

## Chapter 7

# Kingship and Social Integration in Angkor

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### Introduction

This paper discusses the concepts of the territory of the state, political domination, kingship, and their changes in the history of Cambodia during the Pre-Angkor (the fifth to the eighth century) and the Angkor (the ninth to the fourteenth century) period, particularly the latter period.

The word ‘Angkor’ has been and is still ambiguously used with reference to the state that created and left behind the so-called ‘Khmer style’ architecture and arts and is often called ‘Khmer empire’ or ‘Angkor dynasty’. The cultural products of ‘Angkor’ span a long period, approximately from the fifth to the fourteenth century, and are widely found in mainland Southeast Asia, centering on present Cambodia and extending to southern Vietnam, Laos, and central and northeastern Thailand.

Because of this, ‘Angkor’ is often described as a gigantic ‘Empire’ which had enjoyed immense prosperity in pre-modern mainland Southeast Asia. The notion that the Cambodian Kingdom had a much larger territory in the past than it does now has come about due to a surge of Cambodian nationalism after its Independence. In order to determine the state formation of ‘Angkor’, however, we have to examine territory, kingship, and social integration, especially the ideas of these as possessed by various peoples and recorded in the sources of the time including Chinese documents.

Though it is not easy to get a clear idea of these in Angkorian history, there are many inscriptions which serve as principal documents recording various matters such as the construction of temples and the land grants made by the king and local elites that are helpful when carrying out research in ancient Cambodian history. These inscriptions also provide information on the state administration including an ideal of the state rule to be achieved by kings. In this ideal, the king is regarded as the lord of the whole world and is given authority comparable with that of the gods. Of course, this simply exaggerates the king’s political power, but I wish to focus in this paper, on the inscriptions to find out to what extent and in what sense the king’s political power extended over the so-called ‘Khmer Empire’.

## 1. What is Angkor's 'Territory'?

To begin with, my first question is 'how should we image the territory of Angkor?' This question also relates to the meaning of the word 'social integration'. Although the so-called 'Khmer style' art and architecture are found widely distributed in the mainland of Southeast Asia, would this fact prove the widespread political domination of the 'Khmer empire'? Not necessarily; there can be great gaps between wide spatial distribution of similar style architecture and actual political control of the central power of the region.

The state in the Angkor area was called Zhen-la (真臘) by Chinese people from the seventh to the seventeenth century and its description appears in many Chinese sources. According to *Zhu-fan-zhi* (諸蕃志, 1225 CE) and *Song-shi* (宋史, 1345 CE), the location of Zhen-la is to the south of Campā (South Vietnam), the west of the sea, the east of Pagan (Burma) and the north of Jia-luo-xi (加羅希, middle part of the Malay Peninsula). Chinese sources from the twelfth century onwards, including *Zhu-fan-zhi* and *Song-shi* mentioned above, provide general information on the so-called barbaric countries approachable by sea from China. The information includes the names of the big countries (Zhen-la is one), which functioned as a 'general mart' or 'metropolis' (*du-hui* 都會) for the smaller ones that they integrated, as well as the items used by the people of these countries in maritime trade such as spices. *Ling-wai-dai-da* (嶺外代答, 1178 CE) enumerates the names of the smaller countries that were integrated by Zhen-la, which functioned as their general mart or metropolis as: Wa-li (窩里), Xi-peng (西棚), San-bo (三泊), Ma-lan (麻蘭), Deng-liu-mei (登流眉), Di-la-ta (第辣撻).

Although it is difficult in present times to identify the locations of these countries, it appears that some of them were situated in the middle of the Malay Peninsula. As for the trade items, *Zhu-fan-zhi* states that the best quality eaglewood (*chen-shui-xiang/chen-xiang* 沈水香/沉香) is produced in Zhen-la, but according to the sections on Zhen-la and *chen-shui-xiang* in *Ling-wai-dai-da*, though Zhen-la's eaglewood is considered the best among those produced in the barbaric countries, the best eaglewood actually comes from Deng-liu-mei, one of the countries integrated by Zhen-la, which probably existed in the northern part of the Malay Peninsula.

