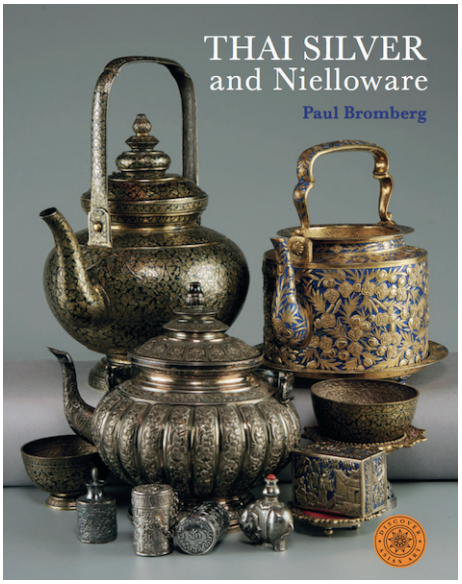
relationship of the *dhammasattha* to the Pali canon both came under challenge. Scholars wondered about the claim that there was a single eternal *dhammasattha,* given that various texts existed. Royal and noble patrons, who sponsored the copying of texts, worried that their patronage might earn demerit rather than merit if the texts were not "correct" and were not part of the canon. Around 1810, a monastic scholar was commissioned to investigate whether the *dhammasattha* had truly come from the wall of the universe. After scanning the teachings, he ruled that there was no trace of this story. From this time, legal scholars pronounced that law had been made by Mahāsammata and his successors. Law was thus a human construction rather than a natural artefact, lay outside the scriptural canon, and was susceptible to change and improvement. Indeed, the provisions of the *dhammasattha* needed to be examined against the scriptural teachings and "cleansed" if they were found to diverge. In practice, this work had not progressed very far before Burma fell under British colonial rule and the *dhammasattha* was appropriated for another project.

Lammerts stresses that even when the *dhammasattha* was under this challenge, the texts were still being reproduced and even elaborated and extended. He shows that many different people were involved in adjudicating disputes and judging crimes, including nobles, village chiefs, monks, and military officers. A written *dhammasattha* served as an aid for these judges and mediators. One author compared the written law to Sakka's thunderbolt, the weapon that defeated the evil demons. Using written law enabled judges to make decisions, which added to the prosperity and well-being of the society, while at the same time ensuring that the judge would earn merit rather than demerit for his work.

Lammerts thus asserts that there most certainly was "Buddhist law" in Burma in the sense of a law both generated and used within the society, that drew on the texts and scholarship of the Pali-using world. Written law was clearly in use from the 13th century onwards, although Lammerts is reluctant to say much about the early centuries in the absence of securely dated texts. The usage of written law and the practice of legal judgment was clearly widely dispersed in the society. The two main texts that Lammerts uses from the mid-16th century make a striking claim for the "natural" origin of law and its rightful presence within the scriptural canon, though conceding kings a role in its transmission through history. In the 18th and the early 19th century, these propositions were challenged. *Dhammasattha* law was excluded from the canon, repositioned as the work of kings, and subject to revision and supplement by new types of law. Yet, at the same time, *dhammasattha* remained important for everyday judicial practice.

Chris Baker

Thai Silver and Nielloware by Paul Bromberg, Bangkok: River Books, 2019. ISBN 978 616 451 0142 (hardback). 1,200 Baht.



For reasons which remain unclear, the subject of this book, *khrueang ngoen* or Thai silverware, has been strangely neglected both by scholars and by Oriental art enthusiasts. This cannot be due to any lack of quality in the objects—as the author demonstrates again and again, the skill and inventiveness of Thai silversmiths is beyond dispute. One reason for this neglect is surely historical: quantities of Indian and Burmese silver objects found their way to Britain (the Imperial power) whereas independent Siam retained most of its silver treasures. Even today, on the rare occasions that Thai silverware appears at auction in Europe, it tends to be catalogued as Indian, Burmese or Malay. A further complication arises from the practice of many Thai (or Thai-Chinese) artisans of stamping the base of their wares with Chinese marks; the objects are then often categorised as Chinese Export Silver.

The literature on Thai silverware has also been seriously inadequate and English speaking readers have had to rely on Sylvia Fraser-Lu's *Silverware of South-East Asia* (1989) and Naengnoi Punjabhan's *Silverware in Thailand* (1991), both now long out of print.[1] Thus, Paul Bromberg's book has had a large lacuna to fill. Without hesitation, I can say that it succeeds brilliantly.

In his Introduction the author is careful to establish the boundaries of the work. Hill tribe silversmiths, working usually with very simple equipment, produced some beautiful artefacts,[2] but theirs is a different culture and a different aesthetic. Coins and weapons are also excluded, the main focus of the book being on vessels and utensils in everyday use or made for presentation.

Chapter 1 of the book provides a useful summary of silverworking techniques, including chasing (embossing), damascening (*khram*), enamelling, engraving, filigree, gilding, openwork and repoussé. These skills have been used worldwide, wherever silversmiths have practised their art, whereas nielloware (*khrueang thom*) may be considered a classic form of Thai decorative art. As such, it merits a chapter to itself in Bromberg's book.

The precise origins of Thai nielloware are a matter for speculation, but the technique

[1] *Arts of Asia* magazine deserves credit for the attention it has paid to this neglected subject. Bromberg's bibliography cites no fewer than fifteen *Arts of Asia* references.

[2] Collectors should be careful to avoid most recent "hill tribe" artefacts. Typically, they are mass-produced from low-grade metal and no tribal hand has ever touched them.

(the production of silverware with patterns inscribed on a blackened surface) is closely related to that used for centuries in Persia (Iran) and India. The skills required may have come from the Portuguese during the mid-Ayutthaya period; Indian traders were regular visitors to Siam; and Muslim pilgrims returning from the *hajj* may have brought niello objects back with them. The southern port of Nakhon Sri Thammarat (formerly Ligor) became an important centre for nielloware production and Bromberg quotes two 19th century visitors, Bishop Pallegoix and Sir John Bowring, as writing in complimentary terms of the city's niello craftsmen.

For many readers the author's chapter on nielloware may well be the most valuable part of the book. There is a wealth of information here: on history, typology, the manufacturing process, patterns, usage, gift-giving and modern wares. Of special interest are interviews conducted by Bromberg in 2014-15 with Yongyuth Buakaew, a veteran Nakhon Sri Thammarat silversmith. Those unfamiliar with niello work may find the detailed information provided in this chapter somewhat daunting. For them I would recommend a slightly different approach: the quiet contemplation of an outright masterpiece of nielloware, the enormous bowl (59 cm in diameter), beautifully photographed by Paisarn Piemmettawat and appearing on page 43 of the book. The elephant head handles are very finely done and, with a stroke of genius, the craftsman has continued the animals' legs into the gilded decoration of the vessel. I congratulate any reader who owns a niello object of similar quality.

Under the heading *Forms and Functions* the author introduces the traditional forms of Thai silverware. Of these, betel chewing sets—typically comprising three boxes, a bowl, a lime pot, a conical leaf-holder, a hinged cutter and a tray—have a special appeal for collectors. The betel habit was almost universal in Thailand until the mid-20th century and it impressed many foreign visitors. Thus Bowring, the 19th century British diplomat, writes:

> The consumption of the areca and the betel nut is enormous throughout Siam. A Siamese who is tolerably well off is scarcely ever seen without the nut in his mouth; and he is invariably attended by servants who carry a supply of the material, with all the needed paraphernalia, whose costliness depends upon the opulence and rank of the possessor.

Betel sets (*chian mak*) were considered a sign of rank and they often appear in photographs of royalty. Indeed, Bromberg includes a charming 1960s photograph (on page 155) of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit with a ceremonial betel set in the foreground.

