

KINGSHIP IN ANGKOR

by

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The study of Angkorian political institutions

Il est donc prématuré de vouloir clore tout un chapitre de l'histoire des études khmères, en affirmant que l'épigraphie a atteint ses limites. Tout n'est pas dit, et l'on ne vient pas trop tard pour lui demander de contribuer à la nouvelle orientation de ces études, dans le sens souhaité par les chercheurs de la nouvelle génération.

The "new generation", mentioned as such a number of times by Coedès in his later writings, is the large number of scholars, some of them by no means young, to whom the dynastic and chronological preoccupations of previous history-writing about ancient southeast Asia have seemed to give only a partial view of the societies under scrutiny. These preoccupations have seemed to be partial not only in portraying a tiny fraction of the population—the world of the court—but also in thereby building an elitist bias into history itself. It is not that there was anything wrong in studying them, it is felt, for this sort of study was necessary in earlier decades to build up a basic framework; but now the time is overdue for a study of the underlying social and economic facts. "Studies of the early Khmer empire have so far been inevitably concerned with establishing the chronological structure of its history and with its religious institutions, of which much is now known. Other areas of enquiry have tended to be postponed in order to undertake these basic tasks, and the impression may exist that the inscriptions, which are the principal documents for such research, contain no other types of information. This impression is ill-founded."² Thus, attention is turning to subjects of study with a more synchronic character—social and political institutions, royal power, law, slavery, for example—and scholars are beginning to scan some of the old sources with new purposes. There is an increased interest in the general character of Khmer society; to gratify this interest we must seek to understand the Khmer socio-political environment. It is not only the focus of attention but also the language of thought that must be adapted to the society under study.

This prescription is easier to state than to dispense. But something can be achieved by asking certain specific questions about the affairs recorded in the historical sources: it is possible to ask, about these affairs, how the individuals concerned in them saw themselves and what their dominant purposes were. Did they act as individuals, as heads of families, as members of clans, organizations, departments, social classes, nation states? Did they wish to increase

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¹ G. Coedès, "L'avenir des études khmères", *BSEI* vol. XL(1965), pp. 205-213.

² M. Ricklefs, "Land and the law in the epigraphy of tenth-century Cambodia", *JAS*, vol. XXVI, no. 3 (May 1967), p. 411.

their wealth, gain influential friends or the good opinion of others, avoid the tax collector, earn religious merit? It is entirely possible to draw from the sources combinations of possible answers to such questions, and by doing so to avoid imputing to the ancient Khmers (or to members of any other society) a type of thought-world which they are not particularly likely to have had.

In the first place, the fact that so much of their culture came from India offers a valuable means of interpretation by analogy, for the ancient history of India has at its disposal hoards of literary material bearing upon the ways in which Indians saw themselves and their purposes. There is therefore value in looking at parallels between Khmer and Indian history. But there is more than this: there is value also in looking at parallels between Khmer and Indian history-writing. The younger study can benefit from the experience of the older, which has travelled a longer road.

There was a time, in the study of ancient Indian political institutions, when it was more or less assumed that Indian kingdoms had been totalitarian in character. Kings were absolute; justice was harsh; the royal guard was ubiquitous; the people were little better than slaves. In the present century, Indian scholars have led the way into a second stage, salutary in many ways, in which the autonomy of various institutions has been recognized. In conscious rejection of the earlier attitudes, scholars have often gone far in the attempt to show that Indian kingdoms were democratic in character. Kings were constitutional monarchs or elected presidents, justice was fair; the royal guard represented the people; and the people were dignified citizens participating in the regulation of their affairs.

Both these sets of attitudes, corresponding to the first and second stages, are Europocentric in their thought-world. Both of them use stereotypes of political organization, totalitarianism and democracy, drawn from European political thought.

The stage which has now been reached by the ancient political historiography of India is less easy to characterize, but certainly the more misleading misinterpretations of the second stage now belong to the past. As for Khmer historiography, by starting later it has indeed achieved a sophistication greater than the Indian at comparable stages, but there is still a danger of repeating some of its oversimplifications. We need to beware of plotting Khmer institutions on a spectrum ranging from totalitarianism to democracy without making sure that this spectrum had meaning for the Khmers.

In a way, totalitarian and democratic interpretations may be alike both true and false. It is true that the king was seen as lord over all the land, but this lordship did not entail anything like ownership as we understand it. It is true that the king had an army of officials, but these officials were locally influential men who had to be negotiated with rather than manipulated. It is true that judicial procedures were available for the redress of anybody's grievances, but it is difficult to know how these procedures worked in practice. It is true that the king was seen as a god, but this did not mean that he gained total obedience, and his divinity was rather a social statement than a political injunction.

These generalizations, though they may well be true of the Indianized kingdoms in general, at least the agrarian ones, apply to the kingdom of Angkor and are based on Khmer epigraphy.

Khmer history of the earlier centuries does indeed depend on inscriptions and on little else besides, though there are scraps in Chinese and other sources. The inscriptions were intended to commemorate the careers of kings and to record the establishment, by kings and others, of religious foundations, or the donation of property to such foundations by individuals who wished to leave a conclusive testimony to their action for the guidance of all parties interested in the administration of temple property (by no means a simple matter, as will appear). The information that may be gained from these inscriptions may thus seem to be very limited in scope. Mentions of kings help to establish dynastic chronology; the accounts of kings' careers—the *praśastis* in Sanskrit which commonly introduce the records in Old Khmer of royal donations—give information about reigns, but only incidentally to the extravagant and implausible stylized eulogies to which they are devoted; the technical details of royal or private donations may be thought to interest only the historian of temple organization. But things are not as bad as that. There is much that can be gleaned about various areas of life, as the labours of generations of epigraphists show.

It was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century A.D. that Cambodian historical studies by Westerners began. The French interest in Cambodia, in the middle of the century, as a possible corridor to China, using the Mekong River, was responsible for the first French missions; Doudart de Lagrée made the first discoveries, collecting various inscriptions and making facsimiles. Bouillevaux had then reached Angkor some time before, and by 1859 the naturalist Mouhot had visited the Angkorian temple ruins, his trip being the first to direct scholarly attention to the monuments. It was some time, however, before the work of collecting, editing and translating the inscriptions could make headway. In the period 1875-1877 Dr Harmand went to Cambodia and Laos and took impressions of inscriptions, but French scholars were slow to recognize the language and script³. The Dutch scholar, Kern, interpreted parts of Harmand's texts and obtained among other things the names Sūryavarman and Jayavarman⁴. This was the beginning of real study. Aymonier, who was familiar with Khmer but was not a Sanskritist, collected inscriptions, and on his return to France in 1881 enabled the Sanskritists Barth, Bergaigne and Senart to set to work. In 1882 Bergaigne published a *Rapport* on 19 inscriptions; during 1882-1885 Aymonier was back in Cambodia taking better impressions of inscriptions and did work that contributed to the understanding of Old Khmer. Barth and Bergaigne began publishing inscriptions in 1885, a work completed after the death of Bergaigne by Barth, Senart and Sylvain Lévi—the pioneering *Inscriptions sanscrites du Cambodge et du Champa*.

Illustrative of the dependence of historians upon inscriptions in this early stage is the difficulty experienced in obtaining any supporting evidence from Cambodian legend, a body of stories that proved flexible in the hands of the monks who retailed them and accommodating to the imagined needs of the foreigners who were asking about them. Aymonier pointed out to his informant, a Cambodian head monk, the discrepancy between the record of King Nipan Bat in the fourteenth century and a legend making him the son of the eighth-century gardener

³ On the early history of Cambodian epigraphy, see L. Finot, "Notes d'épigraphie, XX: l'épigraphie indo-chinoise", *BEFEO*, vol. XV (1915), pp. 53-106.

⁴ See H. Kern, "Inscriptions cambodgiennes", *Annales de l'Extrême-Orient*, vols. II, III, IV.

king. Thereupon the monk "*compulsa de nouveau ses sources*"⁵ and returned with an obligingly revised account inserting the required intervening kings.

The establishment, right at the end of the nineteenth century, of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient set Indochinese scholarship on a firm footing, bringing together scholars capable of exploiting various sources including Chinese. Pelliot's work in reconstructing the history of Funan and much of the historical geography is notable. The *Bulletin* of the school has of course been a prime locus of research reports ever since. Finot, the first director, contributed a valuable series of "Notes d'épigraphie", and Coedès, who later became director, contributed over many years his important "Etudes cambodgiennes". He also compiled an inventory of inscriptions, and in the 1920s the school published a corpus of reproductions of inscriptions, which formed the basis for much of Coedès' own later work of transliterating, editing and translating his *Inscriptions du Cambodge*. The eighth volume of this work appeared in 1966. Since then 40-odd more inscriptions have come to light, and improved impressions have been taken of some previously known. This enabled Jacques to publish a supplement to Coedès' inventory of inscriptions, bringing the number up to 1,050⁶. The inscriptions have various dates, some belonging to the sixth or seventh century of the Śaka era (which begins 78 years after the Christian era), one of these supplementary inscriptions as late as the sixteenth to seventeenth-century Śaka. Geographically, they cluster most densely around the Angkorian capital site, but are scattered over much of Cambodia and surrounding countries. The geographical distribution of Cambodian inscriptions in general known before 1916 has been mapped by Parmentier⁷. The inscriptions are sometimes written in Sanskrit, sometimes Khmer, sometimes both (with a paraphrase including technical details in Khmer commonly following a Sanskrit verse introduction), and there are occasional portions in Pali.

All this was largely pioneering work; scholars were beginning without any knowledge of the names of dynasties or even the location of kingdoms. Whole new empires, previously unknown, were likely to come to light. So it is entirely natural that the purpose of most of the discussion of inscriptions as they became known should have been the establishment of a basic chronology and the rudiments of political geography.

By the time Coedès wrote his *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*⁸ the outlines of ancient southeast Asian history in general were well established, and *Les états*, revised in 1964, stands as the most authoritative general account of the period. A brief characterization of the salient features of Angkorian chronology, the authority for most of whose assertions may be found in this history, will serve as an introduction to the synchronic study of Angkorian political institutions to which the following chapters will be devoted.

The area of Cambodia and the Mekong delta was dominated until the end of the sixth century A.D. by the 'empire' of Funan⁹. Khmer immigrants then displaced this 'empire',

⁵ E. Huber, "Etudes indochinoises, V: le jardinier régicide qui devint roi", *BEFEO*, vol. V (1905), p. 178.

⁶ C. Jacques, "Supplément au tome VIII des *Inscriptions du Cambodge*", *BEFEO*, vol. LVIII (1971), pp. 177-195.

⁷ H. Parmentier, "Cartes de l'empire khmer", *BEFEO*, vol. XVI, no. 3 (1916), pp. 69-73.

⁸ G. Coedès, *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*.

⁹ 'Empire' is itself a Europocentric term. It is likely that the kingdom known to the Chinese as 'Fu-nan' did not have the extent or the centralized power commonly attributed to it.

and for two centuries much of the region was ruled by the Khmer monarchs of the kingdom (or kingdoms¹⁰) of 'Chenla'. By the end of the eighth century, Chenla was apparently splintered into a number of principalities and subject in some sense to the suzerainty of Śailendra Java. Right at the end of the century, returning from Java, Jayavarman II united the Khmers gradually under his sway, establishing a new kingdom and a new dynasty in 802¹¹. He instituted the *devarāja* cult which commemorated the establishment of a unified kingdom independent of Java¹², and set up a series of capitals in the area north of the Tonlé Sap, the great lake seasonally filled by a backwash from the Mekong, stored with fish and a source of water for irrigation. The series of new capitals (Indrapura, Hariharālaya, Amarendrapura to the west, Mahendraparvata to the north in the Kulen hills—where the *devarāja* was instituted—and finally Hariharālaya again) is likely to reflect the progress of a king pacifying his intended kingdom. Jayavarman succeeded in laying the foundation for a new dynasty, tenuously linked to pre-Angkorian royalty and fortified by the claims embodied in the *devarāja* cult, and passed away in 850, taking the posthumous name of Parameśvara.

His last capital, also that of his early successors, was at a site some miles to the southeast of the eventual hub of the kingdom. Following Jayavarman III, the next king (and son of the founder), Indravarman I (877-889), acceded with weak claims and was the first to leave his own inscriptions. His *purohita* or court chaplain, Śivasoma, appears to have been a disciple of the Indian Vedānta teacher Śaṅkara. Initiating a custom of taking responsibility for major irrigation works, this ruler undertook the construction of the reservoir called *Indrataṭāka* in 877; two years later he built the Preah Ko as a monument to his parents, his grandparents, and to Jayavarman II and his wife, and in 881 he built the Bakong, the predecessor of the pyramidal temple-tombs of later rulers. This sequence of foundations—public works, ancestral shrine, and cult shrine for the royal *liṅga*—has been considered to represent a significant pattern in the duties assumed by the Angkorian rulers¹³. Indravarman's empire extended as far as the area to the northwest of modern Ubon Ratchathani, in Thailand. He took the posthumous name of Īśvaraloka, which embodied a claim to have passed on to the abode of the god Śiva.

His son Yaśovarman (889-c.900), linked by marriage to Funanese royalty, moved the capital to the area which was to remain the capital site of Angkor, founding the city of Yaśodharapura centred on the Bakheng temple-tomb which was moulded to the summit of a hill. He undertook construction of the Eastern Baray reservoir seven kilometres long and nearly two wide. Inscriptions show his influence to have extended to lower Laos and to the coast of the Gulf of Siam; his ambitions brought him up against the Chams and against the northern king-

¹⁰ By the same token, 'Ch'en-la' may be a *portmanteau* term for various principalities. See O.W. Wolters, "Northwestern Cambodia in the 7th century", *BSOAS*, vol. XXXVII pt. 2 (1974), pp. 355-384.

¹¹ On Jayavarman's reign see O.W. Wolters, "Jayavarman II's military power: The territorial foundation of the Angkor empire", *JRAS*, 1973, pp. 21-30, and C. Jacques, "Études d'épigraphie cambodgienne VII: la carrière de Jayavarman II", *BEFEO*, vol. LIX (1972), pp. 205-220.

¹² On the *devarāja* cult, see O.W. Wolters, "Jayavarman's military power", *loc. cit.*, p. 30; and H. Kulke, "Der Devaraja-Kult", *Saeculum*, vol. XXV pt. 1 (1974), pp. 24-55. (The latter reference has been translated into English—see "Bibliography".)

¹³ P. Stern, "Diversité et rythme des fondations royales khmères", *BEFEO*, vol. XLIV, no. 2 (1954), pp. 649-687.

dom of Nanchao in the area from which some elements of the Siamese people appear to have moved by stages.

Yaśovarman was followed by two sons in succession; an uncle of the second usurped the throne as Jayavarman IV in 928 and founded a new capital to the north at Koh Ker (Chok Gargya), marrying a sister of Yaśovarman and taking the posthumous title of Paramaśivapada. His son Harṣavarman reigned for two or three years.

Rājendravarman (944-968), a nephew of Yaśovarman and also of Jayavarman IV, acceded while young and returned the capital to the now overgrown Yaśodharapura. In 952 he erected the East Mebon monument on an artificial island in the middle of the Yaśodharataṭāka (eastern *baray*); in 961 he founded Pre Rup; and he was responsible for many other foundations. His reign witnesses to the importance, especially during a minority, of the families of great dignitaries who often hold hereditary office—notably the Rājakulamahāmantri, or royal great minister, and the sacrificial priest Śivācarya. Around 950 there was again war with the Chams.

Rājendravarman's son Jayavarman V (968-1001) also acceded while young. The cult of Śiva, predominant in official Angkorian religion, was strong, but Buddhism also gained ground. Jayavarman's posthumous title was Paramavīraloka.

The reign of Sūryavarman I (Nirvāṇapada, a posthumous name indicating Buddhist allegiance; 1002-1050) opened in a situation of confusion. Jayavarman's nephew Udayādityavarman appears to have reigned for a few months during 1001-1002. Rivalry between Jayavīravarman (who was reigning at Angkor in the early years of the century) and Sūryavarman, who fought his way to power from a power base in the west, in the region of the Malay Peninsula, issued in success for Sūryavarman who instituted the oath of allegiance sworn to him in 1011 and dated his reign retrospectively from 1002. He has commonly been seen as a usurper, but may have had a reasonable claim to the throne. The *devarāja* was maintained, but Buddhism appears to have cast the mould of the official religion. The hereditary chief of the *devarāja* family officiants was withdrawn from religious life and married to a princess. The reign saw much expansion to the west and north, colonizing Mon territory around Lop Buri.

Sūryavarman's son Udayādityavarman II (1050-1065) built a vast reservoir with an island in the middle, founded the Baphuon monument, and crushed revolts, his army being led by the general Sangrāma. His younger brother Harṣavarman III (acc. 1066) restored ruins, and engaged in war with the Chams. Jayavarman VI (acc. 1080), apparently a usurper from the nobility of the provincial centre of Mahīdharapura and perhaps a former governor, gained the allegiance of Divākarapaṇḍita; it is uncertain whether he ruled at Angkor. His brother Dharanīndravarmān (1107) was crowned by Divākarapaṇḍita. Sūryavarman II (Paramaviṣṇuloka, acc. 1113) reunified the kingdom after fighting his predecessor and great-uncle; he fought wars also against the Dai-Viet and the Chams, putting his nominee on the Cham throne, as well as the Mons to the west. According to Chinese sources his empire extended to the north of Champa, to Burmese Pagān (though he is not likely to have controlled this empire in any sense), to Grahi near Ch'aiya on the Peninsula, and to the Bay of Bandon. He acknowledged Chinese overlordship. Under his reign, the Viṣṇu cult was established, gaining recognition in the famous and spectacular temple-tomb of Angkor Wat.

Sūryavarman's cousin Dharanīndravarman II (acc. 1150) married a daughter of Harṣavarman III, and patronized Buddhism. He was followed by Yaśovarman II; and in about 1165 a usurper took the title of Tribhuvanāditya. At the time, the later king Jayavarman VII, then a prince, was away in Champa, and returned too late to help the previous king (if indeed that would have been his ambition); his opportunity came after a Cham naval invasion toppled the usurper, and, fighting off the Chams, he took the throne himself in 1181.

Jayavarman VII (1181-c.1218), son of Dharanīndravarman II, presided over a period of magnificence. Crushing a revolt in Malyang, he reconquered Champa, using the Cham prince Vidyānanda as his general. This prince gained a part of Champa, and later the whole, as his reward, but later turned against his patron. The empire was meanwhile extended to include Say Fong in modern Laos to the north, and claims were made to dominion in the Malay Peninsula and Burma. Inscriptions reveal the great extent of Jayavarman's control. He dedicated the Ta Prohm monument to the queen mother and the Preah Khan to his father. He authorized an enormous public works programme, involving 102 hospitals and 121 resthouses along the roads. In a frenzy of building activity, he built a great new capital city, Angkor Thom, centred on the Buddhist Bayon monument.

There is no space here to elaborate upon the magnificence and the impressive scale of Jayavarman's career, but it is necessary to emphasize that it stands apart from most other reigns in various respects; a general survey of Angkorian political institutions, such as is to be made here, cannot assume without at least some caution that the characteristics of this reign form part of a continuum with the rest of the dynasty. So great was the building activity under Jayavarman that the extant stone structures or their ruins equal in quantity those of the rest of the Angkorian kings in combination, and for a long time scholars failed to recognize that so many things dated from the same period. Jayavarman's Buddhist temple-mountain, the Bayon, was at first thought to belong to a much earlier time. It was the work of Coedès and Stern that laid the basis for a more fruitful chronology of Angkor¹⁴, and it came to be realized how extraordinary was this reign.