The above statements in *Ling-wai-dai-da* and *Zhu-fan-zhi* show either the mutually dependent economic relations between Zhen-la and Deng-liu-mei, or a political relationship such as subordination or vassalage. In these Chinese documents, however, there is no direct evidence from which we can assume that political domination or the rule of Angkor reached down to the Malay Peninsula in those days. These facts may indicate that the territory of Angkor was a multi-layered space composed of political, religious, cultural, and economic relations. This in my opinion is the meaning of 'social integration in Angkor' based on the recognition

by the Angkorians themselves as seen in the inscriptions and by others, such as the Chinese scholars who have mentioned or documented this region in their writings.

In South and Southeast Asian historiography there have been many studies which treat the states under terms such as ‘segmentary states’, ‘galactic polity’, *maṇḍala*, and so on. This is a vague interpretation of the state territory and the state itself seems an ‘amorphous’<sup>1</sup> entity. It is in this context that we also have to examine the social integration and the kingship in Angkor.

## 2. Social Integration and the Kingship in Angkor

An examination of kingship will help us understand the social integration in Angkor. In the inscriptions of Angkor, kings boast their authority by emphasizing their close relationship with gods. This, of course, comes partly from the characteristic of inscriptions as documents concerning religious matters. The contents of most inscriptions start with a veneration of Hindu gods or Buddha followed by the extolling of kings or officials and their families. By using periphrastic expression, the greatness of the king is described as similar to the gods in order to show the divinity of the king and to enhance royal authority for state consolidation. Though all inscriptions repeat this pattern of emphasizing the divinity of the king, if we pay attention to the sort of religious matters that are taken up in order to emphasize the king’s divinity or the religious conduct of a particular king, we find differences as well as changes in these over the course of the concerned period. As I.W. Mabbett remarks:

It is clear that Angkor cannot be treated as a static entity, unchanging from start to finish.... P. Stern discerns an interesting rhythm in the pattern of activity of certain kings who had the motive, the means, and the time to fulfil their destiny as they saw it: first the construction of major works for the public good, especially reservoirs; then the building of ancestral temples; finally, as the crowning demonstration of imperium, the erection of the symbolic temple mountains which notionally were the centre of the kingdom, the abode of divinity and royal power. [Mabbett 1978: 8]

Stern’s observation of the pattern of activity of a king in relation to state integration of Angkor is very interesting, but if we check the inscriptions, there are

<sup>1</sup> Studies include Wolters 1999. Claude Jacques also states ‘Khmer country was also divided into several more or less important kingdoms, which seem to us to have been united because historians have been able to establish the succession of each “supreme king of Khmer kings”. In fact, we often have no idea how many of these kingdoms were really subservient to the “supreme king”’ [Jacques 2007: 35].

only four kings who accomplished the erection of the symbolic temple mountain: they were Indravarman I (reigned 877-889 CE), Yaśovarman I (889-910?), Rājendravarman II (944-968), and Jayavarman VII (1181-1218?). Therefore, if we attach much significance to this evidence, we would have to say that either the other kings of Angkor were ‘inadequate’ in their fulfilment of state rule, or doubt the consistent policy of the state rule throughout the history of Angkor. As H. Kulke states:

The process of state formation usually passed through three successive phases, namely, the local, regional, and imperial phases or levels.... The numerous Early Kingdoms with their precarious balance of power, shared by the central authority of a *primus inter pares* and the centrifugal local polities, were certainly the dominant feature of the political map of Southeast Asia throughout the first millennium AD. At the end of this period, however, a new development began which changed this political map considerably during the first centuries of the second millennium. [Kulke 1986: 5-8]

Mabbett further observes:

