Open Library of Humanities

ASIANetworkExchange
A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts

Article

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *ASIANetwork Exchange*, which is a journal of the *Open Library of Humanities*.

Copyright:

Open Access:

ASIANetwork Exchange is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

The Open Library of Humanities is an open access non-profit publisher of scholarly articles and monographs.

ARTICLE

Medieval Khmer Society: The Life and Times of Jayavarman VII (ca. 1120–1218)

Paul Nietupski
John Carroll University, US
pnietupski@jcu.edu

Jayavarman VII (ca. 1120–1218) is one of the best known Cambodian "Angkor" leaders, in part because he was able to unite the numerous small, fragmented Khmer Cambodian and Cham kingdoms of the day. He ruled his consolidated Khmer kingdom from 1181–1218, bringing the decentralized Khmer and Cham states together through political and military alliances. Religion, especially India-derived Brahmanism, or "Hinduism," Mahāyāna Buddhism, and local Cambodian religion, was a key component of Khmer society. Over time different Khmer rulers endorsed one or more of the religious systems to their own advantage. Jayavarman VII was especially committed to Mahāyāna Buddhism, evidenced by the remarkable extent of his support for Buddhist monuments, and attested in many hundreds of Sanskrit inscriptions. This essay tells the story of Jayavarman VII, a political and military leader who used Indian religious visions and prototypes as models to build a remarkable cultural edifice.

Introduction

Jayavarman VII (ca. 1120/25-ca. 1218; r. ca. 1181–1218) was one of the most influential kings of "Angkorian" Cambodia; in his lifetime, through conquest and astute diplomacy, he brought a large number of small regional territories under his control. He reportedly lived a very long life and more certainly, was responsible for massive building projects in his Cambodian, ethnically Khmer kingdom. The Cambodian or Khmer civilization flourished between the early ninth and the mid-fifteenth century, with shifting boundaries between its Thai "Ayutthaya" and Vietnamese "Cham" neighbors, sometimes as allies and sometimes as enemies. For a brief but brilliant period, Jayavarman VII was able to assume control of a remarkably large empire, one constructed in the political climate of the day, of sometimes shifting alliances and disputes.

This essay includes a description of Jayavarman VII, and his rise to power through medieval Khmer political processes. It shows the important role of religion through analysis of inscriptions carved in stone. The goal is to show the complex and distinctively Khmer interface of politics, Buddhist and Hindu ("Brahmanical")

Map, Natalie Maitland, "Peninsular Southeast Asia at the time of Jayavarman VII." In Sonya Rhie Mace, *Banteay Chhmar, Lokeshvara, and Cleveland.* Cleveland Museum of Art, 2017, p. 9.

religions and cultures. The proliferation of Mahāyāna Buddhist images and epigraphs will be used to consider components of medieval Khmer identity, including their regard for monastic institutions and fundamental religious principles and practices.

Jayavarman VII was in a privileged class of his day. He was born into a lineage of wealthy rulers, and was exposed to political diplomacy and the politics of conquest at an early age. In a vibrant religious environment, he marked his success in politics and diplomacy with expressions of religious belief and practice; in his case, Buddhism. In his reign, as with those before and after him, religions (especially Indian Buddhism and Brahmanical or "Hindu" ideologies) were the central systems for validating royal authority.

Many of the medieval Angkor monuments were constructed as Buddhist or Brahmanical, and several served both religions over time.[1] This essay focuses on Jayavarman VII (1181–1218), a major sponsor of Buddhist monuments, whose visions and achievements are commemorated in votive and donative inscriptions. The proliferation of Buddhist monuments and inscriptions, moreover, evidences broad community acceptance of Buddhist beliefs and practices, and along with these, political and economic support. This support is verified by the remarkable extent of existing Buddhist monuments and, notably, by very many inscriptions that serve as sources for this essay. As Sheldon Pollock argues, inscriptions were not only written "for the gods"; rather, "[i]nscriptional discourse in Cambodia had some other, political-cultural work to do."[2]

---

[1] Partial support for this project was from a 2007–2008 Council of American Overseas Research Centers' Multi-Country Research Fellowship. All of the photos were taken by Sandar Aung, except where indicated. Thanks for the hospitality of the officers of National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, and to Ed Mish for technical support. The general terms "Hindu" and "Brahmanical" are used interchangeably. Hindu deities including Śiva, Viṣṇu, and goddesses, references to the Mahābhārata, and even Pāṇini are mentioned in several places, see Georges Coedès. *Inscriptions du Cambodge* Vols. I–VIII, Paris: École Française d'Éxtrême-Orient, 1952, Vol. IV: 232. (References to this collection below will read Coedès, Roman numeral, and page number.) Pollock's observation that Indian Brahmins and Khmer scholars were literate in Sanskrit and Indian myth is surely correct, see Sheldon Pollock. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India.* Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007: 129–131, etc. See Chandler 2000: 72, who mentions a centuries-long Buddhist presence at Angkor.

[2] See Pollock 2007: 128.

The monuments and inscriptions studied here represent the multi-faceted Khmer political and religious vision, which focused on Buddhism in Jayavarman VII's time. One caveat is that the extant data from conserved monuments, art objects, and inscriptions are only traces of complex religious institutions and sponsorship by literate classes of society. They can only provide inferential clues about long lost religious buildings made of perishable materials, and about beliefs and practices of communities at large. Nonetheless, this paper proceeds under the assumption that the inscriptions and objects under study did the work of kingship and religion in specific contexts, with recognizable expressions of religious affiliation and of devotion to deities, to Buddhist and Hindu principles and practices, and to monastic institutions.[3]

Photos, Sandar Aung, top left photo of Jayavarman VII at the National Museum, and the remaining four at the Bayon.

---

[3] For a criticism of relying on Sanskrit for Khmer studies in all periods, see Michael Vickery, "What to do about '*The Khmers*,'" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27.2 (1996): 389–390. See also Ian W. Mabbett and David P. Chandler, "Response to Dr. Michael Vickery's Review of '*The Khmers*' ("*Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*") 27.2 (September 1996): 389–404," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 28.2 (September 1997): 389–391.

The Life of Jayavarman VII

The little available biodata about Jayavarman VII shows that he was the son of King Dharaṇīndravarman II (r. 1150–1160) and his wife Queen Śrī Jayarājacūḍāmaṇi. Jayavarman VII married Jayarājadevī, and after her death he married her sister Indradevī. Little else is known of Jayavarman VII's childhood and youth, but it is clear that he was in a privileged class, relatively wealthy, with political connections likely through his clan, and with significant military skill. It appears that he grew up in the Khmer empire, but spent much time in neighboring Cham (Vietnam) lands. For their part, the Cham were at least as fragmented as the Khmer; Vickery has shown that like the Khmer there were several, if not many, small Cham kingdoms, some of which allied among themselves, with their Khmer neighbors, and evidently mercenary groups, in agreements made and broken over years for expected military, political, trade, and territorial advantages.[4] This was the normal political process in medieval Cambodia. The scenario was one of running battles between different allied Khmer and Cham clan groups, who could and did shift alliances over time.

After Jayavarman VII's father passed away in 1160 and his clan member Yasovarman claimed the throne, Jayavarman VII (then about forty years old) served in the court. But around 1166, Tribhuvanādityavarman, evidently a court official, took the throne. Jayavarman VII left the Khmer capital, possibly going to Preah Khan in Kompong Svay (about 100 km east of Angkor) or perhaps to a Cham kingdom.[5] For the next decade, until about 1177, there were more alliances and more battles between groups of allied Khmer and Cham. It is often said that in 1177 there was

---

[4] See Michael Vickery, "Champa Revised," 23–24. The accuracy of the often-repeated stories of the battles between the Khmer and Cham forces has also been challenged by Tranh Ky Phuong and Olivier Cunin, personal communications, June–July 2007. For the battles with the Cham, see Anne-Valérie Schweyer, "The confrontation of the Khmers and Chams in the Bayon period," in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, ed. Joyce Clark (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), 50–71; on this book and other points see Michael Vickery, "Bayon: New Perspectives Reconsidered," *Udaya: Journal of Khmer Studies* 7 (2008): 101–176; see also Claude Jacques, *Angkor* (Cologne: Könemann Publishing, 1999), 124, 129 ff. For an example of the inscriptional evidence about the Cham wars in George Coedès, "La Stèle de Ta-Prohm," 44–86; verse no. XXVIII. See Albert Le Bonheur, "Ancient Cambodia: A Historical Glimpse," in *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, ed. Helen Ibbitson Jessup & Thierry Zephyr (Washington: National Gallery of Art), 13–32.

