



**PORTRAIT  
OF  
BANGKOK**



# **PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK**

Larry Sternstein

Published to Commemorate  
the Bicentennial  
of the  
Capital of Thailand  
by the  
**BANGKOK METROPOLITAN  
ADMINISTRATION**  
April, B.E. 2525/A.D. 1982



*The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's emblem shows Phra Indra, the keeper of Amara-wadee ("immortal" or "undying") in Dawa Doeng, the highest of the seven heavens of Thai mythology, carrying his three-bladed weapon Wachira ("thunder-maker") and seated atop a white elephant whose four ivory tusks denote celestial status.*

*As Phra Indra keeps Amara-wadee, so the Governor keeps the City; heading-up the administration and providing leadership in furthering the welfare of the city's residents. Phra Indra's domain is "undying"; the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration is dedicated to the eternal maintenance of the capital's vitality, thereby ensuring its prosperity. Fortunately, in this herculean endeavor, the City is provided with a four-tusked elephant, an elephant which ordinarily accomplishes twice as much as its earthly brethren.*

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# HIS MAJESTY KING BHUMIPOL ADULYADEJ



*The reigning monarch of Thailand in full coronation regalia.*

**K.K. Venugopal**

(Reproduced from a splendid, unique black and white photograph taken on the occasion of the Coronation of His Majesty King Bhumipol Adulyadej — Rama IX — which is now in the possession of Mr. Jan Jetzo Boeles.)



## A Message from the Governor on the Occasion of the Bicentennial of Bangkok

Bangkok is two hundred years young. Only yesterday, it seems, Bangkok was "A few bamboo huts set in and surrounded by mud"; today it is a modern metropolis in which is focussed the political, economic, social and cultural life of Thailand. Indeed, in no other capital city are the ideals of a people so concentrated, and no other capital city so determines the ideals of a people as does Bangkok. We who administer the capital are ever mindful of our responsibility to maintain in Bangkok an inspiration for the Thai people, and we are dedicated to nothing less than an exemplary development of the metropolitan area.

This volume, entitled *PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK*, comprises essays written by our former advisor on municipal affairs, Dr. Larry Sternstein, in honour of the bicentennial of our capital. We know you will find *PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK* a fitting commemorative work; a unique volume which will be treasured as a memento of a unique event: the bicentennial of Bangkok.

We who administer Bangkok look to the future but we are mindful of the past: we recognise change as an integral part of the Thai way of life; we are concerned to adopt and adapt better ways of doing things while maintaining our Thai identity; in the well tempered way of the Thai people, we will link the best of current fashion to the best of established practice so as to perpetuate the wholesome environment which is Bangkok.

*T Makarananda*

Admiral Tiam Makarananda

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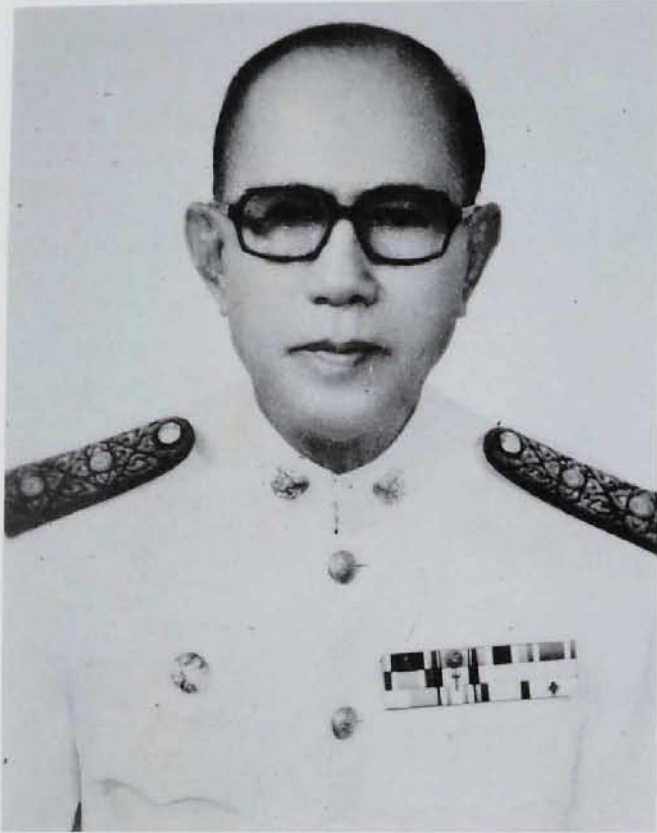


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# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF KRUNG THEP MAHA NAKHON

Mr. Tawil Praisont  
Director  
Department of Policy  
and Planning



The history of the Thai in the area now known as Thailand can be separated into three periods under three different capital cities:

First Period B.E. 1790-1893 (A.D. 1247-1350) under Krung Sukhotai;

Second Period B.E. 1893-2320 (A.D. 1350-1777) under Krung Sri Ayutthaya; and

Third Period B.E. 2321-present (A.D. 1778-present) under Krung Thep Maha Nakhon.

In B.E. 2325 (A.D. 1782) when Krung Thep Maha Nakhon was formally named the capital, Somdej Chao Phraya Maha Kasat Suk was crowned as King Rama Thibodi, the first of the Chakri Dynasty and ancestor of the present King.

At the beginning of the Ratanakosin Period, which dates from the foundation of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon as capital in B.E. 2325 (A.D. 1782) government was in the style of the previous Ayutthaya Period. The major cities, Hua Muang, were under the control of three ministries: the Minister of Interior supervised the northern Hua Muang; the Minister of Defence supervised the southern Hua Muang; and the Minister of Finance supervised the Hua Muang along the sea shore. In B.E. 2437 (A.D. 1894) during the reign of King Rama V, the administration was centralized. The major cities, the Hua Muang, were all placed under the control of the Ministry of Local Government. Other ministries no longer administered the Hua Muang. In B.E. 2465 (A.D. 1922) King Rama VI merged the ministries of Interior and Urban Affairs into a Ministry of Interior which took over the responsibilities of the Ministry of Local Government.

During the reign of King Rama V the territorial administration of the country was reformed between B.E. 2437-2449 (A.D. 1894-1906) into a number of Monthon (Circles). At first there were eighteen Monthon which included the whole of the country. Later, these were abolished or redivided and their names changed as the need arose. During the reign of King Rama VII a promulgation dated March 13, B.E. 2468 (A.D. 1925) abolished four Monthon (Maharat,

Surat, Roi Et and Ubon Ratchathani) and redivided others so as to leave fourteen Monthon. Another promulgation dated February 16, B.E. 2474 (A.D. 1931) abolished another four Monthon (Pattani, Chanthaburi, Nakhon Chaisi and Nakhon Sawan) and redivided others so as to leave ten Monthon: Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, Ayutthaya, Nakhon Ratchasima, Udon, Prachin, Phitsanulok, Payap, Ratchaburi, Phuket and Nakhon Si Thammarat. These ten Monthon were abolished under the provisions of the Thai Administrative Organisation Act of B.E. 2476 (A.D. 1933) which, among other things, altered the territorial administration of the country so as to make the Changwat (Province) the principal unit of administration. Krung Thep Maha Nakhon had Monthon status under the Ministry of Urban Affairs, though in the reign of King Rama VI Monthon Krung Thep was renamed Krung Thep Maha Nakhon.

When Krung Thep Maha Nakhon was under the Ministry of Urban Affairs an Act was promulgated in B.E. 2437 (A.D. 1894) which stated that the boundary of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon was to be decided by the Minister. However, this special power was lost when the Ministry of Urban Affairs was merged with the Ministry of Interior in B.E. 2465 (A.D. 1922). At the end of B.E. 2458 (A.D. 1915) two Changwat (Provinces) within Krung Thep Maha Nakhon (Pathum Thani and Thanyaburi) were transferred to Monthon Ayutthaya. At the end of B.E. 2474 (A.D. 1931) another two Changwat (Phra Pradaeng and Minburi) within Krung Thep Maha Nakhon were reconstituted, so that four Changwat comprised Krung Thep Maha Nakhon: Phra Nakhon, Thon Buri, Nonthaburi and Samut Prakan.

The Monthon Thesaphiban system of territorial administration comprised a hierarchy headed by Monthon which were made up of Muang or Changwat (Muang were renamed Changwat in B.E. 2459, A.D. 1916, during the reign of King Rama VI) which were divided into Khwaeng or Amphoe which were subdivided into Tambon, which were made up of Ban (Villages). In B.E. 2440 (A.D. 1897) during the reign of King Rama V, the legislation under-

pinning the Monthon Thesaphiban system was re-worked in the Provincial Government Act and the Local Administration Act. As well, subsequent legislation under the Monthon Thesaphiban system considered several Monthon which were distinguished by their customs and traditions — as Monthon Payap (the Northeast of Thailand) and Monthon Pattani, the so-called 'seven cities' (the extreme south of Thailand) — or by peculiar geographical situations — as Monthon Phuket, an island — or by a certain special status, as Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, the capital.

The capital city of a country commonly has a government which is different from that of other cities. The capital of Thailand shares this difference. For example, in an announcement dated December 23, B.E. 2438 (A.D. 1895) concerning the division of responsibility between the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defence, it is stated that the Minister of Interior was responsible for the internal security of the kingdom except for Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, which was to be under the Ministry of Urban Affairs. At that time the Ministry of Urban Affairs was solely responsible for Krung Thep Maha Nakhon. A Royal Decree dated B.E. 2441 (A.D. 1898) distinguished between the outer and inner districts of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon; and in the same year, sanitary legislation was enacted which held the Minister of Urban Affairs responsible for the cleanliness, orderliness, beauty and the prevention of severe diseases in Krung Thep Maha Nakhon. Also the government of Monthon Krung Thep was given a title different from that given to other Monthon in order to emphasize its uncommon character. Under a promulgation dated October 21, B.E. 2458 (A.D. 1915) the responsibility for Krung Thep Maha Nakhon devolved on its constituent Changwat and its governing body comprised the Governors of Minburi, Samut Prakan, Nonthaburi and Phra Pradaeng municipalities under the directorship of the Director of the Department of Urban Affairs who was also the Governor of Phra Nakhon and Thon Buri. The Department of Urban Affairs had previously been named the Department of Districts which was in the Ministry of Urban Affairs. The administration of Krung Thep was then carried out by departments within the Ministry of Urban Affairs. For example, sanitation was administered by the Department of Sanitation, orderliness was administered by the Department of Police, prisons were administered by the Department of Correction and local administration was the responsibility of the Department of Urban Affairs. For the purpose of local administration, Krung Thep was divided into districts which differed from those usual in provinces. There were two kinds of districts in Krung Thep Maha Nakhon: inner districts and outer districts. The distinction had been made in the reign of King Rama V. In the inner districts the Local Government Act was not wholly in force. Significantly different was the fact that though

inner districts were sub-divided into Tambon, the Tambon were not made up of villages and there were no officers of government specific to the inner districts of Krung Thep as there were for other districts in the kingdom. For example, the inner districts had no headmen or traditional doctors. The outer districts, on the other hand, were divided into Tambon made up of villages, and had officers assigned according to the Local Government Act. The administration of the inner districts of Krung Thep was carried on (until announcement number 335 of the Revolutionary Party) under a special Local Government Act dated September 18, B.E. 2458 (A.D. 1915). So, Krung Thep Maha Nakhon was governed by the Ministry of Urban Affairs until B.E. 2465 (A.D. 1922) when the Ministry of Urban Affairs was merged into the Ministry of Interior. Since, the Ministry of Interior has been responsible for local administration in Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, and other functions of the defunct Ministry of Urban Affairs were taken over also or given to other ministries.

The administration of Krung Thep under a modified Monthon system was carried on until the Coup d'État of B.E. 2475 (A.D. 1932) when the absolute monarchy was made a constitutional monarchy. In B.E. 2476 (A.D. 1933) two Acts significantly altered the administrative system: the Thai Administration Act and the Municipal Government Act. These Acts created a new form of administration under which Monthon were abolished. The new administrative organization was divided into two main parts: the central administration and the regional administration. The central administration comprised ministries and departments; the regional administration comprised provinces and districts. The Municipal Government Act specified the different forms of municipal administration and organization. Under these Acts, Krung Thep became a province as any other province, and the capital city itself became a municipality of the highest status but essentially like other municipalities.

Under the Municipal Government Act B.E. 2476 (A.D. 1933) three kinds of municipal areas were to be established. The highest category, the Nakhon municipality, included urban areas with at least 30,000 people at a density of at least 1,000 people per square kilometre. Each Nakhon municipality was established under a specific Act in which its boundaries were delimited and its name assigned. Subsequent local government acts dated B.E. 2481 (A.D. 1938) and B.E. 2486 (A.D. 1943) altered the criteria for municipal status somewhat. The Municipality of Bangkok, or more exactly Nakhon Krung Thep, was formally established on April 1, B.E. 2480 (A.D. 1937). General Chao Phraya Ram Rakop was the first Lord Mayor. The Municipality of Thon Buri (directly across the Chao Phraya river from the Municipality of Bangkok) was formally established on April 1, B.E. 2480 (A.D. 1937).



Phraya Mahaisawan was its first Lord Mayor. On establishment, these municipalities took over certain responsibilities from various departments in several ministries.

Under this form of administration, the trans-river municipalities of Krung Thep and Thon Buri, and the provinces in which each was included carried on until two Proclamations dated December 21, B.E. 2514 (A.D. 1971) established a Metropolitan municipality comprised of the former municipalities of Krung Thep and Thon Buri, and the Krung Thep-Thon Buri Metropolitan Area which comprised the two previously independent provinces which contained the former municipalities. However, the merger did not drastically alter the administrative system; the aim was to rationalize and make more effective the administration of an area in which the people lived as if in a single city and province. Also, the change was to permit the efficient planning of the metropolitan area as a whole. Good results came from this largely territorial reorganization, but government felt even better results could be obtained if a special form of administration particularly empowered to deal with the unique conditions of the capital city was established. Accordingly, a Promulgation dated December 13, B.E. 2515 (A.D. 1972) established Krung Thep Maha Nakhon (the 'Bangkok Metropolis') in which all administrative affairs were placed under a single government. The elements in this reorganization can be summarized as follows:

1. A special Metropolitan Administration was established that took over all responsibilities in the area named Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, which was given the status of a province.

2. The administration of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon was headed by a Governor, appointed by the Cabinet and deriving authority and responsibility from the Cabinet.

3. A Metropolitan Assembly was established as a legislative body comprised of an equal number of elected and appointed members serving four-year terms. At the outset, however, all Assemblymen were appointed by the Ministry of Interior.

4. Krung Thep Maha Nakhon was divided into Khet; and each Khet was sub-divided into Khwaeng. At the outset there was a simple renaming of the former Amphoe and Tambon as Khet and Khwaeng, respectively.

5. The Khet were given the same powers and responsibilities as the former Amphoe and other similar territorial governments.

6. The Khwaeng were given powers and responsibilities according to the authorization of the Governor of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon.

The idea was that the Khet would become the unit of administration directly engaged in providing the people with services.

7. All revenue and expenditures within Krung Thep Maha Nakhon were transferred to the one government from the several former local govern-

ments within the area.

8. All the personnel — officials, staff and employees — of the different local governments within the Krung Thep Maha Nakhon area were transferred to the one government. Relevant personnel belonging to agencies outside those of local government were not so transferred, but legislation was to be enacted which would make their transfer possible.

The administrative reorganization of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon outlined above was established in the belief that it would permit a rational and efficient management of the metropolitan area. Significantly, the new Metropolitan Administration was given more power, more responsibility and more wherewithal to carry out its duties than was previously the case. The central government, then, devolved real authority onto the administration of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon in an effort to permit the effective development of the Metropolitan area.

Despite this essential administrative reorganization, there were problems in the actual implementation of public improvements. Part of the problem was related to laws, ordinances and regulations which had become ineffective with the passage of time. Accordingly, on December 13, B.E. 2515 (A.D. 1972) 'Krung Thep Maha Nakhon Legislation for Administrative Management' was announced under which a number of essential changes could be effected. These changes were brought together in B.E. 2518 (A.D. 1975) under a promulgation entitled 'Krung Thep Maha Nakhon Legislation'.

Krung Thep Maha Nakhon is now a department of government having the status of a juristic person. It is a local government comprised of two parts: the Governor and the Assembly. The management of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon comprises the Office of the Secretary to the Governor, the Office of the Metropolitan Assembly, the Office of the Under-Secretary of State, the offices of other high ranking agencies, and the Khet.

The Governor of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon is the Chief Executive. The Executive Body comprises the Governor and four Deputy Governors elected by residents of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon for four-year terms. The power and responsibility of the Governing Body is laid down in an Announcement dated September 29, B.E. 2515 (A.D. 1972) and as ordered by the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and the Minister of Interior.

The Metropolitan Assembly comprises elected members. The number of Assemblymen depends on the population of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon since there is one Assemblyman for every one hundred thousand people. At present, there are forty-five Assemblymen. The Assembly enacts the bye-laws of the Metropolis and has the power to fine and/or imprison offenders. The Assembly is responsible, also, for controlling the Executive by way of open debate or advice.

# BANGKOK BICENTENNIAL

PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK comprises a series of essays, arranged in a rough chronology, which aim to provide a vivid picture of the dynamic development of the colourful city with which I have been intimately associated during the two decades past; it is not, and was not intended to be, 'The Compleat Bangkok'. Although half of the essays which make up PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK have been published previously, these have been reworked and elaborated expressly for this bicentennial commemorative volume. Indeed, each essay was written originally with this ultimate use firmly in mind, for I have thought to commemorate the bicentennial of Bangkok in this way since the late 1960s when it was my happy fortune to be the advisor on municipal affairs in the Government of Thailand.

The profuse use of illustrative material reflects my concern with both accuracy and attractiveness. Maps and pictures may belie reality, but less so than words. A well chosen illustration is worth not ten thousand words, but ten thousand awfully well chosen, highly stimulating words. The maps and pictures which pepper this volume have been chosen with care. Although not a few illustrations are included, these are but a few of those which might have been contained had there been no constraint on their reproduction. Constraints there were, however; both restrictions and self-imposed restraints. The main restriction was the availability of reproducible, relevant pictorial material. A number of the relevant illustrations known to exist, or to have existed, were unobtainable (the search for these continues); and a too sizable number of the relevant illustrations which were obtainable were unusable. As well, the reproducible, relevant pictorial material which was available was not regularly distributed through the years or catholic and representative in its coverage. A second restriction was the limit placed by the publisher on the amount and the kind of pictorial material which could be included; in truth, this limit was not so much a constraint as it was a frame within which the selection of illustrative material could be ordered. Several restraints were self-imposed. So, whenever possible, pictorial material included was previously unknown or unavailable. This restraint led, quite naturally, to a set of priorities in which maps were of first importance, early drawings and photographs held precedence over more recent materials, and general rather than particular views were favoured. A single view only of an object or an activity was included, unless it was

intended to illustrate change. Fanciful pictorial material was excluded, however entertaining; and the least number of illustrations needed to animate a particular point was included, despite any number of excellent illustrations available.

Because I want PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK to attract and to hold the attention of the inquisitive layman, the jargon of the expert and the notations of the scholar have been eschewed; not at the expense of accuracy, but in the interest of readability. A word about the use of the word 'bicentennial' instead of 'bicentenary': strictly, 'bicentennial' means occurring every two hundred years; 'bicentenary' means the two hundredth anniversary. Common usage, especially in America, allows 'bicentennial' to mean 'bicentenary', and official Thai usage of 'bicentennial' has decided its preference in PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK.

PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK simply would not be were it not for the generous assistance given me by a great number of people. To name even those most helpful would require an interminably long list; however, the spirit with which aid was given assures me such a roll is not needed. But, I should acknowledge three people without whose care PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK would not be with you: Jan Jetzo Boeles, a scholar of merit, a businessman of repute and a friend of decades in whose debt I shall ever be; Somsong Anamarn, a public servant of integrity and a friend of years for whom I have admiration unbounded; and John Loftus, a professional of profound sensitivity and a friend of months with whom I have a rapport unique and for whom I have respect aplenty. Also to be recognised is the Phranakorn Milk Industry Company which contributed handsomely to the publication of PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK and particularly during the critical initial phase of production; actually, it seems only right that a company bearing the name Phranakorn, which means capital city, should be associated with this volume which commemorates the bicentenary of the capital city of Thailand.

I hope this commemorative volume provides each of the good folk with whom it was my good fortune to work some satisfaction. I will be well satisfied should the reader derive a measure of the joy given me in the preparation of this PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK.

Larry Sternstein  
Bangkok, 1982

# CONTENTS

BANGKOK BICENTENNIAL .....	xxiii
FROM AYUTTHAYA TO BANGKOK .....	3
THE VENICE OF THE EAST .....	13
ALONG THE RIVER AND AMONG THE TREES: 'BANKOK' 1862 .....	39
CAUGHT IN CAMERA: BANGKOK 1862 .....	49
SECOND SOVEREIGNS OF SIAM .....	55
CITY OF MAGNIFICENT DISTANCES .....	65
CITY OF GREAT DISTANCES.....	87
BURGEONING BANGKOK: 200 YEARS OF POPULATION GROWTH.....	93
BANGKOK 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY .....	109
EXORCISING THE BEDEVILLED CITY OF ANGELS .....	117
THE GENIAL LAND OF THE ELEPHANT .....	137
SOURCES .....	139

# **PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK**

Essays in honour of the bicentennial  
of the capital of Thailand

Larry Sternstein

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# I U D E A



*One of several similar oblique plan-views of Ayutthaya which appear to be based on an original, now lost, dated from the early seventeenth century (possibly commissioned by Joost Schouten, Dutch factor at Ayutthaya in the 1630s) when such portrayals of cities were in vogue in Europe. Source: Original held at the Rijksmuseum (State Museum), Amsterdam, The Netherlands.*

# FROM AYUTTHAYA TO BANGKOK

Ayutthaya, capital of the Thai kingdom for four hundred and seventeen years, was stormed and taken by the Burmese in 1767 after a siege, maintained for more than a year, despite the seasonal floods of the Chao Phraya river. The siege is graphically described in the *Hmannan Yazawindawgyi*, the Burmese Annals.

There are two eyewitness accounts of the fall of Ayutthaya. One, in Dutch, is in a two-page handwritten official statement, a *procès-verbal*, drawn up and signed by the *Shabandar*, or harbour master, at Batavia on April 26, 1768. The witnesses were an Armenian who was head of the Europeans at Ayutthaya, and a Muslim priest. The *Shabandar* took the trouble to record the statement officially because it confirmed that the factory or trading post of the V.O.C. (Dutch East India Company) at Ayutthaya had been destroyed. A second eyewitness account, in French, is alluded to by Turpin in his history of Siam in which particular notice was given to the overthrow of the Ayutthayan kingdom.

These two accounts differ somewhat in detail, and are different also from that given by Wood in his history of Siam which is based on Thai sources. Each account contains questionable points. All agree, however, that Ayutthaya was reduced to ashes and the population massacred.

Why, having won the city, did the Burmese destroy their prize? It has been suggested that they were 'enraged by the relentless resistance which the T'ais had shown', that they had a 'sacrilegious lust for destruction', and the 'blind rage' of '...barbarians'. The *Hmannan Yazawindawgyi* is dispassionate:

In the midst of their enjoyment in celebration of the conquest...the commander-in-chief...[informed] his officers that news had been received that the Chinese Emperor had sent a vast army...to invade Burma; and that their brother generals and officers at the capital were distinguishing themselves and winning royal favour by successfully repelling the invasion...He added that as they had most successfully accomplished their mission by the capture of the Siamese capital...it behoved them to return as quickly as possible, after demolishing the city, moats, and all defensive and offensive works, as commanded by their Sovereign, so that they might be in time to take part in the fighting against the Chinese and share the honours of war in that field also.

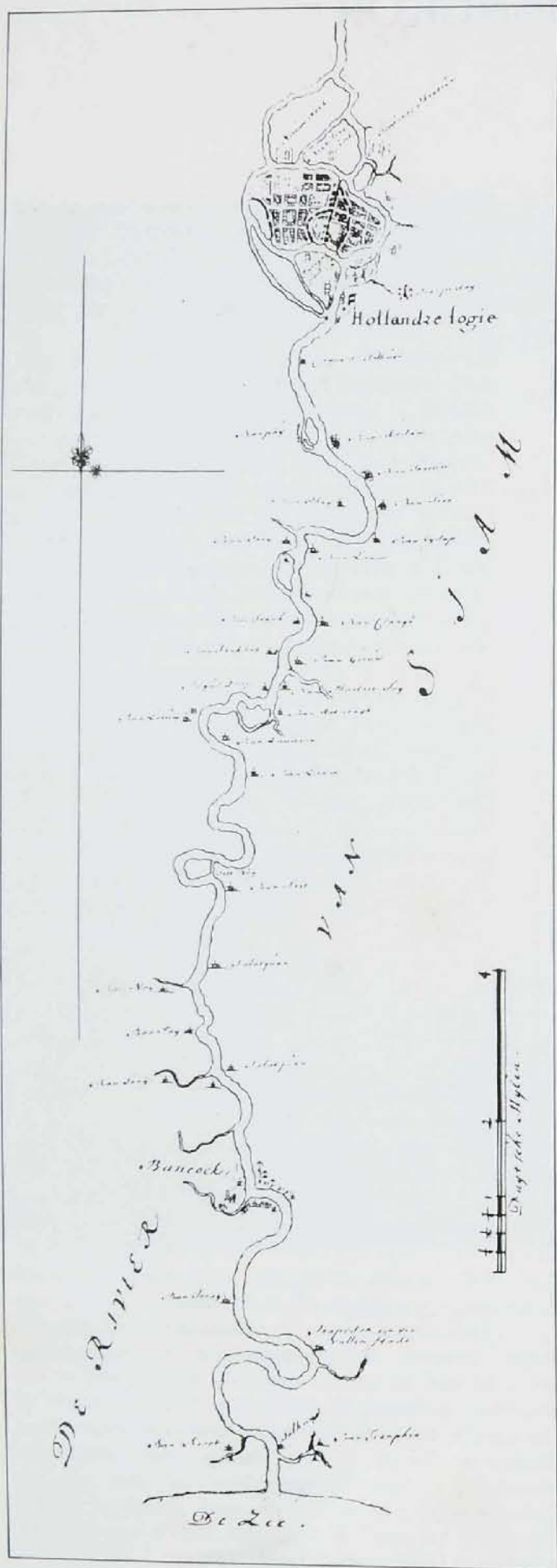
Barely two months later the Burmese army had withdrawn. Only a token force was left behind to secure the countryside.

Within six months of the departure of the Burmese Army, Ayutthaya was 'liberated' by Phya Tak, one of five local 'strongmen' who laid claim to various vaguely delimited parts of the Ayutthayan kingdom on the collapse of central authority. Phya Tak...

surveyed the ruins...became filled with pity, and meditated the rebuilding of the city, and placing it again upon its former basis...[but] one night he dreamed that the former sovereigns drove him away and would not allow him to remain. Early next morning the king related his dream for the information of his noblemen, and remarked: 'Noticing that the city has become an overgrown waste, it has been my wish to rebuild and resuscitate it, and place it upon its former prosperous footing. As the former owners of the city still jealously cling to it, let us mutually stimulate each other to build up the town Tonaburee [Thon Buri]'. Having made known his dream and his determination, he gave orders to disband the army, gather together the people, the priests, and the descendants of the former royal families that remained. Heading these, he returned and located himself and them in the town Tonaburee...where the king constructed for himself a palace, adequate to the necessity of the times.

According to the *Hmannan Yazawindawgyi*, 106,100 families were taken from Ayutthaya to Burma. Luang Phraison Salarak contests this figure because 'even calculating the modest average of three persons to a family, the number...taken away would amount to 318,000 souls'. This is an incredible figure because the Thai version of the fall of Ayutthaya says two hundred thousand Thai lives were lost during the siege, a figure which included those who had died of disease and starvation. Salarak concludes that 'there could not possibly have been a very large population left in the city'. Further, the Thai Annals admit to only thirty thousand prisoners of war taken off to Burma.

This argument seems reasonable. During the siege, however, the population in the surrounding area, as well as armies raised in other parts of the kingdom, gathered at Ayutthaya. The population of the capital would have been abnormally large. How abnormally large is not known, but since the *Hmannan Yazawindawgyi* bases its total on the apportioning of prisoners to each Burmese soldier according to rank, it is certain that a considerable number of Thai were at Ayutthaya.



It is probable that most prisoners of war put up valuables in their stead. Consider the problems involved in transporting several hundred thousand half-starved men, women and children from Ayutthaya to Burma; and that the Burmese army wanted to return home as quickly as was possible 'so that they might be in time to take part in the fighting against the Chinese'. The conquerors would have found ransom as attractive as the conquered.

When Phya Tak led 'the people, the priests, and the descendants of the former royal families that remained' to Thon Buri, he may have been at the head of a multitude. Ayutthaya may have been depopulated more by the decision to relocate the capital than by losses suffered from siege and captivity.

The Burmese dismantled the fortifications and may have fired Ayutthaya, but it seems that much remained usable. Substantial building materials — which are in scarce supply on a delta plain — were later loaded on barges and floated down-river to be rebuilt into facsimiles of the Ayutthayan structures from which they had come. Also, much booty must have stayed hidden from the Burmese, since 'treasure-farming' continued on a grand scale for at least fifteen years after the city was razed. A French Catholic missionary in the area at the time goes so far as to credit treasure-farming for the rapid recovery of the economy, remarking that 'the local Chinese...went through the ruins with a fine-toothed comb and recovered uncounted treasures from the debris and interiors of pagodas'.

Perhaps the destruction of Ayutthaya was as much a result of treasure-farming and the wholesale removal of building materials as it was a consequence of the Burmese siege.

Phya Tak is characterised as a 'man of destiny' whose faith in himself was such that 'he believed that even the forces of nature were under his control'.

Whatever this characterisation owes to the belated bestowing of attributes which might be expected in 'a worker of miracles', Phya Tak appears to have been well aware of his destiny should he attempt to 'rebuild and resuscitate' Ayutthaya. Not only would he have to contend with and probably bow to local vested interests — descendants of the royal family and the nobility whom he had antagonised when a general — but at Ayutthaya he was

◀ *Seventeenth century Dutch chart of the Chao Phraya river from its mouth to the capital of the kingdom, Ayutthaya; apparently the earliest extant, drawn perhaps in the 1630s. Bangkok town appears on the west bank of the Chao Phraya as Bancoek. Source: 'Kaart van de rivier van Siam, van de Zee tot aan de Stad Judia' No. 266 in Inventaris der Verzameling Kaarten berustende in het Rijks-Archief. Uitgegeven op last van Zijne Excellentie den Minister van Binnenlandsche Zaken. Eerste Gedeelte. 's Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1867.*

uncomfortably close to the stronghold of a much stronger rival in the person of the Governor of Phitsanulok, who had merely exalted himself in an area already accustomed to his authority.

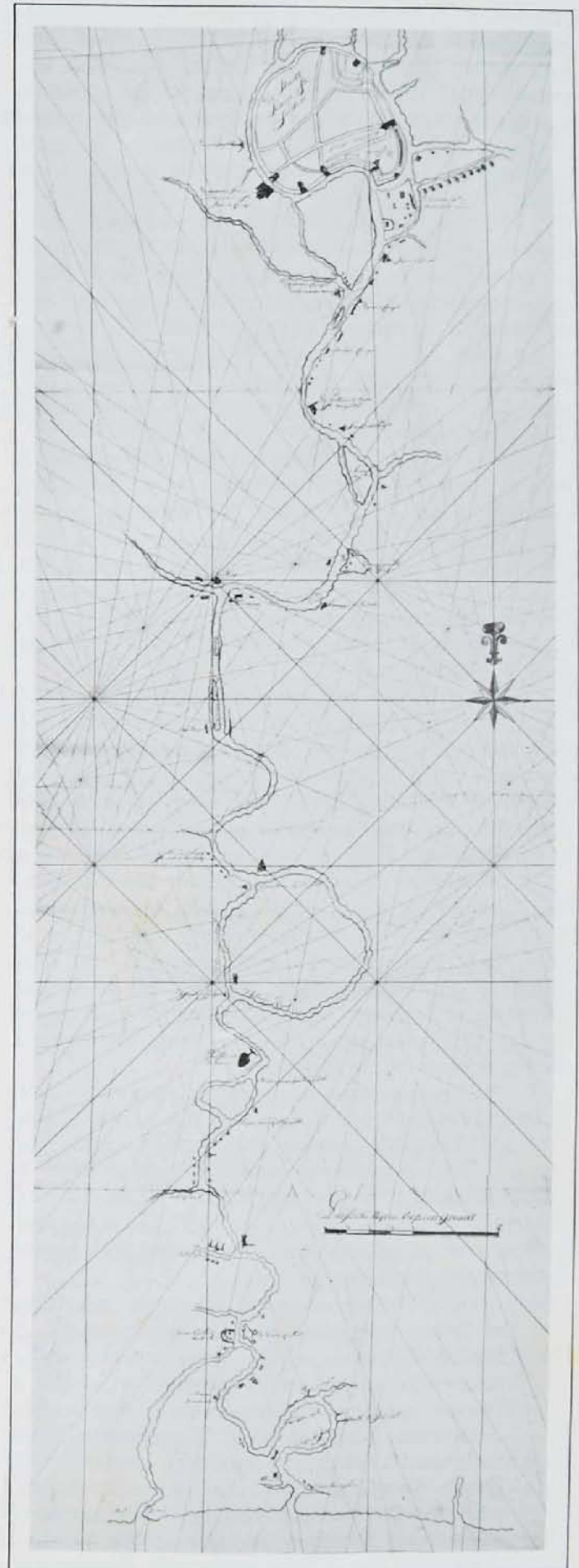
Phya Tak's 'home' base was some distance from Ayutthaya along the east coast of the Gulf of Thailand, the present provinces of Chon Buri, Rayong and Chanthaburi. This area had not been attacked by the Burmese, and so was able to supply Phya Tak with both the men and materials he needed to overcome his rivals and restore the territorial limits of the Ayutthayan kingdom. Nothing less than the restoration of the kingdom, with himself as king, was the aim of Phya Tak.

A reason frequently given for the decision to abandon Ayutthaya was the threat of famine. The land around the capital had gone untended during the siege. Relocating the capital did not solve this problem, however, for 'money was poured out without stint to obtain supplies [of rice] from abroad'. In fact, rice was not produced in plenty in the area around the new capital; land immediately east of the Chao Phraya river and directly opposite Thon Buri was drained, levelled and bunded for rice growing after Phya Tak assumed the throne, and even then only to assure the supply of this essential foodstuff should the capital be besieged.

Another reason often voiced is that 'to restore Ayut'ia would have cost a great deal of money'. Doubtless, but to build another city on the delta plain would have cost more.

A third reason, closer to the mark, is that the defence of Ayutthaya 'would have needed a large army'. In fact, Phya Tak was interested more in offence than in defence — the liberation of Ayutthaya was an offensive operation, carried out perhaps to establish a just claim to the throne — but he did need a secure stronghold to which he could retire with impunity.

The Burmese were occupied with the Chinese who had invaded their homeland, but Phya Tak had four rivals for the kingship of all or parts of the former kingdom. Each of these rulers had greater resources at his disposal than did Phya Tak. Whatever sanguine hopes motivated Phya Tak, immediate



► *Seventeenth century Dutch chart of the Chao Phraya river from its mouth to the capital of the kingdom, Ayutthaya, which represents the course of the river remarkably well, and probably dates from the 1680s/1690s. Bangkok town appears on the west bank of the Chao Phraya as 't oude Casteel Bankok, directly opposite 't Nieuwe Casteel across the river. Source: 'Kaart van de Stad Siam ofte Judea' No. 267 in Inventaris der Verzameling Kaarten bernstende in het Rijks-Archief. Uitgegeven op last van Zijne Excellentie den Minister van Binnenlandsche Zaken, Eerste Gedeelte. 's Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1867.*



considerations demanded he retire to the most strategic position available, a defensible command post from which offensives could be directed. The fortress-town of Thon Buri, the strongest post guarding the approach to Ayutthaya by river and the system of canals that linked the Chao Phraya to its main distributaries, was more a prescription than a selection.

Nicolas Gervaise, writing of mid-seventeenth century Thailand, describes 'Bangkok' as 'the most important place in the kingdom of Siam, for it is the only one along all the coast which may offer any resistance to its enemies'. He adds that 'It is protected by walls only on the side facing the river which waters it on the east [my italics] and south'. Thon Buri, not Bangkok, is on the western bank of the Chao Phraya river.

The distinction between the two places is seldom drawn in the literature. Joost Schouten, manager of the Dutch factory at Ayutthaya in the 1630s, describes 'Banckock' as the head of a province and the most important place down-river from Ayutthaya. A Dutch pictomap dated from Schouten's time shows *Banckock* on the west bank of the river, though the east bank is lined also by important looking buildings.

A fort on the east bank appears to have been built first in the 1660s to the design and under the supervision of Father Thomas, an Italian member of a French Jesuit missionary group which came to Ayutthaya in 1664. Both forts were reconstructed about ten years later by a French engineer seconded to the Crown in 1675.

In 1686 a distinguished French naval officer, the Chevalier de Forbin, was on loan to the Crown for a short time. He modernised the fortifications at Thon Buri and Bangkok and mounted the best European artillery on them as part of a general tightening of defences against the possibility of action by the Dutch to regain their former pre-eminent trading position in the kingdom.

Thai envoys were at the French Court in 1686 to invite French troops to come to the southern Thai town of Songkhla, where they could check the Dutch. The negotiations were successful, and a French force of 636 men and officers under General Desfarges set sail for Thailand in 1687. Two plenipotentiary envoys accompanied the troops, and carried extraordinary instructions:

It is His Majesty's Pleasure that...the King of Siam authorises the appointment of a French Governor at Bangkok, who shall be responsible to himself; also that he admits a French garrison to this town, and permits it to erect fortifications as a protection from the attacks of his neighbours and of the Dutch. Mergui is as vital for the trade of Siam with the Coromandel coast and other parts of India as is Bangkok for that of the Gulf of Siam and the China coast: the Envoys are

therefore to request that a French garrison and Governor be posted there.

There is no indication that the Envoys will encounter any difficulty in regard to these demands which they will make on His Siamese Majesty. Moreover, nothing could be worse than to have to apply pressure openly, since it would gravely prejudice the cause of Christianity, and would complicate the task of the trading Company. Nevertheless, if any change should have occurred in the sentiments of the King during the period that has elapsed... and if no hope remains of negotiating with success, in that event His Majesty is determined to force an entry into Bangkok...

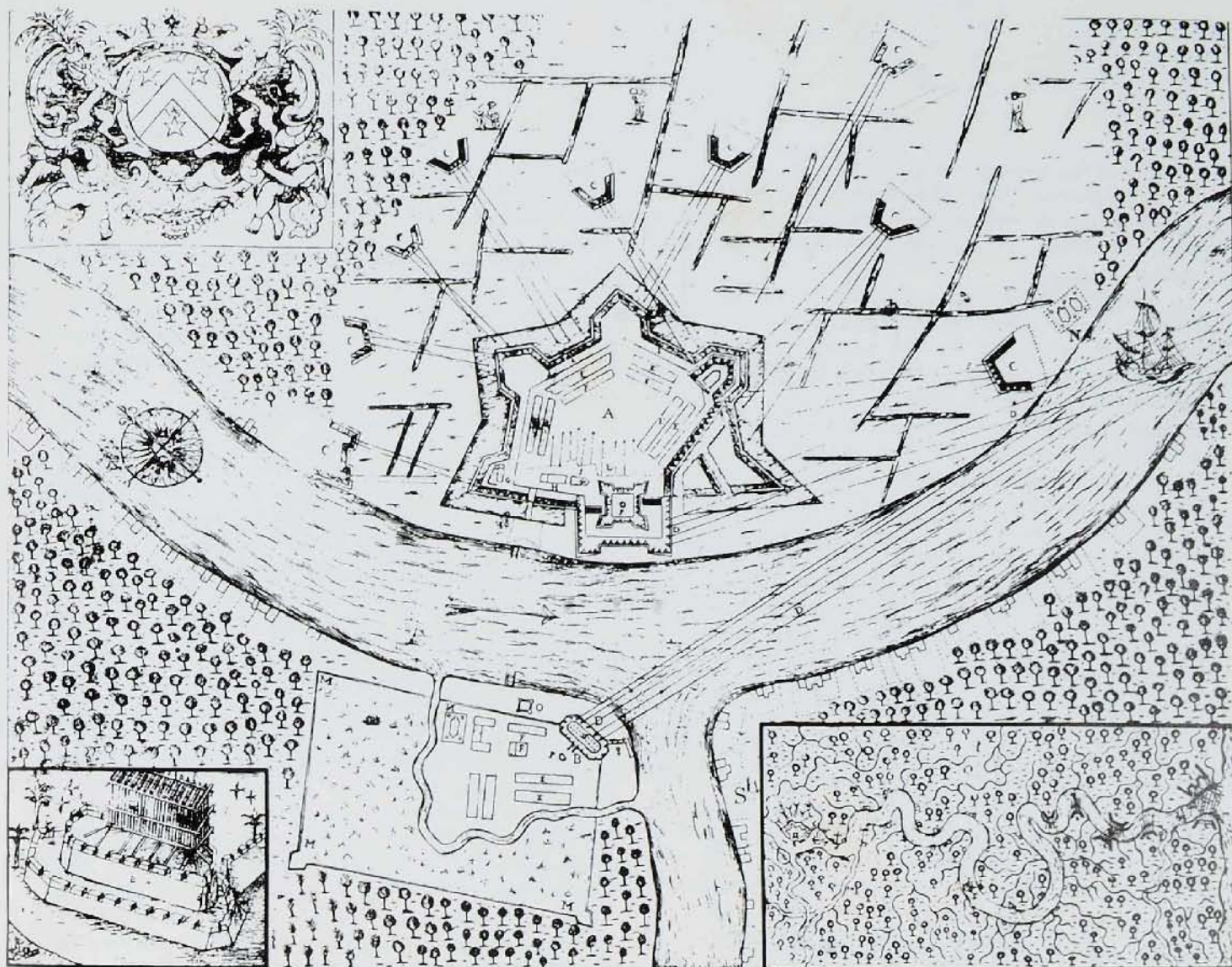
The French were determined to exact the maximum price for their assistance. A foreign garrison at Bangkok could strangle the kingdom. A fiasco ensued and fourteen months after its arrival 'the French garrison was forced to retire from Siam, leaving behind a feeling of hostility towards France in particular and towards Europeans in general which lasted for more than a century'. In fact, it was not until the ascension of the enlightened King Mongkut (Rama IV) in the mid-nineteenth century that the activities of Western diplomats, traders and missionaries were renewed in earnest. A number of eyewitness accounts of happenings in the kingdom at the time are available.

Events of the years in which we are particularly interested are not well documented, but it may safely be assumed that the condition of the trans-river forts at Bangkok had not improved with time. Dr. Engelbert Kaempfer, physician to the Dutch embassy to the Emperor of Japan, passed through the kingdom in 1690 and 'found the old Fort...in good condition; but the new Fort, that had been built by the French on the East shore...quite demolished'.

About thirty years later, Captain Alexander Hamilton described the fort at 'Bangkok' as a regular tetragon that could mount 'about 80 great Guns...but no artillery is in it'.

Despite its deterioration, the fortress of Thon Buri retained strategic pre-eminence in the area. Phya Tak, now King Taksin, set out from Thon Buri first in one direction and then in another and, in a remarkably short time and despite setbacks, overcame his more powerful rivals and restored the territorial limits of the kingdom of Ayutthaya. The kingdom, centred on Thon Buri, was restive but King Taksin sustained his hegemony and repulsed several incursions and full-scale invasions by the Burmese, who had been freed for further adventures by the achievement of peace with China in 1769.

By 1782, however, King Taksin had become incapable of governing, and he was replaced by his ablest general, Chao Phya Chakri. General Chakri was crowned King Rama Thibodi, and is known as Rama I or Phra Phuttha Yot Fa Chulalok, the



Diagrammatic evocation of the 'Battle of Bangkok' in 1688 which forced the French from the kingdom.  
 Source: Volent des Verquains, J., Histoire de la Révolution de Siam Arrivée en l'Annee 1688 Lille, 1691.

Explanation of the plan:

- A. The fort where the French were besieged by the Thai.
- B. The fort which the French were forced to abandon because they had insufficient men to man both forts. This fort was later occupied by the Thai, though the French had removed all ammunition and had either burst or spiked the cannon.
- C. Redoubts of the Thai.
- D. Lines of fire of the French cannon on a Chinese barque belonging to the King. These shots were the first hostile acts of the war.
- E. Barracks for the French troops.
- F. Lodging for the French officers.
- G. Magazine for food.
- H. Lodging of the Commandant.
- I. Chapel.
- [J. and K. did not appear on the plan.]
- L. Palisades with cannon which were made so as to sustain the attack or facilitate the retreat of the French.
- M. Old wall of the town.
- N. Buddhist monastery.
- O. Court of Justice of the Governor.
- P. Powder magazine.
- Q. Emplacement made by the Thai for a cannon firing a ball of 200 pounds.
- R. Wooden tower erected by the Thai so as to be able to better observe the French and to direct their fire.
- S. Map of the Chao Phraya river from its mouth to Bangkok.
  1. Mouth of the river.
  2. Batteries erected by the Thai to prevent the French from getting additional aid.
  3. Dutch factory.
  4. Trench with large stakes made by the Thai to prevent any large ships that might bring help to the French from entering the river.
  5. Place where a small ship sent by the French to convey troops elsewhere and to bring back supplies was attacked by many small Thai vessels. The ship was burned by the French to prevent its capture.
  6. House of the Apostolic Missionaries.
  7. Chinese barque depicted on the main map.
  8. Fortress of Bangkok depicted on the main map.
  9. Siege of the fort depicted on the main map.
  10. Canal dug by the Thai so as to service the batteries along the river without having to pass under the French cannon.

founder of the present ruling dynasty.

In Burma, King Bodawpaya had seized the throne a month before the ascension of Rama I. Soon he began to prepare for a grand offensive against the Thai.

Rama I seems to have sought additional security from the Burmese by moving his citadel from the west to the east bank, thereby positioning his stronghold behind the westward bow of the Chao Phraya river. The river was, in effect, a ready-made moat, a quarter of a kilometre wide and nine fathoms deep; and the bow was easily 'strung' by a canal.

It has been suggested that King Taksin had planned to establish his citadel on the east bank of

the Chao Phraya river from the outset, and that construction or at least the planning for building, had been under way for some time before the move by Rama I.

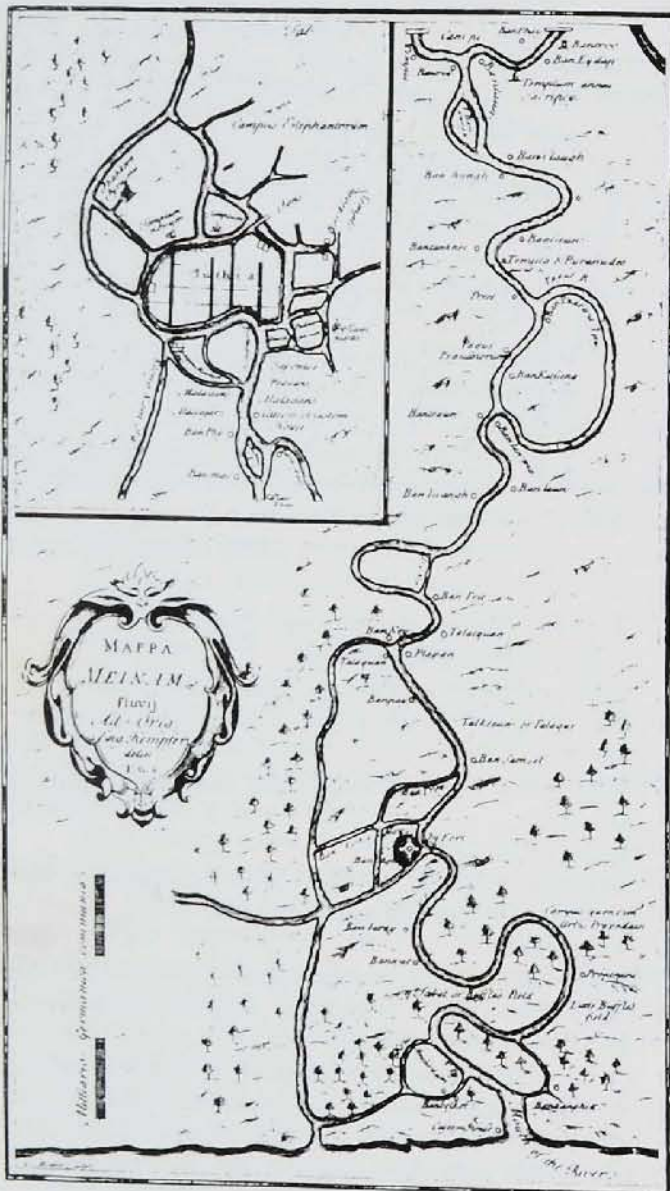
There is not conclusive evidence for this view, but the circumstantial evidence is persuasive. First, east of the river stretched the vast, swampy 'Sea of Mud' which had to be drained before construction could begin. Second, the site chosen for the new palace was already occupied by a rich Chinese merchant who, together with a considerable community of Chinese, was invited to move to an uninhabited area immediately beyond the walls of the new citadel. Third, King Taksin's 'palace' west of the river seems to have been a temporary residence, as it lay next to two much-frequented monasteries which were adjacent to busy markets — not the remote site which might be anticipated for a royal palace, in view of the nature of the monarchy. Fourth, piles had to be driven into the waterlogged site to support even a paltry building, which the palaces and the residences of the nobility were not. Fifth, Bangkok was planned meticulously in the image of Ayutthaya, the layout of the city and the form of the principal structures being intended to correspond as closely as possible to Ayutthayan prototypes. Sixth, King Taksin began, but did not complete before his death, the construction of a fortified crescentic moat on the eastern side of the Chao Phraya river. Although this moat, now known as Khlong Lot and yet a feature in the cityscape of Bangkok, has been represented as 'an aid in the defense' of the palace on the west bank of the river, it seems too grand a work for this purpose alone.

All this strongly suggests that much of the groundwork, if not actual construction, had been accomplished, or at least carefully considered, before Rama I announced his intention to establish his citadel east of the river. It has been argued, however, that Rama I, when a General, had urged the trans-river relocation of the capital but King Taksin had not been so persuaded.

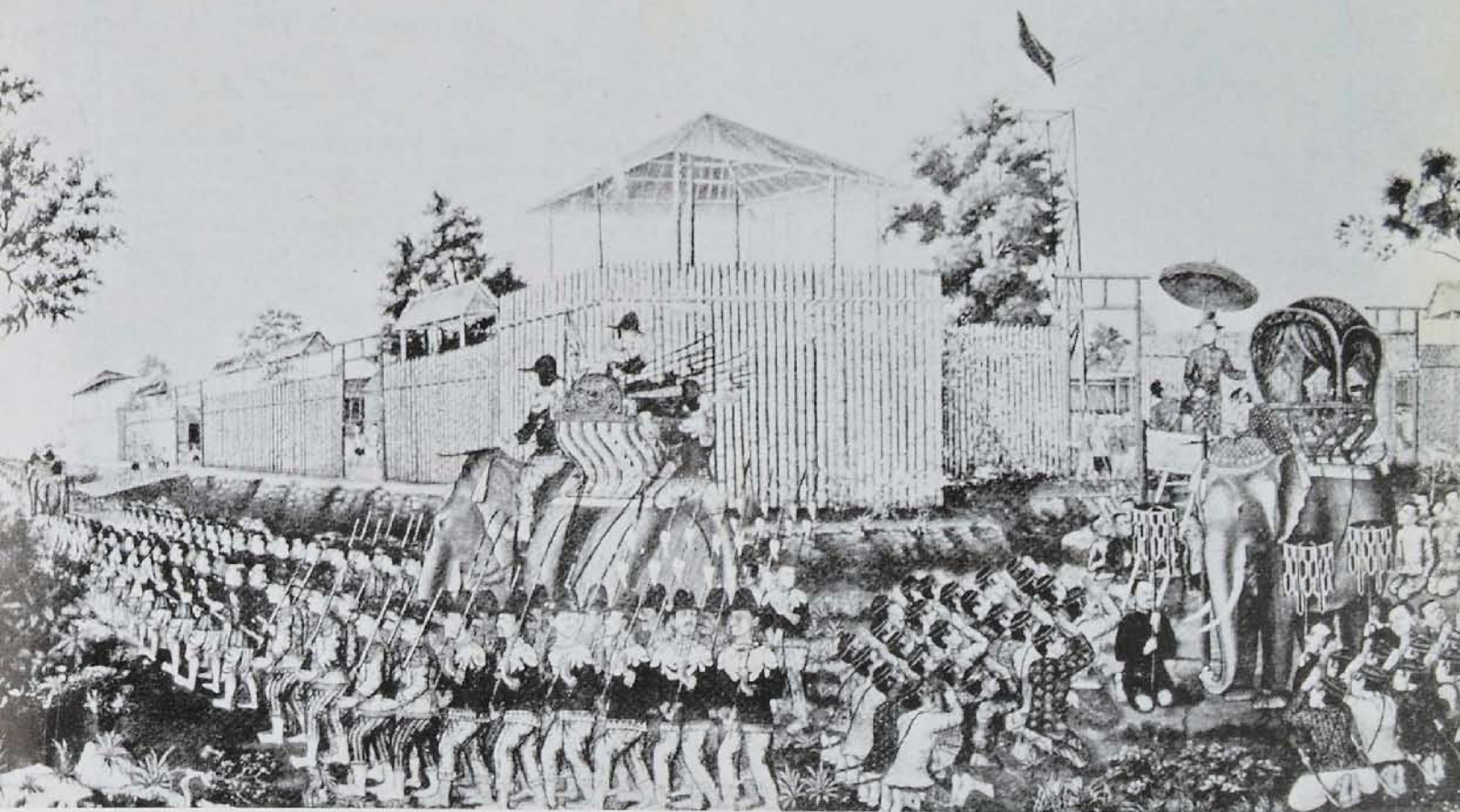
It might be suggested also that King Taksin had thought to return to Ayutthaya when he had a firm grip on the kingdom but that he later decided, in effect, to move Ayutthaya to Bangkok. Perhaps King Taksin had the prescience to realise that as Ayutthaya was fast becoming inaccessible to overseas shipping another port would have to be developed; since this would, necessarily, dissociate the commercial and political affairs of the State, it could lead to fragmentation of the kingdom or to re-location of the capital in future.

It has been argued that Thailand was neither an exporter nor an importer of any importance before the mid-nineteenth century:

Only luxuries and very valuable and little bulky commodities...were the usual articles of trade at these times, before modern transportation...[enabled] bulky stock to enter...trade with the East. As Siam...did not produce to



The critical strategic significance to the kingdom of the stronghold at Bangkok is shown clearly on this late seventeenth century chart, circa 1690, of the Chao Phraya river from its mouth to the capital, Juthia or Ayutthaya. Source: Kaempfer, E., *The History of Japan... Together with a description of the Kingdom of Siam* Glasgow, 1727.



The return to Thon Buri in 1782 of General Chao Phya Chakri, soon to be king, at the head of a large force which had been warring in Cambodia, as depicted in a painting by a modern Thai artist. Although the scene is 'posed', the painter has been at pains to represent truly each of the elements in the tableau. The original is in the resplendent collection of paintings at the exquisite Bang-Pa-In Palace.

any considerable amount such [goods]...the trade...could not become important...[or] profitable.

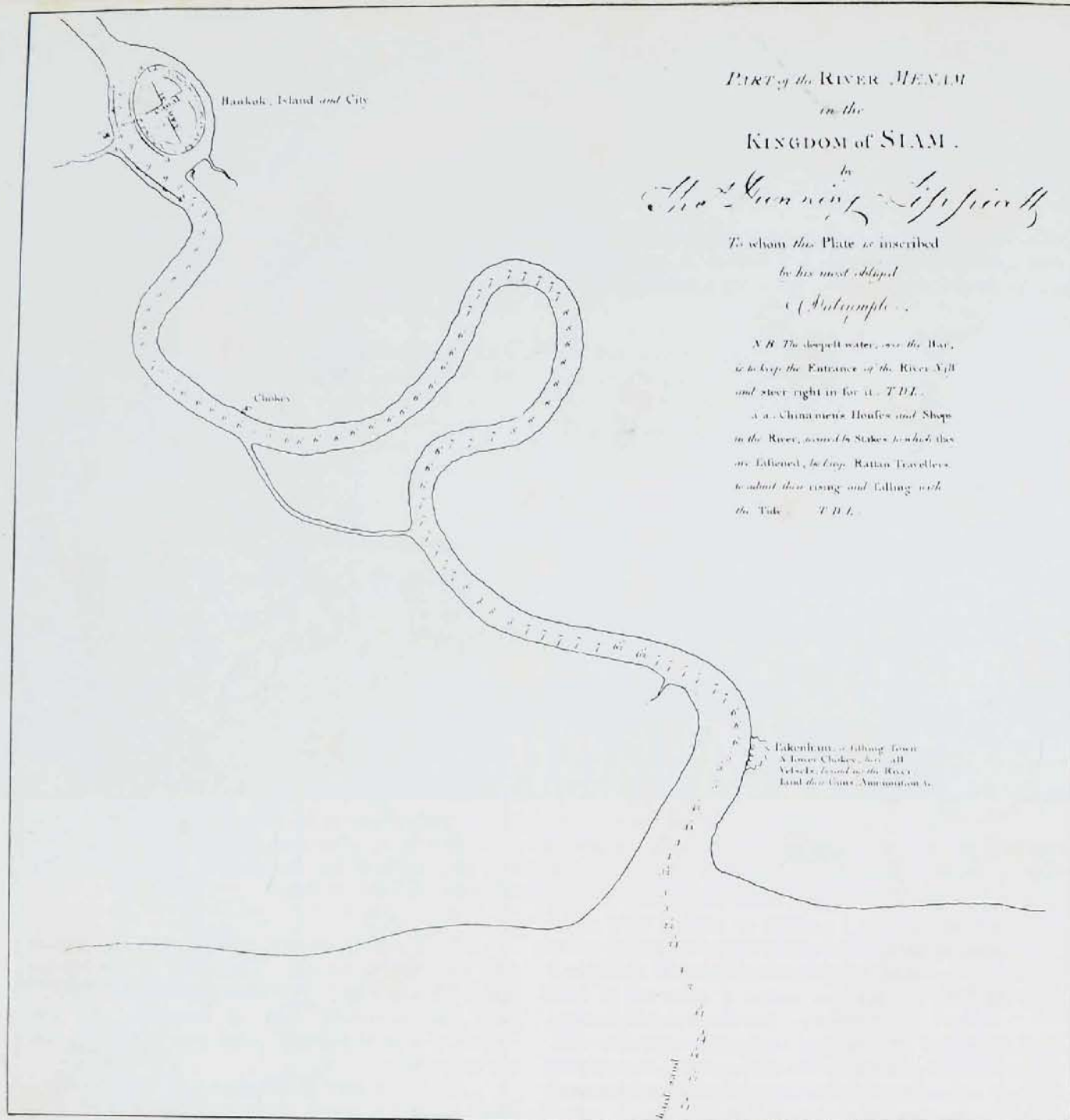
Judged by European standards of the day, Thai trade before the mid-nineteenth century would seem negligible, but that this trade was of importance in its day is reflected in the number of European and Asian trading houses at Ayutthaya.

