

THE GLORIOUS HISTORY AND TEMPLES OF ANGKOR

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BOOKS:

Angkor and the Khmer Civilization by Michael Coe. A well-researched historical treatise which probes far beyond the temples to put them into their full context. It reaches back to the pre-Angkorean period.

The Civilization of Angkor by Charles Higham. For the more academically inclined, this book charts the history of Angkor through archaeological research – largely through inscriptions on temples and stelae.

Customs of Cambodia by Zhou Daguan. In this unique memoir and travelogue by a 13th-century Chinese emissary to the great Khmer capital of Angkor Thom, young Zhou Daguan describes his first-hand impressions of Khmer civilization at its peak. This 2009 edition is the first-ever English translation.

Angkor: Cambodia's Wondrous Khmer Temples by Dawn Rooney. This book straddles two intersecting realms: scholarly history and practical travel guide. Dawn Rooney is an American-born expat art historian who lived and studied in southeast Asia for decades.

Focusing on the Angkor Temples by Michel Petrotchenko. An extraordinarily comprehensive and richly illustrated guide to the temples for the serious Angkor enthusiast. Author Michel Petrotchenko is an Angkor-obsessed dedicated researcher who is also a fine writer and master graphic artist.

Travels in Siam, Cambodia and Laos by Henri Mouhot. The original journals of the French naturalist-artist-explorer who “discovered” the temples of Angkor in 1860 and lovingly documented his findings.

The Art of Southeast Asia by Philip Rawson. Part of the excellent *World of Art* series, this compact book covers the art history of the region. This helps put Angkorean art and architecture in context.

Art and Architecture of Cambodia by Helen Ibbetson Jessup. Nice compendium.

Guide to the Angkor Monuments-by Maruce Glaize. The classic, 1944.
[free pdf download available at: <http://www.theangkorguide.com/images/download/Angkor.pdf>]

A History of Cambodia by David Chandler. Angkor and the bigger picture of Cambodian history.

A Woman of Angkor by John Burgess. Historical fiction set in the courts & temples of ancient Angkor.

ON THE WEB

Ancient Megastructures: Angkor Wat. From Nat Geo's “*Engineering The Impossible*” series. This will take you back to the actual building of the spectacular structure.

<http://www.infocobuild.com/books-and-films/social-science/AncientMegastructures/angkor-wat.html>

To Angkor With Love - Traveler's Guide to Angkor <https://angkorguide.net/en/>

Spectacular Angkor by Dr. John Freedman <http://travelenrichmentservices.com/checkoutourblogs.php>

Angkor Wat: Cambodia's Iconic Temple

<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/cambodia-famous-temple-angkor-wat-info>

Interactive Guide to Angkor – Click to see the temples as they looked in Angkorian times vs. today

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/asia/cambodia/articles/Angkor-Wat-an-interactive-guide-to-the-must-see-temples/>

Map of Angkor – Hi-res downloadable map of Greater Angkor

<https://angkorguide.net/en/the-matchless-angkor-map/>

Google Maps of Angkor Temples in Street View

<https://www.google.com/maps/about/behind-the-scenes/streetview/treks/angkor/>

In Cambodia, Along the Path to Something Profound

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/17/travel/in-cambodia-along-the-path-to-something-profound.html>

'Recycling' Monuments- Archaeological Palimpsests

<https://cyark.org/about/recycling-monuments-the-hinduism-buddhism-switch-at-angkor>

The Surprising New Discoveries At Angkor Wat

<http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20170309-the-mystery-of-angkor-wat>

Laser Scans Unveil an Ancient Network of Cities

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/20/science/angkor-wat-cambodia-archaeology.html>

ANGKOR PRIMER

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The Three Great God-Kings of Angkor: J2, S2, and J7

Jayavarman II (J2) : The Founding Father.

Fully 3 centuries before construction of Angkor Wat even began, J2 declared himself the first of the great god-kings of Angkor. A Khmer-born prince who was installed as a puppet to govern over the proto-Angkorian Kingdom of Chenla by the then-dominant Javanese, J2 rebelled and consolidated a new Khmer kingdom, declaring himself the *devaraja*, or universal god-king, in 802CE in a ceremony at the summit of Phnom Kulen. Having probably spent much of his youth in (Indianized, Hindu) Java, he was heavily influenced by Javanese art, architecture, and king-worship. He moved his capital progressively north to the Tonle Sap and close to what would become greater Angkor, centralizing the capital's location and leveraging the prodigious bounty of fish and ideal rice-growing *terroir* of the area. He fittingly dedicated his new Kingdom to the Hindu god **Shiva** in his capacity as the great Transformer/Renewer/Rebuilder.

Suryavarman II (S2) : The Builder of the magnificent Angkor Wat.

