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Practice and Belief in Ancient Cambodia: Claude Jacques' *Angkor* and the *Devarāja* Question

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Angkor: Cities and Temples

By CLAUDE JACQUES and MICHAEL FREEMAN. Translated from the French by MICHAEL WHITE.
Bangkok: River Books, 1997. Pp. 319. Plates, Glossary, Bibliography, Index.

Angkor: Cities and Temples is a handsome picture book with a text by Claude Jacques, a leading epigraphist whose publications, spanning several decades, detail what inscriptions do and do not tell us about crucial moments in ancient Cambodian history.¹ In this work, he provides a total picture of a society, its development, aesthetic achievements, political rivalries and religious beliefs. Jacques is not interested in merely passing on received opinion, and *Angkor* bristles with his strong individual vision. A discussion of Jacques' book could take up almost any of its aspects. Here the focus will be on religion, a matter about which the author's positions allow considerable room for contrary views.

George Cœdès died in 1969. His first published translation of an ancient Cambodian inscription appeared in 1904, and volume 8, the index volume of his *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, was published in 1966. Given such a span of activity, the post-Cœdès era is today barely half over, and the conditions one might expect in such an era could last several more decades: the absence of a single towering figure, contentiousness, confusion over scholarly direction, and a moderate but incomplete internationalisation of the field of study.

Cœdès' scholarly virtues were grounded in the epigraphist's art: an attention to detail, a love of the concrete, an awareness of empirical knowledge contributed by other scholars, a sense of words and their nuances, an aversion to grand theories, yet at the same time a willingness to fill in gaps, and to spin hypotheses when the facts cried for explanation. Claude Jacques, too, is an epigraphist, and it cannot be expected that his virtues should be precisely the same as Cœdès'. Jacques is best known for a series of painstaking studies reconstructing political events, primarily focusing on the centuries before the foundation of the city of Angkor around 900. What is somewhat surprising is that Jacques is weak in an area in which epigraphists should be strong - in being scrupulously careful about words and the boundaries of their meanings. Perhaps this weakness can be forgiven, but it has contributed to theories that play a considerable role in *Angkor: Cities and Temples*. These theories must be considered untenable, and readers of this attractive volume should be warned about them.

¹ Henry Ginsburg, David Chandler, and Frits Staal have read earlier versions of this essay. I am grateful for their suggestions, especially those of Professor Staal, but I do not wish to imply that they are in agreement with the proposals I make. And, as is customary, they are not responsible for remaining errors. *Angkor: Cities and Temples* is a translation of a French-language expansion of Claude Jacques, *Angkor* (Paris: Bordas, 1990). A German translation of the latter (with new photographs) was published as Claude Jacques, *Angkor* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 1997). This, in turn, was translated into English as Claude Jacques, *Angkor* (Cologne: Könemann, 1999). A different work entirely is Claude Jacques, *Angkor: vision de palais divins*, with photographs by Suzanne Held (Paris: Editions Hermé, 1997).

As a book of photography and as a visual introduction to the subject, *Angkor: Cities and Temples* is a success. Michael Freeman's colour photography illuminates practically every page, and there is a judicious mix of overall views, unexpected shots and close-ups, most of which are quite well chosen, and include the human figure, animal and vegetative ornament. Jacques tells the story in eight chapters ('Khmer Civilisation', 'The Pre-Angkor Period', 'The First Angkor', 'Moving the Capital', 'Angkor in the 11th Century', 'Suryavarman II and Angkor Wat', 'Angkor Thom' and 'The 13th Century and After'). Facts are presented in great profusion, but with liveliness and precision; the narrative flow is strong, and the reader's interest is maintained. Quotations and colourful details ornament the text.

But the decision to publish this book with no scholarly apparatus, no footnotes and an inadequate bibliography, will dismay the scholar and confuse the student reader. The scholars – other than Jacques – who are so immersed in the field that they could easily supply the missing notes are few and could probably be counted on the fingers of a single hand. Jacques follows rules of accountability that place him under no obligation to acknowledge recent scholarship if he would prefer to ignore it. *Angkor*, therefore, provides no clue as to what the author thinks, for instance, about Eleanor Mannikka's *Angkor Wat: Time, Space, and Kingship* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), with its proposals regarding measurements at the twelfth-century temple and their symbolic significance.

At moments Jacques puts forward significant hypotheses that depend on archaeological data. The most consequential proposals are those that relate to the thirteenth century, and to the question of how long work continued at the Bayon. He believes that the inner quadrangular gallery at the Bayon, the one with the more-or-less Hindu reliefs, was constructed after 1243, in the time of Jayavarman VIII, to whose reign he assigns the anti-Buddhist movement responsible for the careful chiselling away of hundreds of Buddha images at Jayavarman VII's great temples, the Bayon included. A much-extended chronology has recently been given support by excavations below the foundation level of the northeastern "library" at the Bayon, which resulted in the discovery of shards of Chinese ceramics that are considered unlikely to predate the mid-thirteenth century.² Jacques also reasonably places the Theravada Buddhist Preah Palilay and several of the Preah Pithu monuments in the middle or second half of the thirteenth century.³ What he does not recognise is the possibility that Preah Palilay and the Preah Pithu group may be speaking to each other in some way and are therefore entirely contemporary, and that the anti-Buddhist movement may have been directed specifically toward Mahāyāna Buddhism rather than towards Buddhism as a whole.

At moments Jacques makes appropriate observations but proves incapable of drawing the proper conclusions. About the portrait statues of Jayavarman VII, for instance, he writes that they represent a 'far cry from the concept of a *Buddharaja* incarnating the king, dreamt up by authors as a parallel to their equally imaginary *Devarāja*' (p. 256). (In fact his argument is not with anonymous authors but with Coedès, who called the giant *nāga*-protected Buddha, thought to have originally been the central image of the Bayon, a *Buddharāja*.⁴) It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the king wished to associate himself with the Buddha in some way when he honoured his mother as the Perfection of Wisdom (the goddess Prajñāpāramitā) at one temple, his father as Lokeśvara (embodiment of compassion) at another, since wisdom and compassion

2 Naho Shimizu, 'Preliminary Report on Ceramics Recovered from the Northern "Library" of the Bayon Complex, Angkor Thom,' *Udaya*, 1, 1 (2000): 207.

