

## THAILAND

MILLER, TERRY E. and JARERNCHAI CHONPAIROT. *A History of Siamese Music Reconstructed from Western Documents, 1505–1932*. *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 8(2), 1994, 1–192.

Research in the music history of the world's cultures is based on a critical study of various types of sources. Without doubt an interpretation of indigenous documents—archaeological, iconographic, and written—will be of primary importance. Nevertheless, a substantial and significant corpus of such sources generally is not easily accessible, and its study demands a lot of intricate considerations before a fair judgement of its historicity and evidence are achieved.

As an initial step towards an understanding of Siamese music history, Miller and Chonpairot present with the study under review a critical evaluation of Western documents. Their book-length article provides valuable insight into the state and processes of Siamese musical life at different periods, and at the same time it critically bears witness to the mode of thinking and the varying levels of preconceptions expressed in these sources. The book covers the development of Siamese music from the earliest, still unspecified stage at Tenasserim, which is now of part neighboring Burma (Myanmar)—mentioned by the Bolognese traveler Ludovico di Varthema (1505)—up to the revolution in 1932, with the old kingdom of Siam becoming a constitutional monarchy with the new name of Thailand.

Appendix A (165–70) gives a list of the inspected written documents in chronological order and in the context of general political events in Siamese history. The evaluation of these sources has been arranged in nine chapters according to central issues of investigation. The first chapter (7–24) gives a description of the nearly sixty texts in chronological order, critically reflecting their value—some of the critiques are very useful with extensive and significant information, others uselessly short and often biased against Siamese music. Miller and Chonpairot evaluate the personal background of the different Western authors, referring to their specific role and function: “missionaries, official envoys and ambassadors, soldiers and naval officers, adventurers and travelers, astronomers, a naturalist, a geographer, educators, traders, a doctor, a lawyer, a governess, and later scholars including a musicologist, an ethnomusicologist, and a philologist” (8).

Starting from this assessment of the literary sources, Miller and Chonpairot reflect on the aesthetic judgments of the Western authors and the written reactions of these Westerners to the performances of Siamese music and theater that they witnessed (25–31).

The consideration of contemporary musical life, as reflected in the various documents, starts in chapter 3 (25–31), in which the presence and importance of neighboring and distant cultures in the musical life of Siam are addressed. Special attention is given to Chinese music, the music of the Lao, and, albeit briefly, to Burmese, Mon, and Western music as well.

The most comprehensive part of the book, chapter 4 (51–91), is devoted to providing information on musical instruments and ensembles whose description is arranged according to the well-known classification of musical instruments by Erich M. von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs (1914). This chapter also includes several illustrations.

Information on the uses and functions of music in ceremonies at the court, among the people, and in Buddhist temples is given in chapter 5 (93–101). In chapter 6 the authors reflect on theater and dance as the most obvious way to witness performing arts in the life of the Siamese people.

Since only a few early Western authors on Siamese music had a specific musical training and knowledge, early attempts to approach the technical and theoretical foundations of Siamese music (e.g., the tuning system, melodic concepts, or musical forms) are sparse and

cursory (chapter 7, 125–35). Initial steps toward a more serious study of musical technique had been undertaken by some authors like Alexander J. Ellis, Carl Stumpf, and Erich M. von Hornbostel, all of whom worked in the very cradle of “comparative musicology/ethnomusicology” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Problems of relating musical notations in early Western texts on Siamese music to transmitted compositions are explained in the discussion given in chapter 8 (137–56).

The concluding chapter 9 (157–63) summarizes the main results of this evaluation of Western written accounts of Siamese music, stating their relative strength in organology, theater, function of music, and autobiography of authors, as well as their weakness in music theory, regional musical traditions, Siamese views on music, and repertory.

Despite the broad range of issues, the study under review proves to be a homogeneous account and very valuable analysis of early Western perspectives on Siamese music. It substantially contributes to our understanding of several periods in the history of Siamese music, while also providing an understanding of substantial changes in the perspectives of Western writers and observers. The ethnomusicological community will be eagerly expecting a complementary study of indigenous documents, which I hope will shed more light on the history of one of the world’s richest musical cultures.

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## INDIA

BANSAT-BOUDON, L., Editor. *Théâtres indiens*. Collection Puruṣārtha 20. Paris: Éditions de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1998. 368 pages. Illustrations. Paper 195F; ISBN 2–7132–1262–6. (In French and English)

This book is a collection of sixteen contributions on Indian theater (classical theater as well as traditional and modern). In addition, it contains two contributions on the image of India in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French theater.

In the introduction the editor admits to her failure to identify a thread connecting the various contributions, which indeed range from a scholarly article on the function of comic scenes in traditional theater, to a poetic reverie on the audience witnessing the Big Bang. In this way the book compares poorly with a study like *Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance*, edited by F. P. Richmond, D. L. Swann, and Ph. B. Zarrilli (Honolulu 1990), which offers a representative and well-balanced overview of the theatrical traditions of India.

The selection of the topics appears to have been completely haphazard; moreover, no attempt was made to edit and bring the individual contributions in line with each other. Thus, in notes 31 and 33 on page 291 in his article on South Indian ritual theater, Tarabout refers to certain features of the North Indian Rāmlilā, ignoring the relevant information provided by Tourlet-Divedi, also in the present collection. This lack of editorial intervention, however, is especially regrettable in the case of topics or questions common to several contributions. A case in point is the relationship between ritual and theater. It is discussed by Malamoud, who tries to define the theatrical in ancient ritual; by Tourlet-Divedi in her study of Rāmlilā, in which at a certain moment the actors are worshiped like gods; by Carrin, who deals with possession in the *bhūta* cult in Karnataka; and, finally, by Tarabout. All these scholars agree in placing ritual acts, possession, and theater on a kind of cline. Next, each scholar