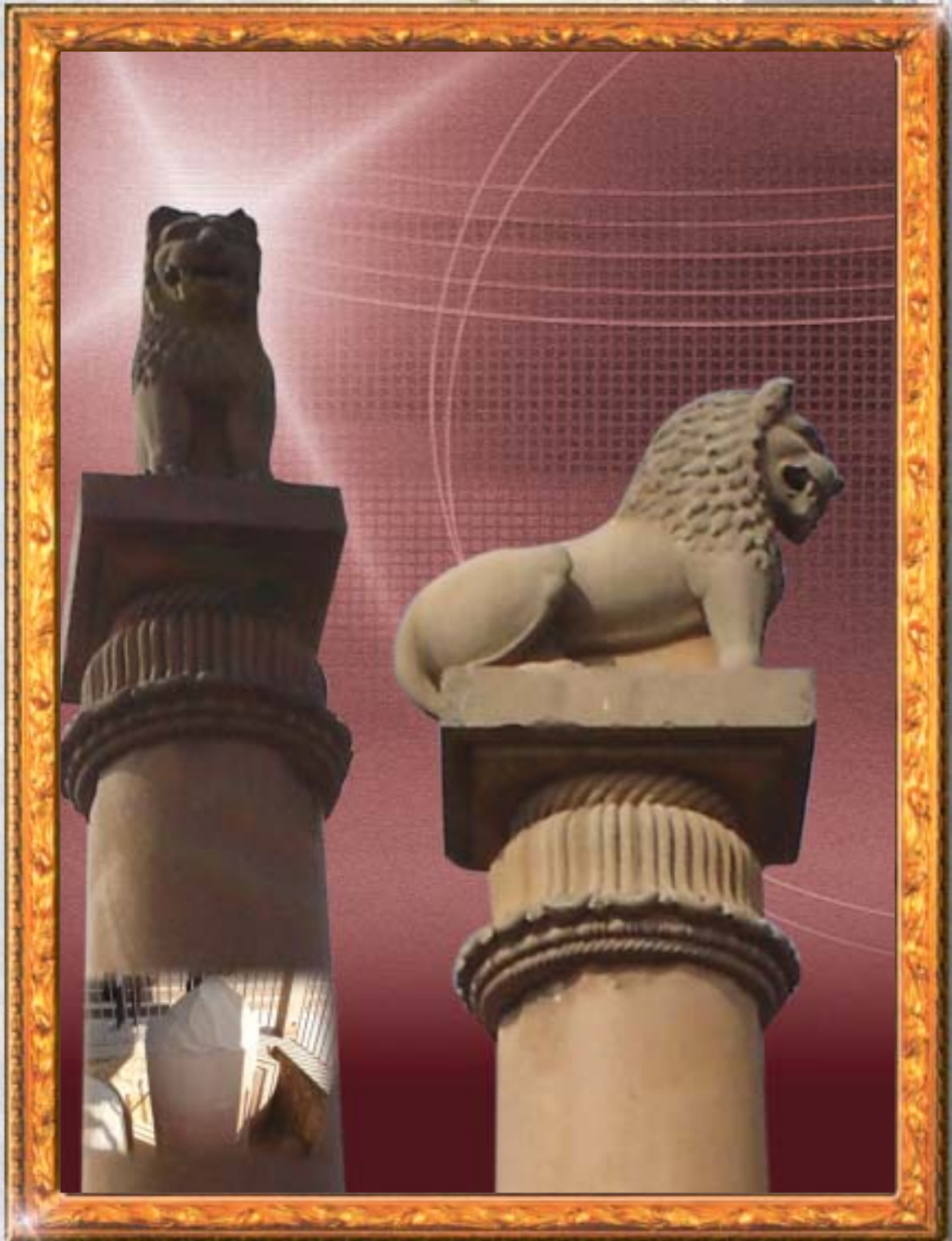




PART 2

The Day of Vesak in Thailand



The Day of Vesak in India

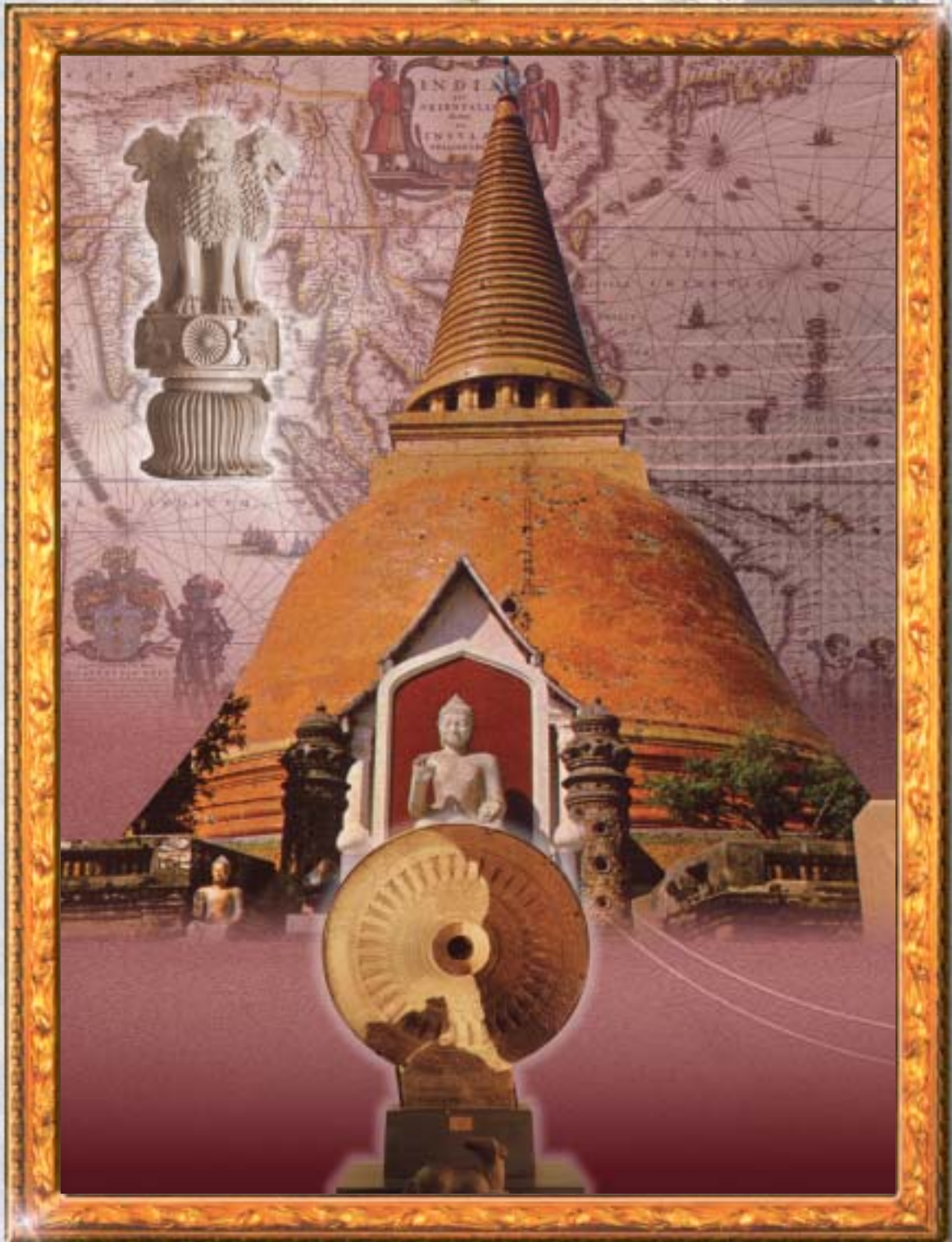
According to King Asoka's Rock Edict IV, the King celebrated the Day of Vesak by organizing shows and processions, exhibiting images of gods in their celestial cars with "*heavenly sights*." The processions were popular, attracting and fascinating the masses.

Fa-hsien, a Chinese pilgrim, mentioned in his journal (5th century):- "every year, on the eighth day of the second month, they celebrate a procession of images. They make a four-wheeled car and on it erect a structure of five stories by means of bamboos tied together...On the four sides are niches, with a Buddha seated in each, and a Bodhisatva standing in attendance on him...."