3 Hiram W. Woodward, Jr, 'Thailand and Cambodia: The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,' in *Ruam bot khwām wichākān. . . / Studies and Reflections on Asian Art History and Archaeology: Essays in Honour of H. S. H. Professor Subhadradis Diskul* (Bangkok: Silpakorn University, 1995), pp. 335-42.

4 George Coedès, *Angkor: An Introduction* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 100.

together bring about Buddha-hood. Yet Jacques is correct that there is some incompatibility between associating oneself with the Buddha and picturing oneself as a worshipper of the Buddha (the portrait images do not show the king meditating: the broken arms originally performed a gesture of adoration, or perhaps held a lotus). This incompatibility has, in fact, a temporal origin and is indicative of a profound shift in thinking patterns. The turn to Theravāda Buddhism, much evidence indicates, fell within Jayavarman's lifetime. Initially he was a Mahāyānist, for whom Buddha-hood was an imminent possibility; then, towards the end of his life, his beliefs changed. The portrait images, which date from late in his reign, show him not only as a worshipper, but as a man receiving a prediction - in accordance with Burmese thinking - as to when in the future he will become a Buddha.⁵ Distance from Buddhahood had become measurable in linear time.

Sometimes the imprecision of Jacques' language is frustrating (and this is not because of faulty translation from French). The main divinity of the temple of Tà Prohm (established in 1186) was, Jacques writes, 'the "Mother of the Buddhas", Prajñāpāramitā: the "Perfection of Wisdom", and was sculpted in the image of Jayavarman VII's mother'. What the Tà Prohm inscription (K. 273, st. 36) says is that a statue with a proper name (Śrī Jayarājacūḍāmaṇi) was erected and that this image was both a manifestation (*mūrti*) of the king's mother and a manifestation of the mother of the Buddhas.⁶ The image itself necessarily depicted the goddess Prajñāpāramitā; to what extent its appearance was shaped by the physical qualities of the king's mother can only be guessed. In this case, endeavouring to convey what the inscription actually says would make life easier for the non-specialist reader than the words 'sculpted in the image of Jayavarman's mother'. Nowhere, however, is the reader led more astray than in Jacques' discussion of that central problem, the *devarāja*.

The passages concerning the term *devarāja* deal with issues that lie at the very heart of ancient Khmer beliefs and practices. An innocent reader might assume that what Jacques writes is something more than a personal opinion, or at least an opinion that is reasonable enough to be considered a viable option. The term *devarāja* is much disputed, and it might appear unlikely that Jacques' views can actually be shown to be mistaken, or that anything new could be added to positions that have been staked out by a number of scholars. Such is not quite the case, however, and the issues are crucial enough to make worthwhile yet another exploration. In his chapter 'Khmer Civilisation', Jacques writes that with the adoption of Indian gods 'the Khmers did not abandon their indigenous deities, the masters of the land and its abundance, human heroes who became guardian spirits, and, of course, the protecting ancestors of each lineage'. Information about these divinities is scarce, however, since the inscriptions were not addressed to them. 'That is why so little is known of the foremost local deity, the renowned *Devaraja* or "the god who is king" who was the counterpart of the Khmer "king of kings"' (p. 29). A number of pages later, after introducing the ceremony carried out in 802 by Jayavarman II (according to the Sdok Kak Thom inscription of 1052), Jacques writes, 'As Jayavarman had established himself as "supreme king of kings", he naturally had to raise a divine counterpart from the empire's guardian spirits. This is what he did, using the title *Kamrateng Jagat ta Raja*: "the god who is king" (translated in Sanskrit by *devaraja*)' (p. 62).

Since this interpretation differs from what can be found in other books on the subject, a

5 I have touched on this subject in various articles: 'Tantric Buddhism at Angkor Thom', *Ars Orientalis* 12 (1981): 57-71; 'Influence and Change: Burma and Thailand in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', *Arts of Asia* 24, 2 (March-April 1994): 99-104; 'The Jayabuddhamahānātha Images of Cambodia', *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 52/53 (1994/95): 105-11.

6 True, in the Phimeanakas inscription (K. 485), the name Śrī Jayarājacūḍāmaṇi does appear as the king's mother's personal name (st. 4), but this must be a case of the name of the image being used to refer to her; in the same inscription (st. 82) the name does refer to the statue.

student reader might regret the absence of footnotes or a more complete bibliography. Jacques' argument was presented in an article called 'The Kamrateñ Jagat in Ancient Cambodia', published in India in 1985.⁷ Essentially, Jacques took Coëdès' insights of 1961 one step further. Coëdès, in his discussion of the titles *kamrateñ jagat* ('lord of the world') and *vraḥ kamrateñ añ* ('my holy lord') observed that contextual usage indicated that *kamrateñ jagat* had overtones of territoriality. 'Although it would be certainly imprudent to choose to interpret *kamrateñ jagat* as an equivalent of the "god of the soil", this connotation cannot be excluded, not least because it has been shown above that *jagat* corresponds to *bhuvana* ["creature", "earth"].⁸ What Coëdès considered imprudent, Jacques considered a necessity; rather than an image of an Indian god with connotations of territoriality, Jacques proposed that the *kamrateñ jagat* might even be a disembodied spirit, not represented 'in any form whatsoever', 'for do we not often see, in contemporary South-East Asia, sanctuaries of every size which shelter deities of all types and which are devoid of images?' (p. 279).

Along the way to raising such a possibility, Jacques brings up evidence that he implies supports his argument. There is the example of a *kamrateñ jagat* Piñ Thmo ('Lord of the World Stone Tank'), in inscriptions from the reign of Rājendravarman (944 – c. 968). For Jacques, this is a 'particularly clear case of a "guardian of a place"' (p. 274). Perhaps that is the case, yet it is misleading not to present at the same time the evidence the inscription provides for believing that this deity probably had the physical form of an image of the god Viṣṇu; *kamrateñ jagat* Piñ Thmo would have been a colloquial name for the image (unremarked by Jacques) called *Śīlāsaroviṣṇu* ('Viṣṇu of the Stone Tank') in the Sanskrit portion of the inscription (K. 56, st. 33).⁹

A second piece of evidence for Jacques is the *Kamrateñ jagat senāpati* Trailokyavijaya, an image established at the temple of Phimai in northeastern Thailand, according to an inscription of 1108 (K. 397). He appears to believe that Trailokyavijaya was an army chief (*senāpati*) in the region who became a 'tutelary genius' after his death. The central image of the temple (surely a Buddha), he maintains, 'belongs to quite another world' (p. 275). But the overwhelming evidence is that they belong to the same world, the world of Tantric Buddhism. Trailokyavijaya ('conqueror of the three worlds') is a martial defender of Buddhist qualities in Tantric Buddhism, especially the Shingon Buddhism of Japan, and terms such as *senāpati* appear in Buddhist texts to characterise comparable deities.¹⁰ Furthermore, a pedestal bearing an inscription (K. 954) including the words *kamrateñ jagat senāpati* was found at Phimai; it is quite probably the pedestal for this very image. The physical appearance of the image cannot be determined for certain, but surely, if it could be identified, it would be recognisable as belonging to the Buddhist pantheon. Perhaps the donor personally identified with such a sculpture; or it possibly had a memorial function and so could indeed have had overtones of a 'tutelary genius'. But the notion that it would have belonged to a separate realm from the main image of the temple is preposterous.