[5] See Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 55–56.

a unified Cham invasion of Khmer territory. Vickery and others refute this, and Vickery argues further that in this decade (1166–1176) the Khmer were in political turmoil and there was a series of raids and battles between the Cham and Khmer.[6] He suggests that "... the real conquest of Angkor was by Jayavarman VII and his Cham allies–probably in the 1170s, at least before 1181–and that the subordination of central and southern Champa to him dated from that time."[7]

In 1181, Jayavarman VII took the throne of the Khmer empire. Again following the policy of fortuitous alliances against his enemies, he then expanded the empire to its greatest extent ever and built an unprecedented number of temples, religious buildings, and infrastructure projects. He was an innovator, and though tolerant and even supportive of Hinduism, he clearly adopted Mahāyāna Buddhism, Sanskrit language inscriptions, and Buddhist imagery. The expansive and explicit nature of his religious expressions supply good materials and some enigmas for the study of Buddhism in Khmer society of the day.[8]

Jayavarman VII's[9] reign over the Khmer kingdom extended from about 1181 to 1218. He was likely in an extended family or as Vickery put it, a "conical clan," in which all biologically and perhaps marital-related members shared considerable wealth and social status.[10] Wolters describes "cognatic kinship," in which prominent males and females are equally important, and there is individual distinction as a "man [or woman] of prowess."[11]

---

[6] Michael Vickery, "Champa Revised," 70.

[7] Michael Vickery, "Champa Revised," 167, 170.

[8] Vickery remarked that "After nearly 300 years of the increasing use of Khmer language in the epigraphy, all of his important inscriptions are in Sanskrit, which could be seen as an international elite language serving both countries, and he adopted as his state religion Mahāyāna Buddhism, which had always been more important in Champa than in Cambodia. Perhaps it was his Champa associations rather than religion which sparked the so-called Hinduist reaction against his creations – allegedly in the thirteenth century, a date which is completely hypothetical." See Michael Vickery, "Champa Revised," 167, 170. See Ian Mabbett, "Buddhism in Champa," 297–298, 300–302.

[9] For an introduction to Jayavarman VII see Georges Coedès, *Un Grand Roi du Cambodge: Jayavarman VII* (Phnom Penh: Éditions de la Bibliothèque Royale, 1935). For bibliography on ancient Cambodia in general, see Bruno Bruguier (with Phann Nady), *Bibliographie du Cambodge Ancien* 2 vols. (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1998).

[10] See Michael Vickery, "Some Remarks on Early State Formation in Cambodia," in *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries*, ed. David G. Marr and A.C. Milner (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), 95–115.

[11] Wolters, "Early Southeast Asian Political systems," 7, 5–11.

It appears that for much of Jayavarman VII's youth and middle age—until he assumed control of the empire—Khmer clan-based society was stratified, with little continuity of administrative and bureaucratic structures, and no unity under a single leader. Social, political, and economic patterns were divided into villages, and likely into groups of bonded workers impressed by or under the control of classes of equal or higher status. These included court officials and corporate groups or small "kingdoms" made up of a number of regional estates.[12] These larger clan-based groups could often rally militias and engage in running battles with neighboring forces. Battles, territories, property and populations, including communities of working people, were won and lost as alliances were made and broken.

Photo, Sandar Aung: Bayon, Khmer & Cham in battle.

---

[12] See for example Wolters, "Early Southeast Asian Political systems," 5–11. For an application of this theory in South India see Veluthat, *The Early Medieval in South India*, 60–71. See the discussion about "slaves" in Vickery, "What to do?," 398, and Mabbett and Chandler, "Response." See Mabbett and Chandler, *The Khmers*, 165–175.

See Vickery, "Some Remarks on Early State Formation"; for references on the difficulties of understanding early Khmer government, see the brief mention of *poñ* (which term Vickery reports was not used after the eighth century, Vickery, "What to do?," 399) other Khmer terms, and Khmer administrative divisions, see Vickery, "What to do," 391–393, 395–396.

Photo, Sandar Aung: Bayon, Cham in doublet armor.

Cham (doublet armor).

Photos, Sandar Aung: Khmer (strap battle dress).

When large groups were consolidated, a group leader or king could be named until he was usurped by a neighboring king in a very loose model that could evolve over time, and was inconsistent.

This was Jayavarman VII's background, one of internecine warfare with unstable and shifting political structures. However, even though unstable, the Khmer corporate regimes or kingdoms did manage to maintain some degree of control via warfare, inter-clan alliances, military force, economy, and diplomacy. This resulted in the establishment of city centers, where culture and economy flourished, as is evident in the Khmer dynastic histories and monuments, notably those associated with Jayavarman VII.

Khmer Politics

Jayavarman VII (r. 1181–1218) unified the Khmer empire by consolidating power over individualized "segmented" provinces. His visions of conquest and kingship over these provinces were likely rooted in Indian models for religion and governance, at least rhetorically. Kulke and others suggest a three-stage model for the emergence of Jayavarman's empire: first, local units led by native chieftains; second, consolidation into larger regional units, with petty "kings" (*rāja*), but "not yet Aryan" (*anaryya*); and third, coalescence into larger states under one central authority. Jayavarman VII was this third type of leader.[13]

As the process went through its stages, there was also a gradual process of royal divinization, the transformation or apotheosis of a human political and military leader into a religiously-endowed leader, from a chieftain, to a king, to a divine king. The use of Indian titles, political structures, and religions was a process many scholars call "Indianization," which Kulke and others minimize, and Pollock and others describe as vital.[14]

---

[13] See Hermann Kulke. "The Early and the Imperial Kingdom in Southeast Asian History." In David G. Marr and A.C. Milner (eds.). *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries.* Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986, pp. 1–22, esp. 2–7. See also the similar model, including the theory of a three stage process of transforming the land, installing kings and divinities, and then building massive monuments, in David Chandler. *A History of Cambodia.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000: 29–76.

[14] Pollock discusses and problematizes the phenomenon of "Indianization" in great detail, and most usefully for understanding Khmer and Jayavarman VII's understanding of Buddhism. See Pollock 2007: 531–533.

The Khmer assimilated outside influences in politics and in the construction of distinctive Khmer art, but they made it their own. This is made clear in the representations of divinities and royalty with Khmer facial features, including rounder faces, broader brows, and other features.[15] The collections of sculpture in Phnom Penh's National Museum and in the Musée Guimet give ample evidence of the beauty and precision of Khmer sculpture.

Photos, Sandar Aung: Bayon apsaras.

Photos, Sandar Aung: Bayon apsaras.

---

[15] See any of the studies of Khmer sculpture, for example, Khun Samen. *The New Guide to the National Museum—Phnom Penh.* Phnom Penh: The Department of Museums, Second Edition, 2006.

Evidence for "Indianization" is in the Khmer's extensive and literate use of Sanskrit and Indian languages for official inscriptions and religious discourse, the subject matter of the exquisite Khmer sculpture, and the evident presence of and high regard for Brahmanical authority and ongoing contacts between India and Cambodia. Taking this into account, Angkor was an "Indianized" state in which Sanskrit and notably, Indian religions, were adopted by local people.[16]

Further, in medieval Cambodia a key Indian political structure was a process called "maṇḍalification" or "sāmantization," a phenomenon known in small Indian Pāla kingdoms and a likely model for the Khmer kings.[17] This was arguably a key component of the Indian influence on the Khmer. The root of this key belief was that if a king was properly consecrated he could transform himself and his environments into a sacred realm (*maṇḍala*) under his control. Consecrated kings became the central Buddhas of these *maṇḍala* realms; their retinues became attendant bodhisattvas, protectors and so on. Their kingdoms became perfected Buddha heavens, their edicts and rule became enlightened speech or mantras, and their motives and inspiration led to Buddhist enlightenment. It may well be that ideologically, the Buddhism adopted by the court was favored precisely because it flattered the imperial self image. "Que

---

[16] For the language of the Cambodian inscriptions, see Kamaleswar Bhattacharya. *Récherches sur le Vocabulaire des Inscriptions Sanskrites du Cambodge*. Paris: École Française d'Éxtrême-Orient, 1991. Pollock makes a strong case for high Sanskrit literacy in Angkor, evidenced by the accuracy of Sanskrit in epigraphic materials. One interesting variation is in the Phimānakas inscription written by Jayavarman VII's second wife, Indradevī, on the occasion of the death of her sister, Jayarājadevī, the king's first wife. The two sisters were known adherents of Buddhism, particularly Indradevī. The text is in Sanskrit and in correct meter, but it is not as heavily laden with Brahmanical *praśasti* imagery and language as are the typical inscriptions, and is rather more narrative. Its language has been described as vernacular: For example, it uses what has been described as a Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit verbal device, the particle *sma* with a present tense verb that renders the verb in past tense. See Coedès II, pp. 161–163 for introductory data; for *sma* see verse VII, XCV, pp. 164, 172. See also much of the same data in Majumdar 1953: 515–528.

[17] See Ronald M Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); see Charles Higham, *The Archeology of Mainland Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), the chapter titled "The Development of Maṇḍalas", 239–320, and the chapter "The Angkorian Maṇḍala: A.D. 802–1431", 321–355. See also Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (Revised, Updated Edition) (London: Routledge, 1990), 109–196, especially on *sāmanta*, 128–138.

