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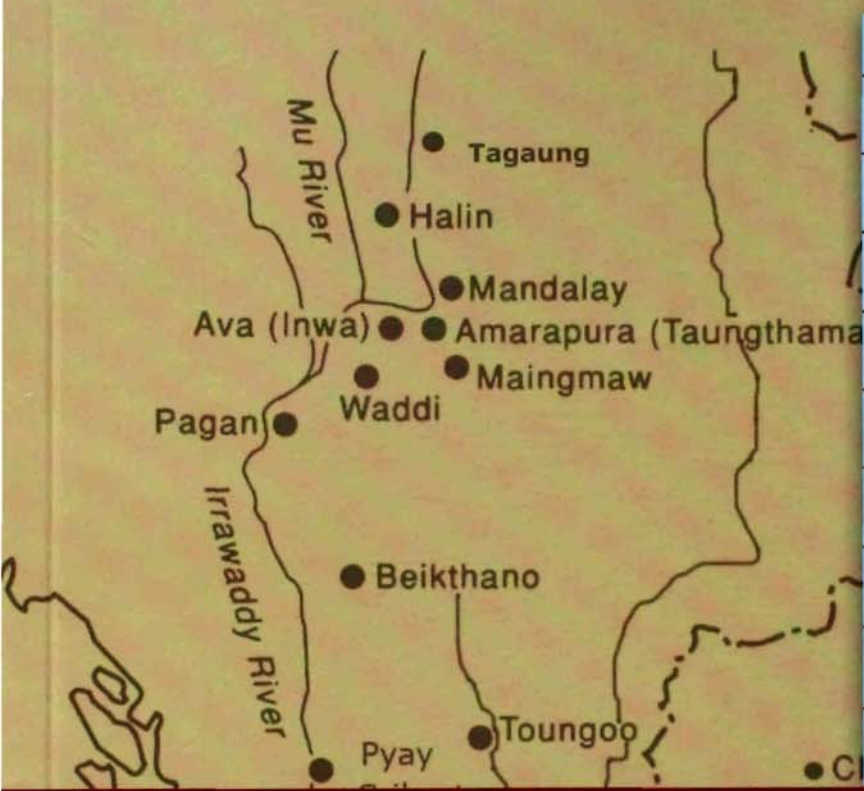

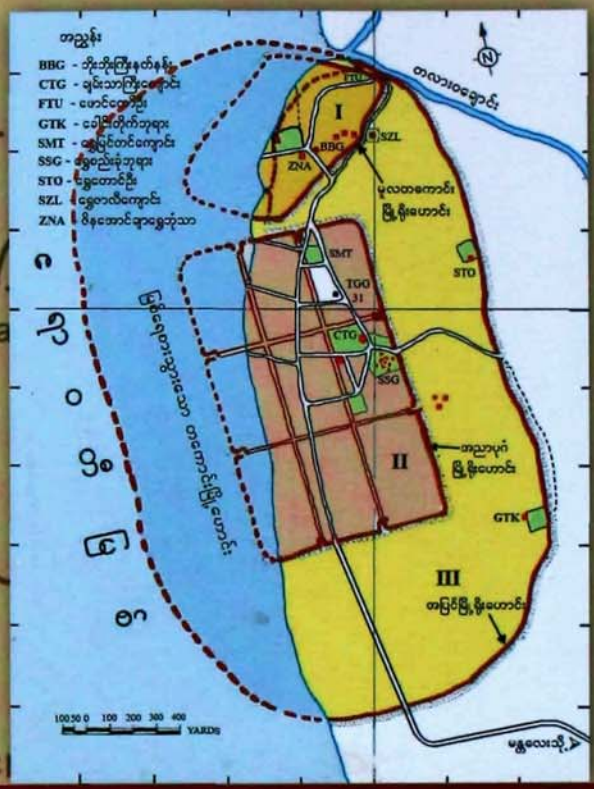

Tagaung, Ancient City of Myanmar

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Designs on the potteries found at excavation site TG.(31) of Tagaung, Myanmar, illustrated by Tampawadi U Win Maung.

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SPAFA Journal

Volume 16 Number 3 (September - December 2006)

"By far the greater part of mankind's thoughts, dreams, deeds, and material achievements lies beneath the ground ..." – Ivar Lissner, 'The Living Past'

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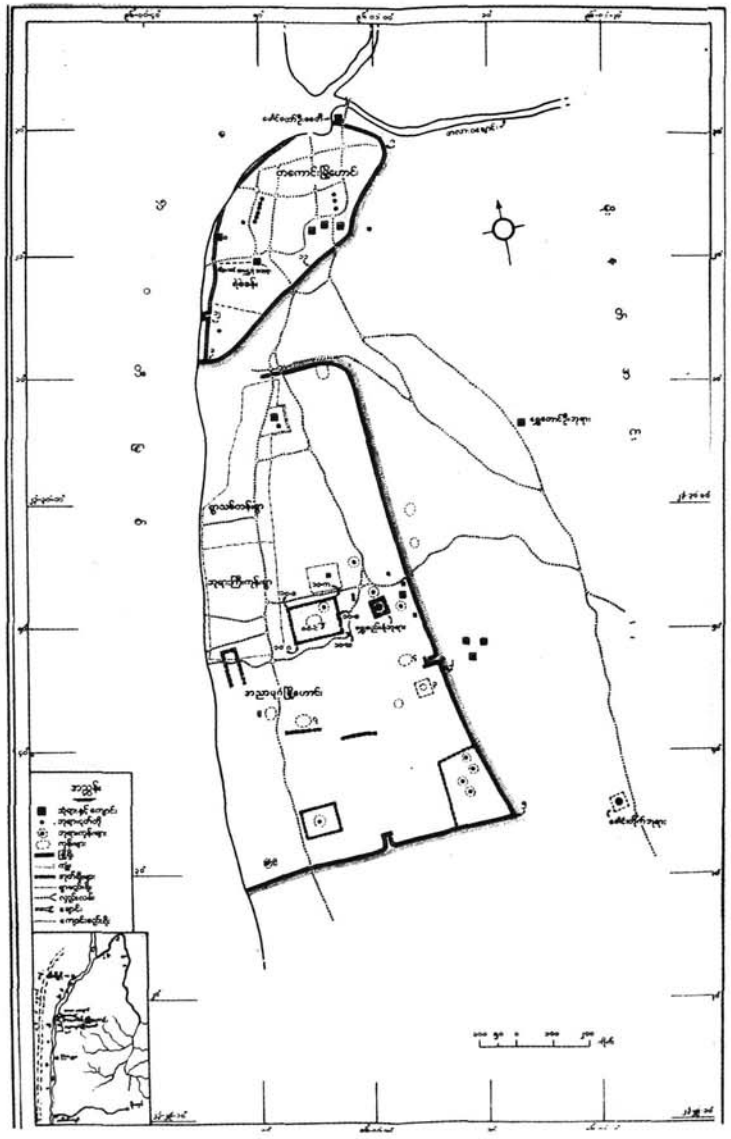


Figure 2 Map of Tagaung ancient city. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar.

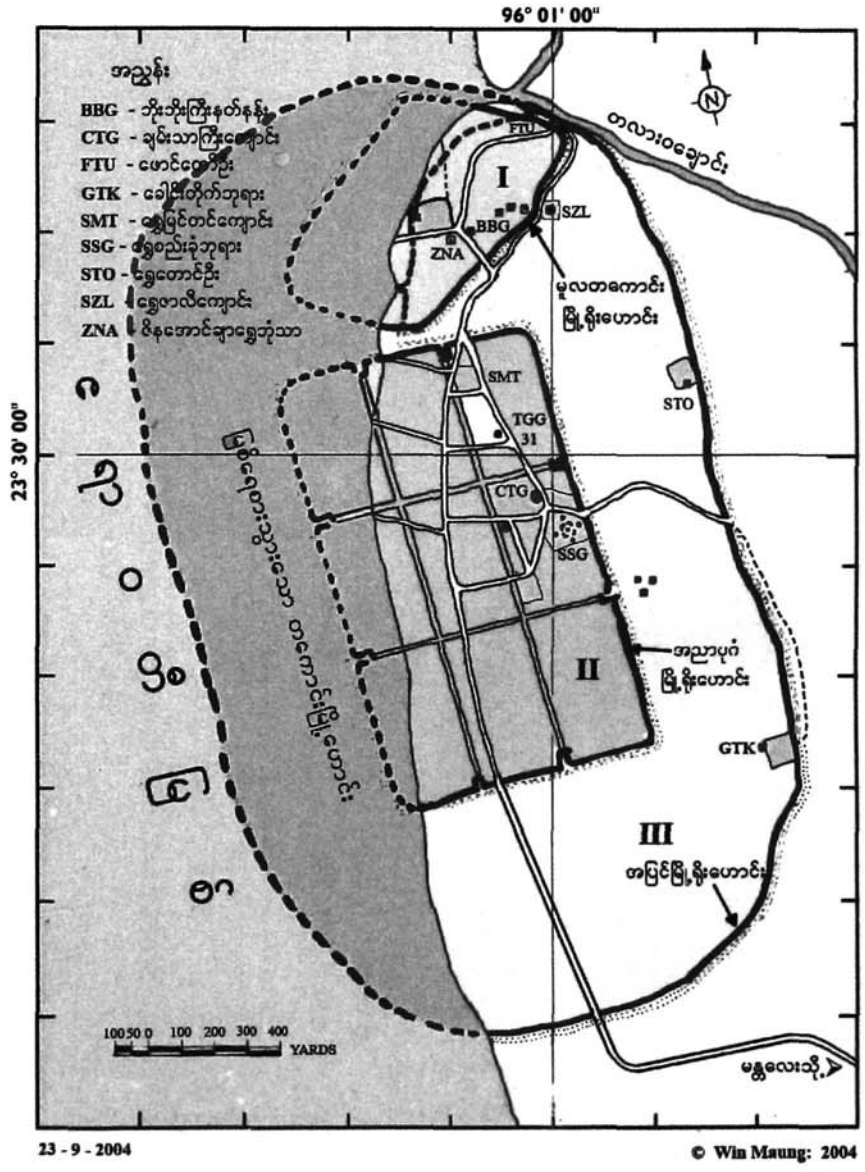


Figure 3 Conjectural drawing of Tagaung map (before the city was eroded by the Ayeyarwady river). Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar.

New Finds at Tagaung, an Ancient City of Myanmar

Discoveries continue to emerge from the historical trading port city of Tagaung. **Elizabeth Moore** and **Nyunt Han** report.

Figure 1 Map of Myanmar showing the location of Tagaung.

Location

The ancient city of Tagaung was located on the eastern bank of Ayeyarwady river in Thabeikkyin township, Pyin-u-lwin District, Mandalay [E 96.11, N 23.30] (Figure 1). From remnants of its old brick walls, which were in the shape of a fish tail, some geologists and archaeologists speculated that the city – half of which has been washed away by the river – was constructed in an oval shape (Figures 2 and 3). Chronicles show a previous city at the site that used to be variously called Samsaya-pura, Rahta-pura and Thintwe prior to being known as Tagaung in the time of Godama Buddha.[1] Tagaung's first dynasty had thirty-three kings, followed by a second line of seventeen rulers. In this brief introduction, we suggest that the ecology and artefacts of the site buttress Tagaung's long reputation as a royal centre.

Trade and Ecology

The walled city of Tagaung occupies the first alluvial island that is encountered when descending the course of the Ayeyarwady.[2] An important historical trading node linking Yunnan to South Asia, Tagaung was a river port blessed with an array of natural resources. Gold dust washing has been carried out north of Tagaung at Tong-nge, a city attributed to the legendary King Abhiraja before his move to Tagaung. According to the popular belief of the people of Myanmar, Tagaung is where the first kingdom of the nation arose, as an adage in Myanmar notes: "Myanmar starts from Tagaung". It is held that the city was probably a meeting point of

traders and farmers from the surrounding regions.[3] Interestingly, Myanmar chronicles record the royal cities not as a lineage of people but one of place: a *bodhimanda* or site where successive Buddhas attain Enlightenment.[4]

The trade in resources from Mogoke and Namtu, such as teak, rubies and silver (used then for land purchases[5]) add to the advantages of Tagaung's river location and position as a trading post for products from other regions and valuable local resources, among which were elephants (captured in the uplands, and held south of Tagaung at Hsin Hnyat Kone, the hill where elephants were clamped). Varied types of land east of the city supported a range of crops, from edible oil to rice and coriander. Pheasants, partridges, toucans, pelicans, *Saurus* cranes, and fish live around and in seasonal lakes (*inn-gyi*) and tall swamp grass areas. Tigers, elephants, bantengs, gaurs and deers were once common around Tagaung (Figure 4, Figure 5).[6]

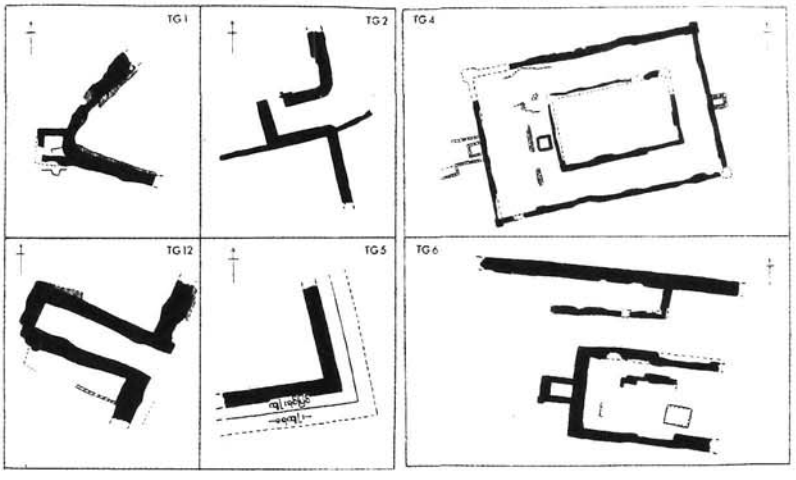
Figure 4 Iron bearing mountain south east of Tagaung. Photograph: Elizabeth Moore

Figure 5 Seasonal lake east of Tagaung. Photograph: Elizabeth Moore

Excavations at Tagaung

In 1904, Taw Sein Kho, chief epigraphist of Burma Epigraphy Office, carried out the first archaeological exploration at Tagaung. In 1916, terracotta votive tablets with inscriptions of the 11th century A.D. King Anawrahtar were discovered at Tagaung and other Upper or Anyar Bagan ancient cities. U Mya, another chief epigraphist, later explored Tagaung in 1930. After Independence in 1948, the Department of Archaeology was founded in 1957 but excavations were first conducted at other ancient cities such as Beikthano, Hanlin and Sri-Ksetra. It was only in 1967-68 that systematic excavations were conducted at Tagaung. Twelve mounds (TG1-12) were unearthed, all revealing brick structures (Figure 6), as noted below:

Figure 6 Plan of excavated structures at Tagaung (1967-1969). Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar.



