

Khmer ceramics represented on the Bayon and Banteay Chhmar **Aedeen Cremin**

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Australian scholars have been privileged to take part in the rebuilding of Cambodian scholarship, through the Greater Angkor Project (GAP), devised by Prof Roland Fletcher of the University of Sydney with his French counterpart Dr Christophe Pottier of the École Française d’Extrême Orient (EFEO), in collaboration with the Cambodian heritage authority APSARA. The GAP project has made a huge contribution to research, particularly in mapping and chronology. My own part has been to analyse the ceramics from the GAP surveys and excavations.

When we started work in 2001 there were effectively no reference collections, but there was one very thorough publication on ceramics, *Udaya I* (2001) co-edited by Ang Chouléan and Ashley Thomson. In Khmer, English and French it summarised previous publications and gave a detailed account of ceramics recovered since 1994 during conservation work and from the ongoing excavations at the Royal Palace (Franiatte 2001). We found that the ceramic repertoire from the GAP projects conformed to well-known types, in four main categories: low-fired domestic earthenwares, high-fired unglazed stonewares, high-fired glazed stonewares and imported Chinese porcellaneous wares.

The last French Conservator of Angkor, Bernard-Philippe Groslier—whose untimely death in 1986 deprived Cambodia of a truly great scholar—had established a ceramics chronology, based primarily on material found in the course of conservation work on various monuments (1954–1974), supplemented by ceramics from his 1968 excavation near Srah Srang, the only stratified site known at that time, and still the only cemetery at Angkor (Courbin 1988). Though our findings and those of our colleagues generally confirmed the accuracy of Groslier’s observations (Cremin 2006) his chronology was not sufficiently precise for our needs. It has now been entirely recast by Armand Desbat (2011).

Nowadays Cambodian archaeology is functioning spectacularly well: the APSARA teams have done remarkable work and have discovered many hitherto unknown sites, most interestingly from our point of view a series of kilns which demonstrate that pottery-making was highly specialised, with different products made in each regional kiln (Ea 2007, see also Hendrickson 2007). EFEO has greatly enlarged the regional corpus of ceramics through its excavations in the West Baray and around Roluos and the French salvage team INRAP has set new standards in the recording of unglazed wares at Trapeang Thlok, largely through Desbat’s work (INRAP 2004; Bâty and Bolle 2005).

A trip to Fujian province, China, to check on the products of the Dehua and other kilns confirmed that Chinese ceramics from the GAP excavations and surveys are of standard export types and add little to what is already known, except to make clear that Chinese wares were commonplace, at least in the twelfth century if not earlier. Their value in the later thirteenth century is well known from the record of Zhou Daguan's commercial embassy: 'Most appreciated here are Chinese gold and silver and then light-mottled double-thread silks. After them come tin goods from Zhenszhu, lacquered trays from Wenzhu, green porcelain from Quanzhou and Chuzhu' (section 21, Smithies ed. 2001: 42).

Our ceramics interests differ from those of most other teams since we take particular note of the domestic earthenwares which are generally considered to be of little account. We have observed the contemporary use of ceramic cooking wares in daily life and their manufacture in the ceramics district of Kompong Chhnang, literally the 'cooking-pot district'. We have been particularly interested in the cooking pot supports from the open brasiers which are used throughout Southeast Asia. In Cambodia today there are two shapes: the 'Chinese oven' is a heavy tronconical vessel with side aperture which uses charcoal, while the 'Siamese oven' is a lighter violin-shaped vessel which can be fed with wood as well as charcoal and will hold two pots at a time. In either case the pots sit on horizontal projections which are today quite thick, but in the past were quite thin. They are roughly triangular in shape and the Vietnamese name 'pig's tongue' is a good description.

Pot-supports are recorded as early as the second millennium BCE from Sabah, Malaysia (Chia 2003: 192). In South Vietnam they have been found in the upper part of Tra Kieu Phase 2, a second- to sixth-century CE site, probably Cham, (Prior and Glover 2003: 282), and at Oc Éo from deep as well as surface levels (Malleret 1960: 145–151). Guérin found four fragments in her re-examination of the finds from Groslier's excavations at Prei Khmeng and Sambor Prei Kuk, dating any time between the second and thirteenth centuries (Guérin 2002: 19). At Angkor they are known from the Royal Palace at Angkor (Franiatte 2001: 112), at our site of Tumnup Barang and at the GAP-recorded site of Veal Kokpnuov, near Srah Srang. They are not mentioned in any of the kiln-excavation reports to date, but that is hardly surprising for they are typically hand-made objects baked on village bonfires.