This chapter of the book will no doubt answer many questions which arise for the collector. For example, several years ago I purchased at a London market stall a small cylindrical container with a Thai inscription. Was this a pill-box? Or perhaps a perfume container? I now learn that it is a *ya dom*, a receptacle for snuff or some other inhalant.

The section of Bromberg's book which deals with the decorative motifs (*lai*) found on Thai silverware, is surely destined to become the essential reference on the subject. The author lists twenty-nine motifs, each with a brief description and (more importantly) an illustration. Some *lai Thai* are familiar and easily recognised—the

theppanom, garuda (*khrut*), naga and elephant (*chang*) for example. Others, such as the numerous floral motifs, are more obscure and may be difficult to identify. The sources of these designs are significant and they tell us a great deal about the cultural history of Siam. Some are derived from the Ramakien epic and others from Buddhist cosmology or from familiar plant and animal life. During the reign of Rama III (1824-51), Chinese influence was at its height and Chinese emblems (flowers, butterflies, bats, dragons) became very popular motifs. What is distinctively Thai is the way in which these various motifs are used. As Chira Chongkol has written:

> The design is characterised by filling in the entire area with stylised motifs, either figurative or floral, in delicate detail, and these motifs are distinctively Thai.

In Chapters 5 and 6 the author turns his attention to fine silverware made for the court or for religious purposes. In the case of royal regalia and gifts, gold was the material of choice but silverware was also widely used. Whatever the material employed, only the finest workmanship was acceptable and highly skilled royal artisans, *chang luang*, were employed. The Norwegian traveller Carl Bock visited the Siamese National Exhibition of 1882, held at Sanam Luang in Bangkok, and noted:

> There were some lovely gold boxes, enamelled and inlaid with precious gems, the king's initials, the royal arms, etc.; heavy gold chains, bangles, gold and silver goblets, a great variety of gold and silver betel-boxes and spittoons, cigar-cases and other articles, such as are from time to time given away as marks of the sovereign's favour.

Royal treasures of this kind combine precious material, outstanding workmanship, and often historical importance. Understandably, they are very rare and command high prices at auction.

Silver has always been a popular material for Buddha figures, and readers will be familiar with the small images made from engraved and chased sheet silver over a wood and clay core. In these the Buddha is usually depicted seated on a throne, although standing and reclining images are also known. The commissioning of such an image was an act of merit and there is often an inscription recording the donor's name. In popular Buddhism silver is frequently used to produce amulets, believed to confer protection and good fortune on the wearer. Today, the amulet business is a huge commercial enterprise, worth many millions of baht. One wonders what Sakyamuni would have thought of it.

A unique feature of the book is a compendium of Chinese "chop marks" which were stamped on the underside of silver objects. These marks are believed to date between 1850 and 1920 and may identify the silversmith, his place of work, or the retailer of the item. In the case of the *Tan Yue He* mark a good deal is known about the firm and its very fine products; for many other marks no such detail is so far available. Additional information will no doubt come to light over time and Bromberg's list will become more comprehensive.

The book concludes with a chapter titled *Advice For Collectors,* the product of

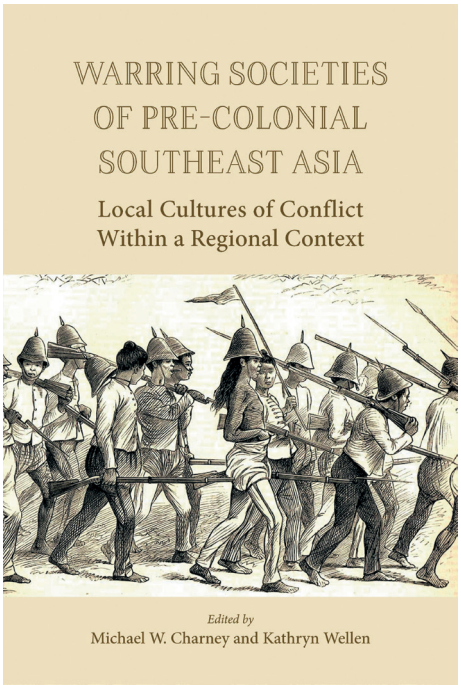
Bromberg's many years of navigating the Thai antiques market. Although the hints given here are concerned with antique silver, they will be of great interest to collectors generally. We are advised to prepare ourselves by visiting the Bangkok National Museum, Suan Pakkad Palace, and Prasart Museum, as well as viewing other collections online. I personally have happy memories of finding silver treasures some thirty years ago in such places as Had Yai and Phrae, but Bromberg advises, correctly, that the antiques market is now overwhelmingly Bangkok-based.

When examining antique silver items we are cautioned to search carefully—in a good light—for possible repairs or defects. Do top and bottom fit precisely? Are feet or other parts later replacements? In the case of betel sets do the constituent items all share the same pattern? This detailed examination is important, but the experienced collector will also use another faculty, a sense of the overall quality or "rightness" of an antique object.

Bromberg's book is the second in River Books' "Discover Asian Art" series[3] and is surely destined to become a classic work, one of those rare books which we turn to again and again for guidance. It will certainly have an honoured place on my bookshelves.

Barbara Harding

Warring Societies of Pre-colonial Southeast Asia: Local Cultures of Conflict Within a Regional Context, edited by Michael W. Charney and Kathryn Wellen. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-87-7694-228-1 (hardback), £65; 978-87-7694-229-8 (paperback), £22.50.



There is only a handful of books, or theses, that focus specifically on warfare in Southeast Asia, and not many scholarly articles. As a result, the chapter on Southeast Asia in Peter Lorge's *The Asian Military Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) was a washout. This book, with seven essays and an introduction, is an attempt to give warfare in the region something like the attention it has received elsewhere. Significantly, the title refers to "warring societies" rather than "warfare."

In their introduction, Michael W. Charney and Kathryn Wellen review the sparse historiography, divided into two phases. In the first, the key work was Quaritch Wales' *Ancient South-East Asian Warfare* (1952), which adopted a cultural approach, drew heavily on knowledge of classical India, and stressed the

[3] The first in the series is Dawn Rooney's *Bencharong*: *Chinese Porcelain for Siam*.

symbolic aspects of warfare and the low rate of mortality. In the second phase, the focus was on the relationship between war and state formation, and this theme had an inherent bias towards the great states in the lowlands. In this collection, the emphasis returns to a cultural approach, but with a "new and particular take to local culture and accepting the clear internal diversity of societies in the region." (9).

The seven articles are widely scattered in location, time period, and theme. Puanthong Pawakapan argues that Siam's wars with Cambodia and Vietnam in the early Bangkok era were designed to bring back people and other resources to bolster the resurgent kingdom. Kathryn Wellen shows how warfare was endemic among the small-scale Bugis societies in South Sulawesi in the 17th and 18th centuries. Ariel Lopez argues that raiding from southern Philippines in the 18th century was part of building the state around ties of family and religion. Vu Duc Liem argues that the modification of traditional craft with some Western technology created the navies with which the Nguyen lords unified Vietnam in the late 18th century. Hans Hägerdal describes Bali from the 16th to the 19th century as a scene of "endemic warfare among the small micro-states," which also occasionally colonised neighbouring islands. Michael Charney argues that royal historiography and colonial bias have highlighted large-scale warfare in mainland Southeast Asia, and obscured the "local, rural warfare" of villages raiding villages and chieftains carving out little kingdoms; he provides a tantalising glimpse of this local warfare in Burma in the 1880s. Gerrit Knaap tours round the island rim from the southern Philippines to Taiwan during the 16th to the 18th century, painting a repetitive picture of small statelets engaged in constant raiding using coastal craft and mostly traditional weaponry.