- City walls, city gates, fortress TG 1, 2, 5, 8, 11, 12

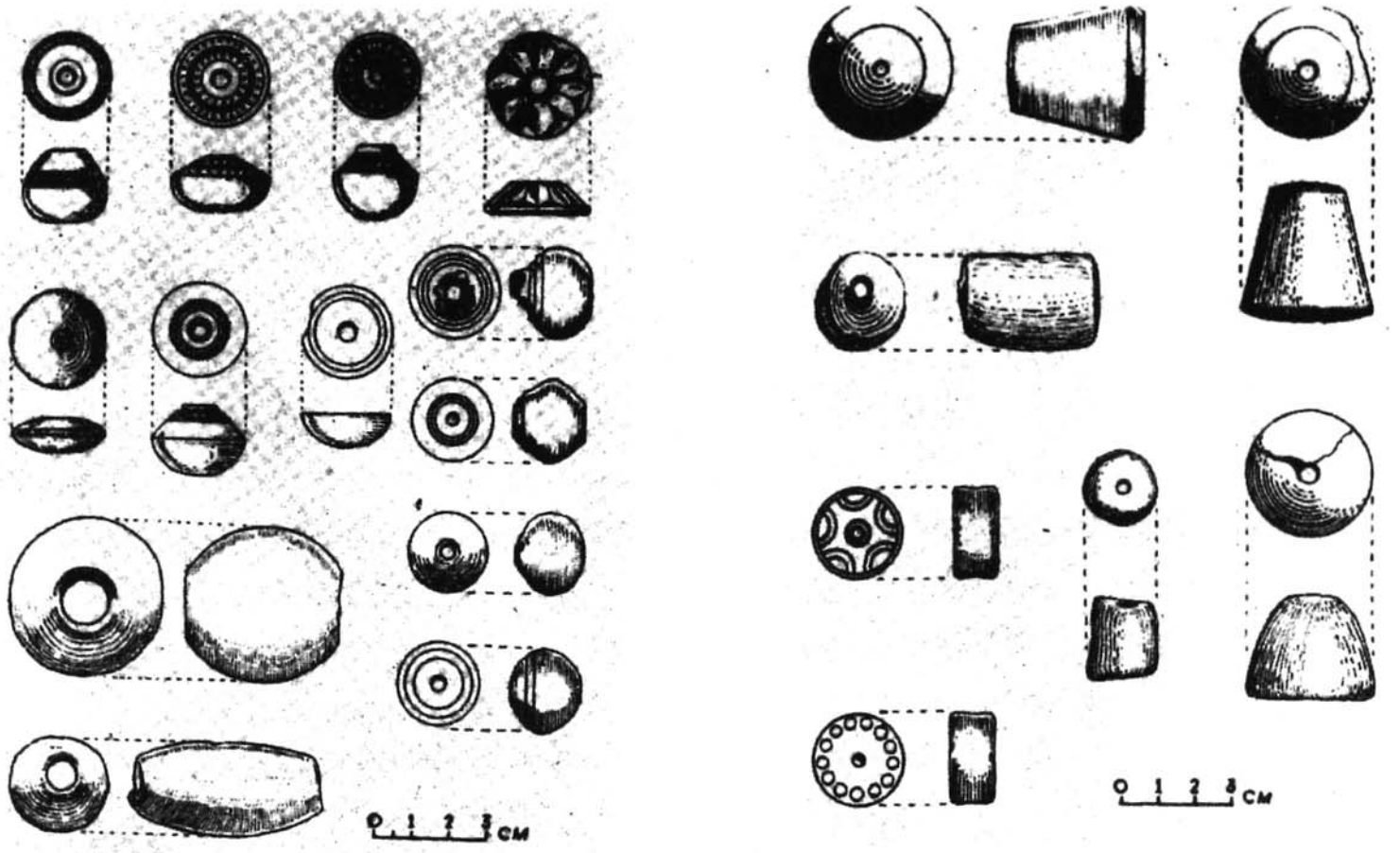


Figure 7 Drawing of terracotta beads excavated at Tagaung. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar.

- Residential buildings TG 3, 7, 9
- Religious and ritual buildings TG 4, 6, 10

Artefacts found during the 1967-1969 excavations included dolomite Buddha images of the Bagan period, Bagan-type pottery (Figure 8d) and terracotta beads (Figure 7 on previous page). There were also stone images of the Buddha, spouted jars, earplugs and iron arrow heads, all placed in the Bagan period. Many surface finds of votive tablets attributed to King Anawrahta were recorded during this period and in the following years (Figure 8). A hoard of level fifty round tablets 4-6 cm in diameter was recovered in recent years, 150 centimeters below ground level, under a deposit of Anawrahta-type tablets. All the small tablets depict a single figure of the Buddha in *Bhumisparsa* mudra (a posture with hands in a certain gesture/ position). They have been divided into three groups according to the surrounding motifs (Figures 8a, 8b, 8c):

1. Oval halo, *takeh* or throne back and up to eight stupas
2. Filled with the medicinal *gamon*, an aromatic tuber of the ginger (*Kaempferia*) family
3. Two small stupas and enclosing lines, the outer marked by *beindu* dots

One tablet of Type 2 was previously dated to the 11th century A.D. with Myanmar scholars today holding various opinions on their dating. Some retain an 'early Bagan' or 'late Pyu' label, based on the leg position, with both feet facing upwards. Others consider them in an earlier framework of Gupta influence in the rounded abdomen, closeness of the feet to the torso and lack of a triangular face that would suggest Bagan or Pala styles.[7]

Given the high proportion of Bagan finds from excavations in the 1960s, U Than Swe, who first excavated at Tagaung, retained a dating of Tagaung at between the 11th and 12th century A.D.. The site was again excavated in 1992-1993 at TG 13 to TG 16, during which time the inner city walls, outer city walls and some religious buildings were for the first time revealed. One important find was a small gold Buddha image in relief, from TG15 (Figure 9). More work was carried out from 1997 to 1999 at TG 17 to TG 21 (Figure 10), unearthing further parts of the city walls and gates as well as religious buildings. Again, the artefacts were assigned to the Bagan period.

Continued excavations at Tagaung (TG31) and Hsin Hnyat Kone (SNK 1 to SNK 3) in the past decade have brought to light a number of

Figure 8 Dolomite stone Buddha images and terracotta votive tablets from Tagaung. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar.

Figure 8a Type 1 round votive tablets, Tagaung, showing thumb print on reverse. Collection: Pandita Nanda (Uzin Min Han, Tagaung). Photograph: Elizabeth Moore

Figure 8b Type 2 rarest of the Tagaung round votive tablets. Collection: Pandita Nanda (Uzin Min Han, Tagaung). Photograph: Elizabeth Moore

Figure 8c Type 3 round votive tablets. Tagaung, showing variation in size and placement of motifs on tablet. Collection: Pandita Nanda (Uzin Min Han, Tagaung). Photograph: Elizabeth Moore

Figure 8d
Artefacts discovered during 1967-1969 excavations. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar

Figure 9 A gold Buddha relief image found at site TG 15. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar.

Figure 10 View of excavation site TG 21. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar

objects dated to the (200 B.C. to 850 A.D.) Pyu period. At Hsin Hnyat Kone, a religious building with finger-marked bricks was uncovered (Figure 11). A number of roof tiles, end-pieces (of roof tile) and large round pots were also recorded at the Hsin Hynat Kone sites (Figure 12). The roof tiles are distinctive, bearing textile impressions on the convex side. Some were slightly curved quarter sections, others semi-circular with a smaller diameter. Two types of end-pieces were recovered. Some are round and others crescent-shaped, divided into two sections. Each section is decorated with a tri-lobed festoon and a dotted border (Figure 13). The round end-pieces are marked with sun-like rays, usually 10 to 15 in number, tipped with circular raised dots around a central spot. Both round and crescent types vary: the crescents in the style of the festoons and number of surrounding dots, and the circular pieces in the number and width of the rays. The crescent pieces are 1 to1.5 cm thick, 15 to 20 cm in height and 21 to 26 cm in width, while the round ones are *circa* 1 to 4.5 cm thick, 13 to 20 cm diameter and with the rim 1 to 3 cm wide. The circular impressions are stamped into the clay to make heavy, often roughly finished, objects that contrast with the more standard proportions of the crescent pieces. The design of the superstructure remains unclear, with the possibilities ranging from brick to a tiered wooden roof, or similar to the Han two-storey halls (Vietnam), built around an earthen core with timber, pounded earth or mud brick walls.[8] Notably, similar types of roof tiles and end pieces dated to the period between the 1st and 6th century A.D.

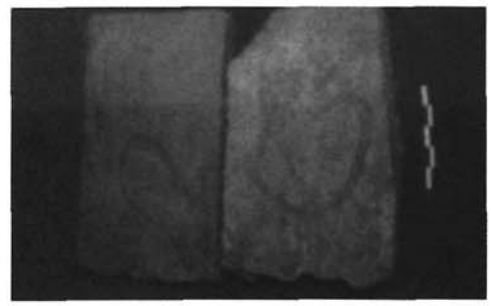


Figure 11 Finger-marked bricks found at site SNK 2. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar.

Figure 12 Two large round pots found at site SNK 2. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar.

Figure 13 Decorated roof tiles found at site SNK 1. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar.

Figure 14 A large pot uncovered at site TG 24. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar

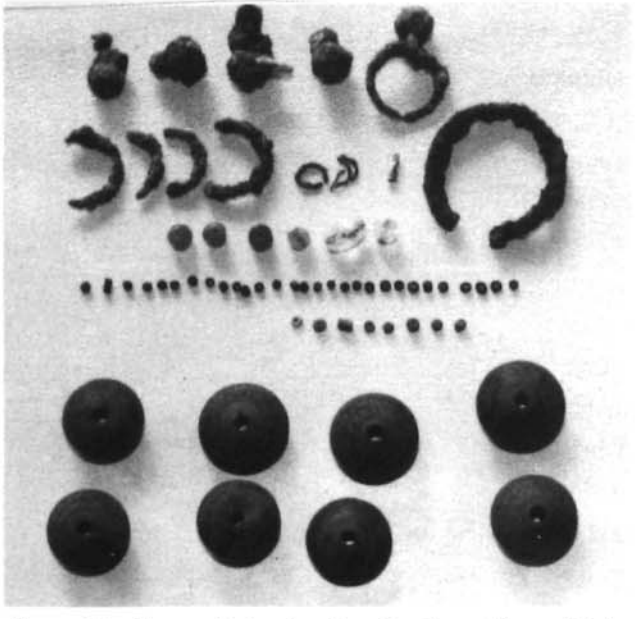


Figure 15 Terracotta beads, stone beads, and iron objects found inside the pot. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar.

have been found in Linshang, Hebei province, northeast China and at Trakieu and Go Cam in central Vietnam. The tiles found in Vietnam have been likened to Chinese styles of the Qin and Han of early first millennium A.D. while the Hebei pieces are dated to the slightly later Northern Dynasties period.[9]

Excavations were undertaken again at Tagaung from 2003 to 2005, yielding more artefacts dated to the first millennium A.D. Pyu era of Upper Myanmar. Among the notable finds are large pots from site TG 24 containing grave goods, such as stone and terracotta beads, iron rings, and iron spearheads (Figures 14 and 15). Similarly, excavation at site TG 31 located inside the Tagaung State High School compound brought a large number of distinct pots and burial urns to light (Figure 16). The Pyu-type pottery was found at a depth of 2.5 meters on a brick 'floor' made with finger-marked bricks. Altogether sixty-five vessels were unearthed, twenty five of which bore stamped designs on the shoulder in single, double or triple rows (Figure 17). Motifs included floral, geometric and zoomorphic designs, such as birds, a human figure, elephants and bulls. The designs, placement of motifs, and the contents of the Tagaung urns are different to the vessels from Hanlin, Beikthano and Sri-

Figure 16 Decorated round pots and jars with long bottle neck found at site TG 31. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar.

