

**Faces of Cambodia:  
Buddhism(s), Portraiture and Images of Kings**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

In the late twelfth-century the face dominated the visual landscape of the Angkor Empire, appearing at the Mahāyānist Bayon temple in the form of monumental ‘face towers’, a distinctive architectural-cum-sculptural feature of the reign of Jayavarman VII, the first Buddhist king of Cambodia. Together with statues apparently sculpted as a physical likeness of the king, this artistic output probed the conceptual contours of the face and the scope of portraiture. Since the twelfth century the face, primarily in a four-faced configuration, has continued as a uniquely Cambodian trope, cited and revived in changing politico-cultural contexts. The monumental visages of Angkor have been the subject of a wealth of scholarship over the last century and a half, yet there has been a lack of consideration of the Cambodian faces as *faces* from a phenomenological perspective. Neither has there been a thorough interrogation of the precise mechanisms by which the faces ‘reappeared’ in twentieth-century Cambodia. Therefore, this thesis addresses questions of the face and portraiture within a multi-layered Buddhist-Brahmānic complex, in order to counter hegemonies which persist in art historical scholarship on the Bayon. This examination of the face is primarily formulated on three levels of interrogation: the face as portrait, the face as the locus of personhood or subjectivity, and historiographies associated with the face. Due to the subsequent, and indeed on-going, appropriation of the Bayon faces, the final chapters give critical emphasis to the face of the king in the contemporary visual landscape of Cambodia.

## **A Note on Language and Terminology**

I have used Sanskrit renderings of terms unless specifically referring to terms in other languages, such as Pali and Khmer. Non-English terms are italicised and include diacritics, unless they are familiar or frequently used in the thesis.

All translations from French to English are my own unless otherwise stated. In the case of Sanskrit inscriptions I include both the Sanskrit transliteration and the French translation with which I have worked, along with my own English translation from the French.

The terms “Cambodian” and “Khmer” are used interchangeably. In more technical usage “Cambodian” refers to national citizenship and language, while “Khmer” refers to Cambodia’s ethnic majority and their mother tongue which is the language of the majority of Cambodian nationals, regardless of whether they are ethnically Khmer or not.

A glossary is included to provide broad definitions for Buddhist, Brahmānic, and Angkorian terminology and major divinities.

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## Introduction: Faces of Cambodia

Standing majestically at the centre of Angkor Thom, the ancient capital city of the Khmer Empire, is the last of the great “state-temples” of Angkor (Fig.1). A veritable masterpiece of sculpture-cum-architecture, the Bayon was constructed at the end of the twelfth century during the reign of Angkor’s last great monarch and first Buddhist king. The main body of the structure is composed of towers with two-metre high faces carved into each side, creating a mountain of over two hundred visages (Fig.2).<sup>1</sup> Unique among the temples that dominated the Angkorian landscape, the Bayon takes the anthropomorphic, sculptural form which was traditionally concealed within the temple complex and makes it the very form of its structure. The interior is made spectacularly exterior. Unsurprisingly the temple continues to fascinate and intrigue with its scores of monumental faces, its close association with a dynamic monarch, and the enigma posed by its compositional qualities. It is these faces of the Bayon which are the object of study of this thesis, the orientating entities which act as both a point of departure and endless returns. Their four-faced structure has endured as a symbol of royal authority and the faces now dominate the visual landscape of contemporary Cambodia, refracted through multiple and often intersecting lenses of colonial and indigenous historiographic practices.

The impulse to critically explore the face in Cambodian culture first arose from my initial encounters with them, travelling in a car beneath the faces of the southern gateway of Angkor Thom. In that moment the stone faces appeared as if they were watching me, a sense compounded by a tingling sensation in the spine as I turned away from them to focus on the road ahead.<sup>2</sup> I was instantly reminded of the Wizard of Oz and Dorothy encountering the dazzling Emerald City, of the moment when Dorothy and her companions were granted an audience with the Wizard and he appeared to each of

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<sup>1</sup> Architectural historian Olivier Cunin has carried out extensive fieldwork at the temples and his research demonstrates that the Bayon would have had fifty-nine towers and two hundred and thirty-six faces in total. Four giant faces, facsimiles of the Bayon towers, face the cardinal points at each of the five gateways of Angkor Thom and face towers are found at other major temples of Jayavarman VII’s rule.

Olivier Cunin, ‘The Bayon: An Archaeological and Architectural Study’, in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, ed. by Joyce Clark (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), 164.

<sup>2</sup> In actuality I have not quite managed to get back to the questions of seeing and vision, although the subject of looking and seeing is returned to throughout in this thesis in implicit and explicit ways, woven into the narrative like a thread that is not yet tied up.

them under a different guise; to Dorothy he presented himself as a giant head.<sup>3</sup> When Dorothy returned to the Emerald City, her dog Toto pulled down the screen in the throne room behind which the ‘real’ wizard hid. Finally he was revealed as nothing more than an ordinary man.

This initial and intuitive comparison of the Bayon with the multiple appearances of the Wizard of Oz proved to be somewhat prescient. The faces of the temple have resisted all attempts at ascribing a singular identity to them and are interpreted in multivalent ways. To some they are the Bodhisattva of compassion, to others they are the face of the king or represent the four Buddhist virtues. These novel face towers are also one component in a larger programme of materially representing kingship in a number of forms, alongside images of divine beings and statues of the king in the pose of a devotee. The face towers might not be able to grant wishes, but they are a means of expressing authority and power and their appearance is viewed differently depending on their audience.



Figure 1. The Bayon temple. Photograph by author, 2009

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<sup>3</sup> L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz*, (London: Puffin Books, 2008). First published in 1900.



Figure 2. A Bayon face tower. Photograph by author, 2011.

The Bayon was built during the reign of Jayavarman VII at the symbolic centre of his empire and at the literal centre of the capital Angkor Thom, known then as Yaśodharapura. The central Angkor region lies in modern Cambodia's northern area, on the fertile plains which spread out beneath the Kulen Mountain range as far as the great Tonle Sap Lake to the south-east (fig.6). It was here that the Khmer Empire, which flourished from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, was symbolically centred. At its height the capital of Angkor was probably the largest urban metropolis in the preindustrial world, with corresponding levels of engineering ingenuity.<sup>4</sup> The term

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<sup>4</sup> Damian H. Evans, Roland J. Fletcher, Christophe Pottier, Jean-Baptiste Chevance, Dominique Soutif, Boun Suy Tan, et al, 'Uncovering Archaeological Landscapes at Angkor Using Lidar', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110 (2013), 12595–12600.

‘Angkor’ is the Khmer pronunciation of the Sanskrit *nagara* (“capital city”) and refers to the capital of the Khmer empire as well as functioning as a metonym for the empire as a whole. Additionally, Angkor has a temporal application, employed to reference a particular time as well as place.

Angkor was visually defined by large temples, built by successive kings, which were predominately dedicated to the Brahmanic deities Śiva and Viṣṇu. According to Sanskrit epigraphy from the period one of the key concerns of Angkorian kings was a sustained discourse into the nature of kingship associated with the divine. The hundreds of stone temples which punctuate the landscape attest to the way this discourse was presented materially. The architecture imitates the heavenly realms and kings honoured both the gods and their ancestors by enshrining images within the temple complexes. This artistic and architectural programme followed a similar pattern: first, kings consecrated statues of their parents and ancestors, apotheosized as deities and identified via an inscription composed of the individual’s name and divine epithet. They then installed their own divine statue within their “state-temple”.<sup>5</sup> Thus the continuity of royal-divine authority was ensured via the processes of temple-building, improving and maintaining urban infrastructure, and publically recording such acts in inscriptions.

Jayavarman VII, the first Buddhist king of Angkor, ascended to the throne in 1181/2 CE and is regarded as the last great king of Angkor. He was certainly the last Angkorian monarch to undertake a large scale building programme. While his kingship heralded the return of a Khmer king after a period of unrest at Angkor, it also marked the beginning of the end of some four centuries of artistic and political creation which had characterised the Angkorian Empire. All major kings of Angkor are associated with an artistic ‘signature’, generally understood to be tied to the formal qualities of the art produced under their reign. Yet Jayavarman VII’s ‘artistic signature’ proved to be the most distinctive. In common with earlier monarchs, Jayavarman VII established his legitimacy by preserving a large number of customs and conventions in common with past kings. This involved incorporating the temples of his predecessors into the cityscape of his remodelled capital city, the construction of new temple complexes, building his own reservoir, and composing lengthy inscriptions detailing his favourable

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<sup>5</sup> In early 2014 Google launched Angkor Street View, which allows viewers to take virtual tours of Angkor. Readers are encouraged to virtually explore some of the temples.  
<<https://www.google.com/maps/views/streetview/angkor?gl=us>> [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014]

comparisons with the gods.<sup>6</sup> For the first time, protective walls and moats were built to enclose the entire capital city, whilst roads, bridges, hospitals and rest houses were constructed across the territory. These constituted projections of Jayavarman VII's protective and compassionate role as a Buddhist monarch and of a desire to accumulate karmic merit. The practice of apotheosis via the creation of divine-royal portrait statues continued in accord with existing Angkorian practices. Yet, the religious and artistic shifts of Jayavarman VII's three-decade reign mark a significant break with the past. This period is widely regarded as introducing portraiture sculpted in a physical likeness of the person represented, rather than under the guise of iconographic features of a deity. More crucially, some of these statues depict the body of the king in the pose of a devotee, devoid of explicit royal or divine accoutrements (fig. 34). Extant evidence strongly suggests that such a representation of a king had never occurred at Angkor prior to this time. Finally, the face towers of the Bayon, which are also a feature of other Jayavarman VII temples, were entirely novel to the period.

### **Faces, Portraits, and Histories**

The beautiful faces of the Bayon have long solicited academic curiosity, provoking a wealth of scholarly enquiry over the last century and a half. A recent monograph dedicated to in-depth, interdisciplinary research on the temple is evidence of the continued interest the temple inspires as well as the many questions it still poses.<sup>7</sup> The corpus of existing research is centred upon art historical, epigraphic, and architectural studies. A great deal of attention has been devoted to interpreting the iconography of the face towers, often in order to ascribe a singular identity to the faces. However, despite over a century of meticulous iconographic and epigraphic research the precise identity of the Bayon faces, if there ever was one, remains the object of intense scholarly debate. It is my contention that the extant evidence does not offer sufficient confirmation of any singular identity of the faces. This lack of solid evidence strongly suggests that there was never a single identity at their origin and I argue for the co-existence of multiple interpretations. However, I do not base this argument solely on the lack of clear evidence. Nor is it founded in a lack of interest in Indic iconography. Rather, the acknowledgment of a multivalency of readings is embedded in an Indic approach, where the divine "one" does not exist to the exclusion of the "many". This

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<sup>6</sup> See for example, George Cœdès, 'Stèles des Pràsàt Ćrun d'Angkor Thom' in *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. 4, (Paris: EFEO, 1937 – 1966), 221-231.

<sup>7</sup> Joyce Clark (ed.), *Bayon: New Perspectives*, (Bangkok: River Books, 2007).

seemingly paradoxical position is at the crux of Brahmānist and Buddhist thought and is elaborated upon throughout this thesis.

The complexity of the Bayon lies not only in its multiple architectural and sculptural phases, but also in the multidimensional layers of meaning it has accrued. In the first instance, there is the complexity and intricacy of the monument in and of itself. Moreover, the accretion of the meaning of the four-faces has occurred at various points in Cambodia's history. In the sixteenth century the (re-)appearance of the four-faced configuration became symbolic of royal Buddhist authority. Then from the late nineteenth century onwards, as Cambodia became part of the French Protectorate in Indochina, colonial scholarship worked to 'reintroduce' Jayavarman VII to Cambodia, resulting in a contemporary landscape of Bayon faces that emerge from entangled indigenous and colonial contexts. These histories at work are multiple and complex. Khmer Buddhist ideas of cosmology, kingship, and history have survived over the centuries in Cambodia, although these themes have been modified, recuperated, and reworked over the years. The adaptation of the faces as symbols of royal authority in modified politico-religious contexts should not be seen as a process of loss or of shedding meaning. The process of understanding the manner in which the faces have endured is one which complicates a linear understanding of the process of history, both in terms of the practice of "citation" of the faces, and in the very history which the faces come to represent.<sup>8</sup>

The principal focus of existing scholarship on the Bayon has been concerned with reading the iconographic evidence alongside archaeological and textual material. This has been a fruitful enterprise and much of the research is vigorous. However, the art historical material often employs the traditional methods of formal analysis, taxonomies of style, and the privileging of text over image. This does a disservice to the material culture and has left a lacuna in academic discourses in Khmer art history. I argue that the Bayon demands, and deserves, an analysis which allows the art and

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout the thesis I employ the term "citation" in response to the reappearances of the faces in post-Angkorian periods. This is because rather than constituting a wholesale recontextualisation of the iconography of the Bayon, these appearances remained aligned to their original context, albeit in a modified fashion. Such an invocation is more adequately described by "citation", which has its roots in the Anglo-French "citer", meaning "to cite or to summon". At other points, the notion of re-appropriation or reworking is more applicable and the reader will be alerted to the precise reasons for this choice of terminology. This is also the case with the terms "representation" and "copy" in particular, which have differing conceptual connotations in different contexts. Again, this will be laid out where necessary in the thesis

architecture of Cambodia to be thought through using ‘western’ aesthetic theory in conjunction with iconographic and textual analysis traditionally employed in studies of Asian art. Although I began this research as an art historian with a strong background in Buddhist and Brahmānic art practices with a focus on the primacy and operation of vision, I did not have specific training as a Southeast Asian specialist. Indeed, my early art historical training was in social art history which critically deconstructed the canon and made in-depth studies of western aesthetic theories. The cultural heritages - the Cambodian and the French colonial - of this thesis are not my own. The advantages of this position are that it enabled my research to move beyond the constraints imposed on someone who is already embedded in the interior position and it allowed me to locate connections and resonances that might otherwise be obscured. I carried out iconographic, epigraphic and historic research into the Angkorian period and beyond. Extensive periods of fieldwork in Cambodia involved sustained periods of visual analysis at the temples, archival research, and ethnographic methods of art historical study.<sup>9</sup> This polymorphous methodological approach added additional depths to my research which, alongside the textual readings of epigraphy, visual texts, and histories, enriched an indigenous perspective, often overlooked in studies of the temple.

Although this thesis presents my own academic interpretation of the Bayon and its faces, it is not an attempt at a comprehensive archaeology of the temple and its history. Rather, it constitutes a sort of ‘montage’ of the face. Such an approach is necessary because the Bayon faces are encountered at distinct historical moments and function in different ways. The notion of a montage comes from the very visual landscape in which the Bayon faces today find themselves, juxtaposed with other ‘symbols of Cambodia’. Montage often creates new meanings and contexts and this thesis is attuned to the historical and contextual specificities of each historical moment. Nevertheless, critical emphasis is given to the Bayon at the moment of its construction and to the reappearance of the explicit citation of the temple from the late nineteenth century onwards.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Nora Taylor has argued for the necessity of the ethnographic approach in the field of contemporary Southeast Asian art because of a general lack of textual historical sources. Nora A. Taylor, ‘The Southeast Asian Art Historian as Ethnographer?’, *Third Text*, 25 (2011), 475–488.

<sup>10</sup> Therefore the implicit but important citation of the four faces in the Middle Period is granted less attention, primarily because of the pioneering research by Ashley Thompson, which has

Once the eye becomes attuned to the fact, it becomes clear that faces dominant the landscape in Cambodia, in addition to those found at the twelfth-century temples. If not explicit copies of the Bayon faces, then it is the configuration of four-faces from Cambodia's Middle Period, or photographs of the recently deceased King Norodom Sihanouk. Despite the insistence of the face in Khmer representations of power, no scholars have thus far taken up the broad theoretical questions of the face or its place in Cambodian art history. This thesis responds to this need to theoretically consider the aesthetic and political implications of the face, including those implicit in the decision to sculpt monumental visages at Angkor. The Bayon calls for a sustained consideration of the idea of the phenomenology of the face in conjunction with, and apart from, iconographic studies closely aligned with textual readings. In order to do justice to this I examine the history of its construction in order to imagine the significance the faces had at their inception. And I consider broader questions of the significance of the face from, broadly speaking, 'eastern' and 'western' positions. The 'western' position on the face is primarily articulated via readings of Georg Simmel and Emmanuel Levinas, each of whom approached the face as the primary site of signification and the locus of expression and whose work informed my own, as much as a points of departure than of commonality. Their position is complicated via a consideration of the utter lack of expression in the face of the Buddha, whereby the face signifies absolutely nothing, if it can be said to signify at all. The political dimension is informed by a Foucauldian reading of the Bayon, via an exploration of the power at play in the anthropomorphic form of the temple. I also examine questions of vision and seeing, as it is of primacy in the Mahāyāna complex, and argue that the paradoxes which the face towers present should be conserved in any analysis of their form rather than elided. To this end, I return to the Brahmānic notion of the one and many.

It is impossible to think about the face and not consider the question of the portrait. This is doubly so in the case of twelfth-century Cambodia because, I argue, the face towers can be understood to be portraits of the king. This period also marks the

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explored the political and aesthetic mechanisms of the modification of the four-faces, which in itself constituted a 'return' to Angkor.

Ashley Thompson, 'Lost and Found: The Stūpa, the Four-Faced Buddha and the Seat of Royal Power in Middle Cambodia', in *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists, Berlin, 1998* (Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Hull, 2000), 245–264; 'The Future of Cambodia's Past: The Messianic Middle-Period Cambodian Cult', in *History, Buddhism and New Religious Movements in Cambodia*, ed. by John Marston and Elizabeth Guthrie (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 13–39.

emergence of what has been described by scholars as ‘true’ portraits in Khmer art, identified as such because they represent a physical similitude of King Jayavarman VII, based on comparisons with the bas-reliefs depicting the king.<sup>11</sup> Such a view complicates the designation of earlier divine-royal statuary as portraits and there is a tendency for imprecision in the usage of the term ‘portrait’ in existing scholarship. Moreover, while the foremost scholars of Angkor considered the portrait, they did so against the backdrop of a broader academic denial of indigenous traditions of portraiture in Indic cultures.<sup>12</sup> The semiotic turn in art history has meant that ideas of portraiture have altered and this has created the space for scholars to consider the nature of Indic portraiture.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, I dedicate a chapter of the thesis to examining questions of the portrait. The case for the Indic portrait is made in order to argue that portraiture existed at Angkor prior to Jayavarman VII’s reign and I propose a precise definition of the portrait that encompasses these royal-divine statues. However, the late twelfth century was a distinctive moment when the genre of portraiture was probed and expanded in order to make manifest multidimensional concepts of Buddhist kingship. From the perspective of a definition of a portrait as something which is indexically symbolic, I argue that one interpretation, among many, of the face towers of the Bayon is that they are a portrait of the king, in a triad of portraits which display different facets of Buddhist kingship. This understanding of the portrait is based upon the precise Buddhist notions of the relationship between the image and the referent and draws attention to the primacy of *seeing* the body of the Buddha. The separation of distinct yet indissociable concepts in portraiture echoes the separation of bodies in Buddhist metaphysics. Furthermore, the multiple bodies of the Buddha – the one divided into many - are referred to in the first stanzas of the major epigraphy of Jayavarman VII’s reign. This thesis marks the first time in Khmer art history that the implications of the theory of “multiple bodies” of the Buddha have been critically examined in relation to the Bayon

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<sup>11</sup> See, George Cœdès, ‘Le Portrait Dans L’art Khmer’, *Arts Asiatiques*, VII (1960), 179–198; George Cœdès, *Jayavarman VII Un Grand Roi Du Cambodge* (Phnom Penh: Éditions de la Bibliothèque Royale, 1935); Jean Boisselier, ‘Réflexions Sur L’art Du Règne de Jayavarman VII’, *Bulletin de la Société des études indo-chinoises de Saigon*, 27 (1952), 261–273; Jean Boisselier, *La statuaire khmère et son évolution*. (Saigon: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1955); Philippe Stern, *Les Monuments Khmers Du Style Du Bayon et Jayavarman VII* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 174; Paul Mus, ‘Le Sourire d’Angkor. Art, Foi et Politique Bouddhiques Sous Jayavarman VII’, *Artibus Asiae*, 24 (1961), 363–381.

<sup>12</sup> Cœdès, ‘Les Statues Du Roi Khmère Jayavarman VII’; Cœdès, ‘Le Portrait Dans L’art Khmer’; Mus, ‘Le Sourire d’Angkor’; Boisselier, ‘Réflexions Sur L’art Du Règne de Jayavarman VII’.

<sup>13</sup> Dehejia, ‘The Very Idea of a Portrait’; Kaimal, ‘The Problem of Portraiture in South India, circa 870-970 A.D.’; Kaimal, ‘The Problem of Portraiture in South India, Circa 970-1000 A.D.’.

period. These multiple bodies represent different levels of materiality, or indeed immateriality, and their relationship to one another provides a basis for thinking about image-making in a Buddhist context.



Figure 3. Bayon at a restaurant in Phnom Penh. Photograph by author 2011.

There is a complexity of diverse and intersecting historiographies at work in the study at hand. The colonial institution of the *École française d'Extrême-Orient*, alongside art education policies, European literary and visual representations of the temples, and colonial exhibitions, worked together to 'reintroduce' Angkor to Cambodia. Yet Angkor had not been wholly abandoned in the indigenous historical record and the four-faces became a visual trope for Buddhist kingship in the Middle Period, expressing a peculiarly Theravāda Buddhist conception of history. Chapter One lays out the two registers on which this thesis approaches historiography and the manner in which they function in conjunction with one another, with a specific focus on art history. Broadly speaking, the first register is the European colonial practices of writing the history of Cambodia. The conception of a linear progression of history, encapsulated by Hegel, is found in the major art historical volumes on Khmer art of the twentieth century. The second register is an indigenous model, founded on Buddhist ideas of cyclical history in which the past foretells the future in such a way that the future is recorded in the past. The notion is expressed in the citation and modification of the four-faces in Middle Period Cambodia. The latter register poses its own critical objections to the former historical register, frustrating linear progressions. It is necessary to further critique and challenge linear studies of style which still characterise

Khmer art history, due in part to the primacy of archaeological research at Angkor and the demands the discipline makes of the material object. Twentieth-century studies predicated on stylistic evolution set up developmental trajectories which risk suggesting a purely internal and formal developmental logic, ignoring deeper contextual considerations. To put it another way, studies predicated upon style ignore the conceptual and phenomenological dimensions of the material.

The trajectories that these foundational studies of style described corresponded to an idea of Cambodian history which best suited colonial administrators in search of a rationale for their *mission civilisatrice*. That is not to say that this was a deliberate act on the part of scholars. However, a circular logic was at play in the writing of Khmer art history whereby creating taxonomies of style played into the wider colonial project and arguably the colonial discourse of a decadent culture shaped scholarly approaches. The scholarly drive to create taxonomies is a common trope in the colonial enterprise of classifying and claiming in order to dominate. Yet in order to classify and claim one must know and name. This was a principal impulse of academic endeavour at Angkor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet the material culture itself posed its own challenges to this epistemic project. There is much to be gleaned from reading the literary and visual descriptions of Angkor by Europeans from this period. European encounters with the face towers of the Bayon were of a different order than the “discovery” of the other temples of Angkor, by virtue of the uncanny appearance of the human face. In Chapter Six these literary and visual accounts are examined in order to demonstrate the “mystery” the stone face towers presented, both by their familiarity and their utter foreignness, as they were seen peering out from beneath a vibrant jungle. Indeed, the apprehension of the face and the uncanny paradoxes it elicits form the basis for the desire to know and name which was then frustrated by the faces’ refusal to succumb to such domination.

An approach of dialogic exchange between historical vantage points has much to offer by ways of new perspectives on the twelfth century, as well as insights into the role seeing the face plays in power relations in present-day Cambodia. It poses challenges to the current scholarship by drawing attention to the deficiencies in previous art historical approaches and demonstrating that the Bayon faces have accrued multiple, and often compatible meanings which place them at the heart of expressions of kingship, national and Buddhist identity. They defy singular identification. The

objective of this study is not to simply chart the appearances of the Bayon faces over time, but instead to understand the evolving signification of the faces as they appear in a variety of modes in changing historic-cultural contexts. Therefore Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight examine the manner in which the different registers of art historiography, as described in Chapter One, function in conjunction with one another, by examining the effects of these modes of art history in twentieth century citations of the faces and images of kings.

These final chapters are also the most expressly concerned with montage and juxtaposition. A magnificent appearance of montage occurred in late-2012 with the laminated photograph-posters that became a fixture of public mourning after the death of Norodom Sihanouk in later 2012, which integrated so closely with questions of the face and the king that it was imperative to examine this phenomenon more closely. Expressions of kingship and modes of temporality were made manifest in unofficial photographic images and photomontages, which were sold in large numbers in the three month period between Sihanouk's death and his five-day funeral. Chapter Eight explores the Bayon faces in the visual landscape of contemporary Cambodia via the lenses of colonial art pedagogies, the onslaught of tourism, and processes of post-colonial nation building. In the first instance this nation building took place as Cambodia strove to gain independence from the French, which was achieved in 1953. In the second instance it has constituted decades of recovery after the civil war and Khmer Rouge genocide of the 1970s. The French colonial project included taking responsibility for categorising Cambodian heritage and for promoting traditional, 'proper' artistic practice through the colonial art school. Then, much as now, the impetus for promoting certain techniques in part rested upon the demands of the foreign tourist and their expectation of encountering something authentically 'Cambodian'. Today the citation of Angkorian influences is undertaken with domestic imperatives too, in the establishment of power and the reasserting what is 'Cambodian' after years of turmoil and the near-destruction of Cambodian culture by the Khmer Rouge, combined with the fear of foreign encroachments on Cambodia territory. This chapter examines the post-war contexts of the 1990s onwards, in a series of case studies which demonstrate differing facets of the citations of the Bayon in the visual landscape. One case study is composed of an examination of the 2002 exhibition entitled *Visions of the Future*, curated by the Reyum gallery in Phnom Penh, because the presence of the Bayon in a number of the

paintings was striking. A decade later the Bayon face(s) remains a significant and intriguing presence in the Cambodian visual and imaginative landscape.

## Some Preliminaries

### Buddhism(s)

Although Angkor appears to have been religiously tolerant it was the Brahmānic deities Śiva and Viṣṇu to which the kings generally paid their homage. However the reign of Jayavarman VII marked a shift in the state religion to Mahāyāna Buddhism. The earliest Mahāyāna inscriptions and statues of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara discovered in Cambodia date from the 7<sup>th</sup> century. An inscription found at Prasat Ta Kam, which is situated approximately 65km from Jayavarman VII's capital at Angkor Thom, dating from 791CE, records the installation of a statue of Lokeśvara, the epithet that Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, was commonly known by in Cambodia.<sup>14</sup> There is evidence of Śaivism and Buddhism in the epigraphic record of Yaśovarman, the founder of the city at Angkor (889-c.900 CE), yet for unknown reasons Buddhism all but disappears from the record after his death, returning during the reigns of Rajendravarman II and Jayavarman V in the tenth century.<sup>15</sup> At this time, the epigraphic record tells us that the Buddhist scholar Kīrtipaṇḍita travelled to seek Mahāyāna texts from overseas and subsequently sponsored their study in monastic communities in Cambodia. Art historian Peter D. Sharrock has argued that the Buddhism propagated by Kīrtipaṇḍita took the Tantric form of the Vajrayāna.<sup>16</sup> These early inscriptions also provide evidence of the co-existence of Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>17</sup> Epigraphist T.S. Maxwell describes this as evidence of 'coalescence' between the two religions, which co-mingled together along with pre-existing beliefs of Cambodia.<sup>18</sup> These ideas were assimilated and modified to form sets of beliefs that were

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<sup>14</sup> T.S. Maxwell, 'Religion at the Time of Jayavarman VII', *Bayon: New Perspectives*, ed. by Joyce Clark, (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), 86.

<sup>15</sup> Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, 'Religions of Ancient Cambodia', in *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, ed. by Helen Ibbitson Jessup and Thierry Zéphir, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 43-45.

<sup>16</sup> Peter D. Sharrock, 'Kīrtipaṇḍita and the Tantras', *Udaya*, 10, 2009, 203-237.

<sup>17</sup> For example, an 8<sup>th</sup> century inscription at Prasat Ampil Rolu'm (K.163), in Kompong Thom province, describes a triad of the Buddha, Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara, yet this inscription was not erased when the temple site was later converted to Hindu use. In fact, the epigraphic records attest to the triad having been succeeded by the *trimurti* of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Siva, suggesting both Buddhism and Hinduism co-existed in some form at the site.

<sup>18</sup> T.S. Maxwell, 'Religion at the Time of Jayavarman VII', 87-88.

in many ways peculiar to Cambodia, incorporating animism, Brahmanism and various branches of Buddhism.<sup>19</sup>

Pali epigraphy has been dated to the pre-Angkorian period, however from the eighth century onwards Sanskrit Mahāyāna inscriptions and imagery began to displace Theravāda, until the latter's rise to dominance in the late thirteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Theravāda is now not only the majority religion of Cambodia, it is also in many ways understood to be the essence of what it is to be Cambodian. This is represented in the chiasmus which emerges from scholarship on Cambodia, in that to be identified as Cambodian is to be Buddhist, yet there is understood to be something peculiarly Khmer about the Buddhism now practiced in Cambodia. As Ashley Thompson has argued, Buddhism – as an embedded set of practices and beliefs aside from any particular school or tradition – is the primary means of defining the nation of Cambodia.<sup>21</sup> The understanding of the historical centrality of Buddhism refutes the idea that the modern Cambodian complex is purely the result of the importation of history, identity, and broadly-speaking, nationhood from colonial epistemology, instituted under the French Protectorate in Indochina, which Cambodia joined in 1863. Instead, attention must be paid to the pre-existing, enduring tropes that pre-date the Protectorate.

### **Kingship**

In 802AD a king now known as Jayavarman II was reputed to have performed some kind of ceremony at Phnom Kulen (a mountain range north of the area that became the capital of Angkor), which apparently involved 'magic rites' and the installation of an object of some ritual significance. The Sdok Kak Thom inscription (K.235), written two centuries after the event, records that a Brahmin priest officiated the ceremony, revealing a secret magic which had not been revealed to anyone before.<sup>22</sup> This ceremony seemingly announced the unification and sovereignty of the Kingdom of Kambuja and marked the beginning of the Angkorian Empire, although it should be noted that numerous temple sites and archaeological evidence point to vibrant pre-

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<sup>19</sup> For an overview of the schools of Cambodian Buddhism, with a focus on the unorthodox tantric elements of the *yogāvacara* traditions see François Bizot. *Le Figuier À Cinq Branches. Recherche Sur Le Bouddhisme Khmer*, (Paris: PEFEQ, 1976).

<sup>20</sup> Bhattacharya, 'Religions of Ancient Cambodia', 41.

<sup>21</sup> Ashley Thompson, 'Buddhism in Cambodia, Rupture and Continuity', in *Buddhism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by Stephen C. Berkwitz (Santa Barbara, CA.: ABC Clio, 2006), 139-142.

<sup>22</sup> P. Dupont and G. Cœdès, 'Les Stèles de Sdök Kāk Thom Phnom Sandak et Prāah Vihār', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 1943, 56–154.

Angkorian centres. According to the Sdok Kak Thom inscription the ‘magic rites’ performed by the priest were called the *devarāja*, but the precise nature of the ceremony and the cult that Jayavarman II is said to have instituted is still very much the subject of scholarly debate.<sup>23</sup> Colonial official, epigraphist and archaeologist Étienne Aymonier was one of the first scholars to translate the term “*devarāja*” rendering it as ‘dieu-royal’ or ‘god-king’ and describing it as ‘a kind of deification’ of kings.<sup>24</sup> He was followed by Cœdès who also used the term ‘dieu-roi’ and who took up the idea that *devarāja* referred to the deification of the king. This notion of the god-king has been retained in much scholarship on Angkor, as well as being commonly referred to in guidebooks and other, less scholarly material on Angkor. However the translation of *devarāja* and the precise meaning of the term remain unclear. The ambiguity surrounding the term is rooted in its Sanskrit grammar yet it is possible that ambiguity surrounding the precise association between the king and the divine was intended from the outset.<sup>25</sup> However, the term undoubtedly suggests some kind of association between the king and the divine. At Angkor the divinity in question was usually Śiva, embodied in the form of the *liṅga*.

With such a high level of uncertainty surrounding the precise association between kings and gods in Angkorian beliefs and practices it is unsurprising that there is scholarly uncertainty over what happened to the *devarāja* when the first Buddhist

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<sup>23</sup> Dupont and Cœdès, ‘Les Stèles de Sdok Kāk Thom Phnom Sandak et Prāah Vihār’, 96. Scholars who have seriously taken up the *devarāja* question include: Philippe Stern, ‘Le temple-montagne khmèr, le culte du Liṅga et le Devarāja’, in *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient*, 34, 1934, 611-616; Hiram W. Woodward, ‘Practice and Belief in Ancient Cambodia: Claude Jacques’ Angkor and the Devarāja Question Angkor.’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32 (2001), 249–61; I.W. Mabbett, ‘Devarāja’, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 10 (1969), 193–201; I.W. Mabbett, ‘Kingship in Angkor’, *Journal of Siam Society*, 66 (1978), 1–58; Herman Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult*, trans. I. W. Mabbett, Data Paper no. 108 (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Programme, Cornell University, 1978); Paul Mus, “Cultes Indiens et Indigenes au Champa” in *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient*, Vol. XXXIII, (1933), 367-410.

<sup>24</sup> E. F. Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*, Vol. III (Paris, 1904), 582.

<sup>25</sup> As Mabbett explains, ‘deva does, or at any rate can, mean "god", and "rāja" certainly means "king". However, two elements can be combined in Sanskrit to make a compound in different ways. The first element may qualify the second, either as an adjective (as in "blackboard") or as a noun in apposition to it (as in "kingpin"). Alternatively, the first may stand in some prepositional relationship to the second (as in "ashtray" — "tray for ash", "shoemender" — "mender of shoes"). Conjunctive and possessive compounds also occur. Thus *devarāja* could mean "god-king", "king of gods", "kings and gods" or "he whose king is a god". I.W. Mabbett, ‘Devarāja’, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 10 (1969), 205. For a treatment of the Khmer term “*kamrateñ jagat*”, the ancient Khmer epigraphic term, translating “*devarāja*”, see Ashley Thompson, *Memoires du Cambodge*, PhD Thesis, Paris VIII, 1999, 265-266.

monarch took the throne. George Cœdès argued that the cult of the *devarāja*, which he understood as the king-as-god, was simply substituted for a cult of the king-as-Buddha, or *buddharāja*, made materially manifest in the large Buddha statue found in the central well of the Bayon in 1933 (fig. 19).<sup>26</sup> It is unclear how far the notion of the *buddharāja* was analogous to the *devarāja* cult, nevertheless the preoccupation with consecrating statues that linked the royal to the divine appears to have been maintained under Jayavarman VII, suggesting that some form of the Brahmanic divine-kingship was retained. The continuation of the practice of apotheosis nevertheless explored new ways of artistically and spatially expressing manifold aspects of Buddhist kingship. Indeed, Jayavarman VII's kingship appears to be a pivotal moment which signalled the beginnings of a shift from the idea of a king ruling by divine right towards the more Theravāda Buddhist notion of a monarch sanctioned by his karmic merit and ability to defend and uphold the dharma, as per the ten royal virtues laid out in the Pali canon.

Kingship and the Buddha are intimately intertwined and the biography of the Buddha Siddhartha illustrates this well. Siddhartha was born the son of a king and shortly after his birth a Brahmin predicted the infant would become either a world ruler (*cakravartin*) or a world renouncer (an ascetic). Concerned that his son and heir would abandon the royal life in favour of a path of asceticism, the king kept his son within the palace confines. One day, the now adult prince snuck out of the palace and was confronted by the realities of suffering, in the form of a sick man, a corpse, an old man, and an ascetic. After returning to the palace he shortly thereafter departed again, leaving his wife and baby son, in order to pursue the religious life, eventually becoming the Buddha and leader of a world order. Although he abandoned the royal path it can be argued that in becoming the Buddha, Siddhartha fulfilled both of the Brahmin's predications by becoming a renunciate and a world monarch. In Buddhist discourses of kingship the righteousness of the king is always connected to the prosperity of the state. In Michael Aung-Thwin's analysis of ideologies of classical kingship in the Southeast Asian Buddhist milieu the monarch can be considered supermundane in three ways: as the administrator of the state and upholder of morality and justice the king can be considered a *dharmarāja*; by conquering the physical land the king is a *cakravartin*, a universal monarch; and his position to achieve all of this is as a result of his

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<sup>26</sup> George Cœdès, 'La Stele du Prah Khan d'Ankor', in *BEFEO*, Vol. 41, 1941, 265-266.

accumulated merit, making the king a *karmarāja*.<sup>27</sup> In his remarkable work on Buddhist kingship in Theravādin Sri Lanka John Holt has also demonstrated the association with the bodhisattva and the king.<sup>28</sup> As a result of dialogue between Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions, the bodhisattva in question is usually Avalokiteśvara, as is the case with Jayavarman VII, but additionally there is the association with Maitreya, the future Buddha.<sup>29</sup>

### “Indianisation”

Angkor’s Sanskritic culture has been generally understood to be the result of what has been termed “Indianisation”.<sup>30</sup> Evidence of Indian influence is detectable in Southeast Asia from the first century onwards and early scholarship on Southeast Asia understood the presence of Indian influence as constituting the importation of linguistic, cultural, religious, and political models from India, by which mechanism Southeast Asian polities came into existence.<sup>31</sup> Early European scholars in Southeast Asia were generally trained as Sinologists and Indologists, and were thus more attuned to the facets of those cultures which they encountered in Southeast Asia. This exacerbated the idea that the colonies of Indochina comprised an admixture of both these cultures, such that the region could not be ‘explained on its own; it is a meeting place of races and

<sup>27</sup> Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1985), 47; 57-64.

<sup>28</sup> John Holt, *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); *The Religious World of Kirti Śri: Buddhism, Art, and Politics of Late Medieval Sri Lanka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> In a 1928 article Paul Mus examines the associations between the ‘adorned’ Buddha, represented in royal regalia, with the cakravartin, or the monarch. Paul Mus, ‘Le Buddha Paré. Etudes Indiennes et Indochinoises’, *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient*, 28 (1928), 147–278.

<sup>29</sup> Holt has noted that the triad of the Buddha, Avalokiteśvara, and Maitreya refers to the past realisation, the present protection and the future promise of the dharma.

John Holt, *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka*, 217-220.

<sup>30</sup> Sheldon Pollock is a more recent voice in the question of Sanskrit cultures and has nuanced the debate into the precise nature of Indian cultural influence and the politico-cultural work that Sanskrit literature carried out in Cambodia.

Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men. Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), esp. 124-127; Ashley Thompson, ‘Book Review: Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*’, in *Bryn Maer Review of Comparative Literature*, 10 (2012)

<<http://www.brynmawr.edu/bmrcl/BMRCLFall2012/TheLanguageoftheGods.htm>> [accessed 6 May 2013].

<sup>31</sup> George Cœdès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, trans. by Sarah Brown Cowing (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1968). For an overview of the historiography of Southeast Asia see Craig J. Reynolds, ‘A New Look at Old Southeast Asia’, in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 54 (1995), 419-446.

civilizations that can only be understood by going back to their origin’, their origin being situated geographically and culturally elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> As Nora Taylor has noted, nineteenth century Europeans, on finding what they saw as an admixture of Indian and Chinese influence, concluded that Southeast Asia had no culture of its own and what culture it did have was not indigenous.<sup>33</sup> However, the process of transplantation of Indian culture, religion, and sociology was never one of organised conquest and the understanding of ‘Indianisation’ was ameliorated in later scholarship, which countered the notion that the Southeast Asian politico-religious complex was founded on the wholesale importation of Indian culture.<sup>34</sup> Instead, the process of acculturation is now understood as occurring over time, in negotiation and adaptation with pre-existing cultural modes, because these indigenous beliefs and practices were already ripe to absorb Indian cultural influences. Paul Mus was the first to propose this in the 1930s and anthropologist Ang Choulean has more latterly followed Mus by arguing that localised animist ancestor spirits called Neak Ta correspond in concept and representation to the Brahmānist configuration of the *liṅga* and *yonī*.<sup>35</sup>

### **What Came Before: The Four-Faces in Pre-Bayon Cambodia**

There is a degree of uncertainty as to the precise details of the manner in which specific political, religious, and cultural ideas from India intersected with extant codes in Cambodia. The first problem is the sudden emergence of the four-faced configuration as it merged the boundaries of architecture and sculpture for the first time. Due to their prominence in the late-twelfth century and their return in the sixteenth century it might

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<sup>32</sup> Auguste Barth speaking in 1898 at the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, as quoted in Clémentin-Ojha, Catherine, and Pierre-Yves Manguin, *A Century in Asia. The History of the École Française d’Extrême-Orient 1898-2006* (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2007), 24.

The notion of India as coloniser appealed to contemporary Indian scholars and, by the 1930s there was considerable interaction between French and Indian anthropologists, including Hindu nationalists. That India had once culturally, if not politically, colonised large territories in their own ‘mission civilisatrice’, was of great interest to Indian scholars.

Susan Bayley, ‘French Anthropology and the Durkheimians in Colonial Indochina’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 34 (2000), 584; 600-602.

<sup>33</sup> Nora A. Taylor, ‘Art without History? Southeast Asian Artists and Their Communities in the Face of Geography’, *Art Journal*, 72 (2013), 7.

<sup>34</sup> For example see, I.W. Mabbett, ‘The “Indianization” of Southeast Asia’, in *Southeast Asian History. Essential Readings*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2006), 2–22; Robert L. Brown, *The Dvāravatī Wheels of the Law and the Indianization of South East Asia* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); Michael Vickery, ‘Funan Reviewed : Deconstructing the Ancients’, *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient*, 2003, 101–143.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Mus, ‘VIII. Cultes Indiens et Indigènes Au Champa’, *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient*, 33 (1933), 367–410; Ang Choulean, *People and Earth* (Phnom Penh: Reyum, 2000).

be thought that the four faces were already established in the hybrid Khmer-Indic artistic canon. However the face towers of Jayavarman VII's reign were an unprecedented architectural innovation, for nothing featured this kind of iconography in Cambodia prior to this time. Indeed, the Bayon is the sole example of a temple comprised of monumental faces anywhere in the world, although partial comparisons can be made with the Nepalese stūpa which feature eyes on each of their four sides (fig.4), and with Indian temple architecture which depicts the four faces of Śiva at each cardinal direction, with Śiva's fifth face being implied in the central tower of the temple. Each correlate with the Bayon conceptually as means of representing omniscience spatially, via the multiple appearance of the face, yet they differ iconographically: Śiva has a particular set of uniform attributes, which the Bayon lacks, and the stupa is understood as an architectural body of the Buddha which demonstrates both his presence and absence. Moreover the Bayon is unique in sheer number of faces that compose its structure.



Figure 4. The Swayambhu stūpa, Kathmandu, Nepal. Note the eyes on the *harmikā* which is an exclusive Nepalese phenomenon. Photography by author, 2008.

Although nothing in Khmer art anticipates the face towers, that is not to say that the four-faced configuration was unknown in sculpture at Angkor. Brahmā, the

Brahmānic deity of creation who is also found in the Buddhist pantheon, is conventionally represented with four heads. For example, the Angkor National Museum in Siem Reap displays a beautiful sandstone head of Brahmā (T.55/ṅ2337), found in Trapeang Phong, at the Roulous Group, outside of Siem Reap (fig.5). It has been attributed to the later tenth or early eleventh century and was recovered from the United Kingdom in 1994 and returned to Phnom Penh two years later. The statue consists of three extant heads adjoined at the ears, which share a single conical diadem. Each face is identical, with none of the variation seen in the Bayon-period face towers. Where the fourth head should be there is a hewn rock face, although the presence of the lower portion of the diadem suggests the original presence of a face.<sup>36</sup>

Image removed for copyright reasons

Figure 5. Brahmā head, Trapeang Phong, late tenth or early 11<sup>th</sup> century, Angkor National Museum, Siem Reap (T.55/ṅ2337). Photo courtesy of Angkor National Museum.

In addition, Śiva-liṅgas which have faces carved on each of their four sides, known as the *mukhaliṅga*, have been found in pre-Angkor and Angkorian sculpture. The *mukhaliṅga* takes the nonfigurative, or synecdochic, form of Śiva embodied in the

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<sup>36</sup> Many other beautiful examples of four-faced Brahmā from Cambodia exist and are held in museum collections around the globe.

phallic form of the *liṅga*, in combination with the figurative form from which emanates the face.<sup>37</sup> However, heads on a monumental scale, explicitly incorporated into the architectural structure, were unknown before Jayavarman VII's rule and the impetus for such an architectural design is unknown. Although there are no precise material correlations with the Bayon faces, the *mukhaliṅga* and the four-headed Brahmā function in the same manner as the four-faces by translating concepts of omnipresence or omni-vision in three-dimension, material form.<sup>38</sup>

The face towers of the late twelfth century appear to spring forth from nothing, with their textual and visual influences so wholly unclear; they are not even explicitly mentioned in the inscriptions of the period. Thus the four-faced configuration becomes a peculiarly Khmer phenomenon which exceeds its indigenous and “imported” heritage, and which is demonstrated in the multiple interpretations it solicits from scholarly and non-academic audiences alike. Nevertheless, the four-faces have undergone renovation and modification, over a historical span which has gone from the moment of their conception in a Mahāyāna-Brahmānist milieu through to the Theravāda Buddhism which rose to prominence in the thirteenth century and continues to be the majority religion in Cambodia, albeit in a religious complex inflected by the Brahmānism and animism which are woven into the cultural fabric of Cambodia.

### **Periodisation**

Throughout this thesis the terms “precolonial”, “colonial”, and “postcolonial” are employed with respect to modern French interventions in Cambodia and the scope of these terms requires clarification here. There are problematic implications posed by these terms in which each period is defined against French intervention and employing such a chronology risks re-inscribing a linear form of history which this thesis argues against.<sup>39</sup> On the face of it such terminology elides the complexities of a multivalent history of Cambodia, which is marked by intercultural interactions which never constituted imperial missions, but which can be described as forms of colonial interface.

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<sup>37</sup> Julie A. Gifford, *Buddhist Practice and Visual Culture. The Visual Rhetoric of Borobudur* (London: Routledge, 2011), 160-161.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Mus, ‘The Thousand-Armed Kannon: A Mystery or a Problem’, *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, 1964, 467-466.

<sup>39</sup> For further discussion on the temporal binaries and biases see Anne McClintock, ‘The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term “Postcolonialism”’, in *Colonial discourse/postcolonial theory*, ed. by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 254-255.

However, for the sake of brevity shorthand is necessary in the thesis. In the context of the thesis the term “postcolonial” refers to Cambodia from the end of the French Protectorate until today. While the postcolonial period here refers to the 1953 post-Independence state, it is recognised that the “post” does not signal the end of European dominance (in the sense that the new nation was largely modelled on European concepts of nation) or the imperialism of international structures of power and economics which remain in force today.<sup>40</sup> While the “postcolonial” signals a victory over direct French domination it obfuscates the international economic and cultural interests in Cambodia, which do not constitute colonialism proper but are nevertheless part of a global hegemony. This also encompasses a second ‘postcolonial’ moment at the end of the decade-long Vietnamese sponsored People’s Republic of Kampuchea in 1989. Additionally, Cambodian history prior to the arrival of the French does not constitute a ‘pure’ precolonial situation. Although not strictly colonialism the processes of acculturation of culture from Indian, the brief twelfth-century Cham ‘occupation’, and the influences of Siamese and Vietnamese courts in the Middle Period each demonstrate that the pre-Protectorate Cambodia had already experienced forms of colonialism and postcolonialism.

Furthermore the designation of periods as pre- and post- Angkor demonstrates the colonial historical paradigm by which Angkor becomes the defining period of Cambodian history against which all other periods are defined. The designation of pre-Angkor poses few problems; in scholarship it is usually viewed as a dynamic precursor to Angkor, in which the later period fully realised many of the artistic and politico-philosophical concepts expressed by the earlier period. For these reason I continue to employ the term “pre-Angkor” to describe pre-802 C.E. Cambodia. However post-Angkor is more problematic. In the first place it suggests a total lack of continuity between the unclear end of Angkor and the centuries which followed, when in fact there is much that was preserved and modified. It is also a period that is characterised as a time of stagnation and decline, which will be described more fully in the coming chapter. For this reason I utilise the established term ‘Middle Period’ to describe Cambodia from roughly the fourteenth century through to the mid-nineteenth century,

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<sup>40</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction* (Malden MA.: Blackwell, 2001), 57; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2007), 174.

whilst recognising that the suggestion of a ‘gap’ between Angkor and the Protectorate – one that can be bridged by French efforts - is still retained in this term.



Figure 6. Map of Cambodia, based on UN map No. 3860 Rev. 4, January 2004.



## Chapter One: Writing Histories: Re-Discovery, Recovery, Style, and Citation.

According to the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, history is the unfolding of world-spirit (*Geist*) into concrete reality, constituted as the dialectical progression of spirit. In his schema, art objects are instrumentalised as a vehicle for spirit and its teleological progress can be traced through the artefacts it once resided in. Conceived of in this way, art history is purposive and formal qualities can be read as the trajectory of spirit developing towards its conclusion. This teleological passage of spirit is geographical as well as temporal, beginning in Asia and ending in Europe, finding its perfect expression in Germanic poetry.<sup>1</sup> Hegel is relevant here because his legacy of a conception of linear, teleological historical progression is present in dominant European histories of Khmer art. This art historical scholarship was the immediate successor to narratives of European (re-)discovery of Angkor, which characterised Cambodia as a region lacking in a conception of its own history, and was written in conjunction with scholarship which defined the grandeur of Angkor up against the perceived decline of the post-Angkorian period. The narrative of ‘rediscovery’ was politically expedient for the French in the nineteenth century, for if the Khmer had forgotten and neglected their own patrimony then this left the way free from political or moral impediments to colonisation. Furthermore, this opened up the space for European scholars to reconstruct histories of Angkor.

This chapter is divided into two halves which set out the two registers which are operational in art historiography in the Cambodian sphere. To begin with history is examined as it is constructed by European scholarship on Cambodia, with its political imperatives and the institutionalisation of knowledge production. Focus is given to critically examining the two major art historical volumes on Khmer art, which are each predicated on studies of style, via the creation of formalist schema.<sup>2</sup> I argue that these scholarly endeavours exhibit an approach to art history which exemplifies Alois Riegl’s

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<sup>1</sup> G.W.E. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Willey Book Co., 1944), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Stern, *Le Bayon d'Angkor et l'évolution de l'art khmer; étude et discussion de la chronologie des monuments Khmers*, (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1927); Jean Boisselier, *La statuaire khmère et son évolution*, (Saigon: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1955).

definition of historical value: ‘everything that once was can never be again and that everything that once was forms an irreplaceable and inextricable link in a chain of development’.<sup>3</sup> This Hegelian-influenced mode of historiography necessarily involves an arc of development, which poses a linear conception of history at odds with traditional Indic conceptions of cyclical time. This is problematic as a linear account enacts a teleology that imposes an apex of development. The appearance of the apex is more often than not continuous with what the author judges to be the best, based on what they recognise. In the case of Khmer art history this apex is the apparent triumph of naturalism. Moreover, art historical approaches which attempt to formulate linear narratives either exclude non-western arts or attempt to shoehorn them into the narrative. The implications of this historiography are demonstrated in the influence that western historiography has had in modern and contemporary Cambodia, specifically through the reintroduction of Jayavarman VII via archaeological and epigraphic scholarship, which will be examined in the final two chapters.

The second half of this chapter details Middle Period Cambodia, a span of some five hundred years from the end of the Angkorian Empire to the beginning of the French Protectorate in the late nineteenth century. This period constituted a time of religious and artistic innovation, which was nevertheless marked by literal and cultural returns to Angkor. Cultural historian Ashley Thompson’s work on the four-faced configuration in the Middle Period is a prime example of indigenous returns to Angkor in a Theravāda Buddhist context. The employment of the four-faces in the Middle Period demonstrates the ways in which the face functions, politically and aesthetically, in Khmer history. But Thompson’s work also acts as methodological foundation for the historiographic work of this thesis because tracing the reappearances of the four-faces articulates an art history predicated on citations and recurrent themes, which has informed my own approach to studying the Bayon. Such an approach is heavily influenced by Buddhist conceptions of historical progression, in which the time is cyclical and history is destined to repeat itself.<sup>4</sup> By surveying the historical and visual landscape of the Middle

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<sup>3</sup> Alois Riegl, ‘The Modern Cult of Monuments’, in *Cultural Heritage, Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Laurajane Smith (London: Routledge, 2007), i, 115. Originally published in 1903 as *Der moderne Denkmalkultus, sein Wesen, seine Entstehung* (Vienna: W. Braumuller).

<sup>4</sup> In his remarkable study on Buddhist relic veneration, John S. Strong argues that relics act as an extension of the biography of the Buddha and that the Buddha’s biography is a key component in making the Buddha a Buddha. One implication of this argument is that every

Period this chapter describes a cyclical historiography, in which history is preserved, documented, interpreted, and refigured via appropriations and citations of motifs from the past.

## **I: Institutionalising Cambodian History**

By the early nineteenth century Cambodian sovereignty was in a period of extreme crisis, undergoing invasions and occupations by the Siamese and Vietnamese, to whom Cambodian monarchs alternatively paid tribute.<sup>5</sup> The coronation of King Ang Chan in 1806 began approximately four decades of increased influence from Vietnam, including cultural reforms which impacted upon the institutions of Theravāda Buddhism, causing widespread discontent across the country. By the mid-1840s the newly crowned King Ang Duang – who had spent his young adulthood at the court in Bangkok – restored Buddhism and royal rituals in accordance with Theravādin kingship, albeit sponsored by the Siamese. This heralded a period of relative stability in Cambodia but by the mid-1850s King Ang Duang sought French assistance in keeping his more powerful neighbours at bay. His death in 1860 sparked an outbreak of civil war and his successor, Norodom, fled to Bangkok in 1861. On his return the following year Norodom's royal regalia remained in Bangkok. This act of hostage encouraged him to begin negotiations with the French to ensure Cambodian sovereignty and reduce the threat of Siamese or Vietnamese annexation of Cambodia. A treaty of protection was signed between Cambodia and France in 1863, which was followed by Norodom's coronation in 1864.

Over the following decades French control over Cambodia tightened and, while the administrative centre of French Indochina was located in Vietnam, it was Angkor which provided the cultural 'jewel' in the colonial crown. The nineteenth century was marked by European fascination with exploratory travel, imperialist expansion, and epistemic domination over colonised lands. For the French, Cambodia did not only hold the promise natural resources and trade routes north into China but, in the temples of Angkor, there was also the promise of a cultural empire to rival British archaeological

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Buddha shares a biography and a biographical journey, thus constituting a cyclical history whereby the future is inscribed in the past and vice versa.

*Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 34-39.

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed treatment of this period see David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 4th edn., (Bangkok: Silkworm, 2008), 119-185.

missions in India. Although Angkor remained under Siamese control until 1907, the Protectorate gave the French a sense of intellectual ownership of the region, with focus given to the promise of ‘lost civilisations’ at Angkor’s ruins. Art historian Alois Riegl described the romanticism of the ruin at a time when monuments from across the globe were seen to possess an eternal, universal value which required preservation and study.<sup>6</sup> But the ruin also captured imaginations of nineteenth-century Europeans who had become fascinated and terrified by the fall of great civilisations and the collapsing monuments which symbolised their cultural decay.<sup>7</sup> For example, when former finance minister Paul Doumer arrived in Angkor, ahead of taking up the post of governor-general of Indochina in 1898, he saw the didactic potential of Angkor for warning French youth about the dangers of decadence and degeneracy. To nineteenth century Protectorate officials and French scholars, Angkor – understood to be Khmer but still under Siamese control - was symbolic of degenerate civilisations, with the builders of this ancient empire at best in terminal decline and on the precipice of disappearing, or at worst already extinct.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Myths of (Re)Discovery**

The politically charged notion of indigenous decline was most expressly communicated via narratives of the discovery of a civilisation abandoned to the jungle. The evocative allure of Angkor was first planted in European minds via the writings of a young French botanist and explorer named Henri Mouhot who, in 1858, received a commission from the Royal Geographic Society in London to travel to Southeast Asia. He journeyed to Bangkok in that same year and from there made lengthy trips into Laos, Thailand and Cambodia between October 1858 and November 1861, when Mouhot died of malaria in Laos. However, the journals and sketches he produced over the course of four expeditions made the return journey to Europe and in 1863 his travels were serialised in nine instalments in *Le Tour Du Monde*. The series was translated into English by the Royal Geographic Society of London in 1864 and again published in French in 1868. The multiple publications of Mouhot’s writings were the result of

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<sup>6</sup> Riegl, ‘The Modern Cult of Monuments’, 122.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Barnett, ‘Cambodia Will Never Disappear’, *New Left Review*, 1990, 101–125.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Barnett describes how this French colonial discourse was taken up by Cambodians, further fuelling their own fears that Cambodia was on the cusp of disappearing, an anxiety that had already been present for years as neighbouring Siam and Vietnam grew in power. Barnett, ‘Cambodia Will Never Disappear’, 101–125.

technological developments that allowed for the affordable production and distribution of print materials on a wider scale, which were able to feed a growing European thirst for travel literature. In this manner these publications brought an awareness of Angkor to a wider audience than ever before.

Despite being feted as the ‘discoverer’ of Angkor – claims never made by Mouhot himself - he was certainly not the first foreign visitor to have written and published an account of the temples.<sup>9</sup> The first European eyewitness account of Cambodia, although not Angkor, comes from Gaspar da Cruz, a missionary from Portugal who visited the capital at Lovek in 1556.<sup>10</sup> Antonio da Magdalena visited Angkor in 1586 and later described what he saw to Diogo do Couto, a historian of the Portuguese in the East Indies.<sup>11</sup> He describes a square city surrounded by a moat and five gateways, with a magnificent temple in its centre, which appears to be the first description of Angkor Thom to be found in a European account. Sixteenth and seventeenth century Portuguese and Spanish accounts provided further mentions of the temples but, as Angkor waned as a regional centre, traders and missionaries sought to reach the more economically powerful Ayutthaya via routes that went south of the Tonle Sap, thus bypassing the temple region. Angkor appears again in Western accounts in the travel diaries of French missionary Charles-Emile Bouilleaux, who visited Angkor in 1850 and published his account eight years later.<sup>12</sup> In 1859 D.O. King gave a paper to the Royal Geographic Society in London which described his travels in the region in 1857-8.<sup>13</sup>

Angkor had also long been a site of Cambodian and international pilgrimage for many centuries, contrary to later descriptions of its ‘abandonment’. Middle period epigraphy from Angkor testifies to significant royal patronage and pilgrimage at Angkor

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<sup>9</sup> In his journal no pretence is made of stumbling across the ruins and Mouhot writes, ‘am now about to go northward to visit the famous ruins of Ongcor’.

Henri Mouhot, *Henri Mouhot's Diary. Travels in the Central Parts of Siam, Cambodia and Laos During the Years 1858-61*, ed. by Christopher Pym (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1966), 81.

<sup>10</sup> Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 97-99.

<sup>11</sup> See Bernard-Philippe Groslier, ‘Angkor et le Cambodge au XVIe Siècle d’après les Sources Portugaises et Espagnoles’, *Annales des Musée Guimet*, (Paris, 1958).

<sup>12</sup> Charles Emile Bouilleaux: *Voyage dans l'Indo-Chine 1848-1856*, (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1858).

<sup>13</sup> D.O. King, ‘Travels in Siam and Cambodia’, *Journal of the Royal Geographic Society*, Vol. 30, 1860, 177-182.

Wat from the sixteenth century onwards.<sup>14</sup> From this time the capitals at Phnom Penh and Lovek were home to traders from Japan, China, Arabia, Portugal and Spain, with English and Dutch merchants arriving a century later. Indeed, according to Mouhot's journals, the local Khmer were well aware of the temples of Angkor, although they apparently described the builders as other worldly creatures.<sup>15</sup> While Mouhot understood that the people he encountered in Cambodia were the successors of the builders of the great temples, he conceived that they only knew how to destroy rather than to construct:

A knowledge of Sanscrit, of "Pali", and of some modern languages of Hindistan and Indo-China, would be the only means of arriving at the origin of the ancient people of Cambodia who have left all these traces of their civilization, and that of their successors, who appear only to have known how to destroy, never to reconstruct.<sup>16</sup>

This discourse of indigenous destruction and inability for (re)construction is detectable in colonial research imperatives which, as discussed below, privileged restoring Angkorian temples in line with their original orientation, at the expense of preserving Middle Period renovations of some temple sites.<sup>17</sup>

### **Colonial Knowledge Production in Cambodia**

Pioneering European scholarly work in Cambodia began in 1879 with Dutchman Hendrik Kern, who translated Sanskrit inscriptions, and with Auguste Barth and A. Bergaigne, two Frenchmen who worked to decipher many more inscriptions. Etienne

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<sup>14</sup> Inscriptions at the temple also attest to visits made by Japanese merchants and pilgrims and a stela found at Phnom Bakheng – a ninth-century temple originally dedicated to Śiva – is inscribed with Arabic verses, which mention phrases from the Koran.

Ashley Thompson, 'Pilgrims to Angkor: A Buddhist "Cosmopolis" in Southeast Asia?', *Bulletin of the Students of the Department of Archaeology, Royal University of Fine Arts*, 3 (2004), 88–119.

<sup>15</sup> Mouhot wrote that when locals were asked who made the temples they replied, 'it is the work of Pra-Eun, the king of the angels; 'It is the work of the giants'; 'It was built by the leprous king'; or else 'It made itself'.

Mouhot, *Henri Mouhot's Diary*, 83.

<sup>16</sup> Henri Mouhot, *Travels in Siam, Cambodia and Laos. 1858-1860*, Oxford in Asia Paperbacks (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), 20.

<sup>17</sup> The restoration of the temples was the subject of great debate and not all scholars were in agreement. Epigraphist Auguste Barth, who was one of the founders of the EFEO, described restoration as an act of 'vandalism' and he urged archaeologists to 'preserve and conserve' the temples. For a somewhat biased précis of the debate, in favour of restoration, see Catherine Clémentin-Ojha and Pierre-Yves Manguin, *A Century in Asia. The History of the École Française d'Étrême-Orient 1898-2006* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2007), 20; 89–93.

Aymonier produced the first archaeological inventory of Cambodia.<sup>18</sup> In 1898 Paul Doumer, the Governor of Indochina, established the *Mission Archéologique Permanente*. Three years later this mission developed to become the *École Française d'Étrême-Orient* (EFEO), which rivalled similar research institutions founded by the British and the Dutch in their respective colonies. The consolidation of scholars under the EFEO demonstrated French institutional control over the history and culture of Cambodia, and crucially, of knowledge production thereof. The incredible dedication of researchers at the EFEO resulted in the collation and interpretation of a wide range of material which gave probable dates for many of the temples and charted complex royal genealogies. Inscriptions were gathered, dated, and translated. Statues were unearthed and their provenance explored. The dedicated work of these scholars makes this thesis possible, yet the frameworks they laboured under resulted in particular historiographic approaches. And while it must be recognised that scholars are unavoidably a product of their own time, through which lens they interpret the past, it is nonetheless the case that the histories produced require critical consideration.<sup>19</sup>

The remit of the EFEO was manifold, encompassing archaeological exploration, the collection of manuscripts, conservation of monuments, ethnographic studies, philology, and the history of Asian civilisations. The EFEO's first director, Louis Finot, outlined three primary objectives of this new organisation: to provide France with knowledge of the peoples of the colonies, such as their languages and traditions; to remind France of its obligations to study and conserve the monuments within the region; and finally, to widen French scholarship on the orient.<sup>20</sup> Finot reasserted these aims – scientific, educational, and touristic – at the opening of the EFEO museum in Saigon in 1927 and he was perhaps forward-thinking in his approach when he alluded to the benefit of understanding contemporary culture: ‘to know...the past we must have seen the present, which reflects and echoes the colours and voices of the past’.<sup>21</sup> However, despite these multiple aims, the focus of the EFEO in reality was very much on antiquity and in Cambodia work was primarily concerned with archaeological research at the stone monuments of Angkor. The celebratory volume *A Century in Asia*.

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<sup>18</sup> E. Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*, 3 vol., (Paris, 1901-1903.) See also, L. de Lajonquière, *Inventaire Descriptif Des Monuments Du Cambodge*, (Paris: L'École française d'Extrême Orient, 1902–1911).

<sup>19</sup> E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 35.

<sup>20</sup> Penny Edwards, *Cambodge. The Cultivation of A Nation, 1860-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 36.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Edwards, *Cambodge*, 36.

*The History of the École Française d'Étrême-Orient 1898-2006* clearly demonstrates the research biases across the Indochina region, with emphasis placed upon archaeological and epigraphic research in Cambodia and far less attention given to post-Angkorian and contemporary religious and anthropological studies.<sup>22</sup> The Angkorian cosmological and architectural preference for constructing temples from durable stone and their earthly abodes – including the royal palace - from imminently perishable wood, meant that the primary material artefacts available for study belonged to a complex divine world, while insight into the vernacular proved, and continues to prove, more difficult to access. Additionally, the move to Theravāda Buddhism in the Middle Period heralded an end to construction in stone, and wood was used instead, which reflected impermanence in the very material of the structure. Wood also requires fewer resources to quarry, transport and manoeuvre into position, which made it a more economically viable material as the wealth of the Khmer Empire diminished during the Middle Period. Yet its vulnerability to climate, insects and time leaves a lacuna in the architectural record, which was interpreted by many to indicate a lack of cultural production in the Middle Period. Whilst no monuments were constructed to rival the complexity and scale of the temples of Angkor, this gap in architectural evidence should not be viewed as signalling an absence of religious construction. Such positivist modes of enquiry bequeathed a Cambodian historiography which was primarily concerned with kings and gods.

The nature of archaeological intervention at certain temple sites was also affected by the burgeoning tourist interest in Angkor. In 1907 two hundred visitors are logged as visiting Angkor and by the following decade tourist infrastructure began to appear in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, as visitor numbers increased.<sup>23</sup> The practical and aesthetic demands of tourism influenced the very presentation of the temples. Jean Commaille, the first curator of Angkor with responsibilities for the conservation and restoration of the temples, ordered the jungle to be cleared from Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom between 1908 and 1914. However, he made the decision to leave Ta

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<sup>22</sup> Clémentin-Ojha and Manguin, *A Century in Asia*.

