

SECOND SOVEREIGNS OF SIAM

George Washington was the last Second Sovereign of Siam. Immediately after his death in 1885, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) abolished the office of subordinate king.

First notice of a Second Sovereign in the Siamese dynastic system comes from the mid-14th century when the Sovereign of the Kingdom of Sukhotai (centred on the city of Sukhotai, approximately 600 kilometres north of the present capital, Bangkok) appointed his son to this office and posted him to a nearby dependent city-state as reward for quelling an uprising which occurred while he was incapacitated.

Next notice of the Second Sovereign comes a century later from a proclamation of King Boroma Trailokanat (1448-1487) of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (successor to the Sukhotai kingdom, centred on the city of Ayutthaya, approximately 70 kilometres north of Bangkok) in which ascension to sub-sublime status is prescribed: the Second Sovereign was to be the son of a royal consort; the Crown, however, was to pass to the eldest son of the Queen. The Second Sovereign, then, was heir presumptive not heir apparent, unless the Queen failed to bear a son. Should the Sovereign be without male issue or should an eligible son be yet a boy, a brother of the King might be Second Sovereign.

—◀ *This plan of the Wang Na (Palace of the Second Sovereign of Siam) represents most of what is known to have been built in the half-century before the date of survey. It is based on a plan dated 1888 and amended in 1916 which is included in a 'cremation volume' published in 1966. and incorporates details from an earlier plan dated 1888. This plan of the Wang Na is a generalized and clarified version in that several structures previously distinguished are not, and all ambiguities have been interpreted and are rendered precisely. The Wang Na, when occupied, appears to have been a hive of activity; a densely peopled place of some 3000 residents. Now, the area is devoted entirely to public and semi-public buildings, and residents are few. This change exemplifies adjustments made throughout the former citadel during the century past to accommodate the head offices of the centralised and elaborate bureaucracy which now oversees the development of the populous and rapidly modernising nation named Thailand. Source: 'Originals' held at the National Library of Thailand and included in 'History of the Second Kings' Part 13, Historical*

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Adherence to these rules was not strict. In time of trouble, for example, the Sovereign might appoint as Second Sovereign an especially competent and loyal leader; or when the rightful heir to the throne was yet a youth, a Second Sovereign might be selected from among his staunch supporters, or, conversely, from among those who had upheld a usurper. A Second Sovereign might not be appointed; indeed, not half the thirty-four reigns which comprised the 400-odd years of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (1350-1767) featured a subordinate king. A Second Sovereign was a dynastic nicety not an essential.

The little which is known about the office of Second Sovereign elsewhere in mainland Southeast Asia – areas now occupied by Burma, Kampuchea and Laos – relegates these kings to secondariness vis-a-vis the Sovereign. On the Indian sub-continent, from where the notion of a duarchy of sorts seems to have come to the kingdoms of the Indo-Chinese peninsula, the status of the Second Sovereign vis-a-vis the Sovereign appears, at times, to have been more equal though not more essential than in Southeast Asia. A similar ambiguity seems to have characterized the position of Second Sovereign in kingdoms west of the sub-continent which occupied the territory now taken by such states as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria and Egypt. The historic source of the duarchy is, of course, Sparta where joint kings with equal authority was an essential in a political system of checks and balances which sought to offset the power of those in command and so to deter the development of a dictatorship. Lost in the Dark Ages is the beginning of this unique mode of government. The Roman system of dual office bearers appears to have been developed independently, though reference to the Spartan means to a balance of power appears in a treatise on political theory by Polybius and was subsequently taken up by Cicero, who argued against duarchy. Long before the rule of Rome, Europe had discarded the duarchical system.

Each of the first five kings of the Bangkok era (Chakri Dynasty), however, was accompanied by a Second Sovereign: Rama I (1782-1809) appointed his brother; Rama II (1809-1824) appointed his brother; Rama III (1824-1851) appointed his uncle, brother of Rama II; Rama IV (1851-1868) appointed his brother; and a regent appointed the eldest son of the previous subordinate king as Second Sovereign under Rama V (1868-1910) who came to the throne a minor. Each of these Second Sovereigns died before his King. Only Rama I enthroned a second Second Sovereign: his son, subsequently Rama II.

