

## BUDDHA-YOGA-ŚIVA HYBRIDITY AMONG THE OLD KHMER AND SIAMESE

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ASCETIC-ARTS RESEARCH AND CURATION

### In Search of a Method

This essay explores some cultural fusions, infusions and confusions among the Old Khmer and Siamese kingdoms, two geographically contiguous neighbors in the Lower Mekong River Basin—a region remarkably rich in enigma but regrettably shrouded in disregard. This essay furthermore aims to provide an array of access tools that would at once explain and counterpoise the prevailing neglect within “etic” colonial erudition for “emic” indigenous methodologies that are basic to the subjects that it seeks to uncover. We place great store on the cultural distillations that largely stem from Vedic India beginning as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE at Funan (or Īśānapura) in the Mekong Delta, a Brāhmanicized pre-Angkorian realm whose social organization stretched westward from the coast of southern Vietnam to the Andaman Sea and present-day Yangon. We lay foundations for the medieval period and offer hints to how the mighty neighbors, Angkor and Siam, expressed their thirsts for mixed elaboration invited by the process of transculturation. The degree of exuberance for combining seemingly opposing doctrinal, ritual and visual content was striking among the early Khmer and old Siamese. The late eighth-century conflation of Śiva with the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and the subsequent adaption of Lokeśvara are eminent examples of elements blending to produce a novel hybrid strain. Inherent methodology furthermore attempts to attest a very rare *triveṇī saṅgam* or “three-stream-confluence” of Śaiva, Yoga and Bauddha currents reflecting an immersive triadic aspiration with feminine component intermedially layered. The “grafting” metaphor is willfully employed. This takes for its rootstock a re-elaboration of the canonical Buddha as symbolically imbued by the Nāga Mucilinda. In no other manner, this paper asserts, is Southeast Asia’s yogic heritage expressed more profoundly than through the numinous fourteenth-century Angkorian depiction of the fabled Kuṇḍalinī Buddha.

Further, our process traces how imported yoga-techné achieves refinement through gracile handling, and how elegance ensues and is rapidly exchanged between bordering and often warring territories. Still, our focus shall not be solely trained on the striking mélanges of natural selection. Neither shall we place our whole concern on the discontinuities, jarring breaches and visceral purges that arose among these seemingly cognate realms. Alternatively, we comb for the presence of native genii who have stood to the pressures of globalization and emerge unflapped midst a new social architecture, breathing self-generated mutant proofs. In a theoretic mood, we dare to gain awareness of their enigmatic character, charm and utility by mapping their intrinsic contiguity and trade. Yogic germinations are especially prized, and by utilizing

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broad eclectic tools with complete somaesthetic-cum-ethnographic license we assess the modulation and diffusions of these primitive forms preserved in contemporary South, Southeast and Far-East Asian soteriological transmissions. In cultural study and artistic practice, equally our procedure acquiesces to an inadvertent naturalistic color-field tendency whose outcomes exemplify not the expression of the individual or its cult but serve the collaborative documentation, curation and advancement of ascetic-arts knowledge.

Speaking less majestically, we aim to differentiate extant relics, be they primitive, indigenous or adventitious to Angkorian, Sukhothai and Ayutthayan forms and marvel over which, if any at all, may strike a telling chord with contemporary ascetic-arts manifestations. Legendary gurus play a part here as well, both as markers and vectors of lineage conduction spanning millennia-long lines of allegiances to kings, royal teachers, and wandering ascetics reroute to the āśramas of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu (1906-1993) and Saint Guru Chot (1900–1988).

### **The Aim of Post-Structuralist Research Theory**

Some comments on the state of the academic field are in order. For more than a century scholars have lengthily deliberated, debated and meticulously detailed the munificence and divine affiliation of Cambodian kings: what religion, what sect, and what god did they worship? Cambodian monarchs worshipped themselves.

Regarding methodology, we cautiously express our area of attention as ascetic-arts research methodology with strong infiltrative cum ethnographic data-acquisitional bias. Our work is rigorously non-institutional aside from the fact that the varieties of South, Southeast and Far-East Asian ascetic-arts traditions we closely observe are invariably institutional in and of themselves. Part of our discipline throughout this chapter is to avoid and supplant the habitual, obsessive and indeed misconceived, unbeautiful and unhelpful nineteenth-century neologisms “Buddhist” and “Buddhism” - to replace these, we say, with the far more penetrating emic, endemic and indeed yet operant single appellation “Bauddha.” This should not increase or take away anything.

We are very impressed and indebted to the work of Oxford professor Alexis Sanderson, likely the world’s top authority on Śaiva-tantra. In his 2003 work “The Śaiva Religion among the Khmers (Part I) (349-462),” Sanderson demonstrates profound erudition in the history of Indian tantric traditions and great innovation in applying this knowledge to the Greater Overseas India theater. Did he drop his plans to write Part Two and publish instead “The Śiva Age” (2009) with its chapter devoted to Southeast Asia? He has contributed masterfully to Old Khmer studies and in charting the history of Śaiva influence on ritual performance right across to Far East Asia (2003, 2009). However, through prodigious scrutiny of source materials and its analytic overlay to overseas developments, could it be that Sanderson has gone too far and distorted the scene by foregrounding exogenous-precursory legacies and staging them as if they were universal yardsticks for everything that popped up in mainland Indo-China, the Malaya peninsula, and the southerly and easterly archipelagic spheres? The intricate approach of the Metropolitan Museum of Art curator John Guy (*Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Early Southeast Asia*, 2014)<sup>2</sup> is a useful contrast to Sanderson’s approach, especially for its stunning but delicate handling of source materials provided to the project by a billionaire list of honored trustees; and against such developments the Oxford philologist stands determined to publish his

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<sup>2</sup> See particularly Guy’s, “Introducing Southeast Asia,” 2014, 3-13

entire database. Another leading scholar in our field of discussion is Professor Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice* (2005). Like high spar galleons, their works loom large and share a distinctive frontline command and over-generalization that reflect increasingly out of hand trends towards highly contorted textual presentation in a drive to compact divergent data into tapering confines, and that through micro-embellishment endeavor to maintain a semblance of consensual schematic uniformity.<sup>3</sup>

Still, every branch of academic study takes for granted its specialized set of protocols for the formalization of textual products. From a reading of Hayden White's "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" (1978), we extrapolate the following. 'To a large degree the historian's practice consists in measured manipulation of the meanings of events by stressing certain elements and attributes as set within chronologies traditionally contrived and maintained.' The discipline of history has been picked on surely, and, similar to the fields of anthropology, Buddhism and increasingly Yoga, has been critically deterred, commandeered and weaponized.<sup>4</sup>

### **Has scholarship been overly obsequious to Buddhism?**

Legend avers that a fifth or sixth-century CE Indian ascetic called Bodhidharma delivered a variety of *dhyāna-yoga* to spiritual communities in southern China. This *sadhu-rṣi* hybrid must have gone a-sailing from the Chola port of Kāñcipuram, a keel full of silks and aromatic cargoes. You can almost see him poised at the helm, Tumburu of a well-built Pallavan ship, his four *bhaginīs* on the deck catching rays and sails billowed full by the monsoon trade winds heading for the entrepôts of Java and beyond - then taking on consignments of tropical forest goods: deerskin, sandalwood, camphor, lac, and benzoin resin for production of incense - nutmeg, clove, black peppercorn, deerskins, betel-nut, bird's nest, and a vast assortment of medicinal herbs. Everything stowed for dawn's embarkment, moored to the pilings beneath the quiet moon. The squeaking of her wood as she gently rocks on the shallow inlet waters.

Yet still, and in the light of our ingenious *Brahmin*, would Baba Bodhidharma have conceived himself a "Buddhist"? Really? In the cultural milieu of sixth-century Chola, would the *Mahasvāmin* have accepted rites of passage to 'complete and total self-abnegation' in the strained and institutionalized sense of the Bauddha—or rather to a wider, unaffiliated sense of a sovereign *saṃnyāsa* with accommodating spatial free-state *āśrama*? For we know that the Bauddha once flourished amidst the Pallava, prevailing over Jaina, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava in the open market of imperial patronage. Therefore, again: if *saṃnyāsin* culture was expressly marked by its full repudiation of sectarian bonds, then how could this subversive have upheld himself a "Buddhist", or was it Buddhism precisely that drove him out to sea?

It is relevant to note that in modern Siam the Indic term *dhyāna - jhāna or jhan* - is pronounced as *chan*. When the *senso stricto* yogic Chan School surfaced in China we can notice how lithe juicy shoots were inserted, grafted and interspersed with sound old native cultivars on proto-stock of unknown provenance. Groups of cross-values and tendencies budded, retained quite a lot of the old road notes and pushed out flowers that had never been seen. A new sort of Structuralist paideia thus blossomed whose shedding petals in the dappled foreground helped to elucidate the highly influential hermeneutic ploy of "forgetting words after getting meaning."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> After Vickery, "Cambodia and Its Neighbors in the 15th Century," 2004, 4.

<sup>4</sup> See David Price, *Weaponizing Anthropology*, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Pan Da'an. "Tracing the Traceless Antelope," 1996: 36-66.

Similarly the aim of post-Structuralist theory is, among other things, unveiling the strength of taxonomies, procedures and ministrations. Take the methodologies of *śraddha* and *bhakti* (faithfulness, faith) where faithfulness *itself* commands pre-eminence, not the hypostatized objects themselves as envisioned in the minds and hearts of the faithful. Do all faith-organizing agents necessarily share an analogous organizing impetus, or router, irrespective to the stereotyped object of faith? This is faith as the alpha and omega of the path that starts and ends with *bhakti* possession.

How is this structured process to be studied? Why are hypostatized shells only studied - the religious, sectarian and cultic links? What is religious study really? What is faith, the process of faith, and its very possession? What is its telos? To what extent may *śraddhāvimukta* (release by faith) be viewed as a 'faith-structure' in-and-of-itself, completely unaffected by fixedness? Is analogous impedance mirrored through *mokṣa-mārga*? Is the path to be cherished any less than the goal? These experimental tiles of inquiry.

In other words, why are we driven to unnaturally isolate the entire registry of ancient Indic ascetic-arts customs? Our obsessive dependence on the "-ism" still reveals this. To ask the same question, can a scholar get *darśan* without having *darśan*? Is "Buddh(a)-ism" the path of the *srotāpanna* or "the path to the path" of the *srotāpanna*? Is it possible for normative "ism-ized" ingredients preserved in the Lower Mekong Basin, the broader Indo-Chinese region connected to the southwest sweep of Malaya, Nusantara and les îles de la Sonde to be studied in a state of 'isolation without consideration of the socio-ideological ecologies through which they are ritually and obsessively directed via normative paideia' (confer Peter Skilling 2007, 182)? Why have our cultural screens been disabled to detect interpenetrating civilizing forces? Because essentialization runs the risk of "literality," expecting words and everything else to conform to the meanings we consensually consigned them, hence construing all implicitness devoid of normativity?

Carefully polishing the shell of Oral Paideia is enough to understand that in an Asian context, we humiliate, denude, and expose ourselves to the accusations of being Orientalist tools. Is it worth it?

### **In the Realm of Disruptive Patternization<sup>6</sup>**

In search of a method, then, how do we precede though the realm of disruptive patternization? By going first with, then against the breath as a consequential practice that should under no circumstance ever condescend to the quirks of leisure time? (How much less to the lure of public pandering?) Was it by the transubstantiation of aesthetic quandary as owning to a genus of poetical-yoga where for all intents and purposes the prima materia undergoes initial sieving procedures through native apparati, and never by those arriving on ships?

How to describe such acute exogenous localization processes that are marked by their clinical and readied designs for rapid deployment at the crucial fork where pot-holed road of the census taker turns well paved thoroughfare of accredited scholarship that controls the region through its operant blueprints and philanthropic bids to vouchsafe endangered heritage sites whose hitherto yield is put on display in the reconverted palaces of the métropoles? Each with its own implicit treaty of the subjugation of whatever compels it. A plea for her protectorate (the underage girl) as a draft resolution of formal strictures for the preservation and trusteeship of her own

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<sup>6</sup> See Hardy Blechman, *DPM: Disruptive Pattern Material*, 2004.

undervalued and misapprehend good, giving ample demonstration to superior skills of exploration, extraction and refinement in the aptness to amass, reformulate and stabilize pictorial systems that camouflage intention via ardent concern over theoretic vocables, commissioned pamphleteering, human rights abuses, internal security, restoration issues and long-term storage: to square their little play pens and bring them all round to the charts and the charters of authorial displacement, dispatching savvy envoys and toady intermediaries with clear-cut mandates to bring all parties to the talking table with believable schemes for co-opting rebel factions and unaligned bodies through incentive-building pledges of technical transfer.

Yet providing neither evidence of counter-objectivity, fossilized registries or lifted lines from the overheard dialogues of “flowers and mute things,”<sup>7</sup> we would track James Elkins (2007)<sup>8</sup> and propose that our practice effects richer meaning ‘when we take not only our subject matter but our interpretive methodologies from the very societies we investigate,’ and re-imbue them with the values of fortuitous misreading, persuasive mutability and primmediacy. Postmodern thought plays a role as well by providing us a kit of analytical tools, complicit to which are the hermeneutic ploys of deconstruction and defamiliarization, dissidence and wariness, the last through which we finally arrive to surmise that the glaze of modern academe is as ‘thin and flaking’ as it ever was - these performative panes that oblige little more than a gentle abrasion, scratch or buff to expose the bones of the colonial sacrifice secreted beneath their mounted burnishments.

### Early Siamese Indic Creeds

The *śāsana*, or religion as it were, of the modern Siamese (and Khmer for that matter) is by and large “Bauddha” (a cultural sphere that is sadly if habitually-obsessively misapprehended by the modern incongruity “Buddhism”—that mere two-centuries-old neologism that demands great vigilance not to reemploy), and yet surely of a Southern early-Buddhist sub-group that only since around the mid-1950s has come to be regarded as “the Theravāda,” “the Doctrine of the Elders.” What exact “elders” (*theras*) are we talking about? What precise doctrine or *vāda*, for that matter?<sup>9</sup> As an ethnogenic-complex this may better be depicted as “Sri Lankan Bauddha” since that’s where the structures assumed their early shape whilst thriving in amongst the island’s elite. It may also be described as “Pāli Bauddha” on account of its devotion to Pāli literature compiled from ancient Ceylonese translations of an allegedly primitive Pāli text-strata, the material evidence of which no longer existed from that time forward. This nominal entity under discussion furthermore regards the Pāli language as its paramount ecclesiastical authority, forfeiting all allegiance to Oral Tradition. With that being said, it needs to be suggested that the term Theravāda is an out and out ahistorical edifice, a misnomer, a ghost word, a back-formation<sup>10</sup> completely dislocated from any sense of originating context. Still, the following may be said: our subject represents a highly differentiating class of Bauddhic religiosity with a steely predilection for conceiving itself in a state of protracted contradistinction to all things roundly “Hindu,” on the one hand, and for a broadly shared perception of doctrinal corruption into which every other Bauddha camp has strayed, on the other hand.

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<sup>7</sup> “*des fleurs et des choses muettes*,” “Élévation” in *Les Fleurs du mal*, Paris, 1857.

<sup>8</sup> “On David Summers’ Real Spaces,” in Elkins (ed), *Is Art History Global?*, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> See Sritantra, “Freeing the Source of the Ancient Bauddha,” 2014, 298 ff.

<sup>10</sup> See Peter Skilling, Re: QUERY>Modern use of “Theravada” (Skilling), *H-Buddhism Discussion Logs*, 22 Dec 2006, online posting.

But for a period extending roughly nine hundred years before the thirteenth-century appearance of Sinhala Bauddha in what we today is called the central and southern regions of Thailand, a broad conglomeration of soteriological, religious, non-religious, and mixed ascetic-arts heritages coexisted throughout what we furthermore regard as mainland, peninsular and archipelagic Southeast Asia. Looking at Old Siam alone, these ranged from Brahminical forms of ecstatic, enstatic and *tāpasic* strivers, to the sundry systems of Śaiva-Śākta worship, to Kṛṣṇa-bhakta Vaiṣṇava schools and Pure Land cults of the Mahāyāna. Yet in striking contrast to modern Thailand with its high conformity-imposing schematics, Thai citizens themselves might be thoroughly stunned to learn by the broad diversity of spiritual forms that flourished in the region prior to the 14th century. They would be very hard put to accept that a range of ascetic-like figures such as shamans, *sādhus*, yogins, *tāpasvin* and *ṛṣi* once thrived in glory beyond the pale of standardized cult-specific ascetic-arts convention. These homegrown and extraterritorial adepts moved free as the breeze and practiced now-vanished ascetic-arts technologies. Such holy men were often skilled healers and commanded high respect from orthodox religious authorities.

