

Garuḍa, Vajrapāṇi and religious change in Jayavarman VII's Angkor

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Ancient Cambodia turned definitively to state Buddhism under King Jayavarman VII at the end of the twelfth century, after four centuries of state Śaivism. This paper explores the motivation behind this momentous change and tries to establish the means by which it was achieved. It uncovers signs of a very large, politically motivated campaign of tantric Buddhist initiations that required a significant overhaul of the king's temples and the creation of a new series of sacred icons.

Since the 1920s, when French scholars discovered, in astonishment, that King Jayavarman VII's (r.1182–c.1218) great state temple, the Bayon, was originally Buddhist, there has been little work on how this king achieved the momentous shift of the ancient Khmers from four centuries of state Śaivism to state Buddhism. As the only texts from the period are a number of temple inscriptions, we are obliged to complement our search for clues to Jayavarman's imperial politico-religious agenda with close study of the decoration of his temples; and here, as Jean Boisselier says, even minor changes in form, size and motif can reveal messages of political and cosmological import:

To accord only a decorative role to all these suparnas [eagles, Garuḍas], particularly in the Bayon period, when the smallest scroll of foliage can recount so much history, would be to misunderstand the meaning of Khmer decorative sculpture.¹

This paper takes up the invitation to further research that Boisselier made in this pioneering paper of 1950² and looks at changes in icons and architecture to address the question of how the king achieved the historical turn to Buddhism; it argues that there

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1 Jean Boisselier, 'Garuḍa dans l'art khmèr', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 44 (1950): 57. (My translation, as are all others from French.)

2 Boisselier said the Garuḍa in the Bayon style were undoubtedly Buddhist but their relations with *nāga* raised questions, and the hypotheses he advanced should not be taken as solutions but as '*instruments de recherche*'; *ibid.*, p. 86.

are many overlooked signs in the sacred art that support Boisselier's tentative iconic observations and that point to a sustained campaign to achieve political legitimisation by imposing the Buddhist state.

The change in Jayavarman's Garuḍa icon that Boisselier detected, along with the widespread deployment of the new model around consecration platforms, when seen alongside other late changes in Jayavarman's temples, are found to signal a major religious event. The new icon points to an important background role in the new state Buddhism for the warrior Bodhisattva of Tantrism, Vajrapāṇi ('thunderbolt-in-hand'), as the protector of all who turn to the Buddha. The deployment of this Garuḍa/Vajrapāṇi icon is then seen to align with both the appearance in the material record of a dozen bronze consecration conches embossed with the tantric Buddhist supreme deity Hevajra, and with the addition of large new sanctuaries in the king's existing temples that are emblazoned with a striking new dancing goddess motif. It is proposed that the sanctuaries were established to undertake large-scale tantric Buddhist initiations. Together, these and other overlooked iconic pointers are seen to disclose a well-planned and sustained campaign to get at least the ancient Khmer elite to accept the historical shift to state Buddhism.

Temples as the powerbase and the archives of the regime

The drive behind erecting temples on earth for the gods was to align the human state with cosmic forces capable of conferring legitimacy and power; political expediency could thus invoke religious authority and supernatural power. The temples became, as Davidson puts it, 'testaments to royal legitimacy' and the 'archives of a ruling house'.³ Jayavarman VII, a gifted communicator, was quick to exploit this means of projecting his regime's legitimacy and its new cosmic alignment with the Buddhas. In the tradition set by his own Mahīdharapura dynasty,⁴ which established itself in the erection of the large tantric Buddhist-dominated temple complex at Phimai (modern northeast Thailand) between 1080 and 1107, the principal vehicle Jayavarman chose for conveying his regnal strategy was a series of large, walled temple complexes

3 R. Davidson: 'In erecting the new temple complexes, kings became patrons to the new divinities that commanded the areas under the rulers' political control. Thus the new temples satisfied many functions. They became testaments to royal legitimacy, with the rulers using the temple walls as a *tabula rasa* for the epigraphs that communicated royal piety, regal decisions on legal matters, imperial conquests, formal alliances with other houses, and a host of matters rendering them archives of a ruling house.' Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian esoteric Buddhism: A Social history of the Tantric movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 73.

4 Claude Jacques has recently questioned George Coedès' inclusion of Jayavarman VII in the 'Mahidharapura dynasty' on the grounds that Jayavarman was raised in the unidentified city of Jayādityapura and probably based his claim to the throne on the august antecedents of his mother Jayarājacūḍāmaṇi, queen of Jayadityapura. (C. Jacques, 'The Historical development of Khmer culture from the death of Suryavarman II to the 16th century', in *Bayon, New Perspectives*, ed. Joyce Clarke (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), p. 32). However, despite the undoubted importance of the maternal line in Khmer genealogy, we know that Jayavarman VII's father, paternal grandfather and paternal great grandmother (sister of Jayavarman VI) came from Mahīdharapura (also yet to be located). I therefore find that Coedès' use of the term 'Mahīdharapura dynasty' remains a legitimate designator for the preponderantly Buddhist northern Khmers who, when Jayavarman VII and Indravarman II are included, ruled Angkor from 1080 to 1270 (this is not invalidated by the possibility we consider later that there was a hiatus during the obscure reigns of Yasovarman II and Tribhuvanādityavarman, whose genealogies are unknown).

designed to regroup the capital's population under Buddhist administrations. Jayavarman VII took power by force in 1182⁵ 'to save the land heavy with crimes'⁶ following a period when the Khmers were split into competing factions,⁷ suffered a Cham incursion and regicide and underwent an embattled five-year interregnum. Jayavarman immediately marshalled Angkor's quarrying, transport, engineering, masonry and carving resources in a building programme that was to double the city's temple population within a generation. He erected more sandstone than all his predecessors combined and turned the royal sculpting workshops into a strategic asset of the realm.

The scale and intensity of the building programme have not however made its purpose a matter of easy modern consensus; even the transition to state Buddhism was not identified until the 1920s, when Coedès and Stern, elaborating on Parmentier's accidental discovery of a built-over Bodhisattva Lokeśvara, dislodged the earlier consensus for seeing the Bayon as a ninth-century Brahmanical foundation.⁸ And the simplistic motivation offered most frequently for the scale of the programme – Jayavarman's megalomania⁹ – is only being contested now.¹⁰

5 The traditional date of Jayavarman's coronation (1181) has recently been modified to 1182 by Sanskrit scholars in a corrected reading of the *śaka* year in an inscription. Refer to Michael Vickery, 'Introduction', in *Bayon, New perspectives*, ed. Joyce Clarke, p. 13 n8.

6 This is Coedès' translation of the Phimeanakas inscription (K.485 C v.28), written by the king's Sanskritist wife Indradevī (George Coedès, 'Inscription du Bayon K.470', *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. III (Hanoi: EFEO, 1942): 177).

7 The Phimeanakas stela says the reign preceding Jayavarman's was marred by multiple parasols being raised by competing monarchs: 'Under the preceding reign, the earth, although shaded by numerous parasols, suffered from extreme heat; under his [Jayavarman VII's] reign, when there was only one parasol, the earth was, strangely, released from all suffering.' (K.485 A v.51/2, Coedès, 'Inscription du Bayon K.470', 387). Michael Vickery, in his Introduction to *Bayon, New Perspectives*, commends Claude Jacques' recent characterisation of this period of internal strife, intensified by a swirling mix of hostile Khmer-Cham alliances:

'Concerning the long, but poorly understood sojourn of Jayavarman in Champa, probably from the 1150s or 1160s, Jacques insists that both Champa and Cambodia were "divided into several more or less important kingdoms", and that conflicts involved alliances of Cham and Khmer fighting other alliances of Cham and Khmer ... This is a welcome innovation in the study of this difficult period.' (Vickery, 'Introduction', in *Bayon*, p. 24.)

8 The quandary the discovery posed is well illustrated in Louis Finot's seminal 1925 paper on Lokeśvara in which he records the presence of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas at Angkor Thom, Tà Prohm, Neak Pean, Tan Neï, Ta Som, Bantéay Chmar as well as in the Bayon, in what he still takes to be the late ninth-century capital of the Śaiva king Yasovarman I: 'This conclusion [that Angkor Thom was ... a Buddhist city dedicated to Lokeśvara] raises complex historical problems, which we cannot address here.' (Louis Finot, 'Lokesvara en Indochine', in *Études asiatiques: Publiées à l'occasion du vingt-cinquième anniversaire de française d'Extrême-Orient par ses membres et ses collaborateurs* (Paris: I EFEO, 1925), p. 247).

9 Coedès' view was: 'What is sure is that he left the country exhausted by his megalomania and thenceforth powerless to resist the attacks of his young and turbulent neighbour to the west.' George Coedès, *Pour mieux comprendre Angkor* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1925), p. 205. Philippe Stern was among the first to use this word: 'The buildings in the style of the Bayon are those most strongly marked, in their dimensions, number and poor quality execution, by a sort of artistic megalomania and desire to astonish ...' Philippe Stern, *Le Bayon d'Angkor et l'évolution de l'art khmer: Étude et discussion de la chronologie des monuments khmers* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuther, 1927), p. 182.

10 See, for example, Christine Hawixbrock, 'Jayavarman VII ou le renouveau d'Angkor, entre tradition et modernité', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 85 (1998): 64; and Jacques, 'The Historical development of Khmer culture from the death of Suryavarman II to the 16th century', p. 40: 'Apart from

One obstacle to understanding the temples is the damage they sustained in an iconoclastic campaign apparently conducted by one of Jayavarman VII's Brahmanical successors, when key historical evidence was surely destroyed. Another barrier to understanding the psychology of Jayavarman VII's temple construction effort is that there seems to be too little awareness of the precarious position the Khmer Buddhists endured through long periods of their history, before the twelfth century. The plight of the oppressed is often only traduced by silence in the historical record, and the silences of the Khmer Buddhists have not been tracked. Khmer sacred art and inscriptions show us that the Khmers had been only marginally Buddhist until Jayavarman VII ascended the throne. Buddhism flowered as a minority faith at certain times from at least the fifth century, but it was suppressed in the late seventh century and thereafter had to survive for substantial periods without royal patronage.

History of Khmer Buddhism

Because of the historical importance of the turn to Buddhism under Jayavarman VII, it is worth sketching here the little-known history of the Khmer Buddhists. The Buddhists flourished and then ran into crisis in the seventh century. In the mid-seventh century, Punyodaya, one of the early Indian Tantric Buddhist scholars to travel to China, spent 15 years among the Buddhist community of pre-Angkorian 'Zhenla' on a Chinese imperial mission to acquire Khmer expertise in medicinal herbs.¹¹ But when Chinese Buddhist scholar Yijing travelled through Zhenla at the end of the seventh century, he reported that Buddhism had entered the Khmer territory after Hinduism and fluoresced alongside it until, a few years before his visit, the Buddhist monks were expelled or killed by 'a wicked king'.¹² Nancy Dowling's study of a series of large standing Buddhas in stone and wood in the Phnom Penh Museum concludes that they were all made between 610 and 665 CE.¹³ The year 665 CE was the date of the last seventh-century Buddhist inscription, at Wat Prei Var.¹⁴ Dowling noted that her findings appeared to support Yijing's report of what befell this Buddhist community. And Yijing's report of the suppression of the Khmer Buddhists is borne out by a century-long gap from 665 to 791 in the mainstream Khmer Buddhist material record, when there is no trace of any Khmer Buddhist icon, inscription, temple or *ashram* (it should be noted that in the non-Khmer world the Mahāyāna Punyodaya belonged to was making great advances in this period in western India, Pāla India, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Tang China, northern Champa, peninsular pre-Thailand and at Borobudur in Śrīvijaya). At the end of this undoubtedly bleak period for the Khmer Buddhists, Jayavarman II (r.c.802–835) founded the Śaiva state in the Angkor region in 802 and ushered in 260 years of monarchs erecting Śaiva state temples, culminating in the Baphuon temple of

the eulogies contained in the inscriptions, it is sufficient to say that Jayavarman VII was a king generally honoured in the same fashion as all Khmer kings, with no special "megalomania".

11 Lin Li-Kouang, 'Punyodaya (N'ati), un propagateur du Tantrisme en Chine et au Cambodge à l'époque de Hsüan-Tsang', *Journal Asiatique* (July–Sept. 1935): 83–100.

12 Yijing, *A Record of the Buddhist religion as practised in India and the Malay archipelago (A.D. 671–695)*, trans. J. Takakusu (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), p. 12.