Although Bangkok was plotted in the image of Ayutthaya (which was overrun by the Burmese in 1767) and its principal structures were to correspond to Ayutthayan prototypes, the dissimilar sites, the difficulty of reconstruction and the urgent need to fashion a stronghold to withstand imminent renewed Burmese aggression, disallowed a nice replication. In its lineaments, Bangkok soon came to resemble Ayutthaya – indeed, the very “stone” of the old city was embedded in the new citadel – in particulars, however, the two capitals were unlike, and most unlike in a particular: the palace of the Second Sovereign, the *Wang Na*.

At Ayutthaya, the Grand Palace (*Wang Luang*) was in an “empty quarter”: apart from the day-to-day activities of the capital; safe against direct waterborne attack in a city encircled and penetrated by waterways at the focus of waterways on a delta-plain crisscrossed by waterways. The *Wang Na* stood well away from the *Wang Luang* in a busy corner of the capital readily accessible by water; a castle keeping watch. *Wang Na* means “palace in front”; shield for the Grand Palace. In Bangkok, the two palaces were adjacent and fronted the Broadway of Bangkok, the busy Chao Phraya river; and the *Wang Na*, being upstream from the *Wang Luang*, was “behind” the Grand Palace when viewed from the quarter-deck. One may ascribe this change round to the personalities of the founders of Bangkok: Rama I came to the throne a thoroughly tested and successful military commander; his predecessor, the remarkable general, then King, Taksin, restored the kingdom almost immediately it had been lost following the overthrow of Ayutthaya, and sustained his hegemony over a restive realm by full-blooded strikes from his fastness at Thon Buri which was directly across the river from the citadel-to-be at Bangkok. These kings were omniscient military leaders. A month before the ascension of Rama I, the Burmese throne had been seized by Bodawpaya; he “of boundless ambition”, determined to force all “neighbouring states to yield to his sway”. Preparations for a grand offensive against the Siamese soon were underway. The Siamese made preparations also: Ayutthaya was the model for Bangkok as a strong hand is to its fist.

To secure the strategic advantages of the Bangkok site quickly, first only forts were made of brick; brick removed from the walls of Ayutthaya. All else was wood and thatch. The Sovereign and the Second Sovereign took possession of their palaces, their wood and thatch palaces, in June 1782, barely two months after the ascension of Rama I. Four years later, in 1786, the Grand Palace and, it is believed, the *Wang Na*, as well as other essential structures, had been remade of substantial stuff and the new capital was solemnly named and consecrated.

The *Wang Na* occupied a tract of land differently shaped but only fractionally smaller than the *Wang Luang* and, like the Grand Palace, was enwalled, moated and strongly fortified.

Within, the *Wang Na* palace itself was three interconnected buildings, like the *Wang Luang* following Ayutthayan tradition which dictated that royalty have different quarters for the hot, “cold” and rainy seasons. Like the *Wang Luang*, the *Wang Na* comprised the appurtenances of a small town: various offices of government and administration; housing for a small army of domestics and retainers, and a not too small army; shops and workshops; stables for elephants and horses; storage sheds and yards; places of entertainment and education and recreation. The *Wang Na* was not the *Wang Luang* writ small; it was in effect another, architecturally distinct, Grand Palace.

Indeed, the first Second Sovereign of the Bangkok era, brother of Rama I, expressed his intention to make the *Wang Na* the Grand Palace, when he assumed the throne; a peculiar aspiration, all the more strange for having been articulated, since the eldest son of Rama I was the legitimate heir. Odd too, the south wall of the *Wang Na*, the wall facing the *Wang Luang*, was topped by an unusually long “fighting hall”, a covered platform in which guns were mounted. Curious also, the *Wang Na*, including four princely palaces for the sons of the Second Sovereign, was built of brick during the First Reign despite that brick was in short supply and that the *Wang Luang* was of wood until the Third Reign. It appears Rama I humoured his brother during the latter’s lifetime. If so, he appears to have lost all patience with the Second Sovereign when the latter, in the throes of fatal cholera, laid a curse on any future Second Sovereign not his descendant who occupied the *Wang Na*. Rama I did not appoint a Second Sovereign until three years after the death of his brother and then he appointed his son – thereby precluding counter claims to either throne by descendants of the first Second Sovereign – and domiciled him across the river in the former palace of King Taksin. The *Wang Na* was unoccupied for seven years.

