

NSC HIGHLIGHTS

#6

SEP - NOV 2017

FEATURES:

*Uncovering a Hidden Temple:
Ta Mok Shwegugyi, Kyaukse*

*Legislation on Underwater
Cultural Heritage in Southeast
Asia*

*Sema Stones and Mountain
Palaces from the Dawn of
Angkor*

Book Review:
*Nalanda, Srivijaya and
Beyond: Re-exploring
Buddhist Art in Asia*

UPCOMING EVENT:

*Imperial Rice Transportation of
Nguyen Vietnam (1802-1883)
by Tana Li*

A Dusun-type jar, extricated from the sediments covering the 9th century Belitung Wreck. Several were smashed by looters to access Changsha bowls within. (Photo: Michael Flecker)

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NSC HIGHLIGHTS

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NSC archaeological field school team at Angkor Thom Gate. (Photo: D. Kyle Latinis)

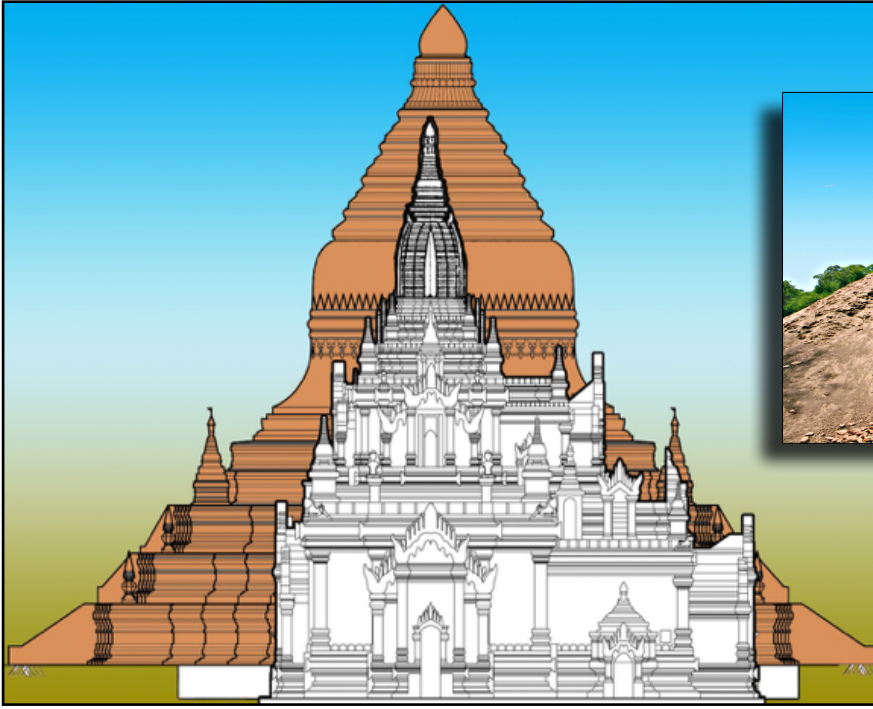
EDITORIAL

NSC Highlights carries contemporary discussions about history, heritage, and culture, at times underlining their inherent instability, be it physical or epistemical. Artefacts can be stolen or destroyed, ideas and concepts can be challenged, norms and cultures are never fixed.

The idea that concepts and artefacts are never stable need not be a demotivating one. To begin with, it allows for contestation, which in turn stimulates discourses and scholarship—the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC) being one amongst many active participants. History as a discipline, for example, revels in claims and counter-claims, bringing the truth close to view yet revealing the boundaries of each knowledge-claim at the same time. Heritage, too, can be a subject of intense contestation, be it in form (tangible vs intangible), ownership (public vs private), or method of preservation (conservation vs restoration).

A reminder of the ‘unstable’ nature of tangible and intangible heritages also encourages action, hopefully, from both the public and private sector. In this issue, Elizabeth Moore writes about “the role of localised social memory in the sustenance of Buddhist traditions” in the story of Ta Mok temple. Michael Flecker canvasses the legislation on underwater cultural heritage in Southeast Asia, an area that will arguably require much attention, action, and investment from governments. The article on *sema* stones by Kyle Latinis and Stephen Murphy also allows NSC Highlights to not only create awareness over the existence of heritage, but also to serve as a form of a publicly-accessible digital archive to document them.

These are, of course, lofty goals and the NSC can by no means do it alone. This is why we have developed networks with agencies and scholars throughout the world, something we hope can be reflected in the diversity of contributors in our many publications, including the NSC Working Paper Series and the NSC Archaeology Unit (AU) Archaeology Report Series. In any case, regional and trans-regional interactions are not new to Southeast Asia. Indeed, the fascination towards such historical linkages forms the basis of the NSC mandate. By striving to preserve traces and records of cross-fertilisations in the past, we hope it provides greater context, richness, and options to the present. 🌱



Top: The top of the temple emerging from the brick stupa during disassembly. Left: Elevation showing the encasement of the two storey 11-13th century CE temple within the 14th century stupa. (Photo: E. Moore and U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), Drawing Courtesy of U Win Maung (Tampawaddy))

FEATURE:

Uncovering a Hidden Temple: Ta Mok Shwegugyi, Kyaukse

By Elizabeth H. Moore

Visiting Senior Fellow, NSC



Detail of the stucco work on the two-storey temple. (Photo: E. Moore)

During the 11th to 13th century CE, the influence of Bagan kings covered much of present day Myanmar. At that time, political assimilation was marked by religious patronage where donations to support Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha, accrued merit towards re-birth. This concept is demonstrated in more than 3,000 brick monuments spread across 45 km² along the banks of the Ayeyarwaddy River. A small walled inner enclave, where the remains of 'palaces' have been excavated, is thought to have housed the king and his court. There is however, no outer wall marking the border of Bagan. Where did it end? The answer lies in areas far from Bagan such as Kyaukse.