Royal power depended in a sense on the personal loyalty of the king’s following; this in turn depended upon the nature and the strength of the ties between sovereign and clients.... In later reigns, the descendants of these clients owe less and less to the monarch, and have their own hereditary and landed sources of authority and power. Centrifugal tendencies become stronger; factions become more violently opposed; finally a candidate for the throne appears who is able, and considers it necessary, to remove from influence all factions but his own. [Mabbett 1978: 9]

To sum up, political situation in Angkor should be understood as showing a certain sequence such as the centralization and the rise and challenge of regional elites. In each epoch of Angkor, kingship faced various challenges. The well-known fact that Angkor kings usurped the throne and kingdom from previous kings is also the result of these challenges. It is not difficult to imagine that kings and their followers tried various ways to reinforce the king’s authority under these circumstances.

For example, state temples built under the name of the king began to grow larger in scale and more complicated with the advent of time. Without going into details about the architectural evolution in Angkor here, briefly, early Khmer temples had only one tower; gradually, they came to comprise several towers with galleries connecting these towers, and were called ‘mountain-like temples’. There were various architectural evolutions, including in methods of construction and architectural ornamentation. The development not only shows a king’s greatness, but also points to the social pressure on kings to build such temples. As officials and local leaders

also constructed temples, it would appear that the king was forced to build the most distinguished temple.

In the succession to the throne, blood relationships to former kings was not definitive, although it was not completely ignored. For example, Rājendravarman II (944-968 CE), who was praised as the person who ‘combine (s) the family of the moon and the family of the sun (*arkkasomakulasanaṅgati*)’ in Baksei Chamkron Inscription (K.286, 947 CE, Siem Reap, Angkor),<sup>2</sup> was only the son of a brother-in-law of the former king, Yaśovarman I (889-910? CE). However, being of ‘good lineage’ or insisting on it was important and necessary. According to a Chinese document on *Zhen-la* (*Zhen-la-feng-tu-ji* 真臘風土記) written at the end of the thirteenth century, many officials gave their daughters away in marriage to the king.<sup>3</sup> A person who became related to the king through such marriages also became a likely candidate as successor of the king.

Apart from blood relation and lineage, a king’s personal talents such as intelligence and bravery are also praised in inscriptions. Possession of great military power is of course most important for a king. As the case of Jayavarman VII indicates, the establishment of a large number of hospitals (*ārogyaśālā*: house of health) for the benefit of inhabitants also contributed to the stable kingship. Thus, there were many ways to reinforce kingship. In the following section, I will discuss the divinity of the king by discussing the tradition of the king giving his name to the main deity of the central temple.

### 3. Divinity of the King

In Angkor, there was a tradition that the name of the main deity of the central temple be associated with the name of the king. For example, Bakong temple was built by the king Indravarman I (877-889 CE), and its main deity was called Indreśvara. In the reign of his successor, Yaśovarman I (889-910? CE), a *linga* called Yaśodhareśvara was erected in the central temple of Phnom Bakheng.<sup>4</sup> This tradition may go back to pre-Angkor period. According to the Prasat Neang Khmau inscription (K.765, 60? Śaka: 678-687 CE, Ta Keo) and the Preah Theat Khvan Pir inscription (K.121, 716 CE, Kratie), King Puṣkara seems to have established the *linga* called Puṣkareśa probably at the place where both inscriptions were found.

<sup>2</sup> Bibliographical references for inscriptions, which cited by K. number only, are mostly found in Cœdès’ *Inscriptions du Cambodge VIII* [Cœdès 1937-1966].

<sup>3</sup> Zhou Daguan, the author of this document, writes, ‘In general, those who take on these positions are the king’s relatives. If they are not, they give him a daughter as a concubine as well’ [Zhou 2007: 51].

<sup>4</sup> Both of these early kings of Angkor also gave their names to the reservoir (*taṭāka*: Baray) they constructed, namely Indrataṭāka and Yaśodharataṭāka.

