

*THE ROYAL CEREMONIES
PAST AND PRESENT*



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INTRODUCTION

THE ROYAL CEREMONIES : PAST AND PRESENT

The ancient royal ceremonies described in the book entitled '*A Treatise on the Royal Ceremonies Held Throughout the Year*' by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) are monthly ceremonies traditionally performed by the King.

They spread over 12 months and, henceforth, derive the renowned title literally translated as **The Twelve Months of Royal Ceremonies**.

The royal ceremonies highlighted in this book : *The Royal Ceremonies : Past and Present*, vary from those performed in the Ayutthaya Period. Some ceremonies have been added by the King, while others have been considered no longer relevant to the times and have been subsequently abandoned.

The royal ceremonies traditionally performed in the Ayutthaya Period appear in the following order, starting from the fifth lunar month which was at that time regarded as the beginning of the New Year, as recorded in the Codes of the Ayutthaya Period :

- 5th lunar month : the Phadetsok Ceremony – The Royal Alms Giving Ceremony
- 6th lunar month : the Phaisakhaya, the Royal Ploughing Ceremony
- 7th lunar month : the offering of water for washing the Royal Feet – The Royal Foot Bathing Ceremony
- 8th lunar month : the Buddhist Lent
- 9th lunar month : the Tulaphara Ceremony
- 10th lunar month : the Phatharabot Ceremony
- 11th lunar month : the Asayuchaya Boat Racing
- 12th lunar month : the Loy Krathong Ceremony
- 1st lunar month : the Triyampawai Ceremony, the Giant Swing Ceremony

- 2nd lunar month : the Busayabhisek Ceremony
- 3rd lunar month : the Thanayathah Ceremony
- 4th lunar month : the Samphacharachint Ceremony, the Royal Ceremony to celebrate the end of the year.

In 1804, during the reign of King Rama I, the ancient codes were revised. However, no alteration was made insofar as the royal ceremonies were concerned. They retained the same form in writing, but in practice, only the royal ceremonies of the 5th, 6th, 10th, 12th, 2nd and 4th lunar months were actually performed.

In this respect King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, explained that in addition to the royal ceremonies performed in Bangkok, namely those of the 5th, 6th, 10th, 12th, 2nd and 4th lunar months, new royal ceremonies to match the number of the royal ceremonies of the ancient times were to be adopted.

In 1864 Wat Rachapradit Sathitmahasimaram was founded by King Chulalongkorn to the east of the Grand Palace. There, in the Royal Chapel, can be seen mural paintings of the royal ceremonies spreading over 12 months starting from the right hand corner front panel to the back of the Royal Chapel. Those royal ceremonies are as follows : the Royal Ceremony of Offering Shrimp Pancakes ; the Giant Swing Ceremony ; the Royal Food – Offering Ceremony on the Occasion of the Chinese New Year ; the Royal Ceremony to Celebrate the End of the Old Year ; the Songkran Festival ; the Royal Ceremony of Visakha Puja and the Royal Ploughing Ceremony ; the Royal Salakhaphat Ceremony ; the Royal Ordination Ceremony ; the Royal Tonsure Ceremony ; the Royal Ceremony To Call For Rain ; the Royal Ceremony For Preparing Celestial Rice ; the Royal Kathin Ceremony ; the Loy Krathong Festival.

Some of these Royal Ceremonies presented here were added during the reign of King Rama IV of the Rattanakosin Period. In the present days, however, not all the royal ceremonies depicted in the mural paintings are performed : some are rarely performed, some occasionally performed and some have already been abolished.

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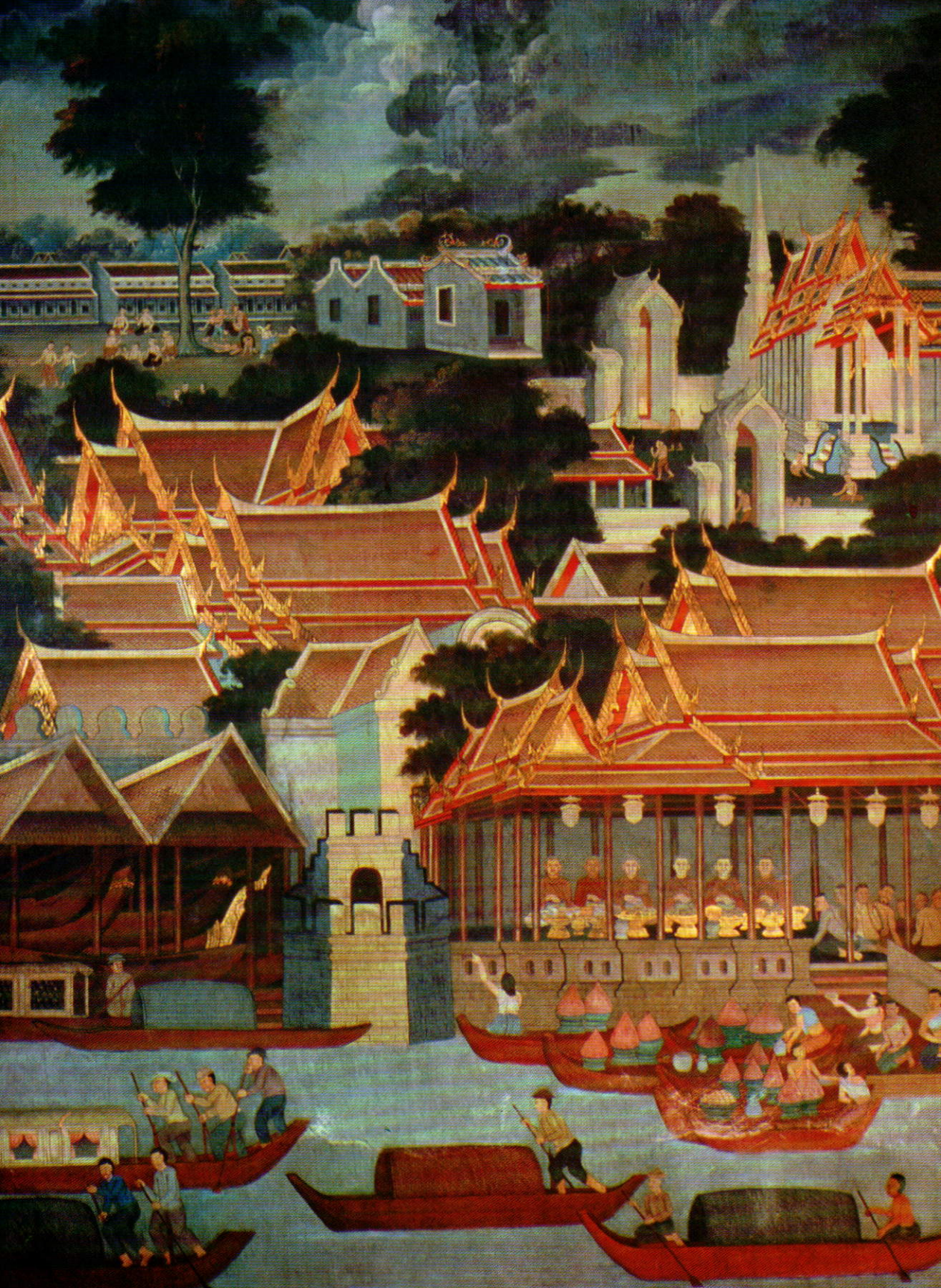