Brasiers figure prominently on the scenes of daily life shown in bas-relief on the outer galleries of Banteay Chhmar and the Bayon (e.g. Smithies ed. 2001: 32, 42, 82; Jacques and Freeman 1997: 260; Jacques and Freeman 2003: 86). The Bayon is a three-level temple in the heart of the city of Angkor Thom; it has over 50 towers, the central one of which was built around a giant statue of the Buddha on a coiled *naga* serpent (Dumarçay 1967 and 1973); Banteay Chhmar is a much smaller monument on one level only, in the frontier province of Banteay Mancheay (Jacques and Lafond

2007). Both of these temples were built by Jayavarman VII who stabilised and extended the Khmer Empire during his long reign (1182–c.1218). Olivier Cunin (2007) has been able to demonstrate that the Bayon's central sanctuary was planned as one entity and is therefore not the series of accretions that has been suggested in the past (e.g. by Dumarçay 1973). I consider that the iconographic program was also planned from the start, perhaps not in every detail, but at least as a broad concept.

For our purposes one indisputable point is relevant: that Jayavarman VII sought to extend the benefits of his rule to all parts of Cambodian society, building hospitals and creating imagery which is certainly inclusive. Many of his buildings have 'face-towers' with calmly beautiful faces on each of their four sides, representing an all-seeing deity, or king, or buddha. Banteay Chhmar had a specific imagery of hospital scenes and no less than eight enormous panels of Lokeshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion (Groslier 1973: 175; Park 2005: 329; Jacques and Lafond 2007: 254–255). The imagery of the Bayon is more complex and not yet fully understood; however, all authors agree that there is a sequence which goes from secular themes at the ground, or public, level, through a mixture of secular and religious imagery in the second level, to religious only at the upper levels.

In my view, the imagery of the two lower levels—those accessible to the lesser orders—is intended to bring the ordinary people into the sphere of the divine by blending them into the imagery of the king and deities. The images of daily life relate to the viewer's 'here and now'. Elsewhere in south Asia such details would normally be shown as part of the Ramayana story or within a *jataka* or story of a previous life of the Buddha. But Jayavarman VII seems to have deliberately aimed at realism: the life of the people is shown very simply and with humour. On the first level, or outer gallery of the Bayon, men, women and children eat, drink, watch performances, play games and haggle on the lowest register of three, with lordly and royal scenes on the upper registers, reflecting the accepted hierarchy of Cambodian society.

One scene shows the manufacture of ceramics (Figure 1). It occupies a recess in the southeastern corner of the outer gallery and is in two registers, the upper register showing a senior person sitting inside a curtained building, with attendants. The lower register contains two related scenes, in which cookpots and stewpots are shown being made and packed for transportation. Reading from left to right, the first scene shows four men around an area where the foreground is of footed bowls and flames: the two larger ones at the right, towards the centre of the panel, are talking to or observing the two on the left who appear to be working: the man at the extreme left is holding a spherical object, which could be a round-bottomed cooking pot; beside him is a man who holds a similar object and stands behind coils (of clay?); the flames may be coming from the footed bowls or from behind them. Above the scene, hanging from a horizontal beam, is a cross-hatched basketry container.



Figure 1. Bayon outer gallery, SE corner, SW recess, showing ceramics manufacture, below, with senior person and attendants above. Photo Luke Benbow 2008

I think that this scene shows the making of earthenware pots and their burning in a bonfire kiln, at the moment before the flames start to consume the straw fuel—as can be observed today in Kompong Chhnang and elsewhere (illustrated in e.g. Shippen 2005). That both panels refer to the same place is indicated by the container hanging from the beam which is also the floor of the upper space. While it might seem that the burning is directly beneath the building, it would in fact be in front of it according to Angkorian perspective, as seen, for instance, in the outer gallery where riverbank scenes are shown directly below boats in the water. In modern villages bonfire-burning is carried out right beside the dwellings, alongside the garden area.