Joost Schouten enthuses that 'in the chief City [Ayutthaya] the trading is very good', and he lists a number of exotic exports. 'They drive a great trade with all eating provisions, especially Rice, many thousand Tuns being transported yearly by Forraigners'. It appears, then, that 'bulky stock' entered Thai trade before the advent of modern means of transport. 'The King himself...hath his own Ships and Factours trading to Choromandel and China... he likewise trafficks to Pegu, Ava, Jongonna, Lang-jang and other places'.

Even when a flourishing centre, however, Ayutthaya was difficult to reach. In addition to the extensive mud flats and the bar across the mouth of the Chao Phraya river, which denied entry to ships drawing more than four and a half metres of water, and the tortuous fairway of the meandering river, the water became shallow a little way above Bangkok, and ships drawing three and a half metres of water were 'scarce able to mount to the City of India [Ayutthaya], where they [were] sometimes forced to stay till... *September, October, and November, for water to return*'.

To a mid-nineteenth century observer, familiar with the ships of his day, 'The water of the Menam [Chao Phraya river] off Yuthia [Ayutthaya]...[was] a great deal shallower than...at Bangkok, and only vessels of a small tonnage could ever have been able to reach [it]'.

The river itself at Bangkok was once merely a short canal cut across the narrow neck of a wide westward meander bow of the Chao Phraya early in the reign of King Prajai (1534-1546) as part of a grand scheme to improve navigation on the river and to shorten the distance from the Gulf to his capital, Ayutthaya, for merchantmen. The Chao Phraya, however, poured through the by-pass canal which rapidly widened and deepened, and soon accommodated the whole of the flow, though even today the river here is narrower than it is immediately upstream. The former meander of the river is traced at present by the narrow, shallow waterways Khlong Bangkok Noi and Khlong Bangkok Yai. A Thai tale tells of a sea-cook who had prepared a pot of rice while his ship was sailing along this meander only to find at the end of the bend that he had left his ladle at its beginning. Unperturbed, he removed the pot from the stove, disembarked, strode across the neck of the meander, recovered his ladle, walked back to his ship, re-boarded, and served the rice piping hot! Less apocryphal, perhaps, is the observation that natives commonly spent the whole of a day rowing round the meander and then strolled back across its narrow neck to retrieve their



PART of the RIVER MENDU  
in the  
KINGDOM of SIAM.

By  
*The Queen's Hydrographer*

To whom this Plate is inscribed

by his most Obliged

*(Autograph)*

*A.B.* The deepest water, *see the Bar,*  
is to keep the Entrance of the River Still  
and steer right in for it. *T.D.L.*

*A.A.* Chinnamen's Houses and Shops  
in the River, secured by Stakes to which they  
are Lashed, to keep Kathan Travellers  
to admit their rising and falling with  
the Tide. *T.D.L.*

Bangkok, or Village Town  
& lower Chokes, where all  
Vessels, bound in the River,  
land their Goods (Ammunition &c.)

This 'map', though a caricature and indistinct, merits attention because it was published in 1797 and may be the first of the new capital, Bangkok. Source: Chart 999(A2) held by Hydrographer of the Navy, Ministry of Defence, United Kingdom.

rice pots, purposefully left behind, and returned still with ample time in which to cook their supper.

'Bangkok' may, in fact, date from the reign of King Prajai (1534-1546) when a string of small fortress-towns was established along the river to guard the more important waterways leading from the Chao Phraya across the delta south of Ayutthaya; however, the founding of a town, named Muang Thon Buri Si Maha Samut, on the west bank of the Chao Phraya is ascribed to 1563, during the reign of King Chakkapat (1549-1565).

The origin of the name 'Bangkok' has proved a conundrum which has attracted the attention of not a few masterminds. Most agree that 'Bangkok', or some near-sounding variant, was used in common parlance by the Thai, and was subsequently taken up and perpetuated — though spelled variously, even quaintly — by foreigners. King Mongkut (Rama IV of Siam,

1851-1868) thought 'Bangkok' referred to an area around a creek which ran through the spur within the meander of the Chao Phraya which was left high, if not altogether dry, when the river shifted into the man-made channel cut across its narrow neck; 'Bang' is Thai for creek or canal, and 'kok' appears to be an abbreviated form of 'Makok' which is the Thai name for a kind of olive tree which once grew in profusion here. Indeed, Wat Arun, the monastery distinguished by a lofty, eighty-two metre high tower which now dominates the skyline of the city on the west bank of the Chao Phraya, was known as Wat Makok when Ayutthaya was the capital of the kingdom. Foreigners were inclined to read 'Ban' — the Thai for 'village' — for 'Bang', and so to translate 'Bangkok' as the 'village of olives'. Several linguists reckon 'Bangkok' was first pronounced by the Portuguese early in the 17th century in an attempt to voice the Thai sound. Most intriguing,

however, is the suggestion by a Thai savant that 'Bangkok' comes from the Malay word for 'river bend'; and that the name, descriptive of the former infamous meander of the Chao Phraya, was bestowed on the area by Malays who resided here in considerable numbers at the time.

Whatever the real origin of the informal name 'Bangkok', Rama I formally named the capital at his coronation ceremony in 1782, viz., *Krung Thep Pra-Maha-Nakorn, Boworn-Thawarawadi-Sri-Yudhya, Maha-Dilokpop, Noparatana-Radhani, Burirom, Udom-Pra-Rajniwet-Mahasatan*. Four years later, in 1786, the capital was renamed, viz., *Krung Thep Pra-Maha-Nakorn, Boworn-Ratanakosindra, Mahindra-Yudhya, Maha-Dilokpop, Noparatana-Radhani, Burirom, Udom-Rajniwet-Mahasatan, Amorn-Pimarn-Avatarn-Satit, Sakkatuttiya-Vishnukarm-Prasit*. (If the deletion of the reference to *Thawarawadi* or *Dvaravati* as a former capital of the realm in the formal title of the new capital as bestowed in 1786 came from a wholesome uncertainty about its existence or its location, there is now no reason to doubt the reality of this pre-Ayutthayan kingdom. Might not the bicentenary of Bangkok provide the occasion on which to restore *Thawarawadi* to its rightful place in the honorific title of the Thai capital?) Later, Rama IV (1851-1868) altered *Boworn-Ratanakosindra* to *Amorn-Ratanakosindra*. Translated (idiosyncratically, perhaps) the formal name of Bangkok reads: The City of Gods, The Great City, The Residence of The Emerald Buddha, The Impregnable City (of Ayutthaya) of God Indr, The Grand Capital of The World Endowed With Nine Precious Gems, The Happy City Abounding in Enormous Royal Palaces Which Resemble The Heavenly Abode Wherein Dwell The Reincarnated Gods, A City Given by Indr and Built by Vishnukarm.

The four years between the first and the 'final' naming of the new capital was spent in laying the lineaments of the city. Given the large force of labour at the King's disposal (much of which was 'recruited' from Cambodia and Laos) it may be argued that four years was an adequate period for the raising of the city; that nothing need have been prepared previously by King Taksin; that, indeed, King Taksin had not intended to establish the capital on the east bank of the Chao Phraya.

The royal palaces and the great houses of the paramount dignitaries were built of wood at first and, though inhabited very soon after the move across the river, construction continued on these and other buildings for at least three years. Bricks were brought down-river from Ayutthaya and across the river from Thon Buri for use in the fortifications and, later, the principal structures.

It seems that the fortifications at Thon Buri were partially dismantled because Rama I, when a general, had experienced the difficulties involved in defending a city built on both sides of a river.

Work continued on essential structures throughout the reign, which ended in 1809. Canals were dug



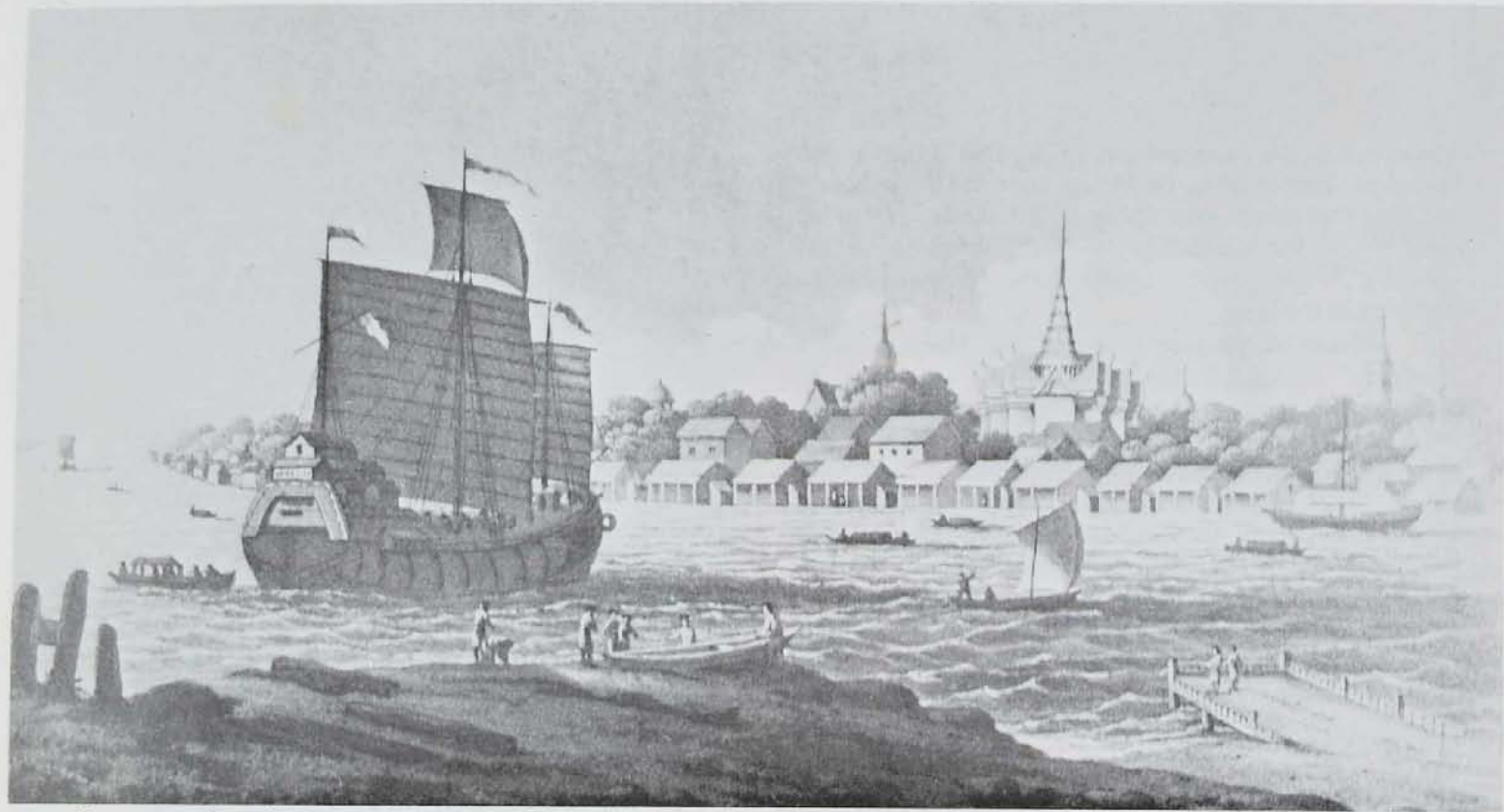
*The Dusit Maha Prasat Palace, commonly regarded as the finest building in the Grand Palace and the paragon of modern Siamese architecture. Built by King Rama I (1782-1806) for ceremonial purposes and used on occasion for coronations and royal lyings-in-state, the structure encloses a single chamber and is in the form of a blunt cross, each wing of which is topped by a five-tiered roof, the whole being centred and capped by an exquisite nine-tiered spire. This fine engraving circa 1855 appears to be the first realistic portrayal of this celebrated structure. Source: Bowring, Sir J., The Kingdom and People of Siam London, 1857.*

around and through the city, both for defence and for drainage. The walls of the city and the citadel were constructed and fortified and were constantly being strengthened. A large number of important and imposing monasteries were constructed and consecrated.

Seventy-five years after the founding of the new capital, it was remarked that 'The general outlines of the old city (Ayutthaya) so closely resemble those of Bangkok, that the map of the one might easily be mistaken for the representation of the other'.

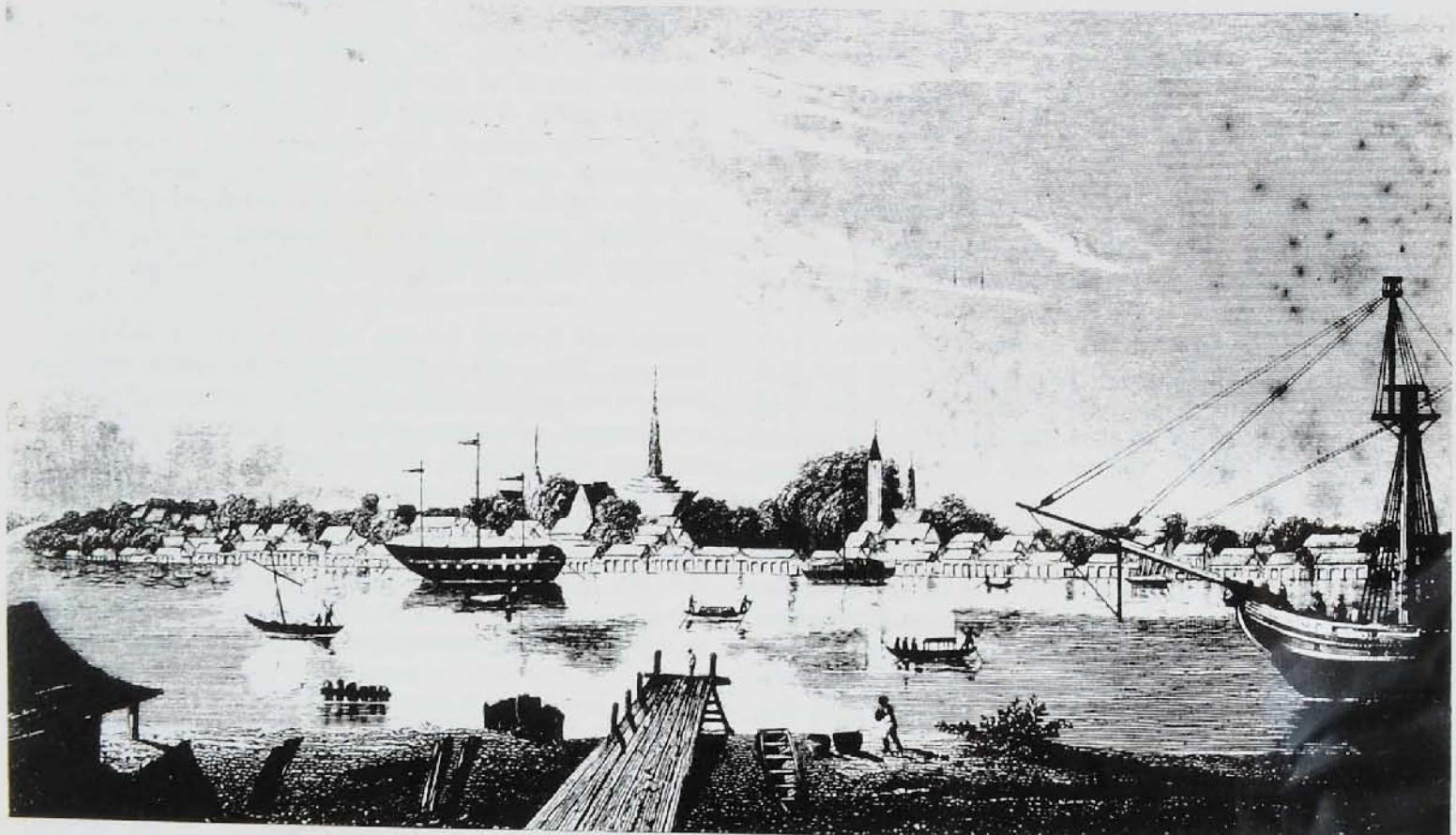
The honours, of course, belong to Ayutthaya, the rubble of which was embedded in the palaces, monasteries and fortifications of Bangkok which were built in the likeness and carried the names of their splendid prototypes.

Rama I did not wish to create a wholly new city but to re-create Ayutthaya, to reproduce the form of the old capital as an essential part of his wish to restore the whole of the Ayutthayan way of life. □



Source: Crawford, J., *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin-China* London, 1828.

*First views of Bangkok. Based on drawings made during an embassy from the Governor-General of India in 1821-22, these engravings depict the Port and the Grand Palace from the west bank of the Chao Phraya river. Although the scene is stylised and decidedly Westernized, a reasonable impression of the cityscape is conveyed provided the air of order and calm is discounted or, better, replaced with disorder and stir.*



Source: Finlayson, G., *The Mission to Siam, and Hué the capital of Cochin China, in the Years 1821-2* London, 1826.

# THE VENICE OF THE EAST

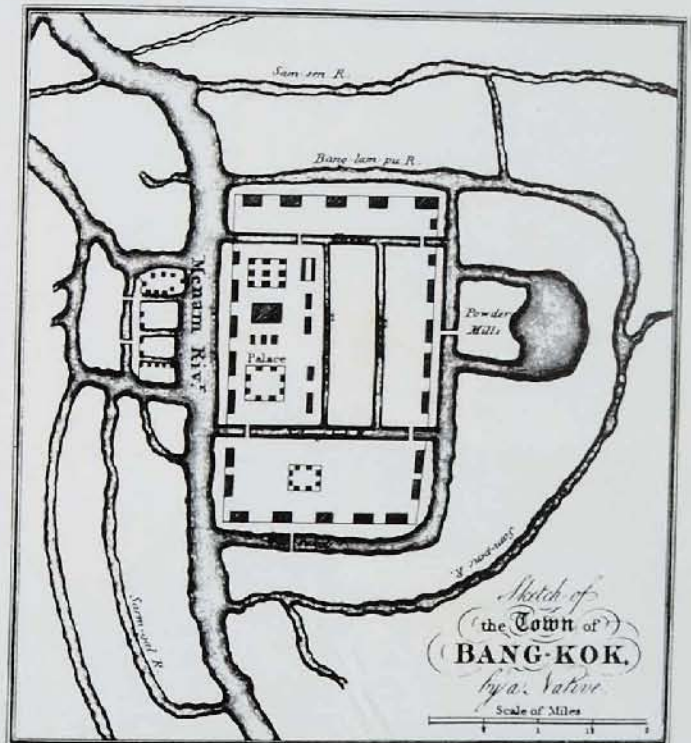
The Venice of the Far East — the capital still wrapped in mystery, in spite of the thousand efforts of modernism amid its maze of canals, and in spite of the popularity of the reigning monarchy... From the crowded dock-roads of the River... which reminds one of the Giudecca [several linked islands south of and separated from the main mass of Venice by the Canale della Giudecca in which merchant ships moored in times past] across the intricate mass of... the Chinese quarter... which, whilst resembling Canton, is still more Venetian. Were it not for queues, almond-eyes, and odours, decidedly Oriental, the illusion would very often be complete... the Quarter of the Legations, the European residences and sporting clubs, all... shady and surrounded by canals which reminded me of Strà (Curious these continual Venetian reminiscences in the Far East.)... the canals ploughed by sampans, which the rowers guide standing as in Venice... little bridges and tiny gardens, reflecting in the quiet water the drooping foliage of ancient trees... as in the remotest corners of the City of the Doges (and a longing for the lagoons nearly seizes one)... the Royal Quarter, rich in parks, temples, and palaces... all a dazzling variety of colour and cadences... which give one the impression of being in Venice... a wild primitive Venice.

So Salvatore Besso, a young, adventurous and perceptive Italian nobleman writing about happenings in the Far East, saw the city of Bangkok on the eve of the coronation of King Vajiravudh, Rama VI of Thailand, in 1911. Many before Besso had casually compared Bangkok and the previous Thai capital of Ayutthaya, its prototype, with the fantastic Adriatic port. Apparently, Fernão Mendez Pinto was the first to use the epithet 'Venice of the East' when referring to Ayutthaya in a letter to the Society of Jesus in Lisbon dated 1554.

Bangkok was born during troubled times, a period of intense conflict among the principalities of Southeast Asia, and, more importantly, among the powers of Europe engaged in the Napoleonic wars. Solemnly proclaimed the capital of Thailand in 1782, Bangkok apparently was unsighted by Europeans of wit before the cessation of hostilities permitted the great powers to revive their intercourse with first island and then mainland Southeast Asia, an endeavour which needed the concurrence of the influential Thai court. From the 1820s Bangkok was on the itinerary of an ever-increasing stream of diplomatic, commercial and evangelical transients, a number of whom thought to leave accounts of their visit containing descriptions of the city which, when

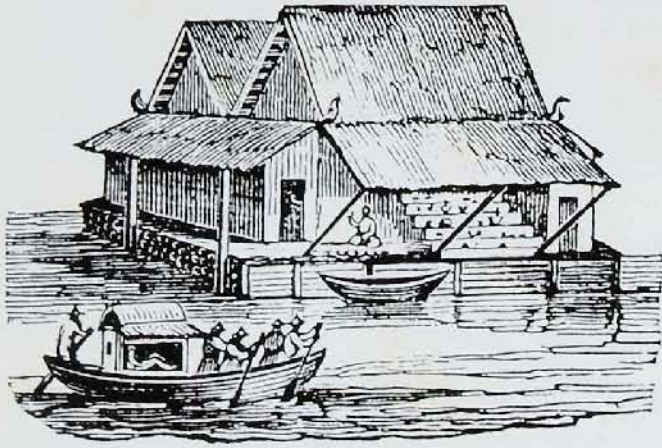
freed from prejudice, provide the material for a vivid anthology comprising material from fifteen eyewitness descriptions of Bangkok between 1821 and 1855:

Yet another tack, yet one more bend of the tortuous river and lo! The glories of the floating city, the capital of Siam, at sunrise. Numerous temples of Buddha with their gilt and glazed tile roofs, some blue and others green or yellow, and tall single spires sparkling in the sun, rise from what seems to be a forest, but is in reality a great city. On each side of the river floating habitations, resting on rafts of bamboos. Close to these anchored the largest descriptions of native vessels. A row of Chinese junks extend for more than two miles, at anchor in the middle of the stream, where they often remain for months, retailing their cargoes. The river presented a busy scene, from the number of boats of every size and description, some not larger than clothes-



'Sketch of the Town of Bang-kok by a Native' was included in a journal of an embassy to the Siamese Court in 1821-22. Although a 'mental map', a caricature, rather than a representation of the built city, something is shown of the citadel and a great deal about the *raison d'être* of the capital. Source: Crawford, J., *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin-China* London, 1828.





Apparently the earliest representation, circa 1835, of a floating shophouse at Bangkok. At first glance this engraving seems a caricature; close inspection, however, is rewarded by an accurate and reasonably detailed portrayal of one of these remarkable structures. Source: Malcom, H., *Travels in South-Eastern Asia, embracing Hindustan, Malaya, Siam, and China; with notices of Numerous Missionary Stations, and a full account of the Burman Empire* Boston, 1838.

baskets, passing to and fro. The number struck us as very great for we were not aware that there are few or no roads, wheel carriages are altogether unknown, and that the ground is a rich tract of alluvial land, low, and intersected by numerous winding creeks and canals ramified in all directions and navigable a part of every tide, that they can go in boats to almost every place, almost every house where business or pleasure calls them.

The market hour was now approaching. The occupants of the floating houses were taking down the shutters which formed the fronts, exposing their wares for sale; printed calicoes, paper-umbrellas, sweet-meats, fruits, pots, pans being placed in situations the best calculated to attract the passers-by. Many of the boats were shops containing earthenware, blachang [a popular fetid condiment], dried fish, and fresh pork. There an old woman hawked betel, plantains, and pumpkins. Here you saw canoes laden with coconuts, the Chinaman, with his ready-cooked pork, the fishmonger, with his fried and well-stewed fish, the baker's girl, with bread and hoppers [a delicious cake made of rice flour and coconut milk], an interminable string of raw commo-



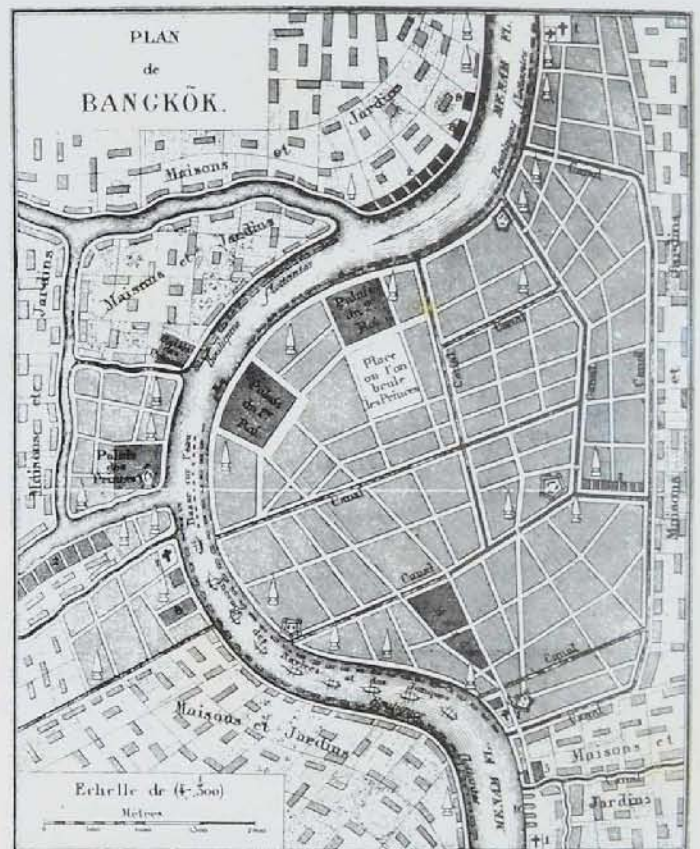
Bangkok residence during the period 1828-1831 of the Reverend Gutzlaff, first resident missionary-physician sent to Siam by the London Missionary Society. This fine engraving is the earliest of those of Bangkok which are remarkable for a photographic-like realism. Source: Gutzlaff, C., *Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China in 1831, 1832, & 1833, with notices of Siam, Corea, & the Loo-Choo Islands* London, 1834.



Morning market along the Chao Phraya river at Bangkok as depicted in a painting circa 1900. Source: Young, E., *Peeps at many Lands: Siam* London, 1908.

dities, sea and river fish, meat and poultry, fruits, vegetables and other minor articles of consumption. Everything that is wanted, or supposed necessary. Vendors hawking and crying as in an European town. Groups of natives proceeding from house to house, on their various occupations and a flotilla of canoes filled with the priests of Buddha readily distinguished by their shaved and bare heads, and their yellow vestments plied on the river on their diurnal eleemosynary excursion.

But the most singular feature in the busy scene was the great bazaar of the city, where all imaginable and unimaginable articles are displayed in houses, floating on the water on thick bamboo rafts in rows eight, ten, or more in depth from the bank. The houses were built of boards, generally teakwood, of a neat oblong form twenty to thirty feet in length, and about half that space in breadth. They consist of a single stage, the floor raised above the water about a foot, and the roof thatched with palm leaves, sometimes with tiles. The houses are small, consisting of a principal centre room, and one or two small ones, the centre being open in front, for the display of wares or used as a playground by the children. At either end the houses were bound to long bamboos driven into the river and linked to each other in parcels of six or seven houses by chains made fast to great piles planted in the bed of the stream so that they can rise and fall with the tide, and yet not be carried away by it. Of course, their locality can be changed without difficulty, and sometimes without the concurrence of the inmates. It is no uncommon thing to see whole streets of floating houses, together with their inhabitants, come floating down the stream to the utter confusion of the shipping. Another and a great disadvantage is this — cattle, dogs, cats, nay even sometimes human bodies, that have been cast into or been drowned in the river higher up are perpetually being swept down by the current, and getting entangled underneath the houses. The inmates are assailed with pestilential odours, which they have no possible means of ridding themselves and no alternative but to abide patiently till time and tide carry away this nuisance, being subjected in the interval to a local



This plan of Bangkok circa 1850, though stylised, provides a good general impression of the capital provided the regular pattern of streets is disregarded or, better, consciously replaced by a maze of meandering footpaths and innumerable creeks, canals and ditches. Source: Pallegoix, Mgr., *Description du Royaume Thai ou Siam* Paris, 1854.



Floating houses along the bank of the Chao Phraya river at Bangkok depicted in a fine realistic engraving — in effect, a documentary photograph — circa 1855. Among the features of these structures, the double roof merits admiration as an ingenious solution to the problem of providing a steep slope overhead to encourage the rapid runoff of torrential downpours, a large catchment area for drinking water and a low centre of gravity to maintain stability beneath one's feet. Source: Bowring, Sir J., *The Kingdom and People of Siam* London, 1857.

miasma quite sufficient to breed typhus. These floating streets, nevertheless, possess advantages. The river furnishes water for all purposes, and is at the same time the common sewer of the city. Habitations are constructed of the most combustible materials, and the inhabitants are often exposed to extensive conflagrations. Floating houses set adrift prevent the fire communicating to others. A troublesome neighbour may be ejected and sent floating away to find another site for his habitation. A tradesman, too, if he finds an opposition shop taking away his custom, can remove to another spot with very little difficulty.

The houses that are not floated are built on posts driven into the mud, and raised above the bank six to eight feet, a precaution rendered necessary both by the diurnal flow of the tides, and the annual inundations to which the country is subject. The houses on the land, with very few exceptions,

are of one story, made of plank or bamboo, and roofed with *atap*. There are a few houses built of stone and brick and roofed with tiles. Some of the best are used as cool retreats for men of wealth, who live on shore. The houses rarely extend more than one or two hundred yards from the river. Instead of accommodating the houses to any line of roads, the roads, or paths, are interrupted and bent in almost every direction, by the encroachment of buildings. The streets are dirty and narrow, in general nothing more than foot-paths, overgrown with bushes, bamboos, and palms, passable on foot only in dry weather. Every few rods, a canal or ditch is to be crossed; and a log, or plank, without a handrail, is generally the only bridge.

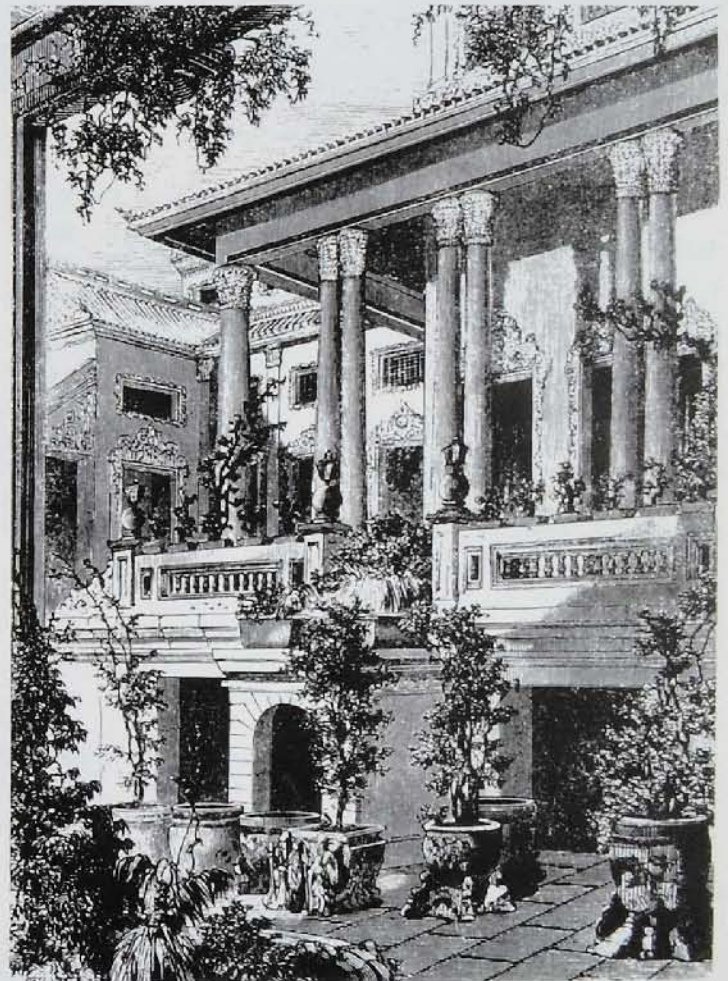
The beauty, splendour and numbers of the temples of Bangkok — their enormous size, their rich ornaments, their peculiar architecture (particularly the roof, which in form may be compared to three

The Chakri Palace circa 1900. The adoption or adaptation of a European architectural style (Italian Renaissance) by a British architect for this imposing building in the compound of the Grand Palace, which bears the name of the ruling dynasty, is clear evidence of the profound concern of King Rama IV (1851-1868) with the modernisation of his kingdom. The roof, in pure Siamese mode, was wisely substituted (at the last minute) for the intended cupolaed top. Source: Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg, *Siam das Reich des weissen Elefanten* Leipzig, 1899.



saddles, placed one on the top of the other, diminishing in size from the lowest to the top), the extent and variety of buildings enclosed within their walls — embarrass the powers of description. Their style can only be made clear to the understanding by drawings. A temple, or monastery — for they are inseparable, called in the language of the country, Wat — is always a large square enclosure, consisting of a place of worship, with the images of Gautama, an extensive area, a library, and the dwellings of the Talapoins [priests] surrounded by brick walls, or bamboo hedges, placed in the most elevated, most conspicuous and beautiful spots on the bank of the Menam [Chao Phraya river], on its tributaries and numerous canals; you never lose sight of them; frequently eight or ten are in view at the same moment. All the temples are constructed of brick and mortar, and are of a square form, with gable-ends. All are of one story.

The Grand Royal Palace, the semi-castellated residences of the Supreme King of Siam, with its roofs and spires, towers pre-eminent over all the city. It is a great citadel, enclosed within high white walls, the circumference embracing nearly the extent of a mile, situated on the left bank of the river upon an island surrounded by a wall fifteen feet high and twelve broad. The palace contains a variety of beautiful edifices, temples, public offices, a court of justice, and an office for the despatch of local business, a theatre, a large royal library, an arsenal of artillery, and a manufactory of fire-arms and other weapons, accommodation for some thousands of soldiers and an innumerable assemblage of ladies, a large extent of stabling for war elephants and horses and, above all, the white elephant. The pavements are either of granite or marble. In the middle of the principal court rises a magnificent great hall of audience covered with glazed tiles, ornamented with sculpture, and surmounted by a tall gilt spire.



The Chakri Palace: a detail of the portico circa 1860. Source: Mouhot, H., *Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China (Siam), Cambodia, and Laos, During the years 1858, 1859, and 1860* London, 1864.

Estimates of the population of Bangkok in the middle of the nineteenth century range widely, from fifty thousand to five hundred thousand. An Englishman who was in the service of the King of Siam for several weeks in 1840 wrote a book about his residence at the capital in which he says that Bangkok comprised 'seventy thousand floating houses or shops' and very few houses built on *terra firma*. Townsend Harris, the first American Consul General and then Minister to Japan, was charged with making a commercial treaty with the King of Siam on his way to the Island Empire and stopped at Bangkok for several weeks in 1856. Having briefed himself by reading our earlier informant's book, the American diplomat calendared his dismay at finding almost the whole of the so-called floating city on *terra firma* and the number of floating houses nearer seven thousand than seventy thousand, and charged his predecessor with lying. Tax records from the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851-1868) reveal seven hundred and twelve 'raft houses' lining the banks of the Chao Phraya river, a hundred along Khlong Bangkok Noi and eighty-eight moored along other canals in the city; a well-rounded, perhaps too well-rounded, nine hundred in all. Apparently only floating shop-houses, not floating houses, were taxed.

Probably the Englishman represented the floating city in caricature, but Bangkok grew apace during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and equally probably the number of floating houses had been reduced drastically by the time of the visit of the American envoy. A new city moat, Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem, dug in 1851-52 and fortified shortly thereafter, had more than doubled the area of the city proper. The suburban development which necessitated the new defensive perimeter doubtless included residents who had moved from 'ship' to shore; residential shifts that might be expected, given the general prosperity of the period. It is also likely that many floating houses were cleared from the river front in anticipation of greatly increased trade with the Western powers as a result of the several commercial treaties being negotiated, treaties which were sealed during the 1850s and 1860s.

Ease of communications, a ready supply of water for personal use and insurance against flooding appear sufficient reason for securing a home or shop upon the waterways of Bangkok. Several early visitors, however, ascribe the floating houses to the frequent recurrence of cholera which induced the King to insist the populace move from *terra firma* to aquatic sites for cleanliness and ventilation. The 'privilege' of building on the banks of the Chao Phraya was then restricted to royalty, the nobility and to others of wealth and influence. This romance may include a drop of truth, though the horrific outbreaks of cholera and other plagues vividly described by each visitor and duly recorded in despatches from missionary dispensaries suggest an amphibious

life did nothing to allay the ravages of disease. In fact, entire villages afloat were usual throughout the deltaic plain and an impeccable Thai source maintains Bangkok comprised floating residences from its founding. On the other hand, large tracts of land were held by a few royal and noble landlords and considerable acreage was occupied by *wats*, so accessible land was generally unavailable and prohibitively expensive to buy or rent for most citizens. Also, many families were engaged in transporting produce and goods along the dense network of inland waterways which criss-crossed the great deltaic plain of central Thailand; families which lived in small boats, for whom a floating house or shop would be a step up in status. Whatever the reasons for floating a house or shop-house upon the waterways of Bangkok, these weaken with the development of the capital, and when roadways began to proliferate the number of floating habitations rapidly dwindled.

The dynastic chronicles of the Fourth Reign (Rama IV, 1851-1868) record an extraordinary petition presented to the King in 1861 by the foreign consuls at Bangkok. The gist of the entreaty was that Europeans were accustomed to the recreation of riding in carriages or on horseback but, as there were no roads in the city and they could not engage in these activities, their health and general well-being had suffered immeasurably. His Majesty King Mongkut received this petition kindly and, noting that the number of resident Europeans at the capital, already considerable, was increasing, and that by their criticism the consuls sought only to enhance the beauty and increase the utility of the city, he thought to initiate a road and bridge building program under an already grand scheme of construction and repair. This, despite the difficult deltaic site which yields only flimsy building materials and demands a great expenditure of time and money to achieve other than paltry construction.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, before the development of a transport system beyond the waterways of the delta plain itself, to bring stone or timber or other durable building materials to Bangkok involved great effort and expense. Often the site of the intended structure had first to be built up to protect against flooding. Long piles had to be driven into the saturated mud only a foot beneath the surface to bear the weight of a building. Even to prepare a site might take several years.

Still, at the end of the reign a great many public works had been completed and many more were underway. Several modern roads had been laid down within the city proper and one, *Charoen Krung*, or 'New Road' as it was and is known to the Western community, led southward from the city, back of the dockyards, warehouses, mills, *wats*, churches and consulates fronting the Chao Phraya river. Another of King Mongkut's innovations was to line both sides of the portion of New Road that lay



▲ River-level view of the Chao Phraya looking downstream from a point immediately north of the Grand Palace; redrawn from a sketch circa 1860. The phra prang of Wat Arun rears up larger-than-life from the west bank. Smoke columns rise from a brace of buoys which, it appears, demarcate an area before the Grand Palace which was not to be used as an anchorage. This particular view, variously retouched, appeared in several later publications; in one, the buoys become steamships!

▼ Mid-river Port of Bangkok; redrawn from a sketch circa 1860. The odd-looking structure on the far shore is the façade of the Catholic church which stood in the long line of mills, commercial houses and consulates fronting the east side of the Chao Phraya south of the city proper.



Source: Mouhot, H., Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China (Siam), Cambodia, and Laos, During the years 1858, 1859, and 1860 London, 1864.



*His Majesty King Mongkut*  
*Raja Siamensis*

A true likeness of His Majesty King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851-1868) in royal regalia painted circa 1855 and bearing his signature. The appellation 'Great' has not been bestowed on King Mongkut though no lesser word adequately describes his reign. Source: Bowring, Sir J., *The Kingdom and People of Siam* London, 1857.

within the walls of the city with brick buildings and market-places let to merchants.

So, even before the Great King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) took up the task of modernisation in earnest (aged sixteen when King Mongkut died, King Chulalongkorn was under a regent until 1873), some were bemoaning the transformation being wrought in the 'silent... dream-like... Venice on the Menam' by the 'ruthless hand of public improvement'.

*The whistle of the railway locomotive is not yet heard in Siam, to be sure, although the whistle of the steamer echoes up and down the river... But the present king is building what this preposterous and Frenchy generation will persist in calling boulevards along the river's bank; and wheeled vehicles and trotting horses begin to spin along the shore. The elephant, however picturesque, cannot contend for speed with such as these, and shakes his solemn head and waves his trunk disdainfully, as fogies will who see the changes which a rapid generation introduces with such reckless haste and inconsiderate extravagance.*

During a reign of nearly half a century, King Chulalongkorn attempted a thoroughgoing reformation of the Thai way of life; an attempt aptly described as 'a revolution from the throne'. Such a task could not be accomplished quickly, but evidence of the 'thousand efforts of modernism' accumulated and at the end of the reign Thailand had changed; the signs of modernisation being nowhere more obvious than at the capital.

Great sections of the massive crenellated city wall had been demolished to provide road metal for the two hundred kilometres of carriageways which crossed the network of canals on substantial, yet graceful, bridges of iron and marble. Pre-eminent among these ways was the sixty-metre wide, three-kilometre long, tree-lined Ratchadamnoen Boulevard (styled after the Champs Elysées) which connected the newly Europeanised Grand Palace with the newly laid-out suburban complex of princely villas and ornamental gardens surrounding the Dusit Summer Palace and the Italianate Anantasamakhon Throne Hall, later the National Assembly Hall, immediately north of Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem.



The Great King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) at the age of twenty; four years after his ascension to the throne under a regent, and a year before the end of the regency and His Majesty's coronation in 1873. Three kings only in the history of the Thai bear the appellation 'Great': King Ramkhamheng of Sukhotai; King Naresuen of Ayutthaya; and King Chulalongkorn of Bangkok. King Chulalongkorn merits the title 'Great' for even one of the many and remarkable reforms made during his long and memorable reign: reforms made despite a deeply ingrained and pervasive traditionalism; reforms which constituted the 'revolution from the throne' which brought the kingdom well and truly into the modern world. Source: Anonymous, 'In and Around Bangkok' Scribner's Monthly From Nov. 1872, to April, 1873. New York.



The Great King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) aged about fifty, when His Majesty had seen many of his modernising reforms implemented: reforms which had overcome, albeit gradually, much of the inertia of tradition and had led to a remarkable development of the kingdom; a development which has since gathered an awful momentum. Source: Antonio, J., Guide to Bangkok and Siam Bangkok, 1904.

Moving along these roadways — heavy-laden with passengers, animals, anything movable — was a never-ending stream of dilapidated rickshaws from Japan *via* Singapore and Hong Kong, decrepit horse-drawn *gharries* and bullock carts from India, unsprung versions of the British omnibus, bicycles of the most modern European design, up-to-the-minute electric trams and a few fine motor cars. Still, most transport was by water and most goods reached the market dangling from the ends of bamboo carrying poles.

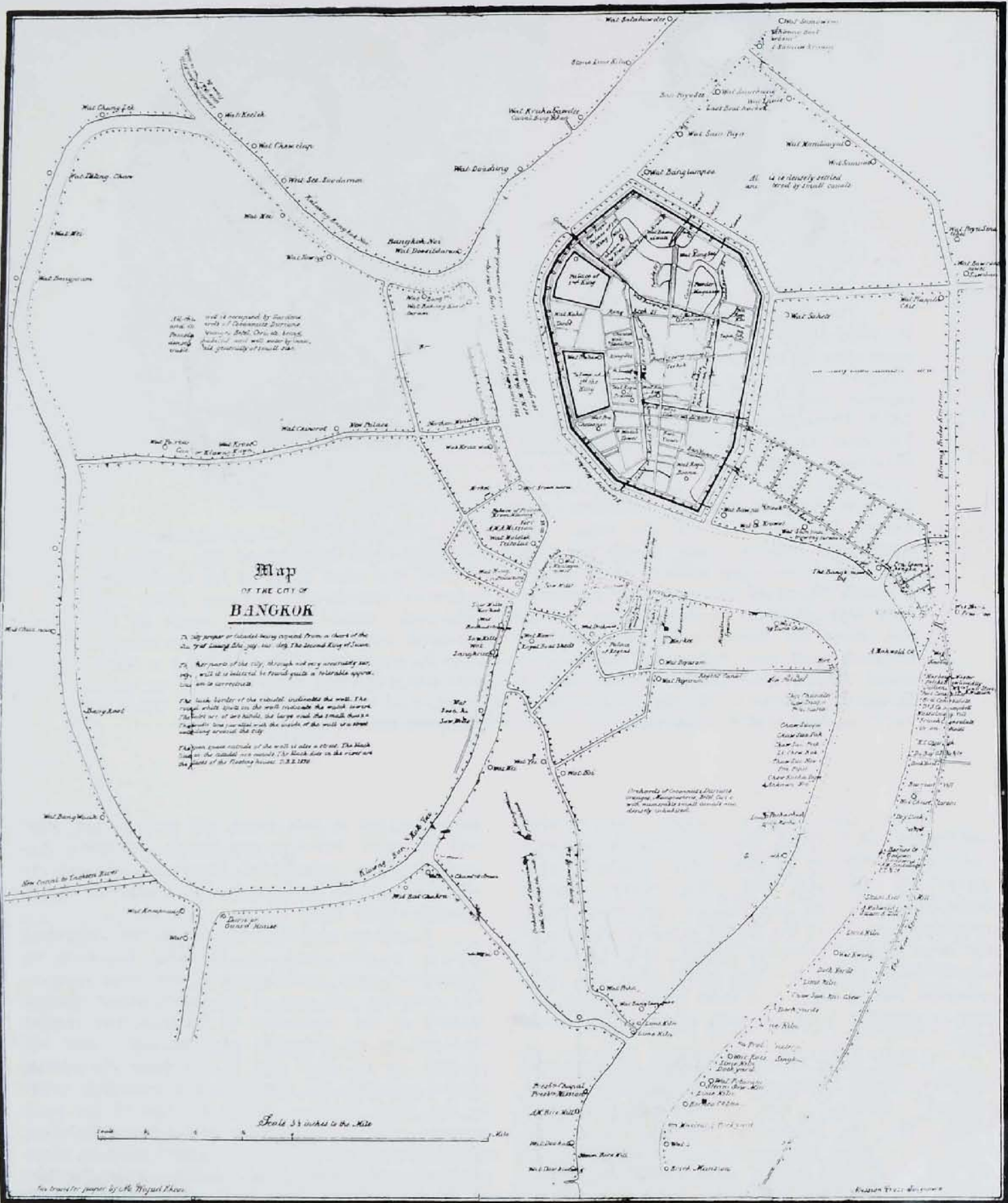
Electric street lamps illuminated the principal avenues, having displaced the more picturesque, less regularly positioned, less frequently-lit coconut-oil lamps. Still, the lamplighter wended his evening round along more modest ways on the outskirts of the city, and most homes were lighted by smoky tallow candles in fanciful lanterns hung from rafters.

Water was piped into the city and available from a number of artesian bores. Still, most of the population got their water directly from the rivers and canals. Many of the larger indigenous teak houses had been pulled down and brick ones of European

design erected in their stead; still most houses were built of wood, bamboo and thatch. At home, the wealthier Thai entertained Europeans in quarters wholly European, but lived in their traditional way in quarters wholly Thai.

European clothing styles in brightly coloured cottons or silks made in England, Germany or Switzerland were conspicuous in the more fashionable quarters; still any of the many ethnic groups making up the population of Bangkok was readily identified by its distinctive costume and it was still possible to tell what day it was from the colour predominating in the garments and ornaments worn by the Thai: Sunday, under the rule of the sun, required bright red clothing and rubies; Monday, under the rule of the moon, required white or silver garments and moonstones; Tuesday, under the rule of Mars, required light red costumes and coral ornaments; Wednesday, under the rule of Mercury, required green garments and emeralds; Thursday, under the rule of Jupiter, required variegated clothing and the cat's-eye; Friday, under the rule of Venus, required silver-blue apparel and diamonds;





Bangkok circa 1870. The first unstylised large-scale map of the capital. Although this reproduction is somewhat unclear, having been based on a poor copy of the original, a good impression of the city may be had and the annotations (when readable) yield information available from no other source. Source: Bradley, D.B., Map of the city of Bangkok Singapore Mission Press, 1870.

Saturday, under the rule of Saturn, required dark-blue clothing and sapphires.

Banking facilities, hotels, a hospital and a nursing home, a university and several secondary schools, a library and a museum, one of the finest race-courses in the East, and a number of social-cultural-athletic clubs were among the amenities provided for 'modern' living. Still, the majority of the half-million people of Bangkok lived a very much less-than-modern life.

The Royal Railway Department had been busy. From its 'Central Station', located in the suburbs immediately east of Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem, trains ran deep into the country north and east of the capital. Still, most traffic up-country went up-river. A long line of steamers, ships from trading nations great and small, rode the midstream anchorage at the port of Bangkok and steam launches darted everywhere. Still, sails and oars propelled most vessels, and the steamers were top-loaded or lightened by flat-bottomed *lorchas* beyond the bar at the mouth of the Chao Phraya river.

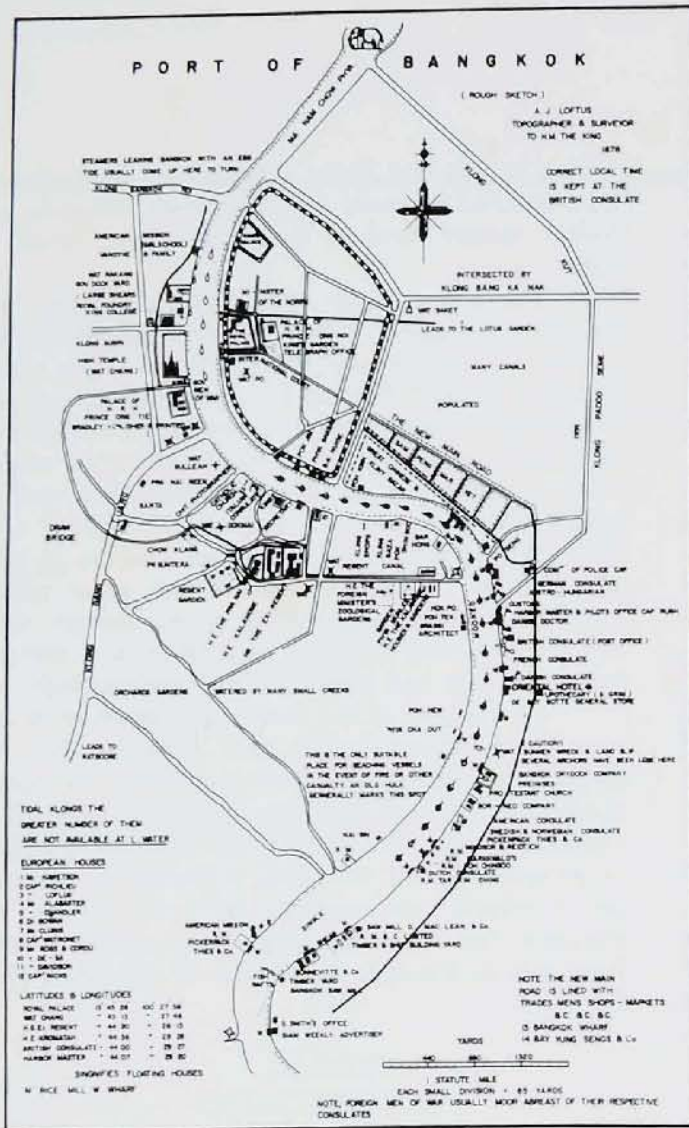
Closely packed along the river both sides of the anchorage were noisy mills — husking rice, cutting teak, crushing cane, burning lime — ugly with galvanised iron and belching black smoke from tall chimneys. Still, a little way up-stream decorous

floating houses and shops clung to the banks; house-boats moored in every available space between, and pedlars quietly hawked their wares from small canoes.

The grand bazaar of the city was *Sam Peng*, the Chinese quarter, where almost every house was a shop and the houses were jammed into a square kilometre of land fronting the river immediately west of Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem. Here an immense trade was carried on; shoppers thronged the narrow, crooked alleyways all day, revellers thronged the gambling houses, opium dens and brothels all night. Still, the floating market carried on. Scores of boats, each loaded to the gunwales under great piles of merchandise, massed together before sun-up, traded with that intensity common to markets and dispersed before the sun had climbed uncomfortably high.

At the turn of the century Bangkok must have seemed a schizophrenic city. Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the pervasive contrast between the modern and the traditional faces of the capital was the juxtaposition yet near independence of its aquatic and terrestrial populations, seemingly two complete and separate cities on the one site. Bangkok has since abandoned its aquatic ancestry. Now it is as though the Venice of the East had not been. □

*Bangkok in the decades around the turn of this century is depicted on the following fourteen pages in engravings, photographs and maps of which few have been reproduced previously.*



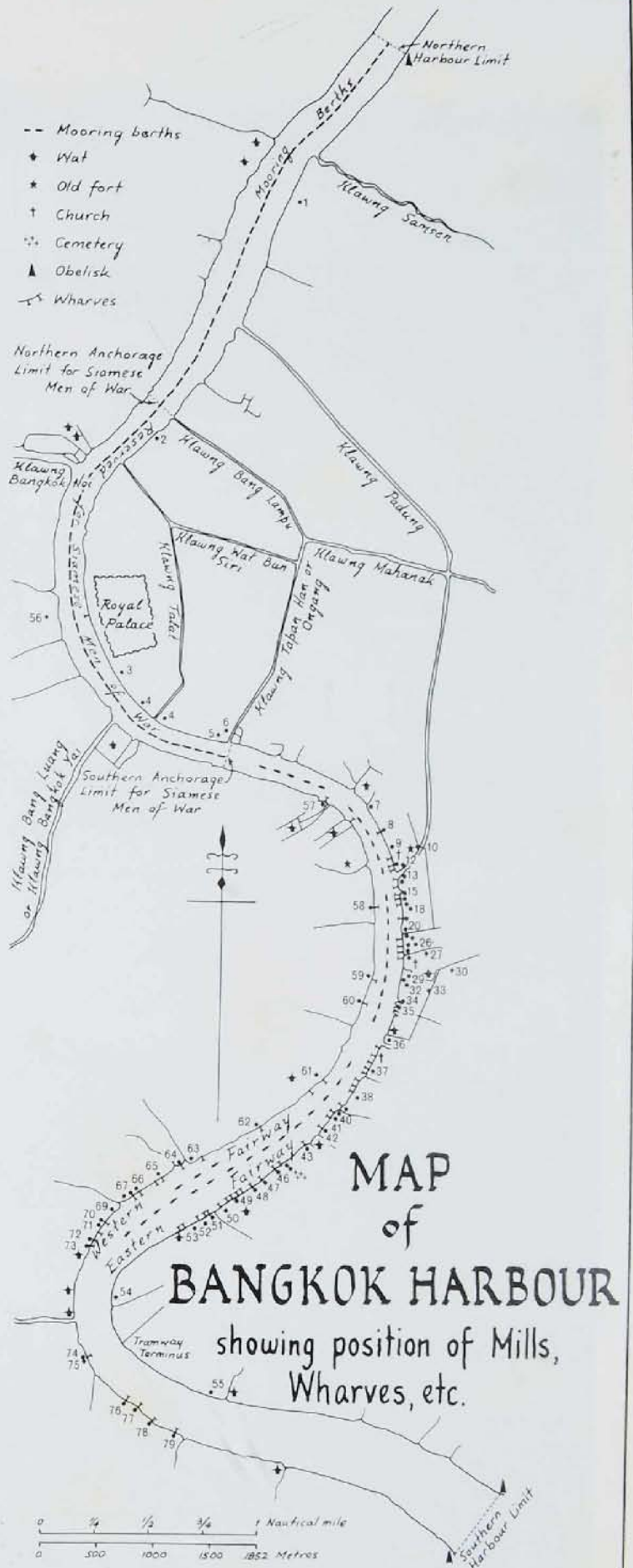
Recent redrafted 'rough sketch' of the Port of Bangkok, made in 1879, which differs somewhat from the original (sadly in an unreproducible condition) and introduces several errors, but still conveys a strong impression of the critical importance to the capital of the Chao Phraya river. Source: Berlingieri, G., *An Oriental Album. A collection of pictures and stories of and about the oldest hotel in Thailand Bangkok*, undated.

