



# NEWS

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Bangkok No. 1 January 2010

National Museum Volunteers





### National Museum Volunteers

The National Museum Volunteers (NMV), under the auspices of the Department of Fine Arts, is a recipient of the Thai National Heritage Preservation Award 1989, 2001 and 2004. The group is also a Member of the Council of the World Federation of Friends of Museums.

The National Museum Volunteers is an organization with Thai and international members whose purpose is to serve the National Museum Bangkok and the public through a variety of activities.

### The NMV Newsletter

A monthly publication of the National Museum Volunteers, distributed free to members.

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### Cover photo:

Statue of Catholic Priest at Prasart Museum

Printed by TR Enterprise Bangkok

## NATIONAL MUSEUM BANGKOK

### Hours of Operation

Wednesday to Sunday:

9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Monday and Tuesday:

Closed, except on public holidays

Thai New Year and 1 January:

Closed

*Entrance fee: baht 200*

### NMV Library

The library is located at the rear of the Museum grounds behind the Palace building.

Hours of opening:

Wednesdays: 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Thursdays: 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Membership cards must be shown when borrowing books.

E-mail: [nmvlibrary@gmail.com](mailto:nmvlibrary@gmail.com)

### Guided Tours

**English: Thai Art, History and Buddhism**

*Wednesday & Thursday*

**French: Pre-Thai and Thai Art**

*Wednesday & Thursday*

**German: Thai Art and Culture**

*Thursday*

**Japanese: Thai History and Culture**

*1st & 2nd Wednesday of the month*

**Thai Art and Buddhism**

**Buddhaisawan Chapel**

*3rd, 4th & 5th Wednesday of the month*

**Various Topics (Depending on the guide)**

*Every Thursday*

Time: 9:30 am

Meet at: Museum ticket office

Fee: Free (*Museum entrance fee must be paid.*)

### For information call:

*Guide Chairperson (Guiding and Special tours):*

*Conrad Harding 084 166 5084*

*Tour Leaders:*

*English: Lynda O'Callaghan 02 285 6162*

*French: Isabelle Depaty 02 261 1964*

*Jean-Pierre Joly 02 271 1249*

*German: Barbara Frank 080 088 3962*

*Japanese: Kumi Ishii 02 662 2179*

*Naomi Nomoto 02 664 3640*

NMV Website address:

<http://www.museumvolunteersbkk.net>



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This issue edited by:

Devin Brougham

## CALENDAR

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- Jan 11 Study Group – *“The Journey of Mahayana Buddhism”*
- Jan 12 At Home – *“Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhammananda”*
- Jan 14 Excursion – *“Buddhist Cosmology and the Grand Palace”*
- Jan 18 Study Group – *“The Journey of Mahayana Buddhism”*
- Jan 25 Study Group – *“The Journey of Mahayana Buddhism”*
- Jan 28 At Home – *“Burma and the Art of Lacquer”*
- Jan 28 Monthly Lecture – *“Lanna Palm-leaf Manuscripts”*
- Feb 1 Study Group – *“The Journey of Mahayana Buddhism”*
- Feb 8 Study Group – *“The Journey of Mahayana Buddhism”*
- Feb 15 Study Group – *“The Journey of Mahayana Buddhism”*

For further details regarding upcoming NMV events, please see announcements in this newsletter or check the NMV website: [www.museumvolunteersbkk.net](http://www.museumvolunteersbkk.net)



## NOTICES

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### **Touching Thailand Guiding**

Are you interested in guiding with a difference? If so, the Touching Thailand project team would like to hear from you!

The NMV invites all visitors to the National Museum Bangkok to learn about Thailand through Touching Thailand Tours. During these Tours, visitors are able to touch specially selected Buddha statues, architectural items, ceramics and other pieces while they learn about Thai art, history and culture.

Developed in conjunction with the National Museum Bangkok (NMB), the Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB) and the NMV, these hands-on programs have been designed so that blind and visually impaired Thais and foreigners can learn about Thai history, art and culture through their fingers.

We are very interested in expanding the Touching Thailand team so that we can meet future demand for tours. We are looking for people who wish to train as guides as well as those willing to help with the organisation of the tours.

If you are interested in getting involved in this very special of NMV activities, then please contact Bo Mazur on email address: [information@museumvolunteersbkk.net](mailto:information@museumvolunteersbkk.net).

### **New NMV Members Directory**

We will publish an updated members directory in the near future – please provide any changes to your contact information if these have changed since your last registration. Kindly submit changes to the email address: [nmvmembership@gmail.com](mailto:nmvmembership@gmail.com). We plan to make electronic copies of the new directory available during the first quarter of 2010

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**NMV ENGLISH GUIDING WORKSHOP 2010**



**EXPLORE THE NATIONAL MUSEUM BANGKOK:**

**Learn more about Thai art, architecture, history, religion and culture.**

**WORKSHOP SCHEDULE 2010**

**Every Wednesday and Friday. 08:30-12:00**

**from Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2010**

**until Friday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

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**Part 1: LECTURES ON THE FOLLOWING TOPICS\*:**

- Introductory Lecture followed by **National Museum Bangkok [NMB]** tour
- Buddhism: Lecture and discussion session
- History: Pre Thai to Thonburi lecture, followed by History Tour of Museum
- Art & History of the Bangkok Period. followed by Wang Na Palace Tour
- Hinduism and the Great Gods followed by tour of Hindu Images
- Evolution of The Buddha Image. followed by Buddha Image Tour.

**Part 2 : 6 SPECIAL IN-DEPTH STUDY TOURS OF THE NMB\***

**COST 2,000 Baht. NMV Members Only**

**VENUE [All Lectures & Tours] at the National Museum Bangkok**

**For more information:**

e-mail: [information@museumvolunteersbkk.net](mailto:information@museumvolunteersbkk.net)

visit our website: <http://www.museumvolunteersbkk.net/>

**Conrad Harding** Guide Chairperson: [NMVGuideChair@Gmail.com](mailto:NMVGuideChair@Gmail.com)  
084-327-3800

**Lynda O'Callaghan** English Tour leader [the.ocalls@gmail.com](mailto:the.ocalls@gmail.com)

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



### Dear Members,

Happy New Year to all of you!

The wonderful fireworks over the Chao Phraya River will welcome in the colourful New Year and chase out the bad, old ghosts with lots of bangs. So the New Year 2010 / 2553 will be a good year.

The NMV starts a new year of activities by participating in Children's Day on the 9th of January. The Museum's curators have prepared many activities linked to Thai history, art and religion; and a small NMV team will offer activities such as a colouring competition, making puppets, the experience of learning through touch, and much more. So come with your children and join the Museum and its volunteers (<http://www.museumvolunteersbkk.net/html/NonNMV.html>).

Our first 'At Home' of the year will be on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January: the Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhammananda will give us insights into Buddhist teaching and the progressive participation of women in Buddhism in contemporary Thailand. Bhikkhuni Dhammananda is a long-time friend of the NMV.