In a sense, perhaps, the very feverishness of Jayavarman's activity may be seen as the last desperate fling of a polity whose sources of vitality were running low. With his Mahāyāna Buddhism, he sought to inspire the style and usages of his predecessors, discredited as they were maybe by the shattering Cham conquest, with a new legitimacy. With his aspirations to a semidivine *bodhisattva*-hood, we may suppose, he sought to surpass the glory of his ancestors while men were still prepared to accept the duties laid on them by Angkor's grandiose style. Or again, we might seek to blame on his huge exactions in labour and other resources the later decline of the kingdom, for after him there were no more mighty monuments built in the grand style, and the kingdom weakened, reign by reign, before the encroachments of the Siamese and the ambition of separatist provincial nobles.

—But such speculations are no more than guesswork. All we know is what scattered inscriptions, and occasional references in Chinese literature, tell us. Not long before Chou Ta Kuan visited Angkor in 1296, there was a big war against the Siamese. A Hindu revival was

¹⁴ See G. Coedès, "La date du Bayon", *BEFEO*, vol. 28 (1928), p. 81.

another feature of the century, possibly in reaction against Jayavarman's Mahāyāna Buddhism; but all the time Theravāda Buddhism was spreading across the mainland from Burma and elsewhere, and was to become the orthodoxy of the Khmers. Chou speaks of Buddhist monks held in honour. He mentions 90 provinces into which the empire was divided, enumerating some. The king at the time that he was there, Śrīndravarman, abdicated and retired to the forest.

In the fourteenth century, trouble from the Siamese increased. From the 1350s, King Rāma harassed the Khmers from the new kingdom of Ayuthya. Eventually, Angkor was abandoned; but the closing stages of its history are obscure¹⁵. In the fifteenth century, Khmer rulers reappeared at their new capital of Phnom Penh with a different kingdom and a changed style of official culture: gone were the stone monuments and Sanskrit *praśastis*, while Khmer names and Pali language (the sacred language of Buddhism) predominated.

Various factors have been noticed by scholars as substantial or potential contributors to the downfall of the old kingdom. One line of speculation begins with the extravagance of Jayavarman VII, as we saw. Another emphasizes the role of Theravāda Buddhism, a more egalitarian creed which may be imagined as having gnawed away at the foundations of the emperors' authority. Again, we may attribute the end of Angkor to the breakdown of the highly intricate irrigation system, increasingly dependent as time went on upon efficient maintenance and increasingly exposed to the risk of disastrous collapse. Such a collapse seems indeed to have occurred, though whether as cause or as effect of Angkor's abandonment is uncertain¹⁶. Among obvious causes are the combined effects of political fragmentation and Siamese conquest. Yet another interpretation points to the way in which rulers alienated land to favourites, especially military chiefs, perhaps eventually destroying the basis of their own power¹⁷.

Not all these theories of decline are equally convincing. All that is of concern here, however, is to notice the character of the facts about Angkor that are firmly established, and to consider their implications for an attempt to generalize about the politics of the kingdom.

In the first place, it is clear that Angkor cannot be treated as a static entity, unchanging from start to finish. Patterns of development we might well expect to find, though they are not obvious. We might seek small cycles within the history of Angkor. 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, and the

¹⁵ See L.P. Briggs, "Siamese attacks on Angkor before 1430", *FEQ*, vol. 8 (1948), pp. 1-33; O.W. Wolters, "The Khmer king at Basan (1371-1373) and the restoration of the Cambodian chronology during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries", *AM*, vol. XII, no. 1 (1966), pp. 44-89; on the role of Thai dynastic rivalries in the decline of Angkor, see M. Vickery, "The 2/k.125 Fragment, a lost chronicle of Ayutthaya", *JSS* 65 : 1 (Jan. 1977).

¹⁶ B.P. Groslier, *Angkor et le Cambodge au XVI^e siècle d'après les sources portugaises et espagnoles*, pp. 107-121.

¹⁷ See S. Sahai, *Les institutions politiques et l'organisation administrative du Cambodge ancien*, p. 151.

destined royal tombs¹⁸. The activities of Indravarman I, Yaśovarman I, Rājendravarman II, and Jayavarman VII can easily be interpreted to follow this pattern.

Though it is not the purpose here to pursue in any detail the implications of diachronic analysis, there is another cyclic pattern which may well represent many features of political change in Angkor. The following sections will suggest that cliques, factions, personalities, clientage and patronage were essential elements in Angkorian politics. It follows that 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. The sequence of relationships that might be expected to appear, not of course always neatly and in identical form, but apparent as a trend, may well be surmised: a king who fights his way to power may to some extent be able to redistribute rewards, honours and appointments among his friends at will, and they, owing everything to him, are loyal. 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.

That this sequence need not be constant and easily identifiable is obvious. It is not necessary that the cycle should occupy any particular length of time; it may be one reign or many. It is not necessary that the initiator of the cycle should be a usurper; he might have good legal claims to the throne but many enemies. It is not necessary that the conflict in which he fights his way to power should involve much bloodshed, though perhaps likely; but in any case it is not to be expected that the bland eulogies which figure in inscriptions should necessarily tell us much about such conflicts. All that can be said is that the sequence here outlined is implied by the logic of the political system that prevailed. Certain kings who came to the throne in circumstances of violent conflict—Jayavarman II, Sūryavarman I¹⁹, Jayavarman VII, for example—are obviously the initiators of cycles, but various others are not so obvious.

There is another sort of question that can be asked about the diachronic study of Angkor's political history. So far we have considered discontinuities within it, but how far is Angkor as a whole discontinuous with what came before and after? How far might the better documented history of other periods throw light on the institutions of the god-kings? Should the end of Angkor as a capital site, the end of Sanskrit, the end of monument building and the advent of Theravāda be seen as an inessential change in the superstructure, while the massive infrastructure of custom and power relationships continued unchanged?

Such questions cannot be answered here; they can only be noted. *A priori* it is to be supposed that the truth lies in a combination of answers: there were both important continuities and important discontinuities. Though Angkor can be (and will be here) isolated for study, it is desirable at least to be aware of the historical context.

¹⁸ P. Stern, *loc.cit.*

¹⁹ Sūryavarman, an innovator, was powerful enough to redistribute the functions of the three great hereditary sacerdotal families; L.P. Briggs, "The genealogy and successors of Sivacharya", *BEFEO*, vol. XLVI (1952-54), pp. 177-186.

Little need be said here about the earlier periods of southeast Asian history, many and interesting though the parallels might be between the institutions of Angkor and its predecessors (and, for that matter, contemporaries). The historical links with Śailendra Java were noticed above, and it is noteworthy that the idea of the ruler as 'Lord of the Mountain' (the literal translation of *Śailendra*) is a tradition traceable from Funan, through Java, back to Angkor. Parallels to the Angkorian royal cult are traceable elsewhere—they are evident in the cults of Javanese chieftains, they may be discerned in the ancestral cults reflected by the *kuts* of Champa, and 'god-kings' have been seen also in pre-Angkorian Chenla²⁰. Angkor was not *sui generis*; it participated in the traffic of institutions and ideas that originated in many parts of southeast Asia and in India.

But more may be gained by looking forwards at the later history of the Khmers. The Siamese victories did not in fact amount to a final break and disruption. Angkor was not incontinently engulfed by the forest and forgotten. Europeans had contacts with the Khmers from much earlier than the advent of the French in the 1860s, and Iberian sources provide information about Angkor in the sixteenth century²¹. Angkor Wat offers 30 Khmer inscriptions dating from 1541 to 1747, which were added on various pillars to commemorate Buddhist ceremonies and record visits by dignitaries²²; the last of them, a substantial account of the career of a dignitary (with sidelights on the importance of women in dynastic and political life), shows that the temple was still important²³.

How much did the Khmer society studied by Europeans preserve of the distant past? The changes wrought by the French *mission civilisatrice*, slow though its application may have been to Cambodia, meant that in the course of time many of the institutions that may have had a hoary ancestry were disappearing before the eyes of the investigators, and it is the observations of the earlier French scholars that are therefore of most interest to us. But, from the beginning, students were dealing with a people among whom most of the basic dynastic facts about Angkor were forgotten, or misremembered. However, the system of Khmer political relationships observed in the nineteenth century²⁴ is likely to contain many echoes of Angkorian times, and is on that account worth noticing.

→ The Cambodian monarch was, emphatically, not a despot. He presided over a formally elaborate administration, the function of whose bewildering complexity seems to have been to prevent the consolidation of power at any point by dispersing functions, creating overlapping roles and fostering cross-cutting loyalties, rather than to define tasks for the purpose of administrative efficiency. The king conducted seasonal rituals and symbolized a psychological, cultural unity that was not embodied in practical political organization. The administration was divided into four parts, under the king, a previously abdicated king, the heir to the throne,

²⁰ On these royal cults see A.K. Chakravarti, "Divine kingship in ancient Cambodia: A study in the *prasastis*", in *Political and Administrative Systems in Ancient India*; and H. Kulke, *op. cit.*

²¹ See B.P. Groslier, *Angkor...*, *op. cit.*

²² S. Lewitz, "Les inscriptions modernes d'Angkor Vat", *JA* (1972), pp. 107-129.

²³ See D. Chandler, "An eighteenth-century inscription from Angkor Wat", *JSS*, vol. 59 pt. 2 (July 1971), pp. 151-159.

²⁴ See A. Leclère, *Recherches sur le droit public des cambodgiens*, the authority for most of the information in the following paragraphs.

and the queen mother²⁵; each part, or "house", had its own administrative apparatus and police and its own territory scattered here and there among the various provinces—perhaps showing traces of original autonomous fiefs. This fourfold scheme, as we shall notice below, has been thought to be a vestige of a classification of the Angkorian administration evident from some inscriptions.

The chief ministers under the king were the prime minister, the minister of justice, the minister of the palace and finances, the minister of transport by land and for war, and the minister of waterborne transport. All these took their cut of the revenues they controlled. Purchase of office by these and other dignitaries, and the sale of monopolies, were prominent features of government.

The cross-cutting of administrative categories is well illustrated by the four classifications of ministers: they were divided into the inner (at the seat of government) and outer, into ten different ranks (the status of which was staggered according to the different status of the four "houses"), into these four "houses", and into "left" and "right" divisions for ceremonial purposes. The assignment of senior officials to particular ministers did not follow a practical pattern—there were judges, for example, responsible to the prime minister, not the minister of justice. Each minister had responsibility for certain provinces, many or few in number.

At the lowest levels of official activity, operations were often performed by slaves. It was estimated in the 1870s that there were some thousands of slaves; they were originally criminals or war prisoners or descendants of these, and they were divided into state slaves, child slaves, and temple slaves. Theoretically unable to buy their freedom, they sometimes could in practice. They owed *corvée* labour of three months a year.

An interesting formal institution, which may well reflect practices which had been more important in more informal centuries before, was patronage. All subjects chose patrons from specific classes of royal individuals and dignitaries. Client and patron had mutual obligations: the patron would protect his client, represent him at court, and in return expect service in ceremonies or at other needs. A. Leclère writes:

*Ces 'forces' ou comlang qui, aujourd'hui, ne sont que des clientèles impuissantes, pouvaient être autrefois des 'forces' militaires considérables entre les mains des mandarins et des moyens d'action puissants à l'aide desquels un homme habile et hardi devait souvent pouvoir acquérir une grande influence dans l'état. C'est probablement pour cela que les lois les ont subdivisées puis si bien amoindries, qu'elles sont aujourd'hui presque détruites.*²⁶

Thus a glance at the Khmer polity as known from more recent times suggests several features that may be sought in Angkor: the absence of practical efficiency as a principle of administrative structure, the importance of high dignitaries and their followings, the central position of rituals giving legitimacy to the whole system, extensive devolution, perhaps vassalage, and the politics of intrigue and clientage. Another theme which may be mentioned here is the fluidity of empire. It is important to be clear what sort of entity is being discussed, and Indian ideas of imperial power, a valuable analogy, will be briefly discussed below.

²⁵ Cp. the designations given by S. Lewitz, "La toponymie khmère", *BEFEO*, vol. LIII (1966-67), pp. 375-452 at p. 407.

²⁶ A. Leclère, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

These generalizations are likely to be useful, and they are synchronic. This fact goes some way to justifying the form of treatment to be given to the inscriptions in the following chapters, in which Angkor will be considered as a whole with a view to discovering something about the way politics worked throughout the period, about the structure within which particular rulers and subdynasties rose and fell, the empire expanded and contracted, royal power became more abstract and more concrete. The analogy of ancient Indian political institutions may be cited in support. Here, there are obviously great changes in the course of time and great differences between such empires as those of the Mauryas and Guptas. But some of the contrasts drawn by earlier scholars were contradictory, and some therefore must have been wrong. Great though the discontinuities may be, it thus seems desirable to establish the general character of political institutions, to understand the vocabulary of the ideas of power, and to recognize the social categories which men recognized in the period of study, before analysing the changes. It is this former type of enquiry which should be approached first when we seek a better understanding of Angkor.

This is not to say that the chronological outline of Khmer history, as sketched above, is the only type of study that has been made in the field. Many works have appeared about various other aspects of Indochinese history, and, where Angkor is concerned, one may notice such examples as the writings of Bhattacharya on religion and temple administration²⁷, Bongert on slavery²⁸, Osborne on Angkorian provincial history²⁹, Ricklefs on the law relating to land³⁰, Sarkar on Sanskrit literary and linguistic influence³¹, Kishore on *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas* in Cambodia³², Sahai on political institutions³³, and du Bourg on justice³⁴, besides a number of significant writings on art, religion and so forth which touch on Indochina or southeast Asia as a whole rather than on Angkor specifically.

But it would be unfair to the older school of writers to leave the impression that such diverse discussions are entirely the work of Coedès' "new generation". It is true that the older research papers and editions of inscriptions set out specifically to answer questions of chronology and dynastic history rather than social or economic, but it is not generally realized how many valuable interpretations, collations of evidence and explanations of problems relating to numerous subjects other than dynastic history are tucked away in the footnotes of the reports by Coedès and others. The following discussion of the role of the Angkorian king and the authority of his government in society at large will illustrate this at several points.

²⁷ K. Bhattacharya, *Les religions brahmaniques dans l'ancien Cambodge*; "Some aspects of temple administration in the ancient Khmer kingdom", *Calcutta review*, vol. 134, no. 2 (1955), pp. 193-199.

²⁸ Y. Bongert, "Note sur l'esclavage en droit khmer ancien", in *Etudes d'histoire du droit privé offertes à Pierre Petot*.

²⁹ M.E. Osborne, "Notes on early Cambodian provincial history: Visanapura and Sambhupura", *France-Asie*, vol. 186 (1966), pp. 433-450.

³⁰ M. Ricklefs, *loc. cit.*

³¹ K.K. Sarkar, *Early Indo-Cambodian Contacts, Literary and Linguistic*.

³² K. Kishore, "Varnas in early Kambuja inscriptions", *JAOS*, vol. 85 (1965), pp. 566-569.

³³ S. Sahai, *op. cit.*

³⁴ H. de Mestier du Bourg, "Le procès dans l'ancien droit khmer, d'après l'épigraphie", *JA*, vol. CCLVI (1968), no. 1, pp. 37-54.

Land, authority and society

The underlying question to consider is whether the Angkorian king should be seen as a powerful tyrant operating a strong regime, a weak, constitutional or figurehead monarch in a state where powers were divided, something in between, or something different. There are various aspects of royal power to consider: authority over the land; the role of royal officials; the welfare, military, taxgathering, religious and judicial powers of government; and the problem of the Angkorian king's religious powers.

Sometimes it has been thought that the king's power over the land was total and that there was no intermediate, large landlord class to restrict his direct authority over the peasants³⁵. The picture given by van Leur³⁶, depicting agrarian societies that were patrimonial and bureaucratic in the agrarian states of the archipelago, reflects a similar sort of inference. The basis for it is not any legal text which asserts the king's ownership of all land, nor is it any scholarly discussion which explicitly argues it: rather, it is an impression which arises from any description of primary sources which so frequently praise kings in language appropriate to omnipotent despots or represent them as apparently giving away land to favourites as if all land were theirs to give.

One fairly recent work on the problem, confining its attention to the tenth century, has set out to correct this impression³⁷, and it is worthwhile to summarize some of its conclusions here. According to this study, land transactions not involving the king were common, though sometimes an individual would obtain the king's sanction for a purchase. This sanction was effectively a legal document confirming the transaction. Sometimes the king shared in the religious merit of a pious donation made by an individual³⁸. The degree of the king's authority over religious establishments (temple organizations, the endowment of which is the subject matter of most of our inscriptional sources) is unclear, but, in matters such as decrees merging the resources of two or more foundations, appears to have been more than formal, and the king appears to have had the right to dispose of property left without an heir³⁹. There was a system of courts that could find even a king's representative guilty⁴⁰. Thus there was a system of private land ownership, when the king was spiritual overlord and a legal umpire but did not interfere unnecessarily. Law was for even the lowliest of free men. The countryside was largely under the control of individuals unconnected with Angkor, and "there is no reason to believe they were important officials, judging from the lowly titles that they bore"⁴¹. This claim is supported by reference to a private communication from Coedès, to the effect that the individuals concerned were of no very high rank; on the contrary, the terms by which they are designated are mere indications of free status distinguishing them from slaves, rather than official titles⁴².

³⁵ See for example H.J. Benda, "The structure of southeast Asian history: Some preliminary observations", *JSEAH*, vol. 3 no. 2 (1962), p. 113.

³⁶ J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society*.

³⁷ M. Ricklefs, *loc. cit.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 413-415.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 415f.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 416f.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 419 and n. 59. Cp. S. Sahai, *op. cit.* pp. 56f, 57 n.1, 104.

To the results of this study may be added the conclusion of Sahai, who points out that if all land were the king's there would be no need to distinguish the category of *rājadavya*, king's property, and that royal grants were of vacant (*nirmūla*) land, and denies that there was royal land monopoly⁴³.

A further examination of the problems involved here needs to begin with the idea of ownership, for it cannot be assumed without question, particularly when we are confronted by such a complex set of relationships between land, objects, slaves, free individuals, priests and kings, that such relationships will fit naturally with modern notions of types of legal rights.

It is here, particularly, that the analogy of Indian institutions offers a profitable model—at the least, in providing a warning that “ownership” is not an easy notion to apply to ancient Asian institutions, and, at the most, in suggesting how the rights of kings and of private individuals may actually have seemed to the Khmers.