S2 ascended the throne in 1113 after the capital had been firmly established at Angkor for over 200 years. He strengthened the empire and the irrigation system of 'the hydraulic city' of Angkor, and then built Angkor Wat beginning in about 1125 and continuing over the next 30+ years - a feat which stands eternally to his credit as the father of the grandest and most perfect temple of the Khmer civilization, and unquestionably one of the greatest architectural achievements of all time. Angkor Wat carried on the Khmer tradition of paying homage to Hindu gods (and their earthly reflections in god-kings), but S2 broke with tradition by dedicating his temple complex to the glory of **Vishnu** (the Protector/Preserver) rather than Shiva – though in reality it was to glorify himself. The great temple also broke with tradition in facing west instead of east (giving us great sunrise shots!), a condition that is thought to be related to its consecration to Vishnu, who is associated with the West, and perhaps more importantly related to S2's vision of Angkor Wat as his eternal mausoleum - thus most appropriately facing toward the setting sun. S2 was a fierce warrior as well as a great temple- and canal-builder. He successfully invaded and sacked the Kingdom of Champa in southern Vietnam, but like other great powers throughout history his attempts to rule over northern Vietnam (Dai Viet at the time) were repeatedly repulsed. He was a forceful statesman and established strong diplomatic relations with China. He died in a battle with the Cham in 1150, but you will see him in full glory in *The Army of Suryavarman II* bas relief in the southwest gallery of Angkor Wat.

Jayavarman VII (J7) : The Great Restorer, Prolific Builder and 1st Buddhist King

Grandson of the great S2, J7 was the most prolific temple-builder of all the Khmer kings- if not of all human history. He too was a great warrior and in fact was the restorer of the glories of Angkor, taking back Angkor in 1191 from the Cham who had conquered and occupied it in 1177. J7 built the walled Angkor Thom (Great City), including the great state temple of the Bayon and the nearby temples of Ta Prohm (which he built for Mom), and Preah Khan (for Dad). Notably, J7 converted to **Mahayana Buddhism** and dedicated his city to the *bodhisattva* of Compassion, Lokeshvara, the divine prototype of the merciful Buddhist god-king. The colossal faces staring out from the gates of Angkor Thom and the Bayon represent both Lokeshvara and his divine earthly equivalent, J7. The temples of J7's reign are grand, and phenomenal in their scope and number, but they lack the methodical perfection of Angkor Wat. After the death of J7 in the year 1243, Angkor slowly declined under a series of weak kings, prolonged drought conditions, inadequately maintained irrigation systems, and intense pressure from repeated incursions by the imperious Siamese of the rising new Thai Kingdom of Ayutthaya (Siam). Angkor was eventually sacked and razed by the Thais, and completely abandoned in **1431**. The Khmer culture of divine kingship disappeared forever, and with it the grandeur and cultural unity of 600 years of Khmer civilization.

...But let's not forget an Unsung Hero : Yasovarman I

Reigning from 889-915, Y1 moved the capital from Hariharalaya (present-day Roluos) to Angkor proper, building the first truly Angkorian temple, Phnom Bakheng. This grand scale temple-mount monument, designed to reflect an earthly Mount Meru (the domain of the gods) was built about 900CE - over 200 years before Angkor Wat. It was the principal temple of Angkor for two centuries. It has numerous astronomical associations, the classic quincunx (5-towers) motif, and was an inspirational precursor of Angkor Wat. Perhaps even more importantly, Y1 built the first great baray (reservoir), the East Baray, which fostered the massive rice cultivation that underpinned the strength and prosperity of the Khmer empire. That vision and engineering achievement may have been the single most important factor in Angkor's subsequent glory and dominance in the region. Y1 may have had leprosy and may have been the "Leper King" of the eponymous terrace. If so, the disfiguring disease clearly did not hold him back from great achievement - so let's pay tribute to the oft-overlooked Yasovarman I.

(over)

ANGKOR GLOSSARY

angkor- royal or holy city – a composite neologism of two words: the Sanskrit word *nagara* and the ancient Khmer word *nokor*, which both mean holy capital

Angkor Wat – Holy City Temple **Angkor Thom** – Great Holy City

apsara- celestial dancer/nymph of Hindu mythology; born of the churning of the ocean of milk

asuras- demons – look for them holding one end of the naga along pathways and in the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat

banteay- citadel, fortified enclosure

baray- diked reservoir – very likely a key ingredient of Angkor's rise and fall

bodhisattvas – in Buddhism, a being who has attained enlightenment but remains in this existence to help others; bodhisattvas range from saint-like human beings (e.g., The Dalai Lama) to chimerical demigods.

devas- gods – Look for them holding their end of the naga, opposing the *asuras* (demons) along pathways and in the most famous Angkor Wat bas relief

devata – female temple guardian figures, similar to their sister apsaras but less scantily-clad, more stately & elegant

dvarapala - temple entry guardians, of every shape and form, from the famous 'Kneeling Attendants' of Koh Ker to all sorts of warriors, gods, and anthropo-zoomorphic figures. A staple of Hindu and Buddhist temples throughout the ages.