This is the sort of evidence that lies behind Jacques' view that in 802 Jayavarman II raised 'a divine counterpart from the empire's guardian spirits' and allowed him to doubt (in the 1985

7 Kurashima Noboru, ed., *Indus Valley to Mekong Delta: Explorations in Epigraphy* (Madras: New Era, 1985), pp. 269-86.

8 'Bien qu'il soit certainement imprudent de vouloir interpréter *kamrateñ jagat* comme une équivalent de "dieu de sol", la connotation ne doit pas être exclue, d'autant moins que l'on a vu plus haut *jagat* correspondre à *bhuvana*....' G. Coëdès, 'Les expressions *vraḥ kamrateñ añ* et *kamrateñ jagat* en vieux-khmèr', *Adyar Library Bulletin* 25 (1961): 456 (incl. 447-60).

9 K. 56, inscription of Kdei An, was published in G. Coëdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, 8 vols., vol. VI (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1964), pp. 3-19. See also K. 653 (references to the publication of other inscriptions are to be found in *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. VIII [1966]).

10 For Trailokyavijaya, see Rob Linrothe, *Ruthless Compassion* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), pp. 178-213. For Vajrapāni as *mahāsenāpati* of the *yakṣa*, see F. A. Bischoff, *Ārya Mahābala-Nāma-Mahāyānasūtra* (Paris: Librarie Orientaliste P. Geuthner, 1956). For Jacques' views, see also *Angkor*, p. 149.

article) if this counterpart 'really is represented in any form whatsoever' (p. 279). How have other scholars reacted to Jacques' proposition? In *The Khmers*, Ian Mabbett endeavours to provide a survey of scholarly opinion concerning the foundation of the *devarāja* in 802. At the same time, such a passage, coming from a scholar who has thought as long and as hard about *devarāja* as anyone, is an acknowledgement of the intractability of the issue, and of the possibility that there may never be a definitive resolution:

What, precisely, did the cult involve? G. Coëdès, pioneer and grand master of Angkorian studies, identified it with the cult of kings at state shrines, but more recent research has discarded this identification. J. Filliozat regarded it as a cult of Śiva under the name of Devarāja, which this god bore in South India: he emphasized the purity of its Indian descent. H. Kulke took the important step of dissociating it decisively from the cult of royal shrines, and suggested that it was a bronze image of Śiva. More recently, C. Jacques has suggested that, instead of seeing the Khmer version of the name as a translation of the Sanskrit (*devarāja* = 'king of the gods', or, as some took it, 'god-king'), the latter was in fact a translation of an originally Khmer name for a local Khmer god - the 'god who is the king', *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja*. Michael Vickery accepts *devarāja* as a type of Khmer cult, but denies that the evidence allows us to recognize its operation before the tenth century. Whatever the origin and meaning of the term, it must be recognized that the cult had to take its place within the universe of Khmer religious thought, as a patron spirit with protective power, like the *nak ta*.¹¹

It is not easy to take issue with the proposition that the *devarāja* - or any of the Indian gods of ancient Cambodia, for that matter - can be considered 'a patron spirit with protective power', if only because such a statement may be impossible to disprove. As for *nak ta*, Mabbett is using the modern Khmer term that can mean 'god of the soil', 'ancestral spirit of the neighbourhood' or 'guardian angel of a particular place'.

Michael Vickery has discussed Jacques' theories in his path-breaking book of 1998, *Society, Economics, and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia*. Jacques, according to Vickery, demonstrated that the term *devarāja* was an awkward rendering of the Khmer *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja*, the latter being 'a special type of Cambodian protective deity, not at all a Hindu concept'.¹² Vickery characterised Jacques' proposal as a 'resolution' of the *devarāja* question. Vickery's ready acceptance of Jacques' theory cannot be unconnected with Vickery's aim in his important book: to use Khmer-language materials to create a total picture of early Khmer society, and to present religion in a materialist framework, minimising Indian influences and mental autonomy. The question of why it is that something 'not at all a Hindu concept' needs such Indic loanwords as *jagat* and *rāja* to be expressed hardly arises.

11 Ian Mabbett and David Chandler, *The Khmers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 90.

12 Michael Vickery, *Society, Economics, and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia: The 7th-8th Centuries* (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, The Toyo Bunko, 1998), pp. 144, 423-5. A discussion of the differences among Jacques', Vickery's and my own viewpoint is complicated by the fact that Vickery has little interest in the form of images. He tends to take an essentialist approach to names, I to forms. He writes (p. 119), 'Two of the foundations... honor the same god, Kedāreśvara', where I would write 'At two of the foundations, the presumed Śivalingas were given the name Kedāreśvara.' Carried to an extreme, this difference could mean that even if the *devarāja* were definitively identified as a *Śivalinga*, Vickery could maintain that it was 'not at all a Hindu concept'.

