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A Journal of the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 1

Special Issue:

*Collectors and Collections in the History of
Thai Manuscripts*

Guest Editor: Justin McDaniel

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Siamese Manuscript Collections in the United States

SUSANNE RYUYIN KERES
University of Pennsylvania

JUSTIN MCDANIEL
University of Pennsylvania

“I HAVE DIRECTED ONE SIAMESE book to you, but I fear it will be too large to be sent to you and therefore I add this small one.” This small note written in white chalk on the inside cover of a black mulberry paper (*samut kloi dam*) manuscript found in the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania reveals a complex series of relationships and the strange travels that Thai manuscripts can take. This “small” Siamese book was sent by Emilie Royce Bradley from Bangkok to her aunt Eliza, most likely living in Baltimore, Maryland, sometime between 1836 and 1845. Emilie Royce wrote a number of letters to her aunt, spent time teaching “palace ladies” in the court of King Rama III, and spread the teachings of Christianity over nearly ten years living in Bangkok. She was the wife of Dan Beach Bradley, famous for being the first Western court physician in Siam (Thailand after 1939). Dan Bradley moved to Siam in 1835–36 and stayed until his death in 1873. He performed the first modern surgery in Siam (removing a tumor from a slave) and introduced methods to combat smallpox (a disease that killed one of his and Emilie’s daughters). He also, outside the scope of medicine, developed the first printing press in Siam and was instrumental in publishing the first modern

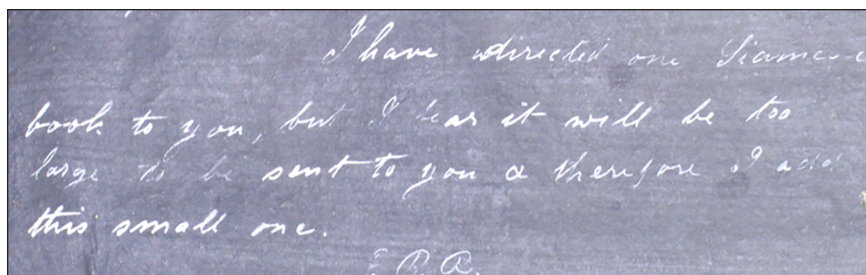


FIGURE 1. This inscription is found on the inside cover of a small manuscript of Thai translations of the Gospels of Matthew, written most likely by Emilie Royce Bradley herself. Penn Museum manuscript 29-170-12, folio A01.

print newspaper in the Thai language and the first Thai language dictionary. He is still honored today, and a major medical facility in Bangkok is named after him. His generally robust health was one of the main reasons that the Siamese royal court and many in Bangkok came to trust his methods despite his constant talk of the virtues of Christianity in the very Buddhist court.

Emilie's life was considerably less glamorous and adventurous. She struggled with her eyesight from a young age and was teased growing up.¹ She studied at the Clinton Female Seminary in rural New York until she turned fifteen, and received no formal education after that. She didn't exactly have a whirlwind love affair with her husband; they met by mail correspondence after his family put an end to his controversial attempt to marry his sixteen-year-old cousin Jane. After their wedding they immediately left for Siam, a place Emilie had no previous knowledge of. Along the way, they were waylaid in Singapore for six months because of monsoons, then attacked by Malay pirates; four of their ship's crew were murdered and all of their possessions were stolen. On top of this, she became pregnant with their first child, Charles, on the ship, and the infant died soon after being born. Her third child, Harriet, died at seven months old in Bangkok.

1 From the diaries of Emilie Royce Bradley kept in Clinton, New York, and cited in Rachel Cope, "Shifting the Plot: Possibilities in Mormon Women's History," *Journal of Mormon History* 38, no. 2 (2012): 100–108.

Emilie was saved the pain of watching her second child, Jane, succumb to smallpox at age twelve because Emilie Royce herself died of an unknown disease in 1845 at the age of thirty-four, leaving Jane and two other children, Cornelius and Sophia, to be taken care of by Dan Beach Bradley (who, of course, quickly remarried).²

I think we can forgive Emilie Royce for the terseness in her short note to her sister in one of two manuscripts she sent back to the United States. She clearly didn't have the easiest of lives. It is unclear how this manuscript got from Eliza's hands to Philadelphia. Most likely her stepson, Mr. M. Jones, donated it sometime after 1852, when he was given it. Although it is unclear, it may have sat in the archives of the American Philosophical Society for some years.

The American Philosophical Society is the oldest learned society in the United States. Founded by Benjamin Franklin and housed adjacent to Independence Hall, the birthplace of the country, on Fourth Street, its library is one of the most unique and valuable in the country, holding some of the founding documents of American democracy and a treasure trove for those

2 Sophia went on to marry the son of two well-known missionaries in Northern Thailand, Dan McGilvary, and her life was partially recorded in her husband's lengthy memoirs—"A Half Century Among the Siamese and the Lao." Emilie Royce Bradley's papers include an album and two diaries (1827–30; 1831–33; 1840–42) kept in Clinton, New York, and in Bangkok; a microfilm copy and a modern transcription of a diary (1834–36) whose original may still remain in private hands; a journal letter written aboard ship during her voyage to Siam in 1834–35; and a record book containing summaries of letters sent. The summaries often refer to "my large letter book," probably indicating that only a portion of Emilie's correspondence has survived. Only three letters in her hand (1835–38) are included in the calendared correspondence of Dan Beach Bradley; the accompanying index to the calendar erroneously ascribes ten letters to her. See especially Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio, RG 30/5—Dan Beach Bradley Family. The family papers of Dan Beach Bradley, which consist of letters, letterpress books, diaries, diary transcripts, journals, notebooks, writings, and photographs, document the missionary careers in nineteenth-century Siam (modern Thailand) of the Rev. Dan Beach Bradley (1804–1873) and his first wife, Emilie Royce Bradley (1811–1845). The collection also includes a small number of correspondence and writings created by two of their children, Sophia Royce Bradley (1839–1923) and Cornelius Beach Bradley (1843–1936). Except for fourteen letters, very little documentation exists of the forty-three-year missionary career (1850–1893) of Bradley's second wife, Sarah Blachly Bradley (1817–1893) of Dane, Wisconsin.

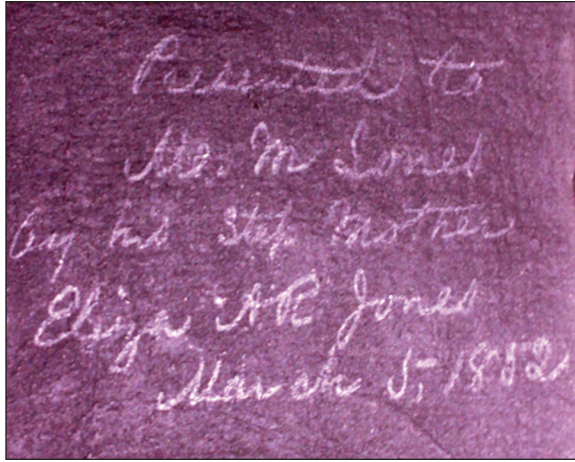


FIGURE 2. This detail of an inscription in pencil could be easily missed among the several blank pages of this manuscript on elementary reading lessons in Thai by Emilie Royce Bradley. Penn Museum manuscript 29-170-11, folio B20.

interested in the history of Native Americans, early trade and commerce, slavery, and the gifts of foreign visitors. It also was the original site of Charles Wilson Peale's famous museum of natural history, foreign cultures, and archaeology. Emilie's manuscript, alongside another one she sent a little later to Eliza, sat there among plant specimens, maps of Canadian rivers, mammoth/mastodon bones, and many a stuffed animal. When space at the American Philosophical Society grew precious, these Siamese manuscripts were most likely moved to the warehouse of the Philadelphia Civic Center (an exposition hall) and eventually into the storage cabinets of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, where they remained unopened until 2010, when Steven Lang, keeper of the Asian collections, gave them to Justin McDaniel to read.

Not only were the travels of these two manuscripts relatively strange, but so are their contents. The manuscript that was too large was eventually sent. It was found stored with the "small" one. It also has a note from Emilie Royce stating: "This volume is a specimen of the Siamese books. The paper is manufactured of the bark of a tree, the ink from a yellow stone, whiting [*sic*] and green, and it is written with a bamboo pen. This volume

contains a part of the tables forming the Elementary lessons.”³ Indeed, this manuscript is a rare example of an early Siamese-language grammar and reading guide, and shows the materials Emilie and her husband would have used to study Thai/Siamese and teach English. This lesson book presents three graded reading lessons, each preceded by a series of exercises arranged by the traditional Thai learning method known as *matdra*, which is the grouping of final consonants according to Thai pronunciation rules that can produce eight possible sounds. The second reading lesson of this manuscript, for example, consists of Thai words classified as *mae-gom*, or the *gom* group of final consonants, producing the final “m” sound. Moreover, the reading lessons are written in Thai verse, like the *gapchabang-sip-bok* verse, which has sixteen syllables per stanza. While it was very likely that Emilie and her husband may have learned to read Thai in this traditional fashion, Emilie also used this kind of manuscript to teach young children when she became too ill to provide them with personal tutoring.⁴

McDaniel opened the “small one” expecting to read a Siamese legal tract, a Buddhist sermon, or a traditional medical text, so he was shocked that the manuscript started off with the story of a spirit surrounded by crowds that descended gloriously from a mountain. This spirit healed a dying servant. Using Buddhist vocabulary and written in a colloquial, but

3 University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Obj. # 29-170-11. Original title: “Na Ton Lem Song.” Item/Leaf Count: 29 folios for each side A and B. Material: Black Khoi. Length in cm: 33.2. Height in cm: 2 cm. Width in cm: 10.4. Language: Thai. Colophon, on Side A, folio 2: “This volume is a specimen of the Siamese books. The paper is manufactured of the back of a tree, the ink from a yellow stone, whiting [*sic*] and green, and it is written with a bamboo pen. This volume contains a part of the tables forming the Elementary lessons.” [At the top of the bottom half of the same folio]: “a part of the table with the final B pronounced P.” Side A, folio 6: “A reading lesson in verse containing only words to be found in the foregoing tables. See vol. 1st.” Side B, folio 20: “Presented to Mr. M. Jones by his stepmother Eliza A. R. Jones. March 5, 1852.” Date: 1820s–no later than 1845.