The temple of Ta Mok in Kyaukse is a good example of how resources and local innovations far from the court empowered the Bagan kingdom. Ta Mok's location, architecture, art, and continued patronage since the Bagan period illustrate this regional originality. The area is rural with fields of rice and

sunflowers, where villagers support local temples such as Ta Mok Shwegugyi. 'Ta Mok' is a measure of about 18 inches (45.72 cm), with Shwegugyi meaning 'great golden cave'. According to epigraphic and chronicle accounts, the canals and sluices that fed the Kyaukse rice fields were augmented from pre-existing hydraulic systems by the Bagan King Anawrahta (1044–1077 CE). Enhancement of the water management went hand-in-hand with religious donation, with the temple of Ta Mok Shwegugyi (based on its location and chronicle history) likely to be one of the nine shwe-gu or 'golden caves' within a clan system of hereditary lordships.

Ta Mok's temple construction began in the 11th century CE of the Bagan period and consisted of a one-storey temple and ordination hall. Based on excavation and stylistic analysis of the temple by traditional architect U Win Maung (Tampawaddy) and the author, it appears that the final structure was enlarged a hundred



Left: Ta Mok temple today. Above Left and Right: Detail of the stucco work on the two-storey temple. (Photos: E. Moore and U Win Maung (Tampawaddy))

“While many examples exist of a stupa encased within a later stupa, nowhere else is there a temple that has been encased within a stupa.”

years later by adding a second storey. This renovation included decorative stucco plaques of the Jataka tales, which depict the previous lives of the Buddha. Most plaques from the same period were made of terracotta and glazed. It is not yet known why stucco

was chosen over terracotta but as the two-storey temple was covered in its entirety by fine stucco work, it may have been local availability of material and skilled artisans.

In the 14th century, Ta Mok was encased for a third time within a stupa (27.9 m high). At this time, the two-storey temple was carefully coated with a layer of mud, with small terracotta votive tablets stuck onto the surface to enshrine the contents. While many examples exist of a stupa encased within a later stupa, nowhere else is there a temple that has been encased within a stupa. It is not yet clear why the site was so well patronised over many centuries but it may indicate the fertility of the surrounding rice fields or the cumulative reputation of the temple as a wish-fulfilling site accrued with each successive donation. Three Andagu or dolomite carved plaques with scenes from the life of the historical Buddha, finely made terracotta votive tablets, a gold-repoussé image of the Buddha and numerous bronze images were among the objects excavated during the process of the temple's documentation and renovation described below.



Stucco plaque, Jataka no. 7 (Kattahāri) on the two-storey temple. (Photo: T. Tan)

Over the centuries, the stupa slowly turned into a hill, part of meditation monastery. A small stupa was erected on the summit in 1905 and local monks went into the cave-like cell on the interior. In 1993, a monk by the name of Ashin Sandawbatha noticed some bricks behind him after completing his meditation and notified a local historian. A request was filed with the Department of Archaeology and in 2008, permission was received to conduct sub-surface excavation as well as uncover the temple within the hill. Local villagers volunteered en masse and the dismantling of the 'hill' began.

Stucco-covered turrets and terraces began to emerge from the process. The temple rapidly became a local pilgrimage destination with mini-vans and pick-up trucks making a constant flow of donations to preserve the ancient temple and renovate the images for veneration. One proved



Triple encased image of the Buddha at Ta Mok. (Photo: E. Moore)

Yunnan during the 11th to 12th centuries and the Mongol Yuan dynasty by the end of the 12th and early 13th centuries. In the 14th century, the centre of power shifted east from Bagan to areas around Mandalay. Patronage of Ta Mok continued, however, seen in the encasement of the temple within a stupa during the 14th century Pinya dynasty and continued patronage during the 16th–17th century Inwa and 18th–19th century Mandalay dynasties.

The story of the Ta Mok temple and its current resuscitation testify to the role of localised social memory in the sustenance of Buddhist traditions. Ta Mok continues to be a meditation monastery with the formal ownership lying with the Sangha. In December 2015, Ta Mok was designated as a Notified Zone, a nationally recognised cultural heritage protection zone under the

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to be a triple-encased image of the Buddha, the outer image measuring 1.8 m high. Stylistic comparison of the throne or palin of the image likewise showed additions made over the 11th to 13th centuries as the temple continued to receive patronage. The research and architectural work from 2008–2014 enhanced both pilgrimage and donation to the temple and images of the Buddha, as well as sparking local interest in the area’s role in the Bagan kingdom.