<sup>23</sup> Tim Winter, *Post-Conflict Heritage, Post-Colonial Tourism. Culture, Politics and Development at Angkor* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 39.

Prohm, Ta Som and Preah Khan in a semi-ruinous state in order to better preserve the fantasy of discovery of a long-forgotten culture.<sup>24</sup>

Due to the intense research focus at the temples, previous and subsequent periods were defined in direct relation to Angkor and named accordingly: the pre-Angkorian and Post-Angkorian periods. This bounded periodisation was matched by geographic boundaries of space when map-making began in 1907, followed by the designation of the Archaeological Park in the mid-1920s. This approach resulted in certain scholarly contradictions in the historical narrative produced by early scholars of the EFEO. While it was recognised that stone monuments were irreconcilable with the Theravāda Buddhism of the Middle Period, the cessation of building in stone after the reign of Jayavarman VII was simultaneously considered to be a sign of cultural decline and decay, rather than a development sensitive to the changing religious and political climate.<sup>25</sup> It is true that the once vast urban complex of Angkor did fall into decline from around the end of the thirteenth century, from which time the historical record becomes sketchier, however such notions of decay and decline ignored oral histories, intangible culture, and the compelling evidence of vast religio-cultural-political innovations, which the renovations of Angkor Wat, Ta Prohm at Tonle Bati, and Wat Nokor attest. It appears that these Middle Period Buddhist renovations of originally Hindu orientated temples were viewed with some consternation by early French archaeological teams. As Edwards notes, scholarly concerns in the early twentieth century shifted from rescuing a ‘vanishing’ culture to recovery of the ‘original’, ‘authentic’ religious, cultural and architectural orientations of the temples.<sup>26</sup> For example, during archaeological research led by Henri Parmentier and Henri Marchal

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<sup>24</sup> Ta Som and Preah Khan have since been cleared and restored. Despite on-going restoration, which includes the felling of trees, the addition of wooden walkways, and conspicuous reconstruction of portions of the temple, Ta Prohm still remains the site of touristic fantasy for thousands upon thousands of tourists every year. Tim Winter has undertaken research into the expectations of tourists to Angkor, and the results of his qualitative studies demonstrate that the myth of remote jungle ruins, to be re-discovered by modern-day Mouhots, persists to this day. Winter, *Post-Conflict Heritage, Post-Colonial Tourism*, 116-138.

<sup>25</sup> Various reasons have been cited for the relocation of the Cambodian capital south and the ‘abandonment’ of Angkor, including the failure of the hydraulic system, drought, malarial outbreaks, invasion from the neighbouring Thai, and increased maritime trade with China which necessitated a port in proximity to the Mekong delta.

See for example, Brendan M. Buckley, Kevin J. Anchukaitis, Daniel Penny, Roland Fletcher, Edward R. Cook, Masaki Sano, and others, ‘Climate as a Contributing Factor in the Demise of Angkor, Cambodia’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107 (2010), 6748–6752; Bernard Philippe Groslier, *Indochina. Art in the Melting-Pot of Races*, trans. by George Lawrence (London: Methuen, 1962), 189-190; David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 92.

<sup>26</sup> Edwards, *Cambodge*, 136.

between 1922 and 1925, the base of a large Buddha statue, which was likely never completed, was found to have been erected upon the summit of Phnom Bakheng, a ninth century temple originally dedicated to Śiva.<sup>27</sup> The decision was made to remove the base of the Buddha and restore the apex of the temple to its original layout. We shall return to these Middle Period renovations in the following pages.

### **History as the Study of Style**

Colonial art historical writing on Cambodia was primarily focussed on Angkor and it is the construction and infrastructure of art histories which concerns us here. The study of style formed a crucial component in the establishment of a historical chronology in Khmer art and assisted with dating many of the temples. Here “style” refers to a diagnostic tool which studies formal patterns and motifs to support dating and locating an artefact.<sup>28</sup> The study of style is crucial for the work of art history and the framework of stylistic study was set out in the 1915 study by Heinrich Wölfflin.<sup>29</sup> His principles of formal analysis enable the work to be placed sequentially, to allow for the identification of influences upon the artist, his own innovations, and his influence upon later artists. For Wölfflin art history *was* the history of formal developments. However, there are numerous flaws in this approach and a key limitation appears when Wölfflin’s schema is applied to art outside of western traditions. In the 1950s Meyer Schapiro argued that formalist changes in western art from the late nineteenth century onwards permitted non-western art to be historicised.<sup>30</sup> His characterisation of “style” as having expressive qualities and an internal order, independent of the content of the work, enabled Schapiro to posit a relativist approach by which all works could be judged on the success of their style. However, Schapiro’s attempts to incorporate non-western arts are predicated on material and formal changes that characterised modern art in the west. While it was his affirmation that these changes opened the space to critically consider non-western art, it nevertheless meant that western art production remained in the privileged position; non-western art becomes dependent upon developments in western art in order to gain a place in “art history”. Moreover, non-western art is conceived of as

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Chronique’, *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient*, 23 (1923), 541.

<sup>28</sup> See Meyer Schapiro, ‘Style’, in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Donald Preziosi, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 143-149.

<sup>29</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, trans. by M. D. Hottinger, 6th edn. (New York: Dover Publications, 1950).

<sup>30</sup> Schapiro, ‘Style’, 148.

being governed by conceptions of history, development, and expression peculiar to the west.

These taxonomies of art historical enquiry are found in the canonical studies of Khmer art history. The concerted work of art historians Philippe Stern and Jean Boisselier in mapping the development of artistic and architectural style was incalculably valuable to enhancing the understanding of the religious, artistic, and monarchical history of Angkor, and their works are the dominant art historical studies of Cambodia.<sup>31</sup> But, I argue that the limitations of stylistic studies as described above are present in their major studies, which are redolent of Hegel's conception of history which dialectically moves towards its teleological conclusion.<sup>32</sup> Not only is there an arc of progression, the apex of this arc is concomitant with art that most closely resembles the formal qualities celebrated in western art histories. Stern worked at the Musée Guimet between 1929 and 1965, first as an assistant curator, and later as chief curator. He visited Cambodia once, in 1937, and the majority of his analysis was undertaken in Paris, based on photographs and artefacts in the museum's collection. He published his first study on the Bayon and Khmer art in 1927, which challenged the conventional dating of the Bayon to the tenth century, and he continued to publish on stylistic motifs for the duration of his career.<sup>33</sup> *Le Bayon d'Angkor et l'évolution de l'art khmer; étude et discussion de la chronologie des monuments Khmers* is divided into three parts, the first of which examines the evolutions of temple motifs, such as decorative lintels, corner motifs, columns, false windows, Buddha niches and standing guardian figures. The remaining two parts comprise a study of the layout of the temples and their chronology. His aim was to develop methods to understand the synchronic developments in otherwise 'unfamiliar' artistic traditions, which relied upon formal analysis, focussed upon decorative elements, adornments, clothing, and ornamentation.

Boisselier was a student of Stern at the École du Louvre and was appointed curator of the National Museum in Phnom Penh in 1950. He also worked with the

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<sup>31</sup> Although they have become the most oft-cited they are certainly not the only works of this kind. See for example, Gilberte de Coral Rémusat, *L'art Khmer, Les Grandes Étapes de Son Évolution*, (Paris: les Éditions d'Art et d'Histoire, 1940).

<sup>32</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*.

<sup>33</sup> Working from photographs and artefacts at the Musée Guimet, he noticed architectural and artistic features that suggested the temple dated from a later period, which he placed in the reign of Suryavarman I (1001-1049) and Udayadityavarman II (1050-1066). Stern, *Le Bayon d'Angkor et l'évolution de l'art khmer; étude et discussion de la chronologie des monuments Khmers*, (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1927).

EFEO and at the Conservation d'Angkor offices in Siem Reap. His 1955 publication, *La statuaire khmère et son évolution*, built upon Stern's earlier work and the study sets out a periodical of Angkorian statuary, comprised of a chronology of statuary from the pre Angkor to post Bayon periods.<sup>34</sup> Inspired by Groslier and Stern, Boisselier nevertheless marked a departure in methodology and his analysis was based upon studies of the anatomy of the forms, modelling, and poses. He appealed to the notion of a certain artistic license on the part of the artist, writing 'one cannot ask of the study of forms and modelling the same precision that one can of the study of costume or adornment. In the modelling, the artist always leaves much to the course of personal inspiration, even without his knowledge'.<sup>35</sup> While Stern's approach relied heavily upon formal analysis, Boisselier recognised the influence of history upon artistic developments and saw that developments in statuary did not always occur in tandem with architectural decoration.

Boisselier argued that it was in the style of the mid-eleventh-century Baphuon temple that a new aesthetic emerged, which led to the development of the Bayon style.<sup>36</sup> He argued that the style of the Baphuon retained the frontality which characterised earlier statuary, but it departed from a strict hieratic stance and the modelling of the figures was more fluid. The style of Angkor Wat marked a brief return to the hieratic, with an absolute insistence on frontality, however the style of the Bayon period – with its 'preoccupation for naturalism' – returned to a less frontal mode of presentation.<sup>37</sup> He states that after the lack of naturalism in the art of Angkor Wat, the art production of the Bayon period marked a 'true return to direct observation'.<sup>38</sup> According to Boisselier the head of the Bayon period presented the most profound stylistic change, in particular the expression of the face. He argued that the statues of Jayavarman VII had been modelled from direct observation and evoked originality, beauty, and human expression, although he conceded that older artistic conventions had been observed.<sup>39</sup>

Neither Stern nor Boisselier claimed to describe a definitive or complete account of stylistic changes and their iconographic typologies are effective as a dating technique. However, the concern with an evolution or development of styles, as

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<sup>34</sup> Jean Boisselier, *La statuaire khmère et son évolution*, (Saigon: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1955).

<sup>35</sup> Boisselier, *La statuaire khmère et son évolution*, 161.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-179.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-201.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-185.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

evidenced in the titles of their studies and in the art histories they produce, points towards an understanding of art as moving and developing in a primarily linear fashion, and that this development was progressing *towards* something. Crucially, the stylistic evolution of Khmer art was said to have reached its apex with the naturalistic rendering of the human figure in the art of Jayavarman VII. It is not the actual technique that garners praise; the execution of Bayon-period stonework lacked finesse. Instead it is the arrival of what has been understood from a western scholarly perspective as “portraiture”; that is, the representation and expression of an individual, through his physical, bodily characteristics. The question of the portrait will be examined in Chapter Four, but the manner in which the history of Khmer art was predicated on formal analysis is pertinent to the issues at hand. These two canonical studies of stylistic developments in Cambodian art history function in conjunction with contemporaneous narratives of cultural decadence, with the triumph of naturalism in the late twelfth century also understood to mark the beginning of the decline of Khmer civilisation. Boisselier’s formulation in particular reveals the frame of a modern, European approach in thinking about artistic practices. He states in the introduction to his study that Angkorian statues were always impersonal, their faces were without individuality and it was the accompanying inscriptions which identified their individuality, except in the case of the art of Jayavarman VII.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, it is primarily the form of the face of the Bayon-period which is born from the ‘personal inspiration’ of the artist, who cannot help but endow it with expression, even without his knowledge and possibly against his conscious will. According to Boisselier’s analysis it is the expression, perhaps the artists’ *own* expression, which is readable in the way in which the face is rendered in the late twelfth century.

The material culture produced at the end of the twelfth century is indeed remarkable; this very thesis is based upon the faces which characterised the Bayon period. The body of statuary in the Jayavarman VII period rendered the human form with a sensitivity and naturalism hitherto unfound in Khmer statuary. Nevertheless, what concerns us here is the enterprise of proposing a notion of artistic development which is premised on the idea of a progression or development of styles. There is the implicit suggestion that the linear narrative of this “evolution” culminates with an apex followed by a decline. The characterisation of the Middle Period as a time of obscurity, stagnation and abandonment further created a narrative arc of glory and decline, with a

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<sup>40</sup> Boisselier, *La statuaire khmère et son évolution*, 10.

glorious past resurrected under colonial protection.<sup>41</sup> This narrative emerged in the scholarship on and in Angkor, via concerted efforts to conserve, restore, replicate and study the stone traces of a civilisation. Although this narrative had effects upon twentieth century Cambodian representations of Angkor, it would be wrong to claim that this narrative was exclusively French, for as we shall see below, it also has roots in Khmer historiography.

## **II: Contesting Linear Narratives: Histories as Citations.**

As detailed above, early colonial scholarship on Cambodia posited that after the splendour of Angkor, the Khmer civilisation fell into decline as the temples were abandoned, a sense of history was lost, and Cambodian culture fell into disrepair. The remaining half of this chapter gives a summary of the centuries after the end of the Angkor Empire in order to articulate both the renovations that took place with the rise of Theravāda Buddhism and the manner in which these renovations constitute historiographic work. In the first instance my aim is to reiterate the inaccuracy of the narrative of the complete abandonment of Angkor. Although this in itself is an unremarkable argument, it demonstrates the way in which Angkor was incorporated into indigenous historiographic modes, which refutes assertions that Cambodians had no conception of their own history. Secondly, the citations of Angkorian iconography in the Middle Period lays the groundwork for thinking about citations of Angkor in modern and contemporary Cambodia because it demonstrates that a return to certain visual imagery was not exclusively the product of colonial scholarship. The recourse to repeated citations of iconographic forms, in modified contexts, also disrupts a linear conception of art history, by instead suggesting an art history predicated on cyclical developments and periodic returns to past motifs, reinvigorating these motifs in modified socio-cultural-religious contexts.

### **Filling in the Gaps: The Middle Period**

Jayavarman VII has been justifiably labelled the last great king of Angkor and he was certainly the last monarch to undertake a monumental building program and

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<sup>41</sup> Thompson, 'Pilgrims to Angkor', 90-91.

leave a large corpus of epigraphy. He likely died in circa 1217-18 CE and was succeeded by Indravarman II.<sup>42</sup> His successor, Jayavarman VIII, has conventionally been blamed for the so-called iconoclasm which focused on Buddhist bas-reliefs, pediments and wall finials at temples built by Jayavarman VII, including Ta Prohm, Preah Khan, Ta Som Ta Nei, Banteay Kdei and the Bayon. Although both Cœdès and Claude Jacques, and others, have argued that Jayavarman VIII represents the most likely culprit of this widespread destruction, it is in no way clear that there was either an iconoclastic program or that it occurred under the reign Jayavarman VIII.<sup>43</sup> As Michael Vickery has noted, there is no extant inscription from the reign of Jayavarman VIII and his religious orientation is not certain.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the dating of the alleged thirteenth-century iconoclastic destruction of Bayon-period Buddha statues has been called into question by recent research. This research found Ayutthaya style Buddha statues, dating from the fifteenth century, interred with the broken Bayon Buddha, which itself appears to have been modified in the sixteenth century.<sup>45</sup> This strongly indicates that there was no such period of Śaivite iconoclasm in the centuries immediately after Jayavarman VII's death and that the twelfth-century statue was placed in the central well of the Bayon at a much later date.

It is known that in the late thirteenth century Angkor was still a thriving city, according to a detailed first-hand account written by the Chinese envoy Zhou Daguan.<sup>46</sup> His account demonstrates the presence of Brahmanism, Theravāda Buddhism and Śivaism, and it is known that the monarch at the time, Indravarman III, was a sponsor of Theravāda, which rose to dominance in the region from the fourteenth century onwards. The shift in religious orientation towards Theravāda was matched by upheavals across the Southeast Asian region, as kingdoms in Siam grew more powerful and the Chinese

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<sup>42</sup> Claude Jacques notes a recent discovery of an inscription on an offering bowl (K.1234) which suggests that Jayavarman VII was alive in 1217-18.

‘The Historical Development of Khmer Culture from the Death of Suryavarman II to the sixteenth Century’, in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, ed. by Joyce Clark (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), 40.

<sup>43</sup> George Cœdès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, 212; Jacques, ‘The Historical Development of Khmer Culture from the Death of Suryavarman II to the sixteenth Century’, 42.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Vickery, ‘Bayon: New Perspectives Reconsidered’, *Udaya*, 7 (2006), 119-120.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Polkinghorne, Christophe Pottier, and Christian Fischer, ‘One Buddha Can Hide Another’, *Journal Asiatique*, 301 (2013), 575–624.

<sup>46</sup> Zhou Daguan, ‘Mémoire Sur Les Coutumes Du Cambodge’, trans. by Paul Pelliot, *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 2 (1902), 123–177.

expanded commercial activities in the area.<sup>47</sup> By the middle of the fourteenth century the Khmer capital was still situated at Angkor, despite Ayutthayan raids, which periodically disposed of Khmer kings. Angkor Thom remained the Khmer capital until 1431-2, when a Thai raid forced the Khmer court to flee, although the Khmer court briefly reoccupied Angkor in the mid-sixteenth century. It is likely the shift of the Khmer capital city south, from Angkor to sites close to modern-day Phnom Penh, was as much the result of increased maritime trade with China as it was to do with Thai incursions.<sup>48</sup> There is scant evidence from the fifteenth century to be found in Cambodia, or in the historical record of its neighbours, although Michael Vickery has reconstructed an account of Cambodia in the fifteenth century, drawing upon what can be gleaned from Siamese and Chinese sources.<sup>49</sup>

### **Cyclical Conceptions of Time and the Cult of Maitreya**

Establishing a detailed chronology of events in Middle Period Cambodia is not the purpose of this chapter. Instead the aim is to set out a conception of history which is predicated on a specific Theravādin cosmology, which articulates practices of historiography which differ from the linear narrative or Hegelian teleology. Thompson persuasively argues for an understanding of a Khmer notion of history where past and future are inextricably intertwined, where the past can be mediated by events in the future.<sup>50</sup> This is a concept of history which not only resists linear explication, but one in which time folds on itself, which ‘conflates a repetition of the past and is a rehearsal of the future in a performative show of sovereignty’.<sup>51</sup> This is demonstrated in the material record from the sixteenth century onwards, located in material modifications and artistic citations from the past, rooted firmly in the institution of kingship. This ‘performative show of sovereignty’ is embodied in the configuration of four-faces, an implicit citation

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<sup>47</sup> See Thompson’s chapter for a summary of the religious and cultural shifts to Theravāda up until the present day: ‘Buddhism in Cambodia, Rupture and Continuity’, 129–167; Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism. History and Practice*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 92.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Vickery, *Cambodia and its Neighbours in the Fifteenth Century*, Asia Research Institute Working Paper No. 27, 2004, published online at [http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/publication\\_details.asp?pubtypeid=WP&pubid=276](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/publication_details.asp?pubtypeid=WP&pubid=276) [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> February 2014]

<sup>50</sup> Ashley Thompson, ‘The Future of Cambodia’s Past’, 13-39; Thompson, ‘Lost and Found’, 245–64; Thompson, ‘Introductory Remarks Between the Lines. Writing Histories of Middle Cambodia’, in *Other pasts: women, gender and history in early modern Southeast Asia*, ed. by Barbara Watson Andaya (Manoa: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 47–68.

<sup>51</sup> Thompson, ‘The Future of Cambodia’s Past’, 13.

and re-working of the iconography of Angkor Thom, although the extent to which the four-faces were directly influenced by the Bayon is questionable. Thompson argues that during Cambodia's Middle Period, in accord with the shift to Theravāda Buddhism, the four-faced configuration becomes explicitly identified with the four historical Buddhas. The axis of the four faces comes to symbolise the future Buddha Maitreya, who will be born on earth at a time when the *dharma* has all but been forgotten by mankind.<sup>52</sup> Maitreya is waiting in Tuṣita heaven for the time when a righteous ruler, a *cakravartin* (a “wheel turner”), exists on earth. Maitreya is often depicted on a throne dressed in monk's robes or royal regalia. In Buddhist polities in Southeast Asia the notions of an ideal king and the future Buddha were often intimately associated, if not conflated. At the same time as the king was associated with the future Buddha, he was also intimately associated with the *cakravartin*, an ideal ruler who will bring about the arrival of the future Buddha on earth.

This appearance of what Thompson suggests could be viewed as a cult of Maitreya was concomitant with the appearance of the stūpa (*ceitya*) in Middle Period Cambodia and, more crucially, with the modification of Angkorian temples. The stūpa, although commonly described as a funerary monument, can also be viewed as a life engendering structure. John Irwin proposed interpreting the vertical axis of the stūpa as a “world pillar” (*Indra-Kīla*), which acts as the stabiliser of the universe in much the same way as Mount Meru. Therefore, whilst the enshrining of relics within a stūpa is a pious act by a good Buddhist monarch, it is also an act which recalls the ordering the universe.<sup>53</sup> By enshrining a relic – a key act of Theravāda monarchs – the relic itself becomes the centre or the *axis mundi* of the kingdom. For example, Borobudur (760-830 CE) was constructed in Java by the Sailendras (“kings of the mountain”) dynasty and has been variously interpreted as a cosmic mountain, maṇḍala, stūpa or the representation of a spiritual ascent.<sup>54</sup> In any or all of these interpretations the structure acts as a means of ordering space, concentrating power, and connecting the ruler with the universal Buddha. Enshrining a relic in a stūpa makes presence the Buddha in the

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<sup>52</sup> This will be a time when the world has fallen into chaos and the teachings of the Buddha have been forgotten.

Jan Nattier, ‘The Meanings of the Maitreya Myth. A Topological Analysis’, in *Maitreya, The Future Buddha*, p.23; Thompson, ‘Memoires du Cambodge’, 130.

<sup>53</sup> Donald K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World in Southeast Asia*, (Albany: State of New York University Press, 1995), 68-71.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 171.

kingdom in such a way that the relic becomes the ultimate symbol of the monarch as *cakravartin*.<sup>55</sup>

Thompson argues that the dual function of the stūpa as both a funerary monument and a monument imbued with latent potential means it comes to be associated with the future as much as it is concerned with the past. More specifically, the stūpa is associated with the arrival of Maitreya, who is also iconographically identified via a stūpa in his headdress. When Maitreya arrives on earth it is said that he will be given the robe that once belonged to the previous Buddha. Thompson sees this story as illustrating ‘renewal, renaissance and revolution’, whereby Maitreya is ‘inscribed in a precise future and is experienced in the present time as an historical event [...] still to come’.<sup>56</sup> Thus the cult of Maitreya and the object of the stūpa represent a notion of time which refuses to be flattened out in a linear manner and which instead rests upon a circularity, in which future events are already known, because they already happened.

### **Material Renovations: Middle Period Citations of the Four Faces**

From the fourteenth century onwards Cambodia was marked by political, territorial, and religious upheavals, which resulted in the repeated relocation of the capital. This period of disruption momentarily ceased during the reign of Ang Chan in the sixteenth century. He situated his capital at Lovek, south of Angkor, but paid close attention to religious constructions at Angkor and elsewhere in the kingdom. Thompson argues that the narrative of abandonment and recuperation was not exclusive to French colonial conceptions of history, for it is identifiable in Khmer historiography of the Middle Period too:

[r]epeated recovery and commemoration of Angkor’s ancient temples, themselves sites of commemoration, have been an important motivating factor of Cambodian history since post-Angkorian times.<sup>57</sup>

A Khmer legend tells that Ang Chan happened upon Angkor Wat whilst hunting elephants in the forest. On making this discovery he reoccupied and restored the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 93.

More prosaically the enshrining of relics is also a means for legitimating the king by the monastic order, part of a mutual system of patronage.

<sup>56</sup> Thompson, ‘The Future of Cambodia’s Past’, 14-16;

<sup>57</sup> Thompson, ‘Pilgrims to Angkor’, 90.

temples. In this way the ‘restoration of the monarchy thus found concrete expression in the restoration of ancestral heritage’.<sup>58</sup> This restoration of this heritage included the renovation of a number of Angkorian temples, but most interestingly there was an emphasis on the configuration of four faces and this configuration of four becomes explicitly bound up with the notion of a cyclical history.

Epigraphic evidence suggests that Ang Chan was responsible for sculpting bas-reliefs on the north-eastern gallery at Angkor Wat, which had been left blank by the builders of the temple.<sup>59</sup> These later bas-reliefs are in accord with the original Viṣṇuite scenes, yet Ang Chan also modified the temple to suit a Theravādin site of worship. The uppermost tier at Angkor Wat comprises five towers, one being the central sanctuary, each of which opened on each of their four sides. Ang Chan instructed that the doorways of the central sanctuary were to be blocked up and each new door was decorated with a relief of a standing Buddha. Thompson persuasively argues that this modification ostensibly turned this central sanctuary into a stūpa, with a configuration of four Buddhas facing the cardinal directions.<sup>60</sup>

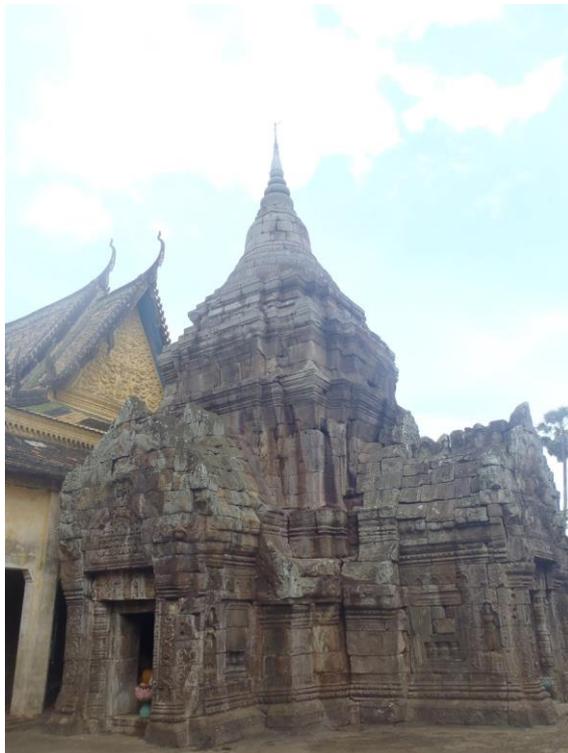


Figure 7. The central sanctuary of Wat Nokor, in which the Angkorian tower has been modified to become a stūpa. Photo by author, 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Thompson, ‘The Future of Cambodia’s Past’, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Thompson, ‘Pilgrims to Angkor’, 93.

<sup>60</sup> Thompson, ‘Lost and Found’, 252-253.

Further textual, art historical, and ethnographic research by Thompson demonstrates that similar modifications were made at Wat Nokor, a temple located approximately 260km south of Angkor and built by Jayavarman VII (fig. 7). A sixteenth century inscription details the transformation of the temple into a stūpa to contain the relics of the founder – or his father – who would be reborn at the time of Maitreya.<sup>61</sup> At Wat Nokor two secondary chapels, Vihear Yiey Peou and Vihear Bi Chey Bi Ar, have a configuration of four Buddhas, facing out at each cardinal direction. The central sanctuary of Wat Nokor is of particular interest as not only does it have a configuration of four Buddhas but Thompson argues, because the bas-reliefs of the four pediments of the “*stūpa-prasat*” suggest a cyclical narrative. Each depicts a scene from the life of the Buddha. The first three are easily identifiable episodes from the Buddha’s biography; his Great Departure from the palace, the cutting of his princely topknot, and the Buddha calling the earth to witness in his defeat of Mara at the time of his enlightenment. The fourth scene is more ambiguous as it can be interpreted as both the final scene and as a beginning. It can be read as the Buddha Siddhartha in his palace on the eve of his Great Departure or interpreted as Maitreya in Tuṣita heaven, awaiting his rebirth as the Buddha. Thompson’s readings of this scene are based on conversations with local worshippers and temple caretakers as well as detailed iconographical and textual studies, and she suggests that the two interpretations of the bas-relief necessarily and unproblematically become conflated with one another as the past and the future become merged.

In this fourth relief the crowned figure of Siddhartha/ Maitreya sits in a pavilion which has a face at its peak (fig. 8). Thompson suggests that this singular face is in fact a two-dimensional rendering of the four-face configuration, which became a potent symbol of (re-)establishing royal authority and power in middle period Cambodia.<sup>62</sup> This configuration is echoed in the Throne Hall at the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh. Built in 1866, the architecture evokes the Middle Period structures, built in a cruciform shape, at the centre of which is the throne. The roof above the throne is pyramidal and its tower is topped with four-faces which are also crowned by a spire; when the king is sat on the throne, he is crowned by the four-faced image (fig.9).<sup>63</sup> Thompson draws

<sup>61</sup> Thompson, ‘The Future of Cambodia’s Past’ 19-27; Thompson, ‘Lost and Found’, 245–264.

<sup>62</sup> Thompson, ‘Lost and Found’, 249.

<sup>63</sup> Thompson, ‘Lost and Found’, 256-257.

upon a Royal Chronicle, the Vāmñ Juon Chronicle which was compiled in the 1920s.<sup>64</sup> This chronicle relates the founding of the capital of Phnom Penh, a legend we will turn to in a moment, and describes the ceremony which inaugurated the new city and the king. This ceremony placed the king at the summit of the city. Thus, at the modern day Royal Palace, the king is crowned by the four-faces but is also conceived as the spire which crowns the four-faces, placing the king above the throne he sits on.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 8. The relief depicting Siddhartha/ Maitreya. Wat Nokor. Photography by author, 2011.

The foundation of the capital at Phnom Penh is steeped in references to the four-faces and the well-known legend of the city's foundation centres around a four-faced image. According to the legend, a woman named Penh saw a tree trunk in an eddy of the nearby Tonle Sap River. She recruited some local men to haul the log out of the water and lodged in the wood they found a stone Viṣṇu statue and a four-faced Buddha

<sup>64</sup> It is usual for Cambodian Royal Chronicles to be written long after the event they describe, thus providing a historical/ legendary account. Thompson, 'Lost and Found', 253.

<sup>65</sup> Thompson, 'Lost and Found', 257.

image made of bronze. To honour this discovery Lady Penh constructed a hill – *phnom* in Khmer – and installed the Viṣṇu statue at the north-eastern foot of the hill and placed the four-faced Buddha image in a *vihear* she built on the summit of the hill. Thompson returns to the Vāṃṇ Juon Chronicle which records that King Ponhea Yat, the historical and/or legendary founder of a royal capital at Phnom Penh, erected a stūpa at Wat Phnom, west of the *vihear* and placed the four-faced Buddha inside, along with Buddha statues retrieved from Angkor Wat. This funerary monument thus symbolised the birth of a new royal city, animated by statues from the ancient capital.<sup>66</sup> Thompson notes that the questionable historical validity of the dating of the chronicles and the buildings at Wat Phnom, which stylistically point to a date later than the fifteenth century; the stūpa has long been closed off so there is no way of ascertaining whether or not the statues described are interred within it. Nevertheless, what is of interest is the ways in which a Khmer understanding of history emerges in the repeat references made to the past royal capital of Angkor in the creation of new seats of royal power.



Figure 9. The Throne Hall of the Royal Palace, Phnom Penh. Photograph by author, 2012

<sup>66</sup> Thompson, ‘Lost and Found’, 253-254.

The new capital which King Ponhea Yat is said to have founded also took the name Chatomuk and this appellation is still used in a variety of contexts. The term “Chatomuk” translates to the “four faces” and in recent times this has been said to relate to the topology of the city, because it is situated at the confluence of three rivers: the Tonle Sap, the Mekong and the Bassac. This geographical feature means that “Chatomuk” is generally translated as the “Four Arms”, in relation to the four branches of rivers. However, as Thompson astutely notes, if Khmer speakers from the sixteenth century onwards had meant to name the city after the four arms of the river then they would have done so, naming the city “tai puon”.<sup>67</sup> Thompson goes further and, in a re-reading of the *Vāṃṃ Juon Chronicle*, writes that the king renames the city referring to the “the river of the four-faces to the east”, which points to the Tonle Sap river, in which the four-faced statue was found; it is this that gives the name Chatomuk.<sup>68</sup>

I outline Thompsons work here for two reasons. First, her studies go beyond interpretations of the material record and incorporate ethnographic accounts based upon oral histories and testimony, which gives multifaceted and multi-layered perspectives on the histories at hand. Thompson’s research demonstrates that the referencing of earlier forms does not constitute a stagnation or derivation of culture. Instead the formal qualities of Angkor were returned to and modified in order to suit an altered religio-politico context. Secondly, in seeing the connection between the iconographic and structural conflation of the Buddha and Maitreya echoed in the returns to the past in refiguring kingship, Thompson provides a methodological basis for thinking through the returns to the Bayon face(s) in contemporary Cambodia. This appeal to indigenous practices of historiography is grounded in general Buddhist conceptions of history as being cyclical and modes specific to Cambodia.

## Conclusion

This chapter sought to achieve two central aims, by interrogating the practices of art history in the Cambodian context. In the first instance, the notion of linear art history in relation to studies of style was questioned and secondly, a notion of cyclical history, from within a Buddhist perspective, was proposed. The question of linear art history in

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<sup>67</sup> Thompson, ‘Lost and Found’, 255.

<sup>68</sup> Thompson, ‘Lost and Found’, 255-256.

Cambodia is crucial because of the manner in which Cambodian history was instituted by colonial scholarship, which had at its origins a notion that Angkor had been effaced in Cambodia's own sense of history. The work of the EFEO focussed upon literally and metaphorically excavating and restoring the monuments of Angkor, which placed Angkor as the pinnacle of Cambodian history. In neglecting Middle Period evidence, this scholarly work contributed to ideas that Cambodia culturally declined and thus required French colonial intervention to protect and preserve Cambodian patrimony.

The notion that Cambodian art had reached its stylistic peak in the late twelfth century is found in the canonical works of art historians Stern and Boisselier. Although their methods differed, their shared focus on style and development each climaxes at the point at which Angkorian art appears to intersect with modern, European artistic ideals; the expressions of the individual artist being legible in the work and the modelling of the figurative form based on direct observation, rooted in the human portrait rather than in a hieratic image of the divine. This demonstrates that the application of the study of style in non-western contexts risks imposing western principles upon foreign artefacts and excludes the possibility of recognising indigenous modes of art historical development. These linear notions of art history are disrupted when one examines the material record of the Middle Period of Cambodia and notes that the Middle Period was marked by a number of returns to Angkor, both literally and metaphorically. These returns are characterised by the renovation of temples and iconography to suit a Theravādin context and this recognition and modification of Angkor demonstrates indigenous historiography in practice. The evidence of a cult of Maitreya during the Middle Period sensitises us to the conception of history which is based upon a cyclical understanding of events, in accord with Buddhist world-views. In this conception of temporality, past and future collapse as events yet to happen are already inscribed in the events of the past. As Thompson has argued,

as history is not strictly perceived [in the Theravāda Buddhist context] in terms of linear progress, the nation is not simply the product of historical evolution. The past is not simply a series of layers for the archaeologist to uncover. The past is rather wholly present now, in new form.<sup>69</sup>

Such an understanding of history complicates a linear narrative of development and dictates that a mode of art historical enquiry must be receptive to such a characterisation of the movement of history. The four-face configuration emerges in the

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<sup>69</sup> Thompson, 'Buddhism in Cambodia, Rupture and Continuity', 148.

Middle Period as symbolic of the cult of Maitreya and cyclical time, as well as acting as a potent symbol of royal power. The authority of the four-faces in conferring royal power no doubt arose from the connection between the king and Maitreya, and the association between the king and the righteous ruler. Yet, the use of this iconographic form also points to a recovery of an Angkorian motif.

The following chapter examines the reign of Jayavarman VII, who is said to be the greatest of Cambodian rulers. Although this notion is primarily the result of European scholarship on Cambodia feeding into indigenous discourses, the king was nonetheless conscious of recording his own legendary deeds, in accord with most Angkorian kings. Nevertheless, his reign marked a radical departure from what had come before. The coming chapters seek to explore the nature of that departure and the consequences of its description in the scholarly record. The citations of Angkor, specifically the reworkings of the four-faced configuration of Jayavarman VII, become explicit in later twentieth-century copies of the Bayon faces. The interplay between the colonial visions of Angkor, the legacies of western art historiography, and indigenous approaches to history, which have intermingled with tourist expectations and post-war reconstructions, will be teased out in the concluding chapters of this thesis.



## **Chapter Two: Jayavarman VII and Architectures of Confidence: (Re-)Establishing Order and Asserting Kingship**

Full of deep sympathy for the good of the world the king expresses this wish: all the souls who are plunged in the ocean of existence, may I be able to rescue them by virtue of this good work. May all the kings of Cambodia, devoted to the right, carry on my foundation, and attain for themselves and their descendants, their wives, their officials, their friends, a holiday of deliverance in which there will never be any sickness.<sup>1</sup>

At the height of its power, the Cambodian people succumbed under the crushing burden of the glory of its kings. Above the ruins of its former splendour, remains the mysterious smile of the faces of Jayavarman the living Buddha.<sup>2</sup>

Jayavarman VII, widely regarded as the last great king of Angkor, marked the return of a Khmer king at Angkor after several decades of unrest. His reign also signalled the beginning of the end of some four centuries of artistic and political creation which constituted the Angkor Empire and marked a shift in the state religion to Mahāyāna Buddhism. This religious shift was probably partly prompted by the upheavals which preceded his reign and it resulted in novel artistic expressions of kingship. This chapter serves as an introduction to the key constituents of the reign of Jayavarman VII and explores the ways in which his court maintained and developed the Angkorian traditions of temple building as an expression of royal power, but in the context of urgent political imperatives wrought by a period of war at Angkor and in an altered religious framework. From this investigation key tropes emerge which portray a king with incredible military prowess who nonetheless expressed his devotion to Buddhism and his compassionate quest to ease the suffering of his people. But these tropes have motivated the historiography of the last century in both colonial and indigenous perspectives.

In examining commemorative inscriptions and bas-reliefs I wish to demonstrate that the formation of a legendary narrative occurs during the reign of Jayavarman VII

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<sup>1</sup> George Cœdès, quoting Jayavarman VII's hospital edicts, in *Angkor, An Introduction*, trans. by Emily Floyd Gardiner (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1963), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Cœdès offering his own interpretation of the period of Jayavarman VII's rule. *Jayavarman VII: Un Grand Roi Du Cambodge*, 40.

himself, and these documents slip between myth, fact, and legend. The Buddhist monarch par excellence, King Aśoka, is perhaps the best illustration, in this context, of the manner in which legends are born, disperse and develop diachronically – Aśoka is the paradigmatic Buddhist king.<sup>3</sup> This fabled king's acts of religious propagation and piety are known in legend throughout the Buddhist world and act as a model for Buddhist kingship. However the rock edicts he erected, and which provided textual accounts of his persona-as-king, were only correctly translated in 1837.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, there are numerous parallels which can be drawn between the legendary persona of Aśoka and that of Jayavarman VII. In differing ways these historical figures were recalled in indigenous histories; Aśoka was immortalised in legends which reached far beyond India, while Jayavarman VII was not remembered by name but via implicit citations of Angkor, and in the stories which place his state-temple at the origin of the country of Cambodia, which local inhabitants of the area still recall (we return to this legend in the following chapter). Yet, both of these kings were reintroduced to history via the scholarly endeavours of colonial structures. The dynamics of these multidimensional historiographies as they pertain to Jayavarman VII, with an emphasis on the art historical strands, will be drawn out over the course of this thesis.

According to the archives left to us, Jayavarman fought his way to the throne after the years of warfare and turmoil at Angkor which preceded his coronation. This presents us with a paradoxically benevolent and violent king who went to great lengths to demonstrate his Buddhist compassion, yet was an accomplished military fighter who engaged huge numbers of people in building and maintaining his vast temple complexes. This mirrors legendary accounts of Aśoka, whose blood-thirsty warrior tendencies were tempered by his conversion to Buddhism, which led him to great acts of donation to support the religion. Such a paradox in kingship is in accord with the tensions constantly at play in the very figure of the *cakravartin* - the sovereign of the world who is aligned with military power and with creating the right conditions for the arrival of a Buddha on earth. The notion of the *cakravartin* pre-dates Buddhism, but in Buddhist thought the worthiness and righteousness of the *cakravartin* is intimately

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<sup>3</sup> For a precise treatment of the legend of Aśoka see John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka* (Princeton: Princeton University Press., 1983). John Holt has examined the replication of Aśokan kingship in acts of legitimating kingship in the Sri Lankan context. See John Holt, *The Religious World of Kirti Śrī: Buddhism, Art, and Politics of Late Medieval Sri Lanka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, 5-30.

aligned with the prosperity of the world.<sup>5</sup> The term itself encompasses both a world renouncer (a Buddha) and a world conqueror (the king).<sup>6</sup>

Jayavarman's military conquests were documented in his architectural works, although his impressive building programme was primarily concerned with demonstrating his own association with the divine, as both apotheosis and through virtuous public works to ease the suffering of his people. Nevertheless these works of compassionate piety also held a political dimension and this chapter constitutes an exploration of the politico-religious as it intersects with the artistic output of the period. This chapter concludes with an account of this remarkable building programme which was the most ambitious attempted by any Cambodian monarch in terms of scale and proliferation. This chapter will set the scene for the following chapters on the innovative face towers as well as the other artistic dimensions of his reign.

### **The Persona of the King**

The persona of the king must be distinguished from the person who was the king. The latter is an unknowable quantity, especially from the distant temporal vantage point from which we survey twelfth century Cambodia. The persona of the king is the public character of the specific king; a hyperbolic identity, which distinguishes one king from another. This persona includes the king's genealogy and biography. In the case of Angkorian kings this is formulated from what can be reconstructed from official inscriptions, which no doubt vary to some extent from veracious historical events. At Angkor, the persona of the king is most readily articulated by the visual culture of a reign. Modern historiography has defined and categorised the artistic output based upon the king it was associated with, often under the moniker of that king's state-temple (for example: Baphuon style and Bayon style). Yet the relationship between art and the king is not a convention invented by modern-day art historians. It is unknowable the degree to which the person of the king was involved in the art-making, however it is clear that the reigns of major kings correlate with degrees of innovation to the extent that an individual king's persona, or signature, was asserted through art production. Although Jayavarman VII is considered the first king to have been immortalised in a 'true'

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<sup>5</sup> Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, 48-49.

<sup>6</sup> For a thorough exploration of this see, Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: a Study of Religion and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

portrait, this does not refute the specific authorship of previous kings. Ashley Thompson has noted that the epigraphy of the ninth-century king Yaśovarman I (reign 889-910 CE) refers to his statuary programme as “works of his own art” (*sva śilpa racita*). The usage of the term “*sva śilpa*” reveals a ‘distinctively individualistic or personal relationship’ between the king and his statues.<sup>7</sup> As Thompson writes in a footnote to this rich essay, the designation of artistic styles under the rubric of the name of the king, or the name of king’s state-temple, has wide-reaching ideological implications. Citing a number of examples she writes ‘characteristics of style (rigid, hieratic, supple, naturalistic, etc.) are, implicitly and explicitly, imbued in the scholarly literature with moral and political meaning, such that that (artistic) nature of the style is taken as the (political) nature of the reign’.<sup>8</sup> There is a risk then of conflating artistic signature with the politics and personality of the king himself. To be attuned to the distinction between legendary persona – revealed in material artefacts - and historical veracity averts the risk of speculating or evaluating the individual personality of king according to the legendary material record left to us. This distinction is precedent to the division of the king’s two bodies made by Ernst H. Kantorowicz in his study of medieval European political conceptions of kingship.<sup>9</sup> Historical specificities of his study and the socio-religious Angkorian context vary, nevertheless the dual-body theory he proposes is a worthy of consideration because in essence it applies to the very conception and institution of kingship itself.<sup>10</sup> In Kantorowicz’s schema the body of the king is separated into the king’s physical body, which is subject to illness and ultimately death, and the king’s body politic or his spiritual body which transcends his physical form and allows for the continuity of the office of kingship after the king’s physical death, best demonstrated in the expression ‘The king is dead; long live the king!’. The separation of bodies into what can be surmised as a physical, material body, and a transcendent or immaterial body, ensures continuity after death. We return to the division of bodies more precisely when examining conventions of representation in Chapter Four, but it is nonetheless crucial to assert that the material examined within the

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<sup>7</sup> Ashley Thompson, ‘Angkor Revisited. The State of Statuary’, in *What’s the Use of Art? Asian Visual Culture and Material in Context*, ed. by Jan Mrázek and Morgan Pikelka (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 182.

<sup>8</sup> Thompson, ‘Angkor Revisited. The State of Statuary’, 208, n.16.

<sup>9</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

<sup>10</sup> See also, Ashley Thompson, ‘The Suffering of Kings. Substitute Bodies, Healing, and Justice in Cambodia’, in *History, Buddhism and New Religious Movements in Cambodia*, ed. by John Marston and Elizabeth Guthrie (Bangkok: Silkwork, 2006), 92-93.

present chapter is read in order to demonstrate political and historiographic processes, rather than to identify the precise dimensions of Jayavarman VII ‘the man’.

### **Angkor’s First Buddhist King**

Jayavarman VII took the throne of Angkor in 1181/2 CE. Only one dated inscription has been identified from between c. 1150 - when King Suryavarman II, Jayavarman VII’s cousin and builder of Angkor Wat died - and 1182, meaning the precise details of events during Jayavarman VII’s early adulthood are unclear. Consequently, inscriptions written during his reign and under his instruction detail most of what is known about his early life and accession to the throne. From the extant epigraphy it can be surmised that he was born in Jayādityapura, the precise location of which is still disputed, between 1120 and 1125 - although Groslier dates his birth to circa 1145 - into the Mahīdharapura dynasty, who ruled Cambodia in the eleventh century. The established view is that he passed through and spent time at Preah Khan of Kompong Svay, approximately 100 kilometres to the east of Angkor, while working to re-conquer Angkor.<sup>11</sup>

The Buddhist orientation of the Bayon and its association with Jayavarman VII was confirmed in the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1925 the Director of the École française d’Extrême-Orient, Louis Finot established the Buddhist nature of the temple and the 1933 discovery of a three-metre tall Buddha sheltered by a *nāga* in the central well at the Bayon complemented the detailed epigraphic work by Cœdès firmly dating the construction of the Bayon to the reign of Jayavarman VII. The final layout of the Bayon strongly indicates that its original design was modified during construction, a move which has been interpreted as evidence of religious doctrinal shifts occurred during its construction. Art historian Philippe Stern’s designation of three phases of the evolution of the ‘Bayon-style’ of art (not the temple construction itself) roughly maps onto the first, second and third decades of Jayavarman VII’s rule.<sup>12</sup> Stern argued that the first decade was defined by the triad of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas Lokeśvara and Prajñāpāramitā; the second phase saw a shift towards a Lokeśvara cult. The final phase

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<sup>11</sup> For details of the Mahīdharapura dynasty see George Cœdès article ‘Nouvelles données chronologiques et généalogiques sur la dynastie de Mahīdharapura’ in *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient*, (1929), 297–330.

<sup>12</sup> Philippe Stern, *Les monuments khmers du style du Bâyon et Jayavarman VII*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965).

included the completion of the Bayon temple and the construction of face towers and shift towards the Tantric deity Hevajra, according to art historian Hiram Woodward.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that the Buddhism of Jayavarman VII remained similar to that which was propagated in tenth-century Cambodia under Kīrtipaṇḍita, who was a significant Mahāyāna Buddhist teacher – indeed his name means ‘renowned teacher’ – at Wat Sithor in Kompong Cham province. This was a Mahāyāna Buddhism with a strong emphasis on the triad of the Buddha, Lokeśvara, and Prajñāpāramitā, with some esoteric elements, although the Tantric Buddhism of the early twelfth-century temple of Phimai, situated in modern-day northern Thailand, likely contributed tantric features.<sup>14</sup> More recently Woodward has noted that it was most likely during Jayavarman VII’s lifetime that Buddhism in Cambodia radically shifted towards Theravāda Buddhism, probably due to events in Thailand and Burma.<sup>15</sup> Although this is a compelling hypothesis, Woodward offers scant evidence for this interpretation, but it does suggest that some of the modifications to Mahāyāna imagery at Angkor Thom could have occurred during his reign or at a later period by Theravādin monarchs. Wat Phra Phai Luang temple, today situated in Thailand, dates from the Jayavarman VII period and it appears that the cult practiced here was partially identifiable as Theravāda.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, several sources claim that the son of Jayavarman VII was ordained as a Theravāda monk in Sri Lanka.<sup>17</sup> The precise dimensions of the Buddhism(s) propagated and practiced by Jayavarman VII are unclear, but the unanswered questions pertaining to the specific doctrinal influences does not prevent posing questions to the aesthetic and political implications of the art of this period. Indeed, as we shall see in the following chapter, the investigation into the precise religious contours has often gone hand-in-hand with the enterprise of ascertaining a singular identification of the face towers.

The precise reasons for the elevation of Buddhism to state-religion in the late twelfth century remain unclear but the religious shift nevertheless represents a clear

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<sup>13</sup> Hiram W. Woodward, ‘Tantric Buddhism at Angkor Thom’, *Ars Orientalis*, 12 (1981), 61-62.

<sup>14</sup> Bhattacharya, ‘Religions of Ancient Angkor’, 47.

In a recent article Sharrock argues that tantric Buddhism existed in Cambodia prior to the twelfth century and that the tenth-century Buddhist revival in Cambodia was orientated towards tantric Vajrayāna.

Peter D. Sharrock, ‘Kīrtipaṇḍita and the Tantras in tenth century Cambodia’, 203-37.

<sup>15</sup> Hiram W. Woodward, ‘Esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia in the Light of Recent Scholarship’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 35 (2004), 352.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, ‘Mémoires du Cambodge’, 57

<sup>17</sup> As recorded in *Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, trans. by Pe Maung Tin and G.H. Luce, (Rangoon: Burma Research Society, 1960).

rupture with the past, with political and social impulses. Indologist Jean Filliozat was the first to suggest that monks from North Indian universities fleeing Muslim invaders may have sought sanctuary in Cambodia due to the presence there of a Mahāyāna king.<sup>18</sup> Jean Boisselier and Peter D. Sharrock have subsequently argued that this migration may have influenced the Buddhist developments of Jayavarman VII's reign, such as the face towers, which are compared to the stūpas-with-faces found in the Kathmandu valley.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, a north Indian exodus reaching Cambodia is presently a hypothesis without concrete evidence and Sharrock's formulation does not answer the question as to why Jayavarman VII made such a significant break with the past to become the first Buddhist monarch at Angkor. Moreover, it appears that the Nepalese stūpas were constructed much later than the face towers in Cambodia.

### **Warrior King: Recording Legends at Angkor Thom**

The popular story of the king, recounted today in guidebooks and by tour guides at Angkor, tells that the warrior Jayavarman came to the throne after defeating the neighbouring Cham armies who had successfully attacked and occupied Angkor in 1177. Often, this uncomplicated formulation of Jayavarman VII as the defeater of the Cham slips into scholarly writing, further blurring distinctions between myth and fact, allowing legendary narrative to become historical statement. While Jayavarman VII almost certainly fought the Cham in order to take his place on the throne, a straightforward narrative of an indigenous monarch overcoming an occupation by neighbouring enemies does not correlate with what is known of Jayavarman VII's early life.

We can glean information about Jayavarman VII's life before taking the throne from the Phimeanakas inscription (K.485). The stele was found in 1916 at the Phimeanakas temple at Angkor Thom, from whence it gets its name, and was first published by Louis Finot in 1925, with revised translations by George Cœdès in 1942 and Ashley Thompson in 2008.<sup>20</sup> Composed in Sanskrit, apparently by Jayavarman

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<sup>18</sup> Jean Filliozat, 'Emigration of Indian Buddhists to Indo-China c. 1200 AD', in *Studies in Asian History: proceedings of the Asian History Congress 1961*, (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1969), 45-48.

<sup>19</sup> Peter D. Sharrock, 'The Mystery of the Face Towers', in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, ed. by Joyce Clark, (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), 232 – 281.

<sup>20</sup> L. Finot, 'Inscriptions d'Angkor: X, Phimeanakas (k.485. Est.n.241)', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 25, (1925), 374; George Cœdès, 'Grande Stele Du Phimeanakas', in

VII's wife Indradevī, it is unique in Angkorian epigraphy as it appears to have been authored by a woman. Indradevī succeeded her younger sister Jayarājadevī as wife to Jayavarman VII after Jayarājadevī's premature death. The inscription is the elder sister's tribute to a devoted wife and their husband, and it gives insight into the prince's early life away from his family home, from the perspective of the women who endured a long wait for his return.

Based upon epigraphic readings it is likely that the young prince was away in neighbouring Champa. Anne-Valérie Schweyer's studies of Cham epigraphy demonstrate that Jayavarman forged strong alliances during his early adulthood spent in Champa and he gave Cham nobles positions of influence in his court at Angkor after his rise to power.<sup>21</sup> It is thought that when Jayavarman's father, King Dharanindravarman II (ruled 1150–60 CE) died, his son was away from Angkor fighting military campaigns in Champa. Schweyer postulates that Jayavarman VII was still living in Champa when King Yaśovarman - Dharanindravarman II's successor - was killed in 1165 by Tribhuvanādityavaman, who is thought to have been a usurper. After hearing of the events in Angkor, Jayavarman returned to Cambodia, presumably with Cham allies.<sup>22</sup> Was it these same Cham allies who were involved in the circa 1177 Cham attack on Angkor? Claude Jacques and Michael Vickery make persuasive arguments that the battles of succession to the throne in Angkor in the years between Suryavarman II's death and Jayavarman VII's coronation were not simply fought between Champa and Angkor, but were composed of alliances between Khmer and Cham fighters, battling other groups of Khmer and Cham.<sup>23</sup> The only data available for Jayavarman's whereabouts and activities is the Phimeanakas inscription (K.485) and the Prasat Chrung (K.288), the latter of which recounts that Tribhuvanādityavaman was slain by a Cham king. Her thorough examination of extant Cham epigraphy has not found a single

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*Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. II, (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extreme-Orient, 1942); Ashley Thompson, 'Performative Realities: Nobody's Possession', in *At the Edge of the Forest: Essays on Cambodia, History, and Narrative in Honor of David Chandler*, ed. by Judy Ledgerwood and Anne Ruth Hansen (Cornell Southeast Asia Programme, 2008), 93-119.

<sup>21</sup> Anne-Valérie Schweyer, 'The Confrontation of the Khmers and the Chams in the Bayon Period', in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, ed. by Joyce Clark (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), 52-71. Although the Phimeanakas stele is damaged, Cœdès surmises what can be deciphered of stanza XXXVIII-XXXIX of the inscription which describes Jayavarman VII's perilous journey undertaken to Champa and oceans of armies.

Cœdès, 'Grande Stele Du Phimeanakas', 176.

<sup>22</sup> Cœdès, 'Stèle Des Prasat Crun d'Ankor Thom', Sanskrit, 221, French 222.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Vickery, 'Bayon: New Perspectives Reconsidered', 114. Claude Jacques 'The Historical Development of Khmer Culture from the Death of Sūryavarman II to the sixteenth Century', 35-36.

reference to an 1177 attack on Angkor or of a Cham occupation, both of which are reported in Chinese Annals.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, there is presently no archaeological indication of considerable destruction at Angkor during this period, and certainly not at the major temples. The Preah Khan stele and the Prasat Chrung report that Jayavarman killed a Cham king, perhaps in alliance with Khmer and Cham forces. This poses the question of whether he liberated Angkor from Cham rule and occupation, or whether he ousted a (Cham or usurper) king in order to bring the throne back to the Mahīdharapura dynasty.<sup>25</sup>

Further epigraphic analysis lends additional credibility to Vickery and Jacques' argument that the Jayavarman VII fought a number of Khmer contenders to the throne, possibly with the aid of Cham allies. If we look at the Phimeanakas inscription there is evidence of victory over multiple rivals to the throne – Cham or otherwise – and the restoration of order wrought by Jayavarman VII. Stanza XXVI, for example, reads:

(51) bhūir bhūryyātapatre pi pūrvvarājye titāpabhāk  
(52) citram ekātapatre yad yadrājye tāpam atyajay

Sous le règne precedent, la terre, bien qu'ombragée par de nombreux parasols, souffrait d'une chaleur extrême, tandis que sous son règne, où il n'y eut plus qu'un seul parasol, elle fut, chose étrange, délivrée de toute souffrance.

Under the previous reign, the land, though shaded by many parasols, suffered from extremes of heat, while under his [Jayavarman's] reign there was but one parasol, and yet the land, remarkably, was delivered from suffering.<sup>26</sup>

The many parasols are allusions to many kings or would-be rulers. In a footnote to this stanza, Cœdès notes that the reference to the extremes of heat probably relates to the troubles which befell Cambodia between 1150 and 1181.<sup>27</sup> This stanza makes reference to the unifying power of the king, who had but one parasol which managed to quell the heat and end the suffering of the population.

Stanza XIII of the Ta Prohm inscription (K.273) which is also repeated in the Prasat Chrung inscriptions, reads,

(25) śrīmadyaśodharapure dhigatādhirājyo

<sup>24</sup> Although Chinese Annals do not always recount accurate geographic or historic details.

<sup>25</sup> Schweyer, 'The Confrontation of the Khmers and the Chams in the Bayon Period', 67.

<sup>26</sup> Cœdès, 'Grande Stele Du Phimeanakas', Sanskrit 165, French 175.

<sup>27</sup> Cœdès, 'Grande Stele Du Phimeanakas', 175, n.2.

rājā jitārivisaro jayavarmmadevaḥ  
 (26) āvāridheḥ pratidiśan nicakhāna kīrtti-  
 stambhān mahīdharapurābhijanāspado yaḥ

Ayant obtenu la royauté suprême dans le ville sainte de Yaçodharapura, le roi Jayavarmadva, vainqueur de la masse de ses ennemis, planta dans toutes les directions jusqu'à la mer des piliers de gloire, et fixa la residence de sa race à Mahīdharapura.

Having obtained supreme royalty in the holy city of Yaśodharapura, the king Jayavarmadeva, victor over the mass of his enemies, erected in all directions as far as the sea pillars of his glory, and fixed the residence of his dynasty at Mahīdharapura.<sup>28</sup>

Stanza LXXXIII of the southwest Prasat Chrung stele suggests that some nobles of the court of Angkor were initially opponents of Jayavarman:

(41) jitadviṣo vāhuvalena yasya  
 mantripravirā vijitā dviṣo pi  
 (42) apipravṛddhābhyudayopabhogā  
 Dattodayāt pratyupakāratapāḥ

Les hauts mandarins ennemis eux-mêmes, vaincus par la force de son bras victorieux, voyant la jouissance de leurs biens augmentée par l'avancement qu'il leur donnait, étaient brûlants de gratitude.

The high mandarins themselves enemies, vanquished by the strength of his victorious arm, seeing the enjoyment of their property increased by the promotion he gave them, were burning with gratitude.<sup>29</sup>

The reference to a 'mass of enemies' in each of these stanzas is a typical reference to the superlative military might of the king; the glorification of victory over all kings is a significant trope of kingship. But read alongside the Phimeanakas inscription, this reference also indicates there were multiple contenders to the throne, probably both Khmer and Cham from competing dynasties. Furthermore, while Jayavarman was fighting several aspirant kings at Angkor, we can postulate that he also battled neighbouring polities in order to bring them under his domination as vassal states. Indeed, we know that Jayavarman VII's influence extended from the Gulf of

<sup>28</sup> George Cœdès, 'La Stèle de Ta-Prohm', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, Vol.6, No.1-2 (1906), Sanskrit, 18, French, 39.

<sup>29</sup> Cœdès, 'Stèles des Prasat Crun d'Angkor Thom', Sanskrit 217, French, 228.

Siam in the west to the coast of present-day Vietnam to the east and north into Laos, which constituted the largest expansion of the Khmer empire (fig. 14).<sup>30</sup>

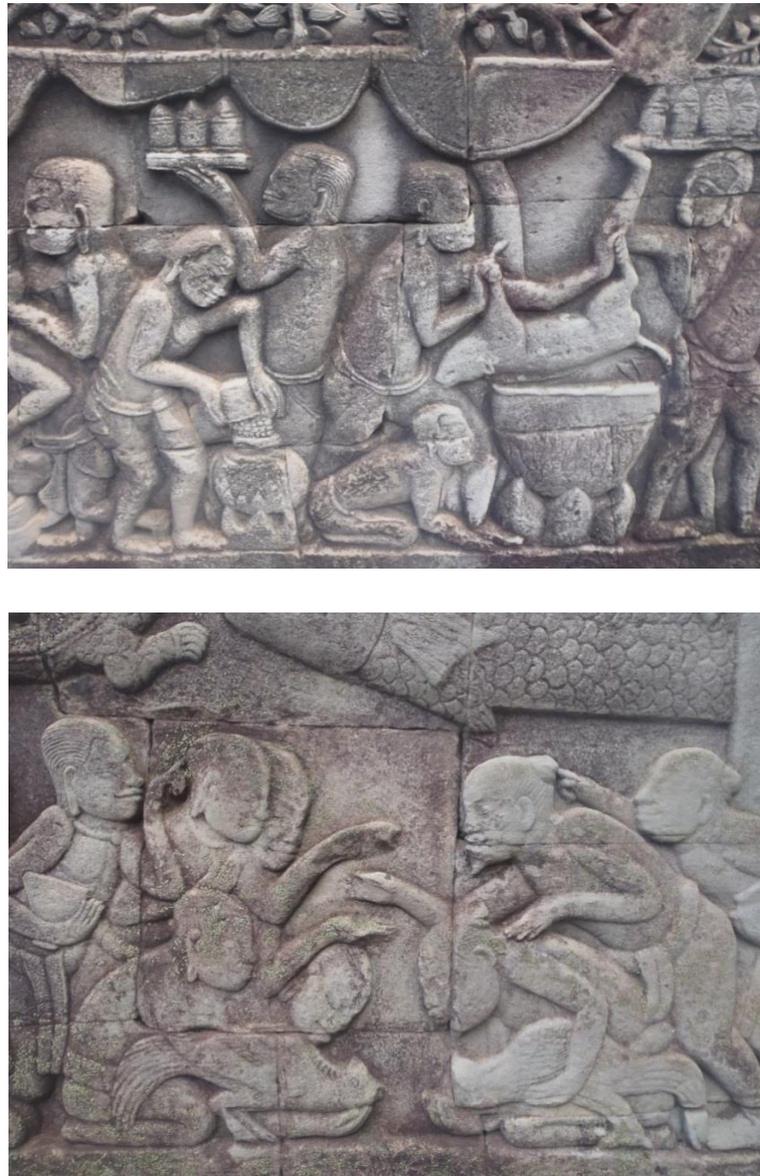


Figure 10. Scenes of cooking and cock-fighting on the southern outer gallery of the Bayon. Photographs by author, 2012.

The notion that the battle to win the throne was fought between Khmer on one side and Cham on the other is generally supported by the many metres of bas-reliefs which depict scenes of war at the Bayon temple. The bas-reliefs of the north, east and

<sup>30</sup> Louis Finot was the first to recognise the potential breadth of Jayavarman VII's empire when he noted the similarity between the Say Fong hospital inscription, located by Georges Maspéro near Vientiane in Laos and a stele which had been found in Nha-Trang in the south central region of Vietnam. Louis Finot, 'L'inscription Sanskrite de Say-Fong : II. L'inscription Sanskrite de Say- Kong', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 1903, 18–33.

west outer galleries of the Bayon show troops marching into battle and engaging in warfare on land and on water. The southern gallery depicts people cooking and troops parading or marching, with a certain ambiguity as to whether this is taking place before and after the battle; these scenes can be read as either the beginning or the end of the narrative. The Cham and Khmer are easily distinguished by their hair and costume and in the majority of the scenes the unidirectional movement of the soldiers makes it clear that it is a fight between two distinct groups. These bas-reliefs have generally been interpreted as evidence of a great battle between Cham and Khmer, supporting the popular narrative.

The emphasis placed on Khmer prowess in the historical record is entirely expected and generally the content of the bas-reliefs conforms to the notion of superior Khmer might. Yet in a handful of scenes it is more difficult to ascertain who is allied with whom. At the northern end of the eastern gallery a Khmer and a Cham warrior are mounted on an elephant which indicates their higher status (fig. 11). The Khmer warrior, one leg raised upon the decorated howdah, takes aim with a bow and arrow, while the Cham fighter sits astride the elephant's neck, his left hand pointing at the battle and his right hand pulled back poised to throw a spear. This Cham warrior, surrounded by Khmer fighters and sat upon the same mount as the Khmer warrior, is approaching the Cham troops. Is he in alliance with the Khmer army? Or has the Khmer warrior - his back foot balanced on the tail of the elephant and arrow pointed towards the Cham fighter's head - just climbed his way onto the elephant's back? The former interpretation is more probable, as the latter represents an unusual disruption to the otherwise singular directionality of the fighters and the clarity of the narration in the battle scenes.



Figure 11. Detail of bas-relief from the northern end of the Eastern Gallery of the outer enclosure of the Bayon. Photograph by author, 2011.

In scenes on the bas-relief of the western gallery, there appears to be Khmer fighting against Khmer, although this can also be interpreted as soldiers in training for battle. Nevertheless, these ambiguities in an otherwise straightforward narration of battle are telling and hint that the war consisted of more complex alliances than simply Khmer versus Cham. It is possible that the bas-reliefs at the Bayon are not depictions of actual battles but are commemorative representations of celebratory re-enactments of the war, which were staged by Jayavarman VII on the anniversary of his victory. The very nature of the bas-reliefs makes it impossible to say with any certainty whether this is the correct interpretation; a re-enactment would be more or less indistinguishable from the original it was restaging. In several scenes of hand-to-hand combat between soldiers severed heads litter the ground; what role did these indications of decapitation play in the restaging? If what we see at the bas-reliefs is a re-enactment, then the annual restaging promoted the Khmer victory over the Cham, with what appear to be a notable inclusion of a handful of Cham allies. The recording in stone of the battle – and/or re-enactment – gives a narrative of Khmer versus Cham but with a tacit recognition of some alliances between the Cham and Khmer.

The interpretation of the art and epigraphy is given here to demonstrate the historical uncertainty surrounding events preceding Jayavarman VII ascending to the throne and to complicate the popular narrative ascribed to this period today. However, it must be remembered that the overwhelming number of bas-reliefs and epigraphic details attest to his unmatched military power. What is of importance is that the bas-reliefs construct a narrative of Jayavarman's victory over *all* of his enemies, Khmer and Cham alike, proving his worth as a monarch. What emerges from the carvings and epigraphy are two crucial points: Jayavarman's kingship put an end to a period of civil unrest, if not war, at Angkor, and recovery of the capital necessitated the re-establishment of faith in institutions of kingship to assert Khmer superiority in the region.

