

DOI: 10.1355/sj36-1n

Defining Dvāravatī. Edited by Anna Bennett and Hunter Watson. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2020. 184 pp.

Defining Dvāravatī, edited by Anna Bennett and Hunter Watson, is a compilation of essays arising out of the *U Thong International Workshop* that took place primarily in Bangkok and U Thong, Thailand between 30 August and 3 September 2017.¹ It brought together both Thai and international scholars, one of whom was Ian Glover, who sadly passed away eight months later. The book has thus been dedicated to him and includes an obituary by Anna Bennett summarizing his career.

While a new publication on Dvāravatī (an early historical polity based in Central Thailand circa fifth to ninth centuries CE) is a welcome sight, overall the volume is light on new data and research. That said, it will be of use for those without prior knowledge of the subject—students in particular—but the caveats outlined in this review should be taken into consideration when doing so. The papers by Ian Glover, Wesley Clarke and Anna Bennet summarize or expand on already published material, mostly that of works of the authors themselves. Phuthorn Bhumadhon’s brief chapter poses valid questions and recommendations but little else. There is an overriding sense here of these four authors all going to the well one too many times. Consequently, those already familiar with the subject will find little new information in these papers.

Next is John Guy’s essay, which is a good summary of our current state of knowledge of Dvāravatī and a perfect starting point for anybody unfamiliar with the subject or to those looking

¹ The workshop and this publication were organized and funded by DASTA (Designated Area for Sustainable Tourism Administration), the Siam Society, the Piriya Krairkish Foundation and BIA (Buddhadasa Indapanno Archives).

to update themselves on this topic.² In this light, it should probably have been placed first in the volume as opposed to fifth. However, his paper does not discuss Northeast Thailand nor its relationship to Dvāravatī in any great detail apart from a brief discussion on Muang Sema.³

The volume starts to bear some fresh fruit in the majority of the papers in the second half. Most of the new information has been gleaned from textual and epigraphic sources. Peter Skilling provides an overview of evidence for the term “Dvāravatī”, and in his welcome re-evaluation and close reading of the Wat Chanthuek inscription reveals the first example of this name ever found on a stone inscription. He also expands on the works of Prince Dhani Niwat ([1939] 1969) and later J.J. Boeles (1964) in uncovering Dvāravatī’s continued usage in the names of Thai capitals. Hunter Watson’s paper on Mon inscriptions highlights the need to question received assumptions about identity, and to revisit, reread and expand the epigraphic record of Dvāravatī. Surely much new information will arise in doing so and the paper acts as a tantalizing *hors d’oeuvre* for what his doctoral thesis, when completed, can potentially serve up.

The volume then turns east to China. Lin Yang and Huang Jiixin’s paper, in revealing the request for horses to the Tang court from Dvāravatī, indicates that there is still much to be gained from close study of Tang Dynasty histories. They also provide a very welcome Tang Period tribute inventory appendix. The final paper by U-tain Wongsathit, Kangvol Katshima and Chatupohn Khotkanok is only one of two essays by Thai authors. Turning to the epigraphic record, they look at one of the most neglected aspects of this area of study, the fall of Dvāravatī.

² There are three mislabelled figures in this essay. On p. 52, figure 5 is mislabelled as figure 7. On p. 59, figure 17 has been labelled as figure 18 and vice versa.

³ For more detailed discussions on this region, see Murphy (2013) and Revire (2016).

Overall, this volume could have benefitted from a more rigorous editorial process. A number of the papers duplicate information discussed in others, while some are largely reworked former publications. There is a distinct absence of a Thai voice in the publication, and it is largely devoid of new information from archaeological sources, much of which is published in Thai and thus not accessible to scholars who lack the requisite linguistic skills. This often results in parallel tracks of knowledge, as evident in this volume—international scholars reference primarily Western language publications while Thai scholars by and large reference only Thai publications and a few classic Western language texts on the subject.

This divide could have been bridged by greater participation by Thai scholars. A number of those who took part in the conference did not publish in the volume, for instance. This is particularly regrettable and puzzling, given that most of the organizers were Thai and one of the volume editors (Hunter Watson) is also a fluent Thai speaker and thus fully aware of the extant Thai language literature.

The defining characteristic of this volume is thus one of familiar reruns and missed opportunities, leaving the reader to wonder what it, and Dvāravatī for that matter, could have been.

Stephen A. Murphy⁴

Department of History of Art and Archaeology, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, United Kingdom; email: sm120@soas.ac.uk.

REFERENCES

Boeles, Jan J. 1964. "The King of Sri Dvaravati and his Regalia". *Journal of the Siam Society* 52, no. 1: 99–114.

⁴ I have aimed to be impartial in my review. However, in the spirit of full disclosure, I would like to put on the record that I was a participant at the U Thong International Workshop, where I presented a paper on Dvāravatī in northeast Thailand. I was subsequently asked to contribute a paper to the volume but had to decline because of prior work commitments.

- Dhani Nivat. (1939) 1969. "The City of Thawarawadi Sri Ayudhya". In *Collected Articles by H.H. Prince Dhani Nivat Kromamun Bidayalabh Brdihyakorn*, pp. 51–56. Reprinted from the *Journal of the Siam Society*. Bangkok: The Siam Society.
- Murphy, Stephen A. 2013. "Buddhism and its Relationship to Dvaravati Period Settlement Patterns and Material Culture in Northeast Thailand and Central Laos ca. 6th–11th centuries CE: A Historical Ecology Approach to the Landscape of the Khorat Plateau". *Asian Perspectives* 52, no. 2: 300–26.
- Revire, Nicolas. 2016, "Dvāravatī and Zhenla in the Seventh to Eighth Centuries: A Transregional Ritual Complex". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 47, no. 3: 394–418.