

## Executive Summary

This book “A Lady of Siam, Ever Serene Everywhere,” is a biography of H.M. Queen Rambhai Barni of the Seventh Reign without first telling readers who she was. This was to draw attention to her personality and character rather than to the fact that she was a Queen. After the “Overture” introductory chapter, her life’s story is related largely chronologically through phases in her life, to be of interest to a general readership. The book contains 17 chapters, with sub-headings as appropriate. Sources are indicated in brackets after each piece of information and footnotes are added when explanations are deemed to be required. It includes a bibliography.

The book relies substantially and substantively on already existing oral history sources. However, these are compared with the official royal biography published by the Office of His Majesty’s Principal Private Secretary in 1988. Where discrepancies are found, such oral history accounts as deemed more reliable are given greater weight. The author has also carried out interviews with more than 10 people of varying stations who knew her or served her at some phase (s) in her life. These were done in 2015 and 2016 as need arose.

The manuscript takes as its basic blueprint the story contained in the “academic document” the author had a hand in fashioning as information for the events company engaged by the King Prajadhipok’s Institute to organize the Permanent Exhibition on the said Queen for the King Prajadhipok Museum. That Exhibition was opened for viewing in January 2008 (not the one now on show that was opened in 2016). At the opening then, a book was published, with the author as advisor to the editorial team, using the “academic document” as a firm base. The book was called, **The Jewel on King Prajadhipok’s Crown.** Its title thus projected H.M. Queen Rambhai Barni as the Royal Consort of H.M. King Prajadhipok. Though the content did focus on her personality and character, the title is unsuitable for present purposes, necessitating a change. In addition, now that a greater amount and quality of material has come to be available, this author has adjusted the names of the chapters, the sub-headings and the sequence of chapters accordingly.

The present book manuscript makes copious use of quotations from the oral history accounts so that no doubt lingers that the author has made it all up himself. He does, however, add commentaries as the need arises to carry the story forward.

The late Queen lived an eventful life of nearly 80 years through rapidly changing and turbulent times both at home and abroad. She faced an unexpected catapult from the young wife of the youngest princely son of a Queen, who brought her up, to Queenship herself. It was her modesty, her readiness to learn, to try out new things, to adapt and to be compassionate that made her the perfect shadow of the royal husband. Loyalty to the Monarchy and the Royal House was second nature to her. She thus stoically and resolutely rode the tide of a coup against the Absolute Monarchy in 1932 and a failed counter-coup in 1933. She played her part at his side, sometimes confidently standing in for him who was often ill, at home and abroad, the epitome of a pretty and ever smiling Siamese lady, yet modern in her ways of dress and mannerisms when appropriate.

In 1935, the King abdicated the throne from England during a European trip to give reassurances of continued normal relations and for a cataract operation. They, ever cognizant of the need to uphold the honour of the Siamese Monarchy and the dignity of the Thai, moved to smaller abodes at intervals. All the while they faced untrue allegations from the government at home of plots to reinstate the Absolute Monarchy. Then the Second World War broke out in Europe. Together they endured the austerities and the risks of overhead bombs. When her royal husband passed away of a heart attack in the midst of it all, she, widowed at a mere 37, persevered as usual. When her male relatives joined the British Army as "Free Thais" in an effort to oust the Japanese from Thai soil, she risked her life going in to London to pack medical supplies. To her it was the natural thing to do for humanity.

When the War ended both in Europe, and later in the Far East, she patiently waited for the day to return home, quietly insisting though that it would be only when the Thai government restored her late husband to the full honour of a former monarch. The day finally came in 1949 when the government, headed uncannily enough by one of the 1932 coup promoters, repented the past wrongs done. An invitation was extended for her to return home with the cremated relics of H.M. King

Prajadhipok to be accorded the proper and highest honour. She readily forgave, for she realized how insecurity in power was the driving force.

