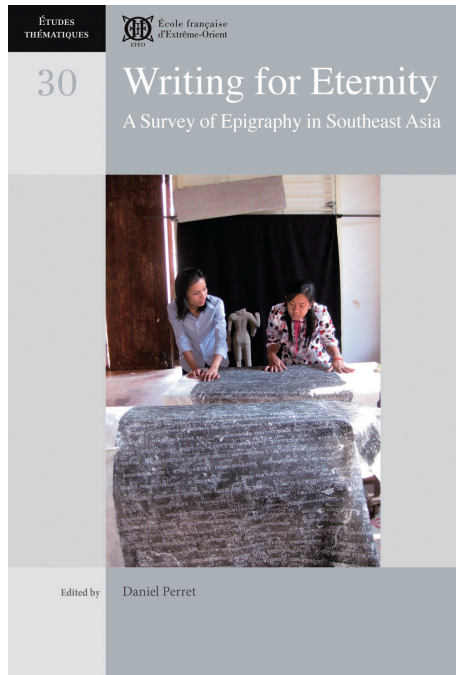


*Writing for Eternity: A Survey of Epigraphy in Southeast Asia* edited by Daniel Perret (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, Études Thématiques 30, 2018). ISBN 978-2-85539-150-2. €40.



This book is a collection of articles relating to inscriptions and epigraphic studies in Southeast Asia, composed primarily in English with some articles in French. The volume includes eighteen articles, authored by seventeen scholars, with an informative introduction by Daniel Perret, the editor. This publication followed a workshop held in Malaysia in 2011; a few scholars not present at the workshop were invited to contribute articles. This book is not a comprehensive look at inscriptions of Southeast Asia through a single lens, but rather a collective volume by scholars presenting overviews of inscriptions in their areas of expertise. The texts are followed by a combined bibliography, an index, abstracts of the articles, and short biographies of each author. The bibliography alone is a valuable resource for those interested in epigraphy in Southeast Asia, although it does

not include all publications dealing with inscriptions found in the region. Moreover, this volume includes numerous color photographs throughout.

The book is divided into three parts: inscriptions in Indian scripts and local variants, inscriptions in Chinese script, and inscriptions in Arabic and Arabic-derived scripts. Greater emphasis is given to Indian and Indic-derived scripts, totaling thirteen articles. Two articles present Chinese script inscriptions and three articles deal with inscriptions in Arabic and Arabic-derived scripts. This bias toward Indian and Indic-derived scripts is logical, as the overwhelming majority of inscriptions throughout Southeast Asia were in ancient scripts from India or were Southeast Asian scripts derived from these Indian models. As Perret notes (p.13), there have been two centuries of research on inscriptions in Indic-derived scripts in Southeast Asia, most notably by Dutch and French scholars. This book is therefore also intended as a survey of this literary heritage, which is useful because few young Southeast Asian scholars are able to read European languages such as French, Dutch, or German.

In the first part, articles are organized based on country or region, roughly arranged as Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and then Maritime Southeast Asia, with special focus given to Java and Sumatra. The first article, by Tilman Frasch, addresses the status of epigraphic studies in Myanmar. He notes that, in addition to the Burmese language, inscriptions in Myanmar have also been found written in Mon, Pyu, Pāli, Sanskrit, and Tamil. Frasch provides an overview of these inscriptions, found primarily on stone artifacts, metal artifacts such as religious images and bells, and also ink-painted

inscriptions. Frasch also describes the history of epigraphic studies in Myanmar from past to present, with a note about future studies. Next, Kyaw Minn Htin and Jacques P. Leider provide a survey of the epigraphic archive of Arakan/Rakhine State in Myanmar. These inscriptions are mostly written in Arakanese or Sanskrit. Inscriptions in this region have also been found written in Mon, Pyu, Pāli, Persian, and Arabic. Htin and Leider note that most inscriptions from Arakan have not been properly published in English, and they emphasize the need for additional research in this area.

The following articles expand to inscriptions in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.

Michel Lorrillard provides a survey of inscriptions in Laos. He notes an apparent lack of scholarly interest in Laos overall, due in part to the false narrative that there is little historical evidence in Laos compared with other areas of Mainland Southeast Asia. Lorrillard explains this lack of scholarship as having been compounded by the difficulty in transportation around the country, and insufficient collaboration between relevant heritage organizations within the country. In addition to the Lao language, inscriptions in Laos are also found written in Khmer and Mon. The majority of these are found in the central and southern provinces of the country, particularly in areas near to the Mekong River, and illustrate the historical relations of these regions with ancient cultures in what is now Cambodia and the Korat Plateau of Thailand. Khmer and Mon language texts predate those in Lao, many of which are found on artifacts dating to these earlier periods. Following this, Peter Skilling provides a bibliography of literary sources relating to epigraphy in Thailand. This includes numerous texts written in both English and Thai, for which Skilling provides the original Thai form. He gives a brief overview of the origin of each series listed and the breadth of material presented in the volumes.

