

BANGKOK, THE VENICE OF THE EAST DESCRIBED AS A CITY OF PARADOX AND ROMANCE

(By Ishbel Ross in New York Herald-Tribune.)

Bangkok, the Venice of the East, is a city of paradox and romance. The last two rulers of Siam have been educated in Europe and have brought back to their capital a quaint infusion of Western customs. King Prajadhipok is equally at home in tennis slacks or as the central figure of the barbaric splendor peculiar to the land of the white elephant.

Bangkok is a dashing city with air mail, spanking regiments, electric trains, a tabloid newspaper in English owned by Siamese, American moving pictures and a national theatre with European scenery and mechanism. Its young blades play golf, polo and tennis; its flappers cast melting black eyes at the fashion plates of another civilization.

But Siam is still fundamentally the land of the white elephant, of unhealthy swamps and jungles, of klongs with floating houses clinging to the banks and markets traveling on the waterways. Above all, it is the land of the bot—that temple of exotic charm found nowhere else in the world. Bangkok itself seems to have sprung full blown from the pages of Hans Andersen, although neither the colored plates of fairy tales nor the wildest fantasies of the modernist furniture maker can quite equal the eccentricity line or the riot of color that the porcelain bots present to the amazed eye of the visitor. Giant devas guard the temples, grotesques intended to fright-

en away the devils, but highly comical to the uninitiated.

Unlike most Orientals, the Siamese have a naive and undisguised curiosity where the visitor from other lands is concerned. They are not so secretive in their study of the manners and speech of the stranger. Their frank faces reveal a childish desire to learn and their initiation into the ways of Occident has been extraordinarily rapid.

Until the '70s of the last century Bangkok was practically without roads, except for a few around the royal palace. The canals were the arteries of communication, like Venice or Amsterdam. Most of the area now occupied by trim white houses and spic and span streets was then garden land or swamp. The banks of the klongs and of the river Menam itself were lined with houses, most of which were built of wood on piles driven down in the soft mud. The roofs were thatched.

A large percentage of the population lived and died either in floating houses or in sampans. Now most of the picturesque floating houses have disappeared.

It was the late King Rama who started the process of bringing Siam up to date. It was his ambition to make his little state one of the nations of the world, and his brother, King Prajadhipok, who was crowned in 1926 is following his example closely. In place of the basket phaeton drawn by twenty white ponies that his father used, King Dama brought eighty-

three different models of automobiles of American and European make to Siam. He also introduced the typewriter and improved the railroads. He preached monogamy and said he would have only one wife, the one he loved, although his father had had 8,000 concubines.

The modern Bangkok is well laid out, with sweeping streets and most commodities available except Bangkok hats, for which one seeks in vain, only to be told that Singapore is the place to buy a Bangkok hat.

The bot is built of heavy timber which is overlaid with varnished tiles of many colors, arranged in definite designs and sometimes superimposed in tiers. On close examination the porcelain has the look of broken plates and saucers, but at a distance of a foot or so away cunning designs are discernible. Prongs encrusted with mosaics of gilt glass which flash in the sun and have snakes for their motif ascent heavenward from the roofs, which are usually of gold and green tiles. The doors are of huge slabs of teakwood, richly carved and gilded, or inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The window shutters are carved and gilded.

Wat Phra Keo (the Temple of the Emerald Idol) is the shrine of the royal family. All the woodwork is overlaid with gold leaf. Painted porcelain and colored glass cover the facade and innumerable figures, with here and there a golden elephant, adorn the spire. Inside is an altar sixty feet high on which reposes the Emerald Buddha with head and collar of pure gold set with diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds and other precious stones. The Buddha itself is of jasper, not emerald. The Royal Palace adjoins this temple and is built in French style, although it has the typical Siamese roof of gold and green tiles.

Steeped all their lives in the bright colors of their architecture, there is nothing that the Siamese like so much as gala days. Their festivals are like Arabian Nights' dreams. October is the month of the principal ceremony—Tot Kathin, the annual offering of gifts. The King, a pious Buddhist, gives magnificent presents to the temples. All the monks of the kingdom receive new yellow robes. The festival is particularly gay on the water, where tugs tow scows of gayly flagged boats.

When the King goes to the monasteries on the west bank of the Menam during the festival he is seated in a golden pavilion poised in the center of a crimson and gold state barge. The prow is carved in the likeness of a dragon. A hundred sailors in crimson paddle the boat, their oars moving in rhythm as they propel the barge through the still waters of the Menam.

On another of the feast days in October his majesty, deserting his throne with its tiered umbrella of gold, may be seen driving through the streets in a coach and four surrounded by mounted aids-de-camp and eunuchs. Detachments of lancers in bright blue uniforms, wearing plumed helmets and armed with glittering tufted lances, escort him.

Never appearing twice in the same guise during these festivities, another day may find him seated in a gilt palanquin carried on the shoulders of crimson-clad porters, with a page holding the scarlet umbrella of royalty over him.

The King is a patron of the arts and has his own dancers, who upon occasion perform for the stranger in the lovely Roman Garden of the Phya Thai Palace Hotel. One of the unforgettable memories of Siam is that of the dancers in their jewel-encrusted robes dancing in the moonlight.

Their performance is much like that of Japanese dancers, but their costumes are more ornate. Their dancing is strangely immobile, a series of stiff movements with the hands and feet and a languid writhing that is slow to the point of boredom after the American tempo. They advance and retreat with gliding motions, all performed in the most graceful and measured manner.


Those playing the roles of kings, queens, princes and princesses wear the tapering "mukala," or crown. Their arms are weighted with heavy golden bracelets and their draperies are literally encrusted with precious stones. They are so heavy that the dancers frequently faint from exhaustion induced by the burden of their garments. Their crowns are incredibly cumbersome, but the little dancers carry them gallantly, their faces frozen into smiling masks behind the stiff coating of white paint and the bright red streaks that mark their lips.

MANDELL BEATEN

Jimmy Goodrich of Buffalo Scored Technical K. O. Over Lightweight Title Holder.

Flint, Mich., Sept. 25—Jimmy Goodrich of Buffalo, scored a technical knockout over Sammy Mandell, light weight champion in the second round of a scheduled 10 round, non-title boxing contest here tonight. Mandell suffered a broken collarbone in the initial session and was unable to continue.

Articles of agreement for the fight provided that Goodrich must weigh in over the lightweight limit of 135 pounds and as a result Mandell's title was not involved. Goodrich weighed in at 140.



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