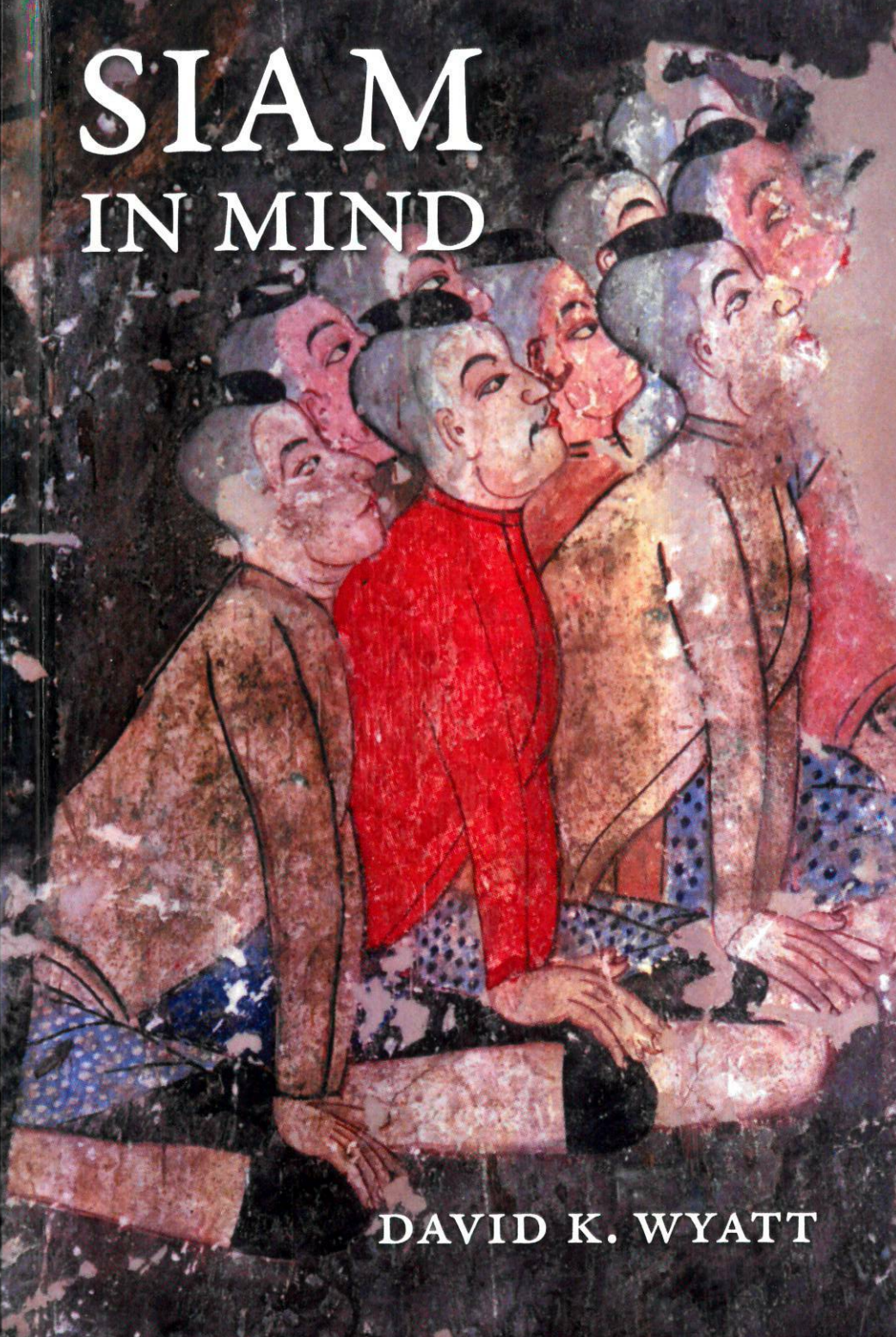


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to

Alene
Douglas
Andrew
James
John
Dick
Debbie
Penny

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PREFACE

In early 2001, I attended a workshop in the Netherlands, and my paper for that occasion was distributed in advance like all the others, dealing with the definition of Southeast Asia. On my first night in Amsterdam, I suffered badly from every traveler's nightmare, and jet-lag awakened me at 3 A.M. As I lay sleeplessly awake, I decided that the paper I had written was inadequate, so I set about composing in my head an alternative paper. Twelve hours later, I delivered that alternate paper, basically arguing something like the Introduction to this volume.