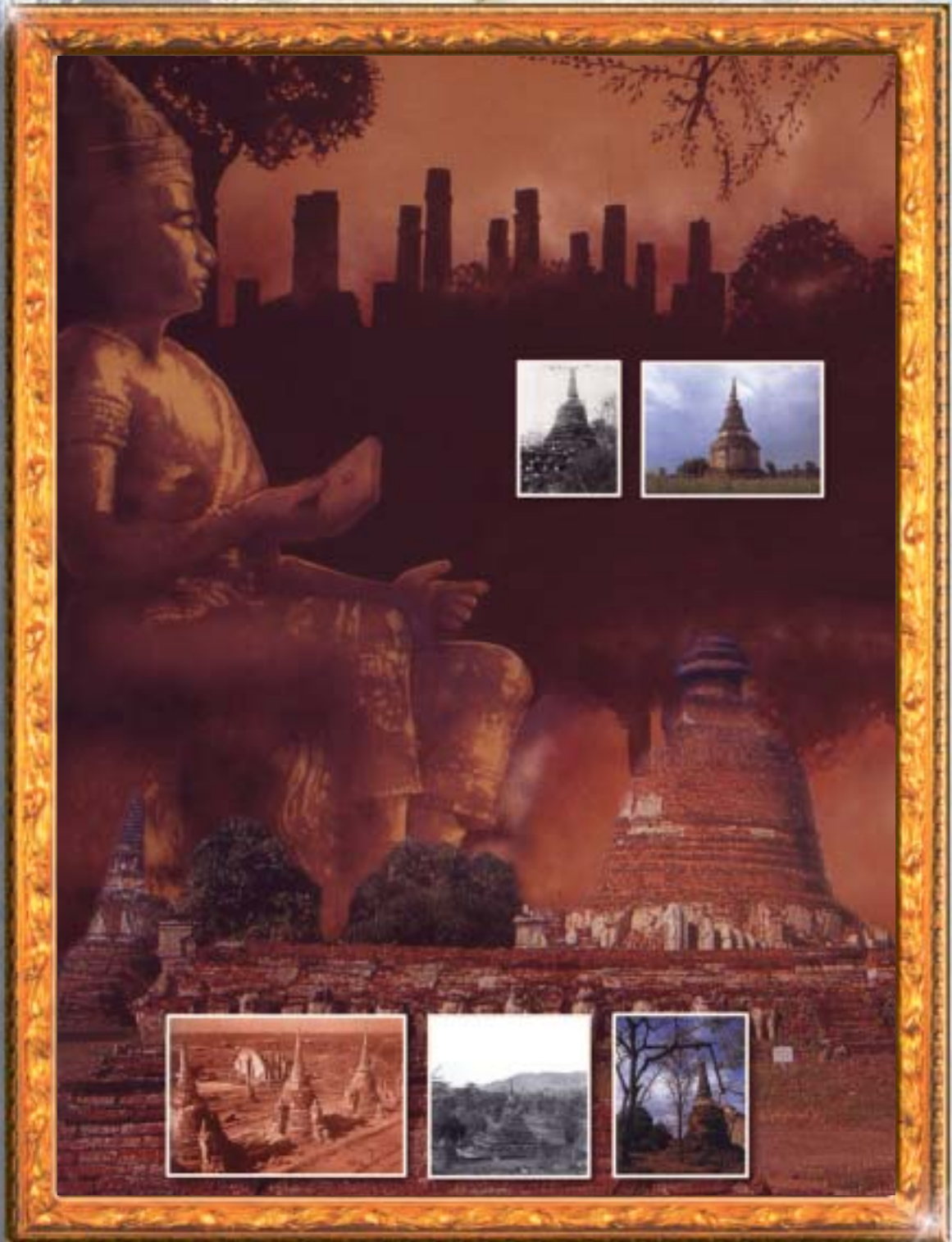
The Day of Vesak in Sri Lanka

According to the *Mahavamsa*, King Dutthagamini (101-77 BCE.) held the Vesak Day celebration for 24 years. King Bhatiya held celebrations for 28 years and King Vasabha for 44 years. Other kings, namely King Voharatissa (269-291 CE.), King Gothabhaya (309-322 CE.), King Jetthatissa (323-333 CE.), King Dalamugalan (611-617 CE.), King Sena II (851-885 CE.) also celebrated the Day of Vesak during their reigns.