Thais today find it rather hard to fathom the religious fabric that formerly loomed between the ancient ruling houses of Tun-sun, Panpan, Lopburi and Nakhon Ratchasima, Grahi (Chaiya)<sup>11</sup>, Si Chon and Tambralinga, Sathing Phra, Langakuka, Phatthalung, Pattani, Nakhon Si Thammarat and others. Spanning an era of nearly one millennium beginning as early as the 5th century CE, a variety of Bauddha and Brāhmanical traditions prospered amongst the sovereign kingdoms, principalities and polities from the Central Plains to the narrow southern-lying Isthmus of Kra. Brahminical, Śaiva and Tantrayānic, Mahāyānic Pure Land and Lokiteśvara sects developed side by side in the overlapping realms in a spirit of mutual appreciation, with no single custom lording over others. The fifth-century kingdom of Sathing Phra (Songkhla province) is an elusive yet fascinating case in point. It was a very ancient maritime kingdom with one of the earliest ports on record. From 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century it was purely Brahminical. Early Buddhist sects prospered there from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century. From late 9<sup>th</sup> to the early 11<sup>th</sup> century Mahāyāna orientations from Nalanda and Java took root and grew. A cursory survey of the Bauddha schools alone is enough to show that, comparatively speaking, the specimens attested in early Siam were far more diverse than those in Tibet.<sup>12</sup>

The manifold appearance of early Buddhist sects is amply acknowledged. Archaeological data suggests that an alliance of Mūlasarvāstivāda threads was the dominant expression that thrived in Phatthalung and Sathing Phra from the 7th to 8th century right alongside varied Brāhmanical customs. Mahāyāna parties had already appeared in the region at this time. By the 9<sup>th</sup> century Vajrayāna organizations reached the Śrīvijaya kingdom, possibly through Java. Its distinctive sentiment was brilliantly expressed through highly evolved modes of religious statuary. Chinese records, local inscriptions and archaeological remains show that from the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> through the 11<sup>th</sup> century the Mahāyānic Mādhyamika and Caityaka (or Mahāsāṃghika) groups were especially active along the eastern and western coasts of the narrow southerly Isthmus. So was Pure Land Amitabha and Avalokiteśvara devotion that spread from China along maritime trade routes. Pure Land veneration was central there, as well, between the eighth and eleventh centuries. Khmer-influenced idols of Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> cen) were found further north in Lopburi (an old Mon capital) and

<sup>11</sup> Michael Vickerey, "Cambodia and Its Neighbors in the 15th Century," 2004, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Recognizing Kamala Tiyavanich, private correspondence, fall, 1998. See Tiyavanich, 1997, 303-4, n. 22.

in villages around Nakhon Ratchasima and Buriram in the region known today as Northeast Thailand (Isan).<sup>13</sup>

While the intricate tapestries bequeathed by these states have been rendered highly tenuous with time, one fundamental fact is known for certain. Around the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Sinhalese alignments began to diffuse through the Central Plains and the Southern Peninsula of early Siam and steadily displaced the earlier traditions.

What is more, the post-twelfth century Lower Mekong Basin, with its latitudinarian and monoculti habitats, would likely have fostered a superb array of highly innovative ascetic-arts environs. Provocative hybrid initiatives are inferred from fourteenth-century Angkor, as well, where the royal bilingual Khmer/Pāli stele K. 754 (dated 1308 near Siem Reap) luxuriously refers to an elder cleric (*mahāthera*) as “Mahāsvāmī” while suffixing “-deva” to his actual name. It furthermore records the installation of a Buddha figure named Mahādeva, an epithet for Śiva, in the *mahāthera*’s newly constructed “*āśrama*.” This is all in a time and a cosmopolin-neighborhood where, according to resident Yuan court diplomat Zhou Daguan, ‘people from the king down, men and women, all wore their hair wound up in a knot and went naked to the waist wrapped only in a piece of cloth, and when out and about they simply wound a larger piece over the smaller.’<sup>14</sup>

As a major leitmotif we reiterate the fact that all of the traditions, schools and theories alluded to throughout the course this essay are culturally speaking primarily Indian, products of the Greater Indic cultural milieu. Naturally, the elements that made their way to Southeast Asia arrived through the process of infiltration, sifting through the various cultural screens and by the gradual processes of localization, accretion, adaptation and evolution. Certain Vajrayānic features therefore came directly from Nalanda in Northeast India while other slightly altered forms arrived via Java. Khmer Vajrayāna from the Mekong Basin was introduced around the 12<sup>th</sup> century and established itself in two different regions. One infusion came overland through the Northeast regions and Central Plains while another via sea to the southeast coastal kingdom of Nakhon Si Thammarat.

### **Brāhmaṇism**

Prior to the thirteenth-century introduction of Pāli-based Sinhalese Mahāvihāra strains into the area known today as the Kingdom of Thailand, a rich diversity of Indic, Brāhmaṇical, Maha-, Vajra- and Tantrayanic persuasions prospered throughout an array early kingdoms. An influential strain of interpretive thought advances that the dominant socio-religious force of the time would best be described as Brāhmaṇism. This is aptly demonstrated by the Vedicization of local language, particularly via Old Khmero-Sanskrit and classical Sanskrit, and Pāli to a lesser though significant degree.

Yet though profoundly a production of Ancient India, the abstract agency we are attempting sequester, abstract and illuminate this is not at all analogous to “Hinduism,” a colonial period ethnonym with scant analytical or taxonomic relevance. Art historian Philip Rawson (*The Art of Southeast Asia* 1990) conveys a common overview of early India as ‘one of the world’s most civilizing forces for the lands that stretch beyond Burma and the Gulf of Siam and that are widely scattered around the Java Sea, and which virtually owe their very existence to the creative influence of Indian ideas. No invasion or conquest, no forced conversion was ever imposed. Their ideas were embraced because the people understood them as opportune and beneficial.

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<sup>13</sup> Pattaratorn Chirapravati, *Votive Tablets in Thailand (Origins, Styles & Uses)*, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Zhou Daguan, *A Record of Cambodia: The Land and Its People*, 2007, 50.

They naturally imported their code of life, conceptions of kingship, law and literature along with their profound philosophical traditions. They naturally intermarried with esteemed local families and dynasties arose.’ Somewhat unexpectedly, the earliest Brahmanical inscriptions yet recovered in Southeast Asia are those of King Mūlavarman (r late 4<sup>th</sup> to early 5<sup>th</sup> c) at Kutei Borneo (Kalimantan) in associations with a temple to Śiva as Vaprakeśvara and of King Purāṇavarman (c. 450) of West Java (Coedes 1968, 52; Sanderson 2003, 351).<sup>15</sup>

Brahmanism or “Brāhmaṇa culture,” then, is known to have provided both the driving force and the cultural design for a very wide range Indianized kingdoms that blossomed in overseas, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Malaya, Champa, Cambodia, Siam and the rest. In the case of the Khmer, their Vedicized kingdom evolved into the powerful Angkorian Empire with its center at the Great Temple City of Angkor Vat. From there the Angkorian Khmer extended domination over nearly the entirety of what we understand today as Thailand. What is more, this same fundamental Khmero-Vedic matrix continues to sustain Thai national culture. Centuries of chauvinistic disinheritance have rendered its legacy obscure and untraceable. It nonetheless reveals itself in unexpected ways; most strikingly, the fact that the Thai state religion, known over the recent decades as “Theravāda Buddhism,” is partially derived from Vedicized culture. This further calls to question the doctrinal supposition that Gautama the Buddha had markedly developed his ascetic movement on an anti-Brahminical socio-political reform platform. Santosh Desai (*Hinduism in Thai Life* 1980, 2-3) attempts to confront this crucial issue. He contends that ancient Bauddha polemics indeed do speak against the practices of untouchability, ritual pollution and Brāhmaṇa claims to superiority and entitlements based on birth alone. This mainly applies to ascetic communities. Benefactors of the Bauddha up to present times continue to live in their respective cultural milieus conventionally regarded as Hindu, Brāhmaṇa, Jaina, et al. Celebrated early Bauddha scholars such as Aśvaghōṣa, Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, though thoroughly Brahmins, adopted and interpreted Bauddha-paideia while remaining entirely within a so-called “Hindu” heritage. They were simply being themselves.

### **Mongkut, hybridity and the Brāhmaṇization of the Bhikkhu saṅghas**

Our immediate set of themes is apropos to two upcoming considerations. This is firstly in connection to the previously mentioned bilingual Khmer-Pāli inscription dated 1308 that inclusively refers to the bhikkhu *mahāthera* as “Mahāsvāmī” (K. 754). This should secondly hold relation to the measured usurpation and re-instalment of high-caste priests in the appearance of Bhikkhus in the Ratanakosin period of Bangkok, though with one significant differentiation. In vivid contrast to the divinely sanctioned and genealogically construed Brahmin caste, the exalted status conferred on the Bhikkhu was perpetuated not by ancestral purity but by a state-sanctioned system of clerical induction caulked on top of self-serving lineage (*paramparā*). In the modern period, this was largely the effort of the energetic Siamese prince Mongkut. From the time of the Reverend Mongkut’s cloistral induction, he embraced the role of an administrative cleric who studied a wide range of classical texts. He was furthermore attentive to foreign contacts, and the highly cosmopolitan Ratanakosin capital proved exceptional for that in its continuance the Ayutthayan tradition. Indeed, according to

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<sup>15</sup> Kutai’s rulers probably maintained their Śaiva-Bauddha religious culture until they were converted to Islam in 1568. See Polkinghorne, *Makers and Models: Decorative Lintels of Khmer Temples, 7th to 11th centuries*, 2007, 106-107.



Reid (“Cosmopolis and Nation in a Plural Peninsula” 2004), ‘all the early population estimates for Bangkok agree that the Thais constituted a small minority in a rich cultural tapestry composed of Mons, Lao, Chinese, Vietnamese and many others’ (Reid 2004, 8-9). In 1820 the traveler Pecot observed that “In Bangkok the Siamese...like and respect foreigners very much, and protect them in an astonishing way.”<sup>16</sup> Still, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ayutthayan law against Siamese women marrying foreign nationals and the similarly effective Bangkok law, which bars local women from owning land if wed non-Thais, tend to cast different lights on the perceived broad acceptance ascribed to the Thais in their administration of international trade relations.<sup>17</sup> Further worth noting is Pecot’s report from the southern region of the Siamese kingdom. Crossing the Malay Peninsula, he observed that, “Here (Nakhon Sri Thammarat) the government is Siamese, but the people consist of three nations: Siamese, Malays and Chinese.”<sup>18</sup>

One of Prince Reverend Mongkut’s early projects was to found and direct a highly influential reformist cloister within the walled city of old Bangkok. Here the abbot ‘placed himself under the tutelage French and American missionaries. He became well versed in traditional Buddhist learning and western sciences’ (Dhammasami 2007, 12).<sup>19</sup> The cloister or *vihāra* named Wat Bovonnives was sponsored by Mongkut’s own royal family and marked the establishment of a new quasi-orthodox sect named Dhammayuttika-nikāya, quite literally “stick-to-the-doctrine division.” He then proceeded to divide the population of *gāṃavāsī* or “town dweller” clerics into two distinct parties within the whole collective. Ranked first was the former king’s recently conceived Dhammayuttika-nikāya, extremely small and elitist in nature. The rest, comprised the vast majority, was conveniently styled Mahā-nikāya, literally “large majority division.” The royal sponsored Dhammayuttika-nikāya gained instant prestige among the civilian population to whom it was generally made to appear as the much more austere and regimented group among the urban dweller clerics.

### **Ascetic-artistry beyond the pale**

It was also at this time that Bangkok-centric religious authorities systematically ignored another major segment of traditional clerics or *bhikkhus*, the ascetic ‘forest-dwellers’ or *araññavāsī* who subsisted in quite severe conditions and focused their attention on austerities (*tapasyāa*). This mainly self-regulated sector of the *saṅgha* tended to live aloof from the others; and though largely overlooked by religious authorities, it was certainly not forgotten. In her valuable article, “Two Paths to Revivalism in Thai Buddhism” (1995), Marja-Leena Heikkilä-Horn reports that after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century all “unauthorized” wandering ascetics were increasingly marginalized and systematically discredited as aberrant, ill-disciplined and heretical elements within the government-sanctioned *bhikkhu saṅgha*.<sup>20</sup> However, what this government policy spelt for a far less specific, hence highly uncontrollable ascetic-arts community is anyone’s guess.

<sup>16</sup> Pecot 1821, in *SME*; cited in Anthony Reid, 2004, 11.

<sup>17</sup> See G. Smith, “The Dutch East India Company in the Kingdom of Ayutthaya, 1604-1694,” 1974, 286-7, cited in Reid 2004, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Pecot 1821, in *SME*; cited in Reid 2004, 11.

<sup>19</sup> See Khammai Dhammasami, “Idealism and Pragmatism: A dilemma in the current monastic education systems of Burma and Thailand,” in Ian Harris (ed.), *Buddhism, Power and Political Order*, 2007: 10-25, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Marja-Leena Heikkilä-Horn, “Two Paths to Revivalism in Thai Buddhism: The Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke Movements,” 1996: 93-111.

We broadly allude to ascetic-arts genres that significantly conform to Vedic-Sanskritic soteriological regimes and to a range of practitioners diversely identified as *bhikkhu*, *ṛṣi*, *yogin*, *tāpasvīn*, *siddha*, *sādhu*, *samana*, *tāntrikā*, *brāhmaṇa*, et al. We furthermore acknowledge less specified genres with their micro-customs that nevertheless observed the protocols of lineage or *guru-śiṣya paramparā*. These dwelt at the margins or beyond the pale of an increasingly intrusive centralized drive for the regularization of ascetic-art observance. These latter persuasions would also have included variations on the Siamese *phram* (Skt. *brāhmaṇa*), the *phra yokhi*<sup>21</sup> (Skt. *yogi*) and the highly significant *prah rūēsī* (Skt. *ṛṣi*, English rishi).<sup>22</sup>

### What happened to the *rūēsī*?

The Thai *rūēsī* holds great importance to our study. Even today in contemporary Thailand the *rūēsī* - or recluse, hermit, sage - is often depicted in popular media and visual art, but even still more in the traditional Thai cult of amulets. What precisely was the *rūēsī*, really? What was its history in the pre- and post-Angkorian eras? The presence of this ‘shadowy and intriguing’<sup>23</sup> agent looms large and inexplicable right across the region. The *ṛṣi/rūēsī* is a benchmark figure in the ascetic-arts history of greater Southeast Asia. A study of the region’s ascetic culture invites a thorough probe of the fabled Khmero-Siamese holy hermit. It was known as early as the seventh-century, from the pre-Khmer kingdom of Chēn-là (Zhēnlà), attested by chronicles, inscriptions and bas-reliefs of Āśrama Maha Rosei,<sup>24</sup> the early pre-Angkorian sanctuary. The small stone temple of the *āśrama* (‘hermitage, institute’) rests below the hilltop ruins of Phnom Da about 80 kilometers south of modern Phnom Penh. It was constructed in the late 7<sup>th</sup> to early 8<sup>th</sup> century under the king Bhavavarman. In fact, according to an earlier mythic account, the origin of the name Cambodia (or Kampuchea) derives from the *rosei* named Kambu Svayambu. We furthermore know that the Cambodia’s earliest kings declared themselves descendant from this marvelous and semi-divine *ṛṣi/rosei*; but alas, this topic goes beyond our present limits.

### Internal Colonization in a Bangkok-centric world

We return to the topic of Prince Mongkut who joined the *bhikkhu saṅgha* in 1824 to retire from his monastic vows 26 years later and be crowned as the monarch King Rāma IV (reigned: 1851–1868).

King Mongkut had long been careful to cultivate contacts with the various foreign emissaries and study the rise of colonialism in the region. While the neighboring countries of Burma and Cambodia were warring against their British and French foreign masters respectively, Mongkut managed to preserve a semblance of diplomatic relations and a nominal independence for the Siamese kingdom. The Bangkok elite took advantage of this period to consolidate its centralized political authority over newly emerging frontier areas in its push to engineer a modern nation-state. The blatant use of institutionalized religion as validating force in the negotiating

<sup>21</sup> We note the modern usage of the Thai term *phra*, an honorific derived from Old Khmero-Sanskrit *vraḥ*. *Phra*- as a prefix functions to exalt the noun it precedes, and as a stand-alone a noun it mainly designates a Bauddha cleric, though may also be used ecumenically for any type of religious, priest or ascetic. A nineteenth-century Thai translation of the Christian Bible rendered the phrase “Thy hallowed name” as *phra-nām*. Vickery (2004, 10 ff.) traces its pattern of usage as a royal Angkorian title and its phonological shift from *vraḥ* to *braḥ* by the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>22</sup> See Justin McDaniel, “This Hindu holy man is a Thai Buddhist,” 2013, 309-313.

<sup>23</sup> Stanley Tambiah, *The Buddhists Saints of the Forest*, 1984, 69.