A few days later, settling in to my airline seat for the trans-Atlantic trip, I decided to put my late-night ideas to the test, and in the next few hours I sketched a rough outline of what I hope amounts to something like an intellectual history of Thailand. My long-suffering publisher and good friend, Trasvin Jittidecharak, kindly agreed to let me put aside the book I had promised to write for her, and to write this one instead.

Many of the chapters in this volume might seem familiar to readers. That is because I continue to be puzzled and preoccupied by many things that have persisted over the years. On occasion I have copied quotations, but I always have refrained from quoting myself. And I should say something about the style of scholarship in this volume. I have been less rigorous in scholarly attribution of evidence than I would have preferred. Much of what I say is there

as my opinion. I have been liberal in allowing my imagination to run freely, and I have stuck my neck out on a few points. Some things I have said might get me into trouble, and a few might even get me shot at. So be it. I certainly no longer have any illusions about my mortality.

I am indebted to the organizers of the Dutch workshop, Remco Rabin and Henk Schulte Nordholt, for their patience and understanding, and also for many old friends who were there, and were always good company. In particular, Baas Terwiel, Bernhard Dahm, Wim Wolters, Robert Cribb, and Han ten Brummelhuis. Many of them, in addition to providing good company, also took turns at pushing my wheelchair over the mercifully level streets of Amsterdam.

It has been genuine fun writing this book. I am grateful to those I could persuade to read and comment on these chapters, and also to those who could put up with my distraction. Here I am especially grateful to Tamara Loos, Barbara Andaya, David Chandler, David Joel Steinberg, and Tracie Matysik.

I remain eternally grateful to the doctors who saved my life in the first half of 1999, especially Adam Law and David Schwed. I could not have survived without them and without Alene, our three sons, and my two brothers and two sisters.

David K. Wyatt
Lansing, New York
6 August 2001

1 INTRODUCTION

WE ARE TOLD THAT JUST ABOUT EVERY REGION OF the world that is written about has an intellectual history. We are not always told how that term might be defined, but we are assured that the region's people had great thoughts that have enriched the world. This seems to have been said about nearly every part of the world except Southeast Asia. Lacking any "intellectual history," the people of Southeast Asia, historians seem to be telling us, did not think, as if they somehow lacked mental capacity, or were occupied instead with more mundane affairs. Is it possible that, if "intellectual history" is the study of thought and the products of thought, then the people of Southeast Asia did not think? Can this be true?

I have been trying since at least 1977 to argue the contrary; but I am left thinking that perhaps no one has been paying any attention. This slim book is an effort to try to argue the contrary, at least for Siam or Thailand. If it does not meet the usual definitions of what "intellectual history" might be, it might instead be considered to be social history or cultural history, but in some way

1. David K. Wyatt, "Reflections on the Intellectual History of Pre-Modern Southeast Asia," *Proceedings Seventh LAHA Conference, 22-26 August 1977*, Bangkok (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1977), II, pp. 1576-1590; *Moral Order and the Question of Change: Essays on Southeast Asian Thought* (ed. David K. Wyatt and Alexander Woodside; New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).

it has to do with what was going on inside the heads of a particular widely-defined group of Southeast Asians. I should hasten to add that similar books could be written about every region of Southeast Asia. I am not trying to write such a book because work like that is heavily dependent upon language skills which I lack.

"Intellectual history" as I have been defining it here has not merely to do with the history of "great thoughts" by "great thinkers." All kinds of thinking were being done by very ordinary people. Some of them were so "ordinary" that their names are not recorded, and in some cases their thoughts have become integrated into the everyday thinking of whole societies.

As mentioned earlier, "intellectual history" is the study of thought, and products of thought, through time. It is best defined to include not only the work of intellectuals, but also the thinking of all sorts of people. This book is intended to sample all kinds of thought over the past 1300 years, in many different regions of what we think of today as Thailand. I have tried to touch upon political and religious thought, but also upon such "artistic" thought as that demonstrated in novels, paintings, and historical writing. It includes both people whom we might think of as conservative and royalist, and also those who usually are thought of as non-conforming.

The emphasis, of course, is on what we might think of as intellectual; but at the same time I have tried to give the book a "spine" of historical comprehensiveness, so that most periods since about the ninth century are at least summarized. A more full historical sequence can be obtained by a reading of some more general account of Thai history, including the most recent edition of my somewhat misnamed *Thailand: A Short History* (Yale University Press and Silkworm Books, 1984).

“SILVER BULLET”

IN THE EARLY MONTHS OF THE YEAR 802, A PARTY of Cambodian men assembled atop a small mountain to the north of present-day Siem Reap and Angkor. Chief among this group was a man whom we would later know as Jayavarman II, who ruled over Angkorean Cambodia from 802 to 850 or thereabouts.

