

**Peaceful Abiding:
Elections in Ayuthaya**
By Dan Thompson

“Who do you think will win the American presidential elections?” my Dutch-Iranian Bahai’i friend asked me amid the ruins of Wat Mahathat.

Vistas are rare, façades common in the mall sprawl of madly developing Thailand. In the ancient capital of Ayuthaya I could survey distant chedis, beyond billboards and trashy vacant lots, across ancient canals and tuk-tuk choked multi-lane streets. While the blackened ruins of the Temple burned by the Burmese in the Middle Ages are not that old compared with our planet or the cave art of the first humans, rumors that some of the chedis held relicary bones of a Buddha make those tourist-choked stones seem ageless.

One of the earringed Japanese hipsters striking a pose for high-tech space age wears a t-shirt with this Buddhist message for today’s novice: “Life’s short. Live hard.” Around the perimeter countless headless Boddhisatvas sit in tranquil half-lotus zazen meditation. The Burmese beheaded them as more recently the Cultural Revolutionaries did in the Humble Administrator’s garden in Suzhou, as French Revolutionaries did to Saints in their Abbés and Cathedrals. In the Mexican Revolution priests hung from beautiful church patio shade trees. It was with such images in mind I answered my friend reluctantly that against my wishes Candidate John “war is inevitable, who knows if we will withdraw in ten, a hundred, a thousand years” McCain will probably win. My preferred candidates fore-lost, have already withdrawn but for now we live in a place of pure potential where history—female or black—can still be made. Peace hopes in that potential and in the countless empty keyhole niches in the ruins where wise tiny Boddhisatva statuettes once sat in silent contemplation.

Here I am reminded of an image from the last National Geographic to reach us in Thailand. Poor peasant farmers in central Afghan struggled to pick up the pieces of exploded Giant Buddhas, to reassemble them. Something remained. Can I admit that the giant arched caves, now empty, where two of the world’s largest Buddhas once stood waiting for us—now strike me as beautiful, even empty? I would make these very empty places peace monuments for the future. If McCain does win I will make a pilgrimage there to sit for immediate peace. Join me.