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# Thailand: The Symbolic Center of the Theravada Buddhist World

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## Introduction

The Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok is considered the most sacred temple in Thailand. The temple's sanctity is derived from its enshrinement of the Emerald Buddha, the nation's religious and political palladium, for which the temple is named. Chronicles explain that the Emerald Buddha was fashioned from the *Chakkavatti's* (Universal World Ruler) wish granting jewel, so that the image came to embody potent symbols of Buddhism and kingship through its form and medium. Its enshrinement in Bangkok symbolically marks the Temple of the Emerald Buddha as a Buddhist center, and its keeper, the King of Thailand, as the ultimate religious and political leader.

Prior to its enshrinement at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in 1784, the Emerald Buddha was described in chronicles as having traveled to important Buddhist centers throughout South and Southeast Asia. This paper focuses on the sacred geography that the Emerald Buddha has created through its movements, arguing that this geography, along with the royal patronage of the temple where it is enshrined, is an important religious and political tool for the self-promotion of Thai Kings and the promotion of Thailand as the sacred center of modern-day Theravada Buddhism.

## Mapping the History, Significance and Movements of the Emerald Buddha

The importance of the Emerald Buddha image as a religious and political palladium is derived, in part, from descriptions of it in chronicles.<sup>1</sup> These chronicles include the *Ratanabimbavamsa*, *Jinakalamali*, and *Amarakatabuddharupanidana*.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that these chronicles all have their origins in modern-day Thailand and Laos. While these chronicles and later commentaries would like the reader to believe that the Emerald Buddha has importance throughout the Theravada Buddhist world, it is only in Thailand and Laos that the icon has had any real religious and political impact.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, the chronicles vary slightly on details of the Emerald Buddha's travels, but they unanimously agree on matters of the icon's genesis.<sup>4</sup> The chronicles explain that the crafting of the icon was intended to preserve the teachings of the Buddha after his *parinibbana* (final nirvana). With the help of the god Indra and the celestial architect and craftsman Vishnukamma, a jewel belonging to the Universal World Ruler was secured by the monk Nagasena in 44 BCE.<sup>5</sup> On this same date, Vishnukamma carved the jewel into the likeness of the Buddha in the Deva heaven (heaven of celestial beings), and proceeded to descend to the ancient Buddhist capital of Pataliputra,

India, where the king prepared offerings to the image in the monastery of Asoka.<sup>6</sup> It is here that the chronicles begin to diverge on matters of the Emerald Buddha's movements through important South and Southeast Asian cities. Generally, the chronicles agree that the image remained in India for over three hundred years until a civil war broke out in Pataliputra, and it was decided that the icon would be safer in Sri Lanka. The image was sent to Anuradhapura in 257 CE and housed in the royal temple of an unnamed king.<sup>7</sup> After two hundred years in Sri Lanka, the image began its journey to Pagan, Burma in order to be protected by King Anawartha (r. 1044-1077)<sup>8</sup> but, through a series of mishaps, landed in Angkor, Cambodia.<sup>9</sup> After its arrival in Angkor, dates become vague and inconsistent among the different chronicles and are not mentioned again until the image's discovery in Chiang Rai in 1434. During this four-century lapse in dating, the Emerald Buddha traveled to the Siamese cities of Ayutthaya and Kampaeng Phet prior to its discovery in Chiang Rai. The chronicles go on to further explain that the image remained in Chiang Rai until 1468, when King Tilok (r. 1442-1487) of Chiang Mai begged for the image to be sent and enshrined in his city.<sup>10</sup> The Emerald Buddha remained in Chiang Mai for eighty-four years, before it was moved to Luang Prabang and later to Vientiane in 1570.<sup>11</sup> The Emerald Buddha remained in Vientiane until 1778, when it was transported to the new Siamese capital, Thonburi, in 1782 and later to Bangkok in 1784, where it currently resides.<sup>12</sup> Descriptions of the Emerald Buddha's enshrinement in these cities not only trace its movements through space and time, but also map a sacred geography that is created through the image's travels.

The Emerald Buddha's movements to and from these specific cities were the direct result of political and religious instability. When a decline in practice and/or faith of a particular king and his kingdom was noticeable, the image was transported, either willingly or by force, to a new city. Here, the chronicles imply an intimate connection between Buddhist religiosity and political stability. A king was able to maintain political stability through his active worship and sponsorship of the Buddhist faith. In instances where he falters, political havoc ensues and the image is removed. In an example described in the Amarakatabuddharupanidana, King Senaraja<sup>13</sup> of Angkor was unable to suppress his desires and fury,

leading him to murder his son's playmate, and thus provoking the gods to send a deluge wiping out the kingdom and its inhabitants.<sup>14</sup> As a result, a monk removed the image from Angkor and the king of Ayutthaya claimed the image for himself. In an excerpt taken from the Amarakatabuddharupanidana, the author<sup>15</sup> makes it clear that King Senaraja's faith was lost but that the king of Ayutthaya, who had greater merit, became the new and rightful keeper of the Emerald Buddha.