The contributions are of consistently high quality. The editors claim they are pursuing a "composite cultural approach" (14). They do not clarify what this means, but they state that "local Southeast Asian societies had their own individual experiences that were unique" (13). This framework seems to make it hard for the editors to draw any general conclusions from the collection. This is a pity, as there are several themes which run through the essays. One theme that the editors do highlight is that "all societies sought the same things in war such as resources, which in Southeast Asia often meant people, prestige, and political stability." Almost none of the fighting described in the individual essays is designed to enlarge a ruler's territory for the long term. Most fighting is raiding, especially raiding for people or slaves. Few pitched battles are seen in the narratives. There is little discussion of mortality rates, but the impression given is that they were quite low.

The protagonists are mostly small-scale entities, ranging from villages and local chieftaincies to island states. The weaponry is rather simple. Gunpowder weapons are present, but their numbers are rather few and the authors seem intent on playing down their significance. Technological change is scarcely discussed, except in the striking and fascinating case of the Vietnamese seagoing battle craft. Most armies are levies with limited development of professional soldiering.

These features of warfare seem to be related to the low population density (except in Bali) and the fragmented state of political authority. Even where larger states are present, as in Burma in the 18th century, Charney seems to be arguing that they have

been unable to impose a monopoly on violence.

Most of the history writing on Southeast Asia has focused on the great states. This collection offers a refreshing counterbalance. It raises more questions than it answers, but hopefully it will spur more attention to the relationship of war and society in the region.

Chris Baker

Selbstbehauptung und Modernisierung mit Zeremoniell und symbolischer Politik. Zur Rezeption europäischer Orden und zu Strategien der Ordensverleihung in Siam by Suphot Manalapancharoen. Konstanz/Munich: UVK, 2017. ISBN 978-3-86764-809-7 (hardcover). €49.

"Order and ceremony", argues the cultural historian Suphot Manalapancharoen in the preface of this book, "have been and continue to be essential components of symbolic politics of a ruling system, not only in Europe, but also in Asia." (p. 13). The German book title can be roughly translated as: *Self-assertion and modernization by means of ceremony and symbolic politics. On the reception of European orders and strategies of awarding ceremonies in Siam*. An *order* is a visible honour publicly awarded by a monarch or state to an individual (or group) for distinguished service or eminence in a field of endeavour. The academic discipline devoted to the study of the subject is called phaleristics in English and is conventionally regarded as a subfield of the auxiliary sciences of history. The phenomenon itself has long become global. Orders, or decorations, and the varying public ceremonies during which they are bestowed, are commonly acknowledged as distinctive elements of national and international political ritual.

Dr. Suphot uses Siamese orders as key sources for an examination of the political and diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Siam and Western countries in the 19th and the early 20th century. He contends that these artefacts can be construed as specific expressions of transnational political communication, embedded in complex patterns of symbolic actions. Questions of diplomatic protocol are, therefore, intrinsically connected to questions of political hierarchy. Historians of Thailand, such as H.G. Quaritch Wales and Maurizio Peleggi, have critically assessed the different ways in which the Siamese monarchy presented its power in public and how political ritual in Siam has changed

over time, particularly in the face of Siam's growing intercourse with European colonial powers in the second half of the 19th century.[4] Dr. Suphot further adds to the picture by employing a rather neglected kind of historical material, highlighting both the global dimension of symbolic communication and the role it played in Siam's struggle for independence.

The book centres on the reigns of King Mongkut (1851-68) and King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). This period is marked by rapid political and economic changes that fundamentally transformed the Siamese state and redefined Siam's political relations with Euro-American countries. Dr. Suphot starts with a survey on the history of Siamese-European political contacts in the 19th century and gives an account of the various Western diplomatic missions that visited the court in Bangkok, from John Crawfurd's mission of 1822 to that of James Brooke in 1850. As a result of these initiatives, the Siamese government was forced to abandon its long-held reservations towards Western powers. The study then traces how King Mongkut and his court set out to learn the language of international politics and carefully describes a mimetic process of appropriation of European elements at the Siamese court. Siamese state ceremonies were increasingly adapted to European rules of diplomatic intercourse, while traditional Siamese insignia (*khrueangyot*) took on European forms. There was a significant expansion of royal endowment in Siam during the second half of the 19th century that brought about a multitude of new decorations and insignia of civil and military orders.

The book provides a detailed account of the development of Siamese orders and the various adaptations made over the years to render them compatible with European conventions. Reception ceremonies for senior members of foreign governments became more expensive and pompous. Western embassies were now greeted with a gun salute and the court orchestra. King Mongkut found it appropriate to sign his international correspondence as "Rex Siamensium" and occasionally celebrated lavish dinner parties in the Royal Palace to impress his foreign visitors. However, even though the king was aware of the importance of symbolism in politics, his attempts to accommodate European forms of ceremony remained largely superficial.

It took time for the Siamese to decipher the codes of European political ritual. Dr. Suphot argues that it was only during the reign of King Chulalongkorn that a more systematic approach to symbolic representation emerged in Siam. (pp. 75-82) The new king frequently used the expertise of foreign consultants, who assisted him in coming to terms with Western diplomatic language and etiquette. The main challenge was, according to Dr. Suphot, to create signs of distinction and forms of political ritual that would be internationally comprehensible while also retaining a specific Siamese taste and aesthetic. *The Most Exalted Order of the White Elephant* (เครื่องราชอิสริยาภรณ์ อันเป็นที่เชิดชูยิ่ง ช้างเผือก, first awarded in 1873) and *The Most Illustrious Order of the Royal House of Chakri* (เครื่องขัตติยราชอิสริยาภรณ์อันมีเกียรติคุณรุ่งเรืองยิ่งมหาจักรีบรมราชวงศ์, 1882), to take just two examples from the book, can be considered as "hybrid" artefacts

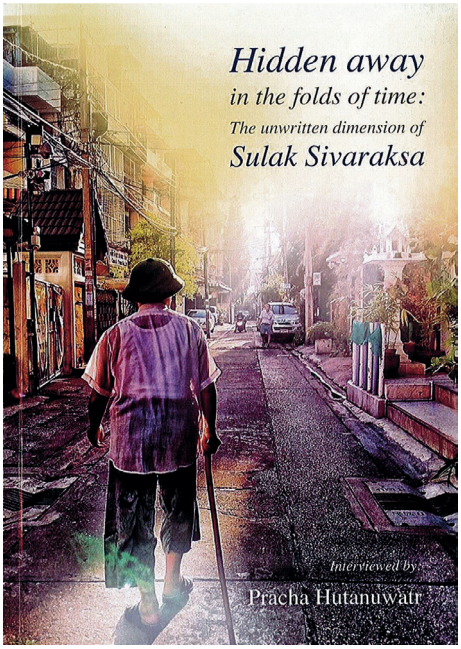
[4] Horace G. Quaritch Wales, *Siamese State Ceremonies. Their History and Function with Supplementary Notes* (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press Ltd., 1992, first published by Bernard Quaritch, 1931); Maurizio Peleggi's *Lords of Things. The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002) is missing in Suphot's bibliography.

that melted Western classifications with long titles in traditional Thai-Pali-Sanskrit, perhaps unwittingly representing the ambivalent character of Siam's colonial modernity.

