

thousands including many highly skilled artisans. The skills required to carve these sculptures were developed hundreds of years earlier, as demonstrated by some artifacts that have been dated to the seventh century, before the Khmer came to power.

ANGKOR THOM

Angkor Thom was the last and most enduring capital city of the Khmer empire. It was established in the late twelfth century by King Jayavarman VII. It covers an area of 9 km², within which are located several monuments from earlier eras as well as those established by Jayavarman and his successors. At the centre of the city is Jayavarman's state temple, the Bayon, with the other major sites clustered around the Victory Square immediately to the north.



Angkor Thom was established as the capital of Jayavarman VII's empire, and was the centre of his massive building programme. One inscription found in the city refers to Jayavarman as the groom and the city as his bride.

Angkor Thom seems not to be the first Khmer capital on the site, however. Yasodharapura, dating from three centuries earlier, was centred slightly further northwest, and Angkor Thom overlapped parts of it. The most notable earlier temples within the city are the former state temple of Baphuon, and Phimeanakas, which was incorporated into the Royal Palace. The Khmers did not draw any clear distinctions between Angkor Thom and Yashodharapura: even in the fourteenth century an inscription used the earlier name. The name of Angkor Thom—great city—was in use from the 16th century.

The city lies on the west bank of the Siem Reap River, a tributary of Tonle Sap, about a quarter of a mile from the river.



The south gate of Angkor Thom is 7.2 km north of Siem Reap, and 1.7 km north of the entrance to Angkor Wat. The walls, 8 m high and flanked by a moat, are each 3 km long, enclosing an area of 9 km². The walls are of laterite buttressed by earth, with a parapet on the top. There are gates at each of the cardinal points, from which roads lead to the Bayon at the centre of the city. As the Bayon itself has no wall or moat of its own, those of the city are interpreted by archaeologists as representing the mountains and oceans surrounding the Bayon's Mount Meru. Another gate—the Victory Gate—is 500 m north of the east gate; the Victory Way runs parallel to the east road to the Victory Square and the Royal Palace north of the Bayon.



The faces on the 23 m towers at the city gates, which are later additions to the main structure, take after those of the Bayon and pose the same problems of interpretation. They may

represent the king himself, the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, guardians of the empire's cardinal points, or some combination of these. A causeway spans the moat in front of each tower: these have a row of devas on the left and asuras on the right, each row holding a naga (serpent deities) in the attitude of a tug-of-war.



In Hinduism, the asuras are a group of power-seeking deities different from the benign deities known as devas (which are also known as suras). They are sometimes considered naturalists, or nature-beings, in constant battle with the devas. In order to explain the demonization of asuras, mythology was created to show that though the asuras were originally just, good, virtuous, their nature had gradually changed. The asuras (anti-gods) were depicted to have become proud, vain, to have stopped performing sacrifices, to violate sacred laws, not visit holy places, not cleanse

themselves from sin, to be envious of devas, torturous of living beings, creating confusion in everything and to challenge the devas



This appears to be a reference to the myth, popular in Angkor, of the Churning of the Sea of Milk.

Kurma Avatar of Vishnu, below Mount Mandara, with Vasuki wrapped around it, churning the ocean of milk during Samudra manthan. ca 1870.

Purana scripture indicates that the sage Durvasa had given a garland to Indra, the king of Gods. Indra placed the garland around his elephant, but the animal trampled it, insulting the sage. Durvasa then cursed the gods to lose their immortality, strength, and divine powers. After losing the kingdom of heaven, they approached Vishnu for help.

He advised that they had to drink the nectar of immortality to regain their glory. To obtain it, they needed to churn the ocean of milk, a body of water so large they needed Mount Mandara as the churning staff, and the serpent Vasuki as the churning rope. The Devas were not strong enough to churn on their own, and declared peace with their foes, the Asuras, to enlist their help.

