

## Chapter 5

### Hevajra at Bantéay Chmàr

On a recent field trip to the ruins of Bantéay Chmàr temple in northwest Cambodia, in dry season conditions that made clambering over the treacherous piles of overgrown sandstone blocks easier than usual, I climbed up close to the miraculously still-standing remnant of a doorway leading to the easternmost hall of a mandapa to the central sanctuary. The lintel over the door bears a large weather-worn icon, which, to my knowledge, has not been published. Some years earlier, I had taken a rainy season, tourist-style photograph of the doorway from a safe distance, my *historically operative consciousness* dormant, and forgotten about it. **[Plate 87 PDS tourist photo 2000]** But on this dry season trip, which came after months of research into the Khmer bronzes of the late Tantric Buddhist deity Hevajra, the lintel gripped my attention. First I marvelled that the 70cm x 75cm icon was still standing over a three-metre high door amid such devastation. **[Plate 88 Bantéay Chmàr Hevajra lintel and doorway 2004]** Then it sank in that I was looking at an eight-headed, 20-armed dancing figure bearing swords in its right hands – Hevajra! At last, I thought, we have an icon of this supreme Buddhist deity ‘showcased’<sup>1</sup> in a central lintel on the wall of a Khmer temple, which can be securely dated to the end of king Jayavarman VII’s reign. **[Plate 89 Śastradhara Hevajra]**. All those traces I had been studying of Buddhism’s third wave, Tantric Vajrayāna, passing through ancient Cambodia could now be anchored to the walls of one of Jayavarman’s largest temple complexes. The identification of the figure came as a confirmation of the thesis, which was superseding all others in my current research: the royal creed of the Buddhist state Jayavarman was built in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century around the Bāyon was Tantric.

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<sup>1</sup> I was thinking of Bruno Dagens’ rejection of arguments for seeing a Tantric Buddhist deity such as Vajrasattva or Vajrapāṇi in the Bāyon face towers on the grounds that the popularity of such a deity in ancient Cambodia was ‘very limited’ and ‘this character is never *showcased* on any pediment or lintel...’ Dagens, B. (2000:112) ‘The Bāyon Face Towers and their Meaning’ 5<sup>th</sup> *international symposium on the preservation and restoration of Bāyon – Final report* Siemreap

One reason art historians have hesitated to accord anything but minor importance to the signs of mature Vajrayāna in Angkor in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries is that the material record of is virtually all in easily transportable bronze, for which provenance exists for only one or two pieces. Boisselier was representative of this when he agreed that Coedès' 1923 publication on *Bronzes khmèrs* 'revealed the existence of unequivocal representations of [Vajradhara and Vajrasattva]', but added:

These bronzes from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries constitute a fairly considerable group but with no stone statue being reported for the same period, the importance of the role that these divinities played in Khmer Mahāyānist beliefs was strongly diminished.<sup>2</sup>

Christine Hawixbrock is more cautious but equally sceptical before the scant evidence:

Mahāyāna Buddhism did therefore become the state religion but it remains impossible to say whether the Small Vehicle cohabited with it or in what manner and in what proportions Tantric Buddhism infused the Mahāyāna in Jayavarman VII's reign. As before, no iconographic or epigraphic index allows us to discern these sectarian specifics.<sup>3</sup>

No inscription elucidates the significant number of Khmer bronzes made of Hevajra, Vajrasattva, Vajradhara and Vajrapāṇi. Nothing provided an indisputable, *in situ* link with the walls of any of Jayavarman's temples. As a consequence, the most obvious questions about why the elaborate, high technology bronzes of Hevajra were made, and what kind of rituals took place in the temples that required their manufacture, have not even been posed. And yet Vajrayāna had mushroomed across many Asian states between the eighth and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, and was the most intensely *ritualised* form taken by Buddhism and the Tantric texts are themselves detailed records of ritual.

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<sup>2</sup> Boisselier, J. (1951:324) 'Vajrapani dans l'art du Bâyon' *Proceedings of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of International Orientalists* Leiden

<sup>3</sup> Hawixbrock, Christine (1998:76) 'Jayavarman VII ou le renouveau d'Angkor, entre tradition et modernité' *BEFEO* 85 (my translation).



Pl. 87. Tourist shot 2000

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Pl. 88. Bantéay Chmàr Hevajra lintel and doorway 2004



Pl. 89. Śastradhara Hevajra, Bantéay Chmar 2004

This chapter looks at the rituals Tantric Buddhism brought to some other countries in medieval Asia, and seeks signs for anything similar in Cambodia. The overlooked lintel in Bantéay Chmàr does at last provide the link between the Hevajra bronzes and the temples, and so the time has come to explore the ritual and liturgy of a Khmer Hevajra cult.

The ancient Khmer sculptors were successful in creating graceful, dancing icons of Hevajra, the wrathful manifestation of the supreme Buddha of the Tantric cosmos. This was an artistic *tour de force* by the royal workshops, for Hevajra is a complex amalgam of many deities and is represented with eight heads, 16-20 arms, bearing various attributes, and with four feet trampling the corpses of Vedic and Hindu gods. Yet the Khmer rendering of this burdened figure turns naturally and powerfully in a cosmic dance.

The lintel stone immediately below the Bantéay Chmàr Hevajra lintel, where the feet were carved, has dropped to the ground and the top parts of the legs are abraded. But the dancing posture is unmistakably that of Hevajra in late Bàyon-style bronzes. The pyramidal tower of eight adorsed heads is weathered, but many of the details that can still be made out and they are close to those of the gilt Hevajra B. P. Groslier excavated from the ruins of Jayavarman's palace. These include the lift of the left knee, the poised frontal posture, some of the facial features, the way the large earrings are supported by the shoulders, and the manner in which the multiple arms are inserted into the primary ones below ornate armllets.

German Lama Angarika Govinda<sup>4</sup> and Wibke Lobo<sup>5</sup> analyse Hevajra's whole multi-headed, multi-armed form as a compound deity representing the quintessence of Buddhahood in the transcendent, formless sphere of the *Dharmakāya* ('body of the law'). Multi-armed icons were first developed to convey the cosmic, *viśvarūpa* form of Viṣṇu, whose four or eight arms

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<sup>4</sup> Govinda, Lama Angarika (1960:206) *Foundations of Tibetan mysticism* B.I. Publications Bombay

<sup>5</sup> Lobo, Wibke (1997:77) 'L'image de Hevajra et le bouddhisme tantrique' *Angkor et dix siècles d'art khmer* Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris

supported the heavens.<sup>6</sup> From at least the fifth century the pre-Angkorian Khmers had been familiar with this concept, rendered in the celebrated 2.9 m. Viṣṇu Hari Kambujendra ('Hari, Indra of the Kambujas') from Phnom Da. His attributes are a composite of those of the six *lokapāla* ('guardians of the world'), Viṣṇu (staff), Śiva (antelope skin), Brahmā (gourd), Indra (*vajra*), Agni (fire) and Yama (stick).<sup>7</sup> [see Plate 12 C6 8-armed Viṣṇu Hari Kambujendra] Hevajra's tower of heads is composed from the five Buddhas of the *Vajradhatu pentad* – Vairocana and the four directional Jinas, who inhabit the *Sambhogakāya* ('body of bliss'), the cosmic sphere where Buddhas still have a form – and three lower heads representing Śakyamuni, Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi, in the sphere named *Nirmānakāya* ('transformation body') in which these deities appear as avatars on earth.<sup>8</sup> The Bantéay Chmâr lintel is consistent with this analysis, for in the lowest tier of heads, the central smiling Buddha has on his left a frowning Asura-like face, which is the Khmer representation of the Vajrapāṇi in wrathful, *trailokyavijaya* mode.

### 1.1 Śastradhara Hevajra

Swords are not Hevajra's usual attributes, but he is a warrior and a Sanskrit Tantric text taken to China in the 11<sup>th</sup> century defines his essence as 'the perfection of heroism (*vīryapāramitā*)'.<sup>9</sup> This aspect is also reflected in the militaristic form of the deity known as the *śastradhara* ('arms-bearing') Hevajra.<sup>10</sup> This is one of the four variants of Hevajra identified in the fifth

<sup>6</sup> Kamaleswar Bhattacharya (1965:72) 'Hari Kambujendra' *Artibus Asiae* XXVII New York University, Ascona

<sup>7</sup> 'Indian iconographical texts speak of several forms of cosmic Viṣṇu, with four faces and four, eight, twelve, sixteen or twenty arms...the eight-armed figures are called Vaikuntha, the twelve-armed ones Ananta, the sixteen-armed Trailokyamohana and the twenty-armed Viśvarūpa.' Bhattacharya (1965:73n1)

<sup>8</sup> See a fuller account in Tucci, Giuseppe (1949:234) *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* La Libreria dello Stato, Roma and Lobo (1997:75)

<sup>9</sup> The text is the anonymous *hevajrasekaprakiyā* found inscribed on bamboo at the P'ou-ngan temple in Tchō-kiang province in 1914 and translated by Louis Finot (1934:45) 'Manuscripts sanskrits de sādhana's retrouvés en Chine' *Journal Asiatique*.

<sup>10</sup> 'La forme à une seule face et à deux mains, et celle à huit faces, seize mains et quatre pieds, semblent avoir été les plus fréquemment représentées. L'aspect à seize mains selon NSP 5 serait appelé Śastradhara Hevajra, le Hevajra porteur d'armes, sans doute pour le différencier de l'aspect aux seize coupes crâniennes, Kapāladhara Hevajra.' (M-T de Mallmann 1986:185 *Introduction à l'iconographie du Tāntrisme bouddhique* Maisonneuve, Paris).

maṇḍala of Mahāpaṇḍita Abhayākaragupta's authoritative 11<sup>th</sup> century *Nispannayogāvalī*, the classic text which contains details of 26 major maṇḍalas.<sup>11</sup> The fifth maṇḍala in the *nispannayogāvalī* lists Hevajra's right-hand weapons as a fang, trident, cudgel, drinking bowl, discus, arrow, sword and vajra. This list of attributes was not adopted by the Khmers; the Bantéay Chmàr Hevajra holds two broad swords, four curved swords, and perhaps three daggers in nine of its 10 right hands. (The left hands of the lintel icon are all missing). And the bronze in the Bangkok Museum, identified as a *śastradhara* Hevajra by Piriya Krairiksh and Wibke Lobo, appears to be holding only vajras.<sup>12</sup>

The militaristic Hevajra may have been chosen for Bantéay Chmàr because the temple is associated with battles. It was dedicated to the memory of prince Śrīndrakumara – probably the younger brother of Jayavarman<sup>13</sup> -- along with four generals, two from this region, who sacrificed their lives to save the prince in a palace coup; the two other generals died defending Jayavarman in an ambush in Čampā.<sup>14</sup> Both events took place before Jayavarman came to the throne, although the temple was only completed 30 years later, when Śrīndrakumara had no doubt apotheosed, perhaps as late as 1200. The Bantéay Chmàr inscription says images of the prince and four generals were raised in the central sanctuary of the temple and in sanctuary-towers around it.

When we later turn to look at the indirect evidence for a Heruka/Hevajra cult in a Čam inscription, which describes a temple built to celebrate a military victory in 1194 – exactly contemporary with the final phase of construction of Bantéay Chmàr – we will come back to the Khmer association of the *śastradhara* Hevajra with victory in battle.

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<sup>11</sup> Bhattacharyya, Benyotosh Ed. (1949:40-1) *Nispannayogāvalī* Oriental Institute, Baroda

<sup>12</sup> Lobo notes: 'Le musée national de Bangkok possède une belle statue en bronze de l'Hevajra porteur d'armes datant du XIIIe siècle. Reproduction dans Piriya Krairiksch (1979:62,145) *The sacred image* Cologne.(Lobo1997:75 n.6)

<sup>13</sup> Groslier B.P. (1973:153) *Le Bàyon: inscriptions du Bàyon* EFEO Paris

<sup>14</sup> Groslier (1973:139)



## 1.2 Hevajra and Śiva

The Bantéay Chmàr lintel also features what seems to be a narrative element that is unusual in a Hevajra context, where the central deity is usually either alone, surrounded by his eight Yoginīs or embracing his prajñā. The usual maṇḍala is in fact present in Bantéay Chmàr, in three-dimensional form, because the still standing lintel is surrounded by a frieze of Yoginīs, who embellish a large, late 'salle aux danseuses'. This lintel also makes space for an additional, smaller, five-headed figure, to Hevajra's left, who seems to be moving in harmony with Hevajra's dance. Hevajra's lower, angry Vajrapāṇi face appears to be glaring down at the smaller, armed figure. Sadāśiva with five heads, of the Siddhantā Tantras, is the only figure in the late Khmer pantheon with five heads.<sup>15</sup> Other examples of the five-headed Sadāśiva or Pañcānana can be seen on Bantéay Chmàr's murals. Vajrapāṇi's glare brings to mind earlier Khmer sculptures of the Bodhisattva's wrathful form in which he destroys Śiva with his vajra and forces him to enter the 37-deity Vajradhatu maṇḍala. [\[Chapter 1.6\]](#)

However, a more local, political reference to the subjugation of Śiva to the greater powers of Tantric Buddhism may be intended. One of Śiva's many names, 'Bharata', appears in the inscription in the nearby cella in combination with the name of the sun-eating demon Rāhu. Coedès interpreted 'Bharata-Rāhu' as a reference to Tribhuvanāditya, the Śaiva usurper who ousted Jayavarman's relative Yośvarman II in 1167 while the future Jayavarman VII was residing in Čampā. Jayavarman's younger brother, prince Śrīndrakumara, came to Yośavarman's aid during the palace coup but was defeated.<sup>16</sup> The inscription says Śrīndrakumara would have been killed had not two of his generals sacrificed their lives to save him. But this interpretation does not quite fit the large panel on the western gallery of Bantéay Chmàr where the prince is clearly seen defeating Bharata-Rāhu, depicted as a giant in the form of a *rāksasa*. Groslier thinks it more likely that this panel illustrates the putting

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<sup>15</sup> 'The faces of Śiva represent his five aspects. They are known as *Vāmadeva*, *Tatpuruṣa*, *Aghora*, *Sadyojāta* and *Īśāna* facing north, east, south, west and top and representing the aspects of *Īśa*, *Īśāna*, *Īśvara*, *Brahmā* and *Sadāśiva* respectively.' Prabodh Chandra Bagchi (1975:3) *Studies in the Tantras*, Part I, University of Calcutta

<sup>16</sup> Coedès' ingenious unravelling of the inscription is in 'Nouvelles données chronologiques et généalogiques sur la dynastie de Mahīdharapura' (1929:297-330) *BEFEO* 29.

down of an internal insurrection, possibly the one at Maylang, between Battambang and Pursat, where Čam prince Vidyānandana restored Angkor's authority.<sup>17</sup> Certainly this fits the image of the *rāksasa* being crushed by the prince. Bantéay Chmàr, linked in this way to battles with Jayavarman's Śaiva enemies, may thus be projecting a dynastic message about the Tantric Buddhist subjugation of Cambodia's long-supreme Śiva in the creation of the Buddhist state.

## 2. Rituals

If Bantéay Chmàr can be shown as affirming a royal Hevajra cult and associated with defending the empire, it is reasonable to assume that the rituals celebrated there involved some of the large number of superbly designed Khmer bronzes of Hevajra and the Yoginīs in the museum collections around the world, or seen fleetingly on the art market.

How did Tantric rituals work? Maṇḍalas were key elements and the Tantras indicate a threefold purpose: they determined which deities were assigned to initiands, they were the stimulus in deity visualization yoga, and they framed the enactment of ritual narratives. Tucci offers this account of deity yoga:

On the other hand the initiate, evoking a divinity out of the bottom of his heart and awaiting its epiphany in confidence and awe, interpreted as true revelations the images appearing before him when he had fallen into the trance of ecstasy.<sup>18</sup>

The progression from secret ceremonies for monks behind monastery doors to large public rituals is traceable in the evolution of ritual icons in Pāla Bengal. Roughly-carved, eighth century stone relief icons of Vairocana have been interpreted by scholars as the work of artisan monks who crafted the stones themselves for secret ceremonies. They are inscribed on flat stones and designed to placing in sand or rice powder maṇḍalas. **[Plate 90 Pāla C8 Sarvavid Vairocana with Prajñāpāramitā]** But by the ninth century, Pāla Vairocana icons had evolved into large gilt bronzes whose creation would

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<sup>17</sup> Anne-Valerie Schweyer, in a paper for a forthcoming publication on the Bāyon, follows up a Claude Jacques suggestion that prince In, who was briefly enthroned in Vijaya then chased back to Cambodia is the same as the prince Indrakumara of the Bantéay Chmàr inscription. She says this name could have been rendered loosely in Čam as *cij* In, where *cij* is the equivalent of 'prince', as is *kumāra*, and In is an abbreviation for Indra.

<sup>18</sup> Tucci, G. (1949:216) *Painted Tibetan Scrolls*



have required a costly team of technologists and artists, of the kind only found in royal workshops or in the best endowed monasteries.<sup>19</sup> **[Plate 91 C9 gilt Vairocana from Nalanda]** These are bronzes for courtly ceremonials, and the high quality of the Khmer bronzes also suggests royal ritual use.

## 2.1 *hevajrasekaprakiyā*

Thanks to the tradition of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, who courageously walked the mountain passes to India or sailed the typhoons of the South China Sea, to bring Buddhist texts to China, a Hevajra cult ritual manual has been preserved that is close in time to the Khmer Mahādhara dynasty. A Sanskrit palm leaf (*olla*) handbook entitled 'The Hevajra consecration ceremony' (*hevajrasekaprakiyā*) was photographed in 1914 by Henri Maspero at the P'ou-ngan temple in China's Tchō-kiang province, northwest of Taiwan and was translated into French by Louis Finot in 1934. Maspero was told by the P'ou-ngan bonzes that the *olla* had been brought from India with other Tantric texts by the monk Pao-tchang in 1057.<sup>20</sup> Finot assigned the script palaeographically to 11<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. A similar text reached Java and it is not impossible that one was brought to Cambodia at that time.<sup>21</sup>

The *hevajrasekaprakiyā* is written in a clear, practical style for use in Hevajra monastic consecrations; but the instructions are applicable on a grand, royal scale. It opens with homage to Vajrasattva, Hevajra and to the officiating master, described as the incarnation of Hevajra. It is worth summarising the text, which is a simplified schema inspired directly by the *hevajra-tantra*, to glean some notion of what the 12<sup>th</sup> century Khmers may have actually enacted in their temples. The Hevajra maṇḍala is designed on the ground with

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<sup>19</sup> Huntington archive at <http://kaladarshan.arts.ohio-state.edu/studypages/internal/213slides/JCH/Lecture7/index07.html>

<sup>20</sup> Henri Maspero (1914:69) 'Rapport sommaire sur une mission archéologique au Tchō-kiang' *BEFEO* XIV

<sup>21</sup> A Javanese Sanskrit version of the *hevajrasekaprakiyā* is known as the *sang-hyang-kamahāyānan-mantrayāna*. Glasenapp compared these texts closely and concluded that although some details are different – the Javanese text for instance does not mention throwing a flower into the mandala – 'soviel ist doch sicher, dass beide Abhisekas eine Reihe von Akten gemeinsam haben.' Helmuth von Glasenapp (1938:202) 'Noch einmal: 'Ein Initiations-Ritus im buddistischen Java' *OLZ Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 1938 Nr.4, Berlin

coloured powder<sup>22</sup> ‘and the gods are installed upon it, while their mantras are recited’ and parasols, banners and standards erected.<sup>23</sup> Here indeed is a ‘ritual place for Khmer bronze Hevajras, Yoginīs and Vajrasattvas. The initiand, dressed in royal robes, his face covered by a red veil and holding a garland of flowers, imagines the maṇḍala shooting up into the air on an eight-petalled lotus, poised on the tip of a vajra-thunderbolt. He is directed into this ‘protected circle’ (*raksācakra*) to a raised throne and warned not to touch the sketched lines, the deities or their attributes. Once inside the magic circle he is protected against ‘the evil committed earlier during many tens of millions of kalpas’.<sup>24</sup> He throws a garland onto the image of the presiding deity that will determine his own special powers, and hands a flower to an attendant Yoginī who assists him in subsequent meditations.<sup>25</sup> He is consecrated with water from the ‘urn of victory’ (*vijayakalaśa*) and enters a yoga trance of triple concentration (*samādhitraya*). A vajra and bell are placed in his hands in further consecrations and he is given a new name which includes the word ‘vajra’.<sup>26</sup> Finally a curtain is drawn and a girl brought in for the secret consecration (*guhyaḅhiseka*) with the magic syllables *om*, *hūm*, *āh* inscribed on her head, breast and ‘stigma’ (*kiñjalke*). The P’ou-ngan olla is damaged here, possibly censored at some later date, but a reference can be made out to ‘the drops of nectar left in the heart of the lotus.’<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Finot: 1934:13. This is probably rice powder or rice grains, as for instance specified for drawing the maṇḍala ‘in a splendid way with rice powder’ in the Śaiva Vīnāśikhatantra (trans. Teun Goudriaan 1985:101 Motilal Banarsidass).

‘...le mandala est tracé sur le sol au moyen de fils de couleur, de sable et de grains de riz teintés’ Marcelle Lalou (1930 :3) *Iconographie des étoffes peintes (pata) dans le Manjusrimulakalpa* P. Geuther, Paris

<sup>23</sup> Finot 1934:13

<sup>24</sup> Finot 1934:35-7

<sup>25</sup> Finot 1934:38. The blindfold, maṇḍala, icons and flower ritual had for centuries been used in consecrations to China’s Tantric female, the 11-faced, 1,000-armed Kouan-yin (a female version of the Avalokiteśvaras of Bantéay Chmâr). This is shown in the *T’o-lo-ni tsi king* (*Collection de dhāranī-sūtra* T.901) assembled in 653 in China by the monk Atikūta from central India: ‘Ensuite, sur un terrain préparé, on forme un maṇḍala complet à l’aide de poudres de diverses couleurs, et toute une série de divinités sont installées à la place qui leur revient. En temps voulu, on place une fleur entre les doigts joints des neophytes, qui ont alors les yeux bandés. Ils sont conduits au point nord du maṇḍala, puis le maître s’installe en face d’eux, côté sud, et leur ordonne de jeter leur fleur devant eux. La divinité sur laquelle elle tombe deviendra leur patron de tutelle, et ils apprendront son mantra.’ Strickmann, Michel (1996:147) *Mantras et mandarins: le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine* Gallimard, Paris

<sup>26</sup> Finot 1934:40

<sup>27</sup> Finot 1934:46



Pl. 90. Pāla Sarvavid (Vairocana) with  
Prajñāpāramitā (after Huntingdon archive)



Pl. 91. Gilt Vairocana, Nālandā (after Huntingdon archive)



Pl. 92. Khubilai Khan's *hevajravaśita*?



Pl. 93. Khmer yab yum 23cm (after Spink  
1988:16 no.25)

The initiand identifies so intimately with Hevajra that he worships him in his own body at the climax. With a deity as complex as Hevajra, whose eight heads are an accumulation of deities who are interacting with the eight surrounding Yoginīs, this makes an extraordinary demand on the adept who, if he reaches this stage, is said to be on the way to becoming a Buddha. The external maṇḍala icons are thus crucial aids to awakening a complete inner image.

The largest and most remarkable set of maṇḍalic aids for submission to Hevajra was found near Beijing. It is made up of six life-size bronze *yab-yum* couples sitting on mounts that include an elephant, a resuscitated man, a buffalo, a bull, a goat and a gazelle. These bronzes were photographed in the 1920s, before they disappeared without trace. **[Plate 92 Khubilai Khan's hevajravasita?]** Pott thought that a maṇḍala on this scale could only have 'featured in the consecration of a sovereign, perhaps at Khubilai [Khan]'s [1261] Hevajravaśitā ['submission to Hevajra']'.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.2 Female participation

We have no evidence for what selections the Khmers adapted for their Hevajra rituals. The virtual absence in the Khmer images of Hevajra in sexual union (*yab-yum*, 'father-mother' in Tibetan) with his partner Nairātmyā may indicate that the Khmers did not share the Indian (or Chinese) tantrikas' penchant for sexual yoga, corpses, cannibalism and other antinomian activities recurrent in the Indian Tantras. However, a single Khmer *yab-yum* Hevajra, long held by Spink, London and published as fig.16.4 in Bunker and Latchford<sup>29</sup> **[Plate 93 Khmer Yab Yum 23cm Spink]** is accepted as authentic by some experts, and we may have to make allowance for the extant material

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<sup>28</sup> Pott, P.H. (1966:70) *Yoga and Yantra: Their Interrelation and Their Significance for Indian Archaeology* trans. R. Needham, Nihoff, Hague. Alternatively, the bronzes may have been created for a performance of the *cakrasaṃvara-tantra*, for with the addition of a horse and a makara, these mounts would correspond exactly with the eight *ksetrapāla* of this Tantra, in which Saṃvara, another Heruka contemporary with Hevajra, is described ripping open an elephant hide representing illusion. Kazi Dawa-Samdub (1918) *Shrichackrasambhara Tantra* Thacker Spink, Calcutta reprint with preface by Lokesh Chandra (1987:20) Aditya Prakashan, New Dehli

<sup>29</sup> Bunker, Emma & Latchford, Robert (2004:400) *Adoration and Glory: the Golden Age of Khmer Art*.

record being distorted by iconoclasm, which might have made prime targets of such explicit sexual images. Khmer *yab-yum* icons could have been lost to a Brahmanical reaction or to Theravādin iconoclasm.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, female celestial dancers draped with flower garlands are accorded primary importance at the entrances to the Bayon and in the large halls added late to the other Buddhist temples in Angkor, suggesting an intense female participation in rituals. And we do have the brief 1225 text by Chau Ju-kua of Canton that appears to imply that the four consecrations of the Hevajra system, possibly including erotic yoga, were being conducted by the Khmers. (See [Chapter 2.1](#) p.63).

### 2.3 Ritual paraphernalia

Further evidence for a sizable cult of consecrations comes in the form of large numbers of lustration conches or śaṅkhas, vajras, bells and other paraphernalia, many bearing impressions of Hevajra's image, which were the principal ritual instruments of the officiating monks. Although much in the Tantric cults remained secret and could only be transmitted between guru and pupil, rituals were gradually adapted to public performance, where the secrets were enshrouded in a coded language (*sandhyābhāsā*) only understood by the initiated. Once the rituals were recorded in manuals, the Tantras elaborated interludes of full theatrical scripts, lending themselves further to public performance. These included dialogues between the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gods and heavenly choruses.<sup>31</sup> Initiations dramatised in song and dance, varied in the many currents of Vajrayāna, but high emotion was probably present in all. Tucci, for instance, describes Tibetan rituals involving secret rites with female partners, in which the initiand collapses after a frenzied dance (*vajranṛtya*), before being revived to dash wildly through the maṇḍala, brandishing a weapon.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Tibetan historian Tāranātha recorded a case of Theravādin iconoclasm at the Vajrāsana temple in Bodhgayā in which Singhalese monks broke into pieces a large silver Heruka image, which they said had been made by Māra (the Devil), and used it as money. Elizabeth English (2002:18) *Vajrayoginī, her visualizations, rituals and forms* Wisdom Publications, Boston

<sup>31</sup> Such scripts might lend themselves to theatrical production. For example, in the *śmaśānavidhi* text in which Hevajra appears as Saṃvara and Vajradāka, a copy of which was also found in P'ou-ngan temple, a forest of ferocious animals is described with human skeletons and 'troupes of Yoginīs with knives and magic wands.'

<sup>32</sup> Tucci 1949:249



## 2.4 Indications of scale

Because of the scant textual evidence for Tantric Buddhism in Cambodia, the scholars who have focused on the Hevajra bronzes have had difficulty deciding whether or not the Khmer Tantric cult was practised on a limited scale, say by a small circle of courtly adepts. For lack of evidence, they have decided against seeing a national cult practised in public in Jayavarman's large new temple complexes.

The paradigm for the large national version of a Tantric Buddhist cult was set in China. When the Tang emperors and their Buddhist mandarins sought to exploit the potential claimed by the Tantric community for generating superhuman powers, large public ceremonies were designed for 'state protection'. These required the aristocracy, the army and the educated classes to join mass consecrations designed both as expressions of loyalty and for favourably aligning the body politic with the ultimate powers of the cosmos. Indeed, the collaboration of Indian Tantric Buddhist masters with the Tang emperors generated the role of mandarin in the imperial court. Michel Strickmann notes the common Sanskrit root for mandarin, mantra and mantrin ('possessor of mantras') and adds: '..."mandarin" originally meant *mantrin*, councillor of the king in possession of powerful *mantra*'.<sup>33</sup>

The supernatural powers conferred by the rituals were of direct interest to kings and armies of Bengal, Java, China, Tibet, Mongolia and Japan.<sup>34</sup> In China, Tantric ceremonies are recorded as lasting for weeks and requiring the erection of large consecration platforms, and with food and accommodation

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<sup>33</sup> Strickmann, Michel (1996:10) *Mantras et mandarins: le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine* Gallimard, Paris

<sup>34</sup> 'La participation royale au rituel tantrique est un thème qui imprègne la littérature tout entière, et ce n'est pas par accident que le mystère central du tantrisme, la consécration, a été modelé à partir de l'ancien rituel indien d'investiture royale. Il n'a pas seulement transformé les moines en rois tantriques, mais également les rois en maîtres tantriques...Les textes tantriques fournissent des instructions abondantes sur l'agression rituelle, pour agir sur l'esprit et le corps de l'ennemi...Les objets de ces actes peuvent s'appeler «démons», et l'exorcisme était une fonction thérapeutique importante pour les maîtres tantriques. Mais les ennemis humains étaient facilement assimilés au démons, et, lorsqu'il bénéficiait de l'assistance d'un ritualiste habile, un souverain ou un général ne craignait personne.' Strickmann 1996:40-1



for thousands of participants. This style of court-imposed mass propagation of Esoteric Buddhism was led by the Indian master and translator Amoghavajra in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century under the Tang. Amoghavajra became the most powerful advisor to three emperors<sup>35</sup> and was often called on to perform rituals in time of war. Orzech calls him 'the most powerful Buddhist cleric in the history of China ... [who] developed a new paradigm of religious polity for Esoteric Buddhism.'<sup>36</sup>

Did Jayavarman VII follow a similar model of mass engagement in potent ritual?

### 3. Which are the Khmer Hevajra temples?

Before the Bantéay Chmàr lintel caught more than my tourist eye, there was little apart from the overlooked Yoginī-dancer motif to connect the Tantric Khmer bronzes with Jayavarman's temples. Only two bronze Hevajras enjoy fairly reliable provenance. One in the Baphûon style was discovered in the floor of a side sanctuary in Bantéay Kdei. **[Plate 94 Bantéay Kdei Baphûon-style Hevajra Phnom Penh Museum]** Another dancing Hevajra, this time in late Bàyon style, was excavated by Groslier in 1952 from the ruins of the Royal Palace. **[see Plate 44 Palace Hevajra and triad]** The provenance of the other bronzes is unknown. And as no Khmer inscription mentions Hevajra or refers to the dancers carved on the Bàyon walls, historians have tended to sideline the bronzes as puzzling Tantric elements. David Snellgrove, translator of the *hevajra-tantra*, is representative:

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 11<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See Raffaello Orlando (1981) *A study of Chinese documents concerning the life of the Tantric Buddhist patriarch Amoghavajra (A.D. 705-774)* Princeton; Orzech, Charles D. 1998 *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for Humane Kings in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism* Pennsylvania State University Press; Patricia Berger (1994:91) 'Preserving the nation: the political uses of Tantric art in China' *Latter days of the law: images of Chinese Buddhism 850-1850* Ed. Marsha Weidner Univ. Kansas; Chou Yiliang (1945) 'Tantrism in China' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 8 Cambridge Mass.; Weinstein, Stanley (1987:78) *Buddhism under the T'ang* Cambridge.

<sup>36</sup> Orzech 1998:147

<sup>37</sup> David Snellgrove (2001:57) *Khmer civilization and Angkor* Orchid Press, Bangkok

Here is a preliminary list of non-literary pointers for Snellgrove's consideration:

**3.1** A large infrastructure of Buddhist temples was being created that can leave us in no doubt that the temples were at the heart of the regnal strategy, and absorbing a significant part of national resources.

**3.2** More than a hundred Khmer bronze icons of Hevajra, sometimes encircled by eight Yoginīs in his maṇḍala, are now held in museums collections around the world or have passed through the auction rooms. Their striking elegance and refined casting suggest they were made for courtly ceremonies.

**3.3** There are *thousands* of dancers carved in Tantric-style postures in the entrances of the Bāyon and on a double row of pillars outside its external gallery. [\[Chapter 3.2.2\]](#) The frontal, stamping-dance posture of these Yoginī-style dancers, with their piercing, confrontational stares, seems to identify them with the bronze Yoginīs in Hevajra's three-dimensional maṇḍalas.

**3.4** More Yoginī-like dancers are carved into the lintels and pillars of large roofed halls inserted as late additions to Jayavarman's earlier temples in Angkor – Praḥ Khan, Tà Prohm and Bantéay Kdei. The largest Yoginī hall of all, in Bantéay Chmàr, measures 35m x 15m. The halls provide the largest covered sacred spaces in Cambodia.

**3.5** The halls are surrounded by even larger stone platforms and terraces with Nāga balustrades, which would accommodate many more ritual participants. The balustrades feature Garuda embracing Nāgas, a symbol in Tantric Buddhism for converts being protected by the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi.<sup>38</sup>

[\[Chapter 4.5\]](#)

**3.6** Just before the Bāyon was opened, a large 4.5 metre-high platform in the form of a Greek cross was extended around the temple's central sanctuary,

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<sup>38</sup> See Alice Getty (1914:48) *The Gods of northern Buddhism*, OUP Oxford

creating an elevated area which would make public rituals visible to a large section of the city's population.

**3.7** Dozens of libation conches have survived that bear images of Hevajra and the Yoginīs. Along with vajras, bells and other ritual paraphernalia these śaṅkhas would have been sufficient to service a large programme of Hevajra consecrations.

The temple rituals under Jayavarman VII, from the evidence at our disposal, appear to have been large, lavish in song and dance and richly furnished with icons in gold, silver, bronze and stone. Towards the end of the reign they seem to have been conducted, with a privileged role for women. The Hevajra and Yoginīs on the walls of Bantéay Chmàr indicate that at least at this temple, large rituals towards the end of the reign were in celebration of the Khmer Hevajra.

Before exploring further the ruins of Bantéay Chmàr for its Hevajra cult, a further piece of evidence should be considered for the spread of such a cult outside Angkor.

#### **4. A Čam piece of the puzzle**

An inscription from neighbouring Čampā may throw light on the Khmer cult. The Mī-Sṃn inscription C92 B is an unusually clear historical account that suggests both a departure from Čam tradition and an adoption of Khmer style.<sup>39</sup> It departs from the conventional mix of panegyrics for the patron, supplication of the gods and details of daily maintenance to provide a compact and lucid account of current Khmer-Čam relations, as well as something on the beliefs and motives of the principal actors.

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<sup>39</sup> Boisselier sees telltale signs of Cambodia's Mahādhara dynasty: 'L'influence khmère aide à comprendre l'accent nouveau de l'épigraphie tant dans sa volonté de préciser les fondements du pouvoir royal que dans des tendances syncrétiques, souvent axées sur le Mahāyāna, qui rappellent celles de la plupart des souverains de la dynastie khmère de Mahādhara-pura.' *La Statuaire du Champa* (1963:303) EFEO Paris.

The man who commissioned the inscription is prince Vidyānandana of Tumprauk-vijaya, appearing in the inscription under his reign name, king Sūryavarman. Sūryavarman-Vidyānandana is described as practising the ‘true science of the Mahāyāna teaching’ (*mahāyānadharma tuy jñānopdeśa*). The inscription says he erected a temple to the Tantric god Heruka (*Śrī herukaharmya* ‘Lord Heruka’s mansion’) in Amarāvātī (Quảng Nam).<sup>40</sup> The temple, dedicated to Heruka, celebrated Vidyānandana’s victory at Jai Ramya-vijaya over an army sent against him by Jayavarman VII in 1194.<sup>41</sup> The stela was found beside the so-called ‘inscription temple’, a small 3m x 3m brick structure at the heart of the largest Čam sanctuary site, the dense Mĩ-Sõn complex inland from the modern port of Danang. **[Plate 95 Vidyānandana’s Heruka temple at Mi Son]**

‘Heruka’ is both a wrathful deity with a distinctive but rarely found iconic form<sup>42</sup> and a generic name for wrathful manifestations of the supreme Buddha that include Hevajra (with 8 heads), Saṃvara (with elephant hide), Mahākāla (black, with tongue out). The names ‘he-ruka’ and ‘he-vajra’ were initially conceived as similar invocations of supreme states or deities experienced by adepts at critical, visionary moments in rituals, which were hardly capable of definition -- ‘Oh, radiance!’, ‘Oh, adamantine!’<sup>43</sup> Later these deities of intercession with the ultimate, formless levels of cosmic being were conceived in distinctive iconic forms. Although they grew distinct, the full title of the Yoginī Tantra that celebrates the eight-headed Hevajra recalls their common genesis and by combining both ‘Hevajra’ and ‘Saṃvara’ – *śrīhevajradākinijālasaṃvara*. As the root meaning of *saṃvara* is ‘union’ or

<sup>40</sup> Finot, M.L. (1904:168) ‘Les inscriptions’ in *Le cirque de Mĩ-Sõn (Quang-Nam)* Henri Parmentier & Louis Finot EFEO, F.-H. Schneider, Hanoi

<sup>41</sup> Finot 1904:169

<sup>42</sup> Ray says his maṇḍala includes four of Hevajra’s eight Yoginī, namely Ḍombinī, Pukkasī, Caṇḍālī, Śavarī (Ray, Reginald 1973:260) *‘Mandala’ symbolism in tantric Buddhism* Chicago University).

<sup>43</sup> ‘With the common vocative prefix “He” the names Heruka and Hevajra mean respectively “Oh, radiant!” and “Oh, adamantine!” Mallmann (1986:182). ‘Formulas take on an aspect, *vidyās* take on a body, they become Vidyārāja, Vidyādhara; Hevajra, “O vajra”, a common invocation of the Tantric ritual, becomes a hypostasis of Akṣobhya and expresses his omnipotence by the multiplication of his heads and arms.’ Tucci (1949:216). ‘Hevajra itself seems to be associated with the naming ceremony (see *STTS* 256a2), but it alternates in the text with Heruka.’ Snellgrove, D. (1959:204-18) ‘The notion of divine kingship in Tantric Buddhism’ *La regalita sacra*: E.J. Brill, Leiden

‘assembly’, the literal rendering of the title is ‘Lord Hevajra’s assembly of the garland of dākinīs.’ Shinichi Tsuda’s work on the *saṃvarodaya-tantra* and the *laghusaṃvara-tantra* persuaded him that the meaning of the full *hevajra-tantra* title can be found the opening lines of the *laghusaṃvara-tantra*, which he translates from the Tibetan as:

Śrīheruka’s union brings all the rewards of fulfilment. It is superior to the unexcelled, *dākinījālasaṃvara* (the assembly of the garland of dākinīs). It resides always in the essence of everything, in the joy of the supreme secret. The being who is composed of all the dākinīs is *Vajrasattva*, the highest bliss. This is the self-originating Lord, the hero, *dākinījālasaṃvara*.<sup>44</sup>

For medieval commentator Tsong kha pa, this is highly abstracted wording for mastery of erotico-yogic ritual:

Dākinī is thirty-six veins and humours flowing in them. *jāla* means assemblage. The wisdom appears from the *bodhicitta* that is aroused by the wind circulating in it, which is *saṃvara*; *saṃvara* means the supreme bliss.<sup>45</sup>

The *hevajra-tantra* expresses this yogic method at I.i:31:

Candālī blazes at the navel,  
She burns the five Tathāgatas.  
  
She burns Locanā and the rest.  
When the *Ham* is burnt, the moon flows.<sup>46</sup>

The yogin visualizes a fire blazing from the navel, burning the five Buddhas of the heart *cakra* and the four Devī in the throat until the *ham bīja* in the crown of the head melts and drips the nectar of the moon down through the body, suffusing it with bliss.<sup>47</sup> The question this poses is whether this is a meditative experience achieved alone in celibate, monastic ritual or is coded language for erotic ritual in which dākinījālasaṃvara alludes to a meeting of human Yogins and Yoginīs, who recognise each other with secret signs and move to

<sup>44</sup> Tsuda, Shinichi (1974:54) *The Saṃvarodaya-tantra, selected chapters* Hosuseido Press, Tokyo. The lines are repeated in Sanskrit at the opening of the *Abhidhānottara-tantra*:

śrīherukasya samyoggam sarvakāmārthasādhakam I  
uttarād api cottaram abhidhānottaram II  
dākinījālasaṃvaram II  
rahasye parāme ramie sarvātmani sadāsthitaḥ I  
dākinīsamayaḥ sattvo vajrasattvaḥ param sukham II  
asau hi svayambhū bhagavan vīro dākinījālasaṃvaram I

<sup>45</sup> Tsuda (1974:55)

<sup>46</sup> Snellgrove (1959:50)

<sup>47</sup> Davidson cites the assurance given in the commentary of the Sa-skya-pa leader Ngor-Chen Kun-dga’ bzang-po (1382-1456) that the repetition of this process will generate the esoteric knowledge that transforms into Buddhahood. ‘Ngor-chen states that, if the yogin continues to meditate in this way, the co-emergent gnosis (*sahaja-jñāna*) will in fact arise.’ Ronald Davidson (1992:121) ‘Preliminary Studies on Hevajra’s *Abhisamaya* and the Lam-‘bras Tshogs-bshad’ *Tibetan Buddhism; Reason and Revelation* Eds Steven Goodman and Ronald Davidson, SUNY



a cemetery or auspicious field and act out the supreme Saṃvara (or Hevajra) maṇḍala in communal, sexual yoga. Tsuda sides with the physical ritual, accompanied with metaphysical meaning:



Pl. 94. Baphuon-style Hevajra found Bantéay Kdei (after Jessop 1997:315)



Pl. 95. Vidyānandana's Heruka temple Mī-Sṃn



Pl. 96. Heruka of Bahal II Padang Lawas, Sumatra (after Schnitger 1937:pl.34)



Pl. 97. Heruka from Śubhapur (after Bhattasali 1929:pl.XII)



[T]he pleasures experienced by each member are fused into one super-individual pleasure. This pleasure is identified with the universal, supreme pleasure realized through the sexual union of *Heruka* and *Vārāhī* [the couple who act as *cakranātha*, lord of the circle].<sup>48</sup>

This question takes us back to the modern dispute about whether medieval *kuṇḍalini* yogic sex rituals were primarily conceptual or physical. As was noted in [Chapter 3.2](#) very ancient beliefs about sex and the anatomy are engaged here. Woodward has recently proposed that the context in which a ritual was enacted would determine whether its yogic content was physical or conceptual:

Practices described in the texts were actually carried out, and therefore we are not dealing with meditation handbooks written in code; at the same time not all practices were necessarily performed, and the text is subject to open-ended interpretation. Yet Davidson does not make a clear case for the view that overt and hidden meanings are easily accommodated by the mind simultaneously.<sup>49</sup>

All Heruka deities perform the meditation-dance of ruthless compassion that enables adepts to feed the transcendent Buddhas within their bodies.<sup>50</sup>

The Čam inscription's reference to Heruka was passed over without comment by the pioneers who excavated and translated the inscription. Yet this temple citation is nothing less than the sole surviving epigraphic record of a Heruka/Hevajra cult in ancient Indochina.<sup>51</sup> Contemporary scholarship is following Boisselier's lead in saying the absence of any sign of a Heruka cult

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<sup>48</sup> Tsuda (1974:57)

<sup>49</sup> Woodward, H. (2004:333) 'Esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia in the Light of Recent Scholarship' *Journal of Southeast Asian studies* 35.2

<sup>50</sup> Reginald Ray records a Heruka maṇḍala which has a subset of four of Hevajra's Yoginīs: Dombinī, Pukkasī, caṇḍalī, Śaravī (Ray 1973:260)

<sup>51</sup> It is not however the earliest Tantric Buddhist inscription in the area. According to Edouard Huber, the first 'purely Buddhist inscription' from Čampā is stela C.138 dated 902 and found in the ruins of An Thai (Quảng Nam). The stone marks the dedication of a statue of Lokanātha (here Avalokiteśvara) by abbot Nāgapuspa of the Śri Pramuditalokeśvara monastery, which was granted tax-exempt status by king Indravarman, founder of the Đông-dùòng dynasty in 875. Huber points to 'the piece of Tantric theology contained in stanzas VIII-X' where Vajradhara, Lokeśvara and Vajrasattva are emitted in meditation in three spheres of the body called *vajra*, *padma* and *cakra*. These correspond with three cosmic abodes of the Buddhas, called void (*śūnya*), great void (*mahāśūnya*) and transcendent void (*śūnyāti*). Huber modestly made little of his discovery – 'I am not sure that I have rendered this well, because the present state of Mahāyānist studies does not yet permit us to follow the good Nāgapuspa into this desolate terrain.' Huber, Edouard (1911:259-311) 'Études indochinoises' *BEFEO* 11. The three Buddhas in the inscription are named as Śākyamuni, Amitābha and Vairocana and they emit the Bodhisattvas Vajrapāṇi, Lokeśvara and Vajrasattva. The supreme Buddha here must be Vairocana, the fifth Buddha, and the cosmology can be identified as that propagated in the *STTS* and the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. The Čam Buddhists in this period, including those at the large sanctuary site of Đông-dùòng, where a large stone icon in Vairocana's mudrā was found, seem to have been practising a cult based on the Yoga Tantras of the early Vajrayāna.

on the Indochinese peninsula leads one to think of Śrīvijayan influence in Čampā, a view which may now be countered.