4 According to W. H. Carey (1850), Emilie spent much of her missionary work in Siam with children. She became ill during her later years in Siam and eventually could no longer teach children in person. She began, then, to prepare reading materials like this manuscript mentioned. See *Oriental Christian Biography, Containing Biographical Sketches of Distinguished Christians Who Have Lived and Died in the East*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: J. Thomas, Baptist Mission Press), 218.

clear Thai, in yellow cobalt ink, it reads like a local Buddhist story about magical healers. Reading on, he found the name of the healing spirit—Phra Yesu (“Jesus Christ” in Thai!). Thinking originally because of the Buddhist vocabulary and references to a Thai “spirit” that this was a story written by a man who had encountered a Christian missionary, upon further investigation, it was discovered that this was a loose translation of Chapters 6–10 of the Gospel of Matthew.⁵ This provides further proof that when picking up Siamese manuscripts in foreign collections, we rarely know what we will find!

As you can see from this short vignette about Emilie Royce and her manuscripts, American collections of Thai manuscripts are large and often frustrating to use.⁶ It is not the conditions of the archives. Working with manuscripts of any kind in the United States is actually quite pleasant. Libraries and archives at the University of California, the University of Michigan, the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, Harvard University, and The Walters Art Museum, among many others, are accessible, well organized, and welcoming. The preservation laboratories are generally well funded and the staff well trained. However, while a number of wealthy collectors and fastidious librarians have made U.S. collections large and safe, the United States has traditionally produced very few scholars, librarians, or curators trained to read Thai or Pali. Therefore, Thai manuscripts often have been mislabeled and ignored. Indeed, Kerekes and McDaniel have come across many Thai manuscripts catalogued as Burmese, Lao, Chinese, or sometimes simply “Asian” or “Oriental.”

This short overview describes the state of Thai manuscript collections and highlights a few manuscripts. A few of the major collectors are mentioned as

5 University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Obj. # 29-170-12. Original title: “A Siamese Book.” Item/Leaf Count: 19 folios for each side A and B. Material: Black Khoi. Length in cm: 19. Height in cm: 1/8th short of 3. Width in cm: 8. Language: Thai. No colophon. Date: -1820s, no later than 1845. The passages in question seem to come loosely from Matthew 8:1–13.

6 Initially it was the authors’ aim to research “North American” collections and include Canadian collections as well as American. However, upon research (as of December 2014), there are no major collections of Thai manuscripts in Canada and none catalogued at any major Canadian academic or cultural institution.

well. There are dozens of manuscripts in private hands, and some occasionally find their way to public auctions. Kerekes and McDaniel researched some of these privately held manuscripts and arranged the purchase of a few by the University of Pennsylvania. However, these manuscripts are not discussed here. The second half of this overview focuses on the collection at the University of Pennsylvania, one of the largest and best preserved in the country, providing a detailed description of a few of the unique manuscripts held there. Finally, three unique manuscripts are described in closer detail.

Major Collections

Early collectors like Sarah Bekker, Philip Hofer, Elizabeth Lyons, Robert Garrett, J. Thomas Rimer, Christine Harris, John Frederick Lewis, and Doris Duke brought back many Thai manuscripts to the United States between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. These were subsequently gifted to many academic libraries and museums. Since Philadelphia was the largest and wealthiest American city at that time, the most significant collections were given to the University of Pennsylvania and the Free Library of Philadelphia; other major collections went to Princeton University and the New York Public Library. The large Doris Duke collection was shared between the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco and The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. The American-born Chester Beatty (from Baltimore) funded the building of a large research library in Dublin, Ireland, to hold his extensive Asian collections including more than forty well-preserved Thai manuscripts, which McDaniel helped partially catalogue in 2008 (see the article on Irish collections in this issue). Of these collections, only those at The Walters Art Museum and the University of Pennsylvania have been properly and fully catalogued. Of all the institutions in the United States that have collections of Thai manuscripts, only six present a visual component of their manuscripts online. The remaining institutions do not provide images; they only list the titles of the manuscripts. Thai manuscripts can be viewed online at the websites of the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco and the libraries of the University of California at Berkeley, Harvard University, and the University of Pennsylvania.

These institutions provide full digital facsimiles of many or most of their Thai manuscripts online, and they are freely accessible. The University of Arizona and the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University own a few Thai manuscripts, but they present only a single photographic image of particular manuscripts online.⁷

In general, there is only one dated source for information on many of these manuscripts: *A Census of Indic Manuscripts in the United States and Canada*.⁸ It is old, incomplete, and often not accurate.

Even though cataloguing has largely not been accurate, the experts at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries and The Walters Art Museum have developed advanced scanning and cataloguing technologies. However, there are many manuscripts at Princeton University Library, the New York Public Library, Columbia University, Harvard University, and elsewhere that have not yet been fully examined. Some of these collections were briefly examined by Henry Ginsburg in the 1990s and by Kerekes and McDaniel in the past three years. They helped correct the individual short list-like catalogues housed at the various repositories. They noticed that these small catalogues have dozens of errors and often do not cover the entirety of each

7 For good examples from private and public North American collections of Siamese/Thai manuscripts online, see Fortune-Telling Manuscript, Asian Art Museum, <http://searchcollection.asianart.org/view/objects/asitem/nid/15275>; Finding Aid to the Swift Family Collection of Palm Leaf Manuscripts, 1782–1898, University of California, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb1z09n6x3;developer=local;style=oac4;doc.view=item>; Ms. Typ. 439, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Treatise on Fortune-Telling, manuscript, before 1844, <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/41261126?printThumbnails=no&action=jp2resize&op=j&imageSize=600&pvHeight=1200&pvWidth=1200&n=2&rotation=0&bbx1=0&bby1=0&bbx2=90&bby2=130&jp2Res=0.125&pres=.25&jp2x=-1&jp2y=-1&medium.x=4&medium.y=6>; Thai Religious Manuscript, University of Arizona, <http://speccoll.library.arizona.edu/collections/thai-religious-manuscript>); Figural Scene With Inscription, Thailand, 19th century, Stanford University, Cantor Arts Center, <http://cantorcollections.stanford.edu/Obj2669?sid=2658&x=33164>; and The Walters Art Museum, www.thedigitalwalters.org; among others. The authors would also like to thank Trent Walker for bringing our attention to the manuscripts held at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University, and Larry Ashmun for directing us to the manuscript at the University of Transylvania.

8 Horace I. Poleman, *A Census of Indic Manuscripts in the United States and Canada*, American Oriental Series, vol. 12 (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1938; repr. New York: Kraus Reprints, 1967).

collection. For example, a number of manuscripts in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology were recently discovered. The catalogued information (last updated in the 1920s) was almost completely wrong. There also had been no effort to identify the contents, donor, condition, and so on. The catalogue from 1980 provides almost no information about its contents or how it was acquired. In another example, the only known catalogue of the more than sixty Southeast Asian manuscripts at the Free Library of Philadelphia is a typed list held at the Center for the Advanced Study of Judaism (twenty-five blocks away). Accessing this hastily produced and inaccurate list is as difficult as retrieving the actual manuscripts in the rare book storage. When McDaniel looked at one manuscript, labeled “Siamese,” in the Free Library of Philadelphia, he discovered it was a nineteenth-century Hebrew Torah. Another manuscript labeled “Sanskrit” was actually Siamese/Thai. In all the collections, few of these manuscripts have been photographed and even fewer scanned. Barely 20 percent of the total has even been properly identified. Siamese heritage deposited by Americans into a variety of collections has been ignored for a century and therefore is useless for research and pedagogical purposes.

Despite these problems, there are large collections and a number of very rare and beautiful manuscripts in the United States.