A realistic view of the Port of Bangkok circa 1870 looking downstream from the phra prang of Wat Arun. Source: Vincent, F., *The Land of the White Elephant London, 1873*.

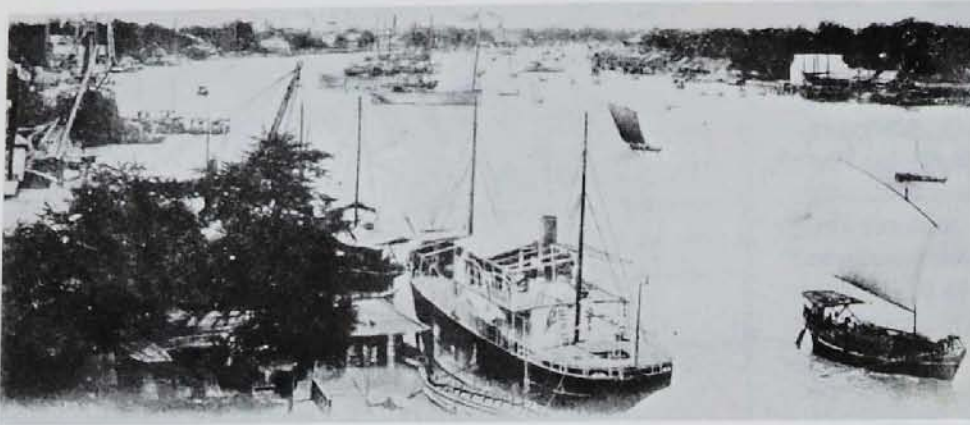


This map of the Port of Bangkok was redrafted from the outsized (*circa* 900 × 2700 centimetres) and unphotographable original chart which was unattributed and undated save that it was 'Photo-Heliographed at the Royal Survey Department., Bangkok' in 1905. An effort has been made to retain the 'flavour' of the magnificent chart from which this map was derived, but certain changes had to be made in order to reproduce it here. The main alteration was the substitution of symbols and numbers for named places. Numbered places are identified in the list which follows. All the numbers do not appear on the redrafted map in order to maintain clarity in several areas; but the numbers omitted may be readily inferred since these were assigned from north to south: first, east of the river; then, west of the river. All place names are spelled as they appeared on the original chart.

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Prince Mahit                      | 44. Bangkok Rice Mills or Tit Lee Chan      |
| 2. Prince Naret                      | 45. Kim Ching & Co.                         |
| 3. Tatién Market                     | 46. Howarth Erskine's Shipway               |
| 4. Survey Office                     | 47. Wang Lee or Leeang Ha Chan              |
| 5. Post Office No. 1                 | 48. Guan Joo Tye (or Phra Bak Dee)          |
| 6. Russian Legation                  | 49. East Asiatic Co. Ltd.                   |
| 7. Water Works                       | 50. Borneo Co.'s Saw Mill                   |
| 8. Harbour Department                | 51. Borneo Co.'s Rice Mill                  |
| 9. Buan Hoa Seng                     | 52. Sieng Kee Chan                          |
| 10. Bangkok Manufacturing Co. Ltd.   | 53. Clarke & Co.                            |
| 11. Kiam Hoa Heng & Co.              | 54. Bangkok Printing Office S.J. Smith      |
| 12. Markwald & Co. (Austrian consul) | 55. Bangkok Police Station                  |
| 13. Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank        | 56. Naval Department                        |
| 14. Messagies Fluviales Diana & Co.  | 57. Ban Hong Long                           |
| 15. Schmidt Fertsch & Co.            | 58. Mah Wah's Rice Mill or Guan Chiang Seng |
| 16. Portugese Consul                 | 59. Seng Huat Chan                          |
| 17. British Legation                 | 60. Lee Tit Guan                            |
| 18. American Legation                | 61. Denny Mott & Dickson                    |
| 19. Custom House                     | 62. Phya Samudh                             |
| 20. Post Office No. 2                | 63. Bombay Burmah Trading Co. Ltd.          |
| 21. French Legation                  | 64. Rice Mill                               |
| 22. Falck & Berdek                   | 65. American Mission Samray                 |
| 23. Chartered Bank                   | 66. Mah Wah                                 |
| 24. Oriental Hotel                   | 67. Guan Hong Seng                          |
| 25. Siam Observer                    | 68. Guan Hoa Seng                           |
| 26. Assumption College               | 69. Arracan Co. Ltd.                        |
| 27. East Asiatic Co.                 | 70. Wang Lee                                |
| 28. Khwee Yuan Long                  | 71. Wan Heng                                |
| 29. Bangrak Hospital                 | 72. Yeah Heng Chan                          |
| 30. Howarth Erskine Ltd.             | 73. Kwang Hap Seng                          |
| 31. Joo Seng                         | 74. Ma Hia Rice Mill                        |
| 32. Bangrak Markets                  | 75. Barthing Officer's Station              |
| 33. Ah Fock's Dock                   | 76. Windsor & Co's Oil Godown               |
| 34. Bangkok Dock Co. Ltd.            | 77. Hap Heng Rice Mill                      |
| 35. Borneo Co.                       | 78. Phya Pakdi Rice Mill                    |
| 36. Windsor & Co.                    | 79. Borneo Co.'s Oil Godown                 |
| 37. Rice Mill                        |   |
| 38. Markwald & Co.                   |   |
| 39. Lee Huat                         |   |
| 40. Hong Lee or Poh Chin Soo         |   |
| 41. Lo Bang Seng or Buan Seng Chan   |   |

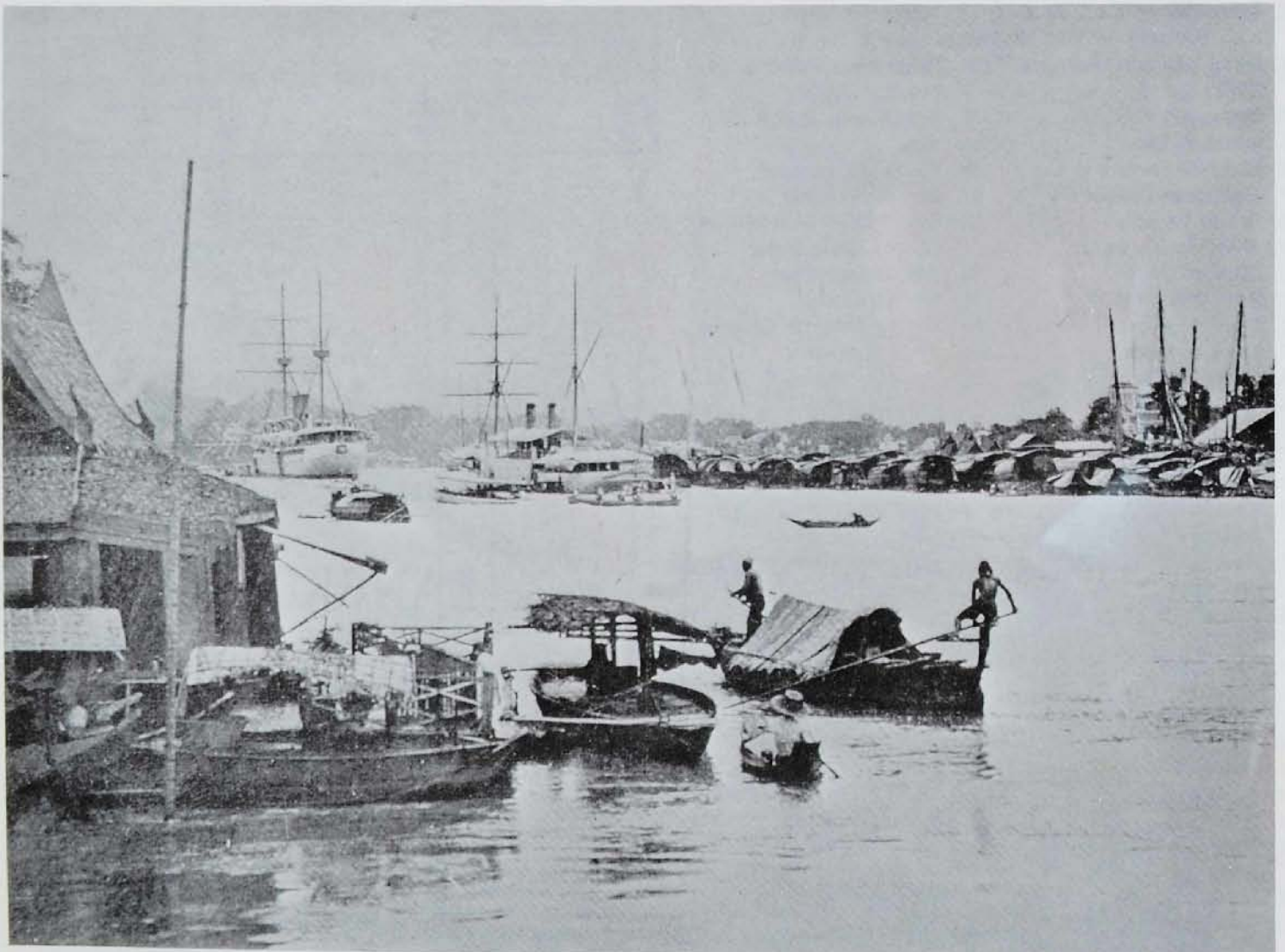


Source: Original held at the National Library of Thailand.



Graphic views of the Port of Bangkok at the turn of the century; looking southward along the commercial-industrial reach of the river from a point near the southern mouth of Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem.

Source: Besso, S., *Siam and China* London, 1911.



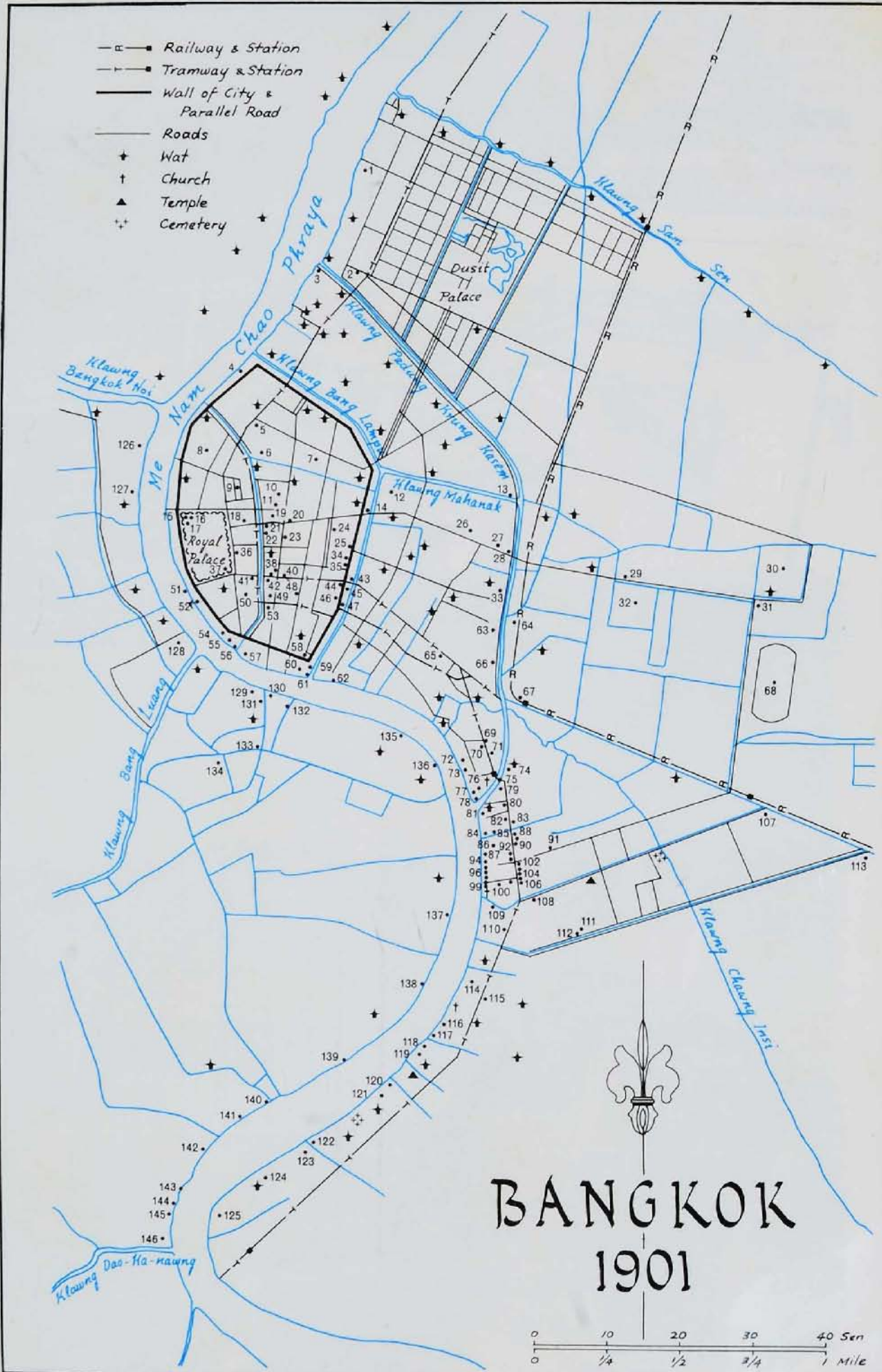
Source: Carter, A.C., *The Kingdom of Siam* New York and London, 1904.



The 'Broadway of Bangkok', the Chao Phraya river circa 1900; from documentary drawings.  
Source: Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg, Siam das Reich des weissen Elefanten Leipzig, 1899.



- R — ■ Railway & Station
- T — ■ Tramway & Station
- Wall of City & Parallel Road
- Roads
- ★ Wat
- † Church
- ▲ Temple
- †† Cemetery



This map of Bangkok 1901 was adapted and redrafted from the outsized (*circa* 60 × 100 centimetres) and unphotographable original chart. The main changes from the original are the use of colour, the substitution of symbols and numbers for named places, and the omission of most road and waterway names. Numbered places are identified in the list which follows. All numbers do not appear on the redrafted map in order to maintain clarity in several areas, but the numbers omitted may be readily inferred since these were assigned from north to south: first, east of the river; then, west of the river. All place names are spelled as they appeared on the original chart. Although the omission of many of the road names was necessitated in order to maintain clarity, that many of the roads shown were planned rather than present (the Dusit Palace area, for example, was not yet on the ground) was good reason to mitigate the apparent importance of roadways *vis-à-vis* waterways.

- |                                  |   |                                      |
|----------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Prince Mahit                  | 50. Garden                                    | 98. Oriental Hotel                   |
| 2. Prince Ratburi                | 51. Ta Tien                                   | 99. East Asiatic Co.                 |
| 3. Prince Kitia Kawn             | 52. Police Station                            | 100. Assumption College              |
| 4. Prince Nares                  | 53. John Sampson and Son                      | 101. Siam Observer                   |
| 5. Prince Kosit                  | 54. Royal Survey Office                       | 102. British Dispensary              |
| 6. Prince Pi San                 | 55. Sunandalaya                               | 103. Bodega Hotel                    |
| 7. Tukdin                        | 56. B. Grimm & Co.                            | 104. Banque De l'Indo Chine          |
| 8. Museum                        | 57. Survey Department                         | 105. English Pharmacy                |
| 9. Siamese Court                 | 58. Siam Electricity Co. Ltd.                 | 106. Bangkok Dispensary              |
| 10. Prince Sum Pra Sat           | 59. Flag Staff                                | 107. Phraya Surisak                  |
| 11. Prince Nara                  | 60. Russian & Danish Consulates               | 108. Hospital                        |
| 12. Pu Kao Tawng [Golden Mount]  | 61. Post Office No. 1                         | 109. Messrs. Howarth Erskine         |
| 13. Prince Nakawn Chaisi         | 62. German Siam Trading                       | 110. Market                          |
| 14. Police Station               | 63. Siam Canals, Land and Irrigation Co. Ltd. | 111. Italian Consulate               |
| 15. Foreign Office               | 64. Royal Railway Office                      | 112. German Consulate                |
| 16. Treasury                     | 65. Photo Studio                              | 113. German Minister                 |
| 17. Mint                         | 66. Police Station                            | 114. Bangkok Dock Co.                |
| 18. War Department               | 67. Workshops [Railway]                       | 115. Police Station                  |
| 19. Prince Photaret              | 68. Race Course                               | 116. Borneo Co.                      |
| 20. Post Branch                  | 69. Photo Studio                              | 117. Messrs. Windsor                 |
| 21. Messrs. Badman               | 70. Western Dispensary                        | 118. Consulate for Norway and Sweden |
| 22. Local Government             | 71. Borispa Court                             | 119. Messrs. Markwald                |
| 23. Prince Tisseman              | 72. Public Works                              | 120. Law Sai Seng                    |
| 24. Prince Wattana               | 73. Convent                                   | 121. Bangkok Rice Mills              |
| 25. School                       | 74. Japanese Legation                         | 112. East Asiatic Co.'s Mills        |
| 26. Children's Home              | 75. Nai Lert                                  | 123. Borneo Co.'s Mills              |
| 27. Government Printing Office   | 76. Messrs. Kian Hoa Heng                     | 124. Messrs. Clarke Co.              |
| 28. Phraya Sri                   | 77. Messrs. Markwald                          | 125. S.J. Smith                      |
| 29. Prince Sawasti               | 78. Austrian Consulate                        | 126. Wang Lang Hospital              |
| 30. Lotus Gardens                | 79. Bangkok United Club                       | 127. Royal Dockyard                  |
| 31. Rifle Range                  | 80. Bangkok Times                             | 128. Palace of Late Prince Awng Yai  |
| 32. Royal Survey School          | 81. H.S. Bank                                 | 129. Chao Phraya Bhaskarawongse      |
| 33. Hospital                     | 82. Printing Office Gotte & Co.               | 130. Phraya Bhanuwongse              |
| 34. Goal                         | 83. Ch. Kinder.                               | 131. Phraya Chantabun                |
| 35. Police Station               | 84. Oriental Inn                              | 132. Phraya Montri                   |
| 36. Royal Garden                 | 85. Portuguese Consulate                      | 133. King's College                  |
| 37. Artillery                    | 86. British Consulate                         | 134. Chao Phraya Suriwongse          |
| 38. Seekak Dispensary            | 87. American Consulate                        | 135. River Police Station            |
| 39. Out Fitting Co.              | 88. Bangkok Library                           | 136. Lunatic Asylum                  |
| 40. American Import Co.          | 89. Italian Hotel                             | 137. Pu Huat                         |
| 41. British Dispensary Branch    | 90. Kerr & Co.                                | 138. Denny Mott & Dickson            |
| 42. School                       | 91. German Club                               | 139. Phraya Samut                    |
| 43. Prince Damrong               | 92. Police Station                            | 140. Bombay Burma T.C.               |
| 44. Prince Pichit                | 93. Siam Free Press                           | 141. Hok Fok                         |
| 45. Boripah Hospital             | 94. Custom House                              | 142. American Mission                |
| 46. Prince Ong-Noi               | 95. Post Office No. 2                         | 143. Arracan Co.                     |
| 47. Boy's English Central School | 96. French Consulate                          | 144. Chasua Luan                     |
| 48. Police Station               | 97. Chartered Bank                            | 145. Phraya Swat                     |
| 49. Chao Phraya Thewed           |   | 146. Hog Seng                        |

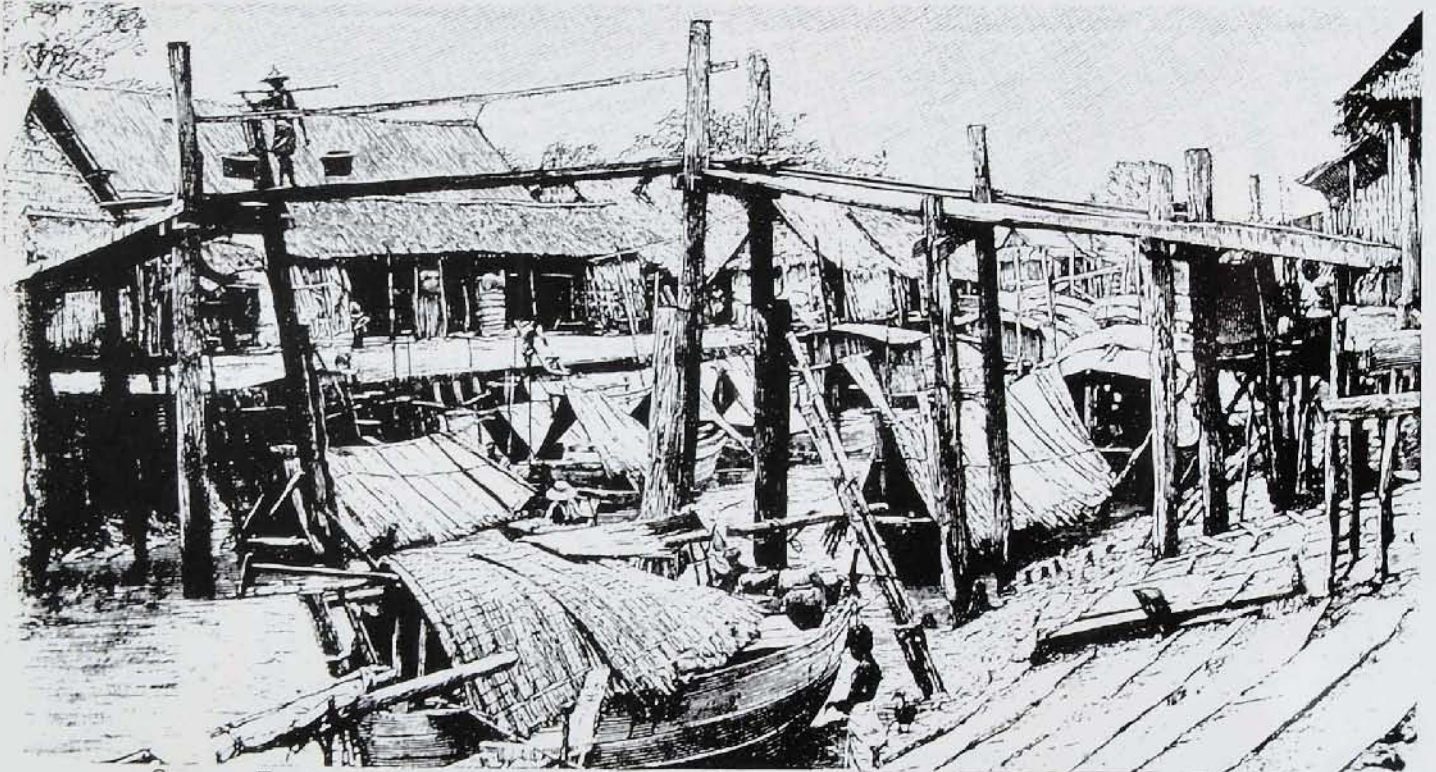
Source: Original held at the National Library of Thailand.



Densely settled, heavily trafficked avenues in Bangkok circa 1900; from painstakingly detailed realistic drawings.



Source: Birdwood, Sir G. (ed.), *Travels in the East of Nicholas II Emperor of Russia when Cesarewitch 1890-1891* Westminster, 1896.

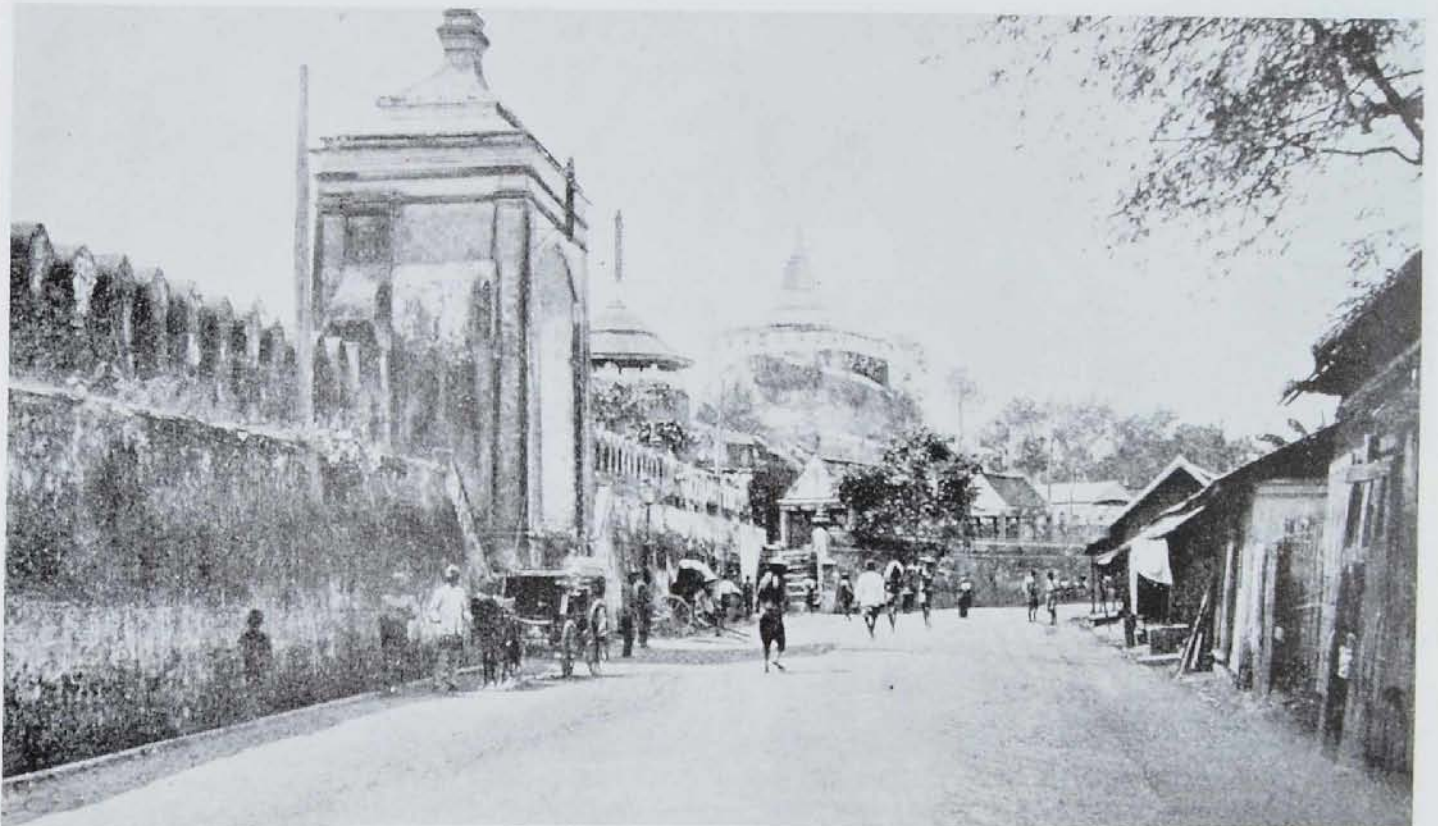


Source: Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg, *Siam das Reich des weissen Elefanten* Leipzig, 1899.

Source: Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg, Siam das Reich des weissen Elefanten Leipzig, 1899.

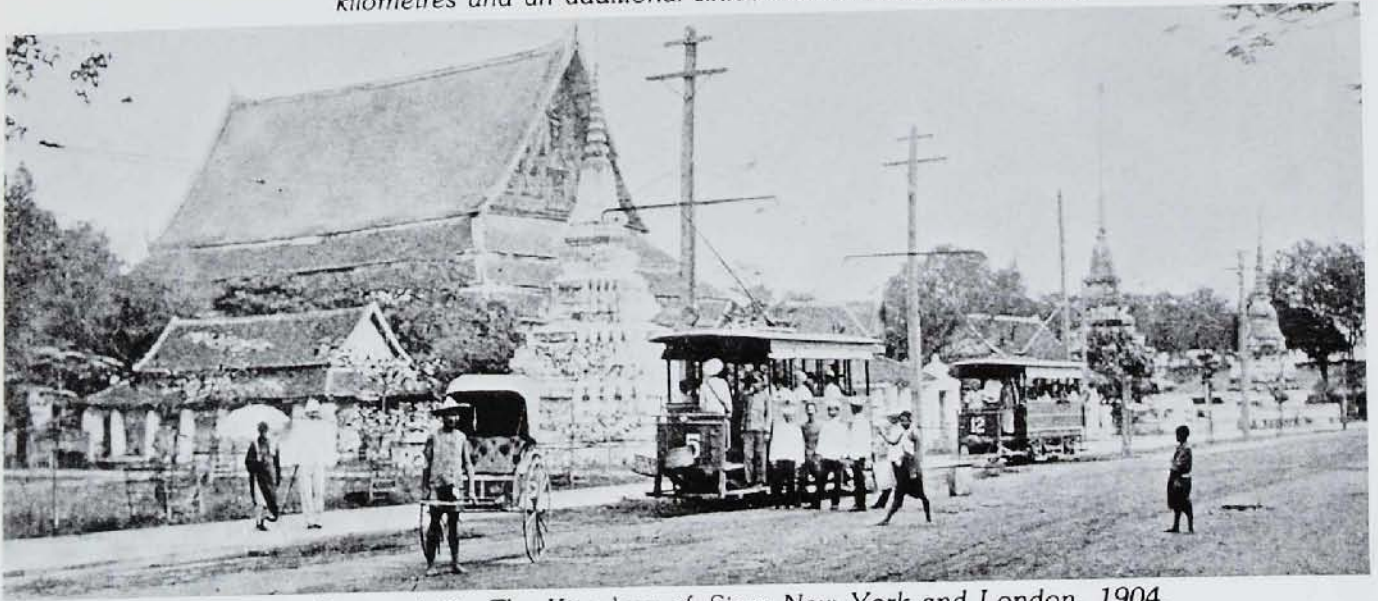


At the turn of the century there were few modern landways in Bangkok and these were lightly used. The avenue shown is Maha Chai road paralleling the 'city wall': above, looking northward toward the 'Golden Mount' from the vicinity of the residence of the Minister of Interior (from a photograph circa 1900); below, looking southeastward toward the 'Golden Mount' (from a photograph circa 1900) from a point near Ratchadamnoen Boulevard (Royal Promenade) which passed through a broad gap in the wall and over the 'city moat', just the other side of the wall, on a fine marble bridge.

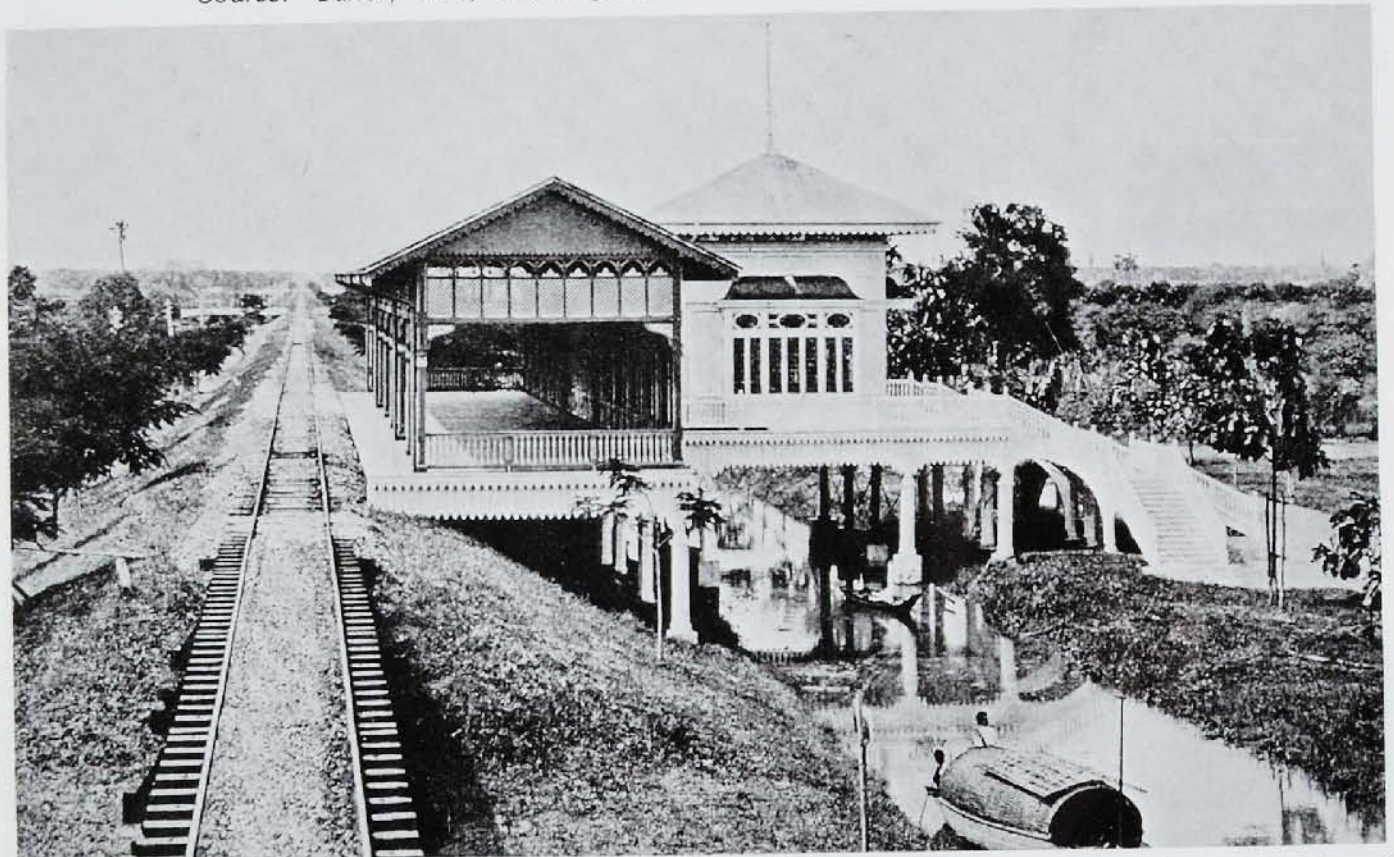


Source: Carter, A.C., The Kingdom of Siam New York and London, 1904.

Electrified tramways were introduced in Bangkok in 1894 when horse-drawn trams still served many European capitals. Cheap, efficient, well-patronized and exceptionally profitable, tramways rapidly reached out to provide access to most parts of the rapidly expanding city; indeed, the tramways encouraged the city to sprawl into the surrounding countryside. The photograph shown was taken circa 1900 when the length of line open approximated seventeen kilometres and an additional sixteen kilometres was planned.



Source: Carter, A.C., *The Kingdom of Siam New York and London, 1904.*



When this photograph was taken of the King's private station at Bangkok circa 1900, the railway had been steadily extended north and northeastward from the capital during a dozen years. In the words of the Great King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) himself:

The construction of railways has not only the greatest influence upon the development of a country but is also the most striking evidence of that development...By bringing the different parts of a country within close communication the railway renders possible that close and beneficial supervision which is necessary to effective administration. By furnish-

ing rapid and easy means of transportation, it adds materially to the value of the land and its products... The railway wherever it goes carries with it enlightenment and encourages the growth of that national feeling which is so important an element in the welfare of a country.

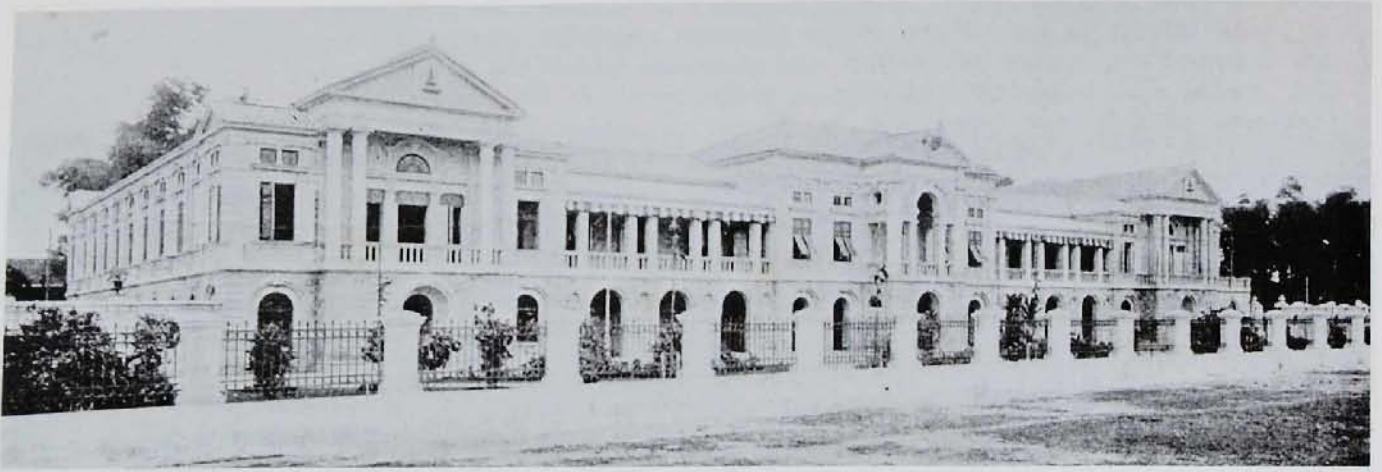
*The elevation of the railbed above the dead level of the delta was necessitated by the periodic flooding of the lower reaches of the Chao Phraya river system, and was accomplished by heaping up material dug from either side leaving so-called 'borrow pits' which immediately became waterways since the watertable lay about a foot below the surface.*



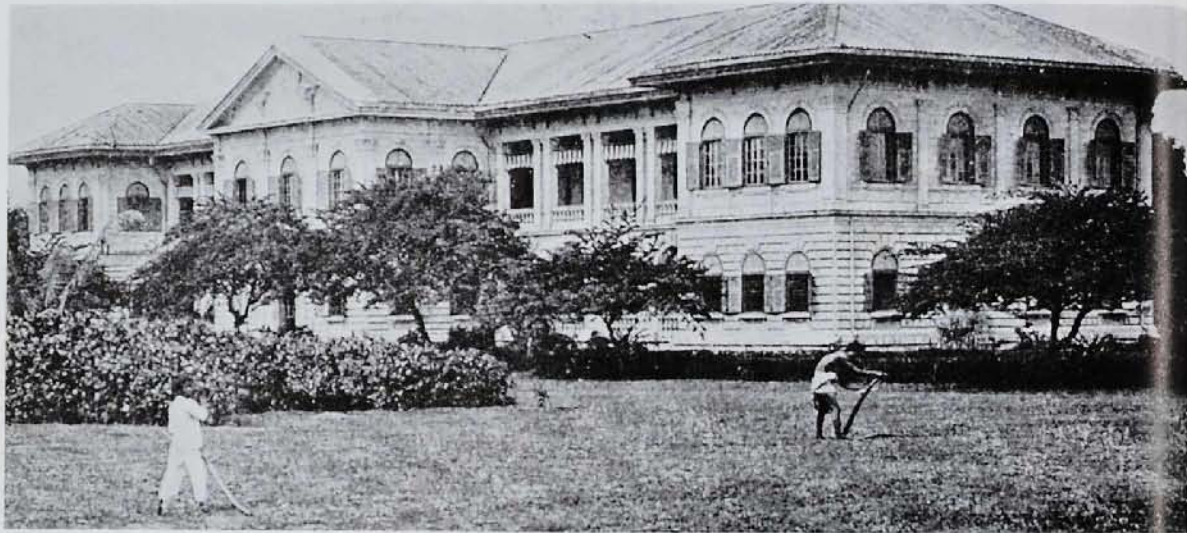
The erection of continuous lines of masonry shophouses in Bangkok is among the improvements said to have been encouraged by King Chulalongkorn following His Majesty's visits to Penang and Singapore. Early shophouse rows lined better streets within the 'city wall' as shown in this photograph circa 1900. Source: Carter, A.C., *The Kingdom of Siam* New York and London, 1904.



Along the main commercial strip of Bangkok, lengthy Charoen Krung or 'New Road' circa 1905, where Siamese, Chinese, Indians, Malays and Europeans — to name only 'nationalities' well represented — met to engage in a brisk trade. Source: Hosséus, C.C., *Durch König Chulalongkorn's Reich* Stuttgart, 1912.



*The Saranorom Palace; known as the Hall of Ambassadors because distinguished visitors were accommodated here. Now the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

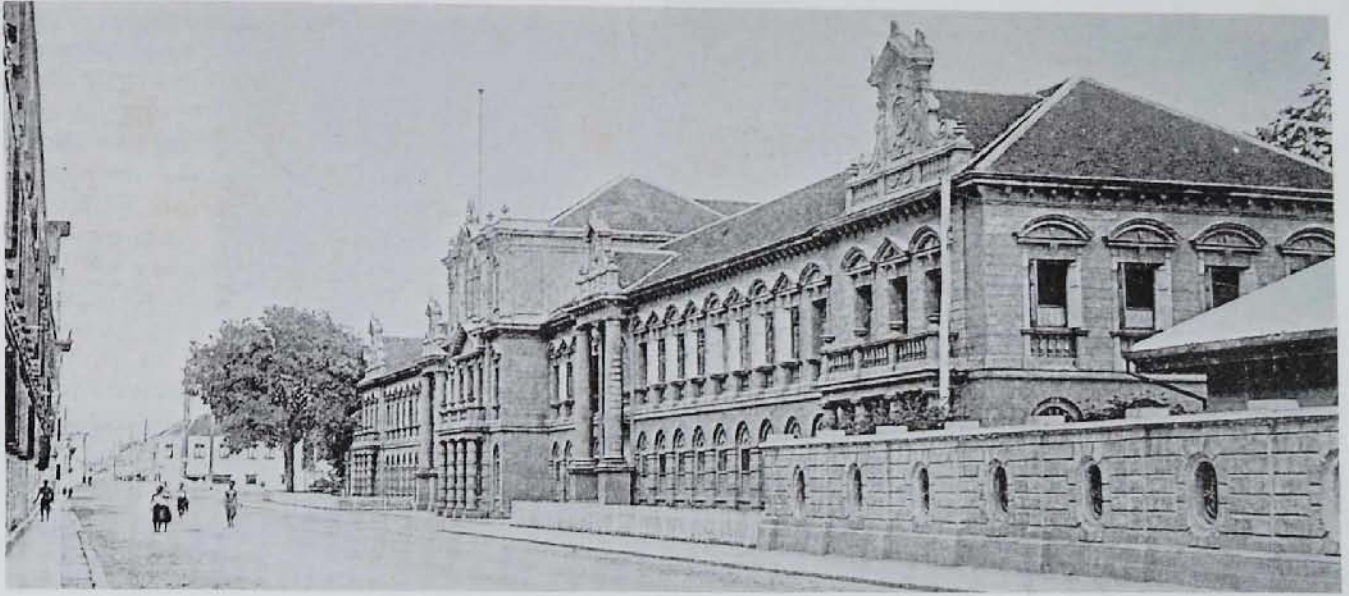


► *Head Office of the Royal State Railways.*



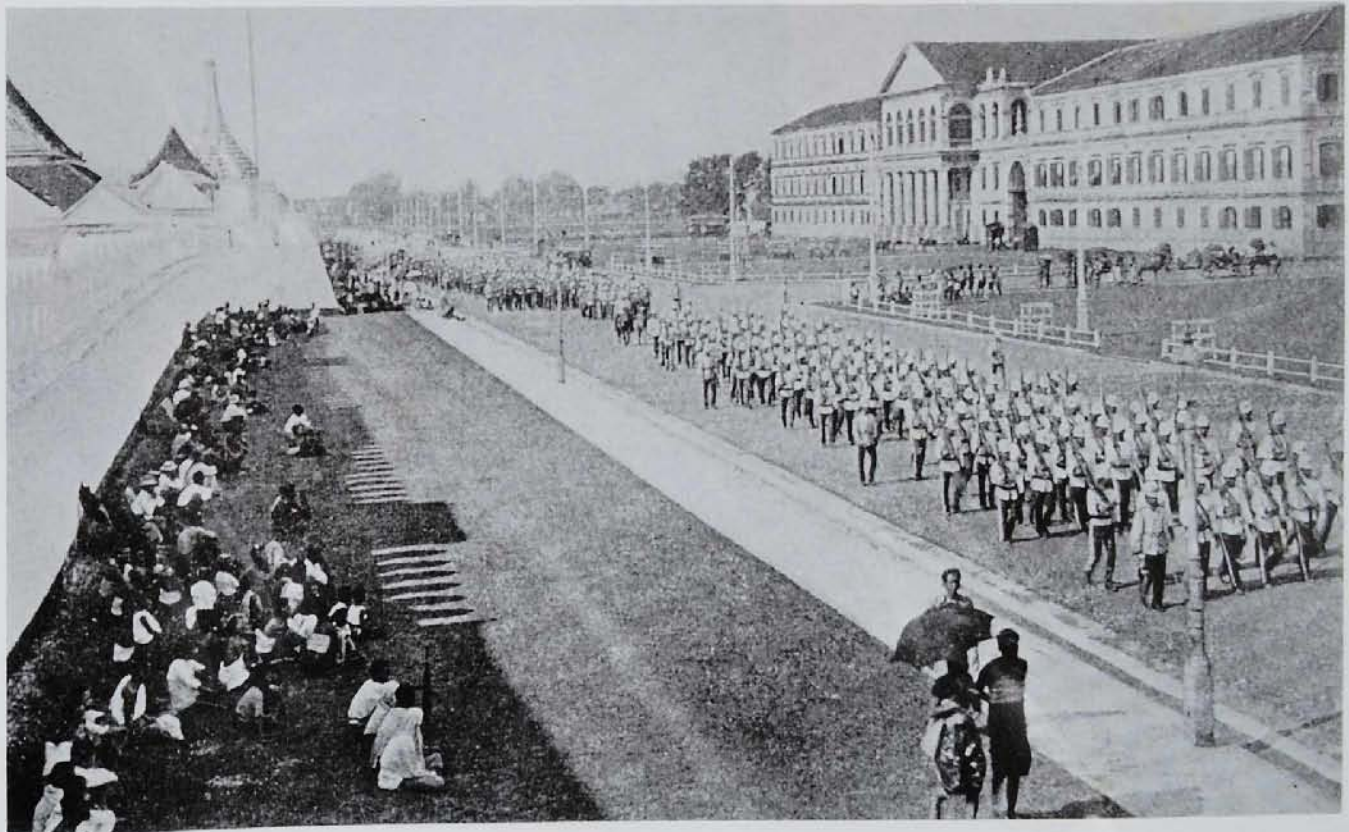
◀ *Central Post Office; now removed.*

*By the turn of the century Bangkok boasted not a few imposing public buildings in a variety of European styles, of which a few examples are shown as they were photographed circa 1900. These concrete expressions of the modernisation of the kingdom were occupied by sundry government departments themselves modernised after European models. Source: Carter, A.C., The Kingdom of Siam New York and London, 1904.*



*The Royal Military College; now the Military Survey.*

*A military parade passing between the Ministry of War (now the Ministry of Defense) and the east wall of the Grand Palace; from a photograph circa 1900.*

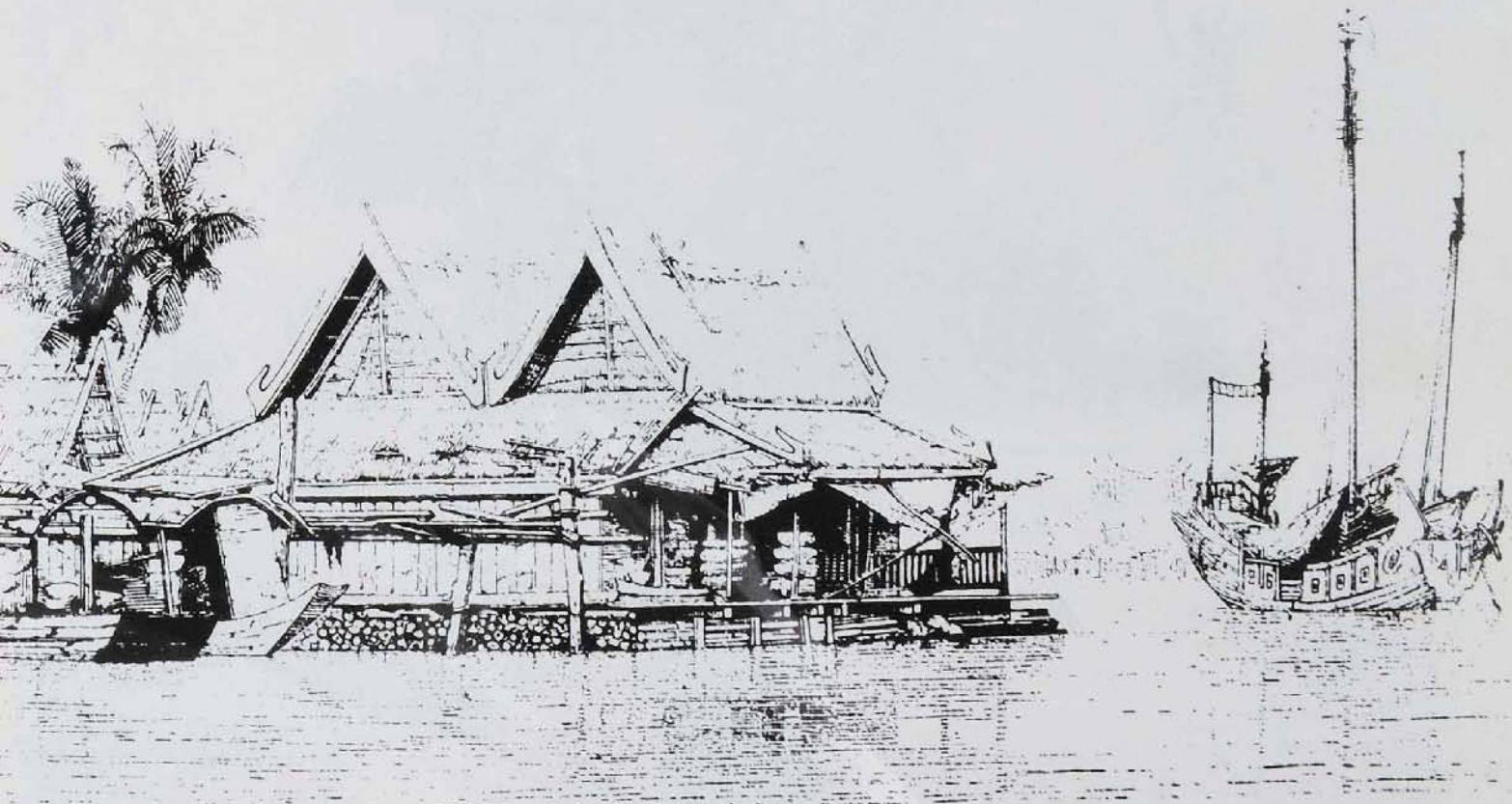




## ALONG THE RIVER AND AMONG THE TREES: 'BANKOK' 1862

A party of Prussians on a scientific expedition to eastern Asia, stopped for a fortnight in Siam on the way home in 1862. Shortly thereafter several members of this expeditionary force had published popular accounts of their travels. Two of these tales were accompanied by lengthy series of photographic-like prints from engravings based on sketches which must have been meticulous. 'Bankok' was portrayed on sixteen exquisite prints, none of which has been reproduced since. The drawings 'talk', and in all tongues; I have merely arranged their show, and provided captions derived from translations of commentaries which accompanied several of the prints, in an attempt to retain the flavour of the original exhibit. □

*Chinese junks lay in the Chao Phraya off the bank which is fronted by a row of floating houses.*







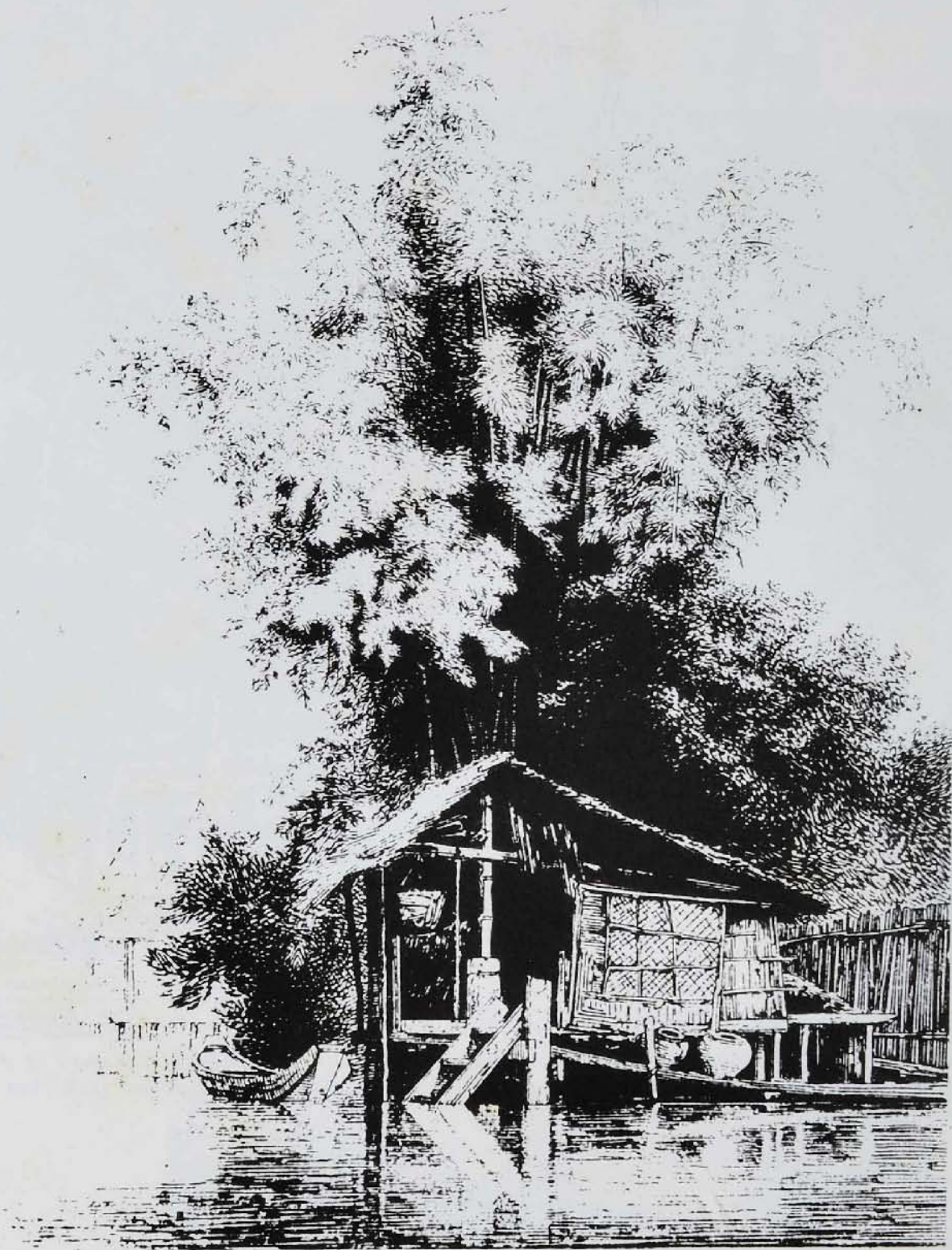
At 'Bankok' the land is covered with wild looking gardens and rank vegetation which springs up spontaneously from the uncultivated ground, and a luxuriant vegetation lines the innumerable waterways and roofs the narrower creeks. In truth, a few minutes from the most densely populated quarters of the capital and one is in the solitude of an exuberant tropical forest.





The city of 'Bankok' lays on both sides of the Chao Phraya river, the water of which feeds innumerable canals and creeks. In the wet season these waterways overflow their banks leaving only a few higher places dry. The population lives in houses of wood and bamboo, placed either on high hurdles along the water's edge, or on bamboo rafts fastened to posts embedded in the bottom muds of the river and the larger canals. There are few dwellings at any distance from the water; in the wet season these would be inaccessible, the ground then being inundated and swampy. Daily, water level rises and falls with the tides in the Gulf of Siam; even the Chao Phraya seems to flow backward for several hours each day. Along the network of waterways either side of the river, the fluctuations in water level give rise to a complicated system of currents which continually undercut the banks, depriving buildings and trees of support and causing them to lean and assume quaint shapes.