Our first excursion on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January will be a superlative event featuring Buddhist Cosmology and its influence on the Grand Palace architecture. Our esteemed Patron M.R. Chakrabort Chitrabongs has kindly agreed to lead this excursion to the Grand Palace, preceded by a lecture at the auditorium. We appreciate Khun Chai's patronage and friendship and we always enjoy his excellent art of teaching. Thank you Khun Chai!

We are looking for members willing to take on co-chair roles at the Steering Committee. Please check the list of our SC coordinators at [www.museumvolunteersbkk.net/html/contact.html](http://www.museumvolunteersbkk.net/html/contact.html) and if you feel called, please don't hesitate to contact us at [information@museumvolunteersbkk.net](mailto:information@museumvolunteersbkk.net). 'Touching Thailand' needs support and new guides to be trained. We want to attract more visitors to explore the Thai art world by touching [www.museumvolunteersbkk.net/html/touching.html](http://www.museumvolunteersbkk.net/html/touching.html).

Changes at the Steering Committee are sometimes unexpected, but sometimes there is a good reason for someone's leaving. Our Vice President Jo West resigned her position to enter the happy world of maternity. For me personally and for the whole committee Jo has been a tower of strength, a best friend, always supporting the responsibilities we have had to carry together. Thank you Jo! We wish you happiness and strength in your new very important 'job'. Isabelle Depaty, the long term French Guides Leader agreed to take over the position as Vice President in our very international committee. Thank you Isabelle! Did you know that the Steering Committee has representatives from 15 countries? And we are only a few of the NMV members!

Have a good start to the New NMV Year! See you soon at the Museum.

Best wishes,

Bo Mazur



We continue to celebrate the NMV's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary throughout the year by featuring articles on various aspects of our history over the past four decades. This month we are pleased to publish reflections by former NMV President Carol Stratton.

### SOME EARLY 70'S MEMORIES FROM A NATIONAL MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

By Carol Stratton (NMV 1971-1976)

It was the best of times. Stimulated by group dynamics, our energy and creativity were at their height. The National Museum Work Study Group, as we were accurately but rather ponderously called then, did just that ... work and study hard in order to be an excellent guide. I remember working harder on my presentation to the Chinese Art study group than I ever did on a paper at college. We knew that haphazard scholarship would not be tolerated by the likes of Dorothy Fickle, Beth Wray, Rosie Yager, Clare Rosenfeld, Dorothy Bailey and later Miriam McNair Scott. On the other hand, the rewards were fulfilling: nothing is more stimulating than praise from your peers. Nevertheless, the process was a steep learning curve as not a great deal had been written at that time in English (or Thai as a matter of fact) on the multi-faceted Thai Art History tradition. In many ways we were pioneers.



At one point when I became Coordinator (1972-3) and Miriam McNair Scott was in charge of the Lecture Series, we two boldly decided to write the art history of Thailand by gathering the lecture series papers and illustrations into book form. This idea was soon discarded due to lack of stylistic or intellectual continuity among the presentations. We would have to do the it ourselves. As envisioned, this book would deal with the Architecture, Sculpture, Painting and Ceramics during the Prehistory, Dvaravati, Srivijaya, and Khmer Art in Thailand, Sukhothai, Lan Na, Ayutthaya and Bangkok periods, all within their cultural and historical setting. We gave ourselves two years. Ah what innocence. Ten years later, after receiving a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (THANK YOU NEH!) we had completed one long chapter which came out in book form in 1981 as *The Art of Sukhothai*.

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Many memories of that time now flood my porous brain to leak into this computer. One I was reminded of by Linda Bigelow at our Washington Reunion this spring. Linda, as photographer, plus other NMV Volunteers, accompanied Miriam and me on a Photographic Tour of Sukhothai in preparation for The Book. Time was of essence and even though the “Hot Season” was in full blast, we set off for a weekend shoot at Sukhothai. We rose at daybreak to begin photographing in the steaming heat, braving brambles and thickets as Sukhothai had not yet become the manicured historical site it is today. The sun rose and poured its strength upon us, depleting ours. I, personally, have the misfortune of being very heat intolerant and felt near exhaustion. Covered with nettles and scratches, we neared the banks of the Yom River at the Phra Ruang Rapids, where, according to Thai history, one of the Sukhothai kings drowned. Undeterred we raced for the Rapids and discarding clothing (retaining underwear) plunged into the cool waters of the Yom River. Ahhhhh. It was delicious! We splashed happily. On the other bank were scattered a handful of wooden and straw houses with a few brown faces peering out of their apertures. These faces registered surprise, nay amazement, to see pink-faced farangs frolicking in the rapids – much like, and as exotic as, the cavorting *kinnari* of lore.

On that trip we spent the night in a “hotel” with very basic accommodations. These included a bed and mattress (which must have been made of local laterite) and a sink in the corner. When one turned the faucet on, water ran down the drain and onto the floor, thus insuring a modicum of cleanliness. The “shower” was over the john probably with the same idea. Bone tired, we retired for the night. However, sleep was illusive due to the “traffic,” the constant slamming of doors, and the giggles of the resident “ladies.”

On another sojourn, we were warned not to stray too far from the main paths as bandits had recently relieved tourists of their wallets, watches and jewelry.

On a still later trip led by Prince Suphat, a group of us gathered at sunset. Where else in the world but with the NMV would two members run up shouting “we’ve just found a pair of inward-turning, curly-tailed makaras!” to be greeted with yelps of enthusiasm?

Sukhothai today is a joy to visit, the brambles gone, the grass manicured, and the monuments mapped. Because of Sukhothai’s intrinsic beauty and important history, the NMV has over the years given birth to a number of adulating “Sukhothai Lovers.” Count us early members among them.



## MONTHLY LECTURE

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**Lanna Palm-leaf Manuscripts: Art, Archaeology and Literature**  
by Dr. François Lagirarde

- Date:** Thursday, 28th January  
**Time:** 10:00 a.m.  
**Location:** National Museum Auditorium  
**Donation:** 100 baht members/200 baht non-members  
**Note:** No booking necessary, just turn up at the door in the morning.



*Library Wat Chiang Man*

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**The lecture:**

Historians often refer to the “golden age” of Lanna (1400 to 1525 AD) and to its “renaissance” (1775 up to the modern times). Both were periods of prosperity made possible by peace and political stability, by population growth, and by the expansion of cultivated land and territory. During both periods monasteries were built (or restored) and new libraries were opened. In response to pedagogic and ritual needs, large numbers of manuscripts were copied and new texts were written in the distinctive Northern Thai alphabet. Thanks to this elegant and effective script, Lanna Buddhist culture rapidly developed into a regional civilization, consolidating an internal network of multiple nodes centred on local and Buddhist sites of power. The “Culture of the Region of the Dhamma Letters” – to use an expression coined by Hans Pentz – would henceforth prevail.