As the kingdom of Bagan grew, new lands were acquired, each bringing new population groups and commodities to support and sustain prosperity. Bagan’s affluence and stability was threatened by internal rivalries and perhaps more crucially, by fluctuating external powers in



Andagu (15 cm) excavated from Ta Wa Gu, Ta Mok. (Photo: E. Moore)

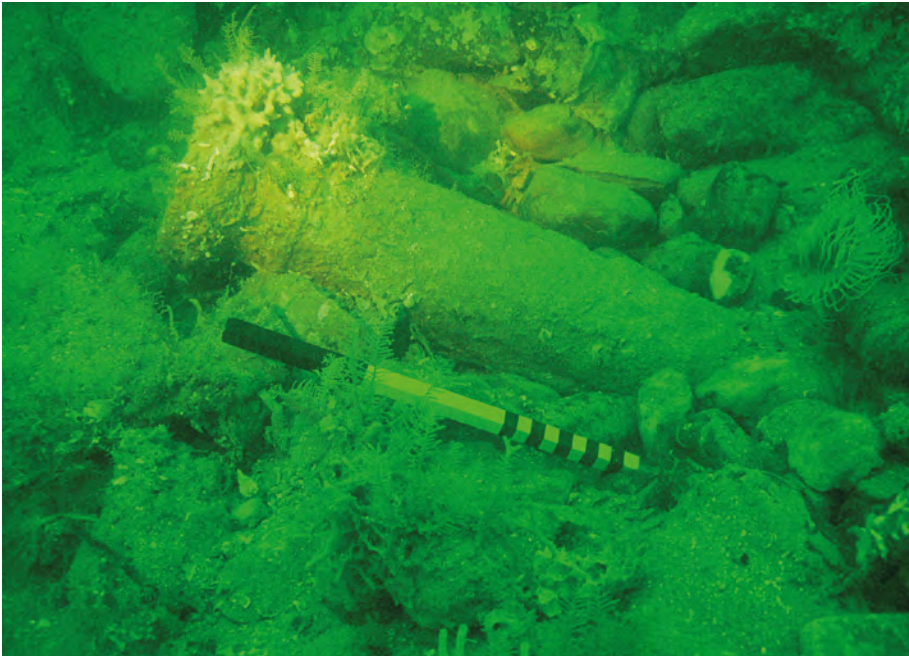
Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs. At least a decade is needed to assess the long-term benefits to both the monastic community and archaeological interests but those dynamics echo the fluid process of localisation that enabled the expansion of the Bagan kingdom. 🌈

Prof. Elizabeth Moore is a Visiting Senior Researcher at the NSC. Her current project on ‘Wider Bagan’ at the NSC compares selected quantitative and qualitative criteria between regions, showing the regional variation supporting the Bagan Empire. The quantifiable data includes sites, walls, temples, stupas and monasteries, agricultural, defensive and hydraulic resources as criteria within a cartographic output. The qualitative data includes social memory and pilgrimage to interpret the changing temporality of the criteria within the Buddhist cultural tradition of Myanmar.

Legislation on Underwater Cultural Heritage in Southeast Asia

By Michael David Flecker

Visiting Fellow, NSC



A late 16th century wreck found in 2004 off Melaka, designated M1J, is potentially the oldest European wreck in Malaysia, and yet it has never been excavated. (Photo: Michael Flecker, Maritime Explorations)

Apart from land-locked Laos and reforming Myanmar, Singapore is the only Southeast Asian country without Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH) legislation, and yet there are likely to be many historical shipwrecks in Singapore waters. Some now lie under reclaimed land. Some lie in busy anchorages where ground-tackle may have caused damage. Some lie at the bottom of Singapore Strait, one of the busiest fairways in the world. They may still be in pristine condition but would only be accessible by mini-submarine, with an exceptionally brave pilot. And some surely lie scattered around the great navigational hazard at the eastern entrance to Singapore Strait, Pedra Branca.

Elsewhere in Southeast Asia UCH legislation varies markedly. Thailand is the only country that self-finances the survey and excavation of shipwrecks, through the Thai Underwater Archaeology Division. There is no question of commercial involvement, either foreign or local, and artefacts are

never sold. Cambodia, as the only Southeast Asian signatory to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of UCH, has a fledgling Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit but

“Apart from land-locked Laos and reforming Myanmar, Singapore is the only Southeast Asian country without Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH) legislation, and yet there are likely to be many historical shipwrecks in Singapore waters.”

no funding. So far efforts have been limited to surveying the coastline and rivers, with UNESCO support. The governments of the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia chose not to fund the archaeological excavation of shipwrecks within their jurisdiction, although there are exceptions. Instead they rely on joint-venture type arrangements with

commercial enterprises.

In the Philippines licensed companies receive a reward of 50% of the recovered artefacts for funding and managing excavations. The National Museum retains the other 50% for their collection. In the past the companies could sell their share. Now only multi-duplicate artefacts can be shared and they can no longer be permanently exported or sold. This limits partners to generous international institutions although they must still pay various fees and bonds. The aim is noble but so far no such institution has come forward, while looting continues at an alarming rate.

In Indonesia the National Committee for Excavation and Utilisation of Valuable Objects from Sunken Ships (locally known as PaNas) is responsible for issuing licences. Shipwreck cargoes are split 50/50 based purely on the proceeds of sale. Artefacts are rarely retained by museums. Presidential Decrees treat shipwrecks as resources rather than UCH, while the Ministry of Culture recognises them as cultural property. Due to frustration over decades of poor outcomes and the obvious need to rationalise legislation, the government declared a moratorium on the issuing of salvage licences in 2010. It remains in place. As a result, looting has intensified, with once-opportunistic fishermen now becoming full-time salvors.