Figure 17 Burial urns and pottery vessels found at site TG 31. Courtesy of Department of Archaeology, Myanmar

Ksetra (Figure 19). The urns are generally egg-shaped, with some of other shapes, including a tall baluster pot with bones and ashes (Figure 18). Vessel 14 had two lids, one bronze and one terracotta, and contained the bones of a complete skeleton. Other finds were shells, copper and bronze bells, bracelets, rings, lids, swords, iron rings, brackets, rivets, gold and silver artefacts. There were also beads made of terracotta, bone and various semi-precious stones with drum and cylinder shapes.

Conclusion

Myanmar chronicles excelled in the art of allusion, something well illustrated with the serpents, giant boars, blind sons, crows, and mighty iron-smiths of Tagaung accounts. As a result of such elements, archaeologists and historians often dismiss chronicles and the record of places cited in them. At Tagaung, however, these burial urns, stamped vessels, roof-tiles, and votive tablets highlight varied links with Yunnan and South Asia. In recent writings on Tagaung, the TG 31 and Hsin Hnyat Kone pottery, decorated designs, finger-marked bricks, terracotta and semi-precious stone beads, the tradition of urn burials have been put in a Pyu cultural context. The identification of the Pyu people, before Bagan, is based on scattered evidence, relying on about twenty-five inscriptions written in Kadamba scripts, which were dated between the 4th and 9th centuries A.D. These have been found on stone objects such as steles, images of the Buddha, burial urns, terracotta votive tablets, sealings, a gilded silver casket and gold plates with Buddhist texts. The majority of the inscribed pieces come from the largest Pyu ancient city, Sri-Ksetra, located some 500 km south of Tagaung. Sri-Ksetra is thought to have reached its zenith between the 4th and 9th century A.D. although it had been founded many centuries earlier. Finds of two roof tile end-pieces at Sri-Ksetra underline links between Tagaung and Sri-Ksetra as described in the chronicles. Despite the wide distribution of similar artefacts

Figure 18 Pot 14 cluster in site TG 31. Courtesy of Chit San Win.

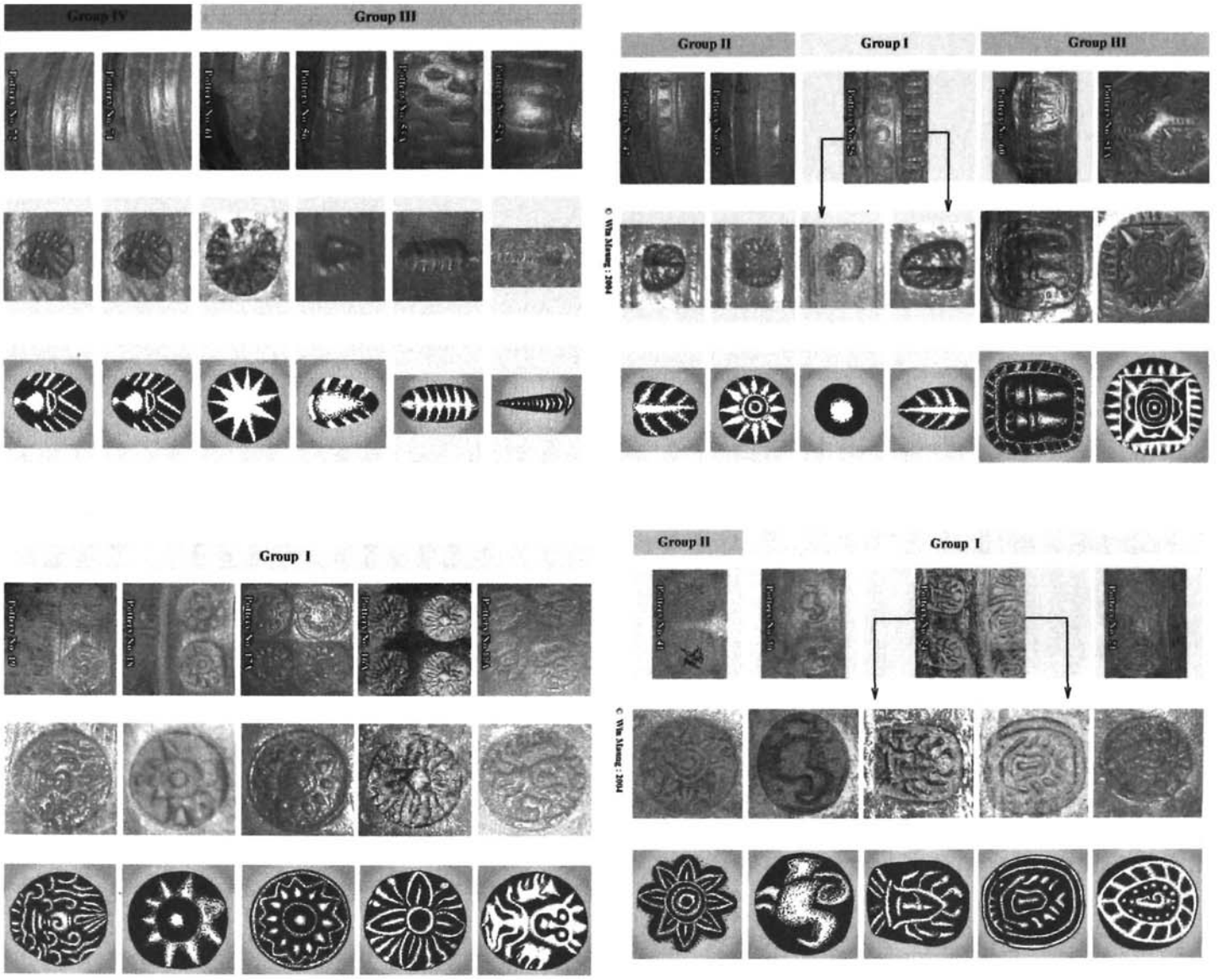


Figure 19 Drawing of stamped designs on pottery vessels found at TG 31. Courtesy of Tampawady U Win Maung.

throughout Upper Myanmar, the absolute dating of the Pyu cultures comes from only two major sites, Beikthano and Hanlin. The radiocarbon date of Beikthano's Phase I is 1950±50 and the date from the Phase II is 1650±50. From these results, it has been surmised that Beikthano was at its apex between 1st and 4th century A.D. and Hanlin between 4th and 9th century A.D.

In Upper Myanmar, most objects associated with Pyu cultures have been found along the Ayeyarwady river basin. Many of these are highly portable beads, symbolic silver coins, semi-precious stone beads, sealings and seals, stone and terracotta Buddha images and votive tablets. These link Upper Myanmar to South Asia and Dvaravati sites, such as Nakhon Pathom and Uthong. Similarly, the large burial urns with stamped designs point to cultural relations with areas outside present-day Myanmar. It is hoped that further excavations may shed more light on the role of the site during the many social and religious changes of this era, and the early history of Tagaung at this unique crossroads of rivers, lakes, mountains and man.

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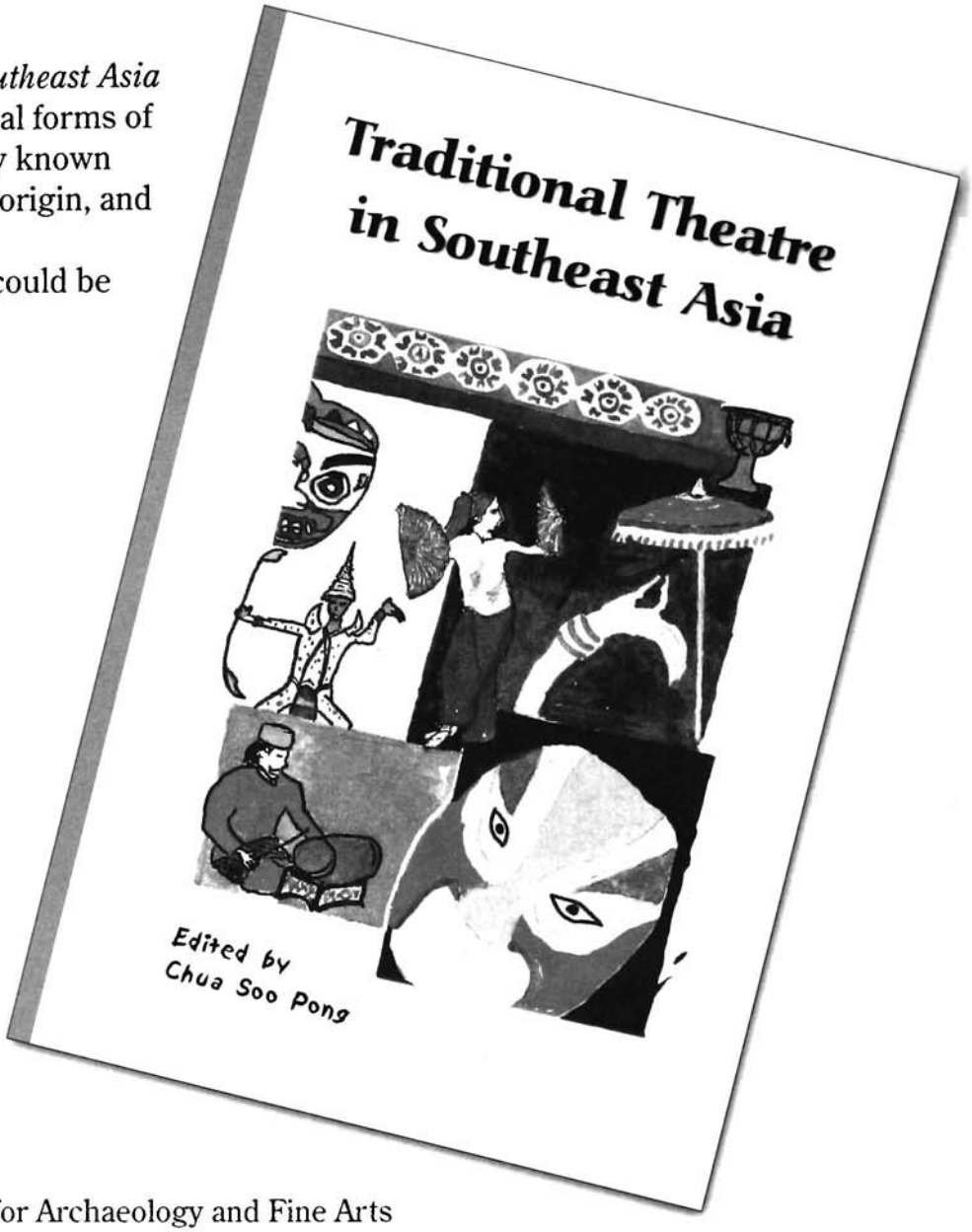

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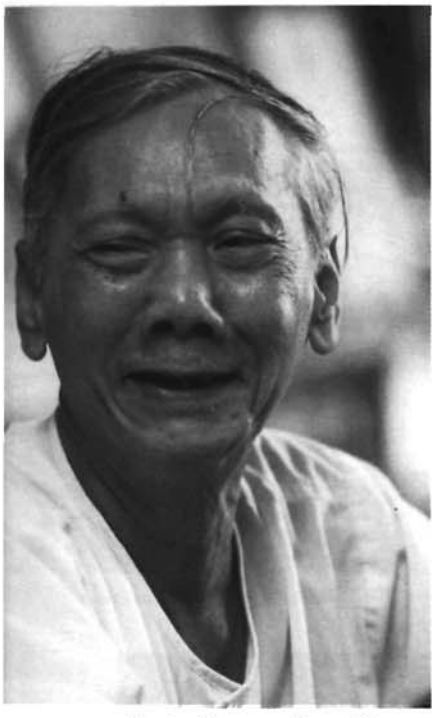


Master Samruay Premjai

Uncle Samruay — the Last of the Thai Traditional Music Teachers

The SPAFA crew visited the Premjai House of Music to explore its hospital-based concept of a school/repair centre, where Patsri Tippayaprapai interviewed the 69-year-old renowned master musician Samruay Premjai.

The people of Thailand have been making indigenous musical instruments since ancient times, during which they also adapted instruments of other countries to create what are now regarded as Thai musical instruments. Through contact with Indian culture, the early Thai kingdoms assimilated and incorporated Indian musical traditions in their musical practices, using instruments such as the *phin, sang, pi chanai, krachap pi, chakhe,* and *thon,* which were referred to in the Tribhumikatha, an ancient book in the Thai language; they were also mentioned on a stone inscription (dated to the time of King Ramkhamhaeng, Sukhothai period).

