

PEOPLE IN ADOLF BASTIAN'S "JOURNEY IN SIAM IN 1863"

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Abstract - This article lays a focus on "Journey in Siam in 1863", a journey's account of Adolf Bastian, a well-known German Ethnologist and anthropologists, who lived from 1826-1905. Bastian started his career as a ship's doctor in 1850 and as such, Bastian could travel to many places around the world, such as Australia, Peru, the Caribbean and Africa. Bastian thus interested in ethnography and anthropology. In 1861, Bastian decided to travel to Southeast Asia. He first visited Cambodia, Myanma and after that Siam in 1863, when his journey's account, *Journey in Siam in 1863*", which will be studied in this article, was published. In this article, Bastian paid attention to the language and customs of Siam, as well as on Buddhism, the main religion in Siam. Moreover, he also reported about people, both important and ordinary, in his journey account. This fact thus makes Bastian's account interesting, since it's difficult for historians to obtain information about life of ordinary people, especially in the early Rattanakosin era.

Keywords - Adolf Bastian, Siam, Journey in Siam

I. INTRODUCTION

Before going into detail, the reason, why this title has been picked up, should be roughly described. The question is, what you, as a historian, would use as primary source to study the life of important people living around 150 or 200 years before you? Many historians would find that it's not difficult, or even easy to answer. Primary source for this purpose could be found varying from official manuscript, document, diary, biography, as well as autobiography. In the contrary, if you're interested in studying life of ordinary people in the mentioned period, the same question could be found difficult to answer since official manuscript or document mostly don't mention life of ordinary people, but only those of important persons. How could the required information be best obtained? Fortunately, in the early Rattanakosin period of Thai history, starting from 1782 until 1868, or after the death of King Rama IV (1851-1868), some foreigners, who had business or were simply interested in Siam, or how the country was called at that time, came to visit the capital Bangkok. Some of them even extended their journey to include other parts of the country and wrote the journey's account.

The next problem is that most of the journey's accounts written by foreigners do provide information about their journey, exiting events or information about important persons, but pay only scant attention to ordinary people. Only a handful of journey's account do focus on the life of ordinary people. The first to be named is the journey's account of a Scottish physician and diplomat, John Crawford, who was sent to Siam and Cochinchina, or nowadays Vietnam in 1821 by the then English Governor-General of India to study Siam and Cochinchina's reaction over English and French influence in Southeast Asia. Crawford arrived Siam in 1820, under the reign of Rama II (1809-1824). While

staying there, he wrote his popular journey's account "Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China; exhibiting a view of the actual State of those Kingdoms"¹, which was published in 1830. With a view of a Colonist, Crawford described a form of the Siamese, their habits as well as religion.

Apart from Crawford's account, in 1828 Charles Gutzlaff, a German protestant missionary to East- and Southeast Asia, including Siam, wrote "Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Island"² describing the royal family of Siam, her religion the Buddhist religion as well as the Buddhism religion. Two decades after Gutzlaff, John Bowring, a talented English diplomat wrote "The Kingdom and People of Siam. With a Narrative of the Mission to that country"³. In this account, he paid attention on geography, history as well as on the Siamese people. Almost in the same time, Frederick Neale, an English citizen, who worked for a Siamese government under the reign of Rama IV, jotted down his experience in the "Narrative of the Residence at the Capital of the Kingdom of Siam with a description of the Manners, Customs, and Laws of the Modern Siamese"⁴. In his

¹ Crawford, John. (1830). *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China; exhibiting a view of the actual State of those Kingdoms*, London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley.

² Gutzlaff, Charles. (1834). *Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Island*, London: Frederick Westley and A.H. Davis.

³ Bowring, John. (1857). *The Kingdom and People of Siam. With a Narrative of the Mission to that Country*, London: John W. Parker and Son, West Strand.

⁴ Neale, Frederick. (1852). *Narrative of the Residence at the Capital of the Kingdom of Siam with a Description of the Manners, Customs, and Laws of the Modern Siamese*, London: Office of the Illustrated Library.

account, Neale told his readers about King Mongkut, or how Rama IV was called by his people, about Bangkok, life of the people there as well as the Siamese customs. While only a few journey's account focus on life of ordinary people, Adolf Bastian, a German ethnologist, who traveled through the world and came to Siam in 1863 gave much information about life of people from different origins in Siam. In his journey's account "Journey in Siam in 1863", he focused on how the important as well as the ordinary people lived, what they believed in or how they communicated within the society. Thus, Bastian's journey account offers a nice addition for the mentioned journey's account.

