

# The Naga King's Daughter

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*This book is dedicated  
to my mother*





## FOREWORD

I take great pleasure in introducing to the public Mr Stewart Wavell's book *The Naga King's Daughter*, which results from the highly interesting expedition he and his party made to South-East Asia.

Organized by the Cambridge University Explorers' and Travellers' Club, this was the first expedition of its kind to Malaya and Thailand to explore into the remote and mysterious past of this region of the world.

Being a Cambridge man myself, I am proud to feel that these enthusiastic scholars came from my own Alma Mater. The trouble they took in their research has brought new light to the fact that the past is still glowing and aglitter.

In Malaya the expedition made recordings and films of many aspects of our culture in dances and dramas, songs and music and stories. They found that the traditional past is very much alive today, being an intrinsic element of the way of life on our east coast.

This is fact, not legend, a heritage which is a tribute both to the richness of the ancient past and the vitality and pride of the Malay and Thai peoples in their culture and traditions.

Who knows, perhaps the interest aroused by this book may stimulate other archaeologists and historians to seek out and uncover sites of such former great kingdoms as Tambralinga and Langkasuka ! I can assure any such expedition a warm welcome and the co-operation of the Government of Malaysia.

I am happy to wish this interesting record and story of the Cambridge Expedition well-deserved success.

TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN  
*Prime Minister of Malaysia*  
Kuala Lumpur  
December 1963

As the man whose ideas inspired the Cambridge Expedition to South-East Asia in 1962, Mr Stewart Wavell has written an eloquent plea for greater research into the history of the Malay Peninsula. The author has been at pains to seek out local tradition using modern methods of research.

Much of his exploration concerns the legendary kingdoms of Tambralinga and Langkasuka, vestiges of which are but vaguely known to the modern world of scientific historians. Their former existence was vouched for by ancient Chinese travellers, who also told us what we know about the ancient kingdom of Funan and its first Queen, the Naga King's daughter. The existence of Funan has been confirmed by the discovery in recent times of the town of Oc Eo in South Vietnam, but the mystery surrounding Tambralinga and Langkasuka still remains.

The author's purpose has been stated to be 'to sound the call to dig. If robbers can do it, so should we. Archaeologists have an urgent duty to go to South Thailand before it is too late.' As a former official of the provincial administration, I am tempted to add that in thus digging we cannot fail to facilitate the work of robbers by exposing the remnants of past civilizations. What is therefore also needed is a call for better preservation of the heritage of our ancient past.

KROMAMUN BIDYALABH

Bangkok

November 1963

## INTRODUCTION

The early history of the Malay Peninsula has yet to be discovered. Our vision of the past before the fifteenth century is dim, a mere shadow-play lit by a flickering candle instead of a Tilley lamp. We thought, therefore, that for an evening's pleasure perhaps a torch would help. Now and again we hope the shadows will leap from the screen like the real demons and demi-gods of long ago.

Our journey through Malaya and Thailand in the summer of 1962 was a journey of discovery. It was the first attempt by an expedition to record and film the residual culture of the east coast of the Peninsula. One Chinese traveller of ancient days called this land 'an ocean stepping-stone'. For 2,000 years it has been washed by the cultures of the ancient world. When the full drama of its story is revealed, it may well become a source of pride to those village peoples who still perhaps unknowingly preserve the ancient ways along the shores of this casuarina coast.

History must begin somewhere and it seems to us that the Naga King's daughter has a great deal to answer for. Certainly, if it had not been for 'Willow Leaf', the Queen of ancient Funan, the Cambridge expedition would never have gone to Malaya and Thailand. We would like to think that she was beautiful, though whether she was black or brown no one can be sure. One Chinese traveller of the fourth century AD described the Funan people on the Mekong Delta as 'black and frizzy haired'. Indeed they could have been Negrito; but what may seem black to a pale-skinned Chinese would seem light olive brown to a Hottentot, so perhaps 'Willow Leaf' was part Negrito and part Indonesian. At any rate, we know from the Chinese annals that the young Queen 'was celebrated for her virile force and her exploits', and she proudly led her people to battle in canoes of war.

The day she stepped into legend was the day of her capture and surrender. From Mo-fu, somewhere on the Malay Peninsula, came a Brahman of destiny called Kaudinya. He was armed with a magic bow, a gift from a genie, and his great ship was blown, with a genie's breath, towards the shores of Funan. On sighting the intruder, the Queen led her canoes to attack, but Kaudinya, seeing this naked girl in command of her dashing oarsmen, fired an arrow from his magic bow which pierced her canoe. 'Willow

Leaf' was frightened and submitted, and thus Kaudinya claimed her for his wife and became King of Funan.