Finally, Mount Mandara churned, but the force was so great the mountain began to sink into the ocean of milk. Taking the form of the turtle Kurma, Vishnu bore the mountain on his back as they churned the waters. Fourteen precious things arose from the turbulent ocean, culminating with Dhanvantari, the physician of the gods, who brought with him the nectar of immortality.



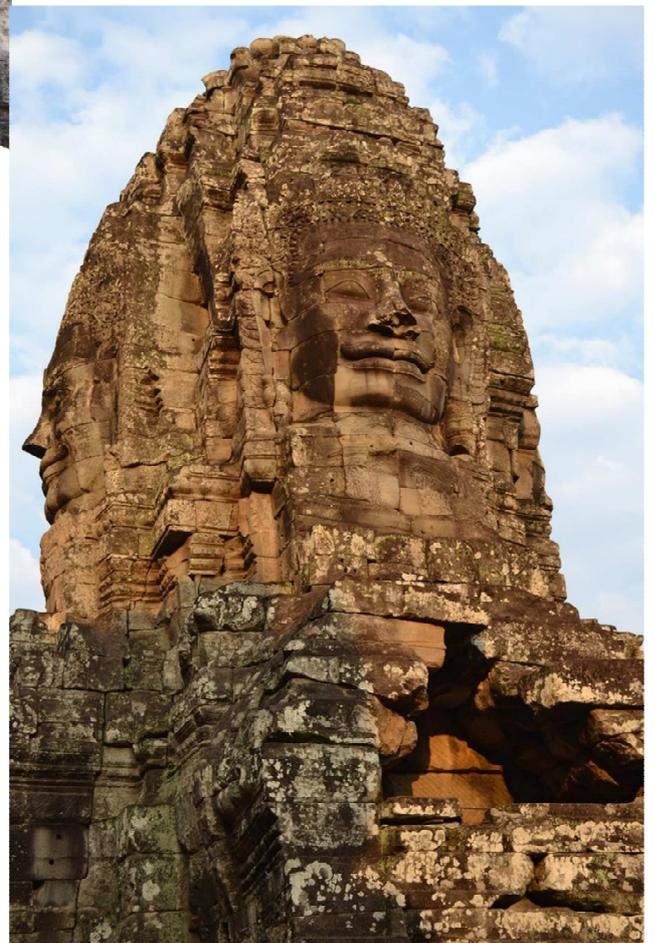
The Asuras immediately took the nectar, and quarreled amongst themselves. Vishnu then manifested himself as the beautiful Mohini and tricked the Asuras to retrieve the potion, which he then distributed to the Devas. Though the Asuras realized the trick, it was too late—the Devas had regained their powers, and were then able to defeat their foes.



There are three temples dedicated to this incarnation of Vishnu in India, Kurmai of Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh, Sri Kurmam in Andhra Pradesh, and Gavirangapur in the Chitradurg District of Karnataka. The name of the village Kurmai mentioned above originated as there is

historical temple of Kurma Varadarajaswamy

The temple-mountain of the Bayon, or perhaps the gate itself, would then be the pivot around which the churning takes place. The nagas may also represent the transition from the world of men to the world of the gods (the Bayon), or be guardian figures. The gateways themselves are 3.5



by 7 m, and would originally have been closed with wooden doors.