JANUARY

The Triyampawai Ceremony : the Giant Swing Ceremony

The Giant Swing Ceremony was originally a Brahmin ceremony performed to pay homage to the God Shiva. According to Hindu legend, the God Shiva spends 10 days each year visiting earth. To mark this occasion, 4 people, representing the earth guardians, would perform on the giant swing. The Codes of the Rattanakosin Period state that the Giant Swing Ceremony should be performed during the 1st lunar month. This was later changed to the 2nd lunar month to conform to the Brahmin tradition. The ceremony was held in front of Wat Suthat, where the frame of the Giant Swing still stands to this day, while the King and Queen watched the ceremony from a gold silk pavilion. The Giant Swing Ceremony was performed annually from the reign of King Rama I until the reign of King Rama VII when the country suffered a severe economic downfall. As the Giant Swing Ceremony required a large budget, the government subsequently abolished it. It was noted that the Giant Swing Ceremony was performed for the last time in 1934. In later years money has been allocated to Brahmin priests to perform only the offerings to the God Shiva instead.



FEBRUARY

The Royal Food Offering Ceremony

on the occasion of the Chinese New Year

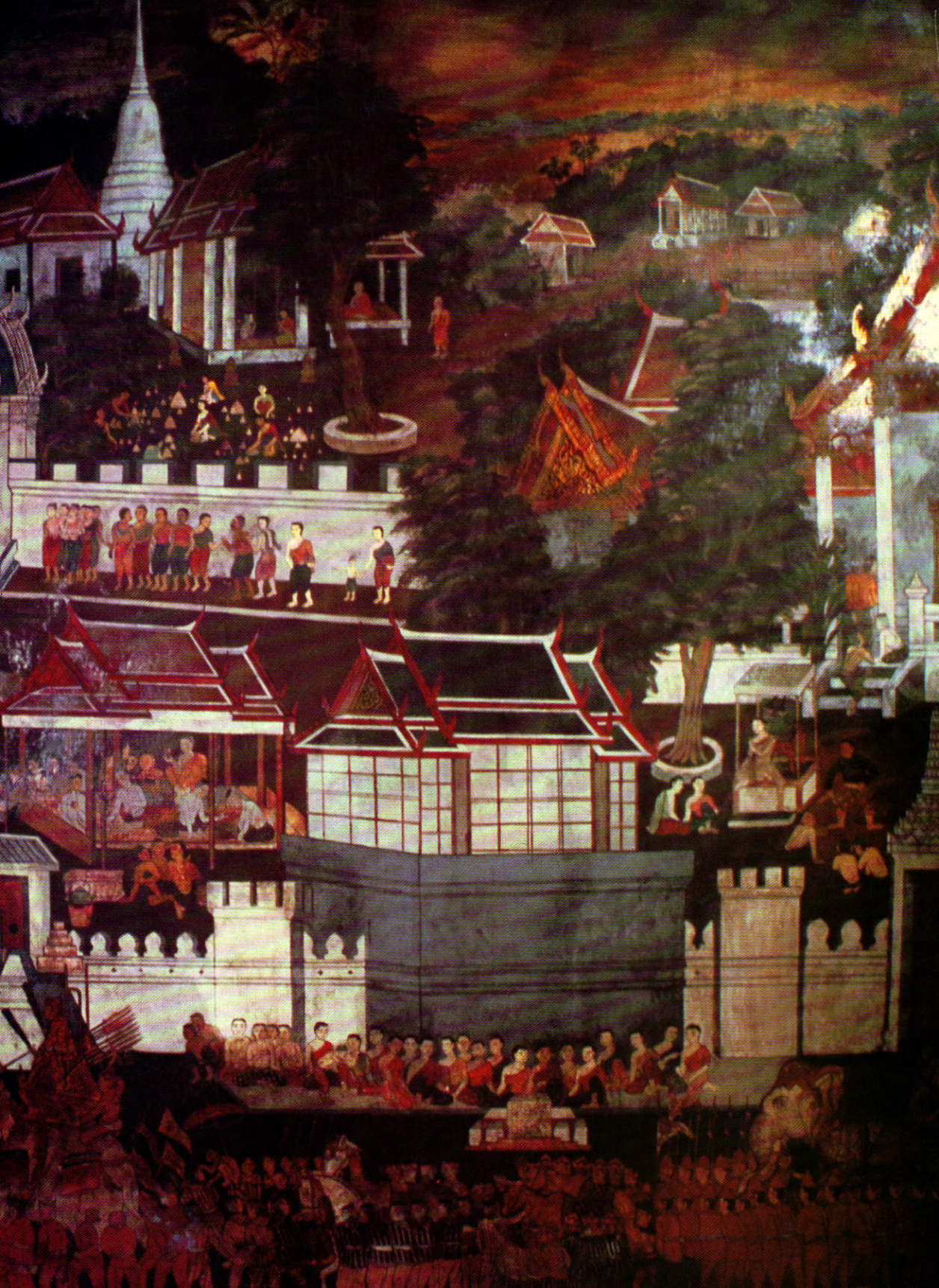
This ceremony was introduced by King Rama III who remarked that the Royal Household received an abundant amount of fresh food such as pork and poultry from the Chinese inhabitants at the time of the Chinese New Year. In turn the King offered food to the Buddhist monks at the Rachakitwinitchai Throne Hall. The feast lasted 3 days. Members of the Royal Family and the Royal Household also participated in the royal merit making ceremony. They arranged boats laden with a special kind of Thai dish called Khanom Jeen, or Chinese noodles, to be stationed by the Royal pier of the Grand Palace. After the food offering each monk was presented with a saffron robe, candles, incense sticks, betel leaves, areca nuts and a packet of green tea leaves. There was no chanting in this ceremony. A feast for the court members was scheduled thereafter. The ceremony ended with the releasing of fish into the river, performed in the presence of the King by one of his sons. The ceremony was slightly revised in the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV) in that the main dish served in this ceremony was altered. He felt that it was inappropriate to serve what is essentially—despite its misleading name—a Thai dish at Chinese New Year. By royal command a more traditional Chinese—style meat soup, called ‘Kao lao’ was served instead.



MARCH

The Royal Ceremony to celebrate the end of the Thai year

According to the lunar calender, the traditional Thai year ends in the fourth lunar month, March. The ceremony derived from Sri Lanka during the reign of King Baromakosa of the Ayutthaya Period and practised up to the mid-Rattanakosin Period, was a religious one designed to expel evil from the city. Monks chanted throughout the night and cannons were periodically fired all around the city. Later, in the reign of King Rama VI, three royal ceremonies, namely the Oath Taking Ceremony, the Phadetsok Songkran Ceremony and the Royal Ceremony to celebrate the end of the Thai year were combined by royal command into one ceremony called the Royal Songkran Ceremony.



APRIL

Songkran Festival

Traditionally the fifth lunar month is the beginning of the Thai year and Songkran Day marks Thai New Year's Day. 'Songkran' means a move, which signifies the sun's move into the first house of the zodiac.