THE WALTERS ART MUSEUM (BALTIMORE, MARYLAND)

Under the curatorship of Hiram Woodward from 1986 to 2003, The Walters Art Museum’s Asian collection grew significantly. Recognized as one of the leading art historians of Thailand, Woodward was able to arrange for the gifting of half of the Doris Duke Collection of Thai art, which included a number of rare illuminated manuscripts (the other half went to the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco). Of all the collections included in this project, The Walters Art Museum’s has been the most studied because of the work of Woodward and the late Henry Ginsburg, who catalogued and described the collection while working at the British Library. The collec-

tion is briefly described by Ginsburg in Woodward's festschrift.⁹ The collection includes fifteen manuscripts (ten birth tales from the Abhidhamma, *Abhidhammavaranaṭṭaka*, a treatise on elephants, the tale of Phra Malai, the story of the hermits from Wat Pho, and a medical divination text), among others. These are some of the most exquisite examples of Thai painting available in North America. The Walters Art Museum has already started to scan these manuscripts. This level of care and cataloguing unfortunately has not been available at other collections besides the Asian Art Museum's collection, which was worked on by Ginsburg and Woodward. Consultation with Woodward and Ginsburg before he passed away has provided McDaniel with a model of expertise and experience from which to work with other collections.

THE ASIAN ART MUSEUM (SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA)

Although consisting of only sixteen Thai manuscripts, the Asian Art Museum's collection curated by Forrest McGill is one of the finest in the world. Eight of these sixteen have been fully photographed and are accessible through their website. They also have been identified and fully catalogued. The collection includes a rare chrestomathy with exquisite illustrations produced in 1857. This manuscript is unique not only because of its combination of several choice passages from different Buddhist texts, but also because it is composed in Mon, Cambodian, and Thai scripts. It provides a rare snapshot of the cosmopolitan readers and wide variety of skills of the artists in the royal court of Siam at that time. Another rare text contains scenes of combat from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This detailed manuscript was probably used as a guide for dancers performing the Hindu epic on stage and reveals the overlap between Hinduism and Buddhism and the secular and religious worlds. There are also manuscripts with scenes from Phra Malai, a rare

9 "A Curator's Choice: Essays in Honor of Hiram W. Woodward Jr.," ed. William Noel, *Journal of the Walters Art Museum* 64–65 (2006–7): 99–148.

anatomical drawing used for students of medicine at one of Thailand's two early monastic medical schools (Wat Chetuphon and Wat Ratchaorot), and a beautiful, fully photographed fortune-telling manuscript that shows Chinese astrological influences.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, MANUSCRIPTS DIVISION,
DEPARTMENT OF RARE BOOKS AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
(PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY)

Fifteen Thai/Siamese manuscripts are found among approximately three hundred Indic manuscripts in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Princeton. Most of them were the gift of Robert Garrett (1875–1961), a Baltimore businessman and Princeton graduate, in 1942. Like the Thai manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the collection at Princeton has not been properly catalogued (there are no experts in Thai or Pali language at Princeton), scanned, and/or photographed. There are at least fifteen Thai manuscripts; however, there could be a few more, as some of the Pali-language manuscripts that were probably composed in Thailand have not been identified. On a previous visit, McDaniel corrected much of the catalogue. After identifying the manuscripts, future funding would enable the manuscripts to be preserved, photographed, and made available online. The manuscripts that have been identified already include several *kamavācā* manuscripts that were used to guide monastic ordination, calendrical, and votive rituals. There are rare examples of sorcerer's guidebooks composed on black khoi paper and silver ink, as well as the texts of the *Yamakapakaraṇa*, the *Puggalapañña*, and illustrated scenes of different levels of hell. McDaniel also discovered one of the only known complete *vohāra* editions of the ten birth stories of the Buddha (*dasajātaka*). Unfortunately, it had been mislabeled. This means that one of the only complete sets in the world was hidden from view for a century! McDaniel consulted with Thai scholars about this, and they were both thrilled that it was found and shocked that no one knew about it. What is most intriguing about the Princeton University Library collection is the fact that occasionally included with these manuscripts are

the silk wrappers, carved and painted wooden covers, and the tying cords. Often when manuscripts were donated to Western collections in the nineteenth century, these covers were not included. Now researchers know that these covers, cords, and so on are markers of the manuscripts' date and provenance and that they are records of the local work of Thai artisans that has largely been lost.

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY (NEW YORK CITY), AND THE UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (NEW YORK CITY)

The Spencer Collection at the New York Public Library (NYPL) contains one of the largest collections of Thai manuscripts in North America. There are fifty-two manuscripts in the Spencer Collection plus an additional four manuscripts in the Oriental Manuscript Collection, held in the Brooke Russell Astor Reading Room (the manuscripts were donated at different times and are kept in two different restricted-access reading rooms). Many are *jātaka*, Phra Malai, and other illuminated narrative texts that were used for performance and chanting in the nineteenth century. Besides these, there is an unusually large number of medical manuscripts, which offer a rare look into medical technologies, magical protection, herbal concoctions, and traditional massage methods used at Buddhist monasteries. There is even a manuscript describing early Thai gymnastics and their use in healing. This extensive collection also includes almost ten manuscripts describing Buddhist iconography and classical dance, three fortune-telling manuscripts, and manuscripts describing the care of cats and elephants. Therefore, botanists, art historians, performance, music, dance specialists, and even zoologists could benefit from this collection. Recently, McDaniel photographed one of the best-preserved *Traibhumikatha* cosmological illuminated manuscripts available in the world at the NYPL. This manuscript contains more than fifty leaves and has beautifully painted scenes of various heavens, hells, and earthly palaces, gardens, and rivers. Another cosmological manuscript in this Spencer Collection was gifted directly by Prince Dhanit Yupho of the Fine Arts Department (Krom Silapakorn) in Thailand in the 1960s. Kazuko Tanabe of the Eastern Institute in Japan has undertaken a close

study of manuscript numbers 6 and 7 in the Thai/Spencer Collection and will publish descriptions of these in Japanese soon.

Although Henry Ginsburg included only six Thai manuscripts held in American collections in his groundbreaking work, four of those six are held within the NYPL's Spencer Collection. They include Thai manuscript numbers 6 and 7, which are both *sip chat/dasajātaka*/ten birth tales illustrations with *Abhidhamma chet gamphi* text); Thai manuscript number 22, which is a Phra Malai manuscript; and Thai manuscript 25, which is the Thai Buddhist cosmology *Traibhumikatha* mentioned earlier. This last manuscript, although rather late and composed in 1903, might be the finest example of its kind ever collected outside of Thailand. Unfortunately, scholars have largely ignored the Brooke Russell Astor Reading Room, but Kerekes found three manuscripts there that are of particular importance. One (labeled "Siamese Manuscript no. 4") is a rare example of tax records from Central Thailand. Dated to 1855, this manuscript was compiled by a "Jao Phasi" (tax administrator), and it would be useful to any social, political, or economic historian of the period. Another, "Siamese Manuscript no. 1, box no. 7," is a forty-folio illuminated "Book of Omens." It is a superb example in terms of the beauty of the script (Siamese and Khom), which is partially in blue ink and has a mix of mythological and historical paintings. One depicting a Chinese junk is unseen in other known manuscripts, as well as a rather strange painting of a man trying to chop off a woman's foot. These images depict different prognostications connected with particular birth dates. "Siamese Manuscript no. 3" is a fascinating manuscript about marriage dated to 1855 of the "Siamese Era" in the year of the rat (but the note within the manuscript does not specify which "Siamese Era," and the closest rat year on the Gregorian calendar is the year 1900). The Thai title, "Phanaikan laksana pua-mia samut," has twenty-nine double-sided folios. Included in the box is a rough English translation by an unknown person of the first three pages with the following note:

This is a native Siamese Book of Laws on Marriage. It is a very good specimen of the Siamese hand writing—it is written with a pencil made of a soft kind of slate stone—& may easily be erased. The more durable works are generally written on black paper with a

bright yellow ink . . . [the king sent] them to all the officers civil & military in all the provinces & ordered them to make them known to the people throughout the magnificent kingdom of Siam, & hand them down to future generations.

The text itself gives specific instruction to wives and husbands, including rather surprising provisions protecting a woman from domestic abuse. Kerekes and McDaniel are undertaking a more extensive study of this manuscript.

There is also a small collection in the Burke Library of the Union Theological Seminary in New York (near the campuses of Barnard College and Columbia University). Some were collected by Charles Robinson in 1932 and others by “Mrs. Professor Henry Mills” in 1867. They seem to have been housed in the Auburn Theological Seminary collection in upstate New York when they first came to the United States. Kerekes and McDaniel examined all six manuscripts that they could find, which were different from the four listed in their online catalogue (since they were, apparently, the first researchers ever to request to see these manuscripts, the library staff had undertaken very little research on how they happened to end up in the Burke Library). Two were not Thai, but Cambodian, one (Museum KP23.9/Library No. 1177) being a Christian book of common prayer translated in Khmer. The Siamese manuscripts include an astrological guide, a set of *suttas*, and manuscripts numbers 21 and 22 (which, according to the labels, were once displayed on the fourth floor of the library). These are, respectively: (1) Pali (in Khom mul script) *Mahāsamayasutta* from *Dīghanikāya* (which also has a Poleman catalogue number—6376), and (2) excerpts from the Pali *Dhammapada* (Poleman 6399). These are rather well-executed manuscripts worth further study.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY SWIFT FAMILY
COLLECTION (BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA)