*Heavily trafficked watercourses lined with close-standing structures pass through the heart of the city. Bridges commonly are single planks without a parapet; few are of more substantial stuff, but this is understandable since there is little movement overland.*



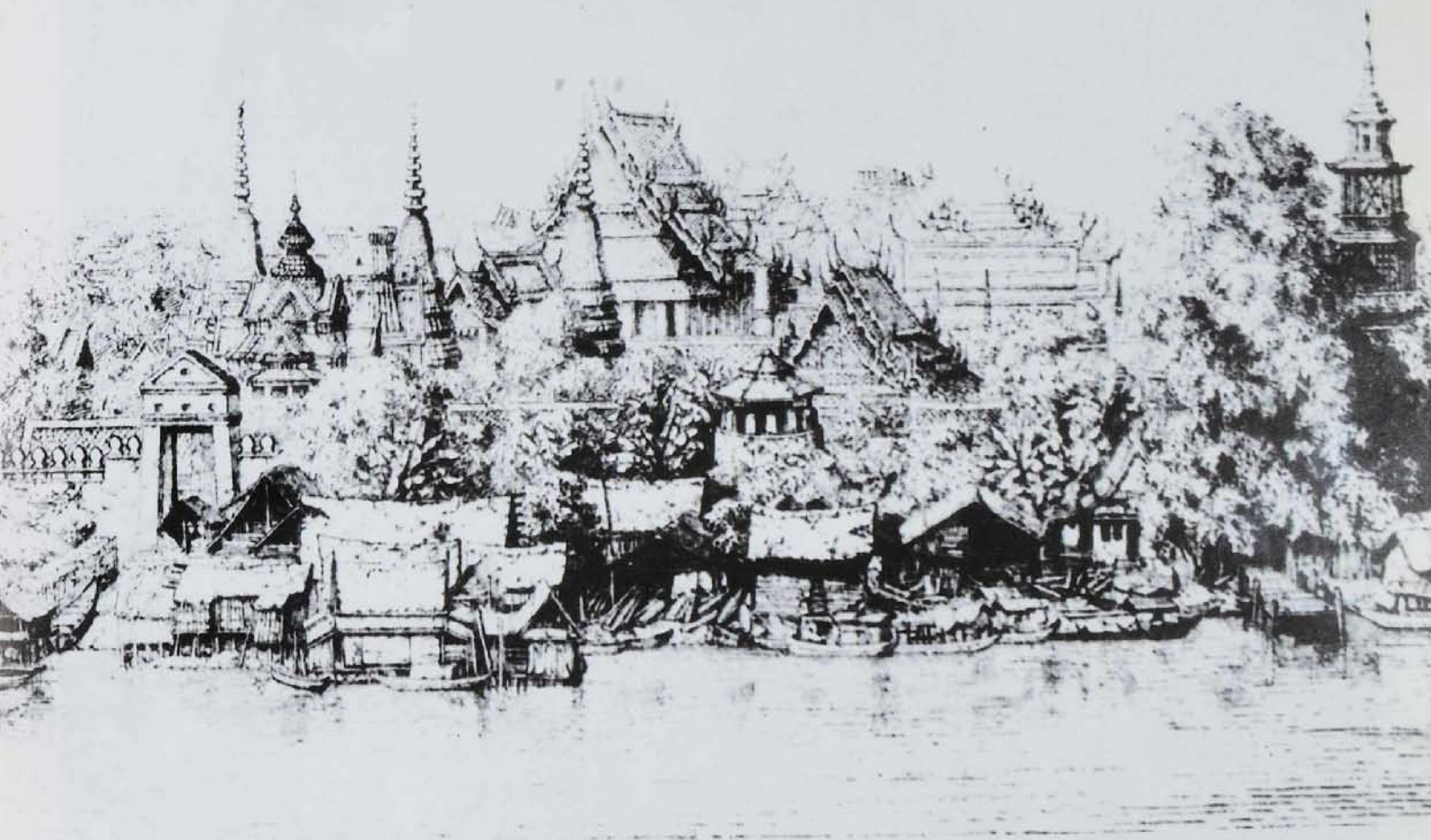


The principal feature of Wat Chang (now Wat Arun) is a tall tower which the French missionaries calculate to be 300 feet high. The profile of this tower is complicated, and the rich ornamentation defies description. The main storeys are ringed by rows of human-like monsters, fabulous animals, and garlands of flowers and foliage. Three-headed elephants look down from window-like niches in the topmost storey just beneath the spire. The ornamentation is executed in white stucco and fragments of broken pottery. Close, this kind of mosaic looks coarse; but even at a small distance it gives a beautiful effect, a colouring both mellow and harmonious. One would not believe that much of the material is broken plates of English manufacture. At

two-fifths of the height of the tower there is a gallery which may be reached by clambering up a ladder-like flight of stone steps. The view from this gallery is magnificent; from here one gets a full impression of the capital. The stately river is covered with craft of all description and thousands of floating houses. The royal city on the opposite bank is reflected in the stream; its gilded roofs and mosaic gables shining like rubies and sapphires. The remainder is one unbounded forest, interrupted only by the highest roofs and the tallest towers; all the creeks and canals lined with thousands of habitations being buried in the dark green foliage. Of the inhabited city only those parts bordering the river are visible. Wat Chang is the focus of picturesque 'Bankok'.

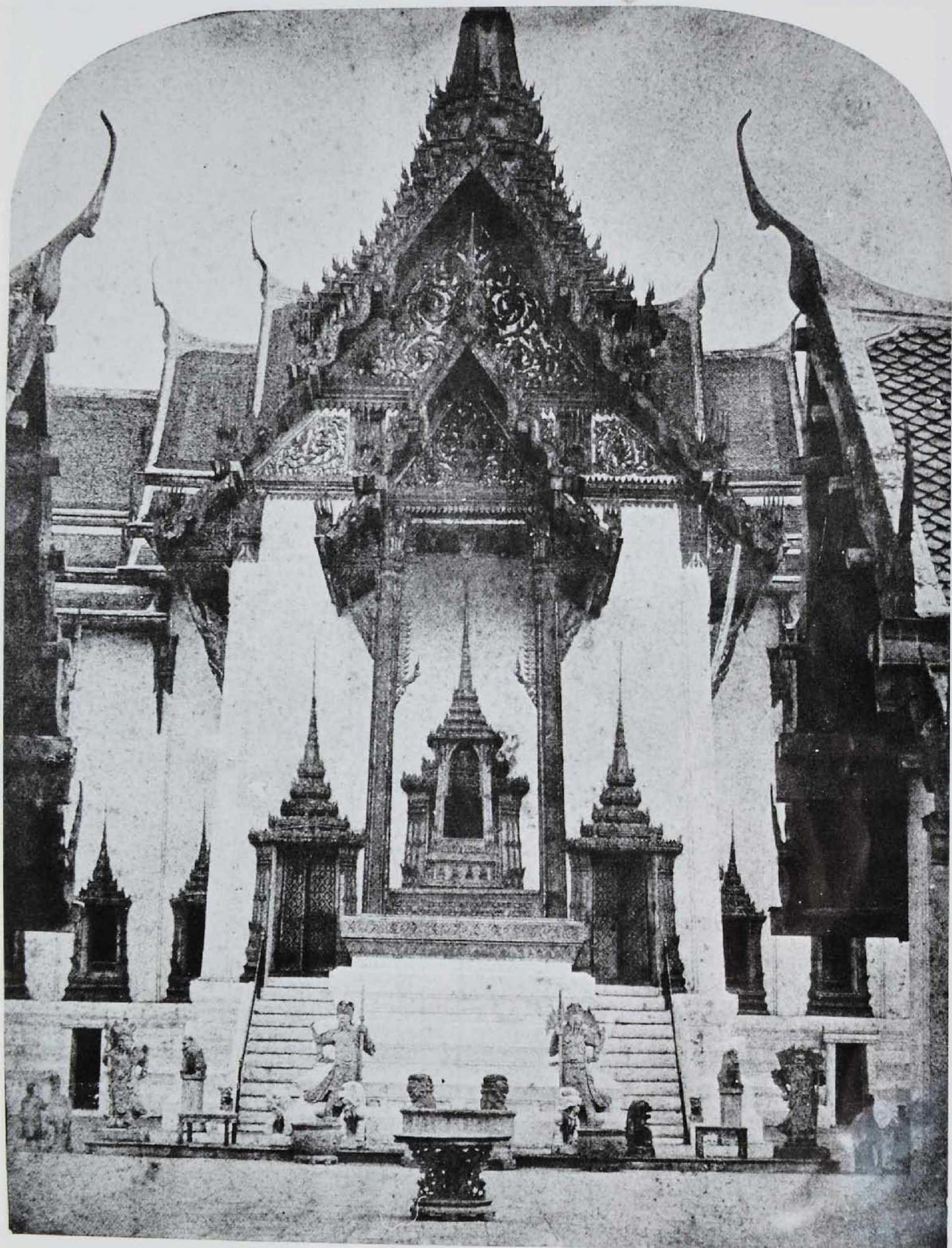


Wat Kalaya, one of the larger monasteries in the capital, located on the west side of the Chao Phraya river. The main building, the bot, houses a colossal gilt statue of The Buddha in a sitting posture.



*The Grand Palace: a maze of delicate spiral roofs, flashing with gold and silver, overtopping white castellated walls with surrounding green lawns, white roads and imposing temples and public buildings.*





*Old Reception Hall in the Palace of the First King of Siam. The Dusit Maha Prasat.*

## CAUGHT IN CAMERA: BANGKOK 1862

The nine photographs which comprise 'Caught in Camera: Bangkok 1862' were taken by J.N. van Kinsbergen, *photographeur extraordinaire* attached to the Dutch Mission to His Majesty King Mongkut in 1862 which was headed by A. Loudon, Envoy Plenipotentiary of the King of The Netherlands. Jan Jetzo Boeles, former Director of Research in the Siam Society under Royal Patronage, discovered the original glass plates of these photographs in the archives of the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology of the Leiden University in The Netherlands; and the Institute generously permitted the first publication of these photographs in PORTRAIT OF BANGKOK. The captions to the photographs come from the list of the contents of 'Bundel 3/196'

in the Institute's archives, to each of which is added the name of the building or monastery and, where necessary, its location.

That these photographs are remarkable is obvious from even a cursory view; how truly remarkable they are technically can only be hinted at: J.N. van Kinsbergen painstakingly developed them using the silver collodium process in which a fortnight might be spent preparing a single cliché. Now, 120 years later, the photographs are sharp; as ageless it seems as the sacred subjects shown.

Are these the first photographs of Bangkok? Probably. These are the earliest photographs of Bangkok yet found. □



Throne Hall in the Palace of the First King of Siam. The Dusit Maha Prasat.



*Temple in the Palace of the First King of Siam. Wat Po.*



*Inner Court of a Buddhist Temple in Siam. Wat Prayunwongsawat, west bank of the Chao Phraya. Identified by Khun Euayporn Kerdchouay, Administrative Secretary of The Siam Society, despite several severe alterations which have since occurred in this scene.*



*Part of the Inner Court of a Buddhist Temple in Siam. Wat Kanlayanimit, west bank of the Chao Phraya. Identified by Khun Euayporn Kerdchouay.*



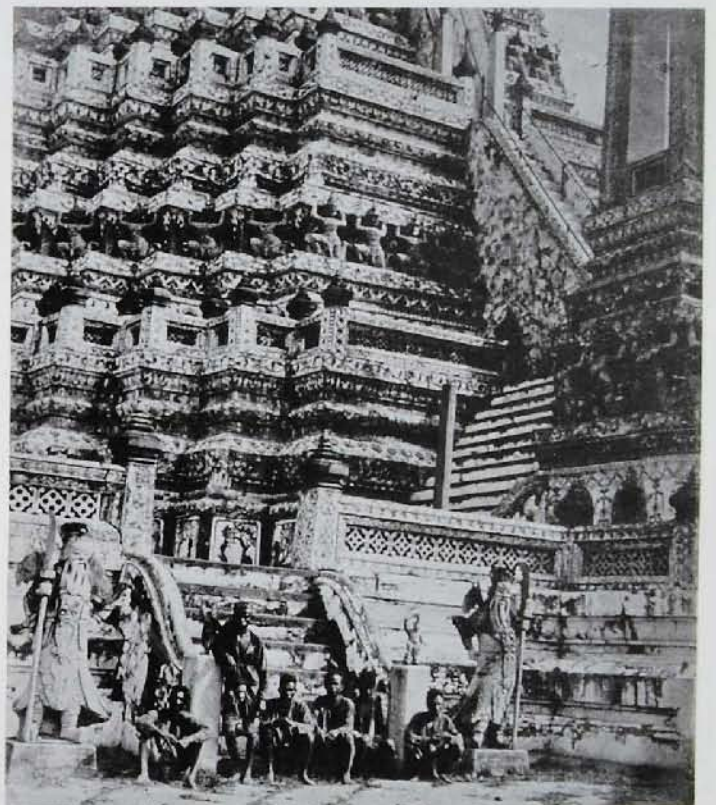
*Part of the Temple of the Prime Minister of Siam, Wat Prayunwongsawat, west bank of the Chao Phraya. Identified by Khun Euayporn Kerdchouay, despite the disappearance of several of the buildings shown.*



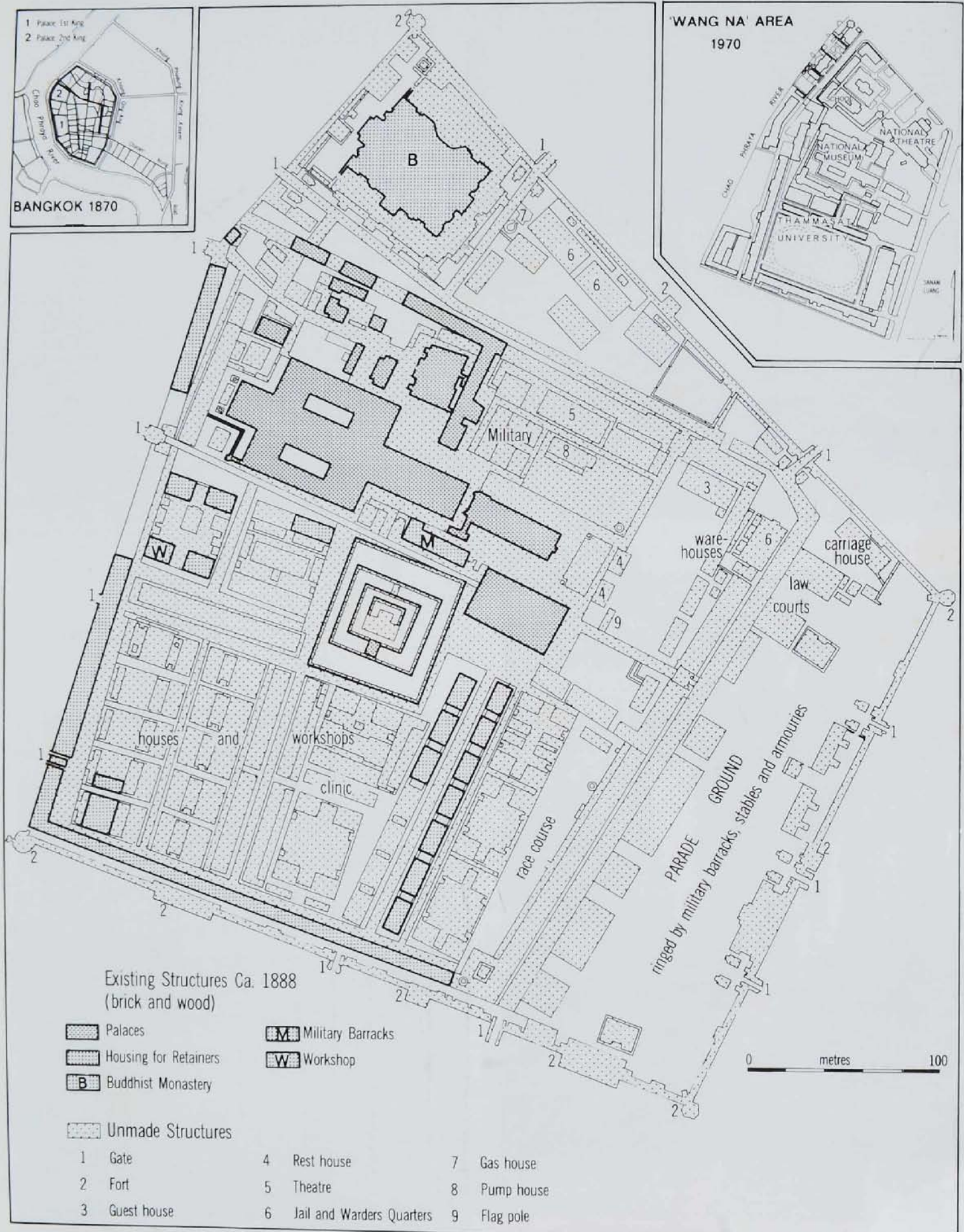
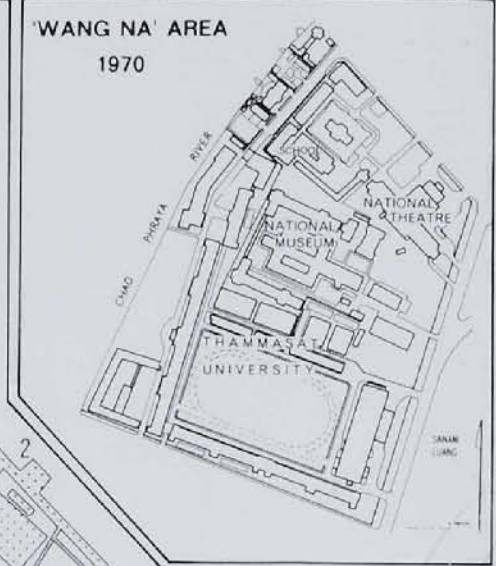
*Great Pagoda in the Temple of the Crown Prince of Siam. Wat Arun.*



*Pagoda in the Temple of the Crown Prince of Siam. Wat Arun.*



*Base of the Pagoda in the Temple of the Crown Prince of Siam. Wat Arun.*



'Wang Na', Palace of the Second Sovereign of Siam

# SECOND SOVEREIGNS OF SIAM

George Washington was the last Second Sovereign of Siam. Immediately after his death in 1885, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) abolished the office of subordinate king.

First notice of a Second Sovereign in the Siamese dynastic system comes from the mid-14th century when the Sovereign of the Kingdom of Sukhotai (centred on the city of Sukhotai, approximately 600 kilometres north of the present capital, Bangkok) appointed his son to this office and posted him to a nearby dependent city-state as reward for quelling an uprising which occurred while he was incapacitated.

Next notice of the Second Sovereign comes a century later from a proclamation of King Boroma Trailokanat (1448-1487) of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (successor to the Sukhotai kingdom, centred on the city of Ayutthaya, approximately 70 kilometres north of Bangkok) in which ascension to sub-sublime status is prescribed: the Second Sovereign was to be the son of a royal consort; the Crown, however, was to pass to the eldest son of the Queen. The Second Sovereign, then, was heir presumptive not heir apparent, unless the Queen failed to bear a son. Should the Sovereign be without male issue or should an eligible son be yet a boy, a brother of the King might be Second Sovereign. Adherence to

◀ *This plan of the Wang Na (Palace of the Second Sovereign of Siam) represents most of what is known to have been built in the half-century before the date of survey. It is based on a plan dated 1888 and amended in 1916 which is included in a 'cremation volume' published in 1966, and incorporates details from an earlier plan dated 1888. This plan of the Wang Na is a generalized and clarified version in that several structures previously distinguished are not, and all ambiguities have been interpreted and are rendered precisely. The Wang Na, when occupied, appears to have been a hive of activity; a densely peopled place of some 3000 residents. Now, the area is devoted entirely to public and semi-public buildings, and residents are few. This change exemplifies adjustments made throughout the former citadel during the century past to accommodate the head offices of the centralised and elaborate bureaucracy which now oversees the development of the populous and rapidly modernising nation named Thailand. Source: 'Originals' held at the National Library of Thailand and included in 'History of the Second Kings' Part 13, Historical Symposium, Literature and History Division, Department of Fine Arts, Bangkok 1966.*

these rules was not strict. In time of trouble, for example, the Sovereign might appoint as Second Sovereign an especially competent and loyal leader; or when the rightful heir to the throne was yet a youth, a Second Sovereign might be selected from among his staunch supporters, or, conversely, from among those who had upheld a usurper. A Second Sovereign might not be appointed; indeed, not half the thirty-four reigns which comprised the 400-odd years of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (1350-1767) featured a subordinate king. A Second Sovereign was a dynastic nicety not an essential.

The little which is known about the office of Second Sovereign elsewhere in mainland Southeast Asia — areas now occupied by Burma, Kampuchea and Laos — relegates these kings to secondariness vis-à-vis the Sovereign. On the Indian sub-continent, from where the notion of a duarchy of sorts seems to have come to the kingdoms of the Indo-Chinese peninsula, the status of the Second Sovereign vis-à-vis the Sovereign appears, at times, to have been more equal though not more essential than in Southeast Asia. A similar ambiguity seems to have characterized the position of Second Sovereign in kingdoms west of the sub-continent which occupied the territory now taken by such states as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria and Egypt. The historic source of the duarchy is, of course, Sparta where joint kings with equal authority was an essential in a political system of checks and balances which sought to offset the power of those in command and so to deter the development of a dictatorship. Lost in the Dark Ages is the beginning of this unique mode of government. The Roman system of dual office bearers appears to have been developed independently, though reference to the Spartan means to a balance of power appears in a treatise on political theory by Polybius and was subsequently taken up by Cicero, who argued against duarchy. Long before the rule of Rome, Europe had discarded the duarchical system.

Each of the first five kings of the Bangkok era (Chakri Dynasty), however, was accompanied by a Second Sovereign: Rama I (1782-1809) appointed his brother; Rama II (1809-1824) appointed his brother; Rama III (1824-1851) appointed his uncle, brother of Rama II; Rama IV (1851-1868) appointed his brother; and a regent appointed the eldest son of the previous subordinate king as Second Sovereign under Rama V (1868-1910) who came to the throne a minor. Each of these Second Sovereigns died before his King. Only Rama I enthroned a second Second Sovereign: his son, subsequently Rama II.



Although Bangkok was plotted in the image of Ayutthaya (which was overrun by the Burmese in 1767) and its principal structures were to correspond to Ayutthayan prototypes, the dissimilar sites, the difficulty of reconstruction and the urgent need to fashion a stronghold to withstand imminent renewed Burmese aggression, disallowed a nice replication. In its lineaments, Bangkok soon came to resemble Ayutthaya — indeed, the very “stone” of the old city was embedded in the new citadel — in particulars, however, the two capitals were unlike, and most unlike in a particular: the palace of the Second Sovereign, the *Wang Na*.

At Ayutthaya, the Grand Palace (*Wang Luang*) was in an “empty quarter”: apart from the day-to-day activities of the capital; safe against direct waterborne attack in a city encircled and penetrated by waterways at the focus of waterways on a delta-plain crisscrossed by waterways. The *Wang Na* stood well away from the *Wang Luang* in a busy corner of the capital readily accessible by water; a castle keeping watch. *Wang Na* means “palace in front”; shield for the Grand Palace. In Bangkok, the two palaces were adjacent and fronted the Broadway of Bangkok, the busy Chao Phraya river; and the *Wang Na*, being upstream from the *Wang Luang*, was “behind” the Grand Palace when viewed from the quarter-deck. One may ascribe this change round to the personalities of the founders of Bangkok: Rama I came to the throne a thoroughly tested and successful military commander; his predecessor, the remarkable general, then King, Taksin, restored the kingdom almost immediately it had been lost following the overthrow of Ayutthaya, and sustained his hegemony over a restive realm by full-blooded strikes from his fastness at Thon Buri which was directly across the river from the citadel-to-be at Bangkok. These kings were omniscient military leaders. A month before the ascension of Rama I, the Burmese throne had been seized by Bodawpaya; he “of boundless ambition”, determined to force all “neighbouring states to yield to his sway”. Preparations for a grand offensive against the Siamese soon were underway. The Siamese made preparations also: Ayutthaya was the model for Bangkok as a strong hand is to its fist.

To secure the strategic advantages of the Bangkok site quickly, first only forts were made of brick; brick removed from the walls of Ayutthaya. All else was wood and thatch. The Sovereign and the Second Sovereign took possession of their palaces, their wood and thatch palaces, in June 1782, barely two months after the ascension of Rama I. Four years later, in 1786, the Grand Palace and, it is believed, the *Wang Na*, as well as other essential structures, had been remade of substantial stuff and the new capital was solemnly named and consecrated.

The *Wang Na* occupied a tract of land differently shaped but only fractionally smaller than the *Wang Luang* and, like the Grand Palace, was

enwalled, moated and strongly fortified. Within, the *Wang Na* palace itself was three interconnected buildings, like the *Wang Luang* following Ayutthayan tradition which dictated that royalty have different quarters for the hot, “cold” and rainy seasons. Like the *Wang Luang*, the *Wang Na* comprised the appurtenances of a small town: various offices of government and administration; housing for a small army of domestics and retainers, and a not too small army; shops and workshops; stables for elephants and horses; storage sheds and yards; places of entertainment and education and recreation. The *Wang Na* was not the *Wang Luang* writ small; it was in effect another, architecturally distinct, Grand Palace.

Indeed, the first Second Sovereign of the Bangkok era, brother of Rama I, expressed his intention to make the *Wang Na* the Grand Palace, when he assumed the throne; a peculiar aspiration, all the more strange for having been articulated, since the eldest son of Rama I was the legitimate heir. Odd too, the south wall of the *Wang Na*, the wall facing the *Wang Luang*, was topped by an unusually long “fighting hall”, a covered platform in which guns were mounted. Curious also, the *Wang Na*, including four princely palaces for the sons of the Second Sovereign, was built of brick during the First Reign despite that brick was in short supply and that the *Wang Luang* was of wood until the Third Reign. It appears Rama I humoured his brother during the latter’s lifetime. If so, he appears to have lost all patience with the Second Sovereign when the latter, in the throes of fatal cholera, laid a curse on any future Second Sovereign not his descendant who occupied the *Wang Na*. Rama I did not appoint a Second Sovereign until three years after the death of his brother and then he appointed his son — thereby precluding counter claims to either throne by descendants of the first Second Sovereign — and domiciled him across the river in the former palace of King Taksin. The *Wang Na* was unoccupied for seven years.

On assuming the throne in 1809, Rama II appointed as Second Sovereign his brother who took up residence in the *Wang Na* as he was married to a daughter of the first Second Sovereign and thereby unthreatened by the malediction. During eight years in residence, until his death in 1818, the Second Sovereign undertook no new construction in the *Wang Na* but he did effect a change through demolition. Among the structures unmade, several were either especially fancied by the first Second Sovereign or associated with royal ceremonies. Was there other than personal purpose behind this destruction? Was it intended to reduce the status of the Second Sovereign vis-à-vis the King and to erase traces of the original architect of the *Wang Na*? Probably. Rama II did not appoint another Second Sovereign.

The *Wang Na* was unoccupied for seven years.

Rama III was the eldest son of Rama II, but not the eldest son of the Queen. The eldest son of the Queen, aged twenty and a Buddhist monk when his father died, was denied his birthright by a powerful group at Court led by a brother of Rama II who subsequently became Second Sovereign. The *Wang Na* was reoccupied, since the Second Sovereign was a son-in-law of the first Second Sovereign and ran no risk of ruin under the latter's curse. During his residence of eight years, the *Wang Na* was virtually rebuilt, and beautifully; but on the death of the Second Sovereign in 1832, construction yet underway was not completed and Rama II did not appoint another in his place.

The corpse of the Second Sovereign lay in state for a year, according to custom, after which period it was taken in fabulous procession to be cremated. For one spectator,

A painting, descriptive of the procession, could alone enable a person to form any idea of the scene, for no pen could describe it, it being impossible even to imagine names for the figures of the animals, griffins, nondescript monsters &c. which were drawn along on hurdles by large groups of men.

For the good envoy from the President of the United States of America sent in 1833 to enter into a treaty with the kings of Siam, the pen sufficed; unfortunately to reproduce his "brief" of this improbable parade would require overmuch space and so those interested must be referred to Edmund Roberts' *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat; in the U.S. Sloop-of-War Peacock, David Geisinger, Commander, During the Years 1832-3-4* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837). Our word-painter thought the procession an "idle and useless ceremony", a "farical scene, a pretty raree show", and a way "to show the public... the magnificence of majesty, and... to strike them with awe and fear". Possibly, too, it was Rama III's cry of quittance for the late Second Sovereign's support when the Crown was usurped.

The *Wang Na* was unoccupied for eighteen years.

Rama III had intended Rama IV to be his eldest son. When Rama III lay dying in 1851, however, his eldest son by the Queen had already died and no other son satisfied the Council at Court. The younger brother of the eldest son of Rama II — the brother of the rightful heir whom his half-brother, Rama III, had shouldered aside to gain the throne — seems to have been a strong candidate for the kingship, but seemingly too strong for some. A reading of the situation suggests the Council found consensus on a less controversial candidate: the eldest son of Rama II was invited to quit the priesthood (where he had remained during the Third Reign and where, it appears, he had intended to stay) and to assume the Crown. His younger brother was to be appointed Second Sovereign. Whether the eldest son of Rama II agreed to become Rama IV

provided his younger brother was made co-king in a duarchy, or whether the compromise reached by the Council included his younger brother's ascension to the office of Second Sovereign is a moot point; whatever the truth, twelve days after his investiture Rama IV gave near equal kingly status to his younger brother in an unprecedented coronation ceremony which culminated in the bestowal by his own hand of a royal title near enough to his own.

Rama IV often spoke to his nobles of the desirability of cultural interchange with other countries. The Council at Court, prompted perhaps by a detailed account (in the form of a large book) of the investiture of the king of Cochin-China that had been widely disseminated abroad, thought to document the investiture of the Second Sovereign in some detail and forward the account to His Excellency W.J. Butterworth, Governor of the Straits Settlements, with the invitation to publish it if he so desired. His Excellency did so desire, and so a vivid description of the extraordinary investiture of the Second Sovereign, dated "18th day of September, 1851" may be read in *The Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* volume V, July[?] 1851.

Paradoxically, the twenty-seven years' stay in the priesthood had made of Rama IV not only a profound scholar of the scriptures, but had sharpened his reason through study of mathematics and science (astronomy in particular) and had made him acutely aware of the outside world through his great enthusiasm for English. He was an insatiable reader. According to a noted historian of Southeast Asia:

Siam owed to Mongkut [Rama IV] more than anyone else the fact that she preserved her independence when by the end of the nineteenth century all the other states of South-East Asia had come under European control. For he almost alone among his people could see clearly that if China had failed to maintain her isolation against European pressure, Siam must come to terms with the external forces threatening her and begin to accommodate herself to the new world, in which Asian traditionalism appeared outworn and inefficient.

Circumstantial evidence suggests his brother, the Second Sovereign, merits much credit also for the modernization of the kingdom. A brief anthology of the characterizations of this Prince by foreign visitors to and residents of Bangkok during the 1830-1850 periods sound a paean:

This prince is probably the most intelligent man among the nobility. He has obtained a sufficient knowledge of the English language, to enable him to read, write, and to speak it with fluency. The prince is very enthusiastic in imitating everything foreign, especially American... and took the keenest interest in what was going on in the great world of the West. He has adopted European customs to a consi-

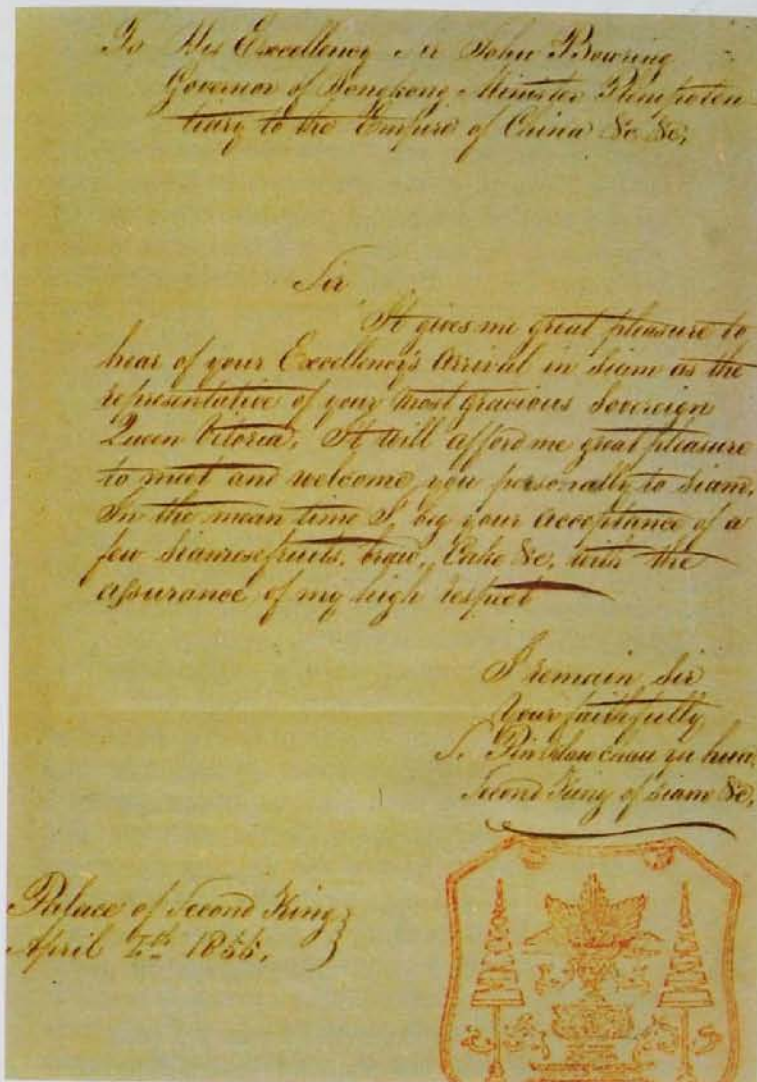
Phra Pin Klao: *penultimate* Second Sovereign of Siam, Fourth Reign of the Bangkok Era. Source: Mouhot, H., *Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China (Siam), Cambodia, and Laos, During the years 1858, 1859, and 1860* London, 1864.



derable extent, and may with propriety be termed a scientific man. His naturally fine mind is enlarged and improved by intercourse with foreigners, by the perusal of English works, by studying Euclid and Newton, by freeing himself from a bigoted attachment to Buddhism, by candidly recognizing our superiority, and a readiness to adopt our arts. He was well read in English literature. He understands the use of the sextant and chronometer; and spent portions of every day in drawing and mathematics, in astronomy and navigation... in the several branches of natural history... he evinced surprising aptitude... He also turned his attention to watch and clock-making which he first thoroughly taught

himself, and then imparted to a picked squad of his own servants, by whom were constructed some very respectable time-pieces — the first ever manufactured in Siam. He cast guns and cannon by his own unaided skill; and... succeeded in substituting for the... junks of the country first-class ships and barques built after the European model. Each year... produced some new trophy to the energy and ability of [the] Prince... and it is unquestionably true that the wonderful progress in western civilization and the arts made by Siam... received its first impetus from [him]...

During the Third Reign, the Prince took active service in the military and diplomatic departments of government. He was loaded with honours and titles,



Note fairly penned by and bearing the seal of the Second Sovereign of Siam. Source: Bowring, Sir J., *The Kingdom and People of Siam* London, 1857.

appointed commander of naval and military forces, superintended the construction of a number of important defensive works and led a successful expedition against the Cochinchinese. He was responsible for the ticklish English-language negotiations and correspondence of the kingdom while the British were bringing Burma and Malaya to heel, and the East India Company and the United States of America negotiated agreements with Siam. Adviser, if not confidant, of Rama III, the Prince regularly attended ministerial meetings at the Grand Palace, and was regarded by many as heir apparent, though not so officially. Indeed, envoys from the West saw the Prince "as a sort of Siamese Peter the Great"; an Oriental counterpart to the enlightened Tsar who metamorphosed medieval Muscovy into modern Russia. Were these ambassadors aware also that Peter I had shared the Diamond Throne with his elder, but sickly, half-brother Ivan V when both were but boys under the regent Sophia?

During the Fourth Reign, the Second Sovereign, though surrounded by the trappings of state

was not obviously engaged in affairs of state. His influence may have been great and his advice sought after; if so, his demeanour was discreet. Even the several treaties entered into with various European states and the United States, addressed to the kings of Siam and signed and sealed by both monarchs, seem not to have actively engaged the Second Sovereign himself; indeed, he seems not to have sighted the treaties prior to their ratification. Still, each envoy was mightily impressed with *Secundus Rex Siamensium* and their characterizations of him are readily interwoven into a personation:

... The Second King was... a gentleman of very cultivated understanding... a sensible, quiet, and amiable person... willing to communicate knowledge, and earnest in the search of instruction... writing and speaking English with great accuracy, and living much in the style of a courteous and opulent European noble, fond of books and scientific inquiry, interested in all that marks the course of civilization. His own apartments are convenient, tastefully fitted up, and... lead you to believe you were in the house of an English gentleman... On each side of the room were hair-seat sofas, and over that on one side, was a colored lithograph of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and five of their children... Over the opposite sofa was hung a map of the United States; and at each side of it an oil portrait of Presidents Washington and Pierce... in the corners were correct statuettes of Napoleon, Wellington, Prince Albert and Victoria... One end of this apartment opened upon a smaller one, in which neatly arranged, were his electrical and philosophical apparatus... a considerable museum of mechanical instruments, with models of late improvements in many of the departments of science, excellent sextants and quadrants, miniature screw-steamers, and a variety of modern weapons... one side of it opened into a secluded study, in which were many elegant and convenient arrangements: chemical apparatus and tests; a silver mounted desk; handsome brass field bed, and brass, morocco-covered rocking chair. In this study, and in the main apartment, were bookcases, filled with standard authors, American and English; in general literature, history, science, theology and military affairs.

The King played... very prettily on the pipes of the Laos portable organ. He had a variety of music; and there was an exhibition of national sports and pastimes, equestrian feats, elephant combats, and other amusements... If it be... that cookery is a good index of civilization, there came in... most civilized cake and tea and coffee, as nicely made as if, by some mysterious dumb-waiter they had come... fresh from the restaurants of

Paris. The king made the tea and coffee with his own hand... with the grace of perfect good breeding... and with the conventional inquiry, "Cream and sugar?"... when we said good-bye and left the pleasant, comfortable, home-like rooms... the piano and the music boxes, the cheery hospitality of our good-natured host... it was with something of the sadness which attends the parting from one's native land...

...the impression he makes is most favourable.

The apartments of the Second Sovereign described by his foreign guests was in the *Wang Na*; a *Wang Na* entirely reconstructed, after having been abandoned for eighteen years and in ruins when the Second Sovereign took up residence. The *Wang Na* as rebuilt is represented, it is thought, on the accompanying plan. Most of the new construction and reconstruction in the *Wang Na* followed building which had occurred or was taking place in the Grand Palace, for it was the express desire of Rama IV to accommodate his younger brother as himself. The Second Sovereign expressed himself also in several structures; one, in Western style, held his apartment. His predilection for the military was manifested in a number of buildings and a parade ground for his private standing army of 2000 soldiers and seamen well drilled after the fashion of the West. His love of horses — the Second Sovereign was an accomplished horseman — was reflected in several modern stables and a race track. His concern to introduce modern scientific practice was expressed in a number of workshops, several of which worked metal using up-to-date technology, a small shipyard, kitchens, and a medical facility among other things.

The Second Sovereign died in 1865. His funeral was that of the Sovereign of Siam. Rama IV did not appoint another Second Sovereign, but himself frequented the *Wang Na*; occasionally remaining overnight in a building which had been under construction when the Second Sovereign died.

Rama IV penned a biographical sketch, in English, of his younger brother which was issued shortly after the death of the Second Sovereign; from this, an excerpt:

He made everything new and beautiful, and of curious appearance, and of a good style of architecture, and much stronger than they had formerly been constructed by his three predecessors, the second kings of the last three reigns, for the space of time that he was second king. He had introduced and collected many and many things, being articles of great curiosity, and things useful for various purposes of military acts and affairs, from Europe and America, China, and other states, and placed them in various departments and rooms or buildings suitable for those articles, and placed officers for maintaining and preserving the various things neatly and carefully. He has constructed several buildings

in European fashion and Chinese fashion, and ornamented them with various useful ornaments for his pleasure, and has constructed two steamers in manner of men-of-war, and two steam-yachts, and several rowing state-boats, in Siamese and Cochin-Chinese fashion, for his pleasure at sea and rivers of Siam; and caused several articles of gold and silver being vessels and various wares and weapons to be made up by the Siamese and Malayan goldsmiths, for employ and dress of himself and his family, by his direction and skilful contrivance and ability. He became celebrated and spread out more and more to various regions of the Siamese kingdom, adjacent States around, and far famed to foreign countries, even at far distance, as he became acquainted with many and many foreigners, who came from various quarters of the world where his name became known to most as a very clever and bravest Prince of Siam...

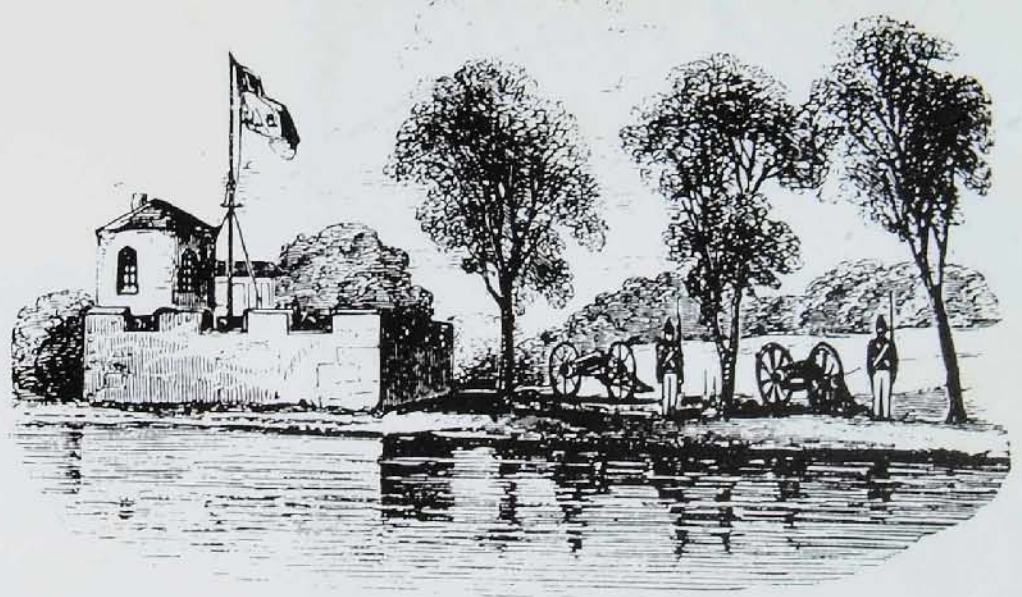
As he pleased mostly with firing of cannon and acts of Marine power and seamen, which he has imitated to his steamers which were made in manner of the man-of-war after he has seen various things curious and useful, and learned Marine customs on board the foreign vessels of war, his steamers conveyed him to sea, where he has enjoyed playing of firing in cannon very often...

He pleased very much in and was playful of almost everything, some important and some unimportant, as riding on Elephants and Horses and Ponies, racing of them and racing of rowing boats, firing on birds and beasts of prey, dancing and singing in various ways pleasantly, and various curiosity of almost everything, and music of every description and in taming of dogs, monkeys, &c., that is to say briefly that he has tested almost everything eatable except entirely testing of Opium and play.

Also he has visited regions of North-eastern Province of Sara Buri and Korat very often for enjoyment of pleasant riding on Elephants and Horses, at forests in chasing animals of prey, fowling, and playing music and singing with Laos people of that region and obtaining young wives from there.

He was rumored to be baptized or near to be baptized in Christianity, but the fact it is false. He was a Buddhist, but his faith and belief changed very often in favor of various sects of Buddhism by the association of his wives and various families and of persons who were believers in various sects of the established religion of the Siamese and Laos, Pegan and Burmese countries. Why should he become a Christian? when his pleasures consisted in polygamy and enjoyment, and with young women who were practised in pleasant

► *Esplanade before the Wang Na guarded by a brace of cannon cast, possibly, by the hand of the Second Sovereign in the Fourth Reign and served by well-drilled soldiers costumed as English artillerymen. Cannon were fired each day from the Wang Na at 48 minutes before sunrise and at 8 o'clock in the evening to provide the citizenry of Bangkok with a regular time signal. Source: Neale, F.A., Narrative of a Residence in Siam London, 1852.*



dancing and singing, and who could not be easily given up at any time. He was very desirous of having his sons to be English scholars and to be learned the art of speaking, reading and writing in English well like himself, but he said he cannot allow his sons to enter the Christian Missionary-School, as he feared his descendants might be induced to the Christianity in which he did not please to believe.

The foreign community found the statement "curious", a "cautious and verbose sketch... wherein he [the Second Sovereign] is by turns meanly disparaged and damned with faint praise"; it was felt that the "honourable reputation" of their favourite had been undermined because of Rama IV's "notorious jealousy of the Second King". This reaction appears unwarranted, and the characterization of Rama IV shallow and ill-founded. Might not Rama IV have sought to give a balanced view of the man who was Second Sovereign, but found it impossible to rid the review of traces of the disappointment of his expectations of his younger brother? As root cause of this frustration of Rama IV, I suggest the withdrawal of the Second Sovereign from affairs of state when his aspirations to the throne were thwarted early in the Fourth Reign by the birth of a son to the Queen, and, perhaps as a consequence, the un-buddhical behaviour of the Second Sovereign, his flirtation with Christianity and his preoccupation with worldly, if not frivolous, pastimes. Rama IV was not simply a Buddhist; he was the founder of a reformed sect of Buddhism which adhered to the moral precepts of the Teacher but eschewed its imaginative cosmogony because it conflicted with the ready introduction of Western scientific thought. As Sovereign, Rama IV was "defender of the faith"; Buddhism is a most tolerant faith, but it is *the* faith of Siam. Also, as actual head of state, Rama IV was engrossed with the modernization of his kingdom, a task which demanded utter dedication, infinite patience, the utmost care and total selflessness. Would not Rama IV have been nonplussed by a less than comparable commitment to this endeavour from his lieutenants, much less from his compeer?

Rama IV died in 1868, three years after the death of his younger brother, the Second Sovereign. Each was succeeded by his eldest son. Rama V, being but sixteen, was under a regent until he

attained his majority in 1873; the regent, in fact, begot his regency since Rama IV had authorized the Council at Court to name as his successor the most capable from among his male relations, not his eldest son alone. The regent masterminded also the appointment — better, perhaps, the *relegation* — of George Washington, aged thirty-one, to Second Sovereign; he being represented as the one suitable candidate:

This prince has studied many subjects and is well versed in the military techniques of Europe. He has also mastered many sorts of skills, just as had the late Second King... He can assume the responsibility for officials who were once under the late Second King.

George Washington was so dubbed by his father who desired that his son bear a name representative of both an English king and an American President. (Innocent Americans were wont to point out that the name "had been borne, not by an Asiatic, not by an European, but by the greatest of Americans — George Washington".) The name was merely one element, if ostentatious, in a Westernized upbringing from birth in which English dress was worn, the English language was spoken, written and read, and European customs were practiced. Might the father have sought to produce an Occidental from Oriental stock? If so, the scheme succeeded to the extent that the son became a facsimile of his Westernized father: characterizations of "Prince George" and, later, "King George Washington" read so like those of his royal sire that one must regularly be reminded of the Second Sovereign in question. Moreover, Westerners were as partial toward Second Sovereign George Washington vis-à-vis Rama V as they had been biased toward his father vis-à-vis Rama IV. This attitude was nicely comprehended by the commander of a United States warship engaged in showing the flag who, following an audience with the Second Sovereign, remarked feelingly: "That is the man who should have been First King". Similarly, descriptions of the *Wang Na* during the occupancy of Second Sovereign George Washington differ only in trifling details from those during the residence of his father, though visitors did remark that the palace was "not in the best state of repair, and looking like an old-fashioned mansion" which "bore an aspect of decay".

Second Sovereign George Washington died in August 1885; in September, Rama V terminated the position of Second Sovereign. Is it too much to say that



King George Washington: last Second Sovereign of Siam, Fifth Reign of the Bangkok Era. Source: Vincent, F., *The Land of the White Elephant* London, 1873.

the abolition of the office of Second Sovereign waited for the demise of the incumbent George Washington? Is it, then, unreasonable to suggest that the Siamese leadership had "read" the lesson of the Meiji Restoration in Japan in 1868 by which the power of the Imperial dynasty was restored (in the person of an Emperor aged fifteen) at the expense of the Shogun? I think not.

For foreigners, long resident or visiting as, indeed, for the native population, the office of Second Sovereign was a puzzlement. For Rama V and his ministers, striving mightily to modernize the kingdom, the office of Second Sovereign was an embarrassment.

One king at a time is commonly thought to be as much as any kingdom has need of. Indeed, there seems to be a growing tendency among... nations... to think that even one is one too many... Nevertheless, there are in Siam... two kings reigning together... This is a curious fact. The office of king, one would suppose, implied in itself the impossibility of a rival. In Siam the second King... exercises a species of secondary or reflected authority, the limits of which did not appear to be at all clearly defined... He is said to dispose of one-third of the state revenue... but never without an order from the King... and to

have at his command an army of about 2000 men... He is surrounded with the same royal insignia as the First King, though somewhat less ostentatiously displayed; and the same marks of honour... are paid to his person. He has his ministers, corresponding to those of the First King, and is supposed to take a more active part in the wars of the country than does the First King.

There would seem some danger in the adjacency of sovereignties so likely to clash... and the struggle between the two sovereignties is one of the incidents in the politics of Siam... the first King's party and the second King's party... took sides, just as at home they do in politics. How there could be a party for the second King, that did not mean the deposition of the first and treason to the crown, was a problem... Thus... the position of the Second King in the government of Siam is most peculiar and anomalous.

From all that can be learned the second King is a very expensive honorary adjunct of Siamese royalty. He has no responsibility in the Government, and no special power except among his own personal adherents... He is a sort of shadow, and yet he is not always a true reflection of the mind and purpose of his sovereign... his present awkward and useless office... seems to be an expensive... one that might readily be absorbed into the royal office with a gain to the treasury and no loss to the State.

This brief anthology of the comments of several astute observers of Siam during the second half of the 19th century provides an ample apologia for the abandonment of the pseudo-duarchy; but it does not provide an appreciation of the plain reason for the office of Second Sovereign. In Siam, the office of Second Sovereign was filled when this would avert a threat to the security of the kingdom; more particularly when, on the death of the King, the Council at Court dead-locked over the successor to the throne and could achieve consensus only provided a generous give and take which involved the *Wang Luang* and the *Wang Na*. The *Wang Na*, then, was a concession made to facilitate a decision on the Crown. The pseudo-duarchy, however, itself came to threaten the security of the kingdom, whatever the ambitions of the Second Sovereign himself. The rarity of the appointment of a Second Sovereign in any reign stands testimony to this unhappy situation. Rama V, however, did not simply decline to appoint a Second Sovereign; he acted to terminate the office of Second Sovereign, and as if to punctuate this sentence, he had the *Wang Na* unmade.

Rama V's abolition of the office of Second Sovereign may be seen as the removal of an anachronistic feature from a modernizing monarchy; as one relatively minor reform in a long

list of reforms aimed at remodelling the administration on Western lines. This explanation may satisfy, but it is superficial. Rama V's reason for reorganizing the working of the kingdom was his certain knowledge that Siam would not long be free from a takeover by the English or the French if he did not act to establish a strong central government, itself unified and synchronized under single leadership. The office of Second Sovereign, if not his person, suggested a split in the sovereignty of Siam which might encourage a European power to insinuate itself in affairs of state. Indeed, an astute American who visited Siam with General U.S. Grant, then ex-president of the United States, about five years before the death of Second Sovereign George Washington, commented on the latter's "great" political influence which he laid to the fact "that the British Consul-General is an active supporter of the second King".

The dissolution of the office of Second Sovereign was dramatized by the simultaneous dismemberment of the *Wang Na*; a large portion of the palace was given to the military; a substantial area in which stood a number of large buildings became the National Museum; and a small group of buildings tucked away in the heart of the *Wang Na*, was set aside to quarter the daughters, not the sons, of the last two Second Sovereigns. (Was the exclusion of male offspring from the former *Wang Na* meant to forestall even the suggestion of hereditary right to the office of Second Sovereign which accompanied the appointment of George Washington, the eldest son of the previous Second Sovereign?) Fortifications, as well as other structures, were not maintained, quickly

fell into disrepair, and were periodically demolished as Bangkok rebuilt itself according to current Western urban fashions. Rama V's return from his European tour in 1897 set off an explosive urban development in which roadway construction figured prominently and was especially effective in reducing the *Wang Na*. Three large office buildings housing first the Ministry of Education, then the Ministries of Justice and Communications, sprang up along the western side of the former *Wang Na*, facing the open park-like area, *Sanam Luang*, itself much enlarged through extensions into areas formerly within the walls of the *Wang Na*. As the remaking of the *Wang Na* proceeded, even the quarters of the daughters of the last Second Sovereigns were progressively reduced as these royal offspring died or otherwise departed. Finally, in 1916, during the reign of Rama VI, the few male scions of the Second Sovereign remaining were rehoused in the *Wang Luang*; in 1917 the urns in which were the ashes of the Second Sovereigns were transferred to the *Wang Luang*; and shortly thereafter the whole of the *Wang Na* was occupied by the Ministry of Defense, except for the National Museum. Since, the area formerly occupied by the *Wang Na* has been variously remade and used, and now it is as if the *Wang Na* had never been, for hardly a trace remains.

Long before the removal of the last vestige of the *Wang Na*, indeed, soon after the office of Second Sovereign was scotched, even educated Siamese were "as unwilling to reply to any question about why he was required as to curious speculations concerning the 'white elephant'". □

*Palace of the Second Sovereign of Siam circa 1890. The structure in front of the main building is a pavilion for mounting an elephant; the buildings behind are living quarters. Source: Smith, M., A Physician at the Court of Siam London, 1947.*







*The southern reaches of Bangkok along the Chao Phraya river downstream from Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem circa 1885; a view from the west bank looking southeastward. The cluster of imposing buildings on the east bank includes the Oriental Hotel, the East Asiatic Company, the French Legation and the Assumption Church. Source: Child, J.T., The Pearl of Asia, Reminiscences of the Court of a Supreme Monarch or Five Years in Siam Chicago, 1892.*

# CITY OF MAGNIFICENT DISTANCES

A would-be restorer of an uncharted cityscape rarely is able to do more than compose a pastiche from the leavings of keen, perforce alien eyewitnesses. So the following world-picture of Bangkok has been pieced together from the fragmentary descriptions of the capital by several farang diplomats, merchants and missionaries resident in the city during the decade or so immediately before its centenary.

Bangkok is built for about six miles on both sides of the noble river Chow Paya [Chao Phraya] ...thirty miles from the mouth... the downward current ... is very strong, but the rising tides force water back into the creeks and canals that intersect ... all over this semi-aquatic city, which, like the "Queen of the Adriatic", depends more on her waterways ... than on streets of solid ground. The view of Bangkok from the river, and the scene on the river itself, are both very striking.

From the centre of the broad deep stream stand out the tall masts of large ... steamers, their huge hulls towering far above the ... innumerable smaller ... native craft ... of every variety ... that ply between them and the shore ... Chinese junks ... moored by immense ratan cables ... also scores of steam-yachts ... The river ... is by no means a "silent highway" ... dozens of small skiffs are flitting about, "manned" by women ... barely seen beneath the broad-brimmed hats of palm-leaves or straw, but whose voices are resonant in all directions, bargaining ... and disposing of their fruits and vegetables, their firewood, and varied up-country produce ... rice, sugar, salt, cotton, oil, dried fish, or dye-wood, as the case may be ... Here and there are ... little boats where John Chinaman sells ... a frugal meal of curried rice, boiled vegetables, bits of pork, or dried fish and cakes ... There are ... private pleasure-boats, shaped like gondolas, in which ... rowlocks are very high ... and the oarsman stands to his work ... with his face to the prow ... so that he has to push ... his oars through the water ... Boating is ... the only chance of getting a little fresh air, and nearly every one keeps a boat.

Along the shore ... in rows five or six deep — the inner row moored to the bank, and the outer ones connected with it by planks, or two or three bamboos lashed together, which serve as gangways — the native boats, with their deck-house covered in with a

semicircular roof, under which the boatman and his family make their permanent home ... Thousands of the people live in floating houses ... lining both banks of the river ... They are but one story high ... built of ... light wood ... thatched with the leaves of the attap palm ... and placed in rafts of large bamboos, which rise and fall with the tide ... moored to the bank, or to ... large posts on each side driven deep into the muddy bed of the river ... These houses have some advantages over all others, for if neighbors are disagreeable or a fire breaks out the occupants have only to move off with the tide ... to some other spot ... Many of them are open in front with a veranda, and are shops ... Here you can purchase your supplies ... by stopping your boat and pointing out what you want in the wide open room before you ... There, in the way of dry goods, are bleached and unbleached and turkey-red muslins, Siamese waistcloths and some fading calicoes. Here are a few boxes of tea, some native umbrellas, a bunch of peacock feathers, tigers' skins ... piles of coarse crockery, pieces of matting ... There ... a floating-house restaurant ... they have — pork steaks, ducks, fowls, hot rice and curry, dried fish and vegetables.

Beyond these, on either bank ... stretches a wide expanse of the sloping roofs of the native houses ... relieved at short intervals by the glittering spires of temples ... or the pinnacles of the royal palaces, rearing their heads high above everything. There are said to be over 100 temples in the city ... and on a sunny day the effect of the glistening towers, many of them gilt to the very top, is very beautiful.

Really imposing as the view ... from the river is, the contrast on landing ... is very great.

Many roads have been constructed during the last few years, it is true ... but they are all below the flood-level ... the city being built on the edge of a great alluvial plain, which is inundated during the rainy season, so that the roads will have to be raised to be of any permanent advantage ... The main road ... which is several miles in length, is itself often partly under water during the south-west monsoon ... The streets are nearly all very narrow and crooked, and only adapted to the Siamese, who until lately never pretended to use

carriages ... They are also very uneven, with here and there great holes, crossed by rough stepping stones, and during the highest tides are overflowed with water, sometimes knee-deep, for several hours each day ... The back lanes and bypaths ... are in a chronic state of filth, wet or dry ... In the city proper ... which is walled in ... are, however, a few wide, pleasant streets ... long enough to furnish six or seven miles of good driving. They are kept in tolerable repair ... daily swept ... in the dry season sprinkled ... to lay the dust, and at night lighted by lamps and patrolled by watchmen.