Five of the six official excavations in Vietnam have been funded and managed by private companies, usually through joint-ventures with the state-owned salvage company, Visal. Terms are negotiable, with sales proceeds split between the company, Visal and the government. All unique artefacts and representative sets are retained by various museums. The Underwater Archaeology Department of the



Looter's signature - all that remained of the c.1300 Jade Dragon Wreck three months after it was first discovered off northern Sabah. (Photo: Michael Flecker, *Maritime Explorations*)

Vietnamese Institute of Archaeology has recently come into being. So far the focus has been on training and capacity building, but funding is lacking.

In Malaysia cargoes from wrecks deemed to be unrelated to national heritage can be sold and the proceeds split, with the National Museum usually retaining part

paper nor a journal article discussing the survey or excavation of a newly discovered shipwreck in Southeast Asian waters for the past five years. Joint-venture proponents typically published within a year or two of completing fieldwork, implying a six to seven year hiatus. Presenters at the International Symposium on Past, Present and Future of ASEAN Maritime Heritage (sic) held in

a Chinese junk, heavily laden with blue-and-white porcelain is a prime example. Some looters were eventually caught, but Indonesia's moratorium on licensed excavation has eliminated the chance of rescue archaeology. It may indeed have forced the looting in the first place, as the finders perceived no legal alternative.

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Singapore can afford institutional investigation and excavation, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of private partnerships. Singapore can also afford enforcement. Now is the time to legislate, by cherry-picking the most effective policies from like-minded governments and moulding them to fit Singapore's unique circumstance. A Maritime Archaeology Unit should be launched to implement new legislation. Singapore can go from non-starter to leader through a single act of parliament. 🇸🇬

of their share as artefacts. The funds so obtained are used to excavate wrecks that are of direct relevance to Malaysia's historical past. In 2006 the newly established National Heritage Council assumed responsibility for issuing excavation licences. Subsequently, the National Museum's Maritime Archaeological Unit was disbanded and foreign-held permits were not renewed. There have been no official archaeological excavations in Malaysian waters since then.

Indeed there has not been an archaeological report, a conference

Thailand on 15–16 June 2017 did not mention one new site, apart from the Phanom Surin Wreck which is buried 8 km inland. The flow of publications is a KPI, an independent and objective measure of policy. The current dearth reflects an appalling state of affairs, made infinitely worse by a marked increase in looting. Legislation intended to protect UCH has not been effective. It has not been enforced.

And in some cases the legislation, or lack thereof, has imperilled UCH. The recent looting of an early 18th century shipwreck, probably

Michael Flecker is a Visiting Fellow at the NSC. His recent publications include contributions in Chong, A. and Murphy, S. A. (eds.), (2017), *The Tang Shipwreck: Art and Exchange in the 9th Century*. Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, [Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds](#) (2010). His doctoral thesis was published by the British Archaeological Series as *The Archaeological Excavation of the 10th century Intan Shipwreck* (2002).

Sema Stones and Mountain Palaces from the Dawn of Angkor

By D. Kyle Latinis¹ and Stephen Murphy²

¹Visiting Fellow, NSC

²Curator (Southeast Asia), Asian Civilisations Museum



Left: Unearthing sema stone with floral-like cakra at Dons Meas. Above: Ornate sema stone with spoked cakra motif, Don Meas. (Photos: D.Kyle Latinis)

In 2015, the NSC Archaeology Unit and APSARA National Authority conducted archaeological research at two *sema* stone sites in Cambodia. Further support was provided by the Asian Civilisations Museum.

The *sema* stone sites, Peam Kre and Don Meas, are located adjacent to the Banteay site atop Phnom Kulen (Kulen Mountain; Mahendraparvata) in the Angkorian homeland at Siem Reap. Phnom Kulen is widely considered to be the holy mountain and birthplace of the Angkorian Empire under the reign of Jayavarman II—a Saivite king—where he first orchestrated the renowned *devaraja* ritual in 802 CE. The ritual has critical symbolic and political importance. It remains a topic of great debate concerning possible ‘god-king’ interpretations and the ensuing implications.

Peam Kre and Don Meas *sema* stone sites consist of carved stone slabs ritually arranged to demarcate sacred Buddhist structures or spaces.

The Banteay site comprises several terraces, platforms, pavements, and other landscape modifications. Banteay is now considered to be the ruins of Jayavarman II’s early 9th century mountain palace after LiDAR analysis revealed the ancient urban

LiDAR and ground survey also revealed that Don Meas and Peam Kre are located at the perimeter of the Banteay site. Previously, the spatial connections between the *sema* stone sites and the palace were unknown, primarily

because the extent and nature of the Banteay site had not been established until recently. The close proximities of the sites along with their contemporaneous nature (8th/9th century CE) were likely no coincidence, suggesting that Jayavarman II also supported Buddhist religious groups.

Interestingly, Buddhist monks and perhaps whole communities possibly migrated from the Khorat Plateau. They may have arrived to seek royal patronage and perhaps solidify socio-political and economic alliances between the newly formed Angkorian kingdom and neighbouring Dvaravati polities among other explanations.