Though the gods established by the king in certain shrines are specified by their names such as Isvara or Buddha, the tradition of giving the king's name to the deity also indicates a sort of personality cult, which overlaps with ancestor worship or family worship in Angkor. For instance, in the Preah Ko inscription (K. 713, 893 CE, Siem Reap, Angkor), former king Indravarman I established Pṛthivīndreśvara, which must have been named after Pṛthivīndravarman, father of Indravarman I.

Later however, a different or 'irregular' practice was brought into the deification of the king by Jayavarman IV (921-941 CE). He moved his capital to Koh Ker, 80 km north-east to the previous Angkor capital and the deity established in the temple there was named Tribhuvaneśvara (lord of the Three [whole] Worlds) in Sanskrit and *kamratenjagat ta rājya* (lord of kingdom) in old Khmer. Rājendravarman II (944-968 CE), however, moved the capital back to the former place and returned to the traditional practice of establishing Rājendravarmeśvara as deity at the central temple in Pre Rup. He seems to have been conservative and revivalist in that sense.

However, the tradition thus restored by Rājendravarman II was discarded again by Sūryavarman I (1002-1050 CE). His Preah Vihear inscription (K.380, 11c, Preah Vihear) states:

[East face, st.18]

*ekaṃśrīśikhareśvarādriśikhareśrīśānatīrthe para[m]  
śrīsūryyādriśiloccayenyadasameśrīsūryyavarmmeśvaram  
līgaṃsamyagasauśriyādhikajayakṣetrepurātiṣṭhipat  
paścāttīrṇaviyatpayodhivivaraīśśrīsūryyavarmmmātriṣu*

According to this inscription, Sūryavarman established Sūryavarmeśvara *līgas* at the three places which he conquered (*adhikajayakṣetre*), namely, the peak of the Śikhareśvarādri mountain, the Īśānatīrtha, and the top of the Sūryādri mountain,<sup>5</sup> by the year 940 (1018 CE). Thus he established a deity named after him according to tradition, but he also established *līgas* in his name at three or four places, something hitherto not practised by previous kings. So we see that there occurred another change in the divinization of kings in Angkor.

This change may have been related to a socio-political development, which emerged during this period. According to M. Vickery:

There is ... general scholarly agreement that the period of Jayavarman V and Sūryavarman saw a rapid development in the administrative apparatus, the bureaucracy, a conclusion which has been reached on the basis of the much greater number of inscriptions dealing with administrative questions: land

<sup>5</sup> The number of places where Sūryavarman installed the *līgas* would have been four, if we take *asama* (*asame*) as a place name.



Fig. 7.1: Phnom Chisor (the eleventh century, 50 km south of Phnom Penh, Cambodia), so-called Southern Edge of Sūryavarman's Territory.

acquisition and transfer, foundation of temples directly of officials rather than by kings, and inscriptions extolling the achievements of official families. The increase in official inscriptions is both absolute and relative to the number of royal inscriptions, that is, those apparently emanating directly from the king or dealing mainly with his activities and initiatives. Whereas in the reign of Indravarman and Yaśovarman the great majority of all inscriptions, and in particular the most important, dealing with the construction of important temples and other edifices, are royal, the number of such impressive royal inscriptions declines under Rājendravarman, and in the reign of Jayavarman V not only are there more official inscriptions, but some of the most impressive new works of construction are attributed to named officials and the king's initiative is ignored. [Vickery 1985: 229]

Vickery further discussed 'rapid bureaucratic expansion of the tenth century', by pointing out the coincidence of this bureaucratic expansion with the rise of regional elites. If we take up the temple building activities as an example, the Prasat Banteay Preav temple was built by a local leader, Narapatīndravarman, around 110 km to the west of the capital of Angkor. In this site, three inscriptions in the period of Sūryavarman I are found (K.220-222). However, these inscriptions, without mentioning the king's name, record simply that Narapatīndravarman established this



temple and donated some wealth and servants for daily work in the temple. Though temples built by local leaders are seen from previous times, their number increases considerably during this period. It should also be noted that the persons mentioned in inscriptions as temple builders often bear certain administrative titles such as *khloñ viṣaya* (chief of a province) or *khloñ vala* (chief of the people). This means that they did not ignore the state administration system of the Angkor kingdom, though they had grown powerful enough to issue inscriptions without mentioning the king's name.