The facilities for locomotion are ... insufficient ... Within the last year or two hacks have been running ... The carriages, kept for hire by a few Klings [Dravidians] and Malays, are generally in a most dilapidated state, while the horses are still worse.

The nobles ... have erected a great many handsome brick houses, which are planned by European architects, and are roomy and comfortable ... and some of them elegantly furnished with English, French, and Chinese furniture. In these houses may be seen beautiful things in great variety ... Some of the princes' palaces have marble and tile floors ... occasionally they have carpets ... All ... have beautiful gardens. Sometimes they are attached to the palaces, and sometimes they are off in another part of the city ... The rich ... have numerous slaves and attendants ... Every man of rank has at least one band, if not two, one exclusively of native and the other exclusively of European instruments ... The Siamese prize their instruments very much, nor is there any shop in Bangkok where one can buy a set ... The princes and noblemen all have the instruments for their bands made on their own premises by skilled workmen ... The missionaries, foreign consuls, merchants and wealthy Chinese have good, substantial dwellings ... on the banks of the river ... to avoid the not too savoury smells of the interior of the city ... and house-rents there are accordingly high ... Until lately the river frontage of palaces was nothing but ... boat-houses and servants' quarters; but now better ideas prevail, and good landings and graceful salas ... may be seen.

The middle class dwell in houses built of wood, usually unpainted teak, and roofed with earthen tiles. They are small and illy ventilated, and here the people huddle together, from the parents to the children of the third and fourth generation ... They have very little furniture ... The lower class live in huts made of woven bamboo, and thatched with leaves ... Nearly all dwellings are built on posts ... which

elevate them five or six feet from the ground, and are reached by ladders, which at night are often drawn up to prevent dogs or thieves coming into the house. But the very poor have ... huts made of palm leaves tied to a bamboo frame, and with ... the bare earth for a floor.

All ordinary Siamese houses ... have three rooms ... There is the common bedroom, an outer room where they sit during the day and receive their visitors, and the kitchen ... where ... is a rude box, filled with earth, where they build the fire and ... boil rice and make curry, and roast fish and plantains over the coals ... vegetables are seldom cooked at home, but are prepared by others and sold in the markets, or peddled about the streets. There they buy boiled sweet potatoes, green corn, and preserved fruits, curries, roasted fish ... peanuts and bananas, sliced pine-apples and melons, and squash ... Curry is made of all sorts of things, but is usually a combination of meat or fish, and vegetables ... The ingredients are chopped very fine, or pounded in a mortar, especially the red peppers, onions, and spices. The predominant flavor is red pepper, so hot and fiery that your mouth will smart and burn for half an hour after you have eaten it. Still, many of the curries are very good, and with steamed rice furnish a good meal ... The kitchen has no chimney, and the smoke finds its own way out ... There is but little furniture, except the rice-pots, a kettle, and perhaps a frying-pan, and baskets of various shapes and sizes, one pair being daubed within and without with pitch and used to carry water. There is a little stool ... on which they place the curry and fish and the sliced vegetables, while those who squat around it, each with a bowl of rice on the floor before them, which they replenish from a dish or basket near by, or from the rice-pot on the fire-place. The rice-pot is of coarse earthenware, round and bulging, with a small mouth and a lid. They cost but a trifle, and are easily broken, but the rice cooked in them is the most delicious ... They eat with their fingers, very few having so much even as a spoon ... The kitchen floors are nearly all made of split bamboos, with great cracks between, through which they pour all the slops and push the dirt ... Near the door are several large earthen jars for water, which are filled from the river by the women or servants ... and here they wash their feet before they enter the house. They dip the water with a gourd or a coconut-shell. They also use brass basins and trays a great deal.

The outer room is barren enough, with perhaps a mat for guests to sit upon, and a



Various river craft and floating structures on the Chao Phraya at Bangkok circa 1885. Source: Child, J.T., *The Pearl of Asia, Reminiscences of the Court of a Supreme Monarch or Five Years in Siam* Chicago, 1892.

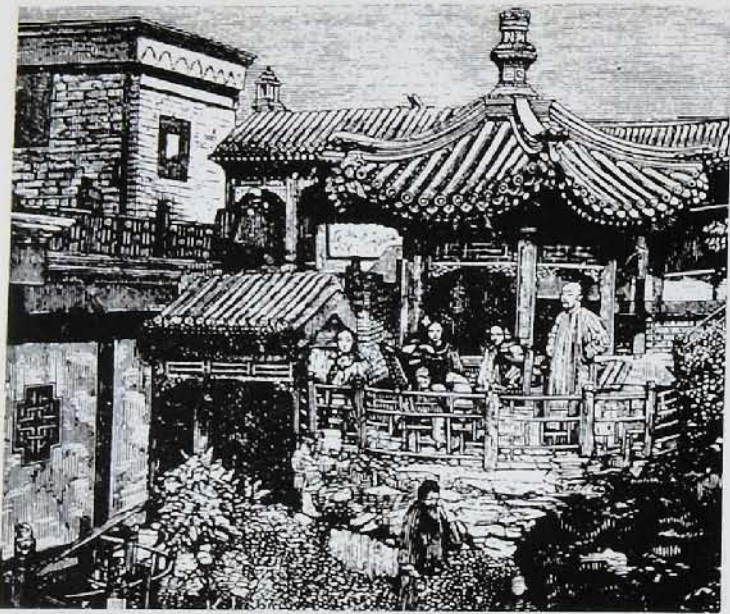
tray from which all are served with betel ... The natives consider it an insult if they enter another's house and are not invited to eat betel, and it is equally impolite to refuse the proffered cud. Indeed, it occupies so important a place in the economy of their social life that a wedding is called ... literally "betel-tray", because it heads the procession of gifts which are laid at the feet of the bride's parents by the bridegroom ... Betel-chewing disfigures the mouth wonderfully, causing the teeth to protrude and blacken, and the lips and tongue to crack ... the cud they chew so persistently is a combination of ereca-nut, cera-leaf, lime, tobacco, camphor, and tumeric. It is ... indulged in by all classes. It is given ... to the priests as well as to the ... beggars ... It costs almost as much as their food, especially among the poor. I have seen it in the mouths of unweaned children; and old folks no longer capable of chewing, pound it in a mortar to reduce it to the desired pulpiness, or have younger jaws and better teeth masticate it for them.

The bedroom is where things accumulate. A ... straw mat, or perhaps an ox hide or two on the floor, with brick-shaped pillows stuffed with cotton, or a block of wood ... and

you have the ordinary Siamese bed. In families of not the very poorest, you sometimes find long narrow mattresses stuffed with tree-cotton ... and over it is suspended a mosquito curtain of unbleached cotton.

The Siamese are great bathers. Several times daily they may be seen splashing in the rivers or canals, or pouring water over themselves from jars set by the doorway ... they use neither soap nor towels ... to complete the toilet they smear the body with tumeric ... Many have ... only a waist-cloth which they wear when they go to bathe. When they come up out of the water they change it for a dry one ... The dress of the Siamese is very simple and comfortable, consisting of a waist-cloth, jacket, and scarf, and sometimes a hat and sandals ... The people are extremely fond of jewelry, and often their gold chains and rings are the only adornment the body can boast.

Thus ... house-life ... among the lower classes ... not among those who have come in contact with ... foreigners ... is very simple ... Housekeeping and needlework form so small a part of female labor here that much opportunity is given for out-of-door work ... Women



Home of a well-to-do Chinese family, circa 1880. Source: Presbyterian Board of Publication, Siam and Laos, as seen by our American missionaries Philadelphia, 1884.

enjoy greater liberty than in almost any other Oriental land. You meet them everywhere; and in the bazaars and markets nearly all the buying and selling is done by them ... They are seen performing all sorts of labor ... It is difficult for a stranger to distinguish a woman of the lower classes from a man, as in dress, manner, appearance and occupation they seem so much alike.

Of the city's half million people, perhaps nearly one-half are Chinese, Hindoos, Malays, and other foreigners, of whom less than three hundred are Europeans. The steamers that come from China now make Swatow their final port of departure, that place being the chief centre of Chinese emigration ... No account of the number of immigrants is kept ... so it is impossible to state with any accuracy how many arrive, but it must now reach over 20,000 annually, and is probably increasing. There is some return emigration from Siam, but it cannot be compared to the immigration. The whole trade of the country now falls into the hands of the Chinese, indeed it would be a difficult matter now to find a Siamese merchant or shopkeeper.

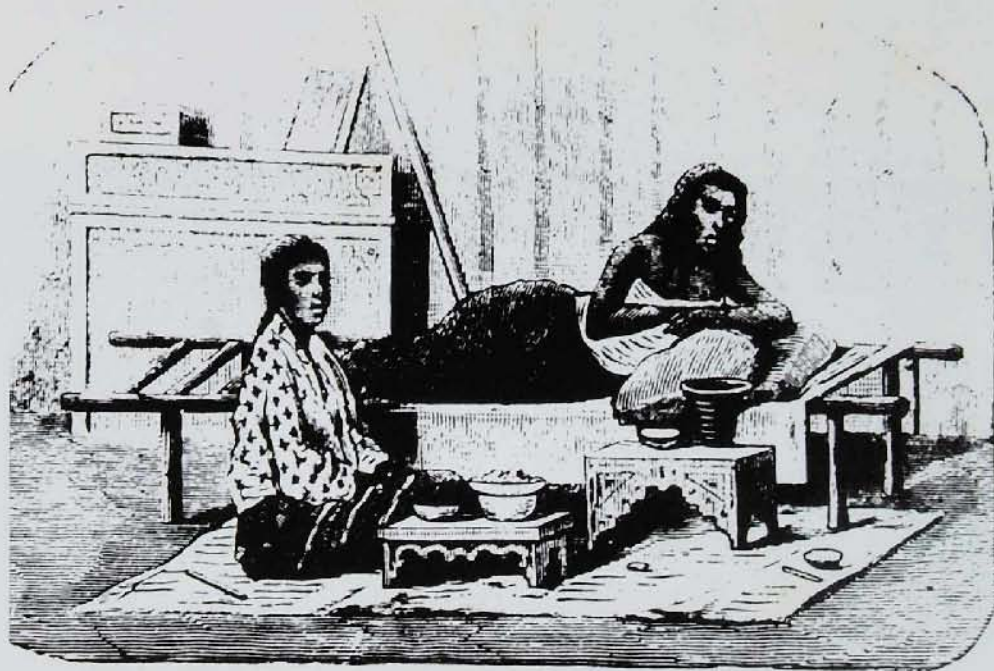
The Chinese are very clannish, and settling together have given to some portions of the city quite a "Celestial" appearance. Their streets are close and dark, some of them covered overhead, and filled with real Chinese odors, principally onions ... Chinese liquor ... and opium ... Pigs, dogs, cats and children throng these thoroughfares; there is no danger from horses or carriages, the streets are far too narrow to admit them ... The houses in the markets are so made that the front can all be taken down in the daytime, and the whole inner room and its contents exposed... If they

have counters, they fill nearly the whole room, which is often not more than ten by eight feet, and ... the merchant sits in the midst of his goods. The whole family ... lives in or back of the store ... and often the baby's hammock is swung from the ceiling, and the little one is cared for while customers are waited on. All sorts of trades are carried on in sight of every passer-by ... At a restaurant or bakery ... you see the inmates prepare the food or cake before your very eyes. The blacksmiths and tanners are hammering for dear life; and the tailors cutting and sewing, but always on the alert to sell a needle or a half dozen buttons ... In the barber-shops ... the ... Chinaman ... sits on a high stool ... and has his ears picked, his head and eyebrows shaved, and his eyelashes and beard pulled out ... On all sides are Chinese joss-houses, Chinese carpenters' shops, Chinese cabinet works, Chinese carriage manufacturers; wherever there is any work going on it is sure to be under the sign of a Chinese proprietor, though here and there may be seen a Siamese pottery works, where the brittle portable ovens, pots, and water-bottles are produced ... In happy confusion may be seen Chinese pawnbrokers'



'Parlor' of a well-to-do Chinese family, circa 1880. Source: Presbyterian Board of Publication, Siam and Laos, as seen by our American missionaries Philadelphia, 1884.

'Bedroom' of a well-to-do Thai family, circa 1880. Source: Presbyterian Board of Publication, Siam and Laos, as seen by our American missionaries Philadelphia, 1884.

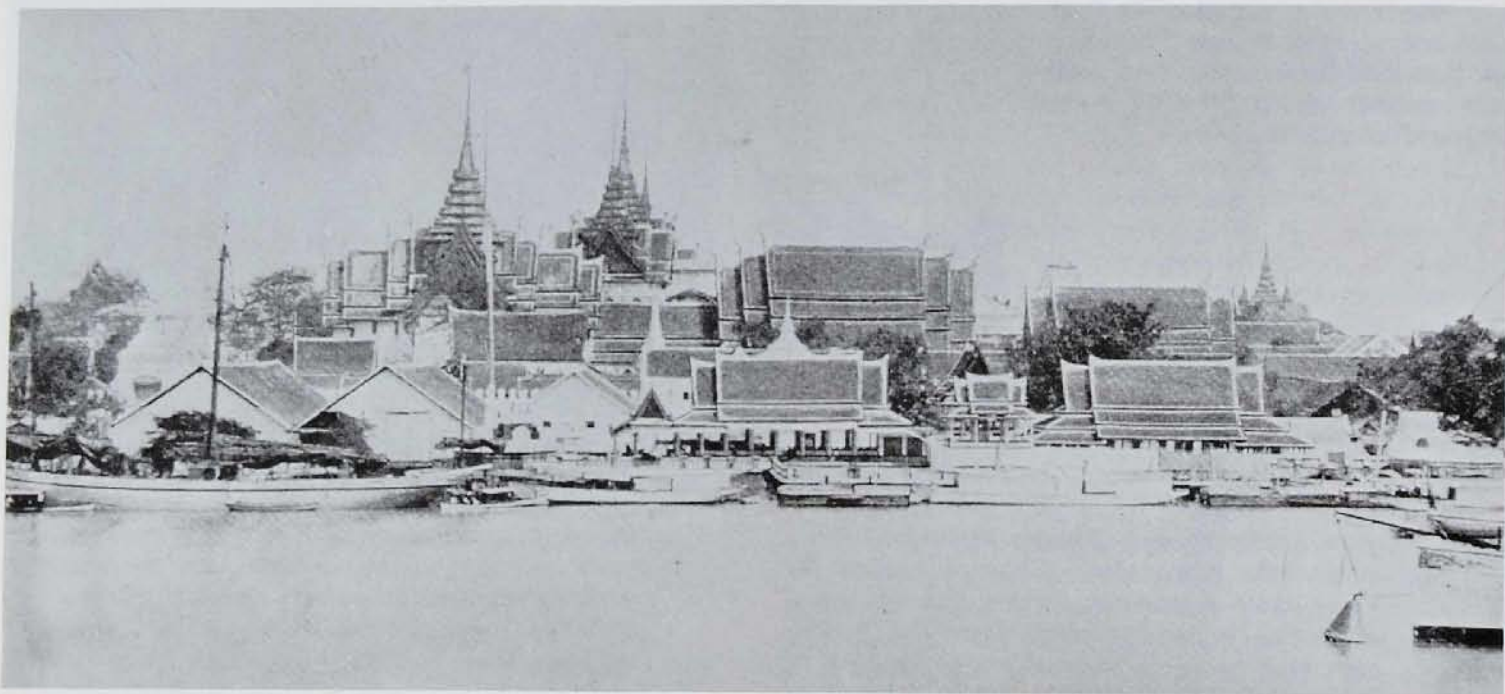


shops; Siamese and Chinese eating-houses ... street-stalls, where John Chinaman offers his home-made lemonade, or his dish of boiled vegetables in which onions form the leading ingredient, with a choice of bits of fat pork or lean duck, or where the Siamese purveyor tempts the passer-by with a mixed collection of rice and cakes, mussels and shrimps, and dried or stinking fish ... Chinese duck farms, where the ducklings are reared from the egg, and find plenty of rubbish to rout about in, if not much food on which to get fat; Chinese drug-shops ... dram-shops, where ... the liquor-jars ... are out in the street, and the people stop and drink ... Native arrack ... made of molasses ... costs but little ... The home production is not equal to the demand, and ... liquor is imported from China, Batavia,

Singapore, and Europe ... Eating and smoking opium are also on the increase, and the law which threatens all consumers of it with confiscation of property and death, is not now enforced. There is a weed ... (which I think is Indian hemp), grown abundantly in Siam, and those who are too poor to buy opium use this instead ... It would be hard to find a Siamese who did not use tobacco in some form. The men and boys nearly all smoke and some of the women. All chew the weed with their betel and some use it as snuff ... More numerous, perhaps, than anything else, are the ubiquitous gambling-houses... probably many hundred in Bangkok ... with a Chinese ... theatre, close at hand ... The gambling establishments are all in the hands of the Chinese ... the master-gamblers of Siam ... Gambling, like many other things in Siam, is a monopoly, and the government sells to the highest bidder the privilege of licensing and controlling all such establishments ... They afford no small amount of revenue ... Men, women and little children all frequent the gambling-places. Cards and dice are both used. The lottery monopoly is also in the hands of the Chinese ... The gambling-houses ... are ... large bamboo sheds, with an attap roof, devoid of furniture, and many of them without even a floor, only the bare earth, over which are laid mats for the players to sit on ... Play usually begins late in the afternoon, and lasts half the night ... When tired of gambling the Siamese adjourn to the neighbouring theatre, where they spend an hour or two watching the ... performance ... We sometimes ... hear the deafening peal of the gong ... the grating notes of ... various stringed instruments, then all together with ... shrill, falsetto voices above the din of the multitude, and passing on to where the crowd is so dense you can hardly force your way through, you will see a stage thrown across the street, and a band of Chinese... perform-



Well-to-do Thai at a meal, circa 1880. source: Presbyterian Board of Publication, Siam and Laos, as seen by our American missionaries Philadelphia, 1884.



The Grand Palace circa 1890; view from the Chao Phraya river. Source: de Fournet, L.D., *Journal d'un Commandant de la Comète Chine, Siam, Japan (1892-1893) Paris, 1915.*

ing some wonderful tragedy, with both action and voice raised to the highest pitch.

There is also a Mussulman's Square ... where the Mohammedan Hindoos [!] live and die. Their homes are built of brick, and the little stalls of shops are filled with many curious and useful things. All are merchants or peddlers. They have mosques and retain their old religion and old home habits as much as possible.

Next to gambling-hells, theatres, and perhaps dram-shops, the structures which are most numerous ... are the temples ... Bangkok may be termed the City of Temples ... There are between one and two hundred temples in the city ... No one can be long in Siam without being astonished at the large part which the wat [temple] occupies as a social centre in the every-day life of the people ... The kings and nobles ... and the ... people spend vast sums ... on these temples ... They occupy the pleasantest parts of the city ... There are some grand old temples ... hidden among the sacred groves and lotus ponds, and others newly built, or repaired, shining in all the glory of gilt, fresh plaster, and Chinese paint ... A Siamese wat ... consists of a number of buildings scattered about a large park-like enclosure ... at the entrance of the enclosure, generally near the boat-landing on the river, you ... find a ... rest-house, called ... by the Siamese sala. You pass the sala and enter an area, generally ... of several acres ... laid out with trees and

ornamental shrubbery. Here are shady ... well-swept ... walks, sometimes paved with marble; fruit- and flower-gardens ... Passing the first, possibly the second, court, you reach by a flight of steps the wide terrace on which stands the principal temple ... This is ... a large ... hall, built of brick thickly coated with white plaster ... The ... roof ... is resplendent with glazed tiles. The roofs, gable-ends, doors and windows (without glass) are of solid timber, covered ... with intricately-cut cornices, intersecting mouldings and fantastic embellishments ... elaborately carved and heavily gilded - an art in which the Siamese have considerable skill ... Entering this building, you see an altar ... It contains ... figures of Buddha ... together with ... wax candles, incense-tapers, gold and silver tinsel ornaments, offerings of fruit and flowers... Pagodas, or sacred spires - detached pyramidal piles of solid masonry, frequently reaching a great height - are always found in connection with the temples. These ... contain some relic of Buddha, and are sacred to his memory... Each wat has also its ... preaching hall. Each wat has also its library, containing the sacred books of Buddhist scriptures ... But a ... wat is not merely a place of worship; most of all it is a ... monastery ... There are often several hundred inmates in a large wat ... The ... priests ... have usually rows of little cells, almost bare of furniture except the coverlets and pillows and mosquito-nets ... Properly, a Buddhist monk possesses his own eight articles - viz. three

robes, a girdle, an alms-bowl, a razor, a needle and a water-strainer, this last that he may not unwittingly in drinking destroy animal life ... Priests are easily recognised by their yellow robes and shaven heads ... It is said that there are ten thousand ... in Bangkok ... and one can easily believe it for you meet them everywhere, and there are hundreds of temples and monasteries to shelter ... them ... They live on the charity of the people ... Every morning the streets of Bangkok are crowded ... with yellow-robed ... priests ... paddled around with their ... alms-bowl ... from door to door.

When Bangkok was founded in 1782 the king's palaces and all the principal buildings were erected on the left bank of the river, but now the royal palaces of both the first and second kings are on the other side ... within the walls of the city ... The walls are fifteen feet high and twelve broad, and surrounding the city proper extend some four and a half miles. This wall is pierced by sixteen large gates and forty-seven smaller ones, and de-

fended by sixteen octagonal forts, two stories high ... It is estimated that the city walls enclose one hundred thousand souls; this leaves four or five hundred thousand outside, and if the city were attacked or besieged, it would be impossible for such a multitude ever to find shelter behind the gates ... Within the city walls are palace walls ... about a mile in circumference ... thick and high, with double doors and ... forts, and in this most carefully guarded enclosure are the grand royal palaces of the king and queen ... the audience-halls, the mint, arsenal, halls of justice, museum, royal chapel, and separated from them by an inner wall is the royal harem ... that "City of Women" ... which is in itself a compact little town, with several streets, a bazaar, a temple, pleasure-gardens and the homes of the numerous wives, sisters and other relatives of the king ... The old palace ... of His Majesty ... has long since become inadequate ... and the present king has just completed the new royal residence ... The style is a mixture of different schools of European architecture, the pic-



Oblique aerial view of the Grand Palace circa 1885; view from the northeast. The structures strewn in the foreground were erected for the elaborate funeral rites of the last Second Sovereign of Siam, King George Washington, who died in August 1885. Source: Child, J.T., *The Pearl of Asia, Reminiscences of the Court of a Supreme Monarch or Five Years in Siam* Chicago, 1892.





The bot of Wat Phra Keo in which the Emerald Buddha is housed.  
 Source: Sommerville, M., Siam on the Meinam from the Gulf to Ayuthia  
 London, 1897.

turesque and characteristic Siamese roof, however, being retained. The internal fittings ... are most elaborate ... the most costly furniture having been imported from London ... and Paris ... and illuminated with electric lights ... One of the features of the palace is a large and well-stocked library ... all the leading European and American periodicals and newspapers being regularly taken in ... The palace of the second king ... is also European in many of its appointments, with mirrors, pictures and English and French furniture ... The dress and habits of the court-circles have undergone an entire revolution within the last few years. The men wear neat linen, collar and cravat; an English dress-coat, with the native p'anoong arranged much like knickerbockers; shoes and stockings. The court-dress of a Siamese lady consists of a neat, closely-fitted jacket, finished at throat and wrists with frills of white muslin and lace, and a p'anoong similar to that worn by the men.

... the work which, in popular estimation at least, will make his Majesty's reign most

memorable ... is the completion ... as an especial work of royal piety ... of the great royal temple ... for the Emerald Buddha, the palladium of the capital ... after having been exactly 100 years in course of construction ... On the 21st of April, 1882, the ceremony of final dedication ... of this magnificent pile of buildings ... was performed ... to give the city its crowning glory ... on the hundredth anniversary of the capital of Siam ... Improvements have not ended here, and the celebration of the centenary of the city was marked by the inauguration of many reforms, many of which are personified in the public buildings then commenced or already erected for their administration ... Of the public buildings ... perhaps the most important is the new Court of Justice ... Besides a new era in the administration of law, the centenary of Bangkok marks a fresh advance in the education of the people. A splendid college — quite a palace in appearance, and with every modern appliance — has been built ... and will shortly be opened ... A fine building has just been erected as the "St.



The 'Emerald Buddha': the most venerated image of The Buddha in the kingdom portrayed circa 1855 in the gold and jewel bestudded vestments with which the image is clothed by the king at the commencement of the cold, the hot and the rainy seasons, respectively. [Note: the pedestal is similar to but not identical with the one on which the image now rests.] 'Emerald' is a mistranslation of an expression for 'semi-precious stone'; in this instance a single piece of clear green jasper sixty centimetres high, which is remarkable enough. Source: Bowring, Sir J., The Kingdom and People of Siam London, 1857.



The 'Golden Mount': the man-made, sixty-four metres high, brick edifice, completed in 1878 and camouflaged to pass as a real hill rising from the dead level of the delta, even planted with trees to sustain the illusion. Source: Campbell, J.G.D., *Siam in the Twentieth Century* London, 1904.



A densely populated area of Bangkok circa 1890 viewed from atop the 'Golden Mount' looking north-westward along Khlong Ong Ang (the crescentic 'city moat' which was dug and fortified during the First Reign, 1782-1809) past its juncture with a major east-west avenue, Khlong Mahanak. Source: Birdwood, Sir G. [ed.] *Travels in the East of Nicholas II Emperor of Russia when Cesarewitch 1890-1891* Westminster, 1896.

Martin's-le-Grand" of Bangkok, and to facilitate the work of the post-office all the houses in the city have been numbered ... Postage-stamps have been ordered from England, and ... a batch of twenty telegraph clerks ... installed, ready for the completion of the lines from Saigon to Bangkok, and arrangements were practically complete for adopting the European postal and telegraphic system ... Bangkok has few sanitary laws, and such as have been enacted are seldom strictly enforced; yet ... the sanitary condition of Bangkok is ... receiving great attention, and measures are being gradually adopted to mitigate the severity of the fearful epidemics of cholera, which in times past have from time to time devastated the country.

Not one half century ago Siam was sealed against the entrance of ... the dreaded ... Europeans ... Chinese junks ... laden with stones ... were sunk at the mouth of the river, and chains stretched from shore to shore to prevent the ... "fire-ships" ... steaming up to Bangkok ... To-day she is in treaty relations with all ... countries, and ... now, large steamers at high tide cross the bar and sail on and on through a wide, deep, open river and cast anchor in the very heart of the ... capital ... In the city ... there are large business-houses conducted by foreign merchants ... Steam rice-mills are developing rice-culture: steam saw-mills are creating a large trade in valuable lumber ... Good inducements are offered to foreigners to enter the various departments of trade, and full protection is given ... Chinese are immigrating in large numbers ... Other nationalities are flowing in across the borders, and through all the open ports, and are working changes, the end of which we do not yet see.

It is a notable fact that ... the Chinese ... fare better in every respect than the ordinary natives ... Their privileges are greater, and their taxes less oppressive. Every Chinaman must pay a triennial poll-tax ... As a proof that this tax has been paid they must wear a cord around the wrist fastened with ... gum ... and stamped with a government seal ... They are not drafted into the army, and are not subject to the beck and call of every officer and nobleman in the unlimited ranks above them... The Chinese have been in Siam since time immemorial, and have increased ... There is no census taken ... and even the government has no positive means of knowing the number of inhabitants. But ... every steamer and sailing craft from China is swarming with ... Celestials ... Chinese of wealth often become favorites

with the rulers and receive titles of nobility, and these noblemen in return present their daughters to their majesties ... Although a Chinaman may have left a wife in his native land, that does not prevent his taking as many as he can support. The first Siamese wife is supreme, and rules the many-sided household ... The children ... cultivate their hair in queue style, and wear the same fashion of dress which their Chinese ancestors wore centuries ago ... A Chinese woman is rarely seen in Siam ... The Chinese element in Siam is a powerful one. No other race can compete with it, not even excepting the Caucasian ... They have their temples and joss-houses, their religious fetes, processions, and festivals. Their holidays are recognised by the Government ... Their secret societies are many and formidable ... the natives of each province [of China] holding together and working to promote the interests of their own particular clan. They have frequent quarrels ... which sometimes threatens the peace of the kingdom and often disturbs that of the city ... We find the Chinese in every business. They are ... industrious and enterprising, and do most of the work and control much of the wealth of Bangkok, outside of what is in the hands of the kings and nobles ... In the days when Siam had a sailing fleet of merchantmen the owners were principally Chinese, as were also the shippers and crews. Even when commanded by a European captain, the supercargo on board was a Chinaman and had chief control. Since steamships have been introduced we find that the owners and agents of some of these are Chinamen. The saw-mills and rice-mills worked by muscle power are all owned by Chinese, and since the introduction of steam-mills they are not slow to adopt these modern improvements, so that now several steam saw-mills and rice-mills are owned by enterprising Chinamen... They are ... gardeners, shopkeepers, carpenters, bricklayers, tailors, sailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, fishermen and washermen ... The manufacture of gold and silver jewellery, which is carried on to a large extent in Bangkok, is entirely in the hands of the Chinese ... All the mills employ Chinese coolies; all cargo-boats for loading and unloading ships are manned by these coolies. Europeans prefer the Chinese for servants: they are cleanly and quick to learn, frugal in their habits, utilizing everything... As gardeners the Chinese are very successful ... Bangkok is situated upon a plain which is almost at sea level; there are no hills or mountains to relieve the eye in any direction. This plain is covered with rice fields, vegetable gardens, fruit and spice orchards, and gardens of betel, coconut, banana, and other tropical trees; orange, mango, coffee.



One of the many major transport termini at Bangkok circa 1885. Source: Child, J.T., *The Pearl of Asia, Reminiscences of the Court of a Supreme Monarch or Five Years in Siam* Chicago, 1892.

and nutmeg ... The land is made sufficiently dry by throwing it up in large beds ten to twelve feet high ... The deep ditches between have a supply of water even in the dry season ... The gardener lives within the premises, his ... hut guarded by a multitude of dogs and a ... stench of pigsty ... The Chinese do not cultivate the paddy fields to any great extent, but buy the rice from the producers and bring it to the Bangkok markets. The seri-leaf ... is cultivated with great care ... in the betel-gardens ... This leaf ... bright green, tender and juicy ... covered with a pink lime paste and a little tobacco and betel-nut added ... rolled up cross-wise and chewed ... is used ... extensively in Siam ... Rotten fish is used as a fertiliser, and consequently the breezes which blow over these gardens are not "spicy breezes", but ... very offensive, obliging one in passing to suspend respiration for a time ... But if you are so fortunate as to be gliding through ... canals in other parts of the city, where the flower-gardens and orange trees are blooming in beauty and fragrance, every sense is filled with delight, and one could almost wish they might drift through such enchanting ways forever.

Is this anecdotal account accurate?

To censure diplomats, merchants and missionaries for leaving vivid impression instead of balanced assessment would be hypercritical; still many particulars in their narrative whistle for whys. A fine example of such a failing is the presentation of betel-chewing among the Siamese: condemned as a disgusting habit or an expensive luxury, and scorned: 'They say "any dog can have white teeth", inferring [sic] that only those who know enough to use betel can have beautiful black ones'. None seems to have troubled to discover why betel-chewing had been ritualised. I fronted a friendly pharmacist knowledgeable about the traditional drugs of Thailand to get at the truth: the active constituents of the betel-cud mitigate dysentery and repel intestinal parasites and as well have antiseptic and tonic properties. Small wonder, then, that extensive, carefully cultivated betel gardens surrounded Bangkok, there was brisk trade in the constituents of the betel-cud, and each household had a betel-service comprising a box, a tray and a spittoon, to accept the outpour from the salivary glands which are activated wonderously when chewing; indeed, the betel-service of the rich was fashioned in gold. How different would be our informants' report of the pervasive practice of betel-chewing had they known of its benefits?

There is no question that the anecdotal record is accented peculiarly and portrays Bangkok in caricature. The question is whether the caricature is incisive or merely grotesque. This might be assessed by comparison with the reminiscences of keen observers at other times. We may do this uncommon thing. Anthologies comprising eyewitness accounts of Bangkok a generation either side of its centenary have been compiled. As it happens, the three anecdotal representations of the city, spanning the early-19th to the early 20th centuries, lay in sensible sequence. There is nothing freakish in the description of Bangkok in 1882; indeed, information is given about aspects of ordinary life which receive scant attention in the earlier and later anthologies. However, an incongruity shows up.

The population of Bangkok in the 1880s commonly was estimated as a half-million, though a few thought a million nearer the mark. A generation earlier, in the 1850s, the population of the city was said to approximate 350,000. During the opening decade of the twentieth century, the population of the city and its suburbs was thought to approximate a half-million, though some reported the number as not more than 400,000 and others as not less than 600,000. A half-million hearts in Bangkok in 1882 may be judged excessive, since the population of the capital burgeoned in the 1890s. How excessive is the estimate cannot be gauged from the anecdotal age or by regression from the first 'census' of 1909 which returned 628,675 for the city and its suburbs; a figure subsequently reduced to 500,000 in the light of the census of 1920 which counted only 345,000 in the 'city proper'. A centennial count is wanted.

In a reply to congratulations tendered him on his thirtieth birthday, September 21, 1883, His Majesty, King Chulalongkorn, referred to the local post:

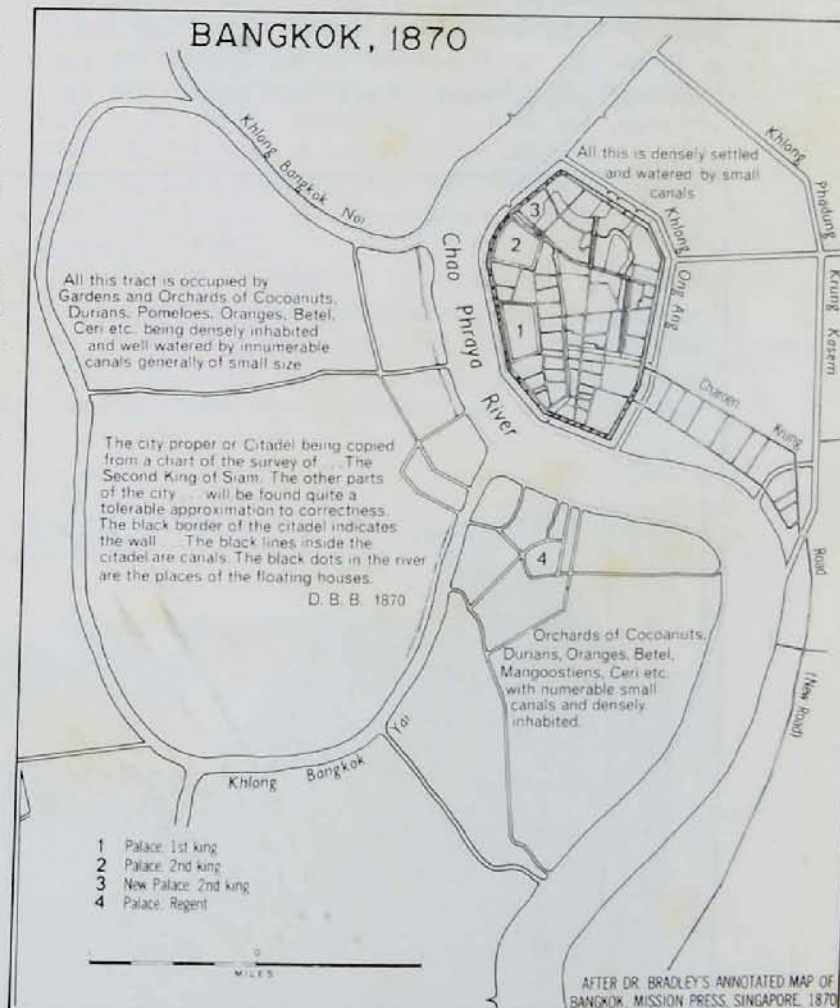
*The post-office now delivers letters with regularity throughout the capital and its suburbs. The use of it has surprisingly exceeded our expectations, as we did not think that Siamese people would write so many letters.*

Postal services had been initiated a few months before. Collection boxes had been set up in all parts of the city; their bottoms reportedly made of sandalwood 'to impart fragrance to the missives, and thereby cultivate a taste for letters'. (In fact, the

anonymity of the post triggered an avalanche of abuse addressed to certain nobles, and also the forwarding of heavy packages of trash for which delivery charges were due.) Each house had affixed to its face a small board bearing a number, and a roll of names and addresses had been compiled to facilitate mail deliveries; to this end, also, distinctive surnames were to be assumed by each family.

The roll was recovered. Its contents exceeded my expectations; though, in retrospect, my hopes should have been high. If the progressive policies of King Chulalongkorn — described at the time as 'one of the most advanced sovereigns of Eastern Asia' — were to be implemented efficiently, a dossier of information about the kingdom was needed. Compilation of the roll of postal addresses afforded an opportunity to gather intelligence. The chance was taken.

According to the postal roll, the population of Krung Thep, comprising the city of Bangkok and a wide area surrounding (roughly thrice the area shown on Bradley's 'Bangkok, 1870') was approximately 169,000 in 1882.



► Lineaments of Bangkok circa 1870; after Bradley, D.B., Map of the city of Bangkok Singapore Mission Press, 1870.

**Table I**

**The population of Krung Thep 1882  
(includes the City of Bangkok)**

Thai	136,000
Chinese	27,000
Malays	4,000
Indians	1,000
Other Asians	1,000
Westerners	300
<b>Total</b>	<b>169,300</b>

Figures are rounded because only estimates could be made for several sub-populations (for example, monks and hareem dwellers) omitted from the postal role.

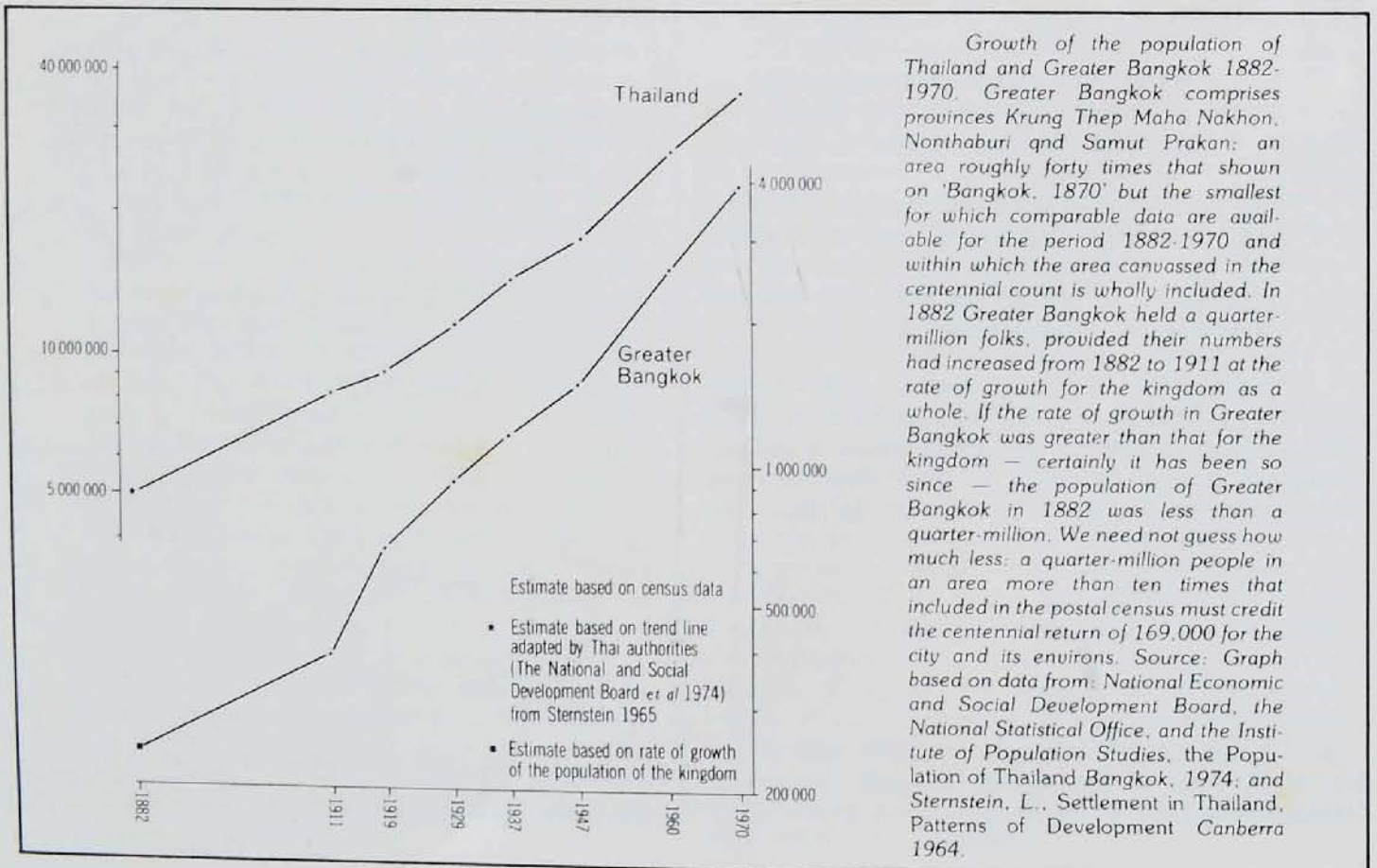
This sum seems reasonable in relation to subsequent censuses, though it differs markedly from mid-nineteenth century estimates and contradicts previous analyses. It permits subsequent, unprecedented population growth stemming from an inrush of immigrants (mainly Chinese) and in-migrants, as well as a downrushing mortality rate which came with the introduction of preventative medicine and the improvement of sanitary conditions in the capital. The incontrovertible argument in support of this new thesis is shown on, and outlined in the caption to the following graph which charts the growth of the

population of Thailand and Greater Bangkok 1882-1970.

How could long-term residents have arrived at the gross over-estimate of a half-million for the population of Bangkok in 1882? Perhaps our eyewitnesses succumbed to a visual fallacy: as they meandered through the city and its environs along innumerable waterways, and the few roadways, they saw houses closely built either side and possibly attributed similarly dense housing to land between the ways; in fact, these tracts were not built-up. Perhaps, also, the great number of native trading boats in the city, in which lived the boatmen and their families, may have been counted permanent city residences by our informants, though few were so certified by the postal authorities. Possibly, too, the estimated population of Bangkok in the 1850s of 350,000 having been made by several sensible men, induced our informants to propose a 'reasonable' figure of a half-million souls in the city a generation later.

Analysis of information provided by the postal roll also discredits eyewitnesses who reported 'Nearly all dwellings are built on posts ... which elevate them five or six feet from the ground' since more than a third of all housing was built on the ground: Table II.

Of the different predilections of national groups for on or off ground dwellings, the anecdotal record says nothing. The picturesque floating houses, however, received fullsome notice in each narrative of the city, though such dwellings, comprised but a fraction of the housing stock. Dr. Bradley, a medical mis-



**Table II**  
**Housing by nationality, in percent, in Krung Thep 1882**  
 (includes the City of Bangkok)

Housing*	Thai	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Westerner	Other	All
Detached							
on ground	16	52	10	19	19	15	26
off ground	73	14	81	30	51	78	56
Row							
on ground	4	21	1	48	13	4	9
off ground	ngl	1	ngl	—	—	1	1
Floating	4	8	7	1	4	ngl	5
Boat	ngl	1	—	—	—	—	ngl
Unknown	3	3	1	2	13	2	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

\* Structures used mainly as residences and shophouses. The description of dwellings given in the postal census would allow also for a classification based on material of construction, or rather main material of construction, since combinations of materials — wood, thatch and bamboo especially — were common.

sionary resident in Bangkok thirty-eight years, appended a description to his annotated map of the city in which he placed the decorative floating houses in perspective:

*The floating houses ... appear to have been diminishing in number for several years. Some 8 to 10 years since [c. 1860] we took the pains to count them, and found their number in the close neighborhood of a 1000. We have counted them again within two months, and make their number 833, including all that are in Bangkok-Noi, and other creeks.*

*But let not one of our readers think from the prominence we have above given to floating houses, that Bangkok is a floating city ... It is passing strange how Foreigners are prone to hold on, like a dog to a root, to this*

*long since exploded idea. It was but a few days since (Nov.) when we read an article in a late issue of the New York Observer, and were astonished to find that a recent sightseer in this city had so worded his article, as to leave that old impression still alive.*

Dr. Bradley, those enamoured of the plain truth — for many, apparently, the truth too plain — salute you; though it pains me to report the postal count of 1882 counted twice the number of houses you found floating on the waterways of Bangkok a dozen years before.

Foreign residents of Bangkok in 1882 also advised that non-Thai comprised half the population of the city; the postal roll puts the non-Thai fraction of Krung Thep at a fifth. Although eyewitnesses probably saw relatively more non-Thai than

*A descriptive, though idiosyncratic, drawing of floating shophouses, shoppers and general river traffic on the Chao Phraya at Bangkok circa 1880.*

Source: Presbyterian Board of Publication, Siam and Laos, as seen by our American missionaries Philadelphia, 1884.





there were (undue weight being given particularly to the queue-wearing Chinese, who stood out boldly from the crowd, engaged in eye-catching activities, and massed near the consulates and business houses of the Europeans), the great difference between the non-Thai fractions of the population reported might reflect different definitions of the city. Beholders of Bangkok limited the city only vaguely to several miles along both banks of the Chao Phraya centred on the citadel. The stretch of river shown on Bradley's 'Bangkok, 1870' appears a fair representation of their description; though overmuch space may be shown west of the Chao Phraya. The city was uncommonly difficult to bound because of its squiggly and discontinuous configuration which matched its framework of waterways. Also confounding, perhaps, was the juxtaposition and the intermingling of agricultural and non-agricultural households; indeed, within households individuals engaged in farm and off-farm activities. If the city of Bangkok in 1882 filled the eastern two-thirds of the area shown on Bradley's 'Bangkok, 1870' its population totalled 120,000, approximately a quarter of which was non-Thai:

Table III

The population of the City of Bangkok 1882

Thai	93,000
Chinese	23,000
Malays	1,800
Indians	700
Other Asians	900
Westerners	300
Total	119,700

Annotations on 'Bangkok, 1870' describe sizeable tracts as *Orchards of Coconuts, Durians, Oranges, Mangosteens, Betel, Ceri, etc. with numerable small canals and densely inhabited.*

or

*All this tract is occupied by Gardens, and Orchards of Coconuts, Durians, Pomeloes, Oranges, Betel, Ceri, etc. being densely inhabited and well watered by innumerable canals generally of small size.*

According to the postal roll fully a fifth of household heads in the 'city' worked the land. Of those who did not work the land better than two-fifths was non-Thai, which fraction is not too far from the anecdotal nearly half non-Thai in the population, albeit the visible population only, of Bangkok in 1882.

A number of eyewitness descriptions of Bangkok from the early and mid-1800s include estimates of the population of the city broken-down into nationalities. Although the total populations reported differ remarkably, the non-Thai fraction strays only

fractionally from two-thirds, and the Chinese consistently outnumber the Thai. 'It may seem strange that the Chinese outnumbered the Thai in the Thai capital city, but ... consensus in this regard of all writers on Siam during the first three reigns (1782-1851) cannot be questioned' and may be accounted for:

*The members of the court itself ... and many of the immediate retainers were Thai; but most of the slaves serving the court were non-Thai ... Physicians, astrologers, artisans, and others providing skilled services were mainly foreigners ... Chinese predominating. Bangkok, furthermore, because of the heavy mercantile interests of the first three Jakkri kings, was somewhat peculiar among oriental capitals in having a large commercial sector in its population, and the great bulk of this group was Chinese. The Thai of course, were not free to move to the capital, even if attracted. The great majority of their number were clients or retainers and slaves of patrons and masters in the elite class. Even the freemen attached to those aristocrats and nobles with duties in the capital were mainly left on the landed estates of their patrons in the provinces. Under these circumstances, Chinese immigrants, whose main port of entry was Bangkok and who remained entirely outside the systems of patronage, corvee, and slavery, readily filled most of the demands of the court and of the capital's trade.*

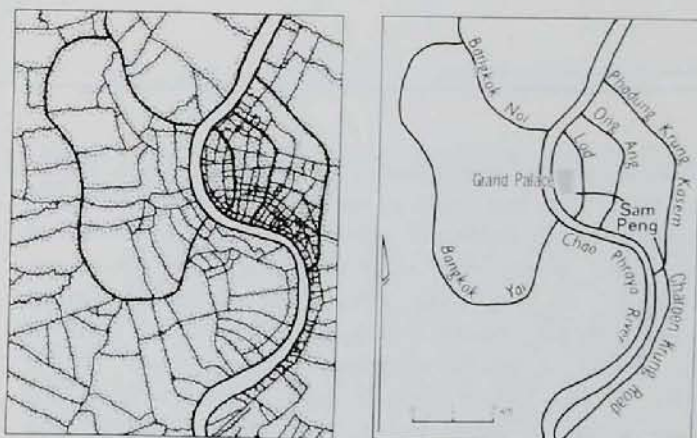
Although this account is more an argument than an explanation, and embodies several questionable points, it is approvable. Indeed, Bangkok may have been more a Chinese than a Thai settlement when Phya Tak, later King Taksin, astutely abandoned Ayutthaya, the former capital, and 'constructed for himself a palace, adequate to the necessity of the times', on the west bank of the Chao Phraya opposite the citadel-to-be on the east bank. The site of the unmade citadel was occupied by a rich Chinese merchant who, together with a considerable community of Chinese, was invited to move to an uninhabited area immediately beyond the walls of the new citadel by Rama I, successor to King Taksin. (There appears to be no supporting evidence for this move being 'commanded' or 'requested and adequate compensation paid'.) Considerable though the community of Chinese invited to move may have been, it should not be inferred that the whole, or even the greater part, of the Chinese community in Bangkok was relocated, or that the Chinese invited to move actually had no choice. The so-called Chinese community was, in reality, a congeries of different Chinese groups, themselves vying, violently at times, with one another. A rich Chinese merchant and his considerable community of Chinese cannot be construed to refer to more than one among several strong groups of Chinese; the one which won the choice commercial location along the Chao Phraya river downstream and immediately beyond the walls of the

new citadel, now part of the area known as Sam Peng, the Chinatown of Bangkok. Why was this choice commercial area uninhabited? (Actually the land was under fruit trees.) Fortress Bangkok had guarded the riverine approach to the capital Ayutthaya, approximately a hundred kilometres upstream. Sam Peng lay in the line of fire downstream. When Bangkok succeeded Ayutthaya as capital, its riverine approach was guarded by forts near the mouth of the Chao Phraya. What enabled the Chinese group relocated at Sam Peng to claim their new quarters? Possibly this Chinese group had distinguished itself in assisting King Taksin (himself born of a Teochiu father and a Thai mother) in reassembling the Thai kingdom following the fall of Ayutthaya, or had found especial favour with Rama I who encouraged the Chinese, abetting even their illegal migration from China, to develop the commerce of his kingdom. Throughout the first three reigns, the development of the kingdom was closely associated with the expansion of state trading and royal monopolies, in which endeavour the tributary relationship with China and the Chinese in Thailand, residents of Bangkok especially, figured prominently. Rama IV (1851-1868) 'mounted the throne ... when European imperialism was tearing Asia to pieces', but Thailand 'preserved her independence when by the end of the nineteenth century all the other states of South-East Asia had come under European control'. His Majesty initiated 'the wise policy of compounding with the advance of Western civilization, instead of resisting it' by concluding a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Great Britain in 1855. The main feature of this treaty was the fixing of duties on imports and exports by British merchants. This was no small concession; in the words of Sir John Bowring, the British negotiator, it demanded 'a complete revolution in the financial system of the country, as it destroys many of the present and most fruitful sources of revenue'. State trading was abolished. 'The conclusion of this treaty ... speedily attracted the attention of other powers, and ... similar treaties ... were made with France and the United States in 1856, Denmark and the Hanseatic cities in 1858, Portugal in 1859, Holland in 1860 ... Prussia in 1862 ... [and] in 1868 ... with Belgium, Italy, and Norway and Sweden'.

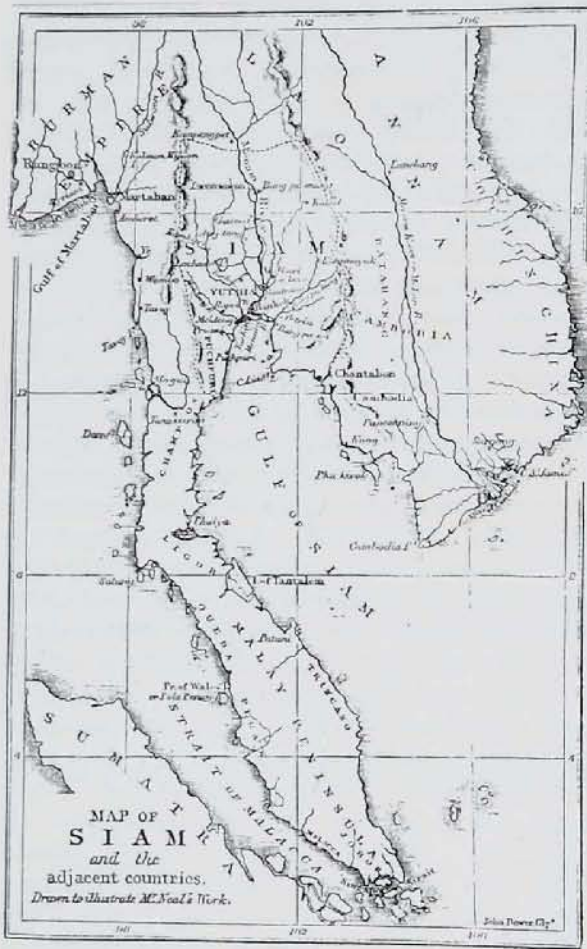
As a result, the economy expanded and so too did the Chinese community; however,

*While Bangkok itself absorbed ever increasing numbers of Chinese, their proportion in the city, if anything, declined. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Thai were progressively released from corvée duties, patronage ties, and slavery, and with their new freedom of movement they migrated into Bangkok in ever greater numbers, even as the Chinese ... the Thai population grew apace with the Chinese, and up until the First World War the number of Thai were equal or close to that of the Chinese.*

In truth, the Thai did not have to wait until 'the last quarter of the nineteenth century' to be 'progressively released from corvée duties, patronage ties, and slavery'. The obligation of client to patron had been progressively eased since the reign of Rama II (1809-1829) when corvée was reduced from six to three months a year. More importantly, clients had successfully sidestepped formal, local obligations always, but particularly since the reign of Rama III (1829-1851) when taxation reforms were introduced which encouraged payment in specie in lieu of corvée. Too, only male clients from the age of twenty were obliged to serve; which circumstance must partially account for the great number of women 'performing all sorts of labor' in the capital; the fact that women enjoyed 'greater liberty than in almost any other Oriental land'; and the commonness of intermarriage with males of different nationality, particularly with Chinese. The Thai migrated to Bangkok 'in ever greater numbers' long before 'the last quarter of the nineteenth century' and long before 'the First World War the number of Thai were equal or close to that of the Chinese': in 1882, Bangkok held more Thai than Chinese. The reportage about centennial Bangkok makes little reference to the distribution of the population other than that certain sections had a 'celestial appearance'. From the postal roll it is clear that the population of Bangkok was aligned strictly along reticulated waterways and the few roadways in a mesh-work; here tightly drawn, there loosely made. Thai were everywhere. Chinese were as widely distributed as the Thai though less uniformly; their distribution, in fact, is described rather nicely by the pattern of population density shown on 'Distribution of the population of Bangkok, 1882'. Two thirds of the

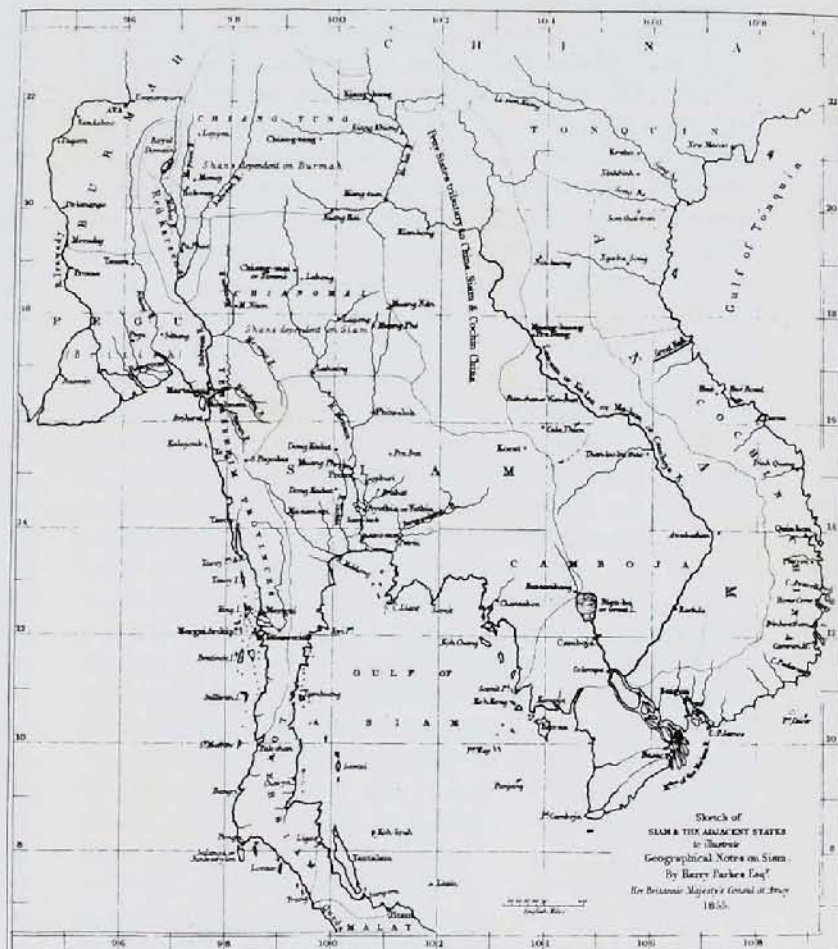


*Distribution of the population of Bangkok 1882. This map was made by representing the main lines of settlement along waterways and roadways, and by photographic reduction running these together to give an impression of population density from the relative darkness of the resulting pattern. Source: Map based on data from the 'Postal Census 1882' plotted on Bradley, D.B., Map of the city of Bangkok. Singapore Mission Press, 1870.*



1840

Source: Neale, F.A., *Narrative of a Residence in Siam* London, 1852.