Through the tireless work of Virginia Shih, the Thai manuscript collection at the University of California at Berkeley has been well catalogued, and the

manuscripts are freely accessible online.¹⁰ Known as the Swift Family Collection, these twenty-three manuscripts, nineteen of which are composed on palm-leaf and four on khoi paper, present an impressive range of different textual genres. Not all twenty-three are Thai. Three are Indian, two Khmer, one Tamil, and one Burmese. Unlike many other American collections, these manuscripts are primarily Northern Thai and Lao. With Virginia Shih's permission, McDaniel helped catalogue many of these manuscripts, and others were examined by Peter Skilling and Henry Ginsburg. There are a number of valuable and rare texts including a large (two bundles) *sip chat* (in Pali, *dasajātaka*) manuscript offering excerpts from the last ten "lives" of the Buddha before his awakening and stories from the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* and a *namasāb* (Thai-Pali gloss) of sections of the *Cullavagga* of the *Vinaya*. Thanks to Henry Ginsburg and Virginia Shih, we know a good amount about how these found their way to Berkeley, unlike the case with many other collections. Lloyd Wesley Swift was a graduate of Berkeley who gave the collection to his alma mater in 1976. A bioscientist, he had acquired the manuscripts from Josephine Hall Bishop (1841–1917), who was a collector and wife of Thomas Benton Bishop, a wealthy lawyer. Shih writes:

[She developed a] private museum on Washington Street in San Francisco. Her father, Professor James Hall (1811–1898), an outstanding geologist and paleontologist, directed the New York Geological Survey and was the first director of the New York State Museum at Albany. After his death, Mrs. Bishop brought much of his papers and personal property to San Francisco. In due time part of the Hall and Bishop material went to Mrs. Edward Bishop (1887–1951), widow of Edward Bishop, son of Josephine and Thomas, and then to Clara Bishop Swift (1905–1964), wife of Lloyd Wesley Swift, and upon Mrs. Swift's death to Lloyd Wesley Swift. It is likely that Rev. Samuel R. House sent several manuscripts to Professor James

10 A collection summary and history, as well as all the digitized manuscripts, can be seen here: <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/hb1z09n6x3/admin/>.

Hall directly from Siam, via his friend Rev. Stephen Bush when the latter went back to New York in 1853. Lloyd Wesley Swift himself assumed that “Josephine Hall Bishop collected the Indo-Chinese manuscripts on one of her trips to the Orient.” His assumption is stated before the following remarks. . . . [However,] if the dating of the lifetime of Josephine Hall Bishop is correct, Josephine was only 11 years old by 1852. It was less likely that by that age she was already travelling to Siam. Moreover, the name “Samuel B. House” is a misreading for “Samuel R. House,” a prominent American minister cum physician who went to Siam. . . . Rev. Stephen Bush, who graduated from the Princeton Theological Seminary in 1848 . . . was a friend of Rev. Stephen Mattoon, who graduated earlier in 1946. All of them went to Siam. In fact, in 1856 Rev. Stephen Mattoon was the first appointed U.S. Consul to Siam. . . . Rev. Samuel R. House (1817–1899) himself was a native of Saratoga, New York and was one of the founders of Christian missionary to Siam and Laos. He went to Siam in 1847 and worked there for thirty years. In any event, it appears that Josephine Hall Bishop handled, and perhaps displayed, the manuscripts. The small, red-bordered labels found on some are in her handwriting. Parts of the manuscripts are wrapped in attractively colored handmade mats. Some brown wrapping paper with notes was together with the manuscripts. Descriptive notes on white paper appear on the inside of the panels of some manuscripts. Lloyd Wesley Swift was unable to identify the writer, but the writing in ink on some of the exterior wrapping paper he credited to a scholarly nun in San Francisco, who saw the manuscripts and, apparently, could read the text.¹¹

11 As Shih notes: “The more complete history of their missionary works is written by House himself and is available in ‘Chapter XXI. History of the Missions in Siam and Laos,’ pages 351–418. It is a chapter in a book edited by Mary Backhus, titled *Siam and Laos, as seen by Our American Missionaries*, published in 1884. On this account, there are at least two more books published afterward. The first is authored by George Haws Feltus, titled *Samuel Reynolds House of Siam; Pioneer Medical Missionary: 1847–1976*, published in 1924. Then, Kenneth E. Wells wrote *History of Protestant Work in Thailand: 1828–1958*, which was published in 1958. In addition, there was also a communication by Rev. Samuel R. House to the US during

OTHER AMERICAN COLLECTIONS

There are several other notable American collections of Thai manuscripts. Unfortunately, these have not yet been fully catalogued, and few of their manuscripts are available online. McDaniel has traveled to examine most of these collections in person, and Kerekes has also joined McDaniel in examining the Columbia and New York Public Library collections as well as cataloguing the entire University of Pennsylvania collection. The largest of these other collections are found at Cornell University, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., Harvard University, and the University of Michigan. Small collections of Thai manuscripts are found at Northern Illinois University, Stanford's Cantor Art Center, and Columbia University. Yale University, the University of Arizona, and the University of Transylvania (Lexington, Kentucky) have one Thai manuscript each. Yale has a rare "cat manuscript" (in Thai, *Tamra Maeo*) that, although short, contains several drawings of different Siamese cat breeds with short descriptions).¹² The University of Arizona's single manuscript is a beautiful Phra Malai manuscript with several illustrations. Unfortunately, Cornell's and the University of Michigan's collections have not been made available online and have only been cursorily examined (McDaniel, for example, looked at six manuscripts at the University of Michigan in 2010, but they have not been properly catalogued). Susan Goh at Michigan and Gregory Green at Cornell are seeking funding and hoping to catalogue the Thai manuscripts in their collections soon. Michigan's collection is one of the largest in the United States, at fifty-three manuscripts. Cornell's collection may have as many as two hundred manuscripts, which would make it the largest in the country, but this

the time he was in Siam. He sent a letter dated 29 January, 1849, to the famous Siamese Twins, Mr. Chang and Eng Bunker, who were already residing in the US. This letter is published in the biography of those twins, written by Judge Jesse Franklin Graves, titled *Life of Eng and Chang Bunker, the original Siamese Twins*." The authors thank Virginia Shih for her help in this research and for letting them examine the manuscripts in person and help catalogue them in 2004 and 2007. For more information, see <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/hb1z09n6x3/admin/#scopecontent-1.3.4>.

12 McDaniel thanks Richard Richie for letting him closely examine and photograph this manuscript.

has not been confirmed. The Library of Congress, before the retirement of Thai cataloguer Sirikanya Schaeffer, had worked with McDaniel in examining the Thai manuscript collection in the late 1990s. However, now there are no Thai experts at the Library of Congress, and that collection remains largely unexplored. This is unfortunate considering there may be as many as sixty Thai manuscripts in their archives. The rare books and manuscript collection at Harvard University's Houghton Library has only one of its ten Thai manuscripts available online. It is a very beautiful fortune-telling manuscript (in Thai, *horasat*).¹³ Henry Ginsburg, Peter Skilling, and McDaniel have examined other manuscripts in this collection.¹⁴ Ginsburg also described a single manuscript at the Honolulu Academy of Art in Hawaii that dates from 1813. Like many other manuscripts in American collections, it is an *Abbidhamma chet gamphi* text with illustrations from the Phra Malai story and the ten birth tales (*sip chat/dasajāṭaka*). Finally, there is one Thai manuscript held in the Free Library of Philadelphia's (FLP) Rare Book Room. However, after examining it with the assistance of the FLP's rare book director Janine Pollock, McDaniel was convinced of its

13 "A treatise on fortune telling: manuscript, before 1844" [37 × 13 cm; 39 folios]. MS Typ 439. Houghton Library, Harvard University, <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/41261126?printThumbnails=no&action=jp2resize&op=j&imagesize=600&pvHeight=1200&pvWidth=1200&n=2&rotation=0&bbx1=0&bby1=0&bbx2=90&bby2=130&jp2Res=0.125&pres=.25&jp2x=-1&jp2y=-1&medium.x=4&medium.y=6>. In October 2016, McDaniel found a section of Sunthorn Phu's *Aphaimani* at Harvard that seems to be related to another section found at Penn. There is also an excerpt of the Gospel of Matthew in Thai in Harvard's collection. Most of the other Thai manuscripts at Harvard were mislabeled, but McDaniel was invited to return to correct the entries. Emilie Hardman at Houghton was very helpful in trying to locate Siamese manuscripts in their collection.

14 For example, Ginsburg describes Thai manuscript #73 in his *Thai Manuscripts in Western Collections*, which contains paintings of the last ten *jātakas* of the Buddha and is quite old, dating to the mid- to late-eighteenth century. This manuscript is one of the seven used in Jo-Fan Huang, "A Technical Examination of 7 Thai Manuscripts in the 18th, 19th, and 20th Centuries," (available here: http://cool.conservation-us.org/anagpic/2006pdf/2006ANAGPIC_Huang.pdf). The manuscripts are further detailed in Henry Ginsburg, "Ayutthaya Painting," in *The Kingdom of Siam: The Art of Central Thailand, 1350-1800*, edited by Forrest McGill and Pattaratorn Chirapravati (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2004):pp. 96-109. Most of the information, however, can also be found in his *Thai Art and Culture* book. Skilling is producing an edition of the Harvard cosmological manuscript to be published in 2016.

importance. It is a very rare *Phra Laksanavamsa* chronicle of the activities of royal heroes that is not found in such excellent condition in other collections. It is a complete manuscript with information on patrons composed using black khoi paper with yellow ink. Its condition is remarkable and the FLP has done an admirable job preserving it. However, McDaniel was the first person to examine the manuscript in several decades, and this rare text is hidden from public and scholarly view. Eventually, it will be included in an online catalogue.