On the eve of Songkran Day, important Buddha images are assembled in the Dusidabhirom Pavilion where a chapter of monks chant special passages to bestow blessings upon the palace and its dwellers. Songkran Day is normally attended by H.M. the King, who graciously presents food and other offerings to monks and sprinkles fragrant water over the Buddha images. The day after Songkran Day a royal bathing rite called Songmuradhabhisek is held under a nine-tiered umbrella with water drawn from four ponds in Suphan Buri province. After the bathing, H.M. the King is offered lustral water from a sacred conch by the Chief Brahmin, though this part of the royal ceremony has now been abolished. The procession of elephants and horses seen in the mural painting originated in the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV). It was to mark an auspicious occasion and was held twice a year, in the fifth lunar month and in the eleventh lunar month. This has been discarded.

For the public, Songkran Festival is a time for rejoicing and merit making. The day begins with the early morning food-offerings to monks. People may go to the temple to make merit, sprinkle fragrant water over Buddha images and ask for blessings from the monks. Some also build sand pagodas or sand mounds in the grounds of the temple as a form of traditional merit making so that the temple authority may make use of the offered sand in maintenance work. Songkran is also a time for people to pay respect to elderly members of their family and those of superior ranks by pouring fragrant water onto their hands and in return they receive their blessings.



MAY

Visakha Puja Day

Visakha Puja day, perhaps the most important of all Buddhist holy days, commemorates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Lord Buddha. It coincides with the full moon day of the 6th lunar month and is remembered by Buddhists all over the world.

Ceremonies to mark this occasion have been observed in Thailand since ancient times and are still practised today with the same reverent devotion.

Historical records from the Sukhothai period show that on Visakha Puja Day the people of the Kingdom strictly adhered to the eight Buddhist precepts and attended temples to listen to sermons given. Merit making and almsgiving were conducted in various manners, and in the evening, the King would lead the entire court, together with his subjects, in a candlelight procession around the city's main temples, pagodas or shrines.

When the capital of the Kingdom was moved to Ayutthaya, many customs and beliefs were adopted from the Khmer empire, which was Brahministic. Buddhist practices declined in prominence and, judging from written documents left from the Ayutthaya period, Visakha Puja was not observed as a royal ceremony.

Later, during the reign of King Rama II, Visakha Puja was revived at the suggestion of the Supreme Patriarch. In addition to the original Sukhothai practices being resumed, His Majesty commanded that lanterns be made especially for the occasion and hung at the four corners of all royal temples. The public were encouraged to follow suit. Floral decorations were made in the palace and offered at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, and royally sponsored sermons were given in 20 major temples along the banks of the Chao Phya River.

Observation of Visakha Puja became increasingly widespread throughout successive reigns and it was during the reign of King Rama IV, an expert in Buddhism, that it became more formalised. His Majesty personally led the candle processions in the Grand Palace on Visakha Puja Day and preached to members of the royal family on the birth of the Lord Buddha, his enlightenment, and his teachings, to the attainment of Nirvana.

Religious ceremonies to mark the occasion, as formalised in the Fourth Reign, have been maintained up to the present day. On the eve of Visakha Puja Day, a chapter of senior monks are offered food, and chant their blessings in the Grand Palace. Royal urns containing the relics of past kings and queens are blessed by monks of the same number as the urns. Four lanterns and a flag are given as royal offerings to each royal temple, and twenty royally sponsored sermons are given during the three day observation.

Nowadays, Buddhists all over the country participate in ceremonies marking Visakha Puja Day which is seen as the time to renew faith and devotion to the Buddhist principles, aiming at true happiness in life which can be attained by human beings through selflessness, compassion and loving kindness to all sentient beings.



The Royal Ploughing Ceremony

This ceremony, which is held in May and divided into two parts, marks the end of the dry season and the beginning of the new rice planting season.

In the first part of the ceremony, the rice seeds and accessories to be used in the ploughing process are blessed during religious rites presided over by His Majesty the King, or a representative, and held in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

The ploughing of the field, which is the second and essential part of the Royal Ploughing Ceremony, is carried out in the traditional manner with a pair of oxen specially selected to draw the plough. A senior nobleman, or a high ranking government official, such as the Director-General of the Agriculture Department, is appointed the Ploughing Lord, while four female officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives act as his assistants to carry the seeds in baskets suspended from yokes carried across their shoulders.

At the commencement of the ceremony, the Ploughing Lord selects one of three identical-looking pieces of sarong-type cloth which are actually of varying lengths. His choice serves as a prediction for the amount of rainfall.

The area to be ploughed is tilled in accordance with tradition by making three vertical and then three horizontal furrows. The seeds, which have been blessed, are scattered in the furrows to be gathered later by eager farmers who regard them as auspicious and keep them to mix with the grain they use in their own farming.

At the completion of the ploughing, the animals drawing the plough are led to troughs containing food and refreshments such as paddy, corn, legumes, sesame, liquor, water and grass. The animals' first choices again serve as means of predicting the harvest for the forthcoming season.



As the majority of Thais live in the countryside and make rice-farming their main occupation, the Royal Ploughing Ceremony serves as an auspicious start to the new planting season, as well as giving them a vision of what the season will bring.



JUNE

The Royal Ceremony for Making Offerings by Drawing Lots

Merit-making is a Buddhist practice performed with great eagerness by all Thai Buddhists since ancient times.

Merit can be made in a variety of different ways : upholding the Buddhist precepts, helping the poor and needy, making donations to public charities, supporting the construction of hospitals, schools and public libraries, etc.

One of the most popular forms of merit-making in Thailand is giving to the monastic community.

In the eyes of the lay follower, the monastic community represents the Buddha and his teachings, the Dhamma. Thus, by making offerings to Buddhist monks and novices, as well as to Buddhist temples, one is, in effect, giving support to the Buddha and the Dhamma.

It is also recognized that taking up the life of a religious ascetic requires great personal sacrifice and worldly renunciation, particularly in the modern day where the emphasis is on material rather than spiritual gain. Consequently, it is considered an extremely worthy act and the people are only too happy to support the aspirant in his spiritual pursuits and make his journey on the path as comfortable as possible.

The most obvious form of merit-making via the Sangha, the monastic community, can be seen in the morning alms round.

Each day at dawn, monks and novices all over the country, leave their monasteries and walk in silence with their almsbowls along the streets and laneways throughout the city and country side to receive food offerings which people have prepared for them. Upon returning to their monasteries, the food is shared to ensure that all have enough to eat for the day.

Merit-making is not only an individual practice, but can also be performed collectively and even communally.

Collective or communal merit-making mostly takes the form of robes offerings to monks, or the collection of donations to support temple constructions or renovations. Such occasions, which generally take place outside the season of the Rains Retreat, are accompanied by great ceremony and festivity, and are a time of joy and celebration for all who participate.

One interesting communal merit-making ceremony, said to date back to the time of the Lord Buddha, is the Salakhapat Ceremony—the Ceremony for Making Offerings by Drawing Lots.