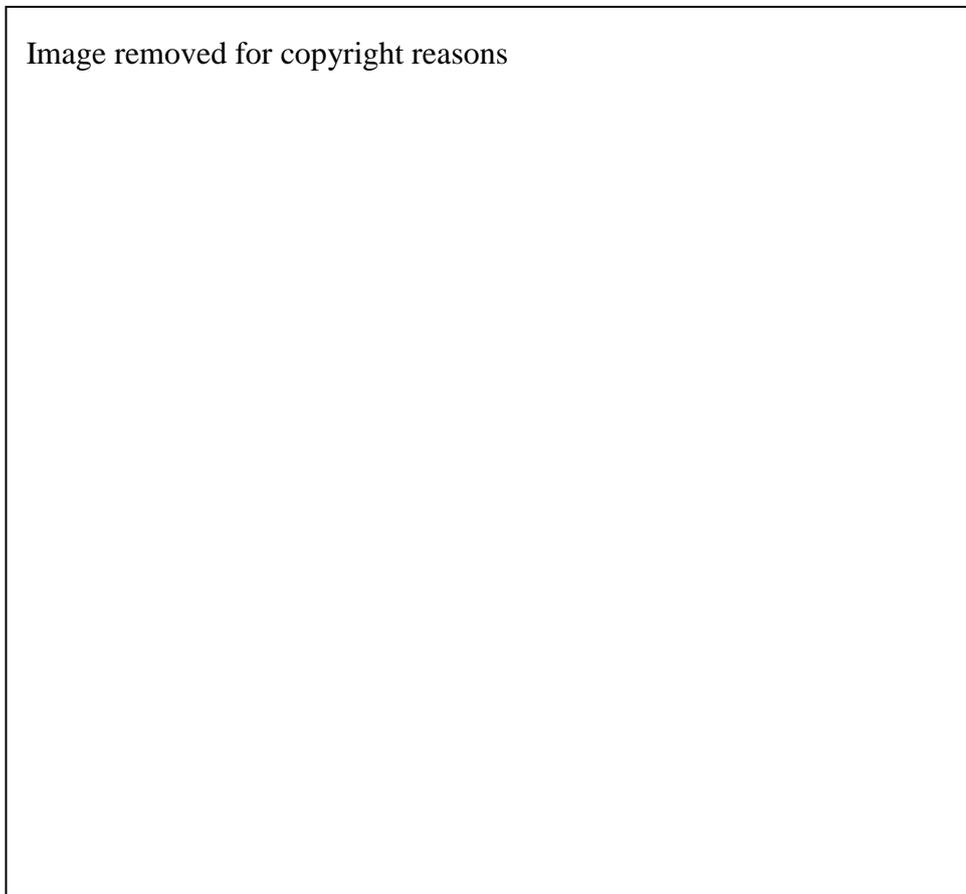


Figure 12. The presumed layout of Angkor before Jayavarman VII's construction programme. Plan by Olivier Cunin, in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, 143.

## Jayavarman VII: Prodigious Builder at Angkor

During his kingship, Jayavarman VII embarked upon the largest construction programme ever undertaken by any monarch in Cambodia's history. In common with previous Angkorian kings his architectural and artistic programme focussed on a remodelling of the capital, remaking the physical and social space through an incorporation of temples built by his predecessors, such as the Baphuon and Phimeanakas, into the new city plan. This integration of existing temples was not new to Jayavarman VII's reign. Indeed as each new monarch consecrated a new state-temple its foundational stele implored his successors to maintain his temple, as he had maintained those of his ancestors. Thus, the visual landscape of Angkor constituted a dialectic of the maintenance of tradition with stylistic developments that became emblematic of the particular king, evidence of their dedication to continuity, tradition and innovation.

However, the level of innovation offered by Jayavarman VII is notable. Jayavarman VII's construction schedule probably resembled that of other great Angkorian monarchs.<sup>31</sup> First, the building of public works such as artificial lakes (baray), monasteries or rest houses, which was followed by the consecration of a temple, or temples, dedicated to the king's parents, grandparents, and other ancestors. Finally, the king would construct his own temple mountain, realigning the symbolic centre of the royal city from the state-temple of their predecessor, and thus the centre of the divine cosmos, since the temple-mountain was symbolic of Mount Meru.

Jayavarman VII adhered to this prescribed model and his impressive building programme extended to constructing roads, bridges, and rest-houses. These served the population, in order to fulfil the king's public desire to ease their sufferings, but also could have enabled the king to better attend to uprisings outside of the capital as well as open overland trade routes.<sup>32</sup> Crucially he adapted this model significantly. The distribution of the rest houses was standardised, so that one was found at roughly every

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<sup>31</sup> Archaeologist Christine Hawixbrock is among scholars who have noted the continuities as well as the ruptures, of the late twelfth century. See, 'Jayavarman VII Ou Le Renouveau d'Angkor, Entre Tradition et Modernité', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 1998, 71.

<sup>32</sup> Chandler, *History of Cambodia*, 70-71.

15 kilometres along the main roadways.<sup>33</sup> The three earlier reservoirs at Angkor each have an island at their centre with a temple.<sup>34</sup> Neak Pean, the central temple of the Jayatatakā, the baray Jayavarman constructed (also known as the North Baray), is unique among Angkorian temples in that it consists of a quincunx of ponds (fig.13). The central pond has a tower at its midpoint, from under which the heads and tails of two intertwined nāga appear. A statue of Balaha, an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara represented as a horse, is situated to the east of the tower. The four surrounding ponds are fed water from the central pond, via the mouths of a variety of animal heads. It is thought that Neak Pean is meant to symbolise the mythical lake Anavatapta, said to be located in the Himalayas and whose waters are thought to cure all illness. Along with this central “hospital” temple, Jayavarman VII founded 102 hospitals across his territory, which he extended east into Champa and north-west into modern-day Thailand and Laos.

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<sup>33</sup> For a recent archeological survey of these rest-houses, including the fire temples associated with them, see Mitch Hendrickson, ‘People Around The Houses With Fire: Archaeological Investigation Of Settlement Around The Jayavarman VII “Resthouse” Temples’, *Udaya*, 9 (2008), 63–77.

<sup>34</sup> Yasovarman I built Lolei at the centre of the Indratataka baray which he constructed at his capital at Hariharalaya in the ninth century. In the tenth century Rajendravarman constructed the East Mebon temple at the centre of the East baray, the construction of which was started by Yasovarman I in the late ninth century. Construction of the West baray probably began in the 11<sup>th</sup> century under the reign of Suryavarman II and at its centre the West Mebon was constructed. A large, bronze reclining Viṣṇu was found here in 1936.



Figure 13. A view the central pond of Neak Pean. Photograph by author, 2011.



Figure 14. Map showing the reach of the Angkorian Empire during Jayavarman VII's reign.

In common with previous monarchs Jayavarman VII consecrated temples to his parents, although he did this on an unprecedented scale. In 1186 Ta Prohm was dedicated to his mother, apotheosised as Prajnāpāramitā, the Perfection of Wisdom. Preah Khan at Angkor Thom was dedicated to his father in 1191, apotheosised as Lokeśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion. The large nāga-protected Buddha discovered in the central well of the Bayon would have been the temple's principle image. Based upon the extant inscriptions, the discovery of the large seated Buddha, and knowledge that earlier kings installed statues to honour the cult kingship associated with gods, it can be surmised that the Bayon was dedicated to the Buddha and was the king's own temple.<sup>35</sup> These three temples form an architectural triad of Lokeśvara-Buddha-Prajnāpāramitā, a triad which was represented sculpturally on a smaller-scale during

<sup>35</sup> See Cœdès analysis of the monuments as temples and tombs, a dual function which illuminates much of the double-meaning and preoccupation with the living after death with dominated Angkor.

George Cœdès, 'Ankor Vat, Temple Ou Tombeau?', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 33 (1933), 303–309

Jayavarman VII's reign. This triad neatly symbolises the Mahāyāna notion that out of the union between wisdom (*prajñā*) - the mother of enlightenment - and compassion (*karuṇā*) – from the father - comes enlightenment, i.e. the Buddha. Jayavarman VII succeeded in representing this dialectical relationship on a monumental scale which can be seen to provide credence to his legitimacy to the throne.

In accordance with earlier Angkorian kings, Jayavarman VII's artistic and architectural programme focused on remodelling his capital, yet he was the first monarch to construct thick, high walls and moats to enclose the city of Yaśodharapura – known today as Angkor Thom (fig. 15). The city walls are punctuated by five gateways, one in the mid-point of each wall on each cardinal direction; a fifth gateway, known as Victory Gate, is found north of the eastern gate and marks the historical road from the temple of Ta Keo to the Royal Palace. Other temples attributed to his reign include the Prasat Chrung temples situated in each corner of the Angkor Thom walls, Ta Prohm, Banteay Kdei, Neak Pean, Ta Som, Preah Khan, Krol Ko and Ta Nei, all of which are in the central Angkor region, as well as Banteay Chhmar, Wat Nokor in present day Kompong Cham province and Ta Prohm at Tonle Bati, located 20km from Phnom Penh. We revisit these temples in the following chapter.

No other Angkorian monarch undertook such an expansive building programme and the labour involved almost defies comprehension. The inscription of Ta Prohm provides an insight into the human resources required to maintain such a grand temple complex; 79,365 people were required to serve and support this temple alone, which included 18 priests, 2,740 officiates, 2,202 assistants and 615 dancers.<sup>36</sup> The stele also details the wealth owned by the temple, which included golden dishes, diamonds, precious stones, and silks, and the supplies required which included rice, butter, oil, honey, sandalwood and clothes for each of the statues.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cœdès, 'La Stèle de Ta-Prohm', 23–26.

<sup>37</sup> Cœdès, 'La Stèle de Ta-Prohm', 44–86.



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Figure 15. Plan of Angkor at the end of the thirteenth century, after Jayavarman VII's architectural programme. Map by Olivier Cunin, *Bayon: New Perspectives*, 139.

## Conclusion

From this abstruse picture of the exact contours of the Buddhism and the events prior to his reign emerges an image of a king who established an empire via a combination of war and pious acts of public charity. Politically speaking these decisions were concerned with (re-)establishing confidence in royal order and authority after the civil unrest, caused by a possible Cham incursion, and concerned with expanding the reach of the Khmer Empire. Jayavarman VII retained an insistence on the king as the essential body of order, but re-configured the body of the king so that it mapped onto a Buddhist cosmology by reworking the cult of the *devarāja* which had previously been expressed through an association with Śiva or Viṣṇu. The association between the king and the divine, the *devarāja* - whatever it was believed to be precisely - was expressed in state-temple architecture and the artefacts they contained. Based upon evidence in the Sanskrit inscriptions, these legitimated royal power via the notion that the royal-divine association offered absolute protection of sovereignty and would ensure the stability and prosperity of the realm. This very notion must have been thoroughly compromised by the unrest which occurred at the heart of the capital in the middle of the twelfth century. The need to form new structures to support royal power, in order to recuperate the prosperity of the country and faith in the cult of the king, was surely a strong

motivational factor in the religious and artistic decisions made during Jayavarman VII's reign.

We find in Jayavarman VII's persona a king who publically recorded, and is remembered as being, motivated by Buddhist piety to reduce the suffering of his people, either in the here and now, or by meritorious acts which would accrue positive karmic consequences for the country, such as the building of numerous hospitals, roads, and rest houses. The edicts which were erected at the 102 hospitals which Jayavarman VII built across the region feature the oft-cited stanza “[h]e suffered the illnesses of his subjects more than his own; because it is the pain of the public that is the pain of kings rather than their own pain”.<sup>38</sup> These devotional acts intersect with the political and aesthetic decisions of his rule, which saw often extant state politico-religious concepts made materially manifest in the art and architecture. The temples Jayavarman VII had built were in many ways analogous with the temples of his forbearers, yet extant concepts were exploited on a monumental scale.

Crucially these efforts were recorded publically in bas-reliefs and inscriptions which offer insight into his public persona as king. Contemporary historical records – primarily the bas-reliefs and the inscriptions – present a legendary account of the king's ascension to the throne, but a careful examination of these records demonstrates that the history recorded a more complex alliance than simply a narrative of a war between the Khmer and the Cham. Nevertheless, the historical archive created during Jayavarman VII's reign constitutes a narrative asserting Khmer glory and dominance and this legendary history has re-emerged in present-day Cambodia via the practices of colonial scholarship. In light of colonial narratives of cultural decline which spurred the imperial imperative to save a disappearing race - as described in Chapter One - it is understandable why a narrative of an indigenous monarch overcoming an occupation by neighbouring enemies appealed to the collective Khmer imagination. The narrative of a legendary king does not only emerge in colonial and contemporary accounts of the king; it appears in the legends that were documented during the reign of Jayavarman VII himself, both in the bas-reliefs and epigraphy.

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<sup>38</sup> This is stanza XIII in the Say Fong inscription. See Louis Finot, ‘L’inscription Sanskrite de Say-Fong : II. L’inscription Sanskrite de Say- Kong’, 18–33.



## Chapter Three: The Bayon: The Orinary Faces of Cambodia

At the centre of Jayavarman VII's empire stands the Bayon temple, thought to be the king's own "state-temple", and uniquely composed of face towers (fig. 16, 21, 22, and 23). Since the late nineteenth century scholarly interest in the temple has often focused on positing a singular identity to the faces, based upon iconographic and textual interpretations. Yet, there is still no scholarly consensus as to the identity of the faces. Their uniformity up against their individuality poses an intriguing ambiguity, made all the more enticing as identification offers the potential to unlock the precise religious dimensions of Jayavarman VII's reign. This academic endeavour – which has already produced a body of knowledge rich with insight into the political, social, religious, and artistic concerns of the period – is nevertheless hindered by a lacuna in the material evidence. A foundational stele – if the Bayon ever had one – has yet to be unearthed. (The foundational steles of Preah Khan and Ta Prohm temples provide an abundance of information about when the temples were consecrated and to whom they were dedicated.<sup>1</sup>) Moreover, no surviving epigraphy from this period gives a definitive identification of the towers. If there were ever a precise, singular interpretation of the faces then this is a startling omission in the written record, given that the multivalent identifications of other statuary and temple dedications are laid-out relatively explicitly in the great steles and smaller inscriptions of Jayavarman VII's major temples, including the inscriptions of the minor sanctuaries of the Bayon.

The most prominent and compelling academic theories regarding the face towers are critically examined in this chapter, in order to review existing research and to situate my own interpretive framework. I argue that attempts to fix a singular reading of the faces risk excluding the sort of sustained conceptual analysis which the face towers demand and, as such, I eschew such an approach. The iconography is too equivocal for the faces to represent a solitary deity, and these faces resist firm identification. I propose an interpretive framework which argues that the metaphorical and literal emphasis on 'radiating' in the epigraphy and iconography underscores a preoccupation with vision; seeing and not seeing; revealing and concealing. This dynamic is predicated on and exploits the status of the face and the portrait.

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<sup>1</sup> Cœdès, 'La Stèle de Ta-Prohm', 23–26; Cœdès, 'La Stèle Du Prâh Khan d'Ankor', 255–301.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the Bayon and its iconography, with focus given to its face towers. The aim of this description is to give an overview of the architectural and artistic components of the temple, including its layout, bas-reliefs, epigraphy, and statuary. Moreover, the purpose is to highlight the lack of solid iconographic markers, which are so often employed in the identification of Buddhist and Brahmanic statuary. Finally, I wish to stress the absolute integration of the face into the architectural body and to draw attention to the open-eyed faces which fill the scopic field beyond the Bayon. These themes will become crucial to my own interpretative analysis which will be established in this chapter and the next.



Figure 16. Bayon, view from the south-east. Photo by author, 2010

### **The Bayon: The King's 'State-Temple'**

The Bayon is located at the geometric centre of Angkor Thom, Jayavarman VII's capital, known then as Yaśodharapura, which is surrounded by high walls, interrupted by five gateways (fig. 17 and 24). The axis of the East Gate and West Gate passes directly through the horizontal axis of the temple. The axis of the North and South Gates does not pass through the central mass of the temple, but instead runs through a series of galleries to the east of the central tower. The result of this 'shift' of the central tower is that the core of the Bayon runs on the same vertical axis as the Elephant Terrace, situated approximately half a kilometre to the north. This provides a 'visual continuity' between the Elephant Terrace, which was once the location of the Royal Palace, and the king's state temple (fig. 18).<sup>2</sup>

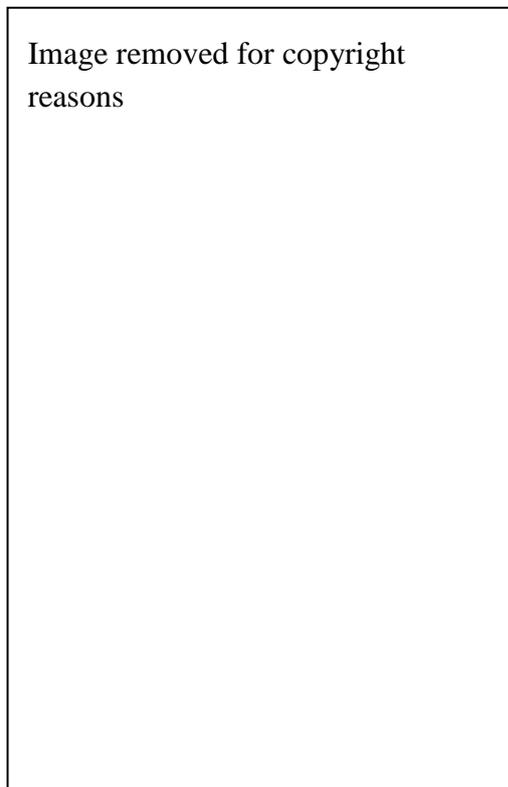


Figure 17. Angkor Thom. Map by Olivier Cunin, in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, 139

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<sup>2</sup> Cunin, 'The Bayon: An Archaeological and Architectural Survey', 141.

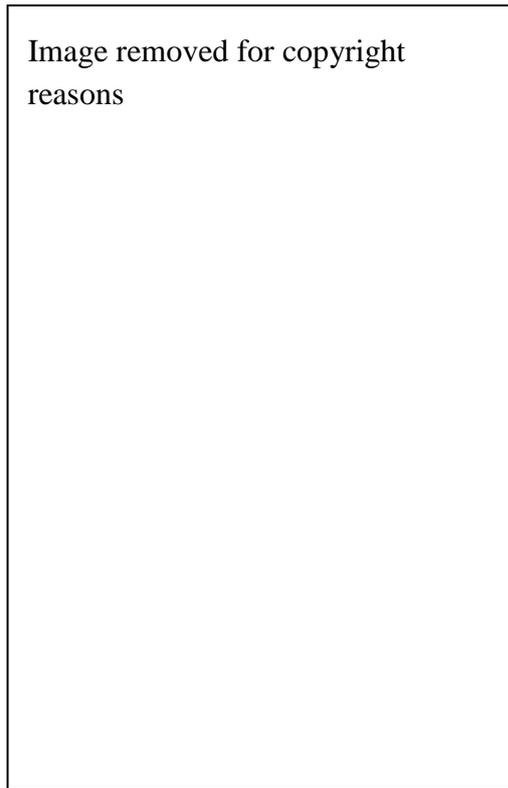


Figure 18. Plan of the royal square at the centre of the walled city of Angkor Thom.  
Plan by Olivier Cunin, in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, 143

The Bayon is composed of three tiers with the main *gopura* (entrance or gateway) at the east, as is common with all Angkorian temples, with the notable exception of Angkor Wat, which opens to the west. The temple complex is rectangular and the first tier consists of an outer enclosing wall with *gopura* at each of the cardinal points, which were likely composed of a formation of towers and galleries. Within these outer walls was an inner enclosure of galleries, decorated with bas-reliefs. As described in the previous chapter, these bas-reliefs depict combat scenes, as well as scenes of everyday life, including people cooking, performing acrobatics, and bartering. A further enclosure of galleries, interrupted by sanctuaries topped with face towers, comprises the second level of the Bayon. These inner galleries depict scenes from Hindu mythology and are thought to be later additions to the temple. The third tier of the temple is a cruciform shape but its central plan is radial, which demonstrates that major reconfigurations occurred in the temple design during construction.<sup>3</sup> The central body of the temple consists of a circular mass rising to height of 42 metres with faces carved into its sides. Architectural historian Olivier Cunin's recent research demonstrates a lag

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<sup>3</sup> See Cunin, 'The Bayon: An Archaeological and Architectural Study', 152-153.

between the construction of the Bayon and the carving of the decoration.<sup>4</sup> Epigraphic evidence on doorjambs of the numerous sanctuaries demonstrates that statues of regional deities were installed beneath each face tower, and identified with the dignitaries who consecrated them by means of an inscription.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, the statue may have physically resembled a (regional) deity, but the identifying inscription was formed of a composite of a real-life dignitary's name and a divine appellation.<sup>6</sup>

In the central sanctuary of the Bayon a large Buddha was installed as the principle image of the temple (fig. 19). This Buddha had lowered eyelids, was seated in *dhyāna-mudra* (meditation pose), and sheltered by a *nāga*. The face of this statue, with its thick-lipped slight-smile, broad nose, and downcast eyes, as well as the form and pose of the body, is analogous to the portrait statues of Jayavarman VII in the pose of a devotee, which will be discussed in the following chapter (fig. 34). The popular scholarly consensus is that the Bayon Buddha depicts the historical Buddha Śākyamuni at the moment of enlightenment, protected by the multiple heads of the *nāga* Mucalinda, although Hiram Woodward suggests that the image should be viewed as a supreme Buddha enveloped by an autochthonous spirit from the waters.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of either interpretation, this Buddha statue represents the apotheosis of Jayavarman VII, in accord with the artistic practices associated with the *devarāja* and, as the central statue of the king's state-temple, the Buddha image would have probably been understood to represent the king.

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<sup>4</sup> Olivier Cunin and Etsuo Uchida, 'Contribution of the magnetic susceptibility of the sandstone to the analysis of architectural history of Bayon style monuments', in Annual Report on the Technical Survey of Angkor Monument, JSA, 2002, 219.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Philippe Groslier, *Indochina, Art in the Melting Pot of Races*, 183; Maxwell, 'Religion at the Time of Jayavarman VII', 91 -93.

<sup>6</sup> First reported by Cœdès in 'Les Inscriptions du Bayon', in *Bulletin de la commission archéologique de L'Indochine*, 1913, 81-91.

<sup>7</sup> Hiram W. Woodward, 'The Bayon-Period Buddha Image in the Kimbell Art Museum', *Archives of Asian Art*, 32 (1979), 72.

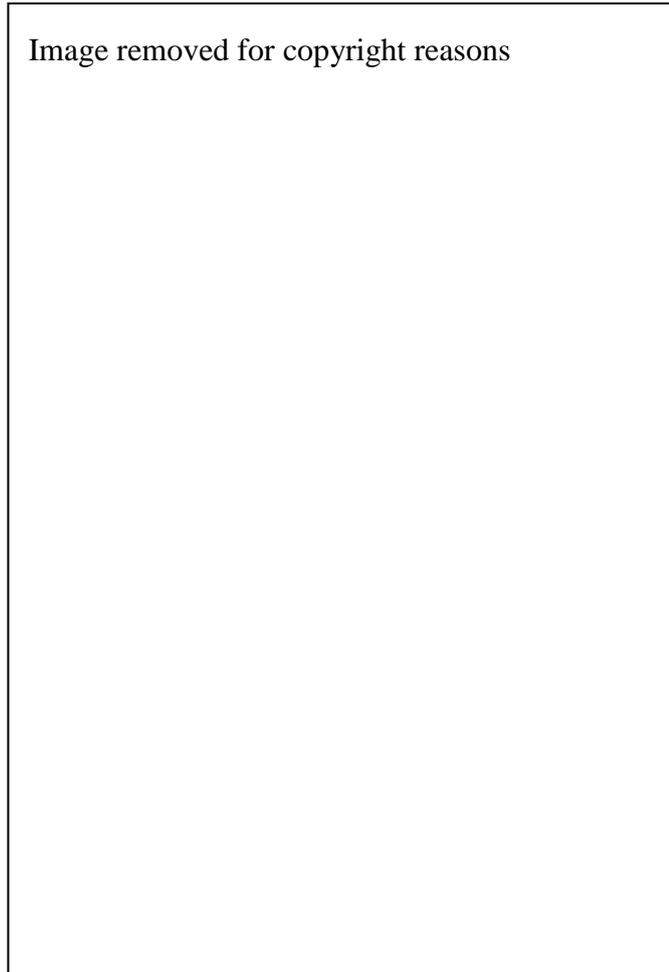


Figure 19. The Buddha found in the central well of the Bayon. From the EFEO Archives, in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, 44.

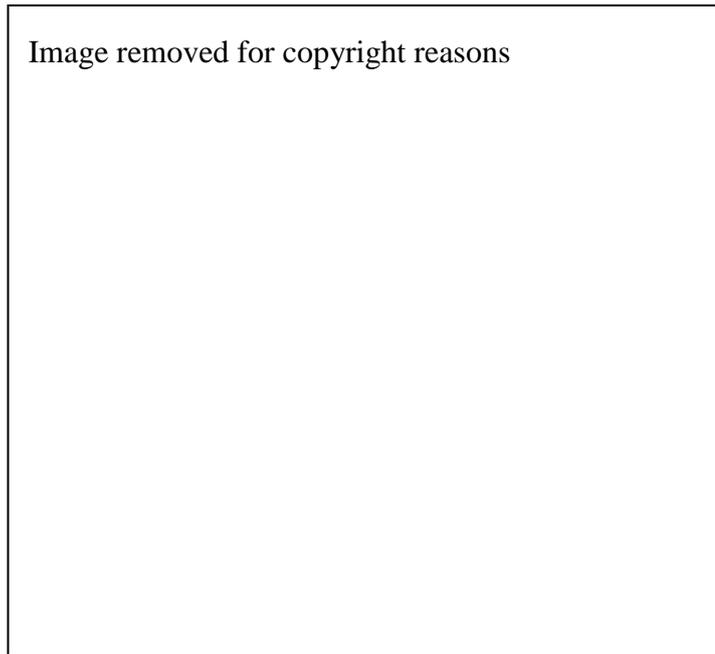


Figure 20. 3D model of the Bayon in its final state. By Olivier Cunin, in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, 166.

### **‘Mysterious Smiles’: The Uncertain Iconography of the Face Towers**

The Bayon temple currently consists of thirty-seven surviving ‘face towers’. Each face tower has a face carved on each of its four sides; some have just three faces because of their position. Cunin has carried out extensive comparative work between the face towers at the Bayon and Banteay Chhmar, in order to plot where face towers which have since collapsed may have appeared at the Bayon.<sup>8</sup> An uncertainty over the exact number of faces does not pose a problem for my own research as it is unlikely that any numerological significance was attached to the faces, beyond the fact that there are many of them. It is their ubiquity which is significant.

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<sup>8</sup> Cunin’s research indicates that there would have been fifty-nine towers in total, including possible towers located in the outer enclosure. He calculates the total number of faces in line with Paul Mus’ proposal that a fourth face is implicated at every tower, even those on which three sides have faces. If we take his proposal seriously, then there are multiple ways to calculate the number of faces and a decision has to be made whether to include the theoretical faces on the sides of the towers which have not been carved due to their position. There are 177 extant faces at the Bayon today, but Cunin estimates the original number of real and virtual faces to be 236 and given the strength of his research this is probably the closest we can get to a precise figure. Cunin, ‘The Bayon: An Archaeological and Architectural Study’, 158-164.



Figure 21. A partially collapsed face tower at the Bayon. A tower on the eastern *gopura* of the third tier of the temple. Photograph by author, 2011.

Each face of the tower is entirely separate and they are not adjoined at the ears. The faces are broad - although their breadth varies - and adorned with a decorated diadem, floral choker, and heavy earrings. Foliate details flow down from the diadem behind the ears. On the majority of towers a tiered tower, which may be suggestive of piled-up hair, rises from above the diadem, culminating in a lotus petal crown. The decorative choker and diadem imply a figure in full regalia and Peter D. Sharrock has suggested that such regalia implies that full bodies should be imagined within the towers.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless this poses an ambiguity to the bodily form and fundamentally the faces towers are the appearance of the face to the exclusion of a body. The lack of a body makes the iconography of the towers all the more imprecise. While all the faces

<sup>9</sup> Sharrock, 'The Mystery of the Face Towers', 233; 238.

share intrinsic qualities that mark them out as recognisably belonging to the same monuments, there is also a lack of uniformity to their features. Some have large, bulging eyes and broad mouths; others deeply incised slanted eyes with visible eyelids, and narrower, upturned mouths. Some have a lozenge carved on the forehead, at the location of the third eye, while others lack this feature. The eyes of many of the faces are unmistakably open, while others are more ambiguous. Some eyelids have been overworked, probably to give the impression of closed eyes, which, judging by the rough chiselled surfaces, probably occurred at a later date. Having carried out extensive field studies at each face tower site, it can be concluded that no pattern emerges in the distribution of certain features; for example, the cardinal direction of the face tower and its facial feature.

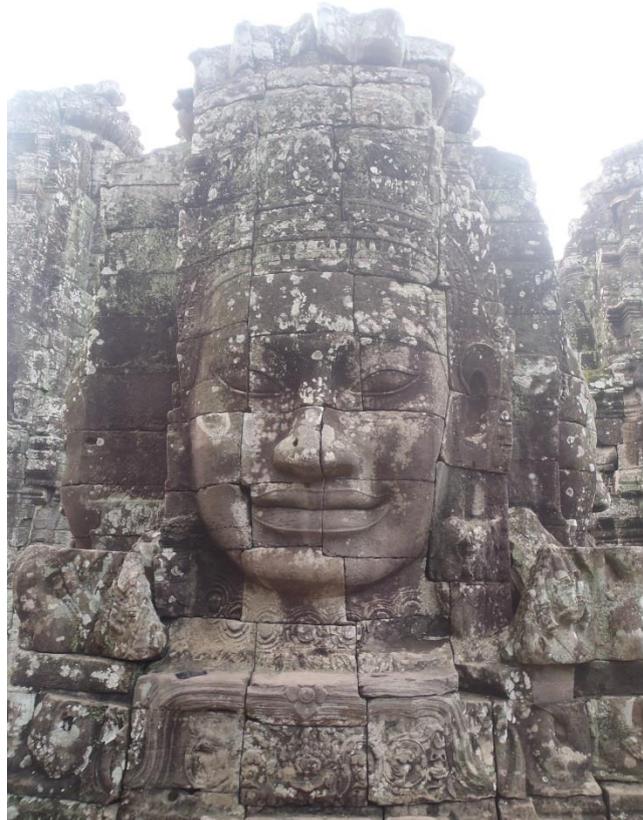


Figure 22. A face at the Bayon. Located on the north-west quadrant of third tier. Photograph by author, 2011



Figure 23. A face at the Bayon, from the south-west quadrant of the third tier. Photograph by author, 2011.

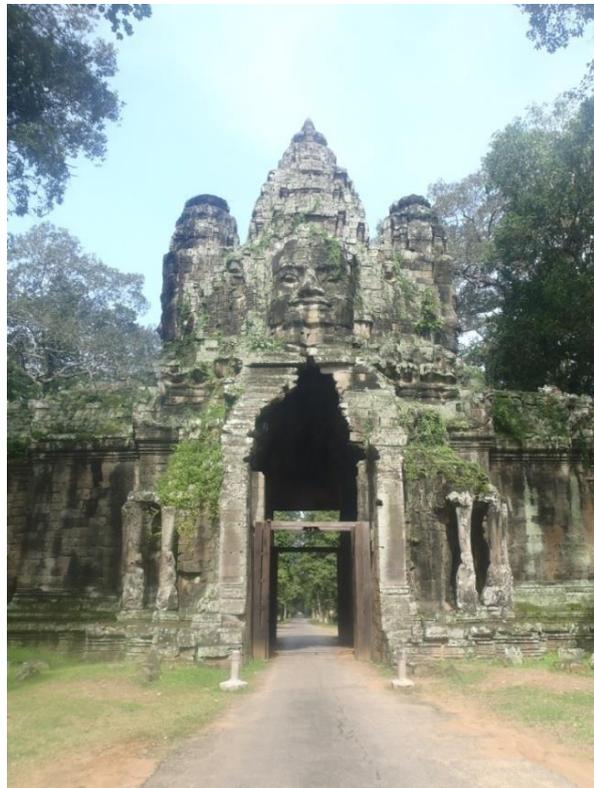


Figure 24. The 'Victory Gate', Eastern Wall Angkor Thom, view from inside the wall, facing east. Photo by author, 2011

At the five gateways of Angkor Thom, a face makes up a side of each four-sided gate tower. The faces are not conjoined or connected and are instead separated by ornamentation, which forms the cruciform gateway. The condition of the stone varies at each gateway, and thus the surviving iconographic details vary. At the North Gate the faces are separated with female figures, identifiable as female figures via the appearance of large, rounded breasts. These women have retained little other iconographic features, aside from their ornamental diadems, decorated, elongated earlobes, and their lowered eyelids. Their skirts appear almost as two elongated legs, with a raised dotted pattern. Beneath them are rows of seven seated figures in a concave semi-circle, with hands together in prayer position (fig. 27). They too wear adorned diadems and earrings and rest upon lotus pediments. Below them Indra is identifiable by his mount, the three-headed elephant (fig. 28). The elephants' trunks entangle with lotus flowers which extend down to the ground. The faces at the North Gate are square with wide mouths, the corners of which upturn into smiles (fig. 26). As with the Bayon faces, their eyes are open, with clearly incised eyelids which accentuate the eye. Each face has a decorated oval shape in the centre of the forehead at the location of the third eye, which has been suggested could be a *vajra* eye. Their ears are stretched by large earrings, a floral choker adorns each neck and each wears an ornate diadem. From above their heads a tiered lotus-shaped tower emerges, again possibly suggesting hair piled up high. The iconography is much the same at the other gateways of Angkor Thom although the condition of each differs, so other decorative details emerge. For example, at the South Gate a flower design fills the otherwise blank spaces between the figures, the faces and the ears. And at the Victory Gate, tucked behind the elephant trunks are beautiful carvings of flowing lotus flowers.

The causeways leading to each of these gateways are flanked on each side by giants holding onto a *nāga* (fig. 25). This may relate to the Brahmanical myth of the Churning of the Ocean of Milk, where *deva* (gods) and *asura* (demons) churned this ocean to produce *amrita*, the elixir of life, using a *nāga* and Mount Mandara (Mount Meru) as the pivot. In this theoretical interpretation, the Bayon acts as Mount Mandara and the giants at each causeway represent the *deva* and *asura*. This theory renders the Bayon and the city of Angkor Thom inextricably linked and locates the Bayon at the centre of the realm, and indeed, as a life-giving force. However, others have offered a

different interpretation and argued that the *nāga* represents the rainbow serpent, which guides people between the mundane world and the divine realm.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 25. The bridge of the South Gate, showing the *asura* and the *deva* on each side. Photo by author, 2011



Figure 26. East facing face at the North Gate of Angkor Thom. Photo by author, 2011

<sup>10</sup> See, Ang Choulean in 'In the Beginning was the Bayon', 364-368; I.W. Mabbett, 'The Symbolism of Mount Meru', in *History of Religions*, Vol.23, No.1, (1983), 64-83; Paul Mus, 'Angkor at the Time of Jayavarman VII', 64-75.



Figure 27. Detail from the North Gate of Angkor Thom. Photograph by author, 2011.

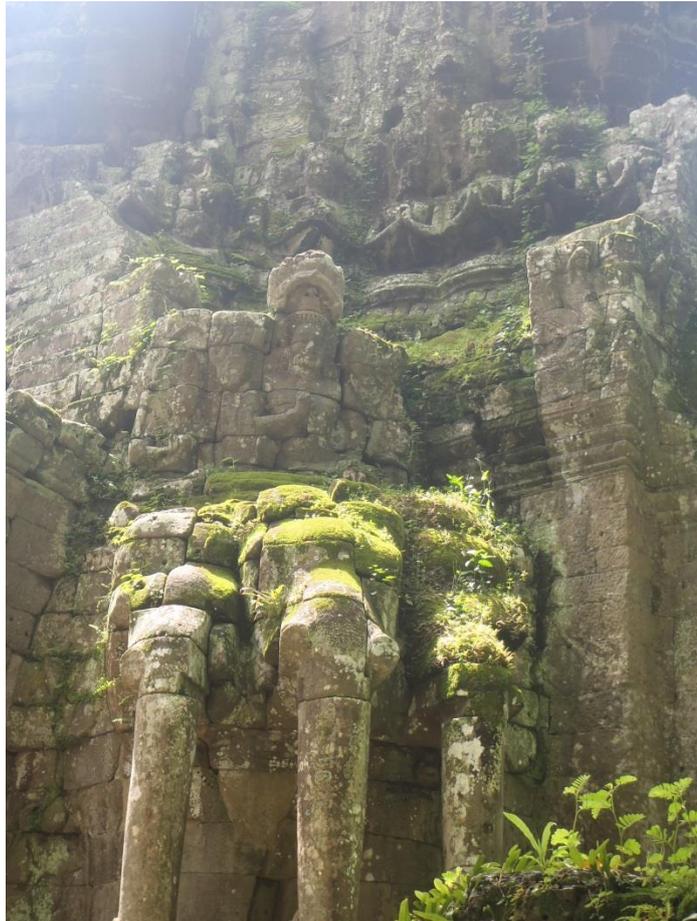


Figure 28. Detail from North Gate of Angkor Thom. Photograph by author, 2011.

Situated outside of the walls of Angkor Thom, the temples of Ta Som, Banteay Kdei and Ta Prohm feature face towers on top of the gateways of their external walls, although the layout of the temples are very different to that of the Bayon, as they are designed on a horizontal, ground-level plan. Ta Som has two face towers at each gateway and Banteay Kdei and Ta Prohm each have four towers, corresponding to their four gateways (fig. 29 and 30). Each of these gateways is a slightly smaller version of those at the Angkor Thom entranceways and, although their iconography is similar, the towers are more compacted and the faces adjoin under one shared tiered tower, which rises up above their diadems. Additionally the towers at the entranceways of Ta Prohm are more rounded and the rows of kneeling women are convex, rather than concave. At Banteay Kdei the eyes are clearly open and below the faces are chokers of female busts, encircling the face tower with their hands in prayer position. They wear crowned headdresses, which do not feature any deity, and they are smiling. The face tower at the west *gopura* of Ta Prohm also features the female busts encircling the face tower, with eyes open and hands in prayer position. These busts fill the field of vision, so that faces encircle the entire gateway. This theme of radiation will be examined further below.



Figure 29. West Gate, Banteay Kdei. Photo by author, 2011

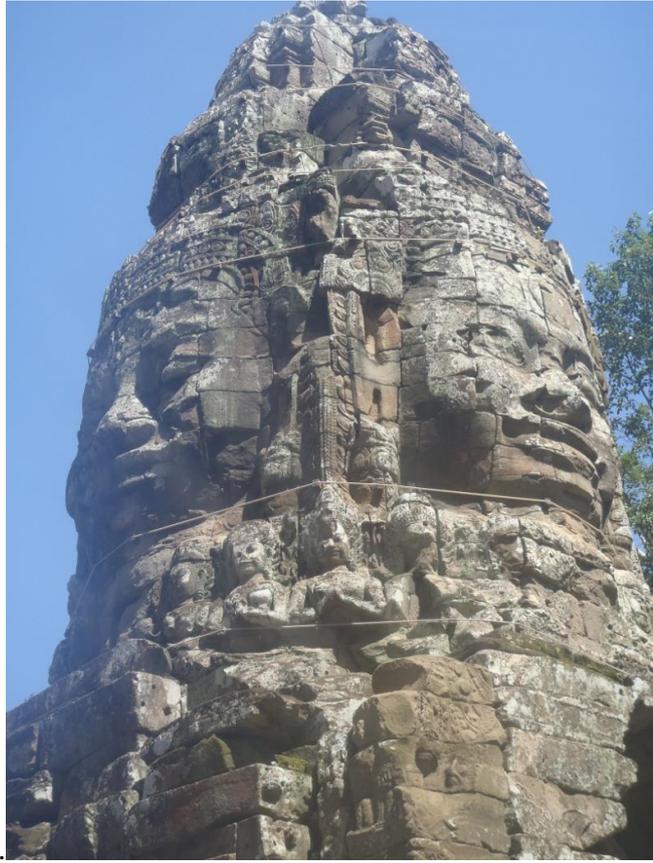


Figure 30. Gateway at eastern entrance of Ta Prohm. Photo by author, 2011



Figure 31. A face tower at Banteay Chhmar temple. Photograph by author, 2010.

The temple of Banteay Chhmar - the centre of which is currently in a ruinous state, but which would have had a layout comparable with Ta Prohm – is situated in northern Cambodia near today's Thai-Cambodia border and has twelve extant face towers, although recent research suggests that the Banteay Chhmar complex would have originally had as many as fourth-five face towers in total (fig. 31).<sup>11</sup> Nine known satellite temples surround Banteay Chhmar, and of those, four have surviving face towers: temples III, IV, V, and VII, or, Ta Prohm, Samnang Ta Sok, Ta Nem and Ta Pai. These temples consist of single cruciform structures, culminating with a single face tower, surrounded by a moat (fig. 32). Ongoing research by Cunin and a team from the Global Heritage Fund are working on ascertaining more precise details about the original structure of these temples, but Cunin concludes that it is possible that all nine satellite temples originally had face towers.<sup>12</sup> Preah Khan of Kompong Svay is situated 100 kilometres east of Angkor and was constructed before Jayavarman VII's reign. It is believed that he lived here during his youth, before he took the throne in Angkor. Jayavarman VII made alterations to this temple, including the inclusion of his 'trade-mark' face towers, and today one extant tower is found in an exterior enclosure of the temple, known as Prasat Preah Stung.

At the Ta Prohm temple at Banteay Chhmar, the most intact of all the satellite temples, the faces vary, much as they do at the Bayon, and this is true of all the faces in this area (fig. 33). For example, the southern face has wide, bulging, rounded eyes, whereas the eastern face has narrowed, highly slanted eyes, and a broad smile. The north face does not appear to be smiling at all. This overall lack of uniformity results in a lack of iconographical certainty. This makes identifying who the towers' faces are supposed to represent problematic, although this has not deterred scholars from proposing hypotheses for almost a century and a half.

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<sup>11</sup> Olivier Cunin, 'The Face Towers at Banteay Chmar', in *The Face Towers of Banteay Chmar*, (Tokyo: Goto Shoin, 2005), 136.

<sup>12</sup> Cunin, 'The Face Towers at Banteay Chmar', 120.

During field research in the region my Khmer guide informed me that it was possible that these were the first face towers constructed by Jayavarman VII, proto-towers. The view that Banteay Chhmar is the 'birthplace of the Khmer face tower' is also advertised on the Global Heritage Website. However there is no sound scholarly basis for this position at present.

<[http://globalheritagefund.org/what\\_we\\_do/overview/current\\_projects/banteay\\_chhmar\\_cambodia](http://globalheritagefund.org/what_we_do/overview/current_projects/banteay_chhmar_cambodia)> [accessed 13 March 2014]



Figure 32. Ta Prohm temple, Banteay Chhmar. Photograph by author, 2011.



Figure 33. Face of central sanctuary at Samnang Tasok, Banteay Chhmar. Photo by author, 2011

## Unveiling the Evidence: Reviewing the Existing Research on the Bayon

The most contemporary account of Angkor Thom comes from the Chinese envoy Zhou Dagan, who visited Angkor in the thirteenth century. His vivid account of life there was first translated from Chinese by Paul Pelliot in 1902.<sup>13</sup> His description of Angkor notes the presence of Buddhist monks – Zhou’s description of them wearing yellow robes and the presence of a single Buddha statue in their temples suggests these were Theravāda monks, Brahmān priests, and devotees of Śiva, who Zhou mistakes as Taoists.<sup>14</sup> The text also details customs, dwellings, healthcare, husbandry, trade, and industry. Additionally, Zhou provides the closest we have to a contemporary account of the Bayon, less than a century after its construction. He wrote that the heads of the Angkor Thom gateways belonged to the Buddha and describes the Bayon as a ‘golden tower, flanked by more than twenty stone towers and several hundred stone chambers’.<sup>15</sup> However, his account does not identify the face towers of the Bayon and the extent to which Zhou probed his sources to ascertain the Buddha identification of the gateways faces is debatable. There are other inaccuracies in his account, such as interpreting the worshippers of Śiva as Taoists, which suggest some of his interpretations were not verified by local inhabitants, or that they were related to him by other Chinese merchants in the city. It is possible that locals referred to the faces as belonging to Buddha. The fifth head at the Angkor Thom gateways is more puzzling. If a fifth head ever existed, it may have been added during a possible Śaivite revival, although the notion of a Brahmānical resurgence in the thirteenth century has been heavily contested in recent decades. However, it is unclear to me where a fifth head would have been added to the existing configuration, unless Zhou Dagan mistook the tiered lotus crown for a fifth head. Nevertheless, this description of a golden head, of which there is no evidence today, led Pelliot to conclude that the faces towers originally represented a five-faced Śiva.

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<sup>13</sup> He continued to work on revising his translation and these revisions were published after his death in 1951. I have worked with Michael Smithies’ translation of Pelliot from French to English.

Zhou Dagan, ‘Mémoire Sur Les Coutumes Du Cambodge’, trans. by Paul Pelliot, *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient*, 2 (1902), 123–177; Zhou Dagan, *The Customs of Cambodia*, trans. by Michael Smithies, 4th ed, (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Zhou Dagan, *The Customs of Cambodia*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Zhou Dagan, *The Customs of Cambodia*, 19.

Work clearing vegetation from the temple began in 1907 under the direction of the first Curator of Angkor, Jean Commaille, after the return of the provinces of Siem Reap, Battambang and Sisophon from Siamese control. Jungle clearance, organising the fallen masonry, and securing and restoring the temple continued under the direction of Henri Marchal, who took the role of Conservator of Angkor after Commaille's murder in 1916. In the early 1930s, restoration work was carried out by George Trouvé and archaeologist Maurice Glaize. This scholarly impulse to clear and categorise is a historical product, linked to the colonial instinct to name and know in order to control. I lay out the history of early academic work at the temple here in order to highlight the contours of this imperative to illustrate how it melds into the enterprise of proposing singular identities to the face towers. This imperative is considered further in Chapter Six.

In the first decades of the twentieth century the Bayon temple was believed to have dated from the ninth century, in part because of the poor quality of construction and the impoverished execution of the decoration when compared to other great Angkorian temples. Until 1924 scholars believed the Bayon to be a Hindu temple, due to the presence of Śaivite iconography on the inner bas-reliefs and the prevalence of four-faces in Hindu iconography; Brahmā is often represented with four faces and multiple-headed Śiva statues are known in the Indian subcontinent. The four-faced configuration is far less common in Buddhist iconography of that period in Southeast Asia. Additionally, local inhabitants identified the faces as belonging to Prohm, which is the Khmer appellation of Brahmā. The historian and traveller J. Moura, writing in 1883, thought that the Bayon was undoubtedly a huge tomb dedicated to Brahmā.<sup>16</sup> This identification persisted in the literature of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century descriptions of the Bayon.

In 1924 a Buddhist orientation of the temple was proposed by the architectural historian Henri Parmentier, after he discovered a previously hidden pediment which depicted the Bodhisattva Lokeśvara.<sup>17</sup> Three years later art historian Philippe Stern questioned the previously accepted ninth-century dating of the temple, based upon his stylistic studies of temple decoration. In the following year Coëdès synthesised his own

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<sup>16</sup> J. Moura, *Royaume Du Cambodge* (Paris, 1883), 268-271.

<sup>17</sup> Henri Parmentier, 'Notes d'archéologie Indochinoise : VIII, Modifications Subies Par Le Bayon Au Cours de Son Exécution', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 1927, 149-167

epigraphic studies with the archaeological and art historical work of Parmentier, Marchal, and Stern to conclude that the Bayon was constructed under the reign of Jayavarman VII in conjunction with the walls of Angkor Thom.<sup>18</sup> In 1933, the Buddhist orientation of the temple was cemented when Trouvé discovered the large, broken Buddha seated on a *nāga* in the central shaft of the temple, which was restored and installed by King Monivong in a nearby Theravāda terrace in 1935.<sup>19</sup> Cœdès's *Pour mieux comprendre Angkor* was published in 1947, which synthesised the archaeological and epigraphic research taking place across Angkor.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1960s the bas-reliefs were cleaned and further work surveying the site was carried out under the direction of the EFEO Director of Archaeological Research at Angkor, Bernard-Philippe Groslier. The 1960s also marked the publication of the first architectural study dedicated to the Bayon. Written by architectural historian Jacques Dumarçay, *Le Bayon Histoire Architecturale du Temple* was published in 1967.<sup>21</sup> This tome, which was primarily engaged in architectural history, included detailed plans indicating, for example, the locations of inscriptions and sacred deposits, and studies which suggested the original layout of the temple and the chronology of its construction, which built upon Parmentier's earlier work. In 1973 the first monograph dedicated to the Bayon was published.<sup>22</sup> This volume consisted of Dumarçay's archaeological and architectural studies and Groslier's epigraphic work. Moreover, this book also included Groslier's interpretative impression of the temple, in which he argued that the temple should be viewed as a *maṇḍala* and proposed that the central tower could be thought of as a *stūpa*, perhaps to commemorate those who were killed during the battles to reclaim the city from the Cham.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Philippe Stern, *Le Bayon d'Angkor et l'évolution de l'art Khmer*; George Cœdès, 'La date du Bayon', in *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 28, (1928), 81-103.

<sup>19</sup> Reported in the 'Chronique', in *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, No.33, (1933), 1116 – 1117.

Recent archaeological and art historical research has added more evidence to the argument that the Bayon Buddha was interred in the central well centuries later than the previously suggested thirteenth century dating. See, Polkinghorne, Martin, Christophe Pottier, and Christian Fischer, 'One Buddha Can Hide Another', *Journal Asiatique*, 301 (2013), 575–624

<sup>20</sup> George Cœdès, *Pour Mieux Comprendre Angkor* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1947).

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Dumarçay, *Le Bayon Histoire Architecturale du Temple (Atlas et Notice des Planches)*, (Paris: EFEO, 1967).

<sup>22</sup> Dumarçay, *Le Bayon Histoire Architecturale du Temple*; Bernard Philippe Groslier, *Inscriptions du Bayon, Mémoires Archéologiques 111-2*, (Paris: EFEO, 1973).

<sup>23</sup> B-P. Groslier, *Inscriptions du Bayon*, 235-236.

Archaeological work at Angkor was halted after the outbreak of war in the early 1970s, which raged throughout the 1980s. In 1991 the Paris Peace Accords were signed, signalling the official end of the war and the start of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). Angkor was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the following year, and international teams began working again at temple sites.<sup>24</sup> Since the 1990s, restoration work at the Bayon has been carried out by the Japanese Government Team for Safeguarding Angkor (JSA), who have completed restoration programmes of the northern library and the southern bas-reliefs.<sup>25</sup> Symposia on the ‘Master Plan for the Conservation and Restoration of the Bayon’ were held annually in Siem Reap from 1996 until 2004. These brought together archaeologists, architectural and art historians, restoration experts, and anthropologists with the primary aim of agreeing a plan for the restoration and conservation of the temple.

In an effort to bring together current scholarship from across disciplines, a second monograph on the Bayon was published in 2007.<sup>26</sup> This rich, multidisciplinary volume features new research by epigraphists, art historians, anthropologists, and historians, and improves upon earlier works, particularly regarding our knowledge about Jayavarman VII’s early life and his connection with Champa, by providing indigenous perspectives and local folklore. The impetus to re-consider the reign of Jayavarman VII has also been influenced by renewed interest in Banteay Chhmar. Access to this temple became possible after the Khmer Rouge surrendered their strongholds in the northwest of Cambodia in the late 1990s, and in recent years the Global Heritage Fund has worked to secure the site and its structures. Olivier Cunin has also undertaken rigorous research at the temple.<sup>27</sup> Cunin’s meticulous architectural

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<sup>24</sup> Ang Choulean, Ashley Thompson, Eric Prenowitz, *Angkor. A Manual for the Past, Present and Future*, (UNESCO, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> The Japanese Government Team for Safeguarding Angkor (JSA) undertook meticulous iconographic studies of each of the Bayon faces and used the data to construct a taxonomy of style. They attempted to argue that the variation of features between faces points to a number of deities represented by different faces, so that they are organised as Devas, Asuras and Devatās. The faces at the Bayon are not symmetrical, nor each face identical, but what impresses me is the overall homogeneity between the faces considering that they were carved in situ by multiple artisans, perhaps with two artisans each working on one side of a face. I can detect no discernible pattern to the distribution of stylistic features which supports the JSA’s interpretation.

Japanese Government Team for Safeguarding Angkor, ‘The Bayon: An Approach from the Relief-Style of the Face Towers’, in *5<sup>th</sup> Symposium on The Bayon, Final Report* (Siem Reap, 2000), 73-74.

<sup>26</sup> Clark (ed.), *Bayon: New Perspectives*.

<sup>27</sup> Cunin, ‘The Face Towers at Banteay Chhmar’, 105–141.

research at Jayavarman VII's temples provides the most accurate descriptions of the original layouts and phases of construction of the temples, although Cunin abstains from making any interpretative claims and shies away from offering hypotheses on face tower identifications.

The Bayon temple has generated much more scholarship beyond the two published monographs. Historian Michael Vickery roughly conceptualises the interpretative stances which inform the study of the Bayon into two categories: idealism and materialism.<sup>28</sup> On the one hand, is a scholar like Paul Mus, who Vickery uses as an example of an idealist methodology. Mus's scholarly work pursued tracing common and divergent metaphors and concepts in Brahmanic and Buddhist philosophy and icono-plastic form and, in doing so, he brought together a broad base of references.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, there are those who work with the material, such as Stern, who build their hypotheses upon the data which this material study yields. Both positions have their limitations. The idealist approach runs the risk of imposing exogenous concepts onto recalcitrant iconography at the expense of considering endogenous factors. The materialist position risks concealing subjective scholarly interpretations beneath the fiction of objective stylistic analysis, without taking seriously philosophical or political factors. Vickery's categorisation is stark and there is certainly overlap between each methodological camp. Nevertheless this framework can be instrumental in presenting the existing literature on the Bayon face towers and so I shall briefly utilise Vickery's distinctions. The so-called idealist interpretations which Mus and, to some extent Cœdès, developed in their research were undertaken between 1930 and 1960, alongside more materialist studies. However, I argue that the pursuit of scholarly enquiry into the face towers has, since the 1960s, been dominated by materialist studies, which risk smoothing over any ambiguities, paradoxes, or tensions which the iconography of the faces present.

I begin this interrogation of face tower theories by considering scholars who have pursued proposing a single identity to the faces. Generally these scholars fall into

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<sup>28</sup> This division is consistent with the Marxist framework which informs Vickery's own research on Southeast Asia.

Michael Vickery, 'Introduction', in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, ed. by Joyce Clark (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), 15-16.

<sup>29</sup> See for example his remarkable, expansive work on Borobudur in Indonesia and on the phenomenon of the 'adorned Buddha'.

Paul Mus, *Baraburdur* (Paris: EFEO, 1932–1934); Mus 'Le Buddha Paré. Etudes Indiennes et Indochinoises'.

Vickery's materialist camp. In 1883 Moura wrote that the Bayon was a tomb to Brahmā and this same identification was later proposed by archaeologist and early explorer of Angkor Etienne Aymonier in 1904, when it was still thought that the religious orientation of the Bayon was Hindu.<sup>30</sup> Although the Buddhist orientation of the temple was ascertained in the 1920s, the Brahmā interpretation persisted.

### **The Four Faces of Brahmā**

Jean Boisselier, who was a student of Stern, began his art historical career in Cambodia, as the curator of the National Museum in Phnom Penh in 1950; however in the following decade he began to concentrate his research on Thai art.<sup>31</sup> Yet, while working in Cambodia in the 1950s he published papers which celebrated the continuity of Bayon period art with earlier Angkorian art and praised its innovative focus on the humane and the individual.<sup>32</sup> He also began to explore Tantric elements in the statuary of this period and suggested the face towers may represent Vajrapāni, one of the three protective deities of the Buddha in Mahāyāna traditions.<sup>33</sup> Despite this, Boisselier later returned to his earlier interpretation of the faces as belonging to Brahmā, positing that the Bayon represented Indra's heaven of the thirty-three gods and therefore the faces represent Brahmā's multiple appearances to greet each god. Boisselier employed readings of the southeast Prasat Chrung inscription and iconographical interpretations of the causeways at Angkor Thom in support of his theory.<sup>34</sup> His translation of the inscription in question states that 'having at its head the assembly hall of the city of gods, his [the king's] land is like the sky'. His interpretation is rooted in the political imperative of safeguarding the city of Angkor Thom after the Cham invasion and he interprets the figures at each gateway of Angkor Thom as being the *yakṣa* (guardian spirits), who were given the role of guarding Indra's heaven after it had been ambushed

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<sup>30</sup> Etienne Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*, Vol. III, (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1904), 152.

<sup>31</sup> See for example, Jean Boisselier, *The Heritage of Thai Sculpture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1975).

<sup>32</sup> Jean Boisselier, 'Réflexions Sur L'art du Règne de Jayavarman VII', 261–273.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Boisselier, 'Vajrapāni Dans L'art Du Bâyon', *Proceedings of the Twenty-second Congress of Orientalists*, 1957, 324–332.

<sup>34</sup> Jean Boisselier, 'The Meaning of Angkor Thom', in *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, ed. by Helen Ibbison Jessup and Thierry Zephir (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 119-120.

by the exiled *asura* (demons). Boisselier sees this myth as being analogous to the Cham invasion of Angkor.<sup>35</sup>

However, the claims by Boisselier that the faces were Brahmā are refuted by Vickery on the basis of numerology, as there never was a stage in construction where there were thirty-three face towers.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, Boisselier's interpretation is highly compelling as it corresponds with the Angkorian theme of the recreation of the godly realms on earth, as well as being sensitive to the political implications of the aesthetic form. There is no doubt that Boisselier was correct to assert that the face towers, and indeed the entire configuration of Angkor Thom, were conceived as being materially and symbolically protective and defensive and that the temple had a magical, microcosmic connection with the heavenly realm, as well as having a mundane, worldly connection.

### **The Benevolent Gaze of Lokeśvara**

Following the discovery of the Lokeśvara pediment and Stern's suggestion of a Lokeśvara cult in the early years of Jayavarman VII's reign, many scholars have viewed the faces as belonging to the Bodhisattva Lokeśvara. This theory was first advanced by Paul Mus in the 1930s as part of his more multivalent interpretation of the symbolism of Angkor Thom, which we return to below.<sup>37</sup> In a move that Vickery would identify as idealist, Mus proposed that the Mahāyāna sutra *The Lotus of the True Law* may have been the source of the Bayon's iconography.<sup>38</sup> *The Lotus of the True Law* states that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Lokeśvara) makes himself visible from all sides and appears differently to different people as a skilful means of preaching the *dharma*.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 117-122.

<sup>36</sup> Vickery, 'Bayon: New Perspectives Reconsidered', 145.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Mus, 'Le Symbolisme à Ankor-Thom: Le "Grand Miracle" du Bayon', *Comptes Rendus de l'Academie des Inscriptions et Belle-Lettres*, (1936), 65-67; Paul Mus, 'Angkor in the time of Jayavarman VII', in *Indian Arts and Letters*, XI, (1937), 65-75.

<sup>38</sup> Mus, 'Le Symbolisme à Ankor-Thom', 65-67; Mus, 'Angkor in the time of Jayavarman VII', 65-75.

<sup>39</sup> 'In some worlds, young man of good family, the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Avalokitesvara preaches the law to creatures in the shape of a Buddha; in others he does so in the shape of a Bodhisattva. To some beings he shows the law in the shape of a Pratyekabuddha; to others he does so in the shape of a disciple; to others again under that of Brahma, Indra, or a Gandharva. To those who are to be converted by a goblin, he preaches the law assuming the shape of a goblin; to those who are to be converted by Isvara, he preaches the law in the shape of isvara; to those who are to be converted by Mahesvara, he preaches assuming the shape of Mahesvara. To those who are to be converted by a Kakravartin, he shows the law after assuming the shape of a

Mus was interested in the manner in which this concept of omnipresent visibility can be represented spatially. He argued that although Brahmā is often depicted as having four faces, in “reality” he only has one face, yet this single face can see and be seen everywhere. Therefore the convention of giving him four heads is means to make his omnipresence understood by man. Mus compares this with the Mahāyāna Buddhist miracle in which the Buddha multiplies himself in order to appear simultaneously to all devotees, gods and bodhisattvas in the four corners of the world. According to this logic, the face towers of the Bayon are a means by which Lokeśvara’s miraculous appearances can be represented concretely. This interpretation takes into account the variations between the faces as Lokeśvara assumed different appearances and the four faces are metaphors for a power which extends across all of space. Mus concluded that the four cardinal directions are the most straightforward way in which to represent all-encompassing power. We will return to Mus’ hypothesis below.

The Lokeśvara interpretation of these monumental towers fits with the bodhisattva’s epithet as the ‘Lord who looks down’ and, being the embodiment of compassion, is in accord with the benevolent kingship Jayavarman VII wished to be associated with, in harmony with protective symbolism. In her wide-reaching study of the iconography of Avalokiteśvara in South and Southeast Asia, Nandana Chutiwongs interprets the face towers as being Lokeśvara, who is ‘watching over the welfare of the universe, ruling over all the gods, great and small, who emanated from him and were worshipped in the temples in all parts of the empire’.<sup>40</sup> George Cœdès - who as we shall see below also adhered to a more nuanced interpretive framework - argued that the faces should be read as Lokeśvara.<sup>41</sup> This is a reading of the face towers which is still the most prominent in popular literature on the Bayon.

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Kakravartin; to those who are to be converted by an imp, he shows the law under the shape of an imp; to those who are to be converted by Kubera, he shows the law by appearing in the shape of Kubera; to those who are to be converted by Senâpati, he preaches in the shape of Senapati ; to those who are to be converted by assuming a Brâhman, he preaches in the shape of a Brâhman; to those who are to be converted by Vagrapâni, he preaches in the shape of Vagrapâni’.

*Saddharma-Pundarîka or The Lotus of the True Law*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), trans. by H. Kern.

<sup>40</sup> Nandana Chutiwongs, *The Iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Mainland South-East Asia*, (New Delhi: Aryan Books International), 2002, 327.

<sup>41</sup> It was common for scholars to streamline and abridge their theories when authoring monographs designed for a more popular or tourist appeal. For example, Cœdès, *Angkor: An Introduction*.

While I am not arguing for a singular identification with Lokeśvara, caution must be made when narrowing iconographic and stylistic interpretation and there are number of problems with the Lokeśvara identification which are rooted in the materialist studies of the Bayon. Firstly, despite evidence of a strong Lokeśvara cult during Jayavarman VII's reign, Lokeśvara pediments at the Bayon were obscured during the construction of the third tier, which Sharrock suggests signifies that the Bodhisattva had diminished in significance at the expense of a different model of representation.<sup>42</sup> In support of his own tantric interpretation of the faces, art historian Peter D. Sharrock makes a further argument against the Lokeśvara identification, grounded in stylistic interpretations: many of the Lokeśvara statues which have been attributed to earlier in Jayavarman VII's reign had lowered eyelids rather than the opened eyes found at the Bayon.<sup>43</sup> However, these stylistic differences are found between radically different forms of representation; the statues of Lokeśvara are of a different order to the colossal towers. Their size, placement, elevation, and crucially their functions differ entirely. Additionally, there are other possible explanations for the obstructed pediments and the changes to the third tier of the Bayon. The haste in which temples were constructed, probably due in part to the ambitious nature of Jayavarman VII's building program and the advanced age of the king, means that it is possible that the realisation of the architectural development of the face towers meant that the smaller Lokeśvara pediments were sacrificed for a more monumental architectural representation of the Bodhisattva. However, this does not explain the absence of an Amitābha Buddha in the headdress of the face, a key iconographical indicator of Lokeśvara. Indeed, given the large number of Lokeśvara statues produced during this period, the absence of the defining iconographic indicator of the Buddha in the headdress is a striking anomaly, if this is indeed a monumental representation of the bodhisattva. Pierre Dupont signalled other iconographical differences between contemporary statues of Avalokiteśvara and the face towers when he noted that the former are never adorned with a choker or diadem.<sup>44</sup> If the face towers were meant to singularly represent this specific Bodhisattva then surely this would be made clear in their iconography?

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<sup>42</sup> Sharrock, 'The Mystery of the Face Towers', 241-242.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-243.

<sup>44</sup> Pierre Dupont, 'Chronique', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 36, (1936), 630.

## Tantric Interpretations

The most recent attempt to ascertain a precise, singular identity of the faces comes from Sharrock who advances the theory that the faces are Vajrasattva, a Buddhist deity who mediates between the Tathāgata pentad of buddhas and the Ādi-Buddha (the primordial Buddha). Sharrock's research displays a thorough reading of iconographic and textual sources and his conclusion is based on what he sees as the increased influence of a specific Tantric Buddhism in the final phase of the construction of the Bayon, which he terms Yoginīfication due to its basis in the rise of a Hevajra cult.<sup>45</sup> Hiram Woodward laid out the groundwork for the presence of tantric elements during Jayavarman VII's reign and Boisselier had earlier advanced the same theory that the faces were that of Vajrasattva in 1957.<sup>46</sup> For Sharrock, the heterogeneity of the faces is not an issue for the Vajrasattva identification:

The uniformity of the faces and their lack of individual detail can be seen as a deliberate attempt to render the qualities of the ultimate "fourth state" (*caturtha tur[i]ya*), defined in the Śiva Tantras and adopted by the late Tantric Buddhists [...] For the Tantric Buddhist Jayavarman VII, this was the ultimate projection of the ethereal, formless Vajrasattva, beyond time and space yet omnipresent and omniscient.<sup>47</sup>

Sharrock acknowledges the complete lack of epigraphic evidence to illuminate the tantric images in stone and bronze that date from this period.<sup>48</sup> But although there is no tradition in Cambodia of the kind of wrathful deities found in Tibetan Tantrism, a number of statues of Hevajra have been found in Cambodia from this period and it is possible that they were used for Tantric meditations.<sup>49</sup> What makes Sharrock's case for a tantric-orientated interpretation of the face towers compelling is its grounding in the omnipresence and omniscience suggested by the face tower architecture.