Equally grounded in Khmer-language texts, but with very different results, are the writings of Saveros Pou. To her, the presence of Indic loanwords has cultural significance. Here is an example of her approach:

The Sanskrit loanword *sthāpanā* was used by the Khmer since the dawn of history. Initially a noun, it functioned in Khmer both as a verb and noun, thus meaning 'a religious foundation' and 'to perform, accomplish a pious deed'. Moreover, *sthāpanā* was semantically well perceived by Khmer borrowers from the outset. A causative of the verbal root *sthā -ti*, it meant 'to cause to stand, to set up'. From Khmer epigraphic evidence, *sthāpanā* meant 'to erect statues, to build temples or *prāsāda*', and most of the time it referred to the erection of statues. Incidentally, a *sthāpanā* was accompanied by various *kalpanā*, another Skt. loanword, also well understood by local speakers. The meaning of *kalpanā* is twofold because it applied to: 1. 'ritual prescriptions' required by the cult of the specific object founded, such as ritual ordinance, and details of the offerings; 2. diverse injunctions pertaining to the performance and the respect of ritual.¹³

When it comes to the question of *devarāja*, Pou's viewpoint is a mixture of her own insights and opinions that were current before the re-examination of the matter undertaken by scholars outside France in recent decades. In 802, Jayavarman II (once again, according to the evidence of an inscription composed 250 years later) 'chose a symbol for the monarchy. Called in Khmer *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja*, "god of the king", this object was undoubtedly a *liṅga* whose powerful attributes we all know. It had to remain close to the king and therefore to follow wherever he chose to stay'.¹⁴ Questions have rightly been raised about the plausibility of such an interpretation: whether it makes sense, in the absence of any corroborative evidence, to believe that a *liṅga* – especially a massive one installed in a royal temple-pyramid – was carried from one place to another. (The inscription does make it clear that the *devarāja* – whatever it was – was portable.) More significant is Pou's gloss of *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja* as 'god of the king'. *Kamrateñ jagat* for her is 'lord of the world/cosmos' ('*seigneur du monde/cosmos*'), hence 'god'; the relative *ta* becomes 'of' and *rāja* is taken to refer to the reigning monarch.¹⁵ The other common title is *vraḥ* ('*sacré*', for Pou) *kamrateñ aṅ* ('*mon, ou notre, seigneur*').¹⁶ At one point Pou states that the two titles are not parallel because *vraḥ kamrateñ aṅ* is an '*appellatif*' like '*Sa Majesté*', while *kamrateñ jagat* is a '*lexème*' like '*le roi*'.¹⁷ The implication of such an observation appears to be that in the inscriptions of the later tenth century (after *Kamrateñ jagat* came into fashion), the eleventh, and the twelfth centuries (up until the Jayavarman VII period, when a distinctive practice arose), the images called *K. J. plus* (commonly but not invariably) a placename, and those called *V. K. A. plus* (usually) a deity name, should be differentiated primarily by naming style. The names do not mean that one type of deity is necessarily more territorial than the other or refer to images that were not part of the Indian pantheon.¹⁸ At any rate, Pou never deigns to mention Jacques, or to refer to his arguments.

13 Saveros Pou, 'Ancient Cambodia's Epigraphy: a Socio-linguistic Look', in *Southeast Asian Archaeology* (1996), ed. Marijke J. Klokke and Thomas de Bruijn (Hull: Centre for South-East Asian Studies, University of Hull, 1998), p. 130 (incl., pp. 123-34).

14 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

15 Saveros Pou, 'Dieux et rois dans la pensée khmère ancienne', *Journal Asiatique* 286, 2 (1998): 662.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 657.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 664n.

18 Vickery, on the other hand, maintains that deities named *K. J. plus* place-name cannot be gods of the Indian pantheon (*Society, Economics, and Politics*, p. 425).

There has been no settling down, no consensus. A reasonable solution is elusive. Yet it is possible to make a fresh approach and to propose an interpretation different from any of those so far mentioned. Given the number of pages that have been written on the *devarāja* question, it is unlikely that any proposal worth making has not at least been touched upon by a previous author, and such is the case. Herman Kulke's suggestion, it will be recalled, was that the *devarāja* was a portable bronze image of Śiva.¹⁹ The proposal had a solid basis, but Kulke failed to notice that processional images make an appearance in Khmer epigraphy as festival (*utsava*) images, just as in southern India, and that therefore one should expect at least some overlap in vocabulary, if the *devarāja* really was such an image.²⁰ The passage to which Kulke drew attention is in the inscription of Kok Rosei (K. 175), from the reign of Jayavarman V (c. 968–1000). The daily gift to 'the divine lord who is lordship' (*vrah kamrateñ añ ta rājya*), says the inscription, should be 'one *liḥ* of rice for the holy fire'. 'The holy fire (*vrah vleñ*) of Angkor', comments Kulke, 'stands in a close relationship with the *vrah kamrateñ añ ta rājya*, or rather the two seem actually to compose a unity.' But then, a few sentences later, Kulke pulls back from the implications of the connection: 'None of this should be allowed to give the impression that the *devarāja* is identical with the holy fire of Angkor. The intention is merely to point to the possible "functional" contiguity of both cult objects.'²¹

One of the reasons for paying close attention to the inscription of Kok Rosei is that the *Steñ Añ Śivācārya* who was involved in the temple appears to be none other than the Śivācārya who belonged to the lineage that according to the Sdok Kak Thom inscription could be traced from *Steñ Añ Śivakaivalya* during the time of Jayavarman II, to Sadāśiva, author of the inscription in 1052.²² In other words, Sadāśiva was very likely aware of the practices described in the Kok Rosei inscription.

A survey of the evidence does indeed provide reasons for believing that the *devarāja* cult had something to do with the sacred fire and that a thorough investigation of Indian texts might demonstrate the connection quite conclusively. Let us review some of the evidence in chronological sequence.

A stanza in King Indravarman's Preah Ko inscription (AD 879) was discussed by Ian Mabbett in a 1969 article:

*Yenābhiṣikto vidhinā mahendras
svayambhuvāropitadevarājyaḥ
tenābhiṣeka(m) gunavān anekam
yaś śrīndravarmammāpad avāryavīryyaḥ*

'On one level', wrote Mabbett, 'the stanza can mean: "By the same rite, by which Mahendra (Great Indra) was consecrated by Svayambhū (Brahmā) on his elevation to kingship (*rājya*) over the gods, Śrī Indravarman, possessed of virtue, of irresistible heroism, received an anointing that is not unique (*anekam*)."²³ What has not been remarked upon (to the best of my knowledge) is how closely this stanza echoes a verse that is part of the prescribed *Agnihotra*, or daily fire sacrifice,

19 Herman Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult*, trans. I. W. Mabbett, Data Paper no. 108 (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1978).

20 An example is K. 276 (Prasat Ta Kev, lines 5-6), where the processional image is said to be of gold (Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. IV, pp. 153-4).