With the birth of a son, the legend of 'Willow Leaf', the Naga King's daughter, passed into history. The Hun, or the first Kaudinya Dynasty, was established and lasted for one hundred and fifty years. 'Willow Leaf' became enshrined as a goddess. Sanskrit became the sacred language, the Naga cult spread, and Brahman rules of kingship held sway in Funan.

The growth of Funan to the importance of a maritime power—the first great power in South-East Asian history—with battle fleets to command, and a Napoleonic programme of conquest, is a story which has yet to be written. It is not our story. What deeply interested us was the culture which went with the battle fleets, a culture so diverse, so richly imaginative, and so compelling in its power to exalt men's minds that, in other lands, and in later centuries, its genius flowered in the creation of some of the most magnificent stone structures known to man. Spirits and Naga serpents, mitred Vishnus, Gupta-style Buddhas, Sivas and Hari-Haras—all these combined in a marvellous syncretism to inspire these 'naked, black, frizzy-haired people' to civilize themselves and the rest of South-East Asia. And this, in double-quick time, they did.

The Liang history records that ten kingdoms were conquered in the third century AD by the great Funan General Fan Shih Man. Of these, four were on the Malay Peninsula: Tan Mei Liu (Tambralinga); Lang Ya Siu (Langkasuka); Tun Sun; and Chu Li. When eventually Funan was conquered by the Khmers in the seventh century, these colonial kingdoms became detached and independent, but retained much of their Funan culture. Even conquering Khmers tended to adopt the culture of Funan. The cults of the sacred mountain and the Naga King's daughter were claimed by the Khmers as their own, and the Naga serpent became the mystic symbol of Khmer origin. Once a year the Khmer king was expected to climb a temple mountain to consummate a mystic union with a Naga princess. Failure to do so, it was said, might lead to the destruction of the kingdom.

As with the Khmers, so with the Sailendras, the 'kings of the mountain' whose empire rose in Java and Malaya as the Funan empire crumbled. Both drew inspiration from Funan, and both far surpassed their mentor in achievement. Angkor and

Borobodur, together with hundreds of other surviving temples in Cambodia and Java, attest to the consummate skill of their ancient craftsmen.

At different periods, both the Khmers and Sailendras had vassal kingdoms on the Malay Peninsula. Ancient gold and tin workings on a considerable scale show that great wealth could be found in these rivers and jungles. Much of this wealth was exported, but perhaps it is not unreasonable to assume that the local kingdoms also had their share. How much it contributed to the growth of these kingdoms may be seen from random quotations from the Chinese Annals:

'More than 3,000 li from the southern frontier of Funan is the kingdom of Tun Sun which is situated on an ocean stepping-stone. The land is 1,000 li in extent; the city is ten li from the sea. There are five kings who all acknowledge themselves vassals of Funan. . . . At this mart, east and west meet together so that daily there are innumerable people there. Precious goods and merchandise—there is nothing which is not there.'

(From the *Liang Shu*)

And of Tambralinga we read:

'In the country there are five hundred families of hu from India, two fo-tu and more than a thousand Indian brahmans. The people of Tun Sun practise their doctrine and give them their daughters in marriage; consequently many of the brahmans do not go away. They do nothing but study the sacred canon, bathe themselves with scents and flowers, and practise piety ceaselessly by day and night.

'He (the King of Chih T'u, otherwise known as Tambralinga) resides in the city of Seng Chih, which has triple gates more than a hundred paces apart. On each gate a painting of spirits in flight, boddhisattvas and other immortals, and they are hung with golden flowers and light bells. Several tens of women either make music or hold up golden flowers and ornaments. Four men, dressed in the manner of chin-kang giants on the sides of the Buddhist pagodas, stand at the gate. Those stationed on the outside of the gate grasp weapons of war, those on the inside hold white cloths in the passage way and gather flowers into white

nets. All the buildings in the royal palace consist of multiple pavilions with the doors on the northern side. The king sits on a three-tiered couch, facing north and dressed in rose-coloured cloth, with a chaplet of gold flowers and necklaces of varied jewels. Four damsels attend on his right side and on his left, and more than a hundred soldiers mount guard. To the rear of the king's couch there is a wooden shrine inlaid with gold, silver and five perfumed woods, and behind the shrine is suspended a golden light. Beside the couch two metal mirrors are set up, before which are placed metal pitchers, each with a golden incense burner before it. In front of all these is a recumbent golden ox before which hangs a jewelled canopy with precious fans on either side. Several hundred brahmans sit in rows facing each other on the eastern and western sides.'

(From the *T'ai p'ing yu lan*)

These are glimpses of only two kingdoms, and we still have not mentioned the kingdoms of Sri Vijaya nor Zabag, extolled by Arabic Persian geographers for the riches and power of its Maharaja, 'king of the isles of the eastern sea'.