Overlapping this scene and on a separate panel is a similar scene directed towards the right. At extreme right a man turns back towards a group of three men, whom he apparently supervising: one of the men is kneeling and stacking two round-bottomed cooking pots onto a footed wide-mouthed bowl. Behind him and moving right are two men holding a pole at shoulder height, from which hangs a stacked pair of larger pots (stewpots, possibly round-bottomed), secured by cord slings. These pots appear to be

separated by basketry rings; they do not have lids. At the left of this scene is a fifth man, who may be assisting the carriers or may be another supervisor: he seems to hold at head-height a footed pot (or this pot may be hanging from the beam as a counterpart to the basketry container in the left-hand panel). This activity may be taking place beneath the dwelling, but could equally well be thought of as happening in the outer compound.

This scene of ceramics manufacture can be viewed as complementary to the two other occupational scenes on the Bayon, one of building (outer gallery W, S section, shown in Giteau 1976: ill. 91; Jacques and Freeman 2003: 91) and the other of stone-cutting (inner gallery W, S section no. 14, Jacques and Freeman 2003: 97). Each of these depictions shows an accomplished sense of observation on the part of the artists and carvers. From a design point of view these vignettes may have been intended simply as ‘fillers’ occupying an empty narrative space, perhaps marking a pause between the various episodes depicted in both outer and inner galleries, but the psychological effect, as with the market scenes, is to bring us closer to the people who actually built the Bayon and lived within its ambit.

The second-level or inner gallery also shows ordinary people, though apparently mostly engaged in religious activities, worshipping or walking to shrines. They carry well-known ceramic vessels: jars, ‘baluster’ and ‘pedestal’ vases. Some are transported in looped string holders or carried on people’s heads (inner gallery N, W section); a similar image is shown on Jayavarman VII’s Neak Pean (upper W pediment of N chapel, Jacques and Freeman 2003: 180) Such pots are known from recent excavations and also from Groslier’s work at Srah Srang (Courbin 1988: fig 27). We know that they could have sacred significance, for the Bayon’s Vishnu-worship scene (inner gallery S, western section) shows straight-sided jars with domed lids, while a baluster vase represents the *amrita* flask on the Churning of the Ocean of Milk (inner gallery W, N section, Freeman and Jacques 2003:99). Bodhisattva relief II at Banteay Chhmar has pedestal vases (Jacques and Lafond 2007: 254) standing on tripods which were probably made of bronze, similar to that published by Bunker (2004: 385).

The Bayon shows a rich panoply of other containers, most of them not in ceramic. Lightweight basketry containers are shown carried on people’s head or hung from rafters. On the second level (inner gallery S, W section), a palace scene shows on the lower register a storage area where a servant half-opens a large container which may have a hinged lid; another servant is slumped asleep over a closed version of the same container, its domed top suggesting it is made of bamboo. On the upper register, near the entrance of the hall, a seated lord is presented by a servant with food? piled up in a wide-mouthed footed vessel, with horizontal ribs. A servant holding a similar vessel, piled up with another substance, is shown at the left, inside the hall. Ceramics in these forms are not commonly found in excavations, but at Srah Srang, in the mid-eleventh-

century level, Groslier found a ‘fruit-presentation bowl imitating basketry, hard light-grey paste with thick green glaze, height 14 cm’(Mourer 1986: pl. 34 fig. 3). The diameter seems from the drawing to be about 27 cm and this pot would therefore be about the same size as the serving vessels described above.

Thomas Maxwell (2007) and Ang Chouléan (2007) each stress the originality of Khmer religious belief and imagery. We have already noted the distinctive interest in apparently contemporary scenes, but to test originality further I compared Khmer representations of ritual ceramics with those from Borobudur and other Javanese temples. Detailed images are accessible in Australia through the magnificent Coffin Collection of black and white photographs in the National Library of Australia. It immediately became clear that there was a marked contrast in the representation of ritual vessels, specifically the *purna ghata*, the spherical Indian flower-vase decorated with a sash around the belly (Al-George and Rous 1957). This is a very common decorative theme in ninth- and tenth-century Java, where it can be further associated with birds, conches, lotus etc., and there is one possibly sixth-century relief from Champa from Da Nghi, now in the Da Nang museum, Vietnam, where a square block with *purna ghata* relief was reused as a column base (Musée Guimet 2005). But there are no *purna ghatas* on Khmer temples (Gairola 1954: 222).

Was the *purna ghata* considered old-fashioned in the Angkorian period? Or was it not in use? The answer can be found in Saveros Pou’s analysis of flowers in Khmer literature: in a discussion of ritual she indicates that floral offerings were highly significant and that the vocabulary indicates the use of ‘garlands’ or ‘arrangements’ (2005: 52–54); there is no mention of vases or containers. The implication is that Khmer ritual did not adopt the use of *purna ghata* and was in that respect not ‘indianised’. In a small way this supports Maxwell’s contention that the Khmer integrated only some Indian forms into their own religious practice rather than adopting a whole pre-fabricated system (2007).