<sup>24</sup> The Old Khmer *rosei* is derived from Sanskrit *ṛṣi*, as is the Khmero-Siamese *rūēsī*. See Henri Mauger, “L’Asram Maha Rosei,” *BEFEO*, 36/1, 1936, 65-95.

process of state formation was marked. It was not without its historical precedence. Since the early thirteenth-century emergence of the Sukhothai kingdom, it was understood that the Bauddha-cult performed a principal manipulative role in legitimizing and normalizing political actors, and thereby shaping the new “Thai” state. Sukhothai’s legendary founder king Ramkhamhaeng was alleged by some to have left inscriptions that at once praised himself, his Bauddha virtues, and his intimate relations to Bauddha clerics. In recent years, however, the inscriptions have come under a great deal of scrutiny. Whether they are ‘real’ or ‘invented’ history, they nonetheless stand as crucial early documents of state formation that were granted authenticity through ecclesial structures. In the later Ayutthaya dynasty (1350-1767), as well, ‘we know that the state provided protection to the established *saṅgha* from religious competition, while in compensation the clerics conferred legitimacy and power to various state actors by ritually accepting material support and attending state pomp and pageantry’ (Heikkilä-Horn 1996). This trend has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Thai Sangha Act of 1902**

A characteristic element the Thai Bauddha-sangha is that it is under virtual state control. With the passing of the Sangha Act in 1902 by Mongkut’s son, the position of the sangha within the Thai state became legally defined for the first time. In fact, this same legislation still stands today to demonstrate the totalizing state-centric locus. When the heir to the throne passed the famous Sangha Act this imposed a regulatory body of religious statutes along with the kingdom’s expanding authority and induced the inculcation of a highly brāhmaṇicized court-centric *sāsana* (religion) in the name of religious dispensation. The laws proclaim that ‘the administration of religious affairs is just as important as the administration of the state,’ and that ‘if systematically administered, religious affairs shall be sure to attract more people to the study and practice of religion under the guidance of Buddhist doctrine, hence leading them to the correct mode of living in accordance with Buddha’s vision.’ One by one, the various regions came increasingly under the centralized state-control of Bangkok’s elite bureaucratic visionaries. Purely political changes followed. With the bloodless revolution of 1932, Thailand ceased to be an absolute monarchy and moved toward its present day constitutional monarchy on similar lines of the British model. Still, royalty remained a sacrosanct pillar of the Thai Triumvirate, monarchically ritualized in the initiatory cult of the Devarāja as adopted in a modified form by Siamese kings of Ayutthaya from their royal Khmer predecessors as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century. After that the state passed a host of other religious reforms “to consolidate state power over the whole kingdom” (Bunnag 1984).<sup>25</sup> Beyond these purely legislative acts, the new reformist Dhammayuttika party provided additional guarantees to the “functioning *sangha*-state relationship.” Members of the sect have “ever since occupied leading positions in the state *sangha* hierarchy” or Council of Elders,” Bunnag writes.<sup>26</sup>

Siamese enthrallment with Angkorian culture continued into the modern period. King Mongkut had a model of Angkor Vat built in Bangkok, and even sponsored a failed attempt to disassemble two towers from Ta Prohm in Cambodia and re-erect them in his capital (Chandler 1976, 55, n. 4<sup>27</sup>; Harris 2005, 32). In a similar fashion,

<sup>25</sup> Jane Bunnag, “The Way of the Monk and the Way of the World,” in Bechert and Gombrich (eds.), 1984: 159-70.

<sup>26</sup> Bunnag 1984. See Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History*, 1986, 116; and Somboon Suksamran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia: The Role of the Sangha in the Modernization of Thailand*, 1976, 34-43, and 1982, 37-51, both cited in Heikkilä-Horn 1996.

<sup>27</sup> David p. Chandler, “Folk Memories of the Decline of Angkor in Nineteenth-Century Cambodia: The Legend of the Leper King,” *JSS* 67(1), 1976: 54-62.

after the passing of the 1902 Thai Saṅgha Act that the Siamese monarch developed a lavish new Bangkok court-style form of religious mannerism greatly inspired on the Khmer model. These changes represented a deep permeation of the sentiment of royalty through ecclesiastic office where clerics turned into sacrosanct princes. This additionally functioned to widen distinction between ascetic elite and mass congregation, the stature of the latter increasingly reduced to approximate that of social untouchability, only feudally bound throughout their lives to attend to the two preeminent castes, ruler and cleric. This new state-centric court-style Bauddha with formalized, decorative and elongated phasing was again largely built on the Royal Angkorian precedent. Brāhmaṇical culture thus continued to exert tremendous influence at every level of Thai social life. The well-pronounced culture of “Theravada Buddhism” appeared in Thailand in the mid-1970s.

### **A Conceptual Mandala-shift**

Here amidst freshly emerging elements we find ourselves presiding over an architectural mandala-shift. The traditional epicenter of tantric conventionalism, so vaguely construed in the popular mind, begins to re-emerge in the Lower Mekong River Basin, a region incredibly rich in enigma yet sadly shrouded in abandonment and ruin. After more than a century of hyper attention on the Indian and Tibetan archetypes, this natural progression ought to be commemorated.

It was the Siamese-born Guru Chod (1900-1988) who seeded the present writer’s brain just a few weeks before his decorporealization. The present essay may therefore be seen to have commenced upon a narrow trail of clues and directives that emerged from a private conversation with the saint while relaxing after lunch one marvelous day. Chod spoke casually, a cup of jasmine tea in hand. “In ancient times Cambodia was an extension of India,” he said, and then he told the meaning of his family name: Harṣavarman. “It’s royal Khmer,” he said with a smile. Harṣavarman is a Sanskrit name. Harṣa means literally “that which causes the hairs on the back to stand up” and signifies Indra, the king of the gods. Varman (lit. “coat of mail”) is a suffix that is often attached to the names of Khmer kings and implies “protector” or “protégé.” The name debuts in Cambodian history with the ascendancy of the first Harṣavarman king in the 9<sup>th</sup> century as attested by a terse stone inscription dated 834 recording the “donation of the king Harṣavarman to Śiva.” Nothing more is known of this early Khmer monarch beyond the fact that his posthumous name is Rudraloka, an epithet denoting “the abode of Śiva.” There were later Khmer Harṣavarman kings as well. Guru Chod was therefore of royal *kṣatriya* legacy as marked by the suffixed title *varman*.<sup>28</sup> Yet we also know of an element of mixing, or hybridization from the intermarriage of *kṣatriya* and *brāhmaṇa*, rulers and priests, at the highest rung of Angkorian society.

Chod spoke further of priestly Brahmin families that in fact still live in Bangkok today, and whose community is centered at the well-known Bot Phrām or “Brahmin Chapel” within Old City. He explained its location near Sao Ching-Cha or “The Giant Swing,” the famous city landmark where spectacular annual festivals were held in honor of the largely vedicized god named Śiva.<sup>29</sup> “I went there many times and talked to the priests,” he said. “But we found that our families were not at all related. It’s easy

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<sup>28</sup> The Pallava kings of southern India typically suffixed their names with *-varman*, a practice that was emulated in many kingdoms in the earliest period of overseas India. See Sachchidanand Sahai, “Studies in Cambodian Epigraphy I – VII,” in *South East Asian Review*, Vol. XXXIII, Nos. 1-2 Jan-Dec, 2008: 55-68, 64.

<sup>29</sup> See Willard Van De Bogart, “The Giant Swing: (Lo Ching Cha) Brahmanical origins and its significance to the religious culture of Thailand,” *South East Asian Review*, 2011.

to tell by examining the names. They frankly admitted that they weren't Khmer but had emigrated up from the old southern kingdom around the beginning of the century.”

### **Suvarṇabhūmi and the Early Khmer**

Three hundred years before the Common Era, Indian kings were already informed of the far-off region called Suvarṇabhūmi, an almost mythical “land of gold” distinguished quite literally for its gold reserves and other natural material. From those early days the entire region experienced intensive Vedicization, Brahmanicization or Indianization (call it what you will). Cambodia was a colony called Kambuja-deśa<sup>30</sup> that appears to have achieved near epical acclaim as an Indo-Chinese El Dorado. The highly fertile and well-watered region corresponded roughly to the broad geographical basin that stretches today from southern Burma eastward to the Mekong Delta. Indeed, there are ancient Sanskrit treatises that classify Cambodia as one of the great sixteen states of India.

The earliest Cambodian realm emerged no later than the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE coinciding with a prosperous Indianized kingdom known by its Chinese name Funan. Most of what we know of this early kingdom comes from Chinese dynastic annals.<sup>31</sup> From the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century the Funanese dominion spread all the way across from what today is the southern part of Cambodia and the Mekong Delta. Its wealth came mainly from maritime trade being favorably positioned at the ancient crossroads of major sea routes that linked the Mediterranean with the China Sea. Commercial exchanges with Rome are certain, and by implication Egypt as well. Roman coins of Antonius the Pious dated 152 and others representing Marcus Aurelius have been unearthed. Eight hundred years after Funan's founding the great Angkorian Empire emerged with its power center at Angkor Vat. The complete historical movement of the Khmer monarchs extended more than a thousand years until its eventual decline in the 13th century.

Still, in its heyday Khmer Civilization spread throughout the mainland Southeast Asia from the Bay of Bengal to the South China Sea, and in a southerly direction to the Isthmus of Kra and the northern portion of the Malaya Peninsula. Its rulers bore Hindu, or Vedic names such as Harṣavarman, Jayavarman, Yaśovarman and Sūryavarman. They learned the elements of classical Sanskrit and introduced many of its forms into their own Old Khmero-Sanskrit language. These facts reflect an intense assimilation of Indic culture. Yet the thoroughness in which this culture was imported and absorbed into the fields of statecraft, literature, science, art, philosophy and religion is hard to be explained by an intimate connection with India alone. Such marked propagation was likely also due to the flourishing numbers of cultural institutions and conservatories, and to diverse ascetic *āśrama* or hermitages that were founded all across the country. Cambodian rulers were themselves responsible for sustaining these citadels of Indian civilization.

Yaśovarman ascended the throne in 889. He was a highly educated monarch with liberal religious views. A devotee of Śiva, he lavishly patronized the Vaiṣṇava cult too, as well as various early-Buddhist and Mahāyānic Buddha cults. He is said to have founded one hundred ashrams throughout the realm where ascetics engaged in piety and study were provided with their daily necessities and where ascetics were free

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<sup>30</sup> Our understanding owes much to R. C. Majumdar, *Kambuja-desh, or An Ancient Hindu Colony in Cambodia*, 1944.

<sup>31</sup> Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia*, 1991. According to Shawcross, Funan was the seedbed for a fusion between Indian and local culture that produced the new civilization called “Khmer.”

to live in accordance to their own specific customs. Epigraphs attest throughout all eras ‘the establishment or restoration of temple-deities, temples, hermitages and other pious institutions by royalty, high dignitaries and local leaders. Endowments consisted of land, gardens, male and female slaves (Khmer *khnñum*, Skt. *dāsaḥ*) to work these properties and to serve as cooks, musicians and the like.’ Such religious foundations were furthermore provide with ‘pearls, gold, silver, cows and horses, buffaloes, livestock and elephants, ritual implements and other treasures.’

### **Khmer caste system**

Elite Khmers theoretically understood the Indian notion of *varṇāśrama-dharma*. *Vārṇa* signified (among other things) the hue or tint of social-class character. *Āśrama* specified four life ‘stages’ along with four platforms of professional opportunity. Dharma meant ‘duty along natural lines.’ Typically explained in modern education as “the Indian caste system,” this essentially colonial imputation has overly concerned itself with “caste-division.” In its application to Indian society, the derogatory “caste” was likely brought into the English language in India at the early 17<sup>th</sup> century from Portuguese *casta* (‘breed, race, caste’). Traditionally, in India, each of the four standard castes was expected to honor the caste above it, except for the priestly Brāhmaṇa caste that honored the gods.

From very ancient times this organization of social classifications was a principal force in Brāhmaṇized India and canonized duly in the *Laws of Manu*. This was jealously guarded down through the ages by implicit adherence to strict prohibitions regarding, in particular, inter-caste marriage and many other aspects of social mingling (Guruge 1991, 124).<sup>32</sup> Eventually the system was exposed to attack by cultural theorists who were prone to be indignant over social inequalities and human rights violations, the stratification of social classes based on the patrimony of racial exclusivity and the enthrallment of despotic ruling cliques. According to Wales (1931), we know that in India the *brāhmaṇa* or priestly-caste gained early domination over the other three castes. They did this largely through maintaining a monopoly on intellectual and spiritual knowledge and by making themselves considered to be indispensable to the governing *kṣatriya*-caste (57-58).<sup>33</sup> Was the case the same among the old Khmer?

Khmer society did not adhere to a “classic” *varṇāśrama-dharma* scheme. Following Lustig (2009)<sup>34</sup> we note the importance of *varṇa* development among the Old Khmer as remarkably distinct from its Indian precursors, particularly in regard to ingrained misunderstandings by people with western educational backgrounds. For neither in the case of South Asia or Cambodia did the *varṇa* of so-called “caste traditions” ever denote a broad scale division of the general population. One needs only to reflect that the late-eighth century king Jayavarman V declared to have created two new *varṇa*. Further, that the early-ninth century king Sūryavarman I reorganized *varṇas* to ‘assume the appearance of professional associations or guilds, such as artisans, gardeners or parasol bearers. These were typically established under an individual after whom the *varṇa* was named’ (Chakravarti 1972-73, 154; Lustig: 71). Hence the inscription K. 257N dated 994 that records a member of a ‘Boxers *varṇa* borrowing silver, metal objects and garments from a local [lending institution?] in order to make a purchase. In accordance with a court, the value was repaid by members of the *varṇa*’ (Coedès 1952, 148; Lustig 174). Nor was admission to *varṇa* in Cambodia solely based

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<sup>32</sup> Ananda Guruge, *The Society of the Ramayana*, 1991, 124.

<sup>33</sup> H.G. Quaritch Wales, *Siamese State Ceremonies*, 1931, 57-58.

<sup>34</sup> Eileen Lustig, *Power and Pragmatism in the Political Economy of Angkor*, 2009.

on hereditary. Even within a single generation people could shift to a different *varṇa*' (Chakravarti 1972-73, 152; Lustig, 70). At the higher tiers, the notion of *varṇa* indicated more of an elitist social stratum (Chakravarti 1972-73;<sup>35</sup> Mabbett 1977;<sup>36</sup> Lustig, 24). To a large degree, they functioned as syndicates or even corporations, and at the topmost levels they were commissioned by the king. By appointing people to specified *varṇa*, 'kings were effectively granting privileges and establishing bonds of obligation' (Mabbett, 433; Lustig, 70). How essential were *varṇa* to the functioning of state? Was the Khmer aristocracy an oligarchic *varṇa*? According to Coedès (1975, 120), the government in Kambujadeśa: was in the hands of an aristocratic oligarchy, and the great offices were held by members of the royal family. [But] the offices of chaplain of the king, officiating priest of the Devarāja, and tutor of the young princes were reserved to members of the great priestly families, within which offices were transmitted in the female line.<sup>37</sup>

Now we gain a glimpse of the vital roles that Brāhmaṇa priests and gurus played as conductors of rites and sacrifices, thaumaturgic advisors and royal teachers. It was the special intimacy of this *kṣatriya-brāhmaṇa* caste alliance that furthermore fostered the new state religion called Devarāja at the very early part of the 9th century. Here, recognizably, traditional highborn Brahmin priests become the mark of a hugely influential traditional *varṇa* in Angkorian society.

### Khmer Yoga

Yoga and asceticism enjoyed great favor in Old Khmer society. This aspect of its culture deserves due notice.<sup>38</sup> Sacred places were set aside and announced in royal epigraphy. Śiva was regarded as the ascetic-yogi par excellence and Cambodia's national god. Grottoes for ascetic practice (*tapas, tapasyā*) are often mentioned. Speculations on the syllable OM frequently appear in early Khmer writing.<sup>39</sup> The Vat Phu temple overlooking the Mekong River at a distance of about six kilometers was a special place for yoga practice. Vat Phu was built at the base of Mt. Phu in southern part of present-day Laos. Its ruined remains are near the western bank about 100 kilometers upstream from the Laos-Cambodian border. From the body of Old Khmer and Sanskrit inscriptions we know that the mountain Phu Kao was called Liṅgaparvath or Liṅga Mountain, a 'self-created' *svayambu liṅgam* formed as the mass of the mountain's face (1416 meters). The mountain was venerated as Bhadrēśvara, an epithet for Śiva, reflected through the name of the first Cham king Bhadravarman I (ca 400 CE).<sup>40</sup> Inscription K. 583 (v. 6)<sup>41</sup> describes this natural outcropping as *Niṣkala Liṅga*, which we take to mean 'complete of its own innate becoming untouched by human agency, interiorly grasped as Śiva's pure Presence through the intimation of the force of his *bhāva*' (Dasgupta 1955).<sup>42</sup> The preceding noun *niṣkala* ('formless') qualifies the *liṅga* as completely "undifferentiated" – 'if broken into pieces the divinity remains uniformly present in each of the fragments; if a fragment of the mountain is detached

<sup>35</sup> A. K. Chakravarti, "Caste System in Ancient Cambodia," *JAIH*, Vol. VI (1-2), 1972-73: 143-158 (discussion of Mabbett (*JAIH* VI: 5-38).

<sup>36</sup> I. W. Mabbett, "Varnas in Angkor and the Indian caste system," *JAIH*, XXXVI (No. 3), 1977: 429-442.

<sup>37</sup> George Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, 1975, 120, brackets added.

<sup>38</sup> Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, "The Religions of Ancient Cambodia," 1997, 52.

<sup>39</sup> Bhattacharya 1997.

<sup>40</sup> See John Guy, "Introducing Southeast Asia," in *Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Early Southeast Asia*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Yale University Press, 2014: 3-13.