1855

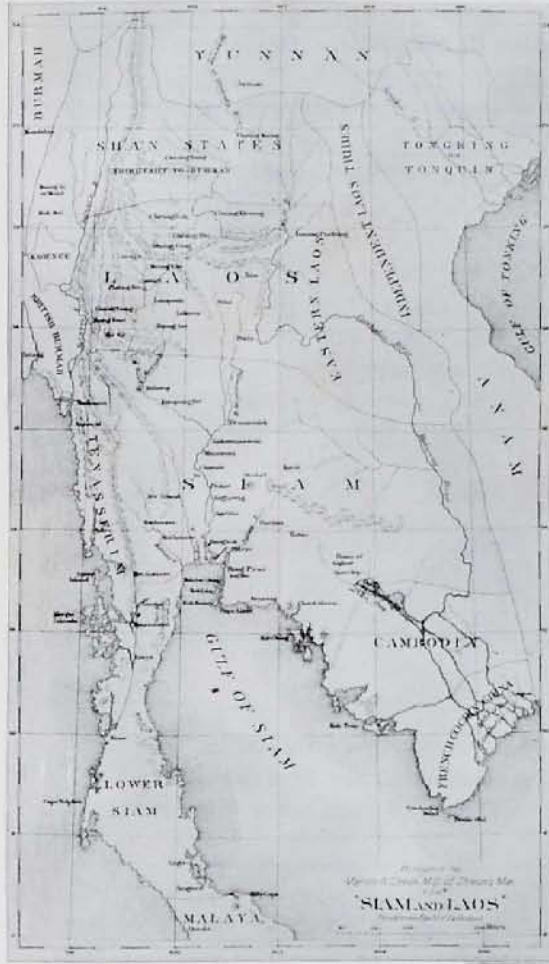
Source: Parkes, H., 'Geographical Notes on Siam, with a New Map of the Lower Part of the Menam River', *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* volume 26, 1856, London.

Chinese resided immediately east of the Chao Phraya river: little less than a third were in Sam Peng (if this quarter is delimited generously as the whole of the area along the river between the southern stretches of the Ong Ang and Phadung Krung Kasem canals); nearly a fifth were within the walls of the citadel, a goodly number being adjacent to the walls of the Grand Palace itself; a tenth lined the river south of Sam Peng; and others fronted the waterways and 'roadways' north of the citadel. The Chinese west of the Chao Phraya favored major waterways, particularly the river bank.

Malays, Indians Westerners — the other national groups of size — nested in the more accessible parts of the city. The largest nest was along the river immediately south of Sam Peng: half the Westerners and more than a third of the Malays and the Indians were here. A second concentration in the heart of

Sam Peng held a quarter of the Westerners and the Indians but relatively few Malays. A third nest was along the left bank of the river opposite and south of the Grand Palace: here were a third of the Indians and a quarter of the Malays but few Westerners. A fourth nucleus north of the citadel along the Chao Phraya held a quarter of the Malays but relatively few Indians or Westerners. Pure ethnic stands were few and small: the two such stands of any size each comprised a troop of Vietnamese mercenaries charged with the operation of heavy artillery. The gathering together of members of different national groups reflected a common concern with trade.

Although trade was a major activity for each of the several major ethnic groups in Bangkok, the membership of each group engaged in a wide range of occupations. There was a certain occupational specialization within national groups, but



1880

Source: Presbyterian Board of Publication, Siam and Laos, as seen by our American missionaries Philadelphia, 1884.

## SIAM LIMITED

The kingdom over which Bangkok ruled during the 19th century was variously delimited but always incompletely, even after its boundaries had been determined (and re-determined) by the colony-hungry English and French early this century. Indeed, neither the area nor the configuration of mainland Southeast Asia was charted with accuracy until this century. Although each of the maps shown — circa 1840, 1855 and 1880, respectively — is imprecise, the sequence illustrates the rapidity with which the limits of Siam and its neighbours were discovered once the Western powers decided their guardianship was necessary to the 'proper' development of the area.

no occupational segregation, notwithstanding contemporary accounts to the contrary; Table IV.

In his commercial report for 1882, Her Majesty's Acting Agent and Counsel-General in Siam, informed the British Parliament:

*The whole trade of the country now falls into the hands of the Chinese, indeed it would be a difficult matter now to find a Siamese merchant or shopkeeper.*

This was nonsense. Even the large fraction of the Thai population of Bangkok engaged in trade which is shown in Table IV is a considerable understatement. For in addition to the many women trading in the bazaars and markets and along the innumerable waterways, the Thai wives of Chinese shopkeepers (few Chinese women were in Bangkok) minded the store. Nonsensical too was the observation of a resident of long-standing that all

Moslems were merchants or peddlers. The anecdotal record avers also that:

*The manufacture of gold and silver jewellery, which is carried on to a large extent in Bangkok, is entirely in the hands of the Chinese.*

This was not so: the makers of gold and silver jewellery were predominantly Thai (75 percent) and Malays were as numerous in this craft as were the Chinese. Indeed, there was not a product made or an activity pursued which was entirely in the hands of a single national group.

So Furnivall was unwise to extend his famous thesis concerning the development of a 'plural society' resulting from the impact of colonialism and capitalism on certain tropical polities by pointing to 'a plural society also in independent states, such as Siam, where Natives, Chinese and Europeans have distinct economic functions, and live apart as sepa-

Table IV

The occupations of heads of households by nationality in percent,  
in the city of Bangkok 1882

Occupation*	Nationality					
	Thai	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Westerner	Other
Farmers & fishermen	25	12	13	2	—	31
Makers of products	13	16	23	6	2	7
Labourers & construction workers	6	9	9	ngl	—	4
Transport & communications workers	1	ngl	5	6	17	3
Clerical workers	8	3	4	3	8	1
Sales workers	14	40	22	66	10	9
Service workers	7	6	6	6	3	4
Professional & technical workers	5	2	3	3	27	2
Administrators & managers	5	3	3	1	28	2
Armed forces	7	ngl	2	—	—	33
Other and unknown	9	9	10	7	5	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

\* 'Occupation' refers to the kind of work performed, not the business in which a person works. For example, a 'clerical worker' might work in a government department, a gambling den or a go-down. Only 'first' occupations were considered in making up this table; many household heads were engaged in two or more occupations.

rate social orders'. Doubtless Furnivall's distance from Bangkok lent enchantment to his view; even residents of Bangkok found it difficult to find an appropriate perspective:

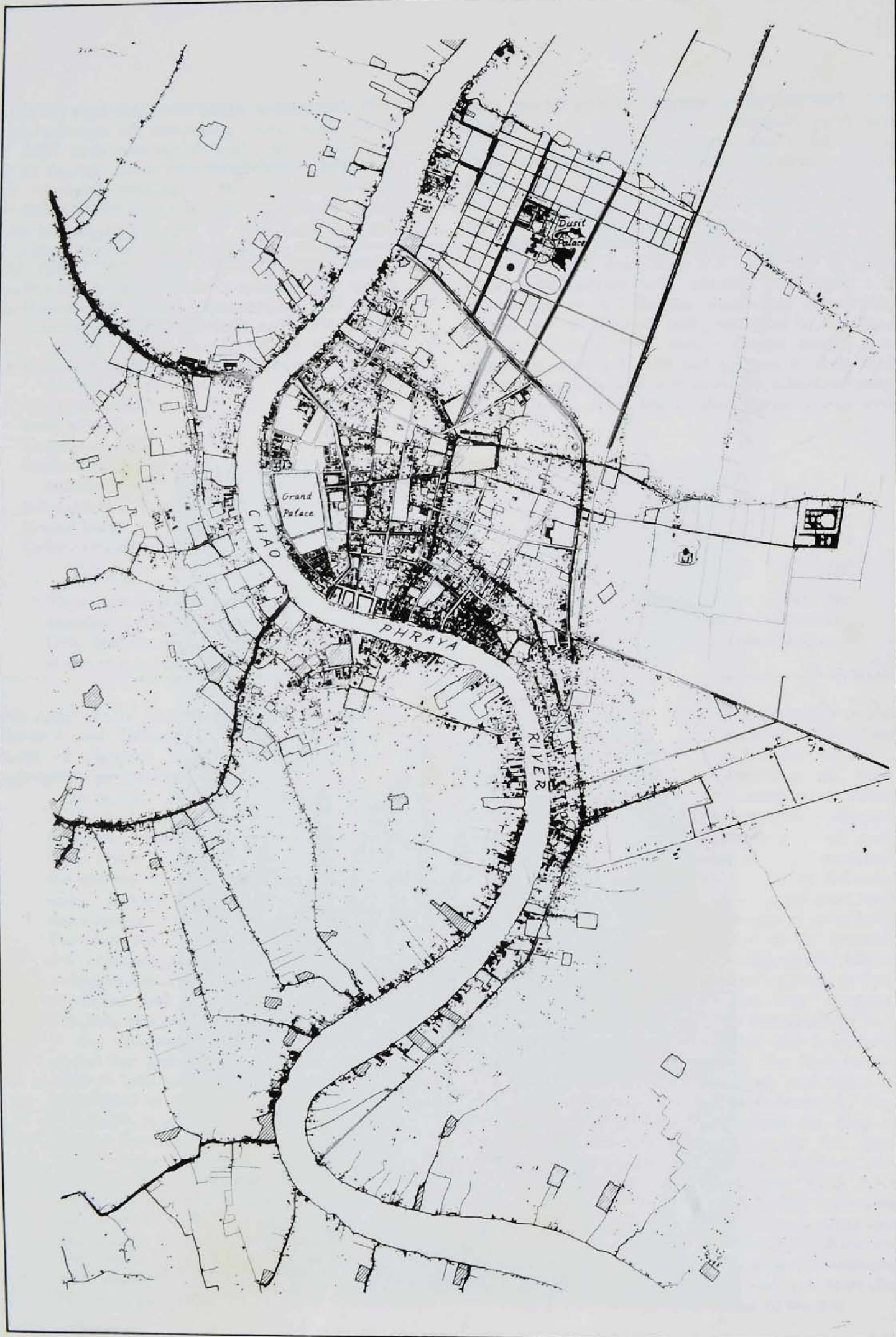
...the famous temple Wat Chang, which as it towers its head above the low sea of roofs of Bangkok, as seen from the River Menam [sic], looks like a grand and costly work of art, on the external decoration of which beautiful masonry, delicate painting or mosaic, with precious stones innumerable have been lavished. Tier upon tier, row upon row, line upon line, this imposing structure rises, gradually diminishing in beautifully graduated proportions, till its curved apex reaches a height of over 100 feet from the ground. Line upon line of what, in the distance, looks like delicate tracery, picked out with sparkling gems, follow each other in bold array, marking the broken octagonal form of the temple, while each important break in the outline of the structure is marked by row upon row of pinnacles of varied design. When the eye has followed upwards, tier upon tier, for twenty tiers or so, this detail, which, being in high relief, stands out in great prominence, and with wonderful distinctness, owing to the brilliantly lighted projections against the dark shadows of the deep recesses, it is arrested by representations of the three-headed elephant, of which there

are four, one on each principal facade of the temple, projecting some distance beyond the line of the tall pilasters which enframe them, and which support four graceful turrets, from between which springs the central spire. When examining in detail this imposing and effective structure, a feeling of amazement that such effects could be produced with the materials employed, conflicts with a sense of ludicrous incredulity that such materials could ever have been employed with the object of producing such effects. The general part of the structure is of brick; the tracery is composed of bits of broken plates, glass, cups and saucers, in fact, all kinds of broken pottery and crockery, mixed with thousands upon thousands of the common cyproea stuck into the brickwork, and formed into designs of the lotus-flower, the monstrous guardian angels and other figures. Only the immense impudence, if I may use the expression, with which the idea of utilizing such decorative materials has been carried into effect, and the great boldness with which the figures and flowers have been executed in high- some in full-relief, producing the wonderful effect of the deep shadows and high lights, redeem the structure from the charge of being absolutely tawdry. I ascended it as far as it was possible...and was rewarded by a very fine bird's-eye view of the city.

The *phra prang* (pagoda) of Wat Chang, now Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn), was to be viewed across the Chao Phraya river from the Grand Palace, specifically when the spire caught the rays of the rising sun. The tower was not built to provide a height from which to gain the wonderful panoramic view of the city beneath. Fashioned from materials chosen carefully and arranged deliberately, the *phra prang* of Wat Arun is a great work because it is set at a magnificent distance. The historian Marc Bloch reminds us that 'each science has its appropriate aesthetics of language', that 'there is no less beauty in a precise equation than in a felicitous phrase'. Each limb of learning has also, I submit, its appropriate aesthetics of perception, a magnificent distance from which objects under study are in focus. □

▼ The sublime eighty-two metre high *phra prang* of Wat Arun which punctuates the cityscape on the west bank of the Chao Phraya river circa 1900. Wat Arun dates from Ayutthayan times, though its lofty spire was brought to its present height in 1842 during the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851). Wat Arun, when known as Wat Chang, gained prominence as the sanctuary of the Emerald Buddha late in the reign of King Taksin (1767-1782) whose palace was adjacent to the monastery. King Rama I (1782-1806) subsequently moved the Emerald Buddha to Wat Phra Keo, the Royal Sanctuary, in the compound of the Grand Palace. Source: Carter, A.C., *The Kingdom of Siam* New York and London, 1904.





# CITY OF GREAT DISTANCES

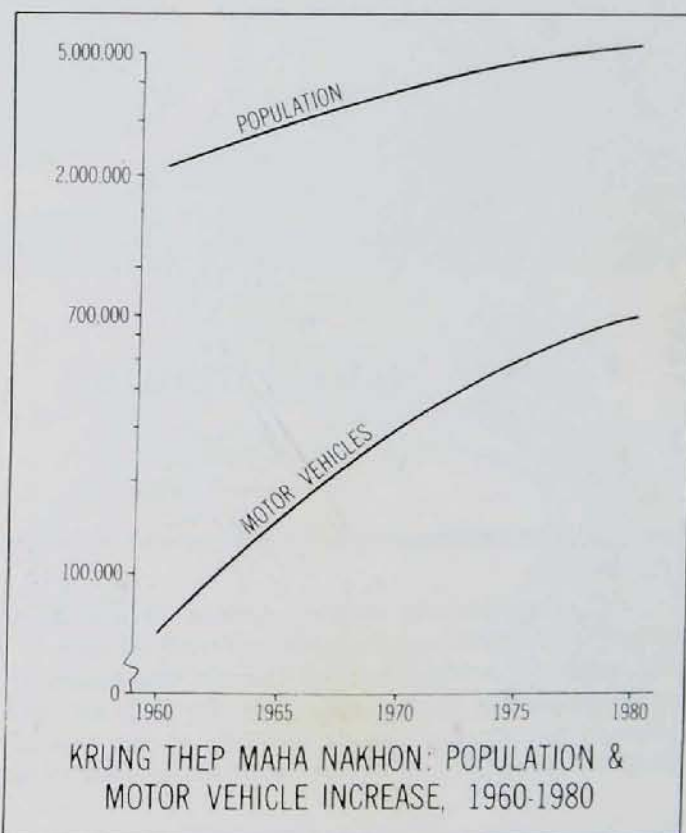
A handsome guide-book to Bangkok, published in 1927 by the Royal State Railways, saw the city in future as a vast well laid out, park-like town intersected with a network of broad shady roads running in all directions; a city which would become much more even than now 'the city of great distances', by which name it is already known. Barely two decades before, Bangkok rightly bore the epithet 'Venice of the East'. The transformation, though rapid, had not taken place overnight but was the result of cumulated construction under the guidance of the Chakri kings who sought to refashion their capital after the Western mode and to reinforce its place as the hub of their kingdom. The Great King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) and his predecessor King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851-1868) were particularly assiduous in working the change, though the groundwork for modernization had been laid by Rama III (1824-1851) and the work was carried on by Rama VI (1910-1925) and Rama VII (1925-1935). These monarchs and their heirs succeeded admirably in their endeavours; though Bangkok is neither 'well laid out' nor 'park-like', and 'shady roads' are few indeed. Roads do run 'in all directions', but traffic crawls. Bangkok is a 'city of great distances' because to go any distance takes a great deal of time. This unfortunate condition may be attributed to an unfettered speculation in and use of land, coupled with an ungoverned increase in the population of the metropolis. Without controls on urban development, the attempt by government to provide ways for a vehicular population which has burgeoned since the Second World War has been in vain; worse, has needlessly sacrificed the more charming, even uniquely attractive, features of the city. Perhaps the worst aspect of the drive to

◀ Redrafted and adapted version of an outsized (2 x 3 metres) original handcoloured 'map' of Bangkok. Unattributed, undated, unscaled and un-oriented, the original (in Thai) appears to be the earliest large-scale chart of the capital based on detailed surveys. Dating this plan is difficult because planned as well as present features are shown (the Dusit Palace area, for example, was not yet on the ground) and the original itself was updated by overdrafting; however, a date in the mid- to late 1890s seems certain. Source: Original held at the National Library of Thailand.

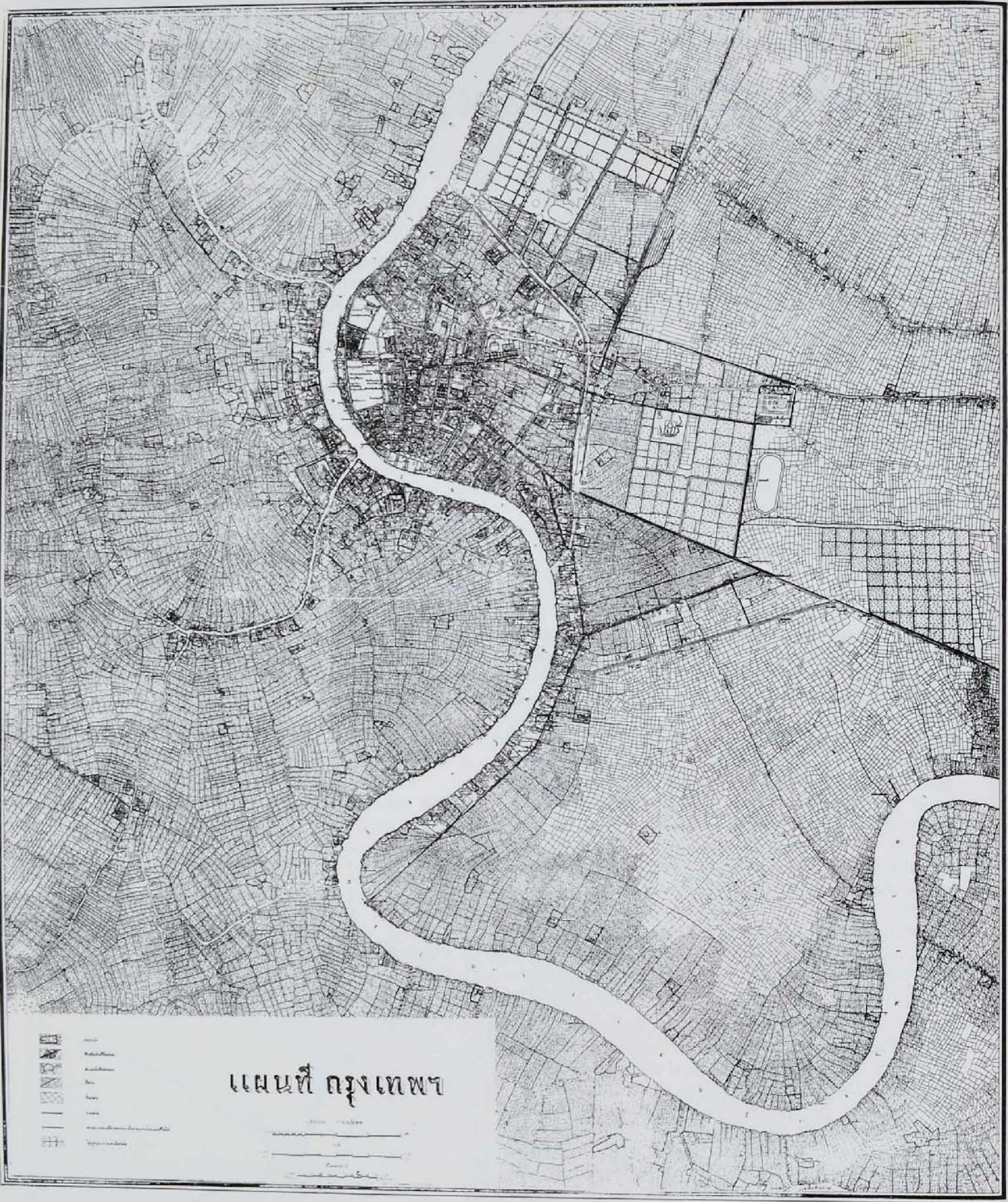
▶ The 'population explosion' in Bangkok: not man alone but also his machines. Source: Based on registration data from the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.

modernize has been the destruction of the system of urban waterways which had earned for Bangkok the favour of a comparison with the Queen of the Adriatic. Many canals have been pierced by roads and now are merely foul pools. Many waterways have been buried beneath avenues. Many streets have been widened by uprooting bordering shade trees, filling paralleling 'borrow pits' and canals, and covering the scars with hot tar. In short, the network of waterways has been dismembered. Its function as a transportation system has not been reconstituted by roadways. Its function as a drainage system has not been replaced, though a grandiose, costly scheme of sewerage, drainage and flood protection has been drawn up and bits are being implemented. The ameliorating effect of the waterways on oppressive city temperatures has been nullified, while the urban area has been resurfaced with heating concrete. The incalculable recreational value of the waterways has been lost, while the public is 'served' by an ever diminishing, already woefully inadequate area of parkland and playground. The beauty of the waterways has been despoiled, while Bangkok has become as any mean, modern city anywhere; truly, a 'city of great distances'.

The tragic transformation of Bangkok may be readily inferred from the graphic illustrations on the following pages.







Photographically reduced version of a large (circa 105 × 120 centimetres) original map of Bangkok. Although undated and including planned as well as present features, this map was made in the late 1890s, soon after the earliest detailed chart of the capital shown on a prior page. Taken together, the two maps clearly show the limited extent of the built-up area of Bangkok and the close, if not intimate, association between the city and the countryside at the turn of the century. Source: Original held at the Royal Survey Division, Army Survey Department, Royal Thai Army.

These plans, derived from large-scale survey maps of Bangkok, clearly show the expansion of roadway and the contraction of waterway in the capital since 1935. In fact, the reduction in the significance of waterway vis-à-vis roadway is understated in this series, since many of the waterways shown were no longer 'working', each waterway — including even the arterial Chao Phraya river — had lost a large measure of its importance, and the network of waterways no longer played a central role in the working of the city.

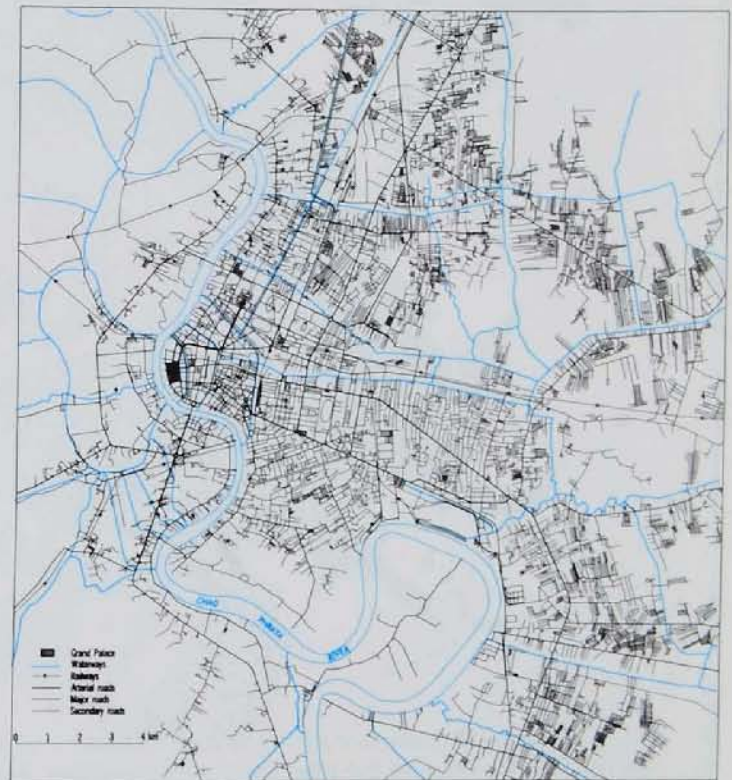
Source: Originals held at the Royal Survey Division, Army Survey Department, Royal Thai Army and in my personal collection.



Circa 1935



Circa 1955



Circa 1975

# COVERING THE NUTURING EARTH WITH CEMENT:

1900  
Built-up area  
13 km<sup>2</sup>



1958  
Built-up area  
96 km<sup>2</sup>



1936  
Built-up area  
43 km<sup>2</sup>



1971  
Built-up area  
184 km<sup>2</sup>

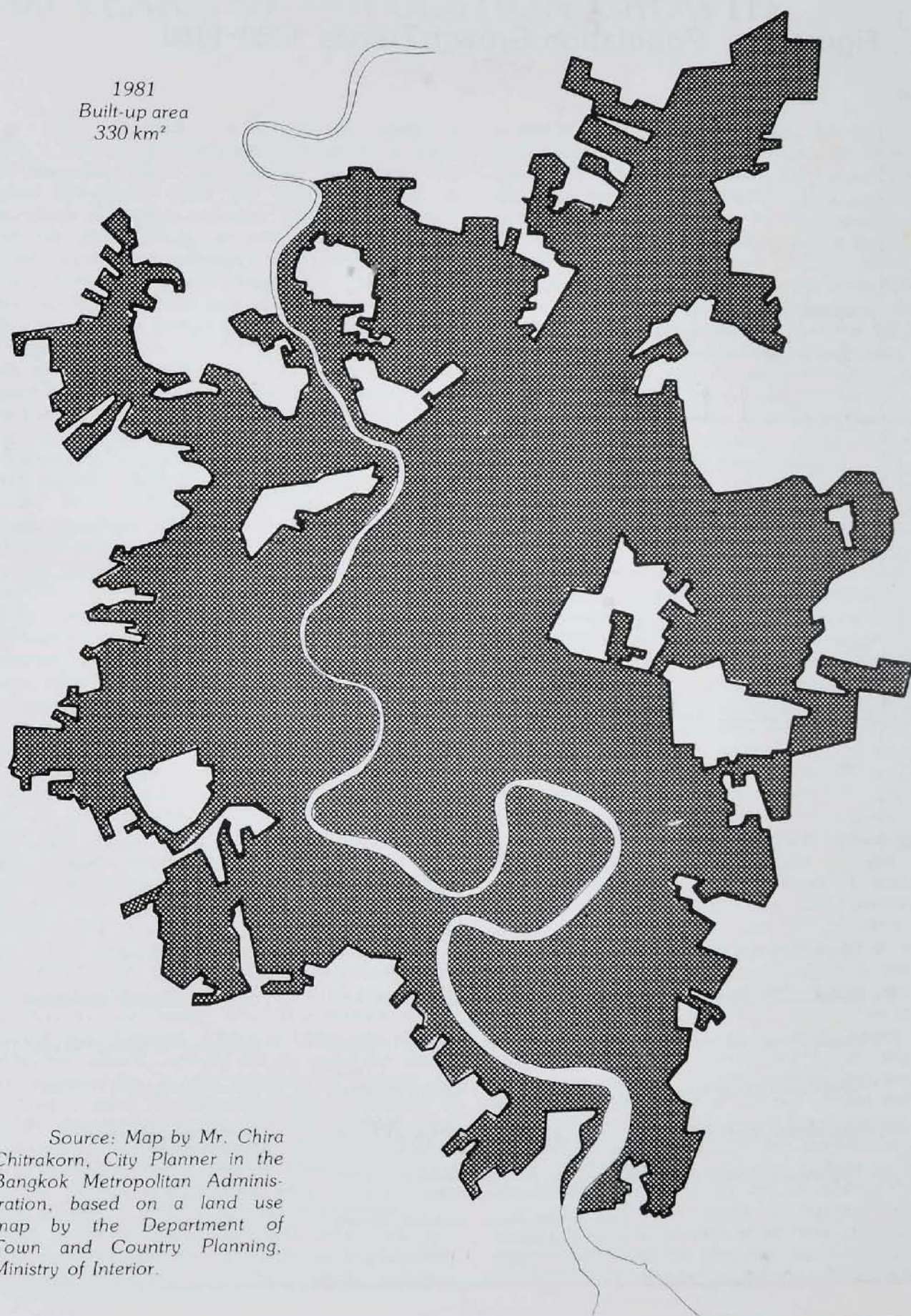


1953  
Built-up area  
67 km<sup>2</sup>



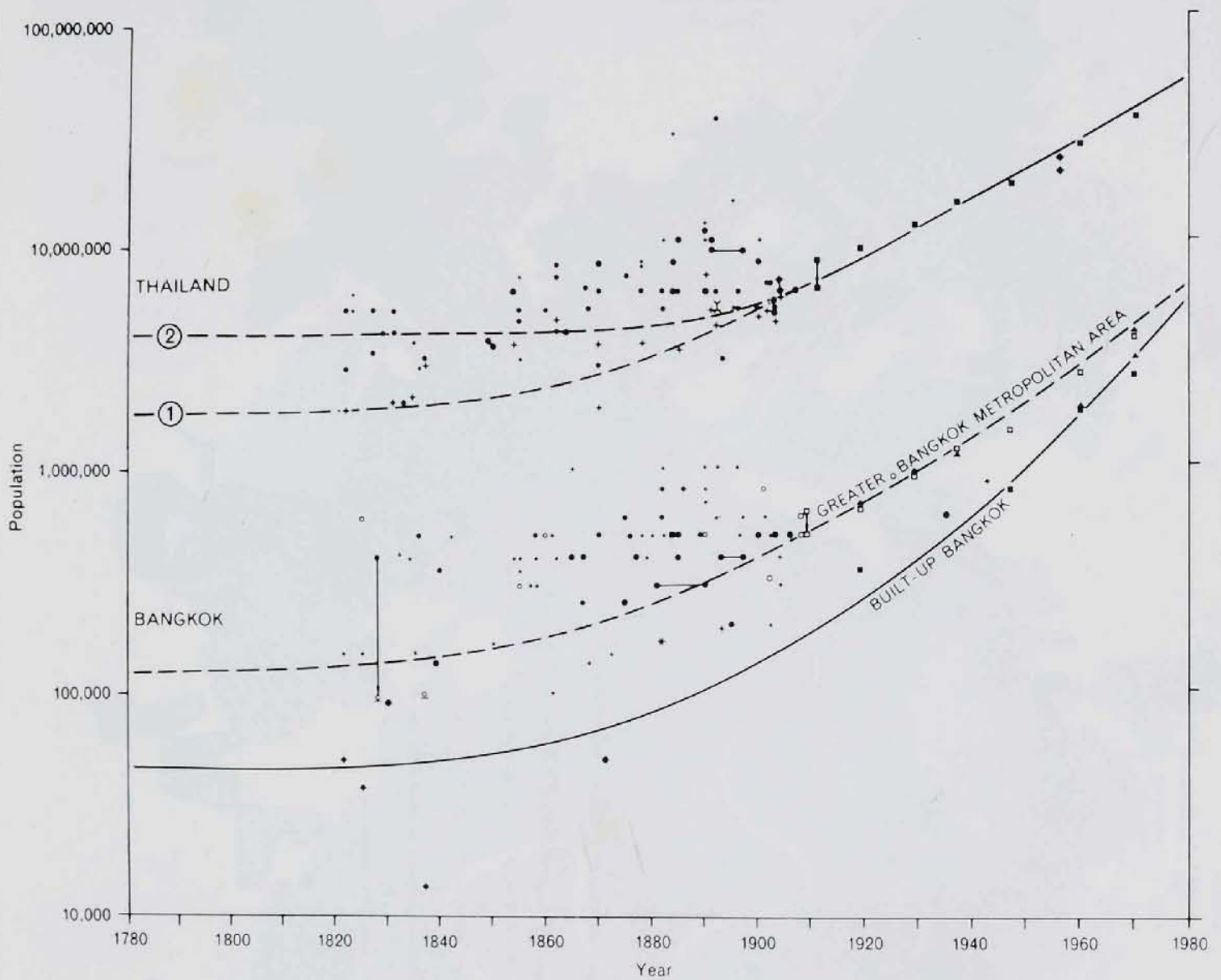
Source: Department of Town and Country Planning, Report on the First Revision of the Plan for the Metropolitan Area Bangkok, 1971 (in Thai). Planning Division, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, Basic Planning Information 1972 Bangkok, 1972.

# "EXPLOSIVE" EXPANSION OF BANGKOK SINCE 1900



Source: Map by Mr. Chira Chittrakorn, City Planner in the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, based on a land use map by the Department of Town and Country Planning, Ministry of Interior.

# Figure 1. Population Growth Trends 1780-1980



- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| ▪ Census : municipal area                | • Eyewitness : resident   | • Cited by eyewitness                         |
| ◻ Census : GBMA/Monthon Krung Thep       | ◻ Identical annual estimates from same source throughout period | • Cited by eyewitness, 'city proper'          |
| + Census : Postal, city and suburbs      | • Eyewitness : resident, 'city proper'                          | ⌘ Estimates from Bunnag 1963 and 1977         |
| ◆ Quasi-Census and Sample Survey         | • Eyewitness : transient, no area nominated                     | ↓ Revised estimate                            |
| ▲ Registration : municipal area          | • Eyewitness : transient, 'city and suburbs'                    | + Eyewitness : calculated for Thailand-as-now |
| ▲ Registration : GBMA/Monthon Krung Thep | ◻ Eyewitness : transient, 'city and immediate suburbs'          |   |
|  | ◆ Eyewitness : transient, 'city and part-city'                  |   |

# BURGEONING BANGKOK: 200 YEARS OF POPULATION GROWTH

When Bangkok was named the capital of Siam it held an inconsiderable population of some fifty thousand. Now, two hundred years later, this capital city boasts some five million residents. A prodigious population increase, indeed: a hundred-fold gain generated by an ever increasing rate of growth which after gathering momentum only gradually during the greater part of the 19th century, rose rapidly around the turn of this century and has since soared. The foregoing compendious description of the historical trend of the growth of the population of Bangkok comes from the curve shown on figure 1 which charts the march of the population of the built-up area of the city. This particular population has not been reported previously; it has been calculated by reworking the numbers which have been reported at particular times by certain 'eyewitnesses'. Since the turn of this century, the 'eyewitnesses' have been censuses and registration counts for administrative areas; previously, 'witnesses' comprised the postal census of 1882 and the considered estimate of the population of the city proper in 1822 by the 'very trustworthy' Dr. John Crawford, Head-of-Mission to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China deputed by the Governor-General of India. All the many other pre-20th century eyewitness estimates of the population of Bangkok have been forsaken; as is evident from figure 1. What has prompted this prodigious repudiation?

Let me begin to build my case by considering 20th century counts and the populations of the built-up area derived therefrom. The censuses of 1970 and 1960, taken by the National Statistical Office and the Central Statistical Office, respectively, provide populations for various administrative areas derived from unpublished numbers for 'collector's districts'. The censuses of 1947, 1937, 1929, 1919 and 1909, taken by the central registration office in the Ministry of Interior, provide populations for various administrative areas derived from unpublished numbers for 'sub-district' units. The creation of the Central, then National, Statistical Office with responsibility for national censuses did not signal the end of the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior for population data: the registration office continued to gather statistics for sub-district units derived from compulsory registrations of births, deaths and changes of residence; and to provide population numbers for the various administrative areas. Municipalities were created in 1933. The census and registration counts shown on figure 1 for 1970, 1960, 1947 and 1937 were reported for the trans-river municipalities of Krung Thep and Thon Buri which, together,

comprise what might be called the city; counts shown for 1929 and 1919 were reported for the 'city proper'. The population counts for the *built-up area* shown on figure 1 were calculated from unpublished census and registration data for small areas fitted to the built-up city as shown on large-scale maps. None of the reported numbers are perfectly, or perhaps even particularly, accurate — neither those from the censuses nor those from the registrations — but they are the best estimates available. Also, the differences between these estimates for the census years 1960 and 1970 are of little consequence when used to determine a credible trend, not only because these differences are relatively small but because the differences owe much to census under-enumeration, which has been officially acknowledged.

Populations were calculated for the built-up area of Bangkok because the area enclosed by the different legal boundaries in 1937, 1947, 1960 and 1970 was not reasonably coincident with the urban area, because of an indefinite reference to the 'city proper' in 1919 and 1929, and because the 1909 census embraced 'Bangkok and suburbs'. Although the calculated populations in the built-up area are not more than estimates, they do refer to the same relevant complex and they can be linked together readily by a relatively smooth curve; or, at least, a curve which is less disjointed than that which might be drawn to link the returns from censuses and registrations. To describe the trend of the growth of the population of Bangkok, then, the calculated numbers in the built-up area of the city are more appropriate than are the estimates from censuses and registrations.

Having established the trend of population growth for Bangkok during the 20th century, pre-20th century information can be considered. The most credible estimates of the population of the city would come from actual counts. There is one such count: the postal census of 'Krung Thep' in 1882 which was taken to facilitate the introduction of mail services of an international standard. 'Krung Thep' comprised an area circumscribed by an imperfect circle, the perimeter of which lay roughly ten kilometres from the center of the city. Within this wide area, the data gathered in the postal census were tabulated by small tracts, and this permits the calculation of the population of the built-up area. Although no certain accuracy can be claimed for this reckoning (shown on figure 1), it does lay at a credible magnitude relative to the trend of population growth established for the 20th century. Since no other pre-20th century population estimate can be

Table I

Bangkok: Mean Annual Rate of Growth of the Population, by Decade, 1780-1980; and Relative Growth Rates for the Greater Bangkok Metropolitan Area and Thailand, 1900-1980.

Decade	Mean annual growth rate, in percent*		
	Bangkok**	GBMA***	Thailand
pre-1840	less than 0.5		
1840-1850	0.5		
1850-1860	1.0		
1860-1880	1.5		
1880-1900	3.0		
1900-1910	3.5	3.0	3.0
1910-1920	4.0	3.5	3.0
1920-1930	4.0	3.5	3.0
1930-1940	6.0	4.0	3.5
1940-1950	6.5	4.5	3.5
1950-1960	8.0	4.5	3.5
1960-1970	8.0	5.0	4.0
1970-1980	8.5	5.0	3.5

\* Percentages are rounded to the nearest 0.5.

\*\* The built-up area of Bangkok.

\*\*\* GBMA refers to the Greater Bangkok Metropolitan Area which comprises provinces Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, Nonthaburi and Samut Prakan; and includes the built-up area of Bangkok.

Source: Figure 1.

accepted on more rigorous grounds, the trend of the curve describing the growth of the population of Bangkok during the decades around the turn of this century has been governed by this calculated approximation of the population of the built-up area in 1882.

In the absence of an actual count, the best basis on which to accredit an eyewitness estimate of the population of the city would be one for which the urban area in question was clearly defined. Prior to the postal census of 1882, there appear to have been three such population estimates: in 1837, 1825 and 1882. The estimates for 1837 and 1825, though divergent, refer explicitly to those 'within the walls'; that is, the population resident in the 2.5 square kilometre citadel at the heart of Bangkok. Dr. Crawford's population estimate of 1822 refers to the built-up area of the city which he describes rather generously as extending 'along the banks of the Menam, to the distance of about two miles and a half; but...of no great breadth, probably not exceeding one mile and a half'. Also, this good emissary was in Bangkok during the new-year period; a time when an unusually large number of provincials were

went to visit their capital city. Acceptance of Dr. Crawford's estimate of the population of the built-up area in 1822 as a credible basis on which to describe the trend of the growth of the population of Bangkok rests on its credible magnitude relative to the previously established trend of population growth since the late 19th century, though additional support for his estimate comes from the lower 'within the walls' population estimate of 1825 and the higher population estimates for 'the city and immediate suburbs' of 1828 and 1827; see figure 1.

The freehand trend line shown on figure 1 indicates that the growth of the population of the built-up area of Bangkok cannot be adequately described by a simple (or a modified) exponential function. (The inconsistency of the ratio of first differences disallows an exponential description.) The curve shown might be broken, with reason, into three segments — 1930 to 1980, 1880 to 1930 and pre-1880 — and regression lines fitted to each, but this is unnecessary since table I tells the tale well.

It should be stressed that the course of the curve shown on figure 1 describes the *trend* of the growth of the population of the built-up area of

Bangkok; it does not necessarily describe the actual growth of population from time to time. For example, the smooth gradual rise of population described by the curve from the 1780s to the period around the turn of this century is meant to approximate the net result of fitful ups and downs in the number of people resident in the city: 'highs' might result from the 'recruitment' of large numbers of labourers for massive public works; 'lows' might reflect the ravages of killer diseases, among which cholera was a fearsome frequent visitor which, on occasion, reduced the resident population by a fifth and more in a few weeks. In modern times, too, the population of the city has grown unsmoothly. For example, during the Second World War many moved from the city to get out of harms way. The curve shown on figure 1 takes little notice of disorders in the real population, but describes an orderly progression, the *trend*, of population growth, albeit unreal. To ascertain the validity of the proposed trend of growth of the population of Bangkok, the components of population growth — natural increase and net migration — must be considered. Before this is done, the evidence provided by other population estimates should be evaluated: first, 'other population estimates' for Bangkok; then, estimates of the population of the kingdom as a whole.

A second freehand trend line on figure 1 describes the growth of the population within an area of approximately 3000 square kilometres occupied by provinces Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, Nonthaburi and Samut Prakan; the so-called Greater Bangkok Metropolitan Area. This is the smallest area including built-up Bangkok for which comparable population counts are available from all 20th century censuses. In the early censuses this area was an administrative unit referred to as Monthon Krung Thep. In the absence of explicit pre-20th century counts or estimates for this administrative unit, the trend line prior to the 20th century has been drawn so as to parallel the rate of growth of the population within the built-up area of the capital. Although there is no real basis for this 'least-worst' solution, there appears no better based interpretation of the pre-20th century population increase for Monthon Krung Thep.

Some support for the proposed trend comes from the passage of the curve through population levels above those reported for 'Bangkok and immediate suburbs' in 1882, 1837 and 1828; see figure 1. That the population of Monthon Krung Thep was greater than that indicated by the trend line cannot be presumed with reason; there is reason to say, however, that no conceivable raising of pre-20th century population levels for Monthon Krung Thep would suggest even the 'possibility' of most of the pre-20th century eyewitness estimates of the population of 'Bangkok and suburbs', much less 'Bangkok'. Even pre-20th century population estimates of eyewitnesses long resident in Bangkok were wonderfully inflated. How could this occur? I have alluded to

several possible explanations in an article about Bangkok at its centenary in 1882:

How could long-term residents have arrived at the gross overestimate of 0.5 million for the population of centennial Bangkok? Perhaps our eyewitnesses succumbed to a visual fallacy: as they meandered through the city and its environs along innumerable waterways, and the few roadways, they saw houses closely built either side and possibly attributed similarly dense housing to land between the ways; in fact, these tracts were not built-up. Perhaps, also, the great number of native trading boats in the city, in which lived the boatmen and their families, may have been counted permanent city residences by our informants; though few were so certified by the postal authorities. Possibly, too, the estimated population of Bangkok in the 1850s of 350,000 having been made by several sensible men, induced our informants to propose a 'reasonable' figure of one half million souls in the city a generation later.

(Sternstein 1979)

Among the 'sensible men' who had provided seemingly trustworthy estimates of the resident population of Bangkok around the mid-19th century, missionaries figured prominently; yet embedded in despatches on the importance of their missionary activity in Siam are the very points which should have cautioned a greater circumspection in their calculations:

Our views have been changed considerably of late, in regard to the importance of our having out-stations. They do not appear to us so important at present as we were once inclined to think them. If our present location was in any city less in rank than the capital, the necessity of different stations would be much greater than it now is; for we should then enjoy far less facilities for intercourse with all parts of the kingdom. The Siamese are almost, if not quite, as much in the habit of coming several times a year to Bangkok, as the Jews were of going up to Jerusalem to worship. It costs them little or nothing to travel. Their rivers and canals intersect the country every where. Boats are very plenty and cheap. They account their time of no value. When they come they bring provisions enough for the journey to the capital, and when they arrive they can obtain food cheaper in the city than in the country.

(Anonymous 1841)

We have been made more sensible of the great advantage of being stationed at Bangkok. It is the grand commercial focus of the kingdom. This was well known before. But



to take one's station at a distance from the scene of his accustomed labors, and see every river, creek and canal alive with human beings, all proceeding to that one place, or returning from it, — this will make an impression which nothing else can make. But there is an immense influx and efflux of people at Bangkok, entirely disconnected from commercial transactions. Every male may be brought into the service of government every fourth month. Many avoid actual service by the payment of a sum of money, and some undoubtedly are exempted on other grounds. Still it is certain that vast numbers do spend their three months yearly at Bangkok, in performing various kinds of government service. On the last day of our tour to the Thachin, it being the last day of the Siamese month, a large number of boats passed us, some containing men who had just finished their month and were returning to their homes, while about an equal number were going to Bangkok to commence theirs. It may well be doubted whether there is another country in the world of equal magnitude with this, every part of which can be so easily and effectually reached by a missionary stationed at one point. The great importance of systematic preaching and distribution of tracts among the boats visiting Bangkok has also been forced upon our attention. I can think of no one place so admirably adapted to give us access to people from all parts, including the inhabitants of Bangkok itself, as that which Providence has already placed in our hands — namely, the tract-house. Multitudes from beyond the limits of Bangkok are there reached. Still there can be no doubt but the distant provinces may more efficiently be reached by a systematic visitation of the boats coming from those provinces.

(Anonymous 1841)

The population of this city is large, probably several hundred of thousands of souls. People from all parts of the country constantly visit this city, which is at once the seat of government, of religion, of foreign commerce, in short of nearly all public life in the kingdom. Bangkok is more to Siam than Paris to France.

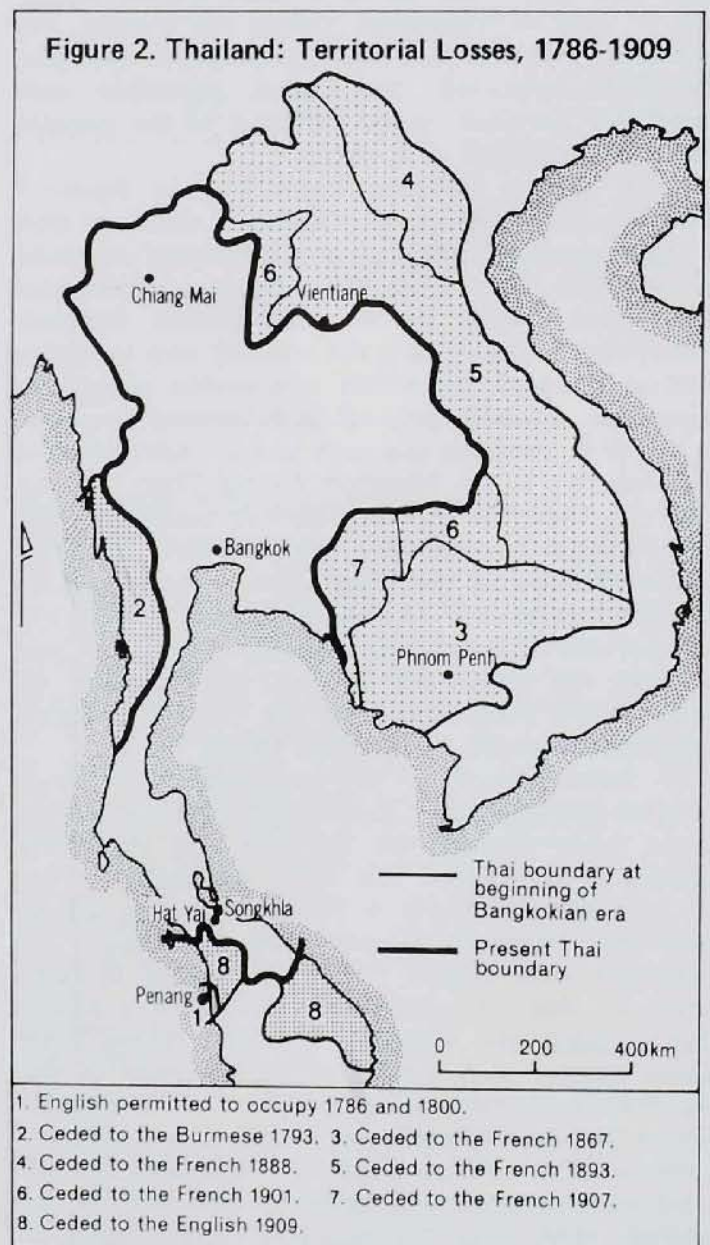
(Anonymous 1865)

Whatever the reason or reasons (whether innocent or not) for the many gross overestimates by eyewitnesses of the pre-20th century population of Bangkok, they stand high and dry.

When first my views on the growth of the population of Thailand were aired some fifteen years ago (Sternstein 1965), the response was thin and

equivocal. With the passage of time, my peculiar thesis came to be accepted by authority, both researchers and officialdom, and the original graphic presentation of the argument has been re-presented updated and otherwise elaborated in a number of papers, monographs and books. My thesis has become 'truth', and there is no denying that this transformation has provided me with a deal of sweet satisfaction; despite my mindful misgivings about such metamorphoses. So, a disinclination on my part to tamper with the original thesis might be excused; but now I am bound to reopen the question of the trend of the growth of the population of the kingdom because a wealth of additional historical data has come to my notice and I have now a greater awareness than before of the nature of the data on which my previous interpretation was based. The original thesis on the growth of the population of Thailand can be encapsulated as follows:

The present population of over 25 million in 1960 has resulted largely from an



unprecedented and ever-increasing rate of growth during the last half-century which was generated rather suddenly after at least 200 years of gradual increase; two centuries during which population numbers rose almost imperceptibly from approximately 4 million late in the 17th century to somewhat less than 5 million in the mid-19th century when a slight, but perceptible, acceleration in the rate of growth set in and brought the population to some 5 million at the turn of this century.

I now regard the pre-20th century part of the previously proposed scenario of the growth of the population of the kingdom as possible, but not probable. In fact, I regard the original thesis as an extreme specification. At the other extreme, the specification of pre-20th century population growth would feature an imperceptible rise of population numbers to somewhat more than 2 million in the mid-19th century and, thereafter, a relatively rapid

and ever-increasing rise in the rate of growth to bring the population to some 5 million at the turn of this century. These two pathways are shown graphically on figure 1.

The course of the single freehand curve shown on figure 1 which describes the growth of the population of the kingdom in the 20th century is governed by the results of censuses and calculations based on partial censuses or other official counts, after allowance was made for a certain amount of under- or over-estimation of population numbers which has been acknowledged by responsible officials. The different courses of the two curves which describe the growth of the population of the kingdom before the turn of this century reflect their different bases. The flatter of the pre-20th century curves (the upper curve on figure 1) describes the growth of the population of the kingdom as postulated in my original thesis which was based on an interpretation of estimates given by eyewitnesses. The

Table II

Thailand: Mean Annual Rate of Growth, by Decade, for Different Population Trends During the Period 1780-1980.

Decade	Mean annual growth rate, in percent*				
	Trend**				
	1	2	3	4	5
1780-1820	0.15	0.05	0.10	0.10	0.05
1820-1840	0.25	0.05	0.15	0.10	0.10
1840-1850	0.50	0.10	0.35	0.25	0.15
1850-1860	0.95	0.10	0.60	0.40	0.20
1860-1870	1.30	0.10	0.85	0.50	0.30
1870-1880	1.55	0.20	1.05	0.70	0.45
1880-1890	2.85	0.20	1.95	1.25	0.65
1880-1900	3.00	0.40	2.25	1.55	0.95
1900-1910	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
1910-1930	3.05	3.05	3.05	3.05	3.05
1930-1940	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.35
1940-1950	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
1950-1960	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75
1960-1970	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.80
1970-1980	3.70	3.70	3.70	3.70	3.70

\* Percentages are rounded to the nearest 0.05.

\*\* Trend 1 and Trend 2 are shown on figure 1; Trends 3, 4 and 5 are simple interpolations between Trends 1 and 2: Trend 3 lies one quarter of the way from Trend 1; Trend 4 lies halfway between Trends 1 and 2; and Trend 5 lies three-quarters of the way from Trend 1.

more changeful of the pre-20th century curves (the lower curve on figure 1) describes the growth of the population of the kingdom as if its rate of growth was the same as that for built-up Bangkok.

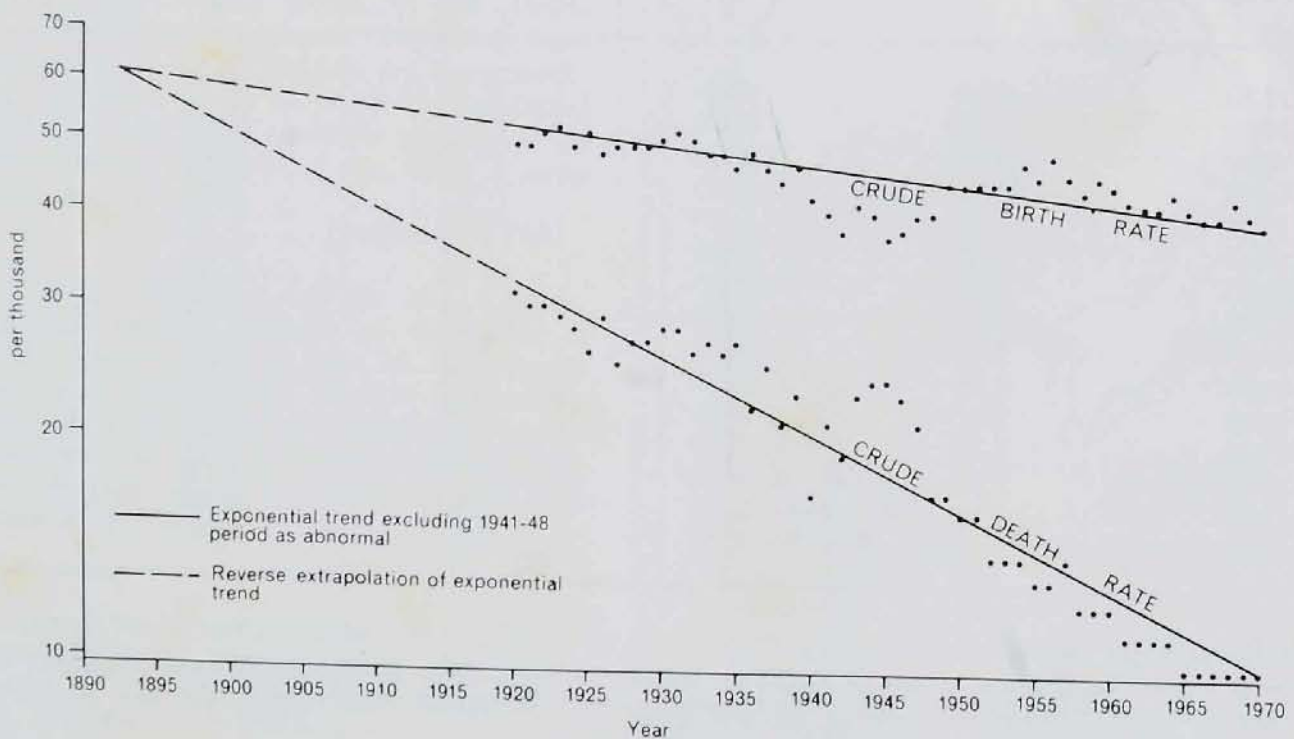
The boundaries of present-day Thailand date from about 1910, by which time the empire based on Bangkok had been whittled down to buffer-state size by treaties with the English and the French which reflected Anglo-French agreements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; see figure 2. Pre-20th century estimates of the population of the kingdom, do not include estimates of the populations of its various parts (see figure 1); as a result, reasonably authoritative numbers involved in these changes are lacking. However, even if such data were available, much would depend on the definition of Thailand adopted; to point to one definition as 'best' for a particular period cannot be argued convincingly because though Thailand exercised suzerainty over areas ceded to the English and French, both the nature and the period of control varied considerably. In some instances, however, pre-20th century eye-witnesses do provide estimates of the populations of several parts of the kingdom from which estimates can be made of the population of the area now known as Thailand. These are shown on figure 1.

