

the Raj and the legal binding of India's Christians to chains of Hindu customary law, a state action which undermined the radicalizing impact of conversion, is extremely insightful, even if implications are not taken far enough.

Yet, for all its sophistication and brilliance, this work also suffers from limitations. For the disciplines of history or theology, it is not sufficiently critical, rigorous, or thorough—not reliable in handling evidence, nor in contextualizing events. Ever since the secularizing (or nationalizing) of Church properties under Henry VIII, those who have represented the forces of religious (Protestant) dissent have never been the opponents of secularization. Indeed, despite civil exclusion in Britain, dissent has contributed to the building of the modern secular state, as also to religious toleration and neutrality as settled principles of statecraft—in Europe, Britain, and America, as also in India. Thus, Newman's ostensible "conversion," from an already marginalized Anglo-Catholicism to Roman Catholicism, involved no radical change in religious convictions, as such. Ramabai's conversion, conversely, involved much more than a passing encounter with Anglican domination by the sisters at Wantage. Her life-long quest, stemming from the shunnings, sufferings and starving death of her parents, brought a never-ending sequence of continuous, ever-deepening spiritual experiences. No mention is made of her second or evangelical conversion to Christ as her personal Lord, nor of her third or Pentecostal conversion to the Holy Spirit as her charismatic "Blessing"—encounters which led Ramabai progressively further along a path from unitarian inclination to trinitarian monotheism. Throughout her life, Ramabai also remained a Hindu and a Brahman, in her culture, her language, and her outlook. The ambiguities, therefore, of what "Hindu" might have meant, then and now, are something which Viswanathan could have explored more deeply. Especially fascinating, for this reviewer, is the narrative of Besant, with its delving into her religious thinking. While much can also be said for the study of Ambedkar, it is surprising that more leading authorities and sources, such as Eleanor Zelliot, were not consulted. Such oversights leave one wondering about what other authorities and sources might be missing.

Finally, in the end, the question of who or what was "outside the fold" remains unanswered. Since none of these individuals seems ever to have been truly "inside the fold"—since they had been "outsiders" for almost all their lives—one is never quite sure exactly how far this metaphor can be taken. One can see how, in a time when scholars of different ideologies and methodologies and perspectives are increasingly embroiled in searing debates over differing perceptions about historical events, resort to a metaphor as a heuristic substitute for precise definitions or hard evidence is so appealing. (Other heuristic devices, such as "marginality" or "imagined community," can have the same kind of appeal.) Yet, what is involved in truly "religious" conversion, as distinct from "political" alienation or deliberate changes of affiliation, still remains to be more satisfyingly explained. Virtual exclusion of serious religious discourse within the academy remains largely undiminished.

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SOUTHEAST ASIA

Architecture of Siam: A Cultural History Interpretation. By CLARENCE AASEN.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. 366 pp. \$85.00 (cloth).

In *Architecture of Siam: A Cultural History Interpretation*, Clarence Aasen, a professor of architecture at Victoria University in New Zealand, attempts to clarify the identifying role played by architecture in the highly diverse and complex culture of Thailand.

Architecture of Siam is a very informative book with examples of architectural structures covering the expanse of Thai history from 6000 B.C.E. to the present, and with especially illuminating sections on Chinese and other foreign influences. The author aims to "concentrate on the architecture which in various ways has had a distinctive cultural strength or potency and has stimulated special spiritual or moral forces in particular groups." In addition, he wishes to "portray the architecture of those groups within a multiplicity of coexisting biographies, sometimes co-operating but often competing."

Each of the book's ten chapters starts with historical materials and a description of religious practices, followed by examples of important architectural sites. Aasen defines the term 'architecture' as encompassing "not only individual buildings but also artefacts ranging in scale from individual art objects to entire settlements."

The first chapter addresses the scope of the work and the methodology to be used. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the pre-Thai periods (the prehistoric, Mon and Dvaravati, Srivijayan, and Khmer-influenced periods). Chapters 4 to 6 cover the Thai periods: Northern Thai region from C.E. 500–1558 C.E., the Ayutthaya Kingdom (1350–1767) and Modern Thailand. The last three chapters focus on the influences from abroad which include Chinese, Burmese (Myanmar), and Western countries. In the conclusion, Aasen firmly states that "Thailand's distinctive, diverse and complex cultures were not created from primordial origins but are rather products of both indigenous and foreign cultures."