A Close Look at One American Collection: The University of Pennsylvania

Kerekes and McDaniel were convinced of the necessity of this project after being asked to examine a few unidentified Thai manuscripts at the Penn Museum and Penn Libraries. These manuscripts were being held in long-term archival storage; they had not been looked at for almost thirty years, and were never seriously analyzed. Their contents were largely unknown. Kerekes and McDaniel quickly found a treasure trove of very rare Northern, Southern, and Central Thai manuscripts. Unlike other collections in the United States, the Penn Museum holds Northern Thai palm-leaf manuscripts. These texts are largely not illuminated, but contain astrological, ritual, and magical formulas, as well as information on homiletic practices in the region. This collection also contains several, improperly labeled “Yuan” and “Lao” script manuscripts that are actually Tua Dham script texts. These are hard to find outside of the region and upon further investigation are probably from rural Nan Province. The Penn Libraries (specifically, the state-of-the-art Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts on the sixth floor of Van Pelt Library) holds mostly Central Thai mulberry-paper manuscripts, many of which are fine examples of Abhidhamma and Phra Malai illuminated texts. Therefore, these two collections (numbering fifty-six texts), offer a wide range of Thai manuscript types and form one of the oldest and largest collections in the United States. This collection was bolstered by the acquisition, with the assistance of

Hiram Woodward of The Walters Art Museum, of the Konrad and Sarah M. Bekker Collection of eleven rare manuscripts that were purchased through the Sloan & Kenyon auction house in 2013.¹⁵ A few examples will demonstrate the diversity of this collection and the research possibilities that await.

L. GODON'S COLLECTION

L. Godon was a curious fellow. He signed his donations of Thai manuscripts to the American Philosophical Society "L. Godon," but his full name is Victor L. Godon. Born in Philadelphia probably around 1810, he attended the Mount Airy School from 1826 to 1827 and then entered medical school at the University of Pennsylvania (the oldest school of its type in North America), graduating in 1834. While attending medical school, which was, unlike today, located in Center City Philadelphia along Fifth Street, he attended lectures by William Paul Crillon Barton at the short-lived "Therapeutic Institute" between 1831 and 1833. He was such a regular visitor that he was labeled a "perpetual pupil" and paid twenty-one dollars (a very large sum at the time) to be permitted to attend all of the lecture series. This institute was a type of intellectuals' salon featuring talks by lawyers, botanists, toxicologists, and physicians. Most likely, he also attended lectures at the American Philosophical Society (although he was not a member of this exclusive salon), which was a mere one block from the medical school. Not being a member of Philadelphia's old-moneyed elite, but obviously filled with a thirst for knowledge and skilled in the study of exotic flora and fauna, after graduating from medical school, he joined the

15 The partial list of Thai/Siamese rare books and manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries (including the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts) and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology can be seen at <http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/search.html?q=thai>. See the museum's collection at http://www.penn.museum/collections/search.php?term=thai&submit_term=Submit+Query.

navy as a physician in 1835.¹⁶ As far as we can tell he was deployed to Brazil in February 1835 aboard the “Columbus 74,” where he served as an assistant surgeon. Then he was assigned to the “Frigate Constitution” in the Mediterranean in August 1836. Then the record goes dark, but we can assume that he went to Siam in late 1836 through the fall of 1837. He never served as a head surgeon on any ship.

While in Siam and the Dutch East Indies, he acquired an interest in manuscripts. While we have no record of his time in Southeast Asia, he did have a good eye for rare manuscripts. When he returned from Siam, he donated four manuscripts to the society on 17 November 1837 (which were originally listed in the meeting minutes as “sundry articles from the South Seas from Midshipman L. Godon”), perhaps in hopes of gaining membership (an endeavor of which he was unsuccessful).¹⁷ He spent the rest of his career until his retirement in 1844 as a surgeon at the Naval Asylum in Philadelphia. Sadly, he was finally admitted into the exclusive American College of Physicians in 1846, but in the list of members his name had an asterisk next to it, identifying him as deceased.¹⁸

Although Godon’s life as a physician can be summed up with an asterisk, he did make a mark on the history of collecting Thai manuscripts. The manuscripts he donated are quite rare and include: (1) “Some Leaves of a Siamese Book of Astrology”; (2) “A Siamese Tale, written in White Letteres, on black paper, one Sheet, curiously folded”; (3) “Missionary Tracis, in Siamese, Hindostanee, Burman”; and (4) “Tract in the Language of the

16 There is a record that he complained of his low pay in the navy. Godon apparently asked for a pay raise, “praying for the difference of pay between the grade of assistant surgeon and passed assistant surgeon.” See *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, at the Second Session of the Twenty-Seventh Congress* (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1841), 343.

17 There is a discrepancy in the dates. The original handwritten tags attached to the manuscripts state 17 November 1837; however, one record at the American Philosophical Society states 18 July 1834. The latter date is most likely a mistake since L. Godon had not yet left for Asia in 1834.

18 *Charter, Ordinances and By-laws of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, as amended November 1st, 1882* (Philadelphia: Collins, 1882), 62 and 66. Collins Printer was located on 705 Jayne Street.

people called Bugis, inhabiting celebes.”¹⁹ Alongside the manuscripts, he also apparently donated “A Mummy of the Ibis, in a Jar, from Egypt” (which he probably acquired while in the Mediterranean). Three of the manuscripts are extant and were moved to the University of Pennsylvania around 1972. The Bugis manuscript is lost.

“Some Leaves of a Siamese Book of Astrology” is a short, but excellent example of horoscopes being composed in central Siam in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁰ Although it is now missing its cover, it has its original sage-green ribbon intact. The ribbon binds nine palm-leaves. Unlike most astrological manuscripts, which describe particular types (often with illustrations) of Siamese and Chinese zodiac symbols and the birth and death of people born under certain stars, this manuscript does not include illustrations of any sort. It describes the ethical qualities of people and has little prognostication. Moreover, the text is in Thai and is clearly written. This was rare for palm-leaf manuscripts of this period, which were primarily composed in Thai with Khom script. This shows the complexity of Thai astrological practices (a point discussed below) and is one of the earliest examples known.

The second manuscript Godon donated is much rarer and may be one of the earliest copies of one of the greatest poems in all of Siamese literature—the *Phra Aphaimani*. *Phra Aphaimani* was composed between 1821 and 1823 while the poet, Sunthorn Phu, was in prison (the entire poem, it is said,

19 “Donations for the Library,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society: Held at Philadelphia, for Promoting Useful Knowledge* 6, n.s. (Published by the Society, and printed by James Kay, Jun. & Brother, Printers to the Society, 1839), 412.

20 University of Pennsylvania Libraries: UPenn Ms. Coll. 390, Item 2990; previously catalogued by the Penn Museum as Obj. #: 2990 (11134), Levitt catalogue #: L-122-249. Original title: “Some Leaves of a Siamese Book of Astrology.” Item/Leaf Count: 9 leaves written on both sides. Pagination: back of leaves have *payanchanas*, but the front of the leaves have no *payanchanas* or any kind of pagination. Material: Palm-leaf. Length: 37 cm. Height: 0.5 cm. Width: 5.75 cm. Language: Thai. Script: Thai. No Colophon. No date (most likely 1790s–no later than 1836): http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/franklin/record.html?filter.format_facet.val=Manuscript&q=godon&id=FRANKLIN_6073068&.

wasn't finished until 1834).²¹ The poem had more than ninety separate chapters (about 1,200 pages of printed text in the published Thai version). It wasn't published until 1870, but it instantly became very popular. The manuscript in Penn's collection is labeled as chapter six and was probably one of the earliest pre-published copies. It had to have been collected by Godon in 1836, which would mean it was composed between 1821 and 1836, making it a rare copy indeed. Beautifully preserved and written with yellow cobalt on black khoi paper, this copy boasts superb handwriting and text with very little damage. The chapter occurs early in the poem and is about Phra Aphaimani and his younger brother Srisuwan. The main action of the section involves Phra Aphaimani escaping from a giant named Nang Phisua with Phra Aphaimani's son Sinsamut.²²

Finally, Godon collected the only known copy of private royal court internal communications in the 1830s. This text, like the *Phra Aphaimani*, is composed on black khoi paper, but instead of clear handwriting in yellow cobalt, this manuscript was quickly and haphazardly composed in white chalk. The scribe was often inconsistent throughout the manuscript and used many unique shorthands that make it a difficult text to read for a proper transcription. Subjected to water damage, it has no title, so McDaniel and Kerekes labeled it "Royal Decrees."²³ In a mere twenty-nine folios, upon which only eighteen are written, this manuscript seems to be an actual copy of the forced resettlement instructions given by one of the king-

21 Penn Libraries, Ms. Coll. 390, Item 2992. McDaniel has been undertaking a social history of this poem focusing on the role of Princess Apsorn (known as Ying Wilat), daughter of King Rama III, and her possible relationship with the poet.

22 The authors thank Arthid Sheravanichkul for helping to understand a difficult passage in this manuscript. Private communication, January 2014.

