

Book Reviews

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A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400–1830. By Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xiii+363 pp.

This is a work of great distinction. That was only to be expected, given the expertise in the field of the two authors. Barbara Andaya's earlier books include a work on Peninsular Malaya in the eighteenth century, *Perak: The Abode of Grace* (1979), and one on Southeast Sumatra in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, *To Live as Brothers* (1993). Leonard Andaya published *The Kingdom of Johore 1641–1728* in 1975, *The Heritage of Arung Palaka* in 1981, *The World of Maluku* in 1993 and *Leaves of the Same Tree* in 2008. The two authors have worked alongside each other, and also together: their well-known history of Malaysia (2001) precedes the present work.

Adding the two accumulations of expertise together has resulted in a book that is more than the sum of its parts. However their collaboration has been achieved — and even a stylistic analyst could probably not tell — it has produced what could be considered a kind of summation of their endeavours, if only that description did not suggest something more pompous or pretentious than a book that is easy to read, free of jargon, full of insights and studded with apt quotations.

Structuring such surveys, as your reviewer knows only too well, is problematic: authors face what Herbert Butterfield called the challenge of “abridgment”. Periodization is essential, despite the requirements of continuity and the untidiness of the past. In a diverse region that is yet recognized as possessing some kind of unity, it is necessary to deal in geographical divisions as well as chronological ones.

The work begins by discussing the validity of the concepts of “Southeast Asia” and, more innovatively, of “early modern” as a descriptor borrowed from the historiography of Europe. Both concepts, the Andayas recognize, are relatively recent, the first taking hold only in the decades after the Pacific War, the second advanced only as recently as the 1990s. Their book will help that second concept to take hold, too.

The chronological divisions that the authors have chosen are the basis of a succession of chapters that follow an initial discussion of the geographical environment. Chapter Two outlines the “antecedents” of early modern Southeast Asia. Chapter Three deals with the “beginning of an era, 1400–1511”, Chapter Four with the “acceleration of change, 1511–1600”, Chapter Five with “expanding global links and their impact on Southeast Asia, 1600–1690s”. The title of Chapter Six is “new boundaries and changing regimes, 1690s–1780s”. The “last phase” is covered in Chapter Seven, on the period 1780s–1830s.

The chronological divisions have a certain familiarity, but older works would have given their chapters different titles, and their contents would have had different emphases. For example, 1511 is the year in which the Portuguese captured Melaka but, as the Andayas once again show, that did not make the following century a “Portuguese period”. The year 1600 marked the founding of the English East India Company and 1602 that of the Dutch company. But, though the latter was to have so much impact on island Southeast Asia, the seventeenth was not a “Dutch century”.

The second means of “abridgment” that the Andayas adopt, that by geography, helps them to analyse what happened in each of the periods that their chapters discuss. Here their approach is strikingly novel. History, as taught, and even as researched, is still bound up with the nation-state, and it is tempting to consider the history of mainland Southeast Asia in the terms of the three major states that came to dominate it and still do so. That temptation the Andayas avoid by dividing the region into “zones”. And that division also enables them to achieve another of their objectives, to give more attention than most to the history of the peoples on the borders

within and between the major states, difficult as it is to find adequate sources for their history.

In the island part of the region, no early modern states so clearly prefigure the states of our own day. But the same “abridgment” strategy proves equally rewarding, though for a different reason. The Andayas divide “island Southeast Asia” into four “zones”: the “western archipelago”, including Sumatra and modern Peninsular Malaysia; the “central archipelago”, centred on Java; the “northern archipelago”, including Borneo and the Philippines; and the “eastern archipelago”, including Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, Timor and western Papua. Doing this enables the authors not only to draw attention to the common characteristics to be discerned within the zones but also, and again, to bring out the historical roles of the “upland” peoples, such as the Bataks and the Igorots, and the coastal peoples, such as the Orang Laut and the Sama Bajau. How these peoples were drawn together into entities that were the precursors of the modern nation states is a history that belongs to the “colonial” period, before which the Andayas, of course, stop short.

Each chapter is preceded by a map, a brief timeline, and a survey of the main trends. Then it deals with mainland and island Southeast Asia “zone” by “zone”, and concludes with some paragraphs of conclusion. It is a structure that works well, though it cannot avoid some repetition.

In a rich book, the authors follow several general themes. Perhaps the most significant is their readiness to characterize “Southeast Asians” as ready borrowers from outside contacts but also ready adaptors. In many fields of life, they were open to influences from beyond the region, brought by a variety of means. These influences were seldom rejected; they were invariably localized.

That happened, of course, in different ways in different places and at different times. Another distinguishing (and distinguished) feature of the book makes a persuasive argument for the chronological divisions that the authors adopt. In particular, as they move into the eighteenth century, they draw attention to changes that weakened the links between the settled centres of authority and the non-sedentary

peoples. The reciprocity that they believe marked the relationship in the earlier phases gives way to greater violence on both sides and to some extent to stronger invocations of identity. Men of prowess — the Andayas utilize Oliver Wolters’s notion — were always a feature of Southeast Asian state-making. In the eighteenth century, charismatic leaders became still more significant and millenarian movements more frequent.

In the “colonial” period, “the capacity of Southeast Asians to order their own existence was increasingly restricted” (p. 342), the Andayas remark in a general conclusion to the book. It was “far more difficult ... to apply the adaptive strategies that had been so successful in the past” (ibid.). But, they think, a “legacy of resourcefulness and adaptation” from the early modern period was “a key element in the preservation of cultural identities and the molding of the new unities that eventually emerged after the Second World War” (p. 343).

The colonial period is not their subject. But perhaps the judgment that they thus offer ought not to pass quite unchallenged. Their history gives an account of the wars that marked the history of the mainland even more than the history of the islands, in particular the devastating conflicts among the Thai, Lao and Burman kingdoms that the imposition of colonial control brought to a halt. Might there not be something in the case colonial rulers made, that they brought peace to Southeast Asia? What did that mean for men without prowess? The return of peace after the Japanese “rampage” and the post-colonial struggles has surely been bought by attempting to play down the legacies of historical conflict within the region. ASEAN has no precedent, though the history of the region offered “lessons”.

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Tuked Rini, Cosmic Traveller: Life and Legend in the Heart of Borneo. By Monica Janowski. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2014. viii+174 pp.

Monika Janowski has carried out fieldwork among the Kelabit of the highlands straddling the border between Sarawak and Kalimantan since the mid-1980s. Early in her initial fieldwork she recorded a recitation of the legend of the Kelabit culture hero Tuked Rini and his battle against powerful spirits. The legend relates the hunting expedition of Tuked Rini, a longhouse leader of extraordinary powers, for the spirit-stone animal called the Spirit Tiger Rock in the company of his male relatives and followers. They manage to capture their quarry and inside it they find another longhouse, against whose inhabitants they do battle. Tuked Rini's side is about to lose when the Great Spirit Mother, the source of all life and power, intervenes and ends the battle, thus allowing Tuked Rini to return home with his crew. At home, Tuked Rini's wife welcomes him, serves him rice wine and they hold a feast to celebrate the harvest.

In this book, Janowski uses the legend of Tuked Rini as a springboard to explore a range of aspects of Kelabit social life, cosmology, longhouse architecture and organization, gender relations, hunting and agricultural practices, rituals and feasting. Although the legend is situated in a mythical time when the current differentiations