13 N. Dowling, 'New light on early Cambodian Buddhism', *Journal of the Siam Society*, 88 (2000): 122–55.

14 Coedès, 'La stèle de Tep Pranam, Cambodge', *Journal Asiatique* (Mar.–Apr. 1908): 207 n1.

Udayādityavarman II. It is just possible, however, that Jayavarman II included the Buddhists in the Khmer alliance he formed against an external foe identified only as 'Javā', and from whom he asserted permanent Khmer independence. Close reading of the Wat Sithor inscription (K.111) of c.990 from near Phnom Penh, and of the Sab Bāk, Prakhon Chai, Nakhon Ratchasima province inscription (K.1158) dated 1066, shows that an (otherwise unknown) tantric Buddhist guru named Śrī Satyavarman (identified in both inscriptions) erected icons of Vajrapāṇi and Lokeśvara for Khmer Buddhist communities in what may have been the first Buddhist recovery from the seventh-century suppression. Neither inscription gives him a date but the Khmer language part of K.1158 says 'Kamsteṅ Śrī Satyavarman, who obtained siddhi, had originally erected them ... above Abhayagiri, to prevent Javā from invading the Khmer country.'¹⁵ Śrī Satyavarman's purpose here is so close to the political banner of Jayavarman II that we cannot do better, on this evidence, than consider them to have been contemporaries. During Jayavarman II's rise to power, one fragment of a Lokeśvara inscription from what Finot calls 'un sanctuaire sans importance'¹⁶ is dated 791 and reused in the doorjamb of eleventh-century Prasat Ta Kam in Siemreap province. The first evidence of the Buddhists being active again after Jayavarman II's time comes after another long break in the record when Yośavarman I began building Yaśodhapura (Angkor) and constructed the Saugatāśrama for what Coedès, who translated the 'Stela of Tep Pranam', called 'a small Buddhist community' at the end of the ninth century.¹⁷ The stela opens with praise for Śiva, reproduces many lines from other Brahmanical stelae, places the Buddhists firmly in the second division with this concession: 'Let us honour, a little less than the Brahmin who possesses the *vidyā*, the *ācārya* versed in Buddhist doctrine and grammar ...' and closes with the king's promise that those who support the *ashram* will go (not to the Buddha's but) to Śiva's abode. One is left with the impression that the *ashram* was a Buddhist island in a Śaiva sea. Thus there was Buddhist shrine construction probably early in the ninth century and a Buddhist *ashram* received royal patronage near Angkor in the late ninth century, but in between the Buddhists were not able to maintain the shrines. The thin evidence we have therefore suggests that after being suppressed, the Buddhists were possibly allowed a respite under Jayavarman II, but altogether their fortunes waned more than they waxed from 665 to 944. The situation of the Buddhists was then strengthened under Rājendravarman and three kings who called themselves Jayavarman (the French historians numbered them Jayavarman V, Jayavarman VI and Jayavarman VII); the Buddhists would eventually become dominant, but not without further roller-coaster rides of fortune.

The Buddhists' sometimes difficult history, through centuries as a religious minority, must have weighed in the deliberations of Jayavarman VII. The prospect of achieving some degree of acceptance among the urban elite of how Buddhist teaching, ritual, liturgy and mythology could embrace and even surpass the long-established Śaiva rituals of state and the learning of the Brahmins must have seemed daunting.

15 Chirapat Prapandvidya, 'The Sab Bāk inscription: Evidence of an early Vajrayāna Buddhist presence in Thailand', *Journal of the Siam Society* (1990): 11.

16 Finot, 'Lokeśvara en Indochine', p. 235.

17 Coedès, 'La stèle de Tep Pranam, Cambodge' (1908): 207.

Yet it was achieved — and how is the subject of this paper. For the Khmers made their historical turn to state Buddhism at this time and — after a switch to the southern Buddhist vehicle — this is still in place today. Furthermore, there was indeed a Śaiva reaction. The desecration of Jayavarman's temples, quite unprecedented in Khmer history, destroyed an untold number of Jayavarman VII's icons and presumably some dedication stelae, which are the most concentrated records.¹⁸ The reworking of Buddha icons into Śivalingas in the Bayon, and the chiselling off of thousands of Buddha images in Jayavarman VII's other temples, has often been attributed to the reign of Jayavarman VIII (r.1270–95 according to a recently adjusted reading of the Maṅgalārtha inscription K.567 by EFEO Sanskritists),¹⁹ whose posthumous title *parameśvarapada* indicates his religion was Śaiva. This king left no inscriptions and Jayavarman VII's giant faces on the Angkor Thom gates were still said to be Buddhas when Chinese envoy Zhou Daguan arrived in Angkor in the year after Jayavarman VIII abdicated, which suggests continuity if anything. My own view is that a Hindu-Buddhist clash, if that was the cause of the wide-scale desecration of Jayavarman's temples, is more likely to have occurred in the reign of Jayavarma Parameśvara (Skt. *jayamādiparameśvara*), the last king to leave an inscription in Angkor before the return of Ang Chan in the mid-sixteenth century. In 1327, in his first year on the throne, Jayavarma Parameśvara erected a Śivalinga in the (I would ask still Buddhist?) Bayon.²⁰ Erecting a Śivalinga in the central temple of Jayavarman's state Buddhism (there are several lingas set in sanctuaries in the Bayon today, but K.470 is the only surviving inscription mentioning one) immediately upon enthronement looks like a politico-religious act of significance. Did Jayavarma Parameśvara convert the whole Bayon for Śaiva ritual and then order the systematic desecration of Jayavarman VII's other temples in Angkor? These questions cannot be confidently answered, but from the little data we have, there is no stronger candidate for the desecration than Jayavarma Parameśvara.

Some major icons have been recovered and brilliantly restored but Jayavarman's temples were left almost empty of icons and substantially scarred. Recently, archaeologists have by chance uncovered a large number of damaged late thirteenth–early-fourteenth-century Buddha icons, carefully placed in beds of sand in what appears as a ritual burial, performed perhaps to preserve them against further attack.²¹ Given the small amount of archaeological excavation yet undertaken within

18 P. Pelliot, *Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge de Tchou Ta-Kouan: Version nouvelle* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1951), p. 11.

19 Jacques, *Bayon*, p. 41.

20 George Coedès, 'Inscription du Bayon K.470', *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, 2 (Hanoi : EFEO, 1942), p. 187.

21 The 274 Buddhist objects, mostly broken Buddhas on *nāga*, were found carefully buried with sand by Sophia University archaeologists in Mar. 2001 in the grounds of Jayavarman's Banteay Kdei temple (Masako Marui, 'The Discovery of Buddhist statues at Banteay Kdei temple', *Journal of Sophia Asian Studies*, 19 (2001); and Yoshiaki Ishizawa, 'Special issue of the inventory of 274 Buddhist statues and the stone pillar discovered from Banteay Kdei Temple', *Renaissance culturelle du Cambodge*, 21 (2004), 2 vols.) The buried icons include several 'earth-touching' Maravijaya Buddhas and standing Buddhas with belt, centre-fold and hand turned forward on the chest, which belong to the Khmer Hinayāna seen in the temples of Praḥ Pallilay temple and monument 486. As Indravarman II apparently followed Jayavarman VII's Buddhism loyally, and Jayavarman VIII seems to have constructed nothing, these temples and the buried Hinayāna icons probably belong to the early fourteenth century, when the

the large Angkor site, this may be only the first such find of ritually buried broken remnants from the iconoclasm. The way in which Jayavarman brought the Khmers to endorse his political strategy and religious predilections and how it was received remain open to interpretation.

Jayavarman's Buddhist strategy

Sanderson remarks on the 'intense commitment to Buddhism manifest in Jayavarman VII's architectural undertakings'.²² But what political agenda was being projected? Surely something was at work here that was more compelling than the drift of courtly fashion towards being Buddhist as suggested by Hawixbrock.²³ Rather, implanting state Buddhism seems to have laid the base for a sustained drive to stabilise the capital and direct the empire towards a longer-term apogee of power and influence. At court, the move to Buddhist dominance would imply a major power transfer from Brahmins to Buddhist monks.²⁴ Snellgrove's reflection on Khmer politics during a Buddhist revival in the tenth century probably applies to the situation faced by Jayavarman in the twelfth:

But Buddhism was clearly at a disadvantage, especially within the confines of the capital city of Angkor... [T]he lineages of influential Brahmins, often related to the leading aristocratic families, formed an essential part of the structure of the state at least from the time of Jayavarman II onwards.²⁵

The stakes for such a major change of regnal strategy must have been high, and one rebellion against the new king is recorded in inscriptions. We are probably entitled to detect the insecurity of the new Buddhist state in the fact that Jayavarman entrusted two Cham Buddhist princes, educated at the court in Angkor, with quelling the Malyang insurrection (recounted by the princes in Cham inscriptions C.92B-C and C.90D after they returned to Champa). The king must have had second thoughts about trusting Khmer generals or regional rulers. Jayavarman was anyway steeped in Cham culture. The future king's long sojourn in Champa in the 1160s and 1170s probably included his being engaged, as a militarily trained Khmer prince, in the ongoing strife there between rival Cham kings and in cross-border fighting between Cham and Khmer factions — where he may well have had to fight against Khmers.²⁶ We have only limited epigraphic clues to go on, but it is certain that

first use of Pāli in a Khmer inscription occurs in 1308 CE. (I differ here from Woodward, who assigns the buried icons to 'not ... later than about the middle decades of the thirteenth century', Woodward, 'Foreword', in *Bayon, New perspectives*, ed. Joyce Clarke, p. 8).

22 Alexis Sanderson, 'The Śaiva religion among the Khmers: Part I', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 90, 1 (2003–4): 429.

23 'We could ask ourselves whether it was not a matter of good form to convert to Buddhism during the reign of Jayavarman VII, for one cannot take all these minor works as representing royal commands.' Hawixbrock, 'Jayavarman VII ou le renouveau d'Angkor, entre tradition et modernité', *BEFEO*, 85, p. 74.

24 This is a surmise, not an observation. The Brahmins seem to have remained the writers of inscriptions.

25 David L. Snellgrove, *Khmer civilization and Angkor* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2001), p. 54.

26 Michael Vickery assumes Jayavarman to have been 'part of the Champa political scene' in these years and therefore proposes that eventually 'the real conquest of Angkor was by Jayavarman VII and his Cham allies, probably in the 1170s, at least before 1181 ...', Michael Vickery, *Champa Revised*, a working

immediately after he took the Khmer throne, he had loyal Cham princes at his side and he appeared well versed in militarised factional strife.

Jayavarman's response to the disarray he found in Angkor, after the interregnum and his victory in battle, was to immediately begin building massive defences to protect his capital against foreign and perhaps domestic foes²⁷ and to invoke the state protection offered by northern tantric Buddhism. His socio-politico-military re-engineering came with major impact for the city populace. Community-building under the guidance of monks, behind major physical defences, appears to have been his policy.²⁸ The 'Angkor Thom' centre around the royal palace and the Bayon construction site was being protected by a moat and 3-kilometre-long earth and laterite ramparts, pierced only by high stone gateways. Just outside the Angkor Thom walls, the large, walled temple complexes of Praḥ Khan, Tà Prohm and Banteay Kdei, and a dozen smaller temples, were rising. The statistics on the stela of the large Praḥ Khan temple record 14,000 residents housed within its outer enclosure walls and temple complex is indeed described as a city – *nagari jayaśriḥ* or 'city of victorious fortune'.²⁹ Louis Finot memorably describes Jayavarman's new fortified Buddhist centres as 'complex establishments that the inscriptions describe for us, at the same time temples, convents, universities, and no doubt fortresses when needed, capable of protecting the population and withstanding a siege'.³⁰ The Praḥ Khan and Tà Prohm temple stelae mention dance troupes and musicians, supplied with costumes and instruments, which were presumably funded to help instil new, royally decreed, religious festivals.³¹ The perennial invocation of Śiva in Angkor's defence had failed with the Cham incursion and the regicide; the new Khmer defences were to be physical as well as spiritual and psychological, and this time they came under a supreme Buddhist pantheon: thus four centuries of state Śaivism were

paper presented at the conference on Champa, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, Aug. 2004, p. 31.

27 Here I support Claude Jacques' interpretation of the ramparts built around Angkor Thom: 'Jayavarman VII clearly was anxious to raise high walls around his capital: his power was fragile because his enemies were not far away and he had understood that he needed a well-protected capital' (Jacques, *Bayon*, p. 43).

28 Mabbett first identified the Indochinese (as opposed to Indian) monarchs as social engineers. '... in Indochina kings possessed and exercised a degree of real control over social organization, by virtue of their ritual position (which was foreign to India): they were social engineers'. I. W. Mabbett, 'Varṇas in Angkor and the Indian caste system', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 36, 3 (1977): 429.

29 Coedès, 'Le stèle du Praḥ Khan d'Angkor', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 41 (1941): 294. Further, some 20,400 divinities in gold, silver, bronze and stone were erected within it and 8,176 villages with 208,532 male and female slaves donated by the king (Coedès, 'Le stèle du Praḥ Khan d'Angkor' (1941): 297).

30 M.L. Finot, 'Lokēśvara en Indochine', in *Etudes Asiatiques publiées à l'occasion du 25eme anniversaire de l'EFEO* (Paris: EFEO, 1925), p. 239.

31 The 1191 Preah Khan stela commands the presence at an annual spring festival in the capital of the icons of 122 gods (including 23 'Jayabuddhamahānāthas' distributed to major cities: K.908 D v.159, Coedès, 'Le stèle du Praḥ Khan d'Angkor', 41 (1941): 267. This is presented as a new, empire-wide Buddhist festival with a leading place in the ritual calendar of the new Buddhist state. For a controversial but illuminating account, refer to a discussion of the form taken by the spring festival in David K. Wyatt, 'Relics, oaths and politics in 13th century Siam', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32, 1 (2001): 18. The Tà Prohm stela prescribes a similar new festival with parades, music and dancing involving large numbers of icons a month later than that at Preah Khan (Coedès, 'La stèle de Ta-Prohm', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 6 (1906): 77).

overnight supplanted by the Khmer equivalent of what in China had been earlier known as 'state protection Buddhism'. The internationalist cast of Jayavarman's vision of empire may be indicated in his choice of Sanskrit, whose use we know he revived in his temple inscriptions and which we can assume was also revived in the liturgy of his temple rituals and festivals.³² For his vision, reflected in his broad road and hospital network, clearly embraced the Mons and Chams in a Khmer-centred, Buddhist-led empire stretching the umbrella of its power from the Burmese border to the South China Sea. Maxwell has recently noted how Sanskrit was 'a prime instrument of power' in the medieval world.³³

Quite how Jayavarman managed to transfer power to the Buddhists has not been much inquired into, and how it was received by the Brahmins and the entrenched and wealthy Brahmanical families is not recorded — unless their reaction is shown in the later desecration of the Buddhist foundations already mentioned. Did Jayavarman Parameśvara's Śaiva activities in the Bayon express a long-lasting resentment among the Brahmanical elite of Jayavarman's imposition of Buddhism? As previous Khmer monarchs invariably respected the foundations of their predecessors, we are bound to seek an exceptional motive when temple desecration on this scale was the visible outcome. If there was a violent Hindu-Buddhist clash under Jayavarman Parameśvara, we can imagine the dismaying social impact on a city, under Buddhist sway for 145 years, of a campaign to smash Buddhist icons in the temples and knock thousands of Buddhas from the temple walls.