II. ADOLF BASTIAN

Bastian was born in 1826 in Bremen, at that time a state of the German Confederation, into a prosperous merchant family. After finishing High School, Bastian studied law at the University of Heidelberg. Almost at the same time, he studied medicine and biology at the nowadays Humboldt University in Berlin, at the University of Jena and Wuerzburg. After his graduation in 1850, Bastian began his career as a ship's doctor so that he – first in the period of 8 years- could travel to many places around the world, such as, Australia, Peru, the Caribbean and Africa and became hence interested in ethnography and anthropology. In 1858, Bastian decided to return home and published his travel-experience in "People in History". This work became popular since the information used in the word had been obtained primarily.

Bastian started his journey again in 1861, when he visited Southeast Asia. He first visited Cambodia and Myanmar and after that Siam in 1863, when his journey's account, *Journey in Siam in 1863*,⁵ which will be studied in this article, was published. After this journey, Bastian returned home again and moved to Berlin in 1866, where he began his career as a Professor. Together with Robert Hartmann, a well-known naturalist and ethnographer, Bastian was a founder of a "Journal for ethnology" and later in 1873, he was also counted as a founder of the "Ethnological Museum of Berlin", where he acted as its first director. In the second half of the 1870s, Bastian left Berlin for Africa as well as Latin-America. In Chile, he planned to establish a museum, but failed eventually. In the contrary, he was successful in publishing many well-known works, such as "The Preface of Ethnology", "The Coast of North-West America", or "The Study from the thinking". In almost all of his work, Bastian tried to point out that there's a general psychic unity of humankind that is responsible for certain elementary ideas common to all people. According to

encyclopedia Britannica, this concept is thought to have influenced various ethnologists and anthropologists, such as, Bronislaw Malinowski or Carl Jung.⁶ Bastian died in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, while running a field research there.

III. JOURNEY IN SIAM IN 1863-THE PATH OF BASTIAN'S JOURNEY

Before focusing on life of the people in Siam, as described by Bastian, the itinerary of his journey should be put on the first place. Bastian began his journey in Siam after finishing his tour in Myanmar. In his journey's account, Bastian tells his readers that on 15th November 1863, he crossed the border from Mawlamyine in Myanmar, under the British rule, into Siam. Arriving in Siam, Bastian and his guide as well as baggage porters spent some nights in a small border-village, where Bastian called "Meiteta". According to Bastian, Meiteta was established to mark the border - which became important due to forestry industry under British occupation - between Myanmar and Siam. For this reason, Meiteta was located in a forest, with five days walk to another villages.

From Meiteta, Bastian continued his journey to "Raheng", a much livelier village than Meiteta, since Raheng had more population, including some Chinese people. A market with many things to buy could also be found in this village. A Chinese man patrolled through the village every morning to sell pork. To get his customers known about his coming, a Chinese man gave a signal by blowing a horn, so that his customers could in time come out of their house to buy pork. From Raheng, Bastian's journey went further to "Kampeng pet", where he mentioned as an uninhabited town, middle in the wilderness. The streets were mostly impassable. At Kampeng pet, Bastian and his team wanted to take a bath in a river, but they were warned by the villagers that they should be aware of a "river ghost". The ghost could draw people while taking a bath and was thus very dangerous. From Kampen pet, Bastian headed for Chainat, where people earned their living with agriculture and fisheries.

From Chainat, Bastian went through several small villages before arriving Aungthong, where he had a chance to explore the city. From there, the journey went further to Ayutthaya, an old capital city of Siam. After spending 4-5 days in Ayutthaya, Bastian traveled through Sam-Kok village in the purpose to reach Nonthaburi, a town, from where it was easy to reach the capital Bangkok. Bastian was eager to reach the capital, so that he spent only one night in Nonthaburi and continued his journey in the next morning. On the 31st December, Bastian finally

⁵ Bastian, Adolf. (1863). *Reisen in Siam im Jahre 1863*, Jena: Hermann Costenoble.

⁶ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Adolf-Bastian>, derived 20 June 2018.

reached Bangkok, where he spent several months to learn the language, customs and cultures of the Siamese. Thus, it's not surprising, when Bastian give much detailed information about his experience in Bangkok.

IV. THE ORDINARY PEOPLE IN BASTIAN'S JOURNEY IN SIAM IN 1863

Since Bastian was an ethnologist as well as anthropologist, it was not surprising that he paid much attention on people, both important and ordinary people. Arriving in a small village, "Meiteta", where Bastian yielded a hope to meet a Siamese officer, so that he could obtain a visa for Siam, since he had traveled from Myanma. In Meiteta, Bastian met one Siamese officer, who was very delighted to welcome Bastian and his team, since the team included Chinese sellers, who had accompanied Bastian from Myanma. The mentioned Siamese officer could thus buy many things, which were difficult to buy in Siam, such as, tobacco, alcohol and other luxurious things. According to Bastian, the delight was with the officer and for him, he just felt another way. He was somehow annoyed by the officer's Laos servants, since they played music almost all the night, so that Bastian couldn't get enough sleep. Besides, the Laos servants always played a game of luck, so that they were always short of money. In the matter of a visa for Siam, the officer in Meiteta couldn't make a decision and thus advised Bastian to go to Raheng to ask for a visa from an officer with a higher position. However, Bastian had to wait for the journey to get started, since he needed elephants for the route from Meiteta to Raheng. The Siamese officer once again came to his help by contacting the Karen people, who usually lived on the mountain and thus get used to elephants as a way to transport, in the next village to come and bring the elephants.