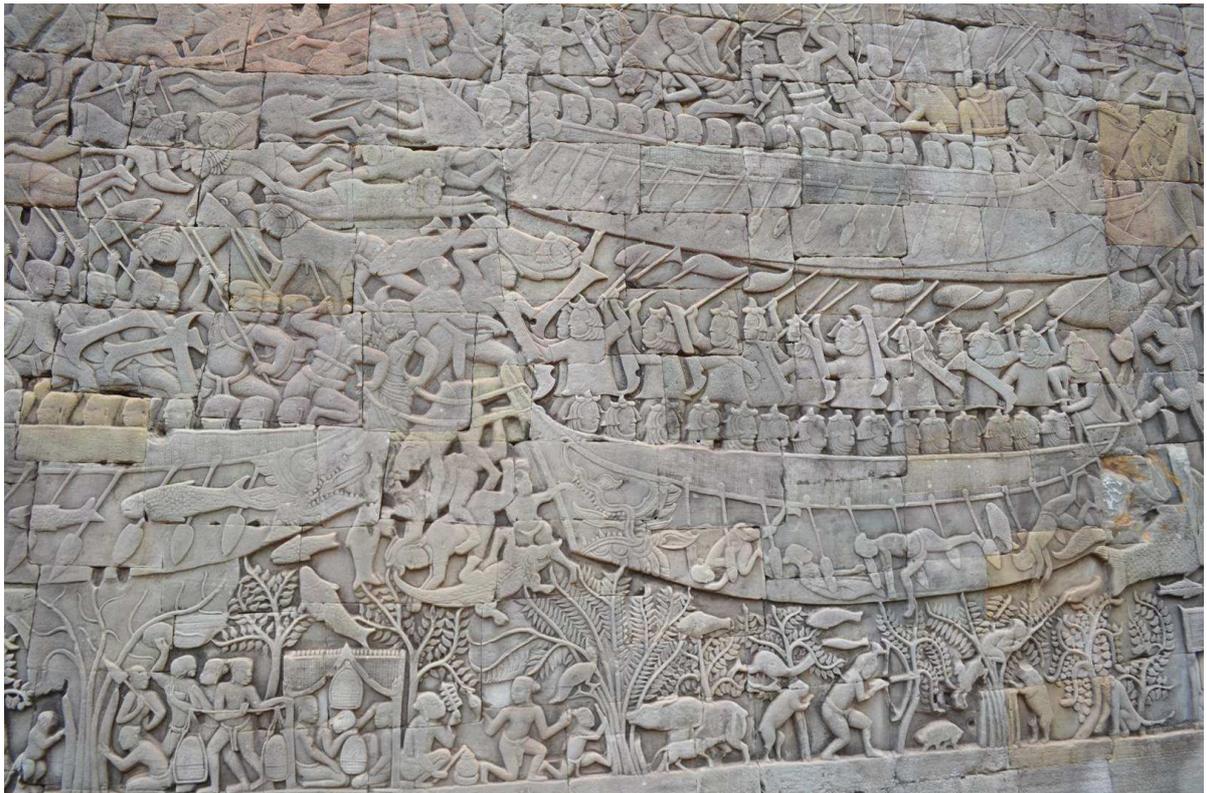
At each corner of the city is a Prasat Chrung—corner shrine—built of sandstone and dedicated to Avalokiteshvara. These are cruciform with a central tower, and orientated towards the east.

Within the city was a system of canals, through which water flowed from the northeast to the southwest. The bulk of the land enclosed by the walls would have been occupied by the secular buildings of the city, of which nothing remains. This area is now covered by forest.