Before turning back to the sustained and evolving investment in sacred art that underpinned Jayavarman's strategy, we should briefly recall the major historical fact that grounds our interpretation: the Khmers turned definitively to Buddhism during Jayavarman VII's reign. From earlier epigraphy and art, we can see that Buddhism reached the Khmers by the fifth century and flourished in the seventh, before being suppressed. In the eighth century, the Khmer Buddhists were either unable to participate in the international florescence of the Mahāyāna — in India, Sri Lanka, Tibet, China, Java, Champa — or they did it in exile. And until Jayavarman VII ascended the throne, the Buddhists had secure footing at only two courts — those of Jayavarman V in the tenth century and of Jayavarman VI, who inaugurated the Mahīdharapura dynasty in the eleventh century. From Jayavarman VII's reign until today however, Khmer regimes have all been Buddhist (except for the brief, destructive resurgence of Śaivism perhaps under Jayavarman Parameśvara). Khmer

32 Jayavarman's revival of Sanskrit in Khmer inscriptions 'as an international elite language serving both countries [Cambodia and Champa]' is noted by Vickery (*Champa revised*, p. 32). We know from the material record that some Cham temples received Khmer icon donations when the Khmers took control of central and southern Champa from 1203–20, and it would follow that these icons were accompanied by Khmer-style, Sanskrit ritual and liturgy. It may be added here that the outlook of reigning Southeast Asian Buddhist monarchs was apparently made internationalist on a greater scale at this time by Islam's destruction of the most important Buddhist monasteries in the Ganges valley (1197–1207) — as seen for example in the King of Burma building a Bodhgayā temple in Burma in an effort to afford Buddhism a replacement international centre following the overrun of the Indian pilgrimage site marking the Buddha's enlightenment.

33 'As in the fifth century, so in the tenth, Sanskrit learning was a prime instrument of power, and the cream of this learning was evidently held by many to be the analytical penetration of Buddhist thought and the catholicity of its Mahāyāna doctrine', T.S. Maxwell, 'Religion at the time of Jayavarman VII', in *Bayon, New perspectives* (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), p. 90.

Buddhism at some as yet undetermined point subsequently switched from the northern to the southern vehicle, but the fundamental shift from state Śaivism to state Buddhism was made under Jayavarman VII, and it is this turn that stands out as one of the most abrupt and decisive in the country's religious history.³⁴ How was it achieved? In part it was done through the sacred art of the Bayon style, and it appears to have been done on a broad scale.

Nāga and Garuḍa

I now want to focus on the evolution of some mythical figures carved in Jayavarman's temples, and in particular on a mutation in the icons of Garuḍa. Jean Boisselier, in two pioneering articles in the early 1950s, studied the Khmer Garuḍa from its modest beginnings as the mythical heavenly eagle of Hinduism and Buddhism in temple lintels in seventh-century Sambor Prei Kuk, to its apogee as the most reproduced icon of all in Jayavarman VII's Angkor.³⁵ The adversary and prey of the classical mythical eagle and their king Garuḍa was the *nāga*, the chthonic serpent that is the Indian and Southeast Asian equivalent of the Chinese dragon and which appears to represent ancient ancestral cults. Boisselier reflected on the sudden mass production of Garuḍa icons under Jayavarman VII and wondered whether this could be associated with narratives in northern Buddhism of the fiery Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi taking on the form of Garuḍa to protect *nāga* that converted to Buddhism. I believe Boisselier's feelers were picking up the right vibrations, but unlike him, I think the association with Vajrapāṇi and the protection of converts was only overlaid after Jayavarman's Garuḍa icon mutated.

The primordial mythical role of *nāga* in the Indian subcontinent, where they were known as the fierce guardians of the treasures of the seas, as well as the producers of rain, was absorbed by all the Indic religions in the first millennium BCE. The early Buddhists evolved icons to respond to the problems they faced in attracting snake- and tree-worshipping hunter-gatherer peoples into a sedentary, vegetarian life of rice-growing around *stūpa* — in sufficient numbers to support a large community of mendicant, non-producing monks. At Amarāvātī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa in the second/third centuries CE, the *stūpa* bears relief images of large *nāga* with multiple cobra hoods stretching in a web over model *stūpa* to protect the relics within.³⁶ The sculptors also developed an icon of the Buddha enthroned on the coils of a large *nāga* and protected by the *nāga*'s multi-headed hood. Many modern historians have long

34 This is not David Wyatt's view, who sees 'Jayavarman VII and the Angkorian elite' as maintaining the state Śaivism of previous centuries under a veneer of Buddhism. But Wyatt is putting the cart before the horse when he sees Jayavarman's twelfth-century Buddhism as 'a sort of Counter-Reformation' against the thirteenth-century sweep of a (by analogy Protestant) Theravāda which was to emerge from Sri Lanka, Burma and Sukhothai and reach Cambodia by the fourteenth century. 'It [Jayavarman's politico-religious strategy] was misguided and doomed to failure, for it was sorely deficient in understanding what the religious change had meant, and why it would amount to what can be called a "religious revolution"'. David Wyatt, 'Relics, oaths and politics in thirteenth century Siam', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32, 1 (2001): 48.

35 '... Garuḍa plays a role of increasing importance. Having made a modest start in statuary, he rose to occupy the first place in the Bayon period ...' (Boisselier, 'Garuda dans l'art khmèr', p. 56).

36 J. Ph. Vogel, *Indian serpent-lore or the Nāgas in Hindu legend and art* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1926), plate 10. Reproduced with the kind permission of Arthur Probsthain, London.

taken this to be the incident in the early Buddha biographies when the *nāga* Mucalinda protected the meditating Gautama from an unseasonal storm beside the Nairāñjanā River, a few weeks after his enlightenment.³⁷ In one Nāgārjunakoṇḍa relief, Longhurst believed that lines suggesting a river carved behind the *nāga*'s hood invoked the Mucalinda episode — one of many other events from Gautama's life recorded there.³⁸ (A third–fourth century Gandharan relief at the Victoria and Albert Museum is closer to the text in showing the requisite seven coils mounting the Buddha's body hermetically to the neck and with Mucalinda's hood and seven heads reaching over him in a canopy). But if this is Mucalinda in just one Nāgārjunakoṇḍa relief, it should not be confused with the predominant Buddha enthroned by *nāga* at these *stūpa*. In the principal and much repeated image, the Buddha is seated on multiple *nāga* coils on the *āyaka* slab behind the railing of his own *stūpa*; here Gautama's life of teaching the dharma among men is over, and not about to begin after his enlightenment, as in the Mucalinda story. This Buddha has gone to *nirvāṇa*, leaving behind his teaching and relics, and so we see a transcendent Buddha, regally raising his right hand in 'have no fear' *mudrā* as his relics are venerated by visitors to the *stūpa*. The *nāga*'s role here seems to be signifying the ascension or transcendence of the Buddha whose earthly mission is in the past and whose power on earth resides in dharma and relics. It is this icon of Buddhist transcendence, sometimes associated with relics, which then began a remarkable passage, as traced by Pierre Dupont³⁹ through Sri Lanka, peninsular pre-Thailand, 'Dvāravatī' and finally Cambodia, where it was reproduced in uncountable numbers.⁴⁰ Pal, among other scholars, has pointed to Andhra Pradesh as the source for the first Buddhas enthroned on *nāga*.⁴¹ Frédéric sees the Southeast Asian Garuḍa-*nāga* myths as ultimately harking back to the *stūpa*-protecting role developed in Amarāvati:

In Buddhism, the Garuḍas are the mortal enemies of the nāgas; only nāgas possessing a Buddhist relic or converted to Buddhism could escape them.⁴²

37 The story is recounted, among other places, in the *Vinaya Pitakam* 1.3 Oldenberg reprint Pāli Text Society, 1938–66.

38 A.H. Longhurst, *Memoirs of the archaeological survey of India: The Buddhist antiquities of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, Madras Presidency* (Madras: ASI, 1937), Plate Lb.

39 Dupont noted the multiple similarities between the sixth–eighth century Sri Lankan Buddhas and the first Khmer *nāga* Buddhas of the tenth century, and concluded that the Mon Buddhists had been the indispensable intermediary in the iconic transfer: 'It is therefore not possible that at the end of the tenth century, Khmer art borrowed [the traditions] directly from Ceylon and, as an intermediary was indispensable, only Mon art could have played this role. We therefore have to admit that the Khmer image of the Buddha on the *nāga* was inspired ... by the Mon iconography ...' Dupont, *L'archéologie Mône de Dvāravatī* (Paris: EFEO, 1959), p. 263. Woodward concurs, noting that the Buddha on the *nāga* appeared in Dvāravatī art in the eighth century but '[t]he source was surely Sri Lanka where the *nāga*-protected Buddha had become an iconic type slightly earlier.' H. Woodward, *The Sacred sculpture of Thailand* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), p. 72.

40 Bruno Dagens has also recently detached the Khmer *nāga* Buddha from the Mucalinda story: 'At first sight nothing explains the success of the Buddha on the *nāga*, unheard of elsewhere in the Buddhist world; we would readily think that it is not due to the anecdote of Mucalinda, but rather to the very Khmer character that the presence of the *nāga* gives him...' Bruno Dagens, *Les Khmers* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003), p. 196.

41 P. Pal, 'An Unusual *nāga*-protected Buddha from Thailand', in *Buddhist Art, form & meaning* (Mumbai: Pal Mang Publications, 2007), p. 55 onwards.

42 Louis Frédéric, *Buddhism* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), p. 279.



Pl. 1 Vogel 1926 pl.10 (Reproduced with the kind permission of Arthur Probsthain, London)

Getty refers to texts where the Buddha divided his monastic robe into infinitesimal pieces, which he distributed among *nāga* who appealed for his help: 'No *nāga* with this inviolable talisman could be harmed by a *Garuḍa*.'⁴³

The *nāga*, as Mus and Coedès show, is linked in many Asian cultures with the rainbow and can be seen as a transcendent highway between the world of man and the world of the gods.⁴⁴ At the same time the image retains the missionary associations of embracing converts and according generous space, under the Buddhist umbrella, for ancestral beliefs. There are already abundant signs of ancient serpent cults in early Angkorian temple lintels and in temple moat balustrades, the most spectacular of which is the 0.7 metre radius *nāga* that stretches 100 metres across the moat at the ninth-century Bakong Śaiva temple at Roluos. The *nāga* here opens a path between the world of men and the palace of the gods that is the temple. However,

43 Alice Getty, *The Gods of northern Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914), p. 155.

44 G. Coedès, *Pour mieux comprendre Angkor* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1943), p. 98.



Pl. 2 Amarāvati transcendent Buddha

the Khmer Buddha was only enthroned on a giant serpent, in the form Dupont traced back to Sri Lanka, when the Khmer Buddhists obtained the right to erect the small brick and stone Bat Cum temple in the rebuilt Śaiva capital of King Rājendravarman II in the mid-tenth century. The Bat Cum Buddha has not been identified but in all the Buddha statues and *caitya* reliefs from this period the Buddhas are enthroned on *nāga* with long, separated, striated necks and with multiple, crested heads. This image of the Buddha was to be reproduced thousands of times in the twelfth century, culminating in a 4-metre *nāga* Buddha being installed by Jayavarman VII in the central sanctuary of the Bayon.

Garuḍa enters the sacred art of Angkor in a minor way as Viṣṇu's mount at the Bakheng temple when Angkor was founded and then on a striking scale at the early tenth-century Vaiṣṇava shrine of Prasat Kravan. In a very physical image, his human body raised high on a giant bird's legs, Garuḍa holds Viṣṇu aloft on his shoulders. The impression of power is enhanced by the way the relief image in brick fills a whole wall of the small sanctuary crowded with large Viṣṇu images. The sacred eagle later takes a minor role in the lintels of East Mebon, Banteay Srei, Baphuon and is surprisingly not

very prominent at the great twelfth-century Vaiṣṇava shrine of Angkor Wat. But in the Bayon period, the eagle suddenly becomes pervasive, in ways which demand explanation. The largest image of Garuḍa appears on the new temple walls in the early, imperial expansion phase of Jayavarman VII's reign. All association with Viṣṇu is dropped and the magical eagle grows into a towering, barrel-chested defender of Buddhism and the new temple enclosures built by the king.