Jayavarman se soit considéré comme un Bouddha vivant."[18] The kings' adoption of Buddhism was "… wholesale conversion, the fundamental transformation, of a human domain into a Buddha-realm, an empire governed by superhuman insight, power, and law."[19]
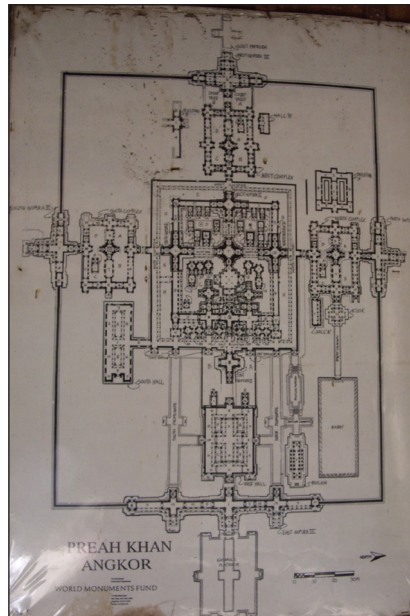
Photo, Sandar Aung: *Maṇḍala*-influenced architectural diagram, Preah Khan.

Photo, Sandar Aung: Ta Prohm.

---

[18] Coedès 1935: 27.

[19] Lorraine Gesick, ed., *Centers, Symbols, and Hierarchies: Essays on the Classical States of Southeast Asia*, Monograph No. 26 (Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1983). See Hirananda Sastri, *Nālanda and Its Epigraphic Material*, Memoirs of the Archeological Survey of India, No. 66. (Delhi: Government of India Press, 1942): 32–36.

The emphasis on kingship and dominion over one's newly formulated world came on a foundation of conquest and subsequent sacralization of space, an extension of a deity's dominion, and a place where a *vastupuruṣa* divine body, "comme un Bouddha vivant" became synonymous with the sacred site of a temple and, by extension, the entire universe, the totality of one's experience. Accordingly, the central religious practice of the time was "… the individual assuming kingship and exercising dominion…. the person metaphorically becom[ing] the overlord (*rājādhirāja*) or universal ruler (*cakravartin*)"[20] or divine king (*devarāja*) of the new vision of a perfected realm,[21] whether individual layman, monk, or king.

Jayavarman VII and other Angkor Buddhist kings had the status of divine kings (*devarāja*) and functioned as universal monarchs (*cakravartin*).[22] Thus, in the course of (and after) consolidating the kingdom, Jayavarman VII utilized established systems of Indian Buddhist mantras, *mūdra*s, and ritual practices.[23] More emphatically, in an epigraph at Angkor Thom, Jayavarman VII "recites mantras to lead the world to the highest religious goal by destroying obscurity and by following all of the rules."[24]

---

[20] Harris 2005: 19; Davidson 2002: 121. The term *cakravartirāja* appears in G. Coedès. "Appendice: Les Inscriptions du Bayon," in "Études Cambodgiennes: XIX – Date du Bayon," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Éxtrême-Orient* XXVIII (vol. 1928, published 1929): 110. [81–121].

[21] See Davidson 2002: 115, "Esoteric Buddhism … reflects the internalization of the medieval conceptual and social environment, rather than the revealed system that orthodoxy portrays." See Davidson 116–168 for details, dates, etc. For the application of this theory and ritual in Cambodia, including references to Jayavarman VII, see Sachchidanand Sahai. *Les Institutions Politiques et l'Organisation Administrative du Cambodge Ancien (VIe–XIIIe Siècles)*. Paris: École Française d'Éxtrême-Orient, 1970.

[22] See Stanley J. Tambiah. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976: 73–131.

[23] Coedès IV, p. 212, XL, no. 18, *mantram upācarad*, tr. 223, "la recitation des formulas magiques."

[24] Coedès IV, p. 216, LXXIX, tr. 227. There is evidence of fire and possibly a Cham invasion at Angkor in inscriptions and in excavated remains of burned buildings. For inscriptional evidence see *agnitaptam*, Coedès IV, p. 210, XIX, # 37. The often repeated, sequential and ethnically distinct stories of the battles between the Khmer and Cham forces have been challenged by Tranh Ky Phuong and Olivier Cunin. Personal communications, June–July 2007. For a standard overview of the battle myths with the Cham, see for example Claude Jacques. *Angkor*. Cologne: Könemann Publishing, 1999: 124, 129 ff. For an example of the inscriptional evidence see the data about the Cham wars in George Coedès. "La Stèle de Ta-Prohm," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Éxtrême-Orient* VI (1906): 44–86, v. XXVIII. Coedès IV: 208–209. Olivier Cunin has charted the extent of Jayavarman's construction and given 1191 as the peak year for new construction. Personal communications, June–July 2007. See Olivier Cunin. "De Ta Prohm au Bayon." PhD diss., L'Insitut National Polytechnique de Lorraine, 2004; see also Olivier Cunin & Baku Saito. *The Face Towers of Banteay Chmar*. Tokyo: Goto Shoin Publishing Company, 2005. Kulke 1986:

Khmer Religions

Buddhism, not to the exclusion of Hinduism, was a one of the major forces in Khmer history. Jayavarman V (968–1001)'s tenth century inscription at Vat Sithor in Kompong Cham tells us:

eṣā śrī jayavarmmājñā buddhadharmmānucār[iṇī]
vauddhānām anukarttavyā mokṣābhyudayasiddhaye[25]

"This observance of the Buddhist teachings was ordered by the glorious Jayavarman and must be followed by Buddhists for success in the process (*abhyudaya*) to freedom."

And again, by Jayavarman VII (r. 1181–1218), in his typical opening dedication of the widely distributed "hospices," here showing the extent of his empire, from Vientien, in Laos:

namo vuddhāya nirmāṇadharmmasambhogamūrtaye
bhāvābhāvadvayātīto dvayātmā yo nirātmakaḥ[26]

[14–15.] Kulke 1986 gives an example of the medieval political process at Prambanan in Java, where temples were built by subsidiary states and their relative importance and function noted in the temple structures at Prambanan, which "reflect the structures in the kingdom." Kulke quotes J.G. de Casparis. *Short Inscriptions from Tjandi Ploasan-Lor.* Djakarta 1958: 31 (Bulletin of the Archeological Service of the Republic of Indonesia, No. 4). Kulke 1986: 15 says that the same is true for Jayavarman VII's Angkor, but I have yet to see as detailed evidence for Angkor as that which de Casparis cites for Java. See the essay and the diagram of Khmer social, political, and religious structures in Kenneth R. Hall, "South and Southeast Asian Epigraphy as a Source of Economic History," in *Indus Valley to Mekong Delta: Explorations in Epigraphy*, ed. Noboru Karashima (Madras: New Era Publications, 1985), 92–98, diagram, 98.

[25] Coedès VI, 199: LI. Here and below read *vauddha-/vuddha-/vrahma-* as *bauddha-/buddha-/brahma-*; reduplicated consonants as single consonants, etc. I follow Coedès' Sanskrit readings, though sometimes not in "correct" Sanskrit, with reference to R.C. Majumdar. *Inscriptions of Kambuja.* Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1953, but the translations are mine. I note some variants and but do not edit the Sanskrit texts to formal, "correct" Sanskrit. K. Bhattacharya (forthcoming) presents edited versions of Angkor inscriptions. See A. Barth. "Notes et Mélanges: Les doublets de la Stèle de Say-fong," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Éxtrême-Orient* III.3 (1903): 461. This inscription includes substantial reference to Kīrtipaṇḍīta, vv. 19–36; and to *Prajñāpāramitā*, v. 44.

[26] L. Finot. "Notes d'Épigraphie II: L 'Inscription Sanskrite de Say-fong" (includes Paul Pelliot, "Le Bhaiṣyaguru"), *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Éxtrême-Orient* III.1: 22 [Finot 18–33, Pelliot 33–37]; see, in the same volume, the articles about the extent of Jayavarman VII's empire in G. Maspero. "Say-fong:

> "I bow to the Buddha, in his emanation, reality, and beatific aspects, who is beyond both being and non-being, whose self is non-dual (*advayātmā*), who is selfless."

If the proliferation of icons, ambulatories, meeting halls, stūpas and other architectural features were used as they were and are in other Buddhist cultures, devotion (*bhakti*) was likely a central practice in medieval Angkor.[27]

There is evidence of this type of practice in medieval Angkor. In her Phimānakas inscription (ca. 1194–1200), Queen Indradevī uses language and mechanisms typical of religious practice. The epigraph is incomplete and the context mundane—and perhaps typical of a devoted wife praying for her husband's safe return— but the language and literary devices use mechanisms reminiscent of, if not taken from, devotional meditation. Fragments of verses (#59–64) are suggestive of religious sentiments:

Photo, Sandar Aung: Phimānakas.

