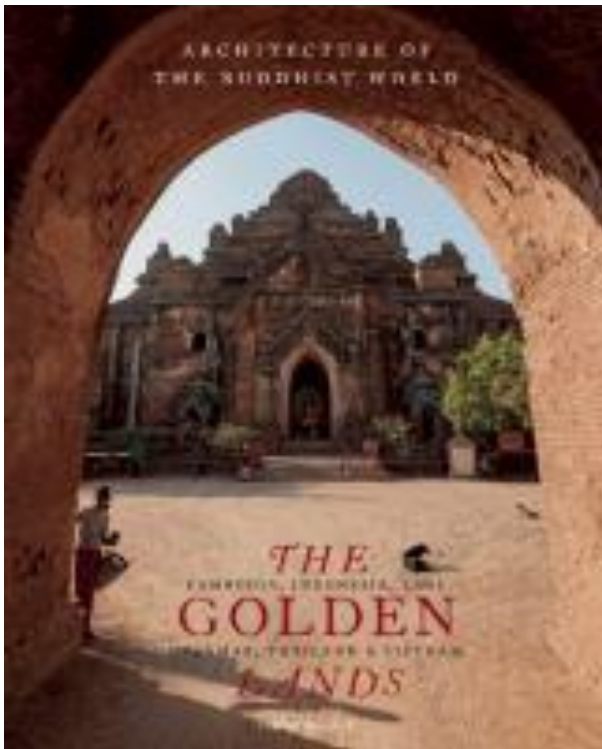


# The Golden Lands: Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand & Vietnam

by Vikram Lall. (Architecture of the Buddhist world). JF Publishing; Abbeville Press, September 2014. 280 p. ill. ISBN 9780789211941 (cl.), \$95.00.

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Buddhist studies on painting and sculpture abound, but books dedicated to the Buddhist architecture of Southeast Asia are harder to find. Luckily, this volume is the first in a series of six to comprehensively explore Buddhist architecture as a product of culture. Architect and scholar Vikram Lall uses a new multi-disciplinary approach to focus on the architectural forms and spaces associated with the faith of Buddhism during its 2,500-year history. *The Golden Lands* examines the Buddhist architecture of Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos. When the series is complete, Lall will have detailed over twenty countries across Asia and beyond, where Buddhist architecture is manifest, providing both historical overviews and case studies.

The author begins with an essay called, "The Theoretical Framework," which provides an introduction to the early history of Buddhism and outlines its most characteristic architectural typologies: the stupa, the temple, and the monastery, which correspond with Buddha, his teachings (Dhamma), and his spiritual

community (Sangha). The remaining six chapters conform to a strict organization, with each country split into three distinct sections: architectural history, architectural characteristics, and selected examples. This structure will allow scholars to either use this title as a ready-reference, easily comprehending a section independently, or to read the book from cover to cover.

One of the most valuable assets to this well-planned tome is the images. Architectural plans, drawings, illustrated 3-D architectural models, cross-sections, maps, and lush photography complement the scholarly text.

Historians will appreciate the well-researched historical narrative of patronage, trade, and development. Practical architectural information - alignment, scale, materials, and construction systems - coexists with discussions on the decorative motifs, sculptural art, and fantastic ornamentation of highlighted structures. Scholars will recognize Buddhist iconography explained through a prism of indigenous building traditions, local materials, and symbolism in shaping of buildings. For example, the book explores a variety of architectural iterations of the cosmic mountain (Mount Meru or Sumeru) and the legendary meditation cave (Gu of Cac Co). The Mandala, a symbolic representation of the cosmos in the form of geometric diagrams, manifests itself in many building complexes. Likewise, monuments incorporate the lotus bud, the Dhamma wheel, Naga, the mythical serpent, as well as other Buddhist symbols.

My favorites are the perfectly balanced and simple Candi Mendut of Indonesia and Kuthodaw Pagoda's 729 marble slabs engraved with the complete Tripitaka found in Myanmar . What librarian could resist the "world's largest book?"

*The Golden Lands* scholarly apparatus includes a chronology of selected Buddhist monuments, a full glossary, bibliography, and index. The publishers also maintain a website, <http://architectureofbuddhism.com/>. Recommended for a basic art library audience.