Illustration of Sukhotai period ensemble of musicians

During the Ayutthaya period, the Thai instrumental ensemble consisted of between four and eight musicians, when songs known as *'Phleng Rua'* were long and performed with refined skills.

The instrumental ensemble later expanded to a composition of twelve musicians, and music became an indispensable part of theatre and other diverse occasions such as marriages, funerals, festivals, etc.. There are today approximately fifty kinds of Thai musical instruments, including xylophones, chimes, flutes, gongs, stringed instruments, and others.

Family heritage: the 100-year-old angklung

Traditionally, Thai musicians were trained by their teachers through constant practising before their trainers. Memory, diligence and perseverance were essential in mastering the art. Today, however, that tradition is gradually being phased out. Maestro Samruay Premjai is one of the last few living traditional teachers of Thai music. He was born with music in his blood – traditional Thai music – and has subsequently been living his almost seventy years of life making music, and being surrounded by music and musical instruments.

Samruay's grandparents were musicians and performers. He is the son of Maestro Prung Premjai, who was a master musician during King Rama VI's reign. It was Maestro Prung who adapted the Javanese *angklung* musical instrument into a three-piece *angklung* (the *angklung* consists of two bamboo tubes attached to a bamboo frame; originated from Indonesia; and is common in the making of music in Southeast Asian countries). The antique musical organ which he created, now more than a hundred years old, has become heirloom and heritage of Samruay's family (image above).

Ranard

Today, Samruay's house in Bangkok is well known as a school for traditional music. Named the Premjai House, it is also a service centre for the making and repairing of a diversity of Thai musical instruments, including the *ranard* (xylophone), *kim* (zither), saw (violin), *klui* (recorder style flute), etc..

Lack of formal education did not prevent Samruay from attaining mastery in music. The forth child of seven siblings, Samruay learned to play music from his father. "My family was so poor," he said, I did not have a chance to study in the military school or police college. I studied at a temple school, and became interested in music.

His mother made the decision to send him away to study music under Chalad Promwongse, a local music maestro, who taught him to play the *khawng wong* (a set of gongs of various sizes in a circle). Samruay studied Thai classical music for a year before starting to perform *likay* (a dramatic performance art popular in Southern Thailand) with a

Workshop in Promjai House

theatre troupe, receiving four baht (about 0.07 Euro) a night for his services. That was in the 1950.

He studied under six teachers, who taught and influenced him significantly in his musical development. For over forty years, he has been performing, touring and teaching traditional Thai music, all over the country, in one capacity or another.

Today, Samruay lives in a kind of hospital. He calls it the hospital for Thai musical instruments. This is where he passes his days teaching music to the young; repairing musical instruments; eating and sleeping; and filling his time with the sound of music. The Premjai House grooms new generations of musicians; its building contains several rooms and sections for practicing music and where musical instruments – which are 'warded' on the basis of their conditions – are repaired. Apart from teaching here, Samruay provides consultation to various institutes, repairs their musical instruments, and lectures at university faculties of music. He also regularly teaches at a private school, where mostly foreigners learn to master classical Thai musical instruments.

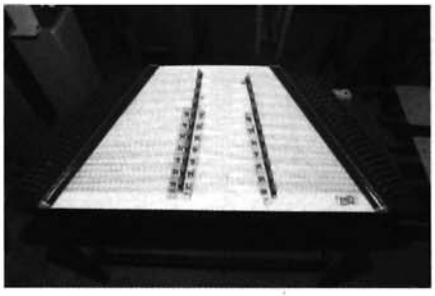
Samruay (everyone addresses him as 'Uncle Samruay') is at the forefront of promoting and preserving the precious heritage of traditional Thai music. An amazingly active and passionate man, at his age, the master musician, who was recognized as the 'Best of Bangkok' in 2000, almost single-handedly runs the place. He poignantly proves the adage that if you do what you love in your life, you live fully by the love of what you do. For Uncle Samruay, music is his love and life.

Patsri:
Master Samruay, is your family living with you in this Premjai house/ music hospital?

Master Samruay:
Yes, my wife – a farmer – owns the land that this house is on. We have five children. I have seven brothers and sisters, but there is only one other sibling remaining now, my 74-year-old sister. My children are musicians, and know how to repair musical instruments. My grandmother was an actress and my grandfather played in the *Pi-Phat*, a popular form of Thai music ensemble.

Patsri:
When you were young, have you ever thought that one day you would become a teacher?

Master Samruay:
Never. When I was six years old, my father played the *angklung*, and made a version of it. Following his tradition, I have, for almost 47 years, made *'angklung Lao'* which became known as *'angklung deaw'* or *'solo angklung'*. I learned Thai classical instruments because I grew up with them. I first started teaching by instructing my children. I did not use notation; my father said that we had to understand music tempo before starting to practise music and play instruments.



Kim

Patsri:
Why are you so fascinated by Thai musical instruments, and which one did you first learn to play?

Master Samruay:
My father transmitted and taught me to respect every instrument as if it is an animate thing, alive and breathing like a living being. I began to learn the *grab* and *chap*. The *grab* is a type of wooden rhythm clapper, and the *chap* is a round cymbal.

THE HOSPITAL SCHOOL

Patsri:
For how long now have you opened the school?

Master Samruay:
It has been opened for 21 years. A friend of mine left his children with me to study music, and it started from there. I accepted more students, and gradually, the need for a school became apparent. Also, at that time I did not have enough income to support my ensemble, even though we played for many important events at numerous places; so, I began to teach. Musicians in those days were not the privileged celebrities you find today; there were times when we did not receive payment for our services.

"The sound of traditional Thai ensemble music might be likened to a stream or river: the main current, the main melody, flow relentlessly onward surrounded by secondary currents that meander in and out of the main flow; here and there little eddies and swirls come suddenly to the surface to be seen momentarily, then to disappear as suddenly. There are no high points and no low points to the ear not educated to this kind of music; it flows onward in a steady non-differentiated band of sound, almost hypnotically, the various threads of seemingly independent melodies of the individual instruments bound together in a long, never-ending wreath like a Greek frieze that constantly repeats the pattern that decorates the top of a wall."

From 'The Music of Thailand' by David Morton

Patsri:
Did you get the first generation of students by yourself or did they apply to study with you directly?

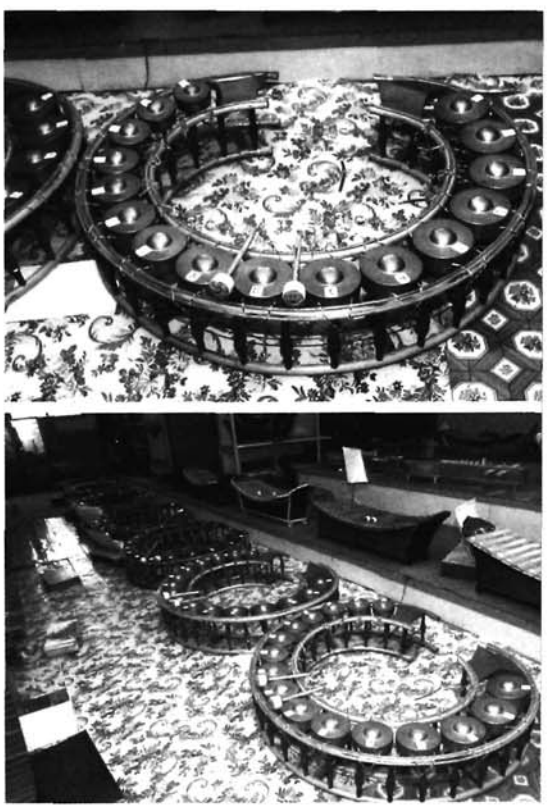
Master Samruay:
Six students came to me by themselves, accepting that to undergo training they would have to be in my custody.

Patsri:
How did the idea of starting a Hospital for Thai Musical Instruments come about?

Master Samruay:
There was a time when my children broke the instruments, and I realized I should open the hospital rather than take them to the shops.

Patsri:
How many doctors and divisions in the hospital?

Master Samruay:
There is only one doctor. It is me. I am both director, chief surgeon and janitor. We have wards as in hospitals. Musical instruments are like human beings; they have an anatomy consisting of parts that can be replaced. Without essential organs, they are dead as they can not make sound. We have every type of treatment here, except abortion.



Khwang wong gongs

Patsri:
Are there many instruments in the Mortuary Room?

Master Samruay:
Not many. We have been taught that we can neither burn nor destroy the musical instruments that are no longer be playable. We have to throw them away; usually into the sea.

Patsri:
What instruments are most susceptible to damage?

Master Samruay:
According to my personal experiences, the *kim* and *saw* are the most vulnerable. Strings are the main problem for *kim* while handles and strings are the Achilles' heels of the *saw*.

Patsri:
Where do you find the materials to make or repair instruments?

Master Samruay:
I go into the forest to obtain wood for the main parts; and over the years these expeditions have taken me to all of Thailand's provinces except Mae Hong Son.

Patsri:
Who usually sends instruments to you for repair?

Master Samruay:
Usually, public schools which are still using some very old musical instruments.

STUDENTS

Patsri:
The students who take Thai classical music training also receive compulsory education at normal schools, don't they?

Master Samruay:
Yes, they do. They normally come during the week-ends. I teach them myself. My assistant is my 18-year-old niece, who I taught since she was very young.

Patsri:
Can you remember every student?

Interview with the maestro

Glimpses into the Premjai House

Master Samruay:
I can remember their faces but not their names.

Patsri:
Are there any naughty children?

Master Samruay:
Many! I have to remain very calm with them. Some of them pretend not to understand anything that I say, and are not easy to instruct. When I was young, before going to school, my duty was to make flower garlands, and weave *'ngob'*, which is a hat made of bamboo and palm leaves. During lunch time, I came home to continue weaving the *'ngobs'*. In the evening, I would catch fish for my mother to cook for dinner. Fish was part of our staple. We ate rice cooked with sweet potato. The present generation is totally different from mine.

Storage area

Patsri:
What would a student usually experience here in terms of musical development?

Master Samruay:
In three months, they should be able to master three *'payots'*, and play in an ensemble. A *payot* is a term that denotes a phrase in a musical piece. We teach by using hand languages. After that, we will teach them how to play with other musicians, and only then will they be able to perform as a part of an ensemble.

Patsri:
How old do the students have to be when they enter the school, and how old is the oldest student that the school has ever had?

Master Samruay:
They should be at least 6 years old, and the oldest we have had was a 72-year-old student!!

"The Thai scale system is thought to have been derived originally from the Javanese tuning system. The current pentatonic scale consists of seven notes, each being precisely equidistant from one another. In such a tuning system, there is never a perfect fourth or perfect fifth. In fact, besides the octaves, not one note in the Thai scales system can be tuned with the European/Western notes. When Western classical music was introduced to Thailand before the turn of the century, and became incorporated into the Thai culture."

Christina Ciraulo

Patsri:
Are there children who told you directly that they did not want to continue, and have you ever dismiss a student?

Master Samruay:
Yes, there are students, particularly those learning to play the *ranard*, who found it a very difficult instrument to master, but I encouraged them to persevere. I have never dismissed a student. Most of them gave up studying because their parents did not have time to take them here.

Patsri:
Any graduated students who came back to help you teach at the school?

Master Samruay:
There were some but they did not know how to manage children, and discouraged the students by upsetting them. You really need to adapt to the needs of the students. I try every means to earn their respect, and ensure that they are comfortable with me. When there is intimacy, the learning/teaching process becomes easier.

Master Samruay

TEACHING METHODS

Patsri:
How much are the fees for the study course?

Master Samruay:
In the past, course fees included the offering of flowers, incense joss sticks and twelve baht. As the fees were negligible, students and their parents too were less concerned about motivation and discipline. Students did not find it difficult to drop out. Now, I require every student to deposit 300 baht [US$8.50] at the beginning, and if they pass the first three months with satisfactory progress, I will return 270 baht to them. They also receive a graduation certificate from the school. We basically charge 30 baht for a full term.

Patsri:
What instrument is the most popular with children now?

Master Samruay:
It goes by trends. The *ranard* is the biggest hit at the moment. One reason for this is due to the movie, 'The Overture'*. The *kim* used to be popular too.

Patsri:
Do you choose the instruments for the students or you let them pick what they want to play?

Illustration of ensemble performance

Master Samruay:
It is based on their needs, but I also have to see if an instrument that a student chooses is suitable for him/her. Fifteen years ago, students did not have the right to choose; they were assigned to an instrument.

Patsri:
If we do not use scale or notation in the teaching method, will it change the way that the students perceive traditional music?

Master Samruay:
Well ... we use the musical scale and notations here but we do not want the students to be too dependent on them, because they might lose that sense of affinity for the musical pieces.

Patsri:
Do you think that this method of teaching music without notation does not help with the preservation and promotion of Thai classical music?

Master Samruay:
I use it sometimes but I think if we attached to it too much, we will lose our aesthetic and intuitive sense of music.

Ranard

Patsri:
How long does it take to make an *angklung*, and do you also open a course on making the instrument?

Master Samruay:
It takes about 10 days to make each piece. We make to order only, so you will not find our products at any market. No, I do not conduct a course on making *angklungs;* it is so difficult that nobody really wants to learn how to make it, and not many people are interested to.