On assuming the throne in 1809, Rama II appointed as Second Sovereign his brother who took up residence in the *Wang Na* as he was named to a daughter of the first Second Sovereign and thereby unthreatened by the malediction. During eight years in residence, until his death in 1818, the Second Sovereign undertook no new construction in the *Wang Na* but he did effect a change through demolition. Among the structures unmade, several were either especially fancied by the first Second Sovereign or associated with royal ceremonials. Was there other than personal purpose behind this destruction? Was it intended to reduce the status of the Second Sovereign vis-a-vis the King and to erase traces of the original architect of the *Wang Na*? Probably. Rama II did not appoint another Second Sovereign.

The *Wang Na* was unoccupied for seven years.

Rama III was the eldest son of Rama II, but not the eldest son of the Queen. The eldest son of the Queen, aged twenty and a Buddhist monk when his father died, was denied his birthright by a powerful group at Court led by a brother of Rama II who subsequently became Second Sovereign. The *Wang Na* was reoccupied, since the Second Sovereign was a son-in-law of the first Second Sovereign and ran no risk of ruin under the latter's curse. During his residence of eight years, the *Wang Na* was virtually rebuilt, and beautifully; but on the death of the Second Sovereign in 1832, construction yet underway was not completed and Rama II did not appoint another in his place.

The corpse of the Second Sovereign lay in state for a year, according to custom, after which period it was taken in fabulous procession to be cremated. For one spectator,

A painting, descriptive of the procession, could alone enable a person to form any idea of the scene, for no pen could describe it, it being impossible even to imagine names for the figures of the animals, griffins, nondescript monsters &c. which were drawn along on hurdles by large groups of men.

For the good envoy from the President of the United States of America sent in 1833 to enter into a treaty with the kings of Siam, the pen sufficed; unfortunately to reproduce his "brief" of this improbable parade would require overmuch space and so those interested must be referred to Edmund Roberts' *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-Chi-na, Siam, and Muscat; in the U.S. Sloop-of-War Peacock, David Geisinger, Commander, During the Years 1832-3-4* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837). Our word-painter thought the procession an "idle and useless ceremony", a "farcical scene, a pret' raree show", and a way "to show the public... the magnificence of majesty, and... to strike them with awe and fear". Possibly, too, it was Rama III's cry of quittance for the late Second Sovereign's support when the Crown was usurped.

The *Wang Na* was unoccupied for eighteen years. Rama III had intended Rama IV to be his eldest son. When Rama III lay dying in 1851, however, his eldest son by the Queen had already died and no other son satisfied the Council at Court. The younger brother of the eldest son of Rama II – the brother of the rightful heir whom his half-brother, Rama III, had shouldered aside to gain the throne – seems to have been a strong candidate for the kingship, but seemingly too strong for some. A reading of the situation suggests the Council found consensus on a less controversial candidate: the eldest son of Rama II was invited to quit the priesthood (where he had remained during the Third Reign and where, it appears, he had intended to stay) and to assume the Crown. His younger brother was to be appointed Second Sovereign. Whether the eldest son of Rama II agreed to become Rama IV provided his younger

brother was made co-king in a duarchy, or whether the compromise reached by the Council included his younger brother's ascension to the office of Second Sovereign is a moot point; whatever the truth, twelve days after his investiture Rama IV gave near equal kingly status to his younger brother in an unprecedented coronation ceremony which culminated in the bestowal by his own hand of a royal title near enough to his own.

Rama IV often spoke to his nobles of the desirability of cultural interchange with other countries. The Council at Court, prompted perhaps by a detailed account (in the form of a large book) of the investiture of the king of Cochin-China that had been widely disseminated abroad, thought to document the investiture of the Second Sovereign in some detail and forward the account to His Excellency W.J. Butterworth, Governor of the Straits Settlements, with the invitation to publish it if he so desired. His Excellency did so desire, and so a vivid description of the extraordinary investiture of the Second Sovereign, dated "18th day of September, 1851" may be read in *The Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* volume V, July[!], 1851.

Paradoxically, the twenty-seven years' stay in the priesthood had made of Rama IV not only a profound scholar of the scriptures, but had sharpened his reason through study of mathematics and science (astronomy in particular) and had made him acutely aware of the outside world through his great enthusiasm for English. He was an insatiable reader.