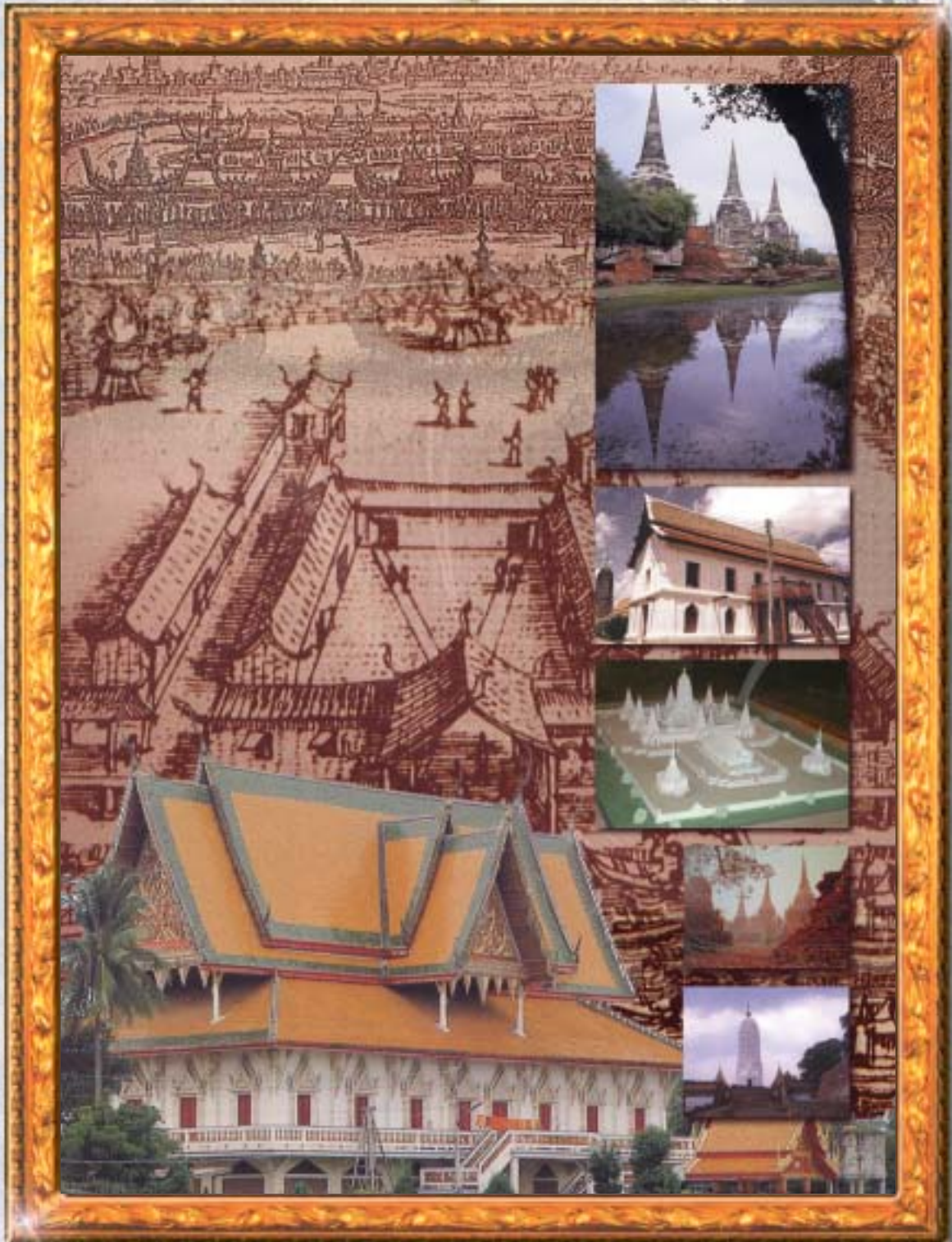
The Day of Vesak in Thailand

After the 3rd Buddhist Council, King Asoka (272-231 BCE.) sent a team of Buddhist missionaries, led by the Elders Sona and Uttara to propagate Buddhism in Suvannabhumi (the Golden Land), which is now believed to be Nakhon Pathom province, Thailand. The Vesak Day celebration may have been introduced into Thailand during this time.