About this man and his friends we know little. We do know that he and (presumably) others were captured and taken as captives or hostages to the island of Java (which may be in present-day Indonesia) several decades earlier. Around 770, he made his way back to the lower regions of the Mekong River north of Prei Ving where he had relatives and friends, and where he was able to gather a group of followers and advisers. These he won to his side by proving his abilities as a leader, and by granting some of them lands and administrative power. Chief among these was a (non-Indian) Brahman called Sivakaivalya, who became his chaplain and chief among his advisers. Together, this group soon raided first the towns along the lower Mekong, next the towns to the northwest of the Great Lake (Tonle Sap), and then just east of that point, near and to the east of Angkor.¹

1. I rather like the account by Claude Jacques (Cologne: Köndmann, 1999), pp. 43–44.

2. Perhaps Prasat Khna in Mlu Prei.

Jayavarman must have known that political chaos and incessant warfare had contributed to the region's weakness, and had brought about his own capture and exile to Java. At the same time, he might have been discouraged by the fact that many small principalities still lay unconquered to the north of the escarpment (that today marks the northern frontier of Cambodia). Unceasing warfare seemed still to surround him.

We don't know who got the word first—whether it was Jayavarman II or Sivakaivalya, or some other among the young king's advisors. But some among them heard that there was some learned man away off in the extreme northeast. That man was called Hirañadâma—literally "Silver Arrow," but we might refer to him as "Silver Bullet," after the ordnance used to slay malevolent creatures. "Silver Bullet" was offering such magic, at what price we do not know. He offered to teach Jayavarman II's chaplain some secret magic incantations that would make the king superior to all other kings on earth, including even the rulers of Java. This would have amounted to a breakthrough, and Jayavarman could hardly resist. A meeting was arranged for the summit of Phnom Kulen, just north of the location of Angkor.

At the appointed time, Hirañadâma arrived, probably alone, from Janapada, far away in the northeast. As a later inscription explains,

Then a brahman named Hiranyadama, an expert in magical science, came from Janapada³ because His Majesty Para-meshvara had invited him to accomplish a supplementary ceremony so as to make it impossible for this country of Kambuja to be dependent

3. A Universal Monarch, one whom all other kings must acknowledge as

on Java; and to assert the existence of only one absolutely unique master over the land, who would be a cakravartin.³

He brought in his head, but not in his hands, four texts, the contents of which he taught for the memorization of Sivakaivalya. We might imagine that he recited these aloud, line by line, until the chaplain had memorized their whole. We might imagine that, at the same time, Sivakaivalya consecrated a small, portable bronze image that was to be the repository of the chants' words. And we are later told that wherever the king and his successors went, there the image (and the chants) went also.

We are never told that, when all was finished, "Silver Bullet" returned to Janapada. Nor are we told that "Silver Bullet" received any gift or payment for his services. We are left to conclude that, when the ceremony was concluded, "Silver Bullet" was killed. The manuscripts on which he had based his work disappeared, one of which was discovered by Teun Goudriaan only in the 1970s.⁴

The significance of what "Silver Bullet" did is that he seems to have inaugurated the formalities which made a king into a *devaraja*. And the importance of the *devaraja* idea is that it augmented a widespread cultural pattern in Southeast Asia which exaggerated the concept of royalty, making it possible to have only one "king" per realm, just as a family could have only one head, and even twins could not be equals and one had to be senior to the other.

superior.

4. Teun Goudriaan, *The inasikhatantra* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), pp. 4-7. I am grateful to Wynn Willcox for finding this rare text and outlining its significance for me.

The other surprising thing about "Silver Bullet" and Janapada has to do with where this *devaraja* ceremony took place. Recent research shows not only that the Phnom Kulen mountain top was among other things a Buddhist site which had been consecrated for such rituals as ordinations, but also that the boundary stones implanted to delimit such ceremonies were very similar to such boundary stones (*sima*) as those known from Müang Fa Dæt in Kamalasai district of Kalasin province.⁵



Plates 1a & b Buddhist boundary stones from Müang Fa Dæt (left, photo Wyatt 1962) and from Phnom Kulen (right, from Boulbet and Dagens)

5. J. Boulbet and B. Dagens, *Les sites archeologiques de la région du Bham Gulen* (Phnom Kulen) (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1973), p. 51, fn. 1.

WHY MIGHT the Phnom Kulen boundary stones have been like the Müang Fa Dæt stones? The most logical way of explaining this is to suggest that both were on important overland trading and communications routes. In this case, it might be equally interesting to see whether the concept of the *devaraja* was moving along these routes as well as the sculpting and statuary of Buddhist boundary stones. As we move in time down to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, let's look for these.