23 Penn Libraries, Ms. Coll. 390, Item 2991. See full record at <http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/d/medren/6073094>. A note tied with a marigold-yellow ribbon (0.5 cm wide) to the top of cover has the following message: "a book in the Siamese language [illegible] a tale or novel written in [illegible] running hand in white letters on blank paper curiously folded AmPhilSoc [illegible] L. Godon 17 Nov 1837." This note is written in black ink (possibly fountain pen) on the back side of a fragment of an old note card that reads: "[cut off text from the top] meetings of the Society 7 o'clock PM. [missing text] New members to be balloted for [missing text] A Librarian and a Committee of Finance to be elected." The authors would like to thank Kennon Breazeale for kindly sharing his insights on this difficult manuscript.

dom's chief ministers, Čhao Pharaya Bodin Sing Singhaseni (1777–1849). The eighteen folios of text are divided into five sections, and each is a distinct document, a royal decree addressed to a regional leader, concluding with the document's composition year according to the Thai minor calendar, Chulasakarat, and the Chinese twelve-year animal cycle. Strangely, the five documents are not recorded in chronological order. The first three documents are dated in the year of the goat and a Chulasakarat year ending in seven (that is, Chulasakarat 1197), translating to the Gregorian year 1835. The last two documents, however, are dated in the year of the rabbit, a Chulasakarat year ending in three, which is 1193, or the Gregorian year 1832.

Of particular interest within these documents are two important names that may be useful for historians: Wat Pho and Čhao Bodin Sing Singhaseni. There are also several provincial names mentioned, including Phitsanulok, Songkhla, Chumporn, Pattalung, Petchabun, Kenethao, Loei, Vientiane, and Lom Sak.

In the first document, we find instructions for the royal repair of the wooden beams on several building complexes on the grounds of the monastery called Wat Pho/Chetuphon, which is situated next door to the palace.²⁴ What is unclear in the remainder of this first document, due to the illegibility of the scribe's hand, is a discrepancy in context regarding the enumeration of "x" in four provincial cities, including Phitsanulok, over the course of three years (1833, 1834, and 1835). The numbers for Muang Phichai, for example, are 760 in the past, 314 in the year 1834, and 1,000 in 1835. Following the earlier context of temple repair, it is possible that the "x," the mystery word in question, is "*tha-naan*," referring to an ancient form of measuring volume via coconut shell, for the measurement of *nam-rak*, or resin, most likely required for the wooden repairs. However, the same line that mentions resin also seems to note *pon-dri*, or military general, in which case the numbers would refer to *tha-haan*, soldiers, instead of *tha-naan*.

24 King Rama III's complete renovation of Wat Pho, which was formerly done in 1832 with the reconstruction of the monks' living quarters, was officially commenced in 1835. See Terwiel, *Thailand's Political History: From the 13th Century to Recent Times* (Bangkok: River Books, 2005), 131; and Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 159.

Čhao Bodin Sing Singhaseni was a well-respected military leader during King Rama III's reign. Following his successful military invasion of Laos and the burning of the city of Vientiane to quell the Laotian Rebellion (1826–28), Sing Singhaseni also earned the title of Samuha-nayok, a high-ranking title equivalent to prime minister in modern Thailand, in charge of all civilian affairs. Most of the five documents discuss the settlement of groups of families from rural villages to Bangkok, providing them with provisions, not letting them starve, with the fifth document specific to families of Loei and Kenethao, Laos.

The sloppy handwriting and the lack of proper formatting suggests that this manuscript consists of the notes a scribe was taking from quick dictation, meant only for internal affairs in the palace. Therefore, what we have would be equivalent to the private instructions President Abraham Lincoln might have given to his generals during the Civil War. This type of social, military, religious, and art history is extremely hard to find.

*One Beautiful and One “Too Beautiful” Manuscript
from the Collections of Konrad and Sarah M. Bekker
and Elizabeth Lyons*

The University of Pennsylvania collection includes several stunning illuminated manuscripts from Central Siam/Thailand composed in the early to mid-nineteenth century. While many of these contain the text of the *Abhidhamma chet kamphi* and decorative paintings or scenes from the Phra Malai story or the last ten *jātakas* and thus are similar to manuscripts from this period found in other American collections, as well as ones in Japan, Great Britain, France, Thailand, and the like, a couple merit particular attention for what they tell us about the creativity of Thai scribes and artists and the problems with studying illuminated Thai manuscripts more broadly. They were collected by two of the greatest patrons of Thai art and religion in the United States—Sarah Bekker and Elizabeth Lyons.

The first is one of the most intricate and beautiful illuminated manuscripts Kerekes and McDaniel have come across. The manuscript at first

might be overlooked, because, like many others, the text is that of the *Abhidhamma chet kamphi* with paintings drawn from the Phra Malai story. However, its unique features are particularly interesting. This was probably a manuscript given as a gift at a funeral and may have even been read and shown at one or many funeral ceremonies. Even though it is not a ritual text per se, sections of the Abhidhamma are used ritually today in Southeast Asia (particularly Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand, as well as among the Tai Lue, Mon, and Shan). According to most scholarly and traditional descriptions of the *Abhidhamma*, there are seven sections (alternatively called groupings, treatises, or volumes) that are listed in different sequences depending on the school of Buddhism. In Theravāda there are seven sections of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*: *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, *Vibhaṅga*, *Dhātukathā*, *Puggalapaññattitīi-pākaraṇa*, *Kathāvatthu*, *Yamaka*, and *(Mahā)paṭṭhāna* compose the third “basket” of the Tipiṭaka. The seven sections are characterized by long taxonomic lists that cover a wide range of subjects generally relating to the relationships between the sense receptors; emotions; mental states; analytical modes; physical elements; the nature of perception; conditional relationships between thought, sense, and action; and the genesis and result of these conditional relationships. They also include early Buddhist debates, the refutation of various opinions, and specific commentaries on passages from the other sections of the Tipiṭaka. Quite simply, these massive tomes attempt to describe in detail the psychological nature of the individual and link that nature to virtuous/nonvirtuous actions and soteriological potentials. Their mastery, if possible, is a mark of intellectual, ethical, and social prestige for teachers and students.

The content of these sections has been the subject of commentary and debate in Southeast Asia. Commentaries composed or transmitted in Burma, Laos, and Thailand include the *Atthasālinī*, *Mohavicchedanī*, *Sammohavinodanī*, *Gūlhatthadīpanī*, *Pañcappakaraṇaṭṭhakathā*, *Abhidhammāvatāra*, *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, *Maṇisāramañjūsā*, *Nāmarūpapariccheda*, and *Saccasaṅkhepa*, among others. Not surprisingly, considering the content of the seven source texts, neither the Abhidhamma texts nor their commentaries include specific instructions on how to conduct rituals, nor does their content have any relation to rituals. However, despite the content of the Abhidhamma and

its major commentaries, Cambodian, Lao, and Thai monastic teachers have used the Abhidhamma in just these ways.²⁵

This title, *Seven Books of the Abhidhamma*, is misleading. This text does not contain the entire seven volumes of the Abhidhamma. Often only the titles of the texts and short excerpt verses are employed in Pali and then expanded on in the vernacular in the course of a ritual and following sermon. In modern times the Pali sections of the Thai and Pali *Abhidhamma chet kamphi* and *Abhidhamma chet kamphi ruam* (the latter being longer and containing additional sections) are only chanted, and the actual Abhidhamma source text is not chanted. These verses are chanted while monks stand in front of the funeral pyre. Sections from the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* are often chanted at the beginning of the funeral. This chanting is in Pali, which the vast majority of lay people and monks cannot understand. The semantic meaning of the text chanting matters little compared with its powerful ritual value. Funerals are perhaps the most common and frequent times for public Pali chanting in Thailand. A funeral is the occasion when large groups of lay people come in contact with monks. At a funeral, chanting the syllables from the titles of the texts of the Abhidhamma helps guide the consciousness of the deceased to a good rebirth. This is also related to a little known funerary custom where monks write the four syllables on a small piece of paper. These stand for the four major subjects of the Abhidhamma (as outlined in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*): *ci* for *citta* “mind,” *ce* for *cetasika* “mental factors or concepts,” *ru* for *rūpa* (matter, material form), and *ni* for *nibbana*. This piece of paper with the four syllables is placed inside the corpse’s mouth to guide the dead person to a favorable rebirth. These four subjects, because they were important for chanting or at least abbreviating at funerals, became standard to study in the major monasteries of Bangkok. It is also common for sections of the Abhidhamma to be chanted as monks walk alongside the corpse being taken for cremation. In Laos, these syllables as well as the first syllables of the names of the seven

25 For more on the ritual uses of the Abhidma, see McDaniel, “Siamese Manuscripts in Ireland” in this issue, p. 182.

books of the Abhidhamma are directly related to parts of the body. In Laos, in particular, the seven texts are also associated with animals, which in turn protect the parts of the body. For example, the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* is connected to the eye, which is protected by the rhinoceros; the *Dhātukathā* is connected to the nose, which is protected by the tiger; the *Mahāpaṭṭhāna* is connected to the internal organs, which are protected by the lion; and so on. Therefore, the written content of the book is much more important for ritual purposes than for private reading, study, and discussion.