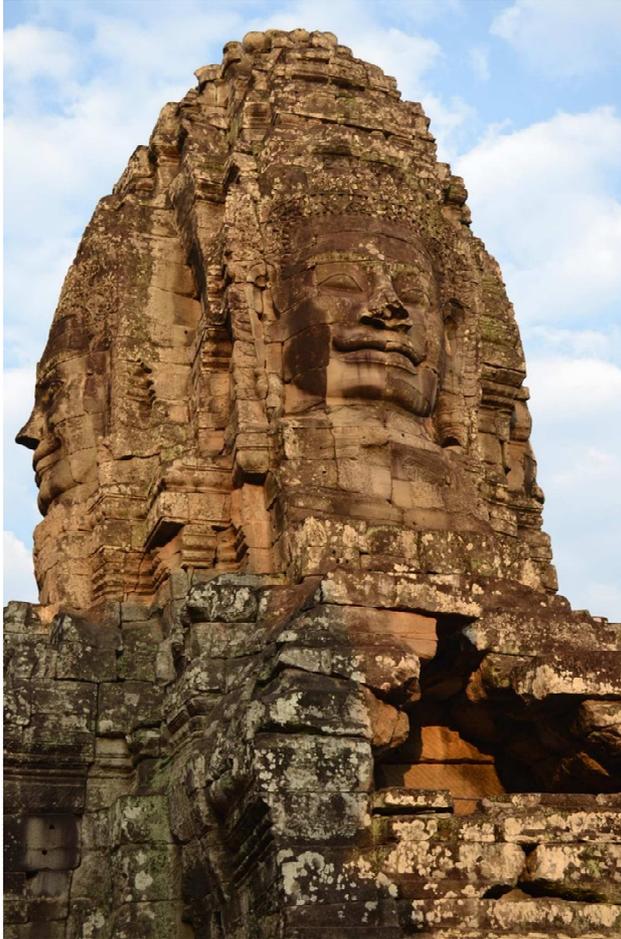


Most of the great Angkor ruins have vast displays of bas-relief depicting the various gods, goddesses, and other-worldly beings from the mythological stories and epic poems of ancient Hinduism (modified by centuries of Buddhism). Mingled with these images are actual known animals, like elephants, snakes, fish, and monkeys, in

addition to dragon-like creatures that look like the stylized, elongated serpents (with feet and claws) found in Chinese art. But among the ruins of Ta Prohm, near a huge stone entrance, one can see that the “roundels on pilasters on the south side of the west entrance are unusual in design.”



What one sees are roundels depicting various common animals—pigs, monkeys, water buffaloes, roosters and snakes. There are no mythological figures among the roundels, so one can reasonably conclude that these figures depict the animals that were commonly seen by the ancient Khmer people in the twelfth century.



TERRACE OF THE ELEPHANTS



The terrace was used by Angkor's king Jayavarman VII as a platform from which to view his victorious returning army. It was attached to the palace of Phimeanakas, of which only a few ruins remain. Most of the original structure was made of

organic material and has long since disappeared. Most of what remains are the foundation platforms of the complex. The terrace is named for the carvings of elephants on its eastern face.



The 350m-long Terrace of Elephants was used as a giant reviewing stand for public ceremonies and served as a base for the king's grand audience hall. It has five outworks extending towards the Central Square-three in the centre and one at each end. The middle section of the retaining wall is decorated with life size garuda and lions; towards



either end are the two parts of the famous parade of elephants complete with their Khmer mahouts.

PHNOM KULEN



Phnom Kulen is considered a holy mountain in Cambodia, of special religious significance to Hindus and Buddhists who come to the mountain in pilgrimage.

It also has a major symbolic importance for Cambodians as the birthplace of the ancient Khmer Empire, for it was at Phnom Kulen that King Jayavarman II proclaimed independence from Java in 804 CE. Jayavarman II initiated the cult of the king, a linga cult, in what is dated as 804 CE and declaring his

independence from Java of whom the Khmer had been a vassalage state (whether this is actually "Java" or "Lava" (a Lao kingdom) is debated, as well as the legend that he was earlier held as a ransom of the kingdom in Java. During the Angkorian era the relief was known as Mahendraparvata (the mountain of Great Indra).

The site is known for its carvings representing fertility and its waters which hold special significance to Hindus. Just 5 cm under the water's surface over 1000 small carvings are etched into the sandstone riverbed. The waters are regarded as holy, given that Jayavarman II chose to bathe in the river, and had the river diverted so that the stone bed could be carved. Carvings



include a stone representation of the Hindu god Vishnu lying on his serpent Ananta, with his wife Lakshmi at his feet. A lotus flower protrudes from his navel bearing the god Brahma. The river then ends with a waterfall and a pool.



Near these mountains is Preah Ang Thom, a 16th-century Buddhist monastery notable for the giant reclining Buddha, the country's largest.



The Samré tribe was formerly living at the edge of Phnom Kulen, quarrying sandstone and transporting it to the royal sites.

