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4-1-1987

### Review Of "A Peasant Community In Changing Thailand" By S. Piker

Donald K. Swearer  
Swarthmore College, dsweare1@swarthmore.edu

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#### Recommended Citation

Donald K. Swearer. (1987). "Review Of "A Peasant Community In Changing Thailand" By S. Piker". *Journal Of The American Oriental Society*. Volume 107, Issue 2. 373-374. DOI: 10.2307/602876  
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-religion/138>

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ennobled and the first Indian Governor of a province. Jinnah rose even higher in one lifetime than Lord Sinha, but then his starting point in the imperial life cycle came close to a century after the Sinhas of Raipur first began to meet the textile labor needs of the East India Company. Among the first prey of these climbing Sinhas was the local Muslim Raja whose zemindari they took over for unpaid debts. N. K. Bose's *Modern India* is relevant to this discussion between pages 20–30.

MORRIS DEMBO

PHILADELPHIA

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*A Peasant Community in Changing Thailand.* By STEVEN PIKER. Pp. 157 + ix (Anthropological Research Papers No. 30). Tempe, Arizona: ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY. 1983.

During the past forty years Thailand, of all the countries of Southeast Asia, has been the most studied by American Anthropologists. The great majority have been trained at Cornell, attracted by the Cornell-Thailand project established under the leadership of Lauriston Sharp and Lucien M. Hanks. The Cornell-Thailand Project bibliography of nearly 500 items includes more than fifty doctoral dissertations. To be sure, Anthropological studies of Thai society and culture have not been the exclusive domain of the Cornell-Thailand project, however. Stanley J. Tambiah, for example, trained under Edmund Leach at Cambridge, has made a major contribution to this field. Steven Piker of Swarthmore College, although a student of Melford Spiro at the University of Washington (now at the University of California, Santa Cruz), has been so highly regarded by the Cornell "mafia" that his work has been included in the *festschrift* for Lauriston Sharp ("The Post-Peasant Village in Central Plain Thai Society," in *Change and Persistence in Thai Society*, eds. G. W. Skinner and A. T. Kirsch, 1975), and papers in honor of Lucien Hanks read at the 1986 Association of Asian Studies meeting. Piker's fieldwork in the village of Banoi, Ayuthaya Province, Thailand, in the 1960's produced several highly regarded articles, e.g., "Sources of Stability and Instability in Rural Thai Society," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 1968"; "Friendship to the Death in Rural Thai Society," *Human Organization*, 1968", but has only now been published as a monograph with the appearance of *A Peasant Community in Changing Thailand*.

Piker's ethnographic study of a village in the Central plains of Thailand constitutes his most substantive contribution to the anthropological study of Thai society. Although

the fieldwork on which this study is based was done 20 years ago, Piker's monograph on the demography, economy, and social organization of Banoi provides not a time-bound picture of a rural Thai community, but a descriptive analysis of a village in transition under the impact of the social, political and economic changes shaping Thailand into a nation-state within a modern global economy. Piker's "micro" or village study, therefore, can be seen as an instance of a post-peasant society, but a unique instance, to be sure. While Piker sees general characteristics of post-peasant societies, he also argues for the unique history and transformations of a particular community subject to the forces of modernization. The author describes, albeit all too briefly, the historical background to Banoi's emergence as part of the Central Plain region of the Thai nation-state. He contends that Banoi's 300 year history makes the village distinctive relative to the earlier famed Cornell studies of Bang Chan and Bangkhud because these communities were not founded until the end of the 19th century when Thailand was already beginning to modernize.

As a social anthropologist with a special interest in psychological anthropology, Piker emphasizes social organization and interpersonal relationships, measuring the deeper significance of the economic changes from a subsistence to a market economy less in material than in social terms. The author sees a breakdown of the local networks of informal social alliance and economic exchange in the face of an emerging society in which landowners rely increasingly on mechanization and wage labor with production aimed primarily for national markets and landless villagers increasingly becoming part of a national labor force, a "rural proletariat." The twenty years since Piker's study lend further confirmation, to his observation, one which can be applied beyond the Central Plains to other parts of Thailand and other developing countries, as well.

Piker's discussion of kinship and social relationships, in particular, marriage and courting customs and types of friendships deserves special mention, as well as his analysis of the much-studied patron-client relationship. He describes the last in terms of various political and economic contexts, placing informal, village patron-client relationships within the more formal structure of the national government. Piker sees his study of the Banoi domestic cycle, furthermore, as representative of studies of other rural Thai communities, e.g., Brian Foster, "Continuity and Change in Rural Thai Family Structure," *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 1975), and his cultural analysis of Thai society as indebted to the work of Lucien Hanks, ("Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order," *American Anthropologist*, 1962). Thus, while, on the one hand, Piker contends that Thai society reflects a fluidity of social position (the so-called "loose-structure") relative to caste-defined societies, there is also an extensive, highly culturally codified system of social stratification and

hierarchy rooted in Buddhist beliefs regarding *karma* and merit. Here the author reveals his Weberian bias.