Ancient *sema* stone traditions dating from the 7th–10th centuries CE are



Dr. Ea Darith photographing a sema with unique design, Peam Kre. (Photo: D.Kyle Latinis)

landscape and palace-like grounds (Evans 2016; Evans *et al.* 2015). Archaeological research by the NSC and APSARA teams also confirmed subsurface palace architecture during the 2014 excavation campaign at Banteay (brick stairs, pavements, and postholes for wooden structures).



Left: Map of Siem Reap and Phnom Kulen (areas in red indicate LiDAR survey zones; map courtesy of APSARA). Right: Google Earth satellite image of site locations with the LiDAR outline of the Banteay site superimposed; normally invisible from aeriels or satellite. (Photo: D. Kyle Latinis)

predominantly found in the Khorat Plateau of modern day Thailand and to a lesser extent in Cambodia and Laos. Most are affiliated with a Dvaravati tradition. The definition of Dvaravati is not consistent. Different researchers varyingly refer to Dvaravati as an art tradition, archaeological remains, ancient polities, and past cultures belonging to ancient Mon-Khmer ethno-linguistic groups with Buddhism strongly represented in the material culture.

Sema stones are Buddhist boundary markers that demarcate ritual space. They may have had additional functions related to spiritual protection or assigning other types of spatial boundaries. Specific *sema* stone arrangements likely defined the perimeters of *ubosot* (*uposathaghara* in Pali)—a structure where ritual ceremonies such as ordinations took place.

The *sema* stones are generally placed upright in rectangular or square arrangements with the stones located at each of the corners and midpoints. In some cases, stones are doubled for a total of 16. There are also sites where 20 or more stones occur. The greatest length of a site's long axis does not usually exceed 20–30 m. Some sites are built on a platform, foundation or terrace made of hard enduring material such as rock, sand, and clay fill or paving. Centrally placed *ubosot* were presumably made of perishable wood and organic materials, but not brick, stone, or laterite like typical Hindu temples and shrines of that period.

Common morphological types of *sema* stones include slab, pillar, octagonal, and

unfashioned shapes. Sandstone is the most typical material. Stones range in size from approximately 50–300 cm tall and 20–80 cm thick. Some are plain, others have simple motifs, and many have highly ornate carvings of symbols, narrative panels, and inscriptions.

“*Sema* stones are Buddhist boundary markers that demarcate ritual space. They may have had additional functions related to spiritual protection or assigning other types of spatial boundaries.”

The Peam Kre and Don Meas sites were first recorded by Boulbet and Dagens (1973) who described several of the more ornately carved stones. They provided plan views, photographs, drawings,

and descriptions within a broader inventory of archaeological sites at Phnom Kulen. Both *sema* sites exhibit double stone arrangements (16 slab style *sema* stones each). Many of the stones are ornately carved with *stupa-kumbha*, *dharmacakra* (Wheel of the Law), and other unique designs. A few portray intricate scenes from important narratives.

The stones were still upright and mostly intact during the original assessment by Boulbet and Dagens. A few broken stones were repaired. The sites have since been looted with almost all stones having been disturbed and moved. At least one beautifully carved stone depicting Gaja Lakshmi—the goddess Lakshmi flanked by elephants—has disappeared. Fortunately, most stones still remain.

Subsequently, Dr. Stephen Murphy (2010) researched the sites in conjunction with his greater doctoral focus on the ancient *sema* stone

tradition in northeast Thailand and central Laos. An APSARA team also reviewed the sites during a more recent Phnom Kulen archaeological assessment.

Many of the motifs on the *sema* from Phnom Kulen depict *dharmacakra* and/or *stupa* motifs. These designs have their origins in the *sema* of the Khorat Plateau, particularly the *stupa* form. The *dharmacakra* found at Phnom Kulen, however are more elaborate. The rim of the wheel is decorated with either one or two bands of small circular motifs. Some of the wheels are flanked by elaborate floral or flame-like patterns which appear to be almost enveloping the whole



Above: *Sema* stone with *stupa* motif being excavated by local labor manager who also worked with Boulbet in the 1970s. (Photo: D. Kyle Latinis)

dharmacakra. On some examples, the *dharmacakra* is placed on *stupa-kumbha* (pot) motif. In some cases the *kumbhas* are depicted with ample vegetation issuing forth which end in volute type designs reminiscent of those found on the spokes of three-dimensional *cakras* from central Thailand. In these cases, the *dharmacakra* appear to be emerging from the mouth of the *kumbha* pot along with the floral motifs.



Sema stone with a dharmacakra motif, Buriram province, Thailand. (Photo: Stephen Murphy)

On another example, the *kumbha* pot is flanked by a lion and a boar, while on a further example the pot is shown with a monkey climbing up its side. The fact that the *stupa-kumbha* motif is present alongside, or at times as part of the *dharmacakra* motif, illustrates that the artists responsible for the carving of these *sema* were extremely familiar with the existing motifs from the Khorat Plateau. This strongly points towards the idea that a group of Buddhist monks and craftsmen decided to move from this region, perhaps in the vicinity of the Mun River, and settled on Phnom Kulen in an attempt to establish a Buddhist community there. The conflation of the *stupa-kumbha* motif with the *dharmacakra* was most likely a conscious choice, perhaps in an attempt to forge new and more dynamic religious symbolism.