Patsri:
Do you think it is worth the efforts? I mean, you have to drive all the way to the north of Thailand to find the materials, and the production all involved much time and money. Do you think the money that they pay you for it is worth your time and energy?

Jakae(Kabue), a string instrument

Ranard xylophones

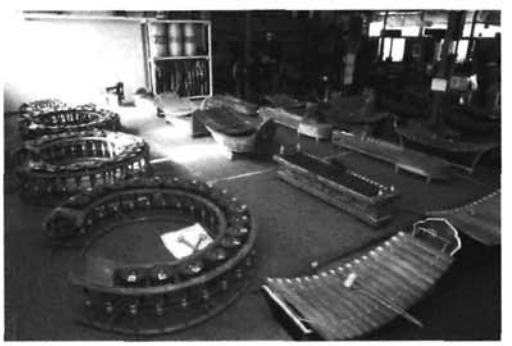
Master Samruay:
If I make forty *angklungs* for a single order, it is worth it. For your information, the wood is from Tak Province in northern Thailand. I have to select every single piece of wood by myself, because if not, ninety percent of the wood they deliver – when you order for them – would not be suitable and can not be used.

PERSONAL

Patsri:
What is your favorite instrument?

Master Samruay:
My favorite instrument is *khawng wong* because I am very good at it. However, I like the others too.

Patsri:
Have you ever thought about transforming a traditional Thai musical piece into a new version that is more up-to-date, as many composers are doing now?



Master Samruay:
Yes, I have but I think it is just a trend. Soon, people will forget and do not want to hear it anymore. Then, a new fad will begin again, like a cycle.

Patsri:
What is your vision on Thai music in the future?

Master Samruay:
As long as we have HRH Princess Sirindhorn**, it will continue to be promising. Thai classical music remains prominent today because of her interest and concern that have influenced and will influence generations of musicians.

Patsri:
And what do you think about Thai classical music class in compulsory education?

Master Samruay:
I hope that the curriculums are more systematic. They do not correctly group the children. I know that in some schools, they teach *klui* to students in Grade 1; they are too young to study that particular instrument. Physically, their fingers are not ready for the versatility needed on the flute. Highly educated individuals designed the curriculums, but they are not in touch with the reality.

Patsri:
What are the current needs of your music hospital?

Master Samruay:
We need more resource persons but if possible we also want people who sincerely admire Thai classical music to work here.

Patsri:
What do you wish for most at this moment?

Master Samruay:
I need a larger space for constructing new classrooms because our school has a large number of students. Although all my expectations are not realised yet, I have another dream: a musical museum as a learning centre for those who are interested in musical instruments, and also as a place to keep collections of the instruments too.

Patsri:
Would you like to say anything to the readers/young musicians?

Master Samruay:
Studying Thai classical music requires a strict attitude to discipline and practice. In the past, it was more difficult than now. Children were not accepted easily by the schools. Nowadays, parents are the most important factor as they are the ones who direct their children toward this or that interest and activity.

In my life, to receive an honour award from HRH Princess Sirindhorn is the ultimate moment of pride. She works harder than I do in promoting Thai traditional music. Her Majesty said to me that only one person such as myself in each province should be enough for the country. I was elated by her comment.

Footnotes:

* *The Overture* is a 2004 Thai movie based on a fictionalized account of the life of maestro musician Luang Pradit Phairao who was a classical musician in the king's palace. It also focused on the significance and aesthetics of Thai classical music and instruments. The film, winner of several awards in Thailand, was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

** *Somdetch Phra Debaratanarajasuda Chao Fa Maha Chakri Sirindhorn (born Her Royal Highness Princess Sirindhorn) is the third child of Their Majesties King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit of Thailand.*

Illustration by Pattanapong Varanyanon

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The future of Asian archaeology

The future of Asian archaeology at Leiden University was recently debated at the workshop 'Current issues in the archaeology of Asia', following the first IIAS masterclass on this topic. Here, **William A. Southworth,** a Research fellow, shares some of his observations of this meeting.

In my opinion, there are four main requirements for effective research on archaeology in Asia, in particular in my own area of Southeast Asia. The first is an archaeology department able to provide the training and practical methodology necessary for field research. The second is access to modern facilities and specialist knowledge required to analyze archaeological material. The third is broad expertise in the history and material cultures of Asia as a whole. As early as 1937, J.C. van Leur argued that Indonesian history could only be understood within a wider Asian context, and this is also true for Indonesian archaeology, even for the earliest periods of prehistory. The last and rarest resource is a centre of learning for area languages and cultures. The decline in Southeast Asian Studies was noted at an earlier seminar in Amsterdam. Terry King, summarizing the present situation in the UK, noted that the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies in Kent was closed in 1991, and the Department in Hull in 2002, leaving only London as a collective centre of learning in this area.

Despite the problems faced by university departments across Europe, it is notable that all four areas of expertise are present at Leiden University. With the gradual centralization of both Asian studies and non-western archaeology, it is now the only institution in the Netherlands where in-depth research is possible. For the study of Indonesian archaeology, the situation is even more serious, as much of the essential literature remains in Dutch and archival resources (such as the photographic archive of the Oudheidkundige Dienst) are available only in Leiden. The university is a centre of European importance for Southeast Asian archaeology, and a unique centre of

learning on Indonesia. Moreover, the strength of both the Sinological and Indological departments makes the future potential for Asian archaeology even greater.

Teaching remains integral to long-term research strategy. The four key speakers at the meeting – John Miksic, Pierre-Yves Manguin, Bion Griffin and Ian Glover – all supported PhD students as part of their archaeological programmes. This teaching and supervision is vital, and I do not believe long-term archaeological programmes can be maintained in Leiden without the continuity of teaching staff and faculty. Finally, I have constantly been impressed by the high quality of research in Asian archaeology currently being undertaken by graduate and doctoral students in Leiden, and the long academic tradition established here. To allow this tradition to be broken, notwithstanding the financial pressures now involved, would be, in my opinion, not only a loss, but a tragedy.

IIAS #40

Engaging cultures across the Timor Sea

As modernisation and globalisation extend into eastern Indonesia, the decline of traditional culture in rural communities is undermining the vibrancy and dynamism of their arts. A partnership between two organisations in Australia and Indonesia is supporting a rededication of these communities to the traditions and values of the past through a program that facilitates a re-imagining of their place in the future.

Australia and Indonesia have a long history of cultural engagement, the earliest recorded contact going back 400 years when Bugis Makassan traders sailed to the shores of East Arnhem Land in northern Australia to trade sea cucumbers with the local Yolgnu people. Modern-day cultural encounters traverse a much broader landscape; traces of those early connections, however, continue to resonate and these historical links form the basis of the Northern Territory-Eastern Indonesia Partnership Programme.

Asialink at the University of Melbourne in Australia and the Kelola Foundation in Indonesia are extending their existing Australia-Indonesia Arts Management Program to encompass a pilot cultural partnership programme between the Northern Territory and eastern Indonesia[1]. It aims to support the development of community cultural centres in eastern Indonesia currently working towards the revitalisation of the traditional arts through a programme of exchanges between indigenous arts centres and other cultural institutions in the Northern Territory.

The programme recognises the achievements of the indigenous arts sector in the Northern Territory, its commercial and critical success in the national and international art scenes and its capacity to rejuvenate the cultural traditions of once devastated communities. Blossoming from humble beginnings in the 1980s, the market for indigenous artwork in the territory is now estimated to be worth A$100 million a year. This income allows communities to stay together, ensuring the transmission of traditional knowledge and ways of life and a sense of pride in the traditions.

Art centres, located within indigenous communities across Australia, are the main centres for the production of indigenous artwork and training in the performing arts in remote areas, and fulfill a variety of functions depending on the needs of the community within which they operate. The Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre and Museum in East Arnhem Land is an example of a highly successful model, owing in large part to the emphasis placed on cultural maintenance by the local community. The Centre is not only a venue for the display and sale of artworks (sales are also made via the Centre's website), it also has a museum and printing studio and will soon establish a knowledge centre to document and present the written, pictorial and oral histories of the local community. The local Yirrkala people have a strong sense of the role the Centre plays in maintaining and revitalising local traditions, and invest much of their time and energy supporting its programmes.

The ability of indigenous Australian communities to maintain cultural integrity while catering to the demands of the market has in the main eluded their eastern Indonesian counterparts, and it is the challenge of this programme to find economically and culturally sustainable ways for these communities to strike a similar balance.

The Indonesian context

The traditional arts of eastern Indonesia, an area encompassing the islands of Sumba, Flores, Rote, Alor and West Timor, are rich and varied, reflecting the region's great cultural diversity. It is predominantly the textile and performing arts traditions of eastern Indonesia that inform and complement the region's broader cultural systems, and in this sense are traditionally the most integral to the daily life of these communities. However, in the years following independence in 1945, Indonesia has seen a significant shift in its cultural landscape; traditional arts in particular have struggled to maintain their relevance in the face of dramatic change. The impact of tourism, globalism and modernisation, the forced abandonment of traditional systems of organisation, dramatic transmigration policies, and an increase in accessible education have a devastating – and in many cases irreversible – effect on traditional arts practice.

Traditional knowledge of dance, music and textile production is less and less concerned with nourishing the cultural life of villages and more focused on satisfying the demands of the market. This has resulted in the production of low-quality synthetic textiles and, in the case of the performing arts, performances that are repetitious rather than challenging and interesting to the audience, to the performers, or to the art form itself. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that younger generations can now afford schooling and are not involved in village life to the same extent as previous generations. There are therefore fewer opportunities to transmit knowledge and inject new life into these art forms.

How then is re-dedication to traditional values encouraged in a less than supportive environment? One place to start is to identify existing structures that could support this kind of activity. It is from this position that the Northern Territory-Eastern Indonesia Partnership proceeds, focusing on the *sanggar* (studio, collective), the main centres for training and producing traditional art for visiting tourists and local and international markets. There is immense potential for these centres to develop into community cultural centres that nurture both the cultural and economic life of the community through the production of high-quality performances and textiles for discerning consumers. *Sanggars* might also be developed as venues for the presentation of works produced, thereby facilitating more active community

involvement and generating pride and value in local living traditions and culture.

Tafaen Pah Foundation: a case in point

Assuming a mentorship role in the programme is Yovita Meta, founder and manager of the non-profit Tafaen Pah Foundation in Kefamenanu, West Timor. The Foundation is a weaving cooperative and gallery that supports the work of 25 self-managing groups of female weavers from surrounding villages. Prior to the establishment of the Foundation, local weavers had almost completely abandoned traditional methods of producing textiles, opting for more affordable machine-made cotton and more vibrant but environmentally destructive chemical dyes. Traditional motifs and weaving styles were traded for those that were easier to make and in demand, producing a glut of textiles that were neither culturally significant nor of high artistic or technical quality.

Workshops and training programmes are now conducted at the Foundation to share traditional knowledge of textile production, including instruction on ikat,[2] supplementary weft and tapestry weaving, natural dyeing and hand-spinning cotton with the aim of producing the highest quality textiles for local and international markets. The cultural significance of the motifs and the associated music and dance traditions that complement them are also shared, ensuring their transmission to younger generations and cementing their place in the futures of these communities. The Foundation's success has encouraged men from local villages to participate in offshoot activities, for example, using profits from sales to cultivate the cotton and indigo necessary for producing the textiles, and establishing house-building co-operatives. The Foundation is an inspiring example of how the re-articulation of traditional culture in a contemporary context can empower communities, both economically and culturally.

Traditional knowledge of dance, music and textile production is less and less concerned with nourishing the cultural life of villages and more focused on satisfying the demands of the market. How then is re-dedication to traditional values encouraged in a less than supportive environment?

Theory into practice

The Foundation and the indigenous art centre models will serve as the starting point for the development of eastern Indonesian *sanggars* involved in the pilot programme. Key arts practitioners and community

leaders working towards the revitalization of the traditional arts will be identified to engage in cultural exchange internships with local *sanggars*, indigenous Australian art centres and other key Australian cultural institutions. The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT), which houses an extensive collection of material culture from across eastern Indonesia, will play a key role in supporting this programme. These organisations will facilitate an understanding of the immense potential community cultural centres have to maintain, interpret and nurture local cultures and identities. The programme's format is intended to provide participants with an understanding of the strategies these organisations employ, the possibilities for applying these models in their own communities, and the opportunity to build networks and skills to support this development.

Through experimentation and cultural exchange, the Northern Territory-Eastern Indonesia Partnership programme seeks to facilitate a revitalizing role for the *sanggar* by developing its potential as a community resource. Stimulating informed 'cultural tourism' and establishing new and more discerning markets will provide the necessary economic support to foster pride and continued investment in the cultural heritage of these communities.

Notes

1. The programme is supported by the Ford Foundation in Jakarta, an organisation concerned with the transmission of traditional arts to new generations of Indonesian performers and practitioners.
2. A fabric in which the yarns have been tie-dyed before weaving. From the Indonesian *mengikat*, 'to tie' or 'to bind'.

