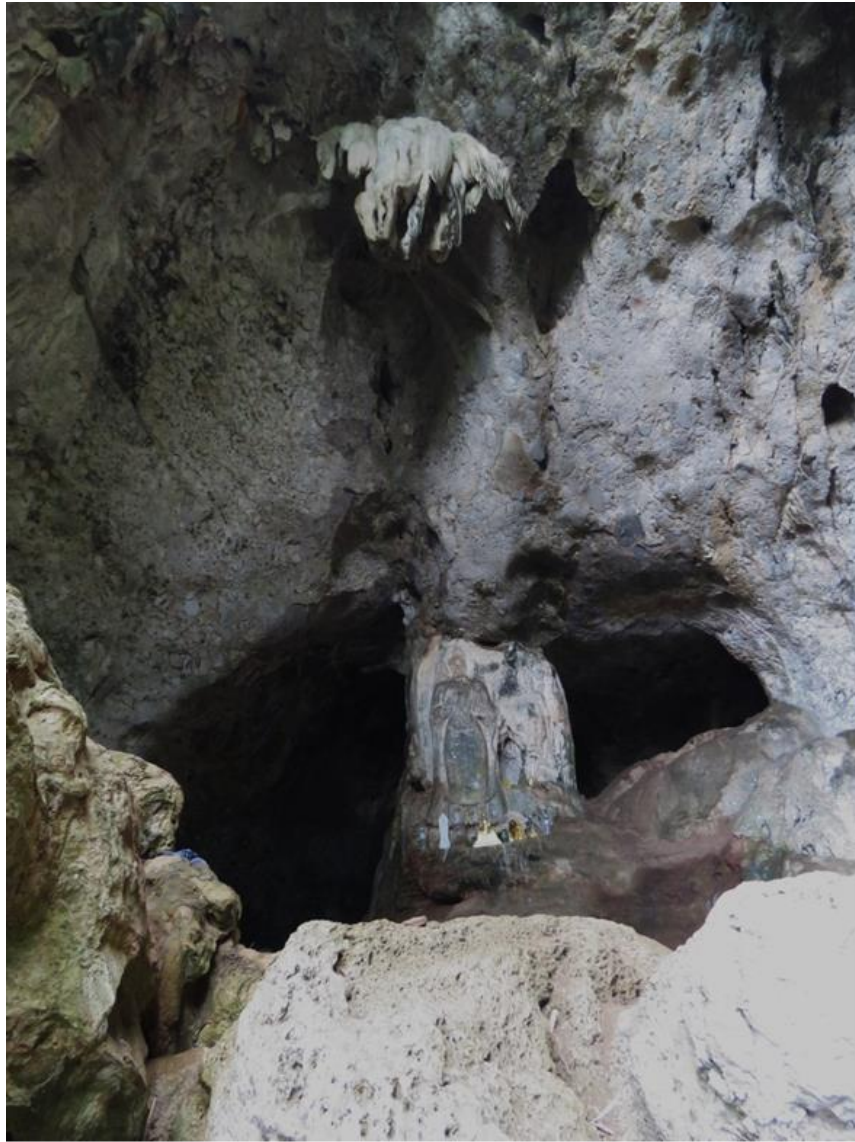


# The Journal of Spelean History



January - June 2017

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# *The Journal of Spelean History*

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**Front Cover:** The entrance to Tha Morat Cave, Thailand. Notice the Buddha carving on the central column, it is 2.6 meters tall for scale. See the article by Lew Toulmin in this issue.

# THE HISTORIC THA MORAT TEMPLE CAVE AND A POSSIBLE UNLOCATED “JIM THOMPSON” CAVE IN PHETCHABUN PROVINCE, THAILAND

Lew Toulmin, Ph.D., F.R.G.S., F.R.S.A.

Although there are over 3900 caves in Thailand (Ellis, 2011; Shepton Mallet Caving Club, 2017) Tha Morat Cave in Phetchabun province, in north central Thailand, must rank among the most important in terms of artistic expression. No less an authority than the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has stated that Tha Morat Cave “has one of the most extensive sculptural programs devoted to Buddhas and bodhisattvas in mainland Southeast Asia” (Guy, 2014). Part of this importance is the fact that the temple cave sculptures date back over 1000 years, to about 600-1000 C.E. (See cover of this issue.)

Despite this importance, the cave is little visited, partly because it is near the top of a small but steep and challenging mountain, Khao Amon Rat (**Fig. 1**). And its exact position is not marked in the two main sources on caves in Thailand (Ellis and Shepton Mallet, *op. cit.*). This article provides information on the cave’s location and history, including its discovery by and links to Jim Thompson, the famous “Silk King of Thailand,” on accessing the area and cave, and on the possibility that another important cave, yet to be located, is in the area.

## History and Legend of the Mountain and its Cave

Tha Morat Cave was apparently inhabited by Buddhist monks and hermits beginning sometime in the 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E., who likely used the cave for meditation and to escape the rainy season floods that threatened the city of Si Thep on the plains below (Guy, 2014). Si Thep was probably part of the Buddhist, Mon kingdom of Dvaravati, which began in about the 5<sup>th</sup> century and was conquered or absorbed by the Khmer empire in about the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries (Dofflemyer, 1982). The large, isolated city was abandoned for hundreds of years before being discovered by the outside world in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



**Fig 1.** Khao Amon Rat, the mountain containing Tha Morat Cave, viewed from the south. Note the so-called “helicopter landing area” on the upper right near the peak.

Various foreign travelers and writers began visiting the ruins of Si Thep city starting in 1904 (Dofflemyer, 1982). But the first awareness of the importance of the only nearby mountain came from Quaritch Wales (1937) who heard the local legend that long ago “on a mountain near the city” there lived two hermits, Fire-Eye and Ox-Eye.

According to this legend as recorded by Wales, Fire-Eye had as a pupil a prince, the son of the king of Si Thep. Fire-Eye told the prince that nearby were two wells, one with deadly water and one with life-giving water. The prince did not believe this tale, so Fire-Eye said he would demonstrate it by bathing in the well of death, if the prince would promise to pour water from the well of life over the hermit, to bring him back from the dead. The prince promised to do this, but then when the hermit was dead “the faithless pupil ran back to the city” without reviving Fire-Eye. Luckily Ox-Eye was passing the well of death, saw bubbles in the well, and realized what had happened. Ox-Eye poured the water of life on Fire-Eye and revived him.

Fire-Eye then swore revenge on the prince, the king, and the city. Using his magic powers, he created a bull which roared around the city for seven days, then rushed in. The bull’s “body burst...[and] poison flowed out, destroying all the people.” And so Si Thep was wiped out, never to rise again. Wales speculates that this legend is perhaps a metaphor for a terrible cholera epidemic that struck the city.