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<sup>45</sup> Peter D. Sharrock, 'Hevajra at Bantéay Chmâr', 49–64; Peter D. Sharrock, 'Garuḍa, Vajrapāṇi and Religious Change in Jayavarman VII's Angkor', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40 (2009), 111–151 ; Sharrock, 'The Mystery of the Face Towers', 232 – 281.

<sup>46</sup> Woodward, 'Tantric Buddhism at Angkor Thom', 57 – 67; Jean Boisselier, 'Vajrapāṇi dans l'art du Bayon', in *Proceedings of the Twenty-second Congress of Orientalists*, (Leiden, 1957), 330

<sup>47</sup> Sharrock, 'The Mystery of the Face Towers', 280.

<sup>48</sup> Sharrock, 'Hevajra at Bantéay Chmâr', 51.

<sup>49</sup> Sharrock, 'The Mystery of the Face Towers', 280.

The tantric orientation of Jayavarman VII's court was proposed by Hiram W. Woodward, an art historian of Southeast Asia, whose work has a focus on Thai art and who is now Emeritus curator at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, which houses the Griswold collection of Thai art. His work demonstrates an interest in examining the connections between the Khmer and Thai courts, with focus on the way in which Theravāda came to prominence in the region. In 1981 he published a meticulous and rich essay which examined the interface between multidimensional religious schools and the art of Angkor Thom.<sup>50</sup> In this essay Woodward developed a complex, nuanced reading of triadic forms and maṇḍalas, beginning with the triad of Lokeśvara, Buddha, and Prajñāpāramitā which is expressed in the temples of Ta Prohm, the Bayon, and Preah Khan, as well as in numerous stone and bronze statues of the period. Woodward suggests that towards the end of Jayavarman VII's reign there was a shift to a Tantric Hevajra cult and he carefully constructs a schema which hypothesises connections between Hevajra and the triad. He draws a parallel between the Jayavarman VII triad detailed above and the triad of Avalokiteśvara, the Buddha Mahāvairocana and the Bodhisattva Vajrapāni.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Woodward suggests that 'an encompassing syncretism was planned from the very beginning' and yet that the alteration of the plan of the Bayon, which occurred during construction, suggests a 'conscious shift in intention'.<sup>52</sup> The shift that Woodward proposes is from a Hevajra cult to identifying the faces as those of Brahmā. He bases this on the same inscription as Boisselier uses, which states 'having at its head the assembly hall of the city of gods, his [the king's] land is like the sky'. In accord with Boisselier, Woodward proposes that this stanza describes the assembly hall where the thirty-three gods of Indra's heaven reside. Brahmā makes thirty-three images of himself, one for each god. Woodward sets forth epigraphic and artistic evidence that suggest Jayavarman VII took part in an Indrābhiṣeka (a royal Indra consecration) ceremony. The ceremony involves a re-enactment of the churning of the ocean of milk, which would connect with the *devas* and *asuras* at the gateways to Angkor Thom and is in accord with the original Vajrasattva heads being transformed into more numerous Brahmā heads and offers insight into the possible contours of Buddhism at state-level.

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<sup>50</sup> Woodward, 'Tantric Buddhism at Angkor Thom', 57 – 67;

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-98.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

Woodward is sensitive to the multiplicity of possible readings of the faces.<sup>53</sup> Meticulous with his scholarship, Woodward is nevertheless rightly cautious in definitively isolating a precise identity of the faces. In 2005 he suggested the Bayon was created in the model of the palace of Indra, yet he maintains the proposition that the faces represent a tantric Buddha, ‘vajra aspects conquering and guarding’.<sup>54</sup> Ultimately, he concludes that more than one interpretation is correct due to the syncretic nature of religion at Angkor and the religious and architectural developments over the course of the temple’s construction.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Indigenous Interpretation**

If there ever were a singular precise identification of the faces then it has not survived intact in the indigenous historical records. Today Cambodians refer to the temple as “Prohm Bayon”, with “Prohm” being the Khmer pronunciation of Brahmā, who has been integrated into Cambodian Theravāda Buddhism.<sup>56</sup> Cambodians living in the Angkor area today recount the myth of creation – traditionally known by all Khmers – with region-specific components of the story centring on the Bayon.<sup>57</sup> The story is known as Nokor Kôk Thlôk and here I am indebted to Khmer anthropologist Ang Choulean’s research. The legend begins as a story of creation, in a world where there is nothing but ocean and a small Kôk – island – on which stands a solitary Thlôk tree. A man named Preah Thong lived on this tiny island. One day he saw the daughter of the *nāga* king surfacing from the watery depths to take a bath and immediately fell in love. The princess, named Neang Neak, took Preah Thong to meet her father and he allowed them to marry. Preah Thong intended to take his bride to live with him on dry land and the *nāga* king, concerned that his son-in-law’s kingdom would only be a tiny island, drank in the waters surrounding the small piece of land to increase its size. This story

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>54</sup> Hiram W. Woodward, *The Art and Architecture of Thailand*, Second Edition, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 168.

<sup>55</sup> Woodward, , *The Art and Architecture of Thailand* ,168

<sup>56</sup> Ang, ‘In the Beginning Was the Bayon’, 368.

<sup>57</sup> Ang, ‘In the Beginning was the Bayon’, 364-368.

It is in the tenth century that we find the first recorded evidence of a mythic history of the origins of Cambodia, recorded in the Baksei Chamkrong Sanskrit inscription. This tells the tale of the beginning of the Khmer people, as the result of the marriage of Kamvu, a ‘self-born ascetic’ and Merā, ‘the primordial apsara’.

Ang, Thompson, and Prenowitz, *Angkor. A Manual for the Past, Present and Future*, 51.

has many regional variations and Ang takes up the story as it is known in the Angkor area:

Preah Thong planned to construct a temple there (the Bayon) marking the centre of the royal capital (Angkor Thom). The king of the *nāgas* approved the project with the one stipulation that no image of Prohm (Brahmā with four faces) be erected. For it is in the nature of *nāgas* to fear representations of Prohm. Preah Thong disregarded the injunction, and wilfully at that.

One day the king of the *nāgas* visited the couple. He emerged from the ocean through the very heart of the kingdom, that is to say, he came to terra firma through the Andong Preng ('ancient well')<sup>58</sup> of the temple. He was not slow to see the faces of Prohm everywhere, right to the gates of the city. Overcome by panic, but at the same time furious with his son-in-law, he challenged the latter to a single combat. Preah Thong was finally the vanquisher, having cut the body of his father-in-law in two. The blood gushed from it and splattered the victor. We don't know whether ordinarily this blood is especially dangerous; still, the patricidal intention and act made Preah Thong leprous.<sup>59</sup>

In this story of creation, the Bayon is woven into the local narratives of the moment of origin of Cambodia and bound to the mythical moment of origin as well as to a historical moment of unification and regional superiority, all of which is embodied in the face of Brahmā. One of the most captivating interpretations of the Bayon, the Nokor Kôk Thlôk story suggests that the temple is the location and symbolic form of the origin of the kingdom – literally, the revealing of the earth - of Cambodia. This interpretation connects the deities or spirits of the water and the divinities of the heavens, with the Buddha and/or the king at the very centre of this union. This vertical penetration of power down into the depths of the earth and high into the heavens is referred to in the south-west Prasat Chrung (K.288) inscription, dated from the reign of Jayavarman VII, which states that,

(25) vilasitavidhuv[i]mvayālikhacchṛṅga eko  
 bhujagasadanaasaṅgāgāḍhatānyāpi tena  
 (26) anukuruta ime te nirmmite śrīmatā śrī-  
 Jayagirijayasindhū tadvṛhatkīrttikotīm

L'un grate de son faîte le disque brillant de la lune, l'autre, par sa profondeur, touché au monde des *nāgas*; ce Cri Jayagiri et cette Jayasindhū faits par ce roi fortune imitaient l'arc immense de sa gloire

<sup>58</sup> Name of the 'cistern' (a term used by French architects and archaeologists) of the Bayon, about ten meters deep, situated in the north-east quadrant on the second storey.

<sup>59</sup> Ang, 'In the Beginning was the Bayon', 365.

One scratches at its summit the brilliant disc of the moon, the other, by his depth, touches to the world of *nāgas*; this Sri Jayagiri and this Jayasindhū made by this fortunate king imitated the immense arc of his glory.<sup>60</sup>

Cœdès interprets this stanza as making reference to Jayavarman VII's construction program at Angkor, primarily the walls (Jayagiri) and moats (Jayasindhū) surrounding Angkor Thom, in imitation of the heavenly realm and as a concrete protective gesture. However, this stanza also neatly summarises the connection the king maintained with both the abode of the gods in the heavens (the brilliant disc is a reference to Viṣṇu) and the world of the *nāgas*, a union related in the mythical origins of the Cambodia, which connects with the notion that the king is the cosmocrator and axis of the world.

Despite being routinely referred to as Prohm, the face towers provoke a plurality of interpretations for Cambodian audiences. The voices of modern-day users of the Bayon site are notably absent from the canonical scholarly literature on the temple, with the exception of Ang Choulean's work. Yet, incorporating the interpretations of local residents is a necessary component of the analysis of the temple, because the site is both a living monument and a reliquary for indigenous historical myths. An insistence on multiple identities is supported by informal conversations I have had with artists, temple caretakers and tour guides at Angkor who gestured to the faces as belonging to the Buddha, the king, Prohm, or a Bodhisattva. Temple caretakers I have spoken with frequently say that Prohm's four faces represent the four Buddhist Virtues of loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity. One caretaker has told me that, according to 'Buddhist texts', Brahmā has one face, but that this iconography was modified in Cambodia to incorporate four faces in order to make reference to the four Virtues. In this account the four-faces are identified as being a particularly Cambodian invention, departing from 'Buddhist texts' to symbolise a moral code personified and looking out across the country, spreading the virtues and thus, prosperity.

### **Faces of Buddhas, Kings and Bodhisattvas: Synthesised Interpretations**

A number of scholars have developed interpretations of the faces which are sensitive to the uncertainties in the material records, such as the unstable iconography and the absence of identification in the epigraphy. In his 1928 essay on the dating of the Bayon, Cœdès began to lay the foundations for a reading of the wider symbolism of

<sup>60</sup> Cœdès, 'Stèle des Prāsāt Ārun d'Ankor Thom', stanza CVI, Sanskrit, 219, French, 230.

Jayavarman VII's architectural programme.<sup>61</sup> He developed this research for a wider audience in the slim volume on Jayavarman VII published in Phnom Penh in 1935, which details a genealogy of the king, his ascension to the throne, and examines his artistic legacy.<sup>62</sup> In this essay Cœdès suggests that the statues which represent a corpulent man in meditation could be portraits of the king, and that statues of Prajnāpāramitā also represent deified versions of the king's wives. He further proposed that a Buddha statue found at Banteay Chhmar could be considered as a portrait of the king, with the *uṣṇīṣa* (a protuberance on the top of the Buddha's head) of the Buddha replacing the chignon of the 'true' portrait statue depicting the king in meditation.<sup>63</sup> Cœdès reasserted this position in papers published in 1958 and 1960, which respond to arguments made by Jean Boisselier, as detailed above.<sup>64</sup>

Cœdès proposed that the architectural aim of the Bayon was to represent an abstraction rather than a specific individual. His position is grounded in Indian theology, in which the 'one and manyness' aspect of divinity means that there is often much overlap between divinities. Cœdès argued that an insistence upon a single, definitive identification is born of a western conception of the discrete nature of divinity, whereas Hinduism accepts the Oneness of God but realises the multiple ways that people see and express this Oneness. There are many *darśanas*, i.e. points of view, of the truth, but they are all deemed orthodox. In Mahāyāna Buddhism Lokeśvara, as the embodiment of compassion, expresses his compassion by taking on a variety of forms depending on his audience. To illustrate his position Cœdès writes, 'Brahmā is the Creator of the Universe; Śiva spreads blessings on every region in space; Buddha of the Great Miracle duplicates himself in infinity; and Lokeśvara faces in all directions'.<sup>65</sup>

At the same time Paul Mus proposed his own reading of the symbolism of Angkor Thom in which he drew upon Buddhist cosmology and iconographical studies to draw comparison between the Bayon as the seat of royal power and the palace of

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<sup>61</sup> Cœdès, 'La date du Bayon', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 28, (1928), 81-103.

<sup>62</sup> Cœdès, *Jayavarman VII: Un Grand Roi Du Cambodge*.

<sup>63</sup> The question of the portrait will be addressed in the following chapter but Cœdès' remarkable interpretation of the body of Jayavarman VII's art as the expression of a living Buddha was to have a bearing on his reading of the Bayon.

Cœdès, *Jayavarman VII: Un Grand Roi Du Cambodge*, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Cœdès, 'Les Statues Du Roi Khmèr Jayavarman VII', 218–226; Cœdès, 'Le Portrait Dans L'art Khmer', 179–198.

<sup>65</sup> Cœdès, *Angkor: An Introduction*, p.63.

Indra on Mount Meru.<sup>66</sup> He recognised that the Angkorian statues of deities were in fact portraits of the kings, as well as images of gods, and therefore the Buddha image of the Bayon was also an image of the king. Moreover, he argued that the face towers could also be read as portraits of the king. In considering the association between the faces and Lokeśvara, Mus connected the multiple appearances of the Bodhisattva which looks in all directions with the Brahmānic deities Brahmā (whose four faces enable him to see all four quarters of the universe and all four Ages) and Śiva as embodied in the Liṅga.<sup>67</sup> Mus advances Cœdès's thinking by arguing for a more conceptual understanding of this multivalent interpretation of the face towers: 'The model that inspired the architect was not a real being, but an abstraction: it is the royal power blessing the four corners of the country.'<sup>68</sup>

The approach of Mus and Cœdès takes into account, and offers an explanation for, the lack of defining iconographic attributes as well as the lack of singular references made to an identity in the extant epigraphy, and their position comes from an Indic perspective rather than because of a lack of concrete evidence. The 'one and many' attitude which underpins Indic philosophy is in accord with a reading of the faces as the king, the Buddha, the god, or the Bodhisattva, in which the face ultimately expresses each identity simultaneously. The identification of the faces as the king has been refuted by Woodward, Vickery and Sharrock on the basis that the faces of the Bayon do not formally compare with the portrait statues of Jayavarman VII.<sup>69</sup> It is true that the "portrait statues" of the king represents him with lowered lids, in the posture of someone bowed in the position of a worshipper. The king in these statues is not

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<sup>66</sup> Mus, 'Le Symbolisme a Ankor-Thom', 57–68.

<sup>67</sup> Mus, 'The Thousand-Armed Kannon: A Mystery or a Problem', 467-466.

Here Mus refers to 'an old Cham inscription' in Sanskrit which refers to the many faces of Īśvara – an epithet of Siva – which enabled him to bless all four quarters of the world at once. Īśvara, meaning 'Lord' also appears in the name Avalokitesvara, perhaps in common with Siva. S.J. Tambiah, following Paul Mus, also argues that the concept of the cakravartin is akin to Mount Meru in that each function as an orientating axis in the physical world. Tambiah quotes an illuminating passage from C.J. Reynolds thesis on Thai Buddhism: 'the Cakavatti is depicted as a cosmocrator whose conquest proceeded through the continents at each of the four cardinal points, and whose rule radiated out from a central position either identified or closely associated with Mount Meru. In the later texts this connection between the Cakavatti and the cosmological pattern of the four directions and Mount Meru comes increasingly to the fore and it plays a dominant role in the architectural symbolism which developed in conjunction with Buddhist kingship'.

Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). 46.

<sup>68</sup> Mus, 'Le Symbolisme à Ankor-Thom', 62-65.

<sup>69</sup> Sharrock, 'The Mystery of the Face Towers', 243.

represented as a god and as Sharrock correctly asserts these statues are certainly not idealised representations of Jayavarman VII, for his body appears to be that of a middle-aged man, well preserved but with a slight paunch.<sup>70</sup> However, I argue that Sharrock et al. subscribe to too narrow definition of portrait, which betrays the assumption that it must bear a physiognomic likeness in order to be authentic. We return to this in the following chapter.

## **Radiating Power: Connecting Centres and Peripheries**

The metaphor of radiating kingly power is well established in theories of political structures in Southeast Asia.<sup>71</sup> In his remarkable work on Buddhist polities Stanley J. Tambiah developed the concept of a ‘galactic polity’, which describes the physical, social and cosmic structures of Southeast Asian kingdoms, where the physical land becomes a representation of the divine cosmos.<sup>72</sup> Closely aligned with the maṇḍala

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 243-244.

<sup>71</sup> In Southeast Asian polities there is a long history of intimate connections between the state and the universe, the microcosm and the macrocosm, in conceptions and expressions of power. Cities and temples were ordered in imitation of the universe, placing at their centre the structuring axis of a temple or palace – even a king – which represented Mount Meru. The Hindu and Buddhist geographies of the cosmos have some differences, but overall their conception of a concentric, maṇḍala structure is similar. In Brahmanic doctrine the world consists of a central, circular continent named Jambūdvīpa, which is surrounded by seven annular oceans and seven annular continents, which are enclosed by a large mountain range. Mount Meru is located at the centre of Jambūdvīpa, with the city of gods at its summit, ruled by Brahma and surrounded by guardians at the eight cardinal points. In the Buddhist structure, Mount Meru is still located at the centre and is surrounded by seven mountain ranges which are separated by seven annular oceans. Beyond these ranges is an ocean with four continents in each of the cardinal directions. The continent to the south of Mount Meru is Jambūdvīpa, the home of men. This universe is enclosed by the Chakravala mountain range.

See Robert Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1963)

<sup>72</sup> Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 102-103.

The maṇḍala structure theory was first explicitly articulated in the Southeast Asian context by O. W. Wolters. The maṇḍala provides the basis for the notion of a galactic polity, and indeed for the very phenomenon that galactic polity describes. Etymologically the maṇḍala refers to organisation from a central point outwards, contained within a structure; ‘manda’ meaning core and ‘la’ meaning a container or enclosing element. In its most basic translation maṇḍala means ‘circle’, however it means this in many senses, for example it has a geo-cosmological meaning as the circle which surrounds Mount Meru, as well as ritual meanings as a the circle which delineates the ritual space.

O.W. Wolters, "Ayudhya and the Rearward Part of the World", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 3 & 4, 1968, 172-178; O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspective* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982);

structural theory, the galactic polity is conceived of as being circular, with decreasing levels of intensity of power as the circle widens. The number of units in this galactic system can vary significantly, but the structure always replicates the cosmos and the physical and spatial relationships always correspond with political and social relations.<sup>73</sup> The space of the galactic polity is unbounded and orientated around the centre, like a planet holding its satellites in orbit. If the force and power of the centre reduces then this impacts on the pulling force it exerts on these satellites (which can be quadrants of the capital or villages, towns, provinces or vassals).<sup>74</sup> Therefore the territory of a king can be described as a variable sphere of influence which increases or decreases dependent upon the royal power radiating from the centre.<sup>75</sup>

The Bayon temple is situated at the literal, as well as the symbolic, centre of the king's territory, representing the stabilising force of Mount Meru. Hawixbrock proposed that when read together all the temples built by Jayavarman VII act as a sign of his status as a *cakravartin*, arguing that several of his temples – Preah Khan, Ta Prohm for example – were built at the sites of victories in battle, symbolising the restoration of order in a monumental maṇḍala.<sup>76</sup> As well as the radiating qualities present in the architecture and art of the Bayon and Angkor Thom, allusions to light and radiance abound in the epigraphic record of Jayavarman VII. This is not novel to the late twelfth century, as it is a common trope in all Angkorian inscriptions. However these pre-existing concepts and metaphors of radiating, omnipresent royal power were made spatially manifest for the first time in Jayavarman VII's capital. I will provide a selection of stanzas from the key inscriptions from this period to illustrate the poetic metaphors employed in the epigraphy.

The inscriptions which interest us here in particular are those found at the Prasat Chrung temples (inscriptions K.287, K.288, K.547, K.597). These are called 'the corner temples', referring to their location at the inner corner of the city walls of Angkor Thom. After several stanzas invoking the triple bodies of the Buddha, the inscriptions pay tribute to Jayavarman VII's ancestors, alluding to their sparkling, illuminating

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Sunait, Chutintaranond, "'Maṇḍala", "Segmentary State" and Politics of Centralization in Medieval Ayudhya', *Journal of Siam Society*, 78 (1990), 89.

<sup>73</sup> Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 110-112.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-113.

<sup>75</sup> Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 112.

<sup>76</sup> Hawixbrock, 'Jayavarman VII Ou Le Renouveau d'Angkor, Entre Tradition et Modernité', 76-77.

characteristics.<sup>77</sup> In Stanza XVI Jayavarman's father, Dharaṇīndravarman, is described as having power which disperses across large areas of space. It states,

XVI: (31) tayos tanūjo mahitadvijendro  
 dvijendravego dvijarājakāntaḥ  
 (32) dikcakravālotkaṭakīrttigandho  
 yo dhīśvaraś śrīdharaṇīndravarmmā

Leur fils, honorant les Brahmā nes, impétueux comme le roi des oiseaux (Garuda), beau comme la lune, parfumant de sa gloire extraordinaire le cercle des points cardinaux, fut le seigneur suprême Śrīdharaṇīndravarman.

Their son, honouring the Brahmins, impetuous like the king of birds (Garuda), beautiful like the moon, perfuming with his extraordinary glory the circle of cardinal points, was the supreme lord Śrī Dharaṇīndravarman [Jayavarman VII's father].<sup>78</sup>

Here Jayavarman VII's father is likened to the moon, shining onto darkness and extending his glory to all the cardinal points. Of course, the light of the moon is penetrating, illuminating, and extends to cover all ground, which speaks to omnipresence and omnipotence. Further, his glory is spread like a perfume and this olfactory metaphor maps onto the metaphor of light, both of which are able to disperse in all directions. We see this metaphor again in relation to Jayavarman VII himself, in the south-west Prasat Chrung inscription, in stanza XXIX, where it is written that on the battle field the clarity of morning was obscured by a mass of flags. Jayavarman VII's victory is described as a sun which disperses the darkness of his enemies.

XXIX: (57) divṣodaye yasya raṇe vṛṣaṅka-  
 vṛṇḍatriyāmīkryavāsarābhe  
 (58) udbhāsītadhavastajaganmukhāśa-  
 dviṣattamāḥ prādur abhūd jayārkkah

Sur le champ de bataille, à l'horizon duquel se levaient les ennemis, et dont la clarté matinale était obscurcie par la foule des étendards, apparut le soleil de sa victoire, dispersant l'obscurité des ennemis qui dévoraient la face du monde éclipsé'.

On the battle field, on the horizon of which the enemies arose, and whose morning clarity was obscured by the mass of flags, the sun of his victory

<sup>77</sup> For a thorough treatment of Jayavarman VII's ancestry and the ancestry of the Mahidarapura dynasty to which he belonged see George Coëdès, 'Etudes Cambodgiennes', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, (1929), 297-308.

<sup>78</sup> Coëdès, 'La Stèle de Ta-Prohm', Sanskrit pp. 18, French 39.

appeared, dispersing the darkness of enemies who devoured the face of the eclipsed earth.<sup>79</sup>

This stanza, also from the southwest Prasat Chrung stele refers to the omnipresence of the king who illuminates the entire universe:

LXIII: (1) loke śnuvān astarasodayastho  
Yo maṇḍadhāmni prahitapatāpaḥ  
(2) sahasradhāmāpi samastalokā-  
Lokaprakāśaṅ janayāñ cakāra

Se répandant dans le monde, se tenant (à la fois) sur la terre et sur les montagnes du Levant et du Ponant, dirigeant sa puissance sur les faibles, bien qu'il demeurât en mille endroits divers, il éclairait l'Univers tout entier [ou: bien qu'il fût le soleil, il éclairait les deux côtés de l'Univers].

Spreading himself throughout the world, standing (at once) on the earth and on the mountains of the east (rising sun) and the west, guiding his power to the weak, although he resided in a thousand different places, he lit up the entire universe (or: although he was the sun, he lit up the two sides of the universe).<sup>80</sup>

Similar allusions to light and radiance are found in the Phimeanakas inscription (K.485), apparently composed by the wife of Jayavarman VII. Stanza XVIII states that 'his glory went to the four points in space'.<sup>81</sup> These metaphors of illumination and radiance are complemented by references made to the brilliant face of the king. In the following stanza from the southwest Prasat Chrung temple the face of the king is deemed to be so bright that Brahmā has to protect himself from the heat produced. In this stanza '*mukhā*' refers to the face of the king, which in Sanskrit can mean both face and mouth.

XXXVIII (13) yasyābhirāmasya paṭupratāpair  
vidhau vidhātā vikasanmukhāvjaḥ  
(14) sahāsanāvjena nitāntatāpād  
aṅgais sudhāṃ lepayati sma nūnam

Lorsqu'il eut créé ce roi charmant, le Créateur épanouissant le lotus de son visage sous ses rayons ardents, fit aussitôt enduire d'ambrosie ses propres membres ainsi que le lotus qui lui servait de trône, (pour les protéger) contre la chaleur excessive (que dégageait le roi).

<sup>79</sup> Cœdès, 'Stèle des Prāsāt Črun d'Ankor Thom', Sanskrit, 221, French 222.

<sup>80</sup> Cœdès, 'Stèle des Prāsāt Črun d'Ankor Thom', Sanskrit, 215, French 225.

<sup>81</sup> Cœdès, 'Grande Stele Du Phimeanakas', 174.

When he created this charming king, the Creator [Brahmā] opening up the lotus of his [the king's] face under his burning rays, immediately smeared ambrosia on his own members as well as the lotus which he used as a throne (for protection) against the excessive heat (which the king exuded).<sup>82</sup>

This idea of connecting the centre of power with the periphery in a galactic structure is expressly made manifest in the structure of the Bayon. Presenting this concept in spatial form is not entirely novel and Angkorian epigraphy is characterised by suggesting that kings metaphorically radiate light, as a symbol of their omnipresent power. But the Bayon is innovative in that it not only translates these concepts into material, spatial form, but it expresses these concepts in *anthropomorphised* form. Jayavarman VII was the first monarch to express this concept explicitly in art and architecture in the form of the face radiating its vision across the empire.

### **The Temple as *Puruṣa***

In diverse ways, both the gods and the powerful men of the territory were gathered together within the Bayon temple complex. Following from his argument that the face towers represent 'abstract royal power', Mus argued that the installation of statues of regional deities in the sanctuaries beneath the faces established a cosmological connection between the king and his subjects, signifying his power extending across the territory.<sup>83</sup> These statues were associated with local dignitaries via inscriptions, which would typically comprise of the given name of the honoured individual – the king, his consort, immediate family, or a dignitary – and their preferred deity.<sup>84</sup> Bernard Philippe Groslier also advocated Mus' interpretation, writing, '[t]hese heads "looking every way at once" are admirable symbols of the omnipresence of the King and god, watching over the land assembled at his feet in the persons of the chief local dignitaries'.<sup>85</sup> In a similar vein, T.S. Maxwell more recently offered a different interpretation which nevertheless adheres to the idea of joining the periphery with the central power. He proposed that the faces symbolise the Mahāyāna pentad of the

<sup>82</sup> Cœdès, 'Stèle des Prāsāt Ćrun d'Ankor Thom', Sanskrit 212, French, 223.

<sup>83</sup> Mus, 'Le Sourire d'Angkor', 377 – 380.

<sup>84</sup> For examples and some of the problems that directly translating the inscriptions at the Bayon pose see, Maxwell, 'Religion at the Time of Jayavarman VII', 100-113.

<sup>85</sup> B-P. Groslier, *Indochina, Art in the Melting Pot of Races*, 183.

Buddhas of the cardinal points, centred on Vairocana, a structure which composes the highest level of the Buddhist universe with the lesser deities installed beneath.<sup>86</sup>

Irrespective of the particular divinity – if any - that the faces may represent, the architectural conception of the face towers succeeds in representing the ‘royal power blessing the four quarters of the country’.<sup>87</sup> In this way the faces represent an outward directional flow of power and authority which extends from its central tower, which encloses a colossal image of the Buddha, who is forever depicted deep in meditation, at the moment of enlightenment. The temple itself is simultaneously charged with an inward directional flow of power and authority from its outside, represented by the consecration of deities corresponding to the provinces. This multidirectional flow of power is maintained via the temple’s position as a microcosmic body of the empire as demonstrated by the statues of regional deities/ dignitaries which are installed in its architectural body. Mus captured this metaphorical movement between the temple and the empire when he affirmed that the Bayon is:

a powerful architectural achievement which not only conceals the statues under the towers but at the same time radiates the face, yet returns this pantheon back to Buddha - and gave this capital city under the guise of Jayavarman VII unification.<sup>88</sup>

The collection of statuary and carving of bas-reliefs within the Bayon presents the inclusion of all components of society within an explicit hierarchical model. This model incorporates the radiating face of the god or king, deities from regional cults consecrated in the name of the elite, and depictions of the ‘little people’ of the population.<sup>89</sup>

The architecture of Jayavarman VII was given a face, or rather multiple faces. No longer was the temple structure a superlative vessel to *contain* the gods of the kingdom and replicate the heavenly cosmos. Now a human face – or faces – was given

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<sup>86</sup> Maxwell, ‘Religion at the Time of Jayavarman VII’, 99-98.

<sup>87</sup> Cœdès, *Angkor: An Introduction*, 63.

<sup>88</sup> Mus, ‘Le Sourire d’Angkor’, 377.

<sup>89</sup> As already described, the external enclosure wall of the Bayon is decorated with bas-reliefs depicting Cham and Khmer soldiers in battle, as well as scenes of what Paul Mus has described as the daily lives of the ‘little people’. These vivid accounts of everyday life include details such as people preparing food such as corn on the cob and roast pig, bartering at market, gambling, giving birth, and performing circus acrobatics. Although the bas-reliefs at the mid-eleventh-century Baphuon temple show naturalistic scenes and a bas-relief at Angkor Wat depicts king Suryavarman II, the majority of Angkorian reliefs were concerned with representing mythological stories rather than historic or secular events. The temples of Jayavarman VII are unique in that significant wall space is dedicated to depicting mundane life.

to the structure itself, incorporating the human form into the entire body of the temple complex. The whole architectural structure of the Bayon can be considered to be a god *in itself*.<sup>90</sup> But it is more apposite to this present study to consider it specifically as a *puruṣa*, which is often translated as “man”, “primal man” or “cosmic man”. According to the Vedas the different body parts of this “cosmic man” correspond to objects in the universe as well as to the distinct castes in India, indeed it is the sacrifice of the body of the *puruṣa* which creates the world.<sup>91</sup> The *puruṣa* is aligned with the *Ātman*, the Self beyond all phenomena, or that which ‘remains when everything that is not self is eliminated’.<sup>92</sup> The term *puruṣa* therefore more refers to an anthropomorphic figure who embodies many distinct concepts, unified within his body. Thinking about the *puruṣa* in such a way presents a concept which is divided into many – sometimes incompatible – parts, yet ultimately is bounded together as a whole. More than simply the sum of its parts, the *puruṣa* is always divided yet always whole; forever one and forever many.

The *puruṣa* is pertinent to thinking through the Bayon for a number of reasons. Firstly, the *puruṣa* corresponds to the cosmic pillar of the *liṅga* or Mount Meru, as each acts as a supreme orientating force.<sup>93</sup> The central pyramid towers of the temple-mountains of Angkor were designed to imitate Mount Meru and the Bayon retains this mountain-like structure, which acts as a centrifugal force around which the territory of the kingdom is orientated. Secondly, the concept of the *puruṣa* not only invokes a figurative body, but it is wholly predicated upon the form of man; primacy is given to the metaphor of the human form for understanding and *ordering* the structure of the universe. What is the Bayon if not a temple which has literally given a human face(s)? I suggest that the face towers of Jayavarman VII were not intended to be associated with a single personality, but instead gave monumental figurative form to the art of the state. This represents a moment of artistic endeavour which took extant preoccupations with

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<sup>90</sup> Bruno Dagens, *Les Khmers*, (Paris: Les Belle Lettres, 2003), 243.

<sup>91</sup> See, W. J. Johnson, *A Dictionary of Hinduism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ralph T.H. Griffith, *The Rig-Ved*, (Forgotten Books, 2008); David Leeming and Margaret Leeming, *A Dictionary of Creation Myths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 140. The Hindu caste system of India never took hold in Cambodia during the centuries of the cultural absorption and attrition of Indic Sanskritic principles into pre-existing Khmer beliefs.

<sup>92</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principle Upaniṣads*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), 73-74

<sup>93</sup> Mus, ‘The Thousand-Armed Kannon: A Mystery or a Problem’, 462.

Mus also notes here that Avalokitesvara can be said to constitute an intersection of the cosmic pillar, the *liṅga*, and Mount Meru, as a Bodhisattva who is the axis of the world. Evidence for this metaphorical reading comes from the Amitābha Buddha – ‘on top of the world’- in the headdress of the Bodhisattva.

divinising monarchs via statuary, and exploited these preoccupations to superlative effect by incorporating the human into the temple itself. Finally, like the *puruṣa*, the architectural temple as a whole embodies a number of distinct, yet interrelated concepts which come together as one in order to symbolise a harmony of royal, Buddhist power. We have seen this in the gathering of regional deities, which are also associated with living people, beneath the outer sanctuaries. And most spectacularly, we have seen the multivalency of concepts present at the Bayon in the ambiguity of the face towers, which disavow any stable reading.

## Conclusion

This co-existence of multiple readings is not based on a lack of clear evidence or a lack of interest in Indic iconography. Rather, the acknowledgment of a multivalency of readings is embedded in an Indic approach. Each component of the Bayon – by which I mean each possible reading of the faces as well as the statues installed in the sanctuaries and the bas-reliefs - can be approached separately or considered as a whole. The taking of one interpretation or component does not exclude or eradicate the multiple identifications or components which comprise the whole conceptual structure. As an example, one might view the faces as the king, yet at the same time view them as the Buddha, while another viewer thinks he is seeing the face belonging to the Bodhisattva, while another person believes she is seeing Brahmā. I argue that each viewpoint is valid and there is no contradistinction between them. The concept of the *puruṣa* incorporates multiple, disparate elements and likewise the Bayon gathers together manifold, diverse and imbricated components which express deeply complex ideas. The Bayon is an insistently material and highly conceptual gathering of diverse components and such an assembly of irregular concepts makes it impossible to clearly define something as being one thing *or* another. A critical appraisal of the scholarship on the face towers has demonstrated that the faces resist attempts to precisely identify them as a single deity. The indigenous interpretations are even more instructive. Here, the faces are commonly given a name – Prohm or Brahmā – but this designation does not foreclose other readings of the faces as being metaphors for the core Buddhist virtues or as being symbolic of the king (in an abstracted sense).

The historical palimpsest has produced a contemporary landscape of multiple interpretations, which generally appear to not be mutually exclusive. If there had been a

single intended meaning of the Bayon faces at the time of its construction, the movement of history means such an interpretation cannot remain static and the multiplicity of identifications over space and time is itself meaningful.<sup>94</sup> Ang Choulean reminds scholars that Angkor Thom remained the Khmer capital until the middle of the fifteenth century and was briefly reoccupied in the sixteenth century, therefore,

one would be making a mistake to think that one interpretation or one vision excludes any other. Concerning religious monuments – or a city like Angkor Thom with a strong religious and symbolic connotation – it is normal, or at least not surprising, to see them as endowed with many meanings.<sup>95</sup>

This multiplicity of identifications, over-lapping, intersecting or appearing at distinct historical moments means that unless new epigraphic material is unearthed, a singular, specific identity to the faces cannot be ascertained. Sharrock states that Jayavarman VII must have known precisely which deity adorned his empire.<sup>96</sup> This may have been the case, however it is striking that no mention is made to the identity of the face towers in any extant epigraphy and that their iconography is so imprecise, given the iconographic precision of other Buddhist and Brahmanic statuary. In the absence of a fixed, stable iconography was this ambiguity intended from the very beginning?

The faces in and of themselves are significant, in their monumentality, facing each of the cardinal directions, making concrete the radiating power of the monarch. This is in accord with Southeast Asian structures of polities in which the centre is connected to the peripheries in a galactic structure. The theme of radiating light and power was not new to Jayavarman VII's reign, for it is recorded in earlier epigraphy but what is novel is that this literary metaphor of rays of light was expressed in art and architecture in the anthropomorphised form of the face. Within the temple complex were gathered statues of provincial divinities, statues associated with royalty, bas-reliefs of everyday life, and images of the Buddha/ king, under the umbrella of the faces. The multiple faces render the temple anthropomorphic in form, corresponding to the notion of the *puruṣa*. This concept is pertinent to the temple because it acts as the orientating force, much like Mount Meru or the body of the king, from around which the rest of the universe spreads. The *puruṣa* is also based upon the human form, much like the body of the Bayon temple itself.

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<sup>94</sup> See, Thompson, 'An Oblique View of the Bayon', 130.

<sup>95</sup> Ang, 'In the Beginning was the Bayon', 376.

<sup>96</sup> Sharrock, 'The Mystery of the Face Towers', 234.

The concept of the faces as a portrait was raised in this discussion and the following chapter examines portraiture from within an Indic perspective. I argue that one possible reading of the Bayon faces, among a plurality of readings, is of them being a portrait of the king, in conjunction with other portrait images of the king. In this triadic collection, each portrait represents different facets of Jayavarman VII's kingship, from within Buddhist-Brahmānic perspectives. Chapter Five consider questions of the face more broadly and examines the inherent ambiguities and paradoxes at play in the face towers at Angkor Thom.



## Chapter Four: Royal-Divine Bodies and Images: The Portrait (Re)-Considered

Above the thick-set body, bowed beneath the fearful weight of power, appears the face of this tremendous king: heavy, powerful and impassive save for the slight and almost bitter smile which hovers on his lips. The eyes are hidden behind the half-closed lids, as if unwilling to look longer on this world of wretchedness. It is the last face of Khmer art as it totters to its doom, and if not the most perfect, is certainly the most human and the most moving.<sup>1</sup>

Of the multiple artistic innovations of the reign of Jayavarman VII, one of the most celebrated has been the emergence of what has been variously described by scholars as the ‘true’ portrait in Khmer art (fig. 34 and 35). These statues have been identified as such because they represent a physical similitude of King Jayavarman VII, based on comparisons with the bas-reliefs depicting the king.<sup>2</sup> The statues show a middle-aged man in the pose of a devotee, in the act of donation, meditation and/or prayer. One statue was discovered at Krol Romeas in Angkor Thom and is now in the National Museum of Phnom Penh (No. 1703). Another was found at Phimai, an Angkorian temple situated in modern-day Northern Thailand, and is now in the National Museum of Phimai. Both of these statues are missing their arms. A near-identical head – the torso is unaccounted for - is now located at the Musée Guimet, Paris (P.430) but its exact provenance is unknown. Another head was found in Preah Khan of Kompong Thom in 1958 and is now in Phnom Penh (Ka.989 / B.857) and in 2000 its torso was located. Also found at the site was a body, in likeness to extant statues of Jayavarman VII, with its arms in the posture of meditation - *dhyāna-mudrā*.<sup>3</sup> The figures of these “portrait statues” are sat in lotus position, bare-chested and dressed in the simple robes

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Philippe Groslier and Jacques Arthaud, *Angkor Art and Civilisation* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957), 158.

<sup>2</sup> See, Cœdès, ‘Le Portrait Dans L’art Khmer’, 179–98; Boisselier, ‘Réflexions Sur L’art Du Règne de Jayavarman VII’, 261–73; Boisselier, *La statuaire khmère et son évolution.*; Philippe Stern, *Les Monuments Khmers Du Style Du Bayon et Jayavarman VII*, 174; Mus, ‘Le Sourire d’Angkor’, 363–81.

<sup>3</sup> Christophe Pottier, ‘A Propos de La Statue Portrait Du Roi Jayavarman VII Au Temple de Préah Khan de Kompong Svay’, *Arts asiatiques*, 2000, 171–72.

The discovery of these fragments corresponds to Cœdès proposal that there were two primary sets of statues: the ‘portraits’ of Jayavarman VII and the Jayabuddhamahānātha statues of a Buddha, whereby the statue of the man is placed in front of – paying homage to – the statue of the Buddha.

Cœdès, ‘Le Portrait Dans L’art Khmer’, 195-96.

of devotee, devoid of royal adornments (although the elongated earlobes are indicative of royal personage). The figure leans forward slightly, his head and eyelids lowered. His hair is swept up into a chignon. These images have been heralded as the short-lived triumph of naturalism over the hieratic by depicting a king stripped of royal or divine attributes. The most interesting and novel element of these statues is that they represent the king in the form of a devotee not as a deity.<sup>4</sup>

Image removed for copyright reasons

Figure 34. Sandstone statue widely believed to depict Jayavarman VII in the pose of a devotee. Late twelfth – early thirteenth century. Provenance: Krol Romeas, Angkor Thom. Now in National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh (B.347 B.19). Height 137cm. Photograph courtesy of National Museum of Cambodia.

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<sup>4</sup> Hiram W. Woodward has suggested that the statues of Jayavarman VII in the pose of a devotee represent a shift towards Theravada Buddhism and thus these statues show him receiving a predication for a time when he will become a Buddha. Woodward, 'Practice and Belief in Ancient Cambodia', 251.



Figure 35. Head widely believed to be that of Jayavarman VII. Image courtesy of National Museum of Cambodia (Ka.989 / B.857 / B.191.7).

The designation of these statues as ‘true-portraits’ poses questions as to what conventions govern the genre of portraiture; what makes a portrait ‘true’? And to what extent can earlier royal statuary at Angkor be classed as portraiture? Moreover, if earlier statues are portraits, then what precisely altered in the latter half of the twelfth century? The notion that the shift was engendered by a stylistic move towards naturalism does not explain the change in the content of the image. The subject of these portrait-statues and the specific Angkorian-Cambodian context will be discussed below as I argue for the central importance of the portrait in Jayavarman VII’s Angkor. But before coming to that reading I wish to interrogate the concept, and offer a definition of, portraiture which speaks to the Indic and Buddhist contexts. This detour is necessary for a number of reasons. Firstly, when the Jayavarman VII statues were first identified as “true-portraits” it was generally accepted by art historians that India – and by extension cultures in Southeast Asia – did not have indigenous cultures of portraiture.<sup>5</sup> The denial of Indian portraiture prior to the arrival of the Mughals was in a sense derived from a

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<sup>5</sup> For an excellent historiography of nineteenth-century scholarship on the absence of Indic portraiture see Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters. History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

*priori* notions of Indian art, a result of the abiding influence of Hegel's art history which deemed all Indian art symbolic, and steadfast ideas of what portraiture is.<sup>6</sup> That position has now altered and a handful of scholars have tackled the portrait in the Indic context, including Vincent Lefèvre with his admirable recent study into early Indian portraiture.<sup>7</sup> However, there remains a lack of sustained enquiry into the subject of the portrait within a Buddhist context - with the notable exception of recent work on monk portraiture<sup>8</sup> - and in the context of Angkor.

The purpose of this chapter is to unravel the tangled knots of inchoate definitions as to what constitutes a portrait, which haunt art historical enquiries into non-western image-making, and to think more precisely about the figurative image in relation to the doctrines and practices of Buddhism. To be more exact, what is required is a consideration of the points of equivalence, or non-equivalence, between physical bodies and image bodies. By venturing into a variety of histories and specificities, this chapter looks to traditions of portraiture in Asia, with a particular focus on Buddha statues, Indian royal portraits, and Chinese monk portraits to arrive at a conceptual understanding of portraiture which embraces Buddhist-Brahmānical frameworks. I argue that the much of the key scholarship on the 'true-portrait' at Angkor has been predicated on an assumption of a stable category of 'portrait' which stems from a modern, western conception of the genre. This is not such an issue in the case of the statues of the king in the pose of a devotee; the statue is a 'true-portrait' in the sense that it is unequivocally not an image of a deity. However, this particular conception of the portrait narrows the interpretive field; a broader discursive foray into the parameters of portraiture in a Buddhist milieu gives scope to consider new interpretations of the face towers of the Bayon, which appeared concomitantly with the statues of Jayavarman VII. This chapter concludes with the contention that portraiture was *the* central artistic trope in the late twelfth-century at Angkor and that the face towers of the Bayon form one element in a triad of portraits, along with the statues of the king as devotee, and Buddha

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<sup>6</sup> Vincent Lefèvre, *Portraiture in Early India. Between Transience and Eternity*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> Lefèvre, *Portraiture in Early India. Between Transience and Eternity*.

<sup>8</sup> See, Robert H. Sharf and T. Griffith Foulk, 'On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China', *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, 1993, 149-219; Robert H. Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf, *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context* (Stanford University Press, 2002); James C. Dobbins, 'Portraits of Shinran in Medieval Pure Land Buddhism', in *Living Images, Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, ed. by Robert H. Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf (Stanford University Press, 2001), 19-48.

images, which taken together constitute an investigation in the potential of materiality for expressing multivalent concepts of kingship.

### **Shadowy Traces: The Origins of the Portrait**

The condition of physical similitude of the portrait is often taken as self-evident in much scholarly work on the ‘true-portrait’ in Cambodia or in arguments made against indigenous traditions of portraiture in Indian art history. However, a brief consideration of the history of the genre in European art history demonstrates that portraiture as a genre has altered, contingent on prevailing notions of identity and the codes by which that identity was transmitted in the image. The variation in these ideas has impacted upon the emphasis placed on physical similitude, expression, function, and the codification of clothing and pose. Even the terminology I am employing has radically shifted over the course of history. “Portrait” has its origins in the Latin verb “protraho”, which means “to reproduce” or “to copy”, yet the term portrait comes from around the fourteenth century and the noun “portraire”, meaning “to paint” or “to depict”. However, the Anglo-French roots “portraire” are slightly earlier and has the literal meaning of “to trace or to draw forth”.<sup>9</sup> This sense of the term is interesting because it connects to the portrait’s role of making manifest something which is otherwise hidden, which reveals something of the function of the portrait as making manifest interior qualities.<sup>10</sup>

In the western context the extent to which the portrait image had to bear physical similitude to its referent has been variable, contingent on the prevailing function of the portrait and the qualities which it emphasised. In the first century C.E. images in Rome became expressly political as legitimacy of rule was established via ancestor portraits. Moreover the reach of the portrait extended across social strata and geographical spaces in the form of coins.<sup>11</sup> The portrait of the emperor in profile on coinage constitutes a compelling case for the political power of the portrait, and the dissemination of the image was an act of distributing sovereign power.<sup>12</sup> Although some scholars have argued that the early Christian period marked a departure from the portraiture traditions

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<sup>9</sup> Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>10</sup> Andreas Beyer, *Portraits. A History*, trans. by Steven Lindberg (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc, 2003), 18.

<sup>11</sup> Beyer, *Portraits. A History*, 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Joanna Woodall, ‘Introduction, Facing the Subject’, in *Portraiture, Facing the Subject*, ed. by Joanna Woodall, (Manchester University Press, 1997), 3 – 4.

of antiquity, to the extent that the genre practically disappeared as the eschatological concerns of the individual within the collective altered<sup>13</sup>, portraits, in particular ruler portraits were a major art form during the Middle Ages, and many employed individual likenesses, in both western Europe and the Byzantine East.<sup>14</sup> Moreover by reproducing the presence of a ruler in the event of his physical absence, inscriptions, seals, coins, and manuscripts constituted portraits in much the same way as they had done in earlier epochs.

The Renaissance saw the emergence of what Heather McPherson has termed the ‘secular’ portrait, in line with the increased importance of biography and autobiography.<sup>15</sup> This saw the development of an understanding of portraiture as being a representation of personality, whereas it had previously - in Christian traditions - been more concerned with portraying political or spiritual power and virtue. There was greater emphasis on the individual and upon assumptions of physical veracity, although idealization and refinement of the sitter persisted. Shearer West contends that an important distinction must be made between likeness and identity.<sup>16</sup> She argues that it is the latter which has constituted an understanding of portraiture within a western framework and upon which the mutations of the genre have been predicated. This has informed the changing emphasis placed upon physical likeness as conventions alter synchronically and diachronically. As Lefèvre pertinently notes, likeness has often been focused on the formal qualities of art – the technique and modeling – rather than on looking at the *function* of the image; individualisation does not need to equal resemblance.<sup>17</sup> It is the function of the image which this chapter seeks to further explore.

Despite arguing for identity as the motivational factor in portraiture, West considers portraiture a western art form, because of what she sees as a greater stress placed upon the individual over the collective; hence the rise of the popularity of the portrait during the Renaissance when there was an increased emphasis placed upon individual self-consciousness. West concedes that there is long tradition of Chinese

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<sup>13</sup> Beyer, *Portraits. A History*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> See for example, Eliza Garrison, *Ottonian Imperial Art and Portraiture*, (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012); Catherine E. Karkov, *The Ruler Portraits of Anglo-Saxon England*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Heather McPherson, *The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth Century France*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11-17.

<sup>17</sup> Lefèvre, *Portraiture in Early India*, 13-14.

portraiture and within Mughal miniature painting, but does not consider these traditions in any detail. However, the portrait image in the Indic context was equally interested in situating the individual – albeit an individual otherwise conceived – within the collective context. Richard Brilliant is similar in his analysis of portraiture, in which he states that it is a genre that is particular to the West.<sup>18</sup> Yet, he argues that the conventions of portraiture adapt to accommodate changes in the nature of the individual in society, which suggests that the genre is adaptable to culturally diverse means of accounting for the individual in society. His initial definition of a portrait states that ‘portraits are art works, intentionally made of living or once living people by artists, in a variety of media, and for an audience’.<sup>19</sup> Nothing here precludes the genre of portraiture existing in non-Western cultures.

The mythic origin of the portrait in the West is instructive in working towards a definition of the term “portrait” because it indicates more precisely the semiotic connection between the referent and the image. In 77 C.E. Gaius Plinius Secundus (Pliny the Younger) wrote of the origins of the portrait in his *Epistulae* (Letters). In this legend the portrait was the first ever image, made when the outline of a man’s shadow was traced on a wall in paint.<sup>20</sup> This legend locates the very birth of art in the act of portraying or copying the trace of an individual. Additionally, Pliny wrote of the first sculptural portrait which also originated with the shadow. The daughter of the potter Butades was saddened at the prospect of her lover leaving for foreign shores and so she traced the outline of his shadow which he projected onto the wall in the lamplight. In order to ease his daughter’s suffering Butades rendered this outline in clay and fired it, producing the first sculpture and a substitute for his daughter to cherish the memory of her lover.<sup>21</sup>

This story reveals much about the motivations behind the act of portraiture. In the first instance the earliest sculpture was manufactured for memorialisation and commemoration for sentimental reasons; the physical form of the lover is preserved for personal devotion rather than public, political reasons. Secondly, the shadow, which allowed for a capturing of the body, demonstrates a desire for the portrait to be an indexical trace. The shadow not only acts as a guide and tool for representation but it

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), 8.

<sup>19</sup> Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 8; 26-27.

<sup>20</sup> Beyer, *Portraits. A History*, 17; Sorcha Carey, *Pliny’s Catalogue of Culture: Art and Empire in the Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 141.

<sup>21</sup> Beyer, *Portraits. A History*, 17; Carey, *Pliny’s Catalogue of Culture*, 142.

also inspires the portrait. Indeed the portrait image copies and makes permanent the shadow, rather than the physical body, the shadow which is already exterior to the person, with a strong indexical connection. The shadow can only exist if the subject is present, yet the shadow is not the subject, just their trace on the wall. This is reminiscent of Plato's cave; the shadow is not real, it is already a copy, and the artwork then becomes a copy of the copy. In fact, Lefèvre locates the origins of the image in India in a similar legend, when Brahmā instructed the king to draw a likeness of a boy who died at an early age, in order to ease the father's distress.<sup>22</sup> The likeness was then 'a living person', although whether or not this meant the image was enlivened in a Pygmalion sense as a living replica, or rather the portrait was so successful it was a suitable substitute. In essence, both legends place the origins of the image to soothe and mediate a physical absence.

From a semiotic point of view the relationship that an image has with its reference – the sign to its object – can be iconic, indexical and/ or symbolic.<sup>23</sup> An iconic relationship exists between portraits which bear a resemblance to the person depicted, either as a sign or resemblance which stands in for the object literally or by way of an analogy. Wendy Steiner persuasively argues that the necessary semiotic condition for the portrait lies in its indexicality; 'gesturing towards the extra-artistic actuality of the subject and functioning in an almost magical fashion so as to render that subject present'.<sup>24</sup> In order to achieve this the portrait is reliant upon its symbolic function which gestures to the individual, although the symbol does this via a conventional rule and it does not require a likeness to the subject; portraits which bear little or no physical resemblance to the person depicted can have a symbolic connection via an inscription or a conventional indicator such as clothing. After being an indexical symbol – a term we return to below - the most enduring characteristic of the portrait is, as Steiner advanced, its paradoxical nature, fixing upon a permanent, timeless approach to identity which runs counter to the temporal nature of existence.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lefèvre, *Portraiture in Early India*, 102-103.

<sup>23</sup> C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1966), IV, 359-361.

<sup>24</sup> Wendy Steiner, 'Postmodern Portraits', *Art Journal*, 46 (1987), 173; also Wendy Steiner, 'The Semiotics of Genre: Portraiture in Literature and Painting', *Semiotica*, 21 (1977), 111-120.

<sup>25</sup> Steiner, 'Postmodernist Portraits', 173.

## **‘Portraiture belongs to civilizations that fear death’: The Indic Context Revisited.**

Art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, who was born in Sri Lanka to a Tamil father and English mother and was educated in England, argued that the closest images to portraiture in a Hindu context – and on the basis on his wider work I believe he is actually talking about Brahmānic-Buddhist traditions more broadly - are ancestral effigies which cannot be a portrait in the ‘accepted’ sense of the term as they are not physical likenesses of a person.<sup>26</sup> In support of his argument he cites Stella Kramrisch who wrote ‘portraiture belongs to civilizations that fear death. Individual likeness is not wanted where it suffices for the type to continue’.<sup>27</sup> Here, the question of the function of the portrait in locating the individual in the collective comes to the fore. In unpacking this statement we can see that Kramrisch and Coomaraswamy are correct in presuming a commemorative or substitutive function of the portrait-image but exclude from that category images which function as indexical representations of an individual even in the absence of a physical likeness. I further contend that Buddhism is highly concerned with death, or rather, absence; so much of its art and the debate it provokes is concerned with working out what it is that does survive death or nirvana and how the (illusionary) self relates to the non-self or the non-subject.

In her brief sketch of Indian traditions of portraiture Vidya Dehejia - one of the handful of scholars who have taken up the theoretical question of Indic portraiture – argues that portraiture did exist in pre-Mughal India, but was predicated on vastly different ideas of the significance of the physical body.<sup>28</sup> In Judeo-Christian-Islamic cultures the individual body is, on some level, required for resurrection, whereas in Brahmānic-Buddhist cultures the ‘soul’ inhabits many bodies over the course of multiple rebirths, with the ultimate aim of discarding and transcending the bodily form. Dehejia concludes that the use of stylized features common to royal portraiture in India

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<sup>26</sup> A.K. Coomaraswamy, ‘The Part of Art in Indian Life’, in *Coomaraswamy. Selected Papers. Traditional Art and Symbolism*, ed. by Roger Lipsey, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), i, 89. First published in 1937.

<sup>27</sup> Coomaraswamy, ‘The Part of Art in Indian Life’, 89.

<sup>28</sup> Vidya Dehejia, ‘The Very Idea of a Portrait’, *Ars Orientalis*, 28 (1998), 47.

was a method of dealing with the problem of rendering the self/body permanently in accord with a doctrinal requirement to display a disregard for the ego/body.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the fertile field of enquiry that Dehejia's study opens up, there are two limitations within her essay which must be addressed because they gesture towards the complexities at hand. Firstly, Dehejia correctly asserts that the term "portrait" can be slippery, yet she never proffers her own precise definition. Without this clarification her study risks falling prey to assumptions on the nature of the portrait, falling back upon modern definitions rooted in western art historiography. Secondly, she states that the historical Buddha 'discarded the body, never again to be confined in bodily form'.<sup>30</sup> This statement, although eschatologically accurate, fails to take into account more complex questions regarding the Buddha, his body(s), and images. Arguably, the Buddha is more confined than ever in figurative statuary. I will return to this point below because the relationship between the physical body of the Buddha and images speaks to broader questions regarding representation and portraiture in a Buddhist context.

Padma Kaimal builds upon this debate with her sustained study of pre-Mughal portraiture in South India.<sup>31</sup> She argues that traditions of portraiture existed in India for persons who displayed great virtue, particularly in the field of spiritual devotion or pious donations.<sup>32</sup> Both Dehejia and Kaimal consider a bronze statue from the tenth century now in The Arthur M. Sackler and Freer Gallery of Art. The bronze depicts a slender woman with rounded breasts standing in *contrapposto*, with her right arm bent at the elbow. Dehejia argues that this statue depicts the Chola queen Sembiyan Mahādevi and identifies it as a portrait due to its idiosyncratic formal nature and naturalistic rendering of the breasts, shoulders and facial features. Dehejia contends that it was the Queen's formidable personality which motivated the manufacture of a portrait in her likeness, connecting personality and persona within the portrait.<sup>33</sup> Kaimal is more circumspect in identifying this *particular* image as a portrait of the Queen, arguing that the rendering of the figure is not as idiosyncratic as Dehejia suggests. However she

<sup>29</sup> Dehejia, 'The Very Idea of a Portrait', 48.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Padma Kaimal, 'Passionate Bodies: Constructions of the Self in South Indian Portraits', *Archives of Asian Art*, 48 (1995), 6–16; 'The Problem of Portraiture in South India, circa 870-970 A.D.', *Artibus Asiae*, 59 (1999), 59–133; 'The Problem of Portraiture in South India, Circa 970-1000 A.D.', *Artibus Asiae*, 60 (2000), 139–79.

<sup>32</sup> Kaimal, 'The Problem of Portraiture in South India, circa 870-970 A.D.', 67.

<sup>33</sup> Dehejia, 'The Very Idea of a Portrait', 43.

accepts that people may have wished to take *darśan* (ritual vision) of an image of the Queen after her death; today there is a small statue enshrined in Sembayan Mahādevi village which devotee residents call a portrait of the queen.<sup>34</sup> Kaimal concedes that even an idealised image can constitute a portrait because it is prior knowledge that is crucial in identifying a portrait as a portrait.<sup>35</sup> The same is true of any portrait image.

Unlike Dehejia, Kaimal works towards offering a definition of the category of the portrait and she utilizes the semiotic approach laid out by Wendy Steiner.<sup>36</sup> For Kaimal, a subject must portray a human individual and be indexical. Kaimal refutes the idea that Indians never sculpted in a physical likeness before the Mughals arrived and, as placing the individual within the collective was a central condition of the portrait, Kaimal argues that Indian artists ‘incorporated both features that captured an individual subject’s unique identity and features that informed viewers about the categories to which that individual belonged’.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, portraits concerned with devotion, heroism and sacred sites – which constituted the majority of figurative images in the Indian landscape – were less concerned with making a clear demarcation between the individual and the collective.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Indexical Connection and Buddhist Portraits**

A portrait is an image, text, or combination of both, which represents a human person and is indexically linked with this person. The emphasis placed upon physical similitude will vary between cultures depending on the emphasis which that culture places upon the bodily form and a portrait is only legible as such by persons versed in the culturally-contingent conventions which govern identity and signifiers of identity. The rooting of physical resemblance, and thus identity, in naturalism is not a universal quality of portraiture. However, for a portrait to succeed there must be an indexical link between the image and the ‘original’, but there must also be an audience able to interpret this connection between the original object and its representation. This raises questions as to what constitutes the original in a Buddhist framework. Robert de Caroli considers early figurative sculpture in South Asian art, which appeared in the second

<sup>34</sup> Kaimal, ‘The Problem of Portraiture in South India, Circa 970-1000 A.D.’, 173-174.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-174.

<sup>36</sup> Kaimal, ‘The Problem of Portraiture in South India, circa 870-970 A.D.’, 65; Steiner, ‘Postmodern Portraits’, 173–77.

<sup>37</sup> Kaimal, ‘The Problem of Portraiture in South India, Circa 970-1000 A.D.’, 174.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

and third centuries BCE as representations of ‘spirit-deities’. He argues that these sculptural forms need to be understood from the perspective of indigenous responses to the image with regards to the relationship between the image and its referent.<sup>39</sup> In this context, images are viewed as having a ritual potency even as they are understood as substitutes or proxies for that which they represent. It is not the material substance of the image which is the focus of veneration, but the god which the image incarnates. So while it is understood that the statue is not actually the spirit-deity, it is known that the deity can be addressed via the image, where the statue mediates human and divine interactions.<sup>40</sup>

The connection between the image and the original takes on particular contours in Buddhist traditions. In his rich essay on Buddha images in Thailand, Tambiah discusses how the consecration of new Buddha statues involves attaching the new image to an older image, via a thread, so that the virtues and efficacy of the latter can be transferred to the former. The logic of this act is that a connection is established between each image going back to the historical Buddha himself.<sup>41</sup> This authenticated lineage is crucial in order for the image to possess something of the power and virtue of the Buddha himself and Tambiah provides a rich, illuminating case study of a particularly efficacious statue in Thai religious and political spheres, the Phra Sihing or Sinhala Buddha.<sup>42</sup>

This preoccupation with establishing lineage is exemplified in the Ch’an traditions of monk portraits in China, which has been the subject of extensive analysis by Robert H. Sharf and T. Griffith Foulk.<sup>43</sup> As is common with other traditions of portraiture, portraits of monks were rooted in funerary and memorial practices and acted as sites for devotional offerings. Portraits were only commissioned for adept abbots who had proved themselves worthy of being in lineage with the historical Buddha and portraiture exemplified these lineages. Installed in Patriarch Halls, these images allowed monks to trace their ‘spiritual’ blood line back to the Bodhidharma, a fifth-century monk who was thought to have been the first Chinese patriarch and the primordial

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<sup>39</sup> Robert De Caroli, ‘From the Living Rock. Understanding Figural Representation in Early South Asia’, in *What’s the Use of Art? Asian Visual Culture and Material in Context*, ed. by Jan Mrazek and Morgan Pikelka (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press), 21–45

<sup>40</sup> De Caroli, ‘From the Living Rock’, 29-34.

<sup>41</sup> Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, 230.

<sup>42</sup> Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, 231-242.

<sup>43</sup> Sharf and Griffith Foulk, ‘On the Ritual Use of Ch’an Portraiture in Medieval China’, 149–219.

transmitter of Buddhism.<sup>44</sup> These portraits are termed “*chen*” which is only used in reference to images which could feasibly represent living, or recently living, persons and is never used for images of legendary figures. However, the very term “*chen*” – which also means “truth” - expresses unease at the root of the portrait; there needed to be a ‘true likeness’ of the abbot in order for the portrait to successfully function as a substitute. Indeed the portrait-statue had to have believably been sculpted from direct visual observation; this is where the truth of the image is found. Yet in this context, truth itself is the formless and thus cannot be found in the embodiment of form.<sup>45</sup> This tension expresses itself in the use of puns which can be found in Ch’an literature and in the paradoxical bind of the act of portrayal, itself a didactic tool:

Thus, when the Ch’an abbot issues a challenge to his disciples to produce a *chen*, to “render the truth”, they are placed in a typical *kung-an* bind. His “real form”, being formless, cannot be captured in any sort of painting. A true representation or depiction of the master can only be no representation at all. And yet, in the words of the *Heart Sutra*, “emptiness is not other than form” – the true nature of the master should not be mistaken for his physical form, but nor can it be found apart from it. The very notion of a “non-representation” can only be signified through representation.<sup>46</sup>

The issue of form and formless arises again in the intimate connection - and often conflation - between the body of the monk and the portrait. Sharf and Foulk recount one example where a portrait came to ‘replace’ the preserved corpse of a master when the body was destroyed by a strong gust of wind.<sup>47</sup> In other cases mummified corpses were coated in lacquer, which was sometimes mixed with the hair of the deceased in a complete conflation of effigy and relic. In these examples the portrait and the corporeal relic functioned in the same way and little ontological difference appears to have been made between them because there was no real discernment between the *material* with which the embodiment of the abbot was made.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Sharf, and Griffith Foulk, ‘On the Ritual Use of Ch’an Portraiture in Medieval China’, 171-176; 194-195.

<sup>45</sup> Sharf, and Griffith Foulk, ‘On the Ritual Use of Ch’an Portraiture in Medieval China’, 202-203.

<sup>46</sup> Sharf and Griffith Foulk, ‘On the Ritual Use of Ch’an Portraiture in Medieval China’, 204.

<sup>47</sup> The ‘incorruptible’ quality of a corpse was taken as evidence of great spiritual accomplishment.

Sharf, Robert and Griffith Foulk, 164-166.

<sup>48</sup> The interacting and at times merging functions of the portrait within the Buddhist complex are evidenced in the Japanese Shin school of Pure Land Buddhism in the twelfth and thirteenth

## Arresting Forms: Bodies and Statues of the Buddha

### Taking Vision of the Buddha's Body

The section above considered the role of monk portraiture in establishing lineage, as a didactic tool, and the equivocation between corporeal body and statue. “Truth” came from the portrait’s manufacture via direct observation and an awareness that “truth” is found in the formless, which has to be expressed in form. It was this and the conflation of bodily relic and artistic media which gave the image its indexical connection to the deceased abbot, over and above physical verisimilitude. The notion of an image acting as a teaching tool, as illustrated in the examples of puns that Sharf and Foulk set out, take us back to the statues of the Buddha. It is not the aim of my argument to pursue questions of the doctrinal validity of Buddhist image-making and veneration; these questions have been interrogated by numerous scholars over the decades. Nor is it my intention to insert myself into the debate over iconic versus aniconic representations of the Buddha.<sup>49</sup> What I wish to explore are the relationships between form and formlessness and materiality and the immaterial in Buddhist traditions and the primacy given to *seeing* the form of the Buddha. These themes are of central import to my thesis overall as they illuminate the interrelation between abstract concepts and artistic forms and the role that representation plays in a Buddhist complex at Angkor.

There are numerous legends that illustrate the role vision plays in Buddhist metaphysics and instruction which have been the subject of detailed analysis by a number of scholars.<sup>50</sup> The most famous illustration of the integrality of vision as a metaphor in Buddhist teachings is the chiasmus ‘whoever sees the Dharma sees me;

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centuries. See James C. Dobbins, ‘Portraits of Shinran in Medieval Pure Land Buddhism’, in *Living Images, Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, 19-48.