'Power Garuḍa'

I will designate these early Garuḍas, twice the height of a man, as Jayavarman's 'power Garuḍas'. They exude strength and military prowess like Dvarapāla door guardians, standing guard beneath large (defaced) icons of the Buddha. The king dedicated Praḥ Khan temple to his father in the image of the Bodhisattva Lokeśvara in 1191 and the 14,000 residents were 'protected' by 72 such martial Garuḍas carved into the walls of their complex. With their beaks thrust into the air, their talons hold down large, multi-headed cobras with unfolded hoods; their human hands hold the *nāga* tails triumphantly aloft. Garuḍa is transformed from Viṣṇu's mount into the protector of Buddhism, as Boisselier observes:

This reign ... confers on Garuḍa his most important role. Reappearing in the decoration of pilasters and lintels, he replaces, united with the *nāga*, the previous decorative motif for temple balustrade ends, adorns the angles of gopuras, supports the gigantic heads of the face towers and alternates with the lion on royal terrace walls ... though he certainly remains a symbol of victory, he appears above all as a protector of Buddhism.⁴⁵

Boisselier goes on to see the *nāga* beneath Garuḍa's talons at Praḥ Khan as resembling the multi-headed *nāga* that form the throne-back of the dominant Khmer *nāga* Buddha icon, and therefore, I believe wrongly on both counts, takes them to be representations of the 'good' *nāga* Mucalinda, who protected the meditating Gautama from an unseasonal storm.⁴⁶ I cannot agree with Boisselier here. I see the similarity he points to in the form of the *nāga* hood but not in the meaning of the *nāga* under the Praḥ Khan Garuḍa's talons. The Khmer Buddha enthroned on *nāga* coils, I have suggested, is a transcendent Buddha in *nirvāṇa*, not Gautama before the commencement of his earthly ministry being covered against a storm by Mucalinda. And the two Praḥ Khan *nāga* pinned down by Garuḍa do not look like *nāga* of transcendence but rather the eagle's traditional opponents pinned underfoot. The Praḥ Khan Garuḍas are surely a symbol of protection, but those being protected are the people inside the complex, not the *nāga* under Garuḍa's feet.

The reason Boisselier brings up the Mucalinda story, is that he wishes to bring in the link made in northern Buddhism between the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi and Garuḍa in the protection of *nāga* that convert to Buddhism.

Garuda, while remaining the enemy of the *nāgas*, also becomes, somewhat paradoxically, the protector of some of those who, like Mucalinda, attached themselves to the person of

45 Boisselier, 'Garuda dans l'art khmèr', p. 57.

46 'Uncrested, [the *nāgas*] strongly remind us of the *nāga* Mucalinda on which the Buddha sits ... Their similarity to the *nāgas* of the corniches leads us to suppose that these are the "good" *nāgas* protected by Garuḍa', *ibid.*, p. 74.



Pl. 3 Praḥ Khan Garuda under effaced Buddha

the master or wanted to hear the teaching of his doctrine. It seems that from this point of view he was fairly closely linked to Vajrapāṇi, who even exceptionally takes on his form in late Buddhism. The thunderbolt clan Vajrapāṇi presides over is thus somehow in liaison with the solar cult and Garuḍa takes an enlarged role. It is without doubt this complex aspect which is illustrated in the statuary of the Bayon, where Garuḍa appears at the same time linked to the nāgas and as the protector of the Buddha.⁴⁷

Boisselier's associating Garuḍa with Vajrapāṇi is I think insightful and, despite his hesitations, has not since been challenged. But I find the association problematic in the Praḥ Khan period of the 1190s, when, I will shortly propose, Jayavarman VII had a different icon for Vajrapāṇi. But I find the association of the eagle and the Bodhisattva does fit the Garuḍa/nāga icon that emerges from a radical mutation in the icon that probably occurred in the early 1200s.

⁴⁷ Boisselier, 'Garuda dans l'art khmèr', p. 56.

'Gentle Garuḍa'⁴⁸

Jayavarman's Garuḍa/*nāga* icon was produced in far greater numbers towards the end of the reign when a mutated Garuḍa/*nāga* appears at the end of a large number of balustrades that mark out new sacred areas around the principal sanctuary buildings in the king's temple complexes. These eagles are smaller in size than the 'power Garuḍas' but they still look lordly and powerful. However, rather than trampling *nāga*, they softly embrace their multiple heads. The relationship has swung from hostility to tender care; they have become what I will call the 'gentle Garuḍa'. Boisselier leaves out Mucalinda in his second paper and says of these later icons: 'Their attitude in fact suggests much more the idea of a protector than a victor suppressing his enemies ...'⁴⁹ The new balustrade Garuḍa, a quarter of the size of their predecessors, straddle one of the *nāga*'s multiple heads and wrap their arms gently around others, while holding their human hands forward in the 'have no fear' *mudrā*. Sometimes their hands hold a flower. The *mudrā* is clear in exceptionally well-preserved Garuḍa from Praḥ Khan of Kompong Svāy that were recently returned to the Siemreap Conservation depot after being looted and recovered from a truck by the Cambodian police.

This dramatic change in the icon is striking and must, in the Angkorian context, betoken a message from the palace. Whatever its import, the message was well distributed, because these gentle Garuḍa also appear in numbers at Banteay Kdei, Ta Prohm, Srah Srang, Banteay Chmar and Wat Nokor. Indeed the proliferation of Garuḍa in the late Bayon period took the familiar but not especially celebrated mount of Viṣṇu from relative obscurity to the status of the most reproduced icon of all, as Boisselier notes:

at the end of the first quarter of the thirteenth century, which corresponds to the apogee of Khmer power and the greatest construction effort the empire experienced, Garuḍa plays a role of steadily growing importance. Having made a modest debut in statuary, he came to occupy the first place in the Bayon period ...⁵⁰

Frédéric says *nāga* only escaped the attacks of the heavenly eagles either by having Buddhist relics or by converting to Buddhism. As the *nāga* in Angkor show no sign of carrying relics in the balustrade ends, should we take them to be converts to Buddhism? If we now take up Boisselier's tip and digress briefly into the mythology of northern Buddhism, we find a better fit than Mucalinda for Jayavarman's new Garuḍa icon.

Vajrapāṇi/Vajrin/Trailokyavijaya

In northern Buddhism, Vajrapāṇi took over Ānanda's role in conversion and rapidly accumulated others, as Etienne Lamotte notes:

Dragon or *nāga* converting became a major activity in the final years of the Buddha's life, and Vajrapāṇi became his most effective and constant companion in this. Where Ānanda was the leading disciple, converter, text memorizer for the Theravāda, Vajrapāṇi had all these roles in the Mahāyāna.⁵¹

48 I thank Elizabeth Moore for this designation of the late Bayon style Garuḍa icon.

49 Boisselier, 'Vajrapāṇi dans l'art du Bâyon', p. 326.

50 Boisselier, 'Garuda dans l'art khmèr', p. 56.

51 Étienne Lamotte, 'Vajrapāṇi en Inde', *Mélanges de sinologie offerts à M. Paul Demiéville* (Paris: PUF, 1966), pp. 133–8.



Pl. 4 Garuḍa platform at Banteay Kdei



Pl. 5 Praḥ Khan Garuḍa



Pl. 6 Garuḍa from Kompong Svây



Pl. 7 Srah Srang Garuḍa

In early Buddhism, Vajrapāṇi was the primitive and violent *krodha-vignāntaka* ('wrathful destroyer of obstacles') or 'hit-man' first known as the *yakṣa* (demigod) protector of the *Rājagṛha* on the 'Vulture peak' (*Gṛdhrakūta*).⁵² He first appeared at the Buddha's side when the Buddha knew his death was near and wanted to undertake a number of difficult conversions, like that of the nāgarāja Apalāla in northern India. So he took Vajrapāṇi with him, rather than Ānanda, and the *nāga*'s storms and hail were suppressed by Vajrapāṇi's fire and violence. His all-powerful *vajra* (previously Indra's thunderbolt) counters all monsters, snakes and other obstacles to conversion. Marcelle Lalou says the engagement of Vajrapāṇi in the Buddha's last conversion missions made '... Ānanda the first victim of a re-emergence of local cults, of which one finds traces elsewhere than in the Vinaya of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin* and in tantric Buddhism'.⁵³ Vajrapāṇi is immediately linked to conversion, violence and the exotic, as Buddhism expands into new areas.

The theme of conversion was present in such early Mahāyāna classics as the *Lotus Sūtra*, where a striking account is given of the powers of an eight-year-old converted *nāga*.⁵⁴ The rapid international expansion of tantric Buddhism in the eighth century boosted the career of the Bodhisattva endowed with Indra's thunderbolt, which could coerce the recalcitrant and protect the converted. Vajrapāṇi's role as chief converter to Buddhism is defined in chapter 6 of the *sarvatathāgatātattvasaṃgraha* (*STTS*), the root tantra of the Yoga class, which was the main textual platform for this phase of the international expansion of the Vajrayāna. The *STTS* was one of the primary Buddhist texts now thought to have been current in Cambodia from the mid-tenth century and this text immediately and indelibly links Vajrapāṇi with conversion.⁵⁵ He dominates chapters 6 to 10 after orchestrating his famous battle to bring Śiva into the Buddhism *maṇḍala* — a drama that disrupts the hitherto smooth flow of events in the celestial assembly in the adamantine jewelled palace at the summit of

52 M. Lalou, 'Four notes on Vajrapāṇi', *Adyar Library Bulletin* (Adyar, 1956), p. 289.

53 Ibid.

54 Burton Watson summarises:

'Chapter 12 relates another affair of equally astounding import. In it, the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī describes how he has been preaching the Lotus Sutra at the palace of the dragon king at the bottom of the sea. The *nāga* or dragons, it should be noted, are one of the eight kinds of non-human beings who are believed to protect Buddhism. They were revered in early Indian folk religion and were taken over by Buddhism, whose scriptures often portray them as paying homage to the Buddha and seeking knowledge of his teachings. Asked whether any succeeded in gaining enlightenment, Mañjuśrī mentions the daughter of a dragon king Sagara, a girl just turned eight, who was able to master all the teachings. The questioner expresses scepticism and ... the girl herself appears and before the astonished assembly performs acts that demonstrate that she has achieved the highest level of understanding and can "in an instant" achieve Buddhahood. Earlier Buddhism had held that five obstacles gravely hamper women, including the fact that they can never achieve Buddhahood. All such assertions are unequivocally thrust aside in the Lotus Sutra. The child is a dragon, a non-human being; she is of the female sex, and she has barely turned eight, yet she reaches the highest goal in the space of a moment.'

Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. xviii.

55 For the Buddhist texts sought abroad by tenth-century Khmer Buddhist guru Kīrtipāṇḍita, refer to A. Sanderson, 'The Śaiva religion among the Khmers: Part I', *BEFEO*, 90–1 (Paris: 2003–4), p. 427 n284. In his recent reflections on the Wat Sithor inscription, Maxwell suggests that in retaining the existing framework of Brahmanical titles, rites and practices, 'Kīrtipāṇḍita was a forerunner of Jayavarman VII, probably one of many' (Maxwell, 'Religion at the time of Jayavarman VII', p. 90).

Mount Sumeru around the supreme, unifying, sun Buddha Vairocana. Vajrapāṇi says he cannot assemble his clan (*kula*) to participate in the Vajradhātu *maṇḍala* because some criminal elements, including the god Śiva-Maheśvara, refuse to submit:

‘O Lords, there are evil beings, Maheśvara and others, who have not been converted even by all of you Tathāgathas. How am I to deal with them?’⁵⁶

Vairocana endows Vajrapāṇi’s *vajra* with special powers and the *vajra* bearer then proclaims:

‘Oho! I am the means of conversion, possessed of all great means. Spotless, they assume a wrathful appearance so that beings may be converted by these means.’⁵⁷

Another Vairocana spell brings Śiva and his host of gods into the assembly and an extended duel ensues in which Vajrapāṇi inflates himself into his wrathful *Trailokyavijaya* or ‘conqueror of the three worlds’ form, trades insults and intimidating displays with Śiva in his equally wrathful *Mahābhairava* shape, until the Bodhisattva tramples the pan-Indic Hindu god and his consort Umādevā and ‘kills’ them, before reviving Śiva in the Vajradhātu *maṇḍala* as the *Tathāgata-bhasmeśvara-nirghosa* (‘Buddha, soundless lord of ashes’). In the ninth century, this *tantra* established *Trailokyavijaya* as the principal deity of what Linrothe designates as phase two of tantric Buddhism; Heruka presides over the third expansion of international tantric Buddhism from the twelfth century.⁵⁸ The *vajra* was to propel Vajrapāṇi to the highest Bodhisattva rank and higher, as Lamotte says:

Bearer of the thunderbolt in the old Buddhist tradition, elevated to the rank of Bodhisattva of the 10th world by the Mahāyāna, Vajrapāṇi had his place ready-made in the Vajrayāna. But here the baton he holds is not only the weapon of fire brandished against the adversaries of the Buddha, it is also the immanent, adamant essence of all beings and all things.⁵⁹

In Cambodia, images of Vajrapāṇi were erected by Buddhist leader Śrī Satyavarman perhaps, as already mentioned, in the early ninth century, when Jayavarman II founded the Angkorian state, but the Bodhisattva’s surviving epigraphic dedications are concentrated in the mid–late tenth century. Boisselier concluded from Finot’s work on late tenth-century Sanskrit inscriptions to Vajrin (‘possessor of the *vajra*’) or Vajrapāṇi (*‘vajra-in-hand’*) that this Bodhisattva ‘ranks third in the texts, after Lokeśvara and Tārā but equalling the Buddha himself.’⁶⁰ Icons of Vajrapāṇi, the Buddha and Divyadevī (*Prajñāpāramitā*) were erected in Bat Cum (inscription K.266), the first Buddhist temple built in Angkor in 953 CE, and the Wat Sithor inscription (K.111 B.39) refers to the guru Kīrtipaṇḍita’s restoration of more than 10 images of Vajrin and Lokeśa first raised by Śrī Satyavarman. One of several *caitya*

56 D.L. Snellgrove, ‘Introduction’, in *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-samgraha*, facsimile reproduction of a tenth-century Sanskrit manuscript from Nepal, ed. Lokesh Chandra and David L. Snellgrove (New Delhi, 1981), pp. 5–67.