### **The Figures in the Cave**

There were between six and eleven carved stone religious figures in Tha Morat Cave, ranging from 60 cm. to 2.6 meters in height (Brown, 1996; Dofflemyer, 1982; Muir, 1998). None have survived with their heads intact, and many of the bodies are severely damaged also. The most famous and attractive head is shown in **Fig. 2**; it probably was taken from this cave, although there is some question about that fact. It is likely from the late 8th century C.E. (Guy, 2014) although Jim Thompson and his photographer dated it to the 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries (Nimboonchaj, 1962) and Wales (1969) thought it was from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Buddha is so important and expressive that it is normally on display in the National Museum of Thailand, and it was recently loaned (April-July 2014) to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (“the Met”) in New York for the major exhibition “Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Southeast Asia, 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Century” (Guy, 2014). The head is a Bodhisattva Maitreya Buddha, meaning that it is an image of a reincarnated Buddha who is prophesied to come to Earth after about the year 4500 C.E., to restore Buddhism to the world (Bowie, 1972). The head is 14.75 inches high and weighs 35 pounds. It was cut from the living rock of a cave in about 1960, and found its way into the collection of the legendary Jim Thompson.



Fig. 2. A Bodhisattva Maitreya Buddha head, likely from Tha Morat Cave.

### Jim Thompson Enters the Scene

The first outsider to grasp the importance of Tha Morat Cave was Jim Thompson, the “Silk King of Thailand,” former OSS (US Office of Strategic Services—the World War II predecessor to the CIA) chief of station in Bangkok and later a CIA asset (Brown, 1984; Kurlantzick, 2012; Scott, 2010; Toulmin, 2015a, 2015b, and 2016) (**Fig. 3**). During the 1950s and 1960s he was one of the most well-known Americans in southeast Asia, and he is certainly the most famous American in Thai history. He created the modern Thai silk industry and the large silk firm that bears his name, built a magnificent house-museum that is still one of the top attractions in Bangkok, filled it with Asian art and antiques, and entertained movie stars, celebrities, and world leaders every night. He disappeared while on vacation at a small mountain resort in northern Malaysia in March 1967. Not a trace was ever found, despite one of the largest searches on land in southeast Asian history (Central Intelligence Agency, 1968; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1967; Kurlantzick, 2012; Toulmin, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017; US Department of State, 1967; Warren, 1998).



Fig. 3. Jim Thompson (1906-1967?), OSS officer, “Silk King,” and cave hunter.

Thompson was quite interested in caves, and had been on expeditions to find caves near the famous River Kwai and likely elsewhere. Just three weeks before he disappeared, he went on a cave-seeking effort north of Bangkok to “photograph cave ceilings to be used for ... Thai silk prints” (Rochlen, 2006).

There are four key unpublished letters that describe in detail Jim Thompson’s connection to Si Thep and his discovery of Tha Morat Cave. These are three handwritten letters from Thompson to Elizabeth “Lisa” Lyons, dated 14 April 1958, 5 January 1962, and 19 March 1962, and a typewritten letter dated 8 October 1962 from Thompson to the Director-General of Thai Fine Arts Department. This latter letter has never been published in its entirety, but was cited extensively by William Warren (1998, 2004). Copies of all 200 pages of the Thompson/Lyons letters, and the Fine Arts letter, are in my Thompson disappearance report (Toulmin, 2015a). See also the Elizabeth Lyons Papers (1959-1966.)

Lyons was previously Thompson’s lover (as made clear in the first of his letters to her; see also Pezzati, 2011) and subsequently his art colleague and confidant. The letters overlap and repeat elements of the story, so the narrative below will proceed chronologically for ease of understanding.

In the first letter (14 April 1958) Thompson describes how the previous weekend (apparently on Saturday, April 12, 1958 or perhaps Saturday, April 5, 1958) he and friend Joe Huffman took an army jeep for a drive up north from Bangkok to Lopburi and to “find the Burmese Pagoda lost in the jungle.” (This is likely a reference to Quaritch Wales’ ruined city.) On Sunday they went to “Petchaboon” province, first going down a “jungle track” that he had tackled the year before in his “Hillman Minx,” in search of the ancient city. But this proved fruitless, so at “kilometer 113” they turned right (east) “into the jungle.” After crossing a small river, hard paddy fields and going through jungle with local guides on board, they thought they had been “hoaxed” but the guide said to press on, and “finally remains of laterite city walls appeared.” They found an artificial lake, a huge brick tower on a laterite foundation, a large Vishnu figure, and a large Khmer “Golden Mount”—all in a ruined city called by the local villagers “Sri Thep”—City of the Gods” (Dofflemeyer, 1982; now called “Si Thep.”). An old man in the village said that Thompson’s jeep “was the first vehicle ever to come in” to the area. He also said that a “farang” [foreigner] had come in “ten years before...in an ox cart.” This was evidently Quaritch Wales.

In this first letter Thompson makes no mention of the cave Tha Morat or any other cave. But in his letter of 8 October 1962, he states that during the 1958 trip,<sup>1</sup> local villagers told him about the “wonderful caves” [sic, note the plural] “full of beautiful sculpture” on top of the nearby Khao Sam (or Amon) Rat mountain. Thompson and Huffman wanted to visit the cave, but were prevented by dense jungle and heavy rains. According to the October 1962 letter, Thompson was later inspired by reading Quaritch Wales’ account of Si Thep, and he realized that the legendary “mountain of the two hermits” and the cave he had heard about in 1958 were likely all the same place—the steep mountain WNW of Si Thep.

In 1960 and 1961 (per the October 1962 letter) Thompson acquired five (or more) beautiful white limestone Buddha heads—including the one later loaned to the Met. The first three heads, bought in 1960, were fully three dimensional, while the two heads acquired in 1961 were flatter. He paid “local dealers ... \$2500” USD for all five heads, and felt that “in the United States they would bring

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<sup>1</sup> In his typewritten letter of October 1962 Thompson estimates that his first visit was in 1954, but his handwritten letter makes it clear that actually the first visit was in 1958.



\$5000 each” (Beech, 1962). Curious about their origins, he made discreet inquiries and learned that they were likely from the Si Thep area, probably from the same cave on the mountain. He resolved to visit this mysterious and important cave, which no previous explorer or art expert had described, documented, or even found.

Thompson’s handwritten letter of 5 January 1962 described his expedition (which apparently took place between 30 December 1961 and 4 January 1962).<sup>2</sup> He told Lisa Lyons that he had just returned from a trip with two friends (Ethan Emory and Kurt \_\_\_\_ ) in which they traveled to the Si Thep area and went looking for the cave, using local guides, including a child and some hunters. For a time he and his companions were lost on the mountain—perhaps a foreshadowing of Thompson’s getting lost and disappearing in the mountains of Malaysia. But then “onward and upward we went” and the guides “shouted “There it is!”—a great opening in the cliff—and there was the body of the great Buddha minus head & hands.” Thompson found “only six figures in this cave.”

In this January letter Thompson states to Lyons that, “Another cave nearby has been sealed up & that no doubt was where my first three heads came from that I found with you & Carl” (Fig. 4).