Our recent archaeological research was intended to record further details of the *sema* stones, assess current conditions, and conduct excavations to determine the nature of structural remains, material culture, stratigraphy, geomorphology, and the extent of looting.

Mapping and test excavations indicate that Don Meas was built atop a rock outcrop on a rubble filled platform with a simple stone alignment. Don Meas has a commanding view of the valley and floodplains. Peam Kre was built close to the existing stream at the base of the peak that contains the Banteay site. Peam Kre had no hard platform or foundation, and was likely built on soil fill. The archaeological team also discovered a *sema* stone quarry adjacent to the Don Meas site. Two unfinished or rejected *sema* stone blanks were partially carved out of sandstone outcroppings—the channeling marks of the quarrying techniques are clearly visible. Incidentally, there is an ancient brick and stone Hindu shrine site near Don Meas which bears the same name. However, it may be completely

“This strongly points towards the idea that a group of Buddhist monks and craftsman decided to move from this region, perhaps in the vicinity of the Mun River, and settled on Phnom Kulen in an attempt to establish a Buddhist community there.”

unrelated to the Don Meas or Banteay sites. It has been heavily looted and damaged.

Artefact content at both *sema* sites, notwithstanding the *sema* stones themselves, were minimal—yielding 160 potsherds in 7 trenches at Peam Kre (approximately 60 m² in total were excavated) and 110 potsherds in 1 trench at Don Meas (approximately 15 m² were excavated). However, most of the potsherds are fine paste earthenware. A spout from a *kendi* (spouted ritual water pot) was also recovered. These wares are typical of assemblages from the late Funan period (4th–6th centuries CE) and, less robustly, the Chenla period (7th–8th centuries CE).

Interestingly, despite Phnom Kulen harbouring a vast glazed and unglazed stoneware kiln industry beginning in the 9th century (particularly Khmer green glazed ware) with a massive set of kilns at Anlong Thom only a few kilometres from Peam Kre, no stoneware was recovered from either site. In fact, we know of no stoneware



Another *sema* stone with dharmacakra motif and monkey motif on the right. Peam Kre, Phnom Kulen, Cambodia. (Photo: D. Kyle Latinis)

at the Banteay site. Surface surveys do not indicate any significant stoneware scatters as well, although they are abundant at other Phnom Kulen sites. This leads us to hypothesise that the Banteay palace site and the *sema* stone sites were abandoned by the mid-9th century or earlier—the space not being subsequently reused (perhaps considered taboo).

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BOOK REVIEW:

Nalanda, Srivijaya and Beyond: Re-exploring Buddhist Art in Asia

By *Andrea Acri*
Associate Fellow, NSC

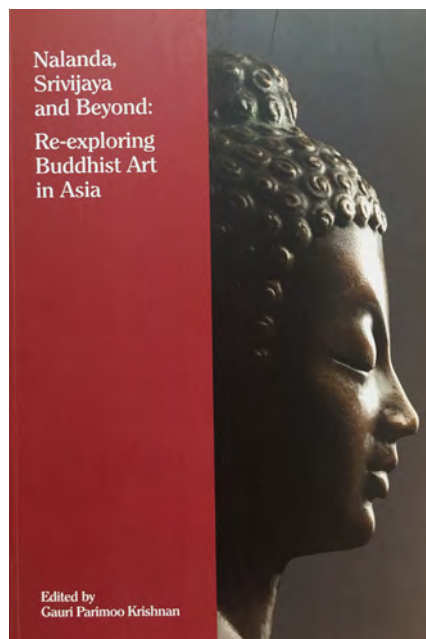
Review of *Nalanda, Srivijaya and Beyond: Re-exploring Buddhist Art in Asia*, edited by Gauri Parimoo Krishnan. 2016, The National Heritage Board, Singapore, 296 pp.

This volume gathers ten among the papers presented at a conference held in conjunction with the exhibition 'On the Nalanda Trail: Buddhism in India, China and Southeast Asia', at the Asian Civilisations Museum (Singapore) in 2008. As such, it focuses on the premodern (mainly 7th–13th centuries) cultural, artistic, and religious networks connecting the centres of monasticism across South, Southeast, and East Asia.

All the papers in the volume explore some truly fascinating material on the extraordinary age of trans-local circulation of people and ideas along the "Nalanda-Srivijaya trail". As per the editor's own description (p. 10), they are divided into three groups: new findings and interpretations of Buddhist art, architecture, epigraphy, history and literature from India, Bangladesh, Central Asia, China, and Southeast Asia (4 papers); archaeological research on the Buddhist heritage of the Malay Peninsula during the Srivijayan period (3 papers, including that of the editor, which actually spans a wider geographical scope); and the Chinese assimilation of Avalokiteśvara into Guanyin (2 papers; the final paper on Kizil on the overland Silk Road does not fit into this arrangement).

The majority of the papers, written in a plain style and rich in illustrations, present short general surveys or syntheses of the current knowledge, making them accessible to a wider audience of non-specialists. Yet, they do not lack scholarly rigour, and some stand out for their originality. Gauri Krishnan's first introductory paper on transmission of Buddhist ideology across Asia sets the stage for the volume. Suchandra Ghosh's

paper on Mainamati (Southeastern Bangladesh) presents new data on this important yet enigmatic medieval Buddhist centre, while Frederick Asher re-interprets Xuanzang's account on Nalanda in the light of the contemporary historical context and the monk's own cultural biases.



