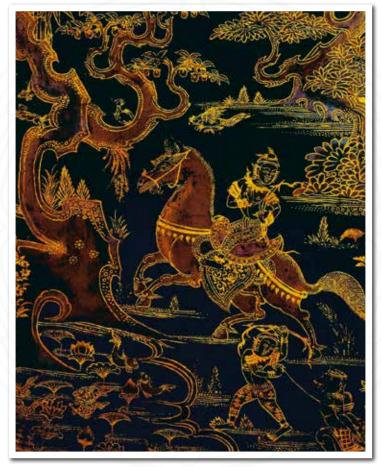




THAI LACQUER WORKS

BY PROFESSOR SILPA BHIRASRI



Lacquer painted and gold gilded, the Story of Ramayana and Himmaphan Forest,

Ayutthaya Period, 18th Century



PUBLISHED BY THE FINE ARTS DEPARTMENT,

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Fig. 1
Book-case (Too Phra Tamma) from Ayudhya

Classic style of Thai art. Note the perfect distribution of the figures and ornaments from which issues the harmony of the dark and light values.

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GRAPHIC EDITOR

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GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Mr. Weerayut Nartchaiyo

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Preface

Thailand is very rich in precious arts and cultural heritage which represents a long-lasting independence, prosperity and stability of the country. These various fields of heritage have been preserved, accumulated and inherited throughout generations until the present. This legacy brings pride, dignity and prestige to Thai people. Therefore, it should be shared with the world so that Thai wisdom can be appreciated.

The Fine Arts Department is responsible for the preservation, promotion, transmission and dissemination of arts and culture of the Thai nation. As such it has compiled and published a book series of 25 volumes written by experts in their respective fields. Their areas of knowledge include artistic works, architecture, music and dramatic arts as well as language and literature. Each series has been reprinted from time to time. In this publication, there are no alterations to the contents* although some illustrations have been added for the benefit of the readers.

The Department hopes that this series of books will be a resource among the international community to help them understand Thailand better through its unique arts and culture.

(Mr. Borvornvate Rungrujee)
Director General,
The Fine Arts Department

THAI LACQUER WORKS

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PROFESSOR SILPA BHIRASRI (C. FEROCI)

was born in Florence, Italy, and graduated from the Royal Academy of Art of Florence. He entered the Thai Government service (The Fine Arts Department) in 1924. He has to his credit a multitude of outstanding works, chiefly in bronze such as the statue of King Buddha Yodfah Chulaloke at the Memorail Bridge and that of King Vajiravudh at Lumpini Park. As Dean of the Faculty of Sculpture and Painting at Silpakorn University, he was a driving force of art study in Thailand. Professor Bhirasri devoted himself for over thirty years to the study of Thai art, and has been universally acknowledged as an authority. He did much to introduce Thai art to the world by writing extensively, gave insight on the subject by organizing a warmly received exhibition of Thai painting, modelling, bronze casting, etc. in London in 1947. He also initiated the annual Bangkok art exhibition.

He died in Bangkok on May 14, 1962 at the age of seventy. In honor of his accomplishments, and his service to Thai art, he was awarded the Knight Grand Cross (First Class) of the Most Noble Order of the Crown of Thailand, and the Dushdi Mâlâ Medal. Professor Bhirasri will always retain an honored place in the affections of his many students, and his friends in Thailand.

Fig. 2

Detail of the preceding illustration

The panel represents Rama, Vishnu's incarnation of the Ramayana epic, borne by Hanuman, the monkey hero. Both the design of the figures and that of the ornaments show exquisite and expressive lines.



Fig. 3

Design of a side Panel of a book-case showing Chinese influence

In some lacquer works of the Bangkok period (19th century) Chinese influences are noticeable. The characteristics of Thai art cannot be blended with other expressions. Accordingly by introducing Chinese peculiarities into a work, its beauty is lost.



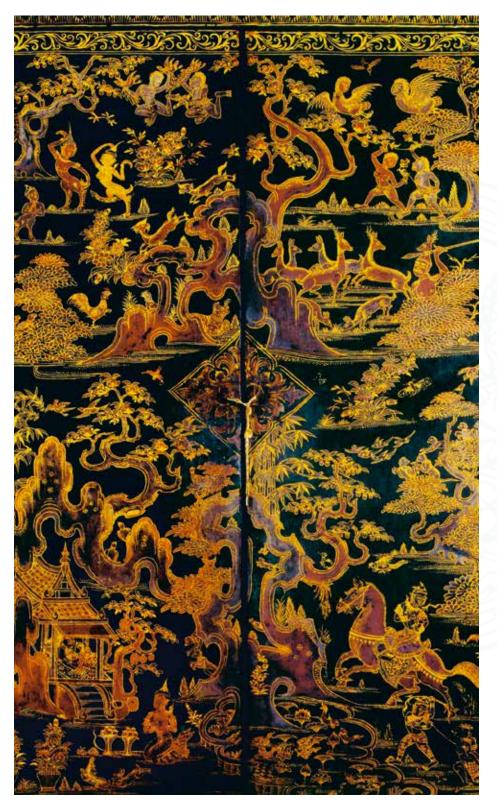


* THAI LACQUER WORKS *

Among the applied arts made in olden days by the Thai, that of the design in gold leaf applied over black lacquer, rarely on red lacquer, was very important to decorate many objects for religious purposes and common uses. From the ornaments of small boxes to the decoration of entire wooden walls, which means from the enrichment of a few square inches to that of hundreds of square feet, the art of the lacquer design found an extensive application.