57 Ibid., p. 40.

58 R. Linrothe, *Ruthless compassion: Wrathful deities in early Indo-Tibetan esoteric Buddhist art* (London: Serindia, 1999), p. 178 and following, 243 and following.

59 Lamotte, ‘Vajrapāṇi en Inde’, p. 151.

60 Boisselier, ‘Vajrapāṇi dans l’art du Bāyon’, p. 325.

found at villages northwest of Angkor, beside the road to Phimai (Thma Puok inscription K.225 III, 66A, 4;C,6) is dated 989 CE and invokes the Buddha, Prajñāpāramitā, Lokeśvara, Vajrin, Maitreya and Indra. The Khmer language inscription (K.240) from Prasat Ta An dated 979 CE from this period and region invokes Vajrapāṇi in his wrathful form of Trailokyavijaya, which recurs later at Phimai.

The icons of the Khmer Vajrapāṇi in the late tenth century mostly show the Trailokyavijaya form which projects his famous battle with Śiva in the *STTS*. In a striking relief on the Kbal Sre Yeay Yin *caitya* from the Phnom Srok village northwest of Angkor, and now in the Musée Guimet in Paris, the six-armed Bodhisattva has three visible crowned heads with fierce expressions⁶¹ and the crowns support the five Buddhas of the Vajradhātu *maṇḍala*. He holds the *vajra* and *ghantā* and other weapons and seems to depict Vairocana's final warning to the still arrogant Śiva that 'Vajrapāṇi is the overlord of all the Tathāgatas':

His brows tremble with rage, with a frowning face and protruding fangs; he has a great krodha appearance. He holds the vajra, ankuśa-hook, sharp sword, a pāśa-noose and other āyudha.⁶²

The contemporary Thma Puok *caitya* names Vajrin and gives him a single, fierce face with hair hanging to his shoulders and four arms, two of which grasp the *vajra* and *ghantā* to his waist. A similar, finely carved, life-size, Kleang-style statue in the Guimet has the same bulging *yakṣa* eyes, fangs and long hair below a regal tiara. Although all four hands of this regal icon are broken off, this also appears to be the same wrathful Vajrin. Woodward, I think rightly, identifies another fierce, dancing Vajrapāṇi on a tenth-century pink sandstone stela now in the Bangkok Museum.⁶³ The one Vajrapāṇi image from this period without the fierce face appears on a slightly earlier Pre Rup style *caitya* from the Prasat Ta Moan in the Dangrek mountains in the reign of King Rājendravarman, where larger images of Prajñāpāramitā occupy the other three sides. The image, published in a Spink catalogue in 1997 and now in the Ashmolean, Oxford, has two of its four arms again grasping the *vajra* and *ghantā* at the waist.

The next Khmer images of a deity dancing on a corpse and flourishing a *vajra* and *ghantā* in the air – as in the figure on the pink sandstone *caitya* Woodward identifies as Vajrapāṇi in the Bangkok Museum – appear at Phimai a century later, where the most likely identification is again Vajrapāṇi (contra Woodward's suggest that this is an early form of Bodhisattva Vajrasattva of the kind adopted in the 16 *vajra* beings of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism in Japan).⁶⁴ The Khmer language inscription at Phimai

61 Iyanaga cites the *Ninnō-nenju-giki* ('probably composed by Liangpi, a disciple of Amoghavajra') on the duel with Śiva in which Vajrapāṇi is described as 'Trailoyavijaya-vajra (Gōsanze-kongō) whose anger is terrible, with four faces and eight arms, and who subjugates Maheśvara (Makeishura-daijizaiten) and the armies of Māra'. Nobumi Iyanaga, 'Récits de la soumission de Maheśvara par Trailokyavijaya d'après les sources chinoises et japonaises', in *Tantric and Taoist studies in honour of R. A. Stein*, ed. Michel Strickmann, vol. 2 (1983), *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, vol. 21 (Brussels: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises: Distributeur, Office international de librairie, 1981–85), p. 671 n54.

62 *STTS* 18.882.369b–373b.

63 Woodward, 'The *Kārandavyūha Sutra* and Buddhist art in tenth century Cambodia' in *Buddhist art, form and meaning*, ed. Pratapaditya Pal (New Delhi: Marg Publications), p. 77.

64 Woodward, *The Art and architecture of Thailand from prehistoric times through the thirteenth century* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), p. 148.



Pl. 8 Vajrapāṇi-Trailokyavijaya on Kbal Sre Yeay Yin caitya, Musée Guimet

calls the god whose image was erected in 1108 CE '*kamrateng jagat senāpati Trailokyavijaya jā senāpati kamrateng jagat vimāya*', an unusual Old Khmer construction, which seems to indicate that the newly raised god Trailokyavijaya is the 'general' of the principal god of Phimai,⁶⁵ who was probably an earlier image of a Buddha enthroned on a *nāga*. Such a military, protective role would indeed fit Vajrapāṇi/Trailokyavijaya, whose historical role 'had always been called the 'general of yakṣas (*yakṣasenāpapati*)'.⁶⁶

65 Coedès, 'Etudes cambodgiennes XVII – L'épigraphie du temple de Phimai', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 24 (1924): 349.

66 Davidson, *Indian esoteric Buddhism*, p. 143.



Pl. 9 Vajrin, Guimet

Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara/Bhaiṣajyaguru

In his work on the Bayon period, Boisselier made yet another valuable contribution to the study of Khmer Buddhism when he separated out a group of seven Khmer 'Buddhas' from the rows of icons in the Siemreap Conservation Depot and identified them as 'statues of Vajrapāṇi ... the only ones we know in the statuary in the Bayon style'.⁶⁷ These seated, two-armed austere deities, with the calm faces and lowered eyes characteristic of Bayon style images of the 1180s and 1190s, all hold a *vajra* and *ghantā* crossed at the wrists before the diaphragm in a version of the *prajñālinganābhinaya* or *prajñā-embrace mudrā* that is the distinguishing mark of Vajradhara.⁶⁸ These deities are all seated in the half-lotus position, minimally

67 Boisselier, 'Garuda dans l'art khmèr', p. 325.

68 Mallmann, *Introduction à l'Iconographie du Tāntrisme bouddhique* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1986), p. 420. The *mudrā* was hitherto rare in icons from this region. A photograph in Christie's 2001 New York catalogue shows a regal 42cm bronze Vajradhara with six arms, probably four faces and with *vajra* and *ghantā* crossed at the chest, sitting on a high throne with elephants and lions. From the parasol and drapes above the throne, it probably belongs with the 'Bengali-influenced' bronzes of the pre-Thai peninsula under the Śailendra, which Woodward dates to the 770–780s (Woodward, *The Art and architecture of Thailand*, p. 93).



Pl. 10 Vajrapāṇi in Phimai

dressed and unadorned; they have single heads with *uṣṇīṣas* covered with lotus petals. Boisselier comments: 'We have said above that the personalities of Vajradhara and of Vajrapāṇi were not clearly defined and that they seem to be merged in Cambodia in Vajrapāṇi.'⁶⁹

The same *mudrā* that Boisselier identified in the depot is found in at least four larger Bayon style icons, one of which was found in the ruins of Jayavarman's Banteay Chmar temple. It is 80 centimetres high and the hands and left arm are damaged. Victor Goloubew saw it *in situ* in the temple in 1921⁷⁰ before it was removed from the remote and unprotected site to the security of the National Museum in Phnom Penh, which now labels it Vajrapāṇi, as a result of Boisselier's work.⁷¹ The remnants of the damaged hands leave no doubt about the *prajñā*-embrace *mudrā*. On the art market in London, dealer John Eskenazi in 1995 published a 94-centimetre Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara almost identical to the one found in Bantéay Chmàr but in almost perfect condition and with the *mudrā* quite

69 Boisselier, 'Garuda dans l'art khmèr', p. 330. The tantric texts themselves render the naming of Vajrapāṇi difficult. Linrothe observes: 'In the STTS Vajrapāṇi is also known as Samantabhadra, Vajrasattva, Vajradhara, Vajrahūmkara and Trailokyavijaya' (Linrothe, *Ruthless compassion*, p. 156).

70 Victor Goloubew, 'Sur quelques images khmèrs de Vajradhara', *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 5 (1937): 97–104.

71 N. Dalsheimer, *L'art du Cambodge ancien: Les collections du musée national de Phnom Penh* (Paris: EFEO, Magellan & Cie, 2001), p. 176.



Pl. 11 Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara of Bantéay Chmār

clear.⁷² Sotheby's auction catalogues offered two similar Khmer icons in the same year in London.⁷³

The Banteay Chmar find spot offers no help in clarifying the context in which this substantial series of Vajrapāṇi/Vajradharas was venerated, but others do. In the phase of imperial expansion, roughly corresponding with the 1190s, when a network of roads with rest-houses and hospitals was extended across Jayavarman's empire (and the army fought unsuccessfully to attach Champa), the icons of distributed Khmer power at the apogee of the empire were a powerful looking 'radiating' Lokeśvara from the *kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra* (KVS) with a Buddha and his universe in every pore of his skin — which Woodward surely correctly identifies as the *Jayabuddhamahānātha* commanded to be brought annually (in effigy?) to a festival in Angkor. This image of Lokeśvara is found on the rest-house chapels. The hospital stelae invoke Bhaiṣajyaguru, the Buddha of medicine, but the hospitals (*ārogyaśāla*) also had a quiet but intense holder of the *vajra* (Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara) seated before their sanctuaries — in at least one case on a *vajra*-decorated pedestal. The hospitals were not, to Finot's surprise, put under the protection of Lokeśvara 'the compassionate healer par excellence'⁷⁴ but were assigned to Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara, identifiable in Khmer icons by the *prajñā*-embrace *mudrā*. Goloubew mentioned in his 1937 article a smaller, headless Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara which was set on the only *vajra*-decorated pedestal in Angkor in front of the east chapel of the hospital complex near Takeo temple.⁷⁵ (The image has now disappeared though the *vajra* pedestal

72 J. Eskenazi, *Images of faith* (London, 1995), no. 41; Regaldado Trota Jose, *Images of faith: Religious ivory carvings from the Philippines* (Pasadena: Pacific Asia Museum, 1990).

73 Sotheby's 27 Apr. 2005 (#221 67cm) and 19 Oct. 2005 (#196 84cm). Hiram Woodward kindly brought these to my attention.

74 Finot, 'Lokeśvara en Indochine', p. 237.

75 Goloubew, 'Sur quelques images khmères de Vajradhara', Plate XIIIIB.

remains.) Goloubew published another image, this time with tiara, which is today in the depot marked with inventory number 308, but without its head. This series of Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara in sandstone implies a significant cult of this deity and a strong link with medicine — a link reinforced by three other crowned icons with the same *mudrā* but in a more squat, provincial style recorded before the sanctuaries of hospital complexes at Nang Rong of Buriram, Prang Ku of Sisaket and Na Dun of Maha Sarakham in northeast Thailand.⁷⁶ And I have identified a fifth 40-centimetre headless image of Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara standing beside the hospital stela in the Wāt Phra Keo museum in Vientiane (which I have not yet been authorised to photograph).

The importance of Bhaiṣajyaguru to the Khmers can be seen from the 10 places reserved for him out of the 41 mentioned in small inscriptions left legible in the Bayon. But did Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara also have a link with medicine, or was his role at the hospital sanctuaries again only protective? It is possible that the Khmers in the late Bayon period were associating Vajradhara with their hospitals because in the tantric version of the *bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra* translated by Yijing in the Tang capital in 707, the Bodhisattva Vajradhara is given special prominence when he utters a concluding *dhāraṇī* for protection against all diseases. According to Pelliot, Vajradhara thus achieved eminence in the esoteric Buddhist communities of Tibet, China and Japan as a Bodhisattva associated with the Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha.⁷⁷ As the ancient Khmers' expertise with medicinal herbs was known to the international Buddhist community from at least the seventh century, when China sent Indian Buddhist sage Punyodaya on a mission to 'Zhenla', as noted earlier, it seems possible that this association of Vajradhara with medicine was also maintained among the Khmer Buddhists into the twelfth century. And as we have five 'Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara' with a firm contextual link to Jayavarman's *ārogyaśāla*, we may also speculate that, for this king, Bhaiṣajyaguru was also Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara.

Sarvadurgatipariśodhana-tantra (SDPS)

Vajrapāṇi's role of protecting *nāga* who converted to Buddhism is also given weight in the eighth-century *sarvadurgatipariśodhana-tantra (SDPS)* 'Tantra of the elimination of all evil destinies'. It is possible that the *SDPS* was one of the texts introduced into Cambodia in the tenth century along with the *STTS*. There are many similar themes in both texts, including a central 37-deity *maṇḍala* and Vajrapāṇi as master of ceremonies, and both are attributed to Buddhaghūya, a celebrated sage of Vikramaśīla monastery in the Ganges valley whom Davidson considers the master of the tantric Buddhist revival 'the pre-eminent exegete during the second half of the eighth century ... [who] more than any other single individual represented the confluence of spirituality, esotericism, political insight, and promotional skill',⁷⁸ Traces in the Khmer temple art may point to a borrowing from this text. In the

76 *Plan and report of the survey and excavations of ancient monuments in north-eastern Thailand* (1959 reprint 1979: fig 38; 1960–1: figs 4, 90) (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department), for which I am grateful to Hiram Woodward, who believes these *Vajradhara* can be dated to as early as 1186 (Woodward, *The art and architecture of Thailand*, p. 208).