The lecture focuses on palm-leaf manuscripts as the artefact *par excellence* of this culture, together with associated technical and material traditions (architecture of libraries, tools and furniture). It also touches upon the literary genres represented in the palm-leaf manuscript tradition, with special mention of the **tamnan** or local chronicles which records the basic beliefs and historical developments which stimulated and defined the very existence of this Culture.

**The lecturer:**

Dr. François Lagirarde is a researcher and an assistant-professor at the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO or French School of Asian Studies). Based in Laos and Thailand for over twenty years, he is currently head of the EFEO office in Bangkok, located in the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, Taling Chan.

For several years François Lagirarde has devoted his time to the study and digitalization of palm-leaf manuscripts kept in thirty monastic libraries of the Northern Thai provinces.



## AT HOME

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### **'At Home' with Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhammananda**

- Date:** Tuesday, 12th January 2010
- Time:** **9:00 a.m. for prompt 9:30 a.m. start.**  
To finish approx 11:00 a.m.
- Place:** Siam City Hotel  
(Si Ayuthaya Rd at Phaya Thai intersection)  
Closest BTS: Phaya Thai Station (Exit 4) just across the road.
- Donation:** 200 baht member; 400 baht non-member
- Deadline:** when all places are filled; latest Friday 8 January 2010
- Contact:** Patricia [NMVAtHomes@gmail.com](mailto:NMVAtHomes@gmail.com)
- Note:** Due to space restrictions, numbers are limited and places fill quickly. NMV Members will get priority. Reservations can be made by email only and each email will be acknowledged. Only those who have confirmed email reservations may attend the At Home presentation. Thank you for your understanding.



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Our first *At Home* for 2010 will again enjoy the hospitality of the Siam City Hotel where we are privileged to welcome Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhammananda.

Venerable Dhammananda became the first ordained Theravada Bhikkhuni in Thailand 2001 and has been engaged in giving education on ordination for women since 1984. She regularly organizes training for Buddhist women and meditation retreats in her temple in Nakhonpathom.

Also known as Associate Prof Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, she lectured in Buddhism and Eastern Philosophy at Thammasat University in Bangkok for 27 years and is an internationally acclaimed author, journalist, editor and translator on all aspects of Buddhist Dharma, participating in regular international conferences and running her own weekly television show.

Venerable Dhammananda returns as a long time friend and supporter of the NMV to give us further interesting insights into Buddhist teaching and the progressive participation of women in Buddhism in contemporary Thailand.

**Please join us – At Home with the Venerable Bhikkuni Dhammananda**

*The NMV appreciates the Siam City Hotel's generous support for the At Homes program.*

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**'At Home' with Mr Ralph Isaacs**  
**"Visions from the Golden Land: Burma and the Art of Lacquer"**

**Date:** Thursday 28 January 2010

**Time** 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

**Place:** To be confirmed

**Donation:** 200 Baht member / 400 Baht non-member

**Deadline:** When all places are filled. Latest Friday 22 January 2010

**Contact:** [NMVAtHomes@gmail.com](mailto:NMVAtHomes@gmail.com)

**Note:** Due to space restrictions, numbers are limited and places fill quickly. NMV Members will get priority. Reservations can be made by email only and each email will be acknowledged. Only those who have confirmed email reservations may attend the At Home presentation. Thank you for your understanding.



The Ralph and Ruth Isaacs collection of Burmese lacquerware, gifted to the British Museum in 1998, formed the core of a special exhibition there in 2000-- "Visions from the Golden Land: Burma and the Art of Lacquer".

We are especially honoured to welcome Ralph Isaacs – collector, author, lecturer and Burmese expert, to be our guest speaker this month. Ralph will introduce Burmese lacquer and the wares of the Shan States, beautifully illustrated with photos from the British Museum collection.

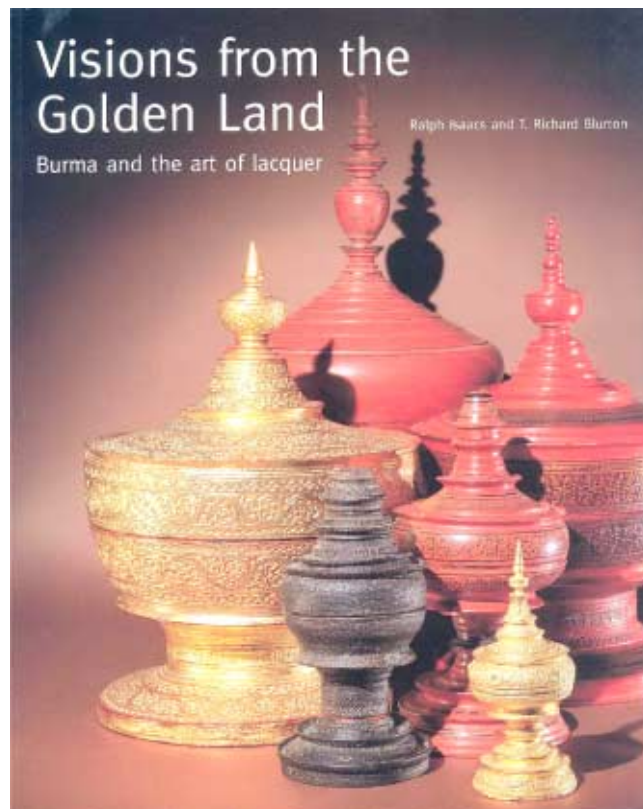
The presentation explains the various techniques of lacquer manufacture, and the amazing variety of finishes. The objects illustrated include splendid pieces made for royal use in

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Mandalay Palace, lacquered manuscripts and images of the Buddha, and domestic containers used everyday by ordinary people, but often of startling beauty. In Theravada Buddhist Burma domestic and devotional spheres overlap, so some lacquer objects are kept in the home but used only on religious occasions. The presentation will show a variety of lacquer vessels, from these splendid palace pieces to workaday household items setting the objects in their social and religious context.

Members attending the talk are invited bring a piece of their own lacquerware for appraisal and discussion on the day.

Please join us – At Home with the Mr Ralph Isaacs



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## An Introduction to Burmese Lacquerware

Raw lacquer (Burmese /thit-si/) is the sap of a tall forest tree. It is tapped like rubber, and like rubber is a natural polymer. Fresh liquid lacquer is greyish, but exposed to air it sets in a few days – jet black, glossy, hard but flexible, and light in weight.

The simplest, and surely the earliest, use of lacquer is the proofing of basketry. Applied to basketry, liquid lacquer soaks into the weave, rendering it tough, hard and waterproof. Containers of basketry, bamboo or wood proofed with lacquer protect their contents from damp, mould and insects. These properties are invaluable in humid climates, and are exploited in a range of boxes, tubes and dishes to hold cooked food, betel-ingredients, cheroots, medicines, clothing and palm-leaf manuscripts. Lacquer objects range from splendid pieces for the palaces to domestic containers used daily by ordinary people.

In Theravada Buddhist homes, domestic and devotional spheres overlap, so some lacquer objects are kept in the home but used only on religious occasions.