Boisselier points to growing Tantrism in the Buddhism of Java by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>52</sup>, while Emmanuel Guillon refers us to Java a century earlier, in Vidyānandana's time.<sup>53</sup> Nandana says Heruka cults were important in northern Sumatra in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, but without adducing much evidence. She cites F.M. Schnitger's excavation of the temples of Padang Lawas in 1935, that uncovered a single, shattered early 11<sup>th</sup> century relief of Heruka, **[Plate 96 Heruka of Bahal 1 Padang Lawas]** which is close in design to a two-armed dancing Heruka with Akṣobhya in his flaming hair, which is also dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>54</sup> in the Dacca museum.<sup>55</sup> **[Plate 97 Heruka from Subhapur]** Heruka images are rare, as attested by Dacca curator Nalini Kanta Bhattasali<sup>56</sup>. The great university-monastery at Nālandā in the Ganges Valley had a Heruka sanctuary with an image similar to the Dacca and Padang Lawas ones. But Schnitger found no other in Sumatra. In 1976 Rumba Mulia followed up on Schnitger's work and revisited the remote Batak region of Sumatra. He found the overgrown temple ruin but found no trace of the Heruka relief.<sup>57</sup> So we are left with a single photograph of the icon of the Sumatran cult. Sumatra may have had links with the large Cam Tantric Buddhist at Đong đưong in the ninth century, as their common brick sanctuaries and 'cylindrical' stupas suggest, but the likelihood of the cult of the small Tantric Buddhist kingdom of Panai of northern Sumatra (perhaps related to the earlier Śailendra settlements of the island) influencing Čampā 170 years later is remote. This is made even more implausible by the fact that

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<sup>52</sup> Boisselier (1963:324)

<sup>53</sup> Guillon, Emmanuel (2001:67) *Cham art* River Books, Bangkok

<sup>54</sup> Khan, F. A. (1969:170) *Architecture and Art Treasures in Pakistan: Prehistoric, Protohistoric, Buddhist and Hindu Periods* Elite Publishers, Karachi

<sup>55</sup> 'He also built a sanctuary in the name of Śrī Herukaharmya, which he dedicated to a powerful protective deity of esoteric Buddhism whose cult was very important in Sumatra during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, though it seems to have been unknown in other countries of the Indochinese peninsula.' Nandana Chutiwongs (2005:75) 'Le bouddhisme du Champa' *Trésors d'art du Vietnam, la sculpture du Champa* Eds Pierre Baptiste and Thierry Zéphir, Musée des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris. She made a similar comment in (1984:431) *The iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Mainland South East Asia*, Leiden.

<sup>56</sup> Bhattasali, Nalini Kanta (1929:35) *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptures in the Dacca Museum* Dacca Museum

<sup>57</sup> Rumba Mulia (1980:9) *The ancient kingdom of Panai and the ruins of Padang Lawas (North Sumatra): Bulletin of the research Centre of Archaeology in Indonesia* no. 14 Jakarta

in 1024 Panai was conquered by Rajendra Cola of the Coromandel coast and permanently lost its independence.<sup>58</sup>

It seems more worthwhile to look to Cambodia to account for the sudden appearance of the Tantric Heruka in Mĩ-Sõn. The Čam king who erected the Heruka temple had intimate connections with the Khmer court and king Jayavarman VII. Ironically, this Heruka temple, erected to celebrate a Khmer defeat by a Čam turncoat of military genius, may give us an important clue to the kind of Buddhism then being practised by the Khmers. For Čam usurper Sūryavarman-Vidyāndana, the author of the inscription, had passed his youth in exile at the Khmer court. As prince Vidyānandana, he arrived at a tender age (*kāla prathamayauvana* 'in early youth') at the court in Angkor in 1182 and was raised like a favourite son of the newly-enthroned Jayavarman VII. This was just one year after Jayavarman seized power, possibly with Čam allies from his earlier years in Vijaya (Chapter 5.3.7). The Mĩ-Sõn inscription does not explain how the Čam prince came to be received at the Khmer court but shows that he was rapidly elevated to the equivalent rank of a Khmer crown prince (*yuvarāja*):

The Cambodian king, seeing that he had all 33 marks of a great man, took him into his affection and taught him, like a prince of Cambodia, all sacred works and all weapons.<sup>59</sup>

Prince Vidyānandana's education in religion, statesmanship and arms was that of king Jayavarman VII himself. The inscription shows how Jayavarman trusted the Čam teenager by conferring on him the quelling of an internal revolt by the citizens of the city of Malyang, west of Angkor.<sup>60</sup> If this is the revolt depicted on the western outer gallery of the Bāyon, then this confirms

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<sup>58</sup> Schnitger (1937:16)

<sup>59</sup> This is a translation of Finot's rendering of: *pu pō tana raya Kamvujadesa mvoh pu pō tana rayā nan madā traitrinśa laksana sampūrna pu pō tana rayā Kamvujadeśa sneha mānasa śiksā putau va sarvvāgamā sarvāyudha samāsta avih di dauk di kamvujadeśa* (Finot 1904:168, 170). The standard number for the marks of the *mahāpurusa* is 32.

<sup>60</sup> Finot's translation of this section: 'Pendant qu'il demeurerait au Cambodge, il y eut dans ce royaume une ville, nommée Malyang, peuplée d'une foule de mauvaises gens et dont les Cambodgiens s'étaient emparés, qui se révolta contre le roi du Cambodge. Celui-ci, voyant le prince était très habile dans toutes les armes, le chargea de conduire les troupes cambodgiennes prendre la ville de Malyang. Il soumit tout selon le désir du roi du Cambodge. Celui-ci, voyant sa valeur, lui conféra la dignité de *yuvarāja* et lui donna toutes les jouissances et tous les biens qui se trouvaient dans le royaume du Cambodge.' (Finot 1904:170)

that the Malyang rebellion was one of the major domestic crises of the early reign. The Bàyon relief, in between scenes of Khmer soldiers fighting Khmers in apparent civil war, shows a princely warrior offering up the severed heads of two traitors to the king in the register above. **[Plate 98 Vidyānandana portrait?]**

Jayavarman's trust was further affirmed a decade later as Vidyānandana was sent home to Čampā at the head of a Khmer army sent to defeat the Čams and install prince In -- a brother-in-law of Jayavarman of unspecified nationality -- as ruler in the north. Vidyānandana was made the vassal ruler of the south. When soon thereafter, prince In ran into difficulties, Vidyānandana came to his rescue against a usurper.

But Vidyānandana then suddenly betrayed his benefactor's trust and seized the north as well, crowning himself king and refusing to acknowledge Khmer suzerainty.<sup>61</sup> Jayavarman responded by sending in another Khmer army, but it was defeated by Sūryavarman-Vidyānandana at Jai Ramya-vijaya. In celebration, the Khmer-educated Čam usurper built his victory temple to Heruka in Mĩ-Sõn, embellished the Śiva-linga in the main Mĩ-Sõn sanctuary with the heaviest golden cover recorded in Čam epigraphy<sup>62</sup>, and turned to emperor Long Cán of the neighbouring Đai Việt for acknowledgement of his legitimacy. This the Vietnamese granted in 1199. But the extraordinary military career of the Čam prince was to end in disaster. Vietnamese records show that after Jayavarman finally sent yet another army to defeat him in 1203, the request of the defeated Sūryavarman-Vidyānandana for asylum in the Đai Việt was rejected, and he and his fleet of 200 junks off the port of Cũu-La disappeared without trace.<sup>63</sup>

The Mĩ-Sõn inscription is an unusually clear historical exposition, in the context of the epigraphic conventions of the time. It does not prove which royal creed was being practised in the Khmer court in Jayavarman VII's reign,

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<sup>61</sup> Maspero, Georges (1928:167) *Le Royaume de Champa* G. Van Oest, Paris

<sup>62</sup> Boisselier (1963:324)

<sup>63</sup> Maspero 1928:167

but it *does* prove that a temple to Heruka was erected in Čampā in 1194 by a Čam aristocrat who had been taught from his youth in Angkor ‘all sacred works and all weapons, like a native prince of Cambodia’ (*sarvvāgamā sarvāyudha samāsta avih di dauk di kamvujadeśa*).<sup>64</sup> And as Vidyānandana was a favoured protégé of Jayavarman, there is a strong possibility that if his god was called ‘Heruka’, then so was Jayavarman’s. The inscription can be read as holding up a mirror to what was happening in Angkor. A Heruka cult has no recorded precedent in Čampā, which strengthens the possibility that this cult in Mī-Sṟn was a direct export from Cambodia, and therefore a reflection of Jayavarman’s creed.<sup>65</sup> And if Hevajra was called Heruka in Čampā by Vidyānandana, then the probability is increased that Jayavarman also called his supreme wrathful eight-headed Tantric deity Heruka. The Khmer cultural imprint on the sacred art of Čampā is very noticeable in this period of invasion and annexation, and the Mī-Sṟn inscription alone provides grounds for our redesignating as ‘Herukas’ the bronze and stone icons made in Jayavarman’s heartland, which we call ‘Hevajras’ on iconographic, not epigraphic grounds.

## 5. Bantéay Chmàr pantheon

This new light from Čampa is strong enough to prompt our looking not for *whether* but for *where* Jayavarman built his *Śri Herukaharmya*. The Khmer temple with a military foundational theme that comes closest in spirit, if not in construction, to Vidyānandana’s modest brick victory temple, is Bantéay Chmàr, the major end-of-reign complex that lies halfway along the imperial road linking Angkor with Pràsàt Phimai, the major Khmer Tantric Buddhist centre that launched the Mahīdhara dynasty.

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<sup>64</sup> Finot 1904:170

<sup>65</sup> Boisselier (1963:324) later commented on the mention of Heruka in the inscription but, overlooking the virtual identity of Heruka, Hevajra and Saṃvara in Tantrism, concluded that as no image of Heruka was known in Cambodia, the Čam prince must have had contacts with Java: ‘Il s’agit, évidemment, d’une divinité mahāyānique mais elle révèle aussi une tendance tantrique très nette. Il ne semble pas que Heruka soit attesté au Cambodge où l’on n’en connaît aucune image isolée. Le «dharma du Mahāyāna» de Suryavarmadeva [Vidyānandana] semblerait quelque peu différent de celui de Jayavarman VII et inviterait à penser à celui pratiqué à Java avec une ferveur croissante vers la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.’

Before I stumbled on the Heruka/Hevajra lintel in the desolate ruins<sup>66</sup> of the unrestored and remote temple, I was heading towards the series of multi-armed reliefs of Lokeśvara on the western wall. The reliefs of cosmic, Mahākarunika-Lokeśvaras, with arms numbering up to 32 and heads up to 11, were a great disappointment after my earlier visit, for only two out of eight of the reliefs were visible. In the interim, a local military commander had dismantled and trucked away several metres of the wall, bearing four of the Lokeśvaras, to the international art market in Bangkok. Fortunately the convoy was stopped at the border and two of the Lokeśvaras were recovered and re-erected in the Phnom Penh Museum. Two more are now collapsed on the ground and the last two may be in Thailand. The temple appears to have been exactly contemporary with the Bāyon. It has giant face towers of the same design and long reliefs of battle scenes like those on the outer gallery of the Bāyon. These battle scenes are so close in design and execution to those of the Bāyon that they could have been carved by one large team of masons working on the two sites.

A design change immediately visible at Bantéay Chmàr clearly divided the construction into two phases. The temple was first dedicated to Lokeśvara, for his usual 1190s style image, similar to that found covered over at the Bāyon in 1924, is set in the lintel of the western entrance to the central block. **[Plate 99 1190s-style Lokeśvara lintel cella entrance Bantéay Chmàr 02.05]** This central section has Devatās and false windows with blinds half drawn on small covered passageways in the style of Praḥ Khan of Angkor, dedicated in 1191. This is in sharp contrast with the later, large, open, pillared spaces of the large Yoginī hall, which was added in the east and extended out almost to the surrounding gallery wall.

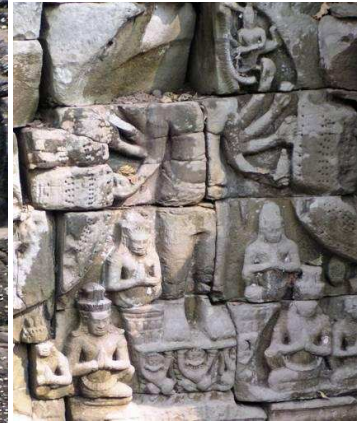
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<sup>66</sup> Etienne Lunet de Lajonquiere (1911:392) *Inventaire descriptif des monuments du Cambodge* (republished PEFEO, Paris 1939): 'Nous devons constater tout d'abord, avant d'en essayer la description, que cette ensemble considérable d'édifices divers est dans un'état de ruine déplorable. Aucun des monuments cambodiens que nous avons vus jusqu'ici, et nous arrivons à la fin de notre tâche, n'est aussi complètement bouleversé.'





Pl. 98. Vidyānandana brings rebel heads to the king after Malyang?



Pl. 99. 1190s-style Lokeśvara pediment axial sanctuary entrance Banteay Chmar



Pl. 100. Bantéay Chmàr Lokeśvara wall dismantled 02.04



Pl. 101. Vajradhara of Bantéay Chmàr, courtesy Phnom Penh Museum

The change in style came with a change of pantheon; the second phase, constructed in parallel with the final phase of the Bāyon, includes face towers, the Yoginī hall and the Mahākarunika Lokeśvaras, which interrupt the long narrative military scenes with an abrupt style break into static, sunburst single icons. **[Plate 100 Bantéay Chmar Lokeśvara wall dismantled]** The Yoginīs of Bantéay Chmār are unique. They have third vajra eyes and hold flowers with outstretched, feathered, arms and stand astride on Garuda legs. **[see Plate 40 Bantéay Chmār 70cm Yoginī frieze]** Bantéay Chmār appears to have been still in the final stages of construction when Jayavarman VII died, for two large dedication stelae were found polished but with only one inscription started.

In the central sanctuary of Bantéay Chmār, on the southern wall, I also came across an unpublished trinity of polycephalous, multi-armed deities that also belong to the late, Tantric phase of decoration. Two of the deities are dancing in Hevajra's *ardhaparyanka* posture beside a seated three- or four-headed deity with its principal arms in dharmacakra mudrā and four others rising in an arc behind. This smiling, open-eyed deity has facial features that are reminiscent of the Hevajra in the nearby lintel. He too wears heavy earrings, necklace and diadems. In [Chapter 6](#) I identify this as the supreme Buddha Vajrasattva, the deity whose giant form also appears, I will later argue, in the face towers. [\[Chapter 6.5.5\]](#)

### 5.1 Vajradhara

The only major statue recorded *in situ* at Bantéay Chmār is a large, 80 cm. mid-Bāyon-style two-armed, sandstone deity seated with vajra and ghantā held crossed at the diaphragm in a mudrā called technically 'embracing the Prajñā' (*prajñālinganābhinaya*).<sup>67</sup> **[Plate 101 Vajradhara of Bantéay Chmār Phnom Penh Museum]** The Phnom Penh Museum identifies it as Vajrapāṇi, following Coedès<sup>68</sup>, but Boisselier identified the mudrā more accurately as

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<sup>67</sup> Mallmann (1986:34)

<sup>68</sup> Dalsheimer, Nadine (2001:176) *Les collections du musée national de Phnom Penh* EFEO Paris

that specific to Vajradhara ('holder of the thunderbolt')<sup>69</sup>, the primordial 'creator of all Buddhas' (*janakḥ sarvabuddhānām*)<sup>70</sup> and therefore virtually the same as Vajrasattva.<sup>71</sup> [Chapter 6.5.2]

This Vajradhara cult drew the attention of Victor Goloubew but he, like Snellgrove 60 years later, hesitated in the absence of an inscription to speculate on the role of Vajradhara in Khmer belief.<sup>72</sup> Yet his findings, along with a later rejoinder from Boisselier<sup>73</sup>, suggest a significant cult of this deity. The confusion over whether the images represent Vajrapāṇi or Vajradhara is understandable as Vajrapāṇi evolved into the supreme Tantric Buddha Vajradhara, but it has obscured a special role in relation to the king's hospitals that developed for Vajradhara in the Khmer pantheon.<sup>74</sup> [Chapter 6.5.3]

In attributing no special significance to this impressive series of icons, we have sidelined further evidence for a high level cult of Vajradhara in the Bāyon period. Yet we now see that Vidyānandana's inscription in Čampā challenges the underlying cause of this failure to position the supreme Tantric deity in the Khmer national pantheon – the absence of an empirical, inscriptional base for a Tantric cult. We must now consider that Heruka was the Tantric god honoured for military victories in the Khmer sphere of influence in this period. This is what the Tang called *chen-kuo*, or 'state protection' Buddhism, when

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<sup>69</sup> Boisselier, J. (1966:Pl.LII.1) *Asie du sud-est : le Cambodge* J. Picard, Paris

<sup>70</sup> Tucci 1949:236

<sup>71</sup> Mallmann (1986:404)

<sup>72</sup> 'Nous savons bien peu de chose sur le Mahāyānisme au Cambodge. Nous ignorons notamment si les doctrines du Vajrayāna y étaient en vogue à l'époque ou s'édifiait le Bayon et jusqu'à quel point leur enseignement avait pénétré dans la conscience de l'élite sacerdotale ou se recrutaient les chapelains et les hotars du roi....Nous voici, une fois de plus, amené à regretter que le Cambodge ancien ne nous ait point légué de texte se rapportant à la doctrine du 'corps de diamant' (*vajrasasira*), ni de traité comparable au *Sang Hyang Kamahāyānikan*, si précieux pour la connaissance du mahāyānisme javanais et des théories mystiques issues du culte de Vajrasattva.' Goloubew, V. (1937:100) 'Sur quelques images khmères de Vajradhara', *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 5.

<sup>73</sup> In 1951 Boisselier said there were six other statues in the Siemreap depot that were Vajradharas mistakenly identified as Buddhas; I found only one other in 2005. Boisselier (1951:324-332)

<sup>74</sup> Dalsheimer and Boisselier (2001:176) follow Coedès' identification of the piece as Vajrapāṇi (Coedès, G 1923:11-49 'Bronzes khmères' *Ars Asiatica* Paris). Coedès saw the mudrā as the *vajra-hum-kara* of Trailokyavijaya (subsequently corrected by Marie-Thérèse Mallmann to the prajna-embrace or *prajñālinganābhinaya* 1986:34) and gave all Khmer icons bearing vajras the generic name 'Vajrapāṇi' on the grounds that only 'Vajrin' is mentioned in Khmer inscriptions.

they performed Tantras to ward off hostile armies or put down rebellions.<sup>75</sup>

Samuel indeed sees military and political purposes as the driving force behind the development of the Tantras:

Evidence increasingly suggests that a central driving force behind this transformation was the use of Tantric ritual for political and military purposes...Rulers patronised Tantric priests and established communities and colleges of Tantric ritualists, because they saw these specialists in Tantric power as an important dimension of the power of the state.<sup>76</sup>

Bantéay Chmàr, identified in its second phase with Jayavarman's battles with Śaiva enemies, thus becomes a metaphor that sublimates his earthly victories into a dynastic celebration of the Tantric Buddhism's subjugation of Cambodia's long-supreme Śiva into the dancing sway of the all-powerful *śastradhara* Heruka/Hevajra. On a far larger scale, it is the Khmer equivalent of the victory temple erected contemporaneously by Jayavarman's former protégé king Sūryavarman-Vidyānandana in Čampā. Bantéay Chmàr makes the best claim to being Jayavarman's *Śri Herukaharmya*.

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<sup>75</sup> See Orzech's account of the esoteric turn of the mid-T'ang court in the eighth century in (1998:135-146)

<sup>76</sup> G. Samuel (2003:1) Ritual Technologies and the State: The Mandala-Form Buddhist Temples of Bangladesh, paper for 5<sup>th</sup> international congress on Bengal Art, Dhaka and Mainmati



## Chapter 6

### The mystery of the B ayon face towers

The towers built by Jayavarman VII with colossal faces staring out in four directions over Angkor are the most singularly striking architectural feature of the ancient capital of Cambodia. And yet, despite many years of scholarly attention, they remain the greatest enigma of the vast complex of temples. This chapter considers most of the earlier interpretations, reconsiders the material facts of the temple art in the context of Jayavarman's Angkor and proposes a solution to the enigma.

At the heart of the mystery is the *identity* of the god in the face towers, but the enigma also encompasses the fundamental idea, the 'intellectual "model"', as Bruno Dagens puts it, that the architects and sculptors of the B ayon were projecting.<sup>77</sup> What statement is made by the first state-level Khmer Buddhist temple? What Buddhism does it celebrate? Why does it look like a fortress with two outer walls and a raised inner citadel? What is its political context and purpose? Why are there so many towers and why are they raised in this unique formation? Many scholars see the B ayon as Jayavarman's pantheon of the gods, past and present, of ancient Cambodia. Our task is to determine how the layers of hierarchy in the pantheon were structured, to look for the overall religious/political strategy which informs this structure, and to identify its principal divinity.

Most guide books interpret the B ayon as bearing giant images of the Mah y anist Bodhisattva Loke vara 'facing all ways', carved in the likeness of the king – an expression of royal-divine power streaming out to connect with a network of local territorial deities. I will retain the idea of a network of territorial deities but question both the identification of the central, linking god as Loke vara and whether the god is carved in the likeness of the king. I will propose instead that the image of the sixth supreme Tantric Buddha,

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<sup>77</sup> Bruno Dagens (2000:99) 'The B ayon Face Towers and their Meaning' *5<sup>th</sup> annual Bayon Symposium* Siemreap

Vajrasattva is what is carved with maximum prominence on the regnal temple. And that this image is the ultimate symbol of a programme to supplant Śaivism as the religion of state and to strengthen Buddhism in Cambodia at the moment it faced destruction by Islam in northern India.

### 1. Giant faces

It should be said from the outset that the Bāyon enigma arises partly from the fact that the Bāyon's giant faces are, iconographically, recalcitrant objects: their iconography is minimal and non-specific. As a consequence, the art historians have not reached a consensus as to their identity – shifting, over many decades, from Brahmā, to Śiva, to the Buddha, to the Bodhisattva Lokeśvara and more recently to the Buddhist Brahma.

The Bāyon itself has long been the most disconcerting monument for Khmerologists. It was first thought to be a ninth century Śaiva foundation; then thought to be 11<sup>th</sup> century, until finally discovered to be Buddhist and placed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The god of the giant faces changed in line with these shifts. George Coedès, who played a key role in this slow evolving archaeology, shows signs of the frustration and embarrassment of the long interpretive struggle in his final words on the faces, as he ends up shifting the blame from the indecision of the interpreters onto the indeterminacy of the object:

I can already hear our critics crying out: 'Just look at those archaeologists of the French School! Faced with an image as distinctive as the faces of the Bāyon, they are not even capable of telling us whether we are dealing with a Brahmā, a Śiva or a Buddha!' But the point is that between Brahmā the Creator of the Universe, Śiva who spreads his blessings to all regions of space, the Buddha who multiplies himself indefinitely in the Great Miracle, and Lokeśvara 'facing all ways', there are not for the Indian religions those distinctions founded on individualism that the gods of Olympus have inculcated in us. What is hiding under these Indian divinities, which the architect wished to represent, is not so much a real being, an individual; it is only an abstraction... 'royal power blessing the four quarters of the country'. Faces of Brahmā, faces of Śiva, faces of Lokeśvara equally fit with this abstraction, and if we have decided on these last, it is only because of the distinctly Buddhist character of other elements in the Bāyon.<sup>78</sup>

Coedès, the primary epigrapher and dominant historian of ancient Cambodia, is here asserting the momentous political significance of the Bāyon temple, constructed by Cambodia's first officially Buddhist king. Reflecting on an influential 1936 article by Paul Mus, he sees the tower deity not as a real,

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<sup>78</sup> Coedès (1943:137-8) (my translation)



individual god but only as an abstraction – a representation of royal power beaming blessings to the whole country. Coedès reluctantly concedes to a more precise identification of the deity as Lokeśvara only on consideration of circumstantial evidence. And yet the following objection to Coedès immediately springs to mind: if Khmer icons, with their deep Indian roots, were not potent with the individuality of the gods they embody, why would one of Jayavarman's (probably Śaiva) successors have felt the need to desecrate the Bāyon and his other temples on a massive scale, in order to transform them into Hindu foundations?<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> The date of the desecration is naturally not recorded in any inscription, but the reworking into Śivaliṅgas of many of the Buddha icons in the Bāyon is usually attributed to the reign of Jayavarman VIII. In an unpublished note on Jayavarman VIII, communicated personally, Michael Vickery points out that the only sign of this king being less Buddhist than Hindu is his posthumous title *parameśvarapada* and that the sole contemporary record from his reign is Khmer language inscription K.241 from Prasat Ta An near Kralanh, northwest of Angkor, which does not mention the king but dates the installation of a *Buddha icon* in 1267. The scarce evidence we have therefore suggests if anything a climate of tolerance for Hinduism and Buddhism, like that clearly attested in the inscriptions of Jayavarman VII. My own view is that a Hindu-Buddhist clash, if that was indeed the cause of the desecration of Jayavarman's temples, appears more likely to have occurred in the reign of Jayavarma Parameśvara (Skt. Jayamādīparameśvara), the last king to leave an inscription in Angkor before the return of Ang Chan in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1327, in his first year on the throne, Jayavarma Parameśvara erected a Śivaliṅga in the (I would ask still Buddhist?) Bāyon. (Coedès 1942:187 'Inscription du Bāyon K.470' *Inscriptions du Cambodge* vol.II EFEO, Hanoi) The installation of a Śivaliṅga in the Bāyon immediately upon enthronement looks like a politico-religious act of some significance, given that Cambodia's move to state Buddhism under Jayavarman VII was centred on this temple. Did Jayavarma Parameśvara also convert the whole Bāyon for Śaiva ritual and then order the systematic desecration of Jayavarman VII's other temples in Angkor? These questions cannot be answered with the data we have, but the question should be raised. Many of the Bāyon's Buddha reliefs were at some date chiselled into Śivaliṅgas, which were in turn removed by a chisel, presumably by Theravādin monks who later controlled the building. Jayavarman VII's huge 4.75m. Buddha on a Nāga was also pushed into the shaft under the Bāyon's central sanctuary. Does Jayavarma Parameśvara's 27-line record of his Bāyon Śivapūjā, which rewards the performing Brahman and provides 13 temple slaves to maintain the liṅga, quietly announce the arrival of the desecrator of the Buddhist Bāyon? On the evidence we have, there is no stronger candidate. There are numerous Śivaliṅgas left today in the Bāyon and one of these was presumably anointed and covered with the bronze (lotus-shaped?) cover (*padmavitāna*) mentioned in K.470. We have no further information on Jayavarma Parameśvara, except that he commissioned Angkor's last inscription in Sanskrit on a temple on the ancient Kapilapura mound just northeast of the moat of Angkor Wāt, which Coedès characterises as redolent 'with Śivaite mysticism'. (Coedès 1968:228) Moreover, two bits of circumstantial evidence argue against Jayavarman VIII being the desecrator. The first is the fact that the 1295 Maṅgalārtha shrine is the last monument in Angkor decorated in the Bāyon style, with false windows and lowered curtains (Cunin 2004:363), which speaks if anything for continuity with Jayavarman VII, as does their sharing the same Brahmanical *purohita*. (The first temples in Angkor in a post-Bāyon style are the Hīnayānist foundations of Praḥ Pallilay and Praḥ Pithu near the royal palace, which must therefore be dated to post-1300). The second is the inclusion of eight Hīnayānist icons among the 274 Buddhist objects recently uncovered by Sophia University in Bantéay Kdei temple. Eight of the buried icons are in Hīnayānist styles current in the Cambodia in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This does not rule out their being made during Jayavarman VIII's reign, because inscription K.241 of 1267, perhaps the 14<sup>th</sup> year of

The Bāyon faces are indeed a special case of recalcitrant, nondeictic iconography set in a culture loaded with readable signs. But as I hope to show in this chapter, even they, on close study and in conjunction with contextual evidence, can be shown to yield clues for a more precise identification of the god whom Jayavarman VII chose to make so extravagantly prominent in his newly fortified capital.

### 1.1 Description of the face towers

Let us start with a brief description of the face towers. They form the superstructure and outline of the massive temple. They are projected high into the sky and their dominant position over the city confers on them superhuman and hierarchical superiority. The 59 towers function both as icons and architecture – an unusual overlap which may have contributed to Coedès' sense of their expressing a politically significant abstraction of royal power. The Bāyon is not only a work of architecture; it is also an icon. The massive bulk of the temple is a god with 200 faces<sup>80</sup>. Thus, while the conventional 'presiding deity' and the focus of ritual activity remains the traditional Khmer Buddha protected by a Nāga erected in the central sanctuary, I suggest that

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Jayavarman VIII's long reign, marks the installation of an earth-touching, *māravijaya* (victory over Mara) Buddha, the icon which developed into the dominant image of the later Hīnayāna of all Indochina. K.241 demonstrates that a Buddhist community a few miles from the capital felt free to erect a new Buddha image. This bespeaks a climate of tolerance, rather than of persecution and hurried icon burial. The icons buried in Bantéay Kdei include four reliefs of standing Hīnayāna Buddhas with right hand held forward on the chest (as found on the false doors of monument 486, which Woodward considers 'may date from the 14<sup>th</sup> century' Woodward 1975:143 *Studies in the art of central Siam 950-1350* Yale), three earth-touching Buddhas and a bronze Hīnayāna standing Buddha with belt and centre fold, which also became standard in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The most likely date when all three Hīnayānist icon styles had developed is post-1300. Apart from Jayavarma Parameśvara, all Jayavarman VII's other successors were Buddhists, so I find it difficult to imagine anyone else with the motivation for wholesale desecration of Buddhist icons. It is conceivable that later Theravādin Buddhists destroyed or desecrated some of the major icons of the earlier Mahāyāna temples, but as most of the icons chipped from the temple walls were simple meditating Buddhas in niches, with no clear sect affiliation, the attribution of the bulk of the large campaign to remove Buddha icons to Theravādins seems unlikely.

<sup>80</sup> Two other scholars take a similar view. Bruno Dagens considers 'It is the invention of the face towers that makes architecture slide towards monumental statuary and temples towards divine images...' Bruno Dagens (2003:243) *Les Khmers*, Éditions les belles lettres, Paris. T.S.Maxwell writes in a forthcoming volume on the Bāyon: 'In terms of architectural theory, the new method of depicting the four faces on the towers of Jayavarman's temples appears to represent – whether intended as such or not – a sweeping liberalization of architecture and iconography, because this method abandons the canonical distinctions between *vāstu* and *śilpa*.'

the architectural superstructure above this image represents a higher vision of ultimate reality, a reality beyond human conception and known only by supreme Buddhas.

The 161 extant faces measuring up to 1.80m.<sup>81</sup>, which originally numbered over 200<sup>82</sup>, are virtually identical, with only minor physical variations among them.<sup>83</sup> Only the four adorsed heads of the deity in the tower are visible.<sup>84</sup>

The heads are mounted with a high, structured *jatā* of piled up ascetic's hair and, where space and design allow, this is surmounted by a large blooming lotus flower.<sup>85</sup> The heads are not hermetically adorsed, as they are in bronze and smaller stone images of multi-headed Khmer icons, but are slightly separated by an ornamented architectural column partially echoed in higher, structural elements in the piled-up hair.<sup>86</sup> The deity's head is, in each case, regally dressed with a diadem, heavy earrings, a high 'choker' necklace (*collier gorgerin*) of floral or medallioned links and a foliate helmet or hair cover that reaches down towards the invisible shoulders. The facial features –

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<sup>81</sup> Jean Commaille (1912:11) *Le Bâyon d'Angkor Thom* EFEO, Paris

<sup>82</sup> Olivier Cunin increases the number of towers by 11 on the basis of carved remnants of giant faces found inside and outside the Bâyon outer gallery, where he concludes that towers bearing faces have collapsed. Cunin (2005) *De Tà Prohm au Bâyon: contribution à l'histoire architecturale du temple de Bâyon* Institut National Polytechnique de Lorraine.

<sup>83</sup> I review below the work of a group of Japanese art historians who have recently conducted detailed measurements of the faces and attempted a classification into types of deities on the basis of minor differences.

<sup>84</sup> This dramatic conversion of the whole temple into an icon is not unique. It can also be seen in an apparently contemporary development in Nepal, where the concept of a sixth, supreme Buddha added a new dimension to the Pentad of Buddhas developed in the Yoga Tantras. T.S. Maxwell notes that a vertical dimension, in the substance of the Svayambhū Mahācaitya itself, with large eyes peering out from a raised central tower, was added to the horizontal Pentad to accommodate the new concept of a supreme unifying Buddha in this temple in Kathmandu (this innovation in temple architecture is unique to Nepal and Cambodia and is taken up later): 'The main bulk of the stūpa was then regarded as the symbol of the Ādi-Buddha. Along with this metaphysical elaboration, which transformed the "horizontal" construct of the Pentad into a "vertical" hierarchy, went elaboration of the personifications of these two new super-additions to the Vajrayānist cosmic structure. The Ādi-Buddha concept was specially embodied in a masculine being named Vajradhara, Wielder-of-the-Thunderbolt...' T.S. Maxwell (1997:164) *The Gods of Asia* OUP, Oxford.

<sup>85</sup> One tower of the Bâyon, numbered 52 by Parmentier, standing alone inside the east gopura and between the first and second galleries, is a variant in that it has slightly flattened noses and a coronet of rampant Garudas around the *jatā* of hair.

<sup>86</sup> These architectural elements in the *jatā* suggest an inheritance from the earlier pineapple-shaped towers over the gopuras of Praḥ Khan of Angkor, which rise in up to five 'false storeys' with columns and pilasters and which are sometimes topped with the same large, blooming lotus. (See Stern 1965:fig.110)

square jaw, full cheeks and broad, pacific, full-lipped, flickering ‘Khmer’ smile – are typical of the sculptures of the ‘Bàyon style’. The eyes are wide open and stare horizontally forward. The forehead bears a raised diamond-shaped lozenge which is sometimes carved with the pupil of a third, ‘vajra’ eye. Notably absent is any Amitābha figurine in the hair, the hallmark of Avalokiteśvara, and although some of the eyes have been closed shut by later deliberate erasure, none originally had the lowered lids of the great Bodhisattva or ‘Lord who looks down’ that is distinctive of the earlier Bàyon style. The facial features are not very close to those of the presumed portrait statues of Jayavarman VII, although the portrait statues also fall within the norms of the Bàyon style. We will come back to this.

None of the iconographic details excludes the faces from either the Buddhist or Hindu pantheons, as Coedès would no doubt readily agree, and yet Jayavarman VII surely knew exactly which deity he had chosen to remodel the skyline of Angkor. Scrutiny of the constrained number of traits and details of ornament and dress should help us narrow down the options.

## **2. Iconographic details:**

### **2.1 Open eyes**

One of the creative breakthroughs of the royal workshops under Jayavarman VII was the capturing of an astonishing mix of quietism and power in the lowered, meditative eyes of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This is seen in the king’s triads of the Buddha, Lokeśvara and Prajñāpāramitā that dominated the first decade of his reign. Boisselier memorably described the rapt smiles and lowered lids:

An impassive ideal of superhuman beauty [expressed in the earlier ‘Angkor Wàt style’] is replaced by a highly sensitive search for human truth. The Buddha, like the Mahāyāna or brahmanical divinities of the time, ceases to be supernatural. Overflowing with compassion, he reverts to the human state and appears in the form of a Khmer.<sup>87</sup>

The lowered eyes continue to grace the huge output of robust, compassionate and human Lokeśvaras through the second decade of Jayavarman’s reign,

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<sup>87</sup> Boisselier, J (1978:327) ‘Cambodia’ in *The Image of the Buddha* Ed. D. Snellgrove, UNESCO

but in the Bàyon towers the eyes of the deities suddenly open into an unwavering yet still smiling stare. Although, as Dagens notes, some of the Bàyon faces have had their eyes smoothed shut in later rework, this was not their original state.<sup>88</sup> The open eyes, charged with knowledge and confidence, become the hallmark of the king's third decade in power. In this, they are almost a throwback to the staring deities of the two largest foundations built before the Bàyon: Angkor Wàt and Phimai. The icons of Hevajra and his eight Yoginīs that are again put into bronze production in this period all have such open, staring eyes.

In this chapter, I am following the three phases of the Bàyon style distinguished by Philippe Stern<sup>89</sup>, which coincide roughly with the first, second and final decades of the reign,<sup>90</sup> the first phase under a Buddhist triad, the second dominated by Lokeśvara and the third, which includes the final work on the Bàyon, Bantéay Chmàr and Bantéay Kdei. Stern suspected a major religious shift in the third phase, because Lokeśvara sculptures were covered over in the Bàyon and his image all but disappeared from the sacred art, but he was unable to define the new phase:

‘Was the great vogue...[of Lokeśvara] ended? Given that one of the hidden pediments was dedicated to him and that he is absent from all the pediments left visible, had a new religious change taken place? One can ask, but as the change is only observable on a single great temple, the Bàyon itself, it is, despite the importance of the monument, difficult to say.’<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> ‘Originally, all of the eyes were open, but it is observed that some of them have been quite roughly reworked at a later date to give them a closed or in some cases partly closed appearance. It is obviously not something simply left unfinished, but a modification that must no doubt be seen in the context of one of the reappropriations that the Bayon underwent after its construction.’ Dagens, B. (2000:100) ‘The Bàyon Face Towers and their Meaning’ in *5<sup>th</sup> international symposium on the preservation and restoration of Bàyon – Final report Siemreap*

<sup>89</sup> Stern (1965:167)

<sup>90</sup> Olivier Cunin has recently extended Stern's analysis of motifs to 10 criteria and added to the relative chronology indicators by measuring the magnetism retained by different iron oxide levels in the sandstone extracted from different quarries. This produces a more detailed stratification of the evolution of the Bàyon style and of the phases of building of Jayavarman's temples, while basically reaffirming Stern's original structure. Both Stern and Cunin believe the first face towers in the Bàyon were carved at the end of the first phase of building the state temple, coinciding with the third phase of Prah Khan and the second Bàyon-style phase, which Stern dubbed ‘Lokesçvarisation’. (Cunin 2004:327). Although Stern expressed reservations about seeing Lokeśvara in the face towers, he allowed himself to be borne along by the interpretation of Lokeśvara *samantamukha* formulated by Mus and Coedès, even while referring to Boisselier's 1951 interpretation of Vajrasattva. (Stern 1965:145, 163)

<sup>91</sup> Stern (1965:164)

I will argue that the third phase, in the opening two decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was focused on a Hevajra cult, which we will, following Stern's 'Lokeśvarization', call 'Yoginification'.

The opening of the eyes may be a signal that the Buddhist conceptions with which Jayavarman remodelled the country's spiritual defences had been adjusted. Staring eyes are usually indicators of Tantric deities (whether Hindu, as in the 'Angkor Wàt style' or Buddhist, as at Phimai). The Khmers did not go in for horrific icons of wrathful deities, so an open-eyed stare, as in the Hevajra icons, was used as an adequate indicator of, say, a wrathful Heruka.

## **2.2 Lozenge/third eye**

Another feature of the Bàyon deities that has caused puzzlement is the lozenge shape on the forehead of the faces. This is mostly raised in relief but sometimes incised into the stone. It sometimes contains a bulging iris and is sometimes only a border, rather like the mounting of a jewel. In Khmer bronze figures any of these variants would be taken as the third 'vajra' eye, which Tantric Buddhism adopted from Śiva's third eye, and which confers the omniscience of a Buddha's vision. Similar raised lozenge eyes are sometimes carved on the forehead of the middle Bayon period Lokeśvaras; they are invariably present on the brow of Hevajra and the eight Yoginīs that dance around him in the icons of what is understood here as the last, more overtly Vajrayānist part of Jayavarman's reign.<sup>92</sup>

## **2.3 Choker necklace**

The necklace below the Bàyon faces is close in design to the high floral or medallion choker worn by the asuras of Angkor Thom's causeways. In the latter case this appears to be part of military dress and the ornament is shared with Khmer temple door guardians. But the chokers on the towers may be no more than a suggestive device, used in the limited space available to the sculptors, to indicate that the unseen giant bodies standing or sitting in the Bàyon towers are adorned in full regalia.

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<sup>92</sup> See Stern, P. (1965:129-70) *Les monuments khmers du style du Bàyon et Jayavarman VII* Universitaires de France, Paris

## 2.4 Diadem & hair cover

The diadem of the face tower deities is in the form of a high coronet or tiara, with attached foliate ornaments falling behind the ears towards the shoulders, and possibly covering the hair. Regal attire in Buddhism points to the princely Bodhisattvas or the crowned Buddhas of the Tantras, and in Khmer sacred art to the crowned Buddhas of Phimai. Long hair and neck covers like these, according to Boisselier, are 'normally reserved for terrifying persons: the *dvarapālas*<sup>93</sup> of the right door post, Asuras and occasionally warriors.'<sup>94</sup> Hair covers could suggest a vigilant guardian aspect in the faces – what Woodward calls the conquering and guarding aspects of Tantric Buddha images.<sup>95</sup> Coedès published in 1923 a Khmer bronze in the Bangkok Museum, which shows Vajrasattva, identifiable in his classical *mudra* with vajra in the right hand before the chest and the bell in the left on the left hip, wearing a lightweight helmet-like hair and neck cover. **[Plate 102 Vajrasattva with hair cover]** If it is not a hair cover that is represented on the towers (which cannot be ascertained) the foliate ornament behind the ears, like the choker, may, again, simply denote full regalia.

## 3. Interpretations

We now survey the principal attempts at identification of the Bāyon faces – including the Buddha, Brahmā, various composite deities (many involving Lokeśvara), the king, territorial gods and deva/asura guardians.

### 3.1 Buddha

The earliest historical description of the face tower deities calls them Buddhas. Exceptionally in Khmer history, we have an almost contemporary eyewitness report dating from the same century in which the Bāyon was completed. In

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<sup>93</sup> 'Curious this diadem worn by the faces of the Bayon style towers. This hair cover is only used for the fierce *dvarapalas* of the reliefs in the third phase of the style.' Boisselier, J (1955:125) *La statuaire khmère et son évolution* EFEO, Saigon

<sup>94</sup> Jean Boisselier (1951:328) 'Vajrapani dans l'art du Bāyon' in *Proceedings of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of International Orientalists Istanbul*

<sup>95</sup> 'In interpreting the faces of the towers of the Bāyon, scholars have sought explanations that accord with one or another of these different strands. In one view, the faces represent the Buddha, or the Buddha in Tantric manifestations – *vajra* aspects conquering and guarding.' Woodward, H. (2003:167) *The art and architecture of Thailand* Brill, Leiden

1296, nearly 80 years after Jayavarman died, and just one year after his son's successor Jayavarman VIII abdicated, an observant and numerate Chinese ambassador spent a year in Angkor. Zhou daguan described the giant *four-faced* towers over the gates of Angkor Thom as *five-headed* Buddhas:

Above each gate are grouped five large heads of Buddha in stone, whose faces are turned towards the four cardinal points; in the centre is placed one of the five heads which is ornamented with gold.<sup>96</sup>

Paul Pelliot, who translated the Chinese text, suggests the carvings were not of Brahmā but were the five-headed Śiva *pañcānana*, that was much produced in images by the Khmers in this period. Pelliot speculated that the fifth, golden head had eventually fallen to the ground.<sup>97</sup> No trace of added heads has been found, but the ambassador's report has given rise to several theories about the fifth golden head, which have tended to strengthen the inculpation of Jayavarman VIII. Dagens, for example, proposes that the fifth golden head may have been added in stucco and gilded and was part of the reworking of Buddha images in the Bāyon to 'Śiva-ize' the city gates and the state temple 'when the Bāyon became Śivite in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century.' However the new look at the evidence for Jayavarman VIII being the desecrator by Michael Vickery, as noted in footnote 426, now prompts a fundamental reappraisal of when the Bāyon was 'Śiva-ized' and the evidence now points to the the late 1320s, some 30 years after the ambassador visited the city. Zhou made no mention of whether the Buddhists were perpetuating their rituals in the great stone temples built by Jayavarman VII when he visited the city. He wrote only of Buddhists in villages using simple, single room temples with clay icons, but he said the Hindu priests (*pa-sseu-wei*) were worse off.<sup>98</sup> The ambassador's mention of four stone and one golden head on the gates of Angkor Thom therefore remains unexplained.