In contrast to the *purna ghata* a great deal of attention is paid to another foreign form, the *kendi*: this is a spouted ewer or pouring-vessel, manufactured in China specifically for export. *Kendi* get distinctive treatment at the Bayon: they are carried respectfully or placed on a stand (outer gallery, SE corner, Smithies ed. 2001: 46); one is shown as an ablutions-pourer in the worship of Shiva (inner gallery S, W section). A *kendi* is also shown beside the Bodhisattva relief VII at Banteay Chhmar (visible in 1970s photo, with relief still in situ, Coffin Collection). This treatment contrasts with Javanese imagery, where *kendi* are rarely shown: at Borobudur a *kendi* is not used for pouring but to hold a flower (relief IIA80).

From these instances we can accept that other images may be realistic and we can extend our enquiry into the representation of what may be foreign usages or behaviour. As is now well-known, Jayavarman VII had close links to Champa, where

he seems to have lived and campaigned; he later had Cham princes at his court and sought to maintain diplomatic relations with Champa (Schweyer 2007). The Cham, conventionally identified by flowery helmets, when not shown as enemies, are shown as musicians or ordinary troops with Khmer officers. The Bayon inner gallery has a narrative scene of a water-festivity with people in hierarchical order: Cham men are on a boat, with a Khmer lord in the adjacent boat to the onlooker's right and a Khmer king to the right again (inner gallery N, W section). The Cham are drinking through straws from narrow-neck bottles. Similar bottles are shown in use by Chinese people at Angkor Wat (Dvaravati festival, SW corner, Roveda 2005: fig. 107) and on the Bayon (outer gallery S, E section). One might conjecture that drinking at festivals was a foreign custom and showing bottles reinforces that these are foreign dignitaries, in much the same way as a modern Cambodian might choose to show a westerner drinking coffee.

In addition to diplomatic alliances Khmer kings would have had to negotiate with the Cham for horses. The Cham bought them from Annam (Wade 2009: sections 6 and 7). 'Annam', the land of the Dai Viet, now northern Vietnam, had been obtaining horses from Yunnan, in southwestern China, from at least the third century CE (Yang 2004), probably bringing them along the Red River route which continued in use into modern days. Cavalry is well represented at Angkor Wat and it is known that its builder Suryavarman II (1113–c.1150) had campaigned in Annam. Systematic horse-trading, as opposed to occasional looting, is a large undertaking, for along with horses come their attendants, grooms and riders, as we know from the better-documented Central Asian horse trade of the Tang and later periods. It is relevant that the Bayon shows mounted officers, including one who appears to be Chinese (outer gallery E, Jacques and Freeman 1997: 264), and that polo-playing on horseback is depicted on the later Elephant Terrace (Jacques and Freeman 1997: 268).

As well the overland horse trade the Cham controlled the maritime trade between Java and China: Cham ports, whether 'Vijaya' or others, were the main points of entry for Chinese goods. From at least the ninth century CE Chinese trade-goods invariably included ceramic containers. In 1981 Groslier postulated the existence of such a trade as the model for Angkorian glazing and manufacturing techniques and this has now been confirmed at Prei Monti, at Roluos, where Christophe Pottier has found ninth- to tenth-century Tang wares (pers comm. 2007). When Groslier wrote, few kilns were known from Cambodia and Chinese kilns were not adequately published. The situation is now much improved (Needham 2004) and enough work has been done in Cambodia to suggest that the Khmer borrowed not specific techniques but rather the ideas of wheel-turning, glazing and high-temperatures firing in kilns. All of these innovations were employed at the Kulen to produce its well-known ash-glazed tiles, finials, lids and heavy-rimmed bottles.

In the tenth-century level of the Srah Srang burial site Groslier found a bottle of similar form to those depicted on the Bayon and Angkor Wat reliefs and described it

as an 'imitation of a Chinese *hu*-bottle, dull red paste with polished *lie-de-vin* [purple] slip, height 13.4 cm' (illustrated by Mourer 1986: pl. 30 fig. 2). He considered that the *hu*-bottle was the model for the Kulen bottles. Such bottles were also produced at the Tani kilns (Nara 2005: pls 18, 34-35), as were boxes of Chinese type, both ash-glazed and unglazed (Nara 2005: pls 14, 16-17, 31-33). Ash-glazing requires only suitable fuel (Ly and Muan 2000: Glazing) and the fact that the Tani potters used it so little suggests that glazing may have been of minor importance to the consumer. Unglazed Kulen-type bottles were also found at Trapeang Thlok, where they would be of tenth–eleventh century date, thus fitting in with Groslier's chronology.