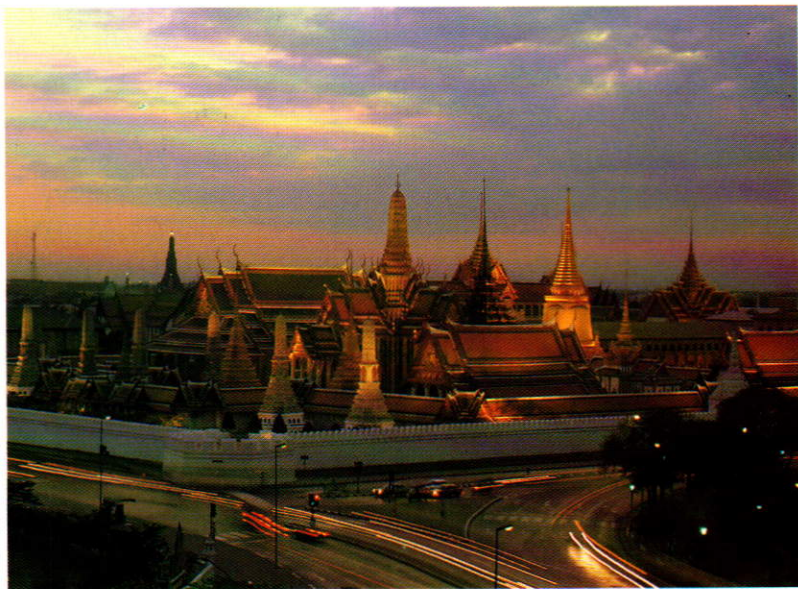
Legend tells that the Lord Buddha, together with a group of disciples, was staying in an area which had been stricken by drought and was consequently suffering a severe food shortage. The people of the village, being devoted followers of the Buddha, wished to make food offerings to him and his disciples. The Buddha knew the hardships the villagers would have to face if they were to provide food for every member of his retinue. To avoid causing this hardship to the people, the Buddha had his disciples draw lots, and alms were given according to the lots drawn.

King Mongkut, Rama IV, revived the tradition of giving alms by drawing lots during his reign, but ironically enough, ordered it to take place during the 7th lunar month, coinciding with the fruit season when food is in abundance.

In his book entitled "*A Treatise on Royal Ceremonies*", King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, describes a 'salakhapat' ceremony he witnessed as a child. The ceremony was held in Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimonmangkhalaram, the Temple of the Reclining Buddha.

"I remember watching from the Suddhaisawan Throne Hall. There was a grand procession and forming part of the procession was a cart driven by an awesome creature with a head the size of an earthen jar. This creature had numerous arms, each holding a variety of objects. I recall watching with fearful trepidation as this cart with the strange creature approached the Royal Pavilion, and I could not take my eyes off it until it had passed out of sight.

Musicians and dancers formed other parts of the procession. Some people were dressed as characters from the Ramayana, while others were dressed like monkeys. All were dancing to the music, and they carried with them many varieties of fruit, as well as other offerings."



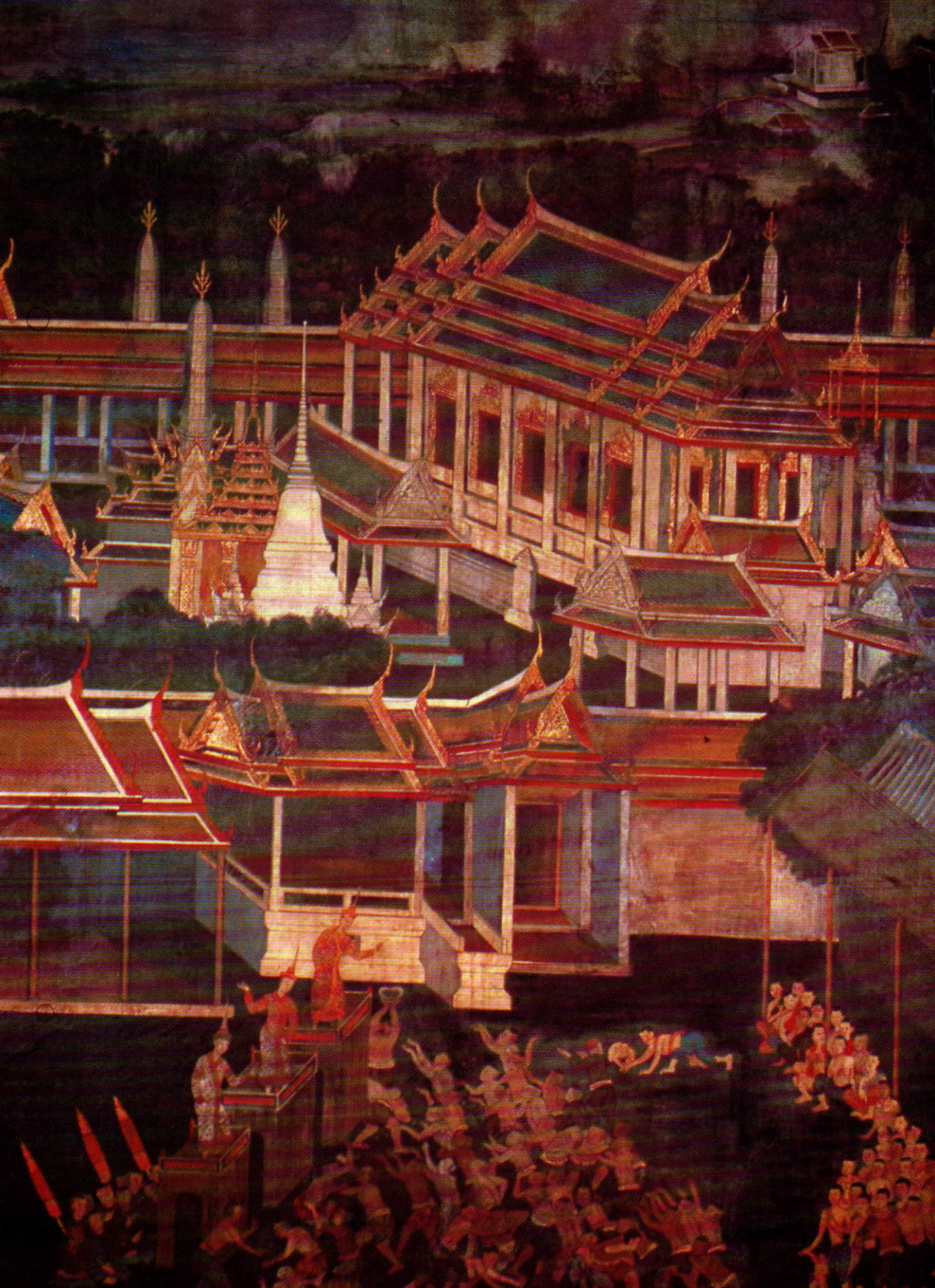
The procession was arranged in format with the royal offerings taking the leading position. Behind came bearers carrying food, fruits and desserts to be offered to the monks. The bearers were dressed in costumes of ogres and monkeys, characters from traditional dramas, Chinese warriors, and even foreigners. Rows of horses and carts drew up the rear.

The Royal Ceremony for Making Offerings by Drawing Lots was also performed at other royal temples such as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha and Wat Bavaranives.