21 Kulke, *Devarāja Cult*, pp. 27-8.

22 There are several Śivācārya in tenth-century epigraphy, but Adhir Chakkravarti has concluded that these two were identical: Adhir Chakkravarti, *The Sdok Kak Thom Inscription, pt. I, A Study in Indo-Khmer Civilization* (Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1978), p. 281.

23 I. W. Mabbett, 'Devarāja', *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10, 2 (Sept. 1969): 207.

in the Brahmanical ritual of India. According to the *Āpastamba-śrautasūtra* (but not the other ritual *sūtras*), the sacrificer at the close of the ceremony recites these words, at a moment when he pours water over his head following the completion of the sacrifices:

yene 'ndram devā abhyaṣiñcanta rājyāya
That by which the gods have consecrated Indra for kingship (*rājya*),
tenā 'haṃ mām abhiṣiñcāmi varcasa
with that I consecrate myself for splendor²⁴

The same elements appear in both verses: the construction *yena* . . . *tena* (just as . . . so); the god Indra; the concept of sovereignty (*rājya*); and an anointing (*abhiṣeka*; the verb *abhiṣic*). We may properly conclude that the Khmer *abhiṣeka* was based upon an Indian ritual and was preceded by fire sacrifices, though not necessarily those of the daily *Agnihotra*. The *Agnihotra* text suggests that the compound *devarājya*, as found in the inscription, perhaps means ‘divine sovereignty’. *Rājya*, an abstraction derived from *rāja*, can be translated by such terms as ‘royalty’, ‘kingship’, ‘dominion’ or ‘sovereignty’.

It may also be concluded that the Cambodian brahmins of the late ninth century were familiar with the *Āpastamba-śrautasūtra* and therefore belonged to the Taittirīya branch of the Black Yajurveda – an affiliation common in southern India and also attested to in seventh-century Cambodia.²⁵ There is no evidence as to whether they actually performed a regular *Agnihotra*. Still, the inscription’s echoing of the *sūtra* means that the compound *devarājya* would have had a connection, in the brahmins’ minds, with fire offerings. The actual ceremony that consecrated Indravarman must have been some form of the *rājasūya* or royal consecration, which could be performed annually, and in which an unction like the one accompanying the *Agnihotra* verse was the key element. A complete *rājasūya* included a feature likely to have had a bearing on Cambodian practices: a fire called the *pūrvāgni* (‘primal Agni’) was placed on a cart and moved at the time of a chariot drive.²⁶ This is precious evidence of a portable fire.

In and of itself, the Preah Ko inscription provides no solid evidence regarding any ceremony carried out by Jayavarman II seventy-seven years previously. But the passage has indeed been interpreted as one that refers secondarily to the *devarāja* ceremony of the Sdok Kak Thom inscription. It can mean, Mabbett wrote, ‘that Indravarman received his consecration by the same rite “by which (Mount) Mahendra was consecrated by Brahmā when the *devarāja* was established on it”’. ‘G. Coëdès’, continued Mabbett, ‘sees a third ingredient in the *double entendre* in the name Svayambhū, Brahmā, which would be taken to refer to the brahmin Hiraṇyadāma (elsewhere said to come “like a Brahmā”). Thus the consecration of kings according to *devarāja* rites is compared

24 *Āpastamba-śrautasūtra* 14.7: P.-E. Dumont, *L’Agnihotra: Description de l’agnihotra dans le rituel védique d’après les Śrautasūtras* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), p. 66. *Varcasā*, instrumental case, ‘for splendor’, becomes *varcasa* because of sandhi. The English translation incorporates suggestions by Frits Staal, for which I am grateful. For the sake of simplicity I have omitted the previous two lines, which may be translated as ‘He pours water over his head with the following verse: “The water first becomes phlegm (*sesma*). That by which Varuna, by which Mitra are supported. . . .”’ Dumont translates the truncated lines with ‘*au moyen duquel les dieux ont consacré (par aspersion) Indra pour la royauté – au moyen de ce flegme, je me consacre moi-même (par aspersion), pour la puissance lumineuse*’. Caland translates, ‘*wodurch die Götter den Indra zur Oberherrschaft salbten (eig. 'begossen'), damit begiesse ich mich selbst*’. W. Caland, *Das Śrautasūtra des Āpastamba*, 1.-7. Buch (Göttingen and Leipzig, 1921), p. 194.

25 Frits Staal, *Mantras between Fire and Water: Reflections on a Balinese Rite* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1995), pp. 94, 101. See also the chart in Frits Staal, *Jouer avec le feu: pratique et théorie du rituel védique*, Publications de l’Institut de Civilisation Indienne, fasc. 57 (Paris: Collège de France, 1990), p. 31.

26 J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Royal Consecration* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957), pp. 117-18 (meaning of *rājasūya*), 129, 143, 148n (*pūrvāgni*).

to the consecration of Indra.²⁷ It may never be possible to determine whether a reference to historical events of 802 was intended, but Mabbett's last statement seems indisputable - that the earthbound ceremonies echoed Indra's consecration. This is the case in both the *Agnihotra* and the *rājasūya* rites.

Jayavarman IV (reigned 928-944) ruled from Koh Ker, where Khmer-language inscriptions have been found mentioning foundations to the *vrah kamrateñ añ jagat ta rājya*, *vrah kamrateñ añ ta rājya*, and *vrah kamrateñ jagat ta rājya* (K. 188, K. 189, K. 682).²⁸ Coédès thought that all three of the Khmer names found in the epigraphy of Koh Ker corresponded to the Sanskrit Tribhuvaneśvara ('lord of the three worlds'), the principal *liṅga* at the temple, installed in 921, but Claude Jacques has questioned the equivalence.²⁹ It seems correct to do so. The word *ta* in the titles, Coédès pointed out, is a Khmer borrowing of a Sanskrit demonstrative which in most cases can be translated '*qui est*': an example (from K. 356, 980 AD) is *kamrateñ añ ta acas*, 'my lord who is old'.³⁰ But other translations are equally valid: in the inscription of Kok Rosei, *ta* becomes 'to', and Saveros Pou has translated it as 'of'. *Vrah kamrateñ añ jagat ta rājya* could be 'my holy lord who is dominion' or, for that matter, 'to' or 'of' or perhaps 'for' dominion. If *rājya* alludes to the concept of sovereignty found in the Preah Ko inscription and in the *Agnihotra*, then all these titles are likely to have had something to do with a ritual anointing or with the fire offerings that precede it. Since it was in a royal temple, 'my holy lord for dominion' might have been a particular fire, reserved for royal ceremonies.