Many more authorities have discussed the rights of ancient Indian kings over land than can be cited here. A few views may be mentioned. Kane in his monumental *History of Dharmasāstra* reviews the evidence and concludes that a sovereign did not have proprietary rights over land⁴⁴. Ghoshal makes a distinction between actual ownership and the various rights or duties which a king might have⁴⁵. Spallman considers that a king was indeed held to own the land, but that this ownership was symbolic rather than economic; the comparison between a king's rights over land and a husband's rights over a wife is considered significant⁴⁶. Particularly useful are the conclusions of one other authority, Bongert, who has in other writings explored areas of Khmer history, and who gives particular attention to the problems of definition⁴⁷. The idea of the absolute and exclusive character of property is a product of the medieval romanists, not necessarily applicable to other societies (even ancient Rome); various Sanskrit texts limit authority over property when making bequests. The tenure of land accorded by a king to officials or favourites could variously be subject to good behaviour, or temporary, or permanent and hereditary, but in all cases the inconsistent and ambiguous textual pronouncements about a king's rights leave the impression that, in practice, what was his to give was not the soil but the revenues to which his office entitled him. “*La plupart du temps d'ailleurs, quoique qualifiées de 'dons de terres', les libéralités portaient en réalité non sur le sol lui-même, mais uniquement sur le revenu de l'impôt.*”⁴⁸

It does not take more than a glance at the Indian sources to confirm that they provide material for conflicting interpretations, that they are not necessarily all mutually consistent on legal theory, and that they can nevertheless be largely reconciled by realizing that a king's lordship over land was defined by his right to a share of the produce of it, given in exchange for his protection. Kātyāyana states that the king is *svāmi* (lord) of the land but not other

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 146 f.

⁴⁴ P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. 2, pp. 865-869.

⁴⁵ U.N. Ghoshal, *The Agrarian State in Ancient India*, pp. 81-103.

⁴⁶ J.W. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India*, p. 209.

⁴⁷ Y. Bongert, “La notion de propriété dans l'Inde”, *Travaux et recherches de l'institut de droit comparé de l'Université de Paris*, XXIII, pp. 149-162.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

wealth, and is entitled to the *ṣaḍbhāga*, the one-sixth share of the produce⁴⁹. The *Jaiminiya Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* says that land is common to all people, and the commentary by Śabara says that the king's function of protection entitles him to a share, but others who use the land have rights⁵⁰. Much quoted is a verse of Manu who says that the king is entitled to a share of treasure found in the ground as he is the protector and lord of the earth (*bhumer adhipatih*)⁵¹; not usually quoted, but interesting for our purpose, is the remark two verses earlier that a Brahman may keep all treasure he finds in the ground as he is the lord of everything (*sarvasyādhipatih*). This surely gives us the clue that the lordship referred to does not entail ownership in the modern sense. It means certain rights given by office or function, and other people may have some rights over the same thing over which one is lord.

When we turn to the epigraphic record for evidence of practice rather than theory, there are interesting possible parallels to Khmer usage in the form of records of grants made by rulers or feudatories to high officials or favourites. The parallel in the Khmer case is the practice of making donations to, or of establishing, religious foundations for the benefit of their gods and the priests who served them. When we consider that the Indian hereditary barrier between priests and nobles did not apply in Cambodia, and that there was a 'brahma-kṣatra' elite in which priests belonged to families of favourites and appear to have played a baronial role in the countryside (facts which will be illustrated below), the parallel appears significant.

Like the Khmer donations, the Indian grants specify what property is granted and frequently list rights which form part of or are excluded from the grant. For example, it is sometimes said that *cāṭas* and *bhaṭas* are not to enter the territory concerned⁵². The nature of these functionaries is unclear; they may have been local officials of some sort, whose activities could have deprived the grantee of rights due to him. Sometimes the phrase "with the ten *aparādhas*" ("offences") occurs⁵³, which is likely to mean that the grantee is entitled to the fines levied on certain offences⁵⁴. Similarly, "*cauravarjam*" ("except for theft") appears to exclude fines for theft from the grantee's benefit⁵⁵. Thus, though these grants have sometimes been seen as signs of administrative decentralization placing pieces of territory under the control of the beneficiaries, a more cautious interpretation seems proper, regarding them as alienations of revenue to reward clients.

There are obvious contrasts between the Indian records of grants and the Khmer inscriptions, however, and the chief of these is important for the understanding of the purposes which inspired the transactions recorded. We are not dealing with secular legal documents at all, an impression which might misleadingly arise if we notice merely the allusions to purchases and to investigations of complaints. The context of every allusion was religious, and this follows necessarily from the nature of our sources. The inscriptions were found in association with

⁴⁹ *Kātyāyana-smṛti*, 16-17.

⁵⁰ *Jaiminiya Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 6.7.1-3.

⁵¹ *Manusmṛti*, 8.39.

⁵² See CII, vol. 3, p. 95 and following inscriptions.

⁵³ E.g. *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 179, line 67.

⁵⁴ The phrase has been seen as evidence of grantees' judicial authority. See *JBORS*, 1916, p. 53n. But the reference to fines is more likely. See P.V. Kane, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 265.

⁵⁵ See *JIH*, vol. 38, pp. 590f.

temples, sometimes in their fabric, and in the overwhelming majority of cases were set up with the purpose of establishing, for the glory of the donors and the protection of the donees, the rights which the gods of the temples, represented by the priesthood, had over the resources allocated to them. Frequently, particularly when inscriptions commemorated foundations by kings, they included a great deal of information about the donors.

That private transactions in land took place is clear enough; exchanges are mentioned in numerous inscriptions, albeit exchanges for goods or slaves or both, not money. Only by the time of the Chinese visitor Chou Ta Kuan was gold or silver used to pay for big purchases. In the tenth and eleventh centuries objects (such as valuable utensils of various sorts, and textiles) were used to pay for land⁵⁶. But it is necessary to consider the sorts of activities actually recorded in order to derive further benefit from the sources, and a brief survey of inscriptions which record private transactions will serve as an initial sample to give something of the flavour. The Ta Nen stele inscription⁵⁷ records a decree that certain temple lands come under the authority of some royal officials but not others, and refers to land from various resources made over to a Śivaliṅga. The Prasat Car inscription⁵⁸ records a debt case in which land was used to pay a debt and following which the creditor made a religious foundation. The Prasat Ta Ros inscriptions⁵⁹ record an interesting case in which a *sten* (religious official) was sent by King Rājendravarman II to undertake duties at a certain foundation whose officials gave him land as a *dakṣiṇā* (honorarium for an officiating priest), and later "received again" this land after certain other people contested the legality of the transaction; later he bought more land, with exclusive rights, from the same people. The inscriptions of Prasat Kantop⁶⁰ record a donation by a *sten* which is made in the king's name and a donation to a Śivaliṅga of land given to an *adhyāpaka* (religious teacher) as *dakṣiṇā*. The Stun Ren region stele inscription⁶¹ records a land rights case after which the beneficiary sold land to an *ācārya* (teacher, priest) who asked him to found a village. The Prei Yan inscription⁶² records offerings made to two sanctuaries. The Stun Crap stele inscription⁶³ mentions a number of purchases of land by an individual, much or all of which land appears to have been given to temples. The Tuk Cum stele inscription⁶⁴ records the arrangements made by a donor to a temple whereby some property was assigned to the *ācārya* in trust for a god.

The interest which at least some Khmers had in making over property to temples is thus easily attested. Mentions of prior sale often occur in the records detailing the provenance of land granted or sold to temple officials, and we are able to observe that, although the king often confirmed a transaction, many sales took place quite independently of him. But further questions arise about these grants. How often was the king involved? What sort of people

⁵⁶ J. Imbert, *Histoire des institutions khmères*, p. 21.

⁵⁷ *IC*, 3.29-33.

⁵⁸ *IC*, 4.140-150.

⁵⁹ *IC*, 5.108-113.

⁶⁰ *IC*, 5.125-142.

⁶¹ *IC*, 5.182-185.

⁶² *IC*, 5.187.

⁶³ *IC*, 5.202-209.

⁶⁴ *IC*, 6.119-122.

made them? What did they give? The previous examples give some indications; a more concise record of a whole series of inscriptions will help to accumulate evidence⁶⁵. A religious dignitary founds a *liṅga* and attaches revenues of a village with royal sanction; an unknown person gives parcels of land and goods and slaves to a Śivaliṅga with royal sanction of some parts; a private individual (*loñ*) founds a religious establishment; the king orders a court to dispose of the property of a dead priest, which had been attached to a foundation; a palace lady grants land to a foundation; the king grants slaves to a *liṅga* for the benefit of a priest who is a favourite; an individual of some lowly rank gives land to a *liṅga*; some private individuals give land to Śiva; 14 people with petty titles together sell a ricefield to a priest; a priest hands over to a *liṅga* slaves given to him by others for the purpose; a Buddhist sage founds six Buddhist deities (i.e. sets up foundations for them); the king gives slaves to a sanctuary; a dignitary (with the granted title *mratāñ*) makes a foundation; two private individuals offer slaves and other resources to a foundation; the brother of a royal servant erects a divinity; somebody makes several foundations with royal sanction of the giving of exclusive rights; somebody sells land; a consortium of individuals jointly establishes a roster of slaves for two shrines.

These examples show how, in various permutations, private individuals, officials and dignitaries of various ranks or kings might found temples, or give them land, slaves or provisions of various sorts, with or without royal sanction (or sell property to temples as an activity that was perhaps as much pious as commercial). We do not commonly observe kings giving their sanction to donations made by individuals without rank (designated merely as *loñ* or *vāp*). In a series of inscriptions recording royal sanction for a donation⁶⁶, the donors thus benefited are a holy man of high rank (*vrah kamrāteñ añ*), an unnamed individual, a *Vrah Kamrāteñ Añ Rājendrapañḍita*, an official under several kings, and a high-ranking ascetic. The implications of royal sanction, which are not simply that it constitutes a conclusive legal right, will be noticed below.

That numbers of Khmers with the means to do so were anxious to make these donations and thus gain religious merit, if not other forms of benefit besides, is evident further from their readiness to contribute small parts of donations even when they did not make substantial endowments in their own right. One of the cases noted above⁶⁷ was of a donation of a list of slaves handed over by various individuals. The inscription of Prasat Trau introduces us to institution of the *mvat* or group, in which various people (in this case, an official who joins with his family, people in various offices) combine to 'control the list' of slaves and resources assigned to a god⁶⁸.

It is not yet clear how far or in what sense the endowments, and the land transactions which constituted or prefaced them, involved a transfer of ownership in our sense. Three parties might be involved: donor, donee (or vendor, buyer) and king. Each party had certain

⁶⁵ *IC*, 3.26-99. This is not a wholly random sample. Volume III of the *Inscriptions* corresponds to volumes III and V of "CII", and includes the CII inscriptions remaining after the edition of the categories previously published. Royal foundation steles are thus excluded. But the volume is representative of other types.

⁶⁶ Those in *IC*, vol. III.

⁶⁷ *IC*, 3.57.

⁶⁸ *IC*, 3.97-99. See also G. Coedès, *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam*, vol. I, p. 25.

rights, and it is necessary to see what these were. Did the donee or purchaser automatically become the complete possessor of the resources allocated? Did the king consider himself to be the ultimate lord of the land?

The first question can be given no clear-cut answer. The donees doubtless considered themselves to be in possession of the property given, but possession could mean different things. Representative, for us, of the ambivalence of the ideas involved is the term *bhūmibhāgin* in the inscription of Prasat Pram⁶⁹. A *bhāgin* is literally one who has a share, who participates; but the term may often be rendered as 'possessor'. (Elsewhere, however, slaves attached to the fields, *kṣetra*, are said to be *kṣetrabhāgin*⁷⁰.) Various inscriptions show that a donor might either hand over full control to the grantee or retain the management of the property in question for his own family. An inscription from Vat Baset⁷¹ records the sale by various officials, who pooled their resources, of parcels of land to a *vrah kamrāteñ añ* Guṇapativarman. This made their own revenues insufficient, and the king ordered a halving of the assessments on the lands they had (presumably thereby halving their liability to dues in recognition of their meritorious activity). The objects given in payment to the vendors included utensils and textiles (as was typical in such transactions), one person for example receiving a bowl, a vase and a spittoon. Guṇapativarman then offered the land bought to a god and entrusted it to his children. Coedès raises the question whether this meant that the property remained in the family, the temple merely receiving the usufruct, or whether the individuals entrusted with the land were enjoined to exploit it in favour of the temple and protect the temple's rights, preferring the latter interpretation as it accords better with the two similar inscriptions⁷². An entirely similar transaction recorded by an inscription from the same place⁷³ is seen by Bhattacharya as a case of land entrusted to the management of those from whom it was purchased⁷⁴. The same author draws attention to the distinction between the family of a donor, for whom in some cases the possession is explicitly reserved, and the servants of the god benefited.⁷⁵ Commenting on one of the Vat Baset inscriptions, Coedès says that apparently the group of vendors who sell land to a temple in fact continues to exploit it, but ensures that the produce of it will be devoted to the maintenance of the daily rites⁷⁶. An oath to this effect is recorded in the inscription.

Such examples suggest that different sorts of relationships might link a donor to the land he makes over, as well as allowing us to believe that the sale of land to a temple, or to an individual who acts as intermediary and then makes it over to a temple, could be a pious work in the same way as outright gift. In such cases, the vendors might keep the articles given in payment as symbols of their piety.

⁶⁹ *BEFEO*, vol. XIII, no. 6 (1913), pp. 11-26 at st. LVII.

⁷⁰ *IC*, 3.180-192 at st. XXI.

⁷¹ *IC*, 3.3-24; sanctuary, south door, west pier; see also *ibid.*, p. 8, n. 4.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 3f.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 16ff.

⁷⁴ See K. Bhattacharya, *loc. cit.*, p. 196.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, and see *IC*, 1 pp. 189-194 at p. 192, st. XV.

⁷⁶ *IC*, 3.17.

Other inscriptions also bear on the distinction between total relinquishment of land given and relinquishment of rights to its produce. The stele inscription of Trapan Don On records certain donations that are made subject to the authority of a relative who is versed in sacred lore (*paṇḍita*), the slaves associated with the land being liable to no other authority⁷⁷. In the Old Khmer part of the inscription it is said that relatives must continue to assure (*cyar*⁷⁸) the foundation and that a member of the family who is a *paṇḍita* is to be in charge of the foundation and order the slaves. Certain other property separately donated, however, is not to be under the donor's relatives but is given without restriction (*akṣatra*). In one of the inscriptions of Prasat Kantop, the donor obtains the king's sanction for the attachment of a shrine, to which he donates property, to another sanctuary, and rights over the donated land are alienated to the foundation to the exclusion of the authority of various officials named. However, this property is explicitly distinguished from that of the donor's family which is for subsistence and for carrying out government requirements⁷⁹. Two further inscriptions which may be mentioned are that of the Trapan Don Mas stele, which specifies that the donated land should be under the authority of relatives of the donor who are qualified in religion, and that of Prasat O Romduol, which excludes from authority even the donor's family, other than children and grandchildren who entered into religion⁸⁰.

These examples, which could be multiplied, show that what was actually given to a temple in the case of a religious sale or donation was a group of rights, allowing the recipient to enjoy much or all of the fruits of the property made over, with its associated slaves subsisting on it. These rights might or might not be accompanied by authority over the property—that was another matter, which had to be separately specified.

Donors were anxious to ensure that the provisions they made should be respected. The transfer of property was not a straightforward matter of substituting one person's rights for another, as the analogy with modern legal institutions might suggest. Any piece of donated property was subject in one combination or another to the claims of the priesthood of the temple benefited, of other temple organizations with which that priesthood might be involved, of various government officials, of all the various branches of the donor's family which might retain authority over it. Only when this is recognized does the practice of concluding donation records with imprecations become wholly comprehensible. A formula commonly employed is that any violator of the terms of the grant shall be cursed "as long as the moon and the sun shall last", a peculiarity of inscriptions in Cambodia, Champa and Java, which perhaps reflects original dynastic links⁸¹. "May those who are violent, wicked, greedy, who steal my good works, go with their ancestors into the ocean of the Raurava hell", says the stele inscription of Prasat Komphus⁸². Another inscription curses whoever harms the foundation benefited, whether the donor's son-in-law or his child, or grandchildren⁸³. Another specifies that

⁷⁷ *IC*, 3.180-192. See st. XXVI-XXXI and 11. 13-14, 38-43.

⁷⁸ See *BEFEO*, vol. XXIX (1929), p. 312, n.2.

⁷⁹ *IC*, 5.125-142. South pier, central sanctuary.

⁸⁰ *IC*, 7.109-119 at C 11ff; *IC*, 5.143-146 at lines. 6-13.

⁸¹ See G. Coedès, "Études cambodgiennes II" in *BEFEO*, vol. XI (1911), pp. 391-406 at pp. 393-396.

⁸² *IC*, 1.159-186 at 1. C 1.

⁸³ *IC*, 5.14-16.

violators are to be cloven in the chest⁸⁴. An inscription from Prasat Thnal Chuk threatens with royal chastisement, countless diseases, and sundry torments for 10,000 *kalpas* and 1,000 *yugas* in the 32 hells all those who harm the foundation concerned, by despoiling its slaves, the produce of the earth or other property of the god⁸⁵. Such prescriptions are numerous, though this last is more specific than most.

An even more specific prescription, which introduces us to the question of the king's authority, occurs in the Prek Krabau stele inscription. It is not a stylized imprecation but a detailed penalty clause. If people do not act in conformity to the foundation, following the stipulations notified to the king, the chief priests are to take the case to the sacred court for the Kamsten Añ Rājakulamahāmantri (a high palace dignitary) to judge⁸⁶.

This shows how the king and his officials could be involved, at least in the role of umpire. But there is more to it than this: many inscriptions record that the king gave his sanction to an endowment or allowed it to be made in his name (nominally as his own foundation, *rājadharmā*), and inspection shows that this is in part a device to allow the king to share in the religious merit, and in part to obtain a good legal sanction against violation⁸⁷. But there might be other motives as well. A significant example of royal sanction is a case where an individual buys some land without lacuna, then, it is said, demands it from the king; the king has boundary marks established and gives his confirmation⁸⁸. As Coedès has pointed out, these cases of royal sanction obtained for the beneficiaries exemption from the authority of numerous royal officials⁸⁹. Among the most often mentioned officials are the *khloñ vala*, district officials, and *khlon rājakārya*, officials concerned with royal service or corvée. It is not surprising, from the apparent abundance of such classes of officials with their perhaps corrupt exactions, that grantees should be anxious to assure exemption from official levies for themselves and their families.

Cases of exemptions are easily documented. The example of the assessment reduction recorded at Vat Baset has been noted above⁹⁰. In some inscriptions, the role of the king in giving his sanction is unclear or not specified. In one the inmates of an establishment benefited are not to employ people of the settlement to work⁹¹; in another is recorded an order that certain foundations come under the authority of the inspectors of royal service only (*vrah rājakārya*) but not of the district chiefs (*khloñ viṣaya*)⁹². Sūryavarman acceded to a request to withdraw certain foundations from the competence of chiefs of religious affairs, royal service inspectors, chiefs of works (*khloñ kārya*), inspectors of population, servants of gods or others⁹³.

⁸⁴ *IC*, 6.224.

⁸⁵ *IC*, 6.187-191 at p. 189, north pier, 11. 2-5.

⁸⁶ *IC*, 7.28f, 11. 2-7.

⁸⁷ See S. Sahai, *op. cit.* p. 147 n.3.

⁸⁸ *IC*, 2.107.

⁸⁹ G. Coedès, "L'avenir des études khmères", *loc. cit.*, p. 210.

⁹⁰ *IC*, 3.3-24.

⁹¹ *IC*, 3.26-28.

⁹² *IC*, 3.29-33.

⁹³ *IC*, 4.39-44, K.829 at 11. 15-21.