<sup>49</sup> Susan L. Huntington, ‘Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism’, *Art Journal*, 49 (1990), 401–8.; Vidya Dehejia, ‘Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems’, *Ars Orientalis*, 21, (1991) 45–66; Susan L. Huntington, ‘Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems: Another Look’, *Ars Orientalis*, 22 (1992), 111–56

<sup>50</sup> Notable examples of such scholarship includes: Malcolm David Eckel, *To See the Buddha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); David L. McMahan, *Empty Vision*, (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002); Andy Rotman, *Thus I Have Seen: Visualising Faith in Early Indian Buddhism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Dietrich Seckel, *Before and Beyond the Image*, trans. by Andreas Leisinger (Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 2004); Bernard Faure, ‘The Buddhist Icon and the Modern Gaze’, *Critical Inquiry*, 24 (1998), 768–813.

whoever sees me sees the Dharma'.<sup>51</sup> This statement, made by the Buddha to his sick disciple Vakkali, poses the physical body of the Buddha as being the same as the body of his teachings.<sup>52</sup> Another revealing event occurs at the denouement of the Buddha's life, as he is preparing to die and enter parinirvana. In a moment of uncharacteristic irritation, the Buddha chastises one of his disciples for blocking the gods' view of him; the gods had assembled to take a final look at the Buddha's body. The Buddha then goes on to instruct the assembled monks that the Brahmins will take care of funeral arrangements and rites pertaining to his body and that the monks should concern themselves with his teachings.

Then the Blessed One said to the monks: "Monks, do not hesitate to ask me, if you have any doubts or uncertainties about the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha or about suffering - its origination, its cessation, or the path to its cessation-and I will elucidate these points for you. It may be that you are feeling: 'Why should we trouble the Master with our questions now?' Do not think that, but make your doubts known, as one monk to another, one friend to another, and I will clarify them."

And [when no monks had any questions], the Venerable Ananda said. . . : "Not a single monk in this assembly has any doubt, any uncertainty as to the points raised earlier! This has been done by the Tathagata for the sake of those people who will follow hereafter."

Then the Blessed One took off his outer robe and said: "Monks, gaze now upon the body of the Tathagata! Examine the body of the Tathagata! For the sight of a completely enlightened Buddha is as rare an event as the blossoming of the udumbara tree. And, monks, do not break into lamentations after I am gone, for all karmically constituted things are subject to passing away." Those were the last words of the Buddha. [ . . . ].<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Eckel, *To See the Buddha*, 131-136.

<sup>52</sup> The precise statement the Buddha makes when his disciple expresses a longing to see the Buddha's physical form is: "Enough, Vakkali! What is there to see in this vile body? He who sees Dhamma, Vakkali, sees me; he who sees me sees Dhamma. Truly seeing Dhamma, one sees me; seeing me one sees Dhamma."

Vakkali Sutta, translated by Maurice O'Connell Walshe, SN 22.87, PTS: S iii 119, CDB i 938, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.087x.wlsh.html>, [accessed 12th June 2014].

<sup>53</sup> John S. Strong, *The Death and Parinirvana of the Buddha*, in *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations*, 2nd edn (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2002), 37.

Ashley Thompson cites this passage of the story to demonstrate the Buddha's physical body as the site of absence or nothingness, of which it is crucial to take vision of at the moment of his death.

'In the Absence of the Buddha: "Aniconism" and the Contentions of Buddhist Art History', *A Companion to Asian Art and Architecture*, 3 (2011), 412-413

This final statement of the Buddha is remarkable. He instructs his followers to take a final vision of his bodily form in order to illustrate that even the physical bodies of Buddha's are subject to death and decay. But the Buddha does not simply command them to look; he asks them to gaze and examine to body, to sear an image of it in their minds as a final teaching. The Buddha makes use of the corporeal form, and the practice of vision, as instruments for comprehending the impermanence of the material and the "truth" that is found in the formless.

### **Originals and Copies: The Buddha and the Statue**

De Caroli's exploration of the relationship between the original and its exemplar is at the nexus of image-making and image veneration and is a necessary intervention in thinking through art in Buddhist frameworks. However, he never states precisely what we are talking about when we talk about the 'original' Buddha. If we think of the original as the physical, historical Buddha then what is the nature of the relationship between this Buddha and images of him, or this Buddha and another Buddha? One of the primary discomforts in scholarship on iconic images of the Buddha relates to whether or not such images contradict the idea of nirvana, and if so, whether or not image-making constitutes a degradation of 'rational' Buddhist discourse. Here the key question appears to be what, if anything, does or should survive after the death of the Buddha?

There exists a number of enlightening legends that pertain to the manufacturing of an image of the historical Buddha Siddhartha, including legends that assert that the first figurative image of the Buddha was sculpted in his lifetime. This sandalwood image was commissioned by King Pasenadi in order to ease his subject's sadness when the Buddha was away from his monastery, for when he was absent they felt that the monastery was 'empty'.<sup>54</sup> After the Buddha granted his blessing, King Pasenadi commissioned the sculpture and placed it on an altar in an adorned pavilion. Sometime later, the king asked the Buddha to visit the statue, to which the Buddha assented.

The next day, the Master, surrounded by his disciples, went to the king's palace, and approached the great pavilion in order to see the statue in his own likeness. At that moment, however, the Buddha statue made from the most excellent sandalwood, seeing the Buddha arriving, . . . acquired as it

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<sup>54</sup> John S. Strong, 'A Story of a Buddha Image', in *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations*, 2nd edn (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2002), 39.

were a devout mind and a living body, and thought: "Now that the most excellent living Buddha is coming here, it is improper for me to be seated on the highest seat. I must show respect for him." As though thinking thus, the statue, so as to honor the Buddha, put one foot down from its seat, thereby showing signs of getting up to go meet the Blessed One. Seeing the Buddha statue doing this, the Master raised his right hand . . . , and, restraining the image, said this verse:

"Friend, stay there. Soon, O statue, I will be entering parinirvana, therefore, you should remain behind so that my religion will last into the future for five thousand years. . .

"Today, I commit my Order to you; for the sake of the wellbeing of the whole world, stay with my religion."<sup>55</sup>

In this exchange between the 'exemplar' and its 'copy', the lineage between the Buddha and his image is legitimated. According to de Caroli this legend illustrates the Buddha designating the statute as his proxy which will act as a model for future images and as a focus of meditation.<sup>56</sup> Yet it is clear that the Buddha authorises the statue to be more than his proxy. In this passage there is a transfer of power between the physical, human Buddha and his image. A key theme in this legend is the absence of the Buddha and the loss of his physical presence, and the Buddha himself is attuned to the need to overcome this physical absence. Conversely the wooden statue becomes animated and imbued with agency via a physical encounter with the Buddha, and is then entrusted to safeguard the religion and the teachings.

The relationship between the physical form of the Buddha and the formless Dharma is elucidated in another story regarding the preserving of the Buddha's image. This story has parallels with the origins of the portrait in Classical Greek mythology. It begins with a Nāga who converted to Buddhism and was then instructed by the Buddha to be the defender of the Dharma. The Nāga was fearful that he would fall back into his old habits when the Buddha left and so the Buddha agreed to leave his shadow on the wall of the cave in which the Nāga dwelled in order to remind the Nāga of what he had been taught.<sup>57</sup> Once again, the Buddha gives his image the status of his proxy, as a reminder of his teachings. The impending absence of the Buddha is mediated by ensuring a permanent physical presence, a presence which bears the indexical trace of

<sup>55</sup> Strong, 'A Story of A Buddha Image' 40-41.

<sup>56</sup> De Caroli, 'From the Living Rock.', 34.

<sup>57</sup> Eckel, *To See the Buddha* , 61.

the Buddha. The shadow, like the image, is both of the Buddha and wholly separate from the Buddha.

This story is recounted by Malcolm Eckel in his study of the philosophy of the 6<sup>th</sup>-century scholar Bhāvaviveka, apprehended through the lens of the accounts of the 7<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese monk/pilgrim Hsüan-tsang. During his pilgrimage in India Hsüan-tsang visited the cave of the Nāga but found that the shadow was no longer visible. Distraught, Hsüan-tsang began reciting the scripture until finally he saw a fleeting vision of the form of the Buddha. In this portion of the story it is Hsüan-tsang's knowledge of the Dharma – the Buddha's teachings - which enable him to take vision of the physical form of the Buddha. He already knew the Dharma before coming to the cave; what he lacked was knowledge about what the Buddha looked like.<sup>58</sup> The adept's desire to supplement his existing knowledge of the Dharma with knowledge of the Buddha's physical body arises in many variations across Buddhist legends. The physical form, be it a representation, shadow, or flesh and bone, are necessary to complement and complete the 'whole picture'.

The Brahmānic concept of the *mūrti* is instructive here as it encompasses the manner in which the divine is divided into distinct bodies and represented materially. *Mūrti* is commonly used to refer to the deity embodied in material form, and is defined in Sanskrit as 'a solid body', 'material form' and 'a manifestation, incarnation, embodiment'<sup>59</sup>, meaning that the *mūrti* is not merely a likeness of a deity, but is an actual material embodiment of the divine; the deity with form.<sup>60</sup> In this context the "representation" of the deity within material form – such as the statue – is in fact a presentation of the deity, in that the statue is not a simulacrum or copy but is an incarnation of the god itself. Yet the relationship between the statue and the physical Buddha is more complex given the physical Buddha's absence because of his passing into nirvana. In this sense the image presents the Buddha by being his actual presence, rather than his simulacrum, yet at the same time the statue is a re-presentation and copy

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>59</sup> Arthur Anthony Macdonell, *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), 232

<sup>60</sup> Diana L. Eck, *Darśan. Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 2nd edn (Pennsylvania: Amina Books, 1985), 38.

Eck describes early usages of the term *mūrti* in the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā which refer to flames as the *mūrti* of fire, or the year as the *mūrti* of time, which indicates that the *mūrti* is the taking of form by that which is formless; a manifestation of something which is nevertheless the same as the formless reality it embodies.

in the sense of being a reaffirmation of the presence of something which no longer exists.<sup>61</sup> Tambiah employs the dual concepts of the indexical symbol to describe the double presence of Buddhist amulets and images.<sup>62</sup> The indexical symbol has a combined association with the object via a conventional semantic rule (the symbolic) and via being an index in existential connection to its object. This takes into account the image being both a reminder of the Buddha – in the sense of a prompt or as a relic<sup>63</sup> - as well as a site of “power” and ritual potency. It also attenuates the distinction between the absence of the Buddha, as evidenced by a symbolic substitute standing in for him as a reminder, and his presence, indicated by the beliefs in the power of the statue which *belongs to* the Buddha. The term “indexical symbol” also advances the thinking on the indexical portrait as proposed by Padma Kaimal above. Although Tambiah is concerned with images of the Buddha and Buddhist saints, strands of royal-divine portraiture in the Brahmanic-Buddhist complex also conform to the dual role of indexical symbolism. In the royal-divine statues at Angkor, the image was symbolically associated with a deity, employing a visual language of attributes to assist with identification. Yet as we shall see below the statues were also indexical of the king.

### **The Buddha Body as Statue**

The question of the relationship between the Buddha and his image draws attention to the status of the image against the status of his physical body. In each legend recounted above, the copy is made to ease the sorrow of devotees who are not able to see the physical Buddha. Does this mean the corporeal body is the privileged body? There is no indication of this in each of the legends, although one wonders if the physical body takes preference because it embodies the “person” of the Buddha, including his teachings, so the sadness is a regret for not being able to ‘meet’ the Buddha himself. Yet it is understood that in some sense the Buddha will be, or already is, absent therefore there is no alternative to the copy and that seeing the copy of his physical form is sufficient to complement the knowledge of his teachings.

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<sup>61</sup> This reading of re-presentation is borrowed from Soko Phay-Vakalis’s reading of Jean-Luc Nancy in the context of post-genocide art practices in Cambodia. Soko Phay-Vakalis (ed.), *Cambodia: The Memory Workshop*, (Cambodia: Editions Sonleuk Thmey, 2010), 208.

<sup>62</sup> Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, 4-5; 204; 262.

<sup>63</sup> Images are included in the *udisaceitya* category of relics, which are reminders of the Buddha.

Seckel notes that the image of the enlightened Buddha seated in meditation shows the Buddha removed from time.<sup>64</sup> This gives an indication of the atemporality and static nature ascribed to the physical body of the Buddha in many of the legends from his life. This atemporality draws into question the distinction between the corporeal form and the statue, beyond questions pertaining to materiality. In the legend of King Aśoka's pilgrimage to key Buddhist sites, accompanied by the monk Upagupta, we find two passages which illustrate the stillness which can be said to characterise the Buddha. The first moment takes place when the Buddha is still a child and he is taken to his ancestral family temple, belonging to the Śākya clan to venerate the ancestral deities. However, when the bodhisattva arrives the statues all fell at his feet in order to venerate him.<sup>65</sup> The second moment occurs as Upagupta describes the story of the Buddha first entering a trance-state:

“In this place, distressed by the sight of an old man, a sick man and a corpse, the bodhisattva went out to the wood; and over here, sitting down in the shade of a jambu tree, he rid himself of evil and demeritorious inclinations, and attained the first level of trance,... and when it was afternoon and the mealtime was past, the lengthening of the shadows of the trees slanted towards the east, except for the shadow of the jambu tree, which did not leave the body of the bodhisattva. And witnessing this, King Śuddhodana once again prostrated himself fully in front of his son”.<sup>66</sup>

The immobility of the shadow across the meditating Buddha's body suggests that his meditation impinged upon the passage of time, thus eternalising the body of the Buddha. In this way the physical Buddha is characterised as a static statue. This is in contradistinction to the animation of the statue, both in legends such as the first Buddha image where the image has agency, or in the consecration ceremonies in which the eyes of the statue are ritually opened, thus animating the statue and imbuing it with power.<sup>67</sup> In a sense the distinction between the flesh body and statue body becomes imprecise, stressing that materiality is often a secondary concern after the primacy of the presence of the visual.

<sup>64</sup> Seckel, *Before and Beyond the Image*, 34.

<sup>65</sup> John S. Strong, 'A Royal Pilgrimage Retraces the Life of the Buddha', in *The Experience of Buddhism. Sources and Interpretations*, 2nd edn (Wadsworth), 7.

Translated from *The Divyāvadāna*.

<sup>66</sup> Strong, 'A Royal Pilgrimage Retraces the Life of the Buddha', 7.

<sup>67</sup> See, Donald K. Swearer, 'Hypostasizing the Buddha: Buddha Image Consecration in Northern Thailand', *History of Religions*, 34 (1995), 263–80; Richard Gombrich, 'The Consecration of a Buddhist Image', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 26 (1966), 23–36.

## Multiple Buddha Bodies: The *Trikāya*

The theory of the multiple-bodies of the Buddha provides a fertile interpretative framework from which to consider image-making in Buddhist traditions. However it becomes integral to the work of thinking about images in twelfth-century Angkor because the invocation of the *trikāya* is found in the epigraphy of Jayavarman VII's reign. The Vaibhāṣika, an early school of Buddhist thought which flourished in north-west India, taught that because the physical body of the Buddha is subject to decay and impurity, refuge should instead be taken in the Buddha's Dharma-body - his *dharmakāya*. This is because the dharma comprises the ultimate qualities that make a Buddha. The Mahāyāna *Perfection of Wisdom* sutra distinguishes between two bodies - the physical body (the *rūpakāya*) and the *dharmakāya* - and describes those who are concerned by the physical representations as 'foolish'. This two-body theory later developed into a tripartite division of bodies. The first body in the tripartite schema is the *dharmakāya*; this is the essential body of the Buddha, the 'Buddha-ness', which all Buddhas share, which is realised through their own embodiment. The *dharmakāya* is timeless, eternal, immaterial, formless, undifferentiated state of being, not created, always present and ahistorical and it can also refer to the corpus of the Buddha's teachings. In this three-body theory the *dharmakāya* acts as the basis for the other two bodies. The second body is the *sāmbhogikakāya*, the Body of Complete Enjoyment or the Body of Bliss, an impermanent physical body able to manifest itself in different ways and locations depending on need. This is the Buddha in his supra-mundane form, 'a transcendent being animated through pure compassion' and according to Williams this body is the most significant because it is the body which becomes Enlightened and it is also the body which is the object of Buddhist devotion.<sup>68</sup> The third body is the *nairmāṇakāya*, the Buddha's Transformation Bodies, and this is the body which interests us here. These are a 'trick' of the *sāmbhogikakāya* and manifest themselves in ways which are required to teach compassion to those who are not able to understand the Mahāyāna. The *nairmāṇakāya* refers to the physical, flesh body of the historical Buddha as well as statues, which poses intriguing questions to the practice of Buddhist image-making and to the possibility of making distinctions between the corporeal body and the statue of the Buddha.

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<sup>68</sup> Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1989) 188; 178.

As a concept, the *trikāya* addresses the notion that the Buddha was both a man and supra-mundane. The historical Buddha reaches enlightenment through a physical embodiment and it is this body which gets old, poisoned and sick, and which eventually dies. In this way it is a human body, yet it is also not the body of man at all. In part, this is due to the body being distinguished by the thirty-two marks of a great man, the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*. The *trikāya* also functions as a means to understand the Buddha's continued existence after his death and parinirvana, where the Buddha is not wholly understood to be absent and in some sense something 'remains' which is accessible. The division of the Buddha into three bodies - which although divided are nevertheless unified as one – also works to solving complex ontological and epistemological problems over whether the Buddha is still 'present' in some sense. The distinct, yet unified and interdependent bodies explain how that which is immaterial and immortal – Buddhahood – can be expressed, lived and understood through material and mortal means – the physical appearance of the Buddha.<sup>69</sup> The *trikāya* can also work to explain how there can be many Buddha throughout time, who all share an inherent 'Buddhahood', as well as physical traits and biographies, but who are nevertheless distinct from one another.

The separation of the *rūpakāya* (physical body of the Buddha) into the *sāmbhogikakāya* and *nairmāṇakāya* can be viewed as a more nuanced expression of differing physical states, and can be understood as stages of physicality, or rather a move towards the absence of physicality. At the most physical, tangible level is the *nairmāṇakāya* which finds its audience in uninitiated beings who are beginning on the path to enlightenment. The next level is the *sāmbhogikakāya*, which can be conceived of as form without fleshiness, and forms the basis for adepts who are further along the path of realisation. These two bodies are ultimately illusory and are employed in order for people to better see and understand the teachings of the Buddha. Finally, the *dharmakāya* poses a complete antithesis to the physical and can be understood as the

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<sup>69</sup> Navigating the relationship between the material and immaterial is not a problem unique to Buddhism; in his study of Christian images from the early period Hans Belting writes, 'while it was one thing to represent a saint, who had a visible body, in an image, it was quite another to present the invisible God in a visible image'. This representational issue was solved via the separation of divine bodies into the human-divine body of Jesus in the unity of the Holy Trinity, where the son was able to embody and mediate the presence of his father. The Buddhist separation of bodies metaphysically and theologically navigates the issue of representing something formless in material form.

Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 7.

ultimate destination of Buddhist development. The two physical, illusory bodies make manifest the immaterial *dharmakāya*, so although the *dharmakāya* acts as the basis for the two other bodies, these two other bodies provide the material vehicle for the transmission and realisation of the *dharmakāya*. In this way each of this triune of bodies are interdependent yet cannot be wholly separated. This takes us back to the Ch’an monks and their portraits, whereby the absolute truth of formlessness (or emptiness or nothingness) can only be apprehended *via* form. Indeed, portraiture as a genre attempts to bring forth and capture the identity (or perhaps essence) of a person via the manufacture of an object which is categorically not the person, but which bears an indexical link to them, analogous to the shadow.

## Summary

This chapter began with an introduction to what has been termed the “true-portrait” in Cambodian art. In order to consider the implications of these statues and their designation, it was necessary to offer a definition of what constitutes a portrait which is applicable across cultural traditions. The refutation of the necessity of mimetic portrayal opens up the space to consider portraiture, and the relationship between image and referent, in the Buddhist context. A deviation into some of the questions at the heart of Buddha image-making addressed broader questions governing the role of the statue in the Buddhist milieu, questioning the distinction between the corporeal body and sculpture, the formless body and form, and questions about what was being apprehended in the image.

We now return to the question of portraiture and portrait-statues of Jayavarman VII’s reign. I argue that royal-divine statues that preceded his reign fall under the rubric of the portrait, based upon their indexical connection to the king. I then examine what altered during the reign of Jayavarman VII and argue that the preoccupation with the concept of the portrait during this period has consequences for interpreting the face towers of the Bayon.

## The Angkorian Royal Portrait: The Case for Divine-Royal Portraits

One of the primary preoccupations of Angkorian monarchs appears to have been the veneration of ancestors and ensuring posthumous royal legacies, via the making and the enshrining of images within temples. The artistic and architectural programs of successive kings followed a similar pattern: kings would consecrate statues of their parents and ancestors, apotheosized as deities and identified via an inscription composed of the individual's name and divine epithet. The king would then install his own divine statue within his own state temple. The first example of this occurs with Indravarman I, successor to Jayavarman II who was responsible for initiating the cult of the *devarāja* and consolidating the Khmer Empire. Indravarman I built Preah Ko in late ninth century at the first capital of Angkor, Hariharalaya. The temple consists of six sanctuaries, each of which is dedicated to the king's father and grandfather and their wives. The central and largest tower was dedicated to Indravarman's predecessor King Jayavarman II, who was Indravarman's uncle. The king then built his state temple, Prasat Bakong, which was dedicated to Śiva. The inscription at this temple names the *Śivaliṅga* installed there as Sri Indreśvara, a combination of the king's name and the suffix "-eśvara" which refers to Śiva. This entire process can be understood as a way of ensuring retroactive legitimacy for the king, via both his kinship and by kingship. The king's parents were now deified, thus associating the king's own bloodline with the divine and the king also established himself within a kingship lineage, by consecrating and venerating his predecessors. In addition to this, kings left inscriptions calling upon their successors to protect and honour their state-temples after their death. This was crucial in a royal line which did not rely upon primogeniture.<sup>70</sup>

The figurative statues from earlier Angkorian reigns did indeed depict gods, replete with their attributes and assuming a certain adherence to the codification of iconography set out in the *śilpa śāstras* (codes governing the formal qualities of Hindu art, including proportions). Art historian Jean Boisselier argued that Angkorian statues – with the notable exception of the art of Jayavarman VII - were always impersonal, their faces without individuality, only identifiable with the king via accompanying

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<sup>70</sup> Maintaining continuity with past kings continues in Cambodia today. Newly crowned kings ritually bathe in water from Phnom Kulen, which is believed to be pure, to wash away any impurities. It is no coincidence that this water is taken from the location and source of what is believed to be the location of the declaration of Cambodian sovereignty in 802 C.E.

inscriptions.<sup>71</sup> George Cœdès concurred and wrote that the reign of Jayavarman VII heralded great artistic changes: ‘some statues deviated from the norm and betray among the sculptors of this era a certain concern with realism, previously ignored, in making a *‘portrait ressemblant’*.<sup>72</sup> He argued that referring to earlier divine statuary associated with kings via inscriptions as “portrait-statues” was confusing because from an art historical perspective the portrait is understood as something which reproduces the physical traits of an individual, although he also suggested these statues were portraits of kings.<sup>73</sup>

However, I argue that the divine-royal images that preceded the reign of Jayavarman VII constitute portraits in that they are often formally distinctive to the reign of each major king and are indexical symbols of the king. In order for the practice of apotheosis to function successfully it must have been understood that the statues enshrined in the temples were to be associated with the king, as well as with the god on whom their physical traits were based. Faithful modelling of physical attributes, or a lack thereof, was not a requirement for figurative representations of kings in the Brahmānical-Khmer tradition.<sup>74</sup> Prior to Jayavarman VII, statues of Angkorian royalty were modelled on deities and the use of a specific iconographic vocabulary meant that individuals could only be identified in their representation by inscriptions which accompanied the statue.<sup>75</sup> These images represented the *vrah rūpa* – the spiritual form – of the individual, represented as a deity and identified through an inscription of a composite of the individual's name and that of the divinity.<sup>76</sup>

Due to the homogeneity of iconography, the individual *rūpa* (form) of the individual had to be designated by these inscriptions rather than by individual physical characteristics.<sup>77</sup> Such statues are often referred to as *yaśasarīra* – “bodies of glory”- in the epigraphy, which indicates that the statues make manifest the divine-royal body of

<sup>71</sup> Boisselier, *La statuaire khmère et son évolution*, 10.

<sup>72</sup> He goes on to state that there is nothing to indicate that these portraits had their origins in India, because sculptors there did not appear to utilise living models or be concerned with realism.

Cœdès ‘Les Statues Du Roi Khmèr Jayavarman VII’, 219.

<sup>73</sup> Cœdès, ‘Le Portrait Dans L’art Khmer’, 179.

<sup>74</sup> For a detailed examination of the Indian context of royal-divine portraits see Lefèvre, *Portraiture in Early India*.

<sup>75</sup> Cœdès, ‘Le Portrait dans l’art Khmer’, 180.

<sup>76</sup> For example, the image installed by King Indravarman was dedicated as Indresvara, with the –isvara signifying Śiva. The image of the Buddha at the Bayon was dedicated as the Jayabuddha, combining Jayavarman with the name of the divinity.

<sup>77</sup> Maxwell, ‘Religion at the Time of Jayavarman VII’, 91; 102; 128 – 129.

the king. Lefèvre draws attention to a Sanskrit literary devise, *śleṣa* (double-entendre), which ‘juxtaposes two meanings which have between them a subtle link and can illuminate each other’ and he persuasively argues for a parallel understanding of the image as being a portrait and image of the divine.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, by depicting the spiritual form of the king (or dignitary in question) the portraits place the individual within the collective. More precisely, these statues located the king within the collective by portraying him *outside* of the collective, by virtue of his royal status and association with the divine. Yet they also constitute portraits in other ways. Ashley Thompson has noted the epigraphy refers to the statuary program of Yaśovarman as “works of his own art” (*sva śilpa racita*) which reveals a ‘distinctively individualistic or personal relationship’ between the king to his statues.<sup>79</sup>

Evidence would suggest that those who commissioned, sculpted, consecrated, and cared for these statues had the requisite knowledge that the image was inextricably associated with the king. This is strongly indicated by the inscriptions which accompany the images. Typically, the name of the statue would comprise the given name of the honoured individual – the king, his consort, immediate family, or a dignitary – and their preferred deity.<sup>80</sup> Both Wendy Steiner and Padma Kaimal note that often titles and inscriptions are required to identify a portrait as such, and to aid with establishing an indexical connection.<sup>81</sup> Although this does not constitute a privileging of text over the visual, indeed, we can suppose that they were meant to be read together to assist those who apprehend the image from a temporal and/or cultural distance in recognising the portrait as a portrait. That these Angkorian statues were associated with textual titles assists with concluding that they were in fact ‘portraits’, understood to be indexical symbols of the royal individuals and dignitaries as well as of the gods.

### **Non-Divine Royal Portraits: The Jayavarman VII Rupture**

The patent demarcation between Jayavarman VII’s statues and earlier statuary must not gloss over the fact that each prominent king had his “own art” or “portrait of

<sup>78</sup> Lefèvre, *Portraiture in Early India*, 41-46.

<sup>79</sup> Thompson, ‘Angkor Revisited. The State of Statuary’, 182.

<sup>80</sup> For examples and some of the problems that directly translating the inscriptions at the Bayon pose see, Maxwell, ‘Religion at the Time of Jayavarman VII’, 100-113.

<sup>81</sup> Steiner, ‘Postmodern Portraits’, 173–77; Kaimal, ‘The Problem of Portraiture in South India, circa 870-970 A.D.’, 65.

[his] reign”,<sup>82</sup> and that the formal qualities of naturalism are detectable in sculptures from earlier reigns, such as the bas-reliefs at the Baphuon. The naturalism in the Jayavarman VII statues prompted scholars to designate them as ‘true-portraits’, noting the statue’s paunch and arguing that earlier statues were so idealised that men were represented only in flawless, peak physical condition.<sup>83</sup> However, my own close reading of the art of Angkor demonstrates that many other male statues – of divinities - have thicker stomachs and are almost pot-bellied. This is in accord with depicting kings/divinities who are muscular, strong, and prosperous. Despite the accusation that this statue depicts a middle-aged man beyond the peak of physical fitness, his half-lotus posture constitutes a remarkable display of strength and flexibility, suggesting the physical prowess of a *cakravartin*. Appeals to the formal qualities of the statuary are not sufficient in examining the continuities and ruptures which took place in Angkorian art at the end of the twelfth century. A clear continuity is that the pattern of consecration and deification of royal-divine statuary continued into the reign of Jayavarman VII. Despite the novel interest in portraying the king in complete human form, as a devotee, the extant traditions of divine-royal portraiture continued, allowing us to recognise that the Buddha statue from the central sanctuary of the Bayon as a portrait of the king.

So what altered with the reign of Jayavarman VII? The portrait-statues thought to bear physical similitude to Jayavarman VII constitute one rupture in portraiture traditions. The innovation of these portrait-statues is fundamentally ideological in nature, as the king is represented in human form, distinct from his divine associations. This is the first time that this occurs in sculpture in the round at Angkor. (Suryavarman II is depicted in the bas-reliefs at Angkor Wat, but not in sculpture.)<sup>84</sup> However the king is not only represented in human form, but as a devotee in a pose of deference. Such a shift in locating the king within the collective called for a change in representation, moving towards a physical similitude of the king which resulted in the naturalistic form of the statues. Function and content comes before style and technique.

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<sup>82</sup> Thompson, ‘Angkor Revisited. The State of Statuary’, 185.

<sup>83</sup> Sharrock, ‘The Mystery of the Face Towers’, 244.

<sup>84</sup> Although a recent article by Éric Bourdonneau has suggested that a tenth-century portrait statue of king Jayavarman IV, located in Koh Ker, might bear a physical resemblance to the king.

‘La Fondation Du Culte Du Devarāja. Danse, Sacrifice et Royauté Au Prasat Thom de Koh Ker’, *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, Juillet à Octobre 2011 (2011–2013), 1343–1382.

In the case of these statues of the king it appears that this physical likeness, rather than an inscription, signaled the indexical association between statue and sitter.

Apotheosised images of kings, portrayed as gods, firmly placed the king outside of his subjects by virtue of his association with the divine. Yet by portraying the king in the pose of devotee, these portraits locate the king within, or inside, of the collective, removed from the divine, by virtue of his pose of prayer, devotion, and submission. Such a bold move could only be made if the king was secure that his royal authority was adequately and publically represented elsewhere. These portrait-statues appear at temples which had face towers somewhere in their construction, ensuring that the face of the king was presented hieratically and his authority was made omnipresent. This allowed for the king to be presented as a merit-making devotee concealed within the temple structure. Here we see representations of kingship separating into multiple representational modes.

### **The Trikāya in Twelfth-Century Cambodia**

The invocation of the *trikāya* is found in the first stanza of the major epigraphy of Jayavarman VII's reign: the Ta Prohm stele, the Preah Khan stele, and the Prasat Chrung inscriptions taken from the four temples located at the interior of the corners of the walls of Angkor Thom, which commemorate Jayavarman VII's victorious ascension to the throne. Each of these inscriptions begins with an invocation and the first eighteen stanzas of the Ta Prohm and Preah Khan inscriptions - and the extant steles of the Prasat Chrung - are identical.

The first stanza of all of these inscriptions reads as follows:

- (1) Sambhāravistaravibhāvitadharmmakāya-  
Sambhoganirmitivapur bhagavān vibhaktaḥ
- (2) Yo gocaro jinajinātmajadehabhājāṃ  
Vuddhāya bhūtaçaraṇāya namo stu tasmai<sup>85</sup>

Au Bienheureux dont les provisions dans tout leur développement manifestent le Corps de la Loi, le Corps de Béatitude et le Corps sensible et qui [de la sorte] est divisé, à celui qui est la domaine de ceux qui participent au corps des Jina et des fils de Jina, au Buddha en qui les êtres trouvent leur refuge, hommage soit rendu!<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Cœdès, 'La Stèle De Ta-Prohm', 48.

<sup>86</sup> Cœdès, 'La Stèle De Ta-Prohm', 69.

To The Blessed [the Buddha] whose qualities in their full development are manifest in the Body of the Law [dharma], the Body of Beatitude [sambhoga] and the Corporeal Body [nirmitiva] [i.e. the *Trikāya*] and who is [therefore] divided, to He who is the domain of those who participate in (constitute) the body of Jina [Buddha] and the sons of Jina, to the Buddha in whom all beings take refuge, may homage be paid to him!

The Phimeanakas (K.485) inscription (K. 485), apparently written by Jayavarman VII's wife, also begins with an invocation to the trikaya.

- (1)      çrīdharmmakāyan janayan ya ekas  
            sa[mbhoga]nirmmānatanun caturdhā  
(2)      bhinno dhimokṣais sugatādiçāmyāt  
            sādha[n tam ī]ḍe jagadekakāyam<sup>87</sup>

Je chante ce Corps unique du monde qui, bien qu'étant unique, est divisé en quatre, puisqu'il engendre le corps de la Loi, le corps de Jouissance et le corps de Création; grâce à la paix primordiale du Sugata, il doit être réalisé par les délivrances.<sup>88</sup>

I praise this body unique in the world which, although being singular, is divided into four, since it engenders the body of the Law [dharma], the body of Enjoyment [sambhoga] and the body of Creation [nirmana] [i.e. the *Trikāya*]; thanks to the primordial peace of Sugata [Buddha], it must be produced by/ realised by liberation.<sup>89</sup>

Scholars have recognised that this invocation makes clear reference to the multiple bodies of the Buddha, yet none have explored the significance of this invocation, even as it appears in the very first verses of the primary epigraphy of the reign of Jayavarman VII. This is a startling oversight given the often meticulous scholarship generated over the last one hundred and fifty years concerning the art and architecture of Angkor Thom. I argue that the unambiguous, repeated statement of the three bodies, divided yet one, offers hints into the philosophy governing image-making

<sup>87</sup> Cœdès, 'Grande Stele Du Phimanakas', 163.

<sup>88</sup> Cœdès, 'Grande Stele Du Phimanakas', 173.

<sup>89</sup> This epigraphic reference to the *trikāya* is unique in Cambodia because it refers to a division of the body into four, suggesting that there is an original body which engenders the other three bodies, whilst simultaneously remaining a body unto itself.

Personal email correspondence with Roger Wright, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2014.

in Angkor Thom at that time, given the broad range of figurative – bodily – statuary that was produced during this period.<sup>90</sup>

How far the three-body theory was experienced and understood as a *theory* during this time is debateable. It is possible that it was an invocation, recited – orally and textually – much in the same way as the taking refuge in the triple gem is recited at the start of Buddhist rituals today. Nevertheless epigraphy at Angkor was conceptually associated with the institution of kingship as formulated and operated under different monarchs. The metaphysical formulation of the multiple bodies speaks to the function of portraits to make present something which is otherwise absent, or to be more precise, the role of the image as being the physical instantiation of an immaterial concept. This is analogous to the physical body of the Buddha in the triune of the *trikāya*. During the reign of Jayavarman VII there were three key, interrelated components of artistic production which expressed immaterial concepts in concrete form. The first are the face towers which comprise the Bayon temple and adorn the gateways of his other temples. The second artistic motif of this period is the so-called ‘true-portrait’ statues of the king in the pose of a devotee. The third and final artistic image is the *nāga*-seated Buddha which was installed as the principle image in the king’s state temple, the Bayon. If the three bodies of the *trikāya* constitute instantiations of different facets of the Buddha/Buddhahood, then can the three key components of figurative statuary in Jayavarman VII’s Angkor display three instantiations of portraits of the king/ kingship?<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Granted, this is not the first time that reference to the three bodies is made in Angkorian epigraphy, for it appears in the tenth-century Buddhist inscription at Wat Sithor (K.111). In this earlier inscription there is an invocation to the triad of the Buddha-Dharma-Bodhisattva and the very first three stanzas pay homage to the Buddha’s three bodies, using the same terminology as the later inscriptions. The inscription at Phnom Banteay Nan (K. 214), which dates from 982, also pays homage to the three bodies of the Buddha and to Lokeśvara and Prajñāpāramitā. So there is precedent for the referencing of the three bodies in Buddhist inscriptions in Angkor. Doctrinally the Buddhism of Jayavarman VII does not appear to have differed significantly from that which came to Cambodia in the late tenth century with Kīrtipaṇḍita. So it is unsurprising that there is a reference made to the *trikāya* and that there are similarities between the content of this significant early Buddhist inscription and the epigraphy of the first Buddhist king of Angkor.

George Cœdès, ‘Stele De Vat Sithor’, in *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, 1954, 202; The Phnom Banteay Nan inscription is noted by Ian Harris in *Cambodian Buddhism History and Practice*, 17.

<sup>91</sup> The form of the triad was most explicitly rendered in the divine-familial triadic statues which were a central theme of Jayavarman VII’s reign. Statues of Buddhist and Brahmanic triads were known in Cambodia for centuries prior to the twelfth century, however the Buddhist triad was manifested on a spectacular scale in the unprecedented scale of the temples he dedicated to his parents (Preah Khan to his father, apotheosised as the Bodhisattva Lokeśvara and Ta Prohm to his mother, apotheosised as the bodhisattva Prajñāpāramitā). Triads in stone and bronze dating

## Unambiguous Ambiguity: A Triad of Portraits

The *nāga*-Buddha (fig. 19) and the statues depicting the king in the pose of the devotee (fig. 34) constitute two instances of royal portraiture in the reign of Jayavarman VII; the Buddha a portrait of the king in line with extant traditions of royal-divine statuary portraits and the devotee statues demonstrating a form of the portrait novel to Angkor. But I argue that the paradigmatic ‘Bayon face’, as seen in the face towers and the statuary, can be understood as variegated portraits of the same face. Moreover, I suggest that the face towers represent a third element in the genre of Angkorian-Buddhist portraiture. This interpretation does not negate the other multiple interpretations of the faces which were laid out in the previous chapter, but the most persuasive reading of the faces is that they signify a synthesis between the king and the divine, taking the form of the Buddha, Bodhisattva, and/ or a divinity. In a culture of apotheosis each element of artistic expression needs to be understood as hypostasised aspects of divine kingship. With this in mind, I posit that the face towers represent Jayavarman VII as a king in a more hieratic form, literally located above all others in the divine realm, as a divinity and acting as a defender and upholder of the dharma. The

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from this period, as well as in the form of votive tablets have been unearthed, the majority of which show the Buddha seated upon a *nāga* flanked on either side by Lokeśvara and Prajñāpāramitā.

In the first instance, the articulation of this particular triad is clearly an exercise in demonstrating genealogy, which goes alongside the numerous stanzas in the epigraphy dedicated to establishing genealogical links. It functions as the means par excellence of legitimatising the monarch’s claim to the throne in a system whereby kingship is so closely intertwined with divinity. Within the Angkorian context, the deification of the king institutes the deification of his parents, demonstrated concretely via the consecration of statues and the erection of temples. This process of associating the parents with the divine then retroactively supports the association of their son – the king- with divinity. Thus, the triad-as-statue demonstrates rightful royal lineage as well as making concrete the continuity of this lineage from the parents to the son. Other dimensions are made manifest in the form of the triad. In the case of the Jayavarman VII triads the qualities of compassion and wisdom are expressed in the ‘parental’ figures of Lokeśvara and Prajñāpāramitā. The triadic form articulates the continuity of compassion and wisdom in passing of these qualities down from parent to child, ensuring the continuity of them after death. There is an interesting interplay here between the parent and the son. In effect, the son/king becomes his own parent. The Buddha is formed from the union of perfect wisdom and compassion. But as Bodhisattva’s who have delayed their own passage into Buddhahood, the Buddha can be understood as being a being prior to Lokeśvara and Prajñāpāramitā; in effect their parent.

See Hiram Woodward’s work on tantric Buddhist elements of Jayavarman’s reign where he schematises the multiple and interrelated triads of the period. Woodward, ‘Tantric Buddhism at Angkor Thom’, 57–67; also Cœdès, ‘VII. Études Cambodgiennes XXXIX. L’épigraphie Des Monuments De Jayavarman VII’, *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient*, 1951, 97–120.

portrait statues depict a more naturalistic aspect of the king as a devotee of the Buddha, accruing karmic merit and perhaps awaiting his own future Buddhahood. Finally, the Buddha statue installed in the central sanctuary of the Bayon represents the divine-royal aspect of the king in accord with existing Angkorian traditions of portraiture.

Mus laid the foundations for such a reading when he examined the relationship between the king as *buddharāja*, embodied in the large *nāga*-protected Buddha statue of the central tower, and the portrait statue of the king in the pose of a devotee, although he neglected including the face towers in this reading.<sup>92</sup> Cœdès also made a similar argument in seeing three elements of Jayavarman VII's power represented in the three forms, but did so from within the stifling confines of a western conception of portraiture.<sup>93</sup> More latterly, in proposing that the reign of Jayavarman VII marked the beginning of the rise of Theravāda Buddhism, Woodward has also put forward a similar reading of the portrait statue up against the other figurative art of Jayavarman VII.<sup>94</sup>

Mus' formulation of two aspects of the king being captured in stone can be extended to form a triad of portraits, each unique and complete in expressing a different facet of the king, yet which can also be read together as one. In this reading, triple aspects of the king are portrayed in the face towers, portrait statues, and the central Buddha image. The statues of Jayavarman VII in the pose of a devotee are the most earthly rendering of the king and the most physically proximate to the living king. These statues represent Jayavarman as a king concerned with accruing merit and prosperity via meditation and devotion, rather than through warfare and violent conquest. The Bayon-Buddha statue shows the Buddha in meditation, sheltered by a *nāga*, representing the enlightenment of the Buddha and the sovereign association or apotheosis between the king and the Buddha, in the manner already established in the Angkorian context. This image is the orientating heart of order in the kingdom, hidden under the face towers of the central massif of the Bayon temple. This statue represents one facet of ultimate kingship, in the form of the world renouncer who becomes the king par excellence which is exemplified in the biography of the Buddha Siddhartha. The Buddha at the point of enlightenment also indicates the future yet to come of the living king. Therefore this colossal Buddha statue represents a spectacular installation

<sup>92</sup> Mus, 'Le Symbolisme a Ankor-Thom', 57–68.

<sup>93</sup> Cœdès, 'Le Portrait Dans L'art Khmer', 196.

<sup>94</sup> Woodward, 'Practice and Belief in Ancient Cambodia', 250-251.

of the powerful association between the king and the Buddha from which power emanates and disperses from the very heart of the empire across the territory.

The face towers, as I have previously argued, are iconographically ambiguous and refuse a precise, singular identification. Nevertheless, they are able to symbolise an abstracted royal, Buddhist portrait of power which has antecedents in the concept of Mount Meru and the *liṅga* (particularly the *mukhaliṅga*), but which is a power nevertheless rooted in the human form of the face. The face towers represent a sovereign associated with the divine, which can be read specifically as a bodhisattva, Buddha, or Brahmā, depending on the interpretation of the viewer (which brings us back to the juxtaposition of multiple readings). Ultimately, the faces express the concept of a paradoxically benevolent and defensive kingship, an aspect of kingship made manifest on a monumental scale, literally situated at the head of the kingdom. In this way they function as indexical symbols of the king. Their function of being an indexical symbol is reliant, in Peircian semiotics, on the audience making such an interpretative connection, such that the face is understood to be a sign of kingship. The existence of this interpretive audience is found in the epigraphic material of the late-twelfth century and has also been retained in usage and interpretation of the four-faces from the Middle Period onwards. One possible reading therefore, among many possible readings, is that the face towers are portraits of Jayavarman VII. Of all the portraits in this triad, the face towers are the most hieratic and other worldly, connected to the heavenly realm, representing a divine aspect of kingship. The multiplication of visages, facing each of the cardinal points, makes literal reference to the omnipresence and omnipotence of the king, who is able to illuminate the entire kingdom with the divine vision – seeing or non-seeing – of these faces with their opened eyes. The portrait only constitutes one reading among many possible readings of the face towers, much in the same way as a statue of Śiva can be understood as a statue of Śiva, as a symbol of the ordering axis of the universe, as a portrait of the divinely associated king, or as an avatar of *Ātman*.

Nandana Chutiwongs has deftly teased out the threads of the finely knitted iconography of the face towers and she concludes that the faces of Angkor Thom belong to both the bodhisattva and the king, possessing protective qualities, revealing their ‘all-powerful manifestations, watching over the welfare of his subjects, and guarding the

territories of his empire'.<sup>95</sup> But she develops this idea by examining the complex relationship between the father (or ancestor) and the son. In the Preah Khan stele Cœdès noted that an image of Lokeśvara, to be identified as an image of the king's father too, is named *Jayavarmesvara*. Cœdès points out that the statue's name refers not to King Dharanīndravarman II, but to his son, which reminded Cœdès of the 'magic identification' between the father and the son which is essential to Brahmānic ritual.<sup>96</sup> Chutiwongs improves this analysis by suggesting that the king's father was deified as the 'Divine Essence of Jayavarman'.<sup>97</sup> She argues that towards the end of the king's reign the art began to merge the concepts of Avalokiteśvara and the Buddha. *Jayavarmesvara* is comprised of the name of the king and Avalokiteśvara, yet in the triad of temples, the king's father is identified with the Bodhisattva, not the king. In this way the king becomes his own father, as a manifestation of both the Buddha and Avalokiteśvara, or as both the father and the son.

Cœdès argued that if the statue of the king as a devotee was placed in front of sanctuary containing a Buddha image, then this would subvert traditional Buddhist iconography by placing a resolutely human aspect of the king in front of the Buddha that he wished to be associated with, stripped of his royal signs.<sup>98</sup> However such an arrangement would be in accord with the complex arrangement of lineage and identification described by Chutiwongs. In the portrait statues of the king apparently in worship, devoid of his royal attributes, he can be understood to be awaiting his Buddhahood, by making offerings to the Buddha. Yet elsewhere the king is identified with the Buddha. In the pose of the devotee the king becomes like the son, awaiting his inheritance from his father. Yet the king is also the father.

## Conclusion

The question of the portrait is crucial to the study of the art of the Bayon-period because one of many valid interpretations of the face towers is that they portray the king and because one of the major artistic developments of the period were the statues widely believed to depict the king in the pose of a devotee. In order to achieve this, these

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<sup>95</sup> Nandana Chutiwongs, *The iconography of Avalokiteśvara in mainland South-East Asia*, (New Delhi: Aryan Books International), 2002, 328.

<sup>96</sup> Cœdès, 'IV. La Stèle Du Práh Khñ d'Ankor', 261.

<sup>97</sup> Nandana Chutiwongs, 319.

<sup>98</sup> Cœdès, 'Le Portrait Dans L'art Khmer', 198.

portraits rested upon a degree of naturalism and are thought to represent a physical similitude of the king, in contradistinction to earlier royal statuary, which adhered to depicting the physical attributes of the gods and were not thought to represent the physical characteristics of a king. An examination of the history of the portrait in the west demonstrates that physical likeness has been of varied importance, contingent upon the concerns of the historical period. Instead, portraits are concerned with presenting an individual, situating them within the collective, and memorialising them. The portrait functions in the same way within the Indic context. Less emphasis might be placed on the body in Brahmanic and Buddhist contexts, however the portrait still places the individual within the collective and functions as an indexical symbol. The status of the physical body is also put into question as the physical body and statue are conflated when statues come to replace mummified corpses or bodily remains are incorporated into statues. The importance of the physical body in the Buddhist context is illustrated by the emphasis the Buddha himself is recorded to have placed upon his disciples taking a final vision of his physical form before he died. This insistence on the place of the physical image of the Buddha is also demonstrated in the legends of the first Buddha images, in which the Buddha authorises his likeness to be the heir to his teachings, thus constituting an association between the teachings of the Buddha and his physical form. This is further complicated by readings which suggest the Buddha becomes more like a statue during his lifetime, as his physical form is seen to be arrested in time, to become static.

Royal images which preceded Jayavarman VII's reign can be understood to be portraits as they served an indexical function and placed the king within the collective, of both the society (by placing him outside of it) and the divine (by associating him with the gods). In this manner the Buddha statue from the central sanctuary of the Bayon can be understood as both a statue of the Buddha *and* as a portrait of the king. What altered with the statues of Jayavarman VII is that they represent the king *apart* from the divine, by placing him in the pose of submission and prayer, devoid of his royal or divine attributes. In such a manner he is located within the collective of devotees at the same time as he is identified with the Buddha. The face towers of the Bayon can be interpreted as the third component in this collection of portraits, which makes manifest the omnipresent qualities of kingship. In this way the reign of Jayavarman VII constitutes an artistic exploration of the functions, breadth, and possibilities of the genre of portraiture in relation to the institution of kingship.

This triadic collection of figurative images explores the concept and reach of portraiture in ways which were both in accord with, and also departures from, the Angkorian tradition. The portraits explored different facets of kingship in relation to the divine and to lineage as well as playing with the distinction between architecture and sculpture. The ‘true-portrait’ statues do not constitute the first portraits in Cambodia, because the royal-divine portraits of earlier periods are in accord with Indic traditions of portraiture. However, these statues are novel in that they represent the king as a devotee rather than directly associated with the divine. Portraiture haunts the analysis in the coming chapter, as the faces tread the line between being specific (open to precise identification depending on the audience) and generic (all faces are generic by virtue of being faces).

## Chapter Five: What is a Face: Paradoxes in the Face Towers

What is a face? The answer to such a question appears to be self-evident. After all, recognition of the human face is the most fundamental, primordial, and revelatory experience as a new-born child begins to map the face of its mother. The face is perhaps the most sketched and reproduced feature of the human form. Since the Renaissance in Western Europe during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, whose art was absorbed by the realism of linear perspective, the face has been considered the visual marker of the individual and is thought of as the primary site of individual and approachable presence.

This chapter considers the problematics of defining the face as the site of signification in non-western cultures, making particular reference to Buddha images and the face towers of the Bayon. In the course of this interrogation two paradoxes of the face emerge, which relate to the aesthetic specificity and generality of the visage and to questions of seeing and not-seeing with regard to the face towers. There has been no serious consideration of the Bayon faces as *faces* in scholarship pertaining to twelfth-century Angkor. This theoretical deficit has resulted in the production of a body of scholarship – reviewed in Chapter Three - which approaches the iconography of the Bayon with the primary aim of ascribing a *specific* and singular identity to the faces, but which has not paused to consider the – often phenomenological - implications of an architectural landscape composed of faces, regardless of whom those faces belong to. The purpose of this chapter is to contemplate the unique status of the face as an aesthetic object and to complicate the often hegemonic thought which guides thinking on and about the face and practices of seeing, a hegemony which is often quietly at work in academic studies of the Bayon.

### The First Paradox: What is a Face?

The apparent self-evidence of the face is refuted when one considers that the face has inspired so many aesthetic and philosophical investigations. Nineteenth-century philosopher Georg Simmel was struck by the idea that ‘the human face is of unique importance in the fine arts’ which caused him to ask ‘what is it about the human

face that makes this possible?'.<sup>1</sup> He argued that the answer to this question is found in the unrivalled aesthetic unity which the face presents, through its perfect balance of rational symmetry and irrational individuality which, unlike the body, possesses the ability to interpret the external world while being the locus of interpretable expression.<sup>2</sup> Beneath the surface unity of the face, he also saw its aesthetic appeal lying in the way in which the face indicates a soul or inner psyche.<sup>3</sup> Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas employed the face as the foundation of his ethics and argued that the face-to-face encounter with the Other is always hierarchical and makes a fundamental ethical demand of the subject: 'thou shalt not kill'.<sup>4</sup> Levinas proposed that the face both solicits interaction and an urgent response while also resisting any attempt to fully grasp it.<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari responded to Levinas by critiquing the notion of the face as universal and pre-discursive.<sup>6</sup> They validly called attention to the historicised and culturally-dependent face, grounded in European imperialism.

This diverse cross-section of thinkers who have approached the face each present differing conceptions of the face, which nevertheless situates the face as being the visible, expressive surface of a subjectivity, whether that surface is understood as universal (as per Simmel) or culturally determined (as per Deleuze and Guattari). Despite their differences, Deleuze and Guattari join Simmel and Levinas in drawing a fundamental distinction between the face and the body.<sup>7</sup> The face is of a radically different order from the body and distinct from the head, due to the face being the primary site of signification.

There are several strands of enquiry put forward in the previous paragraphs which I wish to pursue here before returning to the paradoxical nature of the architecture of Angkor Thom. The first is a questioning of the extent to which the face can be universally understood to be the locus of expression and the visible, legible surface of a subjectivity located immediately behind it. A questioning of this complex notion, up against the distinction between the face and the body, opens up the space to

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Simmel, 'The Aesthetic Significance of the Face', in *Georg Simmel, 1858-1918. A Collection of Essays*, ed. by Kurt H. Wolff, (Ohio State University Press, 1959), 276.

<sup>2</sup> Simmel, 'The Aesthetic Significance of the Face', 276–281.

<sup>3</sup> Simmel, 'The Aesthetic Significance of the Face', 277.

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1969), esp pages, 194-219.

<sup>5</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 212.

<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 186.

<sup>7</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 188-189.

consider the face, and thus image-making, from a Buddhist perspective. Or rather, Buddhist doctrine and practices force us to reconsider the signifying function of the face. The second line of enquiry I wish to elucidate is the question of the face-to-face encounter, or non-encounter, in relation to the face towers. Such a study draws attention to a number of paradoxes inherent to the face towers, which I believe is integral to their meaning and significance, rather than the product of a lack of material evidence. I suggest that this line of enquiry will lead to a more nuanced understanding of what the construction of hundreds of faces meant, aesthetically and theoretically.

In a compelling essay, anthropologist James Siegel begins to probe the question of the face as being universal across cultures and as being the universal site of expression, in a direct response to Simmel's work. Siegel was prompted to consider the face after he began to notice uncanny facial expressions in Japanese media, which led him to ask whether or not the translation – or untranslatability – of facial expressions between cultures destroys the 'unity' of the face, as argued for by Simmel.<sup>8</sup> Of course, Simmel was a product of his time, but Siegel rightly charges him with imposing a particular aesthetic and cultural perspective which took the European face as universal, which thus weakened his analysis of the face as the site of expression and unity. Siegel argues that locating the primary site of signification and expression in the face is a Euro-centric position. Like Simmel, Siegel somewhat problematically shifts his analysis between mediums: he moves between discussing real people, paintings, statues, photographs, billboards and Buddhas. Nevertheless, Siegel's essay presents a fertile ground to further consider the question of the face.

One particularly rich vein of study is Siegel's consideration of statues of the Buddha where it is the *mudras* – intricate hand gestures - which are animate and communicate narrative. The pose of the hands indicates the activity the Buddha is presently engaged with, such as teaching, or the precise moment of the Buddha's life that is being represented, for example the moment of his enlightenment. For Siegel the face of the Buddha, almost unanimously represented in perfect symmetry, is devoid of animation or expression and thus is unable to signify. Siegel explains this is because the Buddha lacks the *desire* to signify.<sup>9</sup> The face is removed from the act of narration. The lack of animation of the face means that it cannot even be read as being – or referring to

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<sup>8</sup> James Siegel, 'Georg Simmel Reappears: "The Aesthetic Significance of the Face"', in *Objects and Objections in Ethnography* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 3–20.

<sup>9</sup> Siegel, 'Georg Simmel Reappears', 12.

- the controller of the communicative hand gestures. For Siegel the hands refer 'elsewhere' and the face does not present the surface of a thinking mind.<sup>10</sup>

Here Siegel presents a radical reversal of the face and body division set out by the scholars above. If we take this proposition seriously then not only is expression situated somewhere other than the face in representations of the Buddha, but the site of signification – the hands – is located at one of the furthest extremities of the body, at the very limits of the bodily form and thus at a great distance from the head, which remains at a literally and metaphorically higher position. The face/head retains its privileged status because it does not, or cannot, signify; the (non-)gesture of the face is an indication of the absence of a personality or subjectivity which characterises the Buddha. For Siegel, the face of the Buddha must be of a different order to any other face precisely because it belongs to a being that is ontologically distinct, by virtue of attaining nirvana and thus being a Buddha. The face of the Buddha cannot signify a presence for there is no self to presence. Siegel argues that if the face of the Buddha communicates anything at all then it must be Buddha-hood, expressed via non-communication, like a mask, an absolute facade, which refers to something beyond itself, rather than directly behind itself to a thinking mind.<sup>11</sup> Siegel's position can be improved by conceiving that the face of the Buddha does not refer elsewhere, it instead refers to *nothing*.

For Simmel, the significance of the face comes from its sense of inner control which works to stabilise its fragile unity. Siegel argues that in the case of the Buddha the face is displaced by the hands as a site of control and the gesture of the hands refers to a controlling agent elsewhere. For Siegel, the face of the Buddha is more than a mask for it hides nothing because there is nothing behind it to conceal. Counter to this position however is that the face appears poised, symmetrical and unified precisely because this is the ultimate expression of control on the part of the Buddha. The expression absolutely refers to the person of the Buddha who has achieved perfect mastery of his facial expression. The tension between these two readings of the face of the Buddha is irresolvable.

As faces, very much to the exclusion of figurative bodies, the face towers of the Bayon present an interesting case to consider the face. Almost all descriptions of these

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>11</sup> Siegel, 'Georg Simmel Reappears', 13.

faces appropriately highlight their expressive qualities: their enigmatic smiles, their compassionate gazes, their *personality*.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the face of the Buddha these are not impassive faces which have deferred all signification elsewhere, although, as we shall see below, their expressive nature does not mean that they are concretely engaged in *this* exterior world. Each Bayon face is endowed with a sense of individuality – as facial features vary between different faces, subtly and not-so-subtly altering their appearance – yet they are all instantly recognisable as ‘Bayon’ faces. This personality presents them as at once unique and generic. This is the first paradox, point of incompatibility, or deconstructive gesture which the faces pose: the face is always both a generic, standardised collection of features and specifically individual.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Second Paradox: Questions of (In)Visibility in Relation to the Face Towers**

The specific yet generic appearance of the face, including the face of the Bayon, feeds into the second paradox which I wish to develop here. This line of thought questions whether the face towers can – like the faces of the Buddha – be imagined as referring to a presence in the here and now or whether they refer to an agent ‘elsewhere’. From a Theravādin Buddhist perspective the question might be reposed, so rather than distinguishing between here and elsewhere, the distinction is made between here and nowhere, or here and nothingness. Many of the readings of the towers imagine that they are looking out across the country. Along with his theory that the faces radiate royal power, Mus also offers an interesting take on this radiating quality of the face towers as he pursues the miracle of the smiling or laughing Buddha.<sup>14</sup> The story of this miracle states that when a Buddha smiles rays of multi-coloured light emanate from his mouth, reaching all beings in all realms. These beams of light cool the hot hells and warm the cold hells, thus easing the suffering of all. These rays of light are also able to predict rebirths based upon where they return to the Buddha’s body. In this story there is a multi-directional flow of these rays of brilliant light as they emanate from the body of the Buddha and then return to him to predict the future rebirth of those whom the

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<sup>12</sup> The artistic images of a Bodhisattva must signify something and must be capable of expression. For example, Avalokiteśvara, as the embodiment of compassion, must express compassion and one of the means of doing this is by taking on multiple forms best suited to who he is preaching to.

<sup>13</sup> Thompson, ‘Angkor Revisited’, 183 – 185.

<sup>14</sup> Mus, ‘Le Sourire d’Angkor’, 363–381.

light touched. This miracle is associated with the ‘divine regard’ or the ‘divine eye’.<sup>15</sup> Mus identifies themes of the Buddha’s omnipresence which emerge from Mahāyāna doctrine, in particular the *Lotus of the Good Law*.<sup>16</sup> He argues that the Bayon, in harmony with the town of Angkor Thom, epitomises and synthesises these themes, where the face towers shine on the Khmer land and, as the faces radiate royal power across the country, they also connect with subjects in the provinces.<sup>17</sup>

The Bayon succeeds in an impressive symbolic unity of form. What Jayavarman VII realised in architecture was a mode of ‘political technology’ that rested upon a monumental, anthropomorphised form, which encompasses every component of his architectural and artistic project. The theoretical basis for the following subsection is twofold: a Foucauldian consideration of architecture and vision as maintaining structures of power and an analysis of the power of vision, metaphorically and literally, within a Buddhist context. The use of the former theoretical framework is tempered and sensitised to the specific context via the latter. This subsection has also been influenced more indirectly by my readings of Levinas.

Foucault’s remarkable study of architectures of power charts the move from spectacular punishments of the Middle Ages, which ultimately emanated from the sovereign body, to the establishment of systematic methods of punishment from the nineteenth century which relied upon democratic structures of power distributed between many bodies.<sup>18</sup> This latter mode of power relations, which finds material expression in the architectural totality of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, had its origins in seventeenth-century methods of preventing plague that gave rise to new methods of disciplining and organising society. By the nineteenth century, institutions functioned via categorising individuals as either normal or abnormal and via coercive placing of individuals in literal and metaphorical locations within society depending upon their categorisation.<sup>19</sup> Foucault’s analysis of the Panopticon reveals the two-fold role of

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<sup>15</sup> Mus, ‘Le Sourire d’Angkor’, 365-366.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

I have worked between two translations of this sutra, but have largely followed the Sanskrit translation. One translated from the Sanskrit by H. Kern, trans., *Saddharma-Puṇḍrīka or The Lotus of the True Law* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), and one translated to English from a Chinese translation made in circa 350-410 Kumārajīva, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, trans. by Leon Hurvitz (New York: Columbia University, 1979)

<sup>17</sup> Mus, ‘Le Sourire d’Angkor’, 377-381.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 207-208.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 199.

naming and coercing within its very architectural structure which explicitly exploits tools of surveillance to exert power over others. The Panopticon had at its centre a watch tower which enabled guards to see inmates whilst themselves being concealed from view. At the periphery, surrounding this watch tower, was a circular structure, divided into cells. Each cell wall opened out into the centre, giving all inmates a view of the tower. There was a window on the opposite wall which allowed light into the cell, enabling observers to see the play of shadows upon the cell walls. But the partition walls between cells were windowless. This had the effect of closing inmates off from one another, unable to see or communicate with neighbouring cells. The inmates could be seen at all times but were never able to see. Yet in the watchtower one saw everything without ever being seen.<sup>20</sup> This play on vision ensures that the inmate was aware at all times of his visibility, even in the absence of a watchman in the central tower. In this way the inmates became part of the very power structure which acted upon them.<sup>21</sup>

Some notes here will be helpful in applying a panoptical analysis to the Bayon, which does not precisely mirror the architecture of the panopticon. In the first instance, the authority figure, the one who watches without being watched, is concealed, or revealed, behind immense faces. The viewer sees the faces, but do they see the authority figure? These leads to the second point and to what extent the watchful eyes of these faces are endowed with a disciplinary capability is dependent upon their audience. Yet in the presence of these face towers the viewer is extraordinarily aware of his or her visibility.<sup>22</sup> But the Bayon does resemble the panopticon by being a powerful centre, out of which radiates the benevolent and dominating supremacy of the king, expressed through the metaphor of vision.<sup>23</sup> The faces stand at a high elevation and the majority

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<sup>20</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 202.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>22</sup> An infamous Khmer Rouge slogan was that the *angkar* - or "Organisation" which euphemistically referred to the hidden Khmer Rouge leadership - had many eyes like a pineapple, enabling it to see everything at once. The invoking of omnipresent vision and knowledge ensured obedience. Alexander Hinton has noted the similarity between the metaphor of the pineapple and the Bayon as representing potent centres of all-seeing power, yet in his analysis the Khmer Rouge appropriation is a crude inversion of the Buddhist idea of all-pervading sight as leading to enlightenment. My suggestion is that the reading of coercive possibility is always contained in the symbol of an all-seeing figure.

Alexander L. Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?: Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 128-129.

<sup>23</sup> Face towers only appear at Jayavarman VII temples within a 100km radius of the capital city at Angkor Thom. Those which appear outside the central Angkor region are at the large complexes of Banteay Chhmar and Preah Khan of Kompong Svay; other provincial temples are

have open eyes, which look out ahead. This gaze could equally and simultaneously be viewed as looking out across the land or be manifestations of an interior meditative gaze. The iconography is unclear, but one reading of the face towers suggests that they are looking out at the population, especially in the wake of an occupation or civil unrest at Angkor, acting as guardians of the empire. Equally, and concurrently, they can be read as protecting the population by spreading compassion. This Janus-faced role, as it were, appears to me to fit with Jayavarman VII's role as a Buddhist *cakravartin*, a sovereign allied with military might who is nonetheless characterised by benevolence and paradoxically represents a projection of worldly renunciation. Whether the Bayon face towers literally represented the king at their origin, or whether they are seen to literally represent the king past or present today, they clearly play a key role in making the king as abstract power visible – and in endowing this power with vision.

Foucault's panoptic structure shifted power away from the sole control of the king, embodied within his own body politic, and distributed it into the multiple bodies, because anyone could have access to the watchtower.<sup>24</sup> As representations of the king – as both Jayavarman VII and the general notion of kingship – the face towers succeed in taking the singular power of the sovereign body politic and multiplying it many times via many bodies. The body of the king is also at once multiplied and unified via association with the bodhisattva and the Buddha and in the multiple artistic representations of kingship: the 'portrait-statue', the central Buddha image, and the face towers.

Here I also wish to return briefly to Levinas who argued that the face solicits an encounter whilst simultaneously resisting offering itself up to be fully grasped. In this

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without face towers. Olivier Cunin poses the question of whether this is symbolic or just a consequence of stylistic changes, but does not offer a possible solution. It appears to me necessary to take the symbolic consequences of this distribution of face towers seriously. Let us recap what we know of the geography of the architecture: the capital city is enclosed with high walls and at each of its five entryways are gateways comprised of colossal faces, which greet each and every visitor to the royal city. At the centre of this city is the king's state-temple where multiple faces at differing elevations face each of the cardinal directions. Both Preah Khan of Kompong Svay and Banteay Chhmar were significant regional outposts of royal power, the former in all likelihood being the childhood home of Jayavarman VII and the latter home to Jayavarman VII's son, the Crown Prince, who conducted military campaigns in his father's name. Preah Khan is to the east of Angkor, Banteay Chhmar to the west, which corresponds to a radial configuration of power. Nevertheless, each of these temples retains a geographical proximity to the capital which, according to a galactic structure of power, means that the royal power endowed within them would be stronger than at the more distant temples of the realm. Cunin, 'The Face Towers at Banteay Chmar', 115.

