



Cambodia

Early Theravādin Cambodia: Perspectives from art and archaeology

Edited by ASHLEY THOMPSON

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Ashley Thompson's edited volume, *Early Theravādin Cambodia: Perspectives from Art and Archaeology*, is an important collation of recent scholarship investigating the establishment of the conglomeration of religious practices in Cambodia known today as Theravāda Buddhism. With this volume, Thompson, the Hiram W. Woodward chair in Southeast Asian Art at SOAS, expands existing inquiries and critiques of traditional historical themes surrounding the creation of Theravāda Buddhist traditions in Cambodia as reflected in surviving material culture—notably that found across the major urban-religious landscape of Angkor—which have defined her research since the 1990s. *Early Theravādin Cambodia* emerged from the symposium *The Emergence of Theravāda Buddhism in Cambodia: Southeast Asian Perspectives* held at SOAS in July 2015, and its eight chapters cover several important art-historical, archaeological, linguistic, and religious topics 'that [energise] the interpretive dimensions of this area of study in methodological and theoretical terms' (p. 1).

The thirteenth-century development of Theravādin Cambodian culture and society is arguably one of the most significant social phenomena of premodern Southeast Asian history, yet is often framed as something of a historical epilogue to Angkorian civilisation. The lack of inscriptions denoting Theravādin practices, rulers, and socio-political organisation compared to Angkor's preceding Hindu and Mahāyāna Buddhist institutions, too, complicate any straightforward studies of this process and time period. In fact, early scholarship reductively connected the spread of Theravāda Buddhism alongside factors such as environmental collapse and the geopolitical expansion of the Thai Kingdom of Ayutthaya to the decline and downfall of Angkor's existing world order, events which marked the beginning of a superficial historical epoch known as the post-Angkorian/Middle Period (c. fifteenth to nineteenth centuries) predating French colonial rule. Appropriately, Thompson begins by providing much needed nuance to these disputed notions by effectively summarising and deconstructing ideas of 'Theravādin' and 'Cambodia' found throughout the volume, emphasising how material and epigraphical traditions indeed blur the lines between medieval and Middle Period traditions related to Theravādin Cambodia while illustrating the fallacy of assessing singular deviations—for example, the adoption of the Pāli canonical language in Angkorian epigraphy—as products of absolute religious change.

As such, the processes of religious transition vis-à-vis Theravādin Cambodia are presented in this volume as complex, gradual, highly localised, and influenced by both temporality and geography. Special attention is also given to developments on the

boundaries of the Angkorian geobody in the creation of Cambodia's Theravādin traditions and artwork, as well as practices simultaneous with Angkor's Hindu and Mahāyāna traditions which were eventually adopted by (or always existed for) Cambodian Theravāda practitioners. For instance, Hiram Woodward (chapter 2) introduces the western frontiers of the Angkorian Empire, notably Lopburi, as important areas for the development of Cambodia's Theravādin traditions, which he argues through art-historical analyses of various *mudras* (hand-gestures) and carving styles helped shape the palimpsest of statuary found within Angkor today. Tuy Danel (chapter 3), meanwhile, explores representations of *jatakas*, tales of the past lives of the historical Buddha, within the art of Angkor. These images, he argues, reflect the existence of both Sanskrit and Pāli-written teachings during the Mahāyāna Buddhist reign of Angkor's great king Jayavarman VII (1181–1218 CE); however, based on their positioning within temples, *jataka* tales were never primary images within Khmer art and iconography (p. 108). Instead, Danel suggests that the appearance of *jatakas* in Dvaravati contexts in northeastern Thailand such as *sema* (boundary stones) indicates these tales also appear within Angkor due to interaction with populations on its frontiers. Finally, Martin Polkinghorne (chapter 8) assesses the artistic replication or import of various later Buddhas of seventeenth to eighteenth-century Thai and Laotian artistry found in Angkor Wat's *Preah Pean* (Hall of 1,000 Buddhas) and Bakan (Central Sanctuary), which suggests that Cambodia's Buddhist neighbours sought out the site as an important area of pilgrimage, historical reflection, and merit-based donation.