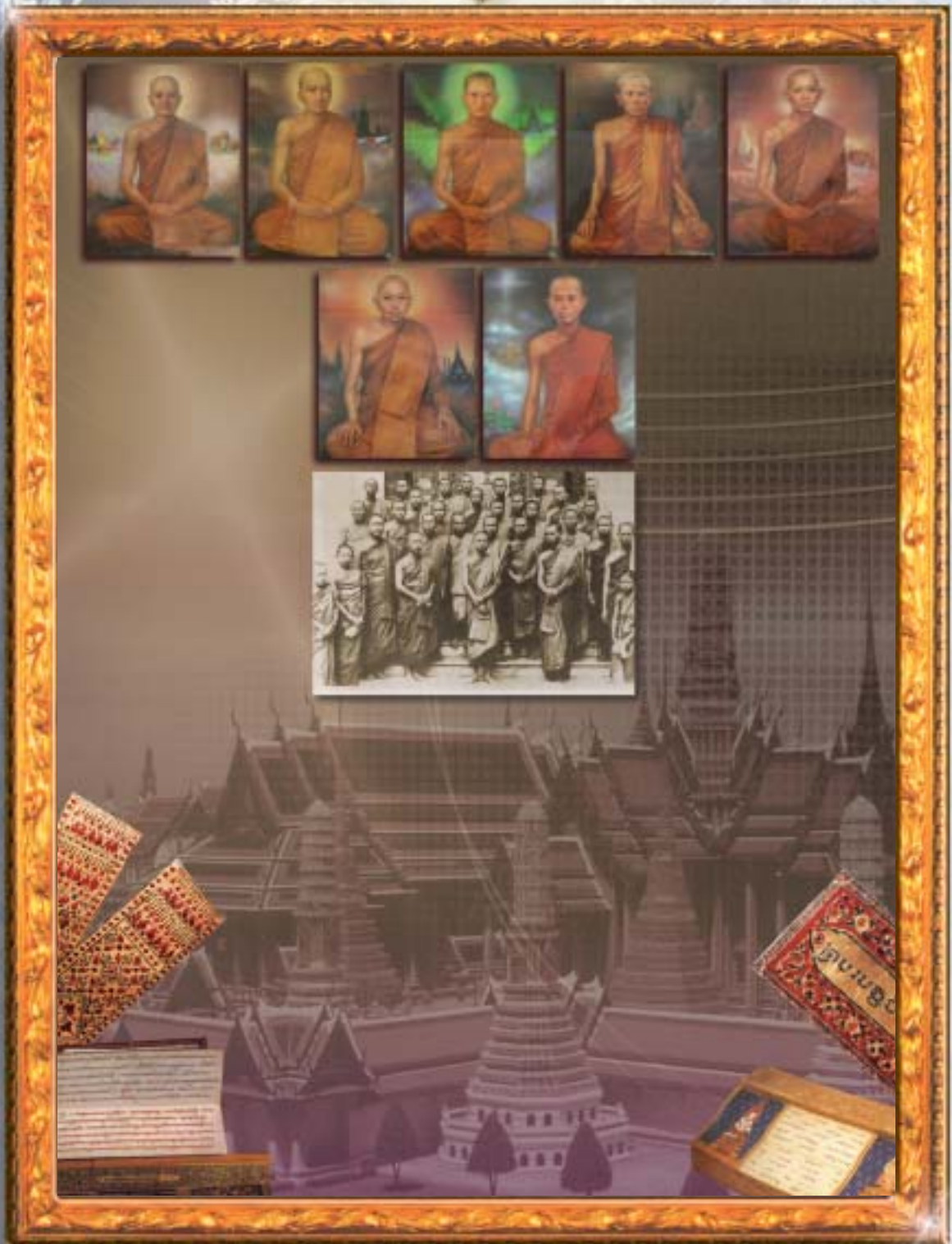
The Day of Vesak in Thailand : Sukhothai Period

In the Sukhothai Period (13th- 14th century), the Vesak Day celebration may have been imported from Sri Lanka by Sri Lankan monks who were invited to the Sukhothai Kingdom by King Ramkamhaeng. According to the “Srichulalak Book” written by Thao Sri Chulalak, one of the concubines of King Ramkamhaeng, the Vesak Day ceremony was held in the Sukhothai Period (13th- 14th century.) The book records that King Ramkamhaeng, his servants and subjects jointly decorated the Sukhothai Kingdom with flowers, scents and lighted lanterns. These were displayed for 3 days during the Vesak Day celebrations.