Une Ville Morte," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Éxtrême-Orient* III.1: 1–17. Majumdar 1953: 492–502 shows that this inscription is similar to many others spread far apart in Jayavarman VII's empire, in Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia. Cf. the Prasat Tor inscription with dedications to Brahmanical deities, credited to Jayavarman VII but dated much earlier, in Majumdar 1953: 502–513. See Barth 1903: 460–466.

[27] In terms of structure and mechanics, Buddhist rituals were not far removed from Brahmanical *bhakti* devotions. See John Carman. "Bhakti," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 132. See Harris 2005: 18–19; see Peter D. Sharrock. "The Buddhist Pantheon of the Bayon of Angkor: An Historical and Art Historical Reconstruction of the Bayon Temple and its Religious and Political Roots." PhD diss., London: SOAS, 2006; see Hiram W. Woodward. "Tantric Buddhism at Angkor Thom." *Ars Orientalis* 12: 12 (1981): 57–67.

59.

> "Her (Queen Jayarāja Devī's) primary teacher was Indradevī; she focused (*avekṣamāṇā*) on the Buddha as her best goal.
> She followed the path to the peace of the Sugata, the middle path between the sea of [suffering] and the fire of sorrow."

60.

> "… First, she invoked (*vavande*) the Buddha, imagined (*cintā*) in the form of an elephant, then manifested over her twisted locks of hair. Then with intense effort … she guided him (*nayantam*) along her own path."

61.

> "… like seeing a blazing flame in a fire chapel she succeeded in her meditation. (*vigaṇyamānām*)"

62.

> "… like a beauty greater than Bhiṣma's, in her mind able to directly realize suffering as happiness."

63.

> "… she had a vision (*sparddham*) of her husband returning home, like the light of a deity (*kṣitidevatā*) that manifests itself (*sandarśitātmā*)."

64.

> "… by the merit of her extreme devotion (*bhaktyā*) to her husband … by the power of her vow she invoked (*yayāce*) continuously."[28]

These are fragments of verses, but they show well the piety of Queen Jayarājadevī. They also show the function of Buddhist devotional meditation. In verse 60 the Queen invokes the presence of the actual Buddha, succeeds, and engages him. In

---

[28] These verse fragments are from Coedès II: 169.

61 she has a powerful vision of light. Verse 62 brings a level of realization consistent with Buddhist trance states. In 63 there is a deity manifesting itself to a devotee, and the use of the verb *dṛś* in a typical Buddhist devotional practice. And finally in verse 64 the Queen carries on with continuous devotional practice, fueled by the force of her vow. These can be understood as examples of Buddhist devotional meditation, likely well known and widely practiced in Angkor's temples and lay communities.

Similarly, the mechanism of devotion appears in Jayavarman VII's (ca. 1186) Ta Prohm inscription,

5.

> *munīndradharmmāgrasarīṃ guṇādhyān*
>
> *dhūmadbhir adhyātmadṛśānirīkṣyām*
>
> *nirastaniśśeṣavikalpajālāṃ*
>
> *bhaktyā jinānāṃ jananīṃ namadhvam*[29]

> "I bow (*namadhvam*) with devotion to the genetrix of the Conquerors
>
> Whose magnificent qualities are foremost of the excellent marks (*indradharma*) of the Sage, whom the wise know as the manifestation of inner being,[30] who has completely eradicated the net of conceptual constructions."

And emphatically, from very late in Jayavarman VII's reign, the Angkor Thom Prasat Chrun (the southwest "Corner Temple," one of the four, in each corner of Angkor Thom) epigraph describes how "by devotion the depths of the king's heart were filled by the waters from the object of his devotion."[31] And again, from Prasat Chrun,

---

[29] George Coedès 1906: 50, v. 5.

[30] *Adhyātmadṛśānirīkṣyāṃ* "contemplate as the manifestation of inner being." I take *nirīkṣ* as "see," or "contemplate," "know," or "understand," consistent with the practice of devotional worship. Coèdes disagrees, translating *nirīkṣ* as a negative verb, p. 71. See the more recent translation in Claude Jacques. "Preah Khan Stele Inscription Translation," Siem Reap, Cambodia: World Monuments Fund, *Preah Khan Conservation Project, Historic City of Angkor*, Report IV, Field Campaign I – Project Mobilization, Appendix C (July 1993): 2 n. 7. [1–35].

[31] Coedès IV, p. 219, CI, #15–16, *alpavastvamvunā bhaktimato pi p[ū]rṇaḥ*.

22.

sakaustubhe vakṣi karkaśe śrīr duḥkhaṃ vasantī dhruvam acyutasya yasyāpi

ratnatrayabhakticitre snigdhe sukhan niścalam eva reme[32]

"The [goddess] Śrī was always miserable in the hard, *kaustubha*-jeweled heart of Viṣṇu, but in gentle, clear devotion to the Three Jewels she enjoyed only unceasing happiness."

The Buddhist and Hindu practices alluded to in these verses were likely formalized and structured when practiced in Angkor's temples; the temple architecture is designed for circumambulation, icon worship, recognition, worship to and invocation of deity bodies. In Indian Brahmanical—and Buddhist—temples, the elaborate *pūja* worship of the time was, in Hopkins' words, "full-blown theism."[33]

The Angkor kings, notably Jayavarman VII, recorded their expressions of devotion in their construction of temples and hospices, and offerings to their teachers and to their parents and families, likewise sanctified. In his 1186 Ta Prohm inscription the king is credited with erecting statues of his teacher, and many others, and performing "daily *pūja* rituals" on an enormous scale.[34] Bhūpendra III's 1189 Prasat Tor, clearly a Hindu inscription, is a good example:

---

[32] Coedès IV, p. 207–236, XXII, #43–44. Read *vasatī* instead of *vasantī*. Coedès' translation adds (p. 242) "poitrine de ce roi" understanding that it was the king's heart that was ornamented (*citre*) by devotion to the Three Jewels. Thus, Coedès renders the king's heart as sweet and ornamented by devotion, while I take "… *bhakticitre snigdhe*" as "tender clarity of devotion to the Three Jewels" itself, in opposition to "the hard jeweled heart of Acyuta." Coedès' translation preserves parallelism with the first part of the verse, but a more literal rendering preserves the parallel between Viṣṇu and the Three Jewels, and the role of the king. It is even possible to eliminate the king altogether from this verse, and render it a matter of religious preference, though in the context of the previous verses the king is understood. See trans. 242, "Demeurant sur la rude poitrine d'Acyuta (Viṣṇu) ornée du (seul) joyau Kaustubha, Śrī était en proie au malheur, tandis que sur la douce poitrine de ce roi, ornée de sa devotion aux Trois joyaux, elle jouissait d'un bonheur constant."

[33] See Thomas J. Hopkins. *The Hindu Religious Tradition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971, 108–130. He describes different rituals in detail. *Pūja* involves invocation, seating, foot water, hand water, drinking water, bathing, fresh clothes, sacred thread, anointment, flowers, incense, lamps, food/gifts, obeisance, circumambulation, praise, farewell.

[34] For daily practice, see George Coedès 1906: 55, v. XXXVII–XXXVIII; George Coedès 1906: 54, v. XXXI, XXXIV: 31. *bhaktyā ca yo mātari* …; 34. *bhaktyāvaśiṣṭam*…. For details of the enormous offerings, see pp. 75–85.

37.

saptārccir vahnyagāre vidhisatatahuto yena mantraiḥ prayuktair

mmedhyenābhūtapūrvveṇa vividhahaviṣāpi prahṛṣyatyīva

pūrvvatrāpūrvvam āśuprahitahavir mandapālasya mantrāt

kṛtsnaṃ kṛṣṇārjunābhyāṃ priyam adhikam asau khāndave no cakhāda[35]

"The [Lord of] Seven Fires [Agni], constantly invoked by rituals in the house of fire is pleased by mantra recitations by [Jayavarman VII], whose manifold offerings are pure and unprecedented. This is similar to Mandapāla's mantras, because of which [Agni] suddenly presented (*āśuprahita*) with an unprecedented offering by Krsna and Arjuna, did not thus consume everything good and excellent in Khāndava."

Further, and even more emphatically, in the earlier but arguably continuously present Buddhist environment at Angkor and here at Vat Sithor (in the reign of Rājendravarman, 944–968) in Kampong Cham province, there is extensive mention of Indian Buddhist ritual:

69.

hṛnmūdramantravidyāsu homakarmmaṇi kovidaḥ

bajraghaṇṭārahasyajño dakṣiṇīyaḥ purohitaḥ

"He is expert in the sciences of essential gestures and invocations, and in fire ceremonies, a skilful priest who knows the secrets of the vajra and bell."[36]

70.

vedasūkta rṣabhavrahmaghoṣonmūlābhiṣecanaiḥ

muneḥ parvvadine kuryyāt snānādini purohitaḥ

---

[35] Coedès I: 235, v. XXXVII. Coedès edits *khāndave* to *khāṇḍave.* See *Mahābhārata, Khāndava-daha Parva,* sections 228–232.