That brings us up to the previously mentioned Kok Rosei inscription (K. 175), from the reign of Jayavarman V (c. 968-1000). Here is the crucial passage, with the phrases divided up for ease of reading, and Coédès' translation added:

(15) *kālpanā steñ śivācāryya*
Fondation de steñ Śivācāryya
ta vrah (16) kamrateñ añ śrī bhadreśvara
à V. K. A. Śrī Bhadreśvara,
sthiti pratidina sru je mvāy
pour l'entretien quotidien: 1 je de paddy;
ta vrah (17) kamrateñ añ ta rājya
au Dieu royal (V. K. A. ta rājya),
sru vra [sic] vleñ pratidina liḥ mvāy
*quotidiennement: 1 liḥ de paddy pour le Feu sacré*³¹

Śivācāryya's *kālpanā* ('ritual prescriptions', according to Saveros Pou, in the passage quoted above) included daily activities. First in honour of an image known as Śrī Bhadreśvara, supported

27 Mabbett, 'Devarāja', pp. 207-8. Lokesh Chandra has written, 'the role of the hotṛ in Cambodia confirms that Devarāja is Indra and it refers to the Ṛgvedic rite of aindra mahābhiṣeka described at length in the Aitareya-brāhmana of the Ṛgveda'. 'The aindra mahābhiṣeka is clearly reflected in the Preah Ko stele of Indravarman I....' The quoted verse says 'that Indravarman was crowned and consecrated by those very ceremonies (*vidhinā*) by which Indra (Mahendra) attained the glorious domain of gods (*devarājyah*) coronated by Svayambhū'. See Chandra, 'Devarāja in Cambodian History', in his *Cultural Horizons of India*, vol. VII (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1998), pp. 200, 205, 206. For the question of the evidence for what Jayavarman II actually did, see Claude Jacques, 'Études d'épigraphie cambodgienne, VIII: La carrière de Jayavarman II', *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 59 (1972): 205-20.

28 Mabbett, 'Devarāja', p. 207; Coédès, 'Les expressions *vrah kamrateñ añ* et *kamrateñ jagat*', p. 450; Jacques, 'The Kamrateñ Jagat', pp. 276-7.

29 Jacques, 'The Kamrateñ Jagat', pp. 276-7.

30 Coédès, 'Les expressions *vrah kamrateñ añ* et *kamrateñ jagat*', p. 452.

31 Coédès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. VI, pp. 175, 179 (east face).

by a *je* of paddy. Second, in honour of the V.K.A. *ta rājya* ('my holy lord for dominion'), there was a sacred fire, supported by a *liḥ* of paddy.

Here, for the first time, is an explicit link between *rājya* and the fire. The Khmer *vrah vleñ*, usually translated 'sacred fire', cannot be other than a Brahmanical ritual fire, to which milk or other substances were offered. The Samrong inscription (K. 258), for instance, mentions the *bhūmi vrah vleñ yajña vrah...*, 'the land [*bhūmi*] of the sacred fire [*vrah vleñ*] ([that] furnishes) for the sacrifice [*yajña*] to the god [*vrah*]...' (following Cœdès).³² And the Sanskrit equivalent to the Khmer *vrah vleñ* must be (as Cœdès' translations indicate) the epithet *vahni*, 'charioteer', that is, the fire god Agni in his role as conveyor of offerings to the gods. This term is found in the same inscription (K. 258)³³ as well as in the Sdok Kak Thom inscription.³⁴

But the inscription does not clarify exactly what the V.K.A. *ta rājya* was. It might have been an image of a Hindu god to whom a cult of fire offerings was attached, but there is little in the way of supporting evidence. If it was the fire itself, the wording would make sense only if V.K.A. *ta rājya* had qualities above and beyond the ordinary *vrah vleñ*; a parallel turn of phrase, perhaps, would be 'for the royal bath, money to pay for the water'. Another interpretation would be that the V.K.A. *ta rājya* was the container for the fire, a container denoting that this fire had specific, limited ritual use. According to the inscription, the fire had to be maintained daily, but how often offerings were made we do not know. Steñ Śivācārya might have thought the fire was to be reserved for use in connection with a royal ceremony. But it is possible that it was used in daily rites as well.

A *vrah kamrateñ añ ta rājya* is named in the inscription of Prasat Khna (K.356, 980 AD) and then, in the Tuol Komnap Tà Kin inscription (K. 125, 1001 AD), *vrah kamrateñ añ ta rāja* appears, the first instance of *rāja* (king) rather than *rājya* (kingship). Interestingly enough, this foundation is attributed in the inscription to the distant past, to a parent of Jayavarman II. The terminology and the projection into an earlier period are features that will also characterize the Sdok Kak Thom inscription of 1052.

So far the specific identity of the V. K. A. *ta rāja* has been elusive, but its connotations and connections have been fairly clear, even if somewhat contradictory. There are links with a ceremony (the *Agnihotra*) performed twice daily, and with a structurally comparable ceremony, the *rājasūya*, performed at most once a year, and for the benefit of a monarch. An element in this rite (according to the textual tradition), in turn, is a portable fire, the *pūrvāgni*. The V. K. A. *ta rāja* is surely connected intimately to the *vrah vleñ*, the sacred fire, and may be either a special fire or a container for the fire.

In the Sdok Kak Thom inscription, this V. K. A. *ta rāja* becomes in the Sanskrit portion the name *devarāja* ('king of the gods') and in the Khmer portion the title *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja* ('lord of the world who is king'). The difficulties of this inscription are many, and the extant translations fail to clarify many key issues. The inscription is obscure because the Khmer and Sanskrit texts

32 Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. IV, p. 181 (l. 61), p. 197. The inscription dates from after 1107, but the foundations referred to predate 1096. In the Sanskrit Prasat Srane inscription of AD 883, the earliest mention of a sacred fire, the *devāgni* named *Nandikeśvara* is an independent cult object (K. 937, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. IV, p. 46). On the fire in general, see Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, *Les religions brahmaniques dans l'ancien Cambodge*, (Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 49 [Paris, 1961]), pp. 147-8.

33 Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. IV, stanza 6, p. 196.