Under ordinary circumstances, we would naturally divide history into "national" units; and the "Silver Bullet" story related above would be considered as a natural part of the history of Cambodia—or earlier, as part of the history of the kingdom of Angkor. But what happens when we include the Müang Fa Dæt element? We might suppose that the episode does not become a part of the history of Thailand until the Kamalasai area becomes a part of Thailand, after about 1777.

This still is not a very satisfactory solution. There is a better way of thinking about it. We might begin by thinking of the various ways in which different activities defined "zones" into which the landscape might have been divided. We might begin with economic exchanges, moving imported luxuries as well as imported ideas and fashions from the region at the head of the Gulf of Siam in northerly and northeasterly directions, traversing the Khorat Plateau and the Kalasin region, and converging on the Nakhon Phanom region. Gathering also the ceramics of the Songkhram River basin, traders went from there across the Mekong and up the Ca Dinh River to the Mu Gia Pass over the mountains to the Vinh area of central Vietnam. Salt and dried fish might also have been traded along this route, as also some metals (copper and tin), medicinals, and aromatic woods.

It is important to imagine this middle Mekong region not as some empty space in between more active and economically rich areas, but as a region rich and important in its own right. After all, though some people might have profited from the carrying trade, moving commodities from one region to another, empty regions were not going to be major importers of religious ideas or builders of important religious monuments, the ruins of which dot the entire region.

Once we have in mind a more richly-textured image of the central portions of Indochina, including the Khorat Plateau, we are in a better position to imagine the movement of imported religious ideas, and art, and social organization. All three of these elements are pointed to by the Müang Fa Dæt and the Phnom Kulen sculptures. This was not simply a Khmer, or a Thai, or a Lao, zone. There were Vietnamese and Chinese, Mon and Indians, and numerous other ethnic groups present. So long as there were incentives for people to move about, then people—both men and women—were moving, and in the process their movement was enriching the life of the region.

3 RELICS

BY THE TWELFTH CENTURY, SHIPS WERE MOVING directly across the Bay of Bengal between ports on the Malay Peninsula and ports in southern India and adjacent parts of the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka). They may have been carrying some commodities like gold, ceramics, and rare spices, or carrying out piratical raids, but they also were often carrying, in both directions, men bound on religious missions. As they had for several centuries, they may have been carrying what amounted to Buddhist missionaries, but increasingly they were carrying young Buddhist monks from Southeast Asia intending to study and be re-ordained in Sri Lanka. Some of these were to become established in Sri Lanka as famous scholars who wrote texts to be studied in the Buddhist world for some centuries—monks like Dhammakitti, author of an important history of a tooth-relic of the Lord Buddha. Most, however, soon returned to Southeast Asia with a renewed commitment to Buddhism and a heightened appreciation of its doctrines.

Travelers, merchants, and monks probably sailed directly across the Bay of Bengal from Sri Lanka (Ceylon) to the port of Trang. There they were loaded onto elephants, or joined horse caravans, for the gentle trip overland through the lush forests to Nakhon Si Thammarat on the west coast of the Gulf of Siam. Rather than take the long trail by land to the Central Plain of Siam,



Plate 2 Sailing ship depicted on stone relief at Buddhist monument of Borobudur, on Java (photo Wyatt 1991)

they probably yet again embarked by ship to a port in the region of Ratchaburi. As late as the twelfth century, what later became the Central Plain was still flooded, and they probably continued by water up the Tha Chin River, perhaps with an added cargo of dried fish or salt. By the time they joined the Chaophraya River around Chainat they probably transferred to smaller, rowed boats to continue up the Nan River to Phitsanulok or up the Yom River to Sukhothai.

Chief among the commodities moving along these and other trails in the twelfth century was Buddhism. It would be a mistake, however, to think of this simply as the transfer of religious ideas. In addition to religion, Buddhism also brought with it the “latest” ideas of science, law, medicine, the letters, and so forth; and these moved as quickly as they did because

they were coming into an area where Indic ideas were long established. For example, most of this region had devised its calendars and established its New Year (early, around the end of March by the Western calendar) using Indian methods that were much more accurate than the Western calendar until the shift was made from Julian to Gregorian reckoning in 1582.