The book's argument is based on the assumption that public ritual and the various signs of distinction awarded by monarchs or states provide a key to understanding of international power relations in the period. The political shifts in the region and the struggle of the Siamese kings for political self-assertion, vis-à-vis the European colonial powers, are reflected in subtle forms of accommodation of Siamese court culture and diplomatic ritual. Dr. Suphot convincingly demonstrates the historical significance of his sources, although he sometimes too uncritically retells the conventional narrative of Siam's independence being based only on the wisdom of kings. The strengths of his book are, therefore, less evident in his general interpretation of 19th century Thai history, but in the author's close reading and careful analysis of hitherto little used sources. Dr. Suphot describes the merging of Thai and Western modes of representation as a form of *selective reception* ("selektive Rezeption"), stressing the agency of Siamese kings and their ability to co-determine what they absorb as their own. The book thus broadens our understanding of the dynamics of transculturation and provides new insights into the complex negotiations of power between Siam and the West at a critical juncture in Thai history.

Sven Trakulhun

Hidden Away in the Folds of Time: The Unwritten Dimension of Sulak Sivaraksa by Pracha Hutanuwat. Bangkok: International Network of Engaged Buddhists, 2017. ISBN 9786169282815.



Suksit Siam, popularly known as Sulak's bookshop, published the Thai version of this book to mark Sulak Sivaraksa's eighty-fourth birthday on 27 March 2017. The book, which contains a series of interviews with Sulak by his disciple, Pracha Hutanuwat, has been translated into English by Sulak's niece, Zia Collins, and edited by Pracha's former wife, Jane Rasbash. As the English edition went to press, an embattled Sulak Sivaraksa laboured under the shadow of yet another lèse-majesté charge under Thailand's notorious article 112, for challenging the official version of a historical elephant duel between King Naresuan and a Burmese prince over 400 years ago.

The official history, taught in Thai schools, claims that the warrior king, Naresuan, slew his Burmese opponent during the duel. Sulak

pointed out there were alternative accounts of the duel that contradicted the official version. Burmese records offer no confirmation of the Thai story. Portuguese sources suggest that the Burmese prince was felled by a gunshot. For taking the trouble to challenge the historical record, Sulak was charged with lèse-majesté.

Sulak has acquired a legendary reputation as a veteran defendant in lèse-majesté litigation. During his controversial career as a public intellectual he has been charged on four occasions. Each time he has been acquitted; thus earning Thailand's "Socrates" the reputation of a cat with nine lives. This time, however, pundits predicted that he would not escape because of a vitriolic dislike of Sulak by the ruling junta.

Why is Sulak detested by the powers that be, the country's most powerful individuals, organisations and institutions, yet enjoys a robust following among the youth, lay Buddhists and large sections of the public? Perhaps some indirect answer can be found in this book. Pracha's intention is to address Sulak, the man, not Sulak, the legend, nor Sulak, the hero. He aims to cut through the mystique surrounding Sulak, the public figure, in order to uncover the soul of Sulak, the man.

Behind the various poses, hero worship, self-image, testimonies and legends, Pracha's search for a kernel of truth about his revered guru takes him on a journey to Sulak's childhood; tracing the long chain of formative influences upon his education, spiritual experience, metamorphosis into manhood and becoming a public intellectual.

In Chapter 4, Sulak recounts that his lovely, kind teachers at Assumption College, were among the formative influences upon his childhood. He liked the old fashioned teachers best; they "are very sweet." Master Junya, Master Jarern and Master Jueh were mentioned with affection, as well as Brother Victorien. While he praises his teachers, he has a low opinion of Assumption College, valuing it no better than "rubbish." He pours scorn upon the institution, which "only taught rich kids to get richer and oppress the poor even more." He disdains the modern-day teachers as much as he despises his school.

Although Sulak went to a Catholic boys school, he grew up as a Buddhist. His inner-directed Buddhist core had already been formed before he was exposed to Western influences and Western education. From early childhood he was tutored by Kleeb, his old nanny, to live by a Buddhist ethical code embodied in the Eightfold Path. At the age of twelve, he was ordained as a junior monk at Wat Tong Noppakun. His trainer and mentor was the venerable monk, Chao Khun Pat, from whom he learned much about Buddhism, including its animistic and magical dimensions. He opposed the teachings of the royalist Dhammayut Sect, which rejected animism and magic. Like Chao Khun Pat, Sulak believes that an exclusively intellectual Buddhism, bereft of animism, superstition and magic, is an impoverished Buddhism.

By the time Sulak departed to England for a Western education, he was already a sophisticated and discriminating Buddhist intellectual. His exposure to the culture shock of the West occurred when his personality was already formed. Consequently, Sulak's encounter with the West was transacted largely on his own terms; he selected what he wanted from the West and rejected that which did not suit him.

The Western influences upon his early life came from his teachers at Lampeter, especially Mr. Newte, who taught him Greek and Latin. Newte became intimate with

Sulak, inviting him on car drives in the country, long walks and chess games during the school holidays. They talked about "all sorts of things" when they were together. Sulak said he learned a lot from these conversations. Sulak first heard of Bertrand Russell from Newte. Although Sulak did not read the works of Russell until he returned to Thailand, Newte's praise of Russell kindled his curiosity and admiration. Later Russell became a big influence on Sulak, and Newte's image of Russell as the Socrates of our time must have captured young Sulak's imagination and contributed to his current reputation as the "Socrates of Thailand" and Thai social critic par excellence.

Another foreigner mentioned with affection is Mr. Pointon, Sulak's boss at the BBC, who taught Sulak to be skeptical of the BBC: just like everybody else, the BBC had its own agenda.

Although Western education played an important role in his personal development, Buddhism became the primary and decisive influence on his life. When Sulak returned from his sojourn in the West, he realised that besides his childhood education in Buddhism, he knew little about his own country.

By far the most powerful and important institution in Thailand is the monarchy, yet Sulak knew little about it. He decided to spare no effort to learn about the Thai monarchy until he became the single most knowledgeable person on the subject. Sulak began reading works by royal historians, especially Prince Naris and Prince Damrong, although he never met them. He intimated that in this delicate field it was not documentation, but "word of mouth", that was paramount in learning about royalty. He was grateful to find royal insiders, like Mom Chao Poonpisamai and Mom Chao Jongjittanom, who were willing to reveal the secret world of Thai royalty to him. Yet another confidante was Prince Dhani, the adopted son of Prince Damrong, who used to dine with Sulak every Saturday.

Besides members of the royal family, another invaluable source of information about royalty were royal monks, embodied in the Royal Chapter of Monks. Sulak tried to find out everything about the Royal Chapter of Monks: its operations, structure, hierarchy and abbots.

He quickly discovered that the subjects of royalty and Buddhism are inextricably intertwined. You cannot know one well without knowing the other. His research into the phenomena of royalty automatically made him an authority on the Buddhist *Sangha* and its luminaries, including Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Panyananda Bhikkhu and Chao Khun Prayudh Payutto. Today, Sulak's outstanding knowledge about Buddhism and the *Sangha* have earned him the grudging respect of royalty and academia, although his relations with academic luminaries have often been testy and ambivalent, especially among Red Shirt and pro-Thaksin sympathisers like Thongchai Winichakul and Nidhi Eoseewong.

Despite his elitist Western education, Sulak has reinvented himself as a Buddhist-centred intellectual. His Buddhist cultivation of his inner self is reflected in a symbolic non-attachment to material possessions. Like the Buddhist monk, who drapes himself in a simple piece of saffron cloth, Sulak goes about clad in simple traditional Thai peasant garb and sandals (see the book cover). Sulak's affectation of Buddhist simplicity and profession of faith in the Buddha's eight noble precepts have earned him public

recognition as an exemplary Thai Buddhist. Many of his faithful disciples and followers accept him as a simple man ordering his life according to basic Buddhist precepts. This by itself is quite harmless. Why then do the powers that be despise him and seek every means to punish and destroy him? Is Sulak a blameless victim of official perversity, or is the story more complicated and more interesting?