This ceremony has not been performed at a royal level for some time now, but is still listed as one of the royal ceremonies to be performed annually.

It is popular amongst Thais at other levels of society, particularly in the eastern region which is a major fruit growing area, and is performed annually at the beginning of the fruit season by offering the first fruits gathered to the monks in local monasteries.

The people in the northern part of Thailand also perform this ceremony each year and invite householders to prepare offerings which they take in procession to a central monastery to be presented, by drawing lots, to monks who have been invited from other neighbouring monasteries.



JULY

The Royal Ordination Ceremony

Buddhism is the state religion of Thailand and the teachings of the Lord Buddha play an integral part in the lives of over ninety-five percent of the population.

It is the customary practice for young men to be ordained into the Buddhist order, for a period of approximately three to five months, after they are 20 years old.

It is believed that the time spent as a monk in a monastery will enable the young man to acquire a better understanding of the Buddha's teachings and provide him with an opportunity to practice Buddhist meditation under the guidance of a learned master.

This experience is believed to make the man a morally better member of society, and that after disrobing, he will be equipped with the tools necessary to give his family correct religious guidance and support.

Through ordination, a young man also expresses his gratitude to his parents for the life they have given him and for the sacrifices they have made in bringing him up. The merit gained through the act of ordination is dedicated to the parents, especially the mother who, as a woman, cannot be ordained.

Although ordination is possible at any time throughout the year, it traditionally takes place in the period before the rainy season commences; that is, the early part of the eighth lunar month. This enables the newly ordained monk to spend the rainy season in monastic retreat.

An ordination is a time for both devotion and festivity, and the ceremony may last two or three days.

Royal ordination ceremonies are officially scheduled to be held between the fifth and twelfth days of the waxing moon of the eighth lunar month.

The ordination of young princes used to take place in the Ceremonial Hall of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. These days, they generally take place in the Royal Temple, Wat Bavaranives.

The ordination rites are usually, preceded by an elaborate ceremony attended by members of the Royal Family and the Royal Household. When more than one prince is ordained on the same occasion, the ceremonies are even more grand and elaborate. Sometimes novitiate ordination is given in a preliminary ceremony.

The candidate for ordination is given the title 'nāg' or 'nāga', which means 'one awaiting ordination'.

On the day that the ordination ceremony is scheduled to take place, the 'nāg' is bathed in waters which have been specially prepared and has his head shaven. He is then elaborately dressed in a gold brocaded white outfit and adorned with bejewelled armlets and rings on eight fingers. Shaded by a tiered state umbrella, the 'nāg' is then led in procession to the Throne Hall to pay respects to the elder members of the Royal Family. The interior of the Throne Hall is decorated with ceremonial offerings and gifts which will be presented later to the preceptor and monks presiding in witness at the ordination. A set of monks robes and an alms bowl, have already been prepared, and set on a pedestal in the centre of the Throne Hall.

The ceremony of paying respects to members of the Royal Family is conducted by a Brahmin priest who commences the ceremony with the lighting of candles and incense. Special verses are chanted and lustral water poured from a sacred conch shell used especially for this occasion.

Once this part of the ceremony has been completed, the monks are invited to take lunch. The 'nāg' eats after the monks have finished their meal, and then the guests at the ceremony eat after him.

In the early afternoon, the 'nāg' is led to the Ceremonial Hall of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha where the ordination ceremony will be performed.



Outside the Ceremonial Hall a pavilion is erected for the guests and opposite that a platform for the 'nāg'. Whilst seated on the platform, the 'nāg' removes his armlets and rings, and receives a quantity of coins from a royal page. These coins he showers amongst the crowds of guests who have come to join in the celebrations. Throwing these coins is a symbol of giving up worldly wealth and renouncing the worldly life. It is a moment of great excitement as the people scurry to catch and gather up the coins as souvenirs of the occasion.

Next, the 'nāg' is led into the Ceremonial Hall where he will be ordained. First, he takes the set of robes and alms bowl which have been prepared and offers them to the preceptor. He then makes a formal request for ordination and acceptance into the monastic community. A formalized ritual follows which culminates in the 'nāg' changing his white robes for a set of saffron coloured monks robes. At the completion of the ceremony, he is a fully ordained monk, bound by the rules of monastic discipline, residing in a temple, and living on alms food. He will abide in such a manner until he disrobes.

The ceremony described is the same ceremony used for ordaining Thai males of all ranks and social levels. The degree of grandeur varies depending on the economic status of the family of the 'nāg', but it can be said that no expense will be spared and every effort will be made to ensure that the ceremony, perhaps the most important in the life of all Thai males, is a happy and joyous occasion.



AUGUST

The Royal Ceremony to Call for Rain

Rain has always been of major importance to the Thai people whose main occupation is rice-farming or other forms of agriculture. Fortunately, the people are generally blessed with reliable seasonal falls, but nature must take her course and there are times when the rains do not come in season or the falls are insufficient to meet the farmers' needs. On these occasions ceremonies and rituals are employed.

One interesting ceremony, which falls in the ninth lunar month, is the Royal Ceremony to Call for Rain.

This ceremony, which has its roots in Brahminism, dates back to the Sukhothai period. During those days Brahmin priests recited sacred passages while holding dark grey flags resembling the colour of rain clouds. These flags were waved twice a day over the next three days to induce rainfall.

When the ceremony was carried over to the Ayutthaya period it became more Buddhistic in style with the emphasis being placed on merit making. Later, during the Rattanakosin period, the Brahmin and Buddhist elements were separated and the ceremony divided into two parts with the former being held at what has now become the Chitralada Villa grounds and the latter at the Phramane Ground in front of the Grand Palace.

The Buddhist part of the ceremony invokes the power of the sacred image known as Khandhararat, which is in the standing posture, beckoning with the right hand while the left hand is extended with the palm turned upwards.

Legend tells that at one time the Buddha visited a drought stricken area in India. After taking his meal, he asked for a bath robe, despite strong contention from his disciples that bathing would be impossible in such a drought. With

the robe worn over one shoulder, the Lord Buddha stood on the bank of the dried up river in the posture mentioned. After a while clouds began to gather and broke into heavy rain, filling the brooks and rivers. Later, when a severe drought hit the state of Khandhara in India, the ruler of the state, who had heard the story, had a Buddha image cast in that particular posture. It became known as the Khandhararat Buddha, with the special connotation of calling for rain.

Royalty became more actively involved in this ceremony during the reign of King Chulalongkorn the Great, Rama V of the Rattanakosin Period. His Majesty was born in the year of a severe drought, and at the time of his birth, the dry spell was broken. A long period of heavy rain followed, resulting in the first ever flooding of the Grand Palace. As a young prince, His Majesty was assigned to preside over the Royal Ceremony to Call for Rain. The Khandhararat Buddha image, adapted to the seating posture, became the Buddha image associated with the reign of King Chulalongkorn the Great.

The Royal Ceremony to Call for Rain is rarely performed these days, and in times of drought the people now resort to merit-making, superstitions and folk rituals.

The Royal Tonsuring Ceremony

In former times it was fashionable for young Thai children to wear their hair in a topknot. The custom may have been related to Brahmin practice, but folk belief holds that a topknot helps to strengthen a child who is weak or prone to sickness.