Some foundations are explicitly declared to be royal foundations⁹⁴; among the exclusions listed in one case with royal sanction are the authority of the corps of pages (*kanmyān pamre*), the rice chief and some other officials, and the right to expel or remove any inhabitants of the settlement⁹⁵. In a number of other cases, a king grants land to a favourite and declares exemptions from the activity of various officials⁹⁶; a donation is designated as a *rājadharmā*⁹⁷; exclusions from certain classes of official authority are said to be by royal favour⁹⁸; the merit of a foundation is made over to the king⁹⁹; comprehensive exemptions are granted to a donation by a number of dignitaries which is designated as royal property¹⁰⁰; various officials "do not have the exclusive right . . . the family of Vāp Īsānaśiva does not have the competence to call up the people (given to the foundation) for the *rājakārya* or any other service"¹⁰¹; slaves attached to granted land are exempt from royal service and from service to the priests alike¹⁰²; certain Buddhist precincts are declared a sanctuary¹⁰³; the Say Fong hospital inscription of Jayavarman VII says that people who enter are exempt from tax, corvée, and law cases other than for causing suffering to living creatures¹⁰⁴. In most such cases of exemption it is evident that kings gave their sanction; in others they may have done so. Thus it is clear that an important charge on any property was its liability to the exactions of various government officials, and that assignment to religious foundations was one way of gaining exemption if the king could be induced to regulate the endowment.

But, as some of these same examples show, it was sometimes kings themselves who made the endowments whose beneficiaries were exempt from various civil duties. One important category of donations is constituted by the activity of kings, sometimes granting property to established temples, sometimes founding them.

The inscriptions recording royal grants throw a great deal of light on social organization in the countryside, and few inscriptions if any have as much useful detail in them as that of the Sdok Kak Thom stele¹⁰⁵. This inscription is concerned to establish the claims of a priestly family to various pieces of land or to rights within them granted by a series of kings in the course of generations. The family in question was, as a unit, uniquely qualified by the appointment of Jayavarman II to perform the *devarāja* rites, and the qualification was hereditary. Though all members were qualified, not all actively participated, and after three generations one man was head (*pradhāna ta kule*). This office passed from uncle to nephew; it is not clear

⁹⁴ *IC*, 4.45-52.

⁹⁵ *IC*, 5.125-142; south pier, central sanctuary.

⁹⁶ *IC*, 3.109-115 at 11. 13-17.

⁹⁷ *IC*, 3.148-156; K.33, 11. 30-34. On p. 152 n. 2, G. Coedès writes: "*Les mérites en étaient transférés au roi, qui, en échange, accordait les exemptions demandées*".

⁹⁸ *IC*, 5.212-215.

⁹⁹ *IC*, 5.229-234.

¹⁰⁰ *IC*, 6.143-146.

¹⁰¹ *IC*, 6.154-164, piers of tower H, south pier, 11. 9-14.

¹⁰² *IC*, 6.192-194.

¹⁰³ *IC*, 6.195-211 at st. XCVII.

¹⁰⁴ *BEFEO*, vol. III (1903), pp. 18-33 at st. XLV.

¹⁰⁵ See E.F. Aymonier, *JA* (1901), pp. 5ff; L. Finot, *loc. cit.*, pp. 277ff; G. Coedès and P. Dupont, *BEFEO*, vol. XLIII (1943-1946), pp. 57-134.

that all brothers in each generation were celibate as priests, and succession in the maternal line, a southeast Asian tradition from pre-Indian times, appears to be in evidence. As the family increased with the passing of time, and as kings established their cities in different places, more grants were made. For example, when Yaśovarman built Yaśodharapura, with its central shrine atop the Phnom Bakheng, the priest Vāmaśiva established there a *līṅga* which was the centre of a foundation, and the king endowed his new *sruks* (settlements) with the various resources, known as *bhogas*, that went to equip a foundation and the community that grew around it—provisions, slaves in abundance, ricefields¹⁰⁶. As the history of the family is followed through the centuries, the account mentions various reigns, and there is a reference to the turmoil at the beginning of the eleventh century when Śūryavarman was fighting his way to power; he controlled areas where the family had land, and gained its service. Later he caused the leader of the family, Sadāśiva, to leave the religious life and marry a younger sister of the first queen and to receive various honours. Family property having been devastated in the disturbances, Udayāditya II renewed the family endowment, clearing the forest, consecrating statues, and so forth¹⁰⁷.

Throughout this history, the heads of the family or its branches are seen acting as managers of landed property, erecting buildings, building dykes and reservoirs, setting slaves to work. When a foundation is made, following a successful application to the king, the first step is the granting of rights over a tract of land (*bhūmi*), and the beginning of a settlement within the tract is the granting by the king of a stone post which is consecrated as a *līṅga* and becomes the centre of a shrine which is built around it. Provisions and slaves are supplied for the daily rituals; a priesthood is installed; a community comes into being.

Coedès and Dupont, in their edition of the inscription, comment that the history it records seems to reflect a process of colonization as the Khmer population expanded geographically; the land granted was on the borders of the settled regions, either waste or without anybody having title to it (*mūla*). The expansion evidenced is progressively to the west. Thus the religious foundations are like fiefs. The priests were granted, first, rights over whole tracts, then the means to establish foundations within them; numerous slaves were assigned, perhaps imported¹⁰⁸.

The social situation which thus seems to prevail is one that irresistibly recalls some of the features of feudalism, and indeed the priests seem to behave in many ways like the barons of mediaeval Europe. Feudalism is of course a term too vague in common usage, and too various in its historical characteristics, to mean anything very precise without further definition, but the authority of the king to grant to beneficiaries certain rights in particular districts, and the establishment in them of the families of the beneficiaries with claims on the labour and produce of people there, are features with clear parallels in other fields of history. (It might be added that Chou Ta-kuan provides us with evidence of something like a priestly *droit du seigneur*¹⁰⁹.)

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, D 12-22.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, D 40-42, 57-61.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 69ff.

¹⁰⁹ See P. Pelliot, "Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge de Tcheou Takouan", *BEFEO*, vol. II (1902), p. 151. References below to this translation cite this edition, but may also be found in the posthumous edition, entitled *Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge de Tcheou Takouan*, Oeuvres posthumes de P. Pelliot III (Paris, 1951), p. 17.

Examples of inscriptions recording the establishment of foundations with all the resources that went with them are easily multiplied. A typical one specifies the goods, slaves and territory over which two dignitaries give to the deity an exclusive right¹¹⁰. 'Territory' here represents *sruk*, which has been translated as 'settlement' above and is often rendered as 'village'; it is the division of territory where a religious foundation is set up and a community grows¹¹¹. Another inscription lists people assigned from a *sruk* to work, one list for each alternating fortnight, for a foundation, and we see that the inhabitants of the temple buildings were to be benefited not only by the means to conduct their sacrifices but also by the attentions of workers, pounders (of grain), singers, players of stringed instruments, crop-watchers, supervisors, cooks and dancers¹¹². The Vat Baset inscriptions tell us about the temple store, recording a case where the purchaser of temple land placed a presumably symbolic clod of soil in the sacred store for each fortnight¹¹³, and it thus appears likely that the 'libraries', buildings found in pairs in the precincts of many shrines, were in fact repositories, one for each fortnight, of the temple treasures in various forms as part of the resources assigned for each fortnight¹¹⁴. The division of each month into two parts is an important feature of an Indian dating system adopted in Indochina and preserved in, for example, nineteenth-century Siam as well as Cambodia. It characterizes endowments generally, and it is normal for inscriptions recording donations of slaves and so forth to give two lists, usually equal or approximately so, for the bright and dark fortnights respectively. This institution allows one to infer that slaves worked for their own subsistence on the plots to which they were attached by birth, or for other masters with coexisting claims on the land, during the periods empty of temple duties.

Such evidence indicates that 'ownership' of land was embedded in a complex system of rights held by various people in relationships to each other that can perhaps appropriately be called 'feudal'. Where exclusive rights are referred to, these seem to imply the exclusion of the various official claims that would otherwise come into force, and the final authority for declaring exclusions was recognized to be the king's. This put a flexible instrument of patronage into his hands: land which was placed under the 'exclusive' control of favoured individuals was perhaps a reward for clients who were thus attached more firmly to the king's party by their status as privileged men and by their reinforced loyalty, while other land was a source of livelihood for various categories of royal officials who owed their position, indirectly or directly, to royal appointment, as well as a source of funds for the royal treasury.

How far though were the customary rights to a share of the produce and labour arising from all land available for the king to distribute and redistribute at will? The best that can be said here is that there is no certain evidence that kings customarily acted like arbitrary despots. It is possible that, as in medieval England, farms once given were difficult to recall. Hereditary farms (like that of the family of Śivakaivalya) created, we may suppose, powerful vested interests, networks of subpatronage that rulers had to treat with caution. A common

¹¹⁰ *IC*, 6.183-186, II. 4-6.

¹¹¹ On the meaning of *sruk* see S. Lewitz, 'La toponymie khmère', *loc. cit.*, pp. 406ff.

¹¹² *IC*, 1. 37-46; see p. 46 n. 2.

¹¹³ *IC*, 3. 3-24, Vat Baset inscriptions, south pier, west door, II. 64-66.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24 n. 2.

impression arising, as from the Sdok Kak Thom stele inscription, is that royal grants reflect colonization of unsettled land. The inscription of Prasat Pram refers to the possibility of a future king revoking a certain grant made to Nṛpatīndrāyudha, in which case the beneficiary declares that the foundation should be maintained by a relative with qualifications as an ascetic¹¹⁵, but this appears to be a special grant made as an addition to one already made over to Nṛpatīndrāyudha. Again, there is a case in the inscriptions of Phnom Sandak of officials being ordered to list the resources of three individuals, and this was seen by E.F. Aymonier as a procedure following upon confiscation by the king¹¹⁶, but Coedès suggested that the case could represent an escheatment to the king following the death of the three proprietors, or again an inventory drawn up at their request with a view to making a pious donation¹¹⁷.

There is indeed a reference in one further place to confiscation, but it is explicitly not total confiscation and it reflects the king's caution: Sūryavarman I refers to the lineage of the people at Pas Khmau, saying that they have constantly been violent and that their resources must be controlled by future kings, and their resources merged with those of the sacred hermitages¹¹⁸. This course is distinguished from 'total seizure'—though the translation of the appropriate phrase is doubtful (depending in part on the sense of the word *ral*)¹¹⁹—which the king would evidently prefer not to make.

There are cases of land being taken away from one family to reward another, the first however being given more land in compensation¹²⁰. There are cases presumably of escheatment, where land said to be left vacant by an individual is solicited by another from the king¹²¹, or where the king gives away land of an extinct lineage¹²², or where land is said to be vacant or overgrown¹²³. There is a case of a king giving land which is said to be (already) populated¹²⁴, which suggests either previous confiscation or escheatment, and there is further a case of resettlement of a family in a new area¹²⁵, the background circumstances being similarly unexplained. One interesting case details the circumspect procedure adopted when a king disposes of a piece of vacant land: a request is formally made to him; he makes a decision; envoys notify a tribunal; villagers, in the settlement concerned and neighbouring villages also, are notified; finally, the matter is ceremonially enacted¹²⁶. The general conclusion suggested by such examples is that once a grant was made it was rarely annulled by later kings. There

¹¹⁵ *BEFEO*, vol. XIII, no. 6. Coedès, "Etudes cambodgiennes X", pp. 11-26 at st. XXXIX.

¹¹⁶ E.G. Aymonier, *Le Cambodge*, vol. I, p. 394.

¹¹⁷ *IC*, 6.128-131 at p. 128.

¹¹⁸ *IC*, 6.254-272, Inscriptions of Prah Vihar, east pier, 11. 64-5.

¹¹⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 265, 270 n. 3. S. Sahai finds evidence that fiefs once given were difficult to recall; even when grants were confirmed by new rulers, this may have disguised *de facto* heredity. *Op. cit.*, pp. 144f.

¹²⁰ *BEFEO*, vol. XLIII, Sdok Kak Thom, pp. 56-134, face D, lines 54-57; *IC*, 6. 254-272.

¹²¹ *IC*, 7.94-98.

¹²² *IC*, 7.45-47 1.8.

¹²³ *IC*, 5.182-185; 6.218-222; 5.306-313.

¹²⁴ *IC*, 6.178-181.

¹²⁵ *IC*, 6.254-272.

¹²⁶ See L. Finot, "Nouvelles inscriptions du Cambodge", *BEFEO*, vol. XXVIII (1928), p. 61.

are cases of outright confiscation¹²⁷, which appear likely to have been in unusual circumstances: it is not surprising that in the turmoil surrounding the accession to power of Sūryavarman there should have been some forcible redistribution of patronage.

That the king in his dealings with established foundations was no mere figurehead is, however, evident from the institutions called *miśrabhoga* and *samgaṇa* (as M. Ricklefs has pointed out¹²⁸). These were mergings of foundations ordered by the king. *Miśrabhoga*, 'joint usufruct', was the combination of different parcels of land with their associated slaves and produce to support temples, and *samgaṇa*, grouping, was the combination of the personnel of more than one foundation into a single organization¹²⁹.

Though the ruler's formal relationship to the land of his kingdom is only one aspect of his power and functions, this discussion of it has been inevitably distended by its importance in the extant records and, it is reasonable to infer, in society at large. The picture that emerges is of a network of private properties and priestly fiefs, all of them subject to the exactions of the ruler represented by numerous officials, and to complex forms of endowment whereby the interests of private individuals, officials, king and priests were interwoven. This is neither a property-owning democracy nor a totalitarian state domain. It is an elite-dominated society in which the ruler, by virtue of his office, has access to the means by which he can maintain the elite with patronage, but must always be careful to forestall the emergence of rival parties¹³⁰.

It is partly a semantic question whether the socio-political structure in Angkor is to be designated as feudal. (Partly also, of course, it is a question of facts which may never be adequately known.) Discussions of 'feudalism' in India tend to treat it as a set of relations between rulers: Spellman has pointed out that, properly speaking, the term refers to internal relations within a kingdom¹³¹, although the distinction between internal and external relations of an Indian-style kingdom, to which the idea of precise frontiers is foreign, may not be clear-cut¹³². It is clear that, within Angkor, there were local centres of landed power where families maintained their influence from generation to generation. Sahai refers to the facts that toponyms are often added to the names of nobles and princes, that the father of Jayavarman VI came from the princely house of Ksitindrāgrāma which appears to have had a power base

¹²⁷ See *BEFEO*, vol. XLIII, pp. 134ff, Inscriptions of Phnom Sandak and Prah Vihar, B. 17-20; I.C. 4.161-166 at II. 33-4.

¹²⁸ M. Ricklefs, *loc.cit.*, p. 415.

¹²⁹ See *BEFEO*, vol. XXXVII (1937), p. 396; *IC*, 1.143-157; 5.125-142; 6.107-112; 6.132-139; 6.228-233; 7.141-147; Cp. H. du Mestier du Bourg, "Anray: une circonscription religieuse de l'ancien Cambodge", *JA*, vol. CCLVI no. 2 (1968), pp. 203-210.

¹³⁰ On the complex combination of claims on donated property, H. Kulke writes (personal communication): "This type of power distribution and the system of checks and balances are, of course, not unknown in India, but, according to my knowledge, never became so dominant. This may be due to the fact that the government in Cambodia was much more based upon an élite with direct links to the court. The question of how to check the élite was easier or, at least, different in India because of the dominant role of the local *sāmantas* with their own local power and limitations which kept them usually under mutual control.... Because of their strong and locally rooted power, the various *sāmantas* often had to be won over, especially by a usurper." This is relevant also to the important question whether there was in Cambodia any parallel to the process of progressive subinfeudation which undermined village autonomy in parts of India; it is not possible to do justice to this problem within the scope of the present synchronic discussion.

¹³¹ J.W. Spellman, *op. cit.*

¹³² See I.W. Mabbett, *Truth, Myth and Politics in Ancient India*.

in the north, and that Jayavarman bestowed upon a Thai chief his daughter in marriage, the ceremonial sword *Jayaśrī*, and the title *Indrāditya* (a regalia which was later to help legitimize the independent Thai kingdom of Sukhothai), and writes that vassal principalities existed in the bosom of the Angkorian kingdom¹³³. Nevertheless, his conclusion, after comparing Angkor with its predecessors, is that Angkor's institutions were not really feudal, despite some elements, for in the main the rulers who followed Jayavarman II were able to centralize power in a way that other kingdoms had not, reducing local principalities into provinces of government¹³⁴. Nevertheless, many important officials were rewarded with territorial grants, and monarchs were not in a position to dispose of all land at will. We are not dealing with an oriental despotism, or with a society in which the entire population outside the palace lived without rights in a state of servility.

But we should be very wary of supposing that, on the contrary, all or most of the Khmer people, high and low, participated in the charitable, judicial, fiscal and other proceedings that the inscriptions describe, for the reason that the available evidence does not make it obvious whether the people who play a role in the inscriptions, buying, selling, giving and receiving, are the whole of Khmer free society or only the most affluent part. Further, we do not know what was the proportion of slaves to free men. If slaves were in fact the greater part of the population, it makes rather less sense to regard the class of people figuring in the inscriptions as a total Khmer peasant population.

It is true that many of the individuals named for us bear no titles and are the recipients of no dignities. But this does not mean that these ordinary, common, free men are not in fact members of a propertied elite. They commonly appear, in the records of donations, as men of substance. A man designated as a mere *vāp*, for example, owns slaves and is a *grā-mavṛdhi*, a village elder¹³⁵. People designated as *loñ* figure among officials (*khloñ*) involved in the donation of land to a foundation¹³⁶. A *loñ* who is grandson of a sacerdotal *steñ añ* (who was a teacher of a king) makes a foundation and gives two hundred slaves¹³⁷. Another *loñ*, related to a teacher whose title is the same as his name, suggests that hereditary titles could become family names¹³⁸. It seems likely that we are here dealing with an elite, whether that elite is to be distinguished from a majority of peasant cultivators and from slaves, or from slaves only¹³⁹. Within the land-holding elite, various institutions exist to share out influence and patronage so that various interests shall be gratified and, ideally, conflicts avoided, and the

¹³³ S. Sahai, *op.cit.*, pp. 139ff, 143, 145.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹³⁵ *IC*, 3.148-156.

¹³⁶ *IC*, 3.164-169.

¹³⁷ *IC*, 4.45-52, Stele of central tower, K. 933.

¹³⁸ *IC*, 5.202-209, A.15-B.1.

¹³⁹ According to S. Sahai, terms such as *loñ*, *tān* and *vāp* refer to subordinate functions, individuals so titled often having the office of *khloñ*; *op.cit.*, p. 56. Cp. Y. Bongert, "Note sur l'esclavage en droit khmer ancien", *loc. cit.*, p. 17. Though low in the official hierarchy, such individuals were (if with the exceptions of *loñ* and *tān* from the twelfth century) élite figures nevertheless. Personal communications from S. Pou (Saveros Lewitz) and Im Proum support the view that *loñ* and *vāp* were dignitaries (cited, I.W. Mabbett, 'Varnas in Angkor and the Indian caste system', *JAS*, vol. XXXVI no. 3, 1977, pp. 429-442).

legitimate ruler, being by virtue of his office held to be above the politics of potentially hostile groups, is alone empowered to distribute a share of the fruits of all land for the support of the elite and the prosecution of works for the public, or religious, good. In this situation the enmeshing of various interests, the diffusion of benefits, are sought as ends in themselves, and it is therefore not surprising to find this instinctive feeling for social interdependence expressed thus in the language of religion:

*Upadiṣṭānumantā ca karttā kārāyitā ca yah || kṛtānupālakaś caiva pañcatulyaphalāh smṛtāh*¹⁴⁰
The recommender, the authorizer, the instrument, the agent and the guardian [of a charitable work]—these five are considered to have equal reward.