Then a venerable priest took away the Emerald Buddha in a junk and with the guardians of the statue went to the North. They arrived at a village in which place the image was deposited. At that time a king, Addidkaraja as he was called, who was reigning over Sri Ayutthaya, went to Indapatha Nagara. Having got the Emerald Buddha in his possession, he brought it to Sri Ayutthaya. The inhabitants of this town, like their king, were harboring an extreme faith and they made preparations for offerings of all sorts.<sup>16</sup>

These events described in the chronicles impart importance to the Emerald Buddha through its ability to validate a particular king by its willingness or unwillingness to be enshrined in a kingdom at a certain place and time. Agency is divided between the Emerald Buddha and the king who possess the image. If a king is able to prove his great merit and religiosity, the Emerald Buddha avails itself to the king in order for him to spread the *dhamma* (Buddha's teachings), and protect his position and kingdom. Consequently, the Emerald Buddha image has become a political and religious palladium sought out by kings to legitimate themselves and their rule.

With the absence of pre-modern accounts and descriptions of Thai history,<sup>17</sup> it is tempting to rely on the Emerald Buddha chronicles as historical documents; however, the events described in the chronicles are not completely supported and reveal a body of literature that goes from a mythical to a more historical narrative. For example, the Emerald Buddha's travels to India, Sri Lanka, Burma and Cambodia cannot be substantiated by the archaeological record or by inscriptional evidence.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, descriptions of the Emerald Buddha's origins and travels dating prior to the fifteenth century and outside of modern-day Thailand and Laos are not historical, and should be read as an effort to ascribe religious and political meaning to the Emerald Buddha.

Inclusion of Pataliputra, Anuradhapura, Pagan, and Angkor help to create a sacred geography for the image because they were important religious and political centers. This sacred geography is meant to impart symbolic meaning to the image so that whomever became the keeper of the image was able to legitimate themselves through its history and their possession of it. The Emerald Buddha's current enshrinement in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha implies the religious fortitude of the temple's keeper, the King of Thailand, and the importance of Bangkok as a religious center as it has become a part of the Emerald Buddha's sacred geography.

The importance of Bangkok as a religious center is implied by the chronicles, as it is the current home of the Emerald Buddha. Its arrival into Bangkok follows the pattern of power and legitimacy crafted by the author(s) of the Ratanabimbavamsa, Jinakalamali, and Amarakatabuddharupaniḍana. However, because the chronicles date to no earlier than the late fifteenth century and have had no impact beyond the borders of modern day Thailand and Laos, the importance of Bangkok as a sacred center may only be viable in these countries.

While there are disjunctions between historical events associated with the Emerald Buddha image and the events described in the chronicles, it is clear that the author(s) and users of the texts had fully intended for the image to be used as a tool for religious and political legitimization.<sup>19</sup> The carefully crafted narrative makes sure to include both important religious centers such as Pataliputra, the site of the Third Council convened by King Asoka, and Anuradhapura, the site of the Fourth Council and the first time the Pali Tipitaka is documented textually. The texts also include important political centers, specifically kingdoms that were significant to the Southeast Asian region, such as Angkor and Pagan. In addition to these regionally important kingdoms, the chronicles also include a number of chief polities within modern day Thailand and Laos, grounding the image and its influence within a more localized geography and time period. As the geographical sphere of influence of the Emerald Buddha icon became more localized, the events described in the chronicles became more historically accurate, and thus more pertinent to its modern function as a national palladium.

### *The Emerald Buddha in Bangkok*

Prior to its enshrinement in Bangkok, the Emerald Buddha was placed in Wat Phra Kaeow (Temple of the Emerald Buddha) in Vientiane, Laos.<sup>20</sup> In 1778 a general by the name of Thong Duong, who later became the first king of the Chakri dynasty, captured the Emerald Buddha from Vientiane and brought it to King Taksin (r.1767-1782) of Thonburi. The Thonburi period began and ended with King Taksin who was forcefully removed, in part, for his unorthodox interpretation of Buddhist kingship and perceived decline of religious merit. In following with descriptions in the chronicles, Taksin's lack of merit resulted in the loss of his political office and the removal of the Emerald Buddha from Thonburi. Taksin was replaced by his general, Thong Duong, who reclaimed the image for himself.