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<sup>96</sup> Pelliot, P. (1951:11) *Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge de Tcheou Ta-Kouan: version nouvelle* Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, Paris.

<sup>97</sup> "On the great wall there are five heads of Buddha; the central one is gilt." We can only come closer to the text by supposing that the so-called Brahmā *caturmukha* were in reality Śiva *pañcānana* whose upper head has fallen.' Paul Pelliot (1902:142) 'Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge' *BEFEO* 2

<sup>98</sup> Pelliot (1951:15)



### 3.2 The most disseminated interpretation: Bodhisattva Lokeśvara

For many decades, scholars viewed the Bāyon as a ninth century Hindu foundation until Parmentier in 1924 discovered a large, built-over pediment of Lokeśvara in a routine cleaning operation that proved the Bāyon's Buddhist vocation and changed the status quo overnight. In 1927 Philippe Stern questioned the ninth century date after analysing the evolution of faces in Khmer sculptures and of temple structures<sup>99</sup> and in 1928, George Coedès argued conclusively that the Bayon was the 12<sup>th</sup> century state temple of the Buddhist king Jayavarman VII whose inscriptions it bears.<sup>100</sup> The Bāyon's Buddhist cult was further confirmed in 1933 when Georges Trouvé recovered and reconstructed a large, smashed Nāga Buddha while cleaning a shaft under the central sanctuary tower, after a storm dislodged stones from the cella, obliging Trouvé to insert iron supports.<sup>101</sup>

In two articles in the 1930s, Paul Mus then laid the groundwork for this quasi-consensus which sees the faces the size of a man in the towers as icons of the Bodhisattva Lokeśvara *samantamukha* ('facing all ways'), in the likeness of the king.<sup>102</sup> Mus proposed to resolve the 'enigma of Khmer archaeology' by applying to the Bāyon the vision of Avalokiteśvara in the great early Mahāyāna classic *Lotus of the Good Law (Saddharma-puṇḍarīka)*. He sees the Buddhist and Hindu deities whose names appear in short inscriptions in alcoves and on the doorjambs of the (subsequently flattened) Bāyon *salles-passage* or *vrah kuṭi* as widely varied icons that are all emanations of the presiding Lokeśvara in the towers. Indeed, Avalokiteśvara in the *Lotus sūtra* is capable of appearing in the form of any deity. Mus also sees the uniformity in

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<sup>99</sup> Philippe Stern (1927) *Le Bayon d'Angkor et l'évolution de l'art khmer: étude et discussion de la chronologie des monuments khmers* Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuther, Paris

<sup>100</sup> Coedès, G (1928) 'La date du Bayon' *BEFEO* 28. This obviated the need for Stern's implausible proposal that the temples were built without inscriptions by king Sūryavarman I and covered with inscriptions 150 years later by Jayavarman VII.

<sup>101</sup> Trouvé's account of the discovery makes no suggestion of the Naga Buddha being smashed before being pushed into the shaft, which had been earlier covered over by Jean Commaille to prevent accidents, as he liberated the temple from the forest. Trouvé found a Buddha head and a gold fragment and assumed the shaft had long since been pillaged for precious objects. Trouvé, G. (1933:1117) 'Chronique: Bāyon' *BEFEO* 33

<sup>102</sup> Mus, P. (1936:57-68) 'Le symbolisme à Angkor-Thom: Le «Grand Miracle» du Bāyon' *Compte Rendus des Séances de l'Année: Academie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres*, Paris; Mus, P. (1937:65-75) 'Angkor in the time of Jayavarman VII' *Indian Arts and Letters* XI

the 200 giant faces as an outcome of this high level synthesis of the pantheon of gods below:

[The faces] signify that beneath them in the shadowy chapels, Buddhas, gods and local genii are merely so many masks worn by the great succouring bodhisattva whose portrait appears in broad daylight on the four sides of the towers.<sup>103</sup>

For Mus, each face tower corresponds to a province or city, whose local gods are united in the icon of Lokeśvara in the tower, carved in the likeness of the king and generating 'royal power blessing the four quarters of the country'.<sup>104</sup> Several of the extant 40 short inscriptions include geographical references, but all attempts to formally map their random distribution to the kind of 'mystical geography' Mus seeks, have failed. Certainly Jayavarman invested resources in erecting temples and deities throughout his kingdom, and then built a state temple that honoured the whole, expanding pantheon. And imperial synthesis was a priority, as seen in the 1191 Prah Khan stela, which commands the presence at an annual spring festival of the icons of 122 gods (including 23 '*Jayabuddhamahānāthas*' distributed to major cities). Coedès presumed the icons were carried to the capital in bronze replicas.<sup>105</sup> This annual capital festival tradition<sup>106</sup> may have been extended in whatever activities took place in the 16 *vrah kuṭi* built across the outer courtyard of the Bāyon. Maxwell, in the forthcoming chapter already cited, notes a geographic aspect to images installed in the outer sections of the temple, so the *vrah kuṭi* may have been reserved for deities of particular regions of the empire. Coedès was prepared to speculate that as positions for two of the *Jayabuddhamahānātha* images are marked in the short inscriptions of the Bāyon all 23 might have had named places there.<sup>107</sup> Dumarçay and Royère estimate the *vrah kuṭi* were built as late as '1210?' and dismantled perhaps five years later, but cite no evidence.<sup>108</sup> Transporting replicas may also have

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<sup>103</sup> Mus (1937:74)

<sup>104</sup> Mus (1936:65).

<sup>105</sup> Coedès, G. (1941:267) 'Le stèle du Prah Khan d'Angkor' *BEFEO* 41. For a controversial and not always reliable account, see a discussion of the form taken by the spring festival in David K. Wyatt (2001:18) *Relics, oaths and politics in 13th century Siam* JSEAS 32.1.

<sup>106</sup> The Tà Prohm stela prescribes a similar huge festival with parades, music and dancing involving large numbers of icons a month later than that at Prah Khan. Coedès (1906:77) 'La stèle de Ta-Prohm' *BEFEO* 6

<sup>107</sup> Coedès (1941:266).

<sup>108</sup> Dumarçay, J. and Royère, Pascal (2001:100) *Cambodian architecture 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries* Brill, Leiden. Parmentier, Dumarçay and Cunin say the *vrah kuṭi* were erected shortly after the Bāyon outer gallery, with which Cunin found they share the same magnetic susceptibility

continued, so that the short, carved Bayon inscriptions may in some cases have only marked the position reserved for each icon.

But the cult of Lokeśvara at the heart of the Praḥ Khan festival underwent a significant change. In 1191 there is indeed much evidence to link Praḥ Khan, Neak Pean and the king's other temples with Lokeśvara. Philippe Stern defines a radical switch in the 1190s from the early Buddhism focused on the triad of Nāga Buddha, Lokeśvara and Prajñāpāramitā to a ubiquitous veneration of the compassionate Bodhisattva Lokeśvara, propagated in an empire-wide campaign he calls 'Lokeçvarisation'. The core second level of the Bāyon around the central sanctuary was built by this time, suggesting it may first have been conceived as a temple dedicated to Lokeśvara. Cunin's measurements of the magnetism held by the stone ( $0.7 \sim 1.3 \times 10^{-3}$ ), which make the core Bāyon contemporary with, or at least built from the same quarry shipments as the third series of additions to Praḥ Khan and the core of Bantéay Kdei,<sup>109</sup> are consistent with this. Moreover, Cunin points to the erection of scaffolding around the Bāyon's 'massif central' and surrounding face towers as requiring that the towers were built before the galleries that later connected them. The same requirement for scaffolding space would also dictate that the faces were sculpted on the towers from the same scaffolding.<sup>110</sup> The rest of the Bāyon appears to have been left undecorated while work on the king's other temples went ahead. Stern remarks on the homogeneity of the decoration of the walls of the state temple and attributes this all to the third and final phase of the Bāyon style in the first 20 years of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>111</sup> Cunin, concurring with Stern's analysis of the late (fourth) *devatā* type and other decorative motifs in the Bāyon, concludes that after the central architectural phases and the carving of the first face towers, there must have been a significant time gap between the building and the

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reading. (Cunin 2005:134) They were dismantled before the 'libraries' were built, because the northern library rests on the former *kuṭi* base.

<sup>109</sup> Cunin (2004:327 vol.1)

<sup>110</sup> Cunin (2004:117 vol.2)

<sup>111</sup> Stern (1965:165)

decoration of the walls and galleries of the Bâyon. Cunin indeed considers this a unique characteristic of this temple.<sup>112</sup>

The abrupt end of Lokeṣvarisation directly impacted the Bâyon, for the first phase of the carving of the state temple also appears to have included large pediments of Lokeṣvaras in the second level facing the central sanctuary<sup>113</sup>, which were later consigned to obscurity below the extension of the third level platform bearing some of the face towers. The hidden pediment was the one whose discovery in 1924, when stone slabs in the platform were raised in a cleaning operation, first signalled the Bâyon's Buddhism. The Lokeṣvara pediment was thus unceremoniously built over before the face towers were carved and the temple decorated. The Mus and Coedès reading of the face towers would therefore leave us with the irreconcilable propositions that the temple builders were carving Lokeṣvara as the monument's great deity of the face towers, while at the same time consigning his image to ignominious obscurity in the courtyard below.

Furthermore, seeing Lokeṣvara as absent from the face towers is supported by a series of significant *iconographical* anomalies. First, the deity of the face towers does not have Lokeṣvara's figurine of Amitābha above the coronet; second, icons of Avalokiteṣvara with four faces are unknown.<sup>114</sup> It is hard to believe that such a committed message propagator as Jayavarman VII would

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<sup>112</sup> '...the decorative programme of the Bâyon would be later than its architectural programme... This rupture between the architectural programme of the Bâyon and its decorative programme appears to us to be one of the principal characteristics of this temple.' Cunin (2004:314)

<sup>113</sup> 'Lastly, a few pediments were completed following the construction of the first stage and even before the enlargement of the terrace of the third level.' Dumarçay (1973:64)

<sup>114</sup> Mallmann for example lists Avalokiteṣvara icons with one, three and five heads: Mallmann, M.-T. de (1986:107-14) *Introduction à l'iconographie du tântrisme bouddique* Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, Paris. Boisselier points out that at Bantéay Chmâr, where Lokeṣvara appears in all his Bâyon-style forms, he is never represented with four faces but with one, eight, 11 and 16. (Boisselier 1951:329). Mus is aware of the problem of associating Lokeṣvara with a four-faced icon and offers the less than convincing explanation that it is *one* face continuously facing the devotees who walk in *pradakṣina* around it, somewhat in the way Brahmā, on a longer timescale, faces the four ages of the world (Mus 1937:73). In late Bâyon style Khmer icons, Lokeṣvara eventually appears in the KVS-inspired Tantric *Mahākaruṇika* form with 11 heads and (representations of) 1,000 arms, which became a major icon in Tibet, East Asia and Vietnam. The largest actual number of arms in Cambodia is 32. This Tantric form of Avalokiteṣvara with 11 heads appeared first in the Kanheri cave of western India in the sixth century (Neville, Tove E. 1998:fig. 9 *Eleven-headed Avalokiteṣvara, Chenresigs, Kuan-yin or Kannon Bodhisattva: its origin and iconography* Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi). The best known Khmer icons of the 11-headed Mahākaruṇika Lokeṣvara are among those linked by Boisselier to the KVS on the outer gallery of Bantéay Chmâr.

have tolerated the omission of the instantly recognisable Amitābha figurine, attribute of the great Bodhisattva, if the latter was indeed the god he was celebrating. The absence of Amitābha was alone enough to discourage Bernard Philippe Groslier, the last French curator of Angkor, from seeing Lokeśvara in the Bayon.<sup>115</sup> A third iconographical problem was immediately raised by Pierre Dupont in response to Mus' article: Khmer Bāyon-style Lokesvaras wear a cylindrical chignon and never wear a diadem.<sup>116</sup> Yet a fourth iconographical difficulty is that unlike the Lokeśvaras of Jayavarman's second decade in power, the Bāyon deities have their eyes open and not lowered, as in all the images of the powerful Bodhisattvas of the 1190s.

### 3.3 *Buddharāja*

We now turn to the other components of the composite deity that Mus and Coedès identify in the face towers. Coedès believed the God of Angkor was the king:

We know that this god of Angkor was the king, the god-king, personified before the 12<sup>th</sup> century by a golden *linga* and at the time of the Bāyon by the statue of Buddha, which was recovered from the bottom of an open pit under the central tower.<sup>117</sup>

Coedès coined the name '*Buddharāja*' to suggest that Jayavarman's royal power was based on a Buddhist restatement of the Śaiva Tantric *devarāja* cult created for his ninth century namesake, Jayavarman II:

Instead of the *devarāja* of previous reigns represented by a golden liōga, however, the central sanctuary sheltered an enormous stone statue of the *Buddharāja*. This statue was not only a substitute for the Śaivite *devarāja* but also a statue of apotheosis of the founder king, whose features are undoubtedly also to be seen on the upper parts of the towers in the form of the Bodhisattva Samantamukha, 'who faces in all directions'.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>115</sup> '...Lokeśvara always has his Dhyāni-Buddha on his chignon. In fact nothing allows any explanation for its disappearance on the towers of the Bayon, where it could have been easily sculpted.' Groslier B.P. (1973:305) *Le Bāyon: inscriptions du Bāyon* EFEO Paris (my translation).

<sup>116</sup> Some iconographical objections to Mus' article were immediately raised by Pierre Dupont: 'We must however observe that that no known Avalokiteśvara – and there are many in the Bāyon period repertoire – corresponds exactly with the head sculpted on the towers of Jayavarman VII. This latter always wears a gilt diadem, decorated with petals and prolonged behind the ears, regularly ornamented with pendants; the neck is encircled by a tightly adjusted necklace. Khmer Lokeśvaras, in as far as they are now known, wear a cylindrical chignon and sometimes jewels, but we never see them with such a diadem and necklace.' Dupont, Pierre (1936:630) 'Chronique' *BEFEO* 36 (my translation).

<sup>117</sup> Coedès (1963:64)

<sup>118</sup> Coedès 1968:175

Coedès held to his interpretation of the *devarāja* cult as the paradigm of divine kingship legitimization throughout Southeast Asia until his death in 1969, despite growing dissent from Stern, Filliozat and others. Later scholars, notably Hermann Kulke, Claude Jacques, Michael Vickery, Saveros Pou and Hiram Woodward have rejected Coedès' understanding of the *devarāja* cult and his '*Buddharāja*'. But the identification of Lokeśvara in the Bāyon faces, led by Mus' invocation of the Lotus Sūtra, with Coedès' assent, was the first attempt to formulate an intellectual model for how the Bāyon functioned, and it certainly merits the broad influence it has had. But it does present problems.

### 3.4 Portrait of the king

Mus' and Coedès' vision of a living, royal-divine network of Nāga Buddha/face tower Lokeśvara and royal portrait makes the king's face ubiquitous as the supreme expression of power and the protection of the empire. This is presumably what eventually led Coedès to see megalomania as a principal drive behind the huge temple-building programme.<sup>119</sup> But were all these icons really made in the king's image?

Coedès believed that a living king can appear as a human being, a Bodhisattva and a Buddha.<sup>120</sup> Since the sculptors of the Bāyon style invented the veridical portrait, we would expect all three forms of the king – human portrait statue, Lokeśvara and '*Buddharāja*' – to be true likenesses of the same man. And Coedès indeed holds that the king's portrait was sent to the cities and his own features appear in the major icons of his state temple. We can therefore test Coedès' interpretation by comparing the portrait statues with the divine ones. The generally acknowledged portrait statues of the king found in Kompong Svāy and Phimai show him as an uncrowned man with lowered eyes probably inclining in *añjali mudrā* before a god – but not himself as a god or Buddha. These statues *do* appear to be portraits of the king; for they depict a muscular, bull-necked, moustachioed, square-shouldered, middle-aged military type, with a slightly expanding girth, such as we might expect

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<sup>119</sup> Coedès G. (1943:205) *Pour mieux comprendre Angkor* Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, Hanoi

<sup>120</sup> Coedès, G. (1960:196) 'Le portrait dans l'art khmèr' *Arts asiatiques* Musée Guimet, Paris



Jayavarman to have been after his long military career with the Cams, and his fight to take the Khmer throne in his mid-thirties. Images of the gods in the Bàyon style have none of these features. The portrait statues are different in many details, for example, from the Nāga Buddha in the Bàyon, which has the conventional narrow waist and somewhat narrow shoulders of most Bàyon-style Buddhas, and no moustache. The Bàyon Buddha also has a pronounced and pointed cranial protuberance or *uṣṇīṣa* on the top of the head, while the portrait statues have a small, tight ball of hair secured by a ribbon on the back of the head. The features of the portrait statues echo neither the ascetic, withdrawn Buddha of the Bàyon cella, nor the more youthful, regally-adorned, wide-eyed, assertive god of the Bàyon face towers. It can be readily granted that all three icons share the basic facial features of the Bàyon style – wide, flat mouth, high forehead, heavy eyebrows – but this applies, as Dagens points out, to ‘virtually all of the statuary of the Bàyon and it is therefore not really meaningful.’<sup>121</sup> We may then conclude that only a handful of portrait statues were made of the king, while images of the gods were produced in thousands and were quite different.

The Coedès scheme of a personalised divine network uniting the empire weakens if we extract the portrait element from the presumed composite of deities in the Bàyon. And if the direct link to the king’s person is removed, the differences between the assertive face tower deities who wear heavy crowns and choker necklaces, and the withdrawn uncrowned Bàyon Buddha sitting under a Nāga hood, with his earrings removed, seem more pronounced. Coedès’ scheme erodes even further if we accept Woodward’s argument – which I propose we do – that from the material record, it is much more likely that the 23 distributed *Jayabuddhamahānāthas* – whose name implies a deity not a man – were not the portrait statues of the king but the large eight-armed ‘radiating Bodhisattva’ icons found in much greater numbers than the portraits.<sup>122</sup> Without the king’s portrait, Coedès’ network reposes solely on a

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<sup>121</sup> Dagens (2000:107)

<sup>122</sup> Woodward, H. (1994:106-10) ‘The Jayabuddhamahānātha Images of Cambodia’ *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 52/3 (1994/5)

centrifugal Lokeśvara and is therefore fully vulnerable to the objections listed in section 3.2 to seeing Lokeśvara in the faces.

### 3.5 *neak ta*

Bruno Dagens modifies the idea of a divine network articulated by Mus and Coedès by defining the Bàyon as the centre of a spiritual map guarded by protective, territorial deities (like India's *kṣetrapāla*, 'guardians of the field/domain') extending from the capital to the frontiers of the empire.<sup>123</sup> Dagens says the *kṣetrapāla* of southern India, because they protect boundaries or sacred places, 'are generally considered as a form or even a double of Bhairava, the "terrifying" form of Śiva...'<sup>124</sup> Although the Bàyon faces do not have the fierce aspect of Indian *kṣetrapāla*, they do wear 'demonic' diadems, which he believes would convey to everyone their dangerous nature. Dagens therefore proposes that the Bàyon constitutes 'the divine assembly of the Protectors of the kingdom, a monumental expression of that, made up of the gods of the great temples of the kingdom grouped in the chapels of the [Bàyon] temple,'<sup>125</sup> and that the divinities in the face towers above this assembly are a kind of super, state-level *neak ta*, the traditional local Khmer ancestral spirits, protective deities of a hill or a tree, which come under this modern Khmer term. He acknowledges the iconographical reservations about seeing Lokeśvara in the face towers, but nevertheless concludes that the guardians in the face towers do link up with the radiating Lokeśvara images distributed throughout the empire in a single divine web of

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<sup>123</sup> Dagens says he is developing Coedès' idea of the face towers representing 'guardians of those territories' of the deities in the chapels and spaces below the towers; but he may also be drawing on Claude Jacques' earlier contribution to the *devarāja* debate, in which he says the Khmer equivalent title for a god -- *kamraten jagat* ('lord of the world/universe') -- 'represents a Khmer reality and not an Indian one.' Here Jacques takes Kulke's separation of the *devarāja* cult from the Śivalinga cult of the Khmer state temples to an extreme position by rejecting Kulke's proposal that the *devarāja* was a processional bronze of Śiva and effectively reducing the *kamraten jagat* to any ghost in a country hut: 'Dr Kulke... suggests we consider it to have been in the reduced form of a *calantī pratimā* ['mobile icon']; this is a perfectly acceptable hypothesis. All the same, we may doubt if he really is represented in any form whatsoever; it would not anyway be necessary, for do we not often see, in contemporary Southeast Asia, sanctuaries of every size which shelter deities of all types and which are devoid of images? Jacques (1985:279) For Jacques, the *devarāja* is no more than 'a king of the spirits who protected the land.' (Jacques C. 1999b:44 *Angkor* Könemann, Cologne)

<sup>124</sup> Dagens (2000:112)

<sup>125</sup> Dagens (2000:113)

‘statues in the provinces and face towers in the heart of Angkor’.<sup>126</sup> The way Dagens accounts for there being 200 faces carved on the Bāyon is by saying these territorial guardians are ‘numerous because they have come from everywhere and watch over the map of the kingdom: visible from far and looking in all directions, they make tangible for all the divine protection which, thanks to the sovereign, extends over the whole kingdom’.<sup>127</sup> From Paul Mus’ last words on the Nāga Buddha of the Bāyon, it seems he was moving towards a position similar to that later articulated by Dagens (though retaining the king’s portrait assumption that Dagens has helped us to dislodge):

Jayavarman VII on the Nāga at the centre of the Bāyon is like a very great village genii at the level of the kingdom.<sup>128</sup>

Mus’ attempt to imagine a village genii rising to the position of pre-eminent guardian deity of state raises the major problem entailed by identifying the face towers closely with *neak ta* – namely that the latter exert their influence over very limited territory – a tree, a hill, a river, a pathway or a home. Their power may be exerted over a neighbourhood, but not a city, let alone over one of the greatest empires on earth.<sup>129</sup> Dagens gives us no idea of how Jayavarman, a learned man steeped in Sanskrit texts and Indic cosmology, could have raised such a homely and lowly group of spirits to be the driving force and the defence force of a major empire; nor does Mus.

India’s (and Central, Southeast and East Asia’s) Brahmans and Buddhists worked for centuries to impose over the myriad ancestral deities of Asia a

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<sup>126</sup> Dagens, B. (2000:114) ‘The Bāyon Face Towers and their Meaning’ *5<sup>th</sup> international symposium on the preservation and restoration of Bāyon – Final report Siemreap*

<sup>127</sup> Dagens (2003:208)

<sup>128</sup> Mus, P. (1962:529) ‘Angkor vu du Japon’ *France-Asie XVIII*

<sup>129</sup> There of course can be no denying the powerful hold the *neak ta* have always had over the people of Cambodia. There is abundant evidence today in Cambodia of central government routinely establishing formal links with *neak ta* when officials are installed in the provinces. (Ang Chouléan 1986:217 *Les êtres surnaturels dans la religion populaire khmère* Cedoreck, Paris). By ministerial decree, local administrators must take off their hats every time they pass the *anak tā* spirit house. Certain *neak ta* have even achieved national renown. In a story still widely related in Cambodia, king Ang Chan (r.1516-66) was on the verge of defeat by a Siamese army, when General Mioeng proposed to commit suicide in order to generate an army of ghosts to support the Khmers. Before the whole army, the general threw himself into a ditch filled with stakes, followed by his wife and sons, and their violent deaths were believed to have resulted in the Siamese army succumbing to cholera and being defeated. The general was venerated as *neak ta* Ghlāmng Mioeng ‘and the popularity of this spirit extended through the whole of Pursat province and even throughout Cambodia.’ (Ang 1986:207)

superstructure of universal gods, which then had state level application in politics and war.<sup>130</sup> One outcome of this was the apotheosis of kings and what Davidson calls the ‘sāmantization’ (making feudal lords) of the gods.<sup>131</sup> Snellgrove remarks that in such rituals: ‘The aspirant seems to desire as much worldly success as buddhahood, and thus it was brahmanical ritual that most easily provided the substance of the actual ceremonial.’<sup>132</sup> The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* indeed stresses that the sons of anointed kings were the preferred initiands.<sup>133</sup> Tantric Buddhist initiations took the form of regal consecrations (*abhiṣeka*) using symbolic crowns, vajra sceptres (borne by *vajrin*) and powerful mantras (also used in war by mandarins or *mantrins*, the possessors of the mantras) before a maṇḍala presided over by a *rājādhirāja*. All these Sanskrit terms are used in Khmer epigraphy.

Dagens’ proposal that we see *neak ta* presiding over Cambodia’s first state Buddhist temple at the high point of imperial power, albeit doubling with the form of a powerful and military-looking Lokeśvara – covered in an armour of Buddhas standing squarely with huge shoulders and legs -- implies that Jayavarman would have been reversing this long-established trend by ceding precedence to local deities in the new Buddhist temple of state.<sup>134</sup> I will argue

<sup>130</sup> Geoffrey Samuel for example suggests the creation of the wrathful deities of Tantric Buddhism was an attempt to harness the power of ancient *yakṣa* and *nāga* cults for political and military purposes in ‘state protection Buddhism’. Geoffrey Samuel (2003:1) *Ritual Technologies and the State: The Maṇḍala -Form Buddhist Temples of Bangladesh*. Proceedings of the Fifth international congress on Bengal Art, Dhaka and Mainmati.

<sup>131</sup> Davidson, R. (2002:71) *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: a social history of the Tantric movement* Columbia University Press, New York

<sup>132</sup> Snellgrove, D. (1959:205) ‘The notion of divine kingship in Tantric Buddhism’ *La regalita sacra*: E.J. Brill, Leiden. Charles Orzech describes how this mix of transcendental wisdom and worldly power developed into Esoteric ‘national protection’ (hu-kuo) in East Asia: ‘The Scripture for Human kings, in its fifth-century recension and even more in its eighth-century Esoteric version, expressed this salvific power and became the vehicle for a Buddhism of National Protection in China, Korea, and Japan.’ Orzech, Charles D. (1998:9) *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for Humane Kings in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism* Pennsylvania State University Press

<sup>133</sup> Snellgrove (1959:206)

<sup>134</sup> In the Middle-period, when Khmer power waned and the kings abandoned Angkor and headed south from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, under military pressure from the burgeoning, neighbouring Thai state, a four-faced Buddha probably reproducing the image of the Bāyon tower deity as protective of the shrinking Khmer state, may have taken a form closer to that of territorial guardian deities. Ashley Thompson points out that when king Ang Chan returned to Angkor and completed Viṣṇu reliefs in Angkor Wāt in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, inscriptions were engraved, which associate the ‘four-faced *stūpa-prāsād*’ [Angkor Wāt converted to Buddhist ritual] with ‘five mysterious gods known as *mahākṣetra*...’, a set of guardian divinities that would seem to have played a key role in the Khmer royal cult since at least the Middle period.’

that Jayavarman followed the long historical trend and that although his mission was designed primarily for maximum impact among the Khmers, he also sought to counter the contemporary destruction of Buddhism in northern India. For boosting Buddhism strengthened his own syncretic regal creed. The kings of Burma, Nepal and Tibet all showed their concern to support the institutions that generated the Buddhism that lent them international support and legitimacy. A geographical maṇḍala linking up the state level power with local territorial guardians still resonates today, but we have still to identify the central deity thus invoked by the medieval Buddhist king.

### 3.6 Brahma

Before the Lokeśvara interpretation took hold, the Bāyon faces were thought by many to represent the four-headed Vedic and Hindu god Brahmā.<sup>135</sup> Scholars first adopted what they took to be the local interpretation, as they believed a Hindu king built the temple in the ninth century. But when Modern Khmers call the Bayon faces 'Brahma' (without the long final ā of the Sanskrit name) or 'Tà Prohm' ('ancestor' or 'grandfather' in Khmer), they are referring to the form of the Hindu god Buddhicized in early Buddhism as well as in the Theravāda of later Khmer and Thai cultures.<sup>136</sup> Scholarly opinion swung away from this identification towards Lokeśvara after the chance discovery of Lokeśvara pediments in a cleaning operation proved the Bāyon was Buddhist before it was converted into a Hindu temple. The articles of Mus charted the new direction. More recently, some scholars have been drawn back to seeing the Buddhist Brahma in the face towers. Boisselier changed his mind in his

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Thompson, A. (2004:29) 'The future of Cambodia's past: a Messianic Middle-Period Cambodian Royal Cult' *History, Buddhism and new religious movements in Cambodia* Eds Marston, J. and Guthrie, E. University of Hawai'i press

<sup>135</sup> Dagens raises an iconographic objection to seeing Brahmā in the face towers when he remarks: 'Brahmā has neither a third eye nor an ūrnā, which leaves no explanation for the forehead lozenge [of the Bāyon faces].' Dagens, B. (2000:108) 'The Bāyon Face Towers and their Meaning' *5<sup>th</sup> international symposium on the preservation and restoration of Bāyon – Final report Siemreap*

<sup>136</sup> Boisselier warns us that modern popular Khmer culture is an unreliable guide to ancient Cambodia because 'it had lost all memory of any of the Mahayanist gods, including Lokeshvara.' Boisselier, J (1951:330) 'Vajrapāṇi dans l'art du Bāyon' in *Proceedings of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of International Orientalists Istanbul*

later writings, without referring back to his earlier view, and opted for a Brahma interpretation, which Woodward subsequently expanded on.<sup>137</sup>

The state Śaivism dominant since the ninth century (though perhaps weakened by the arrival of the Mahīdhara dynasty in 1080) was presumably maintained in a calendar of Brahmanical rituals and ceremonies ensuring continuity in royal dedications, state liturgy and hagiography. Even Jayavarman VII's predominantly Sanskrit Buddhist inscriptions are shot through with Brahmanical poetic allusions, borrowing constantly from the Hindu epics and mythology. Boisselier changed his interpretation of the Bāyon on the basis of such allusions. He took one section of a fragmentary inscription as yielding *clear* allegorical evidence that Jayavarman VII consciously built the Bāyon and Angkor Thom on the model of the city of Indra in the Trāyastrimśa heaven of the 33 gods.<sup>138</sup> But I find the evidence of the passage, in which the city is compared with a bride, is neither direct nor clear because it depends on translating *sudharma* ('good order', 'justice', 'righteousness') in its secondary sense of a name for the assembly hall of the gods in Indra's celestial city. One would hardly suspect this to be the case from the forceful way Boisselier puts his view across:

...the Khmer inscriptions still establish clearly that the new capital is the City of Indra (with whom the king is identified) and Tavatimsa Heaven – the Heaven of the 33 Gods – (with whom the princes and provincial governors under the king's authority are identified), with its Royal Palace, its pleasure gardens and the Assembly Hall of the Gods, which is none other than the Bāyon (it is not I who put forth this idea, but epigraphy which asserts such a notion, destroying a multitude of perilous or whimsical hypotheses).<sup>139</sup>

Coedès offers the allegorical translation in parentheses as a second rendering of the Sanskrit; this is Boisselier's version:

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<sup>137</sup> Boisselier, J. (1978:323-31, plates 324, 325:410) 'Cambodia' *The Image of the Buddha* ed. D. Snellgrove, UNESCO Serindia, London. Boisselier did not refer back to his earlier interpretation of the tower deity as Lokeśvara in the form of Vajrapāni (see footnote 86) or explain how his view changed. Woodward, H. (1981:57-67) 'Tantric Buddhism at Angkor Thom' *Ars Orientalis* 12

<sup>138</sup> Boisselier expanded on his Brahma interpretation in a lecture to the Siam Society in Bangkok in 1987: Boisselier (1987:2-5) 'The symbolism of Angkor Thom' *The Siam Society Newsletter* March 1988 vol.4.1. His final thoughts on the subject are found in Boisselier, J. (1993:129-38) 'A Buddhist presence amidst the gods' *Angkor the serenity of Buddhism* ed. M. Ribaud Thames and Hudson, London

<sup>139</sup> Boisselier (1987:3)



'...worthy of praise, containing the great [garden] Nandana, and having at her summit the [hall of] Sudharma of the [city of] Sudarsana, her domain was comparable to heaven.'<sup>140</sup>

But if we take Coedès' preferred translation of the lines, the clarity of the supposedly key interpretative reference for the Bàyon evaporates before our eyes:

Pure, thanks to the conduct of her master, possessing celestial power, worthy of praise, experiencing a great joy, versed in the righteousness of honest people, her land resembled heaven.<sup>141</sup>

Boisselier made the allegorical allusion the basis for a dramatic change in his interpretation of the Bàyon, its face towers and Angkor Thom – a base which I find precarious, and surely not robust enough to destroy a 'multitude of perilous or whimsical hypotheses'.

In the poetical inscription in which the Čam king Jaya Indravarman is called Rāvaṇā for attacking Angkor, presumably sometime in the 1170s, Boisselier sees a parallel with the Asura attack on Indra's city. The Asuras were defeated and Boisselier compares the four Great Kings set to guard the city with the giant faces above Angkor Thom's gates -- where they indeed loom above an image of Indra seated on his three-headed elephant Airavata. On the Bàyon itself, whose faces Boisselier calls, without further elaboration, 'quite different' from those on the gates, he sees Brahma as he appears on auspicious days in the guise of the ever-youthful chieftain Gandharva Pañcaṣikha who multiplies his image to honour each of the 33 gods simultaneously. Boisselier admits his reliance here on Theravādin sources, justifying this by claiming 'there is no significant difference in cosmological matters between the Mahāyānist and Theravādin traditions.'<sup>142</sup> As we will shortly see, Woodward makes a more sustained case for seeing the Theravādin Brahma in the Bàyon faces by taking head-on the issue of which Buddhism we are experiencing in the late Bàyon and claiming the king affected a momentous switch to the Theravāda as his state temple was being completed. But I will hold that whereas there is but little evidence to support

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<sup>140</sup> (Boisselier 1993:134)

<sup>141</sup> K.597 D line P Coedès *IC IV* 1952:233. 'gurunītisucir divya- vibhū ślāghyorunandanā sudarsanaśudharmmāgryā yasya dyaur iva medinī'.

<sup>142</sup> Boisselier (1993:138)

Woodward's admittedly coherent interpretation of a dramatic change of creed, there is much evidence that suggests the king advanced ever further into Vajrayāna – evidence which Woodward was the first to draw together.

Boisselier again appeals to pan-Buddhist doctrines when he describes the Bāyon faces as not exactly smiling but expressing the meditational “‘active state of mind’ which the scriptures call the four *brahmavihāra*, the ‘things pleasing to Brahma’, the ‘sublime state’ leading to charity, compassion, joy and tranquillity.’<sup>143</sup> These meditational stages are indeed, as Snellgrove says, ‘very old property of Indian Yoga and probably belong to the earliest Buddhist practice’ and they survived in all forms of Buddhism.<sup>144</sup> They are preserved in mature Vajrayāna, where they feature in the *hevajra-tantra*<sup>145</sup> and the *tārā-sādhana* of the *sādhanamālā*.<sup>146</sup> Sanderson finds them in another Yoginī-tantra, a still untranslated Tantra for visualizing the deity Saṃvara (the Heruka deity who is known to be in the Mahīdhara pantheon from his image on one of the principal lintels at the central sanctuary in Phimai):

For example one carries out the second evocation of Saṃvara as follows. After reciting the Mahāyānist formulae: confessing sins, delighting in the merit of others, transferring one's own merit for the benefit of others, and taking the vow of the bodhisattva, one contemplates the four *brahmavihāras*: benevolence, compassion, joy and patience. One then meditates on the essential purity of all phenomena and oneself, sees oneself and all things as nothing but mind (*cittamātra*), realizes their emptiness, and then out of this emptiness generates the deity's icon.<sup>147</sup>

If we transform this picture of the meditator into a king generating the icon of his city or state, we arrive at a vision of the Bāyon and its faces, which is very close to that which will be endorsed later in this chapter.

But Boisselier's drift is distinctly towards Theravāda, because the *caturbrahmavihāra* are seen primarily as a meditational technique for advancing to the Theravādin *Brahmaloka* and their major canonical exposition

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<sup>143</sup> Boisselier (1993:137).

<sup>144</sup> Snellgrove (1959:56n1)

<sup>145</sup> ‘We shall expound the chapter on the divinities. First one should produce thought of love, secondly that of compassion, thirdly that of joy, and last of all that of impassibility.’ *Hevajra-tantra* I.iii.1

<sup>146</sup> Bhattacharyya, Benoytosh (1924:171) ‘Appendix A. *kiñcit-vistara-tārā-sādhana*’ *The Indian Buddhist Iconography mainly based on the Sādhanamālā and other cognate tāntric texts of rituals* OUP

<sup>147</sup> *Cakrasaṃvarapūjavidhi*. Sanderson (1994:96) ‘Vajrayāna: Origin and Function’ *Buddhism into the year 2000* Dhammakaya Foundation, Bangkok.

is in Buddhaghosa's fifth century Pāli *visuddhimagga*.<sup>148</sup> Moreover Boisselier, in seeing Jayavarman's southeast Prasat Chrung inscription as indicating the Bāyon was conceived as the assembly hall of the gods, adduces the support of the Pāli *janavasabha-sutta* for the visit to Tāvatiṃsa heaven by Brahma Sanaòkumāra ('ever-young') in the form of Pañcaṣikha (with five topknots and visible to the gods) when he created an image of himself on the couch of each of the gods<sup>149</sup> – a vision realised architecturally in the Bāyon face towers.

### 3.7 *indrābhiṣeka*

Hiram Woodward significantly buttressed Boisselier's account by showing that a cosmological document compiled in Bangkok in 1802 states that when Sanaòkumara appears over the throne of *devaputra* he 'feels great joy, as if a king had received a new *abhiṣeka* and were rejoicing in the prosperity of his kingdom'.<sup>150</sup> Southeast Asian Theravādin cosmology had thus actually absorbed the vision of Brahma appearing simultaneously all over Mount Meru that Boisselier had divined in the Bāyon; furthermore it was linked to a *second* consecration of a king as an emperor. The subject of a second consecration is a contentious one because the evidence is thin, but it is worthy of exploration because it usefully raises the unanswered question of what state ceremony officially inaugurated Jayavarman's vast state temple – was this a second consecration of the king as cakravartin?

Woodward responds affirmatively, suggesting that Angkor was the scene of one of the early absorptions of this Brahmanical material, when the first 16 giant faces of Vajrasattva carved on the Bāyon were converted into multiple images of Brahma to accommodate them in a Theravādin imperial *indrābhiṣeka* ceremony. In this way he addresses the larger issue of when the Hīnayāna arrived in Angkor, which Boisselier had left aside.

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<sup>148</sup> Bhikkhu Ñānamoli (1991:288 ff) 'The divine abidings' *The path of purification*

(*visuddhimagga*) by *Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa* Buddhist Publication Society, Canda

<sup>149</sup> Malalasekera, G. P. (1938:1021) *Dictionary of Pāli proper names* John Murray, London

<sup>150</sup> Woodward (1981:63) citing the *Traiphūmlôkwiniitchayakathâ*, Bangkok.

Coedès believed an *indrābhiṣeka* ‘took on a particular character in the Indic kingdoms of Indochina’ and proposed its origin could be found in the Vedic *aitareyabrāhmaṇa*.<sup>151</sup> The Vedic text in fact refers to a higher consecration of Indian emperors who achieved paramount power after a major war.<sup>152</sup> It was called *aindra mahābhiṣeka*, recalling Indra’s consecration as the king of the gods, a name which seems to have survived in Southeast Asia as the contraction ‘*indrābhiṣeka*’. Such a ceremony is mentioned, as Coedès noted, in the Thai Palatine Law, but with no indication of when its use was deemed appropriate. The 1557 *indrābhiṣeka* recorded in the Ayutthaya annals marked the construction of a new palace by king Mahācakravartī – whose reign title ‘great cakravartin’ left no doubt that he considered himself a twice-anointed emperor.<sup>153</sup>

As the Khmer kings retreated south from the Thai advance into Angkor, the Khmer Chronicles prescribe a re-consecration (*abhisek*) of the king for the inauguration (*samboth*) of a new capital.<sup>154</sup> The Khmer king was proclaimed *maharajadhiraj* (king of kings, cakravartin) and ‘lord of the summit of *catumukkh*’ (the four faces), in what Ashley Thompson considers as a key link back for ‘the Middle-period kings to Jayavarman VII through a cultural “citation” of what had become his iconographic emblem’ [the Bāyon face towers].<sup>155</sup> Under such a protocol, the inauguration of the Bāyon and Angkor Thom could have been the second consecration for Jayavarman’s new capital. Khmer and Thai Theravādin ceremonials thus included some form of second, higher consecration of a reigning monarch, and Woodward wonders whether a similar tradition may have existed in Burma. He proposes that the Khmer

<sup>151</sup> Coedès, G (1932:74) ‘Etudes Cambodgiennes XXVIII. Quelques suggestions sur la méthode à suivre pour interpréter les bas reliefs de Bantéay Čhmār et de la galerie extérieure du Bāyon’ *BEFEO* 32

<sup>152</sup> According to F.W. Thomas, the Vedic *aitareyabrāhmaṇa* says the *aindra mahābhiṣeka* was a consecration reserved to mark an emperor’s attainment of paramount power, after final victory in a great war. The *Brāhmaṇa* (vii.15) lists with lavish titles 12 famous rulers of old who were distinguished by such a second unction. (Thomas, F. W. 1908:20-2 ‘Abhiṣeka’ *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* Ed. James Hastings, T & T Clark, Edinburgh)

<sup>153</sup> Coedès (1932:74)

<sup>154</sup> Thompson, A. (2000:128) ‘An oblique view of the Bāyon’ *5<sup>th</sup> international symposium on the preservation and restoration of Bāyon – Final report JSA, Siemreap*

<sup>155</sup> Thompson, A. (2004:31) ‘The future of Cambodia’s past: a Messianic Middle-Period Cambodian Royal Cult’ *History, Buddhism and new religious movements in Cambodia* Eds Marston, J. and Guthrie, E. University of Hawai’i press

version may have been introduced to Angkor by a Burmese Brahmanical chaplain in Jayavarman's court,<sup>156</sup> whose presence in Angkor may be read as one of the signals for a 'shift in outlook' in Jayavarman 'toward a Buddhism that has a more Hīnayāna character.'<sup>157</sup> He feels Burmese influence may be further attested in the iconographic detail of Burmese-style adorants appearing at the feet of Devatā on the walls of the Bāyon.<sup>158</sup>

I find that a case for Jayavarman propagating a form of Hīnayāna, and for this being visible in the Bāyon, rests on a very delicate web of evidence. Jayavarman undoubtedly turned Cambodia to Buddhism, but his major extant inscriptions were in Sanskrit (except for the minor Khmer inscriptions of the Bāyon, Praḥ Khan, Tà Prohm and his smaller temples) and the first use of Hīnayāna Pāli in a Khmer inscription occurs only in 1308, almost a century after his death. Much less tenuous, however, is the amount of evidence, which we will examine shortly, to suggest that the king advanced ever further into projecting icons of mature Vajrayāna and that the final phase of his royal Buddhist cult emphasised the presence of Hevajra, Yoginīs, Vajrapāṇi, Vajradhara, and Vajrasattva -- evidence which Woodward was the first to draw together.

Furthermore, it is hard to imagine Jayavarman VII choosing as a celestial figurehead the Buddhist version of Brahma, who may have been later accorded less status than Viṣṇu in Cambodia's Theravādin Middle-period<sup>159</sup>,

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<sup>156</sup> The Burmese origin of the Brahman remains uncertain and is based on his coming to Cambodia from his native village of Trikatantu in a country named 'Narapatideśa' as detailed in the Maḡgalārtha inscription K.488 from the reign of Jayavarman VIII. Coedès thought the country may be Burma, as the Burmese king in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century was called Narapatisīthu. Coedès (1927:402n2) 'Temple de Maḡgalārtha à Angkor Thom' BEFEO 1927.

<sup>157</sup> Woodward (2003:201) The presence of Burmans in Angkor is attested in line 67 of the Praḥ Khan stela, which also records Cams and Vietnamese as being among 306,372 people attached to the foundation. (Coedès 1941:301n1)

<sup>158</sup> As for example illustrated in Stern (1965: fig.27)

<sup>159</sup> 'In the myth of the origin of Phnom Penh, Viṣṇu descends with the four-faced Buddha from the north (from the former royal capital of Angkor?) to found the new southern capital.' (Thompson 2004:32) This may be related to a 1913 report, in which Coedès describes seeing a recension of the official Khmer chronicle of the foundation of the city of Phnom Penh. Four bronze Buddhas (rather than a four-faced one) and a stone icon were recovered from a tree floating in the confluence of the four rivers which face the modern capital. Don (Madame) Penh placed in a sanctuary on the hill (phnom) named after her Phnom Penh. (Coedès G. 1913:6 'La foundation de Phnom Penh au XVe siècle d'après la chronique cambodgienne')

and who had long declined in his Hindu form in India. The king's strategy after seizing power by force – in circumstances still far from clear – following a Čam attack that killed the previous king and possibly left the palace sacked in Angkor – was to effect a major shift to impose Buddhism as the dominant religion of state for the first time. Placing Brahma at the pinnacle of his pantheon at the ceremonial high point of the reign would just not have packed the requisite message of cosmological backing for the new vision for the state.