Overall, Aasen draws from excellent sources and up-to-date research materials from many disciplines such as history, art history, and cultural anthropology. Thus, *Architecture of Siam* is dense with informative details. However, when he comes to offer an interpretation of his investigations, Aasen more often gives another's opinion rather than his own. He does not challenge or reinterpret previous conceptions of some sites where recent discoveries have been made. As a result, this book offers few new interpretations of such topics from the viewpoint of architecture, but rather follows the established trends of current research.

Architecture of Siam: A Cultural History Interpretation is beautifully produced. It contains excellent photographs of important architectural sites, well-drafted plans and elevations of cities, palaces, temples, and houses with clearly drawn maps. Many drawings were executed by undergraduate students in architecture and design at Victoria University of Wellington based on other published sources. However, very limited information is provided along with the architectural plans. Thus, they will mainly be of benefit to those who are already familiar with the sites or at least know how to read architectural plans. Also, some maps are confusing because of the use of solid dots, which generally signify cities, to distinguish districts and subdistricts of present day Thailand (e.g., on map 1 Muang Sima and Ban Tak are subdistricts, not cities).

My minor quibbles about the text are mainly technical. Although Aasen firmly states in the introduction that the art historical technique of classifying stylistic periods is problematic (e.g., Dvaravati period and Srivijaya period), in chapter 3 he refers to the period of Mon hegemony of central and northern Thailand as Mon and Dvaravati Kingdom or Srivijayan Peninsula, without clearly defining these terms. While admirably trying to avoid problems with labels, Aasen carefully defines the

terms he thinks will help him to discuss time periods. The terms “Siam” and “Siamese” are used for periods before 1939, the year in which the country officially switched its name to “Thailand.” Aasen uses the term “Tai” to refer to the ethnolinguistic group inhabiting northern Thailand and “Thai” for those in Central Thailand. Yet, as he implies in the introduction, Tai or Thai people never called themselves Siamese, a term used by other people. Thais commonly identified themselves with the *Muang* (country, chiefdom, or city-state) they originally came from, such as Thai from Sukhothai (*khon Muang Sukhothai*) or from Ayutthaya (*khon Muang Ayutthaya*). Thus, it would be clearer to identify Thai ethnicity by period and regional context, such as Lanna Tai (northern region) or Ayutthaya kingdom. Similar problems occur with other terms (e.g., Theravada Buddhism). Hence, while this book can be read with benefit, it should also be read with some caution.

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Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island. By FILOMENO V. AGUILAR JR. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998. xiv, 314 pp. \$49.00 (cloth); \$28.95 (paper).

Aguilar is certainly not the first scholar to be concerned with the turbulent issue of sugar production in the Philippines, in particular on the Visayan island of Negros. For the last decade only, publications by such scholars as historian John Larkin or political scientist Alfred W. McCoy come immediately to mind. But Aguilar, who teaches in a School of History and Politics, feels entirely comfortable with the two fields that his affiliation entails. He does not hesitate to go across disciplines, trespassing and poaching in whatever domain might help him illuminate afresh and anew the production of sugar in the Philippines. Perfectly at ease on this adventurous path where cultural analysis treads along political economy, Aguilar invites us to revisit in the process the entire Philippine history and society from prehispanic to post-Marcos times.

The spirits that clash according to the title are to be understood in a richly diverse and multivocal way. As the book opens, the reader is presented with a late 1960s incident in which a steam-filled tank at a sugar mill on Negros exploded. Local people blamed the accident upon the new management who had refused to propitiate the spirits by “baptizing” the new machinery with chicken blood. The rites of appeasement belatedly performed, normalcy returned and “no devastating mechanical failures or accidents have since occurred” (p. 2).

In this conflict of beliefs a certain complicity is revealed between the sugar workers, mindful of intemperate intrusions of spirits in their daily experiences, and the spirit of capitalism manifested by the sugar planters who go along with rituals not only to quell spirits but to make their workers more compliant and of course more productive. Consequently, the spirits involved here are, on the one hand, to be taken literally as supernatural beings that can intervene to disrupt production and that must be soothed. On the other hand, they are to be understood in a figurative sense. The spirit of tradition clashes with the spirit of capitalism because, throughout the history of sugar production, the relations of production keep changing with the passage of time in consonance with the historical changes that are shaping the Philippines from prehispanic to post-Marcos times.