Parents would begin to style the child's hair into a topknot at the same time that the ceremonies to mark the child's first month were performed. On that occasion, the fine baby hair was shaven leaving a small tuft at the crown of the head. The tuft could be at the front, the back or in a pair on the sides.

Once the styling of the topknot had begun, it was left untouched to grow naturally, only the hair on the head and around the topknot being shaved regularly.

As the topknot grew longer, parents would roll the hair into a bun and adorn it with a garland of jasmine, or other fragrant blossoms. Sometimes they might even decorate it with bejewelled clasps or bands, depending on their economic status.

If the topknot was at the back of the head, it was not uncommon for the hair to be left hanging loose, or plaited in the style of a queue, particularly on informal occasions.

The wearing of a topknot was not limited to royalty or the noble classes, just as it was not restricted by social or economic standing. While the young princes and princesses of the past wore their hair in a topknot, so did the children of royal subjects.

The child continued to wear the topknot throughout childhood, and at the age of 11 years for girls and 12–13 years for boys, elaborate ceremonies were arranged to perform the tonsuring ceremony.

As the time for the tonsuring ceremony approached, astrologers were consulted to assign an auspicious date, dependent on the time, day, month and year of the child's birth. To perform the ceremony on a day which was not proclaimed to be auspicious was believed to be unwise as it would result in misfortune for the child later in his life.

The Royal Tonsuring Ceremony was held over a period of two days and involved both Brahmin and Buddhist rituals.

On the evening of the first day of the ceremonies, adult members of the family or household busied themselves preparing and consecrating an area where the tonsuring ceremony was to be performed. While this was happening, the child was bathed and anointed with perfumes and fragrant powders, and dressed majestically in fine clothes trimmed with silver and gold. The hair on the head and around the topknot was shaved and the topknot adorned with jasmine garlands and bejewelled decorations.

The child was then taken into the sacred area and presented before a chapter of Buddhist monks who had been invited to perform ceremonies and chant verses to bless the child.

In front of the child, a small table would have been set with the instruments to be used in the tonsuring ceremony. There would also be a ball of sacred thread which was wound around the topknot and held by the monks while they were chanting. The thread was removed from the topknot when the chanting was completed.

At that moment an orchestra began to play, and the Royal Astrologer, or a Brahmin priest, sounded a gong signalling that the first part of the ceremony was over.

The remainder of the evening was spent with the hosts attending to their guests and celebrating the occasion of their child's tonsuring, exchanging greetings, good wishes and blessings. There would certainly be feasting and perhaps even entertainments of music and folk drama.

The following morning, the child was bathed and modestly dressed in white. The topknot was divided into three locks, each held separate with a ring of nine gems.

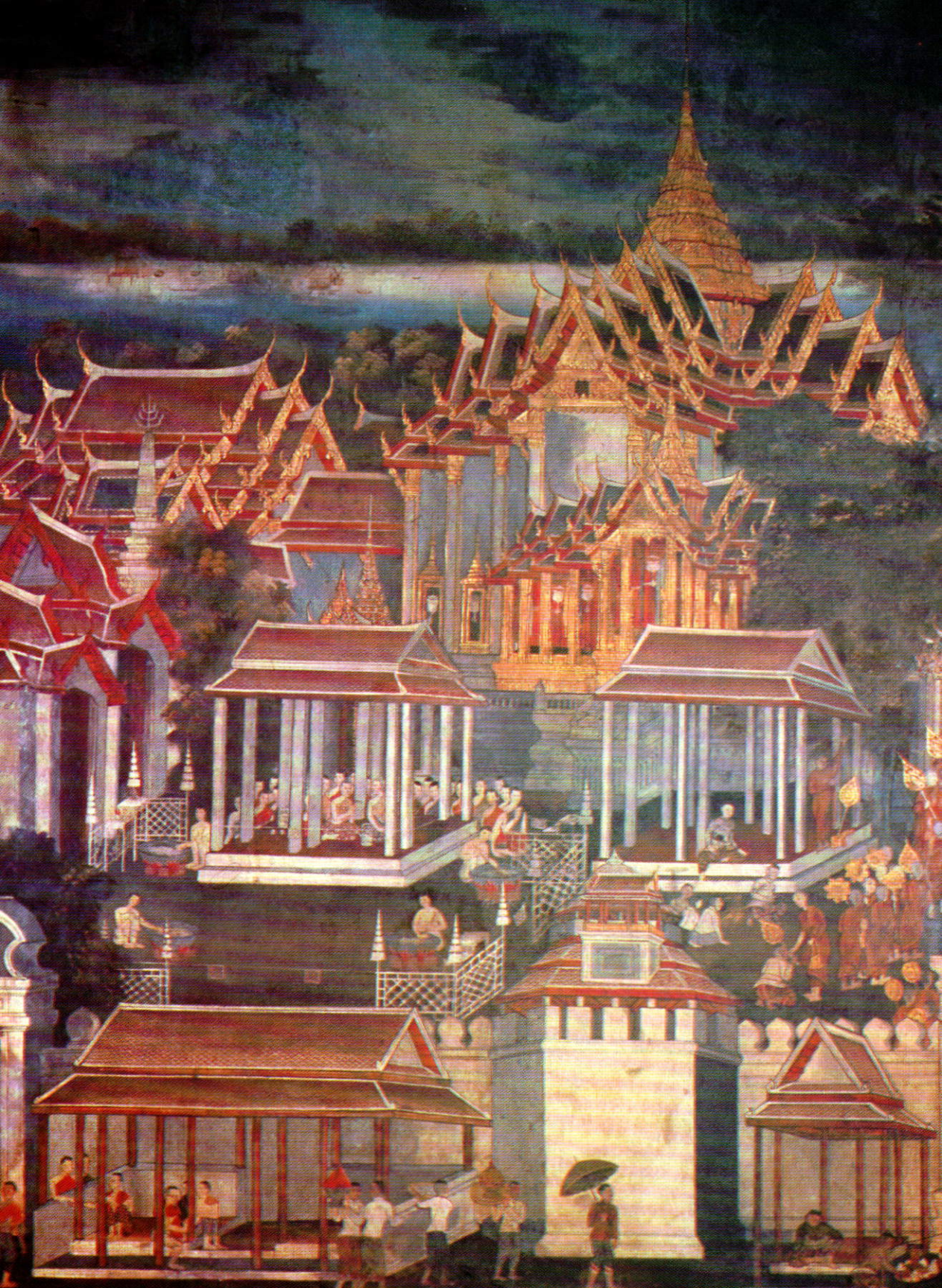
When the child was ready, a chapter of monks were invited into the sacred area and the child presented before them. The Royal Astrologer, or a Brahmin priest, beat a gong three times signalling the ceremony to commence. Upon hearing this signal, the monks would start chanting sacred verses from the Buddhist scriptures. At a certain moment during the chanting, the senior lay-person presiding over the ceremony would cut one of the locks from the topknot. The remaining two locks were then cut by respected elders in order of seniority. While the locks were being cut, a Brahmin priest would blow on a conch and beat a small drum. As well as heralding the tonsuring, the conch and drum also signalled that the ceremonial area was no longer considered sacred.