Moreover, post-Bàyon style sculpted reliefs and icons on the Angkor royal terraces suggest that Jayavarman's kind of Buddhism was perpetuated for at least two decades after his death during the reign of his son Indravarman II (r. ca 1220-43). These terraces maintain the father's focus on the kind of dancers in the 'salles aux danseuses', although their wings and their ornate, bejewelled and crowded style betrays a loss of intensity, compared with the Bàyon dancers.<sup>160</sup> **[Plate 103 crowded vajra-eyed post-Bàyon Yoginis]** Stern called it an 'internal, precious evolution' of the Bàyon style.<sup>161</sup>

Indravarman's primary Buddha image is known as the Buddha of Commaille, after Angkor's first – sadly murdered – Conservateur who found it. This Buddha is transitional in style in that it shows a distinct development towards the kind of tranquil, unadorned images in monk's robes, with softened features and with eyes again lowered, that was to characterise the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> century Khmer Hīnayāna.<sup>162</sup> But Indravarman's 'Commaille Buddha' still sits naked or in a diaphanous robe on the Mahāyānist Nāga and has not yet metamorphosed into the standing monk who was shortly to dominate the religion of the Khmers.

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*BEFEO* 13 ). Coedès says the stone icon is described as holding a baton and a conch which could be Viṣṇu. One of the finest bronzes of Khmer Theravāda, which is usually considered to be a 65cm Viṣṇu, and is attributed to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, was found in the north Kleang in Angkor, which is now in the Phnom Penh museum (illustrated in Madeleine Giteau (1997:132) *Khmer art: the civilisations of Angkor* ASA editions, Paris).

<sup>160</sup> Stern attributes both the Bantéay Chmàr 'salle aux danseuses' and the royal terraces in Angkor to what he calls a 'troisième période avancée' (Stern (1965:161) -- 'either contemporary with the last work on the Bàyon or immediately following it'. (Stern 1965:165) I am calling this style post-Bàyon.

<sup>161</sup> Stern (1965:165)

<sup>162</sup> See for example the Musée Guimet's 1.78m standing stone Buddha found in the northern wing of gopura III east of Praḥ Khan (Jessop, Zephir 1997:cat.113) or the 0.85m Kong Pisei (Kompong Speu) bronze Buddha in the Phnom Penh National Museum (Jessop, Zephir 1997:cat.114).



The definitive Khmer swing to Hīnayāna is first seen clearly in the decoration of the Praḥ Pallilay and Praḥ Pithu temples, built close to the palace in Angkor, which, in footnote 3, I have suggested should be dated to post-1300. The pediment of the Praḥ Pallilay gopura indeed holds a new style standing monk Buddha. **[Plate 104 Praḥ Pallilay gopura standing Buddha]** These temples are also carved with early Khmer Buddhas in earth-touching mudrā<sup>163</sup>, of the kind first encountered in epigraphy in the inscription K.241 from Prasat Ta An near Kralanh, northwest of Angkor (see footnote 3). In the no doubt later Praḥ Pallilay model, the earth-touching Buddha is accompanied by crowned adorants. Popular Hīnayānist scenes like the taming of the Nalagiri elephant are also present. Praḥ Pallilay and Praḥ Pithu are built on a significant scale in stone and are positioned strategically close to the palace – all of which suggests the return of royal patronage to the Sangha, perhaps immediately after Jayavarman VIII's abdication in 1295.

A further reason for resisting the Brahma interpretation is that a second coronation or *indrābhiṣeka* could have been recorded with a Tantric Buddhist version of the Indic Ocean of Milk churning myth that supplied the principal theme of such celebrations in Thailand.

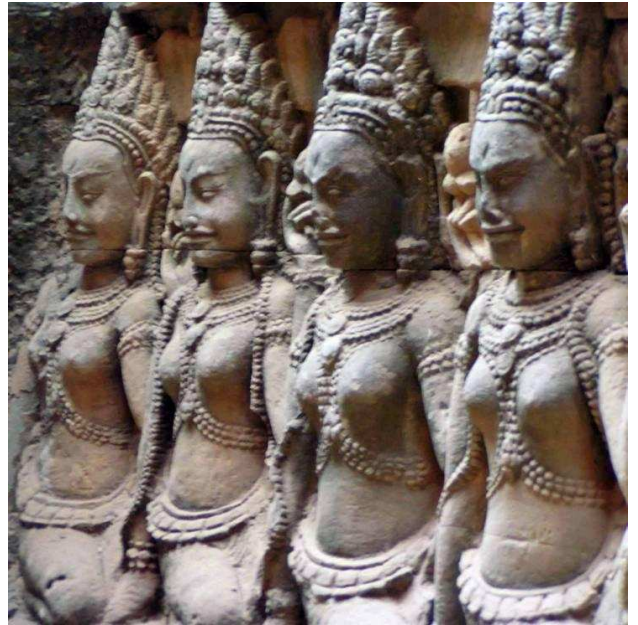
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<sup>163</sup> The Maravijaya (victory over the demon) or earth-touching mudrā also appeared in bronzes in Lopburi in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the city asserted its independence from Khmer rule and sent tribute missions to China, and went on to dominate the seated Buddha images of Indochina to the present.

Chapter 6



Pl. 102. Vajrasattva with hair cover  
(after Coedès 1923:pl.28.3)



Pl. 103. Crowded vajra-eyed, post-Bàyon Yoginīs



Pl. 104. Praḥ Pallilay gopura standing  
Hīnayānist Buddha



Pl. 105. Swayambhū Mahācaitya Kathmandu (after Held, Beguin  
1997:11)

In the next section I argue that the Indian monastery at Nālandā had already supplied the northern Buddhist world with a Buddhicized version of the Hindu creation myth that could have supported the celebrations of a Tantric Buddhist *indrābhiṣeka* in Angkor. Indeed, I suggest there is direct evidence in Angkor for the Nālandā version of the creation myth being followed by the Khmers.

### 3.8 A Tantric Buddhist *indrābhiṣeka*

From what little we know of how a Southeast Asian *indrābhiṣeka* was undertaken, formal celebrations appear to have centred on re-enacting the Indic ocean churning myth.<sup>164</sup> From an unusual source we find an *indrābhiṣeka* recorded in the Bāyon – an informal inscription, which is possibly a roughly chiselled instruction by a master mason or a temple official on the northwest section of the outer gallery of the Bāyon:

...the peace of the whole universe. Then the king retires into the forest at the time when he celebrates the holy *indrābhiṣeka*.<sup>165</sup>

This appears on the least finished section of the Bāyon outer gallery walls, which may explain why four such informal inscriptions are left here. The script is cursive and difficult to read or to date according to Coedès, but he was convinced they were ‘not simple graffiti without relation to the bas-reliefs.’<sup>166</sup> A number of scholars have attempted to link the *indrābhiṣeka* inscription on the outer gallery to the Churning of the Ocean of Milk relief directly opposite on the inner gallery<sup>167</sup>, but I would personally resist this on the grounds that Jayavarman VII seems to have developed a new, Buddhist version of the Churning myth, described below, whereas the Churning relief on the Bāyon inner gallery is a reversion, presumably ordered by Jayavarman VIII or another king who refurbished the Bāyon for Śaiva ritual, to the Hindu classical version involving Viṣṇu, Indra and Śiva. The inner gallery relief is indeed fairly

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<sup>164</sup> Thai Prince Dhani Nivat saw a similarity in the Thai and Khmer celebrations in the Pràsāt Suor Prat (‘towers of the tightrope walkers’) in the Angkor royal plaza and wooden towers with acrobats suspended on ropes between them in a painting of the ‘Indrābhiṣek’ in the Grand Palace in Bangkok. Prince Dhani (1961:275-83) ‘The gilt lacquer screen in the audience hall of Dusit’ *Artibus Asiae* 24, Ascona

<sup>165</sup> ‘...śānti buvana bphon hon stac vanodesa nā stac thve vraḥ indrābhiṣeka.’ Coedès, G (1932:74) ‘Etudes Cambodgiennes XXVIII. Quelques suggestions sur la méthode à suivre pour interpréter les bas reliefs de Bantéay Čhmār et de la galerie extérieure du Bāyon’ *BEFEO* 32

<sup>166</sup> Coedes (1932:73)

<sup>167</sup> For example Groslier 1973:171.

close in design to the version of the myth depicted in Angkor Wàt. Although the Devas and Asuras have changed sides, a flying Indra returns to the top of the spinning Mandara and the jar of *amṛta* carved in the inner Bàyon relief has just been sketched in an almost identical form on the unfinished Angkor Wàt relief just below the projecting fold of Viṣṇu's sampot.

Bernard Philippe Groslier saw the idea of an *indrābhiṣeka* linked to the ocean churning myth borne out in the causeways of giants outside the walls of Praḥ Khan, Angkor Thom and Bantéay Chmàr:

Let us say very summarily here that Neak Pean, associated with Preah Khan, marks for me the establishment of Jayavarman VII's power at Angkor, his *abhiṣeka*, while the Bayon will be the sign of his *Indrābhiṣeka*. This is manifested notably by the giants' causeway, invented at Preah Khan as Stern confirmed, and which imitates the creationist churning of the new world.<sup>168</sup>

Groslier's seeing the Bàyon as the sign of Jayavarman's *indrābhiṣeka* is consistent with what architects Dumarçay and Royère describe as the festive decorative touches the master builders added for the occasion of the formal dedication, but also as the topping-out ceremony for a massive project that be pulled through so many major design changes: 'Finally, to indicate that the objective was obtained, the moment when this culmination was reached is shown in the decoration of the monument....In its final state, the monument appeared as though dressed overall for a festival, with garlands of leaves hanging from the cornice...'<sup>169</sup> The causeways of giants may also be associated with the festivities, but they cause puzzlement because they are seen as depicting an odd version of the Churning of the Ocean of Milk – one performed in the absence of the three key actors: Viṣṇu, Śiva and Indra. The

<sup>168</sup> Groslier B.P. (1973:239) *Le Bàyon: inscriptions du Bàyon* EFEO Paris. The first part of Groslier's 'highly summary' sentence is not very clear but I assume he is either referring here to Jayavarman's *abhiṣeka* or enthronement in 1181-2 (stated as fact in Phiméanakas inscription K.485.v), which he sees represented by the sacred sword of state held at the Praḥ Khan/Neak Pean complex, rather than to an enthronement at Praḥ Khan itself, which was only dedicated 10 years later, or to a notion of an enthronement and a delayed *abhiṣeka* or uncton, which he did not expound. But Claude Jacques, in his abrasive review of Groslier's book, takes a less charitable view, when he bluntly asks: 'Does M. Groslier know what an *abhiṣeka* is when he writes this sentence?' Jacques, C. (1976:253) 'Bernard-Philippe Groslier."Inscriptions du Bàyon". Le Bàyon.' *Artibus Asiae* Vol. XXXVIII,i

<sup>169</sup> Dumarçay, Jacques and Royère, Pascal (2001:26) *Cambodian architecture 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries* Brill, Leiden. Flowers also bedeck the maṇḍala which emerges from intense meditation, as will be taken up later. '[The maṇḍala] must be four-sided with four gates and adorned with four portals, hung with four cords and bewreathed with garlands and flowers.' Snellgrove, D. (1957:69) *Buddhist Himālaya: travels and studies in quest of the origins and nature of Tibetan Religion* Cassirer, Oxford



Khmers had for centuries reproduced an accurate, conventional version of the Churning myth on their temple walls, and at Tà Prohm of Tonle Bati (south of modern Phnom Penh) Jayavarman's sculptors produced a fairly standard Hindu Churning lintel featuring Viṣṇu and his turtle avatar, Brahmā and the sun and moon gods. So the peculiarity of Jayavarman's Angkor Thom design must have been a deliberate move away from this Brahmanical version.

Jayavarman's Churning has only two main actors, one of whom looks godly and the other demonic. This in fact provides a closer fit with Nālandā's Tantric Buddhist version, which features a titanic battle between two antagonists – Vajrapāṇi and the demon leader Rāhu. I propose therefore that we see the new Buddhist version of the myth as the one being staged on Jayavarman's causeways, and go on from this to assume that the anointment and celebrations could have been led by Buddhists.

Indic *indrābhiṣekas* follow foreign conquests and the Khmer foreign conquest being celebrated in the early 1200s would presumably have been the subjugation of at least some of the neighbouring Čam kingdoms to direct Khmer rule after many years of war.<sup>170</sup> The re-establishment of Khmer control of at least some of the Čam kingdoms in the 1203 may have been the trigger for Jayavarman's *indrābhiṣeka*, particularly given the deep attachment he must have felt for the Čam city of Vijaya, where he lived during his early adult years between the ages of about 25-40.

### 3.9 Devas, Asuras & Devatās

Continuing uncertainty about the deity of the towers is reflected in the work of a Japanese team which is at present stabilising the structure of the Bāyon. The team's art historians measured many of the faces and noted minor variations in the shape of an ear or the width of a jaw. From these small differences they devised a scheme of three types of face: square-jawed Asuras, oval-faced Devas and slim-faced goddesses. The team put up a

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<sup>170</sup> Cam inscriptions clearly state that the Khmer king lost his control of central and southern Čampā in the mid-1190s to a Čam prince Vidyānandana, who had been one of his protégés. But the Khmer army restored these areas to direct control from Angkor by 1203 and remained under Khmer control until the end of Jayavarman's reign.

notice outside the temple stating that the face towers represent a broad coalition of Hindu and Buddhist demi-gods securing the city against the repetition of what they assumed to be a psychologically jarring invasion by the neighbouring Čams: 'Devatā, Deva and Asuras are common to Buddhism and Hinduism. They are depicted on the Bāyon as symbols of all gods and goddesses in both celestial worlds.'<sup>171</sup> This interpretation of the Bāyon towers may owe something to the work of Mus and Coedès; but it goes beyond them in asserting, from what I consider a questionable interpretation of measurements of the physical faces of the Bāyon, a vision of a broad, pan-religious celestial warrior coalition in the city's defence against an invasion whose severity is still unproven.

The Bāyon faces do bear some resemblance to the faces of the Devas of the Angkor Thom causeways – though the causeway Devas have a more military, square-jawed and less regal aspect than the pacific tower deities – but they assuredly bear no resemblance to the heavily-jowled Asuras with angry, bulging eyes and deeply furrowed brows. Nor do the narrower faces and slightly more sloping eyes of a few of the tower deities display any femininity. But the more fundamental difficulty I have with this new taxonomy of the faces is that I cannot see three face types in the towers and find myself siding with Mus, who deems the degree of *uniformity* achieved in the sculpting of the faces as extraordinary, given the scale of the project and the fact that the faces were carved *in situ* with simple technology after the rectangular blocks of sandstone were hoisted into position.<sup>172</sup> The Khmers' mastery of the problems of carving sandstone on a gigantic scale is I think suitably acknowledged by Claude Jacques:

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<sup>171</sup> Whether the Čam attack on Angkor was a momentary raid or a prolonged occupation has yet to be substantiated archaeologically. The Phiméanakas stela (K.485) suggests Angkor's defences were weakened by internal rivalry or civil war: 'Sous le règne précédent, la terre, bien qu'ombragée par de nombreux parasols, souffrait d'une extrême chaleur; sous son règne, où il ne lui restait plus qu'un seul parasol, elle fut, chose étrange, délivrée de toute souffrance.' (Coedès 1927:387 'Phimānākàs' *BEFEO*)

<sup>172</sup> The Japanese team indeed records slight differences in the two sides of some single faces – square jaw on one side and less pronounced on the other – which they are surely right to attribute to two carvers working on one face. I would differ from the team in seeing this as the result of two craftsmen with slightly different styles working to the same design. See Park, Hyounggook (2005:301) 'Appendix 3: Art History Survey Report of the Bāyon Temple' *The Bāyon master plan* JSA

Given the difficulties associated with creating sculpture on a gigantic scale, it has to be acknowledged that the Khmers of this era created, at the Bayon temple and elsewhere, the most beautiful giant sculptures which, moreover, are imbued with a symbolic significance that makes them deeply spiritual.<sup>173</sup>

Moreover this uniformity of model and execution extends to the face towers of Bantéay Chmàr and Preah Khan of Kompong Svay and to the other temples of Jayavarman VII where face tower gopuras were inserted into the outer enclosure walls. There are minor differences in the execution of the faces, but they are indeed minor, accidental to the homogenous and carefully implemented single design idea. The intellectual model that the architects and sculptors of the Bàyon were projecting required just such visual homogeneity. It is the impressive sameness of the repeated faces that is powerful and eloquent, not the minor differences in physical execution.

#### 4. The international context: the Buddhist crisis

A look at the international context of Buddhism at the start of the 13<sup>th</sup> century may help us in our quest for the identity of the lord of the Bàyon maṇḍala. At that time, the Buddhist Khmer court could not but have been directly affected by the terminal crisis of Buddhism in Northern India. Jayavarman had based his retention of power, after seizing it in battle, on imposing Buddhism as being more powerful than the traditional state Śaivism. Yet Moslem general Muhammed ibn Bakhtiyar Ikhtiyar-ud-din Khilijii had stormed the monasteries of the Ganges valley in 1197 and butchered the monks.<sup>174</sup> The theologians or *mahāntas* who were not killed on the spot, fled with texts and portable icons into the Himalayas.<sup>175</sup> According to Tibet's historian Lama Tāranātha (1575-1634), a large group of the refugee Tantric masters from the monasteries managed to reach Southeast Asia.<sup>176</sup> Tāranātha is looking back over four

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<sup>173</sup> Jacques, C (1999:182) *Angkor* Koenemann, Cologne

<sup>174</sup> The brutal manner in which Bakhtiyar destroyed the northern Indian Buddhist monasteries can be gathered from the Arab historian who wrote *Tabak'at-I Na'siri*. John Dowson (1869:306) *The history of India as told by its own historians. The Muhammadan period. Edited from the posthumous papers of Sir H.M. Elliot KCB* Trübner, London.

<sup>175</sup> Jean Filliozat suggested there were links between Nepalese and Khmer architecture at this period as a result of learned Tantric masters fleeing the devastation of the monasteries. Filliozat, Jean (1969:47) 'Emigration of Indian Buddhists to Indochina c. A.D. 1200' *Studies in Asian History: proceedings of the Asian History Congress 1961* Asia Publishing House

<sup>176</sup> 'The panditas Samghamashrijana, Ravishribhadra, Candrakaragupta and other *mahant*s, just 16 of them, and some 200 lesser panditas went a long distance to the east, to Khang [Pagan?], Mu-nyang, Kam-po-ja [Cambodia] and other countries.' Translated by Tadeusz Skorupski of SOAS from the Tibetan text printed in Sarnath in 1965.



centuries here and some of the names of the Tantrikas' destinations are unclear.<sup>177</sup> But his knowledge of South and Southeast Asian geography had a solid base, acquired from his teacher Buddhagupta, who travelled in the 16<sup>th</sup> century through India and the southern seas and stayed in Arakan, Pagan and Haripunya.<sup>178</sup>

Earlier, in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, there had been raids by the Islamic armies based in the Sind. Burmese king Kyanzitha's last Prome inscription in 1105 refers to the Vajrasāna temple in Bodhgayā, the heart of Buddhism, being destroyed.<sup>179</sup> Tilman Frasch notes that 'the considerable number of Indian names [in Pagan inscriptions] suggests an increasing human influx from India' in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. He believes the stream of refugee monks from the Bihar monasteries may have extended the period during which Mahāyānist ideas flourished in Pagan.<sup>180</sup> But the situation became grave in the late 1190s and Burma took actions to prop up Buddhism at this time: king Narapatisithu sent a mission to Bodhgayā. An early 13<sup>th</sup> century text supports Tāranātha's report of an exodus to other Buddhist centres. It records a local ruler of Bodhgayā supplying provisions for 1,000 monks from a Sinhalese monastery on the north side of the Bodhgayā compound, who were returning to Sri Lanka.<sup>181</sup> Narapatisithu began building a replica of Bodhgayā's Mahābodhi temple so that Pagan could fill the gap left by the loss of the enlightenment shrine and become the new centre of the Buddhist world.<sup>182</sup> The project amounted to transferring the Buddhist holy land, and its representative temple, to Pagan whose own Mahābodhi 'came to stand as a symbol for Pagan's new role as a Buddhist world power.'<sup>183</sup> Pagan went on in the 13<sup>th</sup> century to generate a wave of Singhalese-backed Pāli-Buddhism

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<sup>177</sup> Even Kam-po-ja cannot be securely identified with Cambodia. Michael Vickery's research (Vickery 1977:371-7 *Cambodia after Angkor, the chronicular evidence for the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries*) into the Pāli version of this name in Southeast Asia finds associations with both Lavo (Lopburi) and 'north central Siam' and Malalasekara's (1937:527) Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names says 'In later literature Kamboja is the name given to Western Siam'. It cannot however be confidently asserted that this Pāli use of Kamboja was what Tāranātha was referring to.

<sup>178</sup> Nihar-Rajan Ray (1936:84) *Sanskrit Buddhism in Burma* H.J Paris, Amsterdam

<sup>179</sup> U Lu Pe Win (1971:3) 'Old Burma – Early Pagan, a radical review' *Journal of the Burma Research Society* LIV

<sup>180</sup> Frasch, T. (1996:170) *Pagan Stadt und Staat* Steiner, Stuttgart

<sup>181</sup> Frasch, T. (2000:46)

<sup>182</sup> Bautze-Picron, Claudine (2003:5) *The Buddhist murals of Pagan* Orchid Press, Bangkok

<sup>183</sup> Frasch, Tilman (2000:47) 'A remark on the Mahābodhi temples at Pagan' *Proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the EASEAA Berlin 1998* Eds Wibke Lobo & Stefanie Reimann

which swept through the emerging state of Thailand and may eventually have contributed to setting Cambodia on Theravāda.

But the stream of Buddhism heading north and northeast in the form of refugees from Vikramaśila and Odantapurī in 1200 was Tantric, and the Pagan court, which had then begun founding a long-term Theravādin alliance with Sri Lanka, would have been circumspect about Tantric overtures from the refugee masters. In Angkor, however, the first Mahāyāna Khmer emperor may well have welcomed the support and authority of an influx of the leading exponents of Buddhist Tantrism. From the point of view of the survivors of the Moslem onslaught, a Mahāyānist emperor in Cambodia would have been a major magnet. Nālandā, Vikramaśila and Odantapurī had been parts of the world centre of Tantric Buddhism for 600 years but were now laid waste and undefended by any earthly sponsor. More than anything, Buddhism needed wealthy patrons with armies. No shred of direct evidence has been found in Angkor for the arrival of Tantric *mahāntas* from India. I will shortly claim that in the final years of Jayavarman's reign, an overtly Tantric pantheon led by Hevajra, Vajrasattva, Vajradhara and Vajrapāṇi moved to centre stage, and Jayavarman had all the resources needed for this in the Phimai tradition from which his Mahīdhara dynasty hailed. Nevertheless, a learned, Sanskritist Tantric Buddhist court ruling over the largest empire of the region could have accommodated the refugee *mahāntas* without difficulty. Moreover, there may be indirect evidence of their presence.

#### **4.1 From Nepal to Angkor**

The influence of the fugitive Bihar *mahāntas* or *Vajrācāryas* in Angkor may be attested from afar in Kathmandu, where most scholars see huge pairs of eyes of a Tantric Ādi-Buddha peer out over the city from each side of the square *harmikā* of the Kathmandu's *Svayambhū Mahācaitya*, and similar monuments in nearby Patan. B.P. Groslier speculates that the painting of the eyes on the towers in Kathmandu and Patan was inspired by the refugee masters from Bengal, at exactly the time that giant four-fold faces were being carved on the towers of the Bāyon.

It has been shown recently<sup>184</sup> that it [the new form of Buddhism of Jayavarman VII] very probably consisted of the doctrine elaborated in Nālandā, then taught in Angkor – finally in Japan – by the doctors of the [Buddhist] law who had to flee before the Moslem invaders in the closing years of the 12th century. It is therefore to this school and its texts that we should turn for Jayavarman VII's conceptions of Buddhism, and therefore for the sources of the Bāyon. This is just as much the case for the Bengali zealots who took refuge at the same time in Nepal and Kashmir, who were very probably the initiators of the stupas marked with four stylized faces, oriented to the four directions, which are the only exact parallels that can be found with the Khmer face towers.<sup>185</sup>

Lack of evidence makes it difficult to date the Nepalese stūpas, and more particularly the moment when the giant eyes were first painted on the *harmikā*; but there are reasons for proposing, as Groslier does, that an innovative rework of the stūpas occurred at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, when the Newar Buddhists were reinforced by the Bihar masters and Arimalla (r. 1200-16) founded the first Malla Dynasty of Nepal. Because of the destruction of Buddhism in India, this period marked a Buddhist renaissance in the Kathmandu Valley, with a distinct focus on religious art innovation. This is how Ulrich von Schroeder imagines Kathmandu bustling under the influence of the immigrant *Vajrācāryas* ('vajra masters') of 1200:

The annihilation of Indian Buddhism caused a great influx of refugees to Nepal who swarmed to the Buddhist monasteries of the Kathmandu Valley, mostly in Patan and Kathmandu... The arrival of these Buddhist refugees was beneficial to Nepal in many ways, one of them being that among these immigrants were many eminent Indian Buddhist scholars who had salvaged valuable manuscripts and probably also many cast images. There is every reason to believe that among these displaced Buddhists were also many skilled artists and craftsmen. At the same time the importance of the *vihāras* as centres of Buddhist studies increased and the Tibetan Buddhists shifted their focus from north-eastern India to Nepal.<sup>186</sup>

Buddhist art in this period was in a unique phase in which one predominant style is diffused internationally – a phenomenon reinforced by Islam's driving the Buddhists out of their Indian monastery-universities. Much of the northern Buddhist art of Pāla-Sena India, Nepal, Tibet and Burma can hardly be differentiated at this time and scholars consequently define a '(Pāla)

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<sup>184</sup> Groslier refers here to Jean Filliozat's paper at the 1961 Asian History Congress published as (1969:47) 'Emigration of Indian Buddhists to Indo-China c.A.D. 1200' Studies in *Asian History: proceedings of the Asian History Congress 1961* Asia Publishing House, New Delhi: 'For example, the famous four-faced towers, a characteristic feature of the art of the Bāyon, appear in the Khmer art in the last part of [Jayavarman's] reign. It may be fruitful to seek their origin in Indian architecture and art and to investigate whether the idea of such representations was carried from Bengal by the emigrants reaching Cambodia. Eyes at least are painted on temple towers facing the four directions of space.'

<sup>185</sup> Groslier, B.P. (1973:239) *Le Bayon: inscriptions du Bayon* EFEO Paris (my translation).

<sup>186</sup> Ulrich von Schroeder (1981:331) *Indo-Tibetan bronzes* Visual Dharma Publications, Hong Kong

International Style'.<sup>187</sup> Images of Tantric Buddhas, whether painted on cloth in Nepal and Tibet, or on temple walls in Pagan, have many iconographic and artistic features in common and convey a powerful, brooding conception of Buddhahood. These features include heavy, lowering eyes with the upper lid sinking over the iris and the whites fired below with a tinge of red. Above them a pronounced *ūrṇā* swells between strong, arched eyebrows. The giant eyes of the *Svayambhū-Mahācaitya* ('self-existent great monument') fit within this convention.<sup>188</sup> **[Plate 105 Svayambhū Mahācaitya Kathmandu]**

Since Khmer Buddhism may also have been influenced by the Vajrayānist practices radiating from Bihar just before the disastrous Islamic onslaught on the monasteries that developed them, it may be worthwhile incurring the obvious risks of anachronism and cautiously enquiring whether there are practices that have survived into modern times among the Newar *Vajrācāryas*, which throw light on what we know of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist cult of the Khmers. Recent research on the unique Nepali experience of Buddhism has illuminated the beliefs and rituals of the *Vajrācāryas* in ways that I believe suggest traces, conserved through time, of features that the two geographically-separated cultures once shared. The Bāyon and the Nepalese caityas are the only religious monuments in the world that share the architectural innovation of four giant faces of a deity peering out in the four directions over a city. In Nepal, the Svayambhū Mahācaitya is seen by several scholars as a monumental representation of the Ādi-Buddha, whose eyes are painted on the sides of high, square, metal-covered *harmikā* tower above a stūpa-shaped dome.<sup>189</sup> I will later suggest that the same ancient design idea of the body of a stūpa or temple being the living Buddha present in the

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<sup>187</sup> Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter (1998:1) 'Is there an inner Asian international style 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries? Definition of the problem and present state of research' *The inner Asian international style 12<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> centuries*, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien

<sup>188</sup> Although the stūpa's eyes are ceremonially repainted every year, they retain the drooping upper lid and threatening, reddened white, as well as the prominent swirling *ūrṇā*, of the Tibetan and Nepalese Buddhas of about 1200.

<sup>189</sup> Mary Slusser for example writes: 'The Svayambhū, for example, is conceived as the primordial Ādibuddha.' Slusser, M. (1982:151) *Nepal Mandala: a cultural study of the Kathmandu Valley*, Princeton

community is built into the Bāyon. Maxwell<sup>190</sup> and Snellgrove<sup>191</sup> identify this Nepalese Ādi-Buddha as Vajradhara; Brian Hodgson<sup>192</sup> inclined towards 'Vajra Satwa' and saw the eyes as representing omniscience.<sup>193</sup> Hodgson, a long-term resident of Kathmandu, no doubt gleaned this from his Newar *Vajrācārya* acquaintances, whose daily *guru maṇḍala* ritual is devoted to Vajrasattva. David Gellner more recently recorded Vajrasattva as 'both the *guru* of the *Vajrācārya* priests and an exoteric deity who is a kind of representation of the absolute in Vajrayāna Buddhism.'<sup>194</sup> The interchangeability of the two names for the Newar's supreme Buddha is made plain in Gellner's citation of *Vajrācārya* Hemraj Sakya, who says Vajrasattva is 'Vajrayāna's main *guru*, also known as Vajradhara, he is worshipped as Ādibuddha Svayambhū.'<sup>195</sup> The five Buddhas of the Vajradhatu Pentad appear on high pentagonal metal panels which rise like a crown above the eyes of the supreme Buddha of the Svayambhū. On a massive scale, this seems to be similar in design to Vajrasattva icons with the Pentad of Jinas in the hair or crown that is known in eastern India from the seventh to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The closest parallel in world religious architecture for thus representing the supreme deity of the state in a giant face overlooking the capital is in the much larger stone face towers which may have been constructed simultaneously in the Bāyon, as Groslier remarked. In both cases

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<sup>190</sup> Maxwell (1997:171)

<sup>191</sup> 'On each of the four sides of the squared top-piece are depicted the all-seeing eyes of supreme buddhahood, surmounted by an arched flange on which appear the Buddhas of the five families – Vairocana above the other four... Every stūpa is his representation [Vajradhara, the Ādi-Buddha, the Primordial Buddha] and they are his eyes that gaze forth from the dome.' Snellgrove, David L. (1957:96) *Buddhist Himālaya* Cassirer, Oxford

<sup>192</sup> Brian Hodgson (1874:30) *Essays on the languages, literature, and religion of Nepal and Tibet: together with further papers on the geography, ethnology, and commerce of those countries* Trübner & Co, London

<sup>193</sup> John Huntington says a yogin at the Svayambhū envisions the wrathful emanation of the Ādi-Buddha, the 12-armed Cakrasamvara, after passing through the maṇḍalas of the five Jinas, Aksobhya, Mañjuśrī and Vairocana.

<sup>194</sup> David Gellner (1992:150) *Monk, householder and Tantric priest: Newar Buddhism and its hierarchy of ritual* Cambridge University Press

<sup>195</sup> Gellner (1992:254). Gellner notes however that the Newars distinguished Vajradhara from Vajrasattva in icons by giving the former two vajras crossed at the chest, rather than Vajrasattva's vajra and ghaṇṭā: 'Another form of Vajrasattva is Vajradhara (instead of *vajra* and bell he holds two *vajras* crossed at his chest. He represents the sixth Buddha, above and assuming the Five Buddhas headed by Vairocana. (Gellner 1992:255)

the whole building becomes the god, an innovation that blurs the traditional Indic dividing line between architecture and sculpture.<sup>196</sup>

During the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries Kathmandu, Angkor and Phimai embraced fierce deities such as Hevajra and Saṃvara, who appear in the Yoginī class of Tantras.<sup>197</sup> Gellner describes the Newar Buddhists' daily *guru maṇḍala* ritual as focused on the invocation and visualization of Vajrasattva, the lustration of his maṇḍala and the recitation of his renowned 100-syllable mantra (*śatākṣara*). We have no trace of such a ceremony in ancient Angkor but there are several Khmer bronzes of Vajrasattva in museum collections which could have served in such a ritual. Gellner gives an example of a maṇḍala ritual using an icon in this way on day five of the secret initiation ceremony for Newar Vajrācāryas: '[Cakrasamvara's] statue is placed in the middle where his mandala is to be made up, and the Vajrācāryas begin making it with coloured powder.'<sup>198</sup>

Both of these Buddhist cultures shared liberal admixtures of Śaivism and apparently performed animal sacrifices. Gellner records that Newar Buddhist priests (*Vajrācārya*) oversee 'Spirit-Offerings' (*bali*) which include rites involving blood, alcohol and buffalo entrails<sup>199</sup> and we find a buffalo tethered for sacrifice on the eastern outer gallery of the Bāyon (such a ritual is of

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<sup>196</sup> T.S. Maxwell notes that the vertical dimension in the eyed tower adds to the horizontal Pentad of the Svayambhū Mahācaitya to accommodate the new concept of a supreme unifying Buddha in this temple in Kathmandu: 'The main bulk of the stūpa was then regarded as the symbol of the Ādi-Buddha. Along with this metaphysical elaboration, which transformed the "horizontal" construct of the Pentad into a "vertical" hierarchy, went elaboration of the personifications of these two new super-additions to the Vajrayānist cosmic structure. The Ādi-Buddha concept was specially embodied in a masculine being named Vajradhara, Wielder-of-the-Thunderbolt...' T.S. Maxwell (1997:164) *The Gods of Asia* OUP, Oxford. Snellgrove records the supreme Buddha as represented in the whole body of the Svayambhū structure: 'The fifth, all-comprehending Buddha is sometimes shown on the great stūpas of Nepal...but there is really no need to show him, for the whole stūpa is his symbol.' (Snellgrove 1957:96) Dagens says 'the idea of the temple being the body of the god is quite frequent in Indian thought...' (Dagens 2000:107)

<sup>197</sup> Saṃvara is known to be in the Mahādhara pantheon from his image with the distinctive elephant-hide cape, on one of the principal pediments at the central sanctuary in Phimai. Hevajra, another Heruka deity with eight heads and 16 arms, is known from a large series of Khmer bronze and stone icons.

<sup>198</sup> Gellner (1992:274)

<sup>199</sup> Gellner (1992:149)

course not only found in Nepal and Cambodia)<sup>200</sup>. Gellner's *Vajrācārya* informants indicate that buffalo sacrifice is allowed in Buddhist rites for fierce deities: 'It is significant that while Spirit-Offerings are never made to Buddhas or other high, pure divinities, they are made to Tantric gods such as Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī. As fierce gods, they can receive such offerings, which are not acceptable to Buddhas.'<sup>201</sup>

Both cultures *crowned* their Buddhas from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Paul Mus' study of crowned Buddhas concluded that although separate crowns and jewels were perhaps first draped over a Śākyamuni image in Bodhgayā in the seventh century<sup>202</sup>, the carving and casting of crowned Buddhas began in Pāla India and was driven to Nepal by the advance of Islam:

[The royal Buddha] appears to be a response to secret practices. We can be certain of this when we consider that we see, under the Pālas in the convents of Bihar, the simultaneous spread of the doctrine of the Vajrācāryas and of the images of the crowned Buddha. And indeed, when we find these Vajrācāryas later chased from India into Nepal and Tibet, we find they have in their hands images of crowned Buddhas, which play an essential role in their beliefs, and are still today the object of a secret cult (Vajradhara-Vajrasattva).<sup>203</sup>

The crowned Buddhas carried to Nepal were contemporary with the first crowned Buddhas made in the Khmer empire. Khmer standing crowned Buddhas and regal Buddhas enthroned on Nāgas first appear in the 11<sup>th</sup> century when Phimai was flourishing.<sup>204</sup> Woodward too links the 11<sup>th</sup> century Khmer Buddhas in royal attire with the Tantric practices developed '[i]n northern India, in the decades around 1000, [in which] the crowned Buddha became very popular...'<sup>205</sup> Although von Schroeder records one ninth century Nepalese bronze Vajrasattva,<sup>206</sup> crowned Buddhas otherwise appear in his

<sup>200</sup> Michael Vickery informs me that for example in Chiang Mai, offerings of blood, alcohol and raw buffalo meat are part of a ceremony for the Buddha. Buffalo sacrifices also continued into modern Cambodian times.

<sup>201</sup> Gellner (1992:149)

<sup>202</sup> Hsüan-tsang recorded seeing the crowned image treated with 'a certain air of secrecy'. Snellgrove (1959:205)

<sup>203</sup> Paul Mus (1928:202) 'Le Buddha paré. Son origine Indienne. Çakyamuni dans le Mahāyānisme moyen' *BEFEO* 28 (my translation)

<sup>204</sup> The Buddhism shared by Mahādhara dynasty Khmers can be seen in the appearance of standing crowned Buddhas in the sanctuary at Phimai with what Pierre Dupont calls the first Khmer standing Buddha on a lintel at Kompong Svāy, possibly in the home territory of King Dharanindravarman II and his son Jayavarman VII. (Pierre Dupont 1936:632 'Chronique' *BEFEO* 36)

<sup>205</sup> Woodward (2005:55)

<sup>206</sup> von Schroeder (1981: fig.79A)

material record from the 11<sup>th</sup> century and are coeval with those of Phimai and Angkor – including a Khmer finial of Vajrasattva described thus by Mus:

Finally a crowned Buddha figure, identical to the Buddha of the triad and seated on the nāga, reappears above a beautiful Khmer image of Vajrasattva and can only here be a representation of the Ādi-Buddha from which Vajrasattva emanates... We are therefore led to reserve an interval, out of precaution, between the Khmer inscriptions which date roughly from the 10<sup>th</sup> century [Bàt Čum etc.] and the figure of the Ādi-Buddha as Vajrasattva, which is not dated but may well be from the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In effect, Vajrasattva ranks only among the very developed forms of the Mahāyāna.<sup>207</sup>

In 1910 Henry Parmentier tried to find a direct connection between the temple architecture of Bengal and Angkor when he claimed that Chinese pilgrim Yijing saw early prototypes of the giant face towers in Nālandā in the late seventh century.<sup>208</sup> Filliozat reopened the question after he translated Tāranātha's Tibetan text that recorded the flight of Bihar theologians.<sup>209</sup> Bruno Dagens later discounted Parmentier's attempt to find a direct architectural link between Nālandā and Angkor by showing that the Chinese phrase 'heads of a man of natural size' had been mistranslated as 'heads the size of a man'. Dagens concluded that Yijing was describing conventional Indian temple *kuḍus* with human-size faces looking down from false windows, not giant faces as tall as a man's body.<sup>210</sup> So there was no direct architectural influence. The only observation of value we can now make is that in two remote geographic locations, there arose conceptually close instances of a major Buddhist architectural innovation where Tantric theologians exited the Islamic occupation of Bihar to settle in Nepal, Tibet and Southeast Asia to build new bases for the preservation of Buddhism.

#### 4.2 The Angkorian context

Against this background of the international crisis of Buddhism, we now turn to ask what theology and cosmology were being projected by the Bāyon. In the years 1197-1207, when all the Ganges Valley monasteries were being destroyed, the Khmers were carving face towers and large friezes of Yoginīs in the Bāyon, Bantéay Chmār and other temples. In addition, the royal

<sup>207</sup> Mus (1928:155-6), my translation.

<sup>208</sup> Parmentier, Henri (1936:284) 'Autres modifications subies par le Bayon au cours de son exécution' *BEFEO* 36

<sup>209</sup> See note 96 above.

<sup>210</sup> Dagens, B. (2000:107) 'The Bāyon Face Towers and their Meaning' 5<sup>th</sup> international symposium on the preservation and restoration of Bāyon – Final report Siemreap



workshops were producing stone and bronze icons of Tantric deities such as Hevajra, Vajradhara, Vajrapāṇi and Rāhu – all progeny of Nālandā and Vikramaśīla. Indeed, from the number of bronze icons that have survived<sup>211</sup>, it could be said that Hevajra, the wrathful form of the supreme, formless Buddha Vajrasattva ('Adamantine being'), may have reached his world apogee in Cambodia. The iconic evidence suggests a close link between the king and the principal deity of a late royal cult. Indeed, we have one piece of evidence that may suggest this baroque deity with eight towering, adorsed heads, 16 arms and four legs<sup>212</sup>, was the king's personal deity or *iṣṭadevatā*. A finely carved and cast gilt bronze image of the dancing Hevajra in the elaborate late Bāyon style<sup>213</sup> was excavated from the ruins of what Groslier identified as Jayavarman's palace in Angkor in 1952.<sup>214</sup> It is possible that this icon could have been used by the king in the prescribed daily maṇḍala meditation ritual in the palace. This is made more likely by the fact that in the Tantric tradition, gurus reserved the use of Hevajra as a personal meditation deity for strong or aggressive personalities, like this battle-hardened king.

In Tantric thinking, a king's personal meditation in discovering the Buddhas inside himself generates a maṇḍala of deities, not only for himself but for the

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<sup>211</sup> Wibke Lobo lists 35 Khmer Hevajra bronzes but art dealers in London specialised in Southeast Asia said they had seen twice this number pass through the market in the last 25 years. Lobo, Wibke (1994:114) 'Reflections on the Tantric Buddhist deity Hevajra in Cambodia' *Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists Paris, 24-8 October 1994* Vol.II

<sup>212</sup> The physical complexity of the representation is variously explained by medieval commentators as forms that reveal Buddhist truth statements. Davidson summarises: 'Thus the sixteen arms of Hevajra are the sixteen forms of emptiness, his crushing of Śiva is the destruction of the ego, Heruka's twelve implements are the twelve stages of the path leading to absolute awakening, and so forth.' Davidson, R. (2002:329) *Indian Esoteric Buddhism* Columbia.

<sup>213</sup> Groslier dated the piece to 1220, perhaps the last year of the reign, but I would agree with Woodward's judgement that 1200 would be more likely. (Personal communication) See Wibke Lobo (1997:318, cat.101) *Angkor et dix siècles d'art khmer* Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris

<sup>214</sup> Groslier, Bernard Philippe (1954:229) "Fouilles du Palais Royal d'Angkor Thom" in *Proceedings of the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Congress of Orientalists Cambridge 1954* Royal Asiatic Society London. The exact provenance for such a remarkable bronze makes this a piece of evidence that cannot be ignored. A single piece cannot prove the nature of the late royal cult but can be added to the other evidence with a note attached on its extraordinary find-spot. As for Groslier's reliability here, little excavation has been done at Angkor but Groslier insisted that the palace excavation was done to the high standards. The remains of four different wooden palaces were identified and dated, starting with Yaśovarman's and concluding with Jayavarman's. The bronze Hevajra, with a unique arrangement of the deity's eight heads, is now in the Phnom Penh museum.

whole state.<sup>215</sup> I will conclude this chapter by saying that the king's meditated maṇḍala is projected in the architecture of the Bāyon.

I argue that, following Stern's characterisation of the previous phase as 'Lokeṣvarisation', we could describe the third and final phase of Jayavarman's Buddhism as 'Yoginīfication', reflecting a return to a broader Tantric pantheon resembling that of Phimai Tantrism. My contention is that the so-called 'Apsaras' or celestial dancers that cluster around the entrances to the Bāyon (originally, 6250 goddesses were carved on the pillars and gopuras, according to my estimate from their positioning in gopura friezes and on entrance pillars) are in fact Tantric: they are Yoginīs or the projections of a Yoginī-Hevajra cult; the same emanations of Hevajra that appear in late 'Bāyon style' bronzes, or accompany the Tantric deities of the central sanctuary at Phimai.

## 5. Hevajra or Vajrasattva or Vajradhara?

It seems prudent, in trying to identify the deities of the Bāyon, to limit the descriptions of Vajrayānist deities to those contained in the Indic texts we know were present in Angkor. The root Yoga class Tantra *STTS*, which I argue in [Chapter 1.2.1](#), reached Angkor in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, opens with Vairocana as the presiding Buddha, but gradually shows Vajrapāṇi, the master of ceremonies throughout, as his equal or possibly more than equal.<sup>216</sup> Vajrasattva is present as the first of the 16 Vajra Beings<sup>217</sup> of the Vajradhātu

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<sup>215</sup> It can hardly be doubted that Jayavarman was a skilful meditator and a learned Buddhist. His second wife and two of his sons were skilled Sanskritists who composed his three major extant inscriptions, and he is described in inscriptions as 'learned in the sutras' (K.485. X Coedès 1927:386), 'a veritable Pāṇini in his youth' (K.908 st.42) and is shown pronouncing the mantras at a public ritual (K.288 B 17, 18).