Upon claiming the throne, Thong Duong took the title of King Ramathibodi<sup>21</sup> (posthumously referred to as Phra Phutthayotfa Chulalok but generally referred to as King Rama I; r. 1782-1809) and moved his capital to Bangkok, where he immediately began construction of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha to house the new capital's palladium. Construction of the temple began in 1782, and two years later the Emerald Buddha was enshrined in the *ubosot* (ordination hall).<sup>22</sup> The Emerald Buddha, if we recall, was carved into the likeness of the Buddha from the Universal World Ruler's wish-fulfilling jewel, thereby imparting the image with potent royal and religious symbolism through its form and material. The temple, much like the Emerald Buddha, serves both a royal and religious function, as it is at once a dynastic chapel and a Buddhist temple.

Since its construction in 1782, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha has been generously supported by each successive Chakri king in the form of artistic renovations and conservation, architectural additions and the addition of *objets d'art*.<sup>23</sup> In its current state, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha includes an *ubosot*, image halls, reliquary mounds, out-door pavilions, belfries and libraries, all typical structures found in monastic architecture. The temple buildings, however, make up just one part of a collection of buildings found at the complex, which includes the Grand Palace, a royal pantheon dedicated to the Chakri dynasty, and a museum. This collection of royal and religious structures is not typical of Thai monastic architecture

nor is the lack of monastic spaces within the complex. Unlike most temples, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha is not located within a monastery. Likewise, there are no permanent living quarters for monks in the complex. The lack of a monastic presence suggests that the temple functions primarily as a repository for the meritorious giving of Chakri kings in addition to serving as a commemorative space for the preservation of the Chakri dynasty and the Buddha's teachings.<sup>24</sup>

The Temple of the Emerald Buddha as it stands today has been greatly altered by the subtraction and addition of buildings, monuments and *objets d'art* both religious and non-religious in subject. These additions by each Chakri king, presumably, reflect each individual king's taste and political agenda. However, certain buildings and decorative elements such as the *ubosot* and overall painting program of the temple space have remained unchanged. These unchanged details of the temple play a pivotal role in creating a cosmically charged space for the temple's main icon, the Emerald Buddha, while also designating the temple itself as a sacral center.

### Enshrining the Emerald Buddha

Unlike Hindu temple complexes, such as Angkor Wat, Theravada Buddhist monastic architecture—specifically the Temple of the Emerald Buddha—do not make direct symbolic references to cosmogonic or cosmological planning.<sup>25</sup> Instead, Buddhist cosmology is expressed in the decoration of temple buildings, typically in the form of painted wall murals. This is suggested at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha where painted murals in the *ubosot*, which include the *Traiphum* (Three Worlds), *Jatakas* (Previous Life Stories), and Life Stories of the Buddha—coupled with the sculptural image of the Emerald Buddha—is meant to designate the temple in general, and the *ubosot* specifically, as a sacral center. A sacral center is a space where the Buddha is made present through his teachings, the *sangha* (monkhood), and his physical presence in the form of images or relics. Paintings of the Buddha's lives in the ordination hall are one such mechanism that creates a biography for the Buddha by making him physically and spiritually “present” in the space. Robert L. Brown has argued for such in his article “Narrative as Icon: The *Jataka* Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture.”

They [*Jataka* and Life stories] are there to indicate, to make “actual,” the Buddha through his life and history. They do this simply by being there, and perhaps are best seen as allowing the Buddha through his “history”: to participate with the monks and lay worshipers. The purpose is to make the Buddha's presence felt, his forms and teachings manifest.<sup>26</sup>

The Buddha's physical presence in the *ubosot*, manifest in the green jewel icon, situates the temple as a sacral center as it is a place and a space where the Buddha is actualized. Paintings that are found directly behind and flanking the Emerald Buddha include images of the “Three Worlds”. In one particular painting, the Buddha is seen descending from the *Tavatimsa* heaven. What this suggests is that the Emerald Buddha, seated on his throne, with an image of the *Tavatimsa* heaven behind him is acting as an axis-mundi, connecting this world to that of heaven and thereby locating the *ubosot*, specifically, and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, generally, within the Buddhist cosmography. This relationship between the temple's *ubosot* and the Buddhist cosmos is further inferred by the Emerald Buddha's elaborate five-tiered throne, which is meant to symbolize the five peaks of Mt. Sumeru.<sup>27</sup> A mountainous landscape is created for the image's throne by arranging Buddha images in tiers ascending towards the Emerald Buddha. Royal five-tiered umbrellas are strategically located on each corner of the throne's five tiers further emphasizing the verticality of the Emerald Buddha's throne and the image's status above all other Buddha images both absent and present. All of these factors aide in the creation of an internal cosmology at the temple, one that does not rely on an external sacred axis. And, thus, further implies the sacrality and centrality of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha to modern Theravada Buddhism in Thailand and Laos.<sup>28</sup>