Peter Skilling in what is the longest and overall best paper in the volume explores the relationship between writing and material culture in South and Southeast Asia in the light of donative inscriptions. John Miksic's paper does a good job in surveying Buddhism in the Straits on the basis of the archaeological and inscriptional findings in the Srivijayan domains of the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra, and usefully complements the paper by Nik Hasan Shuhaimi on Buddhism in the Bhujang Valley (Malaysia). Gauri Krishnan's second paper is an informative art historical overview of Nalanda-inspired Buddhist sculptures found along the commercial, diplomatic, and religious trails linking Eastern, South India, the Malay Peninsula, and Srivijaya. The papers by Teoh Eng Soon on the Chinese assimilation of Avalokiteśvara, by Hon Puay-Peng on the colossal images of the same

Bodhisattva in 10th-century China, and by Rajeshwari Ghose on the impressive caves of Kizil all strike me as well researched.

A positive aspect of the volume is that it does not fulfill a mere antiquary or academic interest but tries to actualise the networks of premodern intra-Asian contacts pivoting around Nalanda to our time, namely by elaborating on the re-creation of Nalanda University in Rajgir, Bihar (India), which officially opened its doors to students in 2014. This international project, supported by several Asian countries including Singapore, aims to foster a new age of intra-Asian cultural relations and revive the excellence that once characterised the scholarship produced at Nalanda and made it a renowned centre visited by intellectuals coming from all over Asia.

Another positive aspect is the markedly translocal approach of nearly all the papers, which strike a good balance between micro-history/regional specificities and transregional links and connections. The reader should be alerted that, regrettably, the map of Asia reproduced on p. 8 grossly misrepresents several of the key localities (such as the very Nalanda and Bodhgaya, Borobudur, and names of states such as Nepal and Pakistan; Dunhuang and Kizil are placed in Siberia and Northwestern Russia instead of Central Asia, while Xian somewhere between Mongolia and Russia). Also, the transliteration of Sanskrit words throughout the book does not follow one and the same standard (diacritics are used erratically and unsystematically), thus creating a potential source of confusion. In spite of these minor shortcomings, this lavishly illustrated and well researched book will be a rewarding read for anyone interested in the long-standing artistic, intellectual and cultural connections across Buddhist Asia. 🌈

Andrea Acri is an Associate Fellow at the NSC and a lecturer in Tantric Studies at the Section of Religious Studies, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris. His recent publications include *Spirits and Ships: Cultural Transfers in Early Monsoon Asia* (2017), co-edited with Roger Blench and Alexandra Landmann and *Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Masters, Texts, Icons* (2016).

PEOPLE:

New Visiting Researchers

This section profiles the new visiting researchers and their research projects at the Centre.

Tana LI (Visiting Senior Fellow)

Dr Tana Li is Visiting Senior Fellow at NSC. She is currently a senior fellow at the College of Asia and Pacific Studies, the Australian National University. She is interested in maritime and environmental histories of Vietnam and southern China from the 2nd BCE to the late 19th centuries. Her works include *The Nguyen Cochinchina* (SEAP, Cornell 1998); *Water Frontier: Commerce and the Chinese in the Lower Mekong Region, 1750-1880* (co-ed. with Cooke, 2004), *Gulf of Tongking Through History* (co-ed. with Cooke and Anderson, 2011), and *Anthony Reid and the Study of the Southeast Asian Past* (co-ed. with Geoff Wade, ISEAS, 2012). Since 2010, Dr Li has developed interests in the environmental history of Vietnam and has been a Chief Investigator of two Australia Research Council Linkage Grants, on 'Southeast Asia's global economy, climate and the impact of natural hazards from the 10th to 21st centuries' (2010-2013), and 'Hazards, Tipping Points, Adaptation and Collapse in the Indo-Pacific World' (2015-2019). Both projects are led by James Warren of Murdoch University. In ISEAS, Dr Li will be working on a manuscript about the maritime history of Vietnam. She will lead an international collaborative project, 'The Making of the Red River', which is financially supported by the Chiang Chingkuo Foundation, Taiwan. This study of the ecological history of the Greater Red River region is carried out by a team of historians, geologists and GIS experts based in Austria, France, Vietnam, and Taiwan.



Research Period at ISEAS: 26 May 2017 – 25 November 2017

Research Interests: History

Research Topic: Coasts and Commodities: The Sea in Vietnam's Maritime Pasts

SHOW Ying Ruo (Visiting Fellow)

Dr Show Ying Ruo has been Visiting Fellow at NSC since July 2017. She received her PhD in Chinese Studies from National University of Singapore (2017) and M.A from SOAS, London (2010). Her PhD thesis explores the vernacular expression and gendered narrative in Chinese religious corpus *Baojuan* (Precious Scrolls). She is interested in the historical trajectory of lay Buddhist movement and local configurations of religious ideas, ritual practices, and texts. She is currently working on a manuscript examining Buddhist linkage and transregional religious network in Southeast Asia through the study of a specific kind of Chinese temple, the Vegetarian Hall (*zhaitang*).