77 Paul Pelliot, 'Le Bhaiṣajyaguru', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 3 (1903): 33.

78 Davidson, *Indian esoteric Buddhism*, p. 154.



Pl. 12 Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara on a vajra pedestal before the East Chapel, Angkor, after Goloubew 1937

SDPS, Vajrapāṇi introduces a series of *maṇḍala* centred on himself and Śākyamuni/Vairocana (the tantra makes an historical transition by having Śākyamuni appear as 'Sarvavid', the 'omniscient' Vairocana) in which the pan-Indic Hindu gods acknowledge the superiority of the Buddhas, as do the Eight Great Planets and the Eight Great *Nāga*. The *astamahānāga* ('Eight Great *Nāga*') *maṇḍala* section treats the theme of conversion from ancestral beliefs, when it says the *maṇḍala* is an antidote to the venom of snakes.⁷⁹ And the Tibetan translation of a commentary known as *sNan bahi rgyan* ('Tibetan Tanjur', vol. 76, no. 3454) takes the ritual removal of the venom of the snakes in the *maṇḍala* as a metaphor for 'the conversion of unbelievers'.⁸⁰ In order to generate the Eight Great *Nāga maṇḍala*, Vajrapāṇi (called Vajradhara 'vajra bearer' in this passage) leads the *nāga* kings Ananta, Taksaka, Karkota, Kulika, Vāsuki, Śamkhapāla, Padma and Varuna into the *maṇḍala* while

79 T. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* (Oxford: Motilal Banarsidass (UK), 1983), p. xxvii.

80 *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

they display their cobra hoods. The *nāga* rejoice ‘holding their hands in *añjali*’ and promise to ‘provide that great being with constant protection, security and cover’:

We will act with great initiative, strength and vigour. We will render the venom ineffective. From time to time we will shower with rain. We will produce all crops. We will shower untimely rains on all the hostile kingdoms. Destroying all fears, we will ensure that the command of the Victorious One and of Vajradhara is carried out.

He [the adept] should recite the syllable PHUM one hundred thousand times meditating on the Lord Vajradhara with his head surrounded with snake-hoods and garlanded with beautiful white rays.⁸¹

This vision of Vajrapāṇi/Vajradhara and *nāga* may also throw light on a mysterious series of Khmer sculptures located behind the Leper King Terrace in the Royal Plaza at Angkor. In these carvings, which from their construction functioned as the embellished ends of balustrades, a deity in the Bodhisattva sitting posture *mahārājatilāsana* (‘at royal ease’), with right knee raised, holds a *vajra* to his chest and is surrounded by a group of crested *nāga* heads that tower above him. These Bayon-style icons were new to Angkor. A possible interpretation is that they represent Vajrapāṇi with the Eight Great *Nāga*. The icons should probably be dated to Indravarman II’s reign, for their style is that of the Leper King Terrace, which Stern considered to be the last of the Bayon style, when figures are crowded together and their dress becomes heavily ornamented.⁸² Under Jayavarman himself, we see other possible evidence for the Eight Great *Nāga maṇḍala*.

Vajrapāṇi and Tà Prohm

No Khmer icon has yet come to light showing the eight *nāga* reclining in *añjali mudrā* on the petals of a lotus, as described in the words of the tantra — the form seen in an eleventh-century Pāla dynasty stone from Nālandā, the other great centre of Vajrayāna having close relations with other Asian states. But the Khmers appear to have had their own version of the eight *nāga* kings being supported by Garuḍa, following their conversion to Buddhism. Boisselier, in his second pioneering paper, drew attention to a narrative lintel in Tà Prohm temple on a tower just outside the central sanctuary, which he thought was associated with Vajrapāṇi and the conversion stories.⁸³ The lintel shows eight *nāga* kings, each with three crested and crowned serpent heads and their human bodies kneeling in *añjali mudrā* beside and under

81 Ibid., p. 58.

82 Stern attributes the northern terraces facing the royal plaza to what he calls a ‘troisième période avancée’. Philippe Stern, *Les monuments khmers du style du Bâyon et Jayavarman VII* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), p. 161 — ‘either contemporary with the last work on the Bâyon or immediately following it’ (Stern, *Les monuments khmers du style du Bâyon et Jayavarman VII*, p. 165).

83 ‘We know that in the Buddhist tradition of the north, Vajrapāṇi, substitute for Indra, appeared as the rain god and the protector of the Nāga. To fulfil this role, he sometimes took on Garuḍa’s own aspect as seen in some Nepalese bronzes. This is the form he took to protect the Nāga from their implacable enemies when they came to listen to the teachings of the historical Buddha. We believe we have identified the episode on a pediment of Tà Prohm at Angkor, where, above a frieze of three-headed Nāga with human bodies, their hands joined, another Nāga and a Garuḍa, both in the attitude of prayer, appear on each side of the Buddha.’ Boisselier, ‘Vajrapāṇi dans l’art du Bâyon’, *Proceedings of the 22nd Congress of International Orientalists* (Istanbul, 1951), p. 326.



Pl. 13 Balustrade ends

the raised throne of a (defaced) Buddha. The leading *nāga* king kneels to one side of the Buddha's throne and on the other we find a winged Garuḍa kneeling with human hands in *añjali mudrā*. Boisselier made no mention of the *astamahānāga* but if we combine Boisselier's hints about Vajrapāṇi's presence permeating late Angkor and Lamotte's description of Vajrapāṇi's discrete ways of working – 'Vajrapāṇi only shows himself to the Buddha and to his direct adversary and remains invisible to the mass of spectators'⁸⁴ – we come back to Boisselier's account of why Garuḍa becomes ubiquitous in the Bayon style:

The exceptional importance accorded the images of Garuḍa in the Bayon style ... do not seem to us unrelated to the importance of the cult of Vajrapāṇi during this period.⁸⁵

Seventh-century Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang records oral accounts of how a group of *nāga* listened to the Buddha preaching and were converted. Alice Getty notes that as they entered the faith, the Buddha charged Vajrapāṇi with protecting them henceforth against their natural enemies, which they identified as the eagles. To do this, Vajrapāṇi transformed himself into Garuḍa, king of the eagles:

84 Étienne Lamotte, 'Vajrapāṇi en Inde', *Mélanges de sinologie offerts à M. Paul Demiéville* (Paris: PUF, 1966), p. 115.

85 Boisselier, 'Vajrapāṇi dans l'art du Bâyon', p. 327. Boisselier went on to claim that 'the continuity of the Vajrapāṇi cult' linked the late tenth century to the epoch of the Bayon and he added Vajrapāṇi as another layer to the already dense mix of deities Coedès saw in the Bayon face towers. 'These data [de La Vallée Poussin's showing that Lokeśvara Samantamukha may teach the law with the face of Vajrapāṇi] would suffice to explain the unusual characteristics of the faces of the Bayon towers, which would so remain the image of Lokeśvara projected in the person of the king, but a complex Lokeśvara possessing the supreme intelligence of Vajrasattva, from whom he proceeds, as much as the virtues of Vajrapāṇi with whom he had the power to identify ...'

Hsüan-tsang mentions Vajrapāṇi as being with the Tathāgata when he subdued the gigantic snake in Udanya. It is also related that when the nāgas appeared before the Buddha to listen to his teachings, Vajrapāṇi was charged by the Tathāgata to guard them from the attacks of their mortal enemies the *Garuḍas*, and that in order to deceive and combat the *Garuḍas*, Vajrapāṇi assumed a form with head, wings, and claws like the *Garuḍas* themselves.⁸⁶

Getty says the ‘Garuḍa form’ of Vajrapāṇi ‘may have a human head with a beak or a head like a *Garuḍa*; he sometimes carries a sword and a gourd-shaped bottle, or his two hands may be in “prayer mudrā” — the pose *Garuḍa* adopts in the Ta Prohm lintel. A somewhat saintly looking *Garuḍa*, crowned and dressed as a prince, suppresses his native power to submit to the commands of the Buddha. There is in fact a second *Garuḍa/nāga* narrative lintel in Ta Prohm, which does not show the eight *nāga* kings but which also appears to convey Xuanzang’s version of the Buddha’s command at Udanya. The second lintel is sited inside the large new ‘hall with dancers’ of the same temple. It shows *Garuḍa* kneeling, with feathered legs and talons, human torso and human hands in *añjali mudrā*, before the (effaced) Buddha and appearing to accept the Buddha’s order to protect a three-headed *nāga* queen (with breasts and a slim, more elegant neck than the *nāga* kings on the other lintel) who also kneels in *añjali mudrā*. The positioning of the second lintel inside the ‘hall with dancers’ may show linkage between the convert protection theme and the late cycle of Buddhist rituals such halls were created to house.

With this new image of *Garuḍa* in mind, it then comes as something of a shock to realise that we have all along been surrounded by just such gentle, partly anthropomorphised and princely eagles in Jayavarman’s temples. For the *Garuḍa* icon on the balustrades that demarcate the open-air platforms and walkways outside the last halls that were added to Jayavarman’s temples is also a princely ‘gentle *Garuḍa*’, with eagle’s head, feathered legs and human torso and hands, who rides upon the necks of the *nāga*. Do these *Garuḍa/nāga* icons then mean that all who enter these areas come under the protection of Vajrapāṇi, in the form he takes to protect converts to Buddhism? The eagle’s human hands open in the ‘no fear’ *mudrā* and often hold a flower, but otherwise it resembles the princely eagle that quietly kneels to do the Buddha’s bidding in the Ta Prohm lintels.

In order to counter any impression that Xuanzang may leave that Vajrapāṇi’s transformation into *Garuḍa* belonged only to the Gautama biographies of early Buddhism, it is perhaps worthwhile here briefly mentioning the broader and current Mahāyānist theme of Bodhisattva transformation. Ariane Macdonald’s study of the *maṇḍala* of the *mañjuśrīmulakalpa* (*MMK*), tracks how branches of the Mahāyāna developed the transformational power of Bodhisattvas as a device for incorporating Hindu gods into tantric Buddhism, namely by claiming they had all been Bodhisattvas in disguise.⁸⁷ In this way, the Indian Buddhists projected the Buddhist mission back in time in order to appropriate intellectual property from their Brahmanical rivals. They claimed the Vedic and Hindu gods were earlier incarnations

86 Alice Getty, *The Gods of northern Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914), p. 48.

87 Ariane Macdonald, *Le Maṇḍala du Mañjuśrīmulakalpa* (Paris: CRNS Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1962), p. 40.



Pl. 14 Eight Great nāga at Ta Prohm

of Bodhisattvas who had appeared in the world in those forms in order to eventually direct people of sophisticated beliefs towards Buddhism. This was claimed as an application of the Bodhisattva capacity for self-transformation into any form in order to propagate Buddhism. Vajrapāṇi's taking the form of Garuḍa in order to protect converts from ancestral cultural beliefs to the Buddhist cause, as recounted by Xuanzang,



Pl. 15 Ta Prohm lintel of Vajrapāṇi commanded to protect nāga converts

was taken up into this tantric Bodhisattva doctrine in India. Macdonald builds on Jean Przyluski's earlier work on how minor deities and magicians or *vidyārāja* entered the Buddhist maṇḍala of the *MMK*, where they are described as 'those who take the body of a woman to save living beings, and those who borrow the form of birds, *yakṣa* or *rakṣaṣa* in order to effect conversions',⁸⁸ The major instance of a Bodhisattva self-metamorphosis made explicit in the *MMK* is not accomplished by Vajrapāṇi but by the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, who claims he had already adopted the form of Brahmā, Śiva, Viṣṇu and Garuḍa 'to convert creatures susceptible to this method'. Macdonald hesitates to call the process 'conversion' as the claim is that it had all been pre-planned and the people were all along being gradually nurtured towards Buddhism:

It was not so much converting as rallying the devotees of Hinduism, viewed as a kind of preconception of the Mahāyāna, at least in its technical aspects.⁸⁹

In the *MMK*, Mañjuśrī claims the credit for the rites taught in the Hindu tantra of Garuḍa and says he appeared on earth as an eagle as the Bodhisattva 'Garutma'.⁹⁰ When a 'buddhicized' Śiva enters the *maṇḍala*, Mañjuśrī claims to be the author of all the Śaiva tantras. Mañjuśrī is however unknown in Khmer Buddhism and so the conversion-by-transformation role presumably fell to the multi-faceted Khmer Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi in his Garuḍa avatar.

Balustrades and temple access

The Garuḍa/*nāga* balustrades were raised in Ta Prohm, Praḥ Khan, Banteay Kdei and around a large platform beside the Sraḥ Srang pool opposite Banteay Kdei in Angkor; outside the capital they occur at Banteay Chmar, Praḥ Khan of Kompong Svāy and Wat Nokor. Thus the 'gentle Garuḍa' becomes pervasive in the late programme of additions to the king's temples. What purpose did it serve? If these platforms and walkways were erected with icons of Vajrapāṇi in his Garuḍa guise, for the protection of converts, do the widespread temple extensions they were contemporary with⁹¹ signal a large-scale campaign of conversion to Buddhism?

88 Jean Przyluski, 'Les Vidyārāja: contribution à l'histoire de la magie dans les sectes Mahāyānistes', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 23 (1923): 309.