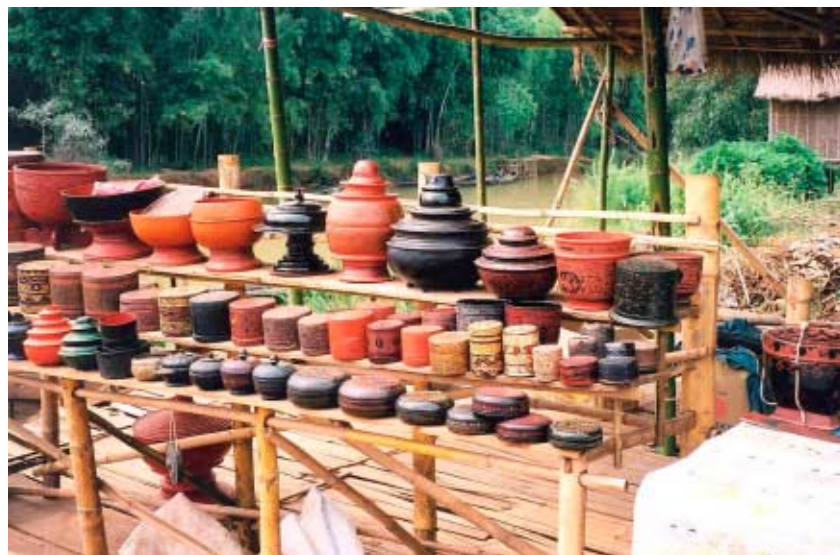
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Vessels lacquered plain black are still popular, but lacquer produced in different parts of Burma shows a range of techniques, and distinctive 'finishes'. Basketry coated with lacquer has its pattern enhanced rather than concealed. Cinnabar, crushed and sifted and mixed in surprisingly small amounts with raw lacquer, converts the black to a bright red. Nowadays cheaper red ochre has replaced the prohibitively expensive cinnabar.

In Pagan, engraved designs are filled with colour, in a technique called /yun/ The /yun/ artist can use his sharp stylus to write inscriptions on the lacquer surface.

A putty (Burmese /thayo/: lit. 'flesh and bones') formed of liquid lacquer mixed with sifted ash of rice-husks, cow-dung, or, for the very finest wares, ashes of cow-bones, is an extremely versatile material. It stays workable for days before setting iron-hard.

Smearred on to basketry it fills in all the interstices of the weave and smooths the surface ready for coats of pure liquid lacquer. This glossy finish can be left plain black, or again coated with red lacquer /Thayo/ can be moulded or sculpted to form patterns and figures in relief on the lacquer surface.



*Inle lacquer stall*



### Thai Mother-of-Pearl Inlay A (Not So) “Minor” Art for Court and Cloister

By John J. Toomey

Once we humans have fulfilled the basic needs of food, drink, shelter, clothing, security and affection, the natural aesthetic impulse in us drives us toward improving our environment. We turn to beautifying our dwellings outside by decorating the exteriors and planting gardens and on the inside by decorating everyday useful as well as ornamental items such as jewelry, clothes, furniture, household necessities such as eating and serving utensils, items of worship and work, transportation, and even items of commerce such as currency and items of warfare, such as weapons and armor. Today we speak of the so-called “minor arts”, or the decorative arts or crafts. However, as we study and learn to appreciate them, we learn that there is nothing minor about these arts at all, especially the art of mother-of-pearl inlay.

Sadly, nowadays, when we think of shell work, the mind conjures up images of cheap carnival trinkets or cheaper beach souvenirs from dear friends and relatives. But mother-of-

pearl inlay lacquer of the Far East has an ancient history of development as one of the highest forms of artistic expression and was reserved exclusively for court and cloister in Thailand.

Lacquer itself comes from a few varieties of sumac tree, the species depending on which country we are discussing. Thai lacquer is made from the sap of the *melanorrhœa*

*usitata* sumac tree, called yang in Thai. The history of lacquer and of mother-of-pearl inlay (*khruang pradab muk* or *khruang muk* in Thai) is more ancient than we might at first suppose. The earliest treatise on lacquer was written in China

by Zhu Zundu from the Five Dynasties era (907-960), but it did not survive to the present. MOP (mother-of-pearl) and other shells were used in Thailand as far back as the Dvaravati period in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries from U-Thong in Suphanburi province, or perhaps used in a rather unrefined way, just as is, as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> C. Dvaravati craftsmen used whole



*Inlay on the door of Wat Ratchabhopit (The Royal Mausoleum)*

rough shells or parts of shell cut round or in ring shapes, or shapeless platelets of shells to inlay into stucco, which was lacquered black, much as porcelain or fragments of porcelain are inlaid into Thai temples even up to the present. Other than the use of shells to inlay the eyes of bronze Buddhist statuary of Lanna and Sukhothai, we cannot trace a continuity or tradition of shell work from Dvaravati to later pieces, so we must look for the early origins of and influences on Thai MOP inlay in the development of this art in general in South East Asia and its surrounding countries. We can presume that the Thais learned to refine lacquer and MOP inlay from examples they later saw and handled from the surrounding countries of China, Vietnam, Burma, and even Japan and Korea.

MOP was used as ornament in China in the An-Yang period, more than three thousand years ago. Black lacquer with red drawings still survives from China's Han dynasty and MOP inlay from the Song dynasty. In 1462, Wang Zuo wrote that the very best of Song and Yuan MOP inlaid lacquer was produced in a village of Jiangxi province. Chinese MOP began to have a direct influence on Thai techniques and styles

from the time of King Rama III (1824-51), though the quality of Thai lacquer of earlier periods, because it was made for royal and ecclesiastical use, was often much better than the quality of the later pieces with Chinese influences. The motifs and ornaments as well as the technique, however, always remained purely Thai.

Chinese MOP inlay from as early as the T'ang dynasty's 8<sup>th</sup> century, though apparently not having survived in China, can be seen inlaid into bronze and red sandalwood on the backs of Chinese mirrors and *pipa* lutes, all over one thousand years old, preserved in the Shoso-in Repository of Imperial Treasures in Nara, near Kyoto, in Japan. Japanese MOP inlay can be seen from the 11<sup>th</sup> century Konjiki-do Golden Hall in Hiraizumi. However, all the Chinese and Japanese examples of MOP use shell which is quite light grey and some of it is dyed due to its pale, grey, lack-luster quality, in great contrast to the deep variegated colors of Thai MOP. It has been deduced by Japanese scholars that the art of inlaying MOP of the turbo shell into lacquer and then covering it with clear lacquer, was learned by the Japanese from influences from southern origins.



*Inlay on the door of Wat Ratchabhopit (The Royal Mausoleum)*

Some forms of Thai MOP inlay might have been influenced by Vietnamese models, if we can presume that the Vietnamese Emperor Gia Long, who lived long in exile in the Thai court during the reign of Rama I (1782-1809), may have shared something new to the Thais, but this cannot be verified, and, in any case, both motifs and execution of Vietnamese MOP inlay derived from China, albeit the Vietnamese exploited most fully the iridescent properties of MOP. We have even less reason to posit any influence of Burma on Thai MOP inlay, with the possible exception of the Buddha footprint in the Chiangmai museum. We can presume that the Thais had some knowledge of Korean MOP from the cargoes of Ryukyuan ships that joined the sea lanes at the time. Laos did not use MOP at all.