As for the paintings in the manuscript, the story of Phra Malai concerns a monk with powers to fly and visit the various realms of heaven and hell and discusses karmic retribution and what can happen to a person after death. Obviously, this is another important theme at a funeral. This is where the manuscript (Penn Libraries, Ms. Coll. 990, Item 5) in question really is striking. It contains much more than simply illustrations drawn from the Phra Malai. It was probably composed in the 1860s in Bangkok.²⁶ It was acquired through the auction house of Sloans & Kenyon Lot 466 in 2013 after consultation with Hiram Woodward and McDaniel with the great assistance of William Noel, David McKnight, John Pollack, Amey Hutchins, and many others at the Penn Libraries. It came from the Bekker Collection (discussed below). It is a large manuscript (68 cm × 14.5 cm with 49 folios, 24 images) composed on thick khoi paper with a black cover that has the title of the text and a short colophon written in gold leaf (a rare feature). The cover also has a gold leaf border (also rare) with lotus flower designs. The title on the cover reads: “Phra Malai lem ni khapajao nai rak mae khong srang wai nai phra sasana kho hai ben bajjai kae phra nippan bajjao hotu” (This book of the Phra Malai story was made by us [most likely the patrons] Mr. Rak and Mrs. Khong to [ensure] the continuation of the religion until [all beings] achieve Nirvana). There is no date, but the style of paintings and script (thin mul/khom script) suggest a date in the mid-1860s, if not slightly later. The text itself is similar to other khom

26 See *Abhidhamma chet kamphi*: Phra Malai, 1860s or 1870s, University of Pennsylvania Libraries, http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/franklin/record.html?filter.format_facet.val=Manuscript&q=krua&cid=FRANKLIN_6073285&.

script manuscripts written in Pali. The seven abbreviated sections of the *mātikā* of the Abhidhamma are written on black painted paper with gold-leaf script. The first folio is the reverse in that the paper is painted gold (with actual gold leaf melted into the paint) and written with black text. These first seven folios alone would have been quite expensive to produce. The paintings on either side of the text are large and take up almost half the page. Instead of the common scenes from the Phra Malai (man picking lotus flowers, Brahmins meditating in caves, people suffering in various hells, and the like), which don't come until later in the manuscript, there are seven double folios depicting seven scenes of monks meditating on corpses.

These are very distinct paintings, and we might even be able to identify the artist (which is almost impossible in the study of Thai manuscripts, since artists almost never signed their work and are never listed in the colophons of manuscripts). The paintings of the monks meditating on corpses are very similar in style to the murals in the *ubosot* (ordination hall) of Wat Sommanat in Bangkok.²⁷ The ubosot's murals were most likely painted in 1860 by Khrua In Khong, King Rama IV's favorite artist, who was actively working in the late 1850s and through the 1860s, or perhaps a student directly trained by him.²⁸ The lower register of the walls in the uposot have

27 On McDaniel's last visit to the *wihan* of Wat Sommanat the preservation was still under way. See No Na Paknam, *Wat sommanat wihan* (2538 [1995]). There has been little study on the murals of the uposot hall. There are also very similar murals of this meditative practice in Wat Boworniwet, specifically the Wihan Phra Sasada. This is another *wihan* built under the direction of King Mongkut.

28 John Listopad's 1984 master's thesis has an entire chapter on these murals. He convincingly argues that they are the work of Khrua In Khong. See John Listopad, "The Process of Change in Thai Mural Painting: Khrua In Khong and the Murals in the Ubosot of Wat Somanasa Vihāra" (master's thesis, University of Utah, 1984). I thank him for mailing me his work. Listopad speculates that the mural subjects were chosen reflecting the preferred meditation practice of Phra Ariyamuni (Buddhasiri Tap). They depict in detail the stages of *asubhakammaṭṭhāna* meditation including the stages of *lobitaka* (meditation on a bleeding corpse), *puḷavaka* (meditation on a worm-infested corpse), *vipubbaka* (meditation on a festering corpse), *vicchiddaka* (meditation on a corpse cut into two), *vikkhāyitaka* (meditation on a gnawed corpse), *hata-vikkhittaka* (meditation on a scattered corpse), among others. Listopad, *The Process of Change*, 18–26. Meditation on corpses has been a common part of Thai Buddhist (and other Buddhist) traditions. However, one does not need an actual corpse to practice this meditation. There is also a tradition of meditation on one's own decaying body. Some

murals painted with scenes of death meditation. Unlike most mural paintings from this period, the scenes are not filled with dozens of characters, temples, palaces, and animals. Instead, panels on the lower north and south walls and eight corner panels depict a single monk standing or sitting next to a corpse in different levels of decay. First the corpse is pinkish and bloody, next the corpse is bound with sacred string. In another panel the corpse is gray with lifeless eyes, in another the corpse's torso has separated from its legs and arms, and next the corpse is being picked apart by vultures with its intestines being pulled from its now headless body. Finally, a monk sits staring at a skeleton and eventually a pile of scattered bones. This progression of the decaying body mirrors the decaying corpse in the Penn manuscript. In Wat Sommanat as well as the manuscript, the paintings are simplistic and hyper-realistic. Death is cold and imminent. The intestines, the blood, the bones are visceral and at eye level. There are no leaves on the trees. The sky is gray. The monks are sitting or standing. The scenes depict the body after it has been taken to the charnel ground, not to be cremated, but to be left exposed for monks to use as an object for *asubbakammaṭṭhāna* meditation. These practices were merely depicted on one royal temple's murals. Indeed, about a fifteen-minute walk from Wat Sommanat, along the Lot Canal, the bodies of prisoners (who died unnatural deaths, of course) from the nearby prison along Mahachai Road were left out for vultures to consume and for the public to watch. The bodies were deposited at Wat Sraket. This monastery is one of the most important royal monasteries of Bangkok. Today it is home to one of the premier Pali-language schools, and for several decades it was home to one of the largest Pali-language printing houses of the city (Bhumiphol Press). Directly

monks and nuns are instructed to imagine themselves dissecting their own body in meditation in order to examine the different organs, and especially the fact that the body also contains feces, bile, and urine. My own abbot suggested that we could even imagine piercing our own flesh with a knife. Meditators in this practice are supposed to focus on both the "disgust" of the body, as well as the impermanence of the flesh, fluids, and bones. Listopad does admit that these murals may have been painted by one or more of Khrua In Khong's students and not him personally. Indeed, as Geoffrey Samuel has pointed out, throughout the history of Buddhism, monks have often been seen as specialists on matters of death (*The Origins of Yoga and Tantra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 128–31.

behind the monastery is one of the main centers for the production of monks' alms bowls and decorative caskets for funerals. Wat Sraket and its former corpse depository were not hidden. In the late nineteenth century, Wat Sraket was in the center of the city along the "royal way" (Thanon Ratchadamnoen). It is situated at the corner of two large canals that were major commercial arteries and still are very busy today. The former national library was a hundred yards away. Within a quarter mile are the royal sponsored monasteries—Wat Boworniwet, Wat Loha Prasat, and several others.

In addition to features that connect it to the painting lineage of Khrua In Khong, the manuscript at Penn also reveals how manuscripts can not only have paintings and text that do not match, but also have several types of paintings in a single manuscript. Indeed, followed by the scenes of monks meditating on corpses, there are depictions of the Phra Malai story, and ornamental illustrated panels depicting local flora and fauna. The paintings themselves have several unique features. For example, the right-side image of side A, folio 5 (F.A5.R), features a painting of a monk holding a lantern in his right hand and a walking stick in his left hand that is not seen in other paintings of this type. Furthermore, the sash on his robe, tied at "empire waist," has a polka-dot design not witnessed in any other manuscript we have examined. One monk on another folio (F.A6.L) seems to be holding a device (not clearly his umbrella or a lantern) being used to scrape his foot. A later addition to the manuscript (written in charcoal) names this monk "Phra Sa" (Monk Sa) (we almost never see the names of monks or other characters in Siamese manuscript painting, and captions are extremely rare for illustrations of any type).

Even though this was a beautiful manuscript and has been well preserved at Penn, it is also a good example of a manuscript that was actively used in ritual. While many Thai manuscripts were made to be given as gifts at funerals or as donations to monasteries, others were actively used in sermons and rituals. The manuscript in question is not a museum piece that was never used. It has signs that it was frequently opened and read in monastic settings either at rituals or for study. For example, on two folios (F.A15 and F.A29) we find evidence of spittle from betel nut juice (a local form of chewing tobacco in South and Southeast Asia). Monks often chew

betel nut when delivering sermons, and apparently one monk reading this manuscript had a habit of missing his spittoon! On others we find several corrections in a mixture of pencil and pen, showing that the manuscript was read and handled by many people over time. On several folios, tone marks are added in red ink (F.B14-27, F.B29). This manuscript went through many hands indeed.