Though by the 1180s King Jayavarman VII of Angkor might still be styled a *devaraja* and upheld a state religious system that centered on Shiva and Vishnu, and though at times he seemed to uphold Mahayana Buddhist deities, the Angkorean kings seriously underestimated the Theravada Buddhist belief and piety of increasing numbers of their subjects through much of what is now Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. The most powerful of the ideas streaming into the region with Buddhism was a strict and persistent morality. Buddhism brought with it the idea that none but the moral and the holy might dare to touch—let alone to handle—the bodily relics of the Lord Buddha, such as a tooth or a fragment of bone (and the Buddha was thought to have been divided into 84,000 relics upon the end of his earthly existence).¹

This was a period of rapid economic and social change. Long-lived power and prosperity had encouraged the growth and development of trading routes that criss-crossed mainland Southeast Asia and knit it to many of the lands and islands to the south and east. These especially connected the sources of numerous goods with the areas in which they were purchased, consumed, and used. These might have included the slaves, precious metals, and forest products of what is now southern Laos;

1. This idea is expanded at length in my "Relics, Oaths, and Politics in Thirteenth-Century Siam," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32:1 (February 2001), 3–66.

the luxury manufactured goods, including porcelain and damask, of what is now northern Vietnam; rarer metals common to (now) central Laos and the Phetchabun valley; the fine ceramics of the north; foodstuffs and tin from the Malay Peninsula; and so forth.

Many people were profiting from the surge in local and international trade. The most visible among these were the Chinese who may have run the north-south trade up and down the Tha Chin River, moving foodstuffs up the river and fine ceramics down it and abroad. Toward the end of this period they were moving to open a new overland trade to what was then southern Vietnam, over the mountains to Vinh via the middle Mekong. They were supported by the indigenous elite of the Yom and Nan River valleys, many of whom gained formal titles from the Angkorean kings, and even swore oaths in allegiance to them. Below them were the foremen who organized labor to fire the kilns and shape the pottery. All benefited from an inflow of labor from further north, in particular from the Kok River basin inland from Chiang Sæn and the upper Wang River basin of the Phayao and Phræ regions. The rich communities around them could afford the construction and maintenance of large, impressive religious buildings, which initially had been dedicated to the Hindu gods, but toward 1200 came to be Buddhist. Monks came to be trained, and embarked on pilgrimages to institutions of the middle peninsula and even to faraway Ceylon.

The young monks returned from their travels with heightened piety, with sprouts of the bodhi tree under which the Buddha had been enlightened, and even in a few rare cases with relics of the Buddha Himself. People soon came to know that only the most pious among men could dare even to touch the relics, lest they and their communities be afflicted with terrible ills.

Shortly after the year 1200 there were several documented cases where ambitious rulers, confident of their high morality and buttressed by public approbation, dared to dig up or enshrine the relics.

There was much ferment in the region at the northern end of the Central Plain around 1220, and also in the far North (at Haripuñjaya), and there may also have been much at the head of the Gulf of Siam and in the region of Nakhon Si Thammarat. It may have been simultaneous by coincidence, or it may all have stemmed from similar developments. Our best guess would be that a flurry of activities involving Buddha relics (Haripuñjaya and Phræ around 1220) and the ceramics trade (the Ratchaburi region) and relations with Sri Lanka had common origins in a spurt in the international trade in ceramics which involved religious contacts across the Bay of Bengal. Ultimately the most important common thread that linked these developments was psychological and intellectual: rulers who embraced Theravâda Buddhism and at the same time built religious monuments involving bodily relics of the Lord Buddha were asserting their own self-confidence in their Buddhist morality, which soon would lead them to challenge the erstwhile rulers of the region in Angkor. In the short run, their self-confidence might have taken local expression, but by mid-century they were engaging and defeating Angkor's armies.

From perusing the written sources, whether stone inscriptions or Chinese records, you might never guess what was going through contemporary minds as the thirteenth century wore on. We do know enough, however, to be able to imagine what they might have been thinking. We know that this must have been an age that was in some ways quite frightening. The Mongols were in the process of conquering China, and soon

moved to attack Vietnam and even to send a naval force against Java, as well as an invasion of inland Burma from Yunnan by the 1290s. Meanwhile, the kingdom of Angkor was issuing the last of its Sanskrit-language inscriptions and building among the last of its large stone monuments. To the ethnic and linguistic potpourri of central Indochina were added now many tens and even hundreds of thousands of Tai peoples, moving both southward from Yunnan and northern Laos, and southwestward from what is now northern Vietnam and adjacent portions of Laos.