Art-historical and epigraphic studies bookend two important chapters by Ea Darith (chapter 5) and Yuni Sato (chapter 6) covering the growing field of Cambodian Theravādin archaeology, an essential avenue for understanding the conception of spaces which hosted these early practices. Both authors situate the twelfth century civic-ceremonial citadel of Angkor Thom as the major theatre of early Theravādin Cambodian place-making, and introduce 'Buddhist Terraces', substructural remains of early wooden monasteries, as well as the conversion of Hindu and Mahāyāna Buddhist temple-spaces as important areas of study. Sato, especially, introduces a plethora of different archaeological data to assess the thirteenth to fifteenth-century Theravāda-inspired expansion of West Prasat Top temple (tenth century), originally a Hindu monument. These include radiometric dates associated with sequential construction phases, newly excavated statuary and a new inscription invoking the Kassapa Buddha, the third incarnation of the historical Buddha; this text is later discussed by Nicholas Revire in his immersive chapter on past and future Buddhas in Angkorian art-history and epigraphy.

Although generally well-argued, some of the entries in *Early Theravādin Cambodia* may have benefitted from interdisciplinary collaboration, even between featured authors; every chapter is a solo effort, and direct overlap and discourse are limited. For example, Woodward's apt art-historical discussions conclude with a reconceptualisation of Angkor Thom's sacred geography which appears somewhat indifferent to the archaeological investigations within this urban centre presented in the following chapters. Conversely, Ea restricts his assessment of 'Buddhist Terrace' survey data to existing scholarly interpretations, and some engagement with Sato's excavation results from West Prasat Top temple would have enriched his analysis. Finally,

nearly every chapter focuses on Angkor (Samerchai Poolsuwan's being an obvious exception), and very little attention is given to the art history and archaeology of Cambodia's southern Middle Period capitals.

In sum, *Early Theravādin Cambodia* is a worthwhile compilation that is as much a holistic academic entry point into this field of study as a source for scholars looking to bolster new data and arguments. As per Thompson's goal, the corpus of articles (while Angkor-centric) overall succeeds in transcending national borders in its scope (p. 1), and each chapter adds something to the rich tapestry of art and ritual this Theravādin Cambodian world once comprised (as well as what it did *not* comprise, with Danel and Revire's chapters being standouts in this regard).

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Indonesia

When violence works: Postconflict violence and peace in Indonesia

By PATRICK BARRON

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Violent inter-communal conflicts can claim a large toll on lives and leave lasting legacies on subsequent political and economic dynamics. Although political scientists have provided many explanations for inter-communal violence, why violence returns in some cases (or conversely, dissipates) after particular conflicts is thus far less understood. Patrick Barron's *When Violence Works* offers a thorough and nuanced answer to this question with his empirical analysis of post-conflict Indonesia, where some areas have continued to experience more violence than others.

With an explicitly instrumentalist lens, Barron conceptualises postconflict violence as a tool political actors use to secure access to resources and power. He argues that 'where postconflict resources are deployed in ways that reward those who use or threaten violence in the early postconflict period, where those who use violence are not disciplined by the state or others, and where institutional channels do not exist whereby groups can access power and resources through nonviolent means, postconflict violence occurs more frequently' (p. 7). In other words, violence tends to continue to the extent that it serves the interests of those who employ it. In Barron's framework, the people who organise and engage in violence, and the interests that guide them, also predict the ensuing forms of violence. Larger, more violent clashes (such as extended communal clashes or riots) happen because political actors are involved and stand to gain something from these confrontations, whereas less violent, shorter clashes (such as vigilantism and crime) are more prevalent when no political elites are involved (pp. 21, 198). The greater the number of people at various levels of