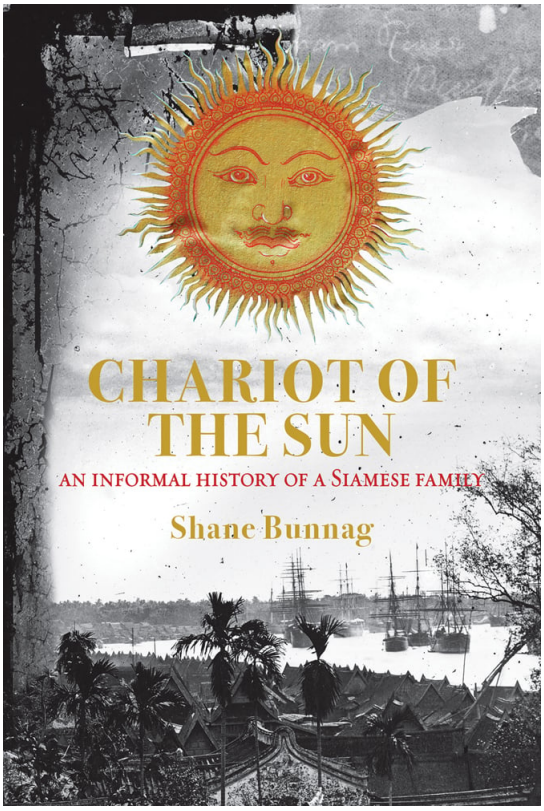
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Chariot of the Sun

An Informal History of a Siamese Family

Shane Bunnag

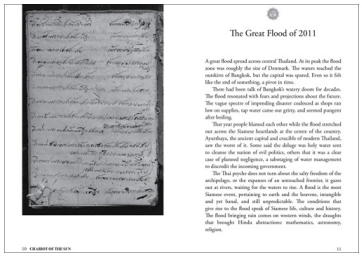
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- First published account in English of one of Siam's foremost families
- Moving and masterful interweaving of a personal story with Siamese history - a beautifully written story with an evocative, elegiac tone - rarely seen archive photographs

A rich and deeply personal journey into the labyrinth of the Thai past, following spectres and vanished landmarks across present day Bangkok. ***Chariot of the Sun*** relates the history of Siam to that of the author's family story; the Bunnags came from Persia in the early 17th century and through daring, cunning and good fortune were to hold commanding positions of power during the 19th century.

Shane Bunnag's family saga weaves an ancient prophecy with Siamese history to give us a rich and deeply personal account of both his own family and Thai history.

"Shane Bunnag's artful merging of text and photographs creates an alternative history of Thailand laced with nostalgia and laden with stories – an evocative, dream-like foray into the past that is both enchanting and enlightening." –**Emma Larkin**, author of *Finding George Orwell in Burma*

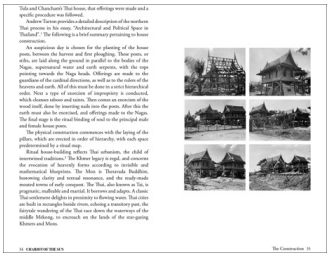

The Great Flood of 2011

A great flood spread across central Thailand. At its peak the flood zone was roughly the size of Denmark. The waters reached the outskirts of Bangkok, but the capital was spared. Even so it felt like the end of something, a pivot in time.

There had been talk of Bangkok's watery doom for decades. The flood resonated with fears and projections about the future. The vague specter of impending disaster coalesced as shops ran low on supplies, tap water came out gritty, and seemed pungent after bathing.

That year people blamed each other while the flood stretched out across the Siamese heartlands at the centre of the country. Ayutthaya, the ancient capital and crucible of modern Thailand, saw the worst of it. Some said the deluge was holy water sent to cleanse the nation of evil politics, others that it was a clear case of planned negligence, a sabotaging of water management to discredit the incoming government.

The Thai psyche does not turn about the salty freedom of the archipelagos, or the expanses of an untouched frontier, it gazes out at rivers, waiting for the waters to rise. A flood is the most Siamese event, pertaining to earth and the heavens, intangible and yet banal, and still unpredictable. The conditions that give rise to the flood speak of Siamese life, culture and history. The flood bringing rain comes on western winds, the droughts that brought Hindu abstractions: mathematics, astronomy, religion.


Tilok and Chanchanit's Thai house, that offerings were made and a specific procedure was followed.

Andrew Turton provides a detailed description of the northern Thai process in his essay, "Architectural and Political Space in Thailand". The following is a brief summary pertaining to house construction;

An auspicious day is chosen for the planning of the house posts, between the harvest and first ploughing. These posts, or stibs, are laid along the ground in parallel to the bodies of the Naga, supernatural water and earth serpents, with the tops pointing towards the Naga heads. Offerings are made to the guardians of the cardinal directions, as well as to the rulers of the heavens and earth. All of this must be done in a strict hierarchical order. Next a type of exorcism of impropriety is conducted, whereby the ground is struck with a hammer made from a piece of wood itself, done by inserting nails into the posts. After this the earth must also be exorcised, and offerings made to the Nagas. The final stage is the ritual binding of soul to the principal male and female house posts.

The physical construction commences with the laying of the pillars, which are erected in order of hierarchy, with each space predetermined by a ritual map.

Ritual house-building reflects Thai urbanism, the child of intertwined traditions.[1] The Khmer legacy in regal, and concerns the evocation of heavenly forms according to invisible and mathematical blueprints. The Mon is Theravada Buddhist, honouring clarity and textual resonance, and the ready-made enamel forms of earth ceramics. The Thai, also known as Tai, is pragmatic, malleable and martial. It borrows and adapts. A classic Thai house is constructed on stilts, with a high floor. The roof rests on both rectangular-hoodo rivers, echoing a transitory past, the fairytale wandering of the Thai race down the waterways of the middle Mekong, to encroach on the lands of the ear-gazing Khmers and Mons.

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