This book projects Sulak as an innocent bystander and passionate intellectural seeking to understand the world, including Buddhism and the Thai monarchy. If this is all there is to Sulak, then it is hard to understand why he is so hated by the junta. The book fails to capture the other, revolutionary Sulak who aggressively seeks to change the world. Without Sulak's revolutionary activism, it is impossible to understand how such a harmless bystander became the number one enemy of the Thai establishment

A more careful examination of Sulak's later activities reveals a powerful man, who deploys aggressive confrontational tactics to pressure the establishment and change the system. Far from being simply an intellectual, who wants to understand the world, Sulak is a revolutionary activist who wants to change it. Even his apparently scholarly endeavour to understand the phenomena of Buddhism and royalty is not simply for knowledge's sake. Professor Thamsook Numnonda's remark that "Sulak is a man who knows a lot of history but he is not a historian," captures the essence of the man — not a harmless man of knowledge but an aggressive and highly effective man of action. Neither is he simply a pious man of religion. His Buddhism is more complex than simple "classical" Buddhism or the Buddhism of the common man.

In his maturity, Sulak has espousesd a form of Buddhism that is unconventional and controversial. He calls this "Engaged Buddhism." While "classical" Buddhism is other worldly, oriented towards individual release from the vicious cycle of reincarnation, advocating control of powerful human sentiments, such as greed for material possessions, passionate love, hate and lust for power, in favour of a harmless, simple, austere life of meditation and non-attachment, Engaged Buddhism preaches what its name advocates—engagement! For Sulak, to be "engaged" means to express solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, the dispossessed, the disadvantaged and the exploited in their struggle for justice, human rights and liberation from various forms of enslavement. Engaged Buddhists participate in political activism, community organising, civil disobedience and advocacy for justice and human rights.

Matteo Pistono, who has written a biography of Sulak titled *Roar: Sulak Sivaraksa and the Path of Socially Engaged Buddhism* (North Atlantic Books, 2019), recounts that Sulak began his Buddhist activism against the backdrop of the social and political unrest of the 1970s when Thailand was greatly affected by the Vietnam War and by the fall of Phnom Penh, Saigon and Vientiane to Communist armies. During the Cold War, donor agencies provided generous funding for academic, political, social and economic research, as well as financial support for charities, development projects, religious institutions, social work training, study groups and seminars. There was plenty of funding available for a budding activist. Sulak launched dozens of foundations, charities, NGOs and activist groups throughout the 1970s and 1980s. He helped to build the infrastructure for a robust and powerful civil society movement in Thailand. With this organisational muscle, Sulak's Buddhist movement addressed issues of social injustice and grievances

of the poor and the oppressed at the hands of governmental agencies, landlords and exploitative corporations. Unlike "classical" Buddhism, which prescribes renunciation of wealth and power, Engaged Buddhism seeks power to "do good".

Often, "doing good" consists in levelling the playing field by aligning the organisational muscle and countervailing power of NGOs with the "powerless" victims of governmental agencies and powerful interest groups. Sulak's Engaged Buddhism and its affiliated organisations, including the Forum of the Poor, championed the struggle of many communities, including the Pak Moon, Ban Khrua and Bo Nok villagers, fighting against construction of a dams, roads, and power plants respectively. Engaged Buddhism derives its inspiration from the age-old tradition of the morality of rebellion, which has throughout history been used to serve as a check on power, to legitimise rebellion and to effect regime change.

Matteo Pistono compares Sulak with the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh and Aung San Suu Kyi. These people are steeped in Buddhist practice, which is inseparable from political practice. Even more than Sulak, the Dalai Lama and Aung San Suu Kyi are first and foremost political leaders. Until he recently stepped down, the Dalai Lama was head of the Government of Tibet in Exile, a militant transnational Buddhist movement composed of moderate and radical Tibetan nationalists. The moderates, led by Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, favoured a dialogue and bilateral negotiations with China for increased autonomy of Tibet within China, while the radicals demanded independence and performed acts of martyrdom in a wave of protests during the last decade. Aung San Suu Kyi became a human rights icon in the Western world for her courage in standing up to the tyrannical military dictatorship of General Than Shwe in Myanmar. Although Sulak was a well-wisher and steadfast supporter through her years of house arrest, he was closer to Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama. Indeed, these three Buddhist luminaries share mutual respect and bonding through a history of solidarity.

Sulak founded the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) in 1989 with the support of the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, the late Maha Gosananda and the venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Engaged Buddhism is a transnational movement growing out of the personal friendships among these founders. Transnational affiliates of the network have participated in protest movements around the world, including the Occupy Wall Street Movement in 2011.

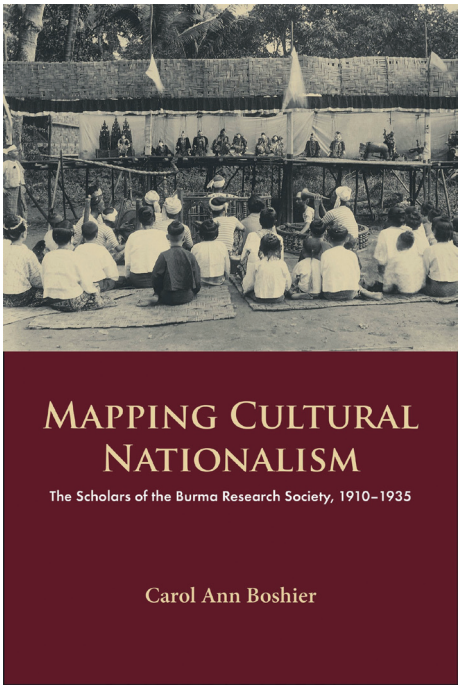
International political activism is a big and varied movement with many fellow travellers and bedfellows, espousing a wide range of political ideologies. They share a common method to achieve their objectives—mass street protests, civil disobedience, demonstrations and people's power—but their political ideologies range across the political spectrum from extreme left to extreme right. Most are committed to non-violent methods of protest, but their actions are vulnerable to infiltration by governmental front organisations, mercenaries, agent provocateurs, revolutionary groups and even terrorist sympathisers.

The fellow travellers of INEB include the Gandhian Peace Movement, the pacifist Quakers, the Tibetan Buddhist followers of the Tibetan Government in Exile, the Open Society Foundation of George Soros, and quasi-governmental organisations promoting "color revolutions" that have sprung up around the world since the Arab Spring of 2011.

Sulak's critical posture towards Thailand's junta and its allies caused him to be seen as a threat to the powers that be. Lèse-majesté charges were brought against him by the military authorities. With the passing of the Ninth Reign, the momentum of the lèse-majesté case against Sulak appeared to gather momentum. However, contrary to expectation, on 17 January 2018 the military prosecutors dropped all the charges against Sulak. Again, Sulak lived up to his reputation as a cat with nine lives, a survivalist.

Jeffery Sng

Mapping Cultural Nationalism: The Scholars of the Burma Research Society, 1910–1935 by Carol Ann Boshier. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2018. ISBN 978-87-7694-205-2 (hardback) £65, ISBN 978-87-7694-206-9 (paperback) £25 / 925 Baht



The Burma Research Society (BRS) was founded in 1910, six years after the Siam Society and partly inspired by it. John Furnivall, the colonial officer later famous for his theory of a "plural society," was given an early copy of *JSS* and thought Burma should have something similar. But the political context of the two societies and their respective journals were very different. Burma was a colonised country, with strict division between ruler and ruled. The Society was not allowed to emulate the Siamese version as "The Burma Society," and was banned from discussing or publishing anything about politics or economics.

In this book, descended from a SOAS doctoral thesis, Carol Boshier argues that the BRS offered one of few opportunities for "boundary-crossing" in this colonial context. She concentrates on the first quarter century of the BRS, through to 1935.