<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 208.

description there is something at once visual and tactile in the invitation and approach to the face but which nevertheless resists complete apprehension.<sup>25</sup> The face resists openly, not closing itself like a closed door, concealing what lies behind it. The face-to-face encounter for Levinas is always asymmetric and hierarchical. I refer to his line of thinking here as a point of departure, to give a sense of where my own thinking on the face – and the face towers – has developed. The face towers of the Bayon present themselves openly, they advertise themselves – and the treasure they hold within – in a more overt manner than the lotus-esque, Mount Meru pinnacles of Angkor Wat. Yet this advertisement belies their function as an architectural structure which also conceals; beneath each tower of the Bayon were statues of apotheosised royalty and dignitaries, hidden within darkened sanctuaries, connected by labyrinthine galleries. Few people would be able to see these statues ordinarily, although epigraphic evidence suggests that they may have been publically displayed on occasion. The Preah Khan inscription details an annual ceremony in which the icons of 122 gods were paraded, including twenty-three Jayabuddhamahānātha statues.<sup>26</sup> The potency of seeing these images is enhanced by only making them visible to large audiences at certain occasions; for the rest of the time they were concealed.

The face towers of Angkor Thom appear to me to be the outward projection, or the concrete illusion, of the omnipotent power of the king who must be more than an ordinary man in order to be the king and to ensure the prosperity of the kingdom. It appeared that the regard of the face towers was a gesture that could be read as protective, compassionate, a paternal gaze that guarded the kingdom. And that the face towers offered this regard in order for viewers to take a divine vision of the king. I maintain, as described above, that the architecture of the face towers represents a potent visual device to symbolise the all-encompassing power of the king. And that the regard of these giant faces can be read in multiple ways, depending on the audience and as such enable the viewer to take vision of the king, much like the many appearances of Avalokiteśvara or the wizard of the Emerald City. However, a deeper analysis presents the second paradox or point of deconstruction inherent in the face towers: they both invite and resist the gaze of the viewer and that they can be read as both seeing and not-

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<sup>25</sup> In a further explosion of sensory encounters, for Levinas the ethical command of the face is something encountered visibly, but also audibly; the face speaks. Nicola Foster points out this inconsistency in Levinas' conception of the sensory apprehension of the face in, 'Photography and the Gaze: The Ethics of Vision Inverted', in *Parallax*, 14:2, (2008), 87.

<sup>26</sup> Cœdès, 'La Stèle Du Préah Khan d'Ankor', 267.

seeing. As faces – a unique aesthetic composition – the visages of Angkor Thom solicit the gaze of a viewer, yet their eyes are firmly locked ahead, avoiding the glance or glare of an observer. Are these eyes looking over the land in a protective gesture or is their gaze firmly directed inward, in meditative contemplation? Both of these positions are powerful assertions of strength, cast in stone, implying the presence of a commanding controlling agent, be that a king, a god, or a Buddha.

Within an Indic context the power of vision is significant. J. Gonda demonstrates that in ancient Vedic texts the eye is considered an agent, which is ‘actively involved in the process of seeing through its illumination of its object’.<sup>27</sup> The act of sight within this Vedic complex involves an exchange between the seer and the object of vision.<sup>28</sup> This process of visual exchange is conceived of as an active, physical transaction, haptic and tactile in a similar way as suggested by Levinas. The physical dimension of vision is firmly rooted in Vedic tradition and has developed in Hindu and Buddhist religious practices where looking is not a passive act; the object of the gaze is believed to be engaged by the act of sight and the trajectory of the gaze takes something of the object of sight back to the viewer; this gives the object a subjectivity or a social agency. Called *darśan*, the Hindu practice allows a devotee to gain intimate knowledge of the divine via making eye contact with the statue-as-god.<sup>29</sup>

The practice is different within Buddhist contexts, however *darśana* is a crucial concept in understanding the importance of the link between seeing and knowing.<sup>30</sup> The Sanskrit term *darśana* is used in contemporary Cambodia to designate philosophy, but it literally means ‘seeing, looking; teaching; sight, vision, observation; perception; the being or becoming visible; going into the presence of; a view or theory; seeing in the mind, mental or spiritual vision; contemplating’.<sup>31</sup> To know a divinity is to see it.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> J. Gonda, *Eye and Gaze in the Veda*, (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1969), 19.

<sup>28</sup> K. Trainor *Relics, Ritual and Representation in Buddhism. Rematerialising the Sri Lankan Theravada Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 176.

<sup>29</sup> Babb, ‘Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism’, 393-397; Eck, *Darśan*

<sup>30</sup> Few scholars have undertaken studies of *darśan* in Buddhist milieus with the notable exceptions of Andy Rotman, who examines the primacy of the visual economy in early Buddhist texts, *Thus I Have Seen: Visualising Faith in Early Indian Buddhism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Eckel, *To See the Buddha*; David L. McMahan, *Empty Vision* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> Email correspondence between author and Southeast Asian language specialist Michel Antelme. December 2011.

Therefore during *darśan* the Hindu devotee does not only see and be seen, but also through sight acquires some knowledge or understanding of the divine.

Although I remain unconvinced that the Nepali stūpa acted as a model for the Bayon, there are ways in which the eyes on the *harmikā* and the face towers of Cambodia can be theorised from within a broader Mahāyāna schema, acting as both metaphor and didactic tool. David McMahan argues that the visual took primacy over the written in Mahāyāna traditions because of the metaphorical significance of the ‘awakened eye’ in epistemological models. This utilised visual symbolism in order to gain understanding of non-conceptual awareness. Vision offers a tool to see an unmediated view of reality.<sup>33</sup> Malcolm Eckel refers to the chiasmus, spoken by the Buddha, ‘whoever sees the Dharma sees me; whoever sees me sees the Dharma’ to illustrate the integral role vision plays in Buddhist discourse.<sup>34</sup> However sight is not merely a metaphor; vision is a means to place oneself in *relation* to the Buddha. This can be seeing in any form and for Eckel, meditative visualisation, reading sacred texts, visiting pilgrimage sites or viewing images of the Buddha are all included as acts of sight that cultivate faith.<sup>35</sup> Seeing is not believed to be a one-way process and the Buddha has a perfected vision of true reality and enables other people to see reality - he illuminates.<sup>36</sup>

Mus writes that the story of the miraculous smiling Buddha is comprised of three parts: an interior meditation, an interior action and a threshold between the two.<sup>37</sup> He argues that the smile of the Bayon is the threshold as it covers and incubates; the faces do not have to raise their eyes to survey the exterior landscape as the rest houses and hospitals act as a royal safeguard and the interior of the temple encases the joys and sorrows of the king’s subjects in the form of regional deities/ dignitaries.<sup>38</sup> This notion of the faces acting as an enveloping incubator can be advanced to think of them as

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This is not only the case within the Hindu paradigm and there are many phrases in English which relate seeing with knowing or understanding. For example, ‘I see’, ‘to gain insight’, ‘to be illuminated’.

<sup>32</sup> See, Michael W. Meister, ‘Seeing and Knowing: Semiology, Semiotics and the art of India’, in *Los Discursos Sobre el Arte*, (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico Instituto de Investigaciones Esteticas,, 1991),193.

<sup>33</sup> McMahan, *Empty Vision*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Eckel, *To See the Buddha*, 131-136

<sup>35</sup> Eckel, *To See the Buddha*,136.

<sup>36</sup> Eckel, *To See the Buddha* ,139

<sup>37</sup> Mus, ‘Le Sourire d’Angkor’, 381.

<sup>38</sup> Mus, ‘Le Sourire d’Angkor’, 381.

covering and uncovering, revealing and concealing. This is where the second paradox of the faces lies; in their acting as a gateway between the outward manifestation of an all-seeing power and in the inward projection of meditation.

The architecture of the Bayon presents a visual paradox. The face towers are visible to all who visit the city – even if they were not admitted into the city walls. Their monumental form and structure insists upon being seen. This assertion supports my earlier argument that the face towers had the symbolic function of connecting the king with his population. The height of the Bayon suggests that the faces were meant to be seen from the surrounding area. That the north-south axis of the Bayon aligns with where the Royal Palace would have been suggests that it was of more importance that the Royal court could see the Bayon in its completeness rather than for it to be seen in its whole by people coming into the walled city. The Phimeanakas inscription (K.485) states that Jayavarman VII's first wife, Jayarajadevi, had portrait-statues of her family and ancestors and, after her death her sister Indradevī, who became Jayavarman VII's wife, continued this tradition, having statues of the king made and distributed to regional centres.<sup>39</sup> Thompson has argued for the connection between the performative ceremony carried out by the queen in order to make physically manifest her absent husband - a ceremony that was successful according to the Phimeanakas inscription – and the presencing aspect of the portrait-statue.<sup>40</sup> This indicates that aside from preservation in stone, there was a concern that making him visible to certain audiences was of great import. That there is the possibility that these statues were only made public during processions at certain times of the year enhances the significance that taking sight of them possessed. That the king also instructed huge faces to adorn his state-temple, the gateways to his city, and at his other temples, once again indicates the importance placed on seeing the face...of the king? Of the god? Of the Buddha? Or, simply, seeing the face.

However, it is likely that few people would have had access to the Bayon's upper tier and the opportunity to be surrounded by these faces. They invite an ocular exchange yet stare ahead, stonily refusing the regard. It is impossible to make any eye contact with the faces as they stare out ahead. Thus the elevation of the Bayon face is not only a presentation of a hierarchically superior other, but it is also an other that

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<sup>39</sup> Cœdès, 'Grande Stele Du Phimeanakas', 161–181.

<sup>40</sup> Thompson, 'Performative Realities: Nobody's Possession', 116.

refuses to enter into a visual relationship with a viewer. The elevated position of the Bayon face towers undisputedly places them in a superior hierarchical position to anything else at the temple or in the city; any visual encounter will be asymmetric. Even on the upper tier of the temple, where it is possible to walk right up to a face, it is difficult to gain the visual distance required to take in a face in its entirety due to their colossal scale. When standing next to one of these towers a person of average height will reach the mouth of the face, so that the rest of it looms above. Other face towers surround the viewer on this tier and Groslier perfectly describes the disorientating moment ‘[w]hen the visitor emerges onto the central terrace and finds himself encircled by these innumerable faces with their staring expressions [...] he no longer knows whether he himself is moving or the Bayon is turning round him’. The layout of this terrace is initially perplexing and otherworldly, yet at the same time allows a person to become absorbed into the architecture in a way that is not possible in the sculptural scale.

The iconic faces are integral to the architecture and this melding of icon and tower allows the visitor to become encased beneath the anthropomorphic structural form. The faces act as host to the visitor, but at the same time, by being sculptural-architecture, as opposed to sculpture, the faces keep the visitor at a distance, foreclosing any haptic encounter. They are as hieratic as they are naturalist; a smiling, inviting human visage which is also unyieldingly other. Thus these faces can be compared to the position of the king, who must be at the literal centre of the ordering of the territory yet existing outside of that ordering by virtue of being necessarily unreachable.

## **Conclusion**

As the previous chapter dealt with the question of portraiture from culturally distinct perspectives, this chapter questioned the role of the face and the practices of vision, by departing from a western philosophical traditions in order to better excavate the Indic position. Beginning by posing the question ‘why the face?’ this chapter explored the role of the face in order to better interpret its repetition in the visual landscape of Cambodia. Siegel’s challenge to western philosophy with questions regarding the translatability of facial expression contested the very notion that the face is primary site (sight) of signification. While the distinction between the face and the body remains in place, their role is reversed in the case of the Buddha, where it is the

hands which act as narrator and signifier rather than the face. While animation is relegated to the farthest extremities of the figurative form, the face of the Buddha retains the privileged position by referring elsewhere and signifying nothingness. However, the faces of the Bayon are imbued with lively expression, at odds with Buddha statues where the face is inanimate and the hands act as the animate signifier. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they can be understood as engaged in this world. As portraits of the king and/or of the divine, the faces stand both within the ordering of space – indeed at the very centre of order-, and outside of it.



Figure 36. View from the third level of the Bayon. Photograph by author. 2011.

I argue for the political dimension inherent in the aesthetics of the face towers, by opening the discursive space to consider the application of the all-seeing power of the king, as well as the notion that this power is multiplied via dividing the bodies of the king into multiple faces. The question of the power structure of the face-to-face encounter, as advanced by Levinas, does not straightforwardly apply in the Bayon context; for Levinas the faces solicit the visual encounter and I can attest to that response from my own, early encounters with the faces. Nevertheless, the face towers stare ahead, avoiding all eye contact with a viewer. While the faces can be interpreted as surveying the empire, they can equally be understood as engaged in an interior vision, a

meditative gaze that divorces them from the exterior world in which they are situated. The power of vision is ritualised within Brahmānic-Buddhist paradigms, as illustrated by the practice of *darśan*, whereby power relations govern who gets to see whom and who has permission to see or not be seen. The face towers are clearly visible and attract attention, yet they also conceal other images, playing with the notion of revealing and hiding, seeing and not seeing.

Paradoxes and tensions are at the heart of the face towers and, I argue, a theoretical consideration of the faces needs to embrace these tensions rather than attempt to obliterate them or smooth them away. Nevertheless, these paradoxes make for uncanny encounters with the faces. The following chapter considers the impact of early colonial encounters with the faces in the jungle and argues that the response to the Bayon differed to that of other temples precisely because of the unique status of the human face as an aesthetic object.



## Chapter Six: Faces in the Jungle: Early European Representations of Angkor Thom and the Allure of the Face.

Theirs was the orient of memories, suggestive ruins, forgotten secrets.<sup>41</sup>

Hail, solitary ruins! holy sepulchres and silent walls! you I invoke; to you I address my prayer. While your aspect averts, with secret terror, the vulgar regard, it excites in my heart the charm of delicious sentiments—sublime contemplations.<sup>42</sup>

Late nineteenth-century literary and visual representations of Angkor, produced by Europeans, provide an archive of material that demonstrates the feelings of wonder, trepidation, and curiosity aroused by the temples, sensations which were often complemented by seductive narratives of ‘rediscovery’. These encounters were recorded in diary entries, travelogues, literature and memoirs, photographed, sketched in-situ, and re-etched by artists who had never travelled to Southeast Asia. Together these impressions of Angkor represent a body of material which, although of a different order to archaeological inventories and accounts, cannot be divorced from the writings of histories which official institutions were engaged in. In large part this was because European ‘explorers’ in the region were there in the capacity of the French government or had scholarly interests in the region. Following Edward Said’s Foucauldian definition of Orientalism as the institutional combination of European descriptions of, and inhabitations in, the Orient, acts of blatant arrogation, I suggest that the emotional, visceral responses recorded in diaries and travelogues cannot be detached from the project of objective scholarly enquiry. Colonial knowledge of Angkor was not only instituted from within the structures of detached scholarly analysis, as detailed in Chapter One, but was also produced in the literary and visual impressions of Angkor.<sup>43</sup> This approach melds both Said’s academic and imaginative meanings of Orientalism. Said analysed the exterior, or surface, of literary sources and he avoided the visual arts, yet it is possible to apply his methodology to visual sources, which interprets the

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<sup>41</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 170.

<sup>42</sup> C.F. Volney, *The ruins: or A survey of the revolutions of empires. By C.F. Volney. One of the deputies of the National Assembly of 1789, and author of Travels into Syria and Egypt. A new translation from the French.* (Philadelphia, 1799), 9-10.

<sup>43</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 2-3.

material as Europe's description of the Orient, which in turn also demonstrates the Occident documenting itself, against the Other.<sup>44</sup> The poetic literary and visual representations which the temples elicited can be understood as informing historiographic work on Angkor as well as constituting a historiography in and of itself. This includes the colonial exhibitions which were taking place in Europe, in which plaster cast copies of temple details as well as full-scale replicas and original artefacts removed from Angkor were exhibited.<sup>45</sup>

These representations have been studied by historian Penny Edwards and Tim Winter, a sociologist specialising in heritage, as part of their readings into colonial attitudes towards the history, culture, and peoples under their Protectorate.<sup>46</sup> Edwards argues that the written and visual accounts of Angkor, together with colonial exhibitions, served to justify French interventions in Cambodia, by presenting a case for the recovery and preservation of the monuments. While I concur with their methods and conclusions, I propose an alternative reading of these materials, which analyses the individual perspectives recorded in the literature which illuminate personal responses to the faces of Angkor Thom. From this reading a tension emerges within the literature between the desire to know, to reveal, and to understand the vine-covered temples, and the allure of the concealed, the unfamiliar, and the other-worldly. This tension is demonstrated in the recollections of Henri Marchal, the EFEO scholar who cleared and

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<sup>44</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 20-21. See also Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient. Devise and Rule*, (London: MacMillan, 1986).

While there have been recent studies of Orientalist visual art in the French colonies of North Africa and British artists in the Middle East there has yet to be a comprehensive survey of colonial visual arts of Cambodia, ostensibly, one imagines, because no major European artistic works were undertaken there prior to the twentieth century.

Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics. Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Nicholas Tromans, 'Introduction: British Orientalist Painting', in *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*, ed. by Nicholas Tromans (London: Tate Publishing, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> A recent exhibition at the Musée Guimet in Paris celebrated 150 years since the establishment of the French Protectorate in Cambodia. Entitled *Angkor: Naissance d'un mythe – Louis Delaporte et le Cambodge*, the exhibition explored the makings of the myth of 'rediscovery' and the manner in which the temples were presented to the metropolitan public. Rather than discursively question the (re)presentation of Angkor at colonial exhibitions, the curatorial decisions *Angkor: Naissance d'un mythe* echoed the techniques employed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and brought together Angkorian carvings from the tenth to thirteenth centuries, as well as replicas made from plaster cast copies of the temples, which were originally manufactured for colonial exhibitions held between 1889 and 1937, as well as for display at the Musée Indo-chinois in the Trocadero Palais in Paris.

Pierre Baptiste and Thierry Zéphir, eds., *Angkor. Naissance D'un Mythe*. (Gallimard: Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> Edwards, *Cambodge*; Winter, *Post-Conflict Heritage, Post-Colonial Tourism*.

excavated Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom and was appointed Curator of Angkor in 1919. After his retirement he wrote:

I myself knew the Bayon when it was still submerged in inextricable thickets of [vines] and foliage. It was very impressive [...], there was something enchanting and phantasmagorical about it; but the architecture was totally destroyed [...] in a word, no scholarly study was possible. Worse still this cloak of greenery that seems so romantic and picturesque caused terrible disintegration and ruin.<sup>47</sup>

I suggest that the European academic, archaeological quest for knowledge was tempered to some degree by the romantic fascination that these jungle-covered faces presented. On the one hand, archaeological study literally stripped back the monuments and dug into the earth for material evidence, which allowed them to take ownership of the architecture. On the other hand was the appeal of the unknown, the untamed, and the unknowable. With this in mind, this chapter considers these visual and literary impressions of Angkor, with a particular focus on the Bayon.

The Bayon and the face towers provoked unique responses, in contrast to Angkor Wat and the other temples, and I argue that this difference in reaction is precisely because of the nature of the face. In the case of the visages of the Bayon – the ‘most singular and beautiful monument’<sup>48</sup> – the scholarly desire to name and to know came up against the haunting presence of the half-visible, bodiless, and nameless faces. Like the literal gateways of Angkor Thom which the faces adorn, they represented a liminal space between two worlds: the known, familiar world which can be mapped and named, and the unknown world, whose precise contours are unfamiliar and indefinable. In addition to describing the awe that Angkor Thom inspired, themes of discovery, revelation, humanity, haunting, femininity, and materiality emerge in the literary and visual representations of Angkor. Comparative literature scholar Panivong Nordindr has written on a number of these themes, with a particular focus on questions of gender and the feminisation of Indochina in the colonial approach to Southeast Asia, as exemplified in André Malraux’s novel *La Voie royale*.<sup>49</sup> The remaining themes of discovery,

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Clémentin-Ojha and Manguin, *A Century in Asia*, 88.

<sup>48</sup> Francis Garnier, *Travels in Cambodia and Part of Laos. The Mekong Exploration Commission Report (1866-1868)*, 38.

<sup>49</sup> Panivong Nordindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina. French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 72-106.

revelation, humanity and materiality will be explored in this chapter, via a reading of literary and visual impressions of the Bayon.

## The Legacy of Romanticism

Before our work on [the Bayon], it was an incomprehensible labyrinth, which was even dangerous, but it had the thrill of an extraordinary romanticism.<sup>50</sup>

The late nineteenth-century period of European exploration and colonial expansion in Indochina occurred in the decades after Romanticism had swept across Europe.<sup>51</sup> Concerned by the detachment of man from nature, the secular rationalism and scientific enquiry of the Enlightenment, and the ideals of Neoclassicism, Romantics were keen to connect with the emotional, subjective, mystic, and natural. The call to connect with nature is perhaps best exemplified in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose ethics were premised upon the relationship man has with nature, wherein the latter acts as the conscience of the former.<sup>52</sup> Romanticism, and the closely related transcendentalist movements, were also characterised by a flourishing interest in Asian cultures, particularly Buddhism and Brahmānism. While Asian Buddhists in contact with Europeans in the late nineteenth century had painted Buddhism as compatible with rationalism and science, European Romantics had already read into Eastern religions the potential for countering rationalism and reuniting man with nature.<sup>53</sup>

While the influence of Romanticism is said to have begun to wane in the mid-nineteenth century, its legacy is legible in the tensions that play out in the impressions of Angkor, understandably as the ruin was such a potent Romantic symbol, standing for the achievements of man as well as the potential for man's downfall and the destructive powers of nature. The Picturesque movement, which was intimately associated with the Romanticism of the early nineteenth century, was fascinated with the foliage-covered ruin and employed it as a poetic metaphor, as it was perfectly poised between survival

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<sup>50</sup> Henri Parmentier, *Angkor: Guide* (Saigon: Albert Portail, 1957), 51.

<sup>51</sup> See the edited collection of Isaiah Berlin's BBC lectures on Romanticism, *The Roots of Romanticism*, (London: Pimlico, 2000).

<sup>52</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. by Maurice Cranston, (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

<sup>53</sup> For a detailed investigation of the translation of Buddhism in the West, including the ways in which Romanticist ideas influenced Buddhist modernism, see David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), especially chapter 3 and 5.

and destruction. The ruin intersected with aesthetic ideas which eschewed the rational in favour of the experiences of the beautiful and the sublime. Alois Riegl captured the pleasure and fear experienced by ‘modern man’ at witnessing the natural cycles of growth and decay and the destruction wrought by natural forces.<sup>54</sup> For him, the appreciation of the monument was paradoxical, in which its historical value was due to its visible decay, but this decay prompted the desire to preserve the monument, keeping the ruin in a stasis of semi-destruction. Art critic John Ruskin’s policy of conserving European Medieval ruins while vehemently against their restoration, acts as a precursor to Riegl’s appreciation of the ruin. Ruskin argued that restoration is a kind of violence or necromancy, because the buildings belong to those who built them and to future generations.<sup>55</sup> The question of humanity and the spectre of past generations emerge in the writings on Angkor, although as point of historical curiosity as much as derogatory comment of the failure of civilisation.

### **The “fragility of human things”: The Place of Humanity at Angkor.**

While nineteenth-century French representations of Cambodia have been interpreted as presenting Angkor as a region devoid of humanity,<sup>56</sup> the actual material record demonstrates that the discourse was more nuanced. Although the recognition given to the builders and the inhabitants of Angkor was often instrumentalised into colonial narratives of cultural decline, acknowledgement of the presence of indigenous humanity was necessary for these narratives to be instituted; inclusion of the presence of local inhabitants became necessary in order for the history of the region to unravel. Moreover, in re-imaginings of Cambodian history, Khmer figures were resurrected from bas-reliefs to be inserted into reconstructions of Angkor.

Although others had arrived before him, Henri Mouhot was the young French botanist whose travels in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand between 1858 and 1861 planted the evocative allure of Angkor in European minds. More precisely, the allure emerged in various translations and editions of Mouhot’s writings, in line with a growing market for travel literature which exploited technological developments that allowed for the affordable production and distribution of print materials on a wider scale. In 1863 his

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<sup>54</sup> Riegl, ‘The Modern Cult of Monuments’, 119.

<sup>55</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, (London: Century, 1988), first published 1849, 194-198.

<sup>56</sup> Edwards, *Cambodge*, 20.

travels were serialised in nine instalments in *Le Tour Du Monde*, a travel journal published in Paris which coincidentally launched in the same year that Mouhot set eyes on Angkor. The series was translated into English by the Royal Geographic Society of London in 1864 and again published in French in 1868. The publication of Mouhot's journals prompted intrigue at the prospect of untold cultural and economic bounties held within these ruined monuments abandoned to the jungle and gave the impetus for further expeditions to the region.

Mouhot illustrated his journal with many sketches and his drawings of Angkor included figures, in all likelihood because they were very much part of the landscapes that he was documenting. A sketch of a "library" at Angkor Wat shows two native Cambodians, identifiable by their attire and hairstyles, at the foot of the structure. Both are depicted in profile and they look at one another as if possibly engaged in conversation. A third bearded figure wearing a turban, who appears to be one of Mouhot's expedition party based upon his clothing and rifle slung across his back, stands to the left of the men (fig. 38). Another sketch of a temple tower, possibly at one of Jayavarman VII's temples, has a Cambodian seated in the doorway. In the 1863 French publication of his journal, his lively sketches were notably absent. Instead his account of Angkor was illustrated by etchings made by engravers in Paris, based upon Mouhot's own sketches. These drawings provided a vivid picture of abandoned jungle covered temples, but were largely devoid of human life.<sup>57</sup> Penny Edwards argues that this erasure of the presence of local Cambodians – the 'presence of the present' – situated the temples in the past, which allowed a fixed meaning to be attributed to them and demonstrated that there were no human impediments to the French presence.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Edwards, *Cambodge*, 20.

<sup>58</sup> Edwards, *Cambodge*, 20.

As Tim Winter perceptively notes, the casting of Angkor as a ruin was a neat metaphor for nineteenth century colonial ideology across Indochina as a whole. Winter, *Post-Conflict Heritage, Post-Colonial Tourism*, 28.

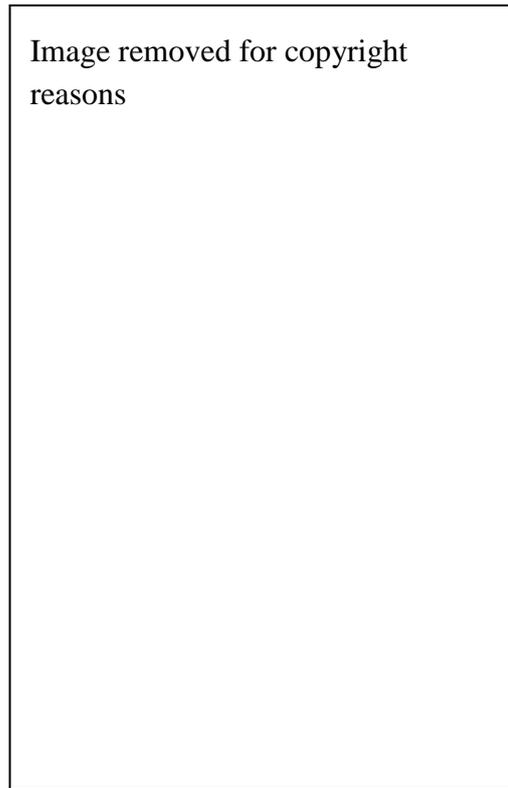


Figure 37. Henri Mouhot, 'Angkor Wat - Detail', in *Henri Mouhot's Diary*, Plate VI.

Yet the discourse and the evidence are more complex than this; Mouhot not only included locals in his drawings but was also very much interested in the people who, to his eyes, had left no historical record aside from the ruined temples and he lamented the lack of historical immortality for the individuals who had built these monuments. In one passage of his diary, written after his exploration of Angkor Thom, he wrote,

Sad fragility of human things! How many centuries and thousands of generations have passed away, of which history, probably, will never tell us anything: what riches and treasures of art will remain forever buried beneath these ruins; how many distinguished men – artists, sovereigns, and warriors – whose names were worthy of immortality, and now forgotten, laid to rest under the thick dust which covers these tombs!<sup>59</sup>

This paragraph and Mouhot's drawings of contemporary Cambodians display a curiosity and sensitivity to the humanity of Angkor, which is distinct from the place locals employed in travel writings and genre paintings of colonial drawings of ruins elsewhere, such as in Islamic monuments of the Middle East and North Africa, where

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<sup>59</sup> Mouhot, *Henri Mouhot's Diary. Travels in the Central Parts of Siam, Cambodia and Laos During the Years 1858-61*, 97.

locals were included for their exoticism and as subjects of ethnographic study.<sup>60</sup> French officials who travelled to Angkor to further document the region after Mouhot's journey also included local inhabitants in their sketches. These human figures were often retained in etchings produced in Europe, which were inspired by the drawings and descriptions that had been produced in situ.

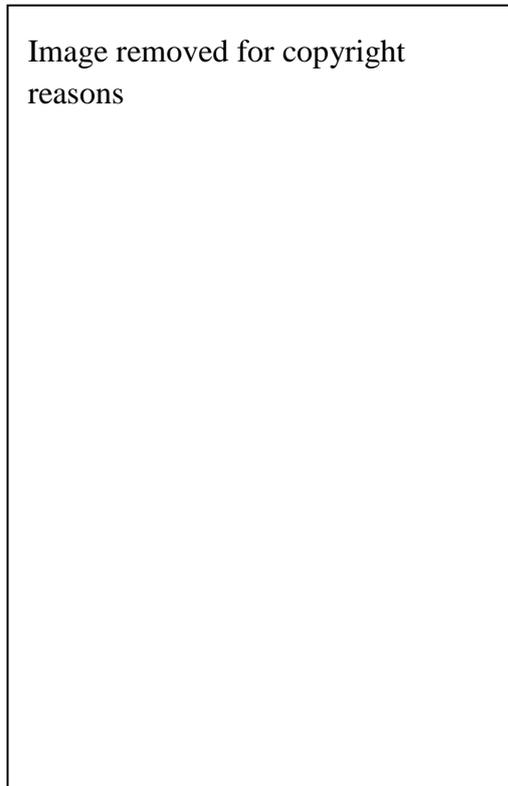


Figure 38. Louis Delaporte, 'Une porte d'Angkor Thom', mixed media, 1870-1873. In Pierre and Zéphir, eds., *Angkor. Naissance D'un Mythe*, no. 31.

Many of such works were based upon the drawings and accounts of Louis Delaporte, who made his first trip to Indochina in 1866-1868 as part of the French Mekong Expedition, along with Francis Garnier and under the command of Ernest Doudart de Lagrée. The aim of the mission was to investigate possible trade routes into China and the resulting report, *Commission d'exploration du Mékong*, was published in 1873.<sup>61</sup> During the expedition Delaporte produced a large number of sketches of the

<sup>60</sup> Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics*, 19; Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 7-8.

<sup>61</sup> On their return to France, Garnier and Delaporte collaborated to produce articles for *Le Tour du Monde*, which were published between 1869 and 1871. In 1880 Garnier's brother Léon reworked the original report, along with articles from *Le Tour du Monde*, to produce a version of the report to appeal to a wider audience. This edition contained a number of sketches

temples, the landscape, and ethnographic and architectural studies, which were used to illustrate the report.<sup>62</sup> A haunting rendering of an Angkor Thom gateway by Delaporte (Fig. 38) is alive with pale and expressive figures, emerging from the ghostly forest, yet all are stone remnants of Angkor, with the exception of two small figures, so dwarfed by the gateway and jungle that they barely register on first examination of the work. Their cropped hair and sarongs suggest these are local inhabitants, turned away from us as they gaze up at the adorned faces of the gateway, which appears to float out of the dense trees suspended in a luminous cloud. The figure on the left squats on the ground, his companion holding an arm up as if gesturing to the crowned figures which rise above them, as if in an act of wonderment or prostration to the true owners of the land. The intimation being that any living persons of the forest are insignificant in comparison to that which came before them and, furthermore, they continue to be over-awed by these stone idols as if they understood everything and nothing of the weight of their own history.

### **Stone Faces from Beneath the Verdant Jungle**

Angkor was swallowed up by the green silence of the forest. Yet strangely enough it was to the temples themselves that the tallest trees and the most riotous festoons of creepers paid their last respects, as if even in the grave they preserved their fallen grandeur.<sup>63</sup>

Although contemporary human figures were routinely depicted at Angkor Wat, they were rarely included in drawings of other temples, possibly because it was not settled in the manner of Angkor Wat, which housed a Buddhist monastery in its complex. The emphasis at the Bayon is given to depicting the surrounding jungle. Descriptions of obscurity, confusion, and disorientation characterise early European accounts of the Bayon, which tell of the dense foliage, the enveloping forest, and the embracing vines. Mouhot recorded the initial difficulty in understanding the layout of

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produced by artists in Paris based upon photographs by Émile Gsell and Delaporte's own sketches..

Louis Delaporte, *Voyage Au Cambodge. L'Architecture Khmer* (Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1880).

<sup>62</sup>English translations of the voyage were published in the late 1990s across three volumes. One volume was dedicated to sketches and segments of text translated from the original report. See, Louis Delaporte and Francis Garnier, *A Pictorial Journey on the Old Mekong. Cambodia, Laos and Yunnan* and Francis Garnier, *Travels in Cambodia and Part of Laos*.

<sup>63</sup> B-P. Groslier and Jacques Arthaud, *Angkor Art and Civilisation*, 196.

the structure, but noted that with time the symmetry of the temple can be comprehended.<sup>64</sup> In the *Mekong Exploration Commission Report* Francis Garnier described the ‘impenetrable curtain’ of vegetation which concealed many of the ruins.<sup>65</sup> Travel writer Pierre Loti recalled glimpsing the Bayon which appeared like a semi-obscured ‘jumble of rocks’ in the forest, where the fig tree was now the master of Angkor.<sup>66</sup> In his novel *Four Faces of Śiva. The Detective Story of a Vanished Race* Robert J. Casey likens the obscuration by the forest to the opacity of Cambodian history:

The lost kingdom of the Khmers is still in the midst of the twilight that enveloped it when the builders departed long centuries ago. The haze is thinning a little. Strange gods, placid and smiling, are peering out of open spaces among the trees to welcome to inquisitive Pale Ones who have found their hiding-places. Little by little the story of the sons of Kambu is being pieced together from the pictures they carved and the inscriptions they left on the pillars of their temples.<sup>67</sup>

In this passage the appearance of the stone faces hints at the historical discoveries which lurk beneath the forest, awaiting explication by European arrivals. Clearing the tangle of vines and trees becomes a metaphor for knowledge production, as if clearing a passage through the debris allows for a comprehension of Khmer history. This idea is encapsulated in a depiction which is signed by ‘Vierge’, likely an artist in Paris who was inspired by Delaporte’s original sketches and descriptions. In one etching of Preah Khan of Kompong Svay dozens of Khmer men work to clear an enormous tree, while dozens more hack away the undergrowth, to reveal the foundations of a tower, whose disembodied faces float above the foliage (fig. 39). The jungle to the left surrounds the tower like a dark cloud, while to the right sunlight shimmers through the sparse branches, as if the move from left to right – dark to light – is a metaphor for the illumination of the foreboding temples, and the illumination of their mystery. The work of felling the tree is carried out under the supervision of a bearded colonial administrator, who casually leans against a column. His companion sits astride the roof of a damaged gallery, his white suit set against the blackness of the trees, open notebook in hand, gazing at the faces before him.

<sup>64</sup> Mouhot, *Henri Mouhot’s Diary*, 102-103.

<sup>65</sup> Garnier, *Travels in Cambodia and Part of Laos*, 30.

<sup>66</sup> Pierre Loti, *Un Pèlerin d’Angkor* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1923), 77-78.

<sup>67</sup> Robert J. Casey, *Four Faces of Śiva. The Detective Story of a Vanished Race* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1929), 86.

The first photographs of Angkor, taken by the Scottish photographer John Thomson, capture the face towers floating out from the surrounding vegetation, framed by vines (fig. 40). Thomson left England in 1862, while in his mid-twenties to set up a photographic studio in Penang. In 1865, apparently inspired by Mouhot's travel dairies, John Thomson travelled to Siam with the explicit aim of 'penetrating' the interior of Cambodia.<sup>68</sup> He was granted a royal audience with King Mongkut, of whom he took the first photographs, and when he eventually travelled to Cambodia in 1866, the King sent word asking that Thomson photograph the temples of Angkor. Thomson was unable to fulfil this request due to the large amount of apparatus the wet plate process of photography required but when he returned to Bangkok, King Mongkut once again requested that he return to photograph Angkor, and to make clear, when he published the photographs, that the temples were in Siamese territory.<sup>69</sup> Succeeding in this assignment, Thomson published the first photographs of Cambodia in *The Antiquities of Cambodia*. Apparently inspired by Thomson's photographs, Ernest Doudart de Lagrée invited photographer Émile Gsell to accompany their *Commission d'exploration du Mékong*. Thus in 1866, mere months after Thomson's expedition, Gsell captured a significant number of photographs of Angkor (fig. 41). Many of these photographs exactly replicate those taken by Thomson. Whether de Lagrée, who was familiar with Thomson's work, requested these specific shots or whether this was entirely coincidental is not known.<sup>70</sup>

The faces were understood by Garnier and Delaporte as belonging to 'Prohm' the Khmer appellation of Brahmā.<sup>71</sup> Yet, Garnier also documents the other name that locals gave to the temple, 'Prea sat ling poun', which means 'the pagoda/temple where one plays hide and seek'.<sup>72</sup> Such a designation is a particularly apt description of the faces which they encountered, peering out from behind the jungle, which are captured in

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<sup>68</sup> Stephen White, *John Thomson. Life and Photographs*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 11.

<sup>69</sup> White, *John Thomson*, 14-15.

<sup>70</sup> Joachim K. Bautze explores this issue more thoroughly in his chapter, 'Émile Gsell (1838-79) and Early Photographs of Angkor', in *Connecting Empires and States, Selected Papers from the thirteenth International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologist*, ed. by, Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz, Andreas Reinecke and Dominik Bonatz, (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012), 306-316.

<sup>71</sup> Garnier, *Travels in Cambodia and Part of Laos*, 39.

<sup>72</sup> Garnier, *Travels in Cambodia and Part of Laos*, 39.

Thomson and Gsell's photographs of the faces of the Bayon.<sup>73</sup> Although the coverage of the temples was not always as 'dense' as described in contemporary writings it is certainly easy to appreciate the romantic wonder and aesthetic awe provoked by these giant stony-still faces shrouded in lush vegetation teeming with life. In fact, Thomson acknowledged that his aesthetic and compositional decisions were influenced by his readings of Ruskin.<sup>74</sup> These photographs capture the interplay between the verdant forest alive with the sounds and smells of life and the inanimate, lifeless faces which appear to belong to another time, or rather, are captured timeless.

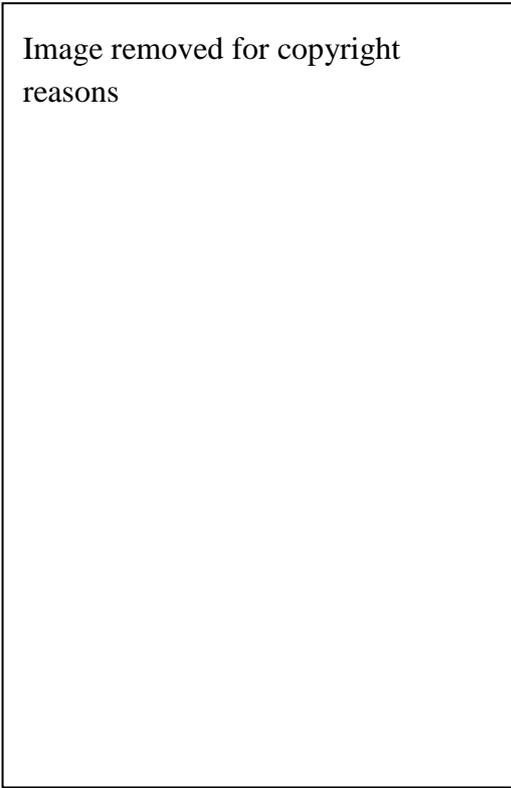


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Figure 39. Louis Delaporte, 'Ruines d'une tour ornée de la quadruple face de Brahmā (Petit temple de Pontéay-Préa Khan)'. In *Voyage Au Cambodge*. 101.

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<sup>73</sup> See from example the Gsell archive at the National Archives of Cambodia, photographs #0002, #0003, #0018 and #0082, all dated 1866, show views of the Bayon, and the Thomson archive at the Wellcome Collection London, especially #19224i.

<sup>74</sup> White, *John Thompson*, 40.

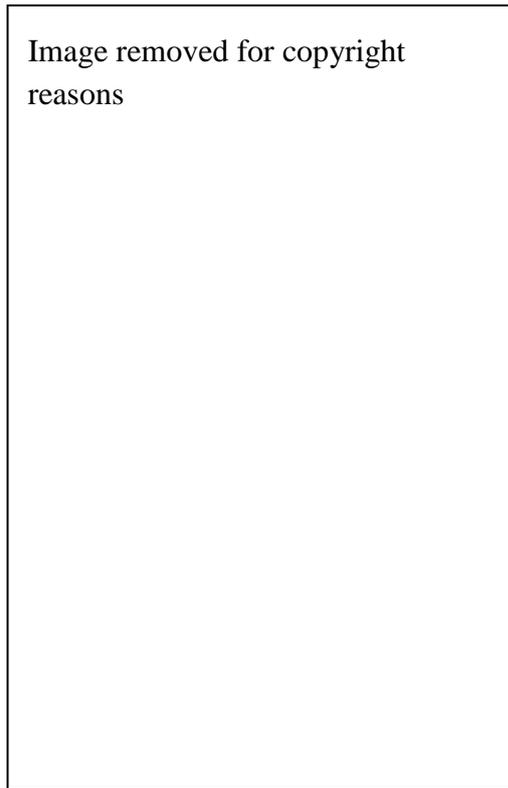


Figure 40. John Thomson, 'Prea Sat Ling Poun', 1886, 254 x 202 mm.

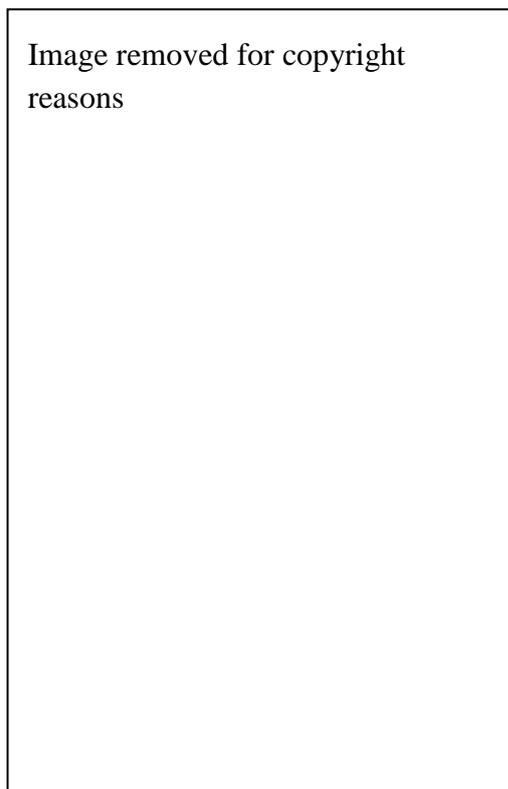


Figure 41. Émile Gsell, No. 138, 'The third level of the Bayon, 1866 or 1873', in Pierre Baptiste and Thierry Zéphir, eds., *Angkor. Naissance D'un Mythe*, no. 27.

## Re-Imaginings of Angkor

Louis Delaporte jointly authored a number of more architectural studies of the temples with Henri Devérin, many of which concentrated on the Bayon and the gates of Angkor Thom.<sup>75</sup> They provided the basis for mapping out the temple complex and imagining early reconstructions of the original design. Additionally, other artists in Paris produced ‘restored’ representations of the temples, with imagined spires added to the temples and altered topologies, based upon the sketches produced in-situ. Artists in Paris often included exotic details, which were absent from the original sketches, such as tigers and monkeys, to images of temple remnants surrounded by the jungle foliage. In a number of these images figures are situated in the ruined temples as well as these ‘historical reconstructions’, in royal processions with elephants or walking the causeway of Angkor Wat. A reconstruction of an Angkor Thom gateway shows a royal figure on a palanquin, flanked by troops holding banners and spears, emerging from the doorway. The architectural details are largely accurate, bar the addition of an extra five-face configuration at the apex of each tiered spire rising from the heads (fig. 43).

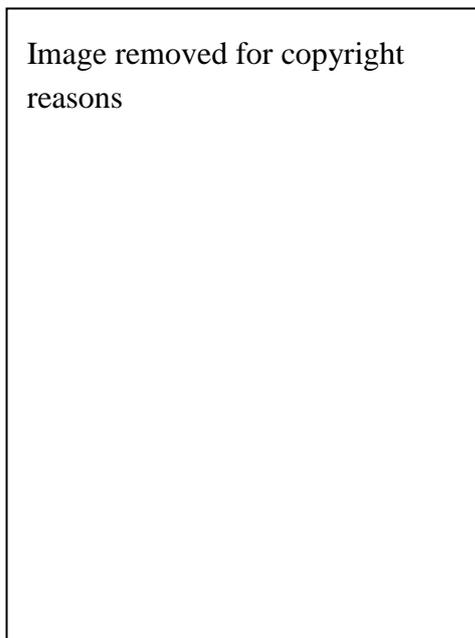


Figure 42. Louis Delaporte, 'Ruines de Baion', 1870-1873, mixed media, in Baptiste and Zéphir, eds., *Angkor. Naissance D'un Mythe*, no. 32.

<sup>75</sup> See Baptiste and Zéphir, *Angkor. Naissance D'un Mythe*, 241-248.

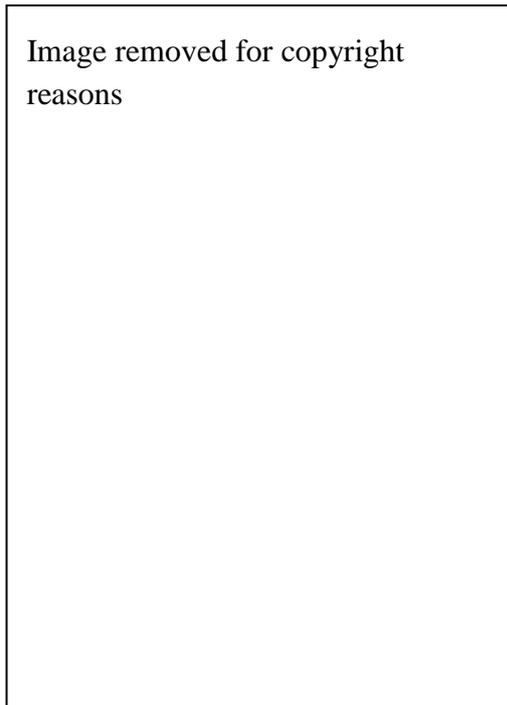


Figure 43. 'Porte d'Angkor-Thom'. Etching signed by 'Levy', in *Voyage Au Cambodge*, 157.

In conjunction with bringing visual and literary descriptions of Angkor back to France, Delaporte was also responsible for the first transportation of fragments of the temples from Cambodia to Europe. On an expedition in 1872 Delaporte received a permission and financial backing from the Ministry of Public Education, Religion, and Fine Arts to travel to Cambodia with the express intention of removing statuary from the temple sites and bringing them back to France for installation in France's museums.<sup>76</sup> These artefacts - along with Delaporte's own drawings - were exhibited at the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris at the newly built Palais du Trocadéro and the collections went on permanent public display in 1882 at the newly opened Musée Indochinois at the Palais du Trocadéro, where Delaporte held the position of chief curator until his retirement in 1924. In 1927 the Khmer art collection was moved to the Musée Guimet.

In his study of replicas of Angkor, Michael Falser argues that plaster casts were an integral instrument in colonial appropriations of Angkor. In his compelling historical critique of plaster casts in French curatorial practices, Falser employs the concept of

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<sup>76</sup> For a more detailed account of Delaporte's mission and their exhibition in museums and colonial fairs in France see Edwards, *Cambodge*, 30-35 and Michael Falser, 'Krishna and the Plaster Cast. Translating the Cambodian Temple of Angkor Wat in the French Colonial Period', *Transcultural Studies*, 2 (2011), 6-50.

translation to explain the asymmetrical power structures which are at play when exchanging or transferring artefacts between cultures in a colonial paradigm.<sup>77</sup> Panivong Norindr argues that the plaster-cast process laboured under the assumption that the original could simply be copied, transported and recontextualised and hold the essence of an entire civilization.<sup>78</sup> The process of replication, for didactic purposes or otherwise implies the cultural, historical and contextual palimpsest could be transposed from one surface to another, as if it could be absorbed by the plaster. The making of plaster casts by applying plaster mould to the surface of the original, places the original and its copy in direct contact. The implication in the manufacture of the replica is that this moulding of the surface passes on a trace of the original – in a permanent, static form – which allows the copy to act with authority and authenticity.<sup>79</sup>

The plaster cast phenomenon was exploited to the highest degree in the creation of full-scale temple replicas for display at colonial exhibitions. The first large-scale ‘replica’ of an Angkorian temple in Europe was a plaster cast model of an Angkor Thom gateway, based on a sketch by Delaporte, which was exhibited at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1878, and later at the Guimet in 1908. The project was overseen by Émile Soldi, a connoisseur who (re-)situated his plaster cast gateway in an imagined Angkor setting in an engraving he made for his publication *Les arts méconnus - les nouveaux musées du Trocadéro*, although Soldi had never travelled to Cambodia himself (fig. 44).<sup>80</sup> In the engraving the gateway appears not so much to be embedded in the surrounding forest as to be floating out of it. Literally untouched by the landscape, the gateway is utterly disconnected from anything that surrounds it, as if even in the imagination of Soldi, his vision of the architecture was at too great a remove from its (original) context that it could not be embedded in the landscape of its origin.

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<sup>77</sup> Falser, ‘Krishna and the Plaster Cast’, 6.

<sup>78</sup> Norindr Panivong, *Phantasmatic Indochina*, 253.

<sup>79</sup> Falser, ‘Krishna and the Plaster Cast’, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Falser, ‘Krishna and the Plaster Cast’, 20.

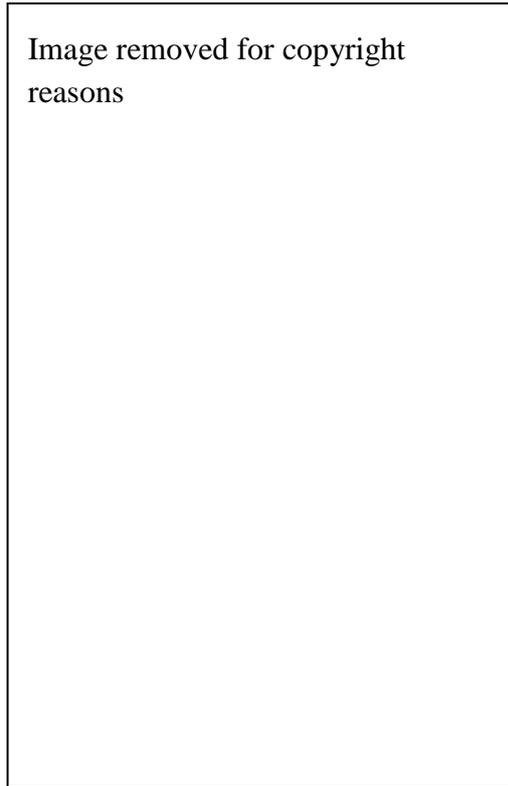


Figure 44. An engraving by Émile Soldi of the scale model of an Angkor Thom gateway manufactured for the 1878 Paris exhibition, re-situated into a 'Cambodian' landscape. Source: Falser, 'Krishna and the Plaster Cast', 21.

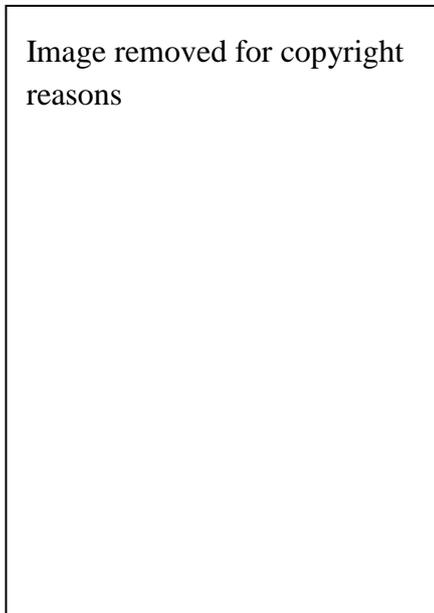


Figure 45. Details of 'Le Temple du Baion', signed by Del. I. Lasiverick, in Delaporte, *Voyage Au Cambodge. L'Architecture Khmer*, 326-327

## The Uncanny Faces

The processes of clearing the jungle, making plaster casts, and removing statuary can be understood as the processes of acquiring knowledge of the temples in order to bolster French legitimacy in the region. Yet, at the heart of this knowledge production is a tension between transporting – and attempting to translate – the wonder of the temples to wider European audiences while at the same time smoothing away Angkor’s unknowable, mysterious contours. I suggest that there is a correlation between the re-presentations of the temples of Angkor Thom and early academic work which is characterised by attempts to de-mystify the Bayon. In the passages and etchings cited in this chapter the human quality of the Bayon emerges, like a ghostly face from within the forest, yet the humanity they present is unfamiliar and uncanny. Delaporte describes the face towers as ‘human masks, distorted, seeming to wince; yet some have retained their primitive, smiling and placid expression’.<sup>81</sup> Pierre Loti’s account of his encounter with the Bayon captures the phenomenological reaction to these faces:

I looked up at the tree-covered towers which dwarfed me, when all of a sudden my blood curdled as I saw an enormous smile looking down on me, and then another smile over on another wall, then three, then five, then ten, appearing from every direction. I was being observed from all sides...the “towers with four faces”! I had forgotten them... they are of such superhuman proportions, these masks sculpted into the air, it takes a moment to understand them; they smile under their large flat noses and keep their eyelids half closed, with an indescribable outdated femininity; they look like old ladies mocking discreetly. Images of gods which were worshipped [...] these men whose history we do not know; images that, for centuries, neither the slow work of the forest, nor the heavy, dissolving rains could remove their expression, the ironic warmth, even more disturbing than the rictus monsters of China.<sup>82</sup>

This description presents a conflicted response to the faces, which are at once warm and passive, and monstrous and threatening. This attitude towards the faces is visually presented in an elevation of the eastern façade of the Bayon which was carried out by an artist in France based upon Delaporte’s drawing and descriptions (fig. 45). The rendering of the temple architecture is fairly accurate but the faces bear no resemblance to the actual faces at Angkor Thom. Instead, they have bulging, rounded eyes, Roman

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<sup>81</sup> Delaporte, *Voyage Au Cambodge*, 156.

<sup>82</sup> Loti, *Un Pèlerin d’Angkor*, 79-83

noses, bushy eyebrows, and display variety of expressions. In fact, they more closely resemble caricatures or European Medieval figures.

The appearance of these faces from within the vegetation presented European visitors at Angkor Thom with something at once familiar (the face) and unknown (the unknown face) and the literature records the responses these face towers inspired. The arousal of dread and horror by something which was once known to us or once familiar is a standard definition of the uncanny. This definition was improved upon by Freud who situated the uncanny in psychoanalytic terms, relating it to repression and the castration complex.<sup>83</sup> Freud focused on the complexity of the German term “unheimlich” –literally “unhomely” – which is routinely translated as “uncanny”, standing in opposition to “heimlich”, meaning familiar, native, or belonging to the home. Freud notes that the frightening aspect of the uncanny would come from a place of unfamiliarity, yet this is not a sufficient definition as not everything new and unfamiliar is scary.<sup>84</sup> Through study of etymology in a host of European languages, Freud points to overlap between the definition of “heimlich” and its oppositional; “heimlich” also means “concealed, kept from sight, withheld from other”, a meaning it shares with “unheimlich”.<sup>85</sup> Freud notes that the double meaning of “heimlich”, that which is familiar as well as that which is concealed, means that what is “heimlich” becomes “unheimlich”. It is from the slippage between these two terms that the notion of the uncanny emerges: that which should have been concealed but nevertheless comes to light, or that which is familiar yet unhomely, like the repressed memory. Freud also notes that the uncanny is produced by the obliteration of the distinction between reality and the imagination, when that which was thought to only exist in fantasy is apprehended in reality.<sup>86</sup>

The responses that encounters at Angkor Thom provoked suggest that the stony, unfamiliar faces that peered from the vibrant jungle evoked in European visitors, unsettling, uncanny sensations. As faces, the Bayon is familiar, particularly to those who read their faces as smiling, welcoming. Yet at the same time these faces were entirely unfamiliar and foreign for the European visitor. There is a sense in the literature

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<sup>83</sup> Freud, Sigmund, ‘The Uncanny’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 219–252.

<sup>84</sup> Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, 220-221.

<sup>85</sup> Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, 220-226.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-245.

of a paradoxical desire to make the faces familiar and to also preserve their ruined mystery. The literal act of clearing the forest, as shown in Figure 39 exposed the very foundations of the faces, which had previously appeared to float like ghosts above the undergrowth and fallen masonry. I propose that this project of jungle clearance was not only one of archaeological discovery, but also a project to attempt to remove the unsettling, uncanny experience of these faces. At the same time, it appears that there was a desire to preserve and contain the unsettling, fantastical feeling provoked by the temples. Despite the clearance of the vegetation and the reconstruction of much of the Bayon, the faces and their smiles are still routinely described as ‘mysterious’. Here the etymology of mysterious intersects with the concealed aspects of the uncanny. “Mystery” has its etymological roots in things which are secret, with particular reference to secret religious rites and in relation to those who have been initiated into those rites. The Greek *mysterion* comes from *mystes* “one who has been initiated’ and from *myein*, “to close the eyes”<sup>87</sup>, implying that only those who had been initiated were able to know the secret rites and that they should keep those rites a secret. Many of the literary examples of the uncanny which Freud uses relate to the eyes and he describes the uncanny is the being ‘robbed of one’s eyes’.<sup>88</sup> While the jungle might have obscured seeing the Bayon, its removal did not allow a clear “vision”, which might have enabled a bounded comprehension of the temple. Are these “mysterious” faces deliberately concealing something? Do they contain a secret, and that uncovering this secret will provide the “truth” which unravels the history of the region?

To be clear, I am not advocating a project which attempts to dismantle the sense of the uncanny or the mystery which these faces provoke; my approach calls for a recognition of this response as an integral constituent of the Bayon. The visceral, emotive response that these face towers provoke is instead explored in order to consider how such a reaction slips into academic discourse on the temple, in particular in the projects arguing for a precise, singular identity of the face towers (naming removes the mystery) and the implications attached to the designation of a ‘true-portrait’ of the king (an identifiable face of the builder of the Bayon makes the faces more familiar). The intrigue the face towers inspire is matched by the on-going scholarly debates which attempt to unravel the mystery and ascribe a definitive name to the visages. Ascertaining a singular identity of the faces is an attempt to contain the limits of the

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<sup>87</sup> *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary*.

<sup>88</sup> Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, 230.

face - naming is knowing and vice versa – despite the inherent paradoxes in the concept of the Bayon face as being both highly specific as well as generic, as described in the previous chapter. The ambiguity of the iconography of the face towers has already been well established.

The ‘true-portraits’ of Jayavarman VII were described as such because, in depicting a possible physical likeness, they correlated with modern definitions of a portrait. Yet, it is my contention that these statues are also of interest because they offer a ‘truth’ which counters the haunting mystery of the face towers. Boisselier wrote that the statues of Jayavarman VII were a new trend in Khmer art, which marked the achievement of ‘le portrait véritable’ and ‘un authentic portrait’ which was likely based upon direct observation and which captured personality and emotion in Khmer art for the first time.<sup>89</sup> It is true that the Bayon-period art has a personality that runs counter to the paradigmatic Buddha statue, often characterised by a lack of personality indicative of a non-personhood or a complete mastery of personhood. The scholarship suggests that Stern, Coëdès, Boisselier, et al were recognising the suggestion of mimetic quality that matched their own contemporary assumptions of portraiture, assumptions which I argued against in Chapter Four. Yet, I contend that there is a double meaning at work here. The first is that the naturalism of the image makes it an ‘authentic’ portrait. The second is that within the image, or revealed by the image, there is a ‘truth’. So in the statues of Jayavarman VII we find the ‘truth’ of the king’s appearance but also perhaps something of the ‘truth’ of his self, his character, his politics, and/or his personality. This promise of a ‘truth’, of knowing the person of the king, connects with the project of identifying a singular identity of the face towers, thereby removing the mystery and ‘taking back’ one’s eyes.

## Conclusion

Chapter One examined the ways in which the history of Cambodian art had been produced through colonial discourses, yet literary and visual representations of the temples were an additional means by which colonial knowledge was produced, codified, transported and shared in Europe. The face towers are often contrasted with the jungle, the faces peering from beyond the vegetation. The stone faces contrasted with the life of the tropical jungle and, as they emerged from within the canopy, evoked a haunting,

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<sup>89</sup> Boisselier, ‘Réflexions Sur L’art Du Règne de Jayavarman VII’, 185-186; 265.

phantasmal quality. As human faces these monuments were familiar, yet at the same time they were unknown and, in a sense, unknowable. This intersects with Freud's definition of the uncanny as something unhomely, but also something unsettling because it should have been concealed but it emerged nevertheless. The archaeological project demanded that the jungle be cleared and the temple restored, but the project of clearing the jungle, of revealing the whole 'body' of the temple, failed to explain away the mystery of the faces, which refuse to give up their 'truth'. The visual tropes of the vine covered, half-concealed mysterious faces have continued in the visual and textual vocabulary of twentieth century Cambodia. The final chapter examines the citations of the faces in the contemporary visual landscape and considers how and why these motifs persist in visual representations of the Bayon, particularly, but not exclusively, in the paintings which are primarily sold for the tourist market. Yet, the royal face also appeared in another context in contemporary Cambodia: in the photographic portraits of King Norodom Sihanouk, who is regarded still by some Cambodians as a quasi-divine. It is this phenomenon that the following chapter addresses.

## Chapter Seven: Royal Portraiture in the Contemporary Politico-Cultural Complex

In the immediate aftermath of his death on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2012, images of Norodom Sihanouk, the former king of Cambodia, flooded the visual landscape of Cambodia. Besides the official photo-portraits that were erected across the country, large numbers of images circulated unofficially, often assembled in laminated montages and photo-posters. These were purchased in markets, pagodas and streets, and shared in the aterritorial spaces of the internet, particularly Facebook (fig. 51). While the display of portraits of Sihanouk is not only a posthumous phenomenon, access to new photographic technologies radically altered the manufacture, sharing and consuming of images, allowing for the circumvention of official channels of image production. Although this chapter is something of a departure from the rest of the thesis, it nonetheless constitutes an important foray into the contemporary place of the face of the king and the historical inheritances of Angkor. The images were placed side by side in laminated montages, which, in the context of other images, pin badges, t-shirts, and billboards, created a montaged visual landscape on a macro scale. I argue that the images of the king in this context stress the unique political and historic importance of *seeing* the face, which is nonetheless related to the phenomenon of the face detailed elsewhere in this thesis.

Sihanouk's death prompted predictable scenes of mourning in Phnom Penh and elsewhere in Cambodia, which were nevertheless unimaginably large and spontaneous. On the morning that his death was announced I was travelling with a Khmer friend between two village wat on the outskirts of Siem Reap, moving between celebrations on the final day of Pchum Ben (the Festival of the Dead, one of Cambodia's most important ceremonial events and holidays). I asked my friend, a woman of roughly my age who worked in a low-level job in the tourist industry and lived in a rural village with her religious parents, if she felt sad. 'No, he was old and sick' she responded. Yet already in Phnom Penh mourners were beginning to congregate outside the Royal Palace. The National Television of Cambodia network began to loop a thirty minute documentary of archival footage, which showed staged scenes of Sihanouk in the 1950s and 60s in the countryside helping to build homes or presiding over newly opened

factories in Phnom Penh.<sup>1</sup> My friend, now free from the distractions and obligations of Pchum Ben, asked to come to my house, which was nearer to her place of work, to watch his body arrive back at Pochentong airport. Millions thronged the streets of Phnom Penh to watch the procession of his coffin to the Royal Palace. On the 20<sup>th</sup> October an estimated 2,000 monks from across Phnom Penh assembled outside the Royal Palace to pray for Sihanouk, as part of the seven-day ceremony, a tradition observed one week after a person's death.<sup>2</sup> The ceremony was attended by hundreds of Cambodians who clutched portraits of the king, lit candles and offered prayers.

### **The Visual Economy and Presence in Unofficial Photo-Montages**

In diverse ways, the death of King Sihanouk was primarily experienced by many Cambodians through the visual: from the crowds gathering along the boulevards of Phnom Penh to watch the coffin go by, many recording the spectacle on mobile phones or iPads, to the huge numbers of people watching the live transmission. Taking sight of his body was hugely significant and his portrait was inescapable. Moreover, mobile technology and social media meant that ordinary Cambodians could record and share the spectacle on an unprecedented scale. At the time of Sihanouk's death there were approximately 2.5 million internet users in Cambodia, which equates to 16% penetration. Of the 19.6 million mobile phone users (131% penetration), 3.2 million mobile users were 3G subscribers and mobile technology accounts for 23% of all internet activity in Cambodia. As of October 2012 there were 690,520 social media users and the number of Facebook users had increased by 41% over six months, with more than one thousand people joining Facebook every day.<sup>3</sup> These technologies

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<sup>1</sup> Friends told me that they suspected that whilst King Sihanouk and Prime Minister Hun Sen were en route to Beijing to collect the body, a power vacuum had formed allowing royalists to play the newsreels. There is no evidence for the veracity of this speculation, and although Cambodian media is tightly regulated by the ruling Cambodia People's Party it is not explicitly censored, and it is unlikely that the government were wholly resistant to the broadcast of the footage. Indeed, it appears that having gauged the mood of the nation, CPP officials manoeuvred to ensure their highly visible involvement in the funeral. Nevertheless, it is telling that the default position for many Cambodians is to assume that the government might wish to censor the footage of pre-war Cambodia and that somehow this footage of the king had been surreptitiously broadcast to them.