Marek Buchmann draws attention to the Northern Thai stone inscriptions of the Lan Na kingdom, dating to the middle portion of the second millennium. He begins with an overview of the geography of northern Thailand and a description of the history and more ancient inscriptions, before going on to discuss languages and scripts. Buchmann describes earlier research on inscriptions in the region, then presents details of northern Thai texts. Next, Christian Bauer provides an overview of inscriptions written in Mon language, which have been found in Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. Mon inscriptions have been found in relatively limited numbers, and are restricted to certain areas of these countries, i.e. mostly in Lower Myanmar and the region of Bagan, in the central, northeastern, and northern regions of Thailand, and lowland regions of Laos. Bauer provides a linguistic explanation of Mon orthography, an overview of the principal types of artifacts on which Mon inscriptions have been found, and a summary of where these artifacts are located today. The article also covers earlier scholarship on Mon inscriptions.

The two following articles deal with Khmer language inscriptions. Dominique Soutif discusses the corpus of Khmer inscriptions, including a summary of the creation of the corpus, as well as descriptions of how data is collected and organized. Soutif provides information on the present location of the main collections of ink rubbings, as well as recent publications regarding Khmer inscriptions and information on the corpus which is accessible online. In the following article, Julia Estève explains the results of a project mapping locations in the ancient Khmer realm based on knowledge gained from inscriptions. Sanskrit and Khmer language inscriptions in Cambodia were studied

closely to identify terminology referencing geographic features, with attempts made to match ancient place names and actual geographic features, with particular focus on religious sites, contextualized using GIS technology to create a topographic atlas.

The remainder of the first part of the volume deals with Maritime Southeast Asia.

Daniel Perret gives a survey of inscriptions in Maritime Southeast Asia in Indian or Indic-derived scripts. He presents the history of scholarship relating to inscriptions, including Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines. Titi Surti Nastiti follows with an article presenting her study of the Watu Sima inscriptions in Java. She explains that these *sīma* stones, or boundary markers, are also modeled after the Śiva liṅga, and serve to indicate territory privileged to religious institutions. She presents several inscriptions, providing transcriptions and translations, followed by an analysis putting the inscriptions into context. Hadi Sidomulyo deals with a similar topic but approaches it from a different angle, describing *sīma* territories in Java during the Majapahit Period based on inscriptions. He relates four distinct regions, based on four different inscriptions, providing dates and describing the extent of each territory. His highly detailed analysis includes numerous place names and references to other inscriptions, as well as maps of the four regions and appendices of the inscriptions reviewed. Next, another article by Daniel Perret explains the development of a corpus of inscriptions in Sumatra. The focus is again on the scholarly literature regarding inscriptions in the island, according to geographic regions and river basins. The first part of the volume concludes with an article by Arlo Griffiths exploring the corpus of Old Malay language inscriptions, which have been found across a wide geographic area, including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and possibly one from Singapore. These inscriptions appear not to have received the attention some might assume they deserve, considering the importance of the Malay language especially in Malaysia and Indonesia. Griffiths provides transcriptions and translations of a few inscriptions as examples, and includes a provisional inventory of Old Malay inscriptions.

The second part of the volume covers inscriptions in Chinese characters. Claudine Salmon provides an overview of Chinese epigraphic sources throughout Southeast Asia, and describes the works of groups of epigraphers, including Europeans, Japanese, Chinese, and local Southeast Asian scholars, in particular the Vietnamese. Salmon then gives a chronological overview of Chinese script inscriptions, followed by a consideration of the historic value of these texts and possible directions for future studies. Philippe Papin presents Chinese script inscriptions in Vietnam. Apparently these originally numbered in the tens of thousands, but following long periods of war in the region, a number of these are now missing, only known by the ink rubbings. Nearly all of the known Chinese script inscriptions from Vietnam date to the latter half of the second millennium.

The third part of the volume deals with inscriptions in Arabic and Arabic-derived scripts. Claude Guillot describes Muslim inscriptions in Southeast Asia. These are largely found in Maritime Southeast Asia, primarily on stone or glass. The majority are funerary inscriptions or gravestones, with another prominent type regarding the foundation of Mosques. Guillot also provides an overview of when and how Islam spread to Southeast Asia. In the following article, Ludvik Kalus discusses Islamic inscriptions in Southeast Asia during the 14th-15th centuries CE. Islamic inscriptions in the region

number well over five hundred. In addition to the lithic funerary inscriptions, less common types of artifacts are made from copper or bronze. Kalus goes on to mention numerous inscriptions and discuss some of the accounts learned from these texts. In the final chapter, Roderick Orlina presents Sulu relic inscriptions from the Philippines. Many Islamic inscriptions in the Philippines were not preserved, due to the religious biases of the colonial Spanish authorities; areas where Islamic inscriptions are better preserved were in locations beyond the effective control of the colonial power. Regional genealogies were often copied and at times embellished for political purposes. Orlina provides two examples of gravestone inscriptions, one written in Arabic language, the other in Arabic and Sanskrit, but both inscriptions use the Arabic script.

In conclusion, this book provides a wealth of knowledge within a single volume. Some aspects of inscriptions in Southeast Asia are however not included. For example, the section on inscriptions in Indic-derived scripts do not deal with Campā inscriptions in Vietnam or Thai language inscriptions of Sukhothai or Ayutthaya. But overall this volume is a valuable addition to scholarship. No such overview of Southeast Asian epigraphic studies previously existed. This volume presents Southeast Asian epigraphy as a distinct and dynamic field of academic scholarship. Epigraphy is a difficult subject because it requires extensive knowledge of scripts and languages which are quite different from those in use today. This volume may stimulate more students to explore this realm, which has potential to reveal much new understanding about ancient Southeast Asia.

Hunter I. Watson