[36] *Bajraghaṇṭārahasyajño,* "who knows the secrets of vajra and bell."

"The priest should bathe [and worship] the Sage at the phases of the moon, with the best words of wisdom (*vedasūkta*), the sacred prayers, and the eye-opening consecration."

71.

buddhasnānādibhir llokās sukhitā dharmmavarddhanāḥ
antarbhūtā hi sarvvajñakāye satvāś carācarāḥ

"The world is happy and the teachings grow by bathing the Buddha, and so on, because active and inactive living beings are inside the body of the omniscient one."

72.

pratītyotpādanaṃ vrahmaghoṣas saddharmma ārṣabhaḥ
sūktaś śāntyavadhāraś ca gāthāveda iti smṛtaḥ

"It is explained that verses of wisdom (*gāthāveda*) are known as dependent origination, sacred prayers, the best true teachings, well spoken, and tranquil."

73.

Vrahmaghoṣādayo vidyā yadokrā [sic][37] mama mastake
tan mūrddhātīva maṅgalya iti sarvvajñaśāsanam[38]

"When [sacred] knowledge (*vidyā*), the sacred prayers, etc, are recited over my head, it is like a blessing on the crown of my head and so on; this is the teaching of the omniscient one."

Queen Indradevī's verse 62 cited above tells us that the Jayarājadevī was "… in her mind able to directly realize suffering as happiness (*sākṣāt … duḥkhaṃ sukhāyamānaṃ*

---

[37] Coedès VI: 209 n. 6 corrects *yadokrā* (p. 200) to *yadoktā* (*yadā ukta*), and suggests *yenoktā* as the proper reading.

[38] These verses are in Coedès VI: 200.

smaraṇe prapede)."[39] And below, in the Ta Prohm inscription, it is said of the king that "He seeks to know (*jighṛkṣur*) substance from the insubstantial body with its impure sense fields, … " (*sāraṇ jighṛkṣur aśubhāyatanād asārāt*)[40] Again, here below, "… materials are a virulent poison … for their invocations are changed into poison, (*dravyaviṣādhikam viṣaṇ hi pratikurvvanti*) …"[41] The implication is that mundane material donations are changed into non-poisonous substance. And finally, "… the residences constructed around the monastery are just like manifested deity heavens made constantly present … by continuous rituals."[42] The point is that there is a transmutation or a transubstantiation of gross, worldly matter into divine substance by means of devotional meditation.

Buddhists and Non-Buddhists

The 1189 Prasat Tor inscription attributed to Bhūpendra III[43] was sponsored by a prominent Brahmanical family with strong religious sensibilities well before and during Jayavarman VII's reign.

Photo, Sandar Aung: Prasat Tor.

---

[39] Coedès II.

[40] Coedès 1906: 52, v. XVII.

[41] Coedès VI, p. 200.

[42] Coedès I: 235, v. XXXVI. See full text below.

[43] Coedès I: 227, 249 n. 2, 229. See Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 252–262, 340–344.

The inscription is clearly Hindu. It describes Jayavarman VII as an embodiment of Śiva, not of a Buddha or of a bodhisattva, and it invokes Hindu deities, myths and doctrines. However, it also includes reference to Buddhist monasteries.[44] The co-existence and overlapping of architecture, iconography, ritual, and language most probably reflected a degree of accommodation, cross fertilization,[45] and even competition. However, it appears that at Angkor there was not a fully developed Hindu-Buddhist syncretism. Each religion maintained its separate identity.

Hindu and Buddhist religions were separate Khmer institutions in medieval Angkor. Rituals and practices were adopted and re-interpreted in historical sequences or in different regions. Coedès has remarked on this point, of a typical passage in the ca. 1186 Ta Prohm inscription (but relevant to the entire religious environment) that "… le caractère bouddhique n'exclut pas certaines expressions trahissant un tréfonds brahmanique …"[46] The inconsistencies between Khmer Hinduism and Buddhism were the results of redefinitions and revaluations of their respective rituals. While orthodox doctrines of both religions were applied to heterodox rituals the faithful were likely clear about their religious affiliations.[47] Buddhism and Hinduism co-existed in this environment, and to a certain extent shared ritual mechanics and ritual spaces.

There is also much evidence of religious conflict: for example, in the post-Jayavarman VII period, when all depictions and statues of the Buddha were systematically and very nearly entirely destroyed or chipped away from major Angkor temples, including the Bayon, Preah Khan, Banteay Kdei, Ta Som, Ta Prohm and others.

---

[44] Coedès, *Inscriptions* I, 235, v. XXXVI. See the comments on Prasat Tor in George Coedès, *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* XXXI (1931): 621, 612–623, esp. 230.

[45] See for example Coedès and Senart quoted in George Coedès, *Inscriptions* VI, 195–196.

[46] See Coedès, "La Stèle de Ta-Prohm," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* VI (1906): 44–48. "The Buddhist character did not preclude taking certain expressions from Brahmanical sources."

[47] See the description of the process of redefinition of icons and attendant rituals across religious, political, ethnic, and historical boundaries in Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 6–26. See Coedès, "La Stèle de Ta-Prohm," 44–86, where Buddhist divinities (XVIII–XXVII), rituals, and doctrines appear alongside Brahmanical, but in a definite Buddhist context. See the even more emphatic inscription at Preah Khan in George Coedès, *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* XLI (1942): 255 ff., which includes similar Buddhist dedications, information about events with the Cham, much Hindu language, myth, and ritual, and information about the construction of Preah Khan temple. Also in R.C. Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Kambuja* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1953), 475–492.

Photo, Sandar Aung: Defaced Buddha images, Preah Khan.

Photo, Sandar Aung: Hindu liṅgam & Buddhist stūpa, Preah Khan.

Many twelfth- to thirteenth-century monuments at Angkor were constructed as either Hindu or Buddhist, but over time several alternated between both religions.[48]

---

[48] The structures that house the obvious Buddhist icons at Preah Khan, Ta Prohm, Bayon, Angkor Thom, Banteay Chmar and elsewhere have basic architectural configurations nearly indistinguishable from

At Ta Prohm, the temple dedicated to Jayavarman VII's mother, the king inscribed his recognition of Buddhism as the dominant religion:

17.

śākyenduśāsanasudhājanitātmatṛptir

bhikṣudvijārthijanasātkṛtabhūtisāraḥ

sāraṇ jighṛkṣur aśubhāyatanād asārāt

kāyād ajasrajinapādakṛtānatir yaḥ[49]

"His self-contentment comes from the moon of the Śākyas and the nectar of the teachings, He extends his respected (*sātkṛt*) influence to monks, the twice-born, and worthy persons,
He seeks to know (*jighṛkṣur*) substance from the insubstantial body with its impure sense fields, [and]
He constantly bows in homage to the Conqueror."

Still, Buddhism and Brahmanism co-existed in this environment, and to a certain extent shared ritual mechanics. Even at times of powerful political sponsorship of one religion over the other, both persisted.

Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and their Friends

The Buddha, stūpas and other Buddhist imagery are common, and Jayavarman VII was clearly influenced by the iconography and symbolism of Mahāyāna Buddhist bodhisattvas, especially a triad known elsewhere in Asia that included various combinations of three; Lokeśvara (Avalokiteśvara), Vajrapāṇi, Mañjuśrī, Śākyamuni, and/or the goddess Prajñāpāramitā.[50]

Hindu buildings. See David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 72, who mentions a centuries-long Buddhist presence at Angkor.

[49] Coedès 1906: 52, v. XVII.

[50] See Harris 2005: 16–17, etc.; Chandler 2000 acknowledges the presence of the triad of bodhisattvas at Angkor; see M. Yoritomi. "An Iconographic Study of the Eight Bodhisattvas in Tibet," in Tadeusz Skorupski (ed.). *Indo-Tibetan Studies: Papers in Honour and Appreciation of Professor David L. Snellgrove's Contribution to Indo-Tibetan Studies.* Tring, UK: The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1990: 323–332; and numerous others on this well known topic.

The invocation and rituals surrounding these deities were carried out as described above, and their specific attributes worked to generate different Buddhist qualities. The main principles embodied by those mentioned here are compassion and wisdom, which together yield enlightenment. Accordingly, Jayavarman VII dedicated Ta Prohm (1186) to his mother as Prajñāpāramitā, and Preah Khan (1191) to his father as Lokeśvara.[51] Lokeśvara appears very frequently at Buddhist Angkor. In her Phimānakas inscription (ca. 1194–1200), Indradevī, his second wife, opens her long poem with praise to the Buddha, dharma, saṅgha, and Lokeśvara, who promote the good of the world (*lokeśvaro lokahitānulomo*), as Jayavarman VII himself strives to further the ends of the world (*lokārthavidhānadīpta …*).[52]

Photo, Sandar Aung, Prajñāpāramitā.