<sup>216</sup> 'It is scarcely necessary to observe at this stage that Vajrapāṇi may appear as the equal of Vairocana (the various eulogies make this quite clear), as the chief divinity in his own right...'  
Snellgrove, D. (1981:42) 'Introduction' *sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha: Facsimile reproduction of a Tenth Century Sanskrit Manuscript from Nepal* edited by Lokesh Chandra and David L. Snellgrove pp. 5-67 New Delhi. This may be seen as presaging his evolution into the sixth supreme Buddha Vajradhara.

<sup>217</sup> This is the form in which Vajrasattva appears in the texts of the Tantric Shingon sect of Japan and which we will see later is the deity that Boisselier and Woodward see being carved in the Bāyon face towers in its original Mahāyānist plan. Woodward's case for seeing a reference to the 16 Vajra Beings in the original 16 Bāyon tower sanctuaries, by Parmentier's count, is however indirectly countered by Cunin, who concludes that 24, not 16, face towers were simultaneously constructed in the first phase of building. Woodward goes on to suggest that the king later, perhaps under the influence of a Burmese chaplain, shifted 'away from the

maṇḍala, the pre-eminent maṇḍala of the Yoga Tantras, and the Bodhisattva who heads the Tathāgata family. Vajrapāṇi's celebrated subjugation of Maheśvara in the *STTS* starts a process which Paul Williams calls the 'vajra-isation of Buddhism,' a complex and determinant shift towards the mature Vajrayāna.<sup>218</sup> Snellgrove, in discussing the *STTS*, concurs:

The tantras now become essentially a *vajra-yāna*, for it is the *vajra* that now symbolizes the sacred power. Its sphere of utmost potency is the *vajra-dhātu-maṇḍala*, and whoever rightly occupies this sphere is consubstantiated in Vajrasattva.<sup>219</sup>

Another seed for change can be seen in the way Vajrapāṇi is also at times called Vajrasattva, 'adamantine being'. Snellgrove suspects this heralds the germination of Vajrasattva as the later Vajrayāna's 'sixth, utterly supreme Buddha':

Vajrapāṇi's personal triumph as a 'mere yakṣa' who is recognized as a Bodhisattva, then as the most powerful of all Bodhisattvas in that he wields the vajra, and finally his identity as Vajra-Being (*vajrasattva*) when he becomes the expression of perfect enlightenment, as conceived in tantric tradition...<sup>220</sup>

In the *hevajra-tantra*, the transformation is complete and 'Vajrasattva' has become the personification of absolute being in the *vajradhātu* or 'adamantine sphere' from which the universe emanates.<sup>221</sup> Hevajra, the lord of the maṇḍala defined in the Tantra, is a fiery, wrathful form of this absolute being, as we hear in the opening lines:

There the Lord pronounced these words: 'Do thou listen to this which is named Hevajra, the essence of Vajrasattva, Mahāsattva and Mahāsamayasattva...It is

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Mahāyāna Buddhism that inspired Jayavarman's great monuments and toward a Buddhism that has a more Hīnayāna character'. In an Indrābhiṣeka, or higher consecration ceremony, which Woodward thinks may also have been Burmese in origin, the faces were transformed into the Theravādin Buddhist Brahma. (Woodward 2003:201)

<sup>218</sup> Williams, P. with Anthony Tribe (2000:218) *Buddhist thought* Routledge, London. Williams adds: 'The role of the vajra as the core symbol in tantric Buddhism continues for the remainder of its history in India, vajra names being characteristic of both Mahāyoga and Yoginī Tantra deities.'

<sup>219</sup> Snellgrove, D. (1959:210) 'The notion of divine kingship in tantric Buddhism' *The Sacral Kingship* Brill, Leiden

<sup>220</sup> Snellgrove, D. (1987:136) *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and their Tibetan successors* 2 vols Shambala, Boston; reprint 2004 Orchid Press, Bangkok

<sup>221</sup> Snellgrove comments: 'Such then is the complex mystery at the heart of *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*. It is this that is referred to as the Body, Speech and Mind of all the Buddhas, as the Three Adamantine Ones (*trayo vajrinah*), as the unity of three states of being (*tribhavasyaikatā*) and may well be indicated by any agreed name. It pervades all things for there is nothing other than it, and yet transcends all things for it is not involved in their accidental or purely unreal defilement. It can be experienced only by learning to associate oneself with its true nature, which is identical with one's own nature, and so on.' Snellgrove (1959:28)

indivisible and so known as Vajra. A Being which is unity of three; because of this device he is known as Vajrasattva.<sup>222</sup>

The Buddha has become something fearful, supreme and cosmic, as Snellgrove notes:

Moreover the Lord (Bhagavan) is no longer Śākyamuni in any of his recognizable hypostases, but a fearful being with the name of Śambara, Vajradāka, Heruka, Hevajra or or Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa ('Fierce and Greatly Wrathful').<sup>223</sup>

Rob Linrothe also remarks on the near absence in the *hevajra-tantra* of a conventional Mahāyānist Buddha or Bodhisattva:

Buddha and bodhisattva have minor roles in the Hevajra Tantra. The chief interlocutor is Vajrasattva, considered to be a kind of 'Ādibuddha' whose 'form comprises all the Buddhas' and who is ultimately identical with Hevajra himself. Vajrasattva answers the questions of the Vajra-being or bodhisattva, Vajragarbhā, and of yoginī (female adepts).<sup>224</sup>

The unifying Buddhist conception of Ādi-Buddha -- primordial Buddha or first mover -- was defined for western scholarship in Tibet in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by the remarkable explorer and scholar Alexander Csoma de Körös.<sup>225</sup> The term Ādi-Buddha is in fact not used to describe Vajrasattva in the *hevajra-tantra*, although the epithet *ādi* – 'first, original, primordial'<sup>226</sup> – is added to the name of the fifth Buddha Vairocana as '*Vairocanādi*'.<sup>227</sup> For Vajrasattva to receive the primordial epithet, we have to await the late eighth century *saṃvarodaya-tantra*<sup>228</sup>, but most of the attributes, such as being ontologically omnipresent are already there in the *hevajra-tantra*, which calls Vajrasattva 'the one unity of all that is'<sup>229</sup> and shows him as a sixth Buddha whose family embraces all those of the Vajradhātu Pentad – Vairocana and the four directional Jinās.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> *Hevajra-tantra* I.i.2-3

<sup>223</sup> Snellgrove (1987:153)

<sup>224</sup> Linrothe, R (1999:27) *Ruthless compassion* Serindia, London

<sup>225</sup> Alexander Csoma de Körös (1833:57-9) 'Note on the Origin of the Kāla-Chakra and the Ādi-Buddha Systems' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 2

<sup>226</sup> M. Monier-Williams p.136-7

<sup>227</sup> *Hevajra-tantra* II.ix.30-7 Snellgrove did not translate these lines, on the grounds that they were mantras repeated from earlier in the text. Consequently he recorded no view on 'Vairocanādi'.

<sup>228</sup> The *saṃvarodaya-tantra*, which the translator dates to the late eighth century or later because of borrowings from Nāgārjuna's *pañcakrama*, identifies Vajrasattva as the Ādi-Buddha: 'Vajrasattva exists in the form of the original god.' Tsuda, Shinichi (1974:250) *The saṃvarodaya-tantra, selected chapters* Hosuseido Press, Tokyo

<sup>229</sup> *Hevajra-tantra* II.x.1

<sup>230</sup> The Tantra states at one point that the family of Vajrasattva is added to the Pentad maṇḍala 'as it is given in the *tattvasaṃgraha*'. (II.v.57) As this text is the *hevajra-tantra*, it also occasionally gives pre-eminence to Akṣobhya at the centre of the maṇḍala of wrathful deities (Snellgrove 1959:124): 'But these six of five families are comprised in one, that one family

In his personified form in icons, Vajrasattva is seated in the lotus position with a vajra held in his right hand, as if issuing from his breast, and a ghaṅṭā in his left, resting on his hip. This mudrā is quite frequently found among the bronzes of Phimai and Angkor from 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the texts Vajrasattva and Hevajra are difficult to separate, but in icons they can never be confused.

In the text, Hevajra is described either in his *ardhaparyāṅka* ('half cross-legged') dance posture surrounded by eight twirling Yoginīs, or braced in *yab yum* sexual union with consort Nairātmyā, who represents non-duality or the doctrine of the non-existence of self. Yet according to the text even in this *maithuna* posture of coition 'the place of this union is the seat of Vajrasattva'.<sup>231</sup> Their differences are, however, made clear. Hevajra is portrayed as brimming with life, colour and emotion and promises that through his Yoginīs he will act as an intercessor between the adept or *sādhaka* and ultimate reality; Vajrasattva, on the other hand, is a more remote, pacific, perhaps androgynous being or even state, which manifests variously at key moments in the rituals. Making contact with ultimate reality, in order to experience reality as non-dual, is seen to require the blurring of some distinctions and the shattering of inculcated dichotomies, such as subject/object, pure/impure. This can be achieved when an invocation of one aspect turns into an invocation of the other:

OM Vajrasattva...He of all eyes, the vajra-eyed, makes manifest, see sublimity,  
Hevajra!<sup>232</sup>

Indeed, 'He-vajra' is a form of address ('hail, vajra!') both for what the word 'vajra' ('adamantine', etc.) represents and for the essence of vajra (Vajrasattva). Tucci describes this absolute being of pure abstraction as 'the

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which has mind as its Lord and consists in the wrath of Akṣobhya. Such is the adamant power of wrath.' (*Hevajra-tantra* II.iv.103). Williams adds: 'The *vajraśekhara-tantra* also contains a reference to a sixth family, that of Vajradhara, a Buddha (or principle) seen as the source, in some sense, of the five Buddhas. From this perspective Vajradhara takes on the foundational role of Vairocana. This is a function also given in some contexts to the figure of Vajrasattva.' Williams with Tribe (2000:210)

<sup>231</sup> *Hevajra-tantra* I.viii.8

<sup>232</sup> David Snellgrove (1957:73) *Buddhist Himālaya* Cassirer, Oxford

supreme Tathāgata, the germinal point outside time and space, from which issue the five directions of the cosmogram, symbolized by the five Buddhas...<sup>233</sup> Etienne Lamotte selects this description of Vajrasattva from the *Jñānasiddhi*:

...the unique eye of knowledge, immaculate, knowledge incarnate, Tathāgata, undivided, omnipresent, immanent, subtle seed, exempt from impurities.<sup>234</sup>

From this theological and cosmological complex, two main possibilities present themselves as to what is being projected in the art of the Bāyon. One option is to see the temple as a unique and extravagant extension of the Hevajra maṇḍala with the dancing god in the face towers surrounded by Yoginīs.

From the large number of bronze statues, libation conches and other ritual paraphernalia in the material record, as well as large Hevajra images in stone, it would appear that Hevajra consecrations formed a significant part of the royal cult in this period. During the earlier Lokeśvara phase, Woodward is surely right to see 'Phimai Tantrism playing a secondary role.'<sup>235</sup> But if we see Jayavarman's Buddhism and sacred art steadily evolving from an early triad, through 'Lokeṣvarisation' to a late, royal cult derived from the Yoginī Tantras, there is no need to sideline the Hevajra ritual conches; they belong to the mainstream of the third phase of the new state religion, when Hevajra consecrations may have been conducted on a significant scale.<sup>236</sup> A state programme of Hevajra consecrations may be further manifested in the architectural friezes of Yoginīs carved in and around the Bāyon gopuras and cut into the pillars standing before the outer gallery walls. If we take up

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<sup>233</sup> Tucci, Giuseppe (1949:222) *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* La Libreria dello Stato, Roma

<sup>234</sup> *Jñānaikacaksur amalō jñānamūrtis tathāgata, niskalah sarvago vyāpā sūksmabījam anāsravah.*

E. Lamotte (1966:150) 'Vajrapāni en Inde' *Mélanges de sinologie offerts à M. Paul Demiéville* PUF Paris

<sup>235</sup> Woodward, H. (2004:348) 'Esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia in the Light of Recent Scholarship' *Journal of Southeast Asian studies* 35.2

<sup>236</sup> In his recent work, which substantiates a revival of the *Kārandavyūha-sūtra* under 'Lokeṣvarisation', following its rise to importance in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Woodward ponders whether the Khmer Hevajra libation conches were only made for esoteric purposes or for some elite group of ritual specialists: 'Tantric beliefs may have been adapted and seen as an esoteric counterpart to the dominant and very public triad; either that, or Tantric priests formed an independent group of ritual specialists (hence the importance of Hevajra imagery on conch shells, for instance).' Woodward, H. (2004:352) 'Esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia in the Light of Recent Scholarship' *Journal of Southeast Asian studies* 35.2

Groslier's intuition to seek a Nālandā text to provide the key to unlocking the mysteries of the Bāyon, then from the material record, the *hevajra-tantra* has the strongest claim. There are indications of other Tantras being adapted to Khmer Buddhist use, but signs of the presence of the *hevajra-tantra* are manifold and incontrovertible.

The second option is to see a Hevajra cult expressed in the Bāyon architecture but with the unifying form of Vajrasattva appearing in architectural-iconic form in the face towers. The giant all-seeing faces which address the four cardinal directions high above the city would then depict the supreme, formless 'adamantine being' (Vajrasattva) of which Hevajra is a wrathful emanation. This option would be consistent with a royal cult in the Bāyon focused on Hevajra initiations. Which option is more compelling?

The question addresses the *form* of the deity because in essence the candidates are aspects of the same.<sup>237</sup> Disentangling the claimants however requires careful navigation. Paul Wheatley for example states that Vajradhara ('bearer of the vajra') is in the Bāyon towers; yet he remains very close to Coedès' solution, for he also sees a portrait of the king and Lokeśvara there, with the latter manifesting himself in the form of the Bodhisattva Vajradhara, an aspect of Vajrapāṇi assumed by Lokeśvara when expounding the Buddhist law.<sup>238</sup> The complexity of this analysis reminds us of the crosscurrents of multiple interpretations that have addressed the Bayon faces. Boisselier, for example, before eventually turning to see Brahma in the faces, arrived at an even denser composite than Wheatley: he said we see the form of Vajrapāṇi in the faces, but this is really Lokeśvara, who is an aspect of Vajradhara and of Vajrasattva and of Vajradharma.<sup>239</sup> Complex overlapping roles and

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<sup>237</sup> As Dasgupta points out: "This Vajra-sattva, the Lord Supreme of the Tantric Buddhists, is found in the Buddhist Tantras bearing many other names of which the most important are Hevajra and Heruka" Dasgupta, Shashi Bhusan (1950:98) *An introduction to Tantric Buddhism* University of Calcutta

<sup>238</sup> 'When Jayavarman VII of Kambujadesa had his own face, in the likeness of Vajradhara carved on each of the four sides of each of the 54 towers of the Bayon, he was ensuring the projection of divine power, of which he was the transmitter, to the four quarters of his kingdom.' Wheatley, Paul (1971:434) *The Pivot of the four Quarters* Edinburgh

<sup>239</sup> Boisselier wrote: 'The *Vajradharma-sādhana* underlines that Lokeśvara proceeds from Vajradharma, an aspect of Vajradhara which M. de La Vallée Poussin identifies with

definitions in a constantly enlarging pantheon were one of the outcomes of the bewildering creativity of the sages of Vajrayāna as it spread through many countries over many centuries and with no centralising hierarchy or authority.<sup>240</sup>

However, thanks to the prolific evidence for a cult of Hevajra we can justify circumscribing the list of candidates for the supreme Khmer deity portrayed in the Bāyon towers to the three who appear in the *hevajra-tantra*. Is it Hevajra, the fierce Heruka form and central figure of the Yoginī cult, whose image was also excavated from the ruins of Jayavarman’s palace? Is it Vajradhara, as identified by one of the great medieval commentators on this Tantra, and as seen by several modern interpreters of the contemporary eye towers of Nepal; or is it Vajrasattva, named by the other medieval commentator as the overarching being of the Vajrayāna cosmos?<sup>241</sup> Here are arguments for each.

## 5.1 Hevajra

1. The thousands of Yoginīs embellishing the entrances to the Bāyon make it conceivable that Hevajra is carved above them in the towers of the state temple. The presence of a large number of Hevajras cast in bronze in this period would tend to support this. Moreover, two large stone statues of Hevajra were found outside the east and west gates of Jayavarman VII’s fortified city, Angkor Thom.

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Vajrasattva and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* adds that for “...those who are susceptible of being converted by Vajrapāṇi”, Lokeshvara Samantamukha “teaches the law in the shape of Vajrapani.” Boisselier (1951:331). (my translation)

<sup>240</sup> This happens even within texts, as Rob Linrothe points out: ‘In the *STTS* [Tantra] Vajrapāṇi is also known as Samantabhadra, Vajrasattva, Vajradhara, Vajrahūmkāra and Trailokyavijaya.’ Linrothe, R (1999:156) *Ruthless compassion* Serindia, London  
Similarly, in the Tantric Shingon sect of Japan, as noted by Ian Astley-Kristensen ‘Within the Buddhist fold [Vajrapāṇi] is equated with Vajrasattva, Vajradhara, Samantabhadra, and Trilokyavijaya (or Trilokya) Vidyārāja... In the Shingon tradition he appears either as Vajrasattva or Vajrapāṇi in five places.’ Astley-Kristensen, Ian (1991:67) *The Rishukyō: The Sino-Japanese Tantric Prajñāpāramitā in 150 Verses (Amoghavajra’s Version)* Institute of Buddhist Studies, Tring.

<sup>241</sup> ‘Sattva is defined as Vajrasattva by [medieval commentator] S[aroruha (*Padmini-Padma can*)] xv.148.5 and as Vajradhara by K[ā]ūha in his ninth century *Yogaratnamālā*. He is the supreme being under any of his names...’ Snellgrove (1959:58n1)



2. Hevajra and his circle of eight Yoginīs are given the central role in a belief system recorded in several Khmer votive tablets. One in the Lopburi Museum, known as the ‘Trailokyavijaya’ tablet, in that it seems to show three linked worlds, has Hevajra and his Yoginis dancing within the pillars demarcating the principal level of the pavilion or palace (*kūṭāgāra*).<sup>242</sup> At the summit, above rows of Buddhas, is the Nāga Buddha with two devotees in the *anjali* posture. This tablet evinces the centrality of the Hevajra concept in Jayavarman’s Angkor. Hevajra also appears seated at the centre of a smaller votive tablet, now in the Bangkok Museum, where he again supports the Nāga Buddha.

3. In design, the individual faces in the face towers share many characteristics with the heads addorsed in triple tiers in Hevajra icons – piercing open eyes, third vajra eyes, and heavy, smiling lips. Hevajra’s regalia are also similar to that indicated on the face towers.

However, as noted earlier, Hevajra and Vajrasattva, although inseparable conceptually, are unmistakable in iconic form. From the perhaps 100 Khmer icons of Hevajra known in public and private collections, all have the same tower of eight addorsed heads, as specified in the *hevajra tantra*. There is some variation in the number of arms between 16 and 20, but there is *no* variation in the number of heads. The iconography of Hevajra’s heads is so consistently deployed in the sacred art of the Khmers as to make it a *sine qua non* for portraying Hevajra. This feature alone is enough to eliminate an identification of Hevajra with the four-faced deity of the Bāyon towers. We are now left with the entwined Vajradhara/Vajrasattva option.

## 5.2 Vajrasattva/Vajradhara?

1. The most striking link I have found between the *hevajra-tantra* and the appearance of the Bāyon temple, presents itself when the architecture is compared with the insight and vision that results from ‘concentrated meditation’ (*samāhitayoga*) on Hevajra. The meditator first imagines a shiny black hook emerging from his breast to ‘draw in the Buddhas who are

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<sup>242</sup> Boeles, J.J. (1966:23) ‘Two Yoginis of Hevajra from Thailand’ *Essays offered to G.H. Luce* Eds. Ba Shin and Boisselier, Artibus Asiae, Ascona

stationed throughout the threefold world’; having venerated them with Hevajra’s eight Yoginīs, the Buddhas are asked to consecrate the sādḥaka. A shower of flowers rains down, drums beat and ‘vajra songs’ are sung as ‘Heruka will be revealed in you’. This, according to the Tantra, initiates a process of gradual fusion between the initiand and the deity:

Performing morning, noon and night this meditation, which bestows such power, you should arise and at all times remain consubstantiated with the divinity.<sup>243</sup>

Later in the Tantra, the concluding moment of the empowerment ritual describes how the meditator conceives of *utpattikrama*, the ‘process of divine emanation’ which generates the universe and herself absorbs this back internally in *utpannakrama* (‘the process of perfection’). The apparent duality of existence implicit in two processes of emanation and absorption is then perceived by the meditator as an essential unity and a vision emerges of ‘the *maṇḍala* [which] appears from continuous application to the practice.’ This is presented as the climactic deity visualization of the text:

The great bliss, such as one knows it in the consecrations of the Great Symbol, of that the *maṇḍala* is the full and efficacious expression, for nowhere else does it have its origin... This bliss is Wisdom, this bliss is Means, and likewise it is their union. It is existence, it is non-existence, and it is Vajrasattva.<sup>244</sup>

This *hevajra-tantra* vision of a *maṇḍala* of deities emerging three-dimensionally into space on a vast scale provides an ‘intellectual “model”’ of the kind we have been seeking in the design of the Bāyon. Indeed, Snellgrove’s account of the meditator’s final *maṇḍalic* vision seems to uncannily echo the Bāyon’s architecture:

One may envisage the final stage of emanation of the *maṇḍala* of sixteen divinities, or one may envisage it as *countless forms of Hevajra filling space in a regularized order in every direction*. Then one must realize the identity of oneself with the whole process by associating one’s personality with the emanation, which is achieved by a strenuous effort of belief: OM HERUKA-*svabhāvātma*ko ‘HAM – ‘I am of the essence of Heruka.’ The imagined forms are conceived as sinking into one’s own heart, and from here the process may be repeated, so that one becomes oneself the twofold process of emanation and absorption, of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.<sup>245</sup> (My emphasis).

<sup>243</sup> Snellgrove (1959:59) I.iv.1-3

<sup>244</sup> Snellgrove (1959:91) II.ii.30-33. Alexis Sanderson records the conclusion of the empowerment ritual of the *Yoginītantras* as the moment when the guru removes the blindfold from the initiand and shows him a mirror: ‘All phenomena, he explains, are like reflections and the deity Vajrasattva, who rests in the heart of all beings, is the mirror in which they appear. The śiṣya should recognize that no entity has any intrinsic reality (*svabhāva*) and should act with this knowledge for the benefit of others (*darpanadarśanavidhi*).’ Sanderson (1994:89)

<sup>245</sup> Snellgrove (1959:33). The 14<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan Lama Tsong-kha-pa defines the transformation to Buddhahood through meditating upon the *maṇḍala* as: ‘Finally, a third

We may indeed envisage the architect of the Bāyon as seeking architectural expression for the maṇḍala of 16 Vajra Beings or of the ‘countless forms of Hevajra filling space in a regularized order in every direction’ -- (or even Saṃvara as noted by Sanderson in the *cakrasaṃvarapūjavidhi*) – in the form of the empowering state maṇḍala of Jayavarman VII. But as we have seen, Khmer iconography excludes Hevajra’s face from the towers, and as noted in footnote 219, the case for seeing the 16 Vajra Beings of the earlier *STTS* and the pantheon of Japan’s Shingon sect (in which Vajrasattva heads the Tathāgata lineage) is weakened by Cunin’s determination that the original plan of the Bāyon included 24 sanctuary towers, not 16 as Parmentier had believed.

So what case can be made for seeing the *hevajra-tantra*’s version of supreme Buddhahood -- Vajrasattva or Vajradhara – being given plastic form in the Bāyon sanctuary towers? The multiple, pacific faces on the Bāyon towers and the sublime effect of their smile, suspended in stone above the city, have some natural affinity with the notion of a Vajradhara or Vajrasattva as the absolute essence of the Vajrayāna cosmos. Maxwell admirably analyses the architectural concept in Nepal as adding the vertical dimension of the sixth Buddha to the ‘horizontal construct’ of the Vajradhātu Pentad enclosing the original stupa.<sup>246</sup>

Separating Vajrasattva from Vajradhara is also problematic. The names of the Vajrayāna’s sixth supreme Buddha oscillate to the point of being fully interchangeable in Vajrayāna texts, as they are in the current usage of Nepal’s Newar Vajrācāryas. ‘Oscillations’ is Tucci’s term for the interchangeability of Vajradhara, Vajrasattva and Mahavairocana:

...oscillations are frequent and the supreme Tathāgata, the germinal point, outside time and space, from which issue the five directions of the cosmogram, symbolized

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definitive meaning refers to the “purity of divine Thatness,” wherein all dimensions and realities have become integrated, where the *māyā* body and the coarse body have coalesced in the inconceivability of the body of Buddhahood, and the five colours have become the five Buddha-wisdoms, the omni-pervasive energy pattern of all things, the bliss-radiation infused in every atom and filling every space.’ Robert A.F. Thurman (1958:142) ‘Vajra hermeneutics’ *Buddhist Hermeneutics* ed. Donald Lopez University of Hawaii Press.

<sup>246</sup> Maxwell (1997:164)

by the five Buddhas, may assume the name of Mahāvairocana, Vajradhara, Vajrasattva, etc.<sup>247</sup>

Snellgrove acknowledges ‘the impossibility of making any final distinction between Vajradhara (Holder of the Vajra) and Vajrasattva (Vajra-Being), for both represent buddhahood in its adamantine aspect’:

[The *vajra-yāna*'s] sphere of utmost potency is the *vajra-dhātu-maṇḍala*, and whoever rightly occupies this sphere is consubstantiated in *Vajra-sattva*. It is possible to force some distinction between Vajra-dhara, the idealised personification of the possessor of the power, who thereby becomes implicitly the supreme being, and Vajra-sattva, who is the properly consecrated being, but of course the two are never properly distinguishable, just because their self-identification is the whole purpose of the rite.<sup>248</sup>

But Snellgrove notes the two deities are ‘distinguishable iconographically’, a point we will shortly take up.<sup>249</sup>

5.2.2. *Four* faces are frequent in images of the fifth supreme Buddha Vairocana, who turns the wheel of the Buddhist law, and are also known in Southeast Asia and China in images of the sixth supreme Buddha Vajradhara or Vajrasattva.

5.2.3. The large open lotuses that crown the *jatās* of the heads in the Bāyon towers never appear above Hevajra’s tower of heads and so they too tend to argue for seeing Vajradhara or Vajrasattva. Jean Boisselier at one point thought the Bāyon represented the cosmic mountain with Vajrasattva manifested continuously at its summit. In this interpretation he saw the lotuses crowning the face towers as symbols of the eternal flame of the supreme

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<sup>247</sup> Tucci, Giuseppe (1949:222) *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* La Libreria dello Stato, Roma  
Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann considers Vajrasattva and Vajradhara as variant names for the sixth Adi-Buddha that take different iconic forms in different Buddhist cultures. Mallmann M.-T. de (1986:404) *Introduction à l’iconographie du Tāntrisme bouddhique* Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, Paris. Shinten Sakai addresses the problem of the sliding names by adducing Max Müller’s word ‘kathenotheism’ for the ‘one by one’ polytheism of the Vedas, where each god is for a time considered single and supreme. ‘The title of this chapter is the *Mañjuśrī-jñānasattvasya paramārtha-nāma-sangīti*: Taisho 1187-90. The reason why the name Mañjuśrī is used here instead of Vajra-sattva, is that Mañjuśrī is a manifestation of the originally enlightened body of Samantabhadra, which is another name for Vajra-sattva. This is considered a kind of Indian kathenotheism.’ Shinten Sakai (1961:217) ‘Ādi-Buddha: development’ *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* Fascicule: A-Aca Ed. G.P. Malalasekera, Government Press of Ceylon. In Tibet, the Ādi-Buddha appears as Samantabhadra, Vajradhara or Vajrasattva while in Japan Mahāvairocana is supreme. (Kanyū Kabese (1961:219) ‘Ādi-Buddha: development’ *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* Fascicule: A-Aca Ed. G.P. Malalasekera, Government Press of Ceylon).

<sup>248</sup> Snellgrove (1959:209)

<sup>249</sup> Snellgrove (1959:244)

Buddha.<sup>250</sup> In the *kuṇḍalinī* yoga that plays a major role in Vajrayāna, the force driving towards enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) is conceived as a fluid in the body which rises during skilful meditation to engage directly with higher spheres of reality and achieve gradual transformation into Buddhahood.<sup>251</sup> The fluid blazes up through nodes or *cakras* in imagined channels beside the spine. The nerve nodes are conceived as being in the perineum and navel, the heart, the throat and the crown of the head, which correspond with the spheres in which Buddhas exist and the *sahasrārapadma* or *uṣṇīsa-kamala* ('1,000-petalled lotus on top of the head'). The large lotus topped with a cone above the face tower deities may then be a rendering of the ultimate state aspired to by adepts of Vajrayāna in which they merge into the supreme Buddha.

In Nepal, what Boisselier here identifies as a cone is called the *bindu* – 'the emergent essence; a drop of radiance that flows upwards from the central yogic channel at the moment of enlightenment'<sup>252</sup> – and is another architectural feature shared by the Bāyon and the Nepalese stūpas.<sup>253</sup> The geographically remote but possibly contemporary architectural parallels between the eye towers of Nepal and the face towers of Angkor, perhaps reflecting common notions brought by the Mahāntas fleeing the advance of

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<sup>250</sup> 'Our hypothesis seems strengthened by the fact that Vajrasattva manifests himself continuously on Mount Sumeru and that the Bāyon itself may be considered as the representation of the cosmic mountain. What is more, each of the towers is crowned with a lotus in bloom surmounted with a cone in which we are tempted to see the flame as symbolising the Ādi-Buddha and the whole as evoking the emblem of Vajrasattva.' Boisselier, J. (1951:330) 'Vajrapāṇi dans l'art du Bāyon' in *Proceedings of the 22nd Congress of International Orientalists Istanbul* (my translation).

<sup>251</sup> Davidson's account of this is: 'Each time, for example, a meditator is asked to visualize himself as a Buddhist divinity, the stages of generation include a movement from a seed-syllable (*bījamaṅtra*) to a divine symbol to the fully formed deity. At each moment of transformation, the idea is that this represents a fundamental transformation, so reality – even at the most exalted level – is subject to manipulation by the mind of the meditator.' Davidson 2002:164

<sup>252</sup> Huntington, John C. (2002:18) 'The Iconography of Svayambhū Mahācaitya: the main maṅḍalas' *Orientalists* vol.33:10

<sup>253</sup> Above the painted eyes of the Svayambhū Mahācaitya rises a finial of 13 parasols, representing 13 stages of attainment, topped by a *chattrā* surmounted by a moon, sun and *bindu*. Like the *uṣṇīsa-kamala* of the Bāyon, this topmost gem 'in Newar Buddhism [...] is known as the *śunyata viśuddhi uṣṇīsa cakṛa annutara samyak sambodhi bhūmi* (Stage of the Highest Attainment of Complete Enlightenment, the Crown-Cakra [i.e. the thousand-petalled lotus] of the Completely Pure Void).' Huntington (2002:18)

the Moslem army into Magadha, may be synchronic circumstantial evidence that weighs slightly on the side of seeing the Vajradhara in the Bāyon.

Fortunately the Khmer context makes a special local use of one of these deities – Vajradhara – which enables us to take a further step forward in determining the deity of the Bāyon towers.

#### 5.2.4. Vajradhara

Vajradhara, identifiable in Khmer icons by the *prajñālinganābhinaya* or prajñā-  
embrace mudrā, was assigned a special and important role in connection with Jayavarman’s network of hospitals. The Bāyon style Vajradhara usually has the vajra and ghaṅṭā not quite crossed, but held forward in front of the chest.<sup>254</sup> His eyes are lowered, whereas the eyes of Khmer bronzes of Vajrasattva’s are wide open and staring forward. The differences are well illustrated in Coedès 1923 photograph of icons from Thai collections which shows, from left to right, Vajradhara, Vajrasattva and Vajrapāṇi, all three of them crowned and regally adorned. **[Plate 106 Vajradhara, Vajrasattva, Vajrapāṇi Coedès’23]**

Vajradhara is also known in a significant series of large sandstone statues. In these images the hands are crossed at the wrists – more likely out of sculptural caution against breakage than from any iconographic imperative – with the vajra prongs of each instrument pointing forward. These deities are all seated in the half-lotus position, minimally dressed and unadorned; they have single heads with *uṣṇīṣas* covered with lotus petals and their eyes are lowered. One of only two major icons found in the ruins of Jayavarman’s Bantéay Chmār temple is one of the larger Vajradharas (80cm.) from this series, which has damaged hands and the left arm missing. Victor Goloubew saw it *in situ* in 1921 before it was removed from the remote and unprotected site to the security of the National Museum in Phnom Penh.<sup>255</sup> Although the

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<sup>254</sup> The hands of most Khmer Vajradharas are damaged or broken off, but in each instance that I have seen the instrument in the left hand appears to be a vajra-ended ghaṅṭā, not two crossed vajras as noted earlier in Nepal (footnote 101).

<sup>255</sup> Goloubew, Victor (1937:97-104) ‘Sur quelques images khmères de Vajradhara’ *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 5

hands are damaged, the remnants leave no doubt about the prajñā-embrace mudrā.

Goloubew also wrote in 1937 about a smaller headless Vajradhara which was set on the only vajra-decorated pedestal in Angkor in front of the East Chapel of the hospital complex just west of Takeo temple. **[Plate 107 East Chapel vajra pedestal]** (The image has now disappeared from the chapel and is not in the Conservation depot in Siemreap, though the pedestal remains in place). Goloubew also published an image of a very similar Vajradhara with tiara which is in the depot marked with inventory number 308, but now sadly without its head. In 1951 Boisselier said there were six other statues in the depot that were Vajradharas but mistakenly identified as Buddhas,<sup>256</sup> but I was able to find only one other in 2005. On the art market in London, dealer John Eskenazi in 1996 published a 94cm Vajradhara almost identical to the one found in Bantéay Chmàr but in far better condition and with the mudrā perfectly clear.<sup>257</sup> **[Plate 108 Vajradhara 94cm]**

This series of large Vajradharas in sandstone implies a significant cult of this deity and the discovery of one of the icons on a vajra pedestal of the East Chapel suggests a link with medicine. The link is reinforced by the discovery of three more crowned Vajradharas, in a more squat provincial style, but wearing crowns like that of number 308 in Siemreap and with bell and vajra held before the chest, in the sanctuaries of hospital complexes in Īsān.<sup>258</sup> Vajradhara's patronage of the far-flung hospital network was, for me, decisively confirmed when I recently found another, as yet unrecorded 60cm. Vajradhara, headless and with hands crossed at the diaphragm, beside Jayavarman's hospital stela in the Wàt Ho Phra Keo Museum in Vientiane (which I was not allowed to photograph).

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<sup>256</sup> Boisselier, J (1951:324-332) 'Vajrapani dans l'art du Bàyon' *Proceedings of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of International Orientalists* Istanbul

<sup>257</sup> Eskenazi, J. (1995: no.41) *Images of faith* London. Sotheby auction catalogues offered two similar Khmer Vajradharas in London on 27 April (#221 67cm) and 19 October (#196 84cm). Hiram Woodward kindly brought these to my attention.

<sup>258</sup> *Plan and report of the Survey and Excavations of Ancient Monuments inn North-Eastern Thailand* (1959 reprint 1979: fig 38; 1960-1:figs 4, 90) Fine Arts Department, Bangkok.

### 5.3 Buddha of Medicine

The Buddha of medicine is known from many icons in the Bàyon and Angkor Wàt style, usually seated on a Nāga and holding an ointment pot (traditionally in lapis lazuli from the Badakhshan deposit in Afghanistan) or a myrobalan fruit (*harītakī*) or simply raising one finger of his right hand while in dhyāna or abhaya mudrā.<sup>259</sup> The name Bhaiṣajyaguru appears no less than 10 times – more than any other, and sometimes with the name of his city of residence – in the small inscriptions identifying icons in the *vraḥ kuṭi* and small sanctuaries of the Bàyon. The familiarity of the Khmer gurus with the *bhaiṣajyaguru sūtra* is attested in an inscription in the small chapel, numbered 21 by the French, which approaches the central sanctuary of the Bàyon from the northeast and which uses the full formal name of the master of healing and the names of the sun and moon Bodhisattvas who lead the assembly in Bhaiṣajyaguru's eastern paradise.

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<sup>259</sup> Raoul Birnbaum (1980:82-3) *The Healing Buddha Rider*, London

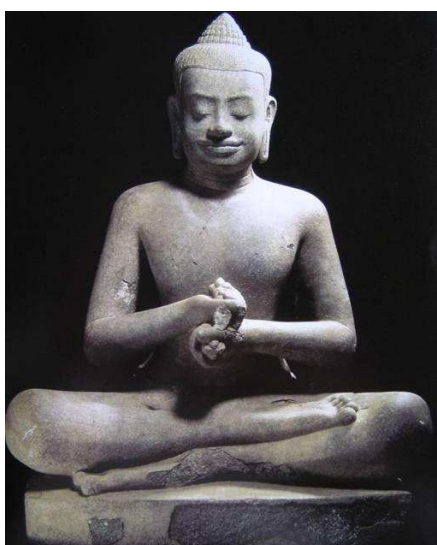




Pl. 106. Vajrdhara, Vajrasattva, Vajrapāṇi (after Coedès 1923:pl.28)



Pl. 107. Headless Vajradhara on vajra pedestal before West Chapel (after Goloubew 1937:pl.13)



Pl. 108. Vajradhara 94cm (after Eskenazi 1995:no.41)



Pl. 109. Mañjuvajra (Vajrasattva) Phimai

Their icons, or their replicas in the Bàyon, evidently anchored the royal network of hospitals, which had already grown to number 102 by the time the Tà Prohm stela was erected in 1186.

Vajradhara is called a *Bodhisattva* in the fourth century classical Mahāyāna version of the *bhaiṣajyaguru sūtra*, where he is among several Bodhisattvas enjoined by Śākyamuni to help those who are ill.<sup>260</sup> But in the later, Tantric version of the Sūtra translated by Yijing in 707<sup>261</sup>, Vajradhara is given prominence at the end of the text when, in an added section not present in Hsüan-tsang's 650 translation, he utters a special, concluding protective *dhāraṇī* – a sacred formula of sounds handed down by Buddhas from aeons past.<sup>262</sup> Although both versions of the Sūtra are included in the Esoteric section of the Tang records (Taisho XIV, 450 and 451) Birnbaum considers that the addition of Vajradhara's special *dhāraṇī* underlines the Tantric credentials of the later text. The Khmer Bhaiṣajyaguru is identified with the Yogācārin version of the three 'bodies' (*trikayā*) or modes of being of Buddhas in the cosmos, in the opening lines of the dedication stelae of the hospitals, which addresses the Buddhas in their 'selflessness' (*nirātmaka*) and 'nondual' (*advaya*) existence in a kind of compressed creed:

'Homage to the Buddha in the forms of compassionate incarnation, visionary bliss and the supreme awareness in emptiness, whose nonduality in selflessness is beyond the duality of being or not being ...'<sup>263</sup>

The *trikāya* of *dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya* and *nirmanakāya* is also evoked in the opening stanza of both the Tà Prohm and Praḥ Khan stelae. The dedication on the hospital stelae points to the Buddhists' belief that although the monks were experts in herbal cures,<sup>264</sup> many diseases had psychological

<sup>260</sup> Birnbaum (1980:38)

<sup>261</sup> Birnbaum comments: 'The highlighting of dhāraṇīs in [I-ching's] text emphasizes the esoteric or tantric nature of the scripture.' Birnbaum (1980:72)

<sup>262</sup> 'A *dhāraṇī* (lit. 'wholly grasping') is a potent phrase or set of phrases used especially for invocation of spiritual forces. It also represents the concentrated vocalization of a spiritual principle of spiritual being. Thus the bestowal of a *dhāraṇī* can indicate the transmission in esoteric form of the concentrated essence of a spiritual teaching.' Birnbaum (1980:145n12)

<sup>263</sup> *namo vuddhāya nirmānadharṃmasaṃbhogamūrttaye  
bhāvābhāvadvayātito dvayātma yo nirātmakaḥ*

<sup>264</sup> The Khmer medical tradition seems to have been strong in herbal cures from as early as the seventh century, when Indian sage Punyodaya was sent from China to gather medicinal herbs in Zhen-la. Lin Li-Kouang (1935:83-100) 'Punyodaya (N'ati), un propagateur du

or spiritual causes and were treated by guidance in meditation skills<sup>265</sup> and with powerful mantras.<sup>266</sup> The Khmer hospitals had a doctor and medical assistants but a key part of any cure was administered by monks who were adept in texts focused on healing the sick. The cult of Bodhisattva Vajradhara, the healer, should in my view be dated on stylistic grounds to the ‘Lokesçvarisation’ decade of Jayavarman’s reign (1190s),<sup>267</sup> for the images have single heads and two arms and are dressed like monks. This sober dress is in contrast with the icons of both the early and late Bayon period, where there is a tendency towards full regal attire, as in the Angkor Wàt style, with crowns, earrings, heavy necklaces, armlets, anklets and sampots bedecked with jewellery.<sup>268</sup> The Vajradharas, like the Lokeśvaras and Buddhas of the first and second Bàyon periods, also have their eyes lowered.

#### 5.4 Vajrasattva

Khmer epigraphy generally offers limited help in determining the name the Khmers used for their supreme Buddha, but a recently discovered inscribed stone from Sab Bāk near Phimai in modern Thailand is exceptionally clear.<sup>269</sup> Dated 1066 in the reign of Bāphūon builder Udayādityavarman, to whom it pays homage, the Sanskrit and Khmer language inscription marks the restoration of nine decaying Buddhist images originally erected probably early

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Tantrisme en Chine et au Cambodge à l’époque de Hsüan-Tsang’ *Journal Asiatique* Juillet-Septembre 1935. [Chapter 2.1.1]

<sup>265</sup> Dowman describes the healing process as: ‘The [patient] performs his sādhana and attains *mahāmudrā-siddhi* and in the process the original disease is cured.’ Keith Dowman (1985:13) *Masters of Mahāmudrā* SUNY, New York

<sup>266</sup> Gellner records how modern Tantric healers in Nepal rely primarily on mantras: ‘The source of Tantric healers’ power is the possession of powerful, and *ipso facto* dangerous, mantras. As indicated above, the practitioners often see themselves as providing a selfless service to others. They have no fixed fees. As with a priest’s *dakṣiṇā*, they take whatever is offered (though they can specify prices if they prescribe a medicine).’ Gellner (1992:329)

<sup>267</sup> Woodward, noting a ‘horizontal emphasis to the facial features’, assigns them to 1186 in the first phase, the date the first 102 hospitals are announced in the Tà Prohm stela. Woodward (2003:208) However, the hospital building programme presumably continued throughout the reign, so more would have been built in the 1190s.

<sup>268</sup> The heavier jewellery and heavier human body are visible in the late bronze Hevajras (for example the image within the maṇḍala frame, the gilt icon found at the Angkor Thom palace, and the bronzes in the Berlin and Guimet museums). The heavier jewellery is found in the stone reliefs of Bantéay Chmār – the Hevajra lintel and the Lokeśvaras of the western gallery – as well as in the Leper King Terrace, which I attribute to the following decades under Indravarman II. It is also in contrast with the unadorned portraits of the king and his wife and the Lokesvaras of the 1190s (the *Jayabuddhamahānātha* images are uniquely bedecked in tiny Buddha images, sometimes taking the form of jewellery).

<sup>269</sup> Chirapat Prapandvidya (1990:11) ‘The Sab Bāk inscription: evidence of an early Vajrayāna Buddhist presence in Thailand’ *Journal of the Siam Society*, Bangkok

in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, like similar ones attributed to a common patron in inscription K.111 of Wàt Sithor. The Sab Bāk inscription calls the supreme Buddha ‘Vajrasattva’, the sixth Buddha and lord of the five Buddhas (*‘śrīpañcasugata’*) of the Vajradhātu Pentad.<sup>270</sup> Woodward has recently made the interesting suggestion that the principal deity in the pentad of Buddhas in the northern lintel at Phimai appears akin to the form of Vajrasattva called Mañjuvajra in the first maṇḍala defined in the 11<sup>th</sup> century *Niṣpannayogāvalī* compendium.<sup>271</sup> The image has Mañjuvajra’s three faces and six arms, the principal ones in dhyāna mudrā and one of the left holding a combined bell with vajra. [ **Plate 109 Mañjuvajra Phimai** ]

Chirapat Prapandvidya, the translator, renders the word *‘sugatādikādika’* in the Sab Bāk text as ‘Ādi-Buddha’ but the Sanskrit construction is unusual, suggesting a more likely translation as ‘images of the first Buddha and the others.’<sup>272</sup> This stone, found in the heartland of the Jayavarman VII’s Mahīdhara dynasty, offers unchallengeable evidence that the Khmer Buddhists were naming their supreme Buddha ‘Vajrasattva’ just a century before Jayavarman ascended the throne in Angkor.