The lacquer work, which in Thai is called "Lai Rod Nam", meaning, as will be seen later, ornaments merging from washing the work with water, saw its best period in Ayudhya from the 17th to the first half of the 18th century. In 1767 and again in 1782,

the capital of Thailand was shifted from Ayudhya to Dhonburi first and afterwards to Bangkok, where the technique of the lacquer work followed exactly the characteristics of the classic specimens. But artistically it gradually degenerated, particularly due to Chinese artistic influences, very noticeable in the later productions. Certainly, the change in style, was due to a new fashion feeling, desire for designs differing from the traditional ones. In doing so, the very Thai artistic peculiarities were lost; on the other hand, this later production could not compete with the Chinese classic lacquer works because the principles ruling the styles of the respective arts are quite different.





In olden days, the technique of the lacquer originated from China and in fact in Thai art we may trace Chinese ornamental elements, but the Thai classic art has such an individual character that it cannot be blended with any other artistic expression lest its peculiarites are obliterated.

In what concerns lacquer compositions, likewise in painting, the Chinese rendered spatial views wherein large areas of sky, earth or water contrast with the comparatively small figures of trees, human beings and animals from which ensues a three-dimensional appearance. On the contrary, the design of the Thai lacquer is two-dimensional and the composition is formed by many elements such as architectural features, human and animal figures, which intermingling amidst rocks, vegetation, rivulets, etc., fills up with well

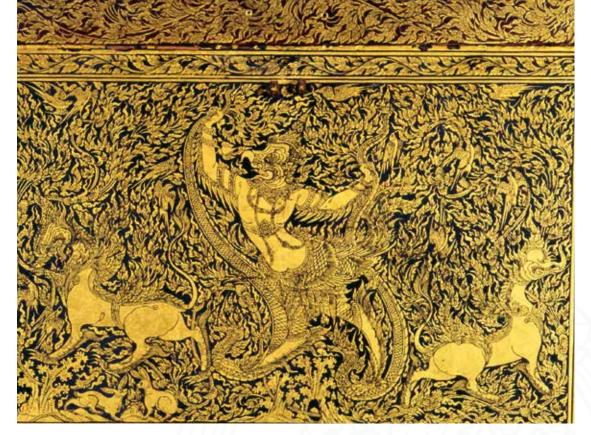


Fig. 4
Specimen of a case formerly used for keeping garments, later used as a book-case

The design represents Garuda (Krut) holding two snakes (nagas) sided by two mythological animals on a background of foliage of the "Lai Kanok" type. Although fine, the design is too minute.

panel or bamboo-box, three coats of black lacquer, a resin from a plant growing in the north of Thailand. Subsequently, the drawing is traced, and with a yellowgummy- paint the parts which have to remain black are covered in all their smallest detail. The next process is to give a thin coat of lacquer over the surface, and when it is semi-dry, gold

leaves are applied over the whole surface. After about twenty hours the work is washed with water which detaching the gold leaves adhering to the yellow-gummy-paint let the design appear neat in all its details. Hence this art is called "Lai Rod Nam" --ornaments washed with water. Of course, the beauty of the lacquer work depends first upon a perfect design and

afterwards a perfect execution which the artist himself must carry out.

distributed masses and details all the space of the panels or other decorated surfaces. Comparing illustrations 2 and 3 respectively, a Thai classic panel and a Thai composition influenced by Chinese art, we may see clearly how the latter production has lost the very characteristics of the Thai style as well as its artistic finesse. Fig. 1 and 2, fine specimens from Ayudhya, show this art at the peak of expression; human and animal figures intermingle perfectly with the floral design and are evenly distributed all over the space.

The technique of the lacquer work is still practised in Thailand today, especially in Chaing Mai, but because a fine design takes much time to be executed, in our day of rapid commercialization, this art has lost its high artistic qualities. Besides the ancient method of lacquer application at present is also used in Chaing Mai. Objects are decorated with ornaments in coloured lacquer only. Usually red and black are used as basic tints.

The lacquer design may be applied on wooden panels or round objects such as boxes, vases, etc., made with interlaced thin splits of bamboo-canes filling up the interstices with lacquer. At large we may say that the technique consists of applying to the wooden

Fig. 5 **Typical book-case**showing the Tripitaka scripts
wrapped in "Kampee".
Each Kampee is formed by books
treating one subject.