BUDDHISM

95% of the Cambodian population are Buddhists, therefore I found it important to explain this religion for better understanding of Cambodian culture.

Buddhism is a religion to about 300 million people around the world. The word comes from 'budhi', 'to awaken'. It has its origins about 2,500 years ago when Siddhartha Gotama, known as the Buddha, was himself awakened (enlightened) at the age of 35.

To many, Buddhism goes beyond religion and is more of a philosophy or 'way of life'. It is a philosophy because philosophy 'means love of wisdom' and the Buddhist path can be summed up as:

- to lead a moral life,
- to be mindful and aware of thoughts and actions, and
- to develop wisdom and understanding.

Siddhartha Gotama was born into a royal family in Lumbini, now located in Nepal, in 563 BC. At 29, he realised that wealth and luxury did not guarantee happiness, so he explored the different teachings religions and philosophies of the day, to

find the key to human happiness. After six years of study and meditation he finally found 'the middle path' and was enlightened. After enlightenment, the Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching the principles of Buddhism — called the Dhamma, or Truth — until his death at the age of 80.

Buddhists sometimes pay respect to images of the Buddha, not in worship, nor to ask for favours. A statue of the Buddha with hands rested gently in its lap and a compassionate smile reminds us to strive to develop peace and love within ourselves. Bowing to the statue is an expression of gratitude for the teaching.

There are many different types of Buddhism, because the emphasis changes from country to country due to customs and culture. In Cambodia the official religion is Theravada Buddhism.

The Buddha taught many things, but the basic concepts in Buddhism can be summed up by the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

The first truth is that life is suffering i.e., life includes pain, getting old, disease, and ultimately death. We also endure psychological suffering like loneliness frustration, fear, embarrassment, disappointment and anger. This is an irrefutable fact that cannot be denied. It is realistic rather than pessimistic because pessimism is expecting things to be bad. Instead, Buddhism explains how suffering can be avoided and how we can be truly happy.

The second truth is that suffering is caused by craving and aversion. We will suffer if we expect other people to conform to our expectation, if we want others to like us, if we do not get something we want, etc. In other words, getting what you want does not guarantee happiness. Rather than constantly struggling to get what you want, try to modify your wanting. Wanting deprives us of contentment and happiness. A lifetime of wanting and craving and especially the craving to continue to exist, creates a powerful energy which causes the individual to be born. So craving leads to physical suffering because it causes us to be reborn.

The third truth is that suffering can be overcome and happiness can be attained; that true happiness and contentment are possible. If we give up useless craving and learn to live each day at a time (not dwelling in the past or the imagined future) then we can become happy and free. We then have more time and energy to help others. This is Nirvana.

The fourth truth is that the Noble 8-fold Path is the path which leads to the end of suffering.

In summary, the Noble 8-fold Path is being moral (through what we say, do and our livelihood), focussing the mind on being fully aware of our thoughts and actions, and developing wisdom by understanding the Four Noble Truths and by developing compassion for others.

The moral code within Buddhism is the precepts, of which the main five are: not to take the life of anything living, not to take anything not freely given, to abstain from sexual misconduct and sensual overindulgence, to refrain from untrue speech, and to avoid intoxication, that is, losing mindfulness.

Karma is the law that every cause has an effect, i.e., our actions have results. This simple law explains a number of things: inequality in the world, why some are born handicapped and some gifted, why some live only a short life. Karma underlines the importance of all individuals being responsible for their past and present actions. How can we test the karmic effect of our actions? The answer is summed up by looking at (1) the intention behind the action, (2) effects of the action on oneself, and (3) the effects on others.

Buddhism teaches that wisdom should be developed with compassion. At one extreme, you could be a goodhearted fool and at the other extreme, you could attain knowledge without any emotion. Buddhism uses the middle path to develop both. The highest wisdom is seeing that in reality, all phenomena are incomplete, impermanent and do not constitute a fixed entity. True wisdom is not simply believing what we are told but instead experiencing and understanding truth and reality. Wisdom requires an open, objective, unbigoted mind. The Buddhist path requires courage, patience, flexibility and intelligence.