The Khmer Vajrasattva tradition may also be traceable to the late 12th century Bantéay Chmàr temple. On the southern wall of the cruciform axial cella, marked ‘C’ by Lunet de Lajonquière and presumably not far from where Goloubew saw the Vajradhara stone image (he did not specify its exact placement), I came across the frieze of a Tantric trinity of deities carved in low relief which I later found had just been partially published, though not identified, by Christophe Pottier.<sup>273</sup> The trinity is composed of two multi-armed, polycephalous deities dancing in Hevajra’s *ardhaparyanka* (‘half crossed-

<sup>270</sup> śrīpañcasugatāyādau śrīghanānām vibhāvīkāḥ |  
śrīghanāś ca sudevānām śrīpradātrṇ namāmi tān ||  
vajrasattvas tu sastha sa- dbodhisattvaprabhur varaḥ |  
ādhāraḥ sarvabuddhānām tan namāmi vimuktaye ||

Chirapat (1990:12)

<sup>271</sup> Woodward (2004:350)

<sup>272</sup> Woodward differs from Chirapat in the translation of *sugatādika*:

‘I take *sugatādikādika* on line 25 to mean “*sugata* after *sugata*” to refer to the nine images mentioned in the Khmer text rather than to “the Dhyāni Buddhas and Ādibuddha.” Woodward (2003:146n112).

<sup>273</sup> Pottier, C. (2004:140) ‘À propos du temple de Bantéay Chmàr’ *Aséanie* 13, juin 2004

legged') posture<sup>274</sup> on each side of a seated, multi-headed, six-armed deity whose principal arms are in *dharmacakra mudrā*. **[Plate 110 Two dancing, one seated, deities Bantéay Chmàr]** Four more arms rise in an arc behind the central figure, which has three or four faces with open eyes that in some respects resemble those of an unpublished Hevajra in a large doorway lintel still standing in the large neighbouring Hall of Yoginīs to the east. If we think of the Vajradhara statue and the central seated deity in relief in close proximity in Bantéay Chmàr, their differences are emphasised in a way helpful to our search. The single-headed, two-armed stone Vajradharas with lowered eyes are monk-like in their lack of jewellery or regal dress, which diminishes the probability that they are the adorned deity in the four-faced Bāyon and Bantéay Chmàr face towers. But the six-armed, smiling polycephalous deity on the Bantéay Chmàr central sanctuary wall has the earrings, diadem and open eyes of the deity in the towers.<sup>275</sup> The seated deity's central position between two dancing Herukas, in a triptych similar to that in a votive casting in Bangkok Museum, suggests the representation of an overarching, central force of the Buddhist cosmos. The regal deity staring into the Bantéay Chmàr cella is quite different from the nearby monk-like statue of Vajradhara in *prajñā-embrace mudrā*: I propose that here we have icons of the Khmer Vajrasattva and Vajradhara in close proximity, which clearly separate the two in the Khmer Buddhist world and eliminate Vajradhara as the name of the face tower deity.

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<sup>274</sup> It is possible they are related to the two golden lords of the dance (*nātyeśvara*) mentioned in stanza 30 of the Praḥ Khan stela where Bhattacharya and Filliozat hesitate between identifications of Hevajra and Śiva. (Bhattacharya, K. (1961:86) *Les religions brahmaniques dans l'ancien Cambodge d'après l'épigraphie et l'iconographie* PEFEO, Paris ; Filliozat, J. (1981:71) 'Sur le çivaïsme et le bouddhisme du Cambodge, à propos de deux livres récents' *BEFEO* 70).

<sup>275</sup> Maxwell emphasises the regalia of Vajradhara and Vajrasattva as Ādi-Buddha: 'He was depicted as an aristocratic personage, dressed in resplendent regalia – including multiple crowns – similar to those of the Bodhisattvas and, like relief sculptures of the archaic Omniscient-Grandfather god of Hinduism, Brahmā, his icon was endowed with three heads.' Maxwell (1997:164).





Pl. 110. Seated supreme deity with two Herukas Bantéay Chmàr



Pl. 111. Hevajra display NY Metropolitan Museum

The most complete record yet found of Jayavarman's late pantheon is contained in the small casting from a votive tablet mould published by Woodward in 1981. The casting presents a three- or four-faced supreme Buddha with six arms at the centre of a maṇḍala that includes Hevajra, Saṃvara (a Heruka variant with Vedic antecedents<sup>276</sup> who appears prominently in the central sanctuary at Phimai and who was venerated at a temple dedicated to him at Nālandā<sup>277</sup>), Vajrapāṇi, Lokeśvara, another Bodhisattva and the Nāga Buddha. Woodward's analysis, as noted earlier, sees Vajrasattva at the centre of the tablet in the earlier form he takes in the *STTS*, *MVS* and the Shingon pantheon<sup>278</sup> -- one of the 16 Vajra Beings and head of the Tathāgata lineage. This is the Bodhisattva Vajrasattva, before he was elevated to the status of supreme Buddha in later Tantric texts that Boisselier first saw in the Bāyon faces.<sup>279</sup> This identification would also bring the tablet close to the Čam version of Tantric Buddhism found in the 902 inscription from An Thai, Quảng Nam, where Vairocana presides over an assembly of the Buddhas Śākyamuni and Amitābha, who emit the Bodhisattvas Vajrasattva, Vajrapāṇi, and Lokeśvara in a cult, which appears based on the Yoga Tantras of the early Vajrayāna. Woodward also associates the Vajrasattva at the centre of the tablet, which is seen as emanated by the image of the Nāga Buddha of the central sanctuary, with the lingering martial or *krodha* aspect of the Bodhisattva Vajrasattva described in the *niṣpannayogāvalī* (*NSP*), such as that shown in an account of him enforcing Śiva's attendance at the ceremony for the Buddha's entry into *nirvāṇa*. His drawing our attention to the Vajrasattva of the 16 Vajra Beings also appeared to be supported by Parmentier's conclusion that the original plan of the Bāyon

<sup>276</sup> Jean Przyluski traces Saṃvara or Śaṃbara to a venerated Vedic stag which became a demon in early writings, later identified with Śiva in Hinduism and with Akṣobhya in late Tantrism. Jean Przyluski (1937:45) 'Heruka- Śaṃbara' *The Polish Bulletin of Oriental Studies* I, Warsaw

<sup>277</sup> Davidson 2002:154

<sup>278</sup> The Shingon Kongōkai-mandara (Vajradhātu) with 37 deities has Vajradhara as leading the 16 Vajra-Bodhisattvas. W.E.Clark (1937:xvi) *Two Lamaistic pantheons* I Harvard; Tajima, Ryūjun (1959:168) *Les deux grands maṇḍalas et la doctrine de l'esoterisme Shingon* Bulletin de la Maison Franco-Japonaise VI Tokyo/Paris

<sup>279</sup> 'If Vajrapāṇi ... seems insufficient for this eminent role in the Bāyon face towers, we can rather think of his transcendent aspects, Vajradhara or Vajrasattva... Vajradhara, like Brahmā, is perhaps too distant but Vajrasattva [citing Foucher 1900:122] 'a supreme divinity, superior to the Dhyāni-Buddha and a part of the Ādi-Buddha, incarnation of the supreme intelligence that directs the universe' we would gladly consider.' Boisselier (1951:330)

contained 16 sanctuary towers<sup>280</sup>, but this detail is in conflict with Cunin's review of the chronology of the Bāyon architecture in this volume, in which he concludes that 24 face towers were begun simultaneously in the first phase of construction and not 16. This is a diagrammatic presentation of Woodward's reading of casting from the Poipet mould:

	Y3. Nāga-protected Buddha	
A. Hevajra [7 visible faces, 16 arms]	Y2. Vajrasattva [3 faces, 6 arms]	B. Saṃvara [3 visible faces, 12 arms]
X. Lokēśvara [4 arms]	Y1. Bodhisattva? [6-8 arms]	Z. Vajrapāṇi [pratyāliḍha, feet on corpse]

The identification of the Khmer Vajrasattva with the 16 Vajra Beings also runs into an iconographical problem. All the Khmer bronze Buddhas in the mudrā of Vajrasattva sit in the lotus position of a Buddha and never in the 'attitude noble' (royal ease) with the right leg extended forwards. Mallmann identifies these two leg positions as the consistent distinguishing mark between the Buddha Vajrasattva and the Bodhisattva Vajrasattva, one of the 16 Vajra Beings as they are represented in the major maṇḍala collections, the *NSP* and *sādhnamālā (SM)*:

The 16 Vajra [Beings] are depicted as humans, with peaceful expressions, and seated in the royal ease posture...[T]he white Vajrasattva Buddha can only be differentiated from the Vajrasattva of the 16 Vajra [Beings] by his seating position: the first is seated in the vajra position, the second in the royal ease position.<sup>281</sup>

Khmer bronzes of Vajrasattva of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries all represent the seated Buddha Vajrasattva rather than the Bodhisattva, as we would indeed

<sup>280</sup> Woodward (1981:61-2)

<sup>281</sup> Mallmann, M.-T. de (1986:396, 420) Introduction à l'iconographie du tântrisme bouddique Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, Paris



anticipate from the contemporary 1066 Sab Bāk inscription, which calls the supreme Buddha 'Vajrasattva', the sixth Buddha and lord of the five Buddhas ('*śrīpañcasugata*') of the Vajradhātu Pentad and so hierarchically above Vairocana.

The casting can be read in various ways; its importance is in the supreme pantheon it contains. My inclination is to read it as a maṇḍala with the major deity in the centre -- and between Hevajra and Saṃvara the crowned, seated polycephalous deity could only be the supreme Buddha Vajrasattva that we find in the *hevajra-tantra* and the *saṃvarodaya-tantra*, rather than his earlier manifestation as one of the 16 Vajra Beings in the *STTS* and the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, the Yoga Tantras that remain core texts for the Shingon.

The casting may give other indications of a deliberate correlation of the temples of the empire, where the major icons of Jayavarman VII resided. The three lotus stalks snaking upwards may be seen as delineating the principal deities of the three great Buddhist foundations that straddled the Dangrek Mountains and formed the spiritual backbone of Jayavarman's empire: the Bāyon in Angkor, Bantéay Chmàr and Phimai. Phimai was dedicated in the early 1100s but was later extended by Jayavarman, who built a chapel with his own portrait image kneeling and facing the central sanctuary -- which assures us that it was still a thriving foundation in 1200. The Bāyon and Bantéay Chmàr, halfway along the imperial road between Angkor and Phimai, were being completed simultaneously at the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This vertical reading therefore takes account of the prominence of both Saṃvara and Vajrapāṇi in Phimai, and Hevajra and Lokeśvara in Bantéay Chmàr.

Bantéay Chmàr	Bàyon	Phimai
	4. Nāga Buddha of the Bàyon	
2. Hevajra of Bantéay Chmàr (8 faces, 16 arms, dancing on one corpse)	1. Vajrasattva (3/4 faces, 6 arms dharmacakra mudra) Bàyon faces	3. Saṃvara of Phimai (elephant hide, 4 faces, 12 arms, prajñā-embrace, 2 corpses)
5. Mahākaruṇika-Lokeśvaras of Bantéay Chmàr West wall	6. Male Bodhisattva (2-6 arms?)	7. Vajrapāṇi of Phimai (dancing wildly on corpse)

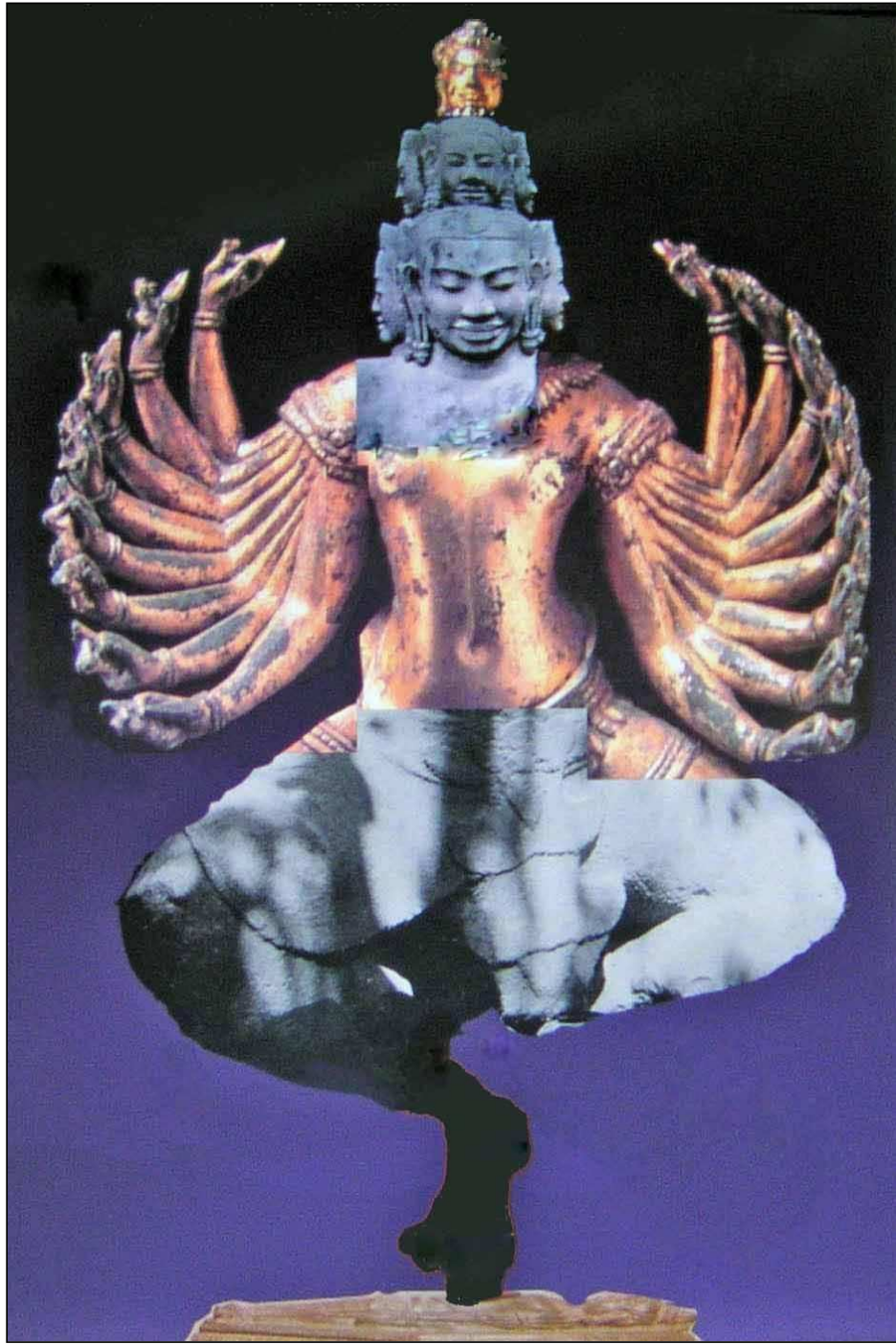
A further possible interpretation is to read the whole casting as a representation of the Bàyon alone. Such a reading would bring the casting closer to the triptych on the wall of the Bantéay Chmàr cella. But this scheme can only survive if a major assumption is granted, namely that the Bàyon cella below the faces of the central sanctuary contained large icons of Hevajra and Saṃvara, the wrathful emanations of Vajrasattva. We have a candidate for such a role in a giant stone Hevajra [**Plate 111 Hevajra display NY Metropolitan Museum**] found dumped outside the Angkor Thom walls. But no similar icon of Saṃvara has been uncovered in Angkor. Certainly the size and quality of carving of the heads and torso of the Hevajra icon, now in New York's Metropolitan Museum, suggest a major royal purpose. From the photographs taken of the exhumation of Hevajra's torso and legs in March 1925 in the EFEO archive, we can establish that the icon was nearly three metres high and was erected on a one metre pedestal. I have attempted a 'virtual' reconstruction of this imposing sculpture from the photograph and the remnant pieces in the Siemreap depot (the legs have now disappeared).

**[Plate 112 Hevajra reconstruction]** We cannot know where this large stone Hevajra was originally erected before it was dumped in a mound of earth outside the east gate of the city walls. Its broken state may suggest it was either one of the thousands of icons smashed when the Buddhists were driven out of Jayavarman's temples, or possibly later by Theravādin Buddhists. Chinese envoy Zhou daguan, who arrived at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, makes no reference to whether Buddhist ceremonies were still being performed in Jayavarman VII's large stone temples. He describes only a widespread village network of modest, single room Buddhist temples with a tiled roof and a single icon made of painted clay.<sup>282</sup> None of the surviving small Bāyon inscriptions refers to a Hevajra or Saṃvara, but if this icon had been erected in one of the Bāyon tower sanctuaries beside the central Nāga Buddha an inscription would perhaps not have been required.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Pelliot, Paul (1951:14) *Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge de Tcheou Ta-Kouan: version nouvelle* Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, Paris

<sup>283</sup> Two small shrines beside the corridor leading into the large cavernous Bāyon cella are inscribed to Pārvatī and the earth goddess Dharanī suggesting they were attendant on a Hindu icon of Harihara within (for Pārvatī supports Śiva and Dharanī Viṣṇu) or as Coedès proposes an icon representing Khmer royalty like a Rājadeva or Kambujeśvara. (Coedès 1928:97). This tends to argue against Hevajra and Saṃvara appearing in the cella, unless the inscription was made later during the refashioning of the Bāyon as a Hindu shrine – a possibility not comforted by Coedès' next remark that the Bāyon inscriptions are 'certainly all from the same period – one could almost say from the same hand.' (ibid)



Pl. 112. Hevajra reconstruction

Sanctuary BY.2 beside the cella could have easily accommodated it. Cunin says this sanctuary ‘...constitutes one of the largest spaces under a corbelled roof in all Khmer art.’<sup>284</sup>

Careful analysis of the facial features and regal dress of this Hevajra show them to be close in style to those of the four metre high Bāyon-style Viṣṇu in the Angkor Wāt temple, which was presumably erected by Jayavarman VII, possibly during his *indrābhiṣeka* celebrations. As Jayavarman VII was honouring Viṣṇu and Śiva with images and ritual space in his new, predominantly Buddhist, temples it would be logical to assume that Angkor Wāt, the Vaiṣṇava shrine of his kinsman Sūryavarman II, continued as an active foundation throughout Jayavarman’s reign. And if the *indrābhiṣeka* also marked the restoration of Khmer power in Čampā, the Khmers had a Viṣṇu called Cāmeśvara (Lord of Čampā), who from pre-Angkorian times had been erected in thanks for victories against the Cams. Rājendravarman in Pre Rup inscription of 961 thanked Cāmeśvara for his victories over the Cams. Japanese archaeologists recently uncovered a very similar, but smaller Viṣṇu to the Angkor Wāt image (their arms broke off at exactly the same points) in the pond behind one of the Prasat Suor Prat towers, which I suggested (footnote 165) may also have played a role in the *indrābhiṣeka* celebrations.

The Angkor Wāt Viṣṇu, also known as Ta Reach, whose broken arms have recently been replaced and whose original head has been returned from the Phnom Penh Museum, of course survived the Śaiva reaction. The striking similarities in the carving of the faces of this Viṣṇu and the Hevajra now in New York (which I have noted in [Chapter 3.8](#), p. 103) suggest that these two exceptional, large statues were among the last great icons commissioned by Jayavarman VII at the time the Bāyon faces were being carved.

Whatever reading is preferred for the tiny Bangkok Museum casting, it seems to hold the key to the enigma of the Bāyon faces. And, whichever way it is construed, the casting, whose mould I have now located in the Phnom Penh

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<sup>284</sup> Cunin 2004:128 vol. 2

Museum [Plate 113 Poipet mould], establishes Vajrasattva at the centre of the Khmer state maṇḍala, as he is the lord of the *guru maṇḍala* of the Newar Vajrācāryas. For only the Vajrasattva of the Mahīdhara Khmers, could take a central position in a cosmic diagram bearing images of his own fierce emanations Hevajra and Saṃvara. When we apply this hierarchy to the Bāyon and see the Nāga Buddha presiding in the cella but Vajrasattva as 'filling space in a regularized order in every direction' above him the face towers, no other identification of the deity in the towers – Brahma, Śiva, Lokeśvara, Siva-Lokeśvara, *neak ta*, Hevajra, Vajradhara – comes closer to fitting the facts of the material record, as well as the context of Khmer Buddhism responding to the dramatic crisis of international Buddhism.

The Bāyon's towering circular sanctuary, enclosed within two square gallery walls, has the form of a maṇḍala in its ground plan and also in its projection upwards as Mount Meru. Seeing Vajrasattva as everywhere visible in the monumental architecture resolves a key part of the Bāyon enigma. We have turned full circle to seeing, with Zhou daguan, the giant deity as a multi-headed Buddha; and we can now confidently add (what a 13<sup>th</sup> century Chinese ambassador probably *assumed*), that the Buddha was *Tantric*. Jayavarman's deliberately slow unveiling of his Tantrism climaxed in the final years of his reign with his inscribing the cosmogony of Vajrayāna into the skyline of Angkor. The sheer number, as well as the uniformity, of the 200 giant faces convey a synthesis of the Bāyon's broad pantheon of Buddhist and Hindu deities in an over-arching conception – captured in Boisselier's earlier vision of the Bāyon as the magical Mount Sumeru on which Vajrasattva is visible at all times. The uniformity of the faces and their lack of individual detail can be seen as a deliberate attempt to render the qualities of the ultimate 'fourth state' (*caturtha tur[i]jya*), defined in the Śaiva Tantras and adopted by the late Tantric Buddhists,<sup>285</sup> that Bhattacharya lists as: invisible (*adr̥ṣṭa*), impalpable (*avyavahārya*), ungraspable (*agrāhya*), indefinable (*avyapadeśya*), unthinkable (*acintya*), without any distinctive marks

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<sup>285</sup> Louis de La Vallée Poussin (1929:803) *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi: la siddhi de Hiuan-tsang* Geuthner, Paris

(*alakṣana*).<sup>286</sup> For Jayavarman VII, this was the ultimate projection of the ethereal, formless Vajrasattva, beyond time and space yet omnipresent and omniscient. Tantric Buddhism approached such large, cosmic, syntheses through constructing complex maṇḍalas and the Bāyon is the maṇḍala of Jayavarman VII. In the *hevajra-tantra* we are told the maṇḍala appears of itself 'as the full and efficacious expression' of 'concentrated meditation' (*samāhitayoga*) on Hevajra, until the king's realisation of emptiness generates the icon of the city and the state, envisaged in countless forms of the deity filling space:

This bliss is Wisdom, this bliss is Means, and likewise it is their union. It is existence, it is non-existence, and it is Vajrasattva.<sup>287</sup>

It is a major new statement addressed to the Śaiva Khmer empire as well as the setting for the consecration of Cambodia's first Buddhist king as cakravartin. At some moment late in the reign, we can assume that a major ceremony was held, beneath the entranced smile of Vajrasattva<sup>288</sup> in the face towers, that was at once the dedication of Jayavarman's regnal temple, the celebration of his *indrābhiṣeka* and an assertion of the future of Vajrayāna Buddhism in a hostile world.

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<sup>286</sup> Bhattacharya, K. (1966:10) 'Linga-kośa' Essays offered to G.H. Luce by his colleagues and friends in honour of his seventy-fifth birthday *Artibus Asiae*, Ascona

<sup>287</sup> *Hevajra-tantra* II.ii.33

<sup>288</sup> Snellgrove cites the *Union of the Precious Ones*, fol. 3a: 'Upon my lowly head rests the Body of Light of Vajrasattva, who comprehends all families. He is shining white, holds vajra and bell and is adorned with gems. He is seated cross-legged. He smiles.' (Snellgrove 1957:244)





Pl. 113. Poipet bronze mould (courtesy Phnom Penh Museum)



## Chapter 7

### Recapitulation: direct and circumstantial evidence for Khmer Tantric Buddhism in 7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries

This chapter lists in chronological order, the evidence adduced for establishing Khmer Buddhism and the cult of the Bâyon as Tantric. The aim is to show the volume of evidence supporting the claim, which has been either overlooked or marginalized. Tantrism is a password, not a shibboleth, for entry into the culture of the Bâyon.

#### 7<sup>th</sup> century

1. A fifth century head of a Buddha found in Oc Eo port and sculpted in the Gupta conventions of India, but with distinctly Khmer characteristics, is the first evidence of the local version of the Indic faith. By the end of the sixth century, emissaries from China's Sui dynasty (589-618) noted Buddhism was practised alongside a local religion in the state they identified as Zhen-la.<sup>289</sup> In the seventh century Buddhism effloresces, leaving a series of large standing Buddhas in stone and wood, some in double vitarka mudrâ, which Nancy Dowling dates to 610-65.<sup>290</sup> These icons share many stylistic affinities with the Theravâdin Buddhas of neighbouring Dvâravatî.

1.1 Mahâyâna Buddhism is also attested in a large image of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara from Rach Gia, on the coast below Oc Eo, and now in the Musée Guimet; Mirielle Bénisti dates it to 650-720 from the motif of a band of alternating round and rectangular jewel settings at the base of the crown, which appears on temple colonettes in these years.<sup>291</sup> Another, smaller, Avalokiteśvara found in the Delta and is now in the Saigon History Museum.

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<sup>289</sup> Tatsuo Hoshino (1986:23) *Pour une histoire médiévale du moyen Mékong* Editions Duang Kamol, Bangkok

<sup>290</sup> Nancy Dowling (2000:122-55) 'New light on early Cambodian Buddhism' in *The Journal of the Siam Society* vol.88.

<sup>291</sup> Mirielle Bénisti (1969:109) 'Recherches sur le premier art khmer: «la bande a chatons», critère chronologique?' *Arts asiatiques* XX. Boisselier reached a similar chronology by analysing the centre-folded dhoti. Boisselier, J. (1957:272) 'A propos d'un bronze cham inédit d'Avalokiteçvara' *Arts asiatiques* IV

**1.2** Seventh century Zhen-La was also exposed to the early stirrings of the third great Buddhist vehicle, Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhism. The evidence for this is found in the official Tang dynasty biography of Punyodaya, one of the first Indian Tantric masters recorded as travelling abroad, who was sent to Zhen-La in the mid-seventh century by the Chinese emperor. The biography says he was well received by local rulers and stayed for four years, greatly strengthening Buddhism in Zhen-la. After returning to China, a Zhen-la delegation arrived in the Tang capital in 663 to plead for his return, which the emperor permitted and the Tantric master spent the rest of his days in Zhen-la.<sup>292</sup> Zhen-la was thus in touch with the first wave of Vajrayāna that in the late seventh century was established in Bengal and Sri Lanka and arriving in Sumatra and China.

In the religious art record, the influence of Punyodaya may be attested in a small (12cm) hitherto unpublished bronze of the supreme Buddha Vajrasattva in the Phnom Penh National Museum. This icon from Barong Lovea Em in modern Kandal province is seated in the unmistakable mudrā of Vajrasattva with a vajra poised against the chest on the middle finger of his right hand and a large ghaṅṭā resting on his left thigh. India's Sarnath Museum has a seventh century Vajrasattva in high relief with the god in identical mudrā. Both icons share the innovation of showing the Vajradhātu Pentad of Buddhas in the *jatā* or around a high crown. The Phnom Penh Museum attributes the bronze to the 'Funan period, 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century' but the facial features are markedly close to Khmer Buddha heads dated to about 650.

### **Eighth and ninth centuries**

**2.** Yijing passed through Zhen-la just before the turn of the century and reported that Buddhism had flourished but had been suppressed by 'a wicked king'. The Buddhists presumably survived, but not with the wealth or status to erect durable monuments. A single inscription dated 791 at Siemreap records the erection of a Bodhisattva image. While Buddhism was at low ebb,

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<sup>292</sup> Lin Li-Kouang (1935:89) 'Punyodaya (N'ati), un propagateur du Tantrisme en Chine et au Cambodge à l'époque de Hsüan-Tsang' *Journal asiatique* Juillet-Septembre 1935.

Jayavarman II founded a strong Cambodian state with a Tantric Śaiva 'devarāja' cult in 802. For the next 150 years the remnant Khmer Buddhist community left few signs of its existence.

**2.1** The eighth century saw Vajrayāna mushroom out across East and Southeast Asia. In China Śubhakarasiṃha (637-735), Vajrabodhi (671-741) and Amoghavajra (705-774) translated the *Yoga Tantras* and lifted Esoteric Buddhism to a status where it replaced Taoism as the court religion. Several Tantric Buddhist communities later suffered setbacks: the Śailendras suddenly disappeared from Java; 4,000 monasteries were shut down in ninth century China; the Mahāyāna was purged from Sri Lanka and Buddhism was crushed in Tibet, before returning in a second, successful wave a century later.

**2.2** A hoard of 300 eighth century bronze Bodhisattvas found at Prakhon Chai, Isān attests to a regal cult of Bodhisattvayāna, perhaps in the shadowy state of Śrī Canāśā that is mentioned in inscriptions.

**2.3** In the ninth century, the Buddhists of Isān and the pre-Thai peninsula cast several series of bronze Tantric deities seated on large lotus thrones with round moon-disk backs. Similar icons were produced in Pāla Bengal and Java at this time and Woodward calls them the 'Bengali-influenced bronzes'. One is a heavily adorned 4-faced, 6-armed Vajradhara in *prajñālinganābhinaya* or *prajñā-embrace mudrā*; another probably represents Vairocana in *dharmacakra mudrā* and the peninsula icon is of a 6-armed Cundā, the consort of the Vajrasattva. All have Javanese-style garlanded umbrellas over a circular, moon-disk throne-back. These bronzes appear to be of local manufacture but strongly linked in style with the contemporary Tantric Buddhist icons of Bengal and Java.

### **10th century**

**3.** A late 10<sup>th</sup> century inscription proves that the revival of Khmer Buddhism in the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century followed the *Yoga Tantras*. Inscription K.111 from the reign of Jayavarman V (968-1001) at Wāt Sithor in Srei Santhor

district, Kandal defines the major texts of the Khmer Buddhist revival as the *STTS* Tantra and Śākyamitra's renowned *ṭikā* or commentary.

**3.1** A series of stone Buddhist caityas, one dated 989, includes one from Phnom Srok which shows the Vajradhātu Pentad set above the crowns of Vajrapāṇi's three visible heads. This seems to illustrate the famous *STTS* narrative where Vajrapāṇi brings Śiva by force into the Buddhist maṇḍala.

**3.3** The Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, who rises to pre-eminence as the master of ceremonies in the *STTS*, is also carved in the largest statues in the 'Khleang' style of the late 10<sup>th</sup> century now in the Musée Guimet. Their quality indicates they are products of the royal workshop and probably commissioned by king Jayavarman V, whose posthumous title Paramavīraloka points to his personal faith being Buddhist.

**3.4** The Phnom Srok caityas also launch the exceptional, yet still mysterious, career of Prajñāpāramitā in Khmer Buddhism, showing her in images with 10 arms and five heads. This Tantric form, which later develops into images with 22 arms and 11 heads, is little understood and is unique to Cambodia.

**3.5** The first Khmer Buddha seated on the coils of a huge serpent appears on one of the caityas. The Nāga Buddha icon can be traced back to Tantric Buddhist communities in the south. The Khmer Nāga Buddha is close in design to stone and bronze images found in Isān, which have long necks, marked with horizontal striations, and crested heads that rise high above the Buddha's head. Isān is at the top of the Khmer external trade route. Śrīvijaya, which probably controlled the southern peninsula, was practising Tantric Buddhism from the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards and had close links with the Tantric communities in Pāla Bengal and Sri Lanka's unorthodox Abhayagiri monastery.

**3.6** Tiles forming a *yantra*, a Tantric ritual diagram of the Sanskrit alphabet on lotus petals, and used in yoga, were excavated from the Buddhist temple of Bāt Čum, built in 953 in Angkor after 150 years of only Śaiva foundations.

One tile bears the incised image of a vajra. The small brick temple with three sanctuary towers and surrounding lake is close to the large Śaiva temples of king Rājendravarman, who came to the throne in 944 and rebuilt the capital in Angkor, after it had been abandoned for 16 years by his predecessor. The king's Buddhist Minister, general and architect Kavīndrārimathana was allowed to erect the monument to house images of the Buddha, Vajrapāṇi and Prajñāpāramitā. The *yantra* and temple inscriptions suggest Minister Kavīndrārimathana practised *kundalinī* yoga in its Tantric Buddhist form.

**3.7** The provincial spread of Tantric Buddhism is indicated in minor sanctuaries with short inscriptions which local landowners with Tantric Buddhist names (including the word '-vajra') erected in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century. They dedicate maintenance resources to small shrines to the Buddha, Prajñāpāramitā, Vajrapāṇi and Lokeśvara. The inscriptions were found at Thma Pūok, Prasat Ben Vien, Wāt Kdei Car, Prasat Kok, Prasat Ta An and Phnom Bantéay Nan.

### **11<sup>th</sup> century**

**4.** An inscription dated 1066 (discovered in 1990) on a stone at the village of Sab Bāk, south of Pràsàt Phimai, provides the first written evidence of Tantric Buddhism being institutionalised in Īśān. The inscription calls the supreme Buddha Vajrasattva, the sixth Buddha of Tantrism and lord of the five Jinas (*śrīpañcasugat*) of the Vajradhātu Pentad.<sup>293</sup> Chirapat translates the word '*sugatādika*' in the text as 'Ādi-Buddha' but the Sanskrit construction is unusual, suggesting a more likely translation as 'images of the first Buddha and the others.'<sup>294</sup>

**4.1** The Khmer Tantric Buddhist pantheon expands at Pràsàt Phimai, the huge new Buddhist complex commenced in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, to include the Heruka Saṃvara, a new standing crowned Buddha and a larger version of

<sup>293</sup> Chirapat, Prapandvidya (1990:12) 'The Sab Bak inscription: evidence of an early Vajrayāna Buddhist presence in Thailand' in *Journal of the Siam Society*

<sup>294</sup> Woodward differs from Chirapat in the translation of *sugatādika*:

'I take *sugatādikādika* on line 25 to mean "sugata after sugata" to refer to the nine images mentioned in the Khmer text rather than to "the Dhyāni Buddhas and Ādibuddha."' Woodward (2003:146n112).

the Tathāgata Pentad of Vairocana's Vajradhatu maṇḍala. Vajrapāṇi is also ubiquitous on lintels and doorframes. An inscription at Phimai honours Trailokyavijaya -- either the Vajrapāṇi of the *STTS* duel with Śiva, or possibly the Saṃvara of the sanctum lintel, whose hand gesture is halfway between the true *prajñālinganābhinaya* of Saṃvara and the vajrahumkara of Trailokyavijaya, the 10<sup>th</sup> century successor to Vajrapāṇi and precursor of the Herukas of mature Vajrayāna.

**4.2** The temple complex at Phimai put Tantric Buddhism on a par with Śaivism in temple construction in the Khmer world. It was a major advance over the modest brick Bāt Čum of a century earlier. Phimai's vast walled complex around large stone sanctuaries established the Buddhists at the heart of the political class. The absence of royal-scale building in Angkor between the Bāphûon (1060) and Angkor Wāt (c.1120) suggests Phimai was the operative state temple of Jayavarman VI, who usurped power in 1080 and installed the northern Mahīdhara dynasty. Dedicated in 1108, Phimai produced multiple innovations in sacred architecture, among them its sanctuary towers, in pineapple-form with sloping antefixes, which became the prototype for the famous quincunx towers of Angkor Wāt.

**4.3** Bronze icons of major international Tantric deities like Hevajra and Vajrasattva were first sculpted in the 'Bāphûon style', a designation which applies to the sacred art of Phimai and Angkor in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century. Analysis of the copper alloys of the Hevajras and Vajrasattvas indicates the icons were made in both Phimai and Angkor (Phimai had far more lead<sup>295</sup>). The temple art of Phimai leaves no doubt that the *hevajra-tantra* and the *śrīcakrasaṃvara-tantra* were primary texts of the Buddhist regime. In these Tantras Vajrasattva presides, with fleeting intrusions from Vajradhara/Vajrapāṇi, over a stage with a Heruka at the centre.

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<sup>295</sup> Woodward, H. (1997A:90) *The sacred sculpture of Thailand* Thames & Hudson, London

## 12<sup>th</sup> century

5. Over 100 Khmer bronze icons of Hevajra (according to international art market estimates in London) exist in public and private collections. In style the bronzes range from the 'Bàphûon' to 'late Bàyon'. Only the royal workshops in Angkor and Phimai were capable of work of such high technical quality. The large Hevajra bronzes make them candidates for being principal sacred icons used in maṇḍalas for Tantric consecrations in the temples. Hevajra may indeed have been Jayavarman VII's elected personal deity or *iṣṭadevatā* for in 1952 Groslier excavated a late Bàyon style gilt bronze Hevajra in the ruins of the royal palace inside Angkor Thom.<sup>296</sup> Proof of the Khmer use of the *hevajra-tantra* maṇḍala is found in the three dimensional bronze maṇḍalas of Hevajra, surrounded by eight Vajrayoginīs and bearing the attributes specified in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century *Niṣpannayogāvalī*.

5.1 A *śastradhara* ('weapons-bearing') Hevajra, identified for the first time in this study, is carved as the lintel of an inner sanctuary door still standing in the ruins of the huge Bantéay Chmàr temple, which was constructed late in Jayavarman's reign. The lintel, published here, provides the first direct link between the Hevajra bronzes and the king's temples. It is the first *in situ* evidence of a late state Hevajra cult. Bantéay Chmàr is a huge complex whose main sanctuary and enclosure walls are decorated in a style which is close to that of the Bàyon. The walls bear long reliefs of the king's military campaigns and a unique series of Tantric 'thousand-armed' Lokeśvaras, which show him carrying the vajra, among many other attributes, in up to 32 hands. Giant face towers surround the central sanctuary. Hevajra dances with eight heads and 20 arms in the centre of a large, late hall to the east of the cella, which is surrounded by a one-metre frieze of Yoginīs.

5.1.1 The largest stone statue of Hevajra so far found in Cambodia exists as a 52-inch bust of a larger dancing deity. This may have been the largest statue carved in sandstone in the royal workshops since the last of the large

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<sup>296</sup> Groslier, Bernard Philippe (1954:229) "Fouilles du Palais Royal d'Angkor Thom" in *Proceedings of the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Congress of Orientalists Cambridge 1954* Royal Asiatic Society London

'radiating' Lokeśvaras of the 1190s. The bust is now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The statue, in the same dancing posture as the bronzes, was found dumped in an earth mound outside the East gate of Jayavarman's nine km<sup>2</sup> walled city of Angkor Thom. Its huge legs, photographed at their discovery by Henri Marchal in 1925, now seem to be lost. Set on the one metre pedestal found with the statue parts, the icon would have risen four metres into the air. An attempt is made here to reconstruct what it may have looked like.

**5.1.2** A second major statue of Hevajra in stone, with eight heads, four legs and 20 arms, was found in 1925 in another sanctuary near the West gate of Angkor Thom. This is now in the Siemreap Conservation. Another Hevajra stone relief recorded dancing in Preaḥ Khan temple in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been lost. Louis Delaporte published an engraving of it in 1880, suggesting it represented Śiva, and saying it had been moved to the 'Musée Khmer'.<sup>297</sup> Bas reliefs of Hevajra appear on several marker stones in the Siem depot and as photographs in the EFEO electronic archive.

**5.1.3** Lustration conches for consecrations have been found in considerable numbers in bronze embossed with Hevajra's image. These Hevajra śaṅkhas suggest Hevajra consecrations were frequent. The scale of the consecrations is indicated by the large new halls dominated by lintels and pillars carved with Yoginī-dancers, which were added to the king's earlier temples at the time the Bāyon was opened. These are the largest halls covered with corbelled roofs (the Khmers did not have the arch) constructed in Angkor. Outside the new halls are spacious, uncovered new terraces capable of accommodating many more participants. The terraces are surrounded by Garudas embracing Nāgas, an icon which in Tantric Buddhism represents Vajrapāni protecting new converts to the faith.

**5.2** The Mī-Sṅn inscription C92 B from neighbouring Čampā gives a clear historical account of Khmer-Čam relations. The man behind the inscription is

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<sup>297</sup> L. Delaporte (1880:358) *Voyage au Cambodge*



prince Vidyānandana of Tumprauk-vijaya who erected a temple to Heruka (*Śri Herukaharmya* ‘Lord Heruka’s mansion’) in Mī-Sṛn, Amarāvati (Quảng Nam). The temple celebrates Vidyānandana’s victory at Jai Ramya-vijaya over an army sent against him by Jayavarman VII in 1194. The stela was found beside a small 3m. x 3m brick so-called ‘inscription’ temple at the heart of the dense Mī-Sṛn complex, the largest surviving Čam sanctuary site. This Čam king had intimate connections with the Khmer court and king Jayavarman VII. But the Heruka temple was erected to celebrate a Khmer defeat by this Čam turncoat of military genius, for Sūryavarman-Vidyāndana had passed his youth in exile at the Khmer court and was raised like a favourite son by Jayavarman VII. The Mī-Sṛn inscription proves the erection of a temple to Heruka in Čampā in 1194 and opens the possibility that if Vidyānandana’s god was Heruka, so was Jayavarman’s. A Heruka cult has no known precedent in Čampā and a probability arises that the cult in Mī-Sṛn was a direct export from Cambodia and a reflection of Jayavarman’s creed. Scholars’ attempts to link the temple to a Heruka sanctuary built in 1024 in Northern Sumatra seem implausible. The Angkor-Mī-Sṛn links are so strong in this period that in the complete absence of any Khmer inscripational reference to ‘Hevajra’ in the material record, the Mī-Sṛn inscription alone is reasonable grounds for redesignating all the bronze and stone ‘Hevajras’ of Jayavarman’s Tantric Buddhism as ‘Herukas’.

**5.3** The supreme Tantric Buddha Vajradhara is represented in a significant series of sandstone statues with hands are crossed at the wrists in *prajñālinganābhinaya* with the vajra prongs of each instrument pointing forward. One 80cm statue was found *in situ* in Bantéay Chmàr. Victor Goloubew saw it there in 1921 before it was removed from the remote and unprotected site to the National Museum in Phnom Penh.<sup>298</sup> Goloubew also wrote about a smaller headless Vajradhara which was set on Angkor’s only vajra-decorated pedestal in front of the East Chapel of the hospital complex west of Takeo temple. (The image has now disappeared from the chapel and is not in the depot in Siemreap, though the vajra pedestal remains in place).

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<sup>298</sup> Goloubew, Victor (1937:97-104) ‘Sur quelques images khmères de Vajradhara’ *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 5

The motif of vajras in a chain on the East Chapel pedestal is unique in the Angkor complex. Goloubew published a similar Vajradhara with tiara which is now in depot, marked with inventory number 308, but without its head. On the art market in London, John Eskenazi offered a 94cm Vajradhara, almost identical to the one found in Bantéay Chmàr, but in far better condition.

**5.3.1** An association of Vajradhara with the Buddha of medicine is suggested by the association with the East Chapel. The medical link is reinforced by the Thai Fine Arts Department's identification of three more Vajradharas, crowned like number 308 in Siemreap, with bell and vajra held before the chest, in the sanctuaries of hospital complexes in Īśān.<sup>299</sup> Another headless Vajradhara icon stands beside Jayavarman's hospital stela in the Wàt Phra Keo museum in Vientiane.

**5.4** On the wall of the Bantéay Chmàr cella there is an unpublished Tantric trinity of deities in relief, composed of two multi-armed, polycephalous deities dancing in Hevajra's *ardhaparyanka* ('half crossed-legged') posture beside a multi-headed, six-armed seated deity, with principal arms are in dharmacakra mudrā. The seated figure is close in design to some Khmer bronzes of the supreme Tantric Buddha Vajrasattva.

**5.4.1** A rare series of votive tablets from the Bàyon period emphasises major roles for these later Tantric deities. The tablets, pressed from a bronze mould in the collection Phnom Penh museum, display a schematised pantheon in a maṇḍala form in which Hevajra, Saṃvara and a transcendent Buddha are the most prominent deities. The mould is photographed here for the first time, courtesy of the museum. Hevajra, with eight adorsed heads and 16 arms, dances on corpses opposite a 12-armed dancing Saṃvara, who tramples corpses from within a split-open elephant hide. The central figure of the tablet is a seated transcendental Buddha with six arms and three or four faces like the central, seated Buddha in relief on the Bantéay Chmàr cella. As the

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<sup>299</sup> *Plan and report of the Survey and Excavations of Ancient Monuments inn North-Eastern Thailand* (1959 reprint 1979: fig 38; 1960-1:figs 4, 90) Fine Arts Department, Bangkok.

iconography of Hevajra and Saṃvara is unmistakable, the Buddha presiding at the centre of the mould must be Vajrasattva.