---

[51] For Jayavarman VII, see Coedès 1935: 27–29; for kingship in Cambodia, see Georges Coedès. *Note sur l'Apothéose au Cambodge*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1911; for the mention of these bodhisattvas, esp. the triad of Prajñāpāramitā, Vajrapāṇi, and Lokeśvara and Mahāyāna texts, see the Vat Sithor inscription in Coedès VI, p. 199, XLIV–XLV, tr. p. 206–207.

[52] Coedès II: 164, v. VII.

There are extensive and dominant bas-reliefs of Lokeśvara at Banteay Chmar that remain to the present day and there is explicit mention at Prasat Chrung of the "compassionate one" (the epithet of Avalokiteśvara), who on the support of the Buddha-fields, solidifies the dharma."[53]

Again, from Vat Sithor, in the tenth century:

Photo, Sandar Aung: Avalokiteśvara, Banteay Chmar.

Photos, Sandar Aung: Banteay Chmar, Khmer soldiers in strap battle dress.

---

[53] See *mahākāruṇiko yas tu … pratiṣṭho vuddhabhūdharaḥ*; in Coedès IV p. 232, I, K, tr. 235: "ce grand compatissant … se tenant ferme sur la règle ayant pour support la terre des Buddha, son dharma (obtint) la fermeté … comme … les montagnes."

Photo, Sandar Aung: Prasat Chrung, "corner temple," of four at Angkor Thom.

44.

tatsthāne sthāpitā sthityai sarvvavidvaṇśabhāsvataḥ

prajñāpāramitā tārī jananī yena tāyinām

"To maintain the light of the lineage of omniscient ones he built there a Prajñāpāramitā Tāra, who protects beings."

45.

Śrīsatyavarmmaṇā bajrilokeśārccā daśādhikāḥ

sthāpitāḥ prāg girau bhagnāsanā yo tiṣṭhipat punaḥ[54]

"The Lord Satyavarman rebuilt statues of Vajrapāṇi, Avalokiteśvara, and ten others on a mountain where their foundations had collapsed."

These two verses show the veneration, active construction and reconstruction of central deities in the Buddhist pantheon. It is not surprising then that Harris wrote that "[a] preoccupation with Mahayanist pantheons, then, is a distinct feature of this period."[55]

There is also a presence of Hevajra and other tantric deities at Angkor. These have been the subject of much speculation, and art historians in particular have

[54] Coedès VI, p. 199, XLIV–XLV.
[55] Harris 2005: 17, 1–23.

done much to locate these deities in Angkor's religious world. There continue to be many different hypotheses, but none, as far as I can tell, present an explanation of the extent of tantric practice. Perhaps these deities were understood much as bodhisattvas mentioned above, powerful and wise deities to be invoked for merit, material benefit, and (for some) to be internalized as components of consciousness.

Hevajra, c. 1200. Cambodia, reign of Jayavarman 7th. Bronze. Overall: 46 × 23.9 cm (18 1/16 × 9 3/8 in.). Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Maxeen and John Flower in honor of Dr. Stanislaw Czuma 2011.143.

McGovern, Crosby, and others have shown the range of esoteric practices that depart from canonical models in later Thai and Cambodian Buddhism; versions of such practices were very likely known at Angkor in years previous. These, however, seem to be more consistent with the kinds of rituals described above, rather than the fully developed transgressive tantra found in India.[56] See for example at Vat Sithor:

42.

> *vāhyaṃ guhyañ ca saddharmmaṃ sthāpayitvā cakāra yaḥ*
> *pūjārthan tasya saṃghasyātitheśca pṛthagāśramān*

> "He set up the true dharma, exoteric and esoteric, and then he made places (*āśrama*) of worship for the ordained community and lay practitioners."[57]

The role and practice of tantra at Angkor remains unclear and is another of the many areas for detailed research.

Monasticism

Religious specialists, monks, and tantric practitioners alike often worked in service of political authorities. Monasteries…

> … interact[ed] with warlords and princes, the military generals and their emerging tribal leaders. [They] arose wherever esoteric Buddhism was practiced. [They were] the domain of monks, who wrote and preached in a hermeneutical method that emphasized the development and integration of

---

[56] Twelfth to thirteenth century Khmer Buddhism has been categorized as Mahāyāna, Khmer tantrayāna, mantrayāna, yogāvacara, tantric Theravāda, early tantra, and tantric Mahāyāna. See Samuel's descriptions of tantric practices of the day in Geoffrey Samuel, *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9. See the summary in Nathan McGovern, "Esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion. Online Publication Date: Oct 2017 DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.617 (accessed 10 January 2018). See Harris 2005: 18–19; see Peter D. Sharrock. "The Buddhist Pantheon of the Bayon of Angkor: An Historical and Art Historical Reconstruction of the Bayon Temple and its Religious and Political Roots." PhD diss., London: SOAS, 2006; see Hiram W. Woodward. "Tantric Buddhism at Angkor Thom." Ars Orientalis 12: 12 (1981): 57–67.

[57] Coedès VI, p. 199, XLII.

esoteric ideas and models into institutional requirements…. [L]aymen from disparate backgrounds became members of a culture unified by monastic rule, ritual, cosmology, and doctrine.[58]

Archeological data for monasticism from medieval Angkor, even from the reign of Jayavarman VII, is minimal. Compared to the more than one hundred remaining temples, there is little evidence of large-scale monasteries.[59] This lack of archeological evidence may, however, be a function of the choice of perishable building materials for monastic and other complexes. The excavation of what is evidently a small monastery in the NW quadrant of Preah Khan is an exception.

However, the presence of educated monks in Angkor is signaled by the mention of monastic activity in inscriptions. This, and the actual level of literacy found in inscriptions, supports the hypothesis that monastic experts were present as authorities, teachers, doctors and medical experts in the more than one hundred medical clinics. These matters were the provenance of Buddhist monks. Further archeological excavations at Preah Khan and elsewhere may reveal evidence of wooden monastic dwellings, which are noted in Zhou Daguan's 1296–1297 CE account.[60]

There are explicit references to monastic activity in inscriptions, even if not yet fully corroborated by archeological data. From the reign of Jayavarman V (968–1001), at Vat Sithor, there is mention (see above) of the establishment of monasteries for esoteric and exoteric groups, and separate residences for ordained and lay persons. The Vat Sithor inscription also contains a long list of rules for monasteries.

---

[58] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 2002, 114.

[59] See the summary in Harris 2005: 10–11, 22–25, etc. See the emphatic statements on this matter in Oliver de Bernon. "About Khmer Monasteries: Organization and Symbolism." In Pierre Pichard and François Lagirarde (eds.). *The Buddhist Monastery: A Cross-cultural Survey.* Paris: École Française d'Éxtrême-Orient, 2003: 209–218; see also in the same volume Christophe Pottier. "Yaśovarman's Buddhist *Āśrama* in Angkor." In Pierre Pichard and François Lagirarde (eds.). *The Buddhist Monastery: A Cross-cultural Survey.* Paris: École Française d'Éxtrême-Orient, 2003: 199–208. For an alternative statement about the presence of Buddhist monasticism at Angkor, see David Snellgrove. *Angkor Before and After.*

[60] Chou Ta-Kuan (tr. Paul Pelliot). *The Customs of Cambodia.* 3rd Edition. Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1993: 11–12. Zhou mentions here that there were no nuns, which contradicts inscriptional evidence. Zhou however also mentions that he was unable to investigate any of these matters in detail.

58.

vihāraṃ kārayitvā yas triṣu ratneṣu kalpayan
pareṣāṃ hitasiddhyarthaṃ sa mahāpuṇyam āpnuyāt

"One who constructs a monastery for the Three Jewels, and for the sake of accomplishing goodness for others, obtains great merit."

59.

tribhāgas sarvvasaṃbhogo ratnatritayakalpitaḥ
sthāpanīyaḥ pṛtaktvena mā miśras syāt parasparam

"All of the donations in three parts must be allotted to the Three Jewels, set up separately without mixing with each other."

60.

na jñaptiś ced vihārasya bhikṣubhir vvidhivat kṛta
avihāra iti jñeyaḥ koṣṭhāgāras sa eva tu

"If it is not designated as a monastery by the monks' rules, it will be known as a non-monastic place, and just a storehouse."

61.

jīvikārthe kṛtas so ya[ṃ] na parārthe na śāntaye
vrahmapuṇyan na tatrāsti yena sarvvajñatā[ṃ] vrajet

"A place for this life that is not for anything else, not for tranquility, has no divine merit (*brahmapuṇya*) that leads one to omniscience."

62.

vihārasya yadā jñaptis sādhunā vidhinā kṛtā
tataḥ puṇyam ivākāśaṃ sarvvatra gatam akṣayam

"When a place is designated as a monastery according to the good rule, its merit spreads everywhere, indestructible, like space."

63.

ata evavidhaṃ puṇyam. ye lumpanti narādhamāḥ

tair ghoran nārakaṃ duḥkham anantam anubhūyate

"Thus too, those wretches who destroy this kind of merit experience unending misery in dreadful hell."