Government

The situation just described, in which political harmony and organization are maintained by a king giving patronage to an elite, his power enhanced and limited in various ways by this function, is a reasonable hypothesis which creates expectations about the other areas of enquiry which seem to be fulfilled when we turn to the evidence.

In the first place, we expect to find high officials behaving like barons rather than bureaucrats, receiving rewards from the king and dispensing largesse in turn to their own clients. We expect to find these figures occupying positions as much in the king's household as in the state apparatus, no distinction being made between these two because both are merged in the function of supporting a party centred on the king.

It should be noted that princes played a part in the government, much as in India—heading parts of the administration, governing territory in the provinces (where, some Sanskrit texts suggest darkly, they are out of the way and less likely to be a threat), and, in particular in Angkor, leading military expeditions¹⁴¹.

We find it said that Jayavarman VI gave riches to his servants¹⁴²; the 'people' of a particular place (the family of its lords) are favourites and receive various honours, one for example being made chief of the hunters of royal elephants¹⁴³; a *rājasabhāpati* (high court dignitary) is honoured by the king and given wealth which he uses to benefit a religious foundation¹⁴⁴. Honours and high office are often hereditary, and it is not unusual to find the families of ministers and priests holding high office for generations; sometimes one individual holds office

¹⁴⁰ *IC*, 5.191-197, Gopura at monument B. This is a quotation from a Sanskrit text.

¹⁴¹ *BEFEO* XXXI (1931), p. 6, verse VII; *ibid.* XXIX (1929), pp. 309-311; *IC*, 2.176 verse 57; also see S. Sahai, *op. cit.*, pp. 51ff.

¹⁴² *IC*, 6.300-311, st. XVI.

¹⁴³ *BEFEO*, vol. XIII (1913), Coedès, "Etudes Cambodgiennes XI", pp. 27-36.

¹⁴⁴ *IC*, 1.12-15.

under several succeeding kings¹⁴⁵. There is a curious case of an inscription naming various brothers of a dignitary Bhūpatīndravallabha (the name itself means 'favourite of the lord of the earth'); the names of the kings these brothers served have been systematically erased and replaced with the names of various kings with the effect of spreading the careers of the brothers over two centuries¹⁴⁶.

Not only priests and ministers but generals are involved personally with kings, and have dignities and court functions¹⁴⁷. *Senāpati*, general, figures as a title of royal ancestors on the Ta Prohm stele¹⁴⁸. A general Saṅgrāma offers to a *liṅga* the booty received from Udayadityavarman II¹⁴⁹. Royal favourites appear with ceremonial positions and what look like sinecures at court: a family with the function of fan-bearing served 13 kings from Jayavarman II onwards¹⁵⁰; the younger son of a district chief is appointed chief of artists by the king and given land¹⁵¹; a member of a family of wise men has a position as barber¹⁵²; a royal elephant keeper makes a pious endowment¹⁵³; a Pon Vastrapāla who may be a wardrobe keeper makes a gift of slaves¹⁵⁴.

It is clear that there was at the court a network of relationships between the high families in the land, each seeking involvement with the fortunes of the ruler by receiving official appointments, honorary titles, gifts or other palpable marks of royal favour, and direct association by concubinage with the king, who had many concubines recruited from the ranks of the elite¹⁵⁵. Chou Ta Kuan reported that the women of the harem were pale in colour, which he attributed to their seclusion indoors, though they may have been imported members of other races; according to him the king had five wives and 3,000-5,000 concubines and girls, though he had to take this on hearsay because they were kept to their apartments¹⁵⁶. The inscriptions sometimes refer to the involvement of queens and princesses in practical affairs, chiefly making pious endowments. A notable example is Jayarājadevī, queen of Jayavarman VII, who was said, in an inscription composed by her sister and successor as queen Indradevī, to have rained her beneficence upon all creatures, devoted to the good of the world, to have endowed various foundations and statues dedicated to relatives and dignitaries, and in particular to have adopted as her own daughters a number of girls abandoned by their mothers¹⁵⁷. Any direct influence upon high policy exercised by women is likely to have been informal. The Burmese legend of the regicide gardener who became king (seen by E. Huber as the basis for

¹⁴⁵ *BEFEO*, vol. XXV (1925), p. 335; vol. XLIII pp. 56-134 at pp. 56f; cp. *ibid.*, pp. 134ff. side A; *IC*, 1.7-12; 1.227-249; 5.229-234; 6.123-127; 7.164-189. Cp. S. Sahai, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹⁴⁶ *IC*, 5.244-269.

¹⁴⁷ *IC*, 5.240 verse XV; *I C*, 6.305 verse XL. See also S. Sahai, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹⁴⁸ *BEFEO*, vol. VI (1906), pp. 44-81 at st. XXXIII.

¹⁴⁹ *ISC*, pp. 145, 172.

¹⁵⁰ *IC*, 1, 195-219.

¹⁵¹ *IC*, 3.3-24 Vat Baset inscriptions, sanctuary, south door, west pier, VII, IX.

¹⁵² *IC*, 5.119-124 at st. XXVIII.

¹⁵³ *IC*, 6.14f.

¹⁵⁴ *IC*, 6.18f.

¹⁵⁵ See P. Pelliot, *loc. cit.*, pp. 147ff.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁵⁷ *IC*, 2.161-181 at st. LXXI, LXXIX.

the Cambodian version) represents the queen as giving orders to the government after the king's death and during his pretended illness¹⁵⁸. The picture of royal behaviour given by such a legend is better historical evidence about the relationships concerned than one might consider on first thoughts, but of course it is entirely speculative how far this feature of the story might have a bearing on Angkor. Women played an important part in the court elite at Angkor, however, perhaps echoing the indigenous usages of prehistoric times in southeast Asia when women were not yet eclipsed by the patriarchal traditions of imported (or agricultural) cultures. The subject deserves greater study¹⁵⁹.

A part of the web of obligation and influence at court more easy to identify than the machinations of women, whose activity behind the scenes may or may not have been occasionally decisive, is the role of the great men, often priests, who figure in the inscriptions recording their own lordly endowments as devoted servants of kings or of generations of kings, as we noticed above. As instructors of kings while they were minors, as officiants at the major religious ceremonies, as qualified experts in law and the technical aspects of government, and as members of landed families with numerous clients of their own in all manner of temple and official positions, they were in a position to exercise a considerable influence upon the conduct of policy. It was for the king to choose his most intimate advisers from among them, and to arbitrate when they disagreed. He was expected to be guided by the advice of his *mantrins*, ministers, and a ruler is represented as doing so, for example, in the Pre Rup stele inscription¹⁶⁰. The *vrah guru* was often important, particularly at the time of Jayavarman VII, educating the royal prince, sacrificing for rain, and controlling the administration of some royal foundation lands¹⁶¹. It is important to recognize that the modern idea of a state constitution, in which high functionaries take offices with defined and limited powers which circumscribe their influence, is inappropriate here. A man's power was defined by his informal influence and by his closeness to the king, measured in gifts and honours. Power, it should be stressed, was something that arose from relationships and needed to be negotiated.

The ceremonial and honorary character of many offices under the king is represented further by a whole variety of positions in groups of individuals often mentioned in inscriptions as *varṇas*. The nature of these bodies is not obvious, and has given rise to some discussion¹⁶². It is best here simply to state a view, which may well be open to challenge, that has been advanced elsewhere. This view is that, in contrast to India where *varṇas* were and are broad divisions of the in-caste population, their apparent counterparts in Cambodia were orders of dignity conferred by the king upon individuals at the court. There were *varṇas* that were given land at their inauguration (like the dignitaries of various sorts already considered), and they were charged with often apparently ceremonial functions around the palace—religious

¹⁵⁸ E. Huber, *loc. cit.*

¹⁵⁹ On women at the Angkorian court, see K. O'Sullivan, "Concentric conformity in ancient Khmer kinship organization", *BIE*, pp. 87-96.

¹⁶⁰ *IC*, 1.73-142 at st. LXI.

¹⁶¹ See S. Sahai, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁶² See A.K. Chakravarti, "The caste system in ancient Cambodia", *JAIH*, vol. IV, (1971), pp. 14-59, and "Caste system in ancient Cambodia", *ibid.*, vol. VI (1972-73), pp. 143-158; I.W. Mabbett, "Varnas in ancient Cambodia", *ibid.*, pp. 5-38, and "Varnas in Angkor and the Indian caste system", *loc. cit.*

teachers, performers of certain rites, door guardians, keepers of the sacred gardens, palace servants, bearers of fly-whisks, artists, and so forth¹⁶³. The *varṇas* thus seem to be rather more like enfeoffed orders of knighthood than guilds of artisans.

As for the bureaucracy, the mass of royal clients with official rather than honorary rank, this is not the place for a systematic study of its divisions and functions, but certain salient features deserve notice. Reference may be made here to the study by Sahai, who notices about a score of hierarchical titles from *vāp* upwards¹⁶⁴. (Not all such appellations are necessarily titles in the strict sense.)

One salient feature is the multitude of ranks and offices mentioned in various connections in the inscriptions, as those of people making endowments, as those of people ordered by the king to carry out certain proceedings involved in the endowments, or as those of people whose authority is excluded from the territory of the endowments. A second is the fact that the official class, or a great part of it, is not easily to be distinguished either from the great and influential men at court or from the landowning class of pious donors. Time and time again there are references to individuals whose careers involved various official offices under the king, the receipt of honour and influential status from him, and the position of lordly landowner and donor, or some combination of these elements. We are confronted by a general class of families of substance all seeking recruitment into the royal service or other forms of recognition of their status. Thirdly, we may notice the abundance of official functions involving claims on the produce and services arising from land; the subject of exclusions, already discussed, constitutes evidence of this.

The *khloñ*, chief, is often mentioned and appears in many forms according to function. The various types of *khloñ*, and some others such as the *guṇadoṣadarśin* (literally 'inspector of merits and faults'), so regularly appear in connection with the demarcation of land given to foundations and the organization of their revenues that K. Bhattacharya has described the *guṇadoṣadarśin*, the *khloñ glān*, the *khloñ kṣetra*, and the *khloñ kārya* among others as temple functionaries: "their designations themselves are eloquent on the manifold nature of duties to be performed by the personnel of an ancient Khmer temple"¹⁶⁵. The *khloñ kṣetra* is seen by him as the head of the sanctuary—a donor of land in one place specifies that it is separated from his own family and that its slaves must obey only the *kṣetrādhipa* (the Sanskrit equivalent of *khloñ kṣetra*)—the chief of the domains¹⁶⁶. The *khloñ kārya* is paraphrased in Sanskrit in one place as the superintendent of work¹⁶⁷. The *guṇadoṣadarśin* is often involved in demarcation commissions. The *khloñ glān* is in charge of the storehouses.

It is possible that no very clear line separated the organization of what may be called the official bureaucracy from the administration of temples. It must be remembered that many

¹⁶³ See *IC*, 4.45-52 K933, lines 23-26; *IC*, 4.102-105, south pier; *IC*, 4.106f.; *IC*, 6.287-292, pier, Vat Baset, line 43; *IC*, 4, p. 142ff., ll. 19-20; 5.233 n. 1 cp. *BEFEO*, vol. XVIII (1918), no. 9, p. 6; *IC*, 7.46, cp. *IC*, 5.206.

¹⁶⁴ S. Sahai, *op. cit.*, pp. 56ff.

¹⁶⁵ K. Bhattacharya, *loc. cit.*, pp. 195ff.

¹⁶⁶ *IC*, 3.180-192 at p. 184, st. XXXI.

¹⁶⁷ *IC*, 5.244ff. at st. LXXXIII.

of the largest foundations were royal, that the administration of their revenues, which came in some cases from hundreds of villages, necessarily required considerable organization, and the maintenance of public welfare by acts of piety and by administrative activity were not regarded as separate occupations. Du Bourg, writing about the term *anray*, which occurs in some inscriptions, suggests that it is a unit of religious administration, with its own personnel and perhaps its own religious jurisdiction¹⁶⁸.

The abundance of official ranks is easily illustrated. Familiar from lists of officials whose authority is excluded from donations is the *khloñ rājakārya*¹⁶⁹ (to whatever extent he may be distinguished from the *khloñ kārya*), whose importance or ubiquity can be imagined from the scale of Angkorian public works. The *rājakārya* is equivalent to corvée, though it could be commuted to crop levies or paid off by selling land¹⁷⁰. There are the *tāmṛvac*, 'inspector', an important official of whom various types appear, the *khloñ karmāntara* (perhaps associated with funerary ceremonies), the *khloñ cralo*, the *khloñ can*, the *khloñ vnam* (head of sanctuary), the *khloñ bhūtāśa* (*bhūtāśa* is a minor functionary), the *khloñ sru* (concerned with grain¹⁷¹), the *khloñ jnval* (concerned with employees¹⁷²), the *khloñ mukha* (in charge of arrangements for one of the fortnights of temple dues), and the *khloñ samtap*¹⁷³. Particularly familiar are the heads of population and of districts, *khloñ vala* and *viśaya*, the first of these being especially common in lists of exclusions, and appearing in various forms (such as the *khloñ vala* of students, etc.).

Some others are the *mūla tāmṛvac vyavahārī* (a commercial or judicial functionary¹⁷⁴), the *vriha*, the *kandvar cramlo* (these two figuring in exclusions¹⁷⁵), the *rājakulamahāmantrin* (a Sanskrit title of a high official¹⁷⁶), *ranvan* (perhaps elders rather than officials, but subject to royal instructions in the matter of demarcating granted land¹⁷⁷), the *sabhāpati* (Sanskrit: judge or chief magistrate¹⁷⁸), and the *vrah̄ sabhā* (members of the court). The 'corps of pages', *kanmyān pamre*, is another case of involvement of recipients of royal favour with executive business: we see its members having their authority in granted land affected by exclusions, carrying royal orders to the villages, and so forth¹⁷⁹.

All these officials are represented in the inscriptions involved in the ways mentioned above. An example of a case where numerous dignitaries (priestly and official) are mentioned together

¹⁶⁸ H. de Mestier du Bourg, '*Anray*', *loc. cit.*

¹⁶⁹ G. Coedès writes of *rājakārya*: "cette expression, qui revient fréquemment, pourrait d'après M. Au Chhieng se rapporter à l'achat d'une charge". *IC*, 5 p. 131 n. 1. This interpretation has been refuted by S. Sahai, *op. cit.* pp. 114f, n.10. See also *ibid.*, pp. 114-116 and p. 118.

¹⁷⁰ See S. Sahai, *op. cit.*

¹⁷¹ *IC*, 6.211 st XCVI.

¹⁷² *IC*, 5.184, 3 p. 14 n. 1.

¹⁷³ See *IC*, 3.55.

¹⁷⁴ *IC*, 3.98.

¹⁷⁵ *IC*, 5.145; 2.66; 2.113.

¹⁷⁶ See *IC*, 7.89.

¹⁷⁷ See *IC*, 6.214f.

¹⁷⁸ See *IC*, 6.236-9 at p. 236.

¹⁷⁹ See *IC*, 5.125-142, 3.109-115, 1.187f. On *kanmyān*, see also S. Lewitz, "Recherches sur le vocabulaire cambodgien", *JA* (1974), section VII, pp. 167-170.

will give some idea of the sort of context involved. The west pier of the south door of the sanctuary at Vat Baset carries an inscription telling of a Śrī Guṇapativarman (known from elsewhere as an inspector of corvée) who buys certain land to offer to a god and entrust to his children, who are presumably to exploit it for the benefit of the foundation. The transaction is a solemn one, and the witnesses to the purchase are listed. They include Sten Stuk Kandan (inspector of the doorway), Kamsteñ Mat Tarāñ (*khloñ mukha* for one fortnight), Kamsteñ Vina (*khloñ mukha* for the other), Kamsteñ Bhīṣaṇavāsa (the head of a holy hermitage), Kamsteñ Yanap (*vrah sabhā*), Khloñ Vala Stuk Sno, Kamsteñ Vrah Jranyan (*cañcañ*), the *kamsteñ* guardian of the sacred registers for one fortnight in a certain village, Kamsteñ Jamrau (artist in the service of the god), Mratāñ (a granted honorary title) Khloñ Pralay, an inspector of corvée, a *khloñ kandvara* and others. There follows a list of members of the court who demarcated the land¹⁸⁰.

Cases such as these, which could easily be multiplied, show the importance of the occasion of an endowment to the whole district, and the priestly titles prefixing the ranks and names of many of the officials show how the government's legal and fiscal affairs were married with those of the temple communities.

Reliable information about the organization of the bureaucracy in districts and villages is scant. There are, of course, various references to a division of officialdom into four houses or orders (named the first, second, etc.)¹⁸¹, a division the nature of which is not altogether clear. These houses have been seen by Coedès and Dupont as the original system from which evolved the division of Cambodia, as known in the nineteenth century, into four appanages under the king, the heir apparent, the junior heir apparent, and the queen mother or first queen¹⁸². Bongert, cited by Sahai, suggests that the Angkorian four categories were echelons, vertical divisions; Sahai, however, points to the fact that officers of the first and fourth categories have the same titles, and suggests that they may have been geographical, administrative divisions¹⁸³.

The well-known inscription recording the oath of loyalty sworn by officials to Sūryavarman I once his power was established¹⁸⁴ is interesting but ambiguous on the subject of bureaucratic organization. There are eight lists of oath-takers with about 400 names. These were taken by Aymonier to be those of the district chiefs, so that the empire of 1011 A.D. could be inferred to have had about 400 districts (*sruk*)¹⁸⁵. Coedès, however, offers three reasons why this should not be so: firstly, these men are *tāmṛvac*, inspectors, not heads of particular districts; secondly, the king's instructions as recorded concern qualities of fidelity, courage in combat, zeal in carrying out missions and so forth rather than district administration; and, thirdly, the *sruk* named do not include many of those known from other sources to have existed—sometimes there are several names to one *sruk*, and these allusions to districts may be allusions

¹⁸⁰ *IC*, 3.3-24. Sanctuary, south door, west pier, 11. 13-20.

¹⁸¹ See *BEFEO*, vol. XLIII, Sdok Kak Thom, face D 11.44; *IC*, 3.205-216; cp. *BEFEO*, vol. XIII no. 6, p. 11; *ibid.*, vol. XXXVII, p. 379.

¹⁸² See *BEFEO*, vol. XLIII, p. 122 n. 3.

¹⁸³ S. Sahai, *op.cit.*, pp. 47f.

¹⁸⁴ *IC*, 3.205-216.

¹⁸⁵ E.F. Aymonier, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 140.

to places of origin, and occasionally to granted fiefs. These *tāmr̥vac* should therefore be seen rather as an elite corps from which the king chose his trusted servants, “*un corps d’administrateurs, une sorte de garde d’élite, au sein de laquelle le souverain choisissait des hommes de confiance*”¹⁸⁶.

References to territorial divisions are thus not to be found in the degree of detail that is desirable. The major divisions, provinces, were known as *pramān* (or in Sanskrit *viṣaya*), though in the Sdok Kak Thom stele inscription *pramān* occurs as the equivalent of Sanskrit *deśa* (region or district), and *viṣaya* occurs also without any consistent system of correspondences being evident¹⁸⁷. Lewitz writes of a hierarchy of *pramān*, *viṣaya* and *sruk*—territory, district and village¹⁸⁸—(*sruk* perhaps commonly refers to the area of a religious foundation). How far down into the villages the tentacles of government reached is not easy to specify. It is likely that village temples were local units of organization of population. For what it is worth, Chou Ta Kuan reported that every village had its temple and its policeman—*mai tsie*, equivalent to the Khmer *me srok*¹⁸⁹. Reference may be made to the work of S. Sahai, who identifies administrative units and locates Sanskrit toponyms¹⁹⁰.