Importantly, however, we find several cases in which non-royal persons, namely local leaders established deities named after them in temples they built. For example, an inscription in Prasat Khao Lon (K. 232, 1016 CE, Thailand, Ta Phraya) records that Samaravīravarma who was *mratāñ khloñ* (chief lord) in this area established a deity called Samaravīravarmēśvara in the temple he built there. Furthermore, according to the famous inscription of the so-called *devarāja* cult<sup>6</sup> in Sdok Kak Thom (K. 235, 1052 CE, Thailand, Sa Kao), Sadāśiva, who is the chief figure in this inscription, was given another name, Jayendravarman, and he established the deity Jayendrarmēśvara in the temple.

These facts indicate that non-royal persons could also perform some of these kingly acts. We may be able to say, therefore, that the kingship, at least the earlier tradition concerning the divinity of the king, was somewhat generalized or enlarged during this period. It seems natural, then, that the king's side responded to this new tendency in order to maintain or enhance the kingship. Sūryavarman I's establishment of *liṅgas* in the three or four temples might have been one of such responses.

The culmination of this new development in the later Angkor period was seen in the reign of the last great king of Angkor, Jayavarman VII (1181-1218? CE). In the Preah Khan inscription (K. 908, 1191 CE, Siem Reap, Angkor), the main deity installed in his temple is described as Jayavarmēśvara, which is Lokeśvara representing the shape (*mūrti*) of Jayavarman VII's father. However, it should not be considered as a revival of the old practice. In the several temples built by Jayavarman VII, we find many inscriptions that have only one or two lines mentioning the name of the deity and its installer [Maxwell 2007b]. In one of these inscriptions, for example, Dharāpatīndravarman (probably an official in Jayavarman VII's court) installed the deity named Dharāpatīndradeva and Dharāpatīndreśvara (K. 630). This fact indicates that the tradition of naming a deity with one's personal name had already been established. Jayavarman VII used this to show his power by establishing the deity named after him in many places and elite officials or local leaders also followed the same practice.

<sup>6</sup> There are many studies on the so-called '*devarāja* cult', among which Kulke's work should be referred to first.



This change or development may be understood as one aspect of social renovation seen in the later Angkor Period, presumably in relation to the change of religion followed by the kings in Angkor. Sūryavarman II who built Angkor Wat mainly worshipped Viṣṇu, and Jayavarman VII was a Buddhist king. However, as Bhattacharya writes, we can observe syncretism throughout the Angkor period [Bhattacharya 1961: 168]. Whichever religion the king practiced, establishing a deity with the king's name seems to have continued to be one of the options for a king to reinforce his rule throughout the Angkor period. Notwithstanding the continuation of this practice, we notice an actual change in the way of deification.

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In conclusion, an examination of the territory of Angkor suggests that we have to understand its multi-layered features and also that it is difficult to define it politically. And the study of kingship also reveals the change in the concept of its divinity and the practice of displaying it to the people to strengthen the kingship. Though the classical understanding of kingship in Angkor assumed that a certain special concept of kingship expressed by the term *devarāja* existed throughout the Angkor history, the idea of kingship also changed according to the development of its socio-economic condition. It may be difficult, therefore, to regard Angkor as a state that retained a stable and centralized rule throughout its long period.

### Abbreviations

EFEO: École Française d'Extrême-Orient

BEFEO: *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*

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