It is remarkable that the pre-20th century population growth curve for the kingdom which has

been drawn parallel to that for pre-20th century built-up Bangkok passes near or through most of the estimates for the population of that part of the former kingdom which is now Thailand. Indeed, it might be argued that a better description of the trend of these particular population estimates would be difficult to mount. These estimates are of unknown soundness, however, and since it is reasonable to assume that the rate of growth of the population of 'Thailand' was somewhat less than that of built-up Bangkok, it might be argued also that the curve describing the pre-20th century trend of population growth in this area would be nicer if it was flatter. How much flatter? Table II marshalls the rates of growth associated with the two 'extreme' curves shown on figure 1 as well as curves interpolated between them.

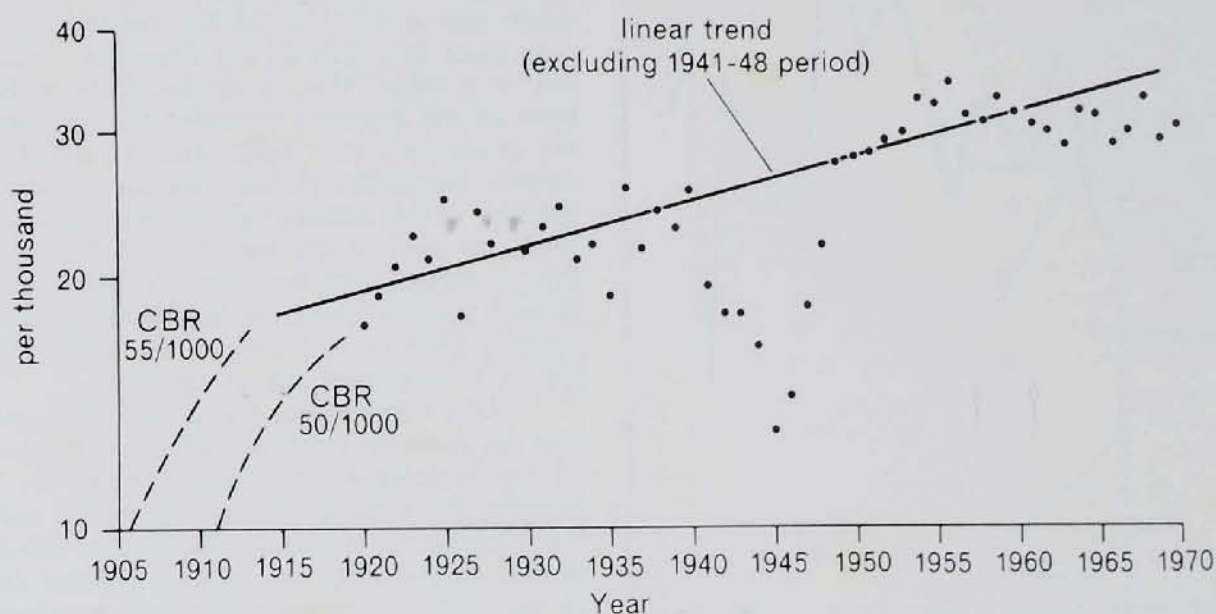
The critical difference between the two trends of countrywide population growth shown on figure 1 is the timing and the sharpness of the upturn in growth rates. On trend 1, the most significant flexure occurs in the decades 1870 to 1890; on trend 2, the most significant flexure is in the decades 1890 to 1910, and this was a much sharper upturn than that on trend 1. Trend 3 follows trend 1 closely, though the upturn in rates of growth is somewhat sharper; and trend 5 follows trend 2 closely, though the upsurge is decidedly less dramatic. On trend 4,

Figure 3. Thailand : Trend of Crude Birth and Death Rates



Source: Estimates of CBR and CDR for each year during the period 1920-1970 from Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 1976

Figure 4. Thailand : Trend of Natural Population Change



Source: Based on data from Figure 3

halfway between the two 'extreme' trends shown on figure 1, the primary flexure occurs around the turn of this century but a strong secondary upturn occurs also around the 1880s. The simple interpolated trends which have been nominated do not rule out the possibility of other trends but other trends cannot be much different. Which of the trends purporting to describe the growth of the population of Thailand is the most plausible? What is the evidence of fertility, mortality and migration?

Thailand's vital registration system was initiated only in 1917 and the data on births and deaths since gathered are of dubious reliability. The information available on fertility and mortality before the initiation of vital registrations is neatly encapsulated in an observation made in 1906 by the first Minister of the Interior, H.R.H. Prince Damrong:

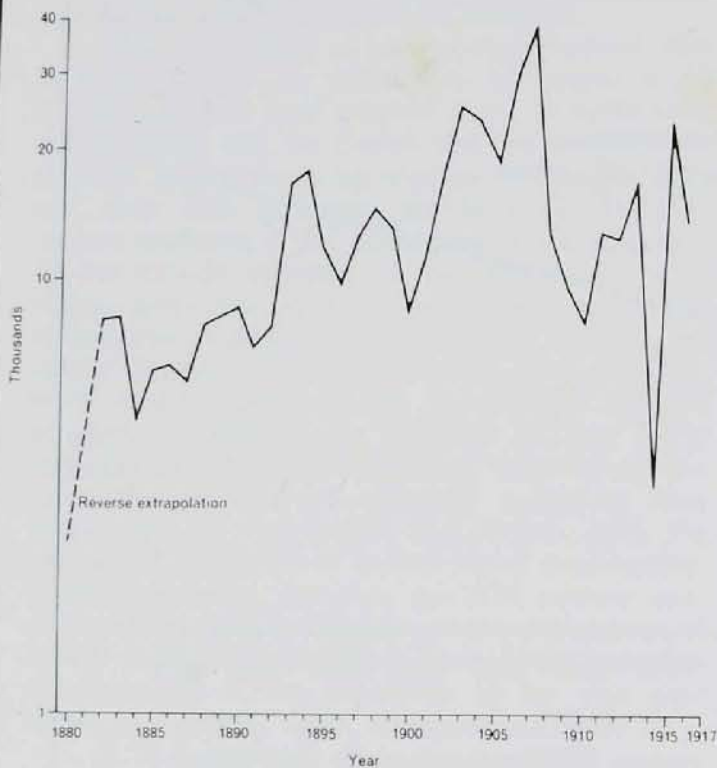
Despite the lack of statistical evidence, it is obvious that the birth rate in Thailand is quite high. A large number of children can be seen everywhere, even in the wildest parts of the country. I reckon they constitute about half of the total population. One cannot help wondering why the population has not increased at a more rapid rate. No doubt, most of these children must die at a very early age. This is detrimental to the nation's economy and prosperity, as much of manpower has been constantly destroyed. Investigation into the major causes of premature death in Thailand has revealed that the most devastating

diseases of all are cholera, smallpox and malaria. Therefore we must urgently find ways and means to prevent these serious scourges from further decimating our population.

(Ministry of Public Health 1971)

The acknowledged inaccuracy and the incompleteness of the data on births and deaths compiled since the establishment of a system of vital registration in 1917 has not deterred determined efforts to study the levels of fertility and mortality in Thailand, and several carefully constructed estimates of birth and death rates for various periods have been prepared (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 1976). The most recent of these estimates considers the period 1920-1970. If the results of this most recent attempt to provide vital trends are credited, a reverse extrapolation indicates that crude death rates began to diverge from crude birth rates in the mid 1890s, and by the turn of this century the difference between the two was significant; see figure 3. The reverse extrapolation of trends in the crude birth and death rates is a simple procedure, but the results may be valid if used with care. The real problem with the particular result obtained in this instance is that the divergence of the extrapolated trends occurs when the crude birth rate is well above the estimated biological maximum of 55 per thousand. If the crude birth rate is permitted to reach the estimated biological maximum, then the divergence of the crude death rate from the crude

Figure 5. Thailand : Net Immigration of Ethnic Chinese



Source: Estimates of Chinese arrivals and departures in Skinner 1957

birth rate would begin only at the turn of this century. If, however, the oscillation of the crude birth rate around 50 per thousand during the 1920s and early 1930s was projected backward, then the crude death rate would begin its divergent trend only after the turn of this century. The most that might be said with reasonable assurance is that crude birth and death rate trends began to diverge around the turn of the century.

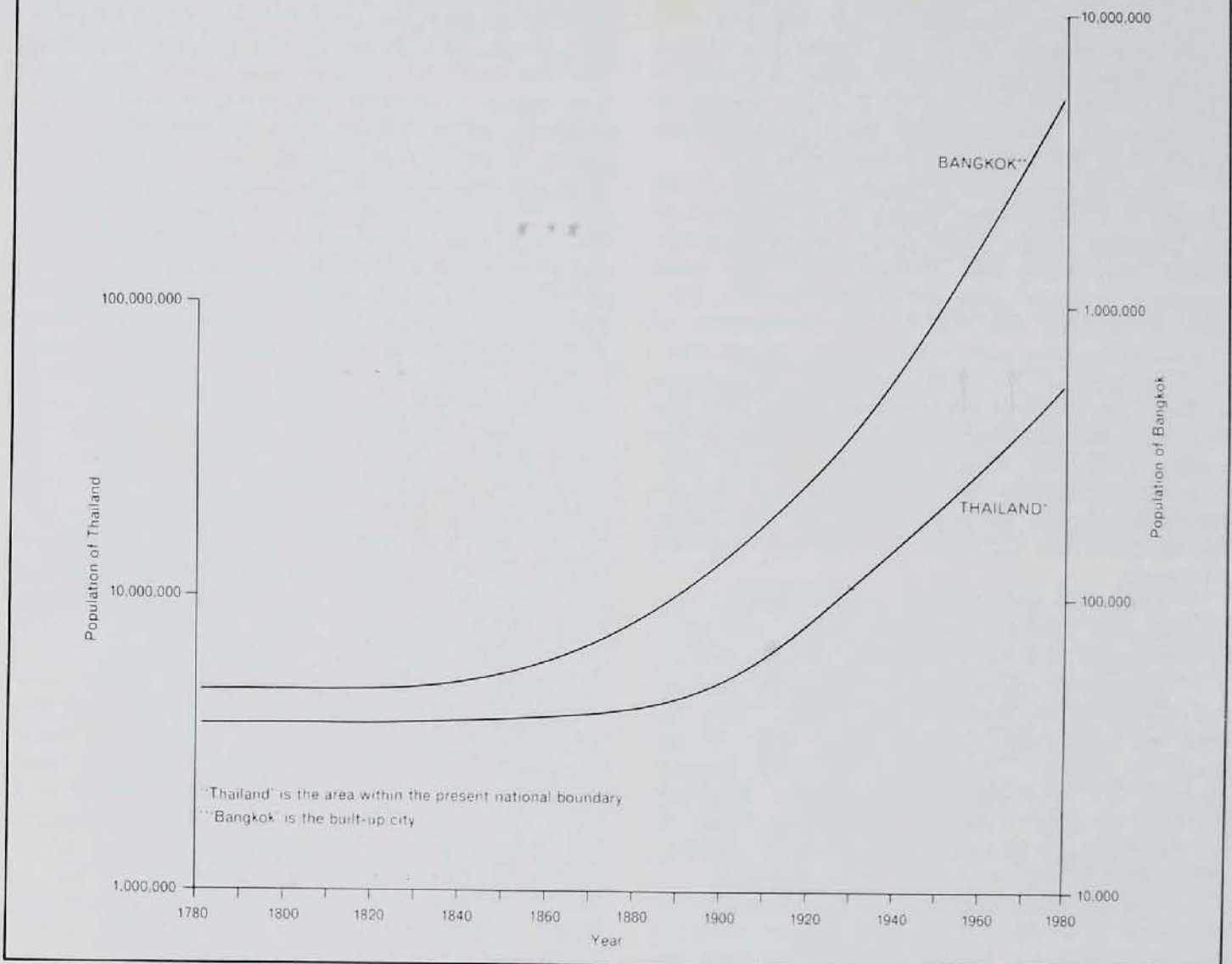
The trends of natural population growth for Thailand, based on the various estimates of crude birth and death rates on figure 3, are shown on figure 4. From these trends, it is clear that natural population growth around the turn of this century was well below 1.0 percent per year, even under the assumption that the crude birth rate was at the estimated biological maximum. This particular conclusion depends on the assumption that the crude death rate closely approximated the crude birth rate in the late 1890s. This might seem rather too much of a presumption. Well, for natural population growth to be 1.0 percent per year around the turn of this century, assuming the crude birth rate was at the biological maximum, would require the crude death rate to be 45 per thousand. Such a crude death rate is possible, given the trend established for the 1920-1970 period; see figure 3. If, on the other hand, a crude birth rate at the estimated biological maximum of 55 per thousand seems rather too much of a presumption, than the more reasonable,

but still very high, rate of 50 per thousand would yield a natural population growth rate of 1.0 percent around the turn of this century, provided the crude death rate were 40 per thousand. Such a crude death rate at the time is possible, given the trend for the 1920-1970 period shown on figure 3. The crude death rate at the turn of the century could not be very much less than 40 per thousand, however, and still be possible. The conclusion, then, is that on the basis of the evidence provided by the estimates for the crude birth and death rates for 1920-1970, the natural population growth rate for Thailand around the turn of this century cannot have been very much more, or very much less, than 1.0 percent. From this, it appears that the major flexure in each of the several possible trends of population growth for the country prior to and around the early 1900s must reflect, in large part, net immigration.

One migrant group only and alone might have had the requisite significant effect on the growth rate of the population of Thailand from the mid-19th century: the Chinese. According to the authority on the Chinese in Thailand, "the annual chinese immigration surplus may have been somewhat over 3,000 in the 1820's, increasing gradually to approximately 7,000 by around 1870" at which time a decline occurred "until the big jump in 1882" (Skinner 1957). Actually this assessment rests on tenuous information. Beginning in 1882, however, it appears an assessment can be better based on a variety of data, both statistical and discursive, and more reasonable estimates of arrivals and departures can be made than before. Still, our authority "believed that the maximum probable error for the *annual* arrival figures approximates 10 per cent for 1882-1892, 7.5 per cent for 1893-1905, and 5 per cent for 1906-1917; while for the annual departure figures, it would be about 18 per cent for 1882-1892, 13 per cent for 1893-1905, and 9 per cent for 1906-1917". In truth, these proffered percentage errors have no better status than guesses, reasonable though they might seem. From such supposition, the estimated annual net immigration of Chinese to Thailand during the period 1882-1915/16 can be derived, and these statistics are shown on figure 5. Explanations of the fluctuations and changing rates of arrivals and departures on which the net immigration curve is based are available in several studies (Dibble 1961, Landon 1941, Skinner 1954, 1957 and 1958) and the reader is encouraged to refer to these for information. Here, the aim is to judge the most plausible population growth trend for Thailand, taking into account the impact of the incoming Chinese.

The figures of net immigration of Chinese as shown figure 5 are too high; in fact, the totals by decade from 1890-1910 are, with two exceptions, higher than the total increase of population possible for any of the five proposed growth trends of the population of Thailand. (The two exceptions both

Figure 6. Thailand and Bangkok : Population Growth Trends 1780-1980



occur in the decade 1880-1890, and these permit a mean annual natural growth of population of only 0.08 and 0.02 per cent.) One reason for the impossibly high figures is that Father Death has not yet been given his quota of Chinese in Thailand. Since there are no accurate data on deaths among the Chinese (or the Thai) around the turn of this century, an assumption might be made that in the decades from 1880 to 1910 the crude death rate among the Chinese approximated a high 40 per thousand; see figure 3. However, deducting the dead, under the assumption of a crude death rate of 40, or even 45, per thousand makes no difference: the net immigration of Chinese as given in the literature simply is too high. (Even an improbable crude death rate of 45 per thousand coupled with a net immigration of Chinese derived from the improbable assumption that the maximum probable errors

in departures, without any commensurate errors in arrivals, as given by Skinner, did indeed occur, make no difference to the conclusion that the estimates, by authority, of Chinese net immigration to Thailand around the turn of this century are impossibly high.)

Although the estimated numbers of arriving and departing Chinese in the decades around the turn of this century cannot be accepted, the fluctuations in the magnitude of Chinese migration, having been studiously accounted for by historical conditions both in China and Thailand, may be credited. So, within a generally rising trend in net immigration from the early 1880s until 1907/08 there were four rather steep rises in the early 1880s, 1890s, 1900s and the period 1905/06-1907/08, the first three of which were followed by periods of ups and downs in net immigration but at successively higher levels; see

figure 5. During the three decades from 1880 to 1910, the net immigration of Chinese was in the approximate proportion 1:2:3. Assuming, also, that there was some definite reduction, however small, in the crude death rate during the first decade of this century, the most plausible of the five proposed trends of population growth for Thailand would be number 5 and, though number 4 might also serve in general description, numbers 1, 2 and 3 appear to be improbable. The suggested trend of population growth, then, for Thailand is shown on figure 6.

Each of the several scrupulous watchers of the Chinese in Thailand have stressed the significance of the Celestials in the development of the country; indeed, they argue that Thailand could not have become a "modern" state without the Chinese. Perhaps. In pointing out that the net immigration of Chinese around the turn of this century cannot have been as high as has been estimated in previous studies, I am not implying that their impact was less than has been suggested. In fact, the impact of the immigrant Chinese must have been greater, even simply in demographic terms, than has been claimed previously, because the population which they joined was decidedly less numerous than has been believed previously.

Since the first decades of this century, the population of Thailand has grown hugely, see figure 6, and largely as a consequence of rapidly declining mortality (particularly among the newborn) coupled with a more or less sustained high fertility. There has been net immigration, but the direct effect of migrants on numbers, nationwide, has been inconsequential. The local effect of immigration, however, has been significant even in a demographic sense, as certain migrant groups have settled specific localities. The specific locality of concern here is Bangkok.

The foregoing discussion of the growth of the population of Thailand might have seemed rather an overlong digression, however interesting, from the subject which was promised in the title; namely, the growth of the population of Bangkok. In fact, the discussion of the growth of the population of the country was not a digression, but essential to an appraisal of the validity of the proposed trend of the growth of the population of Bangkok because the requisite specific data on births, deaths and migration for the city are unavailable. Also, in addition to the inadequate data on natural growth and international migration, the magnitude of internal migration has not been adequately monitored. The problem of validating a particular population growth trend for Bangkok, can be 'solved' only indirectly by attempting to account for the trend of population growth for Bangkok as compared with that for Thailand (see figure 6) on the basis of reasoned conjecture about natural growth, net immigration and net in-migration.

According to the proposed population growth trends for Bangkok and Thailand, see figure 6, the city grew at much the same rate as did the country

during the half-century following its founding as the capital in the early 1780s. At this time, the built-up area was more a citadel than a city: little more than a fortress set in relatively densely settled agricultural surrounds. Bangkok was abuilding, of course, but the built-up area was small and was being extended only slowly and, it seems, the resident population also was small and increased only slowly, since there is no reason to suppose that fertility or mortality was decidedly different from that of populations elsewhere. There is reason to suppose, however, that there was movement to the city from overseas and from the provinces, but there is reason to suppose, also, that this movement was both inconsiderable and impermanent. Most immigrants appear to have passed through Bangkok on their way to agricultural areas in its immediate vicinity and farther afield after, at most, a short stay in the capital. Most movement to the city from the provinces was not in-migration but rather the toing and froing associated with trade and contract labour. It has been argued (Skinner 1962) that the Thai were not free to move to their capital city during the greater part of the 19th century because they were anchored to the up-country estates of their patrons under the *corvée* system. In truth, however, the obligation of client to patron was progressively eased and monetised since the early 1800s and, even more importantly, clients side-stepped formal, local obligations always. Moreover, only male clients from the age of twenty were required for *corvée* duties. Still, up-country Thai did not gravitate *en masse* to their capital city; most up-country Thai who did migrate took up land elsewhere, for the country was thinly settled and arable tracts were freely available. Also, it appears that those Thai who did migrate to the city subsequently moved after relatively short stays; perhaps to take up valuable land in its environs, for labour was scarce — even the unskilled were well paid in the city — and the cost of living was low.

The rate of population growth in Bangkok began to outpace that for the country as a whole in the mid-nineteenth century. This accelerated increase in population was manifested in the quickening physical expansion of the capital; a build-up which reflected the desire of the Bangkokian leadership to commercialise the kingdom according to the ways of the West as rapidly as traditional ways would allow in an attempt, it is said, to forestall the outright takeover of Thailand by a European power or powers. Bangkok was to control all aspects of this unprecedented development and it began to accumulate the necessary administrative, commercial, industrial and residential structures. More migrants were attracted to the city, and it appears that more of those who came remained permanently or at least for longer periods than before. It seems it was the in-migrants who forced the pace of population growth in the mid-19th century. At the same time, however, a number of medical missionaries from the

West came to Bangkok to offer their services. Bangkok was not a particularly unhealthy place — resident medical missionaries described the capital as “one of the healthiest of Oriental cities”; and it certainly was not the ‘cemetery’ which cities in industrialising Western Europe were at this time — though it did suffer devastating visitations of killer-epidemics, among which smallpox was a principal scourge:

Many persons, judging a priori, conclude that Bangkok must be necessarily one of the *hot beds* of disease. A low and level country, extensive jungles, a rank vegetation, a hot climate, and a dense and indolent population, all ‘squatting in the mud,’ are circumstances, think they, which must generate disease in most malignant forms. That the ‘marsh miasma,’ that invisible and terrible scourge of the human race, should not find a favorite abode here, they imagine is impossible. The writer was formerly of this opinion. But a residence of a year and a half in the city, under the best possible advantages for acquiring correct information respecting the salubrity of the climate, has convinced him, that he was much mistaken in his preconceived opinions. Bangkok is, by no means, unhealthy. Compared with most places, within the tropics, and many without them, it has a salubrious climate. The fevers, which are so fatal in Java, Sumatra, Burmah, and Bengal, seems to be very little known in Bangkok, or its vicinity. Among 3450 different individuals, living in various parts of the city and kingdom, who applied to the writer for medical aid during a term of fourteen months, there were only eighteen cases of fever, and all of those were of the mildest intermittent type. Hepatitis, both acute and chronic, which takes so conspicuous a rank among the prevailing diseases of Burmah, Bengal, and Bombay, appears to be of comparatively rare occurrence. And consumption, which cuts down annually its thousands in England and America, is a stranger in Siam. From the notes which I made during a term of eighteen months, it appears that the prevailing diseases of the natives are: 1st, small-pox; 2nd, cutaneous complaints; 3rd, ulcers; 4th, ophthalmia, in all its forms; 5th, rheumatism; 6th syphilis; 7th, diarrhoea; 8th, dysentery; 9th, tumours. European and American residents at Bangkok are chiefly exposed to simple diarrhoea, dysentery, ulceration of the intestines, piles, nervous lassitude, and cerebral affections. Their children are the greatest sufferers from bowel complaints. As yet experiment proves that Bangkok is favorable to the health of foreigners.

In no country have I ever seen a greater proportion of aged people than in Siam.

Persons aged 80 and 90 are often seen in Bangkok. It is not an uncommon thing to meet with those who are a hundred years old and upwards. The females here, as in other countries, live to the most advanced age. I would remark, in conclusion, that from all the information I have been able to gain, it does not appear that there is any thing in the location of Bangkok, or in the climate itself, peculiarly calculated to abridge human life. The chief diseases of the natives are evidently caused by poverty and irregularities of living: unwholesome diet, filthiness, intemperate eating, debauchery, lasciviousness, indolence, and the like, are here the waters [wasters?] of human life.

(Quoted exactly, Anonymous 1837)

Vaccination against smallpox was successfully introduced by medical missionaries in 1840, and it was in Bangkok that this practice, as well as all other ‘modern’ medical practices, first found favour. So, a downturn in mortality, albeit gradual, may have occurred in Bangkok as much as a half-century before the decline in mortality elsewhere in the country.

Bangkok-led development has accelerated since the mid-19th century, and the capital itself has burgeoned: the built-up area has sprawled, seemingly uncontrolled, deep into the agricultural surrounds; and the population has increased prodigiously. Until the turn of this century, it appears that the population of the capital grew more quickly than the population of the country primarily because of immigration, though at times an inrush of immigrant Chinese might have accounted for the greater part of the increment. Still, the Chinese contributed handsomely to the rapidly increasing numbers in the city, not only in themselves but in their offspring — their numerous offspring according to eyewitnesses — from marriages with local ladies. Chinese women came to Thailand only rarely before the 1890s and in only limited numbers thereafter until the 1920s. So the usual household of a Chinese immigrant resident in Bangkok included one or more Thai wives. A host of seemingly valid reasons for the easy union between Thai females and Chinese males has been proffered in the literature:

During the 19th century...the alternatives for the great mass of Chinese immigrants were to remain single or marry local women. A survey of the 19th century sources indicates the following pattern: The great majority of the mining and plantation laborers did not marry so long as they remained in that occupational status. The same could be said of urban wage-earners, though apparently a somewhat larger minority did marry in Siam. On the other hand, Chinese who settled down on the land as farmers or plantation owners almost



always got married. Most of the merchants and artisans also married local women, though the rate was presumably lower for shop assistants and apprentices. Wealthy merchants usually had more than one wife, and by the turn of the century some had wives from China. There was, then, a considerable class differential in the marriage rate, low among the more temporary working-class groups, and high among those who were more settled and held higher economic status...at the turn of the century... about half of the Chinese immigrants still living after five years in Siam had married local women.

Language and poverty seem to have been the only barriers to intermarriage with Thai women. Immigrants in all occupations other than mining and wage-labor usually picked up some Thai language for business reasons, and most of the immigrants after a few years in the country were as well-off as the bulk of Thai men. There were no religious scruples on either side, and indeed Chinese men were said to have readily accommodated themselves to the Thai form of Buddhism. There were in fact several positive inducements for Thai women to marry Chinese. Thai women — not their menfolk — were the traders in the indigenous population; they had a certain amount of business know-how and could appreciate the advantages of an industrious Chinese husband. The Siamese woman is a shrewd, practical person, and is willing to put sentiment in the background for the sake of obtaining a hardworking and not unaffectionate husband who has his little savings and a thriving business... Chinese could get the best girls to marry them, for they have more to offer, and treat the ladies with more consideration than do the men of their own nationality. Moreover to the Chinese man, taking a Thai wife presented certain advantages stemming from her Thainess. It was convenient for a Chinese merchant to have a wife who could deal with Thai customers, and in the days of slavery it was said that Chinese with local wives could more readily obtain loans. Furthermore marrying a Thai was a much less expensive proposition than a wedding in China.

In the 19th century, then, marriage with Thai women was the rule for Chinese immigrants when occupation and financial status permitted.

(A compendium, albeit incomplete, of reasons for Thai-Chinese intermarriage from several sources in Skinner 1954.)

Unanswered (indeed, unasked) is the question of from where came the many willing, if not eager, local ladies who wed the Chinese immigrant males

resident in Bangkok: were most women waiting in the city or were they 'recruits' from rural residences?

It is a fair assumption that 19th century Bangkok held far fewer unattached female Sino-Thai than were resident in the immediate rural environs of the capital; and that there were far greater numbers of unattached Thai than Sino-Thai women both within and without the city. Since the Chinese-in-Thailand watchers have suggested that the Chinese immigrant male preferred a Sino-Thai spouse, it seems reasonable to suppose that the bride price was higher — considerably higher — for a Sino-Thai than for a Thai lady; and that a city-bred Sino-Thai female would cost immoderately more to wed than a country-bred Thai lass. The Chinese-in-Thailand watchers have suggested also that it was usual for the immigrant Chinese to join a so-called 'family' group, and that the head of such a group commonly arranged marriages for its members; which suggests that the catchment area for brides was far wider than that which might have been canvassed by an individual immigrant. The upshot of all of this is that immigrant Chinese males resident in Bangkok probably induced an in-migration of indigenous females; and, if so, then fertility in the capital also received a boost. This novel thesis is not based on substantial stuff, that is clear, but it claims rather less for even the demographic impact of the Chinese immigrants than might be their due.

The rate of growth of the population of Thailand accelerated smartly at the turn of this century: an uprush so rapid that during the first few decades of the 1900s, the rate of growth of the population of the country was little less than that of its capital, which also had quickened; see figure 6. The near-parallel between the two population trends at this time was due, at least in part it seems, to a substantial reduction in mortality throughout much of the kingdom. Although the mortality rate in Bangkok had been reduced to a relatively low level earlier, and appears to have been always lower than in the rest of the country, it may be supposed that the decline in the death rate in the capital slowed at the turn of this century as the limited ability of contemporary medical measures to alleviate mortality was more or less exhausted, while the mortality rate elsewhere was still hastening downward. The next, and the most dramatic, reduction of mortality in Bangkok, and thereafter in the rest of Thailand, had to wait for the development of chemotherapy in the 1930s, after which most killer diseases were curable.

If there is reason to suppose there was a reduction in the difference in mortality rates between the capital and the country during the opening decades of this century, there also is reason to doubt that this was sufficient, or even primary, cause for the near-parallel between the two population growth rates at this time. It seems there also must have been a relative decline in the rate of increase of net migration to the capital as compared with its kingdom.

Data on arrivals and departures of Chinese migrants indicates a relatively high average level of net immigration during the period 1900-1930, despite several years of extremely low net intakes; and increasingly significant proportions of female migrants. No question, Bangkok was both the first and the only residence in Thailand for many of these migrants. The question is: were there other places to which large numbers of immigrants might have gone? The answer is: yes. The first few decades of this century was a time of unprecedented national development — a massive modernisation programme orchestrated from Bangkok — which included such huge projects as the construction of the system of railways which radiates from the capital to the outer limits of the country, extensive irrigation, drainage and waterway transportation works which transformed vast unused tracts of the delta plain into highly productive rice farms, and the creation of a network of administrative/commercial centres throughout the country. Prior to the turn of this century, however, only the framework within which modern development was to take place had been designed; and though government was making every effort to pursue its policy of modernisation, a shrewd and sympathetic British civil engineer who was engaged in railway surveys in Thailand at this critical time observed that:

It is too early just yet to look for results from efforts of this kind. This influence hardly extends beyond Bangkok. The transition from old ways to new ways must be gradual, and it is obvious that the Siamese Government recognises this, as it proceeds tentatively in much-wanted improvements. But the time has now come when it must take measures to keep progress with its neighbours, who, in Burma, in the Malay States, in Cochin-China and Tonquin, contemplate, or are actually carrying out, projects which may affect Siam. The Government is fully alive to this, and is giving careful consideration to a number of projects for the development of the resources of Siam itself, which may enable it to keep pace with the countries around it... In Siam the expenditure on works for developing the resources of the country is almost nothing up to the present time... Had the Siamese Government, during the last thirty years, spent judiciously on public works for developing the country as much money as has been spent on similar works in Pegu, the volume of trade would have been as great, if not greater, to-day. The reproductive character of such work is now universally recognised... Roads, irrigation works, and railways are being pushed on with vigour in Upper Burma... In the British Malay States the system... is being extended with excellent results. Several railways and many roads are in progress... The French in Cochin-China and Tonquin are also

alert, and projects are being pushed forward. Numerous proposals have been made affecting Siam, both from within and without... Altogether, there is every reason to expect a prosperous future for Siam. A fair start is being made. There is a large amount of capital lying idle in the kingdom... projects will be thrown open to the world; and the good faith, liberality, and friendship hitherto shown by the Siamese Government... afford grounds to hope that, if the opportunity is availed of wisely and vigorously, there will be profitable results to all parties... the only point... was the question of labour. At present, undoubtedly, that was a great difficulty. The Chinese were not so numerous as they had been led to believe, and commanded high wages, which they fairly earned, as agricultural labourers and artisans. Perhaps one of the best results of making railways would be the development of the country people into labourers... This was slow work, but, if carried on, it would develop, as it did in Burmah. There the time came when thousands would come in seeking work, though at first it was difficult to find a man who would carry a bag for you.

(Gordon 1891)

In fact, the entire net migrant intake during the 1900-1930 period, say a half-million, could have been profitably employed on development projects upcountry. That most immigrants were not so employed, suggests that an army of indigenes also were at work upcountry; which implies at least a slowing of the rate of increase of net in-migration to the capital.

Since the 1930s, the rate of growth of the population of Bangkok has departed markedly from that of Thailand, see figure 6; indeed, the population of the capital has increased at roughly twice the already remarkably rapid rate of growth of the population of the country.

During the 1930s, '40s and '50s the pre-eminent cause of the astonishing acceleration in the rate of growth of the population of Bangkok was natural increase. Chemotherapy came first to Bangkok in the late 1930s, though the rest of the country benefited from this dramatic death-reducer only after the Second World War. The importation by the Bangkok elite of each modern medical measure against mortality soon after it came on the market was part of a long-standing, sometimes strident, pronatalist population policy:

....both quantity and quality of population are the ideals aimed at. Backed by the principle of traditionally large family and a plentiful supply of Vitamin E in the diet, a very favourable result is hoped to be arrived at. The vicious doctrine of birth control as widely practised in some western countries is practically unknown among our gay and reli-

gious people. Early marriage characterized by normal, natural, healthful and reproductive sexual life still prevails among the masses, and the Government will see to it that no pernicious or unnatural sexual practices allowed to be spread among the people. For several years passed statistics of birth and death shows that by lowering the somewhat heavy rate of mortality of infants, children, and mothers, our population will increase automatically. To achieve this end, the Department of Public Welfare will co-operate with the Department of Public Health.

(Part of an outline, quoted exactly, of the responsibilities of the Division of Life Betterment in the Department of Public Welfare which was created in 1941; Chutima 1942.)

When the Department of Public Health was raised to the status of a Ministry in 1942, the Prime Minister stated in his speech of inauguration that Thailand needed 100 million people if it would be an international power. The Minister of Health took up this task by appointing a Wedding Promotion Committee which was to encourage early marriage; and in 1956, an Act entitled "Welfare of Persons with Numerous Offspring" authorised the granting of bonuses for large families.

The worldwide Depression of the early 1930s, the Second World War, and the imposition immediately thereafter of very low annual quotas on the numbers of migrants permitted to enter Thailand, reduced immigration to inconsequential numbers; indeed, during the depth of the Great Depression, more Chinese departed than entered the country. Net in-migration, too, was much reduced during the Depression, and the capital actually was partially evacuated during the Second World War.

In 1960, government began to respond to the growing number of recommendations from both home and abroad which urged it to abandon pronatalism, and adopt antinatalism. Throughout the 1960s, government reiterated its initial decision on birth control which was reached in 1961:

Let birth control be a matter of voluntary action on the part of the people, who should be aware of their own status and how many children they should have. As for giving advice on matters of birth control, this should be allowed and should be done, but it should not yet be done in an open manner.

(Quoted in Thomlinson 1971 )

So hospitals, and health clinics were permitted to disseminate information about family planning to married couples who came to them seeking advice. In fact, much more than information was disseminated. During the period 1965-1970, the Chulalongkorn Red Cross Hospital inserted more IUDs (almost

48,000) than did any other IUD clinic anywhere in the world. In 1966, four large hospitals in Bangkok had postpartum programmes; and in 1968 a Family Planning Section was operating in the Ministry of Public Health itself. So, large-scale and effective antinatalist activities were being undertaken by government agencies despite government's distaste which was thinly disguised as apparent disinterest. What happened was that several well-placed physicians in Bangkok decided birth control was essential, introduced the necessary programmes, and distributed both information on and supplies of contraceptives. In 1969, commercial sales of oral contraceptives topped three million monthly cycles. Clearly, the people wanted the product. International organisations also provided impressive amounts of equipment and ample funds for training medical and paramedical personnel under various family planning programmes. How all this antinatal activity could be pursued when it was not condoned by government may be difficult to comprehend; in fact, there is no contradiction: Thailand is not only strongly-governed, it is sensibly-governed. In March 1970, Thailand's first national population policy was expressed by government in a single sentence:

The Thai government has the policy of supporting family planning through a voluntary system, in order to resolve various problems concerned with the very high rate of population increase, which will constitute an important obstacle to economic and social development of the nation.

(Quoted in Thomlinson 1971 )

The promotion of birth control was permitted. At first, this simply legitimised activities already underway; soon, however, government got to antinatal work in earnest and set tough targets in its national five-year plans which were designed to rapidly reduce the rate of population growth. Whether these national goals have been met is not clear, though government claims their near-realisation. What is clear, is that the natural increase of the population of Bangkok "has declined much more dramatically than has been suspected" and is "lower than that which even the most optimistic of family planners could have hoped for" (Sternstein 1981).

The rate of growth of the population of the capital increased markedly from the 1940s to the 1950s; by comparison, the increase from the 1950s to the 1960s was only marginal. It appears reasonable to suppose that the deceleration in the increase of the growth rate reflected the beginnings of a local downturn in fertility (in response to the initial Bangkok-based antinatalist drive) and this partially offset a significant upturn in net in-migration, which was

...rooted in the considerable increase of the Thai population...during the 1960s, and the heightened abilities and expectations of a considerable proportion of the provincial popu-

lation stemming from the adoption of universal, compulsory primary education and the upgrading and provision of a variety of educational facilities in the provinces during the 1960s. Equally influential was the fact that much of the great expansion of both secondary and tertiary industry which occurred in Thailand during the 1960s took place in and near Bangkok, which is the political, financial, commercial and industrial capital of the nation, the pre-eminent port handling practically all foreign trade, the focus of the nation's transportation system, and the one metropolitan market in the country.

(Sternstein 1979)

During the 1970s the local downturn in fertility developed into a downrush, the local upturn in net in-migration became an uprush, and the net result was a rate of growth of the population of built-up Bangkok during the decade only slightly greater than the high growth rate of the 1960s. The 1980s promise further decreases in natural growth in the capital, but at less precipitous rates than previously since mortality is already low and fertility is fast

approaching replacement level. Further increases in net migration to the city also seem assured, but the rate at which this influx of population will occur is uncertain. A continuation of the current deterioration of conditions upcountry implies a huge increase of in-migrant numbers, though a continuation of the current deterioration of conditions in the capital might ameliorate this inflow somewhat. That Bangkok will retain its status as the "beau ideal" of a primate city is certain, however, for despite government's efforts to implement the national policy of "decentralised urbanisation" — formulated in the face of the evident deterioration of the metropolitan milieu — Thailand remains the most centralised of nations, and its capital is without peer as the world's pre-eminent primate city; see table III.

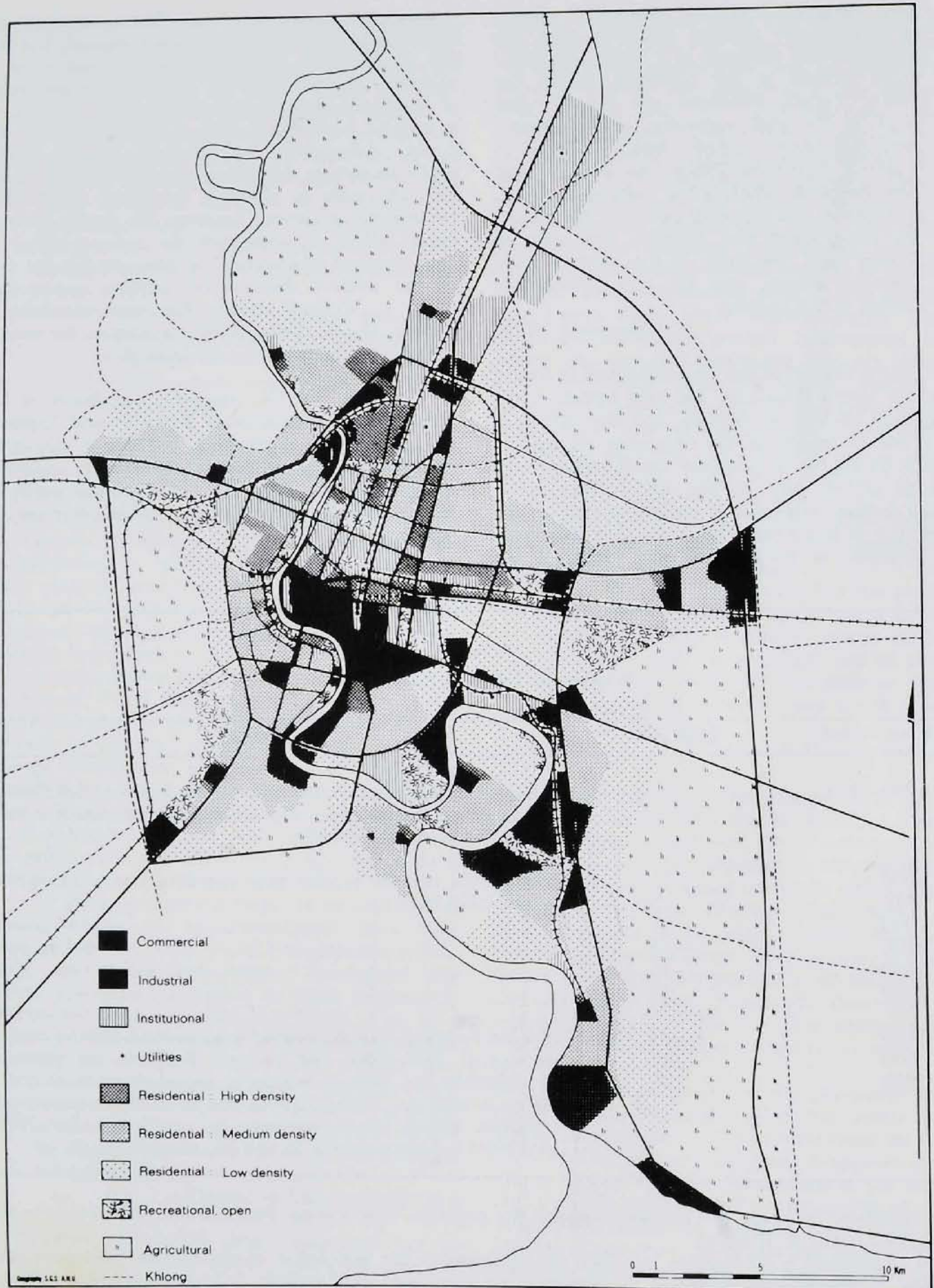
I claim for the foregoing description of the growth of the population of Bangkok, and Thailand, not only that it is plausible, but that it cannot be significantly improved without there being unearthed a cache of vital data. Such a discovery would be truly wonderful: seemingly impossible yet most desirable. □

Table III  
Primacy of Bangkok 1780-1980\*

Time Period	Multiplier**	Remarks
1780-1900	10	Data are only occasional and of uncertain accuracy, but Chiang Mai appears to have been the second most populous centre during the period 1780-1900.
1900	11	Chiang Mai was the second most populous centre during the period 1900-1950.
1910	12	
1920	13	
1930	14	
1940	15	
1950	23	
1960	25	Hat Yai-Songkhla was the second most populous centre during the period 1960-1980. Hat Yai and Songkhla are separate municipalities but there is reason to regard the two as comprising a twin-city. Taking Chiang Mai to be the second most populous centre would increase the multipliers for 1970 and 1980 to approximately 35 and 55, respectively.
1970	33	
1980	51	

\* By "primacy" is meant the disparity between the population of built-up Bangkok and the second most populous centre in Thailand.

\*\* The "multiplier" is the number by which the multiplicand (the population of the second most populous centre in Thailand) is multiplied to reproduce the population of Bangkok; it is expressed as a whole number to suggest only general accuracy. For the 1780-1900 period the multiplier is not more than a reasonable supposition.



Greater Bangkok Plan 2533 [A.D. 1990]. Source: Sternstein, L., *Planning the Developing Primate City: Bangkok 2000* Canberra, 1971.

# BANGKOK 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

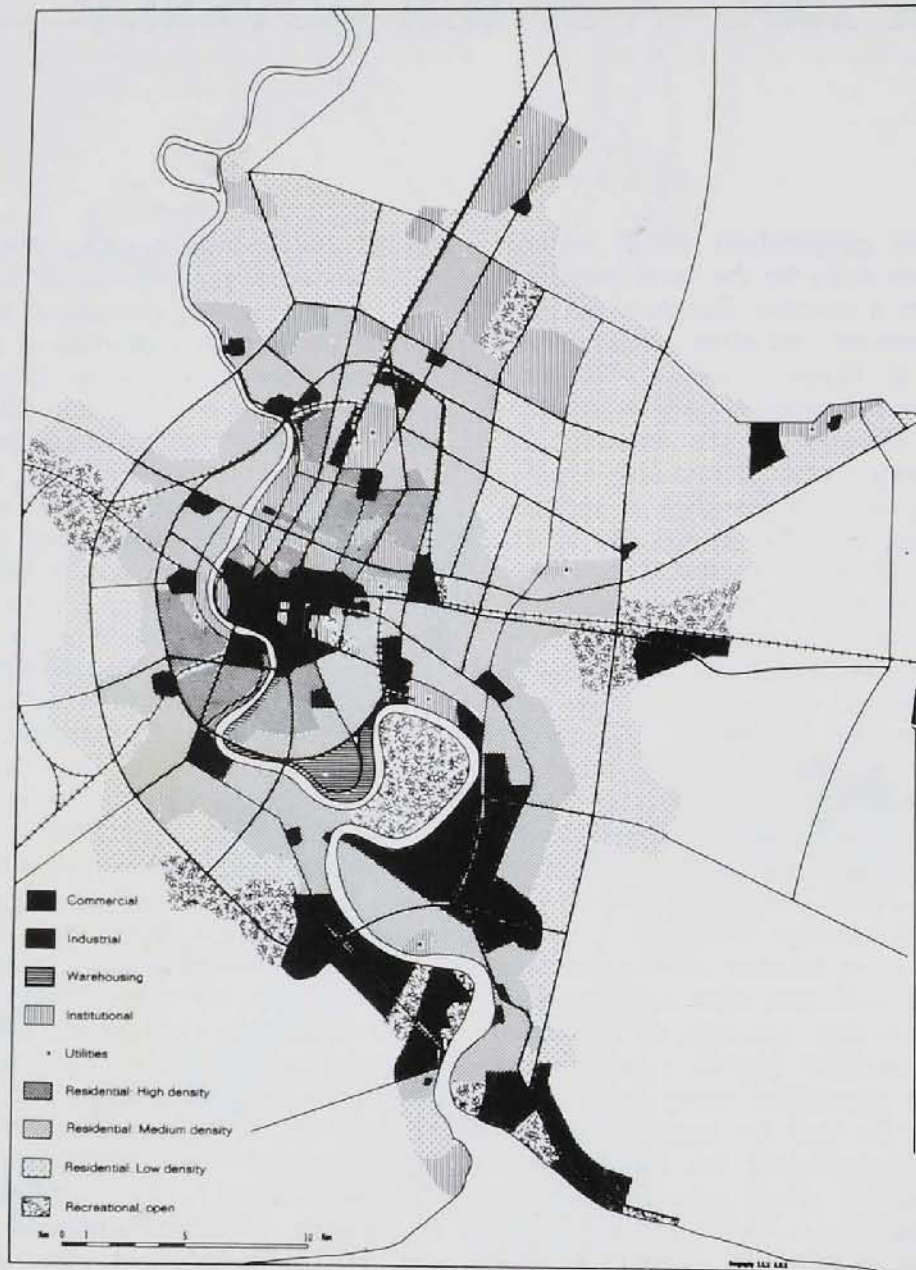
Bangkok is what geographers call a primate city: a metropolis which is by far the most populous and most influential in a country. Bangkok, in fact, is the political, commercial, industrial, cultural and administrative capital of Thailand. Indeed, Bangkok is *the* primate city — the world's pre-eminent primate city — if the disparity in size between the largest and the next largest urban centre in a country is the criterion of primacy; for Bangkok is approximately fifty times larger than the second city in the kingdom, the so-called 'northern capital' Chiang Mai. Bangkok is *the* centre of change, *the* proving ground for and *the* prime mover in the development of Thailand. Bangkok is the *beau ideal* of a primate city. Bangkok also is the *bête noir* of the Thai leadership faced with the complexity, the fearful interrelatedness, the damnable immediacy, even the sheer number of problems wanting solution. Those responsible for developing Bangkok reason that the problems of the metropolis, to a large extent, have been imported and so too should the solutions to these problems. So, the foreign consultant is invited to tackle at least the more obvious and troublesome of the symptoms of growth, and while so engaged is expected to train promising nationals in his ways. Meanwhile, as many qualified Thai as is possible are sent directly into the developed camp to discover these ways first-hand. To fault the leadership in this endeavour would be hypercritical, but the danger is clear: an adoption or too simple adaptation of the mannerisms of the city of the 'developed' world will harden Bangkok in a mean mold, committing it to an existence in mime. The city fathers are so overwhelmed by the problems of growth that the opportunities for the development of the metropolis, which is without piled improvements and free of disjointed political units, go unrecognised; and the experts prescribe only well-trying remedies and proffer plans which can do little more than ameliorate present difficulties.

Late in 1960, following almost three years of study, *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* [A.D. 1990] was submitted to the Thai Government by American consultants. Though the consultants believed a comprehensive plan to be concerned with the physical environment of a city or region, *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* may be considered the first attempt at a comprehensive urban plan in Thailand and the first plan seeking to provide a rational, consistent framework wherein specific physical plans could be developed. At the same time the consultants were 'to develop general, practical plans, including programmes for their implementation' for a number of

facilities and 'to institutionalise planning as a continuing... process in the...Metropolitan Area'.

On arrival, the consultants found no adequate map of the city. A base map of the area was then produced from aerial photos. Compiling information gathered from the many and various agencies involved and from field surveys, first-ever maps were made of such fundamentals as administrative divisions in the Metropolitan Area, population distribution, land use, land assessments, traffic characteristics and the location of various facilities such as schools and markets. Obviously, a considerable time was devoted to providing the bare necessities of planning; further, Thai personnel were employed extensively and had to be trained prior to assuming even petty responsibilities. It appears that a considerably greater period of time ought to have been devoted to the compilation and analysis of basic data, for the result is neither complete nor critical. In particular, it seems strange that the available population data were not carefully assessed. (The Population Census of 1960, the first by the Central, now National, Statistical Office, was most informative, many characteristics of the population becoming known for the first time. None of the data elicited were used in preparing *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533*. Apparently, advance returns for the Metropolitan Area were not requested or could not be supplied before the contract between the Thai Government and its consultants terminated in August 1960.) More importantly, most of the information which was acquired is static and descriptive of the leavings of past growth rather than indicative of trends in development. Since the worth of a comprehensive plan is in its use as a guide to directing anticipated developments most profitably, this is most unfortunate.

Not surprisingly, then, the Plan itself is essentially a land-use plan. Blocks of different uses are separated by access ways and designed to produce a pleasant mosaic-like structure able to accommodate comfortably four and a half million people, attendant facilities and anticipated industrial growth to 1990. Indeed, the consultants thought of the future land-use pattern presented as *the* Plan. The Plan, then, is apparently the very model of that type of planning eschewed in the so-called new planning philosophy which insists on strategic measures and provision of the necessary fiscal, legal and administrative infrastructure. Indeed, under the 'new' planning philosophy a 'Plan' is not prepared. In fact, *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* includes a budgetary document indicating the costs involved in providing necessary facilities, translates the land-use plan into a series of



First Revised Metropolitan Plan. Source: Sternstein, L., *Planning the Developing Primate City: Bangkok 2000 Canberra, 1971.*

projects strategically phased over time, discusses the need for fiscal, legal and administrative change to enable implementation of the Plan, and makes perfectly clear that a comprehensive plan is a guide: a means to an end, not an end in itself. The 'old' planning philosophy is not less aware of the nature of comprehensive planning than is the 'new' planning philosophy, but where the 'old' produced a comprehensive plan regardless, the 'new' — painfully aware of the failure of comprehensive planning introduced directly into the developing countries — seeks first to provide the necessary planning milieu by gradually turning the *ad hoc* project-by-project approach into an integrated programme. This difference is fundamental and the merit of the new philosophy is evident.

Thai authorities referred to *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* in bolstering arguments for specific developments included in it when these cropped up in the traditional project-by-project approach and ignored it when the project was not included in the Plan. Neither the Plan nor any of its parts received official approval. The value of the land-use plan was, however, appreciated. Although the project-by-project approach is actively pursued by each agency involved in developing the city, each agency wants a guide to overall growth. A land-use plan rooted in actual use, duly cognisant of all projects contemplated by the many and various agencies responsible, and merely filled out through a clear and simple extrapolation, is a satisfying tactical device in working toward integrated, comprehensive planning.

*The Report on the First Revision of the Plan for the Metropolitan Area* prepared by the Department of Town and Country Planning in 1971 attempted to confirm *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* in the very changed condition of the metropolitan area after a decade of development. In the main, parameters critical to the invention of a comprehensive plan were revised, though certain not unreasonable suggestions in *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* were reiterated as were, disconcertingly, certain sadder features. Essentially, revision of *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* stemmed from a very great difference in the population anticipated in the metropolitan area in 1990: 6.5 million in the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* as against 4.5 million in *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533*. This considerable difference derived from the fact that the authors of *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* envisaged government limiting growth to 4.5 million in 1990 in the belief that, failing this, population densities would increase and a huge financial outlay would be necessary to provide the public facilities required. Wisely, the authors of the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* doubted the practicability of attempting to limit numbers in the metropolitan area to 4.5 million. The *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* argues that the population in 1990 will be 6.5 million and that government must find the wherewithal to provide the necessary facilities. The approach suggests a healthy pragmatism, but nevertheless, the estimate of 6.5 million people in 1990 is strewn with those questionable assumptions common to the prediction of population levels. Unfortunately, the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan*, as had its lineal ancestor *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533*, appeared immediately before the results of a national census. In view of the acknowledged errors introduced into *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* by the difference between the population in the metropolitan area reported in the 1960 Census and the estimate of the consultants, should not the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* have awaited the results of the 1970 Census; particularly since the lack of accurate, readily usable data is officially bemoaned and the gathering of such information is urged on agencies of government as being indispensable to planning?

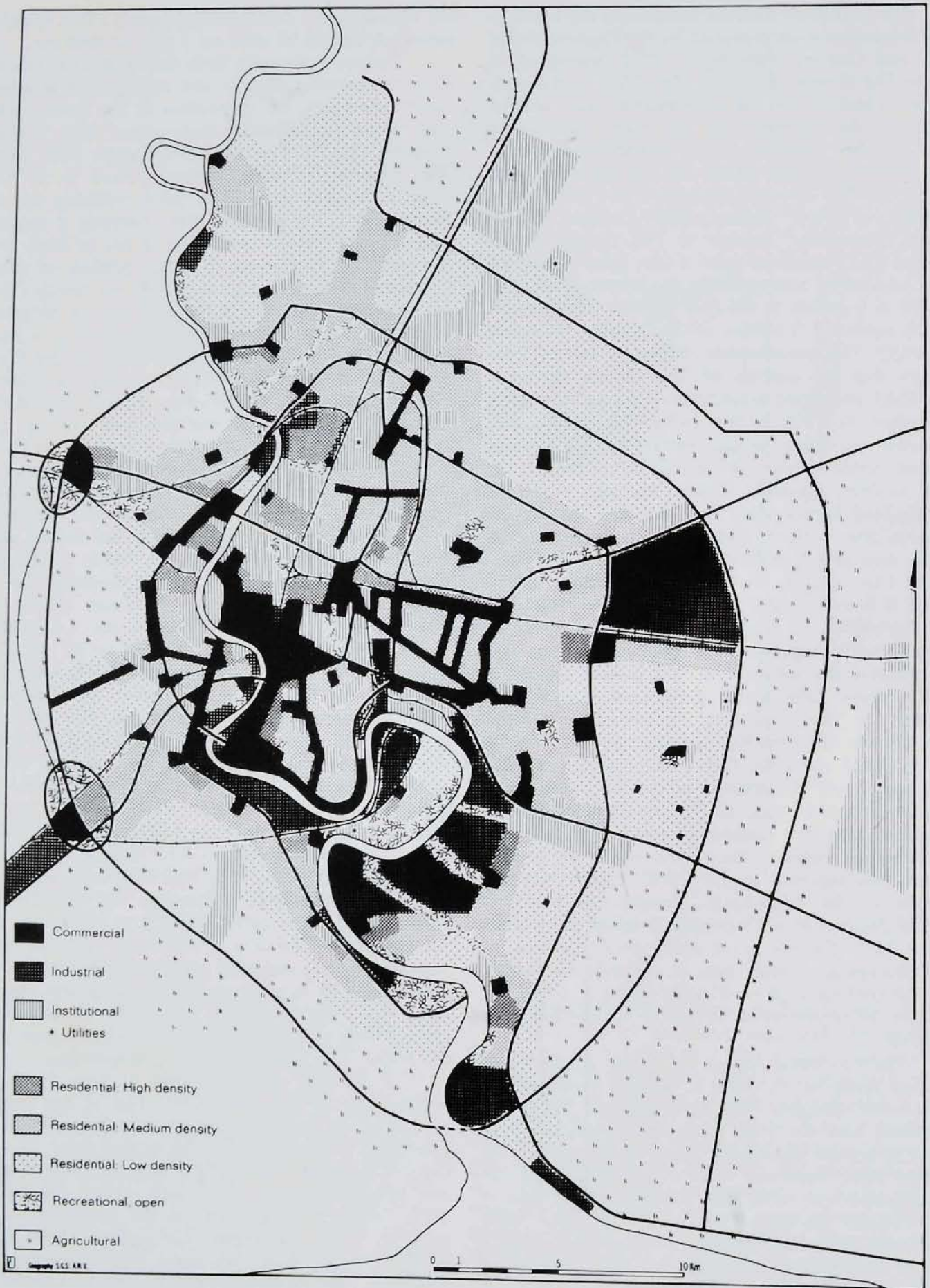
The two plans appear to include approximately equal areas but to differ in general configuration. *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* includes 780 square kilometres and the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* only 732 square kilometres. None of the area of the *Revised Plan*, however, is zoned for agricultural use as compared with more than two fifths of the area in *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533*. It may seem reasonable to exclude fringing cultivated lands from a plan of metropolitan land-use, but this suggests an 'empty' countryside into which the city may sprawl if necessary. In fact, the countryside is well populated. A first aim of city planning must be to contain this sprawl, since the integral metropolitan area comprises

the city and the country surrounding. This interdependence should be clear on a plan of land-use.