Table screen of Buddha with Shariputra and Mogallana

The older works of MOP made for court and temple ritual used a shell of better quality than that seen in more recent and souvenir pieces that we see today in the market which are made of common abalone shells. High quality Thai MOP uses a shell similar to the *Pila ampullacea* which belongs to the family of *Turbinidae turbo maroratus-Linn Linnaeus*. This is basically a kind of turbo, a “roundmouth” or, more commonly termed, a sea snail, which

comes from the Gulf of Siam, specifically around various smaller islands in Rayong, around the Samui Islands of Surat Thani, on the Sing Peninsula of Chantaburi, the island of Khram in Chonburi, and Phuket Island, and from a river on the western side of Thailand. This *hoi muk fai* (flaming mother-of-pearl) has a rough, hard green-brown outside and a deep and iridescent pink and green luster reminiscent of fire opals

pale by comparison. In this author’s experience, the only iridescence that can equal that of the MOP inlay of Thailand, and sometimes even surpasses it, can be found in the so-called “rainbow mother-of-pearl” technique of Korea.

Because the shells are naturally curved, it takes considerable dexterity to cut straight, flat pieces

from the most colorful parts, which are always away from the edges. The basic tools are small saws, files and burins (polishers). To make for easy handling, the shells are first sawn into pieces of about 2.5 cm in length, then rubbed down with a whetstone, and attached to a disk of wood to prevent them from snapping while being further cut to the required sizes. Sometimes the wood is cut to a “v”-shape at one end and the shell piece glued across the “v”,

which serves as a kind of vise holding the shell firmly in place during cutting. The desired design is then drawn onto thin paper which is glued to the MOP, which is sawn with a curved bow saw along the lines of the pattern. The best workers can saw out up to 30-35 platelets a day, less if the pattern is a complicated one, such as a flame-like *kranok* design; but it takes 1,500 to 2,000 platelets to cover only the upper portion of a Thai *talum* food box. Then the pieces are quickly stuck with an adhesive to a larger paper used as a temporary backing, while giving sensitive attention to the placement of the gradations of color in a harmonious fashion. The wood, bamboo, rattan, or *papier mâché* object is then lacquered once all over to insure a smooth and consistent drying. It is next given a coating of a better quality and fast drying lacquer termed *rak smook*, made from powdered charcoal from the stem veins of banana leaves or certain grasses or even from soot, mixed with the sap of the lacquer tree, making a paste that is applied several times. When the piece has almost dried, but is still a little flexible, the tiny platelets of MOP are forced into the lacquer on the body, very delicately so as to keep the surface of the piece uniform. The paper is re-

moved after the work completely dries, more *smook* is filled into the spaces between the platelets of MOP inlay, and the lacquer surface is rubbed with a carborundum or other hard stone to restore the sheen. The whole exterior is finally polished with cocoa butter applied with dried banana leaves. The piece can also be more traditionally polished, first by a stone, then a whetstone and then with pulverized charcoal; and finally a coat of *rak* is applied as the final polish. This process applies to old pieces, but the modern technique skips some steps and substitutes more modern materials and adds a coat of varnish at the end for commercial products available to the public.



Detail of *thepanom*  
angel and scroll

In former ages in Thailand MOP inlay was used exclusively on ecclesiastical objects, such as sutra covers for the Buddhist scriptures and their boxes, sutra cabinets, and on the doors and window panels of monasteries, where the finest inlay is still seen today. The oldest Thai MOP doors were ordered by King Samphet VIII in 1702 for the *mondop* shrine of the Buddha's Footprint atop Mount Suwanbanphot in Saraburi, but they no longer exist. Some of the best are the doors from Wat Baroma Buddharam in Ayudhya now on the Monthien

Viharn of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha and also in its collection of sutra cabinets. One of the cabinets is made from some of the 1751 doors of Wat Baroma Buddharam and is now preserved at the National Museum Bangkok. The oldest known surviving doors are those at Wat Chainat Mahadhatu in Phitsanuloke from the reign of King Boromakot in the mid-18th century. Both sets of doors are from the Ayuddhya period and are so similar that they may have been made by the same craftsman. Other doors from 1753, during the reign of Baromakot were made for the study hall of Wat Pamok and are now on the Phra Viharn Yod at the Emerald Buddha compound. The best of the Ratanakosin Bangkok Period doors are on the Chapel Royale of the Emerald Buddha and also on its *mondop* in the same compound, all made during the reign of Rama I (1782-1809). Also well-known are those on the *ubosot* ordination hall of Wat Pho (Reclining Buddha Temple) from the reign of Rama III (1842-1851) and those at Wat Ratchabhopit (The Temple of the Royal Mausoleum) from the reign of Rama V (Chulalongkorn) in the late 19th century.

The Ayutthya Palace Law of 1358 prescribed the MOP utensils to be

given to certain royal ranks. Some examples are the umbrella of the king's sons "decorated with mother-of-pearl inlay" and the king's grandson's MOP inlay containers and pedestals. The members of the royal family were to eat from a "container ...decorated with turtle shell or mother-of-pearl inlay..." So important was the grandeur of MOP to royal prestige that the ninth king of Ayuddhya, Trilok, established a Department of Mother-of-Pearl to direct its craftsmanship and limit the craftsmen to courtiers within the royal household. The building itself which housed this ministry was of MOP inlay and situated near a pond near the throne hall, showing even moreso how important MOP inlay was to the monarchy. In the late Ayuddhya period, the use of MOP inlay utensils was extended to commoners who could afford them.



*Jiad hat container*

After the fall of Ayuddhya in 1787, the MOP royal craftsmen were regrouped by the new Ratanakosin Bangkok government into the Department of Mother-of-Pearl Craftsmanship. One of the most important of their products was the state throne of wood inlaid with MOP. Square with redented corners and mounted on a multi-tiered base supported by "lion legs", the three upper

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registers are covered with (from bottom to top) *singha* lions, *garudas* birds holding *naga* snakes, and *thepanom* angels. The uppermost tier has a railing around the seat of the throne and all is covered with MOP inlay.

These doors at Wat Pho also show scenes from the Ramakien. Here Montho, an ally of the evil monkey Totsakan, sprinkles Totsakan's dead army with the elixir of life, resurrecting them to fight against Prince Rama again. In this panel, in his final battle just before his death, Totsakan has taken the shape of the god Indra in order to deceive Prince Rama and mounts his chariot to do battle. Prince Rama's Monkey King ally Hanuman has already stolen Totsakan's crystalline heart and Rama is seen in the process of shooting his arrow. Every detail of clothing, harness and weapons is minutely detailed. In the next panel Prince Rama's wife Sita, in exile living in the care of a hermit, has given birth to Rama's son and the hermit has conjured up another son and teaches his arts to both of them. Note the animals and household utensils of the hermit, including the tea equipment in the foreground, and the elegant framing of Sita under the elaborate roof and inside the intricate walls of the hermitage, reflecting the rustic atmosphere of Thailand during the early Ratanakosin period.