After one week of waiting, the Karen with their four elephants arrived, so that Bastian had a chance to describe the Karen. According to him, the Karen was very diligent, honest and quiet people and thus was popular by the Siamese, including the Siamese officer in Meiteta. In controlling the elephants, they used words and symbols instead of causing a pain to get the elephants obeyed. According to Bastian, the honesty – whereupon the Siamese always laughed about - of the Karen people could be best seen, as he tried to pay them more than it had been agreed.

For the journey time, or the time before the arrival in Bangkok, the account don't give a detailed information about life of the people, which Bastian met along his way. The reason for this could lay in the fact that Bastian was on his way to arrive Bangkok and thus didn't have much time. After the arrival in the capital, Bastian could gave his full attention to describe life of ordinary people again. Bastian war surprise to see many boats – some of

them belonged to small merchants- on the Chaopraya River in Bangkok. The Chaopraya River was not only full of boats, but also full of floating houses, that somehow were built on a large piece of wood knotting together. The fact that large amount of houses in Bangkok were built as a floating house shows that the Siamese life was much related to a river. Bastian explained that the Siamese in every district of Bangkok took a bath in front of their floating houses and they didn't need to be ashamed, because the mentioned activity was very normal among them. The Siamese in Bangkok – in the contrary to the Siamese in other provinces – didn't need to worry about the crocodiles in the river since the crocodiles "were not allowed to harm people in Bangkok, and if they still intended to bite people, the king would send someone to catch them".⁷ The crocodiles were firstly forced to come to the surface by the spell, so that it was easy to catch them. Moreover, Bastian added that the crocodiles in Bangkok were not really dangerous and they didn't need to harm people as their food, because they could eat any waste, which were swimming plenty on the surface.

Apart from the Siamese in Bangkok, Bastian reported visiting a Kha-village, which was situated at the suburb of Bangkok. In his journey's account, Bastian reported that, one afternoon, he was taken to the suburb of Bangkok to visit the village of the Kha. Arriving there, Bastian was invited to take a boat-tour around the village and he was accompanied by one wise man of the Kha, who told him the history of their ancestor. According to the mentioned Siamese, Kha people had come from the East of Siam, where it was very mountainous. But in Bangkok, Kha people lived in a small house and they had to work for the Siamese noblemen. Back in their mountainous homeland, Kha people had earned their living from growing rice.

Apart from Kha people, in Bangkok, Bastian came across European missionaries. Bastian reported that the Portuguese missionary was the most successful in Siam, nevertheless, they couldn't persuade the Siamese to change their religion. Due to their activity in Siam – some missionaries practiced medicine and some acted as teacher- the European missionaries were mostly called "Mor" or doctor and "Kru" or teacher.

While staying in Bangkok, Bastian had a chance to visit several Buddhism temples around Bangkok. Talking about temple, it's almost unavoidable to speak about monks, who had to go out for a short distance every morning to ask for food from the people. As mentioned that the Siamese were close to life in a river, the monks thus used a boat as their transport, so that Bastian could see a long line of yellow robe of the monks going out every morning.

⁷ Bastian Adolf. (1863). *Reisen in Siam im Jahre 1863*. p. 66.

He also mentioned a "Lek-Wat" or plainly a slave of a temple. Bastian got explained that Lek-Wat was a person, who lived, as a single, in the temple-area, and as a married person, near the temple. Lek-Wat was responsible for the cleanliness in the temple and thus was always looked down by the villagers. Bastian explained that "Lek-Wat was someone, who hadn't have an ability to pay back their debt, and no one did care to help. Thus, the fact of being a "Lek-Wat" was mostly given from one generation to the next generation.

Speaking about "Bao Chao-Chevit", Bastian explained that they were slave of war.⁸ To announce the being of "Bao Chao-Chevit", symbol was made at their left or right wrist. According to Bastian, the King usually sent "Bao Chao-Chevit" to serve the gentry. In the case that "Bao Chao-Chevit" wanted to changed their status to be a freeman, they had to pay to free themselves within the reign of the King, who had ordered them to their gentry, otherwise, they had to remain "Bao Chao-Chevit" all their life.