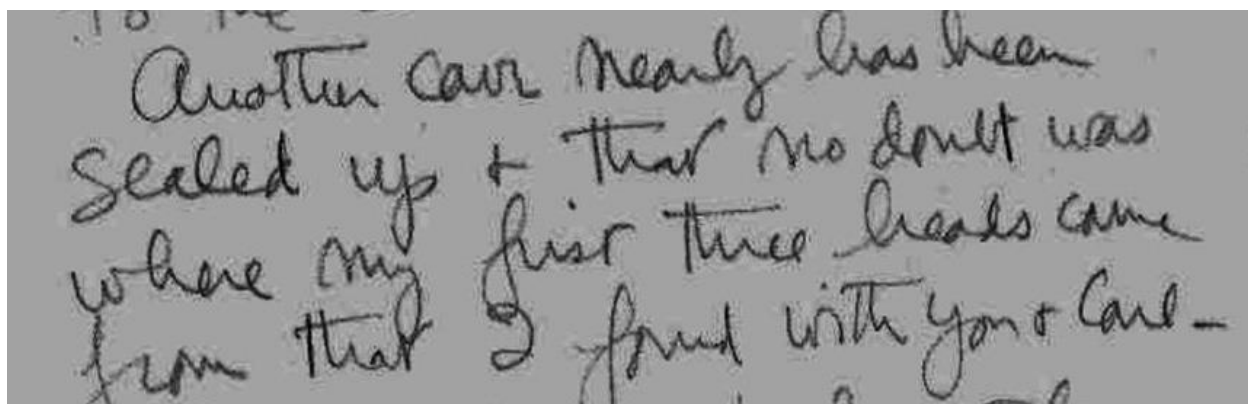


Fig. 4 Excerpt from Jim Thompson’s letter to Lisa Lyons, 5 January 1962.

Thompson reiterates in his 8 October 1962 typewritten letter that, “All the figures [in Tha Morat Cave] were in rather flat relief, and the first three I acquired were almost full relief, and **could not have come from this cave.**” [Emphasis added.]

This same letter states that, “We asked the boy [the 12-year-old guide] if there was another cave on the mountain, and he answered yes, but a giant naga [snake or cobra] lived in it and it had been sealed up. At first he [and the] hunters said they would take us to it...” but then the guides led the foreigners down the mountain instead.

Thompson’s handwritten letters also make the following points:

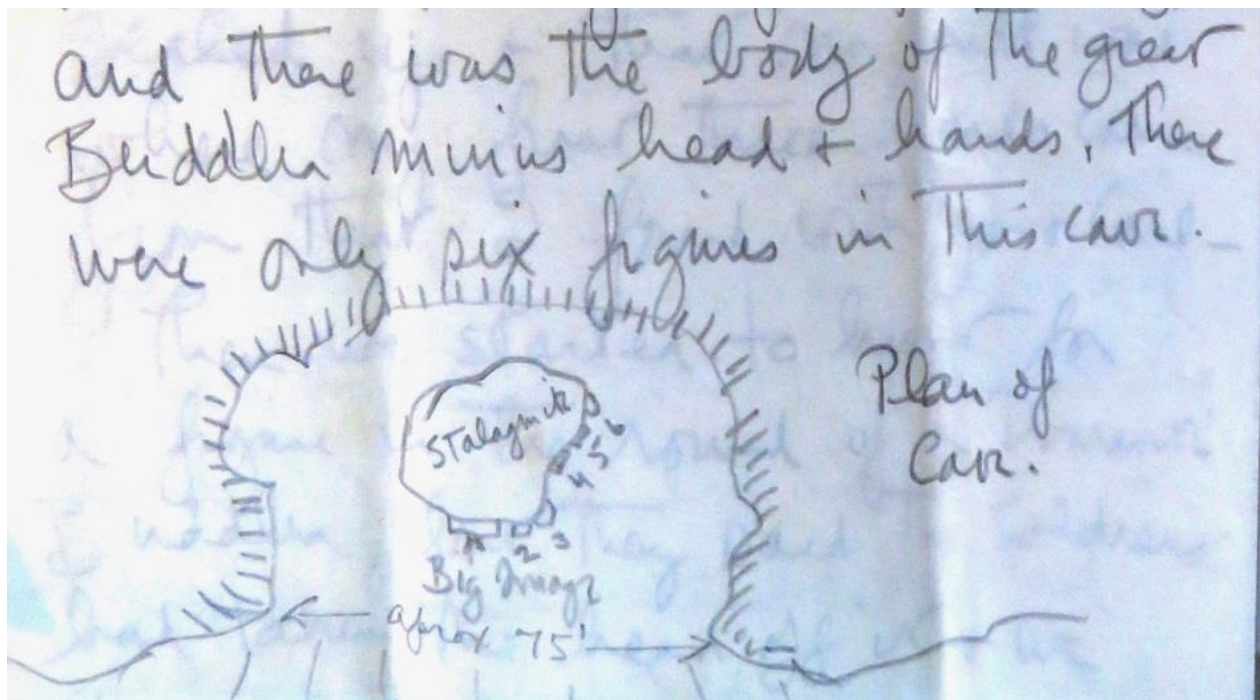
- The trip to Si Thep and Tha Morat was “successful beyond belief” (January 1962 letter).
- He said, “We thought we better not unseal the other cave” (January 1962 letter) since the guides were superstitious about it and Jim thought that he would return soon to pursue the

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Ellis feels that, although this letter is dated “5 Jan 1962, Bangkok, Chinese New Year,” Thompson mis-dated the “Jan” and meant “Feb,” since Chinese New Year was on February 5 that year. This would mean that the expedition likely took place on February 2-4 (Friday through Sunday), 1962 (Ellis, 2016b).

effort. (Note that here the phrasing almost seems to indicate that the second cave was actually located by Thompson, but this notion is contradicted by the typewritten October letter to the Fine Arts Department.) Thompson was going to return to the cave three weeks later (apparently on 20-21 January 1962—or late in February 1962) but he became ill and his friends went instead. They “were not shown the second cave” (8 October 1962 letter).

- “The opening of the big cave had been dynamited much wider by the police” [!] (January 1962 letter).
- “The police and the army had both removed things and dynamited the place” [!] (January 1962 letter).
- He thinks that the dimensions taken in some future expedition, and the different number of arms of the figures, should allow one to tell which severed heads match which bodies in the cave (March 1962 letter).
- A sketch is provided by Thompson which matches well with the existing, known Tha Morat Cave (**Fig. 5**).



**Fig. 5** Jim Thompson’s “Plan of Cave,” dated 5 January (or February) 1962. Note “only six figures in this cave” and the “stalagmite” and six figures around it with the “big image” in front.

William Warren (1998), a close friend of Thompson, adds that later, after an art dispute with the Thai government (described below) “Thompson lost interest in the project and **never resumed the search** [for the second cave], **nor, it seems, did anyone else**” (p. 119; emphasis added).

As indicated by Thompson himself in his letters, the only way to accurately determine whether or not each of the heads now in the National Museum are positively from Tha Morat Cave would be to:

- Make accurate casts of the originals.
- Undertake accurate measurements of the originals.
- Take the casts and the measurements up to the cave itself (an arduous task).
- Build a platform(s) to access the tops of the decapitated Buddha bodies.
- Try to match the casts and measurements of the heads to the bodies and “shadows” of bodies that remain carved in the stone.
- Stylistically match the bodies and heads.
- Undertake analysis of the limestone composition of the heads, bodies, and cave walls.