Ganesha – Elephant-headed Hindu deity, son of Shiva, god of auspiciousness and overcoming of obstacles

Garuda – mythical bird-man deity, vehicle of Vishnu, fighter of evil, harking back to early animistic Indian myth and eventually incorporated into Hindu and then later Buddhist mythology

gopura- entry pavillion or gateway

Hindu triad/trinity- Also called the **Trimurti** from the Sanskrit. The 3 primary gods who preside over the vast Hindu pantheon, each personifying a cosmic function: **Brahma** (the Creator), **Vishnu** (the Protector/Preserver), and **Shiva** (the Destroyer/ Transformer/Renewer). Shiva was the original 'Lord of Angkor' prior to the building of Angkor Wat, when S2 broke with tradition and dedicated his state temple/mausoleum to Vishnu.

Hanuman – A prominent and beloved zoomorphic deity of the Hindu pantheon, Hanuman is a monkey-god-warrior featured in the *Ramayana*. He is the bringer of courage and hope, and the apotheosis of loyalty as he helps Prince Rama in his quest to rescue his kidnapped wife, Sita.

Indra- Hindu god of war, the skies, and thunderstorms – look for him on his 3-headed elephant at Banteay Srei

jaya- (prefix) – victory **khan**- sword (as in Preah Khan, Sacred Sword)

Krishna- an avatar of Vishnu and a hero of the *Mahabharata*, the mythologized epic story of a North Indian civil war

linga- an ancient symbol associated with the god Shiva, usually carved of stone and phallic in form, and often resting on a **yoni**, a slotted pedestal representing female fertility. Together they represent the totality of creation. The degree to which the linga is overtly sexual versus purely metaphysical is hotly debated.

Lintel- a cross-beam between two posts, often richly carved

Lokeshvara – the bodhisattva of compassion, a Buddhist demigod and patron saint of Angkor Thom. The beatific smiling faces of Angkor Thom's gates and the 200+ faces on the giant pillars of the Bayon are thought to represent a fusion of Lokeshvara and his earthly god-king reflection, Jayavarman VII. Lokeshvara is also known as **Avalokiteshvara** and was likely derived from the original Hindu God of Mercy, syncretically transmuted into the Buddhist God (and later Goddess) of Mercy, known as Guanyin in China, Kannon in Japan, and Quan Am in Vietnam.

Mandara- mythical mountain used to churn the ocean of milk in the Hindu creation myth

Mebon- an island temple. At Angkor, it's used to name small temples in the middle of barays such as the East Mebon.

Mount Meru – 5-peaked mountain abode of the Hindu gods – the key element of temple mount architecture

Naga– Great multi-headed serpent god-kings, Protectors of the Angkorian state, associated with creation and life-giving water, although sometimes associated with evil as well. The Naga tends more toward the positive in Buddhism (Muchalinda, King of the Nagas, protected the meditating Buddha under his hood during a violent rainstorm) versus Hinduism in which the Naga can be deceitful. Naga was the supreme landlord of Angkor, receiving homage from even the omnipotent god-kings.

Nandi- Shiva's white bull, his mount and guardian. A ubiquitous guardian figure at temples dedicated to Shiva.

pediment- despite the root "pedi-" suggesting foot, a pediment in architecture is actually a triangular area up high at the top of a portico, often richly carved - as is beautifully exemplified at Banteay Srei

phnom- mountain or hill **plinth** – stone platform on which a column, pedestal, statue, or other structure rests

prasat- like pagoda, prasat can mean a tower or can be used metonymically for an entire shrine or temple

preah- sacred, as in Preah Khan (Sacred Sword) and Preah Ko (Sacred Bull) temples

quincunx- (a favorite Scrabble word!) An arrangement of 5 objects with 4 at the corners and 1 at the center of a rectangle. This is the most common arrangement of sanctuary towers in Cambodian architecture, including most notably Angkor Wat.

Rahu- A noteworthy *asura* demon monster with no body, a head only, who swallows the sun and causes eclipses – he puts in several appearances at Banteay Srei

Raja- King **Rama**- Hindu prince – and an avatar of Vishnu – who is the hero of the *Ramayana*

Ravana- 10-headed and 20-armed demon King of Lanka who abducts Rama's wife Sita in the *Ramayana*

spean- bridge **stele**- upright stone block inscribed with writing

stupa (also called **chedi**)- holy structure/shrine/reliquary in which ashes or other remains are interred; typically contains putative relics (hair, bone fragment, tooth) of the Buddha, or more commonly a Buddha statue

surya- sun (as in Suryavarman II, the builder of Angkor Wat)

thom- great **-varman** (suffix) – protector (as in Jayavarman- Victory Protector, Suryavarman -Sun Protector)

wat- (also sometimes written as **vat**) - temple/shrine/monastery