34 Stanza 74. 'The sister of the chief queen Śrī Viralakṣmī was given to him according to the rite and before the fire [*vahni*] and *brāhmaṇas* by King Sūryavarman (I), (thus) initiating him to the duty of the householder [*gārhasṭhya-dharmme*].' Adhir Chakravarti, *The Sdok Kak Thom Inscription, pt. II, Text, Translation and Commentary* (Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1980), p. 40. The reference to the householder implies the maintenance of the *gārhapatya*, the household fire, but the *vahni* may or may not have been the *gārhapatya*.

take different approaches, because the authors must step gingerly around secret practices, and because the inscription attributes rites to the past that must have been of more recent origin, and so therefore deliberately indulges in mystification. In addition to *devarāja* and *kamrateṅ jagat ta rāja*, there is a third term, of considerable importance in the Sanskrit text, and equally elastic in connotation. This term is *siddhi*. Its core meaning must be 'magical power'. Such *siddhi* as remembering past lives and understanding the speech of animals number among the fruits of yogic endeavor, according to Indian thought, and the eight great *siddhi*, found in both Hindu and Buddhist texts, include the ability to shrink one's body to the size of an atom and to touch the planets.³⁵ In origin, *siddhi* lie somewhat outside the realms of Brahmanical ritual, whether personal or royal, but by the eleventh century, ritual paths to the *siddhi* had been established. One Cambodian inscription that evokes a realm of practices relevant to the Sdok Kak Thom inscription, and a milieu of Śaiva asceticism, is that of Samrong (K. 258). A sacred fire was established in a *tapovana* ('penance grove') in 1079, and one *tapovana* was known as the *tapovana aṣṭasiddhi*, the 'eight-*siddhi*' *tapovana*.³⁶ Surviving southern Indian practices, involving worship of the fire and joining it mystically with fire lying inside the body, may suggest the nature of the activities in an eight-*siddhi* *tapovana*.³⁷

Stanza 25 of the Sanskrit text of the Sdok Kak Thom inscription introduces King Jayavarman (who reigned some 250 years previously) and his preceptor Śivakaivalya. In stanza 26 appears the intelligent and compassionate Brāhmaṇa Hiraṇyadāma, who reveals to the king his *siddhi*—'magical power', in the translation by Adhir Chakravarti.³⁸ Then, in stanza 27, this *siddhi* ('magical power' again, according to Chakravarti) is taught to the *hotar* Śivakaivalya, together with certain *sādhana*, or mystical incantatory verses. (Śivakaivalya and his descendants were *hotar*—technically, reciters of the *R̥gveda* in fire-sacrifice rites, but the exact responsibilities of a *hotar* in Cambodia are not easy to determine.) The teaching that is conveyed (stanza 28) is that of four texts, which embody this *siddhi*. Not all these are identifiable, but they are Tantric in nature—thus implying the realisation of *siddhi* through initiatory rites and through mystical identification in the course of *sādhana*.³⁹

In stanza 29 comes the establishment of the *devarāja*. This is Chakravarti's translation:

After carefully extracting the quintessence of the sāstras (sacred texts) by his experience and understanding of the mysteries, this Brāhmaṇa [Hiraṇyadāma] established the magical rites bearing the name of Devarāja for the sake of prosperity in the world.⁴⁰

35 Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 85, 88. For a helpful discussion of the *astamahāsiddhi*, 'the eight great miraculous or magical powers', see Vidya Dehejia, *Yogini Cult and Temples: a Tantric Tradition* (New Delhi: National Museum, 1986), pp. 53-6.

36 Coedès, *Inscriptions*, vol. IV, pp. 175-205: #A 55-6; #A 65-6 and Sanskrit, st. 32. Also to be noted is the fact that by the first half of the tenth century, a tradition appears to have been established whereby a *kalyāṇisiddhi* ('une cérémonie bénéfique', Coedès translated) had been carried out on behalf of Jayavarman II, according to the inscription of Vat Samrong (K. 956; Coedès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. VII [1964], pp. 129, 133). Furthermore, the seventh-century inscription of Kedukan Bukit (Palembang, Sumatra) refers to *siddhiyātra*, 'a trip undertaken to obtain magical powers' (G. Coedès, 'Les inscriptions malaises de Çrivijaya', *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 30 (1930): 29-80, esp. pp. 34-5).

37 *Nittiya hmam*, as described in Carl Gustav Diehl, *Instrument and Purpose: Studies on Rites and Rituals in South India* (Lund: Gleerup, 1956), pp. 124-9.

38 Chakravarti, *The Sdok Kak Thom Inscription*, pt. II, p. 16.

39 See Dehejia, *Yogini Cult and Temples: a Tantric Tradition*, p. 74. The *Śiraścheda*, one of the four texts cited, 'is another name for the Jayadratha Yāmala which, in its third section, contains references to the Yoginis'. 'The Jayadratha Yāmala is in the nature of a supplement to the Brahma Yāmala which also refers to the Yoginis.'

40 Chakravarti, *The Sdok Kak Thom Inscription*, pt. II, p. 19.

Kulke's translation is more precise:

When this brahman, full of zeal, employing his knowledge and experience in occult science, had brought together the essence of the *sāstras*, then, for the increase of the well-being of the earth, he performed the success-ensuring [*siddhi*-ensuring] (ritual) called *devarāja*.⁴¹

The text does not make it clear what the 'siddhi-ensuring' is. That it is a ritual must be inferred from the subsequent stanza, which speaks of a rite, *vidhi*.

Other parts of the Sdok Kak Thom inscription indicate that the *devarāja* was a cult object. At the end of the Sanskrit portion, it is offered daily worship (*arcā*) by Śivācārya. In the Khmer section, it (or its equivalent, the *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja*) is established (*pratiṣṭhā*), members of Śivakaivalya's family carry out a ceremony (*vidhi*) in the presence of (*nā*) it, and it follows (*nām*) the king. It is possible that it was both a rite and the paraphernalia used in the observance of the rite. The ritual manuals on Vedic sacrifices (and other texts as well) provide plenty of evidence for understanding rituals from two points of view, one inward, the other outward. The *Āpastamba-śrautasūtra*, for instance, has a 'formula of the 10 *hotars*' that provides the correspondences between the elements of the personality and the ritual instruments and players in the *Agnihotra*: intelligence (*citti*) is identified with the spoon, thought (*citta*) with clarified butter, vital breath (*prāṇa*) with the offering (*havis*), and so forth.⁴² The ritual paraphernalia are the outward manifestation of an inner state.