This *khon* mask of Hanuman was made as a decorative piece and not for use in the theatre. As it is

rounded, the pieces of MOP were applied to the mask individually, not all at once from a temporary paper backing as in flat pieces. It is in the Theatre Arts Room of the National Museum Bangkok. In the Mother-of-Pearl Room of the National Museum Bangkok one can see some of the most exquisite examples of royal and ecclesiastical ware. Of especial interest are the table screen showing the Buddha attended by his disciples and angels showering flowers down upon them, a throne for the supreme patriarch, the tall covered *tiap muk* trays for presenting food to monks, the tall *jiad* hat boxes, small rounded *krob* clothing containers that sometimes held incense to scent clothes, small side tables scriptures, and sutra covers and boxes for scriptures.

In 1879 King Chulalongkorn ordered MOP inlay doors to be made for the restoration of the Phra Buddha Prang Prasat Shrine in the Emerald Buddha Temple. The work was completed in 1882; but the structure burned down in 1903 and the remaining damaged doors and window panels were removed and later restored and installed on the *ubosot* of Wat Ratchabhopit (Royal Mausoleum). These doors are decorated with roundels showing royal decoration-orders, such as the Illustrious Order of the Royal House of Chakri, the Ancient and Auspicious Order of the Nine Gems, etc., so detailed that one can even make out the watered-silk motif of the ribbons (or sashes). The backgrounds and the spaces between the roundels are filled with

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characters from the *Ramakien* and the frames are decorated with four-petal flowers (*prajam yam*) and a scroll design (*kan kod*), and the crossed rice-stalk motif which has its roots in ancient India and was first imported into Thailand by the ancient Dvaravati culture.

By the end of the 19th century, MOP inlay became less popular and the Department of Mother-of-Pearl Inlay Craftsmanship was closed, signifying the end of royal patronage. Presently the craft is carried on by private groups of craftsmen, who still produce fine work for both court and cloister.

(All photos by John Toomey)

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# GUIDES GUIDE GUIDES



*These articles have been prepared by members who took the guiding course at the National Museum. At the end of the course each participant made a presentation on an aspect of Thai culture or history that they researched.*

## Engraved Stone Slab, Sukothai period: No 23 the Bhiojania Jataka

By Heather Chappell

While trying to decide what of all the many wonderful objects in The National Museum to choose as the subject of my talk, I read in a back issue of The National Museum Volunteers newsletter (April 1991) a really interesting account about a Sukothai period stone engraving depicting Jataka No 23, in which the Boddhisvatta was born as a horse. This is one of the many stories concerning previous lives of the Buddha. Intrigued, I decided I would like to make this stone slab the subject of my talk.

But where in the museum was this stone slab? – I hadn't noticed it during any of our tours during the course. I talked to Miriam about it and she managed to discover its last 'known location', the south wall of the North Wing near the Buddha foot print. So off I went on a mission to find the object and was initially thrilled to find a stone slab from the correct temple, Wat Si Chum, but

disappointed to discover on closer observation that this one did not depict Jataka No 23. However knowing from our lecturers that objects often disappear for periods of time, then reappear, I decided after consultation with Miriam to go ahead and prepare a presentation on the 'disappearing stone slab from Wat Si Chum'



### Background Research: The Jataka Stories

Available originally in verses the Jataka Stories or the collection of the stories of the previous births of Sakyamuni Buddha, (563-483 BCE) is the tenth book of the *Khuddaka-Nikaya*, which in turn is a part of the corpus of the *Sutta-Pitaka* belonging to the Buddhist canon.

As we learnt during the guiding workshop, after the Buddha reached enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, he tramped tirelessly, for forty-five years through the cities and towns of the Ganges plain, teaching. These teach-

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ings, given on 84,000 topics, were directed to beings of all ages and capabilities, in all six realms of existence. To show how karma operates and manifests as cause and effect, the Buddha often illustrated his teachings with accounts of his previous lives as well as those of his disciples. These accounts have many meanings, some pointing towards times and universes that lie outside our experience.

In all Buddhist countries the Jataka tales were the major sources for developing the character of the people. They were used widely in preaching by monks and lay preachers.

Even earlier, the same types of stories were present in Vedic literature. Some of the literature suggests that Greek myths, as well as the fables of Aesop, were inherited from the Vedas and Buddhism and that Persia also took them from India and later they migrated into the stories of Chaucer in England and Boccaccio in Italy.

The underlying theme of each story is the practice of the six perfections, the main focus of the Bodhisattva's actions: giving, moral practice, patience, effort, meditation, and wisdom. Each of the Jataka stories showcases one of these ten paramis of the Bodhisattva.



**Charity:** Accepting the need for sacrifice.

**Morality:** The performance of tasks of one's own free will without regard to self-interest.

**Renunciation:** Performing tasks without hope of obtaining wealth, fame or privileges.

**Wisdom:** Employing one's physical and mental abilities for the well being of the world.

**Diligence:** Performing the task with zeal and energy.

**Forbearance:** Undaunted by difficulties and obstacles.

**Truth:** Believing the task to be deserving in body, speech and mind.

**Resolution:** Performing the task in conformance with changing times and conditions without deviating from one's aim.

**Loving-Kindness:** Performing the task in conformance with changing times and conditions without deviating from one's aim.

**Equanimity:** Unperturbed by praise or threats.

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The stories are timeless. By reading or listening to these stories, children and adults even in our modern world can develop knowledge and learn how to face the difficult experiences of life. The major purpose of these stories is to develop the moral and ethical values of the audience.

#### **The Stone-slab engravings from Wat Si Chum, Sukhothai**

The Sukhothai Kingdom began around 1240 when King Intradit asserted his independence from the Khmers. Sukhothai became the first historical Thai Kingdom whose capital had the same name literally meaning 'Dawn of Happiness'. The Sukhothai period is synonymous with some of the finest artistic endeavors in Thai history. This golden age was relatively short lived, just two centuries and nine kings long. Sukhothai was absorbed by The Kingdom of Ayutthaya in 1438.

The most notable Sukhothai king was Ramkamhaeng who developed the Thai script, promoted Theravada Buddhism and established links with China. In this period, though Hindu influence remained, the Thai embraced Theravada Buddhism, inviting monks from Sri Lanka to clarify points of scripture.

The oldest examples of Thai painting are the ruined fresco in the Sipla Caves, Yala and some engraved panels from Wat Si Chum, Sukhothai, dating to 1237. Except for a fragment at Wat Chedi Chet Thaeo in Si Satchalanai, the paint-

ings of the Sukhothai period have been completely obliterated. This makes the stone slabs from Wat Si Chum very important. The style of painting during this time, in contrast with the three dimensions of western art, was two dimensional art. Much of its beauty depended on the expressiveness of the lines.