The first three chapters describe the foundation of the Society, its members and its activities. The members were drawn from officers of the colonial service, often mavericks, and the very thin ranks of English-speaking Burmese. Membership was small, peaking at 369 in 1922, and had declined to 176 by the mid-1930s. At the peak, fifty-five percent were Asian. The Society's *Journal of the Burma Research Society* (*JBRS*) published around thirty articles a year in its first decade, but the number declined to less than ten in the mid-1930s.

Five main chapters trace the aspirations and conflicts that lay behind this decline. Each chapter focuses on a single theme and a prominent scholar. The first of these chapters focuses on Furnivall and cultural nationalism. Furnivall, and others involved

in founding the BRS, believed that Burma had suffered a long-term decline. Colonial subjection was just the finale. They argued that Burma could be revived by a combination of cultural nationalism, founded on the rediscovery of the country's history and culture, and the "modernity" brought by Britain. They imagined a renascent "Burmese nation" within the framework of British colonial rule. Furnivall believed that a nation had to be a unity, in particular with a single ethnicity, a single history and a single religion. In Burma's case, that meant the Burman/Burmese (Bamar), the history of the lowland plain, with a focus on 11th century Pagan, and the religion of Theravada Buddhism.

However, like the rest of Southeast Asia, Burma did not match this simplified, European idea of a nation. It was a patchwork of ethnicities with a contested history and several religions. The unified cultural nationalism of the BRS founders quickly came under challenge. Furnivall drifted off to other ventures, and retired to Europe in 1931. His reaction to the criticisms of his cultural nationalism offers a fascinating preamble to his influential concept of a "plural society", which he developed after leaving Burma.

Furnivall's two early allies, Gordon Luce and Pe Maung Tin, are the focus of the next chapter on history. Through his extraordinary research in epigraphy, archaeology and manuscripts, Luce almost single-handedly created Pagan, and especially 11th century Pagan of King Anawrahta, as the "Golden Age" of Burmese history that could inspire the renascence of a Burmese nation. Luce denied in the thesis that anything great in historical Burma had come from India, and he saw off attempts to see a Chinese hand in Pagan's glory.

Buddhism was more difficult. In the colonial narrative, boosted by a mission lobby, Buddhism was seen as one major reason for Burma's decline. Through *JBRS*, Shwe Zan Aung argued that Theravada Buddhism was rational and intellectually robust enough to coexist with modernity and Western science, perhaps even better than Christianity could. Shwe Zan Aung became associated with Thomas and Caroline Rhys Davids of the Pali Text Society, and helped with their pioneering work in translating and publishing the Buddhist scriptures. But Shwe Zan Aung's proposition was fiercely attacked, not only from the Orientalist viewpoint that "East is East and West is West," but also by Burmese traditionalists, who suggested that the Pali Text Society was engaged in creating a Westernised simulacrum of "true" Buddhism. In this crossfire, Buddhism became the most popular subject for articles in *JBRS* for a time, but then faded almost completely in the 1930s, when political nationalism began to mobilise Buddhism, and the BRS debates became irrelevant.

In the mid-1920s, articles from upcountry authors equalled the number from Rangoon. San Shwe Bu was a member of the small and highly dominant landed and money elite in remote Arakan/Rakhine. He was also a self-motivated scholar, who monopolised the collection of historical and cultural source materials from his home province. He fell in with Maurice Collis, the official and writer, who sourced stories from San Shwe Bu when he launched his second career as an author. With some help from Collis, San Shwe Bu contributed nineteen articles on Arakan to *JBRS*. These articles offered an implicit challenge to Luce's unified history and the special prominence of Pagan. His scholarship came under attack, partly because he may have misrepresented some source materials. From the mid-1920s, he abandoned scholarship for politics.

A much more serious threat to the BRS theme of a unified nation came from Leslie Fernandez Taylor, who arrived in Burma as a school headmaster in 1915, and conceived the idea of replicating in Burma Grierson's monumental Linguistic and Ethnological Survey of India. The colonial government was interested in the project because it was extending its grip over the hill regions and was keen to know more about the people. However, the core supporters of the BRS theme of unified nationalism—Furnivall, Luce and Pe Maung Tin—understood the threat that such a survey offered. By now, they were in positions of some authority in the colonial structure, and quietly blocked the proposal for the survey until Taylor retired in disgust.

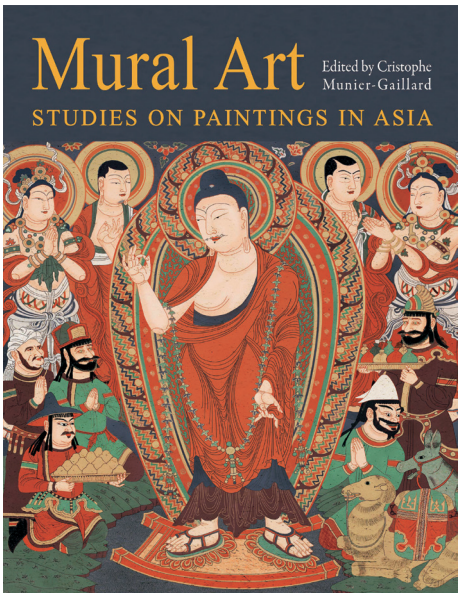
These internal disputes were partly the cause of the decline of the BRS in the 1930s, but the more important reason was the rise of political nationalism. Rangoon University opened in 1920, and the BRS stalwarts helped to design its courses to promote the "Imperial Idea" of a Burmese nation coexisting happily with colonial rule. However, from the beginning, the university was beset by protests and boycotts against this project. As Burmese political nationalism gathered momentum throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the BRS and its vision of a cultural nationalism within the imperial framework lost its appeal.

The BRS was a small, elitist organisation with a rather short heyday, but Boshier shows that it had a special importance in the history of knowledge. Perhaps its main legacy is the Text Publication Series, which published forty-six texts before the Second World War and thus made possible the study of Burmese history and culture at the university level. The works of Luce and Pe Maung Tin have lasting relevance.

Boshier's study ends in the 1930s. The BRS and its Journal continued to function until 1980 when Ne Win suppressed it (after a short period during which it was run by his wife). In recent years, there have been attempts to revive the Society and Journal, but the country's turbulent politics have stood in the way. Knowledge is always political.

Chris Baker

Mural Art: Studies on Painting in Asia, edited by Cristophe Munier-Gaillard, Bangkok: River Books, 2018. ISBN: 978 616 7339 96 2. 2,200 Baht.



This weighty book consists of ten superb essays, all written by eminent specialists in their respective fields and illustrated with magnificent photographs that include both sweeping panoramas and enlargements of exquisite details. The murals encompass a vast geographic, stylistic and sectarian range. Geographically, they extend from Afghanistan to China, Mongolia, Tibet, Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand; chronologically, from the 5th to the 18th century; doctrinally, they represent virtually every school of Buddhism. Packed with details, this is a book to be studied and savored, read and digested in small portions while absorbing the many stunning details of murals reproduced in it. The methodologies used by the authors are diverse, innovative, and in some cases groundbreaking with new information on the latest findings and research, along with many photos of murals that have never before been published. And some of the chapters have a fascinating backstory, telling for example of a remote cave that was unexpectedly rediscovered, or how murals were physically hacked out of temple walls or how a deadly palace duel led to the construction of a major temple.

The book begins with two chapters focusing on Afghanistan, the first of which is "*Parinirvāṇā* Scenes in Bāmiyān Murals: Transformation of Gandhāran Art in Central Asia" by Akira Miyaji. This distinguished senior scholar visited the site with archaeological missions in 1969, 1972, 1976 and 1978. Photos taken from those missions enrich the chapter, as more than half of the murals are no longer in existence, having been destroyed when the Taliban bombarded the two colossal Buddha images in March 2001. Since then, UNESCO and the Japanese Funds-in-Trust have preserved and restored the site, while scholars have carried out numerous projects.