Fig. 6
Specimen of a "Too Nangsue Suat" or "Phra Malai" containing books concerning metaphysical matters.

As mentioned above, the lacquer decoration was applied to many objects, but principally it was used to enrich door and window-panels and book-cases serving to keep holy-scripts written on palm-leaves.

Because each monastery needed many book-cases, one may imagine the great number existing till a few decades ago before the influence of the west, when common book-cases with glass-panes replaced in many instances the beautiful classic ones.

These book-cases, called "Too Phra Tamma", were and in many instances, are still roomed in wooden libraries, "Ho Trai", built over ponds to prevent the termites from destroying the scripts. The interior of the libraries too was often decorated with geometrical ornaments; few were enriched with compositions dealing with historical or mythological scenes. On account of the perishability of wood, in our day libraries with figurative compositions are so rare that we may cite only the exceptionally beautiful one belonging to the family of His Late Royal Highness Prince Chumbhot Krommamün Nagara Svarga. This library, together with another room used to write holy scripts, hence called "Ho Khien" were sent from Ayudhya to Wat Ban Kling, a locality not far from that old capital. In a later period the

two were combined into a single structure. In 1958 the library was brought to Bangkok, the panels were restored and the library rebuilt with the old material in a harmonious unity as it stands at present at Suan Pakkad Palace. It is formed by an inner room to contain the book-cases and a walled corridor around it with three windows each side* the interior of both the corridor and the room are decorated with hundreds of human, animal, architectural and natural forms. It is a wonder of designs depicting religious, mythological and realistic scenes which, beside from their great artistic value, have also that of recording historical peculiarities of Ayudhya at the end of the 17th century. Composition after composition fill up a surface more than four hundred and fifty square feet.



"Heep Phra Ted",
a small portable box containing literature concerning sermons

^{*} The library may have a closed corridor or an open verandah.





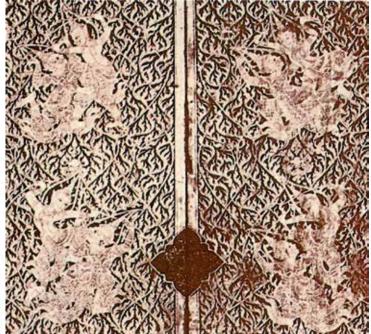


Fig. 8

Design of panels with groups of mythological beings on an ornamental background of the "Lai Kanok" type

Compositions with groups of figures like this example belong to a late period, particularly typical in the Bangkok productions.

The most important object of domestic use decorated with lacquer work was a large box, about 30" x 20", and 24" high: of this box there are two types: one with a high pyramidal lid, the other, more handsome, has a flat lid closed with a lock and two lateral iron handles. Formerly it was used by the wealthy to keep their personal articles of clothing. Because of its important artistic value, when the owner passed away the box was given to a monastery and the monks used it to store their holy scripts; thus from civil, it became a religious box termed "Too Phra Tamma Fa Tad", a box having a flat lid to keep Tripitaka books. See illustration 4.

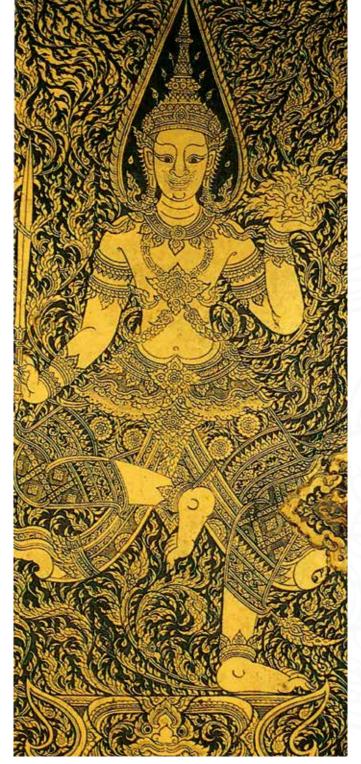


Fig. 9
A fine drawing of lacquer work of the Bangkok period
The design of the standing "Celestial Guardian" holding a
sword and flowers already bears the characteristics of a late
conventionalism. By comparing this drawing with that of illustration No. 2, it will be easier to understand the difference
between the classic and the later productions.

As mentioned above, hundreds of the classic book-cases were dispersed in preference to the modern ones, but very luckily there still exists a great number both in the Wats and many of the best ones have been collected in the National Museum of Bangkok. In addition to the real bookcases, the Museum has also some of those boxes which formerly were used to keep garments.