What gave the Tai peoples some of their identity and self-confidence was their ability to handle the new economic production and marketing that surrounded (female-made) textiles and ceramics, and the experience that came from widespread (male) education and (male) participation in the life of the Buddhist monkhood. It was this self-confidence that, by the middle of the thirteenth century, gave them the self-confidence needed to challenge the Angkorean Empire and to win their independence. We don't know the dates when all this happened, but it probably included Sukhothai around 1247, Nakhon Si Thammarat by mid-century, Haripuñjaya by the 1270s, Chiang Mai and Chiang Sæn by the 1290s, and Nan sometime during this period. Luang Prabang and some places on the Khorat Plateau were to follow by the middle of the next century.

These "rebellions" are often referred to as the actions of the Tai or Thai; but were they really? Many of the places mentioned seem to have had populations that consisted of a variety of different ethnicities. In general, those towns east and south of a line stretching from Luang Prabang to Kanchanaburi were ethnically and linguistically more mixed than those places further north and west, and it would be legitimate to associate

“rebellion” against Angkor with intellectual and economic considerations like religion and ceramics, rather than with ethnic and linguistic considerations.



Plate 3 That Phanom monument. From book by the same name, Bangkok: Muang Boran, n.d., frontispiece.

NAKHON PHANOM

ALREADY WE HAVE ENCOUNTERED THE MEKONG River valley several times in connection with the early history of Siam, and we shall soon meet it again. But in treating the early history of Siam, it is customary to find scant references to the Mekong valley before the Bangkok period. What is the point now of mentioning it earlier?

Though there are exceptions,¹ it is usual to include the northeastern part of Siam in the history of Laos until the French took over Laos in 1893, and only to include it in Siam/Thailand after that date.² However, if we carefully consider the treatment of the Khorat Plateau in this way, we might ask ourselves, Do we really want so to privilege political history? Suddenly, overnight, at the stroke of a pen, does the northeastern part of what is now Thailand cease being “part” of Laos and become thereafter a “part” of Thailand?

We might instead let a part of the world “declare” its membership in one part of history or another by how it behaves. In such terms, the middle Mekong valley in the early centuries AD is a part of the history of Dvaravati; that is,

1. Notably, for example, Hoshino Tatsuo, *Pour une histoire medievale du Moyen Mekong* (Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1986).

2. For example, see Martin Stuart-Fox, *The Lao Kingdom of Lan Xang: Rise and Decline* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1998).

that slice of territory stretching from the head of the Gulf of Siam to the middle of the Gulf of Tonkin. I am thinking in particular of that part of the region we already have met and will meet again, stretching back from the Mekong River and the That Phanom monument toward Sakon Nakhon, Kalasin, and the upper basin of the Chi River, as well as the basin of the small Songkhram River. Technically, this is the northeastern part of the Northeast.³

There is no better way for the region to define its own history than for us to look at the physical and written remains it has left us. First, we can hardly miss the towering monument known as That Phanom, now located just to the south of Nakhon Phanom. It was reconstructed after collapsing in August 1975. Its date is uncertain, but we can be fairly sure that there was some monument constructed there toward the middle of the first millennium AD. We know that it continued to be a focus of local life almost continuously since then, right to the present day.

Next we might consider the unusual remains of Mûang Fa Dæt in what is now Kalasin province. It clearly dates from the sixth to the ninth centuries of the current era, and has certain affinities with Angkor, as we saw in chapter 2.

The third set of historical data with which we can begin comes from the Vietnamese annals written in the fourteenth century which tell us that Siam contacted Vietnam early in the fourteenth century. It seems reasonably certain that the contact was made

3. The reader will find extremely useful Srisakara Vallibhotama, *A Northeastern Site of Civilization: New Archaeological Evidence to Change the Face of Thai History* (Bangkok: Sinlapa Watthanatham, 1990), which includes English summaries for each chapter.

4. Georges Maspero, *Le royaume de Champa* (Paris: van Oest, 1928), pp. 196–7, fn. 5.

over the Mu Gia Pass in 1318.⁴ The Mu Gia Pass is directly east (by about 100 kilometers/60 miles) from Nakhon Phanom.

A fourth bit of evidence comes from an inscription in Sukhothai language and Sukhothai script from Sakon Nakhon (75 kilometers/50 miles west of Nakhon Phanom) dated in early 1351.

If we take these four references together and imagine that they work together to draw arrows across the landscape, we might then ask where are those arrows pointing? The answer is that they are pointing generally to the northeast and to the southwest. They do not seem to be pointing either to the north or northwest (toward Vientiane) or to the south (toward Angkor and Cambodia).

What follows has to do with the "why" question of what reasons there might have been for the people in Nakhon Phanom to be so oriented in a northeasterly and southwesterly direction. Why might they have been so oriented?