Compassion includes qualities of sharing, readiness to give comfort, sympathy, concern, caring. In Buddhism, others can really be understood, when themselves are really understood, through wisdom.

GODS OF HINDUISM

In ancient Cambodia, Hinduism was the official religion. Therefore one can see statues of Hindu gods in temples. There are many Hindu gods and goddesses. I want to give a short description of five of them: Ganesha, Shiva, Hanuman, Durga and Laksmi.

GANESHA: All Tantric and spiritual worship in the Hindu tradition begins with the invocation of Lord Ganesha, the elephant headed god.

Ganesha became the Lord of all existing beings after winning a contest from his brother Kartikay. When given the task to race around the universe, Ganesha did not start the race like Kartikay did, but simply walked around Shiva and Parvati, both his father and mother as the source of all existence.

The human part of Ganesha represents that which is manifested, while the elephant part represents the unmanifested great being. Therefore the elephant part is the head.

SHIVA: is the god of the yogis, self controlled and celibate, while at the same time a lover of his spouse. Lord Shiva is the destroyer of the world, following Brahma the creator and Vishnu the preserver. Shiva is responsible for change in form of death and destruction and in the positive sense of destroying the ego, the false identification with the form. This also includes the shedding of old habits and attachments.

Lord Shiva is conceived in his unborn, invisible for as the Shiva Lingam. The Lingam represents the male creative energy of



Shiva. This main symbol of Shiva is worshipped in virtually every Hindu temple and home. The phallus is not worshipped as such, but through it Shiva is worshipped, as the supreme consciousness. Embracing the base of the linga is the yoni, the female organ, as the universal energy, as Shakti, Shiva's spouse. Through profound understanding of this symbol, the mystery of creation can be understood as an act of love.

HANUMAN: is the monkey deity renowned for his courage, power and faithful, selfless service

DURGA: is the incarnation of Devi or the Mother Goddess, unified symbol of all divine forces.

The Hindu goddess Durga manifested when evil forces threatened the very existence of the gods. To destroy these demons, all gods offered their radiance to her creation and formed part of Durga's body. Durga also obtained very powerful weapons, such as the chakra (energy points in the subtle body) from Vishnu and a trident (three pronged spear) from Shiva.

The name "Durga" in Sanskrit means "invincible". The syllable "du" is synonymous with the 4 devils of poverty, sufferings, famine and evil habits. The "r" refers to diseases and the "ga" is the destroyer of sins, injustice, irreligion, cruelty and laziness.

LAKSHMI: is the goddess of light, beauty, good fortune and wealth. Being the consort of Vishnu, the preserving principle, Lakshmi also signifies love and grace. Lakshmi often expresses her devotion to Vishnu by massaging his feet as he lies on the coils of the snake Shesha. While Lakshmi is generally worshipped to achieve success, she does not reside long with anyone who is lazy or desires her only as wealth.

CHONG KHNEAS THE FLOATING VILLAGE

The residence of the floating village are mainly immigrants from neighboring Vietnam, who cross the Mekong River in search for a better life and decided to call Tonle Sap Lake as their home. They are mainly fishermen. The water is their



lifeline. This is their source of income and a reason of existence. This is life for them and to be at the water is as natural as it could be. They have shops, church and most



importantly, a school.

COOKING CLASSES

In order to learn more about Cambodian culture, I decided to complete two cooking lessons, one in Phnom Penh and one in Siem Reap.

Before the class we were visiting the market to purchase the ingredients for the cooking.



The instructor in Phnom Penh was quite a prima donna. For no reason he let us wait in the soaring heat for 20 minutes before the class and again at the market.

He informed us, that he cooked for the king and is very busy

with other chef's commitments. What he taught us I was not over impressed. The desert I found the best; simple and nice.

Mango fruit, cut into slices, coconut cooked in palm sugar and sticky rice.



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