

A photograph of a traditional Thai interior. The walls are covered in dark wood paneling with intricate carvings. A low, tufted orange sofa sits on a wooden floor. A small table with a bowl and other items is in front of the sofa. A hanging lantern provides light. The scene is viewed through a doorway on the right.

Classic Thai

Design · Interiors · Architecture

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Ayutthaya Painting

Thai murals are created on a background prepared and dried before the application of pigments mixed with glue. Thus they are not frescoes, which are painted on wet plaster. The technique was employed in the 11th-13th century murals of Pagan in neighboring Myanmar (Burma). One may surmise that Thailand too had murals of the type at that time.

As of the 17th century, saw-toothed bands were employed on the lower lateral walls of monastery buildings to separate the scenes from the Life of the Buddha, the Jataka (stories of the Buddha's 547 lives preparing for Buddhahood), as well as celestial figures in registers above them. The palette is restrained, limited to black, white, red and green with the main figures outlined in black. The paintings in general are two-dimensional although at times some of the buildings are depicted with a kind of perspective suggesting possible Western influence.

During the reign of King Borommakot (r 1733-1758) new designs were introduced as is evident from those at Wat Koh Keo Suttharam, Petchaburi. The Ayutthaya murals reached their apogee in the crypts at Wat Rajaburana, Ayutthaya, painted during his reign. These have been dated erroneously to 1424 because of an oblique reference in the *circa* 1680 Luang Prasoert Chronicle. However, the memoirs of King Uthumphon (r April-May 1758), who succeeded Borommakot, state that his father built War Rajaburana (Office of the Prime Minister 1991, 46). The murals affirm this for they show Sri Lankan influence from Borommakot's sending monks to that country to resuscitate Buddhism there and include a jewelled Footprint of the Buddha atop a mountain, indicating his devotion to the Footprint on top of Adam's Peak, Sri Lanka, and Phra Phuttha Bat on Mount Suvan napabbata, Saraburi, Thailand.

The presiding Buddha image of Wat Koh Keo Suttharam, Petchaburi, echoes in style that of the meditating Buddha image in the mural to the rear being attacked by Mara's Army, which the earth goddess wrings water from her hair to disperse. On each side of the mural is a Buddha Footprint representing the Footprint on Adam's Peak and Phra Phuttha Bat. Dated 1734, early in the reign of King Borommakot.



Painting on wood of a rhinoceros perhaps suggesting that they were abundant in Thailand at the time, Sala Kan Parien, Wat Yai Suwannaram, Petchaburi; *ca* early 18th century.