All these have existed and yet all remain a mystery. Inscriptions are few: they tantalize more than reveal. Surface ruins survive in Thailand but not in Malaya. As a result, scholars over the past fifty years have been forced to play the Chinese word-game: the board is the modern map of South-East Asia, and the counters are ancient Chinese place-names. Erudition and ingenuity have not been lacking. Such masters of deduction as Professor Coedes, Professor Luce and Sir Roland Braddell have used minimal evidence to build up an elaborate structure of history; and more recently Professor Hall (patron of our expedition) and Paul Wheatley have provided new perspectives. Scholars from India, China and Japan have also joined in the game, displaying patience and notable skill.

But while these monumental structures of speculation rise magnificently above the ground, the ancient kingdoms themselves remain undisturbed below. Just once in a while, the occasional Buddha, Hari-Hara, Vishnu or Sivalingam has been accidentally upturned by the plough of a paddy farmer, and each new find has been respectfully placed in a museum or monastery; but nothing further has been done. The buried kingdoms resume their

ancient slumbers. We still gain much pleasure from the Chinese word-game, and more ingenious histories are written. New scholars arise and build up new theories to supersede the old. The years flow on into centuries. The earth keeps its silence, the jungle its secrets, and the rivers flow on into the sea.

This one fact seems to be clear: no excavations have been attempted at any time along the full length of Malaya's east coast; and, similarly, no excavations have been undertaken at any time in South Thailand. One can find very good reasons for this: Malayans in recent years have been keenly interested in the rapid development of their own country; and the Thais, with their monasteries and museums already loaded with antiquities, have been primarily interested in the historic movement of their own people from Yunnan in the north, and the recovery of such ancient centres of Thai culture as Lopburi and Ayuthia. Perhaps the kingdoms of the south may soon capture the imagination of the Thai people.

Our own expedition to Malaya and Thailand was not archaeological in purpose: we have merely tried to survey the ground. Our main interest was people and traditions, and whatever remains we could find of ancient dances, music, opera, drama and shadow-plays. Our tape-recordings of all these are now available to scholars in Britain through the Institute of Recorded Sound; to Malayans through Radio Malaya; and we hope it will not be long before LP discs can be made available to Thai scholars through the Siam Society and the Fine Arts Department.

My purpose in writing this book is to sound the call to dig. If the robbers can do it, so should we. Archaeologists have an urgent duty to go to South Thailand before it is too late. Thieves nightly plunder the crumbling stupas of Yarang in Patani,<sup>1</sup> yet this site may one day prove to have been the capital of the once legendary kingdom of Langkasuka. Sa'tingpra', between Songkhla Lake and the sea, is now a forgotten village whose people (in these days a trifle hard to believe) had never seen a white man before we came, yet here, scattered on pathways and paddy fields and gardens, are broken, green-glazed shards equal to the best Sawahankalok. Here are countless *trapeang*, those ancient communal bathing

<sup>1</sup> Patani with one 't' is the Malay rendering with the emphasis on the second syllable. Pattani with two 't's is the Thai rendering with emphasis on the first syllable.



pools used by the peoples of Funan and Cambodia. Here have been found the sacred rites of Siva. Nakawn Sri Tammarat and Chaiya are almost too well known to mention, yet these former cities of proved antiquity are among those which have never yet been excavated.

Fortunately, both the Malayan and Thai Governments are sympathetic, indeed anxious, to encourage the visits of expert archaeologists. Officials in the National Museum, Bangkok, are not only concerned by the danger of theft of priceless antiquities, but they have impressed on me that they would welcome collaboration and help from archaeologists and Foundations in Britain, the United States and Europe to solve the mystery of these ancient kingdoms.

In this book you will find no Chinese word-game, and scarcely any erudition: it is merely the story of our wanderings for three months through remote parts of the Malay Peninsula. You will share our experiences, for no one will have quite the same experience again. The peoples we will meet are still held within the thrall of bygone centuries. The old demons still stalk in the sunlight; and the gongs beat out the rhythms of 2,000 years to enchanted villages under a bright moon. But our meeting is none too soon. The roads and the new ways are creeping in: the reading and the writing and the cinemas, better houses, better clinics, and the right to vote. A broad highway reaches up from Singapore to Pahang; and another is projected right across the Peninsula to Kelantan. A canal may one day be cut across the Isthmus of Kra. Thai towns are fast expanding and becoming prosperous.

Improvements there are, yet there are casualties, not unimportant some of them: a sense of wonder, a habit of enchantment, and the last remnants to survive of the cultures of once great kingdoms.

STEWART WAVELL

'Ulu Dong'  
Old Coulsdon,  
Surrey.