



Court in Wat Phra Keo.

# THE GARDENS OF SIAM

*One can see the unique and beautiful characteristics of a Siamese temple court, with their shady old ficus trees, their white buildings with such beautifully decorated doorways and windows, their dazzling gold stupas and glittering mosaic work.*

ELIZABETH K. ROYS, 1927

Traveling through Siam, now known as Thailand, Elizabeth Roys concludes that the only authentic Siamese gardens are found surrounding the country's many Buddhist temples, or *wats*. An influx of Europeans and an embrace of Western "progress" had too strongly shaped the gardens of the wealthy in Bangkok, while the rural gardens of the poor, if they existed at all, consisted only of modest vegetable patches.



[Wat Arun, Bangkok] A curved bridge leads over a small canal to the rest of the temple buildings, and ficus and palm trees are to be found in the courts. The priests used this canal for bathing purposes.



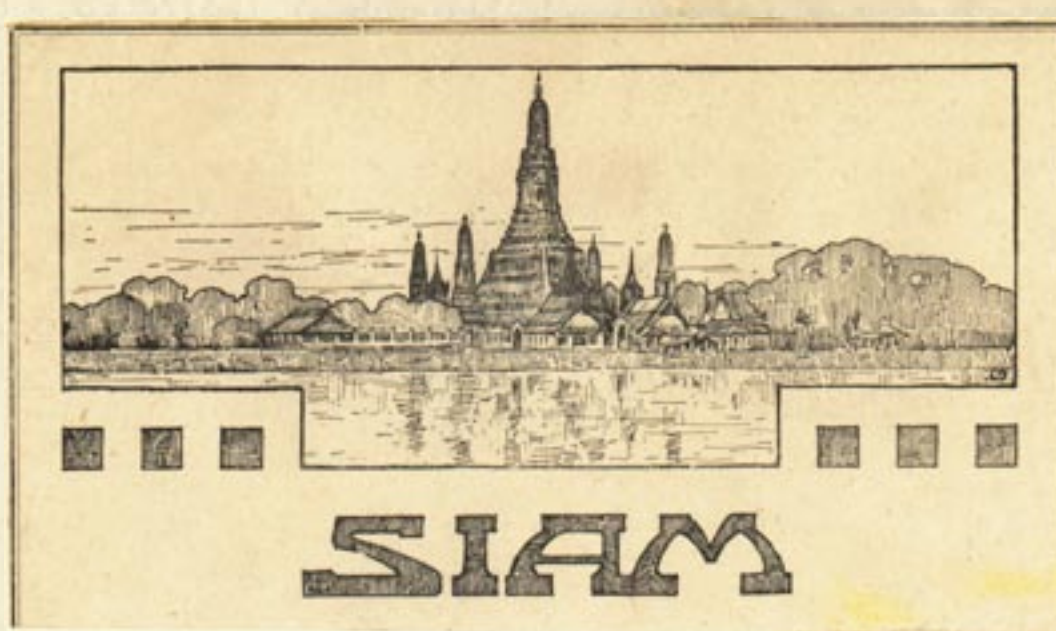
One of the numerous old stupas to be found in ruined condition throughout the country-side in Siam. This one was found in the fields north of Chiangmai, nothing left of the temple but a pile of rubbish and the spire of the stupa.

Roys underscores the importance of Buddhism to Siamese culture and records the great number of *wats* dotting the landscape. She describes their prevalent coating of gleaming white stone and stucco set off by black lacquered windows and doors, brilliantly colored roof tiles, and the shade of fig trees. No flowers appear. Instead, courtyards are adorned with venerable old trees, clipped shrubs, rockeries, figures of lions, horses, and elephants, and many statues of the Buddha. Numerous highly decorated *stupas*, or small pagodas, contain the ashes of the dead.

In Bangkok Roys visited the famous Wat Phra Keo, or Chapel of the Emerald Buddha and recorded her impressions of the Wat Arun, or Temple of the Dawn. She also carefully investigated the temples of northern Siam, including the Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep,



[Postcard] A corner of the town house of Prince Damrong, the Prime Minister, showing the pergola built in the garden. This can be easily seen to be entirely foreign to anything Siamese, though very attractive in itself. I did not take a picture of the house—it was too discouraging to one looking for the typically Siamese.



Clipping pasted by Roys into her notebook

on the mountaintop above the city of Chiang Mai. Most striking is Roys' lamentation over the great number of ruined temples and overgrown gardens she encountered during her visit. Today many of these may exist only through her photographs.