Research Period at ISEAS: 3 July 2017 – 2 July 2018

Research Interests: Chinese Religious History and Literature

Research Topic: Lay Buddhist Linkages and Transregional Religious Network in 19th Century Nanyang: A Case Study on Chinese Sectarian Vegetarian Hall (*zhaitang*) in Southeast Asia

PUBLIC OUTREACH:

Archaeology Programme for Students

Beyond research and publications, the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC) is committed to public outreach activities. Such activities promote the importance of Southeast Asia's premodern history, as well as the pivotal role played by archaeology and history in recovering such histories.



Left: The mentor explaining about the procedures and context before commencing the handling of artefacts. Right: Mr. Michael Ng and the students from St. Andrews Junior College on the last day of their programme. (Photos: Michael Ng)

The main objectives of the Archaeology Programme for Students (APS) are to nurture an appreciation for the discipline and to learn about the past. Almost 100 students have been through the Programme since 2016. Between May to June 2017, the Archaeology Unit (AU) played host to 39 students from Bedok Green Secondary School (BGSS) and Nanyang Junior College (NYJC).

With APS, students receive an introductory lecture on general archaeology as well as the archaeological work done in Singapore. Students help clean artefacts excavated from the 2015 Empress Place Project. The process of cleaning reveals decorations and characteristics of the artefacts. This enables researchers to interpret the artefact's meaning and significance. Discussion topics covered by the APS include survey and excavation techniques, basic ceramics identification, underwater archaeology, geo-archaeology, and social and cognitive archaeology. Under the AU's guidance, students interpret the artefacts they are cleaning and explore plausible narratives of the past. NYJC students also went on a field trip to the NUS Museum to study the chronology of Chinese ceramics. Through these activities, students received a first-hand appreciation of the importance of archaeology and how it can benefit society. 🌈

For more information on APS, please contact Michael Ng at michael_ng@iseas.edu.sg.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS:

NSC Working Paper Series

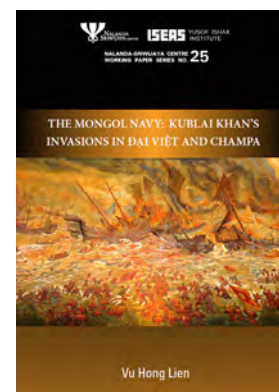
The Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre Working Paper Series was established for the swift publication and wide dissemination of research conducted or presented within the Centre, and of studies engaging fields of enquiry of relevance to the Centre.

NSC Working Paper No. 25

The Mongol Navy: Kublai Khan's Invasions in Đại Việt and Champa

Author: Vu Hong Lien

Abstract: During his campaign in southern China and following his final victory over the Southern Song in 1279, the Yuan Emperor Kublai Khan launched a series of naval campaigns to conquer East and Southeast Asia. The chain of attempted conquests began with Japan and ended with Java, and all ended in failure. Although Kublai Khan did not succeed, the Mongol intervention seriously affected the dynamics of the region and left long-lasting consequences. Based on historical accounts by the Persian historian Rashid-al-Din, who had access to Kublai Khan's papers, the Yuanshi, Vietnamese pro-Mongol documents, the Vietnamese official annals, and analyses by modern historians, this Working Paper focuses on the series of crucial events that took place in the late 13th century, when the Mongols actively and violently interfered in Đại Việt and Champa. It highlights the first-ever failure of the Mongols worldwide in Đại Việt, a hitherto less known fact due to the lack of cross-study on the Mongols in the East and the West. As events gradually unfold, we can see why Kublai Khan paid such close attention to Southeast Asia, how the Mongol Navy was created, the Mongols' own reaction to its function, and why they failed repeatedly in their attempts at expansion down the South China Sea/Bien Dong.



The complete set of the NSC Working Papers can be accessed via:
<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/nsc-working-papers>

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Brown Bag Dialogue - Monks and Kings: Marking Out the Landscape of Wider Bagan (11-13th century CE), Myanmar (by invitation only)

Speaker: Professor Elizabeth Moore

Date: 13 Sep 2017

Time: 12.30–2.00 pm

Location: Seminar Room 1, ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute

Wider Bagan is a landscape of 11th to 13th century CE temples, images and stone inscriptions, fluid in substance and local meaning. Sites mark construction in strategic rice and agricultural lands, of water features and defensive forts. Continued veneration has remodelled forms and embellished meanings; social memory of the monks and kings who built or to whom lands were donated enlivens today's Buddhist landscape throughout Central Myanmar and outlying regions. The aim of the session is to generate discussion on ways to define Wider Bagan.

NSC Lecture Series - Imperial Rice Transportation of Nguyen Vietnam (1802-1883)

Speaker: Dr Tana Li

Date: 1 Nov 2017

Time: 3.00–4.30 pm

Location: Seminar Room 2, ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute

Victor Lieberman compared three geographically-based regions of Mainland Southeast Asia and points out that Vietnam's integration was neither complete nor sustained as Burma and Siam. Instead of three sustained integrations, he saw two and a fraction. Vietnam lacked one dominant integrating river system like the Irrawaddy or Chao Phraya. Yet it has a 3260 km coast line which could play a compensatory role in integration. Why did such potential positive fail to promote closer integration? This paper focuses on imperial rice transportation, a major cornerstone of Nguyen policy which was implicated in that failure.



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