The real "Too Phra Tamma," illustration 5, has a cubical shape narrower at the top; the four corner poles extend from the base of the case about fifteen or twenty inches; in general between the poles there is a decoration either in lacquer designs or, on rare occasion a wood carving. Although the size of the book-cases varies very much, the average has a height of 50", a width of 40" and a depth of 30", plus the fifteen or twenty inches of the legs. Inside the cases there are shelves to keep the Tripitaka scripts which; as already mentioned, are written on palm-leaves, and bound together in twenty-five sheets each: the complete set treating one subject has many books which wrapped together are termed "Kampee".

Besides the two aforementioned book-cases there is a box usually termed "Too Nangsue Suat" or "Phra Malai". The books contained in this box are related to metaphysical matters and are read during the ceremonies concerned with the deceased ones. The term "Phra Malai", a disciple of Lord Buddha, refers to his visits to Heaven and Hell wherein the saint was illuminated about the causes giving spiritual happiness or punishments according to our terrestrial behaviour.

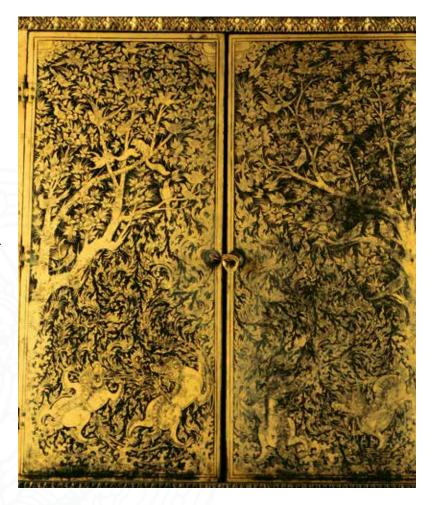
Usually, the decoration of the front and back of these boxes which have a size of about 32"x 11" and a height of 14" is divided into three or four small panels enriched with ornaments or figurative scenes of religious, mythical or realistic characters: subjects from the Ramayana are often depicted. The sides have the same enrichment. See illustration 6.

Also a small portable box containing only a few scripts for preaching purposes was in the past enriched with lacquer design. The size of this box is about 26"x 4"x 4" and due to its smallness the decorative motif is generally only ornamental. This box, termed "Heep Phra Ted" is carried by a boy or any other person accompanying the Buddhist monks when going outside the temple to deliver some sermons. See fig. 7.

The composition of the panels of book-cases varies so much that only a few types can be mentioned. One type has groups of conventionalized mythological beings, fig. 8. Another composition has single figure either standing alone as shown in illustration 9, or carried by other mythological creatures as those of the right and left panels of the book-case illustrated with fig. 1, representing respectively: Rama carried by Hanuman, the hero monkey, and Thotsakan (Ravana) the king of demons, borne by a demon, and so on. In all these instances the background is formed by the typical conventionalized, flamboyant foliage termed "Lai Kanok" which represents the luxuriant undergrowth of the tropical vegetation.

Another design of the decoration of book-cases like that of illustration 10, has no human figures; the panels are decorated in the lower part with the same "Lai Kanok" while the upper part depicts semi-realistic trees. Among this vegetation we notice many lovely animals and insects such as monkeys, squirrels, birds, lizards, butterflies, etc. Ferocious animals are to be seen in the undergrowth. This book-case is a magnificent specimen of the lacquer work of the Ayudhya period referred to as "Too Phra Tamma Wat Serng-Wai".





 $Fig.~11 \\ {\bf A~detail~of~the~previous~illustrated~book-case}$

showing the exquisite finesse of both floral and animal designs. Squirrels, birds and butterflies enliven the composition with realism of the luxurious flora and fuana of the tropics. At the lower right side of the illustration can be noted the bold and vital ornaments termed as "Lai Kanok."

Fig. 10
"Too Phra Tamma, Wat Serng-Wai"

For its finesse of drawing and perfect technical execution, this book-case is considered the best specimen of the Thai lacquer. Instead of the usual long legs, this case has a basement formed by a decoration called "Kha Singha" - it is a very conventionalised leg of a lion whose paws have become ornaments.



Animals and insects are drawn with a wonderful knowledge of their respective characteristics and indeed it could not be otherwise when we think that the old Thai folk lived amidst a natural surrounding so rich in flora and fauna and artists of the past had occasion to study and understand nature in its multiform expressions.

As can be seen from the same illustration 10, the book-case has a base different from the ordinary one: the lower part of the base is formed by a decoration called "Kha Singha", lion's leg, which, although found also in Sukhothai art, was universally used in Ayudhya and Bangkok both in wooden or stucco mouldings.

The design of the "Lai Kanok" of this case is the best specimen of such a kind of ornament. It is worth noting that although the foliage fills up all the space under the trees, the many masses of foliage are clearly legible one from the other and at the same time the different component parts form a perfect harmonious unity. Truly

Fig. 12

Detail of the two front panels of a book-case

showing the Lai Kanok-scroll-type. All the scrolls end in mythological.

showing the Lai Kanok-scroll-type. All the scrolls end in mythological Kinnaras and Kinnarees (half bird half human beings), demons and other similar figures.

in this design, one has the sensation to behold the thick undergrowth of the high grass or other tropical vegetation undulating under the pressure of the wind.

