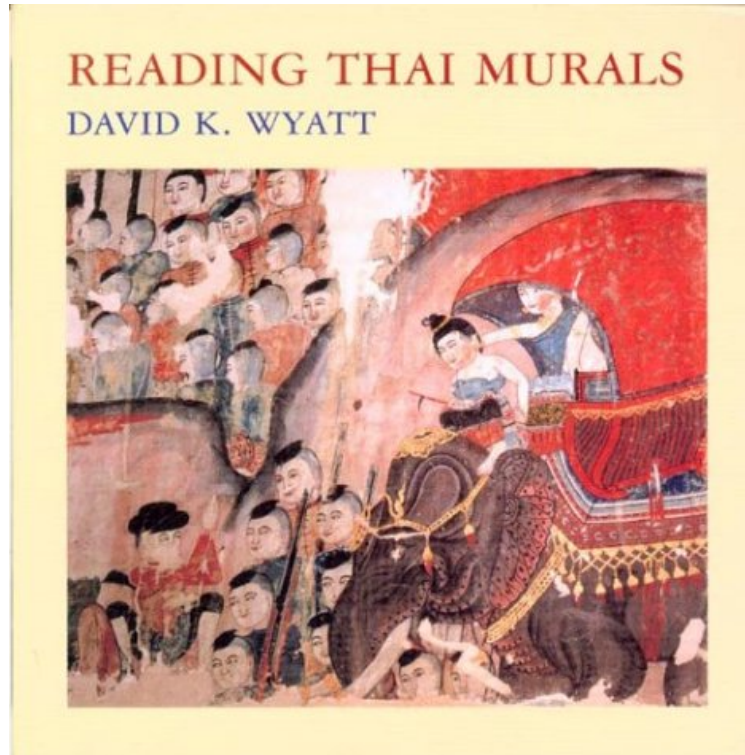



## Reading Thai Murals

David K. Wyatt

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**David K. Wyatt : Reading Thai Murals** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Reading Thai Murals:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Reading into Thai temple muralsBy Joan KingDavid K. Wyatt's book is a historian's interpretation of the murals of Wat Phumin, a temple in northern Thailand. Despite its rather misleading title, this book is neither an introduction nor a guide to reading Thai temple murals; nor is it art history or criticism. Written in plain language that is essentially jargon-free, this slim volume of 80 pages is quite accessible and reflects Wyatt's view that the Wat Phumin murals can be "read" as evidence of the past. The overall purpose of temple murals, of course, is to teach. Wat Phumin's murals were commissioned by the King of Nan at the end of the 19th century, not long after the Siamese king ceded half of Nan, then a vassal state of Siam (now Thailand), to the French. There are no written records of what the King of Nan must have thought or felt about the loss of his territory. Wyatt conjectures that the murals of Wat Phumin were a political and social commentary of contemporary events as re-told in scenes from the Buddhist tale of Gaddhana. Because it would have been impolitic to openly criticize the Siamese king, the murals depict the story of Gaddhana, a boy who goes in search of his father, the god Indra. "The message that viewers were reading off the walls," Wyatt concludes, "was from a cautionary tale of persistence through adversity, in a world suffused with evil in which virtue was rewarded eventually" (p. 21). Wyatt offers compelling evidence for historical commentary, revealing at different times slyness (the Gaddhana tale) and startling directness (the French depicted as copulating monkeys) in the parallels between story and history. In contrast, some of the social commentary

proves elusive, undoubtedly, because it is also cultural. There are some clever and even bawdy scenes that have been inserted in these religiously themed murals, which remind the reader/viewer that mural painting may have had more than teaching as its purpose; for example, the "shrouded man" which Wyatt interprets as a transvestite, and which may indicate social attitudes at the time. Examples such as this are references to local conditions, now forgotten. Though Wyatt attempts to avoid unfounded generalizations by providing examples and illustrations, the danger is in claiming to be able to "interpret" another culture's symbols. His book reminds us that ambiguities, both deliberate and accidental, are the result of time passing and cultural differences, and demonstrate the artist's ability to both reveal and coyly conceal a world and its politics. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Seeing is Believing. By Fred Prager Living in Thailand and working at the local National Museum I came into contact with the confusing styles of Thai temple murals. Wyatt's book lifted the veil on many of the reasons people look at these exquisite glimpses into Thai history and culture and just shake their heads. The educational aspects of the temple murals are often overlooked and the differing styles of the artists throughout the years only add to the inability of one to appreciate the beauty of the murals themselves. A few simple explanations by Mr. Wyatt put many of these questions to rest and allow one to appreciate the actual beauty of the murals themselves. I would consider this book to be a "must have" for the layperson either living in, or visiting, the Kingdom of Thailand. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting book. It really centers on Wat Phumin's frescos ... By Lance Manion Interesting book. It really centers on Wat Phumin's frescos.

Buddhist temple murals have been a vital form of religious expression in Thailand for centuries. In this lively, slim volume, historian David Wyatt takes a peek behind the scenes to investigate the wider meanings hidden within the beautiful, elaborately painted images that adorn Thai temples. Wyatt shows how a sensitive reading of these "texts" from the past can reveal fascinating new insights into the psyche and history of Thai communities.

"This is a fascinating piece of work, intelligently conceived and beautifully produced." Bangkok Post About the Author David K. Wyatt is one of the foremost historians of Thailand. He was John Stambaugh Professor of History at Cornell University before he recently retired.