<sup>41</sup> Claude Jacques (ed.), "Études d'épigraphie cambodgienne, 9. La stèle du Baphûon, K. 583," *BEFEO* 63, 1976, 351–365, as cited in Sanderson, 2003, 410, n. 240.

<sup>42</sup> See Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy, Volume 5*, 1955, 62.

through erosion, it is installed for worship in another place’ (Sanderson 2003, 412). The Vat Phu temple-complex in Champasak province, aligned with the *liṅga* of Mt. Phu Kao, is dedicated to Śiva Bhadrēśvara the national god of the Khmer empire and protector of the monarch. From inscription K. 723, recovered from a cave 1500 meters north of Vat Phu temple, we know that veneration of Liṅgaparvathḥ predates Angkor, and that the cave itself was as a place set-aside for ‘every type of ascetic to practice’ (*sarvatapodhanāṇām*).<sup>43</sup>

There is specific reference to the practice of yoga in relation to the tradition of worship and austerities that were carried out around Phu Kao and Bhadrēśvara. This comes from inscription K. 300 (vv. 7-10), dating from the 14th century and considered the last of Sanskrit inscriptions. It was discovered in a ditch in the northeast corner of Angkor Vat.<sup>44</sup> The inscription tells of a Śaiva Rāguru named Sarvajñāmuni of Vidyeśa lineage. He is said to have employed a yoga technology to arrive to Cambodia from Āryadeśa (northern India) in order to worship Bhadrēśvaraśiva, and ‘having done that for quite some time he departed this world for his ultimate goal.’ An undated (probably ca. 968) Sanskrit inscription by Jayavarman V (K. 111) from Vat Sithor, Komong Cham details a devotional trend that was current from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century in Cambodia and indicates plainly that the king was an enthusiast of the Bauddha Yogatantra Mantra-mārga. The text is an administrative brief for royal sponsorship of ritual-based institutes throughout the land. Each is to engage a skilled officiant (the term *purohitah* is used). It furthermore reports on a teacher named Kīrtipaṇḍita, who was an expert in the esoteric Mantra rites of the Yogatantra, and who was taken in by the royal family as a kind of *rājaguruḥ*. In his inscription the king lavishes great praise on his teacher for propagating yoga throughout the land.<sup>45</sup>

### **Buddha with Nāga, an esoteric reading**

Philosophically, nirvana both represents the summum bonum and telos of all ancient Indian ascetic-arts procedures. From the post-Vedic period to our present day, it is important to grasp that throughout this millennia-long course of history, all sincere Indian seekers of knowledge, whatever their sectarian persuasions may have been, pursued one thing and one thing alone: a consummate reality beyond human pain. Moreover, they pursued this aim through the means of yoga. Hermann Oldenberg (1918) explained that Nirvana was widely known from around 500 BCE. It was essential to Jaina and Bauddha literatures as well as to other ascetic communities.<sup>46</sup>

Entering the mythic cycle, if we may, Gautama Buddha never denied the existence of a naked reality or unconditioned truth the knowledge of which could usher the boon of emancipation to ignorant men. It was just that he exhibited extreme discretion by declining to openly speak of these things for fear that discussion would only obstruct a person’s passage to the goal itself. This is why Buddha categorically denied the validity of experiencing or even discussing this topic so long as man remained unawakened.

Assuming veracity of the Pāli scriptures and barring possibility that the Buddha may have uttered things that not recorded therein, we may cautiously infer that the Buddha denounced neither the doctrine of *atman* (substance) nor *bráhmaṇ* (ultimate reality). Rather, that the Buddha largely aimed to reproach such professors for their

<sup>43</sup> See Sanderson 2003, (349-462), 414, n. 248.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice*, 2005, 12, 232.

<sup>45</sup> See Sanderson 2003, 427, n. 284, and Wibke Lobo, “The Figure of Hevajra and Tantric Buddhism,” 1997, 72-73.

<sup>46</sup> H. Oldenberg, *The Doctrine of the Upanishads and the Early Buddhism*, 1997, 172.



unrestrained loquacity in regard to those themes that he felt ought to be treated as ineffable. Maintaining the position that “atman exists, is real and permanent,” was according to Buddha an unsupportable affirmation. Conversely, to claim “substantiality does not exist, has no reality and does not continue” is an equally unreasoned declaration. Still, trying to determine what Buddha did hold as the ultimate object or aim of the seeker, it could only be “freedom in the present life.” Such a person may be classed a *jivan-mukta*, or ‘liberated being,’ who in the scriptural words of Buddha himself is “even in this life cut off, nirvan-ized, aware of happiness within himself and living with his soul identified with Brahman,”<sup>47</sup> or “godhead” in the parlance of comparative religion. Two remarkable equations may be drawn from this: (i) see the Buddha, see the Truth, (ii) Buddha = Brahman = Dharma. In this way, Buddha is not an approximation of Brahman, but *is* Brahman, the lord of the world, natural law, the omniscient master of *dharma*. The Vedic term *dharma* means ‘to hold, support,’ it is that which forms a foundation and ‘upholds.’ *Dharma* signifies the universal infrastructure. *Dharma* is the interpreted order of the world. In theological parlance, *dharma* equals god and is equated to *śakti*. In an epistemological disposition, *dharma* is the scaffolding of human perception, conception, and thought intent on grasping ultimate things. The knower thus becomes the incorporation of the knowable, a self-awakened being, *sammāsambuddha*, *buddhatva* (the condition of buddha).<sup>48</sup>

### The Cosmic Axis: being in the body

The Indian subcontinent presents itself as a very different world a millennium following Gautama’s passing. A baroque revolution of vast dimension is in full swing. Yogis preach a new alchemical philosophy based on the notion of a “cosmic body.” Their philosophy also lays great importance on the mystical implications of *prāṇa* as “life-force.” This tantric philosophical and ascetic-arts advancement is seen to have exerted a profound influence on every aspect of Indian cultural life. The diverse Bauddha signatories are not aloof from this astounding pan-Indian revolution. The esoteric Bauddha text *Hevajra-Tantra* depicts the Buddha as Bhagavān who extols the virtues of physical fitness: “Without a perfectly strong and fit body one cannot know bliss.”

In the compelling symbolism of Bauddha Tantra, the body of the Buddha is equated with the cosmic universe. His spinal column, called the *merudaṇḍa*, is a single bone that exemplifies reality beyond time and space, a withdrawn, autonomous zone of purity and non-differential void called *śūnya*. This mystical backbone is additionally described as a secret cavern within Mount Kailāśā, a reflective, crystalline interiority where esoteric truth is revealed to the yogin while immersed in the unexcelled state of absorption (*chan*). This helps to decipher why, according to a legend, the Buddha was unable to turn his head, but had to turn his entire body around because his spinal column was fixed and motionless just like a pillar. This is furthermore read as the *axis mundi*, the center of the world or cosmic pillar, a primordial emblem representing a pole at the center of the world that supports and connects the cosmic spheres of heaven, earth and netherworld. As a “pillar” it ensures support of the universal order. It further corresponds with the vertebral column and interiorly traversing the center of the universe.

<sup>47</sup> See Anguttara-nikāya. Trans., I.B. Horner, The Pāli Text Society, 1994.

<sup>48</sup> See I. B. Horner 1994: II, 206.

The spine is crucial in yoga practice. Emphasis is placed on the 33 bones whose hollow portion surrounds the spinal cord.<sup>49</sup> We detached it from the skeleton for close examination. It's a beautiful structure; its slim configuration from the tip of the coccyx gently curving upward through sacral, lumbar, dorsal and cervical vertebrae bares amazing likeness to an up-raised cobra. This might be the reason why the symbol of the cobra has long played a role in ancient cultures. It is the *naja* of Egypt, the *nāga* of India. It is known as *kuṇḍalinī*, too, a “the coiled little she-serpent” dozing at the base of the spine. With dilated neck taking shape of a hood, the cobra has always been a royal emblem, feminine, majestic and deeply mysterious. The cobra is therefore an archetypal symbol for the transfigurative power of primordial nature. For reasons like this the Yoga-tantras have emphasized developing graceful posture.

Largely unacknowledged in Buddha heritage, this universal symbolism nonetheless appears in the well-known legend of Mucalinda Buddha or Mucalinda Sheltering Buddha. The episode occurs in the sixth week after Gautama's astonishing elucidation as he dwelt in bliss beneath the Mucalinda Tree near to the shores of Mucalinda Lake near Gaya. Suddenly a torrential storm breaks out. But the fledging Buddha is absorbed in trance and pays no attention to the raising waters. As the lake is about to drown the Buddha, the *nāga* of the lake, named Mucalinda, protectively coils his body around the Buddha and shields him with his seven-headed hood.

A deconstruction of the Mucalinda legend could prove very useful to our present study. Does the legend reveal the metaphoric rising of the serpent in the body? Does this represent the stirring of psychic *kuṇḍalinī*? But how appropriate, really, is the *kuṇḍalinī* notion in examining the ancient Buddha fable, considering the neologistic *kuṇḍalinī-yoga* specifically, a compound first attested in 1935?<sup>50</sup> We cite the valued article by Wibke Lobo, “The Figure of Hevajra and Tantric Buddhism” (1997) wherein the writer adopts the terminology of industrial yoga, vis-à-vis “the *cakras*,” as implanted in the minds of present-day consumers, to interpret what “yoga” would have meant to its votaries a millennium prior.

It would be strange if the image of the erect serpent had not been brought into association with the awakening of cosmic energy. In this connection it would also be possible to recognize a system of mystical numbers in the seven heads and three coils [of the *nāga*], for they can be linked to the set of seven centers of energy (*cakras*) in the human body and to the three highest of these in the throat and head, where Enlightenment takes place.”<sup>51</sup>

Should we leave this reading to the twentieth century?

Still nowhere is the depth of this esoteric schema more keenly expressed than through the stunning image of the Buddha with Nāga, otherwise known as the Mucalinda Buddha and indeed, if one wishes, Kuṇḍalinī-Buddha. The Khmer in particular have displayed great intensity in expressing the trance-like nature of the epitomic yogic leitmotif with extraordinary sculptural virtuosity. Gracefully adorned, the Buddha sits splendidly in the posture of *dhyāna* or other distinct mudras. Three thick coils of the *nāga*'s body form the Buddha's seat while the serpent's dilated seven-

<sup>49</sup> “Spinal Column is known as Meru Danda. This is the axis of the body just as Mount Meru is the axis of the earth. Hence the spine is called ‘Meru.’ Spinal column is otherwise known as spine, axis-staff or vertebral column... The vertebral bones are piled one upon the other thus forming a pillar for the support of the cranium and trunk. They are connected together by spinous, traverse and articular processes and by pads of fibro-cartilage between the bones. The arches of the vertebrae form the hollow cylinder of a bony covering for the passage of the spinal cord” (Swami Sivananda, *Kundalini Yoga*, Madras: p.K. Vinyagam, 1935).

<sup>50</sup> Swami Sivananda, *Kundalini Yoga*, 1935.

<sup>51</sup> Wibke Lobo, “The Figure of Hevajra and Tantric Buddhism,” 1997.

headed hood rears up from the back in a broad cocooning manner to protect the Buddha's head. In no other manner is Khmer-yoga legacy better expressed than by the symbolism of the Buddha with Nāga. What is more, this icono-syncretic-hybrid mélange of Śaiva, Yoga and Bauddhic streams unequivocally declares a *triveṇī saṅgam*, or 'three stream convergence'<sup>52</sup> of near inconceivable power and grace where concealed femininity, intermedially immersed, inconspicuously anoints itself *caturbhadra*, the 'immeasurably blessed.' It is plainly the milieu of Khmer Yoga-tantra that imbues this figure its profound and extensive ramifications. Where else in South or Southeast Asia has this quintessentially ascetic-yoga icon gained such acceptance as among the Khmer? Still, the emblematic import of the Buddha with Nāga rests not on its allusion to enchanting fables of Gautama's nascent hierophantic mission, but on its plush esoteric contextualization and nimble kindling of inner heat, or ascetic-arts techné known as *tapas*.

Are we firmly in the realm of reality here? Does the notion of *tapas* hold clear correlation to that which we normally perceive as yoga? Does the non-standard phrase "ascetic yoga" connote non-soteriological *tapas*? Are alternative words or notions available? Can a line be drawn between these two? What are the respective aims of *tapas* and *yoga*?<sup>53</sup>

Historically the aim of *tapas* is power. What kind of power? The power of yoga? What sort of yoga? Sober assessment is rarely pronounced. Power-seeking practices are typically dismissed as lower, self-centered and motivated aims confined to the realm of social and material ascendancy and dominance. In contrast, the notion of renunciation with its non-specific aim of spiritual redemption is stereotypically regarded as a pure pursuit. Discussion never leaves these bipolar vacillations. How may we progress? By considering the power of a strong and healthy body for the purpose of developing a strong and healthy mind? Then what is the value of a strong and healthy mind? To better confront life's problems and difficulties? Nothing more than that? Does yoga in its highest sense teach nothing more than surmounting life's hardships and not to evade responsibility?

The Khmer inscription K. 410 (dated 1022 or 1025) by king Sūryavarman I from Lopburi reports of Sthavira and Mahāyāna clerics who live as neighbors with Brāhmaṇical *tāpasas* (specialists in *tapas*) as well as other groups of 'Sthaviras, Mahāyānas and *tāpasas*.' The inscription is essentially a royal command to the broad community of diverse ascetics to dedicate the merit of their austerities (*tapas*) to the King. 'Disrupters will be ousted and heavily punished.'

### **Angīrasa: the proto-tantric Buddha**

What follows is a brief but compelling illustration of how the Buddha-cult's narratological heritage authorizes dominance-expressing austerity. Arguably, this passage represents the earliest strata of the Bauddha-movement's entire scriptural preserve. We come across the character Angīrasa, a somewhat conflating epithet applied now and then to Gautama the Buddha. The name debuts in an intriguing scene from the opening portion of *Vinaya-Pitaka* (i.25).<sup>54</sup> This is Buddha as *tapasya* (body

<sup>52</sup> For comparative analysis note the negative Sanskrit form *avenī*, 'without convergence, commingling, influence,' hence 'single, by itself, entirely unique.' Look also to the Bauddha-cult-specific compounds *avenīka* and *avenīka-buddha-dharma*.

<sup>53</sup> See Bronkhorst, 'The Brāhmaṇical Contribution to Yoga,' 2011: 318-322, 321.

<sup>54</sup> See *Dīghanikāya* iii.196; *Samyuttanikāya* i.196; *Anguttaranikāya* iii.239; *Theragāthā* v.536; *Jātaka* i.116.

heat master).<sup>55</sup> Shortly after his eminent awakening Gautama is wandering alone through the countryside. Night approaches and he needs a place to rest. He finds an *aśrama* and requests accommodation. He is taken to the sauna, the only space available. He is told that a terrible *nāga* lives inside, but Angīrasa shows no concern. He passes the night in ascetic inner heat ‘with brilliant flames streaming from his body.’<sup>56</sup> In fact, the Buddha generates so much heat that smoke starts spewing from the roof of the sauna. The resident hermits all rush outside and remark to each other, ‘That shaman must have done himself in.’

Not so. ‘At the end of the night’ the narrative alludes, ‘as the multi-colored flames are finally quenched, the Buddha emerges from the sauna radiant—deep green, crimson, yellow, red and the colors of crystal.’ Here the Buddha’s blazing body should substantiate the presence of shamanic and proto-tantric traits at the earliest strata of the *Bauddhamata*.<sup>57</sup> The story yields two strong interpretive suggestions. Firstly is the hint that the Buddha was encountering episodes of psychic metamorphosis weeks beyond the moment of his grand illumination. Secondly is the virtual attestation that the ascetic practice of producing psychic heat is by no means a later baroque innovation. Through ill-defined and outmoded idiom, the text<sup>58</sup> represents a credible depiction of *tapasya* obtained through the *prāṇāyāma* and *kumbhaka*. Elsewhere the Buddha is made to explain, ‘As two big men might lift up a weaker man and hold him over a barbecue pit, when I finally stopped my [*kumbhaka*] practice a terrific heat arose in my body.’ *Dhammapada* (v. 387) describes the Buddha as being “on fire.”<sup>59</sup> Another *Dhammapada* verse (31) portrays the ascetic as “moving like fire, burning all his fetters, small and large.”<sup>60</sup>

The Buddha with *Nāga* was a main cult icon installed in the central shrine of Prasat Bayon within the walled temple city of Angkor Thom - built by king Jayavarman VII (r. c.1181-1218)—immediately adjacently just north of Angkor Vat. The king enshrined the Buddha with *Nāga* icon and identified himself with the spirit of its divinity. When built at the end of the 12th century, the Bayon marked the center of Jayavarman’s capital. Prominence was given to *Bauddha* devotion. It’s still unknown if a *Buddharāja* notion had ever displaced the “god-king” tradition of the *Devarāja*. Other major questions remain unanswered. What do the four gigantic faces on the

<sup>55</sup> *Angi* clearly indicates ‘limb’ or ‘parts.’ *Rasa* (‘passion, juice, flavor’) requires some interpretive flare. Handled broadly—‘brilliance, essence, semen, sap, living water, the ambrosial seed of Śiva Himself’—*rasa* finds its home in Indian aesthetics and the discourse on rhythm, time, beauty and taste, with allusions to ‘that which distinguishes a work of art (or poesis) from mere predication’ (Thomas Merton, [on *rasa*], *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, 1973, 396, n).