Upon her return, the Dowager Queen made it clear that she wished, as any Thai lady would, to spend the rest of the life quietly with her relatives, away from the affairs of state. It was at once a statement of real intent and a plea. She sought out land to farm and found a suitable plot in rural Chantaburi where, with the help of relatives and hired locals, succeeded in building up a farm for self-sufficiency and to pass on knowledge should experiments be of use. However, it was to a local craft, mat-weaving, to which much of her attention turned. Hands-on, she fashioned new designs and colour, making them not run, and used the mats to make hitherto unavailable table mats, trays, tissue box covers and ladies' handbags. This was at a time when few engaged in such efforts. Using and sporting the products herself, she was ambassador for the brand that acknowledged in its name the villagers' local wisdom and skills. It became a viable occupation for many years to come.

There in Chantaburi, she was shocked by the poor condition of the health service provided to the locals at the provincial hospital. She thus had built for it a modern, well-equipped surgery building and named it "The Prajadhipok Building" in memory of her late husband. This paved the way for the government's move to expand the hospital and to name it "Phra Pokklao Hospital" after his official title and to establish there a college of nursing. She continued, through the Prajadhipok Fund she set up, to provide financial assistance to both of them as need arose.

In her senior years, she moved back to Bangkok and sold her farm and abode in Chantaburi to the Ministry of Education at an inexpensive price, for it was to be used as the campus for a teacher's training college. She gave scholarships to its needy students. Taking up golf in earnest once again, mainly to get some exercise and for pleasure, she used golfing trips upcountry as occasions to hand out provisions to the needy, especially the aged and schoolchildren. Such trips meant that her circle was enlarged and golfers then organized competitions to raise funds for her charity. Ever cognizant of life's uncertainties and impermanence, the Queen gave a lump sum to enable the registration of the Fund as "the Prajadhipok Foundation." Ever humble, the Queen never granted the use of her name to be used for anything.

At home, she brought up a niece from the age of nine, teaching her by example rather than by lecturing and scolding, in loving kindness and closeness as any childless aunt would. She was “like a mother and a teacher” in the niece’s reckoning. She was ever kind to her maids, servants, mat weavers and farm workers, providing them with accommodation, food on-site primary healthcare and even a nursery for their children. She often voiced concern about their future once she was no more and gave the students the means to an education that would secure for them good jobs so that they could fend for themselves. She certainly knew of rapidly changing times.

Not a frequenter of temples except on special occasions, the Queen simply adhered in her behaviour and compassion, to the Buddha’s Teachings.

All the while before her health deteriorated such that she was unable to walk steadily, the Queen led a full life. She always attended royal ceremonies, sometimes stood in for H.M. King Bhumibol and accepted invitations to other functions, such as the granting of certificates at the Nursing and Teacher’s Colleges at Chantaburi, and others more private.

H.M. Queen Rambhai Barni told an American historian of Siam: ***“I consider universities and hospitals to be better memorials than statues”***

Yet, perhaps the last of her public appearances was to view the dummy for the Royal Statue of H.M. King Prajadhipok to be erected in front of the then new Parliament Building. She then bequeathed to the nation, through the Parliamentary Secretariat, numerous items of personal belongings of the Late King. Such items made possible the coming to life of the King Prajadhipok Museum, now under the responsibility of the King Prajadhipok’s Institute, a comparatively new institution of higher learning with a focus on democracy. Categorized as a “museum of an important personality,” it now occupies the colonial style “heritage building” at the Panfa Lilat junction of Rajadamnern Klang and Rajadamnern Nok Avenues.

H.M. Queen Rambhai Barni of the Seventh Reign passed away with a sudden heart attack on May 22, 1981, at the age of nearly 80, at her own home, Sukhodaya Palace.

Huge crowds flocked to the Lying-in-State and the Royal Cremation Ceremony and freely donated money, however small, amounting to millions of bahts, in the memory of this “Lady of Siam, Ever Serene Everywhere.” Her exemplary conduct lives on as a legacy to be emulated.