Fig. 11 is a detail of the aforementioned bookcase showing the lovely small animals drawn with masterly skill. In particular, it is remarkable to note the tiny squirrel depicted in the dynamic moment of darting from one branch to another. The other squirrel seems to be in limbo-deciding whether to follow the example of its fellow-creature. At the right of the squirrels can be seen three birds feasting on an unlucky butterfly; other birds fly, chirp or perch among the finely stylized leaves and flowers of the tree. Only artists who have observed nature with the utmost keenness could represent these small creatures in so many varied actions. In the lower right part of the illustration we notice the extreme finesse and at the same time vitality of the Thai classic Lai Kanok ornaments.



The Lai Kanok may be composed in a free style such as in the aforementioned specimen, or in geometrical patterns. In some specimens the stems of the foliage have a vertical sense, while in others form scrolls which in most cases end in figures of angels, monkeys, demons or dragons. See illustration 12.

Another design is inspired by the rice stalks as illustrated with fig. 13, which is another fine example of the Ayudhya art. As can be seen, the motif is composed by three magnified stalks spreading upwards; the leaves of the plants are conventionalized as the usual Kanok design. Here, too, in order to give variety to the composition, the artist enlivened it with many birds and other small creatures flying or perching among the leaves in a most charming and natural way. It will be noticed that here, as in the lower part of many other panels, amidst the high grass blades, these are two conventionalized lions which seem to attack each other. It is worth

remarking that while all other animals are rendered in a realistic or semi-realistic style, these large ones representing lions, tigers or makaras* designed either in lacquer or painted on murals are rendered very conventional. But as decorative as they may appear, the conventional animals bear that vital energy which is peculiar to Thai art. This peculiarity together with the fantastic designs noticeable in Thai art were inspired by natural surroundings. In fact, one may imagine how vividly the fantasy of the old Thai artists was affected by the luxuriant vegetation where any plants intermingling each other inspired visions of strange forms of animals or semihuman beings. It is just amidst the mysterious, awesome darkness of the forests that the real and the unreal become inseparable, and when a people with a remarkable artistic temperament, then blossom forth with art in wonderful expressiveness.



Fig. 13
Side panel of a book-case from Ayudhya with a design inspired by rice stalks which, although maintaining the character of the plant, have been converted into the conventional Thai ornaments. As usual in the lower of the composition there are stylised large animals while the rice stalks are enlivened by small creatures.

^{*} Makara is an Indian mythological aquatic creature having a trunk and tusks like those of the elephant.

Fig. 14

Book-case of the Bang-kok period

Both in later Ayudhya

and Ratanakosin (Bang-

and Ratanakosin (Bangkok) periods designs for lacquer works became more complex imitating compositions of murals where religious or mythical subject develop uninterruptedly. The episodes superpose one another in a peculiar bird's eye view.



Illustrations 14 and 15 show another important composition particularly noticeable in the production of the Bangkok period. This compositon is formed by scenes with buildings superimposed one another and arranged on rocks amidst trees, rivulets and other natural elements. The episodes of the subject develop uninterruptedly as to appear a single composition. We cannot refer to this superimposition of buildings as a real bird's eye-view, because all architectural figures have the same size and the parallel perspective. It is a style proper to the Thai art noticeable both in lacquer works and in murals. But contrary to painting, where the artist is free to compose masses and values as he likes, in lacquer works there must be a perfect balance of dark and light values emanating from the black lacquer and the light of the gold leaves. If one of these values predominates over the other, the result is a patchy, disharmonious appearance. Once the work is finished, it must not appear too massive as can be noted in illustration 16 representing King Louis XIV of France and King Aurang Zebe of India. Although this book-case was done in Ayudhya, artistically it has little value: it is very interesting as an historical