The southwest "arrow" is fairly straightforward. It was from the southwest that India came to the Nakhon Phanom region. That is, from the southwest came Buddhism and Indian arts and sciences. But how did they come? There were no electronic media then. If texts and ideas were coming, they were transported by people. The distances were sufficiently long, and the rigors of travel were so heavy, that we might imagine that few travelers might have been inspired to make the journey for ideas and beliefs alone. No, (and this is a twentieth or twenty-first century prejudice) it is likely that travelers were encouraged to travel by economic motivations.

The best guess might be that the Nakhon Phanom (or That Phanom) area was the ideal link between the Mu Gia Pass over the mountains to the coasts of Vietnam and Champa, and their large populations, and the areas of the Khorat Plateau which

produced pottery and agricultural products. There must have been considerable income here from the distance trade, and from a large inland market, for a great deal seems to have been spent in That Phanom and its vicinity. Nakhon Phanom was to continue to be a major center through the eighteenth century.

AYUTTHAYA AND ITS NEIGHBORS, 1351

ON 4 MARCH 1351, A SMALL GROUP OF MEN GATHERED in a newly-built hall on an island in the Chaophraya River. Before them was an urn filled with water gathered from throughout Siam, stirred with a magical sword, and which they drank swearing their loyalty to the relative who was becoming their king (soon remembered as Ramathibodi I). The capital of a new kingdom there was taking shape.¹

What happened that day (and we still lack any reliable accounts) has much to tell us about the processes that were then at work. First, many of the people then present were related to the new king, and soon would govern many of the surrounding towns and their territory. Many of them were native speakers of the Cambodian language (Khmer); and all the high-ranking among them possessed gold or copper plates on which were inscribed their formal titles. Much of the oath which they

1. Thai schoolbooks and scholars cling tenaciously to the idea that Ayudhya was founded in 1350, having long ago been told that Lesser Era (*chulasakkarat*) years are converted to AD years by adding 638. The reason for the discrepancy is simple: the year 712 began on the 7th day of the waning moon of the 5th month, and continued until 713 began on the 1st day of the 6th month in the next year (365 days later), the interval being from 28 March 1350 to 28 March 1351. Thus the 6th day of the waxing moon of the 5th month did not occur until 4 March 1351 (Julian calendar).



Plate 4 Foundation of Ayutthaya, 1351. From *Siam: General and Medical Features* (Bangkok, 1930), opp. p. 140.

swore was like the oaths taken by colleagues even to the present day; but there was another part that is almost unintelligible nowadays. It was that part of the oath that warned men that the spirits of particular named streams and caves would punish them if they failed to keep their promise of loyalty.² It is fascinating to note that those spirits were localized in extreme northern Thailand and adjacent portions of Laos. Either the spirits were being imported (which is unlikely), or the animistic

2. Text of the oath is given in Plüang na Nakhòn, *Prawat Wannakhadi Thai samrap naksüksa* (6th ed.; Bangkok, 1967), pp. 42–47. See also Photcananukrom *sap wannakhadi Thai samai Ayutthaya Lilit ongan cheng nam* (Bangkok, 1997). The best analysis of the oath is in Cit Phumisak, *Ongkan cheng nam* (2nd ed.; Bangkok, 1981).

See also my “Three Sukhothai Oaths of Allegiance,” in Wyatt, *Studies in Thai History* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996), 59–68.

religion employed here was rooted in the north, from whence some of these people came.

But who were these people, and why were they here? The best guess is that those functioning as scribes, lawyers, accountants, chronologists, astrologers, and similar specialists probably were persons associated with "East Siam"—i.e., Lopburi, Nakhon Nayok, and similar old localities once part of the Angkorean Empire. On the other hand, the administrative and military functionaries probably were people from "West Siam"—especially Suphanburi, Ratchaburi, and Phetchaburi, for example. Lurking in the shadows there may have been an important third group of people—Chinese and Indian merchants. About them we know very little, except that they were intimately involved in the trade of Siam by the early fourteenth century. One of their many interests was the ceramics trade, which earlier had brought them to the valley of the Tha Chin River, especially to Ratchaburi and Suphanburi.

The one person who tied together all these groups was the new king, Ramathibodi I (also referred to as U Thong). Our best guess is that his wife was the daughter of the late king of Suphanburi, while his mother was the daughter of the ruler of Lopburi and his father was a Chinese merchant of Phetchaburi. It is important to note that he brought all three of these groups together, and from each of these he gained important resources. With his Lopburi relatives he gained many generations of expertise in rulership, including skills in such things as law and medicine. His Suphanburi relatives brought with them manpower and military skills, while his Phetchaburi relatives gave him skills with such things as commerce and cash. The combination would have been hard to equal.