Loyalty to the king, as Sūryavarman I knew, was a problem in a society where claims to embody *dharma* with divine sanction, rather than a modern state constitution, gave legitimacy, and where parties were always liable to form round rival claimants with ramifications extending throughout the elite. Sūryavarman claimed to choose his servants by age, ability and family qualities rather than by gossip¹⁹¹. Another inscription mentions a minister appointed principal counsellor because of skill in his functions¹⁹², and another mentions a judge appointed because of his impartiality¹⁹³. It is not surprising that ability should be rated a qualification, but the ubiquity of family connections in the mentions of ranks makes it natural to suppose that influence and family counted for a great deal. The analogy with Indian kingdoms, with their rampant intrigue, treason, subornment and espionage, would suggest that spies played a considerable part in the maintenance of a king’s position, but we should not expect to find their activities celebrated in the records of charitable endowments. There is, though, a rather tortuous allusion to espionage in a *praśasti* of Rājendrarvarman, for whom it was claimed in the course of a series of stylised *doubles entendres* using Vedānta terminology that he gained knowledge from the reports of spies¹⁹⁴.

It is possible to see the bureaucracy in Angkor as an aspect of the network of relationships between well-endowed families by which their affairs were interwoven and the king sought to enlist the acquiescence of as many families as possible in his role as an impartial umpire

¹⁸⁶ *IC*, 3.205ff. S. Sahai (*op.cit.*, p. 54), speculates whether after Sūryavarman it may have become normal practice for large numbers of royal servants to swear allegiance.

¹⁸⁷ See *BEFEO*, vol. XLIII, p. 104, n. 9; vol. XV, p. 112.

¹⁸⁸ S. Lewitz, “La toponymie khmère”, *loc. cit.*, pp. 406ff.

¹⁸⁹ *BEFEO*, vol. II (1902), p. 173.

¹⁹⁰ S. Sahai, *op. cit.*, pp. 74ff.

¹⁹¹ *IC*, 1.195-219, 2nd inscription, st. LXIX.

¹⁹² *IC*, 6.100-106, south pier, st. XIX.

¹⁹³ *IC*, 115-118 st. VII.

¹⁹⁴ *IC*, 1.73-142 st. LVIII.

of society by distributing rewards of various sorts. Royal servants were members of a party rather than civil servants in the modern sense. This at any rate a survey of the royal service allows us to believe. But of course a king's legitimacy was not secured merely by distributing a share of the fat of the land to prominent families. It was secured by the protection of the undifferentiated public interest, a function with religious significance, and this involved the preservation of the peace and the undertaking of public works. "From the time when he received the royal power, he made this promise: 'In five days from today, I shall begin to dig, etc.'"¹⁹⁵ (The "etc." can scarcely be more gracefully translated from the Sanskrit "-*adi*" in the text.)

This celebrated undertaking of Indravarman I indicates a monarch's awareness of his duty to take responsibility for the maintenance and extension of the Angkorian irrigation system. From the end of the ninth century onwards, this responsibility was a heavy one, for the earthworks which we may suppose the officials of the *rājakārya* to have supervised and which alone made possible the highly productive rice culture that sustained the Khmer population, are staggering in the scale of their construction. It would take fleets of modern earth-moving equipment many years to accomplish the same work. The study of these reservoir and canal systems belongs to archeology rather than here, but the mighty excavations, undertaken by successive kings alongside their less obviously utilitarian though more spectacular religious constructions, necessarily form an imposing background to an excursion through any area of Khmer government. In the inscriptions however, there are only scattered references to public works of construction which appear more or less incidentally to the record of pious foundations. Sūryavarman II, for example, ordered royal artisans to set up a village, building a tower, digging a reservoir and so forth¹⁹⁶, and in the same vein we have noticed how the Sdok Kak Thom stele inscription records the digging and building that went on when priests received from kings grants of land and the means to establish communities. The Prasat Tor stele inscription refers to a reservoir dug by Jayavarman VII¹⁹⁷, and Chou Ta Kuan mentions resthouses provided by the government along the roads¹⁹⁸.

Education is an accepted public welfare responsibility of the state in modern societies, but in Angkor this was the initiative of individual teachers and temples. Much study went on in communities of holy men, and some teachers set themselves up in the temples of Jayavarman VII¹⁹⁹. Brahmans and monks, of course, had in front of them the Indian traditions of the *brahmacārin* who studied under, and served in all capacities, his preceptor during his youth. Dignitaries of various sorts and members of the royal family sometimes give instruction to groups of people; Indradevī, queen of Jayavarman VII and evidently a lady of some accomplishment, gave instruction to assemblies of women in a Buddhist temple²⁰⁰.

But, when we think of public works, it is of course Jayavarman VII who springs first to

¹⁹⁵ *IC*, 2.17-31 at st. VII.

¹⁹⁶ *BEFEO*, vol. XLIII, inscriptions of Prah Vihar and Phnom Sandak, pp. 134ff, at face B 11.20-22.

¹⁹⁷ *IC*, 1.227-249 at st. XXVII.

¹⁹⁸ *BEFEO*, vol. II (1902), p. 173.

¹⁹⁹ See S. Sahai, *op.cit.*, pp. 28ff.

²⁰⁰ *IC*, 2.161-181 (Great Stele of the Phimeanakas), st. XCVIII.

mind, with his resthouses, his 102 hospitals, and all the rest. Various inscriptions commemorating his hospital foundations have come to light. For example, the inscription of Say Fong, in modern Laos (an indication of the extent in one direction of the territory under Jayavarman's control) tells of an *ārogyasāla* built as part of the organization of a Buddhist temple. It gives highly specific details of such matters as the numbers of the personnel and the thrice-yearly handouts of food and clothing²⁰¹. A foundation recorded in the same terms is recorded by the hospital stele of Chean Chum²⁰². The Ta Prohm stele inscription records the addition of buildings including a great number of residences to an already existing foundation, and lists the goods assigned by the king to support it, making mention of the 102 hospitals which Jayavarman claimed to have founded in various provinces²⁰³. It was the foundation of Ta Prohm whose superior was responsible for the appointment of the personnel of the hospitals²⁰⁴.

Coedès comments that the goods listed as assigned from the royal store are much more than the quantity obtained by multiplying the allocation made in any one hospital edict by 102, and imply the support, not simply of hospitals, but of a regular health service—consuming 11,192 tons of rice, 2,124 kilogrammes of sesame, 105 kilogrammes of cardamums, and so forth²⁰⁵.

The oddity of this testimony commonly escapes remark. It is not just that there is lacking any evidence of other kings doing exactly the same thing, for Jayavarman VII did nothing by halves and left as much for posterity to judge him by as the other kings of Angkor put together. What is striking is that hospitals, whether public or private, were never an ancient Khmer institution. As in India at the same time, illness was traditionally treated in the home. We must therefore treat Jayavarman's hospitals as attesting, all the more, the extraordinary enterprise of an innovating monarch anxious to accumulate as much merit as a *bodhisattva*.

Though provision for royal servants and public works must have been expensive, these were not the only major areas of government activity. The chronological record of the Khmer kingdom as a whole is sufficient evidence of the importance of the imperial motive, and the Angkor Wat and Bayon gallery friezes, with their vivid battle and military parade scenes, are eloquent of the ambitiousness of martial enterprise. In the telescoped perspective of history, Angkor seems at first glance a powerful and stable polity; but it did not always seem so to its men of affairs, and the threats to imperial unity or continuity from the great men of its outer provinces, from the Chams to the east, and eventually from the Siamese who finally assisted in its downfall, constantly exercised the diplomatic and military talents of its rulers. The history of the Angkorian empire in the sense of its geographical extent is something which may, with some caution, be reconstructed from the density and location of its inscriptions,

²⁰¹ *BEFEO*, vol. III (1903), pp. 18-33.

²⁰² See Bergaigne, "Les inscriptions sanscrites du Cambodge", *JA*, vol. XX (1882).

²⁰³ *BEFEO*, vol. VI (1906), pp. 44-81. The Digraphic inscriptions of Yasovarman, which deserve more attention than they have received, offer some parallel to the welfare policies of Jayavarman. See G. Coedès, "Etudes cambodgiennes, XXX: à la recherche du Yaçodharāçrama", *BEFEO*, vol. XXXII (1932), pp. 84-112. See especially Prasat Kamnap inscription, st. LXV.

²⁰⁴ G. Coedès, "Etudes cambodgiennes, XXXIV: les hôpitaux de Jayavarman VII", *BEFEO*, vol. 40. pp. 344-347.

²⁰⁵ G. Coedès, *Un grand roi du Cambodge - Jayavarman VII*, p. 35.

and Parmentier published six maps of the empire, showing the empire in successive periods, as early as 1916²⁰⁶. Various handicaps arising from the varying incidence of inscriptions, which he acknowledged, impede the drawing of boundaries with any confidence (he mapped sites of inscriptions, not frontiers). Another handicap was the fact that, when he wrote, the chronology of the monuments and hence the importance of some reigns were not yet fully understood. A more general obstacle to reaching firm conclusions about the extent of empire arises from the fluidity of its nature, a fluidity which is suggested by a comparison with Indian models—instead of frontiers, we should think rather of the shading off of spheres of influence²⁰⁷.

Far less is known about Khmer diplomacy and military organization than about Indian usage. But it is known that the Sanskrit *śāstras* were revered and the Indian language of politics familiar, and it is tempting to make considerable use of Indian sources. Though the application of these to Cambodian conditions is entirely speculative, some general features of the Indian political environment are entirely likely to have made the journey to the Indianized kingdoms, and it is in order to refer briefly to some inferences which may be drawn from the Sanskrit technical literature²⁰⁸.

The chief point to make is that the modern idea of a territorial state is scarcely appropriate to the thought-world of the *śāstras*. We do not find in Sanskrit literature any development of the notions of state constitutions, constitutional legitimacy, or territorial jurisdiction circumscribed by precise frontiers, and the consequences of this feature of theory are indeed quite important for an understanding of the corresponding political realities. For what this means is that the field of a ruler's ambitions was not, even ideally, confined to an area of territory with known boundaries: he was automatically in competition with all other kings and would-be kings around him. Naturally, known boundaries came to be established in practice, following the indications of geography, settlement or previous conquest, but these were not fundamental to the definition of legitimacy, and warfare was endemic. This view makes sense of various characteristics of the Indian evidence—the way in which, for example, even in sources whose very nature is to define righteous and moral behaviour, it is taken for granted that a king should be dedicated to conquest for the sake of glory. Military strategy and tactics are not distinguished from diplomacy or administrative organization—all are parts of the science of kingship, and martial technique bulks very large. The idea here is that the all-powerful king is the one appointed by the gods, so to speak, and the one in the shadow of whose glory the harmony of society is preserved and by whose righteous authority the usages and the security of the population are protected. The ideal of the universal emperor, the *cakravartin*, follows naturally. The aspiring *cakravartin* is at the centre of a circle, *maṇḍala*, whose constituents are *rājyas*. *Rājya* is usually misleadingly translated as “state”, but it seems better to adopt the more literally correct interpretation as rule or regime. Within the *maṇḍala*, neighbouring regimes are automatically enemies, and it is the ambition of a ruler to secure, not the destruction of the other *rājyas* (which would cause the *maṇḍala* to cease to exist),

206 H. Parmentier, *loc. cit.*

207 Cp. E. Leach, “The frontiers of ‘Burma’”, *CSSH*, vol. III (1960-61), pp. 49-68.

208 See Mabbett, *op. cit.*

but their submission and homage to his glory—usually though not necessarily to be brought about by conquest—whereby his empire is constituted.

The idea of the *maṇḍala* was recognized in Angkor. It was said, for example, that Rājendravarman's *maṇḍala* was rich and without faction²⁰⁹. Elsewhere, it was claimed for him that he caused evil to diminish and good to increase in it²¹⁰. Again, there is a mention of the *maṇḍala* along with the seven constituents (*prakṛtis*) which in Indian theory make up a regime, *rājya*²¹¹.

That the Indian vocabulary of politics was taken over *holus-bolus*, and that claims could be made to empire without the territories claimed necessarily being administratively integrated, are apparent from the occasional *prasasti* boast that a ruler's dominion extended "as far as Sindhu".²¹²

The constant wars with the rival Champa exercised many kings. According to Chou Ta Kuan, who, incidentally, was told that Angkor had more than 90 vassal states, Champa had at one time been in a position to exact a regular tribute of a jar of human gall, a practice the existence of which is confirmed by other references²¹³. Tribute, possibly but not necessarily associated with the installation of a new ruler, was the expected consequence of subjugation according to the Indian theory, and Jayavarman VII was acting in accordance with this when he captured and released the king of Champa²¹⁴.

It is important to recognize that, outside the home territory around the capital, empire was constituted by acknowledgement of the emperor's superior glory and by offering tribute rather than by total absorption into the administrative apparatus of the capital. Hence, empire was precarious; rulers had to placate the great men of the provinces with rewards; and in succession disputes there was a tendency for rivals to develop regional bases of power. Revolt was a constant fear. The disturbances attending the accession to the throne of Sūryavarman I, defeating his rivals after years of struggle, are well known, and as we have seen the Sdok Kak Thom stele inscription mentions the ravages caused by the fighting. This picture of the constitution of empire perhaps assists the comprehension of how it should finally disintegrate and allow an external power to assume the mantle of overlordship, as finally happened to Angkor in the circumstances discussed by O.W. Wolters²¹⁵.

Military expenditure could be heavy. But it is not to be supposed that there were regular standing armies of many thousands of men. The Indian manuals of statecraft specify that an army is recruited from various sources of which only one, *maula*, is the basic standing army. The rest is made up in various ways by calling upon the obligations of feudatories, martial guilds and various local communities. There are various contingents, and in Cambodia

²⁰⁹ IC, 1.73-142, Pre Rup stele inscription, at st. CCXLI.

²¹⁰ IC, 5.164-169 at st. XV.

²¹¹ IC, 5.222-228, face A, st. I. See also S. Sahai, *op. cit.*, pp. 12ff

²¹² G. Coedès, "Études cambodgiennes V", *loc. cit.*, p. 402, st. IV; IC, 3.105-108 at st. XI; IC, 3.180-192 at st. III.

²¹³ See BEFEO, vol. II (1902), pp. 172 ff.

²¹⁴ IC, 4.207-253; BEFEO, vol. VI (1906), pp. 44-81, st. XXVIII.

²¹⁵ O.W. Wolters, "The Khmer King at Basan (1371-73)...", *loc. cit.*

the Angkor Wat gallery reliefs represent the distinctive appearance of different groups in the army. In an emergency, resources might indeed be extended by conscription or something like it—Chou Ta Kuan was told that everybody was required to fight in the war against the Siamese²¹⁶.

The king's role as conqueror, or defender against would-be conquerors, was central to the general conception of his status according to the ideas considered above, and strong kings at least, who asserted authority with their advisers, were commanders-in-chief of their forces and controlled military policy. Army leaders depended for their position and wealth upon rewards given by the king, who alone was in a position to distribute booty, and there are several inscriptional references to this sort of patronage²¹⁷. It is a natural extension of the idea of royal responsibility that kings should be represented in *praśastis* as carrying in battles swords red with the blood of their enemies²¹⁸, felling their foes with vibrant blades²¹⁹, cleaving the bodies of their enemies with displays of awesome skill²²⁰, and the like, but these are figures of speech²²¹.

Clearly the military, public works and bureaucratic activities of government required sizeable revenues, and many of the types of official figuring in exclusions from royal endowments are likely to have been involved in the collection and application of these revenues. Assessments were largely in kind, rated at so much for varying periods, in given quantities of goods rather than as a proportion (thus in contrast to India, and probably also to Champa)²²². The vast quantities of rice and other goods levied in the king's name were placed in the royal store, *rājakoṣṭha*, for disbursement at need. Particular districts were liable to particular levies, others being excluded; there is an example of a territory (still a great honey producer) liable to tax in the form of wax, honey and nothing else; it is said to be outside the jurisdiction of the *khloñ viṣaya* and other officers, and that if the officials of the district do not conform the wax superintendent is to report to the king²²³. There are comparable cases of inscriptions enumerating districts which are to supply grain, honey and wax²²⁴. Sahai notices such levies in kind, and mentions royal storehouses containing honey, wax, butter, salt, spices, camphor and so forth²²⁵. He also suggests that taxes should not be seen as the salary of the king but as his right²²⁶. The king "ate" his territory. Under Yaśovarman, the king's tax collector was compared to a bee²²⁷. This reminds us of the doctrine explicit in Sanskrit texts that taxation should be moderate, for excessive taxation, like excessive exploitation of flowers by bees, harms future productivity—what we might think of as the 'golden egg' theory.

²¹⁶ BEFEO, vol II (1902), pp. 175f.

²¹⁷ See IC, 5.229-234, cp. IC, 5.238-243: ISCC, pp. 145, 172.

²¹⁸ BEFEO, vol. XLIII, Sdok Kak Thom, st. XIV.

²¹⁹ IC, 1.17-38 at. st. V.

²²⁰ IC, 1.73-142 at st. XXIII.

²²¹ On military organization, see S. Sahai, *op. cit.* pp. 134-137.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

²²³ IC, 5.270 f.

²²⁴ IC, 5.272 f, 274.

²²⁵ S. Sahai, *op. cit.*, pp. 116 ff.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122; cp. I.W. Mabbett, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

Not only produce but service was owed to the king, as we have seen, but it appears that landowners, perhaps loth to lose the work of their retainers beyond a certain point, could commute this obligation to payment in goods or valuables, or that service was due in the form of rice, thereafter being used to finance government activity in various ways. There is for example a case of a corporation of 'boxers' (*mustiyudha*) obtaining a loan in order to carry out *rājakārya* (and later not being able to repay it)²²⁸, and there is a mention of land given in compensation for rice owed to the *rājakārya*²²⁹. For what it is worth, there is a *praśasti* claim that a ruler's taxes were gentle²³⁰. This would indeed be in accordance with Sanskrit fiscal theory, which recognized that excessive impositions can harm the future potential yield of any taxation source, and it would certainly be consonant with the moral ideals of kingship conducing to public welfare which the same sources constantly hold up.

It followed from the unique central position of the ruler that only he could levy taxes. There is one inscriptional provision that those who levy an annual tax are to be punished²³¹.

Similarly, it was the ruler and he alone who had the final responsibility for the maintenance of order and tranquillity throughout his realm. Indeed, the *śāstras* associate this idea with religious principles such as *karma*—when the king fails to fulfil his duties and allows wicked subjects to prey on others, the heavens frown and the kingdom founders, whereas if he is good the kingdom prospers. Thus, ideally, the ruler should busy himself constantly with the administration of justice, and there is evidence that conscientious Indian kings spent much time giving audience to their subjects, high and low—anybody was entitled to come before the king with a petition, though the need to gain access to the king by the favour of a series of officials was known to dilute this democratic privilege considerably.

The Khmers knew the same traditions. Indian legal texts were known and used perhaps in pre-Angkorian times²³². Chou Ta Kuan reports that even trivial cases were taken to the king, who gave twice-daily audiences when he appeared at a golden window²³³. It was claimed for Rājendravarman that his government, eschewing slumber, worked for the prosperity of his subjects, and that he never said no to a group of petitioners²³⁴. Jayavarman V was supposed to give access to petitioners²³⁵, and Jayavīravarman was cited as granting petitions²³⁶. Another ruler was said to be compassionate and to dry the tears of his afflicted subjects²³⁷.