When all three locks had been cut, a barber completed the tonsuring by shaving the remaining hair on the head.

The child was then taken to a spot arranged and anointed with lustral waters and given blessings by elders and senior members of the family.

Lunch was presented to the monks who, after eating, recited one last selection of verses to bless the child and all who had participated in the tonsuring ceremony. After this they would depart, bringing the ceremony to an official end.

The fashion of wearing a topknot is rarely found in modern Thai society, but may be seen in rural areas where ancient traditions still prevail. In such areas Buddhist monks preside over tonsuring ceremonies which are conducted in the traditional manner.



The Royal Ceremony for Preparing Celestial Rice

The tenth lunar month coincides with the middle of the rainy season, the time when the crops and paddy are beginning to ripen and mature. Seeing the fruits of their labours beginning to appear, farmers wish to celebrate, and do so by feasting on a large variety of rice-meals. While the grain is still tender on the stalks, it is gathered and prepared in many different ways : madhupayas, a light porridge of rice boiled, sometimes in milk, with sugar or honey ; khao mao, rice crackers prepared from shredded rice grain and roasted ; and khao yakhu, tender grains pounded and sweetened with sugar or honey.

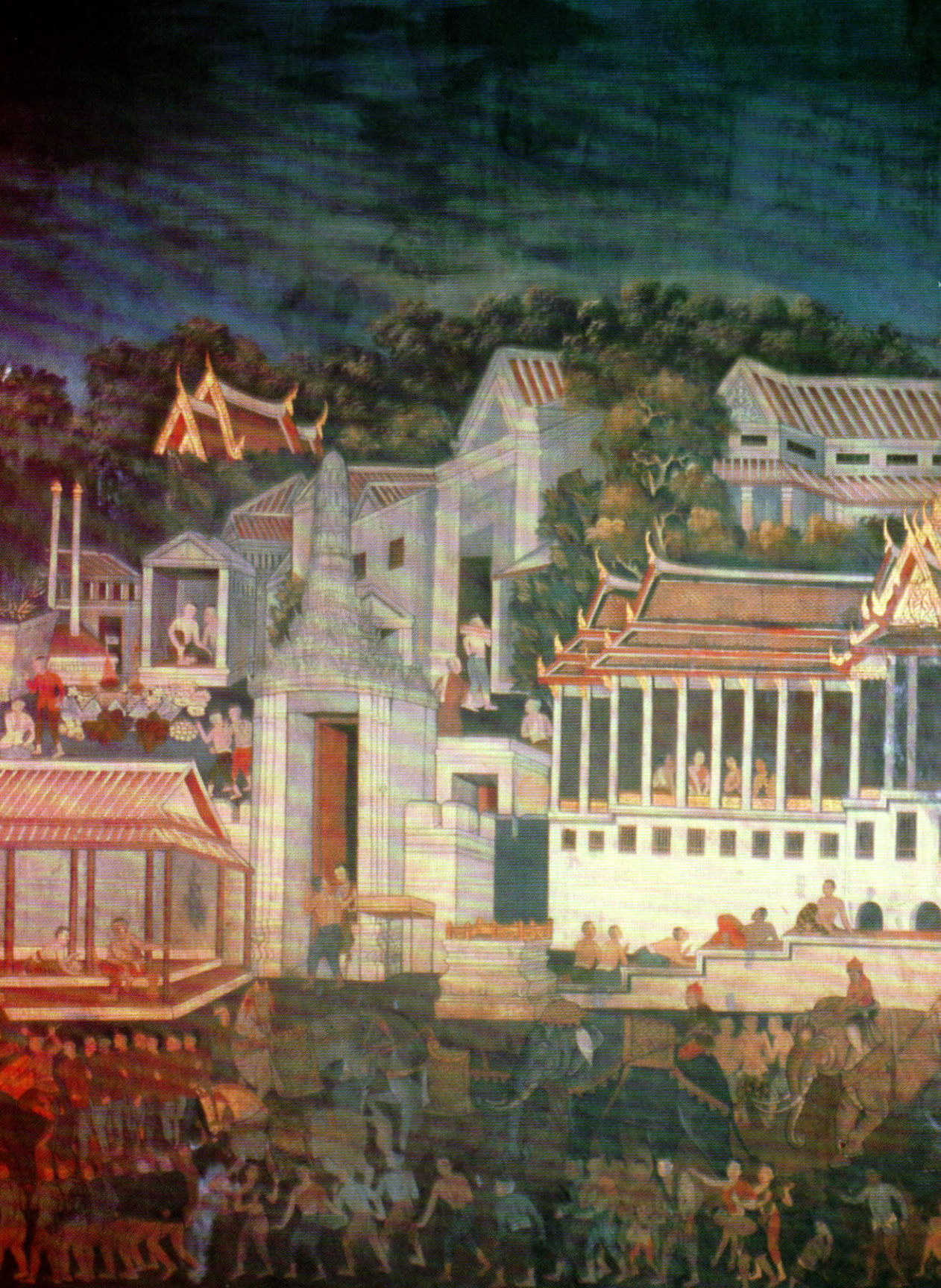
A traditional favourite at this time of year, though these days rarely found, is the ambrosial khao thip, or celestial rice, which is said to have been originally prepared in the heavens by celestial beings as an offering to the god Indra. Mention of this celestial dish is made in various historical works of literature, particularly those of Indian origin.

Making celestial rice has been a palace tradition in Thailand since the early Ayutthaya period, its preparation being carried out in accordance with ancient ritual and ceremony.

In the early days, the celestial rice was prepared by Brahmin virgins, but this later changed and the maiden daughters of the king were selected for the ceremony.

To prepare celestial rice, ingredients comprising eight varieties of legumes, sesame, various types of grain, potato, water chest, lotus seed, coconut milk, butter, honey, brown sugar, palm sugar, fresh fruit, preserved fruit, and many other ingredients are cut into tiny pieces, or powdered, and put together in a huge pan over a fire, to be stirred continuously. The finished product is a peculiar jam of light brown colour, with tiny parcels of different tastes and textures. A portion of the celestial rice is offered to monks while the remainder is divided in varying quantities among the royal family, courtiers and household members.

As custom demands that the preparation and stirring of celestial rice can only be done by virgins, the practice of making this ambrosial dish came to a natural end in the royal court of recent days as the number of young princesses who do not succeed to the titles of their parents decreased.



OCTOBER

The Royal Kathin Ceremony

Traditionally, Buddhist monks lead a wandering life, settling down in one place for the three months of the rainy season only. They live on alms, treat themselves with herbal cures or natural remedies, and make their robes from discarded cloth gathered during their wanderings. They can accept ready made robes offered by devout lay people.

As the monks are settled during the rainy season, they are unable to find the cloth necessary for mending their existing robes, or needed for making new sets. Consequently, by the end of their three months retreat, their robes are somewhat tattered and ragged.

There is a story that tells of a group of monks who made a pilgrimage to the city of Savatthi to pay homage to the Lord Buddha. Before they could reach their destination, the rainy season began and they had to settle down for the three months period. At the end of their retreat they continued their journey on foot, despite the continuing rain. The path they took was rugged and muddy from the incessant rain, and by the time they reached the feet of the Lord Buddha their robes were drenched and spattered with mud. Realizing his disciples' difficulty, the Lord Buddha granted monks permission to accept new robes each year at the end of the rains retreat.