Another vessel form which may be of ultimately Chinese origin is the distinctively Cambodian water-pourer, the *kaam*. This vessel is always unglazed; it has a horizontally-flanged rim, an everted neck, a distinctively shaped shoulder and a carinated belly. The decoration is of moulded ridging on the shoulder with lesser moulding around the carination. The shape is perfectly designed for graceful pouring without the use of a spout and we have been shown how the slight swelling at the base of the neck enables the vessel to sit comfortably within the crook of the arm (Ea, pers comm. January 2006). Mourer (1984: 33) points out that this design also eliminates the need for a handle. Despite the lack of a spout the basic form of the *kaam* may nevertheless derive from carinated *kendi* (e.g. Lu 1983: 156, no. 173; *FPM* 2002: 31), such as are found in the Philippines (Brown 1989: figs 59-62; Guy 1986: 101, no. 87). One is reported from Srah Srang and dated to the ninth century (Mourer 1986: pl. 27, fig. 3). If this form is indeed the original model, the Cambodian potter simplified it by removing the spout and enriched the decoration through multiple ridging. It is interesting to note that at the Tani kilns only one *kendi* was found, suggesting that this form did not appeal as much as the *kaam*.

At Trapeang Thlok *kaam* are earthenware and at the Royal Palace one is described as being of rather coarse earthenware (Franiatte 2001: 110, fig. 27), but the Tani ones are in stoneware and stoneware examples have been found at the eleventh–twelfth century site of Prasat Ban Phluang, in Surin province, Thailand (Childress and Brown 1978). *Kaam* were rare at GAP's Tumnuh Barang site: parts of only two vessels, one an earthenware rim and neck, the other a sherd of high-fired grey ware, with incised decoration on the ridged shoulder (no. 4449). On this sherd diagonal rouletting has been used to create a distinctive pattern immediately identified by villagers as 'snakeskin'. This can be seen also at Tani (no. 380, Nara 2005: pl. 52). Is this a deliberate allusion to the symbolic connection between the *naga* snake and water? In the Khmer creation myth the Naga King ruled the waters of Cambodia and was the ancestor of its royal families through the marriage of his daughter to the first Khmer king (Ang 2007). If there is such an allusion, the *kaam* might have both ritual and practical uses: perhaps the earthenware forms are utilitarian water-pourers, while the stonewares may have more sacred functions.

It is interesting to note that *kaam* are not shown on the Bayon or at Banteay Chhmar. Given that they were in use at that time, as the archeology clearly indicates, why choose not to show them? The *kendi* might be considered more appropriate for ritual scenes, but one would still expect to see *kaam* in the domestic scenes. On consideration, there are other omissions, such as any scenes of agriculture, though the artists would certainly have been competent to depict ploughing, rice planting and rice harvesting. This suggests that the domestic scenes do not represent village life but the life of the city, where fishing and fruit-picking could be observed on a daily basis, since the city of Angkor Thom was crisscrossed with waterways and its houses had adjacent gardens, each with a fishpond (Gaucher 2003). The Royal Palace itself had wooded areas and fishponds.

Everything we know about Jayavarman VII (or his designers) tells us that the realism of the bas-reliefs was not an accident: they appear to deliberately include every class from the king to market vendor and occupations from midwifery to warfare. As Groslier put it, while images could be read differently by different viewers, from peasant to scholar 'they were nonetheless understood, real and efficacious for each person' (1973: 303). So why exclude the people's major occupation, which is also a major feature of the Cambodian landscape? This is yet another question to add to the ongoing debate about the nature and ideology of Jayavarman VII's reign. The study of ceramics will certainly not answer many of those questions, but it may help to formulate them.

In conclusion, ceramics contribute to Khmer studies in many ways, of which this paper briefly considers two. The first is the realistic depiction of contemporary ceramics on the Bayon temple: it is suggested that realism was intended to reinforce the message that the king was all-seeing and intimately concerned with the life of his subjects. The second is the import of Chinese ceramics: it is suggested that these may be part of a far more significant trade in horses which has left no traces other than depictions on temple relief.

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