

Portrait of King Jayavarman VII

Ven Sophorn

In Khmer history, Jayavarman VII is regarded as the last great king of Angkorian era of the Khmer empire; the name of Jayavarman VII was little known before 1903, at which time the Bulletin EFEO (Ecole Francaise d'Étreme-Orient) published a study by Louis Finot concerning a Sanskrit inscription discovered by Georges Maspero in the Say Fong region of Lao (near Vientiane)¹.

From stone inscriptions recorded at Preah Khan, Ta Prohm, Say Fong, Prasat Chhng, Banteay Chhmar and others in his reign from late 12th century to early 13th century A.D., they gave such an important event of King Jayavarman VII's royal court life, social affair and his eulogy. Before ascending to the throne, he probably had a name as Jayavadhana, his birthplace is Jayadityapura². He was a son of Dharanindravarman II (a cousin of King Suryavarman II, the powerful king who built Angkor Wat temple) and Sri Jayarajadhamuni, his mother. He has a principle wife named Jayarajadevi, who mourned for him while he went to Champa³. After the death of Jayarajadevi, King Jayavarman VII married her talented elder sister named Indradevi who is the great composer of Phimean akas stele inscription⁴. Another name of his queen is Rajendradevi which is mentioned in Preah Khan Stele inscription⁵. The king had several sons, namely: Suryakumara, the author of the inscription of Ta Prohm; Virakumara, the author of the inscription of Preah Khan; Indravarman, the governor of Louvo or Lavodaya; and another son who died young is Samdac Srindrakumara⁶. For the death of Jayavarman VII, noted that the end of his reign in Coedès and other books is around 1220⁷, he bears a posthumous name as Mahaparamasangata pada.

During his reign, the territorial political expansion of Khmer empire was spanned a huge area. According to a Chinese book written around 1220. Cambodia's border included Lavo (the region of Bangkok-Ayuthaya -Suphanburi), Chenlifu (near Chanthaburi on the southeast coast of Thailand,

¹ http://cambodiamuseum.info/en_collection/stone_object/jayavaraman.html

² Vong Sothera, King Jayavarman VII through Inscriptions, 2007 and Michael Vickery, Summary of lectures at Faculty of Archaeology 2001-2002, p.106.

³ Phimean Akas inscription K.485

⁴ Vong Sothera; according to Vat Sangke inscription K. 86, these two queens are originated from the Buddhist family

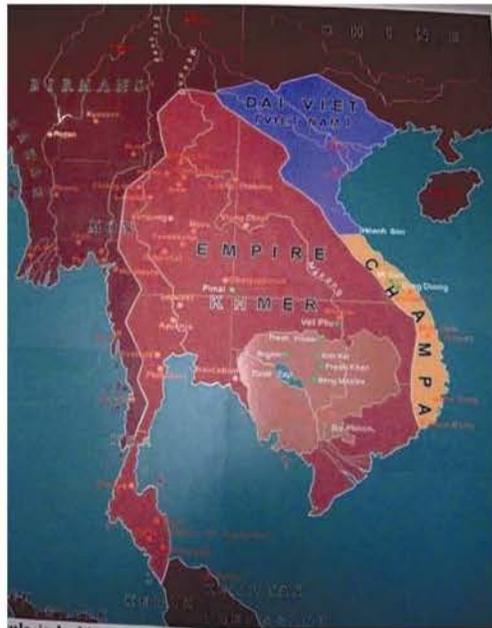
⁵ Lawrance Palmer brigge, The Ancient Khmer Impire, page 209

⁶ Georges Coedès, King Jayavarman VII commemorated the dedication of Banteay Chhmar temple to Srindrakumara

⁷ Michael Vickery, Summary of lectures at Faculty of Archaeology 2001-2002, p.110.

and went as far as Pagan, Burma)⁸. But increasingly he devoted his energies and organizational capacities to the kind of religious and social infrastructure construction projects that had been carried on by his royal predecessors.

He built Banteay Kdei, Ta Prohm, Preah Khan, Ta som, Kroal ko, Neak Poan, Bayon temple and Angkor Thom complex, and as further temple at Banteay Chhmar and Ta prohm tonle Bati temple.



Map of Khmer Empire under King Jayavarman VII
Source: <http://www.cambodianguide.com>

Beside the temple constructions and political administrative works, the king established an irrigation system and road network linking from Angkor to Champa, Phimai and others. Furthermore, as the inscription of Preah Khan says, there were 121 rest houses built along these roads⁹ and another significant records, the erection of 23 Buddha images called Jayabuddhamahanatha, possibly representing the king himself as Buddha and intended as symbolic of his rule over the localities concerned in 23 places:

Sri jayarajadhani, sri jayantanagari, jayasimhavati, sri jayaviravati, lavodayapura, svarnapura,

sambukapattana, jayarajapuri, sri jayasimhapuri, sri jayavajrapuri, sri jayastambhapuri, sri jayarajagiri, sri jayavirapuri, sri jayavajravati, sri jayakirtipuri, sri jayaksemapuri, sri vijayadipuri, sri jayasimhagrama, madhyamagramaka, samarendragrama, sri jayapuri, viharottaraka and purvavasa¹⁰.