<sup>56</sup> *Angato rasiyo samaranti*. See discussion in Thomas, *The Life of Buddha*, 1927, 22.

<sup>57</sup> *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* (MN 36) caricatures the Buddha’s *prāṇāyāma* training: ‘restraining respiration at the mouth, nose, and ears, feeling violent winds tearing at the belly, the feeling of the stomach being stabbed with a butcher’s knife; a violent burning inside the body as though one were rolling in a ditch of burning coals.’

<sup>58</sup> This is our interpretive translation of *Majjhima-nikāya* (*Middle Length Sayings*, trans. Horner, vol. I, 1954-59, 244). The text clearly speaks of the magical “heat” produced by holding the breath. Here we see the ancient and widespread notions of “magical sweating” and “inner light” found among various shamanic peoples. See Horner (trans.) vol. 4, 1993, and *Mahavagga*, 1951, 35, note. For “Lo! See Angīrasa, illuminant / As the midday sun, all radiant,” see also *Anguttara-nikāya* (*Gradual Sayings* vol. III, trans. E.M. Hare, 1952, 175.) For the Buddha as “burning,” see also Eliade, *Yoga*, 1964, 331.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Mascaro, trans. *The Dhammapada*, verse 387.

<sup>60</sup> Verse 11. For more on ‘psychic heat’ or *tapas*, see Allen, “The Indo-European Prehistory of Yoga,” 1998: 1-20. Allen approaches the subject of *tapas* from the standpoint of an ‘Indo-European cultural comparativist.’ He compares the heroic ordeals of Odysseus with ascetics from pre-historic Indian traditions. Hence when “he sleeps in his pile of leaves, the Greek hero is likened to a firebrand (*dalon*) carefully kept alight under a heap of ashes (5.487).” Allen then points to scriptural Svetāmbara Jain stories where a king that becomes an ascetic similarly “undertakes intense austerities and is likened to ‘fire confined within a heap of ashes.’ If accepted, “the rapprochement has bearing on the history of the notion of *tapas* (‘heat’),” (n. 12).

temple represent? While the Bayon sanctuary has been variously regarded as a temple unto Śiva, Brahma, Avalokiteśvara or Buddha, it may have been all of these and something more added. Still, the often mentioned ‘break in the Vedic tradition’ that marked the reign of the seventh Jayavarman is likely more apparent than existing in fact. Michael Vickery (2004, 9)<sup>61</sup> discusses the bilingual Khmer-Pāli inscription (K. 754) ascribed to king Śrīndravarma (1308) the third reigning monarch after Jayavarman VII. Following Coedès (1964, 328-329), Vickery peers closely at the replacement of Sanskrit with Pāli words; but even if king Śrīndravarma had indeed converted to a Pāli-based Bauddha-cult, supplanting longstanding Śaiva-cult supremacy, the king’s inscription, according to Vickery, “shows no change in the structure of society, in spite of the new religion.”<sup>62</sup> In Bhattacharya’s view, as well, the older forms of worship never subsided, and the local adorations, whatever the persuasion, were reunified in the late 12th or early 13th century Prasat Bayon, “a veritable pantheon that functioned both as the kingdom’s center and its image in small.”<sup>63</sup>

### Syncretic and Restorative Elaborations

The predominant religion among the Khmer was clearly based on the worship of the Vedic god Śiva described as “a great ascetic with many names.” Through many of his epithets Śiva is identified with the sacred mountain and variously worshipped as Girīśa, “mountain lord,” Girīkr “reclines as mountain” and Giritra, “protecting mountain.”<sup>64</sup> The importance of this great spiritual Spartan as deity in the early 7th century Zhēnlà or Chēn-là period is attested by the fact that king renamed his capital Iśanapura, “Śiva city” (Daweewarn 1982, 30).<sup>65</sup>

It needs to be mentioned that the religion of Viṣṇu (or the Vaiṣṇava), and the closely allied Bhāgavata cult (devotees of Kṛṣṇa) prospered from as early as the fourth-century pre-Khmer Funan period. Kṛṣṇa was the favorite of certain Khmer queens and princesses. An inscription dated from the pre-Angkorian reign of Jayavarman I espouses the central Vaiṣṇava doctrine that ‘a man may progressively purify himself in the course of his various existences and thereby free himself from successive rebirths, either good or bad, resulting from action (karma).’ Khmer dedication to the cult of Viṣṇu is compellingly confirmed by the piety of king Suryavarman II, responsible for building of Angkor Vat during first half of 12th century. Angkor Vat (near Siem Reap in northwest Cambodia) is unreservedly taken as the greatest Vaiṣṇava temple known to the world. Unlike all other temples of the Greater Angkor complex, Angkor Vat faces west, the direction of the setting sun, the symbolical pole of the after-world. Thai scholar Daweewarn holds the view that the incarnation concept of the Devarāja is a purely Vaiṣṇava belief (1982).

Viṣṇu appears famously in Khmer iconography reposing on the primordial multi-headed serpent Ananta-śeṣa depicted in lintel at the famous Phnom Rung Temple in present day northeast Thailand. The decorative eastern lintel of the central shrine (*maṇḍapa*) of the temple is a brilliant sample of distinct Khmer stylistic handling. The extraordinary carving is an illustration of the Puranic re-creation myth. Viṣṇu reclines with Ananta-śeṣa (the eternal one) in the primordial ocean of eternal bliss in the period just before the creation of the world. From Viṣṇu’s navel stems a lotus blossom upon

<sup>61</sup> Vickery, “Cambodia and Its Neighbors in the 15th Century,” 2004, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Vickery 2004, 10.

<sup>63</sup> Bhattacharya 1997, 49.

<sup>64</sup> Bhattacharya 1997, 38.

<sup>65</sup> Dawee Daweewarn, *Brahmanism in Southeast Asia*, 1982, 30.

which a tiny Lord Brahmā (world creator) sits in yoga-trance. A uniquely Khmer innovation on the theme is the appearance of a dragon in place of the serpent that supports the ensemble.

It needs to be said and boldly underscored that the worship of Viṣṇu found far less acceptance than that of Śiva among the Khmer. The great preponderance of Śaiva-themed inscription demonstrates the favor that the faith enjoyed, particularly together with phallic *Śiva-Liṅga* through which the god was mainly worshipped. Stone-hewn bas-reliefs of brāhmaṇa ascetics worshipping Śiva bear further testament to Cambodia's affinity with Vedic heritage. We see two bearded ascetics dressed in nothing but loincloths; their hair is tied in topknot fashion. They sit on the ground in a casual manner and gracefully repose against a decorative pillar. Each of them holds between their hands a ritual *chillum* in performance of the quintessential Vedic rite of honoring Śiva through a sacramental offering of smoke. Such baked clay conical pipes would be filled with herbal mixtures consisting in part of cannabis-derived substances. This bas-relief is at the hilltop fortress Prasat Phnom Rung, in present-day Buriram Province, Thailand. It is Śaiva sanctuary built between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **Khmer Śaiva Philosophy**

There were varied forms of Śaiva-based worship and speculation among the Khmer. Śaiva Pāśupata appeared in the 7<sup>th</sup> and late 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Monism with its “multiple bodies” notion was especially influential. This was doubly inspired by Adi Śaṅkarācārya's Advaita Vedānta and by the southern Indian Śaiva Āgama texts. In a remarkable inscription dated 1100, Bhattacharya (1997) identifies the most distinctive aspect of Indian Śaiva Āgama tradition, the feature of *dīkṣā* (initiation) mentioned often in Khmer inscriptions. Śiva's *śakti* (energy, power), by assuming two different attributes, initially strengthens the bonds of the soul and then subsequently disburdens the soul from them. Such ties that have existed for all eternity are firstly reinforced or brought to maturity for the singular purpose of helping people take their innate capabilities to complete fruition. When the bonds are ripe they are broken by the power of Śiva's grace or by the god himself in the form of Bhairava or the Goddess,<sup>66</sup> or in the form of a guru who descends to perform the *dīkṣā* (preparation) that induces different states in different entities depending on their capacities.<sup>67</sup> What is missed in the study of Khmer philosophy of any persuasion is the absence of native Khmer philosophers.

### **Harihara (Viṣṇu-Śiva)**

Syncretic tendencies are marked in Khmer religion. This may possibly reflect a disposition or appetite for great religious acceptance. Alexis Sanderson (2003) studied Old Khmer and Sanskrit inscriptions and found that ‘relations between the faiths appeared generally tolerant. There were Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Bauddha family lineages among the nobility. In the palaces as well, though principally Śaiva, marriages occurred between the different faiths’ (Sanderson 2003, 433). Was it the deep-seated Indic notion of the “unity of self” that provided validation for these remarkable features?

The syncretic half-Viṣṇu half-Śiva image called Harihara appeared from the early pre-Angkorian period. What are the basic distinguishing criteria in the worship of the compound deity Vishnu-Śiva? The worshipers of Viṣṇu, or Vaiṣṇavas, believe

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<sup>66</sup> Alexis Sanderson, “*Ritual for Oneself and Ritual for Others*,” in Michaels 2010, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Bhattacharya 1997, 46.

in numerous *avatāra*, incarnations or messiahs, if you will, who quite literally “descend” or appear on earth at precarious junctures to restore the path of ethical rectitude. Contrastingly, the worshippers of Śiva, known as Śaivas, disclose the complexity of Śiva’s nature through the invocation his 1,008 mantric names and descriptions. Viṣṇu signifies the ontic emergence or arousal of primordial consciousness conveyed by the slumbering Mahā-Viṣṇu. He also indicates the cosmic axis that sustains world order. In this way Viṣṇu is seen as the “Preserver” who is exalted as the supreme personification of godhead from among the pantheon of lesser gods. Śiva, by distinction, dwells apart from any god-friends and is worshiped as the archetypal lone-ascetic who at times displays a virulent, wild and contemptible nature. Thus Śiva is regarded as the god of destruction who is typically surrounded by a company of *pāśu* or fiendish devotees who may symbolize the psychological barriers of fear. Śiva’s chief object is destruction of the ego by way of which he saves his multitude of followers. He represents the sixth sense, *kāla*, or time, which is typically conceived as both inescapable and inexhaustible. Death is not the end of life enactment but an ignorance-abolishing site of transformation. In this sense Śiva is the god of creation. He is furthermore regarded as the patron god of yoga and creative arts. Śiva’s *liṅga* or phallic is aniconic, a nonfigurative mark that is often installed in the sanctum sanctorum (*garbhagrha*) of a Śiva shrine. For Śiva’s celebrants the *liṅga* denotes what the *śālagrāma* does for the followers of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu’s *śālagrāma* is a coil-shaped fossilized black-colored shell that symbolizes his potency or seed. Both of these insignias, *śālagrāma* and *liṅga*, are believed to retain miraculous qualities and emanate the deity’s boundless presence. Other correspondences arise from the fact that the *Śivaliṅgam* and Viṣṇu’s *śālagrāma* are kept in temples or on people’s private altars and are regularly ritually bathed, anointed and perfumed. The water that is used for these ritual baths is believed to possess sin-dispelling qualities and devotees may drink it after the enactment.<sup>68</sup>

To return to the subject of Harihara, the syncretic half-Viṣṇu half-Śiva icon: its early importance among the Khmer and early Siamese is clearly demonstrated by the seventh-century royal pre-Angkorian town of Hariharālaya, ‘abode of Harihara,’ founded by king Jayavarman II, the ninth century founder of the Khmer Empire. Hariharālaya is today known as Roluos, a dusty hamlet situated around 20 kilometers southeast of Angkor Vat, just south off of National Highway 6 in Siem Reap province. It was immediately preceded by King Yaśovarman’s founding of the first true Angkorian capital Yaśodharapura.

### Śiva-Buddha Fusion

Even before the seventh-century founding of Aninditapura by Jayavarman I, Khmer theological speculation had mainly revolved around the worship of Śiva. It is also clear that a more profound level an indigenous penchant for intermingling notions of an all-embracing theocratic Supreme abided among the Khmer elite, a fact borne out by the reconciliation and fusion of divergent metaphysical advances appropriate to the hybrid-mélange Harihara icon.

A far more compelling illustration is observed in the fusion and confusion of Śiva and Buddha. In a Khmer inscription (K. 397) dated 1110 from the great Phimai temple (northeastern Thailand), Śiva and Buddha are invoked in a way that reveals their concepts merging very closely. In another inscription, about 19 years later, we witness

<sup>68</sup> *Śālagrāma*, the fossil of an extinct species of molluscs particularly found in the Kali Gandaki River and at Dvarka. See Stutley, 1977, 101-2, and Narayanan, “Śālagrāma,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 2015.

an expansion of the “classical Hindu trinity” (*trimūrti*) of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara (Śiva) to include and combine the historical Buddha in an astonishing *Śaiva-caturmūrti*, or “Śiva in four-forms” tetrad. The inscription records the installation of a *Śiva-liṅgam* along with statues of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Buddha.<sup>69</sup> From the standpoint of Indian Monist philosophy in which both Śaiva and Bauddha engage, such blending seems as natural as it is preordained. At their highest metaphysical concentrations there is hardly any variance between the two trajectories.<sup>70</sup> Śiva, who is absolute, “one in his essence,”<sup>71</sup> manifests through a massive multitude of forms. Yet in spite of being many, he is empty and devoid of all discernible substantive cause. Congruently, Buddha, though construed beyond implicitness, assumes four very distinctive “bodies”: *sambhogakāya*, *nirmanakāya*, *dharmakāya* and *śivakāya*.<sup>72</sup>

It is furthermore fitting to remind ourselves that the central image of the great Phimai temple (mentioned just above) was “most likely” (Woodward 2004) the Buddha with Nāga, though named there, revealingly, Lord Vimāya (‘free of illusion’) to which Thai *phimai* corresponds. Of additional interest, Woodward advances the theory that Phimai as “Vimāya” is attested in a southern Indian text as an epithet of Śiva, but only from around the 14th century. From this he infers the important instance of a Southeast Asian religious development transferred to the Indian subcontinent directly.<sup>73</sup> We should not be surprised that the Sanskrit-Khmer inscription dated 1129 from Trapan Don On, Siem Reap (K. 254), ‘relates that a consummate Śiva-Buddha fusion is conclusively achieved’; but as Bhattacharya (1997) wisely advises, ‘we must always keep in mind that the Indian texts seem to never grow weary of repeating the adage that Truth is one, only worshipped by the followers of different religions under various names and forms.’

### **The Bilingual Khmer and Pāli Royal Inscription K. 754 (1308)**

Along this speculative syncretic vein it is worth returning to the bilingual Khmer and Pāli inscription (K. 754) from Kok Svay Chek, near Siem Reap. The royal stone-inscribed statement dated 1308 records the donation by king Śrīndravarma of land, human resources, and a single item of religious statuary to the Mahāthera (senior cleric) named Sirisirindamoḷi of assumed Bauddha-lineage affiliation. The Pāli inscription thus proclaims ‘an endowment of the king to Mahāthera Sirisirindamoḷi of land for construction of an ascetic institution, and an entire village named Sirisirindaratanaḡāma, men and women laborers, and a Buddha statue.’ While the initial side of the inscription is in Pāli, the second part is written in Khmer.<sup>74</sup> This second part furthermore offers details not included in the Pāli section. In the Pāli part the king’s name is given as Śrīndavamma. But in the Khmer text all proper names are in Sanskrit. The name of the king is Śrīndravarma and the name of the village Śrīndraratnagrāma, both of these literal translations from the Pāli. The donor’s name is also in Sanskrit, but given as Śrīndramaulīdeva. This is somewhat odd. Why would

<sup>69</sup> Bhattacharya 1997, 46-47.

<sup>70</sup> Bhattacharya 1997.

<sup>71</sup> Regarding “absolutes” we cite Frits Staal, *Discovering the Vedas* (2008, 331): “The most serious difficulty that affects all absolutes is that they are all alike. An absolute is defined by having no attributes that distinguish it from anything else. It is *anirvacanīya*, nothing can be asserted of it. But if ‘emptiness’ or ‘nothing’ is different from ‘fullness’ or ‘everything,’ one of them must be different from the other in at least one respect which provides it with an attribute so that it is not an absolute. I conclude that absolutes are not only all alike, they are all identical.”

<sup>72</sup> Bhattacharya 1997.

<sup>73</sup> Hiram Woodward, “Esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia,” 2004.

<sup>74</sup> Coedès, “Etudes cambodgiennes” (1936, 15): “La première face de la stèle est couverte d’une inscription en pâli, qui comprend 20 lignes formant 10 śloka. La seconde face porte 31 lignes en khmèr.”



“deva” be suffixed to a name that is aptly rendered into Sanskrit as Śrīndramauli? Is the element “deva” a kind of encodment? Or conversely, could the word have been detached from the Sanskrit name when rendered into Pāli?