Thompson’s own words on this topic, are: “As usual, Boeles [a friend and associate of Thompson] thinks that it’s impossible to figure which head came off which body, but we have the dimensions of the heads and the dimensions of the blank spaces—Also all the Bhodisatvas have four arms and the Buddhas two” (March 1962 letter).

Regarding the chain of custody of the Thompson heads, the letters shed some new light on this. As mentioned above, the letters state that the cave was looted and “dynamited” by the Thai police and army. Note that this very disturbing allegation has never before been revealed. The dealers who sold the heads to Thompson are not named.

But the hand-written letter of 19 March 1962 states that: “I just got a letter from Mr. Wolfe today that he had sold the head of the Scythian<sup>3</sup> donor of the cave to Blanchette Rockefeller.” This appears to reflect Thompson’s feeling that one of the six figures in the cave was the donor of the cave (his October 8 letter refers to “another figure which might represent the donor of the cave”) and thus that head eventually ended up in the possession of the Rockefeller family.

Blanchette and John D. Rockefeller III founded the Asia Society in 1959 and later donated over 300 works to the Society’s museum in New York City (Cotter, 2005). Blanchette (1909-1992) was twice president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and was the mother of Jay Rockefeller, the West Virginia Governor and US Senator. A search of the on-line catalog of the holdings of the Asia Society Museum showed only one possible limestone head or figure that might be the “donor” from the cave, but this figure is so beautifully preserved and so large that it seems very unlikely that this is the ex-Thompson head.

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<sup>3</sup> Scythian is likely the correct word here, since there were Scythian connections in north central Thailand. The Scythians were a group of Iranian Eurasian nomads who lived on the steppes of Ukraine, Russia and Crimea for hundreds of years up until about 100 B.C., then migrated to northwest China, where they lived and sometimes traded with southeast Asia through about 1100 C.E. A statue of the Scythian god Surya was found in Si Thep “dressed in Scythian style with a long tunic down to his knees and boots” (Krairiksh 2012). Thus the statue sold to the Rockefellers is probably dressed in this style.

Hence it appears possible that Thompson acquired six (not five) heads, one was sold via “Mr. Wolfe” to Blanchette Rockefeller (and apparently was not given to the Asia Society) and five (or more) were seized by the Thai government.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that the typewritten letter of October 1962 from Thompson is a key part of a major dispute between Thompson and the Director-General of the Thai government’s Fine Arts Department. The DG was accusing Thompson of looting the patrimony of the country, while Thompson’s attitude was that he was buying the best of the best that was available, holding it, and was leaving it to the Siam Society and thus the people of Thailand in his will. (The Siam Society is a prestigious cultural society under Thai Royal patronage.) The Director-General insisted on seizing the Buddha limestone heads that Thompson held. (Note that Dofflemyer (1982) lists seven heads (not five or six) and various other objects that Thompson eventually ceded ownership of or “permanently loaned” to the Thai Fine Arts Department.) The DG even created a public spectacle, in which “crowds of police invaded” Thompson’s house to seize the heads, along with a “pack of local news reporters and photographers” (Beech, 1962; Kurlantzick, 2012).<sup>4</sup>

This incident so angered Jim, who ironically earlier that year had been decorated with the prestigious Order of the White Elephant by the King of Thailand (Beech, 1962) that he sold off a considerable portion of his remaining Thai Buddha art collection, focused on collecting other items, and never returned to Si Thep or the cave. Jim was also angered that the Siam Society was not intervening on his behalf, so he changed his will and left all his art and other holdings to his nephew in America, instead of to the Society (Warren, 2004).

Fortunately, after Jim’s disappearance in 1967, his nephew and others created the Jim Thompson Foundation, which now administers the Bangkok house-museum and retains its many art objects, antiques and artifacts (but not the limestone Buddha heads or other ceded items) and is open to the public.

Jim Thompson’s anger and bitterness is perhaps more understandable if we try to understand his point of view. He likely felt that one part of the Thai government, the army and police, had looted and dynamited a beautiful and ancient heritage site that Thompson wanted to preserve (per his letter of 5 January 1962). Thompson was trying to hold onto the Buddha heads from that site and leave them to the Siam Society and thus the Thai people; and then another branch of the Thai government—the Fine Arts Department—accused him of looting the patrimony of the country and demanded that he immediately turn over the relics, without compensation or pursuing the original looters, while severely blackening his reputation.

One possibility which was apparently never voiced by Thompson and may not have occurred to him was that the entire scenario was a “set up” by the Thai police or army (Ellis, 2016a). Thus perhaps the police/army looted the cave, and benefited by selling the Buddha heads to a dealer. Then the dealer benefited by selling the heads to Thompson at a higher price—with perhaps a cut back to the looters. Next the Thai Fine Arts Department benefited by seizing the heads for free from Thompson, thus improving the Department’s reputation as crime fighters, and meanwhile selling some artifacts onward at a 100 percent profit, less any cut back to the original looters. (Dofflemyer

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<sup>4</sup> According to Maryanne Stanislaw (2017), granddaughter of Connie Mangskau (Jim’s best friend and art associate), Jim got some revenge on the Thai Fine Arts Department, because Connie was warned by a source about the impending October 1962 police raid, some time before the raid occurred. She passed this warning to Jim, and he immediately sold or transferred a large portion of his Thai antiques to friends in the diplomatic corps who “quietly took them out of the country.”

(1982) states that some items that were reportedly seized from Thompson were not locatable at the National Museum.) The only loser was Jim Thompson. All this is quite speculative, but Ellis (2016a and b) states that this kind of criminal operation is not uncommon in Thailand even down to the present.

A tantalizing, previously unpublished account from the 1960s written by a US Foreign Service officer (Rock, n.d.) serving in Bangkok, states that in a different series of police raids, numerous antique dealers, especially foreigners, were raided, but the police knew the “suspects” were in fact innocent, and the largest corrupt antique dealer and smuggler, named “Thada,” was not raided and was being protected by the police. It is clear from this account that the powerful Thada is very hostile towards Thompson and his friends and art experts Connie Mangskau and Lisa Lyons (and the latter two were targeted in this series of raids). So perhaps Thada set up Thompson in the 1962 raid. Unfortunately, William Warren, the last remaining actor alive, does not remember this shadowy figure (Warren, 2017b).

### **Matching Heads with Bodies**

A literature review was undertaken, to locate any comprehensive scientific analysis of whether the Buddha heads now in the possession of the National Museum of Thailand, actually came from Tha Morat Cave, or from some other cave or location.<sup>5</sup>

This review showed that some measurements of the cave (at 15 meters high, 25 meters deep, 25 meters wide, with a central, natural column) and its six or more carved figures have been made over the years (Brown, 1996; Dofflemyer, 1982; Munier, 1998; Wales, 1969). However, it is reasonably apparent that: first, no comprehensive, detailed, scientific analysis has been done to firmly prove that all the ex-Thompson heads came from Tha Morat Cave; second, such an analysis would be difficult but perhaps not impossible; and third, no concerted effort has been made to find a second, but unknown, cave.