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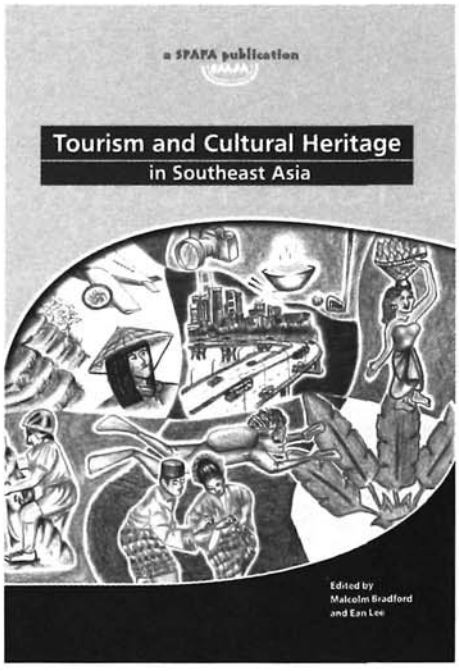
IIAS #41 summer 06

Tourism and Cultural Heritage in Southeast Asia



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Tourism is today one of the largest industries in the world, and Southeast Asia is a favourite destination among tourists. It generates immense income and employment, and is economically beneficial, but can also leave a negative impact on the environment and culture of the host country.

The management, preservation and sustainability of cultural heritage and an ongoing discussion on their effectiveness in the Southeast Asian region are the particular focus of this publication. Case studies, and essays on heritage management and eco-tourism are presented in this volume, which includes information on the effects of tourism on Southeast Asian society and culture, and the measures and actions taken in response to the phenomenon.

Tourism and Cultural Heritage in Southeast Asia is published by SPAFA, and is available at book shops of Asia Books, River Books, all Bookazine branches, and Muang Boran in Bangkok. For information and purchase, contact:

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"What make these papers particularly interesting are the specific and in-depth treatments of subjects unique to the individual countries. Of special interest are those papers dealing with countries that are in the earliest stages of modern tourism development, such as Brunei and Viet Nam."

Russell V. Keune,
FAIA American Institute of Architects

Neolithic village found near Stonehenge

Archaeologists have discovered a Neolithic village in the vicinity of Stonehenge. It is now believed that hundreds of people, including the builders of Britain's most famous stone circle, lived in the settlement over 4,000 years ago.

In fieldwork financed by the National Geographic Society and English Heritage, the outlines of domestic homes and dozens of hearths have been excavated at Durrington Walls, the world's largest known henge. The houses were radiocarbon dated to 2,600-2,500 BCE. As these dates roughly coincide with the construction of the menhirs at Stonehenge, researchers have concluded that the residents of the village and the builders of what is now a very popular World Heritage Site were one and the same.

There is a long-standing theory that the site formed part of a larger ritual complex and was never completely isolated as it appears today.

In September 2006, during the Stonehenge Riverside Project, eight homes were unearthed of which six contained well preserved floors made of clay; each room measuring 25 sq m with a hearth at the centre. One trench reveals the remains of a track consisting of flint, broken bones and pieces of pottery.

The excavations were partly directed by Dr Mike Parker Pearson of Sheffield University, who described it not only as "the richest site," but also "the filthiest site of this period known in Britain." As Stonehenge and Durrington Walls are only 3.2 kms apart, Dr Pearson believes that the village received and prepared bodies for burial. The site has been declared as a candidate for one of the Seven Modern Wonders of the World.

Stonehenge Site has been declared as a candidate for one of the Seven Modern Wonders of the World

Stonehenge timeline:

- 8,000 BCE – A wooden structure is erected at the site
- 3,000 BCE – Ditches and timber circles are put in (for cremations?)
- 2,600 BCE – 43 megaliths erected
- 1,600 BCE – Last known construction at Stonehenge
- 1620 CE – Inigo Jones the Antiquarian concludes that it was a Roman temple
- 1640 CE – John Aubrey declares that druids were responsible for its construction
- January 2007 – Archaeologists discover an ancient village near Stonehenge

Archaeologists find evidence of the Battle of Tell Hamoukar

Tell Hamoukar, one of the world's earliest cities, was destroyed in an ancient battle 5,500 years ago, according to archaeologists.

The excavations in Syria, in what was Northern Mesopotamia, have revealed some of the oldest known evidence of organised warfare, including a collection of "clay sling bullets."

Since 1999, the joint team from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago and the Syrian Department of Antiquities have found that the city had been surrounded by a 3 m thick perimeter wall. The main mound of occupation extends over 105 hectares, while pottery and obsidian flakes and cores are scattered in its southern outskirts across over 283 hectares. Ruins of storerooms revealed numerous clay seals, used to secure baskets. Two large administrative buildings destroyed by fire contained over 1,000 round or oval-shaped clay bullets fired from slings, at that time the weapon of choice. One bullet had pierced the plaster of a mud-bricked wall. Twelve inhumations are believed to have been casualties of this battle.

With the war in Iraq unabating, archaeologists have had to switch their research and fieldwork of Ancient Mesopotamia to Syria. Thus, such sites as Tell Hamoukar, Tell Brak and Habuba Kabira have had to

come to the fore, while the more thoroughly studied ancient sites of Southern Mesopotamia (Iraq) have become inaccessible. However, these northern sites have offered valuable insights, especially into the ancient economy of the Near East.

At around 4,500 BCE, Tell Hamoukar emerged as a manufacturing centre. Sharp and durable tools and blades were being produced from raw obsidian, a volcanic glass, brought in from Turkey, over 300 kms away, then exported in a highly lucrative long-distance trade network. This prosperity is what may have led to the site's fiery demise in c. 3,500 BCE.

Ironically, as they dug for traces of ancient war, the explosions of a more modern war could be heard several miles away from the other side of the border with Iraq.

Philistines not so philistine

Excavations in Israel are revealing that the Philistines were more refined and not as uncultured as their reputation suggests.

Archaeologists now believe that the Philistines – a people from the region of the Aegean Sea who settled on the coastal areas of ancient Palestine at around 1200 BCE – were not only highly cultured but also a literate group.

Painted inscriptions on ceramic sherds discovered at the site of a Philistine seaport in Ashkelon, Israel, represent an undeciphered system of non-Semitic writing.

Frank Moore Cross Jr, an expert of ancient Near Eastern scripts at Harvard, proposed that these inscriptions represent a form of Cypro-Minoan script, that could be classified as "Old Philistine."

Moreover, some of the signs found at Ashkelon bear the hallmarks of Cypro-Minoan inscriptions found on artefacts unearthed in Cyprus, and at Ugarit, Syria. The script almost resembled "Linear A," a writing system used in the Aegean between 1650-1450 BCE.

Previous archaeological research has turned up weights and measures

for trading commodities, even precursors of coinage, so it is only to be expected that these inscriptions would eventually surface.

The biblical Philistines are generally thought to be just one group of the mysterious "Sea Peoples" who may have migrated to various coastal areas around the Mediterranean from somewhere amongst the Greek islands.

They were cast as boorish and uncultured by the neighbouring Israelites, when the Bible came to be written; typically, Goliath was portrayed as the bad Philistine.

By the 10th century BCE, however, the Israelites and Philistines moved closer together socially and culturally, with the latter adopting Old Hebrew, but nothing could quell the unfavourable reputation that the Philistines had gained.

Clash of past and future in the Eternal City

Progress on Rome's new 25 km subway line is being hampered by its greatest asset – almost daily discoveries of relics belonging to its rich cultural heritage.

Archaeologists have moved in to see what they can find from the glory days of the Roman Empire as the perennial tug-of-war between preserving ancient treasures and developing essential infrastructure continues.

No less than 38 archaeological sites have sprung up around the city, mostly around famous monuments or at key locations around the gridlocked streets

No less than 38 archaeological sites have sprung up around the city, mostly around famous monuments or at key locations around the gridlocked streets, and reports present some important finds almost every day.

Working amidst one of Rome's infamous traffic jams in front of the baroque church of Sant'Andrea della Valle, one team uncovered the 4-metre thick cement wall of a public building dating back to the imperial age. It is possible that it may have belonged to a temple dedicated to the goddess, Fortune, built in the area by Agrippa,

general and son-in-law of Rome's first emperor, Augustus.

Other finds emerging across the city include Roman taverns found near the ancient Forum; and 2,000 year-old tombs containing the remains of two children encased in amphorae.

The 3-billion-euro Metro project has finally had to be implemented as traffic and tourists had combined to wreak congestion havoc on the capital, taking its two subway lines to almost breaking point. Ironically, calls for construction of a third line were stalled for years due to the extended delays that archaeologists would cause in the pursuit of ancient treasures.

Under Italy's strict conservation laws, the state's archaeological office has to declare whether a find should be removed, destroyed or encased within the subway network.

Excavations are being carried out only to clear the way for stairwells and air ducts as the eventual 30 stations and their adjoining tunnels will be dug at a depth of 25-30 metres (80-100 feet), lower than any level of human habitation in the city's history.

Malcolm Bradford is a SPAFA researcher, currently working on two publications; an archaeological history of Srivijaya, and a compilation of papers presented at the "Archaeology of Early Harbours" Workshop held in Singapore in 2004.

Just off Jalan Penampang and surrounded by lush gardens is the Sabah Museum Complex, comprising the Main Building, the Science and Technology Centre, the Conservation Centre and the Heritage Village.

The Main Building is designed after a traditional Rungus longhouse. Inside are the Ethnography, Natural History, Ceramics, Archaeology, History and Islamic Civilization Galleries. Showcase display beautiful and fragile jars, traditional costumes and craft, precious fragments from the past, colourful birds and butterflies, insects and animals. The Museum's main offices are located at this building.

The Science and technology Centre houses, among others, the Sabah Art Gallery, an exhibition on oil and gas production and an exhibition on broadcasting technology.

The Heritage Village allows visitors a chance to experience several traditional houses within a small area. Among them are a Bajau House, a Murul Longhouse, a Chinese farmhouse with earthern floor, and a Bamboo House.

Commercial medicinal and ornamental plants make up the well-planned gardens of the Sabah Museum. Local fruit trees as well as vegetables are grown around the Heritage Village. A Montane Garden also graces the grounds of the Museum.

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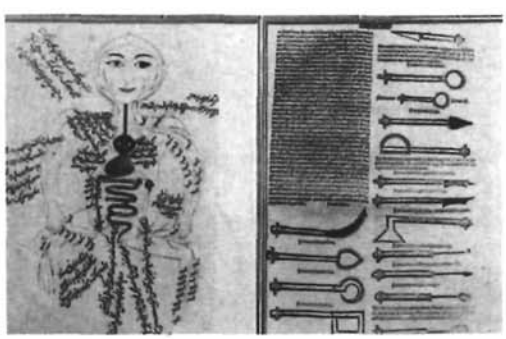
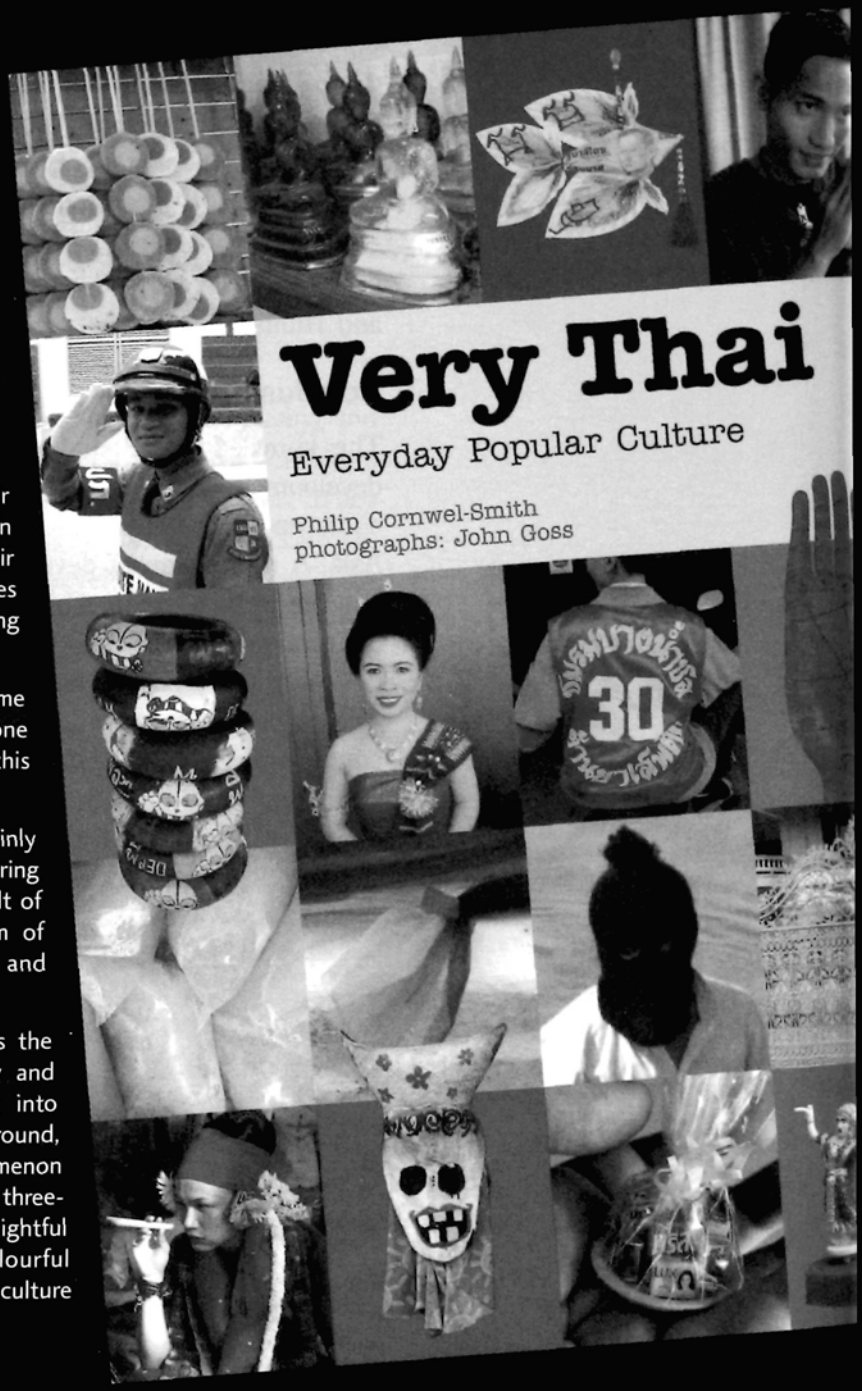


Very Thai

Everyday Popular Culture

Philip Cornwel-Smith
photographs: John Goss



Why do Thai soldiers carry a hem of their mothers' skirts with them while they are on military duty? How did Siamese cats get their truncated tails? And what are wooden phalluses doing amongst cooking utensils in food-vending stalls?