The cases dealt with by the king were various, though most of those mentioned in the inscriptions (by the nature of the source) concerned land in one way or another. A king is

228 *IC*, 4.140-150, north pier.

229 *IC*, 4.161-166 II. 11-14.

230 *BEFEO*, vol. XLIII, Sdok Kak Thom. st. XXI.

231 *IC*, 2.13 (Prah Kuha Luon stele inscription).

232 See S. Sahai, *op. cit.*, pp. 7ff. On Indian influence generally, see A. Leclère, "Recherches sur les origines brahmaniques des lois cambodgiennes", *Nouvelle revue historique de droit français et étranger*, pp. 1-67.

233 *BEFEO*, vol. II (1902), pp. 161, 171.

234 *IC*, 1.73-142 at st. CLXIX, CCXXXVI.

235 *IC*, 1.143-157.

236 *IC*, 2.113.

237 *IC*, 6.195-211, st. XVIII.

said to have ordered the restitution of certain wrongfully alienated ricelands²³⁸. Problems of inheritance could be subject to a ruler's order: for example, a dignitary with no heirs made arrangements sealed by the king for the bequest of his land²³⁹. The king could give pardons, and we find it claimed for one court dignitary that he could use his influence with the king to gain pardon even for those condemned to death²⁴⁰. On the subject of capital punishment, it appears that the Indian tradition of exempting or favouring Brahmans was known; but, also as in India, the principle of imposing higher penalties on higher ranks (from Brahmans down) was also known²⁴¹.

Of the legal cases made the subject of full-scale investigations that are mentioned in the inscriptions, all or nearly all concern rights to land, and the procedures adopted are frequently described in great detail. Events are set in train by the king when a plaintiff, directly or by finding people willing to speak for him at court, brings his cause to the king's attention. A commission is set up to investigate the case on the spot, a commission commonly consisting of high functionaries with impressive titles who interview local notables. When they feel that the truth is established (or perhaps when they have exhausted the possibilities of squeezing contributions from the parties concerned), they announce their conclusions and the king gives judgment. Various examples may be given. Ministers and counsellors at the court investigate a crime²⁴². An enquiry is launched into the history of some land belonging to a member of the corps of pages (*kanmyān pamre*), who is proposing to give it to a foundation; border marks have been moved²⁴³. An enquiry, involving among others a *guṇadoṣadarśin*²⁴⁴, is made into the case of a loan of silver which has not been repaid (the one mentioned above involving the "boxers")²⁴⁵. A royal emissary sent on business to a foundation receives land from its personnel as *dakṣiṇā* (sacrificial fee), but another party claims to have the right to the land and is found for after an enquiry; the emissary receives the land from this party instead (a corporation or foundation of some sort) and later buys more land from it for the Śivaliṅga concerned²⁴⁶. A plaintiff designated as *vāp* is found against in a case concerning certain land and dues levied on it, and mutilation is his punishment; in resolving the case the king gives instructions to the *guṇadoṣadarśin*, the *kamsteñ* and the court among others²⁴⁷. A certain Mratāñ Kurun Vīrabhaktigarjita, a *khloñ viṣaya*, is found guilty of harvesting another's rice, and despite his plea that he was misinformed about the boundaries he is fined in gold, but spared a whipping because of his position²⁴⁸.

²³⁸ *IC*, 5.182-185.

²³⁹ *IC*, 6.141-246 at p. 244 face C l. 29-face D l. 5.

²⁴⁰ *IC*, 6.195-211, st. XXXIV.

²⁴¹ *ISC* no. LV, p. 410, verses 78-82, and S. Sahai, *op. cit.* p. 95.

²⁴² *IC*, 2.107-109.

²⁴³ *IC*, 4.108-139, south pier.

²⁴⁴ 'Inspectors of merits and faults'; see above, p. 30.

²⁴⁵ *IC*, 4.140-150, north pier.

²⁴⁶ *IC*, 5.108-113.

²⁴⁷ *IC*, 5.212-215, face C, ll. 6-13.

²⁴⁸ *IC*, 6.140-142. See also M. Ricklefs, *loc. cit.*, p. 418; G. Coedès, "L'avenir des études khmères", *loc. cit.*, p. 211; and H. de Mestier du Bourg, "L'inscription de Nak Ta Carek"; *JA* (1970), pp. 149-154.

The central position of the king in the administration of justice is quite evident, though it is not possible to be sure how far any given king really exercised personal initiative and set the stamp of his character upon things, or how far he was the prisoner of ceremony, ministers and precedent. But at least it is clear that the resources over whose distribution he adjudicated gave him the means if he was energetic to assert himself.

As for the decisions and sentences for which the king was responsible, the Sanskrit *śāstras*, by which he was supposed to be guided, themselves lent their own authority, up to a point, to whatever decisions a king made: he was the mouthpiece of *dharma*. Du Bourg considers that in Cambodia royal edicts sometimes had the force of law. The king was the final authority in hearing appeals and granting pardons²⁴⁹. The *śāstras* were known and honoured in Cambodia and it was claimed for example that Jayavarman VI formed his opinions in conformity to the *śāstras* and gave sentences following his indomitable intelligence²⁵⁰. The influence of Indian tradition is to be seen also, according to Bongert²⁵¹, in the custom of using ordeals to test guilt, a custom which is certainly amply attested in the Sanskrit texts (and still practised by Indochinese tribes) but not strong in the zone of Chinese cultural influence. Chou Ta Kuan reports the use of the ordeal of boiling oil, or of illness following incarceration, in cases of suspected theft²⁵². Mutilation, a practice mentioned in some inscriptions, is reported in the same source: criminals with their toes cut were not allowed through the gates of Angkor Thom,²⁵³ and standard punishments included burying alive, and cutting off fingers, feet, hands and arms; summary justice could be meted out by citizens to robbers²⁵⁴.

The question of equality before the law and impartiality is interesting, but by its nature it is difficult to give an answer about actual practice. The ideal of equal treatment, as of government without discrimination between high and low, was certainly known. The Say Fong hospital inscription, for example, specifies that treatment is available for all "the four *varṇas*"²⁵⁵. In matters of legal cases, it is not clear how far references to people without titles or honours winning their causes really constitute evidence that justice was available to the humblest citizen, since these people are likely to have been men of substance with good connections. But the *praśastis* sometimes praise kings for their impartiality. A king was alleged to watch over the punishment of crimes without distinction between criminals²⁵⁶. Jayavarman VII was lauded for his fairness²⁵⁷. A chief of judges (*sabhyādhipa*) was appointed "because of his impartiality which removed passion and hatred on his own or another's behalf"²⁵⁸. There is elsewhere a reference to "justice, that road which is even (*sama*) and has been venerated since Manu"²⁵⁹. The Phnom Sandak inscriptions express in tortuous Sanskrit the judgment that Jayavarman VI did not allow his favoured ministers acting in

²⁴⁹ H. de Mestier du Bourg, "Le procès dans l'ancien droit khmer . . .", *loc. cit.*, pp. 39ff., 46.

²⁵⁰ *IC*, 6.300 at st. XXI.

²⁵¹ Y. Bongert, *La problématique de la preuve chez les peuples de l'ancienne Indochine Française*, pp. 501ff. Cp. S. Sahai, *op. cit.* p. 108.

²⁵² *BEFEO*, vol. II (1902), pp. 161ff.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 161ff.

²⁵⁵ *BEFEO*, vol. II (1902), pp. 18-33 at st. XIX.

²⁵⁶ *IC*, 4.3-24, K 436, st. IX.

²⁵⁷ *IC*, 4.207-253 southwest stele, st. XLIV.

²⁵⁸ *IC*, 6.115-118 st. VII.

²⁵⁹ *IC*, 6.195-211 st. XIII.

his own interest to save criminals condemned by him, since it was bad *dharma* that operated through favouritism to protect self-interest²⁶⁰. It is interesting to compare this with the inscription cited above²⁶¹, in which a minister showed his influence by being able to induce the king to pardon those sentenced to death.

It is understood in any reference to justice or to judicial processes that the rights protected by the king are the rights of free men, and the references to slaves make it all too easy to suppose that they were mere chattels of no consequence beyond their value as labour. There is for example a discussion by Coedès of certain legal niceties where slaves appear as equivalent to mere tokens: a distinction is seen in Khmer practice between giving a pledge (for example, against the loan of a buffalo) and giving a payment (for example, for a loan at interest)²⁶². The recorded case in question concerns a slave given as a payment; he ran away subsequently and his former owner was supposed to replace him, whereas if he had been given as a pledge there would have been no obligation to replace him. There are occasional references to slaves running away, causing some embarrassment where they are involved in pious donations: in one case a recaptured slave had his nose and ears cut off²⁶³. Such evidence certainly suggests that slaves were treated as mere chattels, but it remains possible that, like serfs on the medieval manor, slaves enjoyed a measure of security and certain customary rights which are more than is apparent from an initial inspection of their legal status.

The whole question of the position of slaves in Khmer society is a problem underlying any study of Khmer institutions, and, though no detailed examination of it can be attempted here, it is necessary to notice that the problem exists. It would be good to know more about the numbers of slaves employed in the Khmer kingdom in relation to free men. Chou Ta Kuan reported that 100 or more slaves were a sign of affluence, but 10 to 20 were a small number to have, and only the very poor had none²⁶⁴, although it is difficult to be sure whether the population about which he was generalizing was the whole of free society or just people who mattered. He also mentioned that likening to a slave was a deadly insult, that children also were slaves, and that they had rings attached to their neck and limbs for security.

Aymonier commented that the Chinese visitors mentioned only bought slaves, coming from wild tribes, but that there must have been also debt slaves and serfs descended from rebels or enemies who had been captured. Various sorts of slavery existed; one inscription explicitly mentions slaves who are legally acquired (*āgama*), slaves who are inherited (*mṛtakadhana*), and religious slaves (*vrah*)²⁶⁵. Lingat, in a study of early Siamese law, distinguished three types of slaves—those who became so by wars, by purchase, and by birth²⁶⁶. Bongert, comparing ancient India with Siam and Cambodia, recognized the institution of fiduciary enslavement arising from contract, as distinct from sale²⁶⁷. It is clear that the Khmer slaves were

²⁶⁰ *IC*, 6.300-311.

²⁶¹ *IC*, 6.195-211.

²⁶² G. Coedès, "La stèle de Tuol Rolom Tim: essai d'interprétation par la langue bahnar d'un texte juridique khmer du X^e siècle", *JA*, 242 (1954), I, pp. 49-67.

²⁶³ *IC*, 3.72-75.

²⁶⁴ *BEFEO*, vol. II (1902), p. 155.

²⁶⁵ *IC*, 3.199-204.

²⁶⁶ R. Lingat, *L'esclavage privé dans le vieux droit siamois*.

²⁶⁷ Y. Bongert, "Reflexions sur le problème de l'esclavage dans l'Inde ancienne", *BEFEQ*, vol. LI, pp. 143-194.

not a homogeneous class of hereditary slaves, but the references in inscriptions, which are innumerable, commonly make it appear that slaves went with land and that their slavery arose from birth there²⁶⁸. K. Chakravarti disputes this, arguing that since slaves were not domestic but attached to the land they were more conveniently identified by the principle of *ius sanguinis*²⁶⁹. But in certain epigraphic contexts there are also suggestions that slaves belonged to certain subjugated communities of other races. A list of slaves includes a reference to some who are *rman*, which could mean Mon²⁷⁰. Elsewhere are mentioned "the Burmans, the Chams, etc."²⁷¹

Such a category may well overlap with the patrimonial slaves who in many contexts appear to be attached to the land. In one place certain slaves going with a *sruk* that is attached to a foundation are described as being attached to it, literally the "fruits" of it²⁷². In another place certain slaves are described as *ksetrabhāgin*, sharing in the land, which suggests that each one had a piece of land, though possibly only in the sense that he was attached to it for his subsistence²⁷³.

Usually, in the records of endowments, slaves are not named, but the numbers of men and women in various groups assigned to foundations for the respective fortnights are given. In a few places, however, individual slaves are listed with mention of their provenance²⁷⁴. There is an apparent reference to the freeing of a slave, with children and grandchildren, "by favour of the king" towards an individual endowing a *linga*²⁷⁵.

Indeed, there are allusions to the direct exercise of the king's authority in every sort of context, and the foregoing discussions of his responsibility in the fields of land rights, appointments, public works, diplomacy, warfare, taxation and justice does not exhaust his purview. Kingship, one can never forget, was not a constitutional office in the modern sense with defined powers enshrined in a man-made code. It was regarded as a responsibility as much moral and religious as civil, and it is not surprising to find kings claiming authority over the inmates of religious foundations in matters of religion as well as tenure and administration. Much of the stele inscription of Vat Sithor concerns Buddhist observance, which is spelled out in some detail by Jayavarman V, who gives directions to the monks on ceremonies, rituals and so forth, with monthly instruction by a learned man²⁷⁶. There are brahmanical terms as well as Buddhist, and, as Senart commented, there was a tradition of tolerating and fostering orthodox and heterodox alike, emphasizing similarities rather than fundamental differences²⁷⁷. K. Bhattacharya refers to the overall authority of the king which was recognized in theory (though

²⁶⁸ Y. Bongert, "Note sur l'esclavage en droit khmer ancien", *loc. cit.*, p. 155.

²⁶⁹ A.K. Chakravarti, "Sources of slavery in ancient Cambodia", *loc. cit.*, p. 126.

²⁷⁰ *IC*, 5.7f.

²⁷¹ *BEFEO*, vol. VI (1906), pp. 44-81, Ta Prohm, at st. LXVII.

²⁷² *IC*, 4.140-150 at p. 143, s. pier, 11. 23-24.

²⁷³ *IC*, 3.180-192, st. XXI.

²⁷⁴ *IC*, 3.54-64, central tower, north pier; *IC*, 4.68-76, central sanctuary, north pier, and north sanctuary, south pier.

²⁷⁵ *IC*, 5.45.

²⁷⁶ *IC*, 6.195-211 *passim*, and see st. LXXV.

²⁷⁷ Cited *ibid.*, p. 230.

he adds, with reference to the exclusions often made from the terms of endowments, that this authority was not insisted upon in practice)²⁷⁸.

A few further examples will illustrate the point about royal authority. Sūryavarman I revised the religious rites of ascetics²⁷⁹. Yaśovarman I installed an ascetic on a ceremonial throne and gave him authority over other ascetics²⁸⁰. Jayavarman IV made a district chief a superior of some ascetics²⁸¹. Sūryavarman II was claimed to have a servant who ruled the affairs of the Buddhists and others (*vauddhādi*)²⁸². A royal order to a religious superior directed him to celebrate a cult, erect a *liṅga*, and so forth²⁸³. Another royal order specified how the slaves were to be used²⁸⁴. The *devarāja* cult, of course, is a case of royal sponsorship *par excellence*²⁸⁵.

The royal powers reflected by these allusions are partly temporal—as chief source of endowments and as beneficiary of much of the revenue of temple land, the king assumed powers of appointment and management. But they are also partly spiritual—the king surrounded himself with priests (or, in some reigns, as Chou Ta Kuan testifies, Buddhist monks²⁸⁶), his administration was largely carried on by priests, and (like Aśoka) he regarded himself as the head of their institutions.

We are thus brought to wonder, confronted by all this evidence of the variety of fields into which a king's acknowledged authority extended, how much of a despot he was or how far he was a mere figurehead, a pawn in the hands of great men at court, surrounded by ceremonial and out of touch with the realities of the kingdom.

Clearly, much would depend upon the personality of the king, the relative power of competing elite families, and the pressure of the aspiring elite upon available sources of patronage. No generalization can be made about all Angkorian kings. Some, such as Jayavarman II, Sūryavarman I, and Jayavarman VII, were at least in some obvious senses strong. They were looked to for leadership, they became the centre of myths or cults, and they were successful. But the nature of their strength itself shows a sort of weakness: these three came to power amid strife; their personalities were so important, their leadership so much vaunted, for the very reason that the followers of each were not a secure establishment but a party struggling against others to assert legitimacy, and therefore needing authoritative direction and symbols. 'Weak' kings were, perhaps, those whose servants were secure.

Thus there are criticisms to be made both of the despot and of the figurehead interpretations. No king was a *mere* figurehead, for as we have seen the king alone had the power to distribute honours and wealth, and he therefore was the supreme patron. This situation is

²⁷⁸ K. Bhattacharya, *loc. cit.*, p. 194.

²⁷⁹ *IC*, 1.195-219, 2nd inscription, st. LXXIV.

²⁸⁰ *IC*, 1.251-271 K. 853 st. VIII.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, K. 854, st. VI.

²⁸² *IC*, 3.180-192, st. IV.

²⁸³ *IC*, 6.22f.

²⁸⁴ *IC*, 6.81f.

²⁸⁵ See H. Kulke, "Der Devaraja-Kult", *loc. cit.*

²⁸⁶ *BEFEO*, vol. II (1902), p. 149.

reflected by the sumptuary laws and the protocol which are described for us in the thirteenth century by Chou Ta Kuan. Subjects "would not dare" to roof their houses with tiles; only the king could wear material patterned with dense floral designs, and various other principles also governed what was proper or improper to wear²⁸⁷. The highest dignitaries had palanquins with gold shafts, and four parasols with gold handles. Lesser dignitaries had just parasols with gold handles; others had parasols with silver handles; and some palanquins with silver shafts²⁸⁸. Thus was degree made manifest.

Kings had a pivotal role, and were expected to display the highest qualities of culture, learning, zeal, energy and concern with public welfare. Claims by flatterers as represented by *praśastis* tell us nothing about achievement, but something about aspiration, and it is worth recording the allusions to kings versed in *nīti* (political science)²⁸⁹, versed in *nyāyāgama* (logic or ethics)²⁹⁰, applying themselves to difficult sciences²⁹¹, liking only *vidyā* (learning)²⁹², excelling in debates of logic²⁹³, and "knowing to the bottom the precepts of the six *Vedāṅgas*" (sciences supplementary to the *Vedas*)²⁹⁴.

The interest which kings claimed to take in their subjects' welfare is well represented by the institution of audiences and the concern that petitioners should not go unheard, discussed above. But it was not only injustice, it was any sort of distress which the ruler, in his moral and paternal role, was expected to try to assuage. Jayavarman VII (like Aśoka) "suffered his subjects' illness more than his own, for it is the sorrow of the people that makes the sorrow of kings, and not their own"²⁹⁵. Protection of the people, a central ideal prominent in the Sanskrit texts, is mentioned for example in the Sdok Kak Thom inscription²⁹⁶. Rājendravarmā's promise to start digging may be seen as an acceptance of public responsibility of another sort. In several places we meet the idea of a spiritual link between the deeds of the ruler and the prosperity of his subjects: the *nāgī* legend, which supposed the fate of Angkor to depend upon the ruler going to the Phimeanakas each night and finding there a snake deity in human form, is an example²⁹⁷; Jayavarman VII, aspiring to be a *bodhisattva*, says: "May I by this meritorious deed draw forth all creatures immersed in the ocean of existences"²⁹⁸, a Buddhist metaphysical notion which implies the same sort of link. As Coedès says, the good king is one whose rule is accompanied by regular seasons and good rain, catastrophe being the consequence of any error in ritual: "*Le bon roi est celui sous le règne duquel les saisons se font régulièrement et la pluie tombe à son heure: une faute dans l'observance du rituel peut provoquer des catastrophes*"²⁹⁹.