### Magnifying the World Axis

While it can be argued that all Buddhist monastic architecture designates a sacred space—one that is articulated by its decoration, architectural planning and/or enshrinement of holy objects—the Temple of the Emerald Buddha is unique in that it houses the Emerald Buddha. The mytho-history and travels associated with the Emerald Buddha allows the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok to exist on its own internal sacred axis because the Emerald Buddha is an

axis-mundi. As the chronicles state, and as history has indicated,<sup>29</sup> the Emerald Buddha's enshrinement in a particular location situates that place as a sacred center because it is the presence of the Emerald Buddha icon that marks the country, city or temple as an apex of Buddhist learning and living.<sup>30</sup> As described in the *Amarakatabuddharupanidana*:

Nagasena had through his supernatural knowledge a prescience of future events, and he made this predication: "This image of the Buddha is assuredly going to give to religion the most brilliant importance in five lands, that is Lankadvipa (Sri Lanka), Ramalakka (Cambodia), Dvaravati (central Thailand), Chieng Mai (northern Thailand) and Lan Chang (Laos)."<sup>31</sup>

The Emerald Buddha's symbolism as an axis-mundi is highlighted and magnified in the *ubosot* of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, where paintings and decorative and religious objects are used to create a well orchestrated visual program that has, for the most part, been present since the temple's conception. During the first reign King Rama I commissioned and had installed in the *ubosot* paintings of the Buddha's previous and historical life, paintings of the Buddhist cosmology, the icon's throne base and two seasonal outfits for the Emerald Buddha (one for summer and one for the rainy season).<sup>32</sup> As previously discussed, inclusion of paintings depicting the *Jatakas* and the life stories brought the Emerald Buddha image to life, making him physically present in the temple space. Likewise, the inclusion of the Buddhist cosmology helped to directly associate the icon as an axis-mundi.

To further emphasize the Emerald Buddha's cosmological aspects, the two seasonal costumes associated the icon with natural and cosmic forces.<sup>33</sup> All of these efforts taken by Rama I were meant to magnify the Emerald Buddha's importance, and, by association, the king's own significance. The ritual changing of the two seasonal outfits were officiated by the king and symbolized his mediation between the physical world and the cosmos.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, the seasonal costumes visually manifested the royal nature of the icon as a *Buddha-Chakkavatti*. This association is made apparent by the rich materials used to fashion the costumes and the royal crowns and decorations that complete each outfit. This detail becomes significant in the third reign where a direct connection between the Buddha and Chakri kings is made.

Over time, each Chakri king has successively added to the visual program in the *ubosot* through the donation of Buddha images and decorative objects. Each individual king's contribution to the temple was inspired, in part, by the temple's need for reconstruction or conservation, the political or religious climate in Bangkok, and the pure enjoyment of adding to the beauty and religious significance of the complex. While Rama II (Phra Phutthaloetla; r. 1809-1824) was a patron of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, his major contributions to Thai architectural building took the form of domestic structures and city planning. This makes sense as the Chakri dynasty had, for the first time, an opportunity to focus on domestic and internal urban infrastructure building.<sup>35</sup> His son and successor, King Rama III (Phra Nangklao; r. 1824-1851) was the most active patron of the temple: major renovations were done and buildings were included during his reign.<sup>36</sup> His most notable additions to the *ubosot*, for the purposes of this paper, were the inclusion of the five-tiered throne, a third seasonal costume, and two large royal Buddha or *Buddha-Chakkavatti* images. The addition of the throne, as previously discussed, marked the *ubosot* as a sacral space as it represented Mt. Sumeru. The addition of a third seasonal costume gave the king another opportunity to have physical contact with the image, further linking his association with the icon.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, the two *Buddha-Chakkavatti* that flank the Emerald Buddha were named after the first and second Chakri kings.<sup>38</sup> The inclusion of these sculptures helped to further solidify the intimate relationship between the Chakri kings and the Emerald Buddha image by associating all three images to a particular event in the Buddha's life. The event represented by these types of images (*Buddha-Chakkavatti*) conveys a particular moment in the Buddha's life where he transformed himself into the Universal Ruler to subdue an unruly monarch.<sup>39</sup> The common iconography between all three sculptures suggests that they have a shared history, and that the enshrinement of the Emerald Buddha is not only a sign of the Chakri's religious merit in the present, but also a sign of the icon's shared karmic destiny with the Chakri kings.