A few more points are curious here. Regarding the king’s donation of a Buddha statue (*buddharūpa[n]*),<sup>75</sup> it is given no name in the Pāli text. But in the Sanskrit text it is named as Śrīndramahādeva or *vrah vuddha kamrateñ ‘añ śrīśrīndramahādeva* (K. 754, line 8). For Vickery (2004, 9) this represents the royal inscription’s most important discovery, as Mahādeva is a name for Śiva. In addition, the full honorific that the stele confers upon the venerable recipient of the Buddha statute is not just Mahāthera but Mahā-Svāmī-Thera, *mahāsvāmī therā śrīśrīndramaulīdeva*.<sup>76</sup> The broad idyllic syncretic scene that a careful reading of the text evokes is absorbingly balanced by gazetted notice that the village bestowed to the Mahāsvāmī was under the authority of “The Venerable Suvarṇaliṅga Sanctuary,” *vrah śakti kamrateñ ‘añ suvarṇaliṅga* (K. 754, line 26)

For Coedès the 1308 inscription gives material evidence of the presence of Pāli at the beginning of the 14th century.<sup>77</sup> The incorporation of Pāli words marks a clear departure from the earlier Sanskrit-based epigraphic custom. K. 754 may also represent the first appearance of Pāli text among the Khmer; but it goes too far to interpret as Vickery (2004) who regards Śrīndravarma’s retiring gesture as a move to institute “Theravāda Buddhism” as a royal cult of Cambodia. “Theravada Buddhism” is entirely out of place here, a highly ineffectual analytic neologism postdating these events by a good five centuries.

We would be hard pressed to presume the formal protocols involved in the production early-fourteenth century royal Khmer steles; but is linking “verbal idiom” to “lineage loyalty” any less discrete than presuming that all who don the ochre cloth observe *en bloc* the self-same ideology? Is it feasible to ascertain and measure creed-compliance?<sup>78</sup> Is it specious to assume that religious institutions are that much different from civilian entities, familial or corporate? Does the richer analysis oblige us to reframe our linear construal of ascetic-arts traditions (*paramparā*) to something more peripheral or horizontal? Is it time to attribute a greater meaning to kinship relationships and to reduce the importance ascribed to ideology? Do people belong to ascetic-arts lineages simply by virtue of what they believe, or by the kinship patterns that effectively mirror their counterparts in secular society? In a similar way we see that the narrative derived from the bilingual Old Khmer and Pāli inscription K. 754 is ultimately wrought from the human dealings that the royal stele itself sought to chronicle. Even if there were important agreements in what individuals wished to believe, the fundamental bonds are not strictly ideological.<sup>79</sup> Viewed as such, are we prepared to revalorize the hybrid nature of all social intercourse, both in and out of lineage life?

### **Primordial Śakti and Sacrificial Human Slaughter**

The early Khmer stand out as unique among world practitioners of human sacrifice. This may be the outcome of extreme, perhaps excessive forms of Śiva worship. We begin with a loose clutch of ‘proto-tantric’ viewpoints. Historical records

<sup>75</sup> From the Pāli portion of the text, verse VII, line 14.

<sup>76</sup> Inscription K. 754, lines 8-9, [8] *vrah vuddha kamrateñ ‘añ śrīśrīndramahādeva prasāda ta mahāsvāmī [9] therā śrīśrīndramaulīdeva jā saṅkalpa paṃre ta kamrateñ*.

<sup>77</sup> Coedès 1936, 14.

<sup>78</sup> Confer, Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice*, 2005, 25.

<sup>79</sup> See Baba Rampuri on ‘the need to privilege kinship relationships over ideology in comprehending ascetic-arts lineages’ developed in a number of talks and blogging.

go back to at least the beginning of the 5th century CE and the earliest Cham inscriptions that reflect the devotions to Bhadrēśvara by the first Cham king Bhadravarman I (ca 400 CE) at My Son (present day Vietnam). The same cult emerged in the Cambodian sphere around Mt. Phu, present-day southern Laos. Mt. Phu was also known as Liṅgaparvath for the natural ‘self-created’ phallus-like formation at its summit that was venerated as Śiva in the form of Bhadrēśvara.<sup>80</sup> How to gain structural sense of this devotion? It was not aimed solely at the figure of Śiva but the outgrowth of Śiva’s consort Śakti, the personification of the primordial power. Fecundity is Śakti main association, the life-giving energies of earth. As Śiva’s bride she is furthermore connected to The Sacred Mountain and variously worshipped as Pārvatī, “she of the mountains,” Umā Haimavatī, “the golden goddess,” and Śikharavāsīnī ‘who dwells on the summits.’ Śakti’s domain is specifically Śākta, largely distinguished by symbolic adoration of the female energy and the supreme divinity as Divine Mother. Other strong features of Śākta worship are the use of mantras (formulas), sorcery and the propitiation of the Goddess Herself with ritual blood and wine offerings. Together with Śiva, her consubstantial consort, they represent the paradigmatic divine family. The Goddess is eternally at Śiva’s side. She gazes admiringly whether Śiva is dancing in cosmic bliss or slaughtering his opponents. The love between them is deep and abiding. In one illustration we observe their family serenely engaged in religious activity. Pārvatī holds their small son Kārttikeya in her lap while their elder son, Gaṇeśa, helps his father string together garlands of severed human heads.

Only in its most outrageous forms does Śākta worship incorporate human sacrifice. Where did such practices originate? India’s cults of human sacrifice have left an indelible mark on her history. They are said to have begun around the 7th century in kingdom of Kāmarūpa (present day Assam), a marginal border-zone lingering between Vedic (civil) and primordial (savage) cultures. Some have regarded the semi-mythic land of Kāmarūpa as the “Tantric country par excellence.”<sup>81</sup> Gorakhnath, the twelfth-century tantric yogi-saint and legendary inventor of Hatha-yoga may have come from Kāmarūpa, along with the sect of Aghora yogis famous for their despicable cruelties and licentiousness.<sup>82</sup> From the terrifying histories of such ascetics the label “yogi” came to insinuate the most frightening and extreme of tantric practitioners (Bhattacharya 1997, 51).

E.A. Gait (1926)<sup>83</sup> speaks of the infamous tantric Kāmākhyā (Kāmākṣya) temple near present-day Guwahati, Assam. The temple is situated on a hill named Kāmāgiri. It is worshipped by sacrificial offering and eroticism, and considered a great *pīṭha* or center of pilgrimage in honor of the Goddess through ritual sexual symbolism. Its enormous sanctity is explained by a legend. It’s the place where Śiva and his consort Pārvatī met for their eon-long erotic encounters. After her death Lord Śiva went mad and carried her sacred corpse over his shoulder and wandered through the universe dancing obsessively. To cure Śiva’s madness Lord Viṣṇu cut the Goddess’s body into fifty pieces with his razor sharp discus (*cakrī*). The pieces represent a garland

<sup>80</sup> The earliest Cham (My Son) inscriptions reflect devotion to Bhadrēśvara. See Guy, “Introducing Southeast Asia,” in *Lost Kingdoms*, 2014, 3-13.

<sup>81</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, 1964.

<sup>82</sup> The name Aghori is usually translated as *a-ghora*, “not-terrified,” “fearless.” They are homeless ascetics who frequent cemeteries, eat from human skulls and once practiced ritual cannibalism. Reports tell of members degusting corpses at cremations sites. Aghoras believe that all of man’s conditioned tastes and aversions, his notions of good and bad should be destroyed. Apart from god in the form of Śiva (or his consort Kālī/Devi, etc.), they only respect their guru. They seem to be descendants of a very much older and widespread Kāpālīka, lit. “Skull adepts.”

<sup>83</sup> E. A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, 1926.

(*varṇamālā*) of the Sanskrit syllables (*akṣara*). The places where the pieces of her body fell became Her sacred pilgrimage and practice sites (*śaktipīṭha* or *yogapīṭha*). Devi's vulva (*yoni*) dropped at Kāmākhyā making it the most sacred site of all. The inner sanctum (*garbhagrha*) is formed by a rock with a natural cleft that resembles a *yoni*. It remains ever moist by a natural spring. Once a year when the monsoon starts the water runs red with iron oxide.

Kāmākhyā was renowned for performances of human sacrifice. The cult interpreted the Vedic injunction *svarga kāmo yajeta* ('the heaven-desiring must sacrifice') to its most distressing end. In 1565, 140 victims were beheaded in a single sacrificial ceremony. Eliade (*Yoga* 1964, 305) offers gripping details of the human sacrifices performed in Assam. 'Those who volunteered were *bhogis* (enjoyers). From the moment they announced their intention of giving themselves to be sacrificed they became almost sacred. Everything they wanted was placed before them. They had their pick of any woman.'<sup>84</sup> The "voluntary victims" were offered to the Goddess on huge copper trays. According to sources and archaeological evidence, kings alone performed these sacrifices. The British stopped the practice in 1832.<sup>85</sup>

The worship of the Earth Goddess Teri among the Kondh is worth mentioning. Derived from their early creation myth, the Kondh believe "there can be no fertility for their community without human blood falling on the ground." The sacrifice seems to imply two things: (i) the deity, considered both impersonal and amorphous, can be made tangible; and (ii) communication is obtainable between the abstract god and its surrounding community.<sup>86</sup> Over time the worship of Goddess Teri evolved the notion that human sacrifice was indispensable not only for securing the prosperity of the Kondh but the entire world. This gave rise to the Meriah sacrifices, the victims of which were usually children procured by the nearby Dom community. The children were strangled and cut into pieces and buried in the fields for the agricultural fertility.<sup>87</sup> Victims were never "served" to the god. The god was not a cannibal. Similar to the *bhogis*, for the length of the ceremony meriah victims were believed to incarnate the divinity. It would seem that the Kondh achieved communication with the Goddess Teri through the agency of the leader-priest.<sup>88</sup> The Kondh tradition of human sacrifice is likely not of great antiquity, perhaps post-medieval. The British put an end to it in the 1850's. Present-day Kondhs still practice sacrifice—at least those not converted to Christianity—but bulls and other animals have replaced child victims.

Perhaps this explains why in India and Cambodia where the human sacrifice was made to the Goddess in the forms of Kālī, Durgā, Bhairava and Bhadrakālī et al., it could only be performed by the king, a *kṣatriya*. Brahmins never performed human sacrifice.<sup>89</sup> Harris (2005, 53-55) states without reference that 'ritual suicide and probable human sacrifice in association to goddess cults also took place in the southern Indian Pallava kingdom from the seventh through ninth centuries.' Making no mention of the middle Mekong riverside site of Liṅgaparvath, Harris puts forward the possibility that the Pallavan rites "were exported to Cambodia." He also affirms that 'Cambodia's

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<sup>84</sup> Eliade, *Yoga*, 1964, 305.

<sup>85</sup> George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnāth and the Kānpaṭa Yogīs*, 1938

<sup>86</sup> According to Stephen Hodge, the Kondh inhabit the entire highland region of Phulbani, most of the highlands in western Ganjam and much of Koraput and Kalahandi in Orissa. See Hodge, "dombii as scavenger woman," *Archives of Indology* (24 Apr 2000). For Meriah sacrifices, see Barbara Boal 1997.

<sup>87</sup> Bhattacharya 1997, 39.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Mus, "L'Inde vue de l'Est: cultes indiens et indigènes au Champa," 1934, 8-11, cited in Bhattacharya 1997, 39.

<sup>89</sup> Bhattacharya 1997, 40.

final human sacrifice took place in 1877 at Ba Phnom when two prisoners of war were ritually beheaded at a royal sponsored ceremony for raising up the ancestors. It significantly occurred in the month of *pisakh*, sacred to Kālī.’ Harris furthermore alludes to evidence suggesting that Bauddha clerics (ascetic priests), based around Ba Phnom, performed certain rituals such as prayers for the dead in the first few days of the just mentioned ceremony, but they left sometime before the final day when the coup de grâce occurred. Rain forecasts were apparently determined by the gushing of the blood from the headless necks. Sacrificial decapitations were reported at two other nineteenth-century Cambodian sites (Porée-Maspero 1962–1969, 1:246-248<sup>90</sup>; Harris 2005, 55). Harris (2005, 257-258, n. 20) cites two further sources; Try (1991, 288) ‘asserts that a human sacrifice took place at Ba Phnom as late as 1884’<sup>91</sup> while Bonnefoy (1991, 2:923) proposes that ‘human sacrifices may have been offered to the tutelary deity (*neak ta Krol*) of Kompong Thom until 1904’<sup>92</sup>; but as times progressed such practice were halted and underwent adjustments. Buffalos in rut replaced human victims but the fundamental aims of fertility and fecundity remained the same (Chandler 1974, 216-202; Harris 2005, 55).

Chronologically, sacrificial human slaughter among the Khmer was known as early as the 6th century. Are earlier occurrences recorded in Indian? Referring to a time before 589 CE, the Chinese *History of the Sui Dynasty* (*Sui shu*) contains the record of a Khmer tantric temple. ‘Near the Capital is a mountain named *Ling-kia-po-p’o*. Its summit is a temple that is constantly guarded by a thousand soldiers and consecrated to a spirit named P’o-to-li to which they sacrifice men. The king visits the sanctuary once a year to perform the rite at night.’ Coedes (1968, 66) identified the temple as Vat Phu overlooking the Mekong River in Champasak province, present day Laos (as mentioned above) and positioned at the summit of Liṅgapārvata (*Ling-kai-po-p’o*), a sacred mountain. According to Wales (1953), “Vat Phu always remained a holy place of the utmost sanctity and received the constant gifts and homage of kings.”<sup>93</sup>

### **Mountain, Menhir, Liṅgam and Sacrifice**

Was Southeast Asia the original Kāmarūpa? Could the rites of human sacrifice, mountain worship, and the worship of the *liṅgam* all be traced to primordial cults that prevailed throughout ancient monsoon Asia?<sup>94</sup> Were these early ‘proto-tantric’ forms of ritual supplication initially designed to promote agricultural and feminine fecundity? May the culturally sophisticated *śivaliṅgam*—symbol of the fertilizing energy of Śiva—be read as a primitive phallic symbol “descended from the uncarved stones of earth cults”?<sup>95</sup> Was the rite of setting up large long stones in the soil and then performing human sacrifice in front of them a widespread feature of primordial cultures throughout the Neolithic world? For Wales (1953) the earliest stage of “simple animism” was founded on the notion of the sacredness of soil. This later transformed into a “religion of sacrifice” where a people were compelled to spill human blood before the vastly amorphous divinity-as-nature. Then came the need to establish sacred sites where the sacrifice secured a means of contact with divinities living in alternate

<sup>90</sup> Maspero, *Étude sur les rites agraires des Cambodgiens*. 3 vols. 1962–1969.

<sup>91</sup> S. Try, “Le bouddhisme dans la société khmère modern,” 1991

<sup>92</sup> Y. Bonnefoy, *Mythologies: A Restructured Translation of Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés traditionnelles et du monde antique*, 1991.

<sup>93</sup> H.G. Quaritch Wales, *The Mountain of God*, 1953, 168-70.

<sup>94</sup> Bhattacharya 1997, 39.

<sup>95</sup> Mus 1934, 8-11.

spheres. Then they chose a place to raise a mound of earth where latent peripheric energies converge (Wales 1953, 43-45).

Concerning the *liṅga* there are varied opinions vis-à-vis its origin, function and purport, especially regarding its application in the elite religion of the early Khmer and the adoration of the Devarāja. Vertically the *liṅga* signifies an axis. Laterally it serves as a spatial locus, the hub of the tangible maṇḍalic perimeter. Hence the *liṅga* signifies the essential center or primal source of its specific locale. Formally established via consecration, the *liṅgam* also marks the essential plumb of an ontic topology to which every subsequent centers correlates. Contrasted to the menhir ('tall upright stone'), the *liṅga* reckons more with the primitive conception of substitute bodies and the tribal leaders' perception of 'a consubstantial presence in the *liṅga*-like stone – *as in himself* – the sanctified "magical" forces of the earth and macrocosmic domain' (Wales 1953, 43-45).

The character of the cult is furthermore expressed by its predilection for human sacrifice. The ritual offering of human sacrifice (or preserved severed heads in the case of certain tribes) may thus arise from the notion that the 'soul force' of enemies can be used to increase the fertility-giving forces of the local divinity for the good of the community.<sup>96</sup> For Wales (1953), the intrinsic primordial notion supposes that every spatial-territorial unit possess its own distinctive ambiance relating to the group of people living there. Originally a naturally occurring stone outcrop<sup>97</sup> became the site of the great divinity, and around this axis the town grew up. Not only a mound, but a tree as well may have been required to entreat and commune with the spirits of the soil in accordance with the animistic outlook that the site where a well-grown tree survived marked the point where fecundating energies converge (Wales 1953, 43-45). But these sacred mounds may symbolize more than the concentration of natural forces. We may also view them as macrocosmic loci, "magical centers" that laterally and vertically combine the *axis mundi* or cosmic pillar and thereby fashion a way for the people's oblation to pass to divinities in alternate realms, on the one hand, and for receiving their benefactions in exchange, on the other hand. The proto-*maṇḍala* of the fundamental center functions as an ambidirectional channel of mysterious immersion, diffusion and expanse to the far-flung spheres of interior foci.