**5.5** The dancers carved in the eight gopuras leading into the Bāyon temple are usually described as apsaras, minor heavenly nymphs, but on close examination they are much closer, in confrontational demeanour and assertive dance posture, to the Yoginīs in the bronze Hevajra maṇḍalas and on the lintels of Phimai. Dagens supports this view.<sup>300</sup> Similar dancers are carved like emblems into rows of square pillars lining the temple's enclosure wall. Totalling 6,250, the Yoginīs of the Bayon dominate the decoration of the temple below the giant face towers. Although they do not bear specific attributes, like Hevajra's eight named Yoginīs, their appearance and positioning around the new state temple, suggest they are emblems of a royal Hevajra cult. Petrological measurements of magnetic susceptibility indicate that the outer enclosure walls and gopuras of the Bāyon were constructed from later shipments of stone than the inner enclosure and central sanctuary. Thus the last phase of the Bāyon covers the raising of the 4.5m platform around the sanctuary, the carving of the faces on the towers, and what I call the 'Yoginification' of the entrances to the edifice. The last addition to the central sanctuary of the Bantéay Chmār was a double Yoginī hall which measures 35m x 15m and was probably the largest covered hall in the kingdom. These seem the likeliest locations for the frequent consecrations to Hevajra suggested by the bronze conches or śaṅkhas.

**5.5.1** The king's earlier temples also underwent 'Yoginification' at this late period. Large 'halls with dancers' ('salles aux danseuses') were added late in the reign (their late insertion also ascertained by magnetic susceptibility measurements) and embellished with prominent lintels and pillars carved with dancers. They have the same stamping feet and the confrontational, open-

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<sup>300</sup> Bruno Dagens (1969:143) made this comment on the dancers: 'One peut se demander si ces dernières (danseuses) qui occupent une si grande place dans l'ornementation du Bayon ne sont pas un rappel des liens qui unissent Lokeśvara à Hevajra. A l'époque de Jayavarman VII ce dieu dansant du panthéon mahayanique jouit d'une popularité, attestée, sinon par l'épigraphie, du moins par de nombreuses représentations en bronze et aussi par une grande statue en pierre...'

eyed stares of the Bāyon. Such 'salles aux danseuses' were added to Preaḥ Khan, Ta Prohm and Bantéay Kdei.

**5.6** A sudden decline in the formerly massive output of Lokeśvara icons from the royal workshops, signals a late shift in the royal Buddhist cult to the more overt Tantrism, represented by Hevajra, the Yoginis and Vajrasattva. The dwindling output of Lokeśvaras in the decade that followed coincides with the carving of the giant face towers, the Yoginī gopuras of the Bāyon, and the 'salles aux danseuses' in the other temples.

**5.6.1** Further evidence of a reduced focus on Lokeśvara at the end of the reign is furnished in the fourth and last major change in the design of the Bāyon. This caused large Lokeśvara pediments to be insensitively obscured in ground-level vestibules at the heart of the temple. In this change, a 4.5m circular platform is raised around the triple central sanctuary tower, covering over the carved pediments below. Until this design change, these were the principal icons carved above the doors of the inner sanctum of the temple.

**5.7** A shift to a mature Vajrayānist state cult may also be signalled in a change in the iconic relationship between Garuḍa and the Nāgas. In the middle phase of Jayavarman's reign, Garuḍa the king of the eagles who stretched Nāgas between his raised hands, is given a guardian role repelling intruders from the outer enclosure walls of Praḥ Khan temple. But in the late Bāyon period (as ascertained in the petrological measurements that match contemporary stone extractions and shipments), Garuḍa balustrades were introduced to embellish large uncovered platforms outside the main walled sanctuaries of the king's temples. This version of Garuḍa is embracing and protecting the Nāgas, with his human hands in a 'have no fear' mudrā. The new 'gentle Garuḍa', who protects Nāgas and all new converts to Buddhism, is identified in northern Buddhism as Vajrapāṇi, disguised as the king of the eagles to ward off the other eagles.

**5.7.1** Vajrapāṇi's role of protecting Nāgas who converted to Buddhism is given special weight in the circa eighth century *sarvadurgatipariśodhana-*

*tantra (SDPS)*. The *SDPS*, a text close to the *STTS* and attributed to the same eighth century author Buddhaguhya, is presided over by Vajrapāṇi who defines the Eight Great Nāga maṇḍala by leading in the Nāgas Ananta, Taksaka, Karkota, Kulika, Vāsuki, Śamkhapāla, Padma and Varuna. Vajrapāṇi is envisioned surrounded by Nāga hoods and this vision appears in a series of so far unexplained sculptures located behind the Leper King Terrace in the Royal Plaza at Angkor, in which a deity holds a vajra to his chest and is surrounded by a group of crested Nāgas. These appear to be icons of Vajrapāṇi and the Nāgas and suggest that both the Eight Great Nāga maṇḍala and the *SDPS* played a role in the late Bāyon period in Angkor.

**5.7.2** The eight Nāgas and the Buddha appear in a narrative lintel in one of Jayavarman VII's temples, in what seems to be hard evidence for the presence of the *SDPS* in the Khmer capital. In the Khmer version of the maṇḍala, found on a lintel outside the central sanctuary Tà Prohm, the eight great Nāgas, each have three snake heads with human bodies and kneel in añjali mudrā before the throne of a (desecrated) Buddha.

**5.7.3** Further possible evidence for the presence of the *SDPS* Tantra in Khmer Buddhism is an unfinished 12<sup>th</sup> century funerary lintel at Phimai, which appears to narrate funerary *homa* rites for a king or nobleman for ensuring his rebirth among the gods. The necessary mantras and fire rituals are the primary purpose of the *SDPS*.

**5.7.4** Causeways of giants constructed over the moats of Praḥ Khan, Angkor Thom and Bantéay Chmàr reflect a Tantric Buddhist version of the Indic Churning of the Ocean origin myth. The causeways feature rows of Devas and Asuras pulling on giant serpents, but they clearly break with traditional versions of the myth because Viṣṇu, Śiva and Indra are absent. The reduction of the number of principals to two fits the Tantric Buddhist version in which Vajrapāṇi and the sun-devouring demon Rāhu lead teams of Devas and Asuras in an effort to generate the elixir for the Buddhas.

**5.7.5** These huge carvings of the Churning may also attest to a second consecration of Jayavarman as universal ruler or *cakravartin*. The Indic myth formed the basis of a 15<sup>th</sup> century Thai celebration. If Jayavarman VII was consecrated *cakravartin* in the first decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, following his military victories of Campā in 1203, the erection of giant causeways modelled after the Tantric Buddhist version of the origin myth, would have been appropriate to such festivities. A row of 12 stone and laterite towers known as Pràsàt Suor Prat ('palaces of the tightrope walkers'), whose function is currently unexplained, line the royal plaza in front of the royal palace in Angkor. Similar towers, built in wood, were constructed to support buffalo-hide tightropes to support acrobats in the Thai Indrābhiṣeka, as shown on a screen painting of the ceremony in the royal palace in Bangkok.<sup>301</sup> In this historical context the Khmer laterite towers for tightrope walkers are supporting evidence for a similar Indrābhiṣeka being celebrated following the Čampā victories.

**5.8** The open eyes of the giant faces carved on the towers of the Bāyon are typical of Tantric images, particularly when accompanied by a third 'vajra eye' in the brow. All the Hevajra and Saṃvara images have staring, fierce eyes and third eyes. The Yoginīs clustered around the entrances to the Bāyon also have similar eyes that bracket all that enter the temple. The giant face towers of the Bāyon were all sculpted with eyes wide open (though some have been subsequently 'closed' for unknown ritual purposes).

**5.8.1** The presence of the supreme Tantric Buddha Vajradhara or Vajrasattva in the face towers of the Bāyon is suggested by circumstantial historical evidence from Kathmandu, where the eyes of Vajradhara painted on four sides of stūpas stare out high over the city. The five Buddhas of the Vajradhatu Pentad are housed in shrines at the foot of the stūpa and appear again above the huge painted eyes. This striking innovation in temple architecture, in which the principal deity is represented in a giant form dwelling

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<sup>301</sup> Nivat, Prince Dhani (1961:275-83) 'The gilt lacquer screen in the audience hall of Dusit' in *Artibus Asiae* 24

in the dome and tower, has no parallel anywhere – except in the giant face towers of the Bāyon. The Kathmandu towers may have been designed by Tantric masters who were refugees from the sacking of the monasteries of the Ganges valley by Turkic Islamic armies between 1197 and 1207. Tibet's 16<sup>th</sup> century historian Lama Tāranātha wrote that the teachers from the monasteries fled over the Himalayas into Nepal, Tibet, Burma and Cambodia, so the Bāyon and the Kathmandu mahācaitya may be contemporary and built under similar direct influence from the eminent Tantric Buddhist refugees from the Ganges valley.

**5.9** Evidence of Jayavarman's direct engagement in Tantric Buddhist rituals is seen in a late inscription on the Prāsāt Chrung temple at the Southwest corner of Angkor Thom (K.288), which describes the king as 'firm in his knowledge of the magical formulas' (*dhruvam mantravidām*) and shows him reciting mantras in person at a public ceremony. This is the only record in Khmer epigraphy of a reigning monarch performing an esoteric part of a public ritual.

## Appendix I

### Coherentist hermeneutics: 'fusing horizons' with the occult

'SPLENDOUR, IT ALL COHERES.'

[Herakles in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, trans. Ezra Pound]

Because of its seeming remoteness and obscurity, medieval Tantric Buddhism in its many forms received a difficult reception from modern Euro-American culture. But after the first expressions of indignant revulsion, a slow dynamic set in that is still today gradually converting prejudices from blockers into enablers for accessing the art of remote cultures. *Khmer* Tantric Buddhism, whose icons are not bloodthirsty nor overtly sexual, was not, like *Tibetan* Buddhism, condemned as decadent, but was instead marginalised as a puzzling minor phenomenon. That is, because of its more subtle and anodyne nature, the *Tantrism* in Khmer Buddhist art went virtually unrecognized, and is still hardly acknowledged today, except in the work of two scholars: Jean Boisselier and Hiram Woodward.

In this appendix, I propose a more comprehensive approach. The approach can be called 'coherentist' for, while remaining close to the material record, it explores the politico-religious horizon as a necessary complementary source of evidence. Signs of coherence with the material record are sought in both local and nonlocal contexts, for though a narrowly materialist approach resists bringing 'exotic' and asynchronous elements into the argument, the peripatetic and missionary nature of Buddhism compels us to remain alert to the international picture. And while seeking objective findings, the approach also aims to be participatory in the phenomena of the remote horizon. Snellgrove sounds an appropriate warning ahead of the attempt:

It clearly only becomes possible to understand these texts thoroughly by accepting their *Weltanschauung* complete, and this is probably an impossibility for a modern European. To think one has done so is not sufficient. One is then placed in the predicament of explaining away much that is unacceptable, and one manner of doing this is an appeal to symbolism and esoteric interpretation; but these are notions that have no meaning in a genuine tradition.<sup>302</sup>

Explaining away as symbolic all that is most difficult to deal with in the other culture, amounts to moving away from it, not towards it. On the other hand,

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<sup>302</sup> D Snellgrove, D. (1959:33n3) *The Hevajra Tantra, a critical study* OUP



completely fusing horizons with a religious and artistic world that is remote in time, geography and culture from our own appears impossible. Tantrism, with its icons of insistent sexuality and horror, has been one of the more perplexing remote worlds for modern Europeans to approach. In dealing with the Buddhist art of 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century Cambodia, scholars are not directly repelled by the iconography, but the general resistance to Tantrism appears to have played an indirect role in deeming the significant numbers of clearly Tantric icons as a minor and hardly intelligible strand in the eclectic, syncretic Mahāyānist/Hindu religion of state of the Khmers. Interpretation is indeed a complex and dangerous process, but it is also an obligation; for side-lining evidence is a kind of unreflected interpretation and can be pernicious.

The early European failure with Tantrism arose from aesthetic, sexual, demonic and scatological revulsions. Tantrism was after all attempting to channel the forces of the human psyche and body that Nietzsche defined for late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe as the 'Dionysian'. 'Lamaism' had been demonised since the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Vatican, which quickly sought to distance itself from early favourable response to the religious practices in the Himalayan monasteries. German Jesuit John Grueber wrote from Lhasa in 1661: 'They celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass with Bread and Wine...give extreme unction....make nunneries...observe divers Fasts during the year, undergo most severe penances, and amongst the rest Whippings...' <sup>303</sup> Jesuit headquarters thundered back with this dismissal by Athanasius Kircher:

The Devil in way of abuse hath transferred, as he hath done all the other Mysteries of the Christian Religion, the Veneration which is due unto the Popes of Rome...unto the superstitious Worship of barbarous people....From him [the Dalai Lama], as from a certain Fountain, floweth the whole form and mode of their Religion, or rather mad and brain-sick idolatry...Strangers at their approach fall prostrate with their heads to the ground, and kiss him with incredible Veneration, which is no other than that which is performed upon the Pope of Rome; so that hence the fraud and deceit of the Devil may easily and plainly appear. <sup>304</sup>

Austine Waddell, later a member of the British military Younghusband expedition of 1903-4, led the Victorian condemnation of bloodthirsty icons and magic 'Lamaism' in his influential 1895 account of *The Buddhism of Tibet or*

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<sup>303</sup> Quoted in Allen C. (2002:33) *The Buddha and the Sahibs* John Murray, London

<sup>304</sup> Kircher, Athanasius (1667: ) *China Illustrata* in Allen C. (2002:33) *The Buddha and the Sahibs* John Murray, London

*Lamaism, with its mystic cults, symbolism and mythology, and in its relation to Indian Buddhism.* Waddell condemned, for example, the *kālacakra-tantra* one of the ‘hideous creations of Tantrism...unworthy of being considered philosophy’:

It is merely a coarse Tantrik development of the Ādi-Buddha theory combined with the puerile mysticisms of the Mantrayāna, and it attempts to explain creation and the secret powers of nature, by the union of the terrible Kāli, not only with the Dhyāni-Buddhas, but even with Ādi-Buddha himself. In this way Ādi-Buddha, by meditation, evolves a procreative energy by which the awful Saṃvharā and other dreadful Dākini-fiendesses obtain ...spouses as fearful as themselves...And these demoniacal “Buddhas”, under the names of Kāla-cakra, Heruka, Ācala, Vajra-vairabha, etc., are credited with powers not inferior to the celestial Buddhas themselves, and withal, ferocious and bloodthirsty; and only to be conciliated by constant worship of themselves and their female energies, with offerings and sacrifices, magic-circles, special *mantra*-charms, etc.<sup>305</sup>

Two years later French Indologist Alfred Foucher called the gods of Vajrayāna – a ‘mob of monsters [which] has nothing Buddhist about it, except for rubbing shoulders with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the same text.’<sup>306</sup> The first European resistance to this stream of alienated denigration came from a colonial judge, Sir John Woodroffe, who in 1919 published pioneering translations of Tantric texts with the help of an Indian scholar:

When will we learn...not to discredit common humanity by supposing that any large body of men have devoted themselves throughout the ages to ‘meaningless’ doctrines and practices! If they are meaningless to them, it is because they do not know the meaning. And what yet is known of the Buddhist Tantra? Very little indeed....It is surely the acme of absurdity to deny that Northern Buddhism has any scheme of metaphysic, when it has developed some of the most subtle and logically welded themes which the world has ever known; or to deny that it has an ethical system, seeing that Buddhism as also Brahmanism have produced the most radical analysis of the basis of all morality and have advocated every form of it which any other religion has affirmed to be of worth.<sup>307</sup>

German-born Lama Angarika Govinda was later to acknowledge Woodroffe as ‘the first European scholar who had the courage to rehabilitate the Tantras,

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<sup>305</sup> Waddell, L. Austine (1895:131) *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism, with its mystic cults, symbolism and mythology, and in its relation to Indian Buddhism*; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1939 W. Heffer & Sons, Cambridge

<sup>306</sup> ‘Selon l’ordre des manuscrits nous voyons passer tour à tour, multimanés, polycéphales, ornés d’attributs guerriers, parés d’ornements macabres, et tous en proie aux fureurs de l’amour et de la colère, Canddamaharosana, Heruka ou Hevajra, Saptaksara, Buddhakapala, Samvara, Vajrahmkara, Mahabala, Vajrajvalanalarka, Paramacva, Bhutadamara, Vighnantaka, Mahakala, et jusqu’à Ganapati: car cette cohue de monstres n’a de bouddhique que le fait de coudoyer des Bouddhas et des Bodhisattvas dans un même recueil.’ Foucher, A (1900) *Etude sur l’iconographie bouddhique de l’Inde, d’après des documents nouveaux* Leroux, Paris

<sup>307</sup> Woodroffe, Sir John (1919) ‘Preface’ *Shrichackrasambhara Tantra* Thacker Spink, Calcutta, reprinted with preface by Lokesh Chandra (1987) Aditya Prakashan, New Dehli

especially the Hindu Tantras of *kundalinī Yoga*'. Govinda singles out Waddell for his failure of sympathy:

One of the main propagators of this mistaken idea [that later Buddhism was an outcome of Saivism], which was built upon the superficial similarities of Hindu and Buddhist Tantras, was Austine Waddell, who is often quoted as an authority on Tibetan Buddhism. In his estimation Buddhist Tantrism is nothing but Śaivite idolatry, Śakti worship and demonology. Mantras and dhāranīs are 'meaningless gibberish', 'its mysticism a silly mummerly of unmeaning jargon and "magic circles"', and its yoga a parasite whose monster outgrowth crushed and cankered most of the little life of purely Buddhist stock yet left in the Mahāyāna.<sup>308</sup>

## 1. Helicopter

In cases of such cultural disjuncture, philosophers Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg Gadamer offer us help with their notion of *heightening our consciousness* from our normal, prejudice-laden judgements, our pre-judgements, to allow at least a partial 'fusion of horizons' with the remote culture. This means somehow *suspending* our rejection reflexes while attending closely to the modes of art, beliefs, conventions, assumptions and aesthetics of the other culture. It means rising in a kind of helicopter mode of consciousness, in which we engage in a detached reflection on our own consciousness of the phenomenal world, a state Heidegger's teacher, Edmund Husserl, called '*epoché*'. And yet, even as we make this effort to attend to the other, with the wonder we experience at the new, we are aware of remaining in our own culture, enwrapped in its language, promptings, conceptions and history. Indeed, as Peter Winch suggests in his critique of anthropology focused on E.E. Evans-Pritchard's account of Azande witchcraft, the encounter with the remote culture is likely to throw new and quite possibly unflattering light back on our own:

What we learn by studying other cultures are not merely possibilities of different ways of doing things, other techniques. More importantly we may learn different possibilities of making sense of human life, different ideas about the possible importance that the carrying out of certain activities may take on for a man, trying to contemplate the sense of his life as a whole. ... [A] Zande's crops are not just potential objects of consumption: the life he lives, his relations with his fellows, his chances for acting decently or doing evil, may all spring from his relation to his crops. Magical rites constitute a form of expression in which these possibilities and dangers may be contemplated and reflected upon – and perhaps also thereby transformed

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<sup>308</sup> Angarika Govinda (1956:362) 'Principles of Tantric Buddhism' *2500 years of Buddhism* Ed. P.V. Bapat Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Dehli

and deepened. ...Our blindness to the point of primitive modes of life is a corollary of the pointlessness of much of our own life.<sup>309</sup>

Heidegger and Gadamer earlier formalised the kind of cultural interaction advocated by Winch by broadening the 19<sup>th</sup> conception of the 'hermeneutic circle' from scriptural exegesis into a universal dynamics of interpretation in which the nature of understanding is seen as a mode of being-in-the-world (*dasein*). In this, the investigator moves from the study of details of evidence and specialised discussion to the apprehension of the whole picture in a broader survey, and back. On another level she is engaging the tradition of her own culture in a dialogue with the remote culture and extending her horizon towards it. Moving between the scrutiny of parts to the awareness of synoptic wholes generates a reciprocal enrichment, whereby the parts (e.g. individual Khmer sculptures or an architectural feature) inform our picture of the whole (the direction of the Khmer empire, 12<sup>th</sup> century Asian politics, the evolution of Buddhism), which then sheds new light on our earlier understanding of the parts, and so on. What I am calling a coherentist view 'outwards' recalls what Wittgenstein, who inspired Winch's work, called his motto: 'Take a *wider* look around.'<sup>310</sup> And the process of reciprocal adjustment is what I shall call a 'coherentist hermeneutics', borrowing another term from philosophy.<sup>311</sup> Following this approach, the present study attends closely to 'enigmatic' parts of Khmer medieval Buddhist art, seeking a more intimate, phenomenological (that is: experience-textured) understanding of the more puzzling temples, icons or texts. We enter the Bàyon and ask questions, trying to let it speak to us. Although the epigraphic evidence is tenuous, can we find clues to what rituals took place here, what texts guided the officiants, what ritual techniques and instruments were in use? Can we find plausible explanations for the major architectural changes in design? What change in ritual demand required a high 4.5m platform, which takes initiates up to a level

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<sup>309</sup> Peter Winch (1964) 'Understanding a primitive Society' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1, pp.307-24, reprinted in ed. Bryan Wilson (1970:78-111) *Rationality* Blackwell, Oxford.

<sup>310</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1956 revised 1978:127) *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* II § 6 trans. G.E. Anscombe Blackwell, Oxford

<sup>311</sup> The standard competing approaches to the explanation of basic beliefs in contemporary epistemology are Foundationalism and Coherentism. The former proposes that there is a groundwork of basic beliefs upon which all non-basic beliefs are founded; the latter disposes of the ground and proposes instead a system of beliefs that are inter-dependently coherent, rather like a planetary system; a statement's truth thus depends on its coherence with other truths.

where they were eye-to-eye with the giant faces of the supreme deity of the central towers? What ritual required such intimacy with the supreme deities? Then, with a turn of the hermeneutic circle, we look to see whether our probing such details alters our grasp of the whole. And, further, the Khmer whole is considered in the context of other wholes – such as the international movement of ideas in the period and the effects of fertilizing cross currents from the iconic and architectural creativity of surrounding communities – in order to see whether this sheds light from a wider perspective on the Khmer details. In this way a coherentist hermeneutics never comes to a full stop, but goes on interpreting all the available evidence – religious, political, artistic, textual, and architectural – in what Clifford Geertz calls ‘a credible, fleshed-out picture of a human form of life.’<sup>312</sup>

## 2. Gadamer: fusion of horizons

Gadamer believes that art is the space in which we have the best chance of fusing horizons with the culturally remote, because art can speak to us across the human world instantly, at a pre-conscious level. He sees the artist, in the act of creation, as generating a new level in human expression, which transcends its creator's natural boundaries of place and time:

The work of art is the expression of a truth that cannot be reduced to what its creator actually thought in it...The creator of a work of art may intend the public of his own time, but the *real being* of his work is what it is able to say, and this being reaches fundamentally beyond any historical confinement. In this sense the work of art occupies a timeless present.<sup>313</sup>

Because of this more than personal, more than local dimension, we respond directly and sometimes powerfully to art from cultures we have had no previous contact with. Gadamer worked on the paradox that although a work

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<sup>312</sup> Geertz has a similar interpretive anthropology, a ‘cultural hermeneutics’ that is insistent on the concrete and the detailed, interspersed with synoptic views, so as to resist a drift to theorising and reifying into a para-science. ‘[W]hat the anthropologist has to do...is tack between the two sorts of descriptions – between increasingly fine-comb observations (of how Javanese distinguish feelings, Balinese name children, Moroccans refer to acquaintances) and increasingly synoptic characterizations (“quietism,” “dramatism”, “contextualism”) – in such a way that, held in the mind together, they present a credible, fleshed-out picture of a human form of life.’ Geertz, Clifford (1983:10) *Local knowledge: further essays in interpretive anthropology* Basic Books

<sup>313</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg (1976:96) *Philosophical Hermeneutics* University of California Press

of art only receives its full determination of meaning within its cultural context, its whole meaning is never confined to that context:

The reality of the work of art and its expressive power cannot be restricted to its original horizon, in which the beholder was actually the contemporary of the creator. It seems instead to belong to the experience of art that the work of art always has its own present. Only in a limited way does it retain its historical origin within itself.<sup>314</sup>

When we are arrested in our tracks by a carving from Cameroon or a statue from Angkor, this fragment of a remote culture challenges us to encounter something fundamentally other, and at the same time pushes us to a new encounter with ourselves. Gadamer calls this interaction a 'historically operative consciousness' (*Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) that wills to hear rather than to master, and is ready to be modified by the other – indeed a placing of oneself so as to be laid claim to by the other.<sup>315</sup> We receive messages from the artwork before we reach a determination of its meaning in its contextual horizon:

For of all the things that confront us in nature and history, it is the work of art that speaks to us most directly. It possesses a mysterious intimacy that grips our entire being, as if there were no distance at all and every encounter with it was an encounter with ourselves.<sup>316</sup>

The issue in aesthetics that Gadamer helped to define – that of achieving an openness of sensibility that makes the apprehension of a remote culture possible – is finely illustrated in this cameo scene in D.H.Lawrence's novel *Women in Love*:

Gerald also lifted his eyes to the face of the wooden figure. And his heart contracted. He saw vividly with his spirit the grey, forward-stretching face of the savage woman, dark and tense, abstracted in utter physical stress. It was a terrible face, void, peaked, abstracted almost into meaninglessness by the weight of sensation beneath... 'Why is it art?' Gerald asked, shocked, resentful. 'It conveys a complete truth,' said Birkin. 'It contains the whole truth of that state, whatever you feel about it.' 'But you can't call it *high art*,' said Gerald. 'High! There are centuries and hundreds of centuries of development in a straight line, behind that carving: it is an awful pitch of culture, of a definite sort.' 'What culture?' Gerald asked, in opposition. 'Pure culture in sensation, culture in the physical consciousness, really ultimate *physical* consciousness, mindless, utterly sensual. It is so sensual as to be final, supreme.'

Lawrence's scene captures the moment when 'ethnographic' art suddenly made an enormous contribution to 20<sup>th</sup> century European art and challenged Euro-American culture to re-position it in its world view of art. This precipitated

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<sup>314</sup> Gadamer (1976:95)

<sup>315</sup> Gadamer (1975:341) *Truth and Method* trans. Weinsheimer & Marshall London, Sheed & Ward

<sup>316</sup> Gadamer (1976:95)

one of the greatest paradigm shifts in 20<sup>th</sup> century art. Finding language to articulate our aesthetic response to art that is culturally remote, even if it is impacting our own, or even if it is allowed exposure in optimally receptive conditions, is challenging indeed; or, some may think, impossible – as Christian Kaufmann, who feels we ‘need the dreams of a Melanesian child to fully understand their art.’<sup>317</sup> Yet bridges between remote cultures *do* sometimes open and allow rich cultural interactions, as when Picasso, Matisse and Braque, seeking new art paradigms, walked over to the Musée de l’Homme and looked at the statues from Africa and Asia. Within years their extension of their concept of art led to the ‘wholesale transfer’ of what were called ‘primitive artefacts’ to museums of fine art, as Richard Wollheim, philosopher of art, observes:

Such an extension [of a concept] in the case of art can occur ... permanently as, for instance, in the event, which has had such far-reaching effects on the whole of modern art, when, around the turn of the century, in response to an aesthetic impulse, there was a wholesale transfer of primitive artefacts from ethnographic collections, where they had been hitherto housed, to museums of fine art, where, it was now thought, they were more appropriately located.<sup>318</sup>

Surely Parisians were getting closer to the dreams of African or Melanesian children, as was Birkin, Lawrence's protagonist, even if their understanding is not as full as Kaufmann would have it.

### **3. Aesthetic monsters**

Medieval Cambodia was highly literate and artistically rich and the French art historians who brought Cambodia’s ancient religious art to the attention of the world were in love with it, but not in all its forms. They made little headway with the multi-headed, multi-armed Tantric Buddhist icons of the kind that upset Foucher. The art historians therefore left them out of their otherwise admirable categorising of the mainstream chronological development of the religious art. Europe’s presiding notion of Buddhism was still narrow. Judith Snodgrass’s analysis of various Asian Buddhist cultures concludes that the Orientalist 19<sup>th</sup> century pursuit of ‘Protestant Buddhism’ – the rational teachings of the historical Buddha contained in the Pāli canon – effectively closed the Western mind to other Asian Buddhist cultures for a century:

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<sup>317</sup> Kaeppler, Adrienne L. and Kaufmann, C. (1997:220) *Oceanic Art*. Trans. from the French by Nora Scott. New York: Harry N. Abrams.

<sup>318</sup> Wollheim, Richard (1980:97) *Art and its objects* Cambridge University Press.

As distorting as the Orientalist pursuit of 'original' Buddhism may have been as an introduction to the richness and profundity of Asian Buddhist cultures, it did have significant consequences for Western appreciation of Indian art. At a time when images of Indian deities were dismissed as 'idols', images of the Buddha were seen to be portraits of the historical philosopher, nothing more than reminders to his followers of his determination and his achievement.<sup>319</sup>

Access to Tibet has always been difficult and by the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, few scholars had penetrated either the country or its Buddhism. From afar it seemed a bizarre deviant. After Eugénie Burnouf and Abel Bergaigne, the most influential French scholar of Indic iconography was Alfred Foucher, who profoundly influenced the scholars who studied the temples being liberated from the grip of the tropical forest in Angkor. Paul Mus had written a classic work on the Mahāyāna, its Vedic origins and the emergence of the maṇḍala,<sup>320</sup> yet he remained deeply disconcerted by the Tantric icons that are typical of Northern Buddhism:

In our eyes, some images of the Great Bodhisattva or Archangel of Mercy, Avalokiteshvara, cannot but look teratological [deformed], at best a symbolic teratology. Here we face a problem not a mystery. How can Asian citizens of the present world, in which their achievements, in so many fields, stand second to none, still find an inspiration in aberrant figures, with pyramids of heads and a halo of radiating arms?<sup>321</sup>

Mus was aware of the eminent precedents for his distaste. He cites the perfunctory dismissal of the artistic 'nonsense' of the Northern Buddhists by Eugénie Burnouf, Sanskrit chair at the Collège de France in the 1840s; and he knew Coedès' condemnation of Tibetan bronzes as 'monsters':

Hevajra, who is also called Heruka, is one of these monsters of Tantric Buddhism that one would hardly have expected to have enjoyed great popularity in ancient Cambodia...In Tibet, Hevajra is generally represented united with his śakti: it would have been surprising if the Khmer artists had given up their well-known concern for chastity by depicting these monstrous couplings.<sup>322</sup>

#### **4. Sex, horror and scatology**

Coedès' 'monstrous couplings' are made 'monstrous' both by the sacred context and by what P.H. Pott calls plurality and demonization:

To the uninitiated the images of the gods with their various heads and many arms are only of value as works of art or as grotesque curios. Many of these gods, and more especially the goddesses, possess a most horrible and disgusting appearance, and the worship they enjoy from the followers of the Buddha's doctrine seems utterly

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<sup>319</sup> Judith Snodgrass (2001:170) 'Buddhism in the West' *Buddha, radiant awakening* AGNSW Sydney

<sup>320</sup> Mus, P (1935) *Barabudur: Esquisse d'une Histoire du Bouddhisme Fondée sur la critique archéologique des textes* Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, Hanoi

<sup>321</sup> Mus 1964:2

<sup>322</sup> Coedès G (1923:44) *Bronzes Khmèrs* Paris



incongruous and inexplicable. But to the initiated and to the interested student they represent an almost inexhaustible source of study and research.....<sup>323</sup>

Complex, coded iconography is one informational barrier to understanding, but there are more difficult barriers to cross – for example when spirituality is experienced through sexuality, horror and scatology. Tantric sexuality is handled with sensitivity and boldness by Snellgrove, translator of the *hevajra-tantra*, but he is still disturbed by the ‘murky and macabre appearance’<sup>324</sup> of the Tantric texts, from which he censors some ‘unattractive sacraments’<sup>325</sup>. Rob Linrothe’s historical survey defines three camps of respondents to what he calls ‘polarity symbolism’:

The sexual content of this symbolism has generated a great deal of controversy, which is still not resolved. Scholarship has tended to fit into three principal camps with regard to images or textual descriptions of a deity embracing his consort. The first confines itself to expressions of abhorrence and disgust with a tradition which would deem such images religious. The second interprets sexual imagery purely as philosophical metaphors, while the third insists that it reflects actual practices of Esoteric Buddhists.<sup>326</sup>

The third group includes those who perform the sexual yogic rites in a monastic environment with an *imaginary* consort, as mentioned in several texts. Guiseppe Tucci holds that *physical* sexual acts were often resisted, though respected, in Tibetan monasteries on communal grounds<sup>327</sup>; and Atiśa, the Indian master who led the second wave of Buddhism into Tibet, ordered on his arrival in 1054 that the second, secret (*guhyābhiṣeka*) and third (*prajñā-jñānābhiṣeka*) consecrations were not suitable for performance except by those who had already grasped the whole truth.<sup>328</sup>

And as well as sexual yoga, we face other forms of scatology such as cannibalism, the beheading of corpses and cremation ground rituals involving all of them. Only by staring into the abyss of human fear could the adepts transcend the human reflex to turn back and remain tied to the phenomenal world. This calloused state of the inner self, achieved through oppressing the body in order to escape its five root passions,<sup>329</sup> shares elements with the

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<sup>323</sup> Pott, P.H. (1947:284) ‘Plural forms of Buddhist iconography’ *India Antiqua* Brill Leiden.

<sup>324</sup> Snellgrove (1959:9)

<sup>325</sup> Snellgrove (1959:215)

<sup>326</sup> Linrothe, R (1999:6) *Ruthless compassion* Serindia, London

<sup>327</sup> Tucci (1961:78) *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala* Rider, London

<sup>328</sup> Snellgrove (1957:206)

<sup>329</sup> Vajrayānist texts hold that the human beings are driven by five passions or root evils to obsessive actions, which shackle them to the wheel of samsāra. They are *dvesa* (hatred),

deprivations of contemporary Christian saints in their desert caves. Pott cites the *sutasoma-tantra* for its articulation of the aim of building inner defences against the ingress of lower drives or states of consciousness:

It is not that he wants to eat human flesh, nor that he has a desire to satisfy himself with it as food or delicacy. He strives for understanding in order that he may have power over life and death; this is the aim of his observances. In this way, he is forever identified with *jina-pati*, the apogee of detachment... Ill-smelling blood flows over his head and drips onto his chest. Intestines twine themselves around his body; innumerable green flies<sup>330</sup> settle on his face and crawl into his eyes. But his heart is not distracted by this.

Such cultivated gruesomeness makes the most wrathful Tantric icons seem like mere sublimations. The icons generated in such powerful experiences, were used as instruments to transmit the visions to others who obey the injunction of the *hevajra-tantra* to plunge in:

Try it; try it one fortnight with zeal, making final realisation your goal, abandoning all discursive thought, your mind set on the form of the divinity.<sup>331</sup>

A line has been crossed, over which the remote observer cannot follow, for she cannot *convert* to the remote world, and does not leave her own. She can only attempt what Ray terms a *phenomenological reconstruction*<sup>332</sup> of how these religious practices felt to participants, viewing the same visible symbols and coming close enough to the time and space of their context of use to sense their ontology – in Gadamer's words, feeling the art as 'so wahr, so seiend' that it changes us:

The intimacy with which the work of art touches us is at the same time, in enigmatic fashion, a shattering and demolition of the familiar. It is not only the 'this art thou!' disclosed in a joyous and frightening shock, it also says to us: 'Thou must alter thy life.'<sup>333</sup>

Finally, the coherentist approach seeks to explore how the extreme human experiences cultivated by the medieval Buddhists were applied in the politics of Buddhist kings (see [Appendix III](#)).

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*moha* (delusion), *abhima* (pride), *raga* (sexual passion) and *irsya* (jealousy). Through Tantric 'visualizations' each passion is transmuted into a corresponding 'wisdom': *dharmadhatuvisuddhi-jnana* (pure absolute wisdom), *adarsa-jnana* (mirror-like wisdom), *samata-jnana* (the wisdom of equanimity), *pratyaveksa-jnana* (discriminating wisdom), and *kriyanusthana-jnana* (wisdom of accomplishing deeds). Ray (1973:198-9)

<sup>330</sup> Pott, P.H. (1966:46) *Yoga and Yantra: Their Interrelation and Their Significance for Indian Archaeology* Nihoff, the Hague

<sup>331</sup> *Hevajra-tantra* II.ii.27

<sup>332</sup> Ray, R (1973:150n1) *Maṇḍala symbolism in Tantric Buddhism* Chicago University

<sup>333</sup> Gadamer 1976:104

## Appendix II

### Stela of Wàt Sithor, Kompong Čam [K.111]

(Partial English translation of problematic sections by Dr Tadeusz Skorupski, SOAS 2003, on the basis of the Sanskrit text edited by G. Coedès 1954 *IC* VI:195-211)

#### Section A

37-38 tasyopāntacaro vidvān ākīrṇṇakīrttipūrṇṇendur	vidyāmbhonidhipāragah ācāryyah kīrttipaṇḍitaḥ //
39-40 niśśesaśāstrajaladhīn labdhvārthatattvaratnāni	tirtvā vīryoduvena yah vibheje dhīdhanārthinām //
41-42 saujanyādiguṇāḥ khyātāḥ doṣās tv agantukā yasya	prakṛtyāgner ivoṣṇatā lohasya dravatā yathā //
43-44 hṛdi roṣādayo yasya krīdoragā iva kṣipraṃ	kathañ cid yadi jṛmbhitāḥ yayur vvidyāvidheyatā[t //]
45-46 catussandhyāsu yogātmā caturmmūdrātmako dharmmañ	caturddānānvito nva [ham] catuṣparṣaṭsu yo – -
47-48 tyāgāyopārjīṭāsa [ṃ]khyā- kvāpi ṣaṭpiṭakārthāḍhyo	svāpateyo pi dhī – - yas sūribhir udīrita[h //]
49-50 yah parasmai padaò karttā na tv ātmane padañ jātu	sarvabhāveṣu ka[r]mma[su] kenāpy uktaḥ prayo[ jayan //]

37-38 His close associate (ūpāntacara) was the ācārya Kīrtipaṇḍita, the scholar (vidvān) who traversed to the other shore of the ocean of knowledge, the full moon of vast fame.

39-40 Having crossed the ocean (jaladhi) of all śāstras with the boat of energy (vīrya-udupa), and having obtained the jewels of real value (arthatattva), he placed them in the domain (?vibheje) of those who desired (artin) them.

41-42 His kindness (benevolence, saujanya) and other qualities (guṇa) were acclaimed (to be) like the primordial fire, while his defects (doṣā) were adventitious like the artificial fluidity of iron.

- 43-44 Whenever anger (roṣa) and other (vices) surfaced in his heart, they quickly subsided like pet snakes (krīda-uragā)<sup>334</sup> due to the rectitude of his knowledge.
- 45-46 During the four daily periods (sandhyā) he practised yoga and every day he offered the four gifts.<sup>335</sup> He was endowed with the character of the four mudrās,<sup>336</sup> and (preached) the Dharma amid the four assemblies (pariṣat).<sup>337</sup>
- 47-48 Although his own immense amassed wealth was for charity (tyāga), everywhere (kvāpi) he was spoken of by learned people as being rich in the meaning of the Piṭakas.<sup>338</sup>
- 49-50 In all his conduct and in all his actions he referred to others, and no-one ever said he was implying himself.

## Section B

3-4	nairātmyacittmātrādi- mithyādṛṣṭiniśā yasmin	darśanārkkas tiraskṛtaḥ bhūyo dina ivāvabhau //
5-6	śāstraṃ madhyavibhāgādyam kāladoṣāniladhvastaṃ	dīpaṃ saddharmmapaddhateḥ bhūyo jvālayati sma yaḥ //
7-8	lakṣagraṇṭham abhiprajñam tattvasaṅgrahaṭīkādi-	yo nveṣya pararāṣṭrataḥ tantrañ cādhyāpayad yamī //
13-14	sāntaḥpuraiḥ pramuditai dideśa vahuśo dharmmaṃ	rājabhir yyo gurūkrtaḥ vauddham dharmmasane sthitaḥ //
21-22	rāṣṭramaṇḍalalarakṣārtham maṇḍirābhyantare bhīkṣaṃ	satkṛtyāyuḥkta yan nṛpaḥ śāntipuṣṭyādikarmmasu //

<sup>334</sup> Krīda, play, sport, dally. Uraga: snake; Uragāja is the name of Vāsuki, king of this category of serpents.

<sup>335</sup> Material possessions (āmisa), fearlessness (abhaya), Dharma, benevolence (maitrī).

<sup>336</sup> In the Tantras: karmamudrā, samayamudrā, dharmamudrā, mahāmudrā.

There is also a triple dharmamudrā: (1.) all formations are impermanent; (2.) all dharmas are with self; (3.) nirvāṇa is real (satya).

In Asanga's sūtrālamkāra there is a fourfold dharmodāna: (1.) all mental formations are impermanent (sarvasamskāra aniyāḥ); (2.) all mental formations are painful (sarvasamskāra dukkhāḥ); (3.) all dharmas are without a self (sarvadharmā anātmānaḥ); (4.) peaceful is nirvāṇa (śāntam nirvānam).

<sup>337</sup> Upāsaka, upāsikā, bhikṣu, bhiksunī.

<sup>338</sup> Vinayapitaka, Sūtrapitaka, Abhidharmapitaka, Bodhisattvapitaka, Dhāranipitaka...? See Lomotte's History p.286: Mahāsāṅghikas compiled five piṭakas: Vinayapitaka, Sūtrapitaka, Abhidharmapitaka, Kṣudrakapitaka, Dhāranīpitaka.

27-28	advayānuttaram yānam yo diśan munaye haimaṃ	anyeṣāṃ svam ivārijayan rājataṃ śivikādvayam //
29-30	mahat tāmramayam yaś ca prāsādaṃ maṇihemāḍhyaṃ	bhavanācchādanaṃ muneḥ tārasimhāsanaṃ vyadhāt //
33-34	vāhyaṃ guhyañ ca saddharmmaṃ pūjārthan tasya saṃghasyā-	sthāpayitvā cakara yaḥ tithes ca pṛthagāśramān //
37-38	tatsthāne sthāpitā sthityai prajñāpāramitā tāri	sarvvavidvaòśabhāsvataḥ jananī yena tāyinām //
39-40	śrīsatyavarmmaṇā bajri- sthāpitāḥ prāg girau bhagnā-	lokeśārccā daśādhikāḥ sanā yo tiṣṭhipat punaḥ //

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- 3-4 In him the sun of the *nairātmya*, *cittamātra* and other doctrines (*darśana*), eclipsed by the night of erroneous views (*mithyādr̥ṣṭi*), shone stronger than the day.
- 5-6 Among the texts (*paddhati*) of the *Sad-Dharma*, he intensified the blaze of the *Madhy (ānt)avibhāga* and other *śāstras* that had been obscured (lost/eclipsed, *dhvasta*) by the wind of time and error.
- 7-8 Having searched<sup>339</sup> from/in a foreign kingdom for the one hundred thousand book (s) of higher wisdom,<sup>340</sup> and for the *tattvasaògraha-ṭīkā* and *Tantra* (s), the self-restrained one (sage)<sup>341</sup> taught (them).<sup>342</sup>

[Coèdes:7-8 Ayant recherché en pays étranger une foule de livres philosophiques et les traités tels que le commentaire du *Tattvasangraha*, ce sage en répandit l'étude]

<sup>339</sup> *anuvesya* from *anu+is*: desire, seek, search after, aim at.

<sup>340</sup> [Sharrock note: *Lakṣa* or 100,000 was conventionally used for large indistinct numbers. In the Chinese canon, for example, the *STTS* and the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* are all said to have consisted of 100,000 *gāthās* or *ślokas* of 32 syllables (Kwon 2002:27). Sanderson prefers the reading '...sought from abroad the *Lakṣagraṇṭha Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* and the *tattvasaògrahaṭīkāditantram*...' Sanderson (2004:427n284)]

<sup>341</sup> *Yamin* means one who restrains or subdues his senses, or in this context sage.

<sup>342</sup> *Adhyāpayad*: *adhi+i* know by heart, in imperfect causative: teach, instruct.

13-14 Appointed as teacher by the delighted king and his womenfolk, he taught the Buddha's Dharma on many occasions, from the Dharma throne.

21-22 He was honoured and appointed by the king to perform inside the palace the peaceful (śānti), enriching (puṣṭi)<sup>343</sup> and other rites (karma) in order to protect the territory of the kingdom (rāṣṭra-maṇḍala).

[Coèdes: Comblé d'honneurs par le roi, à cause de son zèle à protéger l'orbe du royaume, il fut chargé en permanence de célébrer à l'intérieur du palais des cérémonies, telles que des rites expiatoires (*śāntikarman*) ou destinés à obtenir la prospérité (*puṣṭikarman*)].

27-28 Procuring for others as if for himself the non-dual (advaya) and supreme (anuttara) vehicle (yāna)<sup>344</sup>, he produced for the Sage (muni) a pair of golden and silver palanquins (śivikā).

[Coèdes: Procurant aux autres, comme à lui-même le véhicule suprême et sans second<sup>345</sup>, il consacra au Muni deux litières en or et d'argent].

29-30 As a concealing canopy<sup>346</sup> for the Sage, he produced a large copper mansion (prāsāda) lavishly (adorned) with gems and gold with a star and lion throne (tāra-siṃha-āsana).

33-34 Having propagated the Buddhist teaching in its exoteric (bāhya) and esoteric (guhya)<sup>347</sup> forms, he established for worship (pūja) separate āśramas to honour the monastic community and their lay guests (atithi).