According to a noted historian of Southeast Asia:

Siam owed to Mongkut [Rama IV] more than anyone else the fact that she preserved her independence when by the end of the nineteenth century all the other states of South-East Asia had come under European control. For he almost alone among his people could see clearly that if China had failed to maintain her isolation against European pressure, Siam must come to terms with the external forces threatening her and begin to accommodate herself to the new world, in which Asian traditionalism appeared out worn and inefficient.

Circumstantial evidence suggests his brother, the Second Sovereign, merits much credit also for the modernization of the kingdom. A brief anthology of the characterizations of this Prince by foreign visitors to and residents of Bangkok during the 1830-1850 periods sound a paean:

This prince is probably the most intelligent man among the nobility. He has obtained a sufficient knowledge of the English language, to enable him to read, write, and to speak it with fluency. The prince is very enthusiastic in imitating everything foreign, especially American.. and took the keenest interest in what was going on in the great world of the West. He has adopted European customs to a considerable extent, and may



Phra Pin Klao: *penultimate Second Souereign of Siam, Fourth Reign of the Bangkok Era.* Source: *Mouhot, H., Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China (Siam), Cambodia, and Laos, During the years 1858, 1859, and 1860 London, 1864.*

with propriety be termed a scientific man. His naturally fine mind is enlarged and improved by intercourse with foreigners, by the perusal of English works, by studying Euclid and Newton, by freeing himself from a bigoted attachment to Buddhism, by candidly recognizing our superiority, and a readiness to adopt our arts. He was well read in English literature. He understands the use of the sextant and chronometer; and spent portions of every day in drawing and mathematics, in astronomy and navigation... in the several branches of natural history... he evinced surprising aptitude... He also turned his attention to watch and clock-making which he first thoroughly taught himself, and then imparted to a picked squad of his own servants, by whom were constructed some very respectable time-pieces - the first ever manufactured in

Siam. He cast guns and cannon by his own unaided skill; and.. succeeded in substituting for the... junks of the country first-class ships and barques built after the European model. Each year... produced some new trophy to the energy and ability of [the] Prince... and it is unquestionably true that the wonderful progress in western civilization and the arts made by Siam... received its first impetus from [him]...

During the Third Reign, the Prince took active service in the military and diplomatic departments of government. He was loaded with honours and titles,



Note fairly penned by and bearing the seal of the Second Sovereign of Siam. Source: Bowering, Sir J., *The Kingdom and People of Siam London, 1857.*

appointed commander of naval and military forces, superintended the construction of a number of important defensive works and led a successful expedition against the Cochin-Chinese. He was responsible for the ticklish English-language negotiations and correspondence of the kingdom while the British were bringing Burma and Malaya to heel, and the East India Company and the United States of America negotiated agreements with Siam. Adviser, if not confidant, of Rama III, the Prince regularly attended ministerial meetings at the Grand Palace, and was regarded by many as heir apparent, though not so officially. Indeed, envoys from the West saw the Prince "as a sort of Siamese Peter the Great"; an Oriental counterpart to the enlightened Tsar who metamorphosed medieval Muscovy into modern Russia. Were these ambassadors aware also that Peter I had shared the Diamond Throne with his elder, but sickly, half-brother Ivan V when both were but boys under the regent Sophia?

During the Fourth Reign, the Second Sovereign, though surrounded by the trappings of state was not obviously engaged in affairs of state. His influence may have been great and his advice sought after;

if so, his emeanour was discreet. Even the several treaties entered into with various European states and the United States, addressed to the kings of Siam and signed and sealed by both monarchs, seem not to have actively engaged the Second Sovereign himself; indeed, he seems not to have sighted the treaties prior to their atification. Still, each envoy was mightily impressed with *Secundus Rex Siamensium* and their characterizations of him are readily nterwoven into a personation:

... The Second King was... a gentleman of very cultivated understanding... a sensible, quiet, and amiable person... willing to communicate knowledge, and earnest in the search of instruction... writing and speaking English with great accuracy, and living much in the style of a courteous and opulent European noble, fond of books and scientific inquiry, interested in all that marks the course of civilization. His own apartments are convenient, tastefully fitted up, and... lead you to believe you were in the house of an English gentleman... On each side of the room were hair-seat sofas, and over that on one side, was a colored lithograph of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and five of their children... Over the opposite sofa was hung a map of the United States; and at each side of it an oil portrait of Presidents Washington and Pierce... in the corners were correct statuettes of Napoleon, Wellington, Prince Albert and Victoria.. One end of this apartment opened upon a smaller one, in which neatly arranged, were his electrical and philosophical apparatus... a considerable museum of mechanical .instruments, with models of late improvements in many of the departments of science, excellent sextants and quadrants, miniature screw-steamers, and a variety of modern weapons... one side of it opened into a secluded study, in which were many elegant and convenient arrangements: chemical apparatus and tests; a silver mounted desk; handsome brass field bed, and brass, morocco-covered rocking chair. In this study, and in the main apartment, were bookcases, filled with standard authors, American and English; in general literature, history, science, theology and military affairs. The King played... very prettily on the pipes of the Laos portable organ. He had a variety of music; and there was an exhibition of national sports and pastimes, equestrian feats, elephant combats, and other amusements... If it be that cookery is a good index of civilization, there came in... most civilized cake and tea and coffee, as nicely made as if, by some mysterious dumb-waiter they had come. fresh from the restaurants of

Paris. The king made the tea and coffee with his own hand... with the grace of perfect good breeding... and with the conventional inquiry, "Cream and sugar?"... when we said goodbye and left the pleasant, comfortable, home like rooms... the piano and the music boxes, the cheery hospitality of our good-natured host .. it was with something of the sadness which attends the parting from one's native land..

...the impression he makes is most favourable. The partments of the Second Sovereign described by his foreign guests was in the *Wang Na*; a *Wang Na* entirely reconstructed, after having been abandoned for eighteen years and in ruins when the Second Sovereign took up residence. The *Wang Na* as rebuilt is represented, it is thought, on the accompanying plan. Most of the new construction and reconstruction in the *Wang Na* followed building which had occurred or was taking place in the Grand Palace, for it was the express desire of Rama IV to accommodate his younger brother as himself. The Second Sovereign expressed himself also in several structures; one, in Western style, held his apartment. His predilection for the military was manifested in a number of buildings and a parade ground for his private standing army of 2000 soldiers and seamen well drilled after the fashion of the West. His love of horses – the Second Sovereign was an accomplished horseman – was reflected in several modern stables and a race track. His concern to introduce modern scientific practice was expressed in a number of workshops, several of which worked metal using up-to-date technology, a small shipyard, kitchens, and a medical facility among other things.

The Second Sovereign died in 1865. His funeral was that of the Sovereign of Siam. Rama IV did not appoint another Second Sovereign, but himself frequented the *Wang Na*; occasionally remaining overnight in a building which had been under construction when the Second Sovereign died.

Rama IV penned a biographical sketch, in English, of his younger brother which was issued shortly after the death of the Second Sovereign; from this, an excerpt:

He made everything new and beautiful, and of curious appearance, and of a good style of architecture, and much stronger than they had formerly been constructed by his three predecessors, the second kings of the last three reigns, for the space of time that he was second king. He had introduced and collected many and many things, being articles of great curiosity, and things useful for various purposes of military acts and affairs, from Europe and America, China, and other states, and placed them in various departments and rooms or buildings suitable for those articles, and placed officers for

maintaining and preserving the various things neatly and carefully. He has constructed several buildings in European fashion and Chinese fashion, and ornamented them with various useful ornaments for his pleasure, and has constructed two steamers in manner of men-of-war, and two steamyachts, and several rowing stateboats, in Siamese and Cochin-Chinese fashion, for his pleasure at sea and rivers of Siam; and caused several articles of gold and silver being vessels and various wares and weapons to be made up by the Siamese and Malayan goldsmiths, for employ and dress of himself and his family, by his direction and skilful contrivance and ability. He became celebrated and spread out more and more to various regions of the Siamese kingdom, adjacent States around, and far famed to foreign countries, even at far distance, as he became acquainted with many and many foreigners, who came from various quarters of the world where his name became known to most as a very clever and bravest Prince of Siam...