Nevertheless, if the *devarāja* was an object, the most reasonable supposition is that it was the container for the fire. Evidence is now available that it is not necessary to demonstrate the plausibility of a movable hearth by invoking the *pūrvāgni*, the fire that was placed on a cart in the course of the royal consecration: portable hearths are depicted in the Buddhist sculptures of ancient Gandhara and in the reliefs of Borobudur in central Java.⁴³ The portable fire containers of Cambodia – and hence the *devarāja* itself – no doubt had a similar appearance. One, in fact, is depicted in the bas-reliefs at Angkor Wat, in the century succeeding that of the Sdok Kok Thom inscription. The litter carried in royal procession panel 24 supports a fire and a container that must correspond to the *devarāja*. The scene is labeled *vrah vleñ*, identifying it as a depiction of the sacred fire, and the adjacent panel, number 23, on which there is a procession of priests, is labeled *rājahota* or the royal *hotar* (the position to which Sadāśiva, author of the Sdok Kok Thom inscription, had made claim on behalf of his family).⁴⁴ The object on the litter is domed, with a knob on top, and can be interpreted as a pierced metal fire protector, a sort of brazier or oversized incense burner.⁴⁵ The close association of *hotar* and fire is clearly stated at Angkor Wat—although at a time when Sadāśiva's family had drifted into obscurity, and the rhetoric of his inscription had fallen out of fashion.

41 Kulke, *Devarāja Cult*, p. 17.

42 *Āpastamba-śrautasūtra* 6.8.5: Dumont, *L'Agnihotra*, pp. 55-6.

43 Giovanni Verardi, *Homa and Other Fire Rituals in Gandhāra*, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Annali, vol. LIV, fasc. 2, supplement 79 (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1994); Anna Maria Quagliotti, 'Rites de passage in Borobudur: a Group of Reliefs from the First Terrace with Some Scenes Subsequent to the Birth of the Buddha', *East and West*, 49 (1999): 217-40.

44 Etienne Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*, 3 vols. (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1900-4), vol. III, p. 261.

45 Following Georges Groslier, *Recherches sur les Cambodgiens* (Paris: Augustin Challamel, 1921), pp. 103-05, with a sketch on p. 104. Bosch proposed that the object could equally well be a fiery linga, but in that case, the gem-like or knob-like element at the summit is hard to explain: F. D. K. Bosch, 'Notes archéologiques IV. - Le temple d'Angkor Vat. a) La procession du feu sacrée', *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 32 (1932): 7-11. Cf. illustrations in Quagliotti, 'Rites de passage in Borobudur'.

Much of the difficulty of the Sdok Kak Thom inscription derives from the breadth of the claims made by Sadāśiva. Here is a rite connected with a personal magical power, *siddhi*. At the same time it is a royal ceremony. This twofold character is in fact implicit in the *Agnihotra* verse: the ritual anointing takes place at the end of a fire offering, almost as an afterthought, but it is an anointing that links the performer both to the god Indra and to the consecration of an actual monarch. The *V. K. A. ta rāja* at Koh Ker may have been restricted to ceremonies carried out on behalf of the king. The same name was used by Sadāśiva's predecessor Steñ Śivācārya at Kok Rosei; whether he was appropriating the *V. K. A. ta rāja* of Koh Ker or was its rightful legatee we have no way of knowing, but surely at Kok Rosei rituals were performed for personal benefit. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, practices involving the sacred fire must have changed somewhat, with Tantric influences, a new interest in the practice of *sādhana*, and the development of the *tapovana* as a center for Śaivite ascetic practices. Sadāśiva's outlook may have been much like that found in a Tibetan text: 'Through the fire offering ritual the *lha* [gods] are satisfied. Being satisfied, they bestow *siddhis*.'⁴⁶ He too could well have believed that there was a direct link between sacrifices and the acquisition of *siddhi*. Meanwhile, there was a shift in terminology, from *rājya* to *rāja*. *Rājya* alluded to Indra's anointing. *Devarāja* refers to Indra as king of the gods, but it sometimes an epithet of Śiva, and so therefore is appropriate to the cultivation of *siddhi* within a Śaivite *tapovana*.

If the proposals in the preceding section move in a proper direction, there are surely lessons for Khmer studies. One would be the futility of elevating one kind of evidence over another, claiming that Khmer-language sources, for instance, provide a truer picture of Khmer society and beliefs than do the Sanskrit inscriptions. Another would be that words matter: however slippery they may be, the closer the attention paid to them and the more that is understood about them, the greater the rewards. We are still a long way from being able to describe ancient Khmer beliefs very clearly, or from differentiating them from those of India. Ethnographic approaches are welcome, but should not lead to hasty conclusions. When Alain Forest, for instance, writes that 'When his statue is erected as a *neak tâ* by a village community, Gaṇeśa is no longer entirely Gaṇeśa but a "*neak tâ* with Gaṇeśa's face"', he may be making assumptions about Indian religious beliefs that are unwarranted - namely that the primary Gaṇeśa is the Gaṇeśa of mythology rather than the concrete image in the particular spot.⁴⁷ On the other hand, a Sanskritic approach may seem so daunting as to be beyond the reach of lesser mortals. Kamaleswar Bhattacharya wrote in 1997 that 'the works of the old masters - Barth, Bergaigne, Finot, and Cœdès - admirable as they are on the whole, often need correction. This is a gigantic task that requires, beyond an excellent command of the Sanskrit language, a vast knowledge of Sanskrit culture. Only one part of this has been accomplished, and it was essentially outside the task of the institutions that were charged with the task.'⁴⁸ Perhaps, however, giants of prodigious learning will not reappear, and progress will have to be made by scholars with one severe handicap or another. It can be done. There are many issues in which a few basic principles can be more valuable than encyclopaedic knowledge.

46 Yael Bentor, *Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) p. 194.

47 Alain Forest, 'Cambodge: pouvoir de roi et puissance de génie', in *Cultes populaires et sociétés asiatiques: Appareils culturels et appareils de pouvoir*, ed. Alain Forest, Yoshiaki Ishizawa, Léon Vandermeersch (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan - Sophia University [Tokyo], 1991), p. 208. ('Quand sa statue est érigée en *neak tâ* par une communauté villageoise, Gaṇeṣa n'est plus tout à fait Gaṇeṣa mais "*neak tâ* au visage de Gaṇeṣa"...')

48 Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, 'The Religions of Ancient Cambodia', in *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, ed. Helen Ibbitson Jessup and Thierry Zéphir (Washington: National Gallery of Art and Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1997), pp. 35-6.