In order to ensure that the karmic legacy of the Chakri dynasty is favorable, continued support of the Buddhist faith is necessary. While patronage of the

Temple of the Emerald Buddha is not the only form of support that Chakri kings provide, it is a very public display of their continued commitment to Buddhism.

In examining the patronage habits of the Chakri kings at the temple, certain patterns become clear. During the first three reigns, a concerted effort is made to create cosmically charged and symbolic spaces at the temple complex. This is made apparent by the aforementioned painting program in the *ubosot*, the Emerald Buddha's throne and its seasonal costumes. This is logical as the main purpose of a Buddhist temple is to provide a space for the worship, learning and dissemination of the Buddha's teachings: as the appearance of this place becomes more symbolic and cosmically charged, it is perceived to be increasingly effective in disseminating the Buddha's ideas.

By the fourth and fifth reigns, a well-programmed architectural and visual program was created at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, leaving Kings Rama IV (Mongkut; r. 1851-1868) and Rama V (Chulalongkorn; r. 1868-1910) with an altogether different agenda than their predecessors. During these reigns, efforts were focused on visually expanding the Emerald Buddha's, and by extension the king's, religious and political sphere of influence. These efforts were achieved through the colonization of regional religious symbols and icons such as a miniature model of Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Javanese Buddha images from Candi Plaosan. The stone replica of Angkor Wat was commissioned by King Mongkut, and finished by his son King Chulalongkorn. After its completion the model was installed outside of the Phra Mondop (library) at the temple complex. Its inclusion was intended to display Cambodia's vassal status to Thailand at the time. It was also during the fifth reign that Buddha images from Candi Plaosan were brought to the temple and again installed outside of the Phra Mondop.<sup>40</sup> The inclusion of Javanese Buddhas at the temple may be less a statement of political colonization and more an effort of beautifying the temple space, as Java was never a Thai vassal state. Nonetheless, the inclusion of the Candi Plaosan Buddhas highlights their subordinate status to the temple's main icon, the Emerald Buddha.

The inclusion of these and similar objects can be read as an effort to elevate the importance of the Emerald Buddha icon, the temple where it is enshrined, and Thailand as a religious center. Their placement outside

of the temple's most important building, the *ubosot*, suggests their inferior importance to the Emerald Buddha icon.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, their location outside of the library may further indicate or symbolize Thailand's self-perceived status as a nineteenth century center for Buddhist learning. To return to the Javanese Buddha images, there are a total of four directional Buddhas each with a different *mudra*. Their placement at the four corners of the Phra Mondop refer to the four cardinal directions making the library a centralized space, a center of Buddhist studies, if you will. By appropriating and exhibiting these symbols, one can argue that Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn were implying their political, religious and cultural authority over Cambodia and Indonesia, and the importance of Thailand as the new sacred center of Southeast Asia.<sup>42</sup>

Patronage since the fourth and fifth reigns at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha can be characterized by an interest in reaffirming the king's support of the Buddhist *sangha* and maintaining the temple complex. During the sixth reign, King Vajiravudh (r.1910-1925) had turned the royal pantheon hall into a space dedicated to Chakri kings. Near life-size images of past Chakri kings were placed in the hall, and were intended to be commemorated in the same manner as Buddhist images found at the temple complex.<sup>43</sup> The inclusion of images of past and present Chakri kings, a tradition that has been maintained through to the present reign, makes a direct connection between kingship and Buddhism. As the chronicles suggest, the Chakri kings must continue to support the *sangha* or they will lose their authority to rule and presumably their ability to keep the Emerald Buddha. Their images, located in the Chakri image hall, physically place them at the temple at all times. The images can be read as proxies worshipping the Emerald Buddha and looking after the temple complex on their behalf. Furthermore, the public display of these images demonstrates the kings' meritorious giving and patronage of the temple to worshippers and visitors. The Chakri kings continued patronage through the donation of funds for restoration and conservation and through the donation of objects are further signs of their meritorious giving and continued support of the Buddhist *sangha*. The most recent projects include large-scale restoration and conservation of temple buildings and decorations under Kings Rama VII (Prajadhipok; r. 1925-1935) and Rama IX (Bhumibol

Adulyadej; r. 1946-present) who readied the temple for the country's 150<sup>th</sup> and bicentennial celebrations, respectively.<sup>44</sup>

### Conclusion

As keepers of the Emerald Buddha, Thai kings must demonstrate that they have greater merit and moral authority than others in order to maintain both their right to rule and possession of the Emerald Buddha. Continued patronage of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha by Chakri kings has become a very public means of demonstrating their moral authority.<sup>45</sup> As discussed, patronage in the form of temple restoration, conservation and donation of buildings and images is a visual display of their support of the *sangha*. Indeed, visitors to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha are intended to be inspired by the generosity and devotion of the kings to Buddhism. Using the Chakri kings as their role models, Thai Buddhist practitioners should follow in their footsteps and support the *sangha* according to their means. Active support of the *sangha* by all Thais ensures that the Emerald Buddha continues to be enshrined in Bangkok.