The period for receiving new robes is known as 'Kathin' and is held from the first day of the waning moon of the eleventh lunar month until the fifteenth day of the waxing moon of the twelfth lunar month. This period on the modern calendar generally falls in the months of October – November.

As Thailand is a Buddhist country, the custom is upheld by all, from the reigning monarch down. It is a season of festivity, merit-making and religious devotion.



Preparations for the Kathin presentation are made well in advance of the actual day, with everybody offering a helping hand to ensure that the proceedings go smoothly and in the most enjoyable manner.

At the village level, entertainment is organised, perhaps in the monastery grounds, or maybe at the local school, and donations are made as a contribution to the temple where the Kathin presentation is to be made.

In addition to new robes, monks are also offered books containing sacred scriptures, personal requisites, materials used to support the monastery, and, in short, anything deemed necessary for the monks' upkeep during the monastic year. Prior to, and at the completion of the ceremony, the monks chant sacred verses blessing the people and present a discourse on the teachings of the Lord Buddha.

The Royal Kathin Ceremony has been performed in Thailand since ancient times and was perhaps seen at its grandest during the Ayutthaya period. During those days the presentation of the Kathin robes was made amidst great pomp and splendour, incorporating the royal barges elaborately decorated for the occasion.

On the day that the presentation was to be made, the Kathin offerings were placed prominently in one of the royal barges and, accompanied by a water-borne procession presided over by His Majesty the King, taken to the monastery where they were to be offered. The largest Royal Barge Procession recorded during the Ayutthaya period took place during the reign of King Narai (1656–1688) and featured 147 magnificent gilded vessels.

The Royal Barge Procession to Present Kathin Offerings was recreated during the present Rattanakosin period and was used during the reigns of King Chulalongkorn, King Rama V, and King Vajiravudh, King Rama VI. It has been occasionally performed during the reign of the present monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great, Rama IX, and emulates the spectacle that was seen during the Ayutthaya period.

Although fewer vessels are nowadays used, they are nevertheless magnificently crafted with ornately carved figureheads in the form of mythological serpents, demons and celestial beings. The principle barge, which carries His Majesty, is the majestic Si Suphannahong which, with its striking mythological swan prow, is the largest barge in the procession.

Each barge is manned by oarsmen voicing stirring and rhythmic boating chants that regulate their strokes. The procession travels along the Chao Phya River in medieval naval battle formation, dating from the time when the vessels were effectively the king's navy.

When the Royal Barge Procession is incorporated into the Kathin ceremony, the presentation is generally made at the riverside Wat Arun, the Temple of Dawn. However, the Royal Kathin Ceremony can be, and often is, performed at any one of the numerous Buddhist monasteries spread throughout the country.



NOVEMBER

Loy Krathong – The Festival of Lights

Loy Krathong, or the Festival of Lights, is celebrated on the full moon night of the twelfth lunar month, when the rainy season has ended and the rivers and streams are filled with water. It is an occasion of great festivity for all, nobility and ordinary folk alike, and involves neither Brahmin nor Buddhist rites.

Various legends prevail as to the origins of the festival, the most popular being the story of Nang Noppamas, the beautiful and talented daughter of a Brahmin priest who served in the royal court during the Sukhothai period.

One evening Nang Noppamas accompanied the royal party on a tour along the city's waterways. During the tour she saw the people floating lanterns of various shapes on the water's surface. (This could be related to the Brahmin festival, Chong Prieng, which was practised during the Sukhothai period.) Upon returning to the palace, Nang Noppamas designed a floating lantern in the shape of a lotus flower and presented it to the king. In addition, she composed verses and songs to be recited or sung for the king on the occasion. It is said that the king was delighted with the lotus-shaped lantern and encouraged further designs. The practise of floating lanterns of various designs became very popular, particularly under the light of the full moon of the twelfth lunar month when

the sky is clear and bright and the country-folk are free of their laborious farming duties.

Another story tells that, at the request of the Naga (Serpent) King, the Lord Buddha left his footprint as an object of worship embedded in the sands of the Nammada, or Nerbudda, River in India. The floating of candlelit floats is a way of paying obeisance to the sacred footprint.

The present day understanding is that the festival is celebrated as an act of worship to Chao Mae Kangka—the Goddess of the Waters.



Water plays an important part in the life of all Thais, particularly the farmers who need it to irrigate their fields, as well as for a variety of other purposes. They sometimes pollute the waters unintentionally, or perhaps use it mindlessly without thinking of its origins or potential scarcity. The festival is, therefore, celebrated as a way of thanking the Goddess of the Waters for providing the water much needed throughout the year, and as a way of asking forgiveness if they have polluted it or used it carelessly.

The floating of lanterns, which began in the Sukhothai period, continued throughout the different stages of Thai history, in varying degrees of popularity and a variety of forms.

Its popularity fluctuated during the early Rattanakosin period and it was not performed as an annual event. Attempts were made to revive it, however, and records show that the Loy Krathong Festival was celebrated periodically during the reigns of King Chulalongkorn, King Vajiravudh and King Prajadhipok. When it was celebrated, it was done on a grand scale with floats large enough to accommodate musicians and performers. The design was not restricted to lotus flowers, but the floats came as replicas of the royal barges, boats and Chinese junks. The festival was accompanied by music and entertainment,

recitations and repartee, feasting and fireworks. The banks of the river were lined with people, and mobile kitchens were set up to serve a variety of delicacies. An air of enjoyment and gaiety prevailed.

Today the Loy Krathong Festival is celebrated annually with great joy and excitement all over the country. Competitions are held to judge the most imaginative and beautiful floats, and beauty pageants are organised to select the Loy Krathong Queen, or Nang Noppamas. Traditional entertainment accompanies the festival, and in some places there are spectacular fireworks displays.

People from all levels of society and of all age groups either make their own floats from banana leaves, or purchase a ready made one at the local market place, to set afloat in the nearby waterways.

Prior to setting their krathong afloat, the people will place in it a lighted candle, incense sticks, flowers, a coin and some food offerings. They make a silent prayer of thanks for the water received, a request for forgiveness for wrongs done, and a wish for the fulfillment of a secret dream.



DECEMBER

The Royal Ceremony for Offering Shrimp Pancakes

Although the origin and meaning of this ancient ceremony is rather obscure, it is known that it is traditionally scheduled to take place at the end of the winter solstice when the sun is at a position of 8° – 9° and in the house of Sagittarius.

The ceremony is performed inside the Amarin Winitchai Throne Hall and involves a chapter of 10 Buddhist monks. Unlike most other occasions, the monks participating in this ceremony do not perform chanting rituals.

On the day of the ceremony, a large marquee is erected adjacent to the Throne Hall and stoves are set up inside the marquee. Members of the Royal Family gather, together with high and low ranking members of the Royal Household, to prepare the shrimp pancakes.

The Royal Ceremony for Offering Shrimp Pancakes, when performed, is an occasion for great celebration and coincides with the season when the shrimp are most succulent.

This ceremony has not been performed for some years now, however, and seems to be fading from practice.

