

Arts of Asia Lecture Series Spring 2018

**The Pali Sphere: Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka and Mainland Southeast Asia**

Forrest McGill, Asian Art Museum, March 2, 2018

The Bay of Bengal as a Mediterranean

Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia

- Places: Amaravati; Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Gampola, Kandy; Pyu city states, incl. Sri Ksetra; Pegu (now Bago)/Hanthawaddy, Thaton, Martaban (Mottama), Pagan (Bagan), Ava (Inwa), Arakan (Rakhine); Chiang Mai, Lan Na, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Nakhon Si Thammarat; Angkor, Phnom Penh; Lan Xang

Pali and its importance; the “Pali sphere”

- Other important scriptural languages: Sinhalese (Sinhala), Sanskrit, Mon, Burmese, Shan, Central Thai, Northern Thai (Lan Na), Lao, Cambodian (Khmer)

“Theravada” Buddhism

“Theravada” Buddhism and Buddhist art in Sri Lanka and areas of mainland Southeast Asia:

*What they have in common*

- Many Pali texts (Tipitaka/Tripitaka)
- Some monastic lineages and practices
- Focus on the life of the Buddha (Shakyamuni)
- Some characteristics of Buddha images
- Vessantara and other jatakas
- Buddhas of the past and of the future (Maitreya)
- No omnipotent creator god, but a variety of other gods such as Brahma and Indra (Sakka/ Shakra)
- No savior bodhisattvas
- Importance of relics
- Cosmology

*What they don't have in common*

- Pali texts composed in Southeast Asia
- The crowned and bejeweled Buddha
- Phra Malai (and connection with Vessantara story and the coming of Maitreya)
- Rama epic
- Customs for royal coronations, important funerals, etc.
- Most frequent mudras of Buddha images
- Copies/evocations in the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhgaya

## FOR FURTHER READING

### THERAVADA BUDDHISM:

Collins, Steven. ““Theravada civilization(s)’? Periodizing its history.” January 2013.  
[http://theravadaciv.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Theravada-civilizations\\_.pdf](http://theravadaciv.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Theravada-civilizations_.pdf) (You can find it by searching for the title.)

Frasch, Tilman, “The Theravada Buddhist Ecumene in the Fifteenth Century,” in Tansen Sen, *Buddhism Across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange Volume 1. Volume 1*. Buddhism Across Asia. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2014.

Skilling, Peter. *Buddhism and Buddhist Literature of South-East Asia: Selected Papers*. Bangkok: Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation, 2009.

Skilling, Peter, et al. *How Theravāda Is Theravāda?: Exploring Buddhist Identities*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2012.

Strong, John S. *Buddhisms: An Introduction*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2015.

### ART:

Fraser-Lu, Sylvia, and Donald M. Stadtner. *Buddhist Art of Myanmar*. Asia Society Museum/Yale University Press, 2015.

Guy, John, ed. *Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Early Southeast Asia*. New York, N.Y.: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014.

Listopad, John. *Guardian of the Flame Art of Sri-Lanka*. Phoenix, Ariz: Phoenix Art Museum, 2003.

McGill, Forrest, Pattaratorn Chirapravati, and Peter Skilling. *Emerald Cities: Arts of Siam and Burma, 1775-1950*. San Francisco, Calif: Asian Art Museum, 2009.

McGill, Forrest, and Pattaratorn Chirapravati. *The Kingdom of Siam the art of Central Thailand, 1350-1800*. San Francisco (Calif.): Asian Art Museum, 2004.

### HISTORY:

Reid, Anthony. *A History of Southeast Asia Critical Crossroads*. Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2015.