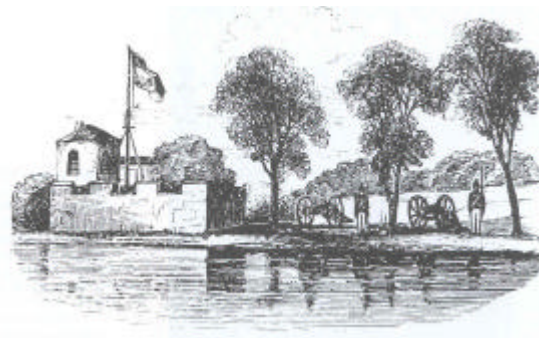
As he pleased mostly with firing of cannon and acts of Marine power and seamen, which he has imitated to his steamers which were made in manner of the man-of-war after he has seen various things curious and useful, and learned Marine customs on board the foreign vessels of war, his steamers conveyed him to sea, where he has enjoyed playing of firing in cannon very often...

He pleased very much in and was playful of almost everything, some important and some unimportant, as riding on Elephants and Horses and Ponies, racing of them and racing of rowing boats, firing on birds and beasts of prey, dancing and singing in various ways pleasantly, and various curiosity of almost everything, and music of every description and in taming of dogs, monkeys, &c., that is to say briefly that he has tested almost everything eatable except entirely testing of Opium and play.

Also he has visited regions of North-eastern Province of Sara Buri and Korat very often for enjoyment of pleasant riding on Elephants and Horses, at forests in chasing animals. of prey, fowling, and playing music and singing with Laos people of that region and obtaining young wives from there.

He was rumored to be baptized or near to be baptized in Christianity, but the fact it is false. He was a Buddhist, but his faith and belief changed very often in favor of various sects of Buddhism by the association of his wives and various families and of persons who were believers in various sects of the established religion of the Siamese and Laos, Peguan and Burmese countries. Why should he become a Christian? when his pleasures consisted in polygamy and enjoyment, and with young women who were practised in pleasant

Esplanade before the Wang Na guarded by a brace of cannon cast, possibly, by the hand of the Second Sovereign in the Fourth Reign and served by well-drilled soldiers costumed as English artillerymen. Cannon were fired each day from the Wang Na at 48 minutes before sunrise and at 8 o'clock in the evening to provide the citizenry of Bangkok with a regular time signal. Source: Neale, F.A., Narrative of a Residence in Siam London, 1852.



dancing and singing, and who could not be easily given up at any time. He was very desirous of having his sons to be English scholars and to be learned the art of speaking, reading and writing in English well like himself, but he said he cannot allow his sons to enter the Christian Missionary-School, as he feared his descendants might be induced to the Christianity in which he did not please to believe.

The foreign community found the statement "curious", a "cautious and verbose sketch... wherein he [the Second Sovereign] is by turns meanly disparaged and damned with faint praise"; it was felt that the "honourable reputation" of their favourite had been undermined because of Rama IV's "notorious jealousy of the Second King". This reaction appears unwarranted, and the characterization of Rama IV shallow and ill-founded. Might not Rama IV have sought to give a balanced view of the man who was Second Sovereign, but found it impossible to rid the review of traces of the disappointment of his expectations of his younger brother? As root cause of this frustration of Rama IV, I suggest the Withdrawal of the Second Sovereign from affairs of state when his aspirations to the throne were thwarted early in the Fourth Reign by the birth of a son to the Queen, and, perhaps as a consequence, the unbuddical behaviour of the Second Sovereign, his flirtation with Christianity and his preoccupation with worldly, if not frivolous, pastimes. Rama IV was not simply a Buddhist; he was the founder of a reformed sect of Buddhism which adhered to the moral precepts of the Teacher but eschewed its imaginative cosmogony because it conflicted with the ready introduction of Western scientific thought. As Sovereign, Rama IV was "defender of the faith"; Buddhism is a most tolerant faith, but it is the faith of Siam. Also, as actual head of state, Rama IV was engrossed with the modernization of his kingdom, a task which demanded utter dedication, infinite patience; the utmost care and total selflessness. Would not Rama IV have been nonplussed by a less than comparable commitment to this endeavour from his lieutenants, much less from his compeer?