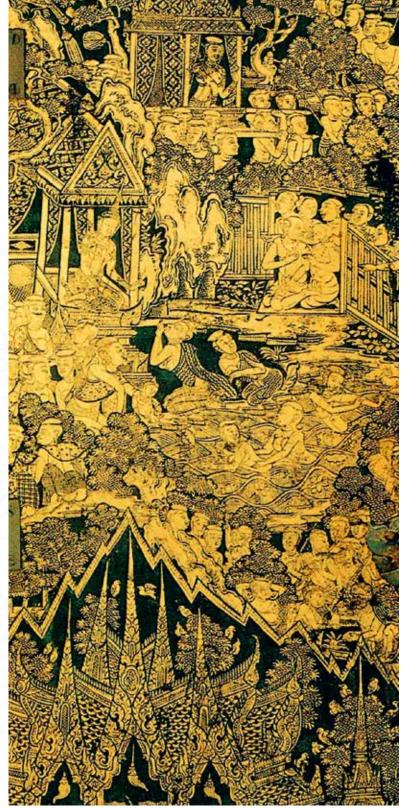


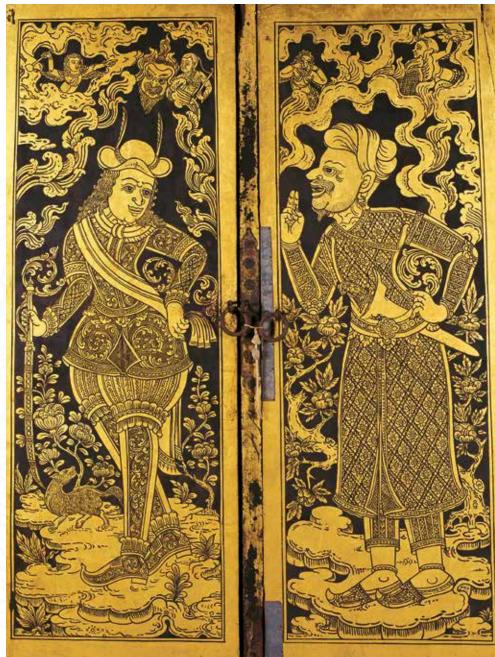
Fig. 15

Detail of the left panel
of the previous illustrated book-case.

Fig. 16 Specimen from Ayudhya with a design representing Louis XIV of France and King **Aurang Zebe of India**

Here the artist had to represent a non-traditional subject with the result of a rather "baroque" composition where the balance of the dark and light values does not correspond to the classic Thai style of the lacquer works.





record but shows once again that Thai art cannot be adapted to different forms which do not correspond to its individual characteristics.

When in the composition there are architectural features which if left plain would appear to large, light masses, they are relieved by moulding and other ornamental details until they harmonize with the smaller figures. The same expedient is applied when, in a panel such as illustration 17, there is a large human figure surrounded by delicate ornaments. In this case the dresses and jewellery are enriched with such details as to harmonize with the other ornamentations.

As can be noted from illustrations 14 and 15, the architectural structures such as shrines, palaces or pavilions serve to enshrine or shelter celestial and human beings connected with the subject of the composition. One single panel of the book-case may contain many small human and animal figures and it is because of such a peculiarity that in order to enjoy these drawings as they deserve, it is necessary to study them closely. Only close study will reveal the exceptional beauty of many particulars which at impression disappear amidst the profusion of the many elements of the composition.

Fig. 17:

By Comparing this specimen of the Bangkok period with illustration No. 16, we notice how a well distributed design in relation to masses and details correspond to the ideal of the Thai art.

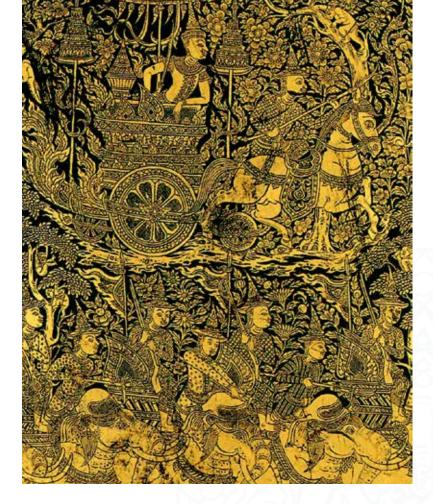


Fig. 18 is a portion of a composition depicting Prince Siddhartha leaving his wife and his newly born child to retire into ascetic life in search of the answer concerning his quest for the causes of human birth, suffering and death. The figures of the future Buddha and that of the sleeping Princess Yasodhara, lying near her child, are characterized by that delicate and sensitive drawing proper to the classic Thai style used to represent celestial figures and royal personages. This conventionalized style contrasts with the realistic one used to represent common people as can be seen in the group of the sleeping musician-girls under the figure of Yasodhara. This realistic scene is so interesting and so typical of the Thai realistic style that we reproduce it in larger scale with fig. 19. In many cases the representation of common people is characterized by a sense of humour which in reality corresponds to the jovial temperament of the Thai race. From the same fig. 18 one may also gain an idea of the beautiful architectural ornamentation.