These are some of the many questions that come to mind while one is in Thailand, no matter if one was born, has been living, or travelling in this Southeast Asian country.

Freelance writer, Philip Cornwel-Smith, has certainly been scratching his head a lot while residing, touring and seeking explanations in Thailand. The result of his search for answers is a pop compendium of everyday Thai things, cultural expressions and experiences.

'Very Thai' is a fine guide book that provides the reader a close-up of mundane, extraordinary and idiosyncratic aspects of Thai life. Delving into traditions and trends, fashion and the underground, the quirky and the occult, and such daily phenomenon as fortune-telling, Buddha amulets, gambling, the three-wheeler 'tuk tuk', and more, 'Very Thai' is a delightful anthology of researched insights and colourful photographs that helps one appreciate Thai culture more.

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Life-sized terracotta warriors of China

The student terracotta warrior

A German art student dressed up and posed as one of the terracotta soldiers in the Chinese heritage site of Xian, and was promptly removed by police.

Twenty-six-year-old Pablo Wendel, clad in costume, went into a pit displaying 2,200-year-old life-size pottery figures, and pretended to be one of the terracotta warriors for many minutes.

He was noticed and led away from the site, with police confiscating his costume, and sending him back to the Chinese city of Hangzhou, where he studied.

Reports said that his 'performance art' did not cause damage to the ancient artefacts, and police neither arrested nor charged him.

The terracotta army was constructed to protect the tomb of Emperor Qin Shi Huang, who unified the many Chinese kingdoms into China more than 2,200 years ago.

Discovered in 1974, the clay statues are regarded as one of the greatest archaeological finds of the 20th century. Villagers digging a well in Xian unearthed what became a part of a sensational discovery of about 8,000 human-sized figures of warriors and horses underground. The precious artefacts also provide information on the weaponry, military organisation, and costumes during those ancient times. It is believed that craftsmen made the models after a real army.

Currently, about fifteen terracotta statues are on display in Rome as part of an exhibition on Chinese history. The Scuderie del Quirinale, near the presidential palace, hosts the show, 'Cina: Nascita di un impero' (China: Birth of an Empire). It runs through till 2007. Meanwhile, the British Museum is negotiating to organise, probably by late 2008, the biggest exhibition of these terracotta statues ever seen outside China.

Mona Lisa pregnant?

'Mona Lisa' may be smiling because she is pregnant or just had given birth to a child, Canadian researchers proposed.

Using laser and infrared scans to create a 3D image of Leonardo Da Vinci's painting, scientists obtained a detailed view under the layers of paint, which revealed a gauzy dress usually worn by pregnant or new mothers in Italy during the early 16th Century.

Apart from the dress, 'Mona Lisa' was portrayed in a slightly different posture, and her hair was held in a bun.

Da Vinci painted the masterpiece between 1503 and 1506, probably modifying it many times. Mysteries surrounding the 'Mona Lisa', one of which is how the image was produced, continue to enhance the portrait as one of the most famous ever. Da Vinci's *sfumato* – smoky – technique still baffles experts.

'Oldest' writing of the New World

New evidence supports the proposition that ancient civilisation in Mexico used a script as long as 2,000 years ago.

Inscriptions on stone slab in Vela Cruz, Mexico

Anthropologists were stunned by the find in the state of Vera Cruz. It was a stone slab with inscriptions of symbolic shapes, prompting experts to consider it the oldest example of writing in the New World. They believed that an ancient pre-Columbian people, the Olmecs, made those inscriptions, and that New World civilisations had established a writing system

about four hundred years before their contemporaries in the western hemisphere.

The object has been dated to the early 1st millennium BC, and belonged to an area once occupied by the Aztecs, Mayas and their predecessors. Known as the 'Cascajal block', it was unearthed by road builders, and weighs 12 kg, measuring 36 cm in length, 21 cm in width, and 13 cm in thickness.

Mexican archaeologists Carmen Rodriguez and Ponciana Ortiz were the first to realise the significance of the discovery, with international archaeologists examining the block in 2006.

The Sumerians are generally considered as the first civilisation to have a form of writing about five thousand years ago, even though claims that Chinese inscriptions are of an earlier period have been put forward.

These whale teeth are made for chewing

A whale fossil with a set of scary teeth has been found in Australia.

The 25-million-years-old discovery was intriguing because it belongs to the group, Baleen whales, whose food source is plankton.

Scientists suggest that the new specimen indicates that ancient Baleen whales hunted prey as toothed whales such as the Orca, Narwhal, Sperm whale and dolphin species did.

They also probably used their big, sharp teeth to catch and chew prey, rather for filter feeding.

The fossil belongs to a species, *Janjucetus hunderi*, which was named after its teenage discoverer, Staumn Hunter, who stumbled upon it in an exposed boulder in 1997 while he was surfing.

The Janjucetus hunderi whale

Thracian dagger

Archaeologists have found a precious dagger in a tomb in the centre of Bulgaria.

The dagger, made of an alloy of gold and platinum, was discovered close to the village of Dubovo, and has been dated to about 3,000 BC.

Over five hundred miniature gold objects were unearthed from the same tomb. They are believed to belong to the mysterious Thracian civilisation, which thrived for about 4,000 years on the edge of the ancient Greek and Roman empires.

The golden dagger measures 16 cm (6 inch) long, and has been described as a sensational discovery. It provided indications that metal processing during that period was far more advanced than what had been known.

Wartime prison art

The paintings of a British woman imprisoned in Singapore during World War II are now displayed in an exhibition in the site of her internment, the Changi Prison, now the Changi Museum.

Mary Angela Bateman was, among thousands of internees, incarcerated by the Japanese for three and a half years. As with several captives, she recorded her experiences in the internment camps, but her work was not recognized until last year. The Changi museum hosted an exhibition that chronicled the experiences of 100,000 prisoners who were captured after the Japanese had taken over the island of Singapore.

Mrs Bateman's collection of fifteen watercolors and sketches were discovered in 2002, in a dusty corner of a junk shop in England.

The artwork became the focus of a collection to commemorate internees' wartime experiences.

Many of the images in her paintings reflected the jail walls and its buildings with clear blue sky in the background. They presented glimpses of the harsh and claustrophobic life in the prison.

'Oldest jewellery'

A study has revealed the earliest known jewelery produced by modern humans. International scientists have identified three shell beads, two from Skhul

The shells were probably beads of bracelets or necklaces

Cave of Mount Carmel, Israel and the other from Oued Djebbhana, Algeria, dating them at 90,000-100,000 years old.

Researchers said that the ancient pieces of jewellery, perforated with a sharp flint tool, represent a remarkable early expression of modern behaviour in the archaeological record.

Although humans with modern-looking anatomy are known in the fossil record from about 195,000 years ago onward, experts were still looking for examples of modern behaviour until not too long ago.

They proposed that modern anatomy and modern behaviour did not evolve in tandem.

The argument put forward was that a mutation in the human brain 50,000 years ago might have sparked creativity, and the production of personal ornaments, art and craft, tools and weapons.

Resent discoveries, including the three beads, have weakened the theory of a sudden creative burst in the evolution of modern human behaviour.

Guggenheim in the Middle East

The United Arab Emirates will have its own Guggenheim museum in its booming capital, Abu Dhabi.

Architect Frank Gehry will design the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, which authorities say will be completed in five years, at the cost of over US$200 million.

It will become the largest museum of the Guggenheim foundation, whose collections in New York, Bilbao, Berlin, Venice and Las Vegas draw more than two and a half million visitors annually.

Located on Saadiyat Island, which is slated to be a new cultural centre, the museum will occupy an area of 30,000m^2, twenty-five times bigger than any of the Guggenheim museums.

Ancient carnivorous kangaroo and bird

Fossil evidence of many unknown creatures, including a 'killer kangaroo', was discovered in Australia recently.

Paleontologists also found the remains of a huge flesh-eating bird, dubbed rather spectacularly 'demon duck of doom'.

All together, the excavation team from University of New South Wales unearthed evidence of no less than twenty new species in the Riversleigh fossil fields.

The university team reported that the carnivorous marsupials, from between 10 and 20 million years ago, would not have been similar to kangaroos today because they had long fangs, and galloped with forearms rather than hopped.

That old rat

A scientific expedition to central Laos has captured images of a fossil rock rat. Known as *'Kha-nyou'* to the locals, it was trapped, photographed and later released.

The Laotian rat, believed to be the sole survivor of an ancient group of rodents, is seen in the pictures as a furry and friendly animal, and is as large as a squirrel.

Scientists traced the lineage of the creature to a family of rodents which might have disappeared over eleven million years ago.

The *'Kha-nyou'* has been classified as *Laonastes aenigmamus*, dead specimens of which were sold in a hunter's market last year. Its appearance attracted the international attention of the scientific community, which at first placed the animal in an unknown family related to rodents in Africa and South America. A fossil discovery in China last summer, however, persuaded the researchers to re-examine fossil evidence.

The similarity in skull, teeth, lower jaw bone and skeletal features of the *'Kha-nyou'* and the fossil prompted experts to link the Laotian rock rat to the extinct rodent family, *Diatomyidae.*

Tut's gem linked to extraterrestrial phenomenon

In 1996, Italian mineralogist Vincenzo de Michele noticed a yellow-green jewel in the middle of a Tutankhamun necklace.

After testing, the gem was determined to be made of glass and more ancient than the earliest Egyptian civilisation.

Its origin was traced to pieces of glass scattered in a remote sandy region of the Sahara Desert.

Recently, a BBC Horizon programme presented an intriguing theory linking the jewel to a meteor.

An astrochemist found that the material had been produced at a temperature which only the intensity of a meteorite colliding into earth could have created. However, signs of an impact, even with satellite imagery, were not found.

A geophysicist proposed that a phenomenon such as the aerial explosion above Tunguska might have occurred to heat the ground and turned it into glass in the Egyptian desert.

In 1908, a powerful burst flattened eighty million trees in the Tunguska forest of Siberia. It did not leave a meteorite impact crater, leading scientists to hypothesize that an extraterrestrial object had exploded in the sky.

The 1945 atomic bomb tested in New Mexico formed a thin layer of glass on the sand of the site. Since the area of glass in the Sahara desert is massively larger, it is suggested that what took place there was much more intense than an atomic bomb detonation.

In 1994, the Hubble telescope documented the most massive incandescent fireball ever recorded when the Shoemaker-Levy comet hit Jupiter.

Simulation of such an impact over earth demonstrated that it could generate a fireball that could produce atmospheric temperatures of 1,800C, ten thousand times more powerful than atomic explosions. A field of glass could be formed as a result.

Scientists suggested that phenomenon such as the Tunguska event could occur as often as every hundred years, and that they could be compared to the effect of many Hiroshima bombs going off.

Tutankhamun's pectoral with desert glass scarab

Even more devastating than the one supposed to have happened in the Sahara was an event 800,000 years ago in Southeast Asia. An air burst created multiple fireballs, and left glass over three hundred thousand square miles but not a crater. A scientist on the BBC programme said that all humans within the region would have perished in such a phenomenon, from which nothing could survive.

Dawn of agriculture

Scientists reported the discovery of fig fossils, in an archaeological site in the Jordan valley, that may indicate the point when humans started to cultivate food.

Dated between 11,200 and 11,400 years old, the figs were found in a house of an early Neolithic Village, known as Grilgal I. Nine of the figs measured 18 mm across, while the other 313 were smaller.

The Israeli and American research team pointed out that the self-pollinating (perthenocarpic) crops were not a wild breed, and could only have been grown by human cultivation.

Parthenocarpic fig trees do not produce seeds because they cannot reproduce, and appear by coincidental genetic mutation or human intervention (removing a shoot for replanting). The researchers suggested that the planting of fig trees led to the dawn of agriculture.