It has been conventional to treat the early history of Ayutthaya (Siam) in terms of its foreign policy, and thus to focus particularly

upon Ayutthaya's continuing rivalry with neighboring Angkor, which after all was only 250 miles/400 kilometers to its east. We might note particularly Ayutthaya's capture of Angkor in 1369 and again in 1431. Here we might imagine that Ramathibodi was acting on behalf of his Lopburi relatives, who might be expected to see Angkor as their chief rival for prestige and power. But rather than defining their interests as being relatively more universalistic or "global," perhaps we might instead see their interest as being more local than the interests of Suphanburi.

Suphanburi, after all, in addition to aspiring to leadership of all the areas to the west of Lopburi, including both the north and the south, might be expected to have not only a strong interest in the ceramics trade—which would reach its peak by the late fifteenth century—but also to have had a strong interest in the trade which extended not only to the center and south of what is now Laos and adjacent Vietnam, but also over the trade routes which extended to the west and south across the Malay Peninsula and into the Bay of Bengal.

It is in this context that we might interpret a stone inscription which otherwise is quite puzzling. This is a stone dated to 17 February 1351 and to the Reliquary of Ban Ræ in what is now Sakon Nakhon province.³ This is what amounts to a Sukhothai inscription. Why is it here? The only way to account for it is to link it with Vietnamese literary references dated to 1318 to a Sukhothai intrusion into Champa in central Vietnam.⁴ But what is Sukhothai doing all the way east in central Vietnam? The only way

3. Thawat Punnothok, *Sila carük Isan samai Thai-Lao* (Bangkok: Ramkhamhang University, 1987), pp. 225–227.

4. Georges Maspero, *Le royaume de Champa* (Paris: van Oest, 1928), pp. 196–7, fn. 5.

of accounting for this is to explore economic considerations; and if the Ban Ræ inscription leads us from Sukhothai to the east, then it would seem natural to look southwards from Sukhothai as well.

In conceptualizing this early period of Siam's history, it is customary to think of it first in terms of religion. Early stone inscriptions detailing the history of Buddhism, for example, often refer to Buddhist monks as *chao thai*, that is, "Thai lords." It is worth remembering, however, the emphasis that the Ramkhamhæng inscription of 1292 places upon economic policy, on the freedom of buying and selling, and on the lightness of taxation. This leads us back to reconsidering the important role of economic activity in the foundation of Ayutthaya and in the location of the Sakon Nakhon inscription, both in early 1351.

Here we might begin with a simple point. Let us simply note that the earliest contemporary reference to the foundation of Ayutthaya occurs two years before it was formally founded in 1351, when Chinese merchants reported in 1349 that Ayutthaya had been created, *and* that it was now named with a Persian or Arabic name that we might translate as "New City" (Shahr i-Naw), implying that an "Old City" had preceded it. By the later years of the century, a mission from Suphanburi was seeking in China the right to trade as a tributary mission. A bit later, in 1416, the Ayutthaya court was persuaded to double the customs duties charged.⁵ Finally, shortly after the catastrophic events in 1424 which ended the lives of two candidates (Ai Phraya and Yi Phraya) for the throne of the

5. Ishii Yoneo, "The *Rekidai Hōan* and Some Aspects of the Ayutthayan Port Polity in the Fifteenth Century," *Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko* 50 (1992), 81-92; also his "Some aspects of the 15th century Ayutthayan port-polity as seen from a Ryukyuan source," *South East Asian Research* 2:1 (March 1994), 53-64.



Plate 5 Chao Ai Phraya and Chao Yi Phraya duel on elephant-back. From *Khlong phap phraratchaphongsawadan* (Bangkok: Birthday of Princess Galyani, 1983), p. 8.

kingdom of Ayutthaya, a major religious monument was constructed in their memory in the city (Wat Ratchaburana), and inscriptions were left inside it written in Thai, Khmer, Chinese, and Arabic.⁶ These were not discovered until the 1950s, so we can be confident of their authenticity. Their significance is ritualistic: that is, in a monument of the greatest importance, at least these four languages were considered to be relevant to memorializing the early kings of Ayutthaya. Even in the style of the early fifteenth century, Ayutthaya was expressing its true globalization.

6. *Citrakam læ sinlapawatthu nai kru phraprang Wat Ratchaburana* (Bangkok: Fine Arts Dept., 1959); and *Phraphuttharup læ phraphim nai phraprang Wat Ratchaburana* (Bangkok: Fine Arts Dept., 1959).