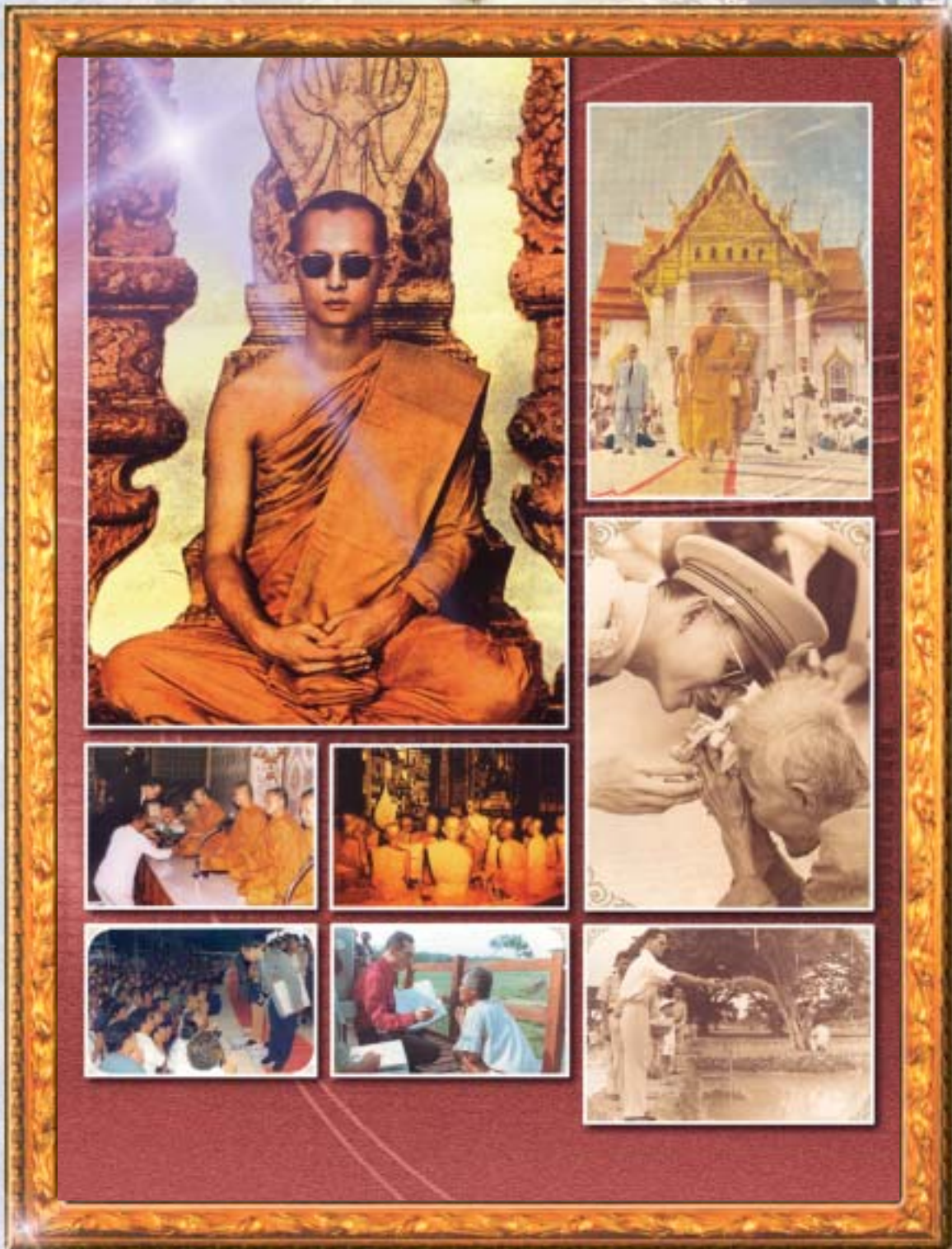
The Day of Vesak in Thailand : Ayutthaya Period

No evidence has been found that the Vesak Day ceremonies were held during the Ayutthaya Period (14th-18th century.) However, it is believed that the Ayutthaya kings and their subjects celebrated the Day of Vesak too.



The Day of Vesak in Thailand : Rattanakosin Period

King Rama II (1809-1824 CE.) invited the Supreme Patriarch named “Mee” to revive the Vesak Day ceremony. The newly-revived ceremony was practiced in accordance with ancient traditions. Later, the Vesak Day ceremony was continued by King Rama III (1824 - 1851 CE.) and King Rama IV (1851-1868 CE.) respectively.