Rama IV died in 1868, three years after the death of his younger brother, the Second Sovereign. Each was succeeded by his eldest son. Rama V, being but sixteen, was under a regent until he attained his majority in 1873; the regent, in fact, begot his regency since Rama

IV had authorized the Council at Court to name as his successor the most capable from among his male relations, not his eldest son alone. The regent masterminded also the appointment - better, perhaps, the *relegation* - of George Washington, aged thirty-one, to Second Sovereign; he being represented as the one suitable candidate:

This prince has studied many subjects and is well versed in the military techniques of Europe. He has also mastered many sorts of skills, just as had the late Second King... He can assume the responsibility for officials who were once under the late Second King.

George Washington was so dubbed by his father who desired that his son bear a name representative of both an English king and an American President. (Innocent Americans were wont to point out that the name "had been borne, not by an Asiatic, not by an European, but by the greatest of Americans - George Washington".) The name was merely one element, if ostentatious, in a Westernized upbringing from birth in which English dress was worn, the English language was spoken, written and read, and European customs were practiced. Might the father have sought to produce an Occidental from Oriental stock? If so, the scheme succeeded to the extent that the son became a facsimile of his Westernized father: characterizations of "Prince George" and, later, "King George Washington" read so like those of his royal sire that one must regularly be reminded of the Second Sovereign in question. Moreover, Westerners were as partial toward Second Sovereign George Washington vis-a-vis Rama V as they had been biased toward his father vis-a-vis Rama IV. This attitude was nicely comprehended by the commander of a United States warship engaged in showing the flag who, following an audience with the Second Sovereign, remarked feelingly: "That is the man who should have been First King". Similarly, descriptions of the *Wang Na* during the occupancy of Second Sovereign George Washington differ only in trifling details from those during the residence of his father, though visitors did remark that the palace was "not in the best state of repair, and looking like an old-fashioned mansion" which "bore an aspect of decay".

Second Sovereign George Washington died in August 1885; in September, Rama V terminated the position of Second Sovereign. Is it too much to say that



King George Washington: last Second Sovereign of Siam, Fifth Reign of the Bangkok Era. Source: Vincent, F., The Land of the White Elephant London, 1873.

the abolition of the office of Second Sovereign waited for the demise of the incumbent George Washington? Is it, then, unreasonable to suggest that the Siamese leadership had “read” the lesson of the Meiji Restoration in Japan in 1868 by which the power of the Imperial dynasty was restored (in the person of an Emperor aged fifteen) at the expense of the Shogun? I think not.

For foreigners, long resident or visiting as, indeed, for the native population, the office of Second Sovereign was a puzzlement. For Rama V and his ministers, striving mightily to modernize the kingdom, the office of Second Sovereign was an embarrassment. One king at a time is commonly thought to be as much as any kingdom has need of. Indeed, there seems to be a growing tendency among...nations... to think that even one is one too many. Nevertheless, there are in Siam... two kings reigning together... This is a curious fact. The office of king, one would suppose, implied in itself the impossibility of a rival. In Siam the second King... exercises a species of secondary or reflected authority, the limits of which did not appear to be at all clearly defined... He is said to dispose of one-third of the state revenue... but never without an order from the King... and to have at his command an army of about 2000 men... He is surrounded with the same royal insignia as the First King, though somewhat less ostentatiously displayed; and the same marks of honour... are paid to his person. He has his ministers, corresponding to those of the First King, and is supposed to take a more active part in the wars of the country than does the First King.

There would seem some danger in the adjacency of sovereignties so likely to clash... and the struggle between the two sovereignties is one of the incidents in the politics of Siam... the first King's party and the second King's party... took sides, just as at home they do in politics. How there could be a party for the second King, that did not mean the deposition of the first and Treason to the crown, was a problem... Thus... the position of the Second King in the government of Siam is most peculiar and anomalous.

From all that can be learned the second King is a very expensive honorary adjunct of Siamese royalty. He has no responsibility in the Government, and no special power except among his own personal adherents... He is a sort of shadow, and yet he is not always a true reflection of the mind and purpose of his sovereign... his present awkward and useless office... seems to be an expensive... one that might readily be absorbed into the royal office with a gain to the treasury and no loss to the State.