The importance of the Emerald Buddha as a palladium to the nation is not lost to most Thais. Its significance is seen in the Chakri kings' and court's continued patronage of the temple where the image is enshrined, and in its active worship by the Thai people. Today, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha has become the top destination for visitors, both local and foreign, traveling to Bangkok. This is no doubt the result of the king's active patronage of the temple and its containment of beautiful art and architecture including the Emerald Buddha. The casual visitor or tourist is most likely unknowing of the significance of the Emerald Buddha and the sacred geography that it has created through its travels throughout important Buddhist centers; however, by traveling to the temple they continue to mark the temple as a place of pilgrimage, religious or otherwise.

As the various chronicles have suggested, the king who possess the favor of the Emerald Buddha can claim his superior religious and political authority to all others. The enshrinement of the Emerald Buddha in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok for over two centuries has been used by the Chakri kings to demonstrate their moral rectitude and the importance

of Thailand as a sacred center of modern-day Theravada Buddhism. Furthermore, unlike other Theravada Buddhist temples, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha is unique in that it does not need to be a part of an external sacred axis because of its very enshrinement of the Emerald Buddha, and the internal cosmology that has been created around and for the icon. The visual program orchestrated by the Chakri kings is a testament to their religious and political savvy, which will without a doubt ensure the Emerald Buddha's enshrinement in Bangkok for years to come.

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> There exist a number of chronicles, which describe the Emerald Buddha. Scholars including Frank Reynolds believe there was a chronicle originally written in Pali that is no longer extant, but we have later versions in Thai, Khmer, Lao, Burmese and English.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Reynolds, George Coedes, Hiram Woodward and Robert Lingat notes that *Ratanabimbavamsa* was probably written during the Sukhothai period sometime around 1450 while the chapter relating to the Emerald Buddha in the *Jinakalamali* was written in Chiangmai in the first half of the sixteenth century. The *Amarakatabuddharupanidana* was written some time in second half of the sixteenth century in Vientiane.

<sup>3</sup> Nowhere in the Indian, Sinhalese and Angkorian annals is the Emerald Buddha mentioned. Instead, accounts of the Emerald Buddha are mentioned in the Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya, Ratanakosin and the Vientiane chronicles.

<sup>4</sup> Frank E. Reynolds, "The Holy Emerald Jewel: Some Aspects of Buddhist Symbolism And Political Legitimation in Thailand and Laos," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos and Burma*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (ANIMA books, 1978), 176-178.

<sup>5</sup> The inclusion of Indra in the chronicles is important because the god, described and depicted with green colored skin, carrying a *vajra* (thunderbolt) and riding on his elephant mount, is associated with bringing forth rain. The importance of rain to rulership is evident in the *Vessantara Jataka*, which retells the last of Shakyamuni's previous births before becoming the Buddha. The story explains that a prince by the name of *Vessantara* sought to perfect the virtue of giving. Along with giving away his own worldly possessions, he gave away his kingdom's rain producing white elephant, which led to the prince's expulsion and eventual asceticism. Here the story makes an explicit link between rain and rulership.

<sup>6</sup> Karen Schur Narula, *Voyage of the Emerald Buddha* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7. In addition to: Camille Notton, trans., *The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha* (Bangkok: The Bangkok Times Press, 1931), 16-18.

<sup>7</sup> Camille Notton, trans., *The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha* (Bangkok: The Bangkok Times Press, 1931), 21. The exclusion of King Gathabhaga (r. 254-267 CE), the monarch whose reign dates coincide with the 257 CE date mentioned, from the Chronicles may indicate his unimportance to Theravada Buddhist history. What is mentioned is that the image was deposited in the Meghagiri temple.

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that there is a six hundred year lapse between when the Emerald Buddha image is purported to have arrived in Pagan and the king with whom the image is associated. Most likely, this association is due to the importance of King Anawartha's fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka and subsequent reformation of the Pagan *sangha*.