<sup>2</sup> Eang Mengleng, 'Monks Stage Mass Prayer at Palace for Late King Father', *The Cambodia Daily*, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2012, <<http://www.cambodiadaily.com/sihanouk/monks-stage-mass-prayer-at-palace-for-late-king-father-4647/>> [accessed 23 May 2013].

<sup>3</sup> Social, Digital and Mobile in Cambodia, research carried out by We Are Social, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, October 2012. <<http://de.slideshare.net/wearesocialsg/we-are-socials-guide-to-social-digital-and-mobile-in-cambodia-2nd-edition>> [accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013]

allowed people to bypass official channels of image production and something of a black market visual economy emerged.<sup>4</sup>

In thinking through the circulation of these portraits of Sihanouk I employ anthropologist Deborah Poole's concept of "visual economy", which encompasses the systems of organisation, both individual and technological, governing image production, transmission, and the codes by which images are interpreted, accrue meanings, and how and why they circulate.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, thinking through the visual economy allows consideration to be given to the social and power relations governing production and consumption from within a global network, between cultures and locations, and within particular communities.<sup>6</sup> The critical emphasis of this chapter is on the unofficial images which were primarily based upon official portraits of Sihanouk, which were then modified, printed, and displayed in diverse ways in the immediate aftermath of his death. While this visual economy was inflected by transcultural influences from the global arena, including the technological mediums employed, I have chosen to pay particular attention to the localised components. In the Cambodian context at hand, the consumption and manufacture of images are indissociable; in the first instance the modifications to the photographs were carried out by consumers who selected images from a pool of already circulating photographs. Secondly, for those who brought modified laminated photographs manufactured the photograph again in a renewed context via their haptic interventions in the image, via installing it in the home for example. I argue that the visual economy of these images was not only concerned with the commemorative, a term which here encompasses memorialisation, souvenir, and remembrance. Instead, the manner in which these portrait photographs were collected, collated, modified, distributed, consumed, and displayed became illustrative, didactic expressions of ideal leadership, intimately intertwined with the need to make the king visible. I suggest that this was motivated by a political urgency, linked to the sense of loss of a figurehead who many felt offered support to rural and dispossessed

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the internet is not completely democratic space; as in the 'real' world there is uneven geographical development with regard to cyberspace and internet usage is limited by the prohibitive cost of smartphones.

J. Stallabrass, *Internet Art: The Online Clash of Commerce*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), 40; 48-50.

<sup>5</sup> Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity. A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 9-11.

<sup>6</sup> Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity*, 8.

communities, up against a government which stands accused of a number of human rights abuses.<sup>7</sup>

It is crucial to note that there are many in Cambodia and in the Khmer diaspora who are not pro-Sihanouk and who did not participate in the phenomenon laid-out in this chapter. Many anti-Sihanouk voices were conspicuously silent during this period. In my view the very vocal, visible mourning was not necessarily evidence of specifically pro-Sihanouk sentiments per se or even grounded in historical realities. Instead, it was directed towards an emblematic ‘ideal king’ in a broad sense, outside of particular institutional or political associations. This is inherent in many of the images themselves which, when collated together, portray a ‘royal ideal’; a person of merit, a pious Buddhist and military leader, one who ensures the prosperity and stability of the country, and in this way embodies a protector. The process of digitally altering images was a means of enhancing the beauty and the aura of the king, as befitting a legitimate Buddhist king, but the (re)production and consumption of images was simultaneously an expression of patriotism concerned with nostalgia for the past as well as present day concerns.

One concern to note here is the increasingly vocal expressions of dissatisfaction with the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP). After the 2013 national elections, the main opposition party, Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), boycotted the National Assembly, citing electoral irregularities which allowed the Cambodian People’s Party to claim victory. The oppositional fervour, which had seen high levels of participation in pre-election CNRP rallies, sparked large demonstrations in Phnom Penh, which occupied public spaces, and became marred by violence.<sup>8</sup> In mid-2013 it was related to me by acquaintances in Cambodia, as well as mentioned in online discussions by Facebook users, that Sihanouk had arbitrated in the violent aftermath of the 1997 elections, whereas the current perception was that King Sihamoni had not sufficiently intervened in working towards a resolution to the current turmoil. Many lamented the loss of the mediating presence of Sihanouk. In addition, Ashley Thompson

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<sup>7</sup> See reports compiled by Human Rights Watch <<http://www.hrw.org/asia/cambodia>> [accessed 8<sup>th</sup> September 2014].

<sup>8</sup> Parameswaran Ponnudurai, ‘Disenchanted Young Cambodians Flex Their Muscle in Elections’, *Radio Free Asia*, 29<sup>th</sup> July 2013, <<http://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/east-asia-beat/young-07292013230725.html>>, [accessed 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014]; Thomas Fuller, ‘Protest Turns Into Clash With Police in Cambodia’, *New York Times* (New York, 15 September 2013) <[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/16/world/asia/cambodia-police-use-water-cannons-on-protesters.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/16/world/asia/cambodia-police-use-water-cannons-on-protesters.html?_r=0)> [accessed 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014]

has proposed a connection between the large gatherings of mourners after the death of Sihanouk and the large numbers of people attending opposition demonstrations.<sup>9</sup> She states that his death marked Sihanouk's final, great return to Cambodia, as he was affectionately embraced once again by the people in public outpourings of emotion which were just as concerned with the generic institution of kingship as with the person of Sihanouk. I suggest that this embrace of Sihanouk, of kingship, and the nostalgia-tinged photographs that accompanied his funeral formed a part of the catalyst for, and a sense of urgency in, these present-day calls for change. The images, especially when assembled into multiple image montages, formed a nostalgic medium, where ideals about society and leadership, or rather kingship, were viewed through a lens of 1950s and 1960s aesthetics and artifice achieved via new photographic technologies.

The intertwined processes of a haptic production and consumption of the portraits marked an attempt at a recuperation of the protective paternal-royal-divine figure of the king. Digital manipulation of photographs, assembled into montages, resulted in recontextualisations of the figure of Sihanouk, mediated via nostalgia, memory, and socio-political imperatives. I borrow Roland Barthes' theory of the spatio-temporal dimensions of the photograph to argue that photoshop dislocates the image from its moment of origin, allowing the images to take on a more urgent political dimension. I further suggest that the images of Sihanouk, particularly those in the unofficial visual economy, frustrate temporal delineations, by commemorating the now-lost past, while at the same time bringing the past into the here-and-now. The popularity of the phenomenon of digital alteration complicates Barthes' description of photography as the 'stupefying evidence' of 'this is how it was.'<sup>10</sup> Although Barthes was more interested in the reception of the photograph rather than the making, his analysis is useful here for it draws attention to spatio-temporal dimensions in which work at the level of manufacture and consumption of the image. According to Barthes, photography gave rise to a new spatio-temporal category of the 'having-been-there'; 'what we have is a new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the here-now and the there-then.'<sup>11</sup> For him, this paradox frustrates the photograph's ability to function as a

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<sup>9</sup> Ashley Thompson, *Introduction Journée d'Etude 'Histoire et Théâtre'*, unpublished speech given on 25th October 2013 at the Cartoucherie, Paris.

<sup>10</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg, (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island, 1980), 278.

<sup>11</sup> Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', 278.

presence or illusion but it offered explanation for the nostalgic turn in the reception of the photograph.

Furthermore, I suggest that presence in the Khmer context presence operates in two ways: the first, drawing upon recent work in media archaeology, argues that presence is the ‘literal transhistorical transference or relay of metonymic and material fragments or traces of the past through time to the “here and now”’, where these fragments are then re-realised in the corporeal and operative spheres.<sup>12</sup> This definition of presence intersects with a Buddhist view-point, as described in Chapter Four, whereby the image not only acts as a proxy, but the distinction between physical person and the representation is radically conflated, allowing the image to act as a presence while at the same time, by being a re-presentation, reaffirming the absence of one who is lost. In the Theravāda context the effect of presence in the photograph or statue is doubled: the image functions as a representation but it also *is* the thing that it shows.

### **Re-Thinking the Royal Aura After the Arrival of Photography**

The mainstream and the “black market” visual economies each relate to historical practices governing image veneration and beliefs in the Theravāda context, such as the display of images on altars or in shrines and the tactile treatment and animation of images through eye-opening ceremonies. Maintaining and controlling when, where and by whom they were seen was a means for Southeast Asia monarchs to orchestrate a sense of aura, and by extension authority, and the arrival of photography meant that kings had to navigate the loss of a singular presence in space and time and find new ways of retaining their ritual, auratic status. That Scottish photographer John Thomson was, in 1865, allowed to take a portrait of King Rama IV or King Mongkut of Siam (r.1855-1868) was remarkable as the king did not usually allow commoners to look directly at him.<sup>13</sup> The introduction of photography in Thailand spelled the end of

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<sup>12</sup> Vivian Sobchack, ‘Afterword: Media Archaeology and Re-Presencing the Past’, in *Media Archaeology. Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, ed. by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 324. See also, Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive*, ed. by Jussi Parikka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed study of the portrait of King Rama IV and the power of photography in Siam see Rosalind C. Morris, ‘Photography and the Power of Images in the History of Power. Notes from Thailand’ *Photographies East. The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. by Rosalind C. Morris, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 121-160. See also Irene Stengs, *Worshipping the Great Moderniser: King Chulalongkorn, Patron Saint of the Thai*

the king's concealment from the eyes of his public. However, whilst the eyes of commoners saw the king, he did not see them and in this nonreciprocal gaze power could be maintained. Photographs were able to travel from the palace in order to represent the king where he was not physically present and within in them were visually coded signifiers to indicate his royalty, his western sensibilities, and his Siamese-ness. As the photographic image of the king travelled from the palace to represent the monarch in different and multiple locations, so the means of creating auratic effect had to alter. Anthropologist Rosalind C. Morris argues that the adornment of the photograph with gold leaf is an example of enhancing the auratic efficacy of the image. The aura is created and maintained by the space created between the 'reverential figure and the revered one' and, in the case of the photograph, it is the frame, literal and metaphorical, which creates this space. She states the object's ability to 'bear presence is dependent on [its] separation from the moment of [its] production'.<sup>14</sup> The distribution of photographs of the king in the Siamese context altered the dynamics of visual exchange and necessitated new responses to the image, which included new ritual and devotional practices, involving haptic interventions in the image.

King Norodom of Cambodia was first photographed in 1866, first by John Thomson and months later by Émile Gsell (fig. 46). Although no scholarly work has seriously examined the introduction of photography in Cambodia, it appears that the response to the new medium mirrored that in neighbouring Siam.<sup>15</sup> Morris argues that the photographic portrait did something to alter presence in Siam, that to say that,

this image *is* [this person] without surrendering the recognition that the image and the man are distinct, [...] is the magic of the photographic copula, which sustains two entities in their duality but binds them in an indissoluble equation of identity.<sup>16</sup>

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Middle Class (Singapore; Seattle: NUS Press ; University of Washington Press, 2009); Irene Stengs, 'Sacred Singularities: Crafting Royal Images in Present-Day Thailand', *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 5 (2012), 51–67.

<sup>14</sup> Morris, 'Photography and the Power of Images in the History of Power', 133.

<sup>15</sup> The image in the Bophana Audio Visual Center archive is dated as 1866, which is in accord with Gsell's travels in Cambodia, however the postcard image in the archives of the National Gallery of Australia is dated to 1870. Presumably this is the date that the postcard was printed. John Thomson also photographed Norodom in the same period.

Bophana Audio Visual Archives, Emil Gsell, 'S.M. Norodom, roi du Cambodge'. Ministère des Affaires étrangères français, Ph. A001465; Bophana Audio Visual Archives, Emil Gsell, 'S.M. Norodom, roi du Cambodge'. Ministère des Affaires étrangères français, Ph. A001535.

<sup>16</sup> Morris, 'Photography and the Power of Images in the History of Power', 135.

However, I contend that this relationship between the image and its referent is at the crux of the question of presence in the Theravāda context and that photography, in this respect, did not offer anything new. The arrival of the photographic portrait added a novel dimension to the visual presence of the king, in addition to the abstracted facial portrait of the king, embodied in the highly visible four faces, which signified kingship while the king's own face was concealed.

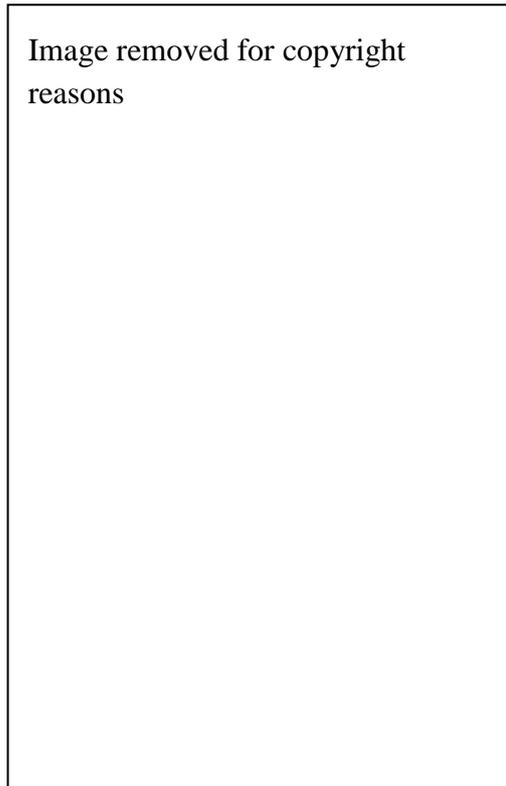


Figure 46. Émile Gsell, 'Le roi du Cambodge Norodom en costume sur son trône à Phnom-penh', 1870, albumen silver carte-de-visite photograph image, 8.8 x 5.1 cm. Image courtesy of National Gallery of Australia Archive, Accession No: NGA 2010.356.



Figure 47. Shop front in Battambang, 25th October 2013. Photograph by author.

## Shared Fortunes: The History of Sihanouk and Twentieth Century Cambodia

The biography of Sihanouk cannot be divorced from the historical trajectory of Cambodia over the last century. In the first instance this is due to his commitment to guiding the development of the nascent Cambodian nation-state and his machinations in the tumultuous political landscape of the country, as it was forced to confront its position in the wider geo-political currents of the Cold War. But more deeply than that, Sihanouk's fate and the fate of Cambodia were inextricably linked because of the longstanding belief in the body of the king as the establishment of order in Cambodia and the belief that a good and righteous ruler would ensure the prosperity of the nation.<sup>17</sup> This understanding has its roots in Angkorian concepts of kingship and order,

<sup>17</sup> In her research on the contemporary influence of the tale of Sdech Kân on Prime Minister Hun Sen, Astrid Norén-Nilsson points to Sdech Kân's place as the 'quintessential *neak mean bon* in Khmer historiography. Sdech Kân is a legendary figure who seized the throne, usurping an apparently unjust king, an act for which his population declared him a *neak mean bon*, which literally means "person with merit", merit here referring to karmic merit. Khing Hoc Dy asserts that the omnipresence in Khmer literature and culture of both Sdech Kân and the *neak mean bon* – he gives several examples from the Royal Chronicles – is illustrative of the central place they both hold in the collective memory of the population.

remodelled in the post-Angkorian Theravāda landscape so that the king's own body comes to replace the cosmological structuring force of Mount Meru.<sup>18</sup>

Norodom Sihanouk was born in 1922, during the French Protectorate rule over Cambodia and he received a French education at the Lycée Chasseloup Laubat in Saigon, Vietnam. In early childhood his care was entrusted to his grandmother, Madame Chau Khun Pat, who Sihanouk remembered as a pious Buddhist who made generous daily offerings to the monks.<sup>19</sup> It was after her death that he was first ordained as a monk for 24 hours. Time spent as a monk is important for all Theravāda Buddhist leaders and it is usual for Cambodian kings – and politicians – to have been ordained for at least a nominal period in order to bolster their *parami* (ten perfections).<sup>20</sup> In 1941 Sihanouk was selected for the Cambodian throne by the French Vichy government, chosen as the French believed him to be the most acquiescent of the candidates and because he was connected to both royal households; the Norodom's on his father's side and the Sisowath's from his maternal side. However, within years of his accession to the throne he began to negotiate for Cambodian independence, in line with domestic independence movements and set against a changing global politic landscape after the Second World War. On the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1953 Cambodian independence was declared, crucially without recourse to the sort of violence and guerrilla warfare witnessed in neighbouring Vietnam's battle for Independence. In 1955 Sihanouk abdicated in favour of his father, Suramarit, enabling Sihanouk to establish the Sangkum Reastr Niyum party, which advocated a policy of Buddhist Socialism. Sihanouk's party swept the

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Astrid Norén-Nilsson, 'Performance as (re)incarnation: The Sdech Kân Narrative', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 44 (2012), 6; Adhémard Eclere, *Histoire du Cambodge depuis le 1er siècle de notre ère*, (Paris: Paul Guethner, 1914), 235-247; Khing Hoc Dy, 'Neak Mean Boun, "Être de Mérites"', *Dans La Culture et La Littérature Du Cambodge*;', *Péninsule*, 56 (2008), 6.

<sup>18</sup> For example, at the coronation of King Sisowath in Phnom Penh in 1904 the king himself was identified with Mount Meru, with parts of his body corresponding to the universe, explicitly making the king himself the axis of the entire universe.

Robert Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Norodom Sihanouk, *Shadow Over Angkor. Volume One: Memoirs of His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia*, ed. by Julio A. Jeldres (Phnom Penh: Monument Books, 2005), 41-42.

<sup>20</sup> The current King Sihamoni was ordained in Paris twice; Sam Rainsy was ordained for a week in Cambodia. Hun Sen was never a monk but often alludes to his time as a temple boy. It is thought that time spent as a monk endows the ruler with *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (the five precepts of abstaining for killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and intoxicants), and *bhāvanā* (the development of physical, moral and emotional wisdom).

See Heng Monychenda, 'In Search of the Dhammika Ruler', in *People of Virtue: Reconfiguring Religion, Power and Moral Order in Cambodia Today*, ed. by Alexandra Kent and David Chandler (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 312.

national elections, and he took the role of Prime Minister later that same year. In 1960 King Suramarit died and Sihanouk became permanent Head of State.

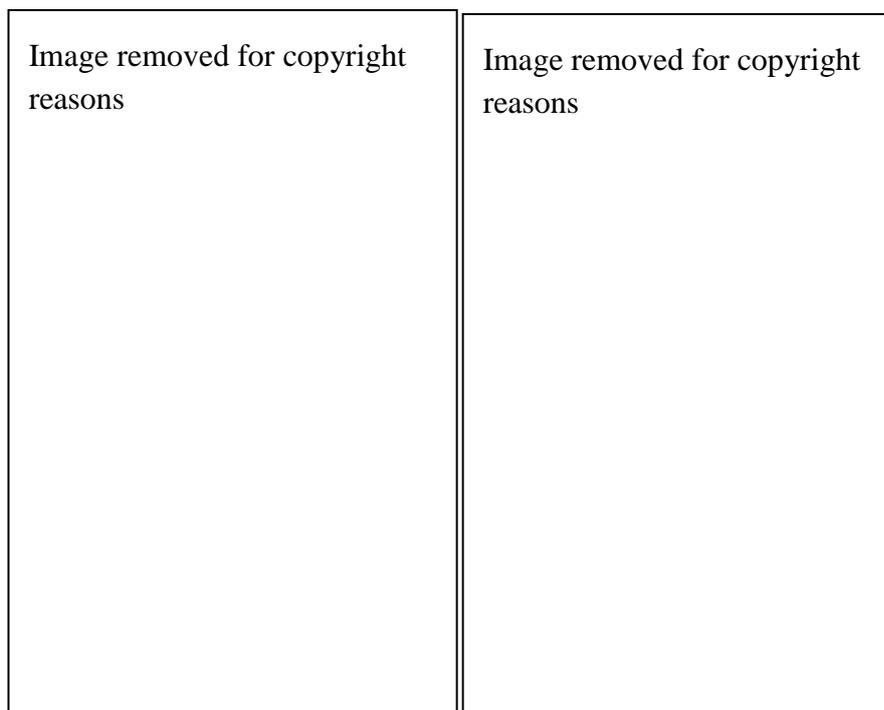


Figure 48. Retouched photograph from Norodom Sihanouk's coronation in 1943, unknown photographer. Image courtesy of National Archives of Cambodia, NAC-RUFA #0942.

Figure 49. Sihanouk's monk portrait, unknown photographer. Image courtesy of National Archives of Cambodia, NAC-RUFA #0939.

By the late 1960s Sihanouk was failing in his attempts to keep Cambodia neutral in the face of the war between the Americans and the Vietnamese.<sup>21</sup> This attempted path of neutrality, balancing the influences of the Cold War – the communism of neighbouring Vietnam and China and growing American hegemony – adhered to the Buddhist doctrine of the middle way.<sup>22</sup> Yet, as the war in Vietnam spilt over the borders America began illegally bombing Cambodia in a bid to prevent the Viet Minh from using areas of the Ho Chi Minh Trail that passed through Cambodia.<sup>23</sup> The bombing forced the Viet Minh further into Cambodia where they met with members of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, better known as the Khmer Rouge, an appellation

<sup>21</sup> For a more thorough historical account of this period of Cambodian history see, Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*; David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History* (Chiang Mai: Silkwood, 1999); William Shawcross, *Sideshow* (London: Hogarth Press, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Thompson, 'Buddhism in Cambodia, Rupture and Continuity', 136.

<sup>23</sup> Shawcross, *Sideshow*.

coined by Sihanouk. The devastation wrought by America's aerial campaign along Cambodia's Eastern border also meant the population was increasingly amenable to the Khmer Rouge's policy of opposing American imperialism.

While travelling in France in 1970 Sihanouk was ousted from power in a *coup d'état* led by Lon Nol and widely believed to have been supported by the Americans. Nevertheless, the riots which broke out across the country, along with the influence Sihanouk held over peasants in the early 1970s, suggests that rural support for him in places remained high as civil war spread across the country. Exiled in Beijing, Sihanouk formed a government in exile in conjunction with the Khmer Rouge, and began regular radio broadcasts into Cambodia where he informed listeners that support for the Khmer Rouge would enable his return to Cambodia. Later Sihanouk blamed Lon Nol for forcing him to abandon his position of neutrality and choose between the Americans or communists. Essentially, he argued, his hand was forced to ally with the Khmer Rouge.<sup>24</sup>

In April 1975 the Khmer Rouge took Phnom Penh, immediately ordering the evacuation of the city. Sihanouk returned to Cambodia as the symbolic head of state, a position he held for approximately one year, before he resigned. He spent the rest of the Khmer Rouge years under house arrest in the palace in Phnom Penh and five of his fourteen children perished under the regime. The increasingly paranoid Khmer Rouge immediately closed schools, abolished money, dismantled all civic infrastructure, destroyed books and musical instruments, murdered artists and intellectuals, and broke down family units. In a bid to erase history, eradicate culture, and create a pure agrarian society the population was put to work in the countryside, dying in their thousands from malnutrition, disease, exhaustion, torture or execution.<sup>25</sup> It is estimated that between one and three million – or up to one third of the population - perished under the Khmer Rouge.

Provoked by Khmer Rouge expansionist attacks on their border, Vietnamese forces entered Phnom Penh at the end of 1978, in a move that has been regarded as both a liberation and occupation. The People's Republic of Kampuchea was established in 1979. The presence of Vietnamese troops and foreign observers revealed the extent of

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<sup>24</sup> Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 125.

<sup>25</sup> Despite this attempt to return to a cultural and historical "Year Zero", the Khmer Rouge retained Angkor, both literally and symbolically.

the genocide as mass graves were uncovered across the country. The discovery of S-21 located in a former high school in Phnom Penh revealed chilling human and archival evidence of the atrocities the regime carried out. S-21 was a prison for ‘enemies’ of the regime and effectively served as a place of torture before certain execution. At least 16,000 men, women and children passed through the facility before execution. The unimaginable task of dealing with the traumatic aftermath of the genocide and its legacy has been a primary preoccupation in Cambodia since 1979, via a number of local and international initiatives of justice and commemoration which are often at odds with each other.<sup>26</sup>

In 1979 the Vietnamese installed a government in Phnom Penh comprised largely of Khmer Rouge defectors, but the Khmer Rouge still controlled vast swathes of the country and war raged on for most of the 1980s. Sihanouk once again found himself in exile and he spent the 1980s in political negotiations between warring Cambodian factions. In 1991 the Paris Peace Accords were signed, officially, if not in practice, signalling an end to the civil war. United Nations forces came to support the ceasefire, administer disarmament, and back the first democratic elections since 1970. This period between 1992 and 1993 is often simply called UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia).

After the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements in October 1991 Sihanouk returned to Cambodia as the Head of State, a position he held until the UN-backed elections in 1993, after which he was once again crowned King of Cambodia. Despite Sihanouk’s alliance of convenience with the Khmer Rouge, huge swathes of the population welcomed him back, his arrival prompting hope after the deleterious effects of the genocide and the instability of the 1980s. Prince Ranariddh’s Royalist FUNCINPEC Party was believed to have won the elections, but the incumbent Hun Sen’s refusal to give up power resulted in the agreement to share office between FUNCINPEC and the Cambodian People’s Party. This coalition of two Prime Ministers

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<sup>26</sup> See for example, Rachel Hughes, ‘Memory and Sovereignty in Post-1979 Cambodia: Choeung Ek and Local Genocide Memorials’, in *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda: New Perspectives*. (Transaction, 2005), 257–80; Rachel Hughes, ‘The Subject Artefacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide’, *Media, Culture and Society*, 25 (2003), 23–44; Ashley Thompson. "Forgetting to Remember, Again: On Curatorial Practice and “Cambodian Art” in the Wake of Genocide" *Diacritics*, 41.2 (2013), 82-109; Stéphanie Giry, ‘Necessary Scapegoats? The Making of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal’, *The New York Review of Books*, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2012. <<http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2012/jul/23/necessary-scapegoats-khmer-rouge-tribunal/>> [accessed 25 July 2012].

came to a violent end in 1997 after a bloody coup in which the CPP took full control of parliament. Hun Sen became the sole Prime Minister, a position he still holds today.

Sihanouk's continual vocal presence in Cambodian politics posed challenges to the post-1979 government of Hun Sen and tensions existed between the government and the royal palace.<sup>27</sup> In 2004 Sihanouk abdicated for a final time citing ill health and was succeeded by his son, King Sihamoni, who is less politically involved than his father, likely due to a combination of circumscription by the government and a disinterest in taking political stage. Nevertheless, abdication did not mark the end of Sihanouk's interference in politics and he explored new mediums to make his views public, including becoming a prolific blogger.<sup>28</sup> His website contains historical documents, correspondence, photographs, press clippings annotated by Sihanouk and his own commentaries on current affairs. Ruom Ritt, who Sihanouk claimed was childhood pen pal who now lived as a virtual hermit in France, wrote letters that were highly critical of Hun Sen.<sup>29</sup> The trajectory of Cambodia's recent past demonstrates Sihanouk's involvement in peacefully securing Cambodian independence from the French and presiding over a period of modernity in urban Cambodia before the country descended into unimaginable horror. His return to Cambodia in 1991 coincided with the promise of democracy and development. The realisation of these objectives is patchy at best, with Hun Sen – a Khmer Rouge cadre who defected to Vietnam in 1977 – still in power and human rights abuses widespread. Nevertheless, for many in Cambodia Sihanouk's vocal critiques of the government, and often simply his presence, were seen to temper the post-war regime. His death left a critical void in oppositional voices, and the perceived absence of a Buddhist leader.

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<sup>27</sup> Milton Osborne, 'Death of a survivor: Norodom Sihanouk', *The Interpreter*, fifteenth October 2012.

<<http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2012/10/15/Death-of-a-survivor-Norodom-Sihanouk.aspx>> [accessed seventeenth October 2012].

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.norodomsihanouk.info/>;

Associated Press, 'Royal Blogger Takes on the World', *Wired*, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2005, , <<http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2005/05/67676>>; Julia Wallace, The Royal Blog, in *Latitude*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2013, < <http://www.latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/29/the-royal-blog-of-norodom-sihanouk/>>

<sup>29</sup> Seth Mydans, 'The Royal Alter Ego Wields a Poison Pen in Cambodia', in *The New York Times*, June 29, 2003

## Kingship in the Image of Angkor

Although Sihanouk formally abdicated from the throne in 1960, and went on to assume a number of leadership roles, for many people, especially in the countryside, his status as a monarch associated with the divine remained unchanged. During the 1950s and 60s Sihanouk made regular visits to the countryside, accompanied by photographers and film crews. In his memoirs he speaks of his affection towards the peasant population, whom he says he felt politically and emotionally closer to than the elites in Phnom Penh. He often referred to his subjects as his ‘children’ and he later wrote, ‘it is true that I felt, and still feel with regard to the loyal Khmer population a paternal affection, similar to that which I feel for members of my family’.<sup>30</sup> In the mid-1950s, he dispensed with the lengthy high-status Royal terms originating in Pali and Sanskrit, in favour of the term “samdech euv”, which can be translated as “monsignor papa”<sup>31</sup>. This term infers an intimate, affectionate, familial connection with the king, while designating him as hierarchically superior to the population due to his status as the ‘father’.

Bernard Krisher, a Newsweek reporter who spent a month shadowing Sihanouk in 1965, recalls that he was struck by the Prince’s popularity and by how much Sihanouk loved to be adored by the masses.<sup>32</sup> However, Krisher’s sense that there was no institutionalized cult of personality, orchestrated by Sihanouk himself, is contestable.<sup>33</sup> These visits to the countryside provided ample occasion for photo opportunities which stressed Sihanouk’s affection and affiliation with rural, traditional Cambodians. Visits to new factories and schools – additional publicity opportunities – demonstrated his involvement with the development of the modern nation-state. Yet rather than simply claim recognition for development and stability in Cambodia, Sihanouk figured himself as the structuring force and the very embodiment of the nation itself, in accord with conceptions of kingship that have their foundations in the Brahmānic-Buddhist apparatus of Angkor. A sense of equivalence between the person of Sihanouk and the country is in accord with traditional Theravāda Buddhist

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<sup>30</sup> Norodom Sihanouk, *Shadow Over Angkor. Volume One: Memoirs of His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia*, ed. by Julio A. Jeldres, (Phnom Penh: Monument Books, 2005), 39.

<sup>31</sup> Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism. History and Practice*, 146.

<sup>32</sup> Prince Norodom Sihanouk and Bernard Krisher, *Sihanouk Reminisces. World Leaders I Have Known* (Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1990), 25.

<sup>33</sup> Sihanouk and Krisher, *Sihanouk Reminisces*, 25.

conceptions of kingship and was encouraged by Sihanouk himself, who played up to the role of a paternalistic protector of Cambodia.<sup>34</sup>

While the Bayon faces have become a significant trope in the visual landscape of Cambodia, there are more implicit connections between the reign of Jayavarman VII and the modern-day monarchy. The image of Angkor has been used in various nationalist discourses in Cambodia for over a century.<sup>35</sup> Historian David Chandler quotes Sihanouk as saying: ‘I carry on my shoulders the overwhelming responsibility of sixteen centuries of royalty, which has given grandeur to the country and peace to the people’.<sup>36</sup> Sihanouk employed the image of glorious Angkor in relation to himself and saw in his own ‘Buddhist socialism’ the legacy of Jayavarman VII, and he encouraged his entourage to favourably compare him to the Angkorian monarch.<sup>37</sup> Sihanouk also promoted the legend of this twelfth-century king as he evoked his name and deeds in conjunction with his own brand of Buddhist monarchy in many of his speeches.<sup>38</sup> For example, Sihanouk made a speech in March 1960 at the inauguration of Jayavarman VII College in which he contested claims that the reign of Jayavarman was decadent, proclaiming that the ruins of his temples serve as testimony for the greatest period of Cambodian history.<sup>39</sup> On a number of occasions Sihanouk highlighted Jayavarman’s concern for his population – evidenced by the construction of hospitals and roads – to

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<sup>34</sup> For an account of the relationship between the figure of the king, the bodies of the king, and the nation see Ashley Thompson, ‘The Suffering of Kings’, 91-112.

In addition to Buddhist textual sources, Ian Harris draws attention to the descriptions of a worthy ruler which are found in Cambodia’s vernacular moral codes (*cpāp*), which date from the sixteenth century onwards. These codes demonstrate the importance of a righteous king, and they stress the suffering that the population will experience if the dharma is not properly protected.

Ian Harris, ‘The Monk and the King: Khieu Chum and Regime Change in Cambodia’, *Udaya*, 9 (2008), 88.

<sup>35</sup> See Penny Edwards who describes Sihanouk’s nationalism as ‘backward looking [and] Angkor centric’ in *Cambodge*, 9.

<sup>36</sup> Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, 64-65.

<sup>37</sup> David Chandler, ‘The Tragedy of Cambodian History’, *Pacific Affairs*, 52 (1979), 412.

<sup>38</sup> See, Milton Osborne, ‘History and Kingship in Contemporary Cambodia’, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 7 (1966), 1–14, for details of the references to Angkor made by kings and politicians in Cambodia in the mid-twentieth century.

In her account of contemporary references to Sdech Kân (the archetypal ‘man of merit’ according to Khmer legend), made by Prime Minister Hun Sen to bolster his political legitimacy, Astrid Norén-Nilsson points to a 2003 reference made by Hun Sen where he suggested he was the reincarnation of Jayavarman VII (the archetypal *Preah Bat Thommik*, or ‘Dharmic Ruler’).

Norén-Nilsson, ‘Performance as (re)incarnation: The Sdech Kân Narrative’, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Garry, *La Renaissance du Cambodge de Jayavarman VII, Roi d’Angkor à Norodom Sihanouk Varman* (Phnom Penh: Departement de l’information, 1964).

refute those who saw the Angkorian king as interested in personal deification and, as Sihanouk was also associating himself with similar good deeds, one can read an attempt to create a direct lineage between the two Buddhist monarchs.<sup>40</sup>

It was not only the name of Jayavarman VII which was invoked; a pamphlet written by a Canadian geography professor and published in Cambodia in 1964 by the Department of Information invokes the legendary names of Jayavarman and Aśoka, stressing the similarity between their reigns and that of Sihanouk.<sup>41</sup> The comparison with Aśoka, the Buddhist monarch *par excellence*, is in accord with Buddhist models of kingship. Aśoka acts as an exemplar of the *cakravartin* which Buddhist monarchs in Southeast Asia have imitated in order to give legitimacy to their reign. But, as Donald K. Swearer has argued, the invocation of Aśoka also allows Buddhist kings to ‘situate their reign within a universal Buddhist history’ and, as Aśoka’s biography follows that of the Buddha, so attainment of nirvana is understood to be the future of the righteous Buddhist king.<sup>42</sup> The similarities in the memory and myth between Sihanouk and Jayavarman VII are striking. When recalling the legendary status afforded to Jayavarman VII one sees a picture of a deeply religious man, who took on the suffering of his people and attempted to alleviate it and who had military-might. This ideal is represented in three images, the seated, meditative Jayavarman VII, in the faces of the Bayon, and in the bas-reliefs of Jayavarman VII temples, and Sihanouk cultivated his own visual record of his Buddhist piety and his involvement in initiatives to alleviate the suffering of the population, negotiated through a royal-paternalism.

### **Constructing Images of the King**

In addition to the archives of newsreels and photographs of Sihanouk’s tours of the countryside, the king-father also produced a large body of films, both documentary and fictive, which he wrote, directed, scored and starred. Between 1960 and 1970 he produced a total of twenty-one films, of which nine were documentaries. A brief examination of Sihanouk’s cinematic oeuvre is relevant to thinking through the visual economy of his image during his lifetime in three ways. Firstly, film was one of the key

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<sup>40</sup> *Principaux discours et allocutions de S.A.R Le Prince Norodom Sihanouk Président du Sangkum Reasir Niyum*, (Phnom Pehn, 1960), p.75

<sup>41</sup> Garry, *La Renaissance du Cambodge de Jayavarman VII, Roi d’Angkor à Norodom Sihanouk Varman*.

<sup>42</sup> Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 73-75.

mechanisms by which Sihanouk portrayed himself in relation to the political climate of the day and communicated his understanding of his relationship to Cambodia. Eliza Romey has proposed a nuanced reading of Sihanouk's cinematic work, concluding that rather than simply poorly executed distractions from political realities, his film-making was a means of communicating with illiterate peasant audiences, allowing Sihanouk to couch his politics within familiar vernacular narratives.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, Sihanouk took the starring role in his films, depicting as many fictional characters as he had official roles throughout his political life. This enabled Sihanouk to inhabit multiple roles and personas while still maintaining the integrity of the monarch. In effect, he remade his own image multiple times, a process which was replicated in the portraits which were collated after his death in which he was posed in many different scenarios and personas. In all likelihood the different dimensions of his filmic characters were devised to appeal to different audiences, much like his multifaceted personas in political life. Finally, Sihanouk's films were a means of further establishing himself within an Angkorian heritage, while at the same time educating the population about this precise heritage and a number of his earlier films make specific reference to Angkor and to Jayavarman VII. These two kings, separated by nine hundred years, were, in effect, engaged in a symbiotic relationship whereby Sihanouk's citation of Jayavarman VII brought this specific Angkorian monarch, whose name was never recorded in indigenous histories, into sharp focus for the larger Cambodian population. Furthermore, by citing the achievements of the great historical Khmer Buddhist king, Sihanouk set up a paradigm of equivalence between himself and Jayavarman VII.

In 1967, as the Americans agitated to disrupt Sihanouk's position of neutrality and draw Cambodia into the war in Vietnam, Sihanouk released the film *Shadow of Angkor*.<sup>44</sup> In the film Sihanouk plays Admiral Prince Dhanari, a counter-revolutionary, who uncovers an international plot to overthrow the Cambodian government. At a dinner at Angkor, attended by the Admiral, a senior CIA agent, the captain of the South

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<sup>43</sup> Eliza Romey, 'King, Politician, Artist. The Films of Norodom Sihanouk', (unpublished master's thesis, La Trobe University, 1998).

When Sihanouk resumed film-making in the late 1980s, he continued to weave political messages into the narrative and plots demonstrated his connection with the Khmer even as he was exiled.

<sup>44</sup> Sihanouk stated that the film's title was symbolic and referred to threats over Cambodia. The plot was based upon the 1959 attempted coup by Dap Chuon, the military commander for Siem Reap and the film itself was set in 1963 after Sihanouk's rejection of US aid.

Bernard K. Gordon, 'Cambodia: Shadow over Angkor', *Asian Survey*, 9 (1969), 58; Romey, 'King, Politician, Artist. The Films of Norodom Sihanouk', Appendix C, 13-14.

Vietnamese army and a host of ambassadors, the Admiral takes Ambassador Esmeralda Alvarez – played by Sihanouk’s wife Monique – to the Bayon temple. Standing beneath an illuminated face tower, the admiral tells the ambassador that the faces are of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, and a symbol of royal omnipresence: ‘He is the king, Jayavarman VII, always ready to defend the nation, the motherland and the people against the enemies of the kingdom’.<sup>45</sup> He then informs the ambassador that Cambodia has faced many aggressors over the centuries and now they face new imperial threats, from Saigon and the neo-colonialism of the United States of America, which threatens his neutrality. The film concludes with the Ambassador being forced to leave Cambodia due to American foreign policy, thus ending their burgeoning romance.

A year later, in the film *Crepuscule* (Twilight), Sihanouk and Monique revisit Angkor, this time as Prince Adit who hosts a widowed Indian Princess in Siem Reap.<sup>46</sup> During this melodramatic love story the couple visit several Angkorian temples and Vihear Rampil Lveng, a Theravāda terrace in Angkor Thom which houses the Bayon-Buddha statue. Here the prince tells the princess how Jayavarman VII suffered the illness of his subjects more than his own and that their pain was the pain of the king, a formulation found in the epigraphy of Jayavarman VII’s reign. Over footage of the Bayon’s bas-reliefs, which show Khmer soldiers defeating the Cham, the prince says ‘the king was concerned with his subjects’ needs. Full of care for their wellbeing he expressed this wish: “may I help people plunged in the ocean of life by virtue of this good work”.

Although *Shadow Over Angkor* is an explicit reference to the political and military machinations in Cambodia in the late 1960s and *Crepuscule* is a tale of unrequited love and an ode to the beauty of the temples of Angkor, both share common themes. Explicit reference is made to Jayavarman VII protecting his subjects during times of unrest, while Sihanouk casts himself as a righteous leader, maintaining stability and upholding tradition while fighting the corruption of modern politicians. The imagery of Jayavarman VII, most explicitly the face towers of the Bayon, feature heavily in relation to declarations of the king’s protective qualities. Moreover, Sihanouk’s liaisons with women in each of the films end when the relationships begin to pose a threat to his loyalty to Cambodia, thus highlighting his dedication to the well-

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<sup>45</sup> *Shadow Over Angkor*, dir. by Norodom Sihanouk, (Khemara Pictures, 1967).

<sup>46</sup> *Crepuscule*, dir. by Norodom Sihanouk, (Khemara Pictures, 1969).

being of the nation and contradicting accusations of his ‘Playboy’ image in the popular press.<sup>47</sup> Middle class and expatriate audiences in Phnom Penh were apparently less than enthralled by Sihanouk’s films – William Shawcross cites one wealthy young Khmer man speaking in the aftermath of Lon Nol’s 1970 coup as saying ‘we were bored with [Sihanouk] and humiliated by him. His damn film shows and endless radio speeches’<sup>48</sup> – and felt that despite Sihanouk’s claims to the contrary, the films represented little of the realities of contemporary Cambodia.<sup>49</sup> However, in the countryside uneducated peasant audiences were exposed to Sihanouk’s glorified version of Cambodian history which invoked the rulers of Angkor at the same time as demonstrating his own commitment to defending Cambodian sovereignty and traditions.

### **Mediating Absence and Presence: Portraits of Sihanouk**

Sihanouk was well versed in the power of the portrait and his official portrait was a common presence in public spaces, which underscored his presence in ritual and political life in Cambodia. The triad of Sihanouk, his wife, and his son, King Sihamoni, is commonly seen in Cambodia on billboards in public spaces and as laminated photos, replete with printed and/or real frames, placed above head height in shops, homes and offices.<sup>50</sup> While Sihanouk posed for a great number of official photographs, it is his two

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<sup>47</sup> Romey, ‘King, Politician, Artist’, 56-58.

<sup>48</sup> Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 126.

<sup>49</sup> Milton Osborne held that Sihanouk’s obsession with film-making helped precipitate his 1970 fall from power as he was compelled to spend less time attending to the issues at hand. Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk. Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1994), 177-183.

<sup>50</sup> Prince Sisowath Thomico confirmed that there is no plan to alter this triad now that Sihanouk has passed away.

Interview with Prince Sisowath Thomico, Royal Palace, Phnom Penh, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

The royal photographic triad has also been rendered diachronically. In March 2013 the official photo of Sihanouk was removed from a traffic junction next to Preah Ang Check and Preah Ang Chem and the royal residence in Siem Reap. It was replaced with an image of Norodom Suramit, King Sihanouk’s father, who was king between 1955 and 1960. In early April 2013 this photograph was replaced by one of Queen Kossamak, Sihanouk’s mother. Like the portrait of her husband it was a black and white image of her dressed in traditional attire and seated on a gilded throne-chair. There was minimal digital manipulation. The ornate metal frame then contained the official portrait of King Sihamoni. On the opposite side of the road a billboard displayed three photographs of King Sihamoni which recall popular images of his father: the king kneeling in front of a peasant family with palms spread in a generous pose and Sihamoni, dressed in white, grinning as he harvests rice together with hunched over farmers, with his official portrait situated in between. In the immediate aftermath of Sihanouk’s death, this billboard was mirrored by a third, opposite the official portrait and on the other side of the road from the Sihamoni billboard. This featured the official portrait of Sihanouk and a photograph of

official portraits which came to dominate the public and private spaces of Cambodia, much like the portrait of the king in neighbouring Thailand. As Sihanouk's physical presence in public life in Cambodia waxed and waned, so too apparently did the visibility of his portrait. The arrival of Sihanouk was often marked by the appearance of his portrait; artist Vann Nath, for example, remembered painting huge portraits of Sihanouk to mark his visit to Battambang in the late 1960s.<sup>51</sup> Archive photographs from the visit by Charles de Gaulle in 1968 show the Olympic Stadium in Phnom Penh filled with large portraits of de Gaulle and Sihanouk, which loom over the assembled crowds.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless Sihanouk's departure is underscored by the absence of the image. For instance, some outbreaks of peasant revolt in the immediate aftermath of the 1970 coup centred on peasant anger at the Lon Nol regime's removal of Sihanouk's portrait from offices and shops.<sup>53</sup> In Kompong Cham for example some ninety people were killed or wounded after riots broke out when officials tried to take down Sihanouk's portrait.<sup>54</sup> While it would be naive to suggest such protests were solely attributable to the removal of the portrait, it nonetheless demonstrates that the ousting of Sihanouk from power in Phnom Penh translated as a loss, via suppression, of his image in the provinces and that rural anger was focused on the symbolic and literal disappearance of the image of the king. In later years, after his re-coronation, photographic portraits of Sihanouk, sometimes hand painted with colour, were erected in Phnom Penh to mark occasions such as his birthday celebrations.

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him dressed in white, kneeling on the ground, using his hands to cover a sapling with soil. In this manner multiple familial triads were created at this traffic junction in the space of several months. The topic of the royal and Buddhist triad as an expression of power in Cambodia is one which deserves further attention, particularly as it is also employed by politicians. It is common to see portraits of the three leading figures of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP), Chea Sim, Hun Sen and Heng Samrin, on party posters and signs. For example, when the official portrait of Sihanouk was removed from outside the CPP headquarters in Siem Reap after the mourning period it was replaced with a photo of a smiling Hun Sen. His gaze looks out above the camera and his arm is raised in the gesture of a triumphant wave. His wife is visible above his left shoulder and several soldiers stand in the background. Hun Sen's pose, a gesture of greeting a crowd, is reminiscent of Sihanouk, yet his military fatigues signify a military prowess. Behind this framed photograph a banner is hung across the CPP building which shows the heads of Chea Sim, Hun Sen and Heng Samrin; in another version of this triad the three men are surrounded by halos of light, which form a triple peaked background reminiscent of the silhouette of Angkor Wat.

<sup>51</sup> Vann Nath, *A Cambodian Prison Portrait*, trans. by Mouen Chhean Nariddh (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1998), 1.

<sup>52</sup> National Archives of Cambodia, Sangkum Reastr Niyum Photographs, Box 48, Album 1.

<sup>53</sup> Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 125.

<sup>54</sup> Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 126-127.

When Sihanouk returned to Cambodia in 1991, his arrival in Phnom Penh on 14th November was marked by sizeable crowds who lined the streets from the airport, and by representations of his own face.<sup>55</sup> Children were filmed holding the same portraits of him as they waited for his cavalcade, although some contemporary reports suggest that many in the crowd were there at the behest of the government.<sup>56</sup> However contemporary artist Leang Seckon, who produced a body of work entitled *Goodbye Cambodia*<sup>57</sup> in the immediate aftermath of Sihanouk's passing, recalls the emotional response to these portraits:

Cambodia [was] smoke and death, but Phnom Penh was new in 1991 and when the portrait [came], we felt protected by the king, everywhere, we [were] not thinking about the king, but everywhere: "oh the king is here!" [we felt] hopeful. He is very symbolic and very protective [... one would] turn their moto on the road and see him smiling [and] that is enough, you feel protected.<sup>58</sup>

In Seckon's recollection the visibility of the portrait is synonymous with the protective presence of the king himself. In echoes of the admiral's impassioned invocation of the omnipresence of royal Buddhist power in *Shadow Over Angkor*, the landscape of portraits, both before and after death, suggest that the visibility of Sihanouk's face was interpreted as a protective gaze across Cambodia; seeing the face of the king was of great importance to many in the population. The centrality of taking vision of a deity or royal person associated with the divine is illustrated in the practice of *darśan*, described in previous chapters, which has been widely documented in the Hindu tradition, but little acknowledged in the Buddhist context. Despite this lack of scholarly recognition, I have argued elsewhere in the thesis that taking vision is well established in Buddhist legends and that the eye-opening ceremony, which animates and consecrates Buddha

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<sup>55</sup> See, *Preparation for the Return of King Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia*, Paul Cummings, 14<sup>th</sup> November 1991, Bophana Audiovisual Center Archive, PLC\_VI\_003368.

<sup>56</sup> Lindsay Murdoch, "'Papa Prince' Returns to Heal Nation', *The Age*, 15 November 1991

<sup>57</sup> *Goodbye Cambodia*, named after a well-known song composed and performed by Sihanouk, was exhibited at Art Stage Singapore, 24 – 27 January 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Leang Seckon, Siem Reap, 27<sup>th</sup> August 2013.

Seckon produced his own portrait of Sihanouk in the mixed media collage *Seven Day Mourning*. (See figure 10). Based upon the official portrait, the face of the king is sketched in grey acrylic paint. His body is excluded, leaving the face emerging from a rich, vivid background composed of hundreds of incense wrappers discarded by mourners, which Seckon collected from outside the Royal Palace every night after the King-Father's death. The painting is large, 1.5m by 1.3m, and the red and gold background is a startling departure from the usual blue background used in official portraits.

statues in Cambodia, illustrates the centrality of vision.<sup>59</sup> Recall here the example of the Buddha instructing his disciples to take a final view of his physical body and admonishing them for blocking the view of the gods who wanted to take a final vision of his form.

I suggest that seeing the portrait of Sihanouk took on an additional dimension and urgency after his death. The portrait no longer replicated and reproduced his presence but instead mediated his final physical presence in Cambodia. It seems to me that the period between Sihanouk's death and his five-day funeral marked a time of transformation in the role of the portrait, culminating in the protective paternal gaze of the king being wholly transferred from the king himself to the photographic image. The desire to see the face of the king, as a marker of his presence, one final time is made concrete in the numerous sightings of the king's apparition in the aftermath of his death. Most famously, on the night of the 21<sup>st</sup> October crowds in Phnom Penh and others in the provinces and beyond – the news was shared by mobile phones - saw the king's face on the surface of the moon. Another such example I was witness to occurred in Phnom Penh on the morning on Sihanouk's cremation, when his face was seen by a group of around thirty *yiey chi* (renunciate women) in the haze of the sun immediately to the north of the cremation area. At the same time a female medium walked amongst the assembled women telling each of them that Sihanouk was watching them. During the actual cremation his face was again seen in the smoke rising from the purpose-built atrium by Cambodian onlookers, both young and old, and some documented it in photographs and video. Immediately after the ceremony these images were shared on Facebook and mourners expressed the desire to buy the image as a photo-poster the following day. It was widely held by those who believed they had seen his face that this apparition signalled that he was watching over the people, protecting them and Cambodia, but that after his cremation his face would no longer appear to them. That Sihanouk was no longer able to cast a protective gaze over Cambodia added a sense of urgency of the circulation and 'black market' consumption of his portrait.

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<sup>59</sup> See, Swearer, 'Hypostasizing the Buddha', 263–280.



Figure 50. Two official portraits of Sihanouk installed at Preah Ang Check and Preah Ang Chom in Siem Reap, December 2012. Photography by author.



Figure 51. Two A3 laminated montages bought in Phnom Penh during Sihanouk's funeral. February 2013



Figure 52. One of six 'billboard' portraits of Sihanouk erected on the perimeter of the gardens in front of the Royal Palace, Phnom Penh for the duration of the five-day funeral. Photograph by author, February 2013.

The photographs which appeared in the aftermath of Sihanouk's death can be organised into three categories. The first are the official portraits which were distributed by official channels for display at public sites. These images were selected and distributed by the Ministry for the Royal Palace, under His Excellency Kong Sam-ol. According to Prince Sisowath Thomico, Sihanouk's nephew and former aide, Sihanouk himself took no part in selecting his official photographs, nor did King Sihamoni or the Queen-Mother.<sup>60</sup> In the days immediately after his death, these official photo-portraits of Sihanouk appeared outside government offices, public buildings and private businesses. The image was the same photograph, although there were two versions which appeared to be used interchangeably, each comprising a head and shoulder shot. Sihanouk's face is angled to the right and his gaze is focused on a space to the right of the frame (fig. 50). He wears a black suit and red tie; lines are visible on his face. Another version of this portrait has been digitally altered, his face now shadow-less and wrinkle-free, his hair a solid grey mass. His suit and shirt are different colours. In several places, such as Preah Ang Chek and Preah Ang Chom, popularly known as

<sup>60</sup> Author's interview with Prince Sisowath Thomico, Royal Palace, Phnom Penh, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

Neang Chek Neang Chum, a shrine situated in front of the royal residence in Siem Reap<sup>61</sup>, these same portraits were situated side-by-side, each surrounded by a digitally-rendered ornate gold frame. The second portrait is also set within an actual gilt frame. Businesses often set up small altars in front of this photo-portrait, whilst ones displayed outside official buildings were draped in black and white cloth.

The second category of image is those taken by the public and distributed on social media, such as Facebook. The primary examples are the photographs of the apparition of Sihanouk's face in the moon on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2013. Some of these were shared and printed out and included in the third category of images. This third category comprises unofficial collections of official and media photographs, collated as laminated montages, photo-posters, plastic enamel pin badges or on Facebook pages (fig. 51). Many of these were sourced from the internet and shared between print shops and individuals via social media. The nature of the circulation of these images made tracing their point of entry into the public, digital realm impossible.

In Siem Reap for example these A3 posters, along with smaller laminated pins of Sihanouk, were sold at Neang Chek Neang Chum. In Phnom Penh it was largely street vendors, poorer families and children who otherwise hawk street snacks or panhandle, who sold stacks of these posters to mourners during the funeral (fig. 53). The vendors replenished their stock at local print shops each night, when montages contained the latest scenes from the funeral went on sale. Street vendors I spoke to in Phnom Penh were selling around forty to fifty laminates per day during the five day funeral. Buyers consisted of families who had travelled from as far away as Banteay Meanchey, monks and renunciate women, students and young factory workers who migrated to Phnom Penh from bordering provinces (fig. 54).

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<sup>61</sup> Both the Royal Residence and the shrine are at the gateway to the temples of Angkor, as designed by colonial urban planning. The two Buddha statues housed in the shrine are royal palladia, rescued from an anti-Sihanouk rebel, Dap Chhoun, who had taken them from a monastery to Phnom Kulen. The statues, in *abhayamudrā* were enshrined in their current location in 1990.

Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism. History and Practice*, 68; Hang Chan Sophea, 'Stec Gamlañ' and Yāy Deb. Worshipping Kings and Queens in Cambodia Today', in *History, Buddhism and New Religious Movements in Cambodia*, ed. by John Marston and Elizabeth Guthrie (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 116-118.



Figure 53. . A photo-poster vendor outside Veal Mean, Phnom Penh, 2nd February 2013. Photograph by author.



Figure 54. A group of yiey chi from different provinces outside Veal Mean, Phnom Penh, 2nd February 2013. Photograph by author.

There are a range of images included in these montages: Sihanouk's official monk portrait from 1947, when he was ordained at Wat Prea Keo Morokat (Silver Pagoda); Sihanouk in decorated military uniform; Sihanouk as an old man, bowing to the people; an image of him riding horses in the French army Calvary training school in Saumur, and many family portraits. Many of the photos included in these posters and on social media sites were subjected to digital alteration, sometimes expertly but often rather crudely, with no attempt made to disguise the process. Often very bright colour was added to photographs, which were originally black and white, and the backgrounds were altered. This in itself is not new in Cambodia, or indeed elsewhere, as hand-colouring existed from the very birth of photography until colour film became readily available in the 1950s and 1960s. Monochrome photographs of Sihanouk's official portraits exist where colour has been added by hand (fig. 48 and 49). However as technology has advanced so have the modes of manipulation and circulation; anyone with access to a photo-editing program, such as Adobe Photoshop, can remake an image and share it on social media. The photo-posters and the images shared online converge with a wider explosion of photography in Cambodia, due to the rise of digital technology, smart phones, and internet access.



Figure 55. A re-touched family portrait of Sihanouk, his wife, and son, King Sihamoni.

A family portrait of Sihanouk with his wife and King Sihamoni appeared several times in the montage photo-posters and in digital albums on Facebook and serves as an example of digital manipulation (fig. 55). Prince Sisowath Thomico recalled that the photograph was taken in 1981 in Sihanouk's house in the south of France.<sup>62</sup> The original photograph has a plain grey background and the only prop is a potted plant in the lower left hand corner, yet many different versions of this image exist. One version of the photograph has been adeptly coloured, while another places the family in a living room, complete with western-style furniture in the background. In a third version the family are set against a psychedelic background of pinks, purples and yellows, with a bunch of pink roses adorning the top-right hand corner of the frame. In yet another version the family is situated in a fantasy garden with vivid painterly flowers and this image is credited to Saly and gives his Facebook page address (fig. 56). Saly is a young Cambodian man who lists his work as a farmer in Koh Kong Province and studies at the National University of Phnom Penh. He participates in a Facebook group called *We're always remember You our King* [sic], the same text which appears at the lower right corner of the printed image. This Facebook group is one of many which were set up in the aftermath of Sihanouk's death in which contributors post photographs of the king, and from which poster manufacturers acquired some of their images. These groups run parallel with the emergence of the social media platform as a place of political and historical discourse among predominately younger, urban generations of Cambodians. This online participation of uploading and sharing images complicates the distinction between producers of images and consumers.

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<sup>62</sup> Author's interview with Prince Sisowath Thomico, Royal Palace, Phnom Penh, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2013.



Figure 56. Family portrait, digitally enhanced.

In conversations with the buyers of the laminated photo-posters it was clear that in the first instance, these photographs were purchased as souvenirs and intended for display in their homes. For people aged fifty and over, the primary reasons cited for buying particular images was as a didactic tool, to take home to show children and grandchildren in order to teach them about Sihanouk, and by extension, a particular version of twentieth-century Cambodian history, utilising these ‘narrated-portraits’.<sup>63</sup> In his archeology of new media technologies, Lev Manovich notes the centrality of montage in the construction of fake realities in the twentieth century, sometimes exploited for ideological purposes.<sup>64</sup> In this context the assemblage of photographs were instrumentalised as narratives of a version of Cambodian history, as embodied by the figure of Sihanouk, and which distil the person of Sihanouk into two over-arching narratives: a meritorious Buddhist king and the father of the modern nation-state. This is

<sup>63</sup> The term ‘narrated-portraits’ is borrowed from Irene Stengs, whose study of the present-day, predominately middle-class Thai cult of King Chulalongkorn, or King Rama V (r. 1868 – 1910), argues that portraits of the king are used to illustrate over-arching narratives of his life. Stengs, *Worshipping the Great Moderniser*, 38.

<sup>64</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, 2001), 144; 148-149.

in accord with Romey's analysis of themes present in Sihanouk's films and the montages themselves display a filmic quality, with some of the more heavily photoshopped images bearing more of a likeness to an animation still. As far as it is possible to discern, these images, these narratives of Sihanouk's life, were taken up, embraced and reworked by people themselves rather than by official channels, although involvement by people at the Royal Palace in putting 'new' images of Sihanouk into circulation is suspected.



Figure 57. An A3 laminated montage poster, purchased in the aftermath of Sihanouk's death.

Print shop workers (re)producing these images were also consumers and the line blurs between the motivating factors in the modification and consumption of portraits. The primary reason given by print shop owners for photoshopping was that this process creates 'more images', driven by a market imperative for more photographs. However, the implications of this process are far greater than a demand for more images, and relate to the narration of a nexus of ideas about kingship and leadership, exemplification of histories, and the metonymic relationship between Sihanouk and the nation. For instance, mourners at the funeral on several occasions gestured to the photoshopped background furniture in the family portrait described above to demonstrate that it was taken in France. On other occasions the same image was used to demonstrate his presence in China, based upon the fictional background. This was done as they

explained to me their admiration of Sihanouk as a protector of Cambodia who negotiated independence. Sometimes they told me he was very clever, that he was fluent in French, or English, or Chinese. These images were illustrative of these qualities and the alteration of the background allowed the king to be expressly situated in the geographic locations that symbolised his mastery of foreign languages and mannerisms. One popular, oval plastic enamel badge featured a photograph of an elderly Sihanouk smiling and *sampeah*-ing to an assembled audience one imagines is located to our left where his gaze falls. The Cambodian flag is in the background, two towers of Angkor Wat visible, and text on the right of the flag reads ‘Our Khmer symbol’. This example underscores the metonymic relationship between the figure of Sihanouk and the nation.<sup>65</sup>

### **Haptic Interventions and Re-Imagings of the Portrait**

I argue that the presence of multiple portraits ranging from the monumental to the miniature in scale, distributed and displayed via official and unofficial channels, adorned with the addition of new colour, and collected together in montages, work to increase, rather than diminish, the auratic presence of Sihanouk.<sup>66</sup> The images retain their ritual and cultic position, attempting to reconcile the royal and political status of otherness of Sihanouk with his empathetic connection with the poorest people who lived outside of the capital, or who were symbolically represented by the rural population. In essays on photograph images of kings within a Thai Buddhist context, John Clark and Clare Veal have each argued for the power inherent in the multiple reproductions.<sup>67</sup> The omnipresence of the face does not diminish its power.

The auratic presence of Sihanouk was not only maintained via the sheer mass of images, but also by the digital alterations, the framing and enshrining of portraits, and the practice of collecting these images together. These processes can be read as a means

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<sup>65</sup> Arguably these expressions of national pride are interlinked with the uglier manifestations of nationalistic fervour which have been a feature of recent opposition rhetoric and protest in Phnom Penh, largely against the Vietnamese.

<sup>66</sup> This is contrary to the destruction of the aura through mechanical reproduction as described by Walter Benjamin in his seminal essay on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.

Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 217-252.

<sup>67</sup> John Clark, ‘Icon and Image in Modern Thai Art: A Preliminary Exploration’, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 3 (2011), 1–31; Clare Veal, ‘The Charismatic Index: Photographic Representations of Power and Status in the Thai Social Order’, *Trans Asia Photography Review*, 3 (2013).

of showing respect and devotion, and allowing the image to bear presence in the here and now. In her discussion of Siamese royal portrait photography, Morris argues that the adornment of a nineteenth-century photograph of King Mongkut with gold leaf was both a devotional gesture and an expression of selflessness.<sup>68</sup> This attention to the image was not reserved solely for royalty, as images of Buddhas and senior monks were subject to similar adornment. This leads Morris to argue that the intervention in the image within this Theravāda context does not necessarily equate to the adoration for the person represented, rather it is a tribute to the generic representation of the exemplary deeds embodied in the image, or a complex conflation between the two.<sup>69</sup> While monk portraits in Cambodia are now often subjected to photoshop, my research has found that this digital alteration is usually done under the supervision of a monk, or monks, from the wat in question and disseminated on a local level. This is at odds with the number of people, both at home and in print shops, who altered Sihanouk portraits, which were then widely shared on the internet and in the laminated montages.

The purchase and display of these photographs and the sharing of images of Sihanouk on Facebook was a means of publically displaying affection, support, and dedication to the former king, which was conflated with notions of devotion to the nation and expressions of patriotism. For example, users were urged to ‘share’ or ‘like’ an image as a devotional practice to honour the king and as a means to bring merit to Cambodia. In such cases, the virtual practice mirrors the way in which people interacted with the iconic presence of his image in a devotional manner offline. Both make personal admiration visible to the public, in the real world and the digital realm. In the virtual world one clicks on a thumbs up icon on Facebook to ‘like’ an image while during the funeral mourners clutched photo-posters to their chests, with the portrait facing outwards, or wore pin badges on their shirts. Perhaps the most explicit haptic intervention with the image is made manifest in the process of photoshopping, where the virtual hand touches up and reworks the image as an act of devotion and of imagination, echoing the way in which mourners gently ran their fingers across the photographs in the montages as they shared their affection for the king-father and histories of Cambodia which he represented. The process of erasing shadows and wrinkles, deciding upon appropriate shades to use in clothing, the imagination involved

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<sup>68</sup> Morris, ‘Photography and the Power of Images in the History of Power’, 132.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

in conceiving of a new background matches the meticulous work put into hand-colouring portraits from earlier decades.

As demonstrated in the multiple versions of the family portrait detailed above, digital manipulation dislocates the image and its subjects, from the original moment or context of production, enabling endless re-productions and re-imaginings. It is worth noting in this context that it was always ‘more’ images, rather than ‘new’ images. Indeed, it was only photographs from the funeral itself which were termed ‘new’; alterations to already existing photographs did not create anything ‘new’, just the endless possibilities of ‘more’. This digital manipulation allowed the image to exist in imagined geographic and historic locations, and represent the king in a variable, contingent space of both here and now *and* there and then. The altered photograph is caught in the disjunction of representing something that exists somewhere and something which exists nowhere. Barthes argues that the impossibility of a photograph to be an authentic presence is due to its inescapable insistence that “this is how it was”, but this formulation does not hold in the present context. Firstly, because of the modes by which presence is instantiated, as outlined above, but also because of the elements of nostalgia and political urgency that accompanied these photographic portraits of Sihanouk. I contend that the “how it was” is precisely what was being instantiated, illustrative of a particular version of history or a kind of longing for something irretrievably lost. The portraits claim that ‘this is how it was’ but this ‘was’ is variable, fictional, and contingent on the decisions of print shop employees, anyone with access to Photoshop, and the consumers of these portraits. When assembled together in a montage the effect of these images is one of animation, retelling a version of the biography of the king, and by extension, a story about the nation. In this context Barthes’ ‘there-then’ is an imagined cultural-politico ‘golden age’ of Cambodia and Cambodian kingship, mediated by nostalgia and refigured in the here and now as a possibility for what might be and as a radical alternative for what currently is.

## **Conclusion**

Navigating the visual economy of the portraits of Sihanouk provides an account of the practices and beliefs surrounding the image of the king in contemporary Cambodia, phenomena which have continuities with the insistence on the face from the end of the twelfth century. Sihanouk as man, king, and politician was synonymous with

Cambodia. His protective, paternal role was one he cultivated himself, in the shadow of pre-existing beliefs in a quasi-divine king, ritually and politically embedded in Buddhism and the prosperity of the country. He was adept at manipulating his own image, displaying a variety of characters in his films and making explicit associations between himself, the paradigmatic Cambodian king – Jayavarman VII – and the glory of Angkor. Arguably, it was Sihanouk himself who set the tone for creating a culture of posthumous assemblage of portraits. The practice of distributing montages of modified images functioned as a means to display characteristics of a ‘good’ leader in the form of narrated biographies of his life. When assembled together these portraits became tools to describe, document, and present key moments in Sihanouk’s life, and in doing so they recounted a certain biography of Sihanouk, whereby the figure of king metonymically stood for a version of Cambodian history.