89 Macdonald, *Le Maṇḍala du Mañjuśrīmulakalpa*, p. 40.

90 'And last the powerful mantra om, eagle, great eagle! You whose wings are spread like a lotus! Killer of all the serpents ... The Bodhisattva who teaches this, *svāhā* is known under the name Garuḍa. He is the best at converting the beings who are difficult to convert. He destroys the venom of the serpents and if we add the Mahāmudrā, he will conquer the hordes of hostile demons and serve as the antidote for all poisons. He has been taught by me (Mañjuśrī) as the means for converting those susceptible to this method. I came to act with the appearance of Garuḍa, the stunning king of the birds. All the rites developed in the Tantra of Garuḍa were taught by me for the benefit of creatures. Having come to earth as the Bodhisattva Garutma, with the appearance of a bird to convert creatures, I worked to combat the venom of the serpents.' *Ibid.*, p. 79.

91 For comparative chronological studies, using petrological sampling of magnetic susceptibility to indicate which sandstone was extracted at the same time from the quarries, and so which parts of the temples were built earlier than others, refer to Olivier Cunin and Etsuo Uchida, *Annual report on the technical survey of Angkor monument* (2002), p. 216. These researchers for example found that the sandstone blocks in the 'halls with dancers' in Ta Prohm and Praḥ Khan produced identical measurements of 1.22×10^{-3} SI Unit.

The relatively open design of Jayavarman's temples also suggests participation in rituals on an unprecedented scale. Bernard Philippe Groslier pointed to the number of temples and the architectural concept of an open Bayon, which had a raised, visible, city-centre ceremonial platform. This design lent itself to wide participation in state rituals, rather than the distancing of the population from secret rites performed behind moats and high walls, as had been the case earlier in Angkor Wat,⁹² or Baphuon. Groslier saw the design of the Bayon and the space allowed for small family sanctuaries in his other temples,⁹³ as a radical design departure and exoteric means for engaging the population in the royal cult:

religious fervour was unequalled and burned like a flame in this crowned old man ... As well as the order and prosperity of the kingdom he seemed to take to heart the wellbeing of each of his subjects. We witness an eruption into the sanctuaries, formerly jealously reserved for the king and his entourage ... It is not only the close or distant relatives of the king who partake of these privileges; they are extended to all ... the temples of Jayavarman VII become veritable pantheons.⁹⁴

Some of the sacred spaces of the un-walled Bayon were exposed on a high platform around the central sanctuary at the heart of Angkor Thom and ceremonies, accompanied by music and dance, would have been observed by a mass of people congregated at the new city centre.

Ritual instruments

The 'gentle Garuḍa' icon alone is an indicator of a change on a notable scale in what was programmed in the temples, but it is not an indicator of specific ritual content. More clues to what was actually being undertaken in the king's temples emerge from studying the surviving bronze ritual paraphernalia cast for temple officiants, and the decoration of the new sanctuaries that the pathways with the Garuḍa/*nāga* icon surround. The material record from Jayavarman's time is in fact unusually rich in ritual instruments. Numerous items of Bayon-style bronze paraphernalia and a number of fine bronze palanquin finials that are now in the museum collections, especially in the bronze rooms of the Phnom Penh and Bangkok museums, also share the decorative theme of Garuḍas and *nāga*. Some items are bronze ritual *vajras* with the heads of *Garuḍa*, which, as Boisselier pointed out, support the link between Vajrapāṇi and Garuḍa and bring both into the ritual arena:

The vajras, whether they are authentic vajras or the handgrip on cultic bells, most often bear, as their only element of decoration, small heads or busts of Garuḍas. This union of the thunderbolt and Garuḍa seems to us to deserve special mention because it could represent a new aspect of the relationship that would seem to exist between Vajrapāṇi and Garuḍa.⁹⁵

92 This was noted by Paul Mus, 'Le Sourire d'Angkor', *Artibus Asiae*, 24 (1961): 380.

93 See also, Christine Hawixbrock's study on the large number of additions of small family chapels inside Jayavarman VII's temple complexes. Hawixbrock, 'Jayavarman VII ou le renouveau d'Angkor, entre tradition et modernité', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 85 (1998): 64.

94 B.P. Groslier, *Hommes et pierres* (Paris: Arthaud, 1956), p. 153.

95 Boisselier, 'Garuda dans l'art khmèr', p. 79.

The unusual volume of surviving Bayon style bronze paraphernalia reflects both the number of temples Jayavarman VII built – Jayavarman was the first Khmer king to construct multiple temples to propagate his strategy – but also surely the intensity of his ritual programme.

What tantric Buddhist initiations are the most likely candidates for performance in Angkor late in Jayavarman VII's reign, say from 1200 to 1210? Historically this was still the period when cults of Hevajra, the fierce, dancing emanation of the supreme tantric Buddha, proliferated internationally in the monasteries of northern Buddhism and indeed beyond the monasteries — Khubilai Khan underwent the four consecrations to Hevajra in 1260.⁹⁶ And the ancient Khmers did create an exceptional number of ritual bronzes of Hevajra. Groslier exhumed a finely cast, 22-centimetre gilt bronze dancing Hevajra in the elaborate late Bayon style⁹⁷ at his excavation site in the royal palace in Angkor Thom in 1952–53.⁹⁸ Wibke Lobo lists 40 Khmer bronze Hevajras in museum collections.⁹⁹ In the context of the Praḥ Khan dedicatory stela of 1191, it was recorded that more than 20,400 statues in gold, silver, bronze and stone had already been distributed throughout the ancient kingdom within a decade.¹⁰⁰ This does not seem a very large number, but it is still probably the largest group of Hevajra ritual bronzes found anywhere. These extant Khmer Hevajra bronzes tell us that this cult was active on an unusual scale under Jayavarman VII and suggest they may have had a role in political legitimisation. Such bronzes would have played a key role in Hevajra initiations, when they would be placed in *maṇḍala* prepared for the four consecrations as defined in some detail in the *hevajra-tantra* itself, and in greater detail in ritual handbooks extracted from the tantra. Henri Maspero in 1914 photographed a Sanskrit palm leaf (*olla*) volume of this kind entitled 'The Hevajra consecration ceremony' (*hevajra-sekaprakiyā*) at the Puan temple in China's Zhejiang province, which Finot translated into French in 1934. Maspero was told by the Puan bronzes that the *olla* had been brought from India with other tantric texts by the monk Baoshang in 1057.¹⁰¹ No

96 Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His life and times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 42; and P.H. Pott, *Yoga and Yantra*, trans. R. Needham (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1966), pp. 69–70.

97 Groslier dated the piece to c. 1200; refer to Bernard Philippe Groslier, *Indochina: Art in the melting pot of races*, trans. George Lawrence (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 186.

98 Bernard Philippe Groslier, 'Fouilles du Palais Royal d'Angkor Thom', in *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Orientalists, Cambridge 1954* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1954), p. 229. Of course, this single piece, now in the Phnom Penh museum, does not alone prove the nature of the late royal cult of Jayavarman's reign, but the exactitude of its provenance supports the idea of a special link of the king with this deity. Groslier's reliability as an excavator must remain in question until the paperwork on the dig and the subsequent laboratory analyses are studied in the EFEO archives. Apart from a brief report to the 1954 Congress of Orientalists, Groslier, despite promising a book for several years, released only skimpy details of the pollen analysis done by the National Natural History Museum, Paris, in a paper published by the Siam Society (Groslier, 'Our knowledge of the Khmer civilization: A Re-appraisal', *Journal of the Siam Society*, XLVIII, 1 (1960): 1–26).

99 Wibke Lobo, 'L'image de Hevajra et le bouddhisme tantrique', *Angkor et dix siècles d'art khmer*, ed. Jessop and Zephir (Paris: Réunion de Musées Nationaux, 1997), p. 73. London art market dealer, Alexander Götz, told me he had handled 25 Khmer Hevajras from private collections over the past 25 years and thought there may 100 such icons in public and private collections.

100 K.908 v.CXXVII (Coedès 'La stèle du Praḥ Khàn d'Angkor' (1941), *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 41 (1979): 279.

101 Henri Maspero, 'Rapport sommaire sur une mission archéologique au Tchô-kiang', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 14 (1914): 69.



Pl. 16 'Gentle Garuḍa' palanquin finial Bangkok Museum

such handbook has survived in Cambodia but it is more than likely that the Mahīdharapura Khmers, who were producing bronze Hevajra icons at the time Baoshang was using his text, had access to such documents.

As well as the Hevajra bronzes, there are a number of bronze moulds for creating clay sealings that bear motifs of Hevajra and his circle of eight dancing goddesses or *yoginī*. We have little understanding of how such sealings were used in temples but according to a recent analysis by Peter Skilling, who dismisses as a modern misconception the theory that sealings were pilgrims' mementoes, they would have served a ritual purpose.¹⁰² I have recorded six different moulds with Hevajra's image: the two

102 'The production of tablets was open to all, and, as we shall see, many were produced by kings, members of the court, and senior monks. The sealings were products of a ritual ideology of mass production – the augmentation of merit by multiplication of images. The mass-production technology led to the earliest known printing of texts (the *ye dharmā* stanza and *dhāraṇī*) in India and Southeast Asia. Oddly, it is not usually recognised as such – perhaps because the impression was done on clay, perhaps because text and figure were often produced together from a single mould, perhaps because the impressed texts were not as such meant to be read.' P. Skilling, 'Buddhist sealings in Thailand and Southeast Asia: Iconography, function, and ritual context', in *Interpreting Southeast Asia's past: Monument, image and text*, EurASEAA, 10, 2, ed. Elisabeth Bacus, Ian Glover and Peter Sharrock (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008).

most interesting are the large so-called ‘Trailokyavijaya’ moulds found in Lopburi and Angkor with Hevajra’s *maṇḍala* in the centre below three tiers of seated Buddhas and above a row of standing Bodhisattvas; and a small one in the Phnom Penh Museum, which was found at Poipet and was published from a plaster cast in the Bangkok Museum by Woodward in his seminal 1981 paper.¹⁰³ The latter mould seems to record the underlying pantheon of the Mahīdharapura Khmers, with Vajrasattva at the centre, Hevajra and Saṃvara on each side, the *nāga* Buddha above and Bodhisattvas below. More obviously important to rituals are the many surviving bronze lustration conches or *shankha*, a dozen of which are embossed with motifs of Hevajra and his *yoginī*. These can only have been made for consecrations to Hevajra.

‘Salles aux danseuses’

Most of Jayavarman’s temples had additions late in the reign which included a large central room with lively friezes of dancers.¹⁰⁴ The early French scholars used the term ‘*salles aux danseuses*’ and left their purpose unexplained. The halls are given central locations and the hall added to Praḥ Khan temple was one of the largest spaces under a corbelled roof in Angkor; the dancers’ hall in Banteay Chmar was even bigger, measuring 35 m × 15 m. The dancers that create a one-metre frieze around the double room in Banteay Chmar are distinctive in their size and in the fact that their arms are symbolically feathered and their legs are the legs of eagles. Why was so much covered space suddenly required in all the temples, under the aegis of these goddesses and five (effaced) Buddhas, who appear to be the Khmer version of Vajrayāna’s Vajradhātu Pentad?¹⁰⁵ The new halls could have accommodated several dozen people at a time in each of Preah Khan, Ta Prohm, Banteay Kdei, Banteay Chmar and if the Bayon was involved that could have accommodated hundreds, so the new cult symbolised by the dancers could have engaged large numbers of people in temple rites.¹⁰⁶

103 H. Woodward, ‘Tantric Buddhism at Angkor Thom’, *Ars Orientalis*, 12 (1981): 57–67.

104 ‘Many additions are made to the monuments that were most important in the first phase. Typical additions were outer galleries, halls with dancers etc.’ Philippe Stern, *Les monuments Khmers du style du Bâyon et Jayavarman VII* (Paris: PUF, 1965), p. 147. Stern’s evaluation is supported by the recent technical studies of Olivier Cunin and Etsuo Uchida, *Annual report on the technical survey of Angkor monument 2002*, ed. Takeshi Nakagawa, Japanese team for safeguarding Angkor (JSA/UNESCO/Japanese Trust Fund for the Preservation of the World Cultural Heritage), Tokyo, p. 216.

105 Claude Jacques now suggests the ‘five great Jinas’ found in the ‘*salle aux danseuses*’ of Praḥ Khan of Angkor and in Praḥ Khan of Kompong Svây, as well as the five Buddhas of the northern lintel of Phimai’s sanctuary, may have been called the ‘five Śrīghana Buddhas’ by the Khmers because the Sab Bāk inscription (K.1158) of 1066 CE, mentioned above, opens with an invocation of *śrīpañcasuḡatā yādau śrīghanāṃ vibhāvīkāḥ*... ‘Those who, from the beginning, were the five Śrī Sugata, the creators of Śrīghana...’ and then invokes the sixth Buddha Vajrasattva (C. Jacques, ‘The Sect of Śrīghana in ancient Khmer land’ in *Buddhist legacies in mainland Southeast Asia* (Paris: EFEO, 2006), p. 73). Jacques lists nine Khmer inscriptions which use this rare epithet for the Buddha. Peter Skilling, who reads the epithet Śrīghana as a Sanskrit *taṭpuruṣa* compound meaning ‘mass of glory’, has traced other occurrences of the word in Nālandā, Nepal, Amarāvati, Bodh Gaya etc. Refer to Skilling, ‘Random jottings on Śrīghana: An Epithet of the Buddha’, *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology ARIRIAB* at Soka University, vol. 7 (Mar. 2004), pp. 147–58.

