

she transforms Mindanao into the central stage of the Lumad, portraying the Lumad as the main actors and the Spaniards as guests, sometimes welcome and sometimes unwelcome, but nonetheless present.

*A mountain of difference* is a must-read book for a better understanding of not only how the different levels of the Spanish colonial system operated in the Philippines, but also for a deeper understanding of how groups on the edge of the colonial world negotiated and operated, ultimately displaying an agency that colonial historiography on the archipelago and the nation-state have not acknowledged thus far. This book signals the need for this type of attention to the periphery: it is maybe time to write a colonial history of the archipelago from the territorial margins of the colonial sphere, to seek new historical centres.

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## Thailand

### *Before Siam: Essays in art and archaeology*

Edited by NICHOLAS REVIRE and STEPHEN A. MURPHY

Bangkok: River Books & The Siam Society, 2014. Pp. 432. Maps, Plates, Notes, Bibliographies, Index.

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*Before Siam* is a major addition to the early history of the culture, art, and politics of the geographical area of what is present-day Thailand. Siam appears in history in the twelfth century, the first Thai state. This book is a collection of contributions from 18 scholars exploring its art and archaeology before the twelfth century; the essays are divided into four chronological parts, from prehistory up until the reign of the Khmer king Jayavarman VII (ca. 1182–1219). There is also a Prologue by Hiram Woodward.

The first essay in ‘Part I: Late prehistory to early history’ is a rethinking of the Palaeo-shoreline of the Gulf of Thailand. Trongjai Hutangkura decisively shows with an impressive display of technical studies that the shoreline was not far inland from where it is today, an idea that has over the last three decades been accepted by many archaeologists in their interpretation of early historical states, specifically that of Dvaravati. Trongjai’s correction is of great importance.

The next three essays focus on recent archaeological excavations of sites in the upper Thai–Malayan Peninsula that have produced truly amazing results with a small army of researchers and a flood of publications starting in the 2000s. The excavations at Khao Sam Kaeo, a site most active from the early fourth to second or first century BCE, uncovered sophisticated urban organisation, local production of high quality luxury items in stone, metal, and glass, and extensive long-distance trade networks (particularly with India). Indeed, the suggestion is that Indian craftsmen were actually working at the site.

The final essay in Part I is on the site of Phromthin Tai. It is one of five essays in the book that focuses on specific sites and their recent archaeological explorations. In

addition to Phromthin Tai are essays on the sites of Phong Tuek, Kampheng Saen, Pattani province, and Sampanago (Myanmar). Some of these sites have been the subject of previous publications, but are provided with new and expanded interpretations as a result of recent archaeological and artistic finds.

'Part II: The growing emergence of Indic material culture' has five essays. Himanshu Ray's essay is a wide-ranging discussion of the cultural, economic, and artistic connections between Southeast Asia and South Asia via the Bay of Bengal. She stresses that both Indic religions of Buddhism and Brahmanism were at play in the interchange, which I don't think many would question, but makes an important point that trade was not the only motivation for the maritime crossings.

This is a helpful caution. Perhaps the major theme that the book's essays share is the importance of trade in the material cultural identification of the Southeast Asian landscape. Much of the discussion in this section focuses on the identification of the trade networks: the rivers, sea coasts, oceans, and mountain crossings. One wonders how just a few scattered objects suggesting some type of interchange can tell us what those objects meant to local people; the interpretations of such objects call for considerable speculation.

Included in Part II are two important essays. One is Paul Lavy's thorough and detailed discussion of the early Vishnu sculpture in Southeast Asia, which determines the correct date for the earliest introduction of Vishnu icons in the region (ca. 500 CE), and suggests the development and sequencing of the sculpture over a three-century period on the Thai peninsula. This topic has been at issue for decades, and has clouded our knowledge of early Indic-related sculpture. Lavy's research appears to supply the necessary clarity.

The second important article in Part II is Michel Lorrillard's identification of pre-Angkorian sites in Laos. The essay presents the mapping of pre-Angkorian sites in the middle Mekong Valley, an area that is essentially a blank in the scholarly record, yet Lorrillard maps 71 archaeological sites. The author's biographical note says he has spent eight years conducting 'systematic surveys'. The number of sites he locates is a complete surprise to me.

'Part III: Early Buddhist practices' has several important articles that deal with what is called the Dvaravati period. I can only give the briefest comments here: Nicolas Revire's essay on the importance of merit-making in Dvaravati Buddhism is an impressive display of erudition, listing and identifying inscriptions from the period that will be an invaluable resource to all future scholars. Pinna Indorf organises the Dvaravati cakras into typologies and discusses how cakras have been interpreted across South and Southeast Asia. Wesley Clarke points out that there are both burials and cremations at Phong Tuek, suggesting a localisation of social practices. And Stephen Murray compares the Buddhist sema stones from northeast Thailand with those from Thaton in Myanmar, finding that they share formal characteristics but do not support the long-held theory that the Thaton semas are derivative from the Thai examples due to immigrants fleeing a cholera epidemic in Thailand.

The fourth and last section, 'Later Khmer impetus', consists of two essays focused on the Tantric Buddhist interpretation of monuments dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Pia Conti suggests the iconographic meaning of sculpture from Prasat Hin Phimai and Hedwige O'Naghten shows how space was organised

in Thailand under the Khmer king Jayavarman VII. The Tantric nature of religion during the last centuries of Angkor's hegemony is yet another topic that is only now being understood and studied. For me, the close relationship between South Asian texts and the art and architecture in Southeast Asia is noteworthy.

In conclusion, *Before Siam* is a major contribution to Southeast Asian scholarship, one that demonstrates the innovation and high level of current research.

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*Living with risk: Precarity and Bangkok's urban poor*

By TAMAKI ENDO

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*Living with risk* is an exploration of the precarious lives of Bangkok's urban poor. Tamaki Endo argues that the urban poor are not only defined by their income levels, but perhaps more importantly, also by the nature of their lives and the texture of their livelihoods. So the issue is not just a quantitative one determined and demarcated by a money-centric view of poverty, but also a qualitative one where we need to ask questions and collect evidence regarding the quality of working conditions and living arrangements among Bangkok's marginal and marginalised 'poor'.

The book is impressively rich in empirical terms and the discussion is supported by a host of footnotes, tables and figures, scores of photographs, nine appendices, three bibliographies .... This is a fact- and evidence-rich exploration of Bangkok's poor. To pursue her argument, Endo embraces three entry points for her discussion. She is interested, to begin with, in the spatial configurations of low income communities, as distinct and discrete slices of Bangkok's urban space. Second, she is interested in the social containers that are to be found within these spaces and, in particular, households/families and 'communities', and how individuals sit within these social units. And third, Endo is interested in the social dynamics of change, in particular through the analysis and interpretation of life course and inter-generational relations. A final organisational theme in Endo's book is an interest in two types of risk: fire risk and employment risk. It is these twin risks which provide the author with the scope to embed her discussion within debates over 'precarity'.

For someone wishing to find out more about the living conditions of Bangkok's poor this is a wonderful place to start; *Living with risk* can be mined for a host of material. But I thought that the density of the discussion and material presented sometimes meant that the argument Endo develops became a little lost from sight. There is simply so much going on, and so many different perspectives, that it is hard to see the wood for the trees. That is a shame because the underlying argument is an important one and worth hearing. As Endo puts it, 'This book attempts to understand the contemporary urban lower class and their community