John N. Miksic and Geok Yian Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*. New York: Routledge.

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As the study of Southeast Asian history has moved forward by leaps and bounds since the 1970s or so, our understanding of “ancient” times, roughly before the sixteenth century, has been revolutionised by new devices in archaeology, fertilised by anthropological and source-critical methods. When reading the volume under review, one inevitably notes the enormous contrast with the classic in the field, Georges Coedès’s *Les états hindouisés d’Indochine et d’Indonesie* (3rd edition, 1964), an erudite survey of kings, states and monuments that offered a paradigmatic narrative echoed in many a textbook. Parallel with the Western fascination for ancient India and classical China, Southeast Asian civilisations tended to be taxed in terms of monumental religious architecture and art which suggested a “Greater India” that stretched until Bali or so. To early archaeologists and epigraphists, the records revealed a golden age of Pagan, Dvaravati, Java, Champa and the Khmer Empire, before the domination of Theravada Buddhism and Islam in this part of the world. As the older generation of classical scholarship has died out, the study of ancient times has become increasingly fragmentised in specialised subfields, with writings in both European and various Southeast Asian languages. This is, of course, what we could expect in any scholarly field of studies. While classical themes of art, architecture and Indianisation have continued to thrive, studies of economic systems and the underpinnings of statecraft have made great advances, and so have studies of areas without monumental remains or written sources. To gather all this in one volume, and to deal with myths and conventions about the “classical” era once upheld by older scholarship, is not a task for the faint-hearted. In this sizeable work, John Miksic and Geok Yian Goh have nevertheless made a respectable attempt to sift through the data and challenge what might be left of the paradigmatic narratives of Krom, Coedès, Briggs and Maspero. The work is labelled as historical archaeology, though the authors reveal a good knowledge of the textual records.

Miksic and Geok take care to define the theoretical focus of their study. While world-system and globalisation theories are found somewhat wanting in explanatory power, they employ the term interaction sphere to study a sprawling region which share certain artefacts and symbolic systems. Among the strengths of the work is no doubt the broad and comparative perspectives taken by the authors. While the old generations of classical scholarship would refer to Indian models with regard to religion, culture and state formation, the book widens the perspective. For example, Miksic and Geok seek explanatory

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models for societal trajectories in parallel but unrelated cultures such as Meso-America which gives a refreshing view of the conditions under which tropical and subtropical high civilisations were able to develop. Moreover, the authors critically scrutinise models of economic redistribution which have sometimes been applied in too categorical ways. Thus they point at the problems of fitting river-based early states into the well-known upstream-downstream (*hulu-hilir*) model which posits a downstream royal centre which receives products from upstream areas for trading with the outside world. In fact the model poorly fits the demonstrable facts even in areas where it has often been applied, as in Sumatra.

The volume is built on a very extensive reading of academic texts in Western languages and Indonesian. Given the heroic undertaking it might be churlish to complain about omissions in the references. I nevertheless find it curious that the authors do not refer to Roy Jordaan's and Maurice Colless's studies which offer a partly new perspective on Srivijaya and its political tie with ancient Java, especially given the miniscule number of serious scholars currently working on the tricky problems of the historical position of the Srivijaya and Sailendra polities. The identities of several geographical names found in Chinese records are controversial to say the least, for example the relation between Poli/Poni and Brunei; reference to the work of Johannes Kurtz could have been useful here. On the other hand, the authors seem very well updated on the archaeological fieldwork results of the last decades, work which has altered much of our understanding about statecraft, trade and foreign relations. The perspectives opened by the strides of underwater archaeology in recent decades provide fascinating insight in the dynamics of inter-regional trade, for example the "Cirebon" shipwreck from c. 970 which carried hundreds of thousands of ceramic ware towards Java, which at the time may have had two million inhabitants. The conclusions about economic networks following the new finds greatly qualify the statements of older generations of scholars. It is also apparent from their account how much looting has disrupted the archaeological record in modern times. In many cases we only have rumours about objects found by looters.

While the book cannot fail to impress the reader with the breadth of details and interpretative points, the massive nature of the undertaking is also its weakness. Certain parts of the book read more like a catalogue of archaeological sites than a textbook narrative. While this approach can be useful for anyone who wants a detailed work of reference, it is tiring for the normal academic reader. Many of these details could, in my opinion, have been relegated to extensive appendices. As a consequence of the focus on sites, the history of the various early states comes in bits and pieces which might be confusing for a reader who is not already familiar with the story. Thus the rulers of

Zhenla appear here and there along the pages, and it is hard for the uninitiated to even know that they belonged to the same polity. There is also a tendency of repetitiveness as some data and points of discussion recur over the chapters, sometimes almost verbatim. No doubt the authors should have devoted more attention to the structure of the text. As an introductory narrative of Southeast Asia up to the sixteenth century the work therefore has its limitations, though as a handbook it definitely fills a role as a reliable and thoughtful resource.

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