They also believed that the discovery, indicating that these Neolithic humans combined food cultivation with hunting and gathering, could reveal more about human behaviour at the dawn of the

Neolithic revolution, which was preceded by 2.5 million years of hunting/gathering culture.

Even though the discovered fossil figs pre-date the cultivation of other domesticated staples such as wheat, legumes and barley, determining the origins of agriculture has been made difficult by other fossil finds, such as domesticated rice which were found in Korea, dating back to 15,000 years.

Hotels, resorts and spas linked to lootings

Art experts are increasingly pointing at the hotel, resort and spa businesses as major contributors to the rise in demand for precious artefacts stolen from heritage sites.

A trend has been growing in the way luxurious hoteliers, and resort/spa developers are decorating their premises with authentic antiquities.

In the province of Ayutthaya, Thailand, there were reports of orders from foreign countries for objects such as old urns in the backyards of temples. Over many years, several thefts of artefacts took place, and only a few of the stolen items were recovered. Buddha statues, antique wooden cabinets and roof ornaments are some the popular antiquities looted from Buddhist temples.

Recently, a 230-year-old antique cabinet containing sacred Buddhist scripture was stolen from a temple, Wat Sing, in Nonthaburi, and believed to have been smuggled out of the country.

Heritage sites: a failure to act?

The World Heritage Committee (WHC), a Unesco agency, has recently disagreed with advocates and activists on the issue of protecting World Heritage Sites through measures aimed at cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Having heard evidence during a meeting in Lithuania that 125 sites, including the Himalayas and the Great Barrier Reef, are vulnerable to the effects of climate change, WHC resisted calls to take action as recommended by the campaigners. It also declined to advise countries to refer to projections of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in conducting risk assessment of the sites.

Environmental groups were upset by the setback, and accused governments behind the opposition to reduction of emissions. *BBC News* reported that the WHC was perceived as failing to protect some of the most important sites from climate change.

Interestingly, a WHC survey found that 125 sites are indeed threatened by climate change.

Prehistoric spiders

Creatures were spinning webs to trap insects during the existence of dinosaurs on earth.

These web weavers were discovered in amber from more than 100 million years ago.

Two specimens are described in *'Biology Letters'*, the UK Royal Society journal.

Dating to the Lower Cretaceous, the fossils were embedded in amber from Alava, northern Spain.

Amber is a resin in trees that has solidified over millions of years, and helps researchers with their study of ancient life forms when fauna and flora are preserved in the wholly organic substance.

The found species used two different kinds of silk to create webs. One was strong and rigid, and the other stretchy and flexible; their combined quality helped to withstand the tension from an insect flying into it, and the caught insect's attempts to break free.

During the Cretaceous, the population and diversity of spiders might have increased, the article in the journal suggested, with the explanation that as flora grew in abundance, insects that pollinated them also proliferated, presenting spiders a stable food source.

Spiders dating from the Devonian period between 350 and 420 million years ago, before the era of dinosaurs, have been discovered in fossils. While the organs – spinnerets – which weave the webs were observed, how spiders used the spinnerets has yet to be determined.

Buddha ashes enshrined

The ashes and bones of Buddha were placed inside a pagoda in Mumbai, India, during a ceremony drawing thousands of Buddhists on 29th October this year.

As part of celebrations to commemorate the 2,250th anniversary of Buddha's enlightenment, organisers said that it was the first time the relics were

enshrined. Resurrected after 2,000 years, the remains of Buddha were found during an archaeological expedition in 1920. It had been kept in an ancient pagoda in the south of India, and thereafter stored in a Buddhist monastery for more than 85 years.

It is believed that after the death of Buddha, his remains were divided and placed in eight different domes across Asia, which were constructed by his disciples.

Indian emperor Asoka collected and kept them in several small pagodas some 2,000 years ago.

Historical brothel breathes new life as art

An ancient brothel in the archaeological complex of Pompeii has been restored, renovated, and revealed officially to the public recently, *AP* said.

Regarded as the most popular brothel in the ancient Roman city, the 'Lupanare' – "Lupa" is the Latin word for prostitute – is a two-floor structure, with five rooms on each floor, and explicit erotic frescoes. The beds, which were made of stones, were covered with mattresses.

Pompeii was devastated by a volcanic eruption in 79 AD. The six-metre-deep cocoon of volcanic ash preserves a significant record of life in the ancient city.

The local office of Pompeii is now managing the famous tourist destination. Information provided by the office said that ancient Pompeii had many brothels, and the prostitutes were slaves, usually of Greek or Oriental origin.

Giant statue unearthed in Mexico city

The biggest Aztec idol ever found was publicly displayed by Mexican archaeologists recently, reports *Reuters*. Researchers claimed that it might be an entrance to a secret chamber at a ruined temple under Mexico city.

Discovered at the archaeological site of Templo Mayor, close to Zocalo Square, the immensity of the 14 metre, 12.4 tonne monolith and detailed relief of the earth god, Tlaltecuhtli, astounded excavators and experts.

From the 14th century, the Aztecs civilisation dominated an empire covering the Gulf of Mexico, the Pacific Ocean and most of Mexico. Its rulers started constructing the pyramid-like Templo Mayor in 1375. War-like and deeply religious, the Aztecs constructed many monuments. They were subjugated by the Spanish in 1521.

Scientists believed that the huge stone slab is a giant idol, and covers the door to a hall yet to be uncovered.

Archaeologist on trial

An archaeologist will be tried in a court of law in Turkey for "inciting hatred based on religious differences", *AFP* reported.

Muazzez Ilmiye Cig, 92 years old, has offended Islamists by writing in a scientific paper that the woman's practice of wearing headscarves could be traced to pre-Islamic sexual rites.

The eminent Turkish archaeologist is an expert on the first known urban civilisation of fourth millennium BC, the Sumerians. In a book published in 2005, she wrote that Sumerian priestesses wore headscarves when initiating the young into sex.

Ms Cig has been known to support Turkey's secular political system, and recently wrote to the wife of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erodogan, urging her to discard her headscarf and set an example to young people.

Mummy dogs

Archaeologists have dug up over forty mummified dogs in southern Peru.

The remains of the animals, buried with food and blankets alongside humans, were unearthed during an excavation of the ancient Chiribaya civilisation (AD 900 - 1350).

Investigators suggested that mummification of the dogs proves the existence of a belief that animals had an afterlife, a belief which ancient Egypt held.

Beige, long-haired, and featuring medium-sized snouts, the Chiribaya dogs found in the desert sand of Ilo Valley seemed similar in appearance to small golden retrievers.

'Monster' fossil haul in Arctic

Palaeontologists in Norway have uncovered a trove of fossils belonging to gigantic marine reptiles which lived during the era of the dinosaurs.

The fossils on the Arctic island chain of Svalbard archipelago, between Norway and the North Pole, are a hundred and fifty million years old.

Thriving in deep sea which was quite cool then, the creatures were supreme predators. One skeleton has been dubbed the 'Monster', due to its huge size.

The finds in a remote area of Spitsbergen, the biggest island in the Svalbard, were made during fieldwork by scientists from the University of Uslo's Natural History Museum. They reported that the area was rich with fossils, but the remains are of two major categories of extinct sea animals, the plesiosaurs and the ichthyosaurs.

'Monster' predators of the Arctic

Plesiosaurs are similar in appearance with the mythical descriptions of the Loch Ness monster, and might be of one of two varieties: small head, long neck, or big head and short neck, also known as pliosaurs.

The 'Monster' was an enormous pliosaur, whose vertebrae of the neck are the size of a dinner plate, and teeth are as large as bananas.

The bones of twenty-two plesiosaurs and six ichthyosaurs have been identified. After their deaths, the carcasses of these sea reptiles remained in the mud at the bottom of the ocean where there was little or no oxygen.

Bee fossil/DNA

The oldest known bee has been identified by scientists. It was trapped in tree sap, and is believed to be a hundred million years old.

Preserved in amber, the specimen is said to be at least 35-45 million years older than the earliest known bee fossil.

It was recovered from a mine in the Hukawng Valley of Burma, and has been named *'Melittosphex burmensis'*. The amber specimen is kept in good condition with clearly visible legs and wings. It has common features with the wasps, and may support the belief that pollinating bees evolved from carnivorous wasp ancestors.

Coincidentally, in a related event, the DNA of the honey bee has been published, and it presents remarkable links with mammals and humans.

Estimated to contain about 10,000 genes, the bee is reported to have a brain slightly bigger than the full-stop period mark you see at the end of this sentence.

Today, there are some 20,000 species of bees. They nurture their offsprings with pollen.

Fora on earth were dependent on conifers to spread plant seeds in the wind prior to 100 million years ago. Later, pollinating bees help flowering plants to proliferate.

Grave robbers lead to archaeological find

While digging by the Step Pyramid at Saggara, near Cairo, looters were caught by police.

The arrest led archaeologists to excavate and uncover the tombs of three royal dentists.

The Step Pyramid is considered the oldest pyramid in Egypt. The tombs discovered near it are dated 4,200 years old. Two hieroglyphs displaying an eye over a tusk indicated that the remains belong to the dentists of the pharaohs.

One of the tombs contained a curse written on the entrance, which has been deciphered as warning: "Anyone who enters my tomb will be eaten by a crocodile and a snake."

On the walls and pillars of the grave were figures depicting the daily life of the chief dentist, including rituals such as the slaughter of animals, honour rites for the dead, and leisure activities.

A hole in a Picasso

An American tycoon accidentally caused a hole in the Picasso painting he owned and was selling.

Steve Wynn, a Las Vegas magnate, was showing the painting (with a sale price of US$139m) to visitors at his Las Vegas office when he hit it with his elbow while speaking and gesturing. *BBC* news reported that his reaction was: 'Look what I've done; thank goodness it was me."

He bought Le Reve (The Dream) for US$48.4m, and had already sealed a deal to sell the 1932 painting at US$4m higher than the private-sale record (Gustav Klimt's 'Adele Bloch-Bauer 1'). For the record sale at art auction, Picasso's 'Boy With a Pipe' fetched US$104.1m in 2004.

Mr. Wynn will now, however, withdraw the sale, and repair the painting, whose centre bore the damage of a hole the size of a coin.

Lucy goes to US

Ethiopia has consented to allow Lucy, the 3.2 million-year-old skeleton, to go on an American tour.

Another hundred and ninety Ethiopian relics, including some of the most ancient human stone tools, will form part of the travelling exhibition.

The first stop for Lucy will be the Houston Museum of Natural Science in Texas, which has been negotiating for four years in finalising the loan of the ancient bones of this famed human ancestor. Then, the exhibition will continue from Washington, to New York, Denver, Chicago and six other yet-to-be-confirmed destinations.

Lucy was found in 1974, in Hader, Ethiopia, by palaeoanthropologists who were reported to be smitten by the Beatles' song, 'Lucy in the sky with diamonds'.

Ancient giant camel bones found

Fossils of a giant camel have been discovered in Syria. The remains of the animal, dated 100,000 years old, were found in the central region of the country by a Swiss-Syrian team of archaeologists.

Reports said that the ancient dromedary is an unknown species. It was about 4 metres tall, and as large as a giraffe or an elephant, and twice the size of a contemporary camel.

Over forty fossils were unearthed by the same team between 2005 and 2006; some fossils of other camel species have also been discovered at the El Kown site, dating to one million years ago.

El Kown is a 20 km-wide gap between two mountain ranges with natural springs, where bones of human, flint and stone tools were found.

Ancient necropolis under the Vatican

While excavating to prepare the ground for the construction of a multi-storey car park under the Vatican, bulldozers stumbled upon a burial site dating to the time of Christ.

It turned out to be a Roman necropolis, with over two hundred tombs uncovered. There were also statues, vases, terracotta urns, coins, skeletons and funery inscriptions.

The underground 'world of the dead' provides glimpses into the life of ancient Rome, and an unprecedented study of Romans belonging to the lower and middle classes.

Unearthed remains included those belonging to artisans, a theatre set designer, letter carrier, circus horse trainer, and slave who became part of the respected household staff of Emperor Nero.

A fascinating feature throughout the necropolis was the common items emerging from the tombs in the form of terracotta pipes. An ancient practice of families was to picnic by the graves, occasionally pouring wine, milk or honey down the pipes to feed the departed.

'THERE BEFORE YOU'

ANGKOR OBSERVED

DAWN ROONEY

ORCHID GUIDES

ANGKOR OBSERVED

by DAWN ROONEY

This is the second book in the series THERE BEFORE YOU. It consists of a selection of early travellers' impressions of the Khmer empire's ancient, 12th century capital and the legends that inspired the majestic stone temples of Angkor, which were described by a visitor in the 1920s as "the most impressive sight in the world of edifices".

The work brings to the reader out-of-print impression of early western travellers, and also includes tales and legends based on an oral tradition, published for the first time. It serves as a guide-book companion, as an introduction to Angkor and as supplementary reading following a visit. It is also of interest to the armchair traveller unable to venture as far afield as Cambodia.

The author has a PhD in art history, and has written several books on Southeast Asian art and culture, including *Angkor. An Introduction to the Temples* (1994).

"Go to Angkor, my friend,
to its ruins and its dreams."

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