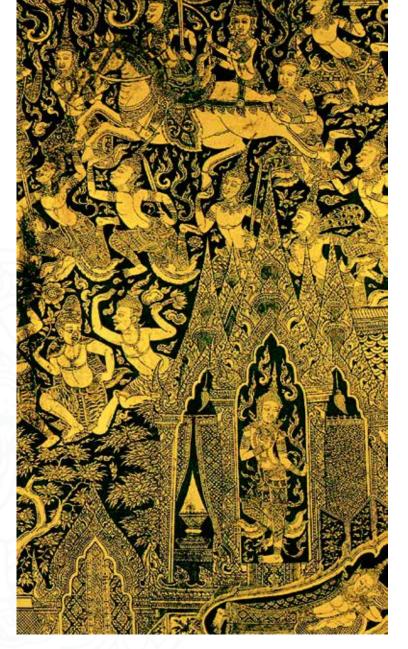


Fig. 18: Detail of a panel of the book-case of the Bangkok period

The composition representing Prince Siddhartha leaving his wife, Princess Yasodhara and his newly born child to retire to ascetic life, shows two distinct styles--- Prince Siddhartha and his wife are drawn in classic style, while the sleeping musician-girls are treated in the peculiar charming realistic Thai style. The difference in treatment denotes personages of high rank and commoners. Note the finesse of the architectural ornaments.

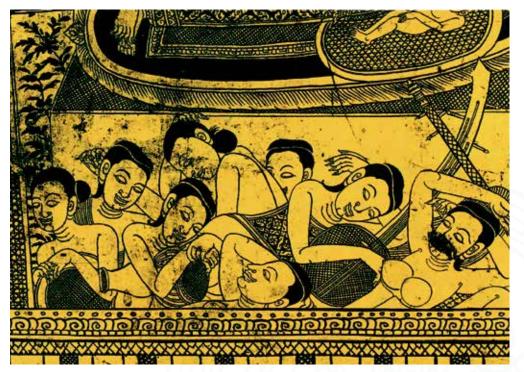


Fig. 19: Group of sleeping musician-girls.
Enlargement of the lower part of the previous illustration.

Illustration 20 is a detail of a composition depicting a war-scene wherein a king is riding on a typical Thai carriage. It is interesting to remark that the chariot ornamentation is formed by the universal flamboyant "Lai Kanok" motif. The National Museum of Bangkok has some fine specimens of these typical carriages. The barge-like chariot is typically represented in many paintings and lacquer designs. In particular it is to be found in subjects dealing with the Ramayana depicting scenes of combat between Rama's and Ravana's armies.



Fig. 20: War scene, detail
A king driving the typical barge-like chariot commonly used by the Thai royalty in state ceremonies. Bangkok workmanship



Fig. 21:

Thotsakan (Ravana), King of the demons,
holding a vase containing the elixir of life with which having restored the lives
of the dead Yakshas (demons) resumes the fight against Rama's army. Noticeable
is the imposing majestic elephant which strides with great vitality against his
master's foes



Fig. 22: The design has already characteristics of a later production,

but it is still a fine composition. It represents the buffalo Torapee attacked by Palee, king of the monkeys. The fury of the buffalo shakes the vegetation giving to the conventionalized design the sense of a real scene.

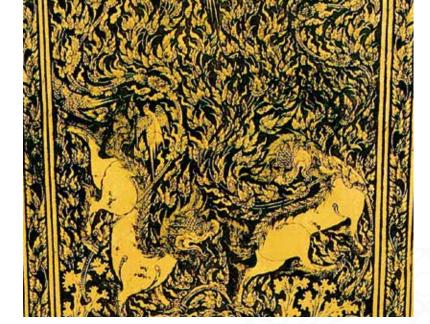


Fig. 23: Side panel of a book-case,

formerly used to keep garments, of Ayudhya period. Although too minute, the design is pure classic. The rhythm of the ornaments is perfectly related to the strong movement of the two fantastic animals fighting with each other.



Fig. 24:
Two monkeys fighting
Although very stylised, the Thai designs always have a remarkable vitality.



Fig. 25:

A scene from the Ramayana epic

Hanuman combatting with a royal demon. The posture and gesture of the figures rendered in classic style are very similar to those of classic theatrical characters

In this example, a later production, the carriage seems to be driven by one horse only instead of two. Such a simplification betrays the naive contrivance of the artist who, in doing so, eliminated the difficulty of drawing the second horse. In Ramayana scenes, instead of horses, the carriages are often driven by fantastic mythological animals. As usual, this group is surrounded by the traditional foliage.

As has been often mentioned, when dealing with other compositions, the design for lacquer works is rich in the representation of the animal life intermingled with the vegetation. Small creatures are in general drawn more realistic than the large ones, but what is very important for the effect of the compositions is the fact that such an animal life gives the real sense of tropical fauna intermingled with luxuriant flora. In each of the cases, be it animals reproduced realistically or partly conventionalized, each of them is drawn with an extraordinary understanding of its proper characteristics. Illustrations 21, 22, and 23 give an idea of the interpretation of