Despite embracing both the haphazard growth of an intervening decade and ungoverned developments scheduled, the disposition of the various land uses in the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* is more coherent than in *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533*. The removal of what intricacy there is in *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* gains credibility for the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan*; certainly it appears more a guide than a goal. This is not to imply that the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* proffers no specific suggestions. Several novel ideas are brought into the plan. For example a national park is proposed immediately south of the Port of Bangkok on a piece of land surrounded almost completely by the Chao Phraya river. Here, the river is not bridged and the island-like area is yet rural. Government is warned that the next five years will see the area built-up and government is urged to seize the opportunity to preserve the area as open space. The uniqueness of the site was not noticed in *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* and the area was scheduled for residential use in most part. It would surprise and delight me if the area were not already in the hands of speculators. (Similarly, the proposed recreational use of vacated Crown properties in the heart of the city seems a forlorn hope.) A decade ago I wondered aloud in knowledgeable company as to why the narrow neck of this bulbous peninsula-like area had not been cut through and the river rechanneled. I was told that a canal had been cut, but not wide and deep for fear of greater intrusion of salt water into orchards and fields. These were already threatened by brackish tides made more threatening by the withdrawal of underground water for use by the rapidly increasing population and proliferating industry in the metropolitan area. The location of the port along the loop in the river bounding the area was a further obstacle. Still, I fancy a cut through this scrawny neck, the resiting of the port at the cut, and the blocking of the flow of salt water upstream by a submerged dam and fresh water wall. Another possibility would be to score channels through the area to allow for much needed expansion of the port. Others have speculated about this unique area, but the notion of a national park is praiseworthy.

It is also proposed that a large block of 'empty' land in the northeastern part of the city be purchased by government and that new offices and extensions to existing offices be located there. In *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* a new government area was proposed on the Thon Buri side of the Krung Thon Bridge and extension of the existing government area was also urged. The authors of the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* argue that to extend the area now used by government is virtually impossible since this is in the heart of the city where land values are very high and surrounding properties are in private hands. The argument is true only in part,





Greater Bangkok Plan 2543 [A.D. 2000]. Source: Sternstein, L., *Planning the Developing Primate City: Bangkok 2000* Canberra, 1971.

for the existing national administrative centre could be expanded if the military moved from a number of spacious encampments in the heart of the city. The military is unlikely to move at present, however, and so the possibility is not mentioned. Allowing this as politic, still the existing seat of government might be expanded in other ways, particularly upward. Almost as obviously, it might also be extended along processional Ratchadamnoen Klang Boulevard, which is now faced on both sides by squat, dismal, woefully inadequate and decrepit structures housing a mixed bag of activities. Ratchadamnoen Klang Boulevard could be faced by efficient and attractive high-rise office buildings, interconnected and with ample off-street parking, and backed by attractive high-rise apartment blocks housing a good number of those employed in the offices adjacent. Shopping and recreational facilities are already to hand and could be readily augmented. Finding the finance for this would be no more difficult than for a similar scheme elsewhere, perhaps less so. The reason for rejecting the Thon Buri site for government proposed in *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* is not stated in the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* but the area passed into different use, mostly residential, during the intervening decade. The *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* sees Thon Buri more as a residential area than does the first plan and this is consistent with present use, but is the encouraging of a dormitory-like Thon Buri wise in the face of increasing congestion on the ways over the river?

The *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* proposes an elaborate system of communications, particularly with regard to land transportation. The roadway system described — and for which nothing less is claimed than that it will solve present traffic problems and prevent these recurring in future or at least for the next forty years or more — comprises three circumferential roads, a large number of radial and cross-town roads, many lesser major roads and several new bridges across the Chao Phraya, as well as a riverside drive actually overhanging its eastern edge so as to minimise costs incurred in expropriating land and demolishing buildings. The need for this riverside drive may be doubted since the plan includes a number of proposals that would thin traffic in the area. Well aware of the uncertainty of implementing such a gradiose scheme, even in part, an alternate way to 'solve' the traffic problem 'immediately' is proffered: two elevated roads with limited access, one above main canals for much of its length, the other above a major avenue. A monorail system, mooted previously, would seem a better immediate solution but no mention is made of it. It is warned that 'immediate solution' will require a huge financial outlay. Doubtless the cost will be high, but no higher and conceivably lower than the cost of providing a comparable portion of the proposed ground-level system. The elevated roadways scheme may find favour, but it is unlikely to solve the traffic

problem. A proliferation of roadway, in itself, has not answered the traffic problem anywhere. In any event, the system of roadways necessary will take more than a few years to build. At the present pace of roadway construction, even a half century would be a foolhardy schedule.

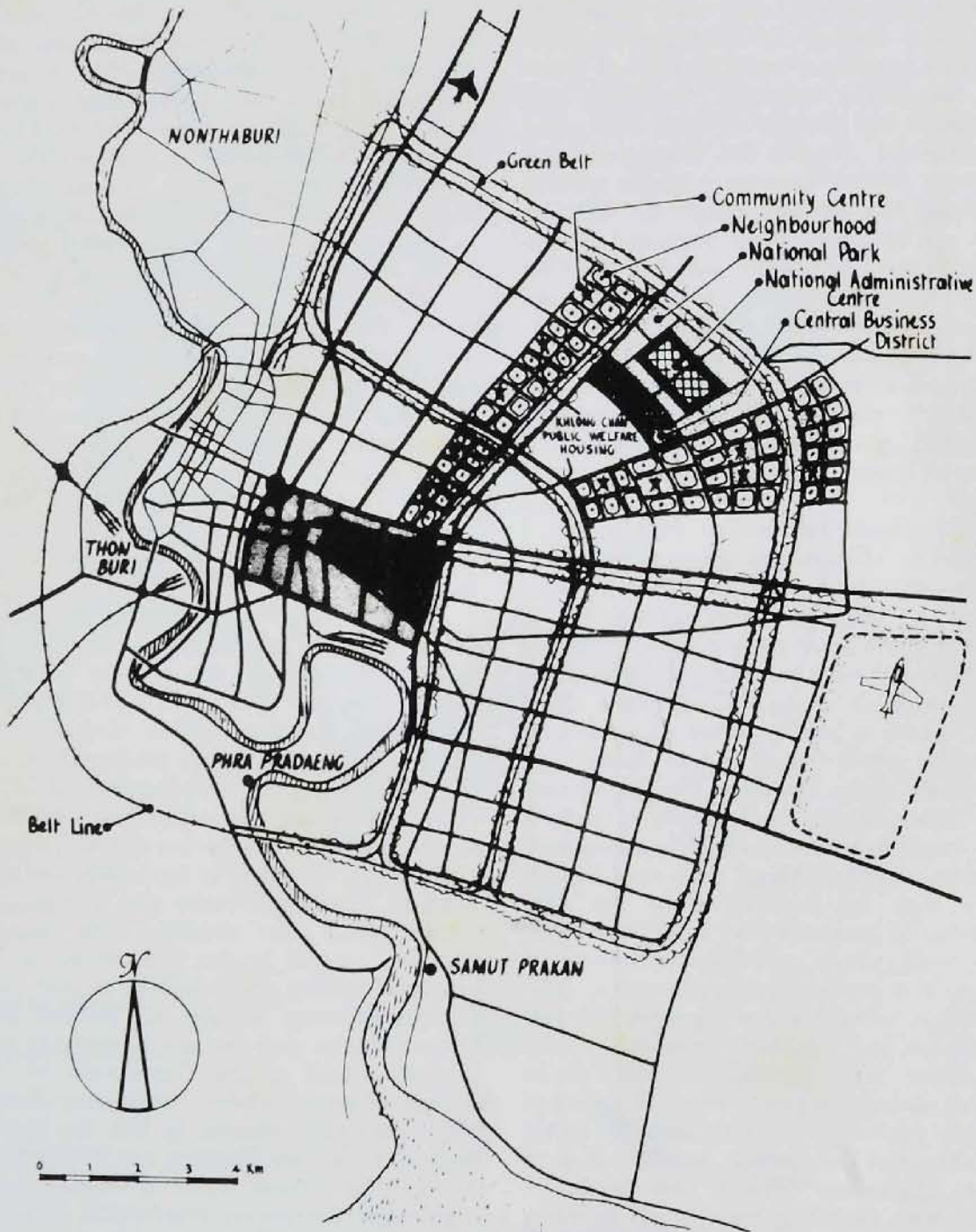
In concept and in execution a third plan for Bangkok, *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2543*, published in 1969, is not different from *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* or from the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan*. Like the latter it attempts revision of the first plan in order to incorporate present and scheduled uses of land different from those set out a decade before and to allow for the greater population anticipated, 6.5 million in the year 2000. As in *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* a restriction of population in the metropolitan area is envisaged, for the author foresees an insupportable 13.62 million in the year 2000 if growth is uncontrolled. To accommodate 6.5 millions, *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2543* includes 975 square kilometres, a quarter again as much areas as in *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533*, and earmarks land somewhat more generously for industry, government and other institutions, commerce and public utilities, decidedly less so for residential use, and more or less equally for recreation and for agriculture. *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2543* lies between *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* and the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* in land use allocations, in the area in non-agricultural use and in configuration, but the use of land is set out more particularly than in the former and the system of road and rail ways is more elaborate than in the latter.

The *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* was published in 1971 by the Department of Town and Country Planning in the Ministry of Interior. *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2543* was published in 1969 by the City Planning Division in the Municipality of Krung Thep, one of two municipalities making up the city of Bangkok. The Department of Town and Country Planning was established in 1961 and assumed the responsibility for overall planning in the metropolitan area and in up-country centres as well. The City Planning Division was to plan only special projects which were consistent with the comprehensive plan set out by the Department of Town and Country Planning. In producing its own overall plan, the City Planning Division has pleaded the urgency of the situation and has got a generally sympathetic hearing, except at the Department of Town and Country Planning where *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2543* is ignored, officially. In fact, the Department of Town and Country Planning was established in order to avoid the criminal waste of severely limited time, money and manpower represented by separate yet similar plans for the metropolitan area. Effective planning stems from critical discussion and the airing of different views, which must be encouraged, but the use of near-identical means to gain near-identical

ends by two agencies of government each of which is aware of but does not acknowledge the activities of the other is irresponsible. In the circumstances, however, the Department of Town and Country Planning might have acknowledged the *de facto Greater Bangkok Plan 2543*, credited that which was good and incorporated as much of it as was possible into the *de jure* plan.

The *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* is remarkable for a lack of reference to prior or continuing studies. This, despite that the Department of Town

and Country Planning should be vitally interested in the working of each of the many agencies responsible for the working of Bangkok and must elicit opinion from them, if only to encourage the sense of interrelatedness necessary to a coordinated effort. Furthermore, one might expect that when a non-governmental authority is sufficiently concerned to present alternative strategies for metropolitan development these should be seriously explored. The *First Revised Metropolitan Plan*, however, does not acknowledge even the existence of Professor An



'An' Plan. Source: Sternstein, L., *Planning the Developing Primate City: Bangkok 2000* Canberra, 1971.

Nimmanhaemindr's *Solution to the traffic problem in Bangkok-Thon Buri and establishment of a new national administrative centre* which was delivered as a lecture — a impassioned lecture — and then published in 1970. Professor An Nimmanhaemindr's *Solution to the traffic problem and establishment of a new national administrative centre*, differs from the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* and the *Greater Bangkok Plan 2543* in not being comprehensive (though the new national administrative centre proposed would involve total planning of the metropolitan area) and in not noticing the *Greater Bangkok Plan 2533*. But Professor An argues for views similar to those expressed in the other plans. For example, he notes the need to reorganise and extend the system of roads and railways in the form of rings and radii; the need to develop mass transportation; the need to control the use of land and the construction of buildings; the need to practice decentralisation and encourage birth control. Strikingly different, however, are proposals to limit the population of Bangkok-Thon Buri to 3,500,000, to remove the Port of Bangkok and to stop dredging the bar at the mouth of the Chao Phraya River immediately, and to relocate all offices of the central government at a new national administrative centre at Khlong Chan in the suburbs of Bangkok; proposals which have been greeted with more than dismay by responsible Thai authorities. Authority would probably like the population of Bangkok-Thon Buri to be around 3,500,000 as the present population gives problems aplenty, but the population was already about 3,500,000 in 1970. Even to get administrative machinery going which could act to encourage a slowing of growth in the foreseeable future seems hopeless; to reduce the population absolutely seems impossible. Again, there must be some among the leadership who are aware of the blunder in siting the Port of Bangkok, but to remove the Port now is unthinkable and therefore to stop dredging the bar is irrational. In fact, additions to the Port of Bangkok are underway and more are planned, for even with a new deep-sea port (or two) shipping facilities will be taxed, as trade will certainly grow rapidly in future.

The crux of Professor An Nimmanhaemindr's thesis is the establishment of a new national administrative centre in the Bangkok suburbs. This is not only to provide the Thai people with 'a new capital, beautiful, properly planned and modern, like Washington, D.C.' or Canberra, but to solve the traffic problem most economically. To cut or widen roads in the heart of the city is many times more costly than in the suburbs. Additionally, the new national capital would open up new areas for residential use, relieve crowding in the city and allow the conserving of places of historic and artistic worth. Authority thinks the proposal is impracticable; and the present economic and political situation, reflected in conservative budgeting, supports this view, though Professor An believes a good part of the necessary outlay

could be defrayed by the sale of present government buildings and the cost of the new centre would be less than the cost of necessary improvements to present sites and structures. Under a policy of decentralization, too, the proposed wholesale relocation of offices of the central government may be questioned; for what is proposed, really, is a recentralization, and the benefits described by Professor An are not likely to be realised. What might better be urged is a rational reconstruction of the administrative heart of the city so that the single purpose, eight hours a day, five days a week, administrative centre is once more a full-time, well-balanced administrative, commercial, residential and recreational area.

The *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* and *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2543* carry over from *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2533* a too conservative approach to the planning of the metropolitan area and each proposes a schedule which will allow in future only a city of the Western fashion. Professor An Nimmanhaemindr's proposals appear extreme but, in fact, are simple borrowings from the West and cannot lead to any real deviation from Western ways, despite that these ways are wanting. I think it fair to insist that the great lesson to be learned from the city of the 'developed' world is what not to do in the city of the 'developing' world. To go this brutal way, at speed, would be foolish. To plan remedially is to forfeit the opportunity yet waiting. To grasp the opportunity for planning Bangkok needs people in authority who are aware of what is going on in the many and varied fields pertinent to urban development and who know Bangkok. There are few such people and their scarcity is all the more serious because all the many and varied ills of a remarkable and chaotic development appear equally urgent and hopelessly entangled. Forced to do something, authority turns to the experts, though the experts are not more than able technicians. In consequence, the planning of the metropolitan area is too much a mimicry of happenings elsewhere, inevitably in arrear of thinking and not dedicated, particularly, to discovering what is happening in Bangkok. Unique Bangkok, most primate of cities — embodiment of the distinct and splendid Thai ethos — is rapidly becoming any mean 'modern' city of some generations past and the planners seem intent on endorsing this.

Neither the *First Revised Metropolitan Plan* nor *The Greater Bangkok Plan 2543* received official approval; in time, perhaps, revised plans will be approved. Planning legislation is being considered; in time, planning legislation may be enacted. The first administrative step toward co-ordinated metropolitan-wide development has been taken; in time, metropolitan-wide development may be undertaken. Meantime, indiscriminate growth continues and will reduce the advantages to be gained from integrated planned development for some time to come. □



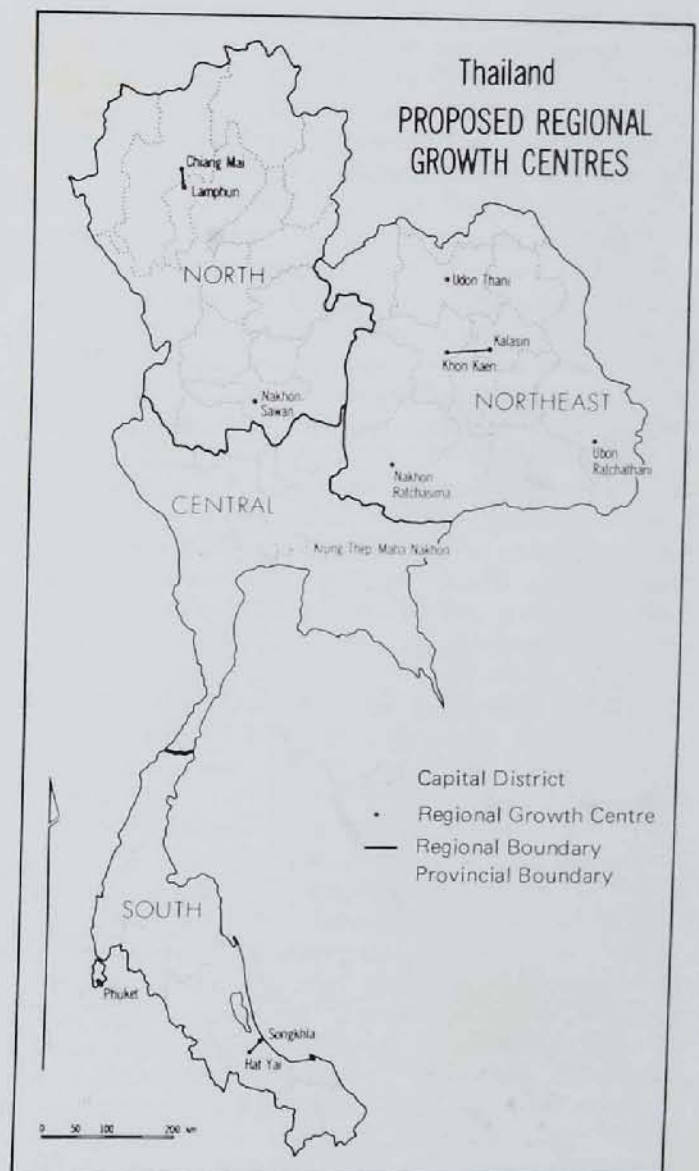
# EXORCISING THE BEDEVILLED CITY OF ANGELS

'Exorcising the Bedevilled City of Angels' might refer to any extant metropolitan complex. It does refer to Bangkok, pre-eminent example of the primate city and the capital of Thailand. Bangkok, or more properly Krung Thep, has been popularized as the 'City of Angels' in the mistaken notion this phrase succinctly sums up the essence of the wordy honorific official name of the Thai capital.

The principal oath invoked to drive the evil spirits from Krung Thep is 'master plan'. The first master plan for the city was prepared by American consultants in 1960. This pioneering effort was unofficially refashioned in 1969, unofficially transformed in 1970, and officially revised in 1971. Each of these master plans or re-plans has been discussed elsewhere in some detail. The point, the simple point, to be made here is that even if each of these master plans were to be credited with all the good a master plan could hold (not a few would argue this capacity is thimble-like), and if at least the official plans were judged to be perfect schedules of progress, one would have to admit that they have not deterred indiscriminate growth and have not allayed a chaotic development which is now all too plainly manifest in the environment of Bangkok. It might be argued, with reason, that these master plans never received the legal and financial backing necessary to their implementation, and that this lack of backing reflected a lack of real will to improve the lot of the majority of city dwellers, the poor. The master plans for Bangkok, therefore, never had a chance to show what they could do. However, even the best laid and best backed of master plans will 'gang aglay' if it does not plan at a human scale, if it does not consider individual households as carefully as it does the positioning of ring roads, industrial estates or shopping centres. Each of the master plans for Bangkok was pre-occupied with the grand scheme of things, with networks, layouts and overall order. Although each plan was loudly dedicated to the improvement of the lot of the people of Bangkok, this was a soft nothing since the inhabitants of the city were not considered first or directly. However, each of the master plans recommended that the population of Bangkok be limited, forcibly if necessary, as a prerequisite for improving the environment of the city. This was not a soft nothing, though the authorities wisely did nothing about it until recently.

◀ *Congestion and pollution: too common a combination in the city. Photograph from the Bangkok Post 1981.*

Government has recently invoked two oaths in addition to 'master plan' to ward off evil spirits. The first of these injunctions is 'family planning' or 'planned parenthood' or, occasionally, 'zero population growth'. Government first took an antinatalist stance in 1970, and a family planning programme has been espoused in the latest five-year national development plan. If family planning were pursued assiduously, which is not now the case, the effects would not be felt for a considerable time, too long a time to avert further widespread deterioration of the environment of Bangkok. There has therefore been a second adjuration: 'growth pole' or 'growth centre' or 'decentralization' or 'decentralized urbaniza-



tion' or 'regional development'. A 'national policy of decentralized urbanization' was urged by the Urban and Regional Planning Division in the all-powerful National Economic and Social Development Board of Thailand, in order to 'promote economic decentralization and to check excessive population flows into... Bangkok by concentrating more resources and development in potential urban centres in the less developed regions of Northeast, North and South Thailand'.

Foreign consultants undertook studies in each of these three regions and recommended the formulation of a strategy of decentralized urbanization to guide efforts at regional development. In the Northeast region, each of the four towns of Nakhon Ratchasima, Udon Thani, Ubon Ratchathani and Khon Kaen was nominated for development as the 'big end' of a corridor-like growth pole. In the North region, the Chiang Mai-Lamphun corridor and Nakhon Sawan were nominated for growth centre status. In the South region, the Songkhla-Hat Yai corridor and Phuket were recommended for development as growth centres. Recent urban and regional planning activities at the National Economic and Social Development Board have led to the identification of a number of 'medium-sized cities' which are thought to have sufficiently strong economic bases and potential for development, and these centres have been nominated for 'a key role as growth poles in extending growth across the entire economic space of its particular region'. The development of several of these regional centres is under way.

In one critic's recent judgement, however, 'there is little evidence that induced growth centres generate significant spread effects on their economically lagging hinterlands, but they can properly serve as regional centres of in-migration'. It appears that the National Economic and Social Development Board may have too high hopes with regard to the ability of growth poles to promote regional economic development. Elsewhere, the few induced growth centres which might be termed successful began as new national capitals of relatively prosperous nations, rather an uncommon but perhaps necessary advantage. If the ability of the several nominated regional growth centres to promote regional development in Thailand is in doubt and, thereby, the decentralization of industry from Bangkok uncertain, what of the ability of the regional growth poles to attract migrants who would have been bound for Bangkok?

The system of urban centres in Thailand is the world's pre-eminent example of the primate city system: Bangkok held approximately thirty times as many people as the next largest centre in Thailand in 1970, and this disparity has been widening in recent years. Most of the medium-sized cities which have been nominated for growth centre status in Thailand are towns with populations of approximately fifty thousand souls with not a fraction of the purchasing power of a similar number of folk in what

we might call an industrialized setting. Advocacy of the proper role of a growth pole as a regional centre of in-migration was based on 'intermediately sized' cities; cities of 200,000 to 750,000 people in an industrialized setting. To develop a series of 'intermediately sized' growth centres in Thailand will take some considerable time, assuming government actively pursues such development.

In fact, government cannot pursue the development of even one such regional growth centre, since it lacks the wherewithal to provide the basic infrastructure for development. Private enterprise will not locate basic industries in the interior provinces far from Bangkok without honeyed inducements and unconditional guarantees from government that essential services will be maintained. Government cannot now offer industry more than was offered in the recent past when 'ugly money' dropped on Thailand as if from B-52s. It cannot guarantee essential services in the provinces or maintain essential services in Bangkok. What government can do and is doing in the several centres it has nominated as growth poles is to upgrade the water supply, to improve transportation, to establish a university or a hospital, or to build a regional conference centre or a recreational complex. All these are good works, perhaps even necessary works, but all are on a relatively small scale, perhaps a realistic scale but one too small to attract any significant fraction of the growing stream of provincials bound for the big city. Paradoxically, upgrading certain amenities or establishing certain tertiary institutions like schools and hospitals in a regional centre, without also siting basic growth industries there, may compound those problems which the so-called growth pole was to mitigate. Educated, healthy provincials with a taste for better things are apt to have great expectations, and they will relocate should the local area lack the opportunities for the realization of their appropriate claims.

It is suggested, therefore, that the development of even one true regional growth pole outside Bangkok is an overlarge undertaking for Thailand; and merely to upgrade the several small towns nominated as regional growth poles will neither promote regional economic development nor discourage migration to Bangkok. The consequence is obvious: the environment of the city must deteriorate even more rapidly with the influx of ever more migrants, ever more of whom will be without provincial recourse.

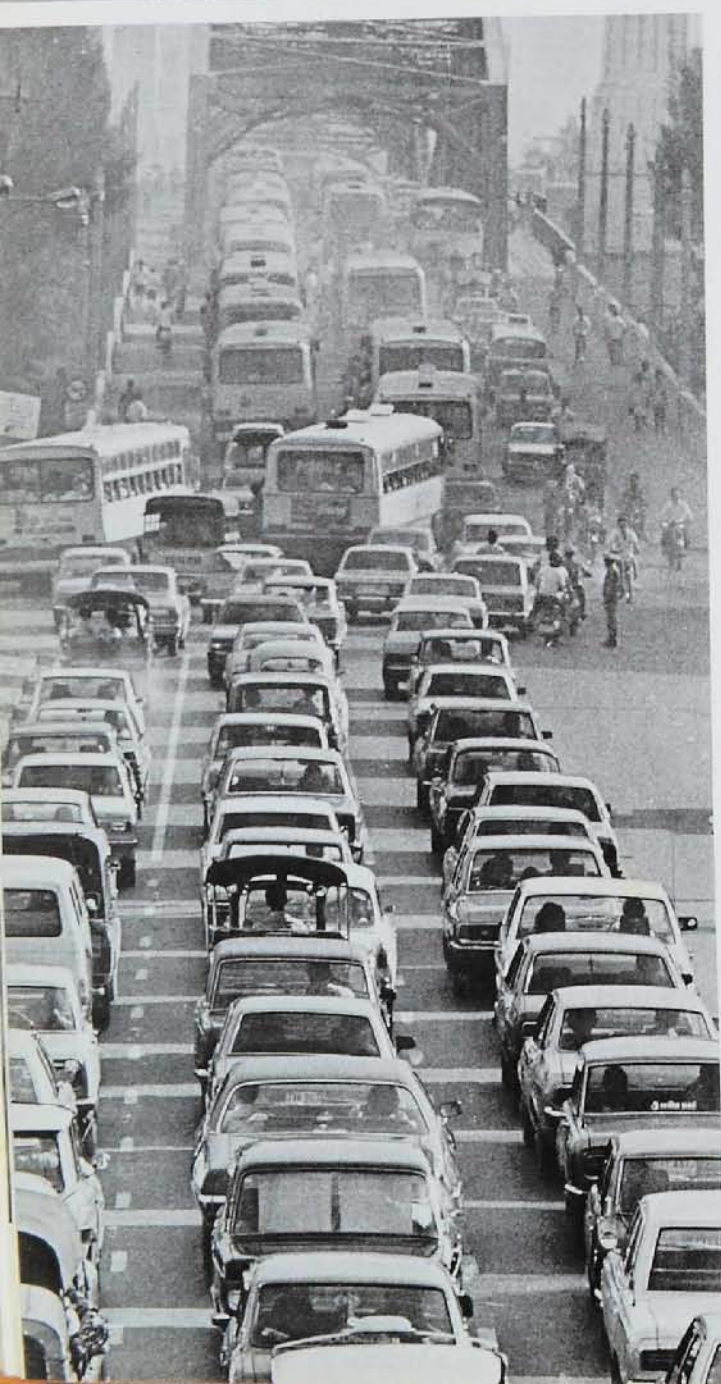
The 'national policy of decentralized urbanization' formulated at the National Economic and Social Development Board is concerned with regional

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► *Some planners would separate dirty industries from other users of land in Bangkok with which they are intermixed; better to cleanse them. Photograph from the Bangkok Post 1981.*









growth poles in three of the four traditional regions of Thailand; the Central region which is centred on Bangkok was purposely ignored. However, an 'urban decentralization plan' for the Bangkok Metropolitan Area was recently outlined by the City Planning Division in the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.

This plan was developed from a suggestion that a number of 'new towns' be developed within the metropolitan area; this suggestion was made in 1971 by a Thai-German team of experts who were engaged in the herculean task of finding a solution to or at least ameliorating the terrible traffic problem in Bangkok. Each of the earlier master plans for Bangkok had recommended that industry be deconcentrated in a number of smaller centres. The four provinces, Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, Nonthaburi, Samut Prakan and Pathum Thani comprise the Bangkok Metropolitan Area of the 'urban decentralization plan', an area of approximately 3750 square kilometres. Adjacent provinces Samut Sakhon and Samut Songkram may be included in the plan area in future. The population in the plan area is to be from 7.9 to 8.3 million, but the City Planning Division thought that this number might be reduced if a co-operative effort were made to do so by national, regional and local planning authorities. No dates are given in the outline 'urban decentralization plan', which itself is undated. The population of the four-province Bangkok Metropolitan Area in 1970 was approximately four million. Assuming that the population continues to grow at the high average annual rate of the 1960s (3.3 per cent), the population of the area will be approximately eight million in 1990, without in-migration. Net in-migration increased enormously during the 1960s and no doubt has continued to increase while the natural growth rate appears to have decreased recently. Whatever the balance between natural growth and net in-migration, the population of the four-province Bangkok Metropolitan Area must more than double before the end of this century.

According to its advocates, the 'urban decentralization plan' provides a flexible master plan for the Bangkok Metropolitan Area able to cope with changing needs, provides guidelines for the use of land commensurate with the needs of the people in such a way as to minimize conflict between private developers and the government, and will act to improve the quality of local environments and to conserve natural resources. The way to these good things involves the development of some forty largely self-contained but co-ordinated centres within the Metropolitan Area. This constellation of centres is to reduce congestion in Bangkok and to ameliorate an

◀ *Too many vehicles, too few ways and too little consideration; the result: congestion and noxious airs seen, heard, smelt and tasted. Photographs from the Bangkok Post 1981.*

*The slums of Bangkok are places of hope, not despair; what is needed is not demolition, but repair. Photographs from the Bangkok Post 1981.*



► *The need for low-income housing is partially met by the National Housing Authority's estates on the outskirts of the city; the attempt is commendable, though its concrete expression merits a rethink. Photographs from the Bangkok Post 1981.*



unhealthy dependence on the capital. The heart of each centre is to be given over mainly to commercial, industrial and institutional uses, though space is to be set aside also for recreational use. The area surrounding the heart of each centre is to be mainly for residential use; residential tracts in which low-income housing projects of the National Housing Agency are to figure prominently. Public utilities are to be sited in this suburban area, and land is to be kept in agricultural use. Industrial estates are to be established only after the most painstaking consideration of the sources of raw materials and labour, of

the adequacy of transportation and other necessary services, and of the effect of the estate on the quality of the environment in surrounding areas. The outline 'urban decentralization plan' places an injunction on the establishment of large industrial estates in the province of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon and urges, instead, that land now under cultivation remain under cultivation. Although there is to be a 'mixed transportation system' within the plan area, mass transportation modes are to be prominent. To facilitate public transportation, terminals built to accommodate different modes of transport are to be





*Vast tracts of land at the outskirts of the city are covered with mediocre middle-income housing; the demand is such that any home-like structure commands a high price. Photographs from the Bangkok Post 1981.*





*The well-to-do suffer no shortage of housing: so-called 'condominiums'; so-called 'townhouses'; and splendid architect-designed dwellings, none more beautiful than those in the exquisite Thai-style. Photographs from the Bangkok Post 1981.*



strategically sited within the Metropolitan Area. Each mode of mass transportation is to be greatly improved — a particular effort is to be made to upgrade and articulate waterways — so that each of the centres to be developed will be within easy reach of Bangkok.

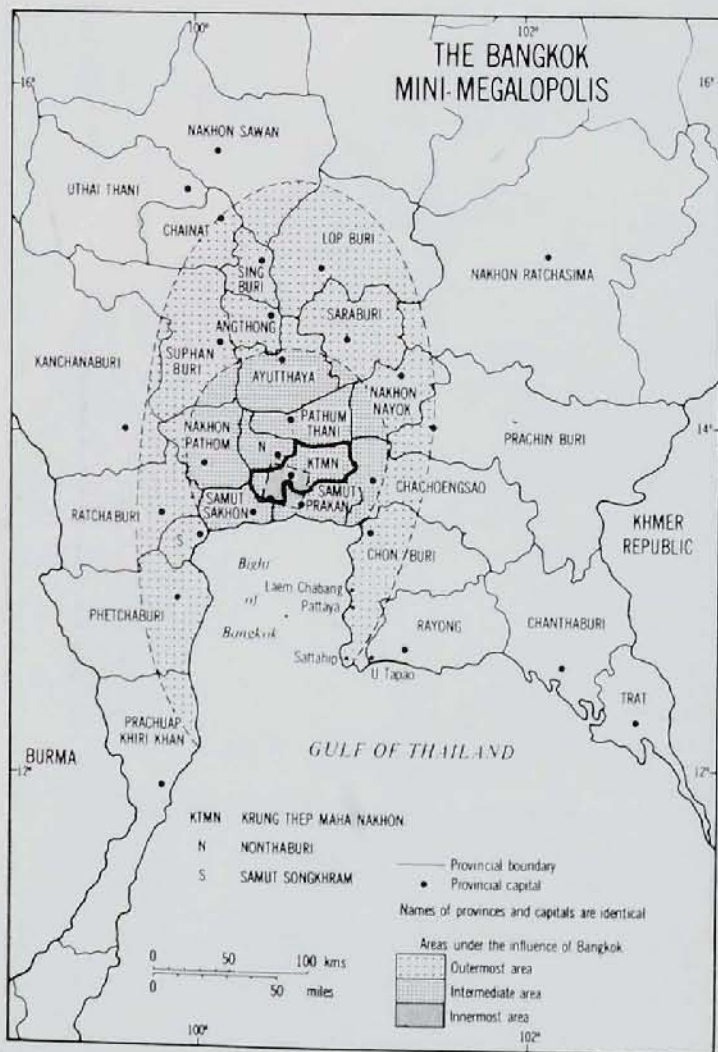
Implementation of the 'urban decentralization plan' will require each of the government agencies concerned to promulgate and enforce regulations concerning such things as land use, construction, communications and transportation, public utilities, public parks and recreational areas. Advocates of the plan point to the Planning Law of 1975, the Industrial Act of 1975, taxation legislation passed in 1975 and other recent legal sanctions, which make it possible to promote certain desirable features and to eliminate certain undesirable features of the urban environment. Of course, the elimination of undesirable features depends on the introduction of unpopular regulations or on the establishment of costly alternative facilities. For example, the use of the private car must be controlled if the horrendous traffic problem of Bangkok is to be ameliorated. But the limitations placed on the use of private car must be preceded by the introduction of an adequate system of mass transportation. Lashings of lucre are needed to implement the 'urban decentralization plan' but perhaps more importantly, co-operation is necessary among the many different and seemingly sovereign agencies of government concerned with the development of the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, and between these agencies and private enterprise, particularly the land developers. The record in this

regard is not promising. Advocates of the plan believe the different government agencies involved should be co-ordinated under the direction of the National Economic and Social Development Board. This seemingly sensible suggestion reeks of a political manoeuvre since it would require a transfer of supervision for such plans from the Department of Town and Country Planning, an agency with which the City Planning Division has been at loggerheads for some time. However, the City Planning Division may have in mind only the interests of its 'urban decentralization plan'; certainly it fervently believes the development of small centres within the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, in accordance with the plan, will eliminate or at least ameliorate many of the problems besetting Bangkok and, as a result, the inhabitants of the city will enjoy greater opportunities and a better environment.

Why place faith in this latest of the master plans for Bangkok? First, because of the passage of recent legislation which is relevant to an attack on the causes of the destruction of the urban environment. In 1974, government passed a Royal Decree on Environmental Protection and Management, and established the National Environment Board. The National Environment Board is to promulgate clear and appropriate laws and regulations which will provide realistic penalties for offenders, to co-ordinate the work of the different agencies concerned with the quality of the environment, to set up guidelines for industrial expansion and to provide information for industrialists which will protect the environment, to inform the general public about environmental issues, and to promote the quality of the environment. Second, because of the focus of the so-called 'urban decentralization plan' itself: the confrontation of the causes of the problem *in situ*. Bangkok is one of the great growth poles of the so-called developing world. The 'urban decentralization plan' uses the immense potential advantages afforded by the already-built city. Third, the environment is plainly in a critical condition. The recent spate of legislation and the public outcries by authority at the profound problems facing them are reactions to a manifestly deteriorating environment. Finally, some encouragement may be found in the recent meetings of concerned citizens at which the problems of environmental management were looked at 'in a constructive and advisory way rather than as a catalogue of environmental destruction'.

Under the 'urban decentralization plan' it may be possible rationally to reorganize the administration of the Metropolitan Area under forceful leadership; it may be possible to refashion budgetary procedures and to reallocate finance; it may be possible to encourage external investment; it may be possible to enforce the massive amount of legislation already on the books; it may be possible to enact an exacting law to curb the selfish activities of speculators; it may be possible to impose a number of stringent mea-

asures designed to tackle, at their source, the many shortcomings which now rob Bangkok of efficiency and beauty. To turn these possibilities into realities will be difficult but feasible. However, the 'urban decentralization plan' as it now stands may be too conservative as regards the territory within its purview. The four-province Bangkok Metropolitan Area seems too narrow a field, too limited an area to act as an effective deterrent to in-migration. It might be wiser to reconcentrate and develop industry in a series of 'new towns' in a wider area including the provinces of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, Samut Prakan, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram, Nakhon Pathom, Ayutthaya, Ang Thong, Singburi, Nakhon Nayok, and portions of the provinces of Prachuap Khiri Khan, Petchaburi, Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Suphanburi, Chainat, Nakhon Sawan, Lop Buri, Sara Buri, Prachinburi, Chachoengsao, Chon Buri, Rayong and Chanthaburi. This recommendation rests largely on the magnitude of migrant intercourse between this area and Krung Thep Maha Nakhon. A similar area has been described on different bases as being 'under the influence of Bangkok' by the Department of Town and Country Planning in the Ministry of Interior.



The area southeast of Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, particularly the provinces of Chon Buri and Rayong, was remarkable for attracting migrants from Bangkok in increasing numbers during the 1960s. In part this reflected the accelerating industrial development of the area, a development which is now in full career. Industrial plants dot the Sukhumvit Highway which skirts the coast from Bangkok to the Khmer Republic, the newer inland highway from the huge military bases at Sattahip and U Tapao through Chon Buri to the Northeast, and the several roads between these two highways.

Thailand's new commercial deep-sea port is to be established along the eastern littoral of the Bight of Bangkok: Sattahip, a major naval station, was for long mooted as the site but now Laem Chabang — north of Sattahip and nearer Bangkok — is favoured as the place for the port. This prospect, coupled with easy access to the metropolitan area, has spurred private enterprise to invest heavily in building up the area and so has induced migration from Krung Thep Maha Nakhon. The sumptuous beach resort at Pattaya, possibly the most spectacular development in southeast Thailand, was under construction during the 1960s but had already attracted the attention of tourists and of residents of Bangkok. Pattaya is still growing but attracts more tourists and vacationers from Bangkok than does any other place upcountry. During the 1960s, the population of each of the four southeastern provinces from Chon Buri to Trat increased at a rate substantially above the national growth rate of approximately 3.3 per cent per year. Southeast Thailand, particularly the provinces of Chon Buri and Rayong, is a burgeoning growth area which merits the assistance and the encouragement of government.

Within a comparatively short time, certainly by the year 2000, a wide ribbon of land bordering the Bight of Bangkok will be built-up and will include a population of at least 15 million. This is a crude but a most conservative estimate derived from extrapolating the present population of the area described by the Department of Town and Country Planning as being 'under the influence of Bangkok' to the year 2000, under the assumptions adopted by the National Statistical Office to derive the projections of the population of Thailand in *The demographic situation of Thailand*, prepared for the Second Asian Population Conference, Tokyo, November 1972, by the National Economic Development Board, the National Statistical Office, the Ministry of Public Health and the Institute of Population Studies, Chulalongkorn University. Actually, three extrapolations of the population of Thailand were made: a high projection, a medium projection and a low projection. The estimated population of 15 million in the area 'under the influence of Bangkok' by the year 2000 is based on the 'low' projection: the 'high' projection yields an estimated 20 million plus in the

area by the year 2000.

Government should oversee the development of this mini-megalopolis which will be centred on Krung Thep Maha Nakhon. The Bangkok mini-megalopolis is the one true 'growth centre' Thailand can sustain. Government should use the immense potential advantages afforded by Bangkok in its formulation of a rational strategy of national development, a strategy in which the rehabilitation of the environment of the city must have high priority.

Although the identification of urban problems and their attempted solution has been a concern of officialdom for some time, a concern with such matters has been evinced only recently by academics, professionals and businessmen as the deterioration of the environment of Bangkok has become all too obvious. During the past few years a number of formal meetings have been held to discuss the urgent environmental problems which confront the city, and a number of papers have been published in which Thai experts point to these problems and suggest ways in which they might be solved or at least ameliorated. The first occasion on which a large number of Thai academics, professionals, businessmen and officials met to discuss the problems of Bangkok was a seminar on urban problems organized by the Chulalongkorn University in March 1972. Twenty-four papers were presented at this meeting and later published as the *Proceedings of*



The sprawling eastern suburbs hold upwards of a million people in housing of all kinds but mostly of a good standard. The Chok Chai tower, for a time the tallest building in Southeast Asia, is a fine example of how not to build in Bangkok. Photograph from the Bangkok Post 1981.





*Trash is everywhere; the strenuous effort made to remove refuse rapidly is frustrated by inadequate means. Photographs from the Bangkok Post 1981.*



*the seminar on metropolitan problems.* Aspects of the metropolitan environment which received special attention included the insufficient water supply and water pollution, the heightening atmospheric temperature, the sinking ground level, the insufferable traffic congestion, the increasing frequency of road accidents, the virtual absence of public transportation, the inadequate educational facilities, the inadequate provision of housing for low-income families, the inadequate recreational space, the inadequate medical and health facilities, the primitive construction technology, the ineffective administration and management of public facilities and government agencies, and the inadequate legal controls over urban activities. In each of the proposed solutions to these and other acute environmental problems the keynote was 'control', control by authority over the current uncontrolled ways of urban living which disadvantage and positively pollute the environment for the great majority of city dwellers. This control was to be effected not only through vigorously enforced legal sanctions but also through educational programmes, through administrative, financial and managerial reorganization and rearrangement, through research and, of course, through planning.

The success of the seminar on metropolitan problems induced the Chulalongkorn University to stage another meeting the following year, in 1973, on the problems of urban housing. Papers presented at this seminar considered economic, social and planning aspects of housing in the Metropolitan Area.

*The National report on human settlements for Thailand* presented at a United Nations Conference



*Once pleasant and efficacious waterways are now choked with debris and black with inorganic waste. An effort is being made to revive them. Photographs from the Bangkok Post 1981.*



The 'Venice of the East' with a vengeance. Floods, now frequent, extensive and prolonged, threaten to become more so as the former drainageways — the khlongs — are filled-in and truncated, the built-up area balloons and the city sinks as underlying reservoirs of fresh water are sucked out. Still, the Thai maintain their enviable equanimity. Photographs from the Bangkok Post 1981.



*The city is not without carefully tended, beautiful open places; the pity is these are too few. Photographs from the Bangkok Post 1981.*



on Human Settlements in June 1976 prominently featured several environmental problems facing Bangkok. These problems included water pollution and drainage, the disposal of solid wastes, air pollution, the shortfall in housing, slums, traffic congestion and insufficient recreational space; a diagnosis similar to that reached at the 1972 seminar on urban problems. Like the earlier seminar of 1972 also, the report saw the way to the solution of these and other acute environmental problems as being dependent, in the first instance, on greater governmental control over the working of the city.

Although it is not possible here even briefly to run through the arguments with regard to each of the problems identified in the three statements concerning the condition of the urban environment, the tenor of these theses can be indicated by summarizing the gist of the contributions concerning certain symptoms of the deteriorating city environment, namely, water pollution and the near absence of recreational space within the built-up area.

The pollution of all the many waterways crisscrossing Bangkok was said to result from the tipping of garbage into waterways, from the discharge of untreated domestic wastewater into canals and the Chao Phraya river, and from the discharge of industrial wastewater and effluent into waterways, either directly or after insufficient treatment. The disposal of solid waste was largely uncontrolled and much solid waste was not collected. Of the uncollected solid waste it was estimated that at least 30 per cent was dumped into canals. Households were virtually free to discharge liquid wastes directly into waterways. Industrial plants were required by law to install treatment works but the penalties for not

complying with the regulations were light. Most industrial plants did not have effluent treatment facilities. Government had attempted to inform the citizenry about the water pollution problem, in addition to its promulgation of ordinances prohibiting the discharge of untreated wastewater into waterways. These measures had been ineffective because of the lack of manpower to enforce the law, because of the inadequate amount of money available for alerting the public to the problem, and because of the several unco-ordinated public authorities which were responsible for one or more aspects of the problem. The proposed solution to the problem of water pollution naturally begins with the strict enforcement of stringent laws prohibiting the direct discharge of garbage and untreated or undertreated domestic and industrial effluents into waterways. Also necessary is the establishment of a single all-powerful government authority which would be responsible for attacking the many-faceted problem of water pollution and a campaign which would include the establishment of pumping stations to augment tidal flows and to aerate water, the widening and deepening of canals to enable these waterways to cope with a certain inevitable amount of wastewater, and the provision of adequate refuse collection services.

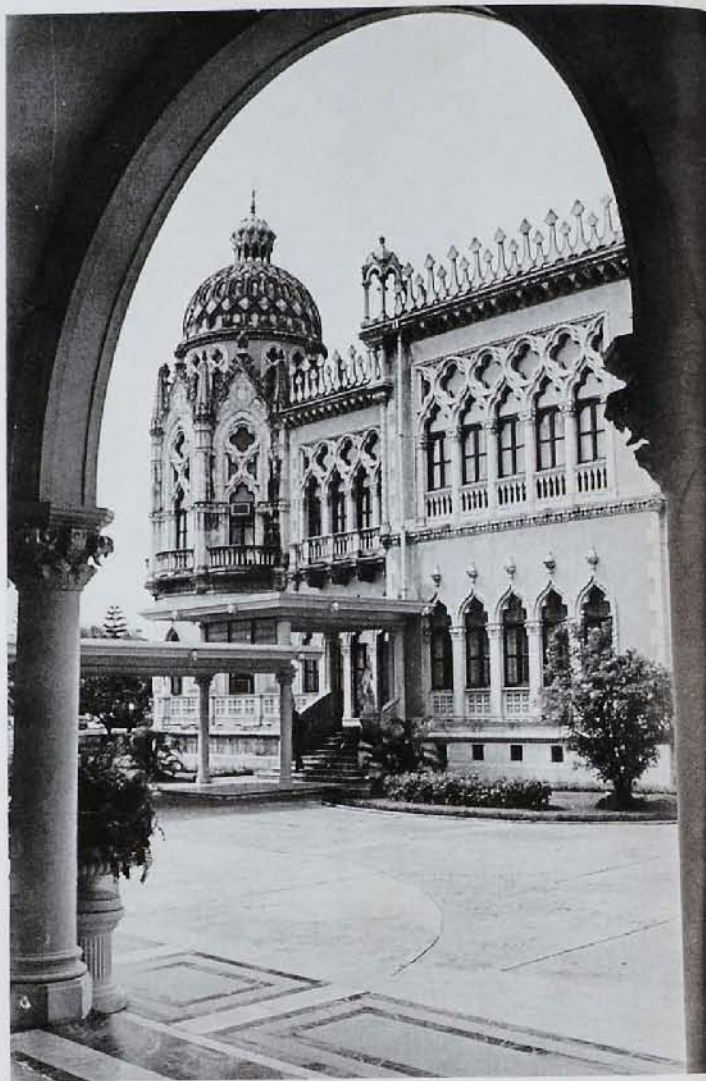
Should the citizens of Bangkok seek open recreational space within their city all at once, each person would have less than one-tenth of a square metre in which to stand, and stand is all he could do. The near absence of open space within the built-up area has resulted from the uncontrolled development of the city, not only by private enterprise but also by government, from the outdated laws which ostensibly govern the provision of open



recreational space in residential areas, and from a near universal disinterest in those few programmes which have attempted to beautify the city, to replant foliage and to reopen space lost in the hurried and haphazard build-up of the city. The proposed solution to the critical lack of open recreational space within the built-up area incorporates both short term and long-term programmes. Short-term projects include: the improvement of existing public parks and other recreational areas; the creation of new public parks and other recreational areas on government land or *wat* (monastery) land which is near those communities desperately in need of breathing space; the creation of public parks in slums, perhaps by demolition of vacated derelict structures, as an integral part of a programme to upgrade these wretched residential areas; the maintenance of historical structures and their surroundings as places of recreation; the provision of public parklands alongside waterways; the siting of pocket parks and playgrounds in densely settled areas; and the widespread planting of trees, particularly along roadways which, it is suggested, should be bordered by nature strips. Long-term projects designed to ameliorate the current critical shortage of recreational space include: the establishment of a single government authority responsible for the conservation of the natural environment of the metropolitan area; the updating of the legislation concerned with the provision of open space in the city in the light of present and predicted conditions, and the strict enforcement of these updated laws; the planning of land use within the city to ensure adequate provision of open space, and the design of a regional plan for the metropolitan area to ensure the maintenance of a reasonable amount of open space; the reordering of priorities in regard to budgetary allocations so that an adequate share of



*'Modern' box-like efficiency towers of government do nothing to beautify Bangkok, but a number of stylish public buildings delight the eye. Photographs from the Bangkok Post 1981.*



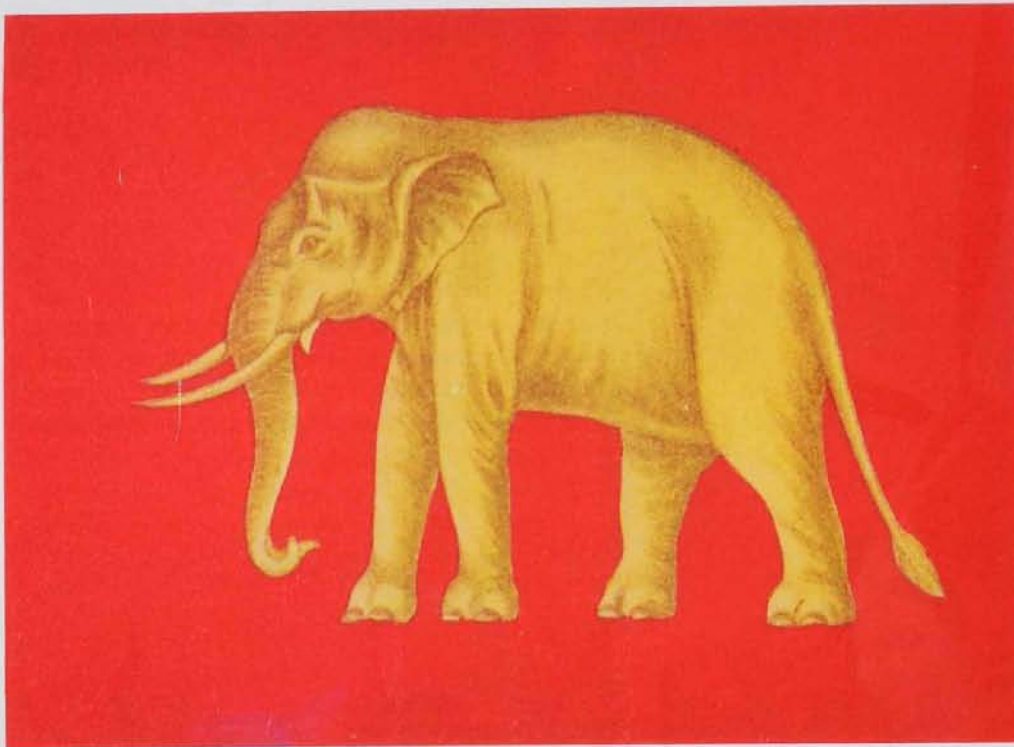
the disbursements goes for the provision of recreational facilities; and the education of the citizenry to a heightened awareness of the benefits to be derived from cleanliness, order and greenery. However, even the enthusiastic proposers of these seemingly sensible solutions believe their programme, indeed any programme, will be thwarted because of the many separate and unco-ordinated government agencies responsible for various aspects of what is in reality an interrelated urban development, because of a wholly inadequate budgetary allocation for the provision and maintenance of public recreational facilities, and because of the lack of understanding between the people and their government.

Although the proposals to solve or at least to ameliorate the black problem of water pollution and the critical shortage of recreational space, as well as the many other acute environmental problems of Bangkok, may be seriously considered by the authorities and realistic plans may be forthcoming in the near future, there remains a certain disquiet. In the first instance, government must itself be quickly transformed into an efficient, rational, co-ordinated selfless body dedicated at the least to the forceful guidance of free enterprise run amok if a reasonable

living environment is to be the lot of the citizenry. The running of government in the past does not inspire confidence in its ability to reorganize itself to mount a massive campaign of environmental improvement. The ills of the environment of the city must be known if treatment is to be effective. Water pollution and insufficient recreational space are but two symptoms of the environment hassle; they are obviously interdependent and are integral parts of the deteriorating urban milieu, no aspect of which may be isolated and dealt with independently. Some considerable time must elapse before the necessary intelligence is gathered for the formulation of a realistic programme of environmental improvement. Also, a mountain of money must be quickly allocated and effectively channelled to environmental reform. The record of budgetary reform does not inspire confidence in the realization of such provisioning. Then, the citizenry must be induced to forsake their anti-social habits and actively to pursue communal ends. The Thai are noted for their individuality, not for their sense of community. Not only is some hard thinking about the environmental deterioration of Bangkok required, but also some brisk, businesslike activity dedicated to its repair. □







*The Tri-Rong, the red, white and blue national flag of Thailand since 1917, is considered by many to be the most effective of the world's tricolours. Although the efficacy of the Thai tricolour is undoubted, one may still rue the change from the national flag designed during the Fourth Reign (1851-1868): the splendid figure of a white elephant on a red ground. Source: Government of Siam, Flag Regulations for the Kingdom of Siam Bangkok, 1900.*

# THE GENIAL LAND OF THE ELEPHANT

During the 19th Century, Siam was 'esteemed the genial land of the Elephant, and among those in which this animal attains the highest perfection': a country in which 'while man's principal work...seems to have been the erection of Temples, nature's supremest effort...appears to have been reserved for the multiplication of Elephants'. Where 'the elephant is...the king of beasts, the white elephant is the king of elephants' and 'everything associated with majesty and rank bore his image...The royal flag and seals, medals and moneys — on all sides the white elephant is the national emblem...and the Siamese are prouder of it than Americans, Russians, Germans, or French are of their eagles, or Spaniards of the golden fleece'. Even the 'Bourbon *Oriflamme*' and 'the British Union Jack, show but faintly in the presence of the white elephant'. Indeed, Siam was known throughout the world as 'the land of the white elephant' but a few decades ago. The elephant epithet is *passé*, but the elephant image yet graces those things 'associated with majesty and rank', and is used so extensively as a symbol that one must marvel at the inventiveness which produced such a troop of unique elephant-marks.

One need not marvel, however, at the adoption of an elephant standard: if ever there was created a figure of genuine authority coupled with instinctive dignity it is the elephant; a being possessed of such impressive intellectual, technical and humanistic capabilities that to embellish them is unnecessary. Basically gentle and affectionate, placid



*Many see the head of an elephant in the shape of Thailand.*

and tranquil, gregarious, seemingly incapable of gratuitous hostility and yet so obviously powerful that its very presence inspires awe, the elephant seems the freest and happiest of creatures. What need be said of the admirable qualities of the Thai people but that they have adopted an elephant standard? What need be said of the future of the Thai people but that they cannot fail to retain their uncommon good sense as long as they remain sensible to the admirable qualities of the elephant?

Speaking of the Thai sensibility of the elephant brings to mind the oft-quoted Tamil tale of the blind men and an elephant. This delightful folktale is so well known in one or another of its several variations, that I do not propose to relate it. The moral of this fable is worth repeating, however, for it is of fundamental importance to the development of Bangkok. Remember: each of the blind men in the tale described only that part of the elephant he had touched. The separate descriptions were not in themselves too unreasonable; what made each of the blind men appear foolish was that each had assumed he had felt the whole of the elephant. Let me take this a step further: had the blind men pooled the information each had gathered and decided on a composite description of the thing they had touched, they still would have arrived at an absurd misrepresentation of an elephant. An elephant is much more than an assemblage of parts; an elephant cannot be described adequately, much less understood, as anything other than an organic entity. Bangkok also is an organic entity which cannot be adequately described, much less understood, as anything else. To develop Bangkok properly, the way in which the Thai capital works must be understood and the way in which the Thai capital should work must be carefully considered. Like elephants, planners must step carefully and be sure of their footing if they would move forward. An elephant takes no incautious step. The essence of the planner's dilemma is neatly caught in a Mon proverb, one already an adage when the Thai founded Ayutthaya in the 14th century: *Elephant tusks, once they have grown forth, do not retract.*

Bangkok might become, like P.T. Barnum's albino jumbo, a 'white elephant': a possession which, though valuable, is burdensome to keep. In truth, I cannot see the Thai people allowing this to happen. I believe Bangkok will be in future as Queen Victoria appeared to an admiring, if not awestruck, Thai ambassador to the court of this august monarch: in her aspect and bearing 'a beautiful and majestic white elephant'. □

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