The chronology of Bāmiyān cave art is difficult to determine because of the lack of inscriptions and historical sources apart from the reports of Chinese visitors: Xuanzang in the early 7th century and Huichao in the early 8th century. Consequently, studies of chronology depend on comparisons of details and decorative motifs with the arts of India and Central Asia as well as radiocarbon dating of fragments of straw, stucco, ropes and wooden joints used in the construction of the colossal Buddhas.

Miyaji, using plans, drawings and photographs gathered by the missions in which he participated along with radiocarbon data carried out after the site was restored, painstakingly compares mural depictions of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇā* in the Bāmiyān caves with Gandhāran reliefs and with murals in the Kizil and Dunhuang caves. He

concludes that these scenes at Bāmiyān were influenced to a certain degree by the murals in the Dunhuang and Kazil caves in western China.

In the second chapter on Afghanistan, "The Origins of the Earliest Buddhist Murals in Bāmiyān," Shumpei Iwai, a specialist in the archaeology of Central Asia and an associate curator at the Ryukoku Museum, examines what appears to be an inconsistency in the reported age of murals of two Bāmiyān caves (M and J) as determined by stylistic versus radiocarbon methods of dating. According to art historians, these murals date from the 8th century and thus they were thought to be the latest of the Bāmiyān murals; however, radiocarbon methods dated them to the late 5th-early 6th century. To solve this contradiction, the author closely examined the two caves in terms of square plan, scenes depicted, iconography and stylistic features and compared them with elements found on murals at Ajanta in northwestern India, schist reliefs in the Greater Gandhāran region, and murals in western China, including those at the Magao caves and cave no. 169 at Binglingsi. He concludes that cave M and J murals are the earliest at Bāmiyān and, like Miyaji in the previous chapter, sees certain influence from western China in these murals.

The third chapter, "Digital Reconstruction of the Mural Panels from Temple no. 15 at Bezeklik, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China" by Yoshihiro Okada and Takeshi Irisawa, features equally groundbreaking methodology. Both are affiliated with Ryukoku University: Okada as director of the Digital Archives Research Centre and Irisawa as director of the Ryukoku Museum. One of the main murals depicts Buddha Gautama's encounter with fifteen Buddhas while he was a Bodhisattva. Data was collected from the murals in situ as well as from those that had been removed from the temples by foreign archaeologists and explorers and taken to museums at the beginning of the 20th century. Here, the backstory is the shocking description of methods employed by German, Japanese, British and Russian expeditions to remove the murals: "knives were used to cut around the paintings, then pickaxes to create the spaces necessary to get the saws in" (p. 64). The panels were then cut into smaller pieces, placed in wooden cases and transported by camel and yak to railways where they were eventually taken to museums in St. Petersburg, Tokyo and New Delhi. Ironically, these efforts to save the murals ultimately led to the destruction of some of them during the bombing of the Second World War. Fortunately, however, many of the murals had been photographed and documented earlier. In 2003, these photos and documentation were digitized and incorporated into a virtual reconstruction of fifteen panels and the ceiling of the corridor of temple no. 15 at Bezeklik, by Ryukoku University in Kyoto. Through an elaborate process of creating a database of 100,000 fragments, the stunning partial replica that was built in the Ryukoku Museum allows visitors to see "what pilgrims could have seen thousand years earlier at Bezeklik" (p. 60).

Tibet is featured in the next three chapters, the first of which is "Mural Conservation in Tibet 1995-2007: Grathang, Shalu and Lukhang Conservation Projects" by Tibetologist and art historian Amy Heller, who carried out twenty research projects in Tibet from 1986 to 2007. This article documents three case studies of mural conservation projects in the Tibetan Autonomous Region that faced complex jurisdictional and bureaucratic impediments. The first was the 11th century Grathang, where in 1995, a project using

traditional Tibetan methods of waterproofing the roof resulted in extensive mud-spill on the murals. As of 2014, the murals were in "a critical situation." The second project involved the Shalu monastery, also founded in the 11th century, with murals added in the early 14th century. Here, the mural painting was becoming increasingly separated from the walls, and a conservation project proposed in 2000 never received a permit because of the many bureaucratic hurdles. Only after repeated attempts by resident monks, beginning in 2000 and by the author in 2004, was permission finally granted in 2005. Through traditional techniques using clay with vegetal fiber infill, the wall was reconsolidated, leaving it solid and the mural painting intact. The third involves the early 17th century Lukhan, with wall paintings added in the late 17th and the early 18th century. Paint loss, peeling and flaking resulting from humidity and water seepage led to the application of a thick coat of varnish to protect them. Although a project consisting of Tibetan and foreign conservators aimed at removing the varnish, studying the iconography of the murals and providing training was met with enthusiasm, numerous administrative issues regarding jurisdiction led to its delay. The varnish was left intact, and in 2005 a sheet of protective glass was set up in front of the murals.

The next two chapters concern murals of a cave in western Tibet first discovered in 1936 by Swiss geologist Augusto Gansser. "Late 13th Century Wall Paintings of Pang gra phug, a Cave in West Tibet. Iconography, Style and Similarities to the Luri *Stūpa* in Mustang" begins with the backstory of the cave's remarkable rediscovery "high up in the eroded flank of a mountain" in 2007 by the article's authors, Helmot F. and Heidi A. Neumann, on one of their annual trips to study art-historically important sites. Photos of the details of murals in this chapter are some of the most stunning in this book.

The temple is an almost square room, in which the wall facing the entrance is painted with four rows of figures: the top row consists of the thirty-five Buddhas of Compassion; the second row includes Prajnaparamita, the Seven Medicine Buddhas and Sakyamuni; the third row depicts Namasangangiti, Usnisavijaya, the Five Thathagatas, Sadaksari; and the fourth row consists of scenes from the life of the historical Buddha. The inscriptions and captions that accompany these scenes are translated by Kurt Tropper in the chapter that follows. The authors analyze the complex iconography and aesthetic characteristics of this site, comparing the figures here with those of the Luri cave in Mustang, 400 kilometers to the east as well as with 12th to 14th century *thangkas*. Patterns on the ceiling and top of the wall replicate textiles and valences hung on wooden temples, also found in Dunhuang caves. The authors conclude that the paintings in this cave reveal how West Tibetan artists created a new style based on elements from South Tibet, Nepal and Central Asia, demonstrating the close connections between these remote areas when this cave temple was created and the sophistication of its elaborate mural figures and decorative elements.

Translations of epigraphy that accompany the life of the Buddha murals in the above temple are presented in the next chapter, "Inscriptions, Captions and Murals of the Buddha-vita in Pang gra phug (mNga'ris, Western Tibet)" by Kurt Tropper, research fellow at the Austrian Academy of Sciences' Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia. His translations of the epigraphs, based on the Neumanns' photos, add a critical dimension to the study of this temple. Tropper differentiates two types

of epigraphs on the basis of their formats. "Captions," or short cues written above or below the scenes, are only one line long, written in prose, and serve mainly to identify the scenes. "Inscriptions" are longer, poetic in nature, and are found on panels integrated within the murals. Both give information about the life of the Buddha, identify the scene, and help the viewer decipher details. Tropper has mapped out the location of scenes, captions, and inscriptions; and meticulously transliterated the epigraphs while noting irregularities, insertions and intentional deletions.