Wat Si Chum houses one of the largest seated Buddha's in Thailand. The enclosing shrine was built in the second half of the 14th century but the image itself, Phra Achana or The Venerable is believed to be older and is perhaps the one mentioned in the famous stone inscription of King Ramkamhaeng. There is a story that the temple is the place where King Naresuan and his troops assembled before the army marched on Sawankhalok. The troops were said to be inspired by an ethereal voice which seemed to come from the Buddha itself...but it was probably the result of a cunning ploy by a general who hid one of his men on the stairway and instructed him to speak through one of the windows. What-ever, the effect was inspiring and the enemy was defeated.

There is a stairway within the walls of the enclosing shrine that leads to the roof. The ceiling of this stairway is made up of more than 86 carved stone slabs with scenes from the Buddha's lives, in particular his early incarnations, with identifying inscriptions in Sukhothai script.

The unique character and arrangement of the craved stone slabs have

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puzzled generations of scholars. Were they really intended to be used in Wat Si Chum where they are virtually hidden and out of sight or were they supposed to be installed in a different temple? Or was their function to turn the ritual of climbing the stairs into a symbolic ascent into Buddha-hood? Partly because of the poor state of the stairway and partially to avoid people standing above the Buddha's head the stairway has been closed by The Fine Arts Department. Unless special permission is sought and given this invaluable art remains hidden and out of sight to most visitors.

The engravings show the influence of Indian style in the form of Indianized figures. Scholars suggest that the liner style and the detailed representation of the jewelry and ornaments could have been derived from illustrated manuscripts brought by Sinhalese monks when they settled in Sukhothai. Possibly some were executed by Sinhalese craftsmen or by Thais working under Sinhalese masters.

**Jataka Tale No. 23 the Bhojajania: The Great Horse, Knowing One**

Horses were always revered in ancient India. There was a traditional way of comparing various parts of the horse with the natural world – the stallion's head was the dawn, his eyes were the sun and his breath the wind.

This story was told, as an example by the Buddha, to a monk who gave up persevering.

Once upon a time a king ruled in Benares in northern India. He had a mighty horse that was intelligent and wise. It was noticed while this horse was still young that he seemed to know what his rider wanted before being told, so he was called, Knowing-one.

Knowing-one was considered the greatest of all the royal horses. He was kept in a beautifully decorated and clean stall and fed on the finest food

One day seven neighboring kings joined together to make war on the King. Each king brought four great armies, an elephant cavalry, a horse cavalry, a chariot brigade and ranks of foot soldiers. The King assembled his ministers and advisors to make plans to defend the Kingdom. It was decided that rather than risk the King's life, a champion should be sent out to represent the King on the battlefield. Only if the champion fell would the King go out. The champion requested the bravest and wisest horse. This was of course Knowing-one.

Knowing-one had a dilemma, the seven kings and their large armies had come to attack the king who fed, cared and trusted him. He could not permit them to win but neither could he permit the champion to kill them as he, Knowing-one, would share in the unwholesome action of taking lives. So he persuaded the champion of a 'new way' All seven kings were to be captured one at a time, without killing anyone, while the champion remained firmly on Knowing-one's back.

As Knowing-one spoke of 'a new way', and 'the true course', and 'the courage that goes beyond', it seemed the noble horse became larger than life. He reared up majestically on his powerful hind legs, and looked down on all the armies surrounding the city. The eyes of all were drawn to the magnificent horse. The earth trembled as his front hoofs returned to the ground and he charged into the midst of the four armies of the first king. The elephants could remember no such horse as this, and they retreated in fear. The horses knew that this, their relative, was the worthy master of them all, and so the horse cavalry and the chariot brigade stood still and bowed as the Great Being passed. And the ranks of foot-soldiers scattered like flies before a strong wind.



And so with Knowing-one's help the knight conquered and captured six of the Kings with no loss of life. Then suddenly the horse was seriously wounded. The knight, seeing the terrible wound, began to prepare another horse to capture the remaining king. Knowing-one, realizing that the knight was scared and that he lacked the knowledge that 'true peace was only won by peaceful means' and that no other horse could achieve what he did, convinced the knight to carry on with him. The champion knight regained

his courage. The brave horse struggled to his feet, and together knight and the horse brought back the last of the seven warlike kings. Again all those in his path were spared from harm. Seeing their seven kings in captivity, all the armies laid down their weapons and asked for peace.

Realizing that the great horse Knowing-one would not live through the night, the King went to see him. He had raised him from a colt and he loved him. When he saw that he was dying, the King's eyes filled with tears. Before he died, the great horse

advised the King to pardon his prisoners and to rule with justice and compassion. Then he closed his eyes and died. All mourned the passing of the great horse, Knowing-one – the Enlightenment Being

**The Lesson:** *Then the Buddha said, "Thus Brethren, in bygone days the wise and good persevered even amid hostile surroundings, and, even when wounded so grievously, still did not give in.....(when) His lessons ended, the Master, identified the Birth by saying "Ananda was the king of those days, Sariputta the knight, and I myself the thoroughbred Sindh horse."*

**The moral:** *True peace is only won by peaceful means.*



## NMV EXCURSION

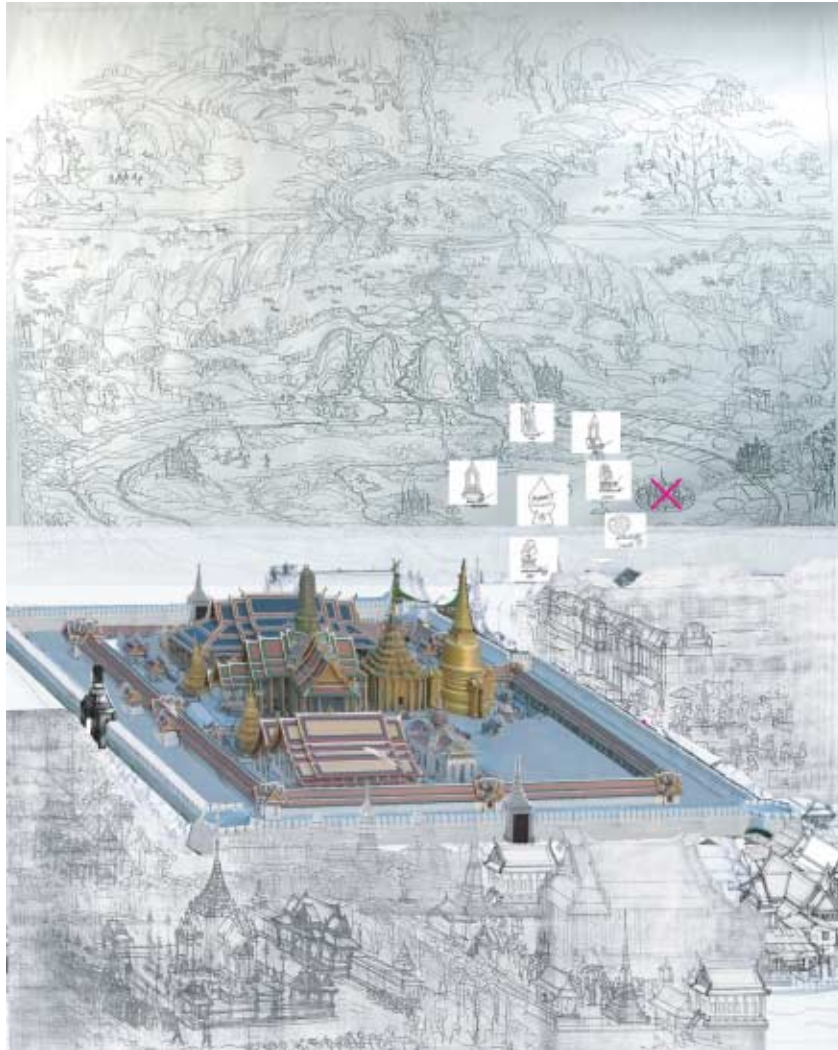
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### **Buddhist Cosmology Reflected in the Architecture and Murals of the Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, through the eyes of NMV Patron M.R. Chakrarot Chitrabongs**