With regard to his great achievement for the nation as described above, he is the one who remains his great fame through the archaeological evidences: inscriptions, bas-reliefs and his personal free-standing sculpture through his territorial domination. According to Mr. Gorge Coedès¹¹, there are a few male statues represented the royal portrait of Jayavarman VII. For instance, one found

⁸ Michael Vickery, Summary of lectures at Faculty of Archaeology 2001-2002, p.109

⁹ Lawrance Palmer brigge, The Ancient Khmer Empire, page 235

¹⁰ Michael Vickery, Summary of lectures at Faculty of Archaeology 2001-2002, p.106

¹¹ Gorge Coedès, Les statues du roi Khmer Jayavarman VII, In: Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 102e année, N. 3, 1958. pp. 218

in the south-eastern shrine of Phimai temple, situated in Thailand (it is well conserved in Phimai National Museum)¹² (fig.1), it represented as a grand human statue, seated on the circular pedestal, two arms are missing without trace remaining on the laps. Similarly, in 1958, they discovered a beautiful head in Preah Khan, Kampong Svay(fig.2), and another one¹³ found in 1931 in the interior of Angkor Thom, at the Death gate; but its torso was found since 1924, at Kraol Romeas, (the northern part of Angkor Thom); and then, they transferred to Phnom Penh museum in 1934 for conservation (fig.3). More precisely, In 1934, G.Coedes had an idea to do comparative approach, those discovered statues to the bas-reliefs of Bayon and Banteay Chhmar, and this interpretation was confirmed by inscriptions at northern wall of western external gallery¹⁴ of Bayon temple, he assumed those discovered statues were the portrait of the King Jayavarman VII. Moreover, if we observe on the bas-reliefs at Ta Prohm and Bayon temple, there were some unusual figures; they probably represented the portrait of king Jayavarman VII with his two queens¹⁵ (fig.4). The most impressive depiction at the outer eastern galley of Banteay Chhmar temple (fig.5), King Jayavarman VII unusually appears as profile figure with full cheeks, a large mouth and a square jaw; he was identified by showing a hairpin decorated with the image of Lokesvara



Fig.1, From Phimai temple (Thailand)
Photo: Mr. Thong Bunthoeun
and Ms. Patcharalada Jullapech



Fig.2, From Preah Khan Kampong Svay,
Photo trail Assembly by National Museum of Cambodia.
Photo: Mr. Thlang Sakhoeun

¹² G. Coedès, Musée de Bangkok (Art Asiatique XII), pl.XVIII-XIX

¹³ According to Pierre Baptiste and Thierry Zephir, *L'Art Khmer dans les collections de Musée Guimet*, P.263, Paris 2008: there's another similar head are displaying in Guimet Museum, its provenance is probably from Ta Prohm?

¹⁴ Gorge Coedès, Les statues du roi Khmer Jayavarman VII, In: *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 102e année, N. 3, 1958. pp. 222.

¹⁵ This great depiction is found on the pediment of Ta Prohm's shrine and Bayon's gallery, on the bas-relief at Bayon, 2nd floor inner gallery on the East side, it was remarked by showing a figure of king was sitting on the throne with two queens in the royal palace.

in his chignon. Clearly resemblance of his portrait associated with the lord of compassion (Boddhisattva Lokesvara) in Mahayana Buddhism, another unique statue was found in Kraol Romeas Temple at Angkor, nowadays, displayed in Galley E, Angkor National Museum (fig.6).

Therefore, from a preliminary study, the portrait of King Jayavarman VII, might be conclude that his representative statue, probably appeared in two forms, one as the human form (before crowning as a king and during the sovereign life?) and another one is associated with the lord of Buddha and Boddhisattva Lokesvara. This researched subject should be extended for further scientific study in the near future.



Fig.3, from Kraol Romeas, Angkor Thom.
Photo: National Museum of Cambodia,
in Phnom Penh



Fig.4, from the bas-relief of Bayon,
2nd floor inner gallery on the East side.
Photo: Mr. Seng Chantha



Fig.5, from the outer east gallery of
the Banteay Chhmar Temple.
Photo: Mr.Thong Bunthoeun



Fig.6, from Kraol Romeas, Angkor Thom.
Now displayed in Gallery E,
Angkor National Museum, Siem Reap.