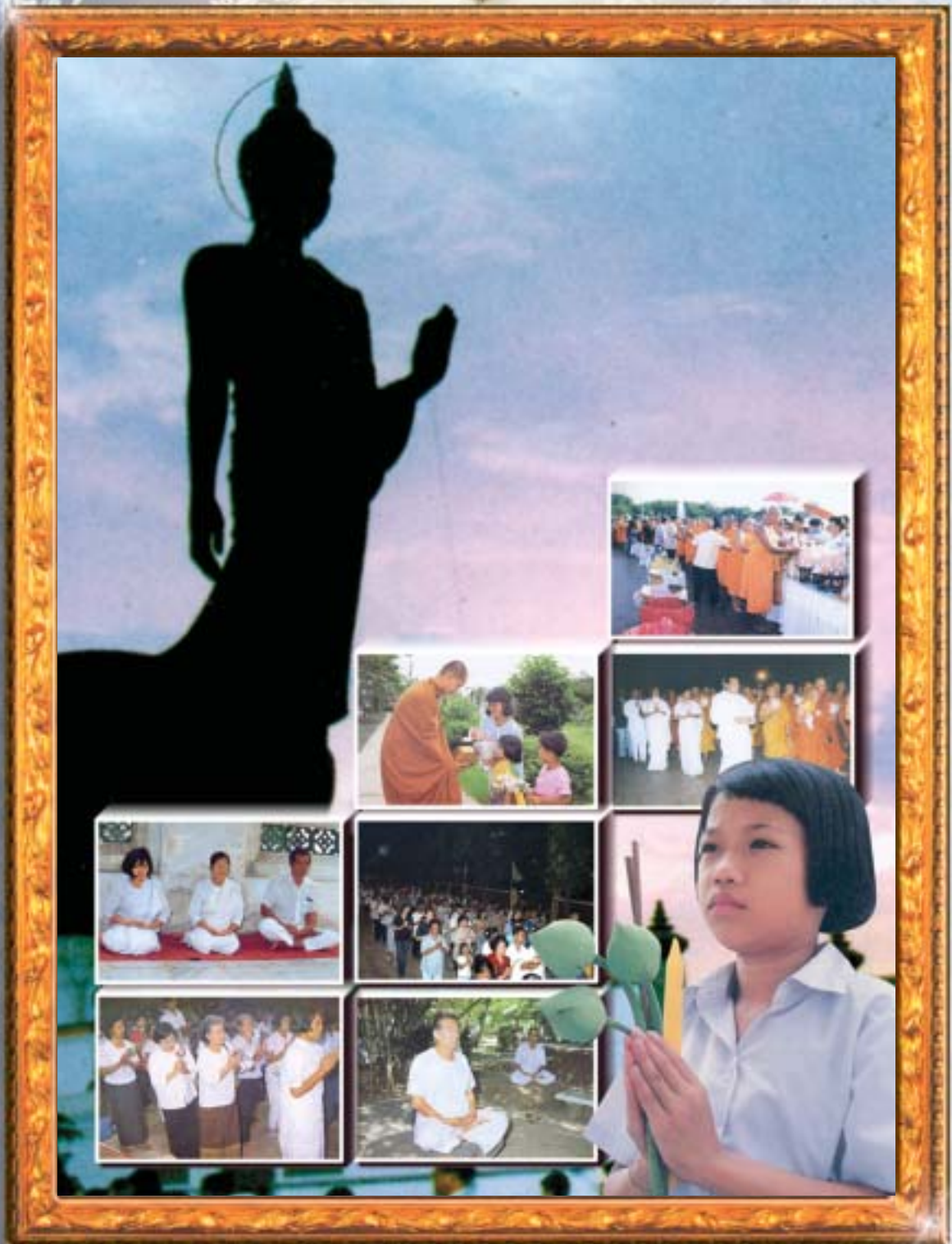
His Majesty the King and Buddhism

During his reign, His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej has done so much for the betterment of Thailand and its people. His concept of the Sufficiency Economy is based on the Buddhist concept of “Moderation” (Mattannuta.) He once said, *“I have often said that a sufficiency economy does not mean that each family must produce its own food, weave and sew its own clothes. This is going too far, but I mean that each village or each district must have relative self-sufficiency...”*



His Majesty the King and the Day of Vesak

King Rama IX (King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1946-present) has duly performed annual royal activities on the Day of Vesak. For example, His Majesty proceeds to offer the Rank Fans (ornamental long handled monastic fans) to monks who have graduated in Pali Studies. He also presides over a merit making ceremony in the morning, and leads a procession around the Uposatha Hall in the afternoon.



Activities on the Day of Vesak

Thai Buddhists take part in the Vesak Day celebrations by visiting the temple. They offer food to the monks, observe the Five Precepts, listen to the Dhamma and perform social activities. They may also go to the Uposatha Hall, where they walk around with lighted candles, worshipping and reflecting on the Buddha.