<sup>9</sup> The chronicles explain that King Anawartha, through his own action, flew to Sri Lanka and had the Emerald Buddha along with a copy of the *Tipitaka* (Pali canon) placed in a boat bound for Pagan; however, the boat went astray and landed in Angkor. After some dispute with the Angkorian king, it was decided that both the Emerald Buddha image and the *Tipitaka* would be returned to King Anawartha; however, upon departure from Cambodia King Anawartha forgot the Emerald Buddha image and so it remained in Angkor Thom.

<sup>10</sup> The Emerald Buddha was enshrined in Wat Chedi Luang in 1481.

<sup>11</sup> In 1522 King Jethavansaraja's father died. His father was the king of Luang Prabang and it was decided that King Jethavansaraja would leave Chiang Mai and become king of Luang Prabang. Upon his departure he took with him the Emerald Buddha image.

<sup>12</sup> Prior to 1939, Thailand was referred to as Siam and its people the Siamese. For the purposes of this paper, I will use the term Siam and Siamese when talking about events in history that took place prior to 1939.

<sup>13</sup> It is unclear when King Senrāja ruled Angkor as the name "Senrāja" does not correspond to any official titles or posthumous names used by Angkorian kings.

<sup>14</sup> The chronicle explains that King Senarāja's son had a pet fly which he loved and cared for. One day the king's son was playing with a friend who accidentally killed the fly, which deeply upset his son causing him great pain. Upon hearing the news the king became enraged and had his son's playmate drowned in a lake. The underlying Buddhist message, here, is that neither the King nor his son were able to suppress their desires and attachment to the material world.

<sup>15</sup> The author of this text is unknown; however, several scholars including Frank Reynolds, George Coedes and Robert Lingat have argued that the author was most likely from Vientiane.

<sup>16</sup> Notton, 27.

<sup>17</sup> The devastating defeat of Ayutthaya by the Burmese in 1767 led to the burning and sacking of the capital city, which also resulted in the loss of historical documents, religious texts and other valuable cultural materials.

<sup>18</sup> There exists an early Khmer inscription dating to the eleventh century that states that a holy stone was worshipped in Cambodia during the reign of Suryavarmen I (r. 1001-1050); however, there is no conclusive evidence at the moment to confirm that the Cambodian holy stone correlates to the Emerald Buddha. Earliest confirmation of the Emerald Buddha's possession is dated to the rule of King Tilok of Lannathai (r. 1442-1487), who brought it from Chiang Rai to Chiang Mai in 1468. Stylistic characteristics of the image such as its rounded body and fleshy torso, along with its heart-shaped face suggests that it is a late fifteenth century Chiang Saen object.

<sup>19</sup> The original author or authors of the Emerald Buddha Chronicles is unknown.

<sup>20</sup> The title of "Wat Phra Kaeow," which translates to the "Temple of the Jeweled Buddha" is used in both Laos and in Thailand to refer to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. The Emerald Buddha temple in Vientiane continues to attract practitioners who go there to worship the empty throne where the Emerald Buddha was once enshrined.

<sup>21</sup> The title of Ramathibodhi is a direct reference to the first king of the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767). At this juncture of time, the glory days of the former Thai capital was a desired ideal, one that was replicated in the architectural building of Bangkok's government and royal structures.

<sup>22</sup> The *ubosot* is the most important building in a Buddhist temple as it's a space dedicated to the ordination of new monks. The *ubosot* at the Temple of the Emerald was used exclusively for the ordination of princes and kings into the monkhood. The current king, King Bhumibol, and his son the crown prince were both ordained at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

<sup>23</sup> Under the sponsorship of King Rama III (r. 1824-1851), the Temple of the Emerald Buddha was completely restored because of fire and decay in order to make it presentable for the fiftieth year anniversary of the Chakri dynasty. The temple continues, up to the present, to be renovated every fifty years.

<sup>24</sup> Within the context of Buddhism, merit is the product of rightful action and thought. The collection of merit throughout one's lifetime determines the outcome of an individual's karmic destiny. Merit can be collected in a number of ways one of which is in the form of alms giving to the monkhood.

<sup>25</sup> Many art historians including Betty Gosling and Daigoro Chihara have argued that the architectural plan of Theravada Buddhist monasteries lack the same cosmological symbolism seen in Hindu temples, which are organized to represent a microcosm of the universe. See Betty Gosling, *A Chronology of Religious Architecture at Sukhothai, Late Thirteenth to Early Fifteenth Century*, (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies. Reprinted, Chiang Mai: Silkwood Books, 1998), and Daigoro Chihara, *Hindu-Buddhist Architecture in Southeast Asia*, (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Robert L. Brown, "The Jataka Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture," in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Tradition of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 73.