These images bypassed official channels and their modification displayed devotion to Sihanouk, through haptic interventions, which underscored a preoccupation with *seeing* the face of the king. In many ways these phenomena are implicitly continuous with historically and culturally embedded practices of asserting kingship via the visible face, or four-faces. That the portrait of the king was a photographic physical likeness may have altered the visual register on which the image functioned, but the phenomenon in itself is a legacy of a long-standing practice of making the faces of the Buddhist king visible. Nevertheless, the overt positioning and representation of Sihanouk – often in the form of self-representation in the 1950s and 60s – as in direct lineage from Jayavarman VII, was very much a product of the reintroduction of Jayavarman VII via colonial scholarship. Here two historical registers intersect: the indigenous historiography in which Buddhist kingship and references to Angkor are exemplified in the four-faces, and in the history composed of specific names and deeds, largely reconstituted by colonial French scholarship. What is retained in the portraits of Sihanouk is the emphasis on the protective face of the king.

## **Chapter Eight: Faces of Cambodia: Bayon Period Iconography in the Post-War Cambodian Visual Landscape**

That the present-day, contemporary visual landscape of Cambodia is dominated by Angkorian imagery is unsurprising, given the attention the temples have been afforded in histories of Cambodia, coupled with twentieth-century nationalistic discourses, post-war nation-building, and the ever-growing tourist market.<sup>1</sup> While Angkor Wat is the official icon of the nation, the Bayon faces have become an unofficial national symbol, embodying various histories and conceptions of ‘Cambodian-ness’, which are subject to more interesting re-workings than the official icon of Angkor Wat. The faces are worthy of individual consideration, set apart from other Angkorian imagery, because of their very unique iconography and the palimpsest of meanings they have accrued. A critical perambulation of citations of the Bayon in contemporary Cambodia allows for something of an excavation of the layers of meaning accrued in its faces. But this is not an archaeology of the image with an aim of stripping back enough historical sediment in order to arrive at a singular meaning of the faces at their origin; as argued in previous chapters, I contend that there was no such singular meaning at the origin of the Bayon. Instead it is an attempt to disentangle the significances of the face in the Cambodian context, which have become tropes for national identity – the quintessential ‘Khmer face’ - and are juxtaposed with other symbols of Cambodia. The case studies in this chapter have been selected because they each demonstrate a different, but integral facet of the faces in this contemporary landscape, and together they form a montage of intersecting histories, values, and connotations.

The first case study is the most recent and it demonstrates the perhaps increasing stress placed on citing the faces from the Bayon. During the annual Water Festival

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<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge that defining of the terms ‘modern’ is a slippery and fraught enterprise and I do not intend to present the term uncritically. While sensitive to its status as a protean term with contested meanings, I use “modern” here to indicate the period of Cambodian history after the establishment of the French Protectorate in 1863 until the present time. Although for the sake of clarity I refer to the “contemporary” as Cambodia from the early 2000s until today, in order to distinguish the post-war recovery period of approximately the last two decades from Cambodia’s brief years of modernity pre-1975.

celebrations in November 2010 three hundred and fifty-three Cambodians tragically died during a stampede on a bridge to the island of Koh Pich, Phnom Penh. The following year work began on a commemorative memorial, officially and often locally designated as a stūpa, now located near the site of the disaster. The winning design entry was a roughly hewn pillar of stone with four ‘Bayon faces’ at its apex (fig. 58). According to Phnom Penh municipal sources the faces symbolise the ‘principles of Prohm’, fusing ‘modern Khmer art style based on Khmer ancient art and belief’ (sic).<sup>2</sup> This choice of design is interesting for two key reasons: in the first instance, finding four faces at the apex of a stūpa is common in vernacular visual culture and examples are found in wats across Cambodia, from urban centres to rural villages (fig. 59). Normally these faces have the narrow facial features of the four-faces found in Middle Period iconography, which have their origins in the post-Angkor Theravāda renovation of Cambodian culture. The presence of the four-faces in the Middle Period represented a royal power associated with the future Buddha Maitreya, who we return to in a moment.<sup>3</sup> But a sizeable number of recently erected stūpa, in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, have four faces at their apex, which are explicit replicas of the faces of the Bayon (fig. 60).

In the second instance, the Koh Pich stūpa tells us something about the precise use of the face in Cambodia. The artists carving the Koh Pich ‘face tower’ worked from photographs from the Bayon and their primary photograph was of a face tower that has had its open eyes closed over – a feature of several of the faces at the Bayon that the precise date and reasons for are not yet clear (fig. 61). When I asked the head artisan whether the finished stūpa would have open or closed eyes he replied, ‘of course the eyes are open, the king has to be able to see in all directions, to protect the people’.<sup>4</sup> While the Bayon faces are readily identified with the with Prohm and Buddhist virtues, this statement indicates that they are also expressly associated with the king, in the sense of an abstracted notion of the “king” or “kingship”, rather than a specific monarch and hints at the significance of the protective gaze. This is in accord with the close association between the institutions of Buddhism and kingship, whereby the king is

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Koh Pich Memorial Stūpa, Begin the Construction This Week’, *Phnom Penh Government Website*, 9th August 2011, <<http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/news-koh-pich-memorial-stupa-begin-the-construction-this-week-1604.html>> [accessed 11th November 2013].

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, ‘Lost and Found’; Thompson, ‘The Future of Cambodia’s Past: The Messianic Middle-Period Cambodian Cult’.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with artisans at Angkor Conservation, Siem Reap, August 2011.

tasked with protecting and exemplifying the dharma. Moreover, a truly righteous king will signal the arrival of Maitreya on earth.<sup>5</sup> As demonstrated in Chapter One, the four-faced configuration can be understood to be symbolic of the pentad of Buddhas and the association between kingship and Maitreya.

The Koh Pich memorial is therefore in accord with the recent phenomenon of explicit citation of the Bayon faces, not only at stūpa, but across the entire visual landscape of contemporary Cambodia: the Bayon faces are found on shop fronts, garages, billboards, and water and beer bottles; non-religious architectural structures, such as the Khmer Arts Theater in Takhmao, a classical dance teaching, research and archive centre, and religious structures (fig. 62). The Bayon is of course the name and logo of many hotels, restaurants and businesses aimed at the tourist and domestic market. The Bayon and Angkor Wat are the most reworked Angkorian images in the paintings sold in Phnom Penh, the temples of Angkor, and Siem Reap – the town which serves as the tourist gateway to Angkor. As I shall describe below, this tendency towards homogeneity of content, and to a lesser degree formal elements, in these tableaux is largely an effect of the legacy of colonial art pedagogies. Yet, the ability to precisely isolate the face allows for a greater range of reworkings of the face, which nevertheless remain a metonym for the temple as a whole and a metonym for that which the temple has come to represent.



Figure 58. Koh Pich memorial. Photograph courtesy of Phnom Penh Municipal Government

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<sup>5</sup> Many Cambodians express the desire to be reborn at the time of Maitreya's arrival on earth, which will expedite their enlightenment; few non-monastic Cambodians view enlightenment as an eschatological aim here and now and instead work towards a fortuitous rebirth.

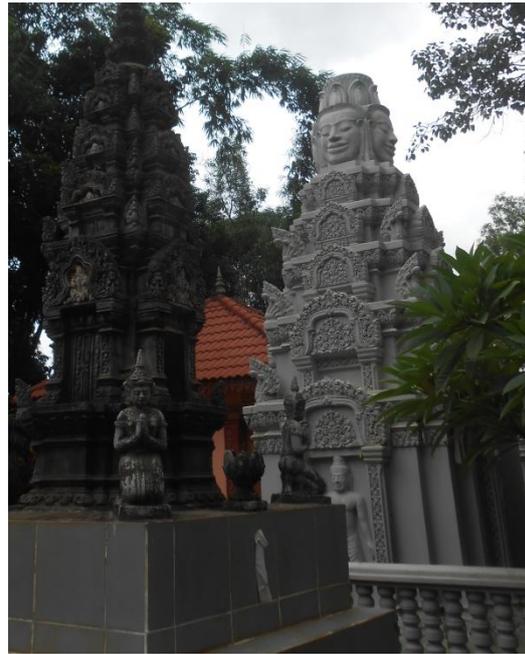


Figure 59. The apex of a stūpa at wat, in the northern quadrant of the Angkor Wat complex. Photograph by author, 2011.

Figure 60. A stupa at Wat Thmei, Siem Reap. Photograph by author, 2013.



Figure 61. Artists working on the clay model for the Koh Pich Stūpa. Angkor Conservation, Siem Reap, August 2011. Photograph by author.



Figure 62. Offices at the Khmer Arts Theatre, Takhmao, Phnom Penh. Photograph by author, 2010.



Figure 63. Wall display at a gallery on St. 178, Phnom Penh. Photograph by author, 2011.



Figure 64. Details of paintings sold at a stall inside Angkor Thom, Siem Reap. Photograph by author, 2011.

## The Formulation of National Icons

The practices of nation-state building involve invoking a grand narrative history of the nation, drawing upon concrete remnants of this history to develop a common, unifying heritage and, as such, the re-working of Angkor is not a phenomenon unique to Cambodia.<sup>6</sup> This model of the nation-state was proposed by Ernest Renan who argued that the nation is constituted by shared pasts which coalesce into a common heritage of memory.<sup>7</sup> As Benedict Anderson has argued, nation-states need material monuments around which national identities and the nation can be ‘imagined’.<sup>8</sup> Anderson, an area specialist of Southeast Asia, proposed that national discourses were not exclusively formulated by colonised states in emulation of European models, arguing that indigenous nationalism arose from the institutions of the colonisers.<sup>9</sup> Partha Chatterjee questioned Anderson’s thesis, arguing if non-western states ‘imagined’ their nation by employing European models, then there had to be a form of *difference* which distinguished Asia and African nationalism from the West.<sup>10</sup> For Chatterjee this difference lay in the ‘spiritual’ sphere, where the “essential” marks of cultural identity are located, allowing the national culture to be freed from colonial influence. This is the ‘inner’ sphere, while the ‘outside’ material sphere of science, the economy and state-

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Geisler argues that a symbol distils and condenses the complex intricate interplay of the ideals and values of a nation, yet the ‘larger the collective to be held together by the symbol, the more complex is the signification process, that is, the process of attaching meaning to a symbol to which all members or subsets of the group can subscribe’. He follows sociologist Durkheim to argue for the position of understanding national symbols as working in a system of mass media; so coins, anthems, monuments, and flags all work together to articulate the nation. Michael E. Geisler, ‘What Are National Symbols – And What Do They Do To Us?’, *National Symbols, Fractured Identities: Contesting the National Narrative*, ed. by Michael E. Geisler (Middlebury, VT: Middlebury College Press, 2005), XIII–XXXI.

<sup>7</sup>The nation is bounded by a sense of a shared past based upon glorious achievements, which intersects with Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of a nation formed as a cultural construct predicated upon social affiliations more than anything else.

Ernest Renan, ‘What Is a Nation?’, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 19; Homi K. Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation’, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 292.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson reads the foundations of ‘nationalism’ in colonised states as being located in the educational and administrative entities which provided the basis of the ‘imagined communities’, the very foundation of the nation according to Anderson’s account.

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Second (London: Verso, 1991), 140. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 163.

<sup>10</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 4-5.

craft are replicated from Western models.<sup>11</sup> The interface between the material and the spiritual, or the outer and inner, is where nationalism exerts itself and formulates a “modern” nationalism which does not entirely mirror a western model and it is from these points of difference that the postcolonial state obtains its power. Chatterjee argues that the histories of nationalism focus primarily on the material apparatus, imported from the West, an imbalance which he addresses in his own study of the ‘inner’ spheres in Bengal.

A comprehensive presentation on the precise manner in which national and cultural identity was constituted in twentieth century Cambodia is not the objective of this chapter. Penny Edwards has thoroughly articulated the formulation of nationhood in colonial Cambodia, although her analysis lacks the dimensions of indigenous historiography.<sup>12</sup> While she rightly critiques the colonial plot device of a stagnated post-Angkorian culture, she nonetheless tends to overlook any pre-Protectorate dimensions in the formulation of state cultural iconography and identity; there are many examples of inner or spiritual spheres through which the cultural identity of Cambodia is expressed, demonstrating the spaces of difference that Chatterjee calls for. However, focus on the Bayon face points to the interface between two cultural registers at work in the Cambodian situation: the citation of the faces is both material and spiritual, from the inside and the out. On the one hand Angkor belongs to the inner, spiritual sphere, yet on the other, it has become refracted through the lens of colonial pedagogy and history, through its incorporation into the colonial narrative. The case studies in this chapter each demonstrate practices of citation which are embedded in colonial historiography, produced and disseminated via colonial institutions, and which display an understanding of the four-faced configuration which has its roots in the Middle Period. The present citations of the faces are the product of Protectorate institutions, historiography, and pedagogy, but are also in accord with modes of indigenous historical narration. The Koh Pich memorial which introduced this chapter can be considered to be an example of these imbricated legacies.

Angkor Wat is undisputedly the icon of Cambodia, both inside and outside of the country and it is represented on the flag by three of its towers, as it appears front its front elevation. From the early twentieth century, French colonial historiography

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<sup>11</sup> Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 6-10.

<sup>12</sup> Edwards, *Cambodge*.

provided the impetus for Angkor to become the national symbol, around which the nation-state of Cambodia could coalesce. As Ashley Thompson has pertinently argued, the French did not impose hollow icons on Cambodia and it is important to recognise that the designation of Angkor as the national icon follows traditional indigenous Theravāda practices of returning to the ancient capital.<sup>13</sup> I suggest that the Bayon has become the unofficial national icon, because of its original Buddhist orientation, the plurality of interpretations it offers, and the (imprecise) iconography of its faces. I was often told by Cambodians that the Bayon faces represent the four Buddhist virtues of loving kindness, compassion, equanimity and wisdom and the four-faces of the Bayon are widely recognised by Cambodians as the most ‘Buddhist’ of all Angkorian imagery in folk iconography.<sup>14</sup> Anderson himself noted an example pertinent to the study at hand whereby King Sihanouk installed a large wood and papier-mâché replica of the Bayon in the Olympic Sports Stadium in Phnom Penh as part of the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1968 celebrations marking the fifteenth anniversary of Cambodian Independence.<sup>15</sup> Anderson understands this as a practice of ‘politicised museumizing’ inherited from the colonial regime, which served to present the Bayon as a symbol of greatness but ‘with the memory of French colonial restorers banished’.<sup>16</sup> While this is a valid observation it nonetheless replicates the idea that the French colonial institution restored an otherwise ruined Cambodian history. No doubt Sihanouk knew precisely what he was doing when he cited Jayavarman VII and Angkorian glory – as examined in the previous chapter – by reclaiming a colonial-produced history and enthusiastically associating himself with it. But I suggest that there was a subtle transposition of the association of the four faces with kingship onto the image of the Bayon, merging these two historical legacies. Furthermore, the Bayon faces have also been employed in building national identities independent of official, state projects of nation-building, but whose origins were nevertheless imbricated in official nation-state narrations.

The citation of Angkorian imagery, particularly the Bayon, in post-war Cambodia as an indigenous form of recuperating national identity is exemplified in John Marston’s ethnographic account of the religious ascetic Tāpas’.<sup>17</sup> Tāpas’ attracted

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<sup>13</sup> Thompson, ‘Buddhism in Cambodia, Rupture and Continuity’, 146.

<sup>14</sup> John Marston, ‘Clay into Stone. A Modern-Day Tāpas’’, in *History, Buddhism and New Religious Movements in Cambodia*, ed. by John Marston and Elizabeth Guthrie (University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 180-181.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 183.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 183.

<sup>17</sup> Marston, ‘Clay into Stone’, 170–92.

a modest cult following – both in Cambodia and amongst the diaspora - in the 1990s. Drawing upon folk beliefs that the temples of Angkor had been fashioned from clay that magically turned to stone, Tāpas’ constructed his own clay temple, richly decorated with Angkorian-style ornamentation and topped with five towers with four-faces (fig. 65). The face bore a greater formal resemblance to Middle Period four-face configurations, with flatter, narrower visage stylistically more in accord with a Thai-style than with the broad, Khmer features of the Bayon faces. Nevertheless, juxtaposed with explicit Angkorian ornamental and in a quincunx configuration based upon the towers of Angkor Wat, these four-faces make clear reference to the iconography of the Bayon. In this context Angkor is instrumentalised as a potent collection of symbols which assert Cambodian greatness. Furthermore, Tāpas’ citation of Angkor goes beyond referencing the temples and their histories, and Tāpas’ project was ‘distinctive in the degree to which a conscious attempt to symbolically *recreate* a vision of Angkor becomes the thrust of a religious movement, and in the degree it stresses Khmer autonomy’.<sup>18</sup> Marston’s analysis illustrates the intimate, complex links between Angkor, nationalism and contemporary religiosity in Cambodia, in which the iconography and legendary process of construction comes to herald a renewed period of national greatness, bolstered by the desire of Khmer overseas to carve a sense of authenticity. Although funded by those in the Khmer diaspora, Tāpas’ was keen to reiterate that the temple was made without the assistance of foreign donors, an assertion of sovereign independence in the face of the vast international presence in Cambodia following the UNTAC period.

I wish to advance the position that the Bayon’s popularity lies in its Buddhist orientation by proposing that the numerous citations of the face towers is equally because of the aesthetic implications of the face. The faces of the Bayon are specific in that they relate to that particular historical monument, but they also have the unspecific nature ascribable to all faces, which makes them immediately recognisable and familiar. While king Suryavarman II is synonymous with Angkor Wat, we do not actually *see him* in the temple itself. Conversely, the Bayon is an outward, highly visible projection of the divine: it is a human face and a divine face, the face of the king and the face of the Buddha. The enigmatic quality of the Bayon, with its many faces and plurality of meanings, allows it to be taken up in a variety of ways. Identified by a face or face tower, the Bayon temple is reducible to its parts without losing reference to its whole;

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<sup>18</sup> Marston, ‘Clay into Stone’, 178.

the temple *is* a face in its configuration of multiple faces. The specificity of the particular ‘Bayon face’, along with the generic qualities familiar to all faces, mean that the image can be isolated, repeated and reworked in ways that the Angkor Wat cannot. The sheer number of possible interpretations of the identity of the face towers, the plurality of meaning, is the scholarly branch of a phenomenon that is familiar to anyone who spent time at the temple or looking at photographs of it. The faces speak, they solicit personal interaction, private musings as to their identity, to their character, to their history. They recall the power of a king, a universal monarch who ruled by divine right. These faces also refer to the other temples of the reign of Jayavarman VII, and in this cross-referencing they act as a shorthand visual tool to represent this perceived moment of historical Khmer glory when the territorial reach of the empire was at its largest and the country was protected by a benevolent, compassionate face. The faces not only symbolise the divine world made present in the terrestrial world, but also the relationship between the king and his people.

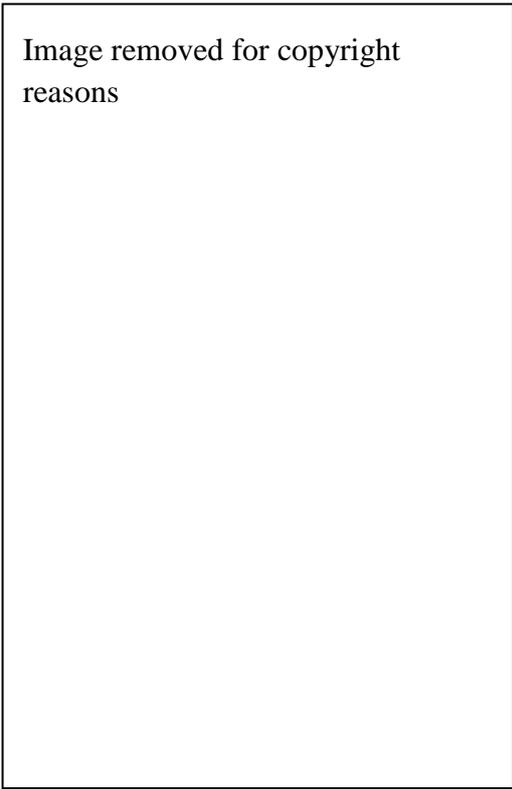


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Figure 65. ‘Tapas’ Prasad, Kien Svay’, photo by John Marston, in ‘Clay into Stone. A Modern-Day Tāpas’, 170.

## Teaching Cambodians to Draw Cambodia

The explicit citations of the Bayon faces are in part in continuity with Middle Period four-faced configurations, yet the historical specificity of the Bayon faces and the nostalgia they invoke in Cambodia today derives in large part from colonial historiography, from both scholarly accounts and in the visual and poetic narratives examined in Chapter Six. The Protectorate-period characterisation of the post-Angkorian period as a time of obscurity, stagnation and abandonment was necessary to create a narrative arc of glory, decline, and resurrection of a glorious past, heralding a new golden age under French protection. This narrative emerged in the scholarship on and in Angkor, via concerted efforts to conserve, restore, replicate and study the stone traces of an ancient civilisation. Ideas of cultural decline and the need to help to rescue a lost civilization proved to be central in colonial initiatives for art education in Cambodia, and Angkor formed a crucial element in the Protectorate's *mission civilisatrice*.<sup>19</sup> The temples and their statuary and decoration became the focus of artistic policies which were inaugurated by Georges Groslier, whose pedagogical approach was deeply entrenched in the notion of aiding Cambodians to produce an 'authentically' Khmer art, untainted by western techniques and rooted in the ornamentation of Angkor.<sup>20</sup>

In the late nineteenth century art production in Cambodia was focused in religious and royal settings. Adept craftsmen were retained in the workshops at the Royal Palace, but a French survey from 1917 which attempted to document artists throughout Cambodia reveals that there were few people exclusively employed in the manufacture of objects that the French administrators could recognise as 'art'.<sup>21</sup> Often farmers had specific skills such as carving or painting and they employed these skills when temples required them to, spending the rest of their time working in the fields.<sup>22</sup> However, this does not mean that art in Cambodia was produced in isolation from what

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<sup>19</sup> See, Edwards, *Cambodge. The Cultivation of A Nation, 1860-1945*; Barnett, 'Cambodia Will Never Disappear', 101–25.

<sup>20</sup> Ingrid Muan thoroughly researched Groslier's project and the subsequent effects it had on art production after Cambodia gained independence in 1953 up until the turn of the millennium. Ingrid Muan, Citing Angkor: The "Cambodian Arts" in the Age of Restoration 1918-2000' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Ingrid Muan and Daravuth Ly, *Cultures of Independence. An Introduction to Cambodian Arts and Culture in the 1950s and 1960s*. (Phnom Penh: Reyum, 2001), 242-243.

<sup>22</sup> Muan and Ly, *Cultures of Independence*, 242-243.

happened elsewhere. Cambodian artists were often sent to Bangkok to train and there is also evidence of a western painter coming to Phnom Penh to teach artists at the Royal Palace. Craftsmen produced copies of European style furniture and examined oil paintings that were gifted to the king. This range of influences meant that artists in Phnom Penh were producing works that were shaped by the exchanges that occurred with the start of the French Protectorate.<sup>23</sup>

This period of apparent artistic exchange was short lived and essentially ended in 1918 with the foundation of the School of Cambodian Arts in Phnom Penh, under the direction of Georges Groslier, the son of a French Protectorate Administrator who had trained as a painter at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. The school took the original Palace workshops and restructured them into six ateliers: drawing, modelling in wax and clay, foundry, jewellery, cabinet making and weaving. The objective of Groslier's pedagogies was to develop a 'pure', 'authentic' Cambodian art in which artists worked exclusively from models and were prohibited from drawing from life. Groslier's vision was to produce artisans who could preserve what was essentially Khmer and serve the needs of tourists who sought traditional and authentic souvenirs.<sup>24</sup> In the drawing classes, which were mandatory for all male students, classes were structured around a two-dimensional ornament which had been divided by grid line, which the students had to copy repeatedly. Alongside the new art school, the colonial administration also established a Museum, named after the Governor of Cambodia, Albert Sarraut, which was renamed the National Museum of Phnom Penh after Cambodia gained independence. The museum collection primarily consisted of Angkorian artefacts and Georges Groslier was its first conservator. The geographical proximity of the museum and the art school – the art school was built behind the museum – reflected the role that each institution would play in supporting the formation of a national artistic identity as envisaged by Groslier; students were able to access the museum to see the collection and gain inspiration from Angkor, and foreign tourists to the museum could buy 'authentic' souvenirs produced in the School's workshops.<sup>25</sup>

Groslier's control of arts education apparently went unchallenged, allowing for his singular vision to dictate artistic policy for the span of his tenure. This vision was

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<sup>23</sup> Ingrid Muan, 'Haunted Scenes: Painting and History in Phnom Penh', in *Udaya*, 6, 2005, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Muan, 'Citing Angkor: The "Cambodian Arts" in the Age of Restoration 1918-2000', 84-87.

<sup>25</sup> Gabrielle Abbe, 'La « Rénovation Des Arts Cambodgiens » » George Groslier et Le Service Des Arts, 1917-1945', *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin*, 27 (2008), 64.

informed by the intense scholarly and public interest in the temples of Angkor and the persistent notion that Cambodia had reached its artistic apex between the ninth and twelfth centuries. This led to the belief that Cambodians should be craftsmen, learning their traditional forms of decorative arts in order to restore Cambodia to its former glory. While marvelling at the constellation of intricate temples at Angkor, it is entirely possible that foreign scholars were blinded to the idea that present-day Cambodians were capable of producing original art work, or had produced anything of artistic value since the end of the Angkorian period.<sup>26</sup>

After Groslier died during the Japanese occupation of Cambodia during World War II, a teacher names Suzuki came to work at the School of Cambodian Art in 1948. He had trained at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Tokyo with teachers who had studied impressionism in France and he subscribed to a method of working from direct observation.<sup>27</sup> The standardised grids were disposed of and students were encouraged to work from nature and use their own perceptions of light and shadow in order to become modern artists like Cézanne, Monet or Picasso.<sup>28</sup> However, students were concerned that by adopting an international style as taught by Suzuki they would lose something specifically Khmer.<sup>29</sup> This fear of losing a Khmer identity ran alongside the rampant nationalism of various independence movements and discourses, and it lingered after Cambodia finally achieved independence from France in 1953.<sup>30</sup> Artists in Phnom Penh had grown up with the colonial rhetoric of needing to produce a ‘Cambodian’ art and painters were preoccupied with producing something modern and exclusively Cambodian.<sup>31</sup> In order to do this they looked to the landscape to secure something Cambodian and a focus on contemporary life allowed for a vision of the modern, which had been expressly forbidden during the Protectorate as it was deemed inauthentic.

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<sup>26</sup> As suggested by Nora Taylor in her exposition of competing historiographies in Southeast Asia given in a conference paper, ‘Cambodia as the Axis of the Southeast Asian Universe: Reflections on the Art Historiography of the Region’, *Contemporary Art In Cambodia: A Historical Inquiry*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, April 21, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Muan, ‘Haunted Scenes: Painting and History in Phnom Penh’, 191-197.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, questions of ‘national identity’ and a national aesthetic in relation to questions of temporality in terms of modernity and contemporaneity in Southeast Asian art and art history has been the topic of recent scholarly work.

See, Joan Kee, ‘Introduction Contemporary Southeast Asian Art’, *Third Text*, 25 (2011), 371–381; Flores, Patrick D, ‘Field Notes From Artworlds’, *Third Text*, 25 (2011), 383–394; Pamela Corey, ‘The Artist in the City: Contemporary Art as Urban Intervention in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and Phnom Penh, Cambodia’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cornell University, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Muan, ‘Haunted Scenes: Painting and History in Phnom Penh’, 23.

Interestingly, according to Muan's research, in the early 1960s rural scenes and images of traditional culture were the most popular subject matter for 'modern' art in urban Cambodia. The temples of Angkor were not heavily present, although the future prevalence of the temples was hinted at in the nostalgia of the paintings of the countryside at the exclusion of the modernity of the urban landscape of the city.<sup>32</sup>

This history of art education and development in Cambodia is recounted here to better situate the present day situation. Colonial art pedagogy, as embodied in Groslier's vision of Cambodian arts, left an indelible mark on the subsequent direction of formal arts education, whereby painting at easels using grid-lined photographs of standardised subject-matter became quintessentially Cambodian. The broader ideological framework surrounding the arts pedagogy rooted itself within the national psyche, as came to help constitute a national identity.

### **Returning to Ingrid Muan's "Haunted Scenes": The Bayon in Commercial Art in Cambodia Today**

The previous chapter gave a history of Cambodia in the twentieth century and the ruinous Khmer Rouge period, during which the majority of artists and intellectuals who had not already fled the country by 1975 were executed. In the aftermath of this period intense focus was placed upon the restoration of the temples of Angkor which were designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1992. Tim Winter has persuasively argued that while the EFEO provided invaluable assistance in this restoration, this involvement also led to a recovery of colonial modes of historiography, reworked via the lens of late twentieth-century world heritage.<sup>33</sup> The mid-1990s also marked the beginnings of discourses surrounding the rebirth of Cambodian arts, which were viewed as a key factor in developing the infrastructure of the decimated country. The 'recuperation' of Cambodian arts and the effect the legacy of colonial training in Phnom Penh and the Soviet-Eastern bloc in the 1980s has had upon artistic practices from the 1990s onwards has been comprehensively examined in a recent dissertation by art historian Pamela Corey.<sup>34</sup> Corey detects echoes of Groslier's rhetoric in discourses surrounding the place of culture in rebuilding Cambodia. By the early 1990s, as peace

<sup>32</sup> Muan, 'Citing Angkor: The "Cambodian Arts" in the Age of Restoration 1918-2000', 221.

<sup>33</sup> Winter, *Post-Conflict Heritage*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Corey, 'The Artist in the City: Contemporary Art as Urban Intervention in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and Phnom Penh, Cambodia', especially chapter 2.

slowly came to the country, so did international aid workers and after them a rapidly increasing influx of foreigners. The expectation of tourists was to find an art that represented a Cambodian-ness. Primarily this was in the form of the Angkorian temples or in representations of the genocide which were adequately recognisable to western audiences.

Colonial art pedagogies and the legacy of Angkor was the subject of Ingrid Muan's doctoral thesis, which argued that the onslaught of tourism presented further demands on art production in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. Muan noted that some of the most popular images in the late 1990s were large canvases of the temples during the legendary moment of their construction, copied from pictures specially commissioned for a 1960 *National Geographic* article.<sup>35</sup> Although copied using a grid system, Muan's research demonstrated how copying, paradoxically, allows for variation and imagination where 'a familiar vocabulary is used to produce never ending variations'.<sup>36</sup> These large canvases are still sold in commercial art stores and my own field research over the last three years has shown that painters catering to the tourist markets still adhere to the practice of copying from photographs or postcards divided into grids, yet artists also develop their own variations of style and subject matter.<sup>37</sup> This process continues to produce novel compositions which nevertheless maintain continuity with existing styles. A new style of representation will appear and, if it proves popular with other artists will co-opt this style into their own vocabulary. Some of these artists have studied at the Royal University of Fine Arts and others are self-taught or learn from a family member who graduated from the university.

It is the expanding tourist market for which many artists produce variations of the same themes.<sup>38</sup> In line with rising tourist numbers, the literal number of markets catering for tourists has grown, particularly in Siem Reap where, over the last five years, two new night markets have opened in addition to one which was already in business. More and more of the space in Psar Chas (Old Market, located in the touristic epicentre of the town) is dedicated to souvenirs and items for tourists and as of August 2013 there were six shops exclusively dedicated to paintings in the immediate vicinity

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<sup>35</sup> Muan, 'Haunted Scenes: Painting and History in Phnom Penh', 31-35; Robert W. Moore, 'Angkor, Jewel of the Jungle', in *National Geographic*, April, (1960).

<sup>36</sup> Muan, 'Haunted Scenes: Painting and History in Phnom Penh', 31-35.

<sup>37</sup> Informal interviews with artists between July-August 2011 and August-December 2013.

<sup>38</sup> According to the Ministry of Tourism tourist numbers increased by 17% between 2012 and 2013, when 4.2 million international visitors came to Cambodia.

of Psar Chas, not including the stalls within the markets themselves. Additionally more paintings are available for sale at popular temple sites. Each vendor stocks the work of between seven and nine individual artists, the majority of whom live in Siem Reap, or the vendors buy from wholesalers whose artists are based in Phnom Penh. In Phnom Penh commercial art is focused around Street 178, which runs along the northern edge of the National Museum and the Royal University of Fine Arts. A number of stalls in the markets of Psar Thmei (New Market) and Tuol Thompong Market (commonly known as “Russian Market”) also sell paintings orientated to the commercial market. From my many conversations with the vendors it is clear that their primary market is foreign tourists, although domestic tourists and long-term foreign visitors constituted a small portion of their revenue. The domestic, urban market appears equally enchanted with scenes of rural life and the temples of Angkor. Of course it is entirely predictable that popular paintings will include the Bayon, Angkor Wat, and rural scenes that present something uniquely “Cambodian”, and all gallery owners and market sellers interviewed agreed that paintings of Angkor Wat are more popular with domestic and foreigner buyers alike.<sup>39</sup> As one market stall owner at Psar Chas told me, ‘[tourists] like something that represents Siem Reap’ and this translates as an image of the temples.<sup>40</sup> She explained this is in contrast to domestic tourists, visiting Siem Reap from the provinces, who like to buy paintings of the Cambodian countryside, pastoral scenes of rice fields, traditional thatch huts and palm trees.

Paintings of Angkor Wat tend to show a view of the entire temple, often with the towers reflected in the two lotus-filled ponds in front on the main temple complex. Bright colours might be used, but there is little compositional divergence from the single-point perspective view of the temple. There is a much greater degree of variation in the paintings of the Bayon faces. Some artists told me they paint to the tourist demands, for example closing the eyes or adding the ‘lozenge’ or ‘third-eye’ as decoration. As many of the artists paint from postcards or photographs the final result may also depend upon the image used. Often the single faces are painted in a vivid tones, applied with a palette knife to give a fractured, textured surface. At other times, the faces bear a closer resemblance to their current grey and weathered state and sometimes vines frame the visage, redolent of the early photographs of Angkor Thom.

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<sup>39</sup> From interviews with market sellers, painters and wholesalers in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh from August 2011 – December 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with the stall owner, Siem Reap, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2013.

Accompanying the individual, brightly coloured paintings of the Bayon face are depictions of the face of the sculptures widely recognised as Jayavarman VII. Both are faces that instantly recall Cambodia and there is now a sense of equivalence between these two distinct faces in that they have both come to personify an abstracted notion of a historical period.

I suggest that this sense of equivalence may go some way to explain why some Bayon faces are painted with closed, meditative eyes, like those of the Jayavarman VII statues. One conversation I had with an artist questions the binary constructed between the open and closed eye.<sup>41</sup> S. Kheang is a fine artist with his own commercial gallery in Siem Reap. He failed to get into the Royal University of Fine Art because he could not afford to pay the exam ‘fees’ and instead worked as an assistant for an artist for five years and honed his techniques during this period. Kheang’s work incorporates much Angkorian imagery, especially the Bayon, which he admits is as much a result of market demands as anything else (fig. 66). The eyes of the Bayon in his paintings often appear to be closed, or are certainly not explicitly open. When I asked him about this he told me that the eyes are not closed or open, but somewhere between the two. Both open and closed and neither open nor closed. In meditation, he told me, the lids of the eyes are lowered, but not completely closed. He related this to the statues of Jayavarman VII in meditation – which also feature heavily in his work - and told me that he likes to use the eyes of a meditational Jayavarman VII as the eyes of the Bayon. At the intersection of these arrangements are composite paintings which feature face towers, a waterfall, Angkor Wat and doorways from other temples. I was told by artists who work in open studios along a back road to Angkor Park that the waterfall represents Phnom Kulen, Cambodia’s most sacred mountain and the site of Jayavarman II’s unification of the Khmer Empire in 802AD. The other temple details are usually identified with Banteay Srei temple. It is not surprising, given how heavily Angkor features in the landscape of contemporary Cambodia, that there is a desire to incorporate iconic symbols of Cambodia into one composition.

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with artist, 2011.



Figure 66. S. Kheang *The Bayon Temple*, undated. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

### **(Re-)Envisioning the Past as Future: The Bayon at the Turn of the Millennium.**

In addition to its popularity in commercial art, the Bayon also features heavily in ‘fine’ art, although the distinction between the two markets is made as a heuristic device rather than as a discrete categorisation. However, there is little doubt that the legacy of the last one hundred years has impacted upon artistic imperatives in both the commercial art spheres and the realms of ‘contemporary fine art’. For the purposes of this chapter I focus on paintings from an exhibition entitled *Visions of the Future*, which was conceived and curated by Ly Daravuth and Ingrid Muan, co-founders of the Reyum gallery and art school in Phnom Penh.<sup>42</sup> Reyum developed organically in response to the urgent need to recuperate culture in Cambodia and arguably the discussions they set in motion are still ongoing in Phnom Penh and Battambang today. Ly Daravuth was a child during the Khmer Rouge period and as a teenager found his way to a refugee camp on the Thai border. While there he took art lessons with a graduate from the Royal University of Fine Arts, before obtaining a visa to move to France in 1983, where he

<sup>42</sup> Ingrid Muan and Ly Daravuth, *Visions of the Future*, (Phnom Penh: Reyum Publishing, 2002).

later studied fine arts at La Sorbonne.<sup>43</sup> He returned to Cambodia in 1996 to teach at the University of Fine Arts, where he met Ingrid Muan, a doctoral student from Columbia University who was researching twentieth century Cambodian art. Despairing of the limited number of venue options for students and artists in the city, they decided to put on an exhibition to showcase the work of artists in Phnom Penh entitled *Hope: A Channel of Communication*. This exhibition brought together a host of painters who had survived the years of war. From the success of this show they put on several more exhibitions and soon founded their own gallery space called Reyum in 1999. Beyond putting on exhibitions, Reyum hosted seminars, artists' residences, performances, and worked to publish scholarly materials in French, English and crucially Khmer.

The *Visions of the Future* exhibition followed on from a show entitled *The Legacy of Absence: A Cambodian Story*, which had taken place at Reyum in 2000 and which was part of a global project instigated by the Legacy Foundation, an American organisation which works in countries that have suffered traumatic events. The Cambodian project began on the premise that the present moment is filled with the absence of those who were killed during the genocide and asked the artists to consider the 'inheritance of such absences'.<sup>44</sup> Despite concerns with staging a show with political content – Reyum was already a focus for the authorities - *The Legacy of Absence: A Cambodian Story* exhibition opened in 2000. All of the works varied in form but each confronted Cambodia's recent past, although each did so in a generic way, without a focus on personal narratives. Following the success of this exhibition the Reyum gallery and a group of artists - some of whom had participated in the 2000 exhibition - decided that the next one should be themed around 'the future'. In the catalogue of *Visions of the Future*, Muan and Ly outline the hope required to imagine a future, any future, but describe the exhibition as a 'melancholic affair'.<sup>45</sup>

There is a certain amount of nostalgia and uncertainty in the works, and concerns about corruption, modernisation, the loss of tradition, and the spectre of the genocide are tangible. The sense of nostalgia is understandable in this post-war context; a melancholic, aching desire to return to a remembered, but idealised past, to a time

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<sup>43</sup> William Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval. Artists on the World's Frontlines* (Oakland, CA: New Village Press, 2008), 57-60.

<sup>44</sup> Ingrid Muan and Ly Daravuth, *The Legacy of Absence*, (Phnom Penh: Reyum Publishing, 2000), 6.

<sup>45</sup> Muan and Ly, *Visions of the Future*, 2.

before.<sup>46</sup> Nostalgia is a multidimensional concept, yet Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw argue that in order to function, nostalgia requires a linear notion of time with no teleological destination; cyclical time is not conducive to nostalgia as there is a sense that the lost period will happen again.<sup>47</sup> However, despite the registers of repetition that an indigenous sense of time calls for, I suggest that the nostalgic turn in the post-war Cambodian context rests upon a sense of the irreparable loss of two historical moments, - the pre-war years between Independence and Sihanouk's disposal in 1970, which came to an unimaginably abrupt and violent end under the Khmer Rouge regime and the spectre of the Angkorian period, which had been explicitly conjured in pre-1970 Cambodia as the pinnacle of Khmer history - the despair at the cycle of history now falling into an abyss and the urgency of ensuring that one acquires the correct merit to be reborn when the world is once again on an upswing. In this sense, the nostalgia for the past also becomes a nostalgic longing for the future. Perhaps more prosaically, many artists in Cambodia were influenced by the nineteenth-century European sketches of Angkor, which themselves were characterised by a romanticism tinged with nostalgia.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ashley Thompson, 'Forgetting to Remember, Again: On Curatorial Practice and "Cambodian Art" in the Wake of Genocide.', *Diacritics*, 41 (2013), 82–109.

<sup>47</sup> Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw, 'The Dimensions of Nostalgia', in *The Imagined Past. History and Nostalgia*, ed. by Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp.2-3.

<sup>48</sup> I have come across a number of paintings in the commercial and 'fine' spheres which bear close resemblance to well-known nineteenth-century, European etchings of Angkor.

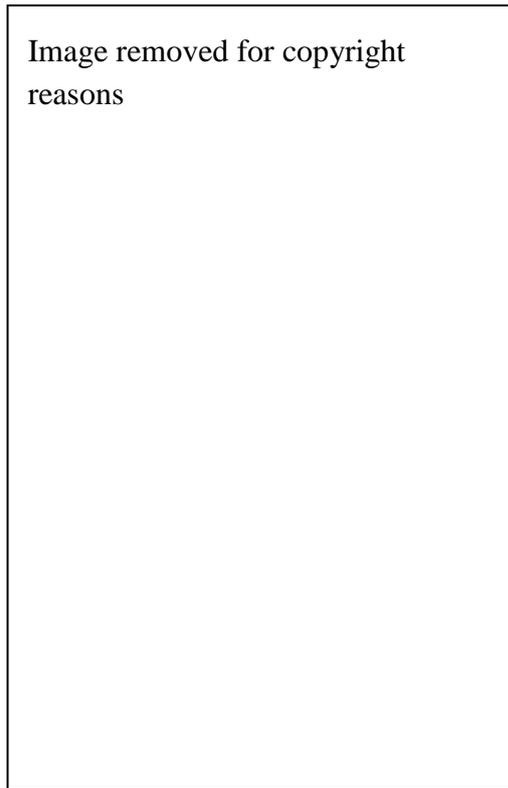


Figure 67. Som Sophon, *New Life*, (undated), oil of canvas, 80 X 120 cm.

The hesitation in imagining a hopeful future is evident in *New Life* by Som Sophon (fig. 67). The body of a woman breastfeeding has been given a Bayon face, which here appears to symbolise the achievements of Cambodia's ancestors, signifying the strength and glory of the past, which is passed down the generations via a maternal, rather than paternal, heritage. The benevolent head does not look down at the baby, its gaze remaining solidly fixed ahead as it has done for centuries. But the possibility of violence is ever-present. This ideal scene is being revealed to us from behind a black, blood stained cloth, which is being unzipped and drawn away. Yet this choice of zipping means that the action does not preclude the possibility of the cloth being closed again, and what is being revealed once again being concealed. Three other paintings make clear the intimate associations of Angkor, exemplified by the Bayon, tourism and hope (fig. 68). In *Khmer Artists of the Future*, *Hope for the Future* and *The Hope of the Bayon* the faces or the whole temple are juxtaposed with other symbols of tourism specific to Cambodia. Artist Som Sophon states in his artistic statement that he uses the Bayon precisely because he sees it as something that has withstood centuries of war yet still stands firm and embodied within the faces is hope.<sup>49</sup> In the catalogue interviews all

<sup>49</sup> Muan and Ly, *Visions of the Future*, 58.

the artists mention the four-face configuration as representing four popular Buddhist precepts or basic virtues; loving kindness, compassion, calmness and wisdom.<sup>50</sup>

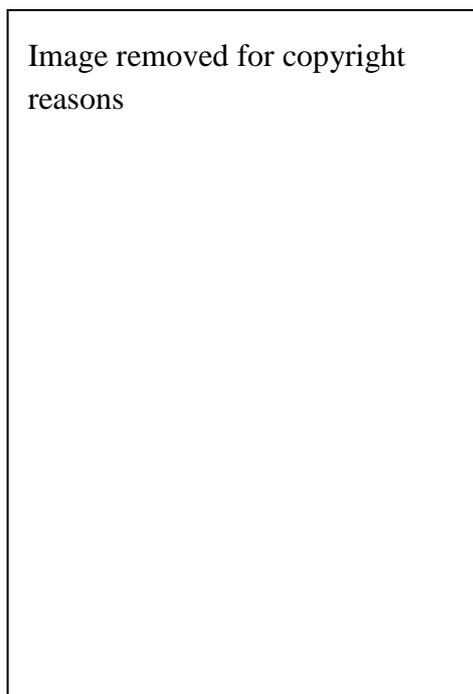


Figure 68. Chhoeun Rithy, *Khmer Artists of the Future*, (undated), oil on canvas,

Artist Khun Sovanrith uses the Bayon face towers in two paintings. In the first, *Hopes of the Young*, we find a face tower dominating the left side of the canvas (fig. 69). The eye appears to be open and there is serenity in the countenance. In the lower right hand corner two children stand on blocks of stone from the temple, the young boy raising his arms towards the sun. How are we to read the eyes of the Bayon? Are they impassive, meditative seeing nothing, or are they actively seeing and omnipresent. In contrast with this bright, light portrayal of the possibility and innocence of childhood, his second painting, *The Thoughts of the Elders*, is dark and fractured (fig. 70). The face towers are in identical positions but are barely distinguishable from the background. We cannot see their features, and there is a suggestion that they cannot see us, having been obscured and rendered blind. The artist states that,

when older people think of the future, they only see things unclearly. It seems like a dark picture which is virtually illegible and incomprehensible[...] I want to show that the future for older people is uncertain, not clear, hard to understand [...] hope and hopelessness mingle uncertainly and everything is as if covered with a black cloth.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Muan and Ly, *Visions of the Future*.

<sup>51</sup> Muan and Ly, *Visions of the Future*, 10.

It could be suggested that it is the old people who are embodied in the temple, however I argue that the works play with the seeing/being seen relationship which is inherent in the face towers; here it is the older generation that cannot see the Bayon. Their inability to see the temple suggests that the face towers too are unable to see the older people and this mutual blindness is only visible to an external viewer. This is in contrast with the potential visual exchange between the Bayon and the younger generation. Indeed, the young girl in profile is at eye-level with a face, their outlines mirroring each other. The ability to see and be seen by the Bayon becomes a metaphor for the ability to envisage a brighter future, the face acting as a visual anchor for conceptions of past and future.

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Figure 69. Khun Sovanrith, *Hope of the Young*, (undated), oil on canvas.

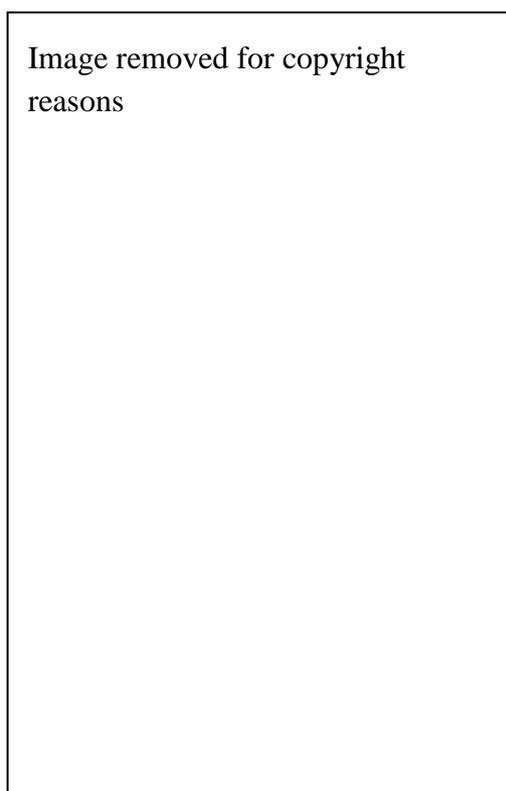


Figure 70. Khun Sovanrith, *The Thoughts of the Elders*, (undated), oil on canvas.

In this context, the enduring faces of the Bayon represent at once the great past of the Angkorian Empire and the possibility for a brighter future. The four-faced configuration becomes important as it can be read as being used historically as a consolidation of kingship and, as Ashley Thompson suggests, can be seen in certain historical contexts in Cambodia, to evoke the future Buddha Maitreya. This possible reading of the four faces brings with it a particular notion of cyclical time, pertinent in thinking about reconstruction, as the past is evoked as a means to recreate a glorious future. It is believed that Maitreya is currently residing in the Tuṣita heaven awaiting rebirth when a moral king renounces his throne to follow the path of enlightenment. This will be a time when the world has fallen into chaos and the teachings of the Buddha have been forgotten. The Buddhist universe is one which oscillates between peaks and declines.<sup>52</sup> When Maitreya arrives it is said that he will be given the robe that once belonged to the previous Buddha. Thompson sees this story as illustrating ‘renewal, renaissance and revolution, whereby Maitreya is ‘inscribed in a precise future and is experienced in the present time as an historical event [...] still to come’.<sup>53</sup> If these four faces invoke the future Buddha Maitreya, then their reworking in the Reyum

<sup>52</sup> Jan Nattier, ‘The Meanings of the Maitreya Myth. A Topological Analysis’, in *Maitreya, The Future Buddha*, 23.

<sup>53</sup> Thompson, ‘The Future of Cambodia’s Past’, 14-16.

exhibition is indicative of looking to a hopeful future which is at once historical, having already been foretold. Here the meaning of the four-faces as being associated with Maitreya collapses into a reading of the face towers as being symbolic of the protective gaze of the king, insofar as the king and the Buddha (or Buddha-to-be) cannot conceptually or historically be divorced from one another. The four faces of the Bayon become a specific Cambodian trope, and serve in this exhibition to conflate/disrupt temporal distinctions between past and future. I argue that these citations of the face call upon the benevolent gaze of the Buddha and/or king and recall the historical moment defined by European historiography as the pinnacle of Khmer political and cultural achievement.

## **Conclusion**

Angkor's place in the visual vocabulary of Cambodia was primarily secured via the intertwined discourses of colonialism and nationalism. One hesitates to even speculate on the cultural developments which may have occurred had Cambodia's recent history been otherwise, but in the aftermath of a genocidal regime which threatened to eradicate culture it is unsurprising that, in the redevelopment of the country after the war, colonial discourses were firmly rewoven back into the fabric of the visual economy of Cambodia and that Angkor returned as a poignant symbol of Cambodian identity. This appearance of the Bayon is in continuation with Middle Period citations, but additionally represents a new form of historical and visual citation in the modern period, which is predicated on colonial pedagogies, in which Angkor was a primary source material. In this way the Bayon as a visual icon straddles Chatterjee's conceptions of the material and the spiritual spheres of nation-building apparatus by being figured from the 'outside' as a suitably Khmer subject-matter designated by colonial authorities, and from the 'inside' by virtue of the four-faces in Cambodian history. Although Angkor Wat is the chief national symbol, I suggest that its present-day status has the greater part of its heritage in French colonial structures of defining 'Cambodia', whereas the Bayon is better able to circumvent the colonial in order to become more overtly an 'inner', Cambodian symbol of cultural identity and history.

The symbolic weight of the Bayon faces in the contemporary visual vocabulary is intertwined with the meanings of the four-faces as they were conceived in the Middle Period, meaning the faces oscillate between recalling a moment of a legendary Buddhist

monarch at the height of the Khmer empire and a call for the hopeful future already predicted in the past via the cult of Maitreya. The faces of the Bayon act as a means of bridging the reign of Jayavarman VII - when Cambodia was reconstituted after invasion - and the present time, a need born out of the upheavals and uncertainties in Cambodia in the latter half of the twentieth century. The faces considered as a portrait of the king - an embodiment of protection and compassion - and with a view to their possible connection to Maitreya, suggests that perhaps the reworking of these specific faces in the visual landscape of contemporary Cambodia is a way of overcoming the temporal separation between the perceived greatness of the Angkorian period and today. Moreover, with its potential for vision, the Bayon acts as a symbolic protector and saviour of Cambodia's sovereignty. The legendary and triumphant history surrounding the construction of the Bayon along with its very specific, yet ambiguous iconography goes some way in explaining the return to the Bayon as an icon in the visual idiom of Cambodia.



## Conclusion

### I: Conclusions: Buddhism(s), Portraiture and Images of Kings

This thesis began with three key themes in mind: faces, kingship, and their Buddhist context. The previous chapters examined the philosophical contours of portraiture and the historiography of the motif of the face as it operated as the visible locus of Buddhist kingship in the Cambodian milieu. The thrust of the research was an exploration of the wider aesthetic and phenomenological implications of the monumental, open-eyed faces of the Bayon temple and the multivalency of interpretations the faces have accrued synchronically and diachronically. Despite the meticulous scholarly attention given to the Bayon and its faces, there has been a dearth of work which considers the phenomenology of the face or their subsequent citations in Cambodian history. Existing scholarship on the Bayon pays particular consideration to the internal developments of the Angkorian period, which risks mirroring modes of early colonial historiography, based upon linear historical developments and the study of style. In the most recent monograph on the temple, the art history was focused on identifying a precise identity to the faces<sup>1</sup>, grounded in iconographic studies and religious textual material. This rich illuminating study was nonetheless based on the premise that the faces must have had a singular identity at their origin. This thesis marked a departure from studies of stylistic developments and precise identifications, marking a return to the multiple identifications made by Mus and Cœdès. My research gives focus to select Cambodian imagery and intimately associated Sanskritic textual sources, with comparative references to western associations of the face. In this way the spheres of the material and the theoretical are incorporated, in alignment with the Bayon itself, a structure which tested the theoretical limits of the material culture of Angkor. I concluded that multiple readings of the faces are not only called for by their ambiguous iconography, but they are also in accord with Indic theology.

In order to think through the face and images it was integral to think about portraiture, in the sense that ‘portrait’ is the term given to images of faces relating to individuals. It was necessary to examine the Bayon faces within the wider artistic context of the period, with a focus on the statues of king Jayavarman VII in the pose of a devotee, as this also constituted a remarkable departure from earlier icono-plastic

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<sup>1</sup> Sharrock, ‘The Mystery of the Face Towers’.

forms because it located king apart from the divine. Although the foremost scholars of Angkor, including Cœdès, Mus, and Boisselier, considered the portrait, they did so against the backdrop of a broader academic denial of indigenous traditions of portraiture in Indic cultures.<sup>2</sup> The semiotic turn in art history meant that ideas of portraiture altered and this opened the space for scholars such as Dehejia and Kaimal to consider the nature of Indic portraiture.<sup>3</sup> More recently Lefèvre published a monograph on early Indian portraiture, in which he gives a gloss of Angkorian portraiture.<sup>4</sup> My own work develops and complements these studies, by focusing upon the Angkorian context, as well as asking broader questions of Buddhist image-making. From the perspective of a definition of a portrait as something which is indexically symbolic, I argued that one interpretation of the face towers of the Bayon, among many valid interpretations, is that they are a portrait of the king, in a triad of portraits which display different facets of Buddhist kingship. This understanding of the portrait is based upon the precise Buddhist notions of the relationship between the image and the referent, in which I suggest that little distinction is made at all, at the levels of both devotional practice and textual theory. My research into the relationship between the statue and the body in the Buddhist context drew out questions as to the primacy of *seeing* the body of the Buddha. It also highlighted the levels of presence and physicality at work in the bodies of the Buddha, because the statue acts very much as his presence, by being considered equal to the physical body, but the image also signals his absence, as a site of nothingness. In the Buddhist context representation and presence are radically conflated and I suggested that such a relationship between the image and its referent is at the crux of the question of portraiture in the Cambodian context.

The portrait interpretation of the face towers is not made to the exclusion of the manifold interpretations which their ambiguous iconography calls for. The iconographical ambiguity of the Bayon face towers is something of an anomaly in Indic figurative art; if the faces were intended to belong *exclusively* to this deity or that deity then this would have been clearly articulated in their iconographic attributes and/or in the epigraphy. Such ambiguity in the appearance of the faces rendered necessary an interrogation of the face in and of itself and an account of the political technology at

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<sup>2</sup> Cœdès, 'Les Statues Du Roi Khmèr Jayavarman VII'; Cœdès, 'Le Portrait Dans L'art Khmer'; Mus, 'Le Sourire d'Angkor'; Boisselier, 'Réflexions Sur L'art Du Règne de Jayavarman VII'.

<sup>3</sup> Dehejia, 'The Very Idea of a Portrait'; Kaimal, 'The Problem of Portraiture in South India, circa 870-970 A.D.'; Kaimal, 'The Problem of Portraiture in South India, Circa 970-1000 A.D.'.

<sup>4</sup> Lefèvre, *Portraiture in Early India. Between Transience and Eternity*.

play in the face towers. Departing from a Foucauldian panoptical analysis, I argued that this technology rests upon the concepts of radiation and omnipresence, visually represented by the visages facing in the cardinal directions. Although these themes were already established in Angkorian epigraphy, the Bayon brings together a number of distinct components, predicated on the figurative form and an expansion of the possibilities of the portrait. More than simply the sum of its parts, the Bayon and its various interpretations are in accord with the Indic concept of the compatibility of the ‘one and many’. This is at the very crux of the enterprise of image-making, and indeed divinity, within a Brahmānic-Buddhist complex.

European encounters with the face towers of the Bayon were of a different order than the “discovery” of the other temples of Angkor, by virtue of the uncanny appearance of the human face. Unravelling the ‘mystery’ of these faces has been at the crux of the majority, if not all, academic work on the Bayon. To this end, the thesis also questioned the differing historiographic registers at work in the ongoing citation of the face in the evolving Cambodian politico-religious context. In order to consider the mechanisms behind the citations of the Bayon faces in contemporary Cambodia, I argued that Cambodian history functions on two distinct, but interrelated registers: the colonial and the indigenous. The colonial institution of the EFEO, alongside art education policies, European literary and visual representations of the temples, and colonial exhibitions, worked together to ‘reintroduce’ Angkor to Cambodia. Angkorian names and dates had not been precisely documented in the Cambodian historical record and this lacuna in the indigenous record enhanced colonial claims that the site had been literally and symbolically forgotten by the Khmer. Yet Angkor had not been wholly abandoned in the indigenous historical record. The four-faces became a visual trope for Buddhist kingship in the Middle Period, expressing a peculiarly Theravāda Buddhist conception of history, embodied in the predestined history of individual Buddhas throughout history, who nonetheless each replicate the biographies of earlier epochs. This complicates the narrative that Angkor was ‘reintroduced’ by French interventions in Indochina.

The colonial and indigenous historical strands came together in the twentieth century, with citations of the four-faces made in continuity with the Middle period yet also, for the first time, as explicit citations of the Bayon *as* Bayon, which has its roots in colonial institutions. While the notion that the French ‘discovered’ Angkor is rightly

criticised in the existing body of scholarship, it is nevertheless done so with little sensitivity to the implications of what was already happening in Cambodian historiography before the French arrived, which risks the erroneous deductions that the citations of the Bayon in recent times are predicated only on the colonial reintroduction of Jayavarman VII. In the contemporary visual landscape, the face of the king - precisely who this 'king' is not of importance - is (re)presented in the Bayon faces, even as the face towers represent Prohm and the Buddhist virtues. Indeed, I argued that it is precisely these multiple identifications which give these Bayon faces their potency and allow them to represent a cyclical temporality. I proposed that the arrival of the photographic royal portrait added a new dimension to the visual presence of the king. In this manner, photographic portraits of King Sihanouk were in accord with the already existing paradigm.

## **II: Faces of Cambodia: Closing Remarks**

In examining the Bayon faces and their explicit reappearances in visual culture from the nineteenth century onwards, this thesis has taken the form of a montage of sorts, which was necessary in order to investigate how the faces have been employed and theorised, at a scholarly level and a phenomenological level. This breadth of study has allowed my research to go beyond examining the Bayon from within the internal logic of Angkor and enabled the temple to be situated in a broader historical, cultural and theoretical context. Nevertheless, the trans-historical nature of my research proved daunting at times and it has meant that, on occasion, granular contextual work has been sacrificed. For example, in order to focus attention on the specific citation of the Bayon in the visual vocabulary of post-colonial Cambodia, it was necessary to circumvent deeper considerations of the precise mechanisms by which Angkor was taken up by Cambodians, including Sihanouk, in the twentieth century. Furthermore, while I consider the face of the king in a number of material instantiations – stone, paint, and photography – further investigation into the differences in materiality could have further enriched this work.

An additional area of study that this thesis was unable to thoroughly engage with is *darśana* – ritual practices of seeing – within a Buddhist Cambodian context, which has received scant attention thus far in scholarship. My thesis focussed upon faces of the king in representation, but further consideration could be given to the literal face of the

king, in the context of thinking about *darśana* and vision. Another avenue of study, concomitant with this thesis, is the precise use of the four-faces on stūpa across Cambodia in the last century, either with the narrower facial features of the Middle Period or as explicit citations of the Bayon faces. Moreover, this thesis concentrated on images of kings and divinities, yet there is a need to further consider Buddhist monk and donor portraits in the Southeast Asian field. My own initial field research demonstrates that the conventions of representation appear to alter between images of Buddhas, kings, monks and donors and certainly the place of the monk portrait, in sculptural, photographic and painted forms, warrants closer investigation in Cambodia. It is hoped that by mapping the contours of portraiture and historiography in Cambodia, this thesis has provided a useful point of departure for such studies in the future.

In summary, this thesis took the Bayon faces as an object of study, because they act as an intriguing material manifestation of (divine) kingship, expressed through an exploitation of the face and the portrait. Visual expressions of power and kingship at Angkor are transposed into demonstrations of nation-hood, via a complex entanglement of historical citations, the legacy of French colonial scholarship, and domestic political imperatives. The multiplicity of meanings the Bayon faces have accrued in the historical palimpsest means that they now function as a multivalent national icon of Cambodia. Able to be taken up in differing religio-cultural moments, the Bayon face appears to transcend the temporal, disrupting distinctions between past, present and future, gesturing towards an ever-changing present.

## Glossary

**Apsara** - celestial nymph.

**Asura** – a demon or antithesis of a god.

**Avalokiteśvara** – also known as Lokeśvara in Cambodia. The bodhisattva of compassion, protecting devotees from danger. Takes on many iconographical forms.

**Baray** – made-man body of water at Angkor, constructed with raised dykes.

**Bodhisattva** – one who has achieved enlightenment but who, out of compassion, postpones their passing into nirvana in order to assist all other beings achieve salvation. Also used to refer to the Buddha prior to his enlightenment.

**Brahmānism** – religion of ancient Indian which evolved from the Vedas. Closely associated with Hinduism which succeeded it, however Hinduism is characterised by the attention given to individual deities and the central importance of devotional worship (bhakti).

**Cakravartin** – universal monarch.

**Darśan** - is the term for an act of devotional Hindu worship, whereby a devotee receives a blessing through the eyes from the deity present within an image. As well as the devotee seeing the deity, the deity also sees the devotee.

**Deva** - god

**Dharma** – commonly translated as the law or doctrine of Buddhism, although there is no single adequate translation for the term. The term is complex and its meaning extends to the teachings of the Buddha, Buddhist ethics and morality, rules of cosmic law and order. The Sanskrit root *dhṛ* means "to hold, maintain, keep".

**Gopura** – Sanskrit term meaning gateway in the enclosing walls of temples.

**Harmikā** – the square portion of a stūpa.

**Liṅga** – a phallic emblem representing Śiva.

**Mahāyāna** – ‘the greater vehicle’. A school (or schools) of Buddhism which features many rituals and deities, with a focus on the bodhisattva.

**Maitreya** – the future Buddha in both Mahāyāna and Theravāda

**Maṇḍala** – a circular form, usually refers to a sacred diagram used as a support in meditation, but can be applied to political or religious formations.

**Mount Meru** – the mountain which at the centre of Indian cosmology, around which the continents and oceans form. Understood as the axis of the cosmos.

**Mudrā** – a hand gesture.

**Mukhaliṅga** – a liṅga with one or four faces of Śiva around the shaft, which represent emanations of various aspects of Śiva.

**Mūrti** - defined in Sanskrit as ‘a solid body’, ‘material form’ and ‘a manifestation, incarnation, embodiment’. Usually refers to the deity embodied in material form, meaning that the *mūrti* is not merely a likeness of a deity, but is an actual material embodiment of the divine; the deity with form.

**Nāga** – a serpent-deity.

**Nirvāṇa** – literally ‘extinction’. The cessation of desire, aversion, and delusion which cause suffering. Freedom from cycle of rebirth. The state achieved by the Buddha after his enlightenment.

**Parinirvāṇa** – nirvana after death, literally nirvana without remainder (i.e. the physical body).

**Prasat** - tower

**Puruṣa** – ‘man’. According to the Vedas the different body parts of this “cosmic man” correspond to objects in the universe as well as to the distinct castes of India. The puruṣa is aligned with the Ātman, the Self beyond all phenomena, or that which ‘remains when everything that is not self is eliminated’.

**Stūpa** – an earth mound built to commemorate a dead king. Taken up in Buddhism to represent the deceased Buddha, after his parinirvāṇa, now built across the Buddhist world from stone, metal or brick. The stūpa can act as an aniconic symbol, or an emblematic body of the Buddha. Iconographically the base of the architectural stūpa represents the Buddha’s legs in lotus position, or alternatively the Buddha Throne; the dome is the torso and the *harmikā* is the head. Although normatively understood as a funeral monument the stūpa can also be understood as symbolic of renewal – like a womb – as it associated with the coming of the future Buddha Maitreya.

**Tantric** – refers to either the practitioner or practice of tantra. Tantric schools exist in Buddhism and Hinduism and are characterised by esoteric and sometimes unorthodox practices, passed on in a master-pupil relationship.

**Theravāda** – literally “the Teaching of the Elders”. A more conservative school of Buddhism, with more focus given to individual salvation. Practiced in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Cambodia today.

**Trimūrti** – literally three forms, or three *mūrti*. In Brahmanism it refers to Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva who personify creation, maintenance and destruction respectively.

**Vihara** or **vihear** - central worship hall of a wat.

**Wat** – The Khmer Buddhist monastery complex. From the Old Khmer meaning “to enclose” or “to be enclosed”

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*Crepuscule*, dir. by Norodom Sihanouk, (Khemara Pictures, 1969)