This *Abhidhamma cbet kamphi* (Penn Libraries Ms. Coll. 990, Item 5) manuscript with paintings of death meditation and scenes from the Phra Malai was part of the Bekker Collection acquired by Penn. Sarah Bekker was an amateur art historian who was born in 1923 and passed away in 2013. She was unable to work professionally as an art historian because she chose to follow her husband, Konrad (born in Berlin in 1911 and moved to the United States for postdoctoral work at Columbia University in 1938), to Thailand, where he was assigned as a diplomat after a short career as an economist at the Brookings Institute and the University of Kentucky (Sarah's home state).²⁹ During World War II, he joined the U.S. Army, became a naturalized citizen, and studied Asian culture at Yale starting in 1943. It seems he was a "spy" of some capacity, working for the Office of Strategic Services (precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency), and was assigned to Asia (India, Sri Lanka/Ceylon, and Thailand).³⁰ After the war, he worked for the State Department for several years; he was assigned to Burma in 1958 and in 1964 started a seven-year assignment in Thailand. Sarah seemed to have spent her time in Thailand collecting art and manuscripts. She spent it well and had a good eye for beautiful manuscripts of various genres.³¹ She also had a fascination with Burmese and Thai music.³² After Konrad passed away in 1981, Sarah led educational tours, under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution, to Thailand and Burma, and later became interested in returning some of the many items she acquired in Thailand to their

29 Information found here, as part of her obituary, but one needs to pay to access the article: <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/kentucky/obituary-preview.aspx?n=sarah-bekker&pid=164066208&referrer=1185>.

30 "In Memory of Konrad Bekker," *Asian Music* 13, no. 1 (1981): 1.

31 "In Memory of Konrad Bekker," *Asian Music* 13, no. 1 (1981): 1.

32 "In Memory of Konrad Bekker," *Asian Music* 13, no. 1 (1981): 2.

home country and arranged before her death to return thirty cow-skin puppets for Ramakian performances and other items in 2012.³³ Other objects from the Bekker Collection are now in the Freer and Sackler Galleries, The Walters Art Museum, and the museums of the University of Michigan, Northern Illinois University, and Denison University, among others.³⁴

Elizabeth (Lisa) Lyons is another great collector of Thai manuscripts who was living in Bangkok around the same time as Sarah Bekker. However, unlike Bekker, Lyons was able to work professionally as an art historian and curator. A native of Michigan, she worked and researched at many museums, including the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the National Museum of Thailand, and the University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania, where she worked from 1968 to her passing in 1989. She published a number of important books, including *Thai Traditional Painting* (1963), *Archaic Chinese Jades* (1963), *The Thotsachat in Thai Painting* (1969), as well as numerous articles on a wide range of Chinese and Southeast Asian art.³⁵ She was also a trailblazer in the preservation of

33 Pakamas Jaichalard, "Shadow Play Treasure Return to Thailand," *The Nation*, 27 March 2012. See Konrad Bekker, "Culture Contact and Cultural Change in Southeast Asia: A Symposium," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1951): 3–15; and Bekker, "The 'Arbeitstrappen' in Basel," *Social Research* 4, no. 4 (1937): 515–18. See also Bekker, "The Philippine Balance of Payments," *Far Eastern Survey* 19, no. 4 (1950): 41–43.

34 Sarah is mentioned in Deena Burton, *Sitting at the Feet of Gurus: The Life and Dance Ethnography of Claire Holt* (N.P: Xlibris, 2009), 109–10, and 110, n. 21: "Pers. Com. Sarah Bekker, March 14, 1999. A scholar in her own right who wrote about Thailand, she was married to Konrad Bekker, a colleague of Claire's in the State Department." See Catherin Raymond, "The Konrad and Sarah Bekker Collection at NIU," *Bulletin of Burma Studies Group* 73 (March 2004).

35 See, for example, Elizabeth Lyons, *Thai Traditional Painting*, Thai Culture Series, no. 20 (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1989); Ivan B. Hart, ed., *Archaic Chinese Jades: Mr. and Mrs. Ivan B. Hart Collection*, catalogued by Elizabeth Lyons (North Hampton, MA: Smith College, 1989); *The Thotsachat in Thai Painting*, Thai Culture Series, no. 22 (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1969); "Southeast Asia: The Changing Scene," *Expedition* [Penn Museum magazine], Summer 1977, 27–32; "Dvāravati: A Consideration of Its Formative Period," in *Early South East Asia: Essays in Archaeology, History, and Historical Geography*, ed. R. B. Smith and W. Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 352–59; with Heather Peters, *Buddhism: The History and Diversity of a Great Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985).

artifacts coming out of Thailand's greatest archaeological site—Ban Chiang.³⁶

One of the many items Lyons acquired for the Penn collection was as beautiful as Bekker's *Abhidhamma chet gamphi* (Penn Libraries Ms. Coll. 990, Item 5). However, the authors found it, with some help from Forrest McGill at the Asian Art Museum (San Francisco), a bit “too beautiful.” They examined this manuscript held in the Penn Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Ms. 89-13-251).³⁷ Initially this manuscript was loosely dated to the 1870s, but unlike manuscripts in other collections (including Penn's), there was very little damage. The condition of the manuscript, including the cover, was remarkable. The authors were very pleased, and when they opened the manuscript they were further impressed with the quality of the paper and the dark color of the text (thin mul style khom script). There was no water damage and no marginalia or corrections (again—remarkable). The quality of the paintings is what was really striking. The colors were vibrant, the details fine, and the scenes iconic. The gold used in the paintings (a common feature of Thai manuscripts is to have actual gold leaf in paint) had not faded and was much thicker than any other example from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. It was a perfect manuscript for a museum display, the authors thought, as it would be appreciated for its beauty and show the value of good conservation efforts. However, they were a little suspicious of the dating to 1870s by Lyons and furthermore had not encountered a manuscript of this quality. McDaniel asked Forrest McGill for his opinion, and he immediately assumed it was made post-1950s and suggested, a suggestion the authors now think is correct, that it could be a forgery. McGill had seen forgeries like this done by a local artist from Thailand who had attempted to pass on fake manuscripts to foreign institutions in the 1970s. That suggestion led Kerekes and

36 Alessandro (Alex) Pezzati (senior archivist, Penn Museum) wrote an article on Jim Thompson, and Lyons is mentioned (*Expeditions* 53, no.1 (2011): 4–6): <http://www.penn.museum/documents/publications/expedition/PDFs/53-1/from%20the%20archives.pdf>. William Warren wrote a brief obituary of her in the *Journal of the Siam Society* in 1989, available at http://www.siamese-heritage.org/jsspdf/1981/JSS_077_1m_Obituaries.pdf

37 See <http://www.penn.museum/collections/object/23042>.

McDaniel to look closely at the paintings and compare them to others they had seen in other manuscripts. Indeed, one painting is directly copied, it seems, from a Phra Malai manuscript now held at the Chester Beatty Library (and mentioned in another article in this issue). In one painting, four monks with grotesque faces are seen reading a large manuscript, drinking tea, and chewing betel nut (a nice piece of social historical evidence for sure) while a half-naked woman and her children ignore the monks and play a board game in front of them (F.A6.L). The right side of the same folio depicts two men drinking tea and smiling coyly at each other on the grounds of a monastery, while a third man is seen in the window of the monastery in a way that suggests he is either napping or being pleased orally by an unseen person. These scenes appear in other extant Thai manuscripts, but here the paintings in the Penn manuscript and the Chester Beatty Library (whose date we can confirm as from the nineteenth century) are nearly identical and the scenes are unique enough that there is no other explanation besides direct copying. It is known that the forger in question knew several manuscripts in Western collections. In another scene, the artist seems to have been trying to have a little salacious, or perhaps perverted, fun. In a common scene from Phra Malai manuscripts, we find men fighting with knives. This scene represents the fate of human beings near the end of the world. However, in this particular painting, the artist inserts a woman into the middle of the fight and graphically depicts her having intercourse with one of the fighting men. One could interpret this as a rape scene, but the woman is smiling and the other men seem to ignore her (F.B26.R). This is certainly unusual, even though Thai artists in the nineteenth century sometimes inserted scenes suggesting sexual encounters. There is little evidence from older manuscripts that graphically depict intercourse or fully naked women and men.

Kerekes noted two particular features of this “too beautiful” manuscript that also led the authors to suspect a late forgery. First, there are clearly newer painted folios that have been inserted into an older text as scenes from cleverly hidden and glued page breaks (F.B42.TB.LR). This could be a sign that an older text was added to make this new text larger or that paintings were removed and sold from an older manuscript and new paintings inserted. Second, on one page is a short sentence in modern Thai script

in a manuscript that is otherwise in the Thai language in khom script (F.A12.B.M). The line tells the reader to take a break and drink tea! This is not found in other manuscripts and seems to have been a clever little joke.

In conclusion, sometimes certain manuscripts are too good to be true, and forgeries do exist. Collectors often pay significant amounts of money for manuscripts, and when markets are created, sometimes, as in all situations, people rise to supply goods for that new market. When that market is premodern art, artists are sometimes tempted to create a “supply.”

Conclusion

Collections and collectors of Siamese/Thai manuscripts in the United States are vast in number and largely unexplored. This short overview was designed to be a roadmap for future scholars who seek to investigate individual manuscripts held at the University of Pennsylvania, The Walters Art Museum, and other collections, or begin to fully investigate the unstudied collections of Cornell, the University of Michigan, or the Library of Congress. There are also small private collections and auctioneers and rare book dealers that occasionally have Siamese manuscripts for sale (Kerekes and McDaniel have explored some of these pieces as well, but they are relatively small and beyond the scope of this survey). What is interesting about American collections is the number of women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved in building these collections compared with European and Japanese collections, as well as the decentralized nature of the collections. Collectors came from different classes and different cities, and had different motivations. The diversity of the collections is matched by the present-day archivists, curators, and librarians to be very open to both local and foreign researchers. The collections are easily explored and accessible. You simply need to know where to look and for what to ask. We hope we have provided a guide to do just that.

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