### **The Cult of the Devarāja**

In the ninth-century reign of Khmer king Jayavarman II this religion based chiefly on fecundity and the life-giving energy of Mother Nature was modified anew and finally supplanted by a politicized form of the Śaiva cult that was founded on rites of the Devarāja (divine rule). Through the prescriptive rites of the Devarāja the king sought empowerment as a *cakravartin*, 'lord of the world,' which denoted nothing less than an absolute merging of the monarch's soul with the essence of Śiva's ontic eminence or deification. From this time forward the Tantric rites of the Devarāja and the consecration of the king's royal *liṅga* were the primary sources of royal legitimacy. At the popular level, too, adoration of the *liṅga* became supreme as sculpted stone phalli representing Śiva were enshrined throughout the expansive realm at the summits of pyramidal "temple-mountains" symbolic of Mt. Kailāsa, the navel peak of the universe.

Śiva's correspondence with "the sacred mountain" has been mentioned above. Juxtaposed, however, with the *Śiva-liṅga* as installed in the central shrine of a temple,

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<sup>96</sup> Schnitger, "Les Monuments mégalithiques de Nias," 1939, 78-84 (cited in Wales 1953).

<sup>97</sup> Svayambhu, 'naturally occurring' or 'self-born.'

itself symbolic of “the sacred mountain,” this does nothing but swell the connotations and ramifications of the primordial concept. As cosmic pillar or *axis mundi*, the royal temple that enshrines the *liṅga* specifies the sacred mountain Kailāsa, “the abode of the gods” and functions to consolidate the primal locus or essential center of the sacred-royal domain (*cakratīrtha*).

Cambodian monarchs made exacting calculations to determine the kingdom’s essential power point, and there they erected the royal temple. This mysterious “point-zero,” as previously described, additionally functioned as the vital criterion to which all peripheral centers aligned. The *liṅga* of the king was the primal locus of not only the immediate geographical locale, but by extension the entire universe. In raising temple-mountains to enshrine the royal *liṅga*, each succeeding king was essentially constructing a personal quincunx, a geometric layout based of five points; four points forming a simple rectangle, the fifth point marking its center, its pole. The imperial *liṅgam* was therefore installed at the center of this religio-architectural *maṇḍala* as a “four-cornered-force-field,” a pyramidal complex of power and protection that mirrored the cosmos. Yet *maṇḍalas*, we should verify, connote far more than mere microcosms of the universe. *Maṇḍalas* are in fact receptacles of the gods, and as Eliade reminds us (1964), in Vedic India the deities actually “descended into the altar,” a conception that may have been ‘extremely widespread and existed far beyond the frontiers of India where the symbolism of royal cities, temples, towns, and by logical extension, *every human habitation* was based on a similar valorization of the sacred place as the center of the world and thereby the site of communication with heaven and hell.’<sup>98</sup> Not at all disconnected, one can hardly help reflecting when exploring the ruins of the Greater Angkor Archaeological zone, that while thieves and archaeologists have divested the place of nearly every *liṅga* that ever stood, abandoned *yonis* remain in abundance.

### **The Sdok Kak Thom Inscription (K.235)**

It was Khmer king Jayavarman II (770-850) who vowed that the Royal Chaplain would be chosen matrilineally, solely from the family of his venerable guru Śivakaivalya. From the history-yielding Sdok Kak Thom inscription dated 1052 from the temple of the same name in Prachinburi province, modern Thailand, we learn that the king led a strangely shifting peripatetic court life. During his approximate fifty-year reign, the king moved the capital at least five times. Debatable reasons for the king’s roving rule may in part be the pressures exerted by Java, a general term for the southern realms. More to our interest though, the royal inscription crucially attests the close alliance of Khmer ruling *kṣatriya* and priestly *brāhmaṇa*. “Whenever His Majesty King Jayavarman II and his family settled,” the inscription states, “the esteemed poet-guru Śivakaivalya and his family settled as well.”

After this the stone-hewn text introduces a character of novelty, mystery and color, Hiraṇyadāma a *brāhmaṇa* priest of presumed Indian birth. At the king’s request, in 802, Hiraṇyadāma accompanied His Majesty and His Majesty’s guru into the depths of the moss-laden forests of Mahendrapārvata (present-day Phnom Koulen). And there the *Brāhmaṇa* satisfied the king by performing the rites of the Devarāja ‘so the king may become the *cakravartin* or single ruler in the Land of Kambuja free from its dependency of the Javanese Empire.’ Next he turned to the king’s own guru ‘to reveal the secrets of the tantric rites and teach him the pertinent Tantric texts.’ P.C. Bagchi

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<sup>98</sup> Eliade 1964, 220.

(1929)<sup>99</sup> identified these texts as four in number, named *Vināśaika*, *Sammoḥa*, *Nayottara* and *Śiraścheda*. The four-part teaching cited in the epigraph comes from the Vāmaśaiva cult of Tumburu (a form of Śiva) and his four sister-goddesses (*Caturbhaginī*) known in India in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. These have also been portrayed as “The Four Faces of Tumburu” in which Tumburu is a four-faced variant of Śiva (*Śaiva-caturmūrti*), “Śiva in four-forms.” Only one of these four texts mentioned in the Sdok Kak Thom inscription presently survives, the *Vīṅśikha-tantra*.

To serve the stated interest of our central theme—that is, Buddha-Yoga-Śiva hybridity among the Old Khmer and Siamese—we make further mention of the worship of Tumburu and his four girl associates, also called goddesses (*bhaginī*) or sisters (*kumārī*). The origins of Tumburu are diverse and unclear. The speculated meaning of the name is enigmatic. He appears in Central Asian Tocharian literature as *Dimbure* and in Old Turkic writings as *Dimburi*, vis-à-vis recensions of the *Maitreyasamtri-nāṭaka*. In the Sanskrit *nāṭaka*, ‘theatrical production,’ Tumburu appears as one of three *gandharvas*, along Pañcasikha and Citrasena, all of whom follow Dhṛtarāṣṭra, a *lokapāla*, one of the “Four World-Guardians,” specifically of the East. But Tumburu is also the name of a *yakṣa* while the four-girl team or *Caturbhaginī* are similarly described as *mahāyakṣiṇīyah* (*Vīṅśikha-tantra*). They are pictured as standing on moving ships and entirely at home on the seas. The sisters appear repeatedly as Jayā, Vijayā, Jayantī (or Ajitā), and Aparājītā while their brother is sometimes called Kumāra, though apparently different from Kārtikeya. His true name seems to have been Tumburu. A strict-sense Bauddha version of the cult appears to be taught in *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*, the source that illuminates the four *bhaginī* sailing on a ship with their brother at the helm. Tumburu is also styled as *sārthavāhaḥ*, ‘caravan leader or international trader.’<sup>100</sup> For Sanderson (2009, 50, n. 22) the Śaiva *Vīṅśikha-tantra*, which centers on the cult of Tumburu and his sisters, represents a very early Śaiva Tantric complex that entered the orb of Bauddha devotion.

To summarize briefly, the Sanskrit-Khmer language Sdok Kak Thom stele of Prachinburi (Thailand) dated 1052 (K. 235) records the debut of the Khmer Devarāja and verifies the intimate relations that endured between priestly Brāhmaṇa *rājaguruḥ*s and ruling *Kṣatriya* for two and a half centuries. The inscription opens on the *rājaguruḥ* figure, a religious agent we will speak again of later, and concludes by ascribing its authorship to the blue-blood Brāhmaṇa Sadaśiva, a direct descendant of Śivakaivalya, exactly 250 years after the great political event it commemorates. From the medieval seventh-century period in India and throughout much of Southeast Asia as well, we know that Śaiva Brahmin gurus commanded prestige in emerging kingdoms as royal instructors (*rājaguruḥ*).<sup>101</sup> Let us just observe that compared to priests (ceremonial officiants or purohitas), the Śaiva *rājaguruḥ* was far less constrained by normative ritual operations that consisted in large of dramaturgic filler. Yet by interesting contrast, the Śaiva *rājaguruḥ* relished the mobility and independence to subordinate “ritual” to the rites of a yoga that conceived the body as an ontic fount<sup>102</sup> and furnished mantric

<sup>99</sup> p.C. Bagchi, “On Some Tantric Texts Studied in Ancient Kambuja,” 1929, 754-769; and 1930, 97-107. Śiva is typically referred to as “four-faced” (*caturānana*, *caturmukha*, etc.) in Khmer inscriptions.

<sup>100</sup> *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* (47.29b, 52a, 54c, p. 413, l. 12, etc.) as cited in Sanderson, 2009, 50, n. 22.

<sup>101</sup> See Alexis Sanderson, “The Śiva Age,” 2009, 252-253, and “Ritual for Oneself and Ritual for Others,” 2010, 9-10.

<sup>102</sup> “[as well as a means of] ensouling of the ‘flower-body’ (*puṣpaśarīra*) in the Śaiva-Bauddha postcremation rites” described in the Old Javanese kakawin *Deśawarnana* vis-à-vis the Javanese queen of Majapahit.” See Prapañca, *Deśawarnana* (Nāgarakṛtāgama), (64.5, 67.2), trans. Robson, 1995, 7, 26, 71, 74, 99.

content to confirm initiation.<sup>103</sup> The practice of “ritual,” contrasted to “rite” then basically aimed to establish and uphold the remembered immemorial prescriptive commands upon which the powerful maintained support, or at least acquiescence from a crucial support base. It must have been the visible, empirical results of his highly skilled and refined elaborations in responding to the needs of patrons individually that ultimately earned the Śaiva *rājaguruḥ* acclaim from society’s highest rung.<sup>104</sup>

### **Brahmins in Siam**

The thirteenth century brought rapid decline to the greatly expanded Khmer Empire. As the center retracted islands of culture appeared on its waning peripheries, self-sufficient polities thriving in their substrates. Events corresponded in some degree to the Mongol invasions of northwest India that turned Kashmir into a vassal state. Toward the end of the century Mongols forces occupied parts of Punjab for decades. Collaboration between Cambodia and India was interrupted during this period. Locally, diminishing Angkorian supremacy invited incursions from its northern, northwest and western edges, much of which was highly Khmerized. This was also the time that a quasi-historical Ramkhamhaeng began consolidation of his Sukhothai kingdom that laid the foundations for a Tai national identity. To emphasize their recent liberation from Angkor the Sukhothai rulers gave a new definition to their ethnic appellation and in one fell swoop the Tai became the Thai, which was said to mean, “free.”<sup>105</sup> Along with the Siamese-Tai penetrations, a new religious format also took root; the Singhalese Pāli-based dispensation that, in Bhattacharya’s view, “made Cambodia what it is today.”<sup>106</sup>

With the steady decline of Angkorian court life Khmer Brahmin families shifted allegiance to evolving courts of neighboring Siam, particularly Ayutthaya. For despite the insertions of Bauddha-cult prescriptions and making such schemata their state sponsored faith, the pomp-thirsty rulers of Old Siam endeavored keenly to ‘surround themselves with the appurtenances’ of Indo-Iranic civilization. And to bolster the façade of theocratic eminence the Siamese ‘recruited court Brahmins from Cambodia’ who, as émigré priests, may have suffered greatly as grossly over-qualified foreign relics in a land less evolved in Vedic knowledge. The Siamese capital of Ayutthaya was established in 1350. It was named after the ancient Indian city of Ayodhyā (*Ayothayā Si Rām Thep Nakhon*), the legendary birthplace of Vedic god Rāma of the epic period *Rāmāyaṇa*, a text well familiar throughout the royal courts of Southeast Asia. Given this outlook it seems rather clear that Khmero-Siamese Ayutthayan leadership demonstrated two strong ambitions from the start: the comprehensive soaking up of all things Vedic and the military expansion of its territory. How might Wales in 1931 have observed these events? ‘Ayutthayan troops moved steadily east annexing Angkorian province after province? According to some, though not all four of the divergent Ayutthayan chronicle traditions, the Angkorian center suffered unremitting violence by Ayutthayan forces, and in 1431 it was finally sacked.’ For reasons unclear, Ayutthaya chose not to occupy the city and, perhaps distrustful of its intricate waterways, had them destroyed. In this way the Great Temple City was abandoned and Cambodia became a vassal of Ayutthaya “unnoticed and almost

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<sup>103</sup> ‘[G]nosis, not ritual was the supererogatory adornment’ (Sanderson 2010, 12).

<sup>104</sup> See Sanderson 2010, 11-15.

<sup>105</sup> “Thai” is a loosely used word both in Thai and in foreign languages. See Smalley, *Linguistic Diversity and National Unity: Language Ecology in Thailand*, 1994.

<sup>106</sup> Bhattacharya 1997, 50.



unmentioned” in history. Here Shawcross (1991, 41) would seem to accept the tradition of Wales (1931), et al, that Ayutthaya attacked and sacked Angkor Vat. But this reading of the sources contested by Vickery (2004) who cites later studies such as Wade (2000)<sup>107</sup> describing the various Ayutthayan annals as “hugely dislocated accounts.” Vickery (2004, 22-23) in turn voices favor for a ‘growing consensus that Ayutthaya actually arose from Hsien (Chinese: Siam) as a coastal power.’

With the devastation of Angkorian center we can easily imagine a mass conscription of Khmer Brahmin families by Ayutthaya and other regional vassal courts as political advisors, scientists, astrologers, artists, doctors, and conductors of sacred Brāhmaṇical rites; but who really knows? Ayutthayan-produced historical data concerning these events would have gone up in flames along with Brahmins when the Burmese razed and pillaged city in 1767, thus ending the Ban Phlu Luang Dynasty. In any case, royal Khmer chronicles recount Cambodian Bauddhas taken as captives when Siamese troops sacked and plundered Angkor (Mak Phœun 1984, 144; Harris 2005, 30). For Harris, this raises provocative questions concerning the direction of a Pāli-based Bauddha in fifteenth-century Ayutthaya where ‘inclusion of human and cultural assets of specifically religious character as booty may suggest that the Siamese longed for the opportunity to strengthen their bonds with the venerable system.’ Harris further cites evidence of a “curious schizophrenia” exhibited among the Siamese who, deeming Cambodia a fount of cultural wealth, felt compelled to exterminate its ethnic heritage (Harris 2005, 31). The Ayutthayan monarch Prasat Thong (1629–1656), the builder of Wat Chaiwatthanaram in honor of the destruction inflicted on Cambodia, sent architects to study Angkorian temples (Fouser 1996, 31; Harris 2005, 31).

### **Ayutthaya to Bangkok**

Unrestrained adoption of Khmer Sanskritic heritage was a well-established rule in the Menam basin by the 14th century. Khmer influence on the sense of kingship was also apparent from the founding of Ayutthaya. Departure from an earlier tribal leader concept prevalent in thirteenth-century Sukhotai is also evident. The Khmer formation of kingly divinity explicit in the rites of the Devarāja was far more appealing to Ayutthayan royalty. But subsequent Tai kings did not enshrine the royal *liṅgam*. ‘Divinity was rather imparted to the kings through their occupancy of the sacred palace, undergoing ritual bathing (*abhiṣeka*) and the rites of coronation. Khmer Brahmin priests conducted all these rites. We are thus provided with a clear example of the role these émigré Brahmins priests performed in conferring state legitimacy in Old Siam. Even to this day through the rites of coronation when the sovereign is identified with Śiva and Viṣṇu, the divinities are held to impart their *śakti* or celestial power to the sovereign king. In is further worth noting that Khmer-style temples were in almost every city of the Menam delta region and its immediate hinterland in the 14th century, in particular Suphanburi, Ratburi, Phetburi and Lophburi (Vickery 1996, 14).<sup>108</sup> Would the highest prized gurus and most sought out priests for the Menam basin courts have belonged the lineage of Śivakaivalya? Did legends still live of the famed tantric family that alone held the keys to the rites of consecration for the awesome cult of the Devarāja that could elevate a king to the stature of a god?

Indigenized Bauddha guilds (*saṅghas*, *nikāyas*) underwent important transformation as well through the long four-hundred-year Ayutthaya period. These were formally divided along traditional lines of habitat or living space and accordingly

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<sup>107</sup> Wade, “The Ming Shi-lu as a source for Thai History,” *JSAS* (31.2): 249-294, 265.

<sup>108</sup> Vickery 1996, 14.

rationed out two distinct Lebensraums<sup>109</sup> - namely, *araññavāsī* and *gā mavāsī*. The *araññavāsī* or “forests-dweller” mendicants engaged in *tapas* and other forms of asceticism encompassed by yoga. The ‘village or town-dwelling’ *gā mavāsī* clerics (including the urban *nagarāvāsī* clergy) - resided cenobitically in populated areas to pursue education and teach common people, and typically accept bureaucratic offices. Their municipal cloisters “were under state control in a profitable symbiosis with the state hierarchy” (Heikkilä-Horn 1996, 93-111).