This brief anthology of the comments of several astute observers of Siam during the second half of the 19th century provides an ample apologia for the abandonment of the pseudoduarchy; but it does not provide an appreciation of the plain reason for the office of Second Sovereign. In Siam, the office of Second Sovereign was filled when this would avert a threat to the security of the kingdom; more particularly when, on the death of the King, the Council at Court dead-locked over the successor to the throne and could achieve consensus only provided a generous give 'and take which involved the *Wang Luang* and the *Wang Na*. The *Wang Na*, then, was a concession made to facilitate a decision on the Crown. The pseudo-duarchy, however, itself came to threaten the security of the kingdom, whatever the ambitions of the Second Sovereign himself. The rarity of the appointment of a Second Sovereign in any reign stands testimony to this unhappy situation. Rama V, however, did not simply decline to appoint a Second Sovereign; he acted to terminate the *office* of Second Sovereign, and as if to punctuate this sentence, he had the *Wang Na* unmade.

Rama V's abolition of the office of Second Sovereign may be seen as the removal of an anachronistic feature from a modernizing monarchy; as one relatively minor reform in a long

list of reforms aimed at remodelling the administration on Western lines. This explanation may satisfy, but it is superficial. Rama V's reason for reorganizing the working of the kingdom was his certain knowledge that Siam would not long be free from a takeover by the English or the French if he did not act to establish a strong central government, itself unified and synchronized under single leadership. The office of Second Sovereign, if not his person, suggested a split in the sovereignty of Siam which might encourage a European power to insinuate itself in affairs of state. Indeed, an astute American who visited Siam with General U.S. Grant, then ex-president of the United States, about five years before the death of Second Sovereign George Washington, commented on the latter's "great" political influence which he laid to the fact "that the British Consul-General is an active supporter of the second King".

The dissolution of the office of Second Sovereign was dramatized by the simultaneous dismemberment of the *Wang Na*; a large portion of the palace was given to the military; a substantial area in which stood a number of large buildings became the National Museum; and a small group of buildings tucked away in the heart of the *Wang Na*, was set aside to quarter the daughters, not the sons, of the last two Second Sovereigns. (Was the exclusion of male offspring from the former *Wang Na* meant to forestall even the suggestion of hereditary right to the office of Second Sovereign which accompanied the appointment of George Washington, the eldest son of the previous Second Sovereign?) Fortifications, as well as other structures, were not maintained, quickly

fell into disrepair, and were periodically demolished as Bangkok rebuilt itself according to current Western urban fashions. Rama V's return from his European tour in 1897 set off an explosive urban development in which roadway construction figured prominently and was especially effective in reducing the *Wang Na*. Three large office buildings housing first the Ministry of Education, then the Ministries of Justice and Communications, sprang up along the western side of the former *Wang Na*, facing the open park-like area, Sanam *Luang*, itself much enlarged through extensions into areas formerly within the walls of the *Wang Na*. As the remaking of the *Wang Na* proceeded, even the quarters of the daughters of the last Second Sovereigns were progressively reduced as these royal offspring died or otherwise departed. Finally, in 1916, during the reign of Rama VI, the few male scions of the Second Sovereign remaining were rehoused in the *Wang Luang*; in 1917 the urns in which were the ashes of the Second Sovereigns were transferred to the *Wang Luang*; and shortly thereafter the whole of the *Wang Na* was occupied by the Ministry of Defense, except for the National Museum. Since, the area formerly occupied by the *Wang Na* has been variously remade and used, and now it is as if the *Wang Na* had never been, for hardly a trace remains.

Long before the removal of the last vestige of the *Wang Na*, indeed, soon after the office of Second Sovereign was scotched, even educated Siamese were "as unwilling to reply to any question about why he was required as to curious speculations concerning the 'white elephant'".

Palace of the Second Sovereign of Siam circa 1890. The structure in front of the main building is a pavilion for mounting an elephant; the buildings behind are living quarters. Source: Smith, M., A Physician at the Court of Siam London, 1947.





The southern reaches of Bangkok along the Chao Phraya river downstream from Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem circa 1885; a view from the west bank looking southeastward. The cluster of imposing buildings on the east bank includes the Oriental Hotel, the East Asiatic Company, the French Legation and the Assumption Church. Source: Child, J.T., The Pearl of Asia, Reminiscences of the Court of a Supreme Monarch or Five Years in Siam Chicago, 1892.