64.

gṛhibhir nnopabhoktavyaṃ saṃghadravyaviṣādhikam

viṣaṃ hi pratikurvvanti mantrādyāḥ na tu sāṃghikam

"The community's materials are a virulent poison for householders who do not donate, for their invocations are changed into poison, but not for those of the community."

65.

sarvvajñavākyam evan tat kṛtvā manasi bhaktitaḥ

vidvān utpādya vidhivad vihāraṃ dūratas sthitaḥ

"An intelligent person with devotion in his mind, who acts according to the words of the omniscient one, who builds a monastery according to the rules, will live for a long time."

66.

guṇinaś śīlavantaś ca dhīmantas te gaṇādhikāḥ

nānābhogas tadarthāya kalpitaḥ puṇyam icchatā

"Those with good qualities, who are ethical, intelligent, the best among their peers, wish to make merit for a variety of good causes."

67.

pratyūṣādiṣu yat karma yamināṃ muninoditam

kāryyaṃ saṃghena tat sarvvaṃ yājakena viśeṣataḥ[61]

---

[61] Coedès VI, p. 200, LVIII–LXVII.

"Obligatory rituals at dawn and so on taught by the Sage are to be performed by the entire community, especially the ritual [master] (*yājaka*)."

82.

tasmāt tyaktānyakarttavyo vihārastho vicakṣaṇaḥ
saddharmmaṃ parigṛhnāti sarvvadā lekhanādinā

"Therefore, a wise monastery resident has abandoned other behavior, always following the true dharma, writing, and so on."

83.

samyagācārabhūṣeṇa vihārādhikṛtādinā
guravo bhyugatās sarvve satkarttavyā yathāvalam[62]

"Teachers endowed with perfect conduct, with the monastery rules and so on, go out to meet all of the worthy, as they come forward (*yathāvalam*)."

Further, there is more evidence of royal sponsorship of monasteries in the twelfth century. In her inscription at Phimānakas, Jayavarman VII's second wife, Indradevī, a devout and well educated Buddhist, sponsored the construction of numerous statues around the kingdom, took in orphaned girls, sponsored their ordination and sustenance as nuns, and was in general known for her ethical behavior. She was a teacher in three named Buddhist nunneries (*jinālaye*). These typical Buddhist merit-making activities are proof that there were monastic institutions at Angkor, including those for women.[63]

The 1189 Prasat Tor inscription attributed to Bhūpendra III[64] includes reference to Buddhist monasteries, which in this strong Brahmanical context is good evidence of actual monastic presence.[65]

---

[62] Coedès VI, p. 201, LXXXII–LXXXIII. Coedès edits *bhyugatās* to *bhyudgatās*.

[63] Coedès II, pp. 171, LXXIX–LXXX, tr. 178. The vocabulary is typical of Buddhist monastic ordination, *prāvrājayat … sasīmasam.pādita …* LXXX. *Jinālaye*, etc., XCVIII, XCIX, p. 172.

[64] Coedès I: 227, 249 n. 2, 229.

[65] Coedès I: 235, v. XXXVI. See the comments on Prasat Tor in George Coedès (ed.) *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Éxtrême-Orient* XXXI (1931): 621, 612–623, esp. 230.

36.

yenāśramā viracitāḥ parito vihāraṃ

ye nityahūtapuruhūtapurassareṇa

achinnasantatamakhe sukhinā sureṇa

kenāhṛtā iva ciraṃ sthitaye dyulokāḥ[66]

"Because of the attendants' constant and repeated invocations the residences constructed around the monastery are just like manifested deity heavens made constantly present (*ciraṃ sthitaye*) by spirits pleased with unbroken, continuous rituals (*makha*)."

Jātaka Stories

The ancient Buddhist *Jātaka* stories tell stories of the Buddha's past and future lives as a human or animal. He may be a king, an ascetic, a god, an elephant, or other animal. In all cases the story carries a Buddhist teaching from the Buddhist tradition. The literary and pedagogical traditions are usually associated with relatively early Buddhist roots, for example in Thailand, Śrī Laṅka, and India. The *Jātaka*s are however known and taught in later Buddhist environments, for example, in Pagan, Myanmar, in Tibet, and in Angkor.

The reliefs and epigraphs at Angkor include episodes from *Jātaka* stories, intended to convey Buddhist messages. For example, the bas-relief from Angkor Wat on display at the Phnom Penh National Museum represents four episodes from the *Vessantarajātaka*, even though Angkor Wat was a known Vaiṣṇavite temple in this period. The panels depict episodes from different non-sequential chapters, but the Buddhist message of generosity is clear.

Temple steles and mural episodes from *Jātaka*s were used to tell Buddhist stories. "Everything in these pictures means something; nothing is merely decorative."[67] *Jātaka* episodes were meant to teach, "[t]hese illustrations are not

---

[66] Coedès I: 235, v. XXXVI.

[67] A.B. Griswold. "Foreword," in Elizabeth Wray, Clare Rosenfield, and Dorothy Bailey. *Ten Lives of the Buddha: Siamese Temple Paintings and Jataka Tales.*" New York: Weatherhill, 1996: 11.

merely ornamental."[68] Queen Indradevī sponsored performances of *Jātaka* stories, likely for their instructive qualities.[69] *Jātaka* stories were used as pedagogical devices; they were not mere decoration.

This pedagogical motive may well have been intended in the carved steles of a number of *Jātaka*-related murals at Jayavarman VII's Bayon.[70] The *Jātaka*s in the outer ambulatory include several episodes from the *Mahānipāta*, the last ten of the canonical collections, said to exemplify key Buddhist virtues.[71] Dagens points out that the Bayon *Jātaka*s also include episodes from other *Jātaka*s and sometimes highlight non-*Jātaka* figures like Lokeśvara and Prajñāpāramitā. The Bayon *Jātaka*s include episodes from the *Sāmajātaka*, representing loving kindness, from the *Vessantarajātaka*, representing generosity, and from the *Vidhurapaṇḍitajātaka*, representing honesty. Thus, in addition to the powerful religious and social messages of the entire complex the Bayon carvings taught viewers compassion, kindness, and generosity, basic Buddhist principles.

Concluding Remarks

Khmer religion does not fit any convenient category. It had beliefs and practices shared with Mahāyāna Buddhism built on Buddhist monastic foundations, and with tantric elements, all synthesized or assimilated into inherited local Khmer religious sensibilities. Brahmanical religions, "Hinduisms," were widely represented and supported at different times and places in Khmer history, not always clearly divided from their Buddhist neighbors. In the end, Khmer religions are perhaps best understood in a category of their own, a special type of Khmer synthesis. This eclecticism, however, did not at all detract from the authenticity of Khmer Buddhism, or Brahmanism, or local religions: much as in other cultures, it instead represents the diversity of the medieval

---

[68] Elizabeth Wray, Clare Rosenfield, and Dorothy Bailey. *Ten Lives of the Buddha: Siamese Temple Paintings and Jātaka Tales.*" New York: Weatherhill, 1996: 16.

[69] See the reference to the *Jātaka, svanarttakīr jātakasāranāṭyaiḥ,* Coedès II: 170, tr. p. 178, "representations tirées des *Jātaka*"; for other mention of the *Jātaka*s, see Coedès III: 198.

[70] See Bruno Dagens. "Étude sur l'Iconographie du Bayon: Frontons et Linteaux," *Arts Asiatiques* 19 (1969): 141–144. [123–167].

[71] Wray, Rosenfield, and Bailey 1996: 16.

Photo, Sandar Aung: Bayon.

Asian religious world. What is important is that the Khmer religious traditions were fully authentic in all of their manifestations, with periods of shifting political and social emphasis and support. In the case of this project, the remarkable proliferation of Buddhist monuments and inscriptions in the reign of Jayavarman VII, displays a full commitment to Buddhism, but in a larger historical and ethnographic context both informed and tolerated by other Indian and local Khmer traditions.

The story of Jayavarman VII's life includes the depth of his Buddhist religious sentiments and at the same time his skill as a military tactician and political leader. These different roles worked with his religious sensibilities to his advantage; there was no contradiction between his apocalyptic Mahāyāna and likely tantric apotheosis and his vision of imperial rule. Cambodian and regional politics of the day were locally segmented under individual rulers who engaged in shifting alliances with their neighbors. Jayavarman VII was thus able to form a critical mass of alliances with his neighbors, Khmer and Cham, to his advantage. The governance of medieval Southeast Asia, and especially the Khmer, was decentralized. Jayavarman VII's astute political sensibilities, fueled by his Buddhist religious vision and authenticated by Indian-derived expertise enabled his construction of a Khmer empire.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

Barth, A. 1903. "Notes et Mélanges: Les doublets de la Stèle de Say-fong." *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* III(3): 461.