106 Tantric Buddhist consecrations ordered by an emperor of Tang China, following earlier texts than the *hevajra-tantra*, are recorded as lasting two weeks and involved thousands of people. Orlando records that in 768 CE, tantric Buddhist patriarch Amoghavajra celebrated a ceremony that lasted 14 days. ‘The



Pl. 17 Poipet mould

If the ceremonies in Angkor were cyclical and repeated, it would be a reasonable assumption that, for example, the adults among the 14,000 residents of Preah Khan would have been involved, over time, but not the 208,532 villagers who supported the temple complex.

The Bayon too shares the motif of dancing goddesses — of the size of those in Banteay Chmar, but in far greater numbers. The demeanour of the Bayon dancers, whose bodies are braced and whose challenging eyes, with one foot raised to the opposite thigh in an extreme dance movement, suggests they are akin to the *yoginī* that whirl around the supreme dancing deity Hevajra in the late Bayon style bronzes. The emphatic use of the motif of dancing goddesses on the Bayon is unprecedented in Angkor, and yet it is what might be anticipated in a cult of Hevajra, who worked largely through the intercession of his eight ascetic goddesses. Friezes of goddesses enwrap all the outer approaches to the Bayon and dominate the temple entrances. They confront visitors with their stares and their sensuality. The Bayon alone, in its pristine state, had some 6,250 of these challenging goddesses on the pillars and *gopura* that led to its sacred spaces, according to my calculations at the site. Many of the entablature friezes in the entrances have collapsed with time, and the sandstone

eunuch attendants, the ministers, and all the commanders of the imperial army were ordered by the emperor to receive *abhiṣeka* at the ceremony. Altogether more than 5,000 monks and laymen attended.' R. Orlando, *A Study of Chinese documents concerning the life of the tantric Buddhist patriarch Amoghavajra* (A.D. 705–774) (Princeton University, 1981), p. 147. Chou records Amoghavajra conducting an *abhiṣeka* in which he 'converted in succession hundreds, thousands, and myriads of people' (Y. Chou, 'Tantrism in China', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 8 (1945): 280).

blocks bearing them are now buried in the piles of stone inside and outside the Bayon outer gallery walls. The original total number of dancers can be calculated from their positions in the eight *gopura* and from the two rows of pillars outside the outer gallery, as well as on internal friezes.

From a Chinese report written in the early thirteenth century, we glean a picture of a period when women were prominent in the temple rituals in Angkor. The Chinese source suggests Jayavarman's temples were particularly known for their focus on female officiants. The 1225 chronicle of Zhoarugua, the Chinese Superintendent of Maritime Trade in Canton, was based on hearsay rather than visits to the countries whose goods he taxed at the northern end of the maritime trade route, but his testimony contains a unique indication of what was taking place in Jayavarman's temples:

[In Chen-la, i.e. Cambodia] the people are devout Buddhists. In the temples there are 300 foreign women; they dance and offer food to the Buddha. They are called a-nan [Skt. *ānanda* (bliss)]. ... The incantations of the Buddhist and Taoist [Śaiva yogin] priests have magical powers.¹⁰⁷

Zhoa's choosing of the term 'a-nan' (blisses) possibly indicates the use of the word in Bayon rituals. The *hevajra-tantra*, for example, defines four 'blisses' that an adept strives for in executing a four-stage consecration cycle (*catrabhiṣekas*). Women trained as 'tantric assistants'¹⁰⁸ help *sādhaka* achieve the four blisses of spiritual emancipation through meditational and yogic-sexual initiations. The four rituals (*ācārya*, *guhya*, *prajñāñāna*, *caturtha*) generate four different blisses (*ānanda* = bliss, *paramānanda* = perfect bliss, *viramānanda* = bliss of cessation, *sahajānanda* = innate bliss or natural ecstasy).¹⁰⁹ The halls with dancers (I have proposed we call them *yoginī*¹¹⁰) suggest that a large investment in space for new consecrations was undertaken in the period when the Bayon was nearing completion, perhaps from 1200 to 1210. The function of the terraces and platforms outside the new consecration halls protected by the new 'gentle Garuḍa' icon could have accommodated large numbers of people, perhaps assembled to take Buddhist initiation vows and renew their allegiance to the king, perhaps on the model of the large tantric Buddhist consecrations led by Amoghavajra under the Tang.¹¹¹ There was indeed a precedent for this taking place in one of Cambodia's neighbours — the Đại Việt. Under the Ly Dynasty (1009–1224) Buddhism was elevated to the rank of official state religion in the mid-twelfth century, shortly before Jayavarman VII took the same step in Angkor. Zürcher says the Buddhist state established by the Ly rulers 'was closely patterned after the

107 Chau Ju-Kua: *His work on the Chinese and Arab trade in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, entitled Chu-fan-chi*, trans. F. Hirth and W. Rockhill (St Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1911), p. 53. The inserted notes are Hirth's.

108 Macdonald, *Le Maṇḍala du Mañjuśrīmulakalpa*, p. 69.

109 D. Snellgrove, *The Hevajra-Tantra, a critical study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 134.

110 P. Sharrock, 'The Yoginīs of the Bayon', in *Interpreting Southeast Asia's past: Monument, image and text*, EurASEAA, 10, 2, ed. Bacus, Glover, Sharrock (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), p. 260.

111 'In consequence all classes of society adopted the cult. This was the most prosperous era of esoteric Buddhism in China' (R. Tajima, *Étude sur le Mahāvairocana-sūtra (Dainichikyō)* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, Paris, 1936), p. 23).

Tang ... prominent monks were admitted to the administration of the kingdom and came to play an important political role'.¹¹²

Support for this argument for the existence of a royal Hevajra cult in Angkor comes from an unexpected source. Rob Linrothe, an authority on the texts and icons of tantric Buddhism in Tibet and China, who would not claim close acquaintance with the Buddhism of Jayavarman VII, makes a brief reference which captures the singularity of what appears to have been a politically driven Hevajra cult of Cambodia. Linrothe surveys the evolution and spread of tantric Buddhism through a ninth–eleventh century phase led by Vajrapāṇi-Trailokyavijaya and defines a further phase (the third, for him) dominated by texts and images of Heruka, Hevajra and Saṃvara. He perceives that something special happened with the deities of this phase in Phimai, Angkor and Java/Sumatra where Hevajra/Heruka was adopted politically into a royal cult and not only in monasteries: 'Phase Three *krodha-vighnāntaka* ['wrathful destroyers of obstacles'] especially Heruka and Hevajra, appear after the eleventh century in Southeast Asia as well [as in Tibet], in Java and in Thai and Khmer contexts.'¹¹³ Outside of his principal focus on Tibet, Linrothe observes a clear political application of such a third phase cult:

If there was a Hevajra cult, it seems to have thrived in Southeast Asia. Hevajra imagery may have come overland to Thailand from eastern India, directly from Bengal via Burma. The transmission of Hevajra teachings was probably reinforced through contacts along the maritime routes from island Southeast Asia and eastern India. Whatever the route it clearly had considerable influence in the highest levels of society. Seemingly removed from his yogic and monastic origins, Hevajra was utilized in the royal cult, not, as in the Ming court, to improve relations with Tibet, but as part of an attempt at local political legitimisation ... The compelling power of the Hevajra image seems to have contributed to the cult, which sponsored commemorative monuments more so than monasteries.¹¹⁴

Linrothe formulates the central metaphor adopted by tantric Buddhism as *dompteur/dompté* ('vanquisher/vanquished'). In yogic concentrations, the aim of destroying the ego and internal impurities originates in early Buddhism in Śākyamuni's victory over Māra and 'esoteric Buddhism appropriated this trope and used the *krodha-vighnāntaka* to express it ... Trailokyavijaya [the wrathful form of Vajrapāṇi] extends and refines the *dompteur/dompté* relationship by conquering

112 Erik Zürcher, 'Beyond the Jade Gate: Buddhism in China, Vietnam and Korea', in ed. Bechert and Gombrich. *The World of Buddhism: Buddhist monks and nuns in society and culture* (Thames and Hudson, London, 1984), p. 206.

113 Linrothe, *Ruthless compassion*, p. 222.

114 *Ibid.*, p. 274. I have earlier drawn a comparison with the political application of the Vajrapāṇi and the STTS at the Tang court, rather than with the more limited Heruka cult under the Ming. Linrothe's perspicacity in this passage seems to me to go beyond the reservations that brought the translator of the *hevajra-tantra* to a halt when he reflected on the meaning of the Khmer Hevajra bronzes: 'Judging by the number of images of Hevajra found around Angkor and on various sites on the Khorat Plateau in Thailand ... it would seem that a cult of this important Tantric divinity was practised from the eleventh century onwards. Since no relevant literature is available, not even a stray reference on a carved inscription, nothing of certainty can be said regarding this cult.' David Snellgrove, *Khmer civilization and Angkor*, p. 57.

not deities associated with the underworld, but the Lord of the Three Worlds above them, Śiva-Maheśvara.¹¹⁵ Hence Vajrapāṇi's epic battle to bring the submission and transformation of Śiva in the *STTS* and *SDPS* entails this logic: 'the conquered is nothing less than the conqueror in a pre-enlightened state, and the conqueror is nothing more than the vanquisher transformed.'¹¹⁶

Vajrapāṇi's role of crushing Śiva was transferred in the later *yoginī tantra* to Heruka (in the *cakrasamvara-tantra*) and to Hevajra in the *hevajra-tantra* — whose four feet trample and destroy Maheśvara, Mārā, Indra and Brahmā.¹¹⁷ In twelfth-century Khmer political terms, the metaphor of the 'vanquisher/vanquished' translates into what is usually called religious syncretism under a Buddhist umbrella, in which sections of Jayavarman's Buddhist temples were reserved for Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava rites, but within a Buddhist framework or *maṇḍala*. State protection Buddhism replaced but also embraced Śaivism in the political arena. Some scholars (e.g. Stein and Iyanaga)¹¹⁸ have questioned whether the historical opposition of Buddhism to Hinduism in India is reflected in the Buddhist tantras. Davidson has, I think, rightly resisted their attempts to dissociate the texts from the socio-political history of their times:

Buddhist monasteries at this period had become enormous landed institutions that controlled great economic resources but had a tenuous relationship to the wider society, somewhat like the medieval Christian monasteries and modern universities ... Thus, at the socio-historical level, we should understand the Maheśvara myth in the *Tattvasaṃgraha* as a straight-forward defensive technique of the Buddhists to establish superiority of their gods over Maheśvara, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, etc., in an attempt to retrieve some of their lost position in unsophisticated circles in India, whether at Devikoṭa, Vārāṇasī, Patna or wherever.¹¹⁹

The Mahīdhara Khmers, as Linrothe perceptively observes, do indeed seem to be the archetype of an application of esoteric Buddhism for political legitimisation, in what he defines as the third and international phase of the Vajrayāna from the eleventh century onwards. Among the *krodha-vighnāntaka* that Linrothe focuses on, are in this mature phase Hevajra, Heruka and Saṃvara,¹²⁰ all of whom are forms of the ultimate truth expressed as the sixth transcendent Buddha, or primordial

115 Linrothe, *Ruthless compassion*, p. 178.

116 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

117 *Hevajratantra*, l.iii.17, D. Snellgrove, *The Hevajra-Tantra, a critical study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 59.

118 Iyanaga, Nobumi, 'Recits de la soumission de Maheśvara par Trailokyavijaya – d'après les sources chinoises et japonaises', in ed. Michel Strickland. *Tantric and Taoist studies in honour of R.A. Stein*, Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques vol. XXI (Brussels: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, 1983), pp. 630–745.

119 R. Davidson, 'Reflections on the Maheśvara subjugation myth: Indic materials, Sa-skyapa apologetics and the birth of Heruka', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 14, 2 (1991): 215.

120 From Linrothe's following list, the 'phase three' wrathful deities known from clear icons or epigraphic mentions to have been adopted under Mahīdhara rule are Hevajra, Heruka and Saṃvara: 'Other members of the set [of *krodha-vignāntaka*] seem to be formal metamorphoses of Trailokyavijaya, but for the most part these are names and deities unique to Phase Three: Heruka, Hevajra, Saṃvara, Yamāri, Guhyasamāja and Kālacakra' (Linrothe, *Ruthless compassion*, p. 244).

Vajrasattva.¹²¹ These are the mature Vajrayānist deities we find in the icons and inscriptions of the Mahādhara.

The ruins of Ta Prohm, today still partly overgrown with the trees of the forest that once engulfed it when the Khmers moved their capital south, seem to hold clues to a seminal message from the Buddhist king who apparently sought large-scale participation in rituals in his temples to consolidate and legitimise his Buddhist state. For only this level of engagement could have ended and absorbed the Śaiva state that first unified the Khmers in the ninth century and enabled them to eventually build one of the great Asian empires. Vajrapāṇi's 'killing' Śiva then reviving him in the Buddhist *maṇḍala*, in the classic *dompteur/dompté* metaphor of transformation, re-enacted in the mature Vajrayāna by Hevajra, reached its political *dénouement* in Jayavarman VII's royal strategy to transform the Śaiva state and implant Buddhism definitively among the Khmers.

121 'For Phase Two Esoteric Buddhism there is no sixth Tathāgata. Mahāvairocana, the central Tathāgata of the *STTS*, unified the five Tathāgata. Phase Three, by contrast, considers a sixth Buddha to be the supreme unifier, usually called either Vajrasattva or Vajradhara (note: The sixth Buddha is called Vajrasattva in the *Hevajratantra* and in the Saṃvara cycle).' *Ibid.*, p. 237.