In some cases the inscriptions add a tinge of local color to the narration of a scene, as in the case of the Bodhisattva's departure from the palace, which reads:

> After he had … seen the results of old age, sickness and death, his mind had been completely stunned, and (thus) in the presence of the gods, up in the sky, he cut off his dark blue hair in order to move beyond the three worlds. And on account of that auspicious one: may bliss and happiness come here today! (p. 132).

"The Story of the Buddha's Eyetooth Relics and Its Pagan Reception" by Lilian Handlin, historian and specialist in the material culture of Myanmar, provides insight into the reasons for the story's popularity in the premodern kingdom of Bagan (Pagan). Relics were viewed as sources of spiritual power worthy of worship as physical connections to the Buddha. In this meticulously detailed essay, Handlin traces the stories regarding relics, beginning with 11th century chronicles and Buddhist texts in conjunction with the appearance of relic veneration scenes and stūpas interwoven into paintings of scenes from the life of the Buddha and Jātakas. The essay is the only one in the book with a theoretical slant as it draws on David Shulman's work on the South Asian imagination (*More Real Than Real*, Harvard University Press, 2012), "suggesting that in Pagan the sense of the more-than-real being an extension of the real provided access to realms unreachable by other human senses…. Relic worship was efficacious precisely because this skill transcended the limits of the real…." (p. 149).

Early Myanmar chronicles speak of the four eyeteeth of the Buddha, one of which was said to have been enshrined in the underworld by *nagas*, another in the Culamani stūpa in Tavatimsa Heaven by Indra, and two more in the terrestrial world – one in Sri Lanka and the other in a land referred to as "Gandhāra." Stories abound about attempts to acquire the latter two, which were said to be unwilling to move, although the Sri Lankan relic was somehow acquired by King Anawratha with the help of Indra, and then multiplied itself, thereby supplying Pagan with four relics. Similarly, stories about the efforts of later kings to obtain and venerate relics materialized as did structures to hold these relics and paintings of such structures on the walls of still other structures. Eventually, paintings of eyetooth stūpas were intertwined with scenes from the life of the Buddha in grid format or tableau murals.

"Typology of 17th- and 18th-century Gold Murals in Myanmar" by Christophe Munier-Gaillard, who has lived in Thailand and Myanmar for over twenty years as a lecturer, interpreter and researcher, traces the chronology of gold murals based on an eight-year study of more than 100 temples. Five types of murals are identified. Type 1 consists of gold painting on the temples' back wall behind the seated Buddha

image. Painted against a red background are branches of the Bodhi tree, the Buddha's disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, and the deities Brahma and Sakka. To establish a chronology of these murals, the author analyzed the iconographic characteristics of elements of the deities' headdresses as well as Sakka's fly swatter. Type 2 murals consist of a small number of captioned registers of twenty-eight Buddhas or scenes of the life of the Buddha painted in gold. In Type 3, gold painting covers the entire inner surface of a temple. Type 4 concerns gold panels that are painted at the same monument with multicolored murals. In Type 5 murals, gold is used to highlight certain details of a composition, such as jewelry, headdresses, and umbrellas. This last group of murals, the author suggests, shows Siamese influence, and is possibly the work of Siamese painters captured after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767.

Chemical analysis at Ryukoku University of fragments from one of the temples dating from the late 18th century reveals that these "gold murals" were actually made with a high ratio of gold and suggests the need for similar analysis at the other monuments.

"At the Nexus of Power: Chinese Traces in the Heart of Wat Ratchaburana in Ayutthaya" is a description and analysis of materials found in a crypt built into the walls inside the temple's main tower. The author, art historian Pattaratorn Chirapravati, has written extensively on Thai material culture and the political usage of icons. The backstory of the temple's construction by King Borommaracha II includes the fact that the monument is located at the cremation site of his two brothers, who were killed in a duel for the throne following their father's death in 1424. The reference to the temple's construction in the Royal Chronicles provides a useful chronological benchmark in dating the recovered materials, which include assorted costumes, jewelry and royal regalia, as well as sculptures and Buddhist votive tablets, many of the latter with Chinese inscriptions. On the walls of the crypt are murals considered to be among the oldest existing Thai paintings, which were deliberately hidden from view. While only sketchy lines remain, Pattaratorn's insightful descriptions and Munier-Gaillard's impeccable photos of the murals enable us to imagine what they must have looked like originally. The murals are found on the walls of the crypt's two levels. Level II (the lower level) murals feature partial scenes from Jātakas and events in the life of the Buddha. Murals on the north and west walls of Level I depict Thai-style figures resembling those in the reliefs in the Wat Si Chum tunnel in Sukhothai. Murals on the south and east walls, however, depict Chinese male figures flanked by guardians and children as well as sketchy outlines of jars, containers of food and traces of undecipherable Chinese characters.

In this way the murals and the objects found in the crypt serve as an accidental time capsule, shedding light on Chinese influence at the court and Ayutthaya's prominence as a cosmopolitan city. At the same time, they raise intriguing questions about royal funerary practices, the reason for the appearance of undecipherable Chinese-style characters and whether Chinese customs of feeding the dead were incorporated into practices here.

The final chapter of the book, "Pe har and Oracle Deities in Mongolia: Paintings of the Five Kings in Yeke juu Monastery of Hohhot" by Isabelle Charleux, presents a detailed examination of the protector deities depicted on the interior of this temple. The

Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China, near the Sino-Mongol border where the temple is located, was an active site of mural painting from the late 16th to the 19th century. Standing in sharp contrast with the delicate line remnants of figures seen in the previous chapter, the paintings here include ferocious-looking beings with vigorous postures and fierce facial expressions. Many look directly at the viewer, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, ready to defend the dharma or the Buddhas that are represented by statues in front of the murals. They include the Five Kings – the five manifestations of Pe har in the Tibeto-Mongolian pantheon. While the iconography of the figures is Tibetan, the colors, stylistic features, clothing and decorative elements are Chinese.

Charleux, who has written extensively on numerous aspects of Mongol material culture, is director of research at the CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research) in Paris. In this essay she relates the intricate process in which a Tibetan oracle god was transformed into a popular Mongolian deity in 18th and 19th century Mongolia. Pe har is a ferocious deity with a complex history. In the Tibeto-Mongolian pantheon, he is the head of the worldly protectors who have not yet reached enlightenment and thus cannot help devotees to do so, but can give advice and predictions through a medium. Charleux analyzes the figures in the murals and their organization primarily from her own excellent photos, comparing them with several *thangkas*, statues, and accounts of the activities of oracles.

She points out that Pe har's cult developed in Tibet "long before the Mongols appear on the historical scene" (p. 211), despite the assertion of modern Mongol scholars that he was originally a Mongol deity. She concludes, saying: "the cult of Pe har as protector of the first Mongol monastic communities was promoted by the Third Dalai Lama and adopted by 16th-century Mongols" (p. 240). Moreover, even four centuries later in many monasteries, he and his four emanations continued to speak through oracles "up to the first decades of the 20th century" (p. 240).

After reading these brilliant essays, I am left with feelings of awe and gratitude to the authors for what they have accomplished through long years of research and shared in this book. Through their descriptions, analyses and photographs, they have brought to life so many diverse aspects of Buddhist art and practice, often in places where Buddhism no longer exists. I can only hope that my brief summaries of the chapters have done justice to the excellence of their contributions.

In addition, the volume editor, Cristophe Munier-Gaillard, is to be congratulated for bringing together this exceptional panel of scholars as are all of those who worked behind the scenes as well as the River Books team. This book is the product of a labor of love and time, originally intended to be a biyearly journal that ended up taking seven years to complete. The energy invested in it is inspiring while the beauty, delicacy and energy that radiate throughout the paintings reflect both the diversity of Buddhist teachings and their exquisite ways of expression.

Bonnie Pacala Brereton