Bhattacharya, Kamaleswar. 1991. *Récherches sur le Vocabulaire des Inscriptions Sanskrites du Cambodge*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Bruguier, Bruno with **Phann Nady.** 1998. *Bibliographie du Cambodge Ancien* 2 vols. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Carman, John B. 1987. "Bhakti." In *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, edited by M. Eliade, 130–132. NY: Macmillan.

Chandler, David. 2000. *A History of Cambodia*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Chou, Ta-Kuan. (tr. Paul Pelliot) 1993. *The Customs of Cambodia*. 3rd Edition. Bangkok: The Siam Society.

Coedès, Georges. 1906. "La Stèle de Ta-Prohm." *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* VI: 44–86. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/befeo.1906.4251

Coedès, Georges. 1911. *Note sur l'Apothéose au Cambodge*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.

Coedès, Georges. 1929. "Appendice: Les Inscriptions du Bayon," in "Études Cambodgiennes: XIX – Date du Bayon," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* XXVIII: vol. 1928, 81–121. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/befeo.1928.3117

Coedès, Georges. 1935. *Un Grand Roi du Cambodge: Jayavarman VII*. Phnom Penh: Éditions de la Bibliothèque Royale.

Coedès, Georges. 1952. *Inscriptions du Cambodge* Vols. I–VIII. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Crosby, Kate. 2000. "Tantric Theravāda: A Bibliographic Essay on the Writings of François Bizot and Others on the *Yogāvacara* Tradition." *Contemporary Buddhism* 1(2): 141–198. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14639940008573729

Cunin, Olivier. 2004. "De Ta Prohm au Bayon." PhD diss., L'Insitut National Polytechnique de Lorraine.

Cunin, Olivier. 2007. "The Bayon: An Archeological and Architectural Study." In *Bayon: New Perspectives*, edited by Joyce Clark, 136–229. Bangkok: River Books.

Cunin, Olivier & **Baku Saito.** 2005. *The Face Towers of Banteay Chmar.* Tokyo: Goto Shoin Publishing Company.

Dagens, Bruno. 1969. "Étude sur l'Iconographie du Bayon: Frontons et Linteaux." *Arts Asiatiques* 19: 123–167. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/arasi.1969.1001

Davidson, Ronald M. 2002. "Reframing *sahaja*: Genre, Representation, Ritual and Lineage." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30: 45–83. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014563830752

Davidson, Ronald M. 2002. *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Davis, Richard H. 1997. *Lives of Indian Images.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

de Bernon, Oliver. 2003. "About Khmer Monasteries: Organization and Symbolism." In *The Buddhist Monastery: A Cross-cultural Survey*, edited by Pierre Pichard and François Lagirarde, 209–218. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

de Casparis, J.G. 1958. *Short Inscriptions from Tjandi Ploasan-Lor.* Djakarta: Bulletin of the Archeological Service of the Republic of Indonesia, No. 4.

Finot, Louis. 1903. "Notes d'Épigraphie II: L'Inscription Sanskrite de Say-fong." *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* III(1): 18–33. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/befeo.1903.1187

Gesick, Lorraine, (ed.) 1983. *Centers, Symbols, and Hierarchies: Essays on the Classical States of Southeast Asia.* Monograph No. 26. Yale University Southeast Asia Studies.

Griswold, A.B. 1996. "Foreword." In *Ten Lives of the Buddha: Siamese Temple Paintings and Jataka Tales*, by Elizabeth Wray, Clare Rosenfield, and Dorothy Bailey, 11. New York: Weatherhill.

Hall, Kenneth R. 1985. "South and Southeast Asian Epigraphy as a Source of Economic History." In *Indus Valley to Mekong Delta: Explorations in Epigraphy*, edited by Noboru Karashima, 87–102. Madras: New Era Publications.

Harris, Ian Charles. 2005. *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Higham, Charles. 1989. *The Archeology of Mainland Southeast Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hopkins, Thomas J. 1971. *The Hindu Religious Tradition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Jacques, Claude. July 1993. "Preah Khan Stele Inscription Translation." (Siem Reap, Cambodia: World Monuments Fund, *Preah Khan Conservation Project*, Historic City of Angkor, Report IV, Field Campaign I – Project Mobilization, Appendix C) 1–35.

Jacques, Claude. 1999. *Angkor*. Cologne: Könemann Publishing.

Kulke, Hermann. 1986. "The Early and the Imperial Kingdom in Southeast Asian History." In *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries*, edited by David G. Marr and A.C. Milner, 1–22. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814377935-004

Kulke, Hermann and **Dietmar Rothermund.** 1990. *A History of India*, Revised, Updated Edition. London: Routledge.

le Bonheur, Albert. "Ancient Cambodia: A Historical Glimpse." In *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, edited by Helen Ibbitson Jessup & Thierry Zephyr, 13–32. Washington: National Gallery of Art.

Mabbett, Ian. 1986. "Buddhism in Champa." In *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries*. Edited by David G. Marr & A.C. Milner, 289–315. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies/Australian National University. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814377935-019

Mabbett, Ian and **David Chandler.** 1988. *The Khmers*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Mabbett, Ian W. and **David P. Chandler.** September 1997. "Response to Dr. Michael Vickery's Review of '*The Khmers*' ("*Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*") 27(2): (September 1996): 389–404." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 28(2): 389–391. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S002246340001451X

Mace, Sonya Rhie. 2017. *Banteay Chhmar, Lokeshvara, and Cleveland.* Cleveland Museum of Art.

Majumdar, R.C. 1953. *Inscriptions of Kambuja.* Calcutta: The Asiatic Society.

Maspero, G. 1903. "Say-fong: Une Ville Morte." *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* III(1): 1–17. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/befeo.1903.1185

McGovern, Nathan. 2017. "Esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion.* Online Publication Date: Oct 2017. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.617. (accessed 10 January 2018).

Pelliot, Paul. 1903. "Le Bhaiṣyaguru." *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* III(1): 33–37. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/befeo.1903.1188

Pollock, Sheldon. 2007. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pottier, Christophe. 2003. "Yaśovarman's Buddhist *Āśrama* in Angkor." In *The Buddhist Monastery: A Cross-cultural Survey*, edited by Pierre Pichard and François Lagirarde, 199–208. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Sahai, Sachchidanand. 1970. *Les Institutions Politiques et l'Organisation Adminstrative du Cambodge Ancien (VIe–XIIIe Siècles).* Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Samen, Khun. 2006. *The New Guide to the National Museum—Phnom Penh.* Phnom Penh: The Department of Museums, Second Edition.

Sastri, Hirananda. 1942. *Nālanda and Its Epigraphic Material.* Memoirs of the Archeological Survey of India, No. 66. Delhi: Government of India Press.

Schweyer, Anne-Valérie. 2007. "The confrontation of the Khmers and Chams in the Bayon period." In *Bayon: New Perspectives*, edited by Joyce Clark, 50–71. Bangkok: River Books.

Sharrock, Peter D. 2006. "The Buddhist Pantheon of the Bayon of Angkor: An Historical and Art Historical Reconstruction of the Bayon Temple and its Religious and Political Roots." PhD diss., SOAS London.

Snellgrove, David. 2004. *Angkor—Before and After: A Cultural History of the Khmers.* Bangkok: Orchid Press.

Tambiah, Stanley Jeyaraja. 1975. *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tambiah, Stanley Jeyaraja. 1976. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background.* London: Cambridge University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511558184

Veluthat, Kesavan. 2009. *The Early Medieval in South India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Vickery, Michael. 1986. "Some Remarks on Early State Formation in Cambodia." In *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries.* Edited by David G. Marr and A.C. Milner, 95–115. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814377935-008

Vickery, Michael. September 1996. "What to Do about The Khmers." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27(2): 389–404. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463400021135

Vickery, Michael. March 2005. "Champa Revised." *Asia Research Institute Working Paper No. 37*, 1–89. Singapore: Asia Research Institute.

Vickery, Michael. 2008. "Bayon: New Perspectives Reconsidered." *Udaya: Journal of Khmer Studies* 7: 101–176.

Wolters, O.W. 1992. "Early Southeast Asian Political Systems." In *The ASEAN Reader*, edited by K.S. Sandhu, Sharon Siddhique, Chandran Jeshurun, Ananda Rajah, Joseph L.H. Tan, Pushpa Thambipillai, 5–11. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Woodward, Hiram W. 1981. "Tantric Buddhism at Angkor Thom." *Ars Orientalis* 12(12): 57–67.

Wray, Elizabeth, Clare Rosenfield and **Dorothy Bailey.** 1996. *Ten Lives of the Buddha: Siamese Temple Paintings and Jātaka Tales.* New York: Weatherhill.

Yoritomi, M. 1990. "An Iconographic Study of the Eight Bodhisattvas in Tibet." In *Indo-Tibetan Studies: Papers in Honour and Appreciation of Professor David L. Snellgrove's Contribution to Indo-Tibetan Studies*, edited by Tadeusz Skorupski, 323–332. Tring, UK: The Institute of Buddhist Studies.