Professor Piker's study of Banoi, a village in the Central Plains of Thailand, makes a welcomed addition to our understanding of the social anthropology of Thailand, in particular, and the nature of post-peasant societies in general.

DONALD K. SWEARER

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

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*Kings of Love. The History and Poetry of the Ni'matullahi Sufi Order of Iran.* By NASROLLAH POURJAVADY AND PETER LAMBORN WILSON. Preface by SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR. Pp. xii + 226, tables. Teheran: IMPERIAL IRANIAN ACADEMY OF PHILOSOPHY. 1978. \$16.50.

The authors Pourjavady, an outstanding scholar, and Wilson, a successful poet as well, present *Kings of Love* as a first attempt in a European language to tell the history of a Sufi order from that order's point of view, while at the same time using the critical tools of the historian. They address the reader who already has some knowledge of Sufism, Sufi history, and the Islamic world, referring the uninitiated to the bibliography, and begin with certain axioms regarding the reality of the events they describe. Accompanying the history are selected translations of poetry written by members of the order which are, at the very least in their fresh, jargon-free style, no doubt quite in the spirit of the originals, a contribution to translations from the Persian.

The biographical portions of the volume, with their careful and detailed footnotes, have a straightforward value. They offer an insider's history of the Ni'matullahi Sufi order, narrated in a format blending the structure of a traditional biographical history with brief digressions enlightening the reader on points a contemporary mentality might find obscure. The tendency for such digressions to take an apologetic tone is counteracted by the authors' firmly assertive stance. This same stance however, may leave the scholar with knowledge of Sufism finding their retreat from theoretical analysis and comparative evaluation in the introductory chapters abrupt. Halfway through the chapter on "The Sufism of Shah Ni'matullah Wali" I wondered: "All these things can and have been explicated so simply before . . . why then these hokey appeals to the rule of ineffability?" The authors are careful to demonstrate at the outset that they can very well manage the bright, sober tone of a top-quality orientalist treatment; perhaps it is in the name of their approach "from the order's point of view" that they blithely abandon it and rely upon shock effects to magnetize the reader. The technique worked on me to a certain extent, for by the time I reached the biography of Bushāq Aṭ'imah my connoisseur's

taste was aroused, and the more the logic of the narrative broke down, the more I enjoyed reading it. But I fear the lack of a more solicitous conception in approach may unnecessarily limit the number of readers who might enjoy *Kings of Love*.

This is especially true for the fine translations; will anyone read them but the members of the order, whose present head has disciples here in New York City? I believe there should be more of an attempt on the part of authors of books on subjects such as this to address the forum of contemporary intellectual debate, simply because what they have to contribute is valuable. The few historical issues touched upon—spiritual and temporal authority, Isma'ili connections—are not sufficiently developed to be of interest in themselves, and literary questions are not addressed at all. But here I criticize the authors' stated aim, not their achievement in fulfilling it. *Kings of Love* does what it sets out to do; I wish it had set out to do more.

VICTORIA ROWE HOLBROOK

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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*The Arabic Materia Medica of Dioscorides.* By MAHMOUD M. SADEK. Pp. 229, 54 illustrations. Quebec: LES ÉDITIONS DU SPHINX. 1983.

Arabic Dioscorides is perhaps the most interesting chapter in the history of Arabic medicine and pharmacology. The medieval sources themselves speak of the problem of the transmission of the Greek text into Arabic in a language reminiscent of folk tales and legends. For modern historians of science, the problems surrounding the study of this transmission are only beginning to be identified, and with every new attempt more of the same kind of problems are raised.

Students of Arabic Dioscorides are today primarily concerned with the establishment of the text, and with the study of the accompanying illustrations. The text itself seems to have undergone several translations and revisions, and it is difficult to decide which of the many versions should be used as the basis for a critical edition. We are told that the text was first translated from Greek into Arabic by Iṣṭifān b. Bāṣil during the reign of al-Mutawakkil (847–861). This translation was then revised by Ḥunain b. Iṣḥāq (808–873), the famous translator of the Galenic Corpus, who had earlier produced a Syriac translation of the text for Bakhtīshū<sup>c</sup> b. Jibrāʾīl, the chief physician of al-Mutawakkil. We also know from a later translation of the text that Ḥunain did not like the version of Iṣṭifān and himself translated at least the first four books, this time into Arabic. We are not sure whether these four books were ultimately incorporated in the Ḥunain-Iṣṭifān version, which was used as the basis of