Please join us in this special event organized at the initiative of our distinguished Patron M.R. Chakrarot Chitrabongs. During this lecture and tour he will explain the influence of the Tribhumi Cosmology (“Three Planes of Existence”) on Thai architecture, using the Grand Palace and The Temple of the Emerald Buddha as a case study.

This event, organized by the NMV President and Excursions Team, will consist of a one-hour lecture by our respected Patron in the Auditorium of National Museum after which we will continue with a two-hour visit of The Grand Palace and Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

- Date:** Thursday, 14th January 2010
- Time:** 8:45 a.m. for a prompt 9:00 a.m. opening
- Leader:** M.R. Chakrarot Chitrabongs
- Location:** National Museum Auditorium
- Donation:** Members Baht 300
- Reservations:** Please email [bernadettesabatini@hotmail.com](mailto:bernadettesabatini@hotmail.com) to reserve a seat. Please advise your mobile phone no. when booking. Pre-payment required. This event is reserved for members only.
- Deadline:** Monday, 11th January or when filled. Please note seats are limited to 40.
- Note:** This tour will include a 15 minute-walk from NMB to the Grand Palace. Please observe appropriate attire: for men, trousers to the ankle; for women, skirts covering the knee (women may wish to bring a sarong), shirts / blouses with sleeves to the elbow or lower.



*A part of the sketch of the "Tribhumi Cosmology painting, King Rama IX version" by Preecha Thaothong, featuring Himavanta Forest and the Grand Palace*



## EXCURSIONS POLICY

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Participating in NMV excursions is a benefit of being a member. An NMV member may be accompanied by a non-member if they are family or a house guest (maximum of 2), space permitting.\*

### **Bookings**

- Always make reservations by email to the organiser listed in the announcement.
- Please provide your name, mobile number plus membership status of you and guest(s).\*
- You are not registered until your request has been received by email and an acknowledgement has been sent to you in writing.
- Reservations are on a first-come, first-served basis.
- By making a booking, you are committing to pay in full for your place.
- If full payment is requested prior to an excursion and has not been received, the organisers retain the right to pass your place to another person.
- Often an excursion announcement will give a booking deadline. If full, the trip may close and be finalised before this date.
- Until the excursion organiser is actually in receipt of your payment, you are not considered to have paid.
- The NMV reserves the right to cancel an excursion if enough members do not sign up.

### **Cancellations**

- Your payment indicates your intention to travel. If you cancel, there will not be a refund.
- If you cannot attend an excursion, please notify the organiser immediately.
- If you cancel your booking, unpaid fees are considered a debt owed to the NMV. We regret that no further bookings can be made until this debt is cleared.

### **WAIVER OF LIABILITY**

*The NMV will not provide personal insurance for excursion participants. The Museum Group's Excursions are an activity of the National Museum Volunteers, which is a non-profit organization and is not a professional travel service. It cannot be held responsible for any injury, loss, or damage that may occur during any excursion, although the Museum Group's Excursions will make reasonable efforts to provide for the safety of participants.*

# MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



Please complete all details on this form and mail to the address below with a crossed cheque of 1,200 Baht for residents in Thailand (1,800 Baht for couple) or **2,000 Baht** or **US \$60** (for cheques drawn on a US bank) for an overseas subscription, made payable to **NATIONAL MUSEUM VOLUNTEERS**. *We regret Postal Orders cannot be accepted.*

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- > Participate in study groups.
- > Enjoy discounted fees and preference on local and out-of-country excursions, at homes and lectures.
- > Receive the NMV monthly newsletter
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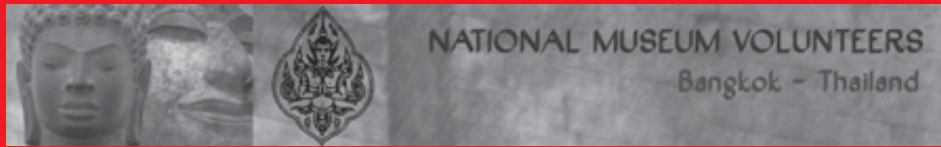


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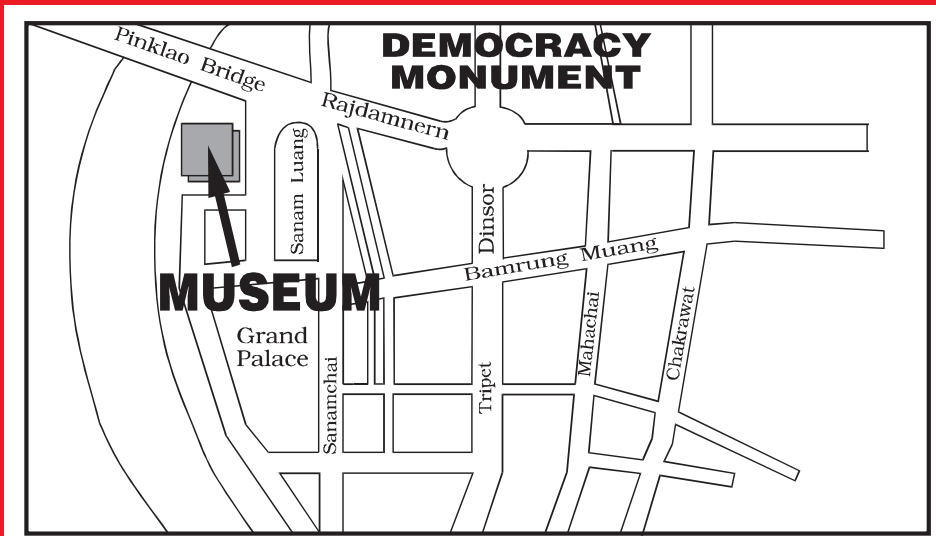


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