Prior to the founding of the Ayutthayan dynasties (1351-1767), the riverine archipelagic entrepôt appears to have been a vassal polity of Khmer domination (Khanittanan 2004, 2005).<sup>110</sup> The capital was a flourishing cosmopolis. Its administration was highly sophisticated, its population extremely international. ‘Nearly half of the kingdom was peopled with Peguans, taken in war, and many Lao. The royal guard was Chinese and Muslim while the standing army was composed in equal measure of Thai, Mon, Khmer and Lao’ (Choisy 1687, 242, cited in Reid 2004, 11). Simon de La Loubère (1693) underscored the mixed or ‘hybrid’ character of the dominant regional population, and the freedom of the kingdom’s trade regulations that attracted many of foreign merchants and brokers, the “great multitude of strangers of different nations, who settled there with the liberty of living according to their own customs, and of publicly exercising their several ways of worship.” Every nation had its own living quarter. Each nation chose its chief.<sup>111</sup>

Ayutthaya was also very literate. A high percentage of educated aristocrats and other elites could read and write in both Khmer and Siamese (Khanittanan 2004, 375-77). ‘They must have been living in the same neighborhoods’ (Khanittanan 2005, 324). In fact, bilingualism may have even been strengthened and sustained by Ayutthaya’s successive assaults on Angkor Vat in 1369, 1388 and 1431, and by the massive numbers of Khmer-speaking captives they would likely have returned with (Kesetsiri 1999: 25, Khanittanan 2004, 375). Quaritch Wales (1934, 3-4, 47-48) invokes a more explicit depiction of the final vanquishment of Angkor Thom resulting in ‘an inflow of Khmer *kṣatriya* and *brāhmaṇa* elites who influenced the Ayutthayan king Trailoka (1448-1488) to completely reshape his administration on the lines of Angkorian principles and methods.’ Vickery (1996, 4-5) however, describes Wales’s assertions as “entirely speculative.”

### **Language shifts: *rāja-sap***

Around the middle part of the 18th century in approach of Ayutthaya’s annihilation by Burmese forces, a language shift would seem to have occurred. The descendants of bilingual Ayutthayans dwindled and the residents became increasingly Siamese-speaking monoglots. But after more than four centuries of living side by side an abundance of Old-Khmer and Khmero-Indic verbal elements had pervaded all aspects of Ayutthayan language (Varasarin 1984; Khanittanan 2005, 324; Diller, 573). How to represent such an indistinct vernacular that retains more words of Khmer derivation than actual “Tai” cognates (Khanittanan 2005, 324), and whose honorific-register, which comprises more than a thousand words for polite or formal usage, is modelled on royal or courtly contexts (Diller, 567-568)? Are its non-Tai lexica “foreign” derived? How to describe the majority of its lexical items: as calques and

<sup>109</sup> For use of Lebensraum in a contemporary context see Tambiah 1992: xiii, xv.

<sup>110</sup> Wilaiwan Khanittanan, “Khmero-Thai: The great change in the history of the Thai language of the Chao Phraya Basin,” 2004, and “An aspect of the origins and development of linguistic politeness in Thai,” 2005.

<sup>111</sup> La Loubère, *The Kingdom of Siam*, 1969 [1691], 112, also 10-11; cited in Reid 2004, 11.

loanwords? How are we to characterize the Ayutthayan language? Is it Khmer, Siamese, an ambiguous hybrid? Vickery (1974, 6) argues that Ayutthayan linguistic and administrative patterns may both be attributed to a long autonomous local Khmer heritage; and that even if directly influenced by Angkor, the Siamese defeat of the Angkorian capital in 1431 or any other date, could not entirely account for this process. It may well be due to Angkorian power having taken hold in the Menam/Chao Phraya River basin two or three centuries before Ayutthaya's rise, Vickery suggests.

About four centuries after the inauguration of the Ayutthayan dynasty, king Ramatibodi (Rāma I) founded his new deltaic line down river in Bangkok in 1782. For the name and emblem of his new royal house he adopted the mytho-magical *chakri*, a Sanskrit reference to the discus-like missile (*cakrī*) that is typically held in Viṣṇu's right hand. The most handsome version of this razor-sharp weapon is the *sudarśana cakrī* that boasts 108 serrated edges. The *cakrī* holds other denotations, as well, the wheel of a monarch's chariot, for instance, rolling across his expansive dominion. But it was not the Viṣṇu's *cakrī* that alone became the symbol Siam's fourth traditional center of power. This emblem of the Ratanakosin realm also incorporated Śiva's *triśūla* whose three-pronged spear pointing vertically upwards from the axis of the *cakrī* demonstrates clearly the syncretic intertwinement, or amalgamation of the two divine symbols.

Not to depart from established custom, the House of Chakri acquiesced to precedence and sought reliance on Khmer stately grandeur. The rulers must have also found late-Ayutthayan language forms essential to the new realm's administrative architecture, and they became the standard-bearers of "Bangkok Thai." This may also account, at least in part, for the remarkable presence in modern Thailand of honorific words that intriguingly befit its holiest and most decorous institutions. The honorific Siamese "royal-language" called *rāja-sap* (Thai ra:cha:sàp),<sup>112</sup> which initially developed in Ayutthaya, expanded much further under Chakri rule. Diller (2006) researched etymologies of honorific forms and confirmed their derivation from a blend of Old Khmer and "Khmero-Indic" linguistic elements (Sanskrit and Pāli) originally borrowed through Old Khmer before their partial assimilation in Siamese.<sup>113</sup> This polite, honorific "royal register" that developed in the early Ratanakosin period was based on earlier Ayutthayan Old Khmer forms for speaking directly *to* or *about* the royal monarch, his household and nobility. Their aim was to elevate His Royal Majesty high above the common level of his subjects and to clothe him in the fabric of mystery and sanctity (Wyatt 1982).<sup>114</sup> Similarly ascetics, *sadhus* and *śrāmaṇa*, and religious specialists generally speaking,<sup>115</sup> commanded a higher status than commoners, though naturally far short of the royal family. In this way an analogous, though much less lavish "priestly register" evolved for modulating discourse *with* and *on* individuals holding religious status. It is interesting to note that when engaging this ritual "priestly register" people were effectively speaking Khmer with Siamese syntax (Khanittanan 2005, 324). In the broader context, Cooke (1968) shows that these hybrid ceremonial languages show how the obtrusion of pronominals and particles expressing regal

<sup>112</sup> Or *rachasap*, '*racha*' is derived from Sanskrit *rāja* ('king, sovereign'), '*sap*' from Sanskrit *śabda* ('sonorous, sound, word, speech'). See Wilaiwan 2005, 315-335.

<sup>113</sup> See Diller, "Polylectal grammar and Royal Thai," 2006, 573.

<sup>114</sup> Wyatt, "The Subtle Revolution of King Rāma I," 1982, cited in Diller 2006, 573.

<sup>115</sup> "*śrāmaṇa*, *brāhmaṇa*, *tapasvi*, *yati*": a clutch of synonyms (line 42) from the Khmer-language Inscription 4, Wat Pa Mamuang, Sukhothai, (C.E. 1349); cited by Skilling (2007, 208, n. 14) to illustrate "the hybridity of religious personnel and objects of worship in Sukhothai" (185) at a time just before the founding of Ayutthaya. See Coedès (1924) [EHS 11 Part I, Section 5, (text), 486, Face I, lines 52–53 (tr.), 491].

grandeur and “elegance-in-deference” methodically replaced “Tai” colloquial pronouns resulting in completely new sets of word-units.<sup>116</sup>

### ***Sakdinā* and the status of Brāhmaṇas**

*Brāhmaṇas* in Ayutthaya played important roles in ritual duties that were often performed in conjunction with members of the Buddha *saṅgha*, and in deciding legal judgements in the courts (Skilling 2007, 199).<sup>117</sup> Thus the founding Chakri monarch designed his Bangkok administration on the model of Ayutthaya, its court, bureaucracy and state ideals (Handley 2006, 28; Skilling 2007, 204). It was furthermore the custom among pre-Modern Southeast Asian kings who ruled as “absolute proprietors of the land”<sup>118</sup> to issue usufruct property grants to its nobility. Ayutthayan kings made specified rankings using *sakdinā* or “status marks”<sup>119</sup> to standardize this practice. The system classified the social hierarchy comprised of royalty, government officials and *brāhmaṇa* officiants in a way that reflected their title, rank or position held, and which furthermore determined both the quantity and quality of allotted acreage. The greater the number of “status-marks” the greater the amount of land received, at least in theory. This indicates a feudal post-slavery social order that was based on birth within the Royal Household, the Aristocracy or the Brahmin lineage that ensured the apportionment of Crown Property. In effect this created a moneyed class that controlled the means of agricultural production, i.e. the land and the people who occupied the land. It imposed taxation on indentured peasants and thereby encouraged the nobility to enter politics (Reynolds 1987, 143). The Ayutthayan ranking of royal hierarchy placed princes highest at 20,000 *sakdinā*. Brahmins were listed in the civil code hierarchy along with important department ministers. The *Mahārājaguruḥ* was the highest listed Brahmin with entitlements equaling 10,000 *sakdinā* (Griswold 1969, 111; Skilling 2007, 199).

Skilling (2007, 204) expresses the need of further research on the history of Siamese Brahmins. The aristocratic status of the *Mahārājaguruḥ* that is glimpsed from Three Seals Law Code suggests that Ayutthaya’s *brāhmaṇa* community were powerful, privileged and socially unique. Still the fate of the *brāhmaṇas* after Ayutthaya’s collapsed remains a mystery. Were important court officiants and their families destroyed in the Burmese assault on the Ayutthayan capital? Might this partly account for the conspicuous absence of Brahminical performance in the transitory fourteen-year Thonburi Kingdom? The Thonburi era stands utterly silent on Brāhmaṇical shrines and rites performed. Were Ayutthayan vassals such as Lophburi, Suphanburi, Rachaburi and Phetburi undesirably affected by the maelstrom at their center?

### **Initiation of the Monarch**

Brahmins were essential to the working of the state and indeed the initiation of the king. The perpetuation of Brahmin heritage was therefore incumbent on the royal palace in order to maintain of a prosperous realm. Numerous Siamese centers of power had Brahmin communities, shrines and histories. We learn from Skilling (2007, 199) that the states of Phetchburi and Nakhon Si Thammarat had ‘giant swings’ (*sao ching-*

<sup>116</sup> Cooke, “Pronominal Reference in Thai, Burmese, and Vietnamese,” 1968, 4-68.

<sup>117</sup> Skilling. “King, Sangha and Brahmins: Ideology, ritual and power in pre-modern Siam,” in Ian Harris (ed.), 2007, 182-215.

<sup>118</sup> Griswold, “Epigraphic and historical studies no. 4,” 1969, 111-112.

<sup>119</sup> Modern Thai *sakdinā* (<Khmero-Siamese *śakti-nā*) seems to be a ‘loanword compounded neologism’ with constituents from two different languages, Skt. *śakti*, ‘power’ + Siamese *nā*, ‘land, field,’ thus rendered literally as “power over land.” Griswold (1969, 111) offers “dignity marks” that “became a measure of a person’s value.”

*cha*) as Bangkok still retains today. Similarly Phetchburi, Phatthalung and Nakhon Si Thammarat had Brahmin chapels (*devasthāna*) as found in the current Ratanakosin capital. In fact, nearly from the start of Chakri dynasty in 1782 the Brahmin community has centered itself at the geomantic heart of the old walled city. Here the *Devāsthāna*, ‘place of the *devas*,’ reflects the importance of *brāhmaṇa* community in Old Siam, and by association throughout Southeast Asia. This is absolutely clear by the fact that the first Chakri king erected his private Brāhmaṇical complex at the center of the capital’s mandalic core in replication of Ayutthaya. Founded in 1784, it is a one-minute walk from *Sao Ching-Cha*, or “Giant Swing,” the famous city landmark where spectacular festivals in honor of Īśvara (or Śiva) used to take place each winter solstice. *Devasthāna* is a charming walled compound. The Thais call *Bot Phrām*, “Brahmin Hall.” This again goes to show how Indic rites and the ceremonial protocols of late Khmer kingdoms, especially between 1100 and 1300, influenced the perspectives Siamese royals; and how the fusion of ritual and state ceremony defined their present belief structure. Brahmins remained essential to the state and just as in Ayutthaya so in Krung Thep where Brahmin priests continue to preside over royal rites and participate alongside Bauddha clerics in ritual performance,<sup>120</sup> like consecrating pillars for *vihāra* construction,<sup>121</sup> and thereby show the syncretic and hybrid manner of devotion expressed in Siam. Still, the grandest yearly ritual that the Brahmins enact is the annual Royal Ploughing Ceremony that marks the beginning of the rice-growing season and ensures rich harvest for the realm. Nonetheless, the most preeminent and imminent formality performed by Bangkok’s Brahmin priests, as led by Phrā Rājaguruḥ Vamadevamuni, is the *abhiṣeka* or coronation rite that marks the prescribed investiture of the monarch and/or consort with regal power with particular attention the ritualized placement of the crown upon the head of the Royal Initiand and the presentation of other articles of regalia. The Ratanakosin *Devasthāna* is a fully functioning spiritual institution.

With the passing of time the great prestige once conferred on Brahmins by the Bangkok court showed marked depreciation and their status grew increasingly subservient. It was during the Fifth Ratanakosin Reign that traditional Brahmin-held positions in the legal system ceased to be exclusive Brahmin preserves (Skilling 2007, 199). Then around the turn of the 20th century a certain outstanding Cambodian family left the royal service altogether and carried off with them sacred manuscripts with instructions for conducting important state ceremonies. In attempt to recover these sacred texts, the government imprisoned the head priest’s mother. To win her release some of the manuscripts were handed over. According to Wales (1931), the government actually feared the commotion that a forceful effort to obtain the remaining documents might have caused and dropped the whole affair.<sup>122</sup>

### **Closing remarks: Hybridity, syncretism, grafting, crossbreeding, commingling & creolization**

The initial interests, intentions and motivations in pursuing this study were to locate extant ascetic-arts elements primordial, indigenous or adventitious to early Khmer-Siamese religious culture. Might any such elements be traced to the rise of a hybrid soteriological advance? Primordially directed artefacts retain the highest compelling appeal to us as drawn from the wellspring of elements tempered in the luster

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<sup>120</sup> Ian Harris, 2007, 8-9.

<sup>121</sup> McDaniel 2013, 307-308.

<sup>122</sup> Wales 1931, 55.

of contiguous loci pondered. This needs to be adopted, adapted and developed, and in every conceivable manner evaluated.

We have taken the notion of hybridity as parable. Peter Skilling (2007) seems to disregard this metaphoric facet. He expresses some aversion to “syncretism” “with its implications of adulterating an imagined ‘pure’ religion,” and possibly unconsciously elevates “hybridity” to a kind of rhetorical figure. “Even if ‘syncretism,’” Skilling writes, “is acceptable as a descriptive term, it is not an accurate model or teleology” (‘it doesn’t describe what’s going on’). And by contrast, he delineates “hybridism” as “creative and selective use of diverse forms, an expression of ideologies in which the boundaries are fluid, if they exist at all” (Skilling 2007, 186).

But is there any real distinction between the two terms? Hybridity originates in biology and taxonomy, the apparent result of quasi-spontaneous instances of animal husbandry, the offspring of a domesticated swine and a wild boar for example. The term derives from Latin *hybrida*, a variant of *ibrida*, literally “mongrel.” “Crossbreeding,” then, may just as well occur in the wild—as may the broad trope of vernacularization. In this regard we call upon Françoise Vergès’s “Writing on Water: Peripheries, Flows, Capital, and Struggles in the Indian Ocean” (2003).<sup>123</sup> She examines the natural occurrences of vernaculars and chronicles the threat that these historically posed in the context of European colonial empires. When ships arrived to distant shores they “wished to destroy vernacular cultures of hybridity and creolization” in order to establish control over markets, insert their rigid ‘vocabulary of trade and forge tightened networks that serve their strategic and financial interests’ (Vergès 2003, 248). What about contemporary impositions such as “Buddhism,” “Theravāda,” and “Theravāda Buddhism”? Do these usages reveal comparable indications? Does colonial scholarship continue to this day?<sup>124</sup> How to speak precisely of those products neither driven nor superintended by the wardens of ideological imperative; but rather by the natural commingling that results from kinship relations, the merging of feelings and the politics of conciliation? We would have to speak of Jawi in a later paper.

By way of concluding, we restate our aims to assist new students as they find their way through the Lower Mekong River Basin, a transcultural zone that is shrouded in obscurity and tragic neglect. As a consequence, this paper has intended to provide postcolonial and cultural studies practitioners with a meaningful array of access tools that at once explain, counterpoise and connect with the flanking spheres of mainland, peninsular and archipelagic Southeast Asia. At the forefront of this project is the conscious acceptance of routinely overlooked indigenous, emic or inbuilt approaches that exogenous, colonial or etic scholarship has falsely represented through distortive constructs like Primordialism, Animism, Shamanism and Brahmanism, Buddhism, Shaivism, and Modern Postural Yoga, et al. But at the end of the day, we shall likely acquiesce with the youthful sentiment of George Coedès (1927), that ‘the marvelous variety of civilizing forces existing simultaneously and successively in this region make for a fascinating study and research.’<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Françoise Vergès, Writing on Water: Peripheries, Flows, Capital, and Struggles in the Indian Ocean. In Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique - Volume 11, Number 1, (Spring 2003): 241-257, 248.

<sup>124</sup> See Sritantra 2014, 12.

<sup>125</sup> George Coedès, “Recent Archaeological Progress in Siam,” 1927, 57-58.

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