Bastian also spoke about Siamese children that they were given an ugly name shortly after their birth. The reason of doing this laid in the fear of the parents, that if the child had been given a beautiful name, it could be taken by the devil. Because of this same reason, the Siamese did call the child with an ugly name until the child was three years old. And in the case that the child was ill, the parents would hang the teeth of the dog or pig on its neck, so that the child would look ugly and could be saved from the devil, or from the illness. And if the child cried and didn't want to stop, the parents in this case would throw three pieces of rice over the roof of their house.

V. IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN BASTIAN'S JOURNEY IN SIAM IN 1863.

Not only to the ordinary people, Bastian also paid attention to important people. As he reached Raheng, Bastian met the governor of that town and thus explained the meeting in his journey's account. According to him, he was invited to the governor's house and as he reached the house, the governor came out to greet him by handing him his hand, which, as Bastian understood, was not normal among the Siamese. Bastian reported in his account, that the governor had long nails, which made the greeting very difficult. Bastian guessed that, the habit of having long nails had come from China and had the purpose to show that the person with long nails was rich and important because he or she didn't need to work, otherwise the long nails wouldn't allow that person to do that. Bastian reported vividly that the governor had a good knowledge of current world affairs. Because directly after they started the conversation in the big hall, the governor talked about several tribes, who lived around Southeast Asia and

then about the relationship between England and France, the Napoleonic Wars, the current Emperor of France,⁹ as well as the civil war in the United States. Bastian made a remark that, when he wanted to return after the conversation, he needed to walk pass several Siamese, who had come to witness the conversation.

As Bastian reached Bangkok, he was allowed to meet the king within the first week of his arrival. According to Bastian, a boat was sent to bring him to the King's palace. After his arrival in the palace, Bastian was brought into a hall, where several officers was awaiting the arrival of the king.¹⁰ As the king entered the hall – reported Bastian- all of the officers immediately bent down. According to him, the king "had the bright eyes, he came directly to me and greeted me with the English hand-shake".¹¹ Bastian was allowed to sit in the same in the same level with the king, who was very supportive, since the king introduced Bastian to one monk, because Bastian had made the king known, that he wished to learn more about Buddhism in Siam.

Bastian also talked about the language-ability of the king in his journey-account. According to him, the king was ordained as a monk and at the time of his monkhood, one French missionary taught him Latin and one another American taught him English, so that the king could master his ability in English. Bastian also had a chance to make contact with the so called "second king",¹² or the younger brother of the king. Also he had the ability of speaking, reading and writing English and he was very interested in mathematics and science. Bastian had a chance to visit his chemical laboratory and study the map the second king had drawn himself.

Apart from the king himself and his younger brother, Bastian was introduced to one prince, who was called "Prince Kromluang"¹³ by the Siamese. Bastian reported in his journey's account that this prince loved to study anatomy and medicine. After the first meeting, Bastian was impressed by the way the prince had treated him and thus became friend, who Bastian often visited. Bastian was often allowed to visit the prince's private study as well as granted a chance to participate in courteous activities.

Since Bastian was interested in Siamese language, culture and literature, he was then introduced to the so called "Phra Alak", or a court-librarian. Bastian shared his experience that Phra Alak treated him kindly, since he was allowed to see some rare books as well as English books, which had been given as a present to the king. Bastian was interested in making

⁹ Emperor Napoleon III of France, who ruled the country from 1852 to 1870.

¹⁰ King Rama IV or King Mongkut, who ruled Siam from 1851 to 1868.

¹¹ Bastian Adolf. (1863). *Reisen in Siam im Jahre 1863*. p. 70.

¹² Price Pinklai, he was nominated as a second king from 1851-1866.

¹³ Prince Wongsathirat

⁸ Ibid. p. 174.

contact with some monks, with whom he could obtain knowledge about Buddhism. One monk, who had once been a teacher of the king, denied to speak about Buddhism with Bastian, since he believed that teaching Buddhism to foreigner would be a serious sin.

CONCLUSION

"Journey in Siam in 1863" from Adolf Bastian pays attention on both important and ordinary people and thus could help bringing light to historians, who are interested in studying life of ordinary people. Bastian's journey account could thus fulfil primary sources, which normally bare information about important people. "Journey in Siam in 1863" could also complete the journey's accounts, which already pay attention to life of normal people, like that of Neale or Gutzlaff. Moreover, "Journey in Siam in 1863" does point out that Siam or nowadays Thailand

has been a multicultural society – with Laos or Chinese people- since the early Rattanakosin era. The Siamese important people were somehow knowledgeable, which shows that Siam at that time wasn't an undeveloped country.

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