[Coèdes: Après avoir implanté la Bonne Loi, sous sa forme exotérique et ésotérique, il fit en vue de son culte, des āçrama séparés pour la communauté religieuse et pour les hôtes laïcs].

37-38 For the continuity (sthiti) and splendour (bhāsva) of the lineage (vaśa) of Sarvavid<sup>348</sup>, he erected in this place the saviouress (?tāri) Prajñāpāramitā, the mother (jananī) of the protectors (tāyin, Buddhas).

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<sup>343</sup> These are two of the four standard or 'homa' rights described in the Tantras: ksānti (śānti), pusti, vaśya (subduing), abhicāra (destruction).

<sup>344</sup> The compound advaya-anuttara-yāna (nondual-supreme-vehicle) implies the category of the highest Tantras.

<sup>345</sup> [Sharrock: Coèdes' footnote reads: 'Le Mahāyāna'].

<sup>346</sup> Bhavanācchādana can mean some form of housing mantle or canopy.

<sup>347</sup> Bāhya and guhya here appear to refer to Sūtras and Tantras.

<sup>348</sup> 'Sarvavid' in the Yoga Tantras is Vairocana.

[Coèdes: Il érigea en cet endroit, pour perpetuer la lumière de la famille des Omniscients, une Prajñāpāramitā, mère des (Buddha) protecteurs].

39-40 He re-erected more than 10 images of Vajrin and Lokeśa, which were raised by Śrī Satyavarman on the eastern hill, whose pedestals were damaged.

## Section C

1-2	eṣā śrījayavarmmājñā vauddhānām anukartavyā	buddhadharmmānucār[īṇī] mokṣābhyudayasiddhaye //
7-8	tato nighnanti pāpiṣṭhān devā nāgās samās tv ete	viṣamā vrṣṭivāyavaḥ dharmmiṣṭhān ramayanti ca //
9-10	satvārthāya tataś śāstā māse māse tathā kāryyāḥ	yathoktā dvādaśotsavāḥ krameṇa sukham icchatā ◉
11-12	sthāpitān diśi vahneh prāk- triṣkālaṃ pratyaham gāndi[ṃ]	sthāpanāyā mahāmuneḥ sampūjyākoṭayed yamī //
37-38	hṛnmūdramantravidyāsu bajraghaṇṭārahasyajñō	homakarmmaṇi kovidaḥ dakṣiṇīyaḥ purohitaḥ //
39-40	vedasūktarṣabhavrahma muneḥ parvvadine kuryyāt	ghoṣonmīlābhiṣecanaīḥ snānādīni purohitaḥ //
41-42	buddhasnānādibhir llokās antarbhūiā hi sarrvajña-	sukhitā dharmmavarddhanāḥ kāye satvās carācarāḥ //
43-44	pratītyotpādanaṃ vrahma- sūktaś śāntyavadhāś ca	ghoṣas saddharma āṛṣabhaḥ gāthāveda iti smṛtaḥ //

1-2 This ordinance of Śrī Jayavarman follows the Buddha's Dharma and is to be practised by the Buddhists (bauddha) in order to attain the happiness of deliverance.

7-8 Thus the adverse rains and winds destroy the wicked (pāpiṣṭha) but the congenial devas and nāgas bring stability to the righteous (dharmmiṣṭha).

- 9-10 Those who desire happiness should observe successively month after month the 12 festivals (utsava) as taught by the Teacher (śāstrī) for the benefit of living beings (sattva).
- 11-12 Taking up position in the quarter of Vahni (god of fire) with the firmness of the Great Sage, the restrained one should strike the gong (gāndi = gandī) three times per day after giving worship.
- 37-38 The one who is skilled in the quintessences of deities (hr̥ṣṭs)<sup>349</sup>, mūdras, mantras, vidyās and the homa rite, and who is knowledgeable in the secret (rahasya) of the vajra and the ghaṇṭā, is a purohita (officiant) worthy of his fees.

[Coèdes: Le purohita qui est versé dans les sciences du cœur, des gestes (*mudrā*) et des formules, dans la cérémonie de l'oblation (*homa*), et qui connaît le mystère de la clochette et du foudre, doit recevoir des honoraires (*dakṣiṇā*).

- 39-40 On the periodic moon day the purohita should perform the bath and the other things for the Sage with Veda hymns (sūkta), āṛṣabha, brahmaghoṣa, eye-opening (unmīla) and sprinkling (abhiṣecana).
- 41-42 The worlds are made happy and the Dharma is made prosperous by the Buddha's bath and the other activities. Indeed the animate and inanimate beings dwell inside the body (kāya) of the omniscient one (sarvajña).
- 43-44 The dependent origination (pratītyotpāda), brahmaghoṣa, Sad-Dharman, āṛṣabha, sūkta, śānti, and avadhāra are remembered as the ghāthāveda.<sup>350</sup>

<sup>349</sup> Hr̥ṣṭs = hr̥daya: quintessence or bīja of deities.

<sup>350</sup> Apart from the initial Buddhist 'Ye dharma' these appear to be more Śaiva and Vedic hymns as in 39-40.



## Appendix III

### Vajrayāna not Mahāyāna: a regal creed

In Java, as is generally the case elsewhere, the rule applies that if we are to understand the art we must have knowledge of the religious ideas and conceptions forming the basis of the culture which produces it. A history of art has therefore to begin with an exposition of the religious concepts.

P.H. Pott (1946 trans.1966:102) *Yoga and Yantra*

The terms ‘Vajrayāna’ (the way of *vajra*, thunderbolt or diamond) and ‘Tantric Buddhism’ are used as synonyms in this thesis. Scholars often treat ‘Tantric Buddhism’ as broader because they use it to include Mantranāya<sup>351</sup> (‘the path/conduct of mantras/spells’), whose practitioners, before the eighth century, innovated with *dhārānī* and thaumaturgy *within* established Mahāyāna,<sup>352</sup> the scholastically elaborated metaphysical doctrines of the Greater Vehicle of Northern Buddhism.<sup>353</sup> As this dissertation places great store by distinguishing Vajrayāna from Mahāyāna in medieval Cambodia, and as I wish to bypass the ongoing scholarly debate about defining the role of *dhārānī* in Buddhist practice, the focus is placed instead on the emergence and dissemination of Tantra – a new genre in Indian literature which became increasingly dominant from the eighth to the 12th centuries. This third wave of Buddhism, propagated through the Tantras in the early medieval period is therefore here called Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhism. This genre of ritual-based, rapidly transformative Buddhism indelibly marked the religious cultures

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<sup>351</sup> ‘Mantranāya’ is also used by modern scholars as a synonym for Tantric Buddhism – supported with the authority of medieval commentators (see Abhayākara Gupta’s use cited in John Makransky 1997:284 *Buddhahood embodied: sources of controversy in India and Tibet* SUNY) – but is avoided here for the sake of clarity.

<sup>352</sup> Williams suggests this was implied in the evolution of three *-yāna* names. ‘How distinct a way (*yāna*) is the Vajrayāna? Is it a special path that is none the less part of the Mahāyāna, or is it a path that is distinct from and supercedes the Mahāyāna? The classical hierarchy of three *yānas* – Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna (where Hīnayāna is of course, the pejorative Mahāyānist term for mainstream non-Mahāyāna Indian Buddhism) – seems to suggest that Vajrayānists saw themselves as following a path distinct from the Mahāyāna. But, as we have seen, pre-Vajrayāna tantric Buddhism – the Mantranāya – took itself to be a branch of the Mahāyāna. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Buddhahood as a legitimate tantric goal made the Vajrayāna especially significant, for some an even necessary, aspect of the Mahāyāna.’ Paul Williams (2000: 219-20) *Buddhist thought* Routledge, London

<sup>353</sup> D Seyfort Rugg calls the Mahāyānist method of technical philosophical analysis ‘Lakṣaṇayāna/Lakṣaṇanāya’, contrasting this with both the earlier ‘way/method of the Perfections’ Pāramitāyāna/Pāramitānaya’ and the later Vajra-/Mantra-yāna, the later so-called ‘experiential’ way. D. Seyfort Rugg (2004:10) ‘Aspects of the study of the earlier Indian Mahāyāna’ *JIAS* 27.1

of South, Central, East and Southeast Asia and one of the claims of this thesis is that its absorption into the Buddhism of the Khmers has been underestimated. A challenge is overdue to the prevailing view that Khmer state Buddhism was a localised, 12<sup>th</sup> century version of an orthodox Mahāyāna, or Bodhisattvayāna, centred narrowly on the Sūtras that extol the compassionate intercession of Bodhisattvas like Avalokitesvara and Prajñāpāramitā. It is proposed instead that to understand Khmer Buddhism we must look for its inspiration to the bewildering emission of myth, doctrine and ritual technology, from northern India from the eighth century onwards, disseminated in the literary and liturgical form of Tantras.

This appendix also looks at why this form of Buddhism would have attracted a ruler in Jayavarman VII's position. There is no doubt that the new Buddhist literature, which engineered a wholesale reconfiguration of Buddhist cosmology and history, found significant traction among the political class of medieval Asia, including, it is argued here, among the Khmers of the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **Family resemblance concept**

Paul Williams calls Mahāyāna 'a shifting mass of teachings with little or no central core', which defies conceptual definition.<sup>354</sup> In the expansive and decentralised world of Northern Buddhism, we should not be seeking to define the essence or core of Mahāyāna tenets, but should rather look for what 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein termed 'family resemblance' traits in the activities and cultural phenomena of Mahāyānist groups. The major traits of the Vajrayāna family of practices are usefully summarised by Gregory Schopen, when he offers a minority, narrow description of 'Tantric Buddhism', which excludes the use of *dhārānī* as a token of Tantric Buddhism:

There is nothing at all 'Tantric' about our text [the seventh century *sarvatathāgatadhiṣṭhāna-sūtra*] if by 'Tantric' we mean that phase of Buddhist doctrinal development which is characterized by the central function of the *guru* as religious preceptor; by sets – usually upgraded – of specific initiations; by esotericism of doctrine, language and organization; and by a strong emphasis on the realization of the goal through highly structured ritual and meditative techniques. If 'Tantric' is to be used to refer to something other than this, then the term must be clearly defined

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<sup>354</sup> Williams, P. (1989:4) *Mahāyāna Buddhism: the doctrinal foundations* Routledge London

and its boundaries must be clearly drawn. Otherwise the term is meaningless and quite certainly misleading.<sup>355</sup>

Medieval Tibetans made a major contribution to the growing Tantric movement with their strategy of introducing stability into the flood of new texts from India by developing a unique classification of the Tantras, according to their literary content, ritual technique, and sophistication – a classification which modern scholars still depend on. Jacob Dalton calls the Tibetan categorisation of the new literature a ‘doxography, arranging the Tantras into a series of hierarchically ordered classes.’<sup>356</sup> We can still profit from the Tibetan doxographic discipline, which proved crucial to the survival of the faith after Buddhism’s equivalent of Vatican city – the Ganges Valley monasteries – were destroyed by a Moslem army at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, by seeking to categorise the dispersed and diverse Buddhist communities through the texts they used, through the rituals they performed that embedded the teaching of the texts, and through their soteriological ideals. The salvation modes adopted by the different Buddhist vehicles or *yānas* were, broadly speaking, the Arhat (śravakyāna), the Bodhisattva (Mahāyāna) and the Siddha (Vajrayāna)<sup>357</sup>. It is interesting to note here that Cambodia’s great 12<sup>th</sup> century sovereign Jayavarman VII, a learned Buddhist king whose second wife and sons were accomplished Sanskrit scholars, is never identified in inscriptions as Śrāvaka or Bodhisattva, but only as Siddha (Prasat Chrung inscription K.288 at the southwest corner of Angkor Thom. [Chapter 2.7.9.1](#)).

If we apply the Tibetan textual categories to the evolution of Khmer Buddhism, we find that Cambodia’s Buddhist gurus, from the 10<sup>th</sup> century on favoured the texts of first the Yoga (‘Father’) Tantras of the Tibetan classification, and then the Anuttarayoga (supreme Yoga, or Yoginī, or ‘Mother’) Tantras. The major Tantric texts imported to Cambodia in the 10<sup>th</sup> century ([Chapter 1](#)), which included the *sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* (STTS), were followed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by the later Yoginī Tantras (most notably the *hevajra-tantra*). These

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<sup>355</sup> Schopen, G. (1982:105) ‘The Text of the “Dhāranī Stones from Abhayagira”: a minor contribution to the Study of Mahāyāna Literature in Ceylon’ *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* vol. 5 no.1.

<sup>356</sup> Dalton, J. (2005:115) ‘A crisis of doxography: how Tibetans organized Tantra during the 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries’ *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* vol. 28 no.1

<sup>357</sup> (Williams 2000:221)

texts belong to the two highest categories of the Tibetan classification and therefore firmly place the Buddhism of the Khmers in Vajrayāna.

The conscious 'Way of the Vajra' may be considered to be opened by the seventh century classic *guhyaśamāja-tantra (GST)* (also known to be current among the Mahādhara Khmers, because it is referred to in the Sab Bāk inscription of 1066 A.D. [Chapter 6.5.5](#)), which contains the first known use of the word 'Vajrayāna' in s.XVIII.52. Ronald Davidson calls Vajrasattva in this Tantra 'eros embodied' and translates the stanza which introduces the new 'yāna' as:

[We speak of] ignorance, anger, desire; but desire always is found in the vajra [penis]. Thus the skilful means of the Buddhas is understood as Vajrayāna.<sup>358</sup>

Williams is surely right to see this first appearance of the word, which was to be widely used by the Buddhists focused on the Tantras, as a significant historical turn.<sup>359</sup> The new nisus is powerfully enhanced in the (*STTS*), the root Yoga Tantra, where Vajrapāṇi and his vajra gradually assume the supreme power of the presiding Buddha Vairocana, and lead to the progressive 'vajra-isation' of Buddhism. This is the significance that Williams sees in the celebrated and often reproduced narrative of Vajrapāṇi's subjugation of Śiva:

In its adoption of the vajra as a symbol for the nature of reality, the Vajrayāna sets about what may be called a vajra-isation of Buddhism. Thus the name *Vajradhātu*, given to Śākyamuni in the *Tattvasaṃgraha* [*STTS*], vajra-ises the Mahāyāna concept of the *Dharmadhātu*, the 'dharma-realm' or 'dharma-sphere', the totality seen as it truly is by the awakened, enlightened mind...The role of the vajra as a core symbol in tantric Buddhism continues for the remainder of its history in India, vajra names being characteristic of both Mahāyoga and Yoginī Tantra deities.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Davidson, R. (2002:197) *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: a social history of the Tantric movement* Columbia University Press, New York

<sup>359</sup> 'A significant point in the history of Tantric Buddhism occurs, probably sometime during the late seventh century, with the appearance of the word *Vajrayāna*, "The Diamond Way". This expression, which was to become one of the standard self-descriptions of Tantric Buddhism, emerged at a time when the word *vajra*, meaning equally 'diamond' and 'thunderbolt', had assumed a major symbolic role in certain texts, standing for the indestructibility of and power of the awakened, enlightened state (*bodhi*). It is worth stressing that the term "Vajrayāna" was not employed before this period, and that, therefore, the expressions "Vajrayāna Buddhism" and "Tantric Buddhism" are not synonymous...An earlier term used to distinguish Tantric from other forms of practice was *mantranaya*, "the path (*naya*) of the mantras"...Indian Tantric Buddhism, in its pre-Vajrayāna phase at least, saw itself as part of the Mahāyāna, a fact that can be obscured by suggestions that Buddhism is comprised of three paths – the Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.' (Williams 2000:196)

<sup>360</sup> Williams (2000:218)

### **Cause-path in the monasteries to results-path in the court**

The Vajrapāṇi-Śiva narrative of violence and supernatural power brings up to the question of why Vajrayāna always entered societies at the level of the court and became inseparable from state protection and allegiance. Ronald Davidson, as already mentioned in Chapter 2, holds that court-level entry became a *sine qua non* for the Tantric Buddhists, as they penetrated new cultures:

There appears no exception to the rule that, when the Mantrayāna becomes culturally important outside India, it is principally through the agency of official patronage, either aristocratic or imperial.<sup>361</sup>

As the Tantras took hold in Buddhist communities through Central, East and Southeast Asia, they accommodated as skilful and expedient means the standard tools of kingship such as armies, wealth and diplomacy and reinforced them with its claims to magical and supernatural powers. The dramatic success of the Buddhists in Tang China, which Jayavarman VII presumably well knew, offers probably the clearest account, because so richly documented, of how Buddhism made this accommodation with the military and political. Davidson uses 'Esoteric Buddhism' (Chinese: *mi chiao*) as a third synonym for Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhism,<sup>362</sup> though many writers reserve the term 'Esoteric' for the Vajrayāna of East Asia, because the word 'Tantra' was not used in China, probably as the result of a break in transmission of Indian Tantric texts to China in the early eighth century.<sup>363</sup>

Vajrayāna was adopted as the regal creed of many states, in many cultures, over several centuries. The profound recycling of the ancient faith of meditation, detachment and non-violence, which made this possible, took place in Indian monasteries in the seventh and eighth centuries. Davidson's research presents this as the Buddhists' survival response to the brutal disruptions of feudal India following the collapse of the Gupta empire.

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<sup>361</sup> Davidson (2002:115)

<sup>362</sup> Davidson (2002:367n2)

<sup>363</sup> Dalton (2005:117n8)

The key to the recycling of Buddhist concepts in the Tantras was the legitimisation of Buddhahood as a personal goal. Williams distinguishes between the Mantranāya of the Mahāyāna being a ‘cause-path’, addressing over many lifetimes the causes (*hetu*) that trap beings in the cycle of saṃsāra, and the Vajrayāna being a ‘result-path’ that sees itself as efficacious in attaining Buddhahood in one lifetime.<sup>364</sup> Whereas the Mahāyānist took the Bodhisattva path of three incalculable aeons for addressing the causes (*hetu*) in repeated lives, the Vajrayānist addressed the Buddha potential within his body and aimed for the result (*phala*) of awakening to a supreme perception of a vast and radiant world through initiations and visualizations. The earlier Mantranāya mode, propagated only through secret transmissions between master and pupil in the monasteries, adhered to the slower path to perfection, achieved through cultivating the six or 10 Bodhisattva perfections – sometimes called the ‘Pāramitāyāna’. On the way to gradually reaching the highest realisations through many lives, adepts acquired growing powers over, for example, health, the weather and opponents. The dramatic acceleration brought by the later Vajrayāna came from a decisive move to a ‘result-path’ (*phalayāna*) that saw itself as capable of attaining Buddhahood in one lifetime.<sup>365</sup> Kukai, the ninth century founder of the Shingon Esoteric sect in Japan, describes the accelerated path as ‘obtaining the state of Buddha from this body’.<sup>366</sup> The acceleration was achieved not through scholastic hair-splitting but through empowering rituals, using devices like those first noted by Kamaleswar Bhattacharya in the Khmer Wāt Sithor inscription ([Chapter 1](#)) and through narration of the exploits of such holders of the thunderbolt (*vajra*) as the former *yakṣa*, turned Bodhisattva, Vajrapāṇi. The emphasis on cosmic power and rapid access to it, soon gave Buddhism a radically new allure. A new Buddhist pantheon deserted the monk’s cloth and was robed and armed like kings; while Buddhist kings sought apotheosis. According to Davidson’s research into the Tantric movement in India, this was the Buddhist survival strategy in the face of a revived Hinduism, whose pan-Indic deities enjoyed similar powers. Davidson sees the development of the vehicle of the Tantras

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<sup>364</sup> Williams (2000:220)

<sup>365</sup> Williams (2000:220)

<sup>366</sup> Ryujun Tajima (1959:249) *Les deux grands mandalas et la doctrine de l’esoterisme Shingon* Maison Franco-Japonaise, Tokyo

as a response to the collapse of the golden age of the Gupta empire in India and the decline of the social coalitions of the populations long-settled under early Buddhism. The monasteries had no choice but to engage their ancient, contemplative, non-violent creed in new politico-military strategies that would gain access to the courts and patronage of belligerent feudal barons.<sup>367</sup>

According to Davidson, the recycling of Buddhism was accomplished in three environments: (1) in secret rites conceived in the orthodoxy of old monasteries, which enjoyed degrees of economic and political independence but had to explore new ways of preserving their status; (2) amid the individual heterodoxy and creativity of forest monks; and (3) at the courts of feudal rulers, who sought the legitimization of realpolitik in the ministrations of Śaiva ascetics or Tantric Buddhists. The Hindu and Buddhist vehicles both claimed the magical powers and metaphysical assurances capable of underpinning feudal military conquest. The Buddhists, driven out of their old social coalitions by the fragmentation of post-Gupta India,<sup>368</sup> began developing rituals with bearing on military and political affairs.<sup>369</sup> Davidson identifies Buddhaghūya as the pre-eminent exegete of the second half of the eighth century, when the first, crucial historical interactions with the political world occurred to test the new Tantric, politicised canon.<sup>370</sup> Although the authors of the new canon suppressed their identities and used the traditional Mahāyāna ploy of identifying their works as original 'Buddha-word', Buddhaghūya is attributed, in the hagiographies preserved in the annals of the Tibetan Nyingma sect, with the authorship of the seminal texts – the *sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* (*STTS*), the *sarvadurgatipariśodhana* (*SDPS*),

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<sup>367</sup> Davidson (2002:163)

<sup>368</sup> '...from the seventh century forward...India fragmented politically and saw the rise of regional centres in a manner unprecedented and unexpected after the stable gravity of the Imperial Guptas and the Vākātakas (c.320-550 C.E.). Pressed by military adventurism, populations moved across the subcontinent, while Buddhist coalitions sustained crippling setbacks in various parts of South Asia...[E]soteric Buddhism is a direct Buddhist response to the feudalization of Indian society in the early medieval period, a response that involves the sacralization of much of that period's social world...the monk, or yogin, in the esoteric system configures his practice through the metaphor of becoming the overlord of a maṇḍala of vassals, and issues of scripture, language, and community reflect the political and social models employed in the surrounding feudal society.' Davidson (2002:2)

<sup>369</sup> Davidson (2002:121)

<sup>370</sup> Davidson singles out Buddhaghūya's 'ability to attract and decline an invitation from the most powerful Buddhist ruler of the eighth century, Trisong Detsen of Tibet, [as] a testament to his institutional aura.' Davidson (2002:154)

*vairocanābhīśambodhi*, the *yogāvatāra*, the *dhyānottara* and *subāhupariṣcch*.<sup>371</sup> Other individuals who emerge from medieval Indian authorial obscurity include Śākyamitra, who may have belonged to the Buddha's own Śākya clan, and who introduced his famous and enormous 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century commentary on the *STTS* with a brief and rare autobiographical statement. Both men were important to the Buddhists of Cambodia, for the works of both were brought into the country during a revival in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The import of their texts is specified in the Wàt Sithor inscription which names the *STTS* and Śākyamitra's commentary. (See Chapter 3.2.1)

### **Jayavarman VII's state Buddhism**

This thesis claims that Jayavarman VII, a soldier, a Buddhist and the last and greatest empire-builder of the ancient Khmer state, who was nurtured to uphold a mixture of Buddhist, Brahmanical and local beliefs, modelled a radical new political strategy on the implementation of Cambodia's first regal Buddhist creed in a state fragmented (not unlike feudal, post-Gupta India), by internal strife and incursions by neighbours. Jayavarman's state Buddhism was designed to supersede the centuries-old state Śaivism and legitimize his usurpation. There are signs that this unprecedented imposition of a supreme Buddhist pantheon over a 'maṇḍala of vassals' made up of a mix of Hindu and chthonic gods, was achieved at the cost of a major propagandist effort through large-scale consecrations to Buddhist deities, that were at the same time a demonstration of loyalty to the regime – much as was done in the imposition of 'state protection' Esoteric Buddhism in eighth century Tang China.

In China the Tantric Indian masters, who became the first mandarins, carried out mass consecrations to Esoteric deities for courtiers and generals at lengthy ceremonies where they were lodged and fed for days at the expense of the emperor. Jayavarman's move to assert his own creed as supreme over the Śaivism of the long-entrenched Brahmanical aristocracy seems to have entailed a blend of conviction, contingency and adventurism. He inherited a

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<sup>371</sup> Davidson (2002:158)



mix of religious traditions and innovated with a radical new balance of power among them that seems designed to give him ultimate control. In other words his syncretism should be seen as based in realpolitik, rather than any spirit of ecumenism. Davidson makes a similar observation about syncretic forms in feudal India:

...the patronage of many kings towards multiple religious traditions could be viewed in part as an attempt to keep them all beholden to the ruler – and divided from one another – rather than a dedicated catholicity among Indian monarchs.<sup>372</sup>

For at least five centuries before Jayavarman's day, northern Buddhists had been exploring magical powers for achieving desired states of detachment from and transcendence over the phenomenal world, which soon found application in achieving ascendance in the temporal sphere of men, armies and kings. If we think of the Śaiva Tantras and Buddhist Tantras as the medieval equivalent of nuclear weapons, we get a rough idea of why these empowering rituals, devised in the university-monasteries and drawing on *siddha* experience in the forests, spread so far and so fast. Additionally, the Buddhist Tantras introduced a new violent narrative mode – exemplified in Vajrapāṇi's extended duel with Śiva in the *STTS*.<sup>373</sup> The new narrative mode was complemented in the Tantric Buddhists' realigning the long tradition of contemplation into new political and military applications in the world of power politics by the elaboration of power hierarchies in maṇḍalas. This, Davidson speculates, was done by observing the formal interactions of medieval Indian kings and their vassals.<sup>374</sup> By the late eighth century Tantric techniques were proliferating in India and were reaching China, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. The dual motivation underpinning this whole shift in Buddhism was the

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<sup>372</sup> Davidson (2002:192)

<sup>373</sup> '[T]he narrative use of violence in the context of Buddhist institutions allowed institutional esotericism to compete with Śaivism, to appeal to the worst instincts of the warlords of the medieval period and yet to delimit the nature of approved violence, in some ways approaching the description of a 'just war' found within Aquinas.' Davidson (2002:152)

<sup>374</sup> 'Accordingly, Buddhists derived their maṇḍala forms and functions, not so much from the theoretical treatises of Indian polity as from their immediate observation at the disposition and execution of realpolitik in their environment. They did not take recourse to the ideology of the *Arthaśāstra* and analogous literature. Instead they obtained this vision of reality by observing the actual relationship of overlords and their peripheral states, which incited this vision of reality. Indeed, the Buddhist maṇḍala is a classic analysis of the system of sāmanta feudalism in early medieval India, all sufficiently sanctified by the monastic community.' Davidson (2002:139)

obtention of patronage from worldly powers, and the imminent attainment of Buddhahood.<sup>375</sup>

### **Esoteric Buddhism in Tang China**

Certainly by the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the propagators of Vajrayāna could draw on a rich experience of engagement in politics across a large number of states. David Snellgrove, who was among the first scholars to point to the political importance of the Buddhist Tantras, observes: 'Only in the tantras do we learn of new practices, which were able to turn the notion of kingship to practical account...The aspirant seems to desire as much worldly success as buddhahood, and thus it was brahmanical ritual that most easily provided the substance of the actual ceremonial.'<sup>376</sup> Charles Orzech's analysis of the rise of Esoteric Buddhism in China reaches the conclusion that '...their teachings were shaped both by their particular religious ideologies and by imperial needs. Chinese Esoteric Buddhism in the eighth century was driven by political utility.'<sup>377</sup> In the rich literature of the official biographies, last testaments and manifold translations of China's Indian Esoteric Buddhist patriarchs Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra, it becomes clear that many proposals and selections from the canon for translation were coloured by diplomacy and political astuteness, all in the service of the greater Buddhist cause of these multi-talented men. Strickmann sees the transformations offered by Esoteric Buddhism as the essential attraction of the rituals of Tantrism for Asian royalty.<sup>378</sup> Eighth century Tang emperor Tai-tsung had a hundred monks stay in his palace chanting the *Scripture for Human kings*

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<sup>375</sup> Williams (2000:194)

<sup>376</sup> Snellgrove, D (1959:204-5) 'The notion of divine kingship in Tantric Buddhism' *The Sacral Kingship: contributions to the central theme of the VIII<sup>th</sup> international congress for the history of religions* vol. IV: E.J. Brill, Leiden

<sup>377</sup> Charles D. Orzech (1998:138) *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for Humane Kings in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism* Pennsylvania State University Press

<sup>378</sup> 'All Chinese translations received official patronage and the principal tantric specialists were in direct contact with the emperors...sovereigns occasionally retired to Shingon or Tendai monasteries, abbots could be princes of the blood and certain Shingon and Tendai establishments still maintain close ties with the imperial family today. ..Royal participation in tantric ritual is a theme embedded in all the literature, and it is not by accident that the central mystery of Tantrism, consecration, was modelled on the ancient Indian ritual of royal investiture. This not only transformed monks into tantric kings, but also kings into tantric masters.' Strickmann 1996:40

whenever an enemy invaded, and a copy of the scripture was carried a hundred paces ahead of the emperor when he was on the street.<sup>379</sup>

One of the results of pursuing the political potential of Buddhism was the development of a variety of forms of what the Chinese called *chen-kuo* or 'state protection' Buddhism, which had considerable influence in China, Korea and Japan in the eighth and ninth centuries. The protection ranged from seasonal rain rituals and daily *homa* (fire) rites for 'averting disasters, subjugation, and joy', to performing sections of the Tantras, or making a new translation, in order to ward off hostile armies or put down rebellions.<sup>380</sup>

The creator and great exponent of *Mi-chiao* (secret doctrine) Buddhism in China – where Esoteric rituals were eventually performed as vast state ceremonies in grand pavilions erected in monasteries– was Amoghavajra (known as *Pu-k'ung* in Chinese), who rose to be a supreme mandarin at the Tang court.<sup>381</sup>

Amoghavajra himself rose in the official hierarchy, intervened in military and cosmic crises, and turned himself into a living example of the tantric union of *prajñā* (wisdom) and *upāya* (skilful means). Amoghavajra and his contemporaries were both deeply spiritual and actively engaged in human affairs, and they helped to mold tantric

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<sup>379</sup> Chou Yi-liang (1945:296n61) 'Tantrism in China' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 8 Cambridge Mass.

<sup>380</sup> See Orzech's account of the Esoteric turn of the mid-T'ang court in the eighth century in (1998:135-146) *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for Humane Kings in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism* Pennsylvania State University Press

<sup>381</sup> Before sailing for Sri Lanka in 741 to collect more Tantras for translation, following the death of his master Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra was asked by the military Governor-General of the southern Nan-hai-Chün district to conduct a mass *abhiṣeka*. 'In the Fa-hsing Temple he converted in succession hundreds, thousands, and myriads of people.' Chou (1945:241-332) Chao Ch'ien's biography of Amoghavajra, translated by Raffaello Orlando (1981:144) *A study of Chinese documents concerning the life of the tantric Buddhist patriarch Amoghavajra (A.D. 705-774)* Princeton, recounts: 'In the 13<sup>th</sup> year [754 A.D.], he [Amoghavajra] arrived at Wu-wei and stayed at the K'ai-yuan monastery. The military governor-general and his subordinates down to the last soul all received *abhiṣeka*. A mob of several thousand gentry and commoners alike all ascended the ordination platform, and along with the clerical disciple Han-kuang, were instructed in the method of the Five Divisions.' 'In the third year of Ta-li [768], the master [Amoghavajra] held a ceremony at the [Ta-] hsing-shan monastery. He was given [by the emperor] 12 quilts of embroidered brocade and 32 embroidered gauze banners, the value of which was 10 million cash. In addition, he was given enough provisions to permit the crowd to remain at the ceremony for 14 days. The 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.' (Orlando 1981: 147)

Buddhism into a system of belief that promised spiritual fulfilment as well as political harmony.<sup>382</sup>

After being credited with a major role (through ritual invocations as well as passing intelligence on the rebels from his Ta Hsing-shan monastery in the occupied capital Ch'ang-an) in the suppression the An Lu-shan rebellion in 756, Amoghavajra was authorised to consecrate Emperor Su-tsung (r.756-62) as *cakravartin* and became an eminent advisor to the imperial family. Under Emperor Tai-tsung (r.762-79) he was allowed to build an altar for four Esoteric consecrations a year 'for the benefit of the empire'. Later he was authorised to construct a chapel for *homa* and *abhiṣeka* in the inner palace that was manned by 100 state-supported monks who were accorded the privilege of arriving and departing on horseback.<sup>383</sup> From this base Amoghavajra deployed the core, politically-oriented rituals which then became known as *Mi-chiao*.<sup>384</sup> For more than 30 years after he first achieved prominence at the Tang court, he continuously emphasized the role of Buddhism in protecting the state and of the emperor as exercising 'the mandate of the Buddha'.<sup>385</sup> Orzech calls him 'the most powerful Buddhist cleric in the history of China ... [who] developed a new paradigm of religious polity for Esoteric Buddhism.'<sup>386</sup>

Amoghavajra's stellar career advance from the status of tolerated foreign scholar under a kind of monastery-arrest<sup>387</sup>, to being ennobled as a strategic state asset was the direct model for the ninth century monk Kūkai's introduction of Esoteric Buddhism as Shingon (*mantra*) Buddhism into Japan. And Amoghavajra's success may still have been the model for 10<sup>th</sup> century Khmer guru Kīrtipaṇḍita, who two centuries after Amoghavajra, also set up

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<sup>382</sup> Berger 1994:93

<sup>383</sup> Weinstein, Stanley (1987:78) *Buddhism under the T'ang* Cambridge

<sup>384</sup> In an incident reminiscent of the Silk Road battle a century earlier, when Tibetan troops threatened the T'ang capital in 765, two carts containing the *Scripture for Humane Kings* were hauled to Ximing temple and Amoghavajra was commanded to give a discourse on it, which the emperor attended. When the Tibetans withdrew Amoghavajra was ordered to write a new recension with a preface by the emperor. (Berger 1994:92)

<sup>385</sup> Weinstein 1987:82, who cites preambles to his translations of Tantras such as 'The Mahāyāna scriptures I have translated will be of benefit to the state and eliminate disasters.'

<sup>386</sup> Orzdech 1998:147

<sup>387</sup> 'The great ācāryas of the eighth century were not free to do as they pleased. On arrival at the court they were placed under house arrest as "guests" in government monasteries where they could be watched and interrogated. Once accepted they were put to work in the service of the state with teams of translators, rendering texts and performing rituals to augment state policy, to ensure seasonable rain, to repel invasion, to put down uprisings, and to help promote the well-being of the imperial family and its ancestors.' (Orzdech 1998:138)

facilities for daily *homa* rituals in king Jayavarman V's palace in Angkor and also brought the *STTS* from abroad.

## Second wave Vajrayāna

The harnessing of the fierce gods and goddesses of the Śaiva Tantras and Vajrayāna to political and military purposes appears to have made a significant contribution to the mushrooming of Tantric cults from the eighth century. Geoffrey Samuel, for example, sees this as a driving force in the spread of Tantrism throughout South and Southeast Asia:

In the course of this transformation the deities who formed the basis of civic and state religion in earlier periods, known to us as *yakṣas*, *nāgas* and the like were replaced as protectors of cities and states by the deities we now generally find in those roles: fierce goddesses and gods, often explicitly regarded as transforms of Durga, Kālī or Śiva, and with close affinities to the central deities of both Śaiva Tantra and Vajrayāna... Evidence increasingly suggests that a central driving force behind this transformation was the use of Tantric ritual for political and military purposes. Much of the growth of what we now refer to as Tantra, both in its Śaivite and Buddhist forms, throughout South and Southeast Asia, was related to such uses. Rulers patronised Tantric priests and established communities and colleges of Tantric ritualists, because they saw these specialists in Tantric power as an important dimension of the power of the state.<sup>388</sup>

In part the Vajrayāna's success with kings and emperors was indebted to an interchange with Brahmanical consecration practices. Already in the early Mahāyāna, the regal dress of the Bodhisattvas had been a significant departure from the renunciatory, meditative ideal of the *arhat* (saint) of early Buddhism. The consecrations of the later Tantric rituals, where the texts sometimes explicitly favour the induction of the sons and daughters of kings, went with moves towards defining divine kingship. David Snellgrove, the translator of the *hevajra-tantra*, observes: 'it is only in tantric practice that one may identify a notion of kingship which is in any sense sacral or divine.'<sup>389</sup> Snellgrove drew attention to how, in the Tantras, the altruistic goal of the Bodhisattva of the Mahāyāna was profoundly altered by contact with the Vajrayāna's promise of magical powers through metamorphosis in meditation:

The higher beings [Bodhisattvas], who were worshipped, were often conceived [in the Mahāyāna] in regal terms, but there was little change in the nature of the practices of the monks themselves. Only in the Tantras do we learn of practices, which were able

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<sup>388</sup> Samuel, G. (2003:1) 'Ritual Technologies and the State: The Mandala-Form Buddhist Temples of Bangladesh'; a paper presented to the 5<sup>th</sup> international congress on Bengal Art, Dhaka and Mainmati February 2003.

<sup>389</sup> Snellgrove (1959) 'The notion of divine kingship in Tantric Buddhism' in *Studies in the history of religions IV: The Sacral Kingship* pp. 204-18 Brill, Leiden.

to turn the notion of kingship to practical account... The benevolent activity of the *bodhisattva* became fused with the notion of magical power, and as this power was but a matter for 'self experiment' (*svasmvedya*), it was no longer necessary to pursue the goal through myriad lives.<sup>390</sup>

Williams also links the cultivating of an internal, esoteric Buddha body with the acquisition of exoteric magical powers.<sup>391</sup>

The Vajrayāna's second wave spread outside India in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries when the northern Indian monasteries had developed the *yoginī* or *anuttara-yoga* Tantras. These were instrumental, for example, in Atiśa's stabilising the second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. The *yoginī* Tantras brought a shift in the Buddhist pantheon to Cakrasaṃvara, Vajravarahi and Amoghapaśa in the Buddhist cave art of the Tangut state of His-hsia but only reached China proper, via Tibet, under the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Tangut emperor Renzong appointed Tibetan Tsang Sopa Imperial Preceptor in 1159 and in Berger's view 'set a pattern of royal patronage of the Tibetan church that would be emulated by both the Mongols and the Manchus as they set up their China-based empires.'<sup>392</sup> A century later in 1258 Tibetan lama Phags-pa, nephew of Sakya Paṇḍita, head of the Sakya order and the most renowned Tibetan monk, defeated the Taoists in a Lhasa-style debate in Kaiping, which was actively adjudicated by Khubilai Khan.<sup>393</sup> The Taoists were punished and 237 temples were handed back to the Buddhists when Phags-pa became Khubilai's spiritual advisor and consecrated the emperor as cakravartin under Mahākāla and Hevajra in 1260.<sup>394</sup> Khubilai and Phags-pa

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<sup>390</sup> Snellgrove 1959:204. 'The aspirant seems to desire as much worldly success as buddhahood, and thus it was Brahmanical ritual that most easily provided the substance of the actual ceremonial.' (Snellgrove 1959:205) Snellgrove interestingly suggests this political/spiritual combination explains the success of the *vitarka* (teaching) Buddha, which he considered evolved into Vairocana and eventually the Ādi-Buddha. (ibid. p.210)

<sup>391</sup> 'In Tantric practice from the beginning – after necessary initiation, for Tantric Buddhism is strictly esoteric – the practitioner tries to see himself as the appropriate Buddha and the world as a divine, magical realm. Gradually this becomes more real; gradually the meditator brings into play a subtle physiology, a subtle (astral?) body usually dormant ...in the gross material body. This subtle body (owing something, I suspect, to ancient Indian medical theories) really becomes a divine body, it is transmuted into that of a Buddha. Gradually the hold of the gross world of inherently existing separate objects is loosened, and the meditator develops an ability to transform the world, to perform miracles.' Williams (1989:186)

<sup>392</sup> Berger 1994:103

<sup>393</sup> Rossabi, Morris (1988:42) *Khubilai Khan: his life and times* University of California Press, Berkeley

<sup>394</sup> P.H. Pott published a photograph of a spectacular series of life-size tantric bronzes which he speculated may have been commissioned for Khubilai's Hevajra consecration. He

formed an alliance sealed by Phags-pa being granted the title of Kuo-shih (State Preceptor) in 1260 and in his being eventually granted jurisdiction over Tibet.<sup>395</sup> After Buddhism was revived in Mongolia, the Mongols transferred the Sino-Tibetan tradition to their eastern neighbours, the Manchus, with the gift of the bronze Mahākāla cast for Khubilai's consecration and the influence of the Tibetan Vajrayāna consequently survived throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties, especially in the late flowering of Sino-Tibetan art under the Qing Qianlong emperor.<sup>396</sup>

Rob Linrothe's research identifies Hevajra icons were a key late part of the expanded use of Tantrism in royal cults:

The timing of the spread of Hevajra is worth noting. Surviving images from eastern India date to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Khmer and Thai examples are nearly coeval, dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tibetan images survive from at least the 13<sup>th</sup> to the present...It appears that despite the earlier origin of the texts and the ideas behind the Hevajra imagery, they were not influential enough to generate a lasting impact until the late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century. By that time, however, the ideas and images quickly flowed in eastern, southern and northern directions. Islam alone proved an impenetrable barrier.<sup>397</sup>

In the Khmer empire the first bronze icons of Hevajra appeared in the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Phimai, where the northern Mahādhara dynasty that usurped power in 1080 built a politico-religious powerbase. They reappeared some 120 years later in the late Bāyon style in Angkor in bronze and then in stone, including a lintel still standing in Bantéay Chmār temple and a three-metre stone icon, the bust of which is now in New York's Metropolitan Museum. The Metropolitan curator sees the large stone icon as part of Angkor's protection.<sup>398</sup>

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suggested that the final stage of the ceremony, when the initiate has to consubstantiate with Hevajra and worship himself as the deity, the emperor with consort may have entered a mandala formed by the giant bronzes which represent many of the animals Hevajra holds in skull cups (but here also including a man) as mounts for gods in yab-yum with their consorts. (P.H. Pott 1966:69-70 *Yoga and Yantra* trans. R. Needham Nijhoff, the Hague)

<sup>395</sup> Rossabi 1988:40, 119

<sup>396</sup> 'It was the Qianlong emperor, more than any other ruler of China, who realized the vast and multifaceted potential that tantric Buddhism held for his family and his empire. Building on a well-established legacy of imperial support for the Tibetan church, one that bolstered and legitimized the very foundations of his rule, Qianlong carried his patronage to an extreme, evidenced by the massive outpouring of art from his imperial workshops and by his grand, often slavishly literal, Tibetan-style architectural projects...It is both tragic and ironic that in modern times the Chinese, while recognizing the importance of Tibet to their own physical defence, have failed to remember the role that tantric Buddhism and ultimately the Buddhism of Tibet played for a millennium in protecting the Chinese nation.' Berger 1994:118

<sup>397</sup> Linrothe 1999:274

<sup>398</sup> 'Tantric or Esoteric Buddhism, so clearly evident at Phimai, became increasingly important during Jayavarman's reign and Hevajra, one of the Tantric tutelary or "high-patron" deities (in

Khubilai Khan and Jayavarman VII probably both underwent consecration to Hevajra in the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Repeated Tantric experiences of this kind were designed to endow the king and his country with god-like, magical powers. In his introduction to the text of the great *niṣpannayogāvalī* collection of Tantric maṇḍalas, Benyatosh Bhattacharyya offers this account of how meditation centred on the cosmic diagrams of deities and inculcated superhuman powers.<sup>399</sup> We can be certain that Jayavarman VII was familiar with such experiences. The Prasat Chrung Southwest inscription (K.288) already mentioned describes him as ‘firm in his knowledge of the magical formulas’ (*dhruvam mantravidām*) and then shows he had acquired the occult skills to lead what appears to be a public Tantric ritual ([Chapter 2.7.9.1](#)):

After having brought a blazing flame to the earth and after spreading a white canopy as brilliant as the moon, this lord of the world filled it with sages and proceeded himself to perform the mantra.<sup>400</sup>

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Tibetan Buddhism classified as a *Yi dam*) was elevated to a new and powerful position. The reason for this adjustment in the religious emphasis of the court is convincingly explained by Giteau... The art of Angkor Thom must be understood in terms of Jayavarman VII’s revised conception of religious protection of the kingdom – one which would ensure ‘the permanent survival of his capital and of Angkorian civilization.’ Wolfgang Felten and Martin Lerner 1989:67 *Thai and Cambodian sculpture* Wilson, New York

<sup>399</sup> ‘The deities appear before [the initiate’s] mind’s eye in bright, effulgent gorgeous and divine beauty in form, dress and ornament. Violent deities in like manner appear in *Bodhicitta* in the most violent shape conceivable in an awe-inspiring form with dishevelled hair, protruding eyes, bared fangs, bone ornaments skulls and severed heads. These beings are known as deities, and once visualized in a regular course of meditation, never leave the ascetic but become one with him. The deities become instrumental in bestowing on the ascetic more and more psychic, supernormal powers.’ Bhattacharyya, B (1949:15)

*Niṣpannayogāvalī*

<sup>400</sup> *IC IV* (1952:212) K.288 B 17, 18



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