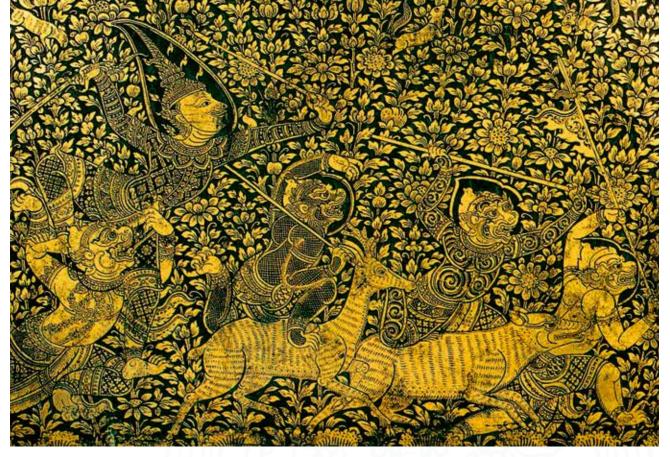


Fig. 26:
Panel design with floral character of the late
Bangkok workmanship
This kind of design is more monotonous than the lively
Lai Kanok ornaments

three different animals. Fig. 21 shows the exuberant vitality of Ravana's elephant: erect, it majestically strides powerfully forward against Rama's army composed of lively monkeys. Fig. 22 represents the mythical story of the buffalo, Torapee, which for its misbehaviour had caused the death of its father, chief of a large herd of buffaloes, and is attacked by the royal monkey Palee. This animal also shows a vigorous force and energy. The commotion created by the furious buffalo shakes the surrounding vegetation to the extent that a monkey, annoyed and frightened, grins and holds himself tightly to a branch. Both fig. 21 and 22 are the side decoration of two cases formerly used for keeping articles of clothing. In composition fig. 23 we notice two very conventionalized animals, possibly lions or dogs, fighting each other with that ferocious impulse proper to carnivorous beasts. The flamboyant vegetation follows rhythmically the movement of the outline of the two animals forming a lively design.

Illustration 24 is a detail representing two fighting monkeys with bodies entangled in enraged fury. The composition follows a flowing circular sense, typical of Thai art.

The design illustrated in fig. 24 and fig. 25, are examples of many groups decorating the book-case panels. Here Hanuman attacks Mangkarakan, a royal demon, grasping his left arm to avoid the blow of the sword. The demon does the same to stop Hanuman's trident from plunging into his body.



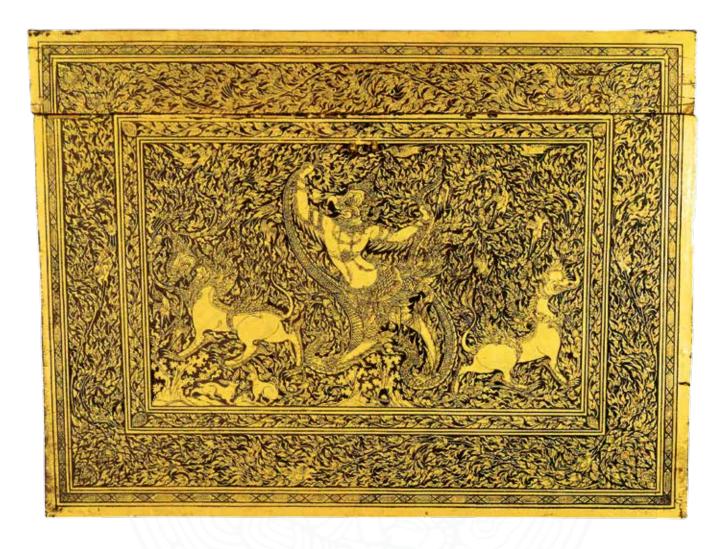




Also in fighting scenes it will be noticed that there is always a sense of balancing powers as if the combat were a mere sports display, When we notice that one of the combatants steps above the other it means he is the victor. At any rate, in scenes of combat, Thai art is characterized by a sense of harmony quite opposite to the effects of pathos and tragedy noticeable in western art.

Illustration 26 shows a type of decoration more floral than the others already illustrated --- it is rich in detail exquisitely executed but the design has not the boldness of expression of many other panels enriched with Lai Kanok.

Figures designed in classic style correspond to theatrical characters, expressing the meaning of the action by mimic gestures. This fact causes repetition of postures,



particularly in figures standing on a slightly bent leg while the other leg is lifted upward in the posture of dancing, figs. 2, 9,17.

On the contrary common people are represented realistically, their action and expression being free.

This is characterized both in designs in lacquer and in painting.

With the advent of the modern age all the arts of the past have been affected so much that in most cases, both in western and eastern countries, it is impossible to carry on traditional expressions. Our modern economic system no longer permits the production of such fine works of art as the traditional Thai lacquer works. For this reason, more than the masters who created such wonderful works, we understand their great artistic value not to mention their historical value.

The exceptionally important collection of book-cases of the National Museum of Bangkok was realised by the foresight of a great Thai historian, Prince Damrong, who, year by year, during his quest for historical data and facts, collected many rare beautiful objects. The only regrettable side regarding these book-cases is the question of space. They are quite numerous and are crowded together in a way that prevents one from fully enjoying their artistic qualities.

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