

V-Na-Ca<sup>3</sup> group, has been found at Sungai Mas and at both Lobu Tua and Si Pamutung, though not at Pengkalan Bujang; they have also been found at Khuan Lukpad, an early site in southern Thailand and Sumatran sites such as Muara Jambi and Kambang Unglen, Palembang. All these glasses are thought to relate to the soda plant-ash glass that dominated mediaeval production in the Islamic world from about the eighth century CE onwards. Comprehensive statistical data is provided for all the analyses.

A variety of hypotheses are offered with regard to the usage of glass in mediaeval times. Recoveries at Lobu Tua and Bukit Hasang in Barus were found in what had been habitation areas. This is true also of the finds at Kota Cina, the majority of which were small glass containers concentrated in two small areas close to a domestic hearth. These vessels were clearly used in a domestic environment. Moreover this same location yielded a gold *tāli* or marriage token, which may suggest the vessels may have contained unguents or perfume of some form used by female members of the community.

All-in-all, this is a useful work on mediaeval glass at Pengkalan Bujang and in Southeast Asia generally, but is best read in conjunction with earlier work by Guillot et al. (2003) and earlier articles by Dussubieux as well as his most recent work. I do feel, however, that in the preparation of this work the authors may have benefited from conversations with Dr Alastair Lamb, said to be resident in France, and with Dr Robert Brill, now retired at Corning.

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### *Museums, history and culture in Malaysia*

By ABU TALIB AHMAD

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This book provides an overview of an area which has, until now, been relatively neglected: museums and public history in Malaysia. Through a survey of a number of the institutions that have sprung up as part of a postcolonial museumising boom, Abu Talib Ahmad analyses the extent to which their exhibits support or challenge national historical narratives. His consideration of the impact of political and cultural developments from the 1960s to the present offers a revealing perspective on contemporary Malaysian attitudes towards history and heritage.

The National Museum in Kuala Lumpur forms the starting point for the study. Since 2007, this institution has focused solely on history, incorporating many of the exhibits formerly displayed in the now-defunct National History Museum. The book's extended introduction describes both museums' foregrounding of nationalist, Malay-centric narratives which are designed to complement the national history curriculum and to support official nation-building aims. The author then introduces the

numerous provincial and thematic museums on which the rest of the book focuses, and outlines the study's central goal: to examine the 'contests and challenges between and within museums' across peninsular Malaysia, comparing the narratives represented in a range of provincial and memorial museums with those in the national museum, and with one another (p. 40).

The book's chapters are ordered thematically, each discussing the representation of a particularly contested aspect of Malaysian history in a range of museums, and assessing the influence of competing political pressures. The contested topics covered include the pre-Islamic history of the region, including indigenous and Hindu-Buddhist cultural influences; the arrival and spread of Islam within Malaysia; the Melaka Sultanate and its significance for Malay identity; the Japanese Occupation; the memorialising of prominent individuals from politics and popular culture; and, the representation of cultural heritage and the monarchy in the post-independence period. These discussions are supported with detailed descriptions of the exhibitions in question and their development over time.

Throughout *Museums, history and culture in Malaysia*, a number of key issues recur. The influence of political agendas — both central and provincial — on museum narratives is clearly drawn out. In the chapter dealing with the Japanese Occupation, for example, the author contrasts the 'official' narrative of the war years, which emphasises the positive consequences of the Occupation for Malaysia's journey to independence and minimises Japanese responsibility for local suffering, with the more diverse local experiences that are foregrounded in the war museums in Kota Bharu and Penang.

Another recurring theme is the role of museums in defining the nature of 'Malayness', and the extent to which exhibits reflect the political and cultural dominance of the Malays. As such, the book's analysis of the impact of the National Cultural Policy, particularly in the final chapter, is extremely insightful. It reveals the continuing struggles over the acknowledgement of non-Islamic influences on Malay culture past and present, in the face of Islamic resurgence and efforts towards cultural 'purification'. In the process, Abu Talib elucidates the deleterious effects of these debates on the preservation of local heritage. Meanwhile, the marginalisation of other ethnic groups in provincial museums is examined at length, as well as the ongoing inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic battles to allow all voices to be heard within public history and heritage narratives. The author argues that these trends have perpetuated a negative perception of museums among non-Malay communities who feel their experiences are inadequately represented, rendering futile many nation-building efforts.

While Abu Talib Ahmad does not dwell on the broader theoretical contexts in which his discussion is situated, he engages extensively with recent scholarship in Malaysian history and archaeology. In doing so, he highlights the many areas in which this diverges from museum narratives. This approach is at its most effective in Chapter 4, which analyses the representation of prime ministers Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak in their respective memorials. The author examines historiographical debates about these leaders' political contributions, before going on to show how the memorial exhibitions carefully sidestep these discussions, and instead choose to emphasise the politicians' admirable — and less contestable — personal qualities of determination, meticulousness and loyalty to the nation. In his

conclusion, he returns to this theme to express concern about museum boards' lack of receptiveness to contemporary scholarship, and the potential consequences of this for museum development.

As a whole, *Museums, history and culture in Malaysia* provides in-depth insight into the museum sector in Malaysia, its role in nation-building and identity formation, as well as the pressures it faces from central and local government, and from increasingly vocal elements in Malaysian society. The book's conclusions are therefore of importance to museum studies and to the growing discourse on public history and heritage in contemporary Southeast Asia.

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## Myanmar

*British Burma in the new century, 1895–1918*

By STEPHEN L. KECK

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This book, one in the series *Britain and the World* edited by the British Scholar Society, pursues two lines of approach. One is to focus on a specific period in the history of Burma that the author considers has been neglected, that between the end, about 1895, of the ten years of British 'pacification' that followed the third Burma war and the abolition of the kingdom, and the emergence of nationalist activity around the end of the First World War, in particular with the opening of the University of Rangoon. Dr Keck thinks that the period has an integrity that historians have rather neglected, and that his book is 'the first to delineate this moment as a relatively discrete historical entity' (p. 3). In his view the period shows the 'colonial state' at work and permits clarification of its objectives and effectiveness. And that, he considers, ought to make it more of a feature in the history of Burma/Myanmar than it does in writings that tend to proceed rather too rapidly from conquest to nationalist movement. There is surely something to be said for this point of view, though it seems to be a bit exaggerated. A drawback is that it risks playing down the influence on the policies and assumptions of the period of the experience of the earlier conquests of 'Lower' Burma.

The second line of approach is to make use less of the official records than of 'colonial knowledge', to work, as the author puts it, 'outside the grain' (p. 22). In this he particularly refers to the writing about Burma in the period with which he is mainly concerned, especially those he calls 'Burmaphiles', such as Sir George Scott (Shway Yoe), V.C. Scott O'Connor, Harold Fielding-Hall, Colin Metcalfe Enriques, 'the most important strand of British intellectual history for this study'