The only possible exception to these conclusions comes from Wales (1969) who presents a sketch of Tha Morat Cave and four of its figures (and a stupa and a wheel) with estimated locations of the missing heads and how they fit into the niches and remaining bodies (**Fig. 6**). Wales does call this an “excellent sketch” made by the Department of Fine Arts, states that he believes the styles of the figures could match the heads, and seems to accept that all the heads came from this cave. He does not present any scientific proofs, exact measurements, casts, or analysis other than the sketch, does not address the issue of two- versus three-dimensionality of some of the figures, and does not discuss the possibility of a second cave.

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<sup>5</sup> This review covered the following: Boisselier (1972), Boisselier (1991), Bowie (1972), Brown (1996), Charoenwongsa (1978), Dofflemyer (1982), Dunkley (1995), Ellis (2011), Gerson (2003), Guy (2014), Higham (1989), Khunsong (2009), Krairiksh (2012), Munier (1998), Nimboonchaj (1962), Vogt (2013), Wales (1937), Wales (1969), Wales (1979), Warren (1998) and Warren (2004). An email was sent to Dr. John Guy of the Met on 22 September 2016 asking if that museum had any detailed proof re the source of the heads, or any knowledge of or interest in a possible second cave, but no reply was received. William Warren (2017a) stated that he has never done any scientific comparison or follow-up.



Fig. 6. Sketch from Wales (1969) showing four figures and two objects from Tha Morat Cave.

### Possibility of a Second, Previously Unknown Cave Nearby

While hiking with my guide and his party up the mountain, I tried to query him about the possible existence of a second cave (thus following up on Jim Thompson's suspicions). At one point I seemed to get two answers: first, that a cave had existed inside the Tha Morat mountain long, long ago but it had collapsed and was now inaccessible; and second, that there was no second cave.

However, another apparently reputable source later yielded the following information:

- There is a second cave near Tha Morat Cave. How near is not clear.
- The second cave is evidently not on the same mountain as Tha Morat Cave.
- The second cave has a very small entrance, but large enough for a man to enter, and is quite hard to find. The cave is not a "known" cave.
- Once inside the cave entrance, one must immediately climb down a ladder to go further.
- The entrance was previously larger, and the cave collapsed upon itself at some point in the distant past.

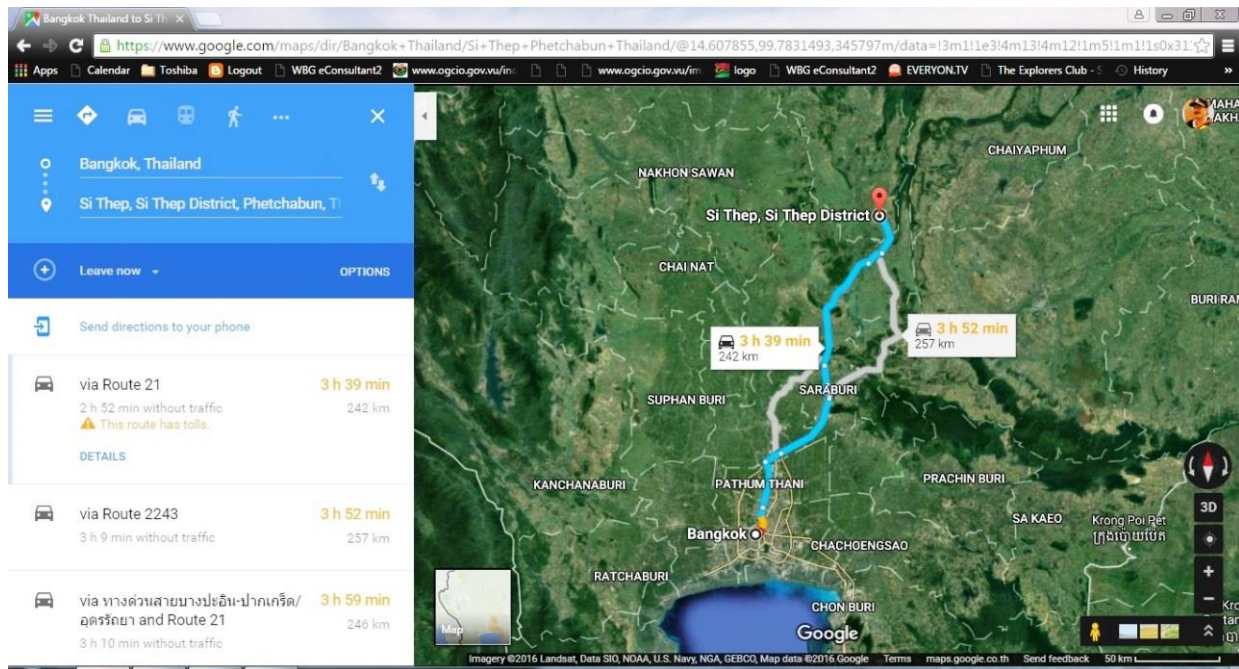
It seems possible that this second cave might contain Buddha statues or temple remains, similar to the important Tha Morat Cave, and that perhaps it could be the source of some of Thompson's white limestone Buddha heads. But this is of course far from certain. Further exploration is warranted.

## Conclusions

This paper has documented the history, location and current state of Tha Morat Cave in Phetchabun province. (For the exact lat/longs of key locations, see below.) Evidence has been presented that there may be a second, historic and perhaps artistically important cave nearby, which has yet to be found. Although the chances are likely slim that such an important second cave exists, even a slight chance warrants a search by reputable parties.

## Getting to the Cave(s)

A map of central Thailand, showing driving routes from Bangkok north to the Si Thep area in Phetchabun Province, is shown in **Fig. 7**. The Si Thep Historical Park is a large ruined and moated city that is historically connected to Tha Morat Cave, as described earlier. Tha Morat Cave is about 16 kilometers WNW of the Park.



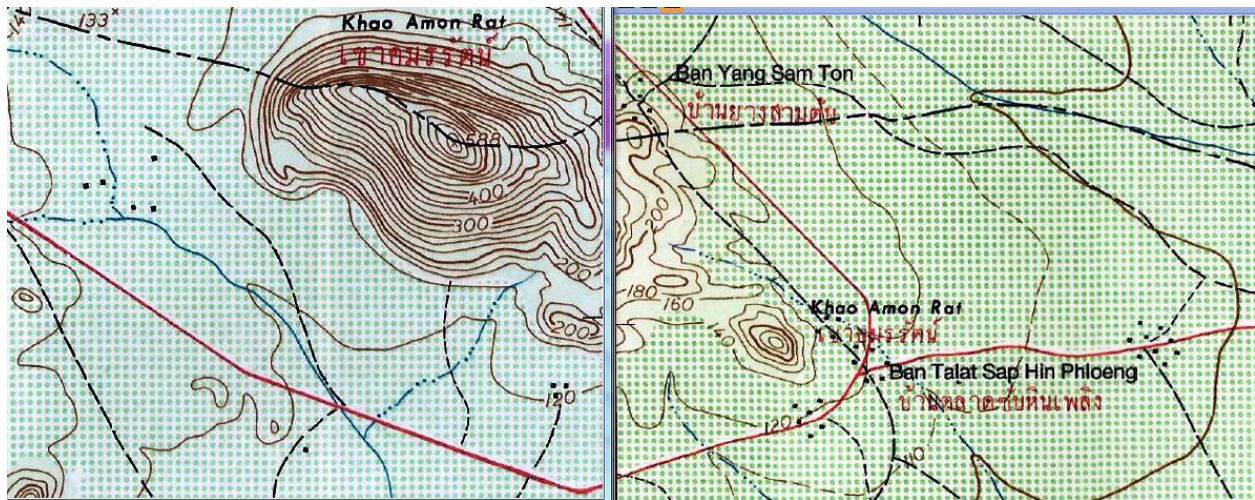
**Fig. 7.** Driving routes from Bangkok to Si Thep.