<sup>27</sup> Mt. Sumeru is located at the center of the celestial and terrestrial world.

<sup>28</sup> There is still great contention in Thailand and Laos over the Emerald Buddha. Many in Laos have argued that the Emerald Buddha was stolen by the Thais.

<sup>29</sup> The chronicles have made it very clear that the Emerald Buddha's presence in a particular place marks it as a center of Buddhism. Take for example the inclusion of India and Sri Lanka. India, the home of the Buddha and of Buddhism, was the first center of the faith and upon its decline Buddhism became centered in Sri Lanka. Later and more historically accurate accounts of the Emerald Buddha in Thailand and Laos can also be interpreted as markings of Buddhist centers as proper Buddhist kingship in Southeast Asia was almost always followed by a reformation of the *sangha*. This type of reform was seen in Pagan under King Anawartha, King Tilok of Lanna and later King Mongkut of the Ratanakosin sought to purify Buddhism during their rule in order to claim that under their kingship the purest and truest form of the *dharmma* was being practiced. King Tilok's Buddhist reform was enacted at the time of his possession of the Emerald Buddha; this is substantiated by both the chronicles concerning the Emerald Buddha and the Chiang Mai chronicles.

<sup>30</sup> The perceived apogee of Buddhist learning and living by the enshrinement of the Emerald Buddha in a particular location is the result of the icon's importance to the legitimization of kings in mainland Southeast Asia.

<sup>31</sup> Notton, 16

<sup>32</sup> Frank Reynolds notes that the Emerald Buddha was outfitted with seasonal costumes as early as the mid fifteenth century when it was enshrined in Chiang Mai.

<sup>33</sup> Brahmanic ceremonies and rituals adopted by Thai kings vest them with the powers of regulating the seasons, and with agricultural fertility and productivity. The Chakri king's changing of the Emerald Buddha's seasonal costumes represents the syncretism of this particular Brahmanical ritual and Buddhism in Thailand.

<sup>34</sup> Traditionally, it had been the king who officiates the ritual changing of the seasonal costumes of the Emerald Buddha; however, recently the HRH Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn and his sister HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn have officiated the changing of the costumes when their father, HM King Bhumipol Adulyadej, was unable to attend the ceremonies.

<sup>35</sup> During the first reign, much effort was placed on erecting state buildings and protecting the new capital from ever present threats from the Burmese.

<sup>36</sup> His activities were the result of a fire that broke out at the temple and the fiftieth year anniversary of the Chakri dynasty.

<sup>37</sup> During the changing of the robes, the king removes the Emerald Buddha's existing costume and lustrates it with holy water before placing a new costume on the image.

<sup>38</sup> Maurizio Peleggi has argued that the two royal Buddhas were intended to be "portraits" of Kings Rama I and II. See Maurizio Peleggi, *The Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Reynolds, 183; also, Alexander B. Griswold, "Dated Buddha Images of Northern Siam," *Artibus Asiae*, Supplement 16 (1957).

<sup>40</sup> The Candi Plaosan Buddha images currently located outside of the Phra Mondop are copies of the originals, which are now displayed in the museum. It should also be noted that the *History of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha* guidebook, written by M.C. Subhadraradis Diskul, claims that the Buddha images are from Borobudur; however, stylistic analysis confirms that the Buddha images outside of the Phra Mondop are from Candi Plaosan.

<sup>41</sup> The *ubosot* is the heart of any Buddhist temple, and is considered by Buddhists to be the most important structure in a monastic complex. It is the place where monks are ordained. Without the proper ordination the faith cannot exist because it is the *sangha* that perpetuates the teachings of the Buddha and provides a field of merit for lay worshippers to participate in the religion.

<sup>42</sup> Angkor Wat and Candi Plaosan are important religious monuments, and represent important religious and political centers in the Southeast Asian region.

<sup>43</sup> The Chakri image hall is opened twice a year to the public, once during the New Year (Songkran) and again during Chakri day. During the hall's opening, visitors prostrate in front of the images and usually pray in their presence.

<sup>44</sup> At this juncture of my research I have found little information regarding King Rama VIII's (Ananda Mahidol; r. 1935-1946) role at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. This is most likely the result of the 1932 coup d'état, which abolished absolute monarchy in Thailand, the king's youth, and his residence in Switzerland.

<sup>45</sup> The Temple of the Emerald Buddha was once only accessible by the royal family, members of the court, political dignitaries and Buddhist monks. The temple has been open to the general public since the 1960s.