287 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

288 *Ibid.*, pp. 147ff.

289 *IC*, 1.48ff K 675, st. XV.

290 *IC*, 1.221-226, st. IV.

291 *IC*, 1.227-249, st. VII.

292 *IC*, 4.3-34 K. 440, st. IV.

293 *IC*, 4.88-101, st. XXXIV.

294 *IC*, 5.244-269, st. XXXVIII.

295 *BEFEO*, vol. III (1903), pp. 18-33, at st. XIII.

296 *BEFEO*, vol. XLIII, Sdok Kak Thom, st. XIII.

297 *BEFEO*, vol. II (1902), pp. 144f.

298 *BEFEO*, vol. III (1903), pp. 18-33 at st. XLVI.

299 G. Coedès, *Un grand roi du Cambodge*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

These beliefs indicate a situation where a strong king, or one whose servants had need of assertive leadership, could exercise considerable power. But it is necessary also to notice that his power was limited—by Indian precedent and customary expectation³⁰⁰, by the influence of religious doctrines (as J. Imbert has pointed out³⁰¹), and, particularly, by the need not to alienate too many influential people. It is simply not the case that succession to the throne was smooth or that a ruler, once on the throne, needed to heed nobody and nothing but his own whim. There was always the possibility of rival parties forming and grouping round relatives with some claim to the throne. The rules of succession did not provide unambiguous indications in all cases, and it was commonly possible for several brothers or other relatives to put forward claims. It has indeed been possible for variant interpretations to be made by modern scholars of the rules of succession, but the most reasonable conclusion seems to be that inheritance in the male line was normal, though liable to variation by inheritance in the female line, which was a principle rooted in indigenous culture that prevailed in various institutions other than kingship, at various times³⁰². Usurpation by princes without real right was certainly known, an occasion of some embarrassment to the composers of *praśastis*, who had to provide suitable genealogies. Chou Ta Kuan refers to a case of intrigue over the succession and possession of the regalia which assured it, where the prince dared not go out of the palace except heavily armoured³⁰³. Interesting, on the subject of succession, is the legend of the gardener who grew delicious cucumbers and was given by the king a lance and the right to kill all intruders. When the gardener killed the king himself in error one night, being unblameable for the deed following the right granted him, he became king himself, marrying a princess³⁰⁴. Another element influencing succession was of course the power of great ministers, who had a role in selecting a new king³⁰⁵ (as was often the case in India also). J. Imbert thinks that the role of ministers increased in importance later in the period, especially when Divākarapaṇḍita was active, and under Jayavarman VII and his successors³⁰⁶.

Much could be written about the insecurity of kingship as reflected in the Sanskrit *śāstras*, which at some points seem almost paranoid in their preoccupation with secrecy, identification of traitors, and apprehension by all manner of ruses of what are called “thorns”, public enemies, who are—following from the absence of the idea of sovereign territorial states—to be found in the royal service, in the palace, even in the king’s family. A powerful impression arises from examination of the literature that those features which at first sight look like the assertion of despotism should in fact rather be regarded as appeals for support by the king and his livery directly to the people and over the heads of an administration known to be factious and corrupt. The connection between the king and his people is thus rather more like that

³⁰⁰ The king’s power was summary and regulative rather than strictly legislative. See S. Sahai, *op. cit.*, pp. 32f. and R. Lingat, “L’influence juridique de l’Inde au Champa et au Cambodge”, *JA*, 1949, pp. 286f.

³⁰¹ J. Imbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 27ff.

³⁰² See L. Finot, “Notes d’epigraphie XX”, *loc. cit.*, p. 54, notes 2, 3, pp. 56f.; E. Porée-Maspéro, “Nouvelle étude sur la *Nāgī Soma*”, *JA*, vol. 238 (1950), p. 237; G. Coedès, “Les règles de la succession royale dans l’ancien Cambodge”, *B S E I*, vol. XXVI (1951), pp. 117-130; J. Imbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 25ff.; K. O’Sullivan, *loc. cit.*

³⁰³ *BEFEO*, vol. II (1902), p. 176.

³⁰⁴ E. Huber, *loc. cit.*

³⁰⁵ See S. Sahai, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

³⁰⁶ J. Imbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 25ff.

between father and family, or clan elder and clansmen, than that between politician and citizen. The claims to authority given a ruler by his position are not confined to any particular sphere of life but extend into morals and religion. Authority is broad and deep, but it is vague and general. A combination of a strong and dominating king with a united elite devoted to the regime could in this situation mean oppression or despotism in the popular sense, but it is quite likely that these two factors varied inversely with each other, and it appears better to regard a ruler's power as being arbitrary rather than legislative. This is an important distinction. It means that a king might be strong enough to strike terror into everybody at court, to issue summary justice in his capital or while on progress through his kingdom, to issue far-reaching commands to his servants, without any of this implying that he actually controlled a reliable apparatus of government that extended its tentacles into all the villages and did his bidding whatever it might be. He could give the signal for his followers everywhere to visit atrocities upon recalcitrant subjects—but only if it was in their interests as a party with its survival at stake to do so. The interests of great families had to be reckoned with all the time, and it would probably be a mistake to regard all apparent signs of strength in the ruler of Angkor as indications that these individuals had all the freedom of tyranny that fairy-tale cruel kings possess.

These observations, based as they are rather upon a brief synchronic study of political institutions than upon the more thorough study of successive reigns that can be expected to substantiate or weaken them, are partly speculative. But they fit with the evidence presented above, which represents both a wide range of royal powers, associated with supreme responsibility for requisitioning revenue and services, and a wide range of landed interests at court and in the countryside. We are reminded of Riggs' "fused society", with its lack of distinction between political, familial, moral and religious roles, and its emphasis upon symbol and ceremony, whereby a ruler enshrines in his person the united interest of all his subjects and is expected to sustain his kingdom's prosperity by a due and proper mediation with heaven³⁰⁷. In such a society, symbolic statements of the unity of the realm under the ruler's authority are more than ornamental court ceremonies giving employment to priests—they are emphatic corroborations of the exaltation of the ruler above the politics of the contending communities beneath his sceptre.

Religious symbolism in Angkor

The open shrine which at present crowns the monument is a late construction open on all four sides. Perhaps the Gold Tower of which the locals spoke to Chou, and which was presumably being used by King Indravarman III (1295-1307) at the time of Chou's visit to Cambodia, was of lighter construction—of wood, perhaps, with a tiled roof, and elegantly and warmly furnished within. As it is now, enveloped in its dank and forbidding stone envelope, and with its draughty summit so steeply poised, Phimeanakas is scarcely the place one would have chosen oneself for such an appointment, hardly *le choix amoureux*, one would have thought. At the end of the first watch the king was free to go home to his wives and concubines, his informants told Chou, seeming to suggest that he was glad enough to be able to do so.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ See F.W. Riggs, *The Ecology of Public Administration*.

³⁰⁸ W. Willetts, *An Angkor Roundabout* (unpublished MS.).

These words refer to the legend reported to a Chinese visitor in the thirteenth century, Chou Ta Kuan, that the king was expected to cohabit nightly with a *nāgī*, a snake divinity in the form of a beautiful woman, atop the Phimeanakas monument. If she did not appear, this foretold disaster for the kingdom. If the king did not keep the rendezvous, he would die at once. As W. Willetts comments in the context to the passage cited, the institution might well be considered as much a curse as a blessing.

There is much to wonder at in this little story. The Phimeanakas, a triumph of restoration work by the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient among the ruins of Angkor, towers forbiddingly against the hot Cambodian sky. The ascent is steep and uninviting; and, for the modern visitor, there is no magic princess waiting at the top.

The historian or the tourist, panting and blinking at the landscape through a mist of perspiration, is confronted by the enigma of the Phimeanakas. Night after night, year after year, the ancient kings of the mighty Cambodian empire struggled up these very steps, reached this very spot where irreverent foreign feet now tread, and—we must presume—found no magic princess waiting either. What did they do? What did they think? Why did they put up with the whole charade? These questions are not often raised, but they are good historical questions, unanswerable though they may be in the end. It is not as if the kings of the Khmers belonged to some strange alien species whose behaviour we could not hope to understand; they were not such fools that we should remain unsurprised by any of their customs however foolish these customs may seem. As a matter of historical method, there must always be an initial supposition that they behaved as we would if we were in exactly the same position—in the same environment, with the same life experiences.

Perhaps, we might say, Indravarman kept a mistress up there; and we can imagine the two of them rejoicing beneath the stars while, below them and all around, the Khmer people slept blissfully on, secure in the knowledge that their ruler was for their benefit maintaining *liaison* with the world of spirits.

Perhaps, indeed, he did just this; but we still need to ask why he and his mistress should keep on meeting each other like this—the same Chinese reporter was told that the king had 3,000 women in his palace, and he could have his pick of them—and why the Khmer people should have this particular compelling myth of *liaison* with the spirit world.

Final empathy is no doubt out of reach, and it is in a way presumptuous for any modern investigator, so far removed in time and culture, to attempt any confident reconstruction of moral need and motive. But perhaps a little progress can be made towards an understanding of these remote societies.

No step can be taken at all without opening up broad and complex questions of cultural history, and it is only by a circuitous route that we can hope, as it were, to join the shadowy duo on the tower.

One question about them, for example, confronts us with the problem of cultural identity. Who are these two, king and princess, we ask, and instantly their names make us think that they must be Indians. All the Angkorian kings took as dynastic suffix to their reign-names the term

varman, shield or protection, and their various particular names show how they plundered Indian tradition for their guardian powers. Indravarman, the contemporary of Chou, looked back across two millennia to Indra, king of the Vedic Indian gods. The *nāgī*, a snake divinity, seems at first sight no less Indian, for in Sanskrit *nāga* is a snake, and the many-headed snake gods and goddesses are known in India as well as in the various kingdoms of ancient south-east Asia. We may therefore be tempted to treat king and princess as actors in a drama that was written by Indian tradition, their subjects as provincials in the greater world of Indian culture, and the riddle of their *liaison* as a puzzle in Indian social history.

But what are we to make of the fact that *nāga* is not really an Aryan word in origin (the Aryan word, *sarpa*, is cognate with our 'serpent') but belongs to a pre-Aryan folklore of mystery, moons and dark places that was, in its essential forms, common to India and southeast Asia before ever the Vedic Aryans came?

Another set of questions concerns the subject, too much involved in matters of religious history to be considered in any detail here, of the *devarāja*, 'god-king'³⁰⁹, whereby we may suppose the Angkorian kings saw themselves as very gods. In what sense did the Khmers see Indravarman as a god? In what sense did he see himself as a god? Could he have been deluded by a monstrous apparatus of myth that caged him into the hallucination that, when he climbed the tower, there really was a *nāgī* there, and that he really cohabited with her?

The first set of questions, concerning the nature and role of Indian cultural influences, lies largely outside the scope of the present study. But it will be useful to refer to the formulation offered by Mus in his classic article, "Cultes indiens et indigènes au Champa"³¹⁰. He is concerned to emphasize the currency of local earthgod cults throughout monsoon Asia—in pre-aryan India and pre-Indian southeast Asia alike. These cults were centred on fixed, essentially localized earth spirits, identified with the earth itself, who were fundamentally shapeless, abstract, and inaccessible, but yet capable of becoming 'bipresent' both in the earth and in a particular sacred spot such as a sacred stone. On the occasions of sacrifices, communication could be established with this second, concrete and determinate, presence of the spirit by the medium of the sacrifice and the chief acting as priest. In India, Hindu culture developed from contact between Aryans and pre-Aryans as these localized indigenous cults assumed more elaborate forms, adopted an Indo-European religious vocabulary, and acquired universal values, without losing their essence. Therefore when Hindu-Buddhist culture came to southeast Asia it was not an alien novelty, for the shared foundations made it possible for the Indochinese and others to experience it, to live it, as their own. Mus does not choose to see Indian culture in such kingdoms as Champa and Angkor as a thin veneer, a "thin and flaking glaze", to use van Leur's much-quoted term³¹¹; nor does he see indigenous culture as a dead or moribund irrelevancy in the 'Great Tradition' of the Indianized kingdoms; he sees two levels of culture that lived in each other and were not consciously distinguished.

The structure of religious thought, however, reveals that—unconsciously, if we wish—the dichotomy between the imported culture that was regarded as superior (Aryan in India,

³⁰⁹ But see H. Kulke, "Der Devaraja-Kult", *loc. cit.*

³¹⁰ *BEFEO*, vol. XXXIII (1933).

³¹¹ J.C. van Leur, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

Hindu-Buddhist in southeast Asia) and the relatively unsophisticated indigenous usage was recognized, and commemorated in a series of systematic oppositions between two complexes of thought and belief—one looking to ancestors and the subterranean world, the other to celestial gods. The first complex, associated with the 'austronesian', pre-Aryan civilization, is characterized by the earth goddess, the moon, snake deities, darkness, female symbolism, and reverence for ancestors. The other complex, which is associated with Aryan culture before it interacted with pre-Aryan civilization, is characterized by sky gods, the sun, bird deities, light, male symbolism, and reverence for gods. Nobody claims that these complexes are unique, indivisible and self-contained—indeed, the history of Hinduism is a history of their fusion and evolution into new and ever-changing complex forms—but, however far the interaction may have gone, traces of the two distinct systems seem to remain discoverable to analysis. The god Śiva of the Aryan Hindu pantheon, for example, is thought to be descended from a pre-Aryan deity associated with cattle and to represent in his cult the various chthonic and unar features of aboriginal belief.

Bhattacharji, in the course of a thorough study of the development of Indian religion, points to the two *yānas*, vehicles, as encapsulating these two traditions: *devayāna*, the (solar) way of the gods, leading to salvation, and *pitryāna*, the (lunar) way of the fathers, leading to reincarnation.

By the time of the epics the distinction between these two *yānas* had become clearer as they symbolically represented two approaches to truth (via knowledge, *jñāna*, and via holy deeds, *karman*), two modes of future existence (liberation and reincarnation), and also two sects, Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism, represented by the two most important epic gods (the solar Viṣṇu and the lunar Śiva). With the bifurcation of the two sects (Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva) with sectarian dogmas and cultic practices on the one hand, and the innate opposition of two philosophies (Vedānta and Sāṃkhya) developing with ever widening differences on the other, the distance and distinction between *Devayāna* and *Pitryāna* became greater, because these were but reflections of the above differences on the eschatological plane. Thus we read: 'Devayāna is Viṣṇu's path. the path of Pitryāna is dark; these are the two paths after death—the one leading upwards, the other below.' (Mbh.XII:315:33). The inferiority of *Pitryāna* to *Devayāna* was widely recognized.³¹²

Thus an examination of the nature and extent of Indian influence suggests that it neither drove out, nor failed to affect, local traditions in any southeast Asian kingdom. Its role was more subtle. It did not, further, enter into an uneasy partnership with local tradition, whereby Indianized courts lost touch with surrounding society. What happened was that the two orders—Indian and local, high and low—adapted themselves to each other, not exactly by compromising, but by arranging themselves into a series of complementary relationships so that they could become heads and tails of a single coin. So, seen from above, as it were, by an Indianist, Khmer culture in ancient times looks Indian; seen from the grass roots, by a prehistorian, it looks southeast Asian; seen by the Khmers, it looked merely Khmer—which is to say both of these, and yet neither.

It is precisely this heads-and-tails relationship between Indian gods and the ancestor cults

³¹² S. Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony*, p. 76.

of local chieftains, the Hindu pantheon and the snakes and water spirits of stone age tradition, high temple and village shrine, solar god and serpent princess that subsists between the divine and earthly terms of the Angkorian myth-play. The myths existed to make many statements, to reconcile the heterogeneous cultural experience of the Khmers into an intelligible whole in a number of ways, but the most ingenious statement was the one not spoken but built into the language itself—the dual nature of its terms, which could be seen as high or low, heavenly or earthly at will.

It is only a short step from here to the inference that a part of the ruler's legitimacy grew from his crucial position as the simultaneous embodiment of the two orders. In his person, the authority of the gods and the authority of the fathers who had passed on came together. His state was defined, not by frontiers or by a constitution, but by the crossing of the divinely inspired and universally valid high culture with the concrete and local usages of his subjects. Angkor—the word itself means 'city', reflecting its identification with the royal centre from which authority radiated, rather than with the territory—had its identity as a state and a legitimate seat of power, independent of any overlord, from this crossing of *devayāna* and *pitryāna* that was instituted by the *devarāja* or a similar cult and fortified by dynastic myth and an accumulation of ritual. When the kings kept their appointment, night after night, with the dark and mysterious *nāgī* on the tower, they felt obliged to do so by the instinctive consensus that they were thus sustaining a union that lay at the heart of their authority. The *nāgī*, moon goddess, serpent queen, guardian of the underworld and essence of femininity at the same time was the necessary complement to the king's role as heavenly god.

It is difficult, in generalizing about ancient Asian cultures, to avoid somewhat mystical propositions difficult by their nature to prove or disprove. But the usefulness of the view of kingship suggested here finds some support in the way it takes account of various problems in cultural history, providing a clue to the operation of the theme of ambivalence in the Khmer mind. Further, it is possible to adduce in support, by analogy, the view of the role of Indian kingship at the junction between the culture of the conquering Aryans and that of the indigenes who became their subjects. An obviously parallel view has been argued by Mus, who sees the Vedic chieftains as a sort of bridge between the religion of their kin and that of the indigenes who came in time to constitute the majority of their subjects. At this point, an accommodation began to be made between the two cultures in the person of the king, who was able to serve as a dual symbol: to the Aryans, the god-hero who as supreme sacrificer was able to manipulate the favour of the Vedic gods, and, to the locals, the priest who was able to serve as a channel of communication with an otherwise deaf, amorphous and voiceless chthonic deity with which, after his death or during a sacrifice, he was mystically identified³¹³.

313 P. Mus, *loc. cit.*, p. 392.

ABBREVIATED REFERENCES

<i>AM</i>	<i>Asia Major</i>
<i>BCAI</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Commission Archéologique Indochinoise</i>
<i>BEFEO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient</i>
<i>BIE</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica</i>
<i>BSEI</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University</i>
<i>CII</i>	Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum: vol. III, J.F. Fleet, ed., <i>Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors</i> (London, 1888/Varanasi, Indological Book House, 1963)
<i>CSSH</i>	Comparative Studies in Society and History
<i>EFEO</i>	Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient
<i>FEQ</i>	<i>Far Eastern Quarterly</i>
<i>IC</i>	G. Coedès, <i>Inscriptions du Cambodge</i> , EFEO Collection de Textes et Documents sur l'Indochine, III; vols. 1, 2 (Hanoi, 1937-42), vols. 3-8 (Paris, 1951-66)
<i>IHQ</i>	<i>Indian Historical Quarterly</i>
<i>ISC</i>	A. Barth, "Inscriptions sanscrites du Cambodge", in Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, <i>Notices et extraites des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque du Roi et autres bibliothèques</i> , vol. 27 no. 1 (Paris, 1885) pp. 1-180.
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JAIH</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Indian History</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JAS</i>	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i>
<i>JBORS</i>	<i>Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society</i>
<i>JGIS</i>	<i>Journal of the Greater India Society</i>
<i>JIH</i>	<i>Journal of Indian History</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSBRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSEAH</i>	<i>Journal of South-East Asian History</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of the Siam Society</i>

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