The road north from Bangkok is ten lanes wide (!) narrowing in Phetchabun Province to four lanes. Average speeds in excess of 100 km/hour are possible, once the Bangkok traffic has been left behind. Compare this to Quaritch Wales, the first explorer in the area, who in 1937 spent five days in a bullock cart traveling the last 54 miles of his expedition to Si Thep (Dofflemyer, 1982).

At about lat 15.450616/long 101.066237 on Highway 21 is a large intersection, with a road leading east (right) to the Si Thep Historical Park. Proceeding north, at about lat 15.478038/long

101.060181 on Highway 21 there is a sign posted, to turn to the left (west) to Tha Morat Cave. Take that turn. Proceed about 5.5 kilometers west along that road, to Wat [Temple] Sap Hin (or Pin) Pung, on the right (north). The trail up to the cave starts there.

A map of the immediate cave area, created from two map files kindly provided by Thai caving expert Martin Ellis, is shown in **Fig. 8**.



**Fig. 8. Khao Amon Rat, the small mountain containing Tha Morat Cave.**

On this map the location of Wat Sap Hin Pung is just northwest of the intersection of the two roads in the right-hand rectangle, northwest of the word “Ban” in “Ban Talat Sap Hin Phloeng.” The estimated site of Tha Morat Cave is in the left-hand rectangle, about 100-150 meters lower in elevation than the peak of the small mountain “Khao Amon Rat.” The cave is on the north side of the mountain, facing north-northeast.

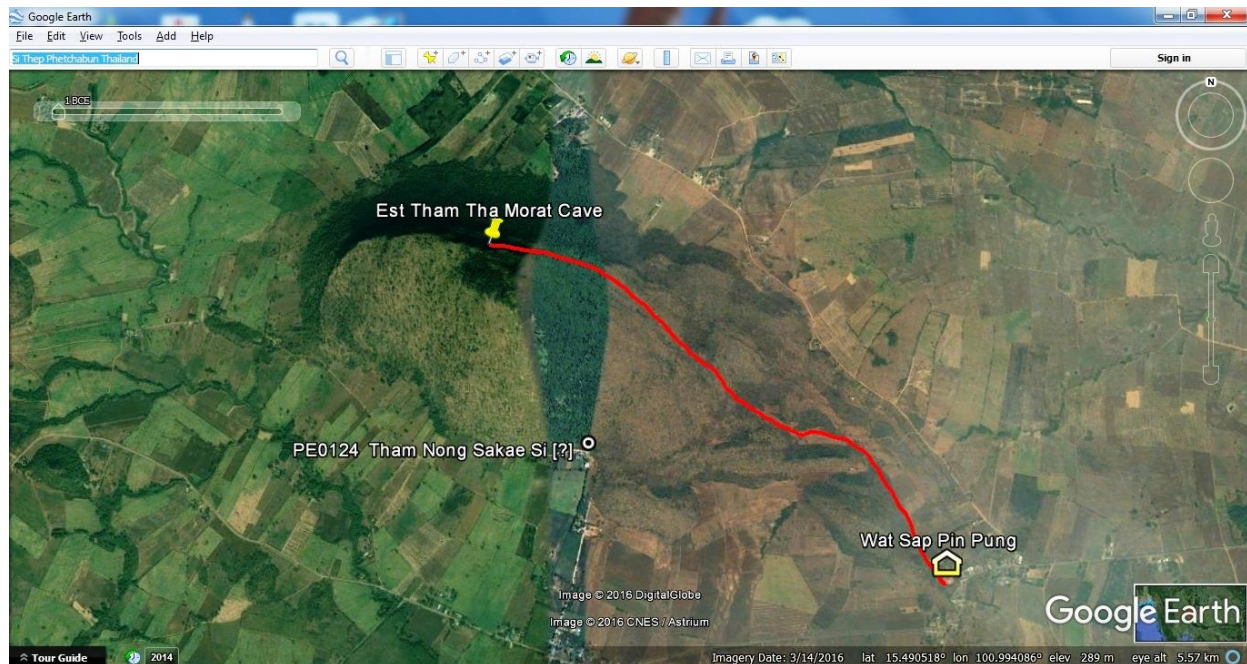
Lat/longs and elevations for relevant locations are estimated from Google Earth as follows:

- Wat Sap Hin Pung: lat: 15.481270/long: 101.008814, elevation: 119 meters.
- Tha Morat Cave: lat: 15.495829/long: 100.987606, elevation: 453 meters.
- Peak of the Khao Amon Rat mountain: lat: 15.494152/long: 100.988408, elevation: 563 meters (per Google Earth) or 588 meters (per Fig. 8).
- Si Thep ruined city, inside the 3 km-wide moated enclosure (visible on Google Earth from a height of 50 km!): lat: 15.465617/long: 101.151033; elevation: 67 meters.

Note that this lat/long for Tha Morat Cave is apparently the first such position ever provided. Ellis (2011, p. 21, under cave number PE0009) does not give a map reference or lat/long, and this historic cave is not on the kml (lat/long geo-positioning) file listing all the caves of Thailand and their locations. (This file is available at: <http://thailandcaves.shepton.org.uk/cave-co-ordinates>, and creates location pins on Google Earth for all the listed caves. It was compiled by the Shepton Mallet Caving Club of Britain.)



A Google Earth view, looking north, of the approximate location of the trail from Wat Sap Hin Pung to Tha Morat Cave is shown in **Fig. 9**.



**Fig. 9.** The trail up to Tha Morat Cave.

## Hiking Up to the Cave

The hike should not be attempted unless the hikers are in good physical condition. The path from the Wat is flat at first, across and beside fields of corn and tapioca, and goes just to the east of a small hill and a rocky outcropping with a balanced rock. But the climb up the mountain itself is arduous and steep, and could be very slippery and dangerous in rainy weather. However, there is no technical climbing involved. The route is marked with red paint blazes on the small trees beside the trail, and by red and orange streamers on the trees and ground. But without a guide it is possible to miss the path at several locations. For information on obtaining local guides, contact the author.

The last 60 meters up to the cave are so steep that a rope is provided to help pull oneself up. Threats along the way are stubs of small trees or bamboos, sharp limestone rocks, falling down the mountain, and the occasional large brown millipede. Heat exhaustion is a possibility in warm and humid weather; bring plenty of water. The entire hike up takes about 2.25 hours, including a couple of short breaks. The “30 minutes” estimate quoted in Ellis’ book is very optimistic.

The summit of the mountain and the large, so-called “helicopter landing area” flat rock on the south side of the mountain top were not climbed, but are reportedly accessible via a steep trail.

I stayed at the Picha Waree Resort, on the east side of the main north-south M-21 road. It is located SW of the Si Thep Historical Park and SE of Tha Morat Cave. The address of the Resort is 99/1 Moo 6 T.Klongkrajung A. Srithep, Si Thep, Thailand, 67170. The phone number is: 086-6280888, 056-921089. The email is: [pichawareeresort@hotmail.com](mailto:pichawareeresort@hotmail.com). Note that there are very few other hotels or resorts in the area, and no taxis or rental cars, only motorcycle transport.

## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Martin Ellis, expert on caving in Thailand, for his assistance and advice. I am also indebted to the staff of the Penn Museum for access to the previously unpublished Lisa Lyons letters that were vital to this research. And I am very grateful to my Thai guides for their expertise and assistance.

## Additional Photos of Tha Morat Cave



Sign and fixed ropes just below the cave entrance.



Interior of Tha Morat Cave. The central column contains all six (or more) carved figures, dating from about the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E. The white tarps are used to discourage millipedes.



Close-up of the largest Buddha figure, showing relation to life size. Note the "shadow" figure to the right. About 7<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> century.



Decapitated and damaged bodies on the rear of the central pillar. In the center is one of the four-armed Bodhisattva images that may have included the “Met” head.

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# CLIPPINGS

James Bond Caves.—While reading Dr. Toulmin's article, I thought of the most famous caves in Thailand associated with secret agents, namely, that well known tourist attraction near Phuket Island, filmed for the 1974 movie *The Man with the Golden Gun*, starring the late Sir Roger Moore. While supposedly located in China, these foot caves in the limestone tower karst were shot as the lair of the villain Scaramanga, played by Christopher Lee. Here's a clipping about them.—Ed.

28 January 18-January 24, 2001

THE NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS

## Resorts & Travel

### Andaman Sea excursion in Phuket, Thailand

#### Part II

By JON HAGGINS

Special to the AmNews

We boarded the Andaman Sea kayak ferry at The Don Pier, which is located 6.2 miles south of the Phang Nga Bay, for what was billed as an unforgettable experience. This is where James Bond filmed "The Man with the Golden Gun" in 1973.

It was so refreshing as we sliced through the blue waterways, past nipa palm trees and tropical forests — these are natural wonders of Southeast Asia. After we dropped anchor, our director assigned a guide to each kayak. Each kayak could accommodate two guests and a guide. The guide paddled us through the open

caves of stalactites that slowly dripped into an eerie lagoon. The limestone mountains and peaks rose from the water and surrounded the shallow lagoon. Occasionally I saw brush growing along the side of the mountains. Our guide led us through the shallow caves with a flashlight. We had to lie flat in the kayak as we went in to avoid the stalactites that hung from the low ceiling. We were warned of a bat haven, looking up with our mouths closed as we cruised through one of the caves. We were told that we could only visit this site during low tide. As we emerged from the cave, the world seemed to open up into

a miraculous lagoon that was surrounded by limestone mountains.

Once we entered the lagoon, I got an opportunity to show off my paddling skills. I was a little too ambitious and paddled us into a spin, going nowhere. Suddenly we ran aground. Just beyond the lagoon, I peered through an open cave into the beautiful blue Andaman Sea. The contrast of the light was very picturesque.

The lagoon was very shallow, so one of the guides stepped out and introduced us to walking fish and sea crabs. He also tricked us by grabbing a handful of mud and quickly squeezing it out, which gave us the impression of a hopping fish. Not a pretty sight — it scared us to death.

After our adventure, we boarded the ferry and shared a divine Thai lunch of tropical fruit and fresh spicy fish, then headed to James Bond Island, Ko Pingan (Leaning Island). We boarded the kayaks again and headed to shore to spend a leisurely afternoon swimming and shopping. After a walk, I was amazed that I could swim the distance back to the boat, which seemed so far from the shore.

This was a fun-filled day, but all good things have to come to an end. When we returned to the dock with our trinkets, we boarded our bus, which took us to another souvenir shop. I discovered wonderful lacquered, pearlized boxes, etched metal cases, assorted casual wear and



Lonny Haggins photo



Srivichai theatrical dancer

(Jon Haggins photo)

strings of black and white pearls. My suggestion to all the shoppers was, "Buy it!"

After returning to the Banyan Tree Hotel, we had a brief break before our dinner at the Srivichai Theatrical Dining Restaurant for a Thai heritage show. Srivichai was once a prosperous kingdom in southern Thailand. The Srivichai dance had been created by the Fine Arts Department of Silpakorn University to depict the flourishing arts and culture of that period. The style of dance, costume and music is characteristic of

the south of Thailand. The dances dated back many centuries and illustrated great form, grace and beauty.

Upon entering this dinner theater, we were requested to check our shoes at the door. As we sat on mats under low tables, beautifully costumed women and men served an abundance of typical Thai dishes, some prepared in coconut milk and spices. Rice is a staple of the country.

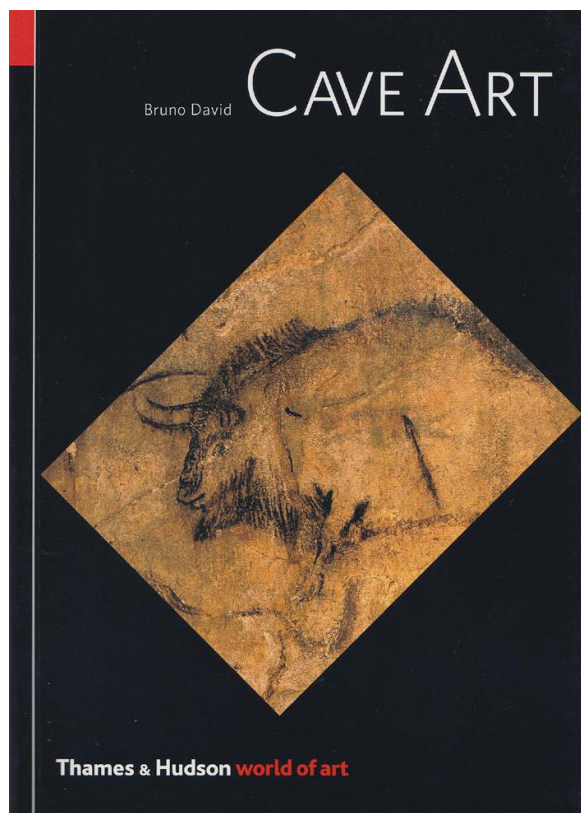
The final dinner was held in the Ruenthai Restaurant in the Dusit Laguna Resort Hotel. This hotel is flanked by two sparkling lagoons and palatial grounds of fauna. It offers first-class beachfront accommodations with balconies overlooking the beautifully manicured gardens, lagoons and the Andaman Sea.

My visit to Phuket was too short. I hope to return to savor the island and its many other offerings. Phuket will always stay in my memory as the most extraordinary place I have ever visited.



# BOOK REVIEWS

**CAVE ART (2017) by Bruno David. Thames & Hudson, NY. Paperback, 256 pages, 6"x9¼" format, ISBN 978-0-500-20435-1. Available for \$24.95. Reviewed by Danny A. Brass.**



In presenting a global survey of ancient cave art, Bruno David takes a fresh look at various aspects of these primeval artifacts. Reaching back through the veil of time, he offers insight into what we know or think we know about the earliest appearance of human symbolic behavior.

Considering an array of available evidence, David's initial focus rests on potential artistic endeavors and aesthetic sensibilities of ancestral hominins that pre-date modern humans by hundreds of thousands (*Homo erectus*) to millions of years (*Australopithecus* sp.). A synopsis of human evolution—discussion not commonly found in books on cave art—helps provide an overview for readers not familiar with paleoanthropology although more attention to aspects of natural history would have been helpful.

David stresses the challenges inherent in assessing the validity of ancient artifacts. In calling attention to potential controversies surrounding the provenance of such finds, he highlights the difficulties faced by

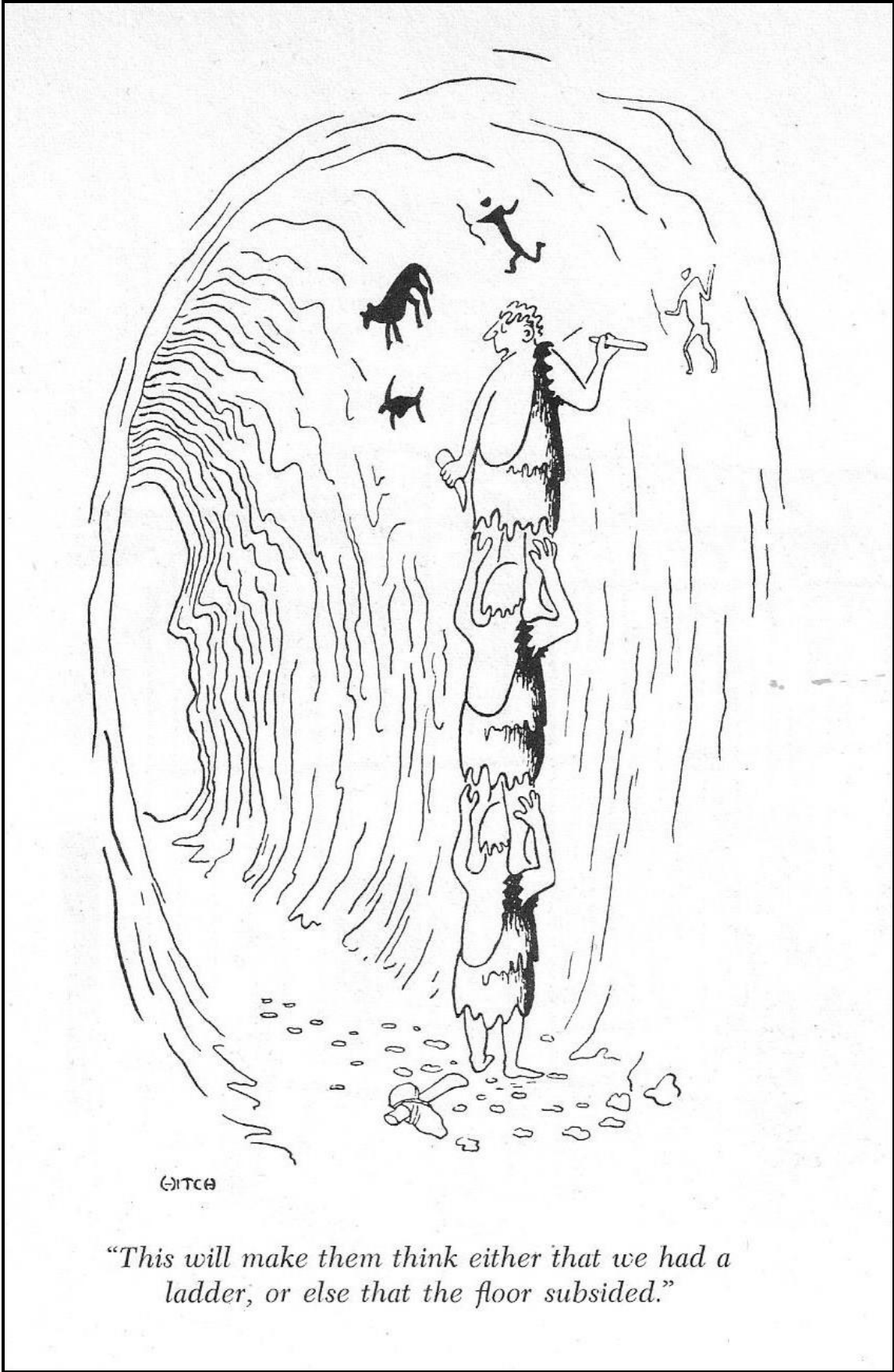
archaeologists in interpreting evidence of cognitive and symbolic behavior in deep time.

He points out, however, that archaeological controversies are not limited to the study of very ancient artifacts. They even encompass relatively recent finds, such as those of the Châtelperronian, a period of time ranging from around 45,000 until about 40,000 years ago, and representing the earliest Upper Paleolithic industry (i.e., late stone age) of France and Spain. During this time, Neandertals (*Homo neanderthalensis*) and anatomically/culturally modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) co-existed. The nature of any interaction between these two ancient peoples remains speculative.

The cave art of southwestern Europe is the largest and best-studied corpus of such work in the world. This is not surprising since much of it is found in caves and, therefore, not subject to the same forces of erosion and weathering as open-air artwork. David contends that its disproportionate representation mistakenly emphasizes this region as the birthplace of human creativity. In fact, the earliest such stirrings are now known to be far removed, both in space and time, from the artwork of Ice Age Europe. As such, he calls attention to the rich body of evidence indicative of symbolic behavior and artistic creativity among early *Homo sapiens* in South Africa, dating to as much as 100,000 years ago (and prior to the exodus of modern humans from the African continent).

In considering the Ice Age art of southwestern Europe, David discusses the rich tapestry of parietal (wall) and portable art. He then moves beyond the confines of Europe to consider cave and rock art on a world stage.

*Cave Art* is a well-written and nicely illustrated book that highlights modern techniques currently employed by archaeologists to help unlock the secrets of cave art (and, to a limited extent, open-air rock art). Although emphasis is placed on Ice Age art, consideration is also given to relatively modern cave and rock art (i.e., dating to no more than a few thousand years ago). The latter is discussed in relation to the known ethnography of select populations, and without making attempts to find similar meaning in more ancient, but unrelated artwork. Largely accessible to general readers, this book will be of interest to anyone fascinated by the creative mind of our ancient